

KINGDOM *of* HEAVEN

A SERIES IN THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Part 2: Matthew 8:1-13:52

Notes exclusively from 'Matthew' by David
L. Turner; Baker Exegetical Commentary on
the New Testament



Rosebank
UNION CHURCH

III. Galilean Ministry Continues (8:1-11:1)

Review of the structure of Matthew

- As we begin studying chapters 8-10 it would be worthwhile reviewing the structure of Matthew's Gospel.
- One of the distinguishing features of Matthew as a Gospel writer is his meticulous structure and very particular organisation of the material.
- This is not for aesthetic purposes, but rather a means of preserving a particular theological agenda¹.
- Students of Matthew have long noted the unique juxtapositioning of **narrative** and **discourse** sections in the Gospel.
- These junctions are clearly marked by the phrase "*When Jesus had finished...*":
 - 7:28 (The end of the Sermon on the Mount)
 - 11:1 (The end of the Missionary Discourse)
 - 13:53 (The end of the discourse on Parables of the Kingdom)
 - 19:1 (The end of the discourse on Kingdom Community)
 - 26:1 (The end of the Olivet Discourse)
- Following is the condensed outline we're using (Turner):
 - I. Prologue/Introduction: The origin of Jesus the Messiah (1:1-2:23)**
 - II. Early days of kingdom word & works (3:1-7:29)**
 - i. Narrative 1: John the Baptist, Jesus & the kingdom of God (3:1-4:25)
 - ii. Discourse 1: Sermon on the Mount (5:1-7:29)
 - III. Galilean ministry continues (8:1-11:1)**
 - i. Narrative 2: Three cycles of miracles and discipleship (8:1-10:4)
 - ii. Discourse 2: Missionary Discourse (10:5-11:1)
 - IV. Growing opposition to the kingdom of heaven (11:2-13:52)**
 - i. Narrative 3: Three cycles of unbelief and belief (11:2-12:50)
 - ii. Discourse 3: Parables of the Kingdom of Heaven (13:1-52)
 - V. Opposition to the kingdom continues (13:52-19:2)**
 - i. Narrative 4: Various responses to the Son of God (13:53-17:27)
 - ii. Discourse 4: Values and relationships in the Kingdom Community (18:1-19:2)
 - VI. Opposition comes to a head in Judea (19:3-26:2)**
 - i. Narrative 5: Ministry in Judea (19:3-23:39)
 - ii. Discourse 5: The Olivet Discourse (24:1-26:2)
 - VII. Epilogue/conclusion: Passion, resurrection, and commission (26:3-28:20)²**

¹ Recall that the genre of 'Gospel' can best be described as 'Theologically interpreted history' (pg 4 of CG manual 1)

² Mark's passion narrative is approx 20% of his Gospel, Matthew is approx 10%.

- Thus, according to Turner, the Sermon on the Mount concludes the first Narrative/Discourse block.
- However, another scholar, Jonathan Pennington³, sees a different alternation of Narrative (N) & Discourse (D), which has the first narrative block *following* the Sermon on the Mount (D+N), instead of preceding it (N+D)⁴. In his view, the accounts of the ministry of Jesus in chapters 8-9 are thus logically connected to the Sermon on the Mount, rather than directly connected to the Missionary Discourse in chapter 10.
- To which of the discourses does the material in 8-9 belong? The point in asking this question is in order to unearth Matthew's theology, which is embedded in his structure⁵.
- Recall that Matt 4:23 functions as a summary of the ministry of Jesus, highlighting the dual emphasis on 'words and deeds':
 - *"And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people"* (Matt 4:23)
- The closing summary of the Sermon is recorded at the end of chapter 7:
 - *"And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes"* (Mat 7:23)
- It seems natural then that chapters 8-9 are completing the pattern set out in 4:23, with the 'teaching' clearly fulfilled in the Sermon on the Mount.
- Thus we could say that chapters 8-9 highlight **Jesus's authority as Messiah as seen in his deeds**, just as the Sermon on the Mount highlighted his **authority as seen in his words**.
- This revelation of authority (both in word & deed) then sets the scene for the commissioning of the disciples in Matt 10, who will also minister in both word and deed.

³ I used Pennington extensively in the Sermon on the Mount part of the series, and found it incredibly important!

⁴ Jonathan Pennington 'The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing'

⁵ Of course it can (and does) connect to both the discourses, much like the 'treasures in heaven' in Matt 5:19-21 both concludes and introduces the material before and after it (ie a 'hinge')

Structure (chapters 8-10)

- Jesus's miracles have been generally noted in 4:23, now Matthew presents specific (selected) examples in order to demonstrate Jesus's authority.
- Note that Matthew has primarily arranged his Gospel topically/theologically, and not chronologically, and thus some of these events likely happened before the Sermon on the Mount (as can be seen when following Luke's account, which is arranged more chronologically).
- The structure within this section is typical of Matthew: highly organised!
- Three sets of three miracle stories are interwoven by two sets of two discipleship stories, which sets up the commissioning of the disciples to come.
- The outline of this section is as follows:

Cycle 1:	Miracles:	Three healing miracles	8:1-17
	Discipleship:	Two would-be disciples confronted	8:18-22
Cycle 2:	Miracles:	Three miracles (storm, demons, paralytic)	8:23-9:8
	Discipleship:	Association with sinners, newness	9:9-17
Cycle 3:	Miracles:	Three miracles (daughter/woman, blind men, demons)	9:18-34
	Discipleship:	Summary (plentiful harvest yet few workers)	9:35-10:4

A. Cycle 1a: Three healing miracles (8:1-17)

- The three miracle stories in this section are about a leper, a Roman centurion and a woman (Peter's mother-in-law).
- Note the diversity of people healed by Jesus, from woman to man, one high on the social ladder (centurion) and one low (leper), and from Jew (leper and woman) to Gentile (centurion). This follows with the diversity of people represented in the genealogy (1:1-17)
- In addition, all three of these groups represent 'outsiders' in Israel, none of whom could enter the court of Israel in the temple, due to either being ritually impure, a Gentile or a woman. The compassion of Jesus to 'outsiders', and their inclusion in the kingdom through faith is a major theme in Matthew.
- As we have seen with Matthew, his propensity for arranging material in odd numbers is often to highlight the central story or teaching⁶. Thus the middle story (Gentile centurion) is the featured story, which is emphasised by the fact that it is the longest of the three. This highlights Matthew's distinct emphasis on Gentile mission in his Gospel⁷, as well as the key theme of this section, which is the authority of Jesus.

1. The leper

- v1
 - The same crowds who were astonished at Jesus's teaching at the end of chapter 7 now follow him around.
 - Crowds will frequently be mentioned in Matthew, often representing a group of people who's comprehension of Jesus is fickle. This is obviously in contrast to the leper, who evidently has real faith.
- v2
 - Leprosy in the Bible can refer to a variety of skin diseases. In all cases the Priests were responsible for ruling on matters of purity. Those deemed 'unclean' were to shout a warning to anyone who might come near, which makes the approach of the leper to Jesus rather audacious!
- v3-4
 - The touch of Jesus is likely the first touch by a human the man has had since the onset of his condition (we are not told for how long). This touch would have made Jesus unclean, but instead the touch heals and cleanses the leper.
 - The command to the healed man to be silent about his miracle is puzzling, but a common feature of the stories of healing in Matthew (9:30, 12:16, 16:20, 17:9). The incident in Matthew 12 is illuminating, since it describes this behaviour as a fulfillment of Isaiah 42:1-3 (already alluded to in Jesus's baptism in Matt 3). In this passage the Messiah is depicted as someone gentle, who will not stir up crowds with words, but will be merciful to the weak. Therefore, Jesus does not want his miracles to incite riots, or to attract the ire of the religious leaders too soon, a conflict which will escalate throughout the Gospel.

⁶ eg with the 'Lord's prayer' being the centre of the centre of the centre!

⁷ page 14 in CG manual 1

2. The Centurion's servant

- v5-6
 - A Centurion commanded about 100 soldiers (a 'century').
 - Capernaum has already been mentioned as Jesus's home, and is marked for its unbelief (11:23). This is in contrast to both the leper and the Centurion.
- v7-9
 - The Centurion acknowledges his unworthiness before Jesus, perhaps both in respect to Jesus's Lordship (he twice calls him 'Lord') as well as realising a Jew would become unclean upon entering a Gentile home.
 - He realises Jesus can heal with just a word! Such healing from a distance is unprecedented in Matthew to this point, and unusual in the ancient world.
- v10-12
 - Jesus tells his 'followers' (probably his disciples plus some of the 'crowds') the shocking news that he has not encountered faith like this Gentile anywhere in Israel! Again, this sets up a contrast between those of 'little faith' (6:30) and those with genuine faith.
 - Jesus then speaks of the future kingdom as time when many from all over the world will gather and enjoy the eschatological feast with Abraham and the patriarchs. This picture of a feast is reminiscent of OT prophecies like Isa 2:2-3 (featuring a similar gathering from East & West) and Isa 25:6-9 (a feast for all nations in Jerusalem).
 - In contrast, the 'sons of the kingdom' will be excluded and punished. The phrase 'sons of the kingdom' is a semitic idiom referring to the expected heirs of God's blessings. 'Outer darkness' refers to a place very far from the light of God's presence. 'Weeping and gnashing of teeth' portrays the anguish of separation from God. All this combined makes this scene one of the most sobering of Matthew's portrayal of Jesus.
 - This sobering vision of an eschatological 'reversal' highlights the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's plan of blessing, a significant theme in Matthew. This Centurion thus becomes the 'prototype' Gentile believer in Matthew, who through genuine faith is included in God's covenant family.
- v13
 - The precise timing indicated here is to emphasise the supernatural authority of Jesus.

3. Peter's mother-in-law

- v14-15
 - One of the differences between this healing story and the other two in this sequence is that in this story Jesus initiates the healing (the other two were both initiated by the recipients of Jesus's miracle).
- v16-17
 - This miracle encourages the residents of Capernaum to bring many more afflicted to Jesus for healing. Jesus obliges by healing and casting out spirits with a mere word, again stressing his Messianic authority.
 - These miracles leads into another 'fulfillment' formula in v17, which cites Isaiah 53:4.
 - Isaiah 53 is a rich messianic passage which describes the Messiah as a 'servant', a despised person who bears the sins of others without complaint (Isa 53:1-12). This section of Isaiah is quoted 5 times in the NT (John 12:38, Rom 10:16, Acts 8:32-33, 1 Pet 2:22, Luke 22:37). Matthew has likely alluded to Isa 53 in 2:23. Allusions to this famous passage in Matthew are too numerous to count!
 - Matthew translates the Hebrew of Isa 53:4 literally, referring to our 'disease', whereas the LXX translates the Hebrew word metaphorically (in keeping with it's biblical usage in Isa 1:5) referring to our 'sins'.
 - The use of Isa 53:4 in Matt 8:17 has led to much debate over physical healing that Christians should experience due to the atonement. It must be remembered that pain, illness and death were originally rooted in sin (Gen 3), and redemption from sin will ultimately result in redemption of the body, with the full removal of illness and death. This will only happen fully in the eschaton, in line with the rest of the Bible's teaching. Thus these appearances of healing by Jesus indicate the presence of God's reign, a token of the future reality. In a way, these miracles therefore prove that 'he will save his people from their sins' (Matt 1:21) *at the root level*. This does not rule out any healing in the present age, but these are temporary and do not warrant the claim that Christians can call for healing at will. Ultimately, Matt 8:17 connects Isa 53:4 to Jesus's earthly ministry, not to his atoning death. The point of the miracles is to stress Jesus's unique Messianic authority, not the therapeutic blessings he brings his people.
 - This debate often centres on the faith of the person being healed, but in these three stories the faith element varies. In the first, the leper demonstrates remarkable faith, but in the second it is the Centurion's faith that is commended, we know nothing of his servant. With Peter's mother-in-law there is no faith presented.
 - Perhaps the leper's faith serves as the best example of an approach to faith: he knows Jesus *can* heal him if he *wishes* to heal him (v2). This puts the power and providence of God side-by-side, and both of them at God's side, not ours! There is no doubt about the power of God, but the leper does not presume upon the providence of God, which would be putting the Lord to the test (4:7). Followers of Jesus cannot dictate that God be willing to heal, but they can rest in God's love and sovereign providence, which makes no mistakes.

