

'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!'

A chiastic structure for Matthew 21:1–23:39

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The identity and authority of Jesus Christ is of fundamental importance. As Jesus' public ministry is about to commence, God the Father attests to Jesus' identity and the Spirit of God comes to rest on Jesus. The Gospel of Matthew, however, narrates the conflict over the Person and message of the King. As his public ministry is about to end, Jesus is involved in five controversies concerning his authority and identity. This article proposes a chiastic structure of Matthew 21:1–23:39, which focuses on the authority and identity of Jesus Christ, Lord and Son of David.

'Geseënd is Hy wat kom in die Naam van die Here!' Die chiastiese struktuur van Matteus 21:1–23:39. Die identiteit en gesag van Jesus Christus is van grondliggende belang. Aan die begin van Jesus se openbare bediening, bevestig God die Vader Jesus se identiteit en God se Gees kom rus op Hom. Die Evangelie van Matteus vertel egter van die konflik oor die Persoon en boodskap van die Koning. Naby die einde van sy openbare bediening is Jesus in 'n stryd oor vyf twispunte rakende sy gesag en identiteit gewikkel. Hierdie artikel stel 'n chiastiese struktuur van Matteus 21:1–23:39 voor, wat op die gesag en identiteit van Jesus Christus, Here en Seun van Dawid fokus.

Introduction

The Holy Spirit reveals the identity and authority of Jesus Christ from the very first verse of the Gospel of Matthew. Twice, God the Father testifies in an audible voice from heaven that Jesus is his beloved Son: at Jesus' baptism and at his transfiguration (Mt 3:17; 17:5¹). Not only does Jesus ask his disciples 'Who do you say I am' (16:15; NJKV), but in the last of five public controversies,² the Lord and Son of David also ask, 'What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?' (22:42). This question is at 'the heart of the gospel' (Carson 1995:470) and not simply a 'theological curiosity which could be hashed out in the seminar room' (Garland 1979:24). Indeed, when the forerunner hashes this out from a prison cell ('Are you the Coming One ...?'; 11:3), Jesus pronounces a blessing on all who is not offended because of him (11:6), and when God the Father reveals the heart of the gospel to him, Peter receives a special blessing from heaven (16:16–19). Written from a pre-millennial perspective, the purpose of this article is firstly, to propose a chiastic structure of Matthew 21:1–23:39; secondly, to interpret these 131 verses using the structural features of this passage; and thirdly to evaluate the proposal before concluding with a few last remarks.³

The chiastic structure of Matthew 21:1–23:39 proposed

That Matthew 21:1–23:39 can be viewed as a rhetorical *unit*, is evidenced by the Messianic greeting (21:9; 23:39), which serves as an *inclusio*. The rhetorical *situation* is established by the entrance into and ultimate return to Jerusalem (21:10; 23:39), the entrance into and departure from the temple (21:12; 23:38) as well as the cursing of the fig tree and the prophetic warning addressed to 'this generation' (21:18–22; cf. 23:34–36; Grams 1991:48–50). Then the controversies are described (21:23–22:46), followed by Jesus' response (23:1–33). According to Grams (1991:51), if the rhetorical situation as a whole is one of judgement, the *species* of rhetoric is judicial: 'The legal issue in this public trial is one called transference, that is, proof and refutation must centre around who has the right to proclaim judgment.' As for its rhetorical *arrangement*, the proposed chiastic structure of 21:1–23:39 is presented:

1. Further references to Matthew will be indicated only by chapters and verses.

2. These five controversies are the questions put to Jesus about (1) his authority; (2) paying taxes to Caesar; (3) the resurrection; and (4) the greatest commandment of the Law of Moses, followed by Jesus' question to the Pharisees about (5) the sonship of Christ.

3. The author is not aware of any study or commentary that proposes a chiastic structure of Matthew 21:1–23:39.

- A. Arrival in Jerusalem and entering the temple 21:1–17
- B. Judgement: fig tree cursed 21:18–22
- C. First question: Jesus' authority 21:23–27
- D. Parable of the two sons 21:28–32
- E. Parable of the tenants 21:33–46
- F. Parable of the wedding feast 22:1–14
- G. Question: paying taxes to Caesar 22:15–22
- H. Question: resurrection 22:23–33
 - I. Question: Law's greatest commandment 22:34–40
 - J. Jesus Christ, Lord and Son of David 22:41–46
 - I.' Law's greatest Teacher: Christ 23:1–12
 - H.' Woe: shutting the kingdom 23:13
 - G.' Woe: widows' homes, prayers and greater condemnation 23:14
 - F.' Woe: proselyte twice a son of hell 23:15
 - E.' Two woes to blind guides: false oaths and weightier matters 23:16–24
 - D.' Two woes: clean inside 23:25–28
 - C.' Last woe: tombs of prophets and monuments of the righteous 23:29–33
- B.' Judgement: all these things upon 'this generation' 23:34–36
- A.' Exiting the temple and future return to Jerusalem 23:37–39

Matthew 21:1–23:39 interpreted

As the corresponding pairs of the proposed chiastic structure are discussed, the centre and the climax of the structure – the identity and authority of Jesus Christ, Lord and Son of David – will be highlighted as its central theological motif.

