The Middle Chapters Corresponding to Matthew’s Gospel (part 1 of 2)

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In two previous articles (Matthew: The Chronicler with a Five-Fold Gospel-- parts 1 and 2), we looked at how Matthew patterned his gospel after both the Pentateuch, and after 1 and 2 Chronicles (which in Jewish thought is just one book—the book of Chronicles). In part 1 of this article, we’ll look more at the Pentateuch, but first a little review regarding Chronicles:

In theme and structure, II Chronicles chapter 6 is the center of Chronicles. In that chapter Solomon, the earthly king, requests of God eight times to “hear from heaven.” Matthew chapter 13 is clearly the central chapter of Matthew, where Jesus, the heavenly king, refers to “the kingdom of heaven” eight times and calls for people to hear.

Also, II Chronicles 6 and Matthew 13 are patterned in an hour-glass structure, or to use the technical term—a chiastic structure, where each of the corresponding topics of these chapters are “mirrored” at the “top” and “bottom” of the chapters, eventually culminating in a central point at the mid-point of the “hour-glass,” or X of the Greek letter Chi, from which the word “chiastic” comes from.

For Matthew 13, that center point refers us to Psalm 78 and Jesus’ use of parables. For II Chronicles 6 the emphasis is on earthly requests--there are eight of these requests, and the center point, the fourth and fifth requests both speak of the physical LAND given to Israel by God; walking in God’s ways (II Chronicles 6:27;31); and God hearing from heaven.

In Chronicles, Solomon is pleading for God to “hear from heaven,” and even says, “But will God indeed dwell with man on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, how much less this house that I have built!” (II Chronicles 6:18). But, in Matthew 13 the tables are turned upside down! Instead of an earthly king pleading for God in heaven to hear, God Himself who is the King over all, does indeed dwell with man on earth, and is calling for mankind to hear!

Of course, we want God to hear our prayers in heaven, but God is turning this around and calling for people everywhere to listen to and hear His message—about the kingdom of heaven! And, in Matthew there’s emphasis not only to hear, but to understand.

The parables of Matthew 13 are preceded and followed by people misunderstanding who Jesus is and who His family is. Those people were looking only at the physical, not the spiritual (Matthew 12:46-50 and 13:53-58).

II Chronicles 6 is preceded and followed by II Chronicles 5: 11-14 about the glory of the Lord filling the house of God, and quoting, “For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.” II Chronicles 7:1-3 quotes the same verse and also states that, “the glory of the LORD filled the LORD's house.”

In Matthew 12 it has just been stated that Jesus is greater than the temple, the Sabbath, Jonah, and Solomon (12:6; 12:8; 12:41; and 12:42). This is followed by that greater One, Jesus, who is the KING of the kingdom of heaven, and who is greater than the temple, giving eight parables about this kingdom. II Chronicles 6 is an eight-fold request for God to hear from heaven after the earthly temple has been completed.

Thematic Centers

The center point of Matthew by number of pages, is not chapter 13, but close. The center point of the book of Psalms by number of pages, is not Psalm 78, but close. The center point of Chronicles by number of pages is not II Chronicles 6, but close (with 29 chapters in I Chronicles and 36 chapters in II Chronicles, it’s not far from the center by number of pages). The center point of the Pentateuch by number of pages is not Leviticus 8-9, but again, it’s very close.

The point about the center of these books, is not to do a word count or page count, to find the exact physical center, but the thematic center—a completed tabernacle and consecrated priests in Leviticus; a completed temple in Chronicles; and ONE who is greater than either the temple or the tabernacle (and who also is our High Priest and King), who has come to earth to dwell among us, pointing us to the fact that we need to hear and understand, which compliments the earthly king’s pleas for God to hear us!

