



CHRIST CHURCH NOTES

# THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

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# THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

## PART 1—INTRODUCTION AND MATTHEW 1:1-17, 28:16-20

It is always important to start with the most basic background to the Gospel of Matthew.

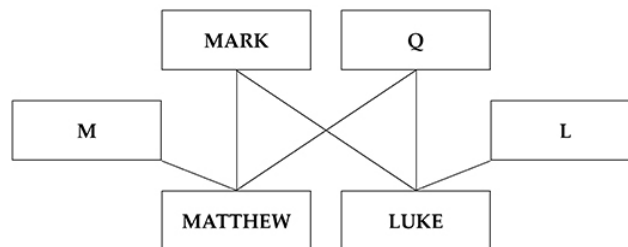
### WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE GOSPEL AND A GOSPEL?

One is a theological concept, the other is a piece of literature. The *gospel* (note the small *g*) literally means *good news* and is a term used to refer to an idea. The idea is that Jesus Christ died and rose again for the forgiveness of sins and generally requires a response of belief (or faith) and repentance from sin. But the word *Gospel* (with the capitalized *G*), generally refers to one of the four canonized books in the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. The four Gospels consists of numerous kinds of text, including poetry, discourses, wisdom literature, prophetic literature, and apocalyptic literature. The main text type found in the Gospels, however, is narrative (or stories). These varied text types and the rough structure of each Gospel (beginning with birth in two, ministry in two; ending with death) has suggested to some scholars that the Gospels might be modelled after Greco-Roman biography.

### WHAT ARE THE RELATIONSHIPS OF THE GOSPELS TO EACH OTHER?

The Gospels, when taken together, create some interesting challenges to a modern social scientific understanding of history and how sources were used in the writing (or editing) of new literary works in the first century. The primary challenge is the fact that of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke—John is in an entirely different category), each has unique passages, each has similar passages to the other two but not both, and there are some passages that are common to all three. A theory, then, of which was written first and how the others made use of it is far from simple. This is called the Synoptic Problem.

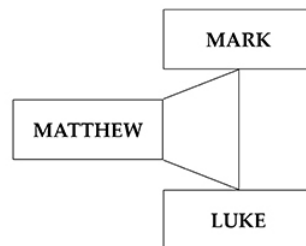
The first main issue is that of *Markan priority*. Mark's style seems to be simpler and his Gospel is considerably shorter than the others and his Greek style is more primitive. This suggests that his was written first and used as a source for the other two (rather than assuming that he had the longer Gospels and shortened the and introduced many grammatical errors). If we assume, as scholars have for about 150 years, that Mark was written the question is how do Matthew and Luke come about and how do we explain the passage they have in common that Mark does not have? The first of the two main theories is the Two-Source Hypothesis:



Mark is a source for both Matthew and Luke. In addition, Matthew and Luke each have access to a Gospel consisting mainly of sayings (not found in Mark). There is no historical record of this document, so it must be reconstructed. It is generally referred to as Q (from the German *Quelle*). Finally, both Matthew and Luke had unique materials that nobody else had (generally

designated as M and L). This hypothesis was proposed and supported by B.H. Streeter and is probably the majority position in modern scholarship.

The other of the main theories is that of Austin Farrer and is called the Farrer Hypothesis:



Here, Mark wrote first (again, the majority position). Matthew used Mark. And later, Luke used both Mark and Matthew (accounting for the commonalities of each). This is the simplest of the dominant positions and is gaining widespread support (see the work of Michael Goulder or Mark Goodacre for a recent articulation of and argument for the theory).

For Matthew’s Gospel specifically: about 90 percent of Mark is replicated in some form in Matthew. But from a different perspective—and remember that Matthew is considerably longer than Mark—46 percent of Matthew appears in all three of the Synoptics (triple tradition), 24 percent is found in common with Luke only (i.e., Q), 10 percent is found in common with Mark only, and 20 percent is unique (or Matthean *Sondergut*). Finally, in addition to his Gospel sources, Matthew mostly used a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures known as the Septuagint (and usually designated as LXX) for several, but not all of his Old Testament references.

#### **WHO WROTE THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW AND IN WHAT LANGUAGE?**

The Gospels are technically anonymous. While we have titles that are arguably fairly early in tradition, they are traditional and not canonical (and so not bound by any doctrines of Scripture). Of the four Gospels, the case for a tax collector named Levi (and later Matthew) having written our Gospel of Matthew is the most tenuous.

The argument for Matthew is built primarily on a tradition from Papias, with most of the other so-called evidence possibly stemming from this one account. One of the church fathers, Papias is thought to have served as Bishop of Hierapolis in the early second century and possibly the late first. According to Irenaeus, his credibility stems from having been a student of both the Apostle John and John’s student Polycarp. His major written work, a five-part exposition of the sayings of the Lord (Λογίων Κυριακῶν Ἐξηγήσεις) is largely lost, apart from a series of fragments preserved in works by other church fathers (including Irenaeus, Eusebius, and Jerome).<sup>1</sup> One of Papias’s fragments is particularly important:

This also the presbyter said: Mark, having become the interpreter [ἑρμηνευτής] of Peter, wrote down accurately [ἀκριβῶς ἔγραψεν], though not in order [οὐ μέντοι τάξει], whatsoever he remembered of the things said or done by Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but afterward, as I said, he followed Peter, who

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<sup>1</sup> There are eight reliable fragments recognized by Enrico Norelli in his definitive volume on Papias. See Norelli, *Papia di Hierapolis*. MacDonald makes extensive use of Norelli in MacDonald, *Two Shipwrecked Gospels*.

adapted his teaching to the needs of his hearers, but with no intention of giving a connected account [σύνταξις] of the Lord's discourses [λογίων], so that Mark committed no error while he thus wrote some things as he remembered them. For he was careful of one thing, not to omit any of the things which he had heard, and not to state any of them falsely...So then Matthew wrote [συνετάξατο, so possibly *set in order?*] the oracles [τὰ λόγια, so possibly *the logia*, or *the gospel?*] in the Hebrew language [Ἑβραϊδι διαλέκτω, so possibly *Aramaic?*], and every one interpreted [ἠρμήνευσεν, so possibly *translated?*] them as he was able.<sup>2</sup>

Though recording several details about the compositional process for Mark's Gospel, Papias makes only a brief comment about Matthew and Papias's comment is anything but clear. The use of *Hebrew dialect* rather than simply *Hebrew* is probably the least problematic phrase as we know that Hebrew was spoken only in a few closed communities, but Aramaic was commonly spoken and is associated with Hebrew. Whether one understands this phrase to be Hebrew or Aramaic typically does not affect one's theory of Synoptic evolution. The use of *logia* or *oracles*, on the other hand, may suggest that the documents in question are not, in fact *Gospels*. Papias's use of *logia* to refer to the Lord's teaching in his comments on Mark along with an understanding that the *logia* generally referred to *sayings*, whereas *Gospels* generally referred to narrative accounts which included *logia*, means that Papias may be referring to something other than the canonical Gospel of Matthew. Of course, it is possible that *logia* refers to not merely sayings, but also narrative and commentary as well. Papias earlier calls Mark's writings *logia* (though, interestingly, he does not refer to the writings as a Gospel). The only document we have attributed to Mark is the canonical Gospel, which, certainly, includes narrative. Likewise, Eusebius relays to us the title of Papias's five-volume work, his expositions of the *logia* of the Lord, which also appears to include more than just commentary on the *sayings* of Jesus. As such, his use of *logia* is at best suggestive, and certainly not conclusive, as to whether Matthew's Hebrew document could be an antecedent to our Gospel of Matthew. Use of the verb ἠρμήνεύω is more conclusive. While both the LSJ and BDAG list both possible renderings—*interpret* and *translate*—scholarship seems to favour *translate*.<sup>3</sup> The clearest argument is the internal argument. The pairing of ἠρμήνεύω and διάλεκτος surely indicates that the question for Papias is one of documents in two different languages.<sup>4</sup> As such, the internal evidence of whether our Gospel of Matthew bears any marks of having been translated from Hebrew (or Aramaic) becomes more important. Finally, use of the verb συντάσσω makes apparent that Papias's concern is the sequence or structure of the Gospel. Compared with Mark's Gospel, which was apparently out of order, Matthew's *logia* were put into a proper sequence in their Hebrew version. This raises the question then, of whether the

