



MATTHEW

Survey of the New Testament: The Gospels & Acts Winter 2005

Introduction

Audience

Matthew is well chosen to begin the New Testament since it is the best transition from the Old Testament into the New Testament. The book is Jewish in its vocabulary, grammar, and subject matter. Matthew uses Old Testament references, uses genealogies from Abraham. His audience is likely Jewish Christians who were removed from Palestine and had never heard of or seen Jesus but had heard many tales of Him.

Author

Matthew-Levi, the despised tax collector in Galilee, and the apostle of Jesus.

The earliest manuscripts do not contain the title “The Gospel according to Matthew.” Therefore the book is technically anonymous. However, early church tradition has attached this gospel to Matthew dating back to Papias, the bishop of Hierapolis. Papias, who died in AD 130, in regards to this book, stated:

Matthew collected the sayings in the Hebrew style and each interpreted them as best he could¹.

The early church believed that Papias meant that Matthew originally wrote the book in the Hebrew or Aramaic language and then translated into the Greek book we have today. Most modern scholars doubt that the book was originally written in Hebrew because: 1) when quoting the Old Testament, the author quotes the Septuagint, (the Greek translation of the Old Testament); and 2) the author uses Greek word plays. It is therefore considered more likely that Papias meant that Matthew wrote the book in a Hebrew style and that the readers *interpreted* or passed these on².

Internal evidence, while not conclusive, supports the Matthew’s authorship. This gospel refers to money and taxes more frequently than any of the other gospels (Matthew 17:24, 27, 18:24). Matthew appears more humble in this gospel, frequently referring to himself as “the tax collector.”

Date

The exact date of the book is uncertain. The debate revolves around two questions: 1) Does Matthew copy from Mark or vice versa? 2) Did Matthew know about the destruction of the temple, and so emphasize that in Jesus’ Olivet discourse?

¹ Scott McKnight. “Matthew, Gospel Of.” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Joel B. Green, Scott McKnight, ed. (Downer’s Grove IL: Intervarsity Press). Electronic Edition STEP file.

² Ibid.

Because Matthew contains more unique material, it seems more likely that Matthew used Mark as a source and then supplemented that with his own memoirs. Therefore Matthew would have been written after Mark (which was written in the late 50s, early 60s)³.

Many scholars believe Matthew's emphasis on the temple's destruction in the Olivet discourse means that he wrote his gospel after AD 70. However, Matthew writes of the destruction of the temple in the future tense suggesting it was still a future event to him. Furthermore, most of the scholars who look towards a later dating doubt the prophetic nature of the Olivet discourse and look to a later dating to explain away Jesus prediction of the future.

Therefore, the book was probably written in the mid to late 60s.

Structure

Matthew structures his book around five narratives. Matthew concludes each of these discourses stating "when Jesus finished these words," providing us with an important transition marker. The five discourses are:

1. The Sermon on the Mount (5:1-7:29)
2. The Sending of the Twelve (10:5-42)
3. Parables of the Kingdom (13:1-53)
4. Sermon on Forgiveness (18:1-35)
5. Olivet Discourse (23:1-26:2)

In addition, Matthew provides transition markers by repeating a summary of Jesus public ministry in both 4:23 and 9:35, suggesting this is a single major section⁴.

1	4:11	4:12	9:35	9:36	16:12	16:13	20:34	21:1	25:46	26:1	28:20
	Preparation of the King	Proclamation of the King		Protest of the King		Preparation by the King		Presentation of the King		Passion of the King	

Purpose

Matthew was written to demonstrate that Jesus was and is the Messiah-King predicted by the Old Testament.

- Matthew demonstrates how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies regarding the Messiah-King.
- Matthew explains the nature of Jesus kingdom in light of the rejection of the Messiah by the Jews. Matthew answers the question, "if Jesus is the King, where is the kingdom?"⁵
- Matthew justifies the inclusion of the Gentiles in the Christian movement and why Gentiles are part of the kingdom.
- Matthew provides insight into the nature of the kingdom and how one is to live as a disciple of the King.

Theme

Jesus, the King of the Jews.

³ D. A. Carson. "Matthew." *Expositors Bible Commentary*. Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998. Electronic edition STEP file.)

⁴ McKnight.

⁵ Stephen S. Kim., Classroom notes from "Gospels, Hebrews-Revelation." (Multnomah Biblical Seminary, Spring 2003).

Preparation of the King (1:1 – 4:16)

Genealogy of the King (1:1 – 1:17)

Matthew begins the book by establishing Jesus' royal heritage. Matthew emphasizes that Jesus is a descendent of Abraham, establishing that he is indeed a Jew, and also a descendent of David, and therefore of the Davidic kingly line. Interesting features of the genealogy:

- The genealogy is through Joseph, Jesus' stepfather, because the royal line is passed through the male.
- The genealogy is divided into three groups of 14 generations: Abraham to David; David to the exile; the exile to the birth of the Messiah. The use of 14 emphasizes the fullness of the genealogy, 14 being a multiple of 7, the number of completion.
- The genealogy includes 4 women: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba. All of these women had been involved in sex scandals and three of the four were Gentiles. Yet they are especially mentioned in the genealogy of the King.

Birth of the King (1:18 – 2:23)

Joseph

Matthew presents the birth of the King from the perspective of Joseph, his father. We know very little about Joseph, and he drops out of the story after chapter 2, causing some to speculate that he died while Jesus was growing up. What is clear from the story is that he was a man of integrity, willing to divorce his betrothed quietly when he had the right to have her stoned, and that he was a man of faith, trusting in and acting on the words of the angel.

The Wise Men

The visit of the Wise Men is only mentioned in Matthew, for they establish the case of Jesus as the king. The wise men would have been rulers much like Daniel was. They were astrologers, philosophers, teachers, and politicians. These magi were like foreign diplomats visiting the birth of a new King. Matthew is showing that Jesus, even as a young child was considered a King by learned men.

The story of the Wise Men leads to the flight to Egypt by the young family (2:13-15) and to the slaughter of the innocent baby boys of Bethlehem at the hand of King Herod (2:16-23). Both these incidents are seen by Matthew as fulfillments of ancient prophecy (2:15, 18), thus furthering his case that Jesus is the predicted Messiah-king.

Baptism of the King (3:1 – 3:17)

John the Baptist

John the Baptist was well respected by the Jews as a prophet. Matthew is showing that the recognition of Jesus as messiah came from reputable people. John himself was a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (3:3), as the precursor to the coming of the Messiah.

John's message was to announce the coming of the king: "Repent, for the *kingdom of heaven* is at hand." This coming king would bring the baptism of the Holy Spirit and will bring judgment against those who reject him (4:12)

Jesus Baptism

As Jesus comes out of the water, the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus like a dove, and the Father calls out from heaven, "You are my beloved Son, in You I am well pleased."

What a great way to start His public ministry: to be baptized by John the Baptist, a very popular prophet, to have the Spirit of God come upon you and to hear the approval of God. This event serves as the inauguration of Jesus ministry, the kick off point before He goes out and begins to promote His kingdom to the world.

Temptation of the King (4:1-11)

Yet, before Jesus preaches His first sermon, before He performs His first miracle, Jesus must first undergo a time of trial and temptation. It is as if, before He can begin His ministry, Jesus must prepare for his mission. He must undergo temptation so that first he proves himself as King. The temptation of Christ shows the building of His character. It acts as a rite of passage. Jesus is passing into manhood, coming into his own as a King.

In all three of the temptations, Jesus was tempted to take short cuts. Satan is asking him to grab hold of the kingdom without going through the process which God the Father had for him.

1. In the first temptation, Satan says “*if* you are the Son of God, command that these stones to become bread.” Jesus had the power and authority to turn stones to bread. But Jesus only did the bidding of his father, and his authority was only from the Father. To turn the stones to bread would have been rejecting the process of fasting and disobeying the Father.
2. For the second temptation, Jesus is told he would be given authority over all the kingdoms of the world. Satan, as ruler of this world, had this authority to give. All Jesus had to do was bow down to Satan and Jesus could obtain all the power and authority rightfully due him. It was God’s plan to give Jesus all that authority, but only after He endured the cross.
3. In the third temptation: the Jews held a belief from Malachi 3:1 that the Messiah would appear supernaturally by descending upon the temple⁶. If Jesus had jumped from the top of the temple to be rescued by angels, Jesus would have been revealing himself supernaturally as the Messiah. But God the Father wanted Jesus to be revealed through His death, resurrection and ascension. In other words, Satan was tempting Jesus to short-circuit the process to His revelation as Messiah and avoid the cross.

Jesus was entitled to all of these things offered in the temptation: comfort, glory, power, authority. As the King, he had authority to act on his own, to rule over all the nations and to receive recognition as Messiah. There will come a time when Jesus is granted this authority, glory and recognition by the Father. But to do so now would be to short-circuit the process God the father has for Him.

Proclamation of the King (4:12 – 9:35)

Ministry of the King (4:12-25, 8:1-9:35)

Jesus’ ministry begins in 4:17 with what is the first transition of the book⁷. John the Baptist has been taken into custody, so Jesus withdraws into Galilee, leaves his hometown of Nazareth and settles in Capernaum. His entire message is summarized in this transitional verse:

⁶ Barbieri, Louis A. Jr. “Matthew.” *Bible Knowledge Commentary*. John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, ed. (Victor Books, 1997. Electronic Edition STEP file)

⁷ Ray Stedman. “The Message of Matthew: Behold Your King.” From the sermon series *Adventuring through the Bible*. (Palo Alto CA: Discovery Publishing, 1995. Accessed on-line at <http://www.pbc.org/dp/stedman/adventure/0241.html>).

(Mat 4:17 NASB) From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

The kingdom is at hand. Jesus is telling these Jews that the coming kingdom and therefore, the coming King is just about here. Get ready and repent, because the messiah is about to establish the kingdom.

