Incorporated Servanthood: A “Pragmatic-Critical” Analysis of the Theocentric Commitment Evoked by Matthew’s Gospel

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Soli Deo Gloria
The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except where acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any institution.
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Bibliography
Abbreviations

Abbreviations in this thesis follow Patrick H. Alexander et al., eds., *The SBL Handbook of Style for Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1999), with the addition of:

McM NTS McMaster New Testament Studies

PMLA Publications of the Modern Language Association
Abstract
The thesis argued in this study is that Matthew’s Gospel generates a communication event in which the author engages with a subset of readers to provoke and sustain a particular kind of theocentric commitment that may be described as “incorporated Servanthood.”

The aim of the research was to contribute to characterization of the concept of discipleship in the Gospel by asking how committing oneself to God is described within it, and how reading or hearing the Gospel may function to evoke such a response. To address these questions, an analytical method was constructed which drew upon those approaches in linguistics and literary studies that treat written texts as components of communication events between the author and his or her readers. The resulting “pragmatic-critical” method characterises the communicative equilibrium between the author and the subset of readers who process the text compliantly.

Applied to the Gospel of Matthew, the method suggested that compliant readers become so by progressively inferring Matthew’s claims concerning the state of the world and the nearness of the kingdom of heaven brought about by the coming of Jesus to complete the “Servant program” of the Prophet Isaiah. The Servant program involves bringing forgiveness of sins to the people of God, and then taking his salvation out to the nations. Matthew’s claim is that Jesus takes up and fulfils the mandate to complete this program. The method helped to show how compliant readers could be persuaded of the credibility of these claims through the high cost incurred in communicating them and the final vindication of the messenger. It then helped to show how, in constructive empathy with Jesus’ disciples in the narrative, compliant readers may be incorporated into his Servant program for the world. They are prepared for incorporation though Jesus’ teaching, especially in the major speeches of the Gospel. They are called to be served by the Servant and their sins forgiven. Finally, at the end of the Gospel, they are commissioned to serve and teach in the same pattern as the Servant, incorporating further disciples and participating in the task of bringing of salvation to the nations.
Chapter 1

Commitment

The thesis that will be argued in this study is that Matthew’s Gospel generates a communication event between its author and his readers, within which the author interacts with a subset of readers to provoke and sustain a particular kind of theocentric commitment. This is both a claim concerning Matthew’s communicative strategy as he composed the Gospel and a claim that the Gospel functions broadly as he intended for a definable subset of “compliant” flesh-and-blood readers.¹

Quite how this works will be unpacked in further chapters, and this introductory chapter will conclude with a more detailed thesis statement. Our aim for the moment is to provide some background for the concept of “commitment” as it might pertain to Matthew’s Gospel and a rationale for adopting it as a thesis topic. We shall then ask what can be said about theocentric commitment from the existing Matthean literature and therefore the scope for further study.

1.1 Commitment as a relational concept

The English word “commitment” is and has been used in a variety of ways, but we are interested here in appropriating its use to describe “the action of entrusting;” in particular, the action of entrusting in relational contexts where “to commit” is taken as an intransitive verb, as in:

To pledge oneself; to make a personal commitment to a course of action, a contract, etc.; spec. to resolve to remain in a long-term (monogamous) relationship with another

¹ We shall be using the name “Matthew” to identify the author or final redactor of the Gospel, without necessarily implying any claims concerning his actual identity.
person; to demonstrate such resolution through a willingness to marry, have children, etc.\textsuperscript{2}

We shall be taking this special use of commitment in human-to-human relationships and applying it to human-to-divine relationships. Using close human-to-human relationships as a metaphor or model for the human-divine relationship has a long pedigree in Judeo-Christian tradition, of course, stretching back to the Hebrew prophets and playing an important role in later Christian thought.\textsuperscript{3} We shall find it suggested in Matthew too.\textsuperscript{4} We clarify a unique kind of relationship in the light of something more familiar.

However, while they may be familiar, human-to-human relationships are hardly straightforward. We may do it automatically and without reflection, but on closer examination for two or more people to establish a relationship between themselves is a surprisingly complex process. Cognitive and volitional faculties are both involved: changes of will as well as changes of opinion. If a relationship is to be sustained in the long term, if it is to grow and to develop, then yet more factors will be involved and further, subtly different, issues raised.

Scholarly interest in the processes of human relationship formation and maintenance spans the disciplines of sociology, psychology and family studies and is gradually evolving as deficiencies are addressed.\textsuperscript{5} For example, it has recently been acknowledged that the factors which make relationships last have received relatively little attention. This has resulted in a renewed interest in clarifying the concept of “interpersonal commitment” and how it interacts with the other components that characterise intimate relationships.\textsuperscript{6}

\textsuperscript{3} Significant examples in the Hebrew Scriptures are Isa 62:5 and Hos 2:14–23 among many other instances. In the NT, Eph 5:21–33 stands out. For one example of later Christian reflection on such passages, take Jonathan Edwards: “The union between Christ and believers is very often represented to a marriage. This similitude is much insisted on in Scripture — how sweetly is it set forth in the Song of Songs! Now it is by faith that the soul is united unto Christ; faith is this bride’s reception of Christ as bridegroom.” Jonathan Edwards, “Miscellaneies 37: Faith,” in The “Miscellaneies”, Entries a-500 (ed. Thomas A. Schafer; The Works of Jonathan Edwards 13; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994 [first published 1723]), 219–20.
\textsuperscript{4} For example, in the father-child relationship in the Sermon on the Mount, the bridegroom metaphor in 9:15, the “family” sayings of 12:46–47, and the servant-master relationships in the parables of 24:43–25:30.
\textsuperscript{6} Adams and Jones, “Preface,” ix.
In this literature, the term “commitment” can be used narrowly, as just one of the ingredients that go to make up a relationship, alongside love, attachment, trust and satisfaction. The term can be used, for example, merely to talk about relational longevity, or to refer to a particularly steadfast kind of trust. However, this is not the only way of organising the concepts associated with relationship formation and maintenance. We can also begin with the construct of a relationship formed and characterised by the action of “commitment,” and then ask how other ways of describing aspects of the relationship contribute to that. “Commitment” then becomes a broad, umbrella term, encompassing those acts which establish a relationship and those features that contribute to its longevity — such as promise-making, love, attachment, trust, satisfaction and so forth. This is how we shall be using the word “commitment” in the course of this study.

1.2 Commitment as a theological concept

We shall be calling the human aspect of establishing and maintaining a relationship between someone and God a theocentric commitment. While we may begin with the similarities with human-human relationships (and there are likely to be useful parallels), we shall need to go further. In theological discourse, characterizing the divine-human relationship has given rise to a range of special concepts and vocabulary that go beyond those used for human-to-human relationships. Predominant here is “faith,” and we expect that when the divine-human relationship is portrayed in documents such as the Gospel of Matthew, “faith” will somehow be involved from the human side of things. However, part of the argument of this study will be that to focus merely on faith as a theme or concept in Matthew, or (even more narrowly) to focus on the πίστη- word-group in Matthew, would produce an inadequate account of commit-

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7 Adams and Jones, “Preface,” x.
8 In Avery Dulles’ history of “faith” as a theological concept in a Christian discourse spanning two thousand years of quite complex development, the Synoptic Gospels receive barely a page of treatment. However, this does appear in a chapter entitled “Biblical Foundations” and Dulles does suggest that in some way the discourse has its origin in such documents, which “set the scene for the theological disputes about faith that have been waged in the history of the Church.” Avery Dulles, The Assurance of Things Hoped for: A Theology of Christian Faith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 10–11.
ment. The biblical authors use a much wider range of language and imagery to express the human side of a relationship with God. We shall find in the Gospel of Matthew, for instance, that characterising relations with God will involve at least the following concepts and their associated word-groups (in no particular order):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept/theme (in English-language discourse)</th>
<th>Associated word-group(s) (in the Greek text of Matthew)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>πιστεύω / πίστις</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>συνήμι</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repentance</td>
<td>μετανοέω, μετάνοια</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfection or completeness</td>
<td>τέλειος</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipleship</td>
<td>μαθητεύω / μαθητής</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following (Jesus)</td>
<td>ἀκολουθεῖω</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Righteous(ness)</td>
<td>δίκαιος / δικαισύνη</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressed obedience</td>
<td>ποιέω, τηρέω</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>ἀγαπάω, φιλέω</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverence</td>
<td>προσκυνέω</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humility</td>
<td>πραδς</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledging (Jesus)</td>
<td>ὄμολογεω</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worthiness (of news of kingdom, of Jesus)</td>
<td>ὀξίος</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service or being a servant</td>
<td>δουλεύω / δοῦλος, διακονέω / διάκονος, παῖς</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are multiple issues here. First, we need to be aware of the complex relationship between concepts and word-groups. This issue was first brought to the prominent attention of biblical scholars by James Barr in his critique of Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)*.\(^9\) Barr’s main objection was that the content of the work could be described as theological “concept history” but that this content was organized under specific words, as if concepts and words were equivalent, thereby leading to confusion.\(^10\) While Barr

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could perhaps have been more charitable on the usefulness of the *TDNT* despite some of its methodological deficiencies, the basic point still stands and has become well accepted.\(^1\)

That we cannot assume a one-to-one correspondence between concepts and words is an issue even if we restrict our attention to the left-hand side of the table. We have called these “concepts,” but of course what appears in the column are in fact the *English words* which are used by convention to discuss certain concepts. Given that the discourse on the concepts extends beyond the English language, this is already then a peculiar list. Indeed, some of the concepts are not easy to label in English, such as that associated with ἄκολοουθεω. In English we may designate someone “a follower” (of someone) but it is more awkward to talk generally about *the concept of* “following someone” (although in German there is the useful term *Nachfolge*). Moreover, each of the concepts referred to in this column are complex in themselves. In theological discourse, “faith,” for example, might encompass sub-concepts such as “state of belief,” “trust” or even something more like faithfulness or loyalty. But do we wish the entry in the column to denote all of these or only some of them?

Turning to the right-hand column, we also know that the biblical authors, including Matthew, employed the word-groups listed there in flexible ways. We certainly cannot assume that they are technical terms in a modern sense.\(^2\)

Put both sides together, and the path tracing concepts, or answers to conceptual questions, from word usage is non-trivial. The command μετανοεῖτε, for example, may imply an exhortation to re-orientate one’s trust — something we might most naturally (as English speakers, at least) categorise conceptually under faith. We might link the word σονίμη to a

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\(^1\) Positive assessments and restatements of Barr’s basic claim can be found in, for example, Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1983), 18–31 or Vern S. Poythress, *Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1987), 74–79.

\(^2\) Barr, *Semantics*, 249, argues that certain words in the NT, such as ἀπόστολος or βάπτισμα, are “pretty nearly technical,” but that others, such as ἀλήθεια, are not. He later suggests (*Semantics*, 252) that a similar claim for non-technicality can be made for the πίστ- word-group. Barr never explicitly defines “technical term” — despite using it as a technical term! We may take technical terms to be words “appropriate or peculiar to, or characteristic of, a particular art” (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edition, 1989) — in this case, terms with a well-defined, particular meaning within early Christian discourse, possibly different to wider conventions.
concept of its own, but it might also be better to link it to faith. These are difficult connections to unravel if we tackle them in isolation. It is important therefore to resist the temptation to begin with a narrow word-study and to then reach conceptual conclusions solely on that basis. The temptation is understandable: one has to begin somewhere, and it is helpful to have sharply-defined research boundaries. There is a considerable danger of information loss under such an approach, however. A given concept is very unlikely to be expressed through just one word-group.

Indeed, we may go further and note that since the concepts listed in the table are overlapping and inter-related, there are possible gains to be made from studying wider groups of inter-related concepts, in that they are likely to be mutually informative. The more we understand what it means to “follow” Jesus, the more we shall understand “faith,” and so forth. The potential gains from a broad approach are even greater when we recognise that the list above is woefully incomplete. There are statements attributed to Jesus in the Gospel, such as, “But the one who perseveres to the end, this one will be saved” (10:22; 24:13), that would seem to relate conceptually to commitment but employ none of the word-groups listed there. Moreover, there is a great deal of metaphor or imagery apparently related to commitment, employing quite diverse sets of vocabulary. The exhortation, “But treasure-store for yourselves treasure in heaven” (Θησαυρίζετε δὲ υμῖν θησαυροῦς ἐν οὐρανῷ, 6:20), for example, can be seen as an exhortation to commitment. The man selling all he has to buy the field with hidden treasure (13:44), or the merchant selling all he has to buy a pearl (13:45–46), would also seem to be pictures of commitment. We shall encounter many more examples in the course of this study — examples which might be missed under a purely lexical approach.

Finally, we need to be aware that the word-groups and imagery employed by Matthew are employed not just flexibly but narratively. That is, their significance is strongly condi-

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13 In 13:10–17, the crowd do not hear or see, οὐδὲ συνίουσιν — in contrast to the disciples, who do. Is this a different kind of “understanding” to that in 16:11, where Jesus says to the disciples, οὐ νοεῖτε — a shortcoming associated with them being ὀλιγόσποντοι? We shall find below some discussion in the literature on the relationship between faith, understanding and their associated word-groups, and we shall be exploring this relationship in later analysis.

14 Compare Barr, Semantics, 233: “Theological thought of the type found in the NT has its characteristic expression not in the word individually but in the word-combination or sentence.”
tioned by their location within Matthew’s story-line. To an extent this is becoming recognised in biblical studies. With respect to Matthew’s Christology, for example, Terence Donaldson says, “Just as the meaning of individual words is determined by their function in the structure of the sentence as a whole, so the meaning of individual [C]hristological statements will be determined by their place in the structure of the story as a whole.”\textsuperscript{15} However, the same applies to any statement in the Gospel, and we shall endeavour to incorporate a concern for story-line in the discussion of method in chapter 2, and in its application to Matthew thereafter.

To conclude: we do indeed have to begin somewhere; but rather than begin narrowly, with a particular word-group, we shall begin very broadly, with the aim of leaving nothing relevant out. This will encompass the concepts and word-groups tabled above and, while we may not be able to say much on the thorny question of how concept and word are related in general, we may hope to be able to say something about how these particular concepts and word-groups are related in Matthew. In this, we shall be suggesting that the concepts taken as a whole give us something that is greater than the sum of the parts, something more easily related to the wider relational and communicative context within which the Gospel functions.\textsuperscript{16} But we also wish to do more than just consider this particular list. Our aim is to consider all the evidence in the Gospel of Matthew pertaining to our topic, with due respect for the manner in which, and the purpose for which, it is presented within the Gospel narrative. To this end, we shall begin by working with a deliberately loose definition of “theocentric commitment” as whatever characterizes the kind of positive human orientation to God that exists within a long-term divine-human relationship, and “theocentric commitment according to Matthew” as the particular kind of theocentric commitment Matthew wishes to evoke.


\textsuperscript{16} We shall return to this in the conclusion, at 8.3.1 below.
1.3 An incomplete, composite portrait of theocentric commitment in Matthew

Given this broad definition, what can be said about theocentric commitment from the existing Matthean literature, and what therefore is the opportunity for further analysis? One issue we immediately face here is the diversity in scope across different studies. On the one hand, there are studies of relatively narrow concepts or themes in Matthew, sometimes associated with particular Greek word-groups. A study such as Michael Wilkin’s *The Concept of Disciple in Matthew’s Gospel* is a clear example of this kind.\(^{17}\) However, there are also studies, especially those aiming to characterise some aspect of “Matthew’s theology,” which address a number of themes of interest, but only indirectly, as a consequence of pursuing a different set of research questions. Gerhard Barth’s “Matthew’s Understanding of the Law” is an example of this kind.\(^{18}\) The question then is: to what extent can we assemble these studies together into a “composite portrait” of the current state of understanding of theocentric commitment in Matthean studies, piecing together the narrow studies and blending them with the broader? We may further ask: is it then possible to draw in results from wider Synoptic studies to fill in the gaps to some extent? In pursuing these questions, our aim here is to expose areas where the current understanding of commitment is thin and to indicate ways in which the overall treatment could be better integrated.

What follows is not an attempt to be exhaustive, but rather to be comprehensive in the sense that as many possible different aspects of commitment are covered. Since our aim is to assemble a contemporary “portrait,” attention is focussed on treatments that have been especially influential in relatively recent (post 1945) Matthean studies, while acknowledging the way these may build on previous scholarship. Toward the end of the survey, we shall also draw upon two works from wider Synoptic studies for some suggestions on how to incorporate the key themes of faith and repentance. 

\(^{17}\) Michael J. Wilkins, *The Concept of Disciple in Matthew’s Gospel as Reflected in the Use of the Term Μαθητής* (NovTSup 59; Leiden: Brill, 1988).

GÜNTER BORNKAMM (1953).

We shall begin with Günter Bornkamm’s “End-Expectation and Church in Matthew,” a paper originally written in 1953 but included in translation in the 1963 collection *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew.* This is a good place to start not just because Bornkamm suggests a distinctive description of what we have called theocentric commitment in Matthew, but also because of his concern to relate its motivation to Matthew’s eschatology. This is a huge strength of the paper, and we shall be endeavouring to express a similar concern in our own analysis of the Gospel.

This is in some ways a hard paper to summarise, in that it has no formal introduction or conclusion. However, the concern to relate Matthew’s eschatology to his purpose is implicit even in the title, which makes it clear that the topic is the relationship between end-expectation and “Church.” Bornkamm never says explicitly what he means by “the Church,” but he seems to mean Matthew’s community or “congregation,” a bounded group of disciples, contemporary to Matthew, for whom the Gospel is written. Bornkamm takes this to be a group within Judaism and not separated from it — for Bornkamm’s Matthew, separation is something that happens “only in the future,” at the judgment. Given this, although he never actually says so, the question Bornkamm is answering seems to be: “How does the expectation of end-time judgment define and motivate the Church in Matthew’s Gospel?”

The basic answer to that question is given in the first part of the paper, as Bornkamm considers the distinctives of Matthew’s discourses. (The concern with *distinctives* follows

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20 The assumption that Matthew wrote his Gospel exclusively or at least primarily for his own distinct community was almost universal in Matthean scholarship until relatively recently. We shall take up this issue in section 3.1 below.

21 Bornkamm, “End-Expectation and Church,” 43. By 1970, he seems to have modified this view somewhat: “Matthew and his congregation presuppose Hellenistic Christianity which had already outgrown its Jewish origin, but they oppose the enthusiasm that wants to cut itself off completely from Judaism.” Günter Bornkamm, “The Authority to ‘Bind’ and ‘Loose’ in the Church in Matthew’s Gospel,” in *The Interpretation of Matthew* (2nd ed.; ed. Graham Stanton; London: SPCK, 1995), 111–12.
from an explicitly redaction-critical approach.\textsuperscript{22} He observes that each of the five main discourses (but also John the Baptist’s speech in 3:1–12, the parables in chapter 21 and the woes of chapter 23) are intimately concerned with eschatological expectation. The expectation of imminent judgment then motivates “the Church” to higher standards than those around them — a “new righteousness.” The link between Church and end-expectation consists “in the understanding of the Law and thereby of the new righteousness, which distinguishes the disciples of Jesus from the Pharisees and scribes and is at the same time the standard by which the members of the Church themselves are to be judged by the coming judge.”\textsuperscript{23}

Bornkamm’s distinctive description of what we have called theocentric commitment is therefore framed in relation to the imminence of judgment and the concept of righteousness expressed through the δίκαιος / δικαιοσύνη word group, “which in his writings alone occupy a predominant place.”\textsuperscript{24} This description is the developed in the subsequent parts of the paper. In part 2, “Righteousness is thus the conduct which corresponds with the will of God in the Law, and therefore with the pronouncement of the coming judge [...] It separates the disciples of Jesus from the Israel represented by the Pharisees and scribes and at the same time unites them with the history and promise of Israel.”\textsuperscript{25} In part 3, the “better righteousness” is exemplified by imitating the earthly Christ in all Ἰδὸς righteousness, humility and compassion, becoming μαθηταὶ of him who is himself meek and lowly in heart, until he comes in glory to judge and will separate the good and evil according to their works and will exalt the lowly.”\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{22} “End-expectation and Church” is included in the same volume as Bornkamm’s short paper on “The Stilling of the Storm in Matthew” (originally published in 1948), on which Graham Stanton comments, “[...] in retrospect this brilliant study [...] clearly marks a most important turning point in Matthean scholarship.” Graham N. Stanton, “The Origin and Purpose of Matthew’s Gospel: Matthean Scholarship from 1945 to 1980,” in ANRW II 25.3 (ed. H. Temporini and W. Haase; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1985), 1893. This was not the first use of something like (what has become known as) redaction-critical method in Matthean studies, but marked a step up in claiming that the single device of investigating the Matthean reinterpretation of a Marcan account was capable of providing what Bornkamm calls “proof of definite theological intentions.” Günther Bornkamm, “The Stilling of the Storm in Matthew,” in Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew (G. Bornkamm, G. Barth, and H. J. Held; London: SCM Press, 1963 [German: 1948]), 57. This opened up a research programme which dominated Matthean scholarship for at least the next 30 years, of which “End-Expectation and Church in Matthew” and Barth’s “Matthew’s Understanding of the Law” (which we shall consider next) are but two early examples.

\textsuperscript{23} Bornkamm, “End-Expectation and Church,” 24.

\textsuperscript{24} Bornkamm, “End-Expectation and Church,” 30.

\textsuperscript{25} Bornkamm, “End-Expectation and Church,” 31.

\textsuperscript{26} Bornkamm, “End-Expectation and Church,” 38.
Consequently, in part 4, “the Church” is defined by its imitation of Christ in his suffering, death and resurrection as she, “in all her members still awaits the future judgment according to deeds.”

Although the focus is on a “new righteousness” to be tested at the imminently coming judgment, Bornkamm does engage with other aspects of what we have called theocentric commitment, and this does qualify his basic conclusion in important ways. So, for example, one of the things which separates the followers first of John and then of Jesus from the Israel of the Pharisees and scribes lies in the latter’s refusal of repentance and faith, “who for that reason cannot enter the βασιλεία.” Moreover, Bornkamm states quite clearly that, “Fulfillment of the commandments and perfection can no more be realised anywhere except in ‘following’ Jesus.” Bornkamm reaches this conclusion from Matthew’s redaction of the rich young man story in chapter 19. Matthew adds the expression εἰ θέλεις τέλειος ἀναι in 19:21 (compare 5:48 and Mk 10:21) thus forming a conditional in which the apodosis is completed by the imperative δέορο ἀκολούθει μοι. He comments, “In following Jesus the perfection demanded by the Law is thus fulfilled.”

This is a rich paper and its main strength lies in demonstrating how expectation of some form of judgment is all-pervasive in Matthew and does indeed shape and motivate what it means to be a disciple of Jesus and committed to God. However, Bornkamm does not discuss exactly what form of judgment Matthew is depicting or engage with the issue of its apparent immediacy. There is much to establish and develop here, and it is apparent that we shall not be able to characterise commitment in Matthew accurately unless further progress is made. There are other important weaknesses. In relating his central thesis concerning the pursuit of a “new righteousness” to other aspects of commitment, Bornkamm is hampered by his method. The method only yields results when there are key differences between, say, Mat-

27 Bornkamm, “End-Expectation and Church,” 49.
29 Bornkamm, “End-Expectation and Church,” 29.
30 Bornkamm, “End-Expectation and Church,” 29.
31 The brief critique of redaction-critical methods offered here also applies to the contributions of Gerhard Barth, Georg Strecker, Ulrich Luz and Hans Klein considered below.
thew and Mark. The unstated assumption is that it is only in editorial changes that one can
discern theological intention, by-passing the (one would have thought) obvious point that edi-
tors also choose to include material and choose not to change it. Bornkamm is only able to
relate τέλειος to ἀκόλουθος, for example, by comparing 19:21 to Mk 10:21. However, there
is a great deal of material common to both Matthew and Mark relevant to his topic — on the
necessity of the cross and the failure of the disciples, for example. Moreover, as we noted
above, this material is arranged and ordered narratively. The scope for achieving a better inte-
gration of themes and concepts with a less partial method would therefore seem to be consid-
erable.

GERHARD BARTH (1960).

In “Matthew’s Understanding of the Law,” which first appeared in the same highly influential
collection as “End Expectation and Church,” Gerhard Barth is building upon Bornkamm’s
claim that expectation of judgment is all-pervasive in Matthew. There is a “marked emphasis
on the expectation of judgment,” he says, with only Matthew among the Gospels containing
“detailed descriptions of the final judgment.” Given this, the predominant exhortation in the
Gospel is to do the will of God. Since, according to Barth, Matthew seems to view “doing
the will of God” in some way relative to the will of God expressed in the Law, that then raises
Barth’s chief concern: how Matthew understands the Law. Barth concludes that “the attitude
of Matthew to the Old Testament law is determined from two sides, corresponding to his dou-
ble front against the antinomians and the Rabbinate.” Contra the antinomians, which he

32 Compare Don Carson, “Redaction Criticism: On the Legitimacy and Illegitimacy of a Literary
26, “In any case, even if we suppose that Matthew used Mark as a source and effected his changes
for various reasons, it is illegitimate to conclude […] that only the changes reflect what Matthew
believed, for if he used a source and left it unaltered, then surely he did so because it expressed
what he wanted to say, and therefore one may legitimately deduce what Matthew believed only
from his entire work, and not merely from the changes.”
34 Take the following striking statements: “On the question of entrance into the kingdom, the Son of
man—‘judge of the world’—decides according to one standard which is valid for all: whether
God’s will was done.” Barth, “Law,” 59. “Everywhere the threat of judgment has a hortatory aim:
to incite to the doing of God’s will.” Barth, “Law,” 60.
35 Barth, “Law,” 94.
takes to be group of libertines relying on their *charismata*, the Law has an abiding validity.\(^{36}\) Contra the Rabbinic, it is repeatedly interpreted through the love-commandment, “the centre and the supporting basis for the whole of the Law and the Prophets,” and righteousness relative to the Law is not merely demand but “at the same time an eschatological gift.”\(^{37}\) Alongside this stands the interpretation of the Law through the imitation of Christ.\(^{38}\)

This is a helpful paper for constructing our “portrait” because, in reaching this conclusion, Barth covers so many issues relevant to the concept of theocentric commitment. Of particular interest is the way in which Barth subsumes a number of themes under the theme of discipleship. Some of these themes appear in the table in section 1.2 above, while some go beyond. We shall briefly consider five of them. First, Barth links *perfection* to discipleship.\(^{39}\) Then, in section IV of the essay, Barth draws a number of commitment concepts together under the heading “On the essence of being a disciple.”\(^{40}\) These are *understanding, faith, conversion* and *childlikeness*.

Concerning *perfection*, Barth argues that discipleship is not the *way* to perfection as a future goal. Rather, discipleship itself *is* perfection, such that when Matthew uses τέλειος, he does not do so “in the Greek sense of the perfect ethical personality, but in the Old Testament sense of the wholeness of consecration to God.”\(^{41}\)

Concerning *understanding*, for the most part, “Matthew reproduces this idea with σοφία, which Barth claims is something already granted to the disciples, and supplied by Jesus where it is lacking.\(^{42}\) He characterises it thus: “The opposite to it is obduracy. It is an opening of the heart, an understanding of what God is now speaking. [...] Understanding is no achievement of man, but is God’s action on man, a gift.”\(^{43}\)

\(^{36}\) Barth, “Law,” 64, 164.

\(^{37}\) Barth, “Law,” 85, 140.


\(^{41}\) Barth, “Law,” 101. cf. Gerhard Delling, “τέλειος,” *TDNT* 8: 72, who argues that in the LXX the word means “unblemished,” “undivided,” “complete” or “whole.” We shall be arguing below that Matthew’s use of τέλειος in 5:48 and 19:21 is, in context, quite prosaic (sections 4.6.5, 6.1.2).

Barth characterises faith like this:

Matthew has taken his πιστεύω-concept very largely from Christian tradition. It is trust in the fatherly kindness of God who cares for his creatures [...] above all it is the trust which is directed to the ἐξουσία of Jesus and which experiences his wonder-working power [...]. Thus πιστεύω denotes in the first place trust.44

In this the influence of the Old Testament conception of faith can be seen. γλώττια denotes in the Old Testament holding firmly to the covenant, to God’s promise, to the Law. This holding firmly means both trust and obedience.45

Barth claims that understanding and faith are separated for Matthew: “the disciples have understanding but they lack faith.” Moreover, “The intellectual element which is contained in the πιστεύω-concept of Paul and John and also in the editor of Mark is excluded from the πιστεύω-concept of Matthew and transferred to συνέναι.”46

Concerning conversion, Barth argues that this is “not especially emphasised in Matthew [...]; it is axiomatic and therefore not stressed.”47 Where repentance is referred to, “a once-for-all turning about is no doubt in mind.”48

However, this is related to the characteristic of childlikeness. In 18:3, “conversion, turning about (ἐὰν μὴ στραφῆτε) means for Matthew ‘to become as a child’ [...] Conversion is not here understood as a once-for-all joining of the Church, but it is an event constantly repeated in the Christian’s life.”49 Indeed, “it is transparent that the child stands for the essence of the disciple.”50 The “essential thing about the μικρόι (or παιδία) which makes them

44 Barth, “Law,” 112.
46 Barth, “Law,” 113–14. In the analysis below, we shall in some ways be challenging these claims. Conclusions on the relationship between faith and understanding in Matthew can be found in section 8.3.1.
48 Barth cites 3:2, 8, 11; 4:17; 11:20f; 12.41 (Barth, “Law,” 117). We shall be challenging a simple equation between μετανοέω/μετάνοια and “conversion” in what follows.
49 Barth, “Law,” 118.
a figure of Christians” is that they are “the weak and lowly, helpless as regards their own salvation.” This qualifies the role of judgment in the Gospel: “It has thus been shown that the constant exhortation to the doing of God’s will and the threat of judgment according to works has not led in Matthew to the Christian relying on his own achievement; the disciples recognise themselves as empty before God, as the μικροι, who live by the seeking love of the shepherd.” Barth then begins to relate this dependency to Matthew’s Christology, but this is not strongly developed.

Barth’s essay is unusual in its broad coverage of themes pertaining to theological commitment, and will provide an important point of reference in what follows. And yet the coverage is not complete and neither is the integration of themes. As we commented on Bornkamm above, Barth is hampered by his method, under which the critic will tend to over-emphasise a narrow selection of material in the Gospel, while missing many of the narrative connections. For example, as we have just seen, Barth has noticed in Matthew 18 that Jesus uses the dependent relation between child and adult as an illustration which qualifies the exhortation to do the will of God in the light of coming judgment. However, he has not noticed that the exhortations to do the will of God in the Gospel all presuppose some sort of close and dependent human-divine relationship. Notably, in the Sermon on the Mount, this is expressed as a child-father relationship (also implicit in 12:46–50), while in the parables of 24:36ff, leading up to the judgment scene of 25:31–46, it is mostly expressed as a servant-master relationship. There would seem to be scope for exploring how these function in the Gospel and how they also relate to and perhaps qualify the exhortations.

We can also identify a sense in which Barth’s treatment is not broad enough. Barth has taken “doing the will of God” in some way relative to the will of God expressed in the Law. However, we shall be pursuing in what follows the possibility that Matthew has a broader concern, for the will of God expressed in the Law and the Prophets: a program of sal-

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vation and transformation fulfilled in Jesus, beginning at Jerusalem but spreading out to the whole world.\textsuperscript{54}

We have suggested that one of the important distinctives of Barth’s essay is its emphasis on discipleship as an organising principle. However, this raises the question of whether it is valid to take the material on the disciples in the Gospel and from it draw inferences concerning Matthew’s understanding of discipleship in general, or to suppose they serve in some way as examples for later Christian readers.

GEORG STRECKER (1962).

Georg Strecker, in \textit{Der Weg der Gerechtigkeit}, which Ulrich Luz describes as “another ‘classic’ of redaction criticism which has long awaited an English translation,” suggests some caution in drawing such inferences concerning Matthew’s understanding of discipleship.\textsuperscript{55} This is therefore an important work for us to consider in this “composite portrait” of theocentric commitment because it sets out one of the main issues we shall have to grapple with in later analysis: the function played by the disciples in Matthew’s portrayal. But Strecker’s work is also instructive because of the way in which, like Bornkamm, he integrates his treatment of eschatology and ecclesiology. Indeed, he goes somewhat further than Bornkamm, with the first part of his work devoted to a more extensive consideration of Matthew’s Christology. This results in an expanded understanding of how Strecker understands salvation-history, as we shall see shortly. This integrated analysis is the main contribution and strength of the work, and one we shall be seeking to emulate later. Although Strecker’s main concern is not with characterising what we have called “theocentric commitment,” he does have something to say on this, and his integration of large theological themes gives him a richer framework in which to do so.

\textsuperscript{54} We shall begin this exploration at section 3.3 below, with conclusions at 8.3.1.

