

General Comments on Matthew 8-12

These chapters are a block of topically related text. Themes are repeated through the text: accusations of blasphemy (cf. 9:3, 12:31); "I desire compassion and not sacrifice" quote of Hosea 6:7 (cf. 9:13, 12:7); Jesus says the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah will be better off than those who reject Him (cf. 10:15, 11:24); the healing of demoniacs and accusation of it being by Beelzebub by the Pharisees (cf. 9:34, 12:24, see also discussion below). The repetition serves to tie the text together into a unity with an overarching theme, which is that of Mal. 3-4.

One might attempt to arrange the text into a textual structure, using these repeating patterns, but the presentation of the repetition isn't well-ordered. And, there are not clear and consistent rhetorical patterns within the text, aside from the repetition noted above. As such, it seems likely the intent is to thematically unite the text.

Fulfilment of Mal. 3-4

When we read these chapters (Matt. 8-12, Mark 2-5, Luke 7-8) we tend to focus on the miracles and parables separately and see them as evidence of Jesus being the Messiah, because he taught brilliantly and performed supernatural miracles. And, yes, this is the case. However, for the ancient Jewish audience, the original audience of these texts, the presentation is intended to hold up Jesus as the fulfilment of Mal. 3-4.

Malachi 3-4 has an angry Lord come to punish the hypocrites among Israel and show kindness to those who worship Him in truth. There are two prominent images in this text: the sending of the herald Elijah and the rising of the Sun of victory/righteousness with healing in his wings/garments. In the current text, John Baptist is the former and Jesus is presented as the fulfilment of the latter prophecy.

The Luke account is the clearest from a Western literary point of view (we like to see similarity in a consistent linear fashion), as he presents it in the same order of John Baptist/Elijah...then miracles and commentary via parables...then Jesus healing the woman who touches the fringe of his garment.

All three accounts present Jesus' teachings with a cynical streak to them. Jesus warns the believers of John against stumbling because of Him (Matt. 11:6, Luke 7:23), a fulfilment

of Isa. 8:14 and Jer. 6:21. The parables talk about how many will reject and few will accept Him. This is following the theme of Mal. 3-4, where the Lord castigates the argumentative hypocrites and says He will come to refine the sons of Levi by purging the sin and dross from them.

The Pharisees are clearly being held up by the NT writers as the worst of the religious hypocrites, those whom the Lord is addressing in Mal. 3 and Mal. 4:1. And the Christian disciples are the faithful few who hear and write the book of remembrance in Mal. 3:16-18.

Matthew's Version (Matt. 8-12)

After the Sermon on the Mount in Matt. 5-7, Jesus becomes widely popular and the result is he is being thronged by many people, no matter where he travels, which we see in Matt. 8-9. Jesus is performing miracles, and his popularity is expanding because of it, so much so that at the end of ch. 9, he is expressing the need for more people to help him, so he calls the Twelve Apostles in ch. 10.

In ch. 8, Jesus' attempt to enlist disciples falls flat as they aren't willing to abandon all for him (cf. 8:18-22). Jesus has more success in 9:9, but even the disciples of John Baptist are questioning Jesus' doctrine, cf. 9:10, and the Pharisees clearly want nothing to do with Jesus, cf. 9:11-13. Jesus solidifies his organization in ch. 10 with the Twelve, a small handful of solidly committed people, called to assist Him.

Matthew's intent in Matt. 8-9 is to show Jesus is popular because of the miracles, but people in general aren't willing to commit to him or his teachings.

Matthew ends the block of text with a scathing rebuke of the religious hypocrisy of the Pharisees who are scheming against Him, saying His power is of the devil, in ch. 12.

Mark's Version (Mark 2-5)

Mark's account differs in that it presents the miracles as being the impetus for people following Jesus. They are impressed by the supernatural. However, when it comes to Jesus' teachings, they cause division. Jesus' parables in these chapters illustrate the division among people, especially the Parable of the Sower (4:1-20). But, even some of the miracles Jesus performs scare people, like the healing of the demoniacs, casting the legion into the swineherd, the people are in fear of

him and ask him to leave (cf. Matt. 8:28-34, Mark 5:1-20, Luke 8:26-39).

Mark's presentation focuses on people's mixed reactions to Jesus, with relatively few accepting Him.

Luke's version (Luke 7-8)

Aside from directly addressing the issue of Jesus being the fulfilment of the Malachi 3-4 prediction, the Luke account in these two chapters places emphasis on how Jesus' interactions with believers includes non-Jews and marginalized Jews, and he contrasts that with the way the Pharisees, the religious leaders, respond to Him.

