

## **Christ, the Son of the Living God: The Theme of the Chiastic Structure of the Gospel of Matthew**

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Many scholars have looked for meaning among the various themes in the book of Matthew through an analysis of literary structure with a special emphasis on chiasms.<sup>1</sup> Ethelbert Bullinger,<sup>2</sup> John Breck,<sup>3</sup> S. Joseph Kidder,<sup>4</sup> and Tyler J. VanderWeele<sup>5</sup> point out many small chiasms which are evident in particular paragraphs of Matthew's gospel. Yet there is also a larger chiasm which encompasses the entire book. Much insight can be gained from considering the chiastic structure of Matthew as a whole. It is through

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<sup>1</sup> Chiasms or chiastic approaches are a literary structure used to emphasize and reveal the depth of a specific passage through reverse parallelism of similar or contrary elements. Chiasms can stand alone or overlap in various ways. Large chiastic structures may include several smaller ones. The end of one chiasm may also form the beginning of another. One section of a chiasm (usually the first or last) may be a smaller version of a larger chiasm. Chiastic structures are by nature rather tightly constructed, yet nothing prohibits a writer from composing an incomplete chiasm or one that is not a perfect mirror image parallel. For more information about chiasms and their relevance in the Bible see John Breck, "Biblical Chiasmus: Exploring Structure for Meaning," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 17, no. 2 (1987): 70-74.

<sup>2</sup> Ethelbert Bullinger, *The Companion Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1922).

<sup>3</sup> John Breck, *The Shape of Biblical Language: Chiasmus in the Scriptures and Beyond*, (New York: St. Vladimirs Seminary Pr; 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> S. Joseph Kidder, "'This Generation' in Matthew 24:34," *Andrews Seminary Studies* 21, no. 3 (1983): 203-209.

<sup>5</sup> Tyler J. VanderWeele, "Some Observations Concerning the Chiastic Structure of the Gospel of Matthew," *Journal of Theological Studies* 59, no. 2 (2008): 669-673.

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

a focus on this larger chiasm that we are able to draw out the major themes and theology of Matthew.

While there is not much research done regarding a chiasm of the book of Matthew as a whole, tradition points to Matthew 13 as the center of the book. For example, Tyler J. VanderWeele<sup>6</sup> builds off B. W. Bacon<sup>7</sup> and C.H. Lohr's<sup>8</sup> chiastic structure with the pivotal point being Matthew 13, the discourse of "the Parables of the Kingdom." He bases his central theme on the observation that the literary style of the Torah and Matthew, both of which can be divided into five books, is made up of narrative and discourses.<sup>9</sup>

However, other views regarding the chiastic structure and center of the book of Matthew have started to be explored. For example, Meko A. Nagasawa<sup>10</sup> puts the center as the Third Discourse in which Jesus compares the Kingdom to a household. James B. Jordan<sup>11</sup> sees the center of Matthew as the decision of the Pharisees to kill the innocent Servant of the Lord (12:14-21) as this is at the heart of his chiasm. Yet, a case can be made that the proclamations of Peter and God the Father, that Jesus is the Son of God in Matthew chapters 16 and 17, is more in line with the overarching themes of Matthew who spends much time telling us who Jesus is.

Of significance for the readers of Matthew is that Jesus, the Messiah, is not only of royal Davidic lineage, but also the divine Son of God on a mission of redemption. The intent of this article is to consider some of the themes and theological views present in the Gospel of Matthew based on a chiasm of the full book.

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<sup>6</sup> VanderWeele, 669-673.

<sup>7</sup> B. W. Bacon, "The 'Five Books' of Matthew against the Jews," *The Expositor* 15 (1918): 56-66.

<sup>8</sup> C. H. Lohr, "Oral Techniques in the Gospel of Matthew," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 23 (1961): 403-435.

<sup>9</sup> VanderWeele, 669.

<sup>10</sup> Mako A. Nagasawa, "The Chiastic Structure of the Gospel of Matthew," December 1, 2012, [nagasawafamily.org/matthew-chiasm.pdf](http://nagasawafamily.org/matthew-chiasm.pdf) (accessed November 19, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> James B. Jordan, "Towards a Chiastic Understanding of the Gospel According to Matthew, Part 1," *Biblical Horizons* v. 94, April 1997, <http://www.biblicalhorizons.com/biblical-horizons/no-94-toward-a-chiastic-understanding-of-the-gospel-according-to-matthew-part-1/> and "Towards a Chiastic Understanding of the Gospel of Matthew, Part 2," *Biblical Horizons* v 95, May 1997, <http://www.biblicalhorizons.com/biblical-horizons/no-95-toward-a-chiastic-understanding-of-the-gospel-according-to-matthew-part-2/> (accessed November 19, 2014).

## *KIDDER: CHRIST, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD*

### **Matthew's Audience**

Matthew begins his writing with a genealogy, showing how Jesus is a descendant of both Abraham and David. Matthew's desire is to make clear to his Jewish readers that the Old Testament prophecies related to the Messiah had been fulfilled in Jesus.<sup>12</sup> Matthew employs about fifty quotations from the Old Testament;<sup>13</sup> the book of Isaiah in particular has exercised a great influence on Matthew's gospel.<sup>14</sup> We may very well characterize the gospel of Matthew as the gospel of fulfillment.