Hour-Glass Structure in the Pentateuch

The Pentateuch also contains some chiastic patterns. In the following chart, comparisons are made for the distribution of key words related to the tabernacle and the priesthood, etc. in the Pentateuch (G = Genesis; E = Exodus; L = Leviticus; N = Numbers; and D = Deuteronomy). Also, since the book of Matthew is patterned after the book of Chronicles, comparisons are made between the two books of Chronicles (CH) and the two books of Kings (K), predicting that Chronicles for the most part uses these key words more than Kings. In doing these searches, the book of Ezekiel (EZ) kept showing up with significant numbers, so I’ve included these here also.

Some examples are also included where the key word does not appear in Genesis or Deuteronomy, but appears “chiastically” in the middle three books. For example, the word “tabernacle” (H4908 mishkan) is not contained in Genesis or Deuteronomy. But, this word appears 58 times in Exodus, 4 times in Leviticus, and 42 times in Numbers. The tabernacle is the place where man could once again be reconciled to God, as in the garden of Eden. Genesis instead speaks of the garden of Eden, and Deuteronomy is preparing the people to enter the Promised Land. Numbers in parentheses are Strong’s Hebrew numbers with the Hebrew words transliterated:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| word or combination of words | G | E | L | N | D | K | CH | EZ |
| covenant (H1285 beriyth) | 27 | 13 | 10 | 5 | 27 | 26 | 30 | 18 |
| appointment; congregation; feast (H4150 moed) | 4 | 38 | 49 | 65 | 4 | 3 | 12 | 5 |
| children of Israel | 5 | 122 | 54 | 171 | 20 | 32 | 26 | 11 |
| glory (H3519 kabod) | 3 | 11 | 2 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 17 | 19 |
| heavy; honor (H3513 kabed) | 3 | 10 | 1 | 6 | 2 | 3 | 8 | 0 |
| dwell, mostly about the tabernacle or the cloud or God’s name dwelling with God’s people (H7931 shakan). The word “shekinah” glory comes from this word. | 8 | 5 | 1 | 10 | 11 | 2 | 3 | 6 |
| cloud (H6051 anan) | 4 | 20 | 2 | 20 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 11 |
| atonement; cover (H3722 kaphar) | 2 | 8 | 49 | 16 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 6 |
| most holy—the Hebrew word qodesh appears together twice (H6944 qodesh) | 0 | 7 | 13 | 5 | 0 | 3 | 7 | 7 |
| incense (H7004 qetoreth) | 0 | 19 | 5 | 21 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 3 |
| house of Israel (Matthew is the only gospel to use this phrase) | 0 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 83 |
| tabernacle (H4908 mishkan) | 0 | 58 | 4 | 42 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 2 |
| tent, often used of the tabernacle (H168 ohel) | 23 | 62 | 44 | 76 | 9 | 16 | 23 | 1 |
| H168 ohel-tent, with H3519 kabod-glory | 0 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 0 |  |  | 0 |
| H3519 kabod--glory, with H1004 bayith—house |  |  |  |  |  | 1 | 4 | 7 |
| H6051 anan-cloud, with H3680 kasah-cover | 0 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 0 |  |  | 4 |
| wilderness (H4057 midbar) | 7 | 27 | 4 | 48 | 19 | 5 | 11 | 15 |
| priest(s) (H3548 kohen) | 7 | 11 | 194 | 69 | 14 | 73 | 108 | 24 |
| the words “Aaron” and “sons” | 0 | 66 | 104 | 54 | 0 | 0 | 39 | 0 |
| eighth day | 0 | 1 | 9 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| unleavened bread | 1 | 11 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 4 |
| fat, related to sacrifices (H2459 cheleb) | 2 | 6 | 48 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 4 |
| burnt offerings (H5930 olah) | 7 | 17 | 62 | 56 | 6 | 17 | 43 | 20 |
| seven days | 6 | 11 | 27 | 10 | 4 | 5 | 10 | 9 |
| sanctuary (H4720 miqdash) | 0 | 2 | 9 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 31 |

These chiastic patterns are not perfectly symmetrical, but close. It is interesting that the word “Aaron” together with the word “sons” only occurs in the three middle books of the Pentateuch and in Chronicles—nowhere else in the Bible. The phrase “the eighth day” only occurs in the three middle books of the Pentateuch (9 times in Leviticus, out of 21 times in the entire Bible), twice in Chronicles, and once each in Kings, Nehemiah, and Ezekiel.