B. Cycle 1b: Teaching on discipleship (8:18-22)

- These two 'interviews' with would-be disciples illustrate the type of disciples that Jesus is seeking.

1. The enthusiastic legal expert

- v18-20
 - The setting of the interviews before Jesus heads across the sea of Galilee is important, as it describes v18 as a call to discipleship, not just an instruction to avoid crowds. Following Jesus will involve heading into difficult circumstances (ie 'storms') with him.
 - As they are about to leave, a Scribe approaches Jesus and promises to follow him wherever he may go. So far in Matthew the Scribes have not been viewed positively (2:4, 5:20), and the Scribe's reference to Jesus as 'teacher' continues this representation. In Matthew, those calling Jesus 'teacher' are usually not disciples. Jesus's response to the Scribe, referencing his difficult ministry, leaves us assuming the Scribe's intentions are superficial.
 - This is the first time in Matthew that Jesus refers to himself as 'Son of Man, his favourite self-designation in the Gospels. This enigmatic title, derived from Daniel 7:13-14, stresses the exultation of Jesus, in stark contrast to his own reference to itinerant ministry without any basic comforts.

2. The Hesitant Disciple

- v21-22
 - A second would-be disciple⁸ approaches Jesus, but attempting to delay his journey with Jesus due to a family responsibility. This would-be follower exhibits an opposite approach to Jesus than the Scribe. The Scribe appears to make an impulsive decision to follow Jesus, without counting the cost. The second person has counted the cost, but his timidity as a result means he too is discounted as a disciple.
 - There is perhaps an element of hyperbole in Jesus's response (like in 5:29-30), but this does not take away from the rigour of Jesus's words, which clearly demand ultimate priority, even over family. This does not mean family should be neglected, as Jesus himself affirms the Torah on honouring one's parents (see 15:4-6), which presumably would include a burial. 'But harsh as it may seem, Jesus teaches that the paramount demands of his kingdom revise one's notions of family' (Turner)
 - These two stories combined 'indicate that Jesus's followers must count the cost of discipleship and temper their faith with a realism that considers the deprivations that come to those who follow Jesus' (Turner)

⁸ This person is described as a 'disciple' by Matthew, and thus is a 'follower' in some sense of the word. How legitimate he is as a disciple however, must be determined from context.

C. Cycle 2a: Three (more) miracles (8:23-9:8)

- This set of three miracles demonstrates Jesus's authority over nature, evil powers, and disease respectively.

1. The calming of the storm

- This famous little story is an important example of a theologically interpreted historical event. The event happened as described, *but Matthew has described it in such a way as to highlight important theological points*. Clearly, this relates to Jesus's authority over nature (a new addition to his 'resume' of authority over disease and evil), but beyond that is the metaphor of discipleship, made clear by the preceding interview stories. At the heart of this account (it is chiasmic in nature) is the key interaction between Jesus and his disciples in v25-26 at the centre. Thus, their own faltering faith is tested, and they learn that Jesus had authority sufficient to overcome any trial that may come their way as disciples.
- v23-25
 - The fact that Jesus is oblivious to the storm has implications of his trust in God's protection. Biblical texts in which God seems to have gone to sleep and forgotten Israel in trials may also be applicable here (eg Ps 35:23, 44:23-26).
 - The fact that the disciples are dismayed at the storm indicates the severity of the storm, considering they were seasoned fishermen!
- v26
 - It is instructive that Jesus first rebukes the disciples for their lack of faith, *before* calming the storm! This emphasises the need for trust in God.
 - It is interesting that Jesus rebukes the wind and waves with language usually reserved for casting out demons. This may indicate that this nature miracle is at the same time a victory over evil forces, perhaps attempting to kill the disciples, if not completely unsettle them.
- v27
 - Jesus's authority over nature produces the same amazement with the disciples that his teaching did with the crowd (7:28).
 - The disciples' question as to what kind of man Jesus is, is a reminder that we know a lot more about the christology of Jesus at this point than the disciples! We had Matt 1-4 to see the development of the Messianic resume in Jesus.
 - The fact that this nature miracle has a discipleship element to it is emphasised in the fact that Jesus exposes their 'little' faith. It is a genuine faith, but limited in its awareness of Jesus's power.

2. Exorcism of the Gadarene Demoniacs (8:28-34)

- Unexpected in this account is the type of opposition Jesus faces. We would expect the demonic opposition, but we don't expect the opposition from the town!
- Once again Jesus's authority is on display here, again over demonic powers, but here with just a single word: 'go'!
- What is unique about this story of relief from demonic oppression is the compassion displayed by Jesus, something the disciples will have to model on their own mission.
- v28-29
 - The demoniac pair immediately recognize Jesus as the 'Son of God' a key Matthew theme. Their awareness of the future judgment of demons is striking, as well as the reality that God's future kingdom is already encroaching on Satan's domain.
- v30-32
 - The use of a single word to relieve the men of their demonic oppression again underscores Jesus's authority. However, it is not final, since the demons destroying the pigs are ultimately released to continue their activity.
- v33-34
 - No explanation is given for the hostility of the crowd to Jesus after this miracle. Either they mistake Jesus for a dangerous magician, or it is plausible that they are Gentiles whose livelihood depends on the pigs. In that case, their economic concerns outweigh the freeing of the men from Satan's dominion.
 - Either way, their negative response is a contrast to the previous reception of Jesus's miracles.
 - Their response also anticipates the Missionary Discourse in chapter 10, where Jesus will warn his followers that many will reject their offer of the good news of the kingdom. Therefore, followers of Jesus can expect the same reception of the Gospel that Jesus received in his ministry.

3. Healing of a paralytic (9:1-8)

- This is another story highlighting Jesus's authority, but in its most important sense: *the authority to forgive sins*.
- The authority to forgive sins is greater even than his authoritative words and deeds expressed thus far, since it gets to the root of the problem, sin.
- Teaching against sin does not get it to stop, let alone secure its forgiveness. Sick people may be healed, but sooner or later they will get sick again, and ultimately die. Therefore, as great as Jesus's authority in these domains really is, *they pale in significance with his authority to forgive and truly cleanse from sin*.
- Coupled with this important topic of forgiveness is the complicated relationship between sickness and sin. In some cases sin can lead directly to sickness, but it is impossible to diagnose those from a human perspective (think of the story of Job!), it is something that can only be seen in Jesus's ministry, as is possible here. Psychosomatic illness due to guilt is also possible here (see Psalm 32:1-4). Ultimately, all sickness is a result of original sin in Adam, and Jesus, the 'new Adam' (1 Cor 15:21-22) will reverse the effects of sin (including sickness) ultimately in the age to come.

- v1-3
 - Comparison of this account with its other occurrences in the synoptics indicates that Matthew places the story here for theological and topical reasons, not chronological ones.
 - The healing receives a mixed response, indicating that the theme of opposition is slowly building.
 - Jesus's tender reference to the paralytic as a 'child' indicates again his compassion as he heals.
 - The response of the legal experts is not compassion or celebration, but accusation: they say that Jesus is blaspheming, since he claims to do something only God can do. However, Jesus's forgiving of the paralysed man's sins is no pretence, he truly has the authority as the Son of God, who will secure the means of forgiveness through his own death and resurrection.
- v4-6
 - Evidently, the legal experts think that Jesus pronounced forgiveness for sins because it was easier to do that than to heal. But Jesus tells them that the immanent healing will demonstrate his authority to forgive. The man's immediate healing confirms the central point of Matt 8-9: Jesus's works confirm his authority as the Son of Man, who is able to forgive sins.
- v7-8
 - The response of the crowd is reverential fear, coupled with praise to God for giving such authority to Jesus.

D. Cycle 2b: Focus on Discipleship (9:9-17)

- The second set of three miracles stories is now complete, and the narrative turns again to a pair of discipleship stories.
- The underlying issue in both these stories, which contain an indignant question from the Pharisees and a question from John's disciples respectively, is the relationship of Jesus, his teaching, and his disciples to Moses, his law, and his disciples (the Pharisees).

1. The call of Matthew and the meal with sinners (9:9-13)

- v9
 - It is not clear why Matthew named here is called Levi in both Mark and Luke. This could be because Jews could have two names (eg Joseph/Barnabas in Acts 4:36), or perhaps Jesus renames Levi to Matthew as he did Simon to Peter.
 - The call of Matthew echoes the call of the four other disciples in Matt 4:18-22, and just like the other four, Matthew's response is unquestioning and immediate.

- v10-11
 - Evidently Matthew invites Jesus and his disciples to a dinner at his house, and invites his tax-collector colleagues and friends (perhaps this is a farewell party for Matthew?).
 - Tax-collectors would be unwelcome by Pharisees due to their reputation for extortion, but also their frequent association with Gentiles, not to mention working with and for the Romans!
 - The designation of 'sinners' may refer to particular behaviour from some of this group, but it may also generally refer to those who do not observe the traditional interpretations of the Torah, such as food laws, which would have been in view at this dinner party. Ultimately, the Pharisees would not attend this sort of dinner, and they are offended that Jesus and his disciples do attend.
 - Fellowship around a table was taken seriously in Jesus's time, and symbolised deep fellowship and unity.
- v12-13
 - Jesus's response again plays on the association between sin and disease, as seen in his metaphor of the physician.
 - Jesus recommends that the Pharisees meditate on Hosea 6:6, which critiques a mentality that prioritises religious ritual over social justice. This does not mean that these concepts are mutually inclusive, but to be sure, mere participation in religious ritual does not release one from compassion and mercy (Matt 5:7).
 - The 'healthy' are those who think they are righteous, like the Pharisees, and the 'sick' are those who realise they are sinners in need of 'medicine'.
 - Therefore, in calling Matthew, Jesus is exemplifying Hos 6:6 by his inclusion of the outcasts and sinners in his kingdom movement. The boundaries of the Kingdom are not set by race, age, gender or social stigmas. God relates primarily to sinners in mercy, and his primary desire is for his people to show mercy, not to offer sacrifices. Jesus epitomises this ideal, without downplaying adherence to the law.
 - Jesus's social interaction with notorious sinners scandalised the Pharisees, and likewise tends to challenge Christians today. Association with unbelievers must be handled wisely so that ethical compromise is avoided (ie maintaining 'saltiness' Matt 5:13), but fear of such compromise cannot lead one to isolation.

2. The question of fasting from John's disciples (9:14-17)

- v14-15
 - It is evident from this exchange that John's disciples fast, whereas Jesus's do not. Evidently the Pharisees feel this is inconsistent with God's law.
 - The fasting mentioned here is perhaps the twice-weekly fast allude to in Luke 18:12, not the obligatory fast associated with the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:34).
 - Jesus's responses metaphorically includes a wedding, garment mending, and winemaking.
 - In the wedding metaphor, Jesus points to his coming estrangement due to his death, a circumstance where fasting would be appropriate.