Matthew's gospel also serves an apologetic purpose which tries to refute the accusations put forward by opponents of the Christian faith.<sup>15</sup> Thus, the birth narrative (in particular Matt 1:18-25) defends Jesus against charges that His birth was illegitimate and the information concerning the bribing of the Roman guard at the grave by members of the Jewish Council (information exclusively reported in Matthew 28:11-15) forms a refutation of the accusation that the disciples had stolen Jesus' body. This exposition on the facts of Jesus' life shows the divine nature of His origins and ministry. Only the divinely appointed Messiah would be able to stand as the sacrifice for all mankind.

### **The Chiasmic Structure of Matthew's Gospel**

Now let us look at a detailed chiasmic structure of Matthew as a whole:

#### **A Jesus's Birth and the Beginning of His Kingdom Ministry (1-4)**

The genealogy and birth of Jesus 1:1-25

Mary was chosen to be the mother of Jesus 1:18

An angel of the Lord told Joseph of Jesus' miraculous conception 1:20

Proclamation of Jesus as Immanuel: "God with us" 1:23

Kingship of Jesus acknowledged by Magi 2:1-12

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<sup>12</sup> David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein, eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 15.

<sup>13</sup> Gijs Van Den Brink, "Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew," (1997): <http://www.elim.nl/en/theologymatthew.html> (accessed June 23, 2014).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. Also, Felix Just has prepared a chart showing where Matthew uses quotations from the OT. He lists 13 instances of Matthew quoting or alluding to Isaiah. See his website for more detail: <http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Matthew-OTQuotations.htm> (accessed June 23, 2014).

<sup>15</sup> Craig A. Evans, *Matthew*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary, Ben Witherington III, ed., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 6.

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

The Magi give expensive gifts to Jesus 2:11

Herod plotted to kill Jesus seeing Him as a threat to his throne  
2:13-23

God directs Jesus to be taken to Egypt to avoid His death 2:13-21

Baptism of Jesus 3:1-3:17<sup>16</sup>

Jesus is tempted three times in the wilderness by Satan who tries to make Jesus doubt His identity as the Son of God and shortcut His mission of sacrifice to save the world 4:1-11.

Jesus begins His teaching ministry, calls the disciples, and starts His healing ministry 4:12-25

**B Sermon on the Mount: The Laws of the Kingdom (5-7)**

Blessings on citizens of the Kingdom 5:1-12

Guidelines for living in the Kingdom 5:13-6:18

Instruction on the use of personal resources for the Kingdom  
6:19-34

Signs that point to the characteristics of citizens of the  
Kingdom 7:1-23

Instructions on how to have a firm foundation in the  
Kingdom 7:24-28

Parable of the wise and foolish builders

**C Jesus' Authority Proven through Healings, Miracles,  
and the Giving of Instructions on How to Serve in the  
Kingdom (8-12)**

Acts of healing (throughout chapters 8-9)

Men invite themselves to be disciples and are  
warned of the cost of discipleship 8:18-22

Jesus calls Matthew the tax-collector 9:9-13

Two blind men proclaim Jesus as "Son of David"  
9:27-31

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<sup>16</sup> While it does not fit chronologically in Matthew's chiasm, the Baptism of Jesus and His transfiguration are linked. God's statement at the Baptism of Jesus in Matthew 3:17, "And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased,'" is repeated verbatim at the Transfiguration in Matthew 17:5: "While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!'"

*KIDDER: CHRIST, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD*

Jesus' summons the twelve disciples and sends them out on His authority 10:1-10:42

Jesus instructs His disciples to take care of the "Little Ones" 10:42<sup>17</sup>

John questions Jesus as Messiah, Jesus answers by affirming John as Elijah 11:1-19

Jesus notes that it is the "babes,"<sup>18</sup> not the wise, who will reveal Jesus as the Son of God 11:25-26

Matthew shows that Jesus was the Servant in whom God delights and fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 42, reaffirming the authority of Jesus 12:15-21

**D The Parables about the Kingdom, Miracles Performed (13:1-16:12)**

Kingdom of God parables: instructions on how to live in the Kingdom 13-16

Mustard Seed Parable 13:31-32

Woman asks for healing for possessed daughter 15:21-28

Disciples rebuked for lack of faith 16:5-12

**E Confirmation that Jesus is the Son of God, Ruler of the Kingdom(16:13-17:13)<sup>19</sup>**

Peter proclaims Jesus as the Messiah, Son of God 16:13-20

God, the Father, proclaims Jesus as His Son 17:1-13<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> While it does not fit chronologically in Matthew's chiasm, the term "little ones" is a literary link. The term is only used in two chapters of Matthew, 10:42 (Section C) and 18:6,10,14 (Section D'). The reference is regarding the spiritually immature as well as the physically immature.

<sup>18</sup> The NIV uses the term "little children" and the NASB uses "infants."

<sup>19</sup> It is interesting to note that in the NKJV, Matthew 1:1-16:12 comprises 540 verses (50%), Matthew 16:13-17:13 contains 29 verses (3%), and Matthew 17:14-28:20 contains 502 verses (47%). Matthew contains 1,071 verses in total. This finding lends itself to the conclusion that Matthew 16:13-17:13 is the center of the book.

<sup>20</sup> John the Baptist compared to Elijah 17:10-13.