Revelation and Ezekiel

The book of Ezekiel has lots of key words in common with the Pentateuch and Chronicles. There are many verses of interest regarding the glory of the Lord and the cherubim also, such as Ezekiel 9:3; 10:4;18-19; 11:22-23; 43:4-5; and 44:4. Just as Matthew patterned his gospel after the book of Chronicles and the Pentateuch, the book of Revelation is patterned after the book of Ezekiel in so many ways, but that’s a separate topic from this article. It’s not surprising that the New Testament echoes these Old Testament themes, albeit in light of Jesus’ fulfillment of the Old Testament; since the author of both Testaments is God Almighty.

The Center of the Pentateuch

Looking at chiastic outlines of the Pentateuch by other authors online, some give Leviticus 16 as the center of the Pentateuch, while others highlight Exodus 25-40 as the center. After making some careful comparisons, I’m convinced that the center of the Pentateuch is Leviticus 8 to 9. These two chapters cover an eight-day period, and are related to Exodus 40, which is also in that same eight-day period.

Some reasons for considering Leviticus 8 to 9 to be the center of the Pentateuch include:

1. Matthew has a five-part structure, based on the five main sermons there, which most would agree are patterned after the Pentateuch. That being the case, the center of the Pentateuch should be in Leviticus, not Exodus. Exodus 40 has some good parallels with II Chronicles 5-7 (the center of Chronicles), but Exodus 40 is the first day of an eight-day event, and there are far more parallels in Leviticus 8 to 9.
2. Leviticus 16 is prescribing in future tense, how the day of atonement is to be carried out. It’s not a description of present time events, as is Leviticus 8 to 9. Plus, atonement for the people, in the present tense, is made in Leviticus 9:7.
3. Matthew’s center chapter with “the kingdom of heaven” mentioned eight times, and the center of Chronicles (II Chronicles 6), asking God to “hear from heaven” eight times, are both pretty straight-forward to identify as the center. In one, a man asks God to hear from heaven (at the completion of the temple, a central theme in Chronicles), and in the other God (who is greater than the temple) comes down to earth and calls people to hear. Having the tabernacle at the center of the Pentateuch seems consistent with God reestablishing a relationship with mankind, after that communion was lost in the garden of Eden. In Chronicles the temple is the reconciliation place, and in Matthew, God Himself, Immanuel, comes down to earth to bring people into the kingdom of heaven. In Leviticus the tabernacle is central.
4. The original texts did not have chapters or verses marked. Considering the original texts, I’m looking at Leviticus 8 to 9 as one “chapter,” at the center of the Pentateuch; and the end of II Chronicles 5, chapter 6, and the beginning of II Chronicles 7 as a unified center.
5. Comparing the tabernacle first being set up (Exodus 40), until the consecration of the priests, and Moses and Aaron entering the tabernacle (Leviticus 8 to 9), with the completion and consecration of the temple in II Chronicles 5-7, we see at least eleven straight-forward parallels (in the chart below).

Two notable exceptions to these parallels are that Exodus 40 to Leviticus 9 precede the Passover Feast (the first month), and II Chronicles 5 to 7 are preceding the Feast of Booths (the seventh month); and in Leviticus 9 Moses and Aaron entered the tabernacle, whereas in Chronicles priests were not able to enter the temple because of God’s glory filling it.

The first month: Take a lamb on the 10th day; sacrifice it on the 14th day; no work on the 1st and 7th days; eat unleavened bread from the 14th until the 21st day (Exodus 12:1-19). Leviticus 8 is a seven-day ordination period for Aaron and his sons. This is still in the first month. Leviticus 9 begins with the eighth day, two days before taking a Passover lamb. There’s no record in the book of Leviticus of the Passover being celebrated. That takes place in Numbers 9:1-5, in this same month.

