

Rhetoric and Composition in Matthew

Structure in the New Testament Gospels

Each of the Gospel writers in the New Testament gathered existing traditions about Jesus, which doubtless circulated for a time in oral form, and structured a selected number into a written Gospel. The structures facilitated an oral reading of the Gospels to members of the early church.

Mark, in the first part of his Gospel, after an initial word on the preparatory work of John the Baptist, reports the many healings, exorcisms, and nature miracles performed by Jesus, but the disciples are nevertheless unable to perceive who Jesus is (Mark 1:16—8:26).¹ Those much less acquainted with Jesus respond with far greater insight, for example, the cleansed leper in Galilee, where Jesus' ministry begins (Mark 1:40-45). A turning point in Mark's Gospel comes in the episode at Caesarea Philippi, where Peter confesses Jesus to be the Christ (Mark 8:27-33). Now comes a sudden change in

1. Theodore J. Weeden, *Mark—Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

the disciples; they have a greater capacity for discernment—however, Peter’s understanding of messiahship is not that of Jesus. For Jesus, it involves suffering and death.

In the second part of Mark’s Gospel, this latter teaching is fulfilled. Judas betrays his master, resulting in Jesus’ capture, suffering, and death (Mark 14:10—15:47). The Gospel ends with a brief report of Jesus’ resurrection on Easter morning, but the women closest to Jesus, who were told to report the good news to the disciples and Peter, are unwilling to tell anyone (Mark 16:1-8). Mark’s strange ending has a point to make, however. A contrast is being drawn between the leper whom Jesus healed in Galilee and what happened subsequently (Mark 1:40-45). Jesus told the fellow not to tell anyone but to go show himself to the priest, but instead he went out and told the good news to everyone (v. 45). The contrast makes an *inclusio* for the entire Gospel, which is another device giving structure to the completed work. The verses in Mark 16:9-20 are a later addition.²

Luke, more the historian than any of the other Gospel writers, structures his Gospel and a second work on the Acts of the Apostles by giving prominence to geography and the Jerusalem temple in getting the good news out to the world. His Gospel begins and ends in Jerusalem, more specifically in the Jerusalem temple, where another tie-in between beginning and end is discerned.³ At the beginning, the aged Zechariah receives a divine visitation, and after his tongue is loosed, he prophesies and exclaims, “*Blessed* be the Lord God of Israel” (Luke 1:64-68). Then at the end of the Gospel, Luke has Jesus *blessing* the disciples at Bethany when he leaves them. He says, “Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his

2. See Jack R. Lundbom, “Closure in Mark’s Gospel,” *Seminary Ridge Review* 9, no. 1 (2006): 33-41; reprinted in Lundbom, *Biblical Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism* (Hebrew Bible Monographs 45; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013), 323-31.

3. Lundbom, “Closure in Mark’s Gospel,” 38 (in *Biblical Rhetoric*, 328-29).

hands he *blessed* them. While he was *blessing* them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and they were continually in the temple *blessing* God” (Luke 24:50–53).

After Jesus’ departure, the disciples must remain in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit is poured out upon them (Acts 1:4–5). Once this takes place, the good news can go forth from Jerusalem to all Judea, to Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8). This is the controlling structure of Luke’s Gospel and Acts.

The Gospel of John is more theological in nature, not history per se, even though it does report the miracles, sufferings, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It contains yet another structure. After introducing Jesus as the incarnate Word of God (John 1:1–14), John the Baptist as forerunner to this Word (John 1:15–34), and Jesus’ calling of his disciples (John 1:35–51), John anchors his Gospel in a “Book of Signs” (chapters 2–12), after which he follows with a “Book of the Passion” (chapters 13–20).⁴ At the end of the Book of the Passion, Jesus’ signs are again given prominence. John says in conclusion:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name. (20:30–31)

Chapter 21, reporting a Galilee resurrection appearance of Jesus, is a later addition.

4. C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 292, 297, 379.

Structure in the Gospel of Matthew

Matthew structures his Gospel as a “new covenant” document for the nascent church, about which more will be said in the following chapter. In this Gospel, the “church” gets explicit mention. There is another tie-in between beginning and end, although the final verses of this Gospel are taken by many as a later addition (Matt. 28:18-20).⁵ For Matthew, Jesus is “Emmanuel,” “God with us” (1:23), and at the end of the Gospel the great biblical affirmation, “I will be with you,” is brought in to show that God, in Christ and in the Holy Spirit, will continue to dwell with his people to the close of the age (Matt. 28:20).