- v16-17
 - The second and third metaphors are more difficult, as they image incompatibility between the new and old.
 - One would never patch an old garment with new cloth, since the new cloth would shrink when washed and tear the garment.
 - Similarly, one would not put new wine into old wineskins since the fermentation pressure would burst the brittle old skins.
 - How do these two metaphors connect with the bridegroom metaphor, and how is Jesus answering the question by John's disciples? Traditionally these metaphors have been taught by describing the incompatibility of the New Covenant with the Old Covenant, how Jesus's teaching and values surpass and supersede the Pharisees and their Judaism. However, Jesus is here addressing John's disciples, not the Pharisees, and he does not discount practices like fasting entirely.
 - This again returns to the discussion on continuity/discontinuity introduced in the Sermon on the Mount (see page 43-44 in CG manual 1). The question of fasting provides the key insight here, where Jesus does say his disciples will fast after he leaves, but certainly in the way he has prescribed in 6:16-18, not the Pharisaical fashion. The last sentence is crucial:
 - *"But new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so **both are preserved**"*
 - If we connect this statement to the important words in 5:17-20 it appears that Jesus means that both the new wine and the old wineskins are preserved.
 - 'Jesus, as the ultimate teacher, preserves the law and the prophets by fulfilling them, not merely by reiterating past teaching (which overstates continuity) or by bluntly jettisoning past teaching (which overstates discontinuity). Fasting is preserved, but in the new context of the righteousness of the inaugurated kingdom, not in the old context of Pharisaical tradition' (Turner).

E. Cycle 3a: Three miracles (9:18-34)

- Matthew now presents the third and final set of three miracle stories followed by a focus on discipleship in mission, which sets up the Missionary Discourse in chapter 10 (the second major discourse in Matthew).

1. Jesus raises the Official's daughter and heals the haemorrhaging woman (9:18-22)

- v18-19
 - Here we have a 'sandwich story', with the story of the woman with blood discharge set within the story of the official's daughter, in order to heighten the suspense of the first story.
 - What both of these stories have in common is the faith of the recipient (the woman & the official) and the healing touch of Jesus. Although touch is included in other healings this is the only healing specifically described as including the laying on of hands.

- v20-22
 - This is the most direct statement of the agency of faith in healing. Here the power for healing is in the woman's faith, not residing in Jesus's cloak!
 - Like with the leper (8:1-4), we would expect Jesus to become ritually impure due to this contact, but instead the woman contracts deliverance, with her becoming instantly healed.
 - Matthew uses the verb 'sozo' to describe her healing, which is a word often used in a spiritual sense, and translated 'save' (eg "he will save his people from their sins" in 1:21). As we have learned in 8:17 and 9:6, the physical and spiritual are deeply intertwined.
- v23-24
 - The story returns to the official's daughter, when Jesus arrives at their house. Flute playing was customarily heard as a sign of mourners, and hired musicians were often used in wakes. Jesus dismisses these 'mourners' declaring the girl only sleeping, not dead, which leads to skeptical laughter from the crowd.
 - Sometimes 'sleep' is used as a euphemism to refer to death, but here it is likely that Jesus infers that whilst she may be at the point of death, or indeed clinically dead, the fact that he will raise her means she is in a temporary state.
- v25-26
 - The simplicity of Matthew's account of this miracle should not detract from the spectacular nature of the miracle. Surely raising someone from the dead has to rank as the greatest of Jesus's miracles!
 - The two miracles in this double story address two basic issues of human existence: the depths of parental love and the pain of chronic disease. In the story of the official's daughter a family is spared the shattering grief of the loss of a child. In the case of the woman, she is freed from the physically debilitating effects of the disease, along with the social & religious stigma which would have ostracised her from society. She can now live vigorously and experience normal human relationship again.

2. Jesus heals two blind men (9:27-31)

- v27-28
 - This is another healing story demonstrating not only Jesus's authority, but also faith on the part of those coming for healing. These two blind men even follow Jesus into the house!
 - They address Jesus as 'Son of David', clearly connecting Jesus to the Messianic title we were introduced to in the very first verse! As Jesus moves on towards Jerusalem his Davidic origins become an increasing source of controversy.
- v29-31
 - The role of faith in healing is repeated here, as is Jesus's request for silence about his miracle. Once again we can go the citation of Isa 42:1-4 showing Jesus not wishing for spectacular miracles to result in a mob mentality. However, we're not surprised when the two mean disobey Jesus's request and spread the story all over the region!

3. Jesus exorcizes a mute man (9:32-34)

- v32-34
 - This story, like the last one, has no parallel in Mark or Luke.
 - The purpose of Matthew including this particular story of exorcism is because of the remarkable result of the religious leaders attributing his power to Satan (in contrast to the amazement of the crowd).
 - Jesus recalls this charge against him in the following Missionary Discourse (10:25), an incident which reaches an ugly conclusion in chapter 12 with the mention of the 'unforgivable sin'.

F. Cycle 3b: Focus on Mission (9:35-10:4)

- Matthew 9:35-10:4 is transitional. Verses 35-38 conclude the miracle stories that began in 8:1, and 10:1-4 introduces the Missionary Discourse in chapter 10.
- The stress in 8-9 on the authoritative *deeds* of Jesus correspond to the stress in 5-7 on the authoritative *words* of Jesus. Held together, Matt 5-9 'presents Jesus as the authoritative Messiah of Israel, whose words proclaim and whose actions actualize the rule of God' (Turner).
- The nearly identical summaries in 4:23 and 9:35 function as an 'inclusio' which bookend, or bind together, the two 'books' of Jesus's words and deeds. At the same time 4:23-5:2 and 9:35-10:4 set the narrative contexts for the discourses to follow.

1. Summary of Jesus's ministry and appeal for more workers (9:35-38)

- v35-36
 - Jesus's compassion is not just for their physical predicaments, but also for their distress due to lack of shepherd leadership among the religious establishment.
 - In particular the warning about physical harassment of the sheep by predators recalls familiar imagery from the OT (eg Jer 34:1-4, among many). Therefore Jesus is not just bemoaning the lack of leadership, but clearly referring to the current religious leaders as being vicious predators. Jesus thus continues in his role as prophet-like figure critiquing the religious leaders, which prepares us for the increasing conflict between them to come.
- v37-38
 - Jesus now switches the metaphor from sheep to fields. If the shepherdless-flock imagery describes the desperation of Israel, the harvest describes the urgency of the situation. The ministry of the disciples is vitally needed at this time, which thus sets up the Missionary Discourse perfectly.
 - The call is sobering: Jesus speaks clearly of the need for more workers, and for prayer in this regard. The type of disciple/harvester/shepherd required is the one who meets the teaching in 5-7 as well as the discipleship segments in 8-9.

2. Jesus commissions the twelve disciples (10:1-4)

- v1
 - Jesus has just described the need for workers, and now he specifically commissions those disciples with him. In doing so he also extends his authority to them, to also minister in both word and deed, describing similar deeds to the ones he has already performed.
 - The dual reference to the twelve disciples in 10:1 and 11:1 provide an inclusio that package the Missionary Discourse.
 - The choice of twelve disciples is clearly intended to correspond to the twelve tribes of Israel, who are currently without godly leaders. Thus these twelve are Israel's new leaders (see Matt 19:28).
- v2-4
 - This is the only time in Matthew where the twelve are describe more technically as apostles than disciples. All apostles are disciples first, but not all disciples would take on the apostolic role that these twelve were called to.
 - Much can be said about the makeup of this list (including a mix of tax collectors, zealots, fishermen and others), and perhaps the fact that quite a few are not mentioned again in Matthew.

G. Discourse 2: Missionary Discourse (10:5-11:1)

- The disciples have witnessed Jesus's words and works, and now it is they who will extend Jesus's ministry by announcing the kingdom and demonstrating its power.
- The structure of this sermon is not as pronounced as with the Sermon on the Mount, but this is perhaps due to the fact that it is significantly shorter. There is however a symmetry in the sermon related to the reception or rejection of the kingdom message:
 - Reception: Blessings for worthy homes and villages (v11-13)
 - Rejection: General warning - unworthy homes and villages (v14-15)
 - Rejection: Specific warnings - synagogues, governors, kings, family (v16-39)
 - Reception: Rewards for receiving Jesus's followers (v40-42)
- The relationship between the mission limited to Israel in Matt 10, and the mission to the nations in Matt 28, is worth considering. While the discourse in chapter 10 is intended primarily for the ministry of Jesus's original disciples to the cities of Israel, there are indications that it speaks to situations beyond the original mission that anticipate the world mission coming (for example the necessity of perseverance until the day of judgment in v18, 22, 26, 28). It is clear that Matthew is progressively revealing God's intentions to include Gentiles as his account continues, which will culminate in the Great Commission in chapter 28. Thus this discourse presents an initial stage of mission that later expands to all the nations after the resurrection. The discourse in chapter 10 thus has an open-ended relevance beyond it's original audience.

1. The commission (10:5-8)

- v5-6 (the audience)
 - The commission begins with a prohibition: the disciple must not go to Gentiles or Samaritans. While these groups are excluded at this point, Jesus has already indicated their final inclusion (8:11), something he will include in v18 of this discourse, and of course directly command at the end (28:19).
 - The stress on Israel is a reminder of the priority of Israel in redemptive history, something which cannot be minimised. Matthew presents Jesus as the son of Abraham (1:1), through whom all nations will be blessed (Gen 12:2-3). Although physical descent from Abraham in itself does not merit inclusion in the kingdom of God, the Jews remain the foundational covenant people of God, and the blessings of God amount to sharing in the promises made to the patriarchs (8:11). In summary, 'Gentile world mission does not replace the foundational mission to Israel but supplements and broadens it' (Turner).
 - Therefore, Christianity must not be separated from its roots in the Hebrew Bible and story of Israel, and acknowledge the priority of Israel in redemptive history (see Luke 2:32, John 4:22, Acts 15:12-18, Romans 11:1-24, 15:7-13, Ephesians 2:11-13 for more on this subject)
- v7 (the message)
 - The central message from the disciples should be what John and Jesus have already been summarised as preaching: repentance in view of the presence of God's rule, the Kingdom of Heaven (3:2, 4:17, 9:35).
 - The anticipated church that will be built by Jesus is also to preach this same message of the arrival of the kingdom of heaven (24:14).
- v8 (the miracles)
 - Similar to the ministry of Jesus, the words of the disciples are to be demonstrated in deeds. The disciples too are to heal, cast out demons, and even raise the dead!
 - They received (and saw others receive) these blessing without payment, and they should now extend these blessings to others without expecting payment.

2. Instructions on support (10:9-15)

- v9-10
 - The disciples are not to take extra money or clothes with them on mission, as their needs will be met by the anticipated support of those who receive their message. While the message of the kingdom is not for sale, those who receive its gifts freely should also give freely to its messengers.
 - This instruction also reminds believers today that their ultimate ministry resource is the Lord's power, not their own provisions.
- v11-13
 - Contrasting responses to the kingdom message are anticipated here. Those who accept the kingdom message are 'worthy', and Jesus's disciples should accept offers of hospitality from them.

- v14-15
 - It is worth repeating Turner's full observation on this part:
 - 'Reception of the disciples is linked to the response to their message (cf. Mark 6:11; Luke 9:5; 10:10-11). Refusal to heed the message is rejection of the messenger. The disciples are to demonstrate the gravity of such rejection by a symbolic act of renunciation, shaking the dust of such homes or villages off their feet as they leave...the action symbolizes the severance of relationship: the disciples reject those who have rejected the kingdom message and leave them to their inevitable judgment (cf. Matt. 7:6). The rejection of the disciples is more egregious than Sodom and Gomorrah's outrageously shameful treatment of God's angels (Gen. 18-19). Judgment more severe than that of those two notorious cities awaits those who reject Jesus's messengers.'