The whole of Jesus early ministry can be summed up in Matthew 4:23 (which is also repeated in 9:35):

Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people.

His ministry gained great fame throughout Galilee and the surrounding territories (4:24-25), for here the King was bringing healing and hope to the people. Chapters 5-9 give examples of this ministry. Chapters 5-7 provide details to the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom. Chapters 8-9 provide details to the healing of the sick.

Message of the Kingdom (5:1-7:29)

Jesus' proclamation that the kingdom is at hand includes a detailed description of what this kingdom looks like. Matthew has compiled this description into one long discourse in chapters 5 through 7, which we today call the Sermon on the Mount. This sermon describes the character, commands, the challenges and the choices of the Kingdom.

The other gospels have most of the words or concepts of this sermon spread throughout their pages. Only Matthew presents it as one complete sermon. However, this wouldn't be the only time he preached this sermon. Jesus was an itinerant rabbi. In Matthew, however, the sermon is presented in a very orderly fashion. This is shown by Matthew as the Christ's platform for His kingdom as He proclaims the coming of the Kingdom.

The Character of those in the Kingdom (5:1-16)

The Beatitudes (5:1-12)

Jesus begins with what we call the Beatitudes, where he gives a picture of the type of person who will inherit God's kingdom.

Verses	Blessed are...	For they shall...
3	Poor in Spirit	Received the kingdom of heaven
4	Mourners	Be comforted
5	Humble	Inherit the earth
6	Hunger & thirst for Righteousness	Be satisfied
7	Merciful	Receive Mercy
8	Pure in heart	See God
9	Peacemakers	Be called sons of God
10	Persecuted	Receive the kingdom of heaven
11-12	Insulted	Receive great rewards

These character qualities create a portrait as a whole. It is not that the merciful receive mercy but the humble inherit the earth. Rather Jesus is painting a big picture view of what a subject in his kingdom is like, and as part of that kingdom they are comforted, satisfied, find mercy, and are find great rewards.

Poor in Spirit

The poor in spirit are those who are spiritually bankrupt. These people have come to the end of their rope spiritually and are struggling. These are the people who will receive the kingdom. Normally we would think those in the kingdom are not the ones struggling and failing spiritually, but those who seem to have it together spiritually. Jesus is saying it's not the person who diligently gets up early and has an hour long quiet time very morning who receives the kingdom. It's the person who is desperately trying to do all the right spiritual exercises, but continually finds themselves failing.

Mourners

Those who fail, but could care less don't receive the kingdom. It is those who fail and are brokenhearted about their inability. It is the mourner who will find comfort.

Humble

In our culture today pride has become a virtue. We teach kids to have good self-esteem and to have pride in who they are and what they accomplish. It is the self assured who will inherit the earth. If you want to have authority and influence on the earth, it comes from developing your abilities and having confidence in yourself. But not according to Jesus. It is those who humbly accept and grieve over their failures who will inherit the earth.

Hunger and Thirsty for Righteousness

People who are hungry and thirsty are those who are aware of their lack of food and water. To be hungry and thirsty for righteousness first requires that one acknowledge our lack of righteousness. Secondly, after recognizing how unrighteous we are, there is a great desire to have that righteousness. It is only in that hunger that satisfaction comes. Only when we realize our sinfulness will we be clothed in righteousness.

Merciful

When we recognize our own need for God's mercy, we become able to extend mercy to others. In contrast, those who believe in their own abilities and their own goodness lack mercy, and are instead judgmental and intolerant.

Pure in Heart

To be pure means to be consistent. If something is made of pure gold, that means it is gold all the way through, and is not merely gold plated. To be pure in heart, then, means that the character exhibited on the outside is the same character that is on the inside. Hypocrites are merely gold plated. But to see God there must be an integrity to our character. There must be an authenticity and transparency.

Peacemakers

The peacemaker is the one caught in the middle of conflict. Rather than join the conflict, they seek to end it and bring resolution. Peacemakers would rather be reconciled than right. This requires humility, mercy and a purity of heart. Those who are self-confident and caught up in their own righteousness can not be peacemakers, for they are so assured of their rightness that they can not compromise or tolerate those who have failed to accept or achieve their level of spirituality.

Persecuted & Insulted

Those who accept their spiritual failings and struggle but fail to achieve righteousness will be put down by this world. They will be persecuted and insulted. But Jesus assures those exhibiting this character that they are in good company, for all the prophets were persecuted. Furthermore, their reward will be in the coming kingdom.

Jesus is in essence stating that those who understand their own depravity and are grieved because of it will be the ones who enter the coming kingdom. It is those who hunger and thirst

for a righteousness they do not have who will receive satisfaction. It is the poor in spirit and the persecuted who will inherit the kingdom. Those who believe in their own goodness and are proud of their spiritual accomplishments will fail to receive the kingdom.

The Influence of those in the Kingdom (5:13-16)

Jesus proclaims as the salt of the earth and the light of the world those who exhibit the characteristics of people described in the Beatitudes.

It is the one pure in heart, who is honest with themselves and those around them who are the salt-seasoning of the world. Humble, pure hearts can bring an influence to the world that will change the way the world tastes, just as a pinch of salt can change the taste of an entire plate of food. Those who hunger for righteousness and mercy are called the light of the world, for they will bring light to the entire world, just as a small candle can fill an entire room with light.

If these things don't characterize us, then we are probably not going to be much of a light and won't give much flavor to the world. Jesus says to such people, "what good are you?" Salt that's lost its flavor is tossed out. This is not an excuse not to be an influence in the world, for as Jesus says, you don't put a lamp under a basket. It is a call to become a person who stands out from the world, not because of our moral superiority, but because of our transparency and humility.

It is that uniqueness in our character itself that will serve as the salt and the light.

Commands of the Kingdom (5:17-48)

(Mat 5:17 NASB) "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill.

The hallmark of Judaism is the Law. God gave the Law to the Jews through Moses. It called people to a high moral ethic. The Pharisee Jews were proud of their understanding of the Law, for they had studied it extensively and worked diligently to apply the law to every day life.

Jesus affirms the law, saying it will never disappear until the end of time. Furthermore, those who annul the law or teach people how to get out of the law are the least in the kingdom. No, Jesus is not getting rid of the law, but is fulfilling it. That is, he is going to flesh out the law, literally, showing people what was truly intended by the law.

As discussed in our overview of this term, due to a number of factors, Pharisaical Judaism had begun to elevate the understanding and obedience to the law above the ritualistic temple sacrifices. Through generations of oral tradition, the Pharisees had provided applications of the law to every day life. Soon these oral traditions had become as important as the original law.

This oral tradition made the law both more difficult and yet easier to keep the law. It was more difficult in the sense that each commandment had exacting criteria. For example, while the law said, "keep the Sabbath holy," the Pharisees would interpret that and apply that by saying that to keep the Sabbath you could only walk a certain number of steps each day. This added a tremendous burden to the law.

At the same time, however, it became humanly possible to keep the law. If one had to do was count your steps, then with effort, one actually could keep the Sabbath. Obedience had become an objective standard which could be kept. As a result, the Pharisees believed that they were blameless when it came to the law. We see Paul, who was a Pharisee, making this same claim in Philippians 3:6.

But Jesus says you must be more righteous than the Pharisees if you want to get to heaven:

(Mat 5:20 NASB) "For I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.

The Expectations Raised (5:21-47)

Jesus then goes on to show specific examples of how our righteousness must exceed the Pharisees by showing how they may keep the letter of the Law but not the spirit of the Law..

For the rest of chapter 5, Jesus takes six commandments from the law, and follows a pattern of comparing what the Pharisees say about the law with what the law truly intended. Each issue begins, “you have heard it that the ancients were told...,” followed by what Jesus says about that same law.

Verse	Issue	Ancients were told...	Jesus Says
21-26	Animosity	Do not murder	Do not be angry
27-30	Sex	Do not commit adultery	Do not look with lust
31-32	Unhappy Marriage	Divorce must be formal	No divorce except unfaithfulness
33-37	Being Believed	Do not break your oath	Do not make an oath at all
38-42	Being Injured	Eye for eye, tooth for tooth	Turn the other cheek
43-47	Enemies	Love your neighbor	Love your enemy

Animosity

The law says you shall not commit murder. But Jesus says, if you call your brother an “empty-head” you are guilty of murder already. It’s fairly easy to keep that law that says don’t murder. Very few people actually violate this law. But Jesus raises the standard such that everyone is now guilty of murder, for we have insulted another.

Jesus not only raises the standard, but he also raises the punishment. The law says a murderer is guilty “before the court.” Jesus says one who insults his brother is guilty enough to “go to hell.”

Therefore, reconciliation with others becomes something of eternal significance. If I offend someone, I am going to hell. That means I had better make friends with my enemies quickly, even if that means leaving my sacrifice on the altar, because I don’t want to risk being guilty of having offended or thinking poorly of someone.

Sex

The law says you shall not commit adultery. Most people have probably obeyed this commandment as well and are not guilty under the law. But Jesus says, if you look at a woman with lust in your heart, you’ve committed adultery already. Jesus has raised the standard such that everyone is now guilty of adultery.

In fact, because looking upon a woman can condemn you to hell, the only way for a man to get into heaven is for you to pluck your eye out!

Unhappy Marriage

The law says that if you want to divorce your wife, you must give her a certificate of divorce. During the time of Moses, when this law was given, if a man wanted to divorce his wife, he would just throw her out of his tent and that was it. This left the woman without any legal protection and without any means of support. But the certificate of divorce provided her with some legal rights and afforded her protection under the law.

But Jesus says that a certificate of divorce is not adequate to obey the law. In fact, divorce is not permitted at all, except in cases of adultery. Therefore, a divorced person who remarries has committed adultery, for all cases of divorce are prohibited under the law.