Casting out Devils and Blasphemy Against the Holy Ghost

Matthew 8-12 present Jesus effortlessly casting out devils, the former demoniacs being grateful, the local Jewish population being amazed, and the Pharisees accusing Him of being in league with Beelzebul to cast out the devils (cf. 9:34, 10:25). This theme is repeated through the chapters, with the final escalated confrontation in ch. 12 (cf. 12:24, 12:27) where Jesus exposes the flaw in their logic and accuses them of being of evil and of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.

These chapters contain the majority of references to possession and devils in the book of Matthew (cf. 8:16, 8:28-34, 9:32-34, 10:8, 11:18, 12:22-29), with the exception of four references: one general statement before (cf. 4:24), one discussion on the subject before (cf. 7:22), and two specific events after (cf. 15:22, 17:18).

The subject is treated at length in these chapters as part of the Mal. 3-4 thesis of Jesus being the Lord incarnate, John being the forerunner and the Pharisees being the hostile apostates among Israel who argue with the Lord when confronted with their sins. The final confrontation in ch. 12 is particularly scathing as Jesus dismantles their logical argument (cf. 12:22-29), states they are deliberately contrary to the Holy Spirit (cf. 12:30-32), and points out their false words indicate they are evil (cf. 12:33-37). The Pharisees challenge Jesus to produce a sign, which He refuses, saying only the wicked demand a sign, and the wise among the nations will condemn them (cf. 12:38-42). Jesus then warns them that when He

leaves, they will be seven times more wicked than before (cf. 12:12:43-45).

Buried in chapter 12 is the contrast of the Spirit of God (cf. 12:28) and unclean spirits (cf. 12:43-45). Jesus tells them plainly evil spirits are exorcised by the Spirit of God, and their denial of such is slandering the Spirit of God, as they are saying the Spirit of God is actually the spirit of the devil. This offense against the Spirit of God is something that cannot be forgiven (cf. 12:31-32). Why? Because the person is murderous (cf. 12:14), evil and adulterous (cf. 12:39), who are themselves possessed by unclean spirits (cf. 12:43-45). There is no forgiveness for them because they are totally unrepentant and completely saturated in sin. Their goal is not to repent and improve, but to attack and destroy what is exposing their wickedness, thereby impeaching their worldly power.

Jesus and His apostles are now casting out the evil spirits, but these evil Pharisees are fighting against them, so when they are gone, the evil spirits will return and run amok.

Comments on Matthew 8

¹ When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him.

v1 After the Sermon on the Mount, documented during ch. 5-7, Jesus' popularity increases significantly. However, as we see later in this chapter, this popularity does not result in a significant increase in newly committed disciples, cf. v, 18-23 and ch. 13. Jesus is popular because of His astonishing teachings and miraculous healings, but the majority of the people aren't willing to change, they are just caught up in the wave of excitement over this possible messianic figure.

² And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. ³ And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. ⁴ And Jesus saith unto him, see thou tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.

v2-4 A leper approaches Jesus, requesting He heal him (v. 2). Jesus agrees to, and touches him, causing him to be healed, and thereby cleansed (v. 3). Jesus then says he is not to tell anyone, but he should go to the Temple and make the offering prescribed by the Law of Moses, so the priests will see that he has been cleansed of his leprosy (v. 4).

The events of this verse must have been well after the Sermon on the Mount and after the crowds from v. 1 had dispersed. A leper would not have been tolerated among crowds, owing to their unclean state.

v4 "shew thyself to the priest...for a testimony unto them", given the context of the fulfilment of the Mal. 3-4 prophecies, Jesus' intent is to convey a message to the Priests and Levites serving at the temple, cf. Mal. 3:3-4. The message to the Priests is clear: there is someone around who is healing lepers. Naturally, this should pique their interest.

⁵ And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, ⁶ And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. ⁷ And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. ⁸ The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst

come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. ⁹ For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.

¹⁰ When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. ¹¹ And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. ¹² But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

¹³ And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour.

v5-13 When entering Capernaum, Jesus is approached by a Roman Centurion, the leader of one hundred Roman soldiers, asking him to heal his servant who is suffering terribly (v. 5-6). Jesus says he will come and heal him (v. 7), but the Roman asks him to heal from a distance and not come to his house (v. 8), because of political sensitivities (v. 9).

Jesus praises the Roman's faith, saying it is greater than that of the Israelites (v. 10). Jesus continues and says many Gentiles will join Abraham in heaven while the Israelites will not (v. 11-12).

Jesus then heals the servant at a distance (v. 13).

The conversation between the Centurion and Jesus also shows the Centurion's only interest is in having his servant healed, not in seeing the sign of the miracle of healing, the way so many others have sought. The implication is the Centurion's faith is genuine, where many of the other locals is not.