<sup>2</sup> This particular fragment of Papias is recorded in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.*, 3.39.15–16 (NPNF<sup>2</sup> 1:172–173). τοῦθ' ὁ πρεσβύτερος ἔλεγεν: Μάρκος μὲν ἠρμηνευτῆς Πέτρου γενόμενος, ὅσα ἐμνημόνευσεν, ἀκριβῶς ἔγραψεν, οὐ μέντοι τάξει, τὰ ὑπὸ τοῦ κυρίου ἢ λεχθέντα ἢ πραχθέντα. οὔτε γὰρ ἠκουσεν τοῦ κυρίου οὔτε παρηκολούθησεν αὐτῷ, ὕστερον δέ, ὡς ἔφη, Πέτρω: ὅς πρὸς τὰς χρείας ἐποιεῖτο τὰς διδασκαλίας, ἀλλ' οὐχ ὡσπερ σύνταξις τῶν κυριακῶν ποιούμενος λογίων, ὥστε οὐδὲν ἤμαρτεν Μάρκος οὕτως ἔνια γράψας ὡς ἀπεμνημόνευσεν. ἐνὸς γὰρ ἐποιήσατο πρόνοιαν, τοῦ μηδὲν ὠνήκουσεν παραλιπεῖν ἢ ψεύσασθαι τι ἐν αὐτοῖς...Ματθαῖος μὲν οὖν Ἑβραϊδι διαλέκτω τὰ λόγια συνετάξατο, ἠρμήνευσεν δ' αὐτὰ ὡς ἦν δυνατὸς ἕκαστος.

<sup>3</sup> Both LSJ and BDAG list *interpret* first and *translate* second. However, BDAG also cites this passage from Papias under the *translate* definition. “ἠρμηνεία,” LSJ, 690. “ἠρμήνεύω,” BDAG, 393. An eloquent defence of *interpret* (and concluding that Matthew wrote in Greek, but in a Semitic style or using Semitic forms) can be found in Kürzinger, “Zur Komposition der Bergpredigt nach Matthäus,” 568–589.

<sup>4</sup> This is also the conclusion at which Nolland arrives. Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 3.

presumably Greek translations were also in the proper sequence and whether Papias's concern about the *ability* of the translators refers to the translation or the sequencing.

Briefly setting aside the specific language, Papias's comment about Matthew also reveals that he is trying to understand the relationships among at least three documents: a presumed Hebrew Gospel and at least two interpretations (or translations), generally assumed to be Greek.<sup>5</sup> As we certainly have a Greek Gospel attributed to Matthew, this is a logical assumption. What we know as the Gospel of Matthew (in Greek) is quoted early in the second century by Ignatius of Antioch, who, interestingly, does not indicate any supposed Hebrew antecedent.<sup>6</sup> The question then necessarily becomes: did Papias actually see a Hebrew Gospel composed by Matthew or is there some other explanation? Could he have been the recipient of problematic tradition? Or, possibly, could the notion of a Hebrew antecedent and multiple translations be a contrived explanation, trying to make sense of multiple Greek Gospels attributed to Matthew which do not convey the same order or sequence of oracles?<sup>7</sup> The particularity of Papias's language seems to indicate this possibility. Or should Papias be taken at his word? Is it possible that a Hebrew antecedent to the Greek Gospel was penned by Matthew and is now completely and surprisingly lost?

However you want to parse out this complex information, the canonicity of the Gospel and the reliability of it as an articulation of authoritative traditions concerning our Lord Jesus Christ are not in question. And while I might be sceptical as to Matthew's involvement with our so-called Gospel of Matthew, I am quite happy to follow tradition and refer to the author of the Gospel as Matthew (if for no other reason than the sake of ease).

#### **WHERE WAS THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW WRITTEN? AND WHEN?**

Most scholars have argued a provenance of the Gospel in Syria, specifically Antioch. The plausibility of this specific location depends on four arguments. First, the earliest witness to the Gospel is in a letter of Ignatius, the third Bishop of Antioch.<sup>8</sup> Second, there appear to be linguistic connections between the Gospel and the *Didache*, a roughly contemporary document. The *Didache* is associated with Roman Syria through its substantial influence on the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (which was composed in Syria in the third century C.E.). Third, Peter emerges as a central figure in an even more significant way than the accounts of Mark and Luke record (particularly in Matt 16:13–20). Paul's letter to the churches in Galatia suggests that Peter had vacated Jerusalem for Antioch.<sup>9</sup> It is not unreasonable to assume that these two facts are related.<sup>10</sup> Fourth and finally, Matt 4:24 refers to news of Jesus spreading

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<sup>5</sup> Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 417–437. MacDonald, *Two Shipwrecked Gospels*, 14. Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 2–3.

<sup>6</sup> Ign. *Eph.* 14:2, *Smyrn.* 6:1, *Pol.*, 2:2.

<sup>7</sup> MacDonald's bibliography on this last option is particularly helpful. MacDonald, *Two Shipwrecked Gospels*, 15. He cites: Norelli, *Papia di Hierapolix*, 322–323, 329; Nepper-Christensen, *Das Matthäusevangelium*, 49–50; Cameron, *Sayings Traditions in the Apocryphon of James*, 100–121.

<sup>8</sup> Ignatius references Matt 3:15 in Ign. *Smyrn.* 1:1. Additionally, he alludes to Matt 10:16b in Ign. *Pol.*, 2:2. He also develops Matthew's story of the Magi and the star in Ign. *Eph.* 19:2–3. For more on this, see R. Brown and Meier, *Antioch & Rome*, 24–25.

<sup>9</sup> See Gal 2:9–14. It appears that after Paul's opposition to Peter in Antioch, Peter travelled to Jerusalem where he and Paul reconciled (to some extent). See Bruce, *Galatians*, 121–134. Betz, *Galatians*, 99–112.

<sup>10</sup> Schweitzer, "Matthew's Church," 149–150.

throughout Syria, a curious addition to the likely source in Mark 1:28–1:39 which highlights Galilee (as does much of the rest of Matthew 4), if Syria is of no particular significance.

More important than a specific location, the kind of place from which Matthew might have been writing could help us understand the Gospel. Beyond the specific evidence, there is a probability that Matthew was writing from a city *like* Syrian Antioch. If the assumption concerning a tension in the Jewish tone of Matthew's work is correct, then Matthew's location would have been a large city where there existed multiple Jewish communities spanning the spectrum as well as a significant gentile community. Matthew's use of certain images and phrases also indicate there would likely have been a large economic spectrum and thus he was likely in a large urban centre. These images and phrases include Matthew's use of the word πόλις (city), which he uses 27 times (compared to Mark's eight), his use of the word κώμη (village) only four times (compared to Mark's seven)<sup>11</sup> and his volume and various uses of elevated monetary terms:<sup>12</sup> In addition to the increased usage of monetary terms, Matthew also frequently heightens values or shifts language to include wealth status. Where Mark's Jesus sends his disciples out on a mission, commanding them to take no bread, no bag and no copper coins (Mark 6:8), Matthew's Jesus commands them to leave their gold, silver and copper at home with their bags (Matt 10:9). Whereas Mark describes Joseph of Arimathea as a respected member of the Council (Mark 15:43), Matthew describes him simply as a "rich man" (Matt 27:57). Finally, assuming that the Gospel was composed in Greek, there would have to have been a sizeable community of Jews speaking Greek.<sup>13</sup> While Antioch fits each of these criteria, the important thing to note is that Matthew's provenance must almost certainly be a large, urban centre on the front lines of interaction (and perhaps tension) between Jewish and non-Jewish Greek communities.

The date question is very complex one. Most scholars tend to assume the Gospel of Matthew was composed between 80 and 90 C.E., with the majority falling in the range from before 70 to after 110 C.E. The question of dates revolves primarily around two points: 1) the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 C.E. (which Matthew may or may not know about), and 2) the Council at Jamnia (or Yavneh), which is hypothetical and may or may not be important for placing the Gospel within the range of first-century Judaism.

### **WHAT IS MATTHEW'S AGENDA?**

With all of the introductory material behind us, the question we must consider is one of agenda. What is Matthew's purpose in writing? What is he trying to accomplish? In answering this question, it will first be helpful to consider the structure.

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<sup>11</sup> Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 25. Note that I have arrived at a different total for Matthew's use of 'city' than Carter's source, which cites only 26 instances in Matthew's Gospel. Carter cites Kingsbury "Verb AKOLOUTHEIN ("TO Follow") as an Index of Matthew's View of His Community," 66–68; Kilpatrick, *Origins of the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 124–126; and R.W. Smith "Were the Early Christians Middle-Class? A Sociological Analysis of the New Testament," 265–271.

