

3-1-1967

The Thematic Structure of the Third Book of Matthew

Michael Gruel

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, mandd_gruel@msn.com

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THE THEMATIC STRUCTURE OF THE
THIRD BOOK OF MATTHEW

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Exegetical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by

Michael R. Gruel

March 1967

45691

Approved by: Victor Bartling

Advisor

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Scope and Purpose

The scope of this paper is somewhat obvious from its title. It will deal with the Third Book of Matthew. This is a title used to designate that which most commentators have set apart as the third major section of Matthew's Gospel, chapters 11 to 13:52. Since it may be necessary to lay a little groundwork, part of the second chapter will deal with the structure of Matthew, specifically that which outlines the Gospel on the basis of its five major sections.

My purpose in this paper must also be defined. It is not intended to give a detailed exegetical study of these chapters, but rather to discover and elucidate the unity to be found within this one section of material, to show the major connections between the narrative and discourse parts of this one section, and to set forth some implications for interpretation that emerge from this unity and these connections. There will be no effort to interpret every section in this light, but only those which in the light of our study seem to bear more directly upon the limited purpose of this paper.

The Necessary Presuppositions

In a study of this kind there are certain presuppositions

with which one must operate. It is outside of the scope of this paper to sit in judgment upon them. They will be used as a working basis for the study.

The first presupposition used as a basis for this study is that Matthew in writing his Gospel made use of the various documents that were at his disposal, one of which was Mark's Gospel. Another likely source which Matthew used is that which scholars have called Q. To this document are assigned those passages which only Matthew and Luke have in common. Besides these two there may have been another source containing those sayings which are found only in Matthew's Gospel. This presupposition is important because it is by comparing Matthew with his sources, especially Mark, that we get a better idea of what Matthew's design was and find a hint as to what his structural intentions may have been.

Our second presupposition is that the analysis of Matthew which divides the Gospel into five major sections is a correct analysis. This analysis will be treated in Chapter II, not to explain fully or vindicate this position, but to lay the necessary groundwork for the reader who is not familiar with the analysis. This presupposition, of course, is basic for setting apart what we shall here call the Third Book of Matthew. In this way it can be studied primarily in its own light. For the reader who is interested in further study on this analysis the sources given for Chapter II are a good start.

The Methodology

In the course of my research, I was unable to find any one book written on just this subject. However, since about 1930, when B. W. Bacon published his work on the five part structure of Matthew, almost every commentator has dealt in some way with this assumed structure. In commenting on the various sections, then, the authors have often indicated points of comparison and the evident unity of each section. For the purpose of a somewhat complete discussion of the subject, it was necessary to consult pertinent parts of many books which deal either deal with this section of Matthew or which give an introduction to the Gospel as a whole. In addition, since the discourse section of Matthew's Third Book is the chapter of parables, it was necessary to consult books and articles on the parables, especially such as treat the subject of Matthew 13 as a whole. This paper, then, has drawn together from many sources the bits of information which point up the thematic structure of Matthew's Third Book.

This paper will follow a simple outline. Chapter II will lay some groundwork with respect to the structure of Matthew's entire Gospel. Chapter III will take a close look at chapter 13 in an attempt to find the basic theme and probable structure of the chapter. Chapter IV will deal with Matthew 11 and 12 to find their theme and point out possible comparisons to chapter 13 and possible implications for structure

and meaning. Chapter V will offer a summary of the conclusions emerging from our study and will list a few areas for further research.

CHAPTER II

MATTHEW 11 - 13:52; EVIDENCE OF UNITY

A Look at the Total Matthean Structure

The structure of the Gospel of Matthew has for some time been one of the centers of exēgetical discussion. The modern phase of this discussion most likely finds its point of departure in a book by B. W. Bacon entitled Studies in Matthew, published in 1930. Bacon's conclusion was that the structure of Matthew centers around five discourse sections, each of which is preceded by a narrative section. This conclusion concerning the structure of Matthew has been largely adopted by such men as Krister Stendahl, Floyd Filson, C. H. Lohr, J. A. Findlay, and many other commentators. An outline of the Gospel of Matthew based on Bacon's conclusion can be seen in Table 1.¹

TABLE 1

THE STRUCTURE OF MATTHEW

Ch. 1-4	Narrative:	Birth and Beginnings
Ch. 5-7	Discourse:	Blessings, Entering the Kingdom
Ch. 8-9	Narrative:	Authority and Invitation
Ch. 10	Discourse:	Mission Sermon
Ch. 11-12	Narrative:	Rejection by This Generation
Ch. 13	Discourse:	Parables of the Kingdom
Ch. 14-17	Narrative:	Acknowledgement by the Disciples
Ch. 18	Discourse:	Community Discourse
Ch. 19-22	Narrative:	Authority and Invitation
Ch. 23-25	Discourse:	Woes, Coming of the Kingdom
Ch. 26-28	Narrative:	Death and Burial; Rebirth

The basis on which those chapters so designated above are called "discourse" sections does not rest only upon the fact that they contain sayings of Jesus; for the narrative sections also contain some sayings of Jesus. There are further reasons for setting them apart as distinct units. At the end of each of the discourses Matthew has placed a refrain. In all cases these refrains are practically identical, and each time they begin exactly the same way, "When Jesus had finished...", and they end with a word summarizing what has just been finished, such as "these sayings" or "these parables." Furthermore, it is generally agreed that each of the discourse sections has a basic thematic unity. With such a clear design of Matthew to set off one part of his Gospel from another, the division of the Gospel into narrative and discourse sections is quite obvious.