This often makes us uncomfortable, for divorce is very common in our society, as it was in Jesus day. If you have been divorced, and if you have been remarried, you are likely rather uncomfortable with Jesus words that you are committing adultery. But you are not alone in your guilt. For Jesus has also just condemned everyone who lusts and everyone who insults. Jesus is making us all guilty under the law. Jesus is condemning us all to hell!

Being Believed

The law says that we are to keep our vows. If we swear an oath, we are to tell the truth. However, Jesus is saying that we be so truthful that we don't have to make oaths in order to be believed. Our "yes" should mean "yes," and our "no" should mean "no." In other words, we should tell the truth all the time, not just when we swear an oath.

Avoiding perjury is something that most of us would be able to do. But Jesus says, don't just avoid perjury. Always tell the truth, for any lying is evil. Jesus has condemned us all, for we have all lied at sometime.

Being Injured

Restitution is one of the hallmarks of the Old Testament law. If someone injures you, you can take them to court and demand restitution for that offense. But Jesus says, we should not require restitution. To truly keep the law, we should not demand justice. To truly be righteous before God, we must be willing to turn the other cheek and to not expect to get repaid when we loan money. Jesus again has raised the bar such that it seems impossible to keep such a requirement. No one can really say they are able to live by such a standard.

Enemies

Finally, the law says that we are to love our neighbor. But Jesus says, even the Gentiles love their friends. To really keep the law, we need to love and bless our enemies. It's easy to keep the law if we just love and bless our friends. But if we really want to keep the law, we must love and bless everyone. This is a nice thing to say, but who of us truly is able to comply with this level of love?

Be Perfect!

As it is written and as it is interpreted by the Pharisees, anyone of us would be able to perfectly keep this law. Personally, I've never committed murder, adultery, or perjury. I can live with "tooth for tooth" justice. I love my friends. I'm okay with no fault divorce. If I can get into heaven by obeying the law, I can easily earn my way to heaven.

But Jesus tells us that this is not sufficient to get into heaven. If you want to earn your way in, you must never insult or think poorly of someone. You can not lust after another person. Divorce is right out. You must never lie. You must love your enemies and allow them to take advantage of you. And then, in case we think we are still able to keep the Law, Jesus concludes this section by summarizing what the Law requires. We must be perfect!

(Mat 5:48 NASB) "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

How can one ever hope enter the kingdom of heaven, if I must be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect? If that's the case, we are all guilty. No one can get to heaven. How does that make us feel? Does it cause us to feel poor in spirit? Does it cause us to feel mournful? Does it humble us? Does this cause us to hunger for a righteousness we can't obtain? If that is our reaction, then we have just entered the kingdom of heaven, for it is the poor in spirit who will have the kingdom of heaven.

What Jesus is trying to do is make us fit the characteristics of the beatitudes. He is trying to make them poor in spirit, hungry and thirsty for righteousness. We can not achieve membership into the kingdom by our own righteousness, but through God's mercy, our poverty of spirit, humility and brokenness allow membership into his kingdom.

The Pharisees believed that they could keep the law and thereby earn their way to heaven. Jesus is saying if you want to use the law as a means to get to heaven, then you have to keep not just the letter of the law, but the spirit behind it. The law was never intended to be a means of salvation, and if you want to try to turn it into that, then you have to change not just your external

actions, but you have to change your internal heart as well. If you fail to change your heart, than you will miss heaven and be guilty of going to hell.

The apostle Paul made this point in Romans 3:20:

By the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

The Law can't provide salvation. The Law can only demonstrate our need for salvation. The Pharisees, however, had reduced the Law to the point where they thought they could obey it sufficiently to actually earn salvation. Jesus has fulfilled the Law in the sermon on the mount to demonstrate that no one can keep the law. All the law can do is condemn us.

Only when we accept our condemnation and recognize our sinfulness do we realize the need for a savior. We can not accept Christ's atonement on the cross until we realize that we are sinners. Only when we are poor in spirit and hungry for a righteousness we know we can not achieve will we enter the kingdom of heaven and be satisfied. We can only hope to keep the Law in the fullness that Jesus gives if we first accept Christ's salvation and allow him to change our heart and turn us into a new creation.

Too often Christians are trying to attain to the impossible standards of the Sermon on the Mount, and in the process they reinterpret and reduce the words of Jesus to commands which can be obeyed. For example, some Christians will refuse to take an oath even in a court of law, thinking they are obeying Jesus command in verses 33-37. Jesus is not trying to create a new law here. He is merely revealing the true nature and spirit of the existing Old Testament law. The law can not save us, and attempting to find salvation through obedience will only enslave us.

That is not to say that we should not strive for the things which Jesus has outlined here. Indeed, these are good and perfect commandments. Without them I would not realize my need for a savior. While I can not find salvation through the Law, I can find it in Jesus. Jesus fulfilled all the requirements of the law, and when I accept Jesus I inherit His righteousness, so that indeed I have met all the requirements of the Law *through Him!*

What the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did; sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:3-4).

Challenges to Kingdom Living (6:1 – 7:12)

Chapter 5 is an elaboration of the first four beatitudes. Chapters 6 & 7 are an elaboration on the next four: merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, persecuted. Jesus does this by showing how these characteristics bring rewards in the coming kingdom. Jesus is telling his audience to not look the externals to determine spirituality. True spirituality is within.

Impressing Others with Our Spirituality (6:1 – 18)

There comes a special kind of arrogance when we think we can achieve our salvation through obedience to the law. When we think we have obtained a certain level of righteousness, we become tempted to desire to impress one another. But when we trust in Jesus' righteousness, we have nothing to impress other people with. Therefore we can pray, give, and fast without seeking to impress others.

This is a good test of whether we are trusting in our own righteousness or if we are trusting the righteousness of Christ. Do we do our good works to be seen by others? How do we feel when we do something good in secret and someone else gets the credit? When we put our hope

and faith in Christ, we can learn to enjoy God privately and resist the temptation to impress people.

Placing Trust in Our Wealth (6:19-34)

The Pharisees taught that if you obeyed God, he would cause you to prosper. This is similar to the so-called prosperity gospel that many preach today. Wealth is seen as a sign of God's approval, while poverty is a result of disobedience to God.

Jesus rejects this, stating that the desire for wealth will actually interfere in your ability to serve God. Instead of seeking wealth to demonstrate God's favor on you, we need to seek the treasures of heaven and wholeheartedly seek to follow Him. If we seek to be merciful, to be peacemakers, and to be pure in heart, we will gain the treasures of heaven, making earthly treasures a foolish pursuit.

Nonetheless, even if we are not pursuing riches, sometimes just making ends meet can be a struggle. Jesus assures us that if we are trusting Him and seeking after the kingdom, God will make sure that all our needs are met. We do not need to be burdened with worry and anxiety. If we seek Him first, all these things we need will be added to us.

Condemning and Controlling Others (7:1-12)

Do Not Judge

Those who believe they can achieve their own righteousness will become judgment and controlling. The Pharisees had certainly become powerful manipulators of the common person, for their interpretation of the law could influence down to the detail how people acted and behaved. Even today, spiritual leaders can wield great influence and control over people through their judgment and through spiritual manipulation. This comes from an arrogance that believes we have achieved a certain level of spirituality rather than from the humility that recognizes our inability to have any righteousness apart from Christ.

In chapter 7, Jesus warns us that whatever standard we set for others will become the standard by which God judges us. It is hypocritical to require people to hold people to a requirement that we ourselves are unable to obtain. Rather, we should, as it says in verse 12, treat people the same way we would want to be treated.

This is not to say that we can not ever hold people accountable for sin. Indeed, scripture requires us to confront a fellow believer who is caught in sin. But doing so must be done with the utmost humility and with a spirit of restoration rather than condemnation (Galatians 6:1-5).

Do No Cast Pearls Before Swine

Too often our confrontation with others is done without grace and without humility. Instead of gently reasoning and appealing to people we try to ram things down their throat. Often the people in a place where they are ready to receive the truth from us. We must be careful to not "throw pearls before swine." This is not suggesting that there are certain classes of people who are not worthy of the gospel, but a recognition that we must be careful not to force truth on people if they are not ready to receive it. Instead we must lead people along a process and give them what they can receive.

One of the best ways to do this is to ask questions rather than preach at people. That is why Jesus tells us in verse 7 to ask. We shouldn't impose on people, but instead to ask questions. Instead of judging and condemning, ask people the questions which will lead them to truth rather than drive them away. Furthermore, ask God for help, and he will be faithful.

Jesus then summarizes. Rather than judge people, we should treat people in the manner in which we would want to be treated.

The Choices for the Kingdom of God (7:13-29)

The Choice to Live in the Kingdom

Entrance into the kingdom, then, is a choice. Jesus uses three illustrations of this choice:

Narrow and Wide Gates

The choice is not always obvious. Many go through life just following the crowd, not realizing there even is the choice. They only see the wide gate and they follow through it to their destruction. But the choice to accept the Messiah is a narrow gate that few find. But those who do find life.

Good and Bad Fruit

Many who are guiding us to truth are actually leading us astray. Jesus is clearly condemning the Pharisees who would lead people to believe they can achieve their own salvation through obedience to the oral traditions. But even today there are those who preach a different gospel than salvation through Christ. How can one tell the true teacher from the false one? By their fruit.

Two Foundations

If one hears Jesus words and bases their life upon them, putting their faith in them, they will have built their life on a solid foundation. Those who ignores the truth of Christ are basing their life on a foundation built upon sand.

The Condemnation for those Refusing the Kingdom

Jesus ends the Sermon on the Mount with a troubling passage, which states that not everyone who thinks he is going to enter coming kingdom will.