<sup>12</sup> Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 25. Note that I have included more terms than Carter's source and have accordingly arrived at different totals. For Carter's sources, see the previous footnote.

<sup>13</sup> Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 17–18.

## WHAT IS MATTHEW'S STRUCTURE FOR HIS GOSPEL?

Matthean scholars outline several options for how the Gospel is structure. Each is so different or so compelling and each has sufficiently failed to get a majority of scholars to agree that entire books are written on the subject. Three of the major options are:

### *Geographic Structure*

Following Mark, Matthew might have organized his Gospel according to simple geographical movements. Some of the material unique to Matthew seems to focus on geography as a significant facet of the story (e.g., the flight into Egypt in the birth narrative). The basic structure is as follows:

1. Prologue (Matt 1:1-4:11): birth in Bethlehem and flight to Egypt, return to Nazareth
2. Ministry in Galilee and surrounding areas (4:12-20:34): neighbouring regions to Jerusalem but excluding Jerusalem (which is different than John's Gospel)
3. Ministry in Jerusalem (21:1-25:46): ministry in the city itself
4. Passion (Matt 26:1-28:20): death and resurrection in Jerusalem

### *Five Books Structure*

This is perhaps the most influential structure in the history of Matthean studies, because of both its persuasive character and its unpersuasive character. Benjamin Bacon was the first to advance the notion that the book was organized around the five major discourses (or speeches) of Jesus, each of which ended with a similar statement (see Matt 7:28, 11:1, 13:53, 19:1 and 26:1). The intervening narrative material then served as a kind of introduction to the discourse (excluding the birth and passion narratives), and each pair formed a *book*. As such, the structure looks something like this:

1. Book I (concerning discipleship)
  - a. Matthew 3-4 (introductory narrative)
  - b. Matthew 5-7 (discourse)
2. Book II (concerning apostleship)
  - a. Matt 8:1-9:35 (introductory narrative)
  - b. Matt 9:36-10:42 (discourse)
3. Book III (concerning the hiding of revelation)
  - a. Matthew 11-12 (introductory narrative)
  - b. Matthew 13 (discourse)
4. Book IV (concerning the church)
  - a. Matt 14:1-17:21 (introductory narrative)
  - b. Matt 17:22-18:35 (discourse)
5. Book V (concerning the final judgement)
  - a. Matthew 19-22 (introductory narrative)
  - b. Matthew 23-25 (discourse)

Bacon went on to suggest that each of these *books* also corresponds to a book of the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses, or the first five books of the Old Testament) and, as such, was likely used for catechizing Jewish Christians. Four important pieces of evidence suggest this structure is also problematic: 1) there may be six discourses with the change of setting between chapters 23 and 24, 2) the similarities in structure and content to the Pentateuch are completely

unpersuasive, and 3) it is inadequate to reduce the birth narrative and Passion to prologue and epilogue (as Bacon's structure does), and 4) it fails to note sub-structures that go across the books (e.g., the inclusio in 4:23 and 9:35).

### *Christological Option*

Jack Dean Kingsbury argues that the content of the Gospel of Matthew flows out of concerns for the person and work of Jesus (i.e., Christology). He notes that the transition statements in Matt 4:17 and 16:21 ("From that time on...") are far more significant than the geographical transitions. As such, he suggests a simple structure:

1. The Person of Jesus (1:1-4:16)
2. The Proclamation of Jesus (4:17-16:20)
3. The Passion of Jesus (16:21-28:20)

Kingsbury also focuses on the titles given to Jesus in the first part, the presentation of himself to Israel in the second part, and because of the rejection from Israel, the necessity of his death and resurrection in the third part. As such, the Gospel is primarily a Christological statement about Jesus and what it means, therefore, to be his disciples.

Many other scholars have come up with many other structures, often combining and refining elements of the three major structures notes above.

## **6. How Does Matthew begin and end?**

One of the most telling strategies for determining an author's agenda is looking at how he begins a document and ends it (sometimes called top and tail). In the case of Matthew's Gospel, it is worth looking at the opening genealogy in Matt 1:1-17 and the concluding proclamation, also known as the *Great Commission*, in Matt 28:16-20.

### *Matthew 1:1-17*

1 An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of **David**, the son of **Abraham**.

...

17 So all the generations from **Abraham to David** are fourteen generations; and from **David to the deportation to Babylon**, fourteen generations; and from **the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah**, fourteen generations.

### *Matthew 28:16-20*

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had

directed them. 17 When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, '**All authority** in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples **of all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey **everything that I have commanded** you.

And remember, I am with you **always**, to the end of the age.'



There are several things to note about the opening text. First, Matthew, in starting his Gospel, uses a Greek work repeatedly: ἐγέννησεν (*begat*, or *was the father of*, or *generated*) and which sounds like the word *genesis*. In Greek, the word *genesis* is actually used in the first verse for the noun *genealogy*. These word choices are highly suggestive in evoking a sense of Genesis, the first book of the Hebrew Scriptures, thought to have been composed by Moses.

Second, Matthew gives a clear structure to his introduction. This is especially obvious when looking at his closing verse. He organizes the genealogy around major historical figures or events in Jewish history: Abraham, David, and the Exile. These are significant figures in Jewish history because, importantly, each is associated with a *covenant* (or agreement about obedience and blessing) between God and his people.

### *Abraham*

Abraham is considered the father of Judaism. Importantly, he is literally the grandfather of Israel (Jacob). Very early in Jewish history, God makes a major covenant with Abraham (then called Abram) that dominates much of how Israel views itself through the time of Jesus and into the modern era. This covenant is first stated in Gen 12:1-3:

Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'

Note that Abraham is promised land and children such that he will become a nation that blesses the earth. The word *nation* is a loaded term that indicates, already, the inclusion of gentiles in the blessed people of God. Matthew subtly underscores this point by, surprisingly, including three gentile women: Tamar (the Canaanite), Rahab (also a Canaanite), and Ruth (a Moabite). Also mentioned is Bathsheba (Uriah's wife), who may or may not have been a Jew, but presumably became Hittite through her marriage to Uriah.

### *David*

David is considered the greatest king of Judaism. He famously had a heart after God's () and it is through David that the kingdom/kingship of God's people is formed by God. The great covenant with David is found in 2 Sam 7:10-13:

And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

Note that the promises of further generations and a place are reiterated. But the language has shifted and the promise is now framed in terms of an everlasting kingdom. David is the first good king of Israel and his line will continue to the final and greatest king of Israel.

### *Exile*

The *exile*, or deportation, was one of the most significant periods in Jewish history. It was a period in which God would allow Assyria (in 734-732 B.C.E.) and Babylon (around 597-581 B.C.E.) to come and take many of God's people into slavery as a kind of punishment for idolatry and other sins against God. Because exile involved being enslaved in a foreign land, much of the prophetic literature that anticipates and describes the deportation(s) frames it in terms of the enslavement in Egypt just prior to the *Exodus*. Indeed, much of the hope of God's people was that of a kind of new exodus from the various exiles. The important covenant associated with the exile, then, is the so-called *New Covenant* in Jer 31:31-34:

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the Lord', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Note that the covenant makes reference to the Exodus and, in particular, that common refrain in the book of Exodus: "I will be their God, and they shall be my people."<sup>14</sup> God's primary promise in this covenant, then, is his presence among his people.

Then ending of Matthew's Gospel is a statement from Jesus with a heightened setting (on a mountain in Galilee, previously appointed and agreed upon in Matt 26:32, 28:7-10) and a heightened rhetorical introduction ("All authority in heaven and earth..."). It is a highly stylized statement structure on the word *all* (πᾶς). And it has four "all" statements:

- all authority: having all *authority* like a ruler or teacher
- all nations: go to *all the nations* (including Gentiles) to make disciples
- all that I have commanded: *teaching with authority* (see 7:28, etc.)
- all time (or always): promising Jesus's *presence* for all time

It is my contention, as such, that these all statement in some way correspond to the opening structure of the genealogy to form a unified set of themes around Abraham/nations/gentiles, David/teaching, and exile/exodus/presence of God.

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<sup>14</sup> See Exod 6:7, 29:45, and 34:31 for a few representative examples.

# THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

## PART 2—ABRAHAM/NATIONS/GENTILES

Having reviewed some of the basics of the Gospels as well as the critical information about the Gospel of Matthew as well as one idea about the dominance of three themes in the Gospel of Matthew, we now turn to the first of the three themes: Abraham/nations/gentiles.