The structure of Matthew is more developed than is the structure of any other Gospel. Benjamin Bacon of Yale divided this Gospel into five books, which he believed were modeled on the five books of the Torah: Genesis through Deuteronomy.⁶ This made Matthew into a “new Torah,” or a “new Law.” Each little book within the larger book contained a narrative section, a sermonic section, and then a closing formula stating that Jesus had finished his teaching. Bacon’s outline is the following:

5. J. C. Fenton, “Inclusio and Chiasmus in Matthew,” in *Studia evangelica: Papers Presented to the International Congress on “The Four Gospels in 1957” Held at Christ Church, Oxford* (ed. Kurt Aland; Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 73; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1959), 174–79; Fenton, *The Gospel of Saint Matthew* (Pelican New Testament Commentaries; Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), 43; Charles H. Lohr, “Oral Techniques in the Gospel of Matthew,” *CBQ* 23 (1961): 410; H. B. Green, “The Structure of St. Matthew’s Gospel,” in *Studia evangelica IV: Papers Presented to the Third International Congress on New Testament Studies*, part 1, *The New Testament Scriptures* (ed. F. L. Cross; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1968), 58; Lundbom, “Closure in Mark’s Gospel,” 37–38 (in *Biblical Rhetoric*, 327–28).
6. Benjamin W. Bacon, *Studies in Matthew* (New York: Henry Holt, 1930), 80–90.

| | | |
|----------|-------------|--|
| Book I | 3–4 | Narrative |
| | 5:1—7:27 | Sermon: The Sermon on the Mount |
| | 7:28–29 | “And when Jesus finished these sayings . . .” |
| Book II | 8:1—9:35 | Narrative |
| | 9:36—10:42 | Sermon: The Missionary Discourse |
| | 11:1 | “And when Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples . . .” |
| Book III | 11:2—12:50 | Narrative |
| | 13:1–52 | Sermon: Parables on the Kingdom |
| | 13:53 | “And when Jesus had finished these parables . . .” |
| Book IV | 13:54—17:21 | Narrative |
| | 17:22—18:35 | Sermon: Church Administration |
| | 19:1 | “Now when Jesus had finished these sayings . . .” |
| Book V | 19:2—22:46 | Narrative |
| | 23—25 | Sermon: End Times/Farewell Address |
| | 26:1 | “When Jesus finished <i>all</i> these sayings . . .” |

The addition of “all” in the final formula shows that a climax has been reached. Bacon’s view was widely accepted, with minor reservations and modifications.⁷ But not everyone was convinced that the five books of the Gospel were a conscious attempt on the writer’s part to put forward a “new Torah.” There are other collections of five books, for example, the Psalms and the Megilloth. But the main problem is that the structure left out material at the beginning and end of the Gospel. According to W. D. Davies, “On Bacon’s view of Matthew,

7. See, for example, Joachim Jeremias, *The Sermon on the Mount* (trans. Norman Perrin; London: University of London, Athlone Press, 1961), 16–17.

the birth narratives are outside the main scheme of the work and, what is more important, the Passion of Jesus and his Resurrection are reduced to mere addenda.”⁸

A better outline for Matthew was proposed by Charles Lohr, who argued that the Gospel was structured into a large chiasmus.⁹ Chiasmus is a crosswise rhetorical figure well known from classical literature, found by Nils Lund to exist in large panels of both the Old and New Testament discourse. Lund showed how words and ideas often build up to a center point, which is frequently the climax, and then repeat in reverse order to the end.¹⁰ Lund found this structure in the Gospels, particularly in Matthew.¹¹ It is an old rhetorical structure, Semitic in origin,¹² with Lund calling it “the gift of the East to the West.”¹³

Lohr’s structure, like Bacon’s, alternates narrative and sermon, as follows:

| | | |
|-------|---|---|
| 1–4 | a | Narrative: Birth and Beginnings |
| 5–7 | b | Sermon: <i>Blessings</i> , Entering the Kingdom |
| 8–9 | c | Narrative: Authority and Invitation |
| 10 | d | Sermon: Mission Discourse |
| 11–12 | e | Narrative: Rejection by Present Generation |
| 13 | f | Sermon: Parables of the Kingdom |

8. W. D. Davies, *Invitation to the New Testament* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 214. This point was also made by H. B. Green, “Structure of St. Matthew’s Gospel,” 49.