This is not to say that there has been unanimous agreement on this structure. There are those who argue that Matthew could not have rearranged the chronology of Jesus' life so as to come up with such a structure. Therefore they maintain that the Gospel must be viewed chronologically. A view of the structure of Matthew, however, does not deny the chronological element in the story of Jesus' life.

It is true that Matt. contains a general chronological and geographical pattern. This does justice to the Gospel as the story of an actual human life. But the author's topical grouping of material shows that detailed chronology and geography were not decisive for his purpose. The teaching of Jesus, the mystery of his purpose, and the theological meaning of his

work find limited expression in this outline.²

Therefore it seems that this structure of the Gospel does not deny or preclude a chronology, but on the other hand, it also does not limit Matthew to a chronology or a simple history of Jesus' life. Matthew is also saying something about what Jesus' words and works meant and always will mean.

There are also those, who, arguing from the basis of Matthew's use of Mark as a major source, say that "...it is hardly possible to make a detailed division of the gospel into five consistent books with five distinct headings, as BACON and FINDLAY do, for they fail to recognize strongly enough Matthew's nature as a revised Gospel of Mark."³ And yet even these men do not totally deny the possibility of such an analysis, or even less the light that such an analysis sheds on various passages. Indeed, the author of the previous quote, for example, says that in section three (Mt. 11-13:52) "...there is a striking relation between preparatory material and discourse, and here Findlay's observations are enlightening."⁴ Few would deny that Matthew used Mark as a source. Yet the freedom with which he used Mark, as will be shown in the second part of this chapter, and the resultant unity at least in general theme for each section of the Gospel, make it clear that Matthew was doing much more than revising Mark; he was offering his own interpretation of the life of Jesus.

Evidence Toward Matthean Intentions:
A Synoptic Comparison

That Matthew's Gospel is based first of all on Mark and secondly on a source which Matthew and Luke both used, commonly known as Q, is generally accepted in current New Testament Introductions. It is obvious from comparison that Matthew was quite free in his use of Mark. He does not follow Mark's order everywhere, but rather gathers together items from various parts of Mark's work. It can be presupposed that Matthew has a reason in doing as he did. Such rearrangement would tend to indicate that Matthew is following some other outline than Mark used and that in supporting the various parts or themes of his outline Matthew gathers supporting ideas from various occasions in Jesus' life, or from various of the occasions as Mark tells the story. Since we do not have the document called Q and can only attempt to reconstruct it from a comparison of Matthew and Luke, it is impossible to know just how much either Matthew or Luke rearranged that source. It is clear, however, that Matthew and Luke do not have what they both seem to owe to Q in the same order. If we take Matthew's use of Mark as a guide, we may be justified in concluding that Matthew also did some rearranging of what he borrowed from Q.

A comparison of the major sections in Matthew 11 - 13 with the parallel sections in Luke and Mark shows Matthew's freedom and discloses a purpose of some kind. Such a comparison

can be seen in Table 2.

TABLE 2
SYNOPTIC COMPARISON OF MATTHEW 11 - 13
TO MARK AND LUKE

<u>Matthew</u>	<u>Mark (within his order)</u>	<u>Mark (from elsewhere)</u>	<u>Luke</u>
11:2-6			7:18-23
11:7-19			7:24-35
11:20-24			10:12-15
11:25-27			10:21-22
11:28-30			
12:1-8	2:23-28		6:1-5
12:9-14	3:1-6		6:6-11
12:15-21	3:7-12		6:17-19
12:22-30	3:22-27		11:14-15, 17-23
12:31-37	3:28-30		12:10; 6:43-45
12:38-42		8:11-12	11:16, 29-32
12:43-45			11:24-26
12:46-50	3:31-35		8:19-21
13:1-9	4:1-9		8:4-8
13:10-17	4:10-12	4:25; 8:17b-18	8:9-10
13:18-23	4:13-20		8:11-15
13:24-30			
13:31-32	4:30-32		13:18-19
13:33			13:20-21
13:34-35	4:33-34		
13:36-43			
13:44-46			
13:47-50			
13:51-52			
13:53-58		6:1-6a	

The table shows quite clearly just from where in Mark Matthew may have borrowed some material; where he stayed within the Markan order; where he went outside of it; and where he added to it. It should be noted that Matthew here borrowed from the very early section of Mark, chapters 2 - 4, to construct what is his own middle section, chapters 11 - 13. It is also interesting that Matthew 11 is completely missing in Mark and that,

while the material is found in Luke, it is not found connected in one section as it is in Matthew. The last part of chapter 13, from verse 36 to verse 52 is peculiar to Matthew. The section beginning at 13:53, which is the beginning of the Fourth Book of Matthew, again shows Matthew's freedom; for it jumps ahead a little more than a full chapter before picking up the Markan order again.