It is worth noting at the beginning, the language of the covenant with Abram (later Abraham):

Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'

Abraham is promised land and children such that he will become a nation that blesses the whole earth. Again, the word *nation* (ἔθνος) is a loaded term that indicates, already, the inclusion of gentiles in the people of God. This notion is clearly referenced again in the *Great Commission* statement to go and make disciples amongst all the nations (gentiles?) of the earth. But does the theme hold up throughout the Gospel?

### ABRAHAM

Let's begin by looking at the three references to Abraham (beyond the genealogy) in three very different sections of the Gospel. First, in the baptism pericope near the very beginning of the Gospel and introducing Jesus's public ministry in Matt 3:7-10:

<sup>7</sup> But when he [John the Baptist] saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup> Bear fruit worthy of repentance. <sup>9</sup> Do not presume to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our ancestor"; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. <sup>10</sup> Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.'

The issue for John the Baptist is that the religious leaders of the Jews were presuming a special favour from God because of their lineage back to Abraham. This is a somewhat startling notion given that just two chapters earlier, Jesus's lineage had been traced specifically to Abraham, the implication being that there is something about different about the way Jesus and the religious leaders understand their relationship to Abraham. The religious leaders use their descent from Abraham as a safeguard, as a way of claiming the privileges of God's people without having to obey his commands (a point Jesus will make with some angst in Matt 15:1-19). Jesus's connection to Abraham is, apparently, something other than the traditional Jewish connection of privilege. But can we say more at this point?

The second reference to Abraham is made by Jesus while doing miracles in Matt 8:10-12:

<sup>10</sup> When Jesus heard him [a centurion], he was amazed and said to those who followed him, “Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. <sup>11</sup> I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, <sup>12</sup> while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

In a lengthy section of primarily healing and other miracles (8:1-9:34), the statement seems out of place. It’s also an idea without context. Jesus just abruptly introduces it. Jesus, apparently amazed that a Roman centurion (i.e., gentile) would make a statement of faith in Jesus’s ability to heal, seizes the moment to make a comment about Jews and gentiles. He suggests, still quite early in his ministry, that (some) gentiles will be ultimately welcomed into the kingdom of heaven to dine with the patriarchs while some Jews (i.e., heirs of the kingdom) will be excluded (see also Matt 21:43: “Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom.”). Jesus sees Abraham as residing in heaven and welcoming those gentiles he was promised to bless while those who presume a connection to him (through being Jewish) might not be so welcomed.

A third reference to Abraham appears near to the end of Jesus’s ministry in Matt 22:29-33:

<sup>29</sup> Jesus answered them, ‘You [Sadducee questioner] are wrong, because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God. <sup>30</sup> For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. <sup>31</sup> And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God, <sup>32</sup> “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”? He is God not of the dead, but of the living.’ <sup>33</sup> And when the crowd heard it, they were astounded at his teaching.

Jesus is, once again, connecting Abraham as the beginning of Jewish history to the end times (or *eschaton*). The Sadducees (Jewish leaders) have come to Jesus to pick a fight, to try to corner him on an esoteric law and a seeming internal contradiction—part of what they had used to deny the notion of a final resurrection. Jesus, however, speaks with authority about the age to come and the final resurrection. He cites some common text (perhaps Exod 3:6) to demonstrate that God is the God of Abraham (and Isaac and Jacob) and yet the God of the living. In other words, Abraham is living and apparently with God in the kingdom of heaven. These Sadducees, by denying resurrection, are denying this fundamental truth about Abraham, the one to whom they presume such an important connection.

Also, note that in all three references to Abraham, there is some reference to the final resurrection and the age to come. For Matthew, then, Abraham is not merely a patriarch that indicates privilege for his biological descendants (as the Jewish religious leaders had assumed), but rather a symbol of inclusion of the gentiles in the final resurrection and the kingdom of heaven yet to come.

#### **ATTITUDE TOWARD GENTILES**

Given this treatment of Abraham, we must also verify that this attitude exists outside of these few references to Abraham. For this, it is important to note two additional passages. The first is found in Matt 12:15-21:

<sup>15</sup> When Jesus became aware of this, he departed. Many crowds followed him, and he cured all of them, <sup>16</sup> and he ordered them not to make him known. <sup>17</sup> This was to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

<sup>18</sup> 'Here is my servant, whom I have chosen,  
my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased.

I will put my Spirit upon him,  
and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.

<sup>19</sup> He will not wrangle or cry aloud,  
nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets.

<sup>20</sup> He will not break a bruised reed  
or quench a smouldering wick  
until he brings justice to victory.

<sup>21</sup> And in his name the Gentiles will hope.'

Using one of his famous *fulfilment statements*, Matthew draws a connection between Jesus's healing of people and a prophetic statement from Isa 42:1-4 that specifically predicts, once again, God's favour on gentiles and their inclusion among the people of God. This contrasts with the Pharisees who, in the previous verse, are conspiring to kill Jesus because he heals on the Sabbath.

A second and very complex passage is found in Matt 24:3-14:

<sup>3</sup> When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?' <sup>4</sup> Jesus answered them, 'Beware that no one leads you astray. <sup>5</sup> For many will come in my name, saying, "I am the Messiah!" and they will lead many astray. <sup>6</sup> And you will hear of wars and rumours of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. <sup>7</sup> For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: <sup>8</sup> all this is but the beginning of the birth pangs. <sup>9</sup> 'Then they will hand you over to be tortured and will put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of my name. <sup>10</sup> Then many will fall away, and they will betray one another and hate one another. <sup>11</sup> And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. <sup>12</sup> And because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold. <sup>13</sup> But anyone who endures to the end will be saved. <sup>14</sup> And this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come.

For our purposes, we should note that this passage comes in the so-called eschatological discourse (i.e., the discourse addressing the end times). Jesus notes that there will be great conflict (including war) between nations and between kingdoms. Yet, those "who endure to the end" are the ones who will be saved (cf., Matt 10:22). Note that Jesus does not reference anything about a chosen people, but rather describes those being saved as those who simply endure. And the saved ones will be gathered up—according to the good news (or gospel) of the kingdom and its testimony to all the nations (including both Israel and gentile nations). And so, the argument from earlier in the book is now affirmed again: Jewishness is no advantage over gentile-ness when it comes to the final judgment. Only endurance (through

faith in Christ Jesus and obedience to his kingdom) matters. This is confirmed in Matt 25:32: “All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats...” All the nations—both Israel and the gentiles, all who were to be blessed as the descendants of Abraham—will be gathered up. And Christ Jesus will choose those who are saved for eternal life (i.e., sheep) and those who will be condemned to eternal damnation (i.e., goats) from among these nations.

### MISSION TO GENTILES

Finally, to see the attitude of Matthew (and presumably his community) toward gentiles in the eyes of Jesus, we will want to look at the two mission statements in Matthew and note their important difference(s). The first comes in Matt 10:5-8ff:

<sup>5</sup> These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: ‘Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, <sup>6</sup> but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. <sup>7</sup> As you go, proclaim the good news, “The kingdom of heaven has come near.” <sup>8</sup> Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons...

Jesus’s first mission statement to his disciples specifically excludes gentiles (see also Matt 15:24: “He answered, ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’”). Yet, by the end of the Gospel and the *Great Commission*, they are to go and make disciples among all the nations (specifically including the gentiles). Why the difference? Why this tension?

Scholars have devised many explanations. Some suggest that it is merely a practical manoeuvre on the part of Jesus. The disciples are still too invested in their own Jewish-ness to properly deal with Samaritans and other gentiles. Others read into it a sense of Pauline order in the chronology of salvation: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom 1:16). Some go beyond Paul and suggest there is a transition in the Gospel of Matthew from a pro-Judaism perspective to an anti-Judaism perspective (that possibly corresponds to a split in self-identity formation between Christians and Jews after the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E.). Yet others see something much subtler: the mission to Israel *includes* the mission to the gentiles as it always did. This last statement is compelling as it makes sense then of the tension throughout the Gospel of Matthew as well as much of the contemporary literature. Jesus is not rejecting *all* the Jews, but rather redefining who God’s people are. It was always going to include some of the descendants of Abraham (who are ethnically Jewish), but not *only* those nor *all* of those descendants. Rather, God’s people are being defined by their obedience to the will of God. The blessing of all nations from Abraham was going to come first through his people, the Jews. And so, the statement in Matthew 10 is simply the last campaign of the original mission, blessing the nations *through* blessing the descendants of Abraham. This nuance is then inverted by the end of the Gospel. Importantly, the *Great Commission* does not exclude Israel. Rather, Israel *is one of* the peoples being blessed by God. The *Great Commission* includes the Jewish people descended from Abraham (as Paul confirms in Romans 9-11). Seeing the mission to gentiles in this light relieves most of the tension between these two mission statements.