**D' Parables and discourses on how to behave in the Kingdom (17:14-20:28)**

Man asks for healing for possessed son  
17:14-21

Disciples rebuked for lack of faith 17:17, 20

Mustard Seed Parable 17:20

Jesus instructs His followers to humble themselves like children and to care for the "Little Ones" 18:1-14<sup>21</sup>

Instructions and parables on forgiveness and how to live as disciples in the Kingdom  
18:15-20:28

**C' Jesus' Authority Proven through the Triumphal Entry, Cleansing of the Temple, and the Telling of Parables on How to Serve and Behave in the Kingdom (20:29-22:46)**

Two blind men proclaim Jesus as "Son of David"  
20:29-31

Triumphal entry and the cleansing of the temple affirm Jesus' authority 21:1-14

The authority of Jesus is questioned by the Pharisees  
21:15-16a

Jesus reminds the Pharisees that the infants and babes will reveal the Lord through their praise of Him 21:16b

Parables about discipleship 21:27-22:40

Jesus quotes Psalm 110 to show that David knew the Christ to be Lord who given authority by God  
22:44-45

Pharisees finally stop questioning Jesus' 22:46

**B' Olivet Discourse: The Signs of the Coming of the Kingdom (23-25)**

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<sup>21</sup> See footnote 17.

*KIDDER: CHRIST, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD*

Woes on those who don't live according to the Kingdom  
23:1-39

Watching for the signs of the coming of the Kingdom 24:1-51

Instructions on how to be firm in faith as you do not know time or hour 25:1-13

Parable of the wise and foolish virgins

Instructions on the use of Kingdom resources 25:14-30

Guidelines for living in the Kingdom 25:31-46

**A' The End of Jesus' Earthly Kingdom Ministry, His Death and Resurrection (26-28)**

The Lord's Supper 26:17-35

Jesus prays three times in Gethsemane while affirming His identity as the Son of God by praying "My Father", and accepts His mission of sacrifice to save the world 26:36-46

Jesus goes to Jerusalem to allow Himself to be led to His death 26:47-68

Peter denies Jesus three times 26:69-75

Kingship of Jesus rejected, chief Jewish leaders plot to kill Jesus 27:1-32

The crucifixion and resurrection (rebirth) of Jesus 27:33-28:15

Joseph of Arimathea gives Jesus a rich tomb 27:57-60

An angel of the Lord told the Marys of Jesus' miraculous resurrection 28:5-6

Two Marys proclaim the resurrection of Jesus 28:1-10

Jesus continues His teaching ministry by sending the disciples to all the world 28:16-20

The proclamation by Jesus: "I will be with you always" 28:20

**Observation and Analysis on the Chiasmic Structure of Matthew**

**A. Past and Future (1-4, 26-28)<sup>22</sup>**

*Jesus' Birth and Resurrection:*

The genealogy of Jesus, in Matthew 1:1-17, brings us up from the past, while the commission in 28:16-20, moves us into the future. Matthew's genealogy is a summary and continuation of the ones found in the Old Testament for David, Abraham, and Adam. The commission given by Jesus is His call to bring people from all nations into His kingdom and family. The genealogy of Jesus in Matthew highlights His place in the royal line of David, while His resurrection reaffirmed Jesus's divine sovereignty over sin. The resurrection can also be seen as a New Birth for Jesus in which He is able to rightly claim His heavenly throne.

*An Angel's Message and the Marys:*

The birth narrative of 1:18-25 can be analyzed as having three parts: Mary is chosen, an angel appears with a message, and Jesus is born. In the same way, the resurrection narrative of 28:1-10 presents two Marys, an angel appears with a message, and then Jesus appears in His resurrected body.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> It has been noted that Matthew was written to present Jesus as a new and priestly Moses, the savior of God's people from earthly and spiritual bondage. Hence, the early chapters of Matthew recapitulate the history of the Pentateuch and set up the themes of "rest" (Matthew 11:28-30) and "deliverance" (as shown throughout Matthew 4, 8, 9, 11, 12, etc.)

1:1-17—genealogies; Genesis (beginning of life; first book of the Pentateuch)

1:18-25—birth of Jesus; birth of Moses (introduction of saviors)

2:1-23—gifts of the magi, descent into Egypt; exodus from Egypt (wealth; reward)

3:1-17—baptism of Jesus; Red Sea crossing (faith journey)

4:1-11—40 days wrestling in wilderness; 40 years in wilderness (deprivation; punishment)

4:12-25—begins preaching the Kingdom; initial conquests in Numbers (start of ministry; leading into the Promised Land)

5-7—Sermon on the Mount; Deuteronomy (how to achieve life; last book of the Pentateuch)

With Jesus being the new Moses, He grants rest and deliverance (the Sabbath). The entire movement of the book of Exodus is from slavery to Sabbath rest; this theme is at the heart of Matthew. For more comparisons of Jesus to Moses, see "The Historical Jesus XIV: The Gospel of Matthew: Jesus as the New Moses," *Outlook*, Worldview Publications, July 2007. <http://www.worldviewpublications.org/outlook/archive/089/089.pdf> (accessed June 23, 2014).

<sup>23</sup> John 1:1-18 only presents one Mary, and that is Mary Magdalene.

### *KIDDER: CHRIST, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD*

#### *“God with Us”:*

Joseph is told to call this new child Immanuel, which Matthew reminds us means “God with us” (1:23). This connects with Jesus reminding His disciples that He will continue to remain “with you always, even to the end of the age” (28:20). The presence of Jesus was not a one-time event, but was ushered in by His birth and lasts throughout eternity.