Strecker has three main theses concerning Matthew’s redaction of his sources. The first is that Matthew was engaged in a process of “historicizing” the traditions he received. The conjecture here is that Matthew is writing at a time when the Christian community was coming to terms with the delay of the parousia, previously thought to be coming within a generation.56 He argues that in focussing on the life of Jesus Matthew reworks the temporal framework implied in his sources to generate a new, extended epoch of salvation history, with the eschaton in the indefinite future. To do this, Matthew separates his own time of writing from the time of Jesus by “historicizing” his material: making it clear that he is writing about a different epoch of history, focussed around Jesus but “separated from the preceding and following time.”57 For example, despite transparently writing in the age of Gentile proclamation (24:14; 28:19), Matthew adds statements that explicitly limit to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” the proclamation of first the Twelve (10:6) and then Jesus himself (15:24).58 This divides salvation history into three main epochs, with the central epoch being the “time of Jesus.”59 Strecker further argues that within this central period Matthew “idealizes” the disciples (i.e. gives them more understanding than in Mark), and that this is evidence of the redactor placing distance between himself and them: “a sign of the comprehensive historicizing of the Gospel tradition: the disciples are like the person Jesus, set in an unrepeatable holy past.”60

56 Strecker, “History,” 84.
58 Strecker, “History,” 87.
60 “Die Jünger sind wie die Person Jesu der unweigerlichen, heiligen Veranlagung eingeordnet.” Strecker, Der Weg der Gerechtigkeit, 194.
Strecker’s second claim is that Matthew was engaged in a process of “ethicizing” his materials. The central epoch of history, the “time of Jesus,” is a time of proclamation and Strecker argues that Matthew makes this is an ethical proclamation from Jesus, raising an ethical demand for Matthew’s community.\(^{61}\) For example, to the material on divorce in his sources he adds an exception clause (5:32; 19:9) to produce a “practicable law.”\(^{62}\)

The third claim is that Matthew was engaged in a process of “institutionalization”, adding the basic features of a disciplinary practice, for example (18:15ff). Strecker also argues that baptism and the Lord’s Supper are presented by Matthew as fulfilling the eschatological demand of Jesus.\(^{63}\)

For Strecker, Matthew is therefore concerned to address his community through the Gospel. As well as being instructed on church polity, his main concern is for them to hear the eschatological demand spoken in “the middle of sacred history,” first by John and then by Jesus. This is Strecker’s take on the portrayal of “theocentric commitment” in the Gospel, and his conclusions are similar to those of Bornkamm considered above. The ethical demand, eschatologically motivated, is to pursue “the way of righteousness” (or “justice”) exemplified by John (cf. 21:32) and Jesus. But while John and Jesus stand as examples, the disciples play no equivalent active role. They are effectively bystanders as Jesus exhorts a later generation.

**ULRICH LUZ (1971) — AND BEYOND.**

Against this conception of the disciples stands Luz’s own “The Disciples in the Gospel According to Matthew” which remains an essential text on the theme of discipleship in Matthew.\(^{64}\) Have the disciples been “historicized” by Matthew, as argued by Georg Strecker? Or

\(^{61}\) “Matthäus hat zwar die Verkündigung Jesu, die in der Auseinandersetzung mit den pharisäischen Gegnern sich gestaltende rechte Auslegung des Alten Testaments als ethische Belehrung verstanden, jedoch nicht im Sinn einer profanen Weisheitslehre, sondern als Forderung, die durch den Blick auf das Eschaton motiviert ist, daher eschatologischen Anspruch erhebt.” Strecker, Der Weg der Gerechtigkeit, 185.

\(^{62}\) Strecker, “History,” 89.

\(^{63}\) Strecker, “History,” 93.

are the disciples “transparent,” such that we see through them to the people and events of “Matthew’s community” — as Luz will go on to argue?

Luz begins by challenging Strecker’s arguments for the “historicizing” of the disciples. For example, while the discourse in Matthew 10 does begin by limiting the proclamation of the disciples (10:6), nevertheless:

the historicizing in chapter 10 is not consistent [...] The post-Easter situation of Jewish Christians being persecuted by Israel shines through (10:17f). Gentile mission and Jewish mission seem to take place simultaneously (10:18). [...] Finally, in this chapter the word “disciple” is clearly used in a sense which goes beyond the historical situation. Even though v. 24 can be understood as a general principle, this is no longer possible in v. 42. “Disciple” there must plainly be understood from the perspective of the Matthean community, i.e. it is transparent. [...] The commands of Jesus are in principle valid for all time.65

Luz also contends the degree to which Matthew is idealizing the disciples, concluding that “the only point at which Matthew has quite consistently ‘improved’ the picture of the disciples is in his elimination of the Marcan motif of their failure to understand.”66 Drawing on Gerhard Barth’s work on “understanding” in Matthew (see above) he then argues that the disciples being people of understanding actually supports the claim that they are “transparent.” To have understanding for Matthew is to be teachable; the disciples then model the reception of Jesus’ teaching for the community.

Luz finishes with a short discussion on how the historical and transparent aspects of discipleship relate to each other, suggesting that the answer might lie in Matthew’s Christology. The “Lord Jesus is clearly understood as a figure in the past who fulfilled a unique mission in the history of salvation. But at the same time in the historical Jesus the

65 Luz, “The Disciples,” 117–18. We shall begin to consider some of the other options for Matthew 10 in section 4.8.2.

risen Lord is present. So transparency in the disciple concept means becoming contemporary with a figure of the past.” Luz, “The Disciples,” 129.


68 Luz, “The Disciples,” 137.


However, in the end perhaps the differences between Luz and Strecker are not so great as Luz has drawn them. After all, in his claims that Matthew has “ethicized” and “institutionalized” his material, Strecker is also claiming that Matthew wants to make a connection between Jesus’ teaching and his own community. It is just that in his scheme the disciples are strangely irrelevant to the connection. But we might also wonder about Luz’s alternative scheme, in which we see the allegorizing tendency of form and redaction criticism (in which the reading community is supposed to “see through” the characters to themselves) taken to an extreme.

We shall have much more to say on this (and the role of the disciples in general) as we begin to construct a new approach, beginning at section 3.2 below. In the meantime, it will be helpful preparation to move beyond Ulrich Luz’s study and to sketch briefly how the role of the disciples is dealt with in some more recent narrative-critical treatments, which presuppose very little concerning the Sitz im Leben of the Gospel but are very much interested in the disciples as a character-group.

We shall begin with Richard Edward’s 1985 narrative-critical study, “Uncertain Faith: Matthew’s Portrait of the Disciples.” Edwards attempts to trace the pattern formed by Matthew’s portrayal of the disciples and its possible effect on “the reader.” He argues first that “the reader is encouraged to respond to them favourably when first introduced” (in 4:18–
However, what then happens defies expectations. The disciples prove inadequate in crises, they are of little-faith, and when the final crisis comes at Jesus’ death “their failure seems assured.” All this is in contrast to “the stability of Jesus and his Father in heaven.” Nevertheless, the disciples are still told at the end of the Gospel to “disciplize” the nations. The end effect, says Edwards, is that “discipleship will be viewed as a situation that is never completed, is likely to be in constant flux, and cannot be idealized.” But one can say that it requires “dedication and denial” and a concern to respond to Jesus’ teaching.

The same overall pattern can be found in Jack Dean Kingsbury’s *Matthew as Story*, another early narrative-critical study. However, Kingsbury has much more to say on the kind of discipleship to which Jesus calls his disciples. It is a call to abandon their former life and join themselves to Jesus in “total allegiance.” It is a call to join a new community, which Jesus calls “my church” (16:18; 18:17), where the distinguishing ethic is a “greater righteousness” (as in Bornkamm and Strecker above). Kingsbury talks about the supreme “commitment of discipleship,” supporting our adoption of “commitment” in the current study as an over-arching concept. Moreover, Kingsbury argues that Matthew uses the “conflict” between Jesus and his disciples (in which the disciples falter or fail in what they have been called to) as a didactic device. It allows Jesus “to instruct them or mediate to them some new insight or perception.” In particular, this allows Matthew to focus down on what Kingsbury calls “the essence of discipleship.” The disciples’ resistance to his suffering allows Jesus to

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75 Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 130.
76 Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 130, 133, 145.
77 Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 134.
78 Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 130.
summon them to follow him in *servanthood* (16:21, 24; 20:28). Then, in seeing the risen but crucified Son of God, the disciples finally realise:

that the central purpose of his ministry was in fact death on the cross (16:21). In comprehending at last the essence of his ministry, they comprehend as well the essence of their ministry: servanthood (16:24; 20:28).\(^79\)

This is a compelling suggestion, even if it is not explicit in 28:16–20. In later analysis, we shall be reaching a similar conclusion down a different but related line of argument, while also pursuing the possibility that the kind of “servanthood” Jesus calls his disciples to is even more closely connected to the wider purposes of God than Kingsbury suggests.

While the main focus of *Matthew as Story* is on the role of conflict in the construction of Matthew’s plot, Kingsbury also has things to say about the role of the speeches that are relevant for the current discussion.\(^80\) He claims that much of Jesus’ instruction has the quality of “speaking past” the audience within the narrative setting:

One of the curious features of Jesus’ great speeches is that they contain sayings that seemingly are without relevance for the characters in the story to whom they are addressed. […] This peculiar phenomenon — that Jesus speaks past his stipulated audience at places in his speeches — compels one to ask whether Jesus is not to be construed as addressing some person(s) other than simply the crowds or the disciples in the story.\(^81\)

Kingsbury concludes: “The upshot of Matthew’s use of these various rhetorical devices is that the implied reader, in hearing Jesus deliver his great speeches, is made to sense that he or

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\(^79\) Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 144.

\(^80\) This is also the focus of Kingsbury’s related paper, “The Developing Conflict Between Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew’s Gospel: A Literary Critical Study,” in *The Interpretation of Matthew* (2nd ed.; ed. Graham Stanton; London: SPCK, 1995 [first published: 1987]), 179–97. We shall have more to say on Matthew’s “plot” in later analysis, drawing things together in section 7.1.

\(^81\) Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 107.
she, along with the crowds or the disciples in the story, is being directly addressed by him.”

In other words, although Kingsbury would disagree with Strecker on the role the disciples have in shaping Matthew’s portrayal of discipleship in the Gospel, this concept of “speaking past” the disciples is certainly consistent with Strecker’s views on the “ethization” of the speeches and the demand they make of later readers.

A similar concept can be found in David Howell’s 1990 monograph *Matthew’s Inclusive Story*. Howell utilizes Gérard Genette’s concept of “prolepsis” to describe the way Matthew “includes” later readers into his discourse. Prolepsis is “any narrative manoeuvre that consists of narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later.” External prolepses anticipate events which occur only after the narrative has ended, while mixed prolepses begin within the narrative but continue beyond it. Both may serve to “relate the Gospel’s story to the time of its readers in Matthew’s community.” An important example of mixed prolepsis is Jesus’ promise to make the first disciples “fishers of men” (4:19), which is partially fulfilled when they are sent out in 10:5–8 but only completed outside the narrative, in the global mission begun in 28:19–20. Howell cites the speech in chapters 24–25 as an important source of (historical) external prolepses, since it looks beyond the end of the narrative to “events which will precede the close of the ages,” some of which (as perhaps implied by the aside in 24:15) may be events “either past or present” for Matthew’s community.

However, turning to the role of the disciples in the narrative, Howell is critical of a simple equation between them and the evangelist’s audience. To put it another way, the

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82 Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 111. What Kingsbury means by “implied reader” is “an imaginary person who is to be envisaged, in pursuing Matthew’s story, as responding to the text at every point with whatever emotion, understanding, or knowledge the text ideally calls for.” Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 38. We shall have much more to say on this concept in sections 2.2.2 and 2.3.6 below.

83 We shall return to assess the concept of “speaking past” in section 3.2.


85 Howell, *Matthew’s Inclusive Story*, 100.


88 Howell, *Matthew’s Inclusive Story*, 104–5. We shall be arguing later, beginning at section 6.3, that some of the events in the speech of chapters 24–25 are actually what Howell would call mixed prolepses, having a partial fulfilment before the end of the narrative.

“implied reader” of Matthew (the “embodiment of the response Matthew was aiming for when he composed his Gospel,” who plays “the role in which the author has cast him”) is distinct from the disciples as a character group. Even though (as with Edwards above) there might be some natural “identification” with the disciples, other character groups are involved as well. Nevertheless, the disciples do play a significant role. They “form a link whereby the readers become connected to the teaching of the earthly Jesus (cf. 28:16–20).” Moreover, their failures “drive the implied reader to Jesus and his behaviour [...] to learn what it means to live a life obedient to God.”

Donald Verseput goes further still in a 1992 paper in attacking the suggestion that the disciples are “transparent,” albeit in a study restricted to the section 13:53–16:20. Despite this restricted scope, he finds sufficient evidence to claim that “the modern student must be prepared to surrender the once fashionable conviction that the disciples in Matthew are “transparent” for the Matthean community.” In his view, the disciples, with their “little-faith,” function as a “dark backdrop” against which the divine authority of Jesus is more radiantly displayed, “so that the reader is called upon to distance himself from their deplorable behaviour.” They thus function as a literary device to elicit understanding in the (implied) reader of the Gospel concerning the divine origin of Jesus’ authority.

On the other hand, there is Terence Donaldson’s 1996 essay, “Guiding Readers — Making Disciples: Discipleship in Matthew’s Narrative Strategy.” Donaldson respects the fact that Matthew is giving the disciples an important role within the story of Jesus (and they

91 Howell, Matthew’s Inclusive Story, 229–36.
92 Howell, Matthew’s Inclusive Story, 246.
93 Howell, Matthew’s Inclusive Story, 247.
are therefore to some extent “historicized” as characters, to use Strecker’s term), but claims this is compatible with them also showing how Matthew views the nature of later Christian experience, between the resurrection and the “end of the age.” “In the final analysis,” he says, “these two ways are intertwined.” He infers this from the Great Commission, in which the disciples are commanded to make disciples (μαθητεύοσατε, 28:19). That is, a term used for a historically particular group in the story of Jesus is also Matthew’s “preferred term for Christian.” Thus, “by telling the story of the disciples in their experience with Jesus, Matthew is, in fact, also guiding his readers to an understanding of what discipleship will mean for them.”

However, Donaldson acknowledges that if Matthew is guiding his readers in this way, then the guidance is complex. That is, echoing at least Edwards and Howell above, while Matthew seems to expect his readers to “identify” with the disciples early on in the story, their story does not unfold as one might expect. The identification and transparency develops as the narrative proceeds. As Robert Tannehill says of Mark’s Gospel: “the relation between the disciples and the Christian reader does not remain simple.” Thus the readers learn from both the disciples’ “successes and failures” (my emphasis); they function “both positively and negatively” (my emphasis). Alongside this, the reader learns “what it means to be a disciple [...] above all, in joining with them as they listen to Jesus’ teaching.” This complexity is also acknowledged in Michael Wilkins’s treatment of the term μαθητής in Matthew: “The disciples are a positive example of what Matthew expects from his church, a negative example of warning, and a mixed group who are able to overcome their lackings through the teaching of Jesus.”

Although Donaldson and Wilkins reach a degree of synthesis concerning the opposing views on the role of the disciples, this is almost certainly not the last word on the subject. One might say that in having a function that is both historical and exemplary — in which the

104 Wilkins, The Concept of Disciple in Matthew’s Gospel, 222.
exemplary function is not only both positive and negative but also one in which the disciples serve as example recipients of Jesus’ instruction — the role of the disciples in Matthew has become too broad to be meaningful. Should some of these aspects of their role be abandoned, or can their role be otherwise simplified by, for example, breaking it up in some way? In later chapters, we shall be attempting to recapture some of Strecker’s insights concerning Matthew’s temporal framework and exploring whether such a framework may help to understand the role of the disciples more clearly. We shall return to these issues in sections 3.2 and 3.4 below.

JACK KINGSBURY (1978).

So far in this survey we have seen the analysis of Matthew’s portrayal of theocentric commitment organised around two centres. The first, beginning with Bornkamm, emphasised coming judgment and the call to do the will of God according to a “new righteousness.” Other aspects of commitment were then brought in as qualifications. The second approach, beginning with Barth, has been to subsume a number of concepts under the concept of discipleship. We have seen something of how this approach has developed into the age of narrative criticism. However, some aspects of discipleship seem to have been neglected in what we have looked at so far, notably the concept of following Jesus.

This is partly addressed by Jack Kingsbury’s paper on the verb ἀκολουθεῖν in Matthew.105 Written some eight years before his narrative-critical study Matthew as Story, Kingsbury’s primary concern is with the verb as an “index of Matthew’s view of his community.” Nevertheless, the first part of the paper remains a useful analysis of the usage of the verb. Kingsbury argues that Matthew employs ἀκολουθεῖν in both “a literal and a metaphorical manner” — literal, in the sense of physically going after someone; metaphorical, as a means of talking about discipleship.106 That is, the verb does not always denote an expression of discipleship: each instance needs to be tested. Kingsbury proposes a test based on those

instances where he feels it to be quite clear that Matthew is utilizing the verb to indicate that those who follow Jesus do so as his disciples. These are the calling of the first disciples (4:20, 22), the calling of Matthew (9:9) and Jesus’ affirmation of the kind of “following” that will receive a future reward (19:27–29). Kingsbury argues that the use of ἀκολούθεω in these instances is characterized by two factors. These are “personal commitment,” an obedient will-ingness to comply with the call to follow, and “personal sacrifice,” the actual bearing of a cost in following Jesus.  

Applied to other instances of the verb, this then suggests that in 8:22 (a call to follow and forgo burying a father), 19:21 (a call to follow and give up wealth to the poor) and 10:38/16:24 (the call to “take up one’s cross” and follow) the verb is being used to indicate discipleship. In 8:19, although Kingsbury concludes that while Matthew did not think of the scribe approaching Jesus as a disciple, the use of the verb still indicates “accompaniment as one’s disciple.” In 8:23, the verb picks up on the metaphorical use in 8:19–22. In 9:27 and 20:34 (both in stories of blindness being healed), Kingsbury concludes that there is insufficient evidence of commitment and cost to signify a metaphorical use. In 21:9, he concludes that despite the crowds wondering whether Jesus might not be the “son of David,” there is again a lack of personal commitment. Indeed, in general, ἀκολούθεω “proves to be without metaphorical significance in the ‘crowd passages.’ ”

Kingsbury’s analysis of the usage of ἀκολούθεω will prove useful in our own later consideration of the passages where the verb is used. However, having adopted “commitment” as an overarching concept, it may be helpful to think of Kingsbury’s test criteria as checking for two different aspects of commitment. The first can perhaps be thought of as the profession of commitment in obedience to a call. The second can be thought of as the costly expression of commitment, perhaps in the longer term.

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109 Kingsbury, “Akolouthein,” 62. The first of these is clear, given that the verb is used of the men before they engage with Jesus, but with the second, where the verb is used after the encounter, it might be safer to say that Matthew leaves the possibility of a metaphorical usage open.
What Kingsbury then does is to argue that where the verb is linked to discipleship it does not imply that Matthew’s community was a group of “wandering charismatics” or that they understood the call to discipleship that way.\textsuperscript{111} Rather, the verb is used metaphorically in these settings to convey the character of being “single-heartedly devoted to God.”\textsuperscript{112} However, it may have been that the community was in a transitional phase: moving from a state where the verb was taken literally to one where the majority of members did not take it so, but where the practice of “leaving everything” was still fresh in the community consciousness.\textsuperscript{113} This may helpfully be compared to Warren Carter’s work on discipleship. Carter agrees with Kingsbury that Matthew’s community was urbanized rather than itinerant, although he also wishes to emphasise the diversity of urban experience represented within it, from extremely poor to economically secure.\textsuperscript{114} But he disagrees that the (metaphorical) use of ἀκολουθεῖω relates to the community being in transition. Rather, the use of the verb encourages an “ambivalent” relationship to society: one in which there is a tension between detachment and participation. This coexistence of detachment \textit{and} participation is indeed a wider feature of the narrative.\textsuperscript{115} There is a movement away from traditional household structures to a “liminal identity” corresponding to the “in-betweeness” of the times in which the disciples live before their vindication in the final judgment.\textsuperscript{116} The community therefore stands on the margins of society, living in contradistinction from its structures — especially “the values, commitments and agendas of the Roman empire.”\textsuperscript{117} Although we are not particularly concerned to construct a characterization of Matthew’s contemporary “community” \textit{per}


\textsuperscript{112} Kingsbury, “Akolouthein,” 72–73.

\textsuperscript{113} Kingsbury, “Akolouthein,” 73.


\textsuperscript{115} Carter, “Matthean Discipleship,” 72.


se (see below, section 3.1) we shall nevertheless find some useful points of continuity with this overall description below.118

Returning to Kingsbury’s paper, the final conclusions concerning the use of ἄκολοθεύο to imply “single-minded devotion to God” are also linked to other devices used to convey the same concept, such as “doing the will of God” (7:21; 12:50) and being “perfect” (5:48, 19:21).119 This is summed up by saying that “the ethic Matthew held up to contemporary Christians is that of the ‘greater righteousness’ (5:20).”120 We thereby return to the emphasis begun by Bornkamm and taken up by Strecker above. However, is there more we can say concerning Matthew’s understanding of “righteousness” and his use of the δίκαιος / δίκαισόνη word group?

BENNO PRZYBYLSKI (1980).

The major study in the line of research focussing on Matthew’s righteousness language is Benno Przybyski’s Righteousness in Matthew and His World of Thought.121 Przybyski observes a spectrum of views on the meaning of righteousness in Matthew, with an emphasis on righteousness as a gift to humankind on the one hand, and an emphasis on righteousness as a demand of God on humankind on the other.122 He himself favours the latter emphasis. Some commentators now suggest there is a “growing consensus around Przybyski’s view.”123

It is not a view shared by all. Donald Hagner, for example, suggests the two uses of δίκαιοσόνη outside the Sermon on the Mount (in 3:15 and 21:32) are best translated “God’s saving will.”124 However, the more significant question is whether it is valid to make such a

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118 Summed up in section 8.3.1.
119 Kingsbury, “Akolouthiein,” 73.
120 Kingsbury, “Akolouthiein,” 72–73.
121 Benno Przybyski, Righteousness in Matthew and His World of Thought (Studies in the New Testament; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).
122 Przybyski, Righteousness in Matthew, 1–12.
124 Donald A. Hagner, “Righteousness in Matthew’s Theology,” in Worship, Theology and Ministry in the Early Church (ed. Michael J. Wilkins and T. Paige; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 115–18. In chapter 4 below, we shall defend a development of this view. However, we shall not find righteousness in 3:15 and 21:32 entirely distinct from the righteousness we find in the Sermon on
sharp distinction between righteousness as a demand and righteousness as a gift. Recall that in his broader-based study, Barth was able to conclude “righteousness is not only a demand but at the same time an eschatological gift.” To make a sharp distinction could well be a step backwards. In the present study we shall also be pursuing the possibility that these two perspectives on righteousness are not mutually exclusive. This will be true, for example, if righteous behaviour is a “fruit” of understanding (e.g. 13:23), and understanding is a gift (e.g. 13:10–17). Moreover, as we began to suggest with respect to Gerhard Barth’s understanding of “doing the will of God,” we shall be pursuing in what follows the possibility that Matthew has a broader concern, for a “righteousness” that is not merely ethical (although it encompasses the ethical), but which expresses a participation in a wider program of salvation and transformation fulfilled in Jesus.

Even if Przybylski is right, he acknowledges that his conclusions on the meaning of righteousness in Matthew cannot be the whole story. He concludes that righteousness in Matthew is a “provisional concept” — it is “used in the Gospel of Matthew to provide a point of contact between the religious understanding of first-century Palestinian Jews and the teaching of Jesus as Matthew understood it.” In other words, once again, we cannot really understand the concept as Matthew uses it without looking more widely.


While some studies have begun with the exhortation to do the will of God and the “new righteousness” and others have focused on discipleship, there seems to be a marked absence of major studies in Matthew that take as their starting point repentance or faith. This is surpris-

125 Barth cites 5:6 and 6:33 in support (Barth, “Law,” 140).
126 As Donald Hagner puts it, “for all its concern with righteousness, the Gospel of Matthew is not nomocentric but christocentric. [...] The call is not to a nomism, not even to a new covenantal nomism.” Donald A. Hagner, “Law, Righteousness, and Discipleship in Matthew,” Word & World 18, no. 4 (1998): 370. Cf. Michael Raiter, “Doers of the Greater Righteousness: The ‘Righteous’ in the Sermon on the Mount,” RTR 49, no. 1 (1990): 10, “From now on it is not possible to live a life of δικαιουσία apart from obedience to Jesus.” We shall be going further still in what follows (beginning in section 3.3), suggesting that “righteousness” in Matthew is not merely Christocentric but Paidocentric. That is, related in particular to Matthew’s Servant (παῖς) Christology.
127 Przybylski, Righteousness in Matthew, 116.
ing, given the early prominence given in the narrative *prescriptively* to repentance (3:2; 4:17) and *descriptively* to faith (Matthew 8–9). For extended examples on how to treat these concepts, we have to look more widely in synoptic studies. On repentance, we shall shortly consider Guy Nave Jr.’s *The Role and Function of Repentance in Luke-Acts*. On faith, there are shorter studies such as Hans Klein’s “Das Glaubensverständnis im Matthäus-evangelium.” However, it will also be helpful to consider a more extended study.

On the πίστη theme in Mark’s Gospel, we have Marshall (1989), *Faith as a Theme in Mark’s Narrative*. Marshall isolates the theme largely (though not entirely) along lexical lines: “primarily focusing on those pericope which employ the πίστες, πιστεύειν word group.” He then adopts a narrative approach to the individual pericopae, but a more topical approach with respect to the Gospel as a whole. When he does employ a narrative approach, this is supplemented to some extent by historical critical methods.

Marshall makes a strong case for the centrality of the theme of faith in Mark’s purpose, which he describes as “broadly pastoral.” It is “to instruct and strengthen the faith of his readers by involving them in the story of Jesus in such a way that those features of his teaching and example which Mark has chosen to narrate are experienced as directly relevant to their present needs.” This is shown in “the location of a call to faith in the programmatic summary of [Mark] 1:14.” The task is then to characterize accurately this Marcan conception of faith. Early in the study, Marshall notes that previous treatments of faith in the New Testament have made a distinction between “kerygmatic faith” (“understood as reception of the message of salvation”) and “miracle faith” (*Wunderglaube*, “confidence in and exercise of the miracle-working power of God”). However, when investigating the faith of the suppli-

130 Christopher D. Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark’s Narrative* (SNTSMS 64; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
ants in Mark’s miracle stories, he concludes “there are no real grounds […] for equating such faith with a simple *Wunderglaube*.”  His final conclusion is that there are two principal aspects to faith in Mark: “kerygmatic” faith in Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom, and “petitionary” faith in the operation of kingdom power.  For Marshall, kerygmatic faith goes beyond mere reception of a message; it is expressed ultimately in “the commitment of discipleship.” Similarly, petitionary faith goes beyond mere *Wunderglaube*: it is believing trust expressed by those seeking the operation of *kingdom* power. Importantly, kerygmatic faith and petitionary faith are inseparable: they are “two expressions of the same fundamental attitude.” This attitude is a “commitment of trust,” with God as its object, expressed as believing confidence in Jesus as the embodiment of God’s saving activity. It exists only relative to a “recognition and acceptance of one’s own human impotence.” It is an “immediate, personal investment” on the basis of a strong cognitive awareness. It is expressed in action: in repentance, in persistence and obedience. In short, faith “demands the involvement of the volitional, cognitive, and affective dimensions of the believer’s personality. It is total commitment.”

Although Hans Klein’s shorter study on Matthew’s understanding of faith was written some time before *Faith as a Theme in Mark’s Narrative*, it begins with a redaction-critical comparison with Mark, so it makes sense to consider it here. Klein notes how Matthew re-orientates his Marcan material to emphasise faith aligned on the person of Jesus. We have seen how Marshall argues this is already present in Mark’s “kerygmatic” faith, but Matthew’s changes make it even more explicitly a “faith in” (a person) rather than a “faith that.” For

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135 Marshall, *Faith in Mark*, 88 (on the faith of the suppliants in Mark 2:1–12; he reaches similar conclusions for the other suppliants).
example, Matthew removes every instance of πιστεύω in the imperative (Mk 1:15, 5:36, 11:22), both instances of πιστεύω ótì (Mk 11:23–24) and every instance of unbelief related to the disciples (preferring to use ὀλιγόπιστος). Moreover, Matthew sometimes supplements πιστεύω with εἰς ἐμε or ἐπ’ αὐτόν (Mt 18:6; 27:42) and “thereby strengthens the reference to the person of Jesus.” Klein then goes on to argue that, “In essence, then, faith is for Matthew a gift, a power, the gift of great trust and unshakable certainty that Jesus can and wants to help.” Despite Matthew’s changes, this is not so far away from Marshall’s conclusions for Mark’s Gospel.

However, what Klein’s study lacks compared to Marshall’s is a better feel for the use of the πιστ- word-group in the wider narrative context of the Gospel. Indeed, it may even be that Marshall’s approach could be improved on here too. Marshall has grouped his narrative analyses of individual pericopae into thematic categories, on the basis that “there is no internal development of the faith-theme itself.” However, it could well be that the faith-theme contributes to Mark’s narrative development more than this allows (for example, the unbelief of the disciples in Mk 4:35–8:21) and that there is a relationship between the wider narrative and the theme which is mutually informative. With respect to Matthew, we shall be pursuing the suggestion in what follows that narrative context is hugely significant for the concentration of πιστ- language in Matthew 8 and 9.

These studies therefore encourage us to push a narrative approach even further. But Marshall’s study in particular suggests there may be some advantages in taking a more expansive approach to commitment as a theme in the synoptics, along the lines of the current study. He notes a large number of thematic and lexical connections to the theme of faith in Mark. It is linked to discipleship, repentance, the response of “the heart,” prayer and “seeing.” Marshall acknowledges: “Some episodes also obviously convey the concept of faith without using the word.” It could be, then, that these connections would have been worth exploring

146 Klein, “Glaubensverständnis,” 29–32.
147 Klein, “Glaubensverständnis,” 32.
150 See sections 4.7 and 8.3.1 below.
more extensively. After all, Marshall’s final conclusion on faith is that it is “total commitment.”

GUY D. NAVE, JR. (2002).

For a relatively recent treatment of repentance in synoptic studies we shall consider briefly Guy Nave Jr.’s *The Role and Function of Repentance in Luke-Acts*. Nave notes early on that it is common for scholars to simply equate the concept of repentance with the concept of *conversion*.153 Moreover, it is frequently assumed that “there is little or no affinity between the usage of μετανοεο and μετάνοια in non-Christian literature and its usage in Christian literature.”154 He suggests the simple equation with conversion may be due to an unfounded assertion that the Jewish translators of the Hebrew scriptures used μετανοεο to translate στρέψιμο (to turn), which is actually most often translated by some compound of στρέψιμο.155 However, Nave concludes that the meaning in Luke-Acts does not differ significantly from its wider usage in Greco-Roman, Jewish and other early Christian literature. It is used to convey “a change in thinking that usually leads to a change in behaviour and or way of life.”156 It may additionally also suggest remorse or regret, an acknowledgment of inappropriate deeds or a desire to escape punishment or to be reconciled.157

Although the vocabulary of repentance is used less frequently in Matthew (with μετανοεο / μετάνοια used seven times compared to twenty-five times in Luke-Acts), there is scope for a similar re-assessment of the term. Matthean scholars have also been quick to equate repentance and conversion, as we saw with Gerhard Barth above.158 However, Nave suggests that the usage in Mark and Matthew is consistent with its wider usage.159 We shall

be suggesting in what follows that although repentance in Matthew may imply a re-orientation of life (approximating to “conversion”), or something that inevitably leads to such a change, its primary reference is to a radical change of mind concerning the state of the world following the reception of new information. That is, we shall be re-locating repentance conceptually, giving it a more foundational position.

1.3.1 Summary.
The “composite portrait” of theocentric commitment constructed above is patchy and fragmented. We have observed in the literature three ways of organising concepts related to theocentric commitment: around judgment, doing the will of God and the “new righteousness;” around discipleship; and around faith and repentance. We have found these approaches to be overlapping in significant ways and yet not fully integrated.

We have also observed some serious gaps in the treatment of what we have termed theocentric commitment. As well as material we have had to draw in from wider synoptic studies on faith and repentance, there is also relatively little attention given to the metaphors of commitment and the models of commitment in Matthew’s Gospel. Important metaphors of commitment — neglected in the material above, but worthy of our attention — include fruit-bearing, laying up treasure in heaven, entering by a narrow gate and so forth.

1.4 Research case

1.4.1 The contribution of the current study to the literature.
Given this composite picture, there would seem to be scope for making a contribution to the literature on the topic of theocentric commitment on three fronts:

First, there is the task of filling in the gaps. The treatment of faith and repentance in wider synoptic studies can be applied to Matthew. The way Matthew uses metaphor, model and analogy to depict or evoke commitment also needs to be addressed. In order to achieve some degree of comprehensiveness, the basic strategy in later chapters will be to study the concept of theocentric commitment within an overview of the whole Gospel.
Second, there is scope for methodological integration. On the whole, we have found redaction-critical studies too partial and involving too much information loss. On the other hand, narrative approaches were lacking too, in that they seemed inappropriately distant from the historical context to which the narrative relates. Narrative critical methods tend to be, as Marshall concedes in his narrative study on faith in Mark, “essentially ahistorical.” The difficulty is then that a particular theme under investigation may have its roots in the purpose of the real author, and may relate to real historical events and persons, but that all of these stand outside the narrative world of the text. There is much work to do here, and these and other issues will be the focus of our attention in chapter 2.

Thirdly, there is the task of thematic and conceptual integration. How do the different concepts employed by Matthew to depict or evoke theocentric commitment relate to one another? Significant and thorny areas to address here include the role of the disciples and the role of the repeated exhortation to do the will of God, and their function in the narrative.

1.4.2 Research questions.

The main question, then, is this: is it possible to give coherent expression to the concept of theocentric commitment in Matthew’s Gospel; and, if so, how far can we go in characterising it? Subsidiary questions are then: How does Matthew present the concept in his Gospel and give it relevance for his readers, and what language or imagery does he use to do that? How does this break down into sub-concepts and how do they relate to one another? Moreover, in giving the concept relevance, how did (or how does) Matthew intend his Gospel to function rhetorically to evoke a response of commitment in his flesh-and-blood readers?

The related methodological question is: what methods can we develop to isolate and analyse the broad theme of theocentric commitment in, and its evocation by, texts such as Matthew’s Gospel?

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1.4.3 Statement of method.