(Mat 7:22-23 NASB) "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' {23} "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'

Jesus says that there are going to be some surprised people at the coming of the kingdom. People who thought they had it together, who thought because of their religious activity that they were members of the kingdom. But Jesus warns us not to be deceived. It is those who do the will of the Father, the poor in spirit, and the pure in heart who will enter the kingdom.

This is a theme that continues throughout Matthew. Jesus gives warnings to people that they may not make it into the coming kingdom just because of their status in the current regime. In 8:11-12, after the Roman centurion shows his faith that Jesus could heal his daughter, Jesus states that people from all over will be in the kingdom, and that some Jews will not. In chapter 19 we learn that it is the little children who will enter the kingdom (19:14), but that it is very difficult for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven (19:24).

In a most disturbing passage to the Pharisees and Sadducees, Jesus says that the tax collectors and prostitutes will see the kingdom before they do (21:31), and that the kingdom will be taken from them and given to another nation (21:43).

The coming messianic kingdom will be exclusive, and those who are relying on their heritage or religion to gain entry will be surprised. But the poor in spirit and pure in heart will have a place in the kingdom which is at hand.

Protest of the King (9:36-16:12)

Commissioning of the Twelve (9:36-11:1)

Introduction to the Commission (9:36-10:4)

The ministry of Jesus has been to travel through all the cities and villages and proclaim the gospel of the kingdom and to heal people of their sicknesses. However, his ministry was limited, for he was only one man. When Jesus looked at the scope of His ministry and the great need, out of His compassion, He knew he would need to expand his ministry and to bring the gospel to the multitudes.

The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore, beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest (Matthew 9:37-38)

Commission to the Present Ministry (10:5-15)

Jesus gives the twelve disciples the authority to carry on the same ministry he had. They were to travel to all the cities and villages, proclaim the gospel and heal the people.

Matthew uses this occasion to introduce us to the names of the twelve disciples. We have already seen the call of the fishermen Peter, Andrew, James and John (4:18-22), and the call of Matthew himself (9:9), but now the remaining seven disciples are disclosed. The New Testament does not tell us much about any of these men. Only Peter and John have any significant role in the New Testament narrative after Christ's ascension. Even though the disciples carry great authority, their ministry is clearly the ministry of Jesus, not their own.

Jesus tells the disciples to restrict their ministry to only the Jews. As the chosen people, Israel was to be afforded the first opportunity to hear and respond to the coming kingdom. This would not have been a surprising restriction for the disciples, and very likely they would have avoided and the Samaritan and Gentile cities anyway due to the prejudice of most Jews of that day.

Jesus also instructs them to travel light. They are to depend on the hospitality of others. This was intended so they could move more rapidly and minister in more cities. There is a sense of urgency in this command. If a city is not responding, they were to not waste their time, but to move on to another city.

Commission to Future Rejection (10:16-42)

Beginning in verse 16, it becomes apparent that Jesus is no longer speaking specifically of the immediate mission of the disciples, but is speaking of the larger mission which his disciples would pick up after his death, resurrection and ascension. Jesus begins speaking of persecution that the disciples would face where they would be handed over to Gentile governors and kings so that their ministry might expand to the Gentiles. We have no evidence that the disciples ever faced the kind of persecution which is predicted here. While certainly the disciples did not realize this at the time, Jesus is speaking about their ministry after his death, resurrection and ascension.

In the time between Christ's ascension and the writing of Matthew, there arose such persecution by the Jewish religious leaders that most of the Jewish Christians had fled Jerusalem and had been scattered throughout Judea, Samaria and beyond. Furthermore, the persecution by the Roman Emperor Nero was just beginning at the time of Matthew's writing. Matthew's inclusion of Jesus prediction of the rejection of the gospel message would have been extremely

relevant to Matthew's readers. Likewise they have applicability to even modern disciples of Christ and provide a lesson for us today on what to expect as we continue to spread the gospel of the kingdom of heaven.

Prediction of Future Hostility (10:16-25)⁸

Whereas the immediate ministry of the disciples was to be limited to Israel, after His ascension, the ministry will expand to the Gentiles (10:18). While the ministry has expanded to the Gentiles, the mission to the Jews will not have ended (10:23).

The disciples will face rejection and persecution. This is inevitable because Jesus himself will be rejected, and "a disciple is not above his teacher" (10:24-25). Jesus instructs his disciples to draw a balance between being wary and on guard (10:17) and not worrying (10:19), for it is the Holy Spirit who will guide them (10:29).

Proper Reaction to the Hostility (10:26-31)

Even though His disciples will face persecution and rejection, Jesus assures them that it is worth the price. True disciples of Jesus need not fear man, for they can only kill the body and not the soul. In words which would have been a great comfort to the Christians of the time of Matthew's writing, even in the midst of hostility, God cares and values His disciples. When facing the hostility, the proper reaction of a disciple is not to fear man but to trust in the compassion of God.

Polarized Response to the Gospel (10:32-42)

But why would Jesus ministry bring such a strong reaction? Because the gospel is a polarizing message. While the gospel might bring peace to the individual, it will not bring peace to society. In fact, the gospel will split families (10:34-39).

But Jesus assures them, that even in the midst of the persecution they would face, discipleship is worth it due to the rewards of a accepting Christ and proclaiming His gospel (10:40-42).

Commencement of the Rejection (11:2-12:50)⁹

Rejection of the Messenger of Jesus (11:2-19)

Up to this point in the book of Matthew Jesus and His disciples have not faced the persecution he predicts. But it doesn't take long for the rejection to enter into full swing. It begins in chapter 11 with the arrest of the forerunner of Jesus, John the Baptist.

Evidently John the Baptist has entertained doubts about Jesus being the Messiah. If Jesus was indeed the Messiah, how could have the Messiah allowed him to be arrested? Why hadn't Jesus demonstrated his authority by breaking John out of prison?¹⁰ Jesus tells John's disciples that proof that He is the Messiah would not come from a jail break, but comes through the ministry of healing (11:5-6).

Jesus then gives high praise to John the Baptist, declaring that he is the greatest person who has been born (11:11). But not all have accepted the message of John the Baptist. Many rejected his ministry, for he was kind of a strange prophet, living an ascetic life in the wilderness. Yet these same people who reject John because of his austere life would also be the people who reject Jesus for his eating and drinking with the tax collectors and sinners. For this reason Jesus

⁸ Craig L. Blomberg. *Jesus and the Gospels*. (Nashville TN: Broadman & Holman. 1997), 286.

⁹ Stephen S. Kim. Classroom notes from "Gospels, Hebrews-Revelation." (Multnomah Biblical Seminary, Spring 2003).

¹⁰ Robert H. Gundry. *A Survey of the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan. 2003), 181

likens this generation to fickle children who can't make up their minds as to what they want (11:16-19).

Rejection of the Miracles of Jesus (11:20-24)

We discover now that not every city has been accepting of Jesus ministry (11:20). Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum have all been witness to the miracles of Jesus, but they had not repented. They have had the chance to accept Jesus as the King, but they have rejected him. They have been given ample proof and more signs of his Kingship. Jesus declares that if the most famous evil Gentiles (i.e. Tyre, Sidon, & Sodom) in history had seen these signs, they would have repented (11:20-24)

Rejection of the Message of Jesus (11:25-30)

Jesus, then, in a prayer to His father, praises God that the gospel of the kingdom would be understood by the simple and the infants. However, those who in their arrogance believe themselves to be wise and intelligent will have the truth of the gospel hidden from them (11:25). It is not that God is purposefully hiding the gospel from the wise, but their arrogance itself will blind them.

Jesus message of forgiveness is not burdensome like the legalistic message of the Pharisees (11:28-30). For those who humbly accept the message of Jesus, they will find rest.

Rejection of the Ministry of Jesus (12:1-50)

It is these arrogant, intelligent, self-righteous men who will lead the rejection of Jesus ministry. It begins by condemning Jesus for breaking, not the Mosaic law, but their legalistic interpretation and application of the law.

Jesus the Sabbath Breaker (12:1-21)

The Pharisees charge Jesus and his disciples of breaking the Sabbath, for they have been casually picking off heads of grain in the field and eating it on a Sabbath day (12:1-2). This would have been interpreted as "working" on the Sabbath and therefore violating their oral traditions.

Jesus answers the charge, first through his words and then through his actions. Jesus uses the Old Testament to show how allowances are made for working on the Sabbath day, for even the priests are allowed to work on the Sabbath in order to accomplish something greater, that is, the giving of temple sacrifices on the Sabbath (12:5-6). If the sacrifices are more important than the Sabbath regulations, then certainly showing compassion is more important than Sabbath regulations, for the Old Testament says, "I desire compassion, and not a sacrifice" (12:7).

Jesus then illustrates this point by going into the synagogue and finding a man with a withered hand. Jesus then blatantly "breaks" the Sabbath by healing the man. Jesus is demonstrating His point that compassion should always be the driving force in our life, not blind adherence to regulations.

This message does not go over well with the Pharisees, who from this point decide to plot Jesus destruction (12:14). The Pharisees have rejected Jesus as the Messiah for He does not subscribe to their brand of religion. He is a Sabbath-breaker who blatantly disregards their interpretation of the Law. Obviously this could not be the Messiah! The Jewish religious leaders had rejected their own King.

Because Israel had rejected their king, in fulfillment of the prophet Isaiah, the kingdom would now be withdrawn from Israel alone and opened up to the Gentiles (12:17-21). Matthew is using this incident to explain to his readers why the Christian church was being infiltrated by so many Gentiles. By AD 60, the Jewish influence in the church was waning as more and more Gentiles joined the faith. This was cause for great concern among the Jewish Christians who

would be Matthew's primary audience. Matthew points out that it was the rejection of Jesus as the Messiah by Israel which opened the door to the kingdom to the Gentiles, and that this should be seen as an exciting event long ago predicted by the prophets.

