

INTERPRETING MATTHEW

(Darrell Bock)

Structure and Themes

Matthew's Gospel is the one most focused on Jewish issues and concerns. Also important to his Gospel is the key role that Jesus's discourses play in the development of the argument. Although it is often said that Matthew contains five discourse units, it is important to note that the last unit is particularly large and combines two distinct discourses: the condemnation of the leadership followed by the eschatological discourse (Matt. 23-25). Other discourse units cover blessing, law, righteousness, and the walk with God (Matt. 5-7); instructions for mission (Matt. 10); the kingdom (Matt. 13); and remarks about community accountability and forgiveness (Matt. 18). A look at a working outline of Matthew reveals much about its concerns:

- I. Prologue: "God with us," "king of the Jews", "born of God" according to promise in the midst of conflict from Israel and gentile adoration (1:1-2:23)
- II. Introduction: John the Baptist prepares the way for the beloved Son, who overcomes temptation (3:1-4:11)
- III. Messiah confronts Israel in Galilee and meets rejection (4:12-12:50)
 - A. Introduction and summary (4:12-25)
 - B. Discourse: Call to genuine righteousness (5:1-7:29)
 - C. Ministry of nine miracles and teaching for disciples (8:1-9:35)
 - D. Discourse: Mission to Israel a—shepherd for the sheep (9:36-11:1)
 - E. Rejected by Jewish leaders, call for disciples to rest in the just servant for the nations (11:2-12:50)
- IV. Responses: Kingdom, provision-acceptance-call for disciples, and rejection by Israel (13:1-20:34)
 - A. Discourse: The mysteries of the kingdom (13:1-53)
 - B. Rejection intensified by many in Israel, provision for and acceptance by disciples, and call for discipleship (13:54-17:27)
 - C. Discourse: Community accountability and forgiveness (18:1-35)
 - D. To Jerusalem: Instruction on faith commitment and grace (19:1-20:34)
- V. Messiah inaugurates kingdom through rejection and vindication (21:1-28:20)
 - A. Messiah confronts Israel in Jerusalem (21:1-22:46)
 - B. Discourses: Pharisees and scribes condemned, Messiah predicts the judgment of unbelieving Israel and his return (23:1-25:46)
 - C. Messiah is rejected in crucifixion, but vindicated in resurrection as a basis for commission (26:1-28:20)

For Matthew, Jesus's relationship to Israel and explaining Israel's rejection are major concerns. Matthew wishes to point out that those who are Christian did not seek a break with Judaism but have been forced to be distinct because the nation rejected the completion of the divine and scriptural promise that Jesus brought and offered. However, that rejection did not stop the arrival of promise. What rejection did was raise the stakes of discipleship and lead to a creation of a new entity, the church. The church's message not only continued to appeal to Israel but also went out as a part of a mission to all in the world. Five discourse units comprising six discourses (the fifth unit contains two discourses) are the backbone of the book. As with all the Gospels, there is an interaction and interchange between Jesus's words and deeds. Jesus's actions support his preaching. Jesus's death was an act of the divine plan that the deliverance and mission that led to his vindication and mission. Disciples are those who come to him and set upon the task of reflecting the righteousness that God so graciously offers.