The approach taken in this study will be to treat Matthew’s Gospel as the “message” within a “communication event” between Matthew and his readers. We shall be developing a new model of text-as-component-of-communication-event, using some tools from the linguistic discipline of pragmatics. The resulting “pragmatic-critical” method will characterize the communicative equilibrium between the author and the subset of readers who process the text compliantly. These terms will be introduced and explained in chapter 2, where it will also be argued that this approach is especially appropriate for addressing the particular research questions we have in view, concerning theocentric commitment in and by means of Matthew’s Gospel. We shall argue that the method used to substantiate this thesis usefully extends existing methods of historical and narrative criticism in ways which allow us to address these research questions with greater clarity.

1.4.4 Thesis statement.

We shall argue that Matthew’s Gospel generates a communication event in which the author engages with a subset of “compliant” readers to provoke and sustain a particular kind of theocentric commitment that may be described as “incorporated Servanthood.” These readers are encouraged to infer that Jesus is engaged in a program of bringing forgiveness of sins to the people of God, and then taking his salvation out to the nations, realizing his plans for worldwide sovereignty as outlined especially in the book of Isaiah. That is, Jesus is in some way taking on the role, function or program of Isaiah’s Servant figure. Furthermore, the Gospel serves to incorporate compliant readers into this program. Compliant readers are instructed in how to participate in the program by being drawn in to stand in “constructive empathy” alongside the disciples in the narrative, as the disciples are themselves prepared for incorporation through Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom and his instruction in the great speeches. Incorporation into the Servant program means being served by the Servant for the forgiveness of sins and then commissioned to serve and teach as a distinct community in a similar but derivative and dependent pattern, incorporating further disciples and participating in the task of bringing of salvation to the nations.
1.5 Outline of the rest of the study

The argument to substantiate the thesis will proceed in two major stages. The first will be to establish and defend an appropriate method to address the particular research questions we have in view. This will be the task in chapter 2.

The second stage will be an analysis of Matthew’s Gospel, using the tools developed in part 1. This will proceed with some preliminary claims concerning Matthew’s audience, his use of the disciples in the narrative, his Christology and his eschatology (chapter 3). The detailed analysis will be contained within a narrative overview of the rhetoric of commitment in Matthew (chapters 4–7), before conclusions are drawn and implications charted.
Chapter 2

Methodology and Method

The purpose of this chapter is to defend the approach to reading and analysing Matthew that will be employed at later stages of the argument. The main characteristic of this approach is that we shall be treating the whole text of Matthew as a single message within a *communication event*. What is meant here by “communication event” will be defined more precisely below, but broadly describes a one-way interaction between a sender and a receiver within which a text is used as a communicative instrument. We shall be reminded in what follows that it is not unusual to treat written texts this way. However, the method we shall be employing is best seen as a development of such approaches, picking up features from some and perhaps extending them, while abandoning features from others. The central part of the chapter will be dedicated to this task of development. We shall find two approaches especially helpful, both from the discipline of pragmatics. These are “relevance theory” (in particular, its conception of how and why audiences “process” messages) and “game theoretic pragmatics” (in particular, its conception of successfully understood communication as arising from some sort of “equilibrium” between author and reader). Nevertheless, we shall be modifying these conceptions in important ways. The basic shape of the final form of our communication model will also share characteristics with a communication “model” we see implied within Matthew’s Gospel itself: in the (interpreted) “Parable of the Sower” of 13:3–23.

However, before we begin to pursue the concept of a “communication event,” it will be helpful to acknowledge that Matthean studies has been dominated by quite different ways of approaching the text. We shall therefore begin with a very brief historical sketch of method with respect Matthew, forming something of a rationale for having more concern for the communication event(s) Matthew’s Gospel plays a part in.
2.1 Method and Matthew: a brief introduction

In some respects there is in fact a relative uniformity of method with respect to how scholars have approached Matthew’s Gospel, a uniformity which Matthean studies shares with many other research areas. There is a procedure that begins by defining a clear research question, proceeds with a discussion of appropriate research method, and is completed by an application of the method to the question in view. This has a simple logic and transparency to it, and will be the basic approach taken in this study — this chapter being the second stage of the process. While there may be issues concerning the epistemological adequacy of this process, these are not our concern here, which is simply to note that the procedure suggests a way of dividing approaches to Matthew which seems to be (at least crudely) reflected in the way the Matthean literature has evolved over the last few decades (from, say, 1980 to the present). On the one hand, and especially at the beginning of this period, we have approaches where research questions have been dominant. These questions are broadly what might be called “historical” questions: date of composition, authorship, setting, and the like. Method is in the background — almost taken for granted.¹ On the other hand, and especially in more recent scholarship, we have approaches where method is very much in the foreground. The focus is more on how Matthew is read (a “narrative reading,” a “sociological reading,” a “feminist reading,” and so forth). The research questions are now very broad.

Writing at the beginning of the period in view, Graham Stanton has a useful few paragraphs of the questions exciting scholars in the two decades leading up to 1983:

Here are some of the questions which have been debated over the last twenty years or so. Was the evangelist himself a Jew or a Gentile? Were his Christian readers mainly Jews or Gentiles? Was Matthew’s community still under strong pressures from neighbouring Jewish synagogues? [...] Is this Gospel a record of the life and teaching

¹ It may well be that if we trace things back far enough the methods have governed what sort of questions get asked, such that in some implicit way they are dominant. However, even if that is so, method has slipped to the back of the discussion.
of Jesus as the central period of salvation history — a period of past time which has now been replaced by “the time of the church”? Or is Matthew using his account of the actions and words of Jesus to address directly Christian readers of his own day? Does Matthew have a distinctive understanding of the significance of Jesus?²

These are kind of questions we find recurring in the literature from this period. There are questions of theology here, but they are subsidiary to the historical questions. Stanton’s own survey article, which deals with the period from 1945 to 1980, shows that this research agenda is in continuity with Matthean scholarship since the second world war.³ The main concern is how best to characterize the “Matthean community.”⁴ The theological emphases of the Gospel (isolated through the tools of redaction criticism) are seen relative to the “needs” of this community, and the purpose of the Gospel is seen as the purpose for this community.⁵ Likewise, R.T. France (1989) begins with explicitly historical questions (to which he gives mostly uncertain answers) before turning to the theological character of the Gospel.⁶ At neither point does he describe or discuss at any length the methods he is using to reach his conclusions. However, once again, the purpose of the Gospel is seen relative to original historical setting (that is, relevant for a particular group, or for particular groups, at the time of its composition), although France thinks it unlikely that Matthew was writing for a single purpose into a single situation.⁷

The first edition of the survey of Matthean scholarship by Donald Senior published in 1983 suggests this focus on original historical setting was widely adopted around this time.⁸ Senior’s foundational chapter is indeed on the historical setting of Matthew’s Gospel — he comments: “A good portion of Matthean studies in the past twenty-five years has concen-

³ Stanton, “Origin and Purpose.”
⁵ Stanton, “Origin and Purpose,” 1921–42.
⁸ D. Senior, What Are They Saying About Matthew? (New York: Paulist, 1983).
trated on this question.”

Having considered sources and structure, Senior then summarises the state of Matthean scholarship according to the answers it has given to questions beginning, “What is Matthew’s view of ... ?” — covering the issues of salvation history, the Old Testament, the Law, Christ and the church. There is a revealing comment towards the end of the survey, as Senior is talking about why it is necessary to deduce Matthew’s vision of the church from the characters and events of Matthew’s story. Senior says, “Matthew’s story is a story from the past but its intent is contemporary to the life of the evangelist and his community.”

That is, in order to answer questions such as “What is Matthew’s view of the church?” and so forth, the role of the critic is to reconstruct the lives of Matthew and his community by inferring it from the story — a programme pursued in almost all the studies Senior cites.

We find the same overall approach in one of the most significant commentaries on Matthew’s Gospel in recent decades. At the conclusion of their three volume study, W.D. Davies and Dale Allison address a very similar set of questions in “Matthew: a retrospect,” questions which are also focussed on the nature of Matthew’s “community.”

However, what is clear is that there was a marked change in Matthean studies in the period between the mid 1980s and the mid 1990s. By the time we get to the survey by David

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9 Senior, What Are They Saying About Matthew? 5. His summary conclusion is: “The evangelist wrote for a group of Christians who were undergoing a transformation from a predominately Jewish-Christian church to an increasingly Gentile church, from a church whose roots and cultural origin were Palestinian to a church plunged into the midst of the Roman empire. The destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans signalled the end of the form of Judaism known to Jesus and to the earliest apostolic Church. Both Judaism and Jewish Christianity had to strike a new course. This search for identity and for continuity within discontinuity seems to have been one of the primary purposes of Matthew’s Gospel.” What Are They Saying About Matthew? 15. “The discussion on the milieu of the Gospel (chapter 1) gives some idea about the probable atmosphere and make-up of Matthew’s community: an urban, prosperous, Greek-speaking church composed of Jews and Gentiles, caught up in the tension of a critical transition moment.” What Are They Saying About Matthew? 67.

10 Senior, What Are They Saying About Matthew? 67.

11 W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison, “Matthew: A Retrospect,” in A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew: Vol. 3, Matthew 19–28 (W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison; London: T&T Clark, 1997), 692–727. On the question of setting, Davies and Allison suggest that the Gospel was a conscious response to the Jamnian Judaism emerging in the decades after AD70. As Pharisaism “sought to re-establish the unity of the Jewish people in terms of the written and oral Torah,” so Matthew was seeking to do something similar around the story and teaching of Jesus. Matthew is a pastor, drawing on, exegeting and applying the texts he has access to, building a “pastoral theology” to guide a community.
Bauer and Mark Allen Powell (1996), the emphasis has clearly shifted. Method is now dominant. Gone is the confidence with which R.T. France, say, could keep methodological discussion in the background until the issues forced them to the fore. Bauer and Powell divide methods according to their focus: composition (focused on the choices of the author or editor, as in source or redaction criticism), narration (focused on the text) and reception (focused on the reader). Taking a different organising principle, Janice Capel Anderson reviews several “new currents” in Matthean scholarship from 1983 to 1993, dividing them into three: literary, social scientific and feminist. But, again, the organising principle is method.

Of these, literary critical methods have had a great impact, spawning a vast literature over the last two decades. In contrast to the historical approaches, the emphasis is now on (the final form of) the text. Indeed, Frank Matera goes so far as to say in his introduction to the narrative critical analysis of plot, “While it is legitimate and often necessary to relate a Gospel to its historical setting to determine the evangelist’s theological intention, this is neither necessary nor permissible in plot analysis. The investigation of plot confines itself to the story world which the text creates” (my emphasis). We shall be critiquing in what follows this assumption that a text such as a Gospel can be so divorced from the history to which it refers, in which it was written and in which it is first read. Nevertheless, the approach taken in this study will have many points of contact with narrative criticism, as we shall outline below in section 2.3.6.

There has also been an explosion of studies addressing Matthew from either a social scientific standpoint, or using social scientific methods. One way of categorising these is to

13 The change is also reflected to some extent in the second edition of David Senior’s survey, What Are They Saying About Matthew? (2nd ed.; New York: Paulist), published in 1996. Senior has expanded his survey with more examples from literary and social science criticism, although the overall format still conforms to the older emphases in Matthean studies.
15 Frank J. Matera, “The Plot of Matthew’s Gospel,” CBQ 49 (1987): 234 cf. Kingsbury, Matthew as Story, 2: “When one reads Matthew, one temporarily takes leave of one’s familiar world of reality and enters into another world that is autonomous in its own right.”
distinguish between the branches of social science from which they originate.\textsuperscript{16} However, we may also simply make distinctions between the broad ways in which these methods are applied. A study such as Overman (1990), for example, straightforwardly takes up the concern of historical criticism to characterize the “Matthean community,” but uses social scientific language and methods to do so.\textsuperscript{17} On the other hand, a study such as Malina and Neyrey (1998) proceeds by applying a limited number of specific social science models to the situations depicted in Matthew.\textsuperscript{18} One of these, for example, is a model of witchcraft originally developed by anthropologist Mary Douglas in research on sorcery accusations in Africa, and which the authors apply to the accusations against Jesus in Matthew chapter 12.\textsuperscript{19} The authors are aware that this approach is “etic” (i.e. imposed from outside), but claim that this helps contemporary readers to read Matthew sympathetically, as they understand better the social system pertaining at the time.\textsuperscript{20}

We may say, therefore, that approaches to studying Matthew have bifurcated. The historical focus which began the period in view continues, albeit in a developed form, in those studies which draw on methods from the social sciences or anthropology. Alongside this stands the quite different approach of narrative criticism. While it is hard to establish a complete set of criteria for assessing these different approaches to reading and analysing Matthew, we can nevertheless identify in both branches some clear methodological dangers.

The first is the danger of an overly restricted research agenda. To ask questions concerning historical circumstance may address one set of interests, but only to ask such ques-

\textsuperscript{18} Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, Calling Jesus Names: The Social Value of Labels in Matthew (Sonoma, California: Polebridge, 1988).
tions must surely leave many dimensions of the text unexplored. The text then becomes merely, as Matera puts it, “a means to a further end, [...] a window through which one views another reality.” The historical questions may also depend on speculative assumptions to the point of making them foundational. Predominant here is the concept of the “Matthean community” adopted by most historical criticism and taken up in the social science critical literature. (We shall return to this issue at section 3.1 below.)

The second is the danger of historical unrootedness. Narrative critics are aware of flesh-and-blood authors and readers as well as implied authors and readers, and aware of the movement from the “real” world to the world of the narrative and back again, but in practice the separation between the two is kept very large. That said, it is not quite fair to say that, in the application of narrative critical methods, every text is treated as a work of fiction. Mark Allen Powell makes the point that all literature has referential and poetic functions. A Gospel may therefore be read legitimately in terms of its poetic function, using narrative critical tools designed for that task. However, if we thereby ignore its referential function, and a significant reference to real history intended by its author, then again it may be that important dimensions of the text are left unexplored.

The third is the danger of anachronism: employing contemporary methods, models, concepts and language to a first century text in an inappropriate manner, such that the first century voice is almost completely obscured. We shall be arguing later in this chapter that it is possible to apply contemporary methods to Matthew and yield meaningful results that are not destructively anachronistic. However, to justify this, it is necessary to establish a degree of continuity between the contemporary situation for which the method was designed and the situation to which it is applied with respect to Matthew (or some means of translating

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21 Matera, “Plot,” 234.
22 In Roman Jakobson’s model of communication, the context of a verbal message is expressed through its referential function; the message itself functions through its poetic function. Roman Jakobson, “Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics,” in Style in Language (ed. Thomas Sebeok; Cambridge: Technology Press, 1960), 350–77. See also below, section 2.2.2.
23 Mark Allan Powell, What is Narrative Criticism? (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 94.
24 See below, section 2.3.1.
between the two). It is not obvious, for example, that the Malina and Neyrey study cited above avoids the danger here.\textsuperscript{25}

In response to these potential dangers, the approach we are going to take in this study is to work under an understanding of written texts as components of \textit{communication events}. A communication event is a concept broad enough to encompass a range of possibilities as to the intended recipients of the text, without having to assume or characterise a certain “Matthean community.” Moreover, by approaching Matthew as part of a communication event, we are already emphasising that it takes place within a historical context, and may well have \textit{real purpose} within that context. There is potential, then, to avoid the historical unrootedness that may be an issue with mere narrative approaches. Furthermore, although we shall be employing social science methods (in particular, from the theory of games), by applying them to the broad concept of the communication event we are more likely to avoid anachronism than we would, say, in applying them to the kinds of historically specific cultural phenomena investigated under social science criticism. A piece of first-century text may be conceived as part of \textit{some sort of} act of interpersonal communication which we may relate helpfully to similar interpersonal communication across cultures and history.

\textbf{2.2 Conceiving the communication event: from ordinary language philosophy to game theoretic pragmatics}

We shall shortly be outlining a model of communication that will be used later in this study. However, this model builds upon a whole family of approaches to literary analysis that take the communication event seriously. We shall therefore begin with a brief overview of the recent history of such approaches — beginning with the “ordinary language philosophers” of Cambridge and Oxford in the 1950s and 60s, and ending with the budding field of “game theoretic pragmatics.” The aim here is neither to provide a comprehensive assessment of each approach, nor even a complete description, but rather to indicate at each step what the approach may usefully contribute to our communication model.

\textsuperscript{25} We shall return to the issue of anachronism in section 2.3.1.
2.2.1 *Ordinary language philosophy.*

The distinctive claim of what has become known as “ordinary language philosophy” is that language can only be understood in relation to its *use*. Kevin Vanhoozer suggests that if the movement had had a motto, it might well have been “There is nothing (e.g. no utterance, no text) outside a context.”26 Language is social in nature: it is *used* in the interaction between people in certain social situations.

LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN (1953).

One of the concerns of Wittgenstein, to take a prominent example, in his treatment of language in the *Philosophical Investigations* was to call attention (as Thiselton notes) “to the close connection between language and life; to speaking as an activity.”27 Wittgenstein himself sometimes expressed this in terms of language-games: “the term ‘language-game’ is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a life-form.”28 What he meant by a “language-game” (*Sprachspiel*) is subtle.29 On the one hand, a language-game is a thought experiment, invented to explore a linguistic issue in a framework that is simpler than our “highly complicated everyday language.”30 For example, Wittgenstein describes a language-game, to be conceived as a “complete primitive language,” in which a builder communicates with his assistant by calling out words such as “block,” “pillar,” “slab” or “beam” and the assistant “brings out the stone which he has learnt to bring at


such-and-such a call.” On the other hand, a language-game is used to describe some aspect of actual linguistic usage, such as “giving orders, and obeying them,” “describing the appearance of an object,” “reporting an event” and so forth. Either way, one purpose of the language-game concept would seem to be a way of maintaining that language is situational — “Like any other game, a language-game is ‘played’ in a setting.”

Although the terminology is similar, Wittgenstein’s approach is different, though related, to the game-theoretic approach to language that will play a more central role in the communication model to be used in this study. As we shall see, game-theoretic pragmatics pursues a narrower and more formal analogy between language and games, one which emphasises the interactive and strategic nature of language exchange. However, when we come to put the model into practice we shall find it necessary to recall the richness of the analogy that Wittgenstein makes between language and games, especially with regard to the issue of complexity (of both games and language). Wittgenstein’s flexible use of the language-game concept will also be a reminder that it may be neither necessary nor desirable to model communication events with strict formality.

JOHN LANGSHORE AUSTIN (1955).

The claim that meaning is a social phenomenon also lies at the heart of speech-act theory, as pioneered by the Oxford philosopher J. L. Austin and outlined in his William James Lectures at Harvard University of 1955. Austin begins by considering what he calls a “performative”: an utterance in which “to say something is to do something.” Clear examples cited by Austin include saying “I do” in a marriage ceremony; “I name this ship [...]” when formally

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34 A formality we shall suggest below gets excessively cumbersome under game-theoretic pragmatics.
36 Although the words in the marriage ceremony of the *Book of Common Prayer* are actually “I will,” Austin’s point remains — and in any case saying “I do” rather than “I will” in an actual ceremony, even if it raised a few eyebrows, would probably not lead to an “unhappy” result (to use Austin’s terminology).
naming a ship; and “I give and bequeath my watch to [...]” as occurring in a will. These explicit performatives are initially held to contrast with “constative” utterances, which are propositional statements. Constative utterances are said to be either true or false, while performatives are either “happy” (the act is completed successfully) or “unhappy” (the act fails due to some kind of “infelicity”). However, it quickly becomes clear that Austin is unsure about the performative-constative distinction, and sees the need for a fresh approach. This is his summary at the beginning of Lecture 10:

Forgetting for the time the initial distinction between performatives and constatives and the programme of finding a list of explicit performative words, notably verbs, we made a fresh start by considering the senses in which to say something is to do something. Thus we distinguished the locutionary act [...] which has a meaning; the illocutionary act which has a certain force in saying something; the perlocutionary act which is the achieving of certain effects by saying something.

The peculiar terminology of speech-act theory can be explained by way of an example. Consider the following text. (This is not an example from Austin, but we shall find it helpful both here and to come back to.) It is based on a Buddhist folktale known as the Daddabha Jātaka (No. 322), and is slightly augmented here to make the speech-act at the centre of the story more explicit:

Once a timid hare lying at the foot of a vilva tree heard a vilva fruit fall on a palm-leaf and, imagining that the world was collapsing, started to run. As the hare ran, he shouted, “Run, for the world is collapsing!” Other animals, alarmed by the sight and

37 Austin, How to Do Things with Words, 5.
38 Austin, How to Do Things with Words, 14–24.
39 Austin, How to Do Things with Words, 121.
40 We shall find that the “timid hare” fable works in some ways as an antitype of how Matthew’s Gospel functions (at least at one level) and hence, perhaps surprisingly, it will provide a useful foil to the analysis later in our study.
41 And may form the basis of many similar folktales, including that of “Chicken Licken” and its many variants.
the shouting, ran also until all the beasts of the forest were in headlong flight. The Bodhisatta, born as a lion, heard their story and calmed their fears.\footnote{Cited from Viggo Fausbøll, ed., \textit{Buddhist Birth Stories: Or, Jātaka Tales} (trans. Thomas William Rhys Davids; International Folklore; New York: Arno Press, 1977), 3:74 The original adds, “The story was related in reference to a question asked of the Buddha by some monks, as to various austerities practised by ascetics.” The Jātaka Tales date from around the sixth century BC to the third century AD.}

The locutionary act within the tale is: the hare said, “Run, for the world is collapsing!”\footnote{We may note, as we do so, the similarities to the prominent speech-act within the narrative of Matthew: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near” (3:2, 4:17) — without necessarily suggesting that the nearness of the kingdom is to be equated with the collapse of the world.}

The illocutionary act performed by the hare has the “illocutionary force” of advice, warning or urging. Austin classifies such utterances under the category of \textit{exercitives} — “An exercitive is the giving of a decision in favour of or against a certain course of action, or advocacy of it.”\footnote{Austin, \textit{How to Do Things with Words}, 155.} If the utterance had been a simple clause such as “Run!” or “The world is collapsing!” we could have left it at that. However, we could say that in the clause complex “Run, for the world is collapsing!” the clause “the world is collapsing” has more of what Austin calls an \textit{expositive} force — “Expositives are used in acts of exposition involving the expounding of views, the conducting of arguments, and the clarifying of usages and of references.”\footnote{Austin, \textit{How to Do Things with Words}, 161.} However, in his original lectures, Austin does not address how the clauses within a clause complex work together to give illocutionary force.

The perlocutionary act (or effect) on “all the beasts of the forest” (apart from the Bodhisatta) was to alert them and prompt them to run for their lives.

Austin was keen to distinguish carefully between the illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. The illocutionary act of warning in our example does not depend upon the beasts running for their lives. If the beasts had ignored the timid hare, then the illocutionary act would still have been performed, so long as there had been “uptake” — i.e. the beasts had understood the “meaning and force” of the locution.\footnote{Austin, \textit{How to Do Things with Words}, 117.} Even though, in such a case, the illocutionary act did not achieve its “perlocutionary object” it may nonetheless have produced a
“perlocutionary sequence” such as bringing the beasts to shake their heads at the hare’s gullibility.

So in speech-act theory, understanding the meaning of a locution does not depend upon that utterance successfully achieving the speaker’s “perlocutionary object.” To use different language, understanding by the listener does not depend upon the speaker being successful in his purpose. Nevertheless, what the speaker is doing in making the utterance does have a bearing on understanding, although quite what bearing is disputed, and different speech-act theorists express this in different ways. As we have seen, Austin talks of “uptake,” and understanding the “meaning and force” of a locution. Paul Grice, on the other hand, says that understanding depends upon the hearer recognising the speaker’s intention. Grice put his original formulation like this:

“A meant_{NN} something by x” is (roughly) equivalent to “A intended the utterance of x to produce some effect in an audience by means of the recognition of this intention.”

Indeed, Grice adds immediately, to ask what the speaker “meant” is “to ask for a specification of the intended effect.” This definition has proved to be contentious. For example, John Searle thinks this makes meaning too dependent on the perlocutionary effect the speaker manages to achieve in his audience. For Searle, meaning should be located in the illocutionary act of the speaker. That is, Grice’s definition of meant_{NN} risks blurring the distinction between illocutions and perlocutions. Searle therefore prefers to talk about understanding as achieving an “illocutionary effect.” Despite the objections, we shall be returning to some of the strengths of Grice’s analysis under “relevance theory” and “game-theoretic pragmatics” below. For the moment we may note that Searle’s alternative formulation also risks blurring things, since one of the main distinctions between illocutions and perlocutions

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47 Austin, How to Do Things with Words, 118.
48 H.P. Grice, “Meaning,” Philosophical Review 66, no. 3 (1957): 385. Grice uses the terminology meant_{NN} to designative “non-natural meaning”; that is, meaning that is not merely a natural sign within a system of reference (“Meaning,” 577–78).
is that the former have *force* while the latter have *effect*. We may conclude at this stage that although speech-act theory has made a useful distinction between illocutionary force and perlocutionary effect (and we shall want to maintain that distinction), it does struggle to maintain this distinction in describing the fine detail of *understanding* a locution within the communicative event.\(^{50}\)

There is nonetheless at least some potential in speech-act theory to make a fallacy of the “intentional fallacy.” It is worth remembering here that the “intentional fallacy” as elaborated by Wimsatt and Beardsley in their 1946 article was a claim that “the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art.”\(^{51}\) We may note, first, that the authors are in part writing in reaction to Romanticism and its critical descendants, where, as Tim Ward puts it, “the text is seen as a window into the mind and soul of artists whose extraordinary insight into the world allows lesser mortals to lift their eyes occasionally from the pettiness of everyday life.”\(^{52}\) If we are interested in communication events, then we can agree that Romanticism construes the author in an inappropriate way. Secondly, Wimsatt and Beardsley were concerned with standards “for judging the success of a work of literary art,” but the argument implicit in their critique seems to have been extended in subsequent discussion to something more fundamental. That is, because we cannot fully reconstruct the mind of the author (especially from the limited data of a written text), then the author must be irrelevant to the *meaning or interpretation* of a text.

However, with respect to this extended argument, what speech-act theory does is *recast* the author: rather than being an object of critical investigation, he or she becomes a *communicative agent*. Viewed this way, we may need to discern enough of the context of a communication event to see what an author is *doing* with a text, but we do not need to

\(^{50}\) We shall return to this issue in sections 2.2.2 to 2.2.4 below, and find some resolution to it in the game-theoretic concept of “equilibrium” applied to the interaction between speaker and audience.


psychologize — to see “deep” into his or her mind. Moreover, it now looks perilous to ignore the author’s intentions completely. This is most obvious with spoken speech-acts. We may well wonder whether the beasts of the forest in our example folktale have understood the meaning of the words “The world is collapsing!” unless they have also formed some opinion on what the hare is doing — whether that may be engaging in the act of warning, playing a practical joke, or whatever.53 Perhaps it is less obvious with written speech acts. With written texts, the on-going connection between author and locution is more complex. Speech-act theory does encourage us to remember that the author was performing an action of some sort, an action which may go beyond mere declaration, when he or she wrote — in a manner at least analogous to direct speech. Text is, as Ricoeur puts it, “any discourse fixed by writing.”54 However, we may fairly criticise speech-act theory in its undeveloped form for leaving the degree of on-going involvement by the author in a written communication act somewhat vague.55

53 Sperber and Wilson go so far as to describe the importance of recognizing intentions within communication as “common sense.” They claim the idea that communication exploits the “ability of humans to attribute intentions to each other should be quite intelligible, and even appealing.” Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, Relevance: Communication and Cognition (The Language and Thought Series; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1986), 24–25.


55 Speech-act theory has indeed failed to squash completely doubts about whether authorial intention is relevant to the understanding of written texts. Ricoeur himself is aware of speech-act theory (e.g., in “The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation,” in Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences [ed. and trans. John B. Thompson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981], 134), but questions the on-going relevance of the author once a discourse has been “fixed” by writing. He is unsure that this also fixes its meaning: “To begin with, writing renders the text autonomous with respect to the intention of the author. What the text signifies no longer coincides with what the author meant [...]” Ricoeur, “Distanciation,” 139. Jacques Derrida goes further, saying that writing as a concept may be “no longer comprehensible in terms of communication, at least in the limited sense of a transmission of meaning.” Jacques Derrida and Samuel Weber, “Signature Event Context,” in Limited Inc.: Supplement to Glyph 2 (trans. Samuel Weber; Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 3. His critique of speech-act theory mirrors Wimsatt and Beardsley’s critique of Romanticism. Just as they sought to show that an author is never fully knowable, so Derrida’s aim is to demonstrate that “a context is never absolutely determinable, or rather, [...] its determination can never be entirely certain or saturated” (“Signature Event Context,” 3). Writing in particular is characterised by a distance between sender and receiver: “The absence of the sender, of the receiver [destinateur], from the mark that he abandons, and which cuts itself off from him and continues to produce effects independently of his presence and of the present actuality of his intentions [vouloir-dire], indeed even after his death, his absence, which moreover belongs to the structure of all writing — and I shall add further on, of all language in general” (“Signature Event Context,” 5). This results in “the disqualification or the limiting of the concept of context, whether ‘real’ or ‘linguistic,’ inasmuch as its rigorous theoretical determination as well as its empirical saturation is rendered impossible or insufficient.
The application and development of speech-act theory has been taken on with enthusiasm by a number of theologians concerned with the doctrine of Scripture. A prominent example is Kevin Vanhoozer, who takes speech-act theory as one of the foundations for his theology of authorial communicative action. He follows Ricoeur by taking a text as “communicative action fixed by writing,” but goes further in suggesting that thereby “authors are indeed ‘incarnate’ in their texts.” That is, texts have illocutionary force inscribed or embodied within themselves.

Speech-act theory has even had some limited impact on actual exegetical practice. Dietmar Neufeld has attempted a speech-act analysis of selected passages in 1 John. For example, in the *incipit* (1 John 1:1–4) Neufeld finds the language “reflects the activity of *proclamation* and *testifying*.” The “thrust of his proclamation is made clear by the various speech acts in which he engages,” and the illocutionary force of these acts combine to “create a world view wherein the cash value of theology is seen in the ethical conduct of the reader in

by writing” (“Signature Event Context,” 9). In response, John Searle, “Literary Theory and Its Discontents,” *New Literary History* 25, no. 3 (1994): 639, is frustrated by what he sees as an “all-or-nothing” argument and “Derrida’s ignorance of the current philosophical commonplace.” However, the question of how and how much we can know about the context of a written speech-act from the text itself nonetheless remains a live one, and one we shall return to in sections 2.3 and 3.1.


Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning?* 229.

Vanhoozer then draws upon and develops the meaning/significance distinction of E. D. Hirsch Jr., “Objective Interpretation,” *PMLA* 75, no. 4 (1960): 463–79. To understand the meaning of the text is to have considered the completed communicative action of its author and grasped its illocutionary force. To experience the significance of a text is to experience the ongoing consequences of the completed communicative action of its author, either intended by the author (perlocutions) or unintended (accidents). Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning?* 260–62. Note that this differs from Austin’s original terminology, where the perlocutionary effect intended by the author is called the “perlocutionary object,” with “perlocutionary sequel” used more for unintended effects. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 118. For Austin, “perlocutions” on its own encompasses any effect on the listener, whether intended or unintended. For Vanhoozer, what constitutes the context in which the illocutionary force of Scripture can be discerned is set by “the canon, taken as a unified communicative act,” behind which stands God as “divine author.” *Is There a Meaning?* 265. We shall return to these issues in sections 2.2.2, 2.3.3 and 2.3.4 below.

the *kosmos*." However, a distinctive feature of this study is the relative infrequency with which speech-act concepts are employed. Beyond the reminder the one may interpret a text “in terms not only of its historical roots but also in terms of its rhetorical power to transform the readers’ expectations, speech and conduct,” speech-act theory provides surprisingly little practical help for the exegete.61

When we turn, shortly, to the communication model to be used in this study, we shall be adopting the basic structure of communication event suggested by speech-act theory, and we shall find some of the terminology useful both within the model and in the subsequent analysis. There are also aspects of Austin’s original conception that have been relatively neglected, such as the distinction between “unhappy” and “happy” speech-acts, and we shall make use of these later.62 However, there is much to develop. How do clauses work together to give illocutionary force? There is more to be said, for example, on the illocutionary force of telling a story (or history). How can we distinguish better between degrees of understanding (and relate these to authorial intention and purpose)? To what extent is the speech-act context and illocutionary force actually “embedded” in a text?

2.2.2 Literary models.

**ROMAN JAKOBSON (1960), WAYNE BOOTH (1966) AND SEYMOUR CHATMAN (1978).**

Roman Jakobson does not refer to Austin, but he does talk about the “speech event,” and there are some basic similarities in his much used communication model to speech-act

theory.\textsuperscript{63} The model describes a communication event as produced by an \textit{addresser}, who relates a \textit{message} to an \textit{addressee} in a certain (historical) \textit{context}; the addressee has a certain \textit{contact} with the message, such as a manuscript, and the message is conveyed in a certain \textit{code}, such as a language. This can be diagrammed thus:

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
  \node[align=center] (context) at (0,0) {CONTEXT};
  \node[align=center] (addressee) at (3,0) {ADDRESSEE};
  \node[align=center] (message) at (1.5,0) {MESSAGE};
  \node[align=center] (addresser) at (0,-1.5) {ADDRESSEE};
  \node[align=center] (contact) at (1.5,-1.5) {CONTACT};
  \node[align=center] (code) at (0,-3) {CODE};

  \draw[->] (context) -- (message);
  \draw[->] (message) -- (addressee);
  \draw[->] (context) -- (contact);
  \draw[->] (contact) -- (code);
  \draw[->] (code) -- (addressee);
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

Jakobson goes on to relate each of the components of the model to a language-function. It is a model that has had an extended influence. For example, when Mark Allen Powell observes in an SBL seminar paper that literary analysis depends ultimately on “an understanding of books as communication events,” he is drawing primarily on this model. He adds that, “Virtually all models of literary criticism are indebted to communication theory” of this kind.\textsuperscript{64} We can see the same basic pattern, for example, in the narrative-critical model developed by Wayne Booth and pictured by Seymour Chatman like this:\textsuperscript{65}

\begin{center}
_____________________
\end{center}


On the addresser side of the communication event we have the real author of a text (often termed the “flesh-and-blood” author). In the middle, the message is conveyed by the text. On the addressee side, we have the real (“flesh-and-blood”) reader. The “implied author” is the author’s personality as “reconstructed by the reader from the narrative.” Opposite this stands the “implied reader.” We met a number of alternative definitions of “implied reader” in chapter 1 above; Chatman simply talks about “the audience presupposed by the narrative itself.”

