Notes on
Matthew

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Introduction

THE SYNOPTIC PROBLEM

The synoptic problem is intrinsic to all study of the Gospels, especially the first three. ("Gospel" capitalized in these notes refers to a book of the Bible, whereas "gospel" lowercased refers to the good news, the gospel message.) The word "synoptic" comes from two Greek words, *syn* and *opsesthai*, meaning, "to see together." Essentially the synoptic problem involves all the difficulties that arise because of the similarities and differences between the Gospel accounts.[1] Matthew, Mark, and Luke have received the title "Synoptic Gospels" because they present the life and ministry of Jesus Christ similarly. The content and purpose of John's Gospel are sufficiently distinct to put it in a class by itself. It is not one of the so-called Synoptic Gospels.

All four of the Gospels are selective accounts of the life and work of Jesus Christ, whose "career was destined to change the history of the world more profoundly than that of any other single individual who ever lived."[2]

> "The Gospels are the most important part of Holy Scripture because all that preceded them led up to them, and all that follows emerges from them. If the revelation of the Gospels were to be removed, the Old Testament would be an enigma, and the remainder of the New Testament would never have been written. These two parts of the Bible, comprising sixty-two of its sixty-six Books, derive their value from the four which we call the Gospels."[3]

Part of the synoptic problem is determining the sources the Holy Spirit led the evangelists to use in producing their Gospels. There is internal evidence (within the individual Gospels themselves) that the writers used source materials as they wrote. The most obvious example of this is the Old Testament passages to which each one referred directly or indirectly.

Since Matthew and John were disciples of Jesus Christ, many of their statements represent eyewitness accounts of what happened. Likewise, Mark had close connections with Peter, and Luke was an intimate associate of Paul as well as a careful historian

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[1]See W. Graham Scroggie, *A Guide to the Gospels*, pp. 83-93.
[2]Abram Sachar, *A History of the Jews*, p. 124.
[3]Scroggie, p. 476.

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(Luke 1:1-4). Information that the writers obtained verbally (oral tradition) and in writing (documents) undoubtedly played a part in what they wrote. Perhaps the evangelists also received special revelations from the Lord before and or when they wrote their Gospels.

Some scholars have devoted much time and attention to the study of the other sources the evangelists may have used. They are the "source critics" and their work constitutes "source criticism." Because source criticism and its development are so crucial to Gospel studies, a brief introduction to this subject follows.[4]

In 1776 and 1779, two posthumously published essays by A. E. Lessing became known, in which he argued for a single written source for the Synoptic Gospels. He called this source the *Gospel of the Nazarenes*, and he believed its writer had composed it in the Aramaic language. To him, one original source best explained the parallels and differences between the Synoptics. This idea of an original source or primal Gospel caught the interest of many other scholars. Some of them believed there was a written source, but others held it was an oral source.

As one might expect, the idea of two or more sources occurred to some scholars as the best solution to the synoptic problem (e.g., H. J. Holtzmann and B. H. Streeter). Some favored the view that Mark was one of the primal sources, because over 90 percent of the material in Mark also appears in Matthew and or Luke. Some posited another primary source, "Q," an abbreviation of the German word for source, *quelle*. It supposedly contained the material in Matthew and Luke that does not appear in Mark.

Gradually, source criticism gave way to "form criticism." The "form critics" concentrated on the process involved in transmitting what Jesus said and did to the primary sources. They assumed that the process of transmitting this information followed patterns of oral communication that are typical in primitive societies. Prominent New Testament form critics include K. L. Schmidt, Martin Dibelius, and Rudoph Bultmann. Typically, oral communication has certain characteristic effects on stories. It tends to shorten narratives, to retain names, to balance teaching, and to elaborate on stories about miracles, to name a few results.

The critics also adopted other criteria from secular philology to assess the accuracy of statements in the Gospels. For example, they viewed as distinctive to Jesus only what was dissimilar to what Palestinian Jews or early Christians might have said. Given the critics' view of inspiration it is easy to see how most of them concluded that the Gospels in their present form do not accurately represent what Jesus said and did. However, some conservative scholars used the same literary method but held a much higher view of the Gospel: for example, Vincent Taylor, who wrote *The Gospel According to St. Mark*.

The next wave of critical opinion, "redaction criticism," began to influence the Christian world shortly after World War II. A redactor is an editor. The German scholar Gunther Bornkamm began this "school" with an essay in 1948, which appeared in English in

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[4]For a longer discussion, see Donald A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, pp. 54-73, 79-112.

1963.[5] Redaction critics generally accept the tenets of source and form criticism. However, they also believe that the Gospel evangelists altered the traditions they received in order to make their own theological emphases. They viewed the writers not simply as compilers of the church's oral traditions, but as theologians who adapted the material for their own purposes. They viewed the present Gospels as containing both traditional material and edited material.

There is a good aspect and a bad aspect to this view. Positively, it recognizes the individual evangelist's distinctive purpose for writing. Negatively, it permits an interpretation of the Gospel that allows for historical error, and even deliberate distortion. Redaction scholars have been more or less liberal, depending on their view of Scripture generally. Redaction critics also characteristically show more interest in the early Christian community, out of which the Gospels came, and the beliefs of that community, than they do in Jesus' historical context. Their interpretations of the early Christian community vary greatly, as one would expect. In recent years the trend in critical scholarship has been conservative, to recognize more rather than less Gospel material as having a historical basis.

Some knowledge of the history of Gospel criticism is helpful to the serious student who wants to understand the text. Questions of the historical background out of which the evangelists wrote, their individual purposes, and what they simply recorded or what they commented on—all affect interpretation. Consequently, the conservative expositor can profit somewhat from the studies of scholars who concern themselves with these questions primarily.[6]

Most critics have concluded that one source the writers used was one or more of the other Gospels. Currently most source critics believe that Matthew and Luke drew information from Mark's Gospel. Mark's accounts are generally longer than those of Matthew and Luke, suggesting that Matthew and Luke condensed Mark. To them, it seems more probable that they condensed him, than that he elaborated on them. There is no direct evidence, however, that one evangelist used another as a source. Since they were either personally disciples of Christ, in close contact with eyewitnesses of His activities, they may not have needed to consult an earlier Gospel.

Most source critics also believe that the unique material in each Gospel goes back to Q. This may initially appear to be a document constructed out of thin air. However, the early church father Papias (A.D. 80-155) may have referred to the existence of such a source. Eusebius, the fourth-century church historian, wrote that Papias had written, "Matthew composed the *logia* [sayings? Gospel?] in the *hebraidi* [Hebrew? Aramaic?] *dialekto* [dialect? language? style?]."[7] This is an important statement for several reasons, but here note that Papias referred to Matthew's *logia*. This may be a reference to Matthew's Gospel, but many source critics believe it refers to a primal document that became a

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[5]Gunther Bornkamm, "The Stilling of the Storm in Matthew," In *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, pp. 52-57.

[6]For a conservative evaluation of the usefulness of redaction criticism, see D. A. Carson, "Redaction Criticism: On the Legitimacy and Illegitimacy of a Literary Tool," in *Scripture and Truth*, pp. 119-42.

[7]*The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus*, 3:39:16.

source for one or more of our Gospels. Most of them do not believe Matthew wrote Q. They see in Papias' statement support for the idea that primal documents such as Matthew's *logia* were available as sources, and they conclude that Q was the most important one.

Another major aspect of the synoptic problem is the order in which the Gospels appeared as finished products. This issue has obvious connections with the question of the sources the Gospel writers may have used.

Until after the Reformation, almost all Christians believed that Matthew wrote his Gospel before Mark and Luke wrote theirs; they held Matthean priority. They did this largely because some of the early church fathers commented on Matthew's priority (e.g., Irenaeus, Eusebius, and Jerome).[8] From studying the similarities and differences between the Synoptics, some source critics also concluded that Matthew and Luke came into existence before Mark. They viewed Mark as a condensation of the other two. Some of the leaders in this movement were J. A. Eichorn, J. G. Herder, and J. J. Griesbach. The Tübingen school in Germany was also influential.

However, the majority of source critics today, as well as many evangelical scholars, believe that Mark was the first Gospel and that Matthew and Luke wrote later. As explained above, they hold this view because they believe it is more probable that Matthew and Luke drew from and expanded on Mark, than that Mark condensed Matthew and Luke. However, the number of scholars who hold Matthean priority is increasing.[9]

Since source criticism is highly speculative, many conservative expositors today continue to lean toward Matthean priority. We do so because there is no solid evidence to contradict this traditional view—that Christians held almost consistently for the church's first 17 centuries.

While the game of deducing which Gospel came first, and who drew from whom, appeals to many students, these issues are essentially academic ones. They have little to do with the meaning of the text. Consequently I do not plan to discuss them further, but will refer interested students to the vast body of literature that is available. I will, however, deal with problems involving the harmonization of the Gospel accounts at the appropriate places in the exposition that follows. The Bible expositor's basic concern is not the nature and history of the stories in the text, but their primary significance in their contexts. One conservative scholar spoke for many others when he wrote the following.

> ". . . it is this writer's opinion that there is no evidence to postulate a tradition of literary dependence among the Gospels. The dependence is rather a parallel dependence on the actual events which occurred."[10]

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[8]See R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, p. 11.

[9]E.g., William R. Farmer, *The Synoptic Problem*. See also C. S. Mann, *Mark*, pp. ix, 47-71, who argued that Mark's Gospel was the third Synoptic written.

[10]Charles H. Dyer, "Do the Synoptics Depend on Each Other?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138:551 (July-September 1981):244.

A much more helpful critical approach to the study of the Bible is "literary criticism," the current wave of interest. This approach analyzes the text in terms of its literary structure, emphases, and unique features. It seeks to understand the canonical text as a piece of literature by examining how the writer wrote it. Related to this approach is "rhetorical criticism," which analyzes the text as a piece of rhetoric. This approach is helpful because there are so many speeches in the Gospels.

GENRE

Genre refers to the type of literature that a particular document fits within. Certain types of literature have features that affect their interpretation. For example, we interpret letters differently than poems. So it is important to identify the genre or genres of a book of the Bible.

The Gospels are probably more like ancient Greco-Roman biographies than any other type of literature.[11] This category is quite broad and encompasses works of considerable diversity, including the Gospels. Even Luke, with its characteristic historiographic connections to Acts, qualifies as ancient biography. Unlike this genre, however, the Gospels "combine teaching and action in a preaching-oriented work that stands apart from anything else in the ancient world."[12] They also are anonymous, in the sense that the writers did not identify themselves as the writers, as Paul did in his epistles, for example, and they are not as pretentious as most ancient biographies.

WRITER

External evidence strongly supports the Matthean authorship of the first Gospel. The earliest copies of the Gospel we have begin "*KATA MATTHAION*" ("according to Matthew"). Several early church fathers referred to Matthew (lit. "gift of God" or "faithful") as the writer, including: Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Origen.[13] Papias' use of the term *logia* to describe Matthew's work, cited above, is not a clear attestation to Matthean authorship of the first Gospel. Since Matthew was a disciple of Jesus and one of the 12 Apostles, his work carried great influence and enjoyed much prestige from its first appearance. We might expect a more prominent disciple such as Peter or James to have written it. The fact that the early church accepted it as from Matthew further strengthens the likelihood that he indeed wrote it.

Internal evidence of Matthean authorship is also strong. As a tax collector for Rome, Matthew would have had to be able to write capably. His profession forced him to keep accurate and detailed records, which skill he put to good use in composing his Gospel. There are more references to money—and to more different kinds of money—in this Gospel, than in any of the others.[14] It has been estimated that about one-fifth of Jesus'

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[11]Carson and Moo, pp. 112-15.

[12]Ibid., p. 115.

[13]For further attestation, see Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 193.

[14]See Werner G. Marx, "Money Matters in Matthew," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136:542 (April-June 1979):148-57.

teachings was about money matters.[15] Matthew humbly referred to himself as a tax collector, a profession with objectionable connotations in his culture, whereas the other Gospel writers simply called him Matthew (or Levi). Matthew called his feast for Jesus "a dinner" (Matt. 9:9-10), but Luke referred to it as "a great banquet" (Luke 5:29). All these details confirm the testimony of the early church fathers.

According to tradition, Matthew ministered in Palestine for several years after Jesus' ascension to heaven. He also made missionary journeys to the Jews who lived among the Gentiles outside Palestine, Diaspora Jews. There is evidence that he visited Persia, Ethiopia, Syria, and Greece.[16]

LANGUAGE

Papias' statement, cited above, refers to a composition by Matthew in the *hebraidi dialekto* (the Hebrew or possibly Aramaic language or dialect, the same Greek word referring to both cognate languages). This may not be a reference to Matthew's Gospel. Four other church fathers mentioned that Matthew wrote in Aramaic and that translations followed in Greek: Irenaeus (A.D. 130-202), Origen (A.D. 185-254), Eusebius (4th century), and Jerome (6th century).[17] However, they may have been referring to something other than our first Gospel. These references have led many scholars to conclude that Matthew composed his Gospel in Aramaic, and that someone else, or he himself, later translated it into Greek. This is the normal meaning of the fathers' statements.

But if Matthew originally wrote his Gospel in Aramaic, it is difficult to explain why he sometimes, but not always, quoted from a Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint. The Hebrew Old Testament would have been the normal text for a Hebrew or Aramaic author to use. A Greek translator might have used the Septuagint (abbreviated LXX) to save himself some work, but if he did so—why did he not use it consistently? Matthew's Greek Gospel contains many Aramaic words. This solution also raises some questions concerning the reliability and inerrancy of the Greek Gospel that has come down to us.

There are several possible solutions to the problem of the language of Matthew's Gospel.[18] The best seems to be that Matthew wrote a Hebrew document—that God did not inspire—that is no longer extant. He also composed an inspired Greek Gospel that has come down to us in the New Testament. Many competent scholars believe that Matthew originally wrote his Gospel in Greek. They do so mainly because of his facility with the Greek language.[19] Most modern scholars do not believe that the Gospel of Matthew is a translation of an Aramaic document.[20]

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[15]Craig L. Blomberg, *Preaching the Parables*, p. 83.
[16]Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 1:13.
[17]Louis A. Barbieri Jr., "Matthew," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 15.
[18]See Stanley D. Toussaint, *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew*, pp. 329-33, for five views.
[19]See, for example, D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *Matthew-Luke*, vol. 8 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 13.
[20]Tasker, p. 13.

> "Archaeological evidence, as we see, does not support the view that the Gospels were written in Aramaic."[21]

DATE AND PLACE OF COMPOSITION

Dating Matthew's Gospel is difficult for many reasons, even if one believes in Matthean priority. The first extra-biblical reference to it occurs in the writings of Ignatius (ca. A.D. 110-115).[22] However, Matthew's references to Jerusalem and the Sadducees point to dates of composition (for both the Hebrew and Greek Gospels) before A.D. 70, when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. His references to Jerusalem assume its existence (e.g., 4:5; 27:53). Matthew recorded more warnings about the Sadducees than all the other New Testament writers combined, but after A.D. 70 they no longer existed as a significant authority in Israel.[23] Consequently, Matthew probably wrote before A.D. 70.[24]

References in the text to the customs of the Jews continuing "to this day" (27:8; 28:15) imply that some time had elapsed between the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and the composition of the Gospel. Since Jesus probably died in A.D. 33, Matthew may have composed his Gospel perhaps a decade or more later. A date between A.D. 40 and 70 is very probable. Some other dates proposed by reliable scholars include between A.D. 50 and 60,[25] or in the 60s,[26] though most scholars favor a date after A.D. 70.[27]

Matthew appears first among the four Gospels in our canon, because when the church established the canon, Matthew was believed to have been the first one written, and the one with the most developed connection to the Old Testament.[28]

Since Matthew lived and worked in Palestine, we would assume that he wrote while living there. There is no evidence that excludes this possibility. Nevertheless, scholars love to speculate. Other sites they have suggested include Antioch of Syria (Ignatius was bishop of Antioch), Alexandria, Edessa, Syria, Tyre, and Caesarea Maratima. These are all guesses.

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

> "If a Bible reader were to jump from Malachi into Mark, or Acts, or Romans, he would be bewildered. Matthew's Gospel is the bridge that leads us out of the Old Testament and into the New Testament."[29]

Compared with the other Gospels, Matthew's is distinctively Jewish. He used parallelisms, as did many of the Old Testament writers, and his thought patterns and general style are typically Hebrew.[30] Matthew's vocabulary (e.g., kingdom of heaven,

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[21]W. F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine*, p. 203.
[22]*To the Smyrneans* 1:1.
[23]Carson, "Matthew," pp. 20-21.
[24]See also Carson and Moo, pp. 152-56.
[25]Mark L. Bailey, in *The New Testament Explorer*, p. 2.
[26]R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 19; Darrell L. Bock, *Jesus according to Scripture*, p.30..
[27]France, p. 19.
[28]Bock, p. 31. For a brief discussion of the New Testament canon, see Carson and Moo, pp. 726-43.
[29]Wiersbe, 1:10.
[30]A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, p. 119.

holy city, righteousness, etc.) and subject matter (e.g., the Law, defilement, the Sabbath, Messiah, etc.) are also distinctively Jewish.

Matthew referred to the Old Testament more than any other evangelist.[31] The United Bible Society's *Greek New Testament* lists 54 direct citations of the Old Testament in Matthew, plus 262 widely recognized allusions and verbal parallels. Usually Matthew referred to the Old Testament, or quoted someone doing so, to prove a point to his readers. The genealogy in chapter 1 traces Jesus' ancestry back to Abraham, the father of the Jewish race. Matthew gave prominent attention to Peter, the apostle to the Jews.[32] The writer also referred to many Jewish customs without explaining them, evidently because he believed most of his original readers would not need an explanation.

Another distinctive emphasis in Matthew is Jesus' teaching ministry. No other Gospel contains as many of Jesus' discourses and instructions. These include the Sermon on the Mount (chs. 5—7), the charge to the apostles (ch. 10), the parables of the kingdom (ch. 13), the lesson on forgiveness (ch. 18), the denunciation of Israel's leaders (ch. 23), and the Olivet Discourse (chs. 24—25).[33] About 60 percent of the book focuses on Jesus' teachings. However, Matthew presented Jesus as a doer as well as a teacher. He referred to more than 20 miracles that Jesus performed.[34] Ryrie counted 35 separate miracles of Christ recorded in the Gospels: 20 related in Matthew, 18 in Mark, 20 in Luke, and seven in John.[35] I have listed 39 references to His miracles in Appendix 6, at the end of these notes.

The transitional nature of this Gospel is also evident in that Matthew alone, among the Gospel writers, referred to the church (16:18; 18:17). He recorded Jesus' prediction of the church, as well as instruction about how His disciples should conduct themselves in the church. The Lord created the church in view of Israel's rejection of her Messiah (cf. 16:13-18; Rom. 11), though it was always in the eternal plan of God.

AUDIENCE AND PURPOSES

Several church fathers (i.e., Irenaeus, Origen, and Eusebius) stated what we might suppose from the distinctively Jewish emphases of this book, namely: that Matthew wrote his Gospel primarily for his fellow Jews.[36]

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[31]Scroggie, p. 146.

[32]Willoughby C. Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew*, p. lxxxi.

[33]Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*, is an evangelical who believed in inerrancy, but he argued that parts of Matthew's Gospel present events that did not really happen in Jesus' life. This is a position that many liberal scholars have taken who refer to these non-historical stories as myth, legend, or heroic biography. Gundry called them midrash, a Jewish embellishment that was common in non-biblical writings of Matthew's time. See Scott Cunningham and Darrell L. Bock, "Is Matthew Midrash?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 144:574 (April-June 1987):157-80, for a refutation of Gundry's position.

[34]See Mark J. Larson, "Three Centuries of Objections to Biblical Miracles," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160:637 (January-March 2003):77-100.

[35]Charles C. Ryrie, *The Miracles of our Lord*, p. 11.

[36]Scroggie, pp. 248, 267-70.

He wrote, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, for a specific purpose or, more accurately, specific purposes. He did not state these purposes concisely, as John did in his Gospel (John 20:30-31). Nevertheless they are clear from his content and his emphases.

> "The author probably wrote primarily to persuade Jews that Jesus is the fulfillment of their Messianic hopes as pictured in the Old Testament."[37]
>
> "Matthew has a twofold purpose in writing his Gospel. Primarily he penned this Gospel to prove Jesus is the Messiah, but he also wrote it to explain God's kingdom program to his readers. One goal directly involves the other. Nevertheless, they are distinct."[38]
>
> "Matthew's purpose obviously was to demonstrate that Jesus Christ was the promised Messiah of the Old Testament, that He fulfilled the requirements of being the promised King who would be a descendant of David, and that His life and ministry fully support the conclusion that He is the prophesied Messiah of Israel. . . .
>
> "As a whole, the gospel is not properly designated as only an apologetic for the Christian faith. Rather, it was designed to explain to the Jews, who had expected the Messiah when He came to be a conquering king, why instead Christ suffered and died, and why there was the resulting postponement of His triumph to His second coming."[39]

Matthew presented three aspects to God's kingdom program. First, Jesus presented Himself to the Jews as the king that God had promised in the Old Testament. Second, Israel's leaders rejected Jesus as their king. This resulted in the postponement, not the cancellation, of the messianic kingdom that God had promised Israel. Third, because of Israel's rejection, Jesus is now building His church in anticipation of His return to establish the promised messianic kingdom on the earth.

There are at least three wider purposes that Matthew undoubtedly hoped to fulfill with his Gospel. First, he wanted to instruct Christians and non-Christians concerning the person and work of Jesus.[40] Second, he wanted to provide an apologetic to aid his Jewish brethren in witnessing to other Jews about Christ. Third, he wanted to encourage all Christians to witness for Christ boldly and faithfully. It is interesting that Matthew is the only Gospel writer to use the Greek verb *matheteuo*, "to disciple" (13:52; 27:57; 28:19; cf. Acts 14:21 for its only other occurrence in the New Testament). This fact shows his concern for making disciples of Christ.[41]

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[37]A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 1:xiii.

[38]Toussaint, p. 18. See also Bailey, pp. 2-3.

[39]John F. Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come*, pp. 12, 13. On the kind of Messiah that the Jews expected, see Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 1:160-79.

[40]See David K. Lowery, "A Theology of Matthew," in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, p. 25.

[41]See Martin L. Franzmann, *Follow Me: Discipleship According to Saint Matthew*.

Carson identified nine major themes in Matthew. They are: Christology, prophecy and fulfillment, law, church, eschatology, Jewish leaders, mission, miracles, and the disciples' understanding and faith.[42]

PLAN AND STRUCTURE

Matthew often grouped his material into sections: so that three, five, six, or seven events, miracles, sayings, or parables appear together.[43] Jewish writers typically did this to help their readers remember what they had written. The presence of this technique reveals Matthew's *didactic* (instructional) intent. Furthermore, it indicates that his arrangement of material was somewhat topical, rather than strictly chronological. Generally, chapters 1—4 are in chronological order, chapters 5—13 are topical, and chapters 14—28 are again chronological.[44] Matthew is the least chronological of the Gospels.

Not only Matthew, but the other Gospel writers as well, present the life of Jesus Christ in three major stages. These stages are: His presentation to the people, their consideration of His claims, and their rejection and its consequences.

A key phrase in Matthew's Gospel enables us to note the major movements in the writer's thought. It is the phrase "and it came about that when Jesus had finished" (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). This phrase always occurs at the end of one of Jesus' major addresses. A different address, therefore, concludes each major section of the Gospel, and they are climactic. Matthew evidently used the narrative sections to introduce Jesus' discourses, which he regarded as especially important in his book. Mark, on the other hand, gave more detailed information concerning the narrative material in his Gospel. In addition to each major section, there is a prologue and an epilogue to the Gospel according to Matthew.

Narrative	Teaching	Transition
1—4	5:1—7:27	7:28-29
8:1—9:34	9:35—10:42	11:1a
11:1b—12:50	13:1-52	13:53a
13:53b—17:27	18	19:1a
19:1b—23:39	24—25	26:1a
26:1b—28:20		

Some commentators include chapter 23 with chapters 24 and 25, because chapter 23 is a discourse, as are chapters 24 and 25.[45] However, chapter 23 is a discourse directed to the scribes and Pharisees, whereas chapters 24 and 25, and the other teaching units identified in the chart above, are discourses addressed primarily to the apostles.

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[42]Carson, "Matthew," pp. 26-38.

[43]See Allen, p. lxv; and Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew*, pp. xix-xxiii.

[44]Henry C. Thiessen, *Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 139.

[45]E.g., Bock, *Jesus according . . .*, p. 26.

One writer believed Matthew constructed his Gospel as an eleven-part chiasm, with the center panel occurring in chapter 13. He argued that this structure highlights the postponement of the kingdom.

"A. Demonstration of Jesus' Qualifications as King (chaps. 1—4)
B. Sermon on the Mount: Who Can Enter His Kingdom (chaps. 5—7)
C. Miracles and Instruction (chaps 8—9)
D. Instruction to the Twelve: Authority and Message for Israel (chap. 10)
E. Opposition: The Nation's Rejection of the King (chaps. 11—12)
F. Parables of the Kingdom: The Kingdom Postponed (chap. 13)
E.' Opposition: The Nation's Rejection of the King (chaps. 14—17)
D.' Instruction to the Twelve: Authority and Message for the Church (chap. 18)
C.' Miracles and Instruction (chaps. 19—23)
B.' Olivet Discourse: When the Kingdom Will Come (chaps. 24—25)
A.' Demonstration of Jesus' Qualifications as King (chaps. 26—28)"[46]

CANON

> "The forming of the fourfold Gospel canon probably took place around the middle of the second century. At about the same time, the apologist Justin Martyr was referring to these church scriptures as 'memoirs of the apostles.' He tells us that they were being read as scriptures in the worship services of the church."[47]

OUTLINE

I. The introduction of the King 1:1—4:11
   A. The King's genealogy 1:1-17
   B. The King's birth 1:18-25
   C. The King's childhood ch 2
      1. The prophecy about Bethlehem 2:1-12
      2. The prophecies about Egypt 2:13-18
      3. The prophecies about Nazareth 2:19-23
   D. The King's preparation 3:1—4:11
      1. Jesus' forerunner 3:1-12
      2. Jesus' baptism 3:13-17
      3. Jesus' temptation 4:1-11
II. The authority of the King 4:12—7:29
   A. The beginning of Jesus' ministry 4:12-25

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[46]Gary W. Derickson, "Matthew's Chiastic Structure and Its Dispensational Implications," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163:652 (October-December 2006):426.
[47]William R. Farmer, *The Gospel of Jesus*, p. 187.

1. The setting of Jesus' ministry 4:12-16
2. Jesus' essential message 4:17
3. The call of four disciples 4:18-22
4. A summary of Jesus' ministry 4:23-25

B. Jesus' revelations concerning participation in His kingdom chs. 5—7
1. The setting of the Sermon on the Mount 5:1-2
2. The subjects of Jesus' kingdom 5:3-16
3. The importance of true righteousness 5:17—7:12
4. The false alternatives 7:13-27
5. The response of the audience 7:28-29

III. The manifestation of the King 8:1—11:1

A. Demonstrations of the King's power 8:1—9:34
1. Jesus' ability to heal 8:1-17
2. Jesus' authority over His disciples 8:18-22
3. Jesus' supernatural power 8:23—9:8
4. Jesus' authority over His critics 9:9-17
5. Jesus' ability to restore 9:18-34

B. Declarations of the King's presence 9:35—11:1
1. Jesus' compassion 9:35-38
2. Jesus' commissioning of 12 disciples 10:1-4
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MESSAGE

The four Gospels are foundational to Christianity because they record the life of Jesus Christ and His teachings. Each of the four Gospels fulfills a unique purpose. They are not simply four versions of the life of Jesus. If one wants to study the life of Jesus Christ, the best way to do that is with a "Harmony of the Gospels" that correlates all the data chronologically.[48] However, if one wants to study only one of the Gospel accounts, then one needs to pay attention to the uniqueness of that Gospel. The unique material, what the writer included and excluded, reveals the purpose for which he wrote and the points he wanted to stress. It also reveals the writer's distinctive message: what he wanted to say.

By the way, when referring to the four Gospels, or one or more of them, it is customary to capitalize the word "Gospel." When one refers to the gospel message, the good news, or the whole New Testament as the Christian gospel, most writers do not capitalize it.

What is the unique message of Matthew's Gospel? How does it differ from the other three Gospels? What specific emphasis did Matthew want his readers to gain as they read his record of Jesus' life and ministry?

Matthew wanted his readers to do what John the Baptist and Jesus called the people of their day to do, namely: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." This was the message of the King to His people, and the message of the King's herald, John the Baptist, as John called the King's people to prepare for the King's coming.

This is not the final message of Christianity, but it is the message that Matthew wanted his readers to understand. When John the Baptist and Jesus originally issued this call, they faced a situation that was different from the situation we face today. They called the people of their day to trust in and follow Jesus because the messianic kingdom was

[48]See Appendix 1 "A Harmony of the Gospels," at the end of these notes, or A. T. Robertson, *A Harmony of the Gospels for Students of the Life of Christ*, or Ernest Burton and Edgar Goodspeed, *A Harmony of the Synoptic Gospels in Greek*.

immediately at hand, coming soon. If the Jews had responded positively to Jesus, He would have established His kingdom immediately. He would have died on the cross, risen from the dead, ascended into heaven, ushered in the Tribulation, returned to the earth, and established His kingdom. All these things are the subjects of Old Testament messianic prophecy that had to be fulfilled.

The messianic kingdom is at hand for us today in a different sense. Jesus Christ has died, risen from the dead, and ascended into heaven. The Tribulation is still future, but following those seven years Jesus will return and establish His messianic kingdom on earth.

The commission that Jesus has given us as His disciples is essentially to prepare people for the King's return. To do this we must go into all the world and herald the gospel to everyone. We must call them to trust in and follow the King as His disciples.

Essentially the message of Matthew is: "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." The proper response to this message is: "Repent." We will consider first the message, and then the proper response. Note three things about the message.

First, "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" is the statement of a fact. "At hand" means that it is coming soon. The subject of this statement is the kingdom. The kingdom is the theme of Matthew's Gospel. The word "kingdom" occurs about 50 times in Matthew. Since "kingdom" is such a prominent theme, it is not surprising to discover that this Gospel presents Jesus as the great King.

Matthew presents the kingship of Jesus. Kingship involves the fact that Jesus is the great King that the Old Testament prophets predicted would come and rule over all the earth in Israel's golden age. It points to the universal sovereignty of God's Son, who would rule over all people on earth. He was to be a "Son of David" who would also rule over Israel.

The word "kingdom" refers to the realm over which the King reigns. This is usually what we think of when we think of Jesus' messianic kingdom: the sphere over which He will rule. However, it is important that we not stress the sphere to the detriment of the sovereignty with which He will rule. Both ideas are essential to the concept of the kingdom that Matthew presents: sphere and sovereignty.

The little-used phrase in Matthew's Gospel "kingdom of God" stresses the fact that it is God who rules. The King is God, and He will reign over all of His creation eventually. The kingdom belongs to God, and it will extend over all that God sovereignly controls.

Matthew, of all the Gospel evangelists, was the only one to use the phrase "kingdom of heaven." John the Baptist and Jesus never explained this phrase, but their audiences knew what they meant by it. Ever since God gave His great promises to Abraham, the Jews knew what the kingdom of heaven meant. It meant God's rule over His people who lived on the earth. As time passed, God gave the Israelites more information about His rule over them. He told them that He would provide a descendant of David who would be their King. This king would rule over the Israelites, who would live in the Promised

Land. His rule would include the whole earth, however, and the Gentiles, too, would live under His authority.

The "kingdom of heaven" that the Old Testament predicted was an *earthly* kingdom over which God would rule through His Son. It would not just be God's rule over His people from heaven. When the Jews in Jesus' day heard John the Baptist and Jesus calling them to "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," what did they think? They understood that the earthly messianic kingdom predicted in the Old Testament was very near. They needed to get ready for it by making some changes.

The simple meaning of "kingdom of heaven," then, is God's establishment of heaven's order over all the earth. Every created being and every human authority would be in subjection to God. God would overturn everyone and everything that did not recognize His authority. It is the establishment of divine order on earth administered by a Davidic King. It is the supremacy of God's will over human affairs. The establishment of the kingdom of heaven on earth, then, is the hope of humanity. It is impossible for people to bring in this kingdom. Only God can bring it in. People just need to get ready, because it is coming.

Second, Matthew's Gospel interprets the kingdom. It does not just affirm the coming of the kingdom, but it also explains the order of the kingdom. Specifically, it reveals the principle of the kingdom, the practice of the kingdom, and the purpose of the kingdom.

The principle of the kingdom is *righteousness*. Righteousness is one of the major themes in Matthew. Righteousness in Matthew refers to righteous conduct, righteousness in practice—rather than positional righteousness, about which the Apostle Paul wrote much. Righteousness is necessary to enter the kingdom, and to serve in the kingdom, under the King. The words of the King in Matthew constitute the law of the kingdom. They proclaim the principle of righteousness (cf. 5:20).

The practice of the kingdom is *peace*. Peace is another major theme in Matthew. When we think of the Sermon on the Mount, we should think of these two major themes: righteousness and peace. The kingdom would come, not by going to war with Rome and defeating it. It would come by peaceful submission to the King: Jesus. These two approaches to inaugurating the kingdom contrast starkly, as we think of Jesus hanging on the cross between two insurrectionists. They tried to establish the kingdom the way most people in Israel thought it would come: by violence. Jesus, on the other hand, submitted to His Father's will, and even though He died, He rose again and will inaugurate the kingdom one day. He secured the future establishment of the kingdom.

Jesus' example of peaceful submission to God's will is to be the model for His disciples. *Greatness* in the kingdom does not come by self-assertion, but by self-sacrifice. The greatest in the kingdom will be the servant of all. The works of the King, in Matthew, demonstrate the powers of the kingdom moving toward peace (cf. 26:52).

The purpose of the kingdom is *joy*. God will establish His kingdom on earth to bring great joy to humankind. His kingdom rule will be the time of greatest fruitfulness and abundance in earth's history. God's will has always been to bless people. It is by rebelling

against God that people lose their joy. The essence of joy is intimate fellowship with God. This intimate fellowship will be a reality during the kingdom to a greater extent than ever before in history. The will of the King in Matthew is to bless humankind.

Third, Matthew's Gospel stresses the method by which the King will administer the kingdom. It is a threefold method.

In the first five books of the Old Testament, the Law or Torah, God revealed the need for a high priest to offer a final sacrifice for humankind to God. The last part of Matthew's Gospel, the passion narrative, presents Jesus as the Great High Priest who offered that perfect sacrifice.

In the second part of the Old Testament, the Historical Books, the great need and expectation is a king who will rule over Israel and the nations in righteousness. The first part of Matthew's Gospel presents Jesus as that long expected King, Messiah, God's anointed ruler.

In the last part of the Old Testament, the Prophets, we see the great need for a prophet who could bring God's complete revelation to mankind. The middle part of Matthew's Gospel presents Jesus as the Prophet who would surpass Moses and bring God's final revelation to mankind (cf. Heb. 1:1).

God will administer His kingdom on earth through this Person who, as King, has all authority; as Prophet, reveals God's final word of truth; and as Priest, has dealt with sin finally. God's administration of His kingdom is in the hands of a King who is both the great High Priest and the completely faithful Prophet.

The central teaching of Matthew's Gospel then concerns the kingdom of heaven. The needed response to this Gospel is: "Repent."

In our day Christians differ in their understanding of the meaning of repentance. This difference arises because there are two Greek verbs, each of which means "to repent." One of these verbs is *metamelomai*. When it occurs, it usually describes an active change. The other word is *metanoeo*. When it occurs, it usually describes a contemplative change. Consequently, when we read "repent" or "repentance" in our English Bibles, we have to ask ourselves whether a change of behavior is in view primarily or a change of mind.

Historically, the Roman Catholic Church has favored an active interpretation of the nature of repentance, whereas Protestants have favored a contemplative interpretation. Catholics emphasize that repentance involves a change of behavior, while Protestants emphasize that it involves a change of thinking essentially. One interpretation stresses the need for a sense of sorrow, and the other stresses the need for a sense of awareness. This confusion also surfaces in the "Lordship Salvation" controversy within evangelical Protestantism. That is why some critics of Lordship Salvation say advocates of Lordship Salvation are leading Protestants back to Rome.

According to Matthew, the word that John the Baptist and Jesus used, when they called their hearers to repentance, was *metanoeo*. We could translate it, "Think again." They

were calling their hearers to consider the implications of the imminent messianic kingdom.

Consideration that the kingdom of heaven was at hand would result in a conviction of sin and a sense of sorrow. These are the inevitable consequences of considering these things. Conviction of a need to change is the consequence of genuine repentance. John the Baptist called for the fruits of repentance, a change of behavior that arose from a change of mind. But note that the fruits of repentance, a change of behavior, are not the same as repentance, a change of mind.

Consideration leads to conviction, and conviction leads to conversion. "Conversion" describes turning from rebellion to submission, from self to the Savior. In relation to the coming kingdom, it involves becoming humble and childlike, rather than proud and independent. It involves placing confidence in Jesus rather than in self for salvation.

To summarize, we can think of the kind of repenting that John the Baptist, Jesus, and later Jesus' disciples, were calling on their hearers to demonstrate as involving consideration, conviction, and conversion. Repentance begins with consideration of the facts. Awareness of these facts brings conviction of personal need. Feeling these personal needs leads to conversion, or a turning from what is bad to what is good (cf. Peter's sermon in Acts).

Now let us combine "repent" with "the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Matthew's Gospel calls the reader to consider the King and the kingdom. This should produce the conviction that one is not ready for such a kingdom, nor is one ready to face such a King, because our righteousness is inadequate. Then we should submit our lives to the rule of the King and the standards of the kingdom.

Matthew's Gospel proclaims the kingdom. It interprets the kingdom as righteousness, peace, and joy. It reveals that a perfect King who is a perfect Prophet and a perfect Priest will administer the kingdom. It finally appeals to people to repent in view of these realities: to consider, to feel conviction, and to turn in conversion. As readers of this Gospel, we need to get ready, to think again, because the kingdom of heaven is coming.

The Christian church now has the task of calling the world to "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The church, as I am using the term here, consists of Jesus' disciples collectively. The King is coming back to rule and to reign. People need to prepare for that event. The church's job is to spread the good news of the King and the kingdom to those who have very different ideas about the ultimate ruler and the real utopia. We face the same problem that Jesus did in His day. Therefore, Matthew's Gospel is a great resource for us as we seek to carry out the commission that the King has given us. Matthew 1:23 ("Immanuel, God with us") and 28:19-20 ("Lo, I am with you always") enclose the book like bookends. In the person of Jesus Christ, God has drawn near to abide forever with His people.

Individually, we have a responsibility to consider the King and the kingdom, to gain conviction by what we consider, and to change our behavior. Our repentance should involve submission to the King's authority, and preparation for kingdom service. We

submit to the King's authority as we observe all that He has commanded us. We prepare for kingdom service as we faithfully persevere in the work that He has given us to do, rather than pursuing our own personal agendas. We can do God's will joyfully because we have the promise of the King's presence with us, and the enablement of His authority behind us (28:18, 20).[49]

[49]Adapted from G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 2:1:9-22.

Exposition

I. THE INTRODUCTION OF THE KING 1:1—4:11

> "Fundamentally, the purpose of this first part is to introduce the reader to Jesus on the one hand and to the religious leaders on the other."[50]

The first two chapters of this section prepare the reader for Jesus' ministry. Consequently they serve as a prologue to the Gospel.

A. THE KING'S GENEALOGY 1:1-17 (CF. LUKE 3:23-38)

Matthew began his Gospel with a record of Jesus' genealogy because the Christians claimed that Jesus was the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. To qualify as such He had to be a Jew from the royal line of David (Isa. 9:6-7). Matthew's genealogy proves that Jesus descended not only from Abraham, the father of the Israelite nation, but also from David, the founder of Israel's royal dynasty.

1:1 This verse is obviously a title, but is it a title of the whole Gospel, a title for the prologue (chs. 1—2), or a title for the genealogy that follows (1:1-17)? Probably it refers to the genealogy. There is no other ancient Near Eastern book-length document extant that uses the expression *biblos geneseos* (book or record of the generation) as its title.[51] While the noun *genesis* (birth) occurs again in verse 18, there it introduces the birth narrative of Jesus.

In the Septuagint, the same phrase—*biblos geneseos*—occurs in Genesis 2:4 and 5:1, where in each case a narrative follows it, as here. Genealogies are quite common in the Old Testament, of course, and the presence of one here introduces a Jewish flavor to Matthew's Gospel immediately.

> "Each use of the formula [in the Bible] introduces a new stage in the development of God's purpose in the propagation of the Seed through which He planned to effect redemption."[52]

The last Old Testament messianic use of this phrase is in Ruth 4:18, where the genealogy ends with David. Matthew reviewed David's genealogy and extended it to Jesus.

> "The plan which God inaugurated in the creation of *man* is to be completed by *the Man*, Christ Jesus."[53]

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[50]Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, p. 5. He believed the first major section of the book ends with 4:16.

[51]Carson, "Matthew," p. 61.

[52]Merrill C. Tenney, *The Genius of the Gospels*, p. 52.

[53]Toussaint, p. 36.

This is "the genealogy of Jesus" Christ. The name "Jesus" is the Greek form of the Hebrew name "Joshua," and it means "Yahweh is salvation" (*yehoshua*, the long form) or "Yahweh saves" (*Yeshua*, the short form). The two major Joshuas in the Old Testament both anticipated Jesus Christ by providing salvation (cf. Heb. 3—4; Zech. 6:11-13).

"Jesus" occurs no fewer than 150 times in Matthew, but human characters never use it when addressing Jesus Himself in this book. Matthew evidently reserved the use of this name for himself, in order to establish the closest possible association between himself as the narrator, and Jesus, so that his point of view might coincide with that of Jesus.[54]

The name "Christ" is the rough equivalent of the Hebrew "Messiah," or "Anointed One." In the Old Testament, it refers generally to people anointed for a special purpose, including: priests, kings, the patriarchs (metaphorically), and even the pagan king Cyrus. It came to have particular reference to the King whom God would provide from David's line who would rule over Israel and the nations eventually (cf. 2 Sam. 7:12-16; Ps. 2:2: 105:15; et al.).

The early Christians believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ of the Old Testament. Because they used both names together, "Christ" became a virtual name for Jesus, a titulary (title turned name). Paul, for example, used it this way frequently in his writings.

Matthew introduced Jesus Christ as the descendant of "David" and "Abraham." Why did he select these two ancestors for special mention, and why did he name David before Abraham?

Abraham and David are important because God gave each of them a covenant. God vowed that He would unconditionally provide seed, land, and blessing to Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 12:1-3, 7; 15; et al.). Abraham would not only receive blessing from God, but he would also be a source of blessing to the whole world.

God's covenant with David guaranteed that his descendants would rule over the kingdom of Israel forever. The *house* or *dynasty of David* would always have the right to rule, symbolized by "the throne of his kingdom" (2 Sam. 7:12-16). Thus Matthew's reference to these two men should remind the reader of God's promises regarding a King who would rule over Israel and the universal blessing that He would bring (cf. Isa. 11:1).[55]

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[54]Kingsbury, pp. 45-46.

[55]See J. Dwight Pentecost, "The Biblical Covenants and the Birth Narratives," in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, p. 262.

> "What is emphasized is the fact that the Messiah has His historical roots in Abraham and that He has come as a Davidic king in response to the promises to the patriarchs."[56]
>
> "He is the Son of Abraham both because it is in him that the entire history of Israel, which had its beginning in Abraham, attains its goal (1:17) and because he is the one through whom God will extend to the nations his blessing of salvation (8:11; 28:18-20). . . .
>
> "Just as the title 'Son of Abraham' characterizes Jesus as the one in whom the Gentiles will find blessing, so the title 'Son of David' characterizes Jesus as the One in whom Israel will find blessing."[57]

The non-chronological order of David first, and then Abraham, indicates that Matthew had more in mind than a simple chronological list of Jesus' ancestors. As the Gospel unfolds, it becomes clear that the Jews needed to accept Jesus as the promised Son of David before He would bring the blessings promised to Abraham (cf. 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30-31; 21:9, 15; 22:42, 45). Jesus presented Himself to the Jews first. When they rejected Him, He turned to the Gentiles. Yet He explained that their rejection was only temporary. When He returns, the Jews will acknowledge Him as their Messiah, and then He will rule on the earth and bless all humankind (cf. Zech. 12:10-14; 14:4, 9-11; Rom. 11:26).

> "Christ came with all the reality of the kingdom promised to David's Son. But if He were refused as the Son of David, still, as the Son of Abraham, there was blessing not merely for the Jew, but for the Gentile. He is indeed the Messiah; but if Israel will not have Him, God will during their unbelief bring the nations to taste of His mercy."[58]
>
> "By this brief superscription Matthew discloses the theme of his book. Jesus is the One who shall consummate God's program."[59]
>
> "First He is Sovereign, then Savior [in Matthew]."[60]

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[56]Eugene H. Merrill, "The Book of Ruth: Narration and Shared Themes," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142:566 (April-June 1985):137.
[57]Kingsbury, pp. 47-48.
[58]William Kelly, *Lectures on the Gospel of Matthew*, p. 14.
[59]Toussaint, p. 37.
[60]S. Lewis Johnson Jr., "The Argument of Matthew," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 112:446 (April-June 1955):143.

> "This introduction clearly demonstrates that Matthew's purpose in writing the gospel is to provide adequate proof for the investigator that the claims of Christ to be King and Saviour are justified. For this reason, the gospel of Matthew was considered by the early church one of the most important books of the New Testament and was given more prominence than the other three gospels."[61]

The Old Testament prophets predicted that the Messiah would be born of a woman (Gen. 3:15), of the seed of Abraham (Gen. 22:18), through the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10), and of the family of David (2 Sam. 7:12-13). Jesus qualified in every respect.

1:2-6a In tracing Jesus' genealogy, why did Matthew begin with Abraham rather than with Adam, as Luke did? Matthew wanted to show Jesus' Jewish heritage, and to do this he only needed to go back as far as Abraham, the father of the Jewish race. Significantly, Matthew called him "Abraham" rather than "Abram." The longer name connotes the covenant privileges that God made to Abraham when He changed his name.

The writer separated "Judah and his brothers" (v. 2), because the messianic promise of rulership went to Judah alone (Gen. 49:10). This allusion to the 12 tribes of Israel provides another clue that Matthew's interests were strongly royal (cf. 8:11; 19:28).

Matthew also mentioned Perez's brother ("Zerah," v. 3), perhaps because he was his twin. But he probably did so because "Perez" was a key figure in both the Old Testament genealogies (Ruth 4; 1 Chron. 4) and in Jewish tradition.[62]

> "Jewish tradition traced the royal line to Perez (Ruth iv. 12, 18ff.), and 'son of Perez' is a Rabb[inic]. expression for the Messiah."[63]

The inclusion of Tamar (v. 3), Rahab (v.5), and Ruth (v. 5) as well as Bathsheba (v. 6b)—is unusual—because the Jews traced their heritage through their male ancestors (until the Middle Ages). Matthew's mention of each of these women reveals his emphases.

> "Of the four mentioned two—Rahab and Ruth—are foreigners, and three—Tamar, Rahab and Bathsheba—were stained with sin."[64]

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[61]Walvoord, p. 17.

[62]For discussion of these traditions, see Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ*, ch. xviii: "Ancient Jewish Theological Literature."

[63]A. H. M'Neile, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, p. 1.

[64]A. Carr, *The Gospel According To St. Matthew*, p. 81.

> "Of these four, two (Tamar and Rahab) were Canaanites, one (Ruth) a Moabite, and one (Bathsheba) presumably a Hittite. Surely they exemplify the principle of the sovereign grace of God, who not only is able to use the foreign (and perhaps even the disreputable) to accomplish his eternal purposes, but even seems to delight in doing so."[65]

The writer had several purposes for including these women. First, he showed that Jesus came to include sinners in the family of God by seeking and saving the lost (cf. v. 21).[66] Second, their inclusion shows the universal character of Jesus' ministry and kingdom.[67] After the Jews rejected Jesus as their Messiah, God opened the doors of the church to Gentiles equally with Jews. Matthew's Gospel records the beginning of this change. Third, reference to these women prepares the reader for the significant role Mary will play in the messianic line though, of course, she was neither a great sinner nor a foreigner.[68]

All five women became partakers in the messianic line through strange and unexpected divine providence. Matthew may have mentioned these women to disarm criticism, by showing that God countenanced irregular marital unions in Messiah's legal ancestry.[69]

> "The word 'King' with 'David' [v. 6a] would evoke profound nostalgia and arouse eschatological hope in first-century Jews. Matthew thus makes the royal theme explicit: King Messiah has appeared. David's royal authority, lost at the Exile, has now been regained and surpassed by 'great David's greater son' . . ."[70]

> "The addition of the title, *the king*, marks the end of this period of waiting, and points forward to Jesus, *the Son of David, the Christ, the King of the Jews*."[71]

A fourth reason was apparently to highlight four Old Testament stories that illustrate a common point. That point is that, in each case, a Gentile showed extraordinary faith in contrast to Jews, who were greatly lacking in their faith.[72]

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[65]Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, p. 188. See also idem, "The Book . . .," p. 138.

[66]*A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, s.v. "Genealogies of Jesus Christ," by P. M. Barnard, 1:638.

[67]Edwin D. Freed, "The Women in Matthew's Genealogy," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 29 (1987):3-19.

[68]Raymond Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, pp. 64-74.

[69]M'Neile, p. 5; M. D. Johnson, *The Purpose of Biblical Genealogies*, pp. 176-79.

[70]Carson, "Matthew," p. 66.

[71]J. C. Fenton, *Saint Matthew*, p. 38.

[72]John C. Hutchison, "Women, Gentiles, and the Messianic Mission in Matthew's Genealogy," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158:630 (April-June 2001):152-64.

> "The allusions to these stories accomplish four theological purposes.
>
> "First, they demonstrate God's providential hand in preserving Messiah's line, even in apostate times. This naturally led to Matthew's account of the virgin conception, through which God brought the Messiah into the world.
>
> "Second, they demonstrate God's heart for godly Gentiles and the significant role of their faith at crucial times in Israel's history.
>
> "Third, they demonstrate the importance of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants in understanding Messiah's mission, with a focus on faith and obedience, not a racial line.
>
> "Fourth, they call Matthew's readers to repentance and humility, and to accepting Gentiles into the body of Christ, thereby affirming an important theme of Matthew's Gospel."[73]
>
> "Here at the very beginning of the gospel we are given a hint of the all-embracing width of the love of God."[74]

1:6b-11 Matthew did not refer to Solomon or the other kings of Israel as kings. Probably he wanted to focus attention on David and on Jesus as the fulfillment of the promises God gave to David. Solomon did not fulfill these promises.

The writer's reference to "Bathsheba" is unusual (v. 6b). It draws attention to the heinousness of David's sin. Perhaps he wanted to stress that "Uriah" was not an Israelite but a "Hittite" (2 Sam. 11:3; 23:39). Evidently Bathsheba was the daughter of an Israelite (cf. 1 Chron. 3:5), but the Jews would have regarded her as a Hittite since she married Uriah.

Five kings do not appear where we would expect to find them. Three are absent between Joram and Uzziah: Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah (v. 8), and two are lacking between Josiah and Jehoiachin, namely, Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim. As we shall note below (v. 17), Matthew deliberately constructed his genealogy in three groups of 14 names. Why did he omit reference to these five kings? The first three were especially wicked. They all had connections with Ahab, Jezebel, and Athaliah. Moreover, all of them experienced violent deaths. The second two were also evil, and Jehoiakim's reign was very short—only three months. Matthew did not sanitize his genealogy completely, however, as his references to Tamar, Rahab, and David's sin indicate.

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[73]Ibid., p. 164.

[74]William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:8.

> "This man [Jehoiachin] is called Coniah in Jer. 22:24-30, where a curse is pronounced upon him. There it is predicted that none of his seed should prosper sitting upon David's throne. Had our Lord been the natural son of Joseph, who was descended from Jeconiah, He could never reign in power and righteousness because of the curse. But Christ came through Mary's line, not Joseph's. As the adopted son of Joseph, the curse upon Coniah's seed did not affect Him."[75]

Jehoiachin's brothers (v. 11), Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, also ruled over Judah. Zedekiah's reign lasted 11 years, but he was a puppet of the Babylonians. The royal line passed through Jehoiachin.

> "There is pathos in this second allusion to brotherhood [cf. v. 2]. 'Judah and his brethren,' partakers in the promise (also in the sojourn in Egypt); 'Jeconiah and his brethren,' the generation of the promise eclipsed."[76]

1:12-16 Most of the names in this section occur nowhere else in the Bible. Matthew probably knew them from oral tradition and or written sources.

> "While no twentieth-century Jew could prove he was from the tribe of Judah, let alone from the house of David, that does not appear to have been a problem in the first century, when lineage was important in gaining access to temple worship."[77]

Verse 16 contains careful and unusual wording. Matthew was preparing for what he later explained, the virgin birth of Jesus (v. 23). The phrase "who is called" (*ho legomenos*) does not imply doubt about Jesus' messiahship. It just identifies the Jesus whose genealogy preceded. This is one of Matthew's favorite expressions in this Gospel. It announces the names of persons or places 12 times (cf. 1:16; 2:23; 4:18; 10:2; 13:55; 26:3, 14, 36; 27:16, 17, 22, 33). As this verse shows, Jesus was *legally* Joseph's son, even though He was *virgin-born* by Mary.

1:17 Clearly, the three groups of 14 generations Matthew recorded do not represent a complete genealogy from Abraham to Jesus (cf. v. 8). Luke recorded several names from the exile to Jesus' birth that Matthew omitted (Luke 3:23-27). "All the generations" (NASB) then must mean all the generations that Matthew listed. The Greek text literally says "all the generations from Abraham to David . . . to Christ." Matthew's summary statement does not constitute an error in the Bible.

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[75]*The New Scofield Reference Bible*, pp. 991-92.
[76]A. B. Bruce, "The Synoptic Gospels," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, 1:64.
[77]Carson, "Matthew," p. 63.

> Jewish writers frequently arranged genealogies so their readers could remember them easily. Perhaps Matthew chose his arrangement because the numerical equivalent of the Hebrew consonants in David's name total 14. In Hebrew the letter equivalent to "d" also stands for the number "4," and "v" represents "6." Matthew did not need to present an unbroken genealogy to establish Jesus' right to the Davidic throne.

Before leaving this genealogy, note that each of the three sections ends with a significant person or event connected with the Davidic dynasty.

> "In the first group, the Davidic throne is established; in the second group, the throne is cast down and deported to Babylon; in the third group, the throne is confirmed in the coming of the Messiah. Further, a basic covenant is set forth in each of these three periods: the Abrahamic covenant in the first (vv. 2-5), the Davidic covenant in the second (vv. 6-11), and the New Covenant [anticipated] in the third (vv. 12-16)."[78]

> "In David the family [of Abraham] rose to royal power . . . At the captivity it lost it again. In Christ it regained it."[79]

Moreover, in each period covered by each section, God gave Israel an important covenant: the Abrahamic (Gen. 15), the Davidic (2 Sam. 7), and the New (Jer. 31).[80] All came to fruition in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Generally, Matthew's genealogy shows that Jesus had the right to rule over Israel, since He was a descendant of David through Joseph. Legally, He was Joseph's son. Specifically, this section of the Gospel strongly implies that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

The differences with Jesus' genealogy in Luke 3:23-38 are a problem that no one has been able to solve adequately. The problem is that Joseph's ancestors in Matthew's genealogy are different from his ancestors in Luke's genealogy, especially from Joseph to King David. The theory that many scholars subscribe to now is this: Matthew gave the legal line of descent from David, stating who was the heir to the throne in each case, and Luke gave the actual descendants of David in the branch of David's family to which Joseph belonged.[81] Other scholars believe that Matthew contains Joseph's actual genealogy, and Luke contains Mary's actual genealogy.[82]

The reason for Matthew's genealogy is to show that Jesus of Nazareth was in the royal line of David and was qualified to be Israel's promised Messiah. This is, apparently, the genealogy of Jesus' earthly father, Joseph, that traces his *legal* ancestry. Luke's genealogy

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[78]*The Nelson Study Bible*, p. 1576.
[79]Allen, p. 2.
[80]Johnson, cited by Toussaint, p. 41.
[81]See I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, pp. 157-65, for further discussion and advocates of this and other views.
[82]E.g., Robertson, *Word Pictures . . .*, 1:3.

evidently traces Joseph's *blood* line. Joseph adopted Jesus as his son (1:25). This made Jesus legally eligible to serve as Israel's king. Matthew presented Joseph's ancestors because they were the former kings of Israel. This genealogy shows Jesus' right to rule as the King of the Jews and His genuine humanity.

B. THE KING'S BIRTH 1:18-25

The birth narrative that follows shows Jesus' genuine deity. The first sentence in this pericope (section) serves as a title for the section, as the sentence in verse 1 did for 1:1-17. Matthew recorded the supernatural birth of Jesus to demonstrate further His qualification as Israel's Messiah.[83] He wanted to show that Mary could not have become pregnant by another man. These verses show how Jesus came to be the heir of Joseph and thus qualified to be Israel's King.

> "Matthew ultimately is arguing that Jesus recapitulates the pattern of Israel's experience while also presenting him as Israel's hope."[84]

> "Matthew tells the story of the birth of Jesus from the standpoint of Joseph as Luke gives it from the standpoint of Mary."[85]

1:18-19 Jewish law regarded an engaged couple as virtually married.[86] Usually women married at about 13 or 14 years of age,[87] and their husbands were often several years older. Normally a one-year period of waiting followed the betrothal before the consummation of the marriage. During that year, the couple could only break their engagement with a divorce.

> ". . . a betrothed girl was a widow if her *fiancé* died (*Kethub*. i. 2), and this whether the man had 'taken' her into his house or not. After betrothal, therefore, but before marriage, the man was legally 'husband' (cf. Gen. xxix. 21, Dt. xxii. 23f.); hence an informal cancelling of betrothal was impossible . . ."[88]

Joseph, being a "righteous" (Gr. *dikaios*) man, could hardly let his fiancée's pregnancy pass without action, since it implied that she had been unfaithful and had violated the Mosaic Law. Joseph had three choices concerning how to proceed. First, he could expose Mary publicly as unfaithful. In this case she might suffer stoning, though that was rare in the first century.[89] Probably she would have suffered the shame of a public divorce (Deut. 22:23-24).

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[83]See Scroggie, pp. 482-86, for a table showing fulfilled messianic prophecies.
[84]Bock, *Jesus according* . . ., p. 64.
[85]Robertson, *Word Pictures* . . ., 1:7.
[86]See Edersheim, *Sketches of* . . ., p. 148.
[87]France, p. 50.
[88]M'Neile, pp. 6-7.
[89]Carson, "Matthew," p. 75.

A second option was to grant her a private divorce, in which case Joseph needed only to hand her a written certificate in the presence of two witnesses (cf. Num. 5:11-31).[90] His third option was to remain engaged and not divorce Mary, but this alternative appeared to Joseph to require him to break the Mosaic Law (Lev. 20:10). He decided to divorce her privately. This preserved his righteousness (i.e., his conformity to the Law) and allowed him to demonstrate compassion.

1:20-21 The appearance of an "angel of the Lord" . . . "in a dream" would have impressed Matthew's original Jewish readers that this revelation was indeed from God (cf. Gen. 16:7-14; 22:11-18; Exod. 3:2—4:16; et al.). The writer stressed the divine nature of this intervention four times in the prologue (1:20, 24; 2:13, 19).

The angel's address, "Joseph, son of David" (v. 20), gave Joseph a clue concerning the significance of the announcement he was about to receive. It connects with verse 1 and the genealogy in the narrative. The theme of the Davidic Messiah continues. Joseph was probably afraid of the consequences of his decision to divorce Mary.

The virgin birth is technically the virgin conception. Mary was a virgin—not only when she gave birth to Jesus, but also when the Holy Spirit conceived Him in her womb. But the idea that Mary remained a virgin for the rest of her life, the Roman Catholic doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary, has no support in the text. Nothing in Scripture suggests that Mary bore Jesus' half brothers and sisters supernaturally. This doctrine has gained credence because it contributes to the veneration of Mary.

The angel announced God's sovereign prerogative in naming the child (v. 21). God named His "Son." Joseph simply carried out the will of God by giving Jesus "His name" at the appropriate time (v. 25). As mentioned above, the name "Jesus" means "Yahweh saves" or "Yahweh is salvation." "Jesus" was one of the most common names in Israel at this time, so Jesus was often described more specifically as "Jesus of Nazareth."[91] The angel explained the appropriateness of this name: JESUS (cf. Ps. 130:8). The Jews anticipated a Messiah who would be both a political savior *and* a redeemer from sin.[92]

> "There was much Jewish expectation of a Messiah who would 'redeem' Israel from Roman tyranny and even purify his people, whether by fiat or appeal to law (e.g., Pss Sol 17). But there was no expectation that the Davidic Messiah would give his own life as a ransom (20:28) to save his

[90]Edersheim, *The Life* . . ., 1:154.
[91]France, p. 34.
[92]Gustaf Dalman, *The Words of Jesus*, p. 297.

> people from their sins. The verb 'save' can refer to deliverance from physical danger (8:25), disease (9:21-22), or even death (24:22); in the NT it commonly refers to the comprehensive salvation inaugurated by Jesus that will be consummated at his return. Here it focuses on what is central, viz., salvation from sins; for in the biblical perspective sin is the basic (if not always the immediate) cause of all other calamities. This verse therefore orients the reader to the fundamental purpose of Jesus' coming and the essential nature of the reign he inaugurates as King Messiah, heir of David's throne . . ."[93]
>
> "The single most fundamental character trait ascribed to Jesus is the power to save . . ."[94]

1:22-25 The phrase *plerothe to hrethen* ("what was spoken . . . fulfilled" [NASB] or "to fulfill what . . . had said" [NIV]) occurs often in Matthew's Gospel (2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 27:9; cf. 26:56). It indicates a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

Matthew worded this verse very carefully. He distinguished the source of the prophecy—God—from the instrument through whom He gave it—the prophet. For Matthew, the prophecy of Isaiah was God's Word (cf. 2 Pet. 1:21). The New Testament writers consistently shared this high view of inspiration (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16).

The prophecy Matthew said Jesus fulfilled comes from Isaiah 7:14 (v. 23). It is a difficult one to understand.[95]

The first problem concerns the meaning of "virgin" (Gr. *parthenos*). This noun usually refers to a literal virgin in the Greek Bible.[96] One exception occurs in Genesis 34:3 in the Septuagint. It always has this meaning in the Greek New Testament. That Matthew intended it to mean virgin appears clear for two reasons. First, virgin is the standard meaning of the word and, second, the context supports this meaning (vv. 18, 20, 25).

A second problem is the meaning of the Hebrew word translated "virgin" (*'alma*) in Isaiah 7:14. It means an unmarried young woman of marriageable age. Thus the Hebrew word has overtones of virginity. Every use of this word in the Hebrew Old Testament either requires or permits the meaning "virgin" (Gen. 24:43; Exod. 2:8; Ps. 68:25 [26]; Prov. 30:19;

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[93]Carson, "Matthew," p. 76.

[94]Kingsbury, p. 12.

[95]See Homer A. Kent Jr., "Matthew's Use of the Old Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 121:481 (January-March 1964):34-43; and Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1—13*, pp. 20-21.

[96]M'Neile, p. 9; Carson, "Matthew," p. 78.

Song of Sol. 1:3; 6:8; Isa. 7:14).[97] That is why the Septuagint translators rendered *'alma* "virgin" in Isaiah 7:14. Matthew's interpretation of this word as virgin harmonizes with the Septuagint translators' understanding.

A third problem is, what did this prophecy mean in Isaiah's day? At the risk of oversimplification, there are three basic solutions to this problem.

First, Isaiah predicted that an unmarried woman of marriageable age, at the time of the prophecy, would "bear" a "child" whom she would "name Immanuel." This happened in Isaiah's day. Jesus *also* fulfilled this prophecy, in the sense that a real virgin bore Him, and He was "God with us." This is a typological view, in which the child born in Isaiah's day was a sign or type (a divinely intended illustration) of the Child born in Joseph's day. I prefer this view.[98]

A second interpretation sees Isaiah predicting the virgin birth of a boy named Immanuel in his day. A virgin did bear a son named Immanuel in Isaiah's day, advocates of this view claim. Jesus *also* fulfilled the prophecy, since His mother was a virgin when she bore Him, and He was "God with us." This is a double fulfillment view. The problem with it is that it requires two virgin births, one in Isaiah's day and Jesus' birth.

A third view is that Isaiah predicted the birth of Jesus exclusively. He meant nothing about any woman in his day giving birth. Jesus alone fulfilled this prophecy. There was no fulfillment in Isaiah's day. This is a single fulfillment view. The main problem with it is that according to this view, Ahaz received no sign—but only a prophecy. Signs in Scripture were fairly immediate visible assurances that what God had predicted would indeed happen.[99]

Some question exists about the sense in which "Immanuel" was Jesus' name (and the name of a son born in Isaiah's day), since the New Testament writers never referred to Him as Immanuel. There is also no record of a son born in Isaiah's day of that name. Even though it was not one of Jesus' proper names, it accurately described who He was (cf. John 1:14, 18; Matt. 28:20). The same may be true of the son born in Isaiah's day. Some believe this person was one of Isaiah's sons, or the son of King Ahaz, who could have been King Hezekiah,[100] or someone else. My guess is that Isaiah's son Maher-shalal-hash-baz was the initial fulfillment and that "Immanuel" may have been his secondary name.

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[97]Willis J. Beecher, *The Prophets and the Promise*, p. 334, footnote; Toussaint, p. 45. This is a complete list of its occurrences in the Old Testament.

[98]See also Toussaint, p. 46, Robertson, *Word Pictures* . . ., 1:11-12; and many commentaries on Isaiah.

[99]For further discussion, see Carson, "Matthew," pp. 78-80. There are also many books on the subject of the virgin birth. One of the best of these is J. Gresham Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*.

[100]Tasker, p. 34.

> "He [Jesus] is Emmanuel, and as such Jehovah the Saviour, so that in reality both names have the same meaning."[101]

> "How can Jesus be a Savior? Because He is Emmanuel, God with us. How did He get with us? He was virgin born. I say again, He was called Jesus. He was never called Emmanuel. But you cannot call Him Jesus unless He is Emmanuel, God with us. He must be Emmanuel to be the Savior of the world. That is how important the Virgin Birth is."[102]

> "The key passages 1:23 and 28:20 . . . stand in a reciprocal relationship to each other . . . . Strategically located at the beginning and the end of Matthew's story, these two passages 'enclose' it. In combination, they reveal the message of Matthew's story: *In the person of Jesus Messiah, his Son, God has drawn near to abide to the end of time with his people, the church, thus inaugurating the eschatological age of salvation*."[103]

The angel's instructions caused Joseph to change his mind. He decided not to divorce Mary privately, but to continue their engagement and eventually consummate it (v. 24). Matthew left no doubt about the virginal conception of Jesus, by adding that Joseph did not have sexual relations with Mary until after Jesus' birth (v. 25).[104] When Joseph named the child, he was taking "Jesus," which was a common name,[105] Jesus as his son.

> "In other words, Jesus, born of Mary but not fathered by Joseph, is legitimately Son of David because Joseph son of David adopts him into his line."[106]

Adoption in Israel was informal rather than formal (cf. Gen. 15:2; 17:12-13; 48:5; Exod. 2:10; 1 Kings 11:20; Esth. 2:7; Luke 2:23). Joseph would by virtue of his marriage to Mary give Jesus His legal status.[107]

Was Jesus' virgin birth theologically necessary, or was it only a fulfillment of prophecy? If parents (specifically fathers) transmit sinfulness to their children in some literal, physical way (i.e., genetically, hereditarily, etc.),

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[101]Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Gospel of Matthew, An Exposition*, 1:37. See Scroggie, pp. 519-20, for a list of the names and titles of Jesus in the Gospels.
[102]J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, 4:13.
[103]Kingsbury, pp. 41-42. Italics his.
[104]See James P. Sweeney, "Modern and Ancient Controversies over the Virgin Birth of Jesus," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160:638 (April-June 2003):142-58.
[105]See Flavius Josephus, *The Life of Flavius Josephus.*
[106]Kingsbury, p. 47.
[107]Tasker, p. 33.

> the virgin birth was necessary to guard Jesus from transmitted sin. However, there is no clear revelation that fathers pass down their sinfulness as they pass down other characteristics. Theologians debate the subject of whether God imputes sin to every individual at birth, or if our parents pass it on to us (creationism vs. traducianism). My view is that fathers do not pass down sinfulness physically. Human nature is not necessarily sinful, though every human—except Jesus—has a sinful human nature, that in some way connects to our parents.

Matthew stressed the virgin birth of Jesus in this section. God, rather than Joseph, was Jesus' true father, making Him the literal Son of God (cf. 2 Sam. 7:14).

In this first chapter, the writer stressed the person of Jesus Christ as being both human (vv. 1-17) and divine (vv. 18-25).

> "If Matthew i:1-17 were all that could be said of His birth, He might then *have had* a legal right to the throne, but He could never have been He who was to redeem and save from sin. But the second half before us shows Him to be truly the long promised One, the One of whom Moses and the prophets spake, to whom all the past manifestations of God in the earth and the types, pointed."[108]

Matthew presented three proofs that Jesus was the Christ in chapter 1: His genealogy, His virgin birth, and His fulfillment of prophecy.

C. THE KING'S CHILDHOOD CH. 2

There is nothing in chapter 2 that describes Jesus Himself. Therefore Matthew's purpose was not simply to give the reader information about Jesus' childhood. Rather, he stressed the reception that the Messiah received having entered the world. The rulers were hostile, the Jewish religious leaders were indifferent, but the Gentiles welcomed and worshipped Him. These proved to be typical responses throughout Jesus' ministry, as Matthew's Gospel reveals. This literary device of presenting implication and then realization is common in the first Gospel.

Also, in this chapter, there are several references to the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies (vv. 5-6, 15, 17-18, 23). Matthew wanted to continue to prove that Jesus was the promised Messiah who fulfilled what the prophets had predicted. In chapter 1, the emphasis is more on how Jesus' identity fulfilled prophecy, but in chapter 2, it is more on how Jesus' geographical connections fulfilled prophecy. To prove that Jesus was the Christ, Matthew had to show that Jesus was born where the Old Testament said Messiah would be born. Another purpose of this chapter was to show God's providential care of His Son.

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[108]Gaebelein, 1:27.

1. The prophecy about Bethlehem 2:1-12

The Old Testament not only predicted *how* Messiah would be born (1:18-25) but *where* He would be born (2:1-12).

> "It would appear that the aim of the evangelist in recording the story of the magi was to show that the child, who was born of the lineage of David to fulfill the ideal of kingship associated with the name of Israel's greatest king, was acknowledged even in His infancy, and by representatives of the non-Jewish world, to be, *par excellance,* the *King of the Jews*."[109]

2:1-2

> "In the 708th year from the foundation of Rome (46 B.C. by Christian reckoning) Julius Caesar established the Julian Calendar, beginning the year with January 1st. But it was not until the sixth century A.D. that Dionysius Exiguus, a Scythian monk living in Rome, who was confirming the Easter cycle, originated the system of reckoning time from the birth of Christ. Gradually this usage spread, being adopted in England by the Synod of Whitby in 664, until it gained universal acceptance. In 1582 Pope Gregory XIII reformed the Julian calendar. However, more accurate knowledge shows that the earlier reckonings of the time of Christ's birth were in error by several years. Thus it is now agreed that the birth of Christ should be placed c. 6-4 B.C."[110]

When did the Magi visit Jesus in Bethlehem?[111] There are several factors that point to a time about a year after Jesus' birth. First, Matthew described Jesus as a "child" (Gr. *paidion*, v. 11), not an "infant" (Gr. *brephos*, cf. Luke 2:27). Second, Jesus' family was residing in a house (v. 11), not beside a manger (cf. Luke 2:1-20). Third, Herod's edict to destroy all the male children two years old and under (v. 16) suggests that Jesus fell within this age span. Fourth, Joseph and Mary brought the offering of poor people to the temple when they dedicated Jesus about 40 days after His birth (Luke 2:24). After receiving the Magi's gifts, they could have presented the normal offering (cf. Lev. 12). Fifth, Joseph and Mary's decision to return to Judea from Egypt (v. 22) implies that Judea is where they had lived before they took refuge in Egypt.

Matthew carefully identified the "Bethlehem of Judea," in contrast to the Bethlehem in Zebulun (Josh. 19:15), as the birthplace of Jesus. This was important because the prophecy of Messiah's birthplace was specifically Bethlehem of Judah, the hometown of King David (v. 6; Mic. 5:2).[112]

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[109]Tasker, p. 36.

[110]*The New Scofield . . .*, pp. 992-93. See also Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 2:704-5.

[111]For the geographical locations of places that Matthew referred to, see the map "Palestine in the Time of Jesus" at the end of these notes.

[112]See Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past*, pp. 297-98, for more information about Bethlehem.

> "Herod the Great, as he is now called, was born in 73 B.C. and was named king of Judea by the Roman Senate in 40 B.C. By 37 B.C. he had crushed, with the help of Roman forces, all opposition to his rule. Son of the Idumean Antipater, he was wealthy, politically gifted, intensely loyal, an excellent administrator, and clever enough to remain in the good graces of successive Roman emperors. His famine relief was superb and his building projects (including the temple, begun 20 B.C.) admired even by his foes. But he loved power, inflicted incredibly heavy taxes on the people, and resented the fact that many Jews considered him a usurper. In his last years, suffering an illness that compounded his paranoia, he turned to cruelty and in fits of rage and jealousy killed close associates, his wife Mariamne (of Jewish descent from the Maccabeans), and at least two of his sons . . ."[113]
>
> "Herod was not only an Idumaean in race and a Jew in religion, but he was a heathen in practice and a monster in character."[114]
>
> ". . . the Jews had borne more calamities from Herod, in a few years, than had their forefathers during all that interval of time that had passed since they had come out of Babylon, and returned home . . ."[115]

"Behold" (Gr. *idou*) is a Hebraic expression that Matthew used to point out the wise men. They are the focus of his attention in this pericope.

It is not easy to identify the Magi (from the Gr. *magoi*) precisely. The Greek word from which we get "magi" comes from a Persian word that means experts regarding the stars: astrologers. Centuries before Christ's time, they were a priestly caste of Chaldeans who could interpret dreams (cf. Dan. 1:20; 2:2; 4:7; 5:7). Later the term broadened to include men interested in dreams, magic, astrology, and the future. Some of these were honest inquirers after the truth, but others were charlatans (cf. Acts 8:9; 13:6, 8). The Magi who came to Jerusalem came from the East. Jerusalem at this time covered about 300 acres, and its population at non-feast times was between 200,000 and 250,000 people.[116]

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[113]Carson, "Matthew," p. 84. See also Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, books 14-18; idem, *The Wars of the Jews*, 1:10-33; Finegan, pp. 254-55; and S. Perowne, *The Life and Times of Herod the Great*.

[114]*Unger's Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Herod," by S. L. Bowman, p. 471. For Josephus' evaluations of Herod, see Josephus, *Antiquities of* . . ., 16:5:4; 16:11:8; and 17:8:1.

[115]Idem, *The Wars* . . ., 2:6:2.

[116]Edersheim, 1:116-17; W. M. Thomson, *The Land and the Book*, 2:589.

Probably the Magi came from Babylon, which for centuries had been a center for the study of the stars.[117] Babylon had also been the home of Daniel, who had been in command of former Magi in Babylonia (Dan. 2:48), and who had written of the death of Messiah (Dan. 9:24-27). The oldest opinion is that the Magi came from Arabia rather than Persia.[118] Magi had such a dubious reputation in Jewish and Christian circles, that it is unlikely that Matthew would have mentioned their testimony if it were not true.[119]

> "The tradition that the Magi were kings can be traced as far back as Tertullian (died c. 225). It probably developed under the influence of OT passages that say kings will come and worship Messiah (cf. Pss 68:29, 31; 72:10-11; Isa. 49:7; 60:1-6). The theory that there were *three* 'wise men' is probably a deduction from the *three* gifts (2:11). By the end of the sixth century, the wise men were named: Melkon (later Melchior), Balthasar, and Gasper. Matthew gives no names. His *magoi* come to Jerusalem (which, like Bethlehem, has strong Davidic connections [2 Sam 5:5-9]), arriving, apparently . . ., from the east—possibly from Babylon, where a sizable Jewish settlement wielded considerable influence, but possibly from Persia or from the Arabian desert. The more distant Babylon may be supported by the travel time apparently required . . ."[120]

The Magi's question (v. 2) was not, "Where is He who has been born *to become* King of the Jews?" but, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?" Jesus' status as Israel's king did not come to Him later in His life. He was born with it (cf. 27:37). In this respect, He was superior to Herod, who was *not* born a king and saw the young Child as a threat to his throne. The only other occurrences of the title "king of the Jews" in Matthew are in 27:11, 29, and 37 where Gentiles used these words to mock Jesus.

What Jesus' "star" was remains problematic. Some scholars have suggested a conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Saturn in the constellation of Pisces.[121] Others believed it was a supernova (a star that explodes and emits unusual light for several weeks or months), a comet, or some other planetary conjunctions or groupings. Still others believed it was a supernatural creation.

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[117]Richard C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, p. 57; Allen, pp. 11-12.

[118]Tony T. Maalouf, "Were the Magi from Persia or Arabia?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156:624 (October-December 1999):423-42.

[119]France, p. 65.

[120]Carson, "Matthew," p. 85.

[121]Edersheim, *The Life* . . ., 1:212-13.

Whatever it was, it was this same "star" that *guided* the Magi ("went before them") to Jesus' house in Bethlehem, or at least to Bethlehem (v. 9). The presence of the definite Greek article with "star" in verse 9 points to the same star mentioned in verse 2. It seems to me that it would be very unlikely that a planetary conjunction or other natural "star" could have given the wise men such specific guidance.

> "Could it be that 'the star' which the Magi saw and which led them to a specific house was the Shekinah glory of God? That same glory had led the children of Israel through the wilderness for 40 years as a pillar of fire and cloud. Perhaps this was what they saw in the East, and for want of a better term they called it a 'star.'"[122]

Perhaps the Magi connected Balaam's messianic prophecy of a star that would rise out of Judah (Num. 24:17) with the Jewish King. Balaam evidently originated in the East (Num. 23:7). The Jews in Jesus' day regarded Balaam's oracle as messianic.[123] Interestingly, Balaam, like the wise men, experienced pressure from a king who was intent on destroying God's people, but he, and they, refused to cooperate.

Another explanation is that when the magi said, "We saw His star," they meant that they had seen a sign that He had been born or was soon to be born.[124]

The Magi's statement that they intended to "worship" the new King does not necessarily mean that they regarded Him as divine. They may have meant that they wanted to pay Him their respects. However, in view of chapter 1, we know that the new King was worthy of true worship. "Worship" (Gr. *proskyneo*) occurs 13 times in Matthew and is something the writer stressed. Apparently the Magi recognized the King as Israel's Messiah. "King of the Jews" was the Gentile way of saying "Messiah."[125] The Messiah was indeed the King of the Jews.

2:3-6 This news "troubled" Herod, because he was very aware of the Jews' desire to throw off the Roman yoke, and his own rule in particular. Remember Pharaoh's fear for his throne that also led to infanticide. Herod was an Edomite, a descendant of Esau, and the prospect of a Jewish Messiah's appearance was one he could not ignore. The rest of Jerusalem's citizens also became disturbed, because they realized that this news from the Magi might lead Herod to take further cruel action *against them*. This is exactly what happened (v. 16). Already we begin to see the opposition

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[122]Barbieri, p. 22. Cf. Walvoord, p. 23; J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, p. 67.
[123]Carson, "Matthew," p. 86.
[124]Plummer, p. 12.
[125]France, p. 61.

of the people of Jerusalem to Jesus that would eventually result in His crucifixion.

Herod assembled Israel's leaders to investigate the Magi's announcement further (v. 4). The chief priests were mainly Sadducees at this time, and most of the scribes ("teachers of the law," NIV) were Pharisees. The chief priests included the high priest and his associates. The high priest obtained his position by appointment from Rome. The scribes were the official interpreters and communicators of the law to the people, their "lawyers." Since these two groups of leaders did not get along, Herod may have had meetings with each group separately.

> "The scribes were so called because it was their office to make copies of the Scriptures, to classify and teach the precepts of the oral law . . ., and to keep careful count of every letter in the O.T. writings. Such an office was necessary in a religion of law and precept, and was an O.T. function (2 Sam. 8:17; 20:25; 1 Ki. 4:3; Jer. 8:8; 36:10, 12, 26). To this legitimate work the scribes added a record of rabbinical decisions on questions of ritual (*Halachoth*); the new code resulting from those decisions (*Mishna*); the Hebrew sacred legends (*Gemara*, forming with the *Mishna*, the *Talmud*); commentaries on the O.T. (*Midrashim*); reasonings upon these (*Hagada*); and finally, mystical interpretations which found in Scripture meanings other than the grammatical, lexical, and obvious ones (the *Kabbala*), not unlike the allegorical method of Origen. In our Lord's time, the Pharisees considered it orthodox to receive this mass of writing which had been superimposed upon and had obscured the Scripture."[126]

The Jews of Jesus' day regarded the *Halekhah* (from *halakh*, "to go," i.e., The Rule of the Spiritual Road) as having greater authority than the Hebrew Scriptures.[127]

Josephus wrote the following about influence of the Pharisees during the Inter-testamental Period:

> ". . . but they that were the worst disposed to him [John Hyrcanus] were the Pharisees, who are one of the sects of the Jews, as we have informed you already. These have so great power over the multitude, that when they say

[126]*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 993. See also *The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Talmud and Midrash," by Charles L. Feinberg, pp. 1236-38; Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 1:93-94; idem, *Sketches of . . .*, pp. 226-38; and Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 13:10:6.

[127]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 1:11.

> anything against the king or against the high priest, they are presently believed."[128]

Notice that Herod perceived the King, whom the Magi had spoken of, as "the Messiah" (v. 4). Some of the Jews—particularly the Essenes, whom Herod did not consult, but not the Sadducees and Pharisees—were expecting a Messiah to appear soon because of Daniel 9:24-27.[129] Daniel had been a "wise man" in the East also.

> "Matthew adroitly answers Jewish unbelief concerning Jesus Christ by quoting their own official body to the effect that the prophecy of His birth in Bethlehem was literal, that the Messiah was to be an individual, not the entire Jewish nation, and that their Messiah was to be a King who would rule over them."[130]

> "In the original context of Micah 5:2, the prophet is speaking prophetically and prophesying that whenever the Messiah is born, He will be born in Bethlehem of Judah. That is the *literal* meaning of Micah 5:2. When a literal prophecy is fulfilled in the New Testament, it is quoted as a *literal fulfillment*. Many prophecies fall into this category . . ."[131]

Another writer called this, literal prophecy plus literal fulfillment.[132]

Matthew's rendering of the Micah 5:2 prophecy adds the fact that the "Ruler" would "shepherd" the Israelites. This statement, from 2 Samuel 5:2, originally referred to David. Thus Matthew again showed the connection between the prophecies of Messiah and the Davidic line, a connection he also made in chapter 1. Perhaps the religious leaders put these passages together in their quotation.[133] Such seems to have been the case. The quotation is free, not verbatim from either the Hebrew or the Greek (Septuagint) texts.

2:7-8 Evidently Herod summoned the Magi "secretly" to avoid arousing undue interest in their visit among Israel's religious leaders (v. 7). He wanted to know when "the star" had "appeared," so he could determine the age of the child King.

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[128]Josephus, *Antiquities of* . . ., 13:10:5.

[129]Ibid., 13:5:9; 20:8:8; and idem, *The Wars of the Jews*, 4:3:9. For Josephus' descriptions of these "three sects of philosophy" peculiar to the Jews, see his *Antiquities of* . . ., 18:1:3-5; and *The Wars* . . ., 2:8:2-14. See Finegan, pp. 280-82, for more information on the Essenes.

[130]Walvoord, p. 22.

[131]Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology*, p. 843.

[132]David L. Cooper, *Messiah: His Historical Appearance*, pp. 174-75.

[133]See Edersheim, *The Life* . . ., 2:710-41, for a list of Old Testament passages messianically applied in ancient rabbinic writings, and talmudic discussion on the Messiah.

Under a pretext of desire to "worship" the new King, Herod sent the Magi to Bethlehem as his representatives, with orders to report what they found to him. His hypocritical humility deceived the wise men. He must have sensed this, since he sent no escort with them but trusted them to return to him.

It is remarkable that the chief priests and scribes apparently made no effort to check out Jesus' birth as the Magi did.

> "It is strange how much the scribes knew, and what little use they made of it."[134]

Their apathy contrasts with the Magi's curiosity and with Herod's fear. It continued into Jesus' ministry until it turned into antagonism.

> ". . . the conflict on which the plot of Matthew's story turns is that between Jesus and Israel, especially the religious leaders."[135]
>
> "Except for Jesus himself, the religious leaders are the ones who influence most the development of the plot of Matthew's story."[136]
>
> "No sooner was Jesus born into this world than we see them grouping themselves into these three groups in which men are always to be found in regard to Jesus Christ."[137]

2:9-12 Perhaps "the" star (v. 2), whatever it was, was so bright that the wise men could see it as they traveled in daylight. Travel at night was common to avoid the heat, so they may have made the five-mile trip south to Bethlehem at night. Nevertheless this would have been winter, so they probably traveled during daylight hours.[138]

The star may have identified Bethlehem as the town where Jesus abode, and the Magi may have obtained His exact location from the residents. On the other hand, the star may have identified "the" very "house" where Joseph and Mary dwelt. This seems more likely in view of verse 11. Notice that the wise men came to a "house," not a *manger*, as many Christmas cards picture them doing. God supernaturally guided the seekers so they found the Messiah. God's provision gave them "great joy" (v. 10; cf. Luke 2:10).

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[134]Richard Glover, *A Teacher's Commentary of the Gospel of Matthew*, p. 14.
[135]Kingsbury, p. 8.
[136]Ibid., p. 18.
[137]Barclay, 1:21.
[138]Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, pp. 25-26.

> The reaction of the wise men to discovering "the Child" and "His mother" was to bow and worship Him. Notice that they did not worship Mary, nor did they worship Jesus through Mary.
>
> It was customary in the ancient Near East to present gifts when approaching a superior (cf. Gen. 43:11; 1 Sam. 9:7-8; 1 Kings 10:2). The wise men produced these from their "treasures" or coffers. The expensive gifts reflected the great honor the Magi bestowed on the Christ Child. The "gold" probably financed Joseph and Mary's trip to Egypt (vv. 14-21). "Frankincense" is a gum obtained from the resin of certain trees that was particularly fragrant. "Myrrh" was also a sap-like substance that came from a tree that grew in Arabia. People used it as a spice, and as a perfume, often for embalming as well as for other applications.
>
> Many commentators, ancient and modern, have seen symbolic significance in these three gifts. Some have said "gold" suggests royalty while others have seen deity, or kingliness. Some say "incense" represents deity, while others believe it better represents perfect humanity, or priestliness. Most expositors view "myrrh" as prefiguring Jesus' death and burial. It is unlikely that the Magi saw this significance, but Matthew may have intended his readers to see it. This act by Gentile leaders also prefigures the wealth that the Old Testament prophets said the Gentiles would one day present to Israel's Messiah (Ps. 72:10-11, 15; Isa. 60:5, 11; 61:6; 66:20; Zeph. 3:10; Hag. 2:7-8). This will occur in the fullest sense at the Second Coming of Christ.
>
> God supernaturally intervened to keep the Magi from returning to Herod, who would have then been able, from them, to target Jesus precisely.[139] Dreams were a common method of divine guidance during the Old Testament economy in which Jesus lived (cf. Num. 12:6).

Several contrasts in this section reveal Matthew's emphases. Herod, the wicked Idumean usurper king, contrasts with Jesus, the born righteous King of Israel. The great distance from which the Magi traveled to visit Jesus, contrasts with the short distance Israel's leaders *would have* had to travel to see Him. The genuine worship of the wise men contrasts with the feigned worship of Herod, and the total lack of worship from the chief priests and scribes. The Gentile Magi's sensitivity and responsiveness to divine guidance also contrast with the insensitivity and unresponsiveness of Israel's leaders.

> "The first to worship the King in Matthew's Gospel are Gentiles, an implication of the last command of the Messiah. The supernatural stellar manifestations attest the divine character of the person of Jesus. Matthew also notes the fact that the Magi who worship the Messiah of Israel are

[139]See Barry J. Beitzel, "Herod the Great: Another Snapshot of His Treachery?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 57:2 (June 2014):309-22.

forced to take refuge from Bethlehem. This, too, is a hint of the future antagonism of Israel to their King."[140]

". . . he [Matthew] contrasts the eagerness of the Magi to worship Jesus, despite their limited knowledge, with the apathy of the Jewish leaders and the hostility of Herod's court—all of whom had the Scriptures to inform them. Formal knowledge of the Scriptures, Matthew implies, does not in itself lead to knowing who Jesus is . . ."[141]

"Even though Israel is cognizant of the prophecies, they are blind to spiritual realities. The King of Israel is worshiped by Gentiles, while His own people do not bother to own Him as their King. The condition of Israel is clearly implied in the early verses of Matthew's Gospel. They are cold and indifferent."[142]

"The Gentile wise men worship the King of the Jews; the Jews are apathetic; and Herod is concerned only for his throne. Herod's interest in his own political well-being marks the attitude of the governmental authorities throughout the remainder of the Gospel."[143]

2. The prophecies about Egypt 2:13-18

Matthew continued to stress God's predictions about, and His protection of, His Messiah—to help his readers recognize Jesus as the promised King.

2:13 For the second time in two chapters, we read that "an angel" from "the Lord appeared" with a message for "Joseph" (cf. 1:20). This indicates that the message had unusual importance.

The order of the words "the Child and His mother" is unusual. Normally the parent would receive mention before the child. This order draws attention again to the centrality of Jesus in the narrative.

"Egypt" was a natural place of refuge at this time. Its border was just 75 miles from Bethlehem, though the nearest town was about 150 miles, and it provided escape from Herod's hatred. Herod had no authority there. Furthermore, there was a large Jewish population there, as well as a substitute for the Jerusalem temple.[144]

Joseph learned that he was to remain in Egypt until God directed him elsewhere, which happened when Herod died. Again the sovereignty of God stands out.

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[140]Toussaint, p. 51.
[141]Carson, "Matthew," p. 86.
[142]Toussaint, p. 52
[143]Ibid., p. 53.
[144]France, p. 79.

> "In obeying at once this command from God and the other commands that follow, Joseph's righteousness (1:19) casts Herod's wickedness in ever sharper relief."[145]

In many respects, Jesus recapitulated Moses' life and experiences. Moses had also been the target of the ruler of his day, who sought to destroy him and all the other male Hebrew babies by ordering them slain (Exod. 1:15-22). Matthew wanted his readers to see Jesus as a "second Moses," as well as the "true Israel."

2:14-15 Herod died in 4 B.C.[146] Josephus recorded that he died a horrible death, his body rotting away and consumed by worms.[147] He was buried in the Herodium, one of the palace fortresses that he had constructed not far from Bethlehem.[148] His grandson, Herod Agrippa, later suffered a similar fate (Acts 12:23).

As noted, Matthew frequently used the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies to show that Jesus was the Christ. Verse 15 contains another fulfillment. This one is difficult to understand, however, because in Hosea 11:1 the prophet did not predict anything. He simply described the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt as the departure of God's son (cf. Exod. 4:22). Old Testament writers frequently used the term "son" to describe Israel in its relationship to God. What did Matthew mean when he wrote that Jesus' departure from Egypt fulfilled Hosea's words (Hos. 11:1)? Matthew's quotation is from the Hebrew text.

Matthew did not say that Jesus was fulfilling a *prophecy*. Another significant factor is the meaning of the word "fulfill" (Gr. *pleroo*). It has a broader meaning than simply "to make complete." It essentially means "to establish completely."[149] In the case of predictive prophecy, the complete establishment of what the prophet predicted occurred when what he predicted happened.

But in the case of *prophetic utterances* that dealt with the past or present, the complete establishment of what the prophet said took place when another event that was *similar* happened. This is the sense in which Jesus' departure from Egypt fulfilled Hosea's prophecy (cf. James 2:21-23). Jesus was *the* Son of God (2:15; 3:17; 4:3, 6; 8:29; 11:27; 14:33; 16:16; 17:5; 26:63; 27:40, 43, 54). The history of "Israel," the "son of God" in a different sense, anticipated the life of *Messiah*.[150]

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[145]Kingsbury, p. 49.
[146]Hoehner, p. 13.
[147]Josephus, *Antiquities of* . . ., 17:6:5; idem, *The Wars* . . ., 1:33:5-7.
[148]Ibid., 1:33:9.
[149]Hermann Cremer, *Biblico-Theological Lexicon of New Testament Greek*, p. 500.
[150]Plummer, p. 19.

To state the same thing another way, Jesus was the "typological recapitulation of Israel."[151] Another writer called this "literal [event] plus typical [fulfillment]."[152] Still another referred to it as "literal prophecy plus a typical import."[153]

> "There were similarities between the nation and the Son. Israel was God's chosen 'son' by adoption (Ex. 4:22), and Jesus is the Messiah, God's Son. In both cases the descent into Egypt was to escape danger, and the return was important to the nation's providential history."[154]

> "And, as Moses was called to go to Egypt and rescue Israel, God's son, His firstborn (see Ex. iv. 22) from physical bondage, so Jesus was *called* out of Egypt in His infancy, through the divine message given to Joseph, to save mankind from the bondage of sin."[155]

> ". . . Matthew looked back and carefully drew analogies between the events of the nation's history and the historical incidents in the life of Jesus."[156]

2:16-18 Some critical scholars discounted Matthew's account of Herod's slaughter of the Bethlehem children because there is no extrabiblical confirmation of it. However, Bethlehem was small, and many other biblically significant events have no secular confirmation, including Jesus' crucifixion. Some writers estimated that this purge would have affected only about 15 or 20 children.[157] He believed that the total population of Bethlehem at this time was under 1,000. Compared to some of Herod's other atrocities this one was minor.[158]

> "The New Testament account of the murder of all the little children at Bethlehem (Matt. ii. 16), in hope of destroying among them the royal scion of David, is thoroughly in character with all that we know of Herod and his reign."[159]

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[151]Carson, "Matthew," p. 91.

[152]Fruchtenbaum, pp. 843-44.

[153]Cooper, pp. 175-76.

[154]Barbieri, p. 22.

[155]Tasker, p. 42.

[156]Tracy L. Howard, "The Use of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15: An Alternative Solution," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143:572 (October-December 1986):325. This article evaluated several other proposed solutions to this difficult citation. See also G. K. Beale, "The Use of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15: One More Time," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 55:4 (December 2012):697-715.

[157]Robertson, *Word Pictures* . . ., 1:20; France, p. 85.

[158]See Edersheim, *The Life* . . ., 1:127. See Josephus, *Antiquities of* . . ., 15:1:2; 15:3:3, 9; 15:6:2; 15:7:4, 8, 10; 15:8:4; 15:10:4; 16:8:4; 16:10:4; 16:11:7; 17:2:4; 17: 6:4, 6; 17:7:1; and idem, *The Wars* . . ., 1:178; 1:22:1, 4, 5; 1:24:8; 1:27:6; and 1:33:4 and 6, for the records of some of those that he executed.

[159]Edersheim, *Sketches of* . . ., p. 51.

> "Emperor Augustus reportedly said it was better to be Herod's sow than his son, for his sow had a better chance of surviving in a Jewish community. In the Greek language, as in English, there is only one letter difference between the words 'sow' (*hys*) and 'son' (*hyios*)."[160]

> "The selfsame character traits Herod exhibits in chapter 2, the [religious] leaders will exhibit later in the story. To enumerate the most obvious of these, Herod shows himself to be 'spiritually blind' (2:3), 'fearful' (2:3), 'conspiratorial' (2:7), 'guileful' and 'mendacious' (2:8), 'murderous' (2:13, 16), 'wrathful' (2:16; cf. 21:15), and 'apprehensive of the future' (2:16)."[161]

> "Here is a terrible illustration of what men will do to get rid of Jesus Christ. If a man is set on his own way, if he sees in Christ someone who is liable to interfere with his ambitions and rebuke his ways, then his one desire is to eliminate Christ; and then he is driven to the most terrible things, for then, if he does not break men's bodies, he will break their hearts."[162]

Matthew again claimed that another event surrounding Jesus' birth fulfilled prophecy (v. 17). Matthew is the only New Testament writer who quoted "Jeremiah" (31:15; cf. 16:14; 27:9). This quotation is evidently also from the Hebrew text. Incidentally, Matthew only quoted Isaiah and Jeremiah by name of all the prophets he quoted.

> "Matthew is not simply meditating on Old Testament texts, but claiming that in what has happened they find fulfillment. If the events are legendary [rather than historical], the argument is futile."[163]

It is not clear whether Jeremiah was referring to the deportation of the northern tribes in 722 B.C., or to the Babylonian Captivity in 586 B.C. Since he dealt primarily with the second of these events in his ministry, he probably did so here too. Poetically, he presented "Rachel" as the idealized "mother" of the Jews, "mourning" from her grave because "her children" were going into captivity. Since Rachel died on the way to Bethlehem (Gen. 35:16, 19), mention of her ties in nicely with the events of Jesus' early childhood near Bethlehem.

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[160]Barbieri, p. 23.
[161]Kingsbury, p. 117.
[162]Barclay, 1:29.
[163]R. T. France, "Herod and the Children of Bethlehem," *Novum Testamentum* 21 (1979):120.

> "In the original context, Jeremiah is speaking of an event soon to come as the Babylonian Captivity begins. As the Jewish young men were being taken into captivity, they went by the town of Ramah. Not too far from Ramah is where Rachel was buried and she was the symbol of Jewish motherhood. As the young men were marched toward Babylon, the Jewish mothers of Ramah came out weeping for sons they will never see again. Jeremiah pictured the scene as Rachel weeping for her children. This is the *literal* meaning of Jeremiah 31:15. The New Testament cannot change or reinterpret what this verse means in that context, nor does it try to do so. In this category [of fulfilled prophecy], there is a New Testament event that has one point of similarity with the Old Testament event. The verse is quoted as an *application*. The one point of similarity between Ramah and Bethlehem is that once again Jewish mothers are weeping for sons they will never see again and so the Old Testament passage is applied to the New Testament event. Otherwise, everything else is different."[164]

Cooper called this "literal prophecy plus an application."[165] Bailey saw three points of comparison between the two situations: in both of them a Gentile king was threatening the future of Israel (cf. 2:13), children were involved, and the future restoration of Israel was nevertheless secure (cf. Jer. 31:31-37).[166]

Matthew evidently used Jeremiah 31:15, because it presented hope to the Israelites, that Israel would return to the land—even though they wept at the nation's departure. The context of Jeremiah's words is hope. Matthew used the Jeremiah passage to give his readers hope, that despite the tears of the Bethlehem mothers, Messiah had escaped from Herod and would return to reign ultimately.[167]

> "Here Jesus does not, as in v. 15, recapitulate an event from Israel's history. The Exile sent Israel into captivity and thereby called forth tears. But here the tears are not for him who goes into 'exile' but because of the children who stay behind and are slaughtered. Why, then, refer to the Exile at all? Help comes from observing the broader context of both Jeremiah and Matthew. Jeremiah 31:9, 20 refers to Israel =

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[164]Fruchtenbaum, p. 844.

[165]Cooper, p. 176.

[166]Bailey, p. 8.

[167]Robert H. Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel, with Special Reference to the Messianic Hope*, p. 210; Tasker, pp. 43-44.

> Ephraim as God's dear son and also introduces the new covenant (31:31-34) the Lord will make with his people. Therefore the tears associated with Exile (31:15) will end. Matthew has already made the Exile a turning point in his thought (1:11-12), for at that time the Davidic line was dethroned. The tears of the Exile are now being 'fulfilled'—i.e., the tears begun in Jeremiah's day are climaxed and ended by the tears of the mothers of Bethlehem. The heir to David's throne has come, the Exile is over, the true Son of God has arrived, and he will introduce the new covenant (26:28) promised by Jeremiah."[168]

3. The prophecies about Nazareth 2:19-23 (cf. Luke 2:39)

Matthew concluded his selective account of the events in Jesus' childhood, that demonstrated His messiahship, and illustrated various reactions to Him with Jesus' return to Israel.

2:19-20 Herod the Great died in 4 B.C. Josephus wrote of his condition shortly before his death as follows:

> ". . . Herod's distemper greatly increased upon him after a severe manner, and this by God's judgment upon him for his sins: for a fire glowed in him slowly, which did not so much appear to the touch outwardly as it augmented his pains inwardly; for it brought upon him a vehement appetite to eating, which he could not avoid to supply with one sort of food or other. His entrails were also exulcerated, and the chief violence of his pain lay on his colon; an aqueous and transparent liquor also settled itself about his feet, and a like matter afflicted him at the bottom of his belly. Nay, farther, his privy member was putrified, and produced worms; and when he sat upright he had a difficulty of breathing, which was very loathsome, on account of the stench of his breath, and the quickness of its returns; he had also convulsions in all parts of his body, which increased his strength to an insufferable degree."[169]

God's sovereign initiative is again the subject of Matthew's record. This is the fourth "dream" and the third mention of the "angel of the Lord" appearing "to Joseph" in the prologue. The phrase "the land of Israel" occurs only here in the New Testament. Evidently Matthew used it since it recalls the promises and blessings God gave Jacob and his descendants.[170]

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[168]Carson, "Matthew," p. 95.
[169]Josephus, *Antiquities of* . . ., 17:6:5.
[170]Toussaint, p. 56.

2:21-23 Joseph obediently responded to the Lord's command. However, before he could do so, news reached him that Herod the Great's son, "Archelaus," had begun to rule as ethnarch "over Judea," Samaria, and Idumea.[171] The rest of Herod the Great's kingdom went to his sons Antipas, who ruled as tetrarch over Galilee and Perea (4 B.C. - A.D. 39), and Philip. "Tetrarch" means Philip ruled over one-fourth of the kingdom of his father, Herod the Great. Philip became tetrarch of Iturea, Trachonitis, and some other territories (4 B.C. - A.D. 34).[172] The title "ethnarch" was a more honorable title than "tetrarch." It meant ruler over a people. It was also a title inferior to "king," however.

> "One of the first acts of Archelaus was to murder some three thousand people in the temple because some of their number had memorialized some martyrs put to death by Herod. Like father, like son."[173]

Archelaus proved to be a bad ruler. Caesar Augustus banished him for his poor record in A.D. 6.[174] Philip was the best ruler among Herod the Great's sons.

Evidently God "warned" Joseph not to return to Archelaus' territory. Joseph chose to settle in "Nazareth" in "Galilee" instead, on the northern border of Zebulun, undoubtedly guided there by God. This had been his and Mary's residence before Jesus' birth (13:53-58; Luke 1:26-27; 2:39). Matthew noted that this move was another fulfillment of prophecy (v. 23). Nazareth stood 70 miles north of Bethlehem, and archaeological evidence points to a population of about 480 at the beginning of the first century A.D.[175] It was the location of the Roman garrison in northern Galilee.[176]

> ". . . the ancient *Via Maris* [Sea Highway] led through Nazareth, and thence either by Cana, or else along the northern shoulder of Mount Tabor, to the Lake of Gennesaret—each of these roads soon uniting with the Upper Galilean. Hence, although the stream of commerce between Acco and the East was divided into three channels, yet, as one of these passed through Nazareth, the quiet little town was not a stagnant pool of rustic seclusion. . . . But, on the other hand, Nazareth was also one of the great centers of Jewish Temple-life. . . . The Priests of the 'course' which was to be on duty always gathered in certain

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[171]Finegan, p. 256.
[172]Cf. Josephus, *Antiquities of* . . ., 17:11:4; idem, *The Wars* . . ., 2:6:3.
[173]Walvoord, p. 24. See also Edersheim, *The Life* . . ., 1:220; and Barclay, 1:30.
[174]Carson, "Matthew," p. 96.
[175]France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 91.
[176]*The Nelson* . . ., pp. 1579, 1580.

> towns, whence they went up in company to Jerusalem, while those of their number who were unable to go spent the week in fasting and prayer. . . . Thus, to take a wider view, a double symbolic significance attached to Nazareth, since through it passed alike those who carried on the traffic of the world, and those who ministered in the Temple."[177]

Careful attention to the terms Matthew used to describe this fulfillment helps us understand how Jesus fulfilled Scripture. First, Matthew said the prophecy came through "prophets," not *a* prophet. This is the only place in the first Gospel that he said this. Second, Matthew did not say that the prophets "said" or "wrote" the prediction. He said "what was said or spoken" through them happened. In other words, Matthew was quoting indirectly, freely.[178]

There is no Old Testament passage that predicted that the Messiah would come from Nazareth or that people would call Him "a Nazarene." How then could Matthew say that Jesus fulfilled Scripture by living there? The most probable explanation seems to be that Nazareth was an especially *despised* town—in the *despised* region of Galilee—in Jesus' day (John 1:46; 7:42, 52).[179] Several of the Old Testament prophets predicted that people would "despise" the Messiah (Ps. 22:6-8, 13; 69:8, 20-21; Isa. 11:1; 42:1-4; 49:7; 53:2-3, 8; Dan. 9:26).[180] Matthew often returned to this theme of Jesus being despised (8:20; 11:16-19; 15:7-8).

The writer appears to be giving the *substance* of several Old Testament passages here, rather than quoting any one of them. There may also be an allusion to the *naser* ("branch") in Isaiah 11:1 that the rabbis in Jesus' day regarded as messianic. In that passage, David's heir appears to be emerging from a lowly, obscure place. One writer gave evidence that the Targums, as well as the New Testament writers, exegeted the Old Testament messianically.[181]

> "In the first century, *Nazarenes* were people despised and rejected and the term was used to reproach and to shame (John 1:46). The prophets did teach that the Messiah would be a despised and rejected individual (*e.g.* Isa 53:3) and this is summarized by the term, *Nazarene*."[182]

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[177]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 1:147-48.
[178]W. Barnes Tatum Jr., "Matthew 2.23," *The Bible Translator* 27 (1976):135-37.
[179]Homer A. Kent Jr., "The Gospel According to Matthew," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 933.
[180]Tasker, p. 45.
[181]See Michael B. Shepherd, "Targums, The New Testament, and Biblical Theology of the Messiah," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51:1 (March 2008):45-58.
[182]Fruchtenbaum, p. 845.

Fruchtenbaum called this type of prophetic fulfillment "summation."[183] Cooper preferred to call it "literal prophecy plus a summation."[184]

> "Jesus is King Messiah, Son of God, Son of David; but he was a branch from a royal line hacked down to a stump and reared in surroundings guaranteed to win him scorn. Jesus the Messiah, Matthew is telling us, did not introduce his kingdom with outward show or present himself with the pomp of an earthly monarch. In accord with prophecy he came as the despised Servant of the Lord."[185]

Less satisfying explanations of this prophecy and its fulfillment are the following: First, some connect "Nazarene" with "Nazirite" (cf. Judg. 13:5). However, Jesus was never a Nazirite (11:19). Furthermore the etymologies of these words do not connect.

Second, some believe that the Hebrew word translated "branch" (*naser*), in Isaiah 11:1, sounds enough like "Nazareth" to justify a connection.[186] The problem with this view is that the Hebrew word and the town of Nazareth have nothing in common except similar sounding names. Also *naser* occurs in only one passage, but Matthew quoted the "prophets."

Third, some writers have posited a pre-Christian sect and suggested that Matthew referred to this. There is no evidence to support this theory.

Fourth, some believe Matthew was making a pun by connecting the names Nazareth and Nazarene. If this were true, how could he claim a fulfillment of prophecy?

Fifth, some think the writer referred to prophecies not recorded in Scripture, but known to, and accepted by, his original readers. Matthew gave no clue that this unusual meaning is what he intended. Furthermore, later readers would not only reject such an authority, but would charge Matthew with fabricating such a source to support his argument.

Matthew chapter 2 advances the writer's argument significantly by making three major points.

> "The first relates to the Gentiles. The Magi come from the East and worship the King of the Jews. A glimmering foreview of all the nations of the earth being blessed in Abraham is seen in this act. . . . The second point Matthew makes concerns the Jews. They are shown to be

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[183]Ibid.

[184]Cooper, pp. 177-78.

[185]Carson, "Matthew," p. 97.

[186]*The New Scofield* . . ., p. 994; Wiersbe, 1:16.

> unconcerned and indifferent to any report concerning Him. Finally, Matthew, by his use of the Old Testament, proves that Jesus is the promised Messiah. He is the fulfillment of all that is anticipated in their Scriptures. These three things form the basis of Matthew's Gospel. Jesus is presented as the Messiah prophesied and promised in the Old Testament. The Jews reject Him. Because of this rejection the King turns to the Gentiles and the kingdom program for the Jews is postponed.
>
> "Chapter one declares the theanthropic character of the person of the Messiah. The reception which is to be given the claims of the Messiah is set forth in chapter two. Matthew three begins the narrative of the historical account of the presentation of Israel's Messiah to that nation."[187]
>
> "Matthew 1—2 serves as a finely wrought prologue for every major theme in the Gospel."[188]

Chapters 1 and 2 show the reader who Jesus *was*, His identity, including the reactions of various groups of people. The rest of the book continues to clarify Jesus' identity and shows what Jesus *said* and *did*, and the reactions of various groups of people. The reactions of these groups and individuals become instructive for us in knowing how to respond to Jesus and how not to respond to Him.

D. THE KING'S PREPARATION 3:1—4:11

Matthew passed over Jesus' childhood quickly to relate His preparation for presentation to Israel as her King. He recorded three events that prepared Jesus for His ministry: the ministry of Jesus' forerunner, John the Baptist (3:1-12), Jesus' baptism (3:13-17), and Jesus' temptation (4:1-11). The major point is that Jesus is the true Son of God. John the Baptist witnessed that Jesus was the prophesied coming Son of God. Matthew's account of Jesus' baptism emphasizes heaven's (God's) attestation of Jesus as God's Son. The Spirit descended on Jesus to *empower* the King for service, and the voice from heaven *validated* Jesus as God's Son. The record of Jesus' temptation shows that He overcame temptation and so was qualified personally to be the perfect Son of God, not just *a* son of God in the traditional kingly sense. All the former "sons" of God (kings of Israel) had fallen before temptation.

> "The material of this section of the Gospel is particularly important since the baptism of Jesus serves as the occasion of his special anointing by the Holy Spirit for the ministry that follows, but it is also Christologically significant in that his divine Sonship is confirmed and the non-triumphalist nature of the present phase of that Sonship is indicated (3:17c and 4:1-11). Thus Matthew provides information that is vitally important to an understanding of the narrative that follows: what Jesus does in his ministry he does by the power of the Spirit; yet Jesus will not act in the manner of a

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[187]Toussaint, pp. 57-58.

[188]Carson, "Matthew," p. 73.

> triumphalist messiah, in accordance with popular expectation, but in his own unique way, in obedience to the will of his Father."[189]

Matthew presented four witnesses to Jesus' messiahship in this section: John the Baptist (3:1-15), the Holy Spirit (3:16), the Father (3:17), and Satan (4:1-11). A fifth witness follows in 4:12-15, namely, Jesus' ministry.

1. Jesus' forerunner 3:1-12 (cf. Mark 1:2-8; Luke 3:3-18)

It was common when Jesus lived, for forerunners to precede important individuals, in order to prepare the way for their arrival. For example, when a king would visit a town in his realm, his emissaries would go before him to announce his visit. They would make sure the town was in good condition to receive him. Sometimes his servants even had to do minor roadwork to smooth the highway the king would be taking as he approached his destination.[190] John not only prepared the way for Jesus, but also announced Him as an important person and implied His royalty. John preceded Jesus in birth, in public appearance, and in death.

> "As Jesus' forerunner, John foreshadows in his person and work the person and work of Jesus. Both John and Jesus are the agents of God sent by God (11:10; 10:40). Both belong to the time of fulfillment (3:3; 1:23). Both have the same message to proclaim (3:2; 4:17). Both enter into conflict with Israel: in the case of the crowds, a favorable reception ultimately gives way to repudiation; in the case of the leaders, the opposition is implacable from the outset (3:7-10; 9:3). Both John and Jesus are 'delivered up' to their enemies (4:12; 10:4). And both are made to die violently and shamefully (14:3-12; 27:37)."[191]

3:1-2 John appeared "in those days" (v. 1). This phrase is a general term that says little about specific time but identifies what follows as historical. It is a common transitional statement in Matthew's narrative.[192] John's ministry, as Matthew described it here, occurred just before the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, approximately 30 years after the events of chapter 2.

"John" ("Gift of Yahweh") became a popular name among the Jews following the heroic career of John Hyrcanus (died 106 B.C.). There are four or five Johns in the New Testament. This one received the surname "the Baptist" because of his practice of baptizing repentant Jews (v. 6).

John was a herald with a message to proclaim. He appears on the scene suddenly and mysteriously, much like Elijah, whose ministry John

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[189]Hagner, p. 43.
[190]Walvoord, p. 29.
[191]Kingsbury, p. 49.
[192]Robertson, *A Grammar . . .*, p. 708.

mirrored (cf. 1 Kings 17:1).[193] "Preaching" is literally heralding (Gr. *kerysso*).

> "In the New Testament the verb does not mean 'to give an informative or hortatory or edifying discourse expressed in beautifully arranged words with a melodious voice; it means to proclaim an event' . . ."[194]

The event John proclaimed was the imminent arrival of God's kingdom.

The scene of John's ministry was "the wilderness of Judea." This loosely defined area lay mainly to the west and somewhat north of the Dead Sea.[195] John evidently conducted his ministry there because of its rough conditions that were suitable to his appeal for repentance. In Israel's history, the wilderness forever reminded the Jews of their 40-year sojourn under extreme conditions and God giving them the Law of Moses. They associated it with a place of separation unto God, testing for refinement, and new beginnings. In John's day, the wilderness spawned many movements that challenged Israel's leadership.[196] This may explain why John chose to minister there.

John called for the people to "repent" (v. 2).

> "Contrary to popular thinking, repent does not mean to be sorry. The Greek word *metanoeo* means '. . . to change one's mind or purpose . . .'[197] In the New Testament it '. . . indicates a complete change of attitude, spiritual and moral, towards God.'[198] The primary meaning involves a turning to God which may indeed make a person sorry for his sins, but that sorrow is a by-product and not the repentance itself. . . . In a word, John's command to the people of Israel was for them to turn from their sins to God in anticipation of their Messiah."[199]

> "Faith means to turn to Christ, and when you turn to Christ, you must also turn from something. If you don't turn from something, then you aren't really turning to Christ. So repentance is really a part of believing, but the primary message that should be given to the lost today is that they should *believe* in the Lord Jesus Christ."[200]

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[193]See Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 2:706-9, on rabbinic traditions about Elijah.
[194]A. M. Hunter, *The Message of the New Testament*, p. 24.
[195]See Finegan, pp. 263-67, for the geology of the Dead Sea region.
[196]Josephus, *The Wars . . .*, 2:13:4-5.
[197]Footnote 74: G. A. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 287.
[198]Footnote 75: J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, p. 403.
[199]Toussaint, pp. 60-61.
[200]McGee, 4:18.

The Jews needed to change their thinking, because most of them believed that they would enter the Messiah's kingdom, simply because they were the children of Abraham (v. 9). John was attacking established religious concepts of his day and those who taught them. He demanded evidence of genuine repentance instead of mere complacency, hypocrisy, and superficiality (cf. v. 8).

John also announced that "the kingdom of heaven" (lit. the heavens) was "at hand." What was this kingdom? Students of this question have offered three basic answers.

First, some believe that "the kingdom" began with Jesus' ministry, and will continue until His second coming, which will mean the end of the world, in their view. They view the kingdom as spiritual, namely, as God's rule over the hearts and lives of believers in Jesus. This kingdom is spiritual in contrast to physical and earthly. Advocates do not believe Jesus will return to earth to set up an earthly, physical kingdom that will resume the Davidic kingdom of the Old Testament. They believe that the promises in the Old Testament—of Israel's restoration under Messiah—are being fulfilled in a spiritual sense in the experience of Christians. For example, promises of Israel's return to her land will find fulfillment in the church's entrance into heaven.

Most advocates of this view believe that the *church has replaced Israel*, and that God has no special future for *Israel as Israel*. The kingdom that Jesus inaugurated, they believe, is *already* present. This is the typical amillennial (no millennium) understanding of the kingdom.

Second, some believe that "the kingdom" that Jesus preached will be entirely earthly. They hold that it is the resumption of the Davidic kingdom, which ended with the Babylonian exile and will resume when Jesus returns to earth at His second coming. Then He will establish this kingdom, which will continue for 1,000 years (the Millennium). The present inter-advent age is not the kingdom, nor is the kingdom the Church Age. There is no present form of this kingdom, according to this view. The kingdom Jesus preached is *not yet* from our perspective in history. This is the view of some premillennialists, mainly some dispensationalists.

Many who hold this second view acknowledge that though the kingdom Jesus announced will be an earthly kingdom, there is another kingdom that has existed throughout history. It is God's sovereign rule over all. Since He has ruled, is ruling, and will forever reign over all, we can speak of this universal rule as His kingdom. However, it is not the restored Davidic kingdom that Jesus announced as being at hand.

Third, some interpreters have concluded that the kingdom Jesus announced was both *already* present, in one form, *and not yet* present in

another form. They believe there is a present spiritual form of the kingdom now (as in view one above), and a future physical form of the kingdom (as in view two above). Some advocates of this view believe that God has a future for Israel *as Israel* (the physical descendants of Jacob). The church has not replaced Israel in God's plans. This is the view of "progressive dispensationalists."[201]

Other advocates of this view believe that the church *does* replace Israel. God's promises to Israel will find fulfillment in the church. These are mainly "historic premillennialists" (or "replacement theologians"). This group believes in a physical, earthly kingdom but for the church, not Israel.

Many dispensationalists are uncomfortable with the idea that the kingdom is already and not yet, in view of how they interpret kingdom passages. Specifically, they are uncomfortable with the idea that the church is the "already" stage of the kingdom. They prefer to view the church as an entity distinct from the kingdom, an intercalation or something inserted in the divine timeline between the Old Testament kingdom of David and the messianic kingdom. They make much of the terminology used to distinguish the church and the kingdom. Most in this group of interpreters see some form of God's kingdom in existence now, however, whether the universal rule of God or a mystery form of the coming kingdom.

Among dispensationalists, some hold that there were two kingdoms that Jesus preached: the "kingdom of God" and the "kingdom of heaven."[202] The former term, they say, refers to a smaller kingdom that includes only genuine believers, and is cosmic and universal in scope. The latter term, they say, refers to a larger kingdom that includes all who profess to be believers, and is limited to the earth. This distinction has been shown to be invalid. One cannot make this distinction on the basis of how the New Testament writers used these terms.

> "Most recent advocates of a distinction acknowledge that the two expressions are 'often used synonymously,' yet are to be distinguished in certain contexts.[203] Others who would generally be identified with dispensationalism agree with most non-dispensationalists that no distinction between these expressions is intended by the biblical writers.[204] Matthew's use of 'the kingdom of heaven' is to

[201]See Appendix 2 "The Kingdoms of God," and Appendix 3 "Views of the Messianic Kingdom," at the end of these notes.

[202]Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 5:316; 7:223-24; John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom*, p. 171; idem, "The Kingdom of Heaven," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124:495 (July-September 1967):203; C. I. Scofield, ed., *The Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 1003.

[203]Footnote 20: *The New Scofield Reference Bible*, pp. 994, 1002.

[204]Footnote 21: Eric Sauer, *The Triumph of the Crucified*, p. 23; Toussaint, pp. 65-68.

> be explained as a Semitic idiom probably resulting from the Jewish reverence for the name of God and the tendency to use 'heaven' or 'heavens' as a substitute.[205] So, although some dispensationalists still distinguish the two terms in some passages,[206] we agree with Ryrie that this issue is not a determinative feature of dispensationalism."[207]

Dispensationalists who are not "progressives" believe that the kingdom that John, Jesus (4:17), and His disciples (10:7) announced and offered the Jews was exactly the same kingdom that the Old Testament prophets predicted. Because the Jews rejected their King and His kingdom, God "postponed" the kingdom until a future time when Israel will accept her Messiah, namely, at His second advent (cf. Zech. 12:10-14). The word "postponed" does not imply that Jewish rejection of the Messiah took God by surprise. It views the coming of the kingdom from man's perspective.

This "postponement" view, I believe, best harmonizes the normal meaning of the Old Testament kingdom prophecies and Jesus' teachings.[208] Similarly, because the generation of Jews that left Egypt in the Exodus refused to trust and obey God at Kadesh Barnea, God postponed the nation's entrance into the Promised Land for 38 years. As God postponed Israel's entrance into the Promised Land because of Jewish unbelief, so He postponed Israel's entrance into the messianic kingdom because of Jewish unbelief.

There is good evidence that the kingdom that John and Jesus spoke about was the earthly eschatological kingdom that the Old Testament prophets foretold: First, the fact that John, Jesus, and Jesus' disciples did not explain what it was, but simply announced that it was near, indicates that they referred to a kingdom known to their hearers.[209] Second, Jesus restricted the proclamation about the kingdom to Jews (10:5-6). If the kingdom was spiritual, why was this necessary? Moreover, the inauguration of the kingdom predicted in the Old Testament depended on the Jews receiving it (Zech. 12:1-14; 13:7-9; Mal. 4:5-6).

Third, Jesus' disciples expected the beginning of an earthly kingdom (20:20-21; Acts 1:6). They did so after they had listened to Jesus' teaching about the kingdom for a long time. Fourth, this kingdom cannot be the church, since God had not yet revealed the existence of the church, let

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[205]Footnote 22: Dalman, pp. 91-93. See also Edersheim, *The Life* . . ., 1:267.

[206]See, for example, McGee, 4:163.

[207]Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, p. 19. His reference to (Charles C.) Ryrie is from *Dispensationalism Today*, pp. 170-71.

[208]See Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, pp. 274-76.

[209]George N. D. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom of Our Lord Jesus, the Christ, as Covenanted in the Old Testament and Presented in the New Testament*, 1:195.

alone established it (16:18). It cannot be God's universal reign over the hearts of mankind, since that had existed since creation.

> ". . . if the Kingdom, announced as 'at hand' by the Lord, had been exclusively a 'spiritual kingdom,' or as some have defined it, 'the rule of God in the heart,' such an announcement would have had no special significance whatever to Israel, for such a rule of God had always been recognized among the people of God [cf. Ps. 37:31; 103:19]."[210]

Therefore, we conclude that when John spoke of "the kingdom of heaven" (v. 2), he meant the earthly kingdom over which Messiah would rule, which the Old Testament prophets predicted.

> "Only the premillennial interpretation of the concept of the kingdom allows a literal interpretation of both Old Testament and New Testament prophecies relating to the future kingdom"[211]

It is particularly important to distinguish "the church" from "the kingdom." The kingdom, whether described as "of heaven" or "of God," always refers to the earthly reign of Messiah as predicted in the Old Testament. The church will play a part in the kingdom, but they are separate entities. Progressive dispensationalists argue that the church is the *first phase* of the messianic kingdom, the "already" phase, in contrast to the eschatological, "not yet," phase. Matthew maintained the distinction between "the kingdom" and "the church" throughout his Gospel, as did the other New Testament writers.

What did John mean when he announced that the kingdom was "at hand" (v. 2)? The Greek verb *eggizo* means "to draw near," not "to be here" (cf. 21:1).[212] All that was necessary for the kingdom to be there was Israel's acceptance of her King (11:14). The kingdom was near because the King was present.[213] Amillennialists, historic premillennialists, and progressive dispensationalists believe John meant that the kingdom was about to begin, which, they say, it did when Jesus began to minister.

> "If Israel had accepted its Messiah, the earthly kingdom would have been inaugurated by the King."[214]

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[210]McClain, p. 303.
[211]Walvoord, *Matthew: . . .*, p. 31.
[212]William L. Lane, *The Gospel according to Mark*, p. 65, n. 93; A. J. Mattill Jr., *Luke and the Last Things: A Perspective for the Understanding of Lukan Thought*, pp. 70-77.
[213]See McGee, 4:19.
[214]Toussaint, p. 63.

This statement may seem to some to render Christ's work on the cross unnecessary, but this is incorrect. Had the Jews accepted their Messiah when He offered the kingdom to them, He still would have died on the cross and experienced resurrection and ascension. He could not have been the Messiah without doing so, in fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies (Ps. 22; Isa. 53; Dan. 9; Zech. 13). Then the prophecies concerning the seven years of Jacob's trouble would have been fulfilled (Jer. 30:7; Dan. 12:1; 9:26-27). Next, Messiah would have returned to set up His kingdom (Isa. 60:1-3; 66:18; Hab. 2:14; cf. Zech. 12:10; 13:6).

Since the Jews rejected Jesus' offer of the kingdom—was His offer genuine? Had God not already determined that Israel would reject her Messiah? Jesus' offer of the kingdom was just as genuine as any gospel offer of salvation to someone who rejects it.

> "Those who cavil at the idea of an offer which is certain to be rejected betray an ignorance, not only of Biblical history (cf. Isa. 6:8-10 and Ezek. 2:3-7), but also of the important place of the legal proffer in the realm of jurisprudence."[215]

3:3

> "This is the one OT citation of Matthew's own eleven direct OT quotations that is not introduced by a fulfillment formula . . . Instead he introduces it with a Pesher formula (e.g., Acts 2:16 . . .) that can only be understood as identifying the Baptist in an eschatological, prophecy-and-fulfillment framework with the one of whom Isaiah (40:3) spoke."[216]

In Isaiah 40:3, "the voice" exhorts the people to prepare for God's coming while He is bringing Israel back from her dispersion. The prophet then proceeded to describe the blessings that would follow her return. Matthew identified Yahweh in Isaiah 40:3 with Jesus in Matthew 3:3. This equates "the kingdom of God" to "the kingdom of Jesus." While this is not an implicit statement of Jesus' deity, it certainly presents Jesus as more than just Yahweh's representative.

3:4-6

In his dress and in "his food," as well as in his habitat and in his message, "John" associated himself with the poor and the prophets—particularly Elijah (cf. 2 Kings 1:8; Zech. 13:4; Mal. 4:5).

> "In view of the considerable Jewish interest in the eschatological role of Elijah (see on 11:14 and 17:10-11) it is likely that John's clothing was deliberately adopted to promote this image."[217]

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[215]McClain, p. 344.
[216]Carson, "Matthew," p. 101.
[217]France, The Gospel . . ., p. 106.

Likewise, John may have selected his venue for ministry because of its associations with Elijah. Poor people ate "locusts" (Lev. 11:22), and such a diet was compatible with that of a Nazirite. John called for the people to get right with God, because the appearing of their Messiah was imminent. Elijah had called the Israelites back to God at the time of their most serious apostasy. John called them back to God on the eve of their greatest opportunity. He was the first prophet from God in approximately 400 years.

Many people responded to John because they perceived that he was a genuine prophet with a message from God (v. 5).

Baptism represented purification to the Jews. Ceremonial washings were part of the Mosaic system of worship (Exod. 19; Lev. 15; Num. 19). When a Gentile became a proselyte to Judaism, he or she underwent baptism. But John "baptized" Jews. John's baptism carried these connotations of cleansing with it, but it was different. In the other types of ceremonial cleansing, the person washed himself or herself. John, on the other hand, baptized other people. He probably received the name "John the Baptist" or "Baptizer" for this reason.[218]

John's baptism did not make a person a member of the church, the body of Christ, since the church had not yet come into existence (16:18). It simply gave public testimony to that Jewish person's repentance and commitment to live a holy life. Lenski, a Lutheran commentator, argued that John did not baptize Jesus by immersion.[219] Lutherans traditionally baptize by effusion (sprinkling or pouring).

It is impossible to identify the method of baptism John used from what the Gospels tell us. However, extrabiblical sources indicate that Jewish proselyte baptism took place in large tanks (Heb. *mikvah*) in which the person undergoing baptism stood.[220] The issue boils down to whether one takes the word "baptism" in its primary sense of *submersion*, or in its secondary sense of *initiation*.[221] Likewise, it is unclear whether the confession involved public or private acts.

3:7-10 This verse contains Matthew's first reference to the "Pharisees" ("separate ones") and the "Sadducees" ("righteous ones"). Significantly, John was antagonistic toward them because they were hypocritical, a trait that marks them throughout the Gospels. Matthew lumped them together here because they were Israel's leaders.

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[218]Ethelbert Stauffer, *New Testament Theology*, p. 22.

[219]Lenski, pp. 101-2.

[220]See Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 2:745-49; *A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, s.v. "Baptism," by Marcus Dods, 1:168-71.

[221]Walvoord, *Matthew: . . .*, p. 31.

> "After the ministry of the postexilic prophets ceased, godly men called *Chasidim* (saints) arose who sought to keep alive reverence for the law among the descendants of the Jews who returned from the Babylonian captivity. This movement degenerated into the Pharisaism of our Lord's day—a letter-strictness which overlaid the law with traditional interpretations held to have been communicated by the LORD to Moses as oral explanations of equal authority with the law itself (cp. Mt. 15:2-3; Mk. 7:8-13; Gal. 1:14). . . .
>
> "The Sadducees were a Jewish sect that denied the existence of angels or other spirits, and all miracles, especially the resurrection of the body. They were the religious rationalists of the time (Mk. 12:18-23; Acts 23:8), and were strongly entrenched in the Sanhedrin and priesthood (Acts 4:1-2; 5:17). The Sadducees are identified with no affirmative doctrine, but were mere deniers of the supernatural."[222]
>
> "The course of our investigations has shown, that neither Pharisees nor Sadducees were a sect, in the sense of separating from Temple or Synagogue; and also that the Jewish people as such were not divided between Pharisees and Sadducees. The small number of professed Pharisees (six thousand) at the time of Herod [Josephus, *Antiquities of* . . . 17:2:4], the representations of the New Testament, and even the curious circumstance that Philo never once mentions the name of Pharisee, confirm the result of our historical inquiries, that the Pharisees were first an 'order,' then gave the name to a party, and finally represented a direction of theological thought."[223]

"Vipers" is a word Isaiah used to describe God's enemies (Isa. 14:29; 30:6). John's use of it associates him with the former prophets and reflects his prophetic authority.

> "The first major appearance of the religious leaders in Matthew's story occurs in conjunction with the ministry of John the Baptist (3:7-10). The importance of their appearance here has to do with the fact that John is the forerunner of Jesus. As such, the attitude that John assumes toward the leaders is predictive of the attitude that Jesus will assume toward them."[224]

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[222]*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 995.
[223]Edersheim, *Sketches of . . .*, p. 244.
[224]Kingsbury, p. 117.

John's question (v. 7) amounted to, "Who suggested to you that you would escape the coming wrath?"[225] The behavior of the Pharisees and Sadducees should have demonstrated the genuineness of their professed repentance, but it did not. "Fruit" is what people produce—that other people see—that indicates their spiritual condition (13:21; cf. Mark 4:19; Luke 8:14; John 15:1-6). The fruits of "repentance" were absent in the case of these leaders. There was no external evidence that they desired to draw near to God in anticipation of Messiah's appearance.

Many of the Jews in the inter-testamental period believed that if one was a descendant of "Abraham," he would automatically enter Messiah's kingdom.[226] They counted on the patriarch's righteousness as sufficient for themselves (cf. Rom. 4). However, God had often pruned back the unrighteous in Israel and preserved a remnant in its history. As Matthew continued to point out in his Gospel, many of the Jews refused to humble themselves before God and instead trusted in their own righteousness. The Pharisees and Sadducees were doing that here. Josephus, himself a Pharisee,[227] placed the origin of both of these groups in the time of Jonathan, the son of Judas Maccabee (160-143 B.C.).[228]

John's reference to "stones" (v. 9) was a play on words with "children" in both the Hebrew and Aramaic languages. If stones could become God's children, certainly Gentiles could.

Verse 10 gives the reason the Jews needed to repent. Divine judgment would precede the establishment of Messiah's kingdom (cf. Isa. 1:27; 4:4; 5:16; 13:6-19; 42:1; Jer. 33:14-16; Dan. 7:26-27). The Jews connected the concepts of repentance and the messianic age closely in their thinking.[229] John announced that this judgment was imminent (vv. 10-12). *Any* "tree (better than "every" tree) that does not bear good fruit," regardless of its roots, will suffer destruction. Probably John had individuals and the nation of Israel in mind.

The reference to "fire" in verse 10 pictures the judgment and destruction of those who fail to repent (cf. "wrath," v. 7, and "winnowing fork," v. 13). For individuals, this judgment would involve eternal destruction (v. 12), assuming there was no later repentance. For the nation, it would involve the postponement of the kingdom and its attendant blessings.

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[225]Carson, "Matthew," p. 103.
[226]Edersheim, *The Life* . . ., 1:271. Cf. Barclay, 1:39.
[227]Josephus, *The Life* . . ., , par. 2.
[228]See Edersheim, *The Life* . . ., 1:96.
[229]C. G. Montefiore, "Rabbinic Conceptions of Repentance," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 16 (January 1904):211.

3:11 John baptized in water "in connection with" repentance.[230] However, the One coming after him, the King, would "baptize . . . with the Holy Spirit (cf. Joel 2:28-29) and fire" (cf. Mal. 3:2-5). The Malachi prophecy speaks of fire as a refining or purifying agent, not as an instrument of destruction. Both prophecies involve the nation of Israel as a whole primarily.

Are these two different baptisms or one? This is a very difficult question to answer because the arguments on both sides are strong.[231] In both interpretations, *baptism* connotes both immersion, in the metaphorical sense of placing into something, and initiation.

The construction of the statement in the Greek text favors one baptism. Usually one entity is in view when one article precedes two nouns joined by a conjunction.[232] This would mean that the one baptism Jesus would perform would be with the Holy Spirit and fire together. Some interpreters believe that this prophecy was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:3-4). However, since the church was a mystery announced first by our Lord (Matt. 16:18), and then explained more fully by subsequent apostles and prophets (Eph. 3:5; Col. 1:25-26), it seems to me that the baptism that John referred to was the one that will take place in the future day of the Lord. There is no indication that John the Baptist knew anything about the church.

The fire in Malachi's prophecy probably refers to purification and judgment. The purification emphasis is in harmony with Malachi's use. This has led many scholars to conclude that the fire baptism that John predicted is not the one at Pentecost.[233] They, and I, believe that the time when Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire to fulfill these prophecies concerning Israel is yet future from our viewpoint in history. It will happen at His second advent. It would have happened at His first advent if Israel had accepted Him. Jesus' baptism of His disciples on the day of Pentecost was a similar baptism, but it was not the fulfillment of these prophecies, since they involved Israel and "the day of the Lord" specifically (cf. John 14:17; Acts 2; 1 Cor. 12:13).[234]

The context, which speaks of blessing for the repentant but judgment for the unrepentant, tends to favor two baptisms (vv. 8-10, 12; cf. Acts 1:5; 11:16). In this case, the "fire" would refer primarily, if not exclusively, to

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[230]Carson, "Matthew," p. 104.

[231]See Hagner, pp. 51-52.

[232]Robertson, *A Grammar . . .*, p. 566.

[233]E.g., Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 1:272; M'Neile, p. 29; McGee, 4:20; Toussaint, p. 70; Carson, "Matthew," p. 105; and James Morison, *A Practical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, p. 36. See also John Proctor, "Fire in God's House: Influence of Malachi 3 in the NT," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36:1 (March 1993):12-13.

[234]See Renald E. Showers, *Maranatha: Our Lord, Come! A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church*, pp. 30-40, for an excellent discussion of "the day of the Lord."

judgment.[235] The baptism "with the Holy Spirit" would refer to Spirit baptism that will happen when Israel accepts her Messiah (Isa. 44:3; Joel 2:28-32). A foretaste of that baptism occurred on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). The baptism "with fire" would refer to Jesus' judgment of unrepentant Israel (cf. v. 12). After Israel's rejection of Jesus, it became clear that this national judgment will happen primarily at His second coming. This fiery judgment might also refer to unrepentant individuals when they reach the end of their lives.

All things considered, it seems probable that John was referring to one baptism that will find complete fulfillment at Jesus' second coming.

The rabbis taught that, even if one was a slave, loosening another person's sandal was beneath the dignity of a Jew.[236] So by saying he was unworthy to unloose ("remove") Jesus' "sandals," John meant that he was unworthy of even the most humiliating service of Jesus.

3:12 John metaphorically described God separating the true and the false, the repentant and the unrepentant, in a future judgment. This thorough judgment will result in the preservation of the believing Israelites and the destruction of the unbelieving (cf. 25:31-46). The "barn" probably refers to the kingdom, and the "unquenchable fire" to the endless duration and the agonizing nature of this punishment.

> "'Unquenchable fire' is not just metaphor: fearful reality underlies Messiah's separation of grain from chaff. The 'nearness' of the kingdom therefore calls for repentance (v. 2)."[237]

What then was the essential message of Messiah's forerunner?

> "John preached *both* a personal salvation, involving the remission of sins (Mark 1:4), *and* a national salvation, involving the establishment of the millennial kingdom with Israel delivered out of the hand of their enemies (Matt. 3:2; Luke 1:71-75)."[238]

2. Jesus' baptism 3:13-17 (cf. Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-23)

Jesus' baptism was the occasion at which His messiahship became obvious publicly. Matthew recorded this event as he did to convince his readers further of Jesus' messianic

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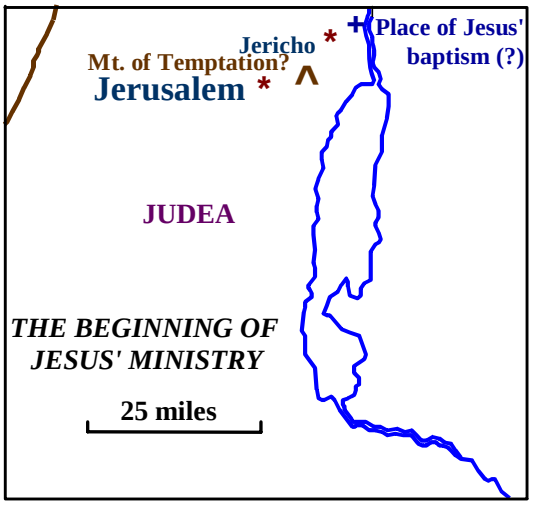
[235]Those who favor this view include Walvoord, *Matthew:* . . ., p. 32; Barbieri, p. 25; and Wiersbe, 1:17.
[236]The rabbinic writing *Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael, Nezikin 1* on Exod. 21:2, cited by Bock, *Jesus according* . . ., p. 83.
[237]Carson, "Matthew," p. 105.
[238]S. Lewis Johnson Jr., "The Message of John the Baptist." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 113:449 (January 1956):36. See also Toussaint, p. 69.

qualifications. Thus John's baptism had two purposes: to prepare Israel for her Messiah (3:1-12) and to prepare the Messiah for Israel (3:13-17; cf. John 1:31).

3:13-14 John hesitated to baptize Jesus because he believed that Jesus did not need to repent. John evidently suggested that it was more appropriate that Jesus baptize him, than that he baptize Jesus, because he knew that Jesus was more righteous than he was. It is unlikely that John meant that he wanted the Spirit and fire baptism of Jesus. John did not know that Jesus was the Messiah until after he had baptized Him (John 1:31-34).

3:15 John agreed to baptize Jesus, only after Jesus convinced him that by baptizing Him, both of them would "fulfill all righteousness." What did Jesus mean?