9. Lohr, “Oral Techniques in the Gospel of Matthew,” 427. Chiasmic structures have also been proposed by Fenton, *Gospel of St. Matthew*, 15–17; H. B. Green, “Structure of St. Matthew’s Gospel,” 58; M. Eugene Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” in *NIB* 8: 113; and Tyler J. VanderWeele, “Some Observations Concerning the Chiasmic Structure of the Gospel of Matthew,” *JThS* 59 (2008): 669–73.

10. Nils W. Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament* (Chapel Hill, NC University of North Carolina Press, 1942; repr., Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1992).

11. Nils W. Lund, “The Influence of Chiasmus upon the Structure of the Gospels,” *ATHR* 13 (1931): 27–48; Lund, “The Influence of Chiasmus upon the Structure of the Gospel according to Matthew,” *ATHR* 13 (1931): 405–33.

12. Lund, “Influence of Chiasmus upon the Structure of the Gospels,” 28.

13. Nils W. Lund, *Outline Studies in the Book of Revelation* (Chicago: Covenant Book Concern, 1935), 4; Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament*, viii.

| | | |
|-------|----|---|
| 14–17 | e' | Narrative: Acknowledgment by Disciples |
| 18 | d' | Sermon: Community Discourse |
| 19–22 | c' | Narrative: Authority and Invitation |
| 23–25 | b' | Sermon: <i>Woes</i> , Coming of the Kingdom |
| 26–28 | a' | Narrative: Death and Resurrection |

Here all the Gospel material is accounted for, and while some descriptive titles proposed by Lohr may not reproduce exactly what Matthew had in mind, they are convincing in the main. One sees very clearly how the “woes” of chapter 23 intend to balance the “blessings” of chapter 5, where also in chapters 5–7 the emphasis is on entering the kingdom, while in chapters 23–25 it is on the kingdom coming in days ahead. The kingdom of heaven, which is the “rule of God,” is both a present and a future reality. The parables of the kingdom in chapter 13 are also seen to be the center and climax of Matthew’s Gospel.

Blessings and Woes

Especially noteworthy in this structure is the balancing of “blessings” and “woes.”¹⁴ This has to be intentional, and it is what makes Matthew’s Gospel into a “new covenant document, about which more will be said in the following chapter.

In Luke’s Sermon on the Plain one cannot miss the contrasting of blessings and woes (Luke 6:20–26), but in Matthew they are separated by so much intervening material that the contrast is nearly lost—and for many readers of the Gospel it is lost. Luther, for example, went to

14. Lohr, “Oral Techniques in the Gospel of Matthew,” 427; see also Isabel Ann Massey, *Interpreting the Sermon on the Mount in the Light of Jewish Tradition as Evidenced in the Palestinian Targums of the Pentateuch: Selected Themes* (Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 25; Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1991), 120.

Luke 6, not to Matthew 23, to cite the woes on those whose behavior was the opposite of what was being taught in the Sermon.¹⁵ This is a good reason, incidentally, for hearing Matthew's entire Gospel read aloud from start to finish. In a single reading one will perceive that the woes on the Pharisees and scribes stand in contrast to the blessings pronounced upon the new people of the kingdom. The woes of chapter 23, as Moshe Weinfeld points out, are firmly rooted in Jewish teaching about hypocrisy.¹⁶ They are the following:

But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! *For you lock people out of the kingdom of heaven.* For you do not go in yourselves, and when others are going in, you stop them.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cross sea and land to make a single convert, and you make the new convert twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.

Woe to you, blind guides, who say, "Whoever swears by the sanctuary is bound by nothing, but whoever swears by the gold of the sanctuary is bound by the oath." You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the sanctuary that has made the gold sacred? . . .

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting others. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel!

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may become clean.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth. . . .

