

Mission, Jews, and Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew

by

Laura Robinson

Graduate Program in Religion
Duke University

Date: _____

Approved:

Mark Goodacre (Co-Supervisor)

Joel Marcus (Co-Supervisor)

Laura Suzanne Lieber

Brittany E. Wilson

Dale C. Allison Jr.

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

The question of Matthew's missiology in modern scholarship frequently centers the relationship between contradictory commissions in 10:5-6 and 28:19-20. Does Matthew believe that the mission to Israel is the primary focus of the nascent church, or that the gentile mission has replaced it? Or does Matthew believe that the mission that began in Israel has now expanded to include all nations? The goal of this dissertation is to complicate this question by expanding our object of study to other passages in the Gospel that discuss missions. We begin with Matt 10. In Matt 10, missionary work is an ethnically and geographically limited project. Missionaries are sent as envoys of Jesus. They depend on their targets for hospitality. They focus on Jews, though gentiles are present as onlookers. The missionary project forces confrontation with Jewish leadership, particularly Pharisees. Neither Jews nor gentiles are singled out as persecutors. The mission is associated with imminent eschatology, and it is underway when Matthew writes. We compare this missiology with five passages that precede the final commission: the parable of the tenants (21:33-46), the wedding banquet (22:1-14), the woes against scribes and Pharisees (chapter 23), the tribulation (chapter 24), and the parable of the sheep and the goats (25:31-46). What becomes clear is that Matthew's missiology is unified. He entertains a mission that is no longer restricted, but other tropes from Matt 10 reappear. This continuity reemerges again in the final call to international mission (28:16-20). Matthew's missiology is not discontinuous, but stable. He introduces a missionary task in 10:5-42, places it in Israel, and expects that this work will continue in the rest of the world. Outreach to Jews and gentiles bleeds into each other from the beginning, given

Matthew's awareness of gentiles in Palestine and of Jews in the Diaspora. The question of whether Matthew intends his message to go to Jews, or gentiles, or both, therefore, is significantly more complicated than it first appears.

Dedication

For the ones who did everything to make this possible at the end: Jon, Sarah,
Mom, Dad, Jim, Josie, Mark, Joel, Chelsea, Keona, Lee-Ann, Ethan

Contents

Abstract.....	iv
List of Figures.....	xi
1. Introduction and Matthew’s Audience: Jews, Gentiles, and the Hope of Expansion.....	1
1.1 Setting the Stage in Matthew.....	1
1.2 Matthew and a Missionary Readership.....	7
1.3 Three Views on Matthew and Mission.....	8
1.3.1. The Jewish Mission Reading: David C. Sim.....	9
1.3.2 The Jewish Mission Reading: Analysis.....	15
1.3.3 The Replacement Reading: Paul Foster.....	22
1.3.4 The Replacement Reading: An Analysis.....	27
1.3.5 The Expansionist Reading: Matthias Konradt.....	40
1.4 Summary and the project of this dissertation.....	66
1.5 The method of the next three sections.....	69
2. Matthew 10: The Paradigmatic Mission.....	72
2.1 First motif: the mission is geographically bounded.....	73
2.2 Second motif: The disciples act as representatives of Jesus.....	81
2.2.1 The Disciples’ Mission as an Extension of Jesus’s Work.....	82
2.2.2 The Tradition of Envoys in Antiquity.....	84

2.3 Third motif: The Disciples are Extreme Ascetics and Dependent on Private Hospitality	86
2.4 Fourth motif: Jewish people are the focus of the mission, but gentiles exist as onlookers	93
2.4.1 The “Witness to Them and to Gentiles” (10:18)	95
2.4.2 “Galilee of the Gentiles”	98
2.4.3 The Miracles So Far	100
2.5 Fifth motif: The mission forces a conflict with Jewish leadership	104
2.5.1 “Shepherding”	105
2.5.2 Miracles.....	109
2.5.3 Proximity to Jerusalem and Judea.....	110
2.6 Sixth motif: Neither Jews nor gentiles are exclusively associated with persecution	112
2.7 Seventh motif: Missionary work is closely associated with imminent eschatology.....	116
2.7.1 The Coming of the Son of Man	117
2.7.2 Finishing the Towns of Israel	120
2.8 Eighth motif: The work is not finished at the time of writing	125
2.8.1 The Coming of the Son of Man	126
2.8.2 Anachronism	127
2.9 Conclusion	130
3. Missionaries Between Matt 10 and 28.....	132
3.1 Missionaries in the parable of the tenants: Matt 21:33-46.....	133

3.1.1 Is the Parable of the Tenants about Missionaries?	133
3.1.2 Israel in the Parable of the Tenants	135
3.1.3 The Mission in Matt 21:33-46	147
3.2 The parable of the wedding banquet: Matt 22:1-14.....	150
3.2.1 Is this Parable about Missionaries?	150
3.2.2. The Wedding Banquet and Israel.....	153
3.2.3. The Parable of the Wedding Banquet and the Missionary Discourse	162
3.3 Woes against the Scribes and Pharisees: Matt 23:34-39	163
3.3.1 Is this Passage about Missionaries?	164
3.3.2 “This generation” – Does This Passage Depict the Rejection of Israel?	166
3.3.3. The Mission in Matt 23:34-39	173
3.4 The tribulation: Matt 24:9, 14.....	176
3.4.1 “All the Nations” or “All the Gentiles?”	176
3.5 The Judgment of the Sheep and the Goats: Matt 25:31-46.....	190
3.5.1 Is Matt 25:31-46 about Missionaries?.....	191
3.5.2 The Sheep Among the Nations	199
3.5.3 The Mission in Matt 25:31-46	205
3.6 Conclusion: Missionaries in Matthew’s Gospel and the Missionary Discourse.....	207
4. Missions and Missionary Activity in Matt 28:16-20	212
4.1. Continuity, discontinuity, or summary? The role of Matt 28:16-20 in the Gospel	213
4.2 One last time: Who are πάντα τὰ ἔθνη?	221

4.3 Why the double replacement reading is not required	229
4.4 Reading Matt 10:5-6 and 28:16-20 in the Same Text.....	234
4.4.1 Matt 28:16-20 and Themes from the Missionary Discourse	234
4.4.2 Reading 10:5-6 and 28:16-20 in the Same Text	241
5. Conclusion	248
5.1 Summary and Evaluation: One Unified Mission	248
5.2 Why Does This Matter? Some Preliminary Thoughts	254
5.3 Avenues for Further Study: What More Can Be Known about Matthew’s Audience?.....	260
Appendix A: Matthew and Torah	272
Matthew’s Thesis Statement of Torah: Matt 5:17-20.....	274
Interpretation and a Case Study: The Sabbath.....	280
Matt 12:1-8: Picking Grain on the Sabbath	281
Matt 12:9-14: Healing a Man on the Sabbath.....	284
Matt 24:20: Fleeing on the Sabbath	286
Conclusion: What Can We Know about Matthew and the Sabbath?	290
Appendix B: Matthew and the Synagogue.....	294
Bibliography.....	306

List of Figures

Figure 1: Themes from the Missionary Discourse and Later Texts	209
Figure 2: Themes from the Missionary Discourse and Later Texts.....	239

1. Introduction and Matthew's Audience: Jews, Gentiles, and the Hope of Expansion

1.1 *Setting the Stage in Matthew*

The question of Matthew's "community," his audience, and their place with respect to Jewish Christianity has been a defining issue in Matthew scholarship for well over a generation. At the heart of this debate is not just the question of who Matthew was and what kinds of early Christians shaped and followed his theology, but what kind of book the Gospel of Matthew really is: an anti-Jewish Gospel by a gentile church already on the road to Christian antisemitism, a dispatch from an isolated messianic Jewish sect¹ or cult,² or a universalist text for a movement that has emerged from Judaism and ultimately envisions its message going to all people regardless of their ethnicity. The polemical tone of Matthew's Gospel, and its appropriation of Jewish literature, appear very different depending on how we answer this question. It matters for our interpretation of Matthew if we think Matthew's readership has no relationship with the Jewish

¹ The term "sect," while contested, refers to a schismatic group that breaks off from a parent body. Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, "Of Churches, Sects, and Cults: Preliminary Concepts for a Theory of Religious Movements," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 18.2 (1979): 117-33, 28. See J. Andrew Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism: The Social World of the Matthean Community* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 142-5; Anthony J. Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community*, Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 108-9 both identify Matthew's community as a sect primarily over against "formative Judaism." Graham Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 90, is less convinced of Matthew's rootedness in extant Judaism, though he uses sectarian language.

² "Cult," over against "sect," refers to "a movement that comes into being when religious innovation gains social acceptance." See Petri Luomanen, "The 'Sociology of Sectarianism' in Matthew: Modeling the Genesis of Early Jewish and Christian Communities," in *Fair Play: Diversity and Conflicts in Early Christianity: Essays in Honour of Heikki Räisänen*, ed. Ismo Dunderberg, Christopher Tuckett, and Kari Syreeni (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2002): 107-130; 128-30; following Stark and Bainbridge, "Of Churches, Sects, and Cults," 156.

community, or if Matthew's community is one of several Jewish sects, all of which are in conflict with one another and claim to be the rightful leaders and teachers of their people.

There are many possible methodological objections to the practice of mirror-reading Matthew's Gospel with an eye to reconstructing the social location of this Gospel and its readership. For instance, Matthew's readership might be universal, not local. It is possible that Matthew's Gospel is not written for any church, but is a Gospel written for "all Christians" that simply told the story of Jesus to any Christian who happened to come upon it. While some scholars follow the evidence of early patristic writers who report that the gospels were written for narrower and more specific audiences, the argument that the gospel texts were written for a general readership has gained ground in the last twenty years.³ The argument that the Gospels were written for a general Christian audience is frequently associated with Richard Bauckham and his numerous responders.⁴ However, concern about the use of Gospel texts to recover Gospel communities was alive and well long before Bauckham – not only on the grounds that the Gospels were written

³ Roland Deines, *Die Gerechtigkeit der Tora im Reich des Messias: Mt 5:13-20 als Schlüsseltext der mattäischen Theologie*, WUNT 177 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 75-84; Margaret M. Mitchell, "Patristic Counter-Evidence to the Claim That 'The Gospels Were Written for All Christians,'" *New Testament Studies* 51.1 (2005): 36–79.

⁴ Richard Bauckham, *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (ed. Richard Bauckham; London: T&T Clark, 1998); "Is There Patristic Counter-Evidence? A Response to Margaret Mitchell," in *The Audience of the Gospels: The Origin and Function of the Gospels in Early Christianity*, Library of New Testament Studies 353 (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 68–110; "Response to Philip Esler," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 51 (1998): 249-53; Philip Esler, "Community and Gospel in Early Christianity: A Response to Richard Bauckham's Gospels for All Christians," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 51 (1998): 235-48. Graham N. Stanton also expresses reservation about the possibility of reconstructing a Matthean community in "Revisiting Matthew's Communities," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1994 Seminar Papers*, ed. E. H. Lovering (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1994), 9–23; also Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People*, 281.

for an audience of generalized Christians, but because the Gospel genre is intended to tell the story of Jesus, not the story of a community.⁵

Whether a specific church can even be associated with any one Gospel is itself a claim that requires historical defense. The existence of a Gospel text alone does not inherently imply the existence of a Gospel community. The text of the Gospel of Matthew refers to communities of Christians who use the Gospel text as an authority. Matthew is aware of an assembly of Jesus worshippers (16:18; 18:17). He is also aware of the scribes who receive and teach the words of Jesus to a wider audience (13:52).⁶ But even if Matthew demonstrates knowledge of a congregation or group, or of scribes who form the core of his audience, the language of a gospel “community” remains problematic. Historians should not assume basic correspondence between the theology of Matthew’s Gospel and the people who read it. Communities are groups of historical persons, not collective manifestations of a text’s theology.⁷ Matthew may have worshipped and worked amongst a community of Christians, but his theology did not reflect the views of everyone in his congregation. For this reason, we cannot read Matthew’s Gospel to discover a report of an idiosyncratic Christian community, only the report of an idiosyncratic author.⁸ It is also possible that Matthew did not write for a

⁵ See the overview of the scholarship in Edward W. Klink, “Gospel Audience and Origin: The Current Debate,” in *The Audience of the Gospels: The Origin and Function of the Gospels in Early Christianity*, Library of New Testament Studies 353 (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2010): 1-26; 5-7.

⁶ Dale C. Allison, “Was There a ‘Lukan Community?’,” *IBS* 10 (1988): 62-70, 70n11.

⁷ Stanley Stowers, “The Concept of ‘Community’ and the History of Early Christianity,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 23 (2011): 238–56.

⁸ Hengel, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Collection and Origin of the Canonical Gospels*, 1st North American ed (Harrisburg, Pa: Trinity Press International, 2000), 106-7, emphasizes the centrality of the authors as composers of Gospels, rather than communities.

specific enclave of Christians (what is often meant by “community”)⁹ but for a collection of similar churches or audience of Christians who might have been sympathetic to his views.¹⁰ The distinction between a “community” and an “audience” is important here. Matthew may have had a particular audience in mind for his Gospel (namely, people who he believed would be particularly receptive to his message), even though this audience was not a collection of people who considered themselves to be a specific, cohesive community.

Nonetheless: these concerns do not eliminate the possibility of carefully reading Matthew’s Gospel with the goal of discovering a strand of theology that uniquely characterized Matthew’s own beliefs, agenda, and circumstances. This implies the existence of Matthew’s anticipated audience. Matthew knew enough Christians who shared his theology (or might be persuaded to share it) that he set out to write a Gospel for them that fit and propagated their interests – better than the Gospel they already had.¹¹ It is undeniable that Matthew’s Gospel is theologically distinct from the other Gospels. This distinction reflects the unique perspective of its writer, and expresses what Matthew wanted Jesus-worshippers like him to believe and do. This theology might well reflect Matthew’s place in (or against) the Jewish world, and how Matthew and his fellow

⁹ E.g., Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 27a (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 26-8, argues that Mark’s Gospel was originally written with a local audience in mind and circulated beyond this.

¹⁰ Ian H. Henderson, “Reconstructing Mark’s Double Audience,” in *Between Author and Audience in Mark: Narration, Characterization, Interpretation*, ed. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, New Testament Monographs 23 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), 6–28, particularly 11-2; Graham N. Stanton, “Revisiting Matthew’s Communities,” 22-3. Cedric E. W. Vine, *The Audience of Matthew: An Appraisal of the Local Audience Thesis*, Library of New Testament Studies 496 (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2014), 10-31 outlines distinctions of kinds of audiences in his introduction, distinguishing between “implied readers,” “real readers,” and Matthew’s contemporaries.

¹¹ See Anders Runesson, “Rethinking Early Jewish-Christian Relations: Matthean Community History as Pharisaic Intra-group Conflict,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127, no. 1 (2008): 95–132, particularly 95n1.

Christians responded to the conflicting pressures of first-century Jewish identity and belief in Jesus's messianic status. The practice of reading Matthew's Gospel in this way does not presume that it was written for one particular church's use, nor that Matthew's Gospel is a textual mouthpiece for a group of people who shared its theology, nor that we can construct a detailed history of Matthew's discrete church from Matthew's text, nor that Matthew had no wider aspirations for his Gospel.¹² It is a story of Jesus, produced by a member of an assembly (Matt 18:17), whose theology is distinct from the other gospel writers and whose views are propagated in this text.

In fact, if we take Matthew at his word, it seems that Matthew did not intend his book to remain within one church at all. One detail that is often missed by those seeking to understand Matthew's Gospel is that one of the text's most distinctive emphases is *expansion*. Matthew writes extensively about mission, and urges Christians to undertake it. Whatever else we might say about Matthew's Gospel, this Gospel was written with the hope that his ideas would spread and find new adherents. Furthermore, it appears implausible that he would have intended his Gospel to circulate for independent readers. In an era in which book production was as cumbersome as it was expensive, Matthew's extended text could not have realistically circulated as a tract without extensive help from its readers. Matthew's Gospel was short enough to circulate as a pamphlet, but in order to have purchase in a largely illiterate society, the text would need to travel in the hands of those who could read it to listening audiences.¹³ So it is at least plausible to consider that

¹² Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven: Yale U. Press, 1995), 260-1; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 28 discusses the possibility that an ancient writer might aspire to a broader audience despite originally writing in and for a local readership.

¹³ Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 69.

Matthew's message had to be carried by figures who agreed with the text and acted as missionaries, whose methods and goals would shape Matthew's audience nearly as much as Matthew's text itself—although this will require much more detailed investigation in subsequent chapters.

But who exactly was Matthew's Gospel meant to reach? Did Matthew think the mission to the gentile nations abroad had replaced the mission to Israel? Did he think that the mission to Israel had expanded to a mission to gentile nations? Or did he think that the mission to gentiles was a responsibility he and his readers should not undertake? The text of Matthew's Gospel contains contradictory data. On one hand, we have Jesus telling his disciples to go only to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" in Matt 10:5-6. This command might suggest that Matthew is a conservative Jewish Christian, that his church might be more rooted in conservative Jewish customs, and Matthean missionaries are spreading a largely Jewish gospel to other Jews. But on the other hand, we have texts like Matt 28:19-20, in which Jesus tells his disciples to bring the gospel to πάντα τὰ ἔθνη – "all the nations" or "all the gentiles." This command might suggest a much less "Jewish" Matthew, who has parted company with Jewish neighbors and whose increasingly non-Jewish message finds its primary audience beyond the bounds of the Jewish nation.

Either way, the role of missions and missionary activity in Matthew's Gospel – what the content of Matthew's mission was, who spread it and how, and what kinds of people Matthew wanted to recruit – can tell us a great deal about Matthew's social setting and what kinds of Christians Matthew's Gospel emerged from. The question of Matthew's theology of mission is also substantial enough that it deserves to be

investigated as a subject of its own, not as one datum point among many concerning Matthew's relative Jewishness.

1.2 Matthew and a Missionary Readership

The questions that sparked this dissertation are the following: What if Matthew's Gospel was written to travel?¹⁴ What was his particular vision of the "gospel of the Kingdom" (Matt 24:14) that he expected to see proclaimed throughout the whole world? How should we read his apparently contradictory instructions for where to take this message? The goal of this dissertation is to illuminate how Matthew conceived of the nascent Christian movement in relationship to Israel and the gentiles by exploring how he understands the work, and particularly the audience, of missionary activity. The specific contribution I intend to make to Matthew scholarship is to offer evidence about Matthew's attitude towards outreach that will help locate Matthew in relation to the larger Jewish world. Does Matthew think the audience of missionary activity has changed from the early days of the Jesus movement? What is the content of this mission? Has the mission to Jews ended? If not, is the content of this mission different from the mission to the nations? By focusing our attention on the theme of mission in Matthew's Gospel, we may be able to better advance a conversation about Matthew's relationship to Judaism. A number of themes can be (and have been) exhaustively analyzed in search of data that might shed light on Matthew's community; the two that regularly seem to receive the

¹⁴ Daniel W. T. Ulrich, "The Missional Audience of the Gospel of Matthew," *CBQ* 69.1 (2007): 64-83 argues the "local community" hypothesis has sidelined the importance of mission in Matthew and the Gospel's suitability for oral performance.

most attention are Matthew's view of Torah, and his view of Jewish leaders and the synagogue. These subjects will be discussed briefly in the appendices at the end of this chapter. If we turn our attention from Matthean motifs that have long preoccupied scholars, and instead give extended attention and inquiry to Matthew's missiology, new hints about Matthew's social location and theology might emerge.

1.3 Three Views on Matthew and Mission

What work has already been done on Matthew's missiology? What conclusions have scholars already drawn? As we will see, the question of Matthew's missiology in modern scholarship centers around the relationship between the apparently contradictory commissions in Matt 10:5-6 and Matt 28:19-20. The former commands a mission to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" only. The second commands a mission to "all the nations," or in some translations, "all the gentiles." Can these commands be reconciled? Or how can we make sense of these as commands in the same text?

For the most part, scholars have provided answers to this question that fall into one of three camps. The first (and minority) position is the "Jewish mission" reading. Matthew's church might affirm the gentile mission, but they themselves do not practice it and continue to focus on the mission to Israel. The second is the "replacement reading," or "partial replacement reading," which is the idea that a mission beyond the bounds of Israel to gentiles has replaced the mission to Israel. This replacement might be partial (the mission to Israel is comparatively limited compared to a mission to the nations) or complete (the mission to Israel is over). The third is the "expansionist reading," or the

assumption that Matt 28:19-20 broadens the mission of the disciples to include all people in the wake of Easter.

For each position, I have selected one major author working on the problem as an example of the view that he or she represents. This author's view should not be seen as agreeing in every detail with others who hold a similar position. Therefore, significant points of disagreement have been noted throughout, and each author's position has been supplemented and annotated with citations from other scholars when necessary. I take this approach for the sake of simplifying and synthesizing a staggering amount of data. As much as possible, I have limited this section to discussing scholarship that directly engages the question of the ethnicity of Matthew's mission targets. I also limit this discussion to scholars who engage the final form of Matthew, as opposed to Matthew's varying redactional layers.¹⁵

1.3.1. The Jewish Mission Reading: David C. Sim

The Jewish mission reading argues that Matthew is still primarily interested in proselytizing Jews, not gentiles. He may know and approve of a gentile mission, but he and his confederates may not participate in such a project. If they do, it is to a limited extent. Matthew worships primarily with conservative ethnic Jews, who retain a learned wariness of gentiles, and his Christian contacts include a small number of gentiles, at

¹⁵ Abel Mordechai Bibliowicz, *Jews and Gentiles in the Early Jesus Movement: An Unintended Journey* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 56-8, argues that Matthew's Gospel started out as an anti-Pauline, Jewish urtext that was eventually redacted and reformed to meet the needs of Jewish Christians.

most.¹⁶ This theory is also often bolstered by the belief that Matthew advocates for conservative Torah observance (see Appendix A).¹⁷ This view of Matthew's missiology is sometimes, but not always, accompanied with an *intra muros* view of the Matthean community, that Matthew is part of a Christian community that remains attached to a synagogue (see Appendix B). Scholars who advance this view of Matthew's mission usually see Matthew's Gospel as reflecting a conflict between the church and Jewish leaders, not the church and Jews in general.¹⁸

This is the argument of David C. Sim's *The Gospel and Christian Judaism*. Sim notes that Matthew's Gospel is particularly interested in the problem of the Jewish mission and its attendant difficulties.¹⁹ Previously, Douglas R. A. Hare²⁰ had argued that this polemical material about the persecution of missionaries meant that the mission to Jews was poorly received and had subsequently come to an end. However, Sim argues that this evidence points the other way. Matthew discusses the Jewish mission not because his church practiced and completed it but because the Jewish mission is still an ongoing concern for his church. Even though this church has largely isolated itself from the Jewish world and operates as an independent Jewish-Christian sect, the community continues to send Jewish missionaries with the goal of recruiting Jews to its cause.

Sim's monograph does not exclusively or even primarily explore the role of missiology in the Gospel. His larger project is to defend an Antiochene provenance for

¹⁶ Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism*, 157-8, allows for the possibility that Matthew's community was becoming cautiously interested in gentile expansion.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 4n8.

¹⁸ Levine, *The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Matthean Salvation History*, 185-92.

¹⁹ Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 157-8.

²⁰ Douglas R. A. Hare, *The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, SNTSMS 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1967), 104-5, 146-62.

the Gospel,²¹ and to construct a history of this Antiochene church using Matthew, Galatians, and the Ignatian epistles.²² Where Sim's thesis concerns Matthew's theology of mission is his argument concerning Matthew's Antiochene church and their identification with Peter. Matthean missionaries continued to missionize Jews, Sim argues, because they identified as heirs of the Petrine tradition, and followed the example of Peter and his mission to the circumcised. Sim also maintains that the early Jerusalem church affirmed the continuing validity of the Torah for Jewish Christians, and expected the Torah to be binding on new gentile converts to the Christian movement.²³ Through the influence of James, and subsequently Peter, the Antiochene church came to follow suit, and expected Torah observance in their own community as well.²⁴ This is the theology Matthew inherits as an Antiochene Christian. Following the example of Peter and his colleagues, the Matthean church came to uphold the Torah as binding on both Jews and gentiles and also emphasized the centrality of the mission to Israel.

Sim's reconstruction of the Jerusalem council, and Peter and Paul's confrontation in Antioch, forms the foundation of his understanding of Matthew's missiology.

According to Paul's account of his meeting with Peter in Jerusalem, Peter, with James

²¹ Raymond E. Brown and John P. Meier, *Antioch and Rome: New Testament Cradles of Catholic Christianity* (Paulist Press, 1983), 22-7; Michael H. Crosby, *House of Disciples: Church, Economics, and Justice in Matthew* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988) 37; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:143-47; R. H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994²), 609; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew*, WBC (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 1:74; Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988²), 152; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary*, trans. Wilhelm C. Linss, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 1:56-7; Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 40-62; B. H. Streeter, *The Four Gospels, Rev. ed.* (London: Macmillan, 1930), 500-23; and Jean Zumstein, "Antioche sur l'Oronte et l'évangile selon Matthieu," *SNT* 7 (1980), 122-38 defend an Antiochene provenance of Matthew,

²² Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 82-91 for Sim's reconstruction of the Apostolic Council, and 92-102 for the subsequent conflicts in Antioch.

²³ *Ibid.*, 84-5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 86-7.

and John, took up the mission to the Jews and agreed that Paul should continue with a law-free gospel to the gentiles.²⁵ Sim argues that Paul exaggerates the extent to which Peter approved of Paul's gospel, as evidenced by Peter and Paul's dispute in Antioch (Gal 2:11-21).²⁶ After the confrontation in Antioch, Paul lost the allegiance of Barnabas, and subsequently departed from Antioch.²⁷ Sim argues that this left the Antiochene church under the leadership of the Jerusalem church, which required its gentile converts either to become Jewish proselytes or to remain attached to the church as God-fearers.²⁸ Following the example of Peter as apostle to the Jews,²⁹ and given his agreement on the centrality of Torah practice from the church, the Antiochene church subsequently prioritized a mission to Israel. Matthew is a later member of this church. Sim argues that, following Peter and Paul's dispute in Antioch, the Antiochene church ceased to missionize gentiles and turned to Jews exclusively.³⁰ When Matthew writes his Gospel several decades later, the community is still zealously pursuing a mission to Jews.

If the Jewish mission is well underway when Matthew writes his Gospel, what about the gentile mission? Sim maintains that Matthew's church did not practice a gentile mission at all. Sim arrives at this conclusion by emphasizing sayings in the Gospel that seem to deny that Matthew's church is interested in recruiting gentiles. First among these is Matt 7:6, which instructs Jesus's disciples not to give "pearls" or "holy things" to dogs

²⁵ Ibid., 83.

²⁶ Ibid., 88, 98

²⁷ Ibid., 101.

²⁸ Ibid., 103-4.

²⁹ Ibid., 161.

³⁰ Ibid., 162.

or pigs. In response, the dogs or pigs will only trample the pearls, and then turn on the disciples themselves.

Sim denies that the word “dog” (κύων) is a general term of abuse for a person who is not worthy to hear the gospel,³¹ nor for Matthew’s opponents.³² It is also not a term for “low quality” converts who are not fully repentant.³³ Instead he argues that the word “dog” specifically means gentiles. Matthew uses a similar word (κυνάριον, “small dog”) to refer to a gentile woman elsewhere in the Gospel (15:26).³⁴ Likewise, the pig (χοῖρος) is unclean according to the Hebrew Bible (Lev 11:7; Deut 14:8). In light of the fact that unclean animals are also used to depict gentiles in Acts 10:11-16, and because “pig” is a word for gentile Christians in later Jewish-Christian writing,³⁵ Sim proposes that the pigs, like dogs, refer to hostile gentiles (Matt 7:6). If the “pearls” represent the kingdom of heaven and its preaching (Matt 13:45-6), and pigs and dogs represent gentiles, then the most likely reading of Matt 7:6 is that missionaries should not attempt to approach gentiles with the preaching of the kingdom.³⁶

Sim argues that scholars tend to discount this reading of Matt 7:6 because they regard other passages in Matthew as exhortations to gentile mission or acknowledgement of the gentile mission’s success. For example, besides Matt 28:16-20, the parable of the wedding feast (Matt 22:1-14) is commonly depicted as a narration of the gentile mission.

³¹ Contra Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:674-7.

³² Contra Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 182.

³³ Contra Gundry, *Matthew*, 122-3. Also in Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism*, 100.

³⁴ Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 238-9.

³⁵ Ps.-Clem, *Rec.*, 2:3, from Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha*, trans. R. Mc.L. Wilson, Revised edition., 2 vols. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1989). Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 238n55.

³⁶ Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 240.

Sim denies that the parable of the wedding feast depicts the rejection of Israel in favor of the nations. The parable depicts the king inviting two rounds of guests to his son's wedding. The first invitees violently reject the king's slaves (Matt 22:3-6), which the king responds to by destroying their city (22:7). The king then invites a second round of guests, some of whom are welcomed into the hall, and some of whom are cast out (22:11-14). According to some scholars, this parable depicts the turn of the Matthean community from Jewish missionary targets, who rejected their message, to gentiles, who were more receptive.³⁷ After the Jewish War,³⁸ which Matthew blames on non-Christian Jews, the Christians have turned their missionary attention to gentiles. However, Sim argues that this reading of the parable contradicts the vision of Matt 28:19-20 concerning when the mission to the gentiles begins. According to Matt 28:19-20 the mission began with the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus, not forty years later at the end of the Jewish War.³⁹ Even if the parable depicts a change in missionary strategies and efforts, it does not seem to be that this parable depicts a shift away from Jews towards gentiles in light of the Jewish War.

To be clear, Sim does not argue that Matthew's church is exclusive to Jews only.

Rather, its universalism resembles the universalism that was common to first-century

³⁷ F. W. Beare, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 432; Schuyler Brown, "The Matthean Community and the Gentile Mission," *Novum Testamentum* 22, no. 3 (1980): 193-221; Hare, *The Theme of Jewish Persecution*, 154; Daniel Marguerat, *Le jugement dans l'Évangile de Matthieu*, *Le monde de la Bible* 6 (Genève: Editions Labor et Fides, 1981), 338-40; John P. Meier, *The Vision of Matthew: Christ, Church, and Morality in the First Gospel* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 153; Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People*, 131. See in more detail §3.2.

³⁸ The likely referent of Matt 22:7. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:201n44, note two patristic readers who identified the burning of the city with the final judgment. The overwhelming majority of scholars identify the destruction of the city with the destruction of Jerusalem. See §3.2.

³⁹ Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 240. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:202, acknowledge this discrepancy but argue that in a parable, the parallels need not be exact. Even so, the "destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 undoubtedly gave impetus to the Gentile mission,"

Judaism. Matthew's church, like many synagogues, was willing to accept gentile proselytes and gentile participants.⁴⁰ However, gentile converts were not sought, and upon conversion proselytes were expected to keep Torah like any other Jew. But the community's practice included neither an active attempt to proselytize gentiles, nor acceptance of non-Torah-observant gentiles into the church as full members.

Now that we have outlined Sim's position concerning Matthew's missiology, we turn our attention to evaluation. To what extent is Sim's framing of Matthew's missiology convincing?

1.3.2 The Jewish Mission Reading: Analysis

Our evaluation of Sim's argument will primarily focus on his construction of Matthew's missiology. Much of Sim's book defends claims about Matthew's commendation of Torah observance, its place in the history of Antiochene Christianity, and the role of Peter. All of this is certainly worth discussing, but need not occupy us now. As much as possible, we will attempt to limit our focus to the question of missions. How convincing is Sim's argument that Matthew and his readers are interested in a mission to their fellow Jews, but not an active mission to gentiles?

⁴⁰ Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 251. For examples of similar evidence among Jewish communities, see Shaye J. D. Cohen, "Was Judaism in Antiquity a Missionary Religion?," in *Jewish Assimilation, Acculturation, and Accommodation: Past Traditions, Current Issues, and Future Prospects*, ed. Menachem Mor, Studies in Jewish Civilization 2 (Lanham: University Press of America, 1992), 14–23; Martin Goodman, *Mission and Conversion: Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire* (New York: Oxford U. Press, 1996), 5–6; Schnabel, *Early Christian Missions*, 1:1712; Bernd Wander, *Gottesfürchtige und Sympathisanten Studien zum heidnischen Umfeld von Diasporasynagogen* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 187.

Sim's hypothesis that Matthew's church sought primarily Jewish converts, not gentile ones, hinges on a few key pieces of data. The first claim is that Matthew's Gospel is too critical of gentiles to reflect the views of a church that was actively missionizing them. If Matthew's community was seeking gentile converts, Sim argues, it would have needed to have a positive view of gentiles, or at least not an openly hostile one.⁴¹ However, Sim argues that this positive disposition towards gentiles cannot be found in the text. Sim defends this argument both from the historical setting of the Gospel and from the characterization of gentiles in the text. According to Sim, the historical situation of the community makes it unlikely that congregants would have had much affection for gentiles. If this community was based in Antioch, its Jewish members would have experienced violence and persecution in the wake of the Jewish War. This experience would have made a Jewish church wary and slower to engage outsiders.⁴² Sim further claims that gentiles as a group are depicted negatively in the Gospel. As a class, gentiles are impious (Matt 5:46-7; 6:32, 7) and tyrannical (20:25). They are also responsible for the persecution and death of Jesus (20:19). In addition to this, most gentile characters in the Gospel play villainous roles. For example, Sim denies Pilate's handwashing is exculpatory.⁴³ Instead, his character can also be framed as ineffective and weak-willed,

⁴¹ Ibid., 241.

⁴² Ibid., 242.

⁴³ Contra Beare, *Matthew*, 531; Pierre Bonnard, *L'Évangile selon saint Matthieu* (CNT1; 2nd ed.; Neuchâtel, Delachaux & Niestlé, 1970), 398; Daniel Patte, *The Gospel According to Matthew: A Structural Commentary on Matthew's Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 380; Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew*, 3rd ed. (London: R. Scott, 1911), 391; Leopold Sabourin, *L'Évangile selon Saint Mattieu et ses principaux parallèles* (Rome: Pontificii Instituti Biblici, 1978), 372-3; Wilm Sanders, "Das Blut Jesu und die Juden: Gedanken zu Matt 27,25," *US*, 27 (1972):168-71, 170; Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew*, trans. David E. Green (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1975), 508-9; Trilling, *Das Wahre Israel*, 70; Sjeff van Tilborg, *The Jewish Leaders in Matthew* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 93-4.

since he is unwilling to release someone whom he knows is innocent (27:18-19) simply to avoid unrest (27:24).⁴⁴ The gentile Roman soldiers who carry out Jesus's execution are also sadistic and villainous (27:27-37). Their fear at the apocalyptic signs following Jesus's death is not a confession of gentile faith (27:36, 54). Rather, they realize they have just killed Jesus, and that God has defeated them.⁴⁵ Finally, "good gentile" characters do not appear often in the text, nor do they signify any systematic change in Jesus's approach to ministry. The healings of the centurion's slave (Matt 8:5-13) and the Canaanite woman's daughter (15:21-28) do not indicate any change in Jesus' priorities, but are only occasional demonstrations of Jesus's exceptional kindness to an exceptional person.⁴⁶ According to Sim, they cannot be called an "example" to gentile converts. Their stories explain why Jesus occasionally healed gentiles: not because his focus ever turned from Israel or because he considered Jews and gentiles to be on equal footing, but because these two were such exceptional gentiles that Jesus made temporary space for them. Altogether, gentiles occupy a negative role in the Gospel, except for a rare few who happen to have "great faith." This suggests that Matthew does not write for a gentile audience, and is not concerned about how gentiles would perceive his material.⁴⁷

Second, Sim argues that Matthew makes few references to a gentile mission at all.

The only unambiguous references are Matt 24:14 and 28:19,⁴⁸ the latter of which,

⁴⁴ Saldarini, *Matthew's Jewish-Christian Community*, 78; Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 224. Similarly, see Timothy B. Cargal, "'His Blood Be Upon Us and Upon Our Children': A Matthean Double Entendre?," *NTS* 37.1 (1991): 101-12.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 225-6.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 224-5; also in Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:543.

⁴⁷ Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 255-6.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 243.

according to Sim, includes Jews, since Matthew depicts no end to a mission to Israel.⁴⁹ At most, in Sim's reading, Matt 28:19 legitimizes a mission to gentiles alongside a standing mission to Jews. This verse does not prescribe it to Matthew's own church. Just because Matthew's community legitimizes a mission to gentiles does not mean that they practice it. After all, according to Gal 2:9, Peter and the other disciples accepted the validity of Paul's mission to gentiles without practicing it themselves.⁵⁰ Matthew may have followed the example of their founders Peter and James, and allowed the business of gentile proselytizing to belong to other churches.

Third, Sim argues that Matthew's insistence on Torah observance would have made a truly "gentile mission," as Paul practiced it, impossible for this church. Matthew did not have a concept of a Torah-free Gospel, and gentiles could not have joined his community as full members while remaining gentiles. Gentiles would not have been able to participate in table fellowship with Jews, based on Sim's reconstruction of the table fellowship dispute in Gal 2:11-14, and the Gospel's affirmation of food laws, based on Sim's reconstruction of Matt 5:17-19, 7:22-23, and 15:1-20.⁵¹ If this argument is true, then Matthean Christians would not have practiced any mission that assumed gentiles would not become Jewish proselytes. We have literary evidence that some early Jewish Christians did preach such a message to gentiles. This law-observant mission apparently interacted with Paul's own mission with some frequency,⁵² and according to the Pseudo-

⁴⁹ Ibid., 243.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 243.

⁵¹ Ibid., 204, 207, 248-9.

⁵² Douglas A. Campbell, "Galatians 5.11: Evidence of an Early Law-Observant Mission by Paul?," *NTS* 57.3 (2011): 325-47.

Clementine *Recognitions*⁵³ it likely continued well into the second century. In Sim's understanding, Matthew is aware of, and approves of, this Torah-observant mission, but he does not practice it himself.⁵⁴ Assuming Matthew's church is Torah-observant, any full member of the church who was originally of gentile extraction would become a Jew by conversion.⁵⁵ The church remains open to these converts but is not actively seeking them out.

Given these three supporting points, is Sim correct in his argument that Matthew's church affirmed a law-observant mission to gentiles, but did not practice it? As we will argue in Appendix A, Matthew did seem to expect Jesus's followers to keep Torah – at least, Torah as he believed Jesus taught it. This interpretation of Torah is apparently at odds with other Jewish groups in Matthew's day. Nonetheless, this interpretation of Torah still mandates the Christocentric practice of distinctive Jewish customs, including food laws (Matt 15:20) and Sabbath observance (24:20). Matthew does not indicate that this interpretation of the Torah applies only to Jews. Instead, he teaches that all disciples, regardless of ethnicity, will keep these teachings (Matt 5:17-20; 28:16-20). In light of this, it does seem that Sim is correct that any mission to gentiles that Matthew might mandate would be Torah-observant – even if Matthew does not mean quite what his contemporaries do when he refers to Torah.

That said, other aspects of Sim's conclusions seem premature. The first problematic conclusion is that Matthew did not expect his readers to engage in a mission

⁵³ Ps.-Clem., *Rec.*, 1.33–71. From F. Stanley Jones, *An Ancient Jewish Christian Source on the History of Christianity: Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions 1.27–71* (Scholars Press/SBL, 2001).

⁵⁴ Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 246-7.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 247-8.

to gentiles. As we have seen, one of Sim's key pieces of data supporting this conclusion is that Matthew's view of gentiles is a negative one. However, these anti-gentile sentiments would not have prevented him from thinking that gentiles needed to be missionized. Matthew would not be the first missionary to take a dim view of his intended target. Disapproval of someone else's lifestyle is virtually a prerequisite for missionary activity. No evangelical missionary passes out tracts on the Las Vegas strip because of their high esteem for gamblers. If Matthew believed that gentiles were unethical, violent people, then attempting to save the few most enlightened individuals from among them would be a coherent action. There is no obvious disconnect between anti-gentile statements and the belief that gentiles need to be missionized.

Second, Sim's hypothesis that Matthew's community affirms a gentile mission but is content to delegate it to other churches is overly speculative. Sim's argument that Matt 7:6 counsels against bringing the news of the kingdom to hostile, uncomprehending gentiles is compelling. However, it does not follow from this that Matthew leaves the task of missionizing gentiles to others. Elsewhere in the Gospel, Matthew commands missionary activity while also counseling caution about one's missionary targets. This occurs in the missionary discourse, in which the disciples are told to go to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 10:5-6) even though they also must be cautious of them (10:17). A similar dynamic occurs in the eschatological discourse, in which the gospel must be preached to the whole world (24:14) though it will be resisted everywhere (24:9). It seems that for Matthew, mission and danger are inseparable, and part of the missionary project is discerning who is worthy of the gospel message and who is not (10:11-14). It is completely possible that Matthew's church would have missionized gentiles in search of

the “little dogs” (κυνάρια, 15:26-27) while discerning the need to avoid the big, dangerous dogs and pigs of Matt 7:6.

Third and finally, if Matthew’s church really does completely eschew missionizing the gentiles, it is surprising that the command to go to “all nations” is placed in such a prominent location at the end of the book. It is spoken to the eleven surviving disciples, marks the occasion of the first meeting of Jesus with his followers after his resurrection, and is enshrined in the very last words Jesus speaks in the entire Gospel (Matt 28:16-20). The command to make disciples of all nations is placed so conspicuously in the text that it would be surprising if Matthew and his readers agreed this was being taken care of by different Christians.

What seems more likely is that Matthew’s church hopes for the conversion of the gentiles, and also mistrusts gentiles as they currently are. These two traits are not mutually exclusive. As I intend to show in this dissertation, Matthew did not just think that the gentile mission was legitimate – he expected his readers to be actively missionizing gentiles themselves. Even then, though, missionaries were permitted to use discretion, and not every person they came across was equally worthy of the kingdom (Matt 10:14-15). I will also endeavor to show that the term “gentile mission” may be misleading, since Matthew does not perceive any change in the content or methods of the mission to Jews or gentiles. The message of Jesus is equally binding on Jews and gentiles, and (particularly relevant in the case of gentiles), Jesus’s message does include adherence to Torah as Jesus interprets it. But Matthew does expect his church to evangelize gentiles or at least support those in the field who are engaging in such work.

1.3.3 The Replacement Reading: Paul Foster

The replacement reading attempts to reconcile the mission charge of Matt 28:19-20 with 10:5-6 by arguing that Matthew's understanding of missions undergoes a shift away from Jews and towards gentiles during the course of the mission. Matthew's Gospel recounts the pre-Easter days of the mission, in which the developing Jesus movement targeted only Israel with the gospel. However, after Jesus's death in Jerusalem and subsequent resurrection, the church turned its attention from the nation that rejected Jesus and now seeks converts from the gentiles.

This framing of Matthean mission usually accompanies readings that see Matthew's Gospel as advancing a more anti-Jewish/pro-gentile theology in general. Major motifs that tend to accompany the replacement reading of Matthean mission include the following: Israel (or most of Israel) has rejected the gospel and its messiah; therefore, God has rejected them and sent his servants to preach to the gentiles.⁵⁶ The

⁵⁶ F. W. Beare, "The Mission of the Disciples and the Mission Charge: Matthew 10 and Parallels," *JBL* 89, no. 1 (1970), 9; Ingo Broer, "Antijudaismus im Neuen Testament? Versuch inner Annäherung Anhand von zwei Texten (1 Thess 2,14-16 und Mt 27,24f)," in *Salz der Erde—Licht der Welt. Exegetische Studien zum Matthäusevangelium. Festschrift für Anton Vögtle zum 80. Geburtstag*, ed. Lorenz Oberlinner and Peter Fiedler (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1991): 321-55, 340; Brown, "The Matthean Community and the Gentile Mission," 208-217; Kenneth W. Clark, "The Gentile Bias in Matthew," *JBL* 66 (1947): 165-72, 166-7; Gernot Garbe, *Der Hirte Israels: eine Untersuchung zur Israeltheologie des Matthäusevangeliums*, WUNT 106 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2005), 59, 150, 212-13; Joachim Gnülka, *Das Matthäusevangelium*. HThKNT (Freiburg: Herder, 1986), 1:362-63; 2:381; Douglas R. A. Hare and Daniel J. Harrington, "Make Disciples of All the Gentiles (Mt 28:19)," *CBQ* 37 (1975): 359-69, 367; Douglas R. A. Hare, "The Rejection of the Jews in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts," in *Antisemitism and the Foundations of Christianity*, ed. Alan T. Davies (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 27-47, 39-40; Joachim Lange, *Das Erscheinen des Auferstandenen im Evangelium nach Matthäus: eine Traditions- und redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu Mt. 28, 16-20*, FB Bibel 11 (Würzburg: Echter-Verlag, 1973), 488-89; Luck, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, 126; Richard S. McConnell, *Law and Prophecy in Matthew's Gospel: The Authority and Use of the Old Testament in the Gospel of St. Matthew* (Basel: Reinhardt, 1969), 159; Poul Nepper-Christensen, *Das Matthäusevangelium ein Judenchristliches Evangelium?* (Aarhus: Universitetsforlaget, 1958), 918-201; Dagmar Paul, "Untypische" Texte im

church, a body of mixed ethnicity or primarily gentile individuals, replaces Israel as the chosen people of God.⁵⁷

I have used Paul Foster's book *Community, Law, and Mission in Matthew's Gospel* as an example of the "replacement reading" even though for Foster, the replacement of the Jews by the gentiles is partial, not complete. Foster's understanding of the "gentile turn" in Matthew's missiology is not as extreme as it is for other scholars. Foster allows for the fact that Matthew's church still hopes to recruit Jews, though this is not their primary goal, and their attention has mostly shifted to the gentiles. The gentile mission thus represents a change of the community's priorities, not a simple expansion of them.⁵⁸ This is not the approach taken by all scholars who advance a replacement reading. Others argue for a more thoroughgoing replacement of Israel as the people of God and as a potential mission field: the gentile church has replaced the Jews, and a mission to the nations is the only mission this church undertakes.⁵⁹

Matthäusevangelium: Studien zu Charakter, Funktion und Bedeutung einer Textgruppe des matthäischen Sonderguts, NTAbh 50 (Münster: Aschendorff, 2005), 306, 309; Donald Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew*, The Passion Series (Wilmington, DE: M. Glazier, 1985), 122; Georg Strecker, *Der Weg der Gerechtigkeit. Untersuchungen zur Theologie des Matthäus* (FRLANT 82; Göttingen, 1966), 226-42; Wolfgang Trilling, *Das wahre Israel. Studien zur einer Theologie Matthäusevangeliums*, 3rd., StANT (Munich: Kösel, 1964), 105, 215; Donald Verseput, *The Rejection of the Humble Messianic King: A Study of the Composition of Matthew 11-12* (New York: Peter Lang, 1986), 264; Rolf Walker, *Die Heilsgeschichte im ersten Evangelium*, FRLANT 91 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), 9.

⁵⁷ Clark, "The Gentile Bias in Matthew," 166; Nils Dahl, "Die Passionsgeschichte bei Matthäus," *NTS* 2.17 (1955): 17-32, 28-33; Sean Freyne, "Vilifying the Other and Defining the Self: Matthew's and John's Anti-Jewish Polemic in Focus," in *"To See Ourselves as Others See Us": Christians, Jews, "Others" in Late Antiquity*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Ernest S. Frerichs, and Caroline McCracken-Flesher, *Scholars Press Studies in the Humanities* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 117-43, 123; Joachim Gnilka, "Das Verstockungsproblem nach Matthäus 13,13-15," in *Antijudaismus im Neuen Testament? Exegetische und systematische Beiträge*, ed. Paul Eckert Willhad, Nathan Peter Levinson, and Martin Stöhr., 1967, 119-28, 126; Ulrich Luz, "Der Antijudaismus im Matthäusevangelium als historisches und theologisches Problem. Eine Skizze," *EvT* 53 (1993): 310-27, 316; Francois P. Viljoen, "Matthew, the Church and Anti-Semitism," in *The Gospel of Matthew at the Crossroads of Early Christianity*, ed. Donald P. Senior, *Journées Bibliques de Louvain* 53 (Leuven: Peeters, 2011): 665-82, 667.

⁵⁸ Foster, *Community, Law, and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, 250.

⁵⁹ Hare, *The Theme of Jewish Persecution*, 104-5, 146-62, 171.

Despite the fact that Foster does not propose such a thorough replacement, his book *Community, Law, and Mission in Matthew's Gospel* generally constructs a reading of Matthew that favors an increasingly gentile church. For instance, Foster criticizes the idea that Matthew is himself a Torah-observant Jew, since Jesus redefines and rereads the demands of Torah repeatedly in the Gospel.⁶⁰ Foster reads Matthew's programmatic statement on the law (5:17-20) neither as an endorsement of Torah observance nor as an indictment of an antinomian party.⁶¹ Rather, Foster sees Matt 5:17-20 as a "pastorally pedagogical piece."⁶² It assures the audience that Jesus was not a lawbreaker, and that such accusations against Jesus are false.⁶³ However, Foster denies that this passage can be read as a command for thoroughgoing Torah adherence, in light of Matthew's subsequent re-interpretation and redacting of Torah in Matt 5:21-48. This removes a major support for the "Jewish Matthew" hypothesis.⁶⁴ Matthew's church may contain some older Jewish conservatives who need to be assured that Jesus was no lawbreaker, but for the most part the community has replaced the Torah with the words of Jesus.

Foster's work on mission predominantly engages Sim's argument; his model of argumentation usually begins with dismantling Sim's case for a Jewish sectarian Matthew, after which he provides his own argument. Foster starts by addressing Sim's claim that Matthew's mission discourse (Matt 10:5-42), which recounts a mission to Israel, must be relevant to Matthew's own setting because it does not simply discuss the

⁶⁰ Foster, *Community, Law, and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, 211.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 211-12.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 213.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 211-12.

⁶⁴ For Foster's full argument on the incompatibility of the Torah and the Antithesis see *ibid.*, 94-143. For our treatment see Appendix A.

historical mission of the twelve disciples circa 30 CE. Sim points out that narrative details that would root Matthew's discourse in the historical past are not discussed. For example, the disciples never go out and come back.⁶⁵ Thus, according to Sim, we cannot read Matthew's mission discourse as instructions pertaining to a past mission that is a *fait accompli*. The mission in Israel will continue past the time of the twelve until the Parousia.⁶⁶ Foster finds this unconvincing. According to Foster, the description of the end of the disciples' mission in Matthew's source text, Mark 6:30, does not state that the mission to Israel has now come to an end. Therefore, Matthew's elimination of this verse cannot mean that Matthew has removed this passage in order to undo Mark's conclusion – that the mission to Israel has ended.⁶⁷ Mark 6:30 does not confirm that the mission to Israel is over; therefore, Matthew's choice to remove this passage cannot be meant to reverse this claim.

Foster acknowledges that Matt 10:23, which proclaims that the missionaries will not finish going through the "towns of Israel" before the Son of Man returns,⁶⁸ is a strong indication that Matthew thinks the mission to Israel is still valid in some capacity.⁶⁹ However, Foster argues that the church's separation from the synagogue has caused the community to reorient itself towards the gentiles.⁷⁰ The instructions to go to Israel in Matt 10:5-6 reflect a time in the community's past in which the Jewish mission predominated, but this time is over. Matthew's church is willing to recruit Jews whenever

⁶⁵ Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 158.

⁶⁶ Also in Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:192.

⁶⁷ Foster, *Community, Law, and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, 222-3.

⁶⁸ Contra Meier, *Vision of Matthew*, 74n48, argues that the return of the Son of Man is the resurrection, not the Parousia.

⁶⁹ Foster, *Community, Law, and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, 226.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 249-50.

possible, but their primary interest is in missionizing gentiles, according to Matt 28:19.⁷¹ At the same time, the more conservative members of Matthew's congregation favorably recall a time when the church was more culturally Jewish. Thus, Matthew must thread a difficult needle of appeasing Jewish congregants with favorable statements about Torah and the Jewish mission, while also appealing to the new gentile converts who ultimately shape his church.⁷² Matthew acknowledges a past era of strict Torah obedience, fellowship with the synagogue, and missionary overtures to Jews. However, his community has changed and is now oriented towards the concerns of gentile Christians.

Foster then turns his attention to the story of the Canaanite woman in Matt 15:21-28. Sim argues that this pericope speaks directly against a "first the Jews, then the gentiles" missiology in which the gentiles will be sought at a later date after Jesus's resurrection. Mark says the Jews must be fed "first" in his telling of the pericope (Mark 7:27), but Matthew's Jesus states he has been sent to "only" Israel (Matt 15:24).⁷³ Foster instead claims that the Canaanite woman as a positive figure who foreshadows gentile inclusion.⁷⁴ Foster argues that, regardless of the variation in Jesus's words, the payoff of the story is the same in both Matthew and Mark. Jesus is originally skeptical about helping a gentile, but is won over to her and other faithful gentiles because of her remarkable answer. Matthew further specifies it is not the woman's wit that qualifies her for the healing, but her faith (Matt 15:28). If this gentile's faith is strong enough to earn her a place in the community, her inclusion is a status that any Christian gentile can also

⁷¹ Ibid., 225-8.

⁷² Ibid., 227.

⁷³ Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 79-80.

⁷⁴ Ibid., *Gospel* 228-9.

achieve through similar faith.⁷⁵ Therefore, Foster argues, the entire pericope points to the Matthean community's openness to gentile converts, and their conviction that gentile faith can secure a gentile convert a place in God's kingdom.

Finally, Foster argues that Matt 28:16-20 enshrines a mission to the gentiles in its final paragraph as the central instruction of the text.⁷⁶ Foster does not think this charge necessarily locks out Israel as a mission target; the charge is gentile-oriented but not gentile-exclusive.⁷⁷ Matthew's hope for success among Jews has been limited, and he blames the Jewish mission's widespread failure on Jews who have contradicted the church's story about the resurrection (28:15).⁷⁸ Since Jews affiliated with the synagogue have their own story about the resurrection, Matthew's community has made the gentile mission its primary focus. The church is certainly willing to accept individual Jewish converts, but missionary overtures to them have not been successful and they are not as actively sought out as gentiles.

To summarize: Foster argues that Matthew 1) does not teach that an exclusive mission to Israel is still in effect, 2) depicts gentiles as having "great faith" and responding positively to Jesus as messiah, and 3) reveals that the mission to Israel has stalled, according to Matt 28:15, which rationalizes the choice to focus on the gentile mission in Matt 28:16-20. Is this construction of Matthew's theology plausible?

1.3.4 The Replacement Reading: An Analysis

⁷⁵ Ibid., *Gospel*, 229-30.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 239-40.

⁷⁷ Contra Hare and Harrington, "Makes Disciples of All the Gentiles," 259-69; Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, 139-40.

⁷⁸ Foster, *Community, Law, and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, 249.

As we have noted, much of Foster's argument focuses not simply on mission but on the increasing gentile influence on its church, specifically concerning non-adherence to Torah.⁷⁹ Foster argues that Matthew's idiosyncratic use of the Torah,⁸⁰ and specifically his apparent contradiction of it in the antitheses,⁸¹ would set Matthean Christians at odds with most Jews. Foster then builds on this divergence between Matthew's theology and the theology of common Judaism to argue that gentiles clearly hold influence over their church's theology and have directed it away from its Jewish roots. In light of this, Foster makes the case that the community has shifted its focus to the gentile mission. Furthermore, the gentile mission itself is evidence that Matthew has split with the Jewish community, since proselytism was not a part of common Jewish practice and would not have been part of synagogue worship.⁸²

A fuller discussion on the role of Torah can be found in Appendix A. For now, we will keep our focus as much as possible on Foster's construction of Matthew's mission. First: does Matthew endorse a mission to gentiles that, for the most part, replaces an earlier mission to Israel? And second, is there evidence that Matthew's theology is more akin to gentile Christianity than Jewish Christianity? If so, can we attribute this to the influence of gentile converts who have already been won over by this missiological project?

Does Mathew encourage his readers to pursue a gentile mission as opposed to a Jewish mission? There are a few challenges with this proposal. The first consists of the

⁷⁹ Ibid., 94-140; 144-216.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 94-140.

⁸¹ Ibid., 113-38.

⁸² Ibid., 218-52.

objections that Foster raises to Sim's claim that Matthew's church is not interested in the gentile mission. Foster seems to slightly misunderstand Sim's point about Matthew's elision of Mark 6:30.⁸³ Sim's point is not that Mark portrays the mission to Israel as concluded, and that Matthew does not. The point is that Matthew takes Mark's narrative about a completed project and redacts it into a discourse on how to live in the present.⁸⁴ Matthew transforms Mark's narrative about history into an instructional text about his current world. He does this by removing the story's beginning and ending, adding eschatological material (10:21-23), and extending the mission described until the Parousia (10:23). I argue that from these redactional changes, we can see that Matthew is not simply telling a story about past events in the same way that Mark is. He is providing instructions that are apparently in effect in Matthew's own context.

The challenge is Foster's choice to see the mission parameters set out in Matt 10:5-6 as traditional and vestigial, while the parameters set in Matt 28:19 are normative for the church in Matthew's own day. On one hand, Matt 28:16-20 occurs chronologically late in the narrative, so this saying could be plausibly seen as a retraction of earlier, contradictory content in Matt 10:5-6. The exhortation to a mission to all nations also occurs after tense and ultimately violent interactions between Jesus and Jewish authorities, which creates a motive in the narrative to retract a mission to Jews. However, the case that Matt 28:16-20 is authoritative while Matt 10:5-6 is vestigial is not airtight. There are at least four limitations with this argument. First, Matt 10:5-6 is still prominently placed in the narrative. This command is set at the head of one of Matthew's

⁸³ Foster, *Community, Law, and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, 222-3.

⁸⁴ Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 158.

five discourses, all of which directly address the audience of the text as well as the disciples in the story itself.⁸⁵ If Matthew intended for this saying to serve only as a historical acknowledgment of a bygone era, it is surprising he placed it at the beginning of a discourse that directly addresses the audience, but did not attempt to separate this instruction from the rest of the discourse. Second, it is difficult to see why Matt 10:5-6 should be seen as a commandment that echoes from the past while Matt 28:19 does not, since both commands are addressed to the same group of people: Jesus's immediate circle of disciples. If Matthew intends the disciples in Matt 28:16-20 to serve as representatives for the current readership of the Gospel, it is difficult to see why the disciples would not have this same function in Matt 10:5. Third, even if Matt 28:19 builds on the original parameters of the mission, expanding the mission need not replace or diminish the mission's original aims. Fourth and finally, Matthew writes in Matt 24:35 that Jesus's words "will never pass away," which necessarily challenges the idea that Jesus's words in one part of the Gospel could be superseded by Jesus's other sayings in the Gospel. Presumably, Jesus's words in Matt 10:5-6 should be just as permanent as his words in Matt 28:16-20. In light of this, it does not seem likely that Matt 10:5-6 is outdated, but Matt 28:16-20 is not.

The third significant problem with Foster's argument is the theological role he assigns to Matthew's positive gentile characters. Foster sees the centurion (Matt 8:5-13)

⁸⁵ Andrew Lincoln, "Matthew: A Story for Teachers?," in *The Bible in Three Dimensions: Essays in Celebration of Forty Years of Biblical Studies in the University of Sheffield*, ed. David J.A. Clines, Stephen E. Fowl, and Stanley E. Porter, JSOT 87 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990): 103–25. Jeannine K. Brown, "Direct Engagement of the Reader in Matthew's Discourses: Rhetorical Techniques and Scholarly Consensus," *NTS* 51, no. 1 (2005): 19–35, argues that the missionary discourse moves from addressing a specific audience to a general one, whereas the parable discourse moves from specific address to general

and the Canaanite woman (Matt 15:21-28) as indications of Matthew's openness and enthusiasm for gentile converts. The exceptional faith of the centurion of Matt 8:5-13 prompts Jesus to announce to those following him that many gentiles will eat at the eschatological table and the "sons of the kingdom" (who presumably lack this faith) will not (8:11-12).⁸⁶ Nonetheless, the healing does not seem to change anything about Jesus's current orientation towards Israel.⁸⁷ However, Foster may be overly quick to see the story of the Canaanite woman as a gentile-inclusive interaction that welcomes converts. Jesus does heal the Canaanite woman's daughter, which complicates his proclamation that he was sent only to Israel (15:24). However, the fact that Jesus heals the Canaanite woman's daughter is not itself a clear indication that she has been welcomed into the community on equal terms. The Canaanite's daughter is healed, on the condition that the Canaanite kneels before Jesus, acknowledges her dog status, and leaves Jesus and the disciples alone once the miracle is accomplished (Matt 15:26-28). She experiences the benefits of salvation, but she is kept at a distance and not a member of the community alongside the disciples.⁸⁸

This kind of "exclusive inclusion" echoes a kind of universalism that appears in other early Jewish texts: often in early Jewish literature, gentiles are assumed to be included in the eschatological Israel, but they are not equal members alongside Jews. In

⁸⁶ Gnilka, *Das Matthäusevangelium*, 1:303.

⁸⁷ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:543; Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 224.

⁸⁸ See Heinz Giesen, "Jesu Sendung zu Israel und die Heiden im Matthäusevangelium.," in *Forschungen zum Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt*, ed. Christoph Niemand, Linzer philosophisch-theologische Reihe 7 (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 2002): 123-56, 131; Strecker, *Der Weg der Gerechtigkeit*, 118-9; and Dieter Trunk, *Der messianische Heiler: Eine redaktions- und religionsgeschichtliche Studie zu den Exorzismen im Matthäusevangelium* (Freiburg: Herder, 1994), 150. Found with the assistance of Konradt, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles*, 64n227.

Deutero and Trito Isaiah, the gentiles who arrive at Zion sometimes do so in a humbled posture, bowing to the Israelites and “licking the dust from (their) feet” (Isa 49:23b; 60:14). In the restored Israel of the future, the kings and queens of the gentiles serve Israel as drastically diminished childcare providers (Isa 49:22-23); other gentiles remain in Israel to serve as builders, shepherds, and gardeners (Isa 60:1, 10; 61:5). Gentiles also carry the returning, lost exiles to Israel along with the wealth of the nations offered in tribute (Isa 60:5-11; cf. *Pss. Sol.* 17:34). This image of gentiles offering tribute seems to be particularly in Matthew’s mind in the story of the magi (Matt 2:1-12).⁸⁹ The magi are presented in a positive light. However, their purpose in Jesus’s home is to make obeisance, give gifts, and leave. They are not there to join any kind of a community of worshippers.⁹⁰ Gentile kings bring elaborate gifts to the King of Israel in Ps 72:10-15 (LXX 71:10-15) and Isa 60:3-9,⁹¹ but in neither example are those kings coming in order to be incorporated into Israel – they demonstrate Israel’s vindication and its freedom from foreign oppression.⁹² This is a kind of inclusion, but it is not inclusion of gentiles as gentiles on equal footing with Israel.

In fact, Schnabel identifies only one Jewish text in which gentiles are unambiguously accepted into Israel as equals with ethnic Israelites – the Animal Apocalypse (1 Enoch 85:3-89:11; 90:38).⁹³ Jewish readers would have been familiar with

⁸⁹ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:250.

⁹⁰ Contra Gundry, *Matthew*, 26.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁹² Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, 1st ed, The Old Testament Library (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 497.

⁹³ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission: Jesus and the Twelve*, vol. 1 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 97; Terence L. Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles: Jewish Patterns of Universalism (To 135 CE)* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 45 also includes Tobit 14:6-7 as a depiction of Jews and gentiles enjoying equal status in the eschaton.

models of eschatological gentile ingathering that did not fully admit them into the people of Israel. Matthew's Canaanite woman is prostrate (Matt 15:25), outside the community, and a dog – but she still receives the gift of healing for her daughter, and as a “little dog” (Matt 15:27) she is permitted to eat under the table. Matthew may have seen this as fitting for a daughter of Canaan, a “slave of slaves” to the people of Israel (Gen 9:25-7). Her incredible faith merits her second-class status, but it is not clear at all that she merits much beyond this. All this is to say – Matthew's story of the Canaanite woman does not clearly express that gentiles should be sought out and welcomed to the community. The exceptional (and exceptionally humble) might be included in the church. However, any universalism that is expressed in this text includes gentiles on only a limited and secondary basis. As Amy-Jill Levine writes: “She is able to obtain a miracle because she accepts her marginal position as a gentile.”⁹⁴

In light of this, the evidence that Matthew expects his readers to turn from a mission to Israel to a mission to gentiles is lacking. This brings us to the second part of Foster's argument: does Matthew's theology reflect the influence of gentile Christians? And if so, does this suggest that Matthew writes for an increasingly sought-after gentile audience?