An important prerequisite to understanding Jesus' words is an understanding of the meaning of "righteousness." Matthew's use of this word is different from Paul's. Paul used it mainly to describe a right standing before God, positional righteousness. Matthew used it to describe conformity to God's will, *ethical* righteousness.[239] Ethical righteousness is the display of conduct in one's actions that is right in God's eyes. It does not deal with getting saved but responding to God's grace. In Matthew, a righteous person is one who lives in harmony with the will of God (cf. 1:19). Ethical righteousness is a major theme of the Old Testament, and it was a matter that concerned the Jews in Jesus' day, especially the Pharisees.



Jesus understood that it was God's will for John to baptize Him. There is no Old Testament prophecy that states that Messiah would undergo water baptism, but there is prophecy that Messiah would submit Himself to God (Isa. 42:1; 53; et al.). That spirit of submissiveness to God's will is primarily what John's baptism identified in those who submitted to it. Consequently it was appropriate for Jesus to undergo John's baptism, and John consented to baptize Him. In doing so, Jesus authenticated John's ministry and identified Himself with the godly remnant within Israel.

[239]Benno Przybylski, *Righteousness in Matthew and His World of Thought*, pp. 91-94.

> "The King, because of His baptism, is now bound up with His subjects."[240]
>
> "Jesus' baptism in the Jordan stands as a counterpart of Israel's crossing of the Red Sea at the onset of the Exodus. Thus Jesus transversed the Jordan and then, like Israel, spent a period of time in the wilderness. Jesus, another Moses, on whom the Spirit had been placed (Isa. 63:10-14), would lead the way."[241]
>
> "Jesus fulfilled the Scripture by replicating in His own life the patterns of God's historical relations with Israel and by accomplishing in His own history the predicted events of prophecy."[242]

It is significant that Matthew did not describe Jesus' baptism. His emphasis was on the two revelatory events that followed it (cf. 2:1-23).

3:16-17 The Greek text stresses the fact that Jesus' departure from the water and God's attestation of Him as the Messiah occurred at the same time. The NIV translation gives this sense better than the NASB.

The person who "saw the Spirit of God descending" was evidently Jesus. Jesus is the person in the immediately preceding context. John the Evangelist recorded that John the Baptist also saw this (John 1:32), but evidently no one but Jesus heard the Father's voice. In fact, the baptism of Jesus appears to have been a private affair with no one present but John and Jesus.

The phrase "the heavens were opened" or "heaven was opened" recalls instances of people receiving visions from God. In them they saw things unseen by other mortals (e.g., Isa. 64:1; Ezek. 1:1; cf. Acts 7:56; Rev. 4:1; 19:11). The phrase implies that new revelation will follow to and through Jesus. What Jesus saw was the Holy Spirit in the form of "a dove," not in a dove-like fashion, descending on Him (cf. Luke 3:22). This is the first explicit identification of the Holy Spirit with a dove in Scripture. It was an appropriate symbol because of its beauty, heavenly origin, freedom, sensitivity, purity, and peaceful nature.

> "The descent of the Spirit upon Jesus denotes the divine act whereby God empowers him to accomplish the messianic ministry he is shortly to begin (4:17). Such empowerment,

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[240]Toussaint, p. 73. Cf. McGee, 4:20.

[241]Don B. Garlington, "Jesus, the Unique Son of God: Tested and Faithful," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:603 (July-September 1994):287.

[242]Craig A. Blaising, "The Fulfillment of the Biblical Covenants," in *Progressive Dispensationalism*, p. 195.

> of course, is not to be construed as Jesus' initial endowment with the Spirit, for he was conceived by the Spirit. Instead, it specifies in what way Jesus proves to be the mightier One John had said he would be (3:11). It also serves as the reference point for understanding the 'authority' with which Jesus discharges his public ministry. Empowered by God's Spirit, Jesus speaks as the mouthpiece of God (7:28-29) and acts as the instrument of God (12:28)."[243]

In Isaiah 42:1, the prophet predicted that God would put His Spirit on His Servant. That happened at Jesus' baptism. Matthew's account shows fulfillment, though the writer did not draw attention to it as such here. When God's Spirit came on individuals in the Old Testament, He empowered them for divine service. That was the purpose of Jesus' anointing as well (Luke 4:14; 5:17; cf. Luke 24:49).

> "It is a great paradox that upon the Messiah, who was to baptize *with fire*, the Spirit should have descended at His baptism *like a dove*, a symbol of gentleness and meekness. In Jesus we are in fact confronted with both 'the goodness and severity of God' (Rom. xi. 22); and this double truth runs right through the New Testament, and not least through the Gospel of Matthew (contrast, for example, xi. 29 and xxv. 41)."[244]

An audible revelation followed the visual one (v. 17). The "voice" from heaven could be none other than God's. After 400 years without prophetic revelation, God broke the silence. He spoke from heaven to humankind again. Matthew recorded God's words as a general announcement (cf. 17:5). The other evangelists wrote that God said, "You are my beloved Son" (Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22).

Evidently the accounts in Mark and Luke contain the actual words God used, the *ipisissima verba*, whereas Matthew gave a free quotation of God's words, the *ipisissima vox*. These Latin terms mean essentially "own words" and "own voice" respectively. As used in New Testament studies, the former phrase indicates a verbatim quotation and the latter a free quotation. The former refers to the words the speaker in the narrative used and the latter to the words of the writer who interpreted the speaker's words. Matthew probably gave a free quotation because he used what happened at Jesus' baptism as evidence of His messiahship.

> "Had the crowds heard the voice from heaven, it is inexplicable why one segment of the public does not at least entertain the idea that Jesus is the Son of God. And

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[243]Kingsbury, p. 52.

[244]Tasker, p. 50.

> had John heard the voice from heaven, it is odd that his question of 11:2-3 contains no hint of this. On the contrary, it reflects the selfsame view of Jesus that John had expressed prior to the baptism, namely, that Jesus is the Coming One (3:11-12)."[245]

The words God spoke identified Jesus as the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. The term "Son of God" was one that God used of David's descendant who would follow him on Israel's throne (2 Sam. 7:13-14; Ps. 2:7; 89:26-29; cf. Matt. 1:20; 2:15; 4:3, 6). God's commendation also linked Jesus with the Suffering Servant at the commencement of His ministry (Isa. 42:1; 53). The Beloved One is equivalent to the One with whom the Father was "well pleased" (Isa. 42:1). Genesis 22:2 may also be behind this announcement since that verse describes Isaac as Abraham's beloved only son (cf. Ps. 2:7; Isa. 42:1). Consequently, "Son of God" is a messianic title.[246] Notice the involvement of all three members of the Trinity in Jesus' baptism. This indicates its importance.

> "For the first time the Trinity, foreshadowed in many ways in the O.T., is clearly manifested."[247]

In this one statement at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, God presented Him as the Davidic Messiah, the Son of God, the representative of the people, and the Suffering Servant. Matthew had presented Jesus in all of these roles previously, but now God the Father confirmed His identity.

> ". . . God's baptismal declaration at 3:17 reveals itself to be climactic within the context of 1:1—4:16 because this is the place where God's understanding of Jesus as his Son ceases to be of the nature of private information available only to the reader and becomes instead an element within the story that henceforth influences the shape of events. To illustrate this, notice how the words Satan speaks in 4:3, 6 ('If you are the Son of God . . .') pick up directly on the declaration God makes in the baptismal pericope ('This is my beloved Son . . .')."[248]

> "Because Matthew so constructs his story that God's evaluative point of view is normative, the reader knows that in hearing God enunciate his understanding of Jesus, he or she has heard the normative understanding of Jesus, the one in terms of which all other understandings are to be judged.

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[245]Kingsbury, p. 51.
[246]Allen, p. 29.
[247]*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 995.
[248]Kingsbury, p. 44, and footnote 2.

> In Matthew's story, God himself dictates that Jesus is preeminently the Son of God."[249]
>
> "He did not *become* Son of God at His baptism, as certain heretical teachers in the early Church maintained; but it was then that He was appointed to a work which He alone could perform, because of His unique relationship with His Father."[250]

Matthew passed over all the incidents of Jesus' childhood, including His appearance at the temple (Luke 2:41-50), because his interests were selective and apologetic rather than merely historical. He introduced Jesus as the messianic King of Israel who fulfilled Old Testament prophecy and received divine confirmation from God with an audible pronouncement from heaven (cf. Exod. 20:1).[251]

In chapter 1, Matthew stressed the glories of Messiah's person. In chapter 2, he gave a preview of the reception He would receive as Israel's Messiah. In chapter 3, he introduced the beginning of His ministry with accounts of His earthly forerunner's heralding and His heavenly Father's approbation.

3. Jesus' temptation 4:1-11 (cf. Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13)

> ". . . Jesus' testing in the wilderness of Judea is one of the most significant indicators of His uniqueness. In fact it may not be stretching the point to say that the very purpose of the temptation narratives is to underscore His uniqueness."[252]
>
> "Just as metal has to be tested far beyond any stress and strain that it will ever be called upon to bear, before it can be used for any useful purpose, so a man has to be tested before God can use him for His purposes."[253]
>
> "In a similar way, the Lord Jesus Christ was tested to demonstrate that He was exactly who He claimed to be."[254]

Jesus' genealogy and virgin birth prove His legal human qualification as Israel's King. His baptism was the occasion of His divine approval. His temptation demonstrated His moral fitness to reign. The natural question a thoughtful reader of Matthew's Gospel might ask after reading God's attestation of His Son (3:17) is: Was He really that good? Jesus' three temptations prove that He was.

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[249]Ibid., p. 52.
[250]Tasker, p. 50.
[251]See S. Lewis Johnson Jr., "The Baptism of Christ," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123:491 (July-September 1966):220-29.
[252]Garlington, p. 285.
[253]Barclay, 1:56.
[254]McGee, 4:21.

> "By the end of the baptismal pericope, the Jesus of Matthew's story stands before the reader preeminently as the Son of God who has been empowered with the Spirit of God. So identified, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the desert to engage the devil, or Satan, in conflict in the place of his abode (4:1-11). . . . Ultimately, the substance of each test has to do with Jesus' devotion, or obedience, to God. The intent of Satan in each test is to entice Jesus to break faith with God, his Father, and thus disavow his divine sonship. Should Satan succeed at this, he succeeds in effect in destroying Jesus. In testing Jesus, Satan cunningly adopts God's evaluative point of view according to which Jesus is his Son (4:3, 6)."[255]

4:1-2 The same "Spirit" who brought Jesus into the world (1:20), and demonstrated God's approval of Him (3:16), now "led" Him "into the wilderness" for tempting by Satan.

> "The [Greek word *peirazo*] means 'to try' or 'to make proof of,' and when ascribed to God in His dealings with people, it means no more than this (see Gen. 22:1). But for the most part in Scripture, the word is used in a negative sense, and means to entice, solicit, or provoke to sin. Hence the name given to the wicked one in this passage is 'the tempter' (4:3). Accordingly 'to be tempted' here is to be understood both ways. The Spirit conducted Jesus into the wilderness to try His faith, but the agent in this trial was the wicked one, whose object was to seduce Jesus away from His allegiance to God. This was temptation in the bad sense of the term. Yet Jesus did not give in to temptation; He passed the test (see 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 7:26)."[256]

> "Just as God led Israel out of Egypt and through the waters and into the desert (Num 20.5; 1 *Bas* 12.6; Ps 80.1 LXX; etc., all using *anagein* ['to lead up']), so does the Spirit of God lead Jesus into the desert after he is baptized."[257]

> "According to Hosea 2:14-23, the wilderness was the place of Israel's original sonship, where God had loved His people. Yet because they had forsaken Yahweh their Father, a 'renewal' of the exodus into the desert was necessary for the restoration of Israel's status as the 'son' of God. In this new exodus, God's power and help would be experienced again in a renewed trek into the wilderness."[258]

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[255]Kingsbury, p. 55.

[256]*The Nelson* . . ., p. 1581.

[257]W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 1:354. Cf. Deut. 8:2, 16.

[258]Garlington, p. 287.

The wilderness of Judea (3:1) is the traditional site. Israel had, of course, experienced temptation in another wilderness for 40 years. The number 40 frequently has connections with sin and testing in the Old Testament (cf. Gen. 7:4, 12; Num. 14:33; 32:13; Deut. 9:25; 25:3; Ps. 95:10; Jon. 3:4). Jesus experienced temptation in the wilderness at the end of 40 days and nights.

The Greek word translated "tempted" (*peirazo*) means "to test" in either a good or bad sense. Here God's objective was to demonstrate the character of His Son by exposing Him to Satan's tests (cf. 2 Sam. 24:1; Job 1:6—2:7). Scripture consistently teaches that God does not "tempt" (Gr. *peirazo*) anyone: to seduce them to sin (James 1:13). Nevertheless He does allow people to experience testing that comes from the world, the flesh, and the devil (1 John 2:15-17; Rom. 7:18-24; 1 Pet. 5:8).[259] God evidently led Jesus into the wilderness to demonstrate the obedience of this Son compared with the disobedience of His son Israel (2:15; cf. Exod. 4:22; Deut. 8:3, 5). God allowed both His sons to be tested "to prove their obedience and loyalty in preparation for their appointed work."[260]

Fasting in Scripture was for a spiritual reason, namely, to forego a physical need to give attention to a more important spiritual need.[261] During this fast Jesus ate nothing but presumably drank water (cf. Luke 4:2). Moses and Elijah, two of God's most significant servants in the Old Testament, likewise fasted for 40 days and nights (Exod. 34:28; Deut. 9:9; 1 Kings 19:8). Jesus' fast would have connected Him with these servants of the Lord in the minds of Matthew's Jewish readers, as it does in ours.

4:3-4 Satan attacked Jesus when He was vulnerable physically. The form of Satan's question in the Greek text indicates that Satan was assuming that Jesus was "the Son of God" (3:17). It is a first class conditional clause.

> "The temptation, to have force, must be assumed as true. The devil knew it to be true. He accepts that fact as a working hypothesis in the temptation."[262]

This temptation was not for Jesus to doubt that He was God's Son. It was to suggest that, as the Son of God, Jesus surely had the power and right to satisfy His own needs independent of His Father. Satan urged Jesus to use His Sonship in a way that was inconsistent with His mission (cf. 26:53-54;

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[259]See Sydney H. T. Page, "Satan: God's Servant," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50:3 (September 2007):449-65.

[260]Carson, "Matthew," p. 112.

[261]On the practice of fasting, see Kent D. Berghuis, "A Biblical Perspective on Fasting," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158:629 (January-March 2001):86-103; and Sigurd Grindheim, "Fasting that is Pleasing to the Lord: A NT Theology of Fasting," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 58:4 (December 2015):697-707.

[262]Robertson, *A Grammar . . .*, p. 1009.

27:40). God had intended Israel's hunger in the wilderness to teach her that hearing and obeying God's Word is the most important thing in life (Deut. 8:2-3). Israel demanded bread in the wilderness but died. Jesus forewent bread in submission to His Father's will and lived.

> "The impact of Satan's temptation is that Jesus, like Adam first and Israel later, had a justifiable grievance against God and therefore ought to voice His complaint by 'murmuring' (Exod. 16; Num. 11) and ought to provide for Himself the basic necessity of life, namely, bread. Satan, in other words, sought to make Jesus groundlessly anxious about His physical needs and thus to provoke Him to demand the food He craved (cf. Ps. 78:18). In short, the devil's aim was to persuade Jesus to repeat the apostasy of Adam and Israel. Satan wanted to break Jesus' perfect trust in His Father's good care and thereby to alter the course of salvation-history."[263]

The wilderness of Judea contains many limestone rocks of all sizes and shapes. Many of them look like the loaves and rolls of bread that the Jews prepared and ate daily.

Jesus' response to Satan's suggestion (v. 4) reflected His total commitment to follow God's will as revealed in His Word. He quoted the Septuagint translation of Deuteronomy 8:3. Its application originally was to Israel, but Jesus applied it to everyone and particularly Himself. By applying this passage to Himself, Jesus put Himself in the category of a true "man" (Gr. *anthropos*).

Jesus faced Satan as a man, not as God. He did not use His own divine powers to overcome the enemy, which is just what Satan tempted Him to do. Rather, He used the spiritual resources that are available to all people, including us, namely: the Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit (v. 1). It is for this reason that He is an example for us of one who successfully endured temptation, and it is this victory that qualified Him to become our high priest (Heb. 2:10; 3:1-2).

> "Matthew here shows that Jesus is not God only, but an unique theanthropic person, *personally* qualified to be King of Israel."[264]

Everyone needs to recognize and acknowledge his or her total dependence on God and His Word. Jesus' real food, what sustained Him above all else, was His commitment to do the will of His Father (John 4:34).

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[263]Garlington, p. 297. Cf. Davies and Allison, 1:362.

[264]Toussaint, p. 76.

In this first temptation, Satan's aim was to seduce Jesus into using His God-given power and authority independently of His Father's will. Jesus had subjected Himself to His Father's will because of His mission (cf. Phil. 2:8). It was uniquely a personal temptation: it tested Jesus' person.

> "Obedience to God's will takes priority over self-gratification, even over the apparently essential provision of food."[265]

Notice in all of these instances of temptation that Satan is a *person*, not merely an impersonal *influence*.

4:5-7 The setting for the second temptation was Jerusalem, perhaps in a vision that Satan gave Jesus, or perhaps Jesus was tempted to imagine Himself there.[266] Matthew referred to Jerusalem with a favorite Jewish term, "the holy city" (cf. Neh. 11:1; Isa. 48:2; Dan. 9:24; Matt. 4:5; 27:53). This suggests that the temptation would have national rather than solely individual implications.

Satan "took" Jesus to a *high point* of the "temple complex" (Gr. *hieron*), not necessarily the topmost peak of the sanctuary. The Greek word is *pterygion*, which can be translated "little wing" or "high corner." The temple complex towered over the Kidron Valley 170 feet below.[267] Some of the Jewish rabbis taught that when Messiah came to deliver Israel, He would appear on the temple roof (cf. Mal. 3:1; John 6:30).[268]

> "Jerusalem was considered the 'center of the nations, with lands around her,' the 'center of the world,' whose inhabitants 'dwell at the center of the earth' (Ezek. 5:5; 38:12; . . .). Thus when Jesus stood on the pinnacle of the temple, He was, theologically speaking, at the center of the world. From that vantage point the Messiah most naturally could claim the nations as His own and rule them with a rod of iron . . ."[269]

Again the devil granted that Jesus was the Son of God. Satan's words replicate the Septuagint version of Psalm 91:11-12, appealing to the authority that Jesus used, namely: God's Word (v. 4). He omitted the words "to guard you in all your ways." Many expositors have assumed that Satan wanted to trick Jesus with this omission, but his free method of

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[265]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 131.
[266]Tasker, p. 53.
[267]Josephus, *Antiquities of. . .*, 15:11:5; Finegan, p. 323.
[268]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 1:293.
[269]Garlington, p. 299. Cf. Davies and Allison, 1:365; and T. L. Donaldson, *Jesus on the Mountain: A Study in Matthean Theology*, pp. 59-61.

quoting was very common. Many New Testament writers quoted the Old Testament in the same loose way.

Probably Satan wanted Jesus to demonstrate His trust in God in a spectacular way to challenge God's faithfulness. He misapplied the Scripture he quoted. The Psalms passage refers to anyone who trusts in God. That certainly applied to Jesus. The verses promise that the angels will uphold such a person as a nurse does a baby (cf. Num. 11:12; Deut. 1:31; Isa. 49:22; Heb. 1:14). God had revealed Himself most particularly at the temple throughout Israel's history. Therefore what better place could there have been to demonstrate the Son of God's confidence in His Father's promise?

Jesus refused Satan's suggestion (v. 7) because the Scriptures prohibited putting God to a test, not because He questioned God's faithfulness to His promise. Satan tempted Jesus to test God. Satan was tempting Jesus to act as if God was there to serve Him, rather than the other way around. Israel had faced the same test and had failed (Exod. 17:2-7; cf. Num. 20:1-13). It is wrong to demand that God prove Himself faithful to His promises by giving us what He has promised *on our terms*. The proper procedure is simply to trust and obey God (Deut. 6:16-17).

> "Testing is not trusting."[270]

Jesus refused to allow Satan to *apply* a valid promise so it contradicted another teaching in God's Word. "On the other hand" or "also" (Gr. *palin*) has the sense of "not contradicting but qualifying."[271] Jesus as a man, voluntarily under the authority of God's Word, proved to be faithful to its spirit as well as to its letter.

4:8-10 The "very high mountain" to which Satan took Jesus next is traditionally near Jericho, but its exact location is not important. It simply provided a vantage point from which Satan could point out other kingdoms that surrounded Israel.

> "The placement of Jesus on the mountain of temptation, where He refused to acknowledge the devil's 'authority,' is deliberately juxtaposed to the mountain (Matt. 28:16) of 'the great commission,' on which He later affirmed that all 'authority' in heaven and on earth had been granted to Him (28:18)."[272]

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[270]J. W. Shepard, *The Christ of the Gospels*, p. 78.
[271]Bruce, 1:90.
[272]Garlington, pp. 301-2.

Luke's wording suggests that Satan presented "all the kingdoms of the world" to Jesus *in a vision* (Luke 4:5). It is hard to tell if Jesus' temptations involved physical transportation or visionary transportation, but my preference is visionary transportation. This temptation would have universal significance, not just personal and national significance, as the first and second temptations did.

Satan offered to "give" Jesus immediate dominion and control over all the kingdoms of the world, and the "glory" connected with reigning over them (v. 9)—something that God would give Him eventually as the Messiah.[273] In the will of God, Jesus would achieve universal rule (Ps. 2), but only as the Suffering Servant who would have to endure the Cross first.

God's divine authentication of His Son (3:16-17) drew attention to both Jesus' Davidic messiahship and His Suffering Servant role. This temptation consisted of an opportunity for Jesus to obtain the benefits of messiahship without having to experience its unpleasant elements. To get this, however, Jesus would have to change His allegiance from God to Satan. This involved idolatry, putting someone or something in the place that God deserves. Later, Peter suggested the same shortcut to Jesus, and received a sharp rebuke as Satan's spokesman for doing so (16:23).

This was a legitimate offer. Satan had the ability, under the sovereign authority of God, to give Jesus what he promised, namely, power and glory (cf. 12:25-28; Luke 10:18; Eph. 2:2). Israel, God's other son, had formerly faced the same temptation to avoid God's uncomfortable will by departing from it, and had failed (Num. 13—14). This third temptation, like the other two, tested Jesus' total loyalty to His Father and His Father's will. Had Jesus taken Satan's bait, He would have been Satan's slave, albeit, perhaps, a world ruler.

> "Jesus was in effect tempted to subscribe to the diabolical doctrine that the end justifies the means; that, so long as He obtained universal sovereignty in the end, it mattered not how that sovereignty was reached . . ."[274]

For a third time, Jesus responded by quoting Scripture to His adversary (v. 10). He banished Satan with the divine command to worship and to serve God alone (Deut. 6:13).

When Satan tempts us to doubt, deny, disobey, or disregard God's Word, we should do what Jesus did. Instead of *listening* to Satan, we should *speak* to him, reiterating what God has said.

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[273]See ibid., p. 290.
[274]Tasker, p. 54.

4:11 Having resisted Satan's attacks successfully, the enemy departed temporarily (cf. James 4:7). God sent messengers ("angels") to assist His faithful Son (cf. 1 Kings 19:4-8). The Father rewarded the Son with divine assistance and further opportunity for service, because Jesus had remained faithful to Him. This is God's normal method.

> "What we call temptation is not meant to make us sin; it is meant to enable us to conquer sin. It is not meant to make us bad, it is meant to make us good. It is not meant to weaken us, it is meant to make us emerge stronger and finer and purer from the ordeal. Temptation is not the penalty of being a man, temptation is the glory of being a man."[275]

Many have observed that Satan followed the same pattern of temptation with Jesus that he had used with Eve (Gen. 3). First, he appealed to the lust of the flesh, the desire to *do* something apart from God's will. Second, he appealed to the lust of the eyes, the desire to *have* something apart from God's will. Third, he appealed to the pride of life, the desire to *be* something apart from God's will (cf. 1 John 2:16). McGee believed that Jesus' first temptation was physical, the second spiritual, and the third psychological.[276]

> "Approaching Jesus three times in Matthew's story, Satan urges him to place concern for self above allegiance to God."[277]

> "Each temptation challenges Jesus' faithfulness. Will he provide for himself independently of God's direction and draw on his power in self-interest (bread)? Will he insist that God protect him by putting God to the test of his protection of the Son (temple)? Will the Son defect from the Father and worship someone else for his own gain (kingdoms)? In each text [*sic*] Jesus stresses his loyalty to the Father as he cites Deuteronomy."[278]

> "All three of the tests are variations of the one great temptation to remove His Messianic vocation from the guidance of His Father and make it simply a political calling."[279]

Each of Jesus' three temptations related to His messiahship: the first to Him personally, the second to the Jews, and the third to all the nations (cf. 1:1). The twin themes of Jesus' royal kingship and His suffering servanthood, which combined in the name Immanuel, "God with us" (1:23), were in tension in the temptation. They remained in tension and created conflict in Jesus' ministry as it unfolded.

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[275]Barclay, 1:56.
[276]McGee, 4:22.
[277]Kingsbury, p. 55.
[278]Bock, *Jesus according . . .*, p. 90.
[279]S. Lewis Johnson Jr., "The Temptation of Christ," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123:492 (October-December 1996):345.

> "In the first temptation Jesus does *not deny* that He is hungry and able to make bread; in the second, He does *not deny* that He is the Son of God, and under special protection; and in the third, He does *not deny* the Kingdom or dominion which is to be given to Him, but only rejects *the mode* by which it is to be obtained. As observed, if such a Kingdom is not covenanted, predicted, and intended, the temptation would not have any force."[280]

> "In this pericope [4:1-11] we encounter a theme that is vital in the theology of the Gospels. The goal of obedience to the Father is accomplished, not by triumphant self-assertion, not by the exercise of power and authority, but paradoxically by the way of humility, service, and suffering. Therein lies true greatness (cf. 20:26-28). In fulfilling his commission by obedience to the will of the Father, Jesus demonstrates the rightness of the great commandment (Deut 6:5) as well as his own submission to it."[281]

> "Just as the first Adam met Satan, so the Last Adam met the enemy (1 Cor. 15:45). Adam met Satan in a beautiful Garden, but Jesus met him in a terrible wilderness. Adam had everything he needed, but Jesus was hungry after forty days of fasting. Adam lost the battle and plunged humanity into sin and death. But Jesus won the battle and went on to defeat Satan in more battles, culminating in His final victory on the cross (John 12:31; Co. 2:15)."[282]

Since Jesus was both God and man, was it possible for Him to sin? Most evangelical theologians have concluded that He could not since God cannot sin. They believe He was impeccable (incapable of sinning). If so, was His temptation genuine? Most have responded yes.[283]

Henri Nouwen helpfully discussed Jesus' three temptations in relation to leadership in ministry. He saw them as temptations to relevance, popularity, and power, and he suggested prayer, ministry, and being led as antidotes.[284]

In the first major section of his Gospel, Matthew showed that Jesus had all the qualifications to be Israel's Messiah—legally, scripturally, and morally. He was now ready to relate Jesus' presentation of Himself to Israel as her King.

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[280]Peters, 1:700.
[281]Hagner, p. 70.
[282]Wiersbe, 1:18.
[283]See Joseph G. Sahl, "The Impeccability of Jesus Christ," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140:557 (January-March 1983):11-20; and the major theologies.
[284]Henri J. M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership*.

II. THE AUTHORITY OF THE KING 4:12—7:29

Having introduced the King, Matthew next demonstrated the authority of the King. This section includes a narrative introduction to Jesus' teaching and then His teaching on the subject of His kingdom.

A. THE BEGINNING OF JESUS' MINISTRY 4:12-25

Matthew gave much prominence to Jesus' teachings in his Gospel. The first of these is the so-called Sermon on the Mount (chs. 5—7). To prepare the reader for this discourse, the writer gave a brief introduction to Jesus' ministry (4:12-25). In it, Matthew provided a résumé of His work, highlighting the authority of Israel's King: the setting of Jesus' ministry (Capernaum), Jesus' essential message ("Repent . . ."), Jesus' call of four disciples, and a summary of Jesus' ministry.

1. The setting of Jesus' ministry 4:12-16

Comparison of John's Gospel and Matthew's, shows that Jesus ministered for about a year before John the Baptist's arrest. John had criticized Herod Antipas for having an adulterous relationship with his brother Philip's wife (14:3-4; Mark 1:14; Luke 3:19-20). Jesus ministered first in Galilee (John 1:19—2:12) and then in Judea (John 2:13—3:21). Then He returned to Galilee by way of Samaria (John 3:22—4:42). Why did Matthew begin his account of Jesus' ministry with John's arrest? John's arrest by Herod signaled the beginning of a new phase of Jesus' ministry. The forerunner's work was now complete. It was time for the King to appear publicly.

> "In royal protocol the King does not make His appearance in public until the forerunner has finished his work. Matthew, emphasizing the official and regal character of Jesus, follows this procedure exactly."[285]

4:12-13 The word "withdrew" (NASB) or "returned" (NIV; Gr. *anachoreo*) is significant. Evidently Jesus wanted to get away from Israel's religious leaders in Jerusalem who opposed John (John 4:1-3; 5:1-16). It is unlikely that Herod Antipas would have imprisoned John if the religious authorities had supported John. Matthew used the same Greek word, *paredothe* ("to be taken into custody"), later when he described Jesus' arrest (26:15, 16, 21, 23, 25; 27:3, 4). The religious leaders evidently played a significant role in both arrests.

To Matthew, "Galilee" had great significance for two reasons. First, it was the place where Isaiah had predicted Messiah would minister (Isa. 9:1). Second, since it was an area where many Gentiles lived, it corroborated Messiah's influence over the nations as well as Israel.

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[285]Toussaint, p. 81. Cf. Johnson, "The Argument . . .," p. 146.

> "Matthew's analysis of Christ's ministry is built upon four clearly noted geographical areas: Galilee (4:12), Perea (19:1), Judea (20:17), and Jerusalem (21:1). With the other Synoptists he omits the early Judean ministry, which occurs chronologically between 4:11 and 4:12 (cf. Jn 1—4)."[286]

Jesus moved the base of His ministry from "Nazareth" to "Capernaum" (v. 13). Matthew described it as he did in view of the prophecy that Jesus' residence there fulfilled (vv. 15-16). This town stood on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee (14:34). It was the town where Peter, Andrew, James, and John (the fishermen) and Matthew (the tax collector) worked (8:14; 9:9). Estimates of its population in the first century range from 1,000 to 15,000.[287]

> "If Joseph settled in Nazareth after the return from Egypt (2:22-23), Jesus now leaves Nazareth and moves to Capernaum (4:12-13), which becomes 'his own city' (9:1). He is thus poised to begin his public ministry."[288]

4:14-16 Jesus' move to Capernaum fulfilled Isaiah 9:1, part of a section of Isaiah's prophecy that describes Immanuel's coming. Matthew's quotation of this passage was a free one. Its point was that "light" had "dawned" in a dark part of Palestine. By New Testament times, the old tribal divisions had little actual relevance.[289] When Isaiah prophesied, Galilee was under the oppressive threat of the Assyrians. He predicted that Messiah would liberate the people living there. When Matthew wrote, Galilee was under Roman oppression. The "darkness" was also symbolic of the absence of religious, political, and cultural advantages available to Jews who lived in Jerusalem. "Dawned" (Gr. *aneteilen*) suggests that the light of Messiah's ministry would first shine brightly in Galilee (cf. John 1:9; 12:46).[290]

> ". . . From of old the Messiah was promised to 'Galilee of the Gentiles' (*ton ethnon*), a foreshadowing of the commission to 'all nations' (*panta ta ethne*, 28:19). Moreover, if the messianic light dawns on the darkest places, then Messiah's salvation can only be a bestowal of grace—namely, that Jesus came to call, not the righteous, but sinners (9:13)."[291]

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[286]Kent, "The Gospel . . .," p. 935.
[287]See France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 141.
[288]Kinsgbury, p. 57.
[289]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 141.
[290]Barnabas Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic*, p. 198.
[291]Carson, "Matthew," p. 117. See Gene R. Smillie, "'Even the Dogs': Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew," J*ournal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45:1 (March 2002):73-97.

> "The natural characteristics of the Galileans, and the preparation of history had made Galilee the one place in all Palestine where a new teacher with a new message had any real chance of being heard, and it was there that Jesus began His mission and first announced His message."[292]

Whereas Galilee was a dark place in one sense, in another sense Jerusalem was even darker. There, hostility to Jesus was much greater, but in Galilee the people heard Jesus gladly.

> "Matthew's story of Jesus' life and ministry possesses a clearly defined beginning, middle, and end and hence falls into three parts: (I) The Presentation of Jesus (1:1—4:16); (II) The Ministry of Jesus to Israel and Israel's Repudiation of Jesus (4:17—16:20); and (III) The Journey of Jesus to Jerusalem and His Suffering, Death, and Resurrection (16:21—28:20). In the first part, Matthew presents Jesus as the Davidic Messiah-King, the royal Son of God (1:1—4:16). To show that Jesus is preeminently the Son of God, Matthew depicts God as announcing within the world of the story that Jesus is his Son (3:17). As the Son of God, Jesus stands forth as the supreme agent of God who authoritatively espouses God's evaluative point of view."[293]

The divisions of the Gospel that I have used in these notes are theological more than narrative.

2. Jesus' essential message 4:17 (cf. Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:14-15)

The clause "From that time Jesus began" (Gr. *apo tote erxato ho Iesous*) is very significant in Matthew's Gospel. The writer used it only twice, here and in 16:21, and in both instances it indicates a major change in Jesus' ministry.[294] Here it signals the beginning of Jesus' public preaching that the kingdom was "at hand." Until now, His ministry had been to selected individuals and groups, which John's Gospel records. Jesus "went public" after John had ended his ministry of preparing Israel for her Messiah.

Here Jesus took up exactly the same message that John had been preaching (cf. 3:2). It is exactly the same statement in the Greek text. The better translations have also rendered these sentences identically. In 16:21, having been rejected by Israel, Jesus announced His approaching passion and resurrection. The verb "began" (*erxato*) indicates the beginning of an action that continues, or it describes a new phase in the narrative, wherever it occurs.[295]

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[292]Barclay, 1:68. See pp. 65-68 for helpful background information concerning Galilee.
[293]Kingsbury, p. 161.
[294]See ibid., p. 40; and Tasker, p. 57.
[295]M'Neile, p. 45.

Jesus used the same words as John, and He, too, offered no explanation of their meaning. Clearly, Jesus' concept of "the kingdom" was the same as that of the Old Testament prophets and John. Some commentators claim that John's concept of the kingdom was eschatological but Jesus' was soteriological.[296] However, there is no basis for this distinction in the text. Both John and Jesus viewed the kingdom as having both soteriological and eschatological elements.

Alva McClain listed and explained five different answers that Bible scholars have given to the questions: "Was this Kingdom identical with the Kingdom of Old Testament prophecy? Or was it something different?"

> "First, the *Liberal-Social* view: that Christ took over from the Old Testament prophets their ethical and social ideals of the kingdom, excluding almost wholly the eschatological element, and made these ideals the program of a present kingdom which it is the responsibility of His followers to establish in human society on earth here and now. . . .
>
> "Second, the *Critical-Eschatological* view: that Jesus at first embraced fully the eschatological ideas of the Old Testament prophets regarding the Kingdom, and to some extent the current Jewish ideas; but later in the face of opposition He changed His message; or, at least, there are conflicting elements in the gospel records. . . .
>
> "Third, the *Spiritualizing-Anti-millennial* view: that our Lord appropriated certain spiritual elements from the Old Testament prophetical picture, either omitted or spiritualized the physical elements (excepting the physical details involved in the Messiah's first coming!), and then added some original ideas of His own. . . .
>
> "Fourth, the *Dual-Kingdom* view: that Christ at His first coming offered to Israel and established on earth a purely spiritual kingdom; and that at His second coming He will establish on earth a literal Millennial Kingdom. . . .
>
> "Fifth, the *One-Kingdom Millennial* view: that the Kingdom announced by our Lord and offered to the nation of Israel at His first coming was identical with the Mediatorial Kingdom of Old Testament prophecy, and will be established on earth at the second coming of the King. . . ."[297]

McClain then proceeded to prove from Scripture that view five above is the correct one.[298]

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[296]E.g., Shepard, pp. 62, 123.

[297]McClain, pp. 274-75.

[298]Ibid., pp. 276-303. See also *A Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. "The Kingdom of God, of Heaven," by James Orr, 2:849.

Now the King began announcing the nearness of the earthly kingdom of Messiah, and He urged His subjects to prepare themselves spiritually.

> "The kingdom being at hand meant that it was being offered in the person of the prophesied King, but it did not mean that it would be immediately fulfilled."[299]

> "Christ came to found a Kingdom, not a School; to institute a fellowship, not to propound a system."[300]

Normative (traditional) dispensationalists—such as Walvoord, Pentecost, Toussaint, Barbieri, Bailey, and myself—believe that the kingdom was postponed due to Jewish rejection of the Messiah. Progressive dispensationalists believe that it began with Jesus' earthly ministry, and continues through the church, but that it will also have a future manifestation in the Millennium.[301]

Matthew wrote "kingdom of heaven," whereas Mark and Luke usually wrote "kingdom of God" in the parallel passages. This was probably because Matthew wrote to Jews who used the word "heaven" instead of "God" to avoid unduly familiarizing the ear with the sacred name.[302] The phrase "of heaven" does not mean that it is a mystical or spiritual kingdom, as opposed to a physical, earthly kingdom. It means that this kingdom is sent from God who is in heaven.

3. The call of four disciples 4:18-22 (cf. Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11)

The calling of these four men shows Jesus' authority over people. The response of these disciples was appropriate in view of their summons by the King. They obeyed "immediately" (vv. 20, 22). From here on in the Gospel of Matthew, we will not read stories about Jesus alone; He is always with His disciples, until they desert Him in the garden of Gethsemane (26:56).

4:18-20 The Hebrews referred to lakes as "seas." The "Sea of Galilee" got its name from its district.[303] Its other name, the Sea of "Gennesaret," came from the plain to the northwest of the lake (Luke 5:1) and from a town on that plain: Gennesaret. The name "Gennesaret" connects to the Hebrew word *kinnor*, meaning "harp." In the Old Testament, this body of water was called the Sea of "Chinnereth" because of its harp-like shape.[304]

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[299]Walvoord, *Matthew: . . .*, p. 38. See also Peters, 1:364-65; McClain, p. 304; L. Berkhof, *The Kingdom of God*, p. 19, footnote; Stanley D. Toussaint, "The Contingency of the Coming of the Kingdom," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, pp. 222-37; and *The New Scofield . . .*, p. 996.

[300]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 1:528.

[301]E.g., Robert L. Saucy, "The Presence of the Kingdom and the Life of the Church," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145:577 (January-March 1988):30-46.

[302]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 1:267.

[303]See the map "Palestine in the Time of Jesus" at the end of these notes to locate the places mentioned in this stage of Jesus' ministry.

[304]See *The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Chinnereth, Chinneroth, Cinneroth, Gennesaret," by R. F. Hosking, p. 209.

Sometimes, in Jesus' day, people referred to the lake as the Sea of "Tiberias." Tiberias was the Hellenistic city that Herod built on its west-southwest shore. This sea was approximately 12 miles long and 9 miles wide at its longest and broadest points. It supported a thriving fishing industry in Jesus' day, with nine towns on its western shore, plus others elsewhere. Simon and Andrew had moved from their hometown of Bethsaida (lit. "Fishtown," John 1:44) to Capernaum (Mark 1:21, 29).

Simon's nickname was Peter ("Rocky"). "Simon" was one of the most common names in first-century Palestine.[305] The "net" (Gr. *amphibleston*, used only here in the New Testament) that Simon and Andrew were "casting" into the lake was a circular one. It was a common tool of Galilean fishermen. Fishing was a major industry in Galilee.

Jesus' command (not invitation), "Follow Me" (v. 19), was a summons to leave their occupations, and literally follow Jesus wherever He would take them as His trainees (cf. 1 Kings 19:19-21).

> "The expression 'Follow Me' would be readily understood, as implying a call to become the *permanent* disciple of a teacher. (Talmudic tractate *Erubhin* 30 a) Similarly, it was not only the practice of the Rabbis, but regarded as one of the most sacred duties, for a Master to gather around him a circle of disciples. (Talmudic tractates *Pirqey Abhoth* 1. 1; and *Sanhedrin* 91 b) Thus, neither Peter and Andrew, nor the sons of Zebedee, could have misunderstood the call of Christ, or even regarded it as strange."[306]

Etiquette required a rabbi's disciples to walk behind him.[307] The phrase "fishers of men" recalls Jeremiah 16:16. There Yahweh sent "fishermen" to gather Israelites for the Exile. Here Jesus called fishermen to announce the end of Israel's spiritual exile (cf. 1:11-12; 2:17-18) and to prepare for His messianic reign. Later, after experiencing rejection by Israel, Jesus re-commissioned these men for duty in the inter-advent age (28:18-20; John 21:15-23).

This message appeared on a church marquee: "Be fishers of men. You catch 'em. He'll clean 'em." That is the proper order.

Evidently Jesus had called Simon, Andrew, Philip, and Nathanael earlier (John 1:35-51). Probably they had returned to Galilee and resumed their former work.[308] This would partially explain their quick response to Jesus

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[305]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 146.
[306]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 1:474.
[307]Idem, *The Temple*, p. 147.
[308]Cf. Lenski, p. 171.

here (v. 20). Furthermore, Jesus had changed water into wine in Cana, which was not far away (John 2:1-11). If the miracle of Luke 5:1-11 occurred the night before this calling, we have another reason they followed Jesus "immediately." Matthew's interest was not in *why* these men responded as they did, but *how* authoritatively Jesus called them, and how they responded. They recognized Jesus' authority and left all to follow Him.

Disciples of other rabbis normally continued their trades, but Jesus wanted His disciples to be with Him fulltime (Luke 9:61). Also, in contrast to the rabbinic model, Jesus chose His disciples; typically the disciple chose the rabbi he would follow. Furthermore, Jesus called His disciples to follow *Him*, not to follow the Law or teaching in abstraction.

4:21-22 "James" and "John" were evidently repairing (Gr. *katartizo*) their nets after a night of fishing (cf. 1 Cor. 1:10; 2 Cor. 13:11).

> "In the Synoptics, unlike Paul's epistles, Jesus' call is not necessarily effectual. But in this instance it was immediately obeyed."[309]

The disciples "left . . . their father" as well as their fishing (v. 22).

> "The twelve arrived at their final intimate relation to Jesus only by degrees, three stages in the history of their fellowship with Him being distinguishable. In the first stage they were simply believers in Him as the Christ, and His occasional companions at convenient, particularly festive, seasons [e.g., John 2:1-11].
>
> "In the second stage, fellowship with Christ assumed the form of an uninterrupted attendance on His person, involving entire, or at least habitual abandonment of secular occupations [Matt. 4:22; Mark 1:20; Luke 5:11].
>
> "The twelve enter on the last and highest stage of discipleship when they were chosen by their Master from the mass of His followers, and formed into a select band, to be trained for the great work of the apostleship [Mark 3:13-15; Luke 6:12-13]."[310]

"The call of God through Jesus is sovereign and absolute in its authority; the response of those who are called is to be both immediate and absolute, involving a complete break with old loyalties. The actual shape of this

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[309]Carson, "Matthew," p. 120.

[310]A. B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve*, pp. 11-12.

> break with the past will undoubtedly vary from individual to individual, but that there must be a fundamental, radical reorientation of a person's priorities is taken for granted."[311]

4. A summary of Jesus' ministry 4:23-25 (cf. Mark 1:35-39; Luke 4:42-44)

This brief résumé (cf. 9:35-38) stresses the varied activities and the geographical and ethnic extent of Jesus' ministry at this time. It sets the stage for the discourse to follow (chs. 5—7) implying that this is but a sample of Jesus' teaching (cf. 9:35).

"Galilee" (v. 23) covered an area of about 2,800 square miles (roughly 70 by 40 miles), and contained approximately 3,000,000 people who lived in 204 cities and villages.[312] As an itinerant preacher, Jesus engaged in three primary activities: *teaching* His disciples, *preaching* good news to the multitudes, and *healing* many who were infirm. This verse helps the reader identify Jesus' main activities during most of His earthly ministry. Matthew never used the verb *didasko* ("teach") of the disciples until after Jesus had departed from them. He presented Jesus as *the* Teacher during His earthly ministry. This is also Matthew's first of only four uses of *euangelion* ("gospel," "good news," cf. 9:35; 24:14; 26:13).

Jesus' ministry was primarily to the Jewish people. This is clear, first, since He preached in the Jewish synagogues of Galilee. Second, He preached a Jewish message, the good news about the messianic kingdom. Third, He practiced His healing among the Jews. The Greek word *laos* ("people") refers specifically to "the people," that is, the Jews.[313] (The English word "laity" comes from *laos*.) Matthew was hyperbolizing when he wrote that Jesus healed "all who were ill"; He could not have healed every single individual, though His healing ministry was extensive (cf. "all Galilee").

> "What is the difference between *teaching* and *preaching*? Preaching is the uncompromising proclamation of certainties; teaching is the explanation of the meaning and the significance of them."[314]

"Syria" (v. 24), to the Jews in Galilee, meant the area to the north. However, the Roman province of Syria covered all of Palestine except Galilee, which was then under Herod Antipas' administration. Regardless of the way Matthew intended us to understand "Syria," Jesus' popularity spread far north. Matthew described the painfully diseased people who sought Jesus out in three categories. There were those whom demons oppressed. Others had ailments that resulted in mental and physical imbalances that demons did not induce. Still others suffered paralyses of various kinds. Jesus' miracles dealt with "incurable" afflictions, not just trivial maladies (cf. Isa. 35:5-6).

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[311]Hagner, p. 78.
[312]Josephus, *The Wars . . .*, 3:3:2.
[313]M'Neile, p. 47.
[314]Barclay, 1:77.

> ". . . both Scripture and Jewish tradition take sickness as resulting directly or indirectly from living in a fallen world . . . . The Messianic Age would end such grief (Isa. 11:1-5; 35:5-6). Therefore Jesus' miracles, dealing with every kind of ailment, not only herald the kingdom but show that God has pledged himself to deal with sin at a basic level (cf. 1:21; 8:17)."[315]

> "I use the word *Miracle* to mean an interference with Nature by supernatural power."[316]

When Matthew wrote that multitudes "followed" Jesus, he did not mean that they were all thoroughly committed disciples, as the text will show. Some were undoubtedly ardent disciples, but others were simply needy or curious individuals who followed Jesus temporarily. These people came from all over "Galilee, Decapolis" (the area to the east of Galilee as far north as Damascus and as far south as Philadelphia[317]), "Jerusalem, Judea," and east of ("beyond") "the Jordan" River. Many of these had to be Gentiles. Matthew made no reference to Jesus ministering in Samaria or to Samaritans.

> "While Jesus begins His ministry with the Jews only, His fame becomes so widespread that both Jews and Gentiles respond. This is clearly a foreview of the kingdom. The King is present with both Jews and Gentiles being blessed, the Gentiles coming to the Jewish Messiah for blessing (Zechariah 2:10-12; 8:18-23; Isaiah 2:1-4)."[318]

This section (vv. 12-25) constitutes a fitting introduction to the discourse that follows. The King had summoned disciples to follow Him, and huge crowds were seeking Him out, anticipating great supernatural blessings from His hand. He had appealed mainly to the Jews, but multitudes of Gentiles were seeking Him and experiencing His blessing, too. No case was too difficult for Him.

> "The evangelist wants us quickly to sense the great excitement surrounding Jesus at the beginning of his ministry, where he began to preach 'the good news of the kingdom,' before presenting him in more detail as the master teacher (chaps. 5—7) and charismatic healer (chaps. 8—9)."[319]

B. JESUS' REVELATIONS CONCERNING PARTICIPATION IN HIS KINGDOM CHS. 5—7

The Sermon on the Mount is the first of five major discourses that Matthew included in his Gospel. Each one follows a narrative section, and each ends with the same formula statement concerning Jesus' authority (cf. 7:28-29).

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[315]Carson, "Matthew," pp. 121-22.
[316]C. S. Lewis, *Miracles*, p. 15.
[317]See Finegan, pp. 307-9.
[318]Toussaint, *Behold the . . .*, p. 85.
[319]Hagner, p. 81.

There are four features of all five of Jesus' major discourses to His disciples, that Matthew recorded, that are worthy of note.

First, they did not provoke conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders.

Second, the reason for this is that Jesus gave them to His disciples and the crowds, not to the religious leaders.

By the way, the Gospels use the word "disciple" in a slightly different way than many Christians do today. We usually think of disciples of Jesus as people who have believed in Jesus and who are going on in their walk with Him. The Gospel evangelists used "disciple" to refer to people who were learning from Jesus, before they came to faith in Him, as well as after they did. In the process of increasing insight into who Jesus was, and increasing belief in Him, many of Jesus' disciples experienced regeneration. The Gospels do not focus on the moment of regeneration for disciples. Instead, they focus on the identity of Jesus, and they encourage increasing faith in Him. The emphasis is more linear than punctiliar. The Greek word translated "disciple" is *mathetes*, which means simply "learner" or "pupil."

Third, Matthew recorded Jesus' discourses in such a way that Jesus appears to be speaking past His original audience (cf. 5:11; 6:17-18; 10:18, 22, 42; 13:18-23, 38; 18:15-20; chs. 24—25). Matthew related Jesus' teaching to include future, as well as original, disciples. This draws the reader into Jesus' teaching. What He taught has relevance for us as well as for the Twelve. Jesus was teaching all His disciples—of every era—when He taught these things.

Fourth, Matthew presented Jesus as the Prophet whom Moses predicted in Deuteronomy 18:18. As such, Jesus not only corrected some false teaching of His day, and clarified God's original intention in the Mosaic Law, but He also replaced the Old Covenant with the New Covenant. Some of Jesus' teaching contradicted and contravened Moses' teaching (cf. Heb. 1:1-2). For example, He declared all food clean.

The Sermon on the Mount has probably attracted more attention than any discourse in history. The amount of material in print on this sermon reflects its popularity and significance. It has resulted in the publication of thousands of books and articles.

> "His [Jesus'] first great speech, the Sermon on the Mount (chaps. 5—7), is the example par excellence of his teaching."[320]
>
> ". . . it were difficult to say which brings greater astonishment (though of opposite kind): a first reading of the 'Sermon on the Mount,' or that of any section of the Talmud.

[320]Kingsbury, p. 106.

> "He who has thirsted and quenched his thirst at the living fount of Christ's Teaching, can never again stoop to seek drink at the broken cisterns of Rabbinism."[321]

However, there is still much debate about its interpretation. A brief review of the basic interpretations of this discourse follows.[322]

Especially in former years, many interpreters believed that the purpose of the Sermon was to enable people to know what God required, so that by obeying they might obtain salvation. One writer articulated this *soteriological* interpretation this way.

> "The Kingdom of God, like the Kingdom of Science, makes no other preliminary demand from those who would enter it than that it should be treated experimentally and practically as a working hypothesis. 'This do and thou shalt live.'"[323]

> "The Faith of the Fellowship of the Kingdom would be expressed in its Creed-Prayer, the Lord's Prayer. No other affirmation of faith would be required. To pray that Creed-Prayer daily from the heart would be the prime expression of loyal membership. The duties of membership would be the daily striving to obey the Two Great Commandments and to realize in character and conduct the ideals of the Seven Beatitudes: the seeking of each member to be in his environment 'the salt of the earth' and 'the light of the world:' and the endeavour to promote by every means in his power the coming of the Kingdom of God among mankind. Membership of the Fellowship would be open to all men and women—whether Christians, Jews, Mohammedans, or members of any religion or of no religion at all—who desired to be loyal to the Kingdom of God and discharge its duties."[324]

There are two main reasons most interpreters now reject this interpretation. First, it contradicts the many passages of Scripture that present salvation as something impossible to attain by good works (e.g., Eph. 2:8-9). Second, the extremely high standards that Jesus taught in the Sermon make the attaining of these requirements impossible for anyone and everyone, except Jesus.

A second approach to the Sermon is the *sociological* view, that sees it not as a guide to personal salvation, but to the salvation of society.

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[321]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 1:525, 526.

[322]See Toussaint, *Behold the . . .*, pp. 86-94; John A. Martin, "Dispensational Approaches to the Sermon on the Mount," in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, pp. 35-48; and W. S. Kissinger, *The Sermon on the Mount: A History of Interpretation and Bibliography*.

[323]H. D. A. Major, *Basic Christianity*, p. 48.

[324]Ibid., pp. 67-68.

> "What would happen in the world if the element of fair play as enunciated in the Golden Rule—'Do unto others as you would that men should do unto you'—were put into practice in the various relationships of life? . . . What a difference all this would make, and how far we would be on the road to a new and better day in private, in public, in business, and in international relationships!"[325]

There are two main problems with this view. First, it assumes that people can improve their society simply by applying the principles that Jesus taught in the Sermon. History has shown that this is impossible without someone to establish and administer such a society worldwide. Second, this view stresses the social dimension of Jesus' teaching to the exclusion of the personal dimension, which Jesus also emphasized.

Still others believe that Jesus gave the Sermon primarily to convict His hearers about their sins. They believe His purpose was also to make them realize that their only hope of salvation and participation in His kingdom was God's grace. One might call this view the *penitential* approach.

> "Thus what we have here in the Sermon on the Mount, is the climax of law, the completeness of the letter, the letter which killeth; and because it is so much more searching and thorough than the Ten Commandments, therefore does it kill all the more effectually. . . . The hard demand of the letter is here in the closest possible connexion [*sic*] with the promise of the Spirit."[326]

The main problem with this view is that it fails to recognize that the primary listeners to this sermon were Jesus' disciples (5:1-2). While not all of them believed in Him, most of them did. This seems clear, since He called them the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world" (5:13-14). Moreover, He taught them to address God in prayer as their Father (6:9; cf. 6:26). He also credited them with serving God already (6:24-34). Certainly the Sermon convicted those who heard it of their sins, but it seems to have had a larger purpose than this.

A fourth view holds that the Sermon contains Jesus' ethical teaching for the church. This is the *ecclesiastical* interpretation to the Sermon.

> "It is a religious system of living which portrays how transformed Christians *ought* to live in the world."[327]

The problem with this view is that the New Testament presents the church as an entity distinct from the kingdom. Nothing in the context warrants concluding that Jesus taught His disciples about the church here. Everything points to Him teaching about the

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[325]F. K. Stamm, *Seeing the Multitudes*, pp. 68-69.

[326]Charles Gore, *The Sermon on the Mount*, p. 4-5.

[327]Thomas. S. Kepler, *Jesus' Design for Living*, p. 12. See also C. F. Hogg and J. B. Watson, *On the Sermon on the Mount*, p. 19; and A. M. Hunter, *A Pattern for Life: An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*, p. 122.

kingdom. Even though there are some parallels between Jesus' teaching here and the apostles' teaching in the epistles, this similarity does not prove church teaching. There are also similarities between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, nine of the Ten Commandments, for example. However, this similarity does not prove that the two covenants are the same.

A fifth view sees the Sermon as applying to the earthly messianic kingdom exclusively. This is the *millennial* view.

> "In our exegesis of the three chapters, . . . we shall always in every part look upon the sermon on the mount as the proclamation of the King concerning the Kingdom. The Kingdom is not the church, nor is the state of the earth in righteousness, governed and possessed by the meek, brought about by the agency of the church. It is the millennial earth and the Kingdom to come, in which Jerusalem will be the city of a great King. . . . While we have in the Old Testament the outward manifestations of the Kingdom of the heavens as it will be set up in the earth in a future day, we have here the inner manifestation, the principles of it."[328]

The main problem with this view is Jesus' frequent references to conditions that are incongruous with the messianic kingdom proclaimed by the Old Testament prophets. For example, Jesus said that His disciples will experience persecution for His sake (5:11-12). Wickedness abounds (5:13-16). The disciples should pray for the coming of the kingdom (6:10). False prophets pose a major threat to Jesus' disciples (7:15). Some who hold this view relegate these conditions to the Tribulation period.[329]

However, if the Sermon is the constitution of the messianic kingdom, as advocates of this view claim, it is very unusual that so much of it deals with conditions that will mark the Tribulation period. Some who hold this view also believe Jesus taught that to enter the kingdom, one must live up to the standards that Jesus presented in the Sermon.[330] If this were the requirement, no one would be able to enter it. The standards of the Sermon on the Mount are even higher than those of the Ten Commandments.

The sixth view is that the Sermon presents ethical instructions for Jesus' disciples that apply from the time Jesus gave them until the beginning of the kingdom. This is the *interim* approach to interpreting the Sermon.

> "The sermon is *primarily* addressed to disciples exhorting them to a righteous life in view of the coming kingdom. Those who were not genuine disciples were warned concerning the danger of their hypocrisy

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[328]Gaebelein, 1:10. See also Kelly, pp. 103-6; William L. Pettingill, *Simple Studies in Matthew*, p. 58; Lewis Sperry Chafer, "The Teachings of Christ Incarnate," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 108 (October 1951):410; idem, *Systematic Theology*, 4:177-78; D. K. Campbell, "Interpretation and Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount," (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1953); and Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, pp. 106-8.

[329]E.g., Donald Grey Barnhouse, *His Own Received Him Not, But* . . ., p. 47; and Campbell, p. 66.

[330]E.g., Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 5:111.

> and unbelief. They are enjoined to enter the narrow gate and to walk the narrow way. This is included in the discourse, but it is only the *secondary* application of the sermon."[331]

Several factors commend this view. First, it fits best into the historical situation that provided the context for the giving of the Sermon. John and then Jesus had announced that the kingdom was at hand. Jesus next instructed His disciples about preparing for its inauguration.

Second, the message of the Sermon also anticipates the inauguration of the kingdom. This is obvious in the attitude that pervades the discourse (cf. 5:12, 19-20, 46; 6:1-2, 4-6, 10, 18; 7:19-23). Moreover there is prediction about persecution and false prophets arising (5:11-12; 7:15-18). The abundant use of the future tense also anticipates the coming of the kingdom (5:4-9, 19-20; 6:4, 6, 14-15, 18, 33; 7:2, 7, 11, 16, 20-22).

Third, this view recognizes that the primary recipients of the Sermon were Jesus' disciples whom He taught (5:1-2, 19; 7:29). They were salt and light (5:13-16), God was their Father (5:9, 16, 45, 48; 6:1, 4, 6, 8-9, 14-15, 18, 26, 32; 7:11, 21), and righteousness was to characterize their lives (5:19—7:12). Jesus had much to say about service (5:10-12, 13-16, 19-20, 21-48; 6:1-18, 19-34; 7:1-12, 15-23, 24-27) and rewards (5:12, 19, 46; 6:1-2; 5, 16) in the Sermon. Probably many of these disciples had been John's disciples who had left the forerunner to follow the King (cf. John 3:22-30; 4:1-2; 6:66). Jesus was instructing His disciples concerning their duties for the rest of their lives. However, Jesus also had words for the multitudes, especially toward the end of the Sermon, the people that did not fall into the category of being His disciples (5:1-2; cf. 7:13, 21-23, 24-27).

Fourth, the subject matter of the Sermon favors the interim interpretation. The Sermon dealt with the good fruit resulting from repentance that Jesus' disciples should manifest (cf. 3:8, 10). The only thing Matthew recorded that John preached and that Jesus repeated in this Sermon is, "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (7:19). Jesus, too, wanted His hearers to bring forth fruit worthy of repentance, and He described that fruit in this address.

Many students of the New Testament have noted the similarity between Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount and James' epistle.[332] James also stressed the importance of believers producing fruit, godly character, and good works (James 2:14-26). All the New Testament epistles present high standards for believers to maintain (cf. Phil. 3:12; Col. 3:13; 1 Pet. 1:15; 1 John 2:1). These flow naturally out of Jesus' instruction. Only with the Holy Spirit's enablement and the believer's dependence on the Lord can we live up to these standards.

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[331]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 94. See also Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, p. 354; Walvoord, *Matthew:* . . ., pp. 44-46; Saucy, p. 18; Barbieri, p. 28; and Hagner, p. 83.

[332]See Virgil V. Porter Jr., "The Sermon on the Mount in the Book of James," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162:647 (July-September 2005):344-60, and 162:648 (October-December 2005):470-82.

1. The setting of the Sermon on the Mount 5:1-2 (cf. Luke 6:17-19)

The "multitudes" or "crowds" consisted of the people Matthew just mentioned in 4:23-25. They comprised a larger group than the "disciples."

The disciples were not just the Twelve, but many others who followed Jesus and sought to learn from Him. Essentially "disciple" means learner. They did not all continue to follow Him (John 6:66). Not all of them were genuine believers, Judas Iscariot being the notable example. The term "disciples" in the Gospels is a large one that includes all who chose to follow Jesus, for some time, anyway (Luke 6:17). We should not equate "believer" in the New Testament sense with "disciple" in the Gospels, as some expositors have done.[333]

> "To say that 'every Christian is a disciple' seems to contradict the teaching of the New Testament. In fact, one could be a disciple and not be a Christian at all! John describes men who were disciples first and who then placed their faith in Christ (Jn. 2:11). . . . This alone alerts us to the fact that Jesus did not always equate being a 'disciple' with being a Christian."[334]

Customarily rabbis (teachers) "sat down" to instruct their disciples (cf. 13:2; 23:2; 24:3; Luke 4:20).[335] This posture implied Jesus' authority.[336] The exact location of the "mountain" Matthew referred to is unknown, though probably it was in Galilee, near the Sea of Galilee, and perhaps near Capernaum. There are no real mountains nearby, but plenty of hills.

> "There is probably a deliberate attempt on the evangelist's part to liken Jesus to Moses, especially insofar as he is about to present the definitive interpretation of Torah, just as Moses, according to the Pharisees, had given the interpretation of Torah on Sinai to be handed on orally."[337]

The phrase "opening His mouth He began to teach them" (v. 2; NASB) or "He began to teach them" (NIV) is a New Testament idiom (cf. 13:35; Acts 8:35; 10:34; 18:14). It has Old Testament roots (Job 3:1; 33:2; Dan. 10:16) and introduces an important utterance wherever it occurs.

> "In Greek the phrase has a double significance. (a) In Greek it is used of a solemn, grave and dignified utterance. It is used, for instance, of the saying of an oracle. It is the natural preface for a most weighty saying. (b)

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[333]E.g., John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3:2:6; and John F. MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, p. 196. For a critique of MacArthur's book, see Darrell L. Bock, "A Review of *The Gospel According to Jesus*," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 146:581 (January-March 1989):21-40.

[334]Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, p. 151. Cf. pp. 150-56.

[335]*A Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, s.v. "*kathemai*," by R. T. France, 3:589.

[336]Tasker, p. 59.

[337]Hagner, p. 86.

> It is used of a person's utterance when he is really opening his heart and fully pouring out his mind. It is used of intimate teaching with no barriers between."[338]

There is some difference between preaching (Gr. *kerysso*; 4:17) and teaching (Gr. *didasko*; 5:2) as the Gospel writers used these terms (cf. Acts 28:23, 31). Generally, preaching involved a wider audience, and teaching was to a narrower, more committed one, in this case the disciples.

Comparison of this Sermon with Jesus' teachings recorded in the other Gospels, especially the Synoptic Gospels, reveals that Jesus said some of the things recorded in this Sermon on other occasions. For example, 13 sayings in this Sermon show up again, at various times in Jesus' ministry, according to Luke. This has raised the question: "Is this Sermon simply Matthew's compilation of Jesus' teachings, rather than a sermon that He delivered on one specific occasion?" In view of the introduction and conclusion to the Sermon that Matthew recorded, it seems that this was a sermon that Jesus delivered on one specific occasion, but Matthew may have selected and arranged the material to present an epitome of Jesus' teachings.

Kingsbury identified the theme of this Sermon as "greater righteousness" and divided it as follows: (I) On Those Who Practice the Greater Righteousness (5:3-16); (II) On Practicing the Greater Righteousness toward the Neighbor (5:17-45); (III) On Practicing the Greater Righteousness before God (6:1-18); (IV) On Practicing the Greater Righteousness in Other Areas of Life (6:19—7:12); and (V) Injunctions on Practicing the Greater Righteousness (7:13-27).[339] The Book of Romans deals with the theme of God's righteousness and how people can share in it.

2. The subjects of Jesus' kingdom 5:3-16

Their condition 5:3-10 (cf. Luke 6:20-26)

This pericope describes the character of the kingdom's subjects and their rewards in the kingdom. McGee titles verses 1-16: "Relationship of the subjects of the kingdom to self."[340]

> "Looked at as a whole . . . the Beatitudes become a moral sketch of the type of person who is ready to possess, or rule over, God's Kingdom in company with the Lord Jesus Christ."[341]

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[338]Barclay, 1:81.

[339]Kingsbury, p. 112. See also idem, "The Place, Structure, and Meaning of the Sermon on the Mount within Matthew," *Interpretation* 41 (1987):131-43; Robert A. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for Understanding*; and Hagner, pp. 83-84.

[340]McGee, 4:29.

[341]Zane C. Hodges, "Possessing the Kingdom," *The KERUGMA Message* 2:2 (Winter 1992):5.

Jesus described the character of those who will receive blessings in the kingdom as rewards from eight perspectives. He introduced each one with a pronouncement of blessedness. This form of expression goes back to the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, particularly the Psalms (cf. Ps. 1:1; 32:1-2; 84:4-5; 144:15; Prov. 3:13; Dan. 12:12). The Beatitudes (vv. 3-10) may describe the fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1-3.[342] They describe and commend the good life.[343]

The English word "beatitude" comes from the Latin word for "blessed," *beatus*. The Greek word translated "blessed," *makarios*, refers to a happy condition.

> "The special feature of the group *makarios, makarizein, makarismos* in the NT is that it refers overwhelmingly to the distinctive religious joy which accrues to man from his share in the salvation of the kingdom of God."[344]
>
> "It [*makarios*] describes a state not of inner feeling on the part of those to whom it is applied, but of blessedness from an ideal point of view in the judgment of others."[345]
>
> "The beatitudes are not simple statements; they are exclamations: 'O the blessedness of the poor in spirit!'"[346]
>
> "It is well to note that they are *be*-attitudes, not *do*-attitudes. They state what the subjects of the kingdom *are*—they are the type of person described in the Beatitudes."[347]

Blessedness is happiness because of divine favor.[348] The other Greek word translated "blessed," *eulogetos*, connotes the reception of praise and usually describes God.

> ". . . the kingdom is presupposed as something given by God. The kingdom is declared as a reality apart from any human achievement. Thus the beatitudes are, above all, predicated upon the experience of the grace of God. The recipients are just that, those who *receive* the good news."[349]

The "for" (Gr. *hoti*) in each beatitude explains why the person is a blessed individual. "Because" would be a good translation. They are blessed now because they will participate in the kingdom. The basis for each blessing is the fulfillment of something about the kingdom that God promised in the Old Testament.[350]

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[342]See Bock, *Jesus according* . . ., pp. 128-29; and Robert A. Guelich, "The Matthean Beatitudes: 'Entrance-Requirements' or Eschatological Blessings?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95 (1973):433.
[343]France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 161.
[344]*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "*makarios et al.*," by F. Hauck and G. Bertram, 4 (1967):367.
[345]Allen, p. 39.
[346]Barclay, 1:83.
[347]McGee, 4:29.
[348]C. G. Montefiore, *The Synoptic Gospels*, 2:30.
[349]Hagner, p. 96.
[350]See Vernon C. Grounds, "Mountain Manifesto," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 128:510 (April-June 1971):135-41.

The Beatitudes deal with four attitudes—toward ourselves (v. 3), toward our sins (vv. 4-6), toward God (vv. 7-9), and toward the world (v. 10, and vv. 11-16). They proceed from the inside out; they start with attitudes and move to actions that are opposed, the normal course of spirituality.

5:3 The "poor in spirit" are those who recognize their natural unworthiness to stand in God's presence, and who depend utterly on Him for His mercy and grace (cf. Ps. 37:14; 40:17; 69:28-29, 32-33; Prov. 16:19; 29:23; Isa. 61:1). They do not trust in their own goodness or possessions for God's acceptance. The Jews regarded material prosperity as an indication of divine approval, since many of the blessings God promised the righteous under the Old Covenant were material.

However, the "poor in spirit" believer does not regard these things as signs of *intrinsic* (self-produced or "built-in") righteousness, but confesses his or her total unworthiness. The "poor in spirit" acknowledges his or her lack of personal righteousness. This condition, as all the others the Beatitudes identify, describes those who have repented and are broken (3:2; 4:17). Perhaps the best commentary on this beatitude is the parable of the Pharisee and the publican (Luke 18:10-14).

> "[The Greek word] *penes* describes the man who has nothing superfluous; *ptochos* [used here] describes the man who has nothing at all."[351]

> "'Poverty in spirit' is not speaking of weakness of character ('mean-spiritedness') but rather of a person's relationship with God. It is a positive spiritual orientation, the converse of the arrogant self-confidence which not only rides roughshod over the interests of other people but more importantly causes a person to treat God as irrelevant."[352]

Such a person can have joy in his or her humility because an attitude of personal unworthiness is necessary to enter the kingdom. This kingdom does not go primarily to the materially wealthy, but to those who admit their spiritual bankruptcy. One cannot purchase citizenship in this kingdom with money as people could purchase Roman citizenship, for example. What qualifies a person for citizenship is that person's attitude toward his or her intrinsic righteousness.

One writer believed that Jesus was not talking about entering the kingdom but possessing it (i.e., it will be theirs in the sense that the poor in spirit will reign over it with Jesus [cf. Rev. 3:21]).[353]

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[351]Barclay, 1:85.

[352]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 165.

[353]Hodges, "Possessing the Kingdom," *The KERUGMA Message* 1:1 (May-June 1991):1-2.

The first and last beatitudes give the reason for blessedness: "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (cf. v. 10). This phrase forms an *inclusio* or envelope that surrounds the remaining beatitudes. The *inclusio* is a literary device that provides unity. Speakers and writers used it, and still use it, to indicate that everything within the two uses of this term refers to the entity mentioned. Here that entity is the kingdom of heaven. In other words, this literary form shows that all the beatitudes deal with the kingdom of heaven.

5:4 "Those who mourn" do so because they sense their spiritual bankruptcy (v. 4). The Old Testament revealed that spiritual poverty results from sin. True repentance produces contrite tears—more than jubilant rejoicing—because the kingdom is near. The godly remnant in Jesus' day, that responded to the call of John and of Jesus, wept because of Israel's national humiliation, as well as because of personal sin (cf. Ezra 10:6; Ps. 51:4; 119:136; Ezek. 9:4; Dan. 9:19-20). It is this mourning over sin that resulted in personal and national humiliation that Jesus referred to here.

> ". . . the Greek word for *to mourn*, used here, is the strongest word for mourning in the Greek language. It is the word which is used for mourning for the dead, for the passionate lament for one who was loved."[354]

The promised blessing in this beatitude is future comfort for those who now mourn. The prophets connected Messiah's appearing with the comfort of His people (Isa. 40:1; 66:1-3, 13). All sorrow over personal and national humiliation because of sin will end when the King sets up His kingdom and the repentant enter into it.

5:5 A "gentle" or "meek" person is not only gentle in his or her dealings with others (11:29; 21:5; James 3:13). Such a person is unpretentious (1 Pet. 3:4, 14-15), self-controlled, and free from malice and vengefulness (cf. Ps. 37:11). This quality looks at a person's dealings with other people. A person might acknowledge his or her spiritual bankruptcy and mourn because of sin, but to respond meekly when other people regard us as sinful is something else. Meekness then is the natural and appropriate expression of genuine humility toward others. Only Matthew mentioned it among the Gospel writers.

Inheriting the Promised Land was the hope of the godly in Israel during the wilderness wanderings (Deut. 4:1; 16:20; cf. Isa. 57:13; 60:21). Inheriting is the privilege of faithful heirs (cf. 25:34). He or she can "inherit" because of who that person is, due to the relationship with the one bestowing the inheritance. Inheriting is a concept that the apostles

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[354]Barclay, 1:88.

wrote about and clarified (e.g., 1 Cor. 6:9; 15:50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:23-24; Heb. 9:15; 12:23; 1 Pet. 1:3-4; et al.).

"Inheriting" is not always the same as "entering." A person can enter another's house, for example, without inheriting it. The Old Testament concept of inheriting involved not only entering, but also becoming an owner of, what one entered. In this beatitude Jesus was saying more than that the meek will enter the kingdom. They will also enter into it as an inheritance and possess it.[355] A major theme in the Sermon on the Mount is the believing disciple's rewards (cf. v. 12; 6:2, 4-6, 18).[356]

"The earth" is what the meek can joyfully anticipate inheriting. The Old Testament concept of the messianic kingdom was earthly. Messiah would rule over Israel and the nations on the earth (Ps. 2:8-9; 37:9, 11, 29). Eventually the kingdom of Messiah will move to the new earth (21:1). This means Jesus' meek disciples can anticipate receiving possession of some of the earth during His messianic reign (cf. 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27). They will, of course, be subject to the King then.

5:6 As mentioned previously, Matthew always used the term "righteousness" in the sense of personal fidelity to God and His will (3:15; cf. Ps. 42:2; 63:1; Amos 8:11-14). He never used it of imputed righteousness: justification. Therefore, the righteousness that the blessed "hunger and thirst for" is not salvation. It is personal holiness and, extending this desire more broadly, the desire that holiness may prevail among all people (cf. 6:10). When believers bewail their own, and society's sinfulness, and pray that God will send a revival to clean things up, they demonstrate a hunger and thirst for righteousness.

The encouraging promise of Jesus is that such people will eventually receive the answer to their prayers. Messiah will establish righteousness in the world when He sets up His kingdom (Isa. 45:8; 61:10-11; 62:1-2; Jer. 23:16; 33:14-16; Dan. 9:24).

5:7 A "merciful" person forgives the guilty and has compassion on the needy and the suffering. A meek person acknowledges to others that he or she is sinful, but a merciful person has compassion on others because they are sinful.[357] Notice that Jesus did not specify a situation or situations in which the merciful person displays mercy because he or she is characteristically merciful. The promise applies in many different situations. See the parable of the unmerciful servant for an illustration of this beatitude (18:23-35).

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[355]Hodges, "Possessing the Kingdom," *The KERUGMA Message* 1:2 (July-August 1991):1-2.

[356]See Dillow, p. 67.

[357]John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, p. 48.

The blessing of "the merciful" is that they will "receive mercy" from God. Jesus did not mean that people can earn God's mercy for salvation by being merciful to others. He meant that God will deal mercifully with people who have dealt mercifully with their fellowmen (cf. 6:12-15; 9:13; 12:7; 18:33-34). There are many Old Testament texts that speak of Messiah dealing mercifully with the merciful (e.g., Isa. 49:10, 13; 54:8, 10; 60:10; Zech. 10:6).

5:8 The "pure in heart" are those who are single-minded in their devotion to God, and therefore morally pure inwardly. Inner moral purity is an important theme in Matthew and in the Old Testament (cf. Deut. 10:16; 30:6; 1 Sam. 15:22; Ps. 24:3-4; 51:6, 10; Isa. 1:10-17; Jer. 4:4; 7:3-7; 9:25-26). Likewise, freedom from hypocrisy is also prominent (cf. Ps. 24:4; 51:4-17; Prov. 22:11; Matt. 6:22, 33). Jesus probably implied both ideas here.

The "pure in heart" can look forward to seeing God in the person of Messiah when He reigns on the earth (Ps. 24:3-4; Isa. 33:17; 35:2; 40:5). Messiah would be single-minded in His devotion to God and morally pure. Thus there will be a correspondence and fellowship between the King and those of His subjects who share His character. No one has seen God in His pure essence without some type of filter. The body of Jesus was such a filter. Seeing God is a synonym for having intimate knowledge of and acquaintance with Him (John 14; 1 John 1:1-4).

5:9 "Peacemakers" likewise replicate the work of the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6-7). Jesus, through His life and ministry, made peace between God and man, and between man and man. Isaiah predicted this of Messiah (Isa. 52:7). True disciples of Jesus make peace as they herald the gospel that brings people into a peaceful relationship with God and with one another.

People who seek to make peace behave as true "sons of God." God called Israel His "son" (Deut. 14:1; Hos. 1:10), and He charged the Israelites with bringing their Gentile neighbors into a peaceful relationship with Himself (Exod. 19:5-6). Whereas Israel failed largely in her calling, the Son of God, Messiah, succeeded completely. Those who follow Christ faithfully will demonstrate concern for the peace of humanity by leading people to Him.

5:10 Persecution is as much a mark of discipleship as peacemaking. The world does not give up its hates and self-centered living easily. This brings opposition on disciples of Christ. Righteous people, those whose conduct is right in God's eyes, become targets of the unrighteous (cf. John 15:18-25; Acts 14:22; 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Pet. 4:13-14). Jesus, the perfectly righteous One, suffered more than any other righteous person has suffered. The Old Testament prophets foretold this, calling Him the Suffering Servant of the Lord (cf. Isa. 52:13—53:12).

> Even though Jesus' disciples suffer as they anticipate the kingdom, they can find joy in knowing that the kingdom will eventually be theirs. It will provide release from the persecution of God-haters when the "Man of Sorrows" reigns. This second explicit reference to "the kingdom of heaven" concludes the *inclusio* begun in verse 3 and signals an end to the Beatitudes (vv. 3-10).

> "The ordinary Jew of Christ's day looked only at the physical benefits of the kingdom which he thought would naturally be bestowed on every Israelite. The amillennialist of today, on the other hand, denies the physical existence of the promised Jewish kingdom by 'spiritualizing' its material blessings. The beatitudes of the King indicate that it is not an either-or proposition, but the kingdom includes both physical and spiritual blessings. A careful study of the beatitudes displays the fact that the kingdom is a physical earthly kingdom with spiritual blessings founded on divine principles."[358]

Their calling 5:11-16

Jesus proceeded to clarify His disciples' calling and ministry in the world to encourage them to endure persecution and to fulfill God's purpose for them.

> "Some might think that verses 11-12 constitute the concluding Beatitude, since these verses begin with the words 'blessed are you". But it is noteworthy that only here in the Beatitudes do we meet a verb in the second person (i.e., 'blessed are *you*'). In addition there are 36 (Greek) words in this Beatitude compared to a maximum of 12 words (verse 10) in the preceding eight Beatitudes. It is reasonable to conclude that verses 3-10 are a self-contained introduction to the Sermon, while verses 11-12 commence the body of the Sermon."[359]

5:11-12 These two verses expand and clarify the last beatitude (v. 10; cf. 6:12, 14-15) and provide a transition to what follows.

> Verse 11 broadens the persecution to include insult and slander. It also identifies Jesus with righteousness.

> > "This confirms that the righteousness of life that is in view is in imitation of Jesus. Simultaneously, it so identifies the disciple of Jesus with the practice of Jesus' righteousness that there is no place for professed allegiance to Jesus that is not full of righteousness."[360]

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[358]Toussaint, *Behold the . . .*, p. 97.

[359]Hodges, 2:2 (Spring 1992):1.

[360]D. A. Carson, *The Sermon on the Mount*, p. 28.

The prophets experienced persecution because they followed God faithfully (cf. Jer. 20:2; 2 Chron. 24:21). Now Jesus said His disciples would suffer similar persecution because they followed Him (cf. Dan. 9:24-27). His hearers could not help concluding that He was putting Himself on a par with God. They also realized that they themselves would be the objects of persecution.

This persecution should cause the disciples to "rejoice" rather than despair (cf. James 1:2-4). Their "reward" for faithfully enduring would be great when the kingdom began. This fact also shows the greatness of Jesus. These are the first claims to messiahship that Jesus made that Matthew recorded in his Gospel.

The phrase "in heaven" (v. 12) probably means throughout eternity. Kingdom reward (v. 10) would continue forever. Some believe it means that God prepares the reward in heaven now for future manifestation.[361] This promise should be an incentive for Christ's disciples to view their opposition by the ungodly as temporary and to realize that their reward for persevering faithfully will be eternal (cf. 1 Pet. 1:3-9). Jesus' words about eternal rewards open and close the New Testament (cf. Rev. 22:12).

> "Unlike many modern Christians, Matthew is not coy about the 'reward' that awaits those who are faithful to their calling."[362]
>
> ". . . because the eye of our mind is too blind to be moved solely by the beauty of the good, our most merciful Father out of his great kindness has willed to attract us by sweetness of rewards to love and seek after him.[363]
>
> "One of the curious features of Jesus' great speeches is that they contain sayings that seemingly are without relevance for the characters in the story to whom they are addressed. Time and again, Jesus touches on matters that are alien to the immediate situation of the crowds or the disciples. This peculiar phenomenon—that Jesus speaks past his stipulated audience at places in his speeches—compels one to ask whether Jesus is not to be construed as addressing some person(s) other than simply the crowds or the disciples in the story. . . .
>
> "If in his great speeches Jesus periodically speaks past his story-audience of crowds or disciples, whom in addition to

[361]Dalman, pp. 206-8.
[362]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 172. Cf. idem, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher*, pp. 268-70.
[363]Calvin, 2:8:4.

> the latter is he addressing in these instances? From a literary-critical standpoint, he is addressing the implied reader(s)."[364]

5:13 Verses 13-16 have been called the epilogue to the Beatitudes, and have been compared to the prologue to the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:3-6).[365]

By placing "you" (Gr. *hymeis*) in the emphatic position in the Greek text, Jesus was stressing the unique calling of His disciples (cf. v. 14).

> "The most obvious *general* characteristic of salt is that it is essentially different from the medium into which it is put. Its power lies precisely in this difference. So it is, says Jesus, with His disciples. Their power in the world lies in their difference from it."[366]

"Salt" was important in the ancient Near East because it represented purity, flavored food, retarded decay in food, and in small doses fertilized land.[367] Jesus implied by this metaphor that His disciples could positively affect the world (Gr. *kosmos*, the inhabited earth, i.e., humankind).[368] They had the opportunity through their lives and witness to bring blessing to others and to retard the natural decay that sin produces in life. As salt thrown out on the earth, they could also produce fruit to God. Some critics have wondered how salt could lose its saltiness ("become tasteless"), since sodium chloride is a stable compound that does not break down.

> "But most salt in the ancient world derived from salt marshes or the like, rather than by evaporation of salt water, and therefore contained many impurities. The actual salt, being more soluble than the impurities, could be leached out, leaving a residue so dilute it was of little worth."[369]

The most obvious characteristic of salt is that it is different from the medium into which its user places it. Jesus' disciples likewise are to be different from the world. As salt is an antiseptic, so the disciples are to be

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[364]Kingsbury, *Matthew as . . .*, pp. 107, 109. For other examples of this phenomenon in Matthew, see 6:16-18; 7:15-23; 10:18, 22, 41-42; 13:18-23, 38; 18:15-20; 24:3—25:46.

[365]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 1:529.

[366]Tasker, p. 63.

[367]Eugene P. Deatrick, "Salt, Soil, Savor," *Biblical Archaeologist* 25 (1962):44-45. See also Barclay, 1:115-18.

[368]See Don Garlington, "'The Salt of the Earth' in Covenantal Perspective," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54:4 (December 2011):715-48.

[369]Carson, "Matthew," p. 138. See also Thomson, 2:43-44.

a moral disinfectant in a sin-infested world. This requires virtue, however, that comes only through divine grace and self-discipline.[370]

In modern Israel, weak salt still often ends up scattered on the soil that tops flat-roofed houses, which the residents sometimes use as patios. There it hardens the soil and so prevents leaks.[371] In biblical times, salt that had leached out, and lost its saltiness, was used for coating pathways.[372] God will use disciples, either as vessels unto honor or as vessels unto dishonor (cf. Rom. 9:21; 2 Tim. 2:20).

5:14-16 "Light" is a common symbol in the Bible. It represents purity, truth, knowledge, divine revelation, and God's presence—all in contrast to their opposites. The Israelites thought of themselves as lights in a dark world (Isa. 42:6; Rom. 2:19). However, the Old Testament spoke of Messiah as the true light of the world (Isa. 42:6; 49:6; cf. Matt. 4:16; John 8:12; 9:5; 12:35; 1 John 1:7). Jesus' disciples are lights in the derived sense, as the moon is a light but only because it reflects the light of the sun (cf. Eph. 5:8-9; Phil. 2:15).

The "city set on a hill" (v. 14) may refer to messianic prophecy concerning God lifting up Zion and causing the nations to stream to it (Isa. 2:2-5; et al.). Since God will make the capital of the messianic kingdom prominent, it is inappropriate for the citizens of that city to assume a low profile in the world before its inauguration (cf. Luke 11:33). Verse 15 is an early example of Jesus teaching with parables in Matthew's Gospel.[373]

The disciples must therefore manifest "good works," the outward demonstration or testimony to the righteousness that is within them (v. 16). Even though the light may provoke persecution (vv. 10-12), they must reflect the light of God. For the first time in Matthew, Jesus referred to God as the "Father" of His disciples (cf. vv. 45, 48; 6:1, 4, 6, 8-9, 14-15, 18, 26, 32; 7:11, 21).

> "It was not so easy to rekindle a lamp in the days before matches existed. Normally the lamp stood on the lampstand which would be no more than a roughly shaped branch of wood; but when people went out, for safety's sake, they took the lamp from its stand, and put it under a[n] earthen bushel measure, so that it might burn without risk until they came back."[374]

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[370]Tasker, p. 63.
[371]Deatrick, p. 47.
[372]*The Nelson* . . ., p. 1583.
[373]See Appendix 4, a chart of "The Parables of Jesus," at the end of these notes.
[374]Barclay, 1:119.

> "If salt (v. 13) exercises the negative function of delaying decay and warns disciples of the danger of compromise and conformity to the world, then light (vv. 14-16) speaks positively of illuminating a sin-darkened world and warns against a withdrawal from the world that does not lead others to glorify the Father in heaven."[375]
>
> "Flight into the invisible is a denial of the call. A community of Jesus which seeks to hide itself has ceased to follow him."[376]
>
> "It is the Christian's duty to take the stand which the weaker brother will support, to give the lead which those with less courage will follow. The world needs its guiding lights; there are people waiting and longing for a lead to take the stand and to do the thing which they do not dare to take and to do by themselves."[377]

The introduction of "good works" (v. 16) leads on to further exposition of that theme in 5:17—7:12.

3. The importance of true righteousness 5:17—7:12

Jesus had just been speaking about the importance of His disciples demonstrating their righteousness publicly with their good works (v. 16). Now He dealt with the more fundamental question of what true righteousness is. This was important to clarify, since the religious leaders of His day misinterpreted righteousness and good works.

> "The kinds of good deeds that enable light to be seen as light are now to be elaborated in the course of the sermon that follows. They are shown to be nothing other than the faithful living out of the commandments, the righteousness of the Torah as interpreted by Jesus."[378]

Righteousness and the Scriptures 5:17-48

In His discussion of righteousness (character and conduct that conforms to the will of God), Jesus went back to the revelation of God's will, namely: God's Word, the Old Testament. We might call this section "the disciple's relationship to the Law."

Jesus' view of the Old Testament 5:17-20

It was natural for Jesus to explain His view of the Old Testament, since He would shortly proceed to interpret it to His hearers.

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[375]Carson, "Matthew," p. 140.
[376]Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, p. 106.
[377]Barclay, 1:120.
[378]Hagner, p. 102.

5:17 Some of the Jews may have already concluded that Jesus was a radical who was discarding the teachings of the Old Testament, their law. Many others would begin to do so soon. Jesus prepared them for the incongruity between His teaching, and their leaders' interpretations of the law, by explaining His relationship to the Old Testament.

> "It seems likely that here Jesus is dealing with the charge of being antinomian since his controversies suggested an approach to the law that was different from traditional thinking. His reply shows that he seeks a standard that looks at the law from an internal, not an external, perspective."[379]

The terms "the Law" and "the Prophets" refer to two of the three major divisions of the Hebrew Bible, the third being "the Psalms" (Luke 24:44). "The Law and the Prophets" was evidently the most common way Jews referred to the Old Testament in Jesus' day (cf. 7:12; 11:13; 22:40; Luke 16:16; John 1:45; Acts 13:15; 28:23; Rom. 3:21). Jesus introduced the subject of Scripture interpretation in this verse with this phrase. In 7:12 He concluded the subject with the same phrase. Thus the phrase "the Law and the Prophets" forms another *inclusio* within the body of the Sermon on the Mount and identifies the main subject that it encloses.

Much debate has centered on what Jesus meant when He said He came "to fulfill" the Old Testament.[380] The first question is: Was Jesus referring to Himself when He said, "I came . . . to fulfill," or was He referring to His teaching? Did *He* fulfill the law, or did *His teaching* fulfill it? Since the contrast is "to abolish" the law, it seems probable that Jesus meant His teaching fulfilled the law. He did not intend that what He taught the people would replace the teaching of the Old Testament, but that it would fulfill (Gr. *pleroo*) or establish it completely. Of course, Jesus did fulfill Old Testament prophecy about Messiah, but that does not appear to be the primary subject in view here. The issue seems to be His teaching.

Some interpreters conclude that Jesus meant He came to fulfill (keep) the moral law (the Ten Commandments), but that He abolished Israel's civil and ceremonial laws.[381] However, there is no basis for this distinction in this text or in any other New Testament text. Others believe that He meant He came to fill out its meaning, to expound its full significance that until then remained obscure.[382] This view rests on an unusual meaning of

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[379]Bock, *Jesus according . . .*, p. 131.

[380]See John A. Martin, "Christ, the Fulfillment of the Law in the Sermon on the Mount," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, pp. 248-63.

[381]E.g., Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, pp. 103-5; Eugene H. Merrill, "Deuteronomy, New Testament Faith, and the Christian Life," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, p. 22; and David Wenham, "Jesus and the Law: an Exegesis on Matthew 5:17-20," *Themelios* 4:3 (April 1979):92-26.

[382]E.g., Lenski, pp. 205-7.

pleroo, and it seems inconsistent with Jesus' comment about the jot and tittle in verse 18.

Still others believe Jesus meant that He came to extend the demands of the Old Testament law to new lengths.[383] This interpretation is improbable because the extension of law does not involve its abolition. Another view is that Jesus meant He was introducing what the Law pointed toward, either by direct prediction or by typology.[384]

Probably Jesus meant that He came to establish the Old Testament fully, to add His authoritative approval to it. This view harmonizes with Matthew's use of *pleroo* elsewhere (cf. 2:15). This does not mean He taught that the Mosaic Law remained in force for His disciples. He taught that it did not (Mark 7:19).[385] Rather, here, Jesus authenticated the Old Testament as the inspired Word of God.[386] He wanted His hearers to understand that what He taught them in no way contradicted Old Testament revelation.

The purpose of the Mosaic Law was revelatory and regulatory, but not redemptive. That is, it revealed what God wanted people to know, and it regulated the life of the Israelites. But God never intended that people should view it as a way to earn salvation, namely: by keeping it perfectly. He gave it to a redeemed people: to Israelites who had been redeemed from bondage in Egypt.

> "He [Jesus] disregarded the oral tradition, which they [the Pharisees] held to be equal in authority to the written Law; and He interpreted the written Law according to its spirit, and not, as they did, according to the rigid letter. He did not keep the weekly fasts, nor observe the elaborated distinctions between clean and unclean, and He consorted with outcasts and sinners. He neglected the traditional modes of teaching, and preached in a way of His own. Above all, He spoke as if He Himself were an authority, independent of the Law."[387]

There is good evidence that the Jewish leaders regarded the traditional laws, as not just having equal authority with the Old Testament, but having greater authority.[388]

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[383]E.g., Wolfgang Trilling, *Das wahre Israel: Studien zur Theologie des Matthaus-Evangeliums*, pp. 174-79.

[384]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 182. Cf. Kent, "The Gospel . . .," p. 937.

[385]See Hal Harless, "The Cessation of the Mosaic Covenant," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160:639 (July-September 2003):349-66.

[386]Cf. Stephen Westerholm, "The Law in the Sermon on the Mount: Matt 5:17-48," *Criswell Theological Review* 6:1 (Fall 1992):43-56.

[387]Plummer, p. 75.

[388]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 1:97-98.

> "It is not obvious at first sight what Christ means by 'fulfilling (*plerosai*) the Law.' He does not mean taking the written Law as it stands, and literally obeying it. That is what he condemns, not as wrong, but as wholly inadequate. He means rather starting with it as it stands, and bringing it on to completeness; working out the spirit of it; getting at the comprehensive principles which underlie the narrowness of the letter. These Messiah sets forth as the essence of the revelation made by God through the Law and Prophets."[389]

5:18 The phrase "truly I say to you" (NASB) or "I tell you the truth" (NIV) indicates that what follows is extremely important. This is the first occurrence in Matthew of this phrase, which appears 30 times in this Gospel, 13 times in Mark, six times in Luke, and 25 times in John. It always conveys the personal authority of the person who utters it.[390] "Until heaven and earth pass away" is a vivid way of saying as long as this world lasts.

The AV "jot," also translated "smallest letter" (NASB, NIV), refers to *yod*, the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The "tittle" (AV) or "smallest stroke" (NASB) or "least stroke" (NIV) is not as easy to identify. The best possibility seems to be that it refers to a small stroke *on* one Hebrew letter (a serif) that distinguished it from a similarly shaped letter.[391] Another possibility is that it refers to a stroke that was sometimes placed *over* certain words in the Hebrew Bible.[392] In any case, Jesus meant that He upheld the entire Old Testament, down to the smallest features of the Hebrew letters that the writers used as they composed the original documents.

> "The words of our Lord, as reported both by St. Matthew (Matt. v. 18) and by St. Luke (Luke xvi. 17), also prove that the copy of the Old Testament from which He had drawn was not only in the original Hebrew, but written, like our modern copies, in the so-called Assyrian, and not in the ancient Hebrew-Phoenician characters."[393]

This verse is a strong testimony to the verbal inspiration of Scripture. That is, divine inspiration extends to the words, even the letters, in the original texts. Verses 17-19 also argue for the plenary inspiration of Scripture, the view that inspiration extends to all parts of the Old Testament. God

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[389]Plummer, p. 76.

[390]France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 184.

[391]See Carson, "Matthew," p. 145, for other less likely possibilities.

[392]Tasker, p. 67.

[393]Edersheim, *Sketches of* . . ., p. 118.

inspired all of it, down to the very words the writers used. In verse 18, "the Law" refers to the whole Old Testament, not just the Mosaic Law or the Pentateuch (cf. v. 17). This is clear from the context.

God will preserve His Law until everything in it has happened as prophesied. It is as permanent as heaven and earth (cf. 24:35).

5:19 The Jewish rabbis had graded the Old Testament commands according to which ones they believed were more authoritative and which ones less, the heavy and the light.[394] Jesus corrected this view. He taught that all were equally authoritative. He warned His hearers against following their leaders' practice. Greatness in His kingdom depended on maintaining a high view of Scripture. This verse distinguishes different ranks within the messianic kingdom. Some individuals will have a higher standing than others. Everyone will not be equal. Notice that there will be people in the kingdom whose view of Scripture will not be the same as before they entered the kingdom. All will be righteous, but their obedience to and attitude toward Scripture will vary.

5:20 Many interpreters regard this verse as the key verse in the Sermon on the Mount. "I say to you" is a claim to having authority (cf. 7:29). The relativistic view of the "scribes and Pharisees" led them to accept some Scriptural injunctions and to reject others (cf. 15:5-6).[395] This resulted in selective obedience that produced only superficial righteousness (only external conformity to the revealed will of God). That type of "righteousness," Jesus declared, would not be adequate for admission into the kingdom.

The phrase "enter the kingdom" occurs seven other times in the New Testament (7:21; 18:3; 19:23, 24; Mark 9:47; John 3:5; Acts 14:22). The condition for entering—in every case—is faith alone. Selective obedience does not demonstrate a proper faith attitude to God, the attitude John and Jesus called for when they said, "Repent."

> "I have always felt that Matthew 5:20 was the key to this important sermon . . . The main theme is true righteousness. The religious leaders had an artificial, external righteousness based on Law. But the righteousness Jesus described is a true and vital righteousness that begins internally, in the heart. The Pharisees were concerned about the minute details of conduct, but they neglected the major matter of *character*. Conduct flows out of character."[396]

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[394]M'Neile, p. 59.

[395]For a good brief introduction to the scribes and the Pharisees, see France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 189.

[396]Wiersbe, 1:21.

This pericope deals with various attitudes toward the Law: destroying it or fulfilling it (v. 17), and doing it and teaching it (v. 19).

Jesus proceeded to clarify exactly what the law did require in verses 21-48.[397] He selected six subjects. He was not contrasting His interpretation with Moses' teaching, but with the interpretation of the scribes and Pharisees. He was expounding the meaning of the text that God originally intended. He was doing Bible exposition.

> "For many generations . . . the *oral* law . . . was handed down in the memory of generations of Scribes. In the middle of the third century A.D. a summary of it was made and codified. That summary is known as the *Mishnah*; it contains sixty-three tractates on various subjects of the Law, and in English makes a book of almost eight hundred pages. Later Jewish scholarship busied itself with making commentaries to explain the *Mishnah*. These commentaries are known as the *Talmuds*. Of the Jerusalem *Talmud* there are twelve printed volumes; and of the Babylonian *Talmud* there are sixty printed volumes."[398]

God's will concerning murder 5:21-26

5:21 In each of these six cases, Jesus first related the popular understanding of the Old Testament, the view advocated by the religious teachers of His day. In this verse He introduced it by saying, "You have heard that the ancients were told" (NASB). This was an expression that the rabbis of Jesus' day used when they referred to the teachings of the Old Testament.[399]

Jesus quoted the sixth commandment and combined it with Leviticus 19:17. The "court" in view was the civil court in Israel.

5:22 Jesus contrasted His correct interpretation with the false common understanding of this command. His, "But I say to you" (vv. 22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44) was not a common rabbinic saying, though it did have some parallels in rabbinic Judaism.[400] It expressed an authority that surprised His hearers (cf. 7:29). Thus Jesus "fulfilled" or established the meaning of the passages to which He referred (v. 17).[401]

> "Jesus implicitly claimed deity in at least twelve ways. He claimed three divine rights: (1) to judge mankind, (2) to forgive sins, and (3) to grant eternal life. He declared that

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[397]William M. McPheeters, "Christ As an Interpreter of Scripture," *The Bible Student* 1 (April 1900):223-29.

[398]Barclay, 1:126.

[399]D. Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism*, p. 55.

[400]Hagner, p. 111.

[401]See Roger D. Congdon, "Did Jesus Sustain the Law in Matthew 5?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:538 (April-June 1978):125.

> (4) his presence was God's presence as well as the presence of God's kingdom and that (5) the attitude people took toward him would determine their eternal destiny. He (6) identified his actions with God's actions, (7) taught the truth on his own authority, and (8) performed miracles on his own authority. He (9) appeared to receive worship or obeisance. He (10) assumed that his life was a pattern for others, a 'divinely authoritative form of life.' He (11) applied to himself OT texts that describe God and (12) in several parables indirectly identified himself with a father or king who represents God."[402]

When God gave the sixth commandment, He did not just want people to refrain from murdering one another. He wanted them to refrain from the hatred that leads to murder. Murder is only the external manifestation of the internal problem. The scribes and Pharisees dealt only with the external act. Jesus showed that God's concern ran much deeper. Refraining from homicide does not constitute a person righteous in God's sight. Inappropriate anger renders one subject to judgment at God's heavenly court "since no human court is competent to try a case of inward anger."[403]

Jesus often used the term "brother" in the sense of a brother disciple. The term usually occurs on Jesus' lips in the first Gospel, and Matthew recorded Him using it extensively. The relationship is an extension of the fact that God is the Father of believing disciples. Thus all believers are brothers in the spiritual sense. The early church's use of the term reflects that of Jesus.

"Raca" is the transliteration of the Aramaic *reka*. It means "imbecile," "numbskull," or "blockhead."[404] The "supreme court" (NASB) or "Sanhedrin" (NIV; Gr. *synedrion*) probably refers to God's highest court in view of the context, not the Jewish Sanhedrin of Jesus' day. The scribes and Pharisees taught that a person who referred to someone as a "Raca" was in danger of being sued for libel before the Sanhedrin.[405] "Fool" (Gr. *mores*) is a similar term that a person who felt hatred—even for his brother—might use. He, too, would be in danger of divine judgment, assuming his hatred was unjustified (cf. 23:17).

Jesus said the offender is "guilty" enough (deserving) to suffer eternal judgment, not that he will. Whether he will suffer eternal judgment or not depends on his relationship to God. There does not seem to be any

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[402]Daniel Doriani, "The Deity of Christ in the Synoptic Gospels," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37:3 (September 1994):339-40.
[403]Stott, p. 85.
[404]Carson, "Matthew," p. 149.
[405]*The Nelson* . . ., p. 1584.

gradation or progression in these three instances of anger. Jesus simply presented three possible instances with an assortment of terms, and assured His hearers that in all these cases, there was a violation of God's will that could incur severe divine torment (cf. 3:12).

The word "hell" translates the Greek *geenna*, which is a transliteration of the Hebrew *ge hinnom* or "Valley of Hinnom." This was the valley south of Jerusalem, where a fire burned continually, consuming the city's refuse. This place became an illustration of the place where the wicked will suffer eternal torment.[406] Matthew recorded 11 references to it.

Jesus' demonstrations of anger were appropriate for Him since He was God, and God gets angry. His anger was always righteous, unlike the anger that arises from unjustified hatred. It is possible for humans to be angry and not sin (Eph. 4:26). Here Jesus was addressing unjustifiable anger that can lead to murder (cf. Col. 3:8).

> "Life is always a conflict between the demands of the passions and the control of the reason."[407]

5:23-24 Jesus gave two illustrations of anger, one involving temple worship (vv. 23-24), and the other, legal action (vv. 25-26). Both deal with situations in which the hearer is the cause of another person's anger rather than the offended party. Why did Jesus construct the illustrations this way? Perhaps He did so because we are more likely to remember situations, in which we have had some grievance against another person, than those in which we have simply offended another. Moreover, Jesus' disciples should be as sensitive about not making other people hate them, as they are about potentially hating others.

The offerer would present his offering at the brazen altar in the temple courtyard. It is more important to lift the load of hate from another brother's heart than to engage in a formal act of worship. Ritual worship was very important to the scribes and Pharisees, and to all the Jews, but Jesus put internal purity first, even the internal purity of another person (cf. 1 Sam. 16:7). Reconciliation, also, is more important than worship, in that it must come first.

> "The most prominent object in the Court of the Priests was the immense altar of unhewn stones, a square of not less than 48 feet, and, inclusive of 'the horns,' 15 feet high. All around it a 'circuit' ran for the use of the ministering priests, who, as a rule, always passed round by the right, and retired

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[406]See Hans Scharen, "Gehenna in the Synoptics," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149:595 (July-September 1992):324-37; 149:596 (October-December 1992):454-57.

[407]Barclay, 1:133.

> by the left. As this 'circuit' was raised 9 feet from the ground, and 1½ feet high, while the 'horns' measured 1½ feet in height, the priests would have only to reach 3 feet to the top of the altar, and 4½ feet to that of each 'horn.' An inclined plane, 48 feet long by 24 wide, into which about the middle two smaller 'descents' merged, led up to the 'circuit' from the south."[408]

5:25-26 The second illustration stresses the importance of making things right quickly. Two men walking together to the court where their disagreement would receive judicial arbitration should try to settle their grievance out of court (cf. 1 Cor. 6:1-11). The offender should remove the occasion for the other man's anger and hatred quickly. Otherwise the judge might make things difficult for both of them. The mention of going from "judge to . . . officer . . . into prison" pictures the red tape and complications involved in not settling out of court.

Likewise, God will make it difficult for *haters*, and those who *provoke hate* in others, if they come before Him with unresolved interpersonal disagreements. Malicious anger is evil, and God's judgment is certain. Therefore, disciples must do everything they can to end inappropriate anger quickly (cf. Eph. 4:26).

God's will concerning adultery 5:27-30

5:27-28 Jesus proceeded to clarify God's intended meaning in the seventh commandment (Exod. 20:14; Deut. 5:18). The rabbis in Jesus' day tended to look at "adultery" as wrong because it involved stealing another man's wife. They viewed it as an external act.[409] Jesus, on the other hand, saw it as wrong because it made the lustful individual impure morally, an internal condition.

The Greek word *gyn* can mean either "wife" or "woman." Certainly the spirit of the command would prohibit *lusting after any woman*, not just a married woman. Fantasized immorality, with or without the use of pornographic material, is just as sinful to God as physical immorality (cf. Exod. 20:17). The fact that fornication that takes place in the brain has fewer bad consequences than fornication that takes place on a bed does not mitigate this truth.

> "A man who gazes at a woman with the purpose of wanting her sexually has mentally committed adultery."[410]

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[408]Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple*, pp. 54-55.
[409]Carson, "Matthew," p. 151.
[410]*The Nelson* . . ., p. 1584.

> "The man who is condemned is the man who deliberately uses his eyes to awaken his lust, the man who looks in such a way that passion is awakened and desire deliberately stimulated."[411]

5:29-30 As before (vv. 23-26), two illustrations aid our understanding. The eye is the member of the body initially responsible for luring us into an immoral thought or deed (cf. Num. 15:39; Prov. 21:4; Ezek. 6:9; 18:12; 20:8). The "right eye" is the best eye, the common metaphorical use of the "right" anything.

A literal interpretation of this verse would have Jesus crippling every member of the human race. Should not one pluck out his left eye as well, following this line of interpretation? Furthermore, disposing of the eye would not remove the real cause of the offense, a lustful heart. Clearly this is a hyperbolic statement designed to make a point by overstatement. Unfortunately, the early church father Origen took this literally—and castrated himself! Jesus' point was that His disciples must *deal radically* with sin. We must avoid temptation at all costs. Clearly this is not a condition for salvation but for discipleship.[412]

The reference to cutting off the "right hand" (v. 30) is also metaphorical, but how symbolic is it? Some take the "right hand" as a euphemism for the penis (cf. Isa. 57:8).[413] This view has the context in its favor. Others take the right hand literally and view it as the instrument of stealing another man's wife. "Hell" is Gehenna, the final place of punishment for all the wicked.[414] Its mention here does not imply that believers can go there. It represents the worst possible destiny. It, too, is hyperbole. The loss of any body part is preferable to the loss of the whole person, is the point.

> "Imagination is a God-given gift; but if it is fed dirt by the eye, it will be dirty. All sin, not least sexual sin, begins with the imagination. Therefore what feeds the imagination is of maximum importance in the pursuit of kingdom righteousness (compare Phil 4:8). Not everyone reacts the same way to all objects. But if (vv. 28-29) your eye is causing you to sin, gouge it out; or at very least, don't look . . .!"[415]

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[411]Barclay, 1:144.

[412]See Robert N. Wilkin, "Self-Sacrifice and Kingdom Entrance: Matthew 5:29-30," *The Grace Evangelical Society News* 4:8 (August 1989):2; 4:9 (September 1989):2-3.

[413]Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, s.v. "*yad*," p. 390; S. T. Lachs, "Some Textual Observations on the Sermon on the Mount," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 69 (1978):108-9.

[414]Scharen, p. 337.

[415]Carson, "Matthew," p. 151.

> "If any man is harassed by thoughts of the forbidden and unclean things, he will certainly never defeat the evil things by withdrawing from life and saying, I will not think of these things. He can only do so by plunging into Christian action and Christian thought."[416]

God's will concerning divorce 5:31-32

Not only is lust the moral equivalent of adultery, but so is divorce. The connective *de* ("and," NASB) that begins verse 31 ties this section in very closely with the one that precedes (vv. 27-30). In Israel, a man divorced his wife simply by giving her a written statement indicating that he divorced her (cf. Deut. 24:1-4). It was a domestic matter, not something that went through the courts, and it was quite common. In most cases, a divorced woman would remarry, to another man, often for her own security.

Jesus said that divorcing a woman virtually amounted to "[causing] her to commit adultery," since she would normally remarry. Likewise, any man who married a divorced woman committed adultery with her, because in God's eyes she was still married to her first husband. Jesus' explanation would have helped His hearers realize the ramifications of a decision that many of them viewed as insignificant, namely, divorcing one's wife. Women did not have the right to divorce their husbands in ancient Israel. Josephus, writing about the divorce of Salome, Herod the Great's sister, and her husband, Costobarus, commented on the Jewish divorce custom:

> "But some time afterward, when Salome happened to quarrel with Costobarus, she sent him a bill of divorce, and dissolved her marriage with him, though this was not according to the Jewish laws; for with us it is lawful for a husband to do so; but a wife, if she departs from her husband, cannot of herself be married to another, unless her former husband put her away."[417]

We could add the exception clause to the last part of verse 32, since that seems to have been Jesus' intention (cf. Mark 10:12). He probably did not repeat it because He did not want to stress the exceptional case, but to focus on the seriousness of the husband's decision to divorce his wife. Jesus had more to say about divorce in 19:3-9 (cf. Mark 10:11-12; Luke16:18).

> ". . . Jesus introduces the new and shocking idea that even properly divorced people who marry a second time may be thought of as committing adultery. The OT, allowing divorce, does not regard those who remarry as committing adultery. . . . Marriage was meant to establish a permanent relationship between a man and a woman, and divorce should therefore not be considered an option for the disciples of the kingdom."[418]

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[416]Barclay, 1:147.
[417]Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 15:7:10.
[418]Hagner, p. 125.

Some interpreters limit fornication ("unchastity," "immorality," Gr. *porneia*) to unfaithfulness during the betrothal period, the year between a Jewish couple's engagement and the consummation of their marriage.[419] The problem with this view is that *porneia* has a broader range of meaning than this.[420]

God's will concerning oaths 5:33-37

5:33 Jesus next gave a condensation of several commands in the Old Testament that prohibited taking an oath, invoking the Lord's name to guarantee the oath, and then breaking it (Exod. 20:7; Lev. 19:12; Num. 30:2; Deut. 5:11; 6:3; 23:21-23). God has always intended simple truthfulness in speech, as well as lifelong marriage.

The rabbis had developed an elaborate stratification of oaths. They taught that swearing by God's name was binding, but swearing by heaven and earth was not binding. Swearing *toward* Jerusalem was binding, but swearing *by* Jerusalem was not. In some cases they even tried to deceive others by appealing to various authorities in their oaths.[421] Jesus was not talking about "cursing" here, but using oaths to affirm that what one said was true.

5:34-36 Jesus cut through all the casuistry by saying that if oaths that God intended to guarantee truthfulness in speech become the instruments of deceit, His disciples should avoid them. Again, Jesus got below the external act to the real issue at stake, that had been God's concern from the beginning. His point was that people should not lie under *any* circumstances.

Jesus explained that whatever a person may appeal to in an oath has some connection with God. Therefore any oath is an appeal to God indirectly if not directly. To say that one could swear by one's own "head," for example, and then break his vow, because he did not mention God's name, was shortsighted.

> ". . . what is called 'promise' among men is called 'vow' with respect to God."[422]

Calvin noted that several passages of Scripture indicate that calling on God as witness, to confirm the truth of one's word, was a sort of divine worship (e.g., Isa. 19:18; 65:16; Jer. 12:16). Curses that contain manifest insults to God should not be regarded as oaths. It was wrong to swear falsely by (to "profane") His name (Lev. 19:12), to use His name in true

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[419]E.g., Kent, "The Gospel . . .," p. 963. For discussion of this view, see David W. Jones, "The Betrothal View of Divorce and Remarriage," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 165:657 (January-March 2008):68-85.

[420]See Appendix 5 "What ends a marriage in God's sight?" at the end of these notes.

[421]Hogg and Watson, p. 54.

[422]Calvin, 4:13:1.

but needless oaths, and to substitute God's servants in place of Him, thus transferring His glory to them (Exod. 23:13). God not only permitted the use of oaths under the Law, but He commanded their use in case of necessity (Exod. 22:10-11).[423]

> "To men of sound judgment there can then be no doubt that the Lord in that passage [i.e., Matt. 5:33-37] disapproved only of those oaths forbidden by the law [cf. James 5:12]. For he, who in his life gave an example of the perfection that he taught, did not shrink from oaths whenever circumstances required. And the disciples, who we may be sure obeyed their Master in all things, followed the same example. Who would dare say that Paul would have sworn if the taking of oaths had been utterly forbidden? But when circumstances demanded it, he swore without any hesitation, sometimes even adding a curse [Rom. 1:9; II Cor. 1:23]."[424]

5:37 Jesus' "yes, yes," and "no, no," is not the exact terminology He wanted His disciple to use. If He meant that, He would be doing just what He was correcting the rabbis for doing. Rather, it means a simple "yes" or "no." The NIV translation gives the sense: "Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.'"

> "By adding oaths to our statements, we either admit that our usual speech cannot be trusted, or else we lower ourselves to the level of a lying world, that follows **the evil one** (ASV)."[425]

The "evil" at the end of the verse may either be a reference to the devil, or it may mean that to go beyond Jesus' teaching on this point involves evil.

Some very conscientious believers have taken Jesus' words literally and have refused to take an oath of any kind, even in court. However, Jesus' point was the importance of truthfulness. He probably would not have objected to the use of oaths as a formality in legal proceedings.

> "They [oaths in court or oaths of political allegiance] should not be needed, but in practice they serve a remedial purpose in a world where the ethics of the kingdom of heaven are not always followed. Refusal to take a required oath can in such circumstances convey quite the wrong impression."[426]

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[423]Ibid., 2:8:23-26.
[424]Ibid., 2:8:27.
[425]Kent, "The Gospel . . .," p. 938.
[426]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 216.

The Bible records that God Himself swore oaths, not because He sometimes lies or could possibly lie, but to impress His truthfulness on people (Gen. 9:9-11; Luke 1:73). Jesus testified under oath (26:63-64), as did Paul (Rom. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:23; 1 Thess. 2:5, 10).

> "It must be frankly admitted that here Jesus formally contravenes OT law: what it permits or commands (Deut. 6:13), he forbids. But if his interpretation of the direction in which the law points is authoritative, then his teaching fulfills it."[427]

> "What Jesus is saying is this—the truly good man will never need to take an oath; the truth of his sayings and the reality of his promises need no such guarantee. But the fact that oaths are still sometimes necessary is the proof that men are not good men and that this is not a good world.
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> "So, then, this saying of Jesus leaves two obligations upon us. It leaves upon us the obligation to make ourselves such that men will so see our transparent goodness that they will never ask an oath from us; and it leaves upon us the obligation to seek to make this world such a world that falsehood and infidelity will be so eliminated from it that the necessity for oaths will be abolished."[428]

God's will concerning retaliation 5:38-42

5:38 Retaliation was common in the ancient Near East. Frequently it led to vendettas in which escalating vengeance continued for generations. Israel's "law of retaliation" (Lat. *lex talionis*) limited retaliation to no more than equal compensation (Exod. 21:24; Lev. 24:19-20; Deut. 19:21). The Jews tended to view the law of retaliation as God's permission to take vengeance. That was never God's intention (cf. Lev. 19:18). He simply wanted to protect them from excessive vengeance and to curb vendettas.

In some situations the Jews could *pay* to avoid the vengeance of their brethren (Exod. 21:26-27). By the first century, monetary reparations had replaced physical maiming as the penalty for physical injury.[429] As God had permitted divorce because of the hardness of man's heart, so He permitted a certain amount of retaliation under the Mosaic Law. However, His intention was that His people would avoid divorce and retaliation entirely. He wanted us to love one another and to put the welfare of others before our own.

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[427]Carson, "Matthew," p. 154.
[428]Barclay, 1:160.
[429]Craig Keener, *Matthew*, p. 127.

5:39a Jesus first expounded God's intention regarding retaliation. Essentially He said: When evil people do you wrong, do not resist them. "Resist" (Gr. *anthistemi*) means to defend oneself, to take aggressive action against someone, as the following verses illustrate. When evil people do bad things to us, Jesus' disciples should accept the injustice without taking revenge.[430]

Implicit in this view are Old Testament promises that God will *take care of the righteous*. Therefore, to accept injustice without retaliating expresses trust that God will faithfully care for His own. The Old Testament taught that the Jews were to leave vengeance to God (Lev. 19:17-18; Deut. 32:35; Ps. 94:1; Prov. 20:22; 24:29). Discerning Jews realized this in Jesus' day.[431] Paul resisted (Gr. *anthistemi*) Peter (Gal. 2:11) out of love for the gospel and his fellow believers, not out of selfishness. We should stand up for what is right and for the rights of others, but we should trust God to stand up for us.

Jesus' purpose in the Sermon on the Mount was threefold: to reinforce the Law's timeless revelatory authority (e.g., 5:18-19), to refocus its original meaning (e.g., 5:21-22), and to replace its temporary regulatory provisions (e.g., 5:38-39). By doing these things, Jesus "fulfilled" (established) the Law.

5:39b-42 Jesus gave four illustrations to clarify what He meant. In the first (v. 39b), a disciple suffers an unjustified physical attack on his or her person. What is that one to do? He or she should not injure the aggressor in return, but should absorb the injury and the insult. He should even be ready to accept the same attack again.

In Jesus' illustration, the disciple gets slapped on the right cheek. Under normal conditions this would come from the back of a right-handed person's right hand. Such a slap was an insult more than an injury. However, we should probably not make too much of that point.

The point is that disciples should accept insult and or injury without retaliating. In Jesus' "honor-shame" culture, such a sacrifice was perhaps greater than it is for us today in the West. As previously (e.g. vv. 29-30), Jesus was probably speaking somewhat hyperbolically.

> "The true Christian has forgotten what it is to be insulted; he has learned from his Master to accept any insult and never to resent it, and never to seek to retaliate."[432]

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[430]Stott, p. 105.
[431]Plummer, p. 85.
[432]Barclay, 1:165.

Second, if someone wanted to extract as much as the disciple's undergarment for some real or imagined offense, the disciple was to part with it willingly (v. 40). The disciple should not resist the evil antagonist's action. Moreover, he or she should be ready and willing to part with his or her outer garment as well. Under Mosaic Law, a person's outer cloak was something he or she had an almost inalienable right to retain (Exod. 22:26-27; Deut. 24:13). This is another example of hyperbole. Jesus did not intend His disciples to walk around naked, but to be generous—even toward enemies—even if it meant parting with essential possessions.

> ". . . what Jesus is saying is this: 'The Christian never stands upon his rights; he never disputes about his legal rights; he does not consider himself to have any legal rights at all.'"[433]

The third illustration requires some background knowledge of customs in New Testament times to appreciate (v. 41). The Romans sometimes commandeered civilians to carry the luggage of military personnel, but the civilian did not have to carry the luggage for more than one Roman mile.[434] This imposition exasperated and infuriated many a proud Jew. Again, the disciple is not only to refrain from retaliating, but even to refrain from resisting this personal injustice. Jesus advocated going an extra mile. The disciple is to respond to unjustified demands by giving even more than the adversary asks, and he or she is to return good for evil.

> ". . . what Jesus is saying is: 'Suppose your masters come to you and compel you to be a guide or a porter for a mile, don't go a mile with bitter and obvious resentment; go two miles with cheerfulness and with a good grace.' What Jesus is saying is: 'Don't be always thinking of your liberty to do as you like; be always thinking of your duty and your privilege to be of service to others. When a task is laid on you, even if the task is unreasonable and hateful, don't do it as a grim duty to be resented; do it as a service to be gladly rendered.'"[435]

> "The Rabbis had a proverb to match, lively and piquant enough, but certainly lacking the gravity of this, and which never could have fallen from the same lips: *If thy neighbor call thee an ass, put a packsaddle on thy back*; do not, that is, withdraw thyself from the wrong, but rather go forward to meet it."[436]

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[433]Ibid.

[434]W. Hatch, *Essays in Biblical Greek*, pp. 37-38.

[435]Barclay, 1:166-67.

[436]Richard C. Trench, *On the Lessons in Proverbs*, p. 60.

Fourth, Jesus told His disciples to give what others request of them, assuming it is within their power to do so (v. 41). This applies to loans as well as gifts (cf. Exod. 22:25; Lev. 25:37; Deut. 23:19). A willing and generous spirit is implicit in this command (cf. Deut. 15:7-11; Ps. 37:26; 112:5). This does not mean we should give all our money away to individuals and institutions that ask for our financial assistance (cf. Prov. 11:15; 17:18; 22:26).

> "Giving must never be such as to encourage him [the receiver] in laziness and in shiftlessness, for such giving can only hurt. . . . And it must also be remembered that it is better to help a score of fraudulent beggars than to risk turning away the one man in real need."[437]

The scene in view in all these illustrations, and in all of this teaching, is one individual dealing with another individual. Personal wrongs are in view, not social or governmental crimes.[438]

> ". . . Jesus is here talking to his disciples, and speaking of personal relations: he is not laying down moral directives for states and nations, and such issues as the work of police or the question of a defensive war are simply not in his mind."[439]

There is a progression in these illustrations, from simply not resisting, to giving generously to people who make demands that tempt us to retaliate against them. Love must be the disciple's governing principle, not selfishness.[440]

Some conscientious believers have taken Jesus' instructions about resisting aggression literally, and refuse to defend themselves in any situation, either as pacifists or as advocates of non-resistance. However, the spirit of the law, which Jesus clarified, did not advocate turning oneself into a doormat. It stressed meeting hatred with positive love rather than hatred. Though Jesus allowed His enemies to lead Him as a lamb to the slaughter, He did not cave in to every hostile attack from the scribes and Pharisees. Likewise, Paul claimed his Roman citizenship rather than suffering prolonged attack by the Jews. Disciples may stand up for their rights, but when they are taken advantage of, they should always respond in love.

God's will concerning love 5:43-47 (cf. Luke 6:27-36)

5:43 Jesus quoted the Old Testament again (Lev. 19:18), but this time He added a corollary that the rabbis, not Moses, provided. Nowhere does the Old

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[437]Barclay, 1:170.
[438]See Hagner, p. 131; and Barclay, 1:173.
[439]Hunter, *A Pattern . . .*, pp. 57-58.
[440]See G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, p. 58.

Testament advocate hating one's enemies. However, this seemed to many of the Jewish religious teachers to be the natural opposite of loving one's neighbors.[441]

5:44-47 Jesus answered the popular teaching by going back to the Old Testament that commanded love for enemies (Exod. 23:4-5). "Love" (Gr. *agapao*) here probably includes emotion, as well as action, in view of Jesus' previous emphasis on motives. The parable of the Good Samaritan provides a good illustration of what it means to love (Luke 10:30-37).

> "To love one's enemies, though it must result in doing them good (Luke 6:32-33) and praying for them (Matt. 5:44), cannot justly be restricted to activities devoid of any concern, sentiment, or emotion. Like the English verb 'to love,' *agapao* ranges widely from debased and selfish actions to generous, warm, costly self-sacrifice for another's good. There is no reason to think the verb here in Matthew does not include emotion as well as action."[442]

The word "enemies" also has a wide meaning, and includes any individuals who elicit anger, hatred, and retaliation from the disciple. Jesus seems to have been correcting the common interpretation of the command to love one's neighbor as an implicit license to hate one's enemies.[443]

Prayer for someone's welfare is one specific manifestation of love for that person.

> "Jesus seems to have prayed for his tormentors actually while the iron spikes were being driven through his hands and feet; indeed the imperfect tense suggests that he kept praying, kept repeating his entreaty, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do' (Luke 23:34). If the cruel torture of crucifixion could not silence our Lord's prayer for his enemies, what pain, pride, prejudice or sloth could justify the silencing of ours?"[444]

> "The surest way of killing bitterness is to pray for the man we are tempted to hate."[445]

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[441]Morison, p. 83.
[442]Carson, "Matthew," p. 158.
[443]David A. Hubbard, *Proverbs*, p. 240.
[444]Stott, p. 119. Cf. Acts 7:60.
[445]Barclay, 1:174.

Some liberal interpreters have concluded that Jesus meant that we become God's sons by loving and praying for friend and foe alike. However, consistent with other Scriptural revelation, Jesus did not mean His disciples can earn their salvation (v. 45). Rather, by loving and praying for our enemies, we show that we are God's sons because we do what He does.

> "They *show* their parentage by their moral resemblance to the God who is Love . . ."[446]

Theologians refer to the blessings God bestows on His enemies, as well as on His children, as "common grace." Disciples, as their Father, should do good to all people as well as to their brethren (Gal. 6:10).

Loving one's enemies is something God will reward (v. 46). This should be an added inducement to love the antagonistic. Tax gatherers were local Jews who collected taxes from their countrymen for the Romans. Matthew was one of them. The whole Roman system of collecting taxes was very corrupt, and strict Jews viewed these "tax collectors" as both traitorous and unclean, because of their close association with Gentiles. They were among the most despised people in Palestine. However, even they, Jesus said, loved those who loved them.

Proper salutations were an evidence of courtesy and respect.[447] However, if Jesus' disciples only gave them to their brethren, they did no more than the Gentiles, most of whom were pagans.

Jesus' summary of His disciples' duty 5:48

This verse summarizes all of Jesus' teaching about the Old Testament's demands (vv. 21-47). It puts in epigrammatic form the essential nature of the "greater righteousness" of verse 20 that Jesus illustrated above. "Therefore" identifies a conclusion.

> "It can be concluded therefore from this section that the moral law of the Old Testament is recognized by Jesus as possessing divine authority, but that as Messiah He claims authority to supplement it, to draw out principles that lie latent within it, and to disclaim the false deductions that had been made from it. This is what He seems to have meant when He said *I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill* (17)."[448]

"Perfect" (Gr. *teleios*) often occurs in a relative sense in the New Testament, and translators sometimes render it "mature" (e.g., 1 Cor. 14:20; Eph. 4:13; Heb. 5:14; 6:1). However it also means perfect. In this context it refers to perfect regarding conformity to

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[446]Plummer, p. 88.
[447]Carson, "Matthew," p. 159.
[448]Tasker, p. 67.

God's requirements, which Jesus just clarified. He wanted His disciples to press on to perfect righteousness, a goal that no sinful human can attain but toward which all should move (cf. v. 3; 6:12). They should not view righteousness as simply external, as the scribes and Pharisees did, but they should pursue inner moral purity and love. This is only appropriate since their heavenly Father is indeed perfect.

> "Perfection here refers to uprightness and sincerity of character with the thought of maturity in godliness or attaining the goal of conformity to the character of God. While sinless perfection is impossible, godliness, in its biblical concept, is attainable."[449]

> ". . . the Greek idea of perfection is *functional*. . . . A thing is *teleios*, if it realizes the purpose for which it was planned; a man is perfect if he realizes the purpose for which he was created and sent into the world.
>
> "*Man was created to be like God*. The characteristic of God is this universal benevolence, this unconquerable goodwill, this constant seeking of the highest good of every man. The great characteristic of God is love to saint and to sinner alike. No matter what men do to Him, God seeks nothing but their highest good."[450]

Good children in the ancient East normally imitated their fathers. Jesus advocated the same of His disciples. In giving this summary command, Jesus was alluding to Leviticus 19:2, which He modified slightly in view of Deuteronomy 18:13.

> "In Jesus' perspective, the debates concerning law and tradition are all to be resolved by the proper application of one basic principle, or better, of a single attitude of the heart, namely, utter devotion to God and radical love of the neighbor (5:48; 22:37-40)."[451]

While we are definitely to strive for perfection in our conformity to the will of God (cf. 1 Pet. 1:15-16), we must beware of the perils associated with perfectionism. Striving for an unattainable goal is difficult for anyone, but it is particularly frustrating for people with obsessive-compulsive personalities, people who tend to be perfectionists. In one sense a perfectionist is someone who strives for perfection, but in another sense it is someone who is obsessed with perfection. Such a person, for example, constantly cleans up his or her environment, straightens things that are not exactly straight, and corrects people for even minor mistakes.

This type of striving for perfection can become an *obsessive compulsive disorder* (OCD), and is not godly. God is not constantly "on the backs" of people who are less than perfect, and we should not be either—whether on other people or on ourselves. In fact, He gives us a great deal of "space" and is patient with us, allowing us to correct our own mistakes

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[449]Walvoord, *Matthew:* . . ., p. 51.
[450]Barclay, 1:176.
[451]Kingsbury, *Matthew as* . . ., p. 63.

before He steps in to do so (cf. 1 Cor. 11:31). It is possible for us, as disciples of Jesus, to become so obsessed with our own holiness that we shift our focus from Christ to ourselves. Rather, we should keep our eyes on Jesus (Heb. 12:1-3) more than on ourselves and on being perfect.

Righteousness and the Father 6:1-18

Jesus moved from correcting popular misinterpretations of selected Old Testament texts that speak of righteous conduct (5:17-48), to correcting popular misconceptions about righteous conduct. He moved from ethical distinctions to the practice of religion. Throughout this entire section, proper motivation for actions is a constant emphasis. The shift in emphasis from the Law to God continues through all of chapter 6.

A basic principle 6:1

"Righteousness" means what is in harmony with the will of God, and righteous deeds are those that are pleasing to Him. Jesus warned His disciples about the possibility of doing good deeds for the wrong reason, as He began His teaching about righteous behavior. If one does what God approves to obtain human approval, that one will not receive a reward for his good deed from God. Notice again that disciples' rewards will vary. Some disciples will receive more reward from God than others. Disciples should practice good works publicly (5:16), but they should not draw special attention to them.

The rabbis considered almsgiving, prayer, and fasting as the three chief acts of Jewish piety.[452] Jesus dealt with each of these aspects of worship similarly. He first warned His disciples not to do the act for man's praise. Then He assured them that if they disregarded His warning, they would get human praise but nothing more. Third, He taught them how to do the act for God alone, secretly (not for public applause). Finally, He assured them that the Father who sees in secret would reward their righteous act openly.

Alms-giving 6:2-4

Alms were gifts of money to the needy. The Jews used the same word—*tzedakah*—both for righteousness and almsgiving.[453] What Jesus said on this subject is applicable to all types of giving.

Interpreters have understood the practice of sounding a trumpet to announce alms-giving metaphorically and literally. Metaphorically it would mean that Jesus was using a figure of speech to picture showy giving, publicizing one's giving, something like "blowing your own horn." However, His description seems to have had a custom behind it. There is historic evidence that during this period, the Jewish priests blew trumpets in the Temple when they collected funds for some special need.[454] Alternatively, this may be a reference

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[452]C. G. Montefiore and H. Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology*, pp. 412-39; G. F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, 2:162-79.

[453]Barclay, 1:186.

[454]David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 133.

to the horn-shaped collection receptacles in the Temple that noisily announced contributions that people tossed into them.[455] However, Jesus mentioned the synagogues and streets, not the Temple. Probably Jesus referred to the blowing of trumpets in the streets that announced fasts that included alms-giving.[456]

The idea of not letting the "left hand" know what the "right hand" does pictures secrecy (cf. 25:35-40). The way to avoid hypocrisy is to let no other people know when we give. We can carry this to the extreme, of course, but Jesus' point was that we should not draw attention to ourselves when we give. Hypocrisy does not just involve giving an impression that is incorrect, such as that one gives alms when he really does not. It also involves deceiving oneself even if one deceives no one else. A third kind of hypocrisy involves deceiving oneself and others into thinking that what one does is for a certain purpose when it is really for a different purpose. This seems to be the type of hypocrisy in view here.

> "They were not giving, but *buying*. They wanted the praise of men, they paid for it."[457]
>
> "The contrast is not between the secrecy of the Father's seeing and the openness of His rewarding, but between the wonderful *reward* that the Father gives and the comparatively miserable 'reward' of human approval."[458]
>
> "The hypocrites are not identified here, but Matthew 23 clearly indicates that they are the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 23:13, 14, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29). A clearer illustration of a facet of Matthew's style can hardly be found. First he intimates a fact, then he builds on it, and finally he establishes it. Here the intimation concerns the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees."[459]
>
> "As 'leaders,' the religious leaders evince their evilness most prominently by showing themselves to be 'hypocritical.' Hypocrisy in Matthew's story is the opposite of being 'perfect.' To be perfect is to be wholehearted, or single-hearted, in the devotion with which one serves God (5:48; Deut. 18:13). To be hypocritical is to be 'divided' in one's fealty to God. Hypocrisy, then, is a form of inner incongruity, to wit: paying honor to God with the lips while the heart is far from him (15:7-8); making pronouncements about what is right while not practicing them (23:3c); and appearing outwardly to be righteous while being inwardly full of lawlessness (23:28)."[460]

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[455]Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 26; J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, p. 170, n. 73.
[456]Adolf Buchler, "St. Mathew vi 1-6 and Other Allied Passages," *Journal of Theological Studies* 10 (1909):266-70.
[457]Davies and Allison, 1:582.
[458]Tasker, p. 73.
[459]Toussaint, *Behold the . . .*, p. 107.
[460]Kingsbury, *Matthew as . . .*, p. 20.

Praying 6:5-15 (cf. Luke 11:1-13)

6:5-6 Jesus assumed that His disciples would "pray," as He assumed they would give alms (v. 2) and fast (v. 16). Again He warned against ostentatious worship. The synagogues and streets were public places where people could practice their righteousness with an audience. The emphasis is not on standing, as opposed to some other posture, but on praying in a conspicuous place.[461] The motive is what matters most. Obviously, Jesus was not condemning public prayer *per se* (cf. 15:36; 18:19-20; 1 Tim. 2:8). He Himself prayed publicly (Luke 10:21-22; John 11:41-42). Praying out loud was common among the Jews, though one could still pray out loud in a private place.[462]

> "The public versus private antithesis is a good test of one's motives; the person who prays more in public than in private reveals that he is less interested in God's approval than in human praise."[463]

> "When a man begins to think more of *how* he is praying than of *what* he is praying, his prayer dies upon his lips."[464]

Jesus alluded to the Septuagint version of Isaiah 26:20 where the private room is a bedroom (cf. 2 Kings 4:33). Any private setting will do. Jesus was not discouraging public praying, but praying in order to be admired for it.

6:7-8 Jesus digressed briefly to give a further warning about repetitious prayer (vv. 7-8) and a positive example of proper prayer (vv. 9-15). Jesus' disciples can fall into prayer practices that characterize the pagans. Jesus Himself prayed long prayers (Luke 6:12), and He repeated Himself in prayer (26:44). These practices were not the objects of His criticism. He was attacking the idea that the length of a prayer makes it efficacious. Pagan prayer commonly relies on length and "repetition" for effectiveness, the sheer quantity of "words."

> ". . . Christ does not forbid us to persist in prayers, long, often, or with much feeling, but requires that we should not be confident in our ability to wrest something from God by beating upon his ears with a garrulous flow of talk, as if he could be persuaded as men are."[465]

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[461]Tasker, p. 73.
[462]France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 238.
[463]Carson, "Matthew," p,. 165.
[464]Barclay, 1:196. Emphasis added.
[465]Calvin, 3:20:29.

Jesus' disciples do not need to inform their omniscient "Father" of their "need" in prayer. He already knows what they are. Why pray then? Jesus did not answer that question here. Essentially we pray for the same reasons children speak to their parents: to share concerns, to have fellowship, to obtain help, and to express gratitude, among other reasons.

6:9-13 Jesus gave His disciples a model prayer commonly known as "The Lord's Prayer." It was not His prayer in the sense that He prayed it, but it *was* His prayer in the sense that He taught it. He introduced the model as such. Here is a way to pray that is neither too long, ostentatious, nor unnecessarily repetitious.

One of Jesus' unique emphases, as I have already mentioned, was that His disciples should think of God as their heavenly "Father." It was not characteristic of believers to address God as their Father until Jesus taught them to do so.[466]

> "Only fifteen times was God referred to as the Father in the Old Testament. Where it does occur, it is used of the nation Israel or to the king of Israel. Never was God called the Father of an individual or of human beings in general (though isolated instances occur in second temple Judaism, Sirach 51:10). In the New Testament numerous references to God as Father can be found."[467]

> "The overwhelming tendency in Jewish circles was to multiply titles ascribing sovereignty, lordship, glory, grace, and the like to God . . ."[468]

"Our" Father indicates that Jesus expected His disciples to pray this prayer, fully aware of their group context, as being a part of His disciples. Private use of this prayer is all right, but the context in which Jesus taught it was corporate, so He gave a corporate address. The "our" does not include Himself, since it is part of Jesus' teaching His followers concerning how to pray.

> "From this fact [i.e., that Jesus said "our" Father] we are warned how great a feeling of brotherly love ought to be among us, since by the same right of mercy and free liberality we are equally children of such a father."[469]

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[466]J. Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, p. 11.

[467]Mark L. Bailey, "A Biblical Theology of Paul's Pastoral Epistles," in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, p. 342. Cf. H. F. D. Sparks, "The Doctrine of the Divine Fatherhood of God in the Gospels," in *Studies in the Gospels: Essays in Memory of R. H. Lightfoot*, pp. 241-62; and James Barr, "Abba Isn't Daddy," *Journal of Theological Studies* 39 (1988):28-47.

[468]Carson, "Matthew," p. 169.

[469]Calvin, 3:20:38.

The way we think of God as we pray to Him is very important. In prayer, we should remember that He is a loving Father who will respond as such to His children. Some modern individuals advocate thinking of God as our Mother. However, this runs contrary to what Jesus taught, and to the thousands of references to God that God has given us in the masculine gender—in both Testaments.

God is not a *sexual* being; He is a *Spirit*. Nevertheless He is more like a *father* to us than a *mother*. Thinking of Him primarily as a mother will result in some distortion in our concept of God. It will also result in some confusion in our thinking about how God relates to us and how we should relate to Him.[470] Thinking of God as our "Father" will also remind us of our privileged access into His presence, and of our need to treat Him respectfully.

"In heaven" reminds us of His transcendence and sovereignty. Our address to God in prayer does more to prepare us for proper praying than it does to secure the desired response from Him.[471]

The first three petitions deal with God, and the last three with us. This pattern indicates that disciples should have more concern for God than we do for ourselves. We should put His interests first in our praying, as in all our living. All the petitions have some connection with the kingdom. The first three deal with the coming of the kingdom, and the last three are appeals in view of the coming kingdom.[472]

> "Therefore, when we pray 'Hallowed be Thy name,' it means, 'Enable us to give to Thee the unique place which Thy nature and character deserve and demand.'"[473]

> "To know that God is, to know what kind of a God God is, to be constantly aware of God, and to be constantly obedient to Him—that is reverence, that is what we pray for when we pray: 'Hallowed be Thy name.'"[474]

The first petition (v. 9c) is that everyone would hold God's name (His reputation, everything about Him) in reverence. He is already holy. We do not need to pray that He will become more holy. What is necessary is that His creatures everywhere recognize and acknowledge His holiness. This petition focuses on God's *reputation*. People need to *hallow* it, to treat it as special. By praying these words we affirm God's holiness.

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[470]See Aída Besançon Spencer, "Father-Ruler: The Meaning of the Metaphor 'Father' for God in the Bible," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39:3 (September 1996):433-42.
[471]Stott, p. 146.
[472]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 107.
[473]Barclay, 1:206.
[474]Ibid., 1:210.

God's reputation and the kingdom had close connections in the Old Testament (Isa. 29:23; Ezek. 36:23).

> "In one respect His name is profaned when His people are ill-treated. The sin of the nation which brought about the captivity had caused a profanation of the Name, Is. 43:25; 49:11; Ezk. 36:20-23. By their restoration His name was to be sanctified. But this sanctification was only a foreshadowing of a still future consummation. Only when the 'kingdom' came would God's name be wholly sanctified in the final redemption of His people from reproach."[475]

The second petition (v. 10a) is that the messianic "kingdom" will indeed "come" quickly (cf. Mark 15:43; 1 Cor. 16:22; Rev. 11:17). It was appropriate for Jesus' first disciples to pray this petition, since the establishment of the kingdom was imminent. It is also appropriate for modern disciples to pray it, since the inauguration of that kingdom will begin the righteous rule of Messiah on the earth, which every believer should anticipate eagerly. This kingdom has not yet begun. If it had, Jesus' disciples would not need to pray for it to come. Christ will rule over His kingdom, the Davidic kingdom, from the earth, and He is now in heaven.[476] This petition focuses on God's *kingdom*. People need to *prepare* for it.