A Arrival in Jerusalem and temple (21:1–17) and A' Exiting temple and future return (23:37–39)

By the time Jesus came near and entered the city of the great king, 'this generation' in Israel had already committed the unpardonable sin by blaspheming the work of the Holy Spirit performed through the Son of David (12:23–32).⁴ Consequently, One greater than Jonah will provide 'this evil and adulterous generation' with only one sign – the sign of the prophet Jonah (12:39–40). When he enters Jerusalem, Jesus fulfils prophecy by officially presenting himself to Israel as the Messianic king and he accepts the Messianic greeting (21:1–17; cf. Zch 9:9; cf. Daube 1956:23), 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!' (21:9, 15). Inexplicably, Jesus is still not recognised in the city for who he is (21:10). So the prophesied Coming One enters the city as much the rejected King as the Passover Lamb of God who will save his people from their sins. Because a household must set aside the Passover lamb on the tenth of Nisan to inspect it for any spot or blemish (Ex 12:3–6; cf. 1 Pt 1:19),

4. According to Fruchtenbaum (1989:617; cf. Toussaint 1980:165), the 'unpardonable sin is the national rejection of the Messiahship of Jesus by Israel whilst he was physically present on the basis that he was demon possessed. ... [J]udgment came in the year AD 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple and the world-wide dispersion of the Jewish people. It was a national sin committed by the generation of Jesus' day ... From this point on, a special emphasis is placed on *this generation* in the gospels, for it was guilty of a very unique sin. At this point, His offer of the Messianic kingdom was rescinded.'

One greater than the temple enters it to be inspected by the house of Israel (21:12; cf. 12:6). In the ensuing controversies (21:23–22; 46), the religious leaders of 'this generation' tests the Passover Lamb of God, but One greater than Solomon ends victorious in verbal combat (22:46) before providing further comment (23:1–39).

Regarding 23:37–39, Jesus poignantly laments over Jerusalem, for if 'this generation' of the nation of Israel had been willing to accept him as the Messiah, the kingdom of heaven would have been established in terms of the Davidic Covenant. However, since Christ was rejected, the house built in terms of the Davidic Covenant will be left desolate. All is not lost, however, for God will fulfil his unconditional promises to Israel. The house of David will yet see Christ establish and rule the Messianic Kingdom. As Jesus prepares to leave the temple, he prophesies that the current rejection will turn into acceptance when Israel as a nation will, at the end of the Tribulation Period,⁵ seek and acknowledge him with the Messianic greeting, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD' (23:39; cf. Hs 5:14–6:3; Toussaint 1980:265–266; Constable 2014:347–348).⁶

B Judgement: Fig tree cursed (21:18–22) and B' Judgement: Upon 'this generation' (23:34–36)

Even though the unpardonable sin had already been committed by 'this generation' (11:1–12:45), the unofficial of the time became official when Jesus was still rejected on the day of his so-called triumphal entry. Until a future generation of the *nation* Israel accepts Jesus as the Messiah, Christ focuses on training his *disciples* for their work. On the day after the triumphal entry, Christ performs his only judgement-miracle by cursing the fig tree (21:18–22). The fig tree represents 'this generation' in Israel, that is, judged for rejecting Jesus and for not producing fruit worthy of repentance (cf. Toussaint 1980:245; Constable 2014:314). 'This generation' would never see the kingdom (cf. 12:31–32) and was judged approximately 40 years later in A.D. 70. Christ thus turns his attention to his disciples who do the will of the Father. According to Constable (2014:346), it is 'that "generation" that Jesus so cursed. It was not the entire Jewish race. God is not finished with Israel (Rom. 11:1). He postponed the kingdom. He did not cancel it.'

After the series of woes in Matthew 23 (cf. Hagner 1995:675; Blomberg 1992:348–349), Jesus prophesies that he will send emissaries (some of whom will be killed and some will be crucified) to these serpents and brood of vipers who will not escape the condemnation of hell (23:33–34). Because they rejected the truth revealed in the Hebrew canon (from Abel, described in Genesis, to Zechariah, son of Berekiah, described in 2 Chronicles), upon them will come the blood of the prophets (Nolland 2005:947). Those who follow in this path will likewise be judged. Since Christ's ministry,

5. The Tribulation period is viewed as a period of seven years immediately preceding the return of the Son of Man (Toussaint 1980:141; Constable 2014:14, 170).