3. Warnings about opposition to the mission (10:16-39)

- This central section on the discourse on mission is a solemn warning of coming persecution, with appropriate encouragement for faithful confession of Jesus and promise of Reward.
- The section itself is divided into three parts:
 - a) Warnings and encouragement (v16-23)
 - b) Reasons not to fear persecution (v24-33)
 - c) Jesus and peace (v34-39)
- These sections also have their own sub-sections, using Matthew's now familiar pattern of 'cycles'.
- The first section above (a) has its own set of two cycles of warning and encouragement.
 - i. In cycle i (v16-20) the persecution comes from the civil courts and religious leaders, but the encouragement is from the promise of the work of the Spirit who will speak through them
 - ii. In cycle ii (v21-23) the persecution now comes from one's own family, and the encouragement comes from the reminder of the return of Jesus, who will save those who remain faithful to the end.
- The second section above (b) provides three reasons the disciples need not fear persecution:
 - i. The disciples are reminded that they are identified with Jesus, and as he suffers/ suffered persecution so must they.
 - ii. They should not fear since although they share in Jesus's persecution, they will also share in his vindication.
 - iii. They should not fear persecutors but instead the one who to whom they will give account on judgment day. The ordeal of persecution is temporary, but the persecutors will suffer eternal punishment. Jesus, the judge, will respond in kind to both.
- The third section moves towards the end of the discourse with a warning that things will not initially move towards peace. The disciples' most basic values will be tested, even their own families cannot take precedence over their allegiance to Jesus. While this will inevitably bring anguish, the anguish over separation from family is temporary and must be compared to eternal separation from God. In the end, Jesus promises that the blessings of the future kingdom will somehow offset all these difficulties.

a) Two cycles of warning and encouragement (10:16-23)

i. Official persecution and the Spirit's ministry (10:16-20)

- v16
 - The disciples are warned that those who reject the kingdom message will not passively remain in unbelief, they will actively oppress them in their ministry.
 - They are likened to being sheep among wolves, and then encouraged to be shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves, reminding them of the need to embrace wisdom with integrity, combining both intellect and ethics.
- v17-18
 - The 'wolves' who persecute will include both religious as well as civil (and therefore Gentile) groups, both of which Jesus himself will appear before.
 - The flogging they can expect will also be the same Jesus experiences, but unexpectedly these sufferings of their will lead to occasions for testimony.
- v19-20
 - Up until this point in Matthew the Spirit has been mentioned only in connection with Jesus and his ministry, but as the disciples extend the message of Jesus, and endure similar persecutions, they will experience the same enablement of the Spirit.
 - Eventually the risen and ascended Jesus will send the Spirit upon all believers, who will themselves be led by the Spirit in responding to their own persecution (See Acts 4:8, 29-31 for the Spirit's direct enablement upon the first believers)

ii. Family division and the coming of Jesus (10:21-23)

- v21-22
 - The divisive nature of the kingdom message will sever the most precious of human relationships: the family.
 - This is the most heartbreaking part of the discourse, where it is predicted that family members will turn on themselves due to the message of Jesus.
 - This difficult saying underscores the reality that the primary allegiance of disciples must be to Jesus and the new family of God.
 - It is clear here that perseverance amidst persecution is the true sign of authentic faith.
- v23
 - There are various views regarding the coming of the 'Son of Man' amidst the mission of the disciples to Israel:
 1. The coming of Jesus refers to an *immediate reunion* between Jesus and the disciples. In this view, the coming of the Son of Man is not eschatological, but simply refers to Jesus rejoining the disciples before they complete their immediate assignments. The weakness of this approach is the use of the eschatological 'Son of Man' (Daniel 7:13)
 2. The coming of Jesus is his *resurrection*, since by it a new era of the Church has begun. Again this ignores the particular 'Son of man' reference, which relates specifically to a human figure (cf Psalm 8:4).
 3. The coming of Jesus is a *process* beginning with the resurrection, continuing through Pentecost, and culminating in Jesus's return to earth. This has the similar weaknesses above.

4. The destruction of Jerusalem in AD70 amounts to a *coming judgment* upon Israel. While this can accord with the eschatological 'Son of Man' idea, the weakness is that it will scarcely bring comfort to the disciples, something this reference by Jesus is intended to do.
5. Jesus will return to the earth before the disciples (through all time, not just the twelve) complete their mission to Israel. This seems to be the best option, as it also aligns with the view that while the Missions Discourse refers primarily to the mission to Israel, it also anticipates the postresurrection mission of the church. Thus this verse anticipates a continued mission to Israel, alongside the mission to the nations, until the second coming of Christ.

b) Three reasons not to fear persecution (10:24-33)

i. Disciples share in their masters persecution (10:24-25)

- v24-25
 - Jesus reminds his disciples of their place as student-learners, who should not expect better treatment than their teacher-master.
 - Their identity is inextricably linked to his, so they can expect similar treatment. Here Jesus recalls being called 'Beelzebul'⁹, so why would they praise his disciples if they so treat their master?

ii. Disciples must not fear persecutors (10:26-27)

- v26-27
 - The natural fear of persecutors is forbidden three times in v26-33 (see also 1 Peter 3:14).
 - Disciples should be emboldened by knowing they follow in Jesus's footsteps (v24-25), but also because of the coming 'reversal' at the end, where 'secrets' (hidden sins) of the persecutors will be revealed on judgment day. Therefore the disciples must not fear but openly proclaim what Jesus teaches them privately.

iii. Disciples must fear only the ultimate judge (10:28-33)

- v28
 - Disciples are ultimately not to fear those whose powers are temporary (and physical), but rather God, whose power is eternal. The persecutors can only cause physical death, but God can punish eternally in hell. 'The temporary peril of persecution and martyrdom is daunting, but it pales in comparison with eternal punishment in hell' (Turner).
 - This introduces an element of reverential awe that disciples should have for God, to be coupled with their view of him as loving Father (10:20, 29).

⁹ 'Beelzebul' means 'lord of the household' or 'lord of the heights', not necessarily a negative term (see 1 Kings 8:13, Isaiah 63:15). However the usage of the term by the Pharisees in 12:24 indicates that the term had been used to describe Satan, master of the evil spirits. Note that some manuscripts have a variation 'Beelzebub', 'Lord of the flies' perhaps a derisive term to the Canaanite god, but the likely correct word is Beelzebul.

- Jesus here refers to 'hell', which is more literally 'gehenna', which refers to the valley of Hinnom near Jerusalem. This was a dreaded place where human sacrifice was at one time offered to Molech (2 Kings 23:10, 2 Chronicles 28:3, 33:6, Jeremiah 7:31-32, 19:2-9, 32:35). It has commonly been said that the valley became used to incinerate garbage, and thus a constant fire burned there. This appears to be without ancient support however. What is clear is that in Matthew 'gehenna' is the place of fiery punishment following the final judgment (see 18:8, 25:41, 46 where 'eternal fire' and 'eternal punishment' is used). Note that 'gehenna' is distinguished from 'hades', which is the place where the dead wait for final judgment (see 11:23 and 16:18 for instances of hades being referred to).
- v29-31
 - This section provides some welcome assurance as disciples are reminded that they are more valuable to God sparrows, and he will thus much more care for them than he does the relatively worthless sparrows.
 - God's awareness of a comparatively worthless sparrow's death provides much assurance that God is aware of the disciples' persecution.
 - Disciples may never fully grasp why God permits persecution, but they can be certain God is aware, and will deal justly with the persecutors.
- v32-33
 - In this antithetical passage the potential 'denial' of Jesus is mentioned. This is a conscious disowning of Jesus, which is contrasted with those who 'acknowledge' or 'confess' (ie those who are loyal to) Christ. Loyalty to Jesus may result in persecution now, but it will result in the loyalty of Jesus on judgment day.

c) **Jesus and peace (10:34-39)**

- v34-36
 - This passage is shockingly counterintuitive: the presence of the kingdom will not mean the absence of hostility. Here Matthew alludes to/cites Micah 7:6¹⁰. Clearly, his ministry will not bring instant universal serendipity to the world.
 - Some have tried to lighten the effect of these verses by saying that this tribulation within family is a *result* of Jesus's coming, rather than the *purpose*. While the stark contrast of peace and sword may be hyperbolic, it remains true that Jesus intends it to be this way. The repetition of 'I have come to..' makes this clear.
 - The positive message here is that peace on earth will not be attained apart from Jesus's work of reconciling people to God, through the Gospel of the kingdom. When people are reconciled to God then they have the capacity to be reconciled to each other, and are equipped to be 'peacemakers' (5:9, 10:13).
 - The kingdom message is ultimately confrontational, and conflicting responses to the message can fracture the most sacred of relationships.

¹⁰ In Micah the division in families is due to social injustice, a critique by Micah who forewarned exile as a result. Here in Matthew the division among family members is not due to social injustice, but different responses to the kingdom message. However, behind Micah's direct usage is the rejection of God's law, which specifically mandated social justice.

- v37-39
 - While the previous passage is counterintuitive, this passage is a classic Christian paradox: if one is willing to lose one's life for the sake of the kingdom, one will end up finding life ie truly living! This is the paradox: if one attempts to avoid the cross and preserve one's life the result is a loss of life. But accepting the cross and giving up one's life results in gaining it.
 - This is later directly spoken to the disciples in 16:24-25.

4. The reward for supporting the mission (10:40-11:1)

- The Missionary Discourse ends positively with the prospect of reward for those who hospitably receive Jesus's disciples.
- It takes more than missionaries to accomplish Jesus's mission, the whole community of disciples must be involved. Those who receive the missionaries favourably will be favourably rewarded in kind.
- This promise of reward for those hospitable to disciples also brings comfort to the disciples who are the messengers amidst persecution, since they can look forward to warm hospitality and support of the community.
- v40-42
 - There is an emphatic 'double negative' in the future tense here, which absolutely denies the possibility of the loss of reward for anyone who receives a disciple of Jesus.
 - God will reward those who receive a missionary disciple of Jesus because receiving Jesus's messengers amounts to receiving Jesus, a connection between Jesus & messenger/servant that has been strongly made in the discourse above, but there related to persecution!
 - Disciples are seen as the agents of Jesus, and Jesus is seen as the agent of the Father.
 - Even a seemingly insignificant cup of cold water given to a disciple meets a very basic human need and will bring reward to the one who brings it.
 - While the end of this discourse does have a positive note to it, the language is still stark, not unlike the ending of the Sermon on the Mount. Just as one had to choose between loyalty to Jesus's words and thus enduring 'storms', so disciples have to choose loyalty to Jesus amidst persecution. In both cases the promise is of heavenly support and endurance amidst the difficulties.
- 11:1
 - The mention of the twelve disciples here forms an 'inclusio' with their mention at the beginning in 10:1, packaging the discourse as a distinct teaching of Jesus.
 - Additionally, Matthew employs his characteristic formula of 'when Jesus had finished' (7:28, 13:53, 19:1, 26:1) to move from Jesus's words back to works in the chapters to follow.
 - Matthew 11:1 mentions only that Jesus instructed the disciples before setting out again on his own ministry. No record is given of their ministry, as evidently Matthew focuses on the ministry and teaching of Jesus for his church.