> "Those who maintain that for Jesus himself the kingdom of God had already come in his own person and ministry inevitably treat this second petition of the Lord's prayer in a rather cavalier fashion. It must be interpreted, they say, in line with other sayings of Jesus. Why? And what other sayings? When all the evidence in the sayings of Jesus for 'realized eschatology' is thoroughly tested, it boils down to the *ephthasen eph humas* ['has come upon you'] of Matt. 12:28 and Luke 11:20. Why should that determine the interpretation of Matt. 6:10 and Luke 11:2? Why should a difficult, obscure saying establish the meaning of one that is clear and unambiguous? Why not interpret the *ephthasen* ['has come,' 12:28] by the *elthato* ['come,' 6:10]; or rather, since neither can be eliminated on valid critical grounds, why not seek an interpretation that does equal justice to both?"[477]

> "Jesus' conception of God's kingdom is not simply that of the universal sovereignty of God, which may or may not be accepted by men but is always there. That is the basis of his

[475]Allen, p. 58.

[476]See McClain, pp. 34-35; 147-60; and Adolph Saphir, *The Lord's Prayer*, p. 173.

[477]Millar Burrows, "Thy Kingdom Come," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 74 (January 1955):4-5.

> conception, but he combines with it the eschatological idea of the kingdom which is still to come. In other words, what Jesus means by the kingdom of God includes what the rabbinic literature calls the coming age."[478]

These are accurate and interesting conclusions coming from a non-dispensationalist.

The third petition (v. 10b-c) is a request that what God wants to happen on earth will indeed transpire "on earth," as it now does "in heaven." That condition will take place most fully when Christ sets up His kingdom on the earth. However, this should be the desire of every disciple in the inter-advent age while Jesus is still in heaven. Nothing better can happen than whatever God's will involves (Rom. 12:1). God's "will" (Gr. *thelema*) includes His righteous demands (7:21; 12:50; cf. Ps. 40:8), as well as His determination to cause and permit certain events in history (18:14; 26:42; cf. Acts 21:14). This petition focuses on God's *will*. People need to *do* it.

> "This difference [between God's heavenly universal rule and His earthly millennial rule] arises out of the fact that rebellion and sin exist upon the earth, sin which is to be dealt with in a way not known in any other spot in the universe, not even among the angels which sinned. It is here that the great purpose of what I have named the Mediatorial Kingdom appears: On the basis of mediatorial redemption it must 'come' to put down at last all rebellion with its evil results, thus finally bringing the Kingdom and will of God on earth as it is in heaven."[479]

The remaining petitions (vv. 11-13) focus on the disciples' needs. Notice the "Thy," "Thy," "Thy," in verses 9 and 10 and the "us," "us," "us," in verses 11-13. Some believers have concluded that prayer should not include anything selfish, so they do not make personal petitions. However, Jesus commanded His disciples to bring their personal needs to God in prayer. The first three petitions stand alone, but the last three have connecting "ands" that bind them together. We need all three of these things equally; we cannot get along without any of them.

> "The second part of the prayer, the part of it which deals with our needs and our necessities, is a marvelously wrought unity. It deals with the three essential needs of man, and the three spheres of time within which man moves. First, it asks for *bread*, thereby asking for that which is necessary for the *maintenance of life*, and thereby

[478]Ibid., p. 8.
[479]McClain, p. 35.

> bringing the needs of the *present* to the throne of God. Second, it asks for *forgiveness*, thereby bringing the *past* into the presence of God, and of God's forgiving grace. Third, it asks for *help in temptation*, thereby committing all the *future* into the hands of God. In these three brief petitions, we are taught to lay the present, the past, and the future, all before the footstool of the grace of God.
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> "But not only is this carefully wrought prayer a prayer which lays the whole of life in the presence of God; it is also a prayer which brings the whole of God to our lives. When we ask for *bread* to sustain our earthly lives, that request immediately directs our thoughts to *God the Father*, the Creator and the Sustainer of all life. When we ask for *forgiveness*, that request immediately directs our thoughts to *God the Son*, Jesus Christ our Saviour and Redeemer. When we ask for help for future *temptation*, that request immediately directs our thought to *God the Holy Spirit*, the Comforter, the Strengthener, the Illuminator, the Guide and the Guardian of our way."[480]

The "bread" in view (v. 11) probably refers to all our food, and even all our physical needs.[481] Bread has this larger significance in the Bible (cf. Prov. 30:8; Mark 3:20; Acts 6:1; 2 Thess. 3:12; James 2:15). Even today we speak of bread as "the staff of life." "Daily bread" refers to the necessities of life, not its luxuries. This is a prayer for our needs, not our greeds. The request is for God to supply our needs day by day (cf. Exod. 16:4-5; Ps. 104:14-15, 27-28; Prov. 30:8). The expression "this day [or today] our daily bread" reflects first-century life—in which workers received their *pay* "daily." It also reminds disciples that we can only live one day at a time, and each day we are dependent on God to sustain us.

Asking God to provide our needs does not free us from the responsibility of working, however (cf. vv. 25-34; 2 Thess 3:10). God satisfies our needs partially by giving us the ability and the opportunity to earn a living. Ultimately everything comes from Him. Having to live from hand to mouth, and one day at a time, can be a blessing if it reminds us of our total dependence on God. This is especially true since we live in a world that glorifies self-sufficiency.

The fifth petition requests forgiveness from debts (v. 12). "Debts" (Gr. *opheilemata*) probably translates the Aramaic word *hoba* that was a common synonym for sins.[482] The Greek word means "*a failure to pay*

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[480]Barclay, 1:199. Some emphasis added.

[481]Calvin, 3:20:44; Walvoord, *Matthew: . . .*, p. 53.

[482]Carson, "Matthew," p. 172.

that which is due, a failure in duty."[483] Viewing sins as debts was thoroughly Jewish (cf. Ps. 51:4).[484]

> "He calls sins 'debts' because we owe penalty for them, and we could in no way satisfy it unless we were released by this forgiveness."[485]

The second clause in the sentence does not mean that we must earn God's forgiveness with our own. Our forgiveness of others demonstrates our felt need of forgiveness. The person who does not forgive a brother's offenses does not appreciate how much he himself needs forgiveness.

> "Once our eyes have been opened to see the enormity of our offense against God, the injuries which others have done to us appear by comparison extremely trifling. If, on the other hand, we have an exaggerated view of the offenses of others, it proves that we have minimized our own."[486]

Some Christians have wondered why we should ask for God's forgiveness, since the New Testament clearly reveals that God forgives all sins—past, present, and future—when He justifies us (Acts 10:43; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14). That is judicial or forensic forgiveness. However, as forgiven believers we need to ask for forgiveness to restore fellowship with God (cf. 1 John 1:9). *Forensic* forgiveness brings us into God's family. *Family* forgiveness keeps our fellowship with God intimate within God's family.

> "Personal fellowship with God is in view in these verses (not salvation from sin). One cannot walk in fellowship with God if he refuses to forgive others."[487]

Some interpreters view verse 13 as containing one petition, while others believe Jesus intended two. Probably one is correct, in view of the close connection of the ideas. They are really two sides of one coin. "Temptation" is the Greek *peirasmos*, and in this case means "testing." It refers not so much to solicitation to evil, here, as to *trials* that test the character. God does not test (*peirasmos*) anyone (i.e., to lead to sin; James 1:13-14). Why then do we need to pray that He will not lead us into testing? Even though God is not the instrumental cause of our testing, He does permit us to experience temptation from the world, the flesh, and the devil (cf. 4:1; Gen. 22:1; Deut. 8:2). Therefore, this petition is a request

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[483]Barclay, 1:222.
[484]M'Neile, p. 80.
[485]Calvin, 3:20:45.
[486]Stott, pp. 149-50. Cf. Matt. 18:21-35.
[487]Barbieri, p. 32.

that He would *minimize* the occasions of our testing that could result in our sinning. It articulates the repentant disciple's felt weakness to stand up under severe trials, in view of his or her sinfulness (cf. Prov. 30:7-9).[488]

"But" introduces the alternative. "Deliver us" could mean "spare us from" or "deliver us out of." The meaning depends on what "evil" means. Is this a reference to evil generally or to the evil one, Satan? When the Greek preposition *apo* ("from") follows "deliver," it usually refers to deliverance from people. When *ek* ("from") follows it, it always refers to deliverance from things.[489] Here *apo* occurs. Also, the adjective "evil" has an article modifying it in the Greek text, which indicates that it is to be taken as a substantive: "the evil one." God does not always deliver us from evil, but He does deliver us from the evil one.[490]

> "It makes very little difference whether we understand by the word 'evil' the devil or sin."[491]

However, the Old Testament predicted that a time of great evil would precede the establishment of the kingdom (Jer. 30). Some commentators, including non-premillenarians, have understood the evil in this petition as a reference to Satanic opposition that will come to its full force before the kingdom begins.[492] God later revealed through Paul that Christians will not go through this Tribulation (1 Thess. 1:10; 4:13-18; et al.). Consequently, we do not need to pray for deliverance from *it*, but from other occasions of testing.

Some have seen a veiled reference to the Trinity in these last three petitions. The Father provides our bread through His creation and providence, the Son's atonement secures our forgiveness, and the Spirit's enablement assures our spiritual victory.

The final doxology appears in many ancient manuscripts, but there is so much variation in it that it was probably not originally a part of Matthew's Gospel. Evidently, pious scribes added it later to make the prayer liturgically complete. They apparently adapted the wording of David's prayer in 1 Chronicles 29:11.[493]

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[488]Rick W. Byargeon, "Echoes of Wisdom in the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:9-13)," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41:3 (September 1998):353-65.

[489]J. B. Bauer, "Libera nos a malo," *Verbum Domini* 34 (1965):12-15.

[490]See Page, pp. 458-59.

[491]Calvin, 3:20:46. Cf. Robertson, *Word Pictures* . . ., 1:55.

[492]E.g., Theodore H. Robinson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 52; M'Neile, p. 81; and T. Herbert Bindley, "Eschatology in the Lord's Prayer," *The Expositor* 17 (October 1919):319-20.

[493]See also Thomas L. Constable, "The Lord's Prayer," in *Giving Ourselves to Prayer*, compiled by Dan R. Crawford (Terre Haute, Ind.: PrayerShop Publishing, 2005), pp. 70-75.

> "In the Temple [in Jesus' day] the people never responded to the prayers by an *Amen*, but always with this benediction, 'Blessed be the name of the glory of His kingdom for ever!' [Footnote 4:] Thus the words in our Authorised [*sic*] Version, Matt. vi. 13, 'For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen,' which are wanting in all the most ancient MSS., are only the common Temple-formula of response, and as such may have found their way into the text. The word 'Amen' was in reality a solemn asseveration or a mode of oath."[494]

6:14-15 These verses explain the thought of the fifth petition (v. 12) more fully. Repetition stresses the importance of forgiving one another if we want God's forgiveness (cf. 18:23-35). Our horizontal relationships with other people must be correct before our vertical relationship with God can be.

> "Prayer is straightforward and simple for those who have experienced the grace of the kingdom in Christ. In prayer the disciple does not try to coerce or manipulate God. There are no magical words or formulae, nor does an abundance of words count with God. Short, direct, and sincere prayers are adequate."[495]

> "The sample prayer, it can be concluded, is given in the context of the coming kingdom. The first three requests are petitions for the coming of the kingdom. The last three are for the needs of the disciples in the interim preceding the establishment of the kingdom."[496]

Fasting 6:16-18

6:16 Fasting in Israel involved going without food to engage in a spiritual exercise, usually prayer, with greater concentration. Fasting fostered and indicated self-humiliation before God, and confession often accompanied it (Neh. 9:1-2; Ps. 35:13; Isa. 58:3, 5; Dan. 9:2-20; 10:2-3; Jon. 3:5; Acts 9:9). People who felt anguish, danger, or desperation, gave up eating temporarily in order to present some special petition to the Lord in prayer (Exod. 24:18; Judg. 20:26; 2 Sam. 1:12; 2 Chron. 20:3; Ezra 8:21-23; Esth. 4:16; Matt. 4:1-2; Acts 13:1-3; 14:23). Some pious believers fasted regularly (Luke 2:37).

The Pharisees fasted "twice a week" (Luke 18:12). God only commanded the Israelites to fast on one day of the year, the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29-31; 23:27-32; Num. 29:7). However, during the Exile the Israelites instituted additional regular fasts (Zech. 7:3-5; 8:19). Fasting occurred in

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[494]Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 155.
[495]Hagner, p. 152.
[496]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 112.

the early church and seems to have been a normal part of Christian self-discipline (1 Cor. 9:24-27; Phil. 3:19; 1 Pet. 4:3). Hypocritical fasting occurred in Israel long before Jesus' day (Isa. 58:1-7; Jer. 14:12; Zech. 7:5-6), but the Pharisees were notorious for it.

> ". . . fasting lasted from dawn to sunset; outside that time normal meals could be eaten."[497]
>
> "Fasting emphasized the denial of the flesh, but the Pharisees were glorifying their flesh by drawing attention to themselves."[498]
>
> "In Jewish fasting there were really three main ideas in the minds of men. (i) Fasting was a deliberate attempt *to draw the attention of God* to the person who fasted. . . . (ii) Fasting was a deliberate attempt *to prove that penitence was real*. . . . (iii) A great deal of fasting was *vicarious*. It was not designed to save a man's own soul so much as to move God to liberate the nation [or the individual] from its distresses."[499]

Jesus' point in this verse was that His disciples should avoid drawing attention to themselves when they fasted. He did not question the genuine contrition of some who fasted, but He pointed out that the hypocrites wanted the admiration of other people even more than they wanted God's attention. Since that is what they really wanted, that is all they would get.

6:17-18 Jesus assumed His disciples would fast as He assumed they would give alms and pray. He said nothing to discourage them from fasting (cf. 9:14-17). He only condemned ostentatious fasting. To avoid any temptation to pander to the adulation of onlookers, Jesus counseled His disciples to do nothing that would attract attention to the fact that they were fasting when they fasted. Again, the Father who sees the worship that His children offer "in secret" will "reward" them.

The three major acts of Jewish worship—alms-giving, prayer, and fasting—were only representative of many other acts of worship that Jesus' disciples performed. His teaching in this section of the Sermon (6:1-18) stressed lessons they should apply more broadly. In His teaching about each of these three practices, Jesus first warned His disciples not to do the act for man's praise. Then He assured them that if they disregarded His warning, they would get human praise, but nothing more. Third, He taught them how to do the act secretly. Finally, He assured them that the Father who sees in secret would reward their righteous act openly. He thereby explained what it means to seek first the kingdom and its righteousness (6:33).

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[497]Barclay, 1:235.
[498]Barbieri, p. 32.
[499]Barclay, 1:236.

Righteousness and the world 6:19—7:12

Thus far in the Sermon, Jesus urged His disciples to base their understanding of the righteousness God requires on the revelation of Scripture, not the traditional interpretations of their leaders (5:17-48). Then He clarified that true righteousness involved genuine worship of the Father, not hypocritical, ostentatious worship (6:1-18). Next, He revealed what true righteousness involves as the disciple lives in the world. He dealt with four key relationships: the disciple's relationship to wealth (6:19-34), to his or her brethren (7:1-5), to his or her antagonists (7:6), and to God (7:7-12).

The disciple's relationship to wealth 6:19-34 (cf. Luke 12:13-34)

Having made several references to treasure in heaven, Jesus now turned to focus on wealth. In the first part of chapter 6, His main emphasis was on sincerity. In this part of the chapter, it is on single-mindedness.

6:19-21 In view of the imminence of the kingdom, Jesus' disciples should "stop laying up treasures on earth."[500] Jesus called for a break with their former practice. Money is not intrinsically evil. The wise person works hard and makes financial provision for lean times (Prov. 6:6-8). Believers have a responsibility to provide for their needy relatives (1 Tim. 5:8) and to be generous with others in need (Prov. 13:22; 2 Cor. 12:14). We can enjoy what God has given us (1 Tim. 4:3-4; 6:17). What Jesus forbade here was selfishness. Misers hoard more than they need (James 5:2-3). Materialists always want more. It is the *love* of money that is a root of all kinds of evil (1 Tim. 6:10).

> "What Jesus precludes here is the accumulation of massive amounts of treasure as a life goal."[501]

It is foolish to accumulate great quantities of goods because they are perishable. "Moth(s)" eat clothing, a major form of wealth in the ancient Near East.

> "All purely physical pleasures have a way of wearing out. At each successive enjoyment of them the thrill becomes less thrilling. It requires more of them to produce the same effect. They are like a drug which loses its initial potency and which becomes increasingly less effective."[502]

"Rust" (Gr. *brosis*) refers to the destructive force of rats and mildew, not just the corrosion that eats metal.[503]

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[500]Nigel Turner, *Syntax*, p. 76.
[501]Bock, *Jesus according . . .*, p. 142.
[502]Barclay, 1:242.
[503]Carson, "Matthew," p. 177.

> "There are certain pleasures which inevitably lose their attraction as a man grows older. It may be that he is physically less able to enjoy them; it may be that as his mind matures they cease in any sense to satisfy him."[504]

"Thieves" can carry off just about anything in one way or another.

> "Suppose a man arranges his life in such a way that his happiness depends on his possession of money; then suppose a crash comes and he wakes up to find his money gone; then with his wealth his happiness has gone."[505]

The "treasures in heaven" Jesus spoke of were the rewards God will give His faithful followers (5:12, 30, 46; 6:6, 15; cf. 10:42; 18:5; 25:40; 2 Cor. 4:17; 1 Tim. 6:13-19). They are the product of truly good works. These are secure in heaven, and God will dispense them to the faithful at His appointed time (cf. 1 Pet. 1:4).

The thing that a person values most highly ("treasure") inevitably occupies the center of his or her "heart." The heart is the center of the personality, and it controls the intellect, emotions, and will.[506]

> "If honour is reckoned the supreme good, the minds of men must be wholly occupied with ambition: if money, covetousness will immediately predominate: if pleasure, it will be impossible to prevent men from sinking into brutal indulgence."[507]

> "Any man whose treasure is in *things* is bound to lose his treasure, for in things there is no permanence, and there is no thing which lasts forever."[508]

On the other hand, if a person values eternal riches most highly, he or she will pursue kingdom values (cf. Col. 3:1-2; Rev. 14:13). Some Christians believe that it is always carnal to desire and to work for eternal rewards, but Jesus commanded us to do precisely that (cf. 1 Cor. 3:11-15; 2 Cor. 5:10). Serving the Lord to obtain a reward to glorify oneself is obviously wrong, but to serve Him to obtain a reward that one may lay at His feet as an act of worship is not (cf. Rev. 4:10).

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[504]Barclay, 1:242.
[505]Ibid.
[506]*The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, s.v. "*kardia*," by T. Sorg, 2(1964):180-84.
[507]John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, 1:334.
[508]Barclay, 1:243.

> "What does it mean to lay up treasures in heaven? It means to use *all that we have* for the glory of God. It means to 'hang loose' when it comes to the material things of life. It also means measuring life by the true riches of the kingdom and not by the false riches of this world."[509]

6:22-23 The body finds its way through life with the aid of the eye. In that sense, "the eye is the lamp of the body" (cf. Luke 11:34-36). A "clear" or good "eye" admits "light" into the body, but a "bad . . . eye" leaves the body in "darkness." Evidently Jesus meant the eye is similar to the heart (v. 21). The heart fixed on God (Ps. 199:10) is similar to the eye fixed on God's law (Ps. 119:18, 148).

> "Eyes are the expression of the soul, not its intake, although certainly the two ideas are related. What Jesus stresses in this saying is that a good eye acts in a healthy way. It is the sign of a healthy soul."[510]

A "bad eye" is a miserly, grudging, jealous eye (Prov. 28:22). Jesus was speaking metaphorically. He probably meant that the person who is stingy and selfish cannot really see where he is going but is morally and spiritually blind (cf. vv. 19-21).[511] However, He may have meant that the person who is double-minded, dividing his loyalties between God and money, will have no clear vision but will lack direction (cf. v. 24).[512] Metaphorically, the body represents the whole person. The lack of light within is the dark vision that the bad eye with divided loyalties, a selfish attitude, provides.

6:24 The choice between "two masters" is what is depicted by the choice between two treasures and the choice between two visions. "Mammon" is the transliteration of the emphatic form of the Aramaic word *mamona*, meaning "wealth" or "property." The root word *mn*, in both Hebrew and Aramaic, indicates something in which one places confidence. Here Jesus personified it and set it over against God as a competing object of confidence. Jesus presented God and Mammon as two slave owners, masters.

> ". . . single ownership and fulltime service are of the essence of slavery."[513]

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[509]Wiersbe, 1:28.
[510]Bock, *Jesus according . . .*, p. 143.
[511]Carson, "Matthew," p. 178.
[512]Floyd V. Filson, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, p. 100.
[513]Tasker, p. 76.

A person might be able to work for two different employers at the same time. However, God and Mammon are not employers but slave owners. Each demands single-minded devotion. To give either anything less is to provide no true service at all.

> "Attempts at divided loyalty betray, not partial commitment to discipleship, but deep-seated commitment to idolatry."[514]

> "The principle of materialism is in inevitable conflict with the kingship of God."[515]

> "A man will not go far wrong, if he uses his possessions to see how much happiness he can bring to others."[516]

6:25 "Therefore" draws a conclusion from what has preceded (vv. 19-24). Since God has given us "life" and a "body," He will certainly also provide what we need to maintain them (cf. Luke 12:22-31; Phil. 4:6-7; Heb. 13:5; 1 Pet. 5:7). This argument is *a fortiori*, or *qal wahomer*, "How much more . . .?" It is wrong, therefore, for a disciple to fret (worry) about such things. He or she should simply trust and obey God, and get on with fulfilling one's divinely revealed calling in life (cf. 28:19-20).

> "There may be greater sins than worry, but very certainly there is no more disabling sin."[517]

6:26-27 If we fret constantly about having enough "food" and "clothing," we show that we have not yet learned a very basic lesson that nature teaches us: God provides for His creatures' needs. Furthermore, God is the heavenly Father of believers. Consequently He will take special care of them. This argument is *a minori ad maius*, "From the lesser to the greater." This does not mean we can disregard work, but it does mean we should disregard worry.

Fretting cannot lengthen life any more than it can put food on the table or clothes on the back (v. 27). Worry really shortens life.

6:28-30 The "lilies of the field" were probably the wild crocuses that bloom so abundantly in Galilee during the spring. However, Jesus probably intended them to represent all the wildflowers. His point was that God is so good that He covers the ground with beautiful wildflowers that have no productive value and only last a short time.

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[514]Carson, "Matthew," p. 179.
[515]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 263.
[516]Barclay, 1:257.
[517]Ibid., 1:264.

> "Once dried, grass became an important fuel source in wood-poor Palestine."[518]

God's providential grace should not make the disciple lazy, but confident that He will similarly provide for His children's needs. God often dresses the simplest field more beautifully than Israel's wealthiest king could adorn himself. Therefore, anxiety about the essentials of life really demonstrates lack of ("little") "faith" in God.

> "The man who feeds his heart on the record of what God has done in the past will never worry about the future."[519]

6:31-32 Since God provides so bountifully for His own, it is not only foolish but pagan to fret about the basic necessities of life. The fretting disciple lives as an unbeliever (Gentile) who disbelieves and disregards God. Such a person devotes too much of his or her attention to the accumulation of material goods, and disregards the more important things in life.

> "The key to avoiding anxiety is to make the kingdom one's priority (v 33)."[520]

6:33 Rather than pursuing material things, the disciple should replace this with a pursuit having much greater significance. Seeking the kingdom involves pursuing the things about the kingdom for which Jesus taught His disciples to pray, namely: God's honor, His reign, and His will (vv. 9-10). This is one of only five places in Matthew where we read "kingdom of God" rather than "kingdom of heaven" (cf. 12:28; 19:24; 21:31, 43). In each case, the context requires a more personal reference to "God," rather than a more oblique reference to "heaven." Seeking God's righteousness means pursuing righteousness in life in submission to God's will (cf. 5:6, 10, 20; 6:1). It does not mean seeking justification, in view of Jesus' use of "righteousness" in the context.

> "In the end, just as there are only two kinds of piety, the self-centered and the God-centered, so there are only two kinds of ambition: one can be ambitious either for oneself or for God. There is no third alternative."[521]

The "things" God will add are the necessities of life that He provides providentially, about which Jesus warned His disciples not to fret (5:45; 6:11). Here, God promises to meet the needs of those who commit themselves to seeking the furtherance of His "kingdom" and "righteousness."

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[518]Guelich, *The Sermon* . . ., p. 340.
[519]Barclay, 1:263.
[520]Hagner, p. 166.
[521]Stott, p. 172.

In view of this promise, how can we explain the fact that some animals, plants, and committed believers have perished for lack of food? There is a wider sphere of context in which this promise operates. We all live in a fallen world where the effects of sin pervade every aspect of life. Sometimes the godly, through no fault of their own, get caught up in the consequences of sin and perish. Jesus did not elaborate this dimension of life, here, but assumed it as something His hearers would have known and understood.

6:34 Since we have such a promise, backed up by the testimony of divine providence, we should not fret "about tomorrow." Today has enough "trouble" or evil for us to deal with. Moreover, the trouble we anticipate tomorrow may never materialize. God provides only enough grace so we can deal with life one day at a time. Tomorrow He will provide enough grace (help) for what we will face then.

To summarize, the disciple's relationship to wealth should be one of trust in God and to have a single-minded commitment to the affairs of His kingdom and righteousness. It should not be hoarding or pursuing wealth for its own sake. God, not Mammon, should be the magnet of the believer's life. The fruit of such an attitude will be freedom from anxiety about daily material needs.

> "It is impossible to be a partially committed or part-time disciple; it is impossible to serve two masters, whether one of them be wealth or anything else, when the other master is meant to be God."[522]

The disciple's relationship to brethren 7:1-5 (cf. Luke 6:37-42)

All of chapter 7 deals with the disciple's relationship to others, but this first section of it focuses on his or her relationship to brethren. Jesus first laid down a principle (v. 1). Then He justified this principle theologically (v. 2). Finally, He provided an illustration (vv. 3-5).

7:1 Jesus taught His disciples not to be judgmental or censorious of one another, in view of the high standards He was clarifying (cf. Rom. 14:10-13; James 4:11-12). He did not mean that they should accept everything and everyone uncritically (cf. vv. 5-6, 15-20; John 7:24; 1 Cor. 5:5; Gal. 1:8-9; 6:1; Phil. 3:2; 1 John 4:1). Neither did He mean, obviously, that parents, church leaders, and civil authorities are wrong if they pass judgment on those under their care.

Jesus meant that His disciples should not do God's job of passing judgment—on His behalf—when He has not authorized them to do so. They really could not, since no one but God knows all the facts that motivate people to do as they do. The disciple who usurps God's place will

[522]Hagner, p. 160.

have to answer to Him for doing so. One public opinion poll indicated that this is currently the most popularly quoted verse from the Bible.

> ". . . it is the *habit* of censorious and carping criticism that Jesus is condemning, and not the exercise of the critical faculty, by which men are able and expected on specific occasions to make value-judgments and to choose between different policies and plans of action."[523]

7:2 The thought here is similar to that in 6:14-15. The person who judges others very critically will experience a similarly rigorous examination from God (cf. 18:23-35). There is a word play in the verse in the Greek text that suggests Jesus may have been quoting a popular proverb.[524]

7:3-5 The "speck" (Gr. *karphos*) could be a speck of any foreign matter. The "log" or "plank" (Gr. *dokos*) refers to a large piece of wood. Jesus again used hyperbole to stress the folly of criticizing someone else. This act reveals a much greater problem in the critic's life, namely: a censorious spirit.

Such a person is a hypocrite and his actions carry him away. He does not deceive others as much as he deceives himself. Other people may realize that his criticism is unjustifiable, but he does not. A proper attitude is important in judging oneself and other people (1 Cor. 11:31; Gal. 6:1). Censorious critics are not helpful. That is what Jesus warned against here (cf. Luke 6:39-42).

> "The disciples of the King are to be critical of self but not of their brethren. The group is to be noted for their bond of unity, which is indicated by a lack of criticism. This is fitting, since the kingdom is characterized by peace. (Isaiah 9:7)."[525]

The disciple's relationship to antagonists 7:6

Jesus' disciples had a responsibility to pass their knowledge of the kingdom on to others so they, too, could prepare for it. Jesus gave them directions about this responsibility in this verse. This exhortation balances the one He just gave (vv. 1-5). The disciples could be too naive and fail to be discerning (cf. 5:43-47).

Pigs ("swine") were typically unclean, wild, vicious animals. Likewise, most "dogs" were not domestic pets but unclean, wild, despised creatures. This verse contains a chiastic construction. The dogs "turn and tear to pieces" those who give them special gifts, and the pigs "trample" under foot the "pearls" thrown before them (cf. Prov. 11:22). "What is

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[523]Tasker, p. 79.
[524]Carson, "Matthew," p. 184.
[525]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 113.

holy" and the "pearls" in this illustration evidently represent the good news announcing the kingdom.

The pigs and dogs probably do not represent *all* Gentiles, but people of any race who react to the good news by rejecting and turning against those who bring it to them (cf. 10:14; 15:14).[526] One example of this type of person is Herod Antipas, who heard John the Baptist gladly (Mark 6:20), but then beheaded him (14:1-12; Mark 6:14-28; Luke 9:7-9). Later when Christ stood before Herod, He said nothing to him (Luke 23:8-9). Such enemies should be left alone (cf. 2 Cor. 6:14-18).

> "As with other parts of Jesus' teaching, the point is not an absolute prohibition, because then the disciple could not share the gospel with those who are not responsive. Rather, the point is that the disciple is not obligated to share with those who are hard-hearted."[527]

The disciple's relationship to God 7:7-12

This section of verses brings the main body of the Sermon to a climactic conclusion.

7:7-8 In view of such hard opposition, Jesus' disciples need to pray for God's help. He will always respond positively to their words, though others may reject them (v. 6). Still, their petitions must be for His glory rather than for selfish ends (cf. James 4:2-3). All that the disciple needs to serve Jesus Christ successfully is available for the asking.

> "Jesus' disciples will pray ('ask') with earnest sincerity ('seek') and active, diligent pursuit of God's way ('knock'). Like a human father, the heavenly Father uses these means to teach his children courtesy, persistence, and diligence. If the child prevails with a thoughtful father, it is because the father has molded the child to his way."[528]

The force of each present imperative verb is *iterative*.[529] We could translate them: "Keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking" (cf. Luke 11:9-10). However, no matter the level of intensity with which we seek God's help, He will respond to every one of His disciples who calls to Him.

7:9-11 In verses 9 and 10, Jesus put the matter of verses 7-8 in two other ways. Even though parents are "evil" (i.e., self-centered sinners), they do not typically give their children disappointing or dangerous counterfeits, in response to requests for what is wholesome and nutritious. Much more

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[526]Cf. Calvin, *Commentary on* . . ., 1:349.
[527]Bock, *Jesus according* . . ., p. 146. Cf. Prov. 9:8; 23:9.
[528]Carson, "Matthew," p. 186.
[529]Tasker, p. 80.

will the heavenly "Father," who is pure goodness, "give . . . gifts" that are truly "good" to His "children" who request them (cf. Jer. 29:13; Luke 11:11-13; James 1:5-8). In the parallel passage in Luke 11:13, what is "good" is identified as "the Holy Spirit."

This is another *a fortiori* argument (cf. 6:26). Jesus' disciples are in view as the "children" praying here (cf. 5:45). The good things they request have direct connection with the kingdom, things such as ability to follow God faithfully in spite of opposition (cf. Acts 4:29). God has ordained that we ask for the good gifts we need, because this is the way He trains us, not because He is unaware or unconcerned about our needs (cf. 6:8).

> "What is fundamentally at stake is man's picture of God. God must not be thought of as a reluctant stranger who can be cajoled or bullied into bestowing his gifts (6:7-8), as a malicious tyrant who takes vicious glee in the tricks he plays (vv. 9-10), or even as an indulgent grandfather who provides everything requested of him. He is the heavenly Father, the God of the kingdom, who graciously and willingly bestows the good gifts of the kingdom in answer to prayer."[530]

There are 14 references to rewards in the Sermon on the Mount (5:12, 46; 6:1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 33; 7:11). While the desire for an eternal reward may not be the highest motivation for serving Christ, Jesus held it out as one motivation, as did other New Testament writers.[531]

7:12 The recurrence of "the Law and the Prophets" here takes us back to 5:17, the beginning of the body of the Sermon. As pointed out previously, this phrase forms an *inclusio*. Everything Jesus said between 5:17 and 7:12 was essentially an exposition of Old Testament revelation. Consequently the "therefore" in this verse probably summarizes the entire section (5:17—7:12).

The "golden rule" sums up the teaching of the Old Testament (cf. Exod. 23:4; Lev. 19:18; Deut. 15:7-8; Prov. 24:17; 25:21; Luke 6:31). The title "golden rule" traditionally comes from "the Roman Emperor Alexander Severus (A.D. 222-35), who, though not a Christian, was reputedly so impressed by the comprehensiveness of this maxim of Jesus . . . that he had it inscribed in gold on the wall of his chamber."[532]

Rather than giving scores of specific commands to govern individual behavior during the inter-advent era, as the Old Covenant did for the Mosaic era, Jesus gave this principle. It provides a rule we can use in

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[530]Carson, "Matthew," p. 187.
[531]See Joe L. Wall, *Going for the Gold*.
[532]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 284.

thousands of specific cases to determine what righteousness looks like. Doing to others what we would want them to do to us is what "the Law and the Prophets" taught. This behavior fulfills them (cf. 5:17). This behavior is the will of God, and that is why Jesus' disciples should do it.

> "When the rule is put in its negative form, when we are told that we must refrain from doing to others that which we would not wish them to do to us, it is not an essentially religious rule at all. It is simply a common-sense statement without which no social intercourse at all would be possible."[533]

> "It is perfectly possible for a man of the world to observe the negative form of the golden rule. He could without very serious difficulty so discipline his life that he would not do to others what he did not wish them to do to him; but the only man who can even begin to satisfy the positive form of the rule is the man who has the love of Christ within his heart. He will try to forgive as he would wish to be forgiven, to help as he would wish to be helped, to praise as he would wish to be praised, to understand as he would wish to be understood. He will never seek to avoid doing things; he will always look for things to do."[534]

> "The attitude which says, 'I must do no harm to people,' is quite different from the attitude which says, 'I must do my best to help people.'"[535]

4. The false alternatives 7:13-27

To clarify the essential choices that His disciples needed to make, Jesus laid out four pairs of alternatives. Their choices would prepare them to continue to get ready for the coming kingdom. Each of the four alternatives is a warning of catastrophic proportions. They all focus on future judgment and the kingdom. This section constitutes the conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount.

The two paths 7:13-14

The Old Testament contains several references to diverging ways that force the traveler to choose between two paths (e.g., Deut. 30:15, 19; Ps. 1; Jer. 21:8). The AV translation "straight" is a bit misleading. That translation reflected the Latin *strictum* meaning narrow, and it probably contributed to the common idea of "the straight and narrow." However, the Greek word *stene* clearly means "narrow" as contrasted with broad. The

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[533]Barclay, 1:279.
[534]Ibid., 1:281.
[535]Ibid., 1:280.

word "small" (v. 14, Gr. *tethlimmene*) relates closely to the Greek word *thlipsis*, meaning "tribulation." Thus, Jesus was saying that the narrow restricting gate has connections with persecution, a major theme in Matthew's Gospel (cf. 5:10-12, 44; 10:16-39; 11:11-12; 24:4-13; Acts 14:22).[536]

The "narrow" road "leads to life," namely, life in the kingdom (cf. vv. 21-22). The "broad" road "leads to destruction," namely, death and hell (cf. 25:34, 46; John 17:12; Rom. 9:22: 1 Cor. 1:18; Phil. 1:28; 3:19; 1 Tim. 6:9; Heb. 10:39; 2 Pet. 2:1, 3; 3:16; Rev. 17:8, 11). Few will enter the kingdom compared with the many who will perish. Jesus clearly did not believe in the doctrine of universalism that is growing in popularity today, the belief that everyone will eventually end up in heaven (cf. John 14:6). Entrance through the narrow gate onto the narrow way will eventually lead a person into the kingdom. The beginning of a life of discipleship (the gate) and the process of discipleship (the way) are both restrictive and both involve persecution.

> "*Gate* is mentioned for the benefit of those who were not true followers; *way* is mentioned as a definition of the life of the disciples of Jesus. This is why Matthew uses the word 'gate' (*pule*) while Luke employs the word 'door' (*thura*, Luke 13:24). Luke is concerned primarily with salvation. Here the King desires subjects for His kingdom, so He uses a word which implies a path is to be followed after entrance into life."[537]

Only a "few" people would find the way "to life" (v. 14). As we noted earlier, Israel's leaders were lethargic about seeking the Messiah (2:7-8). Many of the Jews were evidently not seeking the kingdom either.

The two trees 7:15-20 (cf. Luke 6:43-44)

7:15 Jesus here sounded a warning, that the Old Testament prophets also gave, about "false prophets" (cf. Deut. 13; 18; Jer. 6:13-15; 8:8-12; Ezek. 13; 22:27; Zeph 3:4). He did not explain exactly what they would teach, only that they would deceptively misrepresent divine revelation. This covers a wide spectrum of false teachers. Their motive was ultimately self-serving, and the end of their victims would be destruction. These characteristics are implicit in Jesus' description of them. The scribes and Pharisees manned a narrow gate, but it was not the gate that led to the narrow way leading to life.

7:16-20 "Fruit" in the natural world, as well as metaphorically, represents what the plant or person produces. It is what other people see (or sample or taste) that leads them to conclude something about the nature and identity of what bears the fruit. "Fruits" are the best indicator of this nature. In false teachers, "fruits" represent their doctrines and deeds (cf. Jer. 23:9-15). Jesus said His disciples would be able to recognize false prophets "by their

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[536]See also A. J. Mattill Jr., "'The Way of Tribulation,'" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98 (1979):531-46.
[537]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 116.

fruits": their teachings and their actions. Sometimes the true character of a person remains hidden for some time. People regard their good works as an indication of righteous character. However, eventually the true nature of the person becomes apparent, and it becomes clear that one's seemingly good fruits were destructive.

Prophets true to God's Word produce righteous conduct, but false prophets who disregard God's Word produce unrighteous conduct (v. 17).

A poisonous plant will yield poisonous fruit. It cannot produce healthful fruit. Likewise a "good tree," such as an apple tree, bears "good," nutritious "fruit" (v. 18). The "bad fruit" may look good, but it is bad nonetheless (v. 16). A false prophet can only produce bad works, even though his works may appear good, superficially or temporarily.

Some interpreters of this passage take Jesus' teaching further than He went with it. They say it is impossible for a genuine believer to do bad works. This cannot be true in view of the hundreds of commands, exhortations, and warnings that Jesus and the prophets and apostles gave to believers in both Testaments. It is possible for a believer to do bad works (e.g., 16:23; Tit. 2:11-13; 3:8; 1 John 1:9). That they will not is the teaching of *sinless perfection*.

Other interpreters say that some bad works are inevitable for the believer, but bad works will not *habitually* characterize the life of a *true* believer. This quickly turns into a question of how many bad works (would prove someone is unsaved)—which the New Testament does not answer. Rather, the New Testament writers present some people who have departed from God's will for a long time as believers (e.g., 1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:17-18). The point Jesus was making, in verse 18, was simply that false prophets do what is bad, and people who follow God faithfully typically do what is good. How disciples of Jesus live was very important to Him.

The end of "every tree that does not bear good fruit" is "the fire" (v. 19). Likewise the false prophet who does bad works, even though they look good, suffers destructive judgment (cf. 3:10).

The words and works of a prophet eventually reveal his true character, just as surely as the fruit of a tree reveals its identity (v. 20). Of these two criteria, words and works, works are the more reliable indicator of character.

Jesus was evidently dealing with typical false prophets in this section. He did not go into the case of a believer who deliberately distorts God's Word. Typically, a false prophet rejects God's Word because he is an unbeliever. However, even in the Old Testament, there were a few true prophets who lied about God's Word (e.g., 1 Kings 13:18).

The two claims 7:21-23 (cf. Luke 6:46)

Verses 15-20 deal with false prophets, but verses 21-23 deal with false followers. The repeated cry of these false disciples reveals their fervency.

> "In Jesus' day it is doubtful whether 'Lord' when used to address him meant more than 'teacher' or 'sir.' But in the postresurrection period, it becomes an appellation of worship and a confession of Jesus' deity."[538]

Obedience to the Father's will determines entrance into the millennial "kingdom," not professed admiration for Jesus. This is the first occurrence of the phrase "My Father" in Matthew. By using it, Jesus was implicitly claiming to be the authoritative revealer of God. During Jesus' ministry, doing the will of God boiled down to believing that Jesus was the Messiah and responding appropriately (John 6:29).[539] Note that entrance into the kingdom was still future; the kingdom was not yet present. Judgment will precede entrance into the kingdom.

Jesus claimed to be the eschatological Judge (cf. John 6). This was one of Messiah's functions (e.g., Ps. 2). "That day" (v. 22) is the day Jesus will judge false professors. It is almost a technical term for the messianic age (cf. Isa. 2:11, 17; 4:2; 10:20; Jer. 49:22; Zech. 14:6, 20-21). "In your name" means as your representatives and claiming your authority. Obviously it was possible for false disciples to "prophesy," exorcise "demons," and "perform miracles" in Jesus' name (e.g., Judas Iscariot). The authority of His name (reputation) enabled them to do so, not their own righteousness or relationship to Him. Many onlookers undoubtedly viewed these works as good fruit and evidence of righteous character. However, these were cases of tares that looked like wheat (cf. 13:24-30).

Jesus Himself would sentence the hypocrites to depart from His presence (v. 23).[540] Thus Jesus claimed again that He is the Judge who will determine who will enter the kingdom and who will not. This was a decidedly messianic function. The quotation from Psalm 6:8 puts Jesus in the place of the sufferer whom God has vindicated, and He now tells those who have done Him evil to depart from His presence. Moreover, He will say He never knew these false professors. Obviously Jesus *knows* who *everyone* is, but here He meant that He would not "know" these *false professors* in the intensive sense of knowing them with favor or acknowledging them (cf. Ps. 1:6; Amos 3:2). Many people deal with holy things daily yet have no personal acquaintance with God because they are hypocrites. It is their failure to bow before divine law, the will of God, that renders them practitioners of lawlessness—and guilty.

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[538]Carson, "Matthew," p. 192.

[539]See Robern N. Wilkin, "Not Everyone Who Says 'Lord, Lord' Will Enter the Kingdom: Matthew 7:21-23," *The Grace Evangelical Society News* 3:12 (December 1988):2-3.

[540]See Karl E. Pagenkemper, "Rejection Imagery in the Synoptic Parables," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:610 (April-June 1996):189-90.

The two builders 7:24-27 (cf. Luke 6:47-49)

Verses 21-23 contrast those who say one thing but do another. Verses 24-27 contrast hearing and doing (cf James 1:22-25; 2:14-20).[541] The will of Jesus' Father (v. 21) now becomes "these words of mine" (v. 24). As throughout this section (vv. 13-27), Jesus was looking at a life in its entirety.

> "The two ways illustrate the *start* of the life of faith; the two trees illustrate the *growth* and results of the life of faith here and now; and the two houses illustrate the *end* of this life of faith, when God shall call everything to judgment."[542]

Each house in Jesus' illustration looks secure. However, severe testing reveals the true quality of the builders' work (cf. 13:21; Prov. 10:25; 12:7; 14:11; Isa. 28:16-17). Torrential downpours were and are common in Israel. Wise men build to withstand anything. The wise person is a theme in Matthew (cf. 10:16; 24:45; 25:2, 4, 8-9). The "wise" person is one who puts Jesus' "words" into practice. Thus the final reckoning will expose the true convictions of the pseudo-disciple.

> "He [Jesus] was the craftsman who knew all about the building of houses, and when He spoke about the foundations of a house He knew what He was talking about. This is no illustration formed by a scholar in his study; this is the illustration of a practical man."[543]

Jesus later compared Himself to foundation rock (16:18; cf. Isa. 28:16; 1 Cor. 3:11; 1 Pet. 2:6-8). That idea was probably implicit here.

Verses 16-20 have led some people to judge the reality of a person's salvation from his or her works. All that Jesus said before (vv. 1-5), and following those verses, should discourage us from doing this. False prophets eventually give evidence that they are not faithful prophets. However, it is impossible for onlookers to determine the salvation of professing believers (vv. 21-23) and those who simply receive the gospel without making any public response to it (vv. 24-27). Their real condition will only become clear when Jesus judges them. He is their Judge, and we must leave their judgment in His hands (v. 1).

> "Hearing sermons is a dangerous business if one does not put them into practice."[544]

Jesus' point in this section (vv. 13-27) was that entrance into the kingdom and discipleship as a follower of the King are unpopular, and they involve persecution. Many more people will profess to be disciples than really are. The acid test is obedience to the revealed will of God.

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[541]Stott, p. 208.
[542]Wiersbe, 1:31.
[543]Barclay, 1:295.
[544]Robertson, *Word Pictures . . .*, 1:63.

> "So the sermon ends with a challenge not to ignore responding to Jesus and his teaching. Jesus is a figure who is not placing his teaching forward because it is a recommended way of life. He represents far more than that. His teaching is a call to an allegiance that means the difference between life and death, between blessing and woe. Jesus is more than a prophet."[545]

5. The response of the audience 7:28-29

Each conclusion to each of the five major discourses in Matthew begins with the same formula statement: literally "and it happened" (Gr. *kai egeneto*) followed by a finite verb. It is, therefore, "a self-conscious stylistic device that establishes a structural turning point."[546] Each conclusion is also transitional and prepares for the next section.

We learn for the first time that, even though Jesus was teaching His disciples (5:1-2), multitudes were listening in to what He taught them. Probably for this reason, the end of the Sermon contains more material that is suitable for a general audience. France believed that all the discourses in Matthew are anthologies of Jesus' teachings on various occasions—that Matthew compiled into discourses—rather than single discourses that Jesus delivered on individual occasions.[547] This is a minority opinion, but it is probably true that the Gospel writers edited Jesus' teachings to some extent.

Jesus' "teaching" included both His content and His delivery. What impressed the crowds was Jesus' "authority" when He taught. This is the first occurrence of another theme that Matthew stressed (8:9; 9:6, 8; 10:1; 21:23-24, 27; 28:18). Jesus' authority was essentially different in that He claimed to be the Messiah. He not only claimed to interpret the Word of God, as other contemporary teachers did, but He claimed to fulfill it as well (5:17). He would be the One who would determine entrance into the kingdom (v. 21), and He would judge humankind eventually (v. 23).

Jesus also claimed that His teaching amounted to God's Word (vv. 24, 26). Therefore the authoritative note in His teaching was not primarily His sincerity, or His oratorical style, or His lack of reference to earlier authorities. It was *who He was*. He claimed to be *the* authoritative Interpreter of the Word of God (i.e., with the authority of the predicted Prophet, the Messiah)!

> "In the final analysis . . . what Jesus says about the law applies to it as something being authoritatively reinterpreted by his teaching. It is not the Mosaic law in and of itself that has normative and abiding character for disciples, but the Mosaic law as it has passed through the crucible of Jesus' teaching."[548]

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[545]Bock, *Jesus according . . .*, pp. 152-53. For a good exposition of the Sermon on the Mount, see Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*.

[546]Carson, "Matthew," p. 195. Cf. Kingsbury, *Matthew as . . .*, p. 105.

[547]France, *The Gospel . . .*, pp. 8-10.

[548]Kingsbury, *Matthew as . . .*, p. 65. Cf. 5:17-18, 21-48; 22:37-40; 24:35; 28:20.

To summarize this sermon, Jesus began by describing the character of the kingdom's subjects (5:1-10). He then explained their calling (5:11-16). Next, He specified their conduct (5:17—7:12). Finally, He clarified their choices and commitments (7:13-27).

Scholars have noted many parallels between Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount and Rabbinic instruction, probably more than in any other part of the New Testament. The similarities, however, lie in form of expression, subject matter, and turn of words, but definitely not in spirit.[549] The authority and power of His teaching, as Matthew ironically pointed out, was "not as their scribes."

> "The King has proclaimed the nearness of the kingdom and has authenticated that message with great signs. With people flocking to Him He instructs His disciples concerning the character of those who shall inherit the kingdom. The kingdom, though earthly, is founded on righteousness. Thus the theme of His message is righteousness."[550]

Jesus proceeded to demonstrate His authority by performing powerful miracles that liberated captives from their bondage, signs that the Old Testament prophets said Messiah would perform.

> "Throughout the rest of his story, Matthew makes it exceedingly plain that, whether directly or indirectly, the issue of authority underlies all the controversies Jesus has with the religious leaders and that it is therefore pivotal to his entire conflict with them."[551]

III. THE MANIFESTATION OF THE KING 8:1—11:1

> "Matthew has laid the foundational structure for his argument in chapters one through seven. The genealogy and birth have attested to the legal qualifications of the Messiah as they are stated in the Old Testament. Not only so, but in His birth great and fundamental prophecies have been fulfilled. The King, according to protocol, has a forerunner preceding Him in His appearance on the scene of Israel's history. The moral qualities of Jesus have been authenticated by His baptism and temptation. The King Himself then commences His ministry of proclaiming the nearness of the kingdom and authenticates it with great miracles. To instruct His disciples as to the true character of righteousness which is to distinguish Him, He draws them apart on the mountain. After Matthew has recorded the Sermon on the Mount, he goes on to relate the King's presentation to Israel (Matthew 8:1—11:1)."[552]

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[549]See Edersheim, *The Life* . . ., 1:531-41.
[550]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 119.
[551]Kingsbury, *Matthew as* . . ., p. 125.
[552]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 121.

A. DEMONSTRATIONS OF THE KING'S POWER 8:1—9:34

Matthew described Jesus' ministry as consisting of teaching, preaching, and healing in 4:23. Chapters 5—7 record what He taught His disciples: principles of the kingdom. We have the essence of His preaching ministry in 4:17. Now in 8:1—9:34 we see His healing ministry. He demonstrated authority over human beings, unseen spiritual powers, and the world of nature. Matthew showed that Jesus' ability proves that He is the divine Messiah. He possessed the "power to banish from the earth the consequences of sin and to control the elements of nature".[553] The King authenticated His claims by performing messianic signs. In view of these things, the Jews should have acknowledged Him as their Messiah. Matthew's purpose was far more than simply to reveal the love of God, as some commentators have proposed.[554]

> "The purpose of Matthew in these two chapters [8 and 9] is to offer the credentials of the Messiah as predicted in the Old Testament."[555]

Matthew did not record Jesus' miracles in strict chronological order. The harmonies of the Gospels make this clear.[556] His order is more thematic. He also selected miracles that highlight the gracious character of Jesus' signs. As Moses' plagues authenticated his ministry to the Israelites of his day, so Jesus' miracles should have convinced the Israelites of His day that He was the Messiah. Moses' plagues were primarily destructive, whereas Jesus' miracles were primarily constructive. Jesus' miracles were more like Elisha's than Moses' in this respect.

Matthew recorded 10 instances of Jesus healing in this section of his book (cf. the 10 plagues in Egypt), half of all the miracles that Matthew recorded. Some regard 8:16-17 as a miracle distinct from the previous healings in chapter 8, resulting in 10 miracles. Others regard 8:16-17 as a summary of the preceding miracles, resulting in 9 miracles. Both explanations have merit, since 8:16-17 records other miracles, but it does not narrate one specific miraculous healing.

Matthew presented these miracles in three groups and broke the three groups up with two discussions (narrative sections) concerning His authority. The first group of miracles involves healings (8:1-17), the second, demonstrations of power (8:23—9:8), and the third, acts of restoration (9:18-34). Together the section presents "a slice of life" out of Jesus' overall ministry.[557]

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[553]*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 1003.
[554]E.g., Barclay, 1:298-300.
[555]Walvoord, *Matthew: . . .*, p. 63.
[556]See, for example, Appendix 1 "A Harmony of the Gospels" at the end of these notes, or Robertson, *A Harmony . . .*; or, for the Greek text, Burton and Goodspeed, *A Harmony . . .*
[557]D. J. Weaver, *Matthew's Missionary Discourse*, p. 67.

Miracles of healing 8:1-17		Demonstrations of power 8:23—9:8		Acts of Restoration 9:18-34
	Jesus' authority over His disciples 8:18-22		Jesus' authority over His critics 9:9-17	

> "The provision of interludes on discipleship in order to divide the nine stories into three groups of three is also closely parallel to the arrangement of the parables of ch. 13 into groups of three with intervening explanatory material, an arrangement which is equally peculiar to Matthew [among the Gospel writers]."[558]

1. Jesus' ability to heal 8:1-17

This first group of four miracle events apparently all happened on the same day (v. 16).[559]

The cleansing of a leprous Jew 8:1-4 (cf. Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-16)

8:1 This verse is transitional (cf. 5:1). Great crowds continued to follow Jesus after He delivered the Sermon on the Mount, as they had before.

8:2-3 Matthew typically used the phrase *kai idou* ("and behold," not translated in the NIV) to mark the beginning of a new section, not to indicate the next event chronologically.

The exact nature of biblical leprosy is unknown. Apparently it included what we call leprosy today, Hansen's disease, but it involved other skin diseases too (cf. Lev. 13—14).[560] A leper not only had some loathsome skin disease that made him repulsive to others, but he also was ritually unclean because of his illness. This precluded contact with other people and participation in temple worship. The Jews regarded leprosy as a curse from God (Num. 12:10, 12; Job 18:13), and healings were rare (Num. 12:10-15; 2 Kings 5:9-14). The Jews thought that healing a leper was as difficult as raising the dead (2 Kings 5:7, 14).

> "Leprosy is viewed in the Old Testament not so much as a type of sin as of the uncleanness and separation that sin produces."[561]

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[558]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 302.

[559]See Appendix 6 "The Miracles of Jesus" at the end of these notes for a chart.

[560]*The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, s.v. "Leprosy," by R. K. Harrison, 2:464-66; Rebecca A. and E. Eugene Baillie, "Biblical Leprosy as Compared to Present-Day Leprosy," *Christian Medical Society Journal* 14:3 (Fall 1983):27-29.

[561]Pentecost, *The Words . . .*, p. 148.

The "leper" in this story knelt (Gr. *prosekynei*) before Jesus. The same word describes worshippers in the New Testament. However, Matthew probably simply described him as kneeling, in order to leave his readers to draw their own conclusions about Jesus' worthiness to receive worship (cf. 7:22-23).

The man had great faith in Jesus' ability to heal him. Evidently he had heard about and perhaps seen others whom Jesus had healed (4:24). His only reservation was Jesus' willingness to use His power to heal him. The leper probably supposed that a Jewish teacher like Jesus would probably not want to have anything to do with him, since to do so would render Jesus ritually unclean.

> "The phrase *if You are willing* is important because it indicates genuine faith. It does not necessarily mean that if one simply believes, God *will* do something, but that He *can* do it (see Dan. 3:17)."[562]

> "In most cases . . . the purpose of the minor characters [in Matthew's story] is to function as foils for the disciples."[563]

Probably the crowd gasped when Jesus graciously extended His hand and touched the unclean leper. Lepers had to avoid all contact with other people, but Jesus compassionately reached out to him in his helpless condition. Jesus expressed His willingness with His word, and He expressed His power with His touch.

> "Jesus allowed the constraint of divine love to take precedence over the injunction against touching a leper . . ."[564]

> "Whatever remedies, medical, magical, or sympathetic, Rabbinic writings may indicate for various kinds of disease, leprosy is not included in the catalogue. They left aside what even the Old Testament marked as moral death, by enjoining those so stricken to avoid all contact with the living, and even to bear the appearance of mourners.
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> "In truth, the possibility of any cure through human agency was never contemplated by the Jews."[565]

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[562]*The Nelson* . . ., p. 1588.
[563]Kingsbury, *Matthew as* . . ., p. 27.
[564]Tasker, p. 87.
[565]Edersheim, *The Life* . . ., 1:491, 492.

> "There is a sense in which leprosy is an archetypal fruit of the original fall of humanity. It leaves its victims in a most pitiable state: ostracized, helpless, hopeless, despairing. The cursed leper, like fallen humanity, has no options until he encounters the messianic king who will make all things new. . . . As Jesus reached out to the leper, God in Jesus has reached out to all victims of sin."[566]

> "When Jesus touched the leper, He contracted the leper's defilement; *but He also conveyed His health!* Is this not what He did for us on the cross when He was made sin for us? (2 Cor. 5:21)"[567]

Homer Kent Jr. believed that Jesus touched the leper and cleansed him simultaneously, so that the man's leprosy did not defile Jesus.[568]

8:4 Why did Jesus tell the cleansed leper to "tell no one" about his cleansing? Probably Jesus did not want the news of this cleansing broadcast widely because it would have attracted multitudes whose sole interest would have been to obtain physical healing.[569] In other words, He wanted to limit His physical ministry's appeal, since He came to provide much more than just physical healing.[570] A corollary of this view is that, by keeping quiet, the leper would have retarded the opposition of Jesus' enemies who were hostile to Him and who resented His popularity.

More significant is why Jesus told the man to present himself to the priests at the temple in Jerusalem. Jesus was encouraging the man to obey the Mosaic Law concerning the cleansing of lepers (Lev. 14:2; cf. Talmudic tractate Negaim 14). However, by sending him there to do that, Jesus was notifying the religious authorities in Israel that someone with messianic power was ministering in Galilee. Since no leper had received cleansing since Elisha had cleansed Naaman the Aramean, the priests should have wanted to investigate Jesus. (Moses had previously cleansed Miriam's leprosy [Num. 12:10-15].)

> "Jesus in effect was presenting His 'calling card' to the priests, for they would have to investigate His claims."[571]

This investigation by Israel's leaders—who, we have observed, were surprisingly uninterested in Messiah's birth—was something Jesus initiated by sending the leper to the temple with his offering. When the

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[566]Hagner, p. 200.
[567]Wiersbe, 1:33.
[568]Kent, "The Gospel . . .," p. 942.
[569]Tasker, p. 87.
[570]Ned B. Stonehouse, *The Witness of Matthew and Mark to Christ*, p. 62.
[571]Barbieri, p. 37.

priests examined the cleansed leper closely, they would have had to certify that Jesus had genuinely healed the man. Their certification should have convinced everyone in Israel of Jesus' power.

Matthew evidently recorded this miracle to show that Jesus' ability to heal leprosy marked Him as the Messiah to all who would pay attention in Israel.

> "By recounting Jesus' response to the most feared and ostracized medical condition of his day, Matthew has thus laid an impressive foundation for this collection of stories which demonstrate both Jesus' unique healing power and his willingness to challenge the taboos of society in the interests of human compassion."[572]

The healing of a centurion's servant 8:5-13 (cf. Luke 7:1-10)

8:5 Centurions were Roman military officers, each of whom controlled 100 men, therefore the name "centurion." They were the military backbone of the Roman Empire. Interestingly, every reference to a centurion in the New Testament is a positive one. These centurions were, according to the biblical record, fair-minded men whom the Jews respected. "Capernaum" was an important garrison town in Jesus' day. Probably most of the soldiers under this centurion's command were Phoenician and Syrian Gentiles.[573]

8:6-7 Matthew recorded that the centurion's address to Jesus (lit. "lord") was polite, though he probably did not intend it as a title of deity.[574] The Greek word that the centurion used to describe his servant, *pais*, usually means "servant," though it can mean "son" (cf. John 4:51). This servant could have been the centurion's personal aide. Matthew did not record the cause of his paralysis. Perhaps reports of Jesus' healing of another official's son led this centurion to approach Jesus (John 4).

Here was one Gentile asking Jesus to come and heal another Gentile. Evidently the centurion sent his request through messengers (Luke 7:3). This is one of only two miracles in which Jesus healed someone from a distance in Matthew's Gospel (cf. 15:21-28). Both involved Jesus healing *Gentiles*, whom He initially rebuffed, but later commended for their unusually great faith in Him.

It is possible to translate Jesus' response as a question: "Shall *I* [emphatic] come and heal him?" This translation has the advantage of providing a reason for Jesus emphasizing "I," namely, to focus attention on Jesus' person. Jesus would not have hesitated to go to the centurion because of

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[572]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 306.
[573]Carson, "Matthew," p. 200.
[574]See my comment on "lord" at 7:21.

ritual uncleanness, as Peter later did (Acts 10); He had already touched a leper (v. 3). Jesus' lack of concern about remaining ritually clean shows that He was replacing some laws in the Mosaic Code (cf. Deut. 18:18; Mark 7:19).

8:8-9 The centurion confessed that he felt unfit, Levitically speaking, to entertain Jesus in his home (cf. 5:3). John the Baptist had also expressed a similar feeling of unworthiness (3:14). The basis for the centurion's feeling of unworthiness (Gr. *hikanos*) was his own perception of how Jews regarded Gentile dwellings, plus the "authority" that he believed Jesus possessed. He believed Jesus had sufficient authority to simply speak and He could heal his servant (cf. John 4:46-53).

All authority in the Roman Empire belonged to the emperor, who delegated authority to others under his command. The Roman Republic ended about 30 B.C., and from then on, beginning with Caesar Augustus, the emperors enjoyed more authority under the Roman Empire. When the centurion gave a command it carried all the authority of the emperor, and people obeyed him. A soldier who might disobey an order the centurion gave was really disobeying the emperor.

The centurion realized that Jesus also operated under a similar system. Jesus was *under* God's authority, but He also *wielded* God's authority. When Jesus spoke, God spoke. To defy Jesus was to defy God. Jesus' word, therefore, must carry God's authority to heal sickness. The centurion confessed that Jesus' authority was God's authority, and Jesus' word was God's word. The centurion believed that Jesus *could* heal his servant, not that He *would* heal him. We cannot know God's will in such matters, but we must believe that He is able to do anything.

8:10 Jesus expressed astonishment at this Gentile's great faith in Him. The Greek verb *thaumazo*, "to be amazed," usually describes the reaction of people to Jesus in Matthew (cf. 8:27; 9:33; 15:31; 21:20; 22:22; 27:14). This is the only time it describes Jesus' reaction to an individual, though Jesus also "wondered" (the same Greek word) at the unbelief of the Jews (Mark 6:6). These two instances are the only ones where Jesus is said to have been "amazed."

> "'*Wonder*' cannot apply to God, for it arises out of what is new and unexpected: but it might exist in Christ, for he had clothed himself with our flesh, and with human affections."[575]

The introductory clause "I say to you" or "I tell you" alerted Jesus' disciples that He was about to say something very important on His personal authority (cf. 5:22). The greatness of the centurion's faith was due

[575]Calvin, *Commentary on . . .*, 1:382.

to his perception of Jesus' relationship to God. It was not that he believed Jesus could heal from a remote distance. Moreover the centurion was a Gentile who evidently lacked the knowledge of Old Testament revelation about Messiah. No Jew that Jesus had met had shown such insight into His person and authority.

Evidently, one of the reasons Matthew stressed the uniqueness of the centurion's faith so strongly, was that he wanted to show the shift in Jesus' ministry from Jews to all people (cf. 1:1, 3-5; 2:1-12; 3:9-10; 4:15-16; 28:18-20).

> "This incident is a preview of the great insight which came later through another centurion's faith, 'Then to the Gentiles God has granted repentance unto life' (Acts 11:18)."[576]

8:11-12 Again Jesus introduced a solemn truth (cf. v. 10). He then referred to the messianic banquet prophesied in Isaiah 25:6-9 (cf. Isa. 65:13-14). There God revealed that Gentiles from all parts of the world will join the Jewish patriarchs "in the kingdom." The Old Testament has much to say about the participants in the kingdom. God would gather Israel from all parts of the earth (Ps. 107:3; Isa. 43:5-6; 49:12), but Gentiles from all quarters of the world would also worship God in the kingdom (Isa. 45:6; 59:19; Mal. 1:11). The Gentiles would come specifically to Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3; 60:3-4; Mic. 4:1-2; Zech. 8:20-23). As mentioned previously, in Jesus' day the Jews had chosen to view themselves as uniquely privileged because of the patriarchs. This led them to write the Gentiles out of the kingdom, despite these prophecies.

> "The Jew expected that the Gentile would be put to shame by the sight of the Jews in bliss."[577]

The "sons [or subjects] of the kingdom" (v. 12) are the Jews who saw themselves as the patriarchs' descendants. They thought they had a right to the kingdom because of their ancestors' righteousness (cf. 3:9-10). Jesus turned the tables by announcing that many of the sons of the kingdom would not participate in it, but many Gentiles would. Many "sons of the kingdom" would find themselves outside the banquet ("into the outer darkness").

The terms "weeping" and "gnashing of teeth" (cf. 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28) were common descriptions of Gehenna, hell (4 Ezra 7:93; 1 Enoch 63:10; Psalms of Solomon 14:9; Wisdom of Solomon 17:21).[578] (The works just cited in parentheses were Old Testament

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[576]R. T. France, "Exegesis in Practice: Two Samples," in *New Testament Interpretation*, p. 260.
[577]Plummer, p. 127.
[578]See Pagenkemper, pp. 183-86.

apocryphal books that the Jews viewed as generally reliable and helpful but not inspired.) This interpretation finds confirmation in the expression "outer darkness," another image of rejection (cf. 22:13; 25:30).[579]

> "The idea of the Messianic Banquet as at once the seal and the symbol of the new era was a common feature in apocalyptic writings and an extremely popular subject of discussion, thought, and expectation."[580]

The Greek text has the definite article "the" before "weeping" and before "gnashing." This stresses the horror of the scene.[581] The terms in Rabbinic usage picture sorrow and anger respectively.[582]

Jesus shocked His hearers by announcing three facts about the kingdom. First, not all Jews would participate in it. Second, many Gentiles would. Third, entrance depended on faith in Jesus, not on ancestry, the faith that the centurion demonstrated.

> ". . . the locus of the people of God would not always be the Jewish race. If these verses do not quite authorize the Gentile mission, they open the door to it and prepare for the Great Commission (28:18-20) and Ephesians 3."[583]

8:13 A similar statement by Jesus helps us understand what He meant, when He said here that He would do for the centurion "as" (Gr. *hos*) he had believed (cf. 15:28). Jesus did not grant his request because the centurion had great faith, or in proportion to his amount of faith. He did so in harmony with what the centurion expected. Jesus did for him what he expected Jesus would do for him.

> "It is . . . interesting to observe that the Gentile follows the Jew in the sequence of healing events. This is in accord with Matthew's plan of presenting Jesus first as Son of David and then as Son of Abraham."[584]

This healing marked Jesus as the Messiah who was under God's authority.

The healing of Peter's mother-in-law 8:14-15 (cf. Mark 1:29-31; Luke 4:38-39)

Peter and his family were evidently living in Capernaum when Jesus performed this miracle (4:13). People considered "fever" a disease in Jesus' day, rather than a symptom of a disease (cf. John 4:52; Acts 28:8).

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[579]Ibid., pp. 186-88.
[580]Bindley, p. 317. Cf. Barclay, 1:309.
[581]Turner, p. 173.
[582]Edersheim, *The Life* . . ., 1:550-51.
[583]Carson, "Matthew," p. 203.
[584]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 124.

> "The Talmud gives this disease precisely the same name (*Eshatha Tsemirta*), 'burning fever,' and prescribes for it a magical remedy, of which the principal part is to tie a knife wholly of iron by a braid of hair to a thornbush, and to repeat on successive days Exod. iii. 2, 3, then ver. 4, and finally ver. 5, after which the bush is to be cut down, while a certain magical formula is pronounced. (Tractate *Shabbath* 37 a)"[585]

Jesus healed "Peter's mother-in-law" with a touch. His touch did not defile the healer, but it healed the defiled (cf. v. 3). Matthew consistently stressed Jesus' authority in this brief pericope. He probably mentioned the fact that, when Jesus healed the woman she *immediately* began to serve Him, in order to illustrate the instantaneous effectiveness of Jesus' power (cf. v. 26). Usually a fever leaves the body weak, but Jesus overcame that here.[586]

> "Peter's wife's mother used the gift of her health restored to serve Jesus and to serve others. That is the way in which we should use every gift of God."[587]

> "Some see great significance in Matthew's deliberate rearrangement of these miracles. Since Matthew did not follow the chronological order, it seems he intended to illustrate the plan of his Gospel. Accordingly, the first miracle shows Christ ministering to the Jews. His mighty works bore testimony to His person, but His testimony was rejected. Consequently, He turns to the Gentiles, who manifest great faith in Him. Later, He returns to the Jews, represented by the mother-in-law of the apostle to the Jews. He heals her and all who come to Him. This third picture is that of the millennium, when the King restores Israel and blesses all the nations."[588]

This miracle shows Jesus' power to heal people fully, instantaneously, and completely. It also showcases His *compassion*, since the object of His grace was a woman. The Pharisees considered lepers, Gentiles, and women as outcasts, but Jesus showed mercy to them all. By healing a leper who was a social outcast, a Gentile, and finally a woman, Jesus was extending His grace to people the Jews either excluded or ignored as unimportant. Jewish narrowness did not bind Jesus any more than disease and uncleanness contaminated Him.[589]

> "He began with the unfit persons for whom there was no provision in the economy of the nation."[590]

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[585]Edersheim, *The Life* . . ., 1:486.
[586]Barbieri, p. 37.
[587]Barclay, 1:315.
[588]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 125.
[589]Walvoord, *Matthew:* . . ., p. 65.
[590]Morgan, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 82.

The healing of many Galileans 8:16-17 (cf. Mark 1:32-34; Luke 4:40-41)

That evening many other people brought their afflicted friends and relatives to Jesus for healing.

> "Officially the Sabbath ended when two stars could be seen in the sky, for there were no clocks to tell the time in those days. That is why the crowd in Capernaum waited until the evening time to come to Jesus for the healing which they knew that He could give."[591]

In the Jewish inter-testamental literature, the writers spoke of demons as responsible for making people ill.[592] Jesus "cast out many" demonic "spirits," "and healed" many ("all") "who were ill." He had power over *every* affliction: "all who were ill" (v. 16).

Matthew noted that Jesus' healings fulfilled messianic prophecy (Isa. 53:4). Matthew's citation from Isaiah actually summarized all the healings in this chapter so far. He interpreted Isaiah freely as predicting the vicarious sufferings of Messiah. This was in accord with Isaiah's prophecy concerning Messiah that appears in Isaiah 53. The Old Testament taught that all sickness is the direct or indirect result of sin (cf. 9:5). Messiah would remove infirmities and diseases by dying as a substitute sacrifice for sin. He would deal with the fruit by dealing with the root. Jesus' healing ministry laid the foundation for His destroying (triumphing over, conquering) sickness by His death. Therefore it was appropriate for Matthew to quote Isaiah 53:4 here. Jesus' healing ministry also previewed kingdom conditions (cf. Isa. 33:24; 57:19).

> "Thus the healings during Jesus' ministry can be understood not only as the foretaste of the kingdom [in which there will be little sickness] but also as the fruit of Jesus' death."[593]

> "Human suffering originates from a combination of the natural consequence of living in a fallen world, the effects of demonic attacks, the work of a sovereign God accomplishing the purposes of his wisdom and desires, and the invitation of Jesus for his followers to identify with him in suffering for his cause."[594]

For Matthew, Jesus' healing ministry pointed to the Cross. The healings were signs that signified more than the average observer might have understood. Matthew recorded that Jesus healed all types of people. Likewise when He died, Jesus gave His life as a ransom for many (20:28). Jesus' ministry of destroying sin, in death, was an extension of the authority that He demonstrated in His ministry of destroying (triumphing over, conquering) sickness during His life. Many scholars believe that the Jews of Jesus' day

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[591]Barclay, 1:316.
[592]Carson, "Matthew," p. 205.
[593]Ibid., p. 206.
[594]Mark L. Bailey, "A Biblical Theology of Suffering in the Gospels," in *Why, O God? Suffering and Disability in the Bible and the Church*, p. 162.

did not understand Isaiah 53 as messianic prophecy. Joachim Jeremias is one exception. Whether they did or not, they should have.

> ". . . it is to cast Jesus' activity of healing in the mold of 'serving' that Matthew informs the reader in a formula-quotation that Jesus, through healing, fulfills the words of the Servant Song of Isaiah: 'He took our infirmities and bore our diseases' (8:16-17; Isa. 53:4). In healing, Jesus Son of God assumes the role of the servant of God and ministers to Israel by restoring persons to health or freeing them from their afflictions (11:5). Through serving in this fashion, Jesus 'saves' (9:22)."[595]

Some Christians believe that Isaiah 53:4 and Matthew 8:16-17 teach that Jesus' death made it possible for people today to experience physical healing now by placing faith in Jesus. Most students of these and similar passages have concluded that the healing which Jesus' death provides believers today will come when they receive their resurrection bodies, not necessarily before then.[596] This conclusion finds support in the revelation about the purpose of periods of healing that the Bible records. Many Christians today fall into the same trap the Corinthian believers fell into when they demanded future blessings now (cf. 1 Cor. 4:6-13).[597]

This summary pericope stresses Jesus' power over every human affliction.

Jesus' *therapeutic* miracles, involving physical healings, presented Jesus to the *crowds* as the compassionate Servant of the Lord—and illustrated His *Messiahship* (18:17; 9:22). His *non-therapeutic* miracles, involving nature, presented Jesus to the *disciples* as having all authority—and illustrated His *deity*. Belief in Jesus' Messiahship was normally preliminary to belief in His deity. His disciples needed to learn this so they would rely on *His* authority for their ministries in the future.

2. Jesus' authority over His disciples 8:18-22 (cf. Luke 9:57-62)

Matthew evidently inserted these teachings about Jesus' authority because they show the nature of Jesus' ministry and the kind of disciples He requires. The King has power over people, not just sickness. He can direct others as His servants, and they need to respond to Him as their King.

Jesus' demands regarding possessions 8:18-20

8:18-19 Verse 18 gives the occasion for the scribe's statement in verse 19 (cf. Mark 4:35). "The other side" of the lake (from Capernaum) would have been the eastern side. There was only so much room in the boat, and the "scribe" wanted to get in with other disciples. At this time in Jesus' ministry there were many more than just 12 disciples, though the Twelve

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[595]Kingsbury, *Matthew as . . .*, p. 68.

[596]See Hagner, p. 211.

[597]See. A. C. Thistleton, "Realized Eschatology at Corinth," *New Testament Studies* 24 (1977):510-26.

were an inner circle. As mentioned above, the word "disciple" does not necessarily identify fully committed followers or even believers (cf. 5:1; 8:21). This scribe, a teacher of the law, looked to Jesus as his "teacher." He wanted to learn from Him. He said that he was willing to "follow" Him anywhere to do so.

> ". . . the designations 'rabbi' and 'teacher' attribute to the person so addressed human respect but nothing more. Hence, in addressing Jesus as 'teacher,' the religious leaders accord Jesus the honor they would accord any teacher, but this is the extent of it. To their mind Jesus' station is not that of the Messiah Son of God, his authority is not divine, and they in no sense follow him or have faith in him."[598]

Some scholars believe that Matthew consistently denigrated the scribes in his Gospel.[599] I do not believe he did this (cf. 13:52; 23:34), but Matthew's references to the scribes are usually negative. Matthew seems to present everyone who came to Jesus without prejudice. The issue to Matthew was how various people responded to Jesus.

8:20 Jesus' reply did not encourage or discourage the scribe. It simply helped him count the cost of following Him as a disciple. Jesus was very busy traveling from one place to another as an itinerant preacher and teacher. His healing ministry complicated His life because it attracted crowds that placed additional demands on Him. He had no regular home, as most people did, but traveled all over the region. The scribe needed to understand this if he wanted to keep up with Jesus. We should not interpret Jesus' statement to mean that He was penniless and could not afford shelter at night (cf. Luke 8:1-3). His ministry simply kept Him on the move.

> "When the object of faith left the earth, and His presence became spiritual, all occasion for such nomadic discipleship was done away."[600]

Jesus called Himself "the Son of Man." This expression occurs 81 times in the Gospels, 69 times in the Synoptics, and 30 times in Matthew.[601] In every instance except two, it was a term Jesus used of Himself. In those two instances, it is a term used by others who were quoting Jesus (Luke

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[598]Kingsbury, *Matthew as* . . ., p. 64. Cf. 9:11; 12:38; 17:24; 19:16; 22:16, 24, 36; 26:25, 49. See Gunther Bornkamm, "End-Expectation and Church in Matthew," in *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, pp. 41-43.

[599]E.g., W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew*.

[600]Bruce, *The Training* . . ., p. 18.

[601]For a good introduction to the meaning of this term, see Hagner's excursus, pp. 214-15, or Carson's excursus in "Matthew," pp. 209-13.

24:7; John 12:34). Though it occurs in several Old Testament passages, as well as in apocryphal Jewish literature, its use in Daniel 7:13-14 is messianic. There, "one like a son of man" approaches the Ancient of Days and receives "authority, glory, and sovereign power." He also receives "an everlasting dominion that will not pass away," in which "all peoples, nations, and men of every language" worship Him. By using this title, Jesus was claiming to be the divine Messiah.

> "It is His name as the representative Man, in the sense of 1 Cor. 15:45-47, as Son of David is distinctively His Jewish name, and Son of God His divine name. Our Lord constantly uses this term as implying that His mission (e.g. Mt. 11:19; Lk. 19:10), His death and resurrection (e.g. Mt. 12:40; 20:18; 26:2), and His second coming (e.g. Mt. 24:37-44; Lk. 12:40) transcend in scope and result all merely Jewish limitations."[602]

However, most of Jesus' hearers probably did not associate this title with a messianic claim when they first heard it. Many of them were probably not well enough acquainted with Daniel 7:13-14 to understand its meaning. Many who *did* understand its significance held a concept of Messiah that the rabbis had distorted. Furthermore, other Old Testament references to the "son of man" were not messianic. For example, David used the term to refer to man generically (Ps. 8:4). Asaph used it to describe Israel (Ps. 80:17). In the Book of Ezekiel, it is a favorite term God used when He addressed Ezekiel personally, in order to stress the prophet's humanity.

God used this term many times in the Old Testament to stress the difference between frail mortal man and God Himself.[603] Jesus' use of the title combined both the messianic and mortal aspects. He was both the Messiah King and the Suffering Servant of the Lord. Some who heard Him use this title probably did not know what it meant. Others understood Jesus' claim to messiahship, and others thought He was simply referring to Himself in a humble way.

> ". . . 'the Son of man' is not of the nature of a Christological title the purpose of which is to inform the reader of 'who Jesus is.' Instead, it is a self-designation that is also a technical term, and it describes Jesus as 'the man,' or 'the human being' ('this man,' or 'this human being') (earthly, suffering, vindicated). It is 'in public' or with a view to the 'public,' or 'world' (Jews and Gentiles but especially opponents), that Jesus refers to himself as 'the Son of man' ('this man'). Through his use of this self-reference, Jesus

[602]*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 1004.

[603]John Bowker, "The Son of Man," *Journal of Theological Studies* 28 (1977):19-48.

> calls attention, for one thing, to the divine authority that he ('this man') exercises now and will also exercise in the future and, for another thing, to the opposition that he ('this man') must face. And should the question be raised as to who 'this man' Jesus is, the answer is, as Peter correctly confesses, that he is the Son of God (16:13, 16)."[604]
>
> "It seems that the reason why Jesus found this title convenient is that, having no ready-made titular connotations in current usage, it could be applied across the whole range of his uniquely paradoxical mission of humiliation and vindication, of death and glory, which could not be fitted into any preexisting model. Like his parables, the title 'the Son of Man' came with an air of enigma, challenging the hearer to think new thoughts rather than to slot Jesus into a ready-made pigeonhole."[605]

In 8:20 "the Son of Man" occurs in a context that stresses Jesus' humanity. The scribe would have understood Jesus to mean that if he followed Jesus, he could anticipate a humble, even uncomfortable, existence. He should also have understood, since he was a teacher of the Old Testament, that Jesus was claiming to be Israel's Messiah.

Anyone who wants to follow Jesus closely as a disciple must be willing to give up many of the normal comforts of life. Following Him involves embarking on a God-given mission in life. Going where He directs, and doing what He commands, must take precedence over enjoying the normal comforts of life whenever these conflict. Discipleship is difficult.

Jesus' demands regarding parents 8:21-22

The first potential disciple was too quick and presumptuous when he promised wholehearted allegiance. This second potential disciple was too hesitant in committing to wholehearted allegiance.

Evidently this disciple made his request as Jesus prepared to depart for the next place of ministry (v. 18). He apparently meant that he wanted some time off from following Jesus in order to attend to family matters. Some students of this passage have concluded that the disciple's father had not yet died, and that he was asking for an indefinite leave of absence from Jesus' company.[606] In other words, he was saying that he could not follow Jesus because he was responsible to take care of his father for the rest of his father's

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[604]Kingsbury, *Matthew as* . . ., p. 103. This author wrote a lucid chapter on "Jesus' Use of 'the Son of Man,'" pp. 95-103.

[605]France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 327.

[606]E.g., T. M. Donn, "'Let the Dead Bury Their Dead' (Mt. viii. 22, Lk. ix. 60)," *Expository Times* 61 (September 1950):384; Barclay, 1:321; Robertson, *Word Pictures* . . ., 1:68; *The Nelson* . . ., p. 1589; et al.

life.[607] Others believe that the man's father had just died recently, and the potential disciple had to make the funeral arrangements.[608] In either case, the man was offering an excuse for not following Jesus as His disciple.

Jesus' reply urged the disciple to keep following Him, and not to suspend his commitment to Jesus. He should put his commitment to Jesus even before his commitment to honor his parents (Exod. 20:12). When following Jesus and other commitments *conflict*, the disciple must always follow Jesus even though his or her other commitments are legitimate. Jesus was testing this man's priorities. Which was more important to him: following Jesus and participating in whatever Jesus' will for him might involve, or abandoning Jesus—even temporarily—for some less important purpose? His was not a choice between something good and something evil, but between something good and something better (cf. 10:37).

Jesus continued by encouraging the disciple to let "the dead . . . bury their own dead." Apparently He meant, let the spiritually dead (i.e., those who have no interest in following Jesus) bury the physically dead. There are many worthy activities in life that a true disciple of Jesus must forgo because he or she has a higher calling and higher demands on him or her. Forgoing these activities may bring criticism on the disciple from the spiritually insensitive, but that is part of the price of discipleship (cf. 7:13-27). Jesus called for commitment to Himself without reservation. The person and mission of the King deserve nothing less.

> "It is better to preach the Gospel and give life to the spiritually dead than to wait for your father to die and bury him."[609]
>
> "A disciple's business is with life, not with death."[610]

Christians must be willing to forsake all things and all people to follow Jesus faithfully. Jesus did not mean that we must give away all our possessions and break contact with our families. He meant that when we have to choose between following Him, and retaining our possessions or putting our families first, our allegiance to Him and His will must be primary. When these conflict, we must put Him first.

3. Jesus' supernatural power 8:23—9:8

Matthew's first group of miracles (vv. 1-17) demonstrated that Jesus possessed the messianic power (authority) to heal physical ailments. His second group (8:23—9:8) shows even greater powers over the fallen creation, namely, over nature, demons, and sin. All the beneficiaries of these miracles needed peace, and Jesus met their need.

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[607]See McGee, 4:50.
[608]Edersheim, *The Life* . . ., 2:133.
[609]Wiersbe, 1:34.
[610]France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 330.

> "The miracles Jesus performs in Matthew's story divide themselves rather neatly into two groups: *(a)* therapeutic miracles (miracles of healing), in which the sick are returned to health or the possessed are freed of demons (cf. esp. chaps. 8—9); and *(b)* nontherapeutic miracles, which have to do with exercising power over the forces of nature. . . .
>
> "The nontherapeutic miracles are less uniform in structure and differ in thematic [purpose from the therapeutic miracles]. Here the focus is on Jesus and the disciples, and the characteristic feature is that Jesus reveals, in the midst of situations in which the disciples exhibit 'little faith,' his awesome authority. . . . The reason Jesus gives the disciples these startling revelations is to bring them to realize that such authority as he exercises he makes available to them through the avenue of faith. In the later situation of their worldwide mission, failure on the part of the disciples to avail themselves of the authority Jesus would impart to them will be to run the risk of failing at their tasks (28:18-20; chaps. 24—25)."[611]

Jesus' stilling of a storm 8:23-27 (cf. Mark 4:36-41; Luke 8:22-25)

Even though Jesus sometimes enjoyed less shelter than the animals and birds (v. 20), He was not subject to nature. It was subject to Him.

8:23-25 It is difficult to know how much Matthew may have intended to convey with his comment that the "disciples followed" Jesus "into the boat." Perhaps it just describes their physical movements. Perhaps he meant that it symbolizes the disciples' proper response to Jesus in view of verses 18-22.

The Sea of Galilee was, and still is, infamous for its sudden and violent storms (Gr. *seismos*). They occur because of geographical conditions. The water is 600 feet below sea level, and the land to the east is considerably higher. As warm air rises from the lake it creates a vacuum that the air on the west rushes in to fill. This brings strong winds on the lake with little warning.

On the occasion Matthew described, the waves were so high that they kept spilling over into the boat. Evidently Jesus was asleep from weariness and because He realized that the time for His death had not yet arrived. He apparently lay in an area of the boat where the disciples had given Him some privacy. The word Matthew used to describe the boat (*ploion*) could fit a boat of many different sizes. However, it is probable that this was a fishing boat that carried at least a dozen or more people, plus fish, across the lake. Matthew probably would have used a different word if it were a larger boat.

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[611]Kingsbury, *Matthew as* . . ., p. 69.

> "If the first-century-A.D. boat recovered from the mud of the northwest shore of the lake of Galilee in 1986 (now preserved in the Yigal Allon Center at Ginosar) is typical of the normal working boats of the period, its dimensions (8.20 meters long by 2.35 wide [about 26 and a half feet by 7 and a half feet]) would suggest that the boat might be overcrowded with more than thirteen people."[612]

In spite of the storm, Jesus continued to sleep. Finally, the disciples realized their inability to cope with their situation and called on Jesus to help ("save") them. They obviously thought He could do something to help, at least bail or at most perform a miracle. They had seen Him perform many miracles. However, their reaction to His help reveals that they did not really appreciate who He was.

Compare the story of Jonah, who also had to be awakened during a storm at sea. However, rather than praying for God's help, as the sailors called on Jonah to do, Jesus used His own authority to still the sea. A greater than Jonah was here (12:41).

8:26-27 Jesus did not rebuke His disciples for disturbing Him but for failing to trust Him as they should have. He said they had "little faith" (Gr. *oligopistos*). Wherever Matthew used this word in his Gospel, it always reflects a failure to see below the surface of things.[613] Faith in Messiah and fear are mutually exclusive. Therefore the disciples should not have been "timid" (NASB) or "afraid" (NIV). Even though the disciples believed Jesus could help them, they did not grasp that He was the Messiah who would die a sacrificial death for their sins. How could the divine Messiah whom God had sent die in a storm before He had finished His messianic work? It was impossible.

> "The life of discipleship is susceptible to bouts of little faith. Such little faith is not to be condoned. Nevertheless, Jesus does not abandon his disciples at such times but stands ever ready with his saving power to sustain them so they can in fact discharge the mission he has entrusted to them."[614]

The disciples expected help, but they were unprepared for the kind of deliverance Jesus provided. It was a much greater salvation than they hoped for. "The sea . . . became perfectly calm."

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[612]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 336.
[613]Carson, "Matthew," p. 216.
[614]Kingsbury, *Matthew as . . .*, p. 135.

> "His disciples who were seasoned fishermen had been through storms on this sea that had suddenly ceased. But after the wind would pass, the waves would continue to chop for a while."[615]

Jesus' ability to calm the wind and water with a word made it clear that He had greater powers than these disciples had witnessed previously. This is the first nature miracle that Matthew recorded Jesus doing. "What kind of a man is this?" they asked." Who was He? The reader of Matthew's Gospel knows better than the disciples did. He is the virgin-born Messiah, God with us, come to provide salvation and to set up His kingdom. While the disciples were "men" (v. 27), Jesus was a different type of man, the God-man.[616] Psalms 65:5-6; 89:8-9; 104:7; and 107:23-30 attribute the stilling of seas to God (cf. Jon. 1—2). Psalm 89:25 predicted that the ideal king would be able to do this.

The Israelites viewed the sea as an enemy they could not control. Throughout the Old Testament it epitomizes what is wild, hostile, and foreboding. It stood for their foes in some of their literature. Jesus' miracle also taught this secondary lesson. Here was a man exercising dominion over the sea, which God had appointed to man before the Fall (Gen. 1:28). Jesus must be the Second Adam (cf. Rom. 5:12-17).

> "The incident is related, not primarily for the sake of recording a miracle, but as an instance of the subduing of the power of evil, which was one of the signs of the nearness of the Kingdom; see xii. 28."[617]

In this incident, Matthew again presented Jesus as man and God. As man, He slept in the boat. As God, He calmed the sea (cf. 4:1-4; 12:22-32). As man, He suffers; but as God, He rules. The pericope indicates Jesus' power to fulfill the prophecies of Isaiah 30:23-24; 35:1-7; 41:17-18; 51:3; 55:13; Joel 3:18; Ezekiel 36:29-38; and Zechariah 10:1. He has all power over nature.

Jesus' deliverance of a demoniac in Gadara 8:28-34 (cf. Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39)

The central theme of this incident is Jesus' authority over evil spirits. Though Matthew previously mentioned Jesus' reputation as an exorcist (4:24; 8:16), this is the first of five exorcisms that he narrated (cf. 9:32-33; 12:22; 15:21-28; 17:14-20).

8:28 Gadara was the regional capital of the Decapolis area that lay southeast of the Sea of Galilee. Its population was strongly Gentile. This may account for the presence of "many swine" there (v. 30). The Gadara region

[615]Barbieri, p. 39.
[616]Plummer, p. 131.
[617]M'Neile, p. 111.

stretched west to the Sea of Galilee. This was "the country of the Gadarenes." Other, less probable, locations are the village of "Kheras," near the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, and "Gerasa," about 30 miles southeast of the Sea.[618]

Mark and Luke mentioned only one man, but Matthew said there were "two" (Mark 5:2; Luke 8:27). Mark and Luke evidently mentioned the more prominent one. Perhaps Matthew mentioned both of them because the testimony of two witnesses was valid in Jewish courts, and he wrote for Jews originally.

The Jews believed that demonic spirits could and did take over the bodies and personalities of certain individuals. Matthew reflected this view of the spirit world. A literal reading of Scripture leads to the same conclusion.[619] Demons are fallen angels who are Satan's agents.

These demoniacs lived lives of terror among tombs, away from other people, in a place that rendered them ritually unclean in Judaism.

8:29 The demoniacs hated and feared Jesus. They recognized Him as Messiah, calling Him by the messianic title "Son of God" (cf. 3:17; 16:16; Luke 4:41). The disciples in the boat did not know who He was, but the demoniacs taught them. The demoniacs may have known Jesus from some previous contact (cf. Acts 19:15), or perhaps the demons had asked the first question through the demoniacs (cf. v. 31).

Their second question revealed their knowledge that Jesus would judge them one day. This was a messianic function. Evidently Jesus will cast them into the lake of fire when He sends Satan there (Rev. 20:10).[620] When Jesus cast out demons, He was exercising this eschatological prerogative early. These demons asked if He planned to judge ("torment") them right then and there. He had cast out other demons recently (4:24; 8:16). "Here" probably refers to the earth, where demons have a measure of freedom to operate, rather than to that particular locale.

> ". . . they who struck terror into the hearts of others were now the victims of fear themselves; as James had occasion to remark, 'the devils also believe, and tremble' (Jas. ii. 19)."[621]

8:30-31 The presence of so many pigs may have been due to Jewish disobedience to the Mosaic Law, since for Jews pigs where unclean. However, this is

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[618]See Thomson, 2:34-37.

[619]See Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, appendix 16, for differences between Jewish and New Testament views of demon possession.

[620]Walvoord, *Matthew: . . .*, p. 67.

[621]Tasker, p. 93.

unlikely, since the Jewish leaders were very particular about such flagrant violations of the Law. Probably they belonged to Gentiles, who lived in large numbers in the Decapolis where this story took place.

The demons may have requested asylum in the swine because they hated the creatures and or because they wanted to stir up trouble for Jesus. Perhaps they wanted to grasp at one last chance to avoid confinement in the abyss (Luke 8:31; Rev. 20:1-3).[622] Demons do not like to be homeless (12:43-45). Exorcized evil spirits sometimes expressed their rage with acts of violence and vengefulness (cf. 17:14-20).

> "But the swine, by stampeding into the waters, thwarted whatever purpose the demons may have entertained."[623]

What happened to the demons? Matthew did not tell us. Probably he wanted to impress us with Jesus' power over them, not detract us by making them the central feature of the incident. Perhaps they went to the Abyss (cf. Luke 8:31).

> "We can construct a 'statement of faith' from the words of the demons. (Demons do have faith; see James 2:19.) They believed in the existence of God and the deity of Christ, as well as the reality of future judgment. They also believed in prayer. They knew Christ had the power to send them into the swine."[624]

8:32-34 Why did Jesus allow the demons to enter the swine, destroy the herd, and cause the owners considerable loss? Some commentators solve this puzzle by saying the owners were disobedient Jews whom Jesus judged. That is possible, but the answers to these questions were outside Matthew's field of interest. They are probably part of the larger scheme of things involving why God allows evil. As God, Jesus owned everything and could do with His own as He pleased. These details do, however, clarify the reality of the exorcism and the destructive effect of the demons.

> ". . . Jesus was ready to sacrifice the less important of God's creatures in the interests of the highest. He came to save men and women, and only men and women . . ."[625]

We can observe from the reaction of the citizens that "they preferred pigs to persons, swine to the Savior."[626] They valued the material above the spiritual.

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[622]Kent, "The Gospel . . .," p. 943.
[623]Ibid.
[624]Wiersbe, 1:34.
[625]Tasker, p. 93.
[626]Carson, "Matthew," p. 219.

> "All down the ages the world has been refusing Jesus because it prefers the pigs!"[627]

This is the first instance in Matthew of open opposition to the Messiah. Matthew will show it building from here to the Cross. The pigs' stampede also testified to Jesus' deliverance of the demoniacs.

> "This dramatic incident is most revealing. It shows what *Satan* does for a man: robs him of sanity and self-control; fills him with fears; robs him of the joys of home and friends; and (if possible) condemns him to an eternity of judgment. It also reveals what *society* does for a man in need: restrains him, isolates him, threatens him, but society is unable to change him. See, then, what Jesus Christ can do for a man whose whole life—within and without—is bondage and battle. What Jesus did for these two demoniacs, He will do for anyone else who needs Him."[628]

This incident shows Jesus fulfilling such kingdom prophecies as Daniel 7:25-27; 8:23-25; 11:36—12:3; and Zechariah 3:1-2. As Messiah, He is the Judge of the spirit world as well as humankind, the supernatural world as well as the natural world. He has all power over demons as well as nature (vv. 23-27). This is a story about power, not about mission.

Jesus' healing and forgiveness of a paralytic 9:1-8 (cf. Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26)

The incident that follows occurred before the one in 8:28-34. Matthew placed it in his Gospel here for thematic reasons. It is another evidence of Jesus' supernatural power, but in a different realm.

9:1 Jesus arrived back in Capernaum ("His own city"), having traveled there by boat.[629] This is another transitional verse that sets the stage for what follows.

9:2 Jesus saw the faith of the men who were carrying their "paralytic" friend.

> "The reason the reader is provided with inside views of characters is to shape his or her attitude toward them."[630]

The evidence of their "faith" was that they "brought" him to Jesus for healing. However, Jesus spoke only to the paralytic. The term "son" (Gr. *teknon*) is an affectionate one that older people often used when speaking to the younger. What Jesus said implied a close connection between this man's sin and his sickness (cf. 8:17; Ps. 103:3; Isa. 33:24), and He implied that sin was the worse condition. Forgiveness of sins is basic to healing.

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[627]Paul P. Levertoff, *St. Matthew*, p. 34.
[628]Wiersbe, 1:34.
[629]See Finegan, pp. 303-6, for more information about Capernaum.
[630]Kingsbury, *Matthew as . . .*, p. 37.

Jesus told him that his sins were forgiven (right at that moment), not previously. He used the present tense that here has punctiliar force.[631] Punctiliar action is action that is regarded as happening at a particular point in time.

9:3 Some of the teachers of the law ("scribes") who were standing by took offense at what Jesus said. He was claiming to forgive sins, but God alone can forgive sins, since He is the One people sin against (Ps. 51:4; Isa. 43:25; 44:22). They called Jesus' words blasphemy because they viewed them as a slanderous affront to God. This is the first instance of this charge in Matthew, but it will become a prominent theme.

9:4 Jesus probably knew what they were thinking simply because He knew them, though some interpret this statement as expressing divine insight. Jesus did not need supernatural power to perceive the typical attitude of the scribes. What they were "thinking" was "evil" because it involved a denial of His messiahship, the very thing His words were claiming.

9:5-7 Jesus' question in verse 5 was rhetorical. His critics believed it was easier to say, "Get up and walk," because only God can forgive sins. Jesus had claimed to do the more difficult thing from their viewpoint, namely, to forgive sins. Jesus responded ironically in verse 6. He would do the easier thing. From the scribes' perspective, since Jesus had blasphemed God, He could not heal the paralytic, since God does not respond to sinners (John 9:31). By healing the paralytic, Jesus showed that He had not blasphemed God. He *could indeed* forgive sins.

Jesus again used the term "Son of Man" for Himself (v. 6). His critics should have sensed the messianic claim that Jesus' use of this title implied, since they knew the Old Testament well. The Judge had come to earth with authority to forgive sins (cf. 1:21, 23).[632]

Finally, Jesus not only healed the paralytic, but also assured him that God had forgiven his sins. He also refuted the scribes' charge of blasphemy.

9:8 The response of the observing crowd was appropriate in view of Jesus' action. People should respect and admire the One who can forgive sins. Here was a manifestation of God before them. They "glorified God" because they saw a man exercising divine authority. Unfortunately they failed to perceive that Jesus was their divine Messiah.

Readers of Matthew's Gospel, however, perceive that this was the promised King come to rule "on earth" (cf. v. 6). The King had come to save His people from their sins. The kingdom of David's Son was at hand.

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[631]Ernest de Witt Burton, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in NT Greek*, p. 9; Turner, p. 64.

[632]See Morna D. Hooker, *The Son of Man in Mark*, pp. 81-93.

> "This is one of the most significant signs Jesus performs relative to the kingdom program. It shows that He is capable of forgiving sins *on earth*."[633]

This miracle proves that Jesus could forgive sins and so produce the conditions prophesied in Isaiah 33:24; 40:1-2; 44:21-22; and 60:20-21. He has power over the spiritual world, as well as the supernatural world and the natural world. The three miracles in this section (8:23—9:8) show that Jesus could establish the kingdom because He had the authority to do so. He demonstrated authority over nature, the angelic world, and sin.

4. Jesus' authority over His critics 9:9-17

Matthew returned to the subject of Jesus' authority over people (cf. 8:18-22). In 8:18-22, Jesus directed those who came to Him voluntarily as disciples. Here, He explained the basis for His conduct to those who criticized Him. This is another section that contains discipleship lessons. In the former section, Jesus dealt with their persons, but in this one He dealt with their work.

The question of company 9:9-13 (cf. Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:27-32)

The main point of this pericope is: Jesus' *response* to the Pharisees' criticism that Jesus and His disciples kept company with tax collectors and sinners. "Tax-gatherers" did public duty, the Latin term for such a person being *publicanus*, from which we get the old English word "publican."[634]

9:9 This incident probably took place in or near Capernaum. The tax office (NASB), or the "tax collector's booth" (NIV), would have been a room close to the border between the territories of Philip and Herod Antipas. There Matthew sat to collect customs and excise taxes.

> "The people of this country *sit* at all kinds of work. The carpenter saws, planes, and hews with his hand-adze sitting on the ground or upon the plank he is planing. The washer-woman *sits* by the tub; and, in a word, no one stands where it is possible to sit. Shopkeepers always sit; and Levi *sitting* at the receipt of custom is the exact way to state the case."[635]

Capernaum stood on the caravan route between Egypt and the East. Matthew thus occupied a lucrative post.

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[633]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 129.
[634]Robertson, *Word Pictures* . . ., 1:72.
[635]Thomson, 1:191.

> "It was the very busiest road in Palestine, on which the publican Levi Matthew sat at the receipt of 'custom,' when our Lord called him to the fellowship of the Gospel . . ."[636]

As mentioned before, the Jews despised tax collectors because they were notoriously corrupt, and they worked for the occupying Romans—extracting money from their own countrymen (cf. 5:46).[637]

Jesus proceeded to do the unthinkable. He called a social pariah to become one of His disciples. Matthew was a sinner and an associate of sinners in the eyes of the Jews.

> "The pericope on the call of Matthew (9:9) illustrates yet another aspect of discipleship, to wit: the broad spectrum of those whom Jesus summons to follow him. . . . Matthew . . . is a toll-collector. As such, he is looked upon by the Jewish society of Matthew's story as no better than a robber and one whose testimony would not be honored in a Jewish court of law. . . . Not only the upright are called by Jesus, but also the despised."[638]

> "The eye of Jesus was single as well as omniscient: He looked on the heart, and had respect solely to spiritual fitness."[639]

> "Since Jesus' mission is predicated upon mercy and not merit, no one is despicable enough by the standards of society to be outside his concern and invitation."[640]

Jews frequently had two names, and Matthew's other name was *Levi* (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27). "Matthew" may derive from Mattaniah (1 Chron. 9:15), meaning "gift of God," or it may come from the Hebrew *emet* meaning "faithful." Perhaps because of its meaning Matthew preferred to use "Matthew" in his Gospel rather than "Levi." Matthew's response to Jesus' call to follow Him was immediate.

9:10-11 Matthew's own account of the feast that he threw for Jesus that followed his calling is brief, and it focuses on the controversy with the Pharisees that occurred then. Matthew had friends who were also "tax collectors" (cf. 5:46). "Sinners" is a term the Pharisees used to describe people who broke their severe rules of conduct (Pharisaic Halakoth). "Eating with"

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[636]Edersheim, *Sketches of . . .*, p. 42.
[637]W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Outline Studies of the Gospel of Matthew*, p. 129.
[638]Kingsbury, *Matthew as . . .*, p. 135.
[639]Bruce, *The Training . . ,* p. 19.
[640]Hagner, p. 240.

these people put "Jesus and His disciples" in danger of ceremonial defilement, but the spiritual need of these people was more important to Jesus than ritual cleanliness.

> "In the ancient world generally a shared meal was a clear sign of identification, and for a Jewish religious teacher to share a meal with such people was scandalous, let alone to do so in the 'unclean' house of a tax collector."[641]

The Pharisees' question, addressed to Jesus' disciples, was really a subtle accusation against Him (v. 11). A teacher would normally keep all the religious traditions, as well as the Mosaic Law, to provide the best example for his disciples. The Pharisees despised Jesus for the company He kept, which implied that He had a lax view of the Law. Note that the Pharisees now become critics of Jesus, as the scribes had earlier (v. 3). Opposition mounts.

9:12-13 Jesus Himself responded to the Pharisees' question. He said that He went to the tax collectors and sinners because they were sinners. They had a spiritual illness and needed spiritual healing. Note that Jesus did not go to these people because they received Him warmly, but because they needed Him greatly. In the Old Testament, God taught His people that He was their "Physician" who could heal their diseases (e.g., Exod. 15:26; Deut. 32:39; 2 Kings 20:5; Ps. 103:3). The prophets also predicted that Messiah would bring healing to the nation (Isa. 19:22; 30:26; Jer. 30:17).

The phrase "go and learn" was a rabbinic one that indicated that the Pharisees needed to study the text further.[642] Jesus referred them to Hosea 6:6. God had revealed through Hosea, that the apostates of his day had lost the heart of temple worship, even though they continued to practice its rituals. Jesus implied that the Pharisees had done the same thing. They were preserving the external practices of worship carefully, but they had failed to maintain its essential heart. Their attitude toward the tax collectors and sinners showed this. God, on the other hand, cares more for the spiritual wholeness of people than He does about flawless worship.

Jesus did not mean that the tax collectors and sinners needed Him but the Pharisees did not. His quotation put the Pharisees in the same category as the apostates of Hosea's day. They needed Him, too, even though they believed they were righteous enough (cf. Phil 3:6).

The last part of verse 13 defines Jesus' ministry of preparing people for the coming kingdom. "Compassion" (NASB) or "mercy" (NIV, Heb. *hesed*) was what characterized His mission. He came to "call" (Gr. *kalesai*) or

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[641]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 353.

[642]Carson, "Matthew," p. 225.

> "invite" people to repentance and salvation. Paul used this Greek work in the sense of efficacious calling, but that is not how Jesus used it. If someone does not see himself or herself as a sinner, that person will have no part in the kingdom.

Disciples of Jesus should be need-oriented, as Jesus was. Meeting the needs of needy individuals, regardless of who they may be, was very important to Jesus. Christians should give priority to the needs of people over forms of worship.

The question of fasting 9:14-17 (cf. Mark 2:18-22; Luke 5:33-39)

The Pharisees criticized Jesus' conduct in the previous pericope. Now John's disciples criticized the conduct of Jesus' disciples and, by implication, Jesus.

9:14 The people who questioned Jesus here were "disciples of John" (the Baptist) who had not left John to follow Jesus. They, as well as the Pharisees, observed the regular fasts that the Mosaic Law did not require. During the Exile—and subsequently—the Jews had made several of these fasts customary (cf. Zech. 7). The strict Pharisees even fasted twice a week—on Thursdays and Mondays—during the weeks between Passover and Pentecost, and between the Feast of Tabernacles and the Feast of Dedication. They believed that on a Thursday Moses had gone up into Mount Sinai, and that on a Monday he had come down, after receiving the Law the second time.[643]

9:15 Jesus responded with three illustrations. John the Baptist had described himself as the "best man" and Jesus as the "bridegroom" (John 3:29). Jesus extended John's figure and described His disciples as the "friends" (attendants, NASB) of the bridegroom." They were so joyful that they could not fast because they were with Him.[644]

The Old Testament used the groom figure to describe God (Ps. 45; Isa. 54:5-6; 62:4-5; Hos. 2:16-20). The Jews also used it of Messiah's coming and the messianic banquet (22:2; 25:1; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:23-32; Rev. 19:7, 9; 21:2). When Jesus applied this figure to Himself, He was claiming to be the Messiah, and He was claiming that the kingdom banquet was imminent.

> "As the *Physician*, He came to bring spiritual health to sick sinners. As the *Bridegroom*, He came to give spiritual joy."[645]

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[643]Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 197.
[644]See Richard D. Patterson, "Metaphors of Marriage as Expressions of Divine-Human Relations," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51:4 (December 2008):689-702.
[645]Wiersbe, 1:35.

> "A Jewish wedding was a time of special festivity. The unique feature of it was that the couple who were married did not go away for a honeymoon they stayed at home for a honeymoon. For a week after the wedding open house was kept; the bride and bridegroom were treated as, and even addressed as, a king and queen. And during that week their closest friends shared all the joy and all the festivities with them; these closest friends were called *the children of the bridechamber*. On such an occasion there came into the lives of poor and simple people a joy, a rejoicing, a festivity, a plenty that might come only once in a lifetime."[646]

When Jesus returned to heaven following His ascension, His friends did indeed "fast" (Acts 13:3; 14:23; 27:9). This is the first hint that Jesus would be "taken away" (a violent and unwanted removal) from His disciples, but that theme will become more dominant soon (cf. 16:21).

9:16-17 The meaning of the second illustration is clear enough (v. 16). The third may need some comment (v. 17). Old wine containers made out of animal skins eventually became hard and brittle. "New wine," that continued to expand as it fermented, would "burst" the inflexible "old wineskins." "New (fresh) wineskins" were still elastic enough to stretch with the expanding new wine.

The point of these two illustrations was that Jesus could not patch or pour His new ministry into old Judaism. The Greek word translated "old" (vv. 16, 17) is *palaios* and means not only old but worn out by use. Judaism had become inflexible due to the accumulation of centuries of non-biblical traditions. Jesus was going to bring in a kingdom that did not fit the preconceptions of most of His contemporaries. They misunderstood and misapplied the Old Testament, and particularly the messianic and kingdom prophecies.

Jesus' ministry did not fit into the traditional ideas of Judaism. Moreover, it was wrong to expect that His disciples would fit into these molds. Jesus used two different Greek words for "new" in verse 17. *Neos* means recent in time, and *kainos* means a new kind. The messianic kingdom would be new both in time and in kind.

In the second and third illustrations, which advance the revelation of the first, the old cloth and wineskins perish. Jesus' kingdom would terminate Judaism, which had served its purpose.

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[646]Barclay, 1:343.

John the Baptist belonged to the old order. His disciples, therefore, should have left him and joined the Groom. Unless they did, they would not participate in the kingdom (cf. Acts 19:1-7).

> "In his characteristic style Matthew here hints that another new age will be brought in if the kingdom comes or not. This may be the first intimation of the church age in Matthew's Gospel."[647]

The point of this incident in Matthew's story seems to be: Disciples of Jesus need to recognize that following Him will involve new methods of serving God. The old Jewish forms passed away with the coming of Jesus, and His disciples now serve under a new covenant with new structures and styles of ministry, compared to the old order. This is a dispensational distinction that even non-dispensationalists recognize.

5. Jesus' ability to restore 9:18-34

The two groups of miracles that Matthew presented so far demonstrated Jesus' ability to heal (8:1-17), and His authority to perform miracles with supernatural power (8:23—9:8). This last cluster demonstrates His ability to restore. These miracles show that Jesus can restore all things, as the prophets predicted the Son of David would do. Furthermore, He can do this in spite of opposition.

The raising of Jairus' daughter and the healing of a woman with a hemorrhage 9:18-26 (cf. Mark 5:21-43; Luke 8:40-56)

9:18-19 This incident evidently happened shortly after Jesus and His disciples returned from Gadara on the east side of the lake (cf. Mark 5:21-22; Luke 8:40-41). The name of this Capernaum synagogue ruler was Jairus (Mark 5:22). He was a Jew who enjoyed considerable prestige in his community.

> "The ruler of the synagogue was a very important person. He was elected from among the elders. He was not a teaching or a preaching official; he had 'the care of the external order in public worship, and the supervision of the concerns of the synagogue in general.' He appointed those who were to read and to pray in the service, and invited those who were to preach. It was his duty to see that nothing unfitting took place within the synagogue; and the care of the synagogue buildings were [*sic* was] in his oversight. The whole practical administration of the synagogue was in his hands."[648]

It is noteworthy that someone of his standing believed in Jesus. This ruler humbly knelt before Jesus with a request (cf. 2:2; 8:2). According to Matthew, he announced that his "daughter" had "just died." Mark and

[647]Toussaint, *Behold the . . .*, p. 132.
[648]Barclay, 1:350-51.

Luke have him saying that she was near death. Since she died before Jesus reached her, Matthew evidently condensed the story to present at the outset what was true before Jesus reached his house.[649]

The ruler had probably seen or heard of Jesus' acts of healing with a touch (e.g., 8:2, 15). However, his faith was not as strong as the centurion's who believed that Jesus could heal with a word (8:5-13). Jesus arose from reclining at the table and proceeded to follow the ruler to his house. Here is another instance where the verb *akoloutheo*, "to follow," does not imply discipleship (cf. 8:23). Context must determine its meaning, not the word itself.

9:20-21 A "hemorrhage" is an uncontrolled bleeding. This woman had suffered with one somewhere in her body for 12 years. Many commentators assume it had some connection with her reproductive system. In any case, bleeding rendered a Jewish person ritually unclean (cf. Lev. 15:19-33). She should have kept away from other people, and not touched them, since by doing so she made them unclean. However, hope of healing led her to push her way through the crowd so that she might "touch" Jesus ("His garment"). She apparently believed that since Jesus' touch healed people, if she touched Him she would get the same result.

"The fringe of" Jesus' "cloak" ("the hem of His garment," KJV; v. 20) was probably one of the four *tassels* that the Jews wore on the four corners of their cloaks to remind them to obey God's commands (Num. 15:37-41; Deut. 22:12; cf. Matt. 23:5).

9:22 Jesus encouraged the woman and commended her "faith" (i.e., her trust in Him). It was her faith that was significant; it "made" her "well." Her touching Jesus' garment simply expressed her faith. Faith in Jesus is one of the themes Matthew stressed in his Gospel. It is not the strength of one's faith that saves him or her, but faith in a *strong Savior*.

The Greek word translated "made you well" or "healed you" is *sozo*, which the translators often rendered as "save." The context here clarifies that Jesus was talking about the woman's faith resulting in her physical deliverance, not necessarily in her eternal salvation. Salvation is a broad concept in the Old and New Testaments. The context determines what aspect of deliverance is in view in every use of the verb *sozo* and the noun *soteria*, "salvation."[650]

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[649]Carson, "Matthew," p. 230.

[650]For a very helpful discussion of key Old and New Testament passages containing these Greek words, see Dillow, pp. 111-33.

> "The association of the language of 'salvation' with faith perhaps also allows Matthew's readers, if so inclined, to find in this story a parable of spiritual salvation."[651]

Why did Matthew include this miracle within the account of the healing of Jairus' daughter? I suspect the answer is the common theme of life. The woman's life was gradually ebbing away. Her hemorrhage symbolized this, since blood represents life (cf. Lev. 17:11). Jesus stopped her dying and restored her life. His instantaneous healing contrasts with her long-term illness. In the case of Jairus' daughter, who was already dead, Jesus restored her, as well, to life. Both incidents show His power over death.

9:23-26 Perhaps Matthew, of all the Gospel writers who recorded this incident, mentioned the "flute players," because he wanted to stress Jesus' complete reversal of this situation. Even the poorest Jews hired flute players to play at funerals.[652] Their funerals were also occasions of almost unrestrained wailing and despair ("noisy disorder"), which verse 23 reflects.

> "The garments would be being rent; the wailing women would be uttering their shrieks in an abandonment of synthetic grief; the flutes would be shrilling their eerie sound. In that house there would be all the pandemonium of eastern grief."[653]

The "crowd" ridiculed Jesus by "laughing" at His statement (v. 24). They thought He was both wrong and late in arriving, too late. They apparently thought He was trying to cover up His mistake and would soon make a fool of Himself by exposing His only limited healing power. However, "sleep" is a common euphemism for *death* (Dan. 12:2; John 11:11; Acts 7:60; 1 Cor. 15:6, 18; 1 Thess. 4:13-15; 2 Pet. 3:4), and it was also so in Jesus' day.[654]

Jesus touched another unclean person. His touch, rather than defiling Him, *restored life* to the girl. Other prophets and apostles also raised the dead (1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:17-37; Acts 9:36-42). However, Jesus claimed to be more than a prophet. This miracle showed He had supernatural power over man's last enemy: Death. The Old Testament prophets predicted that Messiah would restore life (Isa. 65:17-20; Dan. 12:2).

> "The raising of the dead to life is a basic symbolism of the gospel (e.g., Rom 4:17; Eph 2:1, 5; Col 2:13). What Jesus did for the dead girl he has done for all in the Church who

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[651]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 361.
[652]Mishnah *Kethuboth* 4:4.
[653]Barclay, 1:353.
[654]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 1:630.

> have experienced new life. There is too, beyond this life, the Church's confidence that Jesus will literally raise the dead (cf. 1 Thess 4:16; 1 Cor 15:22-23)."[655]

Matthew recorded that everyone heard about this incident (v. 26). Consequently many people faced the choice of believing that Jesus was the Messiah or rejecting Him.

> "We must learn to trust Christ and His promises no matter how we feel, no matter what others say, and no matter how the circumstances may look."[656]

Jesus' power to bring life where there was death stands out in this double instance of restoration—two witnesses—for the benefit of Jewish readers especially.

> "It is interesting that Jairus and this woman—two opposite people—met at the feet of Jesus. Jairus was a leading Jewish man; she was an anonymous woman with no prestige or resources. He was a synagogue leader, while her affliction kept her from worship. Jairus came pleading for his daughter; the woman came with a need of her own. The girl had been healthy for 12 years, and then died; the woman had been ill for 12 years and was now made whole. Jairus' need was public—all knew it; but the woman's need was private—only Jesus understood. Both Jairus and the woman trusted Christ, and He met their needs."[657]

The healing of two blind men 9:27-31

Another instance of double restoration shows Jesus' ability to restore sight where there had been blindness.

9:27-28 This is the first time in Matthew's Gospel that someone called Jesus the "Son of David" (cf. 1:1; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30, 31; 21:9, 15). This was a messianic title, and the blind men's use of it undoubtedly expressed their belief that Jesus was the Messiah. The Gospel writers recorded that Jesus healed at least six blind men, and each case was different (cf. John 9; Mark 8:22-26; Matt. 20:29-34, Mark 10:46-52, and Luke 18:35-43). Blindness was a common ailment in Jesus' day, but the Gospel evangelists also used it to illustrate lack of spiritual perception.

> "Blindness was a distressingly common disease in Palestine. It came partly from the glare of the eastern sun on unprotected eyes, and partly because people knew nothing of the importance of cleanliness and hygiene. In

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[655]Hagner, p. 250.
[656]Wiersbe, 1:35.
[657]Ibid.

> particular the swarms and clouds of unclean flies carried the infections which led to loss of sight."[658]
>
> "The use of the Davidic title in address to Jesus is less extraordinary than some think: in Palestine, in the time of Jesus, there was an intense messianic expectation."[659]

Ironically, these "two" physically "blind men" saw who Jesus was more clearly than most of their seeing contemporaries. Isaiah had prophesied that Messiah would open the eyes of the blind (Isa. 29:18; 35:5-6). Frequently in the Synoptics, the desperately needy individuals cried out to Jesus, calling Him the "Son of David."[660] There seems to be a relationship between the depth of a person's felt need and his or her willingness to believe in Jesus.

Probably Jesus did not heal these men outdoors for at least two reasons. He had already done two miracles outdoors, before many witnesses that day, and may have wanted to keep the crowd under control (cf. v. 30). Second, by bringing the blind men indoors, He heightened their faith, since it involved waiting longer for a cure. Jesus' question furthered this aim (v. 28). It also clarified that their cries for help came from confidence in Him, rather than just out of desperation, and it focused their faith on Jesus specifically, and not only God generally.

9:29-31 Perhaps Jesus "touched" the "eyes" of the blind men, in order to help them associate Him with their healing, as well as because He was compassionate. However, it was primarily Jesus' word, not just His touch, that resulted in their healing (cf. Gen. 1). "According to your faith" does not mean "in proportion to your faith" but "because you believed" (cf. v. 22). This is the only time in the first Gospel that Matthew presented faith as a condition for healing.

Jesus "sternly warned" them against telling anyone about the miracle, probably because these blind men had identified Jesus as the Son of David. The verb *embrimaomai* occurs only five times in the New Testament (Mark 1:43; 14:5; John 11:33, 38). Jesus wanted to avoid the masses of people that would have dogged His steps and hindered Him from fulfilling His mission (cf. 8:4). He wanted people to hear about Him and face the issue of His messiahship, but too much publicity would be counterproductive.

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[658]Barclay, 1:357.

[659]Hill, p. 180.

[660]Dennis C. Duling, "The Therapeutic Son of David: An Element in Matthew's Christological Apologetic," *New Testament Studies* 24 (1978):392-410.

> Unfortunately, but understandably, these beneficiaries of Messiah's grace disobeyed Him, and broadcast what He had done for them widely, "throughout all that land"! They should have simply joined the band of disciples and continued to follow Jesus faithfully.

This incident shows that some people in Galilee, besides the Twelve, were concluding that Jesus was the Messiah.[661] The emphasis in the incident is on Jesus' ability to restore sight where once there was blindness.

The casting out of a spirit that caused dumbness 9:32-34

Not only could Jesus bring life out of death, and sight out of blindness, but He could also enable people to speak who could not previously do so. Each of these physical healings has metaphorical implications: eternal spiritual life, understanding and insight, and witness.

9:32-33 The Greek word translated "dumb" (NASB, *kophos*) refers to deaf people, mutes, and people who were both deaf and dumb. This man's condition was the result of demonic influence, though that was not the cause in all such cases (cf. Mark 7:32-33). The crowd's reaction here climaxes their reaction in this entire section of the text. Here was Someone with more power than anyone who had ever appeared before. Messiah would heal the dumb (Isa. 35:5-6). The natural conclusion was that Jesus was the Messiah.

9:34 The reaction of the Pharisees contrasts with that of the crowd in the sharpest possible terms. They attributed Jesus' power to Satan, not God. They concluded that He came from Satan rather than from God. Instead of being the Messiah, He must be a satanic counterfeit. Notice that the Pharisees did not deny the authenticity of Jesus' miracles. They could not do that. They accepted them as supernatural acts. However, they ascribed them to demonic rather than divine power.

> This testimony to Jesus' authority comes at the end of a collection of stories about demonstrations of Jesus' power (8:1—9:34). Matthew probably intended the reader to understand that this was the common reaction to all these miracles.[662] This reaction continued, and culminated in the Pharisees' accusation in 12:24: "This man cast out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons."
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> This testimony contrasts, too, with the opinion of the Gentile centurion (8:5-13), who saw that Jesus' operated under God's authority. This is one evidence of a chiastic structure in chapters 8 and 9, which I shall comment on further below.

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[661]Plummer, p. 143; Samuel J. Andrews, *The Life of Our Lord Upon the Earth*, p. 307.

[662]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 369.

The incident illustrates Jesus' ability to enable people to speak who could not formerly do so. This was important in people confessing Jesus as the Son of God and the disciples bearing witness to Jesus. It also illustrates Jesus' compassion for needy people.

One of the main themes in this section (8:1—9:34) is the spreading of Jesus' fame. This resulted in an increasing number to people concluding that Jesus was the Messiah. It also resulted in increasing opposition from Jesus' enemies, Israel's religious leaders, and even some of John the Baptist's disciples. However, some religious leaders believed in Jesus, Jairus being one. Opposition to Jesus was mounting among those who suffered economically, because of His ministry, as well as those who suffered religiously. Matthew's primary purpose, however, was to present Jesus as the promised Messiah who could establish God's kingdom on earth.

All of this material also prepares the reader for the next events: Jesus' self-disclosure to His disciples in His second major discourse (ch. 10).

Chapters 8—9 seem to be a chiasm focusing the reader's attention on Jesus' power to overcome Satan (8:28-34).

A Jesus' power to heal (8:1-17; three incidents and a summary [8:16-17])
- **B** Jesus' authority over His disciples' persons (8:18-22; two lessons)
  - **C** Jesus' supernatural power (8:23—9:8; three incidents with victory over Satan in the middle)
- **B'** Jesus' authority over His disciples' work (9:9-17; two lessons)

A' Jesus' power to restore (9:18-38; three incidents and a summary [9:35-38])

B. Declarations of the King's presence 9:35—11:1

The heart of this section contains Jesus' charge to His disciples to proclaim the nearness of the kingdom (ch. 10): Jesus' Mission Discourse. Matthew prefaced this charge with a demonstration of the King's power, as he prefaced the Sermon on the Mount by authenticating the King's qualifications (cf. 4:23; 9:35). However, there are also some significant dissimilarities between these sections of the Gospel. Before the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus separated from the multitudes (5:1), but here He has compassion on them (9:36). Then He ministered to His disciples, but now He sends His disciples to minister to the multitudes in Israel. The Sermon on the Mount was basic to the disciples' understanding of the kingdom. This discourse is foundational to their proclaiming the kingdom. Jesus had already begun to deal with discipleship issues (chs. 5—7; 8:18-22; 9:9-17). Now He gave them more attention.

1. Jesus' compassion 9:35-38 (cf. Mark 6:6)

This section summarizes the previous incidents that deal primarily with healing, and prepares for Jesus' second discourse to His disciples. It is transitional, providing a bridge from the condition of the people that chapter 9 revealed, to what the King determined to do about that condition (cf. 4:23-25). Jesus' work was so extensive that He needed many more workers to assist Him.

9:35 This verse summarizes the heart of Jesus' ministry in Galilee. It also provides the rationale for the new phase of His ministry through the Twelve. At this time, there were about 240 cities and villages in Galilee.[663]

9:36 Until now, Matthew presented the crowds as those Galileans who listened to and observed Jesus with wonder. Now they become the objects of Jesus' concern. His "compassion for" the multitudes recalls Ezekiel's description of God's compassion for Israel (Ezek. 34). "Distressed" (NASB) really means "harassed" (NIV). It pictures the Jews bullied and oppressed by their religious leaders. They were "downcast" (NASB) because they were "helpless" (NIV). No one was able to deliver them. They lacked effective leadership, as "sheep without a shepherd" (cf. Num. 27:17; 1 Kings 22:17; 2 Chron. 18:16; Isa. 53:6; Ezek. 34:23-24; 37:24). The Old Testament describes both God and Messiah as Shepherds of their people (cf. 2:6; 10:6, 16; 15:24; 25:31-46; 26:31).

9:37-38 Jesus' figure of speech in addressing His disciples, however, was an agricultural one. He wanted to infuse His compassion for the multitudes into them. Jesus viewed Israel as a field composed of numerous stalks of grain. They needed gathering for safe-keeping in the barns of the kingdom. They would die where they were, and the nation would suffer ruin if "workers" did not bring them in soon. Unfortunately there were not enough workers to do this massive task. Consequently Jesus commanded His disciples to beseech God, the Lord of the harvest, to provide additional laborers for "His harvest."

> "It is the dream of Christ that every man should be a missionary and a reaper. There are those who cannot do other than pray, for life has laid them helpless, and their prayers are indeed the strength of the labourers. But that is not the way for most of us, for those of us who have strength of body and health of mind. Not even the giving of our money is enough. If the harvest of men is ever to be reaped, then every one of us must be a reaper, for there is someone whom each one of us could—and must—bring to God."[664]

> "How seldom do we hear prayers for more preachers. Sometimes God literally has to push or force a man [or woman] into the ministry who resists his known duty."[665]

The picture is of imminent change. A change was coming, whether or not the Israelites accepted their Messiah. It would either be beneficial or detrimental to the nation. An adequate number of workers was one factor

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[663]Josephus, *The Life . . .*, par. 45.

[664]Barclay, 1:366,

[665]Robertson, *Word Pictures . . .*, 1:76.

that would determine the way the change would go. Evidently Matthew expected his readers to understand "disciples" as *all* who were in a learning relationship to Jesus, at that point in time, rather than just the Twelve. That is the way he used the term so far in this Gospel (cf. 10:1).

> "In the early period of their discipleship hearing and seeing seem to have been the main occupation of the twelve."[666]

2. Jesus' commissioning of 12 disciples 10:1-4 (cf. Mark 6:7; Luke 9:1-2)

10:1 This is Matthew's first reference to Jesus' 12 disciples, though here he implied their previous identity as a group. He "summoned" (Gr. *proskaleo*) these men as a king commands his subjects. He who had all "authority" now delegated some of it to this select group of disciples. Perhaps Jesus chose 12 close disciples because Israel consisted of 12 tribes.

> "As soon as he [Jesus] remarked that number, every Jew of any spiritual penetration must have scented 'a Messianic programme.'"[667]

If Israel had accepted Jesus, these 12 disciples probably would have become Israel's leaders in the messianic kingdom. As it turned out, they became leaders of the church.

Until now, there is no evidence that Jesus' disciples could cast out demons and heal the sick. This was new power He delegated to them for the mission on which He would shortly send them. This ability is a clear demonstration of Jesus' unique greatness.

> "This was without a precedent in Jewish history. Not even Moses or Elijah had given miraculous powers to their disciples. Elijah had been allowed to transmit his powers to Elisha, but only when he himself was removed from the earth."[668]

10:2-4 The 12 special disciples now received the title "apostles." This noun, *apostolos* in Greek, comes from the verb *apostello* meaning "to send." This was not a technical term until Jesus made it such. It continued to refer generally to people sent out with the Christian message,, such as Barnabas (Acts 14:4, 14; Rom. 16:7; 1 Cor. 12:28-29; 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25). It referred to any messenger (John 13:16) and even to Jesus (Heb. 3:1). Paul

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[666]Bruce, *The Training . . .*, p. 41.
[667]Hunter, *The Message . . .*, p. 62.
[668]Plummer, p. 147.

became an apostle who received his commission directly from the Lord, as the 12 special disciples had. This is the only place Matthew used the word "apostle." He probably used it here because Jesus proceeded to prepare to send these 12 men on a special mission to the Israelites (vv. 5-42).

Lists of the 12 Apostles occur in Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:13-16; and Acts 1:13, as well as here. Comparing the four lists, we note that there appear to have been three groups of four disciples each. Peter, Philip, and James the son of Alphaeus seem to have been the leaders of these groups.

	Matt. 10:2-4	**Mark 3:16-19**	**Luke 6:14-16**	**Acts 1:13**
1.	Simon Peter	Simon Peter	Simon Peter	Peter
2.	Andrew	James	Andrew	John
3.	James	John	James	James
4.	John	Andrew	John	Andrew
5.	Philip	Philip	Philip	Philip
6.	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Thomas
7.	Thomas	Matthew	Matthew	Bartholomew
8.	Matthew	Thomas	Thomas	Matthew
9.	James, son of Alphaeus	James, son of Alphaeus	James, son of Alphaeus	James, son of Alphaeus
10.	Thaddaeus	Thaddaeus	Judas, son or brother of James	Judas, son or brother of James
11.	Simon the Cananaean	Simon the Cananaean	Simon the Zealot	Simon the Zealot
12.	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	

Peter's name occurs first, here, as in all the other lists, probably because he was the "first among equals." Matthew may also have listed him first because he became the leading apostle to the Jews.[669] James' name occurs before his brother John's, probably because James was older. Matthew described himself humbly as "the tax-gatherer."

"Thaddaeus" ("Warm-hearted") and "Judas the son (or brother) of James," seem to be two names for the same man, and "Simon the Cananaean" seems to have been the same person as "Simon the Zealot." The Zealots constituted a political party in Israel, centered in Galilee, that sought to

[669]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 138.

throw off the Roman yoke.[670] However, "Zealot" did not become a technical term for a member of this revolutionary group until the time of the Jewish Wars (A.D. 68-70).[671] So "Zealot" here probably refers to Simon's reputation for religious zeal.[672] "Cananaean" is the Aramaic form of "Zealot" and does not refer to the land of Canaan.

"Iscariot" may mean "of Kerioth," the name of two Palestinian villages, or "the dyer," his possible occupation. It may be a transliteration of the Latin *sicarius*, a Zealot-like movement.[673] Some scholars believe it means "false one" and comes from the Aramaic *seqar* meaning "falsehood."[674] The names "Andrew" and "Philip" are Greek and probably reflect the more Hellenistic flavor of their hometown, Bethsaida, on the east side of the Jordan River (John 1:44).

These men became Jesus' main agents in carrying out His mission, though "Judas," of course, proved to be a hypocritical disciple. Probably Matthew described the Twelve in pairs because they went out in pairs (Mark 6:7).[675]

3. Jesus' charge concerning His apostles' mission 10:5-42

Matthew proceeded to record Jesus' second major discourse in his Gospel: the Mission Discourse. It contains the instructions Jesus gave the 12 Apostles before He sent them out to proclaim the nearness of the messianic kingdom.

> "If the Sermon on the Mount was appropriately delivered on the occasion when the apostolic company was formed, this discourse on the apostolic vocation was not less appropriate when the members of that company first put their hands to the work unto which they had been called."[676]

Kingsbury saw the theme of this speech as "the mission of the disciples to Israel" and outlined it as follows: (I) On Being Sent to the Lost Sheep of the House of Israel (10:5b-15); (II) On Responding to Persecution (10:16-23); and (III) On Bearing Witness Fearlessly (10:34-42).[677] Whereas there is much instruction on serving Jesus here, there is also quite a bit of emphasis on persecution.

> "Before Jesus sent His ambassadors out to minister, He preached an 'ordination sermon' to encourage and prepare them. In this sermon, the King had something to say to *all* of His servants—past, present, and

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[670]See Edersheim, *The Life* . . ., 1:237.
[671]Cf. Josephus, *The Wars* . . ., 4:3:9, 13, 14; 4:4:5-7; 4:5:1, 5; and 7:8:1.
[672]France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 378.
[673]Carson, "Matthew," p. 239, listed six possible meanings.
[674]Earle E. Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 110; Marshall, p. 240.
[675]Tasker, p. 106.
[676]Bruce, *The Training* . . ., p. 110.
[677]Kingsbury, *Matthew as* . . ., p. 112.

> future. Unless we recognize this fact, the message of this chapter will seem hopelessly confused."[678]
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> "It is evidential of its authenticity, and deserves special notice, that this Discourse, while so un-Jewish in spirit, is more than any other, even more than that on the Mount, Jewish in its forms of thought and modes of expression."[679]

This observation suggests that this mission was uniquely Jewish. Yet, as in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke beyond His immediate audience with later disciples also in mind. This seems clear as we compare this instruction with later teaching on the conduct of Christ's disciples in the present age.

The scope of their mission 10:5-8

Jesus first explained the sphere and nature of the apostles' temporary ministry to Israel.

10:5-6 The apostles were to limit their ministry to the Jews living in Galilee. They were not to go north or east into Gentile territory, or south where the Samaritans predominated (cf. Acts 1:8). The "Samaritans" were only partially Jewish by race. They were the descendants of the poorest of the Jews, whom the Assyrians left in the Promised Land when they took the Northern Kingdom into captivity, and the Gentiles whom the Assyrians imported. On religion, they only accepted the Pentateuch as authoritative. This is Matthew's only reference to the Samaritans.

The apostles were to go specifically to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel," a term that described all the Jews (Isa. 53:6; Jer. 50:6; Ezek. 34). The designation highlights the needy character of the Jews. Jesus sent them to the Jews exclusively to do three things. They would announce the appearance of a Jewish Messiah, announce a Jewish kingdom, and provide signs—to Jews who required them—as proof of divine authorization.

Jesus did not need the additional opposition that would come from Gentiles and Samaritans. He would have to deal with enough of that from the Jews. His kingdom would be a universal one, but at this stage of His ministry, Jesus wanted to offer it to the Jews first. We have already noted that Jesus had restricted His ministry primarily, but not exclusively, to Jews (8:1-13). He was the King of the Jews.

10:7-8 The apostles were to herald the same message that John (3:2) and Jesus proclaimed (4:17, 23; 9:35). They were to be itinerant preachers, as these men had been.[680] The absence of "repent" here should not be a problem

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[678]Wiersbe, 1:36.

[679]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 1:641. See ibid., 1:641-53, for many parallels.

[680]Cf. Plummer, p. 149.

since, as we have pointed out, repentance was not a separate step in preparation but a way of describing adequate preparation.

> "If the Jewish nation could be brought to repentance, the new age would dawn; see Ac. iii. 19f., Jo. iv. 22."[681]

"The kingdom of heaven" was "at hand," namely, imminent. It had not yet begun. The powers the apostles had would impress their Jewish hearers with God's authentication of their message (cf. 12:28). That was the purpose of signs throughout the Old and New Testaments.[682]

Matthew had not mentioned raising the "dead" and cleansing "lepers" previously (v. 1). The disciples were to offer their services free of charge because the good news they had received had not cost them anything.

The provisions for their mission 10:9-15 (cf. Mark 6:8-11; Luke 9:3-5)

Jesus explained further how the 12 Apostles were to conduct themselves on their mission.

10:9-10 They were not to take enough money with them to sustain them while they ministered. "Acquire" (NASB, Gr. *ktesesthe*) can mean "take along" (NIV, Mark 6:9) or "procure" while they ministered (Acts 1:18; 8:20; 22:28). Probably Jesus did not want them to accumulate money as they ministered, or to take along enough money to sustain them. They were not to take an extra tunic ("two coats"), either. In other words, they were to travel lightly and to remain unencumbered by material possessions.

> "At this day the farmer sets out on excursions quite as extensive, without a para in his purse; and the modern Moslem prophet of Tarshîha thus sends forth his apostles over this identical region. Neither do they encumber themselves with two coats. They are accustomed to sleep in the garments they have on during the day, and in this climate such plain people experience no inconvenience from it. They wear a coarse shoe, answering to the sandal of the ancients, but never take two pair of them; and although the staff is an invariable companion of all wayfarers, they are content with *one*."[683]

As a general principle, those who minister spiritual things have a right to expect physical recompense in return (Deut. 25:4; 1 Cor. 9:4-18; 1 Tim. 5:17-18). That is the principle Jesus wanted to teach His disciples.

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[681]M'Neile, p. 134.
[682]See Thomas R. Edgar, "The Cessation of the Sign Gifts," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145:580 (October-December 1988):371-86.
[683]Thomson, 1:533.

Itinerant philosophers and teachers typically expected board, room, and a fee from their hearers.[684]

10:11-15 They were to stay with "worthy" hosts, not necessarily in the most convenient or luxurious accommodations. A worthy person would be one who welcomed a representative of Jesus and the kingdom message. He or she would be the opposite of the "dogs" and "pigs" Jesus earlier told His disciples to avoid (7:6). By this time, there were probably people in most Galilean villages who had been in the crowds and observed Jesus. His sympathizers would have been the most willing hosts for His disciples.

The "greeting" the disciple was to give his host was the normal greeting of the day ("Peace"). If his host proved to be unworthy by not continuing to welcome the disciple, he was to leave that house and stay somewhere else. By withdrawing personally, the disciple would withdraw a *blessing* from that house, namely, his presence as a representative of Jesus. The apostles were to do to towns as they did to households.

> "A pious Jew, on leaving Gentile territory, might remove from his feet and clothes all dust of the pagan land now being left behind . . . thus dissociating himself from the pollution of those lands and the judgment in store for them. For the disciples to do this to Jewish homes and towns would be a symbolic way of saying that the emissaries of Messiah now view those places as pagan, polluted, and liable to judgment (cf. Acts 13:51; 18:6)."[685]

More awful "judgment" awaited the inhabitants of the Jewish towns that rejected Messiah, than the judgment coming on the wicked residents of "Sodom and Gomorrah," that had already experienced divine destruction (Gen. 19). This statement implies that there will be degrees of judgment and torment for the lost (cf. 11:22, 24; Heb. 10:28-29). The unbelievers of Sodom and Gomorrah will receive their sentence at the Great White Throne judgment (Rev. 20:11-15).

The unbelieving Jews of Jesus' day will also stand before Jesus at that judgment. One's eternal destiny then, as now, depended on his or her relationship to Jesus, and that was evident in his attitude toward one of His emissaries (cf. v. 40; 25:40, 45). In that culture, people treated a person's official representative as they would treat the one he represented. The apostles could anticipate opposition and rejection, as Jesus experienced, and as the Old Testament prophets had as well.

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[684]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 384.
[685]Carson, "Matthew," p. 246.

The perils of their mission 10:16-25

Jesus proceeded to elaborate on the dangers the apostles would face and how they should deal with them.

In His descriptions of the opposition His disciples would experience, Jesus looked beyond His death to the time of tribulation that would follow. Then, the disciples would have the same message—and the same power—as they did when He sent them out here. The narrow road leading to the kingdom led through a period of tribulation and persecution for the disciples. They did not understand that Jesus would have to die and experience resurrection before the kingdom began, even though this is what the Old Testament revealed. Jesus was beginning to prepare them and their successors for these events and the persecution they would experience as His followers. If Israel had accepted her Messiah, He still would have had to die, rise from the grave, and ascend into heaven. Seven years of tribulation would have followed. Then Jesus would have returned to the earth and set up His kingdom. As it happened, Israel rejected Jesus, so the period of Tribulation, His return, and the kingdom are all still future.