It seems fairly clear, then, that Matthew intended what we shall call his Third Book to be taken thematically as a unit and that he so structured his materials as to fit his purpose in this section. It is with this in mind that we now proceed to examine the possible theme and structure in Matthew's Third Book.

CHAPTER III

THE THEMATIC STRUCTURE OF MATTHEW 13:1-52

As was stated above, Matthew 13:1-52 forms a unit within Matthew's over-all structure as the third of five major discourse sections. It may be assumed that such a unit in structure will also have a unity of subject. Such is the case in the discourse of Matthew's Third Book. First of all, the chapter consists almost entirely of parables, the only lengthy interruption being the explanation of the use of parables. Secondly, six of the parables in this section begin with a formula introduction making reference to the Kingdom of Heaven. If this were a common Matthean pattern it would not be so important, but of the ten times that Matthew begins a parable in this way, six are in this chapter. It is clear right at the outset, then, that the Third Book of Matthew consists in part of a collection of Jesus' parables on the subject of the Kingdom of Heaven. What we must do now is examine just what is being said about the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Kingdom of Heaven Demands Either Acceptance or Rejection

That the Kingdom of Heaven is not to be viewed entirely as some future event or as a place of abode is clear from the Gospel itself. Indeed, some have even gone so far as to say that the Kingdom of Heaven should not be viewed in any way as something outside of earthly experience.

...~~From~~ this point on, the term, 'the Kingdom of Heaven' refers not to the final establishment of the kingdom of God over all the earth, but to the work of Christ in the earth between the days of His flesh and His advent in power and in glory.¹

Nonetheless, that there is a future element in the Kingdom has been correctly stated by most authors, though not to the point of denying the Kingdom's present reality. The following statement sums up the usual view:

The conclusion...is, we believe, that Jesus did look toward a consummation of that which had begun in his own ministry, and that he did indicate various aspects of that consummation. But he did not offer any specific instruction as to its exact nature. ...To do justice to this teaching we must hold fast to the conviction that the consummation of that which has begun in the ministry of Jesus will be.... This teaching puts the emphasis where it belongs: on the state of tension between present and future in which the believer must live and move and have his being.²

That men must react to this Kingdom is the next point that is obvious. This is evident from the one parable in this section which does not begin with the "Kingdom of Heaven is like..." formula, but rather serves somewhat as a heading for the whole group of parables. This is the parable of the sower. In sowing his seed, the sower finds two basic results; either the seed grows and produces fruit, in which case it is useful, or it does not grow or produce fruit; indeed, sometimes it doesn't grow at all. Jesus' own explanation makes it clear that this is meant to refer to the spreading of the Word, which "...throughout this chapter means the good news of the kingdom...."³ It is the news of the Kingdom as it comes to man that either grows or does not grow.

This two pointed possibility is even more clear in Jesus'

answer to the question why he taught in the form of parables. The reason is that there is a possibility of two responses to the Kingdom; either acceptance or rejection. The parables in turn either reveal or conceal the truths of the Kingdom, depending on the stance of the hearer with regard to the Kingdom of Heaven. The concealment is directed towards Christ's opposition and those who reject him. "Those whose hearts were open to the witness of the Lord would discover in these parables the heavenly secrets He intended to unveil (vv. 11-12; cf. 11:25-27)."⁴ These truths or "mysteries" of the Kingdom were indeed too profound for man to discover by his own intellect or knowledge, and yet it is given to the disciples to know these mysteries (13:11). This understanding does not denote any event which could have its basis in the natural reason of man;

...the disciples are not intellectually more gifted than the multitude which sees and does not see. The opposite to it [understanding] is obduracy. It is an opening of the heart, an understanding of what God is now speaking. But it is not only for the 'that' of the divine speaking, but also for the 'what'. It is the opening of the understanding for the revelation. Yet the human intellect is not excluded, since it also has to do with the understanding of parables. Understanding is no achievement of man, but is God's action on man, a gift.⁵

So it is to those who are open to the Kingdom, to those who have made the commitment of following Jesus that the parables are spoken as enlightenment.

That Jesus was not proclaiming anything radically new is also clear from the last two verses of this section, verses

51-52. Jesus has given his disciples a treasure which contains both the "new" and the "old." He taught them the mysteries that were hidden since the beginning of the world, so what they know "...is both new and old--old because it was determined by God at the beginning; and new because it has only now been revealed by Jesus."⁶ And beyond this, what Jesus proclaimed was not in reality out of step with the Old Covenant as it was originally intended by God. It was the false ideas of some men concerning that covenant which Jesus sought to eradicate and which caused those same people to reject him. But for him who was "trained for the kingdom," what Jesus spoke was not only new, but it was old.

The proclamation of the Kingdom of Heaven in its full glory is Matthew's concern. It is going to be rejected by some for various reasons, but it will be accepted by others. It is in a way new, but it is also ancient. The Kingdom demands a man to put aside his own ideas of what should be and to gain true understanding in following Jesus. That is the Kingdom of Heaven. It is this important subject that Matthew places in central position in his Gospel and concerning which he elucidates further.