PAUL HERNANDI (1976).

These elements are incorporated into an even more sophisticated model by Paul Hernandi in a 1976 paper for the journal Critical Inquiry. Hernandi actually presents a series of communication models, of increasing complexity. These are interesting in that they distinguish between a (horizontal) “rhetorical axis of communication” and a (vertical) “mimetic axis of representation.” The third of the four “maps” provided by Hernandi looks like this:

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This “map” is a sophisticated and helpful integration of a wide range of concepts in the philosophy of language, linguistics and literary theory. It summarizes much of our discussion thus far, and will be a useful point of reference. However, we shall see that it also suggests the need for further integration.

67 Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 150.
69 Hernandi, “A Compass for Critics,” 381.
The vertical “mimetic axis of representation” illustrates the approach to language as a sign system, and Hernandi draws ideas here from both Saussure and Plato. Working from bottom to top: there is a worldwide reservoir of potential signs out of which there is a “continuous making and remaking of language systems.” A given system of language (langue) then provides the resources for naming things in specific acts of saying or speaking (parole). All this is presupposed within the work in view, which evokes one of many potential corresponding “mimetic messages” or sets of images, representing objects by designating them within a certain view of the world. That is, we may say that words “design or help to design aspects of an imaginary world within which it is possible to name, signify, evoke and mentally represent” certain things. Finally, the world-view thus generated may then be matched against “the available totality of rival views of the world.” The overall movement is thus from potential signs to representable worlds.

Without going into the details of this scheme, we can agree with Robert Fowler that most modern biblical scholarship that has been “historical” or “theological” in orientation has focussed on this axis. “More precisely, it has focussed on the [...] north end of the mimetic axis.” That is, the concern has been with the historical world represented by the work in view — or, failing that, the theological world-view it implies.

The horizontal “rhetorical axis of communication” in Herandi’s Map 3 can be seen as an attempt to integrate much of our discussion of speech-act theory with the communication model assumed by narrative criticism, such as that of Seymour Chatman discussed above. The overall movement is from the motivations for communicative acts (on the left) to the active effects of communicative acts (on the right). Circumstances provide what Hernandi

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calls “pre-locutionary input,” bringing the actual author to perform the communicative act with the aim of achieving certain outcomes, specified by his “perlocutionary intention.”

Hernandi then shifts to talking about the implied author. That is, the actual author takes on a stance or persona as he writes, such that it is through this persona that the communication is performed with a certain illocutionary force.

The model is perhaps a little less clear on the right side of the axis. Hernandi has the implied reader performing “uptake,” which is Austin’s term to describe a hearer understanding a locution and perceiving its illocutionary force. What Hernandi actually says at this point is, “The implied author and the implied reader thus emerge from the text to the extent of an actual reader’s inclination to personify what he perceives as the ultimate origin and destination of the text’s illocutionary force.”

How the actual reader comes to perform “uptake” and understand the work through this “personification” is not transparent.

However, as we move to the right along this axis, once uptake (of some sort) has happened, the work then has some sort of perlocutionary impact on the actual reader, which corresponds to the perlocutionary intention of the actual author but may not match it (depending upon the “success” of the communicative act from the actual author’s point of view). Depending on the reader’s (or readers’) subsequent actions or inaction, the communicative act will then result in a “post-locutionary outcome”, a “certain post-locutionary effect on the world.”

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75 Recall that Austin’s terminology was “perlocutionary object.” We could also talk of authorial purpose.
76 The shift allows for such rhetorical devices as irony or deliberately unreliable narration. Hernandi, “A Compass for Critics,” 376, n11.
77 Hernandi, “A Compass for Critics,” 376.
78 Hernandi, “A Compass for Critics,” 383. Hernandi does not expand greatly on “post-locutionary outcome” but we may take it that this will encompass what Austin called the “perlocutionary sequel” or what Vanhoozer calls “unforeseen consequences” — “accidents, unintended significance.” Austin, How to Do Things with Words, 118; Vanhoozer, Is There a Meaning? 261. Or to put it as David Hirsch might put it, the “post-locutionary outcome” concerns the domain of application of a text, which is split (in his revised understanding) between “meaning and significance.” E. D. Hirsch Jr., “Meaning and Significance Reinterpreted,” Critical Inquiry 11, no. 2 (1984): 215. (We shall return to the boundaries of the meaning/significance distinction below, sections 2.3.3 and 2.3.4.)
While we may wonder quite how helpful or successful Hernandi’s integration of speech-act and narrative theories has been, that is not the main issue here. The main issue is that in this conception of a text the axis of communication does not overlap with the mimetic axis of representation. They stand as two disconnected ways of looking at a text. This is despite the fact that Hernandi himself is very much aware that these two axes are mutually dependent: “human communication is unthinkable without representation and vice versa.”
Even more strongly: “To speak metaphorically, that stalwart horizontal axis of communication would break down right in the middle without the friendly support it receives from the vertical axis of representation.”

The challenge for the communication model we are building in this chapter is therefore to relate these two ways of thinking about a text much more closely.

2.2.3 Relevance theory.

DAN SPERBER AND DEIRDRE WILSON (1986).

One potential resource for making progress in this task may lie in relevance theory. This is an inferential approach to pragmatics that has its roots in Paul Grice’s treatment of meaning and his focus on the recognition of a speaker’s intentions, especially as it was expanded into an theory of conversation in Grice’s William James Lectures of 1967. According to Sperber and Wilson, “Grice laid the foundations for an inferential model of communication [...] in which] a communicator provides evidence of her intention to convey a certain meaning, which is inferred by the audience on the basis of the evidence provided.”

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79 There are a number of other questions one could raise concerning it: such as why there is only one actual reader on the horizontal axis.
80 However, the figure does have a rotational symmetry that allows Hernandi to make analogies between elements on different axes: e.g. between langue and the actual author. “A Compass for Critics,” 372.
81 Hernandi, “A Compass for Critics,” 373.
1986 proposal by comparing and contrasting this “inferential approach” with what they call the “code model” of verbal communication:

A code, as we will use the term, is a system which pairs messages with signals, enabling two information-processing devices (organisms or machines) to communicate. A message is a representation internal to the communicating devices. A signal is a modification of the external environment which can be produced by one device and recognized by the other.  

The hypothesis underlying the code model is that verbal utterances encode thoughts. They comment that beginning with Saussure the task of the semiotician is to reconstruct the “system of signs that express ideas.” (This links to our previous discussion: the task of the semiotician relates to the vertical axis of Hernandi’s Map 3 discussed above, p.58.) While this may be an element of how some utterances communicate thoughts, Sperber and Wilson regard it as “descriptively inadequate”; that is, “comprehension involves more than the decoding of a linguistic signal.” Their final assessment is that the programme “has been one of simultaneous institutional success and intellectual bankruptcy.”

The basic shape of Sperber and Wilson’s alternative model can be pictured like this:

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86 Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance*, 7.
88 Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance*, 7.
The figure shows an interaction between a “communicator” and his or her “audience.” The communicator performs some sort of informative act which forms an input to the cognitive processes of an audience within some context. The “context” is seen from the point of view of an individual, and in their 1986 book Sperber and Wilson use here the language of “cognitive environment”: a set of assumptions concerning the world which this individual takes as true or probably true. They seem to be talking here about some sort of mental representation of the world or “worldview” — what we broadly might describe as “beliefs.” Processing the input (shown here at the centre of the figure) in a context results in a new context (at the base of the figure). Quite how this happens we shall consider below, but it is taken that this incurs a cost: a “processing effort.” If the new context differs from the original, then the input has had a “cognitive” or “contextual” effect. This could be, for example, a “contextual implication”: a conclusion which can be made neither from context alone, nor from the input alone, but only from context and input combined. Other kinds of cognitive effect include strengthening, revising or abandoning one or more existing assumptions in response to the input. In later work, Sperber and Wilson clarify their model with the concept of a positive cognitive effect. A positive cognitive effect is one deemed “worthwhile” to the audience — “a true conclusion, for example.”

Hence, in the basic model illustrated in the figure, the audience processes inputs with the aim of producing positive cognitive effects, but at a certain effort or processing cost. The greater the positive cognitive effect relative to the processing cost, the more the input is said to be relevant to an individual.

With the basic features of the model in place, Sperber and Wilson then move to characterize actual communication so far as they can. They begin by considering the communication from the communicator’s point of view. Here they build upon what they call in later

89 Sperber and Wilson, Relevance, 39.
90 Sperber and Wilson, Relevance, 108.
91 Wilson and Sperber, “Relevance Theory,” 608; Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, “Postface,” in Relevance: Communication and Cognition (2nd ed.; Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 260–66. This was an important clarification. The notion of positive cognitive effect is needed to specify the goal of cognition, according to which the relevance of information is assessed.
work “the cognitive principle of relevance.”\textsuperscript{93} This states that: Human cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance. For example, if a communicator wishes his or her informative act to be noticed and then processed and to have an effect, then one means of doing so (and this is the means Sperber and Wilson focus on) may be to engage in what they call ostensive communication. Under ostensive communication, a communicator has not just an informative intention (intending to inform the audience of something), but also a communicative intention — intending also to let the audience know that he or she intends to inform them.\textsuperscript{94} Sperber and Wilson consider the concept of ostensive behaviour central to relevance theory:

Ostensive behaviour provides evidence of one’s thoughts. It succeeds in doing so because it implies a guarantee of relevance. It implies such a guarantee because humans automatically turn their attention to what seems most relevant to them. The main thesis of this book is that an act of ostension carries a guarantee of relevance, and that this fact — which we will call the [communicative] principle of relevance — makes manifest the intention behind the ostension. We believe that it is this principle of relevance that is needed to make the inferential model of communication explanatory.\textsuperscript{95}

What kind of relevance are we talking about here? The formal definition of ostensive communication states that it “communicates the presumption of its own optimal relevance” (emphasis added).\textsuperscript{96} That is, the ostensive stimulus is “relevant enough” to make it worth the addressee’s while to process it, and the most relevant ostensive stimulus the communicator could have used to communicate what he wants to communicate.\textsuperscript{97} The picture of ostensive communication therefore looks more like this:

\textsuperscript{93} Wilson and Sperber, “Relevance Theory,” 610.
\textsuperscript{94} Sperber and Wilson, \textit{Relevance}, 63.
\textsuperscript{95} Sperber and Wilson, \textit{Relevance}, 50, emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{96} Sperber and Wilson, \textit{Relevance}, 158.
\textsuperscript{97} Sperber and Wilson, \textit{Relevance}, 158.
We can think of this as one way of describing how a communicator might factor-in the audience’s desire for relevance as he or she performs the communicative act. The communicator makes it clear that he or she intends to inform the audience of something, communicates something worth processing, and does it to the best of his or her communicative abilities: “By producing an ostensive stimulus, the communicator therefore encourages her audience to presume that it is relevant enough to be worth processing.”

Sperber and Wilson then consider the communication from the audience point of view by developing conjectures concerning the processing of inputs (pictured above at the centre of the figure). They begin like this: “We assume that people have intuitions of relevance: that they can consistently distinguish relevant from irrelevant information, or in some cases, more relevant from less relevant information.” In later work, Sperber and Wilson then go to suggest a simple algorithm: a “relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure”:

a. Follow a path of least effort in computing cognitive effects: Test interpretive hypotheses (disambiguations, reference resolutions, implicatures, etc.) in order of accessibility.

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98 Wilson and Sperber, “Relevance Theory,” 611. They add, “This need not be a case of Gricean cooperation.” That is, they are not assuming Grice’s “cooperative principle,” which is a set of standards concerning quality of information, truthfulness, relevance and manner. Grice takes these as conditions for successful communication in a talk exchange. Grice, “Logic,” 26. However, Wilson and Sperber note that not all of these are necessary for ostensive communication: “Even a self-interested, deceptive, or incompetent communicator manifestly intends her audience to assume that her stimulus is relevant to be worth processing.” Wilson and Sperber, “Relevance Theory,” 611–12.

99 Sperber and Wilson, Relevance, 119.
b. Stop when your expectations of relevance are satisfied.¹⁰⁰

Sperber and Wilson suggest that the “default” expectation of relevance in most individuals will be to expect optimal relevance. When this expectation is met, the processing stops. Up to that point, they describe the process as “non-demonstrative inference” from context and input. That is, they abandon any attempt to demonstrate that the processing algorithm used by individuals will always be able to recover the “true meaning” of a communication: “even under the best of circumstances [...] communication may fail.”¹⁰¹

The processing in step (a) of the procedure may be further divided into sub-tasks (although these are not necessarily performed in any particular order).¹⁰² The description at this point becomes quite complex. (We shall consider an example shortly that may help to clarify what follows.) First, the individual constructs the explicatures (or “explicit content”) of the utterance he or she has received as an input. These may be “basic” explicatures, using minimal processing to produce a determinate proposition of some form, or explicatures made at a higher level, where propositions are embedded in higher-level descriptions.¹⁰³ The process of constructing explicatures may include decoding, disambiguation, reference resolution, “and other pragmatic enrichment processes.”¹⁰⁴ Secondly, the individual constructs implicated premises: selecting the assumptions from his context that the communicator intends him to make use of. Thirdly, the individual constructs implicated conclusions: building an appropriate hypothesis about the contextual implications the communicator intends him to make.

Wilson and Sperber further divide the process of implication into strong implication and weak implication. A proposition derived from an utterance is strongly implicated “if its recovery is essential in order to arrive at an interpretation that satisfies the expectations of relevance raised by the utterance itself.” It is weakly implicated “if its recovery helps with the

¹⁰¹ Sperber and Wilson, Relevance, 65.
¹⁰² Wilson and Sperber, “Relevance Theory,” 615.
¹⁰³ Deirdre Wilson and Dan Sperber, “Linguistic Form and Relevance,” Lingua 90, no. 1–2 (1993): 5. See also the example below.
¹⁰⁴ Wilson and Sperber, “Relevance Theory,” 615.
construction of an interpretation that is relevant in the expected way, but is not itself essential because the utterance suggests a range of similar possible implicatures, any one of which would do.”¹⁰⁵

This complex of concepts can best be grasped with an example, and thinking through our “timid hare” fable using relevance theory immediately gives one interesting result, which is that the hare’s utterance within the tale is not necessary for communication to occur. The hare starts and runs and this act may in itself be sufficient to inform the other beasts that something is seriously wrong. The hare may have even intended the act to supply that information.

What the utterance does is turn the act into ostensive communication. By speaking, the hare now makes it clear that he intends to inform others about something (at least) and may additionally make it clear that what he intends to inform them about is the state of the world and his opinion that it would be desirable for them to run.

To illustrate the concept of strong implication, let us suppose first that the hare utters the single clause “The world is collapsing!” An example of how a given beast (a tortoise, say) might process the utterance could go like this:¹⁰⁶

| (a) While running, the hare has said to all the beasts, “The \( \text{WORLD}_1 \) / \( \text{WORLD}_2 \) is collapsing.” | Embedding of the decoded (incomplete) logical form of the hare’s utterance into a description of the hare’s ostensive behaviour. |
| [\( \text{WORLD}_1 = \) the planet earth] | [\( \text{WORLD}_2 = \) the life circumstances of the hare from his point of view] |
| (b) The hare’s utterance will be optimally relevant to the tortoise. | Expectation raised by recognition of the hare’s ostensive behaviour and acceptance of presumption of relevance it conveys. |

¹⁰⁶ Compare the example in Wilson and Sperber, “Relevance Theory,” 616, from which this is adapted. The left-hand column shows steps in the processing, while the right-hand column gives an explanation.
(c) The hare’s utterance will achieve relevance by describing the state of the $\text{WORLD}_1 / \text{WORLD}_2$ and explaining why the hare is running.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expectation raised by (b).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First assumption to occur to the tortoise which, together with other appropriate premises, might satisfy expectation (c). Accepted as an implicit premise of the hare’s utterance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First enrichment of the logical form of the hare’s utterance to occur to the tortoise which might combine with (d) to the satisfaction of (c). Accepted as an explication of the hare’s utterance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First enrichment of the logical form of the hare’s utterance to occur to the tortoise which might combine with (d) to the satisfaction of (c). Accepted as an explication of the hare’s utterance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inferred from (d) and (e), satisfying (c) and accepted as an implicit conclusion (strong implicature) of the hare’s utterance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From (f) plus background knowledge. One of several possible weak implicatures of the hare’s utterance which, together with (f), satisfy expectation (b).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| What happens, then, is that the tortoise assumes the hare’s utterance, decoded in (a), is optimally relevant to him. Since he wants to know at this point what it is about the state of the world that will explain why the hare is running, he assumes in (c) that what the hare says will achieve relevance by satisfying that desire. The tortoise accepts the assumption (d) as the one that best applies to the situation, which leads to the explication (e): the planet earth is collapsing. By combining the implicit assumption (d) with this explication, the tortoise arrives at the implicit conclusion (f), from which further, weaker implicatures, including (g) and others, can be derived. The claim is then that this interpretation of the hare’s utterance satisfies the tortoise’s expectations of relevance. |

If we now extend the utterance to “Run, for the world is collapsing!” the likely effect is that (f), a strong implicature in the above account, would be strengthened to an explication. This would be a high-order explication: the content embedded in speech-act form, with the hare taken to be engaged in the act of warning and encouraging.
It needs to be remembered that these are merely examples. Different original contexts could result in different processing of the utterance. For example, if the first assumption to occur to the tortoise was not (d) but something like “The collapse of one’s life circumstances may result in people running around in despair,” then the explicature would more likely be “The hare’s WORLD$_2$ is collapsing.”

So far, we have only considered the communicative act within the timid hare fable, not the fable itself as a communicative act. Relevance theory has so far been applied mainly to relatively simple utterances, usually in some sort of conversational context. However, Sperber and Wilson do consider more subtle forms of inference. Most interesting here is what they call the poetic effect: “Some utterances achieve relevance by weakly suggesting a wide array of possible implications, each of which is a weak implicature of the utterance.” Why would a communicator do this? “A speaker aiming at optimal relevance will leave implicit everything her hearer can be trusted to supply with less effort than would be needed to process and explicit prompt.” For example, if the speaker can evoke directly, with choice of style or turn of phrase, the appropriate implied premises for processing an utterance, then that is a great deal more efficient than spelling these out explicitly. The speaker can also use a number of devices, such as metaphor or irony, to suggest some relationship between (the propositional form of) her utterance and the thought she wishes to communicate. She may also use assertion, request, question or exclamation to suggest some relationship between the thought she wishes to communicate and actual or desirable states of affairs or other attributed or desirable thoughts. How this works in practice under the theory is more hinted at than spelled out in full.

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108 Sperber and Wilson, Relevance, 218.
109 A possibility that Sperber and Wilson do not pursue here is that an utterance which uses the poetic effect may be impossible to reformulate into something explicit. (However, they might agree that it would sometimes be impossible to reformulate a “poetic” utterance while maintaining its relevance.) We shall be leaving open the possibility in our own communication model that some aspects of “poetic” language, such as metaphor or figure, are rather more foundational than Sperber and Wilson seem to think. To reformulate them as explicatures may be to destroy them, rather as a joke may be destroyed through over-explanation.
110 Sperber and Wilson, Relevance, 224–43.
Although there are similarities in overall structure, relevance theory does seem to present a much richer portrait of the communication event than speech-act theory, which looks descriptively inadequate in comparison. Under relevance theory, the classification of the illocutionary force of an utterance, which has always been a focus of speech-act theory, is no longer central to understanding how the utterance functions. As we saw above, forming high-level explicatures (in speech-act form) may form a part of how an utterance is processed, but not necessarily so.

Relevance theory also provides a way of thinking about how far a listener will go in processing and interpreting an utterance. We remarked above on the debate in speech-act theory about how to characterise “understanding the meaning” of an utterance, and whether to do so with the concept of “uptake” (Austin), “recognising the speaker’s intention” (Grice) or “illocutionary effect” (Searle). We also noted some difficulties in Paul Herdandi’s attempt to link this initial step in interpretation to deeper stages of interpretation or effect: perlocutionary impact and post-locutionary outcome. In relevance theory, however, there is a relatively simple spectrum of sub-tasks in the processing of an utterance: constructing explicatures, strong implicatures and weak implicatures. The listener tackles these in order of accessibility and how far a listener gets in this process depends on his or her expectations of relevance, stopping when these are met.111

We shall be drawing extensively on relevance theory in what follows partly because it begins the task of integrating the communicative nature of language with its representational aspect. The processes of decoding, disambiguation and reference resolution that are the bread-and-butter of a representational approach to language are all there, but in their proper place as processes in the construction of basic explicatures, forming just a part of the wider task of processing an utterance.

111 Notice that the listener may stop before he or she fully recognises the speaker’s intention; that is, before “understanding the meaning” of the utterance in a Grician sense. Ostenstive communication requires only that the listener discern the speaker’s intent to inform, not his full intention in any great detail. (We shall return to the issue of characterizing situations where meaning is understood in section 2.2.4 below.)
We shall also find the concept of “processing effort” useful in the construction of our model of the communication event — and directly useful in understanding how parables and other figures function in Matthew’s Gospel. The recognition in relevance theory that the initial context (or worldview) of a listener will affect how an utterance is processed will also play a role in what follows.

However, in many regards relevance theory is under-developed for our purposes. As noted above, it has been concerned chiefly with simple utterances in single-listener, conversational settings. There are additional issues raised when utterances are fixed in writing. There are still further issues raised when the discourse fixed in writing is a narrative. There are subtleties in “processing” a narrative that have been more extensively addressed in conventional narrative criticism than they have been in relevance theory.

There is also a weakness at the heart of relevance theory in its assumption of optimal relevance. Quite how listeners form expectations of the positive cognitive effects from an utterance, and thereby form expectations of its relevance, and quite how the relevance comes to be, or comes to be expected to be, optimally relevant is largely unexplained. We need some wider treatment of the interactive environment in which speaker and listener find themselves, and some additional tools to think through how expectations in such an environment might be formed.

One promising place in which to look for these things is in the field of game theory.

2.2.4 Game theoretic pragmatics and beyond.

Game theory comprises a set of tools for the formal, mathematical modelling of interactive decision-making. It is an extension of choice (or decision) theory. In choice theory, we sup-

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pose an agent (the chooser) makes a choice from a choice set according to some criteria. The agent has different preferences over the “states of world” pertaining to the choices, and chooses accordingly.\footnote{Some of this terminology comes from Leonard J. Savage, \textit{The Foundations of Statistics} (New York: Dover Publications, 1972), 9. The \textit{world} is “the object about which a person is concerned.” A \textit{state} (of the world) is “a description of the world, leaving no relevant aspect undescribed.” The \textit{true} state (of the world) is “the state that does in fact obtain, i.e., the true description of the world.”} Game theory extends this model to suppose there is more than one agent. For a given agent (or “player”), the resulting state of the world (or “outcome”) depends not just on that player’s choice, but on the choice(s) of the other agent(s). The choice a player makes is therefore influenced by what he or she believes the other players will choose.

Suppose we take a certain instance of social interaction that we would like to understand better or to explain. In the current study we are interested in the interaction between a communicator and his audience, between the sender of a message and its receiver, but one of the strengths of game theory is that it may be applied across a wide range of interactive situations. The basic method of game theory is to build a simple model (or game) that corresponds to what we observe in all essentials — while still remaining tractable. (There is of course a certain art in this, and that the game corresponds to reality “in all important essentials” is something the modeller will have to convince others of.) To build a model means specifying (at least): the players, the rules of the game (the choices the players can make and the order in which they make them), and the players’ preferences over the different outcomes. A player’s preference for an outcome is often described by assigning it with a “payoff” — a number which expresses the strength of preference relative to other outcomes.

Game theorists will then talk about the “equilibrium outcome(s)” of a game. Equilibrium is a heavily debated and complex issue in game theory. However, the basic concept of equilibrium as proposed by Nash denotes a state of affairs where, once every player has made his or her choice, no player has a positive incentive to change that choice (taking the other players’ choices as given). A given game may have many such equilibria. Of the many proposals for ranking or selecting between different equilibria, one worth mentioning (because we shall be returning to it later) is the concept of a “subgame perfect” equilibrium.\footnote{This is due to Selten, “Perfectness.”} This
applies to dynamic games, where actions may be made in sequence and where the structure of the game may be diagrammed as a kind of decision tree — sometimes called the “extensive form” of a game. The concept selects those equilibria of the whole game where the strategies are also consistent with equilibrium at every stage of the game — i.e. in every “subgame.” Such equilibria may be found by a process of backwards induction: considering first decisions made at the end of the game and then working backwards through the decision tree.\textsuperscript{115}

But there are many such “refinements” of Nash’s basic equilibrium concept. Many of these explore what “rational” behaviour in complex interactive situations might look like, while evolutionary game-theory studies dynamic processes of learning and social interaction whereby players may come to play certain equilibrium outcomes.\textsuperscript{116}

The methods of game theory have had an enormous impact on the social sciences, most especially in economics but also in politics and sociology. This is at least in part because the tools allow interaction to be modelled in a way that is both precise and transparent, using concepts that can be widely applied. However, the approach has its limitations. Game theory in its classical guise tends to work best in modelling situations where the players know the characteristics of other players well, where they can rely on past experience in similar situations, and where social conventions are well-established.\textsuperscript{117} To some extent, these limitations have been mitigated by the development of evolutionary game theory (with application to both biological and social evolution), but the very precision of game theory, although in some respects a strength, renders its application to complex situations cumbersome.

The terminology of game-theory is vast and somewhat overwhelming at first. Some of it will be familiar and has made it into wider usage. A “zero-sum game,” for example, is a

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{115} Andreu Mas-Colell, Michael D. Whinston, and Jerry R. Green, Microeconomic Theory (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 268–82.
\item \textsuperscript{116} An introductory text is Jörgen W. Weibull, Evolutionary Game Theory (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1995). This is an area of research I have been involved in. Social dynamics such as partnership or group-formation may be important in evolutionary learning processes, as in Ben Cooper and Chris Wallace, “The Evolution of Partnerships,” Sociological Methods and Research 28, no. 3 (2000): 365–81 and Ben Cooper and Chris Wallace, “Group Selection and the Evolution of Altruism,” Oxford Economic Papers 56 (2004): 307–30.
\item \textsuperscript{117} David M. Kreps, Game Theory and Economic Modelling (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 139–45.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
game of pure conflict: either you win and the other player loses, or you lose and the other player wins. With some terminology, on the other hand, an apparent familiarity could be deceptive. The word “strategy,” for example, is used by game-theorists in a special, technical sense. A strategy is a complete description of what a player will do in every possible circumstance in a game. A player chooses a strategy to maximize her expected payoff. Chess players and businessmen will talk about “strategy,” but from a game-theoretic point of view a chess strategy and many real-life business plans are too complex to specify in full detail. Many other concepts are discussed in game theory; fortunately, a comprehensive grasp of game-theoretic terminology and methods, and all their subtleties, will not be necessary for what follows.

Our interest in game theory here comes from the fact that, as Gerhard Jaeger notes in a recent survey, “a lively interdisciplinary community has emerged in recent years, which uses game theoretic techniques to study genuinely linguistic problems.” Although we shall find a purely game theoretic approach impractical, we shall find in what follows some elements of this programme very useful.

DAVID LEWIS (1969).

It was the philosopher David Lewis who first applied game-theoretic methods to the theory of language. Lewis developed a relatively simple framework for thinking about language, communication and meaning based upon a communicator and his audience settling upon con-

\[\text{118} \text{ The game-theoretic concept of strategic action is therefore different to that of Habermas, which is } \text{“appraised from the standpoint of the efficiency of influencing the decisions of rational opponents.” Jürgen Habermas, “Reply to My Critics,” in Habermas, Critical Debates (ed. John B. Thompson and David Held; Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1982), 264. A strategy in a game takes others’ decisions into account, but may or may not be designed to influence them — it depends on the game. Habermas distinguished strategic action from communicative action: “that form of social interaction in which the plans of action of different actors are co-ordinated through an exchange of communicative acts [...] orientated towards reaching understanding” (“Reply,” 234). Thinking game theoretically about communication, however, leads us to consider “an actor’s communicative act” as part of her strategy, and any shared understanding as the consequence of strategic interaction, as we shall see below.} \]

\[\text{119} \text{ Gerhard Jaeger, “Applications of Game Theory in Linguistics,” Language and Linguistics Compass 2, no. 3 (2008): 407.} \]

\[\text{120} \text{ David K. Lewis, Convention: A Philosophical Study (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969).} \]
ventions about the referents of certain verbal or written signals. In game-theoretic terms, communicator and audience are playing what is known as a “coordination game,” and a signalling convention is simply an equilibrium in such a game. It then becomes possible to talk about the “conventional meaning” of a signal, a concept that can be extended to language more generally.\textsuperscript{121}

We shall begin with Lewis’ treatment of non-verbal signalling. As we do so, we should note that in some ways we are going backwards, to something more like what Sperber and Wilson called the “code model” of communication (section 2.2.3 above). We shall therefore abandon our “timid hare” fable as an example for the moment, and use instead a simplified version of one of Lewis’ own examples to illustrate game-theoretic modelling as applied to simple signalling. Lewis uses a story from the American War of Independence in which the sexton of Old North Church (in the North End of Boston, Massachusetts) uses lanterns to signal the movements of the British army to the colonists of Charlestown on the other side of the river.\textsuperscript{122} The signal used in the story is famously, “One if by land, and two if by sea.”

What we have here is a situation in which there are two possible states of the world: one in which the British army come by land, and one in which they come by sea. This is observed by the communicator (the sexton of Old North Church), but not by the audience (the colonists of Charlestown). The communicator has to choose a signal (one lamp or two) depending upon what he observes the British army doing. The audience has to choose an action depending on the signal — either “defend an attack from the land,” or “defend an attack from the sea.”

Let us suppose that if the communication is successful, then the colonists fend off the attack, and that this is the preferred outcome for both communicator and audience. If communication is unsuccessful, the colonists are defeated. To keep things simple, let us indicate this preference by supposing that in a successful outcome, both receive a payoff of 1; in an unsuccessful outcome, both receive a payoff of 0. (As we noted in passing above, roughly speaking,

\textsuperscript{121} Lewis, *Convention*, 144.
\textsuperscript{122} Lewis, *Convention*, 122–25.
a payoff is simply a numerical expression of a player’s strength of preference for a particular outcome.\(^\text{123}\)

We can tabulate all of the relevant choice combinations as in the table below, with the communicator’s choices on the rows of the table, and the audience’s choices in the columns. Payoffs are given in the cells of the table, depending on the choices, in the form (payoff to row player, payoff to column player).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>R1: One lamp if by land; two if by sea.</th>
<th>C1: If one lamp, defend the land; if two, defend the sea.</th>
<th>(1, 1)</th>
<th>C2: If one lamp, defend the sea; if two, defend the land.</th>
<th>(0, 0)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R2: One lamp if by sea; two if by land.</td>
<td>(0, 0)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(1, 1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table represents the very simplest form of coordination game. It has two strict Nash equilibria, (R1, C1) and (R2, C2). That is, there are two choice combinations in which, for both players, a player will be strictly worse off changing his choice, taking the other player’s choice as given. These also satisfy Lewis’ stronger conditions for a “coordination equilibrium,” which is “a combination in which no one would have been better off had any one agent alone acted otherwise, either himself or someone else.”\(^\text{124}\) (That is, if any player makes a unilateral deviation from the combination, no one benefits.)

Lewis’ great insight was that the meaning of a signal is established by such an equilibrium without the signals having to have any pre-existing meaning at all.\(^\text{125}\) In the (R1, C1) equilibrium, for example, communicator and audience have adopted a signalling convention

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\(^{123}\) Speaking less roughly, a payoff is a von Neumann–Morgenstern expected utility. Given a list of probabilities over different outcomes, such utility is a linear function in these probabilities. The assumption of linearity here is not without controversy, but the issues need not concern us here. For more, see, e.g., Mas-Colell, Whinston, and Green, Microeconomic Theory, 168–83. The original formulation of expected utility goes back to von Neumann and Morgenstern, Theory of Games and Economic Behavior.

\(^{124}\) Lewis, Convention, 14.

\(^{125}\) Lewis, Convention, 124–25.
in which one lamp conventionally means that the British are coming by land and two lamps conventionally means that the British are coming by sea. Such signalling conventions can be described as “rudimentary languages.” If the signals were verbal signals, the use of such conventions would even sound like language. Lewis is well aware that such verbal signalling falls far short of the full use of language, and lists a number of key differences. Indeed, the colonists of Charlestown in our example who receive the signal “two lamps” are engaged merely in what we might describe as reference resolution (“Does that mean ‘by land’ or ‘By sea’?”), but we have already seen from our above discussion that there is a great deal more to language processing than reference resolution. Nevertheless, we may well expect something like Lewis’ notion of conventional meaning to play an important role in actual language use — language usage which involves much more complex inferences (including pragmatic inferences), and this is what Lewis goes on to argue.