IV. Growing opposition to the Kingdom of Heaven (11:2-13:52)

- This is the third narrative/discourse block in Matthew, which culminates with the important discourse on the Kingdom of Heaven.
- In the narrative section, the opposition to Jesus and the Kingdom grows, and comes to a head with the accusation that Jesus is in league with the devil.

A. Narrative 3: Three cycles of unbelief and belief (11:2-12:50)

- Just as the narrative of Matt 8-9 follows the Sermon on the Mount, so the narrative in 11-12 follows the Missionary Discourse.
- Overall these two chapters stress Israel's unbelief and the escalating opposition to Jesus. Mixed between these confrontations (instances of 'unbelief') are more positive conversations ('belief' sayings) regarding subjects such as the sovereignty of God (11:25-30), fulfillment of prophecy (12:17-21) and commendation of discipleship (12:46-50).
- The structure of this narrative section seems to be another set of three cycles, each with two confrontations/instances of unbelief, with a positive saying or belief statement ending the set.
- Structure of Matt 11-12:
 1. Sayings collection 1
 - a) Unbelief: John the Baptist (11:2-19)
 - b) Unbelief: the towns of Galilee (11:20-24)
 - c) Belief: "Come unto me" (11:25-30)
 2. Sayings collection 2
 - a) Unbelief: Sabbath controversy (12:1-8)
 - b) Unbelief: Sabbath controversy (12:9-14)
 - c) Belief: "The hope of the Gentiles" (12:15-21)
 3. Sayings collection 3
 - a) Unbelief: The unforgivable sin (12:22-37)
 - b) Unbelief: An evil generation (12:38-45)
 - c) Belief: Jesus's true family (12:46-50)

1. Cycle 1: Jesus and John rejected (11:2-30)

a) The identity of Jesus and John (11:2-19)

- This section is packaged by an 'inclusio', formed by the repeated statement about 'deeds', the Messiah's (v2) and Wisdom's (v19).
- The section is divided into three, all of which begin with questions:
 - i. John's question about the Messiah (v2-6)
 - ii. Jesus's question about John's significance (v7-15)
 - iii. Jesus's question about the current generation's unbelief (v16-19)

i. Jesus answers John's question about the Messiah (11:2-6)

- John's question about whether Jesus is the Messiah comes at a crucial stage in Matthew's Gospel. Up till now, we have seen the mixed response to Jesus, both increasing in intensity. The crowds are growing in their fervour for Jesus, and the religious establishment in their ferocity towards him. John's question comes at a time when the reader needs to untangle these responses and decide for themselves. This kind of decision cannot be superficial, and John's honest question is a helpful guide. Jesus settles the question though, and encourages 'blessing' for those who hold to him as Messiah.
- v2-3
 - We have not seen John since his imprisonment in 4:12, although his disciples were mentioned in 9:14.
 - We know two things for sure about John at this stage: he is aware of Jesus's true identity (3:13-17), and he is aware of what Jesus has been doing during his imprisonment (11:2). What then prompted John's question? It seems clear that the key issue was not whether Jesus was the/a Messiah, but what *kind* of Messiah he was. The reports coming to John about Jesus would have included his compassionate miracles, and no doubt John was expecting judgment on the religious establishment. This was emphatic at the story of Jesus's baptism (3:7-10). John expected a more immediate judgment, and thus perhaps he was looking for another Messiah of a different kind.
- v4-5
 - Jesus's answer calls John's messengers attention to both the words and works of Jesus. Six specifics are given:
 1. Blind people see (cf. 9:27-28; 12:22; 20:30; 21:14; Isa. 29:18b; 35:5a; 42:7a, 18b).
 2. Lame people walk (cf. 15:30-31; 21:14; Isa. 35:6a).
 3. Lepers are cleansed (cf. 8:2; 10:8).
 4. Deaf people hear (cf. 9:32-33; 12:22; 15:30-31; Isa. 29:18a; 35:5b; 42:18a).
 5. Dead people are raised (cf. 9:18-26; 10:8; Isa. 26:19).
 6. Poor people hear the good news (cf. 4:14-17, 23; 5:3; Luke 4:18; Isa. 61:1c).
 - 'This description of Jesus's ministry is drawn heavily from the Hebrew Scriptures (Isa. 26:19; 29:18; 35:5-6; 42:7, 18; 61:1), although this material is not quoted but only alluded to in its general sense...The clear biblical echoes found in this list of messianic works performed by Jesus provides much for John to ponder' (Turner)

- Thus while John expected (rightly!) judgment on the prevailing religious and political establishment, he overlooked the ‘good news’ elements of the arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven. No doubt John’s imprisonment at the hands of these leaders contributed towards this oversight!
- v6
 - ‘Taking offense’ is literally ‘stumbling’, which refers to a serious loss of faith, spiritual defeat, or apostasy. This language both comforts and warns. It comforts by encouraging John to reflect on Jesus’s messianic works, and it warns that he must not allow doubt to defeat him.
 - In a sense then, v2-6 interprets all of Matthew 4-10. As the coming one whom John announced, Jesus’s words and works bring the saving rule of God to bear on human sin and suffering, fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecies.
 - The encouragement to us is, if one as great as John could doubt this, how much more the rest of Jesus’s followers! Thus, if the followers of Jesus focus on opposition and the delay of God’s judgment, doubt will arise. Their focus must be on the presence of salvation, not the absence of judgment (2 Peter 3:8-9).

ii. Jesus’s teaching on John’s significance (11:7-15)

- The account of John’s doubts previously should not lead us to think he is a weak, vacillating person. To the contrary, Jesus says, he is the greatest human who has lived up till that point! He is the fulfillment of the one spoken about in Malachi 3:1, who will prepare the way for the Messiah himself.
- This unit describes how John lived at the crucial conclusion to the prophetic era, but would not live to see the full unveiling of the kingdom. John’s ministry heralded the kingdom that is violently opposed, but he will become a victim of it before it’s fulfillment.
- v7-10
 - The enquiry by John’s disciples leads to a mini-discourse on John’s significance within the story of redemption thus far.
 - Three times Jesus asks the rhetorical question: ‘what did you go out to see?’, which makes for a powerful rhetorical structure:
 - q1: What did you go out to see?
 - a1: A reed by wind shaken?
 - q2: But what did you go out to see?
 - a2: A person dressed in soft clothes?
 - e2: Those clothes are for kings
 - q3: But what did you go out to see?
 - q3: A prophet?
 - e3: Yes I tell you, and more than a prophet.
 - Clearly the answers in q1 and q2 are sarcastic. The first is so obvious it does not even require elaboration (e). John is not a weak and wavering person, nor was he one accustomed to a plush and comfortable life. The third question reaches the heart of the matter and expects a positive answer. Yes, John is a prophet, even a ‘super-prophet’ (Turner), whose role in preparing the way for Messiah Jesus is crucial.
 - John’s ultimate prophetic status is confirmed by citing Malachi 3:1, the one predicted who would herald the Messiah.

- v11
 - Jesus's testimony about John has a striking contrast: no one greater than John has ever lived up till that point, but surprisingly, John's greatness pales when compared with the significance of the person least in the kingdom of heaven.
 - This is because John's ministry was both the apex and conclusion of the old era (hence being 'the greatest'), as well as the introduction of the new era. In this new era he would see signs of the kingdom initiated, but not witness it's expansion nor consummation.
- v12
 - This is a challenging verse to interpret due to the difficulty of translation surrounding the words for 'violence' and 'violent' (ESV). The word for 'violence', ('biazetai'), can be translated in both a passive or active sense. Thus, either the kingdom is suffering violence (passive), or is charging ahead with a 'violent' force (active).
 - The ESV translates it in the passive:
 - "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force".
 - However, there is a footnote which offers the alternative rendering:
 - "...the kingdom of heaven has been coming violently".
 - The NIV also chooses the passive sense:
 - "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it".
 - The NLT mixes the active and passive sense in the first and second portions of the verse:
 - "And from the time John the Baptist began preaching until now, the Kingdom of Heaven has been forcefully advancing, and violent people are attacking it."
 - Indeed nearly all the translations take the passive sense, which certainly fits the context of John's imprisonment scenario best, not to mention the persecution elements mentioned in the previous Missionary Discourse.
- v13-15
 - John's role as bringing to a climax the Law and Prophets is clearly outlined here. It's interesting to note that the order of Law/Prophets is reversed here, where we have 'prophets and law' instead of the more familiar 'law and prophets'. Perhaps this is due to John's prophetic status, and thus viewing the Hebrew Bible through the lens of the Prophets, culminating in John.
 - John's connection to Elijah had been hinted at in his introduction in chapter 3, particularly his appearance and the nature of his ministry. Now that connection is reinforced: "...he is Elijah who is to come". This is a reference to the prediction of the return of Elijah in Malachi 4:5-6. That reference seems to refer to a literal return of Elijah, prior to 'the day of the Lord' ie the return of Christ. Thus John is not fulfilling this prophecy in a literal sense, but figurative, in that he ministers 'in the spirit of Elijah', as mentioned in the account of John's birth in Luke 1:13-17. John is not Elijah reborn, but he fulfills a role similar to Elijah.
 - The connection between Elijah and John will further be explored by Jesus in 17:9-13, but again there will be a sense of both a figurative fulfillment in John, and a literal fulfillment to come.
 - Either way, Jesus's solemn words in v15 highlight the importance of making the connection between John & Elijah, at the very least in the figurative/preparatory sense.

iii. Jesus reproaches unbelief (11:16-19)

- v16-19
 - Jesus turns from explaining John's significance to confronting the unbelief of 'this generation.'
 - This rejection is compared to the behaviour of childish brats who will not play either a wedding game or funeral game. In this parable John is the one who 'sings a dirge', a reference to a funeral, which is a connection to John's abstinent lifestyle. Jesus is the one who 'plays a flute', a reference to a wedding, which is a connection to Jesus's enjoyment of food and drink. These links to the wedding & funeral imagery are strengthened by the chiasmic structure of v17-19:
 - A Flute playing but no dancing (17a)
 - B Dirge singing but no mourning (v17b)
 - B' John's abstinence slandered as demon possession (v18)
 - A' Jesus's participation slandered as excess (v19)
 - John certainly did live an ascetic lifestyle, and Jesus certainly did associate with 'gluttons and drunkards'. But the charge of gluttony and drunkenness against Jesus was certainly a lie.

b) Jesus denounces unrepentant cities (11:20-24)

- The denunciation of first Chorazin and Bethsaida in v21-22, and then of Capernaum in v23-24 is expressed in a symmetrical structure that includes the denunciation, the reason and the verdict.
- These words are the most severe of Jesus up till this point in Matthew (more severe words are coming in chapter 23!). If there were any questions about how Jesus's ministry was being received, these verses put them to rest. While there were crowds forming and following Jesus around, it is clear that their intentions are not to follow Jesus as Messiah, and live out his teachings. They are happy to receive the blessings (miracles) of the kingdom present, but have no intention of becoming true citizens through repentance.
- These three towns thus receive severe judgment because they received such clear and sustained revelation, yet still did not fully accept Jesus as Messiah. *It seems that greater access to truth brings greater accountability.* The wicked towns of Tyre, Sidon and Sodom had not received as much revelation as Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, thus the judgment of the first three towns will be more tolerable than the last. These towns thus serve as a warning to nonchalant people whose familiarity with Christianity has bred contempt with it.
- v20-22
 - These two Galilean towns are not mentioned elsewhere in Matthew, but they evidently experienced the ministry of Jesus.
- v23-24
 - Here the comparison is with the infamous city of Sodom, the most notoriously wicked city in the Bible. Capernaum will fare worse than Sodom, due to its unbelief and rejection of Jesus as Messiah, despite the miracles worked in her.