> "The King performed His ministry according to the Old Testament Messianic calendar of events. According to the Hebrew Scriptures the Messiah, after He appeared, was to suffer, die, and be raised again (Daniel 9:26; Psalm 22; Isaiah 53:1-11; Psalm 16:10). Following the death and resurrection of Christ there was to be a time of trouble (Daniel 9:26-27; Jeremiah 30:4-6). The Messiah was then to return to the earth to end this tribulation and to judge the world (Daniel 7:9-13, 16-26; 9:27; 12:1; Zechariah 14:1-5). Finally, the Messiah as King would establish His kingdom with Israel as the head nation (Daniel 7:11-27; 12:1-2; Isaiah 53:11-12; Zechariah 14:6-11, 20-21)."[686]

Part of the tribulation that Jesus prepared His disciples for took place when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and scattered the Jews all over the world, in A.D. 70. Yet the destruction of Jerusalem then was not the full extent of the tribulation the prophets foretold for Israel. This becomes clear as one compares the prophesied tribulation for the Jews with the events that surrounded the destruction of Jerusalem.

10:16 Jesus pictured His defenseless disciples in a dangerous environment. The Shepherd was sending His "sheep" into a wolf pack. They needed, therefore, to be as "shrewd as serpents," a proverbial way of saying *prudent*. People sometimes think of snakes as shrewd because they are silent, dangerous, and because of how they move. The disciples' shrewdness must not be cunning (sinister or dishonest) though, for they needed to be "innocent" as well. Either characteristic without the other is dangerous. Innocence without prudence becomes naiveté.

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[686]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 140.

The disciples were to be both prudent and innocent toward the objects of their ministry. "Doves" are peaceful, retiring birds; they leave when other birds challenge or oppose them rather than fighting. This is how the disciples were to behave. They needed to be shrewd by avoiding conflicts and attacks where possible, but when these came they were to withdraw to other households and other towns. These figures were common in Rabbinic teaching. But the rabbis normally used the sheep and doves as figures of Israel, and the wolves and serpents as representing the Gentiles.[687]

10:17 "But" (Gr. *de*) does not introduce a contrast here; it shows how the disciples should apply the warning Jesus just gave them. Opposition would come from the Jews. The courts in view could be either civil or religious. This is the only occurrence of the plural "courts" or "local councils" (Gr. *synedria*) in the New Testament. The responsibility of these courts was to preserve the peace. The scourging in view would be the result of judicial action, not mob violence.[688]

10:18 This prediction has caused problems for many interpreters, since there is no indication that the disciples appeared before governors and kings during the mission that followed. As mentioned above, Jesus was evidently looking beyond their immediate mission, to what His disciples would experience after His death, resurrection, and ascension.[689]

10:19-20 Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit, called here "the Spirit of your Father," would enable the disciples to respond to their accusers. Some lazy preachers have misappropriated this promise, but it applies to disciples who must answer charges leveled against them for their testimonies. Jesus had not yet revealed the Spirit's relationship to these men after His departure into heaven (John 14—16). Here He simply assured them of the Spirit's help. Several of the apostles' speeches in Acts reflect this divine provision.

10:21-22 The disciples would find themselves opposed by everyone without distinction, including their own family members, not just rulers. In spite of such widespread and malicious persecution, the disciple must endure patiently to the end. "The end" refers to the end of this period of intense persecution, namely, the Tribulation (cf. 24:13). The Second Coming of the Son of Man will end it (v. 23). The promise of salvation ("will be saved") for "the one" who remains faithful (endures "to the end"), does not refer to eternal salvation, here, since that depends on faith alone in Jesus. It is *deliverance* from the period of intense persecution that is in view.

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[687]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 1:645.
[688]Douglas R. A. Hare, *The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, p. 104.
[689]Hagner, p. 262.

Entrance into the millennial kingdom would constitute salvation for these future persecuted disciples.

Thus, this verse does not say that all genuine believers will inevitably persevere in their faith and good works.[690] Rather, it says that those who do during the Tribulation, can expect God to deliver them at its end. Jesus was not speaking about eternal salvation but temporal deliverance. Temporal deliverance depended on faithful perseverance. Whereas "the end" has specific reference to the end of the Tribulation in 24:13, here it probably has the more general meaning of "as long as may be necessary."

If the Jews had accepted Jesus, these 12 disciples would have taken the message of the kingdom throughout Israel during the Tribulation period that would have followed Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension. Before they could finish their task, Jesus would have returned from heaven. Those of them who persevered faithfully would have experienced deliverance from further persecution by entering the kingdom following His return. But since the Jews rejected Jesus, God postponed the kingdom for at least 2,000 years.

During the Tribulation period yet future, the 144,000 Jewish disciples of Jesus living in Palestine—and elsewhere in the world—will be preparing people for Jesus' return to set up His kingdom (Rev. 7:1-8; 14:1-5). Those Tribulation saints who remain faithful, and withstand persecution, will be saved from further persecution by Jesus' return to the earth to set up His kingdom.

> "If those who fight under earthly commanders, and are uncertain as to the issue of the battle, are carried forward even to death by steadiness of purpose, shall those who are certain of victory hesitate to abide by the cause of Christ to the very last?"[691]

10:23 Jesus promised that He would return for His disciples before they had finished preaching the kingdom throughout "the cities of Israel." If Israel had accepted Jesus as her Messiah, this would have happened at the end of seven years of persecution following Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension. Since Israel rejected her Messiah, it will happen at the end of the Tribulation, yet future from our perspective in history (Dan. 7:13). Obviously it did not happen after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Commentators have offered many other explanations of this verse. There is great diversity of opinion concerning what Jesus meant, mainly because people have failed to take Jesus' offer of Himself—and the messianic

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[690]E.g., John Murray, *Redemption—Accomplished and Applied,* p. 152; et al.

[691]Calvin, *Commentary on . . .*, 1:456.

kingdom—literally. Some interpreters believe that Jesus simply meant He would return to the Twelve before they completed the mission He sent them on in this passage. The problem with this view is that there is no indication in the text that that happened.

Others interpret the "Son of Man *coming*" as a reference to the public identification of Jesus as the Messiah. However, that is not what Jesus said, and it is not what happened. Some believe Jesus made a mistake, and what He predicted did not happen. Obviously this view reflects a low view of Jesus' person. Still others believe that Jesus was predicting the destruction of Jerusalem, but this hardly fits the Old Testament prophecies or the context of this verse. Carson summarized seven views, and preferred one that equates the coming of the Son of Man with the coming of the kingdom. He viewed "the end" as the destruction of Jerusalem.[692]

> "What was proclaimed here was more fully demonstrated in the apostles' lives after the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) in the spread of the gospel in the church (e.g., Acts 4:1-13; 5:17-18, 40; 7:54-60). But these words will find their fullest manifestation in the days of the Tribulation when the gospel will be carried throughout the entire world before Jesus Christ returns in power and glory to establish His kingdom on the earth (Matt. 24:14)."[693]

10:24-25 Jesus' point was that persecution should not surprise His disciples. They had seen the scribes and Pharisees, and even John's disciples, oppose Jesus. They could expect the same treatment.

Beelzebul was Satan, the head of the household of demons (12:24-27). The word "Beelzebul" probably came from the Hebrew *baal zebul*, meaning "Prince Baal." Baal was the chief Canaanite deity, and the Jews regarded him as the personification of all that was evil and satanic. The "house" in view is Israel. Jesus as Messiah was "the head of" that "household." However, His critics charged Him with being Satan (cf. 9:34). Therefore, the disciples could expect similar slander from their enemies.

> "We believe, that the expression 'Master of the house' looked back to the claims which Jesus had made on His first purification of the Temple [John 2:16]. We almost seem to hear the coarse Rabbinic witticism in its play on the word *Beelzebul*. For, *Zebhul*, . . . means in Rabbinic language, not any ordinary dwelling, but specifically the Temple, and *Beel-Zebul* would be the Master of the

[692]Carson, "Matthew," pp. 250-53.
[693]Barbieri, p. 42.

> Temple.' On he other hand, *Zibbul* . . . means sacrificing to idols; and hence *Beel-zebul* would, in that sense, be equivalent to 'lord' or 'chief of idolatrous sacrificing'—the worst and chiefest of demons, who presided over, and incited to, idolatry. 'The Lord of the Temple' . . . was to them 'the chief of idolatrous worship,' the Representative of God that of the worst of demons: Beelzebul was Beelzibbul!"[694]

The attitudes of the disciples 10:26-39 (cf. Luke 12:1-12)

Even though Jesus' disciples would encounter hostile opposition, they should fear God more than their antagonists.

10:26-27 The basis for confidence, in the face of persecution, is an understanding that whatever is presently "hidden" will eventually come out into the open. This proverbial statement applies to the truth about Jesus (the gospel) that the fearful disciple might seek to keep hidden for fear of opposition. It also applies to the disciple who might himself want to hide instead of letting his light shine. It applies also to the preceding teaching about persecution.

What Jesus told His disciples privately would eventually become public knowledge, so they should declare it publicly. In Palestine, common flat-roofed houses were good places from which to make public addresses.

> "Good news is not meant to be kept under wraps, however little some people may wish to hear it."[695]

10:28 It also helps to conquer "fear," if the disciple will remember that the worst a human adversary can do, does not compare with the worst God can do. Jesus was not implying that true believers might go to hell if they do not remain faithful to God. His point was, that God has power over the disciple after he dies, whereas human adversaries can do nothing beyond killing the disciple's body. The believer needs to remember that he or she will stand before God one day to give an account of his or her stewardship. "Destroy" here does not mean annihilation, but ruination. The same Greek verb appears in 9:17, and describes ruined wineskins. Walvoord took "him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" as a reference to Satan.[696]

10:29-31 Third, the same God who will not permit a sparrow to "fall to the ground," will certainly take care of His faithful servants. The Jews were very familiar of this illustration.[697] The poor in Israel ate many "sparrows,"

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[694]Edersheim, *The Life* . . ., 1:648.
[695]France, *The Gospel* . . ., pp. 402-3.
[696]Walvoord, *Matthew:* . . ., p. 77.
[697]Edersheim, *The Life* . . ., 1:649.

since they only cost a fraction of a day's wage ("a cent"; Gr. *assarion*, a small-value coin).[698] The mention of the disciples' heavenly "Father" (v. 29) stresses His care—that extends to the numbering of his or her "hairs."

> "God loves you! The Lord Jesus loves you more than your mother loved you. Did your mother ever count the hairs on your head? But God knows the number!"[699]

Often people think that God cares only for the big things in life and is unconcerned about the details. Jesus taught the opposite. God's concern with details should give us confidence that He controls the larger affairs of life.

> "Indeed, the principal purpose of Biblical history is to teach that the Lord watches over the ways of the saints with such great diligence that they do not even stumble over a stone [cf. Ps. 91:12]."[700]

> "It is not that God marks the sparrow when the sparrow falls dead; it is far more; it is that God marks the sparrow every time it lights and hops upon the ground."[701]

10:32-33 Disciples of Jesus must acknowledge Him publicly. One cannot fulfill the basic requirements of a disciple privately (cf. 5:13-16). Again, the terms "believer" and "disciple" are not synonymous. In the context, confessing Jesus means acknowledging Him faithfully in spite of persecution to do otherwise. Jesus will acknowledge faithful disciples as such to His Father. He will not give this reward to unfaithful disciples who cave in to pressure to deny Him. Obviously, Jesus believed it is possible for believers to be unfaithful. It is possible to deny Jesus with our words, our silence, or our actions.[702]

Notice that the blessing of Jesus' commendation will go to anyone (i.e., any disciple) who confesses Him *publicly*. Jesus probably looked at the whole course of the disciple's life as He made this statement. One act of unfaithfulness does not disqualify a disciple from Jesus' commendation (e.g., Peter). An example of Jesus confessing a faithful disciple before others is His testimony concerning John the Baptist's greatness (11:11; Luke 7:28).

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[698]Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, pp. 272-75.
[699]McGee, 4:60.
[700]Calvin, *Institutes of . . .*, 1:17:6.
[701]Barclay, 1:401.
[702]See ibid., 1:403-4.

The view that this passage teaches that a believer may lose his or her salvation—if he or she fails to confess, or denies Jesus—cannot be correct. Elsewhere Jesus taught that believers will never lose their salvation (cf. John 10:28-29). This is the consistent revelation of the rest of the New Testament (e.g., John 10:28-29; Rom. 8:31-39; et al.). Jesus was speaking here of rewards, not salvation.[703]

10:34-36 Jesus meant that His immediate purpose would entail conflict, even though Messiah would ultimately bring "peace" (Isa. 11; Luke 2:14). People would divide over whether Jesus was the Messiah.

Micah 7:6 refers to rebellion that happened during King Ahaz's reign. It pointed to a greater division in Jesus' day. In both cases, the root of the conflict involved righteousness and unrighteousness.

> "Feud between members of a family is also mentioned in the Talmud as a sign of the coming of the Messianic age."[704]

Jesus spoke of the consequences of His first coming in terms that sounded like they were His main purpose in coming. But He came to bring this kind of conflict only in an *indirect* sense. By expressing Himself in this way, Jesus demonstrated His Christological and eschatological awareness. These conditions will prevail before Jesus' second coming. too.

> "Consequences are often expressed in the Bible as though they were intentions. So here the divisive result of Jesus' coming, particularly in the sphere of family relationships, is described as though He had deliberately come to bring it about."[705]

10:37-39 Jesus taught that people must love one another, but they must love Him more. This is a remarkable claim that shows what great importance Jesus placed on the supreme allegiance of His disciples. In Judaism, no human relationship was more important than the one to family.[706] Taking one's "cross" does not mean tolerating some unpleasant situation in one's life for Jesus' sake. It means dying to self, namely: putting Jesus first. In this sense every disciple bears the same cross. Jesus' reference to crucifixion, His first in Matthew, would have helped His disciples realize that their calling would involve pain and shame.

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[703]See also Robert N. Wilkin, "Is Confessing Christ a Condition of Salvation?" *The Grace Evangelical Society News* 9:4 (July-August 1994):2-3.
[704]Montefiore, *The Synoptic . . .*, 2:152.
[705]Tasker, p. 108.
[706]Bock, *Jesus according . . .*, p. 176.

> "In the ancient days the criminal did actually carry the cross-beam of his cross to the place of crucifixion, and the men to whom Jesus spoke had seen people staggering under the weight of their crosses and dying in agony upon them."[707]

Those who find (i.e., preserve) their lives now will forfeit them later. Conversely, the disciple who loses his or her life (Gr. *psyche*) by martyrdom or by self-denial now, "will find (preserve) it" in the next stage of his or her existence. This is true in a twofold sense. The person who lives for the present loses the real purpose of life.[708] He or she also loses the reward for faithful living.

> "The Christian may have to sacrifice his personal ambitions, the ease and the comfort that he may have enjoyed, the career that he might have achieved; he may have to lay aside his dreams, to realize that shining things of which he caught a glimpse are not for him. He will certainly have to sacrifice his will, for no Christian can ever again do what he likes; he must do what Christ likes."[709]

> "There is an absolutism in the call to Jesus and the kingdom that can seem unattractive, if not unendurable. But this is only half the story, for the rewards are beyond calculation."[710]

This entire section (vv. 26-39) contrasts the present with the future. For the 12 Apostles: their present ministry, self-denial, and consequential persecution, involved identifying themselves publicly as Jesus' disciples. It involved calling on the Jews to repent: because the kingdom was near at hand, and the King had arrived! For modern disciples: our present ministry, self-denial, and consequential persecution, likewise involve identifying ourselves publicly as Jesus' disciples. They also involve urging people to believe in Him.

In both groups, those who are *faithful* to their calling will receive God's commendation when they stand before Him. Old Testament saints will stand before God when He judges Israel at Jesus' second coming (Dan. 12:1-2). Modern Christians will stand before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Cor. 3:10-15). Those who are *unfaithful* will not receive some of the commendation, joy, and reward that could have been theirs had they remained faithful.

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[707]Barclay, 1:408.
[708]William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, p. 477.
[709]Barclay, 1:408.
[710]Hagner, p. 293.

This discourse (ch. 10) covers the whole period during which disciples of Jesus will minister, from Jesus' day until the establishment of the messianic kingdom. It begins with the duty of the 12 Apostles, but then broadens to include all subsequent disciples before the establishment of the kingdom. The scope of the Mission Discourse and the Sermon on the Mount are the same: the interim between Jesus' first and second advents.

The reward for hospitality 10:40-42

These verses bring Jesus' teaching to a positive and encouraging conclusion. Jesus had given His disciples severe warnings. Now He gave them great encouragement.

10:40 By receiving His disciples, those to whom the disciples would go would show that they welcomed Jesus. Because they received Jesus, they would also receive God. How a person receives an agent shows his or her attitude toward the agent's master, and toward all that the agent represents.

10:41 "A prophet" is one who speaks for another. The disciples served as prophets when they announced Jesus' message. Jesus Himself was a prophet since He spoke for God. The one who received the disciple would "receive a prophet's reward" from God, suitable to the one who had entertained one of God's representatives. Likewise, the disciples were righteous men who represented another righteous Man: Jesus. God would give those who received the disciples, as ("in the name of") "righteous" men, a "reward" in keeping with what a righteous man deserves (cf. 5:20; John 13:20).

10:42 The "little ones," in view of the context, probably refer to the persecuted disciples who remain faithful to the Lord. Anyone who assists "one of" them—by giving him or her "even a cup of" refreshing "cold water"—will receive a reward from God. That person can even give the cup of cold water "in the name of" (on behalf of) a follower of Jesus, not in the name of Jesus Himself. The point is that no act of kindness for one of Jesus' suffering disciples will pass without (or "lose") God's "reward."

> "Keep in mind that the theme of this last section is discipleship, not sonship. We become the children of God through faith in Christ; we are disciples as we faithfully follow Him and obey His will. Sonship does not change, but discipleship does change as we walk with Christ. There is great need today for faithful disciples, believers who will learn from Christ and live for Him."[711]

This Mission Discourse (ch. 10) is instruction for Jesus' disciples in view of their ministry to call people to prepare for the kingdom. Jesus gave the 12 Apostles specific direction about where they should go and to whom they should minister. However, He broadened His instruction, in view of mounting opposition, by giving guidance to disciples who

[711]Wiersbe, 1:40.

would succeed the Twelve. Their ministry was essentially the same as that of the apostles.

The scope of this discourse, as the scope of the Sermon on the Mount, is the entire inter-advent age, the time between the two advents of Christ to the earth, including the time of His earthly ministry, the Church Age, and the Tribulation period. Both discourses prepare Jesus' disciples during this period for service before His kingdom on the earth begins and when it does begin.

Jesus did not reveal here that Israel's rejection of Him would result in a long gap between His first and second advents. That gap is irrelevant to the instruction and its meaning. Christian disciples today need to do essentially what the Twelve were to do, but to a different audience and region (28:19-20). Jesus explained those changes after His firm rejection by the Jews.

Whereas some of what Jesus told the Twelve to do on this occasion applied only to them, many things that He told them apply to modern disciples as well. These lessons include: preach the gospel, help people, live simply, move on if you are rejected, use wisdom and discernment, expect persecution, do not be afraid, remain faithful to God, and remember your reward.

> "These two words, Care not, Fear not, are the soul and marrow of all that was said by way of prelude to the first missionary enterprise, and we may add, to all which might follow. For here Jesus speaks to all ages and to all times, telling the Church in what spirit all her missionary enterprises must be undertaken and carried on, that they may have His blessing."[712]

4. Jesus' continuation of His work 11:1 (cf. Mark 6:12-13; Luke 9:6)

Here is another of Matthew's formulas that ended a discourse (cf. 7:28-29; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). Matthew had no concern for recording what happened when the Twelve went out having received Jesus' "instructions." He passed over their ministry in silence and resumed narration of Jesus' ministry.

> "The motif that dominates Matthew's story throughout 4:17—11:1 is Jesus' ministry to Israel of teaching, preaching, and healing (4:23; 9:35; 11:1)."[713]

IV. THE OPPOSITION TO THE KING 11:2—13:53

To review, Matthew introduced the King of the Jews, then demonstrated His authority, and then explained His manifestation in Israel. Matthew proceeded next to record Israel's opposition to Him and rejection of Him. Chapters 11—13 record Israel's rejection of her Messiah and its consequences. Opposition continued to build, but Jesus announced new revelation in view of hardened unbelief.

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[712]Bruce, *The Training . . .*, p. 111.
[713]Kingsbury, *Matthew as . . .*, p. 72.

> "The Evangelist has carefully presented the credentials of the king in relationship to His birth, His baptism, His temptation, His righteous doctrine, and His supernatural power. Israel has heard the message of the nearness of the kingdom from John the Baptist, the King Himself, and His disciples. Great miracles have authenticated the call to repentance. Now Israel must make a decision."[714]

> "Thematically the three chapters (11—13) are held together by the rising tide of disappointment in and opposition to the kingdom of God that was resulting from Jesus' ministry. He was not turning out to be the kind of Messiah the people had expected."[715]

A. Evidences of Israel's rejection of Jesus 11:2-30

Matthew presented three evidences of opposition to Jesus that indicated rejection of Him: John the Baptist's questions about the King's identity, the Jews' indifference to the King's message, and their refusal to respond to the King's invitation.

1. Questions from the King's forerunner 11:2-19

This section illustrates how deeply seated Israel's disenchantment with Jesus was.

The confusion of the King's forerunner 11:2-6 (cf. Luke 7:18-23)

Even John the Baptist had doubts about whether Jesus was really the promised Messiah.

> "Matthew includes the record of this interrogation for at least two reasons. First, the questioning of Jesus by John, a representative of the best in Israel, points up the misconception of Israel as to the program of the Messiah and His method. He had heard of the works of Jesus (Matthew 11:2), and they certainly appeared to be Messianic. However, Jesus did not suddenly assert His authority and judge the people as John probably had thought He would (Matthew 3:10-12). Because of this misconception he began to doubt. Perhaps his being in prison, a place which was certainly incongruous for the herald of the King, reinforced his doubts. . . .

> "The second purpose of these few verses (Matthew 11:2-6) is to reaffirm the concept that the works of Jesus prove His Messiahship."[716]

11:2-3 Herod Antipas had "imprisoned" John in the fortress of Machaerus, east of the Dead Sea (cf. 4:12; 14:3-5).[717] There John heard about Jesus' ministry.

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[714]Toussaint, *Behold the . . .*, p. 147.
[715]Carson, "Matthew," p. 260.
[716]Toussaint, *Behold the . . .*, p. 148.
[717]Josephus, *Antiquities of. . .*, 18:5:2. See idem, *The Wars . . .*, 7:6:2, for a description of this fortress.

> "Herod Antipas of Galilee had paid a visit to his brother in Rome. During that visit he seduced his brother's wife. He came home again, and dismissed his own wife, and married the sister-in-law whom he had lured away from her husband. Publicly and sternly John rebuked Herod. It was never safe to rebuke an eastern despot; Herod took his revenge; and John was thrown into the dungeons of the fortress of Machaerus down in the mountains near the Dead Sea."[718]

Matthew wrote that John "heard" about "the works" of "the Christ." This is the only place in Matthew where the name "Christ" standing alone refers to Jesus.[719] Matthew evidently referred to Jesus this way here to underscore the fact that Jesus was the Christ, the Greek term for Messiah. John had doubts about that, but Matthew presented Jesus as the Messiah in unequivocal terms. The "works" of Jesus would include His teachings and all of His activities, not just His miracles.

John sent Jesus a question through some of John's disciples. This use of "disciples" is another proof that this word does not necessarily mean believers in Jesus. These disciples were still following John. They had not begun to follow Jesus. John questioned whether Jesus was "the Coming (Expected) One" after all (Ps. 40:7; 118:26; Isa. 59:20). "The Coming One" was a messianic title.[720] John had previously announced Jesus as the Coming One (3:11), but Jesus did not quite fit John's ideas of what Messiah would do. He was bringing blessing to many but judgment to none (cf. 3:10-12).[721]

> "The prophetic infirmity of querulousness [complaining in a petulant or whining manner] and the prison air had got the better of his judgment and his heart, and he was in the truculent humor of Jonah, who was displeased with God, not because He was too stern, but rather because He was to gracious, too ready to forgive."[722]

> "The same questions of the ultimate triumph of God undoubtedly face everyone in suffering for Christ's sake. If our God is omnipotent, why does He permit the righteous to suffer? The answer, of course, is that the time of God's judgment has not yet come but that the final triumph is certain."[723]

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[718]Barclay, 2:1.
[719]Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, 1:114.
[720]Lenski, p. 425.
[721]See James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, pp. 55-62.
[722]Bruce, *The Training . . .*, pp. 49-50.
[723]Walvoord, *Matthew: . . .*, p. 80.

An old interpretation of John's question is that he asked it for his disciples' sake, but he himself never doubted Jesus' identity. There is nothing in the text to support this view. Rather John, like Elijah, seems to have become discouraged (cf. v. 14). Probably this happened because Jesus did not begin to judge sinners immediately.

11:4-6 Jesus sent a summary of His ministry back to John. He used the language of Isaiah's prophecies to assure His forerunner that He really was the Messiah (Isa. 35:5-6; 61:1; cf. Isa. 26:19; 29:18-19). It is interesting that all of these Isaiah passages contain some reference to judgment. Thus Jesus assured John that He *was* the Coming One, and He implied that He would fulfill the judgment prophecies, though He had not done so yet.

Verse 6 may contain an allusion to Isaiah 8:13-14. It is a gentle warning against allowing Jesus' ministry to become an obstacle to belief and a reason for rejecting Jesus. It assumes that John and his disciples began well, but it warned them against reading the evidence of Jesus' miracles incorrectly. The little beatitude in verse 6 commends those who believe God is working without demanding undue proof (cf. John 20:29).[724]

> "It is well to note that if John had an erroneous concept of the kingdom, this would have been the logical time for Christ to have corrected it. But He did no such thing."[725]

The commendation of the King's forerunner 11:7-11 (cf. Luke 7:24-28)

John had borne witness to Jesus, and now Jesus bore witness to John. In doing so, Jesus pointed to Himself as the person who would bring in the kingdom.

11:7-8 As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus took the opportunity "to speak to the crowds about John." Reeds of cane grass grew abundantly along the Jordan River banks. "A reed" blown "by the wind" represents a person easily swayed by public opinion or circumstances.

> "By the way John was not the reed shaken with the wind; he was a wind shaking the reeds! In our day, the pulpit has become very weak because it is in subjection to somebody sitting out there in the pew who doesn't like the preacher. Or the massage is tailored to suit a certain group in the church. Too often the pulpit is a reed that is shaken in the wind. Thank God for John the Baptist, a wind shaking the reeds!"[726]

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[724]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 425.
[725]Toussaint, *Behold the . . .*, p. 148. Cf. McClain, pp. 301-2.
[726]McGee, 4:62.

The multitudes certainly did not go into the Judean wilderness to view such a common sight as a "reed shaken by the wind." They did not "go out to see . . . a man dressed in soft," even effeminate clothes (Gr. *malakos*) either. Such people lived in "kings' palaces." Jesus probably alluded derogatorily to King Herod, who had imprisoned John. Herod wore soft garments, but John wore rough garments (cf. 3:4-6).

By replying this way, Jesus was allaying public suspicion that John's question might have arisen from a vacillating character or undisciplined weakness. John's question did not arise from a deficient character, but from misunderstanding concerning Messiah's ministry. Jesus was defending John.

11:9-11 The people had gone out into the wilderness to hear John because they believed he was "a prophet." Jesus affirmed that identification. He was the first true prophet who had appeared in hundreds of years. However, John was an unusual prophet. He was not only a spokesman from and for God, as the other prophets were, but he was also the fulfillment of prophecy himself. He was the one predicted to prepare for Messiah's appearing.

The passage Jesus quoted is Malachi 3:1, and His quotation reflects an allusion to Exodus 23:20. The changes Jesus made in His quotation had the effect of making Yahweh address Messiah (cf. Ps. 110:1). This harmonizes with the spirit of Malachi's context (cf. 4:5-6). By quoting this passage, Jesus was affirming His identity as Messiah.[727] He viewed John as potentially fulfilling the prophecy about Elijah preparing the way for Yahweh and the day of the Lord. Whether John really would have fulfilled it depended on Israel's acceptance of her Messiah then (cf. v. 14). In either case, John fulfilled the *spirit of the prophecy*, because he came in the spirit and power of Elijah.

Jesus called "John the Baptist" the greatest human being because he served as the immediate forerunner of Messiah. This was a ministry no other prophet enjoyed. Yet, Jesus added, anyone in "the kingdom" will be "greater than" John. Perhaps Jesus supported John so strongly, too, because some of the Jews may have questioned John's commitment to the Messiah.[728]

Scholars have offered many different explanations of the last part of verse 11. Some translate "the least" as "the younger," and believe Jesus was contrasting Himself, as younger than John, with John, who was older.[729] However, this is an unusual and unnecessary translation. Others believe that even the least in the kingdom will be able to point unambiguously to

[727]R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, p. 155.
[728]*The Nelson . . .*, p. 1594.
[729]E.g., Fenton, p. 179.

Jesus as the Messiah, but John's testimony to Jesus' messiahship was not persuading many who heard it.[730] The best explanation, I believe, is that John at that time only anticipated the kingdom, whereas participants will be *in it*, thus "greater."

> ". . . possession of a place in the kingdom is more important than being the greatest of the prophets."[731]

Jesus did not mean that John would fail to participate in the kingdom. All true prophets will be in it (Luke 13:28). He was simply contrasting participants and announcers of the kingdom.

The identification of the King's forerunner 11:12-15

This section further explains John the Baptist's crucial place in God's kingdom program.

11:12-13 These verses record Jesus' description of the condition of the kingdom when He spoke these words. "From the days of John the Baptist until now" began when John began to minister, and extended to the time Jesus uttered the words Matthew recorded here. What does "suffers violence" mean? If the Greek verb *biazetai* is a deponent middle tense, it could mean that disciples must enter the kingdom through violent effort.[732] This seems to introduce a foreign element into Jesus' teaching on discipleship. Entrance into the kingdom depends on faith in Jesus as the Messiah.

The deponent middle could also mean that the kingdom has been *forcefully advancing*, but it had not swept away all opposition, as John had been expecting.[733] However, the image of an irresistibly advancing kingdom seems foreign to Matthew's portrayal of Jesus' ministry thus far. Mounting opposition suggests that the kingdom was encountering severe resistance.

Probably the verb *biazetai* is in the passive tense. "The kingdom of heaven suffers violence" because evil men take it violently. Perhaps Jesus meant that men were snatching the kingdom from God and forcing its coming.[734] This is impossible, since Israel was not forcing the kingdom to come. The Jews were unwilling to receive it when Jesus offered it. Perhaps Jesus meant that some Jews, such as Barabbas, where trying to bring in the kingdom by political revolution.[735] This is unlikely, since Jesus made no other reference to this happening in the context. Probably Jesus meant that

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[730]E.g., Carson, "Matthew," p. 265.
[731]Marshall, p. 296.
[732]J. N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, 3:59.
[733]Carson, "Matthew," p. 267.
[734]Schweitzer, p. 357.
[735]Robinson, p. 102.

the religious leaders of His day were trying to bring in the kingdom in their own, carnal way, while refusing to accept God's way that John and Jesus announced.[736]

This view explains satisfactorily Jesus' reference to the period from the beginning of John's ministry to when He spoke. Ever since John began his ministry of announcing Messiah, the Jewish religious leaders had opposed him. Moreover, in 23:13, Jesus accused the scribes and Pharisees of trying to seize the reins of kingdom power from Messiah, to lead the kingdom as they wanted it to go. They also snatched (took "by force") the kingdom from the people by rejecting, and eventually crucifying, the Messiah. The imprisonment of John was another evidence of violent antagonism against the kingdom, but that opposition came from Herod Antipas. John and Jesus both eventually died at the hands of these violent men.

Jesus described the imminent kingdom as in grave danger because of His enemies. The Old Testament ("all the") "prophets" had predicted the Messiah, "until John," but when John began his ministry, the time of fulfillment began. That was a unique time that the law and the prophets had foretold (v. 13).[737]

11:14-15 In the previous two verses, Jesus spoke of the imminent kingdom. It was encountering severe opposition. In these two verses, He discussed the potential beginning of the kingdom.

The messianic kingdom would come *if* the Jews would accept it. In the Greek text, the conditional particle (*ei*) assumes for the sake of the argument that they would receive it. Assuming they would, John would fulfill Malachi's prophecy about Elijah being Messiah's forerunner (Mal. 4:5-6).

> "There is scarcely a passage in Scripture which shows more clearly that the kingdom was being offered to Israel at this time."[738]

All amillenarians and some premillenarians, namely, covenant (historic) premillenarians and progressive dispensationalists, believe that the kingdom really began with Jesus' preaching.[739] They interpret this conditional statement as follows. They say Jesus was acknowledging that it was difficult to accept the fact that John was the fulfillment of the prophecies about Elijah. They take "it" as referring to Jesus' statement about John rather than the kingdom. Since both antecedents are in the

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[736]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., pp. 151-52; Walvoord, *Matthew:* . . ., p. 82.

[737]See Edersheim, *The Life* . . ., 2:764-66, for discussion of how the Jews understood the Law in Jesus' day.

[738]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 153.

[739]E.g., Carson, "Matthew," p. 268, a premillenarian.

context, the interpretation hinges on one's conclusion about whether the kingdom really did begin with Jesus' preaching, or if it is still future.

I favor the second alternative, in view of the Old Testament prophecies about the kingdom, and how Matthew presented Jesus' concept of the kingdom. Jesus viewed the messianic kingdom as future and earthly, not present and future. In saying this, I do not deny that in one sense, God rules over His own now. However, this is a heavenly rule, a rule from heaven. The Old Testament prophets predicted that Messiah would rule on the earth. This earthly rule of God over His own is still future. This is the kingdom that John announced, and Jesus offered, to Israel.

Jesus did not say that John was Elijah. That depended on Israel's repenting and accepting Jesus as the Messiah. John fulfilled Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1, prophecies about Messiah's forerunner, but not Malachi 4:5-6, the prophecy about the forerunner turning the people's hearts to God, since Israel rejected Jesus.

> ". . . John the Baptist stands in fulfillment of the promise of Malachi concerning the coming of Elijah, but only in the sense that he announced the coming of Christ."[740]

Who will fulfill Malachi 4:5-6, and when? Perhaps Elijah himself will be one of the two witnesses who will prepare the Israelites for Messiah's second coming (Rev. 11:1-14). Since John could have fulfilled the prophecy of Elijah, I tend to think that Elijah need not return to earth personally for this ministry.[741] Probably the two witnesses will be two contemporary believers in the Tribulation, who will turn the people's hearts to God, as Elijah did in his day.

> "This passage clearly shows the contingent nature of the kingdom offer."[742]

Verse 15 underlines the great significance of what Jesus had just stated.

The dissatisfaction with the King and His forerunner 11:16-19 (cf. Luke 7:29-35)

Jesus proceeded to describe the Jews' reaction to John and Himself more fully to clarify their opposition.

11:16-17 The "generation" Jesus spoke of consisted of the Jews to whom He offered the kingdom (cf. vv. 20-24; 12:39, 41-42, 45; 16:4; 17:17; 23:36; 24:34). This use of "generation" refers to a group or circle of His countrymen (cf. Prov. 30:11-14). Jesus must have observed "children" playing the

[740]Merrill, "Deuteronomy . . .," p. 30.
[741]Walvoord, *Matthew: . . .*, p. 82.
[742]Kent, "The Gospel . . .," p. 948.

marriage and funeral games He referred to here, and He used them to illustrate the childish reaction of most of His adult contemporaries. The point was that the people found fault with whatever Jesus did. He did not behave or teach in harmony with what *they* wanted Him to do, or as *they* expected that Messiah would do. His concept of the kingdom was different from theirs. They wanted a King who would fit into and agree with their traditional understanding of the Messiah. Consequently they rejected Him.

11:18-19 Even though John lived as an ascetic, as some of the Old Testament prophets did, most of the Jews rejected him and even charged him with "demon" possession. Jesus ate and drank with "sinners," and many of the people criticized Him for lack of moderation, and concluded that He despised the Law. If they had understood John, they would have understood Jesus.

Jesus concluded with a proverb that justified John's and His lifestyles. The Jews had criticized both John and Jesus for the ways they lived. Jesus' point was: the good "deeds" that John and Jesus did "vindicated" their choices to live as they did. Who could justifiably criticize them, since they went about doing good? "Wisdom" in the Old Testament is almost a synonym for *God* in many places. Jesus claimed that He and John were living wisely, under God's control, by behaving as they did. The Jews could make childish criticisms, but the lifestyles of John and Jesus argued for their credibility.

In spite of John's doubts, Jesus supported and affirmed His forerunner to his disciples and his critics. John's message was correct—even if he had developed some misgivings about it.

> ". . . it seems there are three lessons to be derived from the passage—the need to respond to John's message with repentance, the importance of rejoicing with Jesus[,] and the vindication of God's plan through both men despite the many who reject it. . . .
>
> "But the three points can be easily combined into a single big idea—that God's true will, despite the ways humans have so often perverted it, involves separation from sin but association with sinners."[743]

2. Indifference to the King's message 11:20-24

One indication of Israel's opposition to her King was the antagonism she displayed toward John and Jesus' methods (vv. 2-19). Another was her indifference to Jesus' message. Jesus and His disciples had preached and healed throughout Galilee. However, most of the people did not repent. Therefore Jesus pronounced judgment on their cities

[743]Blomberg, *Preaching the . . .*, p. 100.

that had witnessed many mighty miracles. Jesus had the residents of the cities in view when He spoke of the cities.

> "Those who really wish to know their Bibles should see that we are in new country from this verse forward. Draw a thick black line between the nineteenth and the twentieth verses. There is a great divide here. Truth flows down to opposite oceans from this point. We are face to face with a new aspect of the work of Christ. The Lord Jesus was henceforth a different Man in His action and in His speech. The One Who was the meek and lowly Jesus was about to exhibit His strong wrath in no uncertain way."[744]

11:20 The Greek word *oneidizein*, translated "reproach" (NASB) and "denounce" (NIV), is a strong word that conveys deep indignation (cf. 5:11; 27:44). Jesus did not denounce these cities because they actively opposed His ministry. He did so because the residents refused "to repent," in spite of the many "miracles" that Jesus and His disciples had performed there (cf. 3:2; 4:17). The verb "to be done" (Gr. *egenonto*) looks at Jesus' Galilean ministry as completed (cf. v. 21).[745]

11:21-22 *Ouai* can mean "woe," a word announcing doom, or "alas," meaning "pity." Both ideas are appropriate here. Isaiah used the Hebrew equivalent 22 times. "Chorazin" stood about two miles northwest of Capernaum. This "Bethsaida" was probably the one on the northeast coast of the Sea of Galilee, on the east side of the Jordan River (cf. Mark 6:45; 8:22; Luke 9:10; John 1:44; 12:21).[746] "Tyre and Sidon" lay on the Mediterranean coast to the north. The Old Testament prophets often denounced Tyre and Sidon for their Baal worship. "Sackcloth and ashes" were common ancient Near Eastern accouterments to mourning.

The Greek word *dunamis* ("miracle" or "power") is one of four that the Gospel writers used to describe Jesus' miracles (cf. Mark 6:2, 5, 14; 9:39; Acts 13:10). This one emphasizes the mighty power of God that His miracles displayed. The other three Greek words are *teras*, meaning "wonder," which underscores the extraordinary character of His miracles (cf. 24:24; Mark 13:22; John 4:48); *ergon*, meaning "works," which describes both Christ's miracles and His ordinary deeds of mercy (cf. John 5:20, 36; 7:3; 10:25); and *semeion*, meaning "sign," which indicates that His miracles were to teach spiritual truth (cf. John 2:11; 4:54; 6:2; 11:47).[747]

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[744]Barnhouse, p. 77.
[745]M'Neile, p. 159.
[746]See Finegan, pp. 306-7.
[747]Ryrie, *The Miracles . . .*, p. 10.

Jesus' statement reveals that as God, He knew what the people of Tyre and Sidon would have done, had they received the amount of witness the Jewish cities had enjoyed. It also indicates that the reception of special revelation is a privilege, not a right. Furthermore when God judges, He will take into account the opportunity people have had. There are degrees of punishment in hell, as there are degrees of felicity in heaven (v. 24; Luke 12:47-48; Rom. 1:20—2:16; Heb. 10:28-29).[748]

> ". . . I do not know what God will do with that person on a little island in the South Pacific who has never heard the gospel and bows down and worships an image. I *do* know what God is going to do with that person who comes and sits in church Sunday after Sunday and hears the gospel and does nothing about it."[749]

11:23-24 "Capernaum" was Jesus' base, and He performed many "miracles" there, half of the 10 recorded in this section of the Gospel (4:13; 8:5-17; 9:2-8, 18-33). It, like wicked Babylon, would suffer eternal damnation (Isa. 14:15). "Hades" is the place of the dead (cf. 5:22; 16:18). In view of the tower of Babel and the Exile, the Jews regarded Babylon as the worst of all cities. "Sodom" likewise was infamous for its wickedness (cf. 10:15). Jesus probably used the second person singular as a rhetorical device to address these cities. He addressed His audience with the plural "you" (vv. 22, 24).

> "Anyone who visits the ruins of Capernaum today and sees the pitiful remains of what was once a beautiful city, can realize the literalness with which this prophecy has been fulfilled. Significantly, Tiberias, not far away, was not condemned and is not in ruins."[750]

These towns had rejected Jesus and His ministry by their indifference. The citizens followed Him and appreciated His healing ministry, but they did not respond to His message.

> "They perhaps took a languid interest in His miracles and teaching; but His beneficence never touched their hearts, and His doctrine produced no change in their lives."[751]

"This passage vividly illustrates the simple truth that the greater the revelation, the greater the accountability."[752]

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[748]Carson, "Matthew," p. 273.
[749]McGee, 4:64.
[750]Walvoord, *Matthew:* . . ., pp. 83-84.
[751]Plummer, p. 165.
[752]Hagner, p. 314. Cf. Rom. 2:12-16.

It was not just the hardhearted religious leaders who did not accept their King, but the majority of the common people rejected Him as well.[753]

3. The King's invitation to the repentant 11:25-30

This invitation is a sign of Israel's rejection of her King, since with it, Jesus invited those who had believed in Him, to separate from unbelieving Israel, and to follow Him. In verses 20-24, Jesus addressed the condemned; but in verses 25-30, He spoke to the accepted. This section is a Christological high point in the Gospel.

11:25-26 Matthew's connective "at that time" is loosely historical and tightly thematic.[754] Jesus' titles for God are appropriate in view of His prayer. "Father" focuses on Jesus' sonship, and prepares for verse 27, whereas "Lord of heaven and earth" stresses God's sovereignty, and prepares for verses 25-26. "These things" refer to the significance of Jesus' miracles, the imminence of the messianic kingdom, and the implications of Jesus' teaching.

> "As elaborated in the context, it [this revelation] concerns in greatest measure two matters. The one matter is the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven (13:11). And the other is insight into Jesus' identity as the Son of God (14:33; 16:16)."[755]

The "wise and prudent [or learned]" are the self-sufficient Jews who rejected Jesus because they felt no need for what He offered. The "babes [or little children]" are the dependent who received Jesus' teaching as needy individuals. Israel was not humble but proud. Consequently she could not understand the things that Jesus revealed to her.

It was God's good pleasure to hide truth from some and reveal it to others. This may make God appear arbitrary and unfair. However, Scripture reveals that God owes man nothing. God is not unjust because He hides truth from some while revealing it to others. Hiding things from some is an evidence of God's judgment, not His justice. That He extends mercy to any is amazing. That He extends it to those who are inadequate and totally dependent is even more incredible. Furthermore, because He hides truth from those who reject it, means that He shows mercy to them because He will judge all people by their response to the truth they have.

Jesus delighted in the fact that His Father revealed and concealed truth as He did (v. 26). Jesus delighted in whatever God did. His disciples should do likewise.

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[753]See McClain, p. 309-10.
[754]Carson, "Matthew," p. 274.
[755]Kingsbury, *Matthew as . . .*, p. 137.

> "It is often in a person's prayers that his truest thoughts about himself come to the surface. For this reason the thanksgiving of Jesus here recorded is one of the most precious pieces of spiritual autobiography found in the Synoptic Gospels."[756]

11:27 Here is another of Jesus' claims to being the Son of God.[757] Jesus claimed to be the exclusive revealer of God's message that the "babes" received. Jesus has authority over those to whom He reveals God the Father. Reciprocal knowledge with God the Father assumes a special type of sonship. It reflects relationship more than intellectual attainment. The only way people can "know the Father" is through the Son (cf. John 14:6). Similarly, there are some things about the Son that only the Father knows (e.g., the date and hour of His return). Some of what the Son has chosen to reveal concerns the kingdom.

> "The Messianic consciousness of Christ is here as clear as a bell."[758]

11:28

> "These verses [vv. 20-27] bring us to a definite break and change in the Lord's message. Up to this point the Lord taught, 'Repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' He had presented His credentials and had been rejected as the Messiah. These cities which have been mentioned turned their backs upon Him, and so had Jerusalem. The Lord now turns His back upon the nation Israel, no longer presenting to them the kingdom. He is on His way to the cross, and His invitation is to the individual."[759]

This invitation recalls Jeremiah 31:25, where Yahweh offered His people "rest" in the New Covenant. The "weary" are those who have struggled long and toiled hard. The "heavy-laden" are those who stagger under excessive burdens.

> "The one [term] implies toil, the other endurance. The one refers to the weary search for truth and for relief from a troubled conscience; the other refers to the heavy load of observances that give no relief, and perhaps also the sorrow of life, which, apart from the consolations of a true faith, are so crushing."[760]

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[756]Tasker, p. 121.
[757]Cf. Plummer, p. 168.
[758]Robertson, *Word Pictures . . .*, 1:91.
[759]McGee, 4:65.
[760]Plummer, p. 170.

> "Jewish background helps with this remark about taking up Jesus' yoke. The picture of life as hard is stated in Sir. 40:1, where a heavy yoke is the inheritance that comes to Adam's children because of his sin. In Sir. 51:26, wisdom from the law is seen as a yoke that a person should take on in order to be instructed. Wisdom also makes an invitation to come to her to eat of her sweet fruit, which is better than honeycomb (Sir. 24:19-29). Thus, Jesus' imagery has parallels to the wisdom and the law of Judaism, but it is to him instead of the law that people should come."[761]

Jesus, the revealer of God, invites those who feel their need for help that they cannot obtain by themselves, to "come to" Him (cf. 5:3; Rev. 22:17). Israel's spiritual leaders had loaded the people with unscriptural burdens that were too heavy to bear (cf. 23:4). The "rest" in view involves kingdom rest (cf. Heb. 4), but it is a present reality too.

Throughout Israel's history, God held out the promise of rest if His people would trust and obey Him. The Promised Land was to be the scene of this rest. However, when Israel entered Canaan under Joshua's leadership, she enjoyed rest there only partially due to limited trust and obedience. As her history progressed, she lost much rest through disobedience. Now Jesus, as her Messiah, promised that the rest she had longed for for centuries could be hers—if she humbly came to Him. He provided this rest for anyone in Israel who came to Him in humble trust.[762] He will provide this rest for Israel—in the future—in the Promised Land. This will take place when He returns to earth to establish His kingdom.

11:29-30 The "yoke" that farmers put on their oxen is a metaphor for the discipline of discipleship. This is not the yoke of the Mosaic Law, but the yoke of discipleship to Jesus. Learning from Him involves assimilating what He reveals, not just imitating Him or learning from His experience.

Jesus is not only the authoritative revealer. He is also the humble Servant of the Lord. He deals gently with the weak (cf. 18:1-10; 19:13-15). Jesus quoted Jeremiah 6:16, a passage that pointed to Him. The yoke of discipleship may involve persecution, but it "is easy" (good and comfortable). His "burden is light" compared to the loads Israel's religious leaders imposed on their disciples.

> ". . . this voluntary making of the yoke as heavy as possible, the taking on themselves as many obligations as possible, was the ideal of Rabbinic piety."[763]

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[761]Bock, *Jesus according . . .*, p. 183.
[762]Feinberg, p. 66.
[763]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 2:144.

> ". . . what makes the difference is what sort of master one is serving."[764]

Israel's unbelief is a strong theme in this chapter. We can see it in John's question (vv. 1-15), in Jesus' generation (vv. 16-19), in the cities of Galilee (vv. 20-24), and in the proud wise (vv. 25-30).[765]

B. Specific instances of Israel's rejection of Jesus ch. 12

Matthew has shown that opposition to Jesus came from two main sources: the animosity of the religious leaders, and the indifference of the common Israelites. In this chapter he presented five instances in which opposition manifested itself and increased. In each situation the approach to Jesus was negative, but Jesus responded positively.[766]

> "Central to the plot of Matthew's story is the element of conflict. The principal conflict pits Israel against Jesus, and the death of Jesus constitutes the primary resolution of this conflict. On another level, Jesus also struggles with the disciples. Here the conflict is to bring them to understanding, or to enable them to overcome their 'little faith,' or to invite them to avail themselves of the great authority Jesus has given them, or, above all, to lead them to comprehend that the essence of discipleship is servanthood."[767]

This chapter records where the tide turned in Jesus' ministry. Here opposition became rejection. Chapter 12 is the climax of the rejection motif so far in Matthew's Gospel.

1. Conflict over Sabbath observance 12:1-21

The first two instances of conflict that Matthew recorded arose over Sabbath observance. Sabbath observance was very important to the Jews.[768] The Sabbath was a uniquely Israelite institution that commemorated the creation of the cosmos and the creation of Israel. Jewish rules of conduct concerning the Sabbath had become very detailed by Jesus' day.

The Sabbath and legal observance 12:1-8 (cf. Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5)

The immediate connection between this section and what precedes is twofold. The first is the theme of rising opposition (11:2—13:53), and the second is the heavy yoke of Pharisaic tradition that made the Israelites weary and heavy laden (11:28-30). The aim of the Sabbath was to provide rest, which Jesus said those who took His yoke upon

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[764]France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 450.
[765]Morgan, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 111.
[766]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 158.
[767]Kingsbury, *Matthew as* . . ., p. 9.
[768]See Edersheim, *The Life* . . ., 2:777-87, for discussion of the ordinances and law of the Sabbath as laid down in the Mishnah and the Jerusalem Talmud.

themselves would find. It was not to provide a burden, which the Pharisees had made it by their traditions.

Matthew recorded that Pharisaic opposition began when Jesus forgave sins (9:1-8). It increased when Jesus associated with tax collectors and sinners (9:9-13). Now it boiled over because Jesus did not observe the Pharisees' legalistic traditions.[769]

> ". . . the leaders (Pharisees), in charging the disciples with breaking the law by plucking grain on the sabbath and hence working, do what they heretofore have not done: they engage Jesus himself in direct debate (12:1-8)."[770]

12:1 "At that time" does not mean immediately after that but at approximately that time (cf. 9:3, 11, 14, 34; 10:25; 11:19). The Mosaic Law permitted the Israelites to do what the disciples did, namely, pluck a few ears of grain "and eat" as they passed through a field (Deut. 23:25).

12:2 The Pharisees criticized Jesus' disciples for doing what was unlawful under Pharisaic tradition, namely, "reaping" on the Sabbath.[771] The Mishnah listed 39 categories of activity that qualified as work on the Sabbath.

> "The Mishnah includes Sabbath-desecration among those most heinous crimes for which a man was to be stoned."[772]

> "By plucking the corn they were guilty of *reaping*; by rubbing it in their hands they were guilty of *threshing*; by separating the grain and the chaff they were guilty of *winnowing*; and by the whole process they were guilty of *preparing a meal* on the Sabbath day, for everything which was to be eaten on the Sabbath had to be prepared the day before."[773]

12:3-4 Jesus responded to the Pharisees' question with another, in common rabbinic style (cf. v. 5; 19:4; 21:16, 42; 22:31). The record of the incident He cited is in 1 Samuel 21:1-6, and the law governing the use of consecrated bread is in Exodus 25:30 and Leviticus 24:5-9. "The house of God" that David "entered" was the tabernacle that then stood at Nob. "David" and his men "ate . . . consecrated bread" that only the priests had a right to eat.

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[769]Morgan, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 124.
[770]Kingsbury, *Matthew as* . . ., p. 73.
[771]Mishnah *Shabbath* 7:2.
[772]Edersheim, *The Life* . . ., 2:52. Mishnah *Shabbath* 7:4.
[773]Barclay, 2:24-25.

The event to which Jesus referred may have occurred on a Sabbath day, though that is not certain (cf. 1 Sam. 21:5-6). That factor is inconsequential, as is the fact that David ate after lying to the priests. Jesus drew this illustration from a time in David's life when Israel's leadership was rejecting him. The Son of David was now experiencing similar rejection.

David ate even though it was unlawful, according to the Pharisees' understanding of Sabbath law, for him to do so, yet the Old Testament did not condemn him for his act. Therefore the Pharisees should not condemn Jesus' disciples for doing something Scripture did not condemn David's men for doing. Jesus was arguing that His authority should override the Law more than their view of the Sabbath should.

Jesus' disciples were not breaking any Old Testament command concerning Sabbath observance. These laws aimed primarily at prohibiting regular work on the Sabbath. The Old Testament set aside a regulation in the Law for David and his men in the sense that it did not condemn them for what they did (cf. 2 Chron. 30:18-20). Could not Jesus then set aside a Pharisaic law that had no basis in the Old Testament for Himself and His men? By arguing this way, Jesus was claiming that He was at least as important as David was. The parallels between David and Jesus make Jesus' veiled claim to being the Son of David obvious.

12:5-6 Jesus' second argument came from Numbers 28:9-10. Technically, the priests broke the "Sabbath" every week, by changing the consecrated bread, and by offering the burnt offerings the Law specified for that day. However, "the Law" considered the priests guiltless ("innocent") for doing this "work" on the Sabbath.

Jesus claimed that "something greater than the temple" was present. He used the neuter, "something," to refer to His authority, because He wanted to stress a quality about the temple—its authority—that He as an individual shared with the temple.[774] What is "greater" than the temple as a symbol of authority is Messiah, a superior authority. Another point of comparison was that God came to meet with His people, both in the temple and in Immanuel.

In Jesus' argument, the temple was greater than the Sabbath. However, now something greater than the temple was there, namely Messiah, and specifically, His authority. Consequently Messiah takes precedence over the Sabbath. The Pharisees not only mishandled the Law, but they also failed to perceive who Jesus was. As the temple's authority shielded the priests from guilt, so Jesus' authority as Messiah shielded His disciples from guilt. Jesus was not comparing but contrasting the priests' authority and His authority.

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[774]Turner, p. 21.

> "In truth, the reason why David was blameless in eating the shew-bread was the same as that which made the Sabbath-labour of the priests lawful. The Sabbath-Law was not one merely of rest, but of rest for worship. The Service of the Lord was the object in view. The priests worked on the Sabbath, because this service was the object of the Sabbath; and David was allowed to eat of the shew-bread, not because there was danger to life from starvation, but because he pleaded that he was on the service of the Lord and needed this provision. The disciples, when following the Lord, were similarly on the service of the Lord; ministering to Him was more than ministering in the Temple, for He was greater than the Temple."[775]

12:7-8 Jesus again criticized the Pharisees for failing to understand the Scriptures (cf. v. 3), and He quoted Hosea 6:6 again (cf. 9:13). Previously Jesus had cited this verse to show the Pharisees that they failed to recognize their own need. Now He used it to show them that they failed to recognize Him. The Jews in Hosea's day relied on mere ritual to satisfy God. The Pharisees were doing the same thing. They had not grasped the real significance of the Law, as their criticism of Jesus' disciples demonstrated. Jesus accused the accusers, and declared the disciples "innocent."

> "Note that Jesus appealed to prophet [vv. 3-4], priest [vv. 5-6], and king [v. 7]; for He is Prophet, Priest, and King. Note too the three 'greater' statements that He made: as the *Priest*, He is 'greater than the temple' (Matt. 12:6); as *Prophet*, He is 'greater than Jonah' (Matt. 12:41); and as *King*, He is 'greater than Solomon' (Matt. 12:42)."[776]

As "Son of Man," *this man Jesus* was "Lord of the Sabbath." That is, His authority was greater than the authority that God had granted the Sabbath to have over His people. Jesus had the authority to do anything He wished with the Sabbath. Significantly, He abolished its observance when He terminated the whole Mosaic Code—even as the temple effectively abolished it for the priests within the Mosaic system.

> "We are free while we are doing anything for Christ; God loves mercy, and demands not sacrifice; His sacrifice is the service of Christ, in heart, and life, and work. We are not free to do anything we please; but we are free to do anything needful or helpful, while we are doing any service to Christ."[777]

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[775]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 2:58.
[776]Wiersbe, 1:42.
[777]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 2:59.

The Old Testament did not condemn David because he ate the priests' bread, even though David broke the law involving ritual worship. Therefore the Pharisees should not condemn Jesus because He violated their tradition. By comparing Himself to David, Jesus implied that He, too, was the Lord's Anointed. Like David, Jesus was the Lord's Anointed who was doing God's will while He was being opposed by Israel's leadership. By contrasting the Mosaic Law with the Pharisees' tradition, Jesus exposed their confusion of tradition with Law and their misplaced priorities. They taught that ritual law was as important as moral law. *How* people worship is never as important as *that* they worship. The Pharisees' hearts were not right with God, even though they were scrupulous about *how* they worshipped God.

This is the first of seven incidents, that the Gospel evangelists recorded, in which Jesus came into conflict with the Jewish religious leaders over Sabbath observance. The chart below lists them in probable chronological order.

SABBATH CONTROVERSIES				
Event	**Matthew**	**Mark**	**Luke**	**John**
The disciples plucked ears of grain in Galilee.	12:1-8	2:23-28	6:1-5	
Jesus healed a paralytic at the Pool of Siloam in Jerusalem.				5:1-18
Jesus healed a man with a withered hand in Capernaum.	12:9-14	3:1-6	6:6-11	
Jesus referred to the Jews circumcising on the Sabbath.				7:22-23
Jesus healed a man born blind in Jerusalem.				9:1-34
Jesus healed a woman bent over in Judea.			13:10-17	
Jesus healed a man with dropsy in Perea.			14:1-6	

The healing of a man with a withered hand 12:9-14 (cf. Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11)

In the previous encounter, Jesus appealed to Scripture, but in this one He did not. In that one, His *disciples* were the targets of Pharisaic criticism, but in this one *He* was.

12:9-10 The Pharisees believed that it was permissible to give medical assistance "on the Sabbath" only if a sick person's life was in danger.[778] They also permitted midwifery and circumcision on the Sabbath.[779]

[778]Mishnah *Yoma* 8:6.
[779]Mishnah *Shabbath* 18:3; 19:2.

12:11-13 This is the third time in Matthew that Jesus argued for the superiority of human life over animal life (cf. 6:26; 10:31). His argument presupposed the special creation of man (Gen. 1—2). Jesus assumed, apparently with good reason, that the Pharisees would "lift . . . a sheep" out of "a pit" on the Sabbath. His argument was again *qal wahomer* (from the light to the heavy, cf. vv. 5-6). Neither the sheep in the illustration, nor the man in the synagogue, was in mortal danger. Jesus cut through the Pharisaic distinctions—about how much help one could give—to the more basic issue of doing good.

Jesus again healed with a word (9:1-8). The healing confirmed the power of His word, a power that God demonstrated in creation and that marked Jesus as God's agent. This miracle confirmed again Jesus' lordship over the Sabbath (v. 8) and His authority to forgive sins (9:1-8). Notice that Matthew made no reference to the healed man's faith. It may have played no part in this miracle, or Matthew simply may have made no mention of it. Matthew wanted to focus attention on Jesus and the Pharisees, not on the man.

Did Jesus break the Mosaic Law by what He did? No, because the Law said that it was more important to demonstrate compassion than to offer a sacrifice (v. 7; cf. Hos. 6:6). By showing mercy to the man, Jesus showed that He put compassion before ritual—in this case Sabbath observance—just as the Law taught.

12:14 The Pharisees would not have put someone to death simply because he broke one of their traditional laws. They wanted to kill Jesus because they understood Him to be making messianic claims that they rejected. "Counseled together" (NASB) or "plotted" (NIV, Gr. *sumboulion elabon*) means the Pharisees had reached a definite decision.

> "The phrase means to come to a conclusion, rather than to deliberate whether or not."[780]

This verse takes the official rejection of Messiah further than it has gone before in Matthew. It is "the culminating point of the opposition of the Jewish religious authorities."[781]

> "Given this narrative comment, the reader knows that the leaders' repudiation of Jesus has now become irreversible."[782]

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[780]Plummer, p. 175.
[781]M'Neile, p. 171.
[782]Kingsbury, *Matthew as* . . ., p. 73.

Not only should human *need* take precedence over ritual worship (vv. 1-8), but human *welfare* should also take precedence over ritual worship (vv. 9-14).

Scriptural vindication of Jesus' ministry 12:15-21 (cf. Mark 3:7-12)

Matthew concluded the two accounts of the Pharisees' conflict with Jesus over Sabbath observance. He did so with a summary of His ministry that shows He fulfilled messianic prophecy and was indeed the Messiah. Jesus' tranquility and gentleness in this pericope contrast with the Pharisees' hatred in the former one.

12:15-17 Jesus "withdrew" when opposition became intense, before His time to go to the cross had arrived (cf. 4:12; 14:13; 15:21).

> "This is the pattern of His ministry until His final and open rejection in chapters twenty-one to twenty-seven—opposition, withdrawal, and continued ministry."[783]

He had instructed His disciples to follow a similar procedure (10:11-14, 23-24). He withdrew specifically to avoid open conflict with the Pharisees.[784] His extensive ministry continued (cf. 4:23; 8:16; 9:35), as did His encouragements to those He healed to keep quiet about what had happened to them (cf. 8:4; 9:30). His conduct fulfilled Scripture.

12:18-21 Matthew recently selected material that presented Jesus as the Son of God, the Son of David, and God Himself. Now he pointed out again that Jesus' conduct proved Him to be the prophesied Suffering Servant of the Lord. The citation is from Isaiah 42:1-4. This is the longest Old Testament quotation in the first Gospel.

> ". . . by inserting this quotation here Matthew helps his readers to put the confrontation in context: it is not of the Messiah's choosing."[785]

The Greek word *pais* translated "servant" can also mean "son." However, the Hebrew word that it translates means "servant." Matthew recorded "whom I have chosen" rather than "whom I uphold" in Isaiah 42:1, evidently to stress God's election and love of Jesus (cf. 3:16-17; 17:5). Jesus performed His miracles with the power of the "Spirit" whom the Father had poured out "upon Him." These miracles extended even to Gentiles. Note the presence of the Trinity in this Old Testament passage.

Isaiah predicted that Messiah would minister with gentleness and humility (v. 19). He would not present Himself arrogantly or brashly. He would be very compassionate (v. 20). He would not advance His own program by

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[783]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 161.
[784]John Henry Bennetch, "Matthew: An Apologetic," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 103 (October 1946):480.
[785]France, *The Gospel* . . ., pp. 468-69.

stepping on others. He would bring salvation, finally, to the harassed and helpless (9:36), as well as to the weary and burdened (11:28), without crushing the weak.[786]

This concept of Messiah was much more gentle than the one Jesus' contemporaries held. They expected Him to crush all opposition. He would, however, bring justice to pass. In Matthew, "justice" (Gr. *krisis*) means fast-approaching judgment, not simply justice as opposed to injustice.[787] Justice in the kingdom is in view. Consequently the Gentiles would put their trust in Him (v. 21).

> "In the face of rejection by the nation of Israel Matthew, by Messianic prophecies, prepares his Jewish reader for the proclamation of a universal Savior."[788]

This Old Testament quotation helps the reader to see how many of the characteristics of Jesus and His ministry, that Matthew has presented, fit the pattern of messianic prophecy. It also sets the stage for other things that Matthew recorded that demonstrated Jesus' messiahship.

2. Conflict over Jesus' power 12:22-37 (cf. Mark 3:19-30; Luke 11:14-26)

The Pharisees moved beyond debate to personal abuse and character assassination in this pericope.

> "We come now to a crucial turning point in the relationship between the Pharisees, the nation, and Christ."[789]

Jesus' miracle and the response 12:22-24

12:22 "Then" (Gr. *tote*) does not demand a close chronological connection with what precedes (cf. 2:7; 11:20). The Greek text describes the man's afflictions in terms that show that his demon possession produced his blindness and dumbness. The miracle itself did not interest Matthew as much as the confrontation that it produced.[790]

12:23-24 The astonishment of the crowd prompted their question. It expected a negative answer. Literally they said, "This cannot be the Son of David, can it?" They raised the faint possibility that Jesus might be the Messiah, but primarily their question reflected their amazed unbelief. The Jews

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[786]Carson, "Matthew," pp. 286-87.
[787]M'Neile, p. 172.
[788]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 161.
[789]Pentecost, *The Words* . . ., p. 205.
[790]See Barclay, 2:38-39, for the view that demon possession is only psychosomatic.

expected Messiah to perform miracles (v. 38), but other things about Jesus, for example His servant characteristics, led them to conclude that He was not the "Son of David."

The Pharisees again attributed Jesus' power to Satan ("Beelzebul"; cf. 10:25; Isa. 5:20). This time their accusation created an open breach between themselves and Jesus.

> "Three times before Matthew 12 the kingdom was said to be near (3:2; 4:17; 10:7). Then after Jesus' opponents accused Him of casting out demons by the power of Satan (12:24-32; Mark 3:22-30; Luke 11:14-26), the nearness of the kingdom is never mentioned again in the Gospels."[791]

John's Gospel, by the way, makes no reference to the nearness of God's kingdom. By the time John wrote, probably late in the first century A.D., it was clear that the messianic kingdom had been postponed.

Jesus' reply in view of the response 12:25-37

12:25-26 Probably Jesus' knew His critics' "thoughts" as anyone else who had suffered such an attack would (cf. 9:4). Alternatively, this may be a statement of Jesus' omniscience. Any "kingdom," "city," or "household" that experiences internal conflict, will destroy itself eventually if the strife continues. This holds true for the domain over which "Satan" rules, as well. For Satan to cast out demons would amount to his casting out himself, since the demons do his work.

12:27 The Pharisees' "sons" cast out demons occasionally. These "sons" were probably their disciples, or less likely, the Jews more generally. In either case, some Jews in Jesus' day could cast out demons (cf. Acts 19:13).[792] If the Pharisees asserted that Jesus cast out demons by Satan's power, they would have to admit that their sons did so by the same power, something they would have denied.

12:28 The "Spirit of God" stands in stark contrast to Beelzebul. Matthew probably used "kingdom of God" here, rather than "kingdom of heaven," in order to connect the kingdom with the Spirit.

> "References to the Spirit occur only twelve times altogether in Matthew's gospel, with one-third of them in chapter 12. As might be expected in a gospel concerned to interpret the

[791]Stanley D. Toussaint and Jay A. Quine, "No, Not Yet: The Contingency of God's Promised Kingdom," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164:654 (April-June 2007):138.

[792]See Barclay, 2:41-43, for some instances of Jewish exorcisms, and Deissmann, pp. 259-61, for the translation of a Jewish exorcism text.

> significance of the life and ministry of Jesus, most of the references describe the work of the Spirit in relation to Him."[793]

Jesus was claiming that He received His power from God's "Spirit" (cf. v. 18), a clear messianic claim.[794] The kingdom was imminent because the King was present.

"Upon" you does not mean the kingdom had somehow entered the Jews or overtaken them, and they were now in it. Jesus was addressing the Pharisees, and He did not mean the kingdom had entered them, of all people, but that it had "suddenly arrived" and was "among" them with His Messianic presence. Moreover, Jesus' concept of the kingdom was an earthly physical one. Furthermore, everywhere else Jesus spoke of people entering the kingdom, not the kingdom entering them.[795]

12:29 Jesus encouraged the Pharisees to look at the same issue another way. Only a stronger person can bind a homeowner and ransack his house (cf. Isa. 49:24-25). On a deeper level, Jesus was speaking of Himself binding Satan and spoiling his house by casting out demons (cf. Mark 3:27; Luke 11:21-22). Thus, Jesus was claiming a superior power to Satan, that could only be divine. Jesus will really bind Satan for 1,000 years when the kingdom begins (Rev. 20:2). Jewish pseudepigraphal literature predicted that Messiah would do this (Assumption of Moses 10:1). The "pseudepigrapha" (lit. "false writings") is a large body of Jewish writings that are neither in the Old Testatment, nor in what Protestants refer to as the Apocrypha. These books date from ca. 200 B.C. to ca. A.D. 100.

12:30 Jesus' point in this statement was that there can be no neutrality in one's relationship to Him. Those who do not side with Jesus side with Satan. This put the Pharisees in undesirable company. The Old Testament viewed man's judgment as a harvest that God would conduct. Jesus claimed that He would be the harvesting Judge. Jesus' statement here would have rebuked the Pharisees and warned the undecided in the crowd. Apparently the Pharisees were not only refusing to come to Jesus themselves, but were even scattering the disciples that Jesus was gathering.

12:31-32 Jesus followed up His statement about the impossibility of being neutral (v. 30) with this further warning. The "therefore" (Gr. *dia touto*) indicates this relationship. "Blasphemy" involves extreme slander (cf. 9:3). God would forgive "any sin," including extreme slander of Jesus, when a person trusted in Jesus. However, He would not forgive "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit."

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[793]Lowery, pp. 31-32.

[794]See Mark R. Saucy, "Miracles and Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:611 (July-September 1996):281-307.

[795]H. D. A. Major, T. W. Manson, and C. J. Wright, *The Mission and Message of Jesus*, p. 596.

One view of the difference between these sins is that it is blasphemy against God's *human* messenger that can be forgiven, but blasphemy against God's *divine* messenger cannot.[796]

> ". . . the sin against the Holy Spirit can be truly described as the loss of all sense of sin."[797]

A better interpretation is that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, in view of the context (vv. 24-28), involved attributing Jesus' works to Satan rather than to the Spirit. The sin was not a matter of speech; the words spoken simply reflected the attitude of the heart. God would not forgive this sin because the person who committed it in Jesus' day was thereby strongly rejecting Jesus as the Messiah.[798] Even today, the only sin one can commit that God will not forgive, and that will result in his or her eternal damnation, is rejection of Jesus Christ (cf. John 3:18). Attributing Jesus' works to Satan was blasphemy of the Spirit in Jesus' day and this resulted in damnation.

Can a person commit this sin today? One can reject Jesus Christ, but one cannot blaspheme the Spirit in the same sense in which Jesus' contemporaries could. To do so, one would have to observe Jesus doing His works and at the same time attribute them to Satan.[799] One could say, therefore, that blasphemy against the Spirit was an unforgivable sin during Jesus' earthly ministry. The unforgivable sin at any time since Jesus began His earthly ministry to the present day is rejection of Jesus Christ.

Speaking "a word against" is the same as blasphemy. Extreme slander of Jesus was forgivable in His day, provided it did not go as far as attributing His works to Satan. That constituted blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Jesus gave this warning to the professedly neutral person who might attribute His works to Satan (v. 30). Such a person needed to realize that, even though he or she was not speaking against Jesus, that one could potentially be doing something with much graver consequences.

> "Given Matthew's christological interests and the unique and central position held by Jesus throughout the Gospel, one may understandably be surprised that Matthew has not said the reverse of what stands in the text, i.e., that blasphemy against the Spirit is forgivable but not that against the Son of Man. The gravity of the blasphemy against the Spirit, however, depends upon the Holy Spirit

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[796]Barclay, 2:47.
[797]Ibid., 2:50.
[798]See McClain, p. 315.
[799]Cf. Barbieri, p. 46.

> as the fundamental dynamic that stands behind and makes possible the entire messianic ministry of Jesus itself . . ."[800]

12:33 Jesus proceeded to point out that conduct typically reflects character (vv. 33-37; cf. 7:16-19). To have "good fruit" one must "make the tree good," for example by cultivating, grafting, fertilizing, etc. If one makes a tree rotten by neglect and abuse, for example, one will get "bad fruit." A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree yields bad fruit. Jesus' works were good, so He must be good.

12:34-35 Everywhere else in Matthew where the "brood of vipers" figure occurs, it refers to the Pharisees and other religious leaders (3:7; 23:33). That is undoubtedly whom Jesus addressed here, too. The figure pictures deadly antagonists. Jesus' point was that a person's character determines what he or she says and does. The mouth usually reveals what is in the heart. The Pharisees' extreme slander of Jesus revealed their rejection of Him. They needed a change of attitude toward Him, not just a change in their speech about Him.

It is going beyond what Jesus said, to interpret this statement as meaning that no true believer will ever say or do what is contrary to the nature of a believer to say or do. All good people say and do some things that are good and some things that are bad. Likewise, all bad people say and do some things that are good and some things that are bad. We are not exactly like the trees in this illustration.

12:36-37 Jesus did not want His critics to gain any satisfaction from what He had just said. Their externally righteous appearance did not excuse them from speaking as they did. Rather, people's "words" are what God will use to judge them eventually. The "careless" word is the word spoken without deliberation. One might think it insignificant, except that it reveals character. "Every word" spoken reflects the heart's overflow, and God knows about it. Therefore words are very important (cf. Eph. 5:3-4, 12; Col. 3:17; James 1:19; 3:1-12).

Verse 37 sounds as though it may have been proverbial, or perhaps Jesus made it a proverb here. The context clarifies that the justification and condemnation in view deal with God passing judgment on everyone. Obviously, Jesus did not mean that if a person was able to say all the right words, he or she could deceive God and win salvation by clever speech. The basis of justification and condemnation is character, but "words" reveal character, so *they* become the instruments by which God judges.

Jesus' critics thought they were assessing Him when they said He did His works by Satan's power (v. 24). Jesus pointed out that they were really

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[800]Hagner, p. 348.

assessing themselves. They thought they were judging Him with their words, but really God would judge them with their words.

The break between Jesus and the religious leaders was now final. They charged Jesus with doing miracles with Satan's power rather than God's power. Jesus refuted their charge and warned them about the seriousness of this sin, but they still rejected Him.

> "It is worth noting that in Mt. the breach between Jesus and the authorities is not definite until the Beelzebub charge."[801]

> "This incident, then, marked the great turning point in the life of Christ. From this point on to the cross the nation is viewed in the Gospels as having rejected Christ as Messiah. The unofficial rejection by the leaders would become official when finalized at the cross."[802]

3. Conflict over Jesus' sign 12:38-45

The fourth incident, and the third type of conflict, concerned a sign that Jesus' critics requested.

> "The Pharisees and teachers of the law knew full well that Jesus was claiming to be the heaven-sent Messiah. They were familiar with the multitude of miracles He had already performed to authenticate His person. But now they came to challenge Him and request a sign that would prove to them He was what He claimed to be."[803]

12:38 Matthew's connective again was weak. This incident was not a continuation of the preceding controversy chronologically, but thematically. Some of the scribes and Pharisees asked Jesus to perform "a sign," not just a miracle. He had performed many miracles, and they had concluded that they were satanic (v. 24). A sign was an immediate tangible assurance that something prophesied would surely happen. They requested a particular type of miracle: "a sign *from heaven*" (16:1). Evidently they wanted a sign that Jesus Himself would not originate.[804] They believed Jesus could not produce one and that His failure would discredit Him.

12:39-40 The "evil and adulterous generation" was the larger group of unbelieving Jews that the scribes and Pharisees represented. Adultery is a common Old Testament metaphor for spiritual apostasy, departure from God (Isa. 50:1; 57:3; Jer. 3:8; 13:27; 31:32; Ezek 16:15, 32, 35-42; Hos. 2:1-7; 3:1; 7:13-

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[801]M. Kiddle, "The Conflict Between the Disciples, the Jews, and the Gentiles in St. Matthew's Gospel," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 36 (January 1935):37.
[802]Pentecost, *The Words . . .*, p. 208.
[803]Ibid.
[804]Tasker, p. 131.

16). God had granted signs in the past to strengthen the weak faith of believers such as Abraham, Joshua, and Gideon. Jesus refused to give His critics one, since they wanted a sign to trap Him, rather than to bolster weak faith.

"The sign of Jonah" was not a sign for the scribes and Pharisees. It became a sign to believers in Him later. The sign of Jonah means the sign that Jonah himself was to the Ninevites. He signified one whom God had delivered from certain death.[805] Jesus' use of "Son of Man" stressed His suffering role (cf. 8:20). The "heart" of the earth may recall Jonah 2:3 (cf. Ps. 46:2). This is a reference to Jesus' burial. Jesus was saying that His deliverance from death in the grave, which would be similar to Jonah's deliverance, only greater, would prove His claims.

As the Jews reckoned time, "three days and three nights" meant either three full days or any *parts* of three days.[806] Jesus was in the grave for parts of three days. Some have mistakenly claimed that Matthew understood Jesus wrongly, since Jesus was literally in the grave only two nights.[807]

12:41 The Pharisees believed, correctly, that judgment followed resurrection.[808] Jesus followed His comments about resurrection in verse 40 with instruction about "judgment" in verse 41.

His critics' condemnation would be greater than that of the Ninevites, because the Ninevites "repented" at Jonah's preaching, but the scribes and Pharisees would not repent at Jesus' preaching. Jesus did not mean that the believing Ninevites and the unbelieving Jews of Jesus' day would appear before God at the same time. That is clear because the Ninevites would not condemn the Jews, but God would. Jesus meant that the believing Ninevites could testify against the unbelieving Jews when each group appeared before God for "judgment."

The "something greater than Jonah" was, again, the authority of Messiah. The sign Jesus promised did not meet His critics' demand, since they did not need weak faith strengthened. It was a sign that He provided for His own disciples. By refusing to respond to Jesus' message, the scribes and Pharisees showed themselves to be worse sinners than the Gentile Ninevites.

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[805]Eugene H. Merrill, "The Sign of Jonah," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 23 (1980):23-30.

[806]Carson, "Matthew," p. 296.

[807]E.g., Barclay, 2:55-56.

[808]F. W. Green, ed., *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew in the Revised Version*, p. 183.

> "Jesus is greater than Jonah in many ways. He is greater in His person, for Jonah was a mere man. He was greater in His obedience, for Jonah disobeyed God and was chastened. Jesus actually died, while Jonah's 'grave' was in the belly of the great fish. Jesus arose from the dead under His own power. Jonah ministered only to one city [according to the Book of Jonah], while Jesus gave His life for the whole world. Certainly Jesus was greater in His love, for Jonah did not love the people of Nineveh—he wanted them to die. Jonah's message saved Nineveh from judgment; he was a messenger of the wrath of God. Jesus' message was that of grace and salvation."[809]

12:42 By referring to "Jonah" the same way He referred to the "Queen of the South," Jesus strongly supported the view that Jonah was a historical person. The "Queen of the South" was the "Queen of Sheba" (1 Kings 10:1-13). She came from the southern end of the Arabian Peninsula, that for the Jews, was the "ends of the earth" (cf. Jer. 6:20; Joel 3:8). She visited Jerusalem because of reports about Solomon's great "wisdom" that had reached her ears. The "something greater than Solomon" was Messiah, the embodiment of divine wisdom.

The queen would join the Ninevites in *condemning* the unbelievers of Jesus' day, because they failed to acknowledge One with greater wisdom than Solomon's, as well as One with a greater message than Jonah's. Jesus was greater than Solomon in His wisdom, wealth, and works.

In both of Jesus' comparisons: Gentiles responded, and Jews did not. Such had been the case in Jesus' ministry so far, and this would continue. The proud scribes and Pharisees undoubtedly resented Jesus comparing them unfavorably with Gentiles.

> "It is a tragic feature in the history of Israel that the nation rejected their deliverers the first time, but accepted them the second time. This was true with Joseph, Moses, David, the prophets (Matt. 23:29), and Jesus Christ."[810]

> "Temple and priesthood, prophet, king, and wise man—something greater is now here."[811]

12:43-45 The point of these verses that describe demon possession goes back to Jesus' warning about the peril of being neutral toward Him (v. 30). A demon cast out of a person initially goes through arid "places seeking

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[809]Wiersbe, 1:43.
[810]Ibid., 1:44.
[811]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 493.

rest." This statement affirms the Jewish belief that demons prefer dry places (Tobit 8:3; cf. Rev. 18:2).[812] Eventually they seek to inhabit human bodies, through which they can do more damage.

Jesus implied the possibility of demonic repossession (v. 44). The demon's "house" is a human body in Jesus' story. The demon returns to the person it had left, discovering that he or she is still receptive to the demon's presence, because no superior power occupies that person. Consequently the demon invites "seven other" demons—a full complement ("more wicked than itself")—and they take up residence in the person.

Jesus compared the unbelieving Jews of His day to the demon-possessed person. John the Baptist and Jesus had purified the lives of many in Galilee by calling them to repentance, but not all of them had embraced Jesus in faith. Jesus had cast demons out of many people, but they did not all believe that He was the Messiah. This neutral condition left them vulnerable to an even worse invasion from Satan, to say nothing about judgment from God. These neutral individuals represented the nation as a whole.

Many Christians believe that Jesus' teaching here gives evidence that demons cannot possess a true believer. That may be so, but demons can afflict believers greatly. Believers are no more immune against attack from Satan, and his demons, than they are against attacks from the world and the flesh. The line between demon possession and demon affliction is a thin one that is very hard to identify.

Jesus' critics already had plenty of evidence as to who He was. They did not need to see more miracles that proved Jesus' Messiahship. Instead, He gave them a different kind of sign, one that would vindicate His claims after He rose from the dead.

4. Conflict over Jesus' kin 12:46-50 (cf. Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21)

A very subtle form of opposition arose from Jesus' physical family members. It provided an opportunity for Jesus to explain true relationship to Messiah and to affirm His disciples.

12:46-47 Jesus' "brothers" were evidently His physical half-brothers, the sons of Mary. Some Roman Catholics, desiring to maintain their "perpetual virginity of Mary" doctrine, and some Protestants, have argued that they were Jesus' brothers but the sons of Joseph by a previous marriage.[813] If they were, the oldest of these brothers would have been the legal heir to David's throne.

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[812]Cf. Tasker, p. 133. See Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 2:748-63, and 2:770-76, for the Jewish views of angels and demons.

[813]E.g., John McHugh, *The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament*, pp. 200-202; B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John*, p. 116.

12:48-50 Jesus' question did not depreciate His physical "mother and brothers." His answer showed that He simply gave priority to His heavenly Father and doing His will (cf. 10:37). Spiritual relationship takes precedence over physical relationship (cf. 8:18-23). This underlines the importance of believing in Jesus and giving Him first place. Jesus' disciples become His adopted, spiritual family. Note that the word "whoever," referring to those who do the will of God by believing on His Son, left the possibility of salvation open to anyone (cf. 11:28-30).

These verses have strong Christological implications. They also reveal more about the spiritual family that was forming around Jesus. In spite of rising opposition, God's purposes through Messiah were advancing (cf. vv. 18, 20).

C. Adaptations because of Israel's rejection of Jesus 13:1-53

> "The die is cast. The religious leaders have openly declared their opposition to their Messiah. The people of Israel are amazed at the power of Jesus and His speech, but they fail to recognize Him as their King. Not seeing the Messiahship of Jesus in His words and works, they have separated the fruit from the tree. Because of this opposition and spiritual apathy, the King adapts His teaching method and the doctrine concerning the coming of the kingdom to the situation."[814]

Jesus had occasionally used parables to illustrate His teaching (e.g., 5:15; 7:3-5, 13-14, 15-20, 21-27, 35; 9:15-17; 11:16-17; 12:25, 29, 43-45). Rising opposition led Him to use them more.[815] Now He began to use parables to reveal new truth about the kingdom.[816] Chapter 13 contains Jesus' third major discourse in Matthew, His Parables about the Kingdom.[817] Matthew presented the first two discourses as uninterrupted monologues by Jesus. He interrupted this third discourse frequently with narrative introductions.

John and Jesus had previously announced that the kingdom was at hand. *Jesus stopped saying that when Israel's rejection of Him was firm* (i.e., after chapters 11 and 12). Instead, He began to reveal new truth about the kingdom, because of Israel's rejection of Him and His rejection of the nation. This new truth, revelation not previously given, was a mystery. The term "mystery," as it occurs in the New Testament, refers to newly revealed truth. It has nothing to do with spookiness. God had previously not revealed it, but now He did.

Kingsbury perceived the theme of this speech as "instruction in the secrets of the Kingdom" and outlined it as follows: (I) On the Secrets of the Kingdom as Being

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[814]Toussaint, *Behold the . . .*, p. 168.

[815]See Appendix 4, a chart of "The Parables of Jesus," at the end of these notes.

[816]See Mark L. Bailey, "Guidelines for Interpreting Jesus' Parables," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155:617 (January-March 1998):29-38.

[817]See J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, pp. 215-45; idem, *The Parables of Jesus*.

Revealed to the Disciples But Not to Israel (13:3-35); and (II) On the Secrets of the Kingdom as Urging Disciples to Obey Without Reserve the Will of God (13:36-52).[818]

As elsewhere in Matthew, references to the kingdom indicate the future messianic (millennial) kingdom. However, Jesus taught some things here about the unseen growth and development of the kingdom, in the *inter-advent age*, that precede the establishment of that kingdom. The scope of this discourse, as is true of the former two major discourses in Matthew, is the whole inter-advent age.

Matthew presented this discourse in a chiastic (crossing) structure.[819] This structure is common in the Old Testament and in other Jewish writings. It enhances the unity of the discourse and focuses attention on the central element as what is most important. A diagram of this structure follows.

A The introduction vv. 1-2
- **B** The first parable to the crowds vv. 3-9
  - **C** An explanatory interlude: purpose and explanation vv. 10-23
    - **D** Three more parables to the crowd vv. 24-33
      - **E** An explanatory interlude: fulfillment and explanation vv. 34-43
    - **D'** Three parables to the disciples vv. 44-48
  - **C'** An explanatory interlude: explanation and response vv. 49-51
- **B'** The last parable to the disciples v. 52

A' The conclusion v. 53

This structural analysis reveals that the discourse consists of two sections of four parables each, the first four to the multitudes and the last four to the disciples. In each section, one parable stands out from the others. In the first group it is the first parable, and in the second group it is the last one. The central section between the two groups of parables explains the function of the parables and explains one of them.

> "Modern readers are so used to thinking of parables as helpful illustrative stories that they find it hard to grasp the message of this chapter that parables do not explain. To some they may convey enlightenment, but for others they may only deepen confusion. The difference lies in the hearer's ability to rise to the challenge. Far from giving explanations, parables themselves need to be explained, and three are given detailed explanations in this chapter (vv. 18-23, 37-43, 49-50). But that explanation is not given to everyone, but only to the disciples (vv. 10 and 36), and Matthew not only makes the point explicit in v. 34 (only parables for the crowds, not explanations), but also confirms it by a formula quotation in v. 35:

[818]Kingsbury, *Matthew as . . .*, p. 112.

[819]David Wenham, "The Structure of Matthew XIII," *New Testament Studies* 25 (1979):516-22.

> parables are 'hidden things.' In this way the medium (parables) is itself integral to the message it conveys (the secrets of the kingdom of heaven)."[820]
>
> "Perhaps no other mode of teaching was so common among the Jews as that by Parables. Only in their case, they were almost entirely illustrations of what had been said or taught; while, in the case of Christ, they served as the foundation for His teaching."[821]

1. The setting 13:1-3a (cf. Mark 4:1-2; Luke 8:4)

Matthew linked this parabolic teaching with the controversy in chapter 12 by using the phrase "on that day" (NASB) or "that same day" (NIV, Gr. *en te hemera ekeine*). These parables were a response to Israel's rejection of her King.

Jesus sat down by the Sea of Galilee to teach the people in typical rabbinic fashion (cf. 5:1-2). In response to the large "multitudes" that assembled to listen to Him, Jesus "sat" in a "boat" where more people could hear Him more easily. He proceeded to address this crowd, most of whom had rejected Him (cf. 11:16-24).

Some expositors have seen symbolism in Jesus' physical movements as described here. They believe that by going "out of the house" He was leaving the house of Israel. "Sitting by the sea" represents going to the Gentiles.

> "Our Lord is leaving the nation of Israel and turning to the world. He is now speaking of what will take place in the world until He returns as King."[822]

Jesus proceeded to tell four parables to the crowd assembled before Him (vv. 3b-9, 24-30, 31-32, 33). He did not interpret the meaning of these parables to the crowd. They would have to figure them out on their own, and disbelief in Jesus as the Messiah clouded their understanding.

Matthew prefaced Jesus' first parable by introducing what follows as parabolic teaching. The Greek word *parabole* is a noun, and *paraballo* is the verb, meaning "to throw beside." The noun means, "a placing of one thing by the side of another, juxtaposition, as of ships in battle."[823] Metaphorically it means "a comparing, comparison of one thing with another, likeness, similitude."[824] The Septuagint translates the Hebrew word *masal* with *parabole* 28 of its 33 occurrences in the Old Testament. The word *masal* refers to proverbs, maxims, similes, allegories, fables, comparisons, riddles, taunts, and stories embodying some truth. Thus it has a wide range of meanings. The New Testament uses

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[820]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 500. See also Tasker, pp. 134-35.
[821]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 1:581.
[822]McGee, 4:71.
[823]Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. "*parabole*," p. 479.
[824]Ibid.

of *parabole* likewise reflect a wide range of meanings, though essentially a parable involves a comparison. Most parables are extended similes or metaphors.

> ". . . in the Synoptic Gospels a parable denotes an extended comparison between nature or life and the things involving the spiritual life and God's dealings with men."[825]

> "So understood, a *parabole* is an utterance which does not carry its meaning on the surface, and which thus demands thought and perception if the hearer is to benefit from it."[826]

Jesus deliberately "spoke . . . in parables" to conceal truth from the unbelieving crowds (vv. 11-15; cf. 7:6). Why did He speak to them in parables if He did not want them to understand what He said? He did so because a parable might be the instrument God would use to enlighten some who had not yet firmly rejected Him, but were still open-minded (cf. 11:25-26). By concealing the truth from His unbelieving critics, Jesus was showing them grace.

> "They were saved from the guilt of rejecting the truth, for they were not allowed to recognize it."[827]

Jesus also taught in parables because the Old Testament predicted that Messiah would speak in veiled language (v. 35; cf. Ps. 78:2).

As will become clear, Jesus was instructing His disciples about what would happen since Israel had rejected Him. God would postpone the messianic kingdom until a later time. If Jesus had told the multitudes that the kingdom would not begin immediately, the people would have turned against Him in even greater numbers. Most of the Jews could not bring themselves to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. It would be even more difficult for them to accept a postponement of the kingdom. Significantly, Jesus' teaching about the postponement of the kingdom followed Israel's rejection of Him as her King.[828]

> "The seven parables of ch. 13, called by our Lord 'mysteries of the kingdom of heaven' (v. 11), taken together describe the result of the presence of the Gospel in the world during the present age, that is, the time of seed-sowing which began with our Lord's personal ministry and will end with the 'harvest' (vv. 40-43). The result is the mingled tares and wheat, good fish and bad, in the sphere of Christian profession. It is Christendom."[829]

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[825]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 169.
[826]France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 502.
[827]Plummer, p. 188.
[828]See Mark Saucy, "The Kingdom-of-God Sayings in Matthew," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 151:602 (April-June 1994):175-97.
[829]*The New Scofield* . . ., p. 1013.

2. Parables addressed to the multitudes 13:3b-33

Jesus spoke four parables to the multitudes, and provided some instruction to His disciples about how to interpret them.

The parable of the soils 13:3b-9 (cf. Mark 4:3-9; Luke 8:5-8)

The first parable is an introduction to those that follow, and the last one is a conclusion and application of the whole series.[830] Both emphasize God's Word.

> "Modern interpretation of the parable has increasingly recognized this implication of the literary form of this particular parable, over against the dogmatic assertion of earlier NT scholarship, following Adolf Jülicher, that a parable has only a single point and that all the rest is mere narrative scenery, which must not be 'allegorized' to determine what each detail means. In this cast the way the story is constructed demands that the detail be noticed, and to interpret those details individually is not arbitrary 'allegorization' but a responsible recognition of the way Jesus constructed the story."[831]

13:3b-7 The focus in the first parable is on the *soils*, rather than on "the sower." Some seeds fell beside the path that was hard from traffic (v. 4). They lay on the surface where birds saw them and devoured them before they could germinate. Other seeds fell where the topsoil was thin (vv. 5-6). Their roots could not penetrate the limestone underneath to obtain necessary moisture from the subsoil. When the hot weather set in, the seeds germinated quickly but did not have the necessary resources to sustain continued growth. Consequently they died. A third group of seeds fell among "the thorns" that grew along the edges of the field (v. 7). These thorn bushes robbed the young plants of light and nourishment, so they died too.

> "The figure marks a new beginning. To labor in God's vineyard (Israel, Isa. 5:1-7) is one thing; to go forth sowing the seed of the Word in a field which is the world, quite another (cp. Mt. 10:5)."[832]

13:8-9 Some seed also fell on good ground and produced "a crop." Even "a hundredfold" return was not outstanding.[833] The same sower and seed produced no crop, some crop, or much crop—depending on the soil.

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[830]Stanley D. Toussaint, "The Introductory and Concluding Parables of Matthew Thirteen," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 121:484 (October-December 1964):351-55.

[831]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 503.

[832]*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 1013. See also McClain, pp. 324-25; McGee, 4:71.

[833]Carson, "Matthew," p. 305.

> "This fourth soil cautions us not to expect identical levels of fruitfulness in all people, since believers grow spiritually at different rates."[834]

Jesus' final statement means the parable needs careful consideration and interpretation (v. 9). Jesus interpreted it to His disciples later in verses 18-23.[835]

The first interlude about understanding the parables 13:10-23

This pericope falls into two parts: Jesus' explanation of why He taught with parables (vv. 10-17), and His explanation of the first parable (vv. 18-23).

The purpose of the parables 13:10-17 (cf. Mark 4:10-12; Luke 8:9-10)

13:10 The disciples wanted to know "why" Jesus was teaching "in parables." This was not the clearest form of communication. Evidently the disciples asked this question when Jesus had finished giving the parables to the crowd (cf. Mark 4:10). The plural "parables" suggests this. Matthew apparently rearranged the material Jesus presented, to help his readers understand the reasons for Jesus' use of parables at this point, since their enigmatic character raises questions in our minds.

13:11-12 Jesus explained that He was teaching in parables, because He wanted to give new revelation ("mysteries") concerning "the kingdom" to His disciples, but not to the multitudes (cf. 7:6). Therefore He presented this truth in a veiled way. The word "mysteries" (Gr. *mysterion*, secrets) comes from the Old Testament and the Hebrew word *raz* (Dan. 2:18, 19, 27, 28, 29, 30, 47 [twice]; 4:9). It refers to what God knows will happen in the future. "Mysteries" are "secrets," namely, divine plans for the future that He reveals to His elect. Paul defined a mystery in Colossians 1:26 where he wrote, "the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints."

> "A 'mystery' in Scripture is a previously hidden truth now divinely revealed. This chapter shows clearly for the first time, that there will be an interval between Christ's first and second advents (vv. 17, 35; cp. 1 Pet. 1:10-12)."[836]

Jesus was revealing some of God's plans concerning the future of the messianic kingdom, but He was not allowing the unbelieving multitudes to understand these plans.

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[834]Bailey, in *The New . . .*, p. 25.
[835]See idem, "The Parable of the Sower and the Soils," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155:618 (April-June 1998):172-88.
[836]*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 1014.

> "Whenever, then, the fewness of believers disturbs us, let the converse come to mind, that only those to whom it is given can comprehend the mysteries of God [Matt. 13:11]."[837]

Some have interpreted these parables as revealing "the coming of the Kingdom into history in advance of its apocalyptic manifestation."[838] This is the view of covenant premillenarians and progressive dispensationalists. Others believe Jesus revealed information about the kingdom in view of its postponement.[839] This is the interpretation of normative dispensationalists.

> ". . . the very outskirts of the subject already force the conclusion that those mysteries refer not to the nature of the kingdom, but to the manner of its establishment, the means employed, the preparation for it, the time for its manifestation, and such related subjects."[840]

The Bible student must determine which of these two views is correct, on the basis of the meaning of the parables, and from all that Matthew has recorded about the kingdom.

Some dispensational writers believe the parables in Matthew 13 deal with the period between the first and second advents of Messiah, exclusively.[841] Some of these believe that there is no connection between these parables and Old Testament teaching.[842] Other dispensationalists believe these parables describe the inter-advent period culminating in the messianic kingdom. This is the interpretation I prefer, and it is quite similar to the preceding view. It seems to me that since Jesus consistently used the same terms for the kingdom in chapter 13 that He did elsewhere in Matthew, He was referring to the same entity. Nothing in the chapter makes this interpretation unnatural. Another option is that these parables describe only the messianic (millennial) kingdom.[843]

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[837]Calvin, *Institutes of* . . ., 1:7:5.

[838]George E. Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism*, p. 222; cf. p. 225. See also Carson, "Matthew," p. 307.

[839]Toussiant, pp. 171-72.

[840]Peters, 1:142.

[841]E.g., Walvoord, *Matthew:* . . ., p. 97-107; Barbieri, p. 50-51; and Pentecost, *The Words* . . ., p. 214.

[842]E.g., Gaebelein, 1:263-64; Barnhouse, pp. 169-70; Kelly, pp. 265-66; E. Schuyler English, *Studies in the Gospel According to Matthew*, pp. 91-92; and Ada R. Habershon, *The Study of the Parables*, pp. 112, 118-19.

[843]E.g., Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., pp. 175-76; and Ronald N. Glass, "The Parables of the Kingdom: A Paradigm for Consistent Dispensational Hermeneutics," paper presented at the meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Lisle, Illinois, 18 November 1994.

Verse 12 repeats a proverbial truth (cf. 25:29). It encourages gratitude for spiritual blessings and warns against taking these for granted. The believing disciples had access into the kingdom by faith in Jesus Christ. God would give them greater understanding that would result in abundance of blessing. However, the unbeliever would not only fail to receive further revelation, but God would remove the privilege of becoming a subject in the kingdom from him or her.

13:13 Jesus restated His reason for using parables, in terms of human perception, rather than divine intention (cf. vv. 11-12). The unbelievers were not able to understand what He had to reveal, since they had refused to accept more basic revelation, namely, about Jesus and the imminence of the kingdom. The parables do not just convey information. They challenge for a response. The unbelievers had not responded to the challenge Jesus had already given them. Until they did, they were in no condition to receive more truth.

> "The giving of these parables, therefore, must be regarded as a *divine judgment* upon the nation of Israel."[844]

13:14-15 Jesus quoted Isaiah 6:9-10, where God told His prophet that widespread unbelief, and consequent divine heart-hardening, would be what he would experience in his ministry. The context of the Isaiah passage explained that Israel's hardness would continue until the land lay in ruins. The Exile was not the complete fulfillment of this prophecy. The hardhearted condition was still present in Jesus' day and, we might add, even today. Most Jews will remain generally unresponsive until their land is desolate in the Tribulation, but they will turn to the Lord when He returns to earth at His Second Coming (Zech. 12:10-14; Rom. 11:25-26). The word "lest" (NASB) or "otherwise" (NIV), in the middle of verse 15, probably indicates God's judicial hardening of the Jews' hearts (cf. 2 Thess. 2:11).

13:16-17 The believing disciples were "blessed" for this reason. They saw not only what their unbelieving contemporaries could not see, but what many prophets and righteous people of bygone years longed to see—but could not. Jesus referred to Old Testament prophets and believers who wanted more revelation about the kingdom than they had. Jesus' claim, to being able to reveal more than the Old Testament prophets knew, was a claim to being more than a prophet. Only God could do what He claimed to be doing.

> ". . . in Rabbinic opinion revelation of God's mysteries would only be granted to those who were righteous or learned."[845]

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[844]McClain, p. 322.

[845]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 1:597.

As the unbelievers in Jesus' day were the spiritual descendants of the unbelievers in Isaiah's day, so the disciples were the sons of the prophets. Likewise, Jesus was the Son of God.

The explanation of the parable of the soils 13:18-23 (cf. Mark 4:13-20; Luke 8:11-15)

Jesus interpreted His first parable to help His disciples understand both it and the others that followed (cf. Mark 4:13).

13:18 Since former prophets and righteous people wanted to know this revelation, and since the unbelieving could not understand it, the disciples needed to listen to it carefully.

13:19 Some people heard Jesus' preaching about the kingdom, but, like hard soil, the truth did not penetrate them. Satan ("the evil one") snatched the message away before they really understood it. His agents of evil were pictured in the parable as birds (v. 4; cf. Jer. 5:26-27; Rev. 18:2). The four soil types represent four *kinds of reception* people gave to the preaching about the kingdom.

13:20-21 The second type of soil stands for those whose initial response to the message Jesus preached was enthusiastic reception ("joy"). This reception gave hope for much fruit to follow. However, external pressures inhibit growth, and because they do not have an adequate rooting in the truth, they soon fade and wither (cf. 5:29). These people are disciples who begin well, but fail to continue to follow the Lord faithfully. Whether they are saved or lost is beside the point. However, some expositors have restricted the meaning to either saved or lost disciples.[846]

> "It is important to understand the explanation of the parable of the soils in its context and with the purpose of the original parable particularly in mind. The key issue is responsiveness or non-responsiveness to the message of the kingdom."[847]

13:22 This disciple (soil "among thorns") allows the other concerns of life to crowd out his commitment to Jesus. He permits the competing concerns of life to take precedence over his spiritual development (cf. 19:16-22). The present life, rather than the life to come, and present treasure, rather than future treasure, capture his affections. They are deceitful because they can drain spiritual vitality before the person realizes what is happening to him

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[846]E.g., Robertson, *Word Pictures . . .*, 1:107; Robert N. Wilkin, "The Parable of the Four Soils: Do the Middle Two Soils Represent Believers or Unbelievers? (Matthew 13:20-21)," *The Grace Evangelical Society News* 3:8 (August-September 1988):2.

[847]Hagner, p. 381.

or her. Interestingly, the enemy of fruitfulness in the first instance is the *devil*, in the second instance it is the *flesh*, and in the third instance it is the *world* (cf. 1 Pet. 5:8; Rom. 7:18-24; 1 John 2:15-17).

13:23 The "good soil" stands for the person who understands the message about the kingdom, when he or she hears it, and responds appropriately to it. This would involve believing in Jesus. Such a person eventually becomes spiritually productive, though the degree of productivity varies (cf. 20:1-15). However, Jesus commended all who received the message of the kingdom, and believed it, regardless of their measure of productivity. The "fruit" in view probably represents increasing understanding of, and proper response to, divine revelation, in view of the context.

If the disciples understood this parable, they could understand the others that followed.

> "The principle taught by the parable is this: reception of the word of the kingdom in one's heart produces more understanding and revelation of the kingdom."[848]

The parable of the weeds 13:24-30

> "Between these two parables [the parable of the soils, vv. 2-23, and the parable of the homeowner, v. 52] are six parables that reveal new truths about God's kingdom. Jesus called them 'the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven' (v. 11). These new truths revealed that a new age would intervene before the millennial kingdom would come; this new age is the present church-age dispensation. Because Israel refused to accept Jesus as their Messiah, a drastic change was made in God's prophetic program. Whereas the kingdom had been proclaimed as near, now a formerly unpredicted period of time would intervene before the kingdom would come. These parables contain truths not seen in the Old Testament."[849]

> "The parable of the sower shows that though the kingdom will now make its way amid hard hearts, competing pressures, and even failure, it will produce an abundant crop. But one might ask whether Messiah's people should immediately separate the crop from the weeds; and this next parable answers the question negatively: there will be a delay in separation until the harvest."[850]

The second and seventh parables both deal with judgment.

13:24 Jesus told the crowds another parable. He literally said, "The kingdom of heaven *has become like* . . ." Matthew used the aorist passive tense, *homoiothe*. This is very significant because it indicates a change in the

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[848]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 179.
[849]Idem and Quine, p. 139.
[850]Carson, "Matthew," pp. 315-16.

kingdom program. The change was a result of Israel's rejection of Jesus. In all these parables, Jesus did not mean that any single person or object in the parable symbolized the kingdom. The narrative itself communicated truth about the kingdom.

> "The parable of the wheat and tares is not a description of the world, but of that which professes to be the kingdom [i.e., Christendom]."[851]

13:25-26 The farmer's "enemy" maliciously "sowed" weeds ("tares") that looked like the "wheat." This weed was evidently bearded darnel (Lat. *lolium temulentum*), a plant that looks very much like wheat when the plants are young. The roots would intertwine with those of the wheat, but when the two plants reached maturity it would be clear which was which. The enemy thoroughly distributed the darnel seed among the young wheat. As the plants grew, it "became evident" to the field owner's servants what the enemy had done.[852]

13:27 The function of the slaves in the parable is simply to get information from the owner.

13:28-30 The farmer "landowner" recognized that "an enemy" was responsible for the weeds, but he instructed his servants to allow the weeds "to grow" among the wheat "until the harvest." Then he would separate them. Evidently there were many weeds. "The reapers" would "gather" the weeds first and "burn them." Then they would harvest "the wheat."

The new truth about the present age that this parable revealed is that good and evil people will co-exist in it (e.g., Judas Iscariot among Jesus' disciples; cf. vv. 47-49). In contrast, the Old Testament prophets said that in the coming messianic kingdom, righteousness will prevail and God will judge sin swiftly (cf. Isa. 11:1-5; 16:5; 32:1; 54:14; 60:17-18; Jer. 33:14-15).

Jesus interpreted this parable to His disciples later (vv. 36-43). He previously used the Old Testament figure of harvest to refer to *judgment* (9:37-38). In this case, the wheat and the weeds must both be people who face judgment in the future.[853] Another view is that the wheat represents true doctrine and the weeds false doctrine.[854] But verse 38 identifies the tares as "the *sons* of the evil one."

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[851]*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 1015.

[852]See Barclay, 2:81-82, for more detail concerning this process.

[853]See Mark L. Bailey, "The Parable of the Tares," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155:619 (July-September 1998):266-79.

[854]McGee, 4:75.

The parable of the mustard seed 13:31-32 (cf. Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19)

This third, and the fourth parable, both deal with the growth of the present form of the kingdom.

> ". . . wherever Jesus tells a pair of closely parallel parables, and he does so several times in the Gospels, without exception these parables make basically the same point, rather than opposite points. So we should almost certainly allow the parable of the mustard seed to govern our interpretation of the parable of the leaven here as well."[855]

The "mustard seed" was so small that the Jews used it proverbially to represent a very small thing (cf. 17:20).[856]

> "We are not to suppose that the mustard-seed is the least of all seeds *in the world*, but it was the smallest which the husbandman was accustomed to *sow*, and the 'tree,' when full grown, was larger than the other herbs in his garden."[857]

When mature, the mustard plant stood 10 to 12 feet tall as "the largest of garden plants" (NIV).[858] Consequently it became a perch for "birds." Several Old Testament passages use a tree with birds flocking to its branches to illustrate a kingdom that people perceive as great (Judg. 9:15; Ps. 104:12; Ezek. 17:22-24; 31:3-14; Dan. 4:7-23). The birds evidently represent those who seek shelter in the kingdom.

The Jews correctly believed that the messianic kingdom would be very large. Why did Jesus choose the mustard plant since it did not become as large as some other plants? Evidently He did so because of the small beginning of the mustard plant. The contrast between an unusually small beginning and a large mature plant is the point of this parable.[859] Jesus' ministry began despicably small in the eyes of many Jews. Nevertheless, from this small beginning would come the worldwide kingdom predicted in the Old Testament.[860]

The parable of the yeast hidden in meal 13:33 (cf. Luke 13:20-21)

This parable stresses the extensive ultimate condition and consequences, of the kingdom, that would be out of all proportion to its insignificant beginnings.

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[855]Blomberg, *Preaching the . . .*, pp. 123-24.
[856]Mishnah *Niddah* 5:2.
[857]Thomson, 2:101.
[858]Cf. Lenski, pp. 527-28.
[859]Cf. N. A. Dahl, *Jesus in the Memory of the Early Church*, pp. 155-56.
[860]See Mark L. Bailey, "The Parable of the Mustard Seed," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155:620 (October-December 1998):449-59.

> "Whereas the parable of the mustard seed answers the question of whether the phase of the kingdom planted by Jesus would survive, the parable of the leavening process answers how."[861]

Some interpreters have understood yeast as a metaphorical reference to evil.[862] This has led some of them to interpret the "meal" as *the gospel* and the "leaven" as *false doctrine*. However, not all uses of yeast in the Old Testament carry this symbolic meaning (e.g., Lev. 7:13; 23:15-18).[863]

This parable stresses the hidden internal change taking place in the kingdom, between its inception in Jesus' ministry, and its final form when the kingdom will cover the earth in the Millennium (cf. 5:13).

> "The kingdom of heaven may be initially insignificant, but it is pervasive."[864]

> ". . . the Kingdom of God, when received within, would seem like leaven hid, but would gradually pervade, assimilate, and transform the whole of our common life."[865]

> "The manifestation of the presence of the kingdom in some form in the Church age is clearly taught in the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven . . ."[866]

This fact led J. Dwight Pentecost to call the inter-advent age the mystery form of the kingdom.[867]

The fact that "a woman" put the "leaven" in the meal is probably an insignificant detail of the parable, as is the amount of flour. Three *satas* of flour (about three-fifths of a bushel) is the amount of flour that a housewife baked into bread for an average family.[868]

> "Practical applications of this parable to present readers can include the following. First, believers should depend on what God is doing through His Spirit in the present age. Second, Christians should be suspicious of any man-made, externally influenced institutional structures that say they are the manifestation of God's kingdom. Third, believers must be cautious

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[861]Idem, "The Parable of the Leavening Process," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156:621 (January-March 1999):62.
[862]E.g., McGee, 4:77; Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 182; Walvoord, *Matthew:* . . ., p. 103; Kent, "The Gospel . . ., p. 953; and *The New Scofield* . . ., p. 1015.
[863]Cf. Barbieri, p. 51.
[864]France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 528.
[865]Edersheim, *The Life* . . ., 1:594.
[866]Gerry Breshears, "The Body of Christ: Prophet, Priest, or King?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37:1 (March 1994):9.
[867]J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, pp. 142-44.
[868]Idem, *The Words* . . ., p. 218.

about setting dates and presuming the arrival of the kingdom since the parable gives no hint as to when the permeation ends. Fourth, Jesus' followers can be confident that regardless of any current perspectives, the kingdom of God has a glorious future."[869]

3. The function of these parables 13:34-43

This section, like the other two interludes in the discourse (vv. 10-23, 49-51), has two parts. The first is an explanation about parables generally (vv. 34-35), and the second is an explanation of one parable in particular (vv. 36-43).

The fulfillment of prophecy 13:34-35 (cf. Mark 4:33-34)

13:34 Matthew stressed the importance of parables in Jesus' teaching. This verse is a chiasm in the Greek text with "parables" in the middle. Jesus constantly used parables in His spoken ministry to the multitudes following His rejection (cf. v. 3a).

> "Jesus deliberately adopted the parabolic method of teaching at a particular stage in His ministry for the purpose of withholding further truth about Himself and the kingdom of heaven from the crowds, who had proved themselves to be deaf to His claims and irresponsive to His demands. Hitherto, He had used parables as illustrations, whose meaning was self-evident from the context in which they were spoken (e.g., vi. 24-27). From now onwards, when addressing the unbelieving multitude He speaks only in parables (34), which He interprets to His disciples in private."[870]

13:35 The writer claimed that this portion of Jesus' ministry fulfilled Asaph's statement in Psalm 78:2. Asaph wrote that he would explain to his readers aspects of Israel's history that had been previously unknown. He then proceeded to use Israel's history to teach the Israelites how consistently rebellious they had been toward God, and how just and merciful God had been with them. He taught these lessons by using "parables," by comparing various things. By comparing various incidents in Israel's history, he revealed things previously unclear. Stephen used the same technique in Acts 7.

Jesus did the same thing when He taught the multitudes using parables. He revealed to the people some things that they had not previously understood. Jesus was not teaching entirely new things any more than Asaph was in Psalm 78. He put things together that taught the crowds new

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[869]Bailey, "The Parable . . . Leavening . . .," p. 71.
[870]Tasker, pp. 134-35.

lessons. Jesus *concealed* some truth by using parables, but with them He also *revealed* some truth to the multitudes. This is the point of Matthew's quotation of Asaph here. Jesus was bringing together pieces of previous revelation about the kingdom, and by combining these, was teaching the people new things about the kingdom. He was throwing new light on the kingdom with His comparisons (parables). Thus, while these parables were mysteries, new revelations, they contained some elements that God has previously revealed.

The explanation of the parable of the weeds 13:36-43

Matthew separated the explanation of this parable from its telling in the text (vv. 24-30). He evidently did this to separate more clearly, for the reader, the parables Jesus spoke to the multitudes from the parables He told His disciples.

13:36 Jesus now removed Himself from "the crowds" by reentering "the house," evidently in Capernaum, from which He had departed to teach the multitudes (v. 1). There he explained three of the parables (vv. 10-23, 37-43, 49-50) and taught His disciples four more (vv. 44-48, 52). Jesus' disciples were not different from the crowd because they immediately understood the parables. They were different because they persisted in asking Jesus to help them understand the parables, whereas the crowds showed less interest. Why did Jesus continue to teach His believing disciples by parables rather than with straightforward explanations? Evidently so many people were following Jesus that whenever He spoke, except in private to His disciples, a mixed audience heard Him.

13:37-39 Jesus identified Himself as both the sower and the director of the harvest. He took these Old Testament figures for God and applied them to Himself.[871] "The field" is "the world" where the sowing takes place, but the wheat (good seed) and "the tares" represent true and professing-only believers.

> "This brief statement presupposes a mission beyond Israel (cf. 10:16-18; 28:18-20) and confirms that the narrower command of 10:5-6 is related exclusively to the mission of the Twelve during the period of Jesus' earthly ministry."[872]

Notice particularly that the field is not the church. The identification of the field as the church was common in the writings of some early church fathers and in those of some Reformers, and it is quite popular with many modern critical, evangelical, and even dispensational scholars. I think it is incorrect, since the kingdom predicted in the Old Testament is distinctly

[871]See Philip B. Payne, "Jesus' Implicit Claim to Deity in His Parables," *Trinity Journal* 2NS:1 (Spring 1981):3-23.
[872]Carson, "Matthew," p. 325.

different from the church. This parable does not teach that there will be a mixture of good and evil in the "true" church, true believers and professing-only believers. The terms "world," "church," and "kingdom" are all distinct in the New Testament.

The "good seed" represents the "sons of the kingdom," namely, those destined for the kingdom, not those presently in the kingdom. The messianic kingdom has not yet begun. Compare 8:12, where the sons of the kingdom are Jewish unbelievers, namely, Jews who should have been destined for the kingdom but were unbelievers of Jesus. The weeds are "sons of the evil one," i.e., sons of Satan (cf. John 8:44; 1 John 5:19).

> "Not all unbelievers are called children of the devil; only those who have willfully rejected the light are so designated (cp. v. 38; Jn. 8:38-44)."[873]

The "devil" is the "enemy," the "harvest" is the "end of the age" (9:37; cf. Jer. 51:33; Hos. 6:11; Joel 3:13), and the harvesters ("reapers") are "angels" (24:30-31; 25:31; cf. 18:10; Luke 15:7; Heb. 1:14; 1 Pet. 1:12). Obviously several elements in this parable have significance. However, note that many others do not (e.g., the conversation between the man and his servants, the servants' sleep, the order of the sowing, etc.).

> "This condition of the kingdom was never revealed in the Old Testament, which spoke of a kingdom of righteousness in which evil would be overcome."[874]

The "end of the age" refers to the end of the *present age*, that will culminate in Jesus' Second Coming and a judgment of living unbelievers (cf. vv. 40, 49; 24:3).

13:40-42 The unbelievers who are born in Jesus' messianic (millennial) kingdom, which will begin when He returns to earth at His Second Coming, will continue to live in that earthly kingdom. I put the word "millennial" in parentheses because God did not reveal the 1,000-year length of the kingdom until Revelation 20. However, at the end of the kingdom, at the end of the 1,000-year reign, Jesus will separate the unbelievers from the believers (cf. Zeph. 1:3). The unbelievers will then perish eternally (Rev. 20:15; cf. Matt. 3:11; 5:22; 8:12; 13:50; Jer. 29:22).[875]

13:43 In contrast to the unbelievers, the believers ("the righteous") will continue to glorify God ("shine forth as the sun") forever (5:13-16; cf. Dan 12:3). "The kingdom of their Father" is probably a synonym for the kingdom of

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[873]*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 1015.
[874]Barbieri, p. 50.
[875]See Pagenkemper, pp. 181-83.

the Son (v. 41), in the sense that the kingdom belongs to both the Father and the Son. However, when the messianic (millennial) kingdom ends, the rule of the Son and the Father will continue forever in the new heaven and the new earth (Rev. 21—22). The Messiah's reign on this earth will be the first phase of His reign, that will continue on the new earth forever.

> "It must be observed again that the Church and the Kingdom are not co-extensive, though prior to the Rapture, subjects of the Kingdom are also members of the Church. After the Church is removed at the Rapture, there will be Kingdom subjects on earth during the Tribulation [i.e., people who will be saved during the Tribulation]. The statement that the tares will be gathered 'first' (vv. 30, 41-43) clearly shows this to occur not at the Rapture (at which time the saints are gathered) but at the end of the Tribulation."[876]

This parable describes an order of events that is the same as what Jesus presented elsewhere as occurring at His Second Coming (cf. 24:37-41; Luke 17:26-37). This order of events is the opposite of what He said would happen at the Rapture. At the Rapture, Christ will remove all believers from the earth and unbelievers will remain on the earth (John 14:2-3; cf. 1 Thess. 4:17). At the Second Coming, unbelievers will be removed from the earth in judgment, while believers will remain on the earth to enter the millennial kingdom. Thus, the Rapture does not take place at the same time as the Second Coming, which posttribulationists believe.[877]

4. Parables addressed to the disciples 13:44-52

The first and second parables in this group are quite similar, as was true of the third and fourth parables in the preceding group. This is a further reflection of the chiastic structure of this section (vv. 1-53). These fifth and sixth parables, among the eight, both deal with the value of participating in the kingdom.

> ". . . true disciples are those who recognize that God's kingdom is so valuable that it's worth sacrificing whatever it takes to be its citizens."[878]

The parable of the hidden treasure 13:44

> "Palestine is probably the most fought over country in the world; and, when the tide of war threatened to flow over them and engulf them, it was common practice for people to hide their valuables in the ground, before they took to flight, in the hope that the day would come when they could return and regain them."[879]

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[876]Kent, "The Gospel . . .," p. 953.

[877]See Showers, pp. 176-91, for an extended discussion of the passages that indicate the differences between the Rapture and the coming of Christ with His holy angels, i.e, the Second Coming.

[878]Blomberg, *Preaching the* . . ., p. 133. Italics omitted.

[879]Barclay, 2:93.

"The kingdom" (of heaven on earth) lay concealed in history for hundreds of years, perhaps from the Exile to the time of Jesus. Toussaint believed Jesus meant from the time of Rehoboam to Jesus.[880] When the Jews in Jesus' day stumbled on it, the believers among them recognized its worth and were eager to make any sacrifice necessary for it. The point of the parable to Jesus' disciples was that they should be willing to pay any price to have a significant part in the kingdom.

Some interpreters believe the person who "hid" and then paid a great price for the "treasure" was Jesus, the price being His own life.[881] Some interpret the "treasure" to be Israel and the "field" the world.[882] This seems unlikely to me, since in all these parables the focus seems to be on the disciples more than on Jesus. They should pay the price.[883]

The parable of the pearl 13:45-46

The same basic point recurs in this parable. The difference between this parable, and the last, is that here the person who finds the treasure is looking for it, whereas in the previous parable the discovery was accidental. In Jesus' day, there were Jews who were looking for the kingdom and Messiah (11:3), and those who were not (e.g., the religious leaders who did not accompany the wise men to Bethlehem). For both types of people, the ultimate price of complete discipleship was not too much to pay for participation in the kingdom. Jesus was not teaching that entrance into the kingdom depended on self-sacrifice; entrance depended on faith in Him. The amount and kind of one's inheritance in the kingdom, however, depended on commitment to Messiah (cf. 5:5; 8:18-22; 25:34).

Some people view "the pearl of great value," as well as the hidden treasure, as references to Jesus.[884] Others believe they refer to the church.[885] I think they refer primarily to the kingdom. Several dispensational interpreters believe the treasure in the field (or land) represents Israel—and that the pearl, taken from the sea, represents the Gentiles,[886] or the church.[887]

> "Like the treasure, the kingdom is the source of highest joy, and, as seen in the pearl, the kingdom should be deemed as the most precious possession."[888]

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[880]Toussaint, *Behold the . . .*, p. 183.

[881]E.g., Ibid., p. 184; and Robert N. Wilkin, "A Great Buy!" *The Grace Evangelical Society News* 6:9 (September 1991):2.

[882]E.g., McGee, 4:78.

[883]See Klaus D. Issler "Exploring the Pervasive References to Work in Jesus' Parables," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 57:2 (June 2014):323-29.

[884]E.g., Richard C. Trench, *Notes on the Parables of Our Lord*, pp. 102-10.

[885]E.g., Walvoord, *Matthew: . . .*, p. 105; Toussaint, *Behold the . . .*, p. 184; and *The New Scofield . . .*, p. 1016.

[886]E.g., Pentecost, *The Words . . .*, p. 218.

[887]E.g., McGee, 4:79; Kent, "The Gospel . . .," p. 954.

[888]Mark L. Bailey, "The Parables of the Hidden Treasure and of the Pearl Merchant," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156:622 (April-June 1999):189.

The parable of the dragnet 13:47-48

This parable has a meaning similar to the parable of the weeds (vv. 24-30), which is its opposite in the chiastic structure of the discourse. However, the focus here is on the judgment at the end of the kingdom, rather than the mixed citizens of the kingdom. In both parables there are "good" and "bad" elements, believers and unbelievers. Jesus will separate these individuals at the end of His messianic (millennial) reign. They will all fall into one of two categories: "the good" (believers) or "the bad" (unbelievers).

The Greek word for "dragnet," *sagene*, occurs only here in the New Testament. It describes a large net that fishermen drew to shore between two boats. Sometimes they tied one end to the shore and the other end to a boat. Then they would sweep an area of the lake with it, possibly a half mile long, drawing as many fish as possible to the shore with it.[889] Then they would separate the fish that they could sell from those that they could not.

The second interlude about understanding the parables 13:49-51

As with the previous interlude (13:10-23), in this interlude there is an explanation of one parable (vv. 49-50), and then a word about understanding all the parables (v. 51; cf. vv. 10-23, 34-43).

The explanation of the parable of the dragnet 13:49-50

Jesus interpreted the meaning of the previous parable without waiting for His disciples to ask Him to do so. The picture seems to be of judgment at the end of the messianic (millennial) kingdom (cf. vv. 41-42). Many other premillennial interpreters believed the judgment in view is the one before the establishment of the kingdom.[890] Later, Matthew recorded that Jesus told two more parables about this judgment at the beginning of the Millennium. The parable of the ten virgins (25:1-13) stressed the need for readiness for this judgment. The parable of the sheep and the goats (25:31-46) identified the basis for the judgment.

In the parable of the dragnet, the point was the sorting out of righteous and wicked individuals that will happen then. "The angels" will assist Jesus in this process. "The wicked" will go to eternal destruction (cf. v. 42), but "the righteous" will continue on in Messiah's kingdom, which will then move from the present earth to the new earth.

> "The fear motive is often condemned by modern Christians, but the Book of Matthew shows Jesus was not opposed to using it properly."[891]

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[889]Lenski, p. 547.

[890]E.g., Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 184; Walvoord, *Matthew:* . . ., p. 106; and Showers, p. 178.

[891]Mark L. Bailey, "The Parables of the Dragnet and of the Householder," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156:623 (July-September 1999):290.

The importance of understanding the parables 13:51

Jesus' question here marks the conclusion to His explanation of the parables that the disciples' question in verse 36 requested. "All these things" probably refers to everything that Jesus had said to the disciples. The disciples claimed to understand what Jesus had said, and presumably they did understand somewhat, at least superficially (cf. 15:16).

> "Matthew contains a total of seven parables, the first and longest of which has to do with Jesus' parabolic method. The rest of the parables have to do with the kingdom of heaven. Every one of the six stresses the hiddenness of the kingdom. It is like treasure hidden in a field, like yeast hidden in dough, like good seed hidden in soil. But we have become bottom-line conscious in the institutional Church and in parachurch organizations. We cannot raise money to support our ministries unless we can quote statistics concerning how successful we are. We have to be able to measure results. We want to evaluate the harvest day after day after day so that we can use the information in our fund-raising endeavors. And we forget that the real impact of the Church of Jesus Christ in the world is immeasurable. We will only know what it is at the harvest, which is the end of the age."[892]

The parable of the homeowner 13:52

Commentators often omit this verse from discussions of the parables in this discourse. Some do not consider it one of the parables of the kingdom.[893] However, it contains a parable, as should be clear from the content of the verse itself, and from the literary structure of the discourse.

Jesus drew a comparison between a "scribe" instructed about the kingdom and the owner of a house ("head of a household"). In view of what follows, the "scribe" portrayed seems to be one who received instruction about the kingdom and believed it.[894] He is a believing "disciple." As with the owner of a house, this type of scribe brings "new and old" things "out of his" storeroom or "treasure" (Gr. *thesauros*). The owner of the house in the parable brings things out of his storeroom to use them beneficially. The storeroom from which the disciple-scribe brings these things is evidently his heart or understanding (i.e., his very being). He brings out *new* understanding concerning the kingdom that Jesus had taught him, as well as *old* understanding about the kingdom, that the Old Testament taught him. The new did not displace the old but supplemented it.

Jesus was comparing His believing disciples to this believing scribe. They had just said they understood what Jesus had taught them (v. 51). Therefore they had a responsibility to teach others what they now understood. Every disciple must become a scribe, a teacher of the law, because he or she understands things that require communicating to others (cf. 10:27; 28:19; Heb. 5:12).

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[892]Richard C. Halverson, "God and Caesar," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37:1 (March 1994):127.
[893]E.g., Ibid., p. 107; Walvoord, *Matthew:* . . ., p. 97; and Hagner, pp. 362-64.
[894]Tasker, p. 140.

"The first two parables relate to planting. The parable of the sower speaks of different responses to the message of the kingdom. The parable of the tares explains the origins of the conflict between the sons of the kingdom and the sons of the enemy and announces that a final separation of the two groups will take place when Jesus, the Son of Man, will return at the end of the age. The second pair of parables utilizes the analogy of growth. The mustard seed reveals the extent of the rapid international growth of the kingdom of heaven, and the leavening process addresses the internal and invisible dynamic of that growth. The next two parables (the treasure and the pearl merchant) address the value of the kingdom. Whether one is looking or not looking, no sacrifice is too great for the kingdom. The final set of parables reveals the disciples' dual responsibilities. The dragnet teaches that evangelism without discrimination should be done in view of Jesus' discriminating judgment at the end of the age. The householder encourages the teaching of both the older and newer truths of the kingdom of heaven by the disciples of the kingdom."[895]

THE LESSONS OF JESUS' KINGDOM PARABLES IN MATTHEW 13	
Soils	God's Word will be sown and predictable results will follow culminating in the earthly kingdom.
Tares	There will be counterfeit believers in the inter-advent kingdom whom God will judge eventually.
Mustard seed	The kingdom will grow from a small beginning to become a large entity.
Leaven	The present form of the kingdom will become increasingly influential.
Treasure	Any price is worth paying for participation in the kingdom.
Pearl	Those seeking the kingdom will find it worth any sacrifice.
Dragnet	The kingdom will include universal harvesting followed by judgment.
Householder	The kingdom will involve new revelation as well as old.

"As we survey the parables, then, we find that in view of Israel's rejection of the person of Christ, He foresaw the postponement of the millennial form of the kingdom. He announced the introduction of a new form of the kingdom, one that will span the period from Israel's rejection of Christ until Israel's future reception of Christ at the Second Advent."[896]

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[895]Bailey, "The Parables of the Dragnet . . .," p. 296. For a summary of the major themes in these parables and a list of applicational principles, see idem, "The Doctrine of the Kingdom in Matthew 13," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156:624 (October-December 1999):443-51.

[896]Pentecost, *The Words . . .*, p. 219.

> "What is certain in the teaching of these difficult parables is that the present age, viewed from the standpoint of the Kingdom, is a time of *preparation*."[897]

5. The departure 13:53

Matthew leaves the reader with the impression, from this concluding transition, as well as from the structure of the discourse—that Jesus related all the preceding parables at one time. This was apparently the case, though He may have repeated some of them at various other times as well. Jesus now left Capernaum and traveled to Nazareth (v. 54).

The clause "and it came about that when Jesus had finished" signals the end of the discourse and the end of another major section of this Gospel. Matthew carefully traced the course of opposition to the King in this section. Israel's rejection of Jesus was so clear that the King began to tailor His teaching more specifically to unbelievers and to believers.

> "Thematically the three chapters (11—13) are held together by the rising tide of disappointment in and opposition to the kingdom of God that was resulting from Jesus' ministry. He was not turning out to be the kind of Messiah the people had expected. Even John the Baptist had doubts (vv. 2-19), and the Galilean cities that were sites of most of Jesus' miracles hardened themselves in unbelief (vv. 20-24). The nature of Jesus' person and ministry were 'hidden' (an important word) from the wise, despite the most open and compassionate of invitations (vv. 28-30). Conflicts with Jewish leaders began to intensify (12:1-45), while people still misunderstood the most basic elements of Jesus' teaching and authority (12:46-50)."[898]

However, Jesus' enemies had not checkmated Him. The kingdom would still come. Matthew 13 provides assurance of that fact. Jesus added new revelation to old, about the kingdom—in this chapter—to appeal further to the crowds, and to prepare His disciples for what lay ahead. He did not teach about the church in this chapter, though He did describe conditions that would exist in the Church Age, which is part of the inter-advent era. The new revelation that there would be a "church" did not come until chapter 16. He *did* give further revelation here concerning the coming messianic kingdom (ch. 13).[899]

V. THE REACTIONS OF THE KING 13:54—19:2

Matthew recorded increasing polarization in this section. Jesus expanded His ministry, but as He did so opposition became even more intense. The Jewish leaders became increasingly hostile. Consequently Jesus spent more time preparing His disciples. Jesus revealed Himself more clearly to His disciples, but they only understood some of what

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[897]McClain, p. 441.

[898]Carson, "Matthew," p. 260.

[899]See Bailey, in *The New* . . ., pp. 29-30, for a list of 25 major truths taught in Matthew 13.

He told them. They strongly rejected other things He said. The inevitability of a final confrontation between Jesus and His critics became increasingly clear. The general movement in this section is Jesus withdrawing from Israel's leaders (13:54—16:12) and preparing His disciples for His passion (16:13—19:2).

A. Opposition, instruction, and healing 13:54—16:12

This section records the course that Jesus' ministry took because of Israel's rejection of Him. Opposition from several quarters led Him to withdraw to safer places, where He continued to minister to Jews and Gentiles, and to prepare His disciples for what lay ahead.

1. The opposition of the Nazarenes and Romans 13:54—14:12

The theme of opposition continues from the Parables about the Kingdom. Jesus' reaction to opposition by Israel's leaders was to withdraw (cf. 10:23). Matthew recorded Him doing this twice in this section. The first instance of opposition came from the people among whom Jesus had grown up in Nazareth (13:54-58). The second came from the Roman leadership of the area in which Jesus was ministering (14:1-12). Both sections show that opposition to Jesus was intense, from the Jewish common people to the Roman nobility.

The opposition of the Nazarenes 13:54-58 (cf. Mark 6:1-6)

13:54 Jesus' "hometown" was Nazareth (Luke 4:16). The local "synagogue" attendees wondered where Jesus obtained His authority. The "wisdom" in His teaching and the power ("powers") in His miracles demonstrated remarkable authority, but "where" did He get these? Did they come from God—or elsewhere (12:24)?

This is the last of Matthew's references to Jesus "teaching" in a "synagogue" (from the Greek meaning, "gathering together").[900] From now on, Jesus appears increasingly outside the structures of traditional Judaism.[901]

13:55-57a The words of Jesus' critics reveal wounded pride. They did not like His having wisdom and power superior to theirs, since they had the same background. Their questions reveal denial of His Messiahship. By referring to Joseph as "the carpenter," and to Jesus as "the carpenter's son," they were implying that Jesus should have followed in His earthly father's footsteps. The definite article before "carpenter" suggests that there may have been only one carpenter in Nazareth. Carpenters did all types of work

[900]See Edersheim, Sketches of . . ., ch. xvi: "Synagogues: Their Origin, Structure, and Outward Arrangements."
[901]France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 547.

with wood and stone. Jesus was more of a builder, or construction worker, than a carpenter in the modern usage.[902]

In one sense, these questions were legitimate. However, the people of Nazareth rejected Jesus' claim to being a prophet (v. 57b). They "took offense" at Him in the sense that His claim caused them to stumble. It was their reaction to His claim, however, not the claim itself, that stumbled them.

> "(Incidentally, their questions render impossible the fanciful miracles ascribed to Jesus' childhood by the apocryphal gospels.)"[903]

> "The hardest place for a preacher to preach is the church where he was a boy; the hardest place for a doctor to practice is the place where people knew him when he was young."[904]

We must be careful not to confuse Jesus' half-"brothers"—"James," "Simon," and "Judas"—with the disciples who had the same names. There is no evidence that Jesus' half-brothers believed on Him until after His resurrection. His brother James eventually became the leader of the Jerusalem church (Acts 11).

13:57b-58 Usually a person enjoys a better reception at home than anywhere else, except if he has attained an exalted position, in which case the opposite is often true. Jesus could "not do many miracles there," because to do so would have been contrary to His mission. Another reason may be that people who did not believe on Him did not ask Him for help, and so He did not give it (cf. James 4:2). Jesus did miracles in order to create and to strengthen faith in Himself. When settled unbelief reigned, there was no point in doing miracles.

The point of this section is to show that even those who knew Jesus best refused to believe on Him.

> "Jesus led a perfect life and still had family members and friends who struggled to believe. Sometimes those most difficult to reach are those who know us best."[905]

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[902]Ken M. Campbell, "What Was Jesus' Occupation?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48:3 (September 2005):501-19; France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 549.
[903]Carson, "Matthew," p. 336.
[904]Barclay, 2:102.
[905]Bailey, in *The New* . . ., p. 30.

The opposition of Herod and his friends 14:1-12 (cf. Mark 6:14-29; Luke 9:7-9)

14:1-2 "At that time" is again a loose connective not intended to communicate chronological sequence necessarily. Herod Antipas ("Herod the tetrarch") lived primarily at Tiberias on the west shore of Lake Galilee.[906] However, if all the events described in this story happened on one day, as seems likely, they must have taken place at Herod's residence at the Machaerus fortress, in southern Perea east of the Jordan River.[907] Antipas ruled over Galilee and Perea from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39, namely, during almost all of Jesus' earthly life (cf. 2:19-20).[908]

Word about Jesus' ministry reached him easily there (cf. Luke 8:3). Herod had previously beheaded John for criticizing his morality (vv. 3-12). Herod could do this because John had ministered within Herod's jurisdiction of Perea (John 1:28). Public opinion evidently encouraged Herod to conclude that Jesus was "John the Baptist" who had come back to life (cf. Mark 6:14; Luke 9:7). He attributed Jesus' miracles to the supposedly resurrected John.

> "The idea of a ghostly or even physical return of someone who has had a special influence, especially if that influence has been prematurely cut off by violent death, is found in various cultures (think of Elijah, Nero, King Arthur, Elvis)."[909]

14:3-5 The Synoptic writers ascribed moral and religious motives to Herod for executing John (cf. Mark 6:16-29; Luke 3:19-20). Josephus wrote that Herod beheaded John for political reasons.[910] Probably both reasons led Herod to act as he did.[911]

Herod Antipas had two brothers named Philip. The one Matthew referred to here was Herod Philip I. The other brother named Philip was Herod Philip II, tetrarch of Iturea, Trachonitis, Gaulanitis, Batanea, and Panias (Paneas).[912] Philip I was Herod Antipas' half-brother. Therefore, Antipas' marriage to Philip's wife "Herodias" was incestuous in addition to being adulterous (cf. Lev. 18:16; 20:21).

Evidently John had *repeatedly* rebuked Antipas, since the verb in verse 4 can read, "he used to say [repeatedly]." Herodias was also Antipas' *niece*, but this in itself would have been no problem for John, since the law did

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[906]Carson, "Matthew," p. 337.
[907]See Harold W. Hoehner, *Herod Antipas*, pp. 146-48; and Josephus, *Antiquities of* . . ., 18:5:2.
[908]See also Finegan, pp. 255-56.
[909]France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 553.
[910]Josephus, *Antiquities of* . . ., 18:5:2.
[911]Hoehner, *Herod Antipas*, pp. 124-49.
[912]Finegan, p. 255.

not forbid uncles marrying their nieces. Combining the Synoptic accounts, Antipas appears to have been a weak man controlled by a wicked and ruthless wife, Herodias. Interestingly John, the latter-day Elijah, faced the modern counterparts of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel in Antipas and Herodias. Unfortunately Herodias succeeded where Jezebel had failed.

14:6-8 The day of celebration may have been "Herod's birthday" or the anniversary of his accession to the throne (Gr. *genesia*).[913] Herodias' daughter, by her previous marriage to Philip I, was Salome, who was then between 12 and 14 years old.[914] The popular idea that her dance was sensuous does not come from the text but from the reputation of the Herodians for low morals and from the low status of dancing girls.[915] Antipas was only a petty monarch, but he acted like one of the powerful Persian kings (cf. Esth. 5:3, 6; 7:2).

14:9-11 Antipas was wrong to give his "oath," which he evidently repeated more than once (vv. 7, 9), and he was wrong to keep it. He feared losing face with "his dinner guests." The Romans practiced decapitation. That form of execution was not Jewish. Likewise, the Romans executed certain prisoners without a trial, whereas Jewish law required one.[916] The gore of this scene testifies to the hardhearted condition of the Roman royal family and their courtiers. As the last of the Old Testament prophets, John suffered a martyr's death, as did many of his predecessors.

> "Death, the temporary end of physical life, is not the worst enemy of humanity. Alienation from God is. And thus those who murdered John are far more pitiable than is John himself."[917]

14:12 Matthew's notation that Jesus heard about John's death unites John and Jesus against this political enemy. It also suggests that John's disciples still had high regard for Jesus (cf. 11:2-6). As Herod had heard the news about Jesus (v. 1), now Jesus heard the news about John.

Herod's testimony to the supernatural character of Jesus' miracles is important in Matthew's unfolding theme of people's perceptions of the King. Likewise the forerunner's unjust execution at the hands of hardhearted Roman officials foreshadows the fate of the King.[918] Matthew evidently recorded these verses to show how Roman political leaders viewed the King and His forerunner. Opposition against Him was intense, mainly for religious and moral reasons.

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[913]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 1:672.
[914]Hoehner, *Herod Antipas*, pp. 151-56.
[915]Carson, "Matthew," p. 338.
[916]Ibid., p. 339.
[917]Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14—28*, p. 413.
[918]Plummer, p. 201.

> "Matthew so connected the ministries of these two men that what happened to one was viewed as having a direct effect on the other. Herod, by rejecting the King's forerunner, was rejecting the King who followed him."[919]

2. The withdrawal to Bethsaida 14:13-33

Having experienced strong rejection from the common people and from the nation's political leaders, Jesus withdrew to train His disciples further. In view of the coming conflict, they needed stronger faith in Him. Jesus cultivated their faith with two miracles.

Jesus' feeding of the 5,000 14:13-21 (cf. Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-13)

Matthew's record of this miracle, which all four Gospels contain, stresses Jesus' power to create, His compassion, and the disciples' responsibility to minister to multitudes as Jesus' representatives. It also previews the kingdom banquet (cf. 8:11). The simple meal that Jesus provided on this occasion, in a wholesome setting, contrasts with Herod's lavish feast, in a degenerate setting, just described.[920]

14:13-14 Since verses 3-12 are an excursus, the opening words of this pericope must refer to Herod's response to Jesus' ministry. When Jesus heard that, "He withdrew" from Herod's territory and his animosity (cf. 12:15). Evidently Jesus believed that Herod Antipas would also oppose Him, just as he had opposed His forerunner. As previously (12:15) and later (15:21), Jesus withdrew from a place of danger and confrontation.