Jesus the Ruler of Demons (12:22-50)

Jesus would not only be rejected as King, but furthermore He would be accused of being Satan himself. As what seemed to be a routine event, Jesus miraculously casts out a demon who had caused a man to become blind and mute (12:22). The Pharisees state that the only reason Jesus has the power to cast out demons is because he is Beelzebub (another name for Satan) and is therefore the ruler of the demons.

Jesus answers the charge by showing the illogic of such an argument. Why would the ruler of demons cast out demons? A house divided against itself can not stand, so why would Satan fight against his own demons?

This is the ultimate rejection of Jesus. The Pharisees have turned their back on Jesus, rejecting Him as their king and instead perceiving Him as being the very antithesis of everything good. For Jesus this is the ultimate sin. This, in fact is blasphemy to the Holy Spirit who leads people into truth, and to blaspheme the Spirit is unforgivable.

Too much has been made of trying to identify the "unforgivable sin." From the context it is clear. The rejection of Jesus as Messiah and the accusation that He is not of God but of Satan is the unforgivable sin. One can not be forgiven if they rejected the forgiver. One can not be saved if they reject the savior.

The Pharisees have been shown miraculous evidence that Jesus is the Messiah-King, and because Jesus didn't fit their idea of what the Messiah should be, they have reinterpreted the evidence and rejected Him. Jesus states that the Gentile city of Nineveh and the Gentile Queen of Sheba repented and followed God without any miracles or proof (12:39-42). However, the miraculous proof He offered was rejected by the very nation who should have recognized Him.

Matthew then inserts an incident into the narrative where Jesus' family is trying to see Him (12:46-50). Jesus responds by saying that His family consists not of the people related to Him by blood, but all those who accept Him as the Messiah. Jesus is not rejecting His family. Rather he is stating that the kingdom is not made up of people related by blood. Being a Jew is not sufficient to enter the kingdom. Entrance into the kingdom comes by acceptance of and obedience to the King. Jesus is opening the gospel to all who believe, both the Jew and the Gentile.

Consequences of the Rejection (13:1-52)

The Kingdom Parables

By now the followers of Jesus must be wondering what kind of kingdom Jesus is planning on ushering in. This kingdom is nothing like what they had imagined. This kingdom will not include the religious leaders but the spiritually bankrupt. This kingdom will not be an exclusively Jewish kingdom, but will include Gentiles. Furthermore Jesus doesn't seem to be interested in a military or political reign, for he hasn't made any plans to rescue his cousin and chief promoter, John the Baptist from prison.

Therefore Matthew explains to his readers the nature of Jesus kingdom in chapter 13 by including Jesus' kingdom parables. These parables are designed to answer the question Matthew's Jewish audience must be asking: if Jesus is the King, where's the kingdom. The parables will answer this question by defining the nature and make-up of the kingdom.

However, Jesus is no longer teaching plainly about the kingdom. Because of the rejection of the Jewish religious leaders, Jesus is now primarily teaching his disciples through the use of parables.

When the disciples ask Jesus why He is now speaking in parables, Jesus states it is so the disciples will be able to understand the mysteries of the kingdom, while the multitudes won't. However, it is not the parables themselves which conceal the truth, for Jesus' opponents often understand the meaning of His parables (Matthew 21:45-46). Rather, Jesus understands that parables are a form of rhetoric which polarizes the response. The point of a parable boils down the lesson to the point where one can only accept or reject Jesus statements. Indeed, the hearing and understanding of the kingdom which Jesus is referring to in 13:33-34, then, are not an intellectual understanding, but an acceptance of that mystery by the will.¹¹

Parable of the Sower (13:3-23)

The first parable is an explanation of why Jesus is speaking in parables. The gospel of the kingdom will create different responses in different people. There are four basic responses to the gospel:

- Some will fail to listen because of their hard hearts.
- Some will seem to accept it, but will ultimately reject it due to persecution.
- Some will seem to accept it, but will ultimately reject it due to their love for the things of this world.
- Some will accept it and embrace it.

Contrary to what the disciples may have been expecting, the Messianic kingdom will not be attractive to everyone. Not everyone will necessarily believe. Jesus is likening the seed thrown on hard ground to the Pharisees who have blatantly rejected the message of the kingdom due to their hard hearts. But Jesus is also warning the disciples that when persecution hits or the demands of the kingdom become too great, many of the multitude which are now eagerly following Jesus will fall away.

But for the few who accept the kingdom, they will result in a great harvest of up to a hundred fold. The kingdom will start with a few, but will soon grow far beyond what should be expected of such a modest start.

Parable of the Wheat and Tares (13:24-30, 36-43)

The sons of the kingdom will coexist with the "tares" for a time. At the harvest they will be separated. Those who reject the kingdom will live in the midst of those who accept it, and it may not even be easy to tell those who are in and those who are out of the kingdom.

This would be in contrast to the belief the messianic kingdom would eliminate all evil. Jesus is telling them that there will be a time period within this kingdom where this coexistence takes place. However later, a "harvest" will come that will separate the tares from the wheat and "the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their father."

Jesus is introducing an important concept about His kingdom: His kingdom will arrive in stages. His kingdom is here now, but His kingdom also has not yet completely come. The kingdom is indeed at hand but, in the initial stage the wheat and tares are going to be side by side. A second stage of the kingdom will come later, with the tares being destroyed while the righteous will "shine forth as the sun."

Parable of the Mustard Seed/Leavened Bread (13:31-33)

The kingdom will start small. It will not be a great political and social movement that quickly overcomes. Rather, it will be a small beginning, barely even noticeable. This is in contrast to the belief that the messianic kingdom would be a great political/military/social uprising that would defeat through great power. But in time this small start would grow large and have a large influence in the world.

¹¹ Blomberg, 262.

Parable of the Hidden Treasure/Pearl of Great Price (13:44-46)

There will be a cost to being part of this kingdom. But those who understand the value of the kingdom, they will be willing to pay the cost. Two primary principles are taught about the kingdom here: 1) the kingdom is a great treasure, but 2) there will be a cost to the kingdom.

Parable of the Dragnet (13:47-50)

Like the parable of the wheat and the tares, Jesus is emphasizing that good and evil persons will coexist in this kingdom, and that in the end they will be separated. In this parable, however, Jesus does not mention the “now” portion of the kingdom where the wheat and tares dwell together.

Continuing of the Rejection (13:53-16:12)**In Nazareth (13:53-58)**

When Jesus finished with the kingdom parables, he returned to his hometown of Nazareth to teach. The people there are amazed at Jesus, for they remember him as Joseph the carpenter’s son, and became offended. As result of their rejection Jesus refused to do any miracles in Nazareth.

John the Baptist beheaded (14:1-12)

After Nazareth, the opposition to the kingdom of heaven reaches a new low as John the Baptist is killed as a result of an ill advised promise by King Herod to his wife’s daughter. When Jesus was informed of John’s death, he clearly becomes troubled and seeks to find seclusion by traveling by boat.

While the kingdom has met a significant set back, the work of the kingdom must go on. While clearly Jesus was seeking some seclusion and a chance to grieve the loss of John, when he arrives he discovers that the crowds have followed Him and are waiting for Him to minister to them when He gets off the boat.

In chapter 12, when Jesus was condemned by the Pharisees for breaking the Sabbath, he countered their accusation by stating that compassion was more important than the Sabbath. Now, at a time when Jesus clearly needs a Sabbath rest, He is tested to see if indeed He will abide by that value. Of course, Jesus takes compassion on the people and heals their sick, delaying his time of rest.

Even in the midst of great opposition, Jesus does not allow the rejection and hardship interfere with His primary ministry of compassion. Matthew’s audience would have understood the opposition Jesus faced, having very likely dealt with the execution of friends and fellow believers. Matthew’s example of Jesus reminds his readers and us that ministry does not stop when opposition comes, for compassion for the lost is paramount in kingdom living.

By the Religious Leaders (15:1-20)

Nonetheless the opposition of Jesus only intensifies. In chapter 15 the Pharisees object when the disciples do not keep the tradition of hand washing before they eat. This is not a concern for the disciples hygiene, but rather a condemnation of Jesus and his disciples unwillingness to abide by their understanding of the law.

Jesus rebukes them for using their traditions to ignore the greater things of the law. He condemns those Pharisees who pledge money to God and then refuse to take care of their aged parents. While such religious actions might make them appear righteous, their disregard for their parents is blatant disobedience to God’s law. Jesus then states the principle that it is not the food we eat or the manners we use which defile us, but what comes from the heart. If our heart is right, the outward actions will take care of itself. But if we concentrate on external matters without a change of heart, we become as hypocritical as these Pharisees.

The disciples stand amazed that Jesus would be so blunt with the Pharisees. Surely he didn't realize that what he was saying would not go over well. So the disciples tell Him later, "do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement."

Ministry to the Gentiles (15:21-39)

The Pharisees again have demonstrated their rejection of Jesus as the King. As a result, we see Jesus begin to shift His ministry away from the nation of Israel to the Gentiles.

Roman Centurion (8:5-13)

We have already seen Jesus perform miracles for a Gentile. In fact, not just any Gentile, but Jesus has performed a miracle for a Roman centurion. This most hated of Gentiles was a commander in the occupying army. There were very few people hated by the Jews as much as a Roman soldier.

So it is with great shock that Jesus states that He has not found anyone in Israel with the Centurion's level of faith. With this statement of Gentile faith, Jesus proclaims that many Gentiles will be part of the kingdom, and that many Jews will not! (8:10-13).

The Syrophenician Woman (15:21-28)

Back in chapter 15, Jesus moves his ministry to the Gentiles, traveling out of Israel to Tyre and Sidon. Here a Canaanite woman asks Jesus to heal her demon-possessed daughter. Jesus proclaims that He was sent to Israel, not to the Gentiles. But this woman understands that Israel's responsibility was to be a kingdom of priests to the world, and that, as part of the Abrahamic covenant, all the world would be blessed through Israel. So she responds, "even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their master's table." Jesus is impressed by her faith and heals her daughter.