The Kingdom at its Beginning

It may have seemed strange to some of Jesus' followers that, even as late as the time when Matthew wrote, such a message as Jesus and the church after him told was not more

widely accepted. If this Kingdom is as great and will be as great as is said, it would seem to many that it should grow magnificently. To meet this problem two parables are given. The parables of the mustard seed and the leaven point out that the Kingdom's beginnings may indeed be small, but this is not the test of the kingdom, for it will indeed grow. In effect we must realize that the Kingdom does have a history;⁷ it does not happen overnight. This does not mean growth will happen in the sense of betterment or perfection, for the Kingdom is "...in itself always perfect, only the conditions of its presence change, and are other in this world than they shall be in the coming one. In this sense we may say that Jesus taught two stages in the coming of the Kingdom, one corresponding to the time of sowing and growth, the other corresponding to the harvest."⁸ These parables call for a faith which is not offended or turned away by the small appearance and humility of the Kingdom in this present time.

The Consummation of the Kingdom

The parables of the tares in the wheatfield and the drag-net have been the center of much discussion for years. Today there are basically two views on their interpretation. Those who hold that the Kingdom Jesus proclaimed is one that is in this world already realized see these two parables as describing a present event.

The appeal goes to all and sundry: the worthy are separated from the unworthy by their reaction to the

demands which the appeal involves....

Here then we have an interpretation of the parable which brings it into line with other sayings of Jesus and relates it to the actual course of His ministry. The Kingdom of God, in process of realization in and through that ministry, is like the work of fishing with a drag-net, for the appeal is made to all indiscriminately, and yet in the nature of things it is selective; and, let us recall, this selection is the divine judgement, though men pass it upon themselves by their ultimate attitude to the appeal.⁹

To many, however, such a view fails to take cognizance of the picture of the ultimate end to the Kingdom in the world and its inauguration as the perfect Kingdom under God. "The nucleus of this parable [of the tares], too, is the traditional metaphor of the harvest, denoting the eschatological crisis at the end of the world."¹⁰ This leaves one with the question concerning the tares, the evil doers; just what is their relation to the Kingdom? It seems that we are forced to admit that the Kingdom's appearance, in the present, "...takes place only in the form of salvation and postpones judgement. That is reserved for it's full manifestation in the future."¹¹ In the present time the weeds and the wheat grow together. It is noteworthy that the weeds are not due to bad seed from the sower of the wheatfield, but are introduced into the field by outside forces. When the harvest comes, however, the time for separation has come.

While the emphasis on the separation involved for the members of the Kingdom of Heaven even within this world is a valid one, and perhaps has often been overlooked, it does not seem possible to justify totally doing away with the con-

summation of the Kingdom in the future. The Kingdom is here in the world in a period of growth which is aimed at fruition, but in that event of final fruition, the harvest, the weeds or bad fruit must be separated out. The Kingdom tends toward perfection and one day will achieve it via God's judgment.

The Worth of the Kingdom

There are two more parables which emphasize yet another point concerning the Kingdom of Heaven. The Kingdom is of the utmost value and worth. And as such it demands that a person devalue what might otherwise have been valuable to him. The parables of the treasure in the field and the great pearl emphasize this point. In each of them two things are predominant; first, the value of the object is so great that it demands one's all to obtain it; second, the nature of its demand is to give up everything else to obtain it.

Both parables challenge to decision: "The Kingdom is wealth which demonetises all other currencies. Are you ready to part with all in order to gain it?"¹²

It is naturally only that which is of the greatest value which can make such a demand. And still its demand to give up all is only a demand to find that which is of the greatest value of all, the Kingdom of Heaven. It is only that person who recognizes the worth of the Kingdom who will make the decision. But for him who sees no value there is little choice but to reject the demand.

Possible Structures of Matthew 13:1-52

A Special Problem: Seven or Eight Parables?

There have been some who have insisted that in this Third Book of Matthew there are not just seven parables, as is usually held, but there are eight. The eighth one, they say, is the parable of the householder at the very end of this discourse. This is the householder who brings forth out of his treasure things new and old. The question of seven or eight parables will probably be debated as long as the world remains. Some argue that it does not begin with the formula "the Kingdom of Heaven is like...", and others answer that neither does the parable of the sower, which is an introduction to the chapter just as this parable of the householder is the conclusion. Furthermore some will point to the fact that Jesus does say, "...every scribe which is instructed unto the Kingdom of Heaven is like...." And while some say that it is too short—it is more like an analogy, others reply that the parables of the mustard seed and leaven are equally brief. So the problem remains really unsolved; are there seven or eight parables?

Regardless of the niceties of that problem, however, thematically the householder saying is an integral part of the chapter just as is the parable of the sower. Few would disagree that it forms some sort of conclusion to the parables, whether the saying itself is a parable or not.

The sower and the householder both speak of the treatment of God's Word by the individual recipient.... That of the sower is the key to the understanding of the mysteries of the kingdom, that of the householder shows the use that is to be made of the mysteries when they are thus understood.¹³

That this saying is therefore important for the understanding of the parables in this section is equally obvious.