For Foster, the primary indication that gentile converts are present in Matthew's church is simply the fact that Matthew insists on a gentile mission at all.⁹⁵ This call for a gentile mission puts Matthew's church outside the bounds of common Jewish practice

⁹⁴ As Levine writes: “She is able to obtain a miracle because she accepts her marginal position as a gentile.” Amy-Jill Levine, *The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Matthean Salvation History: “Go Nowhere Among the Gentiles” (10:5b)*, Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 14 (Lampeter, Dyfed, Wales: Mellen House, 1988), 152.

⁹⁵ Foster, *Community, Law, and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, 75.

and challenges any claim that Matthew could be considered “within the bounds of Judaism.”⁹⁶ Foster notes that first-century Judaism was not a missionary religion and most first-century Jews were not invested in converting gentiles to their faith.⁹⁷ Therefore, if Matthew’s church has taken such a non-Jewish step as to actively missionize gentiles, their congregation must be outside the synagogue, and likely contains many non-Jewish members.

Matthew may not share the mission theology (or lack thereof) of common Judaism. This does not mean that Matthew’s theology is coming from gentiles. In effect, Foster argues that Matthew’s church must be under the influence of gentiles, because orthodox first-century Jews would not have developed the non-Jewish idea of a gentile mission on their own without extensive non-Jewish influence. On one hand, Foster is in agreement with current scholarly consensus that most first-century Jews welcomed converts without seeking them. And yet, at least some Jews got the idea of a gentile mission on their own. Paul claimed to receive such a commission directly through a revelatory experience of Jesus (Gal 1:16). Just as importantly though: the fact that Matthew’s church engages in practices that were atypical among early Jews does not mean that Matthew’s church must have contained a significant number of ethnic gentiles.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 75.

⁹⁷ With Schnabel, *Early Christian Missions*, 1:1712; Bernd Wander, *Gottesfürchtige und Sympathisanten Studien zum heidnischen Umfeld von Diasporasynagogen* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 187. Contra Louis H. Feldman, “The Omnipresence of the God-Fearers,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 12, no. 5 (1986): 58–69, 59; Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity*, 1-18; see also Dieter Georgi, *The Opponents of Paul in Second Corinthians: A Study of Religious Propaganda in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 175; Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, ed. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Matthew Black, Rev. ed., 3 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 3:171. Louis H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World: Attitudes and Interactions from Alexander to Justinian* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 293, is more reserved and proposes there are other explanations to the growth of the Jewish population.

Matthew's church could have also been a sectarian movement that differed from mainstream Judaism in key respects but still contained primarily ethnic Jews. Most Second Temple Jews did not live in isolated, rural settlements, but that does not mean that the Qumran community contained gentiles. In the same way, Matthew's interest in a gentile mission puts him at odds with common Jewish practice, but this does not mean that the movement contained a large number of ethnic gentiles.

So, if hopes for a gentile mission are not in themselves evidence that Matthew's community contained many gentiles, what other evidence is there for the presence of gentiles in Matthew's audience? Another piece of evidence that Foster cites is inter-church dynamics mentioned in Matthew's Gospel. Foster (like several other Matthew scholars) locates Matthew's community in a transitional phase.⁹⁸ Foster writes that the Matthean community began in the synagogue, so its older members are more conservative Jews. However, the influx of gentile converts has changed community norms, so traditional Torah observance is no longer normative in the community. This is particularly apparent in Matt 5:21-48, where Foster argues Jesus's teachings replace and contradict Torah observance.⁹⁹ Jesus's teachings have displaced Torah as the community rule and are equally binding on Jewish and gentile Christians. This means that gentiles are meant to be welcomed as full participants in the community, and Torah observant Jews are forbidden from hindering them (σκανδαλίζω, Matt 18:6-7).¹⁰⁰ To be fair, Foster

⁹⁸ Also Stephenson H. Brooks, *Matthew's Community: The Evidence of His Special Sayings Material*, vol. 16, JSNTS (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 120-2; William G. Thompson, *Matthew's Advice to a Divided Community: Mt. 17, 22-18, 35*, AnBib Dissertationes 44 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1970), 259; Benedict T. Viviano, *Matthew and His World: The Gospel of the Open Jewish Christians: Studies in Biblical Theology*, NTOA/StUNT 61 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 22.

⁹⁹ Foster, *Community, Law, and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, 140-3.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 246.

does not explicitly identify the “scandalizing” in Matt 18:6-7 as Torah enforcement in the community. However, since Foster invokes this verse in his discussion of Matthew’s community and Torah observance, it seems that the stumbling-block he has in mind is Jews pressing gentiles to keep Jewish laws.¹⁰¹ This reading treats Matt 18:6-7 as analogous to Acts 15:28, in which the apostles elect to abrogate the demands of Torah for gentiles in order to not put a “burden” (βάρος) on them.

However, does the use of the term σκανδαλίζω in relation to the “little ones” in Matt 18:6-7 actually refer to burdening potential gentile converts to Christianity or restricting their ability to join the community? Foster alludes to the idea that older church members are not to look down on newer converts (20:1-16)¹⁰² and therefore hinder the progress of new gentile converts to the faith. But is the “hindrance” in question related to Jew-gentile relations in the church? If so, Matthew’s word choice to describe the problem (σκανδαλίζω) is an odd one. For Matthew, σκανδαλίζω usually refers to tempting someone to sin (Matt 5:29, 30; 18:8, 9; cf. Mark 9:42, 43, 45, 47). A lenient attitude towards the temple tax is also said to “scandalize” in Matt 17:27; this is consistent with another use of σκανδαλίζω in Matthew that simply means “to offend” (13:57; 15:12; cf. John 6:61). The idea that a permissive attitude toward personal ethics can cause offense to stricter individuals also appears in Paul (Rom 14:21; 1 Cor 8:13). According to Paul, eating meat sacrificed to an idol might be acceptable in itself, but runs the risk of offending those who find such meat eating immoral. To “scandalize” a person suggests inciting them to engage in more lenient or sinful behavior, or shocking someone else with

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 246, 252.

¹⁰² Ibid., 245-6.

one's own leniency. This does not seem to be a relevant dynamic between conservative Jewish Christians and newly initiated gentiles. Following the normal definition of "scandalizing," gentile Christians would be more likely to scandalize Jewish Christians than the other way around. In this case, it seems unlikely that Matthew's "little ones" (μικρός, 18:6, 10, 14) are specifically gentile converts as opposed to Jewish ones. "Little ones" are also identified with the disciples/missionaries in Matt 10:42 – who are certainly not new gentile converts. There is no real reason to think that the term specifically refers to gentiles in Matt 18:6.

Another piece of evidence Foster offers to demonstrate gentile influence in the church is Matthew's relaxed interpretation of Torah. While we will deal with the question of whether Matthew's interpretation of Torah is in fact relaxed in the appendices, for now, it is worth engaging the question of whether Matthew's use of Torah reveals the influence of gentiles.

Foster maintains that Matthew's idiosyncratic reading of the Torah (particularly as it is expressed in Matt 5:21-48) indicates the influence of gentile worshippers. The first part of Foster's conclusion – that Matthew's understanding of law observance puts him outside the bounds of formative Judaism – is plausible. For instance, Foster argues that several of the antitheses make Christian practice incompatible with synagogue worship: namely, the taking of oaths (5:33-34) or the validity of the *lex talionis* (5:38-39).¹⁰³ But are deviations from Jewish orthodoxy evidence that Matthew's church is full of gentiles, or is there another explanation? Matthew's approach to the Torah could also be explained

¹⁰³ Ibid., 121-4.

by sectarianism or differing norms of Torah interpretation among early Jewish groups. For example, Kampen notes that preference for honesty over oaths in God's name appears in Philo¹⁰⁴ and Ben Sira (23:9-11), and Josephus reports that the Essenes did not take oaths.¹⁰⁵ Apparently, restrictions on oath-taking can be attributed to factors other than gentile Christian influence, such as sectarian sensibilities. Even if the community is outside the synagogue, this does not mean that the community is no longer made up of devout Jews or has waged a successful gentile mission.¹⁰⁶ We should not assume that Matthew's distinctive teaching on the Torah must reflect a community that has adjusted its praxis to accommodate gentiles. There are other social and cultural factors that could also explain Matthew's attitude towards the Torah, many of which could arise from a Jewish community.

As a final note, we should also remember that Matthew dedicates surprisingly little attention to gentiles if he is writing for an overwhelmingly gentile audience, and the attention he gives gentiles is rarely unambiguously positive. If Matthew's church is full of gentile converts, it is surprising that Matthew's Gospel contains very little material that is of obvious interest to gentiles. Only the stories of the magi,¹⁰⁷ the centurion, and the Canaanite woman show gentiles interacting with Jesus. When we weigh this against negative statements about gentiles in the Gospel (Matt 5:47; 6:7, 23; 18:17), a very

¹⁰⁴ John Kampen, *Matthew within Sectarian Judaism*. The Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library (New Haven: Yale U. Press, 2019), 104; Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 2.2.

¹⁰⁵ Josephus, *J.W.* 2.135, 139.

¹⁰⁶ Kampen, *Matthew within Sectarian Judaism*, 104-6.

¹⁰⁷ C. Sim, "The Magi: Gentiles or Jews?," *HTS Teologiese Studies* 55, no. 4 (1999): 980–1000, argues that the magi may be diaspora Jews.

different picture of Matthew's audience emerges. Matthew actually seems somewhat wary of gentiles, despite his conviction that the gospel must reach them.

To conclude: Foster's evidence that Matthew insists on a mission beyond the bounds of Israel, and that this mission should be undertaken by his readers, is solid. Foster appears to be correct that Matthew does expect his readership to proselytize gentiles. However, the evidence is not there that Matthew has necessarily turned his attention away from Jews, or that a mission to gentiles has been so zealously undertaken that the theology of the community is now more gentile than Jewish. The evidence for extensive gentile participation in Matthew's church seems to be lacking. Matthew's community might be interested in gentile proselytism, but, like other Jewish members of the Jesus movement, could have developed this practice without direct gentile influence. Matthew may embrace an idiosyncratic reading of Torah, but early Jews were capable of developing these readings on their own without gentile influence. Finally, far from expressing favorable attitudes about gentiles and the gentile mission, Matthew's Gospel actually expresses a dim view of gentiles in many passages and might even reflect a readership that remains somewhat wary of recruiting them. In light of this, it cannot be said, as Clark does, that Matthew's Gospel has a "gentile bias."¹⁰⁸ It is true that Matt 12:21 states that the gentiles will "hope" in Jesus, Matt 8:12 predicts that those from the "east and west" will sit with the patriarch at the Eschaton, and Matt 21:43 predicts that an ἔθνος, not the present leadership of Israel, will inherit the kingdom of God. But the

¹⁰⁸ Clark, "The Gentile Bias in Matthew," 165-72.

evidence that Matthew's community has largely replaced its Jewish mission with a gentile mission is therefore not compelling.

1.3.5 The Expansionist Reading: Matthias Konradt

The "expansionist" reading of mission in Matthew reconciles the contrasting missionary commissions of Matt 10:5-6 and 28:16-20 by arguing that the second charge supplements the first one. In Jesus's earthly life, he commanded his disciples to missionize only Jews in the land of Palestine. After the resurrection, Jesus's new enthronement over earth and heaven has cleared the way for the mission to be expanded to all nations, including Jews and gentiles alike. The direction of missionary activity in Matthew's Gospel is thus one of expansion and inclusion. What was begun in Israel for the Jews has now opened to the whole world, and the goal of the missionary project is to create a new community that crosses ethnic and national boundaries.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Schuyler Brown, "The Mission to Israel in Matthew's Central Section (Mt 9:35-11:1), *ZNW* 69 (1978): 73-90; "The Twofold Representation of the Law in Matthew's Gospel," 29; *The Gospel of Matthew at the Crossroads of Early Christianity*, ed. Donald P. Senior, BETL 243 (Leuven: Peeters, 2011): 73-90; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:684; Detlev Dormeyer, "Die Rollen von Volk, Jüngern und Gegnern im Matthäusevangelium," in "Dies ist das Buch ..." *Das Matthäusevangelium. Interpretation-Rezeption-rezeptionsgeschichte*, ed. Rainer Kampling (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2004): 105-28, 123; Richard T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 53-4, 171-8, 413; Hubert Frankemölle, *Matthäus: Kommentar* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1994), 2:547; Garbe, *Der Hirte Israel*, 181; Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia: Jesus' Eschatological Discourse in Matthew's Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 2000), 67; Gundry, *Matthew*, 595-8; Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:887; Arland J. Hultgren, "Mission and Ministry in Matthew," *WW* 18 (1998): 341-47, 344-6; Jack Dean Kingsbury, "The Significance of the Cross within the Plot of Matthew's Gospel: A Study in Narrative Criticism," in *The Synoptic Gospels: Source Criticism and the New Literary Criticism*, ed. Camille Focant, BETL 110 (Leuven: Leuven U. Press, 1993); 263-70, 272; Edgar Krentz, "Make Disciples"—Matthew on Evangelism," *CurTM* 33.1 (2006): 23-41; Christof Landmesser, *Jüngerberufung und Zuwendung zu Gott: ein exegetischer Beitrag zum Konzept der matthäischen Soteriologie im Anschluss an Mt 9,9-13*, WUNT 133 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 15-17; Andreas Lindemann, "Israel im Neuen Testament," *WD* 25 (1991): 167-92, 189; Meier, "Nations or Gentiles in Matthew 28:19?," 94-102; Richard E. Menninger, *Israel and the Church in the Gospel of Matthew*, American University Studies 162 (New York: P. Lang, 1994), 43-5; Vincent Mora, *La symbolique de la création dans l'évangile de Matthieu*, *Lectio Divina* 144

The expansionist view usually frames the Matthean church as ethnically diverse and open to Jews and gentiles. It locates the primary conflict in the text between the Jesus movement and Jewish leaders, not Israel in general. It denies that the nascent, increasingly gentile church replaces Israel, and sometimes frames the church as the “remnant” or the “reconstituted” Israel to explain the continuity between Israel and the new, gentile-inclusive church.¹¹⁰ One of the key interpretive decisions that supports the expansionist reading is the insistence that Israel is included in the command to go to πάντα τὰ ἔθνη in Matt 28:19. The appropriate translation of the phrase is “all the nations,” not “all the gentiles.”¹¹¹ The expansionist reading is also buoyed by appeal to other apparently inclusive texts in the Gospel. For instance, Stanton also argues for the sustained hope that the mission will continue to Jews on the grounds of his exegesis of Matt 23:39— the prediction that at least some Jews of Jerusalem will bless “he who comes in the name of the Lord” at Jesus’s return.¹¹²

The expansionist reading can be found in many Matthean studies, but one of its more recent defenders is Matthias Konradt, who takes up the question of mission in his

(Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1991), 107; E. C. Park, *The Mission Discourse in Matthew's Interpretation*, 185; Sparks, “Gospel as Conquest: Mosaic Typology in Matthew 28:16-20,” 655-6; Stanton, *Gospel for a New People*, 137-8; 158; Peter Stuhlmacher, “Zur missionsgeschichtlichen Bedeutung von Mt 28,16-20,” *EvT* 59 (1999): 108-30, 117; Charles H. Talbert, *Matthew*, Paideia (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 139, 313; Guido Tisera, *Universalism According to the Gospel of Matthew*, European University Studies Series XXIII; Theology 482 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1993); Andries G. Van Aarde, “Jesus' Mission to All of Israel Emplotted in Matthew's story,” *Neotestamentica* 41.2 (2007), 419, 428-32; Vögtle, “Das christologische und ekklesiologische Anliegen von Mt 28,18-20,” 259.

¹¹⁰ Chase, *Eschatological Davidic Shepherd*, 340-69; B. F. Meyer, “Jesus and the Remnant of Israel,” *JBL* 84 (1965), 123-40; Menninger, *Israel and the Church in the Gospel of Matthew*, 136-57.

¹¹¹ Anthony O. Ewherido, *Matthew's Gospel and Judaism in the Late First Century C.E.: The Evidence from Matthew's Chapter on Parables*, StBibLit 91 (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 21; Meier, “Nations or Gentiles in Matthew 28:19?,” 94-102; Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People*, 137-8. Levine, *The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Matthean Salvation History*, 193-205, maintains an exclusive definition of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη in 28:19 despite a generally inclusivist view of mission.

¹¹² See Stanton, *Gospel for a New People*, 249-50 for Matt 23:39 as an allusion to Ps 188:26 and Matt 21:9.

book *Israel, the Church, and the Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew*. Konradt writes against what he calls the “double replacement thesis.” The “double replacement thesis” maintains that in Matthew, Israel has been replaced by the church as the people of God, and also that “the nations” have replaced Israel as an object of mission. These two theses commonly accompany each other, but do not have to go together. Even if Israel has been replaced by the church, it does not follow that Israel has been replaced by “the nations” as the target of missionary activity.¹¹³

However, to assume that Israel has been rejected even as a mission field is to read Matthew through Paul (who argues for a short displacement of the Jewish mission until the gentile mission is complete, Rom 11:11-15) or Luke-Acts (where Paul abandons missionizing the Jews in favor of receptive gentiles in Acts 13:46-47, 18:5-6; 19:8-10; 28:24-28).¹¹⁴ In Matthew, Konradt says, Israel is not “rejected.” However, the development of the church (which is distinct from both Israel and the gentiles) and the expansion of the mission to all nations in Matt 28:19 still needs to be accounted for.¹¹⁵ For Konradt, the two mission commissions –one to Israel and one to the nations –must be read sequentially. The two commissions do not conflict, but fully disclose Jesus’s true identity throughout the course of the narrative.¹¹⁶ The first mission reveals Jesus as the Son of David and savior of Israel, and the second mission reveals Jesus as the Son of God and savior of the world.

¹¹³ Konradt, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew*, 5-6.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

Chapters 2 and 3 of Konradt's book exegete how Matthew frames Jesus as the Davidic messiah, shepherd of Israel, and rescuer of Israel's "lost sheep" in his earthly mission. Jesus's identity as the messiah of Israel is a critical part of Matthew's Christology, and is not reversed or diminished by anything that occurs later in the narrative.¹¹⁷ Particularly, Konradt challenges the idea that Israel as a group rejects Jesus as the messiah. Only a certain class of Israelites do. Within conflict narratives, Konradt sees a sharp distinction between the way Matthew portrays Israel's leadership¹¹⁸ and the way Matthew portrays Israel's "crowds." The *hoi polloi* of Israel are receptive of their messiah (4:25; 8:1; 9:33; 13:2; 15:30, 19:2; 21:11). The leadership of Israel, beginning with Herod (2:3) and continuing to the priests in Jerusalem (21:46), are not.¹¹⁹ Jerusalem is particularly singled out as a site of resistance. At both the beginning and the end of the story, Jesus's appearance in Jerusalem throws the city into chaos (Matt 2:3; 21:10-11).¹²⁰ The leaders of Jerusalem convince its people to reject Jesus, continuing Jerusalem's historical trend of prophet rejection and killing (21:33-46).¹²¹ Having been led astray by Israel's leadership, the Jerusalem crowds turn on Jesus and doom their city to destruction.¹²² However, the Gospel does not suggest that the destruction of Jerusalem should be equated with the damnation of Israel as a whole.¹²³ Rural Israel actually is a site of renewal even after the death of Jesus in Jerusalem; Galilee is the site of a new commissioning of the disciples after the resurrection (28:10, 16).

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 86-7.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 123-35

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 135.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 160.

¹²¹ Ibid., 161.

¹²² Ibid., 163.

¹²³ Ibid., 164-5.

Ultimately, Konradt identifies the primary conflict in Matthew's Gospel as a conflict between Jesus and Israel's leaders. As a result of their resistance to Jesus, the authorities' right to instruct and lead the people is revoked and handed over to Jesus's disciples and their successors.¹²⁴ This does not end the mission in Israel.¹²⁵ This mission continues in Matthew's own day and is not revoked by the addition of the gentile mission.

Konradt then turns his attention to the universality of salvation: namely, how does Matthew think the mission charges of Matt 10:5-6 and 28:19 are related? Konradt rules out the possibility that there is a "turn to the gentiles" based on Israel's hard-heartedness. If the gentile mission does not replace the Jewish one, though, how are they related?

Konradt sees the theme of universal salvation as taught throughout the entire Gospel. At the beginning of the text, Jesus is called both the Son of David, and also the son of Abraham (1:1).¹²⁶ Abraham represents the father of Israel, but he also represents salvation to the gentiles because he is depicted in some early Jewish texts as the first proselyte.¹²⁷ Abraham appears elsewhere in the Gospel when John the Baptist invokes him in his diatribe against the Pharisees: God can "raise up children for Abraham" per Matt 3:9. In this text, Konradt sees a possible allusion to the hope that the "mission to the nations" will create new "children of Abraham" outside Israelite descent.¹²⁸ This does not need to be read as replacement theology. Abraham is still Israel's patriarch, but Israel as

¹²⁴ Ibid., 263-4.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 264.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 265-72.

¹²⁷ See Ibid., 266n5-6.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 266.

founded by Abraham has always been intended to reach the nations.¹²⁹ The mission to the gentiles is thus continuous with the mission to Israel: the mission to the gentiles brings about the universal salvation that, Matthew believes, was always meant to be Israel's destiny.¹³⁰

Konradt finds further hints of universalism in the nativity story. For instance, there are four women in Matthew's genealogy (Matt 1:1-17), whom Konradt identifies as exemplary gentiles.¹³¹ This theme continues with the appearance of the magi, who come in search of the chance to honor the "king of the Jews."¹³² Universality is planted in the beginning of Jesus's story, just like it was planted in the beginning of Israel's story with Abraham. Universal salvation and inclusion are the ultimate destinies of both.

Konradt continues by arguing that this theme of the expansion of Israel's blessings to all nations is present throughout the entire Gospel. After the nativity sequence, Matthew incorporates a fulfillment citation, Matt 4:15-16, that identifies Galilee as "of the gentiles." Konradt reads this passage as implying that the salvation that is first offered to the people of Israel will "undergo an expansion" as gentiles will be included in the people of God.¹³³ The same theme occurs in the fulfillment text in Matt 12:17-21, which Konradt reads this fulfillment text as referring to the proclamation of the gospel.¹³⁴ This universal proclamation is further alluded to when the church is called the "light of the world" (Matt 5:14) and the field in the parable of the wheat and the tares is

¹²⁹ Ibid., 287-8.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 320-21.

¹³¹ Ibid., 269-71.

¹³² Ibid., 272-4.

¹³³ Ibid., 275.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 279-80.

identified as the whole world (Matt 13:38). However, though the time of the universal mission is foreshadowed in Jesus's lifetime, it only arrives when Jesus has been exalted as the Son of God, having dominion over the whole earth.¹³⁵ The mission to the nations extends the ongoing mission to Israel to the whole world (Matt 28:18), as is fitting for the missionaries of the Son of God.¹³⁶ This is a similar argument to Levine's case in *The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Matthean Salvation History*.¹³⁷ The central claim of Levine's book is that the fundamental distinction in Matthew between people is not between Jew and gentile, but between the marginalized and the powerful. Jesus's mission is to the "lost sheep" in Israel, but then the gospel is offered to "the gentiles" (Levine's translation of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη) in Matt 28:19.¹³⁸ The expansion of the mission to the gentiles does not replace Jews, but instead signals the inauguration of an era in which "no ethnic or national entity is privileged in the age of the church."¹³⁹ The gospel goes to the gentiles because all nations must hear it, not because the gentiles beyond Israel's borders are more deserving. Konradt and Levine thus agree that the disciples' mission has expanded beyond the Jews to the gentiles. Konradt identifies this expansion with the universalization of Jesus's lordship over heaven and earth, while Levine locates the expansion as a product of a post-Easter reality where ethnicity does not determine membership into the people of God.

What does this mean for the relationship between the church and Israel?

According to Konradt, the church serves as the agent by which God's message of

¹³⁵ Ibid., 285.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 324.

¹³⁷ Levine, *The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Matthean Salvation History*, 1-12.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 185-92.

¹³⁹ Levine, *The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Matthean Salvation History*, 192.

salvation is spread.¹⁴⁰ It is the entity that is responsible for ushering people into the kingdom (21:43), in the face of the Pharisees' failure to do this. This does not place the church in competition with Israel, or as an alternative to it. Rather, this makes Matthew's church an entity that exists to serve Israel.¹⁴¹ Konradt notes that some Judean communities of Christians identified themselves as the "assembly of God" (ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ, 1 Cor 15:9; Gal 1:13; 1 Thess 2:14). This is a phrase from the Hebrew Bible/LXX that identifies the assembled people of Israel as a cultic-liturgical body.¹⁴² This does not mean that communities that identified as "assemblies of God" thought of themselves as a new or alternative Israel.¹⁴³ The church as an eschatological marshalling of God's people sets up its responsibility as a missionary community. It is given the "keys to the kingdom," signaling its special responsibility to teach and lead Israel. At the same time, Israel as it exists outside this community does not cease to be "Israel."¹⁴⁴

Konradt does argue for a levelling of privilege between Israel and the nations as objects of mission. Israel will always be primary as an object of election, but gentiles have been included.¹⁴⁵ This introduces some tension in Matthew's concept of Israel's election. They are uniquely elected among all peoples in history, but they are placed on the same footing as gentiles because of their need for Jesus and access to the church's mission. The church also does not require gentiles to convert to Judaism in order to be

¹⁴⁰ Alexander Sand, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1986), 306; Konradt, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew*, 331.

¹⁴¹ Konradt, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew*, 331-2.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 334-5.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 335.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 345.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 347.

included in the church.¹⁴⁶ The roots of the church may be in Israel, but its future is in the whole world. The completion of the work Jesus initiated for Israel is “accompanied by a universalization” and applied to all people.¹⁴⁷ Nonetheless, Konradt is insistent that the term “people of God” never undergoes a similar universalization and remains affixed to Israel in the Gospel.

Konradt thus seeks to steer between the difficult poles of universality and particularism in Matthew’s Gospel. On one hand, salvation and the “new covenant” (Matt 26:28) are renewed in such a way that they are made available to Jews and gentiles alike. On the other hand, Israel’s identity as a chosen people, and as the people of God, is never challenged or compromised.¹⁴⁸ The church’s leaders replace Israel’s leaders, and the church claims to be a unique and exclusive custodian of Israel’s theology, history, and tradition. But in this capacity, they exist to gather God’s people and outsiders into the “community of salvation.”

1.3.6 The Expansionist Reading: Analysis

Konradt’s argument against the double replacement reading makes the following claims about Matthew’s theology: because Jesus is the savior of Israel and of the world, the church does not replace Israel and a mission to the gentiles does not replace a previous mission to Jews. Instead, the church is a place where gentiles and Jews alike are welcomed, no ethnicity is privileged over another, and there is no expectation that

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. 347.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 350.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 350-51.

gentiles must become Jews in order to participate. This mixed church therefore exists for the sake of serving Israel and the world by missionizing them and bringing them into the new community.

This argument presents several questions. First, Konradt's argument of an expanded mission depends on an elimination of ethnic privilege in the church. Do we see evidence that Matthew sees no distinction between Jew and gentile in the age of the church? Second, does Matthew clearly write for an ethnically mixed audience – both the members of the church as it exists now, and those he hopes to recruit in the future? Finally, is it the case that Matthew sees the church as an agent that exists equally for the sake of Israel and the nations?

1.3.6.1 Ethnic privilege in Matthew's Gospel

First, the elimination of ethnic privilege. As we have seen, the expansionist reading depends on neither Jews nor gentiles occupying a position as insiders or as the priorities of the church. Konradt insists that the gentiles' gain is not Israel's loss. Gentiles can be welcomed into the people of God without Israel losing any status. This is certainly possible – after all, there is nothing about the introduction of gentiles into God's people that excludes Jews, and early Judaism was often quite positive about proselytes to Judaism and perceived their inclusion as a credit to the community.¹⁴⁹ However, does

¹⁴⁹ Michael F. Bird, *Crossing over Sea and Land: Jewish Missionary Activity in the Second Temple Period* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2010), 75; Schnabel, *Early Christian Missions*, 1:1712; Bernd Wander,

Matthew see the inclusion of gentiles in the church as an inherent good, which does not displace Israel?

A challenge to this reading, as we saw earlier with Foster's replacement strategy, is the fact that Matthew does not seem to have a terribly positive view of gentiles. Matthew reports that "many from the east and the west" will sit at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Matt 8:11-12), but the Canaanite woman is left under the table (Matt 15:27). Matthew also indicates several times that gentiles are morally depraved (Matt 5:47; 6:7; 6:32) and outside the fellowship of the community (Matt 18:17).

Konradt attributes a positive view of gentiles to two fulfillment texts: Matt 4:15-16 and 12:18-21. The idea that these texts foreshadow the inclusion of gentiles into the people of God is foundational to Konradt's argument, but it is not clear that this is actually the best interpretation of these texts. The reference to "Galilee of the gentiles" in Matt 4:15, sitting in darkness and shadow, seems more intended to underscore the hopelessness of Galilee's situation, not its international flavor and potential for ethnically diverse community-building.¹⁵⁰ Similarly, Davies and Allison place the phrase Γαλιλαία τῶν ἐθνῶν in Matt 4:15 alongside the worship of the magi (Matt 2:11) and John the Baptist's preaching concerning the Sons of Abraham (Matt 3:9) as evidence of Matthew's warmth towards gentiles.¹⁵¹ This may be overreading the data. In context, Matt 4:15 seems less intended to speak of the worthiness of gentile Galilee and more of its profound

Gottesfürchtige und Sympathisanten Studien zum heidnischen Umfeld von Diasporasynagogen (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 187.

¹⁵⁰ Contra Gundry, *Matthew*, 59.

¹⁵¹ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:383.

need. Galilee, full of the “lost sheep of Israel” (10:6; cf. 9:36) is dwelling “in darkness” and in the “shadow of death” (4:16). The need of Galilee is the focus, not its gentile residents who hear the words of Jesus.

Likewise, Matt12:18-21 might frame the gentiles in a more ambiguous light than Konradt allows.¹⁵² In this passage, Jesus is said to proclaim κρίσις, “justice” or “judgment,” to the gentiles. This word is more commonly used to denote “judgment,” the negative aspect of κρίσις, in Matthew (5:21-22; 12:41, 42; 23:33; for the “day of judgment” see 10:15; 11:22, 24; 12:36) than it is to denote “justice” (one use in Matt 23:20). Κρίσις in Matthew’s Gospel overwhelmingly refers to eschatological judgment that results in inclusion or exclusion. In this case, the κρίσις is only as good as the gentiles who receive it. Jesus’s message for the nations is imminent judgment and the need for repentance. This does not mean that the gentiles will respond *en masse*. Rejection, not acceptance, is the most commonly predicted Matthean response to gospel proclamation, from Jews and gentiles alike (24:9). Finally, the prediction that the nations will “await/hope for” Jesus’s name (ἐλπίζω, 12:21) may be ambiguous. “Hope” is not a major Matthean theme. The word ἐλπίζω does not occur at all in the Gospel, and ἐλπίζω occurs only once. Thus, as Sim notes, “hope in” may not be the only translation of ἐλπίζω + the dative. Sim proposes that the phrase is too ambiguous to necessarily assign a positive meaning.¹⁵³ Of course, it is difficult to find a better translation than “hope in.”

¹⁵² Davies and Allison make the case that the “sons of the kingdom” are those “in Israel” (8:10) while the “many from the east and the west” are both Jews and gentiles (*Matthew*, 2:27-29). Also Boris Repschinski, *The Controversy Stories in the Gospel of Matthew: Their Redaction, Form, and Relevance for the Relationship Between the Matthean Community and Formative Judaism*, FRLANT 189 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 39-40.

¹⁵³ Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 222.

However, no matter how we translate ἐλπίζω, this one verse cannot lead us to conclude that Matthew has a generally open attitude towards gentiles. The nations may hope in Jesus's name in the eschaton, but in the meantime, they are still objects of suspicion and even danger (Matt 24:9). In light of Matthew's apparent ambivalence about gentiles, it is difficult to see how it could be the case that Matthew really does think that there is no ethnic privilege for Israel over the gentiles in the age of the church.

Are there any unambiguous depictions of universal salvation in Matthew that depict Jews and gentiles as unqualified equals? The best evidence that Matthew holds this position is Matt 8:11-12, the saying that "many will come from the east and the west" to eat with Israel's patriarchs while the "sons of the kingdom" are cast out. This saying has been read as a statement of replacement theology,¹⁵⁴ or at least as an affirmation that gentiles will enter the kingdom ahead of many Jews.¹⁵⁵ Konradt and Levine both provide readings that problematize this. First, the centurion has great faith (Matt 8:10) in contrast to those following Jesus, who have "little faith" (Matt 8:26), not *no* faith. The faith of the centurion is aspirational for the disciples and crowds, not as a sign that their situation is hopeless and that Israel is doomed.¹⁵⁶ Second, Konradt argues that the "many" from the east and west include gentiles, but not only gentiles.¹⁵⁷ The saying alludes to the prophetic motif of the eschatological pilgrimage to Israel, which will bring both Jews and

¹⁵⁴ Konradt, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew*, 202n181.

¹⁵⁵ Charles E. Carlston and Craig E. Evans, *From Synagogue to Ecclesia: Matthew's Community at the Crossroads*, WUNT 334 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 255; Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:205; David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew: Based on the Revised Standard Version*, NCBC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 159; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 268-9; Luz, *Matthew*, 2:11; Schweizer, *Matthew*, 216; Trilling, *Das Wahre Israel*, 88-90, 103.

¹⁵⁶ Konradt, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew*, 205.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 205.

gentiles to Zion.¹⁵⁸ This is not an image that excludes Israel from eschatological salvation. It glorifies Israel as a site of eschatological renewal.¹⁵⁹ Third, Konradt considers the “sons of the kingdom”¹⁶⁰ to serve primarily as an ingroup warning (cf. 22:13; 24:51; 25:30). They are the ones who fail to understand that salvation is being offered universally.¹⁶¹ Levine’s argument further bolsters this point by emphasizing the contrast between the elite and the non-elite in Matthew. The contrast between the “many” and the “sons of the kingdom” is not obviously the contrast between Jews and gentiles, but the elite who would normally presume that they would be included at an eschatological banquet (cf. Matt 3:9) and those who seem less likely. In this case, Matt 8:10-12 refers to the contrast between the elite and the non-elite, not simply between Jews and gentiles.¹⁶²

In light of this, it does seem that expansionist writers are correct that Matthew sees gentiles being welcomed with Jews at the eschatological banquet. Jesus’s saying in Matt 8:10-12 appears to communicate this. Nonetheless, this still needs to be weighed against Matthew’s tendency to express wariness and distance towards gentiles. This might not be evidence of true ethnic levelling, but it is evidence of inclusion.

1.3.6.2 Matthew’s Church as Ethnically Mixed

This brings us to our second question: does Matthew write for a church that is ethnically mixed and pursuing an ethnicity-blind mission? Authors who affirm an

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.,205n201.

¹⁵⁹ See section 1.3.4 for further discussion of the eschatological pilgrimage.

¹⁶⁰ Konradt, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew*, 206.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.,207-8.

¹⁶² Levine, *Social and Ethnic Dimensions*, 110-5.

expansionist reading of Matthew usually appeal to the idea that Matthew is writing to a “mixed body” of Jewish and gentile converts.¹⁶³ Gundry goes even further than this and argues that Matthew’s church is not just ethnically mixed,¹⁶⁴ but spiritually and morally mixed: the church has exploded with gentile converts, but the quality of these recently-pagan converts is variable (13:24-30, 36-43, 47-50; 22:11-14; 25:1-13).¹⁶⁵ How good is the evidence, though, that Matthew actually does write for an increasingly gentile audience?

There are several problems with this. First, as we have already argued in §1.3.4, it is extremely difficult to find evidence that would make sense of Matthew’s community containing a significant number of gentiles. Matthew’s writing is frequently critical of them.

Second, there is the significant gap between the command to missionize gentiles and the apparent success of such a mission. For Konradt, the strongest indication that gentiles have successfully been incorporated into the church is Matthew’s insistence on international proclamation, particularly 24:14 and 28:19.¹⁶⁶ It is not uncommon for scholars to assume that a church on a mission to gentiles is a church that has gentile members. But this does not necessarily follow. The commission of Matt 28:16-20 hardly serves as an indication that Matthew’s church has been flooded with gentile converts; all it tells us is that Matthew’s church has been sent to “make disciples” of the nations.

¹⁶³ E.g., Vine, *The Audience of Matthew*, 206-7.

¹⁶⁴ Gundry, *Matthew*, 593-98,

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 261-65, 271-75; 279-80; 439-41; 497-502.

¹⁶⁶ Konradt, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew*, 318-20.

Matthew does not give many indications that the mission is successful, though. In fact, he seems to assume that most people will actively reject it (Matt 7:13-14; 24:9).

Indeed, Matthew would not be the first author to suppose that sharing a message of salvation with gentiles does not necessarily save those gentiles. In Jewish literature, the universal availability of the knowledge of God does not always lead to gentiles widely embracing the opportunity. Occasionally, images of the universal availability of salvation are actually employed to establish the justice and necessity of universal judgment. In *2 Baruch*, this is said particularly of Jews. Israel's judgment in the wake of the destruction of the temple would not have been justified if God had not instructed them in Torah. But since God did give them Torah, this punishment is fair and deserved (15:5-6; cf. 19:3).¹⁶⁷ *2 Baruch* later extends this logic to the whole world. Relying on the tradition that God offered the Torah to gentiles as well, *2 Baruch* maintains that the nations rejected it "because of pride." Thus, everyone on earth, not just Jews, knows when they sin, and God's condemnation of them is just (48:40). This same argument also appears in the *Wisdom of Solomon*. The *Wisdom of Solomon* identifies the unrighteous evildoers as those who reject knowledge of God and choose deceit instead (2:22; 12:27; 13:1, 9; 14:22; 15:11; 16:16). This occurs despite the fact that God's spirit is manifest and obvious throughout the world (1:7-8). Thus, knowledge which ought to mediate knowledge of God, instead serves to condemn people (13:8-9; 15:13).¹⁶⁸ We also see this argument in Rom 1:18-31 in reference to gentiles: the identity and reality of God is universally available to all (1:19-21), but does not result in their widespread conversion

¹⁶⁷ Theophilus, "The Portrayal of Gentiles in Jewish Apocalypse," 85.

¹⁶⁸ Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles: Jewish Patterns of Universalism*, 62-8.

(1:25). Knowledge of God derived from contemplation of the cosmos does not guarantee a positive response among the gentiles, and in this case, it results in God's wrath being justly carried out against them (1:18-19).

Therefore, there is an established tradition in early Jewish writing that knowledge of God, depending on how it is received, can serve to condemn rather than deliver. Matthew himself apparently embraces this logic in Jesus's woes against Chorazin and Bethsaida. Despite the fact that they are the sites of his most mighty works, they will be judged all the more harshly because of their failure to repent (11:20-24; cf. 12:38-42; 13:14-15; cf. Luke 10:13-15). If Matthew thinks knowledge, preaching, and access to miracles can serve primarily to condemn people within Israel, he is presumably just as capable of making the same claims about gentiles. It does not seem so impossible that the gospel preached throughout the world could be a "testimony against them," not simply for them (Matt 24:14).

A third problem with the "mixed body" theory is Gundry's proposal – that the quality of the converts in Matthew's church is uneven because some of them were recently pagan. Gundry argues in particular that the parable of the wheat and tares depicts a sifting between those who have genuinely converted and those who have not.¹⁶⁹ But this reading of the parable is strained. The field in the parable of the wheat and the tares is not the church, but the world (13:38), which Matthew believes has both good and bad people in it. The parable of the net, which follows, also seems to depict the judgment of the world, not the church (13:49). Ewherido argues that these images of division do not

¹⁶⁹ Gundry, *Matthew*, 261-65, 271-75; 279-80; 439-41; 497-502.

depict the sifting of the church, but the division in the world between Matthew's church and its perceived enemies.¹⁷⁰ Gundry further argues that this judgment of the church appears at the conclusion of the parable of the wedding banquet, in which the guest without a wedding garment is cast out of the dinner (Matt 22:11-14). However, the parable of the wedding banquet closes on the statement that "many are called, but few are elect" (22:14). The "elect" for Matthew is a name for those in the church (Matt 24:22, 24, 31) who are scattered throughout the world and are juxtaposed with those who are not in the church. It is not clear that this parable expresses concern that the church is currently vulnerable to the presence of lightly converted pagans. The images of judgment and separation in the Gospel do not seem to depict the judgment of the church.

The fourth and final problem of the "mixed body" theory of Matthew's church is the question of gentiles and Judaizing. One of the foundational assumptions of the expansionist reading is that gentile converts are converted as they are: they become gentile Christians who attend a church of both Jewish Christians and gentile Christians. Konradt assumes that gentile members do not convert to Judaism.¹⁷¹ They are not circumcised, and they remain gentiles, while Jewish converts to the church remain Jews. Such an interpretation assumes that the final call of the Gospel for how to initiate converts, to baptize and teach them (Matt 28:19), is comprehensive. Since circumcision is not mentioned, the assumption is that Matthew does not require them to take this final step of conversion and thus become Jews.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Ewherido, *Matthew's Gospel and Judaism in the Late First Century C.E.*, 137-64.

¹⁷¹ Konradt, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew*, 320.

¹⁷² Shaye J. D. Cohen in *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: U. California, 1999), 158, argues circumcision marks a final step in the Judaizing process that completes one's

This view of the mixed church, though, depends on three assumptions. First, it assumes that Matthew does not command circumcision. Second, it assumes that because Matthew does not command circumcision, he does not expect gentile converts to Judaize more broadly. Third, this assumes that law-observant Jews and gentiles actually could (and did) worship comfortably alongside each other in church.

All these assumptions, however, are problematic. First, there is the obvious problem that Matthew simply does not mention circumcision, for good or for ill. Therefore, we cannot say with any certainty what exactly he thought about gentile circumcision at all. Matthew does list two initiatory rites by which people can join the church: being baptized and being taught (Matt 28:19-20). It is not necessarily clear that “teaching” clearly excludes circumcision, though. At least some early Christians interpreted the words of the Matthean Jesus concerning Torah (Matt 5:17-20) to include a robust call to fidelity to Torah and even to circumcision. Epiphanius reports that the Cerinthians took the saying “It is enough for a... slave to be like his master” (Matt 10:25) as a proof-text for circumcision.¹⁷³ This does not tell us anything about Matthew’s own views of gentile circumcision, but it does tell us that some early readers of Matthew assumed that Matthew commanded Torah observance, to the point of gentile circumcision. If Matthew meant for gentiles to become Christians while remaining gentiles, not all his early readers got the message.

Second, there is the question of *why* Matthew did not explicitly command circumcision. We could suppose that Matthew did not mention circumcision because he

conversion. According to Cohen, circumcision sets the convert apart from gentiles who practice Jewish rituals (149-50) or venerate Israel’s God (150-54) but do not become full converts.

¹⁷³ Epiphanius, *Pan.*, II.28.5.1.

did not wish for gentiles to be circumcised. This does not necessarily mean that Matthew did this out of an anti-Torah, anti-Judaizing impulse. According to Matthew Thiessen, not all Jews believed that gentiles could become Jews at all, and some believed that circumcision was not valid unless it was done eight days after birth.¹⁷⁴ Matthew does not address circumcision on the eighth day or any other day, but if he shared an understanding of Judaism that was based on genealogy rather than conversion,¹⁷⁵ then his silence about circumcision can be explained by some factor other than disregard for Torah. It could also be that Matthew takes after some of his contemporaries and does not believe that gentiles can be made into Jews at all.

We see even more evidence that Matthew's silence on circumcision is not accompanied by a general assumption that Matthean converts will not Judaize. Matthew would not be the only early Christian writer who maintains that Torah is to some extent binding on gentiles, even if they are not circumcised. While we will discuss this further in Appendix A, Matthew's text seems to imply that to some extent, gentile converts will be expected to Judaize—even if their observance is not in accordance with common Jewish practice.¹⁷⁶

Finally, there is the question of what a “mixed church” would have looked like in the first century, and how realistic it is that Matthew could have envisioned missionaries

¹⁷⁴ Matthew Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion: Genealogy, Circumcision, and Identity in Ancient Judaism and Christianity* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 72.

¹⁷⁵ For the prevalence of this idea in early Judaism, see Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion*, 89-103.

¹⁷⁶ Reinhard Feldmeier, “Israel als Gegenüber des Judenchristentums: Das Beispiel des Matthäusevangeliums,” in *Israel als Gegenüber: vom Alten Orient bis in die Gegenwart. 25 Studien zur Geschichte eines wechsellvollen Zusammenlebens*, Schriften des Institutum Judaicum Delitzschianum 5 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), Kun-Chun Wong, *Interkulturelle Theologie und multikulturelle Gemeinde im Mattheusevangelium: zum Verhältnis von Juden- und Heidenchristen im ersten Evangelium*, NTOA 22 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1992), 140.

planting Jewish-gentile churches throughout the Mediterranean world. A core element of early Christian practice was the love feast, and Matthew's report of the words of institution (Matt 26:26-29) suggests that this was an element of Matthean ritual. Thus, Matthew's churches would have needed to figure out some way to eat together.

This might not have been a significant problem in the Diaspora. Diaspora Jews would have faced considerable pressure to assimilate into their broader communities, and thus would have likely either dispensed with strict observation of food laws or found creative workarounds for eating with gentiles.¹⁷⁷ However, it seems that even in the Diaspora, Jews were known to refrain from eating with gentiles.¹⁷⁸ Galatians suggests that even when Diaspora churches succeeded in finding ways to eat together, these solutions were at best short-lived and influence from Palestinian Jews could discourage compromise altogether (Gal 2:11-13). True universality where Jews and gentiles could mix freely seems to have been difficult to achieve.

In light of this, it is hard to imagine, as many Matthew scholars have done, that Matthew worshipped at a harmonious church where Jews and gentiles each kept their own customs, and that Matthew expected missionaries to create similar churches throughout the Mediterranean world. Some level of compromise would need to be reached. At the very least, in worship, Jewish customs and concerns would need to be respected. At the most, gentiles would need to adopt some Jewish practices themselves.

¹⁷⁷ John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora from Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE- 117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 435. Solutions might have included bringing one's own food to Gentile homes (Judith 12.1-14, 9), eating vegetarian and abstaining from wine (Josephus, *Vit.* 14; Rom 14:1-2; Dan 11:11-16), or sitting at separate tables (*Jos. Asen.* 7.1). Gentiles also might serve food that Law observant Jews could eat (*Let. Ar.*, 181; Rom 14:1-15:6). See Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 435n50.

¹⁷⁸ Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.5.2; Diodorus, *Bib. hist.*, 34.1.2; Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 33; Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 436-7.

So, to conclude: we cannot argue that Matthew does not believe that gentile Christians should become Jews. We also cannot argue that he does not expect gentiles to adopt any Jewish practices, simply because they remain uncircumcised. Matthew does not counsel against gentile circumcision. He simply does not mention it. As we have seen, there is more than one explanation for this. The first is that Matthew might believe that gentiles *cannot* become Jews because Judaism is genealogical, or because Jews must be circumcised on the eighth day. He might also assume that circumcision is included in the commandments of Matt 5:17-20 and leaves it to missionaries to make the thorny point on their own. Or, Konradt might be right, and gentiles might be won to the church without adopting any ethnic practices of the Jews.

Because of Matthew's silence on circumcision, I do not believe we can adjudicate between possible explanations for why Matthew does not command circumcision. However, as we will argue in Appendix A, it does not seem that the best explanation is that Matthew does not expect gentile converts to Judaize in any way, or that he does not think that the Torah is binding in any capacity on his gentile readers. Matthew may hope for gentile converts and a gentile readership, but it does not seem to be the case that Matthew writes for a truly mixed and ethnicity-blind readership.

1.3.6.3 The church as the savior of Israel?

Finally: does Matthew see the church as an agent that exists to serve Israel, not as its replacement? In light of Matthew's apparent wariness towards gentiles, this argument may be harder to maintain. Even though Konradt maintains the church exists to serve Israel, the expansionist reading of mission tends to imply that Israel actually exists for the

sake of the world. Konradt argues that Matthew's community identifies itself as an assembly within Israel that is on a mission to Israel and the nations. This construction of Matthew's ecclesiology is similar to Kampen's, who sees Matthew church as a renewal movement within Israel.¹⁷⁹ However, in practice, this claim de-centers Israel as the primary figure in salvation history in a way that Matthew himself does not.

Konradt is appropriately careful to foreground the salvation of Israel, but occasionally this slides into treating Israel as a tool for gentile salvation, rather than the other way around. This is particularly apparent in Konradt's invocation of Abraham in Matt 1:1. In rabbinic literature, Abraham is the first proselyte, and also the one through whom all nations will be blessed (Gen 12:3).¹⁸⁰ In this reading, Israel as founded by Abraham was always meant to bless the gentiles. This motif is even more pronounced in the work of other expansionist scholars who identify Mathew's church as a reconstituted Israel¹⁸¹ or the ideal remnant of Israel.¹⁸² The implication then becomes that Matthew's church has expanded its mission to all the nations, because this is what Israel in its purest form would do.

This is a difficult theology to derive from early Jewish literature, let alone Matthew's Gospel. To be fair, the idea that Israel was meant to play some sort of role as an example or educator for other nations is certainly attested in some early Jewish writing. For instance, Philo imagines that if Israel were to repent of its own failings, the

¹⁷⁹ Kampen, *Matthew within Sectarian Judaism*, 184-202.

¹⁸⁰ Konradt, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew*, 287-8.

¹⁸¹ Menninger, *Israel and the Church in the Gospel of Matthew*, 142-57.

¹⁸² Edgar A. Johnson, "Aspects of the Remnant Concept in the Gospel of Matthew" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, 1984), 177-201, 220-32.

world would follow its example and be redeemed as well.¹⁸³ Philo also argues that the purpose of the exodus was to send Israel out to a place from which it could bless all nations.¹⁸⁴ Philo also hopes that gentiles will join Jews in worshipping at the temple.¹⁸⁵ However, none of this means that Philo saw his nation as existing for the sake of gentiles or as a “light to the nations.” Certainly Philo wanted Israel to be a good influence on the nations. But this does not mean that he saw Israel as serving some utilitarian role for the sake of the gentiles. In actuality, a great deal of early Jewish literature frames the salvation of gentiles as an event that occurs for the sake of Israel,¹⁸⁶ rather than Israel being redeemed for the sake of the nations. In fact, the Testament of Moses explicitly says God created the world for the sake of Israel, and held this knowledge from the nations so that they would be held guilty (1.12-13).¹⁸⁷ Israel-centrism is made evident by the fact that some texts specify that gentile participation is not made available to nations that oppress Israel (2 Baruch 72). Other texts specifically admit gentiles into God’s people to serve or glorify Israel.¹⁸⁸ Gentiles come to bring the exiles, gifts, labor, and homage to the restored Zion. Occasionally, gentiles are present only to facilitate Israel’s restoration, or to observe it happening (Isa 18:7; 60:1-22; 66:18-21; Hag 2:21-22.)¹⁸⁹ Some texts do depict gentiles being more incorporated into the eschatological

¹⁸³ *Vit. Mos.* 2.43-44; Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles: Jewish Patterns of Universalism (To 135 CE)*, 231-5.

¹⁸⁴ *Vit. Mos.* 1.149; *Spec. Leg.* 1.97; Michael F. Bird, *Jesus and the Origins of the Gentile Mission*, LNTS 331 (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 127-8.

¹⁸⁵ *Spec. Leg.* 1.67-8.

¹⁸⁶ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:27.

¹⁸⁷ Michael P. Theophilus, “The Portrayal of Gentiles in Apocalyptic Literature,” in *Attitudes to Gentiles in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. David C. Sim and James S. McLaren, LNTS 499 (London/New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013): 72–91, 75.

¹⁸⁸ Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles: Jewish Patterns of Universalism*, 503.

¹⁸⁹ From Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles: Jewish Patterns of Universalism*, 500.

community,¹⁹⁰ but even here the interest is in how this incorporation is good *for Israel*. The promise of bringing in the Gentiles in Zechariah 8 is given in the context of God declaring that he means to “do good to Jerusalem and Judea” (8:15). Likewise, in Isaiah 56, God extends promises and blessings to eunuchs and foreigners, who were historically excluded from Israel’s benefits. These blessings are promised in highly Israel-centered language, though. They are given only to those foreigners who keep the Sabbath and covenant (Isa 56:4-6) and they are promised inclusion at Israel’s cultic shrines (Isa 56:7). This is not at all the same thing as suggesting that Israel is intended to draw foreigners. Foreigners are admitted if they behave like good Israelites. If Matthew indeed saw Israel, as founded by Abraham, as existing for the sake of the world, then this was a significant innovation in his theology. This could be the case, but we need to note this does not seem to be an idea he inherited from a larger Jewish tradition.

More to the point, though – it is surprisingly difficult to find consistent evidence that Matthew actually does intend Israel to serve such a role to the nations. Israel is the object of service in Matthew, not the servant itself. It needs shepherding (Matt 2:6; 9:36; 15:4) and healing (Matt 10:6). When we look at Matthew’s Gospel, images of gentile inclusion for Israel’s sake seem to be the ones that Matthew particularly has in mind. The image of gentiles bringing tribute to Israel is strongly alluded to in the story of the magi (Matt 2:11)¹⁹¹ and is alluded to in the stories of the centurion (8:5-13) and Canaanite woman (15:21-28). Matthew highlights the worshipping posture of the centurion

¹⁹⁰ E.g., Zech 8:20-22; Isa 56:6-8; *Syb. Or.* 3.710, 722; Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles: Jewish Patterns of Universalism*, 500-2. This continues well into the rabbinic era (t. Ber. 6.2, *Mekhilta Shirtah* 8, *Gen. Rab.* 26.2, 98.9, *Num. Rab.* 1:3).

¹⁹¹ See §1.3.4.

(παρακαλέω in Matt 8:5; compare with ἐρωτάω in Luke 7:3), and the Canaanite woman accepts a lower station at the eschatological banquet (Matt 15:27). The diminished posture and humble status of even these most exceptional gentiles communicates that they have great faith in Jesus, and that they accept an appropriately reserved position relative to Israel.

In light of this, it is difficult to link Matthew's ecclesiology or theology of mission back to some idea of the "true purpose of Israel." Matthew does not seem to see Israel as an inherently missionizing body, or as having some purpose relating specifically to the gentiles. Matthew does expect the inclusion of the gentiles, but he appears to remain preoccupied with Israel as the locus of salvation. The salvation and inclusion of gentiles is part of this process, not the goal of Israel in the first place.

1.3.6.4 The Expansionist Reading: Conclusion

As we will discuss in the fourth chapter, Matthew ends his Gospel with a commission to go to all the nations. However, Matthew remains guarded about who the missionaries will find when they get there and continues to prioritize Israel as the locus of salvation. Jesus has come to shepherd his people Israel, and the identification of Israel as God's people is never reversed or relativized. The church goes beyond the boundaries of Israel, but this is not necessarily because of Matthew's ethnicity-blind orientation to the world. Just because Matthew expects the mission to go to all nations does not mean that Matthew sees the people of God as ethnically undefined, or that Matthew has foregone ethnocentrism. Any reconciliation of the mission charges in Matt 10:5-6 and 28:19-20

has to account for Matthew's apparent wariness towards gentiles and his central overarching concern for Jesus as Israel's messiah. An overemphasis on universalism obscures this.

It is difficult to maintain that Matthew has a truly universal vision, one in which gentiles and Jews are on equal footing in the eyes of Matthew and his associates, and one in which Jews and gentiles are largely left at liberty to remain ethnically as they are in church. Matthew's theology is thoroughly Jewish. His vision of the church, its mission, and its customs is Jewish. Even if Matthew's aspirations are international, his perspective, theology, and view of the church are not.

1.4 Summary and the project of this dissertation

All three of the above constructions depend on Matt 10:5-6 and Matt 28:16-20 portraying fundamentally different missions, where Matt 28:19-20 either modifies or replaces Matt 10:5-6. The exception is, to some extent, Sim's argument, in which some churches practice Matt 28:16-20 and others practice Matt 10:5-6. Few constructions entertain the possibility that the texts can be read as continuous with one another, or that the intervening material in the rest of the Gospel unites these texts, or that the missionary discourse in Matt 10 is not abrogated by Matt 28:19-20. This is surprising, since there is no evidence in Matthew's own text that suggests that Matthew himself found these commands to be conflicting. The conflict seems to lie with us as modern readers, but not with Matthew himself.

As I intend to show in this dissertation, Matthew's understanding of how missionary activity works and how it will be received does not meaningfully change throughout the narrative. For example, there is no migration from a law-observant to a non-law-observant mission between Matt 10:5-6 and 28:19-20, which we might expect if Matthew meant to draw a sharp division between a "Jewish mission" and "gentile mission." Matthew's programmatic statement on the law is laid out in Matt 5:17-20, and it is never retracted, amended, or conditioned in the rest of the text (though see Appendix A for details). Whatever Matthew means by Torah observance, it is apparently consistent for all readers of the Gospel.

This is different from the separation of the Jewish and gentile missions outlined in Gal 2:6-10 and Acts 15. Schuyler Brown argues that Paul's report in Gal 2:6-10 suggests that the key element of Paul and Peter's agreement was separation.¹⁹² The two groups did not seem to come to any theological agreement about the role of the law in salvation. They also must not have come to any agreement about table fellowship, since this became a point of dispute later on (Gal 2:11-13). As Brown argues, if the question of table fellowship was not resolved in Jerusalem, it seems likely that the two groups of missionaries had no intentions of working alongside each other.¹⁹³ In light of this, if Matthew expected a Jewish law-observant mission and a gentile non-law observant mission to work hand-in-hand to create one unified church, questions about how to eat together and how to interpret the law would have been priorities for the church to answer. Matthew contains no instruction about how to cross these cultural divides. Because of

¹⁹² Brown, "The Matthean Community and the Gentile Mission," 207.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 212.

this, the plain reading of his text is that he does not agree with Paul that there should be two different missions with different content.

Similarly, in Acts 15:23-29, the apostles set out an amended form of Torah that applies only to the gentiles. The gentiles are not expected to obey the entire law (15:19) but should only be expected to avoid food sacrificed to idols, sexual immorality, eating strangled animals, and eating blood (15:20-21). On the other hand, Jewish Christians in Acts apparently remain obedient to Torah (Paul in 18:16, 26:17-26). Luke-Acts attests to a clear division of Torah obedience standards between Jews and gentiles: Jewish Christians continue to live as faithful Jews, and gentiles are permitted to obey very little of Torah. No such division between Jewish and gentile law-observance is ever taught in Matthew's Gospel. The Torah, as Jesus teaches it, is said to stand, and Matthew never changes this.

Nor does Matthew expect a change in the gospel's reception between Matt 10:5-6 and 28:19-20. Whenever Matthew discusses proselytism and mission, there is no assumption that the mission might be rejected among Jews but accepted elsewhere. Luke has Paul make such a declaration in Acts. After Jews give the gospel an unfriendly hearing in Rome, Paul tells them that "the salvation of God is sent to the gentiles, and they will hear it" (Acts 28:28; cf. 13:46, 18:6). Paul thus proclaims not just a change in his message's audience, but a change in his audience's response. The Jews have not listened, but the gentiles will. Therefore, missionary attention has shifted from the Jews to the receptive gentiles. But nothing like this is ever suggested in Matthew's Gospel. Persecution is anticipated both in Judea and beyond (Matt 10:16-23; 24:9-13). When Matthew depicts missionary work, his emphasis remains consistently on the missionaries'

hardship and rejection. He does not say that the mission should be preached to the gentiles because they are most likely to hear it.

Indeed, the entire premise for thinking that Matthew must be thinking in terms of two distinct missions is faulty when we seriously question whether Matthew describes a mission to “Israel” and then “the gentiles” at all. The most significant difference between the two mission charges is the geographic area they are expected to cover (Palestine versus everywhere else). The ethnic distinctions between both missions’ focus, though, are quite blurry. Gentiles appear in Galilee (Matt 10:18), while Diaspora Jews are certainly to be found among τὰ ἔθνη where the disciples are sent in Matt 28:16-20.

All this is to say that, with the exception of geographic expansion, there may be more consistency in Matthew’s portrayal of mission than scholars have historically seen. The goal for Matthew’s readers is thus not to determine how the mission *changes* in the course of the Gospel (and thus how Matthew might be transitioning out of the Jewish world into a more gentile or more universal understanding of the church). Rather, the goal is to determine how Matthew frames the missionary project, what kind of convert Matthew’s imagined project might attract, and what this might tell us about Matthew’s social situation in the first century Jewish world. The rest of this dissertation will investigate the portrayal of mission in Matthew’s Gospel, what we can learn about the Gospel’s audience, and what this might suggest about the Gospel’s social context.

1.5 The method of the next three sections

This dissertation explores the continuity of Matthew's missiology by identifying key motifs that are introduced in Matthew's missionary discourse. It will then examine how these motifs emerge wherever missionary activity is invoked. By identifying and tracing those motifs' appearance throughout the text, I intend to test the possibility that Matthew's missiology does not begin as an Israel-centric, law-observant place in 10:5-6 and end in a Pauline-esque universal mission in 28:19-20. When we look at Matthew's depiction of missionaries throughout the entire text, it actually appears that Matthew's understanding of mission does not transform throughout the narrative very much at all. Though the location of the mission (and therefore possible audiences) change, the practice and content of the mission do not. Throughout the entire Gospel, Matthew understands the mission to be the work by which Jesus's followers act as his representatives, perform his miracles, and teach his commandments. This work is always done with the assistance of the missionaries' beneficiaries, who are expected to host and provide for the needs of the missionaries. The mission is always in conflict with the Jewish leadership, and continuously attracts persecution from Jews and gentiles alike. Missionary work is closely associated with the end time, and at the time that Matthew writes, it is not thought to be complete. This profile of Matthean missiology is remarkably consistent throughout the text. The primary parameter of the mission that changes is where the mission is meant to take place – first in Israel, and then in the whole inhabited world. As we will also see, elements of discontinuity we would expect to see if Matthew envisioned a “mission to the Jews” and “mission to the gentiles” are absent. For example, the mission charges are not given to two different groups of people, which we would expect to see in the context of two distinct missions. Paul, for instance, depicts a

split in the early Christian movement, in which Peter directs the mission to the circumcised and Paul directs the mission to the gentiles (Gal 2:7). This is very different from Matthew's Gospel, in which the first charge is given to the twelve (10:1-5), and the next charge is given to the twelve's surviving members (28:16). Establishing just how much continuity in Matthew's missiology should shape how we understand Matthew's final call to go to "the nations," and who exactly Matthew thinks is in his audience.

2. Matthew 10: The Paradigmatic Mission

What exactly does Matthew say about missionary work? What texts in the Gospel engage the question of how Matthew's message spreads? This chapter analyzes the missionary discourse, a comprehensive set of instructions and expectations concerning missionary activity. What follows is not a line-by-line commentary on the discourse; this method of analysis would not be conducive to the work we will undertake in chapters three and four where we will compare missionary activity as it is depicted in Matt 10 with missionary activity in other texts. In order to build a foundation for comparison in later chapters and avoid an unwieldy line-by-line comparison between Matt 10 and subsequent discussions of missionaries, we will discuss eight major themes of the missionary discourse and how they contribute to the discourse's understanding of missionary activity.

The goal of this first section is to present a comprehensive analysis of missionary work, how it is understood, and how it is carried out according to the missionary discourse. This will prevent us from focusing too exclusively on the apparent intended beneficiaries of missionary activity to the exclusion of other data. The identity and ethnicity of Matthew's targets is certainly a critical component his missionary theology. However, this is still only one component. My goal is to develop a more comprehensive understanding of what Matthew thinks missionary activity is, how it works, and what he expects to occur as a result. This information may help us to answer the question of whether Matthew writes for Jews, gentiles, or both, and more precisely answer questions about this Gospel's social location and relationship with Judaism.

As we argued in §1.3.4, Matthew’s missionary discourse, like the other discourses, is redacted for the purpose of instructing readers in Matthew’s own era. The fact that the discourse itself is set in the past should not distract us from the fact that it is still composed to be relevant to a present audience.¹ Additionally, Matt 10:5-42 draws from other sources, including Mark. Hints about Matthew’s specific concerns and theology can be gleaned both from what Matthew changes, and from what he leaves unaltered. With this in mind, we will now turn our attention to major themes in the missionary discourse.