The Gentile Multitudes (15:29-39)

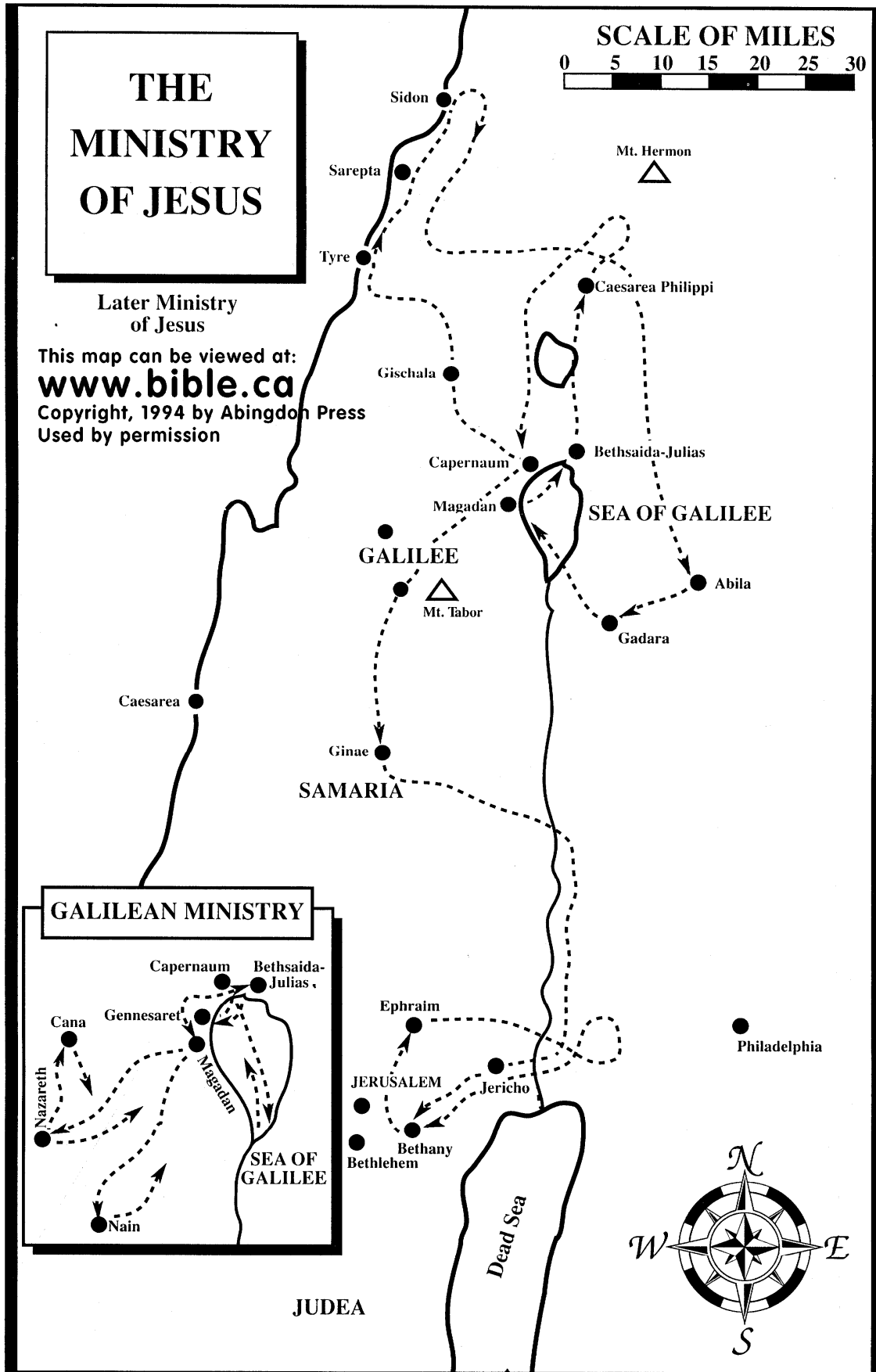
Jesus then travels to the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, to a Gentile region. There he continued to heal the sick. The Gentile crowds were amazed at His miracles. The Jews saw Jesus perform the same type of miracles, and they chose to attribute those miracles to Satan. The Gentiles observe the miracles, and Matthew tells us that they "glorified the God of Israel."

Matthew is again showing how the spreading of the gospel to the Gentiles was a large part of Jesus ministry. Secondly, it is only because Israel rejected their King that Jesus took His ministry to the Gentiles. The Jewish Christians in Matthew's day were struggling with the increasing influence of Gentiles in the church. But Matthew is illustrating that it is only because Israel failed to recognize Jesus that the Gentiles were being included in the kingdom. But since Israel gave up on the kingdom as Jesus described it, Jesus was offering the kingdom to the Gentiles.

Results of the Rejection

The Gentiles opportunity for the kingdom was a long term ramification of the Jewish leadership's rejection of Jesus as king. Nonetheless, there were also immediate ramifications to the nature of Jesus ministry as a result of this rejection.

- Jesus would cease speaking plainly to the multitudes and begin to speak only in parables.
- Miracles would no longer be performed as a sign to the people, but only as lessons for the disciples. Jesus no longer will perform miracles for the benefit of the crowds, for it is not helping and only adds to their condemnation. (16:1-12)
- Jesus ministry shifts from a public ministry to a private ministry to the disciples.
- Jesus begins preparing the disciples for His coming death.
- Jesus being preparing the disciples to lead His church after His ascension.



Preparation by the King (16:13-20:34)

Pronouncement and Glorification of the King

A transition takes place in chapter 16¹². The disciples are asked by Jesus who people say he is. Peter responds, “You are the Christ (Messiah), the Son of the living God (16:16).” Jesus acknowledges this, and from here on Jesus begins to show his disciples He is the messiah-king, and what that means.

(Matthew 16:21 NASB) From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day

Now that the disciples know who he is and what his purpose is for the kingdom, He reveals more and more of his kingly state, promising in 16:28 that some would live to see him coming in His kingdom. This fulfilled in chapter 17, at the transfiguration when Peter, James and John see Jesus in his glory talking with Moses and Elijah. They had now seen the King in all His glory. The disciples were certain that the kingdom was certainly at hand (although not in the form they had expected). But Jesus tells them not to tell anyone about this until after He is risen from the dead. While the disciples were to see Jesus in His glory, it was not yet time to reveal Himself fully to the people, for he still had to suffer and die.

The disciples ask about Elijah, who was predicted in the Old Testament to precede the coming kingdom. While Jesus explains that John the Baptist came in the spirit of Elijah (17:12-13), more intriguing is that Jesus states that Elijah is also still to come. In this “Second Coming,” Elijah will restore all things. This matches with the concept of the “harvest” with the wheat and the tares, and the sorting of the fish with the great dragnet. But it also means that everything is not going to be restored with the first advent, and that the wheat and the tares are going to coexist for awhile longer in the kingdom.

Lessons on the Greatest in the Kingdom

The disciples ask Jesus who is the greatest in the kingdom. Jesus responds in the fourth of five discourses in the book of Matthew. In this discourse, Jesus reveals that it is not the disciples or the religious leaders who will be the greatest, but those who are as humble as a child. The Father has such concern for children that anyone who causes a child to stumble will be condemned. Jesus illustrates this concern through the parable of the lost sheep, illustrating that God does not desire that any child become lost.

Discipline in the Kingdom (18:1-20)

Jesus has just illustrated to the disciples the deep concern that God has for those who are lost and have gone astray. Then Jesus outlines the role that the disciples are to play for those who are caught in sin. Jesus outlines a three-step process in confronting others:

Step One

If a fellow believer has sinned, go and tell him, Jesus commands us to go by yourself, in a one on one discussion. There are two thoughts behind this one on one discussion. First, Jesus is telling us to be proactive. It means we take the initiative to deal with the issue. Secondly, Jesus is telling us to keep it private. If we keep the offense private, one on one, then if the person repents and says I’m sorry, the conflict is over.

¹² Stedman.

Step Two

Jesus states that if the person doesn't respond to the one-on-one, then go back, but this time bring some others with you. It is still not a public matter, however, and if the person repents, then those two or three people can be a witness to the change of heart and the matter is cleaned up.

Step Three

If the person does not repent after the bringing witnesses, then the matter goes before the church. At that point, if there is no repentance, then Jesus says that the church should treat the offending party like a heathen. But this is the last stage. Long before we get to that stage, we need to be proactive about addressing sin when we see it in one another. We need to be private so that repentance and reconciliation can happen as easily as possible.

Forgiveness in the Kingdom (18:21-35)

Right after Jesus outlines that process of confrontation, Peter asks Jesus a question.

(Matthew 18:21-22 NASB) Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"

It seems Peter isn't really asking a question, but is trying to demonstrate to Jesus that he is a truly forgiving person. The Pharisees taught that you only had to forgive three times. But Jesus response was amazing. It was beyond what Peter expected. Jesus says to forgive not merely three times like the religious leaders, nor merely seven times as suggested by Peter. Rather, Jesus says we are to forgive seventy times seven. Jesus is using this exaggeration to say to Peter and us that, we should forgive without limits, without counting, over and over and over.

To emphasize this teaching, Jesus tells a parable of man who had been forgiven much, but then refused to forgive one who had committed a minor offense. In a reminder of the Sermon on the Mount, it is the merciful who find God's mercy. The more we recognize the depths of our spiritual poverty and the heights of God's grace, the easier it is for us to forgive those around us.