## CONCLUSION

After looking at these passages, three things become very important to consider. First, the tension between Jews and gentiles is a significant part of Matthew's Gospel. And, as we have seen, it takes on a special significance regarding eschatology (the end of time and *ultimate* things). Matthew's audience is very much wrestling with the questions of what it means to be Jewish (ethnically, religiously, culturally) as well as whether gentiles will be welcomed in to the people of God *and saved* in the end. The references to Abraham and the shift in the two mission statements suggest that Matthew is correcting a slight misunderstanding. The Jews of Jesus's day had clearly understood the first part of the promise to Abraham. God would make a great and chosen nation from Abraham. And over time, they seem to have misunderstood this to mean that merely being descended from Abraham was sufficient. Obedience and honouring God's Word were no longer part of the equation. Likewise, they neglected the second half of the covenant with Abraham, namely that through them all the nations of the world (i.e., gentiles) would be blessed. Matthew's correction of this sentiment pervades the Gospel, ultimately drawing together *Father Abraham* with the gentiles who are to be blessed through his descendants.

Second, and practically speaking, this means we should pay attention to this theme as it emerges in various texts over this coming year. We should note when there seems to be a presumption of privilege based on ethnicity and when tensions arise between Jews and gentiles. We should note when Jesus heals or talks to gentiles and how he handles those situations slightly differently. We should, likewise, note when Jesus seems to be arguing against the Jewish leadership and its establishment. Noting each of these facets of the Gospel of Matthew will help us to be better interpreters of the texts.

Third, also practically speaking, we should consider how this tension plays out in our own lives. What do we presume from God because of our heritage or our traditions? What groups of people do we disdain because of their heritage or traditions? How might we more frequently and more deeply consider that which is most important: a relationship with Christ Jesus and God his Father that is based on the essentials of faith and repentance and obedience, regardless of ethnicity or tribe or nation.

# THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

## PART 3—DAVID/KINGDOM/SONSHIP

Having reviewed some of the basics of the Gospels as well as the critical information about the Gospel of Matthew as the first of the three major themes in the Gospel of Matthew (i.e., Abraham/nations/gentiles), we now turn to the second: David/kingdom/authority.

It is, again, worth noting at the beginning, the language of the covenant with David:

<sup>12</sup> When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. <sup>13</sup> He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. <sup>14</sup> I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me.<sup>1</sup>

There are a couple distinctive elements that emerge from this covenant statement. The first and most associated with David is the notion of an eternal kingship and kingdom. God specifically promises to establish his kingdom and his throne. The second is that of father and son. Note that in establishing the line of kings to come from David, God promises to be as a father to the son(s) of David. And these two elements are embedded in the Gospel of Matthew in some very interesting ways.

Before we look at these themes, however, we must consider two prefatory concepts. First, the nature of fulfilment is complex. If you were part of the typology sessions earlier this year, you might remember that prophetic statements in the Old Testament typically have multiple horizons of fulfilment. That is, there are usually at least two fulfilments of a prophetic promise. The first occurs in proximate history to the prophecy (1 Sam 2:35, for example, promises a faithful priest to replace Eli, and so Samuel is established in the next chapter as the replacement priest). The last fulfilment is the escalated and perfect fulfilment in Christ Jesus (and so the promise to replace Eli is ultimately fulfilled by the perfect priest who makes the fullest and final sacrifice; cf., Heb 5:1-10:28). This is quite important when considering the Davidic covenant as there will certainly be multiple partial fulfilments with each of the successive kings of Israel from David's line. But only Christ Jesus is the final and flawless fulfilment.

Second, there is another complex set of themes and typologies—Moses, exodus, commandments, authority—that are wrapped up in the last theme (Abraham, nations, gentiles), this theme (David, kingdom, sonship), and indeed, throughout the Gospel of Matthew. This set of Mosaic images is so pervasive, it is hard to separate it, at points, from the main themes under consideration here. There are also other minor themes drawn from the Old Testament, particularly from the Isaac stories, Daniel, and Zechariah. We must strive for clarity on our themes during this complicated admixture of Old Testament ideas.

With these two prefatory caveats in place, we now turn to the issues raised specifically in the Davidic covenant: the kingdom and sonship. To explore how these themes emerge uniquely

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Sam 7:12-14a.



in the Gospel of Matthew, it will be important to consider a few pervasive ideas captured in the Gospel: David and Davidic sonship, kingship and sonship together, and the kingdom of heaven.

### DAVID AND DAVIDIC SONSHIP

We shall dispense with David rather quickly as the other themes draw David into them in some very important ways. In very simple terms, Matthew has a particular interest in David and Davidic typology. He uses David's names 15 times, compare with Mark using the name 7 times and Luke using the name 12 times (despite Luke being longer than Matthew by about 5 percent). Beyond the 3 uses in the genealogy statement (Matt 1:1-17), 8 of Matthew's other 12 uses are simple identifications using the phrasing "Son of David."<sup>2</sup> One appears in Matt 12:3, wherein Jesus compares himself David as a defence for his disciples plucking grains on the Sabbath (citing David and his men eating the bread in the temple in 1 Samuel 21). In each of these references, Matthew is simply identifying Jesus (or in one case, Joseph) as a descendent of David (and therefore eligible to be the Davidic king per the Davidic covenant). The remaining 3 uses occur in Matt 22:41:46:

<sup>41</sup> Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: <sup>42</sup> 'What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?' They said to him, 'The son of David.' <sup>43</sup> He said to them, 'How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying, <sup>44</sup> "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet'"? <sup>45</sup> If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?' <sup>46</sup> No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

The context suggests confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees (note that the dialogue is the second half of a two-part dialogue in which the Pharisees question Jesus about the *commandments* in the first half and Jesus turns the tables on them with his question about *Davidic kingship* in the second half). Jesus raises a point of tension for the Pharisees, trying to pin them down on their faulty view of *kingship*. He does so by trying to demonstrate an inconsistency in their reading of the Scriptures with their view of *kingship*.

The Messiah must be the "son of David" in the sense of descending from him. This much is clear and accepted. Yet, as Jesus points out from Psalm 110:1, the Messiah will also be called *Lord* by David. The language is a bit confusing. David, the author of the Psalm (according to the superscription) states: "The Lord [God] said to my [that is David's] Lord [David's son], 'Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet'"? Jesus is then asking the Pharisees, how can David be calling his own son "Lord" and why would God be elevating a subsequent king to his own right hand?

The simple answer is this: Jesus is not only David's Son. He is also the Son of God and Jesus, then, is both the Son of David and the Son of God. This much was made clear in Jesus's baptism (Matt 3:17) and transfiguration (Matt 17:5). Jesus is challenging their view of kingship again. If the Messiah is merely some human king who comes to free the Jews from the oppression of Rome, a human David king with a military agenda, then it makes no sense for

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<sup>2</sup> Matt 1:20, Matt 9:27, Matt 12:23, Matt 15:22, Matt 20:30, Matt 20:31, Matt 21:9, and Matt 21:15.

David to call him *Lord* or for God to elevate him. The apparent contradiction is resolved, however, if the Messiah is seen to be more than merely a human king descended from David. And this is the argument of Jesus in this text and Matthew throughout the Gospel: Jesus Christ is the final and perfect king promised to David and who will reign forever over God's people because he is not only descended from David, but he is the Son of God himself. This theme becomes especially clear when consider how Jesus is presented as both king and Son of God.

### **KINGSHIP AND SONSHIP TOGETHER**

It is worth noting that the statement in Davidic covenant in 2 Samuel 7 is the first time in the Bible that an individual is called a *son of God*. Though God had referred to Israel as His first-born son earlier, no individual person was referred to this way. It suggests that the idea of sonship and kingship go together uniquely (cf., Ps 2:7). These two themes, accordingly, come together uniquely in Jesus Christ.

The David typology is important in establishing Jesus Christ as a king in the Gospel as well as the Son of God. This is especially clear in the baptism narrative found in Matt 3:13-17.