#### *Rich Gifts and the Acknowledgment of Kingship:*

On the occasion of His birth, the Magi in 2:11 give rich gifts to Jesus, whom they called “King of the Jews” (2:2), which will sustain the family while in Egypt. Similarly, the wealthy Joseph of Arimathaea provides a rich tomb for Jesus (27:57-61) which gives temporary shelter for His body. The myrrh given by the Magi foreshadow Jesus’ death as myrrh was commonly used for anointing the dead.

Also like the Magi, Pilate indirectly affirmed Jesus as king. Pilate asked if He was “King of the Jews” (27:11) and had this title engraved on a plaque and put on His cross (27:37).

#### *Plots to Kill Jesus:*

Herod wanted to use the Magi, who were looking for the “king of the Jews” (2:2), in his plot to kill baby Jesus whom he saw as a threat to his authority. He wanted the Magi to lead him to the baby so that he could carry out the death sentence. The Magi took another route home because they were divinely warned (2:12) of Herod’s plot against the innocent Jesus, since Jesus had not yet fulfilled His mission.

Much like Herod used the Magi, the chief priests needed to use Pilate in their plot to kill Jesus who they saw as a threat to their authority. They wanted Pilate to carry out the death sentence after they led Jesus to him. Pilate tried to get out of it, knowing Jesus to be innocent (27:24). Pilate was unable to avert the plot to kill Jesus as Jesus’ death would fulfill the mission of the Messiah.<sup>24</sup>

Just as Herod sought to prevent Jesus’ birth, the Jews sought to prevent His disciples from claiming His resurrection by persuading Pilate to guard the grave of Jesus (27:62-66).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Note that the attempt to eliminate and finish off Jesus is found at the beginning of Matthew (chapter 1), the middle (chapter 12) and the end (chapter 27).

<sup>25</sup> Compare Matthew 2:1-11, 16-23 with 27:62-66.

## *JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

### *Avoiding and Embracing Death:*

In 2:13-21, we find Joseph taking his family down into Egypt to hide from Herod who attempted to kill Jesus. Jesus' descent into Egypt for protection has a direct relationship with His ascent into Jerusalem for His destruction. After His experience in Gethsemane Jesus readily goes out and meets those coming to arrest Him (26:47-68).

### *Baptism and the Lord's Supper:*

While acknowledging the connection of the voice from Heaven in both the baptism and transfiguration of Jesus (3:17, 17:5),<sup>26</sup> there is a strong connection between the function of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Before He officially starts His ministry, Jesus takes part in John's baptism of repentance and forgiveness of sin (3:1-17). This symbolic ordinance of baptism is still practiced by those who desire to give an outward testimony of their acceptance of Jesus, repentance, and acknowledgment of the power of Jesus to forgive sins.

During the Lord's Supper, which is instituted at the end of His ministry (26:17-30), Jesus speaks of his betrayal by His disciple and compares the bread and wine to His body and blood "which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (26:28). The Lord's Supper remains a large part of the Christian experience. As with baptism, this ordinance is a renewal of one's commitment to Christ and acceptance of forgiveness that came with His sacrifice.

### *The Wilderness Temptations and Prayers in Gethsemane:*

After His baptism Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness. He is preparing "himself spiritually for the events to come" by spending time alone in prayer and fasting.<sup>27</sup> He is then visited three times by Satan in an attempt to persuade Jesus to give up His mission and loyalty to God by making Him question His identity (4:1-11). Jesus stands up to Satan and

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<sup>26</sup> A comparison of these two sections, the baptism of Jesus and the transfiguration of Jesus, reveals their parallels. Both begin with the witness of Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. In Matthew 3:13-17, John the Baptist acknowledges the righteousness of Jesus and the need to be baptized by Him. In Matthew 16:16, Peter confesses that Jesus is the Christ, "Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.'" Also, in both sections Jesus hears the voice of God saying "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17 and 17:5).

<sup>27</sup> Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew*, general ed. Terry Muck, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 154.

### *KIDDER: CHRIST, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD*

accepts His role as the divine Messiah. Jesus exercises His authority over Satan, sending him away so that the ministry on Earth can begin.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prays three times for God to change the course He must take (26:36-46). He is praying for the spiritual, emotional, and physical strength He will need to carry out His mission. There is no doubt for Jesus regarding His relationship to God; He calls out to “My Father” (vs 39, 42, 44). After this third prayer Jesus has fully accepted His ministry and role. He then leads His disciples to His arrest knowing that His death would soon follow.

#### *The Public Ministry of Jesus and the Disciples*

Jesus, now secure in His calling, begins His teaching ministry, calls the disciples, and starts His healing ministry (4:12-25).

After His resurrection, Jesus’ ministry is to continue on through His disciples. As part of the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20, they are instructed to teach and make new disciples carrying the ministry of Jesus to all the world.

### **B. The Sermon on the Mount and the Olivet Discourse (5-7, 23-25)**

#### *Blessings and Woes:*

The blessings for the citizens of the Kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount (5:1-12) correspond to the woes given on those who do not live according to the Kingdom (23:1-39).

#### *Guidelines for Kingdom Living:*

Guidelines for living in the Kingdom are found in both the Sermon on the Mount as evidenced in 5:13-6:18 and the Olivet Discourse in 25:31-46.

#### *The Use of Resources:*

The instructions on how to use personal resources for the advancement of the Kingdom in 6:19-34 matches with the instructions for how to use the resources of the Kingdom in 25:14-30.

#### *Signs of Citizenship and the Coming of the Kingdom:*

Further connections can be seen in the signs which point to the characteristics of those who are Kingdom citizens in 7:1-23 and the signs which signal the coming of the Kingdom in 24:1-51.