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous, and you say,

15. *Luther's Works*, vol. 21, *The Sermon on the Mount (Sermons) and The Magnificat* (ed. Jaroslav Pelikan; St. Louis: Concordia, 1956), 11, 44.

16. Moshe Weinfeld, "The Charge of Hypocrisy in Matthew 23 and in Jewish Sources," *Immanuel* 24–25 (1990): 52–58.

“If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.” (Matt 23:13-36)

These are contrasted with the blessings beginning the Sermon on the Mount, commonly called the “Beatitudes.” They are the following:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is *the kingdom of heaven*.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is *the kingdom of heaven*.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matt 5:3-12)

These woes and blessings contain some striking contrasts:¹⁷

17. Adapted with minor changes from Fenton, *Gospel of St. Matthew*, 368.

JESUS' SERMON ON THE MOUNT

| Woes | Blessings |
|---|---|
| “You lock people out of the <i>kingdom of heaven</i> ” (23:13) | “poor in spirit/those persecuted . . . theirs is the <i>kingdom of heaven</i> ” (5:3, 10) |
| “you make the convert . . . a <i>child of hell</i> ” (23:15) | “peacemakers . . . will be called <i>children of God</i> ” (5:9) |
| “ <i>blind</i> guides . . . <i>blind</i> fools . . . <i>blind</i> . . .” (23:16-19) | “the pure in heart . . . will <i>see</i> God” (5:8) |
| “you have neglected . . . <i>mercy</i> (23:23) | “the <i>merciful</i> . . . will receive <i>mercy</i> ” (5:7) |
| “you clean the outside of the <i>cup</i> and of the <i>plate</i> . . .” (23:25) | “those who <i>hunger and thirst</i> after righteousness . . . will be filled” (5:6) |
| “you are like whitewashed <i>tombs</i> . . . full of the <i>bones of dead men</i> ” (23:27) | “those who <i>mourn</i> . . . will be comforted” (5:4) |
| “you will build the <i>tombs</i> . . . and decorate the <i>graves</i> . . .” (23:29) | |
| “that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on <i>earth</i> ” (23:35) | “the meek . . . will inherit the <i>earth</i> ” (5:5) |

The Kingdom of Heaven

In Matthew’s Gospel the term “kingdom of heaven” appears prominently at the beginning, middle, and end (5:3, 10; 13:1-52; 23:13). The Sermon on the Mount pronounces blessings on those entering the kingdom, while chapters 23–25 state that, when the kingdom comes (in its fullness), the blessed will enter into the joy of their master, while those receiving woes will reap a dreadful reward.

The kingdom is also featured at the center of Matthew’s Gospel, where it is portrayed in parables (chapter 13). This becomes a “turning point” of the Gospel.¹⁸ Our concern here is with the six parables at the core of the chapter, which appear to manifest another rhetorical structure.

18. Lohr, “Oral Techniques in the Gospel of Matthew,” 428; Jack Dean Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1969), 13.

We are accustomed to hearing that a parable is told to convey a single point, which is true, although parables may contain allegorical traits as Jewish stories often do.¹⁹ But here six parables are grouped in pairs, so that two parables—not one—are intended to convey a single point.²⁰ We notice in other Gospels, too, that Jesus is said to have told two parables in succession, for example, the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven (Luke 13:18-21); two parables of the feasts (Luke 14:7-14); the parables of building a tower and a king going to war (Luke 14:28-32); the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin (Luke 15:3-10); and the parables of the unrighteous judge and the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:1-14). But what makes the present structure different is that one of the pairs is here broken up to frame the whole: The parable of the good and bad seed is placed at the beginning, and the parable of the good and bad fish is placed at the end. The structure, then, is the following:

- a Parable of the Good and Bad Seed (13:24-30)
- b Parable of the Mustard Seed (13:31-32)
- b' Parable of the Leaven (13:33)
- c Parable of the Treasure Hidden in the Field (13:44)
- c' Parable of the Costly Pearl (13:45-46)
- a' Parable of the Good and Bad Fish (13:47-50)

19. Floyd V. Filson, *A Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew* (Harper's New Testament Commentaries; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), 158.