2.1 First motif: the mission is geographically bounded

According to Matt 10:5-6, the disciples are instructed not to take a “road to the gentiles” nor to enter a “town of the Samaritans.” Instead, they are to focus on the “lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Commentators are often quick to describe Matt 10:5b-6 as a charge to engage in a mission “to Jews” or “to Israel,” with the assumption that Israel is ethnically defined and that all Jews are included in Matthew’s first missionary charge.² This reading foregrounds the ethnicity of Matthew’s intended targets, and prompts the interpreter to anticipate a later shift in Matthew’s theology that will also center on ethnicity.³ The implication of such a phrase is that Matthew restricts this mission’s target

¹ See Dorothy Jean Weaver, *Matthew’s Missionary Discourse: A Literary Critical Analysis* (JSNTS 38. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 1-29.

² For the argument that this saying is a vestigial remnant from a Jewish source that is out of place in Matthew’s theology, see Brown and Meier, *Antioch and Rome*, 53-4.

³ For example, see Heinrich Kasting, *Die Anfänge der urchristlichen Mission: eine historische Untersuchung*, Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie 55 (München: Kaiser, 1969), 111 Gerhard Maier, *Das Evangelium des Matthäus, Kapitel 1-14*, Historisch Theologische Auslegung (Witten: SCM R. Brockhaus, 2015), 563. For the expansionist reading see Hubert Frankemölle, *Matthäus*, 2:76; Anna Case-Winters, *Matthew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 150-1.

to a certain religious and ethnic group, and that this restriction remains in force no matter where in the world the missionaries might find themselves.

Explanations for why Matthew commands this initial mission in Israel vary. One is that this text reflects a historical memory. Jesus may have ministered exclusively to Jews in Israel,⁴ or sent his disciples on brief, local missions in Israel as training for later and more extensive travels.⁵ By recalling this Israel-centered period of Jesus's ministry, Matthew may appease a conservative faction in his audience.⁶ Another explanation is that this first commission is not binding on Matthew's own community, but foreshadows a second mission to gentiles that will happen either after Easter or after Matthew's own day.⁷ All these explanations agree that Matt 10:5-6 commands a mission "to Jews," with a more ethnically inclusive mission to follow.

However, the idea that Matt 10:5-6 commands a mission "to Jews" may not be the most accurate way to read this passage. The text of the commission includes an instruction to go to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" and prohibits the disciples from carrying out their work in two locations: εἰς ὁδὸν ἐθνῶν and εἰς πόλιν Σαμαριτῶν.

What exactly does this mean? Εἰς ὁδὸν + genitive is an unusual idiom. In the LXX, it can be used in a local sense to describe a person going on a journey ("he went on

⁴ For this logion as a saying of Jesus, see Volker Hampel, "Ihr werdet mit den Städten Israels nicht zu Ende kommen': eine exegetische Studie über Matthäus 10,23," *TZ* 45.1 (1989), 1–31; Levine, *The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Matthean Salvation History*, 14–25; Barnabas Lindars, *Jesus Son of Man: A Fresh Examination of the Son of Man Sayings in the Gospels in the Light of Recent Research* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 122–3.

⁵ Rudolf Pesch, "Voraussetzungen und Anfänge der urchristlichen Mission," in *Mission im Neuen Testament*, ed. Karl Kertelge (Freiburg: Herder, 1982), 11–70; 27.

⁶ Schuyler Brown, "The Two-Fold Representation of the Mission in Matthew's Gospel," *Studia Theologica* 69 (1977), 73–90.

⁷ Schlatter, *Matthew*, 798. Schuyler Brown, "The Matthean Community and the Gentile Mission," *Novum Testamentum* 22, no. 3 (1980): 193–221; 196 argues for two different ethnically defined missions, but maintains that the mission to the gentiles will happen in a later time, not in Matthew's own era.

his way”),⁸ or it can be used with an accusative of purpose or intention (“supplies for the journey”).⁹ Most commonly, though, the phrase is used with a genitive of place to denote travel to a geographic location. For example, εἰς ὁδὸν + genitive means “the way to the desert” in Judg 20:42; the “road to its boundaries, Beth-Shemesh” in 1 Sam 6:9, 12; or “the way to Sinai and Kadesh-Barnea in Judith 5:13. In light of this, though Matt 10:5b is often translated “do not go to” or “among” the gentiles, it appears more accurate to translate this phrase as “do not go on a journey/road *towards* the gentiles,”¹⁰ or “to gentile lands.”¹¹

One possible objection to this reading is that it is overly literal. For example, Hooker maintains that εἰς ὁδόν is idiomatic, and thus should be read as “among the gentiles.”¹² However, this reading obscures the parallelism with εἰς πόλιν Σαμαρειτῶν. The instruction not to enter a “city of the Samaritans” (probably a synecdoche for the region in general)¹³ is not quite the same as an instruction to avoid an individual Samaritan they might happen to encounter. A specific prohibition of going to towns of Samaritans implies that Matthew thinks of Samaritans as geographically clustered, and in an area one could avoid. In order to go to a “city of the Samaritans” from Galilee, a

⁸ Herbert Weir Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2013), 376. For example, Judg 18:26, 19:9; 1 Sam 13:15; 25:12.

⁹ Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, 376. For example, Gen 45:23.

¹⁰ John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005) 415. Davies and Allison translate this as “a road leading to a gentile city.” See W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew: In Three Volumes*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 2:165; also Luz, *Matthew*, 2:72n18. Tisera, *Universalism According to the Gospel of Matthew*, 137, interprets the phrase as simply a prolix way of saying “to gentiles.”

¹¹ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:165; Hill, *Matthew*, 184-5; Joachim Jeremias, *Jesus’ Promise to the Nations* (London: SCM, 1981), 185; Kampen, *Matthew within Sectarian Judaism*, 185; Levine, *Social and Ethnic Dimensions*, 52-7.

¹² Morna D. Hooker, “The Prohibition of Foreign Missions (Mt 10:5-6),” *ExpTim* 82.12 (1971), 361–5.

¹³ Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1:676.

disciple would need to actually leave Galilee and head south. Presumably, if the instructions are parallel to one another, a prohibition against taking a “road to the gentiles” would function the same way. The Samaritans are in Samaria, and the gentiles are in the nations beyond Israel, and both regions ought to be avoided. The restrictions limit the disciples’ mission to an exclusive geographic area. Ethnic restrictions are absolutely implied as a corollary of the geographic restrictions. Not going to Samaritan towns means that ethnic Samaritans will not be part of this missionary operation, and even in Israel the Matthean Jesus makes a distinction between Jews and gentiles (15:24). However, given the presence of gentile characters in the missionary discourse and subsequent narrative, the ethnic restrictions are not absolute.

The specific injunction against going “towards” gentiles also makes better sense of the verb ἀπέρχομαι, “to depart” (cf. Matt 2:22; 8:18; 14:15; 20:4). The idea of “departing” towards gentiles suggests that Matthew is not thinking of these gentiles as present among the disciples. A suitable paraphrase that captures the implications of 10:5b might say something like “Do not leave here and go to the gentiles.” The implication is not that the missionaries are supposed to avoid certain ethnic groups that might be integrated among them, but rather that they should not go to countries beyond Israel to seek converts.

Both restrictions concerning the parameters of mission use geographic referents to limit the mission. How strict are they? At its most limiting, this command could be understood as a restriction to preach only in Galilee,¹⁴ except possibly for the

¹⁴ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 381-2. See also Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew*, 185; Keener, *Matthew*, 315-6; Konradt, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew*, 78.

predominately gentile cities of Tiberius and Sepphoris. If Matthew is aware of Palestinian geography, then the boundaries of the mission are quite narrow. To the north is Phoenicia, to the west is Syria and the Decapolis,¹⁵ to the southwest is the Transjordan and Perea, and to the immediate south is Samaria. All these locations are apparently off-limits if a “road to the gentiles” is forbidden. If a Galilean disciple were to take this command literally, this so-called “Jewish mission” would not even include Judea and Jerusalem. All available land routes to Jerusalem requires a road to gentiles or passage through Samaria. We could also read these instructions as commands to avoid any area that is settled by non-Jews in Palestine or greater Syria, depending on how the boundaries of “Israel” are determined.¹⁶ This may constitute a command to avoid more urbanized areas.¹⁷ The least restrictive option is that the disciples are instructed to go to areas settled by Jews anywhere in the world, but this is not likely.¹⁸ For Matthew, “Israel,” when used to describe a location, means the land of Palestine, not locations in the Diaspora (2:20, 21; 9:33; possibly 8:10). Here, the use of “Israel” to refer to a location seems to be in play, since he refers to the “towns of Israel” in Matt 10:23. Likewise, this phrase “towns of Israel” (10:23) is not a likely term for the Diaspora. Jews in the Diaspora were generally not confined to their own towns or quarters, but lived side-by-side with their

¹⁵ The region of the Transjordan would have traditionally been part of the land of Israel. See Konradt, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles*, 51.

¹⁶ Amy-Jill Levine, “Anti-Judaism and the Gospel of Matthew,” in *Anti-Judaism and the Gospels*, ed. William R. Farmer (Harrisburg: Trinity International, 1999), 9-36, 29; Herman C. Waetjen, *Matthew’s Theology of Fulfillment, Its Universality, and Its Ethnicity: God’s New Israel as the Pioneer of God’s New Humanity* (New York: T&T Clark, 2017), 129. Waetjen argues that from an Antiochene perspective, “Israel” includes the Levant and broader Mediterranean.

¹⁷ Foster, *Community, Law, and Mission in Matthew’s Gospel*, 222.

¹⁸ Luz, *Matthew*, 2:93. Contra France, *Matthew*, 395; Kilpatrick, *Origins of the Gospel*, 119; Anders Runesson, *Divine Wrath and Salvation: The Narrative World of the First Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 383.

gentile neighbors¹⁹ and participated in the civic institutions of whatever city they inhabited.²⁰ Alexandria had a predominantly Jewish district, but before the pogrom in 38 CE Jews were not confined to this area and frequently lived beyond it.²¹ If the disciples are to conduct their mission in the “towns of Israel,” they are probably intended to keep their work in predominantly Jewish cities in the region of Palestine, possibly only in Galilee.

At any rate, we are left with a mission that does not seem to be accurately described as a mission “to the Jews.” The restrictions concerning where missionaries can and cannot travel rule out the possibility of reaching the Diaspora. The goal of the mission is to care for Jewish people within a narrowly bounded area, but any Jews who might require a “road to the gentiles” to reach them are excluded. The significance of this kind of restriction should not be overlooked. The number of Jews that 10:5b-6 renders unreachable is no trivial number. By some estimates Jews of the Diaspora outnumbered their fellows in Palestine by two to one.²²

To focus on the centrality of geography in Matt 10:5-6 is not to deny that ethnicity plays any role. The instructions are at least “ethno-geographic,” and assume a

¹⁹ E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE-66 CE* (London/Philadelphia: SCM Press; Trinity Press International, 1992), 435-6. Antioch, one of the likely candidates for Matthew’s provenance, would have been structured like this. See Magnus Zetterholm, *The Formation of Christianity in Antioch: A Social-Scientific Approach to the Separation Between Judaism and Christianity* (London: Routledge, 2003) 37-40.

²⁰ Erich Gruen, “Judaism in the Diaspora,” in *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism*, ed. John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010): 77–96, 82; Thomas A. Kraabel, “Paganism and Judaism: The Sardis Evidence,” in *Diaspora Jews and Judaism: Essays in Honor of, and in Dialogue with, A. Thomas Kraabel*, ed. J. Andrew Overman and Robert S. MacLennan, *USF Studies in the History of Judaism* 41 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992): 237-56, 242-3.

²¹ Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora from Alexander to Trajan*, 54-5.

²² A. Thomas Kraabel, “Unity and Diversity among Diaspora Synagogues,” in *The Synagogue in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lee I. Levine (Philadelphia: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1987): 49-60, 29.

concentration of Jews within Israel and a concentration of gentiles outside of it.²³

Matthew calls Galilee “of the gentiles,” but in this narrative Galilee is still a location in which Jesus ministers to Jews.²⁴ Freyne argues that this is because Matthew’s terminology here is “essentially theological rather than geographical.” Matthew identifies the people as being from “Israel,” not as “Galileans,” though the latter is technically more correct.²⁵ However, we could also suppose that Matthew’s theology and geography both reflect the actual historical makeup of Galilee in the first century. While some rural Galileans may have had regular contact with Greek-speaking gentile cities for trade and work,²⁶ rural people of Galilee seem to have spoken Aramaic and practiced Judaism after the Hasmoneans conquered and settled the area.²⁷ There are obvious ethnic implications to limiting the mission to regions primarily settled by rural Jews. Likewise, Jesus’s focus on Jews is borne out during the course of his mission to Israel. Jesus is reluctant to extend himself for gentiles he encounters incidentally later in the text (the centurion²⁸ and his

²³ Ben Cooper, *Incorporated Servanthood: Commitment and Discipleship in the Gospel of Matthew*, Library of New Testament Studies 490 (London: T&T Clark, 2013), 125.

²⁴ For Galilee as “of the gentiles,” see §2.4.2.

²⁵ Sean Freyne, *Galilee, Jesus, and the Gospels: Literary Approaches and Historical Investigations* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 71. Also note that the ones who see the light are the λαός, Matthew’s term for Jewish people (Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 220).

²⁶ Scott D. Charlesworth, “The Use of Greek in Early Roman Galilee: The Inscriptional Evidence Re-Examined,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 38, no. 3 (2016): 356-95, 383; Eric M. Meyers, “An Archaeological Response to a New Testament Scholar,” *BASOR* 297 (1995): 17-26, 22.

²⁷ Mark A. Chancey, “The Ethnicities of Galileans,” in *Galilee in the Late Second Temple and Mishnaic Period, Volume 1: Life, Culture and Society* (ed. David Fiensy and James Strange; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014): 208-15; *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee: The Population of Galilee and New Testament Studies*, SNTS 118 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 4-6; Sean Freyne, *The Jesus Movement and Its Expansion: Meaning and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 48; Bradley W. Root, *First Century Galilee: A Fresh Examination of the Sources*, WUNT 2. Reihe 378 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 112-4.

²⁸ For Jesus’s reluctance to heal the centurion’s slave, see Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:21-22. Jesus’s statement Ἐγὼ ἐλθὼν θεραπεύσω αὐτόν can be read as a statement (“I will come and heal him”) or as a question (“Should I come and heal him?”). The use of ἐγὼ seems emphatic (“should I?”), and in the parallel stories in Luke 7:1-10 and John 4:46-54 Jesus needs to be persuaded (Luke 7:4-5; John 4:48-49).

slave²⁹ in 8:7; the Canaanite woman and her daughter in 15:21-28), even though the centurion finds Jesus within the borders of Galilee (Matt 8:5) and the Canaanite woman may be there as well.³⁰ Even within Galilee, gentiles are kept at arm's length. The mission of Matt 10 is by no means ethnically inclusive. Nonetheless, it is not primarily bounded with ethnic labels. Matthew does not command a mission that selects targets based on ethnic divisions that would be valid in any part of the world. This is a mission for Israelites, in Israel.

The geographic limitations placed on the mission prevent us from uncritically calling Matt 10:5-6 a “mission to the Jews” as opposed to a mission to the gentiles. It is a mission that excludes most Jews, and targets only those Jews who happen to live in Galilee, or possibly Palestine or greater Syria. As we will see, this mission also includes gentile “eavesdroppers” who also live in the region, though they are not specifically targeted. The presence of these gentile onlookers further blurs the line between ethnic and geographic distinctions in this section, even as Matthew continues to conceive of Jesus's work as oriented towards Israel.

Why does this matter? An emphasis on the geography of the mission, and not simply the ethnicity of its targets, challenges any construction of Matthew's theology that presents the Gospel as steering missionary attention away from Jews and towards gentiles as the narrative progresses.³¹ If Matt 10:5-6 does not describe a mission to Jews as a

²⁹ Probably a slave, not son. The word *παῖς* means “slave” in Matt 14:2, probably “servant” in Matt 12:18.

³⁰ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:546, propose the phrase *εἰς τὰ μέρη Τύρου καὶ Σιδῶνος* in 15:21 may mean “towards the region of Tyre and Sidon,” not “into.”

³¹ Contra Herbert W. Bassler and Marsha B. Cohen, *The Gospel of Matthew and Judaic Traditions: A Relevance-Based Commentary*, The Brill Reference Library of Judaism 46 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2015), 254. For similar patristic arguments see John P. Meier, *Law and History in Matthew's Gospel*, *Analecta*

class, then it cannot be the foundation of a failed mission to Jews that will give way to a successful mission to the gentiles in 28:16-20. Matthew is thinking in terms of space and geography, not only ethnicity.

To conclude, the geographic references in Matt 10:5b-6 should be taken seriously, and they challenge the use of totalizing ethnic binaries to describe this text. The instructions of Matt 10:5b-6 should not be read as an instruction “go to all Jews,” but “do not go far and do not go to gentiles.” Matthew tells us about the mission Jesus’s disciples began in the Jewish homeland, which (as we shall see) Matthew assumes will continue until the imminent Parousia. But this interest in space, regions, and geography complicates the ethnic binaries often imposed on this text. This mission charge must be read as a mission in Israel, not just to it.

2.2 Second motif: The disciples act as representatives of Jesus

The preamble of Matthew’s missionary discourse includes a list of the names of the Twelve (Matt 10:2-4) and states that these disciples are given the ἐξουσία to cast out spirits and heal (10:1). The image seems to be one of delegation; this ἐξουσία that the disciples receive is Jesus’s ἐξουσία. He is able to grant this authority to those who will do work on his behalf to advance the kingdom. This brings us to the second critical motif of the mission discourse: that the disciples who carry out their assigned missionary work are representatives of Jesus.

Biblica 71 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1976), 27-30; Tertullian, *Praescr. Haer.* 8; see also Foster, *Community, Law, and Mission in Matthew’s Gospel*, 226-7.

The theme of missionaries as representatives of Jesus is expressed in two different ways in the discourse. First, the work the disciples do is the same work Jesus does, and is an extension of his own activity. Second, the disciples play the role of classical envoys, who are meant to be received as Jesus is received.

2.2.1 The Disciples' Mission as an Extension of Jesus's Work

The components of the disciples' mission are to preach the nearness of the kingdom (10:7) and to heal (10:8). These are the same tasks we have already seen Jesus doing throughout the text.³² Jesus's preaching and the disciples' preaching is so similar that they speak the same words. In Matt 4:17, Jesus's proclamation (Μετανοεῖτε ἠγγικεν γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν) is nearly identical to the disciples' (Ἠγγικεν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν, Matt 10:7). Jesus has also been teaching (4:23, 9:35; 11:1) in his travels around Galilee, which should not be read as meaningfully different from the preaching the disciples are assigned in Matt 10:7. Jesus's preaching proclaims the nearness of the kingdom and commands responding to the kingdom with repentance (Matt 4:17). Preaching the kingdom is inseparable from this expected repentant response to it – the hearers are expected to do something about the kingdom. Because of this, ethical instruction has to follow proclamation,³³ and is an implied component of the disciples' work.

³² For the disciples as Jesus's fellow workers, see Peter Fiedler, *Das Matthäusevangelium*, TKNT 1 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2006), 228; Martin Hengel, *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers*, trans. James Greig (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1968), 75; Meier, *The Vision of Matthew*, 73; Paul S. Minear, "The Disciples and the Crowds in the Gospel of Matthew," *Anglican Theological Review* 3 (1974): 28-44; Michael J. Wilkins, *The Concept of Disciple in Matthew's Gospel, As Reflected in the Use of the Term Mathētēs*, NovTSup 59 (Leiden/New York: Brill, 1988), 138.

³³ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:415. Contra Donald Senior, *Matthew*, ANTC, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 114 who contrasts the work of teaching with the work of preaching.

The disciples are also given the power to heal diseases, just as Jesus is. According to Matt 4:23-4 and 9:35, Jesus performs healings alongside his teaching ministry, and these two components of ministry are impossible to separate. Physical healing and spiritual healing (repentance or forgiveness from sin) are not strictly separated in many early Jewish texts,³⁴ and they are not separate in Matthew. For instance, Matthew links the forgiveness of sin with healing in the pericope of the paralyzed man (9:1-8).³⁵ “Saving” (σώζω) and “healing” (θεραπεύω) are not completely distinct for Matthew, either, and the two words often function as synonyms. The hemorrhaging woman wishes to be “saved” (σωθήσομαι) from her bleeding, not healed (θεραπεύω, 9:21-22).³⁶ The work of healing is inseparable from Jesus’s work of saving “his people from their sin” (1:21).³⁷ Demonic possession, illness, and sin are all part of a whole,³⁸ and both Jesus and his disciples overcome them because of the kingdom’s approach. Matthew further demonstrates the similarities between Jesus’s healing and the disciples’ by listing specific healings the disciples’ will perform in Matt 10:8. These acts include raising the dead, purifying leprosy, and casting out demons, and all are analogous to the miracles that Jesus has performed earlier (cleansing leprosy, Matt 8:1-4; healing of the sick/disabled in 8:5-13; 8:14-15; 8:16-17; 9:1-8; 9:20-22; 9:27-29; casting out of demons, Matt 8:28-34; 9:32-34;

³⁴ See, e.g., Exod 20:5; Lev 26:14-33; Deut 28:15-68; 2 Chron 21:15; Ps 103:3; 4Q510; 1 QapGen 20.16-29; 1 Cor 11:29-30; Jas 5:14-15; t. Gad 5; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:28.

³⁵ Walter T. Wilson, *Healing in the Gospel of Matthew: Reflections on Method and Ministry* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 148-9.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 216.

³⁷ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:415.

³⁸ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 199.

raising of the dead, Matt 9:23-25). By doing the same work that Jesus does, the disciples represent Jesus to the people of Israel.

By receiving delegated authority and performing the works Jesus does, the disciples demonstrate that, as missionaries, they are the representatives of Jesus. They receive Jesus's ἐξουσία at the beginning of their mission (10:1) because they will undertake the work that Jesus himself does. Jesus commissions them to carry out the work he has been doing himself. The power by which they operate is the power they receive from Jesus, and they carry out healings that are analogous to the work Jesus has already done.

2.2.2 The Tradition of Envoys in Antiquity

The disciples further demonstrate their function as representatives of Jesus by serving in the Greco-Roman tradition of envoys. As Margaret Mitchell writes, “the general principle governing all social relations... (is) the envoy or emissary represents the one by whom and in whose name he was sent.”³⁹ To receive an envoy is to welcome the sender, and to reject him or her is to reject the sender. Furthermore, the hospitality with which the envoy is received ought to reflect the status of the sender, not the status of the envoy himself. Slaves are not received like slaves when they are sent on behalf of a king; they are received like the king himself.⁴⁰ This norm is well-established in Greco-Roman⁴¹

³⁹ Margaret M. Mitchell, “New Testament Envoys in the Context of Greco-Roman Diplomatic and Epistolary Conventions: The Example of Timothy and Titus,” *JBL* 111.4 (1992), 644. For an extended discussion of different kinds of representation and envoy-sending in antiquity see Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 313.

⁴⁰ Mitchell, “Envoys,” 647-8.

⁴¹ Derek J. Mosley, *Envoys and Diplomacy in Ancient Greece*, *Historia: Einzelschriften* 22 (Steiner: Wiesbaden, 1973), 79, 89. For the violent rejection of envoys see Mitchell “Envoys,” 646; cf. *Didache* 11.2, 4; 12:1.

and rabbinic literature.⁴² Paul apparently expected churches to practice this rule as well in their reception of his letter carriers.⁴³

The missionary discourse depicts both Jesus and his disciples as Greco-Roman envoys. The disciples represent Jesus, and Jesus represents God. To receive one is to receive the other, and Matthew makes this explicit in Matt 10:40. Furthermore, Jesus promises rewards for those who provide the appropriate reception for an envoy. Whoever hosts a prophet or “righteous one” (δίκαιος, 10:41-42) will receive the same reward as the prophets and “righteous ones” themselves. The terms προφήτης and δίκαιος here refer to people who require even basic needs like food and water to be provided for them. This suggests that these terms may refer to an emergent class of itinerant or semi-itinerant Christians,⁴⁴ rather than Christians in general.⁴⁵ According to Matthew, followers of Jesus need subsistence-level care, specifically because of their discipleship (8:20). The ones who provide this care for Christian itinerants will receive the same reward that they could expect if they were the itinerants themselves. The missionaries thus do not only represent Jesus by carrying out his work, but also represent Jesus in their official capacity as envoys. They are authorized to act on his behalf and should be treated as though they were Jesus himself.

Unfortunately for the missionaries, royal welcomes for Jesus and his envoys are hard to come by in Matthew. Just as Jesus and his disciples perform the same work, they also experience the same rejection (10:13-15, 24-25)⁴⁶ This does not stop Matthew from

⁴² t. T’an 3:2; m. Ber 5:5; Bassler and Cohen, *Matthew*, 254; Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 513.

⁴³ Mitchell, “Envoys,” 645-5.

⁴⁴ David Hill, “Δίκαιοι as Quasi-technical Term,” *NTS* 11 (1965): 296–302.

⁴⁵ Contra Luz, *Matthew* 2:120-1.

⁴⁶ Luz, *Matthew*, 2:120; Nolland, *Matthew*, 443-4.

assuming that the norms concerning the sending and receiving of envoys should still be in force. The disciples deserve to be welcomed like Jesus should be welcomed, even though they will not be. In the same way, Jesus ought to be welcomed as God's emissary, though the Gospel predicts he will not be.

2.3 Third motif: The Disciples are Extreme Ascetics and Dependent on Private Hospitality

One of the more striking aspects of Matthew's instructions for the missionaries is just how radically ascetic the disciples are expected to be. Matthew is the strictest of all the Synoptics concerning what exactly the travelers can bring with them. Matthew prohibits the disciples from bringing money bags, staves, or sandals (Matt 10:9-10). This is considerably stricter than Mark, who tells the missionaries to wear sandals and carry staves (Mark 6:8-9). Luke takes a more moderating position, forbidding only the staff for the mission of the twelve disciples (9:3), though the mission of the seventy-two is less limited (10:4). Only Matthew insists on barefoot, staff-free missionaries under all conditions.

In addition to restricting travel gear more than the other Synoptics, Matthew also places far more emphasis on the prohibition against carrying money than his Markan source text does. Mark simply lists money as one of several items the disciples should not bring with them (Mark 6:7). Matthew, on the other hand, recounts Jesus telling the disciples twice in a row to reject payment for their work (10:8b-9). Matthew further reiterates the prohibition on carrying cash by listing three different currencies as off-

limits (χρυσός, ἄργυρος, and χαλκός in 10:9, as opposed to only χαλκός in Mark 6:8 and ἀργύριον in Luke 9:3). Money is not welcome on the mission field in any denomination.⁴⁷ Matthew also places the prohibition against carrying money at the front of his list of restrictions (10:9-10), whereas Mark (6:8) and Luke (9:3, but note the absence in 10:4) place the prohibition fourth. The missionaries are not to collect the means to provide for themselves. This instruction is stated prominently and repeatedly.

Why is it so important that the Matthean missionaries carry so little with them? Both Mark and Matthew agree that the beneficiaries of the missionaries (and God) will provide for the missionaries' needs.⁴⁸ This explains why the disciples are not supposed to collect or carry cash. Their empty handedness signifies their trust in God's care. However, Matthew's restriction from carrying a staff and sandals is surprising. A lack of sandals and staff would make a journey through Palestine significantly slower and more cumbersome. The Septuagint frequently depict staves as essential for cross-country travel, particularly in the context of journeys that need to be accomplished quickly (Gen 32:10; Exod 12:11; 2 Kings 4:29).⁴⁹ A staff might also be particularly important for a person suffering from a physical trauma who might not be ambulatory without it (Exod 21:19). Since Matthew expects the missionaries to face active, violent resistance (Matt 10:17), this makes it all the more noticeable he does not permit them to carry walking aids. So why does Matthew encourage a barefoot, underequipped, considerably slower style of travel?

⁴⁷ Anne M. O'Leary, *Matthew's Judaization of Mark: Examined in the Context of the Use of Sources in Graeco-Roman Antiquity*, LNTS 323 (London; New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 157, argues there is a possible Exod 25:1-3 allusion in the list of coins.

⁴⁸ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 388-9.

⁴⁹ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:173.

One interpretive option for the disciples' barefoot status is that they are expected to treat the mission as a journey on sacred ground.⁵⁰ The Mishnah requires one to leave behind both one's shoes and one's staff before approaching the temple (m. Ber. 9:5).⁵¹ In the same way, Moses and Joshua also remove their shoes in the presence of a theophany (Exod 3:5; Josh 5:15). However, this interpretation is flawed on three counts. First, links between this passage and the appearance of a theophany are slim. Matthew never suggests that the disciples will interact with an angel or a divine manifestation, so there is no urgent reason for the disciples to remove their shoes at this point but not earlier in the narrative. Second, the Mishnaic passage counseling bare feet on the Temple Mount is later than Matthew's Gospel. Matthew and his contemporaries may not have been aware of this practice. Third, the "sacred ground" theory does not explain the prohibition against second tunics, which would presumably be permitted on the Temple Mount or in front of an angel.⁵² In fact, since Exodus instructs worshippers to shield the altar from nudity (Exod 20:26), one would expect the disciples to wear more clothes on sacred ground, not less.

A second possibility is that the missionary outfit in Matthew is intended to be distinctive. The lack of a money bag and sandals would sartorially distinguish the missionaries from Cynics, who wore both,⁵³ and the lack of a staff would distinguish the

⁵⁰ T. W. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus, As Recorded in the Gospels According to St. Matthew and St. Luke* (London: SCM Press, 1977), 473; Park, *Mission Discourse*, 104-5.

⁵¹ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:173; Park, *The Mission Discourse*, 104-51.

⁵² Gundry, *Matthew*, 187.

⁵³ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:173; Francis Gerald Downing, *Christ and the Cynics: Jesus and Other Radical Preachers in First-Century Tradition*, JSOT 4 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988), 48; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 383; Park, *The Mission Discourse*, 106-7.

missionaries from traveling rabbis, who carried staves.⁵⁴ However, this is not convincing. First, bags,⁵⁵ tunics,⁵⁶ staves, and sandals⁵⁷ are all common, generic items of ancient clothing, and other travelers on the road would likely not notice the presence or absence of any one of these particular items in anyone else's kit. Second, an underequipped missionary might not have been particularly distinctive in an era in which many people did not have adequate clothing (Matt 25:36, 43; James 2:15).⁵⁸ Onlookers may have pitied an itinerant person dressed improperly for inclement weather, but that does not mean they were surprised by them. A lack of equipment in itself would not successfully advertise that the traveler was part of a new religious movement.

A third option is that Matthew is simply less concerned about speed than Mark and Luke are. The Markan Jesus instructs the disciples to wear "strapped sandals," signifying the disciples' readiness and ability to move at any time (Mark 6:9),⁵⁹ and Luke forbids the missionaries from taking the time to greet people on the road (Luke 10:4). However, Matthew does not suggest the missionaries should be in any particular hurry.⁶⁰ This is probably true, but also not the entire story. It is clear that Matthew's missionary instructions place less emphasis on speed than Mark's and Luke's do. Nonetheless, this does not explain why Matthew's instructions are also significantly more difficult, not just placing less emphasis on speed.

⁵⁴ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:173.

⁵⁵ Such as the one Odysseus carries (Homer, *Od.* 13.437). The *πήρα* can refer to either a traveling bag or a begging bag (Nolland, *Matthew*, 418).

⁵⁶ The *χιτών* is the uniform of the everyman in Matt 5:40; Mark 14:63, Luke 6:29, and Acts 9:39. These seem to be clothing that most people would own.

⁵⁷ *Ἐπόδημα* appears in Exod 12:11, Jos 9:13, Isa 5:27 as standard gear for a traveler.

⁵⁸ See also LXX Isa 58:7; 2 Esdr. 2:20; T. Zeb. 7.1-2; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:427.

⁵⁹ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 383.

⁶⁰ Nolland, *Matthew*, 418.

The fourth and most likely option is that inadequate equipment that the Matthean Jesus assigns his missionaries renders them radically helpless—not only dependent on God,⁶¹ but impoverished,⁶² and vulnerable to anyone the disciples happen to encounter. Davies and Allison argue that the lack of a staff in particular denotes pacifism, since a staff would ordinarily be used as protection.⁶³ The *ράβδος* served as a walking aid, but it is used as a rudimentary weapon in the Hebrew Bible.⁶⁴ Josephus reports that despite their asceticism, Essenes traveled with staves in order to protect themselves.⁶⁵ Traveling without a staff communicates passivity and a willingness to suffer without retaliating, in line with Jesus's instructions in Matt 5:39 and 44.

If the lack of a staff communicates pacifism, the lack of any other gear signifies dependence on others.⁶⁶ A lack of shoes and provisions means that the missionaries are completely dependent on anyone who might receive them, and at the mercy of anyone who might reject them. The missionaries cannot and should not bring anything on their journeys, because they deserve to be fed and provided for by anyone who benefits from their work. However, the missionaries must not collect a wage in order to provide for themselves. They are distinct from traveling philosophers or wonderworkers because they cannot receive any pay for their work, but they can and should accept food and shelter.

⁶¹ France, *Matthew*, 418

⁶² Culpepper, *Matthew*, 198.

⁶³ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:173; also Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 383. For pacifism as a Matthean Christian norm, see 5:38-42; Gerd Theissen, *Social Reality and the Early Christians: Theology, Ethics, and the World of the New Testament*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress 1992), 14.

⁶⁴ Num 22:27; 1 Sam 17:43; Ezek 39:9.

⁶⁵ Josephus, *J.W.* 2.125; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 383

⁶⁶ Waetjen, *Theology of Fulfillment*, 127-8, notes this also communicates solidarity with the poorest of the poor.

Verse 10b, γὰρ ὁ ἐργάτης τῆς τροφῆς αὐτοῦ ἐστίν, introduces the practical consequence of the disciples' lack of provisions – the need to find suitable hosts during the course of the mission. The missionaries are instructed to begin their work in a city by finding a “worthy” household (Matt 10:11). The “worthy one” (ἄξιος) in Matt 10:11a is best understood not as a worthy individual but as a household, in light of the instruction to stay “there” (κακεῖ), not “with them” until the end of their mission.⁶⁷ The worthiness of the house is characterized not only by their receptivity to the mission (“listen to your words,” v. 14) but also by their willingness to allow the missionaries to stay. The worthy home is blessed with the “peace” of the missionaries while they are present in the house. The blessing is removed if the missionaries are not welcomed (10:13). In this circumstance (and apparently only this circumstance, 10:11b), missionaries can depart the home and look for greener pastures, condemning the home or town by shaking the dust from their feet (10:14). Matthew provides no other guidelines for when a disciple might know that a mission to a particular town is concluded. The only stated reasons to leave a town are persecution and lack of hospitality.

Matthew’s praxis of missionary activity centers entirely on this process of securing a host and using this house as a basis for missionary operations. Though both Mark and Luke assume that accepting hospitality is a normal practice for missionaries (Mark 6:10; Luke 9:4; 10:5), Matthew is the only Synoptic Gospel to include a specific command to begin missionary work by seeking out a suitable house from which the missionaries will operate in a certain town.⁶⁸ Accommodations are apparently arranged

⁶⁷ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:175.

⁶⁸ Nolland, *Matthew*, 419.

spontaneously upon entrance to the city. The fact that the disciples must go hunting around for a “worthy” house upon their arrival in a new village indicates that the missionaries will not necessarily be acquainted with their hosts when they arrive. Nonetheless, the radical deprivation of the disciples means that the missionaries must successfully find a host or missionizing a town will be impossible. Matthew is also the only Gospel to describe individual households rejecting missionaries. Matthew expands the act of shaking dust off one’s feet against locations to include houses as well as towns (10:14). In Mark and Luke, foot shaking is practiced only against entire cities (πόλις in Mark 6:11; Luke 9:5, 10:10). Matthew anticipates various responses to missionary work within the same city, and even different responses between members of households (10:35-6). A possible explanation may be that Matthew’s redaction of the missionary commission is more grounded in historical missionary experience. Matthew recognizes that the response to missionaries may vary from house to house. Whether this is the case or not, Matthew demonstrates particular interest in the house the missionaries stay in, and assumes that missionary work cannot proceed without it.

The upshot of this is that Matthew actually does seem to be engaging with the actual possible experiences of traveling Christian teachers. These resemble instructions Matthew expects some of his readers to follow. Matthew denies alternative means of support to the missionaries. This leaves them dependent on their intended targets for care. The people of Israel are judged not only for their adherence to the missionaries’ message, but also for their willingness to care for the otherwise unequipped messengers.

2.4 Fourth motif: Jewish people are the focus of the mission, but gentiles exist as onlookers

The mission described in Matt 10 primarily benefits the people of Israel. This is clearly stated in Matt 10:5-6, which instructs the disciples to focus their attentions on the lost sheep of Israel. Just as critically, though, this focus on Israel is established and justified in Matt 9:35-38.

The ten miracles of Matt 8-9 end with a short summary statement, recalling that Jesus has gone throughout the region preaching, teaching in synagogues, and healing diseases (Matt 9:35; cf. Matt 4:23-4). This causes crowds to gather around him. These crowds are apparently Jewish, and their regions of origin are within the traditional boundaries of ancient, united Israel (Matt 4:23-4). Matthew has redacted his source text, Mark 3:7b-8, to better reflect the Hebrew Bible tradition of Israel's territory.⁶⁹ These crowds of Jews arouse Jesus's compassion because of their lamentable state, "like sheep without a shepherd" (9:36). Wiefel argues the "lost sheep" are simply people in need, not necessarily Jews. However, this ignores the connection made to the "sheep of Israel" just a few verses later in Matt 10:6.⁷⁰ The impetus for the mission is the neediness of the people of Israel, and this is precisely the mission the disciples are instructed to pray for in Matt 9:37-38.

⁶⁹ Konradt, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles*, 124.

⁷⁰ Wolfgang Wiefel, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament 1 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1998), 193.

The mission to Israel and the missionary discourse are prompted by this high volume of receptive, needy people in the crowd. Jesus expresses sympathy for this Jewish multitude as well as expectation that Israel is ripe for harvest.⁷¹ Hill reads “harvest” negatively, as a warning of judgment based on the apocalyptic associations with harvests in Matt 3:12 and 13:24-30.⁷² But this is an overly negative reading of agricultural images in Matthew. Matthew never depicts the eschatological harvest as a complete destruction. The act of harvesting involves separation of good and bad elements (chaff in Matt 3:12, weeds in Matt 13:24-30), but the harvest itself is ultimately positive. The crop is gathered and stored, not destroyed (3:12; 13:30). Matthew may go on to anticipate resistance within Israel in Matt 10:17-18, but we should not miss that the logic of the commissioning narrative is that Matthew expects success. Matthew commissions missionaries to Israel precisely because of the possibility of success. God will raise up laborers within Israel, because there is a crop (9:37-38).

The disciples’ mission is intended to benefit Israel and ethnic Jews within it. Whether or not that mission continues into Matthew’s day is more controversial and will be discussed in later chapters. However, this should not cause us to disregard that even in the midst of a mission to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel,” Matthew’s relationship to exclusivity is somewhat complicated. Gentiles do live in the land of Israel and the Gospel assumes that the missionaries will have some kind of interaction with them. How much contact the missionaries can expect with gentiles, and the nature of that contact, is a

⁷¹ Blaine Charette, “A Harvest for the People? An Interpretation of Matthew 9.37f.” *JSNT* 38 (1990): 29-35, 32-3; Joel Willitts, *Matthew’s Messianic Shepherd-King: In Search of “the Lost Sheep of the House of Israel*, BZNW 147 (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2007), 118.

⁷² Hill, *Matthew*, 182.

complex question. Below we will consider four elements in the missionary discourse and the preceding chapters that indicate that the missionary discourse has a more complicated relationship with exclusivity than we might initially expect. These include 1) the prediction that the persecuted disciples will be “witnesses to the gentiles” (Matt 10:18), 2) the location of the mission in Galilee “of the gentiles” (Matt 4:15) and 3) the miracles Jesus has performed in the chapters leading up to the missionary discourse and their beneficiaries. As we will see, none of these elements suggest that the mission within Israel is ethnically inclusive, or intended to foreshadow a later and more successful mission to gentiles. Rather, they introduce the idea that the mission to the lost sheep of Israel has gentile “eavesdroppers,” who may yet become participants in the Jesus community as well.

2.4.1 The “Witness to Them and to Gentiles” (10:18)

Matthew 10:18 predicts that in the course of persecution, the disciples will be handed over to gentile rulers εἰς μαρτύριον αὐτοῖς καὶ τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, and will receive inspired speech to address these gentiles through the “Spirit of the Father” (10:19-20). This verse, promising the miraculous ability to answer persecuting rulers, is sometimes read as a foreshadowing of the mission to the gentiles, or even an early realization of it.⁷³

Is this what Matthew means, though? What does Matthew think it means for the disciples to be “a witness” in this context? The phrase εἰς μαρτύριον αὐτοῖς can be read

⁷³ Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading*, Bible and Liberation (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 2001), 68; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 2:184*; Konradt, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles*, 81; Eloff Mervyn, “Ἀπό . . . Ἐως and Salvation History in Matthew’s Gospel,” in *Built Upon the Rock: Studies in the Gospel of Matthew* (ed. Daniel M. Gurtner and John Nolland; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008): 85-108, 97; Nolland, *Matthew 416*; Tisera, *Universalism*, 148-51.

as a dative of advantage or as a dative of disadvantage, a witness either for the gentiles or against them. Matthew's source text Mark uses this phrase once with a clear dative of disadvantage (the act of shaking the dust of an unrepentant city off one's feet, Mark 6:11), and once when either meaning could be intended (Mark 13:9). Matthew has eliminated the clear use of the dative of disadvantage from this action of prophetic disavowal (Matt 10:14/Mark 6:11); both occurrences of the phrase εἰς μαρτύριον αὐτοῖς in Matthew are ambiguous (Matt 10:18; 24:14).

This redaction of Mark could mean, as Gundry proposes, that Matthew wants to communicate only positive meanings with the εἰς μαρτύριον αὐτοῖς, and teaches that the occasion of persecution will become an opportunity for growth and expansion among political leaders.⁷⁴ However, there are two problems with this reading. First, the phrase εἰς μαρτύριον αὐτοῖς is ambiguous in the Gospel, but the verb form μαρτυρέω is not. Witnessing in the Gospel is a negative act in Matt 23:31, in which the Pharisees witness against themselves by insisting that they would not have persecuted the prophets. This claim becomes their testimony against themselves that they are cut from the same cloth as their prophet-killing forebears. Second, on the whole, the Gospel does not seem to suggest that Matthew expects missionaries to make converts of their persecutors. The witnessing in Matt 10:18 is to the "governors and kings" before whom the persecuted missionaries are dragged. These figures are not positive presences in Matthew's Gospel. Besides David (1:6; 5:35), Jesus (2:2; 21:5; etc.), and God (18:23; 22:2, etc.), the only kings in the Gospel are Herod (2:1, 3, 9) and his son (14:9). It is hard to imagine that

⁷⁴ Gundry, *Matthew*, 190.

Matthew imagines either of these villainous figures hearing the message of the missionaries and accepting it. Likewise, the only named “governor” (ἡγεμῶν) in Matthew is Pilate. Pilate remains convinced of Jesus’s innocence (27:18-19), but ultimately emerges as a fairly unsympathetic figure. Despite his awareness that Jesus has done nothing wrong, at the insistence of the crowds (27:24) he hands Jesus over to be crucified all the same (27:26)⁷⁵ There are no truly positive examples of gentile rulers who give any indication that Matthew is hopeful for their conversion. In Matt 20:25 the “rulers of the gentiles” (οἱ ἄρχοντες τῶν ἐθνῶν) are a negative example that the church should not emulate, and in 20:19 the gentiles are specifically those who “mock, scourge, and crucify” Jesus. In light of this, it does not seem likely that Matthew intends associations with “witnessing” to be exclusively positive, nor does it seem that Matthew believes that the missionaries will convert their powerful persecutors.

Nonetheless, this does not mean we should assume that this witness to the leaders of the gentiles is inherently negative, either. The ambiguity may be intentional. The extent to which Matthew expects the gospel to actually be “good news” to any individual depends largely on the disposition of the hearer. For those who hear Jesus’s teaching and respond positively, Jesus’s words really are a testimony to them. They hear the witness and respond positively. However, for those who do not have the ability to listen, the preaching of the Gospel leads to judgment (cf. Matt 13:11-17). Both meanings are captured in the phrase εἰς μαρτύριον αὐτοῖς. The gentiles may respond positively, but they also may be judged.

⁷⁵ Simmons, “Mark and Matthew’s *Sub Rosa* Message in the Scene of Pilate and the Crowd,” 736; Turner, *Matthew*, 654. Contra Albright and Mann, *Matthew*, 345.

The presence of gentile persecutors who will hear the missionaries' proclamation complicates the apparent exclusivity of the missionary discourse. Israel is the primary focus; gentiles stand to benefit only when adverse circumstances create occasions where a missionary must explain their work to hostile gentile persecutors. There remains a chance that this missionary's testimony will bring about a genuine conversion experience in a faithful gentile's heart. Nonetheless, these gentiles are not the focus of the missionary discourse, and they do not distract from the primary attention paid to Israel.

2.4.2 "Galilee of the Gentiles"

The next element that stands to complicate the ethnic exclusivity of the mission is its location, Galilee. According to Matt 4:15, Jesus's ministry takes place in "Galilee of the gentiles." What exactly Matthew means by "Galilee of the gentiles" is a subject of some contention. The first issue is the literary question: how Matthew thinks Galilee is "of the gentiles." Some scholars have argued that Matthew has used this Isaiah quote because he sees Galilee as a racially mixed region, and Jesus's mission there serves to foreshadow the universal nature of his mission.⁷⁶ Others see the label of "of the gentiles" as more negative. For example, Carter argues the meaning of this phrase is not that gentiles have settled the area but they have dominated it. Galilee "of the gentiles" is Galilee "under the gentiles," colonized and brutalized by the Roman Empire.⁷⁷ The suggestion of imperial domination, however, does not seem to be foregrounded. Galilee may be "in darkness" (4:16), but the causes are not limited to Rome.

⁷⁶ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:383; Gundry, *Matthew* 60; Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 233 and *Studies*, 12; Tisera, *Universalism*, 92.

⁷⁷ Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 46.

The question grows even more complicated when we look beyond Matthew's intentions with this verse and raise the question of how "gentile" the history Galilee actually was.⁷⁸ To some extent, the question of how Hellenized the real Galilee actually was is a red herring. The Galilee in question is not the Galilee of history but Galilee as Matthew represents it. Galilee is the seat of Matthew's envisioned mission, but Matthew simply does not tell us much about the gentiles there. Two of them, the centurion and the Canaanite woman, are faithful and receptive to Jesus's work. For the most part, though, Matthew does not depict Jesus engaging potential gentile converts. Furthermore, as we have already suggested in §2.1,⁷⁹ Galilee's status as "of the gentiles" is often misread as enthusiasm. For example, Davies and Allison place the phrase Γαλιλαία τῶν ἐθνῶν in Matt 4:15 alongside the worship of the magi (2:11) and John the Baptist's preaching concerning the Sons of Abraham (3:9) as evidence of Matthew's warmth towards gentiles.⁸⁰ However, in context, Matt 4:15 describes Galilee's need, not its cosmopolitan qualities. The more obvious reading is less positive. Galilee's position is marginal and its status as being "of the gentiles" indicates its backwater, decentralized location, its less-than-pious⁸¹ reputation.⁸² Jesus does not begin his work in Galilee because Galilee is full

⁷⁸ See §3.1. For the role of Galilee in Matthew see France, *Matthew*, 143; Frankmölle, *Matthew 1*, 193; Alexander Sand, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, 76; Florian Wilk, *Jesus und die Völker in der Sicht der Synoptiker*, BZNW (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2001), 147. For Palestine as Greek-speaking with a significant presence of Greek arts and letters, see J. Andrew Overman, "The Diaspora in the Modern Study of Ancient Judaism," in *Diaspora Jews and Judaism: Essays in Honor of, and in Dialogue with, A. Thomas Kraabel* (ed. J. Andrew Overman and Robert S. MacLennan; USF Studies in the History of Judaism 41; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992): 63-78.

⁷⁹ See §1.3.5; Nolland, *Matthew*, 174.

⁸⁰ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:383.

⁸¹ Hill, *Matthew*, 104. But see also Root, *First Century Galilee*, 168 for evidence of Galilean piety; also Martin Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul: Studies in the Earliest History of Christianity* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 7.

⁸² Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:74; Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 220.

of gentiles who will support his work. Jesus begins in Galilee because it is lost and dark. The presence of the gentiles underscores this. Galilee is in a dire and vulnerable position, much like the “lost sheep of Israel” (10:6), and the presence of gentiles does not enhance its status. The emergence of Jesus into their grim situation (4:16) saves them.

2.4.3 The Miracles So Far

Matthew’s exclusivity clause in Matt 10:5-6 is not entirely unprecedented in the text. A singular focus on Israel and a deliberate marginalizing of the gentiles is strongly suggested in the miracle stories in Matt 8-9. The work of the missionaries in Matt 10 is best understood as an extension of the work Jesus began following his baptism (3:13-17). The recipients of Jesus’s healing and teaching have been primarily Jews. Jesus heals a Jewish leper, whose faith and heritage is assumed in the instruction to show himself to the priest after his purification (Matt 8:4). Peter’s mother-in-law (8:14) and the residents of Capernaum (8:16) are presumably Jewish. The dispute with the scribes woven into the story of the paralyzed man in Capernaum (Matt 9:1-8) strongly suggests that everyone present is Jewish. Jairus’s name and identity as a synagogue ruler have both been eliminated in Matthew’s text (Matt 9:18), but Jesus’s willingness to go with him (compare with Jesus’s hesitancy to see the centurion in Matt 8:7)⁸³ suggests that this man and his daughter are not gentiles. Finally, the two blind men in Matt 9:27 use a distinctively Jewish title for Jesus, Son of David, when they ask Jesus for healing. Even when the ethnicity of a supplicant is not clear, Matthew clarifies when a character in the story whom Jesus performs a healing for is actually a gentile (8:5-13; 15:21-28), and

⁸³ See n28.

details concerning Jewish faith and practice color most of Jesus's interactions. When in doubt, we can assume that Jesus's beneficiaries are Jewish.

However, Matt 8-9 still includes two stories in which Jesus performs a miracle for a gentile. These are the centurion and his slave (Matt 8:5-13) and the Gadarene demoniacs (Matt 8:28-34). The centurion is an unambiguously positive figure whose exceptional behavior secures him a miracle. He treats Jesus with exceptional deference, he seeks Jesus out on his own initiative,⁸⁴ and his faith dramatically outstrips that of anyone else in Israel (8:10). His unusual faith may also foreshadow another centurion later in the text, who names Jesus as the Son of God (Matt 27:54). This positive depiction of a gentile is a flattering portrait. However, it is also a high standard that a gentile must meet in order to receive a miracle. The centurion, like the Canaanite woman (Matt 15:21-28), overcomes Jesus's apparent slowness to meet his needs (8:7).⁸⁵ The centurion clears a higher bar than anyone in Israel— he has more faith than all of them (Matt 8:10). Meanwhile, the disciples' "little faith" is no hindrance to God repeatedly intervening on their behalf (6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8). An enthusiastic portrayal of this gentile character must not be conflated with a warmth for gentiles in general. This particular gentile is remarkable. Furthermore, the merit of this gentile does not mean that gentiles as a class will replace Jews as a class at the eschatological table. Some gentiles will be present at the table, while some Jews will be excluded (Matt 8:11-12).⁸⁶ Nonetheless, the table is still Israel's table. It is defined by the presence of Israelite patriarchs (8:11). The image

⁸⁴ Menninger, *Israel and the Church in the Gospel of Matthew*, 40.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁸⁶ Dale C. Allison, "Who Will Come from East and West? Observations on Matt 8.11-12/Luke 13.28-29," *IBS* 11 (1989): 158–70.

apparently alludes to prophecies of the eschatological gathering of Israel; many of these texts predict that gentiles will join Israelites and Jews of the Diaspora at the end (Isa 2:3; 19:18-25; 45:22; 66:18-21; Jer 3:17). The gentiles are included, but they do not overrun or displace their Jewish fellows. The healing of the centurion's slave thus demonstrates that a remarkable gentile can find a place in the eschatological community through faith. However, it does not distract from Jesus's focus on Israel.

The other two gentiles whom Jesus heals before the missionary discourse are the Gadarene demoniacs. Matthew has redacted this pericope considerably from his source material (Mark 5:1-20) to de-emphasize the gentile status of the possessed men. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus decides somewhat spontaneously to depart for the far side of the lake (Mark 4:35). Once Jesus arrives and completes the exorcism, the townspeople urge Jesus to leave (Mark 5:17). The healed man attempts to leave with Jesus and become a disciple (Mark 5:18), but instead Jesus sends him home to proclaim his healing throughout the Decapolis (5:20). In the Markan version of this story, Jesus locates and exorcises a gentile, who then undertakes a missionary project of his own in an unfriendly gentile region.

This is not the version of the story that Matthew tells. In Matthew's version, Jesus's journey to the Gadarenes begins when he sees great crowds and decides to depart in search of peace and quiet (Matt 8:28). Unlike Mark, Matthew feels compelled to give Jesus a reason to sail across the lake; he is not looking for gentiles, he is looking for space. When Jesus lands, he is met by two demoniacs, whose violence is so great that "no one has the power to pass by on that road" (Matt 8:28). This detail is another Matthean invention. According to Mark, no one is able to bind the demoniac (Mark 5:3), but Mark

says nothing about the ability to pass him. Matthew, on the other hand, suggests Jesus must perform the exorcisms because, in order to leave the lakeshore and go off by themselves, they would have to go past these demoniacs but are not able to. In ancient literature, demons pose an unusual threat to travelers,⁸⁷ so Jesus must perform this miracle to pass by. Matthew also eliminates the report that the recovered demoniac seeks to become a disciple and ultimately becomes a missionary. After the demons are cast out (Matt 8:32), the demoniacs themselves cease to be characters. None of the healed gentiles in Matthew become disciples,⁸⁸ and when the townspeople come to see what happened, they find Jesus alone (Matt 8:34). The story has turned from a tale of Jesus's act of mercy leading to a mission in the Decapolis to something else entirely. Jesus goes out seeking solitude, but the coasts are a hostile, inhospitable place full of dangers and unwelcoming people.⁸⁹ Jesus goes back to Capernaum after this (Matt 9:1), and he has no lasting impact on the region.⁹⁰ A mission to gentile regions will come later (Matt 28:16-20), but it does not happen yet. The extent to which gentiles benefit in the meantime is either limited to these incidental encounters, or to unusually faithful gentiles.

To conclude, the overwhelming majority of miracles in chapters 8-9 are for Jews. The mission of Matt 10:5-6 is an extension of Jesus's work in these chapters, and it targets the same people. They occur in Israel,⁹¹ for people of Israelite extraction. The

⁸⁷ Wilson, *Healing in the Gospel of Matthew*, 130.

⁸⁸ Levine, *Social and Ethnic Dimensions*, 165; Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community*, 74-5; Sim, *Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 222-3.

⁸⁹ Contra Nolland, *Matthew*, 378. "Matthew is... more interested in the fact of rejection than the ethnic identity of the rejecters" in this scene. Matthew does not dwell on the ethnic identity of the rejecters, but it is strongly implied.

⁹⁰ Luz, *Matthew*, 2:25; Wilson, *Healing in the Gospel of Matthew*, 132.

⁹¹ Wilson, *Healing in the Gospel of Matthew*, 297.

locus of salvation remains Israel. Matthew is aware of the presence of gentiles, and they have access to some of the missionaries' work and occasionally receive some benefit. However, this does not change the focus of the missionaries' work.

2.5 Fifth motif: The mission forces a conflict with Jewish leadership

Matthew's Jesus approaches the sick and suffering of Israel with compassion and service, but this should not be mistaken for an undifferentiated goodwill towards Israelites in general. Matthew's Gospel draws a sharp distinction between Israel's ordinary people and its religious leadership. The *hoi polloi* receive teaching and miracles, but the leaders of Israel are targeted for attack. This theme of a division within Israel will be explored more in §3.1 and §3.2. For now, we can say Matthew does not portray Israel as an undifferentiated mass. The evangelist recognizes a critical difference between the general people of Israel and Israel's political and religious establishment. Jews from all around Judea and the Transjordan (Matt 3:5-6) receive John's baptism, but John saves his criticism and condemnation for the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt 3:7b).⁹² Even though John challenges the value of Abrahamic ancestry for salvation (Matt 3:9), he does not issue this warning to everyone who happens to have Abrahamic ancestry. The Pharisees are warned against this presumption; the multitude of repentant Jews are not. This

⁹² Wesley G. Olmstead, *Matthew's Trilogy of Parables: The Nation, the Nations, and the Reader in Matthew 21:28-22:14*, SNTSMS 127 (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 2003), 51.

introduces a theme of conflict in the text, and the mission of the disciples eventually emerges as a front in the battle.

Matthew frames missionary work as a confrontation with Israel's leaders. The missionary discourse makes overt references to Jewish persecution and "flogging in synagogues" (Matt 10:17). Beyond this, the text makes further allusions to the ways in which the mission to Israel becomes a confrontation of established Jewish leadership and the means by which Jesus's movement fosters hostility towards them. These include the image of "shepherding" the people of Israel, contention over Jesus's miracles, and the disciples' practice of working in areas that are easily accessible to the Jewish leadership.

2.5.1 "Shepherding"

The pastoral language of Jesus's disciples serving "the lost sheep of Israel" belies the fact that the work of becoming Israel's shepherd is a confrontational project.⁹³ Israel

⁹³ For "shepherding" as confrontation with Israel's leadership/compassion on the people, see Wayne Baxter, *Israel's Only Shepherd: Matthew's Shepherd Motif and His Social Setting*, LNTS 457 (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 163-5; J.C.R. Cousland, *The Crowds in the Gospel of Matthew*, NovTSup 102 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 92-3; Marlis Gielen, *Der Konflikt Jesu mit den Religiösen und politischen Autoritäten seines Volkes im Spiegel der Matthäischen Jesusgeschichte*, Bonner biblische Beiträge 115 (Bodenheim: Philo, 1998), 105-6; Jack Dean Kingsbury, "The Developing Conflict between Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew's Gospel," *CBQ* 49 (1987): 57-73, 62-4; David E. Garland, *The Intention of Matthew*, NovTSup 52 (Brill: Leiden, 1979), 128; Michael Knowles, *Jeremiah in Matthew's Gospel: The Rejected Prophet Motif in Matthean Redaction*, JSNT 68 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 180; David D. Kupp, *Matthew's Emmanuel: Divine Presence and God's People in the First Gospel*, SNTSMS 90 (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1996), 68; Monika Lohmeyer, *Der Apostelbegriff im Neuen Testament*, Stuttgarter Biblische Beiträge 29 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1995), 383; Scot McKnight, "New Shepherds for Israel: A Historical and Critical Study of Matthew 9:35-11:1," (Dissertation: University of Nottingham, 1986), 183-5; J. Andrew Overman, *Church and Community in Crisis: The Gospel According to Matthew* (Valley Forge: Trinity International, 1996), 138-93; Rusche and Horst Goldstein, "Für das 'Haus Israel' vom 'Gott Israels' gesandt. Jesus und die Juden in der Deutung von Mt 15,21-28," in *Gottesverächter und Menschenfeinde? Juden zwischen Jesus und frühchristlicher Kirche* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1979), 109-10.

already has shepherds. The missionaries are intended to do their work in a way that confronts and displaces Israel's current leadership.

What makes the language of sheep and shepherding confrontational? The instruction to go to the "lost sheep of Israel" (10:6) recalls Matthew's evaluation of the crowds in 9:36. They are "troubled" (ἐσκυλμένοι) and "downcast," (ἐρριμμένοι) like "sheep without a shepherd." They are specifically "lost," per Matt 9:36, because they have no one to lead and protect them.

What exactly is it that makes the sheep "lost?" The saying has some precedent in the LXX. In Jer 50:6-7, the "lostness" of the sheep seems to refer to the Israelites' literal presence scattered among the nations. They are geographically separated from the land of Israel and must find their way back to it (Jer 50:5) from the land of Babylon (Jer 50:8). A similar dynamic occurs in Ezek 34, in which God as a shepherd seeks out his sheep from the "countries" (34:13, מן־הַמְּדִינֹת MT, ἀπὸ τῶν χωρῶν LXX) where they wander and brings them back to Israel. The problem is that the people of Israel are literally lost outside their homeland and need to be brought back. Both Jeremiah (50:6) and Ezekiel (34:21-22) blame Israel's leaders (called the "strong" in Ezek 34:16)⁹⁴ for scattering the people. Matthew alludes to this image but differs from his prophetic forebears in that the "lostness" of the sheep is not a geographic problem. The lost sheep in question are in Palestine (10:5, 23).

⁹⁴ For Ezekiel's depiction of the leaders of Israel being replaced by God as shepherds, see Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel* (translated James D. Martin; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 2:216-7. Kampen, *Matthew within Sectarian Judaism*, 186; George W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch*, ed. Klaus Baltzer and James C. VanderKam, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 181-219; note the problem of "poor shepherding" among Israel's leadership is also depicted in the Animal Apocalypse.

If Israel's lost sheep are not geographically lost, what else might Matthew be referring to? Lost sheep appear again in Isa 53:6. Here, the sheep's "wandering" is not a matter of geography, but morality.⁹⁵ The sheep have gone "their own way" (שִׁיבָה לְדַרְכֵּי אֲשֶׁר יָצְאוּ מִן־הַכֹּחַל מִתְּנַחֲמֵיהֶם·MT; ἄνθρωπος τῆ ὁδοῦ αὐτοῦ ἐπλανήθη LXX) and the problem seems to be related to their "sin" (חַטָּא, LXX ἁμαρτία). This passage is more relevant to Matthew's purposes; Jesus's people need to be saved "from their sins" (Matt 1:21).⁹⁶ However, sin is not foregrounded as Israel's problem in the missionary discourse. Repentance is part of Jesus's proclamation earlier in the Gospel (Matt 4:17), but the call to repent is not said to be part of the preaching of the disciples (Matt 10:7).

If the sheep are not lost in a geographical sense and they are not lost because of their own sinfulness, why does Matthew think they are lost? According to Matt 9:36, the problem with the sheep is that they are shepherdless. The specific phrase "sheep without a shepherd" appears three times in the LXX –Num 27:17, 2 Chron 18:16, and Jud 11:19. In Num 27:16-17, Moses speaks to YHWH requesting that YHWH appoint a leader after Moses' death (Num 27:12-14). This leader will "go out and come in" before the congregation, so that the people are not like "sheep without a shepherd" (Num 27:17). The phrase also appears in 2 Chron 18:16, in which the "shepherdlessness" of Israel suggests that the king Ahab is going to die soon. Finally, in Jud 11:19, Judith uses this phrase to deceptively predict that Holofernes will conquer Jerusalem. When Holofernes

⁹⁵ Klaus Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah: A Commentary on Isaiah 40-55*, Hermeneia (Augsburg: Fortress, 2001), 412.

⁹⁶ Boris Repschinski, "'For He Will Save His People from Their Sins' (Matthew 1:21): A Christology for Christian Jews," *CBQ* 68. 2 (2006): 248–67.

takes power over Israel, he will “drive them like sheep without a shepherd” and meet no resistance.

In all three cases, the shepherdless sheep of Israel are shepherdless specifically because they have no proper leadership. This interpretive option, that “lost sheep” are sheep without a leader, best fits Matthew’s context of conflict with the Jewish religious leadership.⁹⁷ The sheep are not to blame. Nor is the community of Israel equally blamed; “the leaders are implicitly condemned; the people are pitied.”⁹⁸ Jesus’s feelings towards them are compassionate (9:36), and his charge is that the disciples teach and heal them. The work of the missionary is to do the work that, Matthew believes, Israel’s leadership has so far failed to do. The rescue mission to Israel is thus both a solution to the precarious, helpless state of Jesus’s people⁹⁹ and an answer to the situation created by its apparently failed leadership. Israel’s shepherds have erred, so Jesus will take over as his people’s true caretaker.¹⁰⁰ By claiming the place of Israel’s shepherd for himself and his disciples, Jesus’s mission enacted through his disciples becomes inherently confrontational. The people are served, but the leaders are replaced. It is an indictment of the leadership that will force a conflict between Jesus, his missionaries, and the rest of Israel’s leadership.