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

*Standing Firm:*

Yet another parallel is the call to keep a firm foundation and stay firm in faith which is found in the parable of the wise and foolish builders (7:24-28) and the parable of the wise and foolish virgins (25:1-13)

**C. The Authority of Jesus and Service in the Kingdom (8-12, 20:29-22:46)**

*Authority of Jesus Affirmed:*

In Matthew 8:9 the centurion likened Jesus' authority to his own and in 9:8 the people have acknowledged the authority of Jesus because of His healings. Likewise, in Matthew 21:1-11 the people once again affirmed the authority of Jesus by calling Him the son of David who comes in the name of the Lord. They also accept His authority to cleanse the temple in 21:13-14 and come to Him for healing.

*Discipleship:*

Those who have asked to follow Jesus are warned of the cost of discipleship in 8:18-22. Shortly after this Matthew the tax collector is called by Jesus to follow Him (9:9-13). This section parallels Jesus' parables about discipleship in 21:27-22:40.

*Blind Men Proclaim Jesus to Be the Son of David:*

Jesus heals two blind men in 9:27-31 who call Him the son of David. This is mirrored by the two blind men who were healed by Jesus after crying out to Him as the son of David. 20:29-31.

*Jesus Gives His Authority to the Disciples and is Questioned by the Pharisees:*

The disciples are given authority by Jesus and sent out with instructions on how to use this authority at the beginning of chapter 10. This is countered by the Pharisees refusal to accept the authority of Jesus as Messiah. They keep testing Him, hoping to discredit Him (21:15-16a).

*Care of the "Little Ones":*

In section C Jesus instructs His disciples to take care of the "little ones" in 10:42. This same idea is reflected in section D' where in Matthew 18:1-14 Jesus instructs His followers to humble themselves like children and to care for the "little ones." While acknowledging that the placement of these texts do not follow a strict chiasmic structure, their connection is still

*KIDDER: CHRIST, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD*

relevant and does not unravel the greater chiasmic structure of the book of Matthew.

*Jesus Settles Questions Regarding His Authority:*

John the Baptist questions Jesus as the Messiah and Jesus answers by affirming him as Elijah in 11:1-19. This leads John to stop questioning Jesus. Similarly, in 22:46 after Jesus quotes Psalm 110 and asks about how One can be both son and Lord to David, Matthew states that no one questioned Jesus anymore.

*Babes Reveal Jesus as Lord:*

Jesus notes that many things have been hidden from the wise, but are revealed to “babes” in 11:25-26. Again, in 21:16b Jesus reminds the Pharisees that the infants and babes will reveal the Lord through their praise of Him.

*Old Testament Prophecies Are Fulfilled in Jesus:*

Matthew often remarks on Old Testament prophecies to show that they are fulfilled in Jesus.<sup>28</sup> In 12:15-21 he cites Isaiah 42 to acknowledge that Jesus is the Servant in whom God delights and has been given authority as such. Later in Matthew 22:44-45, it is a Psalm of David that is used by Jesus Himself to show that the Christ is to be Lord, One granted authority by God.

**D. Miracles and Parables of the Kingdom (13:1-16:12, 17:14-20:28)**

*Kingdom Living:*

Matthew 13 contains six parables that are introduced with the phrase “The kingdom of heaven is like...” These are intended to help the listeners understand more about what it is like to live in the Kingdom. Jesus later uses parables as part of His discourse on forgiveness and how to live as disciples in the Kingdom (18:15-20:28).

*A Mustard Seed:*

One of the Kingdom parables uses the example of how a tree can grow out of something the size of a mustard seed (13:31-32). In 17:20 Jesus again

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<sup>28</sup> Starting with the genealogy of Jesus in the first chapter and ending with the Great Commission in the last chapter (28:18), Matthew affirms the authority of Jesus on Earth and in heaven throughout his gospel.

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

uses the example of the small size of a mustard seed to emphasize the great power that comes with faith.

*Parents Ask for Healing:*

Matthew 15:21-28 tells the story of a Gentile woman who comes to Jesus to ask for healing for her demon possessed daughter. Because of her faith, Jesus complies. Then in 17:14-21 a man comes to Jesus asking for his demon possessed son to be healed. He was rewarded with healing because he had faith in the ability of Jesus even though the disciples had failed to heal the boy.

*Rebuked for Lack of Faith:*

The disciples are rebuked in 16:5-12 for not having faith in Jesus' ability to provide bread for them even after they had witnessed the miracle of the feeding of the 4,000. Their lack of faith was hindering their understanding of Jesus' teachings. Again, they are rebuked in 17:17, 20 told that it was their unbelief which was the reason they could not heal the demon possessed boy.

**E. Jesus as Messiah, Son of God**

Throughout his gospel, Matthew has been building a case for a divine Messiah who has come to save His people. The miracles, teachings, and fulfillments of prophecy as well as the testimonies of those He came in contact with demonstrated various elements of the royal and divine purpose of Jesus. At the heart of this gospel, Peter was able to come to an understanding of Christ's true identity, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (16:16).<sup>29</sup> At the transfiguration, God confirms the confession of Peter that Jesus is indeed His Son (17:5).

**Concise Chiastic Structure of Matthew**

The concise chiastic structure below reinforces the focus of Jesus as Christ the King, the Son of God.