c) Gracious revelation in the midst of opposition (11:25-30)

- The end of this section sees Jesus bringing comfort after the hard words of the previous verses. He again invites people to follow him, assuring them that 'his yoke is easy'.
- This section is divided into two parts:
 - i. Gracious Election
 - ii. Gracious invitation

i. Gracious Election

- v25
 - Jesus surprisingly switches from rebuke to prayer, one of public thanksgiving (one might have expected lament, given the context!)
 - The Father hides 'these things' from the 'wise and understanding' and reveals them to 'little children'. This does not literally refer to the intellectuals and the children, but rather those who are proud and those who are humble (Cf Matt 5:3 'blessed are the poor in spirit'). This concealment from the proud has been called 'the dark side of grace' (Calvin).
- v26
 - Jesus affirms that the basis of the revealing and concealing is the Father's own desire. Nothing outside the Father has determined this.
- v27
 - Jesus turns from prayer to affirmation of his unique status of Messiah-Son-of-God, who has a unique relationship of reciprocal intimate knowledge.
 - This passage is strongly Christological, emphasising the unique relationship within the trinity of Father and Son.
 - Within this important Christological statement is the blunt yet beautiful teaching that saving knowledge of God the Father comes only through the revelation of Jesus, the exclusive mediator of salvation.

ii. Gracious Invitation

- These verses are some of the most memorable in scripture, which have brought comfort to disciples of Jesus through the ages.
- Here Jesus motivates disciples to respond to him, recognising that they are burdened and weary. However he is gentle, and those who respond positively to him will find rest. The last line is an addition to the parallel structure of previous verses, emphasising that despite the difficulty in following Jesus, his way is 'easy' and his burden 'light'.
- This parallel structure is outlined below (literally translated):
 - A Come to me
 - B all who are tired and burdened
 - C and I will give you rest
 - A' Take my yoke on you and learn from me
 - B' because I am gentle and humble in heart
 - C' and you will find rest for your souls
 - D for my yoke is easy and my burden is light

- v28-30
 - This follows neatly from v27 in that it is fitting that if people come to know the Father only through Jesus, Jesus is the one to invite them to come to *him*, and *he* will give them rest as they take *his* yoke upon them.
 - In promising rest, Jesus takes on the role of God in fulfilling the promises of rest, based on God's rest after creation.
 - It is paradoxical to speak of an easy yoke and a light burden. Jesus's yoke is not less rigorous than the Pharisees, since he requires a righteousness that surpasses theirs (5:20). As we have learned, Jesus gets to the heart of the Torah, and of people, and thus the paradox indicates that the focus on weightier matters leads to a lighter yoke.

2. Cycle 2: Jesus and John rejected (11:2-30)

- As mentioned on pg 24 Matthew 11-12 consists of three sets of sayings ('cycles'), that each consist of three parts, two expressing unbelief and one expressing belief.
- This is the second cycle, with v1-8 & v9-14 stressing unbelief, and v15-21 stressing belief.
- These cycles continue the escalation of tension and confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees.

a) Picking and eating grain (12:1-8)

- These verses describe a controversy over Jesus's disciples picking and eating grain as they walk through a field. Jesus's response to this objection mentions King David, the temple, and the Sabbath, to demonstrate the disciples' innocence and to show he is greater than each of these items.
- The reference to King David would have been problematic enough for the Pharisees, but Jesus's claim to be greater than the temple and Lord of the Sabbath would be viewed as outrageous.
- v1-2
 - It was not against the law to pick a few heads of grain if one became hungry as one walked through a field, but one was not allowed to use a sickle (Deut 23:25). The Pharisees apparently view the disciples picking a few heads of grain by hand as work that desecrates the Sabbath.
 - There is irony in Matthew's intentional placement of these Sabbath controversy stories right after the promise of Jesus to give his disciples rest.
- v3-4
 - Jesus's two questions imply that he is surprised at their biblical ignorance. They have no doubt read, but they have not understood and obeyed.
 - Jesus's first question alludes to 1 Sam 21:1-6. The Pharisees do not object to David's technically illegal behaviour of eating the sacred bread, but they object to hungry disciples doing what was permitted by Deut 23:25. According to Jesus, the activity of his disciples is a permissible exception to the general rules of Sabbath observance.
 - Jesus's method is thus based on his authoritative position as teacher and interpreter of the law (Matt 5:17-48), as well as his prioritisation of human need over oral legal tradition.

- v5-6
 - Technically the priests break the sabbath law by 'working' in the temple on the Sabbath, but the priests are obviously guiltless because their cultic obligations override the general Sabbath law (Lev 24:8). Thus temple 'work' takes precedence over Sabbath 'rest'. The Pharisees are inconsistent because they do not object to such priestly Sabbath-breaking, but they object to Jesus, who is greater than the temple and its sacrificial ministry.
- v7-8
 - The concluding verses of this section get to the heart of Jesus's differences with the Pharisees. Two major problems surface: the Pharisees do not interpret the Bible as Jesus does, and they do not recognize his authority as Lord of the Sabbath.
 - Jesus again cites Hosea 6:6 (as he did in 9:13) to prove that the Pharisees' harsh approach to the Sabbath contradicts God's compassionate purposes for God's people. The Pharisees seem to begin with the institution of the Sabbath and view it as of utmost importance. Their oral tradition on proper Sabbath observance overrides the humanitarian concerns behind Deut 23:25. Jesus, on the other hand, begins with God's concern for his people, which takes precedence over the institution of the Sabbath on certain occasions. As Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus provides the ultimate interpretation of its role in the life of God's people.

b) Healing in the Synagogue (12:9-14)

- Another Sabbath controversy follows on the heels of the previous one, this time involving a healing incident.
- This is healing can be viewed as divine endorsement that validates Jesus's previous teaching on Sabbath observance.
- v9-10
 - The Pharisees' question does not stem from a sincere desire to discuss the law, but from their desire to have something with which to accuse Jesus. The penalty for profaning the Sabbath was death (Ex 31:14), and so their question is likely linked to their plot in v14.
- v11-12
 - Jesus responds that it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. Here he again employs the argument of lesser to greater, since healing a diseased person is more necessary than lifting a shoe out of a cistern.
 - Doing good on the Sabbath is equivalent to prioritising compassion over sacrifice. This is an instance of Jesus not annulling the law but fulfilling it (5:17) by loving a neighbor. Therefore, Jesus and his disciples should not be viewed as Sabbath breakers.
- v13-14
 - This passage reinforces the basic impasse that is evident in 12:1-8. Jesus and the Pharisees are at loggerheads over the relationship of the Sabbath law to compassionate deeds. As the ultimate interpreter of Torah, Jesus properly relates Sabbath law and human need. The written Torah is not violated by this healing.
 - It is a little ironic that a dispute over the finer points of Sabbath law leads the Pharisees to plan to break the sixth commandment.

c) The servant's response to escalating opposition (12:15-21)

- v15-16
 - Jesus leaves the area where the previous two conflicts have occurred and continues his ministry of healing. He again warns those he heals not to make him known (just as in 8:4, 9:30), because he will not pander to those who want only to see spectacular feats.
- v17-18
 - Matthew cites Isaiah 42:1-4 in the now familiar 'fulfillment' formula, the longest biblical passage cited in Matthew.
 - Matthew's version of the passage does not exactly follow the Hebrew MT or the LXX and is likely his own translation of the original.
 - This text speaks of the Lord's beloved servant (alluded to at Jesus's baptism in 3:17) who is enabled by the Spirit to proclaim justice to the Gentiles. This significant reference to the Gentiles continues the theme of the outward expanding mission to the Gentiles, and also anticipates their future favourable response to Jesus as the story proceeds.
- v19-21
 - The Spirit leads the servant away from the kind of ministry that would please the carnal desires of the crowd.
 - The servant is not characterised by quarrelling, shouting, or rhetoric calculated to incite a mob. He will handle weak people (characterised as bent reeds and flickering lamps) with compassion and gentleness. The Messiah does not use his power to manipulate people but to serve them.
 - This citation serves three purposes. First, it explains why Jesus withdraws from conflict with the Pharisees, and why he urges people not to reveal who he is. Second, this passage indicates that the servant would minister to the Gentiles. Third, this citation stresses that the servant's ministry will be Spirit-empowered. This provides the important background for Jesus's response to the slander that his powers are demonic.

3. Cycle 3: Confrontation with the Pharisees (12:22-50)

- The confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees comes to a head when Jesus heals a blind, mute, and demon-possessed man. The crowd respond wondering whether Jesus is the Messiah, but the Pharisees respond by slandering Jesus with the charge of collaborating with Satan. Jesus argues against the Pharisees by affirming that his ministry indicates the arrival of God's kingdom through God's Spirit. He warns everyone that neutrality regarding the kingdom is impossible (v30). The Pharisees' slander amounts to what Jesus calls 'the unforgivable sin', resulting in judgment in 'this age' as well as in 'the age to come'.
- The next section continues the emphasis on unbelief, with the request for a sign, which Jesus refuses to give.
- The final part of the cycle has the now usual comforting end, where Jesus teaches on genuine community.

a) The unforgivable sin (12:22-37)

- This unit comes as no surprise. Jesus has already been accused of collaborating with the devil in 9:32-34, and now that accusation resurfaces after another exorcism miracle.
- Jesus responds by showing the absurdity of the claim (v25-27), and explaining the real source of his power (v28-29).
- The passage concludes with solemn words about the eternal consequences of this accusation.
- v22-23
 - These verses set the occasion for the conflict, which is the healing of a blind and mute man, whose affliction was due to demonic possession.
 - The reaction of the crowd is in stark contrast to the Pharisees. The crowd wonder if this is indeed the 'son of David' ie the Messiah.
- v24
 - The Pharisees view Jesus not as Messianic but demonic. They do not deny the reality of Jesus's miracles, but attribute them to Satan.
 - Later Jewish sources continued to affirm that not only Jesus but also the early church did in fact do miracles, but through sorcery! Thus this was a charge that would stick for years to come!
- v25-27
 - Jesus answers the Pharisees with two rhetorical questions. He first asks the Pharisees whether Satan would work against himself, then asks whether the Pharisees own exorcists are empowered by Satan.
- v28
 - After the rhetorical arguments Jesus states the real power behind his works: the Spirit of God.
 - The same Spirit who was active in his conception (1:18, 20) has been empowering him for ministry, as recently highlighted in the Isa 42 citation in 12:18. Thus the only conclusion that can be drawn from these miracles is that the saving power of God's kingdom has arrived. This is probably Matthew's strongest statement on the presence of the kingdom.
- v29
 - Jesus pictures the advance of the kingdom upon Satan's domain as the tying up of a strong man and the looting of his house. His preaching and miraculous deeds have steadily been encroaching on Satan's territory since their encounter in the desert in chapter 4.
 - The 'binding of the strong man' is linked to the binding of Satan in the abyss in Rev 20:1-10. One's eschatological disposition will affect an interpretation of this link, as those holding to amillennial views see the full binding of Satan at Jesus's first coming, whereas premillennial views see the full binding of Satan only in the future. There is truth to both of these views. Premillennial and dispensational views must acknowledge the decisive defeat of Satan at Jesus's first coming, and amillennials must not underestimate the extent to which Satan's limited power can still injure the church (Eph 6:11-17, Jam 4:7, 1 Pet 5:8-9). Only in the future will Satan fully be incapacitated, but the future is already present in some degree, and Christians can rejoice that the power of Jesus has already overcome the enemy (John 12:31, 16:11, Acts 26:18, Eph 2:1-6).