6. The unconditional covenants and promises that God gave to Israel will still be fulfilled to Israel; the Church *partakes* in these covenants, but does not take them over (Eph 2:11–3:6; Rm 9:4; Fruchtenbaum 1989:634–636; Toussaint 1980:19; Constable 2014:348). See footnote 15 of this article.

during his First Advent, was restricted to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (15:24; cf. 10:5–7), all these things will come upon ‘this generation’ of Israel that rejected the Son of David.

C First question: Jesus’ authority (21:23–27) and C’ Last woe: Tombs ... (23:29–33)

The ‘story of Jesus is one of conflict, so that its plot turns on conflict’ (Kingsbury 1992:347). Here the conflict is not only about the authority of Christ and thus his right to judge,⁷ but in the context of the Feast of Passover, the testing of the Passover Lamb of God commences when the chief priests and elders question Jesus in the temple.⁸ Having witnessed Jesus’ actions the previous day and hearing his teaching (21:12–17, 23), they ask Jesus questions, which, in accordance with rabbinic interrogation procedures, Jesus is justified to respond with questions of his own.⁹ By referring to the baptism of John, Jesus focuses on the authority of the ministry of John (Carson 1995:447). If these religious authorities were more concerned for the truth already revealed, instead of pragmatically focusing on outcomes (21:25–27), they might have believed John, a prophet, who called Israel to repent and whose entire ministry pointed to Jesus (3:2, 11). However, since the chief priests and elders choose not to answer, Jesus’ question undermines their authority. Smillie (2005:459) notes that with Jesus’ curt dismissal in 21:27, the matter is only *apparently* concluded, for by ‘telling three parables one right after the other (21:28–22:14) Jesus subtly provided an answer to both their questions, “By what authority?” and “Who gave You this authority?”’ Moreover, these ‘three parables advance the argument that the leaders have no jurisdiction’ (Grams 1991:54).¹⁰ For those who have ears to hear, this question-for-a-question undeniably argues that Jesus Christ is the Lord and Son of David who acts in accordance with the Father’s authority.

In the last woe of the series,¹¹ Jesus notes that by building tombs for the prophets and decorating the grave monuments of the righteous, the scribes and Pharisees imply that they

7. Daube (1956:217–222; cf. Owen-Ball 1993:6) notes that, because Jesus acted like a Rabbi without being ordained in accordance with rabbinic procedure, the religious authorities imply that if Jesus is not ordained, either his doctrines and actions are ridiculous, or they imply that Jesus is a false prophet.

8. Turner (2008:506) states that Matthew 21:23–22:46 may contain a chiasmic structure, bracketed by two (unanswered) questions that Jesus puts to the religious leaders of ‘this generation’: A Jesus’ question (21:24–27); B Three parables (21:28–22:14); B’ Three controversies (22:15–40); and A’ Jesus’ question (22:41–46). At the beginning of the trial, the religious leaders *choose not* to answer Jesus’ question (21:23–27); at the conclusion of the controversies, they *cannot* answer Jesus’ question (Grams 1991:59).

9. According to Daube (1956:151, 219; cf. Owen-Ball 1993:4), a pattern of rabbinic interrogation may proceed along these lines: (1) hostile question by an outsider; (2) response with a counter-question; (3) the counter-question compels an inadequate answer and the outsider becomes vulnerable; (4) refuting the outsider as a result of the inadequate answer.

10. Grams (1991:54–55) argues that these three parables function effectively as interrogation and for self-indictment: ‘The parabolic examples are stated, then the leaders are asked to make a judgment on the example, but by doing so they indict themselves. Such inductive rhetoric is highly suitable when direct confrontation is either impossible or ineffective.’

11. The woes employ ridicule and taunt, but to avoid an insult from ricocheting back to the speaker, ‘Jesus in His woes always has the scribes and Pharisees condemn themselves through their own speech or actions’ (Simmonds 2009:341–343). Consequently, each of the woes in Matthew 23 ‘takes a highly stylized form of commendation immediately followed by a clarifying refutation. The first part builds up and the second part puts down. Thus while *against* the scribes and Pharisees, the woes are all triggered off by their *merits*’ (Simmonds 2009:336).

would not have shed the blood of the prophets.¹² However, with the Jewish leaders of that day displaying ‘an endemic lack of receptivity to the messengers sent to Israel by God’ (Hagner 1995:672; cf. Carson 1995:448), their claim ironically testifies to the exact opposite (23:31).¹³ If they had heeded the ministry of John (11:13), and all the prophets and the law prophesied until John (11:13), how much more should they have heeded Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God? Because these religious leaders dismissed all these prophets, Jesus concludes the last woe by repeating words first uttered by John the Baptist (‘brood of vipers’ – 3:7; 23:33; cf. 12:34). Since they did not believe the messages from heaven (cf. 21:25), the scribes and Pharisees prove they are the sons of their fathers who will not escape hell (23:32–33).