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<sup>29</sup> It has been noted that Matthew's preference of the term "kingdom of heaven" (32 times) over "kingdom God" (used only in 6:33, 12:28, 19:24, and 21:31, 43), is out of respect for his Jewish Christian readers. Matthew is able to avoid using the sacred name of God by using a word closely associated with God, in this case "heaven." Therefore, much significance can be placed on Matthew being the only one of the synoptics to have Peter call Jesus "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). See Turner, 41-42 and Evans, 90-91 for a more detailed rationale of Matthew's lack of use of the phrase "kingdom of God."

*KIDDER: CHRIST, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD*

A. Announcements about King Jesus' birth, exile into Egypt and life in Nazareth (Matt 1:1-4:16).<sup>30</sup>

B. Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God (Matt 4:17-16:12).<sup>31</sup>

C. Jesus proclaimed to be Christ, the Son of God (Matt 16:13-17:13)

B'. Jesus' instruction for how to live in the Kingdom of God (Matt 17:14 - 25:46).

A.' Announcements about King Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection (Matt 26:1 - 28:20).<sup>32</sup>

We can summarize this gospel in two words: "royal" and "messianic." Matthew's purpose is to present Jesus as the long expected Messiah. He is the king who has been sent to rule His people. There is from start to finish a royal aspect. The intent of the first Gospel is to declare the good news of prophetic fulfillment in the Messiah. That which was foretold long ago by the prophets has at last come about.

Matthew points to Jesus at the very beginning as Immanuel who is born to a virgin (Matthew 1:23; Isaiah 7:14) in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:6; Micah 5:2), coming up from Egypt (Matthew 2:15; Hosea 11:1) to live in Nazareth (Matthew 2:23; Isaiah 11:1). After the confirmation by Peter as to Christ's true identity, Jesus tells His followers that He must suffer (Matthew 16:21). Hence, He is also the fulfillment of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53.<sup>33</sup> Some other shared attributes of Jesus and the Suffering Servant are healing of the sick (8:17), rejection by those He came to serve but acceptance by Gentiles (12:16-21), dying with transgressors for the purpose of intercession (26:28), and burial by a rich man (27:57-60). Clearly this Suffering Servant of Isaiah must be Jesus the Messiah and therefore the rightful King. Matthew's impression of Jesus is that He is of royal lineage, possesses divine authority, and has the privileges and rights of the powers of God. The Matthean motif, as it relates to Jesus, is His inherent relationship to the Old Testament. By presenting Jesus as the Messiah, the Suffering Servant,

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<sup>30</sup> According to Biblegateway.com, the theme of the king and kingdom of God and kingdom of Heaven is mentioned 47 times in Matthew. For a detailed listing of these verses see footnote 41.

<sup>31</sup> Part of these proclamations include parables (see especially chapter 13).

<sup>32</sup> Compare Matthew 28:18-20 with 2:2, 6, and 11. These verses clearly show that Jesus is king.

<sup>33</sup> Udo Schnelle, *Theology of the New Testament*, translated by M. Eugene Boring (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 429-463.

and King, Matthew is showing that Jesus is not a contradiction to Judaism but rather the climax and completion of Judaic faith.<sup>34</sup>

### **The Five Discourses of Matthew**

There are five major discourses systematically placed by Matthew that emphasize the theme of the Kingdom of God. We find these in five 'blocks,'<sup>35</sup> three of which are found in the Galilean period.<sup>36</sup>

The Sermon on the Mount: The Laws of the Kingdom (5-7)

The Duties of the Leaders of the Kingdom (9:35-10:42)

The Nature of the Kingdom: The Parables of the Kingdom (13)

Greatness and Forgiveness in the Kingdom (18)

The Olivet Discourse: The Signs of the Second Coming of the King (24, 25)<sup>37</sup>

These blocks start with the Sermon on the Mount which lays out the duties and attitudes that will be evident in those who are citizens of the Kingdom. They close with the parallel section of the Olivet Discourse which details out the signs of the physical coming of the Kingdom at Jesus' return. The heart of the message that Matthew wants to pass on to his readers is that Jesus is the Messiah and with Him the Kingdom of God has 'broken into' the world.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> William Cannon, "The Gospel of Matthew." *Religion-Online*. The Upper Room, 1982. <http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=651&C=870> (accessed June 23, 2014).

<sup>35</sup> Identical wording concludes these five edifying passages connecting them with the narrative passages that follow. We find these expressions at the start of the narrative passages:

Matthew 7:28: "When Jesus had finished saying these things. . ."

Matthew 11:1: "After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples. . ."

Matthew 13:53: "When Jesus had finished these parables. . ."

Matthew 19:1: "When Jesus had finished saying these things. . ."

Matthew 26:1: "When Jesus had finished saying all these things. . ."

<sup>36</sup> Van Den Brink.

<sup>37</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*. Revised Edition. Volume 1. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), 8; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1982), 10-11; Turner, 8-10; and Evans, 8-9 are but a few examples of references to the structure of Matthew being based on the five discourses.

<sup>38</sup> Van Den Brink.

## *KIDDER: CHRIST, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD*

### **Theological Themes Embedded in the Gospel of Matthew**

Now that we have outlined the chiastic structure of Matthew, let us look at some of the major themes which it highlights. Matthew's principle interest of the fulfillment of God's purposes in and through Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, governs four theological themes.