20. Filson notes that the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven make one point, viz., that great developments come from small beginnings, and that the parables of the treasure hidden in the field and the costly pearl emphasize a single truth—the supreme worth of the kingdom (*Gospel according to St. Matthew*, 162, 164). Sherman Johnson says, too, that the mustard seed and the leaven are twin parables, so also the hidden treasure and the costly pearl (“Matthew,” *IB* 7:414). He speculates, too, that Matthew may have rewritten Mark 4:26-29 into the parable of the good and bad seed in order to provide a twin parable to the good and bad fish (p. 239).

The parables at beginning and end both speak about the final separation of the righteous from the wicked at the end of the age (a and a'); the parables on the mustard seed and the leaven speak about the spectacular growth of the kingdom (b and b'); and the parables on the treasure hidden in the field and the costly pearl speak of the kingdom's infinite worth (c and c').

Matthew is adopting here a rhetorical form in Hebrew poetry used by the Old Testament prophet Hosea. Hosea writes his poetry in ordinary parallelism of bicolons and tricolons, but in some oracles he will break up a bicolon, putting a single colon at the beginning and a single colon at the end.²¹ Two of these structures appear in Hosea 4, the first one in vv. 4b-9a:

^{4b}Your *people* are like the contentions of a *priest*.

⁵You shall stumble by day;
and the prophet also will stumble with you by night,
and I will destroy your mother.

⁶My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge;
because you have rejected knowledge,
so I reject you from being priest to me.

And since you have forgotten the law of your God,
I will forget your children—even I.

⁷The more they increased, the more they sinned against me;

21. See David Noel Freedman, "Prolegomenon" to George Buchanan Gray, *The Forms of Hebrew Poetry: Considered with Special Reference to the Criticism and Interpretation of the Old Testament* (1915; repr., Library of Biblical Studies; New York: Ktav, 1972), xxxvi-xxxvii (reprinted in Freedman, *Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy: Studies in Early Hebrew Poetry* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1980], 46); Jack R. Lundbom, "Contentious Priests and Contentious People in Hosea IV 1-10," *VT* 36 (1986): 52-70 (reprinted in Lundbom, *Biblical Rhetoric*, 216-31); and Lundbom, "Poetic Structure and Prophetic Rhetoric in Hosea," *VT* 29 (1979): 300-308 (reprinted in *Prophecy in the Hebrew Bible: Selected Studies from Vetus Testamentum* [ed. David E. Orton; Brill's Readers in Biblical Studies 5; Leiden: Brill, 2000], 139-47; and in Lundbom, *Biblical Rhetoric*, 232-39).

I will exchange²² their glory for shame.

⁸They feed on the sin of my people;
they are greedy for their iniquity.

^{9a}Therefore it shall be like *people*, like *priest*. (Hos. 4:4b-9a)

And again in 4:11-14:

¹¹New wine takes away the mind of *my people*.

¹²They inquire of their thing of wood,
and their staff gives them oracles
For a spirit of whoredom has led them away,
and they have gone a-whoring out
from under their God.

¹³On the tops of the mountains they sacrifice,
and on the hills they burn offerings,
Under oak, poplar, and terebinth
because their shade is good!

Therefore your daughters play the whore,
and your sons' brides commit adultery.

¹⁴I will not punish your daughters when they play the whore,
nor your sons' brides when they commit adultery.
For those men over there go aside with whores
and sacrifice with sacred prostitutes.

A people without sense will be thrust down. (Hos. 4:11-14)

22. *Tiq soph* [scribal correction]: "They exchanged."

Another broken bicolon structure occurs in Hos. 8:9-13:

⁹For *behold* they have gone up to *Assyria*,

A wild ass off by himself.

Ephraim has hired lovers.

¹⁰Even though they hire among the nations,

now I will gather them up,

So that they soon writhe under the burden,

king and princes.

¹¹Indeed Ephraim has multiplied altars,

altars for sinning they have become to him

altars for sinning.

¹²Though I write for him multitudes of my laws,

they are regarded as something strange.

¹³Sacrifices they love, so they sacrifice,

and flesh they eat.

Yahweh takes no delight in them.

Now he will remember their iniquity

and punish their sins.