Rank & Privilege in the Kingdom

The Rich Young Ruler (19:16-26)

This lesson regarding privilege in the kingdom didn't seem to get through to the disciples, and He again and again must remind them that the greatest in the kingdom is the least on the earth. He shows them first in 19:13-15 that it is the little children who belong to the kingdom of heaven.

In chapter 19:16ff, a rich young man asks Jesus what He must do to obtain eternal life. Jesus responds that He must sell all He has and give it to the poor. This is too difficult for the young man to do, leading to Jesus conclusion that "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." (19:24)

Peter responds to this by reminding Jesus that the disciples have indeed given up everything to follow Him (19:27). Jesus recognizes this sacrifice and tells them that in the coming kingdom, when Jesus is sitting on the throne, the disciples will sit upon thrones ruling over Israel, and that others who forsake all to follow Him would also gain a great reward. But it will probably surprise us as to who those people will be for "many who are first will be last, and the last shall be first."

In other words, the people we expect to be the rulers in the kingdom will not be, and the lowly and disadvantaged will be. Humility seems to be the key to becoming great in the coming kingdom.

Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (20:1-16)

Jesus illustrates this in the parable of the laborers in the vineyard. A landowner hires people to work all day in the field. Later in the day he hires more people to work so as to finish the task, including some hired in the 11th hour. Yet when it comes time to pay the wages, those who work all day and those who work for just an hour all receive the same wages. This upsets those who had been working all day. But the landowner says he has been fair, for they earned what they had agreed to up front, and it is of no concern as to what he pays the others.

In the kingdom of heaven there will be those who are great in the kingdom who come to enter the kingdom late in the game. In the context of the book of Matthew, this is likely referring to the entrance of the Gentiles into the kingdom. The Jews always saw the kingdom belonging first to them, but Matthew has been building the case that due to the Jews rejection of the Messiah, the Gentiles now will gain an equal share in the coming kingdom.

But this same principle can apply to Christians today. We often are resentful of new people entering the church, gaining privilege and authority at our expense. There is a temptation for those who have been here since the beginning of time to expect that they should have more say and more influence. But that is not how the kingdom operates. Authority and influence belong to the humble, not those who think they deserve it. In the kingdom, the first shall be last and the last shall be first, and so it should be also in our churches.

The Cost of Rank in the Kingdom (20:17-28)

Being first in the kingdom is not all its cracked up to be. When Jesus says the last shall be first, he is not just referring to a humble attitude, but as we have seen he is referring to those who are willing to give up all in order to follow Him.

Indeed, Jesus himself, who will be the very first in the coming kingdom, must also give up all to be first. Jesus shows this to his disciples in 20:17-19 when He predicts his arrest, death, and also resurrection.

So when the mother of James and John asks Jesus in 20:20ff that He would allow her sons to sit beside Him in the kingdom, He responds, “you do not know what you are asking.” To sit in glory next to Jesus requires the same sort of suffering and sacrifice that Jesus would face. To be great in the kingdom requires that you become a servant of all, just as Jesus did not come to be served, but to serve all through death on a cross (20:27).

This is the new leadership paradigm in Christ’s kingdom. Those who wish to be great are those who serve. Those who expect to be served will be those who are least in the kingdom. This is different than they way the world operates. This is a crucial element to understand regarding leadership in the church. If you wish to be a leader in the church, it begins by being a servant. If you are already a leader in the church, are you expecting others to serve you, or do you expect to be serving others. Within the kingdom, rank does not have its privileges, except the privilege of serving others.

Passion of the King

Presentation of the King (21:1-11)

Jesus has been careful to keep his identity as the king under wraps until chapter 21. Often when performing miracles, he would warn people not to spread the news of the miracle (8:4, 9:30). After Peter’s confession in chapter 16, Jesus warns the disciples not to tell anyone his true identity.

But now in chapter 21, Jesus approaches Jerusalem, and He is ready to reveal to the whole town that he is the King. He rides into the city on a donkey with the crowd shouting “Hosanna!” According to Matthew, this is the fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9:

(Matthew 21:5 NASB) "SAY TO THE DAUGHTER OF ZION, 'BEHOLD YOUR KING IS COMING TO YOU, GENTLE, AND MOUNTED ON A DONKEY, EVEN ON A COLT, THE FOAL OF A BEAST OF BURDEN.'"

Judgment by the King

Jesus cleanses the temple (21:12-17)

After Jesus entered the temple, He arrived at the temple, only to find that the outer courtyard of the temple had been turned into a marketplace. This outer courtyard was the place reserved for the Gentiles and the children to worship, and their place had been invaded by these greedy moneychangers. Jesus clears out the temple and restores it to its original purpose.

Jesus is defending the rights of the Gentiles and the children. Is there any question why children were shouting in the temple "Hosanna to the Son of David!" (21:15). Jesus had restored their place of worship.

Parables of Rejection

Needless to say, this enraged the chief priests. They had not only allowed the moneychangers into the temple, but were very likely given a cut of the profits. So they approach Jesus and ask him what gave him the right to enter the temple and toss out the moneychangers (21:23). Jesus turns this on them and asks them where John the Baptist received their authority. This was a trap, of course, and the chief priests can't answer.

Jesus uses this occasion to confront the religious leaders by telling three parables illustrating the Israel's rejection of the Messiah.

Parable of the Two Sons (21:28-32)

A man asked his two sons to work in the vineyard. One refused, but then later regretted it and went to work in the vineyard. The second agreed to go, but then never went. Which one did the will of his father. The former represents the tax gatherers and the prostitutes who believe in John the Baptist, while the latter represents the religious leaders. Jesus' point is:

(Matthew 21:31b) The tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you.

Parable of the Landowner (21:33-41)

A landowner prepares his vineyard and then hires a manager to care for it. At harvest time the owner sends his slaves to help with the harvest, but the manager killed the slaves. So the landowner sends his son, but the manager killed the son as well. Jesus asks what the landowner will do to the manager when he comes. His audience responded that the landowner will bring the manager to a "wretched end," and give the vineyard to others. Jesus point is:

(Matthew 21:43) The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it.

Parable of the Marriage Feast (22:1-14)

A king gave a wedding feast for his son. He sent out an invitation, but those who were invited refused to come. So the king sends out his servants to invite anyone of the street to come, both the evil and the good. However when one of the guests came without proper wedding attire. But how could a guest who came off the street be expected to be wearing proper attire? Such ones would have been given proper attire by the host, yet this one refused to wear the garment.

Jesus seem to be referring to Isaiah 61:10¹³:

(Isaiah 61:10 NASB) I will rejoice greatly in the LORD, My soul will exult in my God; For He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

Jesus point is that the religious leaders have been invited to the wedding, but they refused to participate. So now the feast has been opened to the tax collectors, prostitutes, and the Gentiles

The Cornerstone (21:42-46)

All three of these parables illustrate the religious leaders rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. All of this is in fulfillment of Psalm 18:22-23, which speaks of a stone rejected by the builders, that, to the amazement of all ends up become the cornerstone of God's work. Jesus has clearly communicated to his audience that because they have not accepted Him as the Messiah, that God would be removing them from the kingdom and giving it to the undesirables of the world.

The chief priests and Pharisees clearly understood Jesus meaning, and they sought to seize Him (21:45). However, they could not do so in front of the crowds, for they believed in Him. However, they did then seek to set traps for him so they could accuse Jesus of some wrong doing (22:15). However this strategy failed (22:46). However, they continued to plot as to how to seize Him when the crowds were not around so as to not start some public disturbance (26:3-5). Finally their break came when Judas Iscariot agreed to betray Jesus at the right opportunity (26:14-16).

Predictions of the King

The Background

Jesus Lament over Jerusalem (23:34-39)

In chapter 23 Jesus then lets all the stops out and He bluntly and publicly condemns the Pharisees and religious leaders for their hypocrisy, and their leading the nation astray. The condemnation comes in a group of eight "woes." He concludes with the condemnation of the nation because of there rejection of the kingdom, stating that this judgment would come upon this very generation (23:36). However, Jesus does not delight in the condemnation, but regrets it. He longs for the nation to accept Him and for Him to gather them under His wings (23:37). But that is not to be, for Israel has rejected her King.

The Disciples Question (24:1-3)

In chapter 24, Jesus and the disciples are admiring the beauty of the temple in Jerusalem. However, Jesus told them that it would not be long before the temple would be destroyed. That destruction would come as a result of the rejection of the King by the Jews. Later that day, at the Mount of Olives, the disciples ask Jesus two questions:

- When will the temple be torn down?
- What will be the sign of Your coming and the end of the age?

In the mind of the disciples, these are the same question. They are asking when will the fullness of the kingdom will come. Jesus has already alluded to a time when the wheat and tares would be harvested and the dragnet would separate the good fish from the bad. The disciples

¹³ Robert Jamieson, A.R. Fausset, David Brown. *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*. (Electronic edition, E-Sword, 2004).

have discerned that at a yet future time the Messiah would return to usher in the full kingdom and would reign over the entire earth.

Jesus answer is the fifth of five of Matthew's discourses¹⁴, known as the Olivet Discourse. However, Jesus' answer reveals to us that the disciples question has two separate answers. That is, the time of the temple's destruction will not be the same as time as the end of the age¹⁵.

Biblical vs. Systematic Theology

When looking at the Olivet Discourse, one must recognize that Jesus is not giving us a full systematic theology of the end times. The study of the Olivet discourse is a study of *biblical theology*, as opposed to *systematic theology*.

Systematic theology tries to determine what the entire bible teaches on a particular subject area. To do this, we would have to compare the Olivet discourse to the Old Testament prophets such as Daniel and Ezekiel, Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 15, 1 Thessalonians 4-5 and 2 Thessalonians 2, and of course the book of Revelation.

Biblical theology looks only at what one biblical author says regarding a particular subject. For this study, we are looking only at Matthew's eschatology. This is limited to Jesus answer to the specific questions asked of Him by the disciples: "when will the temple be torn down and what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?"