It [householder saying] covers all the preceding seven, for it shows the use which is to be made of the teaching they contain. It also gives a key to their interpretation, for the "things new and old" are plainly the things contained in the preceding parables, and therefore the mysteries of the kingdom must include both. Some teach that the kingdom parables refer only to the earthly kingdom prophesied of old..., others see only the present dispensation; but there are things new and old in His teaching, and we must recognize them both as equally true and equally important.¹⁴

The Over-all Theme: the Kingdom of Heaven

To sum up briefly the unifying theme of this dialog section of Matthew, we see the emphasis on the Kingdom of Heaven as central. This Kingdom comes with the spreading of the Word, the good news, but it is not accepted by everyone. The Kingdom is of the greatest worth even though it begins in such a meager way. And while it is on earth it is not yet pure; not due to any fault of the proclaimer of the Word, however. So there will come a day when the true members of the Kingdom will be separated from the false, a day of judgment.

The Individual Emphases: Their Structure

It would seem obvious even without looking closely that Matthew would have given the various emphases of this chapter

an arrangement of some kind. Further study only bears out this assumption. There is a definite arrangement, whether actually intentional or not, within the discourse section of Matthew's Third Book. To begin with, we must notice the first obvious break into parts. In verse 1 we see Jesus leaving the house and going to the seashore to speak. He addresses the multitudes. Later in verse 36 Jesus sends the multitudes away, goes into the house, and addresses the remaining parables to the disciples. This breaks the discourse into two sections: four parables to the crowd; three parables (or four, if we include the householder) to the disciples. If we center only on the parables which begin with the "Kingdom of Heaven is like..." formula, we come up with three and three. This would leave open the possibility that the parable of the sower is an introduction to the entire subject of the kingdom; it lays the groundwork on which the rest are built. It also permits the householder saying to act similarly as a conclusion.

Taking these two sets of three, then, we find that they can be separated still further by their themes. In the first group of three we have first the parable of the tares, then the two parables of the mustard seed and the leaven, which are very similar in meaning. In the second group we find first two similar parables in the hidden treasure and the great pearl, then the parable of the drag-net, which is very similar in theme to the parable of the tares. It is in this

manner that Ada Habershon has dealt with this dialog. Table 3 gives the structure in diagrammatic form.¹⁵

TABLE 3

STRUCTURE OF THE PARABLES IN
THE THIRD BOOK OF MATTHEW

1	<u>Sower</u>			(Introduction)
+	1	<u>Tares</u>		
3	+		C	
	2	<u>Mustard-seed</u>	O	S I M I L A R
		<u>Leaven</u>	N	
AND		<u>Hidden Treasure</u>	R	
	2	<u>Great Pearl</u>	A	
3	+		S	
+	1	<u>Dragnet</u>	T	
1	<u>Householder</u>			(Conclusion)

While this structure does justice to the actual parables in the chapter and is thus helpful in this respect, there are three things which it seems to leave out. First, there is the question and answer to why Jesus spoke in parables. Second, there are the interpretations given to two of the parables, the sower and the tares. Third, there is the conclusion type of section after the first four parables in verses 34-35. These are completely ignored in the above outline.

Another structure might offer itself as a possibility. As was done above, a division will be made at the most obvious place, where Jesus goes into the house. This leaves us with four parables outside the three inside. It also puts one of the given interpretations on each side of the division.

If we then take the sower and the question concerning why Jesus spoke in parables as separate introductory material to the other parables, these two interpretations fall at the beginning of each section. At the end of each of these two sections, then, we are left with a short saying, both of which seem similar in character. In verse 35 Jesus is said to be fulfilling prophecy by making known the things that have been hidden from the foundation of the world. Over against this, verse 52 speaks of the disciples as the scribes of the Kingdom who bring out that which is new and old. In the light of all this the following outline seems to loom as a possibility:

Introduction: Parable of the Sower and Reason for Speaking in Parables(Mt. 13:1-17).

Part One: An Interpretation, Three Parables, Conclusion.
 Parable of the Sower Interpreted(Mt. 13:18-23).
 Parable of the Tares(Mt. 13:24-30).
 Parable of the Mustard Seed(Mt. 13:31-32).
 Parable of the Leaven(Mt. 13:33).
 Conclusion: Things Old Explained(Mt. 13:34-35).

Part Two: An Interpretation, Three Parables, Conclusion.
 Parable of the Tares Interpreted(Mt. 13:36-43).
 Parable of the Hidden Treasure(Mt. 13:44)
 Parable of the Costly Pearl(Mt. 13:45-46)
 Parable of the Drag-net(Mt. 13:47-50)
 Conclusion: Things New and Old(Mt. 13:51-52)

This outline does not destroy the very helpful symmetry that was pointed out in the former outline, and this outline also accounts for every portion of the chapter. This is very fitting, since some have pointed out that the entire Gospel of Matthew seems to have a symmetry with Book Three as its apex.¹⁶

It must be admitted that a definitely ~~Matthewan~~ outline can

never be reconstructed, and any attempt at finding a structure will always have its objectors for various reasons. This does not mean, though, that all such attempts are invalid nor that they should not be used insofar as they aid our interpretation. Perhaps it must suffice finally to say that it is at least clear that the discourse section of Matthew's Third Book does show a definite unity of thematic material and gives some indication of having been given a structure to aid that theme by Matthew.