D Parable of the two sons (21:28–32) and D’ Two woes: Clean inside (23:25–28)

In this parable, two sons are approached and then sent by their father to work in the vineyard. In symmetrical but opposite responses, one son refuses to go, changes his mind and ends up doing the father’s will; the other son says he will go, but his words remain empty. When Jesus applies the parable, the religious leaders are told that the tax collectors and prostitutes enter the kingdom of God before they do (21:31). Making no claim to righteousness themselves (cf. 5:20), these tax collectors and prostitutes did the will of God by believing that John came in the way of righteousness.¹⁴

Regarding the two woes (23:25–28) that compare an outward appearance with an inner state, Nolland (2005:940; cf. Hagner 1995:671) notes that these two woes belong closely together, sharing the same theme and vocabulary. In 23:25–26, the inside of the scribes and Pharisees are shown to be full of extortion (as could be said of tax collectors) and self-indulgence (sometimes applied to sexual immorality; cf. Nolland 2005:937–938), although they appear clean on the outside. And again, although the scribes and Pharisees appear beautiful and even righteous on the outside, they remain full of hypocrisy and lawlessness as they did not believe in the way of righteousness that John preached (23:27–28; cf. 21:32).

E Parable of the tenants (21:33–46) and E’ Two woes to blind guides ... (23:16–24)

In the parable of the tenant farmers, a landowner leased his vineyard to tenants. Twice, he sent servants to the tenants to

12. Kingsbury (1987:58) argues that since the term *leaders* is used in Matthew to refer to persons who hold positions of authority in Israel (15:14; 23:16, 24), it can also be used by the literary critic to denote all such groups of persons. Thus, the different kinds of leaders (such as Pharisees, scribes, Sadducees, Herodians, elders, chief priests) may be treated, narrative-critically, as a single character (Kingsbury 1987:58). Simmonds (2009:348) states that the Pharisees ‘were the most worthy opponents against which Jesus demonstrated His vocal pugilistic skills’.

13. With irony, ‘Jesus used the scribes’ and Pharisees’ superficially meritorious appearance to display them in a most negative light. Jesus did not disagree with the meritorious part; that would undermine the effect of the rhetorical device He was using to avoid being tarred by His own insult’ (Simmonds 2009:343). Moreover, in each of the ‘woes and five controversies, Jesus pointed out a contrast between things of this world and things of the next’ (Simmonds 2009:337–338).

14. Noting that the noun *righteousness* occurs seven times in Matthew (3:15; 5:6, 10, 20; 6:1, 33; 21:32), Viljoen (2013:2) states that the occurrence of the word in 3:15 (referring to John and Jesus) and 21:32 (referring only to John) ‘form a wide *inclusio* [inclusion] around the concentration of five occurrences of the word in the Sermon on the Mount, where it refers to the life of the disciples’.

collect fruit as payment in kind, but some of these servants were beaten, some were killed and some stoned. Then the landowner sent his son, but the heir was killed by the tenants outside of the vineyard. Referring to Psalm 118:22–23, Jesus portrays the religious leaders as ignorant of the Scriptures which point to him (21:42; cf. Carson 1995:453). The tenant farmers are replaced for two reasons: firstly, because they do not personally enter the kingdom of God (21:43; cf. Nolland 2005:878), and secondly, because they are wicked leaders (21:41).¹⁵ Regarding their role as religious leaders, Turner (2008:516) notes that the kingdom is ‘taken away from the disobedient religious leaders and given to the twelve apostles who will lead Jesus’ church’. Earlier, Jesus had pre-authenticated a scribal and teaching role for his disciples once the great commission commenced (13:52; cf. 28:18–20). Jesus had also given his apostles the authority to bind and loose (16:19; 18:18). In 21:43, the transfer of authority from the wicked tenants to other tenants who will deliver fruit in their season is made public.