#### *1. Jesus the Messianic Son of God*

The first theme prominent in Matthew's Gospel is the picture of Jesus as the Christ, the Messianic Son of God, as this is the center element of the chiasm of the book as a whole. Matthew was intentional to include support from God the Father, Jesus, and His followers recognizing that Jesus is rightfully the Son of God.<sup>39</sup>

At the start of His ministry, God acknowledges Jesus as His Son. Matthew 3:16-17 states, "When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'" Later, at the transfiguration, God again acknowledges His relationship with Jesus. "While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!'" Matthew 17:5. Both of these passages allude to the Messianic royal Psalm 2 (specifically verse 7) and the Servant introduced in Isaiah 42:1.

Jesus repeatedly referred to God as "My" Father.<sup>40</sup> In Matthew 10:32-33, "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven." Here Jesus is showing His connection with His Father. Later on, Jesus understanding His role as Son of God, submits Himself to the will of God in Matthew 26:39, "He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, 'O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.'"

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<sup>39</sup> Jesus is called the "Son of God" four times before Peter's confession in Matthew 16:16 (4:3,6; 8:29; 14:33) and four times after the confession (26:63; 27:40, 43, 54).

<sup>40</sup> Jesus very plainly emphasizes that He was the reflection of His Father in John 14:7-10.

## *JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

Even the followers of Jesus and those who watched Him came to understand His true origins. Those who saw Him walk on water worshiped Him calling Him the Son of God (Matthew 14:33). Later Peter espoused this same thought. “Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven,’” Matthew 16:16-17. Jesus affirmed Peter calling Him not only Messiah (Christ), but also Son of God. Matthew later records the cry of the centurion, “So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, ‘Truly this was the Son of God!’” (27:54).

As the Son of God, Jesus was able to serve as God’s agent on Earth. As such, He was given authority to share intimate knowledge and instruction regarding the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5-7) and power over nature as seen in many healing including raising people from the dead (9:23-26), the calming of the storm (8:23-27), walking on water (14:22-33), and cursing of the fig tree (21:18-22).

The acknowledgment of Jesus as the Son of God by Jews, Gentiles, and His Father points to the universal nature of Jesus as the Messiah whose sacrifice was for the benefit of all mankind. God is pleased with His son Jesus who became a servant to fulfill the will of His father.

### *2. Jesus the King*

The kingdom of God and the kingship of Jesus are referenced throughout the entire the book of Matthew.<sup>41</sup> Matthew starts his gospel with the genealogy of Jesus (1:1-6); emphasizing His kingship by showing that He is the son of David. He then stresses that Jesus is of royal lineage by pointing to the Magi who came from the east to worship and pay homage to Him as a king. Matthew, in chapter two, starts with very plainly stating that Jesus is king. He writes: “After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born *king of the Jews*? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him,’” Matthew 2:1-2, NIV.

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<sup>41</sup> Using Biblegateway.com, I was able to find 47 references in total where the kingdom of God, kingdom of heaven, and king as it refers to Jesus are mentioned in the NKJV (Kingdom of God, 5 references: 6:33; 12:28; 19:24; 21:31, 43; (kingdom of heaven, 33 references): 3:2; 4:17; 5:3, 10, 19 (twice), 20; 7:21; 8:11; 10:7; 11:11, 12; 13:11, 24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47, 52; 16:19; 18:1, 3, 4, 23; 19:12, 14, 23, 20:1; 22:2; 23:13; 25:1, 14; (Jesus as King, 9 references): 2:2; 5:35; 21:15; 25:34; 27:11 (twice), 29, 37, 42.

### *KIDDER: CHRIST, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD*

In the story of the birth of Jesus, the apostle Matthew uses three prophecies from the Old Testament as hooks on which to present his message, the first of which clearly speaks of “the One to be Ruler in Israel” Micah 5:2.<sup>42</sup> These are His birth in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:5-6 and Micah 5:2), that He would come out of Egypt (Matthew 2:15 and Hosea 11:1), and the slaughter of the innocents (Matthew 2:17-18 and Jeremiah 31:15).<sup>43</sup> “The foundation of the Gospel of Matthew is the Old Testament with its Messianic and Kingdom promises. Jesus the Messiah is truly the promised King. He is legally the royal king of Israel.”<sup>44</sup>

It is through the triumphal entry and the subsequent show of His authority that Jesus attempts to show the people that He truly is the promised King. Matthew reminds us in 21:5 that Jesus took care to follow the formula laid out in the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 for the way in which the king would enter the city. The people understood this sign by declaring Him to be the “Son of David. . . who comes in the name of the Lord,” Matthew 21:9. His next task was to assert authority in the temple by driving out the money changers and healing the blind and lame (21:12-17).

The themes of king, kingship, and authority are intertwined. Matthew 7:29 says, “for He taught them as one having *authority*, and not as the scribes.” In 21:21-23, Jesus’ authority is questioned. The author refutes this by closing with the words of Jesus: “And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All *authority*<sup>45</sup> has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen” (Matthew 28:18-20).

Matthew understood the Old Testament prophecies as sign posts pointing to Jesus as Christ, the Son of the living God that is also King,

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<sup>42</sup> Will Pounds, “Matthew 2:5, 15, 17, 23 Four Prophecies in Matthew Chapter Two.” Life of Christ Series (2008). [www.abideinchrist.com/messages/mat2v5.html](http://www.abideinchrist.com/messages/mat2v5.html) (accessed June 23, 2014).

<sup>43</sup> Though Matthew uses the prophecy that Jesus will be from Nazareth as another fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy (Matthew 2:23), it is not in the OT.

<sup>44</sup> Pounds.