- David and all the kings that followed were anointed by Levites. Jesus was baptized in the Jordan by John the Baptist, a Levitical priest.
- When Old Testament kings were anointed, "the spirit of the Lord rushed upon" him (e.g., 1 Sam 16:13). Matt 3:16 states: "And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him."
- 2 Sam 7:14a states that David and the kings of his line would be considered as sons of God. When Jesus was baptized, a voice from heaven made an important statement: "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased" (Matt 3:17).

Two things become clear in the text. First, Jesus's baptism is unlike other baptisms. John certainly treats Jesus differently, putting himself in submission to Jesus and recognizing that Jesus has no need for a baptism for the repentance of sins. Yet, he follows when Jesus wishes to proceed. Second, the details and imagery already listed above suggest that the baptism was more like an anointing than a baptism. Jesus is being declared King in the text and Son by the voice of God at the same time. Luke's Gospel makes the king imagery even clearer.

### **KINGDOM (OF HEAVEN)**

There can be little doubt that the concept of kingdom in the Synoptic Gospels is a dominant theme. Scholars generally agree on this point (which is rather significant given how rarely scholars agree!). Matthew is no exception to this claim and, in fact, may be rather more interested in kingdom language than the others. Matthew uses the Greek word for kingdom (*βασιλεία*) 55 times in a wide variety of phrases, including "kingdom of heaven," "kingdom of God," "the Father's kingdom," and simply, "the kingdom."<sup>3</sup> Matthew's uses outnumber both the other Gospels as well as the rest of the New Testament (excluding the Gospels). It introduces John the Baptist's ministry (Matt 3:2) as well as Jesus's (4:17). It is that which Jesus

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<sup>3</sup> This section of the notes is very much based on the pioneering work of an acquaintance of mine, Jonathan T. Pennington in the published version of his dissertation: *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

commends his disciples to proclaim in the first mission statement (10:7). And only some of these uses can be attributed to Mark as a source. Matthew also introduces a unique phrase: “the gospel of the kingdom” (Matt 4:23; 9:35; 24:14), possibly as a way of combining the nature of the main message with this theme. The Sermon on the Mount is a statement of a kind of way of life in the kingdom (note the framing references to the beatitudes in Matt 5:3 and 5:10, the propositional statement in Matt 5:19-20, the peroration statement in 7:21, and the centrality of the idea to the Lord’s Prayer in 6:10). The second and fourth discourses likewise focus on what the kingdom is like.

Most importantly, however, Matthew uses the phrase *kingdom of heaven*. No other Gospel writer uses this statement and it does not really enter common Christian language until significantly later (apart from Matthew’s Gospel). This unique phrasing has traditionally been attributed to a desire to accommodate Jewish readers by avoiding the writing of God’s name where the other Gospel writers mostly use the phrase *kingdom of God*. But a simple substitution for the sake of sensitivity is unlikely. Matthew is clearly not avoiding the use of God’s name as he uses the phrase *kingdom of God* (βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ) on four occasions (Matt 12:28, 19:24, 21:31, and 21:43). Likewise, he uses God’s name 51 times in the whole of the Gospel. Rather, as has been pointed out by one prominent Matthean scholar, the distinctive phrasing of *kingdom of heaven* is part of an elaborate and comprehensive theme concerning *heaven and earth* that is seen throughout the Gospel.

In other words, the notion of *kingdom* in the Gospel of Matthew is wrapped up in a larger theme of *heaven and earth*. The Sermon on the Mount, for example, then shows what are the ethics and way of life of a *heaven-oriented* follower of Jesus Christ in distinction to the earthly values of fallen humanity. Matthew is especially focused on this theme of *heaven and earth* as he references the connection between heaven and earth more than 20 times (compared to 2 in Mark and 5 in Luke). Likewise, he uses a variation on *Father in heaven* at several points, most of them unique.

Interestingly, most of the uses of *heaven* in Matthew’s Gospel appear as a plural version of the word (*heavens*), including the *kingdom of heaven* phrasing. It seems that Matthew tends to use the singular and plural versions of this word to draw a significant distinction between *heaven* in a limited temporal and earthly sense (i.e., sky) and the idealized, abstract, future-oriented and other-worldly sense of *heaven*, frequently referring to the *kingdom of heaven*.

This greater theme of *heaven and earth* and the way Matthew uses this language suggests that Matthew’s notion of the kingship of Jesus and the *kingdom of heaven* transcend a normal understanding of earthly kingship. Christ Jesus is a heavenly king, not an earthly king as might have been expected by first century Jews in hope of a Messiah. Jonathan Pennington, a Matthean scholar and Professor of New Testament, puts it rather clearly:

Matthew critiques the common Jewish expectation for God’s coming kingdom. It seems that many Jews of Jesus’ day were expecting the Messiah to be a military leader who would drive out the heathen (Romans), deliver the Jews from bondage, and establish his Davidic kingdom in Jerusalem. Jesus’ model and message about God’s coming kingdom patently did not fulfill these expectations. Jesus not only repudiates the use of violence (e.g. 5:5, 9, 39; 26:52), but shockingly he heals and welcomes

members of the Roman oppressors (e.g. 8:5-12). So, while the message about God's kingdom does provide solace for those suffering under oppression, its message is one of humility, meekness, cheek-turning, and waiting. This is not what most Jews expected or wanted.<sup>4</sup>

## CONCLUSION

With these three concepts in mind, it seems as though Matthew is trying to correct a misunderstanding of the nature of the kingdom and the king in the popular understanding of the Messiah amongst the first-century Jewish leadership. They expect a human king, descended from Abraham, who will come and take the throne in Jerusalem. He will militarily defeat the Roman captors. He will rule on this earth. But Matthew paints a very different picture of the king and kingdom of heaven.

The Sermon on the Mount, the second and fourth discourses, and several other statements throughout the Gospel show the nature of kingship and kingdom of the ultimate and final Son of David: The Son of God. The kingdom is one that values meekness, mercy, and purity of heart. And the king is one whose authority is not based on military prowess, but (like Moses) on his mediation of God's Word. It is his teaching, not his attitude about Rome, that convinces the people that Jesus Christ is one with authority (see Matt 7:28-29).

As such, just as we saw in the last section in how Matthew is trying to correct a popular first-century misunderstanding of the inclusion and, indeed, blessing of gentiles through understanding the true nature of the Abrahamic covenant, I suggest to you that Matthew is correcting a misunderstanding of the nature of Messiah's reign by showing us once again the *heavenly* aspect of the Davidic covenant and true nature of Jesus Christ's authority as king.

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<sup>4</sup> Pennington, Jonathan. "The Kingdom of Heaven in the Gospel of Matthew," *SBJT* 12/1 (2008): 49.

# THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

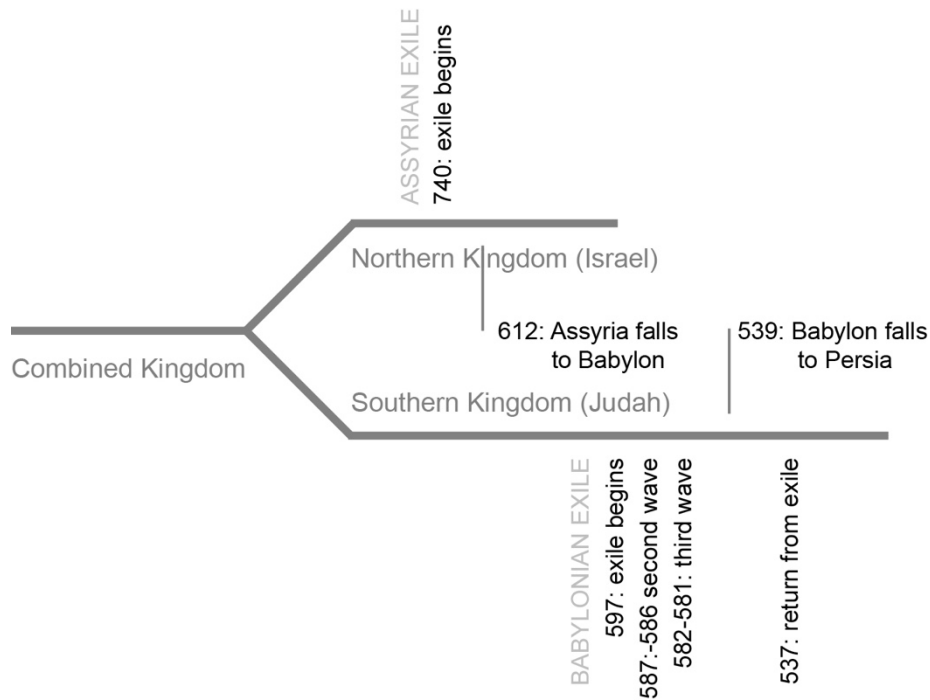
## PART 4—EXILE/EXODUS/PRESENCE

Having seen now the compound themes related to the Abraham covenant (nations and gentiles) and the Davidic covenant (kingship and sonship) in the Gospel of Matthew, we turn to the final theme: exile (and its related ideas of exodus and God's presence). As before, it emerges first in the genealogy and is almost certainly tied to the covenant promise from God found at the heart of the Exile story: The New Covenant. But, in order to understand the particular language of this covenant, we must first understand the Exile. The Exile is a *major* concept in Judaism (and Old Testament Christianity). It is, perhaps, one of the two or three most dominant concepts, in fact. It refers, in part, to a complex series of historical events that are, in part, still having effects for modern Jews.