CHAPTER IV

THE THEMATIC STRUCTURE OF MATTHEW 11 AND 12

There is no one, to my knowledge, who has done for Matthew 11 and 12 what has been done for Matthew 13 as far as structure is concerned. It is probably so because such a structure just is not to be found in this section. This is not to say, however, that the narrative section of Matthew's Third Book does not really belong with the discourse section that follows it. It is rather clear that "...the function of narrative in Matthew is to focus attention on the teaching section."¹ And it is also clear from most commentators that also the narrative section in Matthew 11 and 12 does just that with its emphasis on one major theme, that of acceptance vs. rejection. Besides this there are a few portions of the narrative which seem to be comparable to certain of the parables that follow in chapter 13. Thus the unity of Matthew's Third Book is given clarity.

The Over-all Theme: Acceptance or Rejection

It is obvious from even a little study of Matthew 11 and 12 and from reading any number of commentators that these chapters do express one overriding major theme, whatever minor themes there may be. Almost every section of this narrative deals with the question of the acceptance or rejection of the message of Jesus. They form basically a section "...on

the response or lack of response...."2 It is to this theme that each part can be related.

It is clear, first of all, that there was an obvious reason for men to reject the claims of the Kingdom proclaimed by Jesus. It was not what was expected by most people, not even by John the Baptist. Hence even he had to send his disciples to Jesus to ascertain the validity of his claims. Jesus could do no better than to point to his deeds as evidence, and yet it was these very deeds which caused the trouble. They did not fit the normal concept of the coming of the Kingdom as a time of judgment and purification. Jesus' deeds caused men to reject his claims. So Jesus' words that follow can be said to sum up the entire theme of the two chapters, "Blessed is he who shall not be offended in me."3 There is a problem in accepting the Kingdom simply because of the unusual demands that it makes.

The Kingdom demanded a reversal of what had been normal to the Judaism of that day. It meant a complete reversal of the religious structure. This was not easy to take.

The preaching of the kingdom means that the least ones are the greatest. A revolution has taken place. That is precisely the Pharisees' objection. Jesus picks it up: "And so it is true (as some of you have heard the objection voiced), ever since John the Baptist the kingdom of heaven experiences violence, and violent men (these publicans and sinners) seize it." Vs. 13, then, explains the reason for the action covered in vs. 12. The arrival of the new age has marked a transitional period, as the critics of the new age have well noted.⁴

John the Baptist expected an immediate judgment on the vile leaders of the Jewish religion; the leaders of the Jewish

religion expected a complete vindication of their righteousness in a new and glorious kingdom ushered in by the Messiah. Against both of these Jesus proclaimed a Kingdom of love through words and deeds of love on those who recognized their own need. This was a scandal to both wrong views. John sent to Jesus to find a basis for acceptance; for assurance that acceptance would be correct; and the Pharisees and other religious leaders rejected the message outright.

The Kingdom also meant the acceptance in faith of much that was against popular thought of the day.

The matters of faith which are mentioned here are that Jesus is the Christ(11:2) who has come after Elijah(11:14); he is the Son of man(11:19, 12:8, 12:32, 40), the servant of the Lord(12:18), the Son of David(12:23), the one on whom the Spirit of God rests(12:18, 28, 32) whose miracles are signs of the coming kingdom(11:20ff., 12:28). These things God has hidden from those who do not believe, who are spoken of as this generation (11:6, 12:39, 41f., 45), the wise and understanding(11:25), the scribes and Pharisees(12:2, 14, 24, 38), Jesus' mother and his brothers(12:46). On the other hand, God has revealed these things to the poor(11:5), to those who take no offence at him(11:6), to those who have ears to hear(11:15), to babes(11:25), to those to whom he chooses to reveal them(11:27), who labour and are heavy laden(11:28), the Gentiles(12:18, 21), his disciples(12:49), whoever does the will of the Father(12:50).⁵

All of this raised difficulties: the apathy of the crowd and especially the violent opposition of the Jewish leaders. While the reaction of acceptance was a reaction ruled by love and concern, the reaction of rejection was ruled by controversy and bitter debate, finally leading even to murder. Thus Jesus condemned violently the cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida for their refusal to repent. Thus it is that Jesus could debate

so vociferously with the Pharisees, pointing out their hypocrisy, self-righteousness, and inconsistencies.

The Kingdom demands a reaction from the people, either acceptance or rejection. There is no middle ground. And it is so often in the doing and saying of things that are of the very nature of the Kingdom that the acceptance comes for some and the rejection for others. It is when Jesus heals, when he purifies, when he feeds that the Pharisees reject the Kingdom, the Kingdom that replaces the many laws of self-righteousness with the righteousness and love of Jesus for the needy. And so to some the Kingdom is a mystery.