Lewis also noted that in a conventional signalling system, in which equilibrium holds, the communicator “means something” by his signal, where to “mean something” is the kind of “non-natural” meaning defined by Paul Grice. In the (R1, C1) equilibrium of our example, the sexton of Old North Church intends his use of two lamps to produce the effect “defend the sea” by means of the recognition of this intention. In other words, two lamps means something. The colonists of Charlestown believe (correctly) that the sexton is using

126 Lewis, Convention, 144. Lewis notes that in this case we could equally well express this in an imperative mood: one lamp conventionally means “Defend from the land!” while two conventionally means “Defend from the sea!”


128 Lewis, Convention, 143, 160ff.


the rule “one lamp if by land; two if by sea,” and when they observe two lamps they recognize that they are intended to defend the sea.131 *Convention results in the communication of intention.* However the converse need not be true. We can supply examples where a communicator means something by a signal, but that signal is not part of an equilibrium; it is not a conventional signal.132

The difficulty with Lewis’ analysis thus far is that we have not yet explained why we should assume that communicator and audience *necessarily* play an equilibrium combination of choices and, if so, *which* equilibrium (given there will always be more than one). The first of these difficulties is quite acute. In our example game, if colonists of Charlestown believed the sexton of Old North Church was using scheme R2 (supported by further beliefs on his part regarding the choice of the colonists), and if the sexton believed the colonists were using scheme C1 (supported by further beliefs on their part regarding his choice), then we would not observe the equilibrium outcome.133 Lewis deals with this issue by restricting his attention to coordination problems that take place in recurrent situations, where there is an opportunity for some regularity of behaviour to develop, such that it becomes *common knowledge* that the convention will actually be played.134 Later developments of game theory deal with the issue to some extent through *evolutionary* game theory, which models the dynamic pro-

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131 Notice that *in this case* the audience need only recognise the intention in a very general sense. They do not need to infer (although they could) “the sexton of Old North Church in particular intends us to defend the sea” for the communication of the signal to function. When we turn to consider “signalling games” below, we shall however be considering cases where it is important to make inferences concerning the intentions of the *actual* speaker or author. We shall further be arguing (section 2.3.3 below) that in the case of Matthew’s Gospel, the intentions of the actual author (or final redactor) are significant.


133 Technically, every choice in the game is *rationalizable*, as defined by D. Bernheim, “Rationalizable Strategic Behaviour,” *Econometrica* 52 (1984): 1007–28; D. Pearce, “Rationalizable Strategic Behaviour and the Problem of Perfection,” *Econometrica* 52 (1984): 1029–50. That is, there exists a consistent belief state for both players for each of the choices to make that choice *rational* — i.e. the best choice from that player’s point of view.

134 In Lewis’ conception, a group of people have *common knowledge* of some truth *x* if there exists a state of affairs such that (1) everyone has reason to believe that the state of affairs holds, (2) the state of affairs indicates to everyone that everyone has reason to believe that the state of affairs holds, and (3) the state of affairs indicates to everyone that *x* is true (Lewis, *Convention*, 56). Cubitt and Sugden outline the differences between this and later conceptions of common knowledge in game theory. They also develop Lewis’ ideas with the concept of a *projectible* behavioural regularity — a pattern of behaviour that the players all find easy to project into the future. Cubitt and Sugden, “Common Knowledge, Salience and Convention,” 183–90, 199–200.
cess by which players come to converge on Nash equilibria (and thereby behave as if rational and with common knowledge). One can posit a very wide number of learning mechanisms whereby such convergence might happen. To an extent, this approach also addresses the issue of which of the equilibria gets played: it depends on the initial conditions of the learning process. However, as in Lewis, the evolutionary approach also requires that we consider relatively simple conventions in recurrent situations.

This means that the difficulty in assuming equilibrium between communicator and audience is compounded for complex messages fixed in writing. On the one hand, we might be able to come up with some plausible account of how people come to reach agreement on the conventional meaning of individual words. Words are relatively simple symbols and are used recurrently. On the other, it is less obvious that an equilibrium will be obtained automatically with more complex arrangements of symbols: building from words to clauses, to clause complexes and beyond — all the way to complete works. Where these works are written, the problem becomes even more acute. Far from there being a situation in which communicator and audience interact repeatedly, fixing the message in writing creates a one off communication event. There may be repeated interaction between the reader and the text, but usually no repeated interaction between the reader and the author.

We shall therefore be pursuing a different approach in what follows. Lewis’ conception of meaning as something which arises from some sort of equilibrium between communicator and audience may in many ways be compelling, but we do not wish to presuppose equilibrium: that the act of communication is “successful” from either party’s point of view, or even that members of the audience necessarily understand what the communicator is saying at

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136 Brian Skyrms’ *Evolution of the Social Contract* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) is one example of an evolutionary approach to conventions, with direct reference to Lewis’ work.
137 Indeed, there is a growing literature which addresses just this issue, of which Tom Lanauerts and Bart de Vylder, “On the Evolutionary Dynamics of Meaning-Word Associations,” in *Game Theory and Pragmatics* (ed. Anton Benz, Gerhard Jäger, and Robert van Rooij; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 263–84, is one recent example.
138 Although one might achieve some sort of recurrent author-reader interaction in a letter or email exchange, for example. But even here, the author would be producing new messages, generating new communication events, rather than repeating the original communication event over again.
all. Rather, we suppose a spectrum of responses to a message; some of which may be (in a sense to be further clarified below) equilibrium responses, some of which may not.

Indeed, this is a good moment to address a major weakness of the communication models used to guide literary analysis that we looked at above. Each of them saw things with respect to a single hearer or reader. One of the distinctive characteristics of a literary work, however, is that it has multiple actual readers. One might have thought this would complicate things, but in some ways it simplifies them. We do not have to defend a particular reading as clearly that of the “implied” reader, or clearly the only or “right” reading. Instead, we suppose that for every complex written work we shall get a spectrum of responses, ranging from responses that are in equilibrium with the author’s communicative action, all the way to complete misunderstanding. The task then becomes to characterize the subset of the audience who reach (some sort of) equilibrium with the communicator in response to a given message.

We shall detail this approach below, in section 2.3.3. However, it may be helpful to provide a preliminary illustration. Suppose we extend our example of signalling across the Charles River, such that we now have multiple colonists independently observing the signal. We no longer presuppose a coordination equilibrium in which everyone’s beliefs about what the signals mean have converged to the same point. Rather, among the colonists, suppose there is some confusion, and a spectrum of beliefs about what signalling conventions apply. The sexton of Old North Church is forced to act on his beliefs about that. If, for example, he thinks the majority of colonists believe he will use the rule, “One if by land, and two if by sea,” and he observes the British going by sea, then he will put out two lanterns. From the signal and other data we can then build a picture of the actual communication event. Within this picture, we may reasonably describe those colonists who move to defend an attack from the sea as those for whom the communication has been successful, those who are in equilibrium with the communication act of the sexton and those who in a now well-defined sense have understood his meaning.

A further example from David Lewis may help here:
Suppose I have come upon a patch of quicksand and I know of no conventional warning signal. I put a scarecrow up to its chest in the quicksand, hoping that whoever sees it will catch on. There is no convention to mark quicksand with half submerged scarecrows; nor do I think there is or expect my audience to think so. But I do intend my action to produce awareness that this is quicksand by means of the recognition of my intention to produce that awareness. I have done my part of a signalling system in a signalling problem; and I hope my future audience will do its part.\(^\text{139}\)

Lewis goes on to say that if the audience does “do its part,” then “coordination [between communicator and audience] will be achieved not by force of precedent but by force of salience.”\(^\text{140}\) However, we may wish to modify this slightly and say that convention and precedent are likely to play some role. There may exist general conventions, such as, “People who come across dangers will do something unusual to alert others,” or, “Warnings often represent (pictorially or verbally) the particular danger in view,” and so forth. Such conventions help the audience to “do its part.” And if coordination is thereby achieved, even if there exist other cases where it is not, then in those cases we may reasonably say that the communicator’s act and the audience’s response are “in equilibrium.” In such cases, all the important features of a signalling convention will apply. In particular, as we noted above, the communicator will “mean\(_{\text{NN}}\) something” by his communicative act, successfully communicating his intentions (both informative and communicative, to use the distinctions from relevance theory).

Written texts are like Lewis’s half submerged scarecrow in that, taken as a whole, they have no explicit conventional meaning established by precedence. However, convention may again play a role in a written text becoming a means of successful communication to an audience: the conventional meanings of individual word-groups, idioms, grammatical constructions; or narrative conventions surrounding the role of characters, point of view, structural

\(^{139}\) Lewis, *Convention*, 158–59. Lewis uses this as an example of where it is possible to mean\(_{\text{NN}}\) something even where no explicit convention established by precedent exists.

\(^{140}\) Lewis, *Convention*, 159.
patterns and so forth. By such means and others, as in Lewis’s example, coordination and equilibrium may be possible if the audience “does its part.”

So it is with Matthew and his Gospel (in broad outline, at least). Like the sexton of Old North Church, or David Lewis discovering a patch of quicksand, Matthew has information about the state of the world that he wishes to communicate to his audience. Moreover, he wishes his audience to act in response to the state of the world as he sees it: with the particular kind of theocentric commitment that is one of our concerns to characterise in this study. He also knows that different members of the audience have different initial belief structures that will affect how they process and respond to his message. Based on his assessment of this, he chooses and crafts a message to maximize this response. From the message and from other data we can then build a picture of the “Matthean communication event” — and this is indeed the task we shall be pursuing in subsequent chapters. Within this picture, we shall want to characterise the subset of the audience who have “done their part” in the communication event are thereby in equilibrium with Matthew’s communication act. We shall describe them as being in communicative alignment with Matthew. We are then interested in the further subset of readers who not only correctly discern how Matthew wants them to believe and respond, but actually do so. We shall describe these as the compliant readers of the Gospel.

More details of this approach (including its relation to relevance theory) will be sketched later. However, before we leave game-theory, it will be worth exploiting the fact that our approach opens up some potentially fruitful interdisciplinary connections. There are game-theoretic treatments of communication, trust and narrative analysis that could have a bearing on our analysis of theocentric commitment in Matthew. The aim here is to sketch a few possibilities. For each of these we shall consider where we might find some helpful connections with the Gospel of Matthew.

MICHAEL SPENCE (1973).

The game between the sexton of Old North Church and the colonists of Charlestown we looked at in the previous section is an example of what has become known as a cheap-talk
game, especially since a seminal paper by Vincent Crawford and Joel Sobel in 1982.\textsuperscript{141} A cheap-talk game is one in which the message chosen by the communicator does not directly affect either his payoff or the payoff of the audience: signalling is costless and (in itself) neutral.\textsuperscript{142} One of the more important results in Crawford and Sobel’s analysis is that in cheap-talk games the amount of credible communication that occurs in equilibrium is greater if the players’ preferences over the outcomes are more closely aligned. Our example game is consistent with this: communicator and audience are on the same side in a conflict. Both sides want the communication to work. The sexton of Old North Church has no incentive to deceive the colonists and the colonists have no reason to believe he might have. What then pertains is, in equilibrium at least, a perfect communication of the situation.

However, what happens if the preferences of communicator and audience are not so well aligned? What if the audience suspects the communicator might benefit from deceiving them? What can the communicator do to make his message credible?

These are live issues in economic theory, where we can find all sorts of situations where the buyers of some good or service are relatively uniformed about its true value, and where the sellers do have a positive incentive to deceive them. This has generated a vast and complex literature that uses game-theoretic methods to investigate the consequences of this asymmetry of information.\textsuperscript{143}

Prominent among the early pioneers in this literature is a paper by Michael Spence on “Job Market Signalling.”\textsuperscript{144} John Riley expresses concisely one of the questions Spence addresses about how much a firm can communicate to its customers: “Is there some way that the firm can, through a costly action, ‘signal’ to buyers that it is selling a high-quality product?”\textsuperscript{145}


\textsuperscript{142} If the sexton of Old North Church had had to pay good money for the use of a second lamp, for example, this would no longer have been strictly true.

\textsuperscript{143} This is surveyed by John G. Riley, “Silver Signals: Twenty-Five Years of Screening and Signaling,” \textit{Journal of Economic Literature} 39, no. 2 (2001): 432–78.


\textsuperscript{145} Riley, “Silver Signals,” 443.
Spence considers this issue within a model with a very similar structure to the one we looked at above. The communicator (now called the “sender”) is the informed party, and moves first, sending a message. The sender has private information concerning the quality of what he or she is offering. In Spence’s job-market model this is *ability*: the quality of service he or she can supply to an employer. The audience (now called the “receiver”) observes the message, updates his beliefs about the sender, and then acts accordingly.146 In Spence’s model, the receiver is an employer who cannot directly observe the ability of a job applicant, but can examine her educational record.

Can the sender signal his or her ability through some sort of costly action, such as taking time out from employment to receive education? Spence’s answer, as with most answers in economics is, “It depends.”147 But there do exist conditions where a high ability sender can use her choice of education as a *credible signal* of ability. Because education is costly for a person of high ability, but not as costly as it would be for a person of low ability, the high ability sender can use the costliness of education to take away the incentive for other types to mimic her. Costly education then provides a credible signal of ability – even if the education has no value in itself!

We can create a further example by modifying our “timid hare” fable. The problem facing one of the beasts of the forest is whether to take the hare seriously. Does the hare truly believe with some certainty that the world is collapsing or is he, say, a practical joker, hoping to have a little fun at the other beasts’ expense? The problem facing a *serious* hare is then how to distinguish himself from a practical joker. He may be able to do so by incurring some personal cost in the delivery of his warning — a full page advertisement in the *Forest Times*,

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146 The similarity of terminology with parts the actantial model proposed by Greimas for the structural exegesis of narrative structures is accidental. “Sender” and “receiver” in actantial analysis are actors *within* the narrative and their interaction is not modelled in a way which a game-theorist would regard as *sophisticated*.

147 It depends on a large number of factors in this case, including how we think about “equilibrium” in this now quite complex setting.
perhaps. If a beast of the forest knows that the fun experienced by a practical joker would never justify such an expense, then he can discount that possibility.\textsuperscript{148}

We can identify three key features of such “costly signalling”:

1. The costly action is either the means of communicating the message or inextricably associated with the message.
2. The costly action is undertaken \textit{voluntarily} by the messenger.
3. The cost is greater than the benefit received by a false messenger who has his message complied with.

It will be a major claim in subsequent chapters that Matthew employs (indirectly) a kind of costly signalling. We shall build this claim progressively in the analysis beginning at chapter 4 below, but it will centre on Jesus’ suffering and death on the cross being \textit{an informative costly signal}. Matthew closely aligns his own message with Jesus’ message and in his narrative makes the cross an integral part of Jesus’ mission and message. He makes it clear that Jesus is going to the cross voluntarily — constrained only by his obedience to his Father. And the cost incurred is far greater than any false messenger would find worthwhile.

In other words, what we need to be open to is the possibility that the following rhetorical strategy is being used in the Gospel accounts: that a suffering messenger is a credible messenger. While possibilities here centre on Jesus as messenger, predicting and taking on the ultimate cost of the cross (note especially 16:24; 17:22–23; 20:17–19; and 26:36–46), the disciples are also encouraged to be suffering messengers (10:16–33 and 24:9–14).\textsuperscript{149}

\textsuperscript{148} Notice now that, unlike the Charles River example (see note 131, p.78 above), it is no longer adequate for a beast of the forest to infer the \textit{general} intention of the utterance “Run, for the world is collapsing!” — making inferences such as “It is intended that I should run.” It is now necessary to make inferences along the lines of “The hare intends me to run” etc. This is because the context demands the beast makes inferences about the hare’s character and trustworthiness before deciding whether to run.

\textsuperscript{149} We shall summarise our conclusions on the credibility of Matthew’s claims in section 7.3 below.

Let us move now from the issue of whether a communicator might have an incentive to deceive, to the issue of whether a communicator is reliable or unreliable, even if otherwise sincere. This is the issue addressed in a 1992 paper by Sushil Bikhchandani, David Hirshleifer and Ivo Welch.\textsuperscript{150} The basic idea can be seen by taking our timid hare fable again, and supposing this time that the hare is taken to be sincere but observes the true state of the world accurately only with a certain probability, less than one. A given beast of the field perhaps begins with its own assessment of the likelihood of the collapse of the world. It then observes the hare and hears the hare’s message (which it takes to be sincere), and updates its own assessment in the light of that. (In Bikhchandani et al’s paper the observer updates using Bayes’ rule, which calculates new probabilities on the basis of existing, known probabilities and new information.)

The hare, of course, may make a mistake concerning the state of the world. The key thing to notice here, however, is that if the hare makes a mistake, then a beast observing the mistake is now more likely to make a mistake than it would be relying on just its own assessment. The problem is compounded if there is a set sequence of individuals making deciding whether to accept or reject some behaviour: with each observing all the decisions of those ahead of him. We can then get what Bikhchandani et al call an “informational cascade.” The further down the sequence we get, the more set the behaviour becomes, with observers putting less and less weight on their own assessments. This fits our fable well: “Other animals, alarmed by the sight and the shouting, ran also until all the beasts of the forest were in headlong flight.”

The concept of an informational cascade is a rich one and Bikhchandani et al apply it to a number of social phenomena where there is local conformity which is vulnerable to small shocks, such as attitudes to cohabitation or drug-taking, the uptake of opposition to communism in eastern Europe, and religious movements, revivals and reformations.\textsuperscript{151} Further appli-


\textsuperscript{151} Bikhchandani, Hirshleifer, and Welch, “Informational Cascades,” 993.
cations are to politics (e.g. bandwagon effects in American presidential nomination campaigns\textsuperscript{152}), zoology (cascades in the choice of territory or mating partners\textsuperscript{153}), medical practice and scientific research (cascades in the adoption of new techniques or theories\textsuperscript{154}), finance (merger waves and, possibly, bubbles or crashes) and fads and fashions.\textsuperscript{155}

Interestingly, Bikhchandani \textit{et al} begin their paper with a quotation from Matthew’s Gospel (using the AV of 15:14): “Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both fall into the ditch.” They make nothing of this, but the quotation suggests that the concept of an informational cascade may throw some light on the nature of Jesus’ polemic against the religious establishment. If the religious establishment has made a mistake concerning the true state of affairs, then those who follow them are worse off than if they had not listened: the blind lead the blind, and both fall into the ditch. The problem is compounded if the religious establishment is taken to speak with some kind of authority, and compounded still further (with the danger of a cascade) if what they say is passed on from generation to generation: in for example, ἡ παράδοσις τῶν πρεσβυτέρων (15:2).

Having said this, it then becomes incumbent on Matthew to demonstrate that Jesus is different: that what he says is not in error (unlike the pronouncements of the religious establishment), that it has direct divine sanction, and that following him is not therefore the wide and easy gate to destruction, but the narrow gate to life (7:13–14). According to Matthew Jesus says as much. When the message of the kingdom is taken out by the apostles (and, by implication, beyond — including Matthew’s own testimony), Jesus says, Ὅ δεχόμενος ὸμᾶς ἐμὲ δέχεται, καὶ ὁ ἐμὲ δεχόμενος δέχεται τὸν ἀποστείλαντά με. We shall return in later chapters to how Matthew goes about demonstrating this divine sanction, in the signs at key points of the narrative — for example, baptism (3:13–17), transfiguration (17:1–8) and death (27:51–54) — but ultimately through the resurrection of Jesus (28:1–20).

\textsuperscript{152} Bikhchandani, Hirshleifer, and Welch, “Informational Cascades,” 1010.
\textsuperscript{153} Bikhchandani, Hirshleifer, and Welch, “Informational Cascades,” 1010–11.
\textsuperscript{154} Bikhchandani, Hirshleifer, and Welch, “Informational Cascades,” 1012.
\textsuperscript{155} Bikhchandani, Hirshleifer, and Welch, “Informational Cascades,” 1002–4, 1014–16.
Let us turn now to the more specific issue of how the receiver actually responds to a message. In particular, how does the receiver express her trust in the messenger and his message? Especially pertinent here are situations where the receiver is given a message that includes conditional promises concerning the future.

This is the issue addressed in a 2004 paper by Ian Smith, whose concern is to answer the questions, “What does it mean for a Christian to have faith in God? Moreover, how is faith related to propositional belief, personal commitment, hope and trust?” Faith — especially as described in Hebrews 11, for instance — does seem to have a strong element of trusting in promises concerning an “unseen, heavenly future,” so Smith draws from the large literature on trust that encompasses the disciplines of sociology, management, economics and philosophy. He builds a simple two-stage model of trust to explore some of the issues surrounding the nature of Christian faith. In the first stage, a truster chooses whether to trust or withhold trust. If she withholds, then the status quo persists. If she trusts, then the trusted makes a choice. He chooses whether to honour or violate the first mover’s trust. If the truster’s trust is honoured, this gives the best outcome for the truster, but if the trust is violated it gives the worst outcome.

Once again it may help to illustrate these concepts if we extend our timid hare fable somewhat. Suppose that in calling the beasts of the forest to run, the hare is making an

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159 As he does so, he anticipates some obvious objections to this kind of approach. This kind of modelling could be seen as “excessively reductionistic.” However, “it is important to distinguish carefully between ontological and methodological reductionism. […] All discussions of faith, whatever the approach, are methodologically reductionistic in the sense that the analysis abstracts from some complexities in order to focus the investigation on particular features of interest.” Whereas his model is not ontologically reductionistic because he is not claiming that faith “is nothing but that which the model describes, or merely or only this.” His approach is not “exhaustively descriptive,” but is rather “a very simple model to try to say something, but not everything, about what faith might mean and imply.” Smith, “Modelling Faith,” 2.
implicit promise to lead them to safety. When a given beast hears the call, it has to decide whether to trust this promise and run with the hare, or whether to withhold trust and stay put. If the beast responds and runs, it exposes itself to the risk that its trust will be violated and that there is no safety.

The decision to trust therefore depends on the truster’s belief about whether her trust will be honoured. If this is high enough, and if the truster prefers the situation in which she has trusted, and her trust has been honoured, to the status quo, then it makes sense to trust.

Smith uses this model to think through two ways of thinking about trust. First, that “trust is cognitive: it is a belief about the trusted’s trustworthiness.” Secondly, that “trust is behavioural: it is an action which, given beliefs, relies on the second mover keeping their promises.” In our extended fable, a beast trusts the hare in this second sense if and only if it responds to the call and runs with the hare.

The model suggests that the first way of thinking about trust is inadequate. To see this, suppose we specify some level of belief in the trusted’s trustworthiness that counts as “true” trust. However, the trust model suggests that we will always be able to find situations where the truster has such “true” trust but chooses not to act in trust. It is better, then, to think of “true” trust being an act of trust — supported by sufficient beliefs in the trusted’s trustworthiness.

These kinds of concerns are especially pertinent to the study of Matthew’s Gospel, where there seems at first glance to be an emphasis on obedient action that goes beyond mere intellectual assent (e.g. 7:21–23), and on understanding that “bears fruit” (e.g. 13:23). We

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161 Which will happen if, for example, staying with the status quo seems relatively attractive compared to the expected outcome from acting in trust. The exception to this is the case where we define “true” trust to be perfect certainty in the trustworthiness of the trusted, and the truster prefers the trust outcome to the status quo. There is something odd about this, though, because the truster would not be exposing herself to any risk at all by acting in trust. (While we would expect a key characteristic of an act of trust to be exposure to some risk.) Smith notes that even if a “trustee” has complete certainty concerning the trustworthiness of the trusted, he still will not act in trust if he prefers the status quo. As James says, even the demons believe in God (James 2:19), but they “prefer their darkness and its perverse pleasures [...] to the light and eternal life with God.” Smith, “Modelling Faith,” 10.
shall see in later chapters whether this initial suspicion is borne out by closer study, and quite
how the different elements of trust (belief and action) fit together according to Matthew.
Moreover, something very similar to Smith’s simple trust game seems to be suggested by
16:24–26. The promise about the future is, ὃς ἀν ἀπολέσῃ τὴν ψυχήν αὐτοῦ ἐνεκὼ ἐμοῦ
εὐρήσει αὐτήν (with a corresponding warning concerning those who do not). Establishing
precisely what circumstances Jesus is referring to in those verses will consequently be quite
important.

2.3 A “pragmatic-critical” method

The point has come to draw together some of the threads in the above discussion. We have
been indicating at each step those elements of each approach (from ordinary language philo-
sophy to game-theoretic pragmatics and beyond) that we shall wish to incorporate into our
method. The task now is to integrate these elements into a coherent — and usable — whole.
Our aim as we do so is to construct a method that is as closely consistent with our object of
study as we can make it. We do not in any way wish to ignore the date, provenance and
milieu of Matthew’s Gospel as a first century document written in a Greek-speaking Mediter-
ranean context. We want to take fully into account the fact that Matthew is written in narra-
tive form. Moreover, as discussed at length above, we also want to take into account the role
Matthew’s Gospel plays within communication events.

Two further considerations will clear the way before describing and explaining the
model. The first is to deal with the possible objection that in using tools developed since the
mid-twentieth century (such as tools from relevance and game theories) to take into account
the communicative aspect of language we are in danger of reading the Gospel anachronisti-
cally. The second is to ask whether we might go further in the specific case of Matthew in
claiming that our approach is consistent with the (interpreted) “parable of the sower” (13:2–
23).

2.3.1 Some further comments on the dangers of anachronism.

The charge of an anachronistic reading or method in biblical studies is a serious one. It is, for
example, one of the main charges used by N.T. Wright against alternative readings to his own
in *Jesus and the Victory of God.*\(^{163}\)

However, there is a sense in which *any* twenty-first century reading of a first century text will almost inevitably be anachronistic at some level. We simply do not have the means or the information to perform some sort of “pure” first-century reading. Even historical criticism can be accused of anachronism in some respects. Despite its claims to historical objectivity and neutrality, the programme involves pursuing questions which, while of great interest in contemporary scholarship, seem to have been of little interest in the first century. The issue is really whether a reading method is *destructively* anachronistic, one which prejudices any results, such that the result is little more than whatever was presupposed in the method, with the text contributing little or nothing. For example, a study of Jesus as a “CEO” using concepts from modern management theory would most likely fall foul here.\(^{164}\) However, as we suggested earlier, if we can establish a degree of continuity between the contemporary situation for which a method was designed and the situation to which we wish apply it with respect to Matthew, then applying the method to a first-century situation should be no more likely to induce bias than applying it to a contemporary situation.

We can also distinguish between *methodological* anachronism and *conceptual* anachronism. No one can claim to avoid methodological anachronism. No one went about the business of studying history in the first century, for example, the way a contemporary (or late-twentieth century) historical critic would go about it. Method can bias results, of course, such as when a method implies its object of study is much more restricted than it actually is.\(^{165}\) But bias does not *necessarily* come from a wide gap in time between the development of a

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\(^{163}\) N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God 2; London: SPCK, 1996), 143, defines anachronism quite broadly as “projecting current preoccupations backwards into earlier times.” However, he seems to have mostly in mind anachronism in characterizations of the historical Jesus, more than methodological anachronism *per se*, as in the following quote: “Here, once again, we face the dangers of anachronism, imagining Jesus as a great teacher of truths-divorced-from-real-life. Only when we soak ourselves in the history of the time can we escape the imprisonment of our own culture.” *Jesus and the Victory of God,* 578.


\(^{165}\) We noted above (section 2.2.2) one example of an “overly restrictive” method in the tendency of historical criticism to restrict the analysis of a text to the “north” end of in the mimetic “axis of representation” in Hernandi’s *Map 3.*
method and its point of application. The bigger danger is conceptual anachronism, where, for example, first century word-groups are inappropriately read in the light of contemporary concepts which actually refer to something quite different. (This is a simple failure of understanding, and we shall be doing our best to avoid it when it comes to characterising theocentric commitment in Matthew. 166)

These considerations suggest that in applying methods influenced by post-1950 ordinary language philosophy, relevance theory and game theory, anachronism need not be a danger, so long as the method finally employed is sufficiently flexible, unrestricted and transparent. By applying contemporary thinking to the communication event, we can be also sure of some trans-historical continuity. Written texts were components of communication events in the first century just as much as they are today. We do not suppose that the participants of a communication event “understand game theory,” for instance, when we apply these methods to a first-century situation any more than we would suppose the participants would understand such things when using game theory to model interaction in a contemporary situation. Moreover by applying contemporary ideas to method, we shall not automatically be guilty of conceptual anachronism.

How about some of the other areas where we suggested a connection between contemporary results in some of the game theoretic material and aspects of Matthew’s Gospel? Here we need to be a little more cautious, since we are moving beyond the communication event itself to more specific social phenomena, such as costly signalling, herd behaviour and trust. Can we establish sufficient trans-historical continuity to avoid the accusation of conceptual anachronism in these cases?

We shall argue that in fact these particular social phenomena are sufficiently general. The issue of making a message (or a messenger) credible is one which spans cultures and historical contexts. Using contemporary methods to study how the credibility of a first century

166 For example, although our overarching concept “theocentric commitment” has no direct first-century equivalent, the breadth and looseness of the working definition we are using means that will encompass a number of more explicit first-century concepts. We can thereby let Matthew set the conceptual agenda, protecting against conceptual anachronism.
message is established need not therefore be anachronistic. However, we need to be aware that what constitutes “credible” and what constitutes a “cost” may well be culturally conditioned. The issue of collective decision-making and being influenced by “the crowd” is again one which spans cultures and historical contexts. Using contemporary methods to study such issues in the first century need not therefore be anachronistic. However, we need to be aware that crowd behaviour is a volatile concept and cultural conventions may apply. Likewise, the issue of what counts as “trust” or “trustworthiness” is one which spans cultures and historical contexts. Using contemporary methods to study trust in the first century need not therefore be anachronistic. However, we need to be aware that some conventions surrounding “trust” may well be culturally conditioned.

2.3.2 “The Parable of the Sower”.

If our pursuit of an appropriate method is not necessarily hampered by using contemporary tools, can we go further in the specific case of Matthew and find some explicit support for kind of communication model we are constructing? Might the (interpreted) “parable of the sower” (13:2–23) help us in this? The parable seems to corroborate one aspect of our model — in that it depicts an open message heard by many, evoking a spectrum of responses, only some of which correspond with the communicator’s wishes.

However, some commentators would argue that that is not how the parable should be read. N.T. Wright, for example, argues that the primary reading “in its first-century Jewish context” is as “a retelling of Israel’s controlling narrative about the kingdoms of the world and the kingdom of [G]od.”167 In this he receives qualified support from Klyne Snodgrass.168 Just as the (interpreted) dream in Daniel 2 and the parable of the tenants (21:33–44) tell a four-stage narrative telling (respectively) the eventual triumph of the kingdom of God and the

167 Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God, 232.
vindication of his Son, so also with the parable of the sower. The difficulty with this line (as Wright to an extent recognises) is that unlike Daniel 2 and the parable of the tenants, there is no chronological sequence in the parable of the sower. Wright therefore complicates his interpretation to talk about “two closely related stories”: one telling the history of Israel, the other telling the story of Jesus’ own ministry (in which there are results from “simultaneous sowings”).

We shall consider the parable of the sower in its context later in the study (section 5.3), but it is difficult at this stage to rule out some support for our approach to the Matthean communication event. It may be that the “historical” reading stressed by Wright is another example of over-particularising a general point that Snodgrass has convincingly exposed in some of Wright’s other interpretations of Jesus’ parables. That is, the “historical” reading actually presupposes a general point about messages and their mixed reception. Moreover, rather than talk about “two closely related stories” it makes more sense to talk about a general point with (at least) two expressions. The general point concerns a comparison between openly broadcast seed resulting in a spectrum of rooting and yield (13:3–8) and openly broadcast messages evoking a spectrum of hearing and understanding (13:18–23) — as in the communication model we are developing. By quoting from Isaiah 6 (in 13:10–17), Jesus links the general pattern, and especially its negative aspects, to Israel’s history. By placing the parable where he does in his narrative, Matthew links the general pattern to Jesus’ current proclamation of the kingdom. We shall argue later that both links support the general exhortation: ὁ ἐχόν ὄτα ἄκουέτω (13:9).

169 Wright also notes verbal links with Isa 55:10–13, which suggests that the sowing of seed in the parable, resulting “in a crop that defies the thorns and briers,” is likewise “a picture of YHWH’s sowing of his word, and the result is the return from exile.” Jesus and the Victory of God, 233.

170 Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God, 234.

171 The most striking example is Wright’s interpretation of the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11–32. Wright claims that as a story about “a son who goes off in disgrace into a far country and then comes back, only to find the welcome challenged by another son who has stayed put” it is “obvious” that this “is the story of Israel, in particular of exile and restoration.” Jesus and the Victory of God, 126. Snodgrass comments, “In my estimation what Wright has done here and with other parables is distil the theology inherent in the parable and apply it to Israel.” Snodgrass, “Reading and Overreading the Parables,” 70. On a different over-reading, he notes, “Such an application is as legitimate as any movement from the general to the particular [...] The theology may again be applied to Israel, but the referent is elsewhere.” Snodgrass, “Reading and Overreading the Parables,” 66.
2.3.3 *An outline of the communication model to be used in this study.*

In our analysis of Matthew in later chapters we shall be employing a model of the communication event which draws heavily on the above discussion. It concerns how a sender (the author) uses a message to affect the beliefs, and therefore the actions, of receivers (the readers or hearers of the message). The beliefs that may be affected are beliefs concerning the true state of the world.¹⁷² We shall be calling the method based on the model a “pragmatic-critical” method, because it highlights the role of *pragmatics* in the processing of a text in a real-world context — in particular, the process of making inferences from the text concerning the true state of the world.¹⁷³

The basic framework can be diagrammed thus:

![Diagram of communication model](image)

Beginning on the left hand side of the figure, we suppose Matthew has beliefs about the state of the world that he wishes to communicate to his audience. Moreover, he wishes his audience to share his beliefs and to act in response to the state of the world as he sees it. We have defined (section 1.2 above) “theocentric commitment according to Matthew” as the God-orientated response he wishes to evoke. (At least, we may say that is his *primary* objective.