Earlier Jesus offended the Pharisees (and the scribes) by calling them ‘blind guides’, because they elevated their halakhic ‘traditions of the elders’ above the authority of the Word of God (15:1–14). In 23:16–24, Jesus pronounces two woes on the halakhot of the ‘blind guides’: firstly, for casuistic oaths that amount to a deceitful evasion of duty to God (23:16–22), and secondly, for so majoring in the minors that the weightier matters of the Law are neglected (23:23–24). By claiming the power to legislate the validity of oaths, binding and not binding, and by linking these judgements to God (23:22), the blind guides not only revealed their lack of spiritual insight (‘have you not read ...?’; 21:42), but were also usurping the prerogative of God and his revealed will (cf. Simmonds 2009:337). By these kinds of oaths, the tenant farmers could pay tithes on mint, dill and cumin, but neglect the weightier matters of delivering to the landowner the fruit of justice, mercy and faithfulness.

F Parable of the wedding feast (22:1–14) and F’ Woe: Make proselytes ... (23:15)

Given the response of the chief priests and Pharisees who wanted to arrest him (21:45–46), Jesus presents another parable to the religious leaders in which the kingdom of heaven is compared to a king who arranges a marriage for his son (22:1–14). In the first part of the parable, the king’s invitations to come to the wedding banquet are either refused or ignored, and some of the king’s slaves are even killed (22:3–6). Nolland (2005:884) correctly points out that the second part of the parable has ‘to do with the impossibility of coming to the wedding feast on one’s own terms’. Thus, after extending more invitations, this time to all, both good and bad, the banquet hall is filled with guests (22:8–10). Another incorrect response is displayed, however,

15. In this parable, it is not the vineyard (Israel) but the tenants (religious leaders of that generation) that are replaced. It is ‘a mistake to view 21:43 as indicating the replacement of Israel by the gentile church’ (Turner 2008:517). Davies and Allison (2004:367) note that nothing here is implied about the eschatological fate of Israel: ‘While many exegetes have found in our passage the final dismissal of the Jews, that is eisegesis.’ The author rejects all forms of supersessionism and anti-Semitism.

when someone presumptuously arrives at the wedding feast without the proper wedding garment (22:11–13; cf. 8:11–12). If the wedding garment refers to righteousness – as the chiasmic structure appears to suggest – the parable may be stressing that ‘unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven’ (cf. 5:20; Hagner 1995:631; Nolland 2005:891).

In contrast to those who did not come to the wedding feast or paid no attention to the invitation to come, Jesus remarks that the scribes and Pharisees are willing to travel across land and sea to win one proselyte (23:15a). Commenting on 23:15, Carson (1995:479; cf. Hagner 1995:668–669) rightly notes that the ‘Pharisees’ teaching locked them [*the proselytes*] into a theological framework that left no room for Jesus the Messiah and therefore no possibility of entering the messianic kingdom’. Consequently, this proselyte is made twice as much a son of hell as the scribes and Pharisees are, that is, he or she corresponds to someone without the proper wedding garment (23:15; cf. 22:12).

G Question: Paying taxes to Caesar (22:15–22) and G’ Woe: Widows’ homes ... (23:14)

Daube (1956:158–163; cf. Owen-Ball 1993:1–4) notes that the last four controversies (22:15–22) are grouped in accordance with the rabbinic tradition of the time, namely as four types of questions: (1) *hokmāh*, ‘wisdom’ (halakhic interpretations of points of law); (2) *bōrūth*, ‘vulgarity’ (questions ridiculing a belief); (3) *derekh eres*, ‘the way of the land’ (questions about a moral and successful life); and (4) *haggādāh*, ‘legend’ (interpretations of biblical texts with apparent contradictions). When the Herodians and Pharisees try to trap Jesus (with a flurry of insincere and essentially hostile words) by asking whether it is lawful to pay a poll tax to Caesar in accordance with the rabbinic system, Jesus is expected to base his ruling upon Scriptural material (Owen-Ball 1993:5; cf. Simmonds 2009:340). The trap, designed to encourage Jesus to answer in a reductionist yes-or-no fashion (Carson 1995:459), is avoided when Jesus’ counter-questions (‘Why do you test me, you hypocrites?’ and ‘Whose image and inscription is this?’; 22:18, 20) make his questioners vulnerable to refutation. Jesus’ answer lays down the proper relationship between his people and the government (Carson 1995:460). The coin should go ‘to him whose likeness it bears, and He suggested that God should be given what bears God’s likeness, alluding to Genesis 1:26 and Exodus 13:9–16 (man is created in God’s likeness)’ (Simmonds 2009:340).