The Luke 7:1-10 version of this story differs in that it presents a set of Jewish elders acting as intermediary between the centurion and Jesus. The Luke account presents the centurion as being very favorably disposed towards the Jewish population he oversees, having built them a synagogue.

v5 "Capernaum", note in 11:23 this city is included in the list of cursed cities filled with unbelievers. Yet, here, Jesus praises a Roman who believes, while rejecting the Israelites.

v8-9 The Roman's confession is that he is personally unworthy to have Jesus visit his home, despite confessing his belief in

him (v. 8). The larger context is because of his position as a Roman, there are people above him and below him in the hierarchy that can cause problems for both of them if they are seen together (v. 9).

At this point in Jesus' ministry, it is clear his popularity is sufficient that everyone knows who he is, including the Romans tasked with keeping the peace. Since this man is the leader of the Roman infantry for the city, he would have local Romans over him and a lot of soldiers under him who could cause problems for them if they so choose. Disgruntled soldiers below him could easily make unflattering insinuations and start a rumor campaign against the Centurion to get him in trouble with the leadership above him. Given the Roman's position as occupiers of Israelite land, there would naturally be a lot of tensions between the two groups of people, and a lot of opportunity to cause trouble, if one were inclined.

The additional details from the Luke 7:1-10 account add some background to the concerns the centurion expresses about being someone in authority who is also under authority. Being favorably disposed towards those whom you are occupying could easily be seen as weakness and a risky position if anyone above or below him were interested in making trouble for him.

¹⁴ And when Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother laid, and sick of a fever. ¹⁵ And he touched her hand, and the fever left her: and she arose, and ministered unto them. ¹⁶ When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick: ¹⁷ That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.

v14-17 Jesus miraculously heals Peter's mother-in-law (v. 14), who's healing is so quick she goes from being incapacitated to the kitchen immediately (v. 15). Later in the evening of the same day, Jesus heals all who are brought to him of whatever ails them (v. 16), as predicted (v. 17).

Matthew uses the series of miraculous healings as evidence of Jesus being the fulfilment of Isa. 53:4. Following the context of Mal. 3-4, Matthew is also implicitly bringing in the larger context of that chapter, particularly Isa. 53:3. The people gladly accept Jesus as a healer and bring the sick and possessed to him to be healed, but are generally unwilling to commit to him and his teachings.

Matthew's presentation shows Jesus' compassion for the people, despite His knowing they will not commit to Him.

v16 "when the even was come", this detail is included to reinforce the healing of and subsequent ministering by Peter's mother-in-law was the same day, implying it was not her naturally getting better on her own. Anyone completely incapacitated doesn't jump up and immediately cook for and serve a group.

¹⁸ Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave commandment to depart unto the other side. ¹⁹ And a certain scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. ²⁰ And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. ²¹ And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. ²² But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead.

v18-22 The miraculous healings of the preceding verses (v. 16) attract many people, so Jesus seeks to distance himself from the crowds (v. 18). Apparently just before they leave, Jesus is approached by two people who profess their belief in Him, neither of whom are willing to abandon all and follow Him (v. 19-22).

Matthew follows the quotation of Isa. 53:4 with a description of how only two of the people in the large crowd are willing to verbally profess their commitment to Jesus, and then even those two fail to follow through with action, just as predicted in Isa. 53:3. Numerous miraculous healings among great multitudes results in no disciples being added to their group.

Note the Mark 1:29-38 account of this same series of events omits the Isaiah quote. Matthew's intent is convey the theological importance of the events.

v18 "great multitudes", the Mark 1:33 account has the entire population of the city there.

"depart to the other side", the Mark 1:35-38 account adds more detail to the exchange. Jesus left early in the morning before anyone else was up, so as to pray in solitude. And when the disciples find him, he then says they should leave so He can preach to others as well. Jesus isn't interested in being

popular in one town, His intent is to preach repentance to all of Israel, so he needs to leave.

²³ And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him. ²⁴ And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep. ²⁵ And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish. ²⁶ And he saith unto them, why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. ²⁷ But the men marvelled, saying, what manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!

v23-27 To get away from the noncommittal crowds (v. 18-22), Jesus and the disciples get into a ship and leave the town (they are presumably still at [Capernaum](#) and intending to cross the Sea of Galilee) (v. 23). A massive storm forms and threatens to sink the boat (v. 24). The disciples wake the sleeping Jesus and ask him to save them (v. 25), and Jesus questions their lack of faith, calming the storm (v. 26). The disciples are shocked and stunned

In the larger context of ch. 8-9 as the fulfilment of Mal. 3-4, Jesus performing such a miracle as controlling the weather is a clear indication that He is the incarnation of the Old Testament Lord, but the disciples are still not understanding, they are simply bewildered at what they are experiencing.