⁹⁷ Ulrich Luz, *Studies in Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005), 229; Nolland, *Matthew*, 416.

⁹⁸ Levine, *Social and Ethnic Dimensions*, 73.

⁹⁹ Gundry, *Matthew*, 185; Tisera, *Universalism*, 141.

¹⁰⁰ Hanna Roose, *Eschatologische Mitherrschaft: Entwicklungslinien einer urchristlichen Erwartung*, NTOA 54 (Göttingen: Fribourg: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Academic Press, 2004), 94; Willitts, *Matthew’s Messianic Shepherd-King*, 121.

2.5.2 Miracles

Jesus's miracles are acts of charity and mercy for the sick and afflicted in Israel (9:36 and 10:5-6.). They also lend credence to his claim that the kingdom of God is near (Matt 12:28). The act of preaching and healing Israel's people in order to serve as their shepherd is already a confrontational act that attempts to supplant Israel's religious and political leaders. But as we will see, the miracles themselves further serve to introduce a schism between the people of Israel and the leadership class.

The miracles of Matt 8-9 inspire variegated responses among onlookers. While the crowds are amazed and impressed (Matt 9:33b), the Pharisees resist the miracles and attribute them to demonic forces (Matt 9:34; cf. 12:23-24). The miracles create "a split within Israel."¹⁰¹ The crowds are positively disposed towards the miracles, even to the point of perceiving Jesus's messianic status (Matt 12:23). However, the Pharisees reject the miracles as any indication that God works in their midst. Instead, they attribute Jesus's power to Beelzebub (9:34; 12:24). This creates division not only between the Pharisees and the crowds, but between the Pharisees and the Jesus movement. The Pharisees see the effort the disciples make to lead Israel, and label this work as demonic.¹⁰²

The accusation that Jesus works through the power of Satan is particularly critical. Matthew recounts the accusation that Jesus performs miracles through demonic assistance twice (Matt 10:25; 12:24; cf. Luke 11:15). He is the only Gospel writer to do so. In the second telling of this story, the accusation is accompanied with a long

¹⁰¹ Luz, *Studies in Matthew*, 228.

¹⁰² Repschinski, *Controversy Stories*, 302.

apologetic argument that the miracles are worked through the “spirit of God” (Matt 12:28; cf. Luke 11:20). The apologetic argument concludes with polemic, a warning that the Pharisees will be held accountable for assigning this miraculous activity to demonic forces on Judgment Day (Matt 12:36-7). In the missionary discourse itself, the missionaries also face the prospect of being “called Beelzebul” (Matt 10:25), and the repetition of this accusation may suggest that this was a contemporary experience for Matthew and his readers.¹⁰³ Matthew is quick to respond to this accusation, and also sees this insult as inextricable from the trials and rejection that both Jesus and his church face. When the miracles elicit a hostile response, they serve the purposes of dividing the world into the dualistic categories of the worthy and the unworthy. Miracles may be acts of mercy for the crowds in Israel, but they are also antagonistic acts that drive Israel’s religious leadership further away from Jesus and the disciples. They force the crowds to choose between Israel’s established religious authorities and the new representatives of Jesus’s movement.

2.5.3 Proximity to Jerusalem and Judea

As we argued in §2.1, the parameters of missionary activity in Matt 10:5-6 limit the mission field to Palestine or possibly Galilee. This forces the missionaries to interact with religious sects and authorities who are based in Jerusalem. These encounters bring about more conflict between the missionaries and the Jewish leadership than would have occurred if Matthew had allowed for the possibility of a mission to the Diaspora immediately. Instead, the mission happens in a region where the religious leadership can

¹⁰³ Stanton, *Gospel for a New People*, 177.

be found in a higher concentration: in the land of Israel, and specifically where leaders from Jerusalem would be found.

Matthew repeatedly suggests that proximity to the centralized religious leadership invites conflict between Jesus's movements and other groups. One of Matthew's dispute stories begins when Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem send a delegation up into Galilee to challenge him (Matt 15:1; cf. Mark 7:1). After debating and denouncing them (Matt 15:1-20), Jesus retreats from them and moves towards Tyre and Sidon (Matt 15:21). When Jesus leaves Galilee and arrives at the border of Judea (Matt 19:1; cf. Mark 10:1), the Pharisees immediately appear (Matt 19:3). In this narrative, the closer Jesus draws to Jerusalem, its teachers, and rulers, the greater the conflict becomes. Operating in and around Israel's religious hub in Jerusalem and Judea creates contexts for clashes and dispute. This may reflect actual historical fault lines between Galilee and Judea. Josephus recalls a similar incident in which Judeans sent emissaries to check on Galilee, apparently to the consternation of the Galileans who lived there.¹⁰⁴ Jesus withdraws north when he wishes to avoid conflict, but these departures are only temporary. On the whole, Jesus and his disciples remain in areas where they are likely to clash with Jewish teachers and other Jewish sects.

The missionary discourse assumes that representatives of the Jesus movement will find themselves in tense exchanges with other Jewish sects and leaders. In fact, the mission parameters seem to actively court this conflict. As we will see in the next section, Matthew also assumes that these interactions will bring about harm and danger for the

¹⁰⁴Vita 20-3; 196-7; Freyne, *The Jesus Movement*, 176-7; Kampen, *Matthew and Sectarian Judaism*, 25.

missionaries, from both Jewish and gentile opponents. Nonetheless, the missionaries continue to seek these confrontations, and encourage onlookers to choose between the Jesus movement and its opponents.

2.6 Sixth motif: Neither Jews nor gentiles are exclusively associated with persecution

Persecution is the obvious consequence of the missionaries' deliberate efforts to antagonize and confront other religious leaders. Matthew 10:14-15 introduces the theme of missionary rejection; many would-be proselytes will not accept the missionaries' message and refuse to house and care for them. However, not all missionary rejection is passive, and Matt 10:16-23 predicts the far more dire possibility that missionary targets will react violently to the messengers. As we see in Matt 10:17-18, the missionaries' persecutors are neither exclusively Jewish nor exclusively gentile. Everyone, regardless of ethnicity, is a possible source of danger for the missionaries.

Matthew warns first about persecution from Jewish communities. Missionaries will be "handed over to councils" (probably small Jewish civic bodies)¹⁰⁵ and "flogged in synagogues" (Matt 10:17). Both of these persecutions are borrowed from Mark 13:9, though Matthew has made a few variations to Mark's text. The first is the use of the word *μαστιγῶ* to describe synagogue discipline in 10:17, as opposed to Mark's *δέρω* in 13:9. The word *μαστιγῶ* can denote the severe Roman *verberatio* that precedes capital punishment (see Matt 20:19; also Mark 10:34; Luke 18:33; John 19:1). However, it is

¹⁰⁵ Hare, *The Theme of Jewish Persecution*, 102-4; Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 882.

unlikely Matthew means this sort of beating. This would not be administered by Jewish civic groups or in synagogues. Deuteronomy 25:1-3 LXX, which uses the term *μαστιγῶω*, is far more relevant to the contexts of synagogues and probably depicts the kind of punishment that missionaries would actually face from Jewish authorities. This is the text from which the “forty lashes minus one” of *m. Makkot* is derived. This text allows religious authorities to sentence an errant person to a limited beating with a flat strap.¹⁰⁶ This punishment is intended to correct, and unlike many Roman floggings is certainly meant to be survived.¹⁰⁷ Matthew has changed Mark’s wording in order to reflect the source text from which Jewish corporal punishment was actually drawn. The missionaries are expected to face synagogue discipline wherever they are found spreading their message. The second change Matthew makes to Mark is the addition of the pronoun *αὐτῶν* to describe the synagogues in Matt 10:17. This phrase may denote separation from the synagogue (see Appendix B).

How likely is it that Matthew was aware of historical missionaries who faced beatings in synagogues? We should not be too quick to assume that Matthew is exaggerating or imagining an eschatological event that may happen in the future. Jewish communities reserved the right to use corporal punishment to discourage troublemakers. Paul’s own missionary activity resulted in flogging on multiple occasions (2 Cor 11:25; for other floggings see Josephus, *J.W.* 6.302; Acts 22:19; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.*, 5.16).¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Culpepper, *Matthew*, 202.

¹⁰⁷ M. Eugene Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 8 (Abingdon: Nashville, 1994): 89–505, 8:264.

¹⁰⁸ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:183.

The scale of danger from local councils is realistic about what non-lethal punishments¹⁰⁹ a council actually could inflict, and in keeping with other contemporary reports. If Matthean missionaries were attempting to operate within Jewish networks and to recruit devout Jews to their cause (and the parameters of the mission in Matt 10:5-6 suggests they were), then submission to synagogue discipline may have been the price of doing business. However, we should also note that the Mishnah limits the use of judicial floggings to offenses against the Torah; it was not for the suppression of heresy.¹¹⁰ It is entirely possible that many lay Jewish Christians privately practiced and preached Christianity without offending against the Torah or disrupting ordinary synagogue services, and thus never faced censure.¹¹¹ Synagogue discipline may have been commonplace, but it was certainly not ubiquitous.

Having discussed synagogues and local councils, Matthew turns his attention higher up the Palestinian social order to a different class of persecutor: rulers and kings (Matt 10:18). The appearance of rulers and kings introduces the possibility of capital punishment into the narrative. Rome, not the synagogue, had the official capacity to execute dissidents. In synagogues, the missionaries stand to be injured or humiliated, but not killed. The number of Christians or Christian Jews who were killed by other Jews for their belief in Jesus is probably small and occurred primarily through unofficial channels. We have some accounts of Jewish leaders executing Christian leaders, such as Herod's execution of James son of Zebedee (Acts 12:2; cf. Mark 10:33-45) and the execution of

¹⁰⁹ Marcus notes the existence of Zealot "kangaroo courts" during the Jewish War for the purpose of locating and killing enemies of their movement (*J.W.* 5.1.1; Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 882). These may have been a contemporary reality for Mark, but probably not Matthew.

¹¹⁰ Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 882.

¹¹¹ Hare, *Theme of Jewish Persecution*, 44.

James the brother of Jesus with other Torah-breakers under Ananias (Josephus, *Ant.* 20.200). We also have some records of Jewish crowds carrying out extrajudicial executions (Stephen's stoning in Acts 7:57-60 is particularly infamous), though these reports are not common.¹¹² Thompson supposes that incidents of this nature are in view in John 16:2, though she notes that lethal Roman persecution of Christians is far better documented.¹¹³ Gentile courts have the authority to kill the missionaries (Matt 10:21) They can also seriously interrupt missionary work, because of the potential for slow arrest and court proceedings to keep missionaries off the field.¹¹⁴

The warnings of persecution in Matt 10:16-23 reveal neither heightened anti-Judaism nor anti-gentile sentiments. No one group is singled out as the cause of danger. Matthew emphasizes Israel as an agent of persecution, predicting that persecution will begin immediately and locally during a mission to Israel.¹¹⁵ He also indicates that gentile rulers pose a particular risk because of their authority to kill and imprison. As far as the missionaries are concerned, no one is safe. Betrayal begins in the household and ends before powerful strangers (Matt 10:19-20). No ethnic group is depicted as inherently receptive to the missionaries' message. If anything, Matthew's wariness is reserved not for Jews or gentiles but for the elite in both communities. Councils, synagogues, governors, and kings threaten the missionaries – people with civic or spiritual authority. Matthew primarily recounts official actions against the missionaries from synagogues and the empire. Nonetheless, the danger at home is significant as well (Matt 10:21-22). The

¹¹² Ibid., 20-43.

¹¹³ Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 297-8.

¹¹⁴ Nolland, *Matthew*, 424-5.

¹¹⁵ Culpepper, *Matthew*, 202.

generic and dramatic warning “Beware of people!” (Matt 10:17) encourages indiscriminate caution vis-à-vis all sides,¹¹⁶ and a shrewd missionary is slow to trust anyone (Matt 10:16). As we will see in the next section, though, the situation is not entirely hopeless. Persecution will not last long. The missionary project takes place in the context of hope for an imminent end, and the missionaries will not need to hold out for long.

2.7 Seventh motif: Missionary work is closely associated with imminent eschatology

As we have seen, Matthew’s missionary discourse is redacted both from Mark’s account of the commissioning of the twelve (Mark 6:7-13) and from the apocalyptic prophecy on the Mount of Olives (Mark 13:3-37). Matthew sees missionary work and persecution as signs of the final tribulation. He demonstrates this by incorporating this eschatological material from Mark 13, particularly Mark’s description of Christian persecution (Mark 13:9-13), into his missionary discourse. Mark appears to describe his own circumstances in Mark 13:9-13; the future events that Jesus predicts in the world of the narrative are contemporary realities for Mark now, and a sign that the end is not far off.¹¹⁷ Matthew agrees, though in this discourse apocalyptic violence has always been part of the missionary experience. The eschatological threat of being “delivered up”

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 202.

¹¹⁷ Marcus, *Mark*, 2:889.

(Matt 24:9-10; cf. Mark 13:9) in the great tribulation applies to the audience of the missionary discourse (Matt 10:19-21). The tribulation is underway and has been for some time. In this context, the nearness of the Parousia is invoked as a promise. If the missionaries remain active and steadfast, they will be saved at the “end” (Matt 10:22). This “end” is imminent, since the disciples will not “finish the towns of Israel” before the Son of Man comes (Matt 10:23).

This saying of Matt 10:23, that the disciples will not “finish the towns of Israel” before the Son of Man comes, has caused no small amount of trouble for exegetes. On its face, the passage seems to make the rather extraordinary claim that the disciples will not run out of new towns in Israel to missionize before the Parousia comes. In such a small area, this is certainly not a process that would take a great deal of time, and almost certainly not the forty or fifty years between Jesus’s day and Matthew’s.

The interpretation of the saying hangs on two main exegetical decisions. First, what is the “coming of the Son of Man?” Second, what does it mean to “finish the towns of Israel?”

2.7.1 The Coming of the Son of Man

Does the coming of the Son of Man have to refer to the Parousia? Not necessarily. Some scholars have sought to identify the return of the Son of Man with a more

obviously proximate event: the resurrection,¹¹⁸ the ministry of the Holy Spirit,¹¹⁹ the Jewish War,¹²⁰ or even Jesus physically reuniting with his disciples at the end of their mission, as in Mark 6:30.¹²¹ In this case, the process of “finishing the towns of Israel” might be a short one and might even end before the events recounted in Matthew’s Gospel are completed. If this is the case, it is possible that Matthew did not expect the eschaton to come quickly after the lifetime of Jesus. It is also possible that Matthew considers the mission of Israel to be complete. However, as we will argue, it is most likely that the “coming” of the Son of Man in Matt 10:23 refers to the Parousia.¹²²

First, when Matthew refers to the Son of Man’s coming (ἔρχομαι, Matt 16:27-28; 24:30; 24:37, 44; 25:13, 31; 26:64),¹²³ he usually means the Parousia. The clear exceptions are Matt 11:19, 18:11, 20:28. In Matt 11:19 the Son of Man is said to have “come eating and drinking,” an apparent reference to his first advent. This advent is already underway when Jesus commissions the disciples in Matt 10, and therefore cannot

¹¹⁸ William Foxwell Albright and Christopher Stephen Mann, *Matthew: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, The Anchor Bible 26 (New Haven: Yale U. Press, 2008), 125; Garbe, *Der Hirte Israels*, 146; Konradt, *Israel, the Church, and the Gentiles*, 84; Levine, *Social and Ethnic Dimensions*, 51; Meier, *Vision of Matthew*, 120-21; Jürgen Roloff, “Das Reich des Menschensohnes. Ein Beitrag zur Eschatologie des Matthäus,” in *Eschatologie und Schöpfung*, ed. Martin Evang, Helmut Merklein, and Michael Wolter (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1997), 288; Leopold Sabourin, “‘You Will Not Have Gone Through All the Towns of Israel, Before the Son of Man Comes’ (Matt 10:23b),” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 7.1 (1977): 5–11, 9-10; Wilk, *Jesus und die Völker*, 86.

¹¹⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.302.

¹²⁰ Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia*, 68-9; Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:280; Martin Künzi, *Das Naherwartungslogion Matthäus 10:23: Geschichte seiner Auslegung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1970), 168; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Gottes Herrschaft und Reich. eine biblisch-theologische Studie* (Herder, 1965), 141.

¹²¹ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, 34.1; Jacques Dupont, “‘Vous n’aurez pas achevé les villes d’Israël avant que le Fils de l’Homme ne vienne’ (Mat. X 23),” *Novum Testamentum* 2, no. 3/4 (1958): 228–44. Sabourin challenges this reading in “You Will Not Have Gone Through All the Towns of Israel,” 5-6.

¹²² Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:187; Konradt, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles*, 84; Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 187.

¹²³ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:675.

be the referent of Matt 10:23. In Matt 18:11 the Son of Man is said to have “come to seek and save that which is lost,” another reference to his first advent. Matthew 20:28 includes a third reference to Jesus’s first advent, reporting that the Son of Man “came to give his life as a ransom.” In Matt 10:23, though, it does not seem plausible to think that Jesus is referring to his first advent, which has already occurred well before the missionary discourse. The only other way Matthew uses the concept of “the coming of the Son of Man” is to refer to the Parousia.¹²⁴

Second, a reference to the Parousia makes the most sense in the context of the passage. The reference to the Parousia explains Matthew’s strategy. The work of missionizing Israel will not go on for long, so the correct response to persecution in one city is simply to move on to the next and try again. The reference to the Parousia also makes sense as a comfort and an assurance that the time of travel and persecution will last only a short time.¹²⁵ The fact that Matt 10:23 functions as a *Trostwort*¹²⁶ does not diminish the imminency of Matthew’s eschatology, however. Any comfort that is to be found in this passage exists precisely because of imminent eschatology. It is not much of a comfort to the disciples to be told that they will not run out of cities to flee to before the transfiguration occurs, because the transfiguration would not end their trials or persecution. Similarly, while Jesus’s resurrection grants him new authority and enthrones him over the whole world, this moment is clearly not the moment of deliverance that

¹²⁴ For Matthew’s “two advents” schema, see Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People*, 185-91.

¹²⁵ Luz, *Matthew*, 2:91.

¹²⁶ Roman Bartnicki, “Das Trostwort an die Jünger in Mt 10,23,” *TZ* 43.4 (1987), 311-9; Brown, “The Mission to Israel in Matthew’s Central Section,” 87. While both scholars argue that the phrase functions more to assure the disciples than predict an imminent end, we have argued these themes are not in tension with each other.

persecuted disciples are told to wait for. The disciples are not told to endure until the resurrection. They are told to endure beyond that to the end (Matt 10:22; 24:13).

Matthew 10:23 assumes imminent eschatology. The work must be done because the Son of Man is returning. The work of mission will continue until the eschaton, and those who carry it out with fortitude until then will be rewarded. The end is in view, and the work of mission is inextricably linked with the coming Parousia.

2.7.2 Finishing the Towns of Israel

According to Matt 10:23, the disciples will not “finish” (τελέω) the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes. The direct object of τελέω is simply “cities.” What exactly the disciples will finish doing is not clear. One option is that they simply won’t finish fleeing (φεύγω), which Jesus commands the disciples to do in Matt 10:23a whenever they face resistance. Read in this light, Matt 10:23 is intended to comfort. It assures the disciples that they will never lack for a safe place to take refuge in Israel.¹²⁷ They may run from town to town, but they will never lack a city in Israel to flee to.

The second option is that the disciples will not finish missionizing Israel. In this reading, the command to flee to the next city in the event of persecution is an instruction about both expediency and urgency. The disciples may as well flee to the next city when they face resistance, because there are plenty of towns to reach, lots of work to do, and

¹²⁷ Hubert Frankmölle, *Jahwebund und Kirche Christ, Jahwebund und Kirche Christi: Studien zur Form- und Traditionsgeschichte des Evangeliums nach Matthäus*, NTA 10 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1974), 130-5; Nolland, *Matthew*, 427. Frankmölle reads “Israel” metaphorically to include anyone who accepts the Gospel, so that 10:23 is a promise that there will always be a safe place for missionaries until the Parousia.

not much time. Of course, both interpretive options could also be implied together: the disciples will not run out of safe havens in Israel, which will allow them to continue working until the Son of Man comes. The work of missionizing Israel will simply continue wherever the missionaries can find safety and shelter.¹²⁸

However, is it actually likely Matthew would think that the missionaries would not run out of either cities to flee to or cities to missionize before the Son of Man returns? Israel is not so large, and it does not seem as though it would take twelve people very long to move through its towns. One possibility is that the “towns of Israel” could include the Diaspora, and thus fleeing and missionizing them would take years, if not decades.¹²⁹ However, this is not likely. Post-exilic writers tend to use the phrase “towns of Israel” to refer to Jewish cities in Israel (e.g., 2 Esdras 2:70; 3:1; 17:73). Matthew probably means that the disciples will not finish their work in Israel itself before the final judgment.¹³⁰

The difficulty of this interpretation only exists if Matthew thinks missionary work must be done in virgin territory. If missionaries count a city as completed after they have visited once, then it is highly unlikely that Matthew would think this work would still be going on forty years after Jesus’s lifetime. However, many religious itinerants in the early Christian movement had no such reservations about missionizing a city that already had a Christian presence, or returning to an area that they had previously visited. For example, Paul’s missionary opponents did not confine themselves to cities that had had no previous Christian contact. In fact, they seemed to consider correcting or supplementing the work of other Christian teachers to be part of the missionary’s calling. Such teachers

¹²⁸ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:191.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, *Matthew*, 2:191.

¹³⁰ With Nolland, *Matthew*, 427-429.

occasionally went where Paul went, and operated in churches that Paul had founded (Gal 1:6-9; Phil 1:15-16).¹³¹ For such teachers, missionary work did not only refer to the business of creating new converts, but also to supervising recent converts, preventing heresy, and amending points of doctrine when they disagreed with other missionaries. The work of re-missionizing a city with an established Christian presence was not necessarily competitive, either. The Didache assumes that wandering teachers will frequent locations where a Christian community has already been established. According to the Didache, congregations could expect “apostles” to pass through from time to time and serve as spiritual leadership for current members of the community (11:3-12).¹³² Even Paul, who did not wish to “build on another’s foundation” (Rom 15:20) and prioritized planting churches in unreached cities (1 Cor 3:6), apparently returned on multiple occasions to cities where he had already established churches. Paul kept in contact with established churches (1 Cor 4:17; 2 Cor 11:28-29; Phil 2:19; 1 Thess 3:5-7), planned return visits (1 Cor 4:18-21; 16:3-7; 2 Cor 12:20-13:2; Phil 2:24; Phlm 22), and addressed failed plans to return to churches (2 Cor 1:15--2:1). Acts also reports Paul returning to his churches in 14:21b, 15:36, and 18:23.¹³³ In light of this, we should not assume that once a missionary had either faced opposition or performed charismatic activity in a city for some time that this city would be considered “finished.” Missionaries regularly returned to locations they had previously visited, or went to cities that already

¹³¹ John M. G. Barclay, “Mirror Reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test Case,” *JSNT* 10.31 (1987): 73–93; Martyn, “A Law-Observant Mission to Gentiles: The Background of Galatians,” 307–24.

¹³² On the Didache’s expectations for the support of peripatetic and local prophets and teachers see Thomas O’Loughlin, *The Didache: A Window onto the Earliest Christians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 115-25.

¹³³ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 2179.

had Christian congregations founded by another missionary. In light of this, it does not seem that we can say for certain what would qualify as “finishing” a city, let alone an entire region of them. It could mean running out of missionary work to do or running out of cities where a missionary could operate safely. Visiting a city one time, though, is not the only possible explanation, and does not fit with the models established by other early Christian missionaries.

When we consider patterns of Christian persecution in the first three centuries, the chances that missionaries might leave cities for a short time and then return later become even more likely. Violent resistance to Christian preaching was extremely localized and sporadic in the first three centuries after Jesus.¹³⁴ One outbreak of resistance to Christian activity did not mean that a certain city would be universally opposed to Christian missionaries in all times and all places. There is no reason to think that this would have been less true in Palestine. It is completely credible that a missionary might arrive in a village, work for some time, and eventually move on after tensions made continued work in this area untenable. Missionaries could always return on a later occasion once tensions had calmed. This pattern is attested elsewhere in the New Testament. According to Acts 8:1, the outbreak of hostilities in Jerusalem caused some, but not all, the Christians there to leave the city. However, later on Christians came and went from Jerusalem without incident (Acts 11:2; 15:2-4). Paul also indicates that he was forced to leave Thessalonica because of danger (1 Thess 2:17; Acts 17:13-14) but made plans to return there almost immediately (1 Thess 2:18).

¹³⁴ G. E. M. De Ste. Croix, “Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?,” *Past and Present* 26 (1963): 6–38.

In light of all this, there is no real reason to suppose that Matthew thinks a city is “finished” once missionaries have been there one time. In 10:14 he allows for the possibility of mixed receptions within a city. The act of shaking off one’s sandals against a whole town is treated as a possibility, but Matthew also seems to be aware that in any particular town, some households might accept the missionaries while others reject them. In these cases, it would not contradict the saying of Matt 10:14 for a missionary to return to those houses at a later date when he or she was welcomed.¹³⁵ What it means to “complete” a town may be up to the discretion of the individual missionary. Matthew has no positive narration about what it means to be finished with a town – i.e., when a certain number of people there have converted, or when a missionary feels divinely called to move on. It seems that being finished with a town is usually a negative situation that arises from necessity – when a missionary can no longer operate there at all because of resistance, for example.

The nature of Christian persecution in Jewish communities makes the possibility of repeated missionary returns in Israel itself all the more likely. Most conflict that Jewish Christian missionaries would face among Jews would have been intrareligious and non-lethal. This would almost certainly mean that missionary activity could continue in a certain area even after an outbreak of hostilities. It is plausible to think that a missionary could be disciplined for disrupting a synagogue, accept the discipline, leave town, and come back to the same village six months later as a forgiven penitent, and then work through less public channels. This was exactly what synagogue discipline was

¹³⁵ For Matt 10:11 as a reference to communities that have already been Christianized, see Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:175 and Gundry, *Matthew*, 188.

supposed to accomplish. Nor would a returning missionary have good reason to expect that he would be subject to constant physical abuse. Hare notes that the experience of a Jewish Christian being beaten must have been relatively infrequent; Paul would not have boasted of the frequency of his beatings if most missionaries had been through as much or more than he had. Less strident forms of proselytization may have been met with less resistance.¹³⁶

All this is to say – the process of “finishing” the towns of Israel in terms of missionizing them absolutely could continue into Matthew’s own day or beyond. It also does not need to be read in opposition to “fleeing” through the towns of Israel.¹³⁷ Missionaries will not run out of work to do, and they will not run out of safe places in Israel to do it before the Son of Man returns.

2.8 Eighth motif: The work is not finished at the time of writing

Finally, Matt 10 indicates that at the time that Matthew is writing, the mission in Israel to the Jews who live there is not complete, and the project is still ongoing. Matthew’s Gospel reports a commission made by Jesus to the original disciples. However, this does not mean the mission to Israel was a *fait accompli* in Jesus’s lifetime, well before Matthew wrote his own Gospel. A number of clues in the text suggest that Matthew does not report this mission as a historical recollection, but as a guideline for a mission that continues in his own era.

¹³⁶ Hare, *Theme of Jewish Persecution*, 46.

¹³⁷ For a reading that encompasses both fleeing and missionizing see John M. McDermott, “Mt. 10:23 in Context.” *BZ* 28.1 (1984): 230–40.

2.8.1 The Coming of the Son of Man

If our exegetical conclusions in §2.7.1 are correct, Matt 10:23 is a critical piece of evidence that Matthew does not depict missionary activity to Jews ceasing during the course of his narrative. The Son of Man has not returned at the time that Matthew writes. Therefore, the missionaries have not finished going through the towns of Israel.¹³⁸

This reading has certainly not gone unchallenged. Luz resists it in his commentary, since he argues that by Matthew's own day the mission to Israel actually *had* been completed, and now the work of the church had moved on to the work of proselytizing gentiles (in keeping with his interpretation of 21:43).¹³⁹ In Luz's reading, Matt 10:23 is "corrected" along with Matt 10:5-6 by the commission to worldwide mission in Matt 28:16-20. The mission to the "towns of Israel" is ended not by the Parousia but by the command to the church to turn its attention to the gentiles. The "towns of Israel" are not receiving missionaries any longer, and Matthew's church has moved elsewhere.

It is possible that Matthew has left a saying in his Gospel that he believes to be irrelevant, superseded, or invalid. However, the more likely option is that this statement must have some continuing relevance for Matthew and his community.¹⁴⁰ Matthew is comfortable with eliding details from Mark that he considered to be incorrect or inaccurate (e.g., the counting of the multiplied loaves and leftovers in Mark 8:17-21). If

¹³⁸ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:190; Gnllka, *Das Matthäusevangelium*, 1:379.

¹³⁹ Luz, *Matthew*, 2:93. By the time Luz completed his third volume, his view had evolved (Luz, *Matthew*, 3:360).

¹⁴⁰ "Our author's compositional habits were not like those of a sea-bottom scavenger which picks up everything without discrimination. Matthew, as his treatment of Mark demonstrates, felt quite free to drop what did not impress him as valuable" (Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:192).

the Gospel includes this saying, it is probably because the redactor thinks it is correct.

The work of mission in Israel continues because Jesus has not returned.

As we touched on in §2.7.1, Jesus promises that the missionary who “endures to the end” will be saved (Matt 10:22b). This, coupled with the promise of the return of the Son of Man in Matt 10:23, indicates that the missionary must endure and keep working to the end of all things.¹⁴¹ The disciples must work as missionaries in Israel until the end of the age, because this, and only this, is the point at which missionary work and its attendant hardships will stop.¹⁴²

2.8.2 Anachronism

Matthew’s extensive use of anachronism indicates that his text is meant not only to recall a historical event that has already taken place, but to teach a contemporary audience. The text of the discourse often does not seem to refer to events that happened in Jesus’s own day. The entire speech points beyond the experience of Jesus and his disciples into Matthew’s era.¹⁴³

First, the depiction of the mission is open-ended. The lack of linear storytelling in Matt 10, compared with the other Synoptic Gospels, makes it difficult to understand this

¹⁴¹ Poul Nepper-Christensen, “Matt 10,23 et crux interpretum,” *Dansk Teologisk Tidsskrift* 58 (1995): 161–75.

¹⁴² Weaver, *Matthew’s Missionary Discourse*, 15.

¹⁴³ E. Schott, “Die Aussendungsrede, Mt 10, Mc 6, Lc 9, 10,” *ZNW* 7 (1906): 140-50, 143; Heinz Schürmann, “Zur Traditions- und Redaktionsgeschichte von Mt 10,23,” *BZ* 3 (1959): 82–8. Contra Robert Morosco, “Matthew’s Formation of a Commissioning Type-Scene Out of the Story of Jesus’ Commissioning the Twelve,” *JBL* 103/4 (1984), 539-56. Morosco argues that only Matt 10:16-42 applies to the church generally while Matt 10:1-15 applies to Jesus’s own context.

passage as a historical recollection of the early Christian mission to Israel or a narrative device that juxtaposes a pre-Easter mission to Israel with a post-Easter mission to the nations. The disciples neither go out nor come back.¹⁴⁴ Both Mark and Luke depict the missionaries going out and returning from their journey to tell Jesus about what they were able to do (Mark 6:30; Luke 10:17). Instead, Matthew simply ends the missionary discourse, and all twelve, apparently unharmed, disciples are present again in Matt 12:1. Matthew does not tell us the story of the mission of the original twelve. He draws on the memory of their mission to give instructions to missionaries that are valid in his own day.

This fits with the role of the disciples in Matthew's Gospel more generally. The Matthean disciples are not only historical figures who lived and worked alongside Jesus in the recent past, but are also characters who represent Christians in Matthew's own era.¹⁴⁵ Matthew recognizes a strong sense of continuity between the twelve disciples named in Matt 10:1-4 and the disciples in his present church. This is suggested both by the Gospel's lack of specialized titles for the twelve disciples, and by its willingness to bestow the identity of μαθητής upon a wide range of figures. The Matthean disciples have no particular titles in the text that suggests that they are set apart from the missionaries and church leaders who followed in their footsteps. Matthew rarely uses the term ἀπόστολος (Matt 10:2) for these early eyewitnesses of Jesus's ministry, far preferring to use only the title μαθητής.¹⁴⁶ Discipleship in Matthew is broad enough that it does not always include those who physically traveled with Jesus during his mission.

¹⁴⁴ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:190; Luz, *Studies in Matthew*, 146-7. Foster finds this unpersuasive in *Community, Law, and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, 222-3 for reasons discussed in chapter 1 of this dissertation.

¹⁴⁵ Culpepper, *Matthew*, 193.

¹⁴⁶ Luz, *Studies in Matthew*, 129-30.

Joseph of Arimathea, for instance, is said to be “discipled” to Jesus (Matt 27:57), a redactional change from Mark 15:43. The word “disciple” is used alongside a number of similar words, such as ἀδελφός, which are relevant words for other Christians long after the time of the original disciples.¹⁴⁷ Matthew wishes his readers to see the disciples as examples and analogues of Jesus-worshippers in his own day, not only as a distinct set of historical persons.

The depiction of persecution also seems to refer to later events.¹⁴⁸ No Gospel depicts the disciples of Jesus facing beatings and trials before Jesus himself did. The threat of being taken before various “governors and kings” (10:18) also suggests a time beyond the original Palestinian setting of Jesus’s day. There is one governor (ἡγεμών) in Israel, not several, and at most one king (βασιλεύς), though Matthew also uses the more accurate word tetrarch (τετραάρχης) in Matt 14:11¹⁴⁹ The text seems to point to events after Jesus’s lifetime, not just during it.

If the mission that Matthew is describing in Matt 10 looks more like missionary work in Matthew’s day rather than that in Jesus’s day, and if this mission goes on until the Parousia, it is harder to make the case that Matthew is reporting a mission in Israel that has already been completed. The mission that Matthew depicts occurs in Matthew’s own day, and it will continue until the final judgment.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 131. See also Luz, *Matthew*, 2:62.

¹⁴⁸ McDermott, “Mt. 10:23,” 232-3.

¹⁴⁹ Weaver, *Matthew’s Missionary Discourse*, 15.

2.9 Conclusion

In chapter 10, the Matthean Jesus commands a mission that is geographically limited, dependent on private hospitality, and apparently ongoing at the time that Matthew writes. The missionaries themselves serve as representatives of Jesus and seek competition with Jewish leadership. This work is strongly associated with imminent eschatology and targets Jewish people as beneficiaries of the movement. Gentiles remain present primarily as onlookers to the mission, and only rarely as recipients of ministry.

As far as the ethnicity of missionary targets is concerned, Matthew is very clear that the mission he describes in this passage is meant to reach Jews. However, this does not seem to be because a more universal mission will replace it later. The mission to Israel described in this passage seems to be one that is going on in Matthew's own day. It is difficult to make the case that what Matthew depicts in 10:5-42 is a limited, Israel-centric missionary project that Jesus and his own disciples carried out and completed in the first generation of the Jesus movement. The use of anachronism and the open-ended nature of the mission, which will continue until Jesus's return, strongly suggests that Matthew's missionary discourse is meant to be applicable to his own day as well.

The question that remains is whether Matthew's theology of mission, as it is expressed throughout the rest of the text, remains consistent with the theology of Matt 10. If so, this is further reason to suppose that the instructions of Matthew 10 continue to govern missionary activity even as the mission moves on to new environments. As we will see in the following chapters, most of the tropes from chapter 10 appear every time Matthew discusses missionary activity. The only significant exception is the geographic restrictions Jesus places on the disciples in Matt 10:5b-6. Matthew's overall

understanding of missionary activity is not disjointed –first to Jews, then to others –but cohesive, unified, and contemporary with his own church. It continuously recalls the instructions of Matt 10, without contradicting or replacing the patterns set by this first mission in Israel. There is one missionary project discussed throughout the Gospel, even if Matthew allows for a geographic expansion of the area where this mission is practiced. It is a missionary project that extends the work that Jesus himself did in his own lifetime. It is dependent on networks of hospitality to sustain it. It is met with resistance from Jews and gentiles alike. And finally, it continues into Matthew’s own era.

3. Missionaries Between Matt 10 and 28

In the last chapter, we examined the missionary discourse and how Matthew explains and introduces the idea of missionary work. In this discourse Matthew teaches that missionary work is carried out by radical, hospitality-dependent itinerants, who represent Jesus to Israel. Is this consistent with how missionary work is depicted later in the same text?

Matthew's two missionary commands, Matt 10:5-6 and 28:16-20, are probably the best known and most explicit references to missionary activity in the First Gospel. Nonetheless, missionary work is actually a pervasive theme in Matthew's work, particularly in the latter third of the text. In the fifth chapter of this dissertation, we will focus on the final commission in Matt 28:16-20. But first, in this chapter, we will focus on missionary activity as it is discussed between the two commissions. Matthew depicts Jesus predicting future missionary endeavors (23:33-36; 24:1-51), and missionaries appear in multiple parables (21:33-46; 22:1-14; 25:31-46). We will now discuss the role of missionaries in the parable of the tenants (21:33-46), the parable of the wedding banquet (22:1-14), the woes against the scribes and Pharisees (23:33-36), the eschatological discourse (24:1-51), and the judgment of the sheep and the goats (25:31-46).

If Matthew is preparing to introduce a major shift in his theology of mission in Matt 28:16-20, we would likely expect to see evidence of discontinuity emerging in the later parts of his narrative. In particular, if the Gospel is preparing the reader for a turn from a mission to Israel to a mission to gentiles, we would also see this theme emerging in the text, displacing the theme of the mission to Israel. However, what I intend to show

is that much of the material that appeared in Matt 10 is actually assumed in these later depictions of missionary activity. This may suggest that, rather than introducing discontinuity into his theology of mission, Matthew's understanding of missionary work and its praxis is actually quite stable throughout his text.

3.1 Missionaries in the parable of the tenants: Matt 21:33-46

The parable of the tenants, redacted from Mark 12:1-11, depicts the owner of a vineyard repeatedly sending his slaves to the tenant farmers of his vineyard in order to receive the harvest. In response, the tenant farmers mistreat and kill them (21:35). When the owner finally sends his own son to collect the crop, the tenants decide to kill the son in order to receive the inheritance (21:39). The vineyard owner avenges the murder by killing the tenants, and then hands the property over to new tenant farmers (21:41). Matthew interprets the act of passing the vineyard to new farmers as the transference of the "kingdom of God" to a different ἔθνος (21:43).

3.1.1 Is the Parable of the Tenants about Missionaries?

Is this a passage about missionaries? The slaves in the parable are repeatedly "sent" (ἀποστέλλω, 21:34-36) by the vineyard owner, which may suggest they play the role of missionaries in the text. However, their fates at the hands of the tenants suggest that they could stand in for a number of persecuted divine representatives mentioned in Matthew's text. The word δέρω, "to hit" in v. 35 is a Matthean hapax,¹ probably lifted

¹ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:181.

from Mark 12:3. It is semantically similar to μαστιγῶω, “to flog,” a persecution which befalls missionaries in 10:17 and Jesus’s “prophets, wise people, and scribes” in 23:34.² Other slaves are killed (ἀποκτείνω), a destiny also faced by the prophets Jesus sends to Jerusalem (23:34) as well as the prophets who preceded him (23:37).³ Other notable murder victims in Matthew’s Gospel include John the Baptist (14:5) and missionaries (10:28, 24:9). Finally, some of the slaves in v. 35 are stoned (λιθοβολέω). The addition of stoning alerts us to Matthew’s redactional hand; stoning is never referenced as a fate of the slaves in the source text of Mark 12:3-5. This verb foreshadows Jesus’s later account in the woe discourse that Jerusalem is the city that “stones the prophets” (23:37).

The total collection of figures that Matthew names in his Gospel as victims of beating, stoning, and killing include the Hebrew prophets, John the Baptist, the disciples, and missionaries. The slaves could plausibly represent any number of these people. Because of this, it is common for scholars to argue that the persecuted slaves in the parable of the vineyard are the Hebrew prophets. This is argued on the grounds that the slaves in the parable of the tenants come before the sending of the vineyard owner’s son, not after.⁴ However, Matthew’s theology may not make a strong enough distinction

² Ibid., 3:181

³ For the tradition of the persecution and silencing of Israel’s prophets, see 1 Kings 19:1; 22:27; Jer 20:2, 7; 40:1; Micah 2:6; Amos 7:10; Matt 5:12; Acts 7:52; Heb 11:35-38; 1 Enoch 89:51-53; Keener, *Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 512.

⁴ Garbe, *Der Hirte Israels*, 85; Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia*, 121; Ferdinand Hahn, “Das Gleichnis von der Einladung zum Festmahl,” in *Verborum Veritas*, ed. Otto Böcher and Gustav Stählin (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1970), 79; Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 72; Hans-Josef Klauck, *Allegorie und Allegorese in synoptischen Gleichnistexten*, 2nd ed., NTAbh (Münster: Aschendorff, 1986), 312; Knowles, *Jeremiah in Matthew’s Gospel*, 116; Jan Lambrecht, *Out of the Treasure: The Parables in the Gospel of Matthew*, Louvain Theological and Pastoral Monographs 10 (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 136-7; Petri Luomanen, *Entering the Kingdom of Heaven: A Study on the Structure of Matthew’s View of Salvation*, WUNT 2. Reihe 101 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 174-5; Luz, *Matthew*, 3:53; Marguerat, *Le jugement dans l’Évangile de Matthieu*, 336; Olmstead, *Matthew’s Trilogy of Parables*, 123; Walker, *Die Heilsgeschichte im ersten Evangelium*, 67, 91-3; Wilk, *Jesus und die Völker in der Sicht der Synoptiker*, 109.

between prophets and missionaries for this reading to be required. Matthew emphasizes the continuity between missionaries and prophets, not their discontinuity (5:12; 10:40-42; 23:29-32). The sequence of the events of the story (slaves, then son) does not change the fact that for Matthew, missionaries and their prophetic forebears occupy the same role. In Israel's history, God continuously sends messengers to God's people, including both the earlier prophets⁵ and now the missionaries. Likewise, the emergence of the kingdom with John the Baptist brings something new to the world; the "prophets and law prophesied until John" (11:13). And yet, this prophecy has its roots in history. John is a prophet himself (11:9), the new Elijah (11:14). Matthew repeatedly juxtaposes continuity with discontinuity in his Gospel (13:52). For this reason, it seems overly determined to argue that this parable depicts the rejection of the Hebrew prophets, but not the rejection of Christian missionaries. This parable narrates the persecution of God's messengers, which includes both groups.

3.1.2 Israel in the Parable of the Tenants

This brings us to the next question that is critical for understanding Matthew's theology of mission: does this passage depict the rejection of Israel and a turn to the

⁵ For prophets as God's slaves, see Jer 7:25; Amos 3:7; Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 428; Jonathan Draper, "Apostles, Teachers, and Evangelists: Stability and Movement of Functionaries in Matthew, James, and Didache," in *Matthew, James, and Didache: Three Related Documents in Their Jewish and Christian Settings*, ed. Huub van de Sandt and Jürgen K. Zangenberg, Symposium 45 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2008), 50. For continuity between the prophets and the missionaries see, Dorothy Jean Weaver, *The Irony of Power: The Politics of God within Matthew's Narrative*, Studies in Peace and Scripture: Institute of Mennonite Studies (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2017), 200-2.A

nations? If it does, this would be evidence for major discontinuity in Matthew's theology: an earlier mission to Israel has been replaced by a mission to gentiles.

One way to address this issue is to examine whether this parable is told against the Jewish leadership, or against the people of Israel in general.⁶ According to Matt 21:45, the "chief priests and Pharisees" understand that the parable (and apparently the entire parable trilogy –note the plural τὰς παραβολὰς in 21:46) is told against them. This is a change Matthew has made to his source material. Mark concludes the parable of the tenants with the statement "and they were seeking to seize him...because they understood the parable was told against them" (Mark 12:12). The ones who perceive that Jesus speaks against them are unspecified individuals who wish to arrest Jesus and realize the parable is about them. Mark awkwardly requires his reader to look all the way back to a possible antecedent in Mark 11:27 to identify who these people actually are: the "chief priests, scribes, and elders." Matthew clarifies his source text and states that the chief priests and Pharisees are the ones who realize the parable is about them (21:46). They are distinguished from the crowd, which believes that John the Baptist (21:26) and Jesus (21:46) are prophets and prevents the leaders from acting against Jesus for the time being.

So, does Matthew's redaction of Mark 12:12 mean that the parable exclusively polemicizes against Israel's leadership? Maybe. One objection is the possibility that Matthew's choice to direct the parable against the "chief priests and Pharisees" instead of "them" is more related to Matthew's desire to construct a good sentence than make a claim about Jesus's opponents. The chief priests and Pharisees may be named as the

⁶ For a larger discussion of the role of Jewish leadership in Matthew's Gospel, see Appendix B.

target of the parable, but to clarify the implied antecedent of Mark 12:12, not to make a theological point. In this construction, the specific address to Israel's leadership should not be overread: the priests and Pharisees are named for the sake of syntax, not because Matthew means to target them instead of the larger population. However, the problem with this reading is that further redactional changes to Mark 12:12 suggest Matthew is being as specific about the targets as he wants to be. In addition to naming them as priests and Pharisees, he also adds a reason why the crowd would prevent opponents from acting against Jesus: they perceive Jesus to be a prophet (Matt 21:46, cf. Matt 21:26/Mark 11:32). This detail is not in Mark 12:12. This makes the distinction in Matt 21:46 between the crowds and the leaders seem more intentional.

Another objection to the idea that Matthew polemicizes exclusively against Israel's leadership here is that Matthew believes the chief priests and Pharisees represent Israel in general, and a parable told against them is a parable told against the people they lead. Stanton, for instance, argues that the "stone the builders rejected" in Matt 21:42 is not Jesus himself but the community around him. The despised community led by Jesus has taken the place of the Jewish community led by the scribes and Pharisees.⁷ In this reading, the contrasted groups are not Jesus and the Jewish leaders, but the religious community led by Christians and the religious community led by Jews. This fits with the dualism of the Gospel (e.g., Matt 12:30), and lays the groundwork for Matthew to contrast the church and synagogue instead of feuding sects of Jewish leaders.

⁷ Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People*, 152.

There are two significant problems with this interpretation. First, the parable's context does not set the reader up to expect a condemnation of Israel at large. Matthew juxtaposes disobedient religious leaders with receptive Jews in the parable trilogy. In the parable of the two sons, Jesus says that the tax collectors and πόρνοι (21:31-32) listened to John the Baptist and "entered the kingdom," but the religious leadership failed to believe in his message (cf. 9:9-13). These receptive sinners are presumably Jewish. In Matt 3:5 the reader is told that John's followers came from Judea, Jerusalem, and the Jordan. In Matt 21:31-32, the tax collectors and πόρνοι are contrasted with the religious leaders because of their ignoble origins and repentance, not because of their ethnicity.⁸ The parable of the brothers primes the reader to hear Jesus further juxtapose the religious leadership against *hoi polloi*. It does not prime us to hear Jesus juxtapose Jews and gentiles. Matthew then ends the parable of the tenants with another comparison between religiously elite Jews and non-religiously elite Jews. The Pharisees and priests wish to kill Jesus but are thwarted by the crowd's receptivity (21:46). The Pharisees and priests may fulfill the role of the tenants (21:38; 21:46), but the crowds do not.

Second, the parable's content does not suggest that it is told against the whole of Israel. The vineyard imagery of the parable is an apparent allusion to Isa 5:1-7. In the Isaiah passage, the vineyard itself is unproductive, despite the owner's best efforts to cultivate it (5:2). The owner destroys the vineyard when it becomes clear that it will never bear fruit (5:5-6). For Isaiah, the vineyard is Israel and Judah (5:7), which are unproductive in producing justice and righteousness despite the owner's labors.⁹ The

⁸ Levine, *The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Matthean Salvation History*, 203-6.

⁹ Cf. Gen Rab. 38:9; Keener, *Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 511; Konradt, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles*, 175.

image of the fruitless vineyard indicts the entirety of both nations. However, Matthew's parable does not depict a fruitless vineyard. There is nothing wrong with the vineyard at all. In fact, the logic of the story assumes that the vineyard produces fruit, since the owner's slaves would otherwise have no need to collect anything from it. The problem is the vineyard's stewards, who refuse to hand over the fruit when it grows (21:34-36).¹⁰ The fruitfulness of the vineyard is further assumed when the vineyard owner destroys the stewards but not the vineyard. In Isaiah, the owner destroys the vineyard because it is useless. In Matthew, the vineyard is productive, and survives. The tenants alone are unproductive, so they alone are replaced. If the vineyard represents Israel, then the parable is not so much about the rejection of Israel as it is about the rejection of Israel's leadership.¹¹ Israel will produce the yield that God is looking for, but its stewards need to go. It thus appears completely reasonable to accept that Matt 21:43 explains that Jesus tells the parable against the leadership of Israel, who do not represent the people in general.

This leaves us with the problem of Matt 21:43. Jesus interprets the parable by predicting that the kingdom will be taken from his interlocutors and given to the ἔθνος producing its fruit. The interpretation of the parable is somewhat at odds with the text that precedes it. Matthew's explanation is suddenly about producing fruit (ποιοῦντι τοὺς καρποὺς, 21:43) rather than handing it over (21:41). The Pharisees and priests are not

¹⁰ Konradt, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles*, 176.

¹¹ From Warren Carter and John Paul Heil, *Matthew's Parables: Audience-Oriented Perspectives*, CBQMS 30 (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1998), 161; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:176, 180; Craig A. Evans, *Matthew*, NCBC (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 2012), 370, 375; Gielen, *Der Konflikt Jesu mit den religiösen und politischen Autoritäten*, 227; Gundry, *Matthew*, 424; Levine, *Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Matthean Salvation History*, 209-10; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 871; Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community*, 60-2.

immediately recognizable as an ἔθνος, so it is not intuitive to think that an ἔθνος would replace them. Has the ἔθνος of Israel been replaced by a different ἔθνος?

Scholars have generally taken one of three interpretive options with this verse. The first option is that the ἔθνος that will receive the kingdom is the church, a predominantly gentile “nation” which will replace the ἔθνος of Israel.¹² At the very least, the ἔθνος of Israel loses its special election and is replaced by the new Jesus-centered community, here depicted as a different ἔθνος that replaces it.¹³ In this reading, Matthew is an early forerunner of the “third race” concept that began to take hold of Christian theology in the second century.¹⁴ Such a position identifies Christians as a group that is distinguishable from Jews and replaces them. If Matt 21:43 articulates a supersessionist theology, this verse may belong (along with 27:62-66 and 28:11-15) to a late, post-70 CE stratum of material reflecting an anti-Jewish theology and assuming a complete split

¹² Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:617; Douglas R. A. Hare, “The Rejection of the Jews in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts,” in *Antisemitism and the Foundations of Christianity*, ed. Alan T. Davies (New York: Paulist Press, 1979): 27-47, 38-9; Hans-Josef Klauck, “Das Gleichnis vom Mord im Weinberg (Mk 12,1–12; Mt 21,33–46; Lk 20,9–19),” *BL* 11 (1970), 137; Armin Kretzer, *Die Herrschaft der Himmel und die Söhne des Reiches. Eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum Basileiabegriff und Basileiaverständnis im Matthäusevangelium*, SBM 10 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1971), 151; William L. Kynes, *A Christology of Solidarity: Jesus as the Representative of His People in Matthew* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991), 136-7; Jan Lambrecht, *Out of the Treasure: The Parables in the Gospel of Matthew*, Louvain Theological and Pastoral Monographs 10 (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 119; Joachim Lange, *Das Erscheinen des Auferstandenen im Evangelium nach Matthäus: eine Traditions- und redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu Mt. 28, 16-20*, FB 11 (Würzburg: Echter-Verlag, 1973), 274; Luz, *Matthew*, 3:39, 42; Park, *The Mission Discourse in Matthew’s Interpretation*, 183-4; Saldarini, *Matthew’s Christian-Jewish Community*, 58n57; Sand, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, 306-7; Bastiaan van Elderen, “The Purpose of Parables According to Matthew 13:10–17,” in *New Dimensions in New Testament Study*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker and Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971): 180-90, 187; Walker, *Die Heilsgeschichte im ersten Evangelium*, 43-4.

¹³ Luz, *Matthew*, 3:41,

¹⁴ The church as a “nation from the nations” appears in 1 Clement 29:3, 7. See James LaGrand, *The Earliest Christian Mission to All Nations in the Light of Matthew’s Gospel* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 96-9; Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition*, Rev. ed (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 41.

between Judaism and the developing church.¹⁵ Such a reading presumes that the transference of the kingdom occurs with the death and resurrection of Jesus,¹⁶ at which time Israel is rejected and the mission to the nations begins.

But is the ἔθνος really a gentile church replacing the nation of Israel? There are a few difficulties. First, ἔθνος does not have the same meaning as ἔθνη. Ἐθνη can serve as a technical term for gentiles, but ἔθνος cannot. If Matthew wanted to express that the kingdom would be taken from Israel and given to the gentiles forming the new church, he would have used the plural form, not the singular.¹⁷

Second, the word ἔθνος usually refers to a national group.¹⁸ This makes it unlikely that the ἔθνος in question is the church, unless Matthew is using this word to prompt the reader to think of the church as a nation. The possibility that Matthew ascribes a national character to the church has been entertained on the grounds of 1 Peter 2:9, which described the epistle's readers as a "holy nation." For example, Keener argues that the ἔθνος of Matt 21:43 is the church, which Matthew depicts as a nation/new Israel that will emerge from the second exodus.¹⁹ However, Exodus allusions are absent from this passage. Konradt denies the usefulness of 1 Pet 2:9 as a useful parallel to Matt 21:43, since 1 Peter is quoting the LXX to depict the church as a "holy nation" and Matthew is not. For this reason, 1 Pet 2:9 is not independent evidence of Christians spontaneously

¹⁵ Peter Tomson, "Transformations of Post-70 Judaism: Scholarly Reconstructions and Their Implications for Our Perception of Matthew, Didache, and James," in *Matthew, James, Didache: Three Related Documents in Their Jewish and Christian Settings*, ed. Huub van de Sandt and Jürgen K. Zangenberg (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2008), 117; 6; Strecker, *Der Weg der Gerechtigkeit*, 169; Sabourin, *L'Évangile selon Saint Mattieu et ses principaux parallèles*, 278; Trilling, *Das Wahre Israel*, 55-6.

¹⁶ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:186.

¹⁷ Konradt, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew*, 178.

¹⁸ Other translations of ἔθνος will be discussed below, but see Konradt, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew*, 181-2.

¹⁹ Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 515-6.

using the word ἔθνος to describe the church, but a quotation that uses the word ἔθνος that a later Christian author repurposed.²⁰ Matthew's text, on the other hand, has not prepared us to see the church as a metaphorical nation. The Gospel refers to Jesus's people as an assembly (Matt 16:18; 18:17) and a family (12:49; 23:8), but not as a nation.

Finally, as we have already argued, even if Matthew does depict the church as an ἔθνος in Matt 21:43, it remains difficult to find good evidence that we ought to identify the replaced tenants with the ἔθνος of Israel. Up until this point, Jesus has not faced consistent rejection from Jews as a class. On one hand, Jesus complains of his critical contemporaries (Matt 11:16-19)²¹ and reviles unrepentant cities where many miracles have been done (11:21-24). But on the other hand, large crowds follow Jesus all over Israel (4:25; 13:2; 15:30; 19:2) and proclaim him as the messiah (21:9, 11). Announcing the rejection of Israel at large at this point in the narrative would be disruptive.

It seems that the first interpretive option, that Matt 21:43 announces the replacement of Israel with the church, is not optimal for making sense of this passage. What other interpretations are available? The second option is Weren's reading, in which Matt 21:43 refers not to a judgment that takes place at the crucifixion or Jewish War, but at the eschaton. Weren derives this reading from Matt 13:12 and 25:29, where the verbs ἀρθήσεται and δοθήσεται appear together to describe the taking and giving that occur as a result of the final judgment.²² In Matthew, the trait of "bearing fruit" (ποιέω τὸς καρπούς) characterizes the worthy who will escape judgment (Matt 3:8-10; 21:43), while

²⁰ Konradt, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew*, 178n61.

²¹ For more on "this generation" see §3.3.2.

²² Wim Weren, "The Use of Isaiah 5:1-7 in the Parable of the Tenants (Mark 12:1-12; Matthew 21:35-46)," *Biblica* 79.1 (1998): 1-26, 22.

failure to produce it merits condemnation. Weren argues that the focus of this parable is Israel's religious leadership, the class John the Baptist castigates for failure to produce fruit in Matt 3:7. The ἔθνος is the church at the end of the age. The defining traits of both the judged and the rewarded are not their ethnicities but their repentant posture towards God's messengers. The significant difference between this reading and the previous one is not just that the scope of the condemned is much narrower (the religious leadership of Israel as opposed to Israel in general), but also when exactly the defining moment of judgment occurs. The act of taking and giving the kingdom does not occur in the course of human history, so it cannot refer to a displacement of Israel in salvation history. Nor can it refer to any change in Matthew's understanding of the targets of mission. It simply refers to eschatological judgment.

The possibility that Matt 21:43 refers to the last judgment should not be too quickly dismissed. For one thing, in the parable of the tenants there is no reference to the Jewish War that is as obvious as the one in the parable of the wedding banquet (22:7). The vineyard owner is said to "destroy" (ἀπόλλυμι, 21:41) the tenants. This is a verb that Matthew uses to describe the historical destruction of the Jewish War (22:7) but also to describe the eschatological destruction of the damned in Gehenna (5:28, 30). Second, the motif of taking and giving is associated with divine, final judgment in Matthew's Gospel (Matt 25:28). The judgment in the parable of the tenants does look sufficiently eschatological for this reading to be worth discussing.

That said, there are a few problems. The first is that even though the destruction of Jerusalem is not depicted in this parable, the events that culminate in the destruction of the temple are still narrated. The killing of prophets and missionaries is strongly

associated with the Jewish War elsewhere in the text; these deaths lead to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in Matt 22:2-7 and 23:34-5. The second challenge is that the divine judgment of “taking” and “giving” is not strictly confined to a final judgment in Matthew’s Gospel. In Matt 13:12, God “takes” and “gives” present-day understanding of Jesus’s teaching. The disciples in Jesus’s own day are given understanding and authority to teach as Jesus’s scribes (13:11, 51), but understanding has been taken from many in the crowd (13:13-17).²³ We can see in the parable discourse that judgment is not an entirely future event. Rather, it is realized at every stage of Jesus’s ministry and beyond. Likewise, in the eschatological discourse, the end of the world and the destruction of Jerusalem are difficult to separate as completely distinct events. The same people who are condemned to face Jerusalem’s destruction (Matt 23:37-8) also face the doom of judgment to Gehenna (23:33). Judgment now is always a foretaste of judgment later, and judgment in the future is always foreshadowed in current events. Matthew starts with a parable about the present-day rejection of Jesus and his missionaries, but redacts the parable further so that it points beyond Jesus’s present conflict, to the destruction of Jerusalem, all the way to the final judgment.

The third interpretive option is that the ἔθνος that will receive the kingdom is the church²⁴ and its leadership as opposed to the Pharisees, not Israel.²⁵ This is the option that

²³ Runesson, *Divine Wrath and Salvation*, 277-9.

²⁴ Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 430-31, argues that in this reading, the church is necessarily a group of mixed ethnicities. However, I am not sure that this passage clearly has gentiles in mind at all. Thus, their position in relationship to the church is difficult to ascertain.

²⁵ Held by Kurt Erlemann, *Das Bild Gottes in den synoptischen Gleichnissen*, BWANT 126 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1988), 176, 234-6; Gundry, *Matthew*, 424-30; Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 302-4; Konradt, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew*, 185; Levine, *The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Matthean Salvation History*, 208-11; Ernst Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Matthäus*, ed. Werner Schmauch, 4th ed., Nachgelassene Ausarbeitungen und Entwürfe zur Übersetzung und Erklärung, KEK Sonderband. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), 314; Franz Mußner, “Die bösen Winzer

Saldarini takes, arguing that ἔθνος can refer not just to a nation but also to a social circle or a guild.²⁶ Israel's leadership loses its role in salvation history, but Israel itself does not. Instead, Israel receives new leaders who will steward Israel in the way God intended. Read in this light, the parable explores many of the same themes we saw Matthew invoke in 9:36 and 10:5-6. The image is again an agricultural one: God's people are depicted as a flock or a vineyard badly in need of tending and cultivation. Its stewards are not up to the task, and must be replaced with representatives of Jesus. The Matthean Jesus's posture towards the larger Jewish world remains compassionate, while his posture to the leadership remains hostile. In this reading, the transference begins during the life and ministry of Jesus and was completed with the death and resurrection of Jesus.²⁷

Could Matthew be using the word ἔθνος to refer to two competing leadership bodies? Once again, this case is difficult to defend. We have no other examples in the Gospel where the word ἔθνος is best defined as a guild. Matthew 21:43 is one of only two occasions in the Gospel in which a singular ἔθνος is mentioned. The other is Matt 24:7, which predicts ἔθνος rising against ἔθνος, which is lifted from Mark 13:8 to denote national groups. Ἐθνος as a group of leaders is not the most intuitive way to read the

nach Matthäus 21, 33– 46,” in *Antijudaismus im Neuen Testament? Exegetische und systematische Beiträge*, ed. Willehad Paul Eckert, Nathan Peter Levinson, and Martin Stöhr, *Abhandlungen zum Christlichjüdischen Dialog 2* (München: Kaiser, 1967): 129-34; 131; Klyne Snodgrass, *The Parable of the Wicked Tenants: An Inquiry into Parable Interpretation*, WUNT 27 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983), 90-4; Kenzo Tagawa, “People and Community in the Gospel of Matthew,” *NTS* 16 (1969/70): 149–62, 161; Tisera, *Universalism According to the Gospel of Matthew*, 226-8; Saldarini, *Matthew's Jewish Christian Community*, 44-5; David L. Turner, “His Glorious Throne: Israel and the Gentiles in Mission and Judgment in the Gospel of Matthew,” in *Matthew within Judaism*, ed. Anders Runesson and Daniel M. Gurtner, *Early Christianity and Its Literature 27* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2020): 135-68, 144, and *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 225-51.

²⁶ Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 429; Saldarini, *Matthew's Jewish-Christian Community*, 58-63.

Saldarini, *Matthew's Jewish-Christian Community*, 59n64, cites Plato Plato, *Rep.* 421c, for an ἔθνος as a voluntary society.

²⁷ Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 429, argues that the transfer of the kingdom occurred with the destruction of Jerusalem.

word ἔθνος, even though it is technically lexically possible. The word ἔθνος tends to refer to a national or ethnic group,²⁸ and thus is an unusual word to describe the Pharisees. But at the same time, since ἔθνος usually refers to a nation instead of a voluntary organization, it is equally unlikely that the ἔθνος is the disciples/the church taking the place of Israel or Israel's leaders. As we discussed above while evaluating the supersessionist interpretive option, in Matthean theology, the church is not a nation.

In light of this, and in light of the difficulties of interpreting ἔθνος as a non-nationalized group of people, I propose an interpretation that, to my knowledge, has not been suggested before: the ἔθνος that will produce the fruits of the kingdom is simply the general population of Israel. According to Matthew, Israel is an ἔθνος that produces fruit. Earlier in the text Jesus likens the crowds of Israel²⁹ to a plentiful harvest that needs workers to gather it in (9:37), similar to the producing vineyard that appears in the parable of the tenants. Furthermore, the most intuitive reading of the parable is that it is told against the priests and Pharisees, according to Matt 21:45. Israel itself would be doing exactly what God expected of it – if it could simply be freed of its leadership that withholds its fruit. This reading of the parable, that Israel would be flourishing and productive if its leadership were removed and the business of the kingdom was given to the people, corresponds well with Matthew's prescription of an idealized, egalitarian governance structure in the church. The church is supposed to have no leaders besides Jesus (23:8), God (23:9), and the community that follows them (18:15-20). The kingdom will be taken from the chief priests and Pharisees and given to the people they once led.

²⁸ Konradt, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew*, 178.

²⁹ Clarified to be crowds of Israel in Matt 10:5-6.

This gives the kingdom to the general population of Israel, the ἔθνος that was always meant to have it.