However, Jesus could not escape the crowds that followed Him wherever He went. The lonely place where Jesus retreated was evidently near Bethsaida Julias on Galilee's northeast shore (Luke 9:10). Jesus traveled there from Capernaum by boat, but the crowds beat "Him there on foot," having learned where He was going. They walked east along the northern coast of the Sea of Galilee. Matthew again noted the great "compassion" of the King (cf. 9:36).

14:15-17 In view of the context (v. 23), and the meaning of "evening" (Gr. *opsios*), the time must have been late afternoon.[921] There were several small towns within walking distance of this region where the people could have bought their own suppers.

Jesus directions (v. 16) turned the disciples' attention to their own resources. By urging them to consider these, Jesus was leading them to recognize their personal inadequacy—and to appeal to Him as the *only* adequate resource (cf. John 2:1-11). There is nothing in the text or context

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[919]Barbieri, p. 53.
[920]See Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 1:677.
[921]See ibid., 1:681.

that suggests the number of the loaves and fishes had symbolic significance, though many of the commentators have thought so.

14:18-21 Jesus' acts of looking heavenward, thanking God, and then breaking the loaves, were normal for the head of any Jewish household.[922] Jesus then performed the miracle, namely, creating enough bread and fish to feed the assembled throng. With 5,000 men present, the total size of the crowd may have been 10,000 to 20,000. Counting only the males had Old Testament precedent (cf. Exod. 12:37). Everyone had enough to eat and felt "satisfied" (v. 20). Jesus' provision was so abundant that there were 12 large wicker "baskets," "full" of scraps "left over," even after many thousands had eaten all they wanted. Evidently each of the 12 disciples had a large basket (Gr. *kophinos*) and circulated among the crowd until his basket was full (cf. John 6:12-13).

> "This sign was very important to three groups—the disciples, the believing remnant, and the wonder-watching unbelievers. From now on the miracles are primarily for the benefit of the disciples in that they are designed to instruct them. But in addition they confirm the faith of those who believe and the unbelief of the unbelieving masses. That they are for the disciples' training is seen in the fact that the rejection of the Lord is evident. The cities in which He had performed most of His mighty works had already indicated their apathy and opposition. He had left the masses so that He could be apart with the disciples."[923]

Jesus' training of the disciples is evident in His questioning them and His using them as His agents.

> "The significance of this miracle was intended primarily for the disciples. Jesus was illustrating the kind of ministry they would have after His departure. They would be involved in feeding people, but with spiritual food. The source for their feeding would be the Lord Himself. When their supply ran out, as with the bread and fish, they would need to return to the Lord for more. He would supply them, but the feeding would be done through them."[924]

The Jews had a traditional belief that when Messiah came, He would feed the people with bread from heaven as Moses had done (Deut. 18:15).[925] Elisha also had miraculously fed 100 men (2 Kings 4:42-44). This miracle proved Jesus' ability to provide for Israel as her King. However, in contrast to the manna, here there was bread left over. Also this miracle probably reminded the spiritually perceptive, in the crowd, of the messianic banquet that the Old Testament predicted Messiah would provide (Ps. 132:15; cf. Matt. 6:11).

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[922]Moore, 2:216-17.
[923]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 190.
[924]Barbieri, p. 54.
[925]Plummer, p. 206.

Jesus' walking on the water 14:22-33 (cf. Mark 6:45-52; John 6:14-21)

Jesus proceeded to do a second miracle to deepen His disciples' faith in Him even more.

14:22 As soon as the people had finished eating, Jesus "immediately compelled" (Gr. *eutheos enagkasen*) His disciples to enter a boat and depart for the other side of the lake. There appear to have been several reasons for His unusual action. First, this miracle appears to have refueled the enthusiasm of some in the crowd to draft Jesus and to force Him to lead the nation (cf. John 6:15). Perhaps Jesus wanted to spare His disciples from this attractive temptation.[926] Second, Jesus wanted to get away to pray (v. 23). Third, He wanted to prepare to get some rest (Mark 6:31-32). Fourth, He had an important lesson to teach them.

> ". . . there are two kinds of storms: storms of *correction*, when God disciplines us; and storms of *perfection*, when God helps us to grow. Jonah was in a storm because he disobeyed God and had to be corrected. The disciples were in a storm because they obeyed Christ and had to be perfected."[927]

Evidently Jesus sent the disciples up the eastern Galilee coast toward Bethsaida Julias with orders to wait for Him, but not beyond a certain time (John 6:17).[928] He planned to travel north by foot. They proceeded west across the lake by boat when He did not appear by the prearranged deadline.

14:23-24 After dismissing the crowd, Jesus walked up the mountainside (NIV) "to pray." There are no real mountains in this part of the Galilee coastline, but there are hills that slope down to the lake. He evidently stayed there longer than He had led the disciples to conclude that He would. Perhaps He prayed about the crowd's attempts to make Him king (John 6:15), among other things.

The word "evening," as the Jews used it, covers a period from late afternoon to shortly after sunset (cf. v. 15). Obviously it was now late in that evening period. By this time, the boat the disciples were in was quite "a long distance" out from the shore (v. 24). A storm had arisen, and the winds were blowing from the west, evidently forcing them away from the northern shore, and impeding their progress to the west.

14:25-27 The Jews divided the night, from sunset to sunrise, into three watches (Judg. 7:19; Lam. 2:19). The Romans, however, divided it into four.

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[926]Lenski, p. 568.
[927]Wiersbe, 1:51.
[928]Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, pp. 348-49.

Matthew used the Roman division of watches. "The fourth watch of the night" was between 3:00 and 6:00 a.m. Jesus had spent most of the night *praying*, and the disciples had spent most of the night *rowing*.

Some translators rendered the Greek word *phantasma* as "ghost," but it means an apparition, i.e., an optical illusion or distorted appearance (cf. Mark 6:49). The disciples saw Jesus, but to them His appearance resembled that of a ghost. Perhaps rain or fog was responsible as well as poor light. They may have believed the popular superstition that evil spirits lived in the sea and that those who had drowned haunted the water.[929]

Jesus' response centered on, "It is I." Note the chiasm of His response. The disciples could take courage and not fear because Jesus was there. The words, "I am," were a term Jesus used to claim deity (cf. Exod. 3:14; Isa. 43:10; 51:12). The fourth Gospel stressed Jesus' use of this term especially. The disciples may not have realized this claim in the terror of the moment, but later they undoubtedly saw the significance of what He had said more clearly.

> "Fear is unwarranted where Jesus is present [cf. 1:23; 28:20]."[930]

Before the Fall, God had ordained that man rule over the sea (Gen. 1:28). Here Jesus was doing precisely that; He was fulfilling God's purpose for humankind. This action gave testimony to His being the Second Adam (cf. 8:27; Rom. 5:12-17), the Man who succeeded where Adam had failed. The Old Testament speaks of God walking on or through the sea (Job 9:8; Ps. 77:19; Isa. 43:16; cf. Ps. 18:16; 144:7).

14:28 This is the first of three occasions in which Matthew recorded that Peter received special treatment (cf. 16:13-23; 17:24-27).

> "The Evangelist here presents Peter in all of his impetuosity mixed with his great devotion. In keeping with Matthew's style of writing, these traits, which are first mentioned here, characterize Peter throughout the remainder of the Gospel. More significant is the fact that the place of preeminence among the apostles which Peter here assumes is never lost in the rest of Matthew's Gospel."[931]

> "The man who said, 'Bid me come to Thee,' was just the man to say, 'Lord, I am ready to go with Thee both into

[929]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 569.
[930]Hagner, *Matthew 14—28*, p. 425.
[931]Toussaint, *Behold the . . .*, pp. 191-92.

> prison and to death.' . . . The scene on the lake was but a foreshadowing or rehearsal of Peter's fall."[932]

It seems almost incredible that Peter could have believed he would walk on water. However, the disciples had already done many mighty miracles because Jesus had given them the power to do so (cf. 10:1). We could translate the first class condition rendered "*if* it is You" as "*since* it is You." Peter evidently wanted to be as close to Jesus as he possibly could, as often as possible (cf. John 21:7).

14:29-31 With remarkable trust, Peter climbed over the side of the boat and began walking "on the water." He, too, in obedience to Jesus' command, was able to fulfill man's destiny by subduing the sea. He was doing well until he became more concerned about the waves than about Jesus. "Seeing the wind" is a figure of speech (synecdoche) for seeing the storm.[933] His distressing circumstances distracted his attention and weakened his faith in Jesus.

Jesus rebuked Peter for his weak ("little") "faith," even though it was stronger than that of the other disciples who remained in the boat. Jesus used this rebuke to help Peter and the other disciples see that consistent confidence in Himself was absolutely necessary. Peter became both a good example and a bad one. Jesus rescued him—as God had rescued many others from watery graves (cf. Ps. 18:16; 69:1-3; 144:7; Jon. 2:10).

14:32-33 The stilling of "the wind" is not the climax of the story. The disciples' worship of Jesus is. This is the first time they addressed Jesus with His full title: "God's Son" or "the Son of God" (16:16; 26:63; 27:40, 43, 54; cf. 3:17; 4:3, 6). This was a new high for the disciples in their appreciation of Jesus' person.

> "Retrospectively, the disciples, in making this confession, are giving answer to the earlier question they had raised in an equally perilous situation at sea: 'What sort of man is this, that even wind and sea obey him?' (8:27)."[934]

In view of their later lapses, the disciples evidently understood this title in the Messianic sense, but their understanding was still not very mature (cf. Mark 6:52). Perhaps, too, their confession here arose from the drama of the moment, whereas later they may have forgotten what they had spoken so truly about Jesus.

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[932]Bruce, *The Training* . . ., p. 134.
[933]See Appendix 7 at the end of these notes for a list of the more common figures of speech in the Bible and their meanings.
[934]Kingsbury, *Matthew as* . . ., p. 74.

> "Several important lessons can be learned from this account. (a) Courage comes from knowing that Jesus is present. (b) The answer to fear is faith, and faith is best placed in the One who is identified as the 'I Am.' (c) Doubt is an evidence of a divided mind. (d) Confessing Jesus' divine sonship is evidence of faith."[935]

3. The public ministry at Gennesaret 14:34-36 (cf. Mark 6:53-56)

This short section summarizes Jesus' public ministry at this stage of His ministry. It shows that even though Jesus was withdrawing from unbelievers (13:54—14:12), and giving special attention to the training of His disciples (14:13-33), He still had time to minister to people who were in need.

"Gennesaret" was a plain on the northwest coast of the Sea of Galilee. There was also a village called Gennesaret on this coastal plain, probably very close to the modern town of Ginosar. The crowds recognized Jesus instantly when He got out of the boat, and they "brought . . . all" types of needy people "to Him" for healing (cf. 3:5; 4:24). The woman with the hemorrhage had also obtained healing from Jesus after touching the "fringe of His cloak" (9:20-22). Now many others pressed on Him with similar faith and found healing (v. 36). The faith of these people contrasts with the faith of the disciples in the boat that was much greater.

These few verses do three things. They show the continuing broad appeal of Jesus' ministry (cf. 4:23-25; 8:16; 9:35-36). They show that Jesus continued to minister to the multitudes, even though He concentrated His ministry on His disciples. Third, Jesus showed no concern with becoming ritually unclean through His contacts with the common people. He made people clean, rather than becoming unclean Himself from these contacts. This last feature sets the stage for the confrontation over clean and unclean in the next section (15:1-20).

4. The opposition of the Pharisees and scribes 15:1-20 (cf. Mark 7:1-23; John 7:1)

Matthew recorded another round of opposition, withdrawal and disciple training, and public ministry (ch. 15). This is his last substantial group of events in Jesus' Galilean ministry. The writer's repetition of this pattern highlights the chief features of this stage of Jesus' ministry. This second round also reveals growth in each area of ministry. There is greater opposition, greater faith, and greater help for the multitudes than Matthew recorded previously.

This controversy with the Pharisees and scribes is sharper and more theological than Jesus' earlier confrontations with these critics. Note that these Pharisees and scribes had come from Jerusalem (v. 1). Jesus also explained His view of the law more clearly than before.

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[935]Bailey, in *The New* . . ., p. 31.

The charge and Jesus' response 15:1-9

15:1 These "Pharisees and scribes" came "from Jerusalem" to question Jesus. They appear to have had more official authority than the local Galilean religious leaders who opposed Jesus earlier. Jesus' great popularity makes such a delegation understandable to the reader.

15:2 The critics again raised a question about the behavior of Jesus' disciples, not His own behavior (cf. 9:14). They did not do so because Jesus behaved differently than His disciples, who followed His example and teaching. They did so because they could attack Him less directly than if they had questioned His personal conduct. In view of Jesus' popularity, they may have chosen this approach because it was safer, not because it was more respectful.

The critics objected to the disciples' disregard for the traditions of the elders, not to their disregard for the Mosaic Law. These traditions were the rabbinic interpretations of Old Testament law that had accumulated over the centuries, the Halakah. In Jesus' day most of these traditions were not yet in written form, but later the rabbis compiled them into the Mishnah (A.D. 135-200). For the Pharisees, these traditions carried almost as much authority, if not more authority, than the law itself.[936]

The disciples' hand-washing was only a specific example of the larger charge. One entire tractate in the Mishnah dealt with proper hand-washing procedures for ceremonial purposes.[937] There were even requirements for proper hand-washing before meals, since the ritual cleanliness of food was such an important matter to the Jews.

15:3-6 Jesus responded with a counterattack. He made a basic distinction between God's commandments and the Jews' traditions. He charged His critics with breaking the former to keep the latter.

> ". . . the ordinances of the Scribes were declared more precious, and of more binding importance than those of Holy scripture itself."[938]

In verse 4, Jesus quoted Exodus 20:12 and 21:17. "Curses" (NIV) is too strong. "Speaks evil of" (NASB) is better since the Greek verb *kakologeo* means "to insult."

The Pharisees and scribes, however, had evaded the spirit of the command, namely, that children should take responsibility for their needy parents. The "you" is emphatic in the Greek text. *Halakic* (rabbinic)

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[936]Moore, 1:251-62.
[937]Mishnah, *Yadaim*.
[938]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 2:15.

tradition said that if someone vowed to give something to God, he should not break his vow. Jesus said the law taught a more fundamental duty. To withhold from one's parents what one could give to "help" them, because of what the rabbis taught, was greedy hypocrisy. The error was not so much using the money for oneself or donating it for a good cause, but failing to give it to the needy parent.

Jesus had taught His disciples to put commitment to Him before family responsibilities (8:21-22; 10:38). He was the Messiah, and as such He had a right to demand such a strong commitment. The traditions of the Jews did not carry that much authority. Moreover, the situation Jesus had addressed previously involved family members opposing His disciples, not His disciples opposing their family members (cf. 10:37-39).

15:7-9 Chronologically, this is the first time Jesus called the Pharisees and teachers of the law "hypocrites." Their hypocrisy consisted of making a show of commitment to God, while at the same time giving human "tradition" (v. 6) precedence over God's Word.

Isaiah addressed the words that Jesus quoted to Jerusalem Jews, who sometimes allowed external acts of worship to vitiate principle. Rather than continuing God's will, the Jews' traditions perpetuated the spirit of the hypocrites in Isaiah's day. The context of the Isaiah quotation is a criticism of the Jews for displacing heartfelt worship with mere ritual. Isaiah branded this type of religion "vain." The hypocrites in his day had substituted their own teachings for God's. Jesus' application of this quotation to the Pharisees and law teachers of His day, therefore, condemned their entire worship of God, not just their carefully observed traditions.

> "My friend, we also are pretty good at rationalizing. Parents say to their children, 'You wash your hands before you come to the table,' but they pay no attention to what their children see on television [or other electronic devices], which is the thing that is damaging the heart. Oh, of course, children should wash their hands, but what is on the inside is far more important."[939]

Jesus' preaching and teaching about man's heart 15:10-20

15:10-11 Jesus had been responding to the question of His critics so far. Now He taught the assembled crowds the same lesson, and at the same time gave a direct answer to the Pharisees and scribes. He responded with a parable (v. 15). He did not utter this one to veil truth from the crowds, however. He urged them to hear and understand what He said (v. 10). This parable

[939]McGee, 4:87.

(proverb, epigram) was a comparison for the sake of clarification. Yet some did not understand what Jesus said (vv. 15-16).

Jesus was speaking of ceremonial (ritual) defilement when He said that eating certain foods does not make one unclean.[940] This was a radical statement that went beyond even the Mosaic Law. Mark noted that when He said this Jesus declared all food clean (Mark 7:19).

> "This saying of Jesus cancels all the food laws of the Old Testament."[941]

As Messiah, Jesus was terminating the dietary distinction between clean and unclean foods that was such a large part of the Mosaic system of worship (cf. Acts 10:15; Rom. 14:14-18; 1 Cor. 10:31; 1 Tim. 4:4; Titus 1:15). Matthew's concern, however, was not to highlight this termination but to stress the point of Jesus' teaching. The point was, that to God, "what proceeds" from the heart ("out of the mouth") is more important than "what enters the mouth." Motives and attitudes are more significant than food and drink.

15:12-14 Mark recorded that this interchange between the disciples and Jesus happened in a house after they had retired there from the public confrontation that preceded (Mark 7:17). Jesus' disciples, as all the Jews, held the Pharisees and teachers of the law in high regard. Since Jesus' words had "offended" His critics, the disciples wanted to know why He had said them. Jesus proceeded to disillusion His disciples regarding the reliability of His critics' spiritual leadership. If there was any doubt in the reader's mind that the religious leaders had turned against Jesus, the disciples' statement in verse 12 should end it.

First, Jesus compared the non-elect, including the unbelieving Pharisees and scribes, to plants that God had not planted (cf. 13:24-30, 36-43). There are several passages in the Old Testament that compare Israel to a plant that God had planted (e.g., Ps. 1:3; Isa. 60:21). Isaiah also described God uprooting rebellious Israel as a farmer pulls up a worthless plant (Isa. 5:1-7). Jesus meant that God would uproot the Pharisees and scribes, and other unbelievers, because they were not people that He had planted. Furthermore, they were worthless as leaders. This would have been a shocking revelation to the disciples. Jesus had previously hinted at this (3:9; 8:11-12), but now, since they had definitely rejected Him, He made the point clear.

Jesus told the disciples to leave the critics "alone," even as He had said God would leave the weeds alone that the enemy had planted in the field (13:28-29). Some of the Jews considered themselves guides of the

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[940]Carson, "Matthew," p. 350.

[941]Barclay, 2:131.

spiritually blind (cf. Rom. 2:19). These Pharisees and scribes apparently did, since they knew the law and understood its traditional interpretations. However, Jesus disputed their claim. To Him they were "blind guides of the blind." They failed to comprehend the real meaning of the Scriptures they took so much pride in understanding. A tragic end awaits the blind guides, as well as those whom they guide. The critics' rejection of Jesus was only one indication of their spiritual blindness.

> "Once in Cincinnati a blind man introduced me to his blind friend. He said that he was showing him the city."[942]

15:15-16 Peter again took the leadership among the disciples (cf. 14:28). Jesus' answer to Peter's request for an explanation of the parable (vv. 17-20) identifies the parable as His statement on defilement in verse 11. Jesus again rebuked the disciples for failing to understand what He meant (cf. 14:31). The unbelieving multitudes were understandably ignorant, but Jesus' believing disciples should have known better. Jesus had taught them the priority of reality over ritual before (3:9; 12:1-21). Jesus' rebuke was probably also a pedagogical device. It would have made the disciples try their best in the future to understand what He was teaching, so they could avoid further rebukes.

15:17-20 Jesus contrasted tangible food with intangible thoughts. Matthew's list of the heart's products follows the order of the Ten Commandments essentially. Jesus' point was this: what a person *is* determines what he or she *does and says* (cf. 12:34-35; Rom. 14:14, 17; 1 Cor. 8:8; Heb. 9:10). Note that Jesus presupposed the biblical revelation that "the heart" (the seat of thought and will) is evil (cf. 7:11). True religion must deal with people's basic nature and not just with externals.

The Pharisees and scribes had become so preoccupied with the externals that they failed to deal with what is more basic and important, namely: a *genuine* relationship with God. Jesus had more concern about human nature than the form of worship. He came to seek and to save the lost (1:21; cf. 6:1-33; 12:34-35).

In this pericope, Jesus rejected the Pharisees and scribes as Israel's authentic interpreters of the Old Testament. He claimed that role for *Himself!* This was a theological issue that ultimately led to Jesus' arrest and crucifixion.

> "The occupation with the outward religious ceremony, instead of inner transformation of the heart, has all too often attended all forms of religion and has plagued the church as well as it has Judaism. How many Christians in church history have been executed for difference of opinion on the meaning of the Lord's Supper elements or the mode of baptism or

[942]Robertson, *Word Pictures . . .*, 1:124.

> for failure to bow to church authority? The heart of man, which is so incurably religious, is also incurably evil, apart from the grace of God."[943]

5. The withdrawal to Tyre and Sidon 15:21-28 (cf. Mark 7:24-30)

As previously occurred, opposition led Jesus to withdraw and train His disciples (cf. 14:13-33). However, this time He did not just withdraw from Galilee, but from Jewish territory altogether. The response of the Canaanite woman to Jesus, in this story, contrasts with that of the Jerusalem Pharisees and scribes in the preceding pericope. She was a Gentile, with no pretensions about knowing the law, but she came to Jesus in humble belief, trusting only in His grace. She received Jesus' commendation, whereas the critics had received His censure. This incident helped the disciples know how to deal with people who believed in Jesus, even Gentiles.

> "This section at the close of the Galilean phase of Matthew's story thus marks a decisive break from the previous pattern of Jesus' ministry, a deliberate extension of the mission of the Messiah of Israel to the surrounding non-Jewish peoples. The whole new approach is a practical enactment of Jesus' radical attitude toward Jewish purity laws which has just been declared in vv. 11-20; he and his good news will recognize no such restriction of the grace of God."[944]

15:21 Matthew used the key word "withdrew" many times (cf. 2:12, 22; 4:12; 12:15; 14:13). "Tyre and Sidon" stood on the Mediterranean coast, about 30 and 50 miles north of Galilee respectively. This was pagan Gentile territory. This was not a mission to preach the kingdom in this Gentile region. Jesus was simply getting away with His disciples for a rest.

15:22 Matthew introduced this extraordinary story with an extraordinary word, "Behold," which the NIV version omits. By describing this woman as "a Canaanite," the writer drew attention to the fact that she was a descendant of Israel's ancient enemies. She "came out . . . from that region" in the sense that she left her home environs to meet Jesus. Her use of "Lord" may have been only respectful.[945] However, by calling Him the "Son of David," she clearly expressed belief that He was Israel's promised Messiah who would heal His people (cf. 9:27; 12:23).

> "She plainly reveals that she has knowledge of the Messianic hopes of Israel and had heard that they were being connected with Jesus as the promised great descendant of King David."[946]

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[943]Walvoord, *Matthew:* . . ., pp. 117-18.
[944]France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 588.
[945]See my note on 8:2.
[946]Lenski, p. 594.

15:23-24 The disciples probably wanted Jesus to heal the woman's daughter so she would stop bothering them. Jesus had previously healed many demon-possessed people (4:24; 8:16, 28, 33; 9:32; 12:22). However, He declined to do so here because His mission was to the Jews. "The lost sheep of the house of Israel" probably means "the lost sheep which is the house of Israel," rather than the lost sheep who are a part of the house of Israel (cf. 10:6).

> "He still claims the place of the King who shall shepherd Israel (Matthew 2:6; 2 Samuel 5:2)."[947]

> "A good teacher may sometimes aim to draw out a pupil's best insight by a deliberate challenge which does not necessarily represent the teacher's own view—even if the phrase 'devil's advocate' may not be quite appropriate to this context!"[948]

15:25 This woman's desperate feeling of helplessness, and her confidence in Jesus' ability to meet her need, are obvious in her posture and her words. Matthew used the imperfect tense to describe her kneeling, making her action even more vivid. She did not just kneel and stand, but she was (stayed) kneeling (in a bowed position) "before Him." This was the attitude of a humble suppliant.

15:26 Jesus again clarified the difference between Jews and Gentiles, in order to challenge her. Parents normally feed their children first. The house dogs get whatever might remain. God, of course, was the Person providing the spiritual Bread of Life to His chosen people (the children's bread), and "the dogs" were the Gentiles, as the Jews regarded them popularly.

> "We can be quite sure that the smile on Jesus' face and the compassion in his eyes robbed the words of all insult and bitterness."[949]

15:27 In her reply the woman said, "for even," not "but even" (Gr. *kai gar*). This is an important distinction to make, because she was not challenging what Jesus had said. She acknowledged the truthfulness of what He said, and then appealed to Him on the basis of its implications. Her words reveal great faith and spiritual wisdom. She did not ask for help because her case made her an exception, or because she believed she had a right to Jesus' help. She did not argue about God's justice in seeking the Jews first. She simply threw herself on Jesus' mercy without pleading any merit.

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[947]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 195.
[948]France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 591.
[949]Barclay, 2:135.

> ". . . she is confident that even if she is not entitled to sit down as a guest at the Messiah's table, Gentile 'dog' that she is, yet at least she may be allowed to receive a crumb of the uncovenanted mercies of God."[950]

She used the diminutive form of "dogs" (Gr. *kynaria*) probably because small house dogs are even more dependent than large street dogs. She also used the diminutive form of "crumbs" (Gr. *psichion*) that expressed her unworthiness to receive a large blessing.

> "The metaphor which Christ had used as a reason for rejecting her petition she turns into a reason for granting it."[951]

She bowed to God's will regarding Jewish priority, but she also believed that God would extend His grace to believing Gentiles (cf. Rom. 9—11).

> "The Canaanite woman was a source of unending wonder and comfort to Luther because she had the audacity to argue with Christ."[952]

15:28 "O" before "woman," also not translated in the NIV, makes this an emotional address.[953] Jesus responded emotionally to her trust; it moved Him deeply. The woman's "faith" was "great" because it revealed humble submission to God's will, and it expressed confidence in His Messiah to do what only God could do. Jesus "healed" the girl with His word, and immediately she became well (cf. 8:13; 9:22).

Jesus had healed Gentiles before, but this was the first time He healed one in Gentile territory. Both people whom Jesus commended for their great faith in Matthew were Gentiles, this Canaanite woman and the Roman centurion (8:5-13). In each case, Jesus initially expressed reluctance to heal because they were Gentiles. In both cases, Jesus provided healing for an acquaintance of theirs from a distance, and He said their faith was greater than that of any Jew. In the case of the centurion, Jesus responded fairly quickly to the request, but in this one He played "hard to get." So of the two cases, the woman appears to have had greater faith than even the centurion.

In the spiritual sense, Gentiles were "far off" until Calvary, when Jesus reconciled them. Then they enjoyed equal footing with Jews in the church (Eph. 2—3).

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[950]Tasker, p. 152.

[951]Plummer, p. 217.

[952]Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand*, p. 284.

[953]F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, § 146 (1b).

This miracle was another important lesson for the disciples. The Jews had priority in God's kingdom program. However, God would deliver Gentiles who also came to Him in humble dependence, relying only on His power and mercy for salvation.

> "In this miracle of mercy there is a clear foreview of Gentile blessing which fits the pattern established in Matthew 1:1 and Romans 15:8-9. The actions of Christ show that He was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, for confirmation of the promises made unto the fathers and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy."[954]

6. The public ministry to Gentiles 15:29-39

Matthew again recorded a summary of Jesus' general healing ministry (cf. 4:23-25; 9:35-38; 12:15-21; 14:34-36) following opposition (13:54—14:12; 15:1-20) and discipleship training (14:13-33; 15:21-28). Opposition and discipleship training did not occupy His attention so exclusively that He had no time to heal the multitudes compassionately.

Jesus' healing ministry 15:29-31 (cf. Mark 7:31-37)

Jesus departed from the region around Tyre and Sidon (v. 21) and returned to the "Sea of Galilee." There are several clues in the verses that follow that enable the reader to see that Jesus went to the eastern (Gentile) side of the lake (cf. Mark 7:31). Again, "large crowds" brought their sick to Jesus for healing. He performed these acts of healing freely ("and He healed them," the "many" who were "brought"). The reference to the people glorifying "the God of Israel" is one clue that the people were mainly Gentiles. They saw a connection between Jesus and the God of Israel. The Decapolis region east of the Sea of Galilee was strongly Gentile in population.

Why did Jesus so freely heal Gentiles, here, when in the previous section He showed such reticence to do so? Undoubtedly, He said what He did to the Canaanite woman for the benefit of His disciples. and to give her an opportunity to demonstrate her great faith *before them*.

Jesus' feeding of the 4,000 15:32-39 (cf. Mark 8:1-10)

Jesus had previously fed 5,000 men, but that was near the northeast coast of Lake Galilee, where the people were mainly Jews (14:13-21). Now He fed 4,000 men on the east coast of Lake Galilee, where the people were mainly Gentiles.

> "Although both miracles are performed in the same way, and are signs that Jesus possesses supernatural power over created things, in the first story He seems to be concerned that the disciples should understand how utterly dependent upon Him they must always be, if they are to do what He would have them do, and in the second story He seems to be indirectly reproving them for their lack of sympathy with the needs of the Gentile world."[955]

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[954]Toussaint, *Behold the . . .*, p. 196.

[955]Tasker, p. 154.

Feeding the 5,000	**Feeding the 4,000**
Primarily Jews	Primarily Gentiles
In Galilee near Bethsaida	In the Decapolis
Five loaves and two fish	Seven loaves and a few fish
12 baskets of scraps	7 baskets of scraps
People with Jesus one day	People with Jesus three days
Spring season	Summer season
Jews tried to make Jesus king	No popular response

15:32-33 Matthew again called attention to Jesus' "compassion" (v. 32; cf. 9:36). Evidently the crowds had not gone home at nightfall, but had slept on the hillsides to be close to Jesus. This presents a picture of huge crowds standing in line—for days at a time—to obtain Jesus' help. Some of them were becoming physically weak from lack of food.

The disciples' question amazes the reader, since Jesus had recently fed 5,000 men—plus women and children. Probably the fact that the crowd was predominantly *Gentile* led the disciples to conclude that Jesus would not do the same for them that He had done for the Jews. This may have been especially true in view of what He had said to the Canaanite woman about Jewish priority in God's kingdom program. If they thought of "the feeding of the 5,000" as a *foretaste* of the kingdom banquet, they probably would have thought that it was a uniquely Jewish experience.

Or, perhaps, since Jesus rebuked the crowd for just wanting food (and not spiritual nourishment) after the feeding of the 5,000, the disciples did not consider that He would duplicate the miracle (cf. John 6:26). Undoubtedly the disciples' limited faith was also a factor (cf. 16:5-12).

15:34-39 Matthew wrote that this time the disciples gathered the remaining scraps in a different type of basket. The Greek word *spyridas* describes baskets made of rushes that the Gentiles used to carry fish and other food (cf. Acts 9:25). In 14:20, the disciples had used *kophinous*, baskets the Jews used to carry kosher food, at least in Rome.[956] This is another clue that the audience here was mainly Gentile.

Possibly there is some significance in the number of baskets of fragments the disciples collected. If "12" in 14:20 represents the 12 tribes of Israel, these "seven" baskets may stand for the mark of a creative act of God, as in the seven days of creation. However, this symbolism is highly tenuous (cf. Rev. 1:20).

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[956]A. E. J. Rawlinson, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, p. 87.

As before, everyone got enough to eat ("and were satisfied"). Matthew again only recorded the number of the males present, in keeping with Jewish thinking. Perhaps the total crowd numbered between 8,000 and 16,000 people.

The site of "Magadan" is unknown (v. 39). Probably it was on the west side of the lake, the Jewish side, since conflict with the Pharisees and Sadducees followed. Some commentators believe Magadan is the same as Magdala, an area just north of Tiberias on Galilee's western shore.[957] Some conjecture that this was the hometown of Mary Magdalene.

This incident would have impressed the disciples with God's graciousness in dealing with the Gentiles. His kingdom plan definitely included them, albeit in a secondary role. Their role as disciples would include ministry to the Gentiles as well as to Jews. They had the same ministry responsibilities to both ethnic groups.

> "If Jesus' aphorism about the children and the dogs merely reveals *priority* in feeding, then it is hard to resist the conclusion that in the feeding of the four thousand Jesus is showing that blessing for the Gentiles is beginning to dawn."[958]

The fact that *Moses* and *Elisha* each performed two feeding miracles should have elevated Jesus to a status, at least equal with *them*, in the people's minds (cf. Exod. 16; Num. 11; 2 Kings 4:1-7, 38-44). Unfortunately most of the people, both Jews and Gentiles, continued to come to Jesus only to obtain physical help.

7. The opposition of the Pharisees and Sadducees 16:1-12

Back in Jewish territory, Jesus faced another attack from Israel's religious leaders.

The renewed demand for a sign 16:1-4 (cf. Mark 8:11-12)

16:1 Matthew introduced "*the* Pharisees and Sadducees" with one definite article in the Greek text. Such a construction implies that they acted together. That is remarkable, since they were political and theological enemies (cf. Acts 23:6-10). However, a common opponent sometimes transforms enemies into allies (cf. Luke 23:12; Ps. 2:2). Representatives of both parties constituted the Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish governing body in Israel (cf. Acts 23:6). This delegation, evidently from Jerusalem, represented the most official group of religious leaders that Matthew reported coming to Jesus thus far.

These men came specifically to test Jesus (Gr. *peipazontes*), to demonstrate who He was by subjecting Him to a trial that they had contrived (cf. 4:1, 7). The scribes and Pharisees had asked Jesus for a sign

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[957]E.g., Walvoord, *Matthew: . . .*, p. 120. See also Finegan, p. 303.

[958]Carson, "Matthew," p. 357.

earlier (12:38). Now the Pharisees and Sadducees asked Him to produce "a sign from heaven." The Jews believed that demons could do signs on earth, but only God could produce a sign out of heaven.[959] The Jews typically looked for signs as divine authentication that God was indeed working through people who professed to speak for Him (cf. 1 Cor. 1:22).

16:2-3 Jesus suggested that His critics did not need a special sign since many things pointed to His being the Messiah. They could read "the sky" well enough to predict what the "weather" would be like soon. However, they could not read what was happening in their midst well enough to know that their Messiah had appeared. The proof that they could not discern the signs of the times was that they asked for a sign.

> "It is surprising that in a wide variety of different fields of knowledge human beings can be so knowledgeable and perceptive, yet in the realm of the knowledge of God exist in such darkness. The explanation of the latter sad state is not to be found in a lack of intellectual ability—no more for the Pharisees and Sadducees than for today. The evidence is there, examinable and understandable for those who are open to it and who welcome it. The issue in the knowledge of God is not intellect but receptivity."[960]

What were "the signs of the times" that Israel's religious leaders failed to read? John the Baptist's appearance and preaching were two. John had told these leaders that *he* was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy of Messiah's forerunner (Isa. 40:3; Matt. 3:1-12).[961] Jesus had also identified John as the forerunner (11:14). Jesus' works were another sign that the King had arrived, and Jesus had pointed this out (12:28). Finally, the prophecy of Daniel's 69 weeks should have alerted these students of the Old Testament to the fact that Messiah's appearance was near (Dan. 9:25-26; cf. John 5:30-47; 8:12-20).

16:4 Jesus refused to give His critics the sign they wanted. The only "sign" they would get would be "the sign of Jonah" when Jesus rose from the dead (cf. 12:38-42).

> "The only sign to Nineveh was Jonah's solemn warning of near judgment, and his call to repentance—and the only sign now, or rather 'unto this generation no sign,' [Mark 8:12] was the warning cry of judgment and the loving call to repentance."[962]

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[959]Alford, 1:169.
[960]Hagner, *Matthew 14—28*, p. 456.
[961]For the Jewish understanding of Isaiah 40:3, see Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 2:744.
[962]Ibid., 2:70.

> "The sign of Jonah was *Jonah himself and his message from God*. It was the emergence of the prophet and the message which be brought which changed life for the people of Nineveh.
>
> "So what Jesus is saying is that God's sign is *Jesus Himself and His message*."[963]
>
> "Miracles will give confirmation where there is faith, but not where there is willful unbelief."[964]

Jesus withdrew again in response to opposition. However, this time Matthew used a stronger word (*kataleipo*) meaning "to forsake or abandon." Jesus turned His back on these religious leaders because they were hopeless and incorrigible.[965] This was to be Jesus' last and most important withdrawal from Galilee before His final trip south to Jerusalem (19:1). He remained outside Galilee through 17:20, when He returned there from the North.

Jesus' teaching about the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees 16:5-12 (cf. Mark 8:13-26)

16:5-7 The NIV translation of verse 5 is clearer than that of the NASB. "When they went across the lake" pictures what follows as happening either during the journey, probably by boat, or after it. Jesus was still thinking about the preceding conflict with the Pharisees and Sadducees, but the disciples were thinking about food. "Leaven" or yeast is primarily an illustration of something small that inevitably spreads and has a large effect (cf. 13:33). Often it stands for the spread of something evil, as it does here (cf. Exod. 34:25; Lev. 2:11; 1 Cor. 5:6-8). The disciples may not have understood what Jesus meant because they were thinking in literal terms, but He was speaking metaphorically. Perhaps they were still thinking about Jesus' instructions for their mission in 10:9-11.[966] Another possibility follows.

> "They thought the words of Christ implied, that in His view they had not *forgotten* to bring bread, but purposely omitted to do so, in order, like the Pharisees and Sadducees, to 'seek of Him a sign' of His divine Messiahship—nay, to oblige Him to show such—that of miraculous provision in their want. The mere suspicion showed what was in their minds, and pointed to their danger. This explains how, in His

[963]Barclay, 2:142-43.
[964]Wiersbe, 1:56.
[965]Plummer, p. 221.
[966]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 609.

> reply, Jesus reproved them, not for utter want of discernment, but only for 'little faith.'"[967]

The pervasive influence of both the Pharisees and the Sadducees was worldly-mindedness.[968] Perhaps this was what Jesus was warning His disciples to avoid. They apparently believed that He meant that they should not buy bread from people belonging to either of these sects.

16:8-12 Jesus' rebuke probably arose from the disciples' failure to believe that He could provide bread for them—in spite of their having witnessed two feeding miracles. This was a serious mistake for them (cf. 6:30).

> "The miracles Jesus performs, unlike the signs the Pharisees demand, do not compel faith; but those with faith will perceive their significance."[969]

The disciples did not perceive their significance, namely, that Jesus was the Messiah who could and would provide for His people. In this, their attitude was not much different from that of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Jesus did not explain His metaphor to the disciples, but, as a good teacher, He repeated it—forcing them to think more deeply about its meaning. Matthew provided the interpretation for his readers (v. 12). Though the Pharisees and Sadducees differed on several points of theology, they held certain beliefs in common. Specifically, the "teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees," that Jesus warned His disciples about, was the skepticism toward divine revelation that resulted in failure to accept Messiah. These critics tried to fit the King and His kingdom into their preconceptions and preferences, rather than accepting Him as the Old Testament presented Him.

This section of the Gospel (13:54—16:12) emphasizes the continuing and mounting opposition to the King. Matthew recorded Jesus withdrawing from this opposition twice (14:13; 15:21). In both instances He proceeded to train His disciples. The first time He ministered to Jews, and the second time He ministered to Gentiles. Opposition arose from the Jewish people (13:54-58), from the Romans (14:1-12), and most strongly from the religious leaders within Judaism (15:1-9; 16:1-4). The rejection of this last group finally became so firm that Jesus abandoned them (16:4). From now on, He concentrated on preparing His disciples for what lay ahead of them because of Israel's rejection of her King.

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[967]Edersheim, *The Life* . . ., 2:71.
[968]Bruce, *The Training* . . ., p. 159.
[969]Carson, "Matthew," p. 363.

B. JESUS' INSTRUCTION OF HIS DISCIPLES AROUND GALILEE 16:13—19:2

Almost as a fugitive from His enemies, Jesus took His disciples to the far northern extremity of Jewish influence, the most northerly place Jesus visited. At this place, as far from Jerusalem and Jesus' opponents as possible, Jesus proceeded to give them important revelation concerning what lay ahead for Him and them. Here, Peter would make the great confession of the true identity of Jesus, whereas in Jerusalem to the south, the Jews would deny His identity. In this safe haven, Jesus revealed to the Twelve more about His person, His program, and His principles as Israel's rejected King.

1. Instruction about the King's person 16:13-17 (cf. Mark 8:27-29; Luke 9:18-20)

16:13 The "district of Caesarea Philippi" lay 25 miles north of Galilee.[970] Its inhabitants were mainly Gentiles. Herod Philip II, the tetrarch of the region, had enlarged a smaller town on the site at the foot of Mt. Hermon: Paneas. The town's elevation was 1,150 feet above sea level. He renamed it "Caesarea" in honor of Caesar, and it became known as "Caesarea Philippi," in distinction from the Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast, Caesarea Sebaste (also known as Caesarea Palaestinae and Caesarea Meritima).[971]

Since Jesus had previously used the title "Son of Man" of Himself, His question must have meant: "Who do people say that I am?" The disciples answered accordingly.

> "He [Jesus] wished them [the Twelve] to be fairly committed to the doctrine of His *Messiahship* before proceeding to speak in plain terms on the unwelcome theme of His *death*."[972]

16:14 There were many different opinions about who Jesus was. Some, including Herod Antipas, believed He was the resurrected "John the Baptist" (14:2). Others believed He was the fulfillment of the "Elijah" prophecy, namely, the forerunner of the Messiah (Mal. 4:5-6; cf. Matt. 3:1-3; 11:9-10; 17:10-13). Some concluded that Jesus was the resurrected "Jeremiah," probably because of similarities between the men and their ministries. For example, both men were quite critical of Israel generally, and both combined authority and suffering in their ministries.[973]

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[970]See Finegan, p. 307.

[971]Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 18:2:1.

[972]Bruce, *The Training . . .*, p. 164.

[973]See Gary E. Yates, "Intertextuality and the Portrayal of Jeremiah the Prophet," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 170:679 (July-September 2013):286-303.

> "Jeremiah was expected by some to appear and restore the ark he had supposedly hidden (II Macc 2:1-8)."[974]

Still other Jews thought Jesus was some other resurrected prophet. It is interesting that the disciples did not answer that some said Jesus was the Messiah. That opinion was not a popular one, reflecting the widespread unbelief in Israel.

> "What we must recognize is that christological confession was not cut and dried, black or white. It was possible to address Jesus with some messianic title without complete conviction, or while still holding some major misconceptions about the nature of his messiahship, and therefore stopping short of unqualified allegiance or outright confession."[975]

16:15-16 The "you" in verse 15 is in the emphatic first position in the Greek text, and it is plural. Peter responded, therefore, partly as spokesman for the disciples, again (cf. 15:15). Peter said he believed Jesus was "the Christ," the Messiah that the Old Testament prophesied, the hope of Israel (cf. 1:1). Matthew's only use of Peter's full name here, "Simon Peter," highlights the significance of the disciple's declaration.

Peter further defined Jesus as "the Son of the living God." This is a more definite identification of Jesus as deity than "God's Son" or "a son of God" (14:33). Those title forms leave a question open about the sense in which Jesus was God's Son. The Jews often described their God as the living God, the contrast being with dead idols. By referring to God in this way, Peter left no doubt about which "God" was the Father of Jesus. He was the one *true* God. Since Jesus was the Son of God, He was the Messiah, the King over the long anticipated earthly kingdom (cf. 2 Sam. 7:14; Isa. 9:6; Jer. 23:5-6; Mic. 5:2). Peter expressed belief that Jesus was both Messiah and God. Jesus had just referred to Himself as the "Son of Man" (v. 13), but Peter viewed Him as the "Son of God."

> "In the region of Caesarea Philippi, a center for the worship of Pan (as it had been previously of the Canaanite Baal), the title ["Son of the living God"] would have a special resonance as marking out the true God from all other gods."[976]

This was probably not the first time that the idea that Jesus was the Messiah had entered Peter's mind. The disciples followed Jesus hoping that He was the Messiah (John 1:41, 45, 49). However, as we have seen,

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[974]Kent, "The Gospel . . .," p. 958.
[975]Carson, "Matthew," p. 365.
[976]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 619.

the disciples gained a growing awareness and conviction that Jesus really was the Messiah (cf. 14:33). Their appreciation of the implications of His messiahship would continue to grow as long as they lived, though Jesus' resurrection resulted in their taking a giant step forward in this understanding. Peter's great confession here was an important benchmark in their understanding and faith.

> "Matthew shows that whereas the public in Israel does not receive Jesus and wrongly conceives of him as being a prophet, Peter, as spokesman for the disciples, confesses Jesus aright to be the Son of God and so reveals that the disciples' evaluative point of view concerning Jesus' identity is in alignment with that of God [cf. 3:17; 17:5]."[977]

16:17 "Blessed" (Gr. *makarios*) identifies someone whom God has singularly favored and who, therefore, enjoys happiness (cf. 5:3-11). It is not the announcement of some special benediction or blessing on Peter for answering as he did.[978] However, verse 19 does reveal that Peter would receive a reward for his confession. "Barjonas" is a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew *bar yonah* meaning "son of Jonah" (short for Yohanan). This address stressed Peter's human nature. Jesus only used this full name for Peter when He had something very important to say to him (cf. John 1:42; 21:15).

Peter gained this insight about Jesus, that he had just expressed, because God had given it to him (cf. 11:27; cf. John 6:44). It did not come from Peter himself. "Flesh and blood" was a Hebrew idiom for man as a mortal being (cf. 1 Cor 15:50; Gal. 1:16; Eph. 6:12; Heb. 2:14).[979] Jesus perceived that Peter's confession came from God-given insight. However, not all such statements about Jesus did, or do, necessarily (cf. 21:9; 27:54).

2. Instruction about the King's program 16:18—17:13

Jesus proceeded immediately to build on the disciples' faith. They were now ready for more information. He gave them new revelation concerning what lay ahead so they would be ready for it.

Revelation about the church 16:18-20

16:18 "I say to you" (cf. 5:18, 20, 22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44; 8:10) may imply that Jesus would continue the revelation the Father had begun. However, the phrase occurs elsewhere when that contrast is not in view. Undoubtedly, it

[977]Kingsbury, *Matthew as . . .*, p. 75.
[978]Morgan, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 210.
[979]M'Neile, p. 240.

means at least that Jesus was about to teach the disciples some important truth. Peter had made his declaration, and now Jesus would make His declaration.

Jesus drew attention to Peter's name because He was about to make a pun on it. The English name "Peter" is a transliteration of the Greek name *Petros*. *Petros* translates the Aramaic word *kepa*. This word transliterated into Greek is *Kephas* from which we get "Cephas" in English (John 1:42; et al.). The Aramaic word *kepa* was a rare name in Jesus' day (cf. 4:18). It means "rock." Peter's nickname was "Rocky." *Petros* commonly meant "stone" in pre-Christian Greek, but *kepa*, which underlies the Greek, means "(massive) rock (cf. 7:24)."[980] It is incorrect to say that the name "Peter" describes a small stone.

> "*Petros* is usually a smaller detachment of the massive ledge. But too much must not be made of this point since Jesus probably spoke Aramaic to Peter which draws no such distinction (*Kepha*)."[981]

There are three main views about the identity of "this rock." The first is that Jesus meant Peter was the rock.[982] Peter's name meant "rock," so this identity seems natural in the context. Moreover, Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah and Jesus' subsequent confirmation of his confession also point in that direction. Peter became the leading disciple in the early church (Acts 1-12), a third argument for this view. A variation of this view follows:

> ". . . Peter himself is the rock, but in a special sense. He is not the rock on which the Church is founded; that rock is God. He is the first initial foundation stone of the whole Church. . . . In other words, Peter was the first member of the Church, and, in that sense, the whole Church is built on him."[983]

However, Jesus evidently intended two different meanings for "Peter" and "rock." Matthew recorded the Aramaic distinction in Greek. If Jesus had wanted to identify Peter as the rock on which He would build the church, the clearest way to do this would have been to use the same word. Second, while Peter's confession triggered Jesus' comment about building His church on a rock, it did not place Peter in a privileged position among the disciples. Jesus never treated Peter as though he occupied a favored

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[980]Carson, "Matthew," p. 367.
[981]Robertson, *Word Pictures . . .*, 1:131.
[982]E.g., Plummer, pp. 228-29; Carson, "Matthew," p. 468; France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 621-22; Edwin W. Rice, *People's Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, pp. 168-69; and most Roman Catholic interpreters.
[983]Barclay, 2:155.

position in the church because he made this confession. Third, the New Testament writers never connected Peter's leadership in the early church with his confession. That rested on divine election, Jesus' command to strengthen his brethren (Luke 22:32), and Peter's personality.

A second view is that Jesus meant the truth that Peter confessed, namely, that Jesus is the Messiah and God, was the rock.[984] This position has in its favor the different words Jesus used for "rock" and the definite "this" before "rock" as identifying something in the immediately preceding context. Furthermore, other New Testament references to the foundation of the church could refer to the truth concerning Jesus' person and work (Rom. 9:33; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:5-8).

Nevertheless, calling "the truth about Jesus" a "rock," when Jesus had just called Peter a "rock," seems unnecessarily confusing. A variation of this view is the idea that the faith that Peter had just expressed was the rock.[985] The addition of "this" before "rock" only compounds the confusion. Also, the other New Testament passages that refer to the foundation of the church never identify that foundation as the truth about Jesus, or faith in Jesus. They point to something else.

This leads us to the third, and what I believe is the best, solution to this problem. Many interpreters believe that *Jesus Himself* is the "Rock" in view.[986] The Old Testament prophets likened Messiah to a Stone (Ps. 118:22; Isa. 28:16), and Jesus claimed to be that Stone (21:42). Peter himself identified Jesus as that Stone (Acts 4:10-12; 1 Pet. 2:5-8), as Paul did (Rom. 9:32-33; 1 Cor. 3:11; 10:4; Eph. 2:20). Second, this interpretation explains the use of two different though related words for "rock." Third, this view accounts for the use of "this" since Jesus was present when He said these words. Fourth, the Old Testament used the figure of a Rock to describe God (Deut. 32:4, 15, 18, 30, 31, 37; 2 Sam. 22:2; Ps. 18:2, 31, 46; 28:1). Since Peter had just confessed that Jesus was God, it would have been natural for Jesus to use this figure of God to picture Himself.

Critics of this view point out that this interpretation makes Jesus mix His metaphors. Jesus becomes both the foundation of the church *and* the builder of the church. However, the New Testament refers explicitly to Jesus as the church's foundation elsewhere (Rom. 9:33; 1 Cor. 3:11; 1 Pet. 2:5-8), and Jesus referred to Himself as the church's builder here. Second, Paul's statement that God builds the church on the apostles and prophets

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[984]E.g., M'Neile, p. 241; Tasker, p. 158; Edersheim, *Sketches of* . . ., pp. 12, 22; Kent, "The Gospel . . .," p. 959; and Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 202.

[985]Robertson, *Word Pictures* . . ., 1:132.

[986]E.g., Calvin, *Institutes of* . . ., 4:6:3, 6; Morgan, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 211; McGee, 4:92; Walvoord, *Matthew:* . . ., p. 123; Lenski, p. 626; Barbieri, p. 57; and Wiersbe, 1:57.

has ruled Jesus out as the foundation for some interpreters (Eph. 2:20). However, the apostles and prophets were the foundation in a secondary sense, Jesus being the chief rock (cornerstone) around which they also provided a foundation (cf. 1 Cor. 3:10-11). Third, Peter's prominence among the disciples, and in the early church, seems (to some) to argue against Jesus being the foundation in view. Still, Peter was only the first among equals. His leadership in the church was not essentially different from that of the other apostles, as the New Testament writers present it.

The next key word in this important verse is "church." The only occurrences of this word (Gr. *ekklesia*) in all four Gospels are here and in 18:17.[987] The Greek word refers to an assembly of people called out for a particular purpose. It comes from the verb *ekkaleo,* "to call out from." The Septuagint translators used it of Israel (Deut. 4:10; Josh. 9:2; Judg. 20:2; et al.; cf. Acts. 7:38).[988] In the New Testament it also refers to an assembly of citizens with no religious significance (Acts 19:39).[989] However, Jesus used it here with a new meaning.

> ". . . *ekklesia* was the only possible word to express the Christian body as distinct from Jews. . . . He had just ended His public ministry in Galilee, had taken the disciples on a long journey alone, and was about to go to Jerusalem with the avowed intention of being killed; no moment was more suitable for preparing His followers to become a new body, isolated both from the masses and from the civil and religious authorities."[990]

Jesus used the term *ekklesia* to refer to a new entity that was yet to come into existence. He said He would build it in the future. He would not yet establish His kingdom on earth, but He would "build" His "church."

> "The word *build* is also significant because it implies the gradual erection of the church under the symbolism of living stones being built upon Christ, the foundation stone, as indicated in 1 Peter 2:4-8. This was to be the purpose of God *before* the second coming, in contrast to the millennial kingdom, which would follow the second coming."[991]

Furthermore, Jesus claimed the church as His own in a unique sense by calling it "My church." Jesus revealed the existence of this new organism here for the first time in history. There is no Old Testament revelation of

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[987]See Benjamin L. Merkle, "The Meaning of *'Ekklesia* in Matthew 16:18 and 18:17," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167:667 (July-September 2010):281-91.
[988]See M'Neile, p. 241.
[989]See Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament,* 1:93.
[990]M'Neile, pp. 241-42.
[991]Walvoord, *Matthew:* . . ., p. 124.

its existence. Jesus brought it into being because Israel had rejected her Messiah, and consequently God would postpone the kingdom of God on earth. In the meantime, Jesus would construct an entirely new entity. He Himself would be both its foundation and its builder.

Jesus' "church" is not the same as His "kingdom." It is interesting that even some scholars who were not dispensationalists acknowledged this.[992] Jesus could have said, "I will build My kingdom," if the church is the first phase of His coming kingdom on earth. But the church is not part of that kingdom; it is a separate thing. Jesus would create a new entity (on the day of Pentecost), but He only postponed the kingdom, which will come into being at His Second Coming after He has taken the church to heaven (John 14:1-3). "Christians" (believers living in the Church Age) will return with Jesus Christ at His Second Coming, and will participate in His messianic kingdom on the earth in glorified bodies (cf. 1 Thess. 4:17).

"Gates" in biblical usage refer to fortifications (Gen. 22:17; Ps. 127:5). "Hades" is the place of departed spirits (cf. 5:22; 11:23). Together these terms refer to death and dying (Job 17:16; 38:17; Ps. 9:13; 107:18; Isa. 38:10).[993] Jesus apparently meant that the powers of death, Satan, and his minions—doing their most powerful work of opposing life—would not prevail over the church. The church cannot die. This statement anticipated Jesus' resurrection, as well as the resurrection and translation of church saints.[994] Even Jesus' death would not prevent Him from building the church. Jesus' church would be a living church, just as Yahweh was the living God (cf. v. 16).

Another view is that Jesus meant that the church would be successful in overcoming all the opposition that it faced:

> "An invading or besieging army does not carry the gates of its cities with it. It is hell, or hades, the realm of darkness, that is being besieged by the forces of light who are carrying on, not a *defensive*, but an *offensive* warfare, and to them the promise is given that 'the gates of hell shall not prevail.'"[995]

This is all that Jesus revealed about the church here. He simply introduced this new revelation to the disciples as a farmer plants a seed. All of their thinking had been about the kingdom. To say more about the church now would have confused them unnecessarily. Jesus would provide more revelation about the church later (ch. 18; John 14—16).

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[992]E.g., Carson, "Matthew," p. 369; and Plummer, p. 230.

[993]See Jack P. Lewis, "'The Gates of Hell Shall Not Prevail Against It' (Matt 16:18): A Study of the History of Interpretation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38:3 (September 1996):349-67.

[994]Robertson, *Word Pictures . . .*, 1:133.

[995]H. A. Ironside, *Notes on Philippians*, p. 27.

16:19 Jesus resumed talking about "the kingdom." When Peter first heard these words, he probably thought that when Jesus established His kingdom, he would receive an important position of authority in it. That is indeed what Jesus promised. The kingdom in view is the same messianic (millennial) kingdom that Jesus had been talking about since He began His public ministry. It is not the church.

Peter did not receive a reward of *power* over the other disciples in the church for his confession of Jesus as the divine Messiah, though he did enjoy *honor* among them (cf. Acts 2:14; 4:8; 15:7).[996] His blessing was not superior authority in the *church*, but a position of authority in the *kingdom* (equal with the other apostles; cf. 19:27-28). Jesus' reintroduction of the subject of the kingdom here helped the disciples understand that the church would not replace the kingdom.

> "We must . . . be careful not to identify the *ekklesia* with the kingdom. There is nothing here to suggest such identification. . . . To S. Peter were to be given the keys of the kingdom. The kingdom is here, as elsewhere in this Gospel, the kingdom to be inaugurated when the Son of Man came upon the clouds of heaven. . . . The *ekklesia*, on the other hand, was the society of Christ's disciples, who were to wait for it, and who would enter into it when it came. The Church was built upon the truth of the divine Sonship. It was to proclaim the coming kingdom. In that kingdom Peter should hold the keys which conferred authority."[997]

Shortly after this event, Jesus told the other disciples that they too had the power to "bind" and "loose" (18:18; cf. John 20:23). He gave this revelation in the context of teaching on church discipline. So evidently all the disciples, who became apostles in the church, shared Peter's authority in the kingdom.[998]

The Roman Catholic Church, following Augustine, equates the (Roman Catholic) church with the kingdom. Protestants who follow Augustine in this matter, namely, amillennialists, as well as many premillennialists (covenant or historic premillennialists and progressive dispensationalists) also equate the church and the kingdom, at least to some extent. Most normative dispensationalists acknowledge that there is presently a mystery form of the kingdom of which the church is a part, but that is not the messianic millennial kingdom.

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[996]Calvin, *Institutes of . . .*, 4:6:5.
[997]Allen, p. 177.
[998]Robertson, *Word Pictures . . .*, 1:134.

The "keys" in view probably represent Peter's authority to admit or refuse admission to the kingdom. They may also signify his authority to make appropriate provision for the household.[999] In Acts we see him opening the door to the church for Jews (Acts 2), Samaritans (Acts 8), and Gentiles (Acts 10; 15). All who enter the church will eventually enter the messianic kingdom, so Peter began to exercise this authority when the church came into existence.[1000] Jesus' prerogative as Judge is in view here (cf. 3:11-12; John 5:22, 30; Rev. 19:21).

Probably "the keys" also refer to the judicial authority that chief stewards of monarchs exercised in the ancient world (Isa. 22:15, 22; cf. Rev. 1:18; 3:7).[1001] They could permit people to enter the monarch's presence or give them access to certain areas and privileges. As the Judge of all humanity, Jesus gave this authority to Peter. Of course, some of the other Apostles exercised it too (18:18; Acts 14:27), but Peter had the primary privilege of doing so.

> "The traditional portrayal of Peter as porter at the pearly gates depends on misunderstanding 'the kingdom of heaven' here as a designation of the afterlife rather than denoting God's rule among his people on earth."[1002]

The next problem in this verse is the binding and loosing. First, what is the proper translation of the Greek text? The best evidence points to the NASB translation: "Whatever you shall bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."[1003] The "whatever" seems to include people and privileges, in view of how the Old Testament described the stewards' use of keys.

The rabbis of Jesus' day often spoke of binding and loosing in the sense of forbidding and permitting.[1004] So Jesus could have meant that whatever Peter forbade to be done on earth would have already have been forbidden in heaven, because Peter would be speaking for God and announcing God's will. Whatever he permitted to be done on earth would have already been permitted in heaven for the same reason. The problem with this view is that from this time on, Peter did not always say and do the right thing (Gal. 2:11). Roman Catholics appeal to this interpretation to argue that when Peter, and his supposed successors, the popes, speak *ex cathedra*—they are using the keys of the kingdom.

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[999]U. Luz, *Matthew 8—20*, p. 364.

[1000]Cf. Barclay, 2:160; Kent, "The Gospel . . .," p. 959.

[1001]Vincent, 1:96.

[1002]France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 625.

[1003]See Carson, "Matthew," pp. 370-72; or Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., pp. 206-7; for explanation of the syntactical arguments leading to this conclusion.

[1004]Edersheim, *The Life* . . ., 2:85; Barclay, 2:160-61; Wiersbe, 1:59.

Josephus interpreted binding and loosing as punishing and absolving, not for declaring actions lawful or unlawful.[1005] We see Peter exercising these powers in the Book of Acts: he punished Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), and absolved Cornelius (i.e., declared him acceptable to God when Cornelius placed his trust in Jesus Christ; Acts 11:17).

> "These two powers—the legislative [i.e., binding and loosing] and judicial [i.e., remitting and retaining]—which belonged to the Rabbinic office, Christ now transferred, and that not in their pretension, but in their reality, to His Apostles: the first here to Peter as their Representative, the second after His Resurrection to the Church [John 20:23]."[1006]

Later, Jesus told His disciples: "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained" (John 20:23). These words seem to explain what binding and loosing mean (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18; 10:6).[1007]

> "Every preacher uses the keys of the kingdom when he proclaims the terms of salvation in Christ."[1008]

> "What are the keys of the kingdom of heaven? Were they given only to Simon Peter? No, Jesus gives them to those who make the same confession made by Peter, those who know Christ as Savior. If you are a child of God, you have the keys as well as any person has the keys. The keys were the badge of authority of the office of the scribes who interpreted the Scriptures to the people (see Neh. 8:2-8). Every Christian today has the Scriptures and, therefore, the keys. If we withhold the Word, we 'bind on earth'; if we give the Word, we 'loose on earth.' No man or individual church has the keys—to the exclusion of all other believers."[1009]

Another, less likely view, is that this was a promise that Peter will fulfill only in the messianic kingdom.

> ". . . the verse is a promise to Peter of a place of authority in the future earthly kingdom. With this promise the Lord gives Peter the basis of the decisions which he shall make.

[1005]Josephus, *The Wars . . .*, 1:5:2; and see the footnote there.
[1006]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 2:85.
[1007]Calvin, *Institutes of . . .*, 4:6:3; 4:11:1-2.
[1008]Robertson, *Word Pictures . . .*, 1:135.
[1009]McGee, 4:93.

> Peter is to discern what is the mind of God and then judge accordingly."[1010]

Peter may determine God's will in particular instances of rendering judgment in the messianic kingdom. Perhaps he will consult the Scriptures or get a direct word from Jesus who will be on earth reigning then. Then he will announce his decision. With his announcement, Peter will give or withhold whatever may be involved in the judgment, but he will really be announcing what the divine authority has already decided. Peter did some of this in the early history of the church (cf. Acts 5:1-11; 8:20-24). All the disciples will have similar judicial functions in the kingdom (19:27-28). Furthermore, all Christians will have some judicial function in the kingdom (1 Cor. 6:2-3).

16:20 Jesus' warning in this verse seems to run contrary to His purpose to manifest Himself as the Messiah to Israel for her acceptance (cf. Mark 8:30; Luke 9:21). Jesus wanted His disciples to keep a "messianic secret," namely, that He was the Messiah. Jesus was not trying to conceal His true identity, but He was controlling how people would respond to Him (cf. 12:38-39; 16:4). If the disciples had broadcast the fact that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, some people would have tried to draft Jesus as a political liberator. However, Jesus wanted people to come to believe on Him because of the words He spoke and the works He performed (cf. 11:4, 25-26). These were the tools God had ordained to give people divine insight into Jesus' identity (11:27), as Peter had experienced (v. 17).

> "Contrary to common misappropriation of the messianic secret, it was not Jesus' purpose to conceal his messianic identity. It was his purpose to set before Israel symbol-charged acts and words implying a persistent question: Who do you say that I am?"[1011]

Jesus wanted His disciples to stay within the means and limits that He had imposed on Himself for His self-disclosure. They should not appeal for people's acceptance of Jesus because of nationalistic zeal, or misguided messianic expectations, but because of faith rooted in understanding. Jesus' popularity on a superficial level could short-circuit the Cross. After Jesus' death and resurrection, the disciples could take a more unrestrained approach to calling people to repentance and faith (cf. 10:27). The disciples apparently grasped the danger of people accepting Jesus for superficial reasons, but they did not understand the threat of short-circuiting the Cross, as the next section shows.[1012]

[1010]Toussaint, *Behold the . . .*, p. 207.

[1011]Ben F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus*, p. 350, footnote 59; cf. pp. 250, 309-10, footnotes 119-20.

[1012]Carson, "Matthew," p. 375.

> "Why this prohibition? Because although the disciples correctly understand who Jesus is, they do not as yet know that central to Jesus' divine sonship is death on the cross. Hence, they are in no position at this point to go and make disciples of all nations."[1013]

> "In the second part of his story (4:17—16:20), Matthew tells of Jesus' ministry to Israel (4:17—11:1) and of Israel's repudiation of Jesus (11:2—16:20). Sent to Israel, Jesus teaches, preaches, and heals (4:23; 9:35; 11:1). He also calls disciples, and commissions them to a ministry in Israel modeled on his own (4:17—11:1). Israel's response to Jesus, however, is one of repudiation (11:2—16:20). Still, even as Israel repudiates him, it wonders and speculates about who he is. Wrongly, the religious leaders think of him as one who acts in collusion with Satan (9:34; 12:24), and the Jewish public imagines him to be a prophet (16:13-14; 21:46). In stark contrast to Israel, the disciples, as the recipients of divine revelation, are led by Jesus to think about him as God 'thinks' about him, namely, as the Messiah Son of God (16:15-17; 14:33). Nevertheless, because the disciples do not know at this point in the story that the central purpose of Jesus' mission is death, Jesus commands them to silence concerning his identity (16:20)."[1014]

Revelation about Jesus' death and resurrection 16:21-27

This is the second aspect of His program that Jesus proceeded to explain to His believing disciples, the first being His creation of the church. He told them about His coming passion and then about His resurrection.

Jesus' passion 16:21-23 (cf. Mark 8:31-33; Luke 9:22)

16:21 This is only the second time in his Gospel that Matthew used the phrase *apo tote erxato*, "from that time" (cf. 26:16). The first time was in 4:17, where Jesus began to present Himself to Israel as her Messiah. Here it announces Jesus' preparation of His disciples for the Cross, because of Israel's rejection, and His disciples' acceptance of Him as the divine Messiah. Thus the evangelist signaled a significant turning point in Jesus' ministry.

Jesus had hinted at His death earlier (9:15; 10:38; 12:40). However, this is the first time He discussed it with His disciples. He began "to show" or "to explain" (Gr. *deikeyo*) these things with His actions as well as His words, not just "to teach" (Gr. *didasko*) them.

[1013]Kingsbury, *Matthew as . . .*, p. 75.
[1014]Ibid., pp. 161-62.

Jesus said that He "must" (Gr. *dei*) go to Jerusalem. He had to do this because it was God's will for Messiah to "suffer" and die, as well as to experience resurrection.[1015] He had to do these things to fulfill prophecy (Isa. 53; cf. Acts 2:22-36). Jerusalem had been the site of the martyrdom of numerous Old Testament prophets (cf. 23:37).

> ". . . Jesus reveals to his disciples, in all he says and in all he does beginning with 16:21, that God has ordained that he should go to Jerusalem to suffer, and that his way of suffering is a summons to them also to go the way of suffering (i.e., the way of servanthood) (cf. 20:28). In other words, Matthew alerts the reader through the key passages 16:21 and 16:24 that suffering, defined as servanthood, is the essence of discipleship and that Jesus will show the disciples in what he says and does that this is in fact the case."[1016]

Jesus identified three groups that would be responsible for His sufferings and death there: the "elders," the "chief priests," and the "scribes" (cf. 27:41). Together these groups constituted the Sanhedrin, Israel's supreme religious body. One definite article describes all three groups and binds them together in a single entity in the Greek text (cf. 16:1, 6). This would be Israel's final and formal official rejection of her Messiah.[1017] Jesus' announcement implied that a trial would take place. However, Jesus also announced that He would arise from the dead on the third day (cf. 12:40; Ps. 16:10-11; 118:17-18, 22; Isa. 52:13-15; 53:10-12).

Here, as in the following two announcements of Jesus' death (17:22-23; 20:18-19), the accompanying announcement of Jesus' resurrection made no impression on the disciples. Apparently the thought of His dying so upset them that they did not hear the rest of what He had to say to them. Every time Jesus announced His coming death to His disciples, He also announced His coming resurrection, thus giving them hope.

> Verse 21 "prepares the reader already for the resolution of Jesus' conflict with Israel in at least two respects: (*a*) It underscores the fact that there are three principals involved in Jesus' passion, namely, God (*dei*: 'it is necessary'), Jesus, and the religious leaders. And (*b*) it reminds the reader that while all three desire the death of Jesus, the objective the leaders pursue is destructive (12:14), whereas that intended by God and Jesus is to save (1:21)."[1018]

[1015]Lenski, p. 634.
[1016]Kingsbury, *Matthew as* . . ., p. 140.
[1017]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 208.
[1018]Kingsbury, *Matthew as* . . ., p. 77.

16:22 Peter obviously understood that Jesus was predicting His death. He "began to rebuke" Jesus privately for thinking such a thing, but Jesus cut him off (v. 23). Apparently Peter's understanding of Messiah did not include a Suffering Servant, which almost everyone in Israel rejected as well.

> "Like many modern readers of the Bible, Peter did not want to accept what did not agree with his hopes and ambitions."[1019]

Peter used a very strong negative expression meaning "Never, Lord!" The Greek expression is *ou me*, and it is comparatively rare in the New Testament. Peter followed up his great confession (v. 16) with a great contradiction.

> "Peter's strong will and warm heart linked to his ignorance produce a shocking bit of arrogance. He confesses that Jesus is the Messiah and then speaks in a way implying that he knows more of God's will than the Messiah himself."[1020]

16:23 Evidently Jesus turned to confront Peter face to face. "Get behind Me, Satan" probably means: "Do not stand in My way as a stumbling block." Jesus had used similar language when rebuking Satan himself (4:10). "Satan" means "adversary." Jesus viewed Peter's comment as coming from Satan ultimately.

> "Peter's outburst was no doubt well meant, but it revealed such utter misunderstanding of Jesus' vocation that, had He heeded it, Jesus would have been doing precisely what the devil had tempted Him to do in the wilderness."[1021]

> "It does not matter how one interprets the rebuke to Peter. Jesus' main point is one that demands a response from his audience. Whether he said, 'Get out of my sight!' [NIV], 'Get behind me!' [AV], or 'Follow after me!'[1022], he intended to focus his attention on the necessity of unconditional obedience in discipleship."[1023]

Jesus had recently called Peter a rock. Now He called him a different type of rock, a rock that causes someone to stumble (Gr. *skandalon*). Satan had offered Jesus messiahship without suffering (4:8-9), and now Peter was

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[1019]Walvoord, *Matthew:* . . ., p. 125.
[1020]Carson, "Matthew," p. 377.
[1021]Tasker, p. 160.
[1022]Footnote: Gundry, *Matthew* . . ., p. 338.
[1023]Dennis C. Stoutenburg, "'Out of my sight!', 'Get behind me!', or 'Follow after me!': There Is No Choice in God's Kingdom," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36:1 (March 1993):178.

suggesting the same thing. These were both appeals to Jesus' humanity. The idea of a suffering Messiah caused Peter to stumble here, and after Jesus' resurrection the same concept caused many Jews to stumble (cf. 1 Cor. 1:23).

Peter was not thinking God's thoughts but man's. When he confessed that Jesus was the Messiah earlier (v. 16), he was thinking God's thoughts. Now he was thinking not only without regard to revelation, but in opposition to revelation, as Satan does. The contrast between verses 13-20 and verses 21-23 clearly shows that the disciples' understanding was a matter of growth. As they accepted what they came to understand progressively by divine illumination, their faith also grew.

The cost and reward of discipleship 16:24-27 (cf. Mark 8:34-38; Luke 9:23-26)

Jesus proceeded to clarify the way of discipleship. He had just explained what was involved in messiahship, and now He explained what is involved in discipleship. In view of Jesus' death, His disciples, as well as He, would have to die to self. However, they could rejoice in the assurance that the kingdom would come eventually. Glory would follow suffering. Interestingly, this was one of Peter's main emphases in his first epistle. He learned this lesson well.

16:24 Discipleship would require self-denial in the most fundamental areas of individuality. What Jesus said applies to anyone who really wants to follow Him. The Jews had renounced Jesus, but His disciples must renounce themselves (cf. 10:33; Rom 14:7-9; 15:2-3). The Romans customarily compelled someone condemned to crucifixion to carry at least part of his own cross. This act gave public testimony to his being under and submissive to the rule he had opposed. This was both a punishment and a humiliation. Likewise, Jesus' disciples must publicly declare their submission to the One whom they formerly rebelled against.[1024]

Jesus did not explicitly identify the method of His death until later (20:19), but the disciples understood, at least initially, what Jesus meant about the price they would have to pay.

> "Death to self is not so much a prerequisite of discipleship to Jesus as a continuing characteristic of it . . ."[1025]

> "(I once met a lady who told me her asthma was the cross she had to bear!)"[1026]

[1024]Barbieri, p. 59.
[1025]Carson, "Matthew," p. 379.
[1026]Wiersbe, 1:60.

Asthma, or another similar affliction, is not the type of cross that Jesus had in mind. Self-denial, as Jesus taught it, does not involve denying oneself things (for example, dessert or ice cream or even legitimate forms of entertainment), as much as it involves denying one's own authority over his or her life (cf. 4:19; John 12:23-26). This is the great challenge. The three verbs in this challenge are significant. The first two, "deny" and "take up," are aorist imperatives indicating a decisive action. The last one, "follow," is a present imperative indicating a continuing action.

> "To deny oneself means in every moment of life to say no to self, and to say yes to God."[1027]

16:25-26 Verses 25, 26, and 27 all begin with "For" (Gr. *gar*). Jesus was arguing logically. Verse 25 restates the idea that Jesus previously expressed in 10:28. The Greek word translated "life" is *psyche*, translated some other places in the New Testament "soul." It means the whole person (cf. James 1:21; 5:20). Jesus was not talking about one's eternal salvation.[1028] The point of Jesus' statement is that living for oneself now will result in a leaner life later, whereas denying oneself now for Jesus' sake will result in a fuller life later. It pays to serve Jesus, but payday will come later. As the next verse explains, the *later* in view for these disciples was the inauguration of the kingdom.

Two rhetorical questions show the folly of earning great material wealth at the expense of one's very "life" (*psyche*, v. 26). Life in the physical sense is not all that Jesus meant. As He used the word, it includes one's existence, his or her *entire being*.

> "For the world, there is immediate gain but ultimate loss: for the disciple, there is immediate loss but ultimate gain."[1029]

16:27 God's future judgment of His disciples, as well as Jesus' example, should be an inducement to deny self, identify with Christ, and follow Him (v. 24; cf. 10:24-25). This verse teaches both eschatology and Christology. Jesus will come with "the glory of His Father" when He returns to earth at His Second Coming (Rev. 19:11-16). Jesus is the "Son of Man" (Dan. 7:13) who will come with the same glory that God enjoys. The "angels" will enhance His glory, and assist Him in gathering people for judgment (13:41; 24:31; 25:31-32; Luke 9:26).

The Father's "angels" are under Jesus' authority. Then He will reward each person "according to his deeds" (conduct). Conduct demonstrates character. Again Jesus referred to the disciples' rewards (cf. 5:12; et al.).

[1027]Barclay, 2:167.

[1028]See Dillow, pp. 116-18.

[1029]Walvoord, *Matthew:* . . ., p. 126.

> The prospect of reward should motivate Jesus' disciples to deny self and follow Him. The disciple who does so simply to obtain a reward has not really denied himself. Rewards are precisely that: rewards.
>
> The rewards in view seem to be opportunities to glorify God by serving Him (cf. 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27). The disciple will have greater or smaller opportunities to do so during the millennial kingdom, and forever after, in proportion to his or her faithfulness on earth now. The New Testament writers spoke of these rewards symbolically as "crowns" elsewhere (cf. 1 Cor. 9:25; Phil. 4:1; 1 Thess. 2:19; 2 Tim. 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Pet. 5:4; Rev. 2:10; 3:11). It is perfectly proper to serve Jesus Christ to gain a reward if our motives are correct (6:19-21). We will one day lay our crowns at the feet of our Savior. The crown is an expression of a life of faithful service that we performed out of gratitude for God's grace to us (cf. Rev. 4:4, 10).[1030]
>
> Both Jesus and Paul urged us to lay up treasure in heaven, to make investments that will yield eternal rewards (6:19-21; Luke 12:31-34; 1 Tim. 6:18-19). It is perfectly legitimate to remind people of the consequences of their actions to motivate them to do what is right. That is precisely what Jesus was doing with His disciples here.

"By including this discussion here Matthew once more emphasized the program of the Messiah as it is based on Daniel's prophecy. The Messiah must first be cut off (Daniel 9:26), a period of intense trouble begins at a later time (Daniel 9:27), and finally the Son of Man comes in glory to judge the world (Daniel 7:13-14). Thus the disciples must endure suffering, and when the Son of Man comes in His glory, they will be rewarded."[1031]

"In the third part of this story (16:21—28:20), Matthew describes Jesus' journey to Jerusalem and his suffering, death, and resurrection (16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19). Jesus' first act is to tell his disciples that God has ordained that he should go to Jerusalem and there be made by the religious leaders to suffer and die (16:21). On hearing this, Peter rejects out of hand the idea that such a fate should ever befall Jesus (16:22), and Jesus reprimands Peter for thinking the things not of God, but of humans (16:23). Then, too, Peter's inability to comprehend that death is the essence of Jesus' ministry is only part of the malady afflicting the disciples: they are also incapable of perceiving that servanthood is the essence of discipleship (16:24)."[1032]

[1030]For a helpful introduction to the study of the Christian's rewards, see Zane C. Hodges, *Grace in Eclipse*.

[1031]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 208.

[1032]Kingsbury, *Matthew as* . . ., p. 162.

More revelation about the kingdom 16:28—17:13

Jesus proceeded to reveal the kingdom to His inner circle of disciples: to strengthen their faith, and to prepare them for the trials of their faith that lay ahead of them.

The announcement of the kingdom's appearing 16:28 (cf. Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27)

Jesus revealed next that "some of" the disciples whom He addressed would not die until they saw Him "coming in His kingdom." This prediction may at first appear to be very similar to the one in 10:23. However, that verse refers to something else, namely, Jesus' reunion with His disciples following their preaching tour in Galilee.

This verse (v. 28) cannot mean that Jesus returned to set up the messianic kingdom during the lifetime of these disciples, since that did not happen. Neither does it mean that Jesus had already set up the kingdom when He spoke these words, as some writers have believed.[1033] What Jesus predicted would happen in the future rules this out. Some interpreters have taken Jesus' words as a reference to His resurrection and ascension. However, Jesus spoke of those events elsewhere as His "departure," not His "coming" (John 16:7). Moreover, such a view interprets the kingdom in a heavenly sense, rather than in the earthly sense, in which the Old Testament writers consistently spoke of it.

Most amillennial, and some premillennial interpreters, confuse the eternal heavenly rule of God with the millennial earthly rule of Messiah. Some take the kingdom as entirely heavenly, and others take it as both heavenly and earthly. Among the latter group are those who believe the kingdom is operating in a heavenly form now but will become an earthly kingdom later. A popular name for this view is the "now, not yet" view. This view often involves confusing the church with the kingdom.[1034] This is the view that progressive dispensationalists hold as well.

Other interpreters believe that Jesus was speaking about the day of Pentecost.[1035] However, the Son of Man did not come then. The Holy Spirit did. Furthermore, the kingdom did not begin then. The church did. Still others hold that the destruction of Jerusalem is in view.[1036] The only link with that event is judgment.

Jesus appears to have been predicting the *preview* of His coming to establish His kingdom, which He gave Peter, James, and John in the Transfiguration (17:1-8).[1037] The Transfiguration follows this prediction immediately in all three of the Gospels that record it (cf. Mark 9:1-8; Luke 9:27-36). Moreover Matthew, Mark, and Luke all linked Jesus' prediction and the Transfiguration with connectives. Matthew and Mark used "and" (Gr. *de*) while Luke used "and . . . it came about" (Gr. *egeneto de*). Peter, one of the witnesses of the Transfiguration, interpreted it as a preview of the kingdom (2 Pet. 1:16-18).

[1033]E.g., C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, pp. 53-54.
[1034]E.g., Ladd, et al.
[1035]Morgan, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 221; Barclay, 2:171.
[1036]Richard C. Trench, *Studies in the Gospels*, p. 198.
[1037]Walvoord, *Matthew: . . .*, p. 126; Toussaint, *Behold the . . .*, pp. 209-10.

Finally, Jesus' "truly I say to you" or "I tell you the truth" (v. 28), separates His prediction of the establishment of the kingdom (v. 27), from His prediction of the vision of the kingdom (v. 28). Jesus' reference to some "who" would "not taste death" until they saw the kingdom may seem strange at first, but in the context Jesus had been speaking of dying (vv. 24-26).

Jesus had just announced that He was going to build His church (16:18), so what would happen to the promised kingdom? Here He clarified that the kingdom would still come (cf. 6:10).

The preview of the kingdom 17:1-8 (cf. Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36)

The Transfiguration confirmed three important facts. First, it confirmed to the disciples that the kingdom was indeed future. Second, it confirmed to them that Jesus was indeed the divine Messiah in three ways. The alteration of Jesus' appearance revealed that He was more than a human teacher. His association with Moses and Elijah demonstrated His messianic role. And the voice from heaven declared that He is the Son of God.[1038] Third, it confirmed to them that Messiah had to suffer.

17:1 The Synoptic evangelists rarely mentioned exact periods of time. Consequently there was probably a good reason Matthew did so here. Probably he did so to show that what happened on the mountain fulfilled what Jesus predicted would happen in 16:28. The reference provides a sturdy link between the two events: prediction and fulfillment.

"Peter, James, and John" constituted Jesus' handpicked inner circle of disciples (cf. 26:37; Mark 5:37). They were evidently the best prepared and most receptive of the Twelve to receive this revelation, not the best loved, since Jesus loved all His disciples equally. Interestingly, when Moses ascended Mt. Sinai he took with him three companions: Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu (Exod. 24:1).

The mountain where the Transfiguration happened is traditionally Mt. Tabor, a 1,900-foot hill that rises conspicuously at the east end of the Jezreel Valley. However, Josephus wrote that there was a walled fortress on its summit then.[1039] This fact throws doubt on the traditional identification. Other scholars have suggested Mt. Hermon as the site. It was close to Caesarea Philippi, and it was 9,232 feet high.[1040] This was probably the location. Another suggestion is Mt. Miron, the highest mountain in Israel between Caesarea Philippi and Capernaum at 3,926 feet (cf. vv. 22, 24).[1041] A fourth possibility is Mt. Arbel on the west side of the

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[1038]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 642-43.

[1039]Josephus, *The Wars . . .*, 2:20:6; 4:1:8.

[1040]E.g., Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 2:96; Thomson, 1:348-49.

[1041]Walter L. Leifeld, "Theological Motifs in the Transfiguration Narrative," in *New Dimensions in New Testament Study*, p. 167, footnote 27.

Sea of Galilee. It is a high mountain from which the whole of the Sea of Galilee is visible.

Fortunately we do not have to identify the mountain to understand the text. It is significant that the Transfiguration happened on a mountain, however. Moses and Elijah both had intimate encounters with God on mountains, probably Mt. Sinai in both cases (Exod. 19; 24; 1 Kings 19). A close encounter with God is what Jesus' three disciples had, too. These were very special revelatory events in all three instances. The location of these "mountain top experiences" also ensured privacy.

17:2 Jesus underwent a metamorphosis. The Greek word that Matthew used is *metamorphoo* meaning "to transform or change in form." It was not just His appearance that changed, but His essential form became different.[1042] Probably Jesus assumed His post-resurrection body that was similar to, but somewhat different from, His pre-resurrection body (cf. 2 Pet. 1:16-18; Rev. 1:16).

Matthew's statement that Jesus "was transfigured before" the disciples indicates that the transformation was for their benefit. Jesus' "face shone like the sun," as Moses' face had, and "His garments became as white as light" because they radiated God's glory (cf. Exod. 34:29-30). Moses, however, reflected God's glory whereas Jesus radiated His own glory.

> ". . . wherever *leukos* [white] is used here or elsewhere in the New Testament in connection with clothing it always has reference either to that of angels (beings surrounded with glory), or else to the garments of the saints who enter into a glorified state in heaven."[1043]

This vision of Jesus would have strengthened the disciples' faith that He was the Messiah. It would also have helped them understand that the sufferings He said He would experience would not be final (16:21). They would see Him glorified "coming in His kingdom" (16:28).

17:3 "Behold" again introduced something amazing (cf. 1:20; 2:13; et al.). Matthew probably mentioned "Moses" first, because to the Jews he was the more important figure. Moses was the model for the eschatological Prophet whom God would raise up, specifically, Messiah (Deut. 18:18). "Elijah" was the prophesied forerunner of Messiah (Mal. 4:5-6; cf. Matt. 3:1-3; 11:7-10; 17:9-13). Both prophets had their most intimate experiences with God on a mountaintop. Both prophets had unusual ends. Perhaps Moses represented those who will be in the kingdom who had

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[1042]Lenski, pp. 651-52.

[1043]Joseph B. Bernardin, "The Transfiguration," *Journal of Biblical Theology* 52 (October 1933):185.

died, and Elijah those whom God had translated.[1044] The disciples may represent those there who had not died.[1045]

Both Moses and Elijah played key roles in God's plan for Israel. Moses established the (Mosaic) covenant under which Israel proceeded to live, and Elijah led the people back to that covenant and God after their worst apostasy. Both experienced a vision of God's glory on a mountain. Both experienced rejection by Israel (Acts 7:35, 37; 1 Kings 19:1-9; cf. Matt. 17:12). Moses was the greatest figure associated with the Law, and Elijah was arguably the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. Jesus fulfilled all that was embodied in both the Law and the Prophets. The disciples would later learn that Jesus was greater than either of these great men (vv. 5, 8). However, now the disciples saw Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus.

> "The abiding validity of the Law and the Prophets as 'fulfilled' by Christ (Mt. v. 17) is symbolized by the harmonious converse which He holds with their representatives, Moses and Elijah."[1046]

17:4 In addressing Jesus, Peter called Him "Lord," a title of general respect (cf. 7:21; et al.). That title would later take on the idea of unqualified supremacy when applied to Jesus, but Peter's appreciation of Jesus was probably not mature enough to recognize that yet. The proof of this is Peter's rebuke of Jesus (16:22), and his putting Jesus on a par with Moses and Elijah here.

Peter did not speak because someone had spoken to him. In countries with monarchies, it was and is often customary for subjects to speak to the monarch, in his or her presence, only if the monarch first initiates conversation. He evidently spoke because he perceived the greatness of the occasion, and he wanted to offer a suggestion.

The "tabernacles" (Gr. *skenas*) which Peter suggested erecting were temporary structures that the Jews pitched for the Feast of Tabernacles every year. This was a seven-day feast that looked forward to the time when Israel would dwell in permanent peace and rest in the Promised Land (Lev. 23:42-43). It anticipated kingdom conditions. Probably Peter meant that since the messianic age was apparently going to begin soon, he should make booths for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah—subject to Jesus' approval.

17:5 The "cloud" was "bright," Matthew said. This was undoubtedly the *shekinah* glory of God. God had hidden Himself in a cloud through which He spoke to the Israelites on Mt. Sinai (Exod. 19:16). He led the Israelites

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[1044]Walvoord, *Matthew: . . .*, p. 130.
[1045]Barbieri, p. 59.
[1046]M'Neile, p. 251.

with it after the Exodus (Exod. 13:21-22), and it manifested His glory to His people in the wilderness (Exod. 16:10; 24:15-18; 40:34-38). The prophets predicted that Messiah would come with clouds to set up His kingdom, and that clouds would overshadow the kingdom (Ps. 97:2; Isa. 4:5; Dan. 7:13).[1047]

If the three disciples remembered these passages, they would have seen another reason to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. The presence of the "bright cloud" should have reminded them of the closeness of God's presence, and linked Jesus *with God* in their thinking.

The cloud may have "overshadowed" (NASB) or "enveloped" (NIV) them. The Greek word *epeskiasen* permits either translation (cf. Exod. 40:35). However, Luke wrote that they entered into the cloud (Luke 9:34). The voice from the cloud essentially repeated what the voice from heaven had said at Jesus' baptism (3:17). It confirmed Jesus' identity as both God's Son and His Suffering Servant (cf. Ps. 2:7; Isa. 42:1). Thus the voice from the cloud, God's voice, identified Jesus as superior to Moses and Elijah. Previously the voice from heaven (3:16-17) was for Jesus' benefit, but now it was for the benefit of Peter, James, and John. At Sinai, the Lord spoke to the Israelites and Moses out of a cloud in order to validate Moses (Exod. 19:9).

The words "Hear Him" or "Listen to Him"—with Moses present—indicated that Jesus was the prophet greater than Moses whom Moses predicted would come (Deut. 18:15-18; cf. Acts 3:22-23; 7:37). God had said through Moses of that prophet, "You shall listen to Him" (Deut. 18:15). Jesus was the climax of biblical revelation, and now people should listen to what He said (cf. Heb. 1:1-2).

> "The voice is that of God, and for the second time [cf. 3:17] God bursts into the world of Matthew's story as 'actor' and expresses his evaluative point of view concerning Jesus' identity."[1048]

> "The injunction to hear Jesus is an exhortation . . . that the disciples are to attend carefully to Jesus' words regarding the necessity both of his own going the way of suffering (16:21) and of their emulating him (16:24)."[1049]

> "Certainly no part of Syria was so given to idolatry as this region round the head-waters of the Jordan."[1050]

[1047]See Richard D. Patterson, "The Imagery of Clouds in the Scriptures," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 165:657 (January-March 2008):13-27.

[1048]Kingsbury, *Matthew as . . .*, p. 79.

[1049]Ibid., p. 140.

[1050]Thomson, 1:350.

17:6-8 This revelation had the same effect on Peter, James, and John that the revelation God gave the Israelites at Sinai did (Exod. 20:18-21; Deut. 4:33; Heb. 12:18-21), and that the revelation God gave Daniel had on him (cf. Dan. 10:8-12). When people see the glory of God revealed, and realize that they are in *His* presence, they feel terror. The Transfiguration was mainly for the disciples' benefit. Jesus brought the three disciples to the mountaintop, the Transfiguration happened before them, and the voice spoke to them. The disciples did not understand the significance of all they saw immediately. However, it was a revelation that God continued to help them understand, especially after the Resurrection (cf. 2 Pet. 1:16-19). Immediately it did give them a deeper conviction that Jesus was the Messiah.[1051]

> "Do you want a good motto for your life? I suggest these two words [from verse 8]: *Jesus only*."[1052]

> "The purpose of the transfiguration was primarily confirmation. It confirmed several vital facts. One of these was the reality of a future kingdom. The very fact that the transfiguration took place attests this. The presence of Old Testament saints on earth with Christ in a glorified state is the greatest possible verification of the kingdom promises in the Old Testament. The reality of this kingdom is also evident from the connection of the transfiguration with the promise of Matthew 16:27-28. The Son of Man was going to come one day to judge the world and establish His kingdom (Matthew 16:27). As an earnest of the coming of the kingdom three disciples were permitted to see the Son of Man in His kingdom (Matthew 16:28). This is exactly the manner in which Peter uses the transfiguration (2 Peter 1:16-21)."[1053]

Why did Jesus let only Peter, James, and John witness His transfiguration? Perhaps they were further along in their faith than the other disciples. They were, after all, the core group of His disciples. Perhaps it was to avoid further misunderstanding among the disciples as a whole (cf. v. 9).

The clarification of the kingdom's herald 17:9-13 (cf. Mark 9:9-13; Luke 9:36)

17:9 This is the last of five times Matthew recorded Jesus telling His disciples to keep silent (cf. 8:4; 9:30; 12:16; 16:20). This time He told them that they could tell others after His resurrection, since this is the first time He told them to keep quiet after He had revealed that He would rise again.

[1051]See James A. Penner, "Revelation and Discipleship in Matthew's Transfiguration Account," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:606 (April-June 1995):201-10.

[1052]McGee, 4:96.

[1053]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., pp. 210-11. See also S. Lewis Johnson Jr., "The Transfiguration of Christ," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124:494 (April-June 1967):133-43.

The proclamation of the King and the kingdom would begin again after the Resurrection. Temporary silence was important because of popular political views of Messiah, and because the signal proof of Jesus' messiahship would be His resurrection, the sign of Jonah.

17:10 The disciples in view seem to be Peter, James, and John (cf. v. 14). It seems unlikely that the disciples viewed Elijah's appearance in the Transfiguration as the fulfillment of Malachi 4:5-6. If they did, their question would have been: "Why did Messiah appear before Elijah, when the scribes taught the reverse order of appearances?" Moreover, Elijah's appearance in the Transfiguration did not turn the hearts of the people back to God.

Peter, James, and John's question evidently arose over an apparent inconsistency involving Jesus' announcement of His death. Elijah's appearance on the mountain probably triggered it. Elijah was to come and turn the hearts of the people back to God before Messiah appeared (Mal. 4:5-6). If that restoration happened, how could Jesus die at the hands of Israel's leaders (16:21)? The disciples were struggling to understand how Messiah's death could fit into what they believed about the forerunner's ministry.

Notice that from the Transfiguration onward, these disciples had no further doubts about Jesus' messiahship.

17:11-12 Jesus confirmed the scribes' teaching about "Elijah coming," but He said another factor needed consideration. John the Baptist's ministry had been a success as far as it had gone (cf. 3:5-6; 14:5), but he had "restored all things" to only a limited degree. The scribes perceived the ministry of Messiah's forerunner correctly, but they did not realize that John the Baptist had been that forerunner (11:10).

Elijah had already come, figuratively, in the person of John the Baptist. However, Israel's leaders had rejected him, and he had died without accomplishing the complete restoration of Israel. John had not completely fulfilled his mission because he died while doing so. Likewise, Jesus would die at His enemies' hands without fulfilling His mission of establishing the kingdom. John had restored all things as much as he could, and yet died. Jesus, too, would fulfill His mission as much as He could, and yet die. This was the answer to the disciples' question.

> "A suffering Forerunner is to be followed by a suffering Messiah."[1054]

[1054]Plummer, p. 240.

> "In other words, just as the messianic forerunner's coming had two phases: John the Baptizer (one to suffer and die), and Elijah the Prophet (one of restoration and glory), so also would the Messiah's coming. The response to the forerunner foreshadowed the response to the Messiah and necessitated the postponement of the fulfillment specifically promised to national Israel."[1055]

God predicted through Malachi that a Jewish revival would precede Messiah's kingdom (Mal. 4:5-6), and the revival did not come. Consequently that revival and the kingdom must still be future.

17:13 The disciples now understood that John the Baptist initially fulfilled the prophecy about Elijah returning. However, their continuing problems with Jesus' death seem to indicate that they did not really understand that He had to die. This incident reveals another step of understanding that the disciples took, but it was only a small step.

3. Instruction about the King's principles 17:14-27

Jesus' instruction of His disciples in view of the King's coming death and resurrection and the kingdom's postponement continued. Jesus had taught them about His person (16:13-17) and His program (16:18—17:13). He now taught them principles that clarified His work and His person further.

The exorcism of an epileptic boy 17:14-21 (cf. Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-43a)

The term "exorcism" means the action of exorcizing or expelling an evil spirit by adjuration or the performance of certain rites. In Jesus' case, this involved His authoritatively commanding a demon or demons to depart, with no appeal to a higher authority or to incantations—which are common in exorcisms that other people perform.

> "The contrast between the glory of the Transfiguration and Jesus' disciples' tawdry unbelief (see v. 17) is part of the mounting tension that magnifies Jesus' uniqueness as he moves closer to his passion and resurrection."[1056]

It also recalls Moses' experience of descending Mt. Sinai only to find the Israelites failing by worshipping the golden calf (Exod. 32:15-20).

17:14-16 The Greek word *gonypeteo*, translated "falling on his knees" or "knelt," suggests humility and entreaty, not necessarily worship (cf. 27:29; Mark 1:40; 10:17). Likewise "Lord" was perhaps only a respectful address (cf. 8:2). The young man's epilepsy was evidently a result of demon

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[1055]J. Randall Price, "Prophetic Postponement in Daniel 9 and Other Texts," in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, p. 134.
[1056]Carson, "Matthew," p. 390.

possession (v. 18). The impotent disciples were some of, or all of, the nine who did not go up the mountain for the Transfiguration.

There are many instances of the disciples' failures in this section of Matthew (cf. 14:16-21, 26-27, 28-31; 15:16, 23, 33; 16:5, 22; 17:4, 10-11). Earlier they had great miraculous powers (10:1, 8). However, their power was not their own; it came from Jesus. As Jesus progressively trained the disciples, He also withdrew some of their power to teach them that it came from Him and related to their trust in Him (14:26-17, 31; 15:5, 8).

> "The sovereign authority of Jesus the Messiah in healing and exorcism is unique; his disciples can draw on it only by faith, and that is what they have failed to do in this case."[1057]

17:17-18 Jesus' rebuke recalls Moses' words to Israel in Deuteronomy 32:5 and 20. Unbelief characterized the "generation" of Jews that had rejected Jesus, and now it marked His disciples to a lesser extent. Their failure to believe stemmed from moral failure to recognize the truth, rather than from lack of evidence, as the combination of "perverse" and "unbelieving" makes clear (cf. Phil. 2:15). The disciples, too, were slow to believe, slower than they should have been. Jesus' two rhetorical questions expressed frustration and criticism.

> "Jesus has accepted that he will be rejected by the official leadership of Israel (16:21), but to find himself let down even by his own disciples evokes a rare moment of human emotion on the part of the Son of God."[1058]

17:19-21 The "we" in the disciples' question is in the emphatic position in the Greek text. The problem, as Jesus explained, was their weak faith (Gr. *oligopistia*). It was not the quantity of their faith that was deficient but its quality (strength). In spite of the revelation of Jesus that they had received, the disciples had not responded to it with trust as they should have done. They had some faith in Jesus, but it should have been stronger.

> "Much earlier, Jesus had endowed the disciples with authority to exorcise demons as part of their mission to Israel (10:1, 8). Consequently, he expects them to draw on this authority. But if they approach the tasks of their mission forgetful of their empowerment and encumbered by a crisis of trust, they render themselves ineffectual."[1059]

[1057]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 659.
[1058]Ibid., p. 661.
[1059]Kingsbury, *Matthew as . . .*, p. 141.

> ". . . the expression, 'small as a mustard-seed,' had become proverbial, and was used, not only by our Lord, but frequently by the Rabbis, to indicate the smallest amount . . ."[1060]

Removing mountains is a proverbial figure of speech for overcoming great difficulties (cf. Isa. 40:4; 49:11; 54:10; Matt. 21:21-22; Mark 11:23; Luke 17:6; 1 Cor. 13:2). In this context, the difficulties in view involved exercising the authority that Jesus had delegated to them to heal people. The disciples were treating the gift of healing that Jesus had given them as a magical ability that worked regardless of their faith in Him. Now they learned that their power depended on proper response to revelation, namely, dependent confidence in Jesus to work through them to heal. Continual dependence on Jesus, rather than simply belief in who He is, constitutes strong faith (cf. Mark 6:5-6).

> "Nothing is impossible for the disciple of Jesus who with faith works within the established will of God. It is therefore the case that not every failure in the performance or reception of healing is the result solely of insufficient faith."[1061]

Verse 21 does not occur in several important ancient manuscripts. Evidently copyists assimilated it from Mark 9:29: "And He said to them, 'This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer.'"

The lesson of this miracle for the disciples was that simple belief that Jesus is the King may be adequate when a person first realizes who Jesus is. It can even result in spectacular miracles. However, with the privilege of added revelation about the person and work of Jesus comes increased responsibility to trust totally in Him. Failure to do this weakens faith and restricts Jesus' work through the disciple (cf. John 15:5).

Understanding Jesus' death and resurrection 17:22-23 (cf. Mark 9:30-32; Luke 9:43-45)

Jesus next gave His disciples His second clear announcement of His passion (cf. 16:21-24). The reference to it in 17:12 was only a passing one. He had alluded to it in veiled terms before He articulated it clearly (cf. 9:15; 10:38; 12:40).

17:22 Matthew's reference to time was general. All the disciples were again with Jesus "in Galilee." Jesus introduced the subject of His passion again, which the Transfiguration and the events that had followed it had interrupted.

[1060]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 1:592-93.

[1061]Hagner, *Matthew 14—28*, p. 506.

Jesus' statement was direct, but it was also somewhat ambiguous. The Greek word *paradidosthai* means either "to hand over" or "to betray" depending on the context, which is no help here. Furthermore, this verb is in the passive tense, so the perpetrator of this action, whomever it would be, remained hidden. In typical fashion Jesus gave His disciples more information, but He did not give them all He could have. More information would have created questions and problems that He did not want them to face yet. This is the first time Matthew recorded Jesus announcing that He would be betrayed. The Son of *Man* would be betrayed into the hands of *men*.

17:23 The disciples' response shows that they understood and did not like to hear what lay ahead. They grasped Jesus' death but did not yet understand His resurrection. It was not until after Jesus arose from the dead that they understood the Resurrection. Had they understood His resurrection now, they would not have been sorrowful.

Appreciating Jesus' sonship 17:24-27

"This story is a nut with a dry, hard shell, but a very sweet kernel."[1062]

"The present incident supplies, in truth, an admirable illustration of the doctrine taught in the discourse on humility."[1063]

17:24 The "two-drachma *tax*" was a Jewish tax that every male Jew between 20 and 50 years of age had to pay toward the maintenance of the temple and its services (Exod. 30:13). There was no two-drachma coin in circulation at this time, so two adults often went together and paid one shekel that was worth four drachmas.[1064]

17:25-26 Jesus turned this inquiry from the tax collector into a teaching situation for Peter—and presumably the other disciples. In His lesson's illustration, Jesus changed the tax from a religious one to a civil one to make His point clearer. The principle is the same in both cases, but it was easier to illustrate in the civil arena of life.

Jesus' point was that as the "sons" of "kings" are exempt from the taxes their fathers impose, so He was exempt from the taxes His Father imposed. He meant the temple tax. The temple really belonged to God (Mal. 3:1). Jesus was teaching Peter the implications of His deity. He was not teaching Peter to fulfill his civic responsibility.

[1062]Bruce, *The Training . . .*, p. 222.

[1063]Ibid., p. 223.

[1064]Carson, "Matthew," p. 393. Cf. Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 3:8:2; 18:9:1; and Mishnah *Shekalim*.

17:27 Even though He was "exempt" (v. 26), Jesus would pay the tax, because He did "not" want to "offend" anyone needlessly (cf. 5:29). Failure to pay the tax would create unnecessary problems. Because Peter was one of Jesus' disciples and one of God's children through faith in Jesus, he also had no obligation to pay the temple tax (cf. 12:1-8). Paul later followed Jesus' example of not giving offense in a similar situation (1 Cor. 8:13; 9:12, 22), as all God's children should.

God had clearly declared Jesus His Son in the Transfiguration (v. 5), as well as at Jesus' baptism. Yet Jesus' glory remained veiled as He moved toward the Cross. This established a pattern for His disciples (cf. 18:1-5). Since the sons of God are exempt from maintaining the temple and its service, the end of this system of worship appeared to be approaching, as it was. Here is another indication that Jesus ended the Mosaic Law (15:11). Again the disciples failed to grasp the major significance of these things—until after the Resurrection.

What an impression this miracle must have made on Peter—as a fisherman—and on his fellow fishermen disciples! Imagine, not only catching a fish but a fish with money in its mouth. This was one of many miracles that Jesus performed for Peter. He healed Peter's mother-in-law (1:29-34), helped him catch fish (Luke 5:1-9), enabled him to walk on water (14:22-33), healed Malchus' ear (26:47-56), and delivered him from prison (Acts 12). No wonder Peter could write, "Casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you" (1 Pet. 5:7).[1065]

Jesus alone could obtain the stater ("shekel") as He did. Again the sinless Man fulfilled the command of the Adamic Covenant to exercise dominion over the fish of the sea (cf. 8:27; 14:25). Even though He was free from the Law's demands, being God's Son, He submitted to them and miraculously provided for His disciples to do so. This demonstration of humility and power is even more impressive following as it does an announcement of Jesus' passion.

Far from the feelings of pride, pretension, and self-assertion that the disciples manifested, by discussing who would be the greatest in Christ's kingdom, Jesus Himself humbly paid a tax that He really did not owe. He did not owe it, in the sense that He was Lord over the whole system that this tax supported. His humility further manifested itself in that, being Lord of land and sea, He made Himself subject to one of its creatures—a fish. Furthermore, He took no offense at having to pay this tax, and He was careful to give no offense to those to whom it was due. This, by the way, is the only story of a miracle in the Gospels that leaves the reader to infer that it occurred; the evangelist did not record that it did indeed occur.[1066]

[1065]See Barclay, 2:190, for a non-miraculous interpretation of this event.

[1066]Tasker, p. 171.

> "It [this story] teaches the children of the kingdom not to murmur because the world does not recognize their status and dignity."[1067]

Jesus continued to teach His disciples the importance of following the examples that He provided for them in the next section (ch. 18).

4. Instructions about the King's personal representatives ch. 18

Chapter 18 contains the fourth major discourse that Matthew recorded (cf. chs. 5—7; ch. 10; 13:1-53; chs. 24—25): His Discipleship Discourse. This discourse continues Jesus' instruction of His disciples that He began in 17:14. Instead of focusing on Jesus, the Lord's teaching focused on the disciples and their responsibilities as His representatives. The theme of this discourse is humility. The theme of the Sermon on the Mount was righteousness. The theme of the Mission Discourse in chapter 10 was ministry. The theme of the Kingdom Discourse in chapter 13 was the kingdom, and the theme of the Olivet Discourse would be the Second Coming. Like the other discourses, the scope of this one is also the inter-advent age.

Kingsbury called the theme of this speech "life within the community of the church" and outlined it as follows: (I) On True Greatness as Consisting in Humbling Oneself so as to Serve the Neighbor (18:1-14); and (II) On Gaining and Forgiving the Errant Disciple (18:15-35).[1068]

Apart from the second question (v. 21), this discourse proceeds as a unit of teaching similar to the first discourse (chs. 5—7) and the second discourse (ch. 10), but not the third discourse (ch. 13).

> "The theme of this discourse is not so much individual discipleship (though several of the examples and instructions are expressed in the singular) as the corporate life of those who are joined by their common commitment as disciples, with special attention being given to the strains and tensions to which such a life is exposed through self-concern and lack of care for fellow disciples, through bad examples and errant behavior, and through an unwillingness to forgive as we have been forgiven."[1069]

The introduction of the theme of humility 18:1-4 (cf. Mark 9:33-36; Luke 9:46-47)

18:1-2 The writer introduced and concluded this discourse, as he did the others, with statements suggesting that Jesus delivered this address on one specific occasion (cf. 5:1; 7:28-29). The last two discourses in Matthew were responses to questions from the disciples (v. 1; cf. 24:1-3).

[1067]Bruce, *The Training . . .*, p. 228.
[1068]Kingsbury, *Matthew as . . .*, p. 112.
[1069]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 672.

"At that time" probably means "in that stage of Jesus' ministry" (cf. 10:19; 26:45). The preceding revelations about the King and the kingdom led the disciples, probably the Twelve, to express interest in "who" would be "greatest in the kingdom" (cf. Mark 9:33-38; Luke 9:46-48). Perhaps Peter's leadership among the disciples, and Peter, James, and John's privilege of seeing Jesus transfigured, made this one of their growing concerns. Jesus had taught that there would be distinctions in the kingdom (5:19; 10:32-33). If Jesus gave this teaching in Peter's house, the "child" may have been Peter's (cf. 17:25; Mark 9:33), but this is only a possibility.

In any case, what Jesus did in setting "a child" forward—as an example for adults to follow—was shocking in His day. People of the ancient Near East regarded children as inferior to adults. Children did not receive the consideration that adults enjoyed until they reached adult status. They were taught to look to adults as examples to follow. Now Jesus turned the tables and urged His disciples to follow the example of a child. To do so would require humility indeed.

18:3-4 Jesus announced His revolutionary words with a solemn introductory formula (cf. 5:18). He said it was necessary that His disciples change and "become" as little "children." The word "converted" in the NASB is misleading. Jesus was not speaking about "getting saved." Childlikeness was necessary for entrance into the messianic kingdom. Children have many characteristics that distinguish them from adults—for example: dependence and trust—but because of the disciples' concern with position in the kingdom and the teaching that follows, humility is clearly in view. Young children have little concern about their personal prestige and position in relation to other people.

> "The feature of child-nature which forms the special point of comparison is its unpretentiousness. . . . A king's child will play without scruple with a beggar's, thereby unconsciously asserting the insignificance of the things in which men differ, compared with the things that are common to all."[1070]

In one sense the disciples had already humbled themselves as children when they believed on Jesus. This gave them access to the kingdom. However, in another sense, they had abandoned that attitude when they became concerned about their status in the kingdom. They needed to return to their former childlike attitude. Similarly, they had exercised great power through simple faith in Jesus, but as time passed, they got away from depending on Him, lost their power, and needed to return to dependent faith. Peter, for example, had made a great confession of faith in Jesus, but shortly after that he regressed and failed to submit to Jesus.

[1070]Bruce, *The Training . . .*, pp. 201-2.

Verse 3 also clarifies that the kingdom was still future when Jesus said these words.[1071] The disciple who humbled himself as a little child would be the "greatest in the kingdom." Greatness in the kingdom was what these disciples wanted (v. 1). Jesus had previously commended childlike characteristics to His disciples (5:3; 11:25).

Since Jesus was speaking to disciples who believed on Him (16:16), it appears that He used the polar expressions "not enter the kingdom" and "greatest in the kingdom" to clarify His point. His point was the importance of humility. Jesus had previously said that if the disciple's eye caused him to stumble he should gouge it out (v. 9; cf. 5:29). That was a similar extreme statement (hyperbole) made to clarify a point.

The seriousness of impeding the progress of a disciple 18:5-14 (cf. Mark 9:37-50; Luke 9:48-50)

The major sub-theme of this discourse is offenses (Gr. *skandalon*, stumbling blocks). The humble disciple will be careful not to put a stumbling block in the path of another disciple as that one proceeds toward the kingdom.

18:5-6 The "child" in view in these verses is not a literal child, but the disciple who has humbled himself or herself, and in so doing has become childlike (vv. 3-4). Jesus was speaking of receiving a humble disciple of His in verse 5. (Jesus taught the importance of receiving a little child in Mark 9:36-37 and Luke 9:48.) Whoever does this "in Jesus' name" welcomes the disciple because he or she is one of Jesus' disciples, not because that one is personally superior, influential, or prominent. The person who welcomes one of Jesus' humble disciples, simply for Jesus' sake, virtually welcomes Jesus Himself (cf. 10:42). In this context, as well as in chapter 10, Jesus was speaking of welcoming in the sense of extending hospitality—with its accompanying encouragement and support. "To receive" (Gr. *dekomai*) means to receive into fellowship.[1072]

The antithesis, in verse 6, involves *not* welcoming a disciple, i.e., rejecting or ignoring him. Withholding supportive encouragement would cause a disciple to stumble in the sense that it would make it harder for him to do his work. Jesus was not speaking of causing the disciple to stumble by leading him or her into apostasy. The contrast makes this clear. Discouraging the disciple amounts to rejecting the Master. Consequently, drowning at sea would be better for the offender than having to face Jesus' condemnation in hell for rejecting Him (vv. 8-9). Again, hyperbole presents the consequences as extremely bad.

[1071]Cf. Montefiore, *The Synoptic . . .*, 2:247.

[1072]Thayer, s.v. "*dekomai*," p. 130.

"Little ones who believe in Me" (v. 6) defines the disciples in view. This is the only place in the Synoptics where "believe in Me" occurs. This phrase is very common in John's writings.

Drowning was a Greek and Roman method of execution, but not a Jewish one.[1073] The type of "millstone" in view was a large ("heavy") one that a donkey would rotate, not the small hand millstone that every Palestinian woman used to prepare her flour.[1074] Drowning in this way would be horrible, but it would be "better" than perishing in the lake of fire (v. 8).

> "It seems to me that what He [Jesus] is doing in this section is making the evangelism of children a divine imperative. He gives top priority to winning the children to Christ. I commend anyone who is working with children today. There is nothing as important as that."[1075]

18:7 Jesus pronounced "woe" on "the world" because it is the source of opposition to Him and His disciples, and the source of much "stumbling" and many "stumbling blocks." The NIV translation may be a little misleading here. "Woe" announces judgment (cf. 11:21; 23:13-32). It is inevitable that the world will reject Jesus' disciples, but God will hold those who do reject them responsible (cf. Isa. 10:5-12; Acts 4:27-28).

> "Someone tells of an old man who was dying; he was obviously sorely troubled. At last they got him to tell them why. 'When we were boys at play,' he said, 'one day at a cross-roads we reversed a signpost so that its arms were pointing in the wrong direction, and I've never ceased to wonder how many people were sent in the wrong direction by what we did.' The sin of all sins is to teach another to sin."[1076]

18:8-9 Jesus next warned His disciples about the possibility of their doing what the world does, namely, making it difficult for another disciple to fulfill his or her mission for Jesus. In the context, one's competitive pride of position might cause another disciple to stumble (v. 1). The illustrations Jesus used recall 5:29-30, where He also urged His disciples to discipline their thoughts and motives.

The point of this section was the seriousness of rejecting or opposing Jesus' disciples in their work of carrying out His will. It is as serious as child abuse.

[1073]Carson, "Matthew," p. 398.
[1074]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 2:120.
[1075]McGee, 4:99.
[1076]Barclay, 2:197.

18:10-11 Jesus warned His disciples not to look down on His followers who were very humbly following Him. The Twelve were in danger of using worldly standards to measure and give value to their fellow disciples, as we are today (cf. 5:3). Judas Iscariot was one disciple who failed to heed this warning.

Many interpreters believe that the last part of verse 10 teaches that God has guardian angels who take special care of small children. However, the context of verse 10 is not talking about small children, but disciples who need to be as humble as small children. Furthermore, the "angels" in this passage are "continually" beholding God's "face in heaven," not watching the movements of small children on earth. Evidently the angels in view are the supernatural messengers (the normal meaning of "angels") who assist God's people (Heb. 1:14). This seems to me to be more likely—than that they are the spirits of believers after death who constantly behold God's face (cf. Acts 12:15).[1077] Another view is that they are the spirits of children who have died.[1078]

Are there "guardian angels" for children? I like to think there are, because of God's concern for children (e.g., 19:14-15), but I cannot point to a verse that teaches this explicitly.

The Jews believed that only the most knowledgeable of the angels beheld God's face, while the rest remained outside awaiting His bidding.[1079] Jesus taught that the angels responsible for believers all have access to Him, because of God's love for His own.

Verse 11 does not appear in the earliest ancient copies of Matthew's Gospel. Probably scribes influenced by Luke 19:10 included it here in later versions of the text.

18:12-13 Having taught the importance of humility, Jesus now illustrated it with a parable. Jesus taught the same parable on a different occasion to teach a slightly different lesson (Luke 15:4-7). His purpose there was evangelistic, whereas His purpose here is pastoral.

The shepherd in the story is God (v. 14). The sheep are those who follow Him, namely, Jesus' disciples (cf. 10:6; 15:24). God has concern for every one of His sheep and seeks to restore those of them that wander away from Him. He has such great concern for the wayward, that when they return to Him, "He rejoices more" than over those who did not wander away. This does not mean that God loves His wayward sheep more than He loves His faithful sheep. It means that when wayward sheep return to Him it gives Him special joy.

[1077]B. B. Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings*, 1:253-66.

[1078]Thomas, p. 268.

[1079]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 2:122.

Since God has such great concern for His disciples who go astray, His disciples should be very careful not to do anything that would cause one of His sheep to go astray.[1080]

Notice again Jesus' identification of Himself and God in this parable. Jesus' disciples are God's sheep. Therefore Jesus and God are one.

18:14 This verse concludes the argument of the discourse thus far. The heavenly "Father" does not want a single "one" of Jesus' humble disciples to wander away—from his calling in life—because someone has discouraged, rejected, or opposed him. Moreover, He does not want His disciples, of all people, to be responsible for this. "Perish" in this context does not mean loss of salvation, but the ultimate result of failing to achieve God's goal for him or her as a disciple, namely: a wasted life.

The restoration of a wayward disciple 18:15-20

Jesus proceeded to explain what a humble disciple should do when a brother or sister disciple has wandered from the Shepherd and the sheep.

18:15 By using the term "brother" Jesus encouraged a humble approach. The disciples should deal with each other as brothers rather than as superiors and inferiors (cf. 1 Tim. 5:1-2). Contextually the sin in view is probably despising a brother or sister. However, Jesus did not specify what it was, but He implied that it was any sin that takes the disciple away from the Shepherd. Jesus commanded His disciples to "go" to such a person and reprove ("show him his fault") him "in private." The disciple must take the initiative and confront (cf. Gal. 6:1).

> ". . . if it is hard to accept a rebuke, even a private one, it is harder still to administer one in loving humility."[1081]

> "The possession of humility is proven not by passively waiting for one to beg forgiveness and then granting it. Rather, it is manifested by actively seeking out the erring brother and attempting to make him penitent."[1082]

> "If we have a difference with anyone, there is only one way to settle it—and that is face to face. The spoken word can often settle a difference which the written word would only have exacerbated."[1083]

[1080]Plummer, p. 252.
[1081]Carson, "Matthew," p. 402.
[1082]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 217.
[1083]Barclay, 2:207.

The verb "reprove" or "show him his fault" (Gr. *elencho*) means "to convict" in the sense of producing an awareness of guilt, not in the sense of lording it over someone (cf. 1 Cor. 9:19-22; 1 Pet. 3:1). The objective should be the erring brother or sister's restoration, not the initiator's glorification (cf. Luke 17:3-4; 2 Thess. 3:14-15; James 5:19-20). This approach was one that the Mosaic Law had taught, too (Lev. 19:17), and that the Rabbis also supported.[1084].

> "Sin, of whatever form, is not to be tolerated within the disciple community, but is to be dealt with when it is noticed. But this is to be done with sensitivity and with a minimum of publicity."[1085]

18:16 The Mosaic Law had also advocated the second step that Jesus taught (Deut. 19:15). However, Jesus broadened the field of civil law that the Deuteronomy passage covered, to include any sin about which a disciple might need rebuke. Jesus was not perpetuating the whole Mosaic Law. He was simply carrying over these provisions in the Law that He declared were now binding on His disciples.

Probably the function of the "witnesses" is to witness to the erring disciple's reaction to the confrontation. This seems to have been the purpose in the Deuteronomy passage. Their presence would be an added inducement to return to the fold of the faithful. These seem to be witnesses to the confrontation, not to the sin. If the brother or sister proved unrepentant, and the initiator needed to take the third step (v. 17), witnesses to the confrontation might be necessary.

18:17 The third step, if necessary, is to report the situation to the "church." This is the second reference to *ekklesia* in Matthew, and the only other occurrence of this word in the four Gospels. As I pointed out above (cf. 16:18), this word means "a called out assembly of people." Jesus probably used it in a wide sense here. We have noted that the terms "lord," "disciple," "apostle," and others came to have more specific meanings as God's kingdom plan unfolded.

Jesus had just recently predicted the existence of the church, the body of Christ, in 16:18. However, the disciples undoubtedly understood Him to mean just His band of disciples. Jesus was talking about "the assembly of His disciples" that He was calling out of the world to represent Him, that He knew would become a large body. He knew this would be the church as we know it, but the disciples must have thought He only meant themselves in a collective sense. Perhaps they thought He was referring to a Jewish assembly, a synagogue.[1086]

[1084]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 2:123.
[1085]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 692.
[1086]Walvoord, *Matthew: . . .*, p. 137.

Jesus revealed almost nothing about the church in the Gospels, as the absence of references to it in these books indicates. The disciples were struggling to grasp Jesus' deity, His suffering servant role, and His passion. Jesus did not confuse them with much revelation about the form that their corporate identity would take following His ascension. He did not even do that after His resurrection (Acts 1:6-8). That revelation came through His apostles after His ascension. We have it in Acts and the Epistles.

When Jesus said, "Tell it to the church (assembly)," the disciples probably heard, "Tell it to all the other disciples, not just the two or three witnesses." Applying this command today becomes more difficult because the number of the disciples is incalculable and they live around the globe. In most situations the scope of public announcement would be a local church congregation, the particular collection of disciples of which the wayward brother is a part.

If the erring disciple does not respond to the church's encouragement to return to the Shepherd, Jesus said the disciples should treat such a person as "a Gentile and a tax collector." This does not mean the disciples should receive him or her warmly, as Jesus received such people (8:1-11; 9:9-13; 15:21-28), which some interpreters have concluded.[1087] The context, as well as the New Testament parallels to this exhortation, shows that Jesus had exclusion in mind (cf. Rom. 16:17; 2 Thess. 3:14). Jesus probably used Gentiles and tax collectors as examples, because the Jews typically withdrew from them. That is what He wanted His disciples to do regarding the erring brother or sister. A. B. Bruce explained his understanding of the difference between "Gentile" and "tax-gatherer" this way:

> "The idea is, that the persistently impenitent offender is to become at length to the person he has offended, and to the whole church, one with whom is to be held no religious, and as little as possible social fellowship. The religious aspect of excommunication is pointed at by the expression 'as an heathen man,' and the social side of it is expressed in the second clause of the sentence, 'and a publican.'"[1088]

The "you" in the Greek text is singular, indicating that the initiator is a single individual, and the sphere of life Jesus had in mind throughout this section was interpersonal relations (cf. v. 15).

> "He cannot be treated as a spiritual brother, for he has forfeited that position. He can only be treated as one

[1087]E.g., Barclay, 2:209

[1088]Bruce, *The Training . . .*, p. 208.

> outside the church, not hated, but not held in close fellowship."[1089]

Neither Jesus nor the apostles specified the exact form this discipline should take (e.g., excommunication, exclusion from the Lord's Supper, social isolation, withheld table fellowship, etc.). France argued that since the sphere of life in view is interpersonal relationships, the guilty party should only suffer isolation from the initiator of action, not the whole community of believers.[1090] However, it seems that if the whole church gets involved in reproving the offender, some sort of communal, as well as individual, punishment would be involved.

Consequently, I assume that Jesus intended the disciples involved in such situations to make these determinations on the basis of all the facts in each particular case. However, it seems to be going too far to put the offender in a situation in which it would become impossible for him or her to repent and experience restoration later. The objective of all discipline is ultimately restoration, not exclusion.[1091]

> "Perhaps the closest analogy in our culture is the way in which sanctions by nations might 'persuade' another nation to respond in order to prevent being isolated."[1092]

> "Such unseemly mixtures of the godly and the godless are too common phenomena in these days. And the reason is not far to seek. It is not indifference to morality, for that is not generally a characteristic of the church in our time. It is the desire to multiply members. The various religious bodies value members still more than morality or high-toned Christian virtue, and they fear lest by discipline they may lose one or two names from their communion roll. The fear is not without justification. Fugitives from discipline are always sure of an open door and a hearty welcome in some quarter. This is one of the many curses entailed upon us by the greatest of all scandals, religious division. One who has become, or is in danger of becoming, as a heathen man and a publican to one ecclesiastical body, has a good chance of becoming a saint or an angel in another."[1093]

[1089]Wiersbe, 1:66.

[1090]France, *The Gospel . . .*, pp. 690-94.

[1091]See Calvin, *Institutes of . . .*, 4:12:2-11; J. Carl Laney, "The Biblical Practice of Church Discipline," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143:572 (October-December 1986):353-64; and Ted G. Kitchens, "Perimeters of Corrective Church Discipline," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:590 (April-June 1991):201-13.

[1092]Bock, *Jesus according . . .*, p. 244.

[1093]Bruce, *The Training . . .*, pp. 213-14.

18:18 This verse is identical to 16:19. There Jesus was talking specifically about the messianic kingdom. Here He was speaking more generally about how His disciples should conduct themselves in humility. The "whatever" again seems to include people and privileges, in view of how the Old Testament describes the stewards' use of keys. The disciples would determine God's will in each particular instance of rendering judgment in the church. Hopefully they would consult the Scriptures and pray when they did this. Then they would announce their decision.

With their announcement, they would give or withhold whatever the judgment might involve, but they would really be announcing what *God*, the divine authority, had already decided. Their decision would be God's will for the person being disciplined, assuming they had obtained the will of God before announcing it.[1094]

> "To Peter the King promised authority in the kingdom, assuring him of guidance in the use of that authority. Now the Lord instructs His disciples concerning the subject of discipline in the church and also promises divine direction in their decisions."[1095]

18:19-20 It should be obvious from the context that this promise does not refer to whatever two or three disciples agree to ask God for in prayer. The Bible contains many promises concerning prayer (cf. 7:7-8; 21:22; John 14:13-14; 15:7-8, 16; 1 John 5:14-15; et al.), but this is not one of them.

In the context, "anything" refers to any judicial decision involving an erring disciple that the other disciples may make corporately. God has always stood behind His judicial representatives on earth when they carry out His will (cf. Ps. 82:1). This is a wonderful promise. God will back up with His power and authority any decision involving the corporate discipline of an erring brother or sister that His disciples may make after determining His will.[1096]

> "The meeting, supposed to be convened in Christ's name, need not therefore be one of church officers assembled for the transaction of ecclesiastical business: it may be a meeting, in a church or in a cottage, purely for the purposes of worship. The promise avails for all persons, all subjects of prayer, all places, and all times; for all truly Christian assemblies great and small."[1097]

[1094]See Craig S. Keener, "Exegetical Insight," in William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek: Grammar*, p. 115.

[1095]Toussaint, *Behold the . . .*, p. 218.

[1096]See C. Samuel Storms, *Reaching God's Ear*, pp. 254-58.

[1097]Bruce, *The Training . . .*, pp. 214-15.

> "He did not wish His church to consist of a collection of clubs having no intercommunion with each other, any more than He desired it to be a monster hotel, receiving and harboring all comers, no questions being asked."[1098]

Here again (v. 20) Jesus takes God's place as "God with us" (1:23; 2:6; 3:3; 11:4-6, 7-8; cf. 28:20). This statement implies a future time when Jesus would not be physically present with His disciples, the inter-advent age, specifically the period following His ascension and preceding His return. Jesus anticipated His ascension.

One writer argued that verses 18-20 are the center of a structural and theological chiasm that embraces 17:22—20:19.[1099] This thesis seems a bit stretched to me.

The importance of forgiving a disciple 18:21-35

From a discussion of discipline, Jesus proceeded to stress the importance of forgiveness. Sometimes zealous disciples spend too much time studying church discipline and too little time studying the importance of forgiveness.

18:21-22 Jesus had been talking about excluding rather than forgiving (v. 17). This led Peter to ask how often he as a disciple should forgive an erring brother before he stopped forgiving.

> "We owe a very great deal to the fact that Peter had a quick tongue. Again and again Peter rushed into speech, and his impetuosity drew from Jesus teaching which is immortal."[1100]

The rabbis taught that a Jew should forgive a repeated sin three times, but after that there need be no more forgiveness (Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:6).[1101] Peter suggested "seven times," and probably felt very magnanimous doing so. Seven was a round number, sometimes regarded as a perfect number, obviously exceeding what the scribes taught (cf. Lev. 26:21; Deut. 28:25; Ps. 79:12; Prov. 24:16; Luke 17:4).

Jesus' response alluded to Genesis 4:24, where the ungodly Lamech said: "If Cain is avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold." Lamech claimed to have taken even more revenge on the man who struck him than God had taken on Cain for killing his brother Abel. Jesus turned Lamech's

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[1098]Ibid., p. 215.

[1099]David McClister, "'Where Two or Three Are Gathered Together': Literary Structure as a Key to Meaning in Matt 17:22—20:19," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39:4 (December 1996):549-58.

[1100]Barclay, 2:212.

[1101]Carson, "Matthew," p. 405; Lenski, p. 708; Bock, *Jesus according . . .*, p. 245.

bad example around, and urged His disciples to practice generous forgiveness when their brothers hurt them.

The NASB has Jesus saying "seventy times seven," whereas the NIV translators wrote "seventy-seven times." Probably the NIV is correct since Jesus quoted the Septuagint of Genesis 4:24 exactly here, and it has "seventy-seven times." Even though the difference between these two translations is great numerically, it is not a very important difference. Jesus was not specifying a *literal* maximum number of times His disciples should forgive their brothers. Neither was He wiping out what He had just taught about confronting an erring brother (vv. 15-20).

Jesus' point was that disciples who are humble should not limit the number of times they forgive one another, or limit the frequency with which they forgive each other. The following parable of the unmerciful servant clarified this point.

18:23 Since Jesus required His disciples to forgive this way, the kingdom had become similar to what He proceeded to describe, not the king in the parable but the whole parable scene. The whole parable taught a certain type of interpersonal relationship based on forgiveness. This parable illustrates kingdom conditions, conditions that will prevail when Jesus establishes His kingdom.

Jesus was not saying "the kingdom" was in existence then, any more than He was saying that the millennial conditions He described were already in existence. He argued that kingdom conditions should be those that the King's disciples should seek to follow in their lives now, since they already live under the King's authority (cf. chs. 5—7; esp. 6:12, 14-15). "Kings" in the parables of the Jewish rabbis of Jesus' day regularly stood for God.[1102]

The whole parable deals with repeated personal forgiveness and the reason for it. The King had already forgiven them much more than they could ever forgive their fellow disciples.

Immediately Jesus put the disciples in the position of servants (Gr. *douloi*) of a great King—who is God. This is one of the relationships that disciples have with God that they must never forget. They are His servants as well as His sons.

18:24-27 This servant had great authority under an even greater king (cf. v. 1). However, he had amassed a debt of such huge proportions that he could not possibly repay it. A talent was a measure of weight equivalent to 75 pounds. The exact, or even the relative buying power of 10,000 talents of

[1102]Blomberg, *Preaching the . . .*, p. 73.

silver, is really secondary to the point Jesus was making, namely, that the debt was impossible to repay. Depending on the current price of silver, the slave owed the equivalent of many millions of dollars. There was no way he could begin to pay off such a debt.

> "Ten thousand (*myria*, hence our 'myriad') is the largest numeral for which a Greek term exists, and the talent is the largest known amount of money. When the two are combined, the effect is like our 'zillions.'"[1103]

The king "commanded" that the servant be sold and everything he had, to compensate him, even though what he could pay amounted to a mere fraction of what he owed. The servant pleaded for time ("Have patience with me"), promising to "repay everything," an obvious impossibility in view of the amount of the debt. Moved by compassion for the hopeless servant, the lord (master) graciously cancelled ("forgave him") the entire "debt."

The Greek word for "debt" in verse 27 is *daneion* and really means "loan." Evidently the king decided to write off the indebtedness as a bad loan rather than view it as embezzlement, another indication of his grace.

> "The first lesson deals with the king's lavish grace in forgiving debts."[1104]

18:28-31 The reaction of the forgiven servant was appalling. He proceeded to try to collect a debt from a "fellow slave," and even resorted to physical violence (tried to "choke" him) to obtain it. A denarius was a day's wage for a common laborer or a foot soldier.[1105] Therefore the debt owed was substantial, but compared with the debt the king had forgiven the creditor servant it was trivial.

Both debtors appealed to their respective creditors similarly (vv. 26, 29). Yet the servant creditor remained unmoved, hardhearted. He "threw" his fellow servant into the debtor's "prison until he" could extract the full amount of his debt from him. Other servants of the king, who were aware of the situation and deeply distressed by it, reported everything to their lord "in detail" (Gr. *diesaphesan*).

> "The second lesson, jarringly juxtaposed with the first, deals with the absurdity of spurning such grace."[1106]

[1103]France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 706.
[1104]Blomberg, *Preaching the* . . ., p. 72. Italics omitted.
[1105]Tobit 5:14; Tacitus *Annales* 1:17.
[1106]Blomberg, *Preaching the* . . ., p. 72. Italics omitted.

18:32-34 The king called the wicked servant into his presence and reminded him of the merciful treatment that he had received. It is interesting that the word he used for "debt" here is the usual word for debt, not "loan" as in verse 27. He took a different view of the servant's debt now. Instead of forgiving him, the king turned the unforgiving servant over to the "torturers" (Gr. *basanistais*, cf. vv. 6, 8-9). The servant would experience torture until he repaid his total debt, which he could never do. In other words his torment would be endless.

> ". . . this is not purgatorial, but punitive, for he could never pay back that vast debt."[1107]

> "The third lesson that the parable teaches deals with the frightful fate awaiting the unforgiving."[1108]

18:35 Jesus drew the crucial comparisons in applying the parable to His disciples. He pictured God as forgiving graciously, yet punishing ruthlessly. God cannot forgive those who are devoid of compassion and mercy because He is so full of these qualities Himself. Jesus did not mean that people can earn God's forgiveness by forgiving one another (cf. 6:12, 14-15). Those whom God has forgiven must "forgive"—as God has forgiven them—from the "heart." This demonstrates true humility.

The idea of God delivering His servants, the disciples, over to endless torment has disturbed many readers of this parable. Some have concluded that Jesus meant a disciple can lose his salvation "if" he "does not forgive." This makes salvation dependent on good works rather than belief in Jesus. Another possibility is that Jesus was using an impossible situation, endless torment, to warn His disciples. But if the disciples knew it was an impossible situation, the warning would lose much of its force.

Perhaps He meant that a disciple who does not genuinely forgive, gives evidence that he or she has never really received God's forgiveness.[1109] That person may be a disciple, but he or she is not a believer (cf. Judas Iscariot). However, many genuine believers do not forgive their brethren as they should. Perhaps the punishment takes place in this life, not after death, and amounts to divine discipline (v. 14).[1110] Another possibility is that Jesus had in mind a loss of eternal reward. Or perhaps this is simply another case of hyperbole to drive home a point.

Jesus concluded this discourse on humility, as He had begun it, with a reference to entering the kingdom (v. 3). Humility is necessary to enter the kingdom because it

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[1107]Robertson, *Word Pictures* . . ., 1:152.
[1108]Blomberg, *Preaching the* . . ., p. 73. Italics omitted.
[1109]Pentecost, *The Parables* . . ., p. 67.
[1110]Walvoord, *Matthew:* . . ., p. 140.

involves humbly receiving a gift of pardon from God (v. 27). However, humility must continue to characterize the disciple. Not only must a disciple live before God as a humble child (v. 4); he or she must also be careful to avoid putting a stumbling block in the path of another disciple (vv. 5-14). Furthermore, he or she must humbly seek to restore a wayward fellow disciple (vv. 15-20). Forgiving fellow disciples—wholeheartedly and completely—is likewise important for humble disciples (vv. 21-35).

> "His [Jesus'] message to the disciples is that loving concern for the neighbor and the spirit of forgiveness are to be the hallmarks of the community of believers in whose midst he, the Son of God, will ever be present."[1111]

5. The transition from Galilee to Judea 19:1-2 (cf. Mark 10:1)

Matthew marked the end of Jesus' discourse on humility (ch. 18) and reported Jesus' departure from Galilee for Judea. This is the first time in Matthew's Gospel that Jesus moved into Judea for ministry. Until now all of Jesus' public ministry following His baptism and temptation was in Galilee and its surrounding Gentile areas. Now Jesus began to move toward Judea, Jerusalem, and the Cross.

Evidently Jesus departed from Capernaum and journeyed through Samaria, or perhaps around Samaria,[1112] and into Judea to Jerusalem. Then He proceeded east across the Jordan River into Perea northeast of the Dead Sea. From there He went to Jerusalem again. Then leaving Jerusalem, Jesus visited Ephraim, traveled farther north into Samaria, headed east into Perea, and returned to Jerusalem. The following ministry took place during this last loop in Perea and Judea.[1113] Great multitudes continued to follow Him, and He continued to heal many people. Jesus did not abandon His ministry to the masses, even though the nation had rejected Him as her Messiah (cf. 22:39).

> "Even as He journeys to Jerusalem to suffer and die, He manifests His royal benevolence in healing those who come to Him."[1114]

These verses conclude a major section of Matthew's Gospel (13:54—19:2). This section has highlighted Jesus' reaction to Israel's rejection of Him. Jesus continued to experience opposition from the ordinary Israelites, from the Roman leadership of the area, and from the religious leaders within Israel. His reaction was to withdraw and to concentrate on preparing His disciples for what lay ahead of them in view of His rejection. However, He also continued to minister to the needs of the masses, primarily the Jews, because He had compassion on them.

[1111]Kingsbury, *Matthew as* . . ., p. 79. Cf. vv. 6, 10, 20, 21-22.
[1112]France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 709.
[1113]Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects* . . ., pp. 62-63.
[1114]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 220.

VI. THE OFFICIAL PRESENTATION AND REJECTION OF THE KING 19:3—25:46

This section of the Gospel continues Jesus' instruction of His disciples in preparation for their future (19:3—20:34). Then Jesus presented Himself formally to Israel as her King with His triumphal entry (21:1-17). This resulted in strong rejection by Israel's leaders (21:18—22:46). Consequently Jesus pronounced His rejection of Israel (ch. 23). Finally He revealed to His disciples that He would return to Israel later and establish the kingdom (chs. 24—25).

Throughout this entire section, the Jewish leaders' opposition to Jesus continues to mount in intensity, and it becomes more focused on Him. Reconciliation becomes impossible. Jesus revealed increasingly more about Himself and His mission to His disciples, and stressed the future inauguration of the kingdom. Between these two poles of opposition and inauguration, God's grace emerges even more powerfully than we have seen it so far. Matthew never used the word "grace" (Gr. *karis*), but its presence is obvious in this Gospel (cf. 19:21-22; 20:1-16).

> ". . . despite the gross rejection of Jesus, the chronic unbelief of opponents, crowds, and disciples alike, and the judgment that threatens both within history and at the End, grace triumphs and calls out a messianic people who bow to Jesus' lordship and eagerly await his return."[1115]

A. JESUS' INSTRUCTION OF HIS DISCIPLES AROUND JUDEA 19:3—20:34

The primary emphasis in this section of Matthew's Gospel is Jesus' instruction of His disciples to prepare them for the future. Specifically, He emphasized the importance of the first becoming last and the last first: humble servanthood (cf. 19:30; 20:16).

1. Instruction about marriage 19:3-12 (cf. Mark 10:2-12)

Matthew evidently included this instruction because the marriage relationships of Jesus' disciples were important factors in their effective ministries. Jesus clarified God's will for His disciples, which was different from the common perception of His day. He dealt with the single state, as well as the essence of marriage, and the subjects of divorce and remarriage.

19:3 The Pharisees again approached Jesus to trap Him (cf. 12:2, 14, 38; 15:1; 16:1; 22:15, 34-35). This time they posed a question about "divorce." In 5:31-32, Jesus had taught the sanctity of marriage in the context of kingdom righteousness. Here the Pharisees asked Him what divorces were legitimate. Perhaps they hoped Jesus would oppose Herod as John had done, and suffer a similar fate. The Machaerus fortress, where Herod Antipas had imprisoned and beheaded John, was nearby, located east of

[1115]Carson, "Matthew," pp. 410-11.

the north part of the Dead Sea. Undoubtedly the Pharisees hoped Jesus would say something that they could use against Him.

Both the NASB and NIV translations have rendered the Pharisees' question well. They wanted to know if Jesus believed a man could "divorce his wife for any" and every "reason." The Mosaic Law did not permit wives to divorce their husbands.

There was great variety of opinion on this controversial subject among the Jews. Most of them believed that divorce was "lawful" for Jews, though not for Gentiles, but they disagreed as to its grounds.[1116] The Qumran community believed that divorce was not legitimate for any reason.[1117] In mainstream Judaism there were two dominant views, both of which held that divorce was permissible for "something indecent" (Deut. 24:1). Rabbi Shammai and his school of followers believed the indecency was some gross indecency, though not necessarily adultery.