- v30
 - Once again, neutrality when it comes to the kingdom is impossible. One who does not actively support Jesus and the kingdom is in opposition to him.
- v31-32
 - Here Jesus moves from explanation to warning. In no uncertain terms he tells the Pharisees that their slanderous charges are unforgivable. If they had merely spoken against Jesus, their sin might be forgiven, but they have spoken against the Spirit by attributing the work of the Spirit to the prince of the demons. The consequences of this is eternal: it will not be forgiven in the present or the future world.
 - In the church there has been much discussion regarding the precise nature of the unforgivable sin. Theologians tend to generalise the unpardonable sin, equating it to unbelief or lack of response to the Gospel. As serious as lack of belief in Jesus is, this incident in Matt 12 is far more specific. Matthew 12 centers on the Spirit-empowered ministry of Jesus, which should be viewed as evidence of his messianic status. But the Pharisees response goes far beyond unbelief. They slander the Spirit's ministry by accusing him of collaborating with the very forces he is overpowering. This is the unforgivable sin. Whether it can be committed today is debatable, but attempts to apply it currently must avoid generalising, and stick to the essence of the conflict described here. People are always accountable to believe the Gospel when they hear it, but it does not mean that those who do not immediately believe the gospel have entered an unalterable state of unforgivable doom.
- v33-37
 - Jesus's reply to the Pharisees continues with a new metaphor, that of a tree and its fruit. Jesus's good fruit demonstrates he is good, but the Pharisees worthless words indicate they are worthless trees. Their slander is thus suggestive of their ultimate destiny.
 - Jesus's depiction of the Pharisees as a 'brood of vipers' recalls Matt 3:7, and anticipates Matt 23:33.

b) The sign of Jonah (12:38-45)

- This sections presents two perspectives that stress the gravity of the unbelief of Jesus's contemporaries, described four times as 'this evil generation'. The sections ends with an enigmatic story about an evil spirit, warning the listeners that their unbelief will leave them worse than they were before Jesus came.
- v38
 - Jesus has already performed many miracles before the Pharisees, and the last one led them to slander the Holy Spirit, so it is unlikely Jesus would oblige their desire for a miracle here!
 - The Pharisees refer to Jesus as 'teacher', an apparently respectful title, but in Matthew those who address Jesus as teacher are not believers of him (8:19, 9:11, 17:24, 22:16, 36)
- v39
 - Jesus describes his contemporaries as adulterous, a common biblical metaphor for sin.

- v40-41
 - The reference to Jonah 1:17 provides a cryptic prophecy of the death and resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection is the ultimate validation of Jesus's identity and mission (Acts 2:24-36).
 - The three days and nights Jonah spent in the belly of the sea monster are to be compared to Jesus's upcoming three days and nights in the earth. This does not have to mean an exact 72 hours in the grave, since in Jewish reckoning any part of the day could count as a day (ie 'third day' would not mean after 72 hours but essentially anytime after 48)
 - This is the first time Matthew portrays Jesus as hinting he will die. Later he will make this clear (16:21, 17:9, 22-23).
 - The allusion to Jonah is extended in v41 where Jesus compares his listeners (unfavourably) to Jonah's audience. Although the Ninevites repented when Jonah preached, Jesus's listeners did not respond when one greater than Jonah (himself) preached.
- v42
 - The queen of Sheba (literally 'the South') would come from a distant land to hear Solomon's wisdom, but Jesus's contemporaries would not listen to nor accept the wisdom of one greater than Solomon.
- v43-45
 - The parable about the activities of an unclean spirit returns to the matter of the exorcism, which began this debate. The purpose of the parable is to show that the man is much worse off than he was before the first spirit left. Evidently, after the first sprite left, nothing good came to fill the vacuum, which left the man open to his disastrous ultimate position.
 - 'It seems the overall idea of this parable is that although a great multitude of Jews have profited from Jesus's healings and exorcisms, comparatively few have genuinely understood his message and repented. The nation, like a recently cleaned house, has had its demons removed. Yet it has done nothing to ensure itself against their more rigorous re-entrenchment' (Turner)
 - This passage dramatically emphasises the evils of hardened unbelief, and is a grim illustration of Matt 11:25.
 - It is also a reminder that the absence of evil spirits does not equate with the presence of redemption. The house has been cleaned, but a good tenant has not taken up residence.

c) **The true family of Jesus (12:46-50)**

- The desire of Jesus's mother and brothers to speak with him provides an opportunity for Jesus to speak of his true family, those who do the will of his Father in heaven.
- After two sections stressing unbelief, it is a relief to find Jesus speaking positively about the community of those who follow him.
- v46-47
 - Jesus's family wish to speak to him, and it appears they cannot get access to him because of the crowd. From Matthew's narrative they may be concerned about the escalating tension with the religious leaders. In Mark 3:21, 31 the family are concerned about Jesus's mental stability.

- v48-50
 - Other passages make it clear that Jesus's family was not always supportive of his messianic mission (Mark 3:21, John 7:1-5).
 - Jesus does not disown his family here, nor is it symbolic of him disowning the 'family' of Israel. He is not disowning family, he is challenging the idea that ethnic descent or family loyalty defines the people of God.
 - Jesus affirms the family unit in other passages (15:1-9, 19:19), so the point here is not to disrespect the family, but to promote allegiance to other believers. 'The words do not dissolve family bonds but rather relativize them' (Davies & Allison). Jesus's disciples may have to leave their families behind (19:29), and they may even face betrayal by their family (10:21, 35-37). Everyday family duties cannot take precedence over the call to follow Jesus (4:22, 8:22).
 - This passage also affirms the strong bonds of the new community formed by fellow believers, who constitute a 'family'.

B. Discourse 3: Parables of the Kingdom of heaven (13:1-52)

Structure of the discourse

- This is the third major discourse of Jesus in Matthew, and thus constitutes the 'centre' of Jesus's teachings (being in the 'centre' of the five discourses).
- The discourse has a distinct symmetrical structure, made up of two sections of four parables each. The first is addressed to the crowds (13:3-33) and the second to the disciples (13:36-52). Between the two sections is an editorial comment on the parables as prophetic fulfillment.
- In both sections Jesus answers a question from the disciples about parables (13:10-17, 36-43). A pair of similar short parables consummates the first section and begins the second section (13:31-33, 44-46).

The interpretation of parables in general

- There have been many imaginative interpretations of Jesus's parables in Church history! Extreme approaches have included fantastical allegorisations on the one hand, and constricting narrow approaches as a response to the allegorisations on the other hand. It is sure that Jesus has a particular theological emphasis in mind with each parable, rooted to the particular historical and literary context. However these parables do also have some flexibility in them, as seen in the fact that Jesus' interprets his own parables on multiple levels (13:18-23, 37-43).
- 'Parable are indeed allegories, but they must not be allegorized...Therefore, each parable must be looked at in its own context, and understood in terms of their own ancient historical and literary conventions, not in terms of extraneous categories superimposed upon them by ancient, medieval, modern or postmodern allegorizers' (Turner).
- The word used for parable, in both the Old and New Testament, can include a range of rhetorical devices from a proverb, a riddle, a simile or allegorical story. What they all have in common however, is that they use concrete analogy to illumine or explain an obscure or abstract thought.

The interpretation of Matthew 13

- The primary focus of these parables is the varied responses to the kingdom message.
- The kingdom message continues with the twin emphases of its present progress as well as future glories.
- The parables conceal the kingdom from unbelievers (13:10-17), but they also reveal the glorious destiny of those who truly believe the message (13:43).

1. Parables to the crowds (13:1-35)

- Since the conclusion to the Mission Discourse Matthew has stressed the increasing opposition to Jesus. The disciples have experienced the same trials during their own mission trip (10:18, 24-25). John the Baptist (11:1-6), Jesus's family (12:46-50), and the residents of Nazareth are not completely in step with Jesus's mission. Of course the opposition from the Pharisees has steeply increased, leading to their murder plot (12:14). Matthew 3:3-53 thus interprets the mixed response to the kingdom message and indicates that such a response will continue until judgment day.
- The parable of the sower is a fitting introduction to this section as it indicates the mixed responses to the kingdom message. This parable is the ruling parable of the discourse, since it leads to the disciples' question about the purpose of the parables (13:10) and is interpreted in detail by Jesus (13:18-23).
- This section of the discourse includes the parables of the sower, the weeds, the mustard seed and the yeast.

a) The Setting (13:1-2)

- Similar to the Sermon on the Mount we have a clear indication of the location of the discourse, both before and after the teaching (Cf Matt 5:1/8:1 & Matt 13:1/13:36).
- The setting is again Jesus teaching to a crowd. The parable of the sower is about the crowds - they must grasp the message of the kingdom!

b) The Parable of the Sower (13:3-9)

- Although this parable is usually called the parable of the sower, its interpretation by Jesus indicates that it is really about the soil, which stands for the varying responses to the message of the kingdom.
- This parable thus explains the mixed response to the kingdom mission experienced by Jesus and his disciples (Mark 4:1-9, Luke 8:4-8).
- What this means is that the parable is not intended to exhort believers, but explain unbelief. Jesus and his disciples have faithfully proclaimed the kingdom message, but relatively few have grasped it. This is explained by the hardness of heart, persecution, worldliness and satanic opposition.
- In the flow of Matthew's narrative, 13:1-23 explains the rejection experienced by Jesus in Matt 11-12. The very next parable and its interpretation (13:24-33) make it clear that such a mixed response to the kingdom will continue until the end of the age.
- v3
 - Matthew's narrative has already included occasional parabolic references, but here the word 'parable' appears for the first time.
 - From v3 we deduce that Jesus taught much in parables, but Matthew has selected certain parables that he views most relevant for his audience, and ones that fit his theological agenda.
- v4-7
 - The rocky soil refers to an underlying shelf of bedrock, not numerous rocks in the soil. In such conditions the soil warms rapidly and seeds sprout quickly, but the plant soon wilts as the soil loses its moisture.

c) Interaction with the Disciples (13:10-23)

i. Reason for Parables (13:10-17)

- v10-12
 - As Jesus speaks to the crowd, his disciples ask why he is speaking in parables. His answer implies that this manner of speaking is partly due to the rejection of his message by many listeners, but ultimately due to God's sovereign purpose to reveal the mysteries of the kingdom to whom he chooses.
 - God gives to some the capacity to understand these secrets but not to others. These solemn words confront Jesus's disciples with God's sovereign activity in graciously revealing himself to some, and in justly withholding that revelation from others.
- v13-15
 - Jesus's language in v13 echoes Isaiah 6:9-10. In v14-15 Jesus directly cites these verses as a biblical pattern now fulfilled in his own ministry.
 - The well-known passage in Isaiah includes Isaiah's commission to minister to sinful Israel, but confronting them with their rebellion against God's message. They have had the revelation but they do not understand what they hear or perceive what they see. Because of their hardened hearts they are unable to respond with believing ears and eyes.
 - Similarly, the rebellious response to Jesus's kingdom message leads to judicial hardening through further enigmatic teaching.
 - Thus the unbelief presented by many is not without historical precedent. The pattern of hard hearts and unbelief from Isaiah's days is recurring in the days of Jesus. Israel as a whole did not believe Isaiah's warnings of impending invasion, and neither does it believe Jesus's kingdom message.
- v16-17
 - By contrast, the disciples are graciously blessed with 'seeing eyes and hearing ears'. This blessedness exceeds that of many prophets and righteous people, who long to hear and see what the disciples have heard and seen.
 - On the difficult subject of God's sovereignty and human responsibility, note Turner's comments in full:
 - 'Finite humans will never fully understand the interplay of God's sovereignty and human responsibility. Matthew 13:11-15, with its citation of Isa. 6:9-10, is one of the strongest biblical affirmations of God's prerogative to reveal himself as he sees fit. This statement is perhaps as striking as Matt. 11:25-27, which speaks even more bluntly of God "hiding" the kingdom message from those who reject it. Matthew 11:27 also goes beyond 13:11-15 in affirming that Jesus shares the divine prerogative of revealing the Father to whomever he wills. One can only respond to these affirmations of divine sovereignty with awe and worship. In the Bible, if not always in Christian theology, the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of God's creatures go hand in hand. This is clear when Matt. 11:25-27 is compared with 11:28-30 and when Peter willingly confesses the identity of Jesus that God has revealed to him (16:15-17). It is also clear that those whom God sovereignly rejects are those who willfully reject God. God does not cast his pearls before swine (7:6). God's sovereign election, adapting F. P. Dunne's famous saying, "comforts those afflicted by sin and afflicts those comfortable with sin".