¹⁷² As in game theory (2.2.4 above), and following Savage, *Foundations*, 9, we take a “state of the world” to be “a description of the world, leaving no relevant aspect undescribed.”

¹⁷³ The term “pragmatic criticism” has however been used in other ways. For example, Joseph Carroll uses it to describe a “practical” criticism that rejects “theory controlled” readings. *Literary Darwinism: Evolution, Human Nature, and Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 32. In contrast, we are using “pragmatic” to relate our method to a particular field of linguistics.
He may, as we shall see, have subsidiary communicative purposes.) By defining “theocentric commitment” very broadly, we have therefore ensured that the model is ostensibly well-suited to help characterize it.

How does Matthew go about achieving his aims? He knows that different members of the audience have different initial belief structures that will affect how they process and respond to his message. (In other words, he is thinking about what will happen on the other side of the communication event, as we shall do next.) Moreover, because his will be a written message, he does not know exactly who will receive it, although he may some expectations concerning that. Based on his assessment of who will receive his message and how they will respond, he chooses and crafts a message to maximize the overall response. As he does so, he may put more weight on some of his expected readers than others. We shall call this his “expected reader profile” — a weighted distribution over the different expected readers. The end result of this compositional process is the Gospel of Matthew.

On the other side of the communication event, we have a large number of readers of the Gospel of Matthew. Take a given reader, and her complete belief structure. Part of this will be her beliefs on the state of the world pertaining to the time of reading. The problem facing a given reader is to process and assess the message she receives for credibility and content in the light of her current beliefs, and if that results in a change beliefs about the situation she finds herself in, to act accordingly. This processing takes effort, of course, and she will constantly be assessing whether it is worth her while to continue processing the message, and at some point may decide to stop doing so.

We must not think about this side of the figure too rigidly. We imagine the task of processing as complex and dynamic, not necessarily reducible to a sequence of neat steps or a simple algorithm. She may read once or many times. She may respond with a simple act or a sequence of actions. These may not be acts of external behaviour at all but, say, changes in attitude. There may be other factors at work too. For example, we could complicate the model by thinking not about individual readers but about a community of readers who process the

174 We shall clarify “overall response” below, section 2.3.7.
message collectively. A given member of this community may not read the message herself, but rather hear it read out loud. There would be scope in such a setting for reducing the processing cost by spreading the load across the different members. On the other hand, each individual would have many more inputs to process. There are many possibilities here, and it may be good to keep in mind some degree of corporate and/or oral processing on the right hand side of the figure. But the basic pattern of processing a message in the light of existing beliefs would remain the same.

We shall now introduce two key technical terms that will play a major role in our later analysis:

We shall say that a given reader is in *communicative alignment* with an author if (and only if) she has *correct* beliefs concerning the author’s choice of message and the reasons why he chose it — his *purpose* in choosing it. Such a reader has “understood” the message in that she knows what the author wants her to believe about the state of the world and how he wants her to respond.

We shall further say that a reader in communicative alignment is a *compliant reader* if (and only if) she comes to believe the author concerning the state of the world and actually responds accordingly.

We have defined both terms *relative to the author* (rather than, say, relative to the text) because we want to allow for the possibility that the author’s preferences over the outcome of the communication may not be initially well aligned with those of the reader. That is, we want to cover situations where the reader may well need to be *persuaded* about something. In such cases, the character of the *actual* author (in particular, his trustworthiness) is likely to play some role in readers’ assessments of the credibility of the message and hence in their decisions on whether to comply.

We can picture this way of dividing the responses to the message like this:
The subset of readers who are in communicative alignment have processed the message until their beliefs about what the author intends corresponds to what he actually intends. They have correct beliefs about what the author thinks they should believe about the state of the world and about what he thinks they should do in response. The further subset of compliant readers have processed the message until their own beliefs (not just their beliefs about the author) and their actual response correspond to what the author wanted.

We can clarify the distinction between a reader in communicative alignment with the author and a compliant reader in terms of empathy and sympathy. The reader in communicative alignment with the author has reached a degree of empathy with him. She is able to see the state of the world from his point of view (without necessarily being in agreement) and is able to describe accurately the response he wishes to evoke. The compliant reader has however gone further, such that she is sympathetic to the author’s beliefs concerning the state of the world and consequently compliant to the response he wishes to evoke. To distinguish sympathy from empathy here, we take sympathy in a relatively strong sense to be an actual conformity “of feelings, inclination, or temperament,” a conformity which “makes persons
agreeable to each other.” Notice also that under these ways of talking about empathy and sympathy, we may further say that a reader in communicative alignment has reached a state of empathy (but not necessarily sympathy) with a compliant reader. (We shall make use of this observation in the next subsection.)

Putting all of the above together, there is therefore in this model a mutual dependency between the two sides of the communication event. We are supposing that the author composes the text with some expectation of how his readers will respond. Likewise, readers reach communicative alignment or compliance in part by thinking through how and why the author has composed the text the way he has. This will play a key role in our analysis of Matthew, as we shall outline further below in section 2.3.7. To put things another way, we suppose an “equilibrium” between the author and such readers. The readers have no reason to change their processing of and response to the given message; while the author, foreseeing some such response and given his expectations concerning it, had no incentive to change his composition.

2.3.4 A necessary aside: reading as an “external” reader.

In what we have said so far, “a given reader” is a member of the author’s set of expected readers. What can we say about someone reading a text from outside this group — an “external” reader?

The discussion above suggests that we can still talk about an external reader reaching communicative alignment in such a situation. She may do so through empathy with someone who is in the target set: empathizing with a compliant reader in that group. Additionally, we may suppose an easier and more accurate communicative alignment when this empathy is with someone given relatively high weight in the expected reader profile — a point we shall return to shortly. While it is no longer possible to talk about a direct compliance for an exter-

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nal reader, we can nonetheless talk about an “indirect” or “analogous” compliance. The external reader translates the compliance to her (possibly quite different) situation and character.\(^{176}\)

Indeed, we can construct situations where such analogous compliance would appear quite automatic and intuitive. A warning directed to a particular person, such as “Jeremy, mind the car!” if overheard by someone also in the path of the car, is likely to evoke a similar response.

We shall be arguing later (section 3.1) that Matthew’s expected reader set is \textit{unbounded}. That is, there are no strictly external readers to Matthew’s Gospel. However, it is worth considering the perspective of an external reader for at least two reasons. The first is that the boundedness or otherwise of Matthew’s audience is strongly contested. As we have already seen, many scholars take the Gospel as an address to a distinct first-century community. Readers outside this community are therefore external readers. Second, even if the expected reader set is unbounded, we shall still be suggesting that some readers are on the “tails” of the expected reader profile, given relatively little weight. To put that another way, even if Matthew considers his Gospel “open to all” and relevant for all time (or to “the end of the age,” 28:20), there will be many potential readers in situations we do not suppose Matthew has given much (if any) explicit thought to — especially future readers.\(^{177}\) Such “fringe” readers (into which category all twenty-first century readers may well fall) face some issues in finding communicative alignment that are similar to those of an external reader. In particular, they face the difficulty that the text was not composed \textit{primarily} with them and their situation in mind. Like an external reader, part of the process of reaching a communicative alignment

\(^{176}\) It may then be, as Vanhoozer, \textit{Is There a Meaning?} 265, suggests, that the act of canonizing certain texts such as letters serves to encourage such acts of empathy with members of the (original) target reader profile. We might even say that such an act implicitly creates a new communication event of the form “As x said to y, so he/we say/say to you” — such that the text may then serve to evoke an analogous compliance.

\(^{177}\) Compare Hirsch, “Meaning and Significance,” 202, who explores the consequences of the fact that as “limited creatures,” we “intend our verbal meanings to go beyond what we can pay attention to at any moment. We intend our meanings to transcend our momentary limitations of attention and knowledge.” He has in mind in particular meaning as it extends into the future. The intention of an author in such unknown settings may be “an open-ended, rather all-purpose intention” but is nevertheless be in recognisable continuity with more immediate exemplifications of his intentions. “Meaning and Significance,” 205, 216–17.
with the author will therefore likely be seeking to empathize with a compliant reader more at
the centre of the expected reader profile, as we shall discuss further below at 2.3.7 and 3.1.

2.3.5 Some further brief examples.

The model and its attendant terminology may be clarified with some further brief examples.
Consider first a text that is pure fantasy — *The Lord of the Rings*, perhaps. A reader seeking
communicative alignment should quickly pick up that Tolkien is not making *direct* claims
concerning the true state of the world. Rather, he is describing an artificial world which has
some points of similarity to the true state of the world. Compliance does not involve believ-
ing the fantasy; indeed, it may involve a temporary “suspension of disbelief” with respect to
may aspects of the narrative. 178 A compliant reading may nevertheless evoke the longer-term
reinforcement of the value of certain virtues, such as fellowship, perseverance or uncondi-
tional opposition to evil. 179 Such effects are even more to be expected in a roman à thèse,
such as Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, or a moral fable, such as the “timid
hare” fable we have used above. Again, compliance will not involve believing the state of the
world is as directly described by such texts. But compliance in these cases will typically be
stronger than for a work of entertainment or fantasy. Compliance for the timid hare fable, for
example, might involve becoming less gullible in the face of shrill claims concerning immi-
nent disaster. 180

178 The expression “willing suspension of disbelief” comes from Coleridge’s explanation of how an
“enlightened” audience might nevertheless continue to enjoy poetic pieces with supernatural
elements. Such works contain “a semblance of the truth sufficient to procure [...] that willing
suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith.” Samuel Taylor Coleridge,
*Biographia Literaria; or, Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions* (Boston: W.
Gowans, 1834), 174.

179 Compare Wayne C. Booth, *The Company we Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: University of
California Press, 1988), 151: “we willingly suspend disbelief about some matters but not all; most
authors would be distressed if we said, after our reading, that nothing we found within it carried
over to our ‘real’ selves.”

180 A compliant hearing of the tale for one of the monks who visited the Buddha with questions about
“various austerities practised by ascetics” (see note 42, p.50 above) would presumably have
involved becoming less sensitive to the apparently alarmist signal such austere behaviour was
sending. However, the editor of the Jātaka tales, by including the story within the collection, was
encouraging a wider application — an “analogous compliance” (see section 2.3.4 above, including
note 176, p.100).
The distinction between communicative alignment and compliance may be further clarified by one of the examples in Mark Allen Powell’s *Chasing the Eastern Star*. While tidying up as a pastor in southeast Texas, Powell discovered a slip of paper on which was written a racist joke.\(^{181}\) He uses the example to illustrate his own terminology of “expected readings” and “unexpected readings.”\(^{182}\) The response associated with the “expected” reading was amusement; Powell describes his own response of anger as “an unexpected reading,” but quickly adds that this “was not the result of misunderstanding.”\(^{183}\) Our terminology can be related to this, but describes Powell’s response with greater precision, highlighting the stage in his processing of the text where he moved to an assessment — including an ethical assessment. Powell quickly reached a communicative alignment with the writer of the joke. However, he refused to comply.

Compare this with the processing of a text such as an instruction manual — for assembling a flat-pack bookcase, say. The reader may (eventually!) reach communicative alignment, and have some idea concerning how to complete the task. But we would be surprised if things stopped there. This is an example where holding back from compliance would give an “unhappy” result — in this case, a flat-pack and no bookcase.

Finally, consider a history or a biography. In communicative alignment, a reader will be able to accurately describe the claims being made concerning past states of the world or a given person. Compliance with these claims would depend on the particular history or biography in view. Some histories are polemic. Compliance with Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, for example, might involve overt anti-revolutionary activity. Some biographies are hagiographies. But without yet adjudicating on the question of whether Matthew’s Gospel is narrative (or apocalyptic) history or ancient *bios*, we may at least say that this is the general family into which it best fits.\(^{184}\) Communicative alignment will involve

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184 We shall return briefly to this issue in section 3.1 below.
being able to describe accurately the *claims* Matthew is making concerning the state of the world past, present and future. Compliance will involve *accepting* those claims, and following the response Matthew indicates.

### 2.3.6 A summary of the connections with other approaches.

The model we have outlined connects with our discussion of speech-act theory (section 2.2.1) by describing what Austin called the “uptake” of a locution as “reaching communicative alignment.” We are further suggesting that the “perlocutionary effect” of a given locution may vary substantially across different members of an audience and that the concept of compliance helps us to characterize the conditions where the perlocutionary effect matches the speaker’s “perlocutionary object.” The model also draws heavily from relevance theory, especially the concept of *processing* a message, and how processing will be affected both by initial beliefs (“context” in relevance parlance) and expectations concerning whether the “positive cognitive effects” of the message will make the cost of processing worthwhile. We shall also make use of the way relevance theory describes the formation of explicatures and strong and weak implicatures, including poetic effects. However there are some differences. Most obvious is the fact that we do not suppose a simple message to a single receiver. We also have a peculiar *kind* of message in view, narrative history or ancient *bios*, and we shall have to factor-in the implications of that.\(^\text{185}\)

We have also employed some game-theoretic-like features in the model. On the receiver side, the reason for this is that we do not wish to assume that readers automatically form expectations of optimal relevance. This was already a strong assumption in relevance theory; it becomes even harder to defend when a message has multiple unknown receivers. Thinking more game-theoretically about the situation in which communicator and audience interact helps us to specify the reasons why a given reader might find it worthwhile to continue to process the message. A reader continues to process the message because if the claims contained within it concerning the state of the world are true, then it would be foolish to do

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\(^{185}\) Beginning in chapter 3 below.
nothing. On the sender side, thinking game-theoretically helps us to conceive how an author thinks ahead to how different readers might respond to his message, as he composes it. Putting the two sides together, we are supposing an interaction between an author and a subset of readers that has sufficient similarities to an equilibrium in a game for us to talk about a “communicative alignment” within which there is a communication of intentions. The readers have no reason to change their processing of and response to the given message; the author, given his expectations of this, has no incentive to change his composition.

The model may also be seen as an extension of the model underlying much narrative criticism, such as that we saw summarized by Seymour Chatman above. There is a strong connection between what we have called here the “compliant reader” and the “implied reader” of narrative criticism. In chapter 1 above we encountered a number of slightly different ways of conceiving the “implied reader.” Robert Fowler’s definition is “the reader implied in the text.” He cites Wayne Booth in support of this view. What Booth actually says (without using the term “implied reader”) is that an author creates in his work “an image of his reader.” Fowler interprets this as a reader who is “ultimately in the text, and is the creation of an author.” He goes on to define an “ideal reader” as “a fictive role created and assumed by a critic as he or she presumes to address the critical community,” implying that in part this will involve a claim to be reading as the implied reader — “the reader we must be willing to become, at least momentarily, in order to experience the narrative in the fullest measure.”

186 Section 2.2.2.
187 As understood by Kingsbury (chapter 1, note 82, p.23) and Howell (chapter 1, note 90, p.24). As Robert M. Fowler, “Who is ‘the Reader’ in Reader-Response Criticism?” Semeia 31 (1985): 15, puts it: “the implied reader is the locus of a great deal of equivocation in current criticism.”
188 Fowler, “Who is ‘the Reader’?” 15.
189 The complete sentence is: “The author creates, in short, an image of himself and another image of his reader; he makes his reader, as he makes his second self, and the most successful reading is one in which the created selves, author and reader, can find complete agreement.” Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction, 138. We can relate this to our current approach by saying that if a real flesh-and-blood reader complies with this creative intention, then she has reached a degree of “equilibrium” with the author.
190 Fowler, “Who is ‘the Reader’?” 12, 16.
Wolfgang Iser expresses a similar idea slightly differently. Rather than being a construct that lies “within the text,” Iser wants to see the implied reader as a construct arising from the way real (flesh-and-blood) readers process the text. He makes the claim that “the real reader is always offered a particular role to play” as she reads a text; “it is this role that constitutes the concept of the implied reader.”191 He also cites Wayne Booth in support here, who says, “It is only as I [a flesh-and-blood reader] read that I become the self [Iser’s implied reader] whose beliefs must coincide with the author’s.”192 We also find here and elsewhere in Booth the suggestion that the success of a work depends upon some agreement of beliefs between author and reader: “the implied author of each novel is someone with whose beliefs on all subjects I must largely agree if I am to enjoy his work.”193 If we take “agreement” here to be an empathy with the (implied) author’s beliefs — correctly perceiving their content while not necessarily actually sharing them in “real life” — then we have something here very close to our concept of communicative alignment. If “agreement” is taken as something much stronger, such that the real reader is persuaded to believe what the author believes in relation to the true state of the world, and thereby comes to take on fully and unconditionally (not just “momentarily”) the “role” offered to her in the text, then we have something close to what we have called compliance. Our approach gives a greater precision on this distinction.

Like Fowler, Mark Allen Powell’s definition of “implied reader” is “the reader in the text.”194 However, unlike Booth, Iser or Fowler, Powell does not wish to go on to relate the concept in some way to the author. He goes on to say that a reader (an “ideal reader”?) who reads the text “as the implied reader” is assessing any proposed reading according to the question, “Is there anything in the text that indicates the reader is expected to respond in this way?”195 Powell himself is thoroughly comfortable about using anthropomorphic language like this, such that texts have “expectations” or “intentions.” After all, “Personification of

191 Iser, Act of Reading, 34–35.
193 Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction, 137.
194 Powell, What is Narrative Criticism? 20.
texts is common in everyday speech.” We have been arguing that in many cases it is nevertheless important to locate the origin of such expectations in the author of the text. Powell’s approach would be closer to ours if we were to reform his question to read, “Is there anything in the text that indicates the author expects (or better: wants) the reader to respond in this way?” The answers to this question would then help us characterize what we have called “communicative alignment.”

Note that, as we began to suggest above (section 2.3.5), the “role” taken on by the compliant reader of a work of fiction such as a novel (the area which interests Iser and Booth) need not be especially demanding or long-lasting. With other kinds of text, it may be very demanding indeed — and we suspect this will be the case with Matthew’s Gospel.

There are two important consequences of the congruence between the implied reader of narrative criticism and the compliant reader in our model. The first is that we can engage with and make full use of existing narrative critical studies of Matthew as we seek to describe what compliance looks like for this text. The second is that as we do so, we are extending the scope of narrative study beyond its normal confines. The compliant reader of Matthew is a real reader, and has been persuaded to believe certain things about the state of the real world, and to respond in concrete ways. This concern for the real reader is a task to some extent already begun by Iser; what we are exploring in this study is how far we can take it.

Closely related to narrative criticism and also drawing on Iser is the “audience-orientated” approach, based on Peter Rabinowitz’s definition of an “authorial audience” as

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196 Chasing the Eastern Star, 69. This may be true, but usually this is a short-hand for something which in principle can be described more precisely. Short-hand is useful sometimes, but if relied on too much can lead to confusion.

197 On the other hand, Booth does argue that some fictional works are “life changing” and it is common experience to find them so. Moreover, choosing which books to love (and therefore to be influenced by) is analogous to choosing which people to be friends with and share one’s company with. Booth, The Company we Keep, 168–98, 228. Some works of fiction are also overtly intended to be “life changing.” Take this from Bunyan’s introductory “apology” to The Pilgrim’s Progress: “This book will make a Traveller of thee / If by its Counsel thou wilt ruled be; / It will direct thee to the Holy Land, / If thou wilt its directions understand.” John Bunyan, The Pilgrim’s Progress from This World to That Which is to Come (Boston: Gould & Lincoln, 1864 [first published 1678]), 6.
“the hearers or readers that the author ‘has in mind’ in creating the text.” The tools of narrative criticism are used, but partly to understand better the rhetorical impact the historical author intended to have on this audience. This is even closer to the current approach, and shares our concern for the impact of a text on the real reader. What we are hoping to offer beyond it is greater precision in quite how this relation between author, text and readers operates. Our treatment of the “audience” of a text is also slightly different. Warren Carter says that he uses the concept of “authorial audience” to specify “one possible audience among many” for the sake of transparency and clarity, without making it normative. The one he chooses is one that “by temporal and physical location shares a range of experiences and knowledge with the Gospel’s author.” We are attempting to be more general and flexible than this by specifying a “expected reader set” (which we claim in Matthew’s case to be unbounded), over which there is a weighted “expected reader profile” (see further below, sections 2.3.7 and 3.1).

The approach being sketched here is also coterminous in many respects to rhetorical criticism. We could even go so far as to describe it as a form or development of rhetorical criticism. Benjamin Fiore, for example, describes rhetorical criticism as that which “considers a work of art chiefly as a means to an end, as a vehicle of communication and interaction

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199 Powell is surprisingly dismissive of the “audience-orientated” approach, categorising at as a “basically author-orientated hermeneutic.” This seems unfair given the concern in the approach to consider both author and audience together. As Powell himself says in the very same paragraph, when it comes to the difference between an “author-orientation” and a “reader-orientation,” “one need not choose between these options, for they are not mutually exclusive.” Chasing the Eastern Star, 73.

200 Compare Warren Carter, “Narrative/Literary Approaches To Matthean Theology: The ‘Reign of the Heavens’ as an Example (Mt. 4.17–5.12),” JSNT 20, no. 67 (1997): 9–14, where Carter even talks about Matthew’s Gospel seeking its real “audience/reader’s lived compliance” (my emphasis). The same concern is expressed in Carter’s response to Powell in Chasing the Eastern Star, 239.

201 The quotes are from Carter’s reply to Powell, Chasing the Eastern Star, 238.

202 Chasing the Eastern Star, 238. Nevertheless, readers outside this group may join it through a process very similar to the process of empathy that we suggested above in section 2.3.4. This process is summarised in Warren Carter, Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist (rev. ed.; Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 4–9, and expanded in the rest of that book.
between the author and the audience” (italics mine). He goes on to define rhetorical criticism as “a synchronic study of literary texts and their strategies of communication and persuasion” (again, italics mine). These descriptions have a distinctly game-theoretic feel to them. Relative to this kind of rhetorical criticism, we can expect the additional contribution from modelling the interaction between author and audience more explicitly along game-theoretic lines to come from a greater precision concerning the relations between authorial strategy, reader beliefs and reader responses. Moreover, especially compared to some forms of rhetorical criticism, the approach being suggested would be less concerned with discerning and classifying the elements of the argument within a text according to some taxonomy, or with the style of discourse, and more concerned with how the argument in a text works to persuade someone to do something. What is more: how the argument works to persuade someone to do something over and above merely conceding a point.

2.3.7 From communication model to exegetical practice.

We noted above that some models of the communication event, such as that in speech-act theory, lacked the descriptive richness to provide much in the way of specific help for the exegete. We shall certainly wish to avoid such lack of application to exegetical practice. The application of the model we have adopted will be best seen in practice in later chapters. However, it will be worth at least sketching here how the application will work, so that its relation to the model can be seen clearly.

Each section in chapters 4 to 7 below will begin with a preliminary explanation of why a particular division of Matthew has been chosen as a unit of analysis. We shall then present that analysis in three basic steps:

1. A claim concerning communicative equilibrium. A simple summary of the claim being made by Matthew in this part of the Gospel concerning the state of the world and what he wants to evoke in terms of compliance. A brief summary explanation of how a reader might reach communicative alignment.

2. *Expansion and further argument*. The bulk of the analysis will be dedicated to arguing from the textual evidence that this claim can indeed be substantiated. This will include a step-by-step expansion of how a reader might reaching communicative alignment through the processing of the text. Complementing this will be a summary of what we can infer concerning Matthew’s authorial strategy.

3. *Continuation*. We shall be attempting at every stage a holistic analysis that treats the entirety of Matthew’s Gospel as the basic unit of communication within the communication event. As well as relating our analysis of each section to its preceding co-text, it will therefore also be helpful to consider how certain aspects of it develop in the subsequent narrative.

For parts of the Gospel that would seem to warrant more extended analysis, we shall be expanding the second of these stages: the central analysis of the text. As we do so, it is worth noting that we shall be following a broad movement in perspective from a reader orientation to an author orientation. We begin from a reader perspective largely because we have no choice. The only fixed evidence we have for the Matthean communication event is the Gospel itself, and the only access we have to this is by reading it. It is worth remembering as we do so that we stand alongside other readers in the communication model of section 2.3.3 above — we are, so to speak, fellow players in the same game. There is some consistency here: we do not give ourselves a qualitatively different status as critics relative to other readers; even though we may begin from a peculiar starting point, with peculiar concerns. We too begin with a set of prior beliefs concerning the state of the world, the nature of the message we are investigating, the character and intentions of the author. These we successively update through our engagement with the text. It is not merely parallel to the reading process of other readers, it is the *same* reading process.

However, there are other reasons for beginning at this end of the communication event. To compose his message effectively, the author has to think through the response to his work. Earlier choices depend on (expectations of) later choices. Inasmuch as we are approaching the communication event as something like a dynamic game, to consider the
later choices first corresponds to the process of “backwards induction” we mentioned in section 2.2.4 above. This gives the reader perspective a logical priority even if not a temporal priority.

We shall then break this movement into four sub-stages:

2A. The wider readership. We begin on the reader side of the communication event, adopting the widest possible perspective. This is to acknowledge that as different readers from different starting points engage with the text, some are drawn to communicative alignment and then, perhaps, to compliance and some are not. Some give up reading at verse 2 of chapter 1; some read over and over again. Some process the text in one order, some in another. For some readers, a given component of the text may evoke an implication with radical “positive cognitive effects,” while the same component leaves other readers unmoved. And yet representatives from both groups may eventually converge to compliance—or not. We do not wish to prejudge the shape of these responses. For example, beliefs consistent with compliance do not necessarily lead to compliance, as we noted in our discussion of “trust” above. Moreover, there are plenty of external shocks which can change beliefs and responses for other reasons. There are likely to be limits to how far we can go in describing the different possibilities here, of course. For the most part they will come from thought experiments of the form, “A person beginning from here is likely to reach such-and-such an implication from processing this.” The recently revived interest in Matthew’s *Wirkungsgeschichte* is also a source of different reader experiences, albeit one biased towards a certain kind of interpreter.204

2B. Communicative alignment. There are two stages here. The first is to ask: what *claims* are Matthew making? He is likely to be making many, including important

claims in the areas we term Christology and eschatology. We shall begin laying the foundations for an analysis of such claims in the next chapter, in sections 3.3 and 3.4. In 3.4 we shall also be introducing what we shall call Matthew’s “implied temporal framework.” This will help us to describe the evolution of what Matthew is claiming concerning the structure of history shaped by the arrival and promises of Jesus. The second stage is to ask: given these claims, what is the shape of the compliance Matthew wishes to evoke? Two strategies, already well-used by critics, will help us to answer this. The first is to read empathetically, knowing that Matthew will have composed his Gospel with those receiving most weight in his “expected reader profile” in mind. Under the supposition that is hard to give weight to people one knows nothing about, we may suspect that Matthew gives prominent weight to Greek-speaking inhabitants of the first-century Mediterranean world. By empathizing with such people, we are therefore more likely to make correct inferences. The second is to read closely and repeatedly. That is, unlike the reader who stops processing when the cost has got too high, we do not place any limit on the processing effort we are prepared to exert. This procedure shall follow a path which can be described using the terminology of relevance theory in broad outline, while it will also use the tools of narrative criticism for the detail. We shall make inferences from the text in order of

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205 Note that it could in principle be true that what Matthew wishes to evoke in terms of compliance is complex, specifying different responses for different readers. However, in practice we shall argue later that it makes best sense of the data to suppose that Matthew’s ultimate purpose is simple, in the sense that there is a descriptive homogeneity of compliance across the subset of compliant readers. That is, Matthew’s Gospel is a message that evokes one kind of theocentric commitment in compliant readers, rather than multiple kinds.

206 I have chosen to use “empathetic” rather than “empathic.” Although the latter is seen as more correct by some, the terms are treated as synonymous by most authorities (e.g. the Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed., 1989) and “empathetic” better highlights its relation to “sympathetic.”

207 Without perhaps going as far as, say, Warren Carter, in specifying and describing a precise social group, as in Matthew and the Margins, 1–49 or Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist, 66–91. Nevertheless, as Rabinowitz puts it (“Whirl Without End,” 85) we shall have occasion to ask what Matthew is assuming concerning “the socio-cultural knowledge and interpretive skills necessary to actualize the text’s meaning.” Or, as Powell puts it, it will often be necessary to ask how readers are expected (we would add: by Matthew) to read and what they are expected to know and believe (Chasing the Eastern Star, 75–130).

208 This is perhaps the main thing which distinguishes the critic from other readers: the fact that he or she has more time to read and process a text and, in principle, more experience to do so efficiently.
accessibility. This will involve discerning the explicit content of the text — forming statements such as, for example, “The story-teller is telling us x,” or, “The story-teller is showing us y.” It will involve specifying “implicated premises”: what the author wants us to use as prior information to our processing. This may be indicated strongly, through editorial comment or other “offline” material, or weakly — by textual allusion, for example. Most importantly, it will involve forming “implicated conclusions”: conclusions strongly implied by an event, by character interaction or example, or by other devices such as structure or arrangement. There may also be significant weak implicatures: poetic effects, such as irony, metaphor or symbolism. As discussed above, we can see here a strong connection with narrative critical studies. The exegetical tools described in, say, the appendix to Powell’s *What is Narrative Criticism*? or in Resseguie’s *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament* all apply, and we shall also appeal to other narrative studies of Matthew as we proceed.  

2C. *Convergence to compliance*. Here we ask: what *persuades* a reader in communicative alignment to accept the claims Matthew is making and move to compliance. We shall be looking at what might make Matthew’s claims *credible*, as we began to discuss above (in section 2.2.4).  

2D. *Authorial strategy*. Finally, we move to the author perspective. In one respect, the aim here is not so much to add something new to the analysis we have conducted from a reader perspective but rather to *recast* it. We have described what it means to be compliant; here we *recast* that as authorial aim or purpose. We have described some of the dynamics of reader response, including the dynamic reading processes whereby different readers might converge to compliance; here we *recast* that as authorial strategy. In another respect, we *are* adding something here in that there are useful insights to be gained from thinking about how expectations with respect to the

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processes of reading may have influenced the process of composition. That is, we now take a “systemic” approach, thinking through the “interrelated sets of options for making meaning” open to an author.\textsuperscript{210} We wish to consider, for example, how and why Matthew has made the choices he has made concerning overall genre, structure and order. We shall be making inferences about the literary structure of the Gospel here, as in most treatments of Matthew. However, we shall also be trying to reconstruct what we shall call the “decision structure” of the Gospel. That is, the shape of the underlying choice or decision Matthew is offering to the reader.\textsuperscript{211} Thinking more broadly, we can usefully suppose from this perspective that Matthew is trying to maximize the “overall response” to his Gospel given his expectations concerning reader response. There may be a trade-off here. He may wish to emphasise the “width” of the response, by composing the Gospel to bring as wide a subset of readers to compliance as possible. But that might be in conflict with the “depth” he can achieve: the degree of response in a given compliant reader.

\textbf{2.4 Conclusion to chapter 2}

Mark Allen Powell comments that:

The field of biblical studies presently seems to be divided into two general camps: author–oriented scholars who use historical criticism and reader–oriented scholars who use literary criticism. There is something of a cold war between these — not much outright hostility but not much interchange either.\textsuperscript{212}

This methodological bifurcation is something we saw in the brief survey at the beginning of


\textsuperscript{211} In this we shall be building on Ian Smith’s “trust model” as described above in section 2.2.4. The first main example of this will be towards the end of our discussion of the Sermon of the Mount, in section 4.6.7 below.

\textsuperscript{212} Powell, \textit{Chasing the Eastern Star}, 1–2.
this chapter. There is an interest in new methods, but they have far from displaced the old ones. Powell reiterates elsewhere, in the introduction co-authored with David Bauer cited above (section 2.1), that the division has not so far been acrimonious. There is a “tendency among Matthew scholars to view various reading strategies as more complementary than they seem to be regarded in the general field of modern literary criticism.”\footnote{Bauer and Powell, “Introduction,” 25.} While acknowledging the healthy “spirit of cooperation” here, the objective in this chapter has been to go beyond eclecticism and complementarity to integration. In pursuing a more descriptively adequate model of the Matthean communication event, we have sought to release the narrative analysis from its “narrative world” to engage with the interaction between the Gospel’s real readers and its real author, and his claims to be representing something related to the real history that has been the interest of historical criticism. The game-theoretic instinct which leads us to consider the composition of a message that thinks about how it will be processed, and the processing of a message that thinks about to what end it has been composed, brings together the author and reader orientations to the text. In that it describes reference-resolution as a component of the way a communication is processed, the model integrates the representational and inferential-communicative aspects of language. The end result is not so much a rival approach, as an approach which, as we have seen above, encompasses other approaches in a coherent fashion.

However, the test of a method is not ultimately its methodological inclusiveness, but rather in practical application. We have set things up such that in characterizing communicative alignment and convergence to compliance for this text we should automatically answer our research questions concerning theocentric commitment.\footnote{Sections 1.4.2 and 2.3.3 above.} But the question remains: how much will that add value to our understanding and appreciation of Matthew’s Gospel? It is to that application that we now turn.
Chapter 3

Theocentric commitment in Matthew’s Gospel: four preparatory claims

With the communication model of section 2.3 in mind, we can turn now to the analysis of Matthew’s Gospel itself. As we do so, it will be important for the transparency of our argument to acknowledge in advance that, with such a long and complex text, our treatment shall necessarily be selective. One of the aims of this chapter is to keep the detailed analysis in subsequent chapters to a reasonable length. We shall do so by bringing forward for a preliminary discussion some of the conclusions concerning the Gospel as a whole implied by the approach we are taking.