The seventh month: A day of rest on the 1st day, proclaimed by trumpets; the day of atonement was on the 10th day; no work on the 9th and 10th days; on the 15th day the Feast of Booths begins and goes for seven days until the 22nd day; no work on the 1st and 8th days of this feast (Leviticus 23:23-44).

Not all of the parallels are in order. For example, the eighth day of Leviticus 9 is before the Passover feast, whereas the eighth day of II Chronicles 7 is the last day of the Feast of Booths. Nonetheless, we would be hard-pressed to find this many parallels in two separate passages, unless they are indeed related. And, I believe this relationship is because of the divine hand of God inspiring both the events, and the Scriptures recording the events:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Exodus 40- Leviticus 9 | II Chronicles 5-7 |
| The tabernacle was completely assembled (Exodus 40:33) | The building of the temple was completed (5:1) |
| The ark was brought into the tabernacle (Exodus 40:20-21) | The ark was brought into the temple from the tabernacle (5:7) |
| A cloud appeared and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle; Moses was not able to enter (Exodus 40:34-35) | A cloud appeared and the glory of the Lord filled the house of God; the priests were not able to stand to minister (5:13-14) |
| Mention of the elders of Israel (Leviticus 9:1) | Mention of the elders of Israel (5:3-4) |
| Moses and Aaron blessed the people (Leviticus 9:22-23) | Solomon blessed the people (6:3) |
| The glory of the LORD appeared to all the people (Leviticus 9:23) | All the people of Israel saw the glory of the Lord on the temple (7:3) |
| Fire from the Lord consumed the burnt offering (Leviticus 9:24) | Fire from the Lord consumed the burnt offering (7:1) |
| “…when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces” (Leviticus 9:24). | “…they bowed down with their faces to the ground on the pavement and worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD” (7:3). |
| Eighth day (Leviticus 9:1) | Eighth day (7:9) |
| Mention of the burnt offering, peace offering, meat offering and the fat for sacrifices (Leviticus 9:17-21) | Mention of the burnt offering, peace offering, meat offering and the fat for sacrifices (7:7) |
| In Leviticus 8, there’s a seven-day consecration period to ordain Aaron and his sons as priests. | In II Chronicles 7:9, there’s a seven-day dedication period for the altar of the temple and the feast. |

As for finding a similar parallel with the phrase “hear from heaven” eight times (II Chronicles 6), or “the kingdom of heaven” eight times (Matthew 13), that was more challenging to find, since even the word “heaven” only appears once in the book of Leviticus, and that in a negative context: “and I will break the pride of your power, and I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze” (26:19).

But, since the central theme is a focus on the tabernacle, the place where man could reconcile with God and commune with Him, it is interesting to note that in Leviticus 8 to 9, “the tent of meeting” (ESV), or “the tabernacle of the congregation” (KJV), is mentioned seven times, and the “tabernacle” (same word in ESV and KJV—H4908 mishkan), is spoken of once (Leviticus 8:10), for a total of eight references to the tabernacle-- seven times using the general Hebrew word for tent (H168 ohel), and one time with the more specific word “mishkan.” And, these events took place during eight days, with emphasis on the eighth!

Maybe this is why Psalm 119, following the Hebrew alphabet of 22 letters, in acrostic style, gives eight verses of each letter for each stanza. By the way, in the last verse of Psalm 119, the psalmist refers to himself as a “lost sheep” in need of God seeking him. This phrase “lost sheep” is only elsewhere in Matthew, though it is elsewhere using other phrases (Isaiah 53 and Luke 15). In Matthew, “lost sheep” is used twice, both times referring to the “house of Israel,” a phrase used the most in the Bible in the book of Ezekiel (83 times), and in Leviticus (5 times), the most of the Pentateuch.

What an amazing book the Bible is! The plain message is already powerful, but when we look at the literary structures pointing us to central themes, and we see how intricately God has woven His message from the times of Moses to the apostles, using various authors, it is truly astounding what a beautiful picture emerges as the puzzle pieces line up, pointing us to Jesus, Immanuel, calling us into fellowship with Himself, and for us to hear and understand. Stay tuned for part 2, Lord willing…