The kind of power exhibited here is described as what the Lord exercises over His creation, cf. Isa. 51:9-11, Ps. 107:23-32, see also Ps. 18:16-19, 29:3-4, 65:5-8, 89:5-10, 104:5-9, 106:6-12.

I have to be sympathetic to the disciples on this point. How could you think you are in the presence of God incarnate? Even when you witness such miracles, making the intellectual jump to come to such a conclusion would be bordering on madness. How could you look at a person and recognize this man is not just a great prophet wielding the power of God, but really is the Lord God of Israel in the flesh.

v26 Jesus' questioning of their faith can be read two different ways. First, He is questioning why they themselves haven't exercised their faith in praying that the storm subsides. Second, they are not recognizing their demise would entirely frustrate Jesus' ministry, so God simply will not allow them to

die. They are failing to recognize their position in religious history.

²⁸ And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way. ²⁹ And, behold, they cried out, saying, what have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time? ³⁰ And there was a good way off from them an herd of many swine feeding. ³¹ So the devils besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine. ³² And he said unto them, Go. And when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine: and, behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters.

³³ And they that kept them fled, and went their ways into the city, and told every thing, and what was befallen to the possessed of the devils. ³⁴ And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus: and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart out of their coasts.

v28-34 Crossing over the Sea of Galilee, they travel into [Gergesa](#) and come across two horrific demoniacs (v. 28). The demons possessing the men speak through their mouths and confess Jesus is the Messiah (v. 29) and they ask Jesus to cast them into the swine (v. 30-31), which he does allow, but they go mad and kill themselves (v. 32). The swineherds run back to town and tell everyone there what just happened (v. 33), and they come out to see him and they ask him to leave (v. 34).

It is unsurprising they ask Jesus to leave, after He heals two long-term well-known demoniacs by casting the evils spirits into their swine herd, which results in a catastrophic loss of the entire herd. It is safe to assume the entire town was involved to some extent in the production of pork, and they would therefore be dismayed over the loss and fearful of whatever else this traveling preacher might cause to happen to them.

Assuming they were at least familiar with the local Jewish customs, it would be easy to conclude Jesus' actions were retributive for raising unclean animals in their borders, even though that was not the case.

See Mark 5:1-20 and Luke 8:26-39 for parallel accounts of this event with different details. The present Matthew account omits one of the demoniacs requesting to go with Jesus and being

told to stay and proselyte the locals who had just rejected Him.

This is a theologically dense set of text that has a lot going on, so much it is difficult to parse it all. It raises a lot of questions that go entirely unanswered in the text:

How do the evil spirits recognize Jesus?

Why do the evil spirits defer to Jesus without Him even asserting His authority? They ask his permission, but why does he grant their request?

When and what is the time the evil spirits speak of where Jesus is going to torment them?

Why would Jesus allow the evil spirits to enter the swine instead of kicking them into the abyss? And what is this abyss?

Why are these people living in the land of Israel keeping a large swine herd?

Matthew's stripped-down account, when compared to Mark and Luke, is intended to present Jesus as the Heavenly King who exerts extraordinary power over all spirits, good and evil, and the entirety of the spiritual kingdom of heaven, which is largely unseen at the moment. The ignorant humans on earth do not recognize Him and are not interested in answering any of these big theological questions. When He permits something seemingly bad to happen to the local's swine herd, they are upset and blame Him, even though He didn't do it, and they ask Him to leave. They are completely uninterested in the larger theological issues at hand, being only concerned about their immediate material loss and the potential for additional harm. Apparently not even the disciples ask Jesus about the broader theological implications of what just happened. Did they also see this as a simple case of Jesus punishing the Gentile swineherds and "cleansing" the Israelite lands?

Again, fitting in with the context of Mal. 3-4, Jesus is presented as the Lord God of Israel, whom the demons acknowledge, but whom mortals ask to depart. Note in Matthews account, he omits the one demoniac convert that is discussed in the Mark and Luke accounts, to emphasize general rejection of

the locals.

v29 "torment us before the time", cf. 2 Peter 2:4, Rev. 20:1-3.

v30 "an herd of many swine", these people are clearly not zealous for keeping the Law of Moses, suggesting they are largely or entirely Gentile. It is unlikely they were Jews who didn't keep kosher, as a large herd (e.g., Mark 5:13 says two thousand) with attendants would be intended for commercial sale, suggesting the entire local population was consuming pork, as opposed to it being a small herd for private consumption or a wild herd.

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