Rabbi Hillel and his school interpreted the indecency more broadly, to include practically any offense that a wife might have committed, real or imagined by the husband. This even included a wife not cooking her husband's meal to his liking.[1118] One of Hillel's disciples, Rabbi Akiba, permitted a man to divorce his wife if a prettier woman caught his eye.[1119] Josephus was a divorced Pharisee, and he believed in divorce "for any causes whatsoever."[1120] In many Pharisaic circles "the frequency of divorce was an open scandal."[1121]

19:4-6 Jesus' opponents based their thinking on divorce on Deuteronomy 24:1-4, where Moses permitted divorce. Jesus went back to Genesis 1 and 2 as expressing God's original intention for marriage: no divorce. He argued that the original principle takes precedence over the exception to the principle.

Jesus' citation of Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 shows that He believed that marriage unites a man and a woman in a unified "one flesh" relationship.

> "The union is depicted in the vivid metaphor of Genesis as one of 'gluing' or 'welding'—it would be hard to imagine a more powerful metaphor of permanent attachment. In the Genesis context the 'one flesh' image derives from the creation of the woman out of the man's side to be 'bone of

[1116]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 2:332-33.
[1117]J. R. Mueller, "The Temple Scroll and the Gospel Divorce Texts," *Revue de Qumran* 38 (1980):247-56.
[1118]For a fuller discussion of the two major views, see Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 2:333-34.
[1119]Mishnah *Gittin* 9:10.
[1120]Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 4:8:23.
[1121]Hill, p. 280.

> my bones and flesh of my flesh' (Gen 2:21-23); in marriage that original unity is restored."[1122]

"One flesh" expresses the fact that when a man and a woman marry, they become whole, as Adam was a whole person before God created Eve from his side. It is a way of saying that, as unmarried individuals, Adam and Eve were each lacking something, but when God brought them together in marriage they became whole. Sexual intercourse creates the "one flesh" condition, which symbolizes the unity that results from marriage. But sexual intercourse by itself does not create a marriage; leaving and cleaving are also required.

God was the Creator in view (v. 4), though Jesus did not draw attention to that point (cf. John 1:3; Col. 1:16). The phrase "for this cause" (v. 5) in Genesis 2:23-24 refers to becoming one flesh. Eve became related to Adam in the most intimate sense when they married. Having been taken from Adam and made from his rib, Eve became "one flesh" with him when God joined them in marriage. When a man and a woman marry, they become "one flesh," a whole entity, thus reestablishing the intimate type of union that existed between Adam and Eve.

> ". . . the 'one flesh' in every marriage between a man and a woman is a reenactment of and testimony to the very structure of humanity as God created it."[1123]

Note, too, that it is the union of *a man and a woman* that Jesus affirmed as constituting marriage, not same sex marriages.

In view of this union, Jesus concluded, a husband and wife are no longer two but one (v. 6). God has united them in a "one flesh" relationship by marriage. Since God has done this, separating them by divorce is not only unnatural but rebellion against God. Essentially Jesus allied Himself with the prophet Malachi, as well as Moses, rather than with any of the rabbis. Malachi had revealed that God hates divorce (Mal. 2:16).

> ". . . the argument here is expressed not in terms of what cannot happen, but of what *must* not happen: the verb is an imperative, *'let* not man separate.' To break up a marriage is to usurp the function of God by whose creative order it was set up, and who has decreed that it shall be a permanent 'one flesh' union."[1124]

[1122]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 717.
[1123]Carson, "Matthew," p. 412.
[1124]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 718.

Jesus focused on the God-ordained and supernaturally created unity of the married couple. The rabbis stressed the error of divorce as involving taking another man's wife. Jesus appealed to the principle. He went back to fundamental biblical revelation, in this case Creation. He argued that marriage rests on how God made human beings, not just the sanctity of a covenantal relationship between the husband and the wife. This covenantal relationship is what some evangelical books on marriage stress primarily. Marriage does not break down simply because one partner breaks the covenant with his or her spouse. God unites the husband and wife in a new relationship when they marry, that continues regardless of marital unfaithfulness.

In summary, Jesus gave three reasons why married couples should remain married: First, the Creator determines what is the ideal in marriage, and since He created one male and one female originally, He intended only one mate for each. Second, God ordained marriage as the strongest bond in all human interpersonal relationships, so it should not be broken. Third, the basic element in marriage is a covenant or contract that the husband and wife make with each other (cf. Mal. 2:14), and that contract involves becoming "one flesh" (i.e., physical intimacy).[1125]

19:7 Jesus had not yet answered the Pharisees' question about how one should take the Mosaic Law on this subject, so they asked Him this question. Granting Jesus' view of marriage, why did Moses allow divorce? In the Deuteronomy 24:1-4 passage to which the Pharisees referred, God showed more concern about prohibiting the remarriage of the divorced woman and her first husband than the reason for granting the divorce. However, the Pharisees took the passage as a "command" (Gr. *entellomai*) to "divorce" one's wife for any indecency. God intended it as only a permission to divorce, as the passage itself shows.

19:8 Jesus explained that the concession in the Mosaic Law was just that, a concession. It did not reflect the will of God in creation but the hardness of the human heart. Divorce was not a part of God's creation ordinance any more than sin was. However, He "permitted" divorce, as He permitted sin.

> "Moses regulated, but thereby conceded, the practice of divorce; both were with a view to (*pros*) the nation's (*hymon*) hardness of heart: since they persist in falling short of the ideal of Eden, let it at least be within limits."[1126]

The divorce option that God granted the Israelites testifies to man's sinfulness. Therefore one should always view divorce as evidence of sin, specifically hardness of heart. He or she should never view it as simply a

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[1125]*The Nelson . . .*, p. 1608.

[1126]M'Neile, p. 273.

morally neutral option that God granted, the correctness or incorrectness of which depended on the definition of the indecency. The Pharisees' fundamental attitude toward the issue was wrong. They were looking for grounds for divorce. Jesus was stressing the inviolability of the marriage relationship.

Notice in passing that Jesus never associated Himself with the sin in the discussion. He consistently spoke of the peoples' sin as *their* sin or *your* sin, never as *our* sin (cf. 6:14-15). This is a fine point that reveals Jesus' awareness that He was sinless.

What was the indecency for which Moses permitted divorce? It was not adultery, since the penalty for that was death, not divorce (Deut. 22:22). However, it is debatable whether the Israelites enforced the death penalty for adultery.[1127] It could not be suspicion of adultery, either, since there was a specified procedure for handling those cases (Num. 5:5-31). Probably it was any gross immoral behavior short of adultery, namely, fornication, which includes all types of prohibited sexual behavior. Even though divorce was widespread and easy to obtain in the ancient Near East, and in Israel, the Israelites took marriage somewhat more seriously than their pagan neighbors did.

19:9 Jesus introduced His position on this subject with words that stressed His authority: "I say to you" (cf. 5:18, 20, 22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44; 8:10; 16:18, 28). His was the true view because it came from Him who came to fulfill the Law. Matthew recorded only Jesus' words concerning a man who "divorces his wife," probably because in Judaism wives could not divorce their husbands. However, Mark recorded Jesus saying that the same thing holds true for a woman who divorces her husband (Mark 10:12). Mark wrote originally for a Roman audience. Wives could divorce their husbands under Roman law. Matthew's original readers lived under Jewish law, which did not permit wives to divorce their husbands.

There are four problems in this verse that account for its difficulty. First, what does the exception clause include? The best textual evidence points to the short clause that appears in both the NASB and the NIV translations, "except for immorality" or "except for marital unfaithfulness."[1128]

Second, what is the meaning of *porneia* ("immorality" NASB, "marital unfaithfulness" NIV, "fornication" AV) in the exception clause? Some interpreters believe it refers to incest.[1129] Paul used this word to describe

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[1127]See Henry McKeating, "Sanctions Against Adultery in Ancient Israelite Society," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 11 (1979):57-72.

[1128]Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, pp. 47-48.

[1129]E.g., J. A. Fitzmyer, "The Matthean Divorce Texts and Some New Palestinian Evidence," *Theological Studies* 37 (1976):208-11.

prostitution in 1 Corinthians 6:13 and 16. Others believe *porneia* refers only to premarital sex. If a man discovered that his fiancé was not a virgin when he married her, he could divorce her.[1130]

Even though the Jews considered a man and a woman to be husband and wife during their engagement period, they were not really married. Consequently, to consider this as grounds for divorce seems to require a redefinition of marriage that most interpreters resist. Furthermore, Deuteronomy 24:1 indicates that the couple is living together, which in Jewish culture would have meant that they were truly married, and not just engaged.

Still others define *porneia* as adultery.[1131] However, the normal Greek word for adultery is *moicheia*, which Matthew used back to back with *porneia* previously (15:19). Therefore they must not mean the same thing. It also seems unlikely that *porneia* refers to *spiritual* adultery, in view of 1 Corinthians 7:12.

The best solution seems to be that *porneia* is a broad term that covers many different sexual sins that lie outside God's will. This conclusion rests on the meaning of the word.[1132] These sexual sins, called "fornication," would include: homosexuality, bestiality, premarital sex, extramarital sex, incest, adultery, prostitution, and perhaps others. Essentially it refers to any sexual intercourse that God forbids (i.e., with any creature other than one's spouse).

A third problem in this verse is: Why did Matthew alone of all the Synoptic evangelists include this exception clause, here and in 5:32, when the others excluded it? To answer this question, we must also answer the fourth question, namely: What does this clause mean?

Some scholars believe that Matthew simply added the clause himself, to make what Jesus *really* said stronger. They assume that what Mark wrote represents what Jesus *really* said. This view reflects a low view of Scripture, since it makes Matthew distort Jesus' words.

Another answer is that the exception clause does not express an exception. This view requires interpreting the Greek preposition *epi* ("except") as "in addition to" or "apart from." However, when *me* ("not") introduces *epi*, it always introduces an exception elsewhere in the Greek New Testament.

[1130]E.g., Mark Geldard, "Jesus' Teaching on Divorce," *Churchman* 92 (1978):134-43.

[1131]E.g., T. V. Fleming, "Christ and Divorce," *Theological Studies* 24 (1963):109; and Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 225.

[1132]*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "*porne, et al.*," by F. Hauck and K. L. Schmidt, 6(1968):579-95. See also Joseph Jensen, "Does *porneia* Mean Fornication? A Critique of Bruce Malina," *Novum Testamentum* 20 (1978):161-84.

Another, similar answer, is that the exception is an exception to the whole proposition, not just to the verb "divorces."[1133] In this case the *porneia* is not involved. We might translate the clause as follows to give the sense: "Whoever divorces his wife, quite apart from the matter of fornication, and marries another—commits adultery." Thus in this view, as in the one above, there is no real exception. The main problem with this view, as with the one above, is its unusual handling of the Greek text. One has to read in things that are not there.

A fourth view is that when Jesus used the Greek verb *apolyo* ("divorces"), He really meant "separates from," and thus permitted separation but not divorce.[1134] Following this logic, there can be no remarriage, since a divorce has not taken place. However, in verse 3, *apolyo* clearly means "divorce," so to give it a different meaning in verse 9 seems arbitrary without some compelling reason to do so.

Other interpreters believe Jesus meant that in some cases divorce is not adulterous, rather than that in some cases divorce is not morally wrong.[1135] In the case of *porneia* the husband does not make her adulterous; she is already adulterous. However, the text does not say he makes her "adulterous" or "an adulteress"; it says he makes her *commit adultery*. If the woman had committed *porneia*, divorce and remarriage would not make her adulterous. However, divorce and remarriage would make her commit adultery. The major flaw in this view is that in verse 9, it is the man who commits adultery, not his wife.

Probably it is best to interpret *porneia* and the exception clause as they appear normally in our English texts. Jesus meant that whoever divorces his wife, except for some gross sexual sin, and then remarries someone else—commits adultery (cf. 5:32).

> "On any understanding of what Jesus says . . ., he agrees with neither Shammai nor Hillel; for even though the school of Shammai was stricter than Hillel, it permitted remarriage when the divorce was not in accordance with its own Halakah (rules of conduct) (M[ishnah] *Eduyoth* 4:7-10); and if Jesus restricts grounds for divorce to sexual indecency . . ., then he differs fundamentally from Shammai. Jesus cuts his own swath in these verses . . ."[1136]

[1133]Bruce Vawter, "The Divorce Clauses in Mt 5, 32 and 19, 9," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 16 (1959):155-67; idem, "Divorce and the New Testament," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 39 (1977):528-48.

[1134]G. J. Wenham, "May Divorced Christians Remarry?" *Churchman* 95 (1981):150-61. See Tim Crater, "Bill Gothard's View of the Exception Clause," *Journal of Pastoral Practice* 4 (1980):5-12.

[1135]John J. Kilgallen, "To What Are the Matthean Exception-Texts [5, 32 and 19, 9] an Exception?" *Biblica* 61 (1980):102-5.

[1136]Carson, "Matthew," p. 411.

Divorce and remarriage always involve evil (Mal. 2:16). However, just as Moses permitted divorce because of the hardness of man's heart, so did Jesus. Yet, whereas Moses was indefinite about the indecency that constituted grounds for a divorce, Jesus specified the indecency as gross sexual sin—fornication.[1137]

Why then did Mark and Luke omit the exception clause? Probably they did so simply because it expresses an exception to the rule, and they wanted to stress the main point of Jesus' words without dealing with the exceptional situation. Since Matthew wrote for Jews primarily, he probably felt, under the Spirit's inspiration, that he needed to include the exception clause for the following reason. The subject of how to deal with divorce cases involving marital unfaithfulness was of particular interest to the Jews, in view of Old Testament and rabbinic teaching on this subject. Mark and Luke wrote primarily for Gentiles, so they simply omitted the exception clause.[1138]

Some interpreters believe that Matthew, who presumably—in the minds of advocates of this view—wrote his Gospel after Mark and Luke wrote theirs, inserted the exception clause because it had become the practice of the early church.[1139] This view is unacceptable for at least two reasons: First, the exception clause appears to have been spoken by Jesus, not inserted by Matthew at a later time. Second, the late dating of Matthew's Gospel has not been proven.

19:10-12 Some scholars, who believe that Jesus meant to discourage remarriage in verse 9, interpret the disciples' statement in verse 10 as evidence that they understood Him in this light.[1140] If a person has to remain unmarried after he divorces, it would be better if he never married in the first place. However, this is probably not what Jesus meant in verse 9. The evidence for this is His reference to "eunuchs" in verse 12, as well as the inferiority of this view as explained above.

Probably the disciples expressed regret because Jesus had come down more conservatively than even Rabbi Shammai, the more conservative of the leading rabbis. Jesus conceded divorce only for sexual indecency, as Shammai did, but He was even more conservative than Shammai on the subject of remarriage. He encouraged the disciples not to remarry after a divorce not involving sexual indecency, whereas Shammai permitted it. His encouragement lay in His clarification that marriage constitutes a very

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[1137]See Craig L. Blomberg, "Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Celibacy: An Exegesis of Matthew 19:3-12," *Trinity Journal* 11NS (1990):161-96.

[1138]See Appendix 5 "What ends a marriage in God's sight?" at the end of these notes.

[1139]E.g., Barclay, 2:223. Cf. 2:168, for his dating of the writing of Matthew's Gospel.

[1140]E.g., Francis J. Moloney, "Matthew 19, 3-12 and Celibacy. A Redactional and Form-Critical Study," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 2 (1979):42-60.

> binding relationship (vv. 4-6). The disciples thought that if they could not divorce and remarry, which both Hillel and Shammai permitted, they would be better off remaining single.
>
> Jesus responded that not everyone can live by the strict verdict that the disciples had just passed in verse 10, namely, never marrying. He did not mean that it is impossible to live with the standards He imposed in verses 4-9. If He meant the latter, He eviscerated all that He had just taught. Some could live by the strict verdict that the disciples suggested, namely, eunuchs whom God graciously enables to live unmarried.
>
> Jesus identified three types of eunuchs (v. 12). Some eunuchs were born impotent or without normal sexual drive and therefore remained unmarried. Other eunuchs were eunuchs because others had castrated them, most notably those eunuchs who served in government positions where they had frequent access to royal women. Still other eunuchs were those who had chosen an unmarried life for themselves so they could serve God more effectively.
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> Thus, in answer to the disciples' suggestion that Jesus' encouragement to remain unmarried presented an unreasonably high standard (v. 10), Jesus pointed out that many people can live unmarried. He was one who did. For those so gifted by God, it is better not to marry. Those who can accept this counsel, or perhaps the single state, should do so.
>
> However, neither Jesus nor the apostles viewed celibacy as an intrinsically holier state than marriage (1 Tim. 4:1-3; Heb. 13:4; cf. 1 Cor. 9:5). They viewed it as a special calling that God has given some of His servants so they can be more useful in His service. Eunuchs could not participate in Israel's public worship (Lev. 22:24; Deut. 23:1). However, they can participate in the kingdom and, we might add, in the church (Acts 8:26-40; 1 Cor. 7:7-9). Evidently there were some in Jesus' day who had foregone marriage in anticipation of the kingdom. Perhaps John the Baptist was one, and maybe some of Jesus' disciples had given up plans to marry in order to follow Him (cf. v. 27). Jesus was definitely one of the "eunuchs for the kingdom's sake."

To summarize, Jesus held a very high view of marriage. When a man and a woman marry, God creates a union that is as strong as the union that bound Adam and Eve together before God created Eve from Adam's side. Man should not separate what God has united (cf. Rom. 7:1-3). However, even though God hates divorce, He permits it in cases where gross sexual indecency (fornication) has entered the marriage. Similarly, God hates sin, but He permits it and gave instructions about how to manage it.

Jesus urged His disciples not to divorce (cf. 1 Cor. 7:10), but if they divorced, He urged them not to remarry (cf. 1 Cor. 7:8, 11, 27). However, He did not go so far as prohibiting

remarriage (cf. 1 Cor. 7:9, 28). He encouraged them to realize that living unmarried after a divorce is a realistic possibility for many people, but He conceded it was not possible for all (cf. 1 Cor. 7:9). A primary consideration should be how one could most effectively carry on his or her work of preparing for the kingdom (cf. 1 Cor. 7:32-34).

Matthew did not record the Pharisees' reaction to this teaching. His primary concern was the teaching itself. He only cited the Pharisees' participation because it illustrated their continuing antagonism, a major theme in his Gospel, and because it provided the setting for Jesus' authoritative teaching.

2. Instruction about childlikeness 19:13-15 (cf. Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17)

Another incident occurred that provided another opportunity for Jesus to emphasize the importance of childlike characteristics in His disciples (cf. ch 18). Instruction about children follows instruction about marriage.

19:13 It was customary for people to bring their children to rabbis for blessings.[1141] The Old Testament reflects this practice (Gen. 48:14; Num. 27:18; cf. Acts 6:6; 13:3). "The disciples rebuked" those who "brought" the "children" to Jesus for doing so (Mark 10:13; Luke 18:15). The evangelists did not reveal why the disciples did this. However, the fact that they did it shows their need for Jesus' exhortation that followed. They were not behaving with humility as Jesus had previously taught them to do (ch. 18; esp. v. 5). Moreover, Jesus' teaching about the sanctity of marriage (vv. 4-6) did not affect how they viewed children. The Jews cherished their children, but viewed them primarily as needing to listen, to learn, and to be respectful.

> "It is a tragedy to make children feel that they are in the way at home and at church."[1142]

19:14-15 Jesus welcomed the children. This attitude was harmonious with His attitude toward all the humble, dependent, needy, trusting, and vulnerable people who came to Him. Furthermore, children coming to Him symbolized people with the characteristics of children coming to Him. Jesus did not want to discourage anyone like them from coming to Him. He did not say "the kingdom" belonged to children, but to people who are similar to children ("to such as these"). Children provided an excellent object lesson that Jesus used to illustrate the qualities necessary for entering and serving in the kingdom.

> "There is a strange difference between Jesus and many a famous preacher or evangelist. It is often next door to impossible to get into the presence of one of these famous

[1141]Carson, "Matthew," p. 420.

[1142]Robertson, *Word Pictures . . .*, 1:156.

> ones at all. They have a kind of retinue and bodyguard which keep the public away lest the great man be wearied and bothered. Jesus was the opposite of that. The way to the presence of Jesus is open to the humblest person and to the youngest child."[1143]

The difference between this lesson, and the one in chapter 18, is that there the focus was on the childlike quality of humility that is so important in a disciple. Here Jesus broadened the lesson to include other childlike characteristics, all of which are important.

3. Instruction about wealth 19:16—20:16

Again someone approached Jesus with a question that provided an opportunity for Jesus to give His disciples important teaching (cf. v.3). This man's social standing was far from that of a child, and he provides a negative example of childlikeness. Previously the disciples did not welcome children (v. 13), but here they can hardly believe that Jesus would not welcome this man of wealth (v. 25).

The encounter with the rich young ruler 19:16-22 (cf. Mark 10:17-22; Luke 18:18-23)

19:16-17 A rich young man asked Jesus "what" he needed to do to "obtain eternal life." Luke 18:18 identifies him as a ruler. Matthew presented him as a rather typical obsessive-compulsive personality who probably never knew when to stop working.

The term "eternal life" occurs here for the first time in Matthew's Gospel (cf. Dan. 12:2, LXX). However, the concept of eternal life occurs in 7:14. Eternal life is life that continues forever in God's presence, as opposed to eternal damnation apart from God's presence (7:13; cf. 25:46).

The young man's idea of how one obtains eternal life was far from what Jesus had been preaching and even recently illustrating (vv. 13-15). He demonstrated the antithesis of childlike faith and humility. He thought he had to perform some particular act of righteousness in addition to keeping the Mosaic Law (v. 20). He wanted Jesus to tell him what that act was. He was a performance-oriented person.

Jesus' question in verse 17 did not imply that He was unable to answer the young man's question, or that He was not good enough to give an answer.[1144] It implied that His questioner had an improper understanding of goodness. Jesus went on to explain that only God "is good" enough to obtain eternal life by performing some good deed. No one else is good

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[1143]Barclay, 2:234.

[1144]See B. B. Warfield, "Jesus' Alleged Confession of Sin," *Princeton Theological Review* 12 (1914):127-228.

enough to gain it that way. Jesus did not discuss His own relationship to God here. However, by answering this, Jesus implied that He was God or at least spoke for God. The young man had asked Jesus questions about goodness that only God could adequately answer.

The last part of verse 17 does not mean that Jesus believed a person can earn eternal life by obeying God's commandments. Obedience to God's commandments is a good preparation for entering into life. However, obedience apart from faith will not do.

19:18-20 The rabbis had added so many commands to those in the Mosaic Law, that the young man did not know which "commandments" Jesus meant. Jesus listed the sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and fifth commandments, in that order, plus part of "the greatest commandment" (Lev. 19:18). All of these commandments deal with observable behavior.

> "Jesus did not introduce the Law to show the young man how to be saved, but to show him that *he needed to be saved* [cf. James 1:22-25]."[1145]

The fact that the young man claimed to have "kept all" of them, reveals the superficiality of his understanding of God's demands (cf. 5:20; Phil. 3:6). Moreover, having apparently lived an upright life, he still had no assurance that he possessed eternal life. This is always the case when a person seeks to earn eternal life by his or her goodness. One can never be sure he or she has done enough.

> "He thought of goodness as quantitative (a series of acts) and not qualitative (of the nature of God). Did his question reveal proud complacency or pathetic despair? A bit of both most likely."[1146]

This young man may have been rich materially, but he was lacking what was more important, namely, the assurance of his salvation.

19:21-22 By referring to being "complete," Jesus was referring to the young man's statement that he felt incomplete (v. 20; cf. v. 16), that he needed to do something more to assure his eternal life. Jesus did not mean that the young man had eternal life and just needed to do a little more, to put the icing on the cake (cf. 23:8-12). Earlier Jesus had told His disciples that *perfection*, the same Greek word translated "complete" here, came from following Him (5:48). He repeated the same thing here.

[1145]Wiersbe, 1:72.

[1146]Robertson, *Word Pictures . . .*, 1:157.

What this young man needed to do was to become a disciple of Jesus, to start following Him and learning from Him. God's will did not just involve keeping commandments. It also involved following Jesus. If he did that, he would learn how a person obtains eternal life: not by good deeds, but by faith in Jesus. To follow Jesus, this rich young man would need to "sell" his "possessions." He could not accompany Jesus as he needed to without disposing of things that would have distracted him (cf. 8:19-22). Such a material sacrifice to follow Jesus would gain a reward eventually (cf. v. 29; 6:19-21). Jesus was assuming the young man would become a believer after he became a disciple.

> "So attached was he to his great wealth that he was unwilling to part with it. Such is the insidiousness of riches that, as Bengel notes, 'If the Lord had said, Thou art rich, and art too fond of thy riches, the young man would have denied it.' He had to be confronted with all the force of a radical alternative."[1147]

The young man was not willing to part with his possessions to follow Jesus. He was willing to keep the whole Mosaic Law, and even to do additional good works, but submitting to Jesus was something else. Jesus had put His finger on the crucial decision this young man had to make when He told him to dispose of his possessions. Would he value his possessions, or following Jesus to learn more about eternal life, more highly? His decision revealed his values (cf. 6:24).

> "His real problem was lack of faith in Christ, whom he considered a good Teacher but who apparently was not to be regarded as one who had the right to demand that he give up all in order to follow Him."[1148]

> "Does Jesus demand this same test of every one? Not unless he [or she] is in the grip of money. Different persons are in the power of different sins. One sin is enough to keep one away from Christ."[1149]

This passage does not teach that salvation is by works. Jesus did not tell the young man that he would obtain eternal life by doing some good thing, but neither did He rebuke him for the good things that he had done. He made it very clear that what he needed to do was to follow Jesus so he could come to faith in Jesus.

[1147]Hagner, *Matthew 14—28*, p. 559. See also Calvin, *Institutes of* . . ., 4:13:13.
[1148]Walvoord, *Matthew:* . . ., p. 145. See Alan P. Stanley, "The Rich Young Ruler and Salvation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163:649 (January-March 2006):46-62.
[1149]Robertson, *Word Pictures* . . ., 1:157.

This passage does not teach that a person must surrender all to Jesus *before* he or she can obtain eternal life, either. Jesus never made this a condition for salvation. He made giving away possessions here a condition for discipleship, not salvation. We have seen a consistent order in Matthew's Gospel that holds true in all the Gospels. First, Jesus called a person to follow Him, that is, to begin learning from Him as a disciple. Second, He called His disciples to believe on Him as the God-man. Third, He called His believing disciples to continue following Him and believing on Him because He had an important job for them to do.

The teaching concerning riches 19:23-30 (cf. Mark 10:23-31; Luke 18:24-30)

19:23-24 "Truly I say to you" or "I tell you the truth" introduces another very important statement (cf. 5:18; et al.). Jesus evidently referred to a literal "camel" and a literal sewing "needle" (Gr. *rhaphidos*) here. His statement appears to have been a common proverbial expression for something impossible. He intended to illustrate an impossible situation by naming the largest beast in Palestine and the smallest of apertures.[1150] I have not been able to find any basis for the view that "the eye of the needle" was a small gate, as some commentators have suggested.

> "We should recognize that by the standards of first-century Palestine, most upper-middle-class Westerners and those on the Pacific rim would be considered wealthy. For all such persons the questions of wealth, discipleship, and the poor cannot be side-stepped if following Christ and his teaching means anything at all."[1151]

Barclay commented on three effects that riches often have on a person's outlook: (1) They encourage a false independence. (2) They shackle a person to his or her wealth. (3) They tend to make a person selfish.[1152]

> "The basis of all Christianity is an imperious sense of need; when a man has many things on earth, he is in danger of thinking that he does not need God; when a man has few things on earth, he is often driven to God because he has nowhere else to go."[1153]

Probably Jesus referred to "the kingdom of *God*" in verse 24 for the sake of variety, since He had just spoken of "the kingdom of *heaven*" in verse 23. Also, by using God's name, He stressed God's personal authority. He proceeded to contrast two kings: God and Mammon. While some interpreters take the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven as two different kingdoms, usage argues for their being synonymous.[1154]

[1150]Kent, "The Gospel . . .," p. 964.
[1151]Hagner, *Matthew 14—28*, p. 562.
[1152]Barclay, 2:240-41.
[1153]Ibid., 2:242.
[1154]See my comments on 3:1-2.

19:25-26 The disciples' amazement was due to the Jewish belief that wealth signified God's favor. "Saved" is a synonym for entering the kingdom (v. 24) or obtaining eternal life (v. 16, cf. Mark 9:43-47). The antecedent of "this" in verse 26 is salvation (v. 25). In other words, man cannot save himself (cf. v. 21). Nevertheless God can save him, and He can do anything else. Jesus characteristically pointed the disciples away from man's work to God's work. Joseph of Arimathea was exceptional in that he was both rich and a disciple (26:57).

19:27-28 Jesus' statement encouraged Peter to ask a question. It may have occurred to him when Jesus told the rich young man that if he followed Him he would receive treasure in heaven (v. 21). Peter asked Jesus what those who had made this sacrifice could expect to receive.

Jesus assured the disciples very definitely—"Truly I say to you"—that God would reward them for leaving what they had left and following Him (v. 28). The "regeneration" or "renewal" (Gr. *palingenesia*) refers to the establishment of the messianic kingdom (Isa. 2:2-4; 4:2-6; 11:1-11; 32:16-18; 35:1-2; 65:17; 66:22; cf. Acts 3:21; Rom. 8:18-23). Then "the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne" (lit. throne of glory, cf. 25:31; Dan. 7:13-14). This is a very clear messianic claim. Jesus equated Himself with the Son of Man, the judge of humanity (Dan. 7:13). Moreover, the 12 disciples will then "sit upon 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel" (cf. Isa. 1:26; Dan. 7:22).

> "In the O.T. *krinein* [to judge] often means 'govern' (e.g. Ps. ix. 4, 8)."[1155]

Since there were 12 chief disciples or apostles (10:2-4), it seems clear that Jesus had these individuals in mind. "Israel" always means Israel, the physical descendants of Jacob (Israel), whenever this term appears in the New Testament. The reward of these disciples, for forsaking all and following Jesus, would be sharing judgment and rule with the great Judge, Jesus, in His kingdom (Ps. 2). This judgment will take place and this rule will begin on earth when Jesus returns at the Second Coming (25:31-46).

> "This is clearly a picture of the millennial earth, not heaven. Late in Christ's ministry, He supports the concept that the kingdom, while postponed as far as human expectation is concerned, is nevertheless certain of fulfillment following His second coming."[1156]

[1155]M'Neile, p. 282.

[1156]Walvoord, *Matthew: . . .*, p. 146. See also David K. Lowery, "Evidence from Matthew," in *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus*, p. 180.

How much the rich young man gave up to retain his "much property" (cf. vv. 21-22)!

> "The Lord thus confirms the promise He had already given to Peter (Matthew 16:19) and enlarges it to include all of the apostles. They are to be rulers over Israel in the kingdom."[1157]

There is a vast difference between earning salvation with works and receiving a reward for works. Salvation is always apart from human works, but rewards are always in response to human works.

19:29 Not only the 12 Apostles, but every self-sacrificing disciple, will receive a reward for his or her sacrifice.[1158] Jesus meant here that "everyone" who makes a sacrifice to follow Him will receive *much more than* he or she sacrificed—as a reward! He did not mean that if one sacrifices one house he or she will receive 100 houses, much less 100 mothers or 100 fathers, etc. If a disciple leaves a parent to follow Jesus, he or she will find many more people who will be as a parent to him or her in the kingdom. God is no man's debtor.

> ". . . the promise will be found to hold good with the regularity of a law, if we do not confine our view to the individual life, but include successive generations."[1159]

Additionally, that person "will inherit eternal life." That is, he or she will enter into the enjoyment of his or her eternal life in the kingdom, as *heirs* for whom their heavenly Father has prepared many blessings.

> "We must remember that eternal life in the Bible is not a static entity, a mere gift of regeneration that does not continue to grow and blossom. No, it is a dynamic relationship with Christ Himself [cf. John 10:10; 17:3]."[1160]

Other passages that present eternal life as something the believer must work to *inherit* are 19:16; Mark 10:17, 30; Luke 10:25; 18:18, 30; John 12:25-26; Romans 2:7; 6:22; and Galatians 6:8. Eternal life is quantitative as well as qualitative.

19:30 This proverbial saying expresses the reversals that will take place when the King begins to reign in the kingdom. The "first" and "last" are positions representing greatness and lowliness, respectively. The rich

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[1157]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 229.
[1158]See also Calvin, *Institutes of* . . ., 3:25:10.
[1159]Bruce, *The Training* . . ., p. 269.
[1160]Dillow, p. 136.

young man and the disciples are cases in point. The young man was rich then, but would not have received many blessings in the kingdom if he was a believer in Jesus. The disciples, on the other hand, had given up everything to follow Jesus, but they will have a great wealth of blessings in the kingdom.

This statement introduces the parable of the workers and their compensation (20:1-15). Jesus repeated it at the end of the parable but in reverse order (20:16). This structure shows that the parable illustrates the point stated in this verse. Here He evidently meant that many (not all) of those in the first rank of priority then—for example, the rich, the famous, and the comfortable disciples—will be last in the kingdom. Their reward will be small because they were not willing to sacrifice themselves to follow Jesus wholeheartedly. Conversely, those whom the world regarded with contempt, because of the sacrifices they made to follow Jesus, will receive great honor in the kingdom for making those sacrifices.

"The principle taught in this account is that neither poverty or [*sic*] wealth guarantees eternal life. . . .

". . . what guarantees eternal life is following Christ (in faith), and what guarantees eternal rewards is living according to His commands (obedience)."[1161]

The parable of the workers in the vineyard 20:1-16

This parable explains why the last will become first. It begins with a well-known scene but then introduces surprising elements to make a powerful point.

"Jesus deliberately and cleverly led the listeners along by degrees until they understood that if God's generosity was to be represented by a man, such a man would be different from any man ever encountered."[1162]

"Any union leader worth their salt would protest at such employment practices. Anyone who took this parable as a practical basis for employment would soon be out of business."[1163]

20:1-2 Jesus introduced this parable as He did the other kingdom parables in chapter 13 (cf. 13:24, 31, 33, et al.). This is how conditions will be in the messianic kingdom. One "denarius" was the normal day's wage for a day laborer in Jesus' day (cf. 18:28).[1164] The "vineyard" is a common figure for Israel in the Old Testament (Isa. 3:14; 5:1-2; Jer. 12:10; et al.).

[1161]Bailey, in *The New . . .*, p. 39.
[1162]Norman A. Huffman, "Atypical Features in the Parables of Jesus," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 97 (1978):209.
[1163]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 748.
[1164]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 2:417.

20:3-7 The "third hour" would be about 9:00 a.m., the "sixth hour" about noon, and the "eleventh hour" about 5:00 p.m. The "market place" would have been the central square of the town where day laborers obtained work and pay. The "landowner" did not promise a particular wage, only that He would deal justly with the laborers. Jesus did not explain why the landowner kept hiring more workers throughout the day. That was an irrelevant detail in His story. All the workers trusted the landowner to give them what was fair at the end of the day.

> "The day laborer did not have even the minimal security which a slave had in belonging to one master. There was no social welfare program on which an unemployed man could fall back, and no trade unions to protect a worker's rights. An employer could literally 'do what he chose with what belonged to him' (v. 15)."[1165]

20:8-12 The "evening" was the time of reckoning for the workers (cf. Lev. 19:13). The order in which the landowner's foreman paid the workers ("last to the first") may imply that he took greater pleasure in rewarding those hired last.[1166] In view of what he paid those hired late in the day, those who began working earlier *expected* to receive more than they had hoped for. They grumbled against him because he had been "generous" (v. 15) to the latecomers and only just with them.

The early starters cited their hard working conditions as justification for their grievance. Their error was that they had served for the pay they would receive, whereas those who served for only one hour did so simply trusting in the grace of their employer. The difference lay in their motivation. We can see the same differences in the motives of Jacob and Abraham, the Pharisee and the woman who anointed Jesus (Luke 7:36-50), and the elder and younger brothers in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32).

20:13-15 "Friend" is only a mild term of rebuke in this context. The landowner pointed out that he had not cheated those whom he hired earlier in the day. He had paid the wage they agreed to. It was his business if he wanted to pay the latecomers more than they deserved. The evil or "envious eye" (v. 15) is an idiom depicting jealousy (cf. 6:23; Deut. 15:9; 1 Sam. 18:9).

The landowner's rhetorical questions explained that he had distributed the wages as he had because he was gracious and "generous," as well as just (cf. Luke 15:11-32; Rom. 4:4-6; 11:6).

[1165]France., *The Gospel . . .*, p. 749.
[1166]Bruce, *The Training . . .*, p. 276.

Some interpreters understand the laborers hired early in the morning to represent the Israelites, since the owner made an agreement (covenant, promises) with them. Those hired later did not have this guarantee, so they represent the Gentiles.[1167]

20:16 The point of the parable was that God will graciously do more, for some of those who work for Him, than His justice demands. His servants should serve Him while trusting in His grace and goodness toward them, rather than calculating how much He owes them for their service.

> "The first are in danger of becoming the last when self-denial is reduced to a system, and practiced ascetically, not for Christ's sake, but for one's own sake."[1168]

> "It is the paradox of the Christian life that he who aims at reward loses reward, and he who forgets reward finds reward."[1169]

In view of the context, the 12 disciples correspond to the workers hired at the beginning of the day, the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. Those hired later correspond to other people who became Jesus' disciples later in His ministry. One of these people might have been the rich young man, if he had become a disciple (19:16-22). Peter's question about what the Twelve would receive (19:27) had implied that they should receive a greater reward, since their sacrifice had been, and later would be, greater. This parable taught him that God would give him a just reward for his sacrificial labor for Jesus. Nonetheless, God had the right to give just as great a reward to those whose service was not as long.

> "The parable teaches that service for Christ will be faithfully rewarded, and that equal faithfulness to one's opportunity will be equally rewarded. However, only God can adequately assess faithfulness and opportunities, and thus human judgments may be reversed."[1170]

This parable taught the disciples not to think of heavenly rewards in terms of justice, getting in proportion to what they deserved. They should think of them in terms of grace, any reward being an act of God's grace. Even those hired early in the day received a reward, and the landowner had been gracious and generous in hiring them and not others.

Modern disciples of Jesus should view heavenly rewards in the same way. The only reason we will receive any reward is that God has called us to be His workers. We can count on God dealing with us justly, graciously, and generously whether we serve God all our lives, or only a short time, having become His disciples later in life.

[1167]E.g., *The Nelson* . . ., p. 1610.
[1168]Bruce, *The Training* . . ., p. 279.
[1169]Barclay, 2:250.
[1170]Kent, "The Gospel . . .," p. 964.

"The parable is emphasizing a right attitude in service."[1171]

This parable does not teach that God will reward all His disciples equally. Other parables also teach that He will not (e.g., 25:14-30). The point of this one is that God will reward all His disciples justly, graciously, and generously. In some cases, "the last" called will be among "the first" in rank of blessing. Conversely, in some cases, those whom God called early in their lives may not receive as much reward as those called later in life.

Jesus was probably hinting at more in this parable. At least we can draw the following applications from it. Disciples in Jesus' day would not necessarily receive more reward than disciples whom God calls to serve Him just before the day of laboring ends, before His second coming. Neither would Jewish disciples necessarily receive more than Gentile disciples, whom God would call later in His program of preparation for the kingdom (cf. 1 Cor. 6:2; Rev. 2:26).

4. Instruction about Jesus' passion 20:17-19 (cf. Mark 10:32-34; Luke 18:31-34)

There is a theological connection between this section and the former one. The death of Jesus provided the basis for God's gracious dealings with believers in His Son. This connection is clear to Matthew's readers because Matthew selected his material as he did, but the disciples probably did not see it when Jesus revealed it.

20:17 Matthew's reference to Jesus going "up to Jerusalem" reminds the reader of the climax toward which the conflict between the religious leaders and Jesus was heading. Of course, Jerusalem was "up" topographically from most places in Israel, but the idea of "going up" there was metaphorical as well, since Jerusalem was the center of national life. The rejection of Messiah is, of course, one of the main themes in Matthew's Gospel. The writer did not say that Jesus had begun "moving toward" Jerusalem, only that He was preparing His disciples further for that next important step.

20:18-19 Jesus was taking His disciples up to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration there. While there, the Son of Man would somehow be "delivered" over "to the chief priests and scribes," His antagonistic opponents. This implied a betrayal (cf. 17:22). They would "condemn Him to death." This implied legal proceedings. He would fall under the control of the "Gentiles," who would ridicule ("mock"), torture ("scourge"), and "crucify" Him. The Romans were the only Gentiles with authority to crucify; the Jews did not have this power under Roman rule. Three days later Jesus would "be raised up" to life.

This was Jesus' third and most specific prediction of His death (16:21; 17:22-23; cf. 12:40; 16:4; 17:9). He mentioned for the first time the mode of His death—crucifixion—and the Gentiles' part in it. Jesus' ability to predict His own death was another indication

[1171]Wiersbe, 1:73.

of His messiahship. His willingness to proceed toward Jerusalem, in view of what lay before Him, shows that He was the Suffering Servant—obedient even to death on a cross.

> "These three passion-predictions are the counterpart to the major summary-passages found in the second part of Matthew's story (4:23; 9:35; 11:1). The function they serve is at least twofold. On the one hand, they invite the reader to view the whole of Jesus' life story following 16:21 from the single, overriding perspective of his passion and resurrection. On the other hand, they also invite the reader to construe the interaction of Jesus with the disciples throughout 16:21—28:20 as controlled by Jesus' concern to inculcate in them his understanding of discipleship as servanthood (16:24-25; 20:25-28)."[1172]

5. Instruction about serving 20:20-28 (cf. Mark 10:35-45)

This pericope shows that the disciples did not understand what Jesus had said (cf. Luke 18:34). In their culture, events were more important than time. They were evidently focusing so strongly on the establishment of the kingdom, and their places in it, that the future passion of Christ made little impression on them.

> "Despite Jesus' repeated predictions of his passion, two disciples and their mother are still thinking about privilege, status, and power."[1173]

> "The natural human concern with status and importance is clearly one of the most fundamental instincts which must be unlearned by those who belong to God's kingdom."[1174]

20:20 Evidently James and John approached Jesus with their "mother," who voiced the request for them (cf. Mark 10:35). The reason they took this approach was not significant to the Gospel writers, though it suggests some reticence on the part of James and John. Evidently they believed Jesus would be more favorable to their mother's request than to theirs, perhaps because Jesus had been teaching them to be humble. Their kneeling ("bowing down") implied respect but not necessarily worship.

20:21 The request evidently grew out of what Jesus had said about the Son of Man sitting on His throne of glory, and the disciples judging the 12 tribes of Israel (19:28). The "right" and "left" side positions alongside Jesus suggest positions of prestige and power in His kingdom. Note that the disciples viewed the messianic kingdom as still future. The fact that they would make this request shortly after Jesus had again announced His death, shows how little they understood about His death preceding the establishment of the kingdom. They did not understand the need for the

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[1172]Kingsbury, *Matthew as* . . ., p. 78.
[1173]Carson, "Matthew," p. 430.
[1174]France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 755.

Cross, much less Jesus' resurrection, ascension, and the inter-advent period.

20:22 The disciples and their mother did not realize that the Cross must precede the crown. To share the crown they would have to share the Cross. Since they did not know what that involved for Jesus, they could hardly appreciate what it would mean for them (cf. 5:10-12; 10:37-39). The "cup" in Old Testament figurative usage sometimes refers to blessing (Ps. 16:5; 23:5; 116:13). Sometimes it is a metaphor for *judgment* or *retribution* (cf. Ps. 75:8; Isa. 51:17-18; Jer. 25:15-28; Ezek. 23:31-34). It also pictures *suffering* (Isa. 51:17-23; Lam. 4:21). Jesus used this figure, the cup, to represent the *divine judgment* that He would have to undergo to pay for the sins of humanity—and its accompanying *suffering*. The disciples evidently thought that all He meant was popular rejection.

20:23 Jesus answered the disciples on their own terms. They *would* experience suffering and rejection. James would become the first apostolic martyr (Acts 12:2) and John would suffer exile (Rev. 1:9), but Jesus would not be the one to determine who will sit on His right and left in the kingdom. The Father, under whose authority Jesus served, had already determined that (cf. Mark 10:40).

20:24-27 James and John's request evidently offended the other "ten" disciples—because they were hoping for those positions. Greatness in the kingdom was still much on their minds, despite Jesus' teaching on humility and childlikeness (cf. 18:10).

> "The fact that the other disciples were angered at James and John shows that they were in heart and spirit no better than the two brothers. . . . They all wanted the first place."[1175]

Jesus proceeded to contrast greatness in the pagan Gentile world with greatness in His kingdom. He did not criticize the abuse of power that is so common in pagan governments. Rather, He explained that the power structure that exists in pagan governments would be absent in His kingdom. In pagan governments, people who promote themselves over others often get positions of leadership. However, in Jesus' kingdom, those who place themselves under others will get those positions. In pagan governments, individuals are great who have others serving them, but in Jesus' kingdom, those who serve others will be great. To make His point even clearer, Jesus used "servant" (Gr. *diakonos*) in verse 26, and then "slave" (Gr. *doulos*) in verse 27.

20:28 Jesus presented Himself, "the Son of Man," as the supreme example of a slave to others. He would even lay down "His life" in the service of others,

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[1175]W. A. Criswell, *Expository Notes on the Gospel of Matthew*, p. 117.

not just helping them, but dying in their place (cf. Isa. 53). As Messiah, Jesus had every right to expect service from others, but instead He served others.

> "To be great is to be the servant (*diakonos*) of many; to be first is to be the bond-servant (*doulos*) of many; to be supreme is to give one's life for many."[1176]

The Greek word *lytron* ("ransom") was a term used frequently in non-biblical Greek to describe the purchase price for freeing a slave.[1177] This word connotes a purchase price whenever it occurs in the New Testament.[1178] "For" (Gr. *anti*) indicates the substitute nature of Jesus' death.[1179] The "many" for whom He would die could be either the elect, or all of mankind (cf. Isa. 52:13—53:12).

> "A theology of 'limited atonement' is far from the intention of the passage and would be anachronistic in this context."[1180]

Other passages seem to favor the interpretation that by His death, Jesus made all people savable. However, only the elect experience salvation and enter the kingdom (e.g., John 3:16; Eph. 1:4-7). Only One would die, but many would benefit from His death. This is one of the great Christological and soteriological verses in the Bible. It is also the first time that Jesus explained to His disciples the reason He would die.

> "The implication of the cumulative evidence is that Jesus explicitly referred to himself as Isaiah's Suffering Servant . . . and interpreted his own death in that light . . ."[1181]

6. An illustration of illumination 20:29-34 (cf. Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43)

Even on the way to give His life a ransom for many, Jesus continued to serve, as this pericope shows. Rather than delivering Himself from the fate He foresaw, He mercifully and compassionately delivered others from their afflictions.

20:29 Jesus and His disciples left "Jericho," at the north end of the Dead Sea, and proceeded west, up the Judean wilderness road toward Jerusalem for the Passover feast (cf. v. 17). Jericho was the last town that travelers to

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[1176]Plummer, p. 280.
[1177]Deissmann, pp. 331-32; Robertson, *Word Pictures . . .*, 1:163.
[1178]Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, pp. 29-38.
[1179]Robertson, *A Grammar . . .*, p. 573.
[1180]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 763.
[1181]Carson, "Matthew," p. 434.

Jerusalem would go through after crossing the Jordan River from Perea. Great crowds continued to follow Jesus, undoubtedly to benefit from His healing ministry. The road was probably full of Jews, many from Galilee, making their way to Jerusalem for the feast.

20:30 Probably the "blind men" were begging (cf. Mark 10:46). Mark mentioned just one beggar, probably the more prominent of the "two." Matthew may have mentioned both to provide two witnesses for his original Jewish readers. They cried out to Jesus for help, appealing to Him as the "Son of David" for "mercy" (cf. 9:27; 21:9). This title expressed their belief that Jesus was the Messiah.[1182] They wanted Jesus to heal them (v. 33).

20:31-34 Matthew's version of this healing stresses Jesus' "compassion," which overcame the opposition of the crowds to provide healing for these men (cf. 19:13-15). When Jesus previously healed two blind men *in Galilee*, He commanded them to tell no one about the healing. He did not do that here, because it was now unnecessary to conceal His identity. Jesus would soon publicly proclaim His messiahship in the Triumphal Entry (21:1-11). The healed "blind men" immediately "followed" Jesus. This was the proper response for people who had come to see who Jesus was. These believers in His messiahship became disciples.

It is significant that these men, though physically blind, were spiritually perceptive regarding Jesus' identity. The other disciples had recently demonstrated their own spiritual imperception (vv. 17-23). Jesus had taught them that insight into messianic truth came only from divine revelation (16:17).

> "The 'sight' of these blind men discloses the 'blindness' of Israel's sight."[1183]

> "The giving of sight to the blind is a dramatic miracle that points to the dawning of the era of messianic fulfillment. The Son of David is present among his people. And as he compassionately delivers them from their literal darkness, so he continues on his way to Jerusalem, where in his sacrificial death he will deliver all of humanity from an even greater darkness—that of the bondage to sin and death. . . . This healing pericope thus may be seen as the gospel in a microcosm."[1184]

Even though the nation as a whole rejected Jesus, individuals continued to believe that He was the Messiah. The postponement of the kingdom did not rule out personal salvation for anyone who believed. They would enter the messianic kingdom by resurrection at the Second Coming (Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2). For this reason Jesus continued to present Himself to Israel as her Messiah in the Triumphal Entry. This miracle is a prelude to that presentation in Matthew's Gospel.

[1182]Morison, p. 365.

[1183]Kingsbury, *Matthew as . . .*, p. 80.

[1184]Hagner, *Matthew 14—28*, p. 588.

B. JESUS' PRESENTATION OF HIMSELF TO ISRAEL AS HER KING 21:1-17

Jesus came to Jerusalem to present Himself formally to the leaders of Israel as the nation's Messiah. He did this when He entered Jerusalem, as Isaiah and Zechariah predicted Messiah would appear.

> "Jesus entered Jerusalem for the last time in a manner which showed that He was none other than the Messiah, the Son of David, who was coming to Sion to claim the city as His own."[1185]

> "Jesus was here offering Himself to the people, at a time when Jerusalem was surging with Jews from all over the country and from all over the world, as the Anointed One of God."[1186]

The events Matthew recorded in chapters 21—28 happened within six days. John recorded that Jesus arrived in Bethany six days before Passover, evidently the Saturday evening before Passion Week (John 12:1-10). Jesus had previously traveled from Jericho, eventually arriving in a town called Ephraim, from which He then went to Bethany (cf. Luke 19:1-28; John 11:55-57). Jesus apparently stayed in Bethany until Monday when He entered Jerusalem.[1187] After that, He seems to have gone back and forth between Bethany and Jerusalem throughout the week (21:17).

Matthew continued to tell his story by presenting groups of three, as he did in previous chapters: three symbolic actions (21:1-22), three polemical parables (21:28—22:14), and three hostile questions and responses (22:15-40).

1. Jesus' preparation for the presentation 21:1-7 (cf. Mark 11:1-7; Luke 19:29-35; John 12:12-16)

21:1-2 Jesus and His disciples traveled the 17 miles from Jericho to Bethany along the Roman road. They climbed about 3,000 feet in elevation between those towns. "Bethphage" ("house of figs") lay slightly farther west than Bethany, also on the southeast slope of the "Mount of Olives." It no longer exists, and its exact location is unknown, but it had messianic connotations (Zech. 14:4; cf. Ezek. 11:23; 43:1-5). It may have been the name of that district, as well as the name of a little village close to Jerusalem where the district began.[1188]

When Jesus approached Bethphage, He instructed "two disciples" to go into that village and "bring" a "donkey" and its "colt" to Him. Most people, except the wealthy, walked everywhere in first-century Palestine.[1189] This is the only record of Jesus riding an animal. He was

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[1185]Tasker, p.197.
[1186]Barclay, 2:265.
[1187]Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects* . . ., p. 91.
[1188]Edersheim, *The Life* . . ., 2:364.
[1189]France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 775.

preparing to recreate the return of King David to Jerusalem in peace and humility (2 Sam. 19—20), and the entrance of Solomon into Jerusalem for his enthronement (1 Kings 1:38-40; cf. Gen. 49:10-11). On each of these occasions, a king rode either a donkey or a mule.

21:3 This is the only place in Matthew's Gospel where Jesus used the title "Lord" (Gr. *kyrios*) of Himself. In every other place it refers to Yahweh. Even though "lord" was a respectful address, used this way it became a title of authority. Probably Jesus had previously made arrangements with the owner to use the animals. Now the disciples went to pick them up, and when questioned, explained that they were taking them to "the Lord," who needed them (Mark 11:5-6; Luke 19:33-34). Evidently the owner was a believer in Jesus.

> "This represents an appeal to the custom of *angaria*, the temporary procurement of resources on behalf of a leader, either ruler or rabbi."[1190]

> "The careful preparation which the Lord makes indicates His sovereignty. That which is about to transpire is no accident."[1191]

21:4-5 It is possible that Jesus spoke these words. However, it is probable that Matthew added them, as he did for other fulfillment passages in his Gospel (1:22; et al.). The first two lines of the quotation are from Isaiah 62:11, and the last two cite Zechariah 9:9. "Zion" is a poetic name for Jerusalem, often used of the city under Messiah's rule during the kingdom.[1192] Jerusalem belonged to Messiah (5:35). Matthew omitted quoting the part of Zechariah 9:9 that speaks of Messiah bringing national salvation to Israel. Jesus would not do that yet because of Israel's rejection.

> "Here was the King's final and official offer of Himself, in accord with the prophecy of Zech. 9:9."[1193]

Rulers rode donkeys in Israel during times of peace (Judg. 5:10; 1 Kings 1:33). This was a sign of their humble service to the people. Warriors rode horses. Jesus was preparing to declare His messiahship by fulfilling this messianic prophecy. By coming in peace, He was extending grace rather than judgment to the city. He was coming as a servant now. He would return as a conquering King riding on a war horse later (cf. Rev. 19:11).

[1190]Bock, *Jesus according . . .*, p. 313. See J. D. M. Derrett, "Law in the New Testament: The Palm Sunday Colt," *Novum Testamentum* 13 (1971):243-49.
[1191]Toussaint, *Behold the . . .*, p. 237.
[1192]Walvoord, *Matthew: . . .*, p. 155.
[1193]*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 1027.

Jesus rode on the "colt" (a young male donkey), not on its mother, the donkey (Mark 11:2; Luke 19:30). It would have been remarkable that Jesus was able to control a presumably unbroken animal, moving through an excited crowd with an unfamiliar burden on its back. This was just one more demonstration that Jesus was the Messiah who was the master of nature (cf. 8:23-27; 14:22-32). Surely He could bring peace to Israel if He could calm the young colt (Isa. 11:1-10).

> "Matthew could hardly make the presentation of the royalty of Jesus more explicit."[1194]

Toussaint titled his commentary on Matthew "Behold The King" because he believed these words are the theme of Matthew's Jewish Gospel.

21:6-7 The disciples ran their errand, returned to Jesus, and spread their outer garments on both animals. Both the donkey and the colt entered Jerusalem. The "them" on which Jesus sat were the garments, not both animals.

This deliberate preparation for a citywide reception contrasts with Jesus' former approach to ministry. Before, He had deliberately *not* drawn attention to Himself, but now He prepared to do so. He had formerly withdrawn from the antagonistic hierarchy, but now He organized a parade that they could not miss.[1195]

2. Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem 21:8-11 (cf. Mark 11:8-11a; Luke 19:36-44; John 12:17-19)

21:8 The large company of pilgrims, mainly from Galilee, were acknowledging Jesus as a King by "spreading" their coats on "the road" before Him (cf. 2 Kings 9:13). Likewise, throwing small "branches from the trees" before Him symbolized the same thing (cf. 1 Macc. 13:51; 2 Macc. 10:7).[1196]

> "A Galilean was essentially a foreigner in Jerusalem, and Jesus' entourage, being made up of Galileans, would normally stand out as distinctive among the Jerusalem crowd."[1197]

21:9 This crowd of non-Jerusalemites both preceded Jesus and followed Him as He approached Jerusalem.

> "Apparently the Galilean pilgrims accompanying Jesus and the Jerusalem crowd coming out to greet him formed a procession of praise."[1198]

[1194]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 238.
[1195]Morgan, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 249.
[1196]Edersheim, *The Life* . . ., 2:371-72.
[1197]France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 771.
[1198]Carson, "Matthew, p. 439.

Undoubtedly, word of Jesus' coming had preceded him, so the people of Jerusalem were anticipating His arrival. Since Jesus was an obedient Jew, He visited Jerusalem for the three required feasts annually. The Synoptic writers gave no hint of this, but John mentioned ministry that Jesus had in Jerusalem during these visits. Therefore many people who lived in Jerusalem had seen and heard Him before He entered Jerusalem in the Triumphal Entry.

According to Edersheim, the population of Jerusalem, which covered only about 300 acres, normally numbered between 200,000 and 250,000. But during the feasts, this number swelled to nearly 3,000,000.[1199] Joachim Jeremias estimated the normal population of Jerusalem at this time as about 30,000, but during Passover about 180,000.[1200]

The people's words of praise came from Psalm 118:25-26. The Jews used this psalm at the Passover as part of "the great Hallel" (Pss. 113—18) and at the feasts of Tabernacles and Dedication. "Hosanna" transliterates the Hebrew word for "Save us now!" (cf. 2 Sam. 14:4; 2 Kings 6:26). It had become an acclamation through usage (cf. Rev. 7:10).[1201] "Son of David" is the messianic title that stressed the kingly role that Messiah would play. "He who comes in the name of the Lord" is likewise a messianic reference (23:39; cf. 3:11; 11:3; Ps. 118:26).[1202] "Hosanna in the highest" probably meant "Glory to God in the highest" (Luke 2:14).[1203] Quoting this passage voiced praise to God for sending the Messiah, and cried out to Him for deliverance.

> "The enthusiastic multitudes thus acclaim Jesus as being blessed by Jehovah, not merely with a verbal benediction, but, as Jehovah always blesses, with the gifts and the treasures implied in the benedictory words; and they acclaim him as coming and bringing all these blessings to them and to their capital and their nation."[1204]

> "They were now proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah and he let them do it."[1205]

However the people, like the disciples, did not understand Messiah's role as the Suffering Servant who would have to die. Also, they did not appreciate the universal scope of the kingdom, as contrasted with its national scope.

[1199]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 1:116-17.
[1200]Jeremias, *Jerusalem in . . .*, pp. 77-84.
[1201]Gundry, *The Use . . .*, pp. 41-43; Dalman, p. 221.
[1202]Carr, p. 242.
[1203]Carson, "Matthew," p. 439.
[1204]Lenski, p. 809.
[1205]Robertson, *Word Pictures . . .*, 1:167.

21:10-11 Jesus probably entered Jerusalem through the sheep gate (St. Stephen's gate, a name given to it after Stephen's martyrdom; cf. Acts 7:58). This gate pierced the eastern city wall to the north of the temple enclosure. Worshippers brought sheep into the city through this gate for sacrificing because it was the closest gate to the temple. It was fitting that the Lamb of God should enter Jerusalem through this gate. Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem became the popular topic of conversation (cf. 2:3). The residents wondered who He really was. Most people who knew about Jesus, described Him as a "prophet from Nazareth," whose arena of ministry had been mainly "Galilee" (cf. 2:23; 16:14; 21:46). This description reflects popular disbelief that He was the Messiah.[1206]

Matthew stated that Jesus' entry "stirred" up the whole "city" (cf. 2:3). At that time, a Herodian king no longer ruled Judea. Rome ruled it directly through a prefect.[1207] The arrival of a Jewish king, from Galilee of all places, would therefore have caused great concern among Jerusalem's residents. How would the Romans react?

> "The significance of the triumphal entry is tremendous in this Gospel. To Matthew it is the final and official presentation of Jesus to Israel as its Messiah. This is evident for several reasons. The first is the manner in which Christ acts throughout this whole course of events. He deliberately makes very careful preparations to fulfill every detail of the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9. In addition He planned His movements with understanding of their significance. . . .
>
> "A second indication of the fact that Jesus presented Himself to Israel is seen in that the people recognized it as such. . . .[1208]
>
> "A third proof that the Lord presented Himself as the King of Israel is seen in the parables which the Messiah gives following this event. . . .
>
> "A fourth indication . . . is the time in which it occurred. Sir Robert Anderson has shown that the entry of Christ into Jerusalem occurred on the very day that the sixty-ninth week of Daniel's prophecy had run out.[1209] This is the exact time in which the Messiah was to come (Daniel 9:25).

[1206]See Kingsbury, *Matthew as* . . ., pp. 80-81.

[1207]France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 781.

[1208]Footnote 48: Johnson, "The Argument . . .," p. 151.

[1209]Footnote 50: Robert Anderson, *The Coming Prince*, pp. 127-28.

> "Because Israel refused to accept the King when He was presented in exact fulfillment of their Scripture, their unbelief was confirmed beyond the shadow of a doubt. The reception which was given the King was without genuine faith and understanding. However, it did give a brief glimpse of that which will characterize the King's reception when He appears to Israel for a second time."[1210]

3. Jesus' entrance into the temple 21:12-17 (cf. Mark 11:11b, 15-18; Luke 19:45-48)

Matthew stressed Jesus' cleansing of the temple as the work of David's Son (vv. 9, 15). This activity had great messianic significance.[1211]

21:12 The Mosaic Law required that the Jews pay a half-shekel temple tax, which they paid in temple coinage (cf. 17:24-27). To accommodate out of town pilgrims, the religious leaders set up currency exchange tables in the large temple courtyard. There people with Greek and Roman money could obtain the required Tyrian currency. The religious leaders also accommodated worshippers by selling animals used in the offerings of Judaism there.

Thus the temple courtyard had come to resemble an outdoor market. Probably greedy merchants cheated their buyers if they could, especially during the feasts when pilgrims from far away crowded the temple area. However, it was that Sadducean priests permitted merchants to conduct business in the Court of the Gentiles, rather than how the merchants conducted their business, that provoked Jesus' wrath.

> "If one bought his animals here, had his money exchanged here, these would be accepted; otherwise he might have trouble on that score."[1212]

Jesus entered the temple area (Gr. *hieron*) and proceeded to destroy the market (cf. Zech. 14:21). The whole Temple area, in Jesus' day, probably occupied an elongated square about 925 by 950 feet.[1213] There were actually four courtyards in the temple area: the Court of the Gentiles (that anyone could enter), the Court of the Women (that only clean Jewish men and women could enter), the Court of Israel (that only clean Jewish men could enter), and the Court of the Priests (that only clean Jewish priests could enter).[1214]

[1210]Toussaint, *Behold the . . .*, pp. 241-42. See S. Lewis Johnson Jr., "The Triumphal Entry of Christ," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124:495 (July-September 1967):218-29.

[1211]See the diagrams of Jerusalem and Herod's Temple at the end of these notes.

[1212]Lenski, p. 813.

[1213]Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 38.

[1214]See Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion*, 2:8.

21:13 Jesus explained why He was doing what He did to the authorities. He quoted Scripture here, similarly to the way He did in replying to Satan (4:1-10). First, He referred to Isaiah 56:7, a passage in which Isaiah looked forward to a time when the temple would be "a house of prayer." Significantly, Matthew omitted "for all the peoples" from Isaiah's statement, focusing his readers' attention on Israel as still the target of Jesus' ministry. Second, Jesus referred to Jeremiah 7:11, a condemnation of superstitious reverence for the temple while the people dishonored it.

> "No matter what they do even by violating the sanctity of their Temple, they imagine that their adherence to this Temple will protect and shield them from any penalty."[1215]

In the context of Jeremiah's prophecy (Jer. 7:9-11), the "robbers" in view were nationalist rebels. That is also the meaning of the Greek word *lestai* that Jesus used here. Rather than being a house for prayer, Israel's leaders had turned it into a stronghold of Jewish nationalism that dishonored the temple while they maintained a superstitious respect for it.[1216]

> ". . . for Jesus to raise the claim through his cleansing of the temple that the temple has, under the custody of the religious leaders, become a 'den of robbers' and that his purification of it from the desecration of merchants is its restoration to rightful use as Israel's house of prayer and worship, is for him to mount a massive assault on the authority and integrity of the religious leaders (21:12-13)."[1217]

> "The problem with the money changers was not a matter of economic exploitation, despite popular readings of this scene that paint the issue this way. Rather, Jesus' action in the temple was fundamentally a prophetic one to point the nation in a fresh direction and announce the arrival of a key figure in God's program."[1218]

By coming to the temple and purifying it, Jesus was making another messianic claim (cf. Mal. 3:1-4). However, the nation's rejection of her Messiah frustrated the cleansing of the temple, and precluded the fulfillment of the blessing following purification (Mal. 3:5-6). This prophecy will finally find fulfillment when Messiah comes the second time.

[1215]Lenski, p. 816.

[1216]For some insights into the temple environment to which Jesus alluded, see Karen K. Maticich, "Reflections on Tractate Shekalim," *Exegesis and Exposition* 3:1 (Fall 1988):58-60.

[1217]Kingsbury, *Matthew as . . .*, p. 81.

[1218]Bock, *Jesus according . . .*, p. 319.

> "As we compare these three records [of Jesus' final week in Jerusalem] in Matthew [21:12-13], Mark [11:11], and Luke [19:21-24, 47-48], it becomes apparent that they record three different entries, and I believe that our Lord entered Jerusalem on three consecutive days [Saturday, Sunday, and Monday] and in three consecutive roles—as Priest, as King, as Prophet."[1219]

21:14 This is the last reference to Jesus' healing ministry in Matthew's Gospel. The healing probably happened in the Court of the Gentiles. Some of these "blind and lame" people could not participate fully in worship activities at the temple (cf. 2 Sam. 5:6-8, where David excluded the blind and lame). However, Jesus made it possible for them to do so by healing them (cf. Acts 3:2). Jesus therefore cleansed both the temple and those who came to it. One greater than the temple had arrived (12:6). The authorities would later question His authority to do this cleansing (v. 23).

21:15-16 The popular response to Jesus' actions aggravated the chief priests and teachers of the law further. The wonderful things that Jesus was doing had messianic implications, and the people realized this.

Jesus introduced the Psalm 8:2 quotation with a rebuke. Surely these experts in the Old Testament should have seen the messianic implications of what Jesus was doing, and heard the words people were using as they responded to Him (cf. 12:3; 19:4; 21:42; 22:31). This psalm describes the "praise" that people, even little "children," will give to God for the conditions that will prevail during the messianic kingdom. Ancient Near Eastern mothers often nursed their babies long after the children learned to talk, sometimes for as long as three years following their births.

Jesus' rebuke provided a basis for the children's continuing praise, and temporarily stifled the leaders' criticism. It also declared His deity, since Jesus accepted praise reserved only for God. Moreover, it reinforced the truth that the humble and childlike often perceive spiritual truth more clearly than the sophisticated, though they are often unaware of its full significance (cf. 19:13-15).

> "The 'Magi' (2:1) and the 'centurion' (8:5) serve as foils for Israel: the faith of these Gentiles contrasts with the unbelief of Israel (2:1-12; 8:5-13). The 'two blind men' (9:27), the 'Canaanite woman' (15:22), the other 'two blind men' (20:30), and the 'children' in the temple (21:15) also serve as foils for Israel: these 'no-accounts' see and confess what Israel cannot, namely, that Jesus is its Davidic Messiah."[1220]

[1219]McGee, 4:111.

[1220]Kingsbury, *Matthew as* . . ., pp. 26-27. See also p. 81.

21:17 Jesus' withdrawal "to Bethany" each evening during the festival season was probably for practical reasons. Jerusalem was full of pilgrims, and Jesus had dear friends in Bethany, namely, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

C. ISRAEL'S REJECTION OF HER KING 21:18—22:46

This section of Matthew's Gospel presents Israel's formal rejection of her Messiah. Jesus had made a formal presentation of Himself to the nation's populace and leadership in the messianic capital with His triumphal entry (21:1-17). Jesus' earlier rejection had taken place in rural Galilee (ch. 12). Now Matthew recorded Israel's response.[1221]

1. The sign of Jesus' rejection of Israel 21:18-22 (cf. Mark 11:12-14, 19-25; Luke 21:37-38)

The Triumphal Entry happened on Monday. The cursing of the fig tree took place on Tuesday, and the disciples' mention of its withering followed on Wednesday (cf. Mark 11:1-14).[1222]

21:18-19 Jesus passed the "lone fig tree" somewhere between Bethany and Jerusalem.

> "Fig leaves appear about the same time as the fruit or a little after [normally in April]. The green figs are edible, though sufficiently disagreeable as not usually to be eaten till June. Thus the leaves normally point to every prospect of fruit, even if not fully ripe. Sometimes, however, the green figs fall off and leave nothing but leaves."[1223]

The "leaves *only*" on this tree suggested that it had borne fruit, since fig trees bore fruit before the leaves came out, but it had not. Jesus saw an opportunity to teach His disciples an important truth using this tree as an object lesson. He cursed the tree to teach them the lesson, not because it failed to produce fruit.

Most interpreters of this pericope have seen Jesus' cursing of the fig tree as closely related to the context, namely, the cleansing of the temple and Jesus' denunciation of Israel's leaders. Many see the "fig tree" as a symbol of the *whole nation of Israel* not bearing the fruit of repentance (cf. Jer. 8:13; Hos. 9:10, 16; Luke 13:6-9).[1224] The problem with this view is that Jesus did not abandon Israel forever for rejecting Him (Rom. 11).

[1221]For more light on the connections that unite this pericope with the previous one, see Mark Moulton, "Jesus' Goal for Temple and Tree: A Thematic Revisit of Matt 21:12-22," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41:4 (December 1998):561-72.

[1222]Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects* . . ., p. 91.

[1223]Carson, "Matthew," p. 444.

[1224]E.g., Bruce, "The Synoptic . . .," 1:264; Tasker, p. 201; and Lenski, p. 825.

A similar view takes the fig tree as representing the *generation of Jews who rejected Jesus*.[1225] God would judge them by withholding the kingdom from them. This is the best view from my viewpoint.

A third view is that the fig tree illustrates a *segment within Jesus' generation* of Jews, namely, the *hypocrites* within the nation who made a show of bearing fruit but did not (cf. 6:2, 5, 16; 7:5; 15:7; 22:18; 23:1-39).[1226] They were barren spiritually. These were the temple merchants and the chief priests and scribes, but not the children, or the blind and the lame. However, Jesus cursed the whole tree and nation, not just the parts in it that proved unfruitful.

The idea that Jesus cursed a helpless fig tree for no fault of its own has bothered some people. However, Jesus also cast demons out of people and into pigs that drowned in the sea (8:28-34). This really demonstrates Jesus' compassion for people as distinct from the animal and plant forms of life. Humankind was God's special creation, and Jesus' recognition of this superior form of life shows that He did not regard all life as equally valuable. In the destruction of the swine, Jesus warned people of Satan's destructive power. In the cursing of the fig tree, He warned them of God's judgment for lack of fruit (cf. 3:8, 10; 7:16-20; 12:33; 13:8).

> "One of the Old Testament images of God's judgment on Israel was the picture of the land being unable to bear figs (Jer. 8:13; Mic. 7:1-6)."[1227]

21:20-22 Mark separated the cursing of the tree, from the disciples' discovery that it had withered, by one day (Mark 11:13, 20). Matthew simply combined both events into one story without saying anything that would make Mark's account incompatible.

Jesus' response has led some commentators to conclude that, what He was teaching with the cursing of the fig tree was simply the importance of faith, not God's judgment on Israel.[1228] However, this seems unlikely to me in view of the preceding context and the symbolism of the fig tree. It seems to me that Jesus was teaching both lessons. The disciples' amazement that the fig tree had withered so quickly led Jesus to comment on that lesson but not on the other. He used the miracle to teach them a lesson on the power of believing prayer.

Jesus had exercised faith in God when He cursed the tree. God had rewarded Jesus' trust by killing the tree. Jesus pointed out that trust in God

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[1225]E.g., Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 245; and Barbieri, p. 69.
[1226]E.g., Carson, "Matthew," p. 445.
[1227]Bailey, in *The New* . . ., p. 43. Cf. Jer. 24:1-10; Hos. 9:10, 16-17; Mic. 7:1-6.
[1228]E.g., Walvoord, *Matthew:* . . ., p. 159-60.

can have amazing consequences. The hyperbolic figure of casting a "mountain . . . into the sea" was one that Jesus had used before to illustrate the power of faith (17:20). There His point was that even a little faith can accomplish great feats.

Here Jesus' point was that His disciples should believe ("have faith" in) God rather than disbelieve Him. The disciples had been observing many doubters in those who did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah, in spite of the evidence that God had given them, and they themselves had struggled with doubt. Jesus was urging them to have full confidence in Him as the Messiah, with the promise that *that* kind of faith can accomplish supernatural feats (cf. Acts 3:6-7).[1229]

> ". . . belief in the NT is never reduced to forcing oneself to 'believe' what he does not really believe. Instead, it is related to genuine trust in God and obedience to and discernment of his will . . ."[1230]

Jesus may have been teaching a deeper lesson with His reference to the mountain cast into the sea. A mountain in the Bible sometimes stands for a kingdom (Ps. 30:7; Isa. 2:2; 41:15; Jer. 51:25; Dan. 2:35, 44; cf. Rev. 8:8; 16:20; 17:9). The sea likewise has the metaphorical meaning of the Gentile nations (Deut. 33:19; Ps. 72:8; 114:3, 5; Isa. 11:11; 60:5). Perhaps with this illustration Jesus was anticipating the coming of His kingdom that would destroy Gentile world dominion (cf. 6:10; Dan. 2:44-45).

Verse 22 assumes what Jesus taught elsewhere about prayer, namely, that God will grant the petitions of His people when they are in harmony with His will (6:9-13; 7:7-11; cf. John 14:13-14; 15:16; 16:23-24; 1 John 5:14-15). His point was that when we pray, we should believe that God *can* do anything we request, and that He *will* do what is consistent with His will and what He has promised to do.[1231]

2. Rejection by the chief priests and the elders 21:23—22:14 (cf. Mark 11:27—12:12; Luke 20:1-19)

The cursing of the fig tree happened as Jesus and the disciples walked from Bethany to Jerusalem on Tuesday. The disciples' exclamation about the withered tree and Jesus' lesson followed on Wednesday. Jesus and His disciples proceeded into Jerusalem where confrontations with three groups erupted in the temple courtyard that day.

[1229]See David DeGraaf, "Some Doubts about Doubt: The New Testament Use of *Diakrino*," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48:8 (December 2005):733-55.

[1230]Carson, "Matthew," p. 446.

[1231]See Thomas L. Constable, *Talking to God: What the Bible Teaches about Prayer*, pp. 170-76.

The issue of authority 21:23-27

Israel's religious leaders approached Jesus, asking that He show them His credentials authorizing Him to disrupt the buying and selling in the courtyard and to heal people.

> "Two incidents about authority (21:23-27 and 22:41-46) serve as 'bookends' to three parables (21:28—22:14) and three controversial dialogues with the Pharisees and Herodians, the Sadducees, and the Pharisees (22:15-40)."[1232]

21:23 Jesus taught in "the temple" courtyard, or perhaps under one of the colonnades that surrounded it. The "chief priests" were high officials in the temple. At this time in Israel's history the Roman authorities appointed these leaders (cf. 2:4). They constituted part of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council in Judaism. The "elders" were evidently non-priests who represented leading families in Israel. They also had representation on the Sanhedrin.[1233] Matthew described these men in terms of their status, not their party affiliation. His point was that these were high-ranking leaders of Israel.

They inquired about Jesus' authority to drive out the moneychangers and merchants, heal the sick, and teach the people. They were the people with authority to control what happened in the temple area. Authority (Gr. *exousia*) is the right, and the power that goes with the right, to do something.[1234] They wanted to know "what authority" Jesus had, and "who" had given Him "this authority" to do what He did, since they had not. The validity of Jesus' authority depended on its source.[1235] Their question indicated their opposition to what He did.

> ". . . at the time of our Lord, no one would have ventured authoritatively to teach without proper Rabbinic authorisation [*sic*]. . . . 'who gave Thee this authority to do these things?' seems clearly to point to their contention, that the power which Jesus wielded was delegated to Him by none other than Beelzebul."[1236]

> "The real issue in the passage concerns not information about the authority of Jesus but the unbelief and unreceptivity of the Jewish leadership. The latter knew well enough that Jesus would have claimed divine authority for his doings in the temple area. Their question thus reflects

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[1232]Bailey, in *The New* . . ., p. 44.
[1233]Jeremias, *Jerusalem in* . . ., pp. 222-32.
[1234]Lenski, p. 826.
[1235]Bruce, "The Synoptic . . .," 1:265.
[1236]Edersheim, *The Life* . . ., 2:382, 283.

> not an inquisitive openness but an already established rejection of Jesus and the attempt to gain evidence that could later be used against him."[1237]

21:24-26 Jesus responded to their question with one of His own. This was common rabbinic debate technique (cf. 15:3; 22:20).[1238] By referring to John's baptism, Jesus meant everything associated with his baptism: his whole message and ministry. Since John was Jesus' forerunner, the leaders' response to John's ministry would answer their own question about Jesus' authority. If they answered that John's ministry was from heaven, they would have had to acknowledge that Jesus received His authority from God, since that is what John announced.[1239]

But if they answered that John's ministry was from men, lacking divine authentication, they knew the people would rise up against them, because the people regarded John as a prophet from God. The leaders refused to commit themselves, knowing that whatever they said would bring bad consequences for them. They wanted to avoid losing face.

Edersheim wrote that the Temple enclosure could have contained as many as 210,000 people at one time. This is about twice the capacity of the Coliseum in Rome.[1240] During the Passover season, close to this number were probably present. Thus the chief priests and elders could well have felt intimidated by the masses.

Any honest seeker among the leaders would have understood and accepted Jesus' answer to the leaders' question. However, most of the leaders simply wanted to get rid of Jesus, having previously rejected Him. Jesus pointed out, with His question, that their rejection of Him grew out of an earlier rejection of John.

21:27 The leaders' equivocation gave Jesus a reason to refuse them a direct answer without losing face. Why did He not give them one? They had refused earlier revelation through John. Having refused that revelation, they had no right to ask for more. They were incompetent to judge Jesus' authority, since they misunderstood the Old Testament and rejected the ministry of John. That was tragic, since these were the men charged with evaluating the claims of those who said they spoke for God. They were ineffective spiritual leaders because they refused to judge fairly.[1241]

[1237]Hagner, *Matthew 14—28*, p. 610.
[1238]Plummer, p. 293.
[1239]Allen, pp. 225-26.
[1240]Edersheim, *The Temple*, pp. 68-69.
[1241]Carr, p. 246.

> "Jesus' subtle answers to the religious leaders' challenge concerning His authority continued for several chapters even after it initially seemed that He had stopped. Without reading on, one would miss the answers Jesus actually did give, namely, that He is the Son of the Father, and that He demonstrated His authority conclusively when challenged to debate by those who considered themselves authorities."[1242]

Matthew used this confrontation over Jesus' authority to introduce three parables. He typically used events to introduce teaching in this Gospel. All three parables deal with these religious leaders. They focus on their failure to respond to God's call, and the consequences of this failure for the future of the Israelites.

The parable of the two sons 21:28-32

This first parable condemned the conduct of these leaders. It showed that they condemned themselves by judging Jesus as they did.

21:28 Jesus evidently launched into this parable immediately. His introductory question, unique in Matthew, continued the rabbinic dialogue. The "first" son was the older of the two (v. 30). The "vineyard," again, referred to Israel, in view of Old Testament usage (cf. 20:1-15).

21:29-31 The ancient Greek texts of these verses contain variations that have resulted in different translations. The NASB (1971 ed.) has the older son saying yes but doing nothing. The younger son says no but repents and goes. The younger son does the father's will. The NIV has the older son saying no but then repenting and going. The younger son says yes but does not go. The older son does the father's will. Probably the interpretation of the parable influenced early copyists. The better reading appears to be the one represented in the NASB.[1243]

This is the first time Jesus applied one of His parables directly to Israel's leaders (v. 31). He introduced this application with His usual solemn introduction (cf. 5:16; et al.). Both the NASB and the NIV have translated the last verb in this sentence poorly. The Greek verb *proago* ("get into . . . before" or "entering . . . ahead of") here means "enter instead of."[1244]

The "tax collectors and prostitutes" were the dregs of Jewish society. Jesus undoubtedly shocked His listeners when He made this statement. The

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[1242]Gene R. Smillie, "Jesus' Response to the Question of His Authority in Matthew 21," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162:648 (October-December 2005):469.

[1243]Metzger, pp. 55-56.

[1244]*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "*telones*," by Otto Michel, 8(1972):105, footnote 158. See also J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, p. 102, footnote 54.

scum of society, though it originally said "no" to God, repented at the preaching of John and Jesus, and thereby *did* God's will (cf. 8:11-12). Consequently these people would enter the kingdom (by resurrection). However, the religious leaders affirmed their willingness to do God's will, but refused to do so by rejecting Jesus. They would not enter the kingdom.

Note that Jesus described both groups as "sons" of the father in the parable. All the Jews, those with a privileged position and those with none, enjoyed being "sons" of God in the sense that God had chosen Israel as His "son" (cf. Hos. 11:1). The leaders could still believe in Jesus and enter the kingdom. Individual salvation was still possible, even though national rejection was strong.

21:32 This verse links the parable with Jesus' earlier words about the leaders' response to John and His authority (vv. 23-27). John had come preaching what was right, "the way of righteousness." Israel's leaders had not responded positively to his message. Even the repentance of Israel's most despised citizens did not change their minds. It should have.

The parable of the wicked tenant farmers 21:33-46

Jesus proceeded immediately to tell another parable. Luke wrote that Jesus addressed it to the crowds in the temple courtyard (Luke 20:9). The chief priests and elders continued to listen (vv. 45-46).

> "This parable is one of the most important that Jesus tells, because it overviews the history of the leaders' response to Jesus. Here is a case of a parable with clear allegorical features, since virtually every step in the story has a correspondence in Israel's history."[1245]

21:33-34 Jesus alluded to Isaiah 5:1-7 and Psalm 80:8-16, where the "vineyard" is Israel and the "landowner" is God. The care the landowner took with his vineyard shows God's concern for Israel. He had a right to expect that it would be a fruitful vineyard and yield much fruit. The tenants ("vine-growers") to whom the landowner entrusted his vineyard represent Israel's leaders. The "harvest time" (lit. the season of the fruits) stands for the time when God could expect to obtain some reward for His investment in Israel. The "slaves" (Gr. *douloi*) are God's faithful servants the prophets. In Jesus' society, slaves were not necessarily on a low social level; many of them held important positions in their owners' households.[1246]

21:35-37 Israel's leaders had beaten and killed various prophets (cf. 1 Kings 18:4, 13; 22:24; 2 Chron. 24:21-22; Jer. 20:1-2; 26:20-23; 37:15). Sending "his son" might seem foolhardy in view of the tenants' former behavior.[1247]

[1245]Bock, *Jesus according . . .*, p. 325.
[1246]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 812.
[1247]Lenski, p. 835.

However, this act showed the landowner's patience, and his hope that the tenants would respond properly to the representative with the greatest authority.

> "The contrast is between what men would do and what God had done."[1248]

21:38-40 Israel's leaders did not reject Jesus because it was not clear who He was, but because they refused to submit to His authority (23:37). Jesus had announced to His disciples that the Jewish leaders would kill Him (16:21; 17:23; 20:18). Now He announced this to the leaders themselves and the people.

21:41 The hearers who answered may have been the leaders, but since Jesus identified the guilty in the parable clearly, they were probably the people standing around listening. They easily anticipated God's action. He would depose the leaders and bring them to a miserable end. Then God would turn over the care of His "vineyard" to "other tenants," who would deliver the desired fruit at the appointed time. These refer to the prophets, apostles, and servants of God who would represent Him after Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension.

21:42 Every time Jesus said, "Did you never read?"—He was stressing that the Scriptures pointed to Him (cf. 12:3, 5; 19:4; 21:16; 22:31; Mark 12:10). In these instances He also referred to well known texts, but He used them in unexpected ways. Jesus changed the figure from a vineyard to a building. This quotation is from Psalm 118:22-23. It probably originally described David, Jesus' ancestor and type. All of Israel's leaders, including Samuel and Saul, had originally rejected David—but God chose him and made him the capstone (or "chief corner [*stone*]") of the nation. Likewise God had chosen Israel, a nation that the other world leaders despised. However, God would make Israel the capstone of the nations when He established the kingdom.

Similarly, in Jesus' day, Israel's leaders had rejected after trial (Gr. *apodokimazo*) the Son of David, but God would make Him the capstone (or "chief corner [*stone*]") of His building. Jesus' history recapitulated the history of both Israel and David. Earthly leaders were rejecting Him, but God would exalt Him over all eventually. This reversal of fortunes is a phenomenon that onlookers marvel at as they observe it. Jesus made another strong messianic claim when He applied this passage to Himself.

21:43 This verse continues to explain the parable of the wicked tenant farmers. Because Israel's leaders had failed in "producing the fruit" that God desired, and had slain His Son, He would remove responsibility and

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[1248]Walvoord, *Matthew:* . . ., p. 162.

privilege from them, and give these to another "nation" or "people" (Gr. *ethnei*). What God did was transfer the responsibility for preparing for the kingdom from *unbelievers in Israel*, and give it to a different group, namely, *believers in the church* (cf. Acts 13:46; 18:5-6; Rom. 10:19; 1 Pet. 2:9). David Turner argued that those who received the responsibility were the faithful Jewish remnant represented by Jesus' apostles.[1249] This is a very similar view since Jesus' apostles became the core of the church.

> "Matthew 21:43 could be the key verse in the entire argument of Matthew."[1250]

The unusual term "kingdom of God," rather than Matthew's customary "kingdom of heaven," probably stresses the fact that the kingdom belongs to God, not the leaders of Israel.

Jesus did not mean that God would remove the kingdom from Israel forever (cf. Rom. 11:26-27). When Jesus returns to the earth and establishes His kingdom, Israel will have the most prominent place in it (Gen. 12; 15; 2 Sam. 7; Jer. 31).

> "For the first time the King speaks openly and clearly to someone outside of the circle of the disciples about a new age. This is full proof that the kingdom was no longer near at hand."[1251]

21:44 The capstone, the top stone on a wall or parapet around a flat-roofed building, could and did become a stumbling block to some. Many Jews similarly tripped over Jesus' identity and plunged to their destruction. Likewise a capstone could fall on someone below and crush him or her. These are allusions to Isaiah 8:14-15 and Daniel 2:35, 44-45. Jesus was a "dangerous person," as well as God's chosen representative and the occupier of God's choice position in His building, Israel. Jesus was claiming to be the Judge; He would crush those on whom He fell.

21:45-46 The meaning of Jesus' words was clear to Israel's leaders who heard Him. Matthew probably described them as "chief priests," who were mostly Sadducees, "and Pharisees," because these were the two leading parties within Judaism. Together, these two groups stood for all the Jewish authorities who opposed Jesus.

Rather than fearing Jesus, whom they "understood" claimed to be the instrument of their final judgment, these leaders feared the multitudes—whose power over them was much less. Rather than submitting to Him in

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[1249]David L. Turner, "Matthew 21:43 and the Future of Israel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159:633 (January-March 2002):46-61.

[1250]Bailey, in *The New* . . ., p. 45.

[1251]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 252. See also idem, "The Contingency . . ., pp. 234-35; and idem and Quine, p. 140.

belief, they tried "to seize Him." Thus they triggered the very situation that Jesus had warned them about, namely, His death at their hands. Their actions confirmed their rejection of Jesus and their consequent blindness.

The parable of the royal wedding banquet 22:1-14

The three parables in this series are similar to three concentric circles in their scope. The scope of the parable of the two sons encompassed Israel's leaders (21:28-32). The parable of the wicked tenant farmers exposed the leaders' lack of responsibility, and their guilt, to the people listening in, as well as to the leaders themselves (21:33-46). This last parable is the broadest of the three. It condemned the contempt with which Israel as a whole had treated God's grace to her.

22:1 Early editions of the NASB and the NKJV say, "Jesus answered." This was Matthew's way of introducing what Jesus said (cf. 11:25). It does not mean that what Jesus said was a response to a particular question someone had asked Him. Newer NASB editions and the NIV have "spoke." Jesus responded to the leaders' desires (cf. 21:45-46). The antecedent of "them" was the Jewish leaders, but there were many other Jews in the temple courtyard listening to the dialogue.

22:2-3 Jesus said the kingdom was similar to what the following story illustrated (cf. 13:24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47; 20:1). The "king" represents God the Father. "His son," the bridegroom (cf. 9:15; 25:1), is Messiah. The "wedding feast" is the messianic banquet that will take place on earth at the beginning of the kingdom (8:11-12; 25:1; cf. Ps. 132:15; Isa. 25:6-8; 65:13-14; Rev. 21:2). As in the previous parable, the "slaves" (Gr. *douloi*) of the king are His prophets (21:34-36).[1252] They announced the coming of the banquet and urged those whom God invited to it, the Jews, to prepare for it. However, most of those who heard about it did not respond to the call to prepare for it. Several writers have taken this invitation as corresponding to the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus.[1253]

22:4-5 The fact that the king repeated his invitation, and urged those who had previously shown no interest in attending, demonstrates his grace and compassion. This was customary practice in the ancient Near East.[1254] The Greek word translated "dinner" (*ariston*) usually refers to the first of two meals that the Jews ate each day, most commonly near mid-morning. This was the first of many meals that the guests at this banquet would enjoy, since wedding feasts usually lasted a week or so in the ancient Near East (cf. v. 13).[1255]

[1252]Pentecost, *The Parables . . .*, pp. 139-40.

[1253]E.g., Morgan, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 263; Walvoord, *Matthew: . . .*, p. 165; and Toussaint, *Behold the . . .*, p. 254.

[1254]Goebel, *The Parables of Jesus*, p. 351.

[1255]Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Cultural Aspects of Marriage in the Ancient World," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:539 (July-September 1978):241-52. See also Paul E. Robertson, "First-Century Jewish Marriage Customs," *Biblical Illustrator* 13:1 (Fall 1986):33-36.

The king emphasized the *imminency* of the feast, as "he sent out" his servants again. This is, of course, what John and Jesus had been preaching as they urged the Jews to get ready for the kingdom. Some scholars took this invitation as one that the apostles issued after Jesus' ascension—that resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.[1256]

> "A very important fact revealed in the parable is the fact that the offer of the kingdom was a genuine one. The kingdom in all of its reality was as prepared and near as was the feast of the parable."[1257]

The wedding feast is not the kingdom, however. It is the celebration at the beginning of the kingdom, the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9).

The people whom the slaves of the king invited showed more interest in their own possessions and activities than they did in the banquet (John 1:12). They refused the invitation of their king, that was both an honor and a command.

22:6-7 Some of those invited not only refused the gracious invitation, but abused and even murdered the king's servants. "Enraged" at their conduct, the king "sent his armies," "destroyed" the "murderers," and burned down "their city" (cf. 21:38-41). Having their city burned down by an enemy was a common fate of rebels in the ancient East (cf. 2 Chron. 36:19; Nah. 3:14-15). Here Jesus implied it would happen to Jerusalem again. It did happen, in A.D. 70, when the Roman emperor Titus finally overcame the Jewish rebels and scattered them from Palestine. This was Jesus' first prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem.

22:8-10 The king did not begin the wedding feast yet. He sent out more slaves to invite anyone to attend. The original guests "were not worthy" because they disregarded the king's invitations. They failed to respond to his invitation to come freely. The king sent his slaves out into the "main highways" (NASB, Gr. *tas diexodous ton hodon*, lit. "street corners," NIV, places where people congregated) to invite everyone to the feast (cf. 8:11; 21:43). His "slaves went out into the streets" and "gathered" everyone who would come, both the "evil" and the "good" in the sight of men. Finally the "wedding hall" was full of "guests."

> "The calling of other guests now (still going on) takes the place of the first invitation—a new exigency and preparation being evolved—and the supper, until these guests are obtained . . . *is postponed* to the Second Advent."[1258]

[1256]E.g., Morgan, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 263; Walvoord, *Matthew:* . . ., p. 165; and Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 254.

[1257]Ibid., p. 255.

[1258]Peters, 1:379.

The majority of the Jews were not worthy to attend the messianic banquet at the beginning of the kingdom, because they rejected God's gracious offer of entrance by faith in His Son. Therefore, God's slaves would go out into the whole world ("all the streets"), to invite as many as would accept the invitation to come, Jews ("good") and Gentiles ("evil") alike (28:19). Jesus predicted that many, not just Jews but also Gentiles, would respond—so that when the kingdom began, the great banquet hall would be as full as God intended.

22:11-13 The "man" who did not wear the proper wedding garment was unprepared for the banquet. In that culture, the proper wedding garment was just clean clothes.[1259] He was there, whether evil or good (v. 10), because he had accepted the king's gracious invitation. However, he was subject to the king's scrutiny. The king addressed his guest as a "friend." He asked how he had obtained admission without the proper (clean) garment. The man was "speechless" due to embarrassment. Then the king gave orders to his servants (Gr. *diakonois*) to "bind" the man, "hand and foot" like a prisoner, and to "throw him" out of the banquet hall. They would throw him into the "outer darkness" (NASB) or "outside, into the darkness" (NIV). The place where he would go would be a place of "weeping and gnashing of teeth."

> "I hear some folk say that they don't need to receive Christ, that they will take their chances before God, that they intend to argue their case. Well, our Lord said that this fellow without the wedding garment was *speechless*."[1260]

It is probably significant that Jesus referred to the king's slaves (Gr. *douloi*, vv. 3, 4, 6, 8, 10) as heralding the kingdom, but He said the king's servants (Gr. *diakonoi*, v. 13) evicted the unworthy guest. Evidently the slaves refer to the prophets and the servants to the angels.

These verses have spawned several different interpretations. One view is that the man who tries to participate in the banquet but gets evicted represents those whom God will exclude in the judgment that will take place before the kingdom begins.[1261] This view takes the man evicted as representing a Jew who hopes to gain entrance to the kingdom because he is a Jew. Since he does not have the proper clothing, the robe of righteousness, he cannot enter the kingdom. The lesson Jesus wanted to teach was that individual faith in Him, not nationality, was necessary for entrance. This view seems best to me.

[1259]France, *The Gospel . . .*, pp. 826-27.
[1260]McGee, 4:116.
[1261]Toussaint, *Behold the . . .*, pp. 254-55.

> "Christ revealed that unless they prepared themselves to be judged acceptable by the host, they would be excluded from the kingdom when it was instituted."[1262]

A second view is that the man was at the banquet because he was a believer in Jesus. There the king, upon careful examination, discovered that he did not have the prerequisite righteousness. Therefore the king excluded him from the kingdom. In other words, he withdrew the man's salvation. The problem with this view is that it involves the withdrawing (loss) of salvation. This view is untenable, in view of Scripture promises that once God gives the gift of eternal life, He *never* withdraws it (John 10:28-29; Rom. 8:31-39).

A third view is that the loss of salvation is not in view, but the loss of eternal reward (inheritance) is. The man has eternal life. The wedding garment does not represent salvation, but good works, with which the believer should clothe himself in response to the demands God has on his or her life.

> "There is no suggestion here of punishment or torment. The presence of remorse, in the form of weeping and gnashing of teeth, does not in any way require this inference. Indeed, what we actually see in the image itself is a man soundly 'trussed up' out on the darkened grounds of the king's private estate, while the banquet hall glows with light and reverberates with the joys of those inside. That is what we actually see. *And that is all!*"[1263]

However, the term "weeping and gnashing of teeth," as Jesus used it elsewhere, seems to describe *hell,* the place where unbelievers go (cf. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28). This term was a common description of Gehenna, hell (4 Ezra 7:93; 1 Enoch 63:10; Psalms of Solomon 14:9; Wisdom of Solomon 17:21). The works just cited in parentheses are Hebrew pseudepigraphal and apocryphal books.[1264]

22:14 Jesus concluded the parable with a pithy statement that explained it (cf. 18:7). Not all whom God has invited to the kingdom will participate in the sharing of rulership authority and special rewards. Only those who respond to God's call and prepare themselves by trusting in Jesus will.

> "Finally, the parable teaches that a general call does not constitute or guarantee election (verse fourteen). The Israelites took great pride in the fact that they as a nation

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[1262]Pentecost, *The Parables . . .*, p. 142.

[1263]Hodges, *Grace in . . .*, p. 89. See also Dillow, pp. 344-53.

[1264]For Rabbinic parallels to this parable, see Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 2:425-30.

> possessed the kingdom promises. But this of itself did not mean each Jew was elected to it. Entrance was an individual responsibility, and that is what Christ is emphasizing in the last portion of the parable."[1265]
>
> "Ironically, the 'chosen people' show in their refusal of the invitation that they are *not* all among the 'elect' but only among the 'called.'"[1266]
>
> "While the invitation is broad, those actually chosen for blessing are few."[1267]

The point of these three parables is quite clear. God would judge Israel's leaders because they had rejected Jesus, their Messiah. He would postpone the kingdom and allow anyone to enter it—not only the Jews, as many of them thought.[1268] The prophets had predicted that Gentiles would participate in the kingdom; this was not new revelation. However the Jews, because of national pride, had come to believe that being a Jew was all the qualification one needed to enter the kingdom. Jesus taught them that receiving God's gracious invitation, and preparing oneself by trusting in Him, was the essential requirement for participation.

3. Rejection by the Pharisees and the Herodians 22:15-22 (cf. Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:20-26)

The dialogue continued in the temple courtyard. Israel's leaders proceeded to confront Jesus, three times, attempting to show that He was no better than any other rabbi. Jesus responded with great wisdom, silenced His accusers with another question of His own, and disclosed His identity again in a veiled way.

> "Jesus was going to die as the Lamb of God, and it was necessary for the lamb to be examined before Passover (Ex. 12:3-6). If any blemish whatsoever was found on the lamb, it could not be sacrificed. Jesus was examined publicly by His enemies, and they could find no fault in Him."[1269]

22:15-16a The Pharisees wanted to ensnare or entrap (Gr. *pagideuo*) Jesus by their question. Clearly their purpose was not simply to get Jesus' opinion on a controversial issue. It was to alienate Him from a major portion of the Jewish population, or to get Him to lay Himself open to a charge of treason, depending on His answer, and to lose face.

[1265]Toussaint, *Behold the . . .*, p. 256.
[1266]Hagner, *Matthew 14—28*, p. 632.
[1267]Walvoord, *Matthew: . . .*, p. 165.
[1268]See Toussaint and Quine, pp. 140-41.
[1269]Wiersbe, 1:79.

The Pharisees had come into existence during the Babylonian exile. The word "Pharisee" means "separate one." During the Exile, the Jews were in danger of assimilation by the Gentiles. The Pharisaic party was started because the Jews wanted to maintain their distinctiveness from their pagan neighbors. This was a good thing then. However, as time passed and the Jews returned to the Promised Land, the Pharisees' separation became too much of a good thing. It resulted in isolation as those Jews built up traditions designed, not just to keep the Mosaic Law, but to enforce the rabbis' interpretations of the Law. The result was what we have seen in this Gospel, namely, Pharisaic devotion to the traditions of the elders that surpassed devotion to the Word of God.

The Herodians constituted a party within Judaism that favored cooperation with the Herods, who ruled Israel under Rome's authority. They supported the reigning Herods and their pro-Roman policies. The Romans had deposed the Herod who ruled over Judea in A.D. 6, but Herods ruled other parts of Palestine.[1270] This position compromised Jewish independence and distinctiveness in the minds of many Jews, including the Pharisees. Consequently it was very unusual that representatives from these two competing groups would unite in opposing Jesus. They rarely united on any subject, but both parties viewed Jesus as a threat to their individual interests.

22:16b-17 The unholy alliance introduced its question with a flattering preamble. The leaders credited Jesus with being a "teacher" or rabbi. Moreover, they said they believed He spoke the truth, and taught God's will truthfully ("in truth," honestly and faithfully). If Jesus failed to reply to their question after such an introduction, He would appear to be trying to hide something, perhaps because of pressure He felt. His integrity would be open to question.

Their question was theological, since all such issues involved God's will in Israel. They wanted to know how Jesus felt about their Roman overlords. Paying the "poll-tax," or head tax, was a kind of litmus test of one's feelings toward Rome, as one's attitude toward paying taxes has indicated one's attitude toward government throughout history. This was a particularly volatile issue in Israel since it was a theocracy. The poll tax was not objectionable because it was large. Really it was quite small. However, it was almost universal, covering women between the ages of 12 and 65, and men between 14 and 65.

"Caesar," the family name of Julius Caesar, had become a title for Roman rulers by this time. The Roman emperor then was Tiberius. The accusers phrased their question to elicit a "yes or no" answer from Jesus. They thought that either answer would embroil Him in controversy.

[1270]France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 832.

> "The poll tax had been among the taxes imposed on Judea following the imposition of direct Roman rule in A.D. 6, not long before, and had been fiercely resented by patriotic Jews, resulting in a serious revolt led by Judas (Josephus, *War* 2.117-18; *Ant.* 18.4-10). That revolt was the inspiration for the later Zealot movement which led to the war of independence beginning in A.D. 66 and so to the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of its temple in A.D. 70."[1271]

22:18-20 Jesus refused to give the "yes or no" answer they wanted. Instead, He initially pointed out, for the benefit of the crowd standing around, that they were "testing" Him (Gr. *peirazo*, to demonstrate intrinsic quality by testing, cf. 4:1; 16:1). This was a more gracious word than the one Matthew used to describe their real intent (v. 15). Their question did not intimidate Jesus, even though He "perceived their malice," but He saw it as an opportunity to reveal His identity. They were "hypocrites" in that they came under a pretense of great respect, but they really had little respect for Him.

Jesus chose to answer on His own terms, not theirs. The coin that most people used to pay their Roman "poll-tax" was "a denarius," the value of which was one day's wage for a workingman or soldier. This coin bore the image of the emperor and the inscription "Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus" on one side and "*pontifex maximus*" on the other. The Jews understood "*pontifex maximus*" (lit. chief bridge-builder) in the sense of "high priest." Both inscriptions were offensive to the Jews.[1272]

The fact that Jesus asked someone to "show" Him a denarius has led some readers to conclude that He was extremely poor. Others believe He did this because He and His disciples shared a common purse. Still others believe He was using a pedagogical technique. Whatever His reason may have been, we should probably not make much of it since Matthew did not.

22:21-22 Jesus' answer accorded with the Old Testament teaching that people should "render" (give over, pay) taxes to those over them, even pagans, because rulers ultimately owe their positions to God (Prov. 8:15; Dan. 2:21, 37-38; cf. Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17). He did not side with the Zealots, a party that sought the violent overthrow of Rome, or with any other group that wanted Messiah to bring immediate political independence to Israel.

[1271]Ibid., p. 829.

[1272]Carson, "Matthew," p. 459.

> "The questioners had said *dounai* ["to give"] (v. 17), as though of a gift which might be withheld; the Lord replies with *apo dote* ["render to"], the payment of a rightful due."[1273]

However, Jesus also advocated rendering "to God" what belonged to Him. As the coin bore the emperor's image, and so testified to his ownership of it, so human beings bear God's image, and so testify to His ownership of them. God has an even more fundamental claim on people than Caesar did. The Jews should acknowledge Caesar's claim by paying their taxes, but what is more important: they should acknowledge God's claim by obeying Him. This was a condemnation of Israel's leaders, who were not obeying God, as well as an exhortation to all the people to follow God's will. For them, that involved believing in and following Jesus.

> "What is taught here is not a 'separation of church and state,' but the recognition of existing spheres of given relationship and responsibility. Both God and the state need to be properly honored."[1274]

This incident shows Jesus' great wisdom and authority, the intensity of the leaders' opposition to Him, and how Jesus prepared His disciples for what lay ahead of them (cf. Rom. 13; 1 Pet. 2:11-17).

4. Rejection by the Sadducees 22:23-33 (cf. Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-40)

Sometime later that day, another group of leaders approached Jesus with a different question—but with the same purpose: to trap Him in a theological controversy that would destroy His reputation.

22:23 The Pharisees believed in resurrection from the dead (Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2). The Sadducees did not, because they could not find it explicitly taught in the Pentateuch.[1275] They believed that both the material and the immaterial parts of man perish at death (cf. Acts 23:8).[1276] There was much diverse opinion concerning death and the afterlife in Jesus' day.[1277]

22:24-28 The Sadducees, like the Pharisees, approached Jesus with hypocritical respect, calling Him "teacher" (cf. v. 16). They had evidently learned to appreciate Jesus' high regard for the Old Testament, because they came to Him with a question of biblical interpretation (Deut. 25:5-6). This is only

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[1273]M'Neile, pp. 319-20.
[1274]Bock, *Jesus according . . .*, p. 329.
[1275]Edersheim, *Sketches of . . .*, p. 241.
[1276]Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 18:1:3-4; idem, *The Wars . . .*, 2:8:14.
[1277]Cf. G. W. E. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism*.

the second recorded time that Jesus had come into public conflict with the Sadducees (cf. Matt. 16:1).

Levirate marriage was an ancient Near Eastern custom that antedated the Mosaic Law (Gen. 38:8). The Law incorporated it and regulated it. This law encouraged the younger brother to marry his deceased brother's widow and have children by her. People considered the first child born to be the older brother's heir, and that child would perpetuate his name in Israel. Customarily a widower was expected to wait over three festivals before he remarried, a widow three months, and a pregnant or nursing mother two years.[1278]

This was an unlikely question for Sadducees to ask, since they did not believe in resurrection. Probably they knew that Jesus believed in resurrection, and wanted to create what they thought was an impossible situation, in order to embarrass Him.

> "It was probably an old conundrum that they had used to the discomfiture of the Pharisees."[1279]

The case they posited could have been a real one or, more likely, a hypothetical one. Their question presupposed that life the other side of the grave will be exactly as it is this side, in terms of human relationships. Since the woman had had "seven" husbands, "whose wife" would "she be . . . in the resurrection," or would she be guilty of incest? For the Sadducees, belief in resurrection created insuperable problems. They probably wondered: Would Jesus deny the resurrection, and thus circumvent the problem, but alienate Himself even further from the Pharisees?

22:29-30 The Sadducees did not understand "the Scriptures"—because the Scriptures taught resurrection (e.g., Ps. 16; et al.). They did not understand God's "power"—because they assumed that life after resurrection, in heaven, would be the same as it is now. They assumed that the resurrection would just involve an awakening, not a transformation. God is able to raise people to a form of existence unlike what we experience now (cf. 1 Cor. 15:35-49).

In the resurrection form of existence, sexual relationships will be different from what they are now.

> "In other words, in heaven there will not be any necessity to continue the race by means of birth."[1280]

[1278]Edersheim, *Sketches of* . . ., p. 156.
[1279]Robertson, *Word Pictures* . . ., 1:176.
[1280]McGee, 4:117.

Jesus was speaking of the resurrection life, not a particular resurrection event, as is clear from the Greek preposition *en* ("in," v. 30, not "at," NIV).

Jesus' reference to the "angels" was an additional correction of their theology, since the Sadducees also denied the existence of angels (Acts. 23:8).

Jesus did not say that in the resurrection state, all memory of our former existence and relationships will end. This is a conclusion some interpreters have drawn without warrant. Neither did He say that we will become angels. We will not. We will be *like* the angels.

> "The greatness of the changes at the Resurrection (cf. 1 Cor 15:44; Phil 3:21; 1 John 3:1-2) will doubtless make the wife of even seven brothers (vv. 24-27) capable of loving all and the object of the love of all—as a good mother today loves all her children and is loved by them."[1281]

22:31-32 Jesus returned to what Scripture teaches (v. 29). He introduced His clarification with a customary rebuke: "Have you not read?" (cf. 21:42; et al.). The passage He cited, Exodus 3:6, came from the Pentateuch, a part of the Hebrew Bible that the Sadducees treated with great respect.

God described Himself to Moses as then being "the God" of "Abraham, . . . Isaac, and . . . Jacob." "I *am* the God of . . ." He was *still their God*, even though they had died hundreds of years earlier. This statement implied the continuing bodily existence of the patriarchs. It also implied the continuing validity of the covenant promises that God had made with these men, since covenants are in effect as long as the covenant partners are alive (cf. Rom. 7:2; 1 Cor. 7:39). The logical conclusion is that if God will fulfill His promise to continue to be the God of the patriarchs, He must some day raise them from the dead. Thus Jesus showed that the Pentateuch, the abbreviated canon of the Sadducees, clearly implied the reality of a future resurrection.

> "The argument is not linguistic: 'I am the God of Abraham' would be a perfectly intelligible way for God to identify himself as the God whom Abraham worshiped long ago. The argument is based rather on the nature of God's relationship with his human followers: the covenant by which he binds himself to them is too strong to be terminated by their death."[1282]

[1281]Carson, "Matthew," pp.461-62.
[1282]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 840.

It seems to me that Jesus' argument was both linguistic and covenantal. God could have said, "I *was* the God of . . .", and this would have been true. But He used the present tense, and in so doing implied the continuing existence of the patriarchs. Note Jesus' high regard for Scripture. He believed that even the tense of a verb in the Hebrew text of Exodus was accurate.

22:33 Matthew closed his account of this encounter by recording the reaction of the multitude, not the reaction of the Sadducees. Probably few of the Sadducees changed their theology as a result of this conversation, since they continued to oppose Jesus. However, the reaction of the crowd shows that Jesus' teaching had a powerful impact. To the unprejudiced observer, Jesus' arguments, authority, and understanding of the Old Testament were astonishing. Matthew undoubtedly hoped this would be the reaction of his readers too.

This pericope reveals the intensity of the opposition to Jesus that existed among Israel's leaders. This was the third group to try to trap Him in one day. It also shows the guilt of Israel's leaders, since they did not understand either the Scriptures or God's power—*but should have*. Jesus had spoken of people entering the kingdom after death (v. 10). For them to do this, there would have to be a resurrection. Jesus also confirmed the belief that the patriarchs would live in the kingdom by what He said. Thus Jesus' teaching about resurrection answered questions about participation in the kingdom because of its postponement. Not many in Jesus' immediate audience may have understood this, but Matthew's readers could.

5. Rejection by the Pharisees 22:34-46

This pericope contains two parts. First, a representative of the Pharisees asked Jesus a question (vv. 34-40). Then Jesus asked the Pharisees a question (vv. 41-46).

A Pharisee's question of Jesus 22:34-40 (cf. Mark 12:28-34)

22:34 "The Pharisees" learned that "Jesus had silenced the Sadducees." In other words, they learned that the Sadducees would no longer oppose Him publicly. Consequently the Pharisees decided to renew their attack against Him.

22:35-36 The NASB describes the Pharisees' spokesman as "a lawyer." The Greek word *nomikos* means "expert in the law" (NIV). He would have been a teacher of the Old Testament who was particularly learned in both theology and law. He subjected Jesus to a test (Gr. *peirazon*) to prove His quality.

He, too, addressed Jesus with hypocritical respect as "teacher," though as the discussions with Jesus progressed this day His opponents' respect for Him undoubtedly increased. The Pharisee asked Jesus another

controversial question to which various Scripture experts gave various answers.

> "The scene is like an ordination council where the candidate is doing so well that some of the most learned ministers ask him questions they themselves have been unable to answer—in the hope of tripping him up or of finding answers."[1283]

The rabbis documented 613 commandments in the Mosaic Law, 248 positive and 365 negative. Since no one could possibly keep them all, they divided them into "heavy" (more important) and "light" (less important). The Pharisees taught that the Jews needed to give attention to all the laws but particularly the "heavy" ones. This Pharisee was asking which of the "heavy" ones Jesus considered the "heaviest."

22:37-39 To answer, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 and then Leviticus 19:18. The terms "heart," "soul," and "mind" are not completely distinct, watertight categories. They overlap somewhat and together cover the whole person. Taken together, the meaning is that we should "love . . . God" preeminently and unreservedly.

> "Jesus loves God with his whole heart, for he is blameless in his fealty to God (4:1-11). Jesus loves God with his whole soul, for he is prepared to surrender his life should God so will (26:36-46). And Jesus loves God with his whole mind, for he lays claim for himself neither to the prerogatives of worldly power [cf. 20:25, 28; 21:5] nor to the security of family, home, and possessions (8:20; 12:50)."[1284]

The "and" in verse 38 is explicative. The one command is great because it is primary.

"The second" greatest command is similar to the first in character and quality (v. 39). It also deals with love (cf. 1 Cor. 12:13). We should "love" our fellow man ("neighbor") unselfishly (cf. 1 John 3:17-18).

> "A simple reading of Leviticus 19:18 . . . divulges that the command pertained to loving others, not oneself. The 'as yourself' part of the command only furnishes a comparison of how Jesus' disciples are to love others."[1285]

[1283]Ibid., p. 464.

[1284]Kingsbury, *Matthew as . . .*, p. 12.

[1285]Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, p. 130.

The writer just quoted went on to discuss why it is inappropriate hermeneutically to argue from this command that one needs to learn to love himself or herself before he or she can love someone else.

22:40 The rest of the Old Testament ("whole Law and the Prophets") hangs from or flows out of "these two commandments." All the other laws deal with specific applications of one or the other of these two commands. The prophets consistently stressed the importance of heart reality with God and genuine love for one's neighbor. Without these two commandments the Old Testament lacks unifying summaries. These are the most important commandments, but they are not the only ones.

> "Mark includes the clause '. . . is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices' (Mark 12:33). Matthew omits this since it might offend his [unsaved] Jewish reader, and the point is well made without it."[1286]

This declaration prepared for Jesus' denunciation of the religious leaders in 23:1-36.

> "Jesus had now answered three difficult questions. He had dealt with the relationship between religion and government, between this life and the next life, and between God and our neighbors. These are fundamental relationships, and we cannot ignore our Lord's teachings. But there is a question more fundamental than these, and Jesus asked it of His enemies."[1287]

Jesus' question of the Pharisees 22:41-46 (cf. Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44)

22:41-42 Having received several questions from His critics, Jesus now turned the tables and asked the Pharisees one. He wanted them to explain what the Scriptures taught about Messiah. This would face them and the crowd with "who" He really was. The real issue was Christological—not taxes, resurrection, or even the greatest commandment.

Jesus broached the subject of Messiah's identity by asking "whose son" He was (v. 42). This was perhaps "the most familiar subject in their theology, that of the descent of Messiah."[1288] The Pharisees gave a standard correct answer based on Old Testament passages (2 Sam. 7:13-14; Isa. 11:1, 10; Jer. 23:5). He was David's son or descendant (cf. 1:1; 9:27-28; et al.). However, it was not the full answer.

[1286]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 259.
[1287]Wiersbe, 1:82.
[1288]Edersheim, *The Life* . . ., 2:405.

Jesus had previously asked His disciples a similar question about His identity (16:13, 15). Peter, speaking for the disciples, had given the proper full answer (16:16). That response led to commendation (16:17-21). The Pharisees' improper response here led to condemnation (ch. 23). Everything hinges on one's view of Jesus.

22:43-45 Jesus pointed out that the Pharisees' answer contained a problem. "How" could Messiah be David's "son" if "David" called Him his "Lord"? Jesus referred to Psalm 110, the most frequently quoted Old Testament chapter in the New Testament. This was a psalm that David wrote, as is clear from the superscription. Jesus regarded it as He regarded all the Old Testament, namely, inspired by the Holy Spirit (v. 43; cf. Acts 4:25; Heb. 3:7; 9:8; 10:15; 1 Pet. 1:21). Jesus assumed that Psalm 110 was Davidic and Messianic, and the Pharisees agreed. He referred to the psalm's inspiration here to reinforce its correctness in the minds of His hearers. David had not made a mistake when he wrote this. The "right hand" is the position of highest honor and authority (cf. 19:28).

There is good evidence that almost all Jews in Jesus' day regarded Psalm 110 as messianic.[1289] Jesus' point was that Messiah was not just David's descendant, but He was God's Son also. This is a point that Matthew stressed throughout his Gospel (chs. 1—2; 3:17; 8:20; 17:5; et al.). Jesus was bringing together the concepts that Messiah was the human son of David and the divine Son of God.[1290]

Moreover, this quotation also shows the preexistence of Messiah. David's Lord was alive when David lived. Furthermore it reveals plurality within the Godhead. One divine person spoke to another.

The psalm pictured Messiah at God's "right hand" while His enemies were hostile to Him. However, Messiah would crush that hostility eventually. This is precisely the eschatological picture that has been unfolding throughout this Gospel. Rejected by His own, Jesus would return to the Father, but He would return later to earth to establish His kingdom. The Jewish rabbis after Jesus' time interpreted David's lord as Abraham, not Messiah.[1291]

22:46 This question silenced the public criticism of Jesus' critics permanently. The confrontation had ended. His enemies could not escape the logical consistency of Jesus' biblical arguments. Rather than submitting to His authority, as they should have (cf. 21:23), they plotted His destruction.

[1289]David M. Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity*, pp. 11-33.
[1290]See Kingsbury, *Matthew as . . .*, p. 82.
[1291]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 851.

> "Defeated in debate, the leaders withdraw from Jesus in the temple, just as Satan, also defeated by Jesus in debate, had earlier withdrawn from him (4:11)."[1292]

Verse 46 finishes off this entire sub-section of the Gospel (21:23—22:46). Israel had rejected her King. Jesus had predicted this rejection (21:18-22). It resulted from the series of confrontations with Israel's leaders that happened on a single Wednesday in the temple courtyard. Now the King would formally reject the nation, but not permanently in view of the promises to the patriarchs.

D. THE KING'S REJECTION OF ISRAEL CH. 23

Israel's rejection of Jesus as her King was now unmistakably clear. Her various groups of leaders had consistently refused to accept Him.

> ". . . it seems that for Matthew the Pharisees particularly exemplify all that is wrong with Jerusalem's current leadership."[1293]

The leaders' rejection was a rejection of Jesus' person (22:42). It contrasts sharply with the disciples' confession that Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God (16:16). Consequently Jesus announced His rejection of that generation of unbelieving Israelites. Note the parallels between this situation and that of the Israelites at Kadesh Barnea (Num. 13—14). That generation would not experience the blessing of participating in the inauguration of the promised messianic kingdom. Jesus' strong language reflects the seriousness of their error and its dire consequences. It also reflects the conventions of ancient polemic.[1294]

Chapter 23 contains a discourse that Jesus delivered the same day His critics assailed Him: Wednesday. However, most students of Matthew's Gospel have not regarded this discourse as one of the major ones in the book. The primary reason for this is it lacks the structural marker by which the writer highlighted the other major discourses. That marker is the characteristic discourse ending (cf. 7:28-29). Rather, chapter 23 appears to be the climax of the confrontations that preceded it (21:23—22:46). The content of this discourse is mainly negative and condemnatory, and its target was a specific group. That it is not part of the discourse in chapters 24 and 25 is clear, because Jesus addressed different audiences.

> "As Matthew began his rehearsal of Jesus' ministry at 4:17, he depicted Jesus as becoming successively involved with three major groups, each of which functions as a character in his story: the *disciples* (4:18-22); the *crowds*, together with the disciples (4:25; 5:1-2); and the religious *leaders*

[1292]Kingsbury, *Matthew as* . . ., p. 7.

[1293]France, *The Gospel* . . ., pp. 853-54. See Barclay, 2:312-14, for a summary of the Talmud's seven different kinds of Pharisees.

[1294]See L. T. Johnson, "The New Testament's Anti-Jewish Slander and Conventions of Ancient Rhetoric," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108 (1989):419-41.

(9:2-13). As an indication that only the climax of his story (i.e., the passion of Jesus) still remains to be narrated, Matthew now depicts Jesus' involvement with each of these same three groups as being successively terminated in a reverse order to the initial one, that is to say, in an order that is chiastic in nature. For example, by reducing the religious *leaders* in open debate to silence, Jesus forces their withdrawal from the scene (22:46). With the leaders gone, Jesus publicly addresses the *crowds* in the temple, together with the disciples (23:1). And leaving the temple, Jesus delivers his eschatological discourse to the *disciples* alone (24:1-3). Through the use of this chiastic pattern, Matthew signals the reader that the culmination of his story is at hand."[1295]

"The attitude attacked in this chapter is a religion of externals, a matter of ever more detailed attention to rules and regulations while failing to discern God's priorities."[1296]

1. Jesus' admonition of the multitudes and His disciples 23:1-12 (cf. Mark 12:38-39; Luke 20:45-46)

23:1 As we have seen, there were three groups of people present in the temple courtyard. These were: the "disciples" of Jesus, His critics, namely, the various groups of Israel's "leaders," and "the crowds" of ordinary Israelites. Jesus now turned from addressing the Pharisees (22:41), and proceeded to speak to the multitudes and His disciples primarily.

Jesus had begun to criticize the Pharisees and scribes to their faces about one year earlier (15:7). Later He warned His disciples to beware of the teachings of the Pharisees and the Sadducees (16:5-12). Now He denounced these enemies publicly. He did so because the decision the masses and His disciples now faced was whether to follow Jesus or Israel's established religious leaders. They could not do both.

23:2 "The scribes" were the official teachers of the Old Testament. "The Pharisees" were a theological party within Judaism.

> "They occupied very much the same position that church leaders occupy today. People looked to them for the interpretation of the truth."[1297]

Jesus was addressing two different, though somewhat overlapping, groups when He made this distinction. Some scribes were Pharisees, but not all Pharisees were scribes. The first title addressed the role of some of the leaders and the second the theological beliefs of some of them. A modern

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[1295]Kingsbury, *Matthew as* . . ., p. 84.
[1296]France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 855.
[1297]McGee, 4:119.

illustration might be "preachers" and "evangelicals." Not all preachers are evangelicals, though some are. Likewise, not all evangelicals are preachers, though some are.

According to Old Testament figurative usage, a person who sat on a predecessor's seat was that person's successor (Exod. 11:5; 12:29; 1 Kings 1:35, 46; 2:12; 16:11; 2 Kings 15:12; Ps. 132:12). When Jesus said the scribes and Pharisees had "seated themselves" on Moses' "chair," He meant they viewed themselves as Moses' legal successors, possessing his authority. This is indeed how they viewed themselves.[1298] Jewish synagogues typically had a stone seat at the front where the authoritative teacher sat.[1299] Accordingly, most rabbis sat when they taught. The NASB translation "have seated themselves" hints at the irony that follows in the first part of verse 3. They presumed to be Moses' successors, with *his* authority.

> "The 'seat of Moses' is a brief form for the chair of the professor whose function it is to interpret Moses."[1300]

23:3-4 Jesus' statement in the first part of verse 3 seems to contradict what He said earlier about how the other Jews should respond to the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees (15:7-14; 16:5-12). Assuming the consistency of Jesus' teaching, we should understand His words here as ironical.[1301] Another view sees Jesus affirming the authority of the Pharisees in principle, since they taught the Torah, but not endorsing all their teachings (*halakhah*, legal interpretations of Scripture).[1302] The first, preferable interpretation allows the Greek aorist verb *ekathisan* ("to sit," v. 2) to have its natural force. This view also explains the chiasm in verses 2-4, in which the first two statements constitute irony, and the second two give non-ironical advice.

A The leaders presumed to take on Moses' teaching authority. v. 2
- **B** Do what they say. v. 3a
- **B'** Do not do what they do. v. 3b

A' Their teaching merely binds people. v. 4

Jesus continued to use irony in this address (vv. 23-28).

[1298]Mishnah *Sanhedrin* 11:3.

[1299]E. L. Sukenik, *Ancient Synagogues in Palestine and Greece*, pp. 57-61.

[1300]Robertson, *Word Pictures . . .*, 1:178.

[1301]J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, Part I, *The Proclamation of Jesus*, p. 210.

[1302]See Noel S. Rabbinowitz, "Matthew 23:2-4: Does Jesus Recognize the Authority of the Pharisees and Does He Endorse their *Halakhah?" Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 46:3 (September 2003):423-47.

Both the School of Hillel and the School of Shammai increased the burden of responsibility on the Jews by adding to the Law.[1303]

> "They are taskmasters, not burden-bearers, not sympathetic helpers."[1304]

23:5-7 Jesus proceeded to identify more of these leaders' practices that the crowds and His disciples should not copy (cf. 6:1-18). "Phylacteries" were small boxes of leather or parchment in which the Jews placed copies of four Old Testament texts written on vellum (fine parchment, customarily Exod. 13:1-10, 11-16; Deut. 6:4-9; and 11:13-21). They then tied these onto their foreheads and or forearms with straps to fulfill Exodus 13:9 and 16, and Deuteronomy 6:8 and 11:18.

God probably intended the Jews to interpret these commands figuratively, but the superficial religious leaders took them literally. The Greek word translated "phylacteries" (*totapot*, lit. "frontlets") occurs only here in the New Testament. It had pagan associations, and Jesus' use of it here implied that the Jews were using these little boxes as good luck charms.[1305] Furthermore, they made them so big that other Jews would be sure to notice their "piety."[1306]

In addition, the hypocritical leaders would "lengthen the tassels" they wore on the corners of their garments (v. 5). God had commanded the wearing of these tassels to remind His people of their holy and royal calling (Num. 15:37-41; Deut. 22:12). All the Jews wore these tassels, including Jesus (9:20; 14:36). However, the religious leaders characteristically wore long ones to imply great piety and to attract the admiration of the common people.

The leaders wanted to sit as close to the law scrolls as possible in the synagogues. These were the "chief seats" (v. 6). The title "rabbi" meant "my teacher" or "my master." It was originally just a title of respect. However, eventually the term became a title expressing great veneration. The leaders in Jesus' day wanted the title because it set them off as distinctive and superior to others. Modern people who take this view of an advanced academic degree or a title fall into the same error.

23:8-10 These verses applied to all the Jews, but particularly the disciples (cf. v. 1). By placing "you" in the emphatic first position when He spoke to the disciples, Jesus was implying that they would take the position of leadership over God's people that the critics currently occupied (cf. 13:52).

[1303]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 2:407.

[1304]Robertson, *Word Pictures . . .*, 1:178.

[1305]*Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, s.v. "Phylactery," by J. Arthur Thompson, 4:786-87.

[1306]See Edersheim, *Sketches of . . .*, pp 220-24.

They were not to love it when people called them "Rabbi," because they had but *one* Teacher (Gr. *didaskalos*), namely, God. They were to regard themselves as on the same brotherly level, as learners, rather than as masters over the unlearned.

The term "fathers" (v. 9) probably referred to their fathers in the faith, the spiritual predecessors of the present generation (cf. 2 Kings 2:12). Apparently the fathers in view were dead. The change in tense of the Greek verbs between verses 8, 9, and 10 seems to suggest this. If this is true, the person who now addresses a Roman Catholic priest, for example, as "father" is probably using this term in a slightly different sense than the Jews used it in Jesus' day (cf. 1 Cor. 4:15; 1 John 2:13-14). If a modern Christian uses the term with the idea that the "father" is his or her spiritual superior, however, he or she would be guilty of doing what Jesus forbade here.

> "A 'father' is a life-giver. To call a man a 'father' in spiritual matters is to put him in the place of God as the one who gives spiritual life. This is blasphemous. Only God the Father gives life."[1307]

The only person worthy of the title of "Teacher" in the ultimate sense is Messiah. He is the only "One" who can sit in Moses' seat, and continue to interpret and reveal the will of God correctly and authoritatively (cf. 1:1; 16:16; 22:41-46). Jesus used a third Greek word for "teacher" here, namely, *kathegetes*. He probably did so to connect it with other key words in this section having to do with authoritative teaching: *ekathisan* ("they sat down," v. 2) and *kathedra* ("seat," v. 2). Thus He employed the rhetorical device of homophony (similar sounding words).

> "Jesus' enemies, the certified teachers of Israel, could not answer basic biblical questions about the Messiah. Now he, Jesus the Messiah, declares in the wake of that travesty that he himself is the only one qualified to sit in Moses' seat—to succeed him as authoritative Teacher of God's will and mind."[1308]

It would be incorrect to conclude, from this teaching, that Jesus discouraged all recognition of distinctions between leaders and their roles among His servants. The apostles, for example, had authority in the church that surpassed that of ordinary Christians. Elders and deacons continue to exercise divinely recognized authority in the church, and God has commanded us to respect these individuals (1 Cor. 16:15-16; Heb. 13:7, 17).

[1307]McGee, 4:120.

[1308]Carson, "Matthew," p. 475.

What Jesus was condemning, was seeking and giving honor that transcends what is appropriate—since believers are all brethren, since God is our true spiritual Father, and since Jesus is our real teacher and leader. The teachers and leaders of God's people must remember that they are always fellow learners with the saints. They are still children of the heavenly Father, and they are always subject to Jesus Christ, who is the Head of the church.

> ". . . the risen Christ is as displeased with those in his church who demand unquestioning submission to themselves and their opinions and confuse a reputation for showy piety with godly surrender to his teaching as he ever was with any Pharisee."[1309]

23:11-12 In concluding these warnings, Jesus returned to the subject of *humility* that He had stressed with His disciples earlier (cf. 18:4; 20:20-28). Jesus taught His disciples to be servants of others, not lords over them.

> "Leadership positions should never be a goal in and of themselves, but should always be viewed as opportunities to serve others."[1310]

The reversal of fortunes that Jesus predicted here will happen when the kingdom begins. Jesus Himself was the greatest example of what He taught here (cf. 20:26-28; Phil. 2:5-11).

2. Jesus' indictment of the scribes and the Pharisees 23:13-36 (cf. Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47)

Jesus now directed His attention toward the scribes and the Pharisees in the temple courtyard (cf. v. 1). He proceeded to announce a scathing indictment of them in seven parts. Compare the six woes of Isaiah 5:8-23 and the five woes of Habakkuk 2:6-20. He introduced each indictment with the word "woe." Jesus spoke *of* the scribes and Pharisees, but He spoke *to* the crowds and His disciples.

> "No passage in the Bible is more biting, more pointed, and more severe than this pronouncement of Christ upon the Pharisees. It is significant that He singled them out, as opposed to the Sadducees, who were more liberal, and the Herodians, who were the politicians. The Pharisees, while attempting to honor the Word of God and manifesting an extreme form of religious observance, were actually the farthest from God."[1311]

[1309]Ibid.

[1310]Barbieri, p. 74.

[1311]Walvoord, *Matthew:* . . ., pp. 171-72.

Essentially Jesus was criticizing them for their hypocrisy.[1312] As the theme of the Sermon on the Mount was righteousness, the theme of these woes is hypocrisy. There is a common strong emphasis in both addresses on the leaders' failure to understand and submit to the Scriptures. Jesus gave both addresses to contrast the true meaning of Scripture with the Pharisees' interpretation and application of it. The Pharisees professed to teach the Scriptures accurately but did not do so. They were therefore hypocrites.

The literary structure of these woes is chiastic.

A Rejection of the kingdom v. 13
B Effects on others being more harm than good v. 15
C Misguided use of Scripture affecting conduct vv. 16-22
D Failure to understand Scripture vv. 23-24
C' Misguided use of Scripture affecting character vv. 25-26
B' Effects on others frustrating the desired result vv. 27-28
A' Rejection of the kingdom's heralds vv. 29-36

The first woe 23:13[-14]

"But" introduces the transition from the words to the disciples that preceded (vv. 1-12). The scribes and Pharisees had taken the exact opposite position on Jesus' person than the disciples had. Consequently their futures would be radically different (cf. 16:17-28; 19:27-29).

"Woe" can be a mild exclamation of compassion (24:19), a strong expression of condemnation (11:21), or both (18:7; 26:24). In this address condemnation is in view, as is clear from what Jesus said. However, we should not interpret this word as connoting vindictiveness or spitefulness here. Rather it is a judicial announcement of condemnation from Messiah, the Judge.

> "Every one of the seven 'woes' is an exclamation like the 'blessed' in the Beatitudes. It does not state a wish but a fact. It is not a curse that calls down calamity but a calm, true judgment and verdict rendered by the supreme Judge himself. Hence six of these judgments have the evidence attached by means of a causal *hoti* [because] clause which furnishes the full reason for the verdict 'woe;' and in the remaining judgment (v. 16) the varied form of expression does the same by means of an apposition."[1313]

These leaders were hypocrites because they professed to teach God's will, but they kept people from entering the kingdom when it was God's will for His people to enter then. They kept people from entering the kingdom: by not preparing to enter it themselves and by discouraging others from doing so (cf. 18:6-7; 22:41-46).

[1312]See Andrew R. Simmonds, "'Woe to you . . . Hypocrites!' Re-reading Matthew 23:13-36," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166:663 (July-September 2009):336-49.
[1313]Lenski, p. 903.

Some interpreters believe the syntax of verse 13 assumes that the kingdom had already begun.[1314] However, the basis for this conclusion is the presupposition that it had begun, more than the requirements of the Greek syntax. The syntax requires that we understand the substantival participle *tous eiserchomenous* ("those entering") and the present finite verb *oude . . . aphiete* ("nor . . . do you permit") as describing action happening simultaneous with the speaker's words. Both actions can and do describe what the leaders were doing in anticipation of the kingdom's beginning. Jesus consistently referred to the messianic kingdom as future, not as present. The King's presence does not equate with the kingdom's presence.

Most of the best and earliest copies of Matthew's Gospel available to us omit verse 14. Some of the manuscripts that do contain it place it before verse 13, and others place it after. Perhaps scribes inserted it later, since it occurs in the parallel passages (Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47).

The second woe 23:15

The scribes and Pharisees were very zealous to get Jews to subscribe to their doctrinal convictions. Some commentators stress that the Pharisees made disciples to Judaism. This may have been true, but their chief offense was bringing Jews under their corrupt theology.[1315] Jesus did not criticize them for their zeal. He criticized them because of what they taught their converts and the effect that this "conversion" had on their converts.

As noted previously, what marked the teaching of these leaders was that they gave the oral traditional interpretations and teachings of the rabbis at least the same authority as the Old Testament, if not more authority. Practically, they twisted the Old Testament when it did not harmonize with the accepted teachings of the rabbis (cf. 5:21-48).

The converts to Pharisaism became more zealous for the traditions of the fathers than their teachers were. This is often the result of conversion. Students sometimes take the views of their teachers further than their teachers do. The dynamic nature of the Pharisees' view of the authority of the fathers' interpretations increased this problem. When a person believes that Scriptural authority extends beyond the statements of Scripture, there is no limit to what else may be authoritative. The Pharisees' interpretation of Messiah locked Jesus out of His role as Interpreter.

The proselytes were the sons "of hell" (Gehenna) in the sense that they belonged to hell and would go there eventually (cf. 8:12; 13:38). Rather than leading them to heaven, the Pharisees and teachers of the law led them to hell. Gehenna represented the place of eternal damnation, the lake of fire (cf. 25:51). Hades is the temporary abode of the wicked, from which God will raise them for judgment at the great white throne, and then final damnation in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:11-15).

[1314]E.g., Carson, "Matthew," pp. 477-78.

[1315]See Irena Levinskaya, *The Book of Acts in Its Diaspora Setting*, pp. 36-46.

The third woe 23:16-22

Jesus had dealt with the subject of taking oaths in the Sermon on the Mount (5:33-37). He had called His critics "blind guides" before, too (15:14). Here is a specific example of what Jesus condemned in the second woe (v. 15). By differentiating between what was binding in their oaths and what was not, the Pharisees and teachers of the law were encouraging evasive oaths that amounted to lying. Jesus' point was that people should tell the truth. Jesus condemned His critics for mishandling the Scriptures that they claimed to defend and expound.

Verses 20-22 provide the rationale for 5:33-37. Whenever a Jew took an oath, he connected it in some way with God. All their oaths were therefore binding. Jesus disallowed all evasive oaths and viewed them as untruthful speech.

> "The time is not yet ended when a man will seek to evade some duty on a technicality, or when he will call in the strict letter of the law to avoid doing what the spirit of the law clearly means he ought to do."[1316]

The fourth woe 23:23-24

The Mosaic Law required the Israelites to tithe grain, wine, and oil (Deut. 14:22-29). How far they had to take this was a matter of debate. Jesus did not discourage scrupulous observance of this law. He directed His condemnation to the leaders' failure to observe more important, "weightier" commands in the Law, while dickering over which specific plants, spices, and seeds to tithe. He went back to Micah 6:8 for the three primary duties that God requires: "justice and mercy and faithfulness." He probably chose the gnat (Gr. *qalma*) and the camel (Gr. *gamla*) as examples because of their sizes and their similar sounding names. This is obviously overstatement, since it is literally impossible to swallow a camel.

> "It is usually the case that legalists are sticklers for details, but blind to great principles. This crowd thought nothing of condemning an innocent man, yet they were afraid to enter Pilate's judgment hall lest they be defiled (John 18:28)."[1317]

This judgment constitutes the center of the chiasm and the most important failure of the scribes and Pharisees. They were distorting the will of God as He had revealed it in Scripture (cf. 9:9-13; 12:1-14). This distortion resulted in erroneous doctrine (woes 3 and 5), which resulted in disastrous practice (woes 2 and 6), which resulted in kingdom postponement (woes 1 and 7).

It is important to recognize that Scripture reveals God's will, and that we should never elevate the authority of human interpretations to the level of Scripture itself. However, it is also important to recognize that within Scripture, some commands are more important

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[1316]Barclay, 2:323.

[1317]Wiersbe, 1:85.

than others, and that we should observe these distinctions and not confuse them. This involves wisdom and balance in interpretation and application.

Modern teachers and preachers of God's Word can commit many of the errors that marked the Pharisees. However, we need to remember that the Pharisees did not believe that Jesus was the divine Messiah.

The fifth woe 23:25-26

Jesus condemned characteristic Pharisaic superficiality with this metaphor. The vessels represent the Pharisees and those they taught. The Jews were to be clean vessels that God could use to bring spiritual nourishment and refreshment to others. The Pharisees taught the importance of being ritually clean by observing the dietary and cleansing ordinances of the Law. Nevertheless they neglected internal purity. The Pharisees were erring in their emphases. They put too much importance on minor matters, especially ritual and external matters, and not enough on major matters, especially those involving spiritual reality. The singular "Pharisee" is probably a generic reference to all Pharisees (v. 26).

The sixth woe 23:27-28

The Jerusalem Jews whitewashed grave markers just before Passover to alert pilgrims to their presence.[1318] They did this so these strangers would not unknowingly touch one, become unclean, and therefore be ineligible to participate in the feast.[1319] It was not so much the whitewashing that made them attractive as it was the monuments themselves that were attractive. Jesus compared these "whitewashed" monuments ("tombs") to the Pharisees. Both appeared attractive ("beautiful on the outside"), but both also contaminated people who contacted them (i.e., through their teaching, which "inwardly" was: "full of hypocrisy and lawlessness"). Pharisaic contamination precluded participation in the blessings that Passover anticipated, namely, kingdom blessings.

Jesus' mention of "lawlessness" is significant (v. 28). The Pharisees prided themselves on punctilious observance of the Law (Gr. *nomos*). Ironically, their failure to understand and apply the Law correctly made them lawless (Gr. *anomia*) in Jesus' view. *Anomia* is a general word for wickedness in the New Testament. Jesus implied that the Pharisees' whole approach to the Law was in fact *wicked*.

The seventh woe 23:29-36

23:29-30 By building the "monuments" to "the prophets" and other "righteous" people that their forefathers had martyred, the Pharisees were saying that they would not have killed them if they had been alive then. These construction projects constituted professions of their own spiritual superiority as well as honors for the dead. The Christian who naively

[1318]Edersheim, *The Temple*, pp. 216-17.
[1319]Mishnah *Shekalim* 1:1; Mishnah *Kelim* 1:4; Mishnah *Moed Katan* 1:2; Mishnah *Masser Sheni* 5:1.

thinks he or she would not have committed the mistakes that the early disciples of Jesus did makes the same assumption of superiority.

