

INTRODUCTION
SECTIONAL OUTLINE OF
MATTHEW VOLUME II

12. Jesus Heals a Leper	(8:1-4)
13. Jesus Heals a Centurion's Servant	(8:5-13)
14. Jesus Heals Peter's Mother-in-law	(8:14-17)
15. Jesus Calls to Discipleship	(8:18-22)
16. Jesus Stills a Tempest	(8:23-27)
17. Jesus Frees the Gadarene Demoniacs	(8:28—9:1)
18. Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralytic	(9:2-8)
19. Jesus Calls Matthew Levi	(9:9-17)
20. Jesus Raises Jairus' Daughter	(9:18-26)
21. Jesus Heals Two Blind Men	(9:27-34)
22. Jesus Evangelizes Galilee	(9:35-38)
23. Jesus Commissions Twelve Apostles	(10:1—11:1)
24. Jesus Receives Question from John and Preaches Sermon on John	(11:2-19)
25. Jesus Condemns Unbelieving Cities and Invites "Babes" to Come to Him	(11:20-30)
26. Jesus Answers Charges of Sabbath Breaking	(12:1-14)
27. Jesus Heals Many	(12:15-21)
28. Jesus Is Attacked for Casting Out Demon and Charge of League With Satan	(12:22-37)
29. Jesus Gives the Sign of Jonah	(12:38-45)
30. Jesus Refuses Fleshly Ties to Bind Him	(12:46-50)

THE PROBLEM OF ORDER IN
MATTHEW'S NARRATION

Is this section really a series of events subsequent to the Sermon on the Mount? It would seem so upon first reading Matthew's text alone. Yet the most cursory comparison with Mark's and Luke's Gospels, of the events included in this section, reveals that there are clear differences in order and emphasis. (See Volume I, Introduction, pp. 4, 5) If it is really Matthew's intention to follow a topical, rather than a chronological, arrangement, we need not be concerned if Mark and Luke both record much of this material in Matthew's chapters eight and nine in relationship to other events. Again, it seems clear that Matthew is illustrating the summary of Jesus' Galilean ministry mentioned in 4:23-25, by means of a good example of His preaching (chaps. 5-7) and ten good samples of His miracles (chaps. 8, 9). If so, must there be necessary time and place connections between each of the samples? Would not logical connection suffice for what we deem to be

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Matthew's evident purpose? Matthew concludes the section (chaps. 5-9) in the way he began (cf. 9:35 with 4:23-25), adding the note concerning the need for laborers in the harvest, a note which prepares his readers for the next major section (chapter 10) containing the commission of the Twelve to evangelize Galilee.

WHAT ARE WE TO DO WITH THESE MIRACLE STORIES?

What is the singular importance of Matthew's placing a collection of Jesus' miracles together here in this place in chapters eight and nine? The relationship to Matthew's whole plan, as we can determine it from his end result, is that he, as a writer of brilliantly clear narration, has given us a quick outline of his project (4:23-25) and now sketches in the outline with examples. He might even be responding to an unspoken demand: "We have heard this visionary who gives us high ideals. But what can He do? Can He DO as well as DREAM? And, better yet, can He make US doers?" It might just well be that Matthew places this striking collection of miracles right after the Sermon on the Mount to provide conclusive evidence that Jesus is not just a dreamer, but also One who really has the power to make us over into whatever image He demands. The miracles Matthew presents do not say merely that this Jesus is a wonder-worker, but, primarily, that this Jesus can throw in the super-natural difference between what we are and what He wants us to be. Best of all, He who has such wonderful power can also transform our feeble wills, our blind eyes, our demonic desires, our double-mindedness, our spiritual insensitiveness to all that is important to God, our emotional storms, our physical wretchedness—all this and more He can transform into a person of usefulness to God. Incidentally, we must admit that He has chosen not to transform us by a sudden word of power, because He, our Creator knows that the fashioning of character takes time and countless lessons learned through the practice of obedience to His Word. But that is just the point: the gospel itself is His word of power to transform us into His likeness. Matthew knew, just as did the other Apostles (See Jn. 5:30-47; 10:37, 38; 14:10, 11) that Jesus' miracles were but the authentication of God, given as credentials to prove that Jesus knew what He was talking about, regardless of whatever claim He might make.