- What is encouraging for us as Bible teachers is that the preaching of the kingdom message will be attended with God's blessing in bringing people to faith!

ii. Jesus explains the Parable of the Sower (13:18-23)

- v18-22
 - Jesus begins his explanation of the parable (a 'fulfillment' of what he had just promised, that is to give understanding to those whom he chooses!) by telling his disciples to 'hear' it. This means more than just listening, it means understanding or grasping the meaning.
 - The seed sown besides the path indicates a superficial hearing of the kingdom message that is thwarted by the evil one, Satan.
 - The seed that sprouted in shallow soil indicates a fickle hearing of the message where initial enthusiasm turns to apostasy due to the problems of persecution.
 - The seed that sprouts and grows but is choked by thorns stands for a promising hearing of the message that ends because of competition from secular concerns, especially greed (cf 6:19-34).
 - Each of the above three responses indicate successively more growth, but none of them yield any fruit.
- v23
 - Only the fourth soil yields fruit, which signifies genuine discipleship: obedience to God's law as taught by Jesus (cf 3:9-10, 7:16-20, 12:33, 21:19, 34, 41, 43).
 - It is significant that fruit is only born when there is understanding of the message. As pointed out earlier, understanding is both a matter of God's sovereignty and human responsibility.

d) Parable of the weeds (13:24-30)

- Jesus's second parable uses the formula "the kingdom of heaven is like..", which is used many times in Matthew.
- v24-26
 - The second parable begins like the first, with a farmer planting seed, but here the seed is specifically called 'good'.
 - In this parable, the feature is an enemy who plants weeds among the wheat while everyone is asleep. The weeds grow among the wheat, but the two are indistinguishable until late in the growing season where the wheat begins to form heads of grain.
- v27-30
 - The farmers response portrays eschatological judgment, which will be explained by Jesus in v36-43. However, attentive readers can already see this through the developing dualism (landowner vs enemy, good seed/wheat vs evil weeds, gathered in the barn vs throw in fire), indicative of the battles between the cosmic forces of good and evil.

e) Parable of the mustard seed (13:31-32)

- v31-32
 - This parable and the following are much shorter than the first two parables. Both are introduced with a similar formula to the parable of the weeds, and both have a similar point: the growth of the kingdom. Thus both parables encourage disciples that despite frequent fruitless responses to the kingdom message, it does indeed bear fruit in many cases. These parables portray a contrast between the present reality and the ultimate destiny of the kingdom - what is humble now will be glorious later!
 - This parable emphasises how the kingdom grows from an insignificant beginning into the largest of garden shrubs, suitable for nesting birds.

f) Parable of the yeast (13:33)

- v33
 - The yeast also portrays the subtle though real influence of the kingdom in permeating the world.
 - The amount of flour leavened by the yeast is the equivalent of 13 litres. Three measures would amount to nearly a bushel of flour, enough to feed around 150 people.

g) Editorial conclusion: the Biblical basis for parables (13:34-35)

- v34-35
 - These verses transition from the parables spoken by Jesus to the crowd from the boat to his parables spoken in the house to his disciples. The move into a more private setting amounts to turning from those who for the most part do not understand, to those who do.
 - Matthew's editorial insertion states that Jesus's customary way of speaking to the crowds at this time is through parables, and asserts that this fulfils what the prophet said in Psalm 78:2.
 - In this lengthy psalm, Asaph recounts the history of Israel for the next generation. The psalm stresses Israel's unbelief (Ps. 78:8, 11, 17-22, 32-33, 36-37, 39-42, 56-58), which led to God's discipline (78:21, 31-34, 59-64). In spite of this, God continues to manifest his faithfulness to Israel through powerful acts (78:4-7, 12-16, 23-29, 38-39, 42-55) and by choosing David to shepherd them (78:65-72). In Matthew's view, Jesus is the son of David who fulfills the Davidic role as Israel's ultimate shepherd (Mat 1:1, 9:36). His parables, like those of Asaph, portray Israel's unbelief and God's discipline, but more important, they stress God's ongoing faithfulness to Israel through Jesus's kingdom mission.
 - This is thus the second 'fulfillment' formula in this discourse (the first was v14 where Isaiah 6:9-10 was cited). The first was by Jesus himself, but here it is Matthew who inserts it. Here the emphasis is God's faithfulness despite Israel's sin and discipline.

2. Parables to the Disciples (13:36-52)

- In the middle of the discourse Jesus returns to the house and at the disciples' request interpret the previous parable of the wheat and weeds. He then tells the disciples four more parables that correspond to the four parables told to the crowd.
- He first tells two short parables of sacrifice (the treasure and the pearl), which correspond with the two closing short parables from the discourse to the crowds (mustard seed and leaven). Next comes the parable of the net, which is similar to the wheat and weeds. A final parable challenges the disciples to grasp Jesus's teachings so that they may be wise scribes of the kingdom.

a) Interaction with the Disciples (13:36-43)

- v36-39
 - The disciples' question regarding interpretation styles this parable like that of the weeds, and Jesus's interpretation likewise focuses on the sobering detail of the weeds and their burning.
 - Jesus explains the parable in detail, listing seven key details:
 1. The sower (Jesus) sows
 2. good seed (the children of the kingdom) in
 3. the field (the world). In contrast,
 4. the enemy (the devil) sows
 5. weeds (the children of the evil one). There will be a
 6. harvest (the end of the age) with
 7. reapers (angels).
- v40-43
 - Having listed the meaning of the seven details, Jesus now develops the drama of eschatological harvest.
 - At the end of the age the angels separate the devil's people from Jesus's people, throwing the former into the fiery furnace of hell (cf Matt 3:12, 5:22) and gathering the latter into the kingdom.
 - There are a few details that are particularly noteworthy:
 - The judgment at the end of the world is portrayed as the removal of sinners from God's kingdom, not the removal of saints from a world that is to be destroyed (v41).
 - The people of Satan are characterised as 'lawless ones' who cause people to sin. The pain of their judgment is vividly described. In contrast, in an allusion to Daniel 12:3, the glorious bliss of Jesus's disciples, the righteous ones, is portrayed as the shining of the sun. Both of these allusions show how Jesus's parabolic imagery is rooted in biblical apocalyptic literature.
 - The enemy, a wolf in sheep's clothing (7:15), also sows seed, and his weeds are difficult to distinguish from Jesus's wheat (at first). Satan is the great imitator.
 - Jesus interpretation of his second parable has a more dualistic and eschatological tone than the first (the sower). Instead of describing people who bear fruit and those who do not, this second parable vividly stresses the destinies of two groups. There is also a clear contrast between of the roles of Jesus and the devil, the ultimate protagonist and antagonist behind the cosmic struggle portrayed here.

- Matthew's narrative frequently stresses the end of the age and the judgment to follow. John the Baptist's vivid language anticipates Jesus's words in this passage (3:12). Jesus speaks of himself as the eschatological judge in the Sermon on the Mount (7:22-23) and stresses the bliss of the future kingdom on earth as the reward for faithful discipleship (5:3,5, 10; 6:10; 7:21). Unexpectedly, many Gentiles will share in the eschatological banquet with the patriarchs (8:11-12). Confessing Jesus and aiding his messengers will be rewarded (10:32-33, 41-42). The fate of the towns that did not believe Jesus will be worse than that of notorious biblical towns when the judgment comes (11:22, 24; 12:41). Those who slander the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven (12:32). With this background, the reader of Matthew is not surprised at this parable's vivid portrayal of the end of the age. Much additional teaching lies ahead!

b) Parable of the hidden treasure (13:44)

- v44
 - Both these short parables make a similar point on the value of the kingdom.
 - In this first short parable, the emphasis is on the sacrifice entailed in discipleship when kingdom values are taken seriously.

c) Parable of the expensive pearl (13:45-46)

- v45-46
 - This parable differs from the previous one in that the merchant is actively seeking the pearl, whereas in the parable of the treasure the man accidentally discovers it.
 - Jesus does not interpret these two short parables, which has led to various interpretations amongst scholars.
 - These parables fit into the pattern of positive responses to the kingdom message, after the initial explanation of various responses, through the parable of the sower. In both these parables the great value of the kingdom is expressed, which would lead one to sacrifice everything to obtain it. This is a picture of discipleship as developed thus far in Matthew, where Jesus's first disciples leave their families and fishing business to follow Jesus (4:20-22).
 - Following Jesus entails the sacrifice of one's life for Jesus (16:25-26). The rich young ruler will not sell all he has to follow Jesus (19:21-22), but all who do make such a sacrifice will be richly rewarded (19:27-29). These parables present both the sacrifice and the resulting joy of those who follow Jesus (13:44; cf. 2:10). Despite the lure of wealth and worldly distractions (13:22), millions continue to follow Jesus at great cost in the present life but with greater prospects in the future. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (5:3).

d) Parable of the net (13:47-50)

- v47-48
 - The parable of the net is immediately explained as a picture of eschatological judgment. It uses the imagery of fishing to similar effect as that of the wheat and weeds earlier.
 - The net being used is a large 'dragnet' used to catch hundreds of fish. The imagery in the parable depicts the sorting of these fish on the beach

- v49-50
 - The interpretation of this parable does not identify its original entities as in v37-39, but simply describes eschatological events.
 - Angels (fishermen) will separate (sort the contents of the net) the wicked people (bad fish) from the righteous people (good fish). They throw the bad fish away (the furnace or hell). There is no mention here of what is done with the good fish in terms of the glory and bliss, as was with the parable of the weeds.
 - The similarities of the parable of the net and the parable of the weeds are evident. But among the differences between the two is the presence of "fish of every kind" in this parable, as opposed to only two kinds of plants, wheat and weeds, in the previous parable. Perhaps this is a subtle reminder of the universality of the kingdom mission, which is mandated to "all the nations" (28:19-20). The net does not discriminate as it gathers the fish, and neither should disciples of the kingdom as they fish for people (cf. 4:19; 22:9-10).

e) Parable of the householder (13:51-52)

- v51-52
 - Jesus asks the disciples whether they have finally grasped his parabolic teaching. When the disciples affirm their understanding Jesus responds with what should be viewed as the eighth and final parable in Matt 13, introduced with the characteristic formula 'is like..'
 - This parable is also about disciples of the kingdom, who are described as legal experts and likened to a homeowner who brings both new and old things from his storeroom. Jesus calls the disciples he has trained legal experts or scribes of the kingdom because their ministries will entail teaching the kingdom message as they draw upon what Jesus has taught them and teach their own disciples new truths tied to old truths.
 - Evidently, the new and old things should be understood in light of Jesus's teaching that he has not come to cancel but to fulfill the law and prophets (5:17-20).