23:31 "Consequently" refers to the Pharisees' acknowledgment of themselves as "the sons of those who murdered the prophets" (v. 30), not to their tomb-building (v. 29). The Pharisees were the descendants of those who killed the prophets more than they knew, not just physically but also spiritually. They were plotting to kill the greatest Prophet (21:38-39, 46).

23:32 The Old Testament idea behind this verse is that God will tolerate only so much sin. Then He will act in judgment (cf. Gen. 6:3, 7; 15:16; cf. 1 Thess. 2:14-16). Here Jesus meant that Israel had committed many sins—and incurred much guilt—by murdering the prophets. When the Pharisees killed Jesus and His disciples (cf. v. 34), the cup of God's wrath would be full, and He would respond in wrath. The destruction of Jerusalem, and the worldwide dispersion of the Jews—resulted—in A.D. 70.

23:33 Jesus repeated the epithets He had used before to announce His critics' condemnation (cf. 3:7; 12:34). They would perish in "hell" for their failure to accept Jesus (cf. 5:22; 23:15).

> "There is today only one proper Christian use of the woe saying of this pericope. It is found not primarily in the application of the passage to the historical Pharisees, and even less to modern Judaism as a religion, but in the application of the passage to members of the church. Hypocrisy is the real enemy of this pericope, not the scribes, the Pharisees, or the Jews. If, on the model of this pericope, a bitter woe is to be pronounced against anyone today, it must be directed *solely* against hypocrisy in the church (cf. 1 Peter 2:1)."[1320]

23:34 The antecedent of "therefore" (Gr. *dia touto*) is the Jews' execution of the prophets that God had sent them in the past (vv. 29-30; cf. 22:3-10). Because the Jews had rejected the former prophets, Jesus would send them additional "prophets," "wise men," and teachers ("scribes"). These men the Jews would also reject, filling up the measure of their guilt to the full. This is probably a reference to the witnesses that followed Jesus and appealed to the Jews to believe in Him (Acts 3:19-21; 7:2-53; cf. Matt. 5:10-12; 9:37-38; 28:18-20).

Jesus would not yet establish His kingdom, because Israel rejected Him as her Messiah. However, in this verse Jesus revealed that God would punish the generation of Israelites that rejected Him, and the apostles who would

[1320]Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, p. 673.

follow Him, in an additional way. This included the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews from the Promised Land. Jesus clarified these events in the Olivet Discourse that follows (chs. 24—25).

Since the Jews did not have the authority to "crucify" people, we should probably understand Jesus' reference to them crucifying some of these witnesses in a causative sense. They would cause others, notably the Romans, to crucify them (cf. 10:24-25).

23:35 Jesus was not saying that the Jews who rejected Him were responsible for the deaths of all the righteous martyrs throughout biblical history. They simply were the ones who would add the last measure of guilt that would result in the outpouring of God's wrath for all those murders.

> "In the case of the Jews, the limit of misbehavior had been almost reached, and with the murder of the Messiah and His Apostles would be transgressed."[1321]

"Abel" was the first righteous person murdered that Scripture records (Gen. 4:8). We do not know exactly when "Zechariah" the prophet, "the son of Berechiah," died, but he began prophesying as a young man in 520 B.C., and delivered some prophecies in 518 B.C. He may have been the last martyr in Old Testament history.[1322] However, according to Jewish tradition, *this* Zechariah died peacefully at an advanced age.[1323]

Many students of this problem believe that the "Zechariah" to whom Jesus referred was the priest whom the Jews stoned in the temple courtyard (2 Chron. 24:20-22). That man died hundreds of years earlier than Zechariah the prophet. Jesus seems to have been summarizing all the righteous people the Jews had slain throughout Old Testament history. "Zechariah the son of Jehoiada" was the last martyr in the last book of the Hebrew Bible (Chronicles), so Jesus may have been saying the equivalent of: "all the martyrs from Genesis to Revelation." Nevertheless, *that* "Zechariah" was the son of *Jehoiada*, not Berechiah, and Jesus mentioned *Berechiah* as the father of the "Zechariah" He meant (cf. 2 Chron. 24:22). Berechiah may have been the actual father of this martyr, and the writer of 2 Chronicles may have designated him as the son of his famous grandfather, Jehoiada.

It seems less probable that the first Zechariah's father had two separate names: Berechiah and Jehoiada. The fact that Abel's name begins with the letter "A" and Zechariah's name with the letter "Z" is simply coincidence. "Z" is not the last letter in either the Hebrew or the Greek alphabet.

[1321]Plummer, p. 320-21.

[1322]See Gleason L. Archer Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, p. 425.

[1323]*Lives of the Prophets* 15:6.

Perhaps both Zechariahs were martyred between the altar and the temple, which would explain the enigma, but this is not recorded in the Old Testament.

23:36 With a strong assertion of certainty, Jesus predicted that God's judgment would "fall" (v. 35) on the "generation" of Jews that rejected Him. This is Jesus' formal, culminating rejection of Israel for rejecting Him as her Messiah. "These things" refer to the outpouring of God's wrath just revealed (vv. 33, 35). That generation would lose the privilege of witnessing Messiah's establishment of the kingdom, and the privilege of being the first to enter it by faith in Jesus. Instead they would suffer the destruction of their capital city and the scattering of their population from the Promised Land (in A.D. 70). The whole generation would suffer because the leaders acted for the people, and the people did not abandon their leaders to embrace Jesus as their Messiah (cf. Num. 13—14).

> "The perversity of the religious leaders of Israel does not excuse the people of Israel. They were guilty of willfully following blind guides."[1324]

However, notice that it is only *that* "generation" that Jesus so cursed. It was not the entire Jewish race.[1325] God is not finished with Israel (Rom. 11:1). He postponed the kingdom. He did not cancel it.

Jesus' mention of the suffering of the present generation led Him to lament the coming condition of Jerusalem (vv. 37-39).

3. Jesus' lamentation over Jerusalem 23:37-39 (cf. Luke 13:34-35)

This lamentation should help us realize that the judgment Jesus just announced—in such strong language—was not something that delighted Him. It broke His heart. This is also clear in that He personalized the people in Jerusalem in these verses; Jesus spoke of the city as many people ("your children"), not as an impersonal thing (symbolized by the brood of "chicks"). He also spoke here as Israel's Savior (symbolized by the "hen" protecting "her chicks under her wings"), not just a prophet but God Himself. These three verses are Jesus' last public words to the Israelite multitudes that the evangelists recorded.

> "Jesus' lament over Jerusalem revealed that He made a legitimate offer of the kingdom to Israel and that it was His desired will that they would respond. As a result of their having rejected such a contingent offer, their house was destroyed. . . . The time from His rejection to His return is the

[1324]Toussaint, *Behold the . . .*, p. 263.

[1325]For defense of the view that "this generation" refers to wicked people of all time, see Susan M. Rieske, "What Is the Meaning of 'This Generation' in Matthew 23:36?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 165:658 (April-June 2008):209-26.

> 'mystery' phase of the kingdom, as described in Matthew 13. The final phase of that period is outlined in chapters 24—25."[1326]

Most dispensationalists view the "kingdom" as having two phases. Normative (traditional) dispensationalists often refer to the present inter-advent age as the mystery phase of the kingdom, and the future millennial age as the messianic kingdom. Progressive dispensationalists refer to the present inter-advent age as the "already" phase of the messianic kingdom, and the future millennial age as the "not yet" phase of the messianic kingdom. A few dispensationalists deny any present phase of the kingdom.[1327]

23:37 "Jerusalem" was also called the "City of David" and the "City of Peace." It was the city God had chosen: to reveal Himself to Israel through the temple; and to be the capital of His kingdom on earth. However, *It* or *She* (personified) had murdered the prophets God had sent to His people with His messages. Stoning was the penalty for the worst crimes in Israel, including false prophecy. The people had used this form of execution on those who faithfully brought God's Word to them. Jesus' words recall His ancestor David's sorrow over the death of his son Absalom (2 Sam. 18:33; 19:4). The repetition of "Jerusalem" reveals the strong emotion that Jesus felt (cf. Luke 10:41; Acts 9:4).

Many times during His ministry, Jesus had sought to gather and shelter Jerusalem, used here by synecdoche to represent the whole nation. Synecdoche is a figure of speech in which one part stands for the whole or the whole stands for one of its parts. He wanted the people to take refuge in Him as chicks do under their mother hen, physically, and as God's people had done under God's care, spiritually (cf. Deut. 32:11; Ps. 17:8; 36:7; 91:4; Jer. 48:40). In spite of God's loving initiatives, Israel had willfully rejected Him—repeatedly. Jesus' identification with God is very clear in this verse (cf. Ezek. 18:32). Jeremiah prefigured Jesus, as he sadly described Jerusalem's destruction by the Babylonians in the Book of Lamentations.

23:38 The "house" in view is probably the temple (cf. 1 Kings 9:7-8). Other views are that it refers to the city, the Davidic dynasty, the nation, or all of the above. Jesus had formerly claimed the temple as His own house (5:35; 17:25-26; 21:12-16). Now He spoke of it as their ("your") "house," the house of prayer that they had converted into a den of thieves (21:13). Jesus and God would leave the temple "desolate" by removing Jesus' presence from it. Instead of it becoming the focal point of worship during the messianic kingdom, it would be devoid of Immanuel—"God with us"—until He returns to it (1:23; cf. Jer. 12:7; 22:5; Ezek. 43:1-5). Instead of bringing promised rest and blessing to Israel, Messiah would leave her desolate, uninhabited.

[1326]Bailey, in *The New* . . ., p. 49.

[1327]E.g., Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., pp. 175-80.

23:39 Jesus quoted Psalm 118:26 (cf. 21:9). He was referring to His return to the temple in power and great glory, when He returns at His Second Coming, not to some return to the temple before His ascension. The negative is very strong in the Greek text (*ou me*). When He returns, all will acknowledge Him instead of rejecting Him (cf. Zech. 12:10). Moreover, He will come in judgment (cf. 24:30-31; Phil. 2:9-11; Rev. 1:7).

> "It is extremely important for one to note that Christ's rejection of Israel is not an eternal one. The word 'until' (*eos*) of verse thirty-nine together with the following statement affirms the fact that Christ will come again to a repentant nation to establish the promised millennial kingdom."[1328]

> "Obviously, the kingdom is going to be postponed. There are many who object to that teaching, but to do that, they must object to the language of our Lord [in this verse]."[1329]

Having said His good-bye to the temple, Jesus left its courtyard where He had spent a busy Wednesday teaching (21:18—23:46).

> "Surprisingly, Jesus' teaching occasions less conflict in Matthew's story than one would expect. The reason is that the religious leaders are the recipients of none of the great discourses of Jesus [chs. 5—7; 10; 13; 18; 24—25], and even Jesus' speech of woes is not delivered to the scribes and Pharisees but to the disciples and the crowds (chap. 23). It is in certain of the debates Jesus has with the religious leaders that his teaching generates conflict."[1330]

E. THE KING'S REVELATIONS CONCERNING THE FUTURE CHS. 24—25

We now come to the fifth and final major discourse in Matthew's Gospel, the Olivet Discourse. Its theme is the kingdom, specifically, events leading up to the establishment of the messianic kingdom.

1. The setting of these revelations 24:1-3 (cf. Mark 13:1-4; Luke 21:5-7)

24:1 The connective "and" (NASB, Gr. *kai*) ties what follows to Jesus' preceding denunciation of the generation of Jews that rejected Him and the divine judgment that would follow (23:36-39). However, the "apocalyptic" or "eschatological" discourse that He proceeded to give was not merely an extension of the address in chapter 23. This is clear because

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[1328]Ibid., pp. 265-66. Cf. Lowery, "Evidence from . . .," p. 180.

[1329]McGee, 4:123.

[1330]Kingsbury, *Matthew as* . . ., p. 63.

the setting, audience, and major themes changed. There is some continuity of subject matter, but not enough to justify viewing chapters 23—25 as one discourse.

Jesus and His disciples were about to leave the temple complex (Gr. *hieron*) and proceed east toward Bethany, where Jesus was spending His nights during the Passover season. However, before they left the temple area, the disciples commented to Jesus about the magnificent temple buildings (cf. Mark 13:1; Luke 21:5).[1331]

> "They still focus on the temple, on which Jesus has pronounced doom, since the true center of the relation between God and man has shifted to himself. In chapter 23 Jesus has already insisted that what Israel does with him, not the temple, determines the fate of the temple and of Israel nationally."[1332]

24:2 "All these things," which Jesus pointed out to the disciples, were the buildings that they had just pointed out to Him. He then prefaced an important revelation with a characteristic emphatic introduction: "Truly I say to you," or "I tell you the truth." Jesus forecast the destruction of the temple complex, that Herod the Great had begun building about 20 B.C., which was not complete until A.D. 64.[1333] He used Old Testament language (Jer. 26:6, 18; Mic. 3:12; cf. 23:38; 26:61; Luke 23:28-31).

> "This statement is given with great force because of the aorist passive subjunctive of the verb 'to leave' with the double negative *ou me* (translated 'not')."[1334]

> "The temple was made of huge stones, some of them many tons in size, carved out in the stone quarries underneath the city of Jerusalem. Such large stones could be dislodged only through deliberate force. The sad fulfillment was to come in A.D. 70, only six years after the temple was completed, when the Roman soldiers deliberately destroyed the temple, prying off stones one by one and casting them into the valley below."[1335]

[1331]See Josephus, *Antiquities of* . . ., 15:11:1-7; idem, *The Wars* . . ., 1:21:1, and Finegan, pp. 322-27, for their descriptions of the temple.

[1332]Carson, "Matthew," p. 496.

[1333]See Josephus, *The Wars* . . ., 5:4 and 5, for descriptions of Jerusalem and the temple just before the Romans destroyed them.

[1334]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 268.

[1335]Walvoord, *Matthew:* . . ., p. 180.

> ". . . the Roman destruction of Herod's temple in A.D. 70 was so complete that all that now remains is part of the substructure of the temple precincts, not of the temple buildings themselves."[1336]
>
> ". . . the precise location of the sanctuary is still unknown today."[1337]
>
> "It may be, as Jewish tradition has it, that ever since the Babylonish captivity the 'Ark of the Covenant' lies buried and concealed underneath the wood-court at the north-eastern angle of the Court of the Women."[1338]

24:3 The "Mount of Olives" stands directly east of the temple area, on the eastern side of the Kidron Valley that separates Mt. Olivet from Mt. Zion. The site of this discourse has given it its name: the Olivet Discourse. It was an appropriate place for Jesus to give a discourse dealing with His return. The Mount of Olives is where Zechariah predicted that Messiah would stand to judge the nations and establish His kingdom (Zech. 14:4). This prophecy is foundational to the discourse that follows.

The word "privately," as Matthew and Mark used it, set the disciples apart from the crowds. Mark wrote that Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Jesus the question (Mark 13:3). Whether He gave the answer only to them, which seems improbable, or to all "the disciples," He did not give it to the multitudes. This was further revelation for their believing ears only. Luke did not mention the disciples as the recipients of this teaching, but implied that a larger audience heard it (Luke 21:5-7). However, this appears to have been deliberate by Luke, to show that this teaching had significance for all the people.

The disciples probably asked Jesus two questions, though some interpreters believe that they asked only one.

> "To the disciples, the devastation of the city and the coming of the Messiah were part of one event. The disciple's [*sic*] questions should probably be taken as one question, though the fulfillment would come in stages."[1339]

The first question was, "When will these things be?" The second question had two parts, as is clear from the Greek construction of the sentence. It linked two nouns, "coming" (Gr. *parousias*) and "end" (Gr. *synteleias*),

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[1336]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 888.
[1337]*The Nelson . . .*, p. 1620.
[1338]Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 60.
[1339]*The Nelson . . .*, p. 1620.

with a single article, "the" (Gr. *to*), and the conjunction "and" (Gr. *kai*). The second question was, "What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" By asking the question this way, we know that the disciples believed Jesus' coming (23:39) would end the present age and introduce the messianic age.[1340] The first question dealt with the time of the destruction of the temple. The second one dealt with the sign that would signal Jesus' Second Coming and the end of the age.

What did the disciples mean when they asked Jesus about the sign of His coming? This is the first occurrence of *parousia* ("coming") in Matthew's Gospel (cf. vv. 27, 37, 39). It appears frequently in the rest of the New Testament, but only here in the Gospels. In classical non-biblical Greek, this word meant "presence," and later "arrival" or "coming," the first stage of being present.[1341]

> "The interesting thing about it is that it is the regular word for the arrival of a governor into his province, or for the coming of a king to his subjects. It regularly describes a coming in authority and in power."[1342]

In the New Testament, *parousia* does not always have eschatological overtones (e.g., 2 Cor. 7:6; 10:10). In the second and third centuries A.D., writers used it to describe the visit of a king or other important official.[1343] In view of Jesus' recent statement that the Israelites would not see Him again until they would say, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord," it was undoubtedly to *that* coming that the disciples referred (23:39). They wanted to know when He would return to the temple having been accepted, rather than rejected by the nation. Specifically, they wanted to know what would signal His return, what would be the harbinger of His advent.

What did they mean by "the end of the age?" Jesus had used this phrase before (13:39, 40, 49; cf. 28:20). By "the end of the age" Jesus meant the end of the present age that will consummate in His Second Coming and a judgment of living unbelievers (cf. Jer. 29:22; 51:33; Dan. 3:6; Hos. 6:11; Joel 3:13; Zeph. 1:3). This will occur just before the messianic kingdom begins. The disciples used the phrase "the end of the age" as Jesus and the Old Testament prophets spoke of it. They understood that Jesus meant the present age, the one before the messianic age began, since in their question they associated it with Jesus' return to the temple.

[1340]See Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 2:434-45, for an explanation of the Jewish expectation connected with the advent of the Messiah.

[1341]Abbott-Smith, p. 347.

[1342]Barclay, 2:345.

[1343]M'Neile, p. 345.

Both of the disciples' questions, occurring as they did together, suggest that the disciples associated the destruction of the temple with Jesus' return to it and the end of the present age.[1344] The Old Testament taught that several eschatological events would happen in the following order. First, Jerusalem would suffer destruction (Zech. 14:1-2; cf. Matt. 24:2). Second, Messiah would come and end the present age (Zech. 14:3-8; cf. Matt. 23:39). Third, Messiah would set up His kingdom (Zech. 14:3-11). The disciples wanted to know when in the future the destruction of the temple, Jesus' return to it, and the end of the present age would occur. They probably did not ask Him when He would inaugurate His kingdom, because they knew this would happen right after He returned to the temple and ended the present age.

> "Matthew's gospel does not answer the first question, which relates to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. This is given more in detail in Luke, while Matthew and Mark answer the second and third questions, which actually refer to Christ's coming and the end of the age as one and the same event. Matthew's account of the Olivet discourse records that portion of Christ's answer that relates to His future kingdom and how it will be brought in, which is one of the major purposes of the gospel."[1345]

2. Jesus' warning about deception 24:4-6 (cf. Mark 13:5-7; Luke 21:8-9)

Jesus began the Olivet Discourse by warning His disciples about the possibility of their concluding wrongly that He had returned or was just about to return. Kingsbury divided this speech on the "last times" as follows: (I) On Understanding Aright the Signs of the End (24:4-35); (II) On Being on the Alert for Jesus' Coming at the Consummation of the Age (24:36—25:30); and (III) On the Second Coming of Jesus and the Final Judgment (25:31-46).[1346]

24:4-5 The destruction of Jerusalem, and other similar catastrophes, would not indicate that Messiah's coming and the end of the present age were just around the corner—as Zechariah's prophecy seemed to indicate. The future appearance of people who claimed to be the Messiah should not deceive the disciples into concluding that He had arrived, either. Those who would "come in" Messiah's "name" refers to those who would come claiming to be Messiah, not those who would come as Jesus' representatives.

[1344]Bruce, "The Synoptic . . .," 1:289.
[1345]Walvoord, *Matthew: . . .*, p. 182.
[1346]Kingsbury, *Matthew as . . .*, p. 112.

24:6 The presence of "wars and rumors of wars" should likewise not mislead the disciples into thinking that the prophesied destruction of Jerusalem was near (cf. Rev. 6:3-4). Wars and rumors of wars would come, but they would not necessarily be the fulfillment of the prophecies about Messiah's destroying His enemies when He returns (Zech. 14:2-5). The disciples should not let the presence of wars and rumors of wars deceive them into thinking that Messiah's return to reign was imminent.

> "Verses 4-6 may describe the first part of Daniel's seventieth week (see Dan. 9:25-27), but possibly they present a general picture of the present age."[1347]

3. Jesus' general description of the future 24:7-14 (cf. Mark 13:8-13; Luke 21:10-19)

Jesus proceeded to give His disciples a general picture of conditions just before He will return to end the present age and inaugurate His kingdom.

24:7-8 Wars, "famines," and "earthquakes" will anticipate the end of the present age (cf. Rev. 6:1-8; 8:5-13; 9:13-21; 16:2-21).

> "The horrors described are not local disturbances, but are spread over the known world; nations and kingdoms are in hostility with one another . . ."[1348]

The Jews believed that a seven-year period of time will immediately precede Messiah's coming to rule the world.

> "Our Rabbis taught: In the seven-year cycle at the end of which the son of David will come . . . at the conclusion of the septennate the son of David will come."[1349]

> "The idea became entrenched that the coming of the Messiah will be preceded by greatly increased suffering . . . This will last seven years. And then, unexpectedly, the Messiah will come."[1350]

> "A prominent feature of Jewish eschatology, as represented especially by the rabbinic literature, was the time of trouble preceding Messiah's coming. It was called 'the birth pangs of the Messiah,' sometimes more briefly translated as 'the Messianic woes.'"[1351]

[1347] *The Nelson . . .*, p. 1621.
[1348] M'Neile, p. 346.
[1349] *The Babylonian Talmud*, p. 654.
[1350] Raphael Patai, *The Messianic Texts*, pp. 95-96.
[1351] Millar Burrows, *Burrows on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, pp. 343-44.

The phrase "birth pains" had its origin in Old Testament passages that describe the period of distress preceding the messianic age, namely, the Tribulation (Isa. 13:8; 26:17; Jer. 4:31; 6:24; Mic. 4:9-10; cf. 1 Thess. 5:3).

> "'Birth pangs' are a favorite metaphor for the tribulations God's judgment brings upon man."[1352]

The "birth pangs" Jesus spoke about here will be a period seven years long immediately before Messiah returns to establish His kingdom.[1353] This corresponds to "Daniel's seventieth week" (Dan. 9:26-27). The beginning of "birth pangs" is the beginning of this Tribulation. Some interpreters believed verses 4-8 describe the first half of the Tribulation and verses 9-14 the last half.[1354] I think this is correct. Others believed verses 4-14 describe the beginning of the Tribulation, verses 15-22, the middle of it, and verses 23-44 the end of it.[1355]

> "Just as the first labor pangs of a pregnant woman indicate the nearness of the birth of a child, so these great signs anticipate the end of the age and the beginning of a new one."[1356]

The 70th Week of Daniel 9 Seven Years The Tribulation	
	Great Tribulation Time of Jacob's Trouble
Beginning of Birth Pangs	Hard-Labor Birth Pangs
First Half	Second Half

"The effect of these verses [6-8], then, is not to curb enthusiasm for the Lord's return but to warn against false claimants and an expectation of a premature return based on misconstrued signs."[1357]

> "A comparison of Christ's description of the beginning of birth pangs in Matthew 24:5-7 with the first four seals of

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[1352]*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, s.v. "Chebel," by H. J. Fabry, 4:191.
[1353]See Showers, pp. 23-24.
[1354]E.g., Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom* . . ., pp. 250-52; and Bailey, in *The New* . . ., pp. 49-50.
[1355]E.g., Wiersbe, 1:87-89.
[1356]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 271.
[1357]Carson, "Matthew," p. 498.

Revelation 6:1-8 indicates that the beginning of birth pangs and the first four seals are the same thing.

"Beginning of birth pangs (Mt. 24)	**First Four seals (Rev. 6)**
1. False messiahs who will mislead many (v. 5)	1. First seal: Rider on white horse, a false messiah (v. 2)
2. Wars, rumors of wars, nation rising against nation (vv. 6-7)	2. Second seal: Rider on red horse takes away peace from earth (vv. 3-4)
3. Famines (v. 7)	3. Third Seal: Rider on black horse holds balances, represents famine (vv. 5-6)
4. Death through famine, pestilences, and earthquakes (v. 7)	4. Fourth seal: Rider on pale horse, represents death through famine, pestilence, and wild beasts (vv. 7-8)

> "In addition, immediately after His description of the beginning of birth pangs, Christ referred to the killing of those associated with Him (Mt. 24:9). Parallel to this, the fifth seal refers to people killed because of their testimony (Rev. 6:9-11)."[1358]

The sixth seal seems also to fall within this period.

24:9-13 In the context, "all these things" (v. 8) described in these verses, will happen during the period of "birth pains," namely, during the Tribulation. However, what follows seems to locate these events in the last half of the Tribulation. During the "birth pains," the disciples would experience persecution and martyrdom. The "you" extends beyond Jesus' immediate disciples, and includes disciples living in the future when these things will happen. Jesus was again speaking beyond His immediate audience.

The word "tribulation" or "persecuted" (Gr. *thlipsis*, or "distress") is a key word in this passage, occurring three times (vv. 9, 21, 29; cf. 13:21). These are all the occurrences of the word in Matthew's Gospel. The outstanding characteristic of this time will be *thlipsis*. Whereas followers of Christ have experienced persecution throughout history, this will be the time of their greatest persecution (cf. v. 21). This persecution will lead many disciples to turn away from the faith (cf. Dan. 11:35).[1359] They will even "hate one another" (v. 10).

[1358]Showers, p. 25.

[1359]For other uses of the Greek word *skandalisthesontas*, "to turn away from," in Matthew, see 5:29; 13:21, 57.

The deceiving influence of "false prophets," as well as the persecution the disciples will experience, will cause many to turn from the faith (to "fall away," v. 10; cf. 7:15-23; 13:21). Those disciples who hate one another will do so because wickedness will abound, and the "love" of many of them (for the Savior, the truth, and or one another) "will grow cold" (v. 12).

Though the term "disciple" is a broader one than "believer," it seems clear that Jesus meant some believers would be deceived, turn from the faith, and even hate other believers. There is no other revelation in Scripture that would preclude this interpretation, and much that warns believers about this possibility (e.g., 1 Tim. 4; 2 Tim. 3). There is much revelation, however, that precludes the view that those who will turn from the faith will lose their salvation (e.g., John 10:28-29; Rom. 8:31-39).

In contrast to those who prove unfaithful, those who persevere and endure the temptations of that period will experience deliverance (v. 13). Their deliverance, unfortunately referred to as being "saved" by the majority of the English translations, will happen when and because Messiah will return at "the end" of the Tribulation. Jesus did not mean that perseverance results in eternal salvation. Only faith in Him does that. He will end the persecution of His disciples and thereby deliver them from this distress. Another view is that "the end" refers to the end of the faithful disciple's life.[1360] However, the main subject of the promise seems to be the time (period) of testing, not the disciple's life.

> "It is a promise that those who are faithful to the end, in the midst of the tribulation persecutions of Antichrist, will be abundantly rewarded with joint rulership with Christ in His coming kingdom."[1361]

24:14 Another characteristic of this second half of the Tribulation period, is that during those years, the good news ("gospel") concerning the coming of the messianic kingdom will reach the ears of virtually everyone on earth. "And" ties this verse into the period in view in verses 9-13. The "gospel of the kingdom" is the same good news that John the Baptist, Jesus, and the disciples had preached, namely, that the kingdom was imminent (3:2; 4:17).

Later revelation informs us that the 144,000 Jewish missionaries, whom God will protect during the Tribulation, will provide the leadership in this worldwide gospel proclamation (Rev. 7:1-8; 14:1-5). Undoubtedly their message will be similar to the message that John, Jesus, and the original disciples preached. They preached that people should get ready for the

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[1360]See I. Howard Marshall, *Kept by the Power of God*, p. 74.

[1361]Dillow, p. 384.

inauguration of the messianic kingdom by believing in the King: Jesus. Undoubtedly, too, some people will believe and others will not.

> "For those who accept the message, entrance into the kingdom awaits. But eternal damnation accrues to those who refuse the gospel of the kingdom."[1362]

> "This is not exactly the same message the church is proclaiming today. The message preached today in the Church Age and the message proclaimed in the Tribulation period calls for turning to the Savior for salvation. However, in the Tribulation the message will stress the coming kingdom, and those who then turn to the Savior for salvation will be allowed entrance into the kingdom."[1363]

> "This verse does not teach that the Gospel of God's grace must be spread to every nation today before Jesus can return for His church. It is the Lord's return *at the end of the age* that is in view here."[1364]

In answering the disciples' second question, Jesus explained that there would be many signs of His coming and the end of the present age. Wars, rumors of wars, famines, and earthquakes would be relatively common occurrences (vv. 6-8). The signs would include the worldwide persecution of His disciples, the apostasy of some, the success of false prophets, and increased lawlessness (wickedness). The love of some disciples would cool, but others would persevere faithfully as the gospel would extend to every part of the earth (vv. 9-14). Then the end (of the Tribulation) would come (v. 14; cf. v. 3).

> "In general, these signs have been at least partially fulfilled in the present age and have characterized the period between the first and second coming of Christ."[1365]

However, we should expect complete fulfillment in the future. Revelation 6—18 gives further information concerning this time.

4. The abomination of desolation 24:15-22 (cf. Mark 13:14-20)

Having given a general description of conditions preceding His return and the end of the present age, Jesus next described one particular event that would be the greatest sign of all. Some interpreters see the last half of the Tribulation beginning to be described here.[1366]

[1362]Toussaint, *Behold the . . .*, p. 272.
[1363]Barbieri, p. 77.
[1364]Wiersbe, 1:87.
[1365]Walvoord, *Matthew: . . .*, p. 183.
[1366]E.g., Kent, "The Gospel . . .," p. 972.

24:15 "Therefore" or "So" (Gr. *oun*) ties this pericope very closely to the preceding one. It does not indicate, however, that what follows in the text will follow chronologically what Jesus just finished describing, namely the end of the Tribulation. In view of Daniel's chronology, it seems to occur in the middle of the seven-year Tribulation.

The "abomination of desolation," or "the abomination characterized by desolation," is a term Daniel used in Daniel 8:13; 9:27; 11:31; and 12:11. It describes something that—because of its abominable character—causes the godly to desert the temple on its account.[1367] In Daniel 11:31, the prophet referred to Antiochus Epiphanes as an abomination that caused desolation. Antiochus proved to be this *abomination* when he erected an altar to Zeus over the brazen altar in Jerusalem, and proceeded to offer a swine on it.

In the Bible, the Greek word translated "abomination" (*bdeluyma*) describes something particularly detestable to God that He rejects.[1368] It often refers to heathen gods and the articles connected with idolatry.[1369] In the contexts of Daniel's references it designates an idol set up in the temple.

Jesus urged the reader of Daniel's references to the abomination of desolation, particularly the ones dealing with a future abomination of desolation (Dan. 9:27; 12:11), to understand their true meaning. Jesus further stressed the importance and validity of these prophecies by referring to Daniel as "the prophet." Matthew's inclusion of the phrases "the abomination of desolation," which Luke omitted, and "the holy place," which Mark and Luke omitted, were appropriate in view of his Jewish audience.

Daniel 9:24-27 predicted that from the time someone issued a decree allowing the Jews to rebuild Jerusalem until the coming of Israel's Messiah, 69 weeks (lit. sevens) of years would elapse. This 483-year period began when King Artaxerxes issued his decree, and it ended when Jesus entered Jerusalem in the Triumphal Entry (21:8-11). Because Israel refused to accept Jesus as her King, the events that Daniel prophesied to happen in the seventieth week (i.e., the remaining seven years in his 70-week prophecy) would not follow immediately.

What Daniel predicted will happen in those seven years will be a unique national distress for Israel (Dan. 12:1; cf. Jer. 30:7). It will commence when a wicked ruler (Antichrist) signs a covenant with Israel (Dan. 9:27). After three and a half years, the ruler would break the covenant and

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[1367]C. E. B. Cranfield, "St. Mark 13," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 6 (July 1953):298-99.

[1368]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 273.

[1369]Cranfield, p. 298.

terminate worship in the temple. He would end temple worship by setting up an abominable idol there (cf. 2 Thess. 2:4; Rev. 13:14-15).

Some interpreters have concluded that we should not take Daniel's prophecy of the seventieth week literally and or as still future. Some of them believe the abomination of desolation refers to the Zealots' conduct in the temple before the Romans destroyed it in A.D. 70.[1370] This view seems unlikely since the Zealots did not introduce idolatry into the temple. This view seems to water down the force of "abomination."

Another view is that when the Romans brought their standards bearing the image of Caesar into the temple and offered sacrifices to their gods they set up the abomination that Daniel predicted.[1371] The main problem with this view is that Jesus told the Jews living in Jerusalem and Judea to flee when the abomination appeared in the temple (vv. 16-20). However, when the Romans finally desecrated the temple in A.D. 70, most of the Jews had already left Jerusalem and Judea. Thus Jesus' warning would have been meaningless.

> ". . . there is reasonably good tradition that Christians abandoned the city, perhaps in A.D. 68, about halfway through the siege."[1372]

There are several reasons why the abomination of desolation must be a future event in God's eschatological program. First, verse 15 is in a context of verses that describes events that have not yet happened (vv. 14-21; cf. v. 29). Second, Daniel's seventieth week, with its unique trouble, has not yet happened. Third, Mark described Jesus saying that the abomination of desolation would stand (masculine participle *estekota*) *as a person who set himself up as God* in the temple (Mark 13:14). This has not happened since Jesus made this prophecy. Fourth, other later revelation points to the future Antichrist as the abomination of desolation (2 Thess. 2:3-4; Rev. 13:11-18).[1373]

> "An interesting parenthesis occurs at the end of Matthew 24:15—'whoso readeth, let him understand.' This statement indicates that what Jesus was teaching would have greater significance for people reading Matthew's Gospel in the latter days."[1374]

[1370]E.g., Alford, 1:239; and Lenski, p. 938.

[1371]E.g., J. Marcellus Kik, *Matthew Twenty-Four, An Exposition*, p. 45; Carson, "Matthew," p. 500; Morison, pp. 467-68; Shepard, p. 517; Tasker, p. 229; and Vincent, 1:128.

[1372]Carson, "Matthew," p. 501.

[1373]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., pp. 274-75.

[1374]Wiersbe, 1:88.

24:16-20 When the abomination of desolation appears, the Jews living in Jerusalem and Judea should "flee" immediately (cf. Luke 17:31; Rev. 12:14). His influence would extend far beyond Jerusalem. They must seek refuge in places ("mountains") where they can escape his persecution. They must not even take time to retrieve possessions from their houses as they flee. It will be like when a house is on fire: the residents should escape to save their lives, giving no thought to possessions left behind (cf. Gen. 19:17). "Pregnant" women and "nursing" mothers will have a hard time because their physical conditions will limit their mobility. Weather would make flight harder in the "winter," and observant Jews would seek to discourage travel "on" the "Sabbath."

When the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, many of the Christians fled and hid in the clefts of Petra. But the final fulfillment of this prophecy lies in the future. Then everyone in "Judea" will have to "flee to the mountains."

24:21 Jesus explained the reason for such hasty retreat. "A tribulation" much greater than any the world has ever seen or ever will see would be about to break on the Jews. This description fits the Old Testament previews of the Great Tribulation: the last three and a half years of the Tribulation (Rev. 11:2; 13:5).

Again, the term "Tribulation" refers to the future seven-year period of distress, Daniel's seventieth week (Jer. 30:7; Dan. 9:26). The term "Great Tribulation" refers to the last half, or the second "three and one-half years" of that seven-year period (Matt. 24:15-22), which Jeremiah called "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:6-7). During the first half of the Tribulation, Israel will enjoy the protection of Antichrist's covenant (Dan. 9:27), but during the second half, after Antichrist breaks his covenant with Israel, she will experience unprecedented persecution (Dan. 9:27).

The description in this verse is not a fitting description of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, as bad as that was. Certainly the Nazi holocaust in which an estimated six million Jews perished, and other purges in which added multitudes have died, have been worse times than the destruction of Jerusalem. Yet the Great Tribulation will be the worst of all times for the Jews. The coming distress will be unprecedented in its suffering (cf. Dan. 12:1; Rev. 7:14).

> "I hear people today talking about the church going through the Tribulation, and they don't seem to realize how severe it will be. In fact, some folk say that we are in the Great Tribulation at the present time! Well, things are bad in our day, I'll grant that, but this period can be matched with many other periods in history. When the Great Tribulation

> gets here, there will be nothing to match it in the past or in the future [cf. the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments of the Book of Revelation, which describe what will happen in more detail]."[1375]
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> "In a century that has seen two world wars, now lives under the threat of extinction by nuclear holocaust, and has had more Christian martyrs than in all the previous nineteen centuries put together, Jesus' prediction does not seem farfetched. But the age will not run its course; it will be cut short."[1376]

24:22 Unless God ends (Gr. *ekolobothesan*, "to terminate or cut off") the Tribulation, no living thing will remain alive.

> "This does not mean that the period will be less than three-and-a-half years, but that it will be definitely terminated suddenly by the second coming of Christ."[1377]

The antecedent of "those days" is the days Jesus just described in verses 15-21: the days of the Tribulation. Jesus will shorten them a little out of compassion. Later revelation of this period in the Book of Revelation helps us appreciate the truth of Jesus' statement here (cf. Rev. 6—18). Not just people, but all forms of life (Gr. *pasa sarx*, lit. "all flesh") will experience drastic cutbacks during the Great Tribulation (cf. Rev. 6:7-8; 16:13-21). Antichrist will target the Jews and then Jews who believe in Jesus particularly (Rev. 12:13-17), but great multitudes of people will perish because of the distress that he brings. The "elect" are believers (cf. 20:16; 22:14; 24:22, 24, 31).

Many interpreters, however, take this verse as describing the present age rather than a future tribulation.[1378] This is the typical amillenarian and postmillenarian interpretation, though some premillenarians, such as Carson, also hold it. Weighing the distress of the present age against that of the Tribulation, I must conclude that verse 22 and this whole passage describes the future Tribulation, not the present age.

> "This entire paragraph [vv. 15-22] relates only to Jews, for no Christian believer would worry about breaking a Sabbath law."[1379]

[1375]McGee, 4:129.
[1376]Carson, "Matthew," pp. 502-3.
[1377]Walvoord, *Matthew: . . .*, p. 188. Cf. Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom . . .*, p. 253; and Showers, pp. 50-54.
[1378]E.g., Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 696-707.
[1379]Wiersbe, 1:88.

5. The second coming of the King 24:23-31 (cf. Mark 13:21-27; Luke 21:25-28)

Jesus proceeded to explain to His disciples that His coming would terminate the Tribulation.

24:23-24 "Then" means "at that time," namely, at the end of the Tribulation (v. 2). Jesus warned the disciples about people who would claim that Messiah had returned toward the end of the Tribulation, before He actually would return. People professing to be the Messiah ("false christs"), and others claiming to be prophets ("false prophets"), "will arise" and "mislead" many people, because of their ability to perform impressive miracles (cf. v. 11; 7:21-23; 16:1; Luke 17:23-24; Rev. 13:15). Evidently Satan will enable them to perform these "great signs and wonders."

> "While false Christs and false prophets have always been in evidence, they will be especially prominent at the end of the age in Satan's final attempt to turn people from faith in Christ."[1380]

"If possible" (Gr. *ei dynaton*, v. 24) means the false prophets will hope to mislead the elect living in the Tribulation. It does not mean that the elect will inevitably remain true to the faith. Jesus had already said that some of His disciples would abandon the truth under persecution (vv. 10-11; cf. 26:31). However, the elect will not lose their salvation.

24:25 Jesus reminded His disciples that He had forewarned them about these impostors (cf. Mark 13:1-37; Luke 21:5-36). They would need to be very careful so they will not dupe them.

The disciples Jesus addressed undoubtedly thought they would be alive when these things happened. However, that was not to be the case, and Jesus said nothing to mislead them. He was teaching disciples of His in the years to come, as well as those sitting in His presence in this discourse, and in His other discourses.

24:26-27 Jesus' point in these verses was that His coming would be obvious to all, rather than obscure. When He comes, everyone will know it. Consequently, the disciples would not need to fear missing the event, and they should not react to every rumor that announced it was happening. His coming will be as obvious as a flash of "lightning" that covers the heavens (Zech. 9:14). It will be a public event, not something private that only the disciples or some small group would witness.

[1380]Walvoord, *Matthew:* . . ., p. 189.

24:28 This appears to have been a well-known proverbial saying (cf. Luke 17:37; Job 39:30). One view of its meaning is that Jesus meant that the false Messiahs and the false prophets were similar to vultures (vv. 24, 26). They would be trying to pick the corpse of a dead Israel clean, for their own advantage, when Jesus returned.[1381] This is a possibility in view of the context. Another view is that the corpse refers to Christ, and the vultures are God's children gathered to feed on Him.[1382] However, the idea of feeding on Christ is foreign to the context, and the comparison of Him to carrion is unappealing. Other interpreters take Jesus' illustration to mean "signs as visible and indicative [as vultures gathering to a carcass] will herald the reality of the Parousia."[1383] Another writer paraphrased the verse as follows to give another interpretation.

> ". . . just as when life has abandoned a body, and it becomes a corpse, the vultures immediately swoop down upon it; so when the world has become rotten with evil, the Son of Man and His angels will come to execute the divine judgment."[1384]

The Greek word translated "vultures," *aetoi*, also means "eagles," but eagles rarely search out carrion. Still another view is that the figure emphasizes the swiftness of Messiah's coming.[1385] However, the repulsive character of vultures and carrion suggest more than just a swift coming. Furthermore, vultures do not always arrive and devour carrion swiftly. The view that appeals most to me is that the world at the end of the Tribulation period is the corpse, and the vultures represent Jesus and His angelic army (cf. Rev. 19:17-19). Where moral corruption exists, divine judgment falls (cf. Job 39:27-30).[1386] Jesus' point was that there will be terrible carnage when He comes in judgment.

24:29 This verse and the following two give a positive description of Messiah's coming. "But" (NASB, Gr. *de*) introduces the contrast from the negative warning that preceded. At the very end of the Tribulation there will be signs in the sky. "The sun" and "the moon" will darken and "the stars will fall from the sky" (Isa. 13:9-10; 34:4; Ezek. 32:7; Joel 2:31; 3:15; Amos 8:9; Hag. 2:6; Zech. 14:6; Rev. 6:12-14). This is probably the language of appearance. The "powers of the heavens" (NASB) or the "heavenly bodies" (NIV) probably is a collective reference to the sun, moon, and

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[1381]Lenski, p. 946; Toussaint, *Behold the . . .*, p. 276; Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom . . .*, p. 254.
[1382]Calvin, *Commentary on . . .*, 3:143-44.
[1383]Hill, p. 322.
[1384]Levertoff, p. 79. Cf. McGee, 4:130; Walvoord, *Matthew: . . .*, p. 190.
[1385]T. W. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus*, p. 147.
[1386]*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 1034.

stars.[1387] However, the descriptions of the Tribulation in the Book of Revelation suggest that God may fulfill these predictions literally.

24:30 What is "the sign of the Son of Man"? One very old interpretation is that it is a display of the cross in the sky.[1388] This view has seemed fanciful to most interpreters. A popular view is that it will be a light and or a cloud, similar to or perhaps identical with the Shekinah, that will surround Jesus when He comes.[1389] This seems most probable to me, since Jesus evidently was referring to Daniel 7:13 when He said these words. Furthermore, when Jesus ascended to heaven in a cloud, an angel told His disciples that He would return the same way (Acts 1:11). The clouds symbolize the heavenly origin and character of the King (cf. 17:5).[1390] A third view is that the sign will be Christ *Himself*.[1391] In this case, the appearance of Christ would signify coming judgment. This may be the correct view.

Zechariah prophesied that all the tribes of Israel in the land would mourn in repentance (Zech. 12:12). Jesus identified this prediction with His coming, and broadened it to include "all the tribes of the earth." Probably the unsaved "will mourn" because of the judgment they anticipate.

24:31 Jesus explained another event that will happen when He returns at the end of the Tribulation. The passage He referred to was Isaiah 27:12-13. There Israel is in view, so Jesus must have been speaking about the gathering of Israelites again to the Promised Land at His Second Coming. The four winds refer to the four compass points. This regathering will involve judgment (13:39, 41; 24:40-41; 25:31; 2 Thess. 1:7-8). Jesus had previously spoken of the angels' role of assisting Him at this time (13:41; cf. 16:27). This regathering will set the stage for Messiah's worldwide reign.

God summoned the Israelites to march and to worship using trumpets during the wilderness wanderings and in the land (Exod. 19:16; 20:18; Jer. 4:5; et al.). This is not the same trumpet that will call Christians to heaven at the Rapture (1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16). Other trumpets will sound announcing various other events in the future (cf. Rev. 8:2, 6, 13; 9:14; 11:15; et al.).

[1387]M'Neile, p. 352.
[1388]Alford, 1:243.
[1389]M'Neile, p. 352; English, p. 177; Gaebelein, 2:209; McGee, 4:120; Pentecost, *The Words . . .*, p. 404.
[1390]Plummer, p. 336.
[1391]Allen, pp. 258-59; Darby, 3:125; Kelly, p. 27; Lenski, p. 948; *The Nelson . . .*, p. 1622.

Events in the Church Age, between Pentecost and the Rapture, are not in view in the Olivet Discourse. This is the typical pretribulational interpretation of the discourse.[1392] The whole discourse deals with the return of Messiah to establish His kingdom on the earth and the things leading up to that. Jesus mentioned no sign, in this discourse, involving anything in the Church Age. The signs begin in the Tribulation when Christians will have gone to be with the Lord. Jesus' first reference to the Rapture was in the Upper Room Discourse (John 14:1-3), which He gave after the Olivet Discourse.[1393] Turner compared and contrasted four main evangelical views of this passage: the futurist, the preterist, the traditional preterist-futurist, and the revised preterist-futurist.[1394] He preferred the third of these, and I take the first.

> "Those accepting the posttribulational view, that the rapture of the church and the second coming of Christ occur at the same time, tend to ignore the details of this discourse in the same fashion as the amillenarians do."[1395]

The reference to Jesus gathering the elect "from the sky" may indicate that the resurrected dead and raptured Christians are also in view.[1396] They will accompany Him when He returns to reign on the earth (cf. Col. 3:4). Some interpreters believe the reference to "the sky" simply describes the whole world in different words, and that only Jews are in view in this verse. Some feel this may include Old Testament saints who have died.[1397] I think it includes Christians and Old Testament saints and possibly angels.

This concludes Jesus' answer to the disciples' question about the sign of His coming and the end of the present age (v. 3). Other important passages of Scripture dealing with the Second Coming are the following: Deuteronomy 30:3; Psalm 2; Isaiah 63:1-6; Daniel 2:44-45; Romans 11:26; 1 Thessalonians 3:13; 5:1-4; 2 Thessalonians 1:7—2:12; 2 Peter 2:1—3:17; Jude 14-15; and Revelation 1:7; 19:11-21.[1398]

[1392]See Bruce A Ware, "Is the Church in View in Matthew 24—25?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138:550 (April-June 1981):158-72.,

[1393]See Thomas R. Edgar, "An Exegesis of Rapture Passages," in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, pp. 217-21; and Paul D. Feinberg, "Dispensational Theology and the Rapture," in ibid., pp. 235-44.

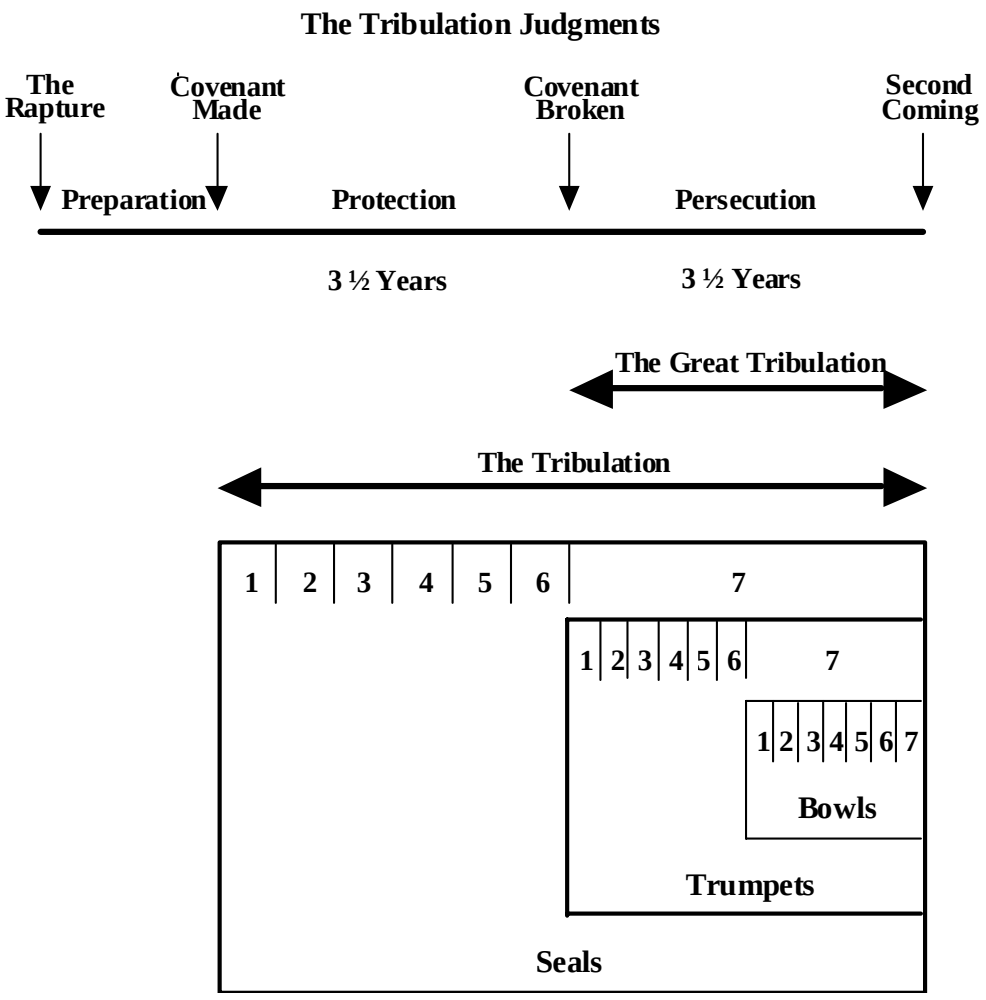
[1394]David L. Turner, "The Structure and Sequence of Matthew 24:1-41: Interaction with Evangelical Treatments," *Grace Theological Journal* 10:1 (Spring 1989):3-27. For a refutation of the preterist interpretation, see Stanley D. Toussaint, "A Critique of the Preterist View of the Olivet Discourse," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161:644 (October-December 2004):469-90.

[1395]Walvoord, *Matthew: . . .*, p. 181. E.g., Morgan.

[1396]Walvoord, *Matthew: . . .*, p. 190.

[1397]Toussaint, *Behold the . . .*, pp. 277-78; Carson, "Matthew," p. 506; Barbieri, p. 78.

[1398]For parallels between the eschatology of Matthew 24 and that of the *Didache*, see William C. Varner, "The *Didache* 'Apocalypse' and Matthew 24," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 165:659 (July-September 2008):309-22.



6. The responsibilities of the disciples 24:32—25:30

Next, Jesus exhorted His disciples on the basis of this revelation concerning the future. He taught them using seven parables.

The importance of vigilance 24:32-44

Jesus told His disciples four parables advocating vigilance in view of the time of His return. These stories were illustrations of His main points in the Olivet Discourse.

The parable of the fig tree 24:32-36 (cf. Mark 13:28-32; Luke 21:29-33)

This parable stresses the importance of the signs signaling Jesus' return.

24:32-33 The lesson (Gr. *parabole*, lit. parable) "of the fig tree" is quite simple. As the appearance of "tender" twigs and "leaves" on "the fig tree" indicate the nearness of "summer," so the appearance of the signs Jesus explained would indicate that His coming is near.

A popular interpretation of this parable equates modern Israel's presence in the Promised Land with the budding of the fig tree.[1399] This view may be placing too much emphasis on the identification of the fig tree with the modern State of Israel (cf. Jer. 24:1-8; 29:17). On the other hand, this could be at least part of what Jesus intended. Many commentators take this parable as describing the destruction of Jerusalem.[1400] As mentioned before, this is probably not correct.

24:34 Jesus first stressed the importance of what He would say.

What did He mean by "this generation?" Many interpreters have concluded that Jesus meant the generation of disciples to whom He spoke (cf. 11:16; 12:39, 41-42, 45; 16:4; 17:17; 23:36). Some within this group of interpreters have concluded that because these signs did not occur before that generation of disciples died, Jesus made a mistake.[1401] This solution is unacceptable in view of who Jesus was.

Other interpreters in this group have concluded that, since these signs did not appear during the lifetime of that generation of disciples, Jesus must have been speaking metaphorically, not literally.[1402] They say the destruction of Jerusalem fulfilled what Jesus predicted.[1403] This solution is also unacceptable, because there is nothing in the text to indicate that Jesus meant that the disciples should understand the signs and Jesus' Second Coming non-literally. Moreover, numerous similar prophecies concerning Messiah's first coming happened literally.

Perhaps Jesus meant that the generation of disciples that saw the future signs would also witness His return.[1404] However, the demonstrative pronoun "this" (Gr. *aute*) seems to stress the generation Jesus was addressing. Even so, this pronoun could refer to the end times rather than to that generation.[1405] I prefer this view.

Other interpreters have noted that "generation" (Gr. *genea*) can refer to a race of people, not just to one generation (cf. 16:4; Phil. 2:15).[1406] They conclude that Jesus meant the Jewish race would not end before all these signs had attained fulfillment.[1407] This is a possible solution, but it seems

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[1399]Gaebelien, 2:213-14; Kelly, p. 451.
[1400]E.g., Morgan, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 286; Allen, p. 259; and Tasker, p. 227.
[1401]E.g., M'Neile, p. 355.
[1402]E.g., Kik, pp. 10-12; and Plummer, p. 338.
[1403]E.g., Barclay, 2:348.
[1404]Carl Armerding, *The Olivet Discourse*, p. 44; Charles Lee Feinberg, *Israel in the Last Days: The Olivet Discourse*, p. 22; Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., pp. 279-80; Barbieri, p. 78; Bailey, in *The New* . . ., pp. 51-52.
[1405]George Benedict Winer, *Grammar of the Idiom of the New Testament*, p. 157.
[1406]Cremer, pp. 148-49.
[1407]E.g., English, p. 179; Gaebelein, 2:214-15; McGee, 4:121; Kent, "The Gospel . . ., p. 972.

unusual that Jesus would introduce the continuing existence of the Jewish race to confirm the fulfillment of these signs.

Another view has focused attention on the words "take place" or "have happened" (Gr. *genetai*) that occur in all three synoptic accounts. The Greek word means "to begin" or "to have a beginning." Advocates affirm that Jesus meant that the fulfillment of *some of* "all these things" would begin in the generation of His present disciples (cf. v. 33), but complete fulfillment would not come until later.[1408]

However, Jesus said "all" those things would begin during that generation. It is possible that "all" those things would begin during that generation if one interprets "all those things" as *the signs as a whole* (cf. v. 32). The earliest signs then would correspond to the branches of the fig tree becoming tender. This would be the first evidence of fulfillment shaping up. "This generation" then "represents an evil class of people who will oppose Jesus' disciples until the day He returns."[1409]

24:35 Jesus further stressed the certainty of what the signs anticipated with these words. He claimed that His predictions had the same authority and eternal validity as God's words (cf. Ps. 119:89-90; Isa. 40:6-8).

24:36 The certainty of fulfillment should not lead the disciples to conclude that they could predict the time of fulfillment exactly. Jesus explained that *only* the heavenly "Father" knew precisely when the Son would return (cf. Acts 1:7).

> "This verse becomes the main proposition which is developed from this point to Matthew 25:30."[1410]

Watchful preparation is necessary, since "no one knows" the "day" or the "hour" when Jesus will return. We do not know the year or the month, either. The alternative to preparing would be living life as usual without regard to the King's return. Jesus deliberately discouraged His disciples from setting dates.

Jesus' self-confessed ignorance has created a problem for some readers. How could He be God and not know everything? The answer is part of the problem of God becoming man, the Incarnation. Jesus voluntarily limited

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[1408]E.g., Cranfield, "St. Mark 13," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 7 (July 1954):291; C. E. Stowe, "The Eschatology of Christ, With Special Reference to the Discourse in Matt. XXIV. and XXV.," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 7 (July 1850):471; Mark L. Hitchcock, "A Critique of the Preterist View of 'Soon' and 'Near' in Revelation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163:652 (October-December 2006):467-78.

[1409]Neil D. Nelson Jr., "'This Generation" in Matt 24:34: A Literary Critical Perspective," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38:3 (September 1996):385. See also Lawrence A. DeBruyn, "Preterism and 'This Generation,'" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167:666 (April-June 2010):180-200.

[1410]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 280.

Himself, and limitation of His knowledge was part of His humiliation (Luke 2:52; Phil. 2:7).[1411]

> "John's Gospel, the one of the four Gospels most clearly insisting on Jesus' deity, also insists with equal vigor on Jesus' dependence on and obedience to his Father—a dependence reaching even to his knowledge of the divine. How NT insistence on Jesus' deity is to be combined with NT insistence on his ignorance and dependence is a matter of profound importance to the church; and attempts to jettison one truth for the sake of preserving the other must be avoided."[1412]

The parable of Noah's days 24:37-39 (cf. Luke 17:26-27)

This parable clarifies verse 36, as the introductory "for" (Gr. *gar*) indicates. The previous parable stressed the signs leading up to Jesus' return, but this one stresses the responses to those signs and their consequences. Life will be progressing as usual when the King returns to judge. Similarly, life was progressing as usual in Noah's day, just before God broke in on humankind with judgment (cf. 1 Pet. 3:20-21). Despite upheavals, people will continue their normal pursuits. Extreme sinfulness and disregard of God's Word will be widespread then (cf. Gen. 6:5).

> "The special point of the analogy is not that the generation that was swept away by the Flood was exceptionally wicked; none of the occupations mentioned are sinful; but that it was so absorbed in its worldly pursuits that it paid no attention to solemn warnings."[1413]

Jesus' disciples need to maintain constant vigilance, because the daily grind, including distress and persecution, will tend to lull them into dangerous complacency. It is normal for even remarkable signs of an impending change to have no effect on people. For example, when meteorologists announce the coming of a hurricane or tornado, there are always some people in its path who refuse to seek safety.

The parables of one taken and one left behind 24:40-41 (cf. Luke 17:34-35)

Having explained the importance of the signs leading up to His return and the responses to those signs, Jesus next explained the respective consequences of the two responses.

Many Christians who have read these verses have assumed that they describe believers, taken to heaven at the Rapture, and unbelievers left behind to enter the Tribulation. However, the context is dealing with the Second Coming of Christ, not the Rapture. The

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[1411]See Appendix 8 "The Incarnation of God the Son" at the end of these notes.

[1412]Carson, "Matthew," p. 508. For further discussion, see idem, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*, pp. 146-60.

[1413]Plummer, p. 340.

sequence of events will be: Jesus' ascension, the Church Age (beginning on Pentecost and ending with the Rapture), the Tribulation, the Second Coming, and the beginning of the messianic kingdom.

> "It will be a taking away judicially and in judgment. The ones left will enjoy the blessings of Christ's reign on earth, just as Noah and his family were left to continue life on earth. This is the opposite of the rapture, where those who are left go into the judgment of the Great Tribulation."[1414]

> "Jesus was not referring to the Rapture of the church in Matthew 24. When that event takes place, all the saved will be removed from the earth to meet Christ in the air, and all the unsaved will be left on the earth. Thus, the Rapture will occur in reverse of the order of things in the days of Noah and, therefore, the reverse of the order at Jesus' coming immediately after the Great Tribulation."[1415]

Some interpreters have made a case for this being a reference to the Rapture, because Jesus used two different words for "take" in the context. In verse 39, the Greek verb is *airo*, whereas in verses 40 and 41, He used *paralambano*. The argument is that *paralambano* is a word that describes Jesus taking His own to Himself. However, it also occurs in a bad sense (4:5, 8). Probably Jesus used *paralambano* because it more graphically pictures sweeping away as in a flood.[1416]

Perhaps Jesus used two illustrations to show that: neither gender, nor occupation, nor close relationship, will prevent the separation for judgment (cf. 10:35-36). Typically two women—often sisters, a mother and a daughter, or two servants—sat opposite each other turning the small hand mill between them.[1417]

> "The proverb of our Saviour is true to life, for women only grind. I can not recall an instance in which men were at the mill. It is tedious, fatiguing work, and slaves, or lowest servants, are set at it."[1418]

An exhortation to watchfulness 24:42 (cf. Mark 13:33-37; Luke 21:34-36)

This verse applies to all that Jesus said beginning in verse 32. Jesus' disciples need to remain watchful because the exact time of the King's return is unknown, even though signs of His coming will indicate His approach.

The parable of the watchful homeowner 24:43-44

Jesus concluded His instructions concerning the importance of vigilance, in view of His return, by giving a parable urging watchfulness.

[1414]Feinberg, *Israel in . . .*, p. 27.
[1415]Showers, p. 180. See also Gerald B. Stanton, *Kept from the Hour*, pp. 51-65.
[1416]Morison, p. 489.
[1417]Carson, "Matthew," p. 509.
[1418]Thomson, 2:295. Cf. Exod. 11:5.

The introductory "but" connects this illustration with the former one and identifies a contrast. Jesus is like a "thief" in only one respect, namely, that other people will not expect His coming. The point of this parable is that: if a homeowner knows the general time when a thief will break in, he will prepare accordingly. The signs of the times during the Tribulation that Jesus revealed (vv. 5-22) will enable believers to know the general time He will return. Consequently believers in the Tribulation should prepare themselves.

> "The death-day of the world needs to be hid for the purposes of providence as much as the dying-day of individuals."[1419]

This concludes the emphasis on vigilance that marks the first part of Jesus' instructions to His disciples, anticipating His return and the end of the present age.

> "Jesus used Noah to warn that men will not know *the day*, and He used the picture of the burglar to warn that they will not know *the hour*."[1420]

It seems clear, then, that Jesus was speaking of His Second Coming and of the Tribulation signs that would precede it, as well as about the coming destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. This was His intended meaning, and understanding what He said this way is the proper *interpretation* of His words, I believe. However, Christians living in the Church Age can *apply* this passage to our situation, because what we face now is similar to the one that Tribulation saints will face in the future. We, too, look forward to a return of the Lord (at the Rapture) that will be preceded by increasing trouble for believers (e.g., 1 Tim. 4; 2 Tim. 3). It is as important for us to be watchful as it will be for saints living during the Tribulation.

The importance of prudence and faithfulness 24:45—25:30

Jesus continued instructing His disciples, but now stressed the importance of prudence and faithfulness, as He prepared them for His return. There are three parables in this section. All of them refer to two types of disciples, the faithful and the unfaithful.[1421]

The parable of the two servants 24:45-51 (cf. Luke 12:42-48)

This parable illustrates the two attitudes that people *during the Tribulation* will have regarding Jesus' return.

24:45-47 The servants (Gr. *douloi*) are Jesus' disciples, to whom He has entrusted the responsibility of managing His affairs during His absence from the earth. Some servants will be "faithful and sensible" (prudent, cf. 7:24; 10:16). They will carry out God's will for them, including feeding the world the gospel, which dispensing food represents in the parable. When Jesus returns, these faithful servants will be "blessed" (i.e., the objects of

[1419]Bruce, *The Training . . .*, p. 338.
[1420]Wiersbe, 1:90.
[1421]See Dillow, pp. 385-96.

God's favor who are consequently happy, cf. 5:3). Moreover, Jesus will promote them to positions of greater responsibility in the kingdom that He will establish.

> "The reward of faithfulness is to be trusted with higher responsibilities; cf. xxv. 21, 23, Lk. xvi. 10a. Since the parable deals with the Parousia, the words apply to higher activities in the age to come."[1422]

24:48-51 Other disciples may conclude that Jesus' delay indicates a postponement of His appearing. This conclusion may lead to their abusing their fellow disciples and their carousing. Jesus' return will surprise such disciples who will not be ready for it. The fate of such unfaithful and unwise servants will be tragic. Jesus will "cut" them to "pieces"—a graphic and hyperbolic description of personal destruction (v. 51; cf. 1 Sam. 15:33; Heb. 11:37).[1423] Their lot will be "with the hypocrites," those whom Jesus predicted would experience God's most severe judgment and rejection (cf. 6:2, 5, 16; 16:3; 23:13-29).[1424] Furthermore they will eventually go to hell.

> "Invariably throughout Matthew this phrase [weeping and gnashing of teeth] refers to the retribution of those who are judged before the millennial kingdom is established (Matthew 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 25:30)."[1425]

These unfaithful servants must be disciples of Jesus during the Tribulation who are not genuine believers. There will be some people who claim to be followers of Jesus in the Tribulation, but who have not trusted in Him for salvation. There were many such in Jesus' day, and there are many today.

In this parable the good servant was both prudent and faithful (v. 45). Jesus next gave the parable of the 10 virgins to illustrate prudence, and then He gave the parable of the talents to illustrate faithfulness.[1426]

> "This [next] part of the Olivet Discourse [i.e., ch. 25] goes beyond the 'sign' questions of the disciples (24:3) and presents our Lord's return in three aspects: (1) as testing profession, vv. 1-13; (2) as testing service, vv. 14-30; and (3) as testing individual Gentiles, vv. 31-46."[1427]

[1422]M'Neile, p. 358.
[1423]See Pagenkemper, pp. 191-94.
[1424]Bock, *Jesus according . . .*, p. 270.
[1425]Toussaint, *Behold the . . .*, p. 282.
[1426]M'Neile, p. 359.
[1427]*The New Scofield . . .*, p. 1035.

The parable of the 10 virgins 25:1-13

This parable helps disciples understand what it means to await the King's return with prudence.

> ". . . the point is simply that readiness, whatever form it takes, is not something that can be achieved by a last-minute adjustment. It depends on long-term provision, and if that has been made, the wise disciple can sleep secure in the knowledge that everything is ready."[1428]

This parable has been understood to teach the partial rapture theory. The partial rapture theory is that only those believers who are prepared (i.e., who are expecting the Lord's call and are ready for it) will be raptured. Other believers will remain behind. The explanation of the parable below will show that this is not the correct interpretation.

25:1 The introductory "then" ties this parable to the subject of the preceding instruction, namely, the Second Coming of the Son of Man. The beginning of "the kingdom of heaven" is in view. It will be similar to what the following story describes.

Jesus probably chose "10 virgins" for His illustration because such a number was customary for marriages of His day.[1429] The number probably does not have symbolic significance. Likewise that the women were "virgins" (Gr. *parthenos*, cf. 1:23), probably has no other significance than that they were young women who were friends of the bride and groom. Their virginity is not a factor in the parable. The "lamps" (Gr. *lampas*) could have been either torches or, probably, smaller lamps with wicks (cf. v. 7). "To meet" (Gr. *hypantesis*) connotes an official welcome of a visiting dignitary.[1430]

Most premillennial commentators have taken these virgins as representing Jews during the Tribulation. However, some argued that they stand for Christians in the present age.[1431] The arguments in favor of the second view are, primarily, what the passage does not contain, such as: the title "Son of Man," the phrase "times or seasons," and Old Testament quotations. However, arguments from silence are never strong, and they are unconvincing here.

The better explanation is that this parable deals with the same time and people as the immediately preceding and following parables do. The ten virgins represent Jewish disciples *in the Tribulation* waiting for the coming of the King. That is not to say, however, that the principle of

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[1428]France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 947.
[1429]Edersheim, *The Life* . . ., 2:455; idem, *Sketches of* . . ., p. 155.
[1430]M'Neile, p. 360.
[1431]E.g., Gaebelein, 2:225-36. Cf. Carr, p. 275; and Plummer, p. 343.

watchfulness that this parable teaches is not applicable to Christian disciples who await the Lord's return for them at the Rapture.

Some background information concerning weddings in the ancient Near East is helpful in understanding this parable:[1432]

- First, the parents arranged the marriage with the consent of the bride and groom.
- Second, the couple passed an engagement period of many months in which it would become clear, hopefully, that the bride was a virgin.
- Third, on the day of the wedding the groom would go to the bride's house to claim his bride from her parents. His friends would accompany him.
- Fourth, the marriage ceremony would take place at the bride's home.
- Fifth, on the evening of the day of the wedding, the groom would take his bride home. This involved a nighttime procession through the streets.
- Sixth, the bride and groom would consummate their marriage at the groom's home the night of the wedding ceremony.
- Seventh, there would be a banquet that would often last as long as seven days. This often took place at the groom's home.

The scene in this parable is at night, when the bride's friends are waiting to welcome the couple, and to enter the groom's house where the banquet will begin shortly. All ten of the virgins knew that the groom's appearing would be soon.

25:2-5 The "five prudent (Gr. *phronimoi*, cf. 7:24; 10:16; 24:45) virgins" represent Jewish disciples who not only anticipated Jesus' arrival but also prepared for it (cf. 3:2: 4:17). The five foolish virgins anticipated it but did not prepare for it. Preparedness is what separated the wise from the foolish.

> "Perhaps their spiritual condition will be analogous to the Jews at the Lord's first coming. With eyes only for the physical benefits of the kingdom, the foolish Jews fail to prepare themselves spiritually for its coming."[1433]

Both groups of young women fell asleep.

[1432]See Yamauchi, 241-52; Jeremias, *The Parables* . . ., pp. 173-74; and Trench, *Notes on* . . ., pp. 200-201.
[1433]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 285.

> "Many a preacher has seen this happen while he is preaching."[1434]

This period of delay corresponds to the time between the first signs of Jesus' coming and His appearance. Jesus did not praise or blame the virgins for sleeping. Only the wise virgins "took oil" with them (v. 4). The foolish ones evidently just lit their torches or wicks without oil. The symbolism of oil is probably significant since it often represents the Holy Spirit in Scripture (e.g., 1 Sam. 16:13). If so, those with oil might be believers, and those without oil, unbelievers.[1435]

25:6-9 "Midnight" probably also has significance, since it is often the time of *judgment* in Scripture (e.g., Exod. 11:4). When someone announced the arrival of the groom, the "virgins" all woke up and "trimmed their lamps." However, the lamps of the foolish soon began to go out (present tense in the Greek text). The preparations of the wise virgins did the unwise no good. The time to prepare had passed.

Though Jesus did not go into this, the bride in the parable must be the church, the bride of Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 11:2). The church will be in heaven with Jesus, during the Tribulation, having gone there at the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-17). Christians will return to earth with Jesus at His Second Coming, and will evidently have some part in the judgment that will begin the kingdom (vv. 31-46; cf. 1 Cor. 6:2).

25:10-12 Shortly after the announcement went out, the groom arrived (cf. 24:27, 39, 50). There was not enough time for the foolish virgins to obtain oil then. The wise virgins entered the wedding feast, and someone "shut . . . the door" into the banquet hall (cf. vv. 34-40). There was no more opportunity for the foolish to enter. Their pathetic cries were of no avail (cf. 7:21-23; 23:37). The groom's refusal to admit them was not the result of callous rejection in spite of their desire to enter the feast. Rather, he refused to admit them because they had failed to prepare adequately.

> "The closed door, which to those who were ready meant security and untold bliss, to the others meant banishment and untold gloom."[1436]

These verses picture the judgment of Jews that will happen at the end of the Tribulation and before the establishment of the messianic kingdom.

25:13 This is the lesson the disciples were to learn from this parable. Disciples need to prepare for Messiah's appearing as well as to anticipate that event. Jesus was not calling for alertness in this parable, remaining awake when

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[1434]Robertson, *Word Pictures . . .*, 1:196.

[1435]Kent, "The Gospel . . .," p. 974.

[1436]Plummer, p. 346. Cf. Pagenkemper, pp. 188-89.

> others sleep, as important as that is. He was calling for preparation. Preparing involves trusting in Jesus as the Messiah. Many Jews in Jesus' day were anticipating the appearance of Messiah and the inauguration of the kingdom. However, they did not prepare, even though John the Baptist, Jesus, and Jesus' disciples urged them to. Those who did, became believing disciples of Jesus. Once again, the same two types of Jews will exist during the Tribulation, before Messiah appears the second time. The prudent disciple is the one who makes the necessary preparation by trusting in Jesus.[1437]

> "If we review in reverse order the three parables we've thus far examined [in 24:43-44; 24:45-51; and 25:1-13], I trust you'll agree that what we've seen are examples of Christ's return later than expected, Christ's return sooner than expected, and Christ's return coming simply at an unexpected time. I think that covers all logical possibilities and ought to put a stop to Christian guesswork about the timing of the end once and for all."[1438]

The parable of the talents 25:14-30

The other important quality that will make a servant blessed when Jesus returns, in addition to prudence, is faithfulness (cf. 24:45-46). This parable explains what Jesus regards as faithfulness. Essentially it involves using what God has entrusted to one to advance His interests in the world. It involves making a spiritual profit with the deposit God has entrusted to each disciple (cf. James 2:14-26). The parable of the ten virgins speaks of salvation, but this one emphasizes the importance of rewards and judgment.

25:14 "For" links the following parable with the lesson expressed in verse 13. The antecedent of "it" is the kingdom of heaven (v. 1).

> "Probably this parable is so tightly associated with the last one as to share its introduction . . ."[1439]

> Thus, the point of the parable of the 10 virgins, and the parable of the talents, is the same. The difference is a matter of emphasis. The emphasis of the first one is the importance of spiritual preparation, whereas the emphasis of the second is the importance of spiritual service. The second parable deals with the period of waiting, that the first parable only mentioned in passing. Both parables deal primarily with the judgment of Jews at the end of the Tribulation, though both apply to Christians today, as does the whole Olivet Discourse.

[1437]See J. Gregory Sheryl, "Can the Date of Jesus' Return Be Known?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 169:673 (January-March 2012):20-32, for a review of date-setters through history.

[1438]Blomberg, *Preaching the . . .*, p. 196.

[1439]Carson, "Matthew," p. 515.

Some slaves (Gr. *douloi*) in the ancient biblical world enjoyed considerable responsibility and authority. In the parable, the man taking the journey turned over his money to three of his slaves. They understood that they could share in the profits if they managed well what they had received.

25:15 In New Testament times, a talent (Gr. *talanton*) was a unit of exchange. Its value depended on the type of metal that was in view—gold, silver, or copper. The talents in this parable may have been silver, though this is not important. The Greek word *argyrion* in verse 18 can mean either "money" or "silver." Originally, a talent was a measure of weight, between 58 and 80 pounds.[1440] Many translators and commentators use "75 pounds" as a convenient working amount. Later the talent was a coin worth about 6,000 denarii. The earning power of a talent coin was therefore the equivalent of about 16 and a half years wages for a workingman or a foot soldier. By any calculation, the worth of the talents entrusted to the slaves in this parable was great. "Five talents" might amount to considerably more than a lifetime of earnings.

This master distributed his resources according to his evaluation of the ability of each slave. As always, greater privilege brings greater responsibility.

Probably we should understand the talents to represent all the working capital that God entrusts to His disciples. To limit the significance of talents to either: spiritual gifts, natural abilities, the gospel, opportunities for service, money, or whatever—limits the scope of what Jesus probably intended. All of these things constitute what God has given His servants to use for His glory.

> "The use that one makes of his opportunities is the measure of his capacity for more."[1441]

> "This capacity for work lies not within our own power; but it *is* in our power to use for Christ whatever we may have."[1442]

These slaves represent Jews living during the Tribulation, not Christians living in the Church Age, though this parable is applicable to us as well. Tribulation Jews will have unparalleled opportunities to serve Jesus Christ. The opportunity to herald the gospel to the ends of the earth will be one of these great privileges. Many disciples then (144,000 missionaries;

[1440]Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, s.v. "*talanton*," p. 803.
[1441]Robertson, *Word Pictures . . .*, 1:198-99.
[1442]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 2:460.

Rev. 7; 14) will probably have the opportunity to present the gospel to thousands, and perhaps millions of individuals, using the technology of their day.

25:16-18 "Immediately," the slaves entrusted with "five" and "two talents" began to put their money to use for their master. This shows their faithfulness to their duty to make money for him. They traded with the money in some way, and they made a profit. The other slave, however, was unwilling to work and to risk. By burying the money, he showed that he valued safety above all else. Burying his talent was even much safer than putting it in a savings account. Before the days of modern banking, many people buried money in the ground for safekeeping.

The slaves of God who have a heart for God and His coming kingdom will sense their privilege, seize their opportunities, and serve God to the maximum extent of their ability in the Tribulation. Those who have no real concern about preparing people for the coming King will do nothing with their opportunities. Their own safety will be more important to them than working to prepare for the arrival of the King. Being a good steward involves taking some risks.

25:19-23 Jesus' mention of "a long time" passing probably suggests the time between His ascension and His second coming (cf. 24:48; 25:5). Thus, while the slaves in view are those living during the Tribulation, with which the whole Olivet Discourse deals, the parable has meaning for all of Jesus' disciples who anticipate the kingdom. This is true of all of Jesus' discourses in Matthew.

The first slave received a verbal commendation from his master, increased responsibility under his master, and joy with his master (v. 21; cf. 24:46; John 15:11). He would exercise his increased responsibility and enjoy his joy in the kingdom and, I assume, beyond it when the earthly messianic kingdom moves to new heavens and a new earth (Rev. 21:1—22:5). The second slave received the same verbal commendation as the first slave, and he received increased responsibility and joy commensurate with his God-given capacity (v. 23). Since we can do nothing except by God's grace (cf. John 15:5), these rewards—like all similar rewards—are really due to God's grace, rather than to the servants' faithfulness, which His grace enables (cf. 1 Cor. 4:7).

> "You don't 'retire' from being a disciple."[1443]

25:24-25 When the third slave said his master was a "hard" (Gr. *skleros*) man, he meant that he exploited the labor of others, namely, this slave and his fellow slaves (cf. John 6:60; Acts 26:14; James 3:4; Jude 15). This slave

[1443]France, *The Gospel . . .*, pp. 954-55.

evidently felt that his master would not share many of the rewards of his labor with him, if he proved successful, but would punish him severely if he failed. The fact that he had received less than the other slaves should not have made him resentful, if it did, since even he had a great opportunity. He ignored his responsibility to his master and his obligation to discharge his duty. Moreover, he showed no love for his master, whom he blamed, attempting thereby to cover up his own failure.[1444]

> "Grace never condones irresponsibility; even those given less are obligated to use and develop what they have."[1445]

25:26-27 Rather than commending this slave, his master gave him a scathing condemnation. Instead of being "good and faithful," he was "wicked" and "lazy." To be lazy is to be unfaithful. The master used the slave's own words to condemn him (vv. 24-25). If the master really was hard and grasping, the slave should have known he was in for trouble if he proved unfaithful. At least he should have put his master's money into the hands of bankers. That would have been a fairly safe and easy way to manage it, and it would have earned some "interest." The Jews were not to charge fellow Jews interest on loans, but they could charge Gentiles interest (Deut. 23:19-20).

> ". . . risk is at the heart of discipleship (10:39; 16:25-26); by playing safe the cautious slave has achieved nothing, and it is his timidity and lack of enterprise . . . which is condemned. Schweizer, 473, pertinently describes his attitude as representing 'a religion concerned only with not doing anything wrong.'"[1446]

25:28-30 Rather than giving this servant increased responsibility, the master took back "the talent" he had entrusted to him. Rather than blessing him with the joy of fellowship with the master, the slave had to depart from his master's presence. Verse 29 expresses a kingdom principle that Jesus had formerly explained (13:12; cf. 21:43). The master removed the slave's opportunity to serve him further. He declared him "worthless" (v. 30) because he had failed to do his master's will with what the master gave him to use. This resulted in the loss of his resources, rejection by the master ("throw out the worthless slave"), banishment from his presence ("outer darkness"), tears ("weeping"), and "gnashing of teeth."

Does the unfaithful slave represent a believing or an unbelieving Jew in the Tribulation? In view of the punishment he received, he must be an

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[1444]Carson, "Matthew," p. 517.

[1445]Ibid.

[1446]France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 956. He quoted the English translation of E. Schweizer, *The Good News according to Matthew*.

> unbeliever (cf. 13:12).[1447] Everywhere else in Matthew's Gospel where the phrase "weeping and gnashing of teeth" occurs, it refers to the final condition of unbelievers (8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51). The "darkness" outside (v. 30) contrasts with the "joy" inside the messianic banquet and kingdom (vv. 21, 23).

> "The last three parables give practical instructions in the light of the King's coming to judge and to reign. The principle which underlies each is the same one which was given in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:16-21). The fruit of faithfulness and preparedness would indicate the character of those living in the days before His coming. In each parable, character is manifested by works. This thought forms the key to the following passage which deals with the judgment of the nations (Matthew 25:31-46)."[1448]

This concludes the section of the Olivet Discourse in which Jesus taught His disciples their responsibilities in view of His coming and the end of the present age (24:32—25:30). He stressed the importance of vigilance with four parables (24:32-44), and the importance of prudence and faithfulness with three parables (24:43—25:30). Modern Christians should cultivate all these qualities as disciples of Christ who anticipate His "any moment" coming for us at the Rapture.

7. The King's judgment of the nations 25:31-46

Jesus concluded the Olivet Discourse with further revelation about the judgment that will take place at the end of the present age when He returns. He had referred to it often in the discourse, but now He made it a special subject of explanation. This judgment will occur when the King returns to earth at the end of the Tribulation to set up His kingdom.[1449]

As we have seen, Matthew stressed judgment in his Gospel (3:12; 6:2, 5, 16; 7:24-27; 13:30, 48-49; 18:23-34; 20:1-16; 21:33-41; 22:1-14; 24:45-51; 25:1-12, 14-30). This is not unusual, since the Old Testament predicted that judgment would precede the messianic kingdom, and Matthew emphasized the kingdom. It is not surprising, therefore, that Jesus concluded this discourse that reveals events leading up to the inauguration of the kingdom, by explaining the judgment that will precede it.

The New Testament teaches that there will be two distinct judgments relative to the kingdom. Many scholars believe there will only be one general judgment at the end.[1450] Most of these are amillenarians, but some premillenarians believe this as well.[1451] One of

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[1447]Darby, 3:131; Pagenkemper, pp. 194-98.

[1448]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 288.

[1449]See Eugene W. Pond, "The Background and Timing of the Judgment of the Sheep and Goats," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159:634 (April-June 2002):201-20.

[1450]E.g., Kik, pp. 92-97; Lenski, pp. 986-88; Tasker, p. 238; M'Neile, p. 369; France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 959; and Shepard, pp. 528-29.

[1451]E.g., Alford, 1:254.

these judgments will occur just before the messianic kingdom begins, and another will follow at its end. The one at the end is the great white throne judgment, when God will send all unbelievers to hell (Rev. 20:11-15).

Some differences between these two judgments indicate their distinctness. First, the first judgment will not involve a resurrection of unbelievers, but will deal with unbelievers alive then on the earth. The word "nations" (i.e., Gentiles, Gr. *ethne*) never refers to the dead elsewhere in Scripture.[1452] The second judgment will involve a resurrection of unbelievers. Second, the first judgment will involve three different kinds of people: the sheep, the goats, and Jesus' brethren. The second will involve the wicked (Rev. 20:13-15), and possibly the righteous who have died during the Millennium. Third, the first will result in some inheriting the kingdom and others getting eternal punishment, but the second will result in the wicked judged going into the lake of fire. Fourth, the first happens at the beginning of the messianic (millennial) kingdom, but the second happens at its end.[1453]

This pericope rounds off Jesus' instructions about the future, in a similar way to how 10:40-42 completes Jesus' charge concerning His apostles' mission to Israel (10:5-42). It is the parable of the sheep and the goats. Some writers have argued that this is not a parable.[1454] However, most interpreters have dealt with this section as a parable, in the looser sense of a lesson.

25:31 This verse fixes the time of the judgment described in the following verses at the beginning of Jesus' messianic reign (cf. Dan. 7:9-14, 22-27). Nowhere in this discourse did Jesus explicitly identify Himself as "the Son of Man." However, since He used that title in answer to the disciples' questions in chapter 24, verse 3, the inference is inescapable (cf. Zech. 14:5; Joel 3:1-12). Jesus becomes the eschatological Judge that the Old Testament identified as God. Jesus again referred to His coming with "His" heavenly "glory" and "all the angels" (16:27; 24:30; cf. 1 Thess. 4:16; 2 Thess. 1:8). Jesus "will sit on His glorious" earthly "throne" as Judge and King (cf. 28:18; 1 Cor. 15:25; Heb. 12:2).

25:32-33 Usually "the nations" (Gr. *ta ethne*) refers to Gentiles—as distinguished from Jews (e.g., Luke 21:24; Acts 14:16).[1455] Because of this, some interpreters believe the judgment of verses 31-46 is a judgment of Gentiles only.[1456] However, the phrase "all the nations" is often more inclusive, referring to all people, including the Jews (cf. Rom. 16:26; Rev. 15:4).

[1452]Peters, 2:374.

[1453]Cf. Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., pp. 288-89.

[1454]E.g., Walvoord, *Matthew:* . . ., p. 200; and Carson, "Matthew," p. 518.

[1455]Abbott-Smith, pp. 129-30; Thayer, *A Greek-English* . . ., p. 168; Vincent, 1:135.

[1456]E.g., Barbieri, p. 80; Bailey, in *The New* . . ., p. 53; and Eugene W. Pond, "Who Are the Sheep and Goats in Matthew 25:31-46?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159:635 (July-September 2002):288-301.

Here it probably refers to all people living on earth when Jesus establishes His kingdom (cf. 28:19; Mark 13:10). Everyone will have heard the gospel of the kingdom preached during the Tribulation (24:14).

In Jesus' day, shepherds separated "the sheep" from "the goats" in their flocks, for various reasons, at various times (cf. Ezek. 34:17). Also, sheep and goats in the Middle East look more alike than they do in some other parts of the world.[1457] The "right" often signified the place of favor, and "the left" the place of comparative disfavor, in biblical and Jewish literature.[1458]

25:34 The identification of "the King" with "the Son of Man" (v. 31) recalls Daniel 7:13-14, where the Son of Man approaches the Ancient of Days (God the Father) to receive a kingdom. The purpose of Jesus separating humanity into two groups at the beginning of the kingdom is to determine whom He will admit to the kingdom, and whom He will exclude (cf. vv. 41, 46). The Father blesses (Gr. *eulogemenoi*, cf. 21:9; 23:39) some by allowing them to enter the kingdom. They now enter into their *inheritance*, a term that presupposes relationship with the Father. The inheritance involves the blessings God will give them in the kingdom, that will vary, depending on their service during the Tribulation (cf. vv. 14-23, 28-29).

Jesus' description of "the kingdom" as what God has "prepared . . . from the foundation of the world" is significant. The rule of Messiah on the earth over all humankind has been part of God's plan since creation. This shows its central place in God's program for humanity. Its establishment will be the fulfillment of many promises and covenants that God gave to Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:15), to Abraham (Gen. 12; 15; 17; 21), to David (2 Sam. 7:12-16), and to the nation of Israel (Ezek. 34:20-31; Jer. 31:31-40; Zech. 10:5-12).[1459]

25:35-40 Jesus clarified the basis for judgment then. It would be the reception or rejection of the "King" as divinely seen in people's reception or rejection of the King's "brothers." The King's "brothers" are probably His faithful disciples who fulfill His will by preaching the gospel of the kingdom during the Tribulation (cf. 12:48-49; 28:10; Isa. 58:7). Most of these will be Jews, including the 144,000, though some may be Gentile converts as well (cf. Rev. 7:1-8; 14:1-5). They will have become believers following the Rapture, since all believers alive on earth just before the Rapture will

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[1457]Bailey, in *The New* . . ., p. 54.
[1458]J. M. Court, "Right and Left: The Implications for Matthew 25.31-46," *New Testament Studies* 31 (1985):223-29.
[1459]Peters, 2:375.

have already gone to be with Jesus.[1460] Other interpreters have variously identified these brethren as: all the needy of the world,[1461] all Jews,[1462] or Christian apostles and missionaries.[1463]

> "Those described here are people who have lived through the great tribulation, a time of unparalleled anti-Semitism, when the majority of Jews in the land will be killed. Under these circumstances, if a Gentile befriends a Jew to the extent of feeding and clothing and visiting him, it could only mean that he is a believer in Jesus Christ and recognizes the Jews as the chosen people."[1464]

"The least of" Jesus' "brothers" are probably Jewish Tribulation martyrs.[1465]

25:41-45 Jesus will banish the goats and send them "into the eternal fire" (cf. 13:24-30, 31-43, 47-50; Rev. 14:11; 19:15). Jesus' descriptions of hell were familiar to the Jews of His day (cf. 3:10, 12; 5:22; 7:19; 13:40, 42, 50; 18:8-9; Jude 7; Rev. 20:10-15). Only the righteous will enter the kingdom (v. 34). The fact that the goats will address Jesus as "Lord" (v. 44) does not show they are believers, since everyone will acknowledge Him as Lord then (cf. Phil. 2:11).

The sheep and the goats will express surprise, but not because they anticipated a different fate. They will express surprise because of the evidence upon which Jesus will judge their condition, namely: their treatment of His brethren. Normally a person's works demonstrate his faith or lack of it.

> "The sins of omission are seen to be even more damning than the sins of commission."[1466]

> "The King's messengers, immediately before He appears in glory, will go forth preaching the gospel of the kingdom

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[1460]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., pp. 290-91; Feinberg, *Israel in* . . ., p. 46; Allen, p. 265; Gaebelein, 2:246-47; Darby, 3:133; Hodges, "Possessing the . . .," 1:3 (November-December 1991):1, 4; and 2:1 (Spring 1992):1, 4.

[1461]E.g., David R. Catchpole, "The Poor on Earth and the Son of Man in Heaven: A Re-appraisal of Matthew xxv. 31-46," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 61 (1978-79):355-97.

[1462]E.g., Walvoord, *Matthew:* . . ., p. 201; Barbieri, p. 81; and Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Romans. Vol. I: Man's Ruin. God's Wrath*, 2:38-39.

[1463]E.g., J. R. Michaels, "Apostolic Hardships and Righteous Gentiles," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 84 (1965):27-37; and Peters, 2:376.

[1464]Walvoord, *Matthew:* . . ., p. 202.

[1465]See Eugene W. Pond, "Who Are 'the Least' of Jesus' Brothers in Matthew 25:40?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159:636 (October-December 2002):436-48.

[1466]Tasker, p. 239.

> everywhere; and when the King takes His throne, those that received the gospel of the kingdom among the nations are recognized as 'sheep,' and the despisers perish as 'goats.'"[1467]

25:46 The goats (unbelievers) will go "into eternal punishment" in hell eventually, instead of entering the messianic kingdom (cf. 7:21-23; 13:40-43). This is the only place in Scripture where the term "eternal punishment" appears. Some interpreters believe that "eternal" here does not mean "everlasting" but pertaining to the age to come, which is eternal.[1468] They favor understanding Jesus to mean that the lost will suffer annihilation. This view is sometimes called "conditional immortality."[1469]

> "*Everlasting* and *eternal* are used to describe both torment and *life*, indicating that one will last as long as the other. In fact, 'everlasting' is used of God in Rom. 16:26."[1470]

> "At the time of Christ the punishment of the wicked was certainly regarded as of eternal duration."[1471]

Immediately these unbelievers will enter Hades, the place of departed spirits, until God resurrects them at the end of the millennium and sends them to hell (cf. Rev. 20:11-15). The sheep (believers) will enter the kingdom, which will be the first stage of their ceaseless life with God. Whereas eternal life begins when a person trusts Jesus Christ, the first stage of life in the King's presence for these believers will be the messianic kingdom. Elsewhere, God revealed that there are degrees of happiness and responsibility in the kingdom (vv. 14-30; cf. 1 Cor. 3:10-15), and degrees of punishment in hell (11:22; Luke 12:47-48). Jesus described the sheep as "righteous."

> "This whole discourse again reflects the Lord's emphasis on righteousness [cf. the Sermon on the Mount]. It is a righteousness founded in faith in God which in turn, by God's grace, empowers the whole man to live a new and righteous life."[1472]

[1467]Kelly, p. 485.

[1468]E.g., France, *The Gospel . . .*, pp. 966-67.

[1469]See Robert A. Peterson, "A Traditionalist Response to John Stott's Arguments for Annihilationism," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37:4 (December 1994):553-68; idem, "Does the Bible Teach Annihilationism?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156:621 (January-March 1999):13-27; Millard J. Erickson, "Is Hell Forever?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* (July-September 1995):259-72; and Bruce W. Davidson, "Reasonable Damnation: How Jonathan Edwards Argued for the Rationality of Hell," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38:1 (March 1995):47-56.

[1470]*The Nelson . . .*, p. 1625.

[1471]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 2:440. See ibid., 2:791-96, on eternal punishment according to the rabbis and the New Testament.

[1472]Toussaint, *Behold the . . .*, pp. 291-92.

Does this passage (25:31-46) teach us anything about the time of the Rapture?

> "Although the question of whether Christ will come for His church before the tribulation (the pretribulational view) or at the time of His second coming to earth (the posttribulational view) is not dealt with in this passage, the implications are clearly in favor of the pretribulational view. If the rapture and translation of the church occur while Christ is coming from heaven to earth in His second coming to set up His kingdom, and the church meets the Lord in the air, it is obvious that this very act would separate all the saved from the unsaved. Under these circumstances, no judgment of the nations would be necessary subsequent to the second coming of Christ, because the sheep and the goats would already be separated."[1473]

Thus ends the Olivet Discourse. Revelation 6—20 provides further exposition of Jesus' teaching in the Olivet Discourse.[1474]

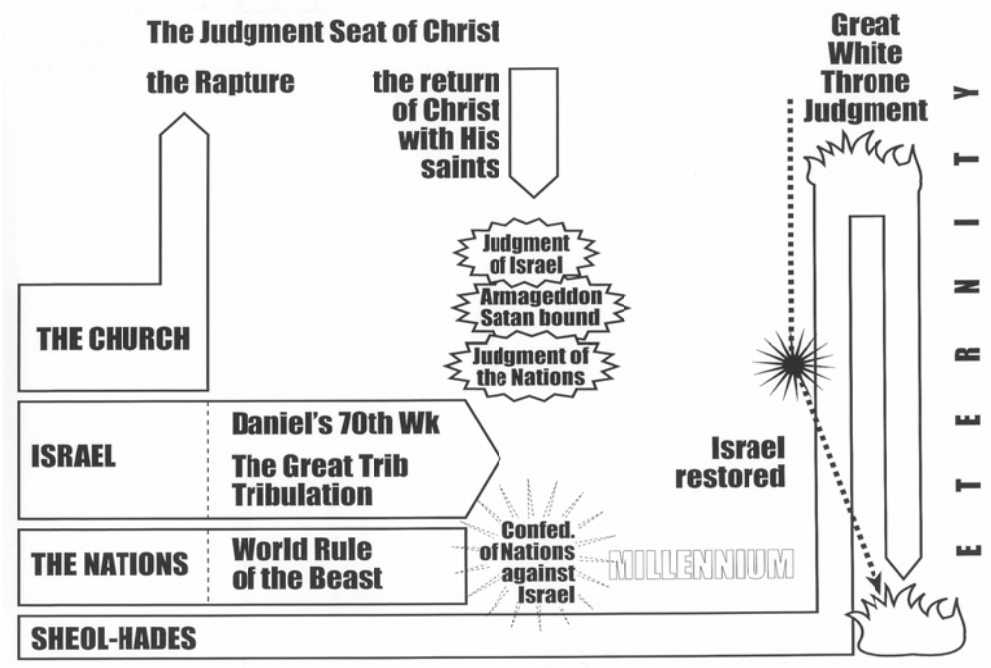
> "Taken as a whole, the Olivet discourse is one of the great prophetic utterances of Scripture and provides facts nowhere else given in quite the same way. In it, Christ, the greatest of the prophets and the master Teacher, described the end of the age as the climax of the troubles of earth in a great tribulation. The time of unprecedented trouble will be terminated by the second coming of Christ. The saved and the unsaved will be separated, and only the saved will enter the millennial kingdom. This is the final word, which Matthew brings in answer to the leading question of this first gospel, concerning the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament of a glorious kingdom on earth. Matthew states clearly that while Christ, in His first coming, suffered and died and was rejected as both King and Saviour by His own people, He will come again and, in triumph, will bring in the prophesied kingdom literally, just as the Old Testament prophecies had anticipated. There is postponement but not annulment of the great prophecies of the kingdom on earth."[1475]

[1473]Walvoord, *Matthew:* . . ., p. 203. See also Paul D. Feinberg, "Dispensational Theology . . .," pp. 229-35.

[1474]For other expositions of the whole Olivet Discourse, see Walvoord, "Christ's Olivet Discourse on the End of the Age," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 128:510 (April-June 1971):109-16; 128:511 (July-September 1971):206-14; 128:512 (October-December 1971):316-26; 129:513 (January-March 1972):20-32; 129:514 (April-June 1972):99-105; 129:515 (July-September 1972):206-10; 129:516 (October-December 1972):307-15; and Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom* . . ., pp. 247-62.

[1475]Walvoord, *Matthew:* . . ., p. 204.

THE BIBLICAL FORECAST FOR THE FUTURE



In one sense 25:46 is the climax of Matthew's argument in this Gospel.[1476]

> "He has at this point accomplished his main purposes in presenting the credentials of the King and the kingdom program of the Jews. The King has shown Himself by His words and His works to be Israel's Messiah. Because Israel refused to accept Him as their King, the kingdom is taken from them and given to a nation bringing forth fruit worthy of repentance. However, this situation will exist only until the Son of Man comes in His glory. At that time, all unrighteousness will be vindicated and Christ shall reign as Israel's King over the nations of the earth."[1477]

VII. THE CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION OF THE KING CHS. 26—28

The key phrase in Matthew's Gospel "And it came about that when Jesus had finished" (26:1) indicates another major transition (cf. 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1). As usual, it occurs at the end of a major address. In this case, it introduces the final and longest continuous narrative section that reaches its climax with another address, in this case a very brief but important one (28:18-20). The Great Commission was the King's final speech that set the final course for His disciples during the age between Jesus' two advents. The record of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection should motivate the modern reader to fulfill the Great Commission. It is in view of what Jesus did for us that we should make disciples of Him all over the world.

[1476]Kiddle, p. 44.

[1477]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 292.

> "As the culmination of Matthew's story, the passion account also constitutes the decisive stage in Jesus' conflict with Israel (chaps. 26—28).[1478] Here the resolution of this conflict works itself out in dramatic detail."[1479]

The narrative section consists of two parts, the crucifixion (chs. 26—27) and the resurrection of the King (28:1-15).

> "Relentlessly the events of the King's life move toward His death on the cross. He has completed His public manifestation to Israel and the nation has rejected Him. In addition, the disciples have been instructed concerning the rejection of Israel and the spiritual basis of entrance into the earthly kingdom. All that remains is the work of the Messiah to provide the means whereby those who exercise faith in Him may enter His kingdom. This work, the death and resurrection of the King, is recounted very succinctly by Matthew. In a large part Matthew's argument is accomplished, and these last events form a fitting conclusion to his book since Jesus here moves through defeat unto victory."[1480]

A. THE KING'S CRUCIFIXION CHS. 26—27

Matthew reported Jesus' crucifixion in five scenes: the preparations for it, Jesus' arrest, His trials, the crucifixion itself, and His burial.

> "A thesis of the New Testament, perhaps *the* thesis, is that the answer to the problem of suffering and death lies in the suffering and death of Jesus Christ."[1481]

1. Preparations for Jesus' crucifixion 26:1-46

There were several events that led up to Jesus' arrest. Matthew did not present them in strict chronological order but in a logical narrative order.

Jesus' fourth passion prediction and the plot to betray Him 26:1-5 (cf. Mark 14:1-2; Luke 22:1-2)

These verses record the fourth major prediction of Jesus' death that He gave His disciples (cf. 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:18-19). Matthew just finished recording Jesus' claim to judge humankind (25:31-46). Now he wrote that the Judge would suffer condemnation from the

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[1478]Footnote 10: For a more detailed treatment of the passion account in Matthew, see Frank J. Matera, *Passion Narratives and Gospel Theologies: Interpreting the Synoptics through Their Passion Stories*, chs. 4-6; and Donald Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew*.

[1479]Kingsbury, *Matthew as . . .*, p. 84.

[1480]Toussaint, *Behold the . . .*, p. 295.

[1481]Dan G. McCartney, "Suffering and the Goodness of God in the Gospels," in *Suffering and the Goodness of God*, p. 79.

condemned. Jesus had warned His enemies about the consequences of hypocrisy (23:12-31). Now we learn that they were paying no heed to His warning, but were hypocritically proceeding to crucify Him. This irony points out Jesus' sovereign control over the affairs that led to His death, and it is an example of masterful narrative composition.

26:1-2 Jesus evidently said these words sometime on Wednesday, the same day as His controversy with the religious leaders (21:23—23:39) and the Olivet Discourse (chs. 24—25). Jesus predicted that His enemies would deliver Him up to die by "crucifixion" in two days. The connection between Jesus' death and the Passover would emerge more clearly when Jesus celebrated that feast with His disciples the next day. Thursday, then, was a day of rest for Jesus, during which He prepared for His great agony on Friday.

26:3-5 Opposition to Jesus had been rising for some time (cf. 12:14; 21:45-46). Matthew's narration of this plot's advance toward its climax, following Jesus' prediction (v. 2), has the effect of showing that His enemies' conspiracy was ultimately a result of Jesus' sovereign authority. He was not a powerless pawn under their control. He was really orchestrating His own passion.

"The chief priests and the elders" represented the clerical and lay members of the Sanhedrin, respectively (cf. 21:23). At that time in history, Rome appointed Israel's "high priest," but typically someone bought the office.[1482] Annas had been the high priest until A.D. 15, when the Romans deposed him and set up his son Eleazar in his place. Eleazar served for about two years (A.D. 16-17), until the Romans replaced him with Joseph Caiaphas in A.D. 18. "Caiaphas" held the office until his death in A.D. 36.[1483] His unusually long tenure reflects his political skill and his acceptability to the Roman prefects.

The Old Testament regarded the high priest as high priest until his death. Consequently the Jews still viewed Annas as the high priest. This probably explains why Matthew and John spoke of Caiaphas as the high priest (John 11:49), but Luke said Annas was the high priest (Luke 3:2; Acts 4:6). Annas was Caiaphas' father-in-law, and he continued to exercise much power—even after the Romans forced him out of office.

The Jewish leaders plotted to execute an innocent man in the very place where justice should have been strongest. *The spiritual leader* of Israel—"the high priest"—took a leading role in this travesty! Matthew's original Jewish readers could not help marveling at this injustice. However, "the

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[1482]Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 94. See Josephus, *Antiquities of* . . ., 20:8:5: footnote, and 20:10:1, for lists of all of Israel's high priests.

[1483]Carson, "Matthew," p. 524. Compare the list of high priests from the accession of Herod the Great to the destruction of Jerusalem in Edersheim, *The Life* . . ., 2:702.

chief priests and elders" were representatives of the people, so the people shared part of the blame. The leaders resorted to deceit, because they could not trap Jesus with questions and turn the crowds against Him, or take Him by force.

> "In portraying the leaders throughout the passion, Matthew orchestrates numerous variations both on this theme of 'deception' and on the related theme of 'self-deception.'"[1484]

Jerusalem's population swelled with pilgrims during Passover season. Since Jesus had a large following, especially among the Galileans, the leaders realized they had to plan to do away with Him secretly, and carefully, lest popular sentiment turn against them.[1485] They did not know how to solve their problem—until Judas volunteered to hand Jesus over to them privately.

Jesus' anointing for burial 26:6-13 (cf. Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-8)

26:6-7 This event evidently happened on the previous Saturday evening "in Bethany" (John 12:1).[1486]

> "Bethany was the place of love, as Jerusalem was the place of hate."[1487]

The reference to two days before the Passover in verse 2 dates the plot to seize Jesus, not the anointing in Simon's house.[1488] Apparently Jesus spent the evening of that Saturday in "the home of Simon," a healed "leper," with His disciples and other guests. John recorded that Lazarus was there, his sister Martha helped with the serving, and their sister Mary was the woman who broke the vial and anointed Jesus' head (and feet, John 12:2-3). Perhaps Matthew did not mention them by name in order to keep Jesus central in his story. John further recorded that the pound of perfume cost 300 denarii, about one year's wages for a working man (John 12:3, 5). Matthew and Mark just said it was "very" expensive ("costly"). The perfume was *nard* that probably came from India.[1489]

26:8-9 Evidently Judas Iscariot led the disciples' criticism of Mary's act (John 12:4). According to the Gospel records, every time Mary tried to do something for Jesus she was misunderstood.[1490] The disciples failed to

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[1484]Kingsbury, *Matthew as* . . ., p. 123.
[1485]Cf. Josephus, *Antiquities of* . . ., 20:5:1-3, for evidence that many tumults and seditions arose during the Jewish festivals.
[1486]Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects* . . ., p. 91.
[1487]McGee, 4:138.
[1488]M'Neile, p. 373; Hendricksen, p. 898; Taylor, p. 527.
[1489]Carson, "Matthew," p. 526.
[1490]Wiersbe, 1:95.

appreciate the significance of what Mary was doing, and that such an anointing was appropriate, in view of Jesus' identity as "the Lord's Anointed" and His impending death (cf. 16:21-28; 17:22-23; 20:18-19).

Regardless of Judas' true motive, the other disciples felt that Mary's gift was inappropriate since so many poor people could have profited from it. They did not realize that the sacrifice Jesus was about to make would solve the basic need of every poor person throughout all of history. Their objection was not evil but wrong, due to lack of understanding. Mary does not seem to have understood that Jesus was going to die any more than the disciples. She evidently made her great sacrifice simply because she loved Jesus.

26:10-11 Jesus probably overheard His disciples talking, though His awareness of their thoughts could have been supernatural (cf. 16:8). Jesus regarded the disciples' outspoken criticism of Mary as a "bother" to her. This beautiful thing that Mary did, which Jesus called "a good deed," was scornfully named "this waste" by the disciples. The disciples would "always have the poor" (people), whom they could help with good deeds, but they would not have the incarnate Son of Man with them much longer.

> "The disciples' concern for the poor is by no means incorrect. In this one instance, however, the timing was wrong."[1491]

> "Implicitly, the distinction Jesus makes is a high christological claim, for it not only shows that he foresees his impending departure but also that he himself, who is truly 'gentle and humble in heart' (11:29), *deserves* this lavish outpouring of love and expense.

> "Jesus is the poor, righteous Sufferer par excellence; and the opportunity to help him in any way will soon be gone forever [cf. Ps. 41]."[1492]

26:12 Normally friends of the deceased would "prepare" the body "for burial" after death, but that was impossible in the case of criminals.[1493] Mary may or may not have understood the full significance of what she was doing, but Jesus used the situation to remind His disciples of His coming crucifixion.[1494]

[1491]Hagner, *Matthew 14—28*, p. 759.

[1492]Carson, "Matthew," p. 527.

[1493]D. Daube, "The Anointing at Bethany and Jesus' Burial," *Anglican Theological Review* 32 (1950):187-88.

[1494]Tasker, p. 242, and Kent, "The Gospel . . .," p. 977, are two commentators who believed that Mary *did* understand.

26:13 The "gospel" or *good news* to which Jesus referred was probably the good news about His death, namely, that it is the basis for salvation (v. 12). This is probably not a reference to the gospel of the kingdom. In either case, Mary's act has become a part of the gospel story in the larger sense, because the Holy Spirit preserved the record of it in Scripture. Jesus introduced this prediction with His characteristic phrase that highlighted something especially important: "Truly I say to you" or "I tell you the truth."

The agreement to betray Jesus 26:14-16 (cf. Mark 14:10-11; Luke 22:3-6)

Here the word "then" probably identifies a logical connection with what preceded.[1495] Evidently "Judas Iscariot" made these plans the same day that Jesus predicted His crucifixion in two days, namely, on Wednesday (vv. 1-5). None of the evangelists recorded Judas' motives for betraying Jesus, but Judas may have taken offense at Jesus' rebuke on the previous Saturday evening (vv. 10-13). Perhaps the fact that Jesus permitted Mary's extravagant act without rebuke convinced him that Jesus was not the Messiah.[1496] This may have been part of his motivation. The "chief priests" were the clerical leaders of Israel. They were able to do Jesus in.

The "30 pieces of silver" they agreed to pay Judas was a paltry sum (in contrast to the "high price" at which Mary evaluated Jesus, v. 9), and fulfilled Zechariah 11:12. The amount constituted a month's wages, if the silver pieces were denarii, which seems likely.[1497] Matthew did not refer to this as a fulfillment of prophecy here, but he did later in 27:9-10. Nevertheless he was careful to make the verbal correspondence with the Zechariah passage close here.[1498] This was the price an Israelite had to pay his neighbor if his ox accidentally gored his neighbor's slave to death (Exod. 21:32). This small amount of money shows the light esteem with which the chief priests and Judas regarded Jesus (cf. Isa. 53:3).

> "There was no doubt contempt for Jesus in the minds of both the Sanhedrin and Judas in this bargain."[1499]

> ". . . tragically, Judas, in selling his services to the chief priests to betray Jesus, unwittingly acts in a manner that is the exact opposite of 'servanthood': Jesus is the servant par excellence, for he delivers himself to death in order that others might gain life; by contrast, Judas delivers Jesus to death in order that he might gain advantage for himself . . ."[1500]

[1495]Plummer, p. 356; M'Neile, p. 376.
[1496]Walvoord, *Matthew:* . . ., p. 209.
[1497]France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 979.
[1498]Charles C. Torrey, "The Foundry of the Second Temple at Jerusalem," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 55 (December 1936):249.
[1499]Robertson, *Word Pictures* . . ., 1:206.
[1500]Kingsbury, *Matthew as* . . ., p. 143.

Jesus' last Passover 26:17-30

In this section Matthew emphasized the preparations for the Passover meal, Jesus' prediction of His betrayal, and the institution of the Lord's Supper.

Preparations for the Passover 26:17-19 (cf. Mark 14:12-16; Luke 22:7-13)

26:17 The first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread would have been Thursday, the fourteenth of Nisan (cf. Exod. 12:18).[1501] The Jews commonly spoke of "Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread," combined, as the "Feast of Unleavened Bread," or simply, "Unleavened Bread."[1502]

> "It was probably after the early meal, and when the eating of leaven had ceased, that Jesus began preparations for the Paschal Supper."[1503]

26:18-19 "The city" was Jerusalem. The identity of the "certain man" to whom Jesus referred His disciples, Peter and John (Luke 22:8), was not important enough for any of the evangelists to record. Obviously Jesus was planning this Passover meal carefully (cf. 21:2-3). To the disciples and the man responsible for the room, the "time" to which Jesus referred was the time of the Passover. Later the disciples realized that by "My time," Jesus meant His time of suffering, when He would culminate His mission—the Passion. They complied with Jesus' instructions. Perhaps Jesus kept the location of the Passover secret so Judas could not inform the religious leaders.

Jesus' prediction of His betrayal 26:20-25 (cf. Mark 14:17-21; Luke 22:14-16, 21-30; John 13:21-30)

26:20-22 This Passover would have taken place on Thursday evening. I have dealt with the problems involving the harmonization of John 13:1, 27; 18:28; 19:14, and 36—with the observance of the Passover that the Synoptic evangelists recorded—in my notes on the Gospel of John. The Jews did not eat the Passover meal until after sundown. Those of them living in Palestine ate it in Jerusalem or not at all.[1504] This fact helps us understand that a large number of pilgrims would have been in Jerusalem then.

The *rabbis* insisted that at least some of the Passover be eaten in a recumbent position, since this was the position in which free men ate.

[1501]For detailed discussions of the chronology of these last days, see Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects . . .*, pp. 81-93; Carson, "Matthew," pp. 528-32; and France, *The Gospel . . .*, pp. 980-85.
[1502]Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 2:15:1.
[1503]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 2:480.
[1504]Carson, "Matthew," p. 534.

Slaves, on the other hand, ate standing.[1505] Sometime during the meal, Jesus announced that one of the Twelve would "betray" Him to His enemies. As the significance of this new prediction sank in, each of the disciples present asked Jesus if it was himself. The form of the question in the Greek text expected a negative reply: "Surely not I, Lord?"

26:23 Jesus' answer did not identify the betrayer specifically. His response meant that the betrayer was someone who had already "dipped his hand" into the same "bowl" as Jesus had, namely, one of the Twelve, someone close to Jesus. This reply stressed the heinousness of the betrayal and the graciousness of Jesus.

> "This language means that one of those who had eaten bread with him [Jesus] had violated the rights of hospitality by betraying him. The Arabs today are punctilious on this point. Eating one's bread ties your hands and compels friendship."[1506]

> "The whole incident must be interpreted as a gracious attempt on the part of Jesus to make Judas realize his terrible sin and turn from it before it was too late."[1507]

If this was the main course of the meal, the bowl would have contained herbs and a fruit purée, that everyone would have been scooping out with bread to eat with the lamb.

> "Toward midafternoon of Thursday, 14 Nisan, the lambs (one per 'household'—a convenient group of perhaps ten or twelve people) would be brought to the temple court where the priests sacrificed them. The priests took the blood and passed it in basins along a line till it was poured out at the foot of the altar. They also burned the lambs' fat on the altar of burnt offerings. The singing of the *Hallel* (Pss 113—18) accompanied these steps.
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> "After sunset (i.e., now 15 Nisan), the 'household' would gather in a home to eat the Passover lamb, which by this time would have been roasted with bitter herbs. The head of the household began the meal with the thanksgiving for that feast day (the Passover *Kiddush*) and for the wine, praying over the first of four cups. A preliminary course of greens and bitter herbs was, apparently, followed by the Passover *haggadah*—in which a boy would ask the

[1505]Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 234.
[1506]Robertson, *Word Pictures . . .*, 1:208.
[1507]Walvoord, *Matthew: . . .*, p. 213.

> meaning of all this, and the head of the household would explain the symbols in terms of the Exodus (cf. M[ishnah] *Pesahim* 10:4-5)—and the singing of the first part of the *Hallel* (Ps 113 or Pss 113—14). Though the precise order is disputed, apparently a second cup of wine introduced the main course, which was followed by a third cup known as the 'cup of blessing,' accompanied by another prayer of thanksgiving. The participants then sang the rest of the *Hallel* (Pss 114—18 or 115—18) and probably drank a fourth cup of wine."[1508]

26:24 The "Son of Man" title here combines Jesus' messianic and Suffering Servant roles almost equally, as is clear from the context. Likewise Jesus' "woe" here expressed a combination of compassion and condemnation (cf. 18:17). Jesus did not identify the Old Testament prophecy that He had in mind. It may have been Isaiah 53:7-9, Daniel 9:26, or a combination of passages such as those dealing with the Passover lamb. The fact that God sovereignly planned for Messiah to die does not mitigate Judas' human responsibility in betraying Him. Jesus' death resulted in salvation for many, but it meant personal and eternal ruin for Judas.

26:25 Judas' hypocritical question, which Matthew only among the evangelists recorded, stresses again the awfulness of Judas' action in betraying Jesus. Probably Judas felt pressure to repeat the question the other disciples had asked, or else he would give himself away by his silence. "Rabbi" was a respectful title. The other disciples had called Jesus "Lord" (v. 22). Perhaps the different title suggested that Judas viewed Jesus differently from the other disciples.[1509]

Jesus' reply was sufficiently vague to lead the other disciples to conclude that Judas was not guilty—and Judas himself, to wonder if Jesus had found him out. "You said it, not I," gives the sense of Jesus' response. The Greek text reads "*su eipas*."[1510] The NIV translation, "Yes, it is you," is too strong. Jesus later said the identical words to Pilate (v. 64). Judas then left the room (John 13:30).

Jesus' institution of the Lord's Supper 26:26-30 (cf. Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:17-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26)

26:26 "And" introduces the second thing Matthew recorded that happened, as Jesus and His disciples were eating the Passover meal, the first being Jesus' announcement about His betrayer (v. 21). Jesus "took bread" (Gr. *artos*, 4:4; 6:11; 15:2, 26), specifically the unleavened bread on the table

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[1508]Carson, "Matthew," p. 533.

[1509]Lenski, p. 1019.

[1510]Cf. Carr, p. 290; M'Neile, p. 381; Plummer, p. 361.

before Him (cf. Exod. 12:15; 13:3, 7; Deut. 16:3), and then gave thanks to God ("a blessing"). A traditional prayer that many Jews used when thanking God for food was, "Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth." Perhaps Jesus said some such words. He then "broke" the bread into parts, distributed it among "the disciples," and instructed them to "eat" it, with the words: "This is My body."

The words "This is My body" were not part of the Passover ritual. Jesus' actions of breaking the bread, and then distributing it, were both significant. His body, like the bread, would be broken, though His bones were not, and His disciples would need to partake of Him personally. Jesus was linking His sacrifice with redemption history when He instituted this rite during the Passover meal. The Israelites associated their redemption from Egypt with eating the Passover meal. Now, Jesus' disciples were to associate their redemption with Jesus' death, symbolized in this similar meal.

There have been various interpretations of what Jesus meant when He said, "This is My body." There are four main views. Roman Catholics take it as a literal statement meaning the bread really becomes the body of Christ, and the contents of the cup literally become the blood of Christ. This is true when duly authorized representatives of the church conduct the service properly. This is the *transubstantiation* view. Adherents believe God transfers the body and blood of Christ into the substance of the elements. This view holds that the bread and wine *really* become the physical body and blood of Christ.[1511]

A second view is not quite so literal. It is the *consubstantiation* view and, as the word implies, its advocates see the body and blood of Christ as present "in, with, and under" the elements. Christ is really present, though not physically present, according to this Lutheran view.[1512]

The third major view is the *spiritual presence* view that Presbyterians, and other followers of Calvin's teaching on the Lord's Supper, hold. For them the spiritual presence of Christ is in the elements and, as in the former views, God ministers grace to the communicant in a concrete way through participation.[1513]

> "Now, if anyone should ask me how this takes place, I shall not be ashamed to confess that it is a secret too lofty for either my mind to comprehend or my words to declare."[1514]

[1511]See Calvin, *Institutes of . . .*, 4:17:14 for refutation.
[1512]Lenski, pp. 1026-31.
[1513]Calvin, *Institutes . . .*, 4:17:1-3.
[1514]Ibid., 4:17:32.

The fourth view is the *memorial* view. Advocates believe that when Jesus said: "This is My body," He meant: "This represents My body." In other words, they understand His statement as completely metaphorical (cf. 13:19-23, 36-39; John 15:1). A metaphor is a comparison, in which one thing is likened to a different thing by being spoken of as if it *were* that other thing (e.g., "All the world is a stage."). Advocates view the elements as pictures or emblems of the body and blood of Christ.

In contrast to the preceding views, this one does not see Christ present—*in any special sense*—in the elements. Ulrich Zwingli, the Swiss reformer, promoted this view. Today most of the churches from the Anabaptist branch of Protestantism (i.e., Baptists, Methodists, Mennonites, independent Bible churches, Evangelical Free churches, et al.) hold this interpretation.[1515] I believe this view best represents the total revelation concerning the Lord's Supper in Scripture. However, many of these, including myself, also believe that the Lord gives a blessing to His children who obey Him by remembering Him in the Lord's Supper.[1516]

Some Christian groups refer to the Lord's Supper as one of the "sacraments."[1517] They mean the elements minister grace to the participant in a more direct and physical way than those who speak of it as an "ordinance," assuming they are using these terms properly. An ordinance or sacrament is a rite the Lord commanded His followers to observe.

26:27 *This* "cup" was probably the *third* cup drunk in the Passover meal, namely, the "cup of blessing." It contained wine diluted with water. This diluted wine was what the Jews usually drank with their meals.[1518] Jesus then gave "thanks" again. The Greek word *eucharistesas* ("gave thanks") is a cognate of *eucharistе* ("thanksgiving") from which we get the English word "Eucharist," another name for the Lord's Supper.

> ". . . to this day, in every Jewish home, at a certain part of the Paschal service—just after the 'third cup,' or the 'cup of blessing,' has been drunk—the door is opened to admit Elijah the prophet as forerunner of the Messiah, while appropriate passages are at the same time read which foretell the destruction of all heathen nations (Ps. 79:6; 69:25; Lam. 3:66). It is a remarkable coincidence that, in instituting His own Supper, the Lord Jesus connected the

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[1515]See Albert H. Newman, *A Manual of Church History*, 2:312-13. For more information on these views, see articles on the Lord's Supper and synonymous terms in Bible encyclopaedias.

[1516]Cf. McGee, 4:408.

[1517]E.g., Calvin, *Institutes of . . .*, 4:19:1-2.

[1518]See Robert Stein, "Wine-Drinking in New Testament Times," *Christianity Today* 19:19 (June 20, 1975):9-11; Norman Geisler, "A Christian Perspective on Wine-Drinking," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 139:553 (January-March 1982):46-56.

> symbol, not of judgment, but of His dying love, with this 'third cup.'"[1519]

Jesus commanded "all" of His disciples to "drink from" the cup. They had to personally appropriate what symbolized His blood, as they had to personally appropriate what symbolized His body. Together, these elements represented *Jesus Himself*.

> ". . . he [Jesus] ordained the cup separately from the bread in order to teach us that he suffices for drink no less than for food."[1520]

The Eleven learned to appreciate the larger significance of these things after His resurrection (cf. 1 Cor. 11:23-28).

26:28 Jesus revealed that the sacrificial death He was about to die would ratify (make valid) "a covenant" (Gr. *diatheke*) with His people. Similarly, the sacrificial death of animals had originally ratified the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants with Abraham and Moses (Gen. Gen. 15:9-10; Exod. 24:8). In all cases, blood symbolized the life of the substitute sacrifice (cf. Lev. 17:11). Jeremiah had prophesied that God would make a New Covenant with His people in the future (Jer. 31:31-34; 32:37-40; cf. Exod. 24:8; Luke 22:20). When Jesus died, His blood ratified that covenant. This upper room meal memorialized the ratification of that covenant. Messiah saved His people from their sins by His sacrificial death (cf. 1:21). The resulting relationship between God and His people is a covenant relationship.

> "It appears, then, that Jesus understands the covenant he is introducing to be the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecies and the antitype of the Sinai covenant [cf. Exod. 24:8]. His sacrifice is thus foretold both in redemption history and in the prophetic word. The Exodus becomes a 'type' of a new and greater deliverance; and as the people of God in the OT prospectively celebrated in the first Passover their escape from Egypt, anticipating their arrival in the Promised Land, so the people of God here prospectively celebrate their deliverance from sin and bondage, anticipating the coming kingdom . . ."[1521]

The Greek preposition translated "on behalf of" or "for" is *peri*. Mark used the preposition *hyper*, also translated "on behalf of" or "for" (Mark 14:24). Both Greek words imply substitution, though the force of *peri* is more on

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[1519]Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 230. See also Zola Levitt, *A Christian Love Story*, for the significance of this cup in the Jewish marriage ceremony.

[1520]Calvin, *Institutes of . . .*, 4:17:47.

[1521]Carson, "Matthew," p. 538.

the fact that Jesus died for us. The force of *hyper* is that He died both for us and in our place.[1522] The "many" for whom Christ died includes everyone (cf. 20:28; Isa. 53:11-12). Evidently Jesus used "many" in its Semitic sense to contrast with His one all-sufficient sacrifice (cf. Rom. 5:15-19; Heb. 9:26-28; 10:10, 12, 14).[1523] Jesus' death provides the basis for God to forgive sinners. The phrase "for forgiveness of sins" goes back to Jeremiah 31:34, where forgiveness of sins is one of the blessings of the New Covenant. There are many allusions to the Suffering Servant in this verse (cf. Isa. 42:6; 49:8; 52:13—53:12).

Jeremiah predicted that God would make a New Covenant "with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" (Jer. 31:31). This is a reference to the nation of Israel. Therefore the New Covenant would be a covenant with Israel particularly (but not exclusively). Jeremiah and Ezekiel predicted many blessings that would come to Israel under the New Covenant. The Jews would experience regeneration (Jer. 31:33), forgiveness of sins (Jer. 31:34), other spiritual blessings (Jer. 31:33-34; 32:38-40), and regathering as a nation (Jer. 32:37). Jeremiah also prophesied that this covenant would be everlasting (Jer. 32:40), and that Israel would enjoy safety and prosperity in the Promised Land (Jer. 32:37; Ezek. 34:25-31). Ezekiel added that God would dwell forever with Israel in His sanctuary (Ezek. 37:26-28).

Even though Jesus ratified the New Covenant when He died on the cross, the blessings that will come to Israel did not begin then. They will begin when Jesus returns and establishes His kingdom on the earth. However, the church enters into some of the blessing of the New Covenant now.[1524] The Apostle Paul wrote of Christians serving under the New Covenant (2 Cor. 3:1—6:10; Gal. 4:21-31; cf. 1 Cor. 11:25). The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews also spoke to Christians of presently enjoying benefits of the New Covenant (Heb. 7:1—10:18).

The New Covenant is similar to a "last will and testament." When Jesus died, the provisions of His will went into effect. Immediately all people began to benefit from His death. For example, the forgiveness of sins and the possession of the Holy Spirit become the inheritance of everyone who trusts in Him, Jew and Gentile alike. However, those provisions of Jesus' "will" having to do with Israel as His particular focus of blessing, will not take effect until the nation turns to Him in repentance at His Second Coming. Thus the church partakes in the benefits of the New Covenant, even though God made it with Israel particularly.

[1522]Richard C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, p. 291.

[1523]See *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "*polloi*," by J. Jeremias, 6:543-45.

[1524]Cf. Kelly, p. 491; Scofield, *The Scofield . . .*, pp. 1297-98, footnote 1.

> "The church's relationship to the new covenant is parallel in certain respects to its connection with the kingdom promises of Israel. The church is constituted, blessed, and directed by the same Person who shall bring about the literal Jewish kingdom. It also will reign with Christ during the millennial age. In a parallel manner, the church participates in the benefits of the new covenant. Therefore, in instituting the new covenant, Christ makes provisions for this covenant to include the present program of the church as well as the future age of Israel."[1525]

Amillenarians and postmillenarians view the relationship of the church to the New Covenant differently. They believe the church replaces Israel in God's plan.[1526] The only way they can explain how the church fulfills all the promises in Jeremiah and Ezekiel is to take them non-literally. Yet the Apostle Paul revealed that God is not finished with "Israel"; it has a future in God's plan (Rom. 11:26). It is very helpful to remember that every reference to Israel in the New Testament can and does refer to the physical descendants of Jacob.

Some premillenarians believe that the church has no relationship to the New Covenant that Jeremiah and Ezekiel prophesied.[1527] They see two new covenants, one with Israel that Jesus will ratify when He returns, and one with the church that He ratified when He died. Most premillenarians, including myself, reject this view because everything said about the New Covenant can be explained adequately with only one New Covenant.

26:29 As the first Passover looked forward to deliverance and settlement in the Promised Land, so the Lord's Supper looked forward to deliverance and settlement in the promised kingdom. Disciples are to observe the Lord's Supper only until He returns (1 Cor. 11:26). Then we will enjoy the messianic banquet together with our Savior and King (Isa. 25:6; cf. Matt. 8:11). Probably Jesus spoke these words after drinking the third cup of the Passover ritual.

> "The four cups were meant to correspond to the fourfold promise of Exodus 6:6-7. The third cup, the 'cup of blessing' used by Jesus in the words of institution, is thus associated with redemption (Exod. 6:6); but the fourth cup corresponds to the promise 'I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God' (Exod. 6:7; . . .). Thus Jesus is simultaneously pledging that he will drink the 'bitter cup'

[1525]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 303.

[1526]E.g., Carr, p. 291.

[1527]E.g., Darby, 3:281; Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:325; L. Laurenson, *Messiah, the Prince*, pp. 187-88; and John R. Master, "The New Covenant," in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, pp. 93-110.

> immediately ahead of him and vowing not to drink the cup of consummation, the cup that promises the divine presence, till the kingdom in all its fullness has been ushered in. Then he will drink the cup with his people."[1528]

By referring to drinking the wine ("fruit of the vine") "anew" (Gr. *kainon*, i.e., new in a qualitatively different way), Jesus meant that He and the disciples anticipated suffering and death, but in the future they would experience the joy of the messianic banquet and "kingdom."[1529]

This verse shows that Jesus' death was very near.[1530] It also reveals that God has a definite eschatological program.[1531] Jesus wanted His disciples to labor for Him in the present age, joyfully anticipating reunion with Him in the kingdom.[1532]

26:30 What Jesus and the disciples sang was undoubtedly the last part of the *Hallel* (Ps. 114—118 or 115—118; cf. Mark 14:26; Luke 22:39; John 18:1). The Jews customarily sang this antiphonally: with the leader, in this case Jesus, singing the first lines, and the other participants responding with "Hallelujah!" What Jesus sang included a commitment to keep His vows (Ps. 116:12-13). Another section of the *Hallel* referred to Messiah's appearing (Ps. 118:25-26). The "hymn" in view may also have been Psalm 136, which some scholars claim was the only Great Hallel psalm.[1533] It can be edifying to read these psalms, while thinking of Jesus singing them in the upper room with His disciples.

> "The disciples in the immediacy of the moment could not have begun to realize the significance of what Jesus was saying and doing. This they would first do after the resurrection. But by the time Matthew's readers read this account, the Eucharist had long since become a fixed component in their worship; hence they read the narrative with fuller understanding."[1534]

Jesus' prediction of the disciples' abandonment and denial 26:31-35 (cf. Mark 14:27-31; Luke 22:31-38; John 13:31-38)

Jesus evidently gave this prediction before He and His disciples left the upper room (cf. Luke 21:31-38; John 13:36-38). Matthew and Mark probably placed it where they did, in their Gospels, to stress the gravity of the disciples' defection and Peter's denial.[1535]

[1528]Carson, "Matthew," p. 539.
[1529]Plummer, p. 365.
[1530]M'Neile, p. 383.
[1531]Allen, p. 277.
[1532]Toussaint, *Behold the . . .*, p. 303.
[1533]Barclay, 2:378.
[1534]Hagner, *Matthew 14—28*, p. 775.
[1535]Carson, "Matthew," p. 540.

Matthew presented Jesus as knowing exactly what lay ahead of Him. He was not a victim of fate, but He deliberately approached His death as a willing Sacrifice, and prepared His disciples carefully for the trauma of that event.

26:31 "Then" (Gr. *tote*) here expresses a logical, rather than a temporal, connection with what precedes. Jesus emphasized that the disciples would desert Him very soon, that very "night." They would find Him to be a source of stumbling (Gr. *skandalon*, cf. 11:6). Jesus' arrest would trip them up, and they would temporarily stop following Him faithfully. They still did not understand that the Messiah must die. By quoting Zechariah 13:7 freely, Jesus was telling them again that He would die, and that their scattering from Him was something within God's sovereign plan. This did not excuse their failure, but it prepared them for it and helped them recover after it.

In Zechariah 13:1-6, the prophet spoke of a day when, because of prevailing apostasy, "the Shepherd" would be cut down and His followers would be scattered. The "sheep" in the prophecy are the Jews, many of whom would depart from the Shepherd, but a third of whom would remain. The disciples constituted the core of this remnant that Zechariah predicted God would bless in the future (Zech. 13:7-9).

26:32 Jesus assured the disciples that He would meet them in Galilee after His resurrection. Following as it does the announcement of their abandoning Him, this promise assured them that He would not abandon them. Jesus would precede them "to Galilee," where He would be waiting for them when they arrived (cf. John 21).

26:33-35 Peter was ready to suffer martyrdom with Jesus, but he was unprepared for Jesus' voluntary self-sacrifice. Despite Peter's claim, Jesus explained that his defection was only hours away. The crowing of cocks signals the morning. Peter refused to accept the possibility that he would deny Jesus. The language he used, the rare subjunctive of the Greek verb *dei* ("if I *must*"), may imply that he really did not think Jesus was going to die.[1536]

Jesus' prayer to His Father in Gethsemane 26:36-46 (cf. Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:40-46)

This pericope illustrates the importance of facing temptation with vigilance and prayer. What is more important, it reveals Jesus' attitude toward what He was about to do. Until now, Jesus seems to have been anticipating His death with calm control and great courage. Here He appears under deep emotional stress. These attitudes harmonize with His being both the Son of God and the Servant who came to give His life a ransom for many (1:21: 20:28). Martyrs can face death bravely, but voluntary self-sacrifice demands greater strength. Moreover, Jesus knew that God would forsake Him when He died,

[1536]Ibid., p. 542.

because He would bear the punishment for (God's wrath against) the sins of humanity. As Jesus' death was unique, so was His anguish as He anticipated it.

26:36-37 Having left the upper room, traditionally located on the southern part of Mt. Zion, west of the City of David (Old Jerusalem), Jesus took His disciples east, out of Jerusalem, and across the Kidron Valley to the western slope of Mt. Olivet.[1537]

> "The streets could scarcely be said to be deserted, for, from many a house shone the festive lamp, and many a company may still have been gathered; and everywhere was the bustle of preparation for going up to the Temple, the gates of which were thrown open at midnight."[1538]

The word "Gethsemane" means "oil press." This olive press was in an olive grove where Jesus and His disciples had been before (John 18:1-2). Peter and the disciples had just boasted of their strength, whereas Jesus told them they were weak (vv. 31-35). In contrast, Jesus sensed His own weakness, and thus made plans to gain strength from His Father.[1539] This section of the text is full of contrasts involving strength and weakness (cf. 2 Cor. 12:9-10).

Jesus left most of the disciples in one part of the olive orchard, and took Peter, James, and John with Him to another area (cf. 17:1; Mark 5:37; Luke 8:51). There He began to release some of the emotions that He had held in check thus far. He became grieved or sorrowful (Gr. *lypeisthai*); and distressed or troubled (Gr. *ademonein*). The second Greek word implies, "a restless, distracted, shrinking from some trouble, or thought of trouble, which nevertheless cannot be escaped."[1540]

> "No man, in sinful and mortal flesh, can understand the conflict in the holy soul of Jesus who had never experienced the slightest shadow of sin and had never known any barrier between Himself and the Father."[1541]

26:38 The "soul" here (Gr. *psyche*) represents the whole person. Jesus meant that He felt sorrowful, painful grief (*agony* affecting His mind, will, emotions, and body) so deeply that He felt that it would almost kill Him ("to the point of death").[1542] He did not mean that He was so sad He wished He were dead. Jesus' words recall the refrain of Psalms 42:5, 11 and 43:5,

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[1537]See the diagram of Jerusalem in New Testament Times at the end of these notes.
[1538]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 2:533.
[1539]Plummer, p. 368.
[1540]M'Neile, p. 389.
[1541]Walvoord, *Matthew: . . .*, p. 218.
[1542]Taylor, p. 553.

which He probably had in mind. He shared these feelings with the chosen three disciples, in order to encourage them to "watch" and "pray" with Him.

26:39 Jesus' prostrate posture ("on His face") reflected the intense anguish He felt. He addressed God as "My Father" (cf. 6:9). This title stresses the intimacy that Jesus felt with God (cf. Mark 14:36). This is the only time, according to the Gospels, that Jesus addressed God this way. In view of the limits that His incarnation involved, Jesus may not have known if another way to provide redemption existed (cf. 24:36), though this seems unlikely.

> "We are here in full view of the deepest mystery of our faith: the two Natures in One Person. Both Natures spake [*sic*] here, and the 'if it be possible' of St. Matthew and St. Mark is in St. Luke 'if Thou be willing.'"[1543]

In one sense God can do anything, but in another sense He binds Himself to certain courses of action because of His own purposes. Jesus was asking for a release ("let this . . . pass"), "if possible," from having to undergo the outpouring of God's wrath ("this cup") for humankind's sins on the cross (cf. 4:1-11; 16:21-23).[1544] Notwithstanding, He wanted something more than that. Above all else, He wanted His Father's "will" to happen. He was submitting to suffering and death, if this was the only way to provide salvation, but He requested another solution "if possible." The "cup" is an Old Testament figure for suffering and death under the wrath of God (cf. v. 27; 20:22-23; Ps. 11:6; 75:7-8; Isa. 51:17, 22; Jer. 25:15-16, 27-29; et al.).[1545]

This is an excellent model prayer when we do not know the will of God specifically. We can request our preference, as Jesus did, but we should also submit our preference to the will of God, whatever that may be (cf. 6:10). That God may overrule our wants does not make prayer meaningless, because sometimes our preferences will be within God's will. However, He may not give us what we want without our requesting it, so we still must ask to receive (cf. James 4:2). If our preference is outside God's will, His denying our request will be a positive answer to our prayer, if we want His will above all else.

26:40-41 Jesus returned to the inner circle of disciples only to find them "sleeping." He wakened them and addressed His question to Peter as the disciples' representative. His question contained a plural "you" in the Greek text.

[1543]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 2:540.

[1544]See Hagner, *Matthew 14—28*, p. 785.

[1545]See C. E. B. Cranfield, "The Cup Metaphor in Mark xiv. 36 and Parallels," *Expository Times* 59 (1947-48):137-38.

"One hour" may be a round number, but it is undoubtedly approximate. Jesus urged them to remain spiritually alert (cf. 24:32-44), and to continue "praying" for strength to withstand the "temptation" that He had told them was coming (vv. 31-35). Even though Jesus had told them they would deny Him, their failure could have been even greater. Therefore prayer for God's sustaining grace in temptation was necessary.

One of the evidences of Jesus' greatness and His compassion, is that even in the face of the Cross, He still thought of His disciples in their lesser trials—and encouraged them.

The contrast between "the flesh" and "the spirit" is not between the sinful human nature and the Holy Spirit (as in Gal. 5:17), but between man's volitional strength and his physical weakness (cf. v. 35). We often want to do the right thing but find that we need supernatural assistance to accomplish it (cf. Rom. 7:15-25).

26:42-44 Jesus' repetition of His request illustrates persistence in prayer, not vain repetition. Persistence expresses the intensity with which we feel the need to have our petition met, and it shows our faith in God's ability to meet our need. Vain repetition relies on the simple repetition of words to supposedly wear God down so that He will give what we want.

Jesus' again illustrated the importance of submission to the Father's will for His disciples. He had taught them the importance of this attitude earlier (6:10). By submitting to God's will, Jesus learned obedience (Heb. 5:7-9).[1546]

> "In the first garden 'Not your will but mine' changed Paradise to desert and brought man from Eden to Gethsemane. Now 'Not my will but yours' brings anguish to the man who prays it but transforms the desert into the kingdom and brings man from Gethsemane to the gates of glory."[1547]
>
> "After three assaults had the tempter left Him in the wilderness; after the threefold conflict in the Garden he was vanquished."[1548]

26:45-46 Jesus' statement, translated as a question in the NASB and NIV versions, though more properly as a statement in the AV ("Sleep on now, and take your rest"), reflected the irony of the moment (cf. 23:2-3).[1549] Time that

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[1546]See S. Lewis Johnson Jr., "The Agony of Christ," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124:496 (October-December 1967):303-13.

[1547]Carson, "Matthew," p. 545.

[1548]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 2:541.

[1549]C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, p. 161.

the disciples should have spent praying was past. Jesus' arrest and their temptation were at hand. Sadly, they might as well "sleep on."

The irony continues. The Son of Man's betrayer was about to hand over *Him who is the Messiah* to sinners. Jesus probably saw and heard the group that Judas led, making its way across the Kidron Valley, and up the Mount of Olives, to Gethsemane.

> "His hour is come, and He is anxious to fulfill all that is required of Him."[1550]

Jesus had prayed: and now met His temptation with strength and dignity, and He overcame it. The disciples had slept: and now met theirs with weakness and fear, and they fell before it.