Thus far, we have argued that the parable of the tenants is best understood as one that condemns Israel's religious leadership and anticipates its overthrow, when the kingdom of God will be given over to the people of Israel. In the parable, God has repeatedly attempted to reach Israel through a continuous series of prophets, missionaries, and Jesus himself. These envoys are repeatedly intercepted and abused by Israel's religious stewards. This finally prompts God to overthrow these leaders, giving the kingdom to the nation "producing the fruits of the kingdom" – namely, the newly-delivered people of Israel. How does this shed light on Matthew's theology of mission?

3.1.3 The Mission in Matt 21:33-46

The most apparent theological consequence of this reading is that the mission Matthew recounts in this parable is still a mission to Israel, as he described previously in Matt 10:5-6. Matthew assumes that the missionaries are still targeting and missionizing Jews, and the parable does not depict the missionaries deviating from this course or even expanding the mission at this time.

This parable also assumes and references a number of themes and motifs from the missionary discourse. For example, the missionary discourse depicts the missionaries as representatives of God and Jesus. They are given Jesus's authority (10:1), their work is an extension of Jesus's work (10:7-8), and Jesus is welcomed or rejected by proxy through

the welcoming and rejection of the missionaries (10:40).³⁰ This is consistent with the tradition of ancient envoys in antiquity, who operated on behalf of their senders, represented their senders' interests, and had a right to the reception that their own senders would receive if they themselves were present.³¹ In the parable of the tenants, the slaves are sent on behalf of the landowner in order to carry out his business. They have a right to be received as though they were the landowner himself. This passage follows classical norms in that the mistreatment of envoys is such a grave offense that this act results in wider violence or even warfare.³² Matthew depicts the missionaries as official envoys here, just as he does in the missionary discourse. The depiction of them as envoys is also reminiscent of the theme of hospitality in the missionary discourse, where the missionaries are instructed to begin their work by finding a sympathetic household that will host them. Similarly, as representatives of the landowner, the landowner's slaves have a right to a landowner's reception, though of course they do not receive it.³³

Another theme from the missionary discourse that reappears in this parable is the theme that missionary work forces a confrontation with Israel's leadership. As we argued in 3.5.1, Matthew's command to go to the "lost sheep of Israel" (10:6) who are without a shepherd (9:36) is a rebuke of Israel's leadership, and makes a play for their authority. The claim that Israel has no shepherd denies the legitimacy of its leadership and encourages the missionaries to encroach on their territory. As we further argued in §2.5.2, the miracles Jesus performs and subsequently delegates to the missionaries force conflict

³⁰ See §2.2.

³¹ See §2.2.2.

³² Mitchell, "New Testament Envoys," 646n14.

³³ *Ibid.*, 647-8.

between Jesus and his associates, on the one hand, and Israel's leadership, on the other. The miracles force the leaders either to accept the miracles as evidence of the presence of the kingdom or to reject them as demonic (9:34; 10:25). In the parable of the tenants, the landowner's repeated sending of slaves, and the eventual escalation of sending his son, forces a conflict between the landowner and the tenants that results in the latter's destruction. The act of sending missionaries is framed as inherently confrontational.

The theme of persecution, discussed in the missionary discourse in Matt 10:17-31, also reappears in the parable of the tenants, though in a different guise. In the missionary discourse, both Jews (10:17) and gentiles (10:18) are accused of persecuting the missionaries.³⁴ However, gentile persecutors do not appear in the parable of the tenants. The persecutors seem to be exclusively Jews, since the target of the parable is the religious leadership. Finally, Matthew continues to associate missionary work with imminent eschatology, as he did in 10:23. In the parable of the tenants, the rejection of the missionaries triggers the Jewish War, an event that Matthew frames as a precursor to an imminent end (24:15-21, 29).

To conclude this section, Matthew reincorporates several important themes from the missionary discourse in this parabolic depiction of missionary activity. A few major themes from the missionary discourse are absent from the parable – in particular, the missionaries' asceticism. But this is to be expected. Matthew is not reinscribing instructions for missionary practice in this section. He is figuratively depicting missionary activity, as he understands it, in service of a larger theological point about the

³⁴ See §2.6.

kingdom and its reception among Israel's religious class. But it is still important to note that, when Matthew depicts missionary work in this parable, the missionary discourse informs his storytelling, and Matthew assumes that the norms related in Matt 10 are still in force.

3.2 The parable of the wedding banquet: Matt 22:1-14

The parable of the wedding banquet contains a number of the same tropes that we saw in the parable of the tenants. We have another powerful man (a king) and his son (22:2) who send out slaves to do work on his behalf (22:3)—in this case, to bring guests to a wedding banquet. The slaves are met with resistance (22:3, 5) and finally violence (22:6). Ultimately, the work of inviting the guests to the wedding is completed with new invitees (22:8-10), and the second round of guests is culled in a final judgment (22:11-14).

3.2.1 Is this Parable about Missionaries?

How can we tell if the parable of the wedding banquet depicts missionary activity? One good indication that Matthew has redacted this parable with missionary work in mind is the similarity between this parable and the preceding parable of the tenants. The kings' slaves correspond to the vineyard owner's slaves, in that both groups of slaves are sent in stages (21:34-36; 22:3-4). Indeed, the phrase *πάλιν ἀπέστειλεν ἄλλους δούλους* is repeated verbatim in 21:3 and 22:4. The slaves in both parables also

meet a violent end at the hands of those who are supposed to receive them (21:35-37; 22:6). In both parables, the slaves' persecutors are met with retributive violence (21:41; 22:7) and the persecutors' roles are subsequently filled by new people (21:41-2; 22:8-10). The parallels between the slaves and their persecutors in both stories are undeniable. If the slaves in the parable of the tenants represent prophets and missionaries, it stands to reason that the slaves in this parable represent prophets and missionaries as well.

A second good indicator that this parable is about missionary work is the extent to which Matthew's parable focuses on the sending and receiving of the slaves as compared to other versions of the parable. Matthew's parable of the wedding feast is similar to the parable of the banquet in Luke 14:15-24 and Gos. Thom. 64. While we cannot here enter into discussion of the origin of the parable, we can see that, when we look at the three versions, Matthew's parable seems more interested in the problem of mission than the others.³⁵ Of these three banquet parables, Matthew's is the only version that appears specifically redacted to depict the experience of rejected missionaries. Both Luke's and Thomas's parables focus on the danger that day-to-day business poses for those who enter the kingdom. Thomas warns that buyers and sellers will not be welcomed by Jesus's father, because the invitees rebuffed the slave to see to their financial dealings – the same excuses that prevent Luke's invitees from attending (14:18-20). Luke and Thomas each depict only one slave (Luke 14:17, 21-24; Gos. Thom 64) and devote minimal attention to him. In both stories, the role of the slave is at most a plot device. The slave only drives the action of the story and prompts the excuses of the busy

³⁵ For Matthew as a source for Luke, though, see Mark S. Goodacre, *The Synoptic Problem: A Way through the Maze*, Repr, The Biblical Seminar 80 (London: Continuum, 2005), 122-61.

guests. Matthew's version of the parable, by contrast, is not about worldly distractions but about the reception of the envoys. Instead of one slave, Matthew's king sends out many of them (Matt 22:3-6). He includes no excuses from the guests, only the fact that some of them went back to work while their fellows were attacking the slaves (22:5). Matthew's preoccupation with persecuted envoys is on display when he makes the idiosyncratic choice to write that the king's slaves are brutalized while delivering wedding invitations (22:6). The slaves in Luke and Thomas are, much more plausibly, rebuffed but not harmed (Luke 14:18-21; Gos. Thom. 64). Matthew's parable shares obvious commonalities with the banquet parables in Luke and Thomas, but Matthew in particular foregrounds missionary labor and its consequences and is not interested in the spiritual dangers of quotidian concerns.

Because the slaves are sent in stages, some scholars have argued that the slaves in the parable do not all stand for the same group of people. In this view, the first group of slaves represents the prophets before Jesus (22:3), and the second group represents missionaries in the era of the church (22:4-6).³⁶ This is probably an overreading of the parable in its insistence on a significant shift in salvation history between rounds of invitations. Both rounds of invitations are sent to a "wedding banquet" for the king's son,

³⁶ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:197; Gielen, *Der Konflikt Jesu mit den religiösen und politischen Autoritäten seines Volkes*, 244n66; Victor Hasler, "Die königliche Hochzeit, Matth. 22,1-14," *TZ* 18 (1962): 25-35, 31; Erich Klostermann, *Das Matthäusevangelium* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1927), 174; Meinrad Limbeck, *Matthäus-- Evangelium*, 3rd ed., Stuttgarter kleiner Kommentar Neues Testament 1 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1991), 246; Alan Hugh McNeile, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (London: Macmillan, 1928), 314-5; Graham Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People*, 153; Schweitzer, *Matthew*, 418; Odil Hannes Steck, *Israel und das gewaltsame Geschick der Propheten. Untersuchungen zur Überlieferung des deuteronomistischen Geschichtsbildes im Alten Testament, Spätjudentum und Urchristentum*, Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament 23 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1967), 301; Alfons Weiser, *Die Knechtsgleichnisse der synoptischen Evangelien*, *SANT* 29 (Munich: Kösel-Verlag, 1971), 66-7.

which seems to refer to either Jesus's advent (cf. 9:15) or his exaltation.³⁷ It seems likely that the repeated invitations emphasize not the progress of salvation history but the solicitude of the host: he is rebuffed once, but graciously attempts again. Finally, as we discussed in §3.1, it is not clear that prophets and contemporary missionaries are two distinct groups in Matthew's Gospel. Matthew, rather, regards prophets and missionaries as one unbroken chain of individuals speaking for God and doing God's work. Both missionaries and prophets carry out the same work of spreading the kingdom, and in Matthew's estimation, they face the same hazards.

3.2.2. The Wedding Banquet and Israel

Does this parable depict the rejection of Israel? Retribution and replacement are significant themes in the parable. The story depicts the original round of invitees rejecting the invitations and killing the messengers (22:3-6). The king avenges the slaves, destroys the city (22:7), then invites new guests (22:8-10). We could read this as a figurative narration of a two-stage mission: the first mission, targeting Jews, ends in rejection and the Jewish War, and the second mission to gentiles is a success, if not an unmitigated one (22:12-14).³⁸ In this reading, the parable depicts the rejection of Israel, confirmed by the sack of Jerusalem. The burning of the temple marks a watershed in salvation history, namely, the point at which Matthew's missionary aims turn from Israel to the gentiles.³⁹

³⁷ Konradt, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles*, 195.

³⁸ Luz, *Matthew*, 3:54-5. Steck, *Israel und das gewaltsame Geschick der Propheten*, 302. Akira Ogawa, "Paraboles de l'Israël véritable?: Reconsidération critique de Mt. XXI 28 - XXII 14," *NovT* 21.1 (1979), 121-49, argues that the parable depicts both Jewish and gentile recalcitrance as the church begins to both struggle with missionary failure and the mixed quality of converts in the church..

³⁹ Samuel Sandmel, *Anti-Semitism in the New Testament?* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 60.

Carlston and Evans defend this reading on the grounds that the persecutors of the slaves must represent a larger group of Jews than the Jewish leadership, because there is no evidence that Matthew ever supposed that the mission of the Jesus movement began with a mission to Israel's religious leaders. Thus, this parable depicts a summons to Israel, Israel's rejection and punishment, and finally a mission to the gentiles.⁴⁰

This is a possible reading of the parable,⁴¹ but it is not the only one, nor necessarily the most likely. Four elements of the parable speak against this reading.

First, the setting of a royal wedding prepares the reader for a contrast between the elite and the non-elite, not between Jews and gentiles. Matthew locates the banquet at a wedding in a king's house. This impacts the guest list and transforms the significance of refusing the invitation. The guests at a royal wedding would be the wealthy and powerful,⁴² possibly the king's clients, or people who receive delegated authority from the king and owe him their submission.⁴³ The king's military response to the refusal suggests that the stakes of the refusal concern politics, not etiquette. Guests who refuse a neighbor's invitation to a banquet in favor of work are rude but not seditious. Guests who kill royal envoys attempting to invite them to a royal function are acting in open rebellion. Davies and Allison argue that the king's response "treats those who have mistreated his servants as though they are rulers of a city, not ordinary citizens" by

⁴⁰ Carlston and Evans, *From Synagogue to Ecclesia*, 264-9.

⁴¹ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, LXIX embraces this reading. See also Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 301-3.

⁴² Richard Bauckham, "The Parable of the Royal Wedding Feast (Matthew 22:1-14) and the Parable of the Lame Man and the Blind Man (Apocryphon of Ezekiel)," *JBL* 115.3 (1996): 471-88, 484; Culpepper, *Matthew: A Commentary*, 416; Konradt, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles*, 197.

⁴³ Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 433-4.

waging war on them.⁴⁴ What is specifically at stake here is a rejection of the patronage system in which vassals defer to the king and acquiesce to his rule by welcoming his slaves and accepting his hospitality. This is not a relationship that the king would have with every individual in his kingdom, only with his vassals.⁴⁵ This tells us that the violent would-be guests of the parable are not Israel's people as a whole, but those whom Matthew would understand as its leaders. In the same way that a king would delegate authority to subordinates and receive them as guests at official functions, God is a king who intends to receive his own vassals at a wedding – in this case, religious authorities.

The argument that Matthew's parable depicts warfare between a king and his vassals does not depend on Matthew setting out to tell a plausible, historically accurate story in this parable. His story could be fanciful rather than a depiction of actual royal customs. For example, characters in ancient literature sometimes actually do invite entire cities to feasts and celebrate important occasions with members of all social classes.⁴⁶ "King mashals" in rabbinic literature are a good example of this genre, where historical details may be set aside for the sake of the narrative.⁴⁷ However, the point here is not whether Matthew has flouted historical realism in this parable. The question is not whether it is *historically* likely that all Israel would have been invited to the king's son's wedding, but whether it is *literarily* likely. In the story, the king's emissaries are met with

⁴⁴ Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 435; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:201.

⁴⁵ Konradt, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles*, 194-5.

⁴⁶ b. Sab 153a; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 64.70; Keener, *Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 518. Stambaugh and Balch, *Antioch as the Social Situation for Matthew's Gospel*, 119, cite Pliny, *Ep.* 110.116 for a similar event.

⁴⁷ Bauckham, "The Parable of the Royal Wedding Feast," 471-88; David Stern, *Parables in Midrash: Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 1991), 19-21.

violence, and the result is warfare. The best reading of this plot is that Matthew has told a story about a conflict between political rivals, not between a king and all his subjects.

Second, the context of the parable suggests that the wedding banquet is part of a larger response to the religious leaders whom Jesus is debating in the temple. The sequence begins with Jesus entering the temple and disputing with the priests and elders (21:23). After refusing to answer their first question (21:27), Jesus tells three parables: the two sons, the tenants, and the wedding banquet (21:28-22:14). All the parables in this trilogy make accusations against Israel's leaders who have just challenged Jesus's authority; they do not make accusations against Israel in general. For example, in the parable of the two sons (21:28-32), the two sons are children of the same father. Jews and gentiles are not an apparent analogy for two siblings. It seems more likely that the two brothers symbolize two closely related groups – for example, two different groups of Jews.⁴⁸ The parable then ends with an explicit contrast not between Jews and gentiles, but between Jews who responded favorably to John the Baptist (mostly drawn from the disenfranchised and despised classes) and the Jewish religious leadership that did not (21:31-32). The “chief priests and elders” (21:23) are condemned (21:32) for failing to believe John, even though the tax collectors and sex workers did. These tax collectors and sex workers are apparently Jewish. John draws his audience from Jerusalem, Judea, and the surrounding areas (3:5). Matthew is clearly aware of a large number of Jews who did believe John the Baptist. The crowd (21:26) believes that John the Baptist was a prophet. The division in this first parable is not between Jews and gentiles, but between the

⁴⁸ Contra Clark, “The Gentile Bias in Matthew” 166; Meier, *Vision of Matthew*, 149-50; Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew*, 268; Jean Zumstein, *La condition du croyant dans l'Évangile selon Matthieu*, OBO 16 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 377.

faithless elite and the faithful lowly - namely, the crowds, the tax collectors, and the sex workers.⁴⁹

The second narrative in the trilogy is the parable of the tenants. We have already argued at length why this parable is likely directed against Israel's religious leadership (§3.1). If this third parable of the wedding banquet is also told in response to the priests and Pharisees, then it fits the pattern established by the previous two parables and the dispute over Jesus's authority in 21:23-27. If the parable of the wedding banquet depicts the rejection of Israel, it is thematically disjunctive with the rest of the material in this section and seems to explicitly contradict the message of the parables before it. As we argued in §3.1, Israel as a whole is not rejected in the other stories.

Third: Carlston and Evans argue that the invitees who persecute the slaves must symbolize Israel in general, because the first missionary commission is to Israel as a whole (10:5-6) and Matthew never recalls or prescribes a mission to Israel's religious leadership.⁵⁰ But this does not necessarily follow. For one thing, Matthew need not recall any specific historical mission to Israel's leadership in order to suppose that they would be the first people to hear the "news of the kingdom." In Matthew's Gospel, Israel's leadership is always the first to hear important news. Herod and his scribes are among the first to learn of Jesus's birth (2:3-8). The Pharisees and Sadducees observe John's baptism at the Jordan (Matt 3:7). The Pharisees and scribes are descended from people with privileged, if squandered, access to prophets (23:29-32), and the chief priests are among the first to hear of the resurrection (28:11). The religiously privileged in Matthew

⁴⁹ Levine, *Social and Ethnic Dimensions*, 205-6.

⁵⁰ Carlston and Evans, *From Synagogue to Ecclesia*, 264-9.

do not need to be the targets of a specific mission in order to have exceptional access to the news of the kingdom. They have access to the law and prophets, and they are consistently present when prophets and missionaries are at work in the text. Also, contra Carlston and Evans, there is no reason to think the king's invitations refer specifically to the mission described in 10:5-6. The "lost sheep of the house of Israel" are not re-narrated as the aggressors in this parable. The guests are not described as sheep, they are not said to belong to the house of Israel, and their violent response to the invitation does not remind us of the "harassed and helpless" sheep in Matt 9:36. The links between the wedding invitation of Matt 22:2-6 and the missionary summons of Matt 10:5-6 are tenuous. It seems more likely that the invitations represent repeated historical efforts to reach the priests, scribes, and Pharisees through prophets and missionaries, which repeatedly end in violence (23:34, 37).

The fourth and final detail that suggests that the leaders, not all Israel, are replaced in the parable is the role of Jerusalem. The rebellious invitees are all from one city. The region surrounding the city, far from being the site of open warfare, is actually the field from which the second round of guests is assembled (22:9-10). The invited guests who reject the invitation, in other words, seem to be connected to Jerusalem. Matthew's new invitees are found at διέξοδοι τῶν ὁδῶν, the roads that lead away from a city (22:9-10). The replacement guests are found outside of the parable's cipher for Jerusalem, either on the road or in the rural areas to which these highways would lead. They are outside the city; they are not necessarily outside the country. The contrast in the parable is not between Israel and the nations, but between Jerusalem and everywhere else.

Does it matter if Matthew's eschatology depicts the condemnation of Jerusalem in particular? Some scholars say no: the destruction of Israel's capital is a judgment on Israel in general. After all, Jerusalemites were not the only victims of the Jewish War. The siege and sack of Jerusalem would have impacted not only the residents of Jerusalem but the significant number of refugees who fled there for shelter during the war.⁵¹ If Jerusalem was home to refugees from all around Judea, as well as a pilgrimage site frequented by Jews all over the Diaspora, then the loss of the city was a loss for Jews across social classes and locations. If this is the case, the fact that the doomed invitees to the wedding are all from Jerusalem is irrelevant, because the aftershocks would have been felt by Jews all over the world.⁵² This judgment would be against Jews in general and would provide the theological framework for a gentile mission to replace a Jewish mission.

However, this reading runs the risk of inflating the significance of Jerusalem as the center of Jewish identity in early Judaism. The fact that Judeans outside Jerusalem were directly impacted by the war should not be taken as an indication that all Jews, or even all Judeans, felt the effects of the Jewish War in the same way. On the whole, Jews weathered the destruction of Jerusalem well. Diaspora Jews had gotten by without Jerusalem long before 70 CE. Literature from the Diaspora certainly does not dismiss the Jerusalem Temple, but it does emphasize the reading of Torah, prayer, and righteous

⁵¹ Keener, *Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, 521-2.

⁵² John P. Meier, *Matthew*, New Testament Message 3 (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1980), 248; Gerd Theissen, *The Gospels in Context: Social and Political History in the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 272.

conduct as supplements to or even replacements of participation in temple worship.⁵³ Closer to the homeland, rabbis adjusted Jerusalem-centered rituals for practice at other locations,⁵⁴ and pre-70 CE prayers and liturgies were incorporated into synagogue worship.⁵⁵ Jewish worshippers were well-equipped for their faith to survive the Jewish War and preserved their traditions through the many avenues that remained available to them. This reading runs the risk of inflating the significance of Jerusalem in Matthew's theology.

A better explanation of the parable is this: Israel's religious life has historically been led by people who enjoy divinely delegated authority and exceptional access to God. However, they have rejected God's repeated efforts to alert them to a new thing happening in the arrival of the kingdom of heaven. Prophets and missionaries have attempted to summon them into the kingdom, but they have been met with violence. Judgment occurs when God destroys the seat of their power in Jerusalem, and efforts to bring people into the kingdom continue beyond it.

But what kind of mission continues after the destruction of Jerusalem? Sim maintains that this mission still focuses on Jews, and that the invitations after the city's destruction represent a revitalized Jewish mission taking shape after the Jewish war, a

⁵³ Michael Tuval, "Doing without the Temple: Paradigms in Judaic Literature of the Diaspora," in *Was 70 CE a Watershed in Jewish History? On Jews and Judaism before and after the Destruction of the Second Temple?*, ed. Daniel R. Schwartz and Zeev Weiss, Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity 78 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2012): 181-242, 204-22.

⁵⁴ See Goodman, "Religious Reactions," 515.

⁵⁵ Esther G. Chazon, "Liturgy Before and After the Temple's Destruction: Change or Continuity?," in *Was Judaism a Watershed in Jewish History? On Jews and Judaism before and after the Destruction of the Second Temple*, ed. Daniel R. Schwartz and Zeev Weiss, Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity 78 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2012): 371-92, 387.

“renewal of earlier Jewish missions.”⁵⁶ But this is overly narrow. The slaves are apparently indiscriminating in their hunt for new guests, bringing in both “good and bad” (22:10) while carrying out their orders to invite anyone they happen to come across (22:9). This parable allows for the possibility of an actual, targeted mission towards gentiles, along with Jews. The invitations are open to everyone, though not everyone will finally be welcomed (22:12-14). Only the ἐκλεκτοί (22:14) remain at the banquet. There may not be many elect (22:14) but, as we will discover in the eschatological discourse, they can be found anywhere in the world (24:31). This suggests that the elect have some gentiles among their number.

This is the first mention in Matthew’s Gospel of a mission that targets everyone indiscriminately, and it introduces the first major disconnect between the missionary discourse and later discussions of missionary activity. There is some suggestion of a privileged status for Israel, since the primary point of contact for the prophets and missionaries is Jerusalem, and the work expands out from there. But the slaves are still told to invite everyone regardless of location and ethnicity. That said, this parable does not prompt the reader to expect an enormous yield of converts from among the gentiles. Many of the invited still end up excluded (22:14). Our first introduction to a truly universal mission is therefore not as optimistic as one might expect if Matthew really did look ahead to the mass conversion of receptive gentiles.

Even so, a significant number of motifs from the missionary discourse are assumed in this parable, as we will see below.

⁵⁶ Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 240; also in Saldarini, *Matthew’s Christian-Jewish Community*, 63-4; Harrington, *Matthew*, 308.

3.2.3. The Parable of the Wedding Banquet and the Missionary Discourse

The theme of representation, for example, and the assumption that missionaries represent God and Jesus, is particularly stark here. As we discussed in §3.2.2., the slaves have been sent as representatives of the king in order to carry out his bidding, and the king gives them his own words to speak on his behalf. The instructions that the slaves are given to speak are in the first person (22:4), reflecting the perspective of the king. The slaves represent the king's wishes and literally speak in his stead. This is reminiscent of the missionary discourse, in which the disciples speak in Jesus's place and repeat verbatim the message he himself preached (10:7; 4:17).

Furthermore, as in the missionary discourse, missionary work forces a conflict with Israel's religious leadership. Here missionary work catalyzes rebellion on the part of the religious leadership and brings about warfare between God and Jerusalem. The conflict between the religious leadership and the missionaries also reintroduces the theme of persecution. The missionary discourse portrays both Jews and gentiles as potential agents of persecution (10:17-23). In the parable of the wedding banquet, the theme is transformed to center on threats to the mission in Israel. The agents of persecution seem to be limited to Jews – particularly, leaders whom Matthew associates with Israel. Likewise, Matthew associates missionary work and missionary conflict with imminent eschatology, as he does in the missionary discourse (Matt 10:23). Missionary abuse culminates in the violent destruction of Jerusalem's leadership class in the Jewish War, an event that Matthew frames as a precursor of an imminent end (24:15-21, 29). The

mission of the church points ahead, and leads to, eschatological catastrophe, which Matthew understands as being in process of fulfillment in his own day and anticipates being completed shortly thereafter.

Much of the material concerning missionary work in Matt 10, then, is still assumed in the parable of the wedding banquet. There are some early and allusive suggestions of a universal mission. But in general Matthew's depiction of missionary work in the parable of the wedding banquet is quite similar to the depiction of missionary work in the parable of the tenants, and it reintroduces many of the themes discussed in the missionary discourse.

In the parables of the tenants and the wedding banquet, then, Matthew uses the tropes of the missionary discourse to depict missionary activity in figurative and narrative depictions of the church's mission. This suggests that Matthew's missionary discourse does not only depict a past historical event (namely, the mission of the twelve) but also a practice that continued up to and after the Jewish War, into Matthew's own day.

In the next section, we will turn our attention from parabolic depictions of missionary work to allusions to missionary activity in Matthew's woe oracle. As we will see, many of the themes from Matt 10 continue to emerge in these pericopes.

3.3 Woes against the Scribes and Pharisees: Matt 23:34-39

In Matt 23:13-33, Matthew recounts seven woes against the scribes and Pharisees. In the seventh woe (23:29-32), he turns his attention to missionary work when he castigates the scribes and Pharisees for their treatment of the prophets' graves. Matthew

accuses them of honoring these graves and saying they would not have participated in the persecution of the prophets. Nonetheless, they are the descendants of those who killed the prophets. They are like their ancestors in that they are completing the work of killing God's messengers, which continues into their own day.⁵⁷

Our attention here is on a short selection from Matthew's woes. At the conclusion of the woes, in Matt 23:34, Jesus declares that he is sending "prophets, wise people, and scribes" to the Pharisees, all of whom will meet a grim end. Some of them will be "killed and crucified," others will be flogged in synagogues, and still others will be chased from town to town. Even in this short section on missionary work, as we will see, Matthew's understanding of missionary work is remarkably similar to the norms he outlined in the missionary discourse.

3.3.1 Is this Passage about Missionaries?

In v 34 Jesus names three distinct classes of individuals he "sends": the προφήτης, the σοφός, and the γραμματεύς. Can any of these titles be said to describe Christian missionaries? The title προφήτης seems to point backwards before Matthew's time. Matthew laments in the seventh oracle that the Pharisees are descended from past Israelites who "killed the prophets" (23:29-31; cf. 5:12). But prophets are also a contemporary phenomenon in Matthew's world; 10:41 acknowledges their existence and encourages their support alongside other missionaries in the missionary discourse. As we discussed in §3.1.1, for Matthew, past Israelite prophets and contemporary Christian

⁵⁷ Culpepper, *Matthew*, 458.

prophets are not discrete categories but overlapping vocations. The prophets named in 23:34-39, therefore, are likely missionaries.

This brings us to the “wise people.” Outside of this passage, the word σοφός is never used in Matthew to describe people within the Jesus community. Matthew uses the word only one other time, in 11:25, where the word takes on a negative valence; God withholds information from the σοφός and συνετός in favor of the “little children” (νηπίοις). In Matt 11:25, σοφός is not an official title but a description of the kind of educated person whom God passes over in favor of the humbler disciples. Who the “wise ones” in the Jesus movement are, though, is less clear. Davies and Allison propose that this is an ironic reversal of Matt 11:25; the “wise ones” castigated in Matt 11:25 have no wisdom and need the wise people sent to them in 23:34. Culpepper and Luz, on the other hand, argue that this term might come from the Hebrew or Aramaic word for “learned ones,” and may be roughly synonymous with “scribe” or “teacher.”⁵⁸ These, then, are probably teachers of some sort who Matthew imagines are “sent” to Israel’s leaders as part of the missionary project.

Finally, Jesus says that he is also sending “scribes.” While there is a class of scribes in the Gospel that falls sharply outside the lines of the Jesus movement (see the association between scribes and Jesus’s opposition in 7:29; 8:19; 9:3; 12:38; 15:1; 16:21; 20:18; 21:15), these are not the only kinds of scribes found in the text. For example, Matthew affirms the scribes’ teaching that Elijah must come before the Messiah (17:10-13, from Mark 9:11-13). He also shows a possible awareness of Christian scribes. In the

⁵⁸ Culpepper, *Matthew*, 459; Luz, *Matthew*, 3:152.

parable discourse, Matt 13:52 identifies scribes as those who understand Jesus's teachings. Based on these texts, Matthew's "scribes," those who teach and work within the confines of the Christian movement, are those who understand and teach Torah alongside Jesus's own message. They are able to understand how the Hebrew Bible predicts events in Jesus's day and to pass on this understanding to others.

If teachers affiliated with the Jesus movement are "scribes," there is no great difficulty in reading Matthew's scribes, along with the wise ones and prophets, as having a missionary function. Matthew has no set vocabulary for a "missionary." Instead, the Gospel uses a cluster of terms to describe people with different roles in religious outreach. In Matt 10:41-42, Jesus's affiliates include "prophets," "righteous ones," and "little ones." In Matt 23:34, his affiliates are "prophets," "wise people" and "scribes." Both groups are commissioned with the phrase, "Behold, I send you" (ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἀποστέλλω, 10:16; 23:34). It is reasonable to conclude that, in 23:34, Matthew depicts the sending of the missionaries to the Pharisees and priests.

3.3.2 "This generation" – Does This Passage Depict the Rejection of Israel?

We are once again left with the difficult question of whether this text, and the woes in general, depict the rejection of Israel. Matthew names two parties as direct addresses of the woes: scribes and Pharisees (22:41), and "this generation" (23:36), which will be judged for "all the righteous blood poured out on the earth." The woes directly address scribes and Pharisees six times (23:13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29) and the

Pharisees alone once (23:6). The scope of the accusations broadens in v. 29, when Jesus broadly denounces those who killed the prophets (23:29-32). This leads to a prediction of judgment for spilling righteous blood (23:35-36), a warning that this judgment will come on “this generation” (23:36), and a lament for Jerusalem (23:37-39). The lament for Jerusalem and the pronouncement that its “house” is abandoned (23:37-8) is probably a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, which occurred shortly before the Gospel was written. Some scholars allow for the possibility that Matthew actually predicts some future, greater tragedy for the temple that actually will complete the prediction that “no stone will be left on another” (24:2) on the Temple Mount.⁵⁹ However, this reading seems to unnecessarily overcomplicate matters. Matthew’s references are relatively straightforward, even if not entirely accurate. He predicts the destruction of the second temple by reminding the reader of the first: the “desolation” of Jerusalem’s house alludes to Jer 22:5 and the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem.⁶⁰ He has already narrated the burning of Jerusalem in a previous parable (22:7). Finally, he predicts that all this will happen soon after the life of Jesus (23:36). Even if Matthew expects something even more catastrophic to happen to the temple site, it is reasonable to assume that he believes that judgment is already underway in the events of the Jewish War.

Should we understand this portion of the text to be a general condemnation of Israel? There is no real reason to read the seven woes against the scribes and Pharisees as woes against Israel in general. The woes are said in the presence of the crowds, but not

⁵⁹ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:329-331. For post-70 CE access to the Temple Mount see Kenneth W. Clark, “Worship in the Jerusalem Temple after A.D. 70,” *NTS* 6.4 (1960): 269–80.

⁶⁰ Gundry, *Matthew*, 473.

against them (Matt 23:1); the goal is to prevent the crowds, and presumably the readers, from following the Pharisees.⁶¹ That said, the warning to “this generation” poses a challenge. Matthew includes a critique and warning to this “generation” of people living at the time of Jesus’s ministry; this warning also appears in Matt 11:16-19, 12:38-45, and 16:1-4. These sayings can be read as evidence that Matthew pronounces judgment on this entire generation of Jews in Israel and that he believes that this judgment was carried out in the Jewish War.⁶² Implicitly, according to this interpretation, the judgment signals an end to the mission to Israel, or at least an extended pause in missionary overtures to Israel while the gentile mission begins.⁶³

This reading, however, can be challenged. In order to do so, we must investigate the various possible interpretations of “this generation” in 23:36. The first possibility is that “this generation” is actually not a generation in time but a “generation” that exists throughout history as a group of people with shared characteristics.⁶⁴ The warning is thus not against Jesus’s contemporaries but against people in every era who are hypocritical, violent, etc. But this ignores the role of Jerusalem and the temple in the woe oracles (23:37-38). Jesus predicts that the shedding of innocent blood throughout history (23:35) will come upon Jerusalem and the temple in this generation. It is incoherent to argue that the violent and hypocrites in every era of history will face the judgment that arises

⁶¹ Konradt, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles*, 227.

⁶² Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Future*, 260; Davies and Allison 3:319; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 51; Garbe, *Der Hirte Israels*, 119–20; Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:678; Volker Schönle, *Johannes, Jesus und die Juden: die theologische Position des Matthäus und des Verfassers der Redenquelle im Lichte von Mt. 11*, BBET 17 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1982), 29, 122; Walker, *Die Heilsgeschichte im ersten Evangelium*, 35.

⁶³ Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew*, 120-21.

⁶⁴ Gundry, *Matthew*, 472. Susan M. Rieske, “What Is the Meaning of ‘This Generation’ in Matthew 23:36?,” *BSac* 165 (2008): 209-26; 222-3 reads this as a charge of eternal damnation laid on all those who persecute God’s messengers both before Matthew’s time and after it.

because of Jerusalem and the temple. Matthew clearly has the Jewish War in mind and understands it as a judgment on his own contemporaries and the contemporaries (or at least near contemporaries) of Jesus.

The second option is Konradt's reading, which argues that, in context, the γενεά that will suffer because of the blood of the prophets (23:36) is exegetically equivalent to the "you" that appears in v. 35. This fits with Konradt's general thesis that γενεά need not always refer to everyone in a generation. It can be used to refer to a class of people within a generation— so "this generation" would refer to "this generation of Pharisees."⁶⁵ In Konradt's defense, this seems to be the way Matthew uses the phrase on several occasions. For example, Jesus accuses "this generation" of disregarding John the Baptist as demon-possessed (11:16-19; 20-24). But "this generation" does not seem to include the crowds who discerned that John was a prophet (21:26).⁶⁶ In this reading, the generation of those who face judgment are specifically those individuals who reject Jesus's message in his era—namely, scribes and Pharisees.

However, this reading still does not do justice to the prediction of the catastrophe of the Jewish War. We have already argued in §3.2.1 that the destruction of Jerusalem cannot be read as a rejection or condemnation of Israel in general, but it is still far too narrow to suppose that the destruction of Jerusalem is only a judgment on scribes and Pharisees. Jerusalem and its surrounding areas were not populated only by scribes and Pharisees. The loss of the city and its temple is still clearly a cause for mourning in Matthew's text (23:37-38) – hardly the tone we would expect from Matthew if the loss of

⁶⁵ Konradt, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles*, 209, 230-1.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 210-1.

Jerusalem was simply the loss of a Pharisaic stomping ground. Even if Matthew is critical of Jerusalem and its leadership, and even if he does not see its destruction as a condemnation of Israel as a whole, we can surely see by his tone that Matthew thinks a large portion of the Jewish population will suffer in the war and from the loss of its holy site.

The third option, and the one I find most convincing, is that Matthew simply means what he says when he predicts that judgment will come on his generation. No, not everyone in Jesus's day rejected Jesus, and no, not everyone in Matthew's day rejects Jesus either. But opposition to Jesus, the prophets, and the missionaries is, in Matthew's mind, terrible enough to warrant the destruction of Jerusalem within a generation of Jesus's life.

Nevertheless, this reading may not matter very much for understanding Matthew's theology of mission. "Israel suffers corporately for Jerusalem and its leaders' rejection of Jesus" is not the same claim as "Israel is rejected as an object for missionary activity because of the crucifixion of Jesus." There are three good reasons to suppose that Matthew thinks the mission to Israel continued after the Jewish War.

The first is that Matthew never suggests that the Jewish War brought an end to the sending of "prophets, wise people, and scribes." If there is a point in history after which the mission shifts to the gentiles, it is the resurrection (28:16-20), not the destruction of the temple.

The second reason is that Matthew's eschatology is too imminent for a two-stage salvation history, with one stage of missionary history targeting Jews and the next targeting gentiles. Matthew does not seem to perceive an extended period between the

destruction of the temple and the eschaton that could serve as a new age of mission to the gentiles. He understands that history will last long enough for a worldwide mission to take place (24:14),⁶⁷ but from his perspective, this process has been going on for some time (28:19) and may even be winding down. In the late first century, Matthew lives in a world where Christianity may not be widely practiced, but it can be found all over the ancient Mediterranean: in Greece, Rome, Palestine, and perhaps already Alexandria.⁶⁸ Matthew writes that the coming of the Son of Man follows “immediately” (24:29) after the destruction of the temple (24:15-28). He is aware of the destruction of the temple and convinced of the nearness of the Son of Man. It is not likely that he thinks that the church is now in some extended, post-70 CE era of a mission to the gentiles.

Third, we cannot assume that, even if Matthew thinks that Israel suffers corporately for the rejection of Jesus, he also sees all Jews as equally culpable. Collective harm does not always signify equal responsibility. The prophetic tradition Matthew draws on from the Hebrew Bible makes frequent reference to corporate judgment while also distinguishing between guilty and innocent parties within the judged group. An illustrative example is the prophetic judgments against Israel for the treatment of the poor. Isaiah (10:1-14) and Amos (2:6-8; 4:1-3) contain woes against Israel for the behavior of the rich and promise destruction for the nation. Presumably, the oppressed poor, widows, and orphans are not responsible for their own oppression, but they suffer collectively with the rest of the nation when it is invaded. By the same logic, the crowds

⁶⁷ Carston and Evans, *From Synagogue to Ecclesia*, 425.

⁶⁸ Streeter, *The Primitive Church*, 236.

have been receptive of Jesus and John the Baptist, but they suffer collectively with the Pharisees, priests, and Sadducees during the war.

Of course, the crowds in Jerusalem play an active role in the judgment of their city when they are persuaded by the Pharisees and chief priests (27:20) to call for Jesus' death and accept responsibility for it (27:21-25). There is no denying that Matthew attributes a level of responsibility for Jesus's death to the crowd of Jerusalem as a whole; they accept the responsibility that Pilate unsuccessfully tries to deny.⁶⁹ But this should not be conflated with the claim that Matthew broadly condemns the crowds,⁷⁰ much less intends to end missionary outreach to them. The best explanation for the crowd's infamous acceptance of Jesus's blood on "us and our children" (27:25) is not a centuries-long curse but the destruction of Jerusalem, within one generation of Jesus's death. Matthew 27:25 is a theological explanation of the destruction of Jerusalem that ties the Jewish War into early Christian history. It has a concrete historical referent; it is not a generalized judgment of Jews.⁷¹ In fact, as we will discuss further in §3.3.3, Matthew even seems to think that the self-judgment the crowd pronounces on itself in 27:25 will be alleviated at the coming of the Son of Man.

Nothing about Matthew's explanation concerning the destruction of Jerusalem suggests the end of any effort to missionize Jews (which Matthew has already insisted in

⁶⁹ Matthias Konrad, "The Role of the Crowds in the Gospel of Matthew," in *Matthew within Judaism*, ed. Anders Runesson and Daniel M. Gurtner (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2020), 213–31; 227–8; Konrad, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles*, 153–66.

⁷⁰ Contra Beare, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 531; Hare, "Rejection of the Jews," 38, and *The Theme of Jewish Persecution*, 156.

⁷¹ For Matt 27:25 as an "etioloical legend" explaining the destruction of Jerusalem rather than a denunciation of Jewish people *en masse* see Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:592; cf. Levine, *Social and Ethnic Dimensions*, 268; Luz, *Matthew*, 3:503; Repschinski, *Controversy Stories*, 331; Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community*, 32–3.

10:23 will continue until the Parousia). Nor does 27:25 suggest newfound hatred for Jews at large. If Jerusalem did not accept the coming of its king, this is primarily the fault of its wayward leaders, and the people were led astray and subsequently suffered. To win people away from their destructive shepherds, the work of missions continues.

Once again, we have good reason to suppose that this passage does not represent the rejection of Israel or the end of missionary overtures to it. As we will also see, though the references to missionary work in this passage are sparse, Matthew still assumes in this passage. that the tropes of missionary work in the discourse of chapter 10 are normative.

3.3.3. The Mission in Matt 23:34-39

Three major motifs of missionary work from the missionary discourse appear in this passage. First, missionary work is assumed to be an act that creates conflict between Jesus and his associates, on the one hand, and the Jewish leadership, on the other. The sending of prophets, wise people, and scribes occurs in the context of a broad critique of Israel's religious leadership. The "scribes and Pharisees" hamper entrance to the kingdom (23:13), produce proselytes who are "children of Gehenna" (23:15), sin egregiously (23:14, 23-28), and encourage others to do the same (23:16-22). In response, Matt 23:34-36 almost depicts missionary work as the act of baiting the Pharisees. Sending missionaries incentivizes the Pharisees to react with persecution, and Matthew sees this as intentional. Jesus sends the missionaries (note the *διὰ τοῦτο*, "therefore," in 23:34) in order to "fill up" the crimes of the missionaries' persecutors (23:32) and hasten judgment.

This is missionary work as confrontation. It is meant to force conflict with Israel's leadership.

The second major theme that reemerges from the missionary discourse and continues into chapter 23 is the threat of Jewish and gentile persecution. Matthew has not referenced gentile persecutors in the last two texts we examined, but here they reemerge alongside Jews. In 23:34 he references synagogue persecution again, but the prediction of crucifixions (23:34) may imply gentile persecutions as well, or at least resistance to Jewish Christian missionaries that ends in Roman courts. Jews could not and would not crucify fellow Jews; this is a Roman punishment. Jesus has already predicted in Matt 10:18 that persecution that begins in Jewish communities may end in persecution from gentiles. In this case, we would have both Jewish and gentile persecutors present for the first time since the missionary discourse.

Third, as in the missionary discourse, the sending of missionaries is strongly associated with imminent eschatology (10:23). The sending and rejecting of missionaries results in judgment, and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (23:36-8). In Matthew's theology, this is an eschatological event that portends the imminent end of the world. Just as importantly, this passage also looks ahead to the Parousia and predicts that, at the end of the tribulation, the Pharisees will see Jesus again: "You will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'" (23:39).

It is possible that this reference to Jesus's return alludes to the redemption of the Pharisees. The language of blessing, as well as the reference to Psalm 118(117):26, suggests more of a joyful response than a grudging or fearful one. But the order of sentiments is jarring. In this reading, Jesus would pronounce judgment on Jerusalem,

only to promise redemption to the leaders within it in the next sentence.⁷² Because of this, some scholars have argued that the Pharisees' "blessing" of the one who comes in the name of the Lord is fearful, reluctant, and too late.⁷³ In this reading, their response would be part of the mourning that the "tribes of the earth" will express when the Son of Man separates the elect from the unbelievers according to 24:30.

But a mournful blessing is counterintuitive, and the shift from judgment to deliverance is disruptive. In light of this, Allison favors an interpretation that reads ἕως as a conditional "until." This reading has precedent in the Greek and is also consistent with conditional predictions of eschatological salvation in rabbinic literature (b. Sanh.98a; b. Ab. Zar. 5a).⁷⁴ Thus, Allison reads this as an "if/then" sentence: if Jerusalem repents and follows Jesus, the Parousia will occur. The idea that Jesus's return is conditional upon the repentance of Israel sits somewhat uneasily alongside Matthew's imminent eschatology. Elsewhere he is quite insistent that Jesus can return without any warning (24:43-51), whether Jerusalem repents or not. Of course, it could be the case that Matthew thinks repentance for Jerusalem is also an imminent event that could take people by surprise. He does seem to retain some level of hope or esteem for the city (5:35). Of our interpretive options, a conditional blessing does make the best sense of the juxtaposition found in Matt 23:37-39. Most importantly for our purposes, this interpretation means that, even after the disaster of the Jewish War, missionary work within Israel is not in vain. Israel must be sought for repentance, even if missionary works are resisted. After this, the end will come.

⁷² Dale C. Allison, "Matt 23:39=Luke 13:35b as a Conditional Prophecy," *JSNT* 18 (1983): 75-84, 76.

⁷³ Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus*, 377.

⁷⁴ Allison, "Matt 23:39=Luke 13:35b as a Conditional Prophecy," 77-81.

Once again, Matthew’s understanding of missionary work is consistent with the missionary discourse. Missionary work to Israel continues without any prediction of its imminent end. Furthermore, the trials of missionary work – particularly, persecution and conflict with the religious leadership– are the same as they were in Matt 10.

This concludes our discussion of the woe oracles, and we will now turn our attention to the eschatological discourse.

3.4 The tribulation: Matt 24:9, 14

The references to missionary activity in Matt 24:9 and 14 occur in the context of an extended prophecy concerning the last days (24:4-51). A key theme of these eschatological sayings is universality. Even though Matthew predicts specific calamities in Jerusalem and Judea (24:15-21), the events of the tribulation – famine, war, and earthquakes –are cosmic in scale and affect the entire world (24:7). The signs of the Great Tribulation are placed in the heavens (24:29), and ultimately Jesus’s return is seen and experienced everywhere (24:27, 30-31). This is an event that impacts everyone. Integrated into this text about universal disaster is the theme of universal mission: Matt 24:9 and 24:14 predict a new scale of mission, a mission to πάντα τὰ ἔθνη.

3.4.1 “All the Nations” or “All the Gentiles?”

Before we continue, we need to address the problem of what exactly πάντα τὰ ἔθνη means. This is our first instance of the phrase πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, which can be translated both as “all the nations” (including Israel), “all the non-Jewish nations”

(excluding Israel), or “all the gentile individuals” (excluding Israelites). The last two meanings of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη are similar in that they are both “exclusive” readings of the phrase (Israel is excluded from the category of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη). However, the connotative meanings of “all gentile communities as collectives” and “all gentile individuals,” especially in the context of mission, are still distinct enough that it helps to distinguish one from the other.⁷⁵

The question at issue here is whether Matthew uses πάντα τὰ ἔθνη differently than he uses τὰ ἔθνη. Matthew often says τὰ ἔθνη when he means “the gentiles” (Matt 4:15; 6:32; 10:5; 10:18; 20:19; 20:25),⁷⁶ but he uses the phrase πάντα τὰ ἔθνη four times in his Gospel: 24:9; 24:14; 25:32; and 28:19. The debate about how to translate ἔθνη in these four cases arises particularly because of the use of the modifier πάντα, and the particular contexts in which the phrase πάντα τὰ ἔθνη occurs. Even though Matthew uses the phrase τὰ ἔθνη as a frequent, unambiguous term for ethnic gentiles,⁷⁷ some scholars argue that he uses πάντα τὰ ἔθνη in the latter sections of the Gospel to refer to all nations, including

⁷⁵ Terence L. Donaldson, “‘Nations,’ ‘Non-Jewish Nations,’ or ‘Non-Jewish Individuals’: Matthew 28:19 Revisited,” in *Matthew Within Judaism: Israel and the Nations in the First Gospel*, ed. Anders Runesson and Daniel M. Gurtner, *Early Christianity and Its Literature 27* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2020), 174-77.

⁷⁶ For the argument that πάντα τὰ ἔθνη is best translated “all the gentiles,” see Donaldson, “Matthew 28:19 Revisited,” Peter Fiedler, *Das Matthäusevangelium*, 430-1; Giesen, “Jesu Sendung zu Israel und die Heiden im Matthäusevangelium,” 130; Hare, *The Theme of Jewish Persecution*, 147-8; Hare and Harrington, “Make Disciples,” 360-61; Harrington, *Matthew*, 414-5; Lange, *Das Erscheinen des Auferstandenen im Evangelium nach Matthäus*, 270-71, 302; Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Matthäus*, 417-8; Luz, “Der Antijudaismus im Matthäusevangelium,” 315-16; Runesson, “Aspects of Matthean Universalism,” 120; Georg Scheuermann, *Gemeinde im Umbruch: Eine sozialgeschichtliche Studie zum Matthäusevangelium* (Würzburg: Echter, 1996), 245-6; Axel von Dobbeler, “Die Restitution Israels und die Bekehrung der Heiden: Das Verhältnis von Mt 10,5b.6 und Mt 28,18-20 unter dem Aspekt der Komplementarität: Erwägungen zum Standort des Matthäusevangeliums.” *ZNW 91* (2000): 18-44, 31-2; Walker, *Die Heilsgeschichte im ersten Evangelium*, 111-13; Florian Wilk, “Eingliederung von »Heiden« in die Gemeinschaft der Kinder Abrahams: Die Aufgabe der Jünger Jesu unter ‘allen Weltvölkern’ nach Mt 28,16-20,” *ZNT 15* (2005): 52-9.

⁷⁷ For the development of τὰ ἔθνη as a term for gentiles, see Georg Bertram and Karl Ludwig Schmidt, “ἔθνος, ἔθνικός,” *TDNT 2* (1964) 364-372.

Israel.⁷⁸ When qualified with the word *παῖς*, the argument goes, *τὰ ἔθνη* loses its ethnic connotations and simply becomes a way of describing “the whole world.”⁷⁹

Historically, these distinctions between translations of *πάντα τὰ ἔθνη* have mattered because of their implications for Matt 28:19 and the final commission’s vision of the post-resurrection mission (which we will address in greater detail in the next chapter). If *πάντα τὰ ἔθνη* means “gentiles” in some sense, then – some scholars have argued – the mission after the resurrection is restricted to the gentiles and has shifted away from the Jews.⁸⁰ However, if *πάντα τὰ ἔθνη* means “all the nations” or “all the world,” then the mission is not restricted at all and has simply been expanded to include everyone.⁸¹

I argue that *πάντα τὰ ἔθνη* is best translated as “all the gentiles,” or sometimes “all those in the gentile lands beyond Israel,” because the term occurs in contexts in which Matthew is contemplating the eschatological mission beyond the physical limits of

⁷⁸ Gnlika, *Das Matthäusevangelium*, 2:508; Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:886; Hengel and Schwemer, *Jesus and Judaism*, 28; Tisera, *Universalism According to the Gospel of Matthew*, 304-6.

⁷⁹ For the inclusive reading see Élian Cuvillier, “La construction narrative de la mission dans le premier évangile: Un déplacement théologique et identitaire,” in *The Gospel of Matthew at the Crossroads of Early Christianity*, ed. Donald P. Senior, BETL 243 (Leuven: Peeters, 2011): 159-75, 164; Dormeyer, “Die Rollen von Volk, Jüngern und Gegnern im Matthäusevangelium,” 123; Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia*, 67; Hultgren, “Mission and Ministry in Matthew,” 341–7; Krentz, “‘Make Disciples’--Matthew on Evangelism,” 34; Landmesser, *Jüngerberufung und Zuwendung zu Gott*, 15-7; Lindemann, “Israel im Neuen Testament,” 189; Paul, “*Untypische*” *Texte im Matthäusevangelium?*, 309; Peter Stuhlmacher, “Matt 28:16-20 and the Course of Mission in the Apostolic and Postapostolic Age,” in *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentile*, ed. Jostein Adna and Hans Kvalbein, WUNT 127 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000): 17-44, 27; Charles H. Talbert, *Matthew*, Paideia (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 313; Stuhlmacher, “Zur missionsgeschichtlichen Bedeutung von Mt 28,16-20,” 108–30; Viljoen, “Matthew, the Church and Anti-Semitism,” 679. Luz, *Matthew* 3:361, endorses the inclusive reading in his commentary, though he also maintains Matthew is not optimistic about the Jewish mission. This is a modification of his exclusive reading in “Der Antijudaismus im Matthäusevangelium,” 312 and *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, 67.

⁸⁰ Hare and Harrington, “Make Disciples,” 362-3.

⁸¹ Not all scholars who favor the translation “all the gentiles” maintain that a mission to Israel has been replaced by a mission to the nations. See von Dobbeler, “Die Restitution Israels”, 6 and Donaldson, “Matthew 28:19 Revisited.

Israel as outlined in Matt 10:5-6. I also argue that this does not particularly make Matthew's theology any more exclusive or anti-Jewish than the translation "all the nations." The five points that lead me to this conclusion are as follows:

First, we should not assume that the meaning of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη is uniform throughout Matthew's Gospel. As Levine and Donaldson have noted,⁸² authors are capable of using the word ἔθνη or the full phrase πάντα τὰ ἔθνη in both exclusive and non-exclusive ways in the same text. The meaning of ἔθνη/πάντα τὰ ἔθνη is best determined on a case-by-case basis. Thus, even if Matthew does mean "all the gentiles" in Matt 24:9, it does not follow from this that he has to mean "all the gentiles" in Matt 28:19. Uses of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη in proximate settings are much more likely to carry the same semantic valence (so Matt 24:9 and 24:14, for instance). Beyond this, we should not necessarily allow an author's use in one context to determine the translation of others. Following Levine and Donaldson's lead, I argue in the following sections that Matthew means something like "all the gentiles," or more precisely, "all those in the gentile world, beyond the boundaries of Israel." I argue that this reading is justified in each specific context, not because of any preexisting assumption that the use of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη in Matthew is uniform.

Second, translating πάντα τὰ ἔθνη as "all the gentiles" is sometimes avoided on the grounds that this would suggest that Matthew intends for missionary activity to go to gentiles only. This introduces exegetical challenges for passages that appear to depict a permanent mission to Israel. But this is not a significant problem. Even if πάντα τὰ ἔθνη

⁸² Donaldson, "Matthew 28:19 Revisited," 187; Levine, *Social and Ethnic Dimensions*, 312-6.

does mean “all the gentiles,” it does not follow that the mission to Israel is concluded. According to Matt 10:23, the mission to the “towns of Israel” continues until the Parousia.⁸³ The evidence that Matthew intends the Jewish mission to continue does not depend on an inclusive reading of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη; it is already clearly asserted in Matt 10:23. “Go to the gentiles” is not the same command as “stop going to the Jews.” Thus, there is no great interpretive trouble introduced into Matthew’s theology of Israel if he means “all the gentiles” at any point when he writes πάντα τὰ ἔθνη.

In fact, defining πάντα τὰ ἔθνη as “gentiles” rather than “nations” inclusively does not add much to our understanding of Matthew’s views of Jews and gentiles. If we were to accept the inclusive reading, the most that would tell us is that Israel is, like the other nations, an object of missionizing (24:14; 28:19), an agent of persecution against the church (24:9), and subject to the judgment of the sheep and the goats (25:32). This is not a ringing endorsement of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη at Israel’s expense. Matthew calls πάντα τὰ ἔθνη a mission field, and also a persecutor of missionaries — the same claims he has made about Israel. An inclusive translation of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη simply repeats claims about Israel that Matthew has already made, and an exclusive translation of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη announces that Matthew is just as skeptical of the gentile world as he is of Israel. Most of both groups will reject the message, most of both groups will abuse the missionaries, and some of both groups will be gathered into the Kingdom. However we translate πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, Matthew does not anticipate an enthusiastic gentile audience, nor does he reflect a belief that God’s attentions have turned away from Israel. At most, Matthew depicts the

⁸³ von Dobbeler, “Die Restitutions Israels,” 29.

gentiles as no better nor worse than Jews. The stakes of this translation are simply not that high.

Third, the use of the phrase πάντα τὰ ἔθνη in one verse is not particularly helpful in interpreting the meaning of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη in another verse, but the use of the word ἔθνος is even less useful. The singular ἔθνος simply does not carry the same meaning that ἔθνη does in Second Temple literature. For example: Meier argues that the ἔθνος of Matt 21:43 is a “people,” the new people of God made of both Jews and gentiles (for further discussion, see §3.1.2).⁸⁴ Similarly, he argues that, in 24:7, Jesus predicts that ἔθνος will rise against ἔθνος. If the Jewish War is in view here (and it almost certainly is), then one ἔθνος must be Israel, and therefore the ἔθνη can include Jews.⁸⁵ But both of Meier’s arguments are weakened by the fact that ἔθνος does not have the same meaning ἔθνη does. An individual gentile is never described in any Jewish literature as an ἔθνος, and ἔθνος does not refer specifically to a non-Jewish nation.⁸⁶ The plural meaning of ἔθνος is different from the singular. Even if Matthew uses ἔθνος to refer to Israel or an Israel-inclusive group, this is no barrier to Matthew also using ἔθνη to refer to gentiles.

Fourth: πᾶς is not an unusual enough addition to the words τὰ ἔθνη to meaningfully change their definition. Πᾶς is something of a Matthean term, and characteristic of Matthew’s special vocabulary.⁸⁷ So, an addition of πᾶς is not necessarily

⁸⁴ Meier, “Nations or Gentiles?” 97-8.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 98.

⁸⁶ Hare, *Jewish Persecution*, 148n3; Harrington and Hare, “Make Disciples,” 386; Levine, *Social and Ethnic Dimensions*, 368.

⁸⁷ Gundry, *Matthew*, 3, 595, counts sixty-three insertions of πᾶς into existing traditions and another 25-26 uses of πάντα in material that is peculiar to Matthew. 3. Lloyd Gaston, *Horae Synopticae Electronicae: Word Statistics of the Synoptic Gospels*. Sources for Biblical Study 3 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 1973), 80, argues that Q has πᾶς 14 times. Matthew draws πᾶς from Q 14 times to Luke’s 13. Special M contains 50 instances of πᾶς compared to 104 of Luke’s, and Matthew adds πᾶς 30 times to Luke’s 20.

a good indication that Matthew means to convey some sort of distinct theological meaning. It is not necessarily clear that Matthew means different things by τὰ ἔθνη and πάντα τὰ ἔθνη.

Fifth and finally: the use of τὰ ἔθνη to mean “gentile nations” or “gentile people” is to some extent idiomatic. In context, we can often determine clearly which is meant by an author, but we should also be careful not to overly define the word beyond what the context allows. The development of the word ἔθνη (and עַמִּים) to mean “gentiles” was a gradual outworking from the Jewish need to describe “the other” and “not Israel” in opposition to itself.⁸⁸ Once ἔθνη had entered linguistic convention as a way to describe undifferentiated “other nations,” natural slippage and idiomatic usage allowed the word to eventually describe undifferentiated “other people” as well.⁸⁹ The use of ἔθνη to mean “others” or “them” has always been an allusive, discursive practice, and we may be overreading ambiguous passages if we insist that ἔθνη must mean either “nations,” “gentile nations,” or “gentile people,” but never a combination of more than one category. When Matthew does not seem to have an obvious referent in mind, it is not necessary to insist on finding one narrow, technical definition for ἔθνη. We should allow for the possibility that ἔθνη means some variant of “other people,” “everyone else,” and anyone who would be “them” to a Jewish-Christian community with its roots in Palestine. This can be an ethnic other (non-Jews as opposed to Jews, as in 10:18), a non-sectarian other (people who are not members of the Jesus movement as opposed to the Jesus movement itself, as is likely in 20:25-6), or a geographic other (the land beyond

⁸⁸ Adi Ophir and Ishay Rosen-Zvi, *Goy: Israel's Multiple Others and the Birth of the Gentile* (Oxford: Oxford U. Press, 2018), 11-3.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 116-7.

Galilee and Judea, as in 10:5-6). In Greek, as in English, the nuances of “nations” and “gentile nations” and “gentile people” are prone to slippage.

It is for this reason that I think we should not exclude the possibility that, if pressed, Matthew would likely concede that πάντα τὰ ἔθνη could, in some contexts, include Diaspora Jews. After all, according to our analysis they are not among the geographically identified “lost sheep of Israel” depicted in Matt 10:5-6; Matthew restricts the mission in geographic terms that preclude the possibility of reaching Jews in Samaria or gentile areas. This also does not seem to be Matthew’s simple oversight; he shows plenty of awareness of people who live beyond the boundaries of their supposed homeland. Galilee is “of the gentiles” (4:14-15), and gentiles are present as rulers during the mission within Israel (10:18). Matthew is not just aware of gentiles within Palestine, either – he is also aware of Jews who live among the gentiles. The παλιγγενεσία depicted in Matt 19:28, in which the disciples judge the “twelve tribes of Israel,” shows awareness of the Diaspora; the παλιγγενεσία apparently refers to the reassembly and ingathering of dispersed Jews.⁹⁰ Matthew 8:11-12 may also depict the ingathering of dispersed Jews to the exclusion of many living in Palestine.⁹¹ If Matthew envisions a mission to nations beyond Israel in the post-resurrection era, as he does in 24:9 and 14, it seems overly

⁹⁰ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:57; Fiedler, *Das Matthäusevangelium*, 204; Gundry, *Matthew*, 392; Luz, *Matthew*, 2:517; Gerd Theißen, *Lokalkolorit und Zeitgeschichte in den Evangelien. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition.*, NTOA 8 (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1989), 48; Vögtle, *Das Neue Testament und die Zukunft des Kosmos*, 165-66; cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 11.66). This reading that those from “the east and west” are primarily Diaspora Jews has been criticized by Freyne, *Jesus: A Jewish Galilean*, 112. For a criticism of how Diaspora-related prophecies have been redacted in Matthew, see Dale C. Allison, “Who Will Come from East and West? Observations on Matt 8.11-12/Luke 13.28-29,” *IBS* 11 (1989): 158-70, 165-7.

⁹¹ Levine, *Social and Ethnic Dimensions*, 126-30. For a reading of the “many” who come from the east and west containing gentiles but not exclusively gentiles, see Konradt, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles*, 204-5.

wooden to assume that he means for the mission to go to gentiles in those lands but not the Jews who live among them. These Jews are not included in Matthew's "lost sheep of Israel" in 10:5-6, and Matthew knows they exist, so this leaves us with little option but to conclude that they are implicitly assigned a place among the ἔθνη. From the perspective of Matthew, they are among "the other" by virtue of their homeland, if not their ethnicity.

So, following up on our insistence that πάντα τὰ ἔθνη must be determined on a case-by-case basis. Matt 24:9 and 24:14 appear in their setting to refer to gentiles living abroad, rather than simply "all nations." When we compare Matthew's redaction with Mark 13, this becomes apparent. First, Matthew obscures the role of Jews in his eschatological discourse, whereas in Mark 13 persecution from Jews is highlighted. In Mark 13:7-9, Mark warns not only about general persecution for the Christians, but specifically persecution from synagogues and one's own family (13:7-9). By contrast, the Markan references to family conflict and synagogue persecution are absent in Matthew's eschatological discourse; Matthew moves the material referring to synagogue and intra-family conflict to Matt 10:16-22. In the eschatological discourse, Matthew's attention has turned outward.

Second, if Matthew meant only to convey that the disciples would preach the gospel to everyone, and that everyone would hate them, this was already stated in his source text, Mark 13:10-13. Instead of sticking with this Markan story, Matthew has made some significant changes that suggest that he is trying to convey something different. For example, he changes Mark's statement of universal hatred by family members and governments (καὶ ἔσεσθε μισούμενοι ὑπὸ πάντων, Mark 13: 13) to a warning that the disciples will be hated and killed by πάντα τὰ ἔθνη (Matt 24:9).

Likewise, he expands Mark's simple statement that the gospel will be preached to πάντα τὰ ἔθνη to predict that the gospel will be preached "in all the world" (ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ οἰκουμένῃ) as a witness (εἰς μαρτύριον) to πάντα τὰ ἔθνη. His distinction between preaching "in all the world" and "a witness to all the ἔθνη" suggests that these concepts are not synonymous. The phrase "in all the world" expresses geographic universality, and the phrase "to all the ἔθνη" describes the people there.