If 23:14 is authentic,¹⁶ it could be paired with 22:15–22 in the proposed chiasmic structure. This woe charges the scribes and Pharisees with misappropriating the property of widows, thereby perverting the justice and mercy that God commanded in the Law of Moses, especially towards widows and orphans (Dt 24:17–22; cf. Mt 9:13). By mocking

16. Matthew 23:14 may be an interpolation from Mark 12:40 and Luke 20:47. This woe is omitted in Matthew by the best Alexandrian and Western texts (e.g. α , B, D, L and Θ); certain MSS include 23:14 after 23:13 (e.g. 0233, f^{13} , I 547, P^{60} and it^a), whereas others reverse the order (e.g. W, Δ , 0102, 0107, Byz [E F G H O Σ] *Lect*) (cf. Aland *et al.* 2000; 23:13; Metzger & United Bible Societies 1994:50; Turner 2008:559).

the poor, they insult their Maker (Pr 17:5); by doing this under cover of long pretentious prayers, greater will their condemnation be (23:14; cf. Ja 1:27; 3:1).

H Question: Resurrection (22:23–33) and H' Woe: Shutting the kingdom (23:13)

The Sadducees ridicule belief in the resurrection through their question about levirate law (22:23–28; cf. Dt 25:5–6). In their riddle no physical offspring is produced (22:24–25). Jesus states that the Sadducees err, because they know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God (22:29). God will raise the dead to a life that is not a mere continuation of the present, but rather a transformation, so that human beings will be like angels in the fact that they will neither marry nor be given in marriage (22:30). As for the Sadducees' lack of knowledge of the Scriptures, Jesus reminds them that God keeps the Abrahamic Covenant with the patriarchs. Since God is a God of the living, there is a continuing living relationship with the patriarchs (22:32). God will fulfil his unconditional promises made to the patriarchs by resurrecting them.

According to 23:13, the scribes and Pharisees do not enter the kingdom of heaven (cf. 12:31–32). But worse, through their teachings and actions, they fail to recognise Jesus as the Messiah foretold in the Scriptures and they also hinder other potential 'spiritual offspring' from entering the kingdom. When the kingdom of heaven is established in terms of the Davidic Covenant, many will come from the east and the west to sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, certainly implying the resurrection of the dead, but those believers will not have been followers of the religious leaders of 'that generation' (8:11–12; 12:23–45; cf. 23:36).

I Question: Law's greatest commandment (22:34–40) and I' Law's greatest Teacher: Christ (23:1–12)

After Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees gather once more to present their final test, asking Jesus what is the greatest commandment of the Law of Moses (22:34–36). Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:4–5 and then Leviticus 19:18, the former text enjoining love for God from our whole person; the latter, love for one's neighbour (cf. Turner 2008:536). According to Carson (1995:465), these two commandments are the greatest, 'because all Scripture "hangs" on them; i.e., nothing in Scripture can cohere or be truly obeyed unless these two are obeyed'. This pericope prepares the way for the denunciations of 23:1–36 (Carson 1995:465; Grams 1991:61) and, in terms of the proposed chiastic structure, 23:1–12 in particular.

Jesus warns the crowds and the disciples (23:1) not to follow the scribes and the Pharisees, because he is the greatest Teacher – not the religious leaders of 'this generation' (23:2–12). Carson (1995:473; cf. France 2007:859) makes a strong case for viewing 23:2–4 as a chiasm where biting irony (23:2–3a) is contrasted with non-ironical advice (23:3b–4).¹⁷ By

17. Carson (1995:473) suggests the following chiastic structure of 23:2–4: A. The leaders have taken on Moses' teaching authority (v. 2); B Do what they say (v. 3a); B' Do not what they do (v. 3b); A' Their teaching merely binds men (v. 4).

extolling the traditions of the elders above the Law of Moses (God's revealed rule of life for Israel at the time) the scribes and Pharisees were not obeying the two commandments on which the Law and the prophets 'hang' (23:4; cf. 15:2). Consequently, it was not love that motivated obedience to the Law, but rather selfish lusts and the pride of life (23:5–7). Jesus requires a humbling of oneself to serve God and others in love (23:11–12).

J Jesus Christ is Lord and Son of David (22:41–46)