<sup>45</sup> The words “all authority” are a kingship metaphor emphasizing power and dominion. Further studies in scripture show that there are 93 verses in the NIV Bible that use the word authority. There are a multitude of texts that equate authority with power and ruler-ship. Here are some sample verses: Genesis 41:35; Nehemiah 3:7; Esther 9:29; Isaiah 22:21; Daniel 4:31, 7:6; Matthew 9:6,8; 10:1; 20:25; 21:23,24,27; Mark 1:22, 27; 2:10; Luke 22:25; John 5:27, 7:28, 16:18, 17:2; 1 Timothy 2:2,12; Revelation 2:26, 27; 12:10; 20:4.

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

granted the authority of Heaven. He, as King, is the cornerstone of the Kingdom (21:42).

*3. Jesus the Suffering Servant*

Another major theme in Matthew is that of the Suffering Servant from Isaiah 42 who will deliver all nations. Matthew 12:17-21 tells readers:

That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying:

“Behold! My Servant whom I have chosen,  
My Beloved in whom My soul is well pleased!  
I will put My Spirit upon Him,  
And He will declare justice to the Gentiles.  
He will not quarrel nor cry out,  
Nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets.  
A bruised reed He will not break,  
And smoking flax He will not quench,  
Till He sends forth justice to victory;  
And in His name Gentiles will trust.”

This theme of the Suffering Servant is seen throughout the Gospel. Matthew 8:17 points the readers to Isaiah 53:4. In Matthew 16:21 and Matthew 20:17-19 Jesus makes it plain to His disciples that His suffering and death is inevitable but they should have hope because of His resurrection (see Isaiah 53:11-12). Jesus is confirming that He understands His role to be that of Isaiah’s Suffering Servant. “From that time Jesus began to show to 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 the third day,” Matthew 16:21.

It is only through the suffering and condemnation of Jesus that hope is brought to the nations. Through the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus, He asserts His authority as the giver of Salvation to all who seek Him.

*4. Jesus’ Abiding Presence*

Another aspect of Matthean Christology is the affirmation of Christ’s abiding presence. At the beginning in the birth narrative, Matthew cites Isaiah’s prophecy of Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14, see Matthew 1:23). The significance of this name is made clear in the phrase “God with us” (1:23;

### *KIDDER: CHRIST, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD*

Isaiah 8:10). Matthew then closes his book with Jesus' final words to His disciples, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (28:20). The gospel starts and ends with the affirmation that Jesus will always be with us. This is one of the beautiful elements of the chiasmic structure of Matthew. The abiding presence of Jesus can be seen throughout this Gospel. In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus invites all to come to Him and accept His promise of rest. He is a continual source of relief and comfort. Jesus also promises the disciples that His presence is not bound by the confines of His physical form or location, "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (18:20). This was additional confirmation of His lasting presence. Matthew wanted his readers to know that Christ is with His people for all time (cf. Ephesians 1:22-23).

One of the reasons Christ has gifted us with His abiding presence is to provide God's children with protection and perseverance. Opposed to the kingdom of heaven is the kingdom of this Earth ruled by Satan (Matthew 4:8-9; 12:26), from whom those with faith in Christ are delivered (12:27-28). While Satan is powerless before the Spirit of God (12:28), nonetheless he will actively work through mankind to hinder and counterfeit the work of God (13:38-39). This is why Christ stays with us through the Holy Spirit. It is through the Spirit that we will be able to defend our faith in the midst of persecution. "But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but *the Spirit of your Father* who speaks in you" (10:19-20).

Matthew saw that much of what Jesus had taught the disciples was applicable to believers of every age. Of great importance in this regard was the commission to make disciples of all nations (28:19). It is because Christ has promised to be God with us (1:21-22; 28:16-20), that we are able to continue His work of making disciples and espousing the commands of God to all nations. Matthew gives a clear priority to the fundamental promise of God being with us in Christ (1:21-22; 28:16-20) because God's omnipresence and grace are necessary for the work of Jesus to continue until His second coming.

### **Conclusion**

By looking at the chiasmic structure of the book of Matthew as a whole, rather than as multiple smaller chiasms, we can see the overarching central message of the book which is that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. Matthew links the Old and New Testaments to show that God has appointed

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

His beloved Son to be the Messiah under whose authority will come the salvation of all nations. Matthew leaves no doubt that the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus all point to Him as the Messiah, Son of God, both King and Suffering Servant.<sup>46</sup> No one else could take on this role; it is only because Jesus was also the Son of God—born of the Holy Spirit and resurrected by the Father—and rightful King that He was able to justify us and take our punishment.<sup>47</sup>

Additionally, prominent in the broader chiastic structure of Matthew are the four major themes of Jesus as the Messianic Son of God, Jesus as the King, Jesus as the Suffering Servant, and Jesus' Abiding Presence. The chiastic structure shows that Matthew had intentionally woven all of the above themes together in a systematic parallelism and symmetry to show the work of God which was fulfilled in His beloved son Jesus Christ. It was the Son of God who came to be one of us, died on the cross, was resurrected for the forgiveness of our sins, and is seated as King on the right side of the Father. Out of love for all the nations of the Earth, Christ, Emmanuel, promised to be with us to the end of the ages.

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<sup>46</sup> Specifically Isaiah's prophecies of the Suffering Servant found in chapters 42 and 52-53.

<sup>47</sup> Isaiah notes that the Suffering Servant is given king-like authority: "Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles" (42:1) "and kings will shut their mouths because of him" (52:15, NIV).