CHAPTER TWO

MATTHEW 23:1-12

The second chapter will deal with the first part of Matthew 23, vv. 1-12. Major attention will focus on the significance of the audience identified in 23:1, the combination of the scribes and Pharisees in 23:2, and the intention of the command in vv. 2-3 in light of its immediate context. The closing verses, 8-12, are judged to be a key to the Matthean purpose and not a momentary diversion; and they will be interpreted with this in mind.

THE AUDIENCE OF MATTHEW 23

Baird’s recent study on the significance of the audience in the gospel narratives has called attention to a neglected factor which can facilitate interpretation. He has shown that the evangelists were intensely interested in identifying the audience that surrounded Jesus at any given moment, calculating that 98% of the approximately 352 individual logia of Jesus and 94% of the 422 separate units isolated by the Huck-Lietzmann synopsis contain an audience identification—the evangelists believed that the message of Jesus was audience-centered. Baird’s thesis centered on the striking agreement and continuity of the gospels in the identification of an audience which he believed must have preceded the evangelists. However, when it can be shown that the audience-identifier is due to the evangelist himself, this may give some intimation of his intention and understanding of the material which follows.

The Audience-Identifier in Matthew 23:1

The audience-identifier in Matthew 23:1 is particularly arresting because the discourse, which mostly castigates the scribes and Pharisees, apparently is not addressed to them at all, but to the crowds and the disciples. As has already been noted, the setting of Matthew 23 fundamentally differs from that of the Lucan woes which are delivered

1 Cf. J. Arthur Baird, Audience Criticism and the Historical Jesus, pp. 17-19, for a brief history of audience criticism.
2 Ibid., pp. 32-33.
in the home of a Pharisee. To a lesser extent, but significantly, Matthew also differs from the identification of the audience in the Markan parallel. In Matthew 23:1, Jesus addresses the ὀχλοι and the μαθηταί; in Mark 12:37b, the great throng (ὁ πολὺς ὀχλος) heard him gladly. In Luke 20:45, Jesus spoke to the disciples in the hearing of all the people (ἀκοοντος παντὸς τοῦ λαοῦ). These differences are not decisive by any means, but Matthew 23:1 shows positive signs of being the composition of the evangelist which in turn intimates that the audience-identifier may reflect a special redactional interest on his part. In addition to this, one cannot simply assume that Matthew adopted the situation of a discourse to a crowd from his Markan source because the ὀχλοι, as opposed to Mark’s ὁ πολὺς ὀχλος, play an augmented role in Matthew that is unique among the Synoptics. The presence of the disciples also appears to be a deliberate insertion. Since both “the crowds” and “the disciples” have a distinctive prominence in the gospel, their combination in 23:1 may be a significant clue for understanding Matthew’s intention in this discourse.

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3 So Ernst Lohmeyer, Das Evangelium des Matthäus, p. 333, n. 2; Pierre Bonnard, L’Évangile selon Saint Matthieu, p. 334; Sjef van Tilborg, The Jewish Leaders in Matthew, p. 163; and Hubert Frankemölle, Jahnewand und Kirche Christi. Studien zur Form und Traditionsgeschichte des Evangeliums nach Matthäus, p. 352. Distinctive Matthean elements in 23:1 are the use of τὸ, τῆς, Mt. 20/Mk. 6/Lk. 15; ὁ Ἰησοῦς as an introduction, Mt. 38/Mk. 11/Lk. 2; λαλῶ + dative in the sense of a discourse, Mt. 13/Mk. 4/Lk. 7; and the plural ὀχλοι, Mt. 30/Mk. 1/Lk. 16.


7 Minear, “Disciples and Crowds”, p. 32, noted that “the crowds” appear either at the beginning or at the close of every sermon in Matthew, although they are not always present to hear what is said.