Behold they will return to *Egypt*. (Hos. 8:9-13)

Matthew, in similar fashion, breaks up a pair of parables, putting one at the beginning and one at the end. The parable of the sower (Matt. 13:3-9) becomes a cover parable used to introduce six other parables on the kingdom. The chapter as it now stands adds in addition some interpretation: (1) an explanation to the disciples as to why Jesus speaks in parables (13:10-17); (2) an allegorical interpretation of the parable of the sower (13:18-23); (3) another explanation as to why Jesus speaks in parables (13:34-35); (4) an

allegorical interpretation of the parable of the good and bad seed (13:36–43); and (5) a concluding word about scribes properly trained for the kingdom of heaven (13:51–52).

Structure in the Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount is likewise well structured within Matthew's Gospel, where it is not at all difficult to delimit pericopes. The Sermon consists of the following sections:

1. Introduction. Jesus teaches on the mountain; primary audience is the disciples (5:1–2).
2. Eight Blessings (5:3–12). Blessings 1 and 7 contain Matthew's key term, "kingdom of heaven," which could make an *inclusio* for a core of seven blessings.²³ Blessing 8 shifts to direct address and expands: "Blessed are *you* . . . rejoice and be glad. . . ." In Hebrew poetry, the final line in a series often varies the repetition,²⁴ is longer than the other lines,²⁵ and shifts to direct address.²⁶ The shift to direct address makes a heavier "ballast statement," which is another rhetorical feature in Hebrew poetry bringing discourse to a dramatic conclusion.²⁷ Matthew Black

23. Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3–7:27 and Luke 6:20–49)* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 142, 146.

24. David Noel Freedman, "Deliberate Deviation from an Established Pattern of Repetition in Hebrew Poetry as a Rhetorical Device," in *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies (Jerusalem, August 4–12, 1985)*. Division A, *The Period of the Bible*. (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1986), 45–52 (reprinted in *Divine Commitment and Human Obligation: Selected Writings of David Noel Freedman* (ed. John R. Huddleston; 2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 2:205–12).

25. David Daube, "Three Questions of Form in Matthew V," *JThS* 45 (1944): 21–23; Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: University of London and Athlone Press, 1956), 196–201.

26. Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah: A Study in Ancient Hebrew Rhetoric* (SBLDS 18; Missoula, MT: Society of Biblical Literature and Scholars Press, 1975, 77; 2nd ed., Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 103.

- believed that the Beatitudes were originally cast in poetic form in Hebrew or Aramaic.²⁸
3. Disciples Are to Be Salt and Light in the World (5:13-16). The two segments have parallel beginnings: “You are the salt of the earth”/“You are the light of the world.” The section concludes by calling those seeing “your good works” to “give glory to your Father in heaven.”
 4. Mandating a Better Righteousness (5:17-20). The concluding verse appears to be another ballast statement. Jeremias says that v. 20, “Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven,” is the theme of the Sermon on the Mount, which would point to its being a particularly weighty statement.²⁹ What follows are the antitheses that develop this statement on a “better righteousness.”
 5. What about Anger? (5:21-26). Here begins the first of five “You have heard that it was said . . . But I say to you” introductions, delimiting the section to vv. 21-26 and making it clear that Jesus has provocative anger in mind. The section concludes with a ballast statement employing the emphatic “truly,” which is the Hebrew “’āmēn!”

27. Ballast lines were first recognized by George Adam Smith, *The Early Poetry of Israel in Its Physical and Social Origins* (Schweich Lectures, 1910; London: Henry Frowde, Oxford University Press, 1912), 20–21, 77, and were identified elsewhere in Hebrew poetry by James Muilenburg, “Form Criticism and Beyond,” *JBL* 88 (1969): 9–12 (reprinted in *Hearing and Speaking the Word: Selections from the Works of James Muilenburg* [ed. Thomas F. Best; Scholars Press Homage Series; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984], 27–44; and in *Beyond Form Criticism: Essays in Old Testament Literary Criticism* [ed. Paul R. House; Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 2; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992], 49–69). In one of Smith’s ballast lines, Deut. 32:14b, a shift to second person address occurs. For ballast lines in the Song of Moses, see also Jack R. Lundbom, “Structure in the Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32.1–43),” in Lundbom, *Biblical Rhetoric*, 133–36; and Lundbom, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 859–62.

