

**A SUMMARY OF THE MINISTRY AND PURPOSE OF JESUS IN MATTHEWS  
GOSPEL:**

**WHY DID THE KING COME BUT NOT THE KINGDOM?**

Jacob Patrick Heaton  
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## Introduction

The purpose of Matthew's gospel is seen to be closely related to the Jewish nation of Israel, and the Kingdom promised to the Jews in the Old Testament. The overall message of Matthew appears to have three divisions. The offer of the promised Kingdom to Israel, the rejection of the King by Israel, and the reason why the Kingdom didn't come though the King had made His appearance and offered His kingdom to Israel.<sup>1</sup>

It is these three general divisions that outline the book of Matthew. These divisions are also what guides this article. As the gospel of Matthew is summarized and the purpose of the ministry of Christ is laid out, these three divisions are the landmarks to the gospel. The first division to Matthews gospel is shown in the early chapters which deal with the King Himself, and the Kingdom He offers to the Jewish nation. The second division to Matthews gospel are the events that unfold as the religious leaders, and many within the nation reject the King who offers the Kingdom to them. Therefore, the promised Kingdom is postponed, but not canceled because the Kingdom was a guaranteed promise from God to Israel. It was the generation that heard the offer of Jesus and rejected it that did not enjoy the benefits contained in the Kingdom's establishment. The third division contains the events that took place following the rejection. The sacrifice of Jesus and what would take place until the Kingdom's establishment are pronounced by the King of the Jews.

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<sup>1</sup> Couch, "An Introduction to Classical Evangelical Hermeneutics: A Guide to the History and Practice of Biblical Interpretation" (pg. 236)

## I. THE KING AND THE KINGDOM

Matthew starts his gospel with provided proof of Jesus' descending from two significant Jews (Mt. 1:1). Abraham and David were given promises that pertained to the program of God unfolded through them. Abraham was promised to be the origin of a great nation (Gen. 12:2) in whom the whole world would be blessed (Gen. 12:3). This was, of course, looking ahead to Jesus being the ultimate blessing that would fulfill this promise (Gen. 22:18; Gal. 3:16). Matthew was pointing out that Jesus' is the seed of Abraham. Matthew also connects Jesus' heritage to the second significant Jew, that is, the shepherd turned King, David. It was to David that God made promises of establishing his throne forever and that his descendants would be the ones seated on the throne that ruled the great nation descended from Abraham (2 Sam. 7:13-14).

The seed of Abraham and David came to fulfill the Old Testament promise of establishing a kingdom that would be ruled by the Messiah and would be characterized by perfect righteousness. Jesus is the Messiah, and He offered the promised Kingdom to Israel. The proclamation of this coming Kingdom began publically with the preaching of John the Baptist (Mt. 3:2). John was calling the nation of Israel to prepare themselves, for the Kingdom was about to come. The preaching of John was followed by Jesus Himself proclaiming the Immanency of the Kingdom (Mt. 4:17), and the good news of the Kingdom (Mt. 4:23).

A particular point of emphasis in the first major division of Matthew's gospel is directed towards the Kingdom teaching found in chapter 5-7. We identify this discourse as instruction on the Kingdom based on the frequent reference to the Kingdom within these two chapters (Mt. 5:3, 5, 10, 19, 20; 6:10, 13, 33; 7:21). These references to the Kingdom are to be understood in the established context of the Kingdom mentioned in Matthew 4:17 and 4:23. This understanding follows the literal grammatical-historical hermeneutic. It is correct, therefore, to see this

Kingdom teaching as being a standard for disciples' lives "for the time preliminary to the establishment of the Kingdom."<sup>2</sup> This interpretation is alluded to in a comment from Lewis Sperry Chafer, though he did not hold to this interpretation. He says "The conclusion growing out of this analysis of this discourse is that it is the direct and official pronouncement of the King Himself of that manner of life which will be the ground for admission into the Kingdom."<sup>3</sup>

The King has been proven in His provided heritage (Mt. 1:1), He has proclaimed the offer of the Kingdom to the children of Israel (Mt. 4:17, 23), and He has taught concerning how that generation would gain entrance into the promised Kingdom that was being offered to them (Mt. 5-7).

## II. THE KING REJECTED, AND THE KINGDOM POSTPONED

The King, having proclaimed the promised Kingdom to Israel, faced opposition that permeated to the majority of the nation of Israel. Jesus first faced opposition from the religious leaders, who influenced the nation of Israel as a whole. Jesus had an encounter with a man with a withered hand who was healed by Jesus publically in the synagogue (Mt. 12:9-13). Following this encounter, the religious leaders saw that it was done on a Sabbath, sought to destroy Jesus. Departing from the synagogue, Jesus healed many who followed after him, causing many to wonder if this indeed was the "Son of David" (Mt. 12:23). The healing of the blind and mute man who was afflicted by demon possession led the religious leaders to publically proclaim their rejection of the Messiah, accusing Jesus of utilizing the power of Beelzebub (Mt. 12:24).