The first exile began in approximately 740 B.C.E., when the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Samaria) was besieged by the Neo-Assyrian Empire (2 Kings 15:29). Many of the inhabitants of Israel were taken as slaves by the Assyrians and deported to Assyria, while some remained. According to 2 Chronicles 31, the people were eventually allowed to return to Zion. Matthew's genealogy, however, refers specifically to the second exile, the exile to Babylon. In approximately 612 B.C.E., the Assyrian Empire fell to Babylon. Having taken the Assyrian capital of Nineveh, the Babylonians continued to campaign, reaching Jerusalem and beginning to lay siege in 605 B.C.E. The people of Judah were taken as slaves into Babylon in waves beginning in 597 B.C.E. (with subsequent waves in 587-586 B.C.E. and 582-581 B.C.E.). The Temple was destroyed during this siege, a significant blow to religious minds of the Judeans. With the fall of Babylon to the Persians in 539 B.C.E., the Judeans were allowed to return and begin construction of a second Temple in around 537 B.C.E. (the story of which is told in the book of Ezra).

But the kingdom of Israel was never quite re-established, nor was the Davidic kingship. The Babylonian empire gave way to the Persian, which then gave way to the Greek occupation as a result of the conquest of Alexander the Great—which included the desecration of the Temple and the overthrow of the priesthood under Antiochus Epiphanes—which gave way to the Roman occupation and the rule of Herod the Great under the Roman empire. And so, many Jews today even view themselves as part of the Jewish community that was dispersed during these exiles, or *the Exile*, having not been returned to a unified and autonomous Israel (different than the modern country) with a re-established Davidic kingship. The Exile is, thus, sometimes called *the dispersion* and those Jews living outside of Israel considered part of *the Jewish Diaspora*.

For our purposes in Matthew, we want to note that the *Exile* was a major part of the history and culture of Judaism well into and through the intertestamental period. The later historical books of the Hebrew Bible tell the history of the deportations. Much of the prophetic literature in Bible specifically addresses the warnings concerning the exiles (as punishments for the sins of God's people). The book of Lamentations narrates the burning of Jerusalem at the hand of the Babylonians. And so, much like WWII or 9/11 in the modern era, the Exile left a major imprint on the psychological and cultural makeup of the people of God.



But it was not just a symbol of defeat and destruction. It was also a symbol of hope. The prophets that foretold the captivity also foretold restoration. The last chapters of Isaiah, for example, describe God’s rescue of his people. Prophecies concerning the Messiah, in fact, are often associated with the end of the Exile (to the point that the Bible refers to Cyrus the Great, the Persian king who allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity and rebuild the Temple, as a messianic figure<sup>1</sup>). As such, it is quite common, then, for the writers of the Scriptures to describe the Exile in terms of and using the imagery of the first great exile to Egypt. There, the focus is generally on the return from slavery in a foreign land: The Exodus. But, the parallels between the two incidents allow for a great deal of intertextual connection and shared language, such that biblical theologians will often take the themes of Exodus and Exile together.

Returning, then, to the New Covenant, the language is quite important:

<sup>31</sup> The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. <sup>32</sup> It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. <sup>33</sup> But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. <sup>34</sup> No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, ‘Know the Lord’, for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Isaiah 45:1.

<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah 31:31-34.

In the first line, the Lord determines to make a widespread covenant, including both the Kingdom of Israel (in the north) and the Kingdom of Judah (in the south). The primary reference points are captivity in Egypt and Exodus. The New Covenant, however, will be one that the people do not break. And the nature of the relationship is described in the language of Exodus: “I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (see Exod 6:7, 20:2, 29:45, et al.; cf., Lev 26:11-12). The primary benefit will be that the people know the Lord. They shall, in the language of Exodus, be his people and know him because he dwells with them. They are in his presence.

### EXILE AND EXODUS IN MATTHEW 1-2

Interestingly, Matthew infuses the very beginning of his Gospel with some significant, though somewhat subtle, references to the Exile and its complex of themes. The first and most obvious one, which we have already seen, is the reference point in the genealogy. This is a significant reference because it *periodizes* the Exile, implying a terminal point. Though Cyrus allows the Jews to return to Jerusalem, rebuild the Temple, and practice their religion in a mostly uninterrupted way, they did not rule themselves autonomously. The Davidic kingship of Israel was not re-established. Compounded by the lack of *revelation* (or the end of the writing of the Scriptures), many Jews in the first century still viewed themselves as part of the Exile. Matthew’s subtle implication, that the Exile lasts 14 generations until the Messiah would have been understood as rather significant. The birth of Jesus, or so Matthew matter-of-factly states, means the end of the Exile.

#### *Matthew 1:21-25*

This much is confirmed when Matthew narrates the birth of Jesus. Joseph had planned to quietly “dismiss” Mary after she got pregnant prior to their marriage, but an angel of the Lord appeared and commanded him rather to take her as his wife. The angel also said:

<sup>21</sup> She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’ <sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: <sup>23</sup> ‘Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel’, which means, ‘God is with us.’

The angel tells Joseph that the son should be called Jesus (meaning “saviour”). But quoting Isaiah 7:14, he also indicates that the son should be called Emmanuel, which Matthew helpfully translates so that the implication is abundantly clear. The arrival of Jesus means the return of God’s presence. He is no longer abandoning his people, but rather beginning to dwell with them again and speak to them again in incarnation of Jesus, the Christ. The context of the quotation—which Matthew certainly assumed his readers would know or go and find—affirms as much. The young woman giving birth to a son called Immanuel was to be a sign to Ahaz (king of Judah), a sign of the choice he should make to trust in the Lord rather than align with Assyria against Israel. Ahaz, instead, willingly makes Judah a servant-state of Assyria and contributes to the Assyrian destruction of Israel (and the ongoing exile of Israelites). As such, the son Immanuel was to be a sign of Judah’s peace and God’s ongoing presence among his people, possibly even leading to the re-unification of Israel and Judah and the end of the Assyrian exile at a time when Israel was in desperate need. But the Lord was not yet done and the Exile continued and came to Judah as well. Matthew, helpfully prepares us for this context

earlier, even mentioning the somewhat controversial figure of Ahaz in the genealogy of Jesus (Matt 1:9).

#### *Matthew 2:13-18*

Another important layer to the exile/exodus/presence theme emerges in the next chapter of Matthew's Gospel.<sup>3</sup> Here, Matthew tells of the escape of Jesus and his family to Egypt when Herod begins the slaughter of children in and around Bethlehem:

<sup>13</sup> Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.'<sup>14</sup> Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt,<sup>15</sup> and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I have called my son.'

<sup>16</sup> When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men.<sup>17</sup> Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:<sup>18</sup> 'A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.'

In this brief narrational interlude, Matthew cites two more prophetic texts with Jesus as the fulfilment. The first relates specifically to the escape to Egypt. In it, Matthew sees Jesus as embodiment of Israel who sojourned to Egypt (as did the people of God at the end of Genesis), returning sometime after. Matthew, interestingly, quotes a much later prophet, Hosea, summarize this fulfilment. In fact, he even changes the language from a common Greek Old Testament (LXX) to something a bit closer to the probably Hebrew.<sup>4</sup> As might be expected, the context of Hosea 11 is important. Hosea speaks of the people of Israel collectively as God's own son at the time of the Exodus (a metaphor that Moses communicated to Pharaoh in Exod 4:22-23). And so, the sense here is that God loves his people as a son with a love that persists despite their disobedience. Hosea draws on the Exodus language to suggest hope for the people of God, despite God's punishment for them at their present time of exile (see Hosea 11:8-9). Both contexts, the historical context of Hosea and the literary context of Exodus, are drawn on by Matthew. Jesus is like the firstborn son of God in the people of Israel, greatly loved and yet sent into exile (to Egypt—but also certainly anticipating Jesus's death), only to be called back out because of God's love (anticipating resurrection). For the careful reader of Matthew's Gospel, the identification of Jesus with Israel (God's people) as a son is confirmed in the next chapter when God himself declares Jesus his son as he comes up out of the water (likely a reference to the Red Sea in the Exodus narrative).