In the centre of the chiastic structure, Jesus takes the initiative and reciprocates by asking questions of his own, but his purpose is 'not to trap them or even to win a debate but to win their hearts (cf. 23:37)' (Turner 2008:539). According to Carson (1995:466), Jesus wants to elicit from them 'what the Scriptures themselves teach about the Messiah, thus helping people to recognize who he really is'. When Jesus asks the Pharisees, 'What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is He' (22:41), their reply, 'The son of David' (22:42) is true but far from complete. The fact that Jesus Christ is a human descendant of David is true, but if David, by the Spirit in Psalm 110:1, calls him Lord, how can he be his son (22:43–45)? The apparent antinomy lies in Jesus' identity, for Jesus is David's son by human descent; yet, he is also David's Lord, because he is God, the second Person of the Trinity, the Son of God (cf. 11:27; 16:16). The fact that Jesus Christ is divine and Lord of David is true, for Matthew, by the Spirit, records how God the Father twice calls Jesus his beloved Son (3:17; 17:5). Since Jesus Christ is both Lord and Son of David, the One who sits at the right hand of God the Father has more authority than David (cf. Turner 2008:540–541; Blomberg 1992:336). According to Carson (1995:468), the Old Testament itself looked forward to one 'who would be both the offshoot and the root of David (Isa. 11:1, 10; cf. Rev 22:16), and so Jesus' question (Mt 22:45) demands the recognition that 'Scripture itself teaches that Messiah is more than David's son'. The centre of the chiastic structure emphasises not only the source of Christ's authority (cf. 21:23), but the Holy Spirit may have inspired Matthew to record these events in a chiastic pattern, not to trap anyone, but for hearts to reciprocate the love that Jesus Christ, the Lord and Son of David, has shown us sinners first.

The chiastic structure of Matthew 21:1–23:39 evaluated

To 'prevent one from imagining a chiastic structure where it is never intended' (Blomberg 1989:5), commentators such as Lund (1942:40–41) and Clark (1975:63–72) have identified criteria to evaluate proposed chiastic structures. However, to evaluate the proposed chiastic structure of Matthew 21:1–23:39, the nine criteria that Blomberg (1989) identified will be used:

- (1) There must be a problem in perceiving the structure of the text in question, which more conventional outlines fail to resolve. ...
- (2) There must be clear examples of parallelism between the two 'halves' of the hypothesized chiasmus ...
- (3) Verbal (or grammatical) parallelism as well as conceptual (or structural) parallelism should characterize most if not all of the

corresponding pairs of subdivisions. ... (4) The verbal parallelism should involve central or dominant imagery or terminology, not peripheral or trivial language. ... (5) Both verbal and conceptual parallelism should involve words and ideas not regularly found elsewhere within the proposed chiasmus. ... (6) Multiple sets of correspondences between passages opposite each other in the chiasmus as well as multiple members of the chiasmus itself are desirable. ... (7) The outline should divide the text at natural breaks which would be agreed upon even by those proposing very different structures to account for the whole. ... (8) The center of the chiasmus, which forms its climax, should be a passage worthy of that position in light of its theological or ethical significance. If its theme were in some way repeated in the first and last passages of the text, as is typical in chiasmus, the proposal would become that much more plausible. (9) Finally, ruptures in the outline should be avoided if at all possible. (pp. 5–8)

That the first criterion has been met is evident in the confusion about the literary role and place of Matthew 23. Some scholars (Carson 1995:469; Nolland 2005:920; France 2007:768) view Matthew 23 as the climax to the preceding confrontations,¹⁸ whilst others (Hagner 1995:653; Ridderbos 1987:13) consider chapter 23 to be a separate discourse because of its negative and condemnatory content aimed at a specific group. Hood (2009:527–532) suggests that the scope of the final discourse extends from chapter 23 to 25,¹⁹ whereas Wilson (2004:67–71; cf. Schweizer 1975:401–482) states that the theme of the coming king, first humbly (21:1–11; cf. Zch 9:9) and then in majesty (25:31–46), forms an *inclusio* around Matthew 21–25.²⁰ The proposed chiasmic

18. Carson (1995:469) adds that the different audiences (23:1; 24:3) and the distinct but related themes separate chapter 23 from chapters 24–25.

19. Hood (2009:527–532) argues that the changes in audience and location between chapters 23 and 24 are comparable to the discourse in Matthew 13 (cf. 13:34–36). According to Blomberg (1992:25, 339), Matthew intended chapters 23–25 to be viewed as a unit, because the final discourse expands the judgement upon Israel to encompass all the nations that will be held accountable for how they responded to Christ and his emissaries.

20. Turner (2008:543; cf. Nolland 2005:920) notes that it is probably better to view Matthew 23 as the culmination of Jesus' controversies with the religious leaders, but at the same time he notes that, on balance, Matthew 23 'functions as a bridge or hinge that concludes the preceding conflict narrative and prepares the reader for the following eschatological discourse'.

structure attempts to resolve the apparent impasse regarding the literary role and place of Matthew 23.²¹

Table 1 shows that criteria 2, 3, 4 and 5 may have been met.