As always, the meaning of the "witness" can be two-sided, depending on how the ἔθνη respond. Matthew is aware of negative responses to the missionary message (see, e.g., the parable of the sower in Matt 13:1-23/Mark 4:1-20/Luke 8:4-15). Witness does not always lead to acceptance and salvation. It can also cause judgment and hard-heartedness.⁹² Thus, it is important to note that while Matt 24 acknowledges a gentile mission, it does not simply manifest an expectation of widespread gentile conversion that will produce greater yields than the mission to the Jews. The anticipation that the gospel will be preached to πάντα τὰ ἔθνη is accompanied by the warning that the preachers of the gospel will face tribulation.

The best reading of Matt 24:9-14 is that it describes the mission beyond the bounds of Israel that will precede the eschaton. Between Jesus's resurrection and return, the church will face new challenges: false teachers (24:11), national and personal conflicts (24:7, 10), and persecution (24:9, 14). The catchphrase πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, which Jesus identifies as the site of mission in 28:19, strengthens the connection between the international mission and the eschatological discourse of Matt 24. The international

⁹² Carter, *Matthew at the Margins*, 473.

mission is an event that must take place in the final countdown to the Parousia, and because it takes place during this dangerous time of the tribulation, it is just as dangerous as the mission that preceded it. Thus, the peculiar emphasis of the passage is on the mission beyond Israel to the gentiles.

3.4.2 Is Matthew 24 about Missionaries?

How can we tell if the persecuted figures described in Matt 24:9-14 are missionaries? The first good indicator is the direct addressees of the discourse. The immediate audience of the eschatological discourse is the disciples (Matt 24:3). Matthew expands the audience of this discourse beyond the “inner four” (Peter, James, John, and Andrew, Mark 13:3) to the disciples as a group. The disciples in Matthew often symbolize the church that comes after them,⁹³ and the eschatological discourse characterizes “the entire post-Easter period.”⁹⁴ Matthew is not simply referring to the persecution of the disciples. He is referring to the persecution of the church that follows after Jesus. In his theology, the church is a missionizing community of people tasked with the responsibility of spreading the gospel.⁹⁵

Secondly, we have the general content of Matthew’s eschatological discourse and its continuous focus on mission. The Matthean Jesus describes the persecution of Christians in general in 24:9-14. However, this is in the context of discussing the spread of a worldwide mission. The gospel is preached everywhere (24:14) and the “elect” are gathered from “one corner of heaven to another” (24:31). These people could either be

⁹³ Luz, *Studies in Matthew*, 131-2.

⁹⁴ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:331.

⁹⁵ Luz, *Studies in Matthew*, 150-1.

the missionaries who spread the gospel abroad themselves, or the ones who are converted by it. Worldwide mission and the expansion of the Christian movement is clearly assumed. Since Matthew's envisioned audience can be found throughout the world, and the passage depicts the missionizing of all peoples, it is most reasonable to assume that it is intended to depict the experience of a church deeply involved in the missionary project.

To conclude this section, in 24:14 the eschatological discourse predicts a worldwide mission that reaches nations beyond Israel, and the persecuted Christians' location among πάντα τὰ ἔθνη strongly ties them to the missionary project. The eschatological discourse shows a keen interest in missionary work, and assumes its expansion. How continuous is this material with what has come before it in the Gospel?

3.4.3 The Mission in Matt 24:9-14

In §3.2.2 we noted that the parable of the wedding banquet contains the first possible allusion in Matthew's Gospel to a worldwide, international mission. In 24:9-14 we have an explicit prediction of worldwide mission, and a major shift in the parameters of the missionary discourse. While 10:5-6 commanded a geographically limited mission within Israel, 24:9-14 predicts a mission that will go to the entire world.

Nonetheless, the theme of missionary persecution, first introduced in the missionary discourse, appears again in this passage. Matthew repeats a number of key catchwords from Matt 10 in his depiction of worldwide persecution, underscoring the similarity between Jewish and gentile resistance. The word μισέω in Matt 24:9 recalls 10:22, in which Jesus warned that the missionaries would be "hated by all (ὑπὸ πάντων) because of my name." This phrase is repeated in 24:9, except now the disciples will be

hated specifically by “all the gentile nations” (ὕπὸ πάντων τῶν ἐθνῶν, compare with ὑπὸ πάντων Mark 13:13). The word παραδίδωμι (Matt 24:9), the “handing over” of the missionaries, is also repeated from 10:17-19. The severity of the persecutions has not diminished as the mission moves from Israel to the rest of the world. Lethal persecution is anticipated in Matt 24:9, the same danger that faced disciples in 10:21 and 28. The severity of the persecution abroad challenges the argument that Matthew shows a gentile bias as he turns his attention to the broader world, and that he teaches that a receptive gentile church will replace Israel. Wherever Matthew’s missionaries go, he anticipates violence and resistance to their message. He does not, as the replacement reading suggests, anticipate resistance only in Israel and a receptive audience abroad. Once again, we have thematic continuity between the mission of Matt 10 and the missionary activity described later in the Gospel.

A second theme that reemerges from the missionary discourse is that of representation. The missionaries in the worldwide mission are representatives of Jesus in the same way they were in Israel. The specific reason all the gentile nations are said to hate the disciples is Jesus’s “name” (διὰ τὸ ὄνομά μου), which is a proxy for his authority and work throughout the Gospel.⁹⁶ Participants in the church prophesy (7:22), receive children (18:5), gather (18:20), and abandon family and property (19:29) in the name of Jesus. When missionaries expand their efforts abroad, they do so with the delegated authority of Jesus, and they represent him personally to the world.

⁹⁶ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:716.

A third theme from the missionary discourse that reappears is the association with the imminent end. The sending of the missionaries to nations that hate them is part of the necessary process of escalating tribulation that culminates in the final judgment. The persecutions are not directionless suffering. They point ahead to their inevitable conclusion. The violence of the tribulation continuously escalates, climaxing with calamity in Jerusalem (24:15-22) and, finally, the gathering of the elect by the Son of Man (24:30-31). None of this is expected to go on indefinitely. As Joel Marcus notes, labor as a metaphor for the end suggests imminence. The end is not immediate (Matt 24:6; Mark 13:7), but it is coming quickly, just as the beginning of labor means that a baby will come soon (Matt 24:8; Mark 13:8).⁹⁷ The prediction of suffering carries with it an assurance of the suffering's end. The signs of the tribulation are like buds on a fig tree -- a sign that spring has almost arrived (24:31-32). In other words, Matthew promises his missionaries an imminent end. Their difficulties during their mission are a sign that their deliverance is not far away -- just as Jesus said in the missionary discourse (Matt 10:23).

Finally, as in the missionary discourse, the mission to the nations is not complete. Matthew promises that both mission at home (10:23) and mission abroad will end with the coming of the Son of Man (24:30-31). He is insistent that there is no chance that this event could have occurred without the missionaries knowing. The Son of Man's coming will not be a quiet event (24:26). Instead, it will be like lightning that can be seen from anywhere (24:27/Luke 17:24). This dramatic event is apparently one that Matthew is still anticipating. If the church is diligent, the Son of Man will return to gather his

⁹⁷ Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 877-8.

missionaries while they are still in the field (24:45-51; cf. Matt 10:23), carrying out their work.

To conclude our discussion of Matt 24:9-14, Matthew's theology of mission shows signs of change as he anticipates a mission that goes beyond Israel to the whole world. The work in the world is specifically beyond Israel (24:14). Nonetheless, the missiology described in the missionary discourse has by no means been abandoned. Matthew still anticipates persecution for the missionaries. He still understands them as representatives of Jesus. He still believes that the mission is underway, and he still associates it with an imminent eschatological end. Even as he introduces theological innovations to his text, his theology of mission remains remarkably consistent.

We now move to the final reference to missionary activity in Matthew's Gospel before the commissioning in 28:16-20, namely the judgment of the sheep and the goats (Matt 24:31-46). As we will see, the pattern of continuity between the missionary discourse and later depictions of missionary work continues, even as Matthew continues to explore the theme of worldwide mission.

3.5 The Judgment of the Sheep and the Goats: Matt 25:31-46

The Son of Man's judgment of the sheep and the goats is the climax of Matthew's eschatological discourse.⁹⁸ The pericope depicts the gathering of τὰ ἔθνη (25:32) before the Son of Man (25:31). The people are separated into two groups of sheep and goats,

⁹⁸ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:416.

placed respectively on the right and the left of the divine throne (25:31-33). The division between sheep and goats is based on their treatment of the Son of Man, embodied in his hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, and imprisoned “least” brothers and sisters (25:40). Those who provided care for these “brothers and sisters” are welcomed into eternal life, and those who did not are expelled (25:46).

I argue that this passage depicts the judgment of the universal mission field based on people’s treatment of missionaries. This reading frames the passage not as a judgment of the church, nor as a universal judgment of treatment of the poor, but as a judgment of how individuals from gentile lands respond to the global mission of the church.

3.5.1 Is Matt 25:31-46 about Missionaries?

The question of whether this passage is about missionaries needs to be framed in the context of the larger interpretive debate concerning the judgment of the sheep and the goats. Broadly speaking, there are two major options in interpretive history for how to read this pericope: the universalist reading, and the particularist one.⁹⁹

According to the universalist reading, the Son of Man judges the sheep and the goats according to their treatment of all the poor, sick, and incarcerated in every time and place. Those among τὰ ἔθνη who have shown compassion to the impoverished, sick, and imprisoned receive everlasting life, and those who have not are condemned. This reading gained rapid popularity in the nineteenth century and has been particularly favored in

⁹⁹ Terms borrowed from Graham Stanton, *Studies in Matthew and Early Christianity*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl and David Lincicum, WUNT 309 (Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 145-6. Also used by Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:422-33; Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 331; and Luz, *Matthew*, 3:282.

scholarship after significant global catastrophes.¹⁰⁰ Depending on the interpreter, τὰ ἔθνη facing the throne of judgment may consist exclusively of Christians,¹⁰¹ exclusively of non-Christians,¹⁰² or of both groups together.¹⁰³

The other option, the particularist interpretation, is that the poor, sick, and imprisoned in question are not the world's needy in general, but specifically needy Christians or missionaries. This narrower definition dominated patristic interpretation and was first advanced by Jerome.¹⁰⁴ A particularist reading of the "least of these" does not depend on any single definition of τὰ ἔθνη who are judged for the treatment of the least of these. Options include non-Jews (τὰ ἔθνη as a label for gentiles), non-Christians (τὰ ἔθνη as a label for pagans), non-Jews who are not Christians, or all humanity.¹⁰⁵

Sherman Gray's taxonomy of "particularist" and "universalist" readings hinges on the definition of the "least" of these. Are they a general class of disadvantaged people, or are they a specific group of individuals in need of care? One hint is the title "the least of these" (ἐλάχιστος) in 25:40 and 45, which is similar to the "little ones" (μικρός) of Matt 10:42 and Matt 18:6-14. In these cases, the "little ones" are Christians.¹⁰⁶ Matthew often describes Christians with diminutive language (7:7-11; 11:25), and he encourages them to emulate children in Matt 18:2-5. The smallness and weakness of Jesus's followers is a

¹⁰⁰ Sherman W. Gray, *The Least of My Brothers: Matthew 25:31-46: A History of Interpretation*, SBLDS 114 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 350-1.

¹⁰¹ Victor Paul Furnish, *The Love Command in the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), 79-84.

¹⁰² Manson, *Sayings of Jesus*, 249-50.

¹⁰³ France, *Matthew*, 961; Gray, *The Least of My Brothers*, 358-9.

¹⁰⁴ Gray, *The Least of My Brothers*, 331-3.

¹⁰⁵ See Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:422 for an outline of options and their supporters.

¹⁰⁶ Stanton, *Studies in Matthew*, 144-5.

consistent theme in Matthew, and the title of “least” fits with these larger trends in Matthew’s Gospel.

The “least” are also described as the Son of Man’s siblings (25:40). “Sibling” (ἀδελφός) is a title for Christ-followers elsewhere in the Gospel (23:8-9),¹⁰⁷ specifically as Jesus’s siblings in 12:46-50 (cf. Mark 3:34-35; Luke 8:21).¹⁰⁸ In a saying that is unique to Matthew, the eleven surviving disciples are also called Jesus’s “siblings” in 28:10.¹⁰⁹ We have a strong tradition of church members being identified as the siblings of Jesus,¹¹⁰ but there are no passages in Matthew or in early Christian writings in general where Jesus is said to be the sibling of the poor and sick in general.¹¹¹ This is a serious problem for the universalist reading of Matt 25:31-46.

So, the “least of these” is probably some kind of Christian – in particular, Christians who lack food and shelter, need housing, or are sick and imprisoned. This has led some scholars to argue that this text depicts the judgment of the church. Christians of means are judged based on how they treated Christians who were poor. By this standard,

¹⁰⁷ See Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:744-5.

¹⁰⁸ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:364; Gundry, *Matthew*, 249.

¹⁰⁹ See also Matt 12:50, where the “siblings” are those who do the will of Jesus; cf. Beaton, *Isaiah’s Christ*, 188; Keener, *Matthew*, 604.

¹¹⁰ For the brothers and sisters of Jesus as Christians/disciples see Graham Anderson, *Sage, Saint and Sophist: Holy Men and Their Associates in the Early Roman Empire* (London/New York: Routledge, 1994), 416-7; Broer, “Das Gleichnis vom Gericht des Menschensohnes über die Völker, Mt 25,31-36,” 273–95; Lamar Cope, “Matthew XXV:31–46, ‘The Sheep and the Goats’ Reinterpreted,” *NovT* 11 (1969): 32-44 and “‘To the Close of the Age’: The Role of Apocalyptic Thought in the Gospel of Matthew,” in *Apocalyptic Thought and the New Testament: Essays in Honor of J. Louis Martin*, ed. Joel Marcus and Marion L. Soards, JSNTSup 4 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 113–24; Ulrich Luz, “The Final Judgment (Matt 25,31–46): An Exercise in ‘History of Influence’ Exegesis,” in *Treasures New and Old*, ed. David R. Bauer and Mark Allan Powell (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 271–310; Jindrich Mánek, “Mit wem identifiziert sich Jesus? Eine exegetische Rekonstruktion ad Matth 25:31–46,” in *Christ and the Spirit in the New Testament: In Honor of C. F. D. Moule*, ed. Barnabas Lindars and Stephen S. Smalley (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1973), 15–25; Jacques Winandy, “La scène du jugement dernier,” *ScEcl* 18 (1966): 169-86.

¹¹¹ Stanton, *Studies in Matthew*. 145.

Jesus separates a “mixed body” of people who claim allegiance to Christ into true followers and false ones (cf. Matt 13:38-43; 22:11-14).¹¹² But this is problematic for two reasons. First, the group divided into sheep and goats is called τὰ ἔθνη, which is not an intuitive word used to describe the church. As we discussed in §3.4.1, τὰ ἔθνη is Matthew’s term for outsiders, not insiders. This is not a likely term to describe Christians, or Christians and non-Christians together.¹¹³ Second, the judgment of the sheep and the goats is a judgment of a multitude with relative power compared to the siblings of Jesus. This does not fit with Matthew’s understanding of what the Jesus movement is, however. In the Gospel, the church is a beleaguered minority, not an international powerhouse.¹¹⁴ At the same time, the judgment in question cannot simply concern the world’s treatment of Christians, in which the Christians are assumed to all be poor.¹¹⁵ Matthew does not seem to think of Christians in general as impoverished. He shows awareness of Christians who are in danger of serving mammon (Matt 6:24). If he writes from an urban context, he may know Christians from a range of economic situations, some of whom have more resources than others.¹¹⁶

¹¹² Carlston and Evans, *From Synagogue to Ecclesia*, 456-7; Furnish, *The Love Command*, 79-84; George Gay, “The Judgment of the Gentiles in Matthew’s Theology,” in *Scripture, Tradition, and Interpretation: Essays Presented to Everett F. Harrison by His Students and Colleagues in Honor of His Seventy-Fifth Birthday*, ed. W. Ward Gasque and William Sandford La Sor (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 199–215; Ulrich Wilckens, “Gottes geringste Brüder - zu Mt. 25, 31-46,” in *Jesus und Paulus. Festschrift für Werner G. Kümmel zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. E. Earle Ellis and Erich Grässer (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), 363-83.

¹¹³ Hill, *Matthew*, 331; Stanton, *Gospel for a New People*, 214; *Studies in Matthew*, 145-6.

¹¹⁴ Stanton, *Gospel for a New People*, 212.

¹¹⁵ Contra France, *Matthew*, 958.

¹¹⁶ Rodney Stark, “Antioch as the Social Situation for Matthew’s Gospel,” in *Social History of the Matthean Community: Cross Disciplinary Approaches*, ed. David L. Balch (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 189–210 and Antoinette Clark Wire, “Gender Roles in a Scribal Community,” in *Social History of the Matthean Community: Cross Disciplinary Approaches*, ed. David L. Balch (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 187–221.

So, who are these siblings of Jesus whose needs are particularly dire? The obvious candidate for such a role would be people serving the church in a missionary capacity. Missionaries are transient figures in the missionary discourse, and they are dependent on their intended targets for food and shelter (10:9-14). Matthew does not show the same generalized interest in the poor that fellow evangelist Luke does (e.g., Luke 3:11; 14:13; 14:21, etc.). For Matthew, rather, poverty is a consequence of Christian outreach. His Gospel praises and reassures individuals who have left homes, families, and livelihoods for the gospel (19:24). Theissen has argued that the difficulties of itinerant ministry shape the Jesus traditions Matthew uses in his text. For example, his advice for the underfed and underclothed (6:25-34) is particularly urgent for individuals who have abandoned their own means of providing for themselves.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, the promise of rewards for those who care for the siblings of Jesus strengthens the connection between the “least of these” and the missionaries. Jesus promises rewards for those who bring water to thirsty missionaries (10:42), just as he does in Matt 25:36. The group of people we have seen consistently in Matthew’s Gospel to be in need of food, clothing, and shelter is not the poor in general nor the church at large, but specifically the poor and hospitality-dependent missionaries.

This all accords with the experience of another missionary from the first century: Paul. Paul brags about facing violent persecution, hunger, thirst, and exposure (2 Cor 11:23-26). Furthermore, imprisonment was apparently a pervasive risk for missionaries. The incarceration of Paul and his associates (Phil 1:12-13; Philem. 1, 23) is well-known,

¹¹⁷ Theissen, *Social Reality and the Early Christian*, 34-43.

but Paul's circle also faced sickness while traveling. Visitors in prison would have been good for morale, and also necessary for survival. Imprisoned individuals in the Roman world depended on friends and family to bring them food, water, clothing and supplies.¹¹⁸ Paul apparently faced regular imprisonment during his missionary journeys and relied on the churches he planted to provide care for him during periods of detention. Paul is also depicted depending on warm clothing and texts from his liberated companions in 2 Tim 4:9-13. The satirical character Peregrinus similarly depends on his disciples while he is imprisoned (Lucian, *Peregr*, 11-14), as do Perpetua, Felicitas, and Thecla.¹¹⁹ In Matthew's theology, visiting prisons is not simply an act of mercy, but essential work that keeps missionaries alive and available for service.

Just as missionaries faced the risk of incarceration, they also may have been unusually vulnerable to illness. Paul apparently struggled with illness on the road (Gal 4:13), as did Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25-6). This may have been because of the rigors of travel in the Greco-Roman world. The pressures and deprivations of life on the road, as well as the cramped quarters of sea and land travel, made illness during travel a likely danger. Disease was a well-known risk of sea travel,¹²⁰ and hostels were hotbeds of infection.¹²¹ Even Augustus struggled with sickness on military campaigns.¹²² Even though Matthew has not explicitly associated illness with missionary activity before in

¹¹⁸ See Jens-Uwe Krause, *Gefängnisse im Römischen Reich* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1996), 271-304 in general but particularly 303-4 on the importance of family and friends providing for prisoners.

¹¹⁹ *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas* 1.2; *Acts of Thecla* 2.4.

¹²⁰ Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Travel in Antiquity*, TSAJ 144 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 192, 204.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹²² Karl Galinsky, *Augustus: Introduction to the Life of an Emperor* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 2012), 32-3.

his text, the connection between illness and itinerant travel is not unattested in ancient literature.

If the “least” are Christians, and particularly Christian missionaries, then who are τὰ ἔθνη? Options entertained by past scholars and commentators include gentiles, non-Christian gentiles, the church, and all humanity.¹²³ As we discussed above, it is unlikely that this passage depicts the judgment of the church or the judgment of the entire world, including the church. The term τὰ ἔθνη, connoting outsiders, suggests that Matthew depicts the judgment of individuals who are targeted by the worldwide mission. Elsewhere in the eschatological discourse (Matt 24:9 and 14), πάντα τὰ ἔθνη designates the post-resurrection, pre-Parousia eschatological mission field that extends beyond Israel. This definition seems to fit the context of Matt 25:31-46. Having established in two preceding parables how the disciples ought to be ready for the end (a theme introduced in Matt 24:42-41 and then expanded in 24:45-51 and 25:14-30), Matthew turns to how the rest of the world will prepare for the eschaton.¹²⁴ The disciples will prepare by being diligent in their responsibilities to Jesus; the rest of the world will prepare by responding appropriately. The judged individuals are thus best defined as recipients of the post-resurrection, pre-Parousia mission, gathered from among the nations beyond Israel. They are presumably mostly gentiles, but could also include Diaspora Jews, who are not included in the Israel-based mission that began in Jesus’s own lifetime.

¹²³ See Davies and Allison’s summary in *Matthew*, 3:422.

¹²⁴ Gray, *Least of My Brothers*, 158.

The nations are the new post-resurrection site of missionary work, and the standard by which they are judged is how they have responded to missionaries. The standard of judgment is both reception of the missionaries' message and provision for their care. Brown argues that, because only material provision for the "brothers and sisters of Jesus" is mentioned and not acceptance of their mission, Matthew does not believe that τὰ ἔθνη are judged on the basis of conversion, but simply on the basis of their practical mercy towards the brothers and sisters of Jesus.¹²⁵ Similarly, Runesson argues that the sheep's surprise at finding out they have fed and clothed Jesus himself indicates that the gentiles are not converted - merely good stewards of Jesus's associates when they have found them.¹²⁶ However, this reading is problematic for two reasons. First, it does not attend to the fact that Matthew assumes that material support accompanies acceptance of the missionary's proclamation earlier in the Gospel (Matt 10:14). A receptive audience is a hospitable one, and a hospitable audience is a receptive one. This is the case in Matt 10 and could certainly be the case here. Second, we misplace the emphasis in the parable if we overread the surprise of the judged for hints about their motivation or disposition to the gospel. The surprise of the judged is a common motif in apocalyptic literature.¹²⁷ The righteous are not surprised because they do not understand that they are righteous, nor because they did not expect a reward from the Son of Man,¹²⁸ but because they did not

¹²⁵ Schuyler Brown, "The Matthean Apocalypse," *JSNT* 2.4 (1979): 2-27, 17-8.

¹²⁶ Runesson, *Divine Wrath and Salvation in Matthew*, 424-6.

¹²⁷ George Njeri, "Surprise on the Day of Judgment in Matthew 25:31-46 and The Book of the Watchers," *Neot* 54.1 (2020): 87-104.

¹²⁸ Nathan Eubank, "Merit and Anti-Judaism in Matthew's Parables since Jülicher," in *Matthew within Judaism: Israel and The Nations in the First Gospel*, ed. Anders Runesson and Daniel M. Gurtner, *Early Christianity and Its Literature* 27 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2020), 427-48; Turner, "His Glorious Throne," 159.

realize they had cared for the Son of Man himself – not only his “brothers and sisters.”¹²⁹ By expressing their surprise, they create the literary context for the Son of Man to reveal the truth, that they cared for him in the place of the missionaries (25:40, 45).

To summarize this section: the judgment of the sheep and the goats is the judgment of the world after the eschatological mission is carried out. The siblings of Jesus are in need because they bring the gospel abroad and have abandoned ordinary means of providing for themselves. The world beyond Israel, now newly targeted by an expanding mission to the ends of the earth, faces judgment based on how it has responded to this mission. Receptive individuals support the missionaries and are blessed, while everyone who fails to listen to and care for the missionaries is condemned. Though Matthew may believe that the final judgment of Israel and the final judgment of the gentiles will be separate events,¹³⁰ Jews and gentiles alike are held to the standard of receiving the missionaries with their message (Matt 10:11-15; 10:40-42). Beyond this, is there anything else that can be said about post-resurrection missionary work in the Gospel of Matthew on the basis of 25:31-46??

3.5.2 The Sheep Among the Nations

¹²⁹ Contra Jeremias, *Parables of Jesus*, 208-10.

¹³⁰ For separate Jew/gentile judgments see Ezek 39:21; Joel 4; Amos 1-2; Zech 8:8-14; 9:1-8; Mic 7:11-13; Pss. Sol. 17:26-30; 1 En. 91:7-16; 4 Ezra 13:33-49; 2 Bar 72; and T. Benj. 10:7-9; cf. Harrington, *Matthew*, 358-59 and Runesson, *Divine Wrath and Salvation in Matthew*, 25-32. It is possible that Matthew mentions the judgment of Israel in 19:28, since here the judgment is presided over by the disciples along with Jesus and not by Jesus alone. For a response that sees the disciples “ruling” Israel rather than “judging” (dividing between the good and bad, or condemning it) see Philip F. Esler, “Ethnic Identities in the Dead Sea Legal Papyri and Matthew: Reinterpreting Matthew 25:31–46,” in *Matthew within Judaism: Israel and the Nations in the First Gospel*, ed. Anders Runesson and Daniel M. Gurtner, Early Christianity and Its Literature 27 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2020): 195–212, 202-4.

Individuals in the international mission field are assigned the label of “sheep” or “goat” depending on their reception of the missionaries. The righteous on the right are called sheep, the condemned on the left are called goats. Is there any theological significance to these particular zoological labels?

One possibility is that Matthew is simply using a familiar image from agriculture to evoke the image of separation. Matthew has already used the image of separating crops from weeds (13:24-30) and good fish from bad fish (13:47-50) to explain judgment. Weeding and fishing would have been familiar images to Matthew’s readers, and dividing livestock may have been similarly well-known to his audience. We have some historical records of shepherds separating sheep from goats either to keep the goats warm indoors¹³¹ or to milk them.¹³² However, the imagery may not be incidental. Matthew identifies Jesus’s in-crowd with sheep throughout the Gospel. Jesus and his disciples are on a mission to the “lost sheep of Israel” (Matt 10:6; 15:24), the disciples are “sheep in the midst of wolves” (Matt 10:16), and the Son of Man is likened to a shepherd seeking his missing sheep (Matt 18:12-13; cf. 2:6; 26:31).

In light of the frequent use of sheep and shepherd imagery to describe Israel as a sheep and Jesus as its shepherd, it is unlikely that the use of sheep/goat imagery in Matt 25:31-46 is an arbitrary selection of mixed farm animals to describe a mixed group. What is missing in this section, though, is Matthew’s usual association of sheep with the people of Israel. The sheep in Matt 25:31-46 are among τὰ ἔθνη, not within Israel, which is where “sheep” in Matthew’s Gospel are usually found. So what is going on?

¹³¹ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:423; Jeremias, *Parables*, 206.

¹³² Gnlika, *Das Matthäusevangelium*, 2:372.

One possibility is that the saved gentiles reveal themselves to be like the sheep of Israel. Their behavior reveals that they are worthy to be part of Jesus's people, and they are therefore brought into the flock. Another possibility is that the sheep are like Israel in that they receive the blessings that are appropriate for Jesus's people: they inherit the kingdom (25:35) on the basis of their service.¹³³ A third and particularly intriguing option is that the ἔθνη who accept Jesus's message reveal themselves to be "lost sheep of Israel" in their own right. In the process of going out to the nation, the missionaries encounter "lost sheep" beyond Israel's boundaries: those who reveal themselves to be "sheep" through their acceptance of Jesus's representatives. These could include both actual Diaspora Jews who are receptive to Jesus's call, and gentiles who have joined the flock through their similar faithfulness (cf. John 10:16).

The idea that Matthew might think of these people as "lost Israelites" in either a spiritual or literal sense should not be excluded simply on the grounds that they are called τὰ ἔθνη. In fact, one under-discussed usage of the word ἔθνη in Jewish literature is not simply to designate "gentile nation groups" or "gentile individuals," but specifically to suggest "the gentile world with dispersed Jews among them."

Consider the following examples from the LXX. In a passage that employs the image of a shepherd gathering sheep from among the ἔθνη, Ezekiel presents Israel as scattered sheep (Ezek 34:5-8; 34:29),¹³⁴ whom God must gather again as a shepherd would (34:11-13). This passage has clear intertextual links with Matt 25:31-46. Not only do we have the references to a shepherd with his sheep, but we have God announcing his

¹³³ Runesson, *Divine Wrath and Salvation*, 393-428.

¹³⁴ See the catchwords διασπείρω, also in Ezek 36:19 and ποιμήν in 36:4-5. The recurring trope that Israel is "scattered prey" reinforces the "sheep" metaphor in later passages.

plans to judge between animals: “sheep and sheep,” “ram and goat,” and “cattle and cattle” (34:17, 20).¹³⁵ God specifically must bring the sheep ἐκ τῶν ἔθνῶν (34:13) in order for this to happen.

Ezekiel 36 also explores the theme that Israel is “scattered” (Ezek 36:19) and ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν (36:21, 22, 23), and that God must gather them up and take them ἐκ τῶν ἔθνῶν (36:24). This is a chapter that we have good reason to suspect is on Matthew’s mind, because of his use of it in Matt 1:21.¹³⁶ When Ezekiel describes the need for God as a shepherd to gather Israel as a lost flock, he says Israel is ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν. If Matthew is drawing on this passage in his depiction of the judgment of the sheep and the goats (and it seems that he is), it stands to reason that he would imagine that the ἔθνη gathered before God’s throne would have lost sheep of Israel within them.

The image of the people of Israel being “in” the nations and needing to be separated from them appears in other post-exilic prophetic literature, even in texts that do not employ the shepherd/sheep motif. Hosea 8:8 LXX describes the northern tribes “swallowed up” by gentiles and “in the nations” (ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν). Amos depicts God sifting for Israel with a sieve, in order to search for the “house of Israel” hidden “in all the nations” (ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, Amos 9:9 LXX). The idea that Israel – particularly the northern tribes – were mixed in with the nations is well-trod territory in prophetic literature. In these texts, the missing Israelites are sometimes even indistinguishable from the nations, until they are brought out at the end of the age. Matthew’s judgment of the sheep and goats seems to traffic in the same image of Israelites scattered in the nations.

¹³⁵ ἐγὼ διακρινῶ ἀνά μέσον προβάτου καὶ προβάτου κριῶν καὶ τράγων, Ezek 34:17.

¹³⁶ Nicholas Piotrowski, “‘I Will Save My People from Their Sins’: The Influence of Ezekiel 36:28b-29a; 37:23b on Matthew 1:21,” *TynBul* 64.1 (2013): 33–54.

The nations of the world are all before the throne, and the Son of Man picks out his own people, the sheep hidden among them.

So, is this a judgment that depicts the Son of Man dividing Jews from gentiles? Not necessarily. The idea of Israel being “in the nations” seems to have been how some early Jews and Christians made sense of the existence of Judaizing gentiles, gentile proselytes to Judaism, and gentile converts to Christianity. Joel Marcus has argued that at least one Jewish-Christian writer, the author of James, sees the gentile converts to Christianity as the ten northern tribes and addresses them, with the two tribes of Jews, as the “twelve tribes of the Diaspora” (James 1:1).¹³⁷ Matthew could be using the imagery of sheep amid the nations to expound on the same idea. Likewise, Staples argues that the Diaspora blurs the distinction between “all Israel” and “the gentiles” in Paul’s letters. According to Paul, Israel is in “the nations” –assimilated and of mixed descent. Therefore, bringing in the “fullness” of the gentiles is a component of rescuing “all Israel” in Rom 11:25-27.¹³⁸ Some gentiles in the nations will respond positively to the gospel – specifically, because they are hidden Israelites abroad.

The extent to which Matthew has a clear theology of Jewish and gentile identity in this highly allusive passage is difficult to pin down. How exactly he envisages a person being both from τὰ ἔθνη and within Israel is not clear. The idea of eschatological participation of gentiles in the salvation of Israel, however, is well-attested in early Jewish literature. How this incorporation was to occur, and how complete the incorporation was, was a subject of considerable debate. Some texts posit that gentiles

¹³⁷ Joel Marcus, “‘The Twelve Tribes in the Diaspora’ (James 1.1),” *NTS* 60.4 (2014): 438-40.

¹³⁸ Jason A. Staples, “What Do the Gentiles Have to Do with ‘All Israel’? A Fresh Look at Romans 11:25–27,” *JBL* 130.2 (2011), 321-2.

who abandon their idolatry and follow Torah will be included among the eschatological people.¹³⁹ Others allow gentiles to retain their gentile identity, while following the Noahic laws rather than the whole of the Torah.¹⁴⁰ Still other texts, like the Animal Apocalypse, envision both Jews and gentiles returning to a primeval undifferentiated state mirroring that of the Patriarchs.¹⁴¹

If Matthew had a clear idea of how gentiles could join Israel in the eschaton, he does not say what it is. But we can say that the missionaries find people who reveal themselves to be sheep and are members of Jesus's flock among the ἔθνη. Some of these people may be, from a Hebrew Bible perspective, "missing sheep" from the scattered flock – specifically, sympathetic Diaspora Jews. Others may be gentiles who welcome missionaries into their home and are granted the title of honorary sheep in their own right. If this is what Matthew intends, it would be the first time in his Gospel that he introduces the idea that gentiles join the eschatological community on a similar footing with Jews. This image is not consistent in the Gospel and may even be openly contradicted in Matt 15:21-28, in which the children of Israel sit at the table and the dogs from the nations eat beneath it. In Matt 25:41-46, though, individuals from the nations are welcomed as true sheep.

The pericope of the sheep and the goats graphically depicts the results of international mission. The references to πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, as well as needy brothers and sisters of Jesus, demonstrate that the passage is best read as one about missionary work. It

¹³⁹ Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles: Jewish Patterns of Universalism (To 135 CE)*, 500-1.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 503, esp. n13.

¹⁴¹ Matthew Thiessen, "Paul, the Animal Apocalypse, and Abraham's Gentile Seed," in *The Ways That Often Parted: Essays in Honor of Joel Marcus*, ed. Lori Baron, Jill Hicks-Keeton, and Matthew Thiessen, *Early Christianity and Its Literature 24* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018), 65–78.

also expands and deepens Matthew's picture of the roles of Jews and gentiles in future salvation. Even individuals who are saved from among πάντα τὰ ἔθνη are identified with the flock of Israel. Matthew remains interested in Israel as a site of salvation, even in the midst of a mission to all nations. This text introduces a significant innovation into Matthew's theology of mission – participation of Jews and gentiles on a level playing field in the eschatological kingdom. It also continues the theme of worldwide mission, which Matthew hints at in Matt 22:1-14 and expounds in 24:9-14. Nonetheless, as we will see, themes from the missionary discourse still appear in this text, even as Matthew continues to turn his attention to worldwide mission.

3.5.3 The Mission in Matt 25:31-46

The judgment of the sheep and the goats is an excellent demonstration of how themes from the missionary discourse persist in Matthew's mission theology. Even as Matthew turns his attention abroad, his discourse concerning the mission in Israel continues to inform how missionary work will function on new fronts.

For example: Matthew foregrounds the theme of missionaries as representatives of Jesus. He literalizes the motif of representation from Matt 10:40 in this passage. In 10:40, Jesus is welcomed whenever missionaries are welcomed. In 25:40 and 45, Jesus is actually fed or neglected in the bodies of his envoys. Caring for the needs of the missionaries is quite literally caring for Jesus himself, and services rendered to them are services rendered to Jesus. Matthew also reintroduces in this passage the theme of hospitality for missionaries and corresponding rewards. In the missionary discourse,

Jesus predicted that whoever provides water for a traveling missionary will be repaid (10:42), but any household that refuses to provide care will face judgment (10:14-15). In the eschaton, as portrayed in 25:31-46, this prophecy comes to fruition. The missionaries are dependent on others for care as they go around homeless, without means of feeding or providing for themselves. Their risks become particularly acute when they fall ill or run afoul of local leaders and are put in prison. Receptive missionary targets recognize this and care for the mission, and are rewarded in turn.

Matthew also revisits the theme of missionary persecution, which does not diminish in severity as the gospel spreads beyond the bounds of Israel. Official, state sanctioned persecution is strongly implied in the case of incarcerated missionaries (Matt 25:36, 39, 43-44). This danger was also explored in the missionary discourse, in Matt 10:18-20. While the missionary discourse warned of persecution from both Jews and gentiles (10:17-20), the role of Jewish persecutors is somewhat elided in the parable of the sheep and the goats. The primary agents of persecution seem to be gentile leaders, given their ability to imprison people. The danger is neither any greater or lesser in the world than it is in Israel, however. Matthew anticipates significant danger in all fields, whether Jewish leaders are involved or not.

Finally, missionary work is strongly associated with eschatological judgment. The moment of vindication for the missionaries in both the missionary discourse and the pericope of the sheep and the goats is the eschatological judgment. The people who have received them are rewarded, and the ones who have rejected them are punished. In Matt 10:23, the hope of a speedy and just end is meant to assure missionaries in the face of difficulty. The judgment of the sheep and the goats both warns the reader not to deny

hospitality to the missionaries and assures them that their treatment will not go unnoticed (cf. 10:29-31).

3.6 Conclusion: Missionaries in Matthew's Gospel and the Missionary Discourse

The figure of the missionary, and the practice of missionary outreach, are themes that pervade Matthew's Gospel. The importance of missionary work in Matthew's Gospel is by no means limited to the two commissions in Matt 10:5-6 and Matt 28:16-20. When we expand our attention to missionary themes beyond these commissions and look at the role that missionaries play elsewhere in the text, we can see that Matthew's theology of missions is far more complex than these two, seemingly contradictory instructions. Matthew's theology of missions, rather, appears in a range of materials in his Gospel and emerges in a range of genres, including parables, woes, and apocalypses.

We can also see in these materials that Matthew's theology of mission is not nearly as disjointed as a simple contrast between 10:5-6 and 28:16-20 might suggest. First of all, Matthew does not narrate a gradual rejection of Israel and a corresponding turn to the gentiles. The Gospel polemicizes against Israel's leadership (Matt 21:33-46; 22:1-14; Matt 23) and Jerusalem (23:37-39), but never against Israel in general. The Matthean Jesus never rejects Israel as a site of post-resurrection missionary endeavors (see §3.1.2; 3.2.1), and he never suggests that a turn from Israel to the nations will result in more conversions. In fact, Matthew anticipates rejection abroad as much as he anticipates rejection within Israel (§3.4.3). Some people among the gentile nations are said to be receptive and welcoming to the missionaries in Matt 25:41-46, but this does not

suggest that Matthew's hopes for Jews have become hopes for gentiles, or that gentile missionary work will succeed where missionary work among Israel has failed. In fact, exactly how "gentile" these converts among the nations may be is not entirely clear. By depicting them as sheep, Matthew associates the converts among the gentile nations with Israel, even if they are not Jews. Matthew may even regard them as on a par with Jews (§3.5.2).

Finally, when Matthew discusses missionary work later in his Gospel, themes from the missionary discourse continuously reappear in new contexts. In the previous chapter, we discussed eight major themes from Matthew's missionary discourse which characterize the beliefs and practices regarding missionary discourse that are manifest in Matt 10. The chart below summarizes some of our data from the sections between Matt 10 and Matt 28, and compares this data to the tropes we saw in the missionary discourse. Green indicates that a trope from the missionary discourse is reaffirmed in this passage. Yellow indicates that the trope is not mentioned, that the trope appears in some varied form, or that the text is ambiguous. Red indicates that a trope of missionary activity from the missionary discourse is clearly contradicted.

Figure 1: Themes from the Missionary Discourse and Later Texts

	Parable of the Tenants (21:33-46)	Parable of the Wedding Banquet (22:1-14)	Woes Against Scribes and Pharisees (chapter 23)	The Tribulation (chapter 24)	The Sheep and the Goats (25:31-46)
The mission is geographically bounded.		Not likely		No	No
The missionaries are depicted as envoys/representatives of God and Jesus.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
The missionaries are extreme ascetics, and exclusively dependent on private hospitality.					Yes
Jews are the focus of the mission, but gentiles are present as onlookers.	Yes, but gentile onlookers are not mentioned.	Some indication of early priority for Israel, possibility of expansion	Yes		Imagery of saved people is Israel-centric. Gentiles are saved.
The mission forces a conflict with Jewish leadership.	Yes	Yes	Yes		
Neither Jews nor gentiles are exclusively associated with persecution.	Yes, but gentile persecutors are not mentioned.	Yes, but gentile persecutors are not mentioned	Yes	Yes, but Jewish persecutors are not mentioned	Yes, but Jewish persecutors are not mentioned
The mission is closely associated with imminent eschatology.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
The mission recounted in the passage is presently incomplete.	Yes	Yes		Yes	

As we can see on the chart, Matthew does not contradict material from the missionary discourse very often, and in fact reincorporates much of it into later

discussions of missionary activity. This suggests that, for Matthew, the missionary discourse is not a historical reminiscence that describes a past era of Israel-centered work that Jesus and his disciples carried out. It is, rather, a depiction of what missionary work generally looks like. The themes of representation, persecution, and imminent eschatology appear in all five passages. Neither Jews nor gentiles are assumed to be the primary agents of persecution, nor is one group depicted as more dangerous for missionaries than the other. The dependence of the missionaries on hospitality is explicitly revisited in the judgment of the sheep and the goats. Missionary work both in Israel (Matt 21:33-44) and outside of Israel (Matt 24:9-14) is discussed as though it was ongoing at the time Matthew wrote. The only major areas of discontinuity between these intermediate texts and the missionary discourse are the geographic scope of mission and the ethnicity of the mission's targets. But even this discontinuity is not as dramatic as we might expect. Just as gentiles were present during the mission in Israel (Matt 10:18), Jews are present in the area beyond Israel. The most significant discrepancy between these texts and the missionary discourse is the mission's geographic limitations. Matthew disavows geographic expansion in Matt 10:5-6, but gradually incorporates geographic expansion into his text later in the Gospel, particularly in 22:14, 24:9-14, and 25:31-46.

Matthew's theology of mission does not transform as radically as we might expect. It certainly does not transform enough to suggest that the content of mission or its methods have changed dramatically since it was first inaugurated. For Matthew, missionaries in the post-Easter era are still vulnerable, hospitality-dependent figures who serve as delegates and representatives for Jesus, facing rejection from all sides and hurrying to complete their work before the end comes. Matthew may write at a time in

which settled urban churches exist, but the radical itinerant still has a powerful hold on his imagination and is the means by which the gospel spreads. Critically, there is also no indication that Matthew rejects a mission to Israel in favor of a mission to gentiles. Even as the mission expands over the face of the earth, Matthew does not expect a more favorable hearing abroad, nor an end to the work in Israel.

This prepares us to turn our attention to Matthew's final missionary commission, the one described in 28:16-20. As we have seen so far, Matthew does not command an exclusive shift from a mission to Israel to a mission to gentiles. His focus shifts beyond the bounds of Israel and to the time period after the life of Jesus. Nonetheless, he does not seem to think that the content or praxis of mission has significantly changed since the days of the twelve disciples. We will now see if the patterns we have seen emerging in the previous section of Matthew's Gospel also appear in the Gospel's final missionary commission.

4. Missions and Missionary Activity in Matt 28:16-20

Does Matthew teach that the mission to the world has displaced a mission to Israel? Is Matthew's theology of mission shaped by, and coherent with, the theology of the missionary discourse? These are the questions that have shaped our discussion of Matthew's Gospel in the preceding chapter. As we demonstrated in five pericopes in Matthew's Gospel, Matthew does not appear to teach that a mission to the nations has replaced a mission to Israel. Nor does Matthew prepare the reader to anticipate the commissioning of a second, distinct mission, which is separate from the missionary discourse. When Matthew discusses missionary activity in his Gospel, he draws on the same tropes and themes he introduced in Matt 10:5-42, and only rarely contradicts those themes.

This brings us to Matt 28:16-20. This pericope contains five verses in which the resurrected Jesus appears to his disciples. He then issues his instructions to the community that will continue in his name, commands them to expand their mission work to *πάντα τὰ ἔθνη* and assures them he will be with them. In this chapter, we will pose the same questions to Matt 28:16-20 that we posed to the five pericopes in the preceding chapter. Does Matthew teach that a mission to the nations has replaced a mission to Israel? And are his instructions for a worldwide, post-resurrection mission novel, or continuous with what he presented in the missionary discourse?

4.1. Continuity, discontinuity, or summary? The role of Matt 28:16-20 in the Gospel

The pericope opens with a short preamble establishing the setting and audience of the commission. Every element of the scene is familiar to the readers. The eleven¹ remaining disciples go to Galilee (28:16). This is the place where they were first called to service (4:18), the place where Jesus inaugurated the work they carried out in his name (4:25), and the place where Jesus promised to meet them after the resurrection (26:32). This meeting takes place on the particularly familiar site of a mountain. Mountains are places of teaching (5:1; 15:29; 21:1; 24:3) throughout Matthew's Gospel, as well as places of healing (15:29), prayer (14:23), and visionary experiences (17:1). The disciples may have even been to this same mountain before. According to 28:16, they meet Jesus at "the mountain where Jesus had appointed them."

Which mountain Matthew means is not quite clear, nor is the relative clause "where Jesus had appointed/directed them." One possibility is that this mountain is simply identified as the place where the disciples were sent and commissioned after the resurrection. Another option is that the disciples have some previous connection to this mountain, and now return there to meet Jesus. The Greek can support either reading.² The first reading is repetitive, and seems to allude to an event that Matthew does not narrate. Jesus tells the disciples (26:12) and the women (28:10; the angel in 28:7) to meet him in Galilee. Neither Jesus nor the angel say anything about meeting at a mountain. A better explanation is that Jesus has already "established" (τάσσω) his disciples on this

¹ For a possible allusion to Gen 37:9-10 and 49:28 see Jason B. Hood, *The Messiah, His Brothers, and The Nations: Matthew 1.1-17*, LNTS 441 (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 154-5.

² Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:681.

mountain. The apparent candidate for this location is the mountain where Jesus first instructed his disciples (5:1, though note that this happens before the disciples are a defined group of twelve).³ The scene of the final commissioning recalls what has come before. Jesus meets his disciples in Galilee, where the work began, to announce the work that will follow.

The disciples' reaction to seeing Jesus is also hardly unprecedented in the text. Matthew tells us that upon seeing Jesus, the eleven bow down to him but at least some continue to struggle with doubt (28:17). Both reactions have been familiar motifs throughout the Gospel. Prostrating oneself (προσκυνέω) before Jesus is not a new reaction that signifies awareness of Jesus's new resurrected status, nor an acknowledgment of Jesus's divinity.⁴ It has been common behavior for the magi (2:2) and supplicants (8:2; 5; 9:18; 15:25; 20:20). The female disciples have worshipped Jesus in his post-resurrection state (28:9), but Jesus accepted obeisance from his followers long before this. Likewise, the disciples doubting in the face of the resurrected Christ is not particularly surprising. "Little faith" has persistently plagued the disciples (6:39; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20). The fact that they doubted even after the resurrection may reflect a historical tradition that some of the disciples and early converts were slower to be confident in the resurrection than others. The tradition may have survived because it was useful for assuring doubting Christians that their experiences were normal and could be overcome.⁵ Faith and doubt existed for the twelve throughout the whole of Jesus's ministry, and it apparently persists even after his resurrection.

³ Culpepper, *Matthew*, 580; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:681.

⁴ Contra Gundry, *Matthew*, 594.

⁵ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:682.

All this is to say: the major literary and theological motifs introduced in Matt 28:16-17 establish continuity with what has come before. Jesus meets his disciples at a familiar location, and the disciples respond in a familiar way. Despite the events that have recently transpired in Jerusalem, little in these verses prepares the reader for a radical break in the content of Jesus's teaching, a complete transformation in the identity of the community that already exists, or a completely new phase in the life of the nascent church that is disjunctive with what has come before.

Jesus then reveals to the disciples the consequence of his resurrection: he has received "all authority on heaven and earth" (28:18). Some scholars have noted that this text contains an intertextual reference to Dan 7:13-14, which depicts the "Son of Man" receiving authority and all nations serving him.⁶ However, other scholars have doubted the usefulness of this parallel. For instance, Popa argues that an overemphasis on Daniel's Son of Man leads scholars to ignore references to the "pilgrimage of nations" to Zion that appears to be suggested in this passage.⁷ The allusions do not need to be played against each other. Both intertexts affirm the tremendous power of the resurrected Christ and his authority in the world far beyond Galilee. The theme of universality is reaffirmed in the promise that Jesus will be present with the disciples throughout the course of their mission (28:20). Because of his new authority,⁸ the disciples must go to πάντα τὰ ἔθνη to

⁶ Otto Michel, "The Conclusion of Matthew's Gospel," in *The Interpretation of Matthew*, ed. Graham Stanton, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995): 39-52, 45-6.

⁷ Romeo Popa, "Der Weg der Völker: Die eschatologische Begründung der Völkermission im Matthäusevangelium," *NTS* 65.2 (2019): 166-89, 172-3. See also Ferdinand Hahn, *Mission in the New Testament*, trans. Frank Clarke (London: SCM Press, 1965), 55.

⁸ Michel, "Conclusion of Matthew's Gospel," 43.

“make disciples” (μαθητεύω) of them, a work that consists specifically of baptizing the new disciples and teaching them all of Jesus’s commandments (28:19-20).

How does this passage relate to what has come before? Sim frames these verses as a turn in the text and the introduction of radically new material.⁹ This is an understandable reaction, or an overreaction, to the common dictum that Matt 28:16-20 contains a “summary” of the Gospel, or that the theme of a universal mission has been central to the entire text.¹⁰ Sim rejects the idea that Matthew closes with a summary of the Gospel and a restatement of the theme of universality, and instead argues that this text introduces a new theme that breaks with the text that precedes it. The themes of universal mission and authority are new, and in fact are out of step with what Matthew has already written. On one hand, Sim is likely correct that calling this passage a “summary” of the Gospel overstates how comprehensive it is. Major themes such as eschatological judgement and conflict with the scribes and Pharisees are absent, and a true summary of the Gospel would include these dominant traits.¹¹ However, it is also a significant overstatement to say that Matt 28:16-20 is discontinuous with what has come before. Matthew recalls familiar people, familiar settings, and familiar struggles that have pervaded his text, and foregrounds them in these final verses.

Even elements that seem to be novel, such as a universal mission or the introduction of new initiatory rituals into the church (Matt 28:19-20), are actually well-

⁹ David C. Sim, “Is Matthew 28:16–20 the Summary of the Gospel?,” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 70.1 (2014): 117-43.

¹⁰ See, for example: Otto S. Brooks, “Matthew XXVIII 16-20 and the Design of the First Gospel,” *JSNT* 3.10 (1981): 2-28, 2; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:687; Peter F. Ellis, *Matthew: His Mind and His Message* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1974), 24; Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, SP 1 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991), 416-7; Michel, “The Conclusion of Matthew’s Gospel,” 39-52.

¹¹ Sim, “Is Matthew 28:16–20 the Summary of the Gospel?,” 4.

established in the Gospel and continuous with earlier texts. One clear example of this is baptism. Sim argues that baptism, as it is practiced in Matt 3, does not prepare the reader for baptism “in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit.”¹² But this is not correct. Whether this trinitarian formula is part of the original text of Matthew at all is contested. On one hand, Eusebius quotes a shorter form of the text, commanding baptism in the name of Jesus only, which could reflect an earlier reading of Matt 28:19.¹³ On the other hand, Eusebius also may reflect a paraphrase of Matt 28:19.¹⁴ Furthermore, a trinitarian naming of the Father, Son, and Spirit occurs in other roughly contemporary texts, such as Paul’s epistles, the Didache, and the epistle of Ignatius, so the use of this formula is not necessarily anachronistic.¹⁵ So, even if the trinitarian baptismal formula is a novel introduction in Matthew’s text, the best explanation may not necessarily be that Matthew himself has introduced novel theology into his text. It is plausible that the novelty was inserted by a later scribe.

Nonetheless, even if the trinitarian baptismal formula is original to Matthew’s text, the meaning of baptism does not actually seem to have changed significantly between John’s baptism in Matt 3:1-17 and the disciples’ baptism in Matt 28:19. In Matt 28:19, baptism is an initiatory rite.¹⁶ This is the same role that baptism has in Matt 3, which challenges the idea that Matthew is introducing novel theology at this point in his text.

¹² Ibid., 3.

¹³ Hans Kosmala, “The Conclusion of Matthew,” *ASTI* 4 (1965), 132-47.

¹⁴ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:684n41.

¹⁵ Ibid., 3:684n41; Luz, *Matthew*, 3:630n130.

¹⁶ Tuckett, “Matthew: The Social and Historical Context,” 127.

How do we know John's baptism is an initiation rite in Matt 3? First, Matthew's redaction of Mark suggests that baptism holds a different theological meaning in the First Gospel than it does in the Second. For Mark, John's baptism is "of repentance, for the forgiveness of sins" (βάπτισμα μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν Mark 1:4). In Mark, baptism remits sins,¹⁷ but in Matthew, it does not. According to Matthew, John's baptism *accompanies* preaching for repentance (3:2, also see the description εἰς μετάνοιαν in 3:11) and culminates in confession (3:6). However, unlike Mark, Matthew does not suggest that baptism in itself imparts forgiveness. Instead, it is meant to signify that the baptized person will undertake new behavior that is appropriate for their new in-group – particularly, confession and repentance. John commands the people attending his baptism to "produce fruit" (3:8, 10). This "fruit" is a trait found among the church's righteous members (7:16-20), but not among the Pharisees (21:43).¹⁸ By submitting to baptism, John's hearers signify their intent to reject wicked acts and perform righteous ones – in other words, they commit to exhibiting the defining trait of being "good trees" that marks them as members of the eschatological community. The baptism is an initiation and signifies group membership, just as the baptism in Matt 28:16-20 does.

Second, the community and cause into which John baptizes people does not seem to be a different group than the group the disciples baptize people into. John and Jesus are part of the same movement, and Matthew does not seem to posit a significant break in salvation history between Jesus and John. John occupies a central place in salvation

¹⁷ Marcus, *Mark 1 – 8*, 155-6.

¹⁸ "Fruit" commonly stands for "actions that indicate a way of life" (Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 189), or behavior that reveals one's character either as good or wicked. For similar imagery see Ps 1:1-3; Hos 9:16; Isa 27:6; Jer 17:7-8; 17:10; Ezek 17:8-9 23; Sir 23:25; *Ep. Arist.* 232; also Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 98.

history; he is the greatest of those “born of women” (Matt 11:11). John the Baptist is squarely part of the era of the Kingdom of Heaven. The saying “from the days of John... until now” serves to include John in the era of the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt 11:12).¹⁹ Likewise, the saying that the “least in the Kingdom” is greater than John need not be read as an exclusion of him from the Kingdom. It can also be read as a reflection that even the greatest humans in the present world will pale in comparison to what they will be in the coming kingdom.²⁰ The baptism of John is not part of an outmoded era that has passed its usefulness, but the beginning of the work that is eventually taken up by Jesus and finally by his disciples. Matthew insists on the continuity between John, Jesus, and the future in the explanation for why John baptizes Jesus in the first place. According to Matthew, John baptizes Jesus “to fulfill all righteousness” (3:15). What exactly the phrase “fulfill all righteousness” means is subject to debate. Meier argues that the baptism fulfills scripture and triggers the descent of the Spirit.²¹ If this is the case, John’s baptism is inextricable from the eschatological work of Jesus and his disciples, whose works have always been led by the Spirit and informed by scripture. To sum up: baptism has always been how people signify allegiance to the community in Matthew’s church, and John’s baptism is continuous with the ministry of Jesus and the disciples. Therefore, it is not the case that Matt 28:16-20 introduces something radically new into missionary praxis. Baptism has always been part of Matthew’s theology.

¹⁹ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:253; Gundry, *Matthew*, 209; Wolfgang Trilling, “Die Täufer-Tradition bei Matthäus,” *BZ* 3.2 (1959): 271–89; 277-8.

²⁰ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:251-2; Versepunt, *The Rejection of the Humble Messianic King*, 87-9, or in line with Matthew’s frequent dictum that the humblest and least in the kingdom will be rewarded with exaltation (18:4; 23:12; Gundry, *Matthew*, 208-9).

²¹ Meier, *Law and History in Matthew’s Gospel*, 76-80. See also Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:326; Frankemölle, *Jahwebund und Kirche Christi*, 94-5.

In the same way, the command to teach all of Jesus's commands (28:20) is not a novel introduction into missionary praxis, either. The importance and authority of Jesus's instructions (Matt 28:20) have been a central theme throughout the entire Gospel. Matthew first announces that Jesus's words are authoritative and binding on all members in Jesus's inaugural sermon. (7:24-26; cf. 24:35). The resurrection does not lead to an elevation of Jesus's teaching or a heightened emphasis on its authority. Following Jesus's instructions has always been commanded. There is also no need to read this as a break from Torah and a turn towards Jesus's own words.²² Matthew's Jesus is the teacher of Torah, as Matthew understands it (5:17-20).

To conclude: Matt 28:16-20 may not contain a brief summary of the whole Gospel, but it also does not contain radically new material. Jesus appears at a familiar location to commission the people who have served him throughout his text. They respond to him in ways that are reminiscent of both their past struggles and their past successes. Jesus then gives them work to do that he has already predicted will take place – namely, the worldwide mission (Matt 24:9-14). The content of this mission is work that Jesus and the disciples have been doing throughout the text. None of this suggests that Matthew considers himself to be introducing novel material or new teaching into the text. The commissioning recalls material that has come before.

This leaves us with a few key exegetical questions. First, who are the objects of this mission? Are we meant to understand them as Jews or gentiles? Second, have

²² See Appendix A.

gentiles replaced Jews as the focus of mission? Third, how can Matt 10:5-6 and 28:19-20 be read as part of the same text?

4.2 One last time: Who are πάντα τὰ ἔθνη?

First, who are the objects of missionary activity in this final commission? In Matt 28:19, Jesus commands the disciples to go to πάντα τὰ ἔθνη and make disciples. As we discussed in §3.4.1, this is one of four instances in the later chapters of Matthew where the phrase πάντα τὰ ἔθνη appears. The first option for translating πάντα τὰ ἔθνη is as an inclusive phrase, “all nations,” or “everyone.” According to this reading, the disciples are to go to every people group in the world, including, significantly, Israel.²³ The mission recounted in 10:5-6 (cf. 15:24) was ethnically exclusive, but following the resurrection the mission is no longer limited and can go to people of any ethnicity.²⁴ Matthew may command a mission to the world beyond Israel, but as Israel is part of the larger world it remains included.

The second option is that πάντα τὰ ἔθνη refers to gentile people groups. This use of τὰ ἔθνη (and its Hebrew cognate, עַמְּוָלָיִם) to describe the world beyond Israel emerged during the Persian and Hellenistic periods. The LXX in particular strengthens the

²³ Gnilka, *Das Matthäusevangelium*, 2:508; Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:886; Hengel and Schwemer, *Jesus and Judaism*, 28; Luz, *Matthew*, 3:631; Tisera, *Universalism According to the Gospel of Matthew*, 304-6. Luz, *Matthew*, 3:629, notes that this is overwhelmingly the most common interpretation among patristic writers.
²⁴ Hans Kvalbein, “Has Matthew Abandoned the Jews?,” in *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles*, ed. Jostein Adna and Hans Kvalbein, WUNT 127 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 45–62; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1265-66; Saldarini, *Matthew’s Christian-Jewish Community*, 59-60; Carolin Ziethe, *Auf seinen Namen werden die Völker hoffen: die matthäische Rezeption der Schriften Israels zur Begründung des universalen Heils*, BZNW 233 (Berlin ; Boston: De Gruyter, 2018), 354-5.

differentiation between λαός, “people,” for Israel and ἔθνος, “nation,” for other people groups.²⁵ This allowed for both λαός and ἔθνος to emerge as technical terms in Jewish literature.²⁶ This definition of τὰ ἔθνη, “the people groups outside of Israel,” is well attested in early Jewish literature and appears at least once in Matthew’s Gospel (20:25).²⁷ In this reading, Matthew’s final exhortation to mission excludes Israel and commands a mission to national communities (i.e., go to the Greeks, the Macedonians, the Persians, etc.).

The third option for the definition of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, which is similar, is “all gentile individuals,” a relatively rare meaning of the word that is nonetheless attested in several early Jewish texts. This definition appears in contexts where entire gentile nations cannot possibly be the referent of the words τὰ ἔθνη. For example, 2 Macc 6:4 states that τὰ ἔθνη engage in debauchery at the temple, which must refer to individual gentiles rather than collectives. Likewise, in 1 Macc 5:22, Simon is said to have killed 3000 ἔθνη, which only makes sense as a reference to individuals. This usage also appears in Pseudo-Philo, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Tosefta, and Tannaitic literature.²⁸ Matthew probably uses this definition of τὰ ἔθνη in Matt 25:32, in which τὰ ἔθνη are divided into groups of sheep and goats.²⁹ If we define πάντα τὰ ἔθνη as “all the gentile individuals,” the final

²⁵ Terence L. Donaldson, *Gentile Christian Identity from Cornelius to Constantine: The Nations, the Parting of the Ways, and Roman Imperial Ideology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 438.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 438-9.

²⁷ Luz’s list of Matthew’s uses of τὰ ἔθνη to mean “gentiles” does not distinguish between gentile people groups and gentile individuals and includes 10:5; 20:19; probably 4:15; 6:32; 10:18; possibly 20:25; inconclusively 12:18, 21 (Luz, *Matthew*, 3:630).

²⁸ Donaldson, “Gentile Christianity,” 439 and “Matt 28:19 Revisited,” 175-6.”

²⁹ Though judgment and division according to nation groups does occur in 2 Bar. 72.2-6 (Donaldson, “Matthew 28:19 Revisited,” 179; Levine, *Social and Ethnic Dimensions*, 191-2). Philip F. Esler, “Ethnic Identities in the Dead Sea Legal Papyri and Matthew: Reinterpreting Matthew 25:31–46,” in *Matthew within Judaism: Israel and the Nations in the First Gospel*, ed. Anders Runesson and Daniel M. Gurtner, *Early Christianity and Its Literature* 27 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2020): 195-212, 206, notes that αὐτοὺς in

command of 28:19 would be to go specifically to gentile individuals. If individual people, rather than nations, are denoted, then Jews are clearly excluded. Israel can be described as one ἔθνος among many, but Jewish individuals cannot be described as ἔθνη. When ἔθνη refers to individuals in Jewish literature, the referent is always gentile people.³⁰

This brings us to our second major exegetical question: does Matt 28:19 mean that gentiles have replaced Jews as the objects of mission for Matthew's readers? The latter two definitions of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, "gentile nations" and "gentile individuals," can be read as evidence of what Konradt calls the "double replacement reading" of Matthew: the church replaces Israel as the people of God, and the gentiles replace Israel as the church's focus of missionary activity.³¹ The assumption behind the "double replacement" theory is that the command to go to the gentiles (either gentile individuals or gentile nation groups) is inherently exclusive, precludes the possibility of a continued mission to Israel, and is specifically a reaction to the crucifixion and the Jerusalem conspiracy to conceal the resurrection narrated in Matt 28:11-15. However, this connection between these definitions and the double replacement reading is not necessary, as we will see below.

The most likely meaning of ἔθνη seems to be some kind of gentile. We have already discussed the fact that the addition of πάντα alone is not enough to signal that Matthew is using the word τὰ ἔθνη in a way that is distinctive from his usual meaning. For Matthew, τὰ ἔθνη usually does not mean "nations, including Israel", and the addition

25:32b does not match the gender of τὰ ἔθνη; "nations or gentiles" are gathered but are separated as individuals.

³⁰ Donaldson, "28:19 Revisited," 177.