2. The arrest of Jesus 26:47-56 (cf. Mark 14:43-52; Luke 22:47-53; John 18:2-12)

26:47 The reader, who has been aware of Jesus' submissiveness to lay down His life voluntarily, may view the large armed mob as unnecessary. However, the religious leaders had feared the reaction of the people if they arrested Jesus. The people who accompanied Judas probably did not come along only to arrest Jesus, but also to restrain His disciples and other sympathizers. They probably thought they were going to have to contend with at least 11 frightened and belligerent disciples. Evidently everyone in this mob was either Jewish, from the Sanhedrin, or Roman (John 18:12).

26:48-50 Judas needed to identify Jesus because it was dark and because, even though many people knew about Jesus, far fewer had really seen Him up close. Judas turned the symbol of friendship, a kiss, into a symbol of hypocritical betrayal with his action. His greeting signal was to target Jesus, not to show affection and honor Him. Judas "kissed" Jesus repeatedly, loudly, and effusively (Gr. *katephilesen*).

Jesus' greeting, "Friend," was not intimate but gracious. Jesus' following words have been translated either as a statement or a question. As a statement, they reflect Jesus' sovereign control in this situation: "Do what you came for." As a question, they offer an ironic rebuke: "Why do you come?" Of course, Jesus knew why Judas had come.

26:51-54 John identified the aggressor as Peter and the wounded man as Malchus (John 18:10). Some have taken the description of this man, "the slave (servant) of the high priest," as indicating that he may have been the commander of the soldiers.[1551] Perhaps the other evangelists did not record

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[1550]Plummer, p. 372.

[1551]E.g., France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 1013.

Peter and Malchus' names to focus attention on Jesus. His control of this situation, even though He was the One being arrested, is an obvious emphasis by Matthew.

Peter's response was predictable, in view of his earlier protestations (vv. 33-35). Peter's courage was admirable, if misdirected. He rushed in to defend Jesus. However, Jesus' prohibition of violence and His submission to arrest made Peter look foolish. Evidently the disciples had brought two swords with them in view of Jesus' predictions (Luke 22:38). Probably Judas' guards did not arrest Peter because Jesus restrained him.

> "Peter had argued with the Word, denied the Word, and disobeyed the Word (when he went to sleep). Now he ran ahead of the Word."[1552]

Jesus' words to Peter in verse 52 showed that violence in defense of Himself was not proper. Jesus did not mean that violence in any situation is wrong.[1553] Jesus had at His disposal more than 72,000 ("12 legions of") "angels" to assist Him, in addition to His 11 faithful disciples (v. 53). He did not need Peter's help.

> "It is characteristic of this gospel that the authority and kingly majesty of Jesus should be suggested at a moment when every hope seemed to have perished."[1554]

It was necessary for Jesus to experience arrest to fulfill many "Scriptures," including all those that pertained to His death and resurrection. Jesus again voiced His commitment to the Father's will (v. 54; cf. vv. 39, 42).

26:55-56 The mob did not need to arrest Jesus secretly and violently at night. They could have found Him easily any day during the Passover season teaching in the temple courtyard. Their nighttime arrest made Jesus look like a dangerous criminal. He was "numbered with the transgressors" (Isa. 53:12). Jesus pointed out that their time and manner of arresting Him said more about them than about Him. They were the threatening ones, not He.

> "The Lord not only reprimands His disciple, but He also reproves the crowd which is taking Him. Even in His arrest Jesus is King."[1555]

> "The characterization of the crowds [in Matthew's story] develops along two lines: through their interaction with

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[1552]Wiersbe, 1:98.
[1553]See Hagner, *Matthew 14—28*, p. 791.
[1554]Carr, p. 295.
[1555]Toussaint, *Behold the . . .*, p. 306.

> Jesus; and through their being contrasted with their leaders. Until Jesus' arrest, the reader's attitude toward the crowds is largely one of approval and sympathy."[1556]
>
> "On balance, then, the Jewish crowds are 'well-disposed' toward Jesus but 'without faith' in him. In being without faith in Jesus, they contrast with the disciples. And in being well-disposed toward Jesus, they contrast with their leaders."[1557]

Matthew again pointed out that all these events fulfilled Scripture, a point of particular interest to his Jewish readers (v. 56). It was imperative that Messiah fulfill prophecy. The writers of the Old Testament Scriptures were prophets, God's authoritative representatives. By fleeing, the disciples fulfilled one of these prophecies, as Jesus had predicted (cf. v. 31; Zech. 13:7).

3. The trials of Jesus 26:57—27:26

Matthew stressed Jesus' righteousness for his readers by highlighting the injustice of His trials.

> "The breaches in law are so numerous as to be unbelievable . . ."[1558]
>
> ". . . even the ordinary legal rules were disregarded in the following particulars: (a) The examination by Annas without witnesses. (b) The trial by night. (c) The sentence on the first day of trial. (d) The trial of a capital charge on the day before the Sabbath. (e) The suborning of witnesses. (f) The direct interrogation by the High Priest."[1559]

France noted that these rules applied later, as reflected in the Mishnah (at the end of the second century A.D.), so not all of them may have been in force when Jesus was tried.[1560]

> ". . . it is often said that the leadership violated their own legal rules in at least three ways by having a capital trial during a religious festival, at night, and without defense witnesses. However, if this was more like a grand jury recommendation than an official trial, no such violations took place. Second, the goal was not to bring a religious indictment, because that would be of little legal interest to the Romans (e.g., Acts 25:18-20). The goal was to bring a political allegation that would cause the Romans to act in their own self-interest. This explains the examination's starting

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[1556]Kingsbury, *Matthew as* . . ., p. 24.
[1557]Ibid., p. 25.
[1558]Carson, "Matthew," p. 549.
[1559]Carr, p. 297.
[1560]France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 1019.

> point being Jesus' remarks about the temple in Matthew and Mark. . . . This also explains the interest in a messianic claim. If Jesus claimed to be a competing king, Caesar would not be pleased."[1561]

It may be helpful to take a brief overview of Jesus' trials, since none of the Gospel evangelists gives the complete picture. There were essentially two trials, one Jewish and one Roman. The Jewish trial, really a preliminary hearing, began when Annas informally examined Jesus late Thursday night (John 18:12-14, 19-23). During this examination, members of the Sanhedrin were evidently assembling. His accusers then brought Jesus before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, who decided He was guilty of blasphemy (Matt. 26:57-68; Mark 14:53-65).

At sunrise on Friday, the Sanhedrin decided to send Jesus to Pilate for trial (Matt. 27:1-2; Luke 22:66-71). The Roman trial began with Jesus appearing before Pilate (Matt. 27:11-14; John 18:28-38a). Pilate then sent Jesus to Herod for interrogation (Luke 23:6-12). Finally, Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate for a second examination (Matt. 27:15-31; John 18:38b—19:16). The trials were over and Jesus was at Golgotha by mid-morning, about 9:00 a.m. (Mark 15:25).

The trial before the Sanhedrin 26:57-68 (cf. Mark 14:53-65; Luke 22:54, 63-65)

Matthew omitted Jesus' hearing before Annas (John 18:12-14, 19-23). Quite possibly, Annas lived in one wing of the same building in which the Sanhedrin met.[1562]

> "This is the point at which Jesus' death is sealed; all that follows involving the Roman prefect is only the formal implementation of a verdict already decided by the Jewish authorities."[1563]

26:57 Josephus wrote that the building in which the Sanhedrin normally met, the "chamber of hewn stone," stood close to the western wall of the temple enclosure.[1564] Part of this western wall is the modern Wailing Wall where Jews go daily to pray. The exact location of this chamber is presently unknown. However, this meeting of the Sanhedrin, or some other high council of the Jewish leadership,[1565] took place in Caiaphas' house or palace, the location of which is also debated (Luke 22:54).[1566] While Annas examined Jesus, the Sanhedrin members assembled.

As mentioned earlier, "Caiaphas" was the official "high priest" then. He would have presided over the Sanhedrin. He was a Sadducee (cf. Acts 5:17). The Sadducees held the power in Israel then. The "scribes" were the

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[1561]Bock, *Jesus according . . .*, pp. 371-72.
[1562]Carson, "Matthew," pp. 552-53.
[1563]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 1016.
[1564]Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 5:4:2.
[1565]Bock, *Jesus according . . .*, p. 372.
[1566]See the diagram of Jerusalem in New Testament Times at the end of these notes.

official teachers of the law, and the "elders" were the lay representatives of the people. The "chief priests," mainly Sadducees, were also present (v. 59). These were the three groups that composed Israel's chief ruling body.

26:58 All the disciples had fled and left Jesus (v. 56; cf. Mark 14:54; Luke 22:54; John 18:15-18), "but Peter" followed "at a" safe "distance," as Jesus' guards led Him across the Kidron Valley, into Jerusalem, and into the high priest's house. This house contained an open courtyard in the middle, which was typical. Peter positioned himself inconspicuously, he thought, near a fire in "the courtyard," to observe what would happen (cf. John 18:15-16). A church now stands over the traditional site on Mt. Zion: the church of St. Peter in Gallicantu, or St. Peter at the Crowing of the Cock.

26:59-63a The phrase "whole Council" or "whole Sanhedrin" need not mean that all 70 members plus the high priest were present, since only 23 constituted a quorum (cf. Luke 23:50-51).[1567] Perhaps Matthew meant that representatives from all parts of the Sanhedrin were present. The chief priests were also the legal experts, so they evidently took the lead in conducting the trial. Matthew wrote that they tried to get "false testimony against Jesus." This does not mean they looked for liars, but they looked for witnesses who would validate their conviction that Jesus was a lawbreaker. To do that, the witnesses would have to give "false testimony."

The Mosaic Law required at least two witnesses in cases of capital offense. The lawyers had to interview several people ("false witnesses") before they finally found "two" of them that would agree on a charge against Jesus. This was another way that Matthew stressed Jesus' innocence. Interpreting with wooden literalism, one might take Jesus' words as a threat to desecrate the temple, but Jesus had spoken metaphorically (John 2:19-21). He had meant that He was the true temple, the place where people met God and where God met them. Most ancient Near Eastern people regarded the desecration of a temple as a capital offense, and the Jews shared this viewpoint (cf. Jer. 26:1-19). Jesus had not, as far as the Gospel records go, said that *He* would or could destroy the temple. He had said, "[*You*] destroy the temple . . . Nor had He said that He would rebuild the Jerusalem temple.[1568]

Even though the religious leaders oppressed and afflicted Jesus, He did not open His mouth. He "kept silent," like a lamb going to the slaughter and as a sheep before its shearers (v. 63a; cf. Isa. 53:7).

[1567]Carson, "Matthew," p. 553.
[1568]Cf. Barclay, 2:391.

26:63b Frustrated by Jesus' silence, "the high priest" tried to cut through to the basic issue. Did Jesus claim to be the Messiah ("the Christ") or not?

> "In terms of the plot of Matthew's story, this unexpected query raises the problem as to the source from which the high priest has even gotten the idea to question Jesus about being the Son of God. This source is Jesus himself and his narration of the parable of the wicked husbandmen [21:33-45]. As the presiding officer of the Sanhedrin, the high priest has knowledge of the claim to divine sonship which Jesus made in telling his parable to the chief priests and the elders. At the trial, therefore, the high priest seizes on Jesus' own claim . . . and hurls it back at Jesus as a weapon by which to destroy him."[1569]

Caiaphas demanded that Jesus answer under oath "by the living God." "Son of God" was an equivalent title with "Messiah" (cf. 2:15; 3:17; 11:27; 16:13-20). If Jesus refused to answer, He would break an oath imposed on Him legally by the high priest. If He denied the charge, He would have had no further influence even though the Sanhedrin might acquit Him. If He affirmed the charge, He would appear to be an impostor given the presuppositions of the Sanhedrin. From their viewpoint, the Messiah would not allow others to imprison Him and put His life in jeopardy.

> "Here was the crucial moment in the trial of Jesus. We might well say that all the universe held its breath as it waited for Jesus' answer."[1570]

26:64 Jesus gave the same answer to Caiaphas that He had given to Judas (v. 25). It was "affirmative in content, and reluctant or circumlocutory in formulation."[1571] Caiaphas took it as a yes (v. 65). Jesus then proceeded to expand or qualify His response, because the religious leaders' concept of Messiah was inadequate. Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, but not the "Messiah" that Caiaphas and his cronies had in mind.

Jesus alluded to Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13, to show that He was not a political Messiah in the popular mold. He was a Messiah who would *receive a kingdom from the Ancient of Days*, and return to reign in great "power" and honor. This was one of Jesus' clearest claims of messiahship (cf. 16:27; 23:39; 24:30-31; 26:29). It constituted both a revelation and a threat to Israel's leaders. From now on, Jesus claimed, His hearers would

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[1569]Kingsbury, *Matthew as . . .*, p. 87.

[1570]Barclay, 2:392.

[1571]David R. Catchpole, "The Answer of Jesus to Caiaphas (Matt. xxvi. 64)," *New Testament Studies* 17 (1970-71):226.

not see Him as He stood before them then. In the future, they would see Him as the Messiah and their Judge.

26:65-66 Rending one's garments expressed indignation or grief (cf. 2 Kings 18:37). It became a traditional response to blasphemy (cf. Acts 14:14).[1572] However, it was illegal for the high priest to rend his garments (Lev. 21:10). The punishment for "blasphemy" in the Mosaic Law was death (Lev. 24:16). At that time, blasphemy consisted of claiming for oneself a unique association with God, reflected in "sitting at God's right hand," not only misusing God's name.[1573] It also included speaking against the temple and Israel's leaders.[1574]

26:67-68 Jesus' messianic claims did not impress or intimidate His accusers. They proceeded to humiliate Him for what they considered to be His false pretensions. Jesus' passive acceptance of these indignities only reinforced their assumption and encouraged them to be even more hostile (cf. Isa. 53:7).

Mark and Luke recorded that they "blindfolded" Jesus (Mark 14:65; Luke 22:64). Perhaps Matthew's omission of this fact suggests that the leaders, and or their servants, "beat" Jesus so badly that He could not see who was doing the beating, even if they *had not* blindfolded Him (cf. Isa. 52:14). If He was the Messiah, He should have been able to tell ("prophesy" in the sense of revealing something unknown) "who hit" Him. Whether or not Jesus was limited in this knowledge is not the point: when the abusers stand before Jesus some day, when He is their Judge, the person(s) who hit Him will have to answer a question from *Him*: What is your defense for hating Me?

> "It is a remarkable fact, that when the Lord Jesus and when His martyr Stephen were before the Sanhedrim [*sic*; Acts 7:58], the procedure was in each case in direct contravention of all the rules of Rabbinical criminal law."[1575]

> "For a trial such as this a quorum was twenty-three [of the 71 Sanhedrin members]. It had certain regulations. All criminal cases must be tried during the daytime and must be completed during the daytime. Criminal cases could not be transacted during the Passover season at all. Only if the verdict was Not Guilty could a case be finished on the day

[1572]Mishnah *Sanhedrin* 7:5.

[1573]See Darrell L. Bock, *Blasphemy and Exaltation in Judaism and the Final Examination of Jesus*, pp. 30-183.

[1574]Ibid., pp. 111-12, 206-9.

[1575]Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 67.

> it was begun; otherwise a night must elapse before the pronouncement of the verdict, so that feelings of mercy might have time to arise. Further, no decision of the Sanhedrin was valid unless it met in its own meeting place, the Hall of Hewn Stone in the Temple precincts. In regard to witnesses, all evidence had to be guaranteed by two witnesses separately examined, and having no contact with each other. . . . Still further, in any trial the process began by the laying before the court of all the evidence for the *innocence* of the accused, before the evidence for his guilt was adduced."[1576]

Even though this was only a preliminary hearing, it is obvious that the Sanhedrin was not treating Jesus fairly.

Peter's denials of Jesus 26:69-75 (cf. Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:55-62; John 18:15-18, 25-27)

All four evangelists recorded three denials, but the details differ slightly.[1577]

26:69-70 Peter was warming himself near the fire "in the" center of the "courtyard" (Mark 14:66-67; Luke 22:55; John 18:18). The servant girl's words expressed both curiosity and accusation. She referred to Jesus derogatorily as "the Galilean" (cf. Mark 14:67). Scroggie believed that she was referring to the political party called "The Galileans":

> "This party rose in northern Palestine, and were the followers of one Judas of Galilee, who headed a rebellion against all foreign domination. They were insistent on their own rights, and reckless of the rights of others. They were political fanatics, and came into violent collision with Pilate (Luke xiii. 1-3). Christ's enemies tried to identify Him and His disciples with this party (Matt. xxvi. 69; Mark xiv. 70; Luke xxiii. 6)."[1578]

Other commentators understood the girl to be referring only to the geographical region of Galilee. Residents of Judea, and especially Jerusalem, regarded Galileans as inferior to themselves because Galilee was mainly rural. Evidently several people overheard her comment and may have joined in her questioning. Peter "*denied it* before them all," replying with words similar to a formal *legal oath*.[1579]

[1576]Barclay, 2:390-91. See also Laurna L. Berg, "The Illegalities of Jesus' Religious and Civil Trials," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161:643 (July-September 2004):330-42; and *The New Scofield . . .*, p. 1042.

[1577]See Max G. Mills, "Peter's Denials: Part II: An examination of the Narratives," *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 17:52 (Winter 2013):207-26.

[1578]Scroggie, pp. 48-49.

[1579]Cf. Mishnah *Shebuoth* 8:3.

26:71-72 Peter withdrew "to the gateway" leading from the street into the courtyard, perhaps because that area was darker and there were fewer people there. There "another" (servant) girl pointed him out to others standing about, as one who had been with Jesus "of Nazareth," another derogatory slur in view of the bad reputation of Nazareth (cf. 2:23). Peter denied her accusation, this time with a stronger oath. Matthew did not mean that Peter used profanity, but he invoked a curse on himself if he was lying. He appealed to something sacred to confirm his truthfulness (cf. 5:33-34; 23:16-22).

26:73-75 A third person, one of the high priest's servants who was a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off in Gethsemane (John 18:26), approached Peter with some "bystanders" about an hour later (Luke 22:59). *They* accusingly asked Peter, again, if he was not one of Jesus' disciples, since he was a Galilean. Galileans had an accent that gave them away (much like a Texan or Boston or New York accent does in America).[1580] This shows how thoroughly the residents of Jerusalem connected Jesus' ministry with Galilee, since it was the site of most of His activity. Most, if not all, of His disciples were Galileans. The one who may not have been was Judas Iscariot, if "Iscariot" refers to the town of Kerioth in Judah.

Peter denied that he knew Jesus a *third* time, using more oaths to confirm his testimony. He may have even cursed Jesus.[1581] "Immediately a rooster crowed." Peter heard it and "remembered" Jesus' prediction that he would *thrice* deny Jesus before the rooster crowed (v. 34). Peter left the courtyard and "wept bitterly" over his cowardice and failure (cf. 2 Cor. 7:10). This is Matthew's last reference to Peter.

Matthew probably recorded this incident because it illustrates Jesus' ability to foretell the future, a messianic characteristic. It also reveals the weakness of the disciples, whom Jesus had taken such pains to prepare for His passion—but without apparent success. Their concept of the Messiah and the kingdom was still largely that of most people in Israel then, though they had come to recognize Jesus as God. Only Jesus' resurrection would clarify their understanding of His messiahship and kingdom program.

> "The reader is invited to choose between two models of how the man of God behaves under pressure, the one who escapes death but with his spiritual reputation in tatters and the one who will be killed only to live again in triumph; so the reader is reminded that 'anyone who finds their life will lose it, and anyone who loses their life will find it' (10:39; 16:25)."[1582]

[1580]Hoehner, *Herod Antipas*, pp. 61-64; France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 1033; Barclay, 2:382.
[1581]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 1034.
[1582]Ibid., p. 1017.

The formal decision of the Sanhedrin 27:1-2 (cf. Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66-71)

Matthew's narrative directs the reader's attention from the courtyard back to the Sanhedrin's council chamber (v. 68). Josephus wrote that the Jews' law forbade them from putting to death anyone without a condemnation by the Sanhedrin.[1583]

The "chief priests and elders" had to decide how they would present Jesus' case "to Pilate" to secure the verdict they wanted from him. The title "governor" is a general one. Pontius Pilate was in fact a *prefect* whom Tiberius Caesar had appointed in A.D. 26 to succeed his predecessor, Valerius Gratus.[1584] Judea and Samaria had become one Roman province in A.D. 6, that Pilate now governed (in A.D. 33).[1585]

Normally Pilate lived in Caesarea, but during the Jewish feasts he often came to Jerusalem and stayed in Herod's former palace, because Jerusalem became a potential trouble spot then.[1586] The site of Herod's palace was what is now known as the Citadel, south of the Jaffa Gate. "Pontius" was his family name.

The suicide of Judas 27:3-10 (cf. Acts 1:18-19)

> "Peter has sinned by words, under the pressure of the moment, and for him there can be a new start; Judas has sinned in deed, in a premeditated, settled course of action which has now borne fruit which, too late, he wishes he could have undone."[1587]

27:3 Judas evidently "felt remorse" because he realized that he had "condemned" an innocent man to death. His remorse (Gr. *metamelomai*) resulted in a kind of repentance (Gr. *metanoeo*), but it was not complete enough. The first of these two Greek words does not indicate "sorrow for moral obliquity and sin against God, but annoyance at the consequences of an act or course of acts, and chagrin at not having known better."[1588] Judas was sorry for what he had done, and tried to make amends, but he never believed that Jesus was the Son of God (cf. Acts 1:16-19).

27:4 Judas' testimony to Jesus' innocence is an important part of Matthew's witness that Jesus was the Messiah. The response of the Sanhedrin members likewise proved their guilt. It should have meant something to them that Judas said that Jesus was innocent. Judas betrayed "innocent blood," and they condemned innocent blood.[1589] They were wrong in

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[1583]Josephus, *Antiquities of* . . ., 14:9:3.

[1584]*Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, s.v. "Pilate, Pontius," by J. G. Vos, 4:790-93. For a list of the procurators of Judea, see Edersheim, *The Life* . . ., 2:702. Cf. Josephus, *Antiquities of* . . ., 18:2:2; and idem, *The Wars* . . ., 2:9:2-4.

[1585]See also Finegan, p. 257.

[1586]Cf. Josephus, *The Wars* . . ., 2:12:1; and idem, *Antiquities of* . . ., 18:3:1.

[1587]France, *The Gospel* . . ., pp. 1039-40.

[1588]Vincent, 1:117.

[1589]Carson, "Matthew," p. 561.

thinking they could avoid responsibility for Jesus' death because of Judas' guilt in betraying Him.

> "They are 'guileful' and 'callous,' purchasing the services of Judas to betray Jesus yet leaving Judas to his own devices in coming to terms with his burden of guilt (26:14-16; 27:3-4)."[1590]

27:5-8 Judas "threw" the 30 "pieces of silver" that he had received for betraying Jesus "into the temple sanctuary." Perhaps Judas thought he could atone for his sin to some extent with this gift. Then he went out "and hanged himself" (cf. 2 Sam. 17:23 LXX). Many scholars believe this was in the region of *gehenna*, the city dump of Jerusalem, near the confluence of the Kidron and Hinnom valleys south of the city.

The Gospel writers did not reveal Judas' motive for betraying Jesus, so there have been several proposals: (1) He may have done it out of greed for the money he received. (2) He may have done it out of hatred based on disillusionment, thinking that Jesus had failed him. (3) He may have done it to force Jesus' hand, so that Jesus would act like the *Messiah* that Judas thought He should be.[1591]

The chief priests properly refused to receive the silver "into the temple treasury" (cf. Deut. 23:18). Here again, they appear scrupulous about ritual observance of the Law, while at the same time they failed to defend what is more important, namely, the innocence of Jesus (cf. 12:9-14; 15:1-9; 23:23: 28:12-13). They decided to use the money for a public project, a graveyard for foreigners, "for the burial of Gentiles who happened to die in the holy city."[1592] The place they bought had evidently been an area of land from which potters obtained their clay, but which by now had become depleted.

The account of Judas' death in Acts 1:18-19 is slightly different, but it is easy to harmonize the two stories. The chief priests "bought" the cemetery "with" Judas' ("the") "money" (v. 7). Judas evidently hanged himself, and then the corpse apparently fell to the ground and burst open. Perhaps the branch from which he hanged himself broke, or his body may have fallen when it began to decompose. The place of his suicide could have received the name "Field of Blood" before or after Judas' death. If it was before, Judas may have chosen to kill himself on the field that his money had purchased. It seems more likely, however, that the Sanhedrin purchased the field sometime after the events of this night.

[1590]Kingsbury, *Matthew as . . .*, pp. 22-23.

[1591]Barclay, 2:366-67. He favored the third view.

[1592]Tasker, p. 258.

27:9-10 This difficult fulfillment seems to be a quotation from Zechariah 11:12-13, but Matthew attributed it to Jeremiah. Probably Matthew was referring to Jeremiah 19:1-13, and or possibly Jeremiah 18:6, which he condensed using mainly the phraseology of Zechariah 11:12-13 because of its similarity to Judas' situation.[1593] See Mark 1:2-3 and 2 Chronicles 36:21 for other examples of this type of fulfillment involving the fusing of sources. Matthew named only Isaiah and Jeremiah as sources of his quotations (2:17; 3:3; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:14; 15:7; 17:9); he left his other prophetic sources unspecified. He also attributed one allusion to Daniel (24:15).

> "Joining two quotations from two Old Testament books and assigning them to one (in this case, Jeremiah) was also done in Mark 1:2-3, in which Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1 are quoted but are assigned to Isaiah. This follows the custom of mentioning the more notable prophet first."[1594]

Another possibility is that the prophecy was spoken by Jeremiah but recorded by Zechariah.[1595]

A different explanation of this problem is that Jeremiah was the first book in the prophets division of the Hebrew Old Testament. Jesus quoted Zechariah as from Jeremiah because the Book of Zechariah was in the section of the Hebrew Bible that began with the Book of Jeremiah.[1596] However, it is uncertain that the Book of Jeremiah occupied this leading position in the third division of the Hebrew Bible in Matthew's day.[1597] A similar explanation is that the name "Jeremiah" stood for the collection of prophetic writings in which the Book of Zechariah was found.

In Jeremiah 19, Israel's rulers had forsaken God and made Jerusalem a place for foreign gods. The valley where the prophet delivered his prophecy and where he smashed the vessel, received the name "Valley of Slaughter," symbolic of Judah and Jerusalem's ruin. Similarly, in Matthew 26—27, the rejection of Jesus led to the polluting of a field that is symbolic of death and the destruction of Israel, which foreigners were about to "bury." In Zechariah 11, and in Matthew 26—27, the people of Israel reject God's Shepherd and value Him at the price of a slave. In both passages, someone throws the money into the temple, and eventually someone else uses it to buy something that pollutes.

[1593]See Douglas J. Moo, "The Use of the Old Testament in the Passion Texts of the Gospels," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of St. Andrews, 1979), pp. 191-210; and Gundry, *The Use* . . ., pp. 122-27.
[1594]Bailey, in *The New* . . ., p. 59.
[1595]*The Nelson* . . ., p. 1630.
[1596]Lenski, pp. 1082-83; Walvoord, *Matthew:* . . ., p. 227.
[1597]See *The New Scofield* . . ., p. 1041.

> ". . . what we find in Matthew, including vv. 9-10, is not *identification* of the text *with* an event but *fulfillment* of the text *in* an event, based on a broad typology governing how both Jesus and Matthew read the OT . . ."[1598]

> This understanding of the fulfillment also explains the changes Matthew made in the texts that he said fulfilled the events involving Judas. Matthew saw in Jeremiah 19 and Zechariah 11, not just several verbal parallels, but a pattern of apostasy and rejection that found its ultimate fulfillment in Judas.[1599]

The trial before Pilate 27:11-26 (cf. Mark 15:2-15; Luke 23:3-25; John 18:33—19:16)

Pilate was a cruel ruler who made little attempt to understand the Jews whom he hated.[1600] He had treated them unfairly and brutally on many occasions, but recently Caesar had rebuked him severely.[1601] This probably accounts for the fairly docile attitude he displayed toward the Sanhedrin in the Gospel accounts. He wanted to avoid another rebuke from Caesar. However, his relations with the Jews continued to deteriorate until A.D. 39, when Caesar removed him from office and banished him.

After describing Pilate's severity with his Jewish subjects, Josephus wrote the following about Jesus:

> "Now, there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works—a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day."[1602]

In the Gospels, Pilate seems to be on Jesus' side, but he probably only *appeared* favorable to Jesus because he hated the Sanhedrin that opposed Him. Pilate may have also dealt with Jesus as he did, because Jesus posed no threat whatsoever to him from his viewpoint. Conviction by both the Sanhedrin and Pilate was necessary to condemn Jesus. These inveterate enemies united against Him.[1603]

[1598]Carson, "Matthew," p. 565.

[1599]See also Charles Lee Feinberg, *God Remembers, A Study of Zechariah*, pp. 167-69.

[1600]Hoehner, *Herod Antipas*, pp. 172-83.

[1601]Idem, *Chronological Aspects . . .*, pp. 105-14.

[1602]Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 18:3:3.

[1603]See also *The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Pilate," by D. H. Wheaton, pp. 996-97.

27:11 The location of this trial is uncertain. It probably took place in Herod's former palace (cf. v. 2). Another less probable site is the Antonia Fortress. This fortress was the site of Peter's later imprisonment and miraculous release (Acts 12:3-11), and Paul's defense before the people of Jerusalem and his imprisonment (Acts 21:27—23:30). Herod the Great had rebuilt this fortress and renamed it—its former name was Baris (the Citadel)—in honor of his friend Caesar Antonius.[1604]

Pilate's question grew out of Jesus' claim to be Israel's Messiah (26:64), that the Sanhedrin undoubtedly reported to Pilate (cf. 2:2). This was a political charge, whereas the charge that Caiaphas had brought against Jesus had been religious (26:61, 63). Jesus responded to Pilate's question with the same affirmative, but qualified, statement that He had formerly given Judas (26:25) and the Sanhedrin (26:64). He *was* "the King of the Jews" (cf. 2:2), but not in the way that Pilate would have thought of such a person.

Only non-Jews used this title of Jesus. Herod the Great had been the last official king of the Jews, before the Romans had assumed sovereign control of them. Jesus was not some military rebel bent on throwing off Rome's yoke using armed forces. Once again, Matthew recorded Jesus' claim to be the Messiah.

27:12-14 Having responded to the charge against Him, Jesus made no further attempt to defend or clear Himself (cf. 26:63). Pilate could hardly believe that Jesus would not try to defend Himself. Obviously Jesus was not trying to avoid the Cross (cf. Isa. 53:7). Such an attitude led Pilate to conclude that Jesus was either foolish or crazy.

Only Luke reported that now Pilate sent Jesus to Herod Antipas for questioning (Luke 23:6-12). Herod then returned Jesus to Pilate.

27:15 Evidently it had become traditional for Pilate "to release . . . one" Jewish "prisoner," that he had taken, as a favor to the Jews each Passover. He probably did this to improve relations with his subjects on a politically important occasion.

27:16 Barabbas' name means "son of the father." Jesus, of course, was the true *Son of the Father*. The Greek word translated "notorious" (*episemos*) really means eminent or outstanding (cf. Rom. 16:7). He was a famous prisoner, but not necessarily one that the Jews regarded as an undesirable character, as portrayed in some movies. On the contrary, he had evidently been leading an insurrection against the Roman government as a freedom fighter (cf. Mark 15:7; Luke 23:19; John 18:40). His guerrilla actions were

[1604]Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 15:8:5; 15:11:4; idem, *The Wars . . .*, 5:5:8.

fairly common then.[1605] Many of the Jews would have viewed Barabbas as a hero rather than as a villain. He was more of a messianic figure, in the minds of most Jews, than Jesus was.

Possibly the two men crucified with Jesus were Barabbas' partners. Matthew used the same Greek word to describe them as the other evangelists used to describe Barabbas (i.e., *lestes*, "rebels" or "insurrectionists," v. 38). All three were better men than common robbers; they were more like Robin Hood's men.

Jesus really took the place of one rebel, Barabbas, because the people preferred the one who tried to overthrow Rome's power, to the Messiah that God had provided for them. This shows their insistence on having a "messiah" of their own design (cf. 1 Sam. 8:5, 19-20).

27:17-18 The "them" (NASB) or "crowd" (NIV) is the multitude of common people (v. 15; cf. Mark 15:8). Pilate saw that the Sanhedrin was trying to get him to eliminate someone they saw as a threat to their own authority, namely, Jesus. He knew the Sanhedrin had no special desire to advance the welfare of Rome. Pilate undoubtedly knew that Jesus enjoyed great popularity among many of the Jewish people (cf. 21:1-16), and that their leaders envied Him. Therefore he appealed to the people to let him know which prisoner they wanted him "to release."

Pilate undoubtedly thought the crowd would request Jesus, thus giving him a reason to humiliate the Sanhedrin by releasing Jesus. He may have mistakenly concluded that the residents of Jerusalem supported Jesus because of His notoriety in Jerusalem at that time. However, it was actually the Galileans who were Jesus' main supporters. The people of Jerusalem seem to have willingly followed the lead of the Sanhedrin in *willfully* rejecting Jesus.

> ". . . Barabbas was also called Jesus. Some of the very oldest versions of the New Testament, for example the ancient Syriac and Armenian versions, call him *Jesus Barabbas*; and both Origen and Jerome knew of that reading, and felt it might be correct. It is a curious thing that twice Pilate refers to *Jesus who is called Christ* (verses 17 and 22), as if to distinguish Him from some other Jesus."[1606]

27:19 Pilate's "wife" interrupted him as he sat "on the judgment seat," about to render a verdict in Jesus' case. Matthew probably recorded this incident because it is another indication of Jesus' innocence. Many of the Romans

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[1605]Josephus, *Antiquities of . . .*, 18:1:1.

[1606]Barclay, 2:399.

considered dreams a means of divine guidance (cf. 1:20).[1607] In this case, God did guide her to testify to Jesus' righteousness.

> "Tradition has given her the name *Procula*; an Apocryphal Gospel describes her as a convert to Judaism [i.e., The Gospel according to Nicodemus, ch. 2]; while the Greek Church has actually placed her in the Catalogue of Saints."[1608]

> "Pilate's 'wife' (27:19) serves as a foil for Pilate himself: her warning to Pilate not to have anything to do with that innocent man (Jesus) contrasts with Pilate's decision to accede to the Jewish demand that Jesus be put to death. 'Barabbas' (27:15-26) serves as foil for Jesus; a notorious prisoner is set free, whereas an innocent man is delivered up to be crucified."[1609]

27:20-21 The Sanhedrin members "persuaded the crowd(s)" to insist that Pilate release Barabbas and crucify Jesus (cf. Mark 15:11). Initially this may seem incredible, but both Jesus and Barabbas were popular with the crowd. Pilate seemed to the people to be favoring Jesus' release, but their religious leaders favored Barabbas' release. It was quite natural that the Jerusalemites would side with their leaders against Pilate, given such a choice, especially since Jesus was a "foreign" Galilean.

The Sanhedrin had previously sown doubts about Jesus in the people's minds by circulating reports that He had blasphemed. To many of them, He was now a heretic. Jesus Himself had not even attempted what Barabbas had attempted, namely: to overthrow Rome's authority over Israel. This may have been another reason the people wanted Barabbas released.

27:22-23 Pilate tried to reverse his tactical error by asking more questions, but mob sentiment against him and his choice became stronger with each question he asked the crowd. First, Pilate offered a milder sentence for Jesus, but the crowd would have none of it (v. 22).

> "Imagine a judge asking a crowd for their decision as to what should be done with a man on trial!"[1610]

Second, Pilate attested Jesus' innocence, but the crowd's original answer had become a mob chant that the governor apparently could not change or silence.

[1607]France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 1055.
[1608]Edersheim, *The Life* . . ., 2:569.
[1609]Kingsbury, *Matthew as* . . ., p. 27.
[1610]McGee, 4:353.

> "One can almost picture this scene, somewhat like a football stadium in which the crowd shouts 'Defense!' Their cheer was 'Crucify, crucify!'"[1611]

The Jews wanted Pilate to "crucify" Jesus, rather than to punish Him another way, because: for the Jews, a person hanging on a tree was a demonstration that he was under God's curse (Deut. 21:23).

27:24 Washing one's hands to symbolize one's innocence was a Jewish custom, not a Roman custom (cf. Deut 21:6; Ps. 26:6).[1612] Probably Pilate did this to show contempt for the Jews, as well as to relieve his conscience by publicly declaring himself "innocent of this Man's blood." Pilate could wash his hands with a clear conscience because he had tried to release Jesus, but the Jews would not allow him to do so. This is not saying he was innocent of guilt, but he undoubtedly felt justified in doing what he did.

Pilate then delivered Jesus up for crucifixion, out of cowardice and fear of the Jews whom he despised. He could no more pass his personal responsibility for Jesus' death off on the people, than the chief priests and elders could avoid their responsibility for it by blaming Judas (v. 4).

27:25 The people's response was not new (2 Sam. 1:16; 3:28; 21:6, 14; cf. Acts 18:6; 20:26). "All the people" in the context refers to the crowd present, not just the Sanhedrin or the whole Jewish nation. This phrase did not cover the Jews who believed on Jesus, but unbelieving Israel. Therefore it is inappropriate to use this verse to justify anti-Semitism.[1613] The people's response was perfectly natural in that culture.[1614]

> "The viciousness of their anger could hardly be described more graphically than by this horrible utterance."[1615]

> "Owing to the leaders' abject repudiation of Jesus, they unwittingly effect, not the salvation of Israel as they had anticipated, but just the opposite, Israel's demise as God's special people: they bring a curse upon themselves and the people (27:25); they provoke the destruction of Jerusalem (22:7); and they unknowingly make themselves responsible for the transfer of God's Rule to another nation, the church, which becomes God's end-time people (21:43; 16:18; 13:38)."[1616]

[1611]Barbieri, p. 87.
[1612]Carson, "Matthew," p. 570.
[1613]See Hagner, *Matthew 14—28*, p. 828; France, *The Gospel . . .*, pp. 1057-58.
[1614]Blomberg, *Matthew*, p. 413.
[1615]Toussaint, *Behold the . . .*, pp. 310-11.
[1616]Kingsbury, *Matthew as . . .*, p. 124. Cf. Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 2:578.

> "What an injustice has been done the Jews down through the centuries. They have been blamed for the crime of men like Annas, Caiaphas, and Pilate. I do not take the responsibility for the crimes of Jesse James just because he happened to be an American, do you? Romanism for centuries has called the Jewish people the 'Christ-killers,' which has been the basis for anti-Semitism in Europe. Yet they are not any more responsible than the Gentiles are. In the final analysis, we all are responsible for His death. He died for the sins of the world. There should be no pointing of the finger at any race or group of people."[1617]

When the Jews present in Pilate's courtyard cried, "His blood be on us and on our children," they were acknowledging their responsibility for Jesus' death, but the Romans (Gentiles) were equally responsible for it.

27:26 Under Mosaic Law, the Jews could not scourge someone with more than 40 lashes (Deut. 25:3; cf. 2 Cor 11:24). However here, the Romans—not the Jews—were scourging Jesus. *They* had no limit on the number of lashes they could impose on a prisoner. They customarily used a leather whip with pieces of bone and or metal embedded in the thongs, a *flagellum*. Scourging with this whip often turned human flesh into pulp and exposed the bones and internal organs.[1618] People frequently died from this type of flogging. The Romans used it to weaken prisoners before crucifixion. This scourging fulfilled Jesus' words in 20:19. After this violent and bloody brutality, Pilate sent Jesus to die like a condemned criminal, by crucifixion (cf. Isa. 53:6, 12).

> "Judas yielded to *the devil* in his great sin (John 13:2, 27); Peter yielded to *the flesh* when he denied his Lord; but Pilate yielded to *the world* and listened to the crowd."[1619]

Matthew's account of the trial before Pilate makes Jesus' innocence clear.[1620] As in the religious trial, Jesus stood before an unjust judge whose personal prejudices guided him rather than justice. The self-sacrifice of the Suffering Servant also comes through in this trial. No one took Jesus' life from Him as a martyr. He laid it down for others in self-sacrifice.

4. The crucifixion of Jesus 27:27-56

Matthew narrated the crucifixion of Jesus by emphasizing the Roman soldiers' abuse of Jesus, the Jews' mockery of Jesus, His actual death, and the events that immediately followed His death.

[1617]McGee, 4:486.

[1618]Josephus, *The Wars . . .*, 2:21:5; 6:5:3; Barclay, 2:400.

[1619]Wiersbe, 1:101.

[1620]See R. Larry Overstreet, "Roman Law and the Trial of Jesus," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:540 (October-December 1978):323-32.

The soldiers' abuse of Jesus 27:27-31 (cf. Mark 15:16-20; John 19:16-17a)

27:27 The "soldiers" in view were probably "Pilate's" troops. The "Praetorium," or courtyard, probably refers to the one in Herod's palace near the Jaffa Gate or, less likely, the one in the Antonia Fortress. All "the soldiers" of "the cohort" present ("the whole *Roman* cohort") evidently "took Jesus into the Praetorium," i.e., the Praetorium's central courtyard. A cohort consisted of 600 soldiers. These soldiers would have been auxiliaries drawn from the non-Jewish population of surrounding areas, since there was no Roman legion stationed in Palestine at this time.[1621]

27:28-31 The Sanhedrin and or its servants had abused Jesus as a false Messiah (26:67-68). Now Pilate's soldiers abused Him as a false king. Ironically, Jesus was everything He was mocked for being: Messiah and King of Israel. The "scarlet robe" (Gr. *chlamys*) they put on Jesus (v. 28) was probably the reddish purple cloak that Roman military and civil officials wore. Perhaps the thorny spikes that the soldiers wove into a circle ("crown of thorns") resembled the one on Tiberius Caesar's head, on Roman coins, that consisted of palm branches.

The imperfect tense of the Greek verb translated "beat" means they beat Jesus on the head repeatedly (cf. Isa. 52:14). Typically, four soldiers plus a centurion accompanied a condemned prisoner to his crucifixion. The criminal normally carried the crossbeam, to which the soldiers would later nail his hands (cf. John 19:17, 23).[1622]

This pericope shows sinners at their worst, mocking and brutalizing the very Person who was laying His life down as a sacrifice for their sins (cf. 20:19).

> "Few incidents in history more clearly illustrate the brutality in the desperately wicked heart of man than that which was inflicted on Jesus the Son of God."[1623]

> "The ultimate explanation of the cross is neither Jewish hostility nor Roman injustice, but the declared purpose of God."[1624]

The crucifixion and mockery of Jesus 27:32-44 (cf. Mark 15:21-32; Luke 23:26-43; John 19:17b-27)

> "The overenthusiastic attempts to draw out the physical horror of crucifixion which disfigure some Christian preaching (and at least one recent movie) find no echo in the gospels. Perhaps the original readers

[1621]France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 1062.
[1622]Carson, "Matthew," p. 573.
[1623]Walvoord, *Matthew:* . . ., p. 231.
[1624]France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 1060.

> were too familiar with both the torture and the shame of crucifixion to need any help in envisaging what it really meant. At any rate, the narrative focus in these verses is rather on the surrounding events and the people involved (Simon, the soldiers, the bandits), together with the ironical placard over Jesus' head which sums up the Roman dismissal of his claims."[1625]

Matthew's emphasis in his account of Jesus' crucifixion was on the mocking of the onlookers.

27:32 Jesus was able to carry the crossbeam of His cross until He passed through the city gate (cf. Mark 15:21; John 19:17). Normally crucifixions took place outside the city wall (cf. Lev. 24:14; Num. 15:35-36; 1 Kings 21:13; Acts 7:58). This location symbolized added rejection (cf. Heb. 13:13).

Simon's name was Jewish. He came from the town of "Cyrene" (modern Tripoli) on the Mediterranean coast of North Africa (cf. Acts 2:10; 6:9; 11:20; 13:1). The Roman soldiers forced him to carry Jesus' cross. Perhaps Matthew mentioned this because it is another piece of irony. Jesus was really bearing Simon's cross by dying in his place. The reader understands this, but at the time, things looked completely the opposite to onlookers. Another reason Matthew may have mentioned "Simon of Cyrene" by name, is that he may have been well known among the early Christians. Ironically, *Simon Peter* should have been present to help Jesus, in view of his previous boasts (26:33, 35), but a different "Simon" had to take his place.

The Muslim teaching that Simon took Jesus' place, and died on the cross in His stead, evidently rests on the teaching of Basilides, a second century Gnostic heretic.[1626]

27:33 The word "Golgotha" is a Greek transliteration of the Aramaic *gulgolta* meaning "skull." "Calvary" comes from the Latin *calva*, "skull." Its exact location is unknown. It was evidently north of the old city wall, probably not far from the site of the present Church of the Holy Sepulcher (cf. John 19:20).[1627] Edersheim believed that the site was very close to the present Damascus Gate.[1628] Gordon's Calvary, which is not far from the Damascus Gate, does not enjoy much support as a site from scholars any more.[1629] The traditional *Via Dolorosa* ("the way of sorrow"), the route from Jesus' trial to the site of His crucifixion, rests on the assumption that Jesus' trial before Pilate took place in the Antonia Fortress.

[1625]Ibid., p. 1064.

[1626]See Iraneus, *Against Heresies* 2:24:4; and J. M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, p. 332.

[1627]See Finegan, pp. 527-32.

[1628]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 2:585.

[1629]See Andre Parrot, *Golgotha and the Chruch of the Holy Sepulchre*, pp. 59-65; and Finegan, p. 319.

27:34 Evidently some women offered Jesus some wine to drink, to which they had added myrrh to decrease His pain (Mark 15:23).[1630] Jesus refused it after tasting it, because He chose to endure the cross fully conscious. Matthew wrote "gall" because of the myrrh's bitter taste, and to make the fulfillment of Psalm 69:20-21 clearer. Another view is that the soldiers offered the drink to Jesus, but it seems uncharacteristic that they would have tried to lessen His sufferings.

27:35 The Romans normally tied or nailed the victim to the crossbeam of his cross. In Jesus' case they did the latter. They would then hoist the crossbeam and the prisoner up onto the upright member of the cross. Next they would fasten the crucified person's feet to the upright, by tying with a rope, or nailing them with a large spike. The Romans constructed crosses in various shapes: an **X**, a **T**, or, as in Jesus' case, the traditional **T** with the upright extending above the crossbeam (v. 37). Sometimes the victim was only a few inches off the ground, but Jesus appears to have been a few feet higher (v. 48; John 19:29).

Normally the Romans crucified their victims naked, "except for a loin cloth."[1631] The four executioners took the criminal's clothes for themselves. These would have been his shoes, his turban, his girdle, his inner garment, and his outer cloak or robe.[1632] In Jesus' case, they cast "lots" for His robe ("garments"), fulfilling Psalm 22:18 (cf. John 19:23-24). This happened in the late morning on Friday (Mark 15:25; John 19:14).

> "In the case of Jesus we have reason to think that, while the mode of punishment to which He was subjected was un-Jewish [i.e., crucifixion], every concession would be made to Jewish custom, and hence we thankfully believe that on the Cross He was spared the indignity of exposure. Such would have been truly un-Jewish."[1633]

Muslims believe that God took Jesus to heaven before He died, and that He will come back to earth to finish His work. As previously mentioned, they believe that it was Simon of Cyrene who died on the cross.

> "Crucifixion was unspeakably painful and degrading. Whether tied or nailed to the cross, the victim endured countless paroxysms as he pulled with his arms and pushed with his legs to keep his chest cavity open for breathing and then collapsed in exhaustion until the demand for oxygen

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[1630]Babylonian Talmud *Sanhedrin* 43a; Barclay, 2:404.

[1631]Ibid.

[1632]Ibid.

[1633]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 2:584.

> demanded renewed paroxysms. The scourging, the loss of blood, the shock from the pain, all produced agony that could go on for days, ending at last by suffocation, cardiac arrest, or loss of blood. When there was reason to hasten death, the execution squad would smash the victim's legs. Death followed almost immediately, either from shock or from collapse that cut off breathing."[1634]

The Romans reserved crucifixion for the worst criminals from the lowest classes of society. Roman citizens were exempt from crucifixion unless Caesar himself ordered it. For the Jews, crucifixion was even more horrible because it symbolized a person dying under God's curse (Deut. 21:23). Israel's leaders hung up those who had died under God's curse for others to see and learn from. Jesus bore God's curse for the sins of humankind, so that people would not have to experience that curse.

27:36 This verse is unique to the first Gospel. Sometimes people took criminals down from their crosses to prevent them from dying. The solders guarded Jesus to prevent this from happening. Jesus really did die; no one rescued Him.

27:37 Often the Romans wrote the charge against the crucified criminal on a white tablet with red or black ink and attached it to his cross. Pilate had Jesus' charge written in Aramaic, Greek, and Latin (John 19:20). He meant it to be insulting to the Jews. The title "King of the Jews" meant "Messiah" to the Jews. Pilate meant that Jesus was a messianic pretender, but of course He was indeed the Messiah. Pilate ironically stated what Matthew wanted his readers to understand, that Jesus was the Messiah that the Old Testament had predicted: Son of God and Suffering Servant.

> "'This is Jesus the King of the Jews' is actually the theme of the book, though it here is used in sheer derision."[1635]

The full accusation, compiled by comparing the various Gospel accounts, was evidently "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" (cf. Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19).

> "In one sense, this title proved to be the first 'Gospel tract' ever written."[1636]

[1634]Carson, "Matthew," p. 574. Cf. M. Hengel, *Crucifixion*; J. A. Fitzmyer, "Crucifixion in Ancient Palestine, Qumran Literature, and the New Testament," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40 (1978):493-513; and Edwin A. Blum, "Jesus and JAMA," Christian Medical Society Journal 17:4 (Fall 1986):4-11, which contains drawings of a Roman scourging, a Roman cross, the placement of the nails in Jesus' hands and feet, how Jesus would have hung on the cross, and the piercing of His side.

[1635]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., p. 312.

[1636]Wiersbe, 1:102-3.

I regard this verse as the key verse in Matthew's Gospel because it states concisely Matthew's message.

27:38 The "two" men crucified with Jesus were guerrilla freedom fighters, not simply "robbers" (Gr. *lestai*, cf. v. 16). Jesus, the true Messiah, hung between two men who wanted to bring in Israel's kingdom through violent action against Israel's enemies—contrary to God's will. Matthew may have had Isaiah 53:12 in mind when he wrote this verse: He "was numbered with the transgressors."

27:39-40 The Romans crucified people publicly to be an example to others. Evidently the site of Jesus' crucifixion was beside a road. Israel's leaders had charged Jesus with being a blasphemer because of His claim to be the One they would see seated at God's right hand (26:64). Matthew pointed out that the people passing by were really the ones "hurling abuse" (lit. blaspheming), since they charged Jesus unjustly (cf. 9:3:12:31; 26:65). Their derision fulfilled prophecy (Ps. 22:7; 109:25; Lam. 2:15). These blasphemers continued to question Jesus' identity (cf. 26:63). Like Satan, they tempted Him to prove who He was by demonstrating His identity in a way contrary to God's will (cf. 4:3, 6). Here Matthew showed the Jews mocking Jesus as the Romans had done earlier (vv. 27-31).

27:41 The "chief priests," "scribes," and "elders" represented all segments of the Sanhedrin (cf. 21:23; 26:59). They all mocked Jesus, probably with words that Jesus heard.

27:42 The reference to His saving others probably goes back to Jesus' healing ministry. The religious leaders intended to throw doubt on Jesus' healing ministry by claiming that He could not even heal His own condition. Perhaps these Jerusalemites were also recalling Jesus' triumphal entry and the cries of His mainly Galilean followers: "Save us now!" (21:9, 15). Of course, Jesus could have saved Himself from His suffering on the cross, but He could not have done so and provided salvation for humankind. In one sense the religious leaders spoke the truth.

The critics continued to point out Jesus' apparent helplessness. They implied that their failure to believe on Jesus was His fault. They promised to "believe in Him" if He would "come down" off "the cross." If He had done so, there would have been no salvation for anyone (cf. 1:21; 8:16-17; 20:28; 26:26-29; 28:18-20). They may also have been ridiculing the belief of the simple Galileans who had become His disciples.

27:43 The leaders were probably unwittingly quoting Psalm 22:8 (cf. John 11:51-52). They meant that God's failure to rescue Jesus proved that God *did not delight* in Him. Jesus' claims to be God's Son were therefore pretentious in their sight. God would identify His Son by delivering Him

from death, but not in the way the religious leaders supposed. Presently God had to abandon His Son (cf. Ps. 2).

27:44 The insurrectionists crucified with Jesus joined the others who mocked Him (cf. Isa. 53:12). Matthew did not record that anyone spoke in His defense.

This section presents many different groups and individuals mocking Jesus: the Roman soldiers, the mob, the Jewish leaders, and the insurrectionists. The picture is of the Suffering Servant totally forsaken, misunderstood, and rejected by everyone. Yet through all this, Jesus fulfilled the prophecies about Messiah.

> "As the leaders see it, Jesus threatens the overthrow of law and tradition and the destruction of the nation (12:1-14; 15:12; 21:43). In claiming to be the Son of God and the decisive figure in the history of salvation [cf. 21:33-42; 26:63-64], Jesus makes himself guilty of blasphemy against God and is deserving of death (26:65-66). Accordingly, in effecting the death of Jesus, the leaders understand themselves to be purging Israel of the error with which a false messiah would pervert the nation (27:63-64). The irony, however, is that in abjectly repudiating Jesus, the leaders achieve the opposite of what they had intended: far from purging Israel from error, they plunge it into fatal error, for they make both themselves and the people responsible for the death of the one who is in fact the Son of God and through whom God proffers salvation to Israel; unwittingly, therefore, the leaders make themselves responsible for Israel's [temporary] loss of its privileged place among the nations as God's chosen people (15:13-14; 21:37-43; 22:7; 27:20-25)."[1637]

The death of Jesus 27:45-50 (cf. Mark 15:33-37; Luke 23:44-46; John 19:28-30)

Matthew now turned his spotlight away from the observers of Jesus to Jesus Himself.

27:45 The "land" (Gr. *ge*) of Palestine became abnormally dark from noon until 3:00 p.m. This was quite clearly an abnormal, literal darkening of the sky. It could not have resulted from a solar eclipse since the Passover was celebrated at full moon.[1638] Matthew's use of *ge* probably implies Israel as well. *Darkness* in Scripture often represents judgment and or tragedy (cf. Amos 8:9-10). Compare the three *days* of darkness in Egypt (Exod. 10:21-23) and the three *hours* of darkness here. Matthew's description of the setting "conveys a strong sense of impending disaster."[1639] This was a judgment on Israel and its people, but it was also a judgment on Jesus. His cry of desolation came out of this darkness (v. 46). This was a time of judgment on Jesus for the sins of all humanity.

[1637]Kingsbury, *Matthew as . . .*, p. 162.

[1638]F. F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins outside the New Testament*, pp. 29-30.

[1639]Kingsbury, *Matthew as . . .*, p. 28.

27:46 Jesus "cried out" the words of Psalm 22:1, because He felt like His Father was abandoning Him when He "(became) sin for us" (2 Cor. 5:21) and bore God's full wrath against sin.

It was out of a similar sense of abandonment that David originally wrote the words of this psalm.

> ". . . the psalm expresses the spiritual desolation of a man who continues to trust and to appeal to God in spite of the fact that his ungodly opponents mock and persecute him with impunity."[1640]

Separation from the Father must have been the worst part of the Cross for Jesus who had never before experienced anything but intimate fellowship with His Father. Since Jesus was God, I do not believe that He experienced actual separation from God the Father. However, when the Father poured out His wrath on His Son—who took upon Himself the sins of the world—the relationship between the Father and the Son became different. Jesus became the focal point of God's judgment on mankind's sin (cf. Rom. 3:21-26; 2 Cor. 5:21).[1641]

> "Here Jesus was bearing the sins of the whole world, and even God the Father had to turn away as Jesus bore the curse and identified Himself with the sins of the whole world. When Jesus actually died, He commended Himself back into the Father's hands."[1642]

The NASB has "*Eli, Eli,*" a transliteration of the Hebrew words that mean "My God, my God." The NIV has "*Eloi, Eloi,*" the Aramaic words that mean the same thing. Probably the NIV is correct here. Jesus evidently quoted these words in Aramaic (cf. Mark 15:34). The remaining words "*lama sabachthani*" are Aramaic. Matthew translated Jesus' Aramaic words into Greek, or perhaps a later copyist made the change.

By comparing the Gospel accounts we know that Jesus spoke seven times while hanging on the cross. First, He said, "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34). Second, He told one of the insurrectionists crucified with Him, "Today you shall be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). Third, He told His mother, "Woman, behold your son," and He told John, "Behold, your mother" (John 19:26-27). Fourth, He cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34). Fifth, He said, "I thirst" (John 19:28). Sixth, He exclaimed, "It is finished" (John 19:30). Seventh,

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[1640]France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 1076.

[1641]See S. Lewis Johnson Jr., "The Death of Christ," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125:497 (January-March 1968):10-19.

[1642]Walvoord, *Matthew:* . . ., pp. 234-35.

He cried, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Matt. 27:50; Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46).

27:47 This statement, made by "some" onlookers "standing there," reflects a belief that "Elijah," whom God took to heaven without dying, would come to rescue the righteous from their distress. There is no biblical basis for this idea, though later Jews held it.[1643] Perhaps it had some connection with the prophecy about Elijah's return to herald Messiah's appearing.

27:48-49 Evidently one of the soldiers took another opportunity to mock Jesus further (cf. v. 34). The Greek word translated "sour wine" or "wine vinegar" is *oxos* and means "vinegar." It probably describes the wine that the soldiers strengthened with vinegar and drank themselves. By giving this to Jesus they really lengthened His sufferings. It was a profession of compassion to offer Jesus the drink, but it did Him no favor (cf. Ps. 69:21). "But" (Gr. *de*) in the NASB in verse 49 is too strong a translation. Including the phrase "Leave Him alone now" (NIV) gives the sense of verse 49. The soldiers wanted to see what the result of Jesus' drinking the vinegar would be. With false piety, the soldiers sarcastically said they would wait to see if Elijah would come to rescue Jesus.

27:50 Forsaken by everyone, including His Father, Jesus again cried out loudly in His agony (cf. John 19:30). This was His sixth utterance on the cross. Then followed His seventh and final statement: "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit" (Luke 23:46; cf. Ps. 31:6). Shortly thereafter, He dismissed "His spirit" (i.e., what animated His life, Gr. *pneuma*). Matthew's description of the moment of Jesus' death shows that Jesus had sovereign control over His own life (cf. John 10:18). Jesus manifested His kingly authority even with His dying breath. He did not commit suicide as Judas had done, but He laid down His life in self-sacrifice for the sins of humankind (cf. 20:28).

> "The Greek words used here and in Jn. 19:30 are unique in the N.T. In fifteen other Bible verses, 'gave up the spirit,' or 'yielded up the spirit,' is used to translate a single Hebrew or Greek word meaning *breathe out* or *expire*. This is true of the description of the death of Jesus in Mk. 15:37, 39 and Lk. 23:46. But in Mt. 27:50 and Jn. 19:30 alone these expressions translate a Greek phrase of two words, meaning *give over the spirit* or *deliver up the spirit*. The death of Jesus was different from that of any other man. No one could take His life from Him except as He was willing to permit it (Jn. 10:18). Christ chose to die so that we might live."[1644]

[1643]*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "El(e)ias," by J. Jeremias, 2(1964):930.

[1644]*The New Scofield . . .*, pp. 1043-44.

The immediate results of Jesus' death 27:51-56 (cf. Mark 15:38-41; Luke 23:45, 47-49)

27:51a The inner "veil" of the temple is probably in view here, the one separating the holy place from the most holy place (cf. Heb. 4:16; 6:19-20; 9:11-28; 10:19-22).[1645]

> "According to Jewish Tradition, there were, indeed, two Veils before the entrance to the Most Holy Place (Yoma v. 1). . . . one Veil hung on the side of the Holy, the other on that of the Most Holy Place. . . . The Veils before the Most Holy Place were 40 cubits (60 feet) long, and 20 (30 feet) wide, of the thickness of the palm of the hand . . ."[1646]

> "This veil was a most elaborately woven fabric of seventy-two twisted plaits of twenty-four threads each . . ."[1647]

> "A wooden partition separated the Most Holy from the Holy Place; and over the door hung the veil which was 'rent in twain from the top to the bottom' when the way into the holiest of all was opened on Golgotha."[1648]

> "The Rabbis speak of two veils, and say that the high-priest went in by the southern edge of the first veil, then walked along till he reached the northern corner of the second veil, by which he entered the Most Holy Place."[1649]

The tearing happened at 3:00 p.man., the time of the evening incense offering. A priest would normally have been standing in the holy place offering incense when it tore (cf. Luke 1:8-10). Some early non-biblical Jewish sources also report unusual phenomena in the temple 40 years before its destruction in A.D. 70, one of which is the temple curtain tearing.[1650]

> "The fact that this occurred from top to bottom signified that God is the One who ripped the thick curtain. It was not torn from the bottom by men ripping it."[1651]

[1645]France, The Gospel . . ., pp. 1079-80.
[1646]Edersheim, *The Life . . .*, 2:611; idem, *Sketches of . . .*, p. 197.
[1647]Robertson, *Word Pictures . . .*, 1:235-36.
[1648]Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 58.
[1649]Ibid., p. 58, f. 3.
[1650]See Robert L. Plummer, "Something Awry in the Temple? The Rending of the Temple Veil and Early Jewish Sources that Report Unusual Phenomena in the Temple around AD 30," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48:2 (June 2005):301-16.
[1651]Barbieri, p. 90.

This was a supernatural act that symbolized the opening of access to God and the termination of the Mosaic system of worship. This event marked the end of the old Mosaic Covenant and the beginning to the New Covenant (cf. 26:26-29). Jesus Himself now replaced the temple (cf. 26:61). He also became the Great High Priest of His people. The rent veil also prefigured the physical destruction of the temple, a necessary corollary to its spiritual uselessness from then on.

27:51b-53 Earthquakes often accompanied divine judgment and the manifestation of God's glory in the Old Testament (1 Kings 19:11; Isa. 29:6; Jer. 10:10; Ezek. 26:18).[1652] This one may have been responsible for the rending of the temple veil, the splitting of the rocks, and the opening of the tombs. The temple stood on a geological fault that has caused minor damage throughout history.[1653] The supernatural occurrences that accompanied Jesus' crucifixion hinted at its spiritual implications.

One writer suggested that the sentence begun in verse 51 should really end with "were opened" or "broke open" in verse 52.[1654] There were no punctuation marks in the original Greek text. Thus the two events that accompanied the earthquake were: the rending of the temple veil and the splitting of the rocks. These first two things happened when Jesus died.

The resurrection of the "saints" (lit. "holy people"), that Matthew described here, actually happened *later* when Jesus arose from the dead. This explanation obviates the problem of people coming out of their graves when Jesus died but not showing themselves until He arose. Matthew did not answer many questions that we would like answers to, such as what type of bodies they had, and whether they died again or went directly to heaven. They were Old Testament saints. I suspect that they experienced the same type of resurrection that Lazarus did.

Perhaps the reason Matthew mentioned their resurrections *here*, was to help us appreciate the fact that Jesus' death provided the basis for the resurrection of believers who died before the Cross as well as after it. Maybe he placed it here also to avoid breaking the narrative flow of chapter 28, and to connect Jesus' death immediately with resurrection.[1655] The King had authority over life and death.

> "Three points are significant here. First, Matthew is depicting in graphic terms that the entire creation was impacted by Jesus' death. . . . Second, the eeriness of the

[1652]See R. J. Bauckham, "The Eschatological Earthquake in the Apocalypse of John," *Novum Testamentum* 19 (1977):224-33.

[1653]D. Baly, *The Geography of the Bible*, p. 25.

[1654]J. W. Wenham, "When Were the Saints Raised?" *Journal of Theological Studies* 32 (1981):150-52.

[1655]Carson, "Matthew," p. 582.

> entire scene, combined with the cosmic darkness, makes the idea and association of appearances from the dead less strange. . . . Third, the release of people from the grave is a proleptic picture of the saving impact of Jesus' death."[1656]
>
> "This event is nowhere explained in the Scriptures but seems to be a fulfillment of the feast of the first fruits of harvest mentioned in Leviticus 23:10-14. On that occasion, as a token of the coming harvest, the people would bring a handful of grain to the priest. The resurrection of these saints, occurring after Jesus Himself was raised, is a token of the coming harvest when all the saints will be raised."[1657]

27:54 What the "centurion" and the other soldiers meant, when they called Jesus "the Son of God," depends somewhat on who they were and what their background was. The centurion was a Roman soldier responsible for 100 men, not that *that many* guarded Jesus at the Cross. The other soldiers may have been Romans from outside Palestine, or possibly Gentile residents of the land who served in the army. They probably meant that Jesus was a divine being in a pagan sense ("a son of a god" rather than "The Son of God"). If so, they spoke more truly than they knew.

The darkness, earthquake, and Jesus' manner of dying convinced these hardened soldiers that this was no ordinary execution. They seem to have reacted superstitiously and fearfully. Matthew recorded the centurion's comment as another ironical testimony to Jesus' messianic identity. Here *Gentiles* testified to the identity of Israel's Messiah—whom the Jews had rejected!

> "In declaring Jesus to be the Son of God, the Roman soldiers 'think' about him as God 'thinks' about him [cf. 3:17; 17:5; 16:23]. Accordingly, their evaluative point of view concerning Jesus' identity can be seen to be in alignment with that of God. . . .
>
> "Two consequences flow from this. The first is that the soldiers acclamation becomes the place in Matthew's plot where Jesus is, for the first time, both correctly and publicly affirmed by humans to be the Son of God. And the second consequence is that, as a result of the soldiers' acclamation, the way is in principle now open for the task of 'going and making disciples of all nations.' Or, to put it

[1656]Bock, *Jesus according . . .*, p. 391.
[1657]Walvoord, *Matthew: . . .*, p. 236.

> differently, one could also say that the way is now open for the task of making the salvation Jesus has accomplished in his death owing to his conflict with Israel redound to the benefit of all humankind. Then, too, since the Roman soldiers are themselves Gentiles, they attest in this way as well that the time for embarking upon the universal mission is at hand."[1658]

Other confessions that Jesus is God's Son appear in 3:17; 4:3, 6; 8:29; 11:25-27; 14:33; 16:16; 17:5; 21:37-39; 22:42-45; and 24:36.

27:55-56 Why did Matthew include reference to the "women" who observed the crucifixion? Even though Jewish society did not regard women equally with men, their witness of Jesus' death would have added some credibility to Matthew's account (cf. 1 Cor. 1:27-31). As Mary, who seemed to understand and believe something of what Jesus had said about dying (26:6-13), they did not abandon Him as most of His unfaithful male disciples had done. The only believing disciples who did not abandon Him appear to have been a few powerless women, who could not help Him but only observed His sufferings from afar, and John (John 19:26-27).

These women were the last at the cross and the first at the tomb (cf. 28:1), indicating their devotion to Jesus, whom they "had followed" in and "from Galilee," and whom they had ministered to financially (Luke 8:2-3). Thus one reason for this mention of the women appears to be to bridge Jesus' crucifixion and His resurrection. The women Matthew chose to identify by name were probably those whom his original readers knew best by the names he used to describe them. The chart below attempts to harmonize the references in the Gospels that identify the women who observed Jesus on the cross.

SOME WOMEN WHO OBSERVED THE CRUCIFIXION		
Matthew 27:56	**Mark 15:40**	**John 19:25**
Mary Magdalene	Mary Magdalene	Mary Magdalene
		Jesus' mother (Mary)
Mary the mother of James and Joseph =	Mary the mother of James the Less and Joses =	Mary the wife of Clopas
Mother of Zebedee's sons =	Salome =	Jesus' mother's sister

[1658]Kingsbury, *Matthew as . . .*, p. 90.

5. The burial of Jesus 27:57-66

Matthew emphasized two things about Jesus' burial: the fulfillment of prophecy, and the impossibility of the theory that someone stole Jesus' body.

The placing of Jesus in the tomb 27:57-61 (cf. Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:31-42)

Normally the Romans let the bodies of crucified criminals rot on their crosses without burial. If family members wanted to bury a crucified loved one, they had to apply for permission to do so. The Romans usually granted these requests, with the exception of criminals who had committed high treason. The Jews, however, did not want dead corpses to remain unburied overnight (Deut. 21:22-23).

27:57 "Evening" would have been late afternoon. The next day, a Sabbath, began at sundown, which would have occurred about 6:00 p.m. at this time of year in Palestine. Hoehner calculated that this was the evening of Friday, April 3, A.D. 33.[1659]

The location of Joseph's home is uncertain. It may have been Ramathaim-zophim, located about 20 miles northwest of Jerusalem.[1660] Joseph was a member of the Sanhedrin who had not consented to Jesus' death (Luke 23:51). Matthew only mentioned that he was a "rich . . . disciple" of Jesus (cf. Isa. 53:9-12). In the Greek text, the word translated "rich" is in the emphatic position in the sentence. Matthew apparently wanted to stress the fulfillment of Isaiah 53:9: "His grave was assigned to be with wicked men, yet with a rich man in His death." Evidently Joseph was a follower *from a distance*, since John wrote that he was a secret disciple for fear of the Jews (John 19:38). Matthew noted that even a member of the ruling body that condemned Jesus believed on Him, another testimony that He was indeed the Messiah.

27:58-60 Joseph was bold enough to "ask" Pilate "for Jesus' body." The fact that Pilate allowed Joseph to bury Jesus' body shows that the governor did not think Jesus was guilty of treason. Joseph prepared the body of Jesus for burial with the help of Nicodemus (John 19:39), and perhaps other friends and or servants.

Matthew did not mention how these men wrapped Jesus' body for burial, but simply stated that they used "a clean linen cloth" (Gr. *sindon*), which in that culture would have been expensive. This reflected their respect for Jesus.

[1659]Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects* . . ., p. 143.
[1660]France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 1089.

Joseph's "new tomb," a sign of his wealth, was probably near the present Church of the Holy Sepulcher. This area had been a stone quarry centuries earlier, out of whose walls the Jews had cut tombs.[1661] Joseph had prepared this tomb for himself, but now he put Jesus in his place. This was an extravagant act of devotion (cf. 26:6-13). It also symbolizes what every person needs to do with Jesus, namely, count Him to have taken our place as our Substitute. It was impossible (humanly speaking) for Jesus to escape from a tomb "hewn out" of solid massive rock (Gr. *petra*, cf. 16:18), even if He had been alive when placed in it. Matthew built a strong case for the reality of Jesus' resurrection, as he did for the virgin birth of Jesus.

> "Tombs were of various kinds. Many were sealed with some sort of boulder wedged into place to discourage wild animals and grave robbers. But an expensive tomb consisted of an antechamber hewn out of the rock face, with a low passage (cf. 'bent over,' John 20:5, 11) leading into the burial chamber that was sealed with a cut, disk-shaped stone that rolled in a slot cut into the rock. The slot was on an incline, making the grave easy to seal but difficult to open: several men might be needed to roll the stone back up the incline."[1662]

27:61 The Romans did not permit friends to mourn the deaths of criminals they executed. However, the women mentioned here witnessed Jesus' burial, along with Joseph and Nicodemus (cf. 1 Cor. 15:4). Matthew's notation of what they saw prepares for 28:1.

The guarding of Jesus' tomb 27:62-66

Matthew's Gospel is the only one that includes this pericope. It is a witness to the falsehood of the chief priests and elders' claim that someone stole Jesus' body (28:11-15).

27:62 The day to which Matthew referred was the Sabbath. He probably referred to it as he did ("the day after the preparation") to avoid the confusion that often arises when describing the Sabbaths associated with feasts. The Sanhedrin members could confer with Pilate if they did not have to travel more than a Sabbath day's journey, and if they did not have to enter his residence (cf. John 18:28). However, they could hardly do everything else they did without violating the Sabbath, something they hypocritically had charged Jesus with doing.

27:63-64 Jesus was in the tomb only about 36 hours, but because these hours spanned across parts of three consecutive days, the Jews reckoned the period as three days long (cf. 12:40). The fact that Jesus' prediction of His

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[1661]Carson, "Matthew," p. 584.

[1662]Ibid. See also Edersheim, *Sketches of* . . ., p. 171.

resurrection had reached the ears of these men reflects badly on the disciples' lack of faith. They should have understood and believed that Jesus would arise, since knowledge of His prediction of this event was so widespread. These Sanhedrin members did not believe Jesus would rise. They wanted to guard against any plot that His disciples might concoct alleging that He arose. The Jews needed Pilate's approval for any military action.

Jesus' first "deception" from their viewpoint was His messiahship, and His "last" (second) was His claim that He would rise from the dead. The falsely pious chief priests and Pharisees pretended to want to protect the people from deception. Matthew viewed their action as self-deception designed to deceive others ("blind leading the blind"). They had formerly accused Jesus, as here, of being a "deceiver" (26:4), but *they* were the real deceivers of the people.

27:65-66 Pilate refused to assign his own troops to guard Jesus' tomb, but he allowed the Jewish leaders to use their temple guards for this purpose (cf. 28:11). Pilate's reply was probably cynical. These men had feared Jesus when He was alive, and now they feared His disciples after He was dead. Pilate did not think the chance that Jesus' disciples would steal His body was very great. The chief priests and Pharisees secured the tomb by posting their guards at the site, and by putting an official wax "seal on the stone" door (cf. Ps. 2:4).

> "It is as if Pilate all unconsciously said, 'Keep Christ in the tomb—if you can.'"[1663]

This pericope stresses the corruptness of Israel's rulers and their willful rejection of Jesus.[1664] It also shows that Jesus was definitely dead.

> "The incongruous, ironical result is that the opponents took Jesus' words about rising from the dead more seriously than did the disciples."[1665]

B. THE KING'S RESURRECTION CH. 28

The resurrection is central to Christian theology (cf. 1 Cor. 15:12-19). However, the Gospel evangelists did not deal with the theological implications of the resurrection, but simply recorded the facts. The Apostle Paul wrote much to help us appreciate the significance of this great event (cf. Rom. 4:24-25; 6:4; 8:34; 10:9; 1 Cor. 15; 2 Cor. 5:1-10, 15; Phil. 3:10-11; Col. 2:12-13; 3:1-4; 1 Thess. 4:14).

[1663]Barclay, 2:414.
[1664]Toussaint, *Behold the . . .*, p. 314.
[1665]Hagner, *Matthew 14—28*, p. 864.

> "The history of the Life of Christ upon earth closes with a Miracle as great as that of its inception."[1666]

> "The unique fact of the gospel is the Resurrection. All other religions record the death of their leader. *Only* the Christian faith records the Resurrection of its Founder. All other religious leaders are dead. *Only Jesus is alive*."[1667]

1. The empty tomb 28:1-7 (cf. Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-8; John 20:1)

28:1 The NASB translation of the Greek preposition *opse* as "late" is misleading. The word can also mean "after," and it makes better sense if translated as such here.[1668] The women waited until "after the Sabbath" to go to Jesus' tomb (cf. Mark 16:1-2). They went early Sunday morning. The "other Mary" was Mary the mother of James and Joseph (27:56). Mark added that Salome also accompanied them (Mark 16:1). Salome was evidently the name of the mother of Zebedee's sons. The "and" (Gr. *kai*) in Mark 16:1 is probably assensive, meaning "even." Apparently they did not know that the Sanhedrin had posted a guard at the tomb. They evidently went there to remember Jesus but also to anoint Jesus' corpse (Mark 16:1). They must not have known that it had been sealed, either.

28:2-4 A second "earthquake" (divine intervention) had occurred (cf. 27:51). The relationship between the earthquake, the descent of the angel, and the rolling away of the stone is indefinite in the text. All of these events have supernatural connotations. An angel had announced the Incarnation, and now an angel announced the Resurrection (1:20-23; cf. 18:10).[1669] The angel rolled the stone away to admit the witnesses, not to allow Jesus to escape (cf. John 20:26). The guards experienced the earthquake and observed the angel, who appeared as a young man (Mark 16:5). It was seeing the angel—whose appearance was also "like lightning," which evidently terrified them so greatly—that Matthew could describe them as appearing "like dead men" (vv. 3-4). Perhaps they fainted "dead away," as in a deep sleep or coma.

28:5-7 The "angel" calmed the women's fear, caused by the shock of observing the scene, by speaking to them (cf. Mark 16:2-7; Luke 24:1-8; John 20:1). Of all the possible reasons for the tomb being open and empty that the women could have imagined, the angel clarified the one true explanation. "Jesus" had "risen" from the grave! The angel reminded them that Jesus had predicted His resurrection (cf. 16:21; 17:23; 20:18-19). He then invited them to "come" and "see" where He had lain, and to "go" and "tell"

[1666]Edershiem, *The Life* . . ., 2:621.
[1667]McGee, 4:151.
[1668]Moule, p. 86.
[1669]Plummer, p. 417.

the other "disciples" that He had "risen from the dead." They should go "quickly" because this was the greatest news of all time. Jesus would confirm His resurrection with a personal appearance in Galilee shortly (cf. 26:32). He would arrive in "Galilee" before they did, and meet them there.

> "Earlier in Matthew's story, Jesus twice said to the disciples that 'whoever loses his life will find it [10:39; 16:25],' and on the cross Jesus held fast to God in trust even as he relinquished his life (27:46, 50). In raising Jesus from the dead, God certifies the truth of Jesus' words and the efficacy of his trust, which is to say that God vindicates Jesus: God resolves Jesus' conflict with Israel by showing that Jesus is in the right."[1670]

Who Moved the Stone? is a classic apologetic on the subject of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Frank Morison, whose real name was Albert Henry Ross, was a skeptical British journalist when he began his research, but it convinced him of the historicity of the resurrection, and he became a Christian. This book presents a careful study of the last seven days of Jesus' pre-crucifixion ministry.[1671]

2. Jesus' appearance to the women 28:8-10

All the Gospels mention the fact that women were the first people to see Jesus alive. This is a proof that the resurrection was real. In that culture the witness of women was not regarded very highly.[1672] Thus, if the evangelists fabricated the resurrection, they certainly would not have written that women witnessed it first.

> "The crowning events of the resurrection narrative are the appearances of the risen Jesus first to the women and then to his disciples, i.e., the eleven. The empty tomb, for all of its impressiveness and importance, is not sufficient evidence in itself for the resurrection of Jesus. What alone can be decisive is reliable eyewitness testimony that Jesus had been raised from the dead."[1673]

28:8-9 Jesus' sudden appearance must have given the women the shock of their lives (cf. Mark 16:8). He gave them a customary salutation (Gr. *chariete*, cf. 26:49). They kneeled at and grabbed "His feet," and "worshipped Him" (cf. v. 17). Grasping someone's feet was a recognized act of supplication and homage (Mark 5:22; 7:25; Luke 17:16).

> "By this action the women were showing their submission to the Lord in the manner in which subjects in the East

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[1670]Kingsbury, *Matthew as . . .*, pp. 90-91.
[1671]Frank Morison, *Who Moved the Stone?*
[1672]Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, pp. 698-99, especially footnote 282.
[1673]Hagner, *Matthew 14—28*, p. 874. Cf. p. 878.

> were accustomed to render obeisance to a sovereign prince."[1674]

28:10 Jesus calmed the women's fears as the angel had done, and He repeated the instructions that the angel had given them. Jesus' "brethren" were His disciples (12:48-50; 18:15; 23:8; 25:40; cf. 5:22-24; 7:3-5; 18:21, 35).

> "Why, then, Matthew's record of a resurrection appearance in Galilee? The answer surely lies in the combination of two themes that have permeated the entire Gospel. First, the Messiah emerges from a despised area . . . and first sheds his light on a despised people . . .; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor in spirit (5:3). For this reason, too, the risen Jesus first appears to women whose value as witnesses among Jews is worthless . . . Second, 'Galilee of the Gentiles' (4:15) is compatible with the growing theme of Gentile mission in this Gospel . . . and prepares for the Great Commission (28:18-20)."[1675]

3. The attempted cover-up 28:11-15

This brief account finishes off Matthew's story of the guard in 27:62-66.

28:11 "Some" of the guards left the others at the tomb and "reported" the earthquake, the angel, and the empty tomb "to the chief priests." That they reported to the priests strongly suggests that they were Jewish temple guards rather than Roman guards (cf. 27:65). If they had been Roman guards and had reported to their Roman superiors, they probably would have lost their lives for falling asleep on duty (cf. Acts 12:19; 16:27-28).

28:12-14 The action of these Sanhedrin members proves that their promise to believe in Jesus if He would come down from the cross was hypocritical (cf. 27:42; Luke 24:13-32). They continued to show more concern for their own reputations and what was expedient than for the truth.

Their devised story was a weak one that a critic might easily discredit. If the guards had been asleep, they could not have known of the theft. If one of them was awake, why did he not sound an alarm? It was also incredible that the disciples, who had abandoned Jesus out of fear, would have summoned enough courage to risk opening the guarded tomb. Moreover, if the Sanhedrin had any evidence against the disciples, they surely would have prosecuted them, but they did not.

[1674]Tasker, p. 272.

[1675]Carson, "Matthew," p. 590. See Zane C. Hodges, "Form-Criticism and the Resurrection Accounts," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124:496 (October-December 1967):339-48.

Molesting graves was sometimes punishable with death in the ancient Near East.[1676] Consequently Jesus' enemies resorted to bribery to shut the mouths of the soldiers, and later Pilate, if necessary. Previously they had been willing to pay Judas money to protect their interests (26:15).

28:15 Matthew explained that this was the origin of the Jewish explanation of the empty tomb that persisted to the time of his writing, whenever that may have been.

> "Justin, *Dial[logus*]. 108, tells us that this charge was still being actively propagated in the middle of the second century; it was an obvious countermove to Christian claims of Jesus' resurrection."[1677]

Justin was an early Christian writer.

> "It is interesting to see the means that the Jewish authorities had used in their desperate attempts to eliminate Jesus. They had used treachery to lay hold of Him. They had used illegality to try Him. They had used slander to charge Him to Pilate. And now they were using bribery to silence the truth about Him. *And they failed*."[1678]

"The reason for Matthew's diligence in approaching the resurrection in such an apologetic manner is evident since so much is dependent upon the resurrection of the Messiah. It authenticated His person. To the nation of Israel, His resurrection was the sign of the prophet Jonah (Matthew 12:38-39) attesting the fact that Jesus was the Messiah. The reason Matthew says nothing about the ascension is bound up in this point. If Jesus is the Messiah, then an account of the ascension is both unnecessary and self-evident to the Israelite. He would yet come in clouds of glory. What mattered to Matthew was that Jesus was Israel's Messiah and the resurrection proved that fact; therefore he goes no further. Second, the resurrection validated Christ's prophecies concerning His rising from the dead (Matthew 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19). Finally, the message of the King involving the character of the kingdom, the offer of the kingdom, and the offer's withdrawal are all involved in the resurrection, for the resurrection verifies the truthfulness of all that Christ ever spoke."[1679]

[1676]Cf. Bruce M. Metzger, "The Nazareth Inscription Once Again," in *Jesus und Paulus*, pp. 221-38.
[1677]France, *The Gospel* . . ., p. 1093.
[1678]Barclay, 2:416.
[1679]Toussaint, *Behold the* . . ., pp. 316-17.

4. The King's final instructions to His disciples 28:16-20 (cf. Mark 16:15-18; 1 Cor. 15:6)

Whereas the chief priests used bribe money to commission the soldiers to spread lies, the resurrected Jesus used the promise of His power and presence to commission His disciples to spread the gospel.[1680] This is the final address that Matthew recorded Jesus giving. As usual, he used a narrative to lead up to the address. In this case the narrative consisted of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Therefore this address is the climax of these events in Matthew's structure of his Gospel. It is also climactic because of its position at the very end of the Gospel and because of its content. It recapitulates many of Matthew's themes, and it ends the story of Jesus where it began: in Galilee.[1681]

> ". . . to demonstrate that Jesus, in enduring the humiliation of the cross, did not die as a false messiah but as the Son who did his Father's will (21:37-39), God vindicates Jesus by raising him from the dead (28:5-6). Consequently, when Jesus appears to the disciples on the mountain in Galilee (28:16-17), it is as the crucified Son of God whom God has vindicated through resurrection (28:5c-6). Although some disciples show, in doubting, that they are yet weak of faith (28:17; 14:32), they all see on the person of Jesus that crucifixion, or suffering sonship, was the essence of his ministry (21:42). Correlatively, they also grasp at last that servanthood is the essence of discipleship (16:24; 20:25-28). As ones, therefore, who comprehend, in line with God's evaluative point of view (17:5), not only who Jesus is but also what he was about and what it means to be his followers, the disciples receive from Jesus the Great Commission and embark on a mission to all the nations (28:18-20; chaps. 24—25)."[1682]

28:16 "But" (NASB) is too strong a contrast for the Greek word *de* that occurs here and means "then" (NIV). However, the action of "the Eleven" contrasts with the action of the guards (v. 15). We do not know "the mountain" to which Jesus had directed them, and to which they went (cf. 26:32; 28:7, 10). "Galilee," of course, was where Jesus began His ministry, and it had Gentile connotations because of the presence and proximity of many Gentiles. What Jesus would tell His disciples in Galilee would continue His ministry and teaching that they had already experienced.

28:17 When the Eleven finally "saw" Jesus, "they worshipped Him." Yet some of them still had unresolved questions about how they should respond to Him. The word "doubted" (Gr. *edistasan*) means "hesitated" (cf. 14:31).[1683] Apparently Jesus' resurrection did not immediately dispel all

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[1680]Carson, "Matthew," p. 590.

[1681]See France, *The Gospel . . .*, pp.2-5, for further explanation of the geographical plan of Matthew's Gospel.

[1682]Kingsbury, *Matthew as . . .*, pp. 162-63.

[1683]I. P. Ellis, "'But some doubted,'" *New Testament Studies* 14 (1967-68):574-80.

the questions that remained in the minds of His disciples. Perhaps, also, some of them still felt embarrassed about deserting Him and wondered how He would deal with them.

28:18 Jesus proceeded to address the Eleven. Matthew did not record them saying anything, which focuses our attention fully on Jesus' words. Notice the repetition of "all" in verses 18-20: all authority, all nations, all things, and all the days. Matthew stressed the "authority" of Jesus throughout his Gospel (7:29; 10:1, 7-8; 11:27; 22:43-44; 24:35).

> "Not merely power or might (*dunamis*), such as a great conqueror might claim, but '*authority*' (*exousia*), as something which is His by right, conferred upon Him by One who has the right to bestow it (Rev. ii. 27)."[1684]

God restricted Jesus' authority before His resurrection because of His role as the Suffering Servant. Following His resurrection, God broadened the sphere in which Jesus exercised authority (cf. 4:8-10). He became the One through whom God now mediates "all authority" (cf. Dan. 7:14; Phil. 2:5-11). This was Jesus' great claim.

> "By raising Jesus from the dead and investing him with all authority, God vindicates Jesus and thus decides the conflict in his favor (28:5-6, 18)."[1685]

28:19 Jesus' disciples should "go . . . and make disciples" because Jesus now has universal authority. He gave them a new universal mission in keeping with His new universal authority. Previously He had limited their work to Israel (10:1-8; cf. 15:24). Now He sent them *into all the world*. They could go confidently, knowing that Jesus has sovereign control over everything "in heaven and on earth" (cf. Rom. 8:28). Note the similarity between the original cultural mandate to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth (Gen. 1:28; 9:1) and this new mandate for believers.

In the Greek text, there is one imperative verb, "make disciples" (Gr. *matheteusate*), modified by three participles, "going," "baptizing," and "teaching."[1686] This does not mean that we should make disciples wherever we may happen to go. The participle "going" is not just circumstantial, but it has some imperatival force.[1687] In other words, Jesus commanded His disciples to reach out to unreached people to make disciples, not just to make disciples among those with whom they happened to come in contact.

[1684]Plummer, p. 428.

[1685]Kingsbury, *Matthew as . . .*, p. 8.

[1686]See Robert D. Culver, "What Is the Church's Commission? Some Exegetical Issues In Matthew 28:16-20," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125:499 (July-September 1968):239-53.

[1687]Cleon Rogers, "The Great Commission," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 130:519 (July-September 1973):258-67.

Making disciples involves bringing people into relationship with Jesus as pupils to Teacher. It involves getting them to take His yoke of instruction upon themselves as authoritative (11:29), accepting His words as true, and submitting to His will as what is right. A good disciple is one who listens, understands, and obeys Jesus' instructions (12:46-50). Disciples of Jesus must duplicate themselves in others.[1688]

The "all nations" (Gr. *panta ta ethne*) in view are all tribes, nations, and peoples, including Israel (cf. Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18).[1689] The phrase does not mean Gentiles exclusive of Jews. Matthew hinted at the Gentiles' inclusion in God's plan to bless humanity throughout his Gospel (1:1; 2:1-12; 4:15-16; 8:5-13; 10:18; 13:38; 24:14; et al.). Jesus' disciples should make disciples among all people without distinction.

"Baptizing" and "teaching" are to characterize making disciples. Baptizing is to be into "the name" of the triune God (cf. 1 Cor. 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; 1 Pet. 1:2; Rev. 1:4-6). The "into" (Gr. *eis*) suggests coming into relationship with God as a disciple. Baptism indicates both coming into covenant relationship with God, and pledging submission to His Lordship.[1690] Obviously water baptism rather than Spirit baptism is in view (cf. 3:6, 11, 13-17).

This baptism differs from John the Baptist's baptism. This one is universal, whereas John's baptism was for Israelites. This baptism rests on the finished work of Jesus Christ, but John's baptism prepared people for Jesus' person and work.[1691]

Jesus placed Himself on a level with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

> "It is one thing for Jesus to speak about his relationship with God as Son with Father (notably 11:27; 24:36; 26:63-64) and to draw attention to the close links between himself and the Holy Spirit (12:28, 31-32), but for 'the Son' to take his place as the middle member, between the Father and the Holy Spirit, in a threefold depiction of the object of the disciple's allegiance is extraordinary."[1692]
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> "The Trinity of God is confessedly a great mystery, something wholly beyond the possibility of complete explanation. But we can guard against error by holding fast

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[1688]See James G. Samra, "A Biblical View of Discipleship," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160:638 (April-June 2003):219-34.

[1689]John P. Meier, "Nations or Gentiles in Matthew 28:19," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 39 (1977):94-102.

[1690]G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, pp. 90-92.

[1691]Lenski, p. 1178.

[1692]France, *The Gospel . . .*, p. 1118.

> to the facts of divine revelation: that (1) with respect to His *Being* or essence, God is one; (2) with respect to His *Personality*, God is three; and (3) we must neither divide the essence, nor confuse the Persons."[1693]

The early Christians evidently did not understand the words "in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" as a baptismal formula that they needed to use whenever they baptized someone (cf. Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; Rom. 6:3). Jesus apparently meant that His disciples were to connect others with the triune God of the Bible in baptism.

> "What, then, did Christ mean when he commanded that Baptism should be in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, except that we ought with one faith to believe in the Father, the Son, and the Spirit? What else is this than to testify clearly that the Father, Son, and Spirit are one God?"[1694]

Jesus did not specify a mode of baptism, though immersion was common in Judaism and is consistent with the meaning of the Greek word *baptizo*, "to immerse or submerge." His command to baptize disciples seems to rule out baptism for infants and others who cannot consciously understand and agree with what baptism signifies.

28:20 Discipling also involves "teaching" followers everything ("all") that Jesus "commanded" His disciples. Notice that the content is not the Old Testament law but Jesus' commands. This does not mean that the Old Testament is unimportant. Jesus validated the whole Old Testament during His ministry (5:17-20). However, the focus now becomes *Jesus* as the Source of revelation, rather than secondary sources such as the Old Testament prophets (cf. Heb. 1:1-4). Likewise, the revelation of the rest of the New Testament came through Jesus and is therefore also authoritative (Acts 1:1-2). "All" of this teaching remains authoritative forever (24:35).

Disciples must not just *understand* what Jesus has commanded, as foundational as that is. They must also *obey* it.

> ". . . Matthew uses this command to weave the final thread of his argument. The purpose of his Gospel was to prove to Israel that Jesus is the Messiah. The inquiring Jew would ask, 'If Jesus is our King, where is our kingdom?' Matthew has indicated that the kingdom was offered to Israel, rejected by them, and postponed by God. At the present time and until the end of the tribulation the kingdom is

[1693]The New Scofield . . ., p. 1046.

[1694]Calvin, *Institutes of* . . ., 1:13:16.

> being offered to the Gentiles (Romans 11). Therefore, the disciples are to disciple all nations. At the end of the age the kingdom of Israel will be inaugurated by the return of Israel's King."[1695]

> This Gospel ends not with a command but with a promise, or rather a fact. Jesus will "always" be "with" His disciples as they carry out His will. This is His great commitment. Immanuel is still "God with us" (1:23; cf. 18:20). "Always" (Gr. *pasas tes hemeras*) literally means "the whole of every day."[1696] Jesus promised to be with us every day forever. It does not mean He will cease being with us when the present age ends and the messianic kingdom begins. Throughout the present age (Gr. *sunteleias tou aiovos*), Jesus' disciples are to carry out His Great Commission.[1697]

The Great Commission explains what Jesus has called His believing disciples to do between His departure from the earth and His return to establish His kingdom on earth (i.e., during the inter-advent age). That is why these verses are so important. Every Gospel writer recorded Jesus giving these marching orders, but they did not all record the same occasion when He did so. Jesus evidently gave this commission on at least three separate occasions. Mark and John recorded the first one (Mark 16:15-16; John 20:21-23). Matthew recorded the second one (28:19-20), and Luke recorded the third one (Luke 24:46-48; Acts 1:8). His purposes for us as His disciples could not be clearer.

Jesus began each of the preceding major sections of Matthew's Gospel with ministry, and concluded each with teaching. However, in this one He concluded with a command for His disciples to continue His ministry and teaching. Thus the book closes with the sense that the ministry and teaching of Jesus are ongoing.

[1695]Toussaint, *Behold the . . .*, p. 319.

[1696]Moule, p. 34.

[1697]See D. Edmond Hiebert, "An Expository Study of Matthew 28:16-20," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149:595 (July-September 1992):338-54; and L. Legrand, "The Missionary Command of the Risen Lord Mt 28:16-20," *Indian Theological Studies* 24:1 (March 1987):5-28.

Appendix 1

A HARMONY OF THE GOSPELS					
	Date[1698]	**Matthew**	**Mark**	**Luke**	**John**
Introduction					
The sources of the Gospels				1:1-4	
The pre-existence and incarnation of Jesus					1:1-18
The genealogies of Jesus		1:1-17		3:23-38	
Events before the beginning of Jesus' public ministry					
The announcement of John the Baptist's birth				1:5-25	
The announcement of Jesus' birth to Mary				1:26-56	
The birth and early life of John the Baptist				1:57-80	
The announcement of Jesus' birth to Joseph		1:18-25			
The birth of Jesus	Winter of 5-4 B.C.			2:1-7	
The announcement to the shepherds				2:8-20	
Jesus' circumcision				2:21	
Jesus' presentation in the temple				2:22-38	
The visit of the wise men		2:1-12			
The holy family's trip to Egypt		2:13-18			
The holy family's return to Nazareth		2:19-23		2:39	
Jesus' childhood				2:40	
The holy family's trip to Jerusalem	Passover, April 29, 9 A.D.			2:41-50	
Jesus' youth in Nazareth				2:51-52	
The beginning of John the Baptist's ministry	29 A.D.			3:1-2	
John's message		3:1-6	1:1-6	3:3-6	
John's preaching		3:7-12	1:7-8	3:7-18	
The beginning of Jesus' public ministry					
Jesus' baptism	Summer or fall of 29 A.D.	3:13-17	1:9-11	3:21-22	

[1698]Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects* . . ., p. 143.

Jesus' temptation		4:1-11	1:12-13	4:1-13	
John the Baptist's testimony about Jesus					1:19-28
John's identification of Jesus as the Messiah					1:29-34
Jesus' first disciples					1:35-51
Jesus' early Galilean ministry					
Jesus' first miracle at Cana					2:1-11
Jesus' initial visit to Capernaum					2:12
Jesus' first visit to Jerusalem					
Jesus' first cleansing of the temple	April 7, 30 A.D.				2:13-22
Initial response to Jesus in Jerusalem					2:23-25
Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus					3:1-15
Jesus' mission and its consequences					3:16-21
The parallel ministries of Jesus and John the Baptist					3:22-30
The explanation of Jesus' preeminence					3:31-36
Jesus' reasons for leaving Judea		4:12	1:14	3:19-20; 4:14	4:1-4
Jesus' ministry in Samaria					
Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman					4:5-26
Jesus' explanation of evangelistic ministry					4:27-38
The response to Jesus in Samaria					4:39-42
Jesus' major Galilean ministry					
Jesus' arrival in Galilee					4:43-45
A synopsis of Jesus' teaching		4:17	1:14-15	4:14-15	
The healing of an official's son					4:46-54
Jesus' first rejection in Nazareth				4:16-30	
Jesus' move to Capernaum		4:13-16		4:31a	
Jesus' call of four disciples		4:18-22	1:16-20	5:1-11	
Jesus' healing of a demoniac in Capernaum			1:21-28	4:31b-37	

Jesus' healing of Peter's mother-in-law in Capernaum		8:14-15	1:29-31	4:38-39	
Jesus' healing of many other Galileans		8:16-17	1:32-34	4:40-41	
Jesus' first tour of Galilee		4:23-25	1:35-39	4:42-44	
Jesus' healing of a leprous Jew		8:1-4	1:40-45	5:12-16	
Jesus' healing and forgiveness of a paralytic		9:1-8	2:1-12	5:17-26	
Jesus' call of Matthew		9:9-13	2:13-17	5:27-32	
Jesus' defense of His disciples for not fasting		9:14-17	2:18-22	5:33-39	
Jesus' second visit to Jerusalem					
Jesus' healing of the paralytic at the Bethesda pool in Jerusalem					5:1-9
The antagonism of the Jewish authorities					5:10-18
The Son's equality with the Father					5:19-29
The Father's witness to the Son					5:30-47
Jesus' resumption of His Galilean ministry					
Jesus' defense of His disciples for plucking grain		12:1-8	2:23-28	6:1-5	
Jesus' healing of a man with a withered hand		12:9-14	3:1-6	6:6-11	
Jesus' teaching and healing by the Sea of Galilee		12:15-21	3:7-12		
Jesus' selection of the Twelve			3:13-19	6:12-16	
The Sermon on the Mount		5:1—7:29		6:17-49	
Jesus' healing of a centurion's servant		8:5-13		7:1-10	
Jesus' raising of a widow's son				7:11-17	
John the Baptist's inquiry		11:2-19		7:18-35	
Jesus' woes on the Galilean cities		11:20-30			
Jesus' anointing in Simon the Pharisee's house				7:36-50	
Jesus' second tour of Galilee				8:1-3	
The controversy about Jesus' connection with Beelzebul		12:22-37	3:20-30		

The Jewish leaders' demand for a sign		12:38-45			
The visit of Jesus' family members		12:46-50	3:31-35	8:19-21	
Kingdom parables Jesus taught by the Sea of Galilee		13:1-53	4:1-34	8:4-18	
Jesus' stilling of the Sea of Galilee		8:18, 23-27	4:35-41	8:22-25	
Jesus' healing of a demoniac in Gadara		8:28-34	5:1-20	8:26-39	
Jesus' healings of a woman and Jairus' daughter		9:18-26	5:21-43	8:40-56	
Jesus' healing of two blind men		9:27-31			
Jesus' healing of a dumb demoniac		9:32-34			
Jesus' last visit to Nazareth		13:54-58	6:1-6a		
Jesus' third tour of Galilee		9:35—10:4	6:6b-7	9:1-2	
The Twelve's tour of Galilee two by two		10:5—11:1	6:8-13, 30	9:3-6, 10a	
Herod's curiosity about Jesus		14:1-3	6:14-16	9:7-9	
The earlier death of John the Baptist	31 or 32 A.D.	14:4-12	6:17-29		
The training of the Twelve around Galilee					
The feeding of the 5000		14:13-21	6:31-44	9:10b-17	6:1-14
Jesus' withdrawal for prayer		14:22-23	6:45-46		6:15
Jesus' walking on the water		14:24-33	6:47-52		6:16-21
Jesus' reception at Gennesaret		14:34-36	6:53-56		
The bread of life discourse					6:22-59
Responses to the bread of life discourse					6:60—7:1
Jesus' defense of His disciples for eating with unwashed hands		15:1-20	7:1-23		
Jesus' healing of the Phoenician girl		15:21-28	7:24-30		
Jesus' healing of a deaf man in the Decapolis region			7:31-37		
Jesus' healing of many near the Sea of Galilee		15:29-31			
The feeding of the 4000		15:32-39	8:1-10		
The sign of Jonah		16:1-4	8:11-13		
Jesus' rebuke of His disciples' dulness		16:5-12	8:14-21		

Jesus' healing of a blind man near Bethsaida			8:22-26		
Peter's confession of faith		16:13-20	8:27-30	9:18-21	
Jesus' first prediction of His death and resurrection		16:21-26	8:31-37	9:22-25	
Jesus' prediction of His coming in glory		16:27-28	8:38—9:1	9:26-27	
The Transfiguration		17:1-8	9:2-8	9:28-36	
The question of Elijah's return		17:9-13	9:9-13		
Jesus' healing of a demon-possessed boy		17:14-20	9:14-29	9:37-43a	
Jesus' second prediction of His death and resurrection		17:22-23	9:30-32	9:43b-45	
Jesus' lesson on paying taxes		17:24-27			
Jesus' teaching on greatness in the kingdom		18:1-5	9:33-37	9:46-48	
Jesus' teaching about stumbling others		18:6-14	9:38-50	9:49-50	
Jesus' teaching about forgiving others		18:15-35			
Jesus' teaching about forsaking all as disciples		8:19-22		9:57-62	
The brothers of Jesus' counsel to display Himself in Jerusalem					7:2-9
Jesus trip to Jerusalem through Samaria				9:51-56	7:10
Jesus' later Judean ministry					
The controversy surrounding Jesus					7:11-13
Jesus' ministry at the Feastof Tabernacles	September 10-17, 32 A.D.				7:14-44
The Jewish leaders' unbelief					7:45-52
The woman caught in adultery					7:53—8:11
Jesus' light of the world discourse					8:12-20
The Pharisees' attempt to stone Jesus					8:21-59
Jesus' healing of the man born blind					9:1-41
Jesus' good Shepherd discourse					10:1-21
The tour of the Seventy two by two				10:1-24	

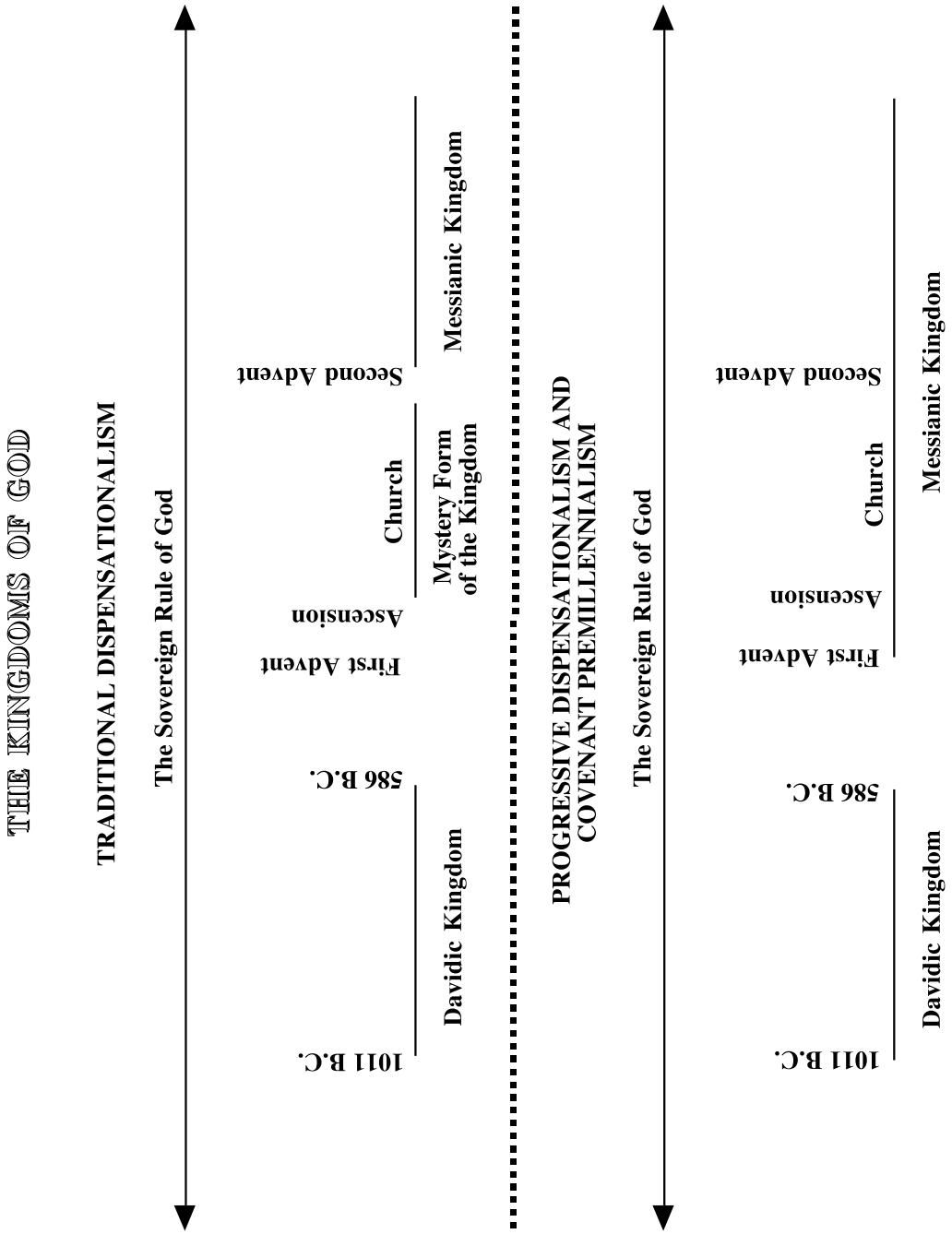
The parable of the good Samaritan				10:25-37	
Jesus' meal in Mary and Martha's home				10:38-42	
The Lord's Prayer				11:1-4	
The parable of the shameless friend				11:5-13	
The second charge of Jesus' collusion with Satan				11:14-36	
Jesus' condemnation of the Pharisees				11:37-54	
Jesus' teaching about stewardship				12:1-59	
The parable of the barren fig tree				13:1-9	
Jesus' healing of the woman bent double				13:10-17	
Parables of the kingdom repeated				13:18-21	
The confrontation at the feast of Dedication	December 18, 32 A.D.				10:22-39
Jesus' withdrawal to Perea					10:40-42
Jesus' later Perean ministry					
Jesus' teaching about the narrow way				13:22-35	
Jesus' healing of a man with dropsy				14:1-6	
Jesus' teaching about participants in the kingdom				14:7-24	
Jesus' teaching on the cost of discipleship				14:25-35	
The parables of three lost things				15:1-32	
Three parables about stewardship				16:1—17:10	
Jesus' raising of Lazarus					11:1-54
Jesus' healing of 10 lepers				17:11-19	
Jesus' teaching about His return				17:20-37	
The parable of the persistent widow				18:1-8	
The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector				18:9-14	
Jesus' departure from Galilee and entrance into Judea		19:1-2	10:1		
Jesus' teaching on divorce		19:3-12	10:2-12		

Jesus' reception of the children		19:13-15	10:13-16	18:15-17	
The rich young ruler's encounter with Jesus		19:16-30	10:17-31	18:18-30	
The parable of the laborers in the vineyard		20:1-16			
Jesus' third announcement of His death and resurrection		20:17-19	10:32-34	18:31-34	
James and John's desire for prominence		20:20-28	10:35-45		
The healing of blind men near Jericho		20:29-34	10:46-52	18:35-43	
Jesus' visit with Zachaeus				19:1-10	
The parable of the minas				19:11-27	
Jesus' final public ministry in Jerusalem					
Jesus' arrival in Bethany	Saturday, March 28, 33 A.D.				11:55-57
Mary's anointing of Jesus' feet		26:6-13	14:3-9		12:1-11
The Triumphal Entry	Monday, March 30, 33 A.D.	21:1-11, 14-17	11:1-11	19:28-44	12:12-19
Jesus' cursing of the fig tree	Tuesday, March 31, 33 A.D.	21:18-19a	11:12-14		
Jesus' second cleansing of the temple		21:12-13	11:15-18	19:45-48	
The disciples' discovery of the withered fig tree	Wednesday, April 1, 33 A.D.	21:19b-22	11:19-25		
Jesus' kernel of wheat teaching					12:20-50
The Sanhedrin's challenge of Jesus' authority		21:23—22:14	11:27—12:12	20:1-19	
The question of paying taxes to Caesar		22:15-22	12:13-17	20:20-26	
The Sadducees' question about the resurrection		22:23-33	12:18-27	20:27-40	
The question about the greatest commandment		22:34-40	12:28-34		
Jesus' question about David' Lord		22:41-46	12:35-37	20:41-44	
Jesus' final denunciation of Israel's religious leaders		23:1-39	12:38-40	20:45-47	
The widow who gave all she had			12:41-44	21:1-4	
Jesus' preparation of the Twelve for the future					

The Olivet Discourse		24:1—25:46	13:1-37	21:5-36	
Jesus' practices during this week				21:37-38	
Jesus' prediction of His crucifixion in two days	Thursday, April 2, 33 A.D.	26:1-5	14:1-2	22:1-2	
Judas' agreement to betray Jesus		26:14-16	14:10-11	22:3-6	
Preparations for the Passover meal		26:17-19	14:12-16	22:7-13	
The beginning of the Passover meal		26:20	14:17	22:14-16, 24-30	
Jesus' washing of the Twelve's feet					13:1-20
Jesus' identification of His betrayer		26:21-25	14:18-21	22:21-23	13:21-30
Jesus' giving of the new commandment					13:31-35
Jesus' prediction of Peter's denial		26:31-35	14:27-31	22:31-34	13:36-38
Jesus' instruction to prepare for mission				23:35-38	
Jesus' institution of the Lord's Supper		26:26-29	14:22-25	22:17-20	
The Upper Room Discourse					14:1—16:33
Jesus' high priestly prayer					17:1-26
Jesus' departure for Mt. Olivet		26:30	14:26	22:39	18:1
Jesus' agony in Gethsemane		26:36-46	14:32-42	22:40-46	
Jesus' passion ministry					
Jesus' arrest	Friday, April 3, 33 A.D.	26:47-56	14:43-52	22:47-53	18:2-14
Jesus' interrogation by Annas					18:19-24
Jesus' interrogation by Caiaphas		26:57-68	14:53-65	22:54-65	18:15-18, 25-27
Jesus' condemnation by the Sanhedrin		27:1	15:1a	22:66-71	
Judas' remorse and suicide		27:3-10			
Jesus' first appearance before Pilate		27:2, 11-14	15:1b-5	23:1-7	18:28-38a
Jesus' appearance before Herod				23:8-12	
Jesus' second appearance before Pilate		27:15-26	15:6-15	23:13-25	18:38b—19:16
The Roman soldiers' severe beating of Jesus		27:27-31	15:16-20		

Jesus' journey to Golgotha		27:32-34	15:21-23	23:26-32	19:17
Jesus' first three hours on the cross		27:35-44	15:24-32	23:33-43	19:18-27
Jesus' second three hours on the cross		27:45-50	15:33-37	23:44-45a, 46	19:28-30
The phenomena accompanying Jesus' death		27:51-56	15:38-41	23:45b, 47-49	
The treatment of Jesus' body after His death					19:31-37
Jesus' burial		27:57-60	15:42-46	23:50-54	19:38-42
The women's visit to Jesus' tomb		27:61-66	15:47	23:55-56	
Jesus' resurrection and post-resurrection appearances					
The earthquake and the angel's removal of the stone	Sunday, April 5, 33 A.D.	28:2-4			
The women's return to Jesus' tomb		28:1, 5-7	16:1-8	24:1-8	20:1
The women's report of the empty tomb to the disciples		28:8		24:9-11	20:2
Peter and John's visit to the tomb				24:12	20:3-9
Jesus' appearance to Mary Magdalene			16:9-11		20:10-18
Jesus' appearance to other women		28:9-10			
The guards' report of the empty tomb		28:11-15			
Jesus' appearance to Peter				24:34b	
Jesus' appearance to the disciples walking to Emmaus			16:12-13	24:13-34a, 35	
Jesus' appearance to the disciple when Thomas was absent			16:14-18	24:36-43	20:19-23
Jesus' appearance to the disciples when Thomas was present	Sunday, April 12, 33 A.D.				20:24-31
Jesus' appearance to seven disciples at the Sea of Galilee	Between April 12 and May 14, 33 A.D.				21:1-24
Jesus' appearance to the Eleven on a mountain in Galilee		28:16-20			
Jesus' last appearance and Ascension	Thursday, May 14, 33 A.D.		16:19-20	24:44-53	
Conclusion					
The scope of the Gospels					20:25

Appendix 2


THE KINGDOMS OF GOD
TRADITIONAL DISPENSATIONALISM
The Sovereign Rule of God
1011 B.C.
Davidic Kingdom
586 B.C.
First Advent
Ascension
Church
Mystery Form of the Kingdom
Second Advent
Messianic Kingdom
PROGRESSIVE DISPENSATIONALISM AND COVENANT PREMILLENNIALISM
The Sovereign Rule of God
1011 B.C.
Davidic Kingdom
586 B.C.
First Advent
Ascension
Church
Second Advent
Messianic Kingdom

Appendix 3

Views of the Messianic Kingdom

View	Has it begun?	How many stages?	Jesus' location	Jesus' agent
Non-millennial	Yes	One	Heaven or the New Earth	Church
Covenant Premillennial	Yes	Two	Heaven (already) and Earth (not yet)	Church and Church
Progressive Dispensational	Yes	Two	Heaven (already) and Earth (not yet)	Church and Israel
Traditional Dispensational	No	One	Earth	Israel

Appendix 4

The Parables of Jesus

(in probable chronological order)

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
The physician			4:23	
The lamp	5:15	4:21-25	8:16; 11:33	
The blind guide	7:3-5		6:39-42	
The two trees	7:15-20		6:43-44	
The two paths	7:13-14			
The two men	12:35		6:45	
The two builders	7:21-27		6:46-49	
The friends of the bridegroom	9:15	2:19-20	5:34-35	
The new patch and the old garment	9:16	2:21	5:36	
The new wine and the old wineskins	9:17	2:22	5:37-38	
The children in the market	11:16-17		7:31-32	
The two debtors			7:41-42	
The divided house	12:25	3:24-25		
The strong man's house	12:29	3:27	11:21-22	
The empty house	12:43-45			
The soils	13:3b-9, 18-23	4:3-20	8:5-15	
The seed growing by itself		4:26-29		
The weeds	13:24-30, 36-42			
The mustard seed	13:31-32	4:30-32	13:18-19	
The yeast hidden in meal	13:33		13:20-21	
The hidden treasure	13:44			
The pearl	13:45-46			
The dragnet	13:47-50			
The homeowner	13:52			
The unforgiving servant	18:21-35			
The good Samaritan			10:30-37	
The shameless friend			11:5-8	
The rich fool			12:16-21	
The faithful servants			12:36-38	
The two servants	24:45-51		12:42-48	
The barren fig tree			13:6-9	
The seats at the wedding feast			14:7-11	
The great banquet			14:15-24	
The tower builder			14:28-30	
The king going to battle			14:31-33	
The lost sheep	18:12-14		15:4-7	
The lost coin			15:8-10	
The prodigal son			15:11-32	

The shrewd manager			16:1-9	
The rich man and Lazarus			16:19-31	
The unworthy servant			17:7-10	
The one taken and the one left	24:40-42		17:34-35	
The persistent widow			18:1-8	
The Pharisee and the tax collector			18:9-14	
The laborers in the vineyard	20:1-16			
The minas			19:11-27	
The two sons	21:28-32			
The wicked tenant farmers	21:33-46	12:1-12	20:9-19	
The royal wedding banquet	22:1-14			
The fig tree	24:32-34	13:28-30	21:29-31	
The doorkeeper		13:34-37		
The watchful homeowner	24:43-44			
The ten virgins	25:1-13			
The talents	25:14-30			
The sheep and the goats	25:31-46			

Appendix 5

What ends a marriage in God's sight?

Jesus' teaching

Matthew 5:27-32

1. Adultery is a sin. v. 27 (Exod. 20:14; Deut. 5:18)
2. Lusting after someone sexually is a form of adultery, so it's sin. v. 28
3. Therefore, Jesus' disciples need to deal with sexual temptations seriously. vv. 29-30
4. Moses allowed the Israelites to divorce. v. 31
5. People who divorce and then remarry someone else commit adultery. v. 32
6. But, remarriage by the innocent party in a divorce doesn't result in adultery if the guilty party was sexually unfaithful. v. 32
7. (Marital unfaithfulness, Gr. *pornea*, means having sexual intercourse with anyone other than one's spouse.)
8. Summary: Divorce is permissible, but it's never God's best (Mal. 2:16).

Matthew 19:9

(Same as points 5 - 7 above.)

Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18

(Same as point 5 above.)

Paul's teaching

1 Cor. 7:11-16

1. Christians who divorce have two options: remain unmarried or be reconciled. vv. 11-12
2. Christians who are married to non-Christians shouldn't initiate a divorce. v. 13
3. Christians who are married to non-Christians shouldn't refuse to grant a divorce if their mate insists on getting one. vv. 14-16

1 Cor. 7:39-40

1. Only death ends a marriage in God's sight (not adultery, marital unfaithfulness, or a divorce). v. 39
2. Widows and widowers are free to remarry other Christians. v. 39
3. But they may be happier if they remain unmarried. v. 40

Appendix 6

The Miracles of Jesus

(in probable chronological order)

Key: ***N*** = nature miracles (9); ***H*** = healings (21); ***E*** = exorcisms (6); ***R*** = raising the dead (3)

Event	Place	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Changing water into wine (***N***)	Cana (Galilee)				2:1-11
Healing an official's son (***H***)	Capernaum (Galilee)				4:46-54
Providing a large catch of fish (***N***)	Sea of Galilee			5:1-11	
Healing a demoniac (***E***)	Capernaum (Galilee)		1:21-28	4:31-37	
Healing Peter's mother-in-law (***H***)	Capernaum (Galilee)	8:14-15	1:29-31	4:38-39	
Healing many others (***H***)	Capernaum (Galilee)	8:16-17	1:32-34	4:40-41	
Healing a leprous Jew (***H***)	Galilee	8:1-4	1:40-45	5:12-16	
Healing and forgiving a paralytic (***H***)	Capernaum (Galilee)	9:1-8	2:1-12	5:17-26	
Healing a paralytic (***H***)	Pool of Bethesda, Jerusalem (Judea)				5:1-9
Healing a man with a withered hand (***H***)	Galilee	12:9-14	3:1-6	6:6-11	
Healing many others (***H***)	Galilee	12:15	3:10-11		
Healing a centurion's servant (***H***)	Capernaum (Galilee)	8:5-13		7:1-10	
Raising a widow's son (***R***)	Nain (Galilee)			7:11-17	
Healing a dumb and blind demoniac (***E***)	Galilee	12:22-24			
Stilling a storm (***N***)	Sea of Galilee	8:23-27	4:35-41	8:22-25	
Healing a demoniac (***E***)	Gadara (Decapolis)	8:28-34	5:1-20	8:26-39	
Healing a woman with a hemorrhage (***H***)	Galilee	9:20-22	5:25-34	8:43-48	
Raising Jairus' daughter (***R***)	Galilee	9:23-26	5:35-43	8:49-56	
Healing two blind men (***H***)	Capernaum (Galilee)	9:27-31			

Healing a dumb demoniac (***E***)	Capernaum (Galilee)	9:32-34			
Feeding over 5000 people (***N***)	Near Bethsaida (Galilee)	14:13-21	6:31-44	9:10b-17	6:1-14
Walking on water (***N***)	Sea of Galilee	14:22-33	6:45-52		6:15-21
Healing a Phoenician girl (***H***)	Phoenicia	15:21-28	7:24-30		
Healing a deaf man with a speech impediment (***H***)	Decapolis		7:31-37		
Healing many others (***H***)	Near the Sea of Galilee	15:29-31			
Feeding over 4000 people (***N***)	Decapolis	15:32-38	8:1-9		
Healing a blind man (***H***)	Near Bethsaida (Galilee)		8:22-26		
Healing a demon-possessed boy (***E***)	Galilee	17:14-20	9:14-29	9:37-43a	
Placing money in a fish's mouth (***N***)	Capernaum (Galilee)	17:24-27			
Healing a man born blind (***H***)	Jerusalem (Judea)				9:1-7
Healing a dumb demoniac (***E***)	Judea			11:14-15	
Healing a woman bent double (***H***)	Judea			13:10-17	
Healing a man with dropsy (***H***)	Perea			14:1-6	
Raising Lazarus (***R***)	Bethany (Judea)				11:1-44
Healing ten lepers (***H***)	Samaria			17:11-19	
Healing two blind men (***H***)	Near Jericho (Judea)	20:29-34	10:46-52	18:35-43	
Killing a fig tree (***N***)	Near Jerusalem (Judea)	21:18-22	11:12-14, 19-25		
Restoring Malchus' ear (***H***)	Near Jerusalem (Judea)			22:49-51	
Providing a large catch of fish (***N***)	Sea of Galilee				21:1-13

Appendix 7

Some Figures of Speech in Scripture		
Figure	**Definition**	**Example**
Hendiadys	the expression of a single complex idea by joining two substantives with "and" rather than by using an adjective and a substantive	"the sacrifice and service of your faith" = the sacrificial service of your faith
Hyperbole	overstatement for the sake of emphasis	cut off your hand if it causes you to stumble = deal radically with instruments of temptation
Litotes	the statement of a negative to stress its positive opposite	"no small thing" = a very large thing
Merism	the identification of two extremes to represent the whole	"heaven and earth" = the universe
Metaphor	a comparison in which one thing is likened to a different thing by being spoken of as if it were that other	"All the world is a stage."
Metonymy	the use of the name of one thing for that of another asssociated with or suggested by it	"Jerusalem" = Israel; "the White House has decided" = "the President has decided"
Oxymoron	the joining of contradictory or incongruous terms to make a point	"an hour is coming and now is" = what will characterize the future is present even now
Personification	attributing the qualities of a person to an inanimate object	"the stones would cry out"
Polarization	expressing the extremes to highlight the difference between them	"as far as the east is from the west" = a very great distance
Simile	a comparison in which one thing is likened to a different thing by the use of "like," "as," etc.	a heart as big as a whale
Synecdoche	the use of the whole to represent a part of it, or the use of a part to represent the whole	"all the world" = all the Roman world, or "bread" = "food"

Appendix 8

The Incarnation of God the Son

There are several aspects of the incarnation of God the Son that merit clarification.

First, God the Son existed throughout eternity. The incarnation was not the beginning of His existence (John 1:1-3; Col. 1:15-17).

Second, when the Son became incarnate He took upon Himself full humanity. He became a man in every essential respect. Specifically, He didn't just take a human body, but He also took a human personality (emotions, intellect, and will), soul (the capacity to interact with other humans), and spirit (the capacity to interact with God). He was fully human in the non-material aspects of humanity, not just the material (physical) aspects. Every human being, including Jesus Christ, possesses both material (physical) characteristics and immaterial (spiritual) characteristics. Both are essential to humanity.

Third, the incarnation does *not* mean Jesus took a *sinful* human nature when He became a man. Sin is not an essential part of being human. God created man without sin, and then Adam and Eve chose to sin. Sin has affected all human beings since the fall, but being sinful is not an essential part of being human. Sin is, in a sense, foreign to humanity. It's a stain that has discolored every aspect of every person (total depravity). That Jesus was not sinful is clear from two facts.

> First, He committed no sins (1 Pet. 2:22). This includes thoughts as well as actions, omissions as well as commissions, little sins as well as big sins. In no way did Jesus ever deviate from God's will for human beings.
>
> Second, He did not inherit a sinful nature from His human father, as all other human beings do, since He was conceived by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:23; Luke 1:35). The virgin birth of Jesus guarantees His sinless human nature.

Fourth, whereas Jesus assumed a human body and a human nature at His birth, He has never and will never cease to be fully human as well as fully divine. When Jesus Christ returns to the earth at His second coming, He will have a human body and a human nature, as He did when He ascended into heaven (Acts 1:11). One day we will see Jesus as His disciples saw Him. And He will remain that way throughout eternity. Today there is a Man in heaven for us.

Fifth, the body that Jesus was born with is not the same kind of body that He arose from the dead with. He was born with a mortal body (i.e., one that could die), but He was raised with an immortal body (i.e., one that cannot and will never die). There are sufficient similarities between these bodies that His disciples recognized Jesus after His resurrection, but there are some dissimilarities so they had trouble, occasionally, recognizing Him.

Sixth, in the incarnation Jesus did not cease to be fully God. What Jesus "emptied Himself" of when He became a human (Phil. 2:7) was not His deity. It was the glory that He had enjoyed with the Father and the Spirit before the incarnation. Rather than retaining this glory, the Son of God assumed the limitations of humanity (sin apart). Furthermore, He became a servant among humans, which extended to dying for the sins of humanity in the most horribly agonizing and humiliating way possible (i.e., by crucifixion).

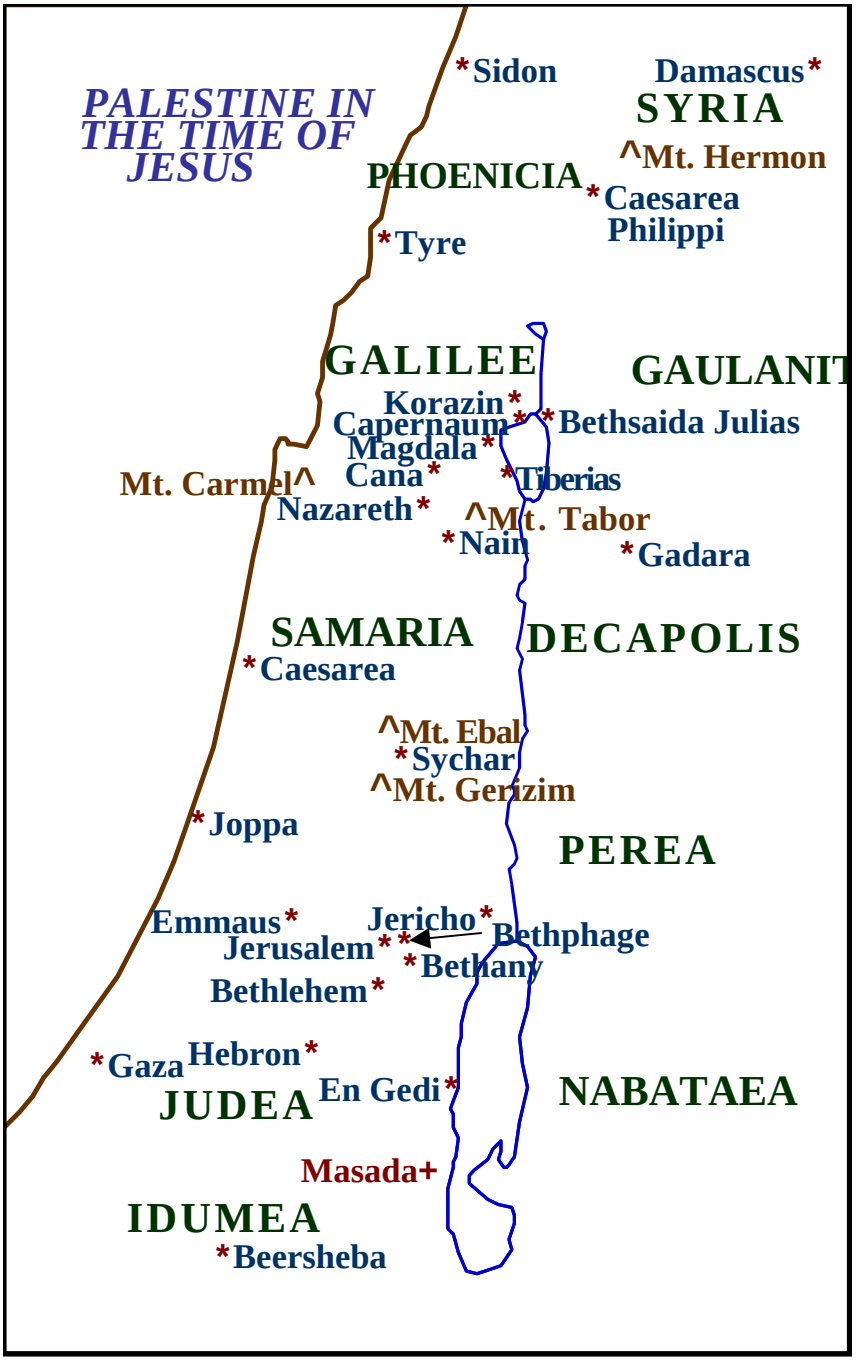
Seventh, during Jesus' earthly ministry He sometimes demonstrated the qualities of full humanity and sometimes the qualities of full deity. For example:

As a man Jesus . . .	**As God Jesus . . .**
Became weary.	Invited the weary to find rest in Him.
Became hungry.	Presented Himself as the bread of life.
Became thirsty.	Claimed to be the water of life.
Suffered great agony.	Was impervious to suffering and healed the afflictions of others.
Grew in favor with God and man.	Is the same yesterday, today, and forever.
Experienced temptation.	Could not experience temptation.
Said He didn't know some things.	Is omniscient.
Was present in only one place at a time.	Is omnipresent.
Operated in the power of the Holy Spirit.	Operated in His own power and authority.
Said the Father was greater than He.	Claimed that He and the Father are equal.
Prayed.	Received and answered the prayers of others.
Wept at the tomb of the dead.	Raised the dead.
Asked who people said He was.	Knew what people were thinking.
Asked why God had forsaken Him.	Claimed that God was always with Him.
Died.	Is eternal and gives eternal life to those who trust Him.
Was God's ideal man.	Is man's ideal God.

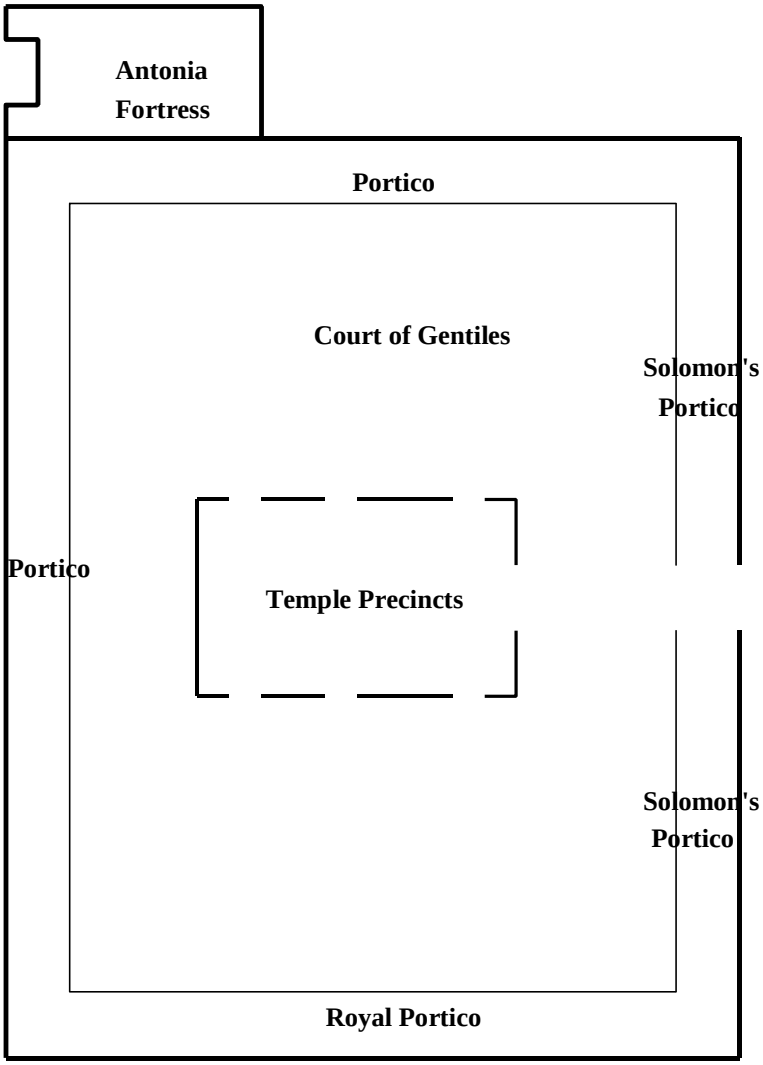
These are some of the paradoxes involved in the dual divine-human natures of Christ following His incarnation. It's because of these paradoxes that we sometimes have difficulty understanding the accounts of Jesus' words and works in the Gospels. He was like no other person, not because He was not fully human but because He was also fully God.

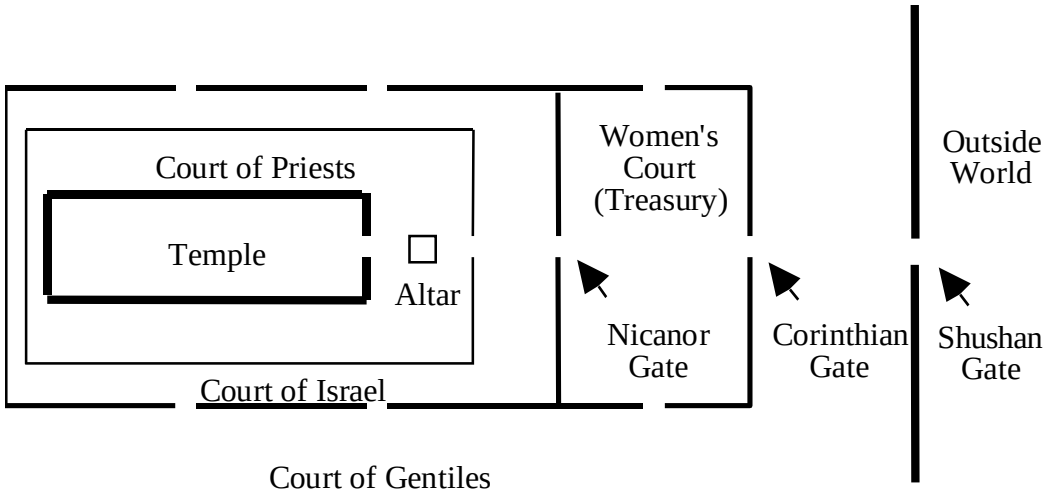
As God, the incarnate Christ reveals God and deserves our worship and service. As man, He reveals what God intended humans to be, and He provides the perfect example of how we should live as human beings.

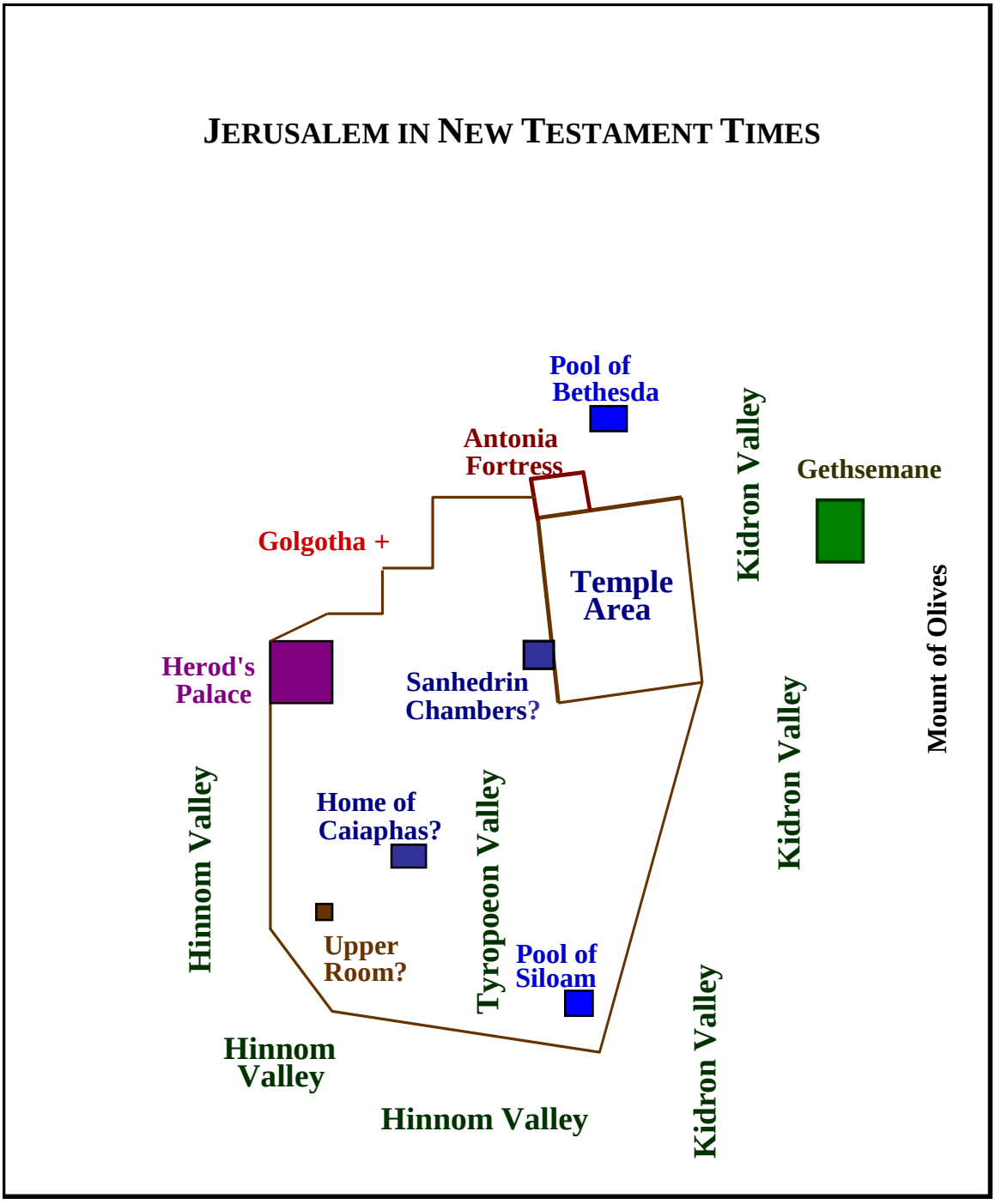
End Maps


PALESTINE IN THE TIME OF JESUS
*Sidon
Damascus*
SYRIA
^Mt. Hermon
PHOENICIA
*Caesarea Philippi
*Tyre
GALILEE
GAULANIT
Korazin*
Capernaum*
*Bethsaida Julias
Magdala*
Cana*
*Tiberias
Mt. Carmel^
Nazareth*
^Mt. Tabor
*Nain
*Gadara
SAMARIA
DECAPOLIS
*Caesarea
^Mt. Ebal
*Sychar
^Mt. Gerizim
*Joppa
PEREA
Emmaus*
Jericho*
Jerusalem*
Bethphage
*Bethany
Bethlehem*
*Gaza
Hebron*
JUDEA
En Gedi*
NABATAEA
Masada+
IDUMEA
*Beersheba

Herod's Temple Area






JERUSALEM IN NEW TESTAMENT TIMES
Pool of Bethesda
Antonia Fortress
Kidron Valley
Gethsemane
Golgotha +
Temple Area
Mount of Olives
Herod's Palace
Sanhedrin Chambers?
Kidron Valley
Hinnom Valley
Home of Caiaphas?
Tyropoeon Valley
Upper Room?
Pool of Siloam
Hinnom Valley
Hinnom Valley
Kidron Valley

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