28. Matthew Black, “The Beatitudes,” *ET* 64 (1952–53): 125–26.

29. Jeremias, *Sermon on the Mount*, 22–24.

6. Beware of Lust (5:27-30). Introduced by “You have heard that it was said . . . But I say to you.” The balance in vv. 29-30 aids in delimiting the unit—“right eye”/“right hand,” also the repeated conclusion: “it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell.”
7. What about Divorce? (5:31-32). Introduced by an abbreviated “It was also said . . . But I say to you,” with the section also delimited by content to vv. 31-32.
8. Better Not to Use Oaths (5:33-37). Introduced by “You have heard that it was said . . . But I say to you,” with the section also delimited by content to vv. 33-37.
9. How to Handle Insult (5:38-42). Introduced by “You have heard that it was said . . . But I say to you,” with the section also delimited by content to vv. 38-42.
10. Love Your Enemies (5:43-48). Introduced by “You have heard that it was said . . . But I say to you,” with the section also delimited by content to vv. 43-48. The concluding verse, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect,” is another ballast statement, this one summing up the entire Sermon on the Mount. See further chapter 4 on the “*Imitatio Dei*.”
11. Beware of Public Piety (6:1-18). Here three teachings have parallel introductions: “So when you *give alms*” (v. 2); “And whenever you *pray*” (v. 5); and “And whenever you *fast*” (v. 16). Matthew supplements the central teaching on prayer with his presentation of the Lord’s Prayer (vv. 9-13), on either side of which is more expansion (vv. 7-8, 14-15). Ulrich Luz thinks that the Lord’s Prayer is the central text of the Sermon on the Mount, which it may be.³⁰ The section is also structured with an *inclusio*:³¹

30. Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary* (trans. James E. Crouch; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 172.

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6:1 Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to *be seen* by them; for then you will have *no reward* from your Father in heaven.

6:18 . . . and your Father who *sees* in secret *will reward you*.

12. Where Your Treasure Is (6:19-21). A teaching on the laying up of treasure, concluding with another ballast statement: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”
13. Single-mindedness to God and to others (6:22-24). Two teachings on single-mindedness, each of which concludes with a ballast statement: “If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!” (v. 23b), and “You cannot serve God and wealth” (v. 24b).
14. Do not worry about Your Life (6:25-34). The three basic human concerns, “What you will eat,” “What you will drink,” and “What you will wear” balance the section at beginning and end (vv. 25, 31). Concerns of food and clothing are met with parallel responses: “Look at the birds of the air . . .” (v. 26) and “Consider the lilies of the field . . .” (v. 28). Concluding the section is a ballast statement: “But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” Verse 34 is a later add-on.
15. Beware of Making Judgments (7:1-5). This section is delimited by content and parallel questions: “Why do you *see the speck* in *your neighbor’s eye*, but do not notice the *log* in *your own eye*?” (v. 3), and “Or how can you say to your *neighbor*, Let me *take the speck* out of *your eye*, while the *log* is in *your own eye*?” (v. 4). Delimiting the section to 7:1-5 makes it clear that the opening

31. Eugene M. Skibbe, “Pentateuchal Themes in the Sermon on the Mount,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 20 (1968): 47.

- “Do not judge” is not absolute but simply a cautionary word about hypocritical judgments.
16. Give Not Away What Is Holy (7:6). A teaching on the infinite worth of the kingdom: It is not to be given to those who will cheapen or ruin it. The section is a chiasmus: give *dogs*/throw before *swine*/they [*swine*] trample/they [*dogs*] turn to rend.
 17. Ask and It Will Be Given You (7:7-12). A teaching stressing the need to search out the kingdom, employing three verbs: ask, search, and knock. It concludes with the Golden Rule, which is another ballast statement in the entire Sermon on the Mount (v. 12). The reference to “the law and the prophets” in v. 12 may also tie in structurally with “the law and the prophets” in 5:17.³²
 18. Enter by the Narrow Gate (7:13-14). A wisdom teaching on the “two ways” and the “two gates”: the gate is wide and the way broad (not easy) leading to destruction; the gate is narrow and the way confined (not hard) leading to life.
 19. Beware of False Prophets (7:15-20). Another wisdom teaching, this one discriminating false from true prophets. Prophets, like trees, are known by their fruits. The false prophet bears bad fruit, and the true prophet good fruit. The unit concludes with a ballast statement: “Thus you will know them by their fruits” (v 20).
 20. Hearing and Doing Is Everything (7:21-27). This concluding teaching develops another wisdom theme, and has two parts: (1) a warning that not everyone speaking the name of the Lord or doing deeds of power/mighty works in his name will enter the kingdom of heaven, only the one who does the will of the Father who is in heaven; and (2) a parable on the two houses: one a house on rock built by the wise man, the other a house on sand

32. Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 173.

built by the foolish man. Jesus expects the assembled to hear and do what he has taught in the Sermon. The parable ends with a ballast statement similar to the one in 6:23: “and great was its fall!” (7:27b).

21. Conclusion. Jesus finishes his teaching on the mountain; the background crowds are astounded because he taught as one with authority (7:28–29). This conclusion balances the introduction in 5:1–2.³³

Proclaiming Matthew’s Gospel in the Early Church

One may well ask why Matthew structured his Gospel and also the Sermon on the Mount in the way that he did. Tradition has it that Matthew was a tax collector, thus a trained scribe (Matt. 9:9), which could account for his attention to balance, order, and good written form. (In the Old Testament, the book of Jeremiah is more ordered than any of the other prophetic books, probably because Baruch the scribe—and also his brother Seraiah—had a hand in the composition [see Jer. 36:4–8, 32; 51:59–64]).³⁴

But there may be another reason for Matthew giving structure to his Gospel, which would obtain also for other Gospel writers, and that would be the need for Gospels to be read aloud in their entirety to gathered assemblies—worshippers in the early church primarily, but also others interested in hearing the faith that this new church was proclaiming. Nils Lund maintained that larger chiasmic structures served a liturgical function in the Jewish community.³⁵ For example,

33. Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 173.

34. Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 21A; New York: Doubleday, 1999; repr., New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 85, 92–101; Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21–36: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 21B; New York: Doubleday, 2004; repr., New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 581–94; Lundbom, *Writing Up Jeremiah: The Prophet and the Book* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 46–86.

he argued that the book of Revelation—which he believed was structured into a large chiasmus—was to be read aloud to a gathered congregation on the eve of persecution.³⁶ Lund also thought that the chiasmic structure might serve as a mnemonic device in a culture still largely oral.³⁷ Lohr, too, argued that, in writing his Gospel, Matthew adapted existing traditions to the traditional style of oral literature.³⁸

Reading the inspired Word of God aloud to worshipping congregations had been going on for centuries. The Deuteronomic law, once put into written form, was to be read aloud every seven years at the Feast of Booths. Everyone was to be present—men, women, small children, even sojourners residing in the land (Deut. 31:9–13). When the first Jeremiah scroll was written in 605 B.C.E., it was read aloud to a gathered assembly on a fast day in 604 B.C.E. The one reading it was a prominent Jerusalem scribe, Baruch ben Neriah (Jer 36:1–8). Paul’s letters, likewise, were read in their entirety to gathered congregations of Christians. The tradition of reading Scripture aloud in worship has been carried on down through the ages, only now only small portions are read; seldom if ever are entire books read.

In the spring of 2011, when the four hundredth anniversary of the translation of the King James Bible was marked in England, a continuous reading of the entire KJV took place in Great Saint Mary’s Church, Cambridge. People from the various Cambridge churches were invited to read portions of the KJV. My church, Saint Mark’s, took part. The committee planning the event estimated that the Gospel of Mark would take about ninety minutes to read. Matthew would take a bit longer.

35. Lund, “Influence of Chiasmus upon the Structure of the Gospel according to Matthew,” 406–7; Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament*, 93.

36. Nils W. Lund, *Studies in the Book of Revelation* (Chicago: Covenant Press, 1955).

37. Lund, “Influence of Chiasmus upon the Structure of the Gospels,” 48.

38. Lohr, “Oral Techniques in the Gospel of Matthew,” 404.

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Matthew's Gospel was written so as to be read aloud to a congregation gathered for worship, its structure containing messages that people today will likely miss if they read the Gospel silently or hear only small portions read aloud in public worship.