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<sup>3</sup> A very helpful article that provided many of the insights in this section is that of Richard B. Hays, "The Gospel of Matthew: Reconfigured Torah," *HTS* 61, 1&2 (2005): 165-190.

<sup>4</sup> Hosea 11:1: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." The LXX version shifts to something more like: "Because Israel was an infant, and I loved him, and out of Egypt I called back his children."



This connection between the Exodus and the Exile and Jesus is affirmed in the next citation in chapter 2 as well. In Matt 2:17-18, Matthew cites Jeremiah 31:15:

‘A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.’

Ramah was, of course, a starting point for the Babylonian exile (see Jer 40:1). And Rachel, the wife of Jacob/Israel in Genesis, weeps over the exile that “she” is witnessing. Again, the three points in history are tied together. Pharaoh’s killing of male children (Exod 1:15-22), the death and deportation into slavery of the *children of Israel* in the Babylonian exile, and Herod’s murder of children in the first century are all tied together with a single line from Jeremiah. And yet again, the context proves hopeful. The statement in Jeremiah is juxtaposed with a statement of hope for God’s people. “Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears,” God says.<sup>5</sup> For, he will bring his people, scattered across the earth, back together. And God’s poem of comfort to his people in Jeremiah concludes with a shift to narrative and a promise: The New Covenant (Jer 31:31-35). And as we have already seen, that text brings together the hope for the end of the Exile, the language of the Exodus, and promise of God’s presence among his people.<sup>6</sup>

#### A NOTE ON PROPHETIC LITERATURE

It is worth mentioning at this point that Matthew’s way of working, citing old texts as authentication for present events is not uncommon amongst first-century historians. The opening words of Mark’s Gospel, which predates Matthew’s, does the very same thing in quoting Isaiah and Malachi to validate the ministry of John the Baptist. Luke, slightly later than Matthew, does very much the same thing. Matthew’s Gospel is more organized and explicit about this practice, and most of the language of Matthew’s Gospel is steeped in Old Testament literature. This all serves his agenda of addressing and correcting aspects of first-century Judaism.

Whether the so-called prophets understood their statements to be foretelling events to come or simply telling forth God’s Word for the people of their days is always a bit complicated (and debated by Old Testament scholars). Some statements clearly are prophecy in the sense of predicting future events. But Matthew frequently takes other statements that do not seem to be prediction (as we just saw with Hos 11:1 and Jer 31:15) and treats them as statement to be fulfilled in Christ Jesus. It is a peculiar practice, but not a unique one. Methodologically, no ancient historian would have a problem with it. It coheres very well with both early Christian and rabbinic Jewish textual practices as well as pagan practices (e.g., the Aeneid), though each group would certainly reach different conclusions about the divinity and salvific work of Jesus Christ. But such disagreement would very likely not be on methodological grounds.

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<sup>5</sup> Jeremiah 31:15.

<sup>6</sup> Hays put it rather succinctly: “Surely it is not merely coincidental that in consecutive formula quotations (Mt 2:15, 2:17-18) Matthew has linked these two very similar passages from Hosea 11:1-11 and Jeremiah 31:15-20. Both prophetic texts speak of the exile and suffering of an unfaithful people, and both declare that God will reach out in mercy and bring the people back from exile. By evoking these prophecies in the infancy narrative, Matthew connects both the history and the future destiny of Israel to the figure of Jesus, and he hints that in Jesus the restoration of Israel is at hand.” Hays, “Gospel of Matthew,” 176.

Given all of this, then, my task, as a biblical scholar, in making the case that Matthew is working in this particular way, is to convince you of the intentionality of his historical and literary allusions. Hopefully that is clear. But I am also a biblical scholar and this project is very much in the field or the discipline of Biblical Theology. That is, the study of Matthew's connections to the Old Testament and the coherence of that story and his apparent uses of typology and analogy and historical trajectory are matters of Biblical Theology and a biblical theologian might be more persuasive.

#### **CHRIST'S PRESENCE IN THE REST OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW**

The promise of the presence of Christ (which is equivalent to the presence of God) appears at other points later in the Gospel of Matthew as well. One especially peculiar place is in Matt 18:20, when Jesus says:

For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.

This phrase is typically applied to prayer, as a kind of encouragement about multiple people praying and thereby ensuring that God is, somehow, paying attention to the prayer. This popularized reading is problematic for two reasons. First, it implies that there is something different (perhaps more effective?) about prayer by groups than prayer by individuals. There is, however, absolutely no suggestion that this is a correct understanding of prayer from the rest of the Scriptures. In fact, the overwhelming majority of 'effective' prayers in the Old and New Testaments are the prayers of individuals. Second, it misunderstands the context. The statement comes in the middle of an extended section on forgiveness. Prior to verse 20, it is a question of one sinning against another member of the church (ἐκκλησία, a somewhat anachronistic term given that the *Church* is not founded in this sense until well after this moment in Jesus's ministry). Here, Jesus spells out a process of seeking the repentance of the individual by means of involving members of the church. Specifically, Jesus mentions that one should confront the sinner with "two or three" witnesses before progressing to public accusation and excommunication. Then Jesus says:

<sup>18</sup> Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. <sup>19</sup> Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. <sup>20</sup> For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.'

The context, then, is not *prayer* at all. It is the working of the Church. Just as when the statement about binding on earth and heaven was mentioned previously (see Matt 16:13-20—wherein the keys of the kingdom of heaven are promised to Peter as the rock on which the Church is built), the primary issue is the working of the church. Authority is given to the Church, even authority that binds things in heaven, when the church in its multiplicity acts. And it is, then, in the Church where Jesus promises his presence. A Church that is focused on the return of repentant sinners has not only the authority of Christ, but his very presence among them.

Finally, Christ's presence is promised in the Great Commission in Matt 28:18-20:

<sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the

name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,<sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

Not only is Jesus Christ promising his ongoing presence in the final sentence, this commissioning statement bears a fascinating relationship to the *end of exile* theme we have already seen. You might remember from earlier in these notes that it was Cyrus the Great, the Persian king who defeated Babylon, that allowed the Jews to return from exile and begin rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem. He was an important for the Jews and even described in Messianic terms. Importantly, the edict that he issued to allow the Jews to return is captured twice in the Hebrew Scriptures, in some of the very last verses of the latest historical writings we have in the Old Testament. First, it is found in the last verse of 2 Chronicles in 2 Chronicles 36:23:

<sup>23</sup> 'Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the Lord his God be with him! Let him go up.'

A slightly different version is found a few verses later in Ezra 1:2-3:

<sup>2</sup> 'Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem in Judah. <sup>3</sup> Any of those among you who are of his people—may their God be with them!—are now permitted to go up to Jerusalem in Judah, and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel...

The language is remarkably similar to that found much later in the Great Commission in Matthew 28. Note the common elements:

- reference to authority from heaven
- reference to all the kingdoms of the earth
- an imperative verb to go (only in 2 Chronicles)
- reference to God's presence with his people

The similarities are too great to be coincidence. Rather, it seems the Great Commission was, in part, modelled after this statement that marked the end of the Babylonian Exile. Indeed, the ending point of Exile and the beginning point of the Church and its mission are brought together here in the person of Christ Jesus, the Messiah who ends the Exile and is himself the head of the body, the Church.<sup>7</sup>

## CONCLUSION

With these connections now in mind, it seems clear that Matthew is connecting the historical theme of the Exodus, the very present theme of the Exile, and the presence of God among his people in both explicit and subtle ways throughout his Gospel. And just as we saw that he is

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<sup>7</sup> See Colossians 1:18.

trying to correct a first-century Jewish misunderstanding of the inclusion of gentiles in the people of God and the nature of kingship exercised by the Messiah, so it seems he is also trying to correct a misunderstanding here as well. The Exile *is* over. God is no longer withholding his presence from his people. In the appearing of Jesus Christ, God re-establishes his relationship with his people in a new and profound way. And in Christ Jesus, the people of God shall truly be his people and he will be their God.

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