There are of course disadvantages in presenting conclusions before the analysis that backs them up. As we turn to consider the text, it may then look as if we are “reading in” a framework — eisegesis rather than exegesis. The reverse arrangement, in which the conclusions appear to emerge inductively from the analysis, might seem less prejudiced. In practice, of course, actual research is far more iterative from analysis to conclusion than either way of presenting suggests and, as most scholars are willing to admit, there is no such thing as presuppositionless interpretation. This study, for example, progressed by building a preliminary thesis statement at a fairly early stage, which was then successively modified (sometimes radically) in the light of analysis. It might seem arbitrary how we then present things, but the advantage of presenting thesis before argument is that the thesis reader can see in advance what each step of the argument is for.

What we shall consider here are four preparatory claims concerning the Gospel as a whole — claims that are in some way foundational and can be built upon in the analysis which follows. These are that:

1) The Gospel generates an “unbounded” communication event;
2) in which post-resurrection readers are “drawn in” to stand alongside the disciples in the narrative in constructive empathy and are then, as they return from the narrative, expected to translate what they hear to apply to their actual situation;

3) in which Matthew builds a Christology which confirms Jesus as the eschatological agent of the Lord, even the “Son of God,” realizing the kingdom program of the prophet Daniel, but which is strongly qualified by the necessity of realizing first the “Servant program” of the prophet Isaiah;

4) and in which Matthew progressively builds an eschatology which reveals and uncovers an “implied temporal framework,” claiming a certain urgent state of affairs with respect to the reader.

Although we shall to an extent be building on these claims in the more detailed analysis to follow, we shall not be treating them merely as assumptions. They are also hypotheses open to testing in the analysis. The aim of this chapter is to outline each hypothesis more fully and place it within the context of the alternatives that have been considered in Matthean studies, building on the material surveyed in chapter 1 where necessary. In what follows, we shall then have a range of alternatives to judge between. This corresponds to the first stage of Peter Lipton’s account of “inference to the best explanation,” which is to draw up a short list of potential explanations for a given phenomenon.1 The second stage is to choose the favoured, “best” explanation from the short list.2 We shall begin that second stage here, but shall be continuing it in chapters 4 to 7 below.

3.1 The “unboundedness” of the communication event generated by the Gospel

Under the communication model sketched in chapter 2, we can classify the communication event associated with a text according to the expected reader profile it implies. We can define

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2 Endearingly, Lipton talks about the “loveliest” explanation, *Inference to the Best Explanation*, 142–63.
an “open” or “public” text as one in which the expected reader profile is unbounded; for a “closed” or “private” text it is bounded. For example, the expected reader set could be very narrow, as in a letter — a closed, private communication event. However, there are ways in which a expected reader set can be expanded — if, say, a letter or private document is made public, generating a new communication event. (The canonical epistles have this sort of quality.) However, there is a third possibility, which is that the original communication event never had any boundaries. It was, and is, a “public” communication event.

There are two main dimensions on which to explore the openness of an expected reader profile. The first is what we could call social proximity. The bounds might be very tight here: a message to a single person, or a specific, well-defined group. Or they might be loose: this is a message “for everyone.” The second is what we might call temporal proximity. A message might concern an issue that is very immediate and short-lived. Or it could have an enduring relevance.

We have observed that Matthean studies up to the 1980s was dominated by the presupposition that Matthew’s Gospel is a message within a private communication event of a quite specific type. The communication event was taken to be bounded in both dimensions. Matthew was writing for a specific group (the “Matthean community”) to address issues raised by, say, the separation of the group from Judaism or the challenges of Jamnia. Such issues were specifically relevant to the first century setting of the community, making the

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3 Richard Bauckham uses the term “open text” to describe a text that leaves its “implied readership relatively open,” and “closed text” to describe texts that “define their implied readership very specifically,” claiming that this terminology is due to Umberto Eco. Richard Bauckham, “Introduction,” in The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences (ed. Richard Bauckham; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1998), 2. However, Eco seems to mean something quite different by “closed” and “open” texts. A “closed” text for Eco is one expected to be read within a relatively narrow range of interpretation, such as a James Bond novel, in contrast to an “open” text, such as Joyce’s Ulysses, where the author seems to be employing a deliberate ambiguity, courting multiple (but not limitless) interpretations that interplay with one another. Umberto Eco, The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts (Advances in Semiotics; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 8–10, 47–66. To an extent Bauckham acknowledges this, but he uses the terminology anyway. Richard Bauckham, “For Whom Were Gospels Written?” in The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences (ed. Richard Bauckham; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1998), 48. For clarity, we shall complement Bauckham’s “open/closed” distinction by also distinguishing between “public” and “private” texts, and “unbounded” and “bounded” communication events.
communication event bounded from a temporal point of view as well. Such presuppositions have to some extent persisted, especially in social science criticism.

On the other hand, narrative approaches have tended to put the issue to one side. In as much as it is possible to use narrative methods without stepping outside the “narrative world” of the text, the location of flesh-and-blood readers (their social location and temporal location), can be ignored. However, we have already argued (section 2.1 above) that marginalizing the flesh-and-blood reader severely limits the usefulness of narrative approaches.

As we think about how to choose between these different claims regarding the boundedness of Matthew’s Gospel, it will be helpful to consider the extent to which the social boundedness of the Matthean communication event has already been discredited. For this, we shall briefly consider Richard Bauckham’s seminal argument against the “Gospel communities” and some of the counter-arguments that have been levied against it.

In his 1998 essay “For whom were Gospels written?” Richard Bauckham made a strong case against the consensus view in Gospel scholarship on the intended audiences of the Gospels. His main thesis was “that an evangelist writing a Gospel expected his work to circulate widely among the churches, had no particular Christian audience in view, but envisaged as his audience any church (or any church in which Greek was understood) to which his work might find its way.”

There follow five main arguments. The first argument is that, under the most accepted view of Synoptic relationships, by the time Matthew and Luke wrote, Mark’s Gospel had already circulated in the churches in this manner. Second, there is no positive evidence in favour of the consensus view. Even if the Gospels were written within specific communities, it does not follow that they were necessarily written for those communities. Third, the results of assuming Gospel communities as audiences do not confirm the assumption: there is too much in each Gospel that is relevant for more than one community. Fourth,

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4 Bauckham, “For Whom Were Gospels Written?” 11.
5 Bauckham, “For Whom Were Gospels Written?” 12.
the genre of the Gospels tells against a specific local audience. They are not letters, but more likely Greco-Roman *bioi*, with a relevance “pitched in relatively broad terms for any competent reader.”⁸ Bauckham asks why a Gospel writer would “go to such trouble to freeze in writing his response to a specific local situation which was liable to change and to which he could respond much more flexibly and therefore appropriately in oral preaching?”⁹ Fifth, it is much more likely that rather than being a scattering of “isolated, self-sufficient communities,” the early Christian movement was rather a “network of communities with constant, close communication among themselves.”¹⁰ Each was part of a worldwide Christian movement and the Gospels were therefore written for this wider, more dynamic setting. The conclusion is therefore that the Gospel writers “wrote *for any and every church* to which their Gospels might circulate” (his emphasis).¹¹

David Sim is one scholar who has worked under the assumption that Matthew was a member of a distinct community and wrote for that community and, perhaps not surprisingly, gives a robust response to Bauckham.¹² We can relate what he says in a 2001 paper to each of Bauckham’s five arguments. First, he suggests that even if Mark circulated widely before Matthew and Luke wrote, the later Gospel writers corrected Mark, and fearful of further correction of their own accounts, would have kept their audience limited to sympathetic readers.¹³ Second, even if the positive evidence for Gospel communities is limited, so is the

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⁹ Bauckham, “For Whom Were Gospels Written?” 29.


¹¹ Bauckham, “For Whom Were Gospels Written?” 46.


positive evidence for wide circulation — there is “no hard evidence”; the claim “lacks concrete support.” Third, he defends the results in recent scholarship from assuming the Gospel communities, in that they provide plausible explanations for the differences in content and emphasis between the Gospels. Fourth, even if the Gospels are μοι, there is no reason to suppose such a genre could not be used “with a smaller and more limited readership in mind.” The lack of reader identification might suggest the recipients were well-known, rather than general and unknown. Fifth, claiming that the Gospels are “for all Christians” suggests a uniformity in the early church, whereas it is “well known that in the initial decades the early Christians were divided into at least two distinct and very different groups that were often in conflict with each other.” Communication between groups was not as free as Bauckham suggests, and was frequently hostile.

Each of these counter-arguments leads perhaps to some qualification of Bauckham’s claims, but none of them are fatal for his overall thesis. That this is so is shown when Sim does in the end partially concede that “it is possible that one or more of the Evangelists wrote for a slightly broader readership than their own local communities.” However, Sim may well be right to suggest that Bauckham has overstated his thesis in claiming the Gospels are uniformly for all Christians.

In order to refine Bauckham’s thesis, we can use Matthew’s Gospel as an example. One of Sim’s criticisms of Bauckham is that “not one argument is based on the internal evidence of the Gospels themselves.” In what follows we shall be suggesting that Matthew’s Gospel does have a contribution to make here. In section 3.2 below, we shall be suggesting

15 Sim, Matthew and Christian Judaism, 27.
19 Sim, “A Response to Richard Bauckham,” 10. According to Sim, the main divide was between a Torah-observant group and a non-Torah-observant group. He places Matthew in the first group, and Mark (and Paul) in the second. To say this is “well known” is a strong claim. Sim, “A Response to Richard Bauckham,” 25; cf. Sim, Matthew and Christian Judaism, 123–39.
that Matthew’s message is built around Jesus’ communication act portrayed within the Gospel. Although this has a primary didactic focus on the disciples, it is self-consciously done in the hearing of a fringe group. We shall be arguing that in part the message is intended to attract in members from this group. That is, although there may be an emphasis on certain kinds of people in the audience, the audience is not bounded—it has fuzzy and open edges.

There is further evidence for openness at the end of the Gospel. When Jesus commands the disciples, “Therefore go and make-disciples [...] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19–20), it seems implicit that this Gospel will have some important role in such teaching. Quite how the pre-resurrection instruction shown by Matthew in the discourses functions for post-resurrection disciples is something we shall have more to say on (beginning with the next section). However, we can at least say that it seems the Gospel has some role beyond the bounds of a local community.

Bauckham’s thesis is that the Gospels were intended for all Christians when they were written in the late first century. Let us extend this suggestion. We shall be suggesting that the Gospel is in part intended to draw in people who are relatively distant and unfamiliar. That is, the Gospel is socially unbounded. However, there is also nothing explicit within the Gospels themselves that suggests they ever had a limited “shelf-life”: relevant for a time, but then no longer. For example, in 28:20 the participial clause “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” would seem to have a time-frame marked out by the phrase καὶ ἴδοὺ ἐγὼ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἐως τὴς συντελεσίας τοῦ αἰώνος. We have yet to decide exactly what point in time Jesus was referring to with ἡ συντελεσία τοῦ αἰώνος, but many would take that phrase to be referring to something stretching into the future relative to its utterance. If so, then that would suggest the Gospel is part of a communication event that is unbounded both socially and temporally.

However, as well as extending the thesis of Bauckham et al, we also need to qualify it. Richard Burridge, writing in the same volume as Bauckham, argues that thinking about “the ‘audience’ implied within each Gospel is more helpful than [thinking about] imagined hypo-
thetical communities.” Moving from talking about “communities” to talking about “audiences” is an improvement, but the disadvantage of this term as it stands is that it may imply a lack of distinction between the different members of the target group. In section 2.3.3 we chose the terminology of “expected reader profile.” This is a more flexible concept because it allows us to suppose Matthew places different weight or emphasis on the different readers he wishes to influence. We can visualise the profile something like this:

![Linguistic boundary](#)

The curves in the figure represent readers on which Matthew places equal weight — rather like the contour lines on a map. The reader at the “centre” of the profile (the one receiving the most weight) is shown here on the far left of the figure, half way up. The way we have drawn the profile here, the central reader is close to Matthew in terms of social distance: he (or perhaps she) was first-century Greek-speaking Jewish Christian like Matthew (if that is

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23 Burridge, “Genre and Audiences,” 134. However, as Warren Carter demonstrates, it is quite possible to accept that the Gospels are *bioi* and to use the language of “audience,” but then to identify that audience as a quite specific “marginal community” in later first-century Antioch. Carter, *Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist*, 40–42, 89.

24 Strictly, this is proximity to Matthew of the modal reader. With such a profile, the expected proximity of a reader (the mean proximity) would be more towards the centre of the figure.
what he was). But there are other possibilities. Relative to the central reader, it may well be that the contemporary reader is right on the “tails” of the profile, receiving much less weight.

We can draw in parts of the profile where there are significant changes in weight or emphasis. Especially significant in this regard is the linguistic boundary beyond which there is a need to translate the Gospel — either into another language-group or into the idiom of a later day. In principle, we could similarly draw in the boundaries of Matthew’s peer-group or “community,” which might or might not coincide with those in the profile receiving most weight. It would not, according to Bauckham et al, passim, given that Matthew was likely to be writing for a group outside his immediate circle. It would, according to David Sim, because Matthew wanted to limit his primary readership to those of a similar persuasion. But even if we were to conclude that Matthew had Christians of close acquaintance and their problems and issues in mind as he wrote, all we are adding by suggesting he was engaged in an unbounded communication event is that he did not have them exclusively in mind. That is, as we shall argue for the internal communication event depicted in Matthew 5–7 (section 4.6.7 below), where the ostensive communication from Jesus is directed at the disciples (5:1–2) but in hearing of the crowds (7:28–29), the boundaries of Matthew’s “audience” are also fuzzy and open.

There is a distinction, then, and sometimes a distance, between different readers on the profile and, as we argued in sections 2.3.4 and 2.3.7 above, the more the “fringe” reader (such as a twenty-first century reader) is able to empathize with a “central” reader, the more he or she is likely to understand what is going on.25 What we shall go on to argue is that one route by which a fringe reader might come to empathize with a more central reader on the profile could well be through a kind of mutual empathy with some of the characters in the narrative. That is, if part of Matthew’s authorial strategy in bringing his readers to communicative alignment (and then on to compliance) is to align them with certain characters, evoking

25 It would not be fair to say, therefore, that in talking about the Gospel as part of an unbounded communication event we are sweeping the problem of hermeneutical “distance” under the carpet. However, we have put that distance in its proper perspective. Different readers are at least on the same profile, as fellow receivers.
a degree of empathy between reader and character, then as fringe readers do this they effectively move towards the centre of the profile. For example, we shall argue in section 4.2 that Matthew wishes to align his compliant readers with the unreserved trust and obedience of Joseph in 1:18–2:23. In sections 3.2 and 3.3 below, we shall begin to argue that Matthew wants an initial empathetic alignment with the Christological and eschatological expectations of John the Baptist. And in the next section we shall begin to argue that Matthew wants a qualified alignment, a “constructive empathy,” with the disciples. As fringe readers at some distance in terms of social and temporal proximity on the expected reader profile, we should then be able to move closer to the centre of the communication event, as we empathize with such characters, taking account of what they would be expected to know and believe in their particular social and historical situation.

3.2 The relationship between Matthew’s addressees and Jesus’ addressees within the narrative

An obvious issue is raised by texts such as Matthew’s Gospel, where we have a message A (the Gospel), given to Matthew’s expected readership (as discussed above) which in itself relates or describes the giving of a message B, given as teaching from Jesus chiefly to his disciples (but sometimes directed at, or overheard by, crowds and opponents). Is message A essentially the same as message B? Are they congruent or opposed? How should Matthew’s expected readership relate to the character groups within the Gospel narrative?

In the “timid hare” example we looked at in the last chapter, the message of the fable and the message of the hare were opposed. The hare’s message is exposed in the fable as ridiculous. The fable functions to distance us from the hare and align us instead with the Bodhisatta. His perspective is consistent with the message of the tale as a whole. That he is to be respected is flagged by the description “born as a lion” (in contrast to the “timid” hare); as he brings order rather than chaos at the end, it is his perspective we are encouraged to respect and adopt. The story thus functions as a fable against panic responses that have no basis in reality, and the herd behaviour that can flow out of them.
In contrast, we shall be arguing that the central communication act within the narrative of Matthew’s Gospel is strongly congruent with its message as a whole. We shall be arguing that Matthew carefully sets Jesus up as principal messenger, and then (so far as is possible) steps into the background. If this is right, then we can expect the characteristics of Matthew’s message to be related to those of Jesus’ communicative activity within the narrative.

What we shall do in this section is to state the claim on this issue we shall be defending in this thesis, raise some opposing or alternative views, and then begin to defend the claim. However, a full defence will have to await more detailed analysis of the Gospel (chapters 4–7 below).

3.2.1 The claim.

On the relationship between Matthew’s message and Jesus’ message within the narrative, and the relationship between Matthew’s addressees and Jesus’ addressees, the claim is as follows. It is that once Matthew has set up his message in Matthew 1–3, the total communication act performed by Jesus within the Gospel is then strongly congruent with the message of the Gospel as a whole, and sets its ultimate pattern and shape. From Matthew 4 onwards, the narrative functions to “draw in” post-resurrection readers to stand alongside the disciples in the narrative. Simultaneously, Matthew encourages such readers to leave the crowd and distance themselves from Jesus’ opponents — either literally or figuratively, depending on their social and temporal proximity to the events being described.

However, the alignment between post-resurrection readers and the disciples in the narrative is not exact. Rather, compliant post-resurrection readers are encouraged to develop a “constructive empathy” with the disciples. That is, they hear what Jesus says as if they were there but then, as they return from the narrative, they are expected to translate what they hear to apply to their actual situation. In particular, Matthew does not expect them to return to their post-resurrection situation without reading and processing the subsequent narrative, including the eventual failure of the disciples, and updating what they have heard in the light of that. The alignment Matthew wishes to make is therefore ultimately with the disciples as they
stand at the end of the narrative, hearing the Great Commission in 28:19–20, after the events of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

3.2.2 Opposing or alternative views.

The antithesis to this claim is that there is some significant incongruency between the message within the Gospel and the Gospel message as a whole. This need not be as stark as the opposition we found in the timid hare fable. For example, Jesus’ message within the Gospel might be a message for the disciples relevant only for the period up to his death and resurrection, but not thereafter. If, for example, like Georg Strecker, we concluded that “the disciples are like the person Jesus, set in an unrepeatable holy past,” then we might expect the instruction to them to be specific to that past, and therefore not to be read as instruction to later readers.  

There are also a number of alternatives to the claim. It is worth noting at this point that many historical critics of Matthew who take the Gospel as a closed or bounded message to a local community also take Jesus’ teaching as teaching directed at the (original) reader. We have already seen this to some extent with Ulrich Luz (see above, section 1.3). Earlier than this, George Kilpatrick developed a theory that the Gospel was composed within the liturgical practice of a local church, for the purposes of instruction. That is, “in these conditions, the Church came to create and employ continuously a literature of its own to proclaim in its worship its message and teaching in explicit terms” — i.e. the Gospel of Matthew. In such a setting, the teaching of Jesus to his disciples would have been heard as direct teaching. Indeed, it would have been heard as teaching edited and adapted specifically for that community. In the late 1960s, Krister Stendahl built on and adapted Kilpatrick, taking the Gospel to

26 Strecker, Der Weg der Gerechtigkeit, 194. Although, as we saw in section 1.3, Strecker himself does think the speeches are redacted, “ethicized,” for the purpose of instructing later readers.

27 George Dunbar Kilpatrick, The Origins of the Gospel According to St. Matthew (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1946), 59–71. Kilpatrick speculates that local Christian churches adopted the synagogue practices of reading scripture and exposition, and the processes of “Haggadah” (“the exegesis of Holy Writ for edification in a free manner” and “Halakah” (the careful derivation of religious rules by exegesis). Then, “As such documents as Mark, Q, and M were repeatedly read in Church over some twenty years there was bound to develop a fixed element in exposition along the lines of Haggadah and Halakah” (Origins, 61).

28 Kilpatrick, Origins, 65.
be “a handbook issued by a school,” suggesting that many features of the discourses “point to a milieu of study and instruction.”

At around the same time, Marxsen had a similar emphasis on the function of the Gospel for teaching:

The speech complexes [...] are sermons as preached in Matthew’s time. They are exactly what Jesus “commanded” and what should and will be “taught” and “observed.”

Some narrative critical studies have also supported the claim that the Gospel in some way constitutes instruction for the post-resurrection disciple. In introducing the issue of how to view the role of the disciples in Matthew in section 1.3, we noted that Terrence Donaldson, for example, defends taking the disciples as a guide to post-resurrection Christian experience from the Great Commission. The disciples are commanded to make disciples (μαθητέσατε, 28:19). The reader learns “what it means to be a disciple [...] above all, in joining with them as they listen to Jesus’ teaching.”

On the role of the crowds and Jesus’ opponents within the narrative there are also a variety of views. This is especially true on the role of the crowds. Similar issues surface here to those we have considered concerning the role of the disciples. Are the crowds a “historicized” backdrop, “wrapped in a cloak of unrepeatability,” or are they “transparent” ciphers for people in Matthew’s day: either Jewish people, or wider? Are they “flat” characters

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30 Willi Marxsen, Mark the Evangelist; Studies on the Redaction History of the Gospel (trans. James Boyce and others; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), 208. Marxsen is taking 28:19–20 as the key to the function of the book: “These words are the inner goal of the entire book.”
33 Compare J.R.C. Cousland, The Crowds in the Gospel of Matthew (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 4: “Even when the crowds have commanded the attention of scholars, it is safe to say that no consensus has emerged concerning their place in the [G]ospel.”
within the narrative or “round”?Should they be seen in a positive light, or a negative light?

J.R.C. Cousland concludes that the dominant role of the crowd is historical. There are two dimensions to this. On the one hand, they are the “lost sheep of the House of Israel,” responsive to the compassionate care of Jesus. On the other hand, they are “the obdurate people of God, who have constantly rejected the Prophets sent by him.” Hence: “The paradox of the crowds is, in Matthew’s view, the paradox of the Jewish people, and is expressive of their ongoing ambivalence toward the God of Israel.” However, Cousland also has room for seeing the crowd as in some sense “transparent”:

The situation of the transparent crowds is akin to that of the historical crowds: they are Jewish and have not become members of the church. Nevertheless, Matthew appears to presuppose that the mission is ongoing, and, by providing different economies for the people and their leaders, evidently envisages a time when within the timing of God the transparent crowds will join the church. His Gospel is, in part, designed to help facilitate this process.

On the role of Jesus’ opponents in the Gospel (in particular, the Jewish leaders), the same basic question of “historical or transparent?” pervades the discussion. As with the disciples and the crowd, redaction criticism has tended to regard them as transparent — in this case, for the opponents of Matthew’s community. However, there is some sensitivity here about opt-

uses the crowd in distinction to the religious leaders to leave a door open for Jewish mission in his own day: “The crowds of the Gospel narrative are a cipher for the Jewish people of Matthew’s time, who are doubtful about whether to follow the new direction set by the Pharisees or to join a community of Jewish-Christians such as Matthew’s gospel reflects.” Joseph A. Comber, “The Verb Therapeuō in Matthew’s Gospel,” JBL 79 (1978): 433–34. This is similar to the view on “transparency” Cousland himself develops (see below).


Cousland, Crowds, 8.


Cousland, Crowds, 296–97.

e.g. Sjef van Tilborg, The Jewish Leaders in Matthew (Leiden: Brill, 1972), who locates Matthew’s community in Alexandria, a centre of Jewish culture and anti-Jewish sentiment.
ing for “transparent,” given perceived worries about anti-Semitism.\textsuperscript{40} An alternative, narrative-critical role for the leaders is suggested by Kingsbury, who suggests they generate the principal conflict in the plot of the Gospel — one which is resolved by the death of Jesus. This is apparently a resolution in favour of the leaders but is overturned by Jesus’ resurrection, through which “God vindicates Jesus in his conflict with them (28:6, 18–20).”\textsuperscript{41}

3.2.3 Towards a defence of the claim as the “best explanation” for the speeches in the Gospel.

Those treatments which “historicize” disciples, crowds and opponents have the advantage of not obscuring the role and narrative function of these groups in building Matthew’s Christology. However, under this view, the only function of the speeches is to contribute in some way to Matthew’s Christology. It is then difficult to explain what appears to be their redundant detail and excessive length. It is very hard, for example, in the midst of reading the long speech in chapters 5–7 not to hear it as instruction. Given the history of interpretation of the speeches (from Chrysostom onwards), which has overwhelmingly tended to read them as Christian instruction, we would have to say that if Matthew intended to historicize these groups and (within that) the instruction given to the disciples, then his communicative strategy has failed comprehensively.

On the other hand, the view that all the groups are “transparent” also seems deficient. On this view, the Gospel is intended to be read in a way that can be described as \textit{strongly

\textsuperscript{40} Note the discussion in Chasing the Eastern Star, 119–20, where Powell says, “Matthew’s original, intended readers (historical people in the first century) were supposed to regard the characters in the story as representative of real people, and I am just as certain that most readers today also do so.” However, Powell wants to claim that it is also valid to read the Gospel “as a nonreferential story (from the perspective of its implied readers)” — and thereby avoid any possibility of anti-Semitism. Note also Tilborg’s eagerness to distance himself from what he perceives to be Matthew’s view on the Jewish leaders, which “can only be explained as being held by someone who [...] was still so absorbed in his own ideas that he had lost sight of reality. It speaks of an one-sided, negative reflexion which has no longer been influenced by a positive contribution from the adversary.” The Jewish Leaders in Matthew, 171.

\textsuperscript{41} Kingsbury, “Conflict,” 195. See further below, section 7.1, on the death and resurrection of Jesus as the climax of Matthew’s plot.
The (first-century, Matthean community) reader is expected to constantly and systematically substitute contemporary groups for the groups within the narrative. This flattens the plot (because everything is now seen relative to the static situation of the Matthean community) and downplays Matthew’s Christology.

Kingsbury’s concept of Jesus “speaking past” the character groups in the narrative to the implied reader (see section 1.3) is also lacking. Not all the instruction in the speeches can be said to have the quality of “speaking past” the audience within the narrative. The commands in 10:5–10, for example, are to twelve named individuals (10:2–4) and concern a specific task which we can locate before the death and resurrection of Jesus (10:23; see below, section 4.8). Matthew leaves no clues that he wishes Jesus’ instruction to be divided up, such that some has the quality of “speaking past” and some does not.

The claim we have made above concerning the groups and (in particular) the role of the disciples and the speeches aims to synthesise the best elements from each end of the spectrum of views we have observed. When compliant readers are “drawn in” to the narrative, they are able to respect the historical role of the groups and their contribution to the plot of the Gospel and Matthew’s Christology. When compliant readers “return to” their own situation, they are then able to translate and apply what they have heard. However, whether the claim stands up under the closer scrutiny of the analysis in chapters 4 to 7 below remains to be seen. Quite how the claim works will also be clearer when we have considered the “implied temporal framework” Matthew is building. This will clarify the situational difference between a disciple in the main part of the narrative (before Jesus’ resurrection) and the post-resurrection reader. We shall introduce the concept shortly (section 3.4), but will only fully see what this looks like towards the end of the study (see section 7.2 below).

42 Compare Francis Watson’s claim that wherever a Gospel is interpreted in the light of its hypothetical original community setting, “an allegorical reading strategy is employed which systematically downplays and circumvents the literal sense of the text” (Francis Watson, “Toward a Literal Reading of the Gospels,” in The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences (ed. Richard Bauckham; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1998), 210). However, we shall find it difficult to maintain that Matthew does not expect some element of what might be called “allegorizing” from his readers. For example, the crowds could well be representative of uncommitted people; the Jewish leadership could well be representative of those who oppose Jesus and deny his claims.
3.3 Some preliminary claims concerning Matthew’s Christology as a “Servant”

Christology

This thesis is primarily concerned with the topic of discipleship within the Gospel of Matthew. However, we shall not get very far in our analysis before having to accept that in Matthew discipleship, eschatology and Christology are so inseparably intertwined that it is impossible to say something about one without implying something about the others. It is worth acknowledging this from the beginning. We shall begin to outline our approach to Matthew’s eschatology in the next section. Here, we shall make some preliminary comments, observations and claims concerning his Christology.

It is beyond the scope of this study to survey Second Temple Messianic expectations or discuss the debate in the secondary literature raised by this material. However, even if we were able to do so, we might not get very far in relating our conclusions to Matthew’s presentation of Jesus — or gain very much from attempting to do so. Even before this, there is what Michael Bird calls the “paucity and diversity of Messianic expectations” across the extant literature. This being so, firm and reliable conclusions would in any case be difficult to make. More significantly, it would then be difficult to establish whether any conclusions we did make were relevant for an understanding of Matthew’s Christology. Matthew’s situation, concerns and his own particular access to oral or written traditions could have led him to begin from a quite different set of assumptions.

It is also beyond the scope of this study to build a picture of Messianic expectation in the Hebrew Scriptures. Again, even if we were able to do so, we might not get very far in relating our conclusions to Matthew’s presentation of Jesus — or gain very much from attempting to do so. As we shall see more of, the relationship between Matthew’s account and the Hebrew Scriptures is complex and highly selective. However, it is worth noting at this point something that we shall building on shortly: that the emphasis in the Hebrew Scriptures is more on the eschatological program Yahweh is expected to fulfil in terms of salvation, res-

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toration, justice, vindication etc. than on the particular agent(s) expected to bring this about. This observation simplifies things enormously, by reminding us that behind the complex web of figures and agents we find (especially) in the Prophets, some of whom — but not all — are given names or titles, lies the singular work of Yahweh himself.

So rather than begin with the Second Temple literature or even the Hebrew Scriptures we shall be beginning with the Gospel of Matthew. That is, we shall be asking what we can infer about the starting point Matthew himself gives us in terms of expectations. In both this section (introducing Matthew’s Christology) and the next (introducing Matthew’s eschatology), we shall begin to claim that Matthew uses an initial alignment with the expectations of John the Baptist, which he then adapts and qualifies in the narrative which follows.

3.3.1 The claim.

The claim, then, is that Matthew builds a Christology based upon an initial, preliminary set of implied expectations concerning “the one who is to come.” These expectations are loosely linked to the titles “son of David” and “Christ” as the Gospel opens, but become more focussed in the expectations of John the Baptist, who heralds one coming after him who will bring judgment and the kingdom of heaven. In the narrative which follows, Matthew confirms the realization of these expectations in the coming of Jesus as the eschatological agent of the Lord, even the “Son of God,” the one who will realize in particular the kingdom program of the prophet Daniel. However, the expectations are strongly qualified by the necessity of realizing first the “Servant program” of the prophet Isaiah. We shall be arguing that this qualification is the dominant emphasis in Matthew’s Christology, such that it warrants being described as “a Servant Christology.”

3.3.2 Expectations.

We shall be arguing in what follows that the initial expectations raised in the narrative are positioned around two axes.44 First, Jesus is the son of David (“who is called Christ,” 1:16);

44 Note that we are not here claiming that these initial expectations represent a summary of “first-century Jewish Messianic expectations.” The claim is weaker than that. Rather, we are supposing that in showing how a particular set of expectations are qualified and adapted by the coming of Jesus, Matthew is intending align a potentially wide range of expectations to his own view.
and second, Jesus is the “one coming after” John the Baptist (3:11) associated by John with the near coming of the kingdom of heaven.\textsuperscript{45} In 11:2–6, these expectations are to an extent combined, as Matthew refers to “the deeds of the Christ” (11:2) and John asks about “the one who is to come” (11:3).

The first strand of expectation Matthew raises strongly in the Genealogy, as we shall see in section 4.1. However, both “son of David” and “Christ” are then placed in the background of Matthew’s account. The designation “son of David” thereafter appears only on the lips of suppliants, the crowd or opponents (9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30–31; 21:9, 15; 22:42). Likewise, after the Genealogy, “Christ” is used by Matthew (1:18; 11:2), by Peter (16:16) and mockingly by opponents (26:68; 27:17, 22), but never explicitly by Jesus as a self-designation. Indeed, in 16:20, Jesus charges the disciples to tell no one that he is the Christ. A self-understanding as Christ is implicit (sometimes strongly) in 11:2–6; 16:13–20; 22:41–46; 23:10; 24:4–35 and 26:63. But it does not seem to be a title Jesus is comfortable to use as a self-designation within the narrative. We may infer that this is because it raises a problem of misunderstanding the narrative is designed to correct, as we shall consider shortly.

The second strand of expectation is raised by John the Baptist in 3:7–12 (in connection with a particular set of eschatological expectations, as we shall note below, section 4.3). In proclaiming the nearness of the kingdom, John prepares the way of the Lord, heralding a near judgment, implying that this will be enacted by a mightier one coming after him (3:1–12).

3.3.3 \textit{Realization.}

What we shall be considering in the analysis below is the claim that, given these expectations, Matthew shows their qualified realization in the coming of Jesus. That is, Matthew wants to confirm that Jesus is “the one who is to come” (cf. 11:3) — he is the eschatological agent of the Lord. John’s proclamation of the nearness of the kingdom is enthusiastically taken up by Jesus in broad outline, beginning at 4:17. We shall also argue that this is related to Jesus’ self-

\textsuperscript{45} We shall return to Matthew’s description of Jesus as “son of Abraham” (1:1) shortly, in section 3.3.4 below.
designation as “Son of Man,” beginning at 8:20. In this, we do not have to suppose that “Son of Man” was considered to be an existing Messianic title (for which the evidence is mixed), or even to suppose that “Son of Man” was used as a formal title at all by Daniel in Dan 7:13 (it certainly does not seem to be). Nevertheless the source of the designation does seem to be Dan 7:13. The claim we shall be making is that what Matthew does in having Jesus use “Son of Man” as a self-designation is simply to align him strongly with the eschatological kingdom program outlined by Daniel, and that central readers in Matthew’s expected reader profile are expected to have some idea what this is. In particular, the claim is that Jesus is the one who will bring in the victory of the kingdom and the vindication of God in the event referred to as “the coming of the Son of Man” (cf. Dan 7:13–14).

