

December 9, 2007 (LS)

**AN INTRODUCTION TO MATTHEW:
SUMMING UP ALL THINGS
GOSPEL READING: MATTHEW 3.1-12**

a) The unity of Matthew with the rest of Scripture.

Matthew is one part of a larger story; it is one section within the symphony of Scripture. In one sense it can stand on its own, but we also need to appreciate how God put these books together to form one book/story.

b) The diversity of Matthew within Scripture and particularly within the four Gospels.

The four Gospels should not be forced into one Gospel (e.g., through “harmonization”). (Not a problem seeing parallels and comparing, but God gave us four Gospels not just one.)

Matthew is a particular Gospel within the whole scope of Scripture. Matthew is a particular Gospel with a particular purpose within the four Gospels. It is diverse and yet in unity with everything surrounding it.

c) Purposefulness of structure as well as content.

Gospels can be understood by children, but they are not “children’s books.” The fact is that the Gospel writers were theologians.

The way Matthew structures his Gospel is significant to what Matthew is communicating. But where Matthew fits in the structure of Scripture and more particularly within the four Gospels also communicates.

Form agrees with the content. The two fit together seamlessly and reinforce one another in order that we might receive the full impact of the story of Jesus.

1. MATTHEW IN HISTORY

Historical situation: The Bible left off after the restoration of the Jews. Cyrus, the Persian emperor, sent the Jews back to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. Between the end of Malachi (or 2 Chron which is the last book in the Hebrew Bible) is approximately 400 years.

Rome became the new world empire during this time. The line of Herods whom we meet in the Gospels and Acts became rulers of the Jews during this time. Much of this you can read about in the apocryphal books of Maccabees.

The setting of the story: God’s people have been anticipating the fulfillment of God’s promises. Matthew (w/ other Gospels) declare that the time of waiting has come to an end.

History has been moving forward from the time of creation, anticipating the coming of *the* seed of the woman who would suffer the strike of the serpent’s seed but would arise victorious over him. *The* story has come to its climatic chapter. And with that all of the lines of the Scripture converge at this one point.

Matthew’s explicit “fulfillment” passages point us to this. Opening genealogy that leads up to Christ points us to this.

All allusions not so obvious to us. Matthew assumes that his readers have immersed themselves in the story up to this point so that his allusions, types, and resonances will be picked up on.

Dale Allison, [The New Moses: A Matthean Typology](#) - like being so familiar with a piece of music that you can recognize it by the smallest snippets.

Six ways allusions are made: (1) Explicit statement (2) Inexplicit citation or borrowing (3) Similar circumstances; (4) Key words or phrases (5) Similar narrative structure; (6) Word order, syllabic sequence, poetic resonance.

All of this means (at least in part) that Matthew understands all of this to be one story.

The story that God is telling has the same basic structure and, like a fine piece of music, the themes are set out and recognizable throughout but there are variations and new dimensions as it moves irresistibly forward. All of these lines crescendo and find their

climax in Christ.

2. MATTHEW AMONG THE FOUR GOSPELS

The first Gospel: Many modern scholars believe Mark was written first. Historically novel position. The order in which we have the Gospels—the canonical order—is the order in which the church believed the Gospels to be written for 1700 years.

One of four: Why four Gospels? Irenaeus (2nd century bishop of Lyons): “It is not possible that the Gospels can be either more or fewer in number than they are. For, since there are *four zones of the world* in which we live, and *four principal winds*, while the Church is scattered throughout all the world, and the “pillar and ground” of the Church is the Gospel and the spirit of life; it is fitting that she should have *four pillars*, breathing out immortality on every side, and vivifying men afresh. From which fact, it is evident that the Word, the Artificer of all, He that sitteth upon the cherubim, and contains all things, He who was manifested to men, has given us the Gospel under four aspects, but bound together by one Spirit. As also David says, when entreating His manifestation, “Thou that sittest between the cherubim, shine forth.” For the cherubim, too, were *four-faced*, and their faces were images of the dispensation of the Son of God.” (<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.ix.iv.xii.html>) (From *Against Heresies*, 3.11)

This seems to be pretty standard reasoning in Church history and is reflected in Christian art concerning the Gospels.

Ephesians 1.10 “... that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth -- in Him.”

Jesus sums up creation in himself: Gen 2, river flows from the mountain through the Garden, splits into 4 symbolically taking life to the four corners of the earth.

“Four corners of the earth” - Isa 11.12; Rev 7.1; 20.8. Not a “primitive” understanding. Cf. Isa 40.22.

These are ways to describe the earth in its completeness; something like talking about the four points of the compass. Four is a structural number in Scripture. Four corners of land (Ez 7.2), altar (Ex 27.2), also seen in Tab/Temple. All of these are related as they are all world-models.

Jesus represented as the four-fold Christ sums up creation in himself. In him is found the new world or the new creation.

Jesus sums up (or unites) heaven and earth: from 2nd day of creation forward, heaven and earth moving toward unification.

Heaven is the pattern for the earthly house where God will dwell. (cf. Mt 6.10)

What does God’s heavenly house look like? First, Ezek 1. God’s throne chariot. He is enthroned among/above his hosts, the angels, the cherubim, four living creatures with four faces. The faces: ox, lion, eagle, and man.

Christian art down through the centuries has associated each of the Gospels with one of the faces of these cherubim. They have varied in their interpretations but they are consistent in associating the Gospels with the four faces of the cherubim.

Heavenly pattern reflected in Israel, esp. in the Tabernacle set up. Heavenly pattern shown to Moses (Ex 25.40; 26.30; cp. Heb 8.5)

Note Num 2.1-34: Tab in the center, tribe arrangement: east Judah (Issachar, Zebulun), *lion*; west Ephraim (Manasseh, Benjamin), *ox/bull*; north Dan (Asshur, Naphtali), *eagle*; south Reuben (Simeon, Gad), *man*. Israel is the host of YHWH upon whom he is enthroned; they are the angelic host reflected on earth.

Jesus = new Israel; sums up the destiny and mission of Israel in himself; the place where God dwells (tabernacles; Jn 1.14).

Jesus sums up history in himself: Four Gospels reflect 4 epochs in history: ox (priestly, early Israel), lion (kingly), eagle (Gentile empire); man (culmination in the man).

The time of animals (old creation) is over. Man is enthroned as he is supposed to be.

(1) We live after the turning point of history.

(2) In Christ we are the new throne of God, the new Israel, gathered as a host around him.