That this leads up to the chapter of the parables is rather obvious. The parable of the sower begins with the assumption that there is not going to be fruit from all of the seed which is sown. There is going to be some rejection. Indeed, the whole reason for using parables is to make the Kingdom and mystery, open to the believer, but hidden to the un-believer. As a mystery the Kingdom demands the commitment of belief to gain understanding.

It is because of this acceptance and rejection that the Kingdom begins so modestly. The validity of the Kingdom does not rest on its acceptance by all people. The Kingdom will grow nonetheless. And there will come a time when there will be no more rejection, when the time of waiting will be past. Then those who rejected will be left out of the Kingdom as it appears in all its glory.

Individual Comparisons to Matthew 13:1-52

Besides the fact that Matthew 11 and 12 lead up to 13 in the theme which they develop, there are various parts of the narrative section in 11 and 12 which seem to be related more closely in theme to certain of the parables in chapter 13. This is not so unusual in the light of Matthew's obvious intentions in each of his five books to present a unified theme in each.

Perhaps the most easy comparison to observe and the best one to show just what is meant by such comparisons is one that was already alluded to above. There seems to be a relation between the Pharisees and the ground in the parable of the sower.

The fruitless ground here in the parable stands for the Pharisees, who have not believed in Jesus, whereas the good soil is the disciples: Jesus has just said of them that they do the will of his Father(12:50).⁶

Whether Matthew intended to make a direct connection to the Pharisees with the fruitless soil is not sure, but in so far as the Pharisees are typical of those who reject the Word that is sown, they may be identified with the ground in the parable. It is also clear that the fruitless ground is not meant to symbolize only the Pharisees, but rather any person who like the Pharisees rejects the message of the Kingdom.

It is equally difficult not to see some connection between the saying concerning the good tree and its fruit(12:33ff.) and

the parable of the tares. This points out that there are only two reactions possible to the Kingdom. Either one is possible now; it may even be that people who have made both types of reaction, whether acceptance or rejection, will seem to be within the Kingdom now, but there will come a time when the bad will be taken out and burned. Might not this also have been taken by some or perhaps even intended by Matthew as a parable against the Pharisees? If so, the same would hold true of the parable of the drag-net. If there is a connection between these two parables and the saying concerning the bad tree, which is decidedly connected to the Pharisees, the meaning of the parables might become more clear to us.

One of the most clear and also most interesting comparisons is found in Matthew 11:15 and 13:9. These two verses are exact replicas of each other: "He who has ears ("to hear" is added by some manuscripts), let him hear." It would seem that such a correspondence would say something about the structure of the two sections. In the chapter of the parables this verse comes immediately after the parable of the sower, which, as we have noted above, may be a part of the introduction to the chapter of parables. The same phrase in chapter eleven also occurs near the beginning of the chapter. It follows after the section concerning John the Baptist, especially his question to Jesus and Jesus' evaluation of John.

It would seem entirely possible, then, that Matthew is intending to set these two sections off over against each other.

This becomes even more obvious through a detailed comparison of the three synoptics. Chapter 11 is Matthew's own work as it occurs nowhere else in any other gospel. While the parable of the sower occurs also in the other synoptics with a sentence on the subject of hearing, Matthew has made an obvious change in the phrase on hearing from what Mark has, a change which Luke does not follow. It would seem that Matthew intended these two verses to read exactly the same so as to make these two opening sections obvious. If, then, Matthew is setting off the first part of chapter 11 with the first part of chapter 13, what is his reason?

This is a subject which I have found dealt with by no one else. It seems obvious that there are some possible comparisons in the two sections, though. One of the questions which such a comparison perhaps helps to clarify is that of the meaning or content of "Word" in the parable. That the "Word" means the message of the Kingdom is obvious, but just exactly how is it expressed or made known is not clearly stated. Perhaps by looking at chapter 11 we get a clue. What was it to which Jesus directed John in answer to his question? The Kingdom is coming in these ways: "The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them." If this is an indication of what the Word is, then it is obviously much more than the spoken word alone; it is the message of love, whether spoke or acted out. This

would also say something about any interpretation of the parable which has emphasized the spoken word or the sermon to the limiting of action and service, or vice versa.

The question might further be raised, then, if the sower in the parable symbolizes only Jesus as the proclaimer of the Kingdom. "Yes" may seem to be the obvious answer at first glance, but if we compare the two sections again, we find that this is not the case. When Jesus told John to consider what had been happening, he was referring to what had been happening just before the question was asked. As Matthew set up his outline, this would refer back to the former section, the Second Book of Matthew, chapters 8 to 10, whose discourse was the sending out of the disciples to preach and to heal. When they returned they were filled with joy at the success they had experienced in preaching and especially in healing. This comparison would lead us to conclude, then, that the sower is not just Jesus, but is any one of his followers as well.

The same sentence which we have used to set up the above comparisons occurs again after the introduction to the second part of the parable chapter, the interpretation of the parable of the tares. Here again Jesus says, "He that hath ears(to hear), let him hear." So now we have three introductions which possibly should be viewed together. This last introduction again deals with seed as does the sower section. Another element is drawn in: an enemy sows bad seed in the field.