And so it is that Jesus "came down off the mountain" figuratively too, so as to meet people's need at the level where they live. It is no wonder that great multitudes could follow a Savior like Jesus who was not satisfied to thunder lofty ideals from His ivory tower on the

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heights of the mountain but was willing to walk and work among needy people. But notice that He did not merely attend to their most pressing need, as they themselves viewed that need, but He responded to their need in such a way as to accomplish at the same time His higher purpose. Matthew's outline draws our attention to Jesus' genius for combining His merciful ministry to real human need at any level with His presentation of His credentials as being truly a "visitor from outer space" come to earth to bring a message of earth-shaking importance.

In these two chapters Matthew arranges his material into ten demonstrations of Jesus' might. These can be arranged into groups of three miracles each followed by a response, the third group having actually four exemplary wonders and two scandals.

But a caution is in order here: we must never destroy the quality of these miracle stories as history in order simply to draw some parabolic teaching from them. They are told by the eyewitnesses as the sober history of facts which actually occurred upon which the secure conclusion is drawn that the miracle worker is thus identified as from God. A secondary purpose for miracles is to show God's mercifulness in practical ways in direct response to some need of men. And yet, despite this caution urging us to let the eyewitnesses tell their story, as we read this history we cannot help identifying ourselves in the stories with the leper, with the Centurion, with Peter's wife's mother, with the demoniacs, the four men who brought their paralyzed friend, with Matthew the publican, with Jairus and his wife and countless others. If we take these stories seriously as true narrations of real events, we cannot but begin to identify ourselves and our problems in these stories. Perhaps Plummer (*Matthew*, 123) is right when he argues for a third intention behind miracles:

Perhaps the (Jesus') touch (of the leper) was also necessary for the sake of the millions who were to read of this cleansing. No *moral* pollution can be so great as to make Christ shrink from contact with a sinner, who comes to Him with a desire to be freed from his plague, and with the belief that He has the power to free him. Christ's miracles are parables. That was part of their purpose when they were wrought, and it is their chief meaning to us . . .

Plummer's metaphor ("Christ's miracles are parables.") must not distract us from the principle truth that our psychological reaction to these facts is parabolic in nature. Psychologically we reason thus: "If Jesus can treat with such tender sympathy this wretched sufferer, He can certainly cleanse me too." Although this begins to be argument

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from analogy from which the conclusions are always doubtful, yet the factual character of the narrations and the conclusions drawn from them by the Apostles in their doctrine assures us that our identification with the miserable characters helped by Jesus was no misplaced confidence.

But if it be objected that we cannot rely for our applied conclusions upon this psychological (intuited) self-identification in the persons whom Jesus loved and helped, then let us remember that, though it is true that we have often identified ourselves with the mythical figures of fairy stories as children or the heroes of dramatized fictions of later years, fully knowing that they never existed, how much more surely can we see ourselves being blessed and helped in these narrations of *fact!* What was it that drew the multitudes to Jesus for healing and blessing? Was it not the news spreading like wildfire that He had helped others, coupled with the conclusion of the suffering individuals that perhaps He could and would help them too, if they could but get to Him? (cf. Jn. 4:45-47; Lk. 5:15; Mt. 4:24-25; Mk. 3:7-12) Our measure of sanity is best gauged by that degree to which we acknowledge the real world and reject the world of fancy. It was into this real world that Jesus came to do His works, reveal to us the Father and call us to enter His service.

But, again, the compelling power of these miracle stories recorded by the four Evangelists lies in the authenticity of the facts. While it is true that men can be led to believe the most monstrous falsehoods, yet anyone who endeavors to construct a reasoned picture of the life of Christ that ignores the factual character of the miracles, must be confounded by the fact that Jesus' life had no sooner ended in apparent failure and defeat, than the entire company of His disciples began immediately to proclaim Him to be a God. They did this against great psychological hazards and unspeakable physical difficulties. Also striking for its absence is the testimony of any first-century contemporary of the early witnesses that denies the reality of any facts involved in the miracles. How did it happen then that the Apostles and early Christians concluded that Jesus was God and worthy of their worship and service if there were nothing in His life to distinguish it from that of ordinary men or that would identify His ministry as supernatural and His person divine? (See special study on miracles at conclusion of chapter nine.)

CHAPTER EIGHT

Section 12. Jesus Heals a Leper (8:1-4)

Section 13. Jesus Heals a Centurion's Servant (8:5-13)