Criteria 6, 7 and 8 also appear to have been met, since the proposed structure has nine corresponding sections or member sets (A-I; A'-I'), and the centre of the structure is clearly worthy of that position in light of its theological and Christological significance. Moreover, sections A and A' repeat the theme of this chiasmic structure as highlighted in section J. Further, the proposed chiasmic structure divides 21:1–23:39 at natural breaks, which most commentators will agree with. Regarding criterion 9, ruptures in the chiasmic structure have been avoided, except perhaps for the inclusion of 23:14 in the structure. This may be a weakness or a strength of the proposed structure, depending on one's view of the text-critical issues involved. If 23:14 is not authentic, the current sections F and G may be combined, with the corresponding pair being a combination of F' and G'.

Conclusion

The Holy Spirit reveals in Matthew 'that a perfect King who is a perfect Prophet and a perfect Priest will administer the kingdom' (Constable 2014:17). Twice, God the Father testifies that Jesus is his beloved Son and once he specifically reveals through Peter that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. The Lord Jesus Christ is returning to rule and to reign as the Son of David, for it is to the Son that the Father said, 'sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool'. And so, when all has been said and done and the controversies and theological curiosities have been hashed out, the crux of the matter can be stated in the question, 'What do you think about the Christ?' The chiasmic structure of Matthew 21:1–23:39 not only identifies him as King (21:5, 15; cf. 23:39), Prophet (21:9) and Priest (22:41–46; cf. Ps 110),

21. This article does not explore the possibility that 21:1–25:46 may be one major literary section, which contains two rhetorical units (21:1–23:39; 24:1–25:46).

TABLE 1: Verbal and conceptual parallelism of Matthew 21:1–23:39.

Section	Parallelism*	Central or dominant imagery/terminology Words/ideas not found elsewhere
A-A'	Prophecy fulfilled (21:5) – prophecy made (23:39); Literal use of donkey and colt (21:2) – metaphorical use of hen and chickens (23:37).	Jerusalem (21:1, 10; 23:37 [twice]); My house – your house (21:13; 23:38); Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! (21:9; 23:39).
B-B'	I say to you (21:21; 23:36); Curse and wither ≈ kill and crucify (21:19–20; 23:34).	Fig tree (21:19–20) ≈ 'this generation' (23:36).
C-C'	Prophet(s) (21:26; 23:29–31); Heaven versus hell (21:25 [twice]; 23:33).	Implied echo in words of John the Baptist: 'Brood of vipers' (3:7; 23:33; cf. 21:25).
D-D'	Righteousness (21:32) versus wickedness (23:28); Tax collectors & prostitutes enter the Kingdom of God (21:31–32) ≈ greed and self-indulgence of scribes and Pharisees who clean outside and look beautiful on the outside but don't enter the kingdom (23:25).	Way of righteousness (21:32) –/versus appearing righteous (23:28); Two sons (21:28) say yes/no but then does not/does ≈ two woes related to outside-inside (23:25–26) and inside-outside (23:27–28).
E-E'	Tenants ≈ blind guides/fools (23:16–17, 24) who 'have not read the Scriptures' (21:42); Fruit in their season (21:35, 41) ≈ mint, dill and cumin and weightier matters of the Law (23:23).	Landowner (21:33, 40) ≈ God on his throne (23:22); the son and heir (21:37–38) ≈ one who dwells in the temple (23:21); Oaths used to neglect duty to God (21:34–38; 23:16–22).
F-F'	Throw outside into darkness (22:13) ≈ twice a son of hell (23:15); Refuse to come or went off to own land (22:3, 5) versus willingness to travel over land and sea (23:15).	Lack of wedding garment (22:12) ≈ proselyte who goes to hell (23:15); Wedding banquet (22:2) versus hell; Capstone (21:42) ≈ one greater than the temple (12:6; cf. 23:17, 19); Rejected stone ≈ altar of the cross (21:42; cf. 23:18–20).
G-G'		Teach the way of God (22:16) versus devour widows' homes; Integrity and truth (22:16) versus pretence (23:14).
H-H'	Resurrection required to fulfil unconditional promises concerning the kingdom of heaven (22:23, 28; cf. 23:13).	Lack of physical offspring via levirate ≈ shut the kingdom to potential 'spiritual offspring' (22:24; 23:13).
I-I'	Teacher (22:36; 23:8, 10); God ≈ Father (22:37; 23:9).	Greatest command in the Law (of Moses) ≈ Moses' seat (22:36, 40; 23:2); Love God versus done to be seen by men (22:37–38; 23:5); Love neighbour vs. love not neighbour (22:39; 23:4) ≈ serving others humbly (23:11–12).

*, Synonymous parallelism indicated by '–'; antithetic parallelism by 'versus' and synthetic by '≈'.

but it also shows something of the power and authority of Jesus Christ, Lord and Son of David.

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