The Signs of His Coming (Matthew 24:4-51)

The False Signs

Jesus begins with a warning not to be misled. There will be many false signs. These false signs include:

- People who claim to be the Messiah (24:5, 24-26)
- Wars and rumors of wars. (24:6-7a)
- Famines (24:7b)
- Earthquakes (24:7b)
- Persecution of the disciples (24:9-10)
- False prophets (24:11)
- Lawlessness and a diminishing of love. (24:12)

These things will always take place and must not be seen as signs of the end of the age. Jesus is warning us against the danger of end time hysteria, which tends to paralyze the church from its primary mission. He reminds us that we must be about spreading the gospel of the kingdom to the entire world, for the end of the age will not come until that time. This is looking forward to the fulfillment of Jesus final command in Matthew 28 to make disciples of all nations, and reminds Matthew's readers of the necessity of including the Gentiles in the church.

Signs of the Temple's Destruction

Jesus explains that the destruction of the temple will follow the abomination of desolation. The prophet Daniel (Daniel 9:27) predicted the desecration of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanes during the time of the Maccabean revolt. Jesus is saying that there will be a similar desecration prior to its destruction.

When this happens, Jesus warns the Jews to flee to the wilderness, for there would be a time of great tribulation for the Jews which surrounds the destruction of the temple. There will also be many false Messiah's rising up to lead the Jews against the Romans. But Jesus warns his

¹⁴ Many scholars include chapter 23 in the fifth discourse. Our discussion will pick up the discourse in chapter 24.

¹⁵ Blomberg, 322.

listeners that these will indeed be false Messiah who will also be destroyed. These things are more imminent than the disciples might imagine, for Jesus warns them that this generation will not pass away until these things take place (vs. 34).

This is exactly what happens. Within 40 years of Jesus message, the Roman empire quashes a Jewish rebellion in what the historian Josephus calls “the Jewish War.” The Romans laid siege to Jerusalem, starving out the people. Then they entered the city, and desecrating and destroying the temple and abolishing the priesthood and the temple sacrifices. Many Jews fled to the wilderness, including some to the fortress of Masada, where the last remnants of the Jewish army committed suicide rather than be captured by the Romans.

Signs of the End of the Age

Truly this was a time of tremendous tribulation for the Jews, and was a direct result of their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. But was this a time of “great tribulation” such as the world had never seen? Some see this “great tribulation” referring to the entire age between the temple’s destruction and the second coming. Others believe that Jesus is “fast-forwarding” from the tribulation which surrounded the temple’s destruction to a yet-future Great Tribulation corresponding to Revelation¹⁶.

In either case Jesus seems to be making a transition to answering the disciples second question: what will be the sign of the end of the age? The answer to this question is, according to Blomberg, “Don’t worry, when it comes you won’t miss it!”¹⁷”

When the Son of Man returns it will be readily apparent to all. It will be appear in the sky (24:30) and will be able to be seen by all, like lightning (24:27). There will be great astronomical events and the sun, moon will be darkened (24:29). Then he will appear in the sky, coming with power and might (24:30). The nations will tremble at his coming (24:30), for this time the Messiah comes to bring judgment. But He will also send forth his angels and gather his elect from the four corners of the earth (24:31).

Be Ready! (Matthew 25:1-30)

But as to the exact timing of this event, no one knows, not even the Son of Man (vs. 37). He will come when he is least expected (vs. 44). Jesus then tells two parables with a single point. Because you do not know exactly when the end will come, you must be ready.

In the first parable there were 10 virgins awaiting the bridegroom. Five brought sufficient oil to keep their lamps lit all night. Five ran out of oil in their lamps, so they left to purchase more oil. The bridegroom came while the five were gone, and missed the wedding feast. (25:1-13)

(Matthew 25:13 NIV) Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

In the second parable a master gave three of his slaves 5, 2, and 1 talents before leaving on a journey. The first two doubled their money before the master came back. The servant with 1 talent buried his talent in the ground. The master rewarded the first two, but he threw out the other servant.

The Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25:31-46)

When the kingdom comes, the King will separate the people like one separates the sheep from the goats. The criteria for judging the people will be the way they treated the poor and destitute.

¹⁶ Revelation 7:14

¹⁷ Blomberg, 325.

(Matthew 25:40 NASB) And the King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.'

This matches the concept of the harvest of the wheat and the tares and the great dragnet mentioned in chapter 13. Through these concepts, Matthew is explaining to the skeptical Jew that the messiah-king's first mission on the earth was not to establish an earthly kingdom. That will take place in the second coming of the messiah.

But if that is the case, then what was the first mission of the messiah-king? That is answered in the trial, death, and resurrection of the King.

Passion of the King

The Execution of the King

As we enter the trial scenes with Jesus, we see his crime explained by Matthew as his very claim to the messiah kingship. In the first trial with Caiaphas and the Jewish elders, Caiaphas asks him flat out, "...tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus, in the plainest response culminates his manifestation and states, "You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven (16:63-64)."

As the Jews deliver him up to Pilate, the Roman governor, the same question is asked of him by Pilate: "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus responds again, "It is as you say (27:11)." Even when Pilate is looking for a way to release Jesus, the option he gives the crowd is between Barabbas or "Jesus who is called Christ. (27:17)" While Pilate saw no real reason for ordering his crucifixion, he knew it was the envy of the Jewish leaders. So almost in spite, the crime listed above Jesus head on the cross states that his crime was "King of the Jews (27:37)." Jesus was finally recognized as the King, but in a manner no one had expected.

His Resurrection

On the Sunday after His death, two women go to the tomb to finish the preparation of Jesus body. The body had to be hastily placed in the tomb on Friday, for the Sabbath was rapidly approaching. Now that the Sabbath was over, the women were going to finish preparing the body for burial. However, when they arrive an angels tells them the body is gone, for He is risen! They are told that Jesus was going ahead of them to Galilee, and that they must tell the disciples to meet them there. Later that day, Jesus appeared in Jerusalem to the disciples and told them to leave for Galilee where they would see Him again.

When they had arrived in Galilee, Jesus gave the disciples their final mission. Jesus had all authority now, and he could have ushered in the fullness of His kingdom at that point. But there was one final mission for the disciples: they were to make disciples of all the nations.

This is Matthew's final explanation for why the King came, but the kingdom didn't come in its fullness. This is Matthew's final apologetic for the inclusion of the Gentiles in the church. Because the coming of the full kingdom means judgment, Jesus is not yet ready for that. Instead, he desires first for all the nations to come to Him. Then, when that mission is accomplished, the kingdom will come.

Conclusion

Matthew writes to a Jewish audience, laying out his case that Jesus is the long promised Messiah, the King of the Jews. In proving this case, however, Matthew must also answer the

question, “if Jesus is the King, where is the kingdom?” For the Jews had expected the Messiah would usher in a new and glorious kingdom, throwing of the oppression of other nations, establishing Israel as the dominant empire in the world, and ruling over a time of great peace and prosperity for not only Israel, but the entire world. If Jesus was the King, why was Israel still suffering under the rule of the Romans?

Matthew has answered this question by editing the words and deeds of Jesus into a comprehensive description of Jesus’ kingdom. What we discover about this kingdom surprised the Jewish beliefs of Matthew’s day and still surprises us to this day.

- Jesus’ kingdom would not be ushered in by a military, political or social revolution. Instead the kingdom would start small, like a mustard seed or like yeast within bread. But over time it would grow into something great (Matt. 13:31-33).
- Jesus’ kingdom would not immediately rid the world of evil, but instead the wheat would grow side-by-side with the tares, only to be separated at a yet-to-come final judgment (Matt. 13:24-30).
- Jesus’ kingdom would not bring peace and prosperity, but would bring persecution, suffering, and would split rather than heal families (Matt. 10:21-22, 34-36).
- Jesus’ kingdom would not consist of the wealthy in this world, but those who have forsaken all to follow Him (Matt. 19:16-26).
- Jesus’ kingdom would not include the chief priests and the temple leaders, but the little children crying “Hosanna!” in the temple’s courtyard (Matt. 21:15-16).
- Jesus’ kingdom would not include the Pharisees who meticulously studied and obeyed the Law of Moses, but the poor in spirit who recognized their inability to keep the law (Matt. 5:3, 20).
- Jesus’ kingdom would not belong exclusively to God’s chosen people, the Jews, but to people from all nations who accept Him as the Messiah-King (Matt. 12:18-21, 22:1-13).

Jesus’ kingdom belongs not to the rich, powerful, religious or learned, but to the poor, weak, unrighteous and common people.

I struggle with that, for I am the former. I am an upper-middle class man, a college graduate, seminary trained, a leader in my church and in the business world, and a fairly moral person. But Jesus says this is not the type of person who will be great in His kingdom, and indeed, may not even make not even find entrance into the kingdom!

As a church, we should struggle with that, for we are a relatively wealthy church, with an above average education level, and we can tend to look at the world around us and become disgusted at the world’s unrighteous lifestyle while ignoring our own lack of compassion.

Jesus tells us the drug-addicted, the homosexuals, and the homeless may actually be closer to the kingdom of heaven than the SUV-driving, Republican voting, church-attending, tithing conservative evangelical Christian. For the former is more likely to recognize their hopeless state, their inherent sinfulness and their desperate need for a savior.

What does it mean for us individually and as a church that the first shall be last and the last shall be first? What does it mean for us that it is the poor in spirit who will inherit the kingdom of heaven? What does it mean for us that those who offend us should be forgiven, over and over and over? What does it mean that the kingdom belongs to the children, the tax gatherers, the prostitutes, the sinners, and the Gentiles?

“Blessed is the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

May God grant to all of us such a humility that we might all become great in His kingdom.

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