At the harvest these weeds will be separated from the grain and will be burned. The fruit of the good seed will be saved. With this emphasis on the good seed, there is a possible parallel between all three introductions. It might be summarized in the sixth verse of Matthew 11, "Blessed is he who shall not be offended in me." This is the good seed. This is the fruit of the good seed. It is the person who is not offended at Jesus and his message who is the good soil. It is this person who produces fruit. It is this person who will be saved and gathered in at the harvest.

Doubtless there are other possible comparisons which could be made by further study. For our purposes, though, this should suffice to emphasize the unity in thematic structure in the Third Book of Matthew.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER QUESTIONS

The Thematic Structure of the Third Book of Matthew

It is fairly clear at this point that the section of Matthew from chapter 11 to 13:52 forms a unity within the over-all structure of Matthew. That this unity is only one of a group of five such units can be studied in many books and commentaries on Matthew's Gospel. The same can be done for the relation of the theme of Matthew's third Book to the other four.

The theme with which this unit deals is that of the Kingdom, to express it most briefly; or to speak more specifically, it centers on the demands of the Kingdom and the possible reactions to it, including their ultimate results. Those reactions can best be summarized in two words: acceptance and rejection. The message of the Kingdom is one of love and concern; it makes itself known in word and in action. This message must either be accepted, in which case it incorporates one into the Kingdom and saves, or it must be rejected, in which case it alienates and condemns. Furthermore, acceptance itself is not easy, for it demands a complete change of one's attitude and way of life. It demands a commitment to the Lord of the Kingdom, Jesus Christ.

The various themes of the parables are set into fairly obvious groups within the total structure of the discourse

section of Matthew's Third Book. While no clear structure is obvious for Matthew 11 and 12, it is clear that there is a definite relationship between the two sections, the narrative of chapters 11 and 12 and the discourse of chapter 13. There are even some very decided points of comparison between the two which add to the interpretation of the theme of acceptance and rejection.

Questions for Further Study

There is probably much concerning the relationship between the narrative and dialog sections of Matthew's Third Book which has not been brought out either in this paper or in the many books on Matthew. It would seem to be advantageous that such a complete study be made for this section as well as for the other four books in Matthew. This would naturally fall as a demand upon those who hold firmly to the structure of Matthew as containing five major sections.

The meaning and content of the idea implied by "Word" was dealt with lightly above. It would seem that further study of this word and its usages, especially in Matthew and the Septuagint, would be helpful and interesting. It might also be interesting to explore any possible relations between Matthew's usage of "Word" and John's usage of the same.

With this we close this study of the Third Book of Matthew, hoping that it might open to its readers new possibilities of interpretation and new directions for study.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER II

¹For a brief study of Matthew's structure on which Table 1 is based see Charles H. Lohr, "Oral Techniques in the Gospel of Matthew," Catholic Biblical Quarterly, XXIII (1961), p. 427.

²Floyd V. Filson, A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew (London: A. & C. Black, 1960), p. 23.

³Krister Stendahl, The School of St. Matthew (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1954), p. 27.

⁴Ibid.

CHAPTER III

¹W. A. Criswell, Expository Notes on the Gospel of Matthew (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1961), p. 70.

²Norman Perrin, The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus (London: SCM Press LTD, 1963), p. 189-90.

³Willoughby C. Allen, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew in the International Critical Commentary (Third edition; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912), p. 148.

⁴Stanley D. Toussaint, "Introductory and Concluding Parables of Matthew Thirteen," Bibliotheca Sacra, CXXI (Oct.-Dec., 1964), p. 352.

⁵Günther Bornkamm, Gerhard Barth, and Heinz Joachim Held, Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew, Translated by Perry Scott (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963), p. 110.

⁶J. C. Fenton, The Gospel of St. Matthew (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 230.

⁷N. A. Dahl, "The Parables of the Growth," Studia Theologica, V (1952), p. 157.

⁸Ibid.

⁹C. H. Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), p. 152.

¹⁰Dahl, op. cit., p. 151.

¹¹Rudolph Schnackenburg, God's Rule and Kingdom (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), p. 157.

¹²A. M. Hunter, "Gospel in Parables," III, The Men and the Crisis of the Kingdom, Interpretation, XIV(July, 1960) p. 313.

¹³Ada R. Habershon, The Study of the Parables (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1957), p. 144.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 122.

¹⁵For a more complete discussion of this subject and for the source of Table 3 see Ada R. Habershon, op. cit.

¹⁶For further reading on this subject see primarily Charles H. Lohr, "Oral Techniques in the Gospel of Matthew," Catholic Biblical Quarterly, XXIII(1961), 403-435.

CHAPTER IV

¹Albert E. Barnett, The New Testament. Its Making and Meaning, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1946), p. 156.

²Krister Stendahl, "Matthew," Peake's Commentary on the Bible, Edited by Matthew Black (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1962), p. 783.

³Ibid.

⁴Fredrick W. Danker, "Luke XVI:16, An Opposition Logion," Journal of Biblical Literature, LXXVII(September, 1958), p. 240.

⁵J. C. Fenton, The Gospel of St. Matthew (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 172.

⁶Ibid., p. 213.

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