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<sup>2</sup> Toussaint, "Behold The King: A Study of Matthew" (pg. 91)

<sup>3</sup> Chafer, "Systematic Theology: Volumes 5 & 6" (pg. 111 vol. 5)

On the same day the religious leaders rejected Jesus as the Messiah (Mt. 13:1), Jesus began to teach in parables. Jesus was faced with a majority of the nation Israel assuming that their descending from Abraham permitted them automatic entrance into the Kingdom of heaven. Consequently, a growing number resisted the message of Christ on how one would be admitted, and receive the promised Kingdom.

Following the growing rejection of Jesus as the Messiah by the religious leaders, Jesus begins his parable teaching ministry (Mt. 13:3). The discourse of Matthew chapter thirteen has posed difficulties for interpretation. There are three general approaches to the interpretation of the “mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” (Mt. 13:11) parables. The first approach is an allegorical approach. The allegorical approach will most often read the Church into the parables meaning. The allegorical view ignores the historical context of first century Israel expecting what was promised to their forefathers, Abraham and David. The second approach is the “new program” of the kingdom approach. The new program view sees the parables as explaining a spiritual form of the kingdom and is determined as being about the church age. The issue with this view is shared with the first view. To see a new program in view is to jump to a figurative approach prematurely and therefore abandons the grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture. The third approach says that these parables reveal new truths about the Old Testament promised Messianic Kingdom.<sup>4</sup> The third view holds most closely to the grammatical-historical hermeneutic and is, therefore, the most accurate of the three general views. The third view has three key arguments in its favor. The first argument is that it fits well with the term “mystery.” The term mystery carries the meaning of a previously unrevealed truth hidden in the mind of

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<sup>4</sup> Couch, “An Introduction to Classical Evangelical Hermeneutics: A Guide to the History and Practice of Biblical Interpretation” (pg. 211-213)

God that is now revealed to Man. The second argument is that this view fits contextually with the usage of “kingdom of Heaven” referenced in Matthew’s gospel. There are twelve occurrences of the word “kingdom,” often paired with “of heaven” in this chapter (Mt. 13:11, 19, 24, 31, 33, 38, 41, 43, 44, 45, 47, 52). Because there is not included any shift in the definition of this kingdom, it must carry the established definition. In this case, it would be the kingdom proclaimed by John (Mt. 3:2), by Jesus (Mt. 4:17, 23), and by the twelve (Mt. 10:5-7). The “mysteries of the Kingdom” would, therefore, be “the span in which the millennial kingdom is being postponed.”<sup>5</sup> This span will be “the experience of the heirs or the sons of the Kingdom” (Mt. 13:38).<sup>6</sup>

The Jews, having plotted against Jesus, delivered him to the governor Pilate (Mt. 27:1-2). This handing over was the ultimate rejection of Jesus. Their rejection is found in the tragic declaration of the Jewish people to crucify Jesus, their Messiah (Mt. 17:22, 23, 25).

### III. THE KING’S SACRIFICE AND PROGRAM UNTIL THE KINGDOM

Following the rejection of the King, and the consequent postponement of the kingdom being established in Israel, Jesus prophesied concerning the events that would transpire before the kingdom comes (Mt. 24-25). The prophecies correlate with the seventieth week of Daniel (Dan. 9:27), and are a response to the disciple’s question “tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?” (Mt. 24:3).

The Messiah was rejected, crucified, and raised from the grave (Mt. 26-28). During these events, Christ provided the satisfying, substitutionary death that would pay for the sins of all

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<sup>5</sup> Toussaint, “Behold The King: A Study of Matthew” (pg. 172)

<sup>6</sup> Woods, “The Coming Kingdom: What Is the Kingdom and How Is Kingdom Now Theology Changing the Focus of the Church” (pg. 103)

mankind. It was Christ's shed blood that was the ratification of the New Covenant that was to be made with Israel (Jer. 31:31-34; Mt. 26:28).

The risen King of the Jews gave orders to His followers. These orders would be the ministry of the Church until they were to be raptured and the final "seven" of Daniel would continue (Mt. 28:18-20). The passage that contains the orders delivered to the disciples of Jesus are the final words in Matthew's gospel. The order contains the charge to make disciples, baptize, and to teach all nations, until the end of the age. The age mentioned was the Church age that would start on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

## **Conclusion**

There are three divisions to the book of Matthew. The first division is the pre-rejection ministry of Christ. This first division contains the ministry of the King comprised of His healing and teaching ministry specifically. The second division is the rejection of the King and postponement of the kingdom. The third division is the post-rejection ministry of Christ, where the message of Jesus begins to be preparatory for the age that would follow. The age is known as the Church age. Though the King came and made a legitimate offer of the kingdom at His first coming, it is clear from Matthew that this literal, earthly kingdom will come, but it will be at the second coming of Jesus. It will come to a generation of believing Jews that are unanimous in saying "blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord" (Mt. 23:37-39).

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