³¹ Assumed by Bassler and Cohen, *The Gospel of Matthew and Judaic Traditions*, 720: "The Jews have been written off." See also Clark, "The Gentile Bias in Matthew," *JBL* 165–72; Michael J. Cook, "Interpreting 'Pro-Jewish' Passages in Matthew," *HUCA* 54 (1983): 135–46.

of πᾶς does not seem to change this (see §3.5). Matthew has another word for the whole civilized world, οἰκουμένη (24:14), which he specifically uses in juxtaposition with πάντα τὰ ἔθνη. If πάντα τὰ ἔθνη and οἰκουμένη simply mean the same thing in 24:14, another passage that deals with the post-resurrection mission, the phrase is redundant. Matthew has added οἰκουμένη to Mark 13:10, which is unnecessary if οἰκουμένη and πάντα τὰ ἔθνη are synonymous.³² Matthew also has other preferred vocabulary to describe the whole world, such as κόσμος (Matt 4:8; 5:14; 13:38; 16:26; 18:7; 26:13).³³ We have seen Matthew describe the whole world and the whole inhabited world several times in his Gospel, and τὰ ἔθνη seems to be referring to something else. It does not seem likely that πάντα τὰ ἔθνη means “everyone,” Jew and gentile alike.

This leaves us to choose between gentile people groups and gentile individuals. How do we distinguish between them? Levine, Hare, and Harrington argue that the translation “gentile individuals” makes good sense of the verbs that make up the content of the commission. The verbs βαπτίζω and διδάσκω are more explicable if they are carried out towards individuals, not collectives. It is more natural to imagine Matthew wishes for people to be baptized than countries.³⁴ However, this point requires nuancing. First, we may be insisting on too much literalism from Matthew if we force ourselves to accept a translation of τὰ ἔθνη that makes pictographic sense. One cannot literally baptize a national group, but Matthew depicts corporate bodies performing apparently individual

³² See §3.4.1.

³³ Matthew 16:26 and 18:7 are from Mark 8:36 and 14:9, respectively.

³⁴ Levine, *The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Matthean Salvation History*, 191. Hare and Harrington also argue that the word μαθητεύω is most commonly used for individuals, not national groups (Hare and Harrington, “Make Disciples,” 358; also in Hare, *Jewish Persecution*, 148n3; Levine, *Social and Ethnic Dimensions*, 171).

actions elsewhere in his text. “All Jerusalem” is afraid when Herod hears of the birth of Jesus (2:3), and “Jerusalem, Judea, and the region surrounding the Jordan” go to John’s baptism (3:5). Matthew also pronounces woe to the κόσμος in 18:7 – an unusual construction of a woe since the object is collective and impersonal.³⁵ Matthew is quite comfortable with language that depicts impersonal subjects and collective nouns performing personal and individual actions, so this does not mean that the taught and baptized ἔθνη in 28:19 must be taught and baptized individuals.

Second, the direct object of βαπτίζω and διδάσκω is not τὰ ἔθνη. Τὰ ἔθνη is neuter plural, but αὐτούς, the object of βαπτίζω and διδάσκω is masculine plural. Donaldson argues that the use of αὐτούς suggests that the focus is on individual persons, not nation groups, and thus the command is to missionize individual gentiles instead of nations.³⁶ But this could be demanding excessive precision. Simon may have killed 3000 people, not nations, in 1 Macc 5:22, but it is not always the case that only one meaning of ἔθνη is clearly intended. For Matthew, people, communities, and places overlap considerably. Israel is at once a people (Matt 2:6) and a place (2:20-21; probably 9:33). Similarly, ἔθνη for Matthew are people (10:18, for example), but these people also denote places. For example, in Matt 12:15, Jesus retreats from his opponents rather than fighting them, and can continue his work once he has departed. This inspires Matthew to quote from Isa 42:3-4. This passage recalls Jesus’s silence in the face of opposition (12:19) but is also said to fulfill the prophecy that Jesus’s message will go “to the gentiles” (Matt 12:18, 20). It is difficult to imagine that the people Jesus is healing here (12:15) are

³⁵ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:405.

³⁶ Donaldson, “Matthew 28:19 Revisited,” 179-80.

themselves gentiles, given Jesus's general refusal to do this (15:24). Nonetheless, Matthew quotes past the point of depicting Jesus's silence (12:19) to claim that Jesus's message will go to the gentiles. Why? The only real association between Jesus and gentiles seems to be the act of withdrawing (12:15). Jesus has gone away from his opponents, which suggests that the gentiles are away from them. The gentiles are among Israel (10:18), but they are also "out there," as a collective. Individuals are foregrounded in Matthew's use of verbs, but Matthew is still using a word that generally denotes "the other" – other nations, other places, other people who are not within Israel.

Third, Levine and Donaldson both agree that Matt 28:19-20 must be read in light of 10:5-6 because of the linguistic parallels. Both Levine and Donaldson maintain this juxtaposition of 10:5-6 and 28:19-20 favors the gloss "gentile individuals" in Matt 28:19-20.³⁷ The first commission concerned the Jewish people, so the second command concerns the gentile people. However, we have already argued that the instructions in Matt 10:5-6 are actually not best read as instructions to generally missionize Jewish people, including the Diaspora. The parameters of the commission in Matt 10:5-6 are geographic as well as ethnic.³⁸ The mission in Matt 10 is within the land of Israel, and assumes the presence of gentile onlookers, even if they are not the intended beneficiaries of the mission. If Matt 10:5-6 and 28:19-20 are truly meant to be read as parallel and complementary texts that need to be understood alongside each other, then we would expect that Matt 28:19-20 should be read in the same way. The mission goes to gentile nations, and not everyone there is a gentile. The mission to gentile nations will have

³⁷ Donaldson, "Matthew 28:19 Revisited," 187; Levine, *The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Matthean Salvation History*, 190-1.

³⁸ See §3.3.1.

Jewish onlookers, just as the mission to Israel had gentile onlookers. If Matthew is thinking of the mission in terms of location and geography in Matt 10:5-6, it stands to reason he would do the same in 28:19-20, particularly in light of 28:18 where Jesus' universal authority spread across earth and heaven inspires the mission.

To summarize the argument: the translation of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη itself cannot tell us how Matthew understands the mission parameters of the final commission and its ethnic limitations. The parallels between Matt 28:16-20 and 10:5-6, and the contents of the missionary commission, suggest that Matthew narrates worldwide expansion beyond Israel. The instructions are to move beyond the previous missionary boundaries of Israel, make disciples in the rest of the world, and to baptize and teach those who respond. Those individuals will include gentiles, but they need not be exclusively gentiles.

This means the emphasis on expansion may be more related to space and geography than scholars have previously allowed. Overwhelmingly, when scholars discuss this passage, the concept of ethnic expansion dominates interpretation, and geography is at best an afterthought.³⁹ This is not unfounded. The word ἔθνη does not always have the same geographic connotations as the English translation “nations.” For “nation” as a regional or geographic entity Matthew uses the word χώρα (2:12; 4:16; 8:28). That said, a geographic meaning of ἔθνη is also not unattested. The idea that one

³⁹ Trilling, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, 2:343 lists an incomplete sample of ethnically focused discussions of the mission. Warren Carter, “Matthew and the Gentiles: Individual Conversion and/or Systematic Transformation?,” *JSNT* 26.3 (2004): 259–82; Konradt, *Israel, the Church, and the Gentiles*, 78; J. Andrew Overman, *Church and Community in Crisis: The Gospel According to Matthew* (Valley Forge: Trinity International, 1996), 406; Donald Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew*, The Passion Series (Wilmington, DE: M. Glazier, 1985), 160-1; Kenton L. Sparks, “Gospel as Conquest: Mosaic Typology in Matthew 28:16-20,” *CBQ* 68, no. 4 (2006): 651-63, 655 include geographic considerations.

can use the word ἔθνη to denote geographic locations is attested in Luke 24:47. In the Lukan report of Jesus' final commission, Jesus teaches that the disciples will go εἰς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη. While we could read εἰς as “unto” (preaching unto πάντα τὰ ἔθνη), the phrasing of “beginning from Jerusalem” encourages the reader to think in terms of geographic expansion.⁴⁰ “Make disciples among the gentile nations,” nations that are both physically beyond the borders of Israel and nations made up of non-Israelites, is an entirely reasonable understanding of Matt 28:19, and is also attested in Second Temple literature.⁴¹ Thus, I argue that the appropriate gloss of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη is “make disciples of all the gentile nations,” signifying a geographically and ethnically expansive mission beyond the people and land of Palestine.

The nations beyond Israel were not ethnically homogenous, and Matthew seems to know this. We have already seen in §3.5.2 that τὰ ἔθνη can refer specifically to gentile nations with Jews in them. Thus, it seems completely reasonable to read τὰ ἔθνη as the lands beyond Israel, which Matthew and his readers think of as “outside nations” with the tacit understanding that some Jewish co-religionists can be found there. The mission's geographic parameters have been changed, but there is little reason to think this has occurred because Matthew has given up on Jews. The impetus for this expansion is Jesus's exaltation, not disappointment over a paltry number of converts within Israel. A mission to the whole world correlates with Jesus's worldwide authority and will target whoever can be found abroad.

⁴⁰ François Bovon, *Luke*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 396; John T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary*, 492; Michael Wolter, *Das Lukasevangelium*, HNT 5 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 763.

⁴¹ 2 Esdras 16:16; Tobit 13:5.

4.3 Why the double replacement reading is not required

What are the implications of this reading? As I have said, I favor the translation “gentile people groups.” This reading can be seen as evidence that Matthew’s Gospel posits the “double replacement” of Israel – both as the people of God and objects of mission. But the translation “all the gentile nations” in 28:19 will not bring us to the double replacement reading on its own. The strongest defense of the “double replacement” reading of the passion and resurrection narrative in Matthew usually requires the reader to make three interpretive choices together.⁴² First, the reader is prepared to expect the replacement of the Jews with gentiles if Matt 27:25 is interpreted as a condemnation of Jews. Second, the argument is strengthened if Matt 28:11-15 is read as depicting the final deception of the Jewish people from Matthew’s perspective. Once the reader has concluded that Israel is both cursed and deceived, it is intuitive to expect that Matt 28:19 will narrate a turn from Israel to the gentile nations beyond it. This leads to the third interpretive choice: that πάντα τὰ ἔθνη in Matt 28:19 refers to a new, exclusively gentile mission. However, all three of these decisions can be made or rejected independently of translating πάντα τὰ ἔθνη as “all the gentiles.”

We have already discussed why Matt 27:25 need not (and should not) be read as a blanket condemnation of Israel as a whole.⁴³ This passage is more comprehensible as an etiological legend attributing the destruction of Jerusalem one generation later to the people in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus’ execution. Jerusalem kills Jesus, and the Jerusalemites who were present and their children suffer in the war. Read in this light,

⁴² For an overview of the double-replacement argument, see Konradt, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles*, 4-8

⁴³ See §3.3.2.

this passage needs to be read neither as a summary statement on Matthew's view of Jews as an ethnicity nor as a referendum on the future of the Jewish mission. Like Matt 23:36, this passage connects Jerusalem's troubled past regarding Jesus and other prophetic figures to its eventual destruction at the hands of the Romans.

The second passage in question is Matt 28:15, when Matthew states that the false report concerning the disciples is spread *παρὰ Ἰουδαίους* in his own day. The "double replacement" hypothesis posits that this passage depicts a final, totalizing distance between Matthew and "the Jews" that leads naturally to the exclusive turn to the gentiles.⁴⁴ "The Jews" believe a false report about the resurrection, and so the mission must go to places where this report has not spread.

But is this what Matt 28:15 describes? The narrative seems to resist the interpretation that Jews in general believe the story of the stolen body instead of the resurrection. First, the claim that Jews throughout the world hold to this alternative explanation of the empty tomb report is, on its face, a ridiculous statement. Most Jews, and indeed most people, forty years after Jesus's death would not claim any story about Jesus's crucifixion or resurrection as the true version. No other Gospel nor Acts reports an alternative, conflicting story of what really happened to Jesus's body. The Sanhedrin in Acts does not seem to feel any need to contradict the disciples' claims. They simply assume that Jesus is, in fact, dead (Acts 5:28), and plan to let the movement die out (5:38-39). The fact that Matthew feels the need to provide an apologetic response to a specific and otherwise unattested counter-story already suggests that Matthew's concerns here are

⁴⁴ Frankemölle, *Jahwebund und Kirche Christi*, 353-4; Trilling, *Israel*, 79; but see Frankemölle, *Matthäus*, 2:534 for a revised argument.

more local. This is a story Matthew has heard within his own networks – perhaps born from networks that had early contact with the Jerusalem-based Jesus movement.⁴⁵

In light of this, Matthew’s narrative does not seem to make any totalizing claims about how “Jews” respond to the report of the resurrection. There is a distinction within Israel, just as there has been throughout the entire Gospel. The distinction between Israel’s leadership and non-elite has been pervasive,⁴⁶ and it continues to the end. The final chapter establishes clear divisions between the believing followers of Jesus and the unbelieving priests.⁴⁷ All of these people are Jewish; what divides them is not ethnicity but their response to the resurrection story. The distinctions begin in the passion narrative when Matthew contrasts the priests’ response to the crucifixion with the female disciples’ reaction. Jesus’s female followers, like the male disciples, are said to have followed him to Jerusalem from Galilee (27:55) and to have attended his body to its burial (27:60). Meanwhile, the Jerusalem-based priests are already discussing the possibility of the disciples staging a fraudulent resurrection (27:62-65), sealing the tomb and setting a guard.

The next day, the contrast between the women at the tomb and the priests is repeated, as is the contrast between Galilee and Jerusalem. The women receive the instruction to tell the disciples to go to Galilee, where Jesus will meet them (28:7-10). Meanwhile, in “the city” (28:11) the priests, attempting to stop a supposed conspiracy, become conspirators themselves. The priests and elders are at the forefront of this project,

⁴⁵ Konrad, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew*, 162n410; Wim Weren, *Studies in Matthew’s Gospel: Literary Design, Intertextuality, and Social Setting*, Biblical Interpretation Series 130 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2014), 276.

⁴⁶ See §4.1.2, 4.2.1.

⁴⁷ Frankemölle, *Matthäus*, 2:534

providing money and protection for the guards (28:12-14). However, the fact that the story of the priests' conspiracy with the guards is bracketed on both ends with references to Galilee (28:7, 10, 16) should challenge this reading. Galilee is repeatedly named as the site of fidelity and renewal, and Jerusalem is the site of danger. The clear contrast is between the obedient, worshipful women and the priests (28:9, 17), and between rural Galilee and urban Jerusalem. Galilee is, as it has always been, a site of ministry and faithfulness. Jerusalem is not. And yet, both locations are treated as locations where Jesus ministers to Israel. It is simply not the case that Matthew narrates a totalizing negative response to the resurrection within Israel. Galilee and the people who come from there – who, in Matthew's narrative, are Jews – do not accept the priests' counter report.

A contrast between Jerusalem and faithful Jews elsewhere should not be surprising to the reader. This is like the contrast between Jerusalem and Jesus' family in Matt 2. Joseph is receptive to the instructions of angels (2:13), while Herod and "all Jerusalem" are disturbed by similar announcements (2:3). Jerusalem represents the center of Israel's power for Matthew, the power that Jesus has come to challenge; Jesus and his Jewish parents, safely some distance away in Bethlehem, represent the alternative.⁴⁸ In the nativity, Matthew's ire is not directed against Jews in general. It is directed at what he perceives to be Israel's elite center: the priestly leaders in Jerusalem. Therefore, it does not seem correct to suppose that Matthew means a "counter-report" about the resurrection has gone to all Israel at home and abroad. The state of the mission to Israel is not at stake in this passage.

⁴⁸ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:238; Richard T. France, "Matthew and Jerusalem," in *Built Upon the Rock: Studies in the Gospel of Matthew*, ed. Daniel M. Gurtner and John Nolland (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008): 108-53, 114.

Without these two interpretive decisions bolstering a double replacement reading, the final interpretive move that the mission to πάντα τὰ ἔθνη represents a decisive and final turn away from Israel to the gentiles seems less tenable. Even if the translation “all the gentile individuals” is correct in 28:19, this need not suggest that Matthew ends on a note of divine disfavor towards Jews, nor that Matthew envisions this new commission to gentiles as a reversal of previous instructions concerning Israel. A positive depiction of gentiles is, in fact, strikingly absent from any texts that reference a mission to the nations. Matthew nowhere suggests that this turn towards the gentiles is motivated by an expectation of a warmer welcome. The most sustained engagement with the gentile mission, Matt 24, predicts violent persecution at the hands of the gentiles (24:9), which is not better than what Matthew predicted would happen in Israel (10:22-23). We could fairly say, in fact, that an inclusive translation of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη would not even add anything to Matthew’s text that is not already present with the exclusive translation. However we translate Matt 28:19, Israel is still a site of ongoing missionary work (10:23) that will inspire hostile resistance – which is exactly what is predicted to occur in the gentile nations. Whether Israel is specifically in view in Matt 28:19 or not does not change this. There is simply not that much at stake in the translation of this one verse. To say that we should not translate πάντα τὰ ἔθνη as “all the nations/everyone” is not to insist that the mission to Israel has ended; other verses from Matthew must be employed to construct this meaning, and they have been found lacking.

The translation “all the gentile nations” appears to be contextually justified, but we do not need to assume that this leads us inexorably to embracing the “double replacement” reading. This still leaves us with the considerable problem that Matt 10:5-6

and Matt 28:16-20 seem to be at significant odds with one another. One cannot stay in Israel and go to all the nations at once. Can these texts be reconciled?

4.4 Reading Matt 10:5-6 and 28:16-20 in the Same Text

4.4.1 Matt 28:16-20 and Themes from the Missionary Discourse

One path forward for resolving this conflict is by treating Matt 28:16-20 the same way we have treated all the other texts concerning missionary activity: by comparing it to the missionary discourse. How much of the missionary discourse is carried through in this later text? Is any of it contradicted?

The major area of contradiction between Matt 10:5-6 and Matt 28:16-20 is geographic parameters. The mission in Matt 10:5-6 is kept within the boundaries of Israel, while the second mission is worldwide. This is a significant point of change, but it should not be overread. The stated cause of this expansion is Jesus's expanded authority. Jesus's rule extends to cover heaven and earth (28:18), and his ability to be with the disciples has expanded as well (28:20). The cause of the expansion is not a rejection of Israel, nor is it caused by any worthiness of the gentiles. This is a mission that grows but does not shift course. Nor does Matthew narrate any sort of explicit salvation-historical turn beginning in Jerusalem or Judea and moving out, as in Luke 24:47 and Acts 1:8. The mission has never been based in Judea for Matthew; its origins are in Galilee. The impetus and logic of the mission arises exclusively from Jesus' resurrection and his new universal power. Because Jesus has authority in the whole world, the mission can be

spread to the entire world as well. Furthermore, the geographic parameters of the mission are changed, but we should also note what has *not* changed. Matthew names the gentile world beyond Israel as the object of mission in Matt 28:19, but he does not say this interrupts a mission within the land of Israel, which will continue as well (10:23). Likewise, there is no new ethnic exclusion in these parameters. Matthew does not think of Israel as ethnically homogenous (10:18), nor does he think of the world beyond Israel as an undifferentiated mass of gentiles. He shows awareness of the Diaspora. The new instruction is a command to go beyond Israel, where the disciples will encounter gentiles but also the Jews who live among them.

So much for contradictions. What about themes from the missionary discourse that are carried through in Matt 28:16-20? One clear example of continuity is the theme of representation. According to Matt 20:20, Jesus is present with the disciples “to the end of the age.” The assurance here is both of Jesus’ presence and of Jesus’ assistance in the new era of the post-resurrection mission. The verse also picks up on the theme of Jesus’ presence with his church, which has been previously promised in Matt 18:10-20, and Jesus’ presence with his people, promised in Matt 1:23. Jesus does not ascend at the end of Matthew, which would undercut the message of his continuing presence and assistance.⁴⁹ Matthew insists that Jesus is present after his resurrection wherever his people are, and this strengthens the missionaries’ claim that they are Jesus’ representatives. Jesus is with them.

⁴⁹ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:687.

We should also note the extent to which the words of the final commission evoke close associations between the disciples and Jesus. One notable catchword here is ἐξουσία, which is here depicted as a power Jesus has specifically received from the Father (Matt 28:18). Matthew has already demonstrated in his Gospel that Jesus' authority is transferable. Jesus has received all ἐξουσία, but this is a trait that Jesus delegates repeatedly. Jesus has authority on earth to forgive sins (9:6), but this authority is broadly shared with "people," plural (9:8); the implication is that Jesus' followers within the community have the same right to forgive sins as he does.⁵⁰ This is a redactional change from Mark, who states that the Son of Man has the authority to forgive sins (2:10) but does not extend this to his disciples. Likewise, Jesus gives his authority to his disciples when he first calls them (10:1) to cast out demons and heal diseases. He also shares with those who follow him the revelation he receives from the Father to (11:27). Though the catchword of ἐξουσία is not used, Jesus has also given the "keys of the kingdom" and the authority to "bind and loose" to Peter (16:19) and to the church in general (18:18). The disciples can do their work in the nations not only because Jesus has received all authority, but because that authority has been given to them. The disciples will continue to represent him by bearing his authority and by bringing his spiritual presence to the nations – just as they did amid Israel in the missionary discourse.

A second theme from the missionary discourse that is reiterated in Matt 28:16-20 is the theme of representation. The account of the resurrection appearance is juxtaposed with the conspiracy between the priests and elders in 28:11-15. We have two competing

⁵⁰ Cf. John 20:20-3. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:96; Gnllka, *Das Matthäusevangelium*, 1:327.

narratives of the resurrection - one, what Matthew insists really happened in 28:1-10, and the other, the alternative narrative taught by the missionaries' religious rivals. Gnilka refers to this commission of guards and priests as a foil to the missions – an “Antibotschaft,” or “antireport” opposing the true message of the disciples.⁵¹ The two reports are in conflict, just as the developing church conflicts with movements that contradict this message. Their competing narratives about what exactly happened to Jesus set the stage for the final mission. The message that the disciples preach will conflict with other Jewish groups, both in their teachings and in their narration of recent events in Jerusalem.

Third, Matthew reintroduces the theme of imminent eschatology, which he also emphasized in the missionary discourse in Matt 10:23. The commission of Matt 28:16-20 ends with an explicit invocation of the end of the age (28:20). The primary purpose of this verse is assurance; Jesus explicitly promises his permanent presence and his assistance with his people. But for Matthew, the “end of the age”⁵² is not a distant event. He has repeatedly insisted that this end is coming quite soon. When the disciples ask for signs of the “end of the age” (24:3), Jesus names events that are occurring presently or recent history for Matthew's community. These include the destruction of Jerusalem (24:15-22), the preaching of the Gospel outside Israel (24:14), and the persecution of missionaries (24:13). The end will happen immediately after these things (24:29). This warning, and the repeated reminder to watch for signs of the approaching end (24:32-34) and the necessity of keeping alert and diligent in service (24:42; 25:13), all lead the

⁵¹ Gnilka, *Das Matthäusevangelium*, 2:499.

⁵² Greek συντέλεια τοῦ αἰῶνος, a phrase unique to Matthew within the New Testament. It is repeated three times in the Parable of the Weeds (13:39, 40, 49), and also appears in Matt 24:3 and 28:20.

reader to the conclusion that this mission might be an extensive one, but it is not a long one. The mission points ahead to the imminent return of Christ, just as the mission to Israel did.

Fourth and finally, the work is not complete at the time of writing. The command to the disciples applies to Matthew's own readers and assumes that the work is still being undertaken and must be practiced by Matthew's own audience. The mission within Israel will continue until the Parousia (10:23). The mission to the gentile lands will too. The end will not come until the Gospel has been preached in the entire inhabited world (24:14), and Jesus will oversee it through his people until this occurs.

The themes of hospitality and persecution do not appear in Matt 28:16-20. However, as we discussed, these themes do appear in the fuller depiction of the mission to πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, which is given in the eschatological discourse. It would be an overstatement to say that these themes are alluded to in Matt 28:16-20 simply because this passage also refers to the same mission, but these themes are part of the eschatological, worldwide mission. As we saw in the third chapter, in the eschatological discourse, πάντα τὰ ἔθνη are agents of persecution during the worldwide mission. The theme of hospitality is also introduced into the worldwide mission in Matt 25:31-46 the πάντα τὰ ἔθνη are judged for their willingness to provide for missionary needs.⁵³ The final commission does not expound upon these themes, but it recalls passages from Matt 24-25 that discuss the worldwide mission. Much of what was introduced concerning

⁵³ See §3.7.

missionary activity in Matt 10 has been carried through the rest of the text, and Matt 28:16-20 continues with this theme.

Figure 2: Themes from the Missionary Discourse and Later Texts

	Parable of the Tenants	Parable of the Wedding Banquet	Woes Against Scribes and Pharisees	The Tribulation	The Sheep and the Goats	Matt 28:16-20
The mission is geographically bounded.		Not likely		No	No	No
The missionaries are depicted as envoys/representatives of God and Jesus.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
The missionaries are extreme ascetics, and exclusively dependent on private hospitality.					Yes	
Jews are the focus of the mission, but gentiles are present as onlookers.	Jews as focus, gentiles not specifically referenced	Some indication of early priority for Israel, possibility of expansion	Yes		Imagery of saved people is Israel-centric. Gentiles are saved.	
The mission forces a conflict with Jewish leadership.	Yes	Yes	Yes			
Jews and gentiles are both possible agents of persecution.	Yes, but gentile persecutors are not mentioned.	Yes, but gentile persecutors are not mentioned	Yes	Yes, but Jewish persecutors are not mentioned	Yes, but Jewish persecutors are not mentioned	
The mission is closely associated with imminent eschatology.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
The mission recounted in the passage is presently incomplete.	Yes	Yes		Yes		Yes

When we compare the themes and messages of the missionary discourse with other discussions of missionary work in the Gospel, two things become clear. First, a gentile mission does not replace a mission to Israel – the “double replacement” reading of Matthew does not cohere with the data on missions and missionary activity. Second, and just as crucially, Matthew’s understanding of missionary work does not change. The worldwide mission is not significantly different from the mission in Israel, except for its audience and where the mission will take place. The mission will not be received differently. The content of the mission does not change. The antagonists of the mission are the same. There is no clear reason to think that the methods of the mission are intended to change as the gospel moves out from Israel to the rest of the world. The same motifs and images surrounding missions early in the text are invoked throughout the rest of the Gospel.

This fact is just as important as the fact that a mission to gentiles does not replace a mission to a rejected Israel. As Matthew begins to envision a mission to the world, and finally commands one, he neither suggests that this mission replaces a mission in Israel, nor does he overturn any other element of the mission. This Gospel depicts an overwhelmingly unified project, covering an increasing amount of geographical space. Unlike Paul and Peter’s agreement in Gal 2:9, Matthew does not speak of distinct missions to the circumcised and uncircumcised.⁵⁴ The requirements for Jews and gentiles alike to join the Jesus movement are the same, and the same work is done to recruit them.

⁵⁴ Contra Turner, “His Glorious Throne,” 164; von Doebbler, “Die Restitution Israels,” 21.

In sum, when we discuss mission in Matthew's Gospel, we have made a mistake if the contrasting demands of Matt 10:5-6 and 28:19-20 lead us to emphasize discontinuity in Matthew's theology of mission. A more unified account emerges in Matthew's text when we put these verses in conversation with other passages in the Gospel. So as we approach our final chapter: what does this mean for our reading of Matthew?

4.4.2 Reading 10:5-6 and 28:16-20 in the Same Text

Matthew 28:16-20 commands a mission to gentile nations. This specific command appears at the end of a Gospel that, much earlier in the narrative, commanded a mission exclusively within Israel (10:5-6). Nonetheless, much of what is commanded in the missionary discourse is reintroduced later in the text. How are we to make sense of this contradictory set of information—especially if, as we have maintained, the “replacement reading” cannot be sustained?

One option is that Matt 28:19 adds a mission on top of the one Matt 10:5-6 already ordered. This makes good sense of Matt 10:23, which teaches that a mission in Israel will continue until the Parousia. The mission to the gentiles in 28:19 expands a mission to the “towns of Israel” without replacing it; the mission to Israel continues and a mission outside of Israel to the gentiles is added.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Lloyd Gaston, “The Messiah of Israel as Teacher of the Gentiles: The Setting of Matthew's Christology,” 24–40 argues that the secondary mission is a mission that specifically instructs gentiles in Torah.

But we hit another snag with the scope of the mission. If we read 28:19 as a command concerning exclusively gentile people, and 10:5-6 as commanding a mission to Jews in Israel, Matthew has neglected to make any kind of provision for the Diaspora. This means that Diaspora Jews (most Jews in the first century!) and possibly Samaritans are never addressed.

It seems unlikely Matthew has not considered the Diaspora at all; as we noted, he shows awareness of it at least in Matt 19:28 and also in Matt 8:11-12, and the parallels between 10:5-6 and 28:19.⁵⁶ We also know from Matthew's reference to the "regeneration" of the twelve tribes in 19:28 that part of his vision of the eschaton includes the regathering of all the lost Israelites. If Matthew thinks of Israel as being "in the nations," as many early Jewish and Jewish-Christian writers did,⁵⁷ we would assume that a mission that incorporates both Jews and gentiles abroad would cohere with his general end expectations. This would signal not a simple ethnic leveling of the mission, but an ethnic and geographic expansion that coheres well with Matthew's general interest in Israel. His goal for the mission encompasses the whole world, but his interest in Israel both at home and abroad is not erased.

Aside from the thoroughgoing interest in geographic space and mission, what else can be determined from the similarities between 10:5-6 and 28:19-20? The parallels between these verses can be read as contrastive;⁵⁸ that is, the mission depicted at the end of the Gospel replaces the mission depicted in Matt 10. The problem with the contrastive

⁵⁶ See §3.4.1; 3.5.2.

⁵⁷ See §3.5.2.

⁵⁸ Ulrich Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 139-41. Also in Hare and Harrington, "Make Disciples," 366.

reading, though, is not just that this leads to the untenable double replacement reading. The challenges of this contrastive reading are much more severe.

The first problem is that there is just not enough material in Matt 28:16-20 to replace the entire discourse of Matt 10. Matthew 10 is a carefully redacted chapter with specific instructions concerning what missionary work is, how to conduct it, and how to anticipate specific challenges. Matthew 28:16-20 contains three sentences of preamble, commission, and assurance. This does not seem intended to replace a text of Matt 10's length and complexity. Matthew 28:16-20 could replace 10:5-6, possibly, but the reader is then left with a considerable block of vestigial material that remains attached to nullified instructions and whose continued validity for the church is rendered incredibly unclear. If Matthew wishes us to read Matt 28:16-20 as a replacement or reversal of 10:5-6, one will also expect Matthew to provide some clearer guidance about what to do with the rest of the instructions, or at least some attention to the fact that he has reversed his own narrative so dramatically.

The second problem is that the actual words of Matt 28:16-20 as well as their brevity demand that we look back earlier in the text to make sense of them. This challenges the idea that Matt 28:16-20 introduces something entirely unprecedented to the text, since the final instructions demand a backward glance at the previous narrative. The instruction to teach all that Jesus has commanded (28:20) requires the reader to look back at the rest of the Gospel for the content of Jesus' instructions. This does not suggest discontinuity with what has preceded but continuity. Furthermore, the incompleteness of Matt 28:16-20 all but requires one to look back at Matt 10 for instructions about how to carry out a worldwide mission. No methodology is explained in Matt 28:16-20, possibly

because Matthew might find further explanation of how exactly to missionize the nations to be redundant. Detailed instructions can already be found in Matt 10. The missionary discourse in Matt 10 provides guidelines for how missionaries should support themselves (hospitality, 10:9-13), and how to respond to persecution (expect it, and keep moving, 10:23). All of this is reaffirmed in Matt 24:9, 14 and 25:33-46. In the same way that Matt 28:16-20 points backwards, missionary discourse points ahead to the coming of the Son of Man (10:23) and the eschatological tribulation of the church (10:17-22; 34-36), with no indication that the discourse's basic directions will be abrogated at some point in the imminent future before the eschaton itself. The missionary discourse points forward, and Matt 28:16-20 points backwards. Both bookend a coherent exploration, revisited repeatedly throughout the text, of how missionary activity works and how to practice it. In this light, Matt 28:16-20 cannot be read as an undoing of the missionary discourse. It introduces the new command to go to the whole world, but details for how to carry out the instructions must be found earlier in the text.

Just as Matt 28:16-20 requires the reader to look backwards in the text for specific instructions, it also encourages the reader to look back at the preceding texts in other ways. Jesus's appearance in Galilee fulfills two prophecies Matthew has made earlier in his text - one in Matt 26:32 and another in Matt 28:7-10.⁵⁹

Matthew 28:16-20 also points back to the eschatological discourse by invoking the worldwide mission. In fact, we might even say that the post-Easter mission to the gentile nations is commanded in 28:19, but it is described in Matt 24-5. As we discussed

⁵⁹ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:688.

earlier,⁶⁰ these texts predict the new event of worldwide mission, but depict this event as being strikingly similar to the mission that is already underway. Matthew's concerns about the post-Easter mission abroad mirror his concerns about the first mission within Israel with remarkable consistency. The Christian community after Jesus faces false prophets (24:11, 24; cf. 7:15) and lawlessness (24:12; cf. 7:23; 23:28), just like the community Matthew presents as existing during the lifetime of Jesus. The specific dangers of missionary activity are the same both in Israel and out of it as well. In Matt 24:9 and 24:14, the process of bringing the gospel to all the ἔθνη results in violent opposition – the same as Matthew expected for the mission to Israel (Matt 10:16-23; 23:34-36). Likewise, Matthew depicts the ἔθνη being judged particularly for their willingness or unwillingness to meet the needs of itinerant missionaries (25:31-46). This is the same metric by which the people of Israel are judged in 10:15 and 40-43. All this is to say, almost nothing about the mission besides the time and location has changed: not the dangers, not the expectation of reception or rejection, nor the meager yields of successful conversion. Matthew 28:16-20 points back to these earlier texts that depict a coherent picture of a growing mission. It is exceedingly difficult to find literary hints that we are to see this text as introducing a reversal or retraction of Matthew's theology. Rather, it looks as though what has begun in Israel will simply expand beyond it.

What does this mean for reading Matt 10:5-6 and Matt 28:16-20 in the same text? It seems that the best way to read this is not as a set of contrasting instructions. Rather, Matt 28:16-20 commands the growth of the work that the missionary discourse, and all

⁶⁰ See §3.4.

subsequent discussions of missionary activity, already put into place. This is not a separate mission. Whatever was taught in Israel is taught outside it. However the missionaries were meant to support themselves in Israel is how they will support themselves outside of it. Whatever is expected to befall the missionaries in Israel will also happen in the rest of the world. What has changed is where the mission is practiced, and by necessity, its targets.

This probably means that, for Matthew, a “gentile mission” requires a significant amount of Judaizing on the part of the converts. We have already discussed above that Matthew’s instructions concerning baptism and teaching make some specific Judaizing demands of gentile converts – to be taught to follow Torah as Jesus interpreted it, and a confession of faith in Israel’s God. But it does seem that how Matthew expects his Jewish readers to follow Torah is probably similar to how he expects gentile readers to follow Torah. As we discussed in the second excursus, Matthew’s theology of Torah would not be recognizably faithful to Pharisaic teachers and would have placed him out of step with much of common Judaism. Nonetheless, Matthew insists on Torah observance, as he understands Jesus taught it. This would involve far more adherence to Jewish food laws, calendars, and divorce laws than the average gentile would be used to. At no point does Matthew suggest that expectations for Jews and gentiles will be different. Gentiles are incorporated into the assembly of the church and held to the same standards.⁶¹

To summarize: Matt 28:16-20 simply cannot have replaced Matt 10. It does not command a mission that replaces a mission to Israel. Furthermore, because Matthew’s

⁶¹ White, “The Eschatological Conversion of ‘All the Nations,’” 5.

mission theology has been so consistent throughout his text, it is not even likely that Matt 28:16-20 commands a different sort of mission that will be more accessible to gentiles. What the disciples have undertaken in Israel is expanded to the rest of the world. The content of Jesus's teaching will go with them, as will the method of missionary practice. These norms have not been disrupted or changed for the sake of gentile mission.

What we are then left with in Matt 28:16-20 is a command to missionary work that goes beyond the boundaries of Israel to the other nations of the world. At the same time, though, this mission builds on the methods, content, and expectations of the mission that began in Israel and continues there during Matthew's day. With that, we will turn our attention to the eight motifs we identified in the second chapter and see which are present here.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Summary and Evaluation: One Unified Mission

In the first chapter, we evaluated three different interpretations of Matthew's missiology: the "Jewish mission reading," the "gentile replacement reading," and the "expansionist" reading. In our discussion, we maintained that both the Jewish mission reading and the gentile mission reading are unsatisfactory. Matthew is openly enthusiastic about a mission to gentiles and exhorts the readers to engage in such a task (Matt 28:16-20). At the same time, he also denies that Israel has lost the favor of God, and he assumes a mission to Israel is ongoing (Matt 10:23). This leaves us with the expansionist reading, which argues that the Gospel orders a mission to the gentile nations in addition to the mission to Israel narrated in Matt 10. This reading, however, still falls short. Konradt's understanding of the gentile mission is that it is a distinct project that seeks to convert gentiles *as gentiles* (uncircumcised, non-Torah-observant) to the Christian movement.¹ This mission would create churches with mixed ethnicities. In these congregations, Jewish members who keep Torah would worship alongside gentiles who were not expected to Judaize.² However, this picture of a Jewish and gentile mission, operating simultaneously but teaching varying messages about Torah, does not seem to fit with Matthew's surprisingly fixed depiction of mission. As we have endeavored to show, the mission to the nations, for Matthew, is fundamentally like the mission to Israel. The methods, content, and predicted response to the mission to Israel is the same as those of the worldwide mission. The goal of the next three chapters was to demonstrate that for

¹ Konradt, *Israel, the Church, and the Gentiles*, 374-6.

² *Ibid.*

Matthew there are not two missions but one. We attempted to do this by examining the parameters of mission outlined in Matt 10:5-42, and then comparing this picture with narrations of mission that appear later in the Gospel.

In the second chapter, we turned our attention to the missionary discourse of Matt 10:5-42. This discourse commands a mission to Jews, living in Israel. Matthew describes this mission as follows. First, this mission is geographically bounded, and targets only those Jews living in Israel itself, and possibly only Galilee. It excludes gentiles in gentile nations, Jews of the Diaspora, Samaritans, and, for the most part, gentiles living in Israel. Second, the commission establishes the disciples as representatives of Jesus, who are authorized to bring his work and his words to a wider audience. Third, these envoys do not work to support themselves. Instead, they live as dependents on the hospitality of anyone who receives them. Fourth, gentiles appear as onlookers to the work, even though they are not the target of the mission. Fifth, the missionaries force a conflict with Jewish leadership. This confrontation is deliberate, as Jesus and his representatives seek to invalidate other Jewish leaders as potential authorities in Israel. Sixth, both Jews and gentiles resist the missionaries, either through official channels (courts, synagogues, etc.) or unofficial channels (refusing to host the missionaries, etc.). Seventh, missionary work is associated with imminent eschatology, and undertaken with the awareness that the final judgment is near. Finally, this mission is still underway at the time that Matthew writes.

In the next two chapters, we compared the missionary discourse with six other passages in Matthew's Gospel that depict mission work. These include the parable of the tenants (Matt 21:33-46), the parable of the wedding banquet (22:1-14), the woes against the scribes and Pharisees (23:33-36), the eschatological discourse (24:1-51), and the

judgment of the sheep and the goats (25:31-46). Our goal was to see which traits of the missionary discourse appear in later texts, or if these traits were contradicted. The missiology remains quite consistent. The text repeatedly invokes the same theological motifs introduced in Matt 10 wherever it discusses missionary work. Matthew does not clearly teach that Israel's time as a missionary target is drawing to a close. Eventually, he does introduce a new theme of worldwide mission (Matt 24:9, 14). However, he continuously draws on his depiction of the mission to Israel to describe even this worldwide mission.

For example, one element that appears in every depiction of missionary activity is the role of missionaries as Jesus's representatives. They serve as envoys (21:32; 22:3; 23; 34) and spread his proclamation of the kingdom and interpretation of Torah (10:7-8; 28:19-20). They do Jesus's work and repeat Jesus's words. Because of this, it seems unlikely that the content of the message would change depending on the audience, since Jesus's words in the Gospel do not seem to be contingent on the audience or location. It stands to reason we could expect the same from the message of Jesus's envoys. At every point, they represent Jesus's words, which are binding on Jews and gentiles alike.

Another element of continuity is the insistence on the missionaries' dependence on hospitality. This appears in the missionary discourse (10:11-13) and the judgment of the sheep and the goats (25:34-36, 41-43). This hospitality is expected to come from the community where missionaries work. The experience of being a missionary involves asking for, and accepting, the assistance of one's audience.

Another motif that appears virtually every time missionary activity is mentioned is the experience of opposition. This resistance is sometimes actively sought. The

missionary discourse (10:17), the parable of the tenants (21:35-39), the parable of the wedding banquet (22:6-7), and the woes against the scribes and Pharisees (23:2-39) all frame missionary work as an act that forces a confrontation with Jewish leaders.

Missionaries seek access to synagogues to operate and are disciplined for doing so (Matt 10:17; 23:34). Persecution is frequently depicted at the hands of Jewish leaders who oppose Jesus's teachings and his envoys, but they are certainly not the missionaries' only antagonists. Gentile officials appear as persecutors in Matt 10:18, and Matt 24:9 predicts opposition from gentiles in general.

Missionary work also repeatedly appears alongside the theme of imminent eschatology. In the missionary discourse, Matthew invokes final judgment (10:26-33) and predicts the imminent arrival of the Son of Man (10:23). Eschatological judgment also appears in the parable of the tenants (21:41, 43-44), the wedding banquet (22:7, 12-14), and the woes against the scribes and Pharisees (23:33, 35-36, 38-39). The mission to the nations is first anticipated in the context of the eschatological discourse (24:9,14). The sheep and the goats are subject to eschatological judgment, and they receive eternal rewards or punishments based on their service to missionaries (25:46). Finally, Jesus's last commission to his disciples looks ahead to the end of the age. The Matthean Jesus promises that he will be present with the missionaries until this occurs (28:20).

Finally, the mission within Israel and the mission beyond it are both assumed to be underway at the time Matthew writes (10:23; 28:20). For Matthew, missionary work is a present and ongoing reality, and even as the mission expands to the ends of the world, the mission to Israel continues. The gentile nations do not replace Israel as a mission

field, and Israel is not rejected. In fact, to some extent the missions bleed into each other from the beginning, since gentiles are in Israel and Jews are in the nations.

We do have some evidence of discontinuity between the missionary discourse and later mission-themed passages in the Gospel. The only obvious example is the geographical bounds of the mission. As we argued in §2.1, the boundaries of the mission to the “lost sheep of Israel” in Matt 10:5-6 are specifically identified in geographic terms. The mission is to Jews, but not to the Diaspora. It remains within the nation itself. Though Israel and its Jewish residents are the specific target of the mission, gentiles exist in Israel and appear as onlookers to the mission (§2.4). Some of these gentiles emerge as surprising beneficiaries to this mission, even as they are not the focus of the work (Matt 8:5-13; 8:28-34; 15:21-28). Gentiles are in Israel, and benefit from a Jewish mission. Because of this, the line between missions “to Jews” and “to gentiles” is less defined than it originally appears. There are Jews in the nations, and gentiles in Israel, and as the mission expands it stands to reason that everyone will be reached.

The scope of Matthew's missiology undeniably widens after the resurrection. All nations and ethnicities are targeted as potential proselytes. Beyond this, it is difficult to see much evidence that Matthew understands the task of missionary activity to fundamentally change. The content appears to be the same. Jesus's words as preserved in the entire Gospel and during his own outreach to Israel (Matt 28:20) are central to the proclamation, which makes it difficult to suppose the content of the mission changes at all. Similarly, the methods of missionary work remain the same. Missionaries do not earn or save money. They depend on food and shelter from their targets to do their work. The opponents of the mission are apparently the same throughout. The Gospel never depicts

Jews or gentiles as primary or exclusive antagonists of the mission. Finally, Matthew continuously expects an imminent end. Matthew does not seem to expect an extended age of the church in which the mission to the nations will continue for some time after the Jewish War. Matthew insists on mission but does not expect an extended era of history in which this will take place. The end is coming soon. There is very little prediction of transformation or change over time in Matthew's missiology. Matthew introduces his vision of missionary work in chapter 10, and after this, he repeats himself. Whether he discusses missionary overtures to Israel or beyond it, he repeatedly draws attention to the same themes he introduced in the missionary discourse.

What are we to make of this apparent continuity in missiology? The consistency and repetition in these texts makes it difficult to argue that Matthew thinks that there are two Christian missions. This is a problem whether one argues the second mission replaces the first or that the second expands the first. There do not seem to be two missions at all. Instead, there is a mission that is inaugurated in Israel, and then grows to include new settings. Israel never ceases to be a missionary target. Whatever we might say about Matthew's relationship with the synagogue, common Judaism, or any other standard-bearer of Jewish identity, it remains the case that Matthew wishes his readers to convince Jews to accept the teachings of Jesus the messiah. There is no turn from Israel to the gentiles. There is only the attempt to reach gentiles with the same message that was given to Israel. Furthermore, Matthew does not seem to see the goal of winning Israel to his cause as being in conflict with a mission to the nations. The same message and tactics can and should be used to missionize both gentiles and Diaspora Jews, without any change in tactics. All people, regardless of their ethnicity, need to hear this message.

Nonetheless, all people are expected to resist it. Matthew does not suggest that the mission to the nations begins because of a poor hearing in Israel, nor because of Jesus's death in Jerusalem. The disciples are encouraged to turn their attention to the rest of the world alongside Israel because of Jesus's newfound authority in light of the resurrection (28:16), not because of Israel's condemnation or destruction. Israel continues to hold Matthew's attention as a community that needs a change in leadership.

5.2 Why Does This Matter? Some Preliminary Thoughts

At the beginning of this dissertation, we compared three different scholars who sought to answer this question: why does Matthew record two conflicting missionary commissions (10:5-6; 28:16-20)? How can these two commissions be understood as part of the same text? As we have argued, if we focus not only on these two texts but on every other passage in Matthew's Gospel where missionary work is depicted, we can see that the apparent contradiction between these two commands is only half the story. Disjunction is not the primary theme of Matthew's Gospel; continuity is. Matthew introduces a missionary task in Matt 10:5-42, places it in Israel, and then expects that this same work will continue in the rest of the world. This is expansion, but it may be more accurate to describe the mission to the nations more as an extension of the mission to Israel. Matthew does not think of the mission abroad as fundamentally different work, but instead as the natural outgrowth of the original project. The mission to Israel now seeks to convert the whole world.

As we have seen in the first chapter of this dissertation, it is difficult to separate Matthew's missiology from the Gospel's Jewishness. Generally speaking, scholars who argue Matthew favors a Jewish mission construct a more Jewish Matthew. A Jewish Matthew operates as a Jewish sectarian, attends synagogue, keeps Torah, and understands Jesus as Israel's messiah. On the other hand, scholars who argue Matthew favors a gentile mission tend to construct a more gentile Matthew. A gentile Matthew (or a Matthew who has disaffiliated from Judaism) rejects the synagogue, believes God has replaced Israel with the church, and substitutes Jesus's teachings for the Torah. Between these two poles, scholars who argue that the Gospel prioritizes neither mission over the other construct a Matthew who remains between Judaism and gentile Christianity. Matthew roots his story in Israel, looks beyond it to the nations, does not require gentiles to become Jewish proselytes to join the church, and worships in a church with both Jewish and gentile missions.

However, Matthew's unified missiology complicates all three narratives. In some ways, it could be read to suggest a more Jewish Matthew. In this framework, Jesus's ministry begins in Israel, the church first operates in Israel, and the church's growth to the nations is all but auxiliary. This coheres with Jesus's own activity and priorities during the bulk of the narrative. Jesus heals and teaches Israel, and yet a few gentiles benefit as well – not as Jesus' primary targets, but as secondary recipients of Israel's blessings.

And yet, a unified missiology does not leave us with a Matthew who belongs comfortably in Judaism anymore, either. Runesson argues that Matthew describes two kinds of mission in his Gospel: an inward mission carried out by Jewish Christians that is

meant to transform the behavior of fellow Jews, and a proselytizing mission that is meant to bring in the gentiles.³ However, Matthew's missiology suggests that he may not agree with this distinction. If the same mission is as appropriate for gentiles as it is for Jews, can we really say that Matthew thinks of all Jews as co-religionists? Matthew may share more presuppositions and beliefs with the average Jew than the average gentile.

However, the work of winning Jews away from Pharisaic teaching and towards the teachings of Jesus is clearly essential for him – as essential as the work of baptizing gentiles in the name of Israel's God (Matt 28:19). This does not indicate that Matthew thinks of himself and non-Christian Jews as part of the same community. They are outsiders to him in the same way that pagans are.

Recent scholarship on ancient conversion is particularly useful here. Zeba Crook argues that, especially in the case of philosophical schools, conversion in the ancient Mediterranean was primarily expressed through loyalty to a teacher, public benefaction, and renunciation of past philosophies and teachers.⁴ This is in contrast to the work of earlier scholars, such as Nock, who argue that true "conversion" consists of a totalizing change of belief and behavior: rejecting one's past sins and starting over in a new belief system. This led Nock to conclude that "conversion" would therefore not be a relevant experience for a gentile worshipping a new deity in a polytheistic framework or accepting a new philosophy; conversion was only truly possible in the case of Judaism or Christianity.⁵ But if Crook is correct, then a student who disaffiliated from one teacher

³ Runesson, *Divine Wrath and Salvation*, 373-88.

⁴ Zeba A. Crook, *Reconceptualising Conversion: Patronage, Loyalty, and Conversion in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean*, Reprint 2012 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 243-6.

⁵ Arthur Darby Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 13-14.

and began to follow another experienced this change as conversion. In this framework, any “conversion” that Matthew would seek from a Jew would be just as radical as the conversion from a gentile. A Jew would still need to disaffiliate from Pharisaic teaching and adhere to Jesus.

Matthew’s unified missiology also poses a problem for those who understand Matthew’s ideal church to contain a mix of Jews and gentiles. For instance, Konradt argues that the invocation of Hos 6:6 in Matthew’s apologetic serves to make the church more accessible to gentiles (Matt 9:13; 12:7). Mercy trumps ritual; inclusion of putative outsiders (9:10-12) is more important than purity.⁶ Still, it remains the case that there is only one set of teachings in Matthew’s Gospel that binds all members. This teaching values the tithing of mint, dill, and cumin alongside justice, mercy, and faithfulness (23:23). Matthew encourages his readers to agree on shared standards for their whole communities, not to tolerate or cultivate ideological diversity (Matt 18:18-20). In this environment, widely differing degrees of Torah observance among members of the same church would have been difficult to sustain. They were apparently not sustainable in the case of Antioch in Paul’s day (Gal 2:11-14). Matthew does not make any clear call for gentiles to become circumcised Jewish proselytes. Nonetheless, he does not make any clear provision for gentiles and Jews to gather separately, nor does he offer any clear advice for how they can gather together. The unified missiology suggests that significant concessions and flexibility will be required from some part of the community.

⁶ Konradt, *Israel, The Church, and the Gentiles*, 358.

It also must be noted that Matthew's missiology does not have obvious parallels among the other Synoptic Gospels or in Paul's epistles. When we look at Mark, Luke-Acts, and Paul, we actually see some awareness that the work of proselytizing Jews and the work of proselytizing gentiles do not fit together comfortably. Both groups need to be persuaded that Jesus is Israel's messiah, but beyond that, how exactly Jews and gentiles can be members of the same assembly is unclear. Paul recounts that he and the Jerusalem church at first sought to resolve this tension by simply going their separate ways, with Peter, James, and John reaching the Jews while Paul reached the gentiles.⁷ However, even this compromise was short-lived, since the subject of table fellowship was not resolved and the Jewish Christians besides Paul eventually stopped eating with gentiles (Gal 2:11-14).⁸ Acts 15:22-29 reports that peace between these two groups was eventually accomplished by requiring gentiles to make some minor concessions and keeping an abridged form of Torah.

More commonly though, Matthew's predecessors and near-contemporaries appear to resolve the tension by appealing to some order in missionary priorities. This allows for the possibility that the mission to Israel has been temporarily or permanently phased out. Mark depicts Jesus telling the Syrophenician woman that the Jews "must be fed first" (7:27) and depicts a gradual turning towards the gentiles in the narrative throughout the Gospel.⁹ In Luke-Acts, rejected missionaries explicitly turn from Israel to the gentiles, anticipating greater success among a gentile audience (Acts 13:46; 18:6; 28:28). Even

⁷ Brown, "The Matthean Community and the Gentile Mission," 207.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 212.

⁹ Eric K. Wefald, "The Separate Gentile Mission in Mark: A Narrative Explanation of Markan Geography, the Two Feeding Accounts and Exorcisms," *JSNT* 18.60 (1996): 3–26.

Paul, who predicts the salvation of “all Israel” (Rom 11:26), acknowledges that the mission to Israel has stalled for the time being for the sake of the mission to the gentiles (Rom 11:11-16). In these texts, the tension of missionizing Jews and missionizing gentiles, and seeking to create one community of both, does not need to be resolved. Missionaries can simply focus their attention on gentiles and create communities that serve gentile needs.

Scholars absolutely have attempted to read Matthew through a salvation-historical perspective in which one mission gives way to the second. Walker, for instance, argues that Matthew depicts the age of the church as an era in which salvation has gone to the gentiles,¹⁰ and Meier also argues that the era of fidelity to the Mosaic law has given way to an era of universal mission in the post-Easter era.¹¹ But the Gospel resists both readings. As we have seen, Matthew’s eschatology remains quite imminent, which challenges the idea that there is an extended “age of the church” in Matthew’s theology at all.¹² Likewise, a unified missiology suggests that for Matthew, the time of Jesus, the time of a mission to Israel, and the time of universal salvation may all take place in the same era. Modern scholars see obvious contradictions, beginnings and ends, causes and effects, and changes over time in Matthew’s narrative. However, Matthew does not seem to mind.

This may in itself offer some explanation as to why Matthew’s place in the “parting of the ways” between Judaism and Christianity remains so contested. Matthew is a Gospel whose theology is thoroughly steeped in the Hebrew Bible, the centrality of

¹⁰ Walker, *Die Heilsgeschichte im ersten Evangelium*, 114.

¹¹ Meier, *Law and History in Matthew's Gospel*, 30.

¹² Strecker, *Der Weg der Gerechtigkeit*, 184-5.

Jesus as Torah interpreter, and the priority of Israel in the Kingdom of God. And yet, the message that Israel needs to hear and accept is one that is just as valid and important for pagan gentiles. This suggests a massive gap between the theology of Matthew and the theology of common Judaism. The Gospel is situated within the lore and literature of early Judaism, and yet it calls its Jewish readers to a very different form of practice.

5.3 Avenues for Further Study: What More Can Be Known about Matthew's Audience?

The discussion of Matthew and the Gospel's place within Judaism is in large part a question of audience: who, among Jews and gentiles, is this Gospel actually written for? As we have argued, this Gospel is not geared towards a closed community, but an audience which the author wishes to expand. The readership is, in part, people who will engage new missionary targets. As we have discussed, Matthew wishes for both Jews and gentiles to join the Jesus movement, and sees the work of outreach to both groups in basically the same terms. He also expects resistance from both groups.

However, it is one thing to say that Matthew wished for Jews and gentiles to join this movement and embrace its teachings, but quite another to suppose this actually happened. What we have constructed in this dissertation is the audience that Matthew apparently hopes for: a mix of Jews and gentiles who embrace Jesus's difficult teachings, who will express their fidelity to Jesus by supporting the mission, and will reject the teachings of all other Jewish groups while still embracing monotheistic worship of

Israel's God and the messiahship of Jesus as Son of David. This is a tall order. How likely is it that the readers who carried Matthew's Gospel actually found this audience?

In light of these conclusions, we can already see that the question "Does Matthew wish to missionize Jews, or gentiles, or both?" is profoundly limited as a research question. By attending to the question of the content and method of Matthew's mission, we are forced to face more pointed and perhaps more concrete questions. Which Jews does Matthew intend to reach? Which gentiles? Beyond this – which Jews and gentiles *did* Matthew actually reach? How?

Concerning specific intended audiences: Matthew's intentions are only available to us through this text, and the evidence is confounding. Matthew's mission has limited apparent appeal. It asks a great deal of possible converts. It is materially costly. Do any historical audiences present themselves as possible avenues for Matthew's Gospel to grow and spread?

First, concerning Jewish converts: internal evidence in the Gospel is clear that Matthew wished for Jewish converts and writes in such a way that his theology and argumentation would be comprehensible to them. Matthew voices a desire for Jews to join his movement (23:37). Likewise, his use of Hebrew Bible typology and Hebrew prophecy suggests an audience that needs an apologetic defense against formative Judaism, or a proselytizing offense.¹³ However, despite all this, there is good reason to suppose that the mission described in this Gospel would not perform well with a Jewish audience. Matthew assumes that synagogues will resist his message, and his primary

¹³ Menninger, *Israel and the Church in the Gospel of Matthew*, 71, 78-9.

opponents are Pharisees – a sect of teachers that, according to Josephus, is exceptionally popular with the Jewish people.¹⁴ Matthew blames the Jewish War on the people who lived in Jerusalem during the end of Jesus’s life, as well as other prominent Jewish leaders (23:37-39; 27:25). The Gospel is not alone in blaming the destruction of the temple on Israel’s sin – a similar argument appears a number of early Jewish texts.¹⁵ However, if Matthew writes shortly after the Jewish War, it is easy to see why his harsh inward critique would fail to move a Jewish audience looking for hope of restoration. Matthew may not intend his message to serve as a general condemnation of all Jews, but his blame against Jerusalem and its leaders is pointed. It is understandable that a general audience of Jews who have recently lived through such a trauma would see themselves as caught in the crossfire. Indeed, a general Jewish audience has been caught in the crossfire ever since. As Jack Sanders has noted, Christianity did not become a dominant, worldwide religion by winning Jewish converts. Evidence for widespread Jewish adherence to the nascent Christian movement in the Diaspora is lacking,¹⁶ and Jewish Christianity lost a tremendous amount of institutional support with the destruction of the temple.¹⁷ Even if Matthew wanted Jewish converts, his message makes it difficult to suppose he actually got them, and the historical evidence does not suggest that Jews ever converted to Christianity *en masse*.

This brings us to the problem of gentile converts. Would the average gentile have enough goodwill for a wandering Jewish Christian missionary who expected him to take

¹⁴ Josephus, *Ant.*, 18.1.3

¹⁵ Michael E. Stone, “Reactions to Destructions of the Second Temple,” *JSJ* 12.2 (2006): 195–204, 199.

¹⁶ Jack T. Sanders, “Did Early Christianity Succeed Because of Jewish Conversions?,” *Social Compass* 46.4 (1999), 498-9.

¹⁷ Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 171-2.

up Jesus's interpretation of Torah that he would be willing to house them in his home as long as they deemed it necessary? This seems unlikely. Matthew's message is stringent and exclusive. It is supported with evidence from the Hebrew Bible. The teaching of the "higher righteousness" would have been a high bar for most converts. A random gentile may have been curious about their message, but it seems less likely that many would have been so curious that they would take on the burden of supporting such a person. A mission "to the nations" has to be understood in light of this. Matthew may aspire to a truly universal mission, but in practice, his message does not seem to be suited for a general audience.

Some gentiles actually did feel an interest in, and attraction to, Jewish customs.¹⁸ The existence of gentiles who associated with the synagogue, admired Jewish teaching, or practiced Jewish rituals is well-attested in both pagan and Jewish literary sources, as well as evidence from inscriptions.¹⁹ In order to get any purchase, missionaries would need to seek gentiles who already had some sort of sympathy with their message - either the message of Christianity specifically, or the ethical teachings of Torah. Fortunately for Matthew, gentiles who were interested in or sympathized with Jewish customs and ethical teachings could be found ready-made all over the Diaspora. We know from many Jewish sources that some synagogues regularly hosted a number of sympathetic

¹⁸ Michele Murray, *Playing a Jewish Game: Gentile Christian Judaizing in the First and Second Centuries CE*, Studies in Christianity and Judaism/Études Sur Le Christianisme et Le Judaïsme 13 (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2004), 3-4

¹⁹ Paul W. Barnett, "Jewish Mission in the Era of the New Testament and the Apostle Paul," in *The Gospel to the Nations: Perspective on Paul's Mission*, ed. Peter Bolt and Mark Thompson (Downers Grove: Apollos/Intervarsity Press, 2000): 263-84, 269-70; Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*, 149; Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*, 87.

gentiles.²⁰ Classical writers commonly refer to the phenomenon of gentiles adopting Jewish customs, implying that this behavior is widely known and familiar to the readers.²¹ Roman legislation also assumes that adherence to Jewish practices was common and Roman officials struggled to prevent it.²² In the Diaspora, urban, assimilated Jews lived among gentile neighbors,²³ and apparently made broad allowances for their gentile associates to participate in their communities. Synagogues were often easily accessible to gentiles in major parts of cities, attached or nearby to other major civic buildings, and posed little barrier to entry to curious or sociable gentiles who wished to attend.²⁴ These gentiles were apparently not often aspiring converts, but instead people who used the opportunities of synagogue meetings and Jewish festivals to associate with Jewish neighbors and participate in synagogue worship.²⁵

²⁰ Judith M. Lieu, "Do God-Fearers Make Good Christians?," in *Crossing the Boundaries: Essays in Biblical Interpretation in Honor of Michael D. Goulder*, ed. Stanley E. Porter, Paul Joyce, and David E. Orton (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 332; J. Andrew Overman, "The God-Fearers: Some Neglected Features," *JSNT* 10.32 (1988): 17–26; Anders Runesson, Donald D. Binder, and Birger Olsson, *The Ancient Synagogue from Its Origins to 200 C.E.: A Source Book* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2008), 9; 120-21; 134-5; 154-5; 166-7; 194-5.

²¹ Clifford H. Bedell, "Mission in Intertestamental Judaism," in *Mission in the New Testament: An Evangelical Approach*, ed. William J. Larkin Jr. and Joel F. Williams (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998), 21–29, 25; Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles*, 475n44; Michele Murray, *Playing a Jewish Game: Gentile Christian Judaizing in the First and Second Centuries CE*, Studies in Christianity and Judaism/Études sur le Christianisme et le Judaïsme 13 (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier U. Press, 2004), 138n14; James Parkes, *Prelude to Dialogue: Jewish-Christian Relationships* (London: Valentine, Mitchell, 1969), 12.

²² Steve Mason, "The Contra Apionem in Social and Literary Context: An Invitation to Judean Philosophy," in *Religious Rivalries in the Early Roman Empire and the Rise of Christianity*, ed. Leif E. Vaage (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006), 187–228, 144, notes incidental references to gentiles adopting Jewish customs in Tacitus (*Hit.*, 5.5.), Epictetus (*Diatr.* 2.9.20), Juvenal (*Sat.* 5.4-96-106).

²³ Scot McKnight, *A Light among the Gentiles: Jewish Missionary Activity in the Second Temple Period* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 14. Josephus records the experience of Jews in Sardis, who retained friendly relationships with their gentile neighbors (*Ant.* 14.235, 259-61; 16.17).

²⁴ Josephus, *J.W.* 7.45; Horace, *Satires*, 1.4.138-43; Philo, *Mos.*, 2.17-25; 26-7 209; *Spec.* 2.26; *Hyp.* 7.13; Dieter Georgi, *The Opponents of Paul in Second Corinthians: A Study of Religious Propaganda in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 83-4.

²⁵ A. Thomas. Kraabel, "Immigrants, Exiles, Expatriates, and Missionaries," in *Religious Propaganda and Missionary Competition in the New Testament World Essays Honoring Dieter Georgi*, ed. Lukas Bormann, Kelly Del Tredici, and Angela Standhartinger, *NovTSup* 74 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 71–88, 82.

Matthew's text refers to missionaries who conduct their work within synagogues (10:17; 23:34). As far as missionaries were able to access them, synagogues would have made a good place to find gentiles who were already interested Jewish monotheism and Jewish ethics.²⁶ Recruiting Gentiles from synagogues and Jewish gatherings also appears in Acts (13:42-43; 14:1; 17:4; 18:4).²⁷

In light of this, it may be that when Matthew imagines missionizing gentiles, he particularly means the occasional gentile who already gravitated towards Jewish customs on their own. But Judaizing gentiles were not the only gentiles in the ancient world who would have had a pre-existing affinity for the missionaries' message. In the forty years before Matthew was written, other Christians had already been traveling around the world creating pockets of monolatrous Gentiles with an interest in Jewish literature and theology. Paul and his associates had produced such communities in urban centers all across the Mediterranean. When Matthew's missionaries went into "all nations," they may have been able to find pockets of Pauline Christians as far east as Asia Minor and as far west as Rome.

We also know that in Paul's own day, not all Christians were content to treat Paul's churches as successfully missionized. The most famous example of this is reported in Galatians. Paul had originally founded Gentile churches in Galatia that did not practice Torah. Other missionaries, though, apparently considered these churches to contain Christians who were insufficiently converted, and urged them to accept circumcision and

²⁶ Lieu, "Do God-Fearers Make Good Christians?," 33.

²⁷ Klaus Haacker, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 1. Auflage, ThKNT, Band 5 (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 2019), 233, 278-9.

thereby become children of Abraham.²⁸ This “circumcision party” is referenced in Galatians and later recalled in Acts; these appear to be Jewish Christians who affirm Torah and expect other Christians to do likewise (Acts 11:2; 15:1, 5; Gal 2:12; 6:12).²⁹ Members of this group seem to be operating like missionaries, but as missionaries within the Christian movement.³⁰ Corinth apparently also hosted teachers who preached “another Jesus” and “another gospel” (2 Cor 11:4) who operated in churches that had already been founded. This is also similar to the behavior of itinerants in the *Didache*,³¹ who are welcomed into Christian communities as apostles on a limited, short-term basis (11.4-12).³²

The content and method of Matthew’s missiology suggests that the Gospel was particularly well-suited to travel on the backs of other religious movements that already had some kind of affinity with Matthew’s theology. This proposal provides an intriguing alternative to both the *intra muros* and *extra muros* readings of Matthew and may provide a way forward for this debate. Matthew neither wrote for a community in the synagogue, nor for a community outside it. He wrote with the goal of furthering a mission that would win adherents both from within the Jewish and gentile worlds to his own movement. This may sound like truly universal aspiration, but in actual fact the specific parameters of Matthean missionary activity are more poised to win converts from some fields than others. What we call Matthew’s “universal mission” might be better described as a series

²⁸ Martyn, “A Law-Observant Mission to Gentiles,” 307–24.

²⁹ Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 20.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

³¹ André Tuilier, “Les charismatiques itinérants dans la Didaché et dans l’Évangile de Matthieu,” 157-169.

³² Aaron Milavec, “Distinguishing True and False Prophets: The Protective Wisdom of the Didache,” *JECS* 2.2 (1994): 117-36.

of high-conflict interactions between this sectarian renewal movement and other religious institutions: particularly, synagogues and other churches.

In summary, what Matthew thinks of as “mission” may not be what we commonly mean by “mission” – namely, going to new regions without a Christian presence to establish new congregations. What might be more in view is missionary activity as a movement within other religious organizations that do not (yet) share Matthew’s theology. By not depending on an audience of potential converts who must be persuaded to cross a wide cultural chasm to join Matthew’s movement, he may have actually been able to spread his message quite quickly by capitalizing on a range of preexisting networks of readers who were already primed to engage his material.

The place to test this thesis is not in this dissertation. However, this possibility – that Matthew’s Gospel spread around the world by capitalizing on an audience as hybrid as the Gospel itself is – is an intriguing possibility. As difficult and contradictory as this Gospel’s theology is, Matthew actually did spread quickly and widely throughout the ancient world, appearing in the works of the apostolic fathers and a number of early apologists.³³ This book did not struggle to find an audience. Matthew’s message as it is preserved in the text may seem to have limited appeal, and yet, the Gospel still managed to spread rapidly and eventually secure itself a place in the New Testament canon. Perhaps this happened because Matthew did not need to break new ground. A network of potential converts and readers already existed at the time the Gospel was written, and

³³ Ian Boxall, *Matthew through the Centuries*, First Edition, Wiley Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2019), 16-17.

Matthew's audience could grow by appealing to established Christian movements, not by creating its own.

This possibility of Matthew as a Gospel for the already-or-semi-converted might also explain how Matthew's interpretation history became so contested. On one hand, Matthew's Gospel seems to have become the preferred Gospel of Christians who continued to embrace Jewish customs and practice alongside their devotion to Jesus. Matthew's Gospel was apparently quite similar (and in some textual traditions interchangeable with) the *Gospel according to the Hebrews*,³⁴ and patristic writers report Matthew as the preferred or only gospel of several Jewish-Christian sects. Irenaeus notes that the Ebionites, who practiced circumcision, rejected Paul, practiced Torah, treated Jerusalem as a holy city and the "house of God," (cf. Matt 4:5; 5:35; 23:21), and used the Gospel of Matthew to the exclusion of all alternatives.³⁵ Epiphanius says the Nazarenes also favored Matthew³⁶ and kept circumcision and the Jewish calendar (18.1.1-2). He also writes that the Cerinthians used Matt 10:25 to encourage circumcision. If students must be like their teachers, and Christ was circumcised, it follows that Christians should be circumcised themselves.³⁷

But Matthew's broader audience did not embrace this message. Matthew emerged into a world where there were already other theological options for how gentiles could become Christians without becoming Jewish. Matthew's contemporaries were already

³⁴ Jeremiah Coogan, "The Ways That Parted in the Library: The Gospels According to Matthew and According to the Hebrews in Late Ancient Heresiology," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 2022, 1–18, 5-7.

³⁵ Irenaeus, *Haer.*, I..26; III.21.

³⁶ Epiphanius, *Pan.*, 29.9.4.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.5.1-2.

erasing food laws, observing a holy day that was not the Sabbath, and finding new and creative ways to set aside normal Torah practice. Matthew also came equipped with enthusiastic denunciations of Jewish teachers. In light of this, it is not hard to see how Matthew's theology could easily become folded into larger, more gentile-friendly projects.

In her 2020 essay "What's Next in the Gospel of Matthew?" Amy-Jill Levine strikes a note of unmistakable boredom about the role of Matthew's theology within Judaism:

Thirty-six years after I wrote my dissertation... we still find the need to show how Matthew is not a fan of the high priests and Pharisees; we still need to show that Matthew promotes Torah observance. Mostly what changes is the length of footnotes. I am reminded of a comment about testimonial dinners: "Everything that needs to be said has been said, but not everyone has said it."³⁸

Levine's irritation is understandable, and surely shared by many Matthew scholars who have labored in this field for decades. It is hard to say something satisfying about this Gospel, so we keep talking about it. The Gospel does seem to be contradictory, and it is difficult to find new ways to advance conversations about it. It is Jewish and anti-Jewish, it elevates Jesus and also Torah simultaneously even when they don't agree,

³⁸ Amy-Jill Levine, "Concluding Reflections: What's Next in the Study of Matthew?," in *Matthew within Judaism: Israel and the Nations in the First Gospel*, ed. Anders Runesson and Daniel M. Gurtner, *Early Christianity and Its Literature* 27 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2020), 449–66, 463.

it seeks to win Israel but not everyone in it, and its mission field is Jesus's people of Israel along with every other nation. The Gospel is an adventure in threading an unthreadable needle, and the theology that apparently satisfied its author leaves many modern readers confused.

However, because Matthew remains so elusive, it does not seem that everything about the Gospel that needs to be said has actually been said at all. My sincere hope is that by looking at Matthew's missiology, we actually have succeeded in saying something new at Levine's interminable dinner party. Matthew is not anti-Jewish or anti-gentile, but neither is he pro-Jewish or pro-gentile. He is convinced he is right about Jesus, and he attempts to convince both groups. He is committed to Israel as a site of salvation, and takes this on by bringing them a message they do not want. He is at war with Jewish leaders in his era who seem to have much more sway over his countrymen than he does. He has one plan for how to convert everyone, no matter who or where they are. He believes this message is important for everyone, and he does not notice, or care, how difficult it is to see how this message possibly could apply to a general audience.

Perhaps with further research we actually can find new things to say about Matthew – namely, how Matthew came to be read the many different ways that it was. Matthew was sometimes received as a thoroughly Jewish text for Jewish Christian sectarians. It also was received as a Gospel that could sit comfortably in the same canon as Luke and Paul, and as a useful tool with which to criticize and even demonize Jews. The secret of how this came to be might lie in Matthew's idiosyncratic vision of missiology. Matthew refuses to distinguish between possible audiences. Given his many internal tensions, his theology could have easily transformed in the hands of whoever

happened to read it. Matthew ultimately has become a text that is defined by its ecclesial audience. From the beginning, this audience was always intended to grow – and it did.

Matthew does not depict a church that turns its proselytizing aspirations to gentiles instead of Jews. Israel as a mission field is not replaced. Nor does Matthew assume that the business of converting pagans will be undertaken by other Christians. And yet, he is never comfortable with true universality, either. He does not make allowances for religious diversity in the church. He does not perceive that a change in missionary tactics or message might enable his message to spread. His attention remains fixed on Israel; it is the nation that will produce fruits once its leadership is changed (§3.1.1), the lost sheep to whom Jesus was sent (15:24), and even the saved gentiles bear a striking resemblance to Israel (§3.5.2). Matthew's aspirations for his message are expansive: gentiles are supposed to join the church. However, how Jews and gentiles alike are to become part of this one assembly, through the proclamation of one message, is not explained or explored. Over the centuries, Matthew's readers have come to their own conclusions about how to do this, and their answers have been as varied as the communities that received the Gospel. But the Gospel itself does not state the solution. Matthew offers a vision of how salvation can come through Israel, for the sake of Israel, and also include the gentiles. He does not tell us how to hold the two pieces of his vision together. And so the debate goes on.

Appendix A: Matthew and Torah

The extent to which Matthew expected his readers to keep Torah is a subject that could be its own dissertation. This discussion of the subject is by no means exhaustive. My goal here is not to present a fully formed investigation into Matthew's theology of Torah. This would require a separate monograph. Instead, my goal is to make a preliminary case about Matthew's view of the Torah by using a few key representative examples.

My general argument is that Matthew does not view the mission to Israel and the mission to the nations as separate projects, and instead frames them as one consistent mission in which the content and means of missionary activity are essentially the same. In light of this we are left with the question of the role of the Torah in a mission to the nations. Does Matthew think that the teachings of Jesus, not the Torah, are binding for Christians?¹ Or does Matthew expect gentiles to convert fully to Judaism and keep the Torah in all its particulars?² Or, despite seeing the mission to Israel and the nations as

¹ For Matthew as subordinating Torah to the teachings of Jesus see Foster, *Community, Law, and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, 94-143; 144-216; Ernst Käsemann, "Die Anfänge christlicher Theologie," *ZTK* 57.2 (1960): 162-85; M. Jack Suggs, *Wisdom, Christology, and Law in Matthew's Gospel* (Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 1970), 115-20; Deines, *Die Gerechtigkeit der Tora im Reich des Messias*, 274-5; "Not the Law but the Messiah: Law and Righteousness in the Gospel of Matthew - An Ongoing Debate," in *Built Upon the Rock: Studies in the Gospel of Matthew*, ed. Daniel M. Gurtner and John Nolland (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 82-4.

² Gerhard Barth, "Matthew's Understanding of the Law," in *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, ed. Gunther Bornkamm, Gerhard Barth, and Heinz Joachim Held, *The New Testament Library* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963), 58-159. Also Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism*, 89-90; Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community*, 124-64; Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 123-39.

largely continuous, does Matthew hold different standards of Torah observance for Jewish and gentile Christians?³

Obviously, a great deal of this theology cannot be retrieved at this date, and Matthew does not clearly answer many questions that we would dearly love him to answer. However, we can recover a few elements of Matthew's theology of Torah, and how it matters in light of Jesus. Towards this end, I make the following argument:

- 1) Matthew believes that the teachings of Jesus concerning the Torah (at least as they are preserved in his Gospel, and/or revealed to the church) are its definitive, accurate interpretation.
- 2) For Matthew, keeping these teachings, not the traditions and interpretations taught by other Jewish teachers, is what it means to follow Torah.
- 3) Matthew's interpretation of the Torah does not cohere with the interpretations of other Jewish groups, and much of it would not be recognizably faithful to other Jews.
- 4) At the same time, Matthew's interpretation of the Torah is not reducible to a "law-free gospel," and Matthew still insists on keeping key institutions of Jewish identity, even if aspects of this observance have been transformed by Matthew's Christology.
- 5) In light of this, it seems that Matthew expects gentile converts to Christianity to Judaize in some key ways.

³ As in Isaac W. Oliver, *Torah Praxis after 70 CE: Reading Matthew and Luke-Acts as Jewish Texts*, WUNT 2. Reihe 355 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013). Oliver argues for continuing validity of the Torah for Jews (531-2) but rejects the possibility that Matthew expected gentiles to be circumcised (524).

In order to make this case, we will first start with an exploration of general topics related to Torah observance in Matthew's Gospel: what does Matthew say about the Torah? It seems that, on its face, Matthew insists that the Torah ought to be kept carefully. However, what it means to keep the Torah in the Gospel is not always clear, since in several key passages Jesus and his disciples appear to break it. In light of this, we will engage in a case study of one aspect of Torah observance and interpretation, and its role in the Gospel: the Sabbath. We will focus on only this aspect of Torah observance for the sake of brevity; a full examination of the role of food laws, divorce, oaths, and other subjects will take longer than one appendix allows. From here, we will note some key aspects of how Torah observance seems to work in Matthew's Gospel, given the apparent discrepancy between what Matthew says about Torah and what he does with it.

Matthew's Thesis Statement of Torah: Matt 5:17-20

Matthew's programmatic statement on the law appears in Matt 5:17-20. In this text, Jesus tells his disciples that he has come to fulfill the law (πληρώω), not destroy it (καταλύω, 5:17). Jesus then says that the smallest detail of the law will not disappear until (ἕως ἄν+subjunctive) two things are accomplished: 1) heaven and earth pass away and 2) everything "comes to pass" (γίνομαι, Matt 5:18). In light of this, whoever "loosens" (λύω, Matt 5:19) even the smallest commandment will be called "least" in the kingdom of heaven, but the one who "does" (ποιέω) and "teaches" (διδάσκω) the commandments will be called great. In order to enter the kingdom, one's righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 5:20).

This leaves us with a series of difficult questions. First, what does it mean to fulfill the law, or destroy it? Second, when will the smallest details of the law disappear? Third, does this mean that Matt 5:17-20 teaches Matthew's readers to follow the Torah?

First, the question of destroying and fulfilling. To “destroy” (καταλύω) the law per Matt 5:17 is a phrase that appears in some early Jewish literature to refer to “annulling” or “invalidating” the law.⁴ Destroying the law means not keeping it as a legal standard, for oneself or for others. This is confirmed by Matthew's condemnation of those who “loosen” Torah, as opposed to those who “keep and teach” it, in Matt 5:19. The implication seems to be that Jesus does not break the Torah, nor does his teaching invalidate or annul it. Of course, as we see in the rest of the Gospel, Jesus's opponents do not agree that Jesus does, in fact, keep and teach the Torah. However, Matthew clearly does believe that this is exactly what Jesus accomplishes. This may not seem intuitive to the modern reader, but Matthew does not seem to see the contradiction.

This brings us to the question of “fulfilling Torah. In Matt 5:17, “destroying” Torah is counterposed to “fulfilling” Torah. To “fulfill” (πληρώω) is trickier. What does it mean that Jesus “fulfills the Torah?” Davies and Allison outlined nine possible options⁵ for how to understand the meaning of “fulfillment in this text:

- 1) Πληρώω is a translation of Hebrew הוסיף, “to add to,” as occurs in b. Sabb 116a-b.

This is a variation of the saying of the historical Jesus, “I did not come to destroy the law, nor did I come to add to it.”

⁴ Meier, *The Vision of Matthew*, 82.

⁵ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:485-6

- 2) Πληρόω is a translation of Aramaic ܩܪܐ, “establish, make valid, execute, to do, execute, bring into effect,” In this case, the saying would read “I did not come to destroy the law, but to establish it.”
- 3) Πληρόω means “to obey,” which is the way Paul uses πληρόω in Rom 8:4, “in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us.”
- 4) By fulfilling the law, Jesus observes the law and fulfills it in his own life.⁶
- 5) By fulfilling the law, Jesus completes the law, and his teachings transcend the original Torah.⁷
- 6) By fulfilling the law, Jesus explains the original meaning of the Torah.
- 7) By fulfilling the law, Jesus enables others to meet the requirements of the Torah
- 8) Jesus teaches the “new righteousness” and “love,” which is the fulfillment of the Torah.
- 9) The ultimate meaning of the law is Jesus, who brings the law’s true meaning. The law is realized in the same way that prophecy is, by pointing to Jesus the Messiah.

Which of these options is the most likely intended meaning? Meier notes that there is no Matthean precedent to use πληρόω to describe obeying or carrying out commandments. In Matthew, the term centers on the completion of prophesied events. In light of this, Meier argues that the meaning of πληρόω refers to prophetic fulfillment: Jesus is the fulfillment of Torah; this fundamentally transforms Torah from a series of

⁶ E.g., Foster, *Community, Law, and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, 209-17, who argues that 5:17-20 is primarily apologetic to assure readers that Jesus was not a lawbreaker.

⁷ E.g., Francois Viljoen, *The Torah in Matthew*, *Theology in Africa* 9 (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2008), 91-2, who argues Matthew neither upholds nor rejects Torah but insists on the exclusive and foundational right of Jesus to define and teach it.

moral imperatives into a means of revealing Jesus. This is similar to Davies' and Allison's ninth interpretive option.⁸ This leads us to a Matthew who does not believe that Torah is binding on all Christians. On the other hand, Saldarini argues that Jesus's fulfillment of the Torah consists of both enacting it in his life, and also in interpreting Torah correctly— options four and six.⁹ This leaves us with a Matthew who believes that the Torah, as interpreted by Jesus, is binding on all Christians.

Davies and Allison favor options five and nine.¹⁰ The idea that Jesus' life is anticipated in Torah is in line with the use of "fulfillment" language in his Hebrew Bible prooftexts. At the same time, Jesus's teachings in Matt 5:21-48 introduce new demands on his readers that are not clear in Torah. Thus, Jesus's teachings do, in fact, transcend the Torah.¹¹ For Davies and Allison, this leaves the importance of the law for Matthew in a somewhat ambiguous state. By fulfilling the law and prophets, Jesus attains primacy and supplants them. "The thing signified (Jesus) is... more important than the sign (the law and the prophets)."¹² At the same time, if the law and prophets are fulfilled, they are proven to be true. They remain in force and ought to be obeyed.¹³

It seems like a combination of meanings of *πληρώω* is present in Matt 5:17-18. On one hand, a prophetic, predictive use of *πληρώω* (Jesus fulfills scripture by living the experiences described in it) is well-attested in Matthew, so it stands to reason that part of Jesus's fulfillment includes living out and embodying the Torah's requirements.

⁸ Meier, *The Vision of Matthew*, 82.

⁹ Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community*, 161.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:486.

¹¹ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:486.

¹² *Ibid.*, 1:487.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 1:487.

However, this does not seem to suggest that Jesus fulfills Torah in such a way that followers of Jesus are not expected to obey it. “Fulfilling Torah” is contrasted with “nullifying it,” and doing and keeping Torah is praised in opposition to relaxing Torah (5:17, 19).¹⁴ In light of this, it seems inescapable that to keep Torah is to teach and live out a morally rigorous interpretation of the Torah – a righteousness that is greater than the righteousness observed by other interpreters of the Torah (Matt 5:20).

This brings us to the question of Matt 5:18: no detail from the Torah will fade “until everything comes to pass” (ἕως ἂν πάντα γένηται). What does this refer to? Luz argues that this means “until everything in the Torah is done” – that is, fulfilled in Jesus.¹⁵ Similarly, Meier argues that πάντα γένηται refers to the completion of the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the full requirement of the law is observed.¹⁶ Feuillet proposes that this refers to the end of the sacrifice system in the destruction of the temple.¹⁷ That said, the saying ἕως ἂν πάντα γένηται appears a second time in the Gospel, Matt 24:34. In this context, “everything coming to pass” refers to all the events beginning with the tribulation and concluding with the appearance of the Son of Man (24:4-31). In this context, “everything” really does mean “everything” – the conclusion of history. If this is what Matthew means in 24:13, it would be surprising if he used this same phrase to refer to a much more proximate event (the resurrection) in 5:18. It seems that for

¹⁴ Barth, “Matthew’s Understanding of the Law,” 62-75; Carlston and Evans, *From Synagogue to Ecclesia*, 126; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:486-7; Trilling, *Das wahre Israel*, 178-9.

¹⁵ Luz, *Matthew*, 1:218

¹⁶ Meier, *Law and History in Matthew’s Gospel*: 48, 83; *The Vision of Matthew*, 229.

¹⁷ André Feuillet, “La Synthèse Eschatologique de Saint Matthieu,” *Revue Biblique* 57.1 (1950): 62–91.

Matthew, everything will “come to pass” at the eschaton and the final consummation, not before.¹⁸

This does seem to put Jesus’s words in some position of privilege over the Torah. The Torah may come to an end with the passing of the world, but Jesus’s words will not (Matt 24:35).¹⁹ At the same time, this does suggest that Torah observance – however it is interpreted – is a practice Matthew expects to continue until the eschaton.

The idea that Torah observance is a value that Matthew upholds is also suggested in Matthew’s use of the word ἀνομία. Matthew condemns ἀνομία, “lawlessness,” in Matt 7:24 and Matt 23:28, and associates lawlessness with sin in Matt 13:41. Strecker resists the idea that this refers to Torah-breaking, asserting that it simply refers to disobedience of God’s will.²⁰ Likewise, Davison argued that lawlessness is simply a catch-all term in the LXX for all kinds of immoral behavior, alongside “injustice.”²¹ In light of this, Davison maintains there is no specific reference to Christian groups that do not teach observance of Torah in Matt 7:24²² and thus no heretical antinomian group that Matthew specifically targets.²³ However, neither of these arguments seriously challenge the idea that for Matthew, the Torah is associated with righteousness, and lawlessness is associated with immorality. Matthew may not polemicize against any specific anti-Torah group, but it still seems to be the case that he thinks of right and wrong in terms of Torah.

¹⁸ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:490.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:490.

²⁰ Strecker, *Der Weg der Gerechtigkeit*, 134.

²¹ James E. Davison, “Anomia and the Question of an Antinomian Polemic in Matthew,” *JBL* 104.4 (1985): 617–35, 620.

²² *Ibid.*, 629.

²³ Also in Stanton, *Gospel for a New People*, 48-9.

At this point, we are still left with a significant problem. How can it be true that Matthew teaches the importance of Torah observance when so much of the Gospel seems to directly contradict this? As we will see, this is an issue of interpretation. Matthew clearly believes that the version of Torah observance taught in his Gospel is the definitive interpretation of the Torah. Exactly how closely this agrees with the interpretation of other Jews is a far more complicated question.

Interpretation and a Case Study: The Sabbath

Matthew's Gospel both demands strict Torah observance and yet frequently depicts its characters observing the Torah in a way that offends other Jewish characters. Does this mean that Matthew is less than sincere when he instructs his readers to keep the Torah, or that Matthew's interpretation of Torah is at odds with common Jewish practice?

Interpretation of Torah in early Judaism was not monolithic, and various Jewish communities debated amongst themselves and with opposing teachers how exactly it was meant to be kept.²⁴ In light of this, the question of whether Matthew's ethical teachings "uphold the Torah" or not is a fraught question. This question depends on the opinions of the interpreters.

In light of this, it is difficult to approach Matthew's Gospel in search of answers to practical questions, such as "does Matthew teach his readers to keep the Sabbath?" or

²⁴ Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 140; Shaye J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, Third Edition (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 123; Saldarini, *Matthew's Jewish-Christian Community*, 5.

“does Matthew teach his readers to observe the Torah’s food laws?” This depends largely on the perspective of the interpreter who determines what it means to keep the Sabbath in the first place. In light of this, we will attempt to broach the subject of Matthew and Torah with one case study: Matthew and the Sabbath.

Sabbath observance varies considerably among early Jewish groups. More traditional accounts forbid ordinary labor or household chores that would prevent Jews from enjoying the Sabbath (e.g., *Jub* 2:26-29), while the Damascus Document forbids idle chatter and socializing (10:14-11:18).²⁵ A number of scholars agree that Matthew’s community keeps Sabbath in some capacity.²⁶ There are three sections of Matthew’s Gospel that discuss Sabbath observance: Matt 12:1-8 (in which Jesus’s disciples pick grain on the Sabbath), Matt 12:9-14 (in which Jesus defends healing a man on the Sabbath) and Matt 24:20 (in which Jesus encourages the readers to pray that the flight from Jerusalem will not take place on a Sabbath).

Matt 12:1-8: Picking Grain on the Sabbath

According to Matt 12:1, Jesus’s disciples are hungry while walking with him on a Sabbath. They begin to pick grain from a field and eat the grain as they go. The Pharisees see them doing this and ask Jesus why his disciples are working on the Sabbath (Matt

²⁵ Saldarini, *Matthew’s Jewish-Christian Community*, 127.

²⁶ Kilpatrick, *The Origins of the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 116; Bornkamm, Barth, and Held, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, 31, 81-3; Overman, *Matthew’s Gospel and Formative Judaism*, 80-2.

12:2). In response, Jesus defends them in a lengthy argument (Matt 12:3-7) that concludes with a declaration that Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath (Matt 12:8).

Matthew's argument (12:3-7) is two-pronged. First, as in Mark, Matthew depicts Jesus defending the disciples' action by comparing it to David and his followers eating consecrated bread because of their extreme hunger (1 Sam 21:2-6). Luz sees the insertion of the disciples' hunger (Matt 12:1, as opposed to Mark 2:3) as appealing to Jewish sensibilities. The disciples are breaking the Sabbath because they must, not because they are flouting Torah. Luz also notes that Jewish readers would have found fasting on the Sabbath inappropriate.²⁷ If the disciples are hungry on the road during a Sabbath, by Jewish standards they are entitled to eat on the road, since going hungry is neither necessary nor desirable.²⁸

Matthew then eliminates the Markan saying that humanity was not made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath for humanity (Mark 2:27), and then continues his argument with an example from the Temple (Matt 12:5-7). This *qal wahomer* argument focuses on Jesus' superiority over the temple. The priests are permitted to work to serve the temple on the Sabbath (Matt 12:5) because they must administer the sacrifices appropriate for the Sabbath (Num 28:9-10). If the priests can work for the sake of the temple, the disciples can work for the sake of something greater than the temple. Levine argues that the addition of Matt 12:5-7 specifically appeals not to the sacrifice of animals in the temple (which would be less relevant to the circumstances at hand), but to the harvesting, threshing, and offering of the first sheaves offering. The right to procure, prepare and

²⁷ 2 Macc 8:27; *Jubilees* 2: 21, 29; 50:12; b. Pesah 86b; Luz *Matthew* 8-20, 180; Yong-Eui Yang, *Jesus and the Sabbath in Matthew's Gospel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 55.

²⁸ Luz, *Matthew*, 2:180.

offer this grain offering on the Sabbath – despite the fact that it required harvesting and threshing– was specifically defended by the Pharisees.²⁹ In this case, Matthew would not be counseling his readers to disregard Sabbath, but to keep it in a way that is analogous to Pharisaic practice. Work that is done for a sacred purpose, including work for one who is “greater than the temple” (Matt 12:6), is permitted. This reading suggests that it is not simply the presence of Jesus that allows for work on the Sabbath,³⁰ but rather than the work the disciples and Jesus are doing is important enough that picking grain on the Sabbath is necessary.

This second argument concerning the work of priests in the temple also makes Matthew’s entire case stronger from a rabbinic perspective. Matthew switches from the use of haggadic to halakhic material, and also employs an example that focuses specifically on Sabbath activity.³¹ Finally, Luz reads Matt 12:7 as a development of both arguments. If mercy is greater than sacrifice, and priests can break the Sabbath for the sake of sacrifice, then surely Jesus’s disciples can break Sabbath for the sake of mercy if they are hungry.³²

To conclude: Matthew’s argument about the disciples picking grain on the Sabbath seeks to justify their behavior using the interpretive tools of other Jewish readers of the Torah. Matthew’s goal does not seem to be to annul Torah observance or Sabbatarianism. Matthew does not argue that the Sabbath has no significance, nor even

²⁹ Étan Levine, “The Sabbath Controversy According to Matthew,” *NTS* 22.4 (1976): 480–83, 481-2.

³⁰ Christopher Tuckett, “Matthew: The Social and Historical Context - Jewish Christian and/or Gentile?,” in *The Gospel of Matthew at the Crossroads of Early Christianity*, ed. Donald Senior, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 99–130, 120-21.

³¹ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:313.

³² Luz, *Matthew*, 2:181-2.

that Sabbath exists for the sake of humanity. Rather, Matthew justifies the specific practice of picking grain on the Sabbath on the grounds that it alleviates hunger and assists the disciples in carrying out their ministry.

Matt 12:9-14: Healing a Man on the Sabbath

In the next passage, Jesus goes to a synagogue, where he encounters a man with a damaged hand. The people at the synagogue are seeking a confrontation with Jesus and ask if it is permissible to heal on the Sabbath (Matt 12:10). In response, Jesus asks his hearers if they would pull a sheep out of a pit on the Sabbath (Matt 12:11). Apparently assuming that they would, Jesus then notes that humans are more valuable than sheep, and so it is “lawful to do good on the Sabbath” (Matt 12:12). Jesus again uses a *qal wahomer* argument: if it is in fact lawful to pull an animal out of a pit, then helping a human is certainly permissible, since the human is more valuable.

According to later rabbinic writings, the premise of Jesus’s argument (any Jew would pull a sheep out of a pit on the Sabbath) is flawed. Rabbinic scholarship actually contradicts the premise of Jesus’s argument: namely, that it is permissible to pull a sheep from a pit on the Sabbath. The Talmud only allows a person to provide bedding and support for the animal so that the animal might be more comfortable until it can be rescued or until it can escape the pit on its own,³³ and the Qumran community seems to have forbidden removing animals from a pit on the Sabbath as well (CD 11:3-4).³⁴

³³ Francois P. Viljoen, “Sabbath Controversy in Matthew,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 32, no. 1 (2011): 1–8, 6.

³⁴ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:320.

Furthermore, healing a man from an injury that can get neither better nor worse overnight also seems to be problematic. For example, the Mishnah allows for prayer for the sick on the Sabbath only in cases where the patient's life is at risk.³⁵ In light of this, one might easily conclude that healing a man whose injury posed no threat to his life was against the Torah.³⁶ In this case, Matthew's understanding of Torah observance is at odds with later Jewish interpretation.

On the other hand, Viljoen argues that permission to alleviate the animal's suffering is in fact analogous to the patient's suffering in Matt 12:11. If one can reduce pain for an animal on the Sabbath by providing bedding and support, then one can reduce pain for a human on the Sabbath.³⁷ Similarly, in the Mishnah, a person is exempt from the law against extinguishing lamps on the Sabbath in order to make the sleep of a sick person more comfortable (m. Shabb 2:5). Thus, Jesus's ultimate argument is simply that "it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath" (12:12) – whether this is to help an animal or to help a person.

Viljoen's argument that this actually upholds a traditional understanding of Torah, though, is not totally satisfactory. One could easily argue that this is a nullification of normal Sabbath observance – if it is "lawful to do good on the Sabbath," and that good act is work, then it is lawful to do work on the Sabbath. Matthew 12 does defend examples of when one can disobey the Sabbath command to not "work."³⁸ These are

³⁵ t. Shabb. 16:22; m. Shabb 14:3; Viljoen, "Sabbath Controversy in Matthew," 6.

³⁶ Deines, "Not the Law but the Messiah," 67.

³⁷ Viljoen, "Sabbath Controversy in Matthew," 6.

³⁸ Tuckett, "Matthew: The Social and Historical Context," 119.

situations in which one can serve the kingdom's objectives by working on the Sabbath. In such cases, work on the Sabbath is lawful.

To conclude this section: the argument in Matt 12:9-14 is significantly broader than the argument in Matt 12:1-8. The passage envisions not only specific exceptions to Sabbath observance, but a general norm that "doing good on the Sabbath" is lawful.

Matt 24:20: Fleeing on the Sabbath

In the eschatological discourse, Matthew adds a short redactional mention of the Sabbath. Mark 13:18 urges the readers to pray that the flight from Jerusalem will not occur on the winter. Matthew expands this saying and also encourages the readers to pray that the flight will not happen on the Sabbath, either. Why is this? One possibility is that Christians would not travel on the Sabbath either in Judea³⁹ or out of it⁴⁰ for fear of persecution by Jews, or by seeking to not offend their Jewish neighbors.⁴¹ Another possibility is that Matthean Christians would have been willing to flee on the Sabbath, but would not have been able to because it would be difficult to obtain necessary goods and services on the Sabbath.⁴² Others propose that Matthew assumes Christians would

³⁹ Hirsch, *Die Frühgeschichte des Evangeliums*, 2:313; Schlatter, *Der Evangelist Matthäus*, 706.

⁴⁰ Stanton, *Gospel for a New People*, 192-206.

⁴¹ Barth, "Matthew's Understanding of the Law," 92.

⁴² Robert J. Banks, *Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition*, SNTS 28 (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1975), 102; Gundry, *Matthew*, 483; Meier, *Law and History in Matthew's Gospel*, 284; William R. G. Loader, *Jesus' Attitude Towards the Law: A Study of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 246; Yang, *Jesus and the Sabbath in Matthew's Gospel*, 233.

keep Sabbath too strictly to flee,⁴³ or would have struggled with the problem of how to observe the Sabbath in the midst of a hurried flight.⁴⁴

The right to protect one's own life, either in flight or in self-defense, is contested in early Jewish literature. In 1 Macc 2:34-38, a group of people attempting to uphold the law flee to the wilderness, and choose to die rather than defend themselves when attacked by Greek forces. In response, the Maccabees decide that they will fight on the Sabbath if it is required (2:39-41). Eventually, rabbis came to agree that flight to protect one's life on the Sabbath was permitted.⁴⁵ In light of this, it is difficult to claim Christians would have been vulnerable to persecution as Sabbath breakers, or that Sabbatarian Christians would have been stranded in Jerusalem. Jewish writers simply do not agree that flight would be a violation of Torah. The dire circumstances in Matt 24:15-21 certainly qualify as life-threatening, Matthew is flexible about Sabbath observance for the sake of human life (or even comfort) in Matt 12:1-8 and Matt 12:9-14. In light of this, it is difficult to suppose that Matthew would have insisted that flight on the Sabbath was forbidden. In addition to this, Matthew's non-Christian Jewish neighbors would not necessarily have acted to prevent their Christian Jewish neighbors from fleeing. Jews did not necessarily agree that this would violate the Sabbath. We do have some records of revolutionary zealots in Jerusalem who actually did attempt to kill those who evacuated Jerusalem, but

⁴³ Klostermann, *Das Matthäusevangelium*, 194.

⁴⁴ Floyd V. Filson, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 2nd ed, Black's New Testament Commentaries (London: A. and C. Black, 1971), 255; Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:701-2.

⁴⁵ Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:702; William H. Shea, "The Sabbath in Matthew 24:20," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 40, no. 1 (2002): 23-35, 30; Stanton, *Gospel for a New People* 192-206; Yang, *Jesus and the Sabbath in Matthew's Gospel*, 61.

this was not in response to Sabbath-breaking. The zealots persecuted refugees no matter what day they attempted to leave.⁴⁶

In light of this, Shea argues that the possibility that Jews would persecute fleeing Christians is not likely, since both Jews and Christians would have agreed it was permissible to leave a city in danger to protect one's life. Shea also maintains that the practical concerns of obtaining supplies on one's way out of Jerusalem than on any other day, since most roads out of Jerusalem went through rural areas and provisions would not have been available on the road anyway.⁴⁷ Matthew envisions a flight that is so abrupt that people should not delay even to retrieve their own belongings, let alone procure new ones (Matt 24:17-18).

In light of this, Shea argues that the hope that the flight would not be on a Sabbath reflects the prayer of Sabbatarian Christians, who were able to keep the Sabbath and avoid flight during the winter. Shea posits that the timing of this flight would have been shortly after Cestius Gallus attacked Jerusalem in the fall of 66 CE, and advanced as far as the retaining wall of the temple.⁴⁸ Cestius then retreated from Jerusalem, after which Roman troops did advance on Jerusalem again until Vespasian attacked in 67 CE.⁴⁹ In light of this, Shea argues that the window for escape was between Cestius's retreat and Vespasian's advance, which allowed the church of Jerusalem to escape without either leaving on the Sabbath or in the winter.

⁴⁶ Barbara C. Gray, "The Movement of the Jerusalem Church During the First Jewish War," *J. Eccles. Hist.* 24.1 (1973): 1-7. Josephus reports that people who were caught fleeing Jerusalem were killed (*ANT.* 20.11.1). However, escape from Jerusalem seems to have still happened occasionally during the course of the war (Josephus, *J.W.* 4.6.3).

⁴⁷ Shea, "The Sabbath in Matthew 24:20," 31.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 33-4.

The reference to the Sabbath is so brief that it is difficult to determine exactly why flight on the Sabbath would be a problem. Two common explanations (Sabbath-observing Jewish Christians will be stranded in a doomed Jerusalem during the Sabbath, or Christians will be persecuted by Sabbath-observing Jews) are difficult to prove in light of the varied arguments concerning the protection of life on the Sabbath we see in Jewish literature. In addition, the argument that it would be difficult to get food and supplies needed for travel on the Sabbath seems unlikely, given that the journey is too sudden to allow for shopping in Jerusalem and the rest of the road does not lead through populated areas. In light of this, it seems that most of the possible explanations for this passage fall flat.

Two options still seem available: One possibility is that Shea is correct that this prayer recalls a small mercy that the Jerusalem church received during their flight: due to the strange tides of war, they were at least able to observe the Sabbath and traveled without breaking it. This is an interesting possibility, but does depend on this passage being redacted in a very narrow window of time in response to a very specific problem – namely, what day of the week Cestius retreated.

But another possibility is simply what we have discussed above: Jews did not necessarily agree about whether one could act to save one's life on the Sabbath. This means in a community of Jewish Christians, some people would have been more eager to save their lives than others, and this difference of action and opinion would be traumatic for the whole community. We see something similar happening in the references to pregnant and nursing mothers (24:9) and flight during the winter (24:20). Maternity, like winter, would have created more difficulty for some refugees than for others. Not every

member of the Jerusalem church would have to experience the same level of difficulty fleeing for the effects to be felt on the entire community. The loss of one toddler while attempting to travel, or the delays of one family struggling to accommodate a woman with a late-term pregnancy, could easily shake the entire community in ways that would be remembered long after the fact. In the same way, a few hardline Sabbatharians refusing to leave Jerusalem until after the Sabbath could have been catastrophic for the whole community, even if this conviction was not shared by everyone. It does seem that some strict Sabbatharian Jews denied that it was permissible to evacuate from disaster on a Sabbath.⁵⁰ In light of this, Matthew's redaction might only reflect that variables in timing and circumstances made the Jewish War more painful for some than others. Leaving Jerusalem was made more difficult for those with a family member whose ability to travel was limited by pregnancy or nursing, or a family member who was not willing to leave as quickly as the circumstances required.

Either way, it seems that the most likely explanations for Matthew's prayer reflect some level of Sabbath observance among the community.

Conclusion: What Can We Know about Matthew and the Sabbath?

What we can see from these examples is that some patterns of Matthew's view of the Torah begin to emerge. We cannot demonstrate that Matthew keeps the Sabbath in a way that other Jews in his day would have, and this seems to have caused conflict for him. In the text, Jesus's opponents agree that picking grain, threshing grain, and healing a

⁵⁰ Meier, "The Historical Jesus and the Historical Law" 52-79.

non-threatening injury are not acceptable behaviors on the Sabbath. Later on, the Mishnah and Talmud take their side. Nonetheless, Matthew defends these practices.

Part of the cause of this significant disagreement is Matthew's Christological interpretation of Sabbath. Jesus is the definitive interpreter of the Torah. Core elements of Jewish identity are transformed in order to meet new standards of Christocentrism. For instance, service done for Jesus is acceptable on the Sabbath, as are "mercy" (Matt 12:7) and good works (Matt 12:12).⁵¹ This is permissible because of Jesus's lordship over the Sabbath (Matt 12:8).

Another cause of disagreement is Matthew's insistence on prioritization. Matthew, like most Jews, is comfortable with the idea that some commands are more essential than others. Matthew at once insists on the preservation of the "jots and tittles" of Torah (Matt 5:18) and the "least" of the commandments (5:19), while also juxtaposing these with the "weightier matters" of Torah. Love of God and neighbor is centralized (Matt 22:34-39; cf. Lev 19:17-18; Deut 6:4; b. Shabb 31a.6), as are justice, mercy, and faith (Matt 23:23). When discussing Sabbath, Matthew introduces a number of means to determine how Sabbath ought to be kept. Rest is subordinate to human comfort (12:3-4) and sacred service (namely, to Jesus in 12:4), and mercy is prioritized over "sacrifice" (12:7).⁵²

All this might lead us to believe that concerning Sabbath, Matthew does not actually insist on Torah observance. However, we should not overstate this case.

Matthew configures Sabbath observance around Jesus, frames some principles as more

⁵¹ Robert K. McIver, "The Sabbath in the Gospel of Matthew: A Paradigm for Understanding the Law in Matthew?," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 2 (1995): 231-43, 242.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 243.

important than strict Sabbath observance, and allows for his readers to perform behaviors on the Sabbath that would otherwise be forbidden because they are useful for the kingdom of God. What Matthew does not say is that the Sabbath is not relevant, that all days are alike, or that anything is permitted on the Sabbath. Matthew is keenly concerned with the question of what is lawful on the Sabbath, and draws on resources from the Torah to justify his practice. We also do not see Matthew giving permission to do normal work on the Sabbath.

In light of this, it seems that Matthew does defend Torah observance, insofar as he interprets it. Jewish members of Matthew's readership have some license to practice Torah in ways that would not be recognizably faithful to other Jews. However, Matthew finds justification for this in the Torah itself, not by annulling or denying its value. We should also note that at no point does Matthew argue that the Torah applies to some and not others. In light of this, it seems plausible to think that, even if Matthew disagrees with other Jews about the Torah, his ethics would still require gentiles to Judaize in some capacity. Normal gentile practice would not involve working on the Sabbath only for the sake of the kingdom of God – it would involve treating the Sabbath like any other day.

How do we reconcile Matthew's apparent regard for Torah with his equally apparent disagreement with Jewish contemporaries? This seems to be a matter of interpretation, not of rejection. Matthew may believe he keeps Torah even though other Jews of his time disagree. This is not particularly surprising, though. Shared reverence for a scriptural text does not necessarily lead to shared practice and theology. In contemporary American Christianity, "believing the whole Bible" still leads to wildly different outcomes in theology and practice. Even among denominations that teach the

inerrancy and inspiration of their scriptures, significant differences in doctrine and practice emerge. These are created not because interpreters treat the Bible as more or less authoritative, but because of different hermeneutical perspectives, presuppositions,⁵³ or sociological settings.⁵⁴ It is not for us as historians to say whether or not Matthew is good at keeping the Torah, or whether his interpretations are correct. What does seem to be apparent is that Matthew does believe that he and his readers are, in fact, keeping Torah, and are doing it well.

⁵³ John Bartkowski, "Beyond Biblical Literalism and Inerrancy: Conservative Protestants and the Hermeneutic Interpretation of Scripture," *Sociology of Religion* 57, no. 3 (1996): 259–72.

⁵⁴ Ted G. Jelen, "Biblical Literalism and Inerrancy: Does the Difference Make a Difference?," *Sociological Analysis* 49, no. 4 (1989): 421–29.

Appendix B: Matthew and the Synagogue

Is Matthew's community inside or outside the synagogue? This is a classic if somewhat dated question concerning the Gospel of Matthew and Matthew's position relative to the Jewish world.¹ Of course, this question assumes that there is a "Matthean community" (which we have previously challenged), and that such a community is in a historically retrievable relationship with a synagogue. As we will see, the question of Matthew's community and whether it is "in the synagogue" is a question that, at this point in the debate, probably cannot answer most of our questions about Matthew's Jewishness. Nonetheless, we can build on the history of this debate to answer questions about Matthew's relationship to early Jewish institutions. The case made in this appendix does not pretend to be an exhaustive account of Matthew's relationship with Jewish institutions or synagogues. Nonetheless, my hope is that this brief discussion of the data in Matthew can help bolster a component of the larger argument of this dissertation: despite poor and worsening relationships with Jewish groups and religious leaders, Matthew feels compelled to encourage his readers to engage Jewish communities, possibly including synagogues, in order to make converts for his movement.

What evidence is there that Matthew and his readership have had a painful break with the synagogue? The first datum point is the use of distancing language. Matthew repeatedly uses the genitive pronoun *αὐτῶν* to describe synagogues in the Gospel (Matt

¹ Stanton, *Gospel for a New People*, 113-45, provides an overview of the history of scholarship of the *intra/extra muros* debate. Konradt, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew*, 364-5, critiques the *intra/extra muros* terminology as unhelpful.

4:23; 9:35; 10:17; 12:19; 13:54 but not in Matt 6:2; 6:5). This has been seen as language that specifies the synagogues are separate from Matthew and his community; the synagogues belong to “them,” not to “us.”² This language is sometimes linked to the post-Yavneh era. The association between Yavneh, the *birkat ha-minim* and mass expulsion of Christians from synagogues was famously made in Martyn’s *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, who argued that John 9:22, 12:42, and 16:2 referred to the postwar expulsion of Jewish Christians from synagogues.³

The argument that Matthew wrote from a post-Yavneh perspective, however, significantly predates Martyn’s book. Kilpatrick traced the language of “their synagogues” to the growing use of the *birkat ha-minim*, after which, he maintained, Christians were no longer welcome in Pharisaic synagogues.⁴ Davies also cast Yavneh as the impetus for Matthew’s writing and redaction of the Sermon on the Mount; the Sermon served as a “Christian response” to developing rabbinic Judaism.⁵ In response Matthew’s community strongly contrasted their own organizations, “the church,” with post-Yavneh Jewish congregations, “the synagogue.”

A second datum point is the depiction of synagogues, and even the Jerusalem temple, as sites of persecution. This persecution is linked with the distancing language of “your/their synagogues” in Matt 10:17 and Matt 23:34, in which Jesus’s agents are

² Stanton, *Gospel for a New People*, 119.

³ J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, 3rd ed, The New Testament Library (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 35-68.

⁴ Kilpatrick, *The Origins of the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 110. Though note that Kilpatrick still understood the dispute between Jews and Christians as “within Judaism” (120).

⁵ W. D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount*, Brown Judaic Studies 186 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 315.

depicted as flogged in synagogues for their message. Matthew also depicts the forerunners of the Pharisees killing Zechariah in the temple (23:38).⁶

The third piece of evidence is the negative view Matthew has of virtually all other Jewish religious groups. Conflict between Jesus and other Jewish groups appears in all four Gospels but it is particularly pronounced in Matthew. Matthew insists on the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees far more than Mark and Luke. Mark calls the Pharisees “hypocrites” only once in Mark 7:6, and Luke never describes them as such. Matthew makes this accusation twelve times (Matt 6:2; 6:5; 6:16; 15:7; 22:18; 23:13; 23:15; 23:23; 23:25; 23:27 23:29; 24:51).⁷ Matthew also has no positive stories about the Pharisees, unlike Luke who occasionally depicts Pharisees as sympathetic and friendly (Luke 7:36; Luke 13:31; 14:1).⁸ The sympathetic figure of Jairus the synagogue leader from Mark (Mark 5:21-43) is also removed, though the story of his daughter’s resurrection remains. Jairus’s name and status as a synagogue leader (stated in Mark 5:22) is elided in Matt 9:18-23. In Matthew, Jarius is not a ἀρχισυνάγωγος but an unnamed ἄρχων.⁹ Scribes, alongside Pharisees and possible synagogue leaders, are also depicted routinely as Jesus’s opponents. In addition to naming the scribes as hypocrites alongside the Pharisees (Matt 23:13; 23:15; 23:23; 23:25; 23:27 23:29; 24:51), Jesus rejects a scribe who wishes to follow him in Matt 8:18-21 and rewrites a story of a friendly scribe who is “close to the kingdom of God” (Mark 12:34) to eliminate the positive portrayal of the scribe. While Mark’s discussion of the “greatest commandment”

⁶ Amy-Jill Levine, “Matthew’s Portrayal of the Synagogue and Its Leaders,” in *The Gospel of Matthew at the Crossroads of Early Christianity*, ed. Donald Senior, BETL 243 (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 177–94, 183.

⁷ Stanton, *Gospel for a New People*, 127.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 127.

is a story of a perceptive and eager scribe (Mark 12:28-34), Matthew changes this pericope into another account of a hostile Pharisaic challenger in Matt 22:34-40.¹⁰ All of this culminates in the woes and invective of Matt 23:1-39, which end in a prediction of disaster for Jerusalem (23:37-39). Van Tilborg argues that this conclusion of the woes means that Israel has lost its place.¹¹ The leaders participate in the evil of the past (Matt 21:32) and cause the destruction of the nation and the loss of its rights.¹² In light of this, Van Tilborg locates the woes as the redactional product of a “Hellenistic” community.¹³ Similarly, Gaston argues that the association of Pharisees and Sadducees (3:7; 16:1, 6, 11, 12) reflects a gentile-level ignorance of what Pharisees and Sadducees are.¹⁴ Not only does the community have conflict with sectarian groups, but they are so detached from these Jewish communities that they do not recognize the difference between them.

Fourth, we have the depiction of the ἐκκλησία as a separate institution in Matthew’s Gospel that serves similar functions to the synagogue. Matthew depicts the church as a place where, like the synagogue, community decisions and administrative work is carried out (Matt 18:15-20).¹⁵ Bornkamm, who had previously coined the use of the term *intra muros* to describe Matthew’s position in the synagogue, argued that the instructions for the church in Matt 18:16-20 depict a community that does not gather around the Torah like a synagogue, but a community that gathers around Jesus.¹⁶

¹⁰ Ibid., 127.

¹¹ Van Tilborg, *The Jewish Leaders in Matthew*, 69-70.

¹² Ibid., 71-2.

¹³ Ibid. 169.

¹⁴ Lloyd Gaston, “The Messiah of Israel as Teacher of the Gentiles: The Setting of Matthew’s Christology,” *Int* 29 (1975): 24–40, 34.

¹⁵ Anders Runesson, “Saving the Lost Sheep of the House of Israel: Purity, Forgiveness, and Synagogues in the Gospel of Matthew,” *Melilah* 11 (2014): 8–24, 20.

¹⁶ Discussed in Stanton, *Gospel for a New People*, 41.

Where does all this leave us concerning Matthew and the synagogues? The evidence that Matthew was in a high-conflict relationship with other Jewish groups, particularly the scribes and Pharisees, is overwhelming. What remains to be seen is if these conflicts mean that Matthew and his readership have decisively left the synagogue, and if so, why. Could Matthew's readers have been widely barred from synagogues after the latter increasingly fell under the influence of Pharisaic groups? Or would Matthean Jewish Christians have felt unwelcome in synagogues even if they were not formally excluded?

One major complication of the argument that conflict with Pharisees is analogous to conflict with synagogues is that it is difficult to determine how uniform synagogues were in the first century, and who had influence over them. Even if Matthew is at odds with the Pharisees, this still leaves us with some challenging questions: namely, how closely associated the Pharisaic and rabbinic movements were,¹⁷ and of how much influence Pharisees and/or early rabbis had over synagogues at the time that Matthew was written.

The latter issue is particularly complex. Even if Matthew faced resistance from a growing proto-rabbinic, synagogue-centered movement, it is not clear that such a movement could have or would have kept Matthean Christians out of synagogues. The influence of the proto-rabbinic movement in synagogues may have been quite limited even after 70 CE.¹⁸ In Palestine, synagogues were primarily civic and administrative

¹⁷ For an overview of the debate see Shaye J. D. Cohen, "The Significance of Yavneh: Pharisees, Rabbis, and the End of Jewish Sectarianism," *HUCA* 55 (1984), 27-53; 36-9.

¹⁸ Lee Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 412-529. See also Lee Levine, "The Sages and the Synagogue in Late Antiquity," in *The Galilee in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lee I. Levine (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992), 201 -

centers that also offered public readings of Torah and liturgical services to their communities.¹⁹ In the Diaspora, synagogues were analogous to other ethnic voluntary societies. Some of these synagogues appear to have organized around specific theological and philosophical ideas (such as the Therapeutae)²⁰, while others formed around other aspects of shared social identity (for example, the “synagogue of the freedmen” in Acts 6:9).²¹ This suggests that not all synagogues even had a specific allegiance to any particular theology, or, even if they did, that they would have shared this theology with other synagogues in the same area.

At the same time, other Jewish groups did seem to be hostile to the Pharisees in particular for their growing influence. The obvious example here is Matthew himself, who depicts the Pharisees as “sitting on Moses’s seat” (23:1-3). This also accords with Josephus’s depiction of the Pharisees as popular with the people, and the Nahum Peshar’s complaint about Pharisaic influence (4QpNah 2.4, 8; 3:7-8).²² We may not be able to know for certain whether Matthew’s local synagogue(s) were subject to Pharisaic influence, but neither can we say that it is entirely unlikely.

Another complicating factor, closely related to the diversity of synagogues, is the voluntary nature of synagogue participation in much of the Greco-Roman world. If synagogue participation is voluntary among Matthew’s readership, then even the conflict that Matthew seems to have with Pharisees and synagogues reflects the experience of

224; Shaye J.D. Cohen, “The Place of the Rabbi in Jewish Society,” in *The Galilee in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lee I. Levine (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992), 157-73.

¹⁹ Runesson, “Saving the Lost Sheep of the House of Israel,” 9-10.

²⁰ Philo, *Contempl.* 30-33, from Runesson, “Saving the Lost Sheep of the House of Israel,” 10.

²¹ Runesson, “Saving the Lost Sheep of the House of Israel,” 10.

²² Josephus, *A.J.* 13.5.9; 13.10.6; Joel Marcus, “Birkat Ha-Minim Revisited,” *NTS* 55.4 (2009): 523–51, 531.

people who are voluntarily affiliating with these groups.²³ Matthew depicts both his characters and his readers as involved with synagogues (Jesus in Matt 4:23; 9:35; the readers in Matt 10:17 and 23:23), even when these synagogues are sites of conflict. Jewish leaders “sit on Moses’s seat,” they have access to copies of the Torah and the literacy needed to read them,²⁴ and Matthew goes so far as to encourage his readers to continue to hear and follow these teachings (Matt 23:1-3). In light of the fact that it is difficult to find clear references to synagogue expulsion in Matthew’s Gospel,²⁵ and that Matthew continues to depict his audience as conflicting with the synagogue and hearing its teachings, it seems that Matthew continues to choose some kind of high-conflict interaction with the synagogue. This might suggest that Matthew sees synagogues as contested spaces, and wishes to use them as staging grounds for his mission. Synagogues may be subject to the influence of his rivals, but that could be changed, and by continuing to participate in synagogue services Jewish Christians can seek to win others to their cause. Particularly in the case of voluntary synagogue associations, facing resistance from the synagogue would be a deliberate choice made by Jewish Christians.²⁶ Being disciplined by the synagogue is still a form of synagogue participation,²⁷ and might be one that Matthew wishes his readers to choose in order to advance his agenda.

²³ Runesson, “Saving the Lost Sheep of the House of Israel,” 12.

²⁴ Levine, “Matthew’s Portrayal of the Synagogue and its Leaders,” 182; Powell, “Do and Keep what Moses Says,” Mark Allan Powell, “Do and Keep What Moses Says (Matthew 23:2-7),” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 114, no. 3 (1995): 419–35, 431.

²⁵ Brown, “The Matthean Community and the Gentile Mission,” 216; Göran Forkman, *The Limits of the Religious Community: Expulsion from the Religious Community within the Qumran Sect, within Rabbinic Judaism, and within Primitive Christianity* (Coniectanea Biblica 5; Lund: Gleerup, 1972) 87-105; Hare, *The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians*, 48-56, 125.

²⁶ Runesson, “Saving the Lost Sheep of the House of Israel,” 12-3.

²⁷ Saldarini, *Matthew’s Jewish-Christian Community*, 66.

Another complicating factor is the role of the *birkat ha-minim*. Evidence that a curse against heretics, specifically Christians, was widespread in synagogues in Matthew's day is quite mixed.²⁸ There is vigorous debate among scholars about whether *birkat ha-minim* was ever used to exclude Christians from synagogue services, even in the later rabbinic era. For example, Sanders argues that the function of the *birkat ha-minim* also seems to be comparatively limited, not to generally keep heretics from attending synagogues but specifically to keep Christians from leading synagogue services as lectors.²⁹ However, the supposed limited applicability of the *birkat ha-minim* (namely, to force heretics to curse themselves or refrain from serving as lectors) seems flawed. Synagogues that actually did use this curse were clearly not friendly to general heretical membership, whether those heretics sought to serve as lectors or not. Likewise, Marcus's case that *birkat ha-minim* is used in Tannaitic literature specifically to denounce sectarian opponents of the rabbis is compelling.³⁰ Again, we cannot say that Matthew was excluded from a synagogue because of *birkat ha-minim*, and Matthew does not make any specific allusion to this practice. But again, we should not rule out the possibility that this happened in Matthew's day.

In light of this, it seems that the more appropriate question is not whether *birkat ha-minim* was ever used to exclude sectarians, but when this practice started, and whether it was widespread enough in Matthew's day to shape his theology. Again, scholarship is divided over this question. Marcus argues for early origins of a rabbinic liturgy and

²⁸ S. T. Katz, "Issues in the Separation of Judaism and Christianity after 70 CE: A Reconsideration," *JBL* 103 (1984) 63-76, 74; Jack T. Sanders, *Schismatics, Sectarians, Dissidents, Deviants: The First One Hundred Years of Jewish-Christian Relations* (London: SCM Press, 1993), 59-60.

²⁹ Sanders, *Schismatics, Sectarians, Dissidents, Deviants*, 60.

³⁰ Marcus, "Birkat Ha-Minim Revisited," 534-40.

movement that sought to exclude those Jews who the rabbis considered to be arch-heretics.³¹ On the other hand, Cohen argues for a much more eclectic rabbinic movement that included Jews from a range of theologies.³² What we can say is that by the time Justin writes, the use of the *birkat ha-minim* as a tool of exclusion is in more widespread use (*Dial.* 16.4; 47.4; 96.2).³³ However, this is significantly later than Matthew's Gospel, and references to such a curse are not present in Matthew's text. Even if Matthew's readership feels unwelcome at synagogues, it is not clear that *birkhat ha-minim* is a cause of this. Matthew could have disaffiliated from the synagogue for unrelated reasons, or he could not have disaffiliated from it at all.

Finally, we have the question of whether the church and synagogue are openly contrasted as competing institutions in Matthew's Gospel. On this point, Saldarini argues that Matthew's ecclesiology is not developed in such a way that he would see the church as an alternative to the synagogue. Saldarini argues that the use of ἐκκλησία refers not to a separate social organization that stands apart from the synagogue, but to 1) refer to an eschatological ideal assembly that endures despite resistance (as in Matt 16:18) and 2) to depict a body of community leaders with disciplinary authority (Matt 18:17-19).³⁴ Both of these groups, Saldarini maintains, do not need to be juxtaposed with any other group and can exist within a wider Jewish world.³⁵ The language of kinship gives us a better view of Matthew's perspective about what the church actually is: not an organization that

³¹ Ibid., 550-51.

³² Cohen, "The Significance of Yavneh: Pharisees, Rabbis, and the End of Jewish Sectarianism," 50-3.

³³ Sanders, *Schismatics, Sectarians, Dissidents, Deviants*, 60.

³⁴ Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community*, 119. Also argued in Paul Ellingworth, "'On This Rock I Will Build'... My Synagogue? Translating Ekklēsia in the New Testament," *The Bible Translator* 68, no. 3 (2017): 219-26.

³⁵ Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community*, 119.

exists as an alternative to the synagogue, but as a voluntary society that is not necessarily exclusive.³⁶ However, on this point Saldarini's case is not terribly convincing. If Matthew believes that the ἐκκλησία performs the functions of a synagogue (namely, community worship and conflict mediation), but is not a synagogue, this actually does seem to depict church assemblies as alternatives to the synagogues. A church did not need to be the large-scale, hierarchical body of later years in order for it to have served as a synagogue's rival. Furthermore, as Ascough notes, by using the term ἐκκλησία to define Christian voluntary associations, as opposed to the much more common term of synagogue, Matthew does seem to insist on some kind of distinction between the synagogue and the church. The word ἐκκλησία in Greco-Roman literature is much more commonly used to describe a government body, not a voluntary organization. Using such a distinctive word to describe an organization that is quite similar to a synagogue, but not actually a synagogue, suggests that the search for some other word was deliberate.³⁷

All this suggests that Matthew actually does think of synagogues and churches as serving similar functions, and yet being different institutions. In addition to this, Matthew uses some distancing language for synagogues. He associates synagogues with persecutions, though in order for this to be a present reality for him and his readers in the Diaspora, they would need to continue to be voluntarily associated with one. Likewise, Matthew sharply criticizes Jewish sectarians who had some influence over synagogues, though it is difficult to determine the level of influence they had in Matthew's location or if there was any organized effort to remove Jesus followers from synagogues.

³⁶ Ibid., 120.

³⁷ Richard S. Ascough, *Early Christ Groups and Greco-Roman Associations: Organizational Models and Social Practices* (Eugene: Cascade, 2022), 155-6.

So, to return to our original question: did Matthew and his readers attend synagogue services? Some pieces of supporting data feel surer than others. Relations between Matthew and other Jewish sectarians seem to be terrible. Still, it is difficult to know what to attribute this to. This could be evidence that Matthew's relationship with these Jewish sectarians is irrevocably damaged. It could also be evidence that the relationship is ongoing, and debate and dialogue continue. In this case, the depictions of dispute and persecution in the synagogue could be connected not to separation with the synagogue, but with Jewish Christians' continuous efforts to engage synagogues despite their disputes with them. In light of this, Runesson proposes that Matthew has not parted ways with the synagogue but with Pharisaic organizations.³⁸ Given the diverse landscape of synagogues in the ancient world, this may be plausible. Matthean Christians might be more welcome in synagogues that are less influenced by other sectarian groups with whom they compete. Nonetheless, it remains true that in Matthew, there is a clear association between synagogues and Pharisees (Matt 12:9-14). Matthew may write from just such a place where Pharisaic organizations and synagogues overlap considerably.

However, this emphasis on engagement and missionizing in synagogues needs to be balanced with the stark evidence of extreme conflict. Some synagogues are not Matthew's synagogues. The conclusion of the woe in Matt 23:34 is difficult to read any other way. At least some synagogues, particularly those that are most influenced by the scribes and Pharisees, are resistant to the Jesus movement. In these cases, we need to remember that Matthew's Gospel is quite practical about how to respond to unfruitful

³⁸ Anders Runesson, "Re -Thinking Early Jewish-Christian Relations: Matthean Community History as Pharisaic Intragroup Conflict," *JBL* 127:1 (2008): 95-132; "Saving the Lost Sheep of the House of Israel," 15.

mission fields: disciples can simply leave (Matt 10:14). Wherever Matthew's opponents had influence in synagogues (and this may have been a growing number in the late first century), relations with the synagogue were presumably more strained or even beginning to disintegrate. In these situations, perhaps Matthew's readers felt free to leave the synagogue altogether. Nonetheless, the necessity of this split probably varied tremendously based on social location and the role of the local synagogue.

As for the Gospel itself, the role of synagogues in the Gospel varies from neutral to negative. At best, they are locations where Jesus teaches and carries out his mission, though his reception there is often mixed or negative (Matt 12:9-14; 13:53-58). This could reflect the perspective of an author who is increasingly turning his back on the synagogue. It could also reflect the frustrated efforts of a community that is attempting to missionize synagogues with mixed results. The references to persecution in synagogues seem to reflect, at the very least, a memory of the latter.

In light of this, the question of Matthew's readership, and its participation in the synagogue, seems to be answerable only with a resounding "it depends." Where Matthew's opponents held sway and missionary endeavors were not realistic, Matthew's readers could have quite plausibly departed. However, this response to synagogue conflict was not the only option available to them, nor can we assume that conflict between Jewish Christians and synagogues in Matthew's day was truly ubiquitous. There seems to be evidence that Matthew wished for his readers to continue to access Torah teaching in synagogues whenever possible (Matt 23:1-3) and use these places as potential mission fields, even when these efforts were resisted.

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