This implies a closeness of identity and purpose between Jesus and the Lord. We shall further claim in what follows that one of the ways in which Matthew strengthens this implication is to show Jesus as “Son” or “Son of God.” In doing so, Matthew is showing a relationship that is like that which Yahweh had with Israel (cf. Exod 4:22; Hos 11:1) and, in particular, the king of Israel (cf. Pss 2:7; 70:1). Matthew quotes Hos 11:1 at 2:15 and Ps 2:7 is one of the Scriptural resonances in 3:17. Moreover, “Son of God” appears in connection to “Christ” in Peter’s confession in 16:16 (“Son of the living God”; cf. the similar confession in 14:33) and in the high priest’s demand in 26:63, where the terms seem to be used synonymously. However, Matthew wants to show in “Jesus Christ, the son of David” (1:1) an even greater and closer relationship than that enjoyed by David, much as Jesus does in his exposition of “Christ” in 22:41–45 (where Jesus claims that David’s son is David’s Lord). The “Son of God” concept helps him to do this. This is apparent early in the Gospel at Jesus’ baptism,

46 Compare Delbert Burkett, “Probably the majority of scholars have come to agree that no unified ‘Son of Man’ title or concept existed in pre-Christian Judaism.” The Son of Man Debate: A History and Evaluation (SNTSMS 107; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 121.

47 Compare Burkett, “Perhaps the widest measure of agreement attaches to the view that the titular use of ‘Son of Man’ originated in a christological interpretation of Daniel 7:13.” The Son of Man Debate, 122.

48 Compare Bird, Are You the One Who is to Come? 80–81: “The ‘son of man’ of Dan 7 is more of a role than a title.” Bird goes on to argue that “Jesus spoke of himself as the Son of Man from Daniel, as an eschatological figure with a messianic function as the representative of Israel.” Are You the One Who is to Come? 78–97.
where the words οὐτός ἐστιν ὦ γόνι μου ὁ ἐγαπητός (3:17) are heard from a voice from heaven.49 The closeness of this filial relationship is further maintained in the prelude to the second open call in the Gospel (11:25–27, section 5.1), at the Transfiguration (e.g. 17:5, section 6.1), in the parable of the tenants (e.g., at least implicitly, 21:38) and, under pressure, at Gethsemane (26:36–46, section 6.4). In short, the Sonship language and the Father-Son relationship depicted by Matthew shows the closest possible unity of will and purpose, such that what Jesus does can legitimately be said to be what his Father does. Remarkably, Jesus’ followers are described as being in some derivative sense called and incorporated into this filial relationship. Especially in the speeches of chapters 5–7 and 10, they also are called to think of God as “Father.”50

3.3.4 Qualification.

However, we shall be arguing that Matthew also wants to challenge the initial expectations set up at the beginning of the Gospel, and to expand what it means to be “Son of God,” by adaptively qualifying the expectations as the narrative unfolds. The claim in what follows will be that he does so chiefly by showing Jesus as Isaiah’s Servant of the Lord. In this, we do not have to suppose that “Servant” or “Servant of the Lord” were well-used titles or expected figures in pre-Christian Judaism. Matthew does not use “Servant” as a title, either editorially or through Jesus. As with the designation “Son of Man” considered above, the role is more important than the figure. Morna Hooker’s conclusion that “the figure of the Servant [...] was not a living concept at the time of Jesus,” even if true, is therefore irrelevant.51 To an extent, this priority of Servant program over the Servant figure has already been recognized. Take N.T. Wright, for example, who claims that in Jesus “the kingdom-programme of Isaiah 40–55 as a whole is put into effect through the work of the servant” (my emphasis):

49 See further below, section 4.3.
50 This is the main observation of Henry Pattarumadathil, who further claims that “discipleship is viewed in Matthew as a process of becoming children of God.” Henry Pattarumadathil, Your Father in Heaven: Discipleship in Matthew as a Process of Becoming Children of God (AnBib 172; Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2008), 11. We shall discuss how this relates to our claim that discipleship in Matthew is viewed as a process of incorporation into Jesus’ Servant mandate for the world in section 8.3.1 below.
I am not suggesting that Jesus “regarded himself as ‘the servant,’” as though second-Temple Jews had anticipated modern criticism in separating out the “servant songs” from the rest of Isaiah 40–55 [...] It is [rather] a matter of understanding Jesus’ whole kingdom-announcement in the light of several major themes from the Jewish scriptures, and showing that it is absurd, granted the whole picture, to disallow reference, allusion and echo to Isaiah 40–55 in general, and to 52:13–53:12 in particular.52

That is, allusions to the Servant passages in Isaiah 40–55 are implied allusions to the whole of the program of the Lord outlined in these chapters. Importantly, this includes the opening promise that Jerusalem’s sin will be taken away (Isa 40:2).53 This is then likened to a new exodus (42:16; 43:16–19; 49:9–11; 51:10). The Servant passages contribute to the overall message, focusing on the agent (linked somehow to Israel, Isa 49:3) who will bring the program about. In particular, the Servant has the role of taking the salvation of the Lord to the nations (49:6) and bearing the sin of the people (53:4–6, 10–12).

However, we may go further than this. As Richard Beaton notes, it is also unwarranted in considering Matthew’s use of the Isaiah texts to separate Isaiah 40–55 or “Deutero-Isaiah” from the rest of the book: “Such designations would have been incomprehensible to the author of Matthew, who cited freely from the entire book under the name of the prophet Isaiah.”54 It is therefore better to say that in fulfilling the role of the Servant, Jesus is the agent who accomplishes the program of the prophet Isaiah in its entirety.55 We shall follow Marvin

52 Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God, 602–3. Compare Beaton: “I am not convinced that the designation ‘servant’ functions as a [C]hristological title in Matthew. Rather, it seems that the two explicit servant texts (Isa 42:1–4; 53:4) attend to a more descriptive task.” Richard Beaton, Isaiah’s Christ in Matthew’s Gospel (SNTSMS 123; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 175.

53 λέειν τινα ἄνυπαρτον (Isa 40:2 LXX) — according to Peter Bolt, “an example of a prophetic perfect — stated as if completed.” Peter G. Bolt, “‘...With a View to the Forgiveness of Sins’: Jesus and Forgiveness in Mark’s Gospel,” RTR 57, no. 2 (1998): 54.

54 Beaton, Isaiah’s Christ in Matthew’s Gospel, 11. That is, it is anachronistic to suppose second-Temple Jews had anticipated modern criticism in separating out Isaiah 40–55 from the rest of Isaiah.

55 When we take this wider view of the program in Isaiah, it is also easier to see the connections between the role of the Servant and the more explicitly Davidic or Messianic expectation found in e.g. Isa 9:7; 11:1, 10 or 61:1.
Sweeney’s succinct summary of what this program is: “the realization of YHWH’s plans for worldwide sovereignty at Zion.”

We can go further still and argue that in taking on the role of the Servant, Jesus fulfils many other expectations one could infer from the Hebrew Scriptures. As one bringing light to the nations (Isa 42:6; 49:6) he realizes the promise of global blessing (Gen 12:3) made through Abraham, the Lord’s servant (Gen 26:24 MT). He fulfils a role like that of Moses, “the servant of the Lord,” realizing the promise for a future prophet like Moses (Deut 18:15). He fulfils a role like that of David, “the servant of the Lord.”

He does so by demonstrating attributes such as “faithfulness, trustworthiness, loyalty, and willingness to put completion of God’s will ahead of one’s own” which more broadly “marked the servants of God in the Old Testament.” We could even argue that the Servant role is implicit in later expectations, such as Zechariah’s humble king (Zech 9:9) and shepherd (Zech 13:7). We can even argue that the wider program of the Lord in Isaiah (accomplished through the Servant), to restore the recognition of the Lord’s worldwide sovereignty, is implicit in Daniel’s expectations of the future kingdom established by the God of heaven (Dan 2:44), replacing the

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56 Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39: With an Introduction to Prophetic Literature* (FOTL 16; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1996), 39–40. Sweeney divides the book against convention. The first part (Isaiah 1–33) concerns YHWH’s intention to establish the recognition of his worldwide sovereignty at Zion. The second part (Isaiah 34–66) concerns how he is to realize this plan. The second part further divides into instruction concerning the realization of YHWH’s plans (Isaiah 34–54) and an exhortation to adhere to YHWH’s covenant (Isaiah 55–66).

57 Moses is described as “servant of the Lord” at Deut 34:5; Josh 1:1, 13, 15; 8:31, 33; 11:12; 12:6; 13:8; 14:7; 18:7; 22:2, 4–5; 2 Kgs 18:12; 1 Chr 1:3; 24:6. Subsuming the “new Moses” under the Servant role is not intended to obscure the Moses typology in Matthew inferred and described by Dale C. Allison Jr, *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), summarized in pp.267–70. Rather, we are raising the possibility here that such typologies can be seen within a broader pattern. The strong “new exodus” theme in Isaiah 40–55 already suggests that the Servant will be reinterpreting the role of Moses. Henri Blocher makes the additional point that the description of the Servant in the MT of Isa 42:4 has, corresponding to the process of the Servant establishing justice (םָדוֹר) in the earth, the “islands” (תָּוִי — i.e. the “most distant parts of the world,” HALOT, s.v.) waiting for his Law (תָּוָיה). This suggests another link between the program of the Servant and some sort of new Mosaic role. Blocher concludes, “The Servant whom he is describing can be no other than the new Moses whom we find already promised in the book of Deuteronomy.” Henri Blocher, *Songs of the Servant: Isaiah’s Good News* (London: IVP, 1975), 27–31. However, it also ought to be said that Matthew’s paraphrase in 12:21 does not reproduce this explicit reference to the Law, following instead the LXX at this point — possibly so that he can use the “nations/gentiles” (יוֹנְכֵי) of Isa 42:4 LXX rather than “islands.” Beaton, *Isaiah’s Christ in Matthew’s Gospel*, 58–59, 138–39.

58 Pss 18:1; 36:1.

“beastly” kingdoms that brought only death (Dan 7:13–14). In other words, to show Jesus fulfilling the role of Servant is an efficient way for Matthew to show that what Jesus does encompasses a wide range of possible expectation.

We shall be using the following terminology repeatedly in later chapters:

The **Servant program** is the program of the Lord in Isaiah 40–55 to bring forgiveness of sins to his people and a salvation that will flow over to the whole world. We have argued that this is implicitly part of the wider program in Isaiah though which the Lord will restore his worldwide sovereignty and do so decisively in Jerusalem/Zion. We have further argued that Isaiah’s vision of this program is so comprehensive that it encompasses all previous promises (and especially the promise of global blessing Gen 12:3) and forms the basis for all later prophetic expectation (especially the kingdom expectation of Daniel).

The **Servant mandate** is the particular task taken on by the Servant, associated with Israel, that will realize the Servant program and enable its completion. We shall be arguing that Matthew will show Jesus taking on and fulfilling this mandate alone, as the only true Israelite. However, this will also enable the incorporation of others into the Servant program, who will participate in its completion in the world.

Matthew’s Servant Christology will play an important role later in our analysis below. Our present concern, however, is to begin to show how Matthew uses his Servant Christology to progressively qualify the particular expectations he has set up at the beginning of his narrative, such that our understanding of Jesus evolves adaptively as the story progresses.

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60 Compare Bolt, “Forgiveness of Sins,” 57–58. It may even be that there is more explicit evidence that Daniel is giving a “re-reading” of the Servant songs of Isaiah in general and Isaiah 53 in particular, as Hans Cavallin argues. The tribulation of the saints in Daniel (e.g. Dan 7:25; 12:1) corresponds to the suffering of the Servant. Just as “many” are raised to life at the resurrection (Dan 12:2), so “many” are counted righteous through the righteous Servant (Isa 53:11). Hans C. Cavallin, “Tod und Auferstehung der Weisheitslehrer: Ein Beitrag zur Zeichnung des frame of reference Jesu,” *SNTS U* 5 (1980): 109–12.

61 In what follows we shall use a capitalized “Servant” to indicate a relation to the Servant program or Servant mandate as defined here, or for the agent who takes on that mandate.
The view that Jesus is Christ and son of David is qualified most explicitly at Caesarea Philippi, where Jesus downplays the language of “Christ” (16:20) and insists that he must suffer and die before he can be vindicated — as Son of Man. At the end of a section structured around three such passion-vindication predictions, he additionally insists that he has come to die in order to serve and to give his life as a ransom (λυτρόν) for many (20:28). The cries of the crowd and the children to the son of David in 21:9, 15 are qualified by Jesus arriving humbly on a donkey (προάξις, 21:5; cf. προάξις in 11:29) and by Jesus’ serving the blind and the lame in the Temple (21:14; cf. 8:17, where Matthew links such service to the fourth Servant song). Finally, there is the irony of the titles “King of the Jews” and “King of Israel” used mockingly in the passion narrative. The allusions to Psalms 22 and 69 throughout the account are intended to show that what Jesus is suffering reveal that this is truly who he is (section 6.4 below).

The claim that Jesus is Son or “Son of God” or “Son of the living God,” which we have said is one of Matthew’s ways of showing divine confirmation that he is the expected eschatological agent of the Lord, is likewise qualified at Caesarea Philippi, as part of Peter’s confession of Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (16:16). But Matthew also explicitly qualifies this claim at the beginning and end of the narrative. As we shall see in section 4.3 on the temptation episode of 4:1–11, the Satan figure successively suggests what might be expected of the Son of God. Each time, Jesus refuses to comply in such a way that reveals more about the Servant mandate he has just taken on. He must depend on his Father alone for life, trust him without testing him, and wait for the global authority given by him (cf. 28:16). The same pattern is found in 27:39–44. To have the power to save himself on the cross might be expected of the Son of God. But in refusing to come down and by dying in such a way as to complete the divine plan, he shows what it truly means to be Son of God — as the Centurion and those with him recognise (27:54). Matthew’s Servant Christology thus

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62 Note again the global perspective.
“fleshes out” the Son of God title.63

Most significantly, Matthew’s Servant Christology qualifies the claim that Jesus is the “one coming after” John the Baptist to bring the kingdom of heaven (3:2) and separating judgment (3:7–10). This is implicit right from the beginning, when, instead of the separating judgment expected by John, Jesus offers himself for baptism, accepting the Servant mandate laid out for him (3:13–17). Jesus then shows that he is “the one who is to come” by demonstrating the full range of Isaiah expectation in his Servant ministry (11:2–6). Finally, the most explicit qualification comes (as for “Christ” above) in the passion-vindication predictions. The Son of Man must suffer and die (in service) before he can be vindicated—or bring vindication for others.

That Matthew’s Christology is in some important sense a Servant Christology is essential to the thesis we are developing. What we shall say concerning discipleship in the Gospel is strongly related to this claim. We shall be arguing that Jesus’ disciples are incorporated into his “Servant program” for the world. First, they are prepared for incorporation though Jesus’ teaching, especially in the major speeches of the Gospel. Then they are served by the Servant: their lives ransomed and sins forgiven through his death. Then, at the Great Commission, they are commissioned to serve and teach in the same pattern, incorporating further disciples and participating in the task of bringing of light and salvation to the nations. As the Gospel account closes the qualification of what it means for Jesus to be Christ, son of David (1:1) is complete. Those who call him Christ (1:16) can now do so without misunderstanding—as “son of Abraham,” through whom the peoples of the world are blessed (1:1; cf. Gen 12:3).

63 Contra Kingsbury, who claims that Matthew subsumes “the title of Servant under the broader category of Son of God” (Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom, 94), but with Beaton, Isaiah’s Christ in Matthew’s Gospel, 173, 175–76. Compare David Hill, drawing on a suggestion by Birger Gerhardsson: “Matthew’s dominant Christological title may indeed be ‘Son of God’: I think it is: but the sonship is expounded, given content, possibly even validated, by Matthew (more clearly than by Mark) in terms of Jesus’ servant-hood in general and by his exemplification of the Servant, Ebed Yahweh.” David Hill, “Son and Servant: An Essay on Matthean Christology,” JSNT 6 (1980): 15; Birger Gerhardsson, “Gottes Sohn als Diener Gottes: Messias, Agape und Himmelsherrschaft nach dem Matthäusevangelium,” ST 27, no. 2 (1973): 73–106.
3.4 Some preliminary claims concerning Matthew’s eschatology and his “implied temporal framework”

When it comes to Matthew’s eschatology, one useful tool we may adapt from literary theory is Boris Uspensky’s conception of point of view on the “temporal plane” of a narrative. Uspensky is articulating the fact that in telling a story a narrator will often locate himself or herself at a certain time and place, as if to say to the narratee, “I would like you to witness these events from the perspective of this particular point of view.” The example Uspensky uses is from Puskin’s The Queen of Spades, where the narrator aligns himself first to the time sense of one character (narrating from that point of view) and then part way through the story switches to the perspective of another character. These kinds of temporal shifts of perspective, sometimes quite complex, are of course common devices in fiction and film.

While commenting on Uspensky’s discussion of the temporal plane, Janice Capel Anderson takes this kind of narrative analysis one step further. As the critic traces the movements on the temporal plane made by the narrator, and also as the critic traces the location on the temporal plane of certain events referred to within the narrative (such that both event and location are implicitly endorsed by the narrator), then it is possible to build a timeline of significant events. She makes the claim that in Matthew’s Gospel, “the narrator has the broad perspective on time represented in the diagram below”:

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64 A longer treatment of this approach to Matthew’s eschatology, closely related to the present study, can be found in Ben Cooper, “Adaptive Eschatological Inference from the Gospel of Matthew,” JSNT (forthcoming).
66 Because the point of view is referenced by both space and time, some narrative critics prefer to talk of the “spatio-temporal plane” (e.g. Howell, Matthew’s Inclusive Story, 170–75).
Anderson does not give this kind of diagram a name, but we shall call it Matthew’s *implied temporal framework*. More precisely, this is the temporal framework inferred by Anderson from the *whole* Gospel. The temporal framework implied at a point, say, half way through the Gospel would be quite different, as we shall be exploring at length further in the analysis of chapters 4–7 below.

There are several points of interest in Anderson’s construction. The point marked “Today” is the “today” of the narrator, as used in the editorial comments of 27:8 and 18:15. Anderson is also happy to use “Parousia” as a technical term and to align it with “the end of the age.” Notice that the destruction of the Temple does not feature in the diagram — and neither do any of the events of AD66–70. It is not apparent from the diagram alone from which data she is making these particular inferences.

However, our task is not directly to critique Anderson’s diagram, but to use her concept of a temporal framework to begin to recast and simplify the “question” of Matthew’s eschatology. The question becomes: what temporal framework *best explains* the eschatological data of the Gospel? Anderson’s diagram is one proposal. Are there better ones?

In keeping with the communication model outlined in the previous chapter, we shall take a progressive, adaptive approach when inferring Matthew’s temporal framework. We shall call this device “adaptive inference.” The rule we shall be using is this:

*As the narrative is read, every new reference to a future event is aligned with an existing event on the temporal framework unless there is sufficient warrant for doing otherwise and separating out future events.* (However, future references where there
That is, just we have claimed Matthew progressively adapts his compliant readers’ understanding of Jesus, so we claim he is doing with their eschatological expectations. Moreover, just as we have claimed Matthew uses John the Baptist to establish the kind of Christological expectation he wishes to qualify, so we shall claim that he uses John the Baptist’s eschatological expectations as the starting point for his implied temporal framework. We shall see this more clearly as we begin to apply the “adaptive inference” rule and trace the dynamic development of the temporal framework through the Gospel.
Chapter 4

Matthew 1:1–10:42. Repent (in Light of the Nearness of the Kingdom)

Turning to the first ten chapters of the Gospel to consider Matthew’s message in more detail, we shall describe Matthew 1–2 as a prolegomenon, placing the birth of Jesus into a wider historical framework and into the context of post-deportation Israel under Herod. Even here, however, Matthew will be working hard to set up examples of commitment that constitute a “righteous” response to the program the Lord is preparing to realize through Jesus. Matthew 3–10 is then linked together by the activity of proclaiming the kingdom. That is what John does in 3:2 and is Matthew’s own summary description of Jesus’ activity in 4:23, repeated in 9:35 and encompassing everything in-between. Proclaiming the kingdom is what the Twelve are sent to do in 10:7. The commitment that the “nearness” of the kingdom should evoke has some of its detailed application and foundations spelled out in the speech of Matthew 5–7, is modelled in essence in the encounters of Matthew 8–9 and is expanded in the speech of Matthew 10. But since the general call of 3:2 and 4:17 and the two speeches are especially important to Matthew’s evocation of theocentric commitment, these will receive the most attention in what follows.

4.1 Matthew 1:1–1:17

Matthew’s presentation begins with a genealogy which gives the origin (γένεσις, 1:1) of Jesus, who is called Christ (1:1, 16), in such a way as to connect him with the history of Israel.

4.1.1 A claim concerning communicative equilibrium.

Matthew wants compliant readers to know the basic starting pattern of the implied temporal
framework he will be developing in his Gospel. He is claiming this has a very simple form:

| Abraham | David | Exile | Jesus Christ’s birth |

Given this basic temporal framework, Matthew is also making an initial claim concerning the faithfulness of the Lord to his promises of blessing and vindication to Abraham and David against the backdrop of Israelite rebellion. This is an implied claim that the realization of these promises and the expectations they have evoked are in some way linked to the birth of Jesus. This claim becomes an important implicated premise for what follows.

Readers prepared to process the Genealogy are able to infer the basic shape of the temporal framework and the implied claim from its beginning and end (1:1, 1:17), from its arrangement into three blocks (1:2–6a, 6b–11, 12–16; cf. 1:17) and from what is highlighted at the beginning and end of these blocks. The orderliness of Matthew’s presentation may persuade some readers that the birth of Jesus fits into and completes the pattern of the Lord’s historical dealings with Israel. There are further weak implications that can be made from the Genealogy, which depend on premises taken from a knowledge of the story of Israel in the Hebrew scriptures.

4.1.2 Expansion and further argument.
That Matthew begins with a genealogy suggests he wishes to bifurcate his readership into those who have some interest in the background to Jesus in the history of Israel and those who do not. Those who do not are unlikely to expend much effort processing these verses,

\[\text{1} \quad \text{Readers who are concerned by this apparently unashamed statement concerning Matthew’s intentions are referred back to the extended discussion in chapter 2. In brief: we have argued it is necessary for readers to make inferences concerning the intentions of the actual author (or final redactor) of the Gospel if they are to assess its credibility. Note also that in making statements such as this one we are making a claim, not an assertion. This is something we shall be arguing can be inferred concerning Matthew from the evidence of the text. That is, every claim such as this one implicitly begins with the caveat, “As far as one can tell, Matthew wants...”}

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and may indeed be dissuaded from reading or paying much attention to the remainder of the Gospel. However, this does not necessarily exclude God-fearing Gentile readers with little knowledge of the Hebrew scriptures. It requires minimal processing from any reader seeking communicative alignment with Matthew to notice the way Jesus (Christ), the deportation to Babylon, David (the king) and Abraham are explicitly highlighted in the Genealogy. All three characters are mentioned in the very first verse. The edges of the three blocks in the Genealogy then highlight Abraham in verse 2, David in verse 6 (beginning one block and starting another) and, similarly, the deportation to Babylon in verses 11 and 12. Finally, Jesus is highlighted, as Christ, in verse 16. To reinforce the highlighting all four elements are repeated in verse 17: Abraham, David, the deportation, Christ. With only the common knowledge (or supposition) that the characters listed here are in some way significant in the historical relations between the God of Israel and his people, and that the deportation marked a major crisis in those relations, it is possible to infer that Matthew is claiming that the birth of Jesus fits into and completes that history, fulfilling both promise and expectation.

With more background knowledge, more inferences are possible—some stronger and some weaker. A minimal background knowledge of the history of Israel might include (1) an awareness of Abraham as the one to whom, against the backdrop of global curse and death, the Lord promised blessing, first to a “great nation” and then to the whole earth; (2) an awareness of David as the anointed king whom the Lord vindicated against his enemies, through whom the Lord vindicated his people and to whom the Lord promised an eternal line; and (3)

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2 David Bauer goes further and suggests that the deportation is strongly highlighted by (1) being the only event in a list of names and (2) by the repetition of ‘and his brothers’ in verses 2 and 11, an inclusion which separates 1:2–11 from 1:12–16. David R. Bauer, “The Literary and Theological Function of the Genealogy in Matthew’s Gospel,” in Treasures New and Old: Recent Contributions to Matthean Studies (ed. David R. Bauer and Mark Allan Powell; SBL Symposium Series; Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1996), 144–46. We could possibly add to this the counting irregularity in the third block of the genealogy. Applying the same principles of counting across the three blocks gives a 14 by 14 by 13 genealogy. If this was intentional, then it may weakly imply the huge rift opened up in the history of Israel by the deportation. The rift is so large, that one needs to start counting again at 1:12, giving 14 generations in the final block as claimed in 1:17.

3 I shall be using the English words ‘fulfil’ and ‘fulfilment’ in this way: that a fulfilment is a realization of a prior promise or expectation. We shall see that this is also the way Matthew tends to use πληρώσα, consistent with BDAG, s.v., 4.a.
an awareness that the deportation marked such a low moment in the relationship between the Lord and his people that they became an object of reproach among the nations. From these it is possible to infer that Matthew is claiming that in Jesus, as the expected “son of David,” the Lord will act in the situation following the deportation to Babylon to keep his promise to Abraham.

Other (weak) inferences can be made, and have been made in the history of interpretation of this passage. For example, a familiarity with the Ancient Near Eastern genealogies might bring some readers to infer that just as their function was apparently “a means for the history and validation of tribal units,” so here the function is to validate Jesus: to claim that Jesus’ lineage meets criteria consistent with the further claims Matthew is going to make concerning him. From more detailed background knowledge of the characters who break the verbal pattern in the Genealogy (such as the four women in 1:3, 5, 6) it is possible to infer that just as the Lord in the past has acted to maintain the line of promise descending from Abraham despite human failings and a number of apparent irregularities, so he will do in the birth of Jesus. Someone familiar with the practice of gematria on Hebrew names, might infer that the number fourteen emphasized in 1:17 represents David, and that this therefore reinforces the claim that Jesus comes as “son of David” (while leaving open quite how like David he will be). And many other inferences have been suggested. The further we pursue these,

4 From, e.g., Gen 12:1–3; 2 Sam 7:8–16; Ezek 5:14 (among many other possibilities).
5 This is using the form-critical definition of the genre of “Genealogy” in George W. Coats, Genesis, with an Introduction to Narrative Literature (FOTL 1; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1983), 318.
6 Compare Christopher Fuller, who argues that the presence of the women and subversion of primogeniture “inverts” the genealogical form. The Genealogy is thus an “eschatological satire,” preparing the reader for Matthew’s presentation of Jesus’ “satirical fulfilment of God’s plan for Israel and the world.” Fuller is using the term “satire,” following Bakhtin, as a genre that inspires “an overturning of cultural and narrative expectations through the active participation of the reader.” Christopher C. Fuller, “Matthew’s Genealogy as Eschatological Satire: Bakhtin Meets Form Criticism,” in Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies (ed. Roland Boer; Atlanta: SBL, 2007), 130–31.
7 Some striking examples of this kind of practice can be found in the book of Proverbs. For example, C. Steuernagel noted some time ago that the value of הָלְמָה in the title “The Proverbs of Solomon” (Prov 10:1) is 375, exactly corresponding to the number of proverbs in that collection. C. Steuernagel, “Die Sprüche,” in Heilige Schrift des Alten Testaments (Teil 2) (ed. E. Kautzsch; trans. U. Bertholet; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1923), 278. Roland Murphy comments, “[such] data are too striking to be coincidental, and certainly tell us about scribal practices in Israel.” Roland E. Murphy, Wisdom Literature: Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Canticles, Ecclesiastes, and Esther (FOTL 13; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1981), 50. Davies and Allison additionally cite the genealogy
however, the less plausible it becomes to claim them as essential to communicative equilibrium in this context. In any case, most (as with the fourteen = David example) simply reinforce inferences that can be made more strongly on other bases.

The Genealogy sets the tone for Matthew’s communicative strategy, suggesting that he is emphasizing the “depth” of a compliant response rather than its “width” (see section 2.3.7). Whatever their background, compliant readers should care about the history of God’s dealings with the world through Israel, and should be persuaded that the birth of Jesus in some way brings this to completion. The processing cost required to make these inferences (especially the weaker ones) is relatively high, excluding those not prepared to make the effort. On the other hand, it is not as if the inferences are impossibly difficult to make: the Abraham–David–deportation–Jesus pattern is fairly explicit, for example. We might add that the extensive use of weak implication here suits the beginning of a persuasive narrative, because Matthew will be making the same claims more strongly and explicitly as the narrative unfolds. A high degree of weak implication allows Matthew to suggest a great deal concerning Jesus as climax to Israel’s history and the realisation of God’s promises and to do so very concisely.

4.1.3 Continuation.

The Genealogy is strongly connected to the narrative which follows it, the βιβλος γενέσεως (book of the origin of) Jesus Christ (1:1) linked to an account of the γένεσις (birth) of Jesus Christ. Readers who have inferred from the Genealogy a theme of God keeping his promises in spite of human irregularities might also notice this continuing in the “irregular” conception of the child who will be called Jesus (1:18–25). Readers who further infer a theme of blessing or involving the outsider in the Genealogy may also see this also developing in the sub-

in Gen 46:8–27, where multiples of 7 are used, and where Gad (גָּד) with numerical value 7, is found seventh in the list — just as here David (דָּוִד), with numerical value 14, is placed fourteenth in the list. Matthew 1–7, 164. If such links are correct, then Ben Witherington (and others) may be right to suggest a sapiential tone to the Gospel. Ben Witherington III, Matthew (Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary; Macon, Georgia: Smyth & Helwys, 2006), 6–11. However, it is less obvious that this observation, even if correct, serves an essential role in processing the text.

8 This suggests that if we want to know what 1:1 is a title to, that answer may be: the whole of Matthew 1–2. But very little depends on this.
sequent narrative. In Matthew 1–2, for example, there are the Magi; in Matthew 8–9, there are the centurion, the Gadarene δάμονιζόμενοι, and the haemorrhaging woman; and in Matthew 14–16, there is the Canaanite woman.

The shadow of the deportation (1:11–12, 17) will also feature prominently in the coming narrative. This can be seen, for example, in the early fulfilment formulae, where Matthew freely quotes from Isaiah texts (1:22–23; 3:3; 4:14–16), all of which in their original context may be related in some way to the deportation. In this way, these quotations link the coming of Jesus to the realization of Yahweh’s promises to bring comfort to his exiled people.9

As we argued in section 3.3, Jesus as “son of David” (1:1) reappears in 1:20 (implicitly) but thereafter only selectively. We shall be continuing to argue that Matthew is working to correct and refine the expectations associated with “son and David” and “Christ.” In this, he “fills out” what it means for Jesus to be “son of Abraham” (1:1). We shall argue later (below, 4.3) that the promises of global blessing to Abraham are implicit in the Isaiah Servant mandate Jesus assumes at his baptism and completes in his suffering, death and resurrection. This global scope is made explicit right at the end of the narrative, as the disciples are commissioned to go and make disciples of all nations (28:19–20), forming an inclusion with 1:1.

4.2 Matthew 1:18–2:23

In the narrative section 1:18–2:23, Matthew picks up, expands and develops the statement which ends the Genealogy (Μαρίας, ἐξ ἡς ἐγεννήθη Ἰησοῦς ὁ λεγόμενος χριστός, 1:16), largely from the point of view of Joseph her husband. Joseph is described by Matthew as δίκαιος (1:19) and by an angel of the Lord as “son of David” (1:20), continuing that emphasis.

9 Although it seems reductionistic to interpret key concepts in the coming narrative such as “repentance,” “faith/belief” and “forgiveness of sins” merely (or even primarily) relative to the deportation, as in Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God, 246–75. We shall be arguing that Jesus has come to fulfil the program outlined by the prophet Isaiah in its entirety. It needs to be remembered that Isaiah is not just the prophet of exilic return, but more importantly the prophet of global blessing.
4.2.1 *A claim concerning communicative equilibrium.*

Matthew wants to persuade his compliant readers more explicitly concerning what is implicit in the Genealogy: the claim that the birth of Jesus is the primary fulfilment of the will of the Lord expressed in his promises to Israel, especially those related to the forgiveness of sins. That is, the implied temporal framework develops like this:

Matthew is more intrusive as an author here than anywhere else within the Gospel, making a number of explicit editorial comments. He wants to encourage a trusting, obedient, joyful and reverent reflection on the coming of Jesus, a desire to participate in the program this coming initiates, and to expose and condemn an indifferent or negative response.

Readers seeking communicative alignment with Matthew can infer his assessment of the salvation-historical significance of the birth event from the vocational naming of Jesus in 1:22 and the fulfilment formulae (1:22; 2:15, 17–18, 23). A major character contrast, between Joseph and Herod, and a minor character contrast, between the wise men of Jerusalem and the Magi, then exemplify Matthew’s understanding of both desirable and undesirable responses to the event, and serve to persuade compliance with the former.

4.2.2 *Expansion and further argument.*

Ulrich Luz and Mark Allen Powell both note the wide variation in the history of interpretation of this passage, and observe that surprisingly many readings seem to make unwarranted inferences from the text.\(^\text{10}\) However, by giving positive emphasis to the character of Joseph,

both in the amount of narrative space dedicated to him and the positive comment he receives, Matthew has made it possible (for those readers prepared to make the effort) to engage empathetically with someone in the narrative. Aligned with “righteous” Joseph, readers may thereby infer how Matthew wants them to believe and respond. The spaces dedicated to Joseph as main character (1:18–24; 2:13–15, 19–23) divide the narrative into five scenes, giving a contrast with the spaces centred on Herod (2:1–12, 16–18). The fulfilment formulae come at or towards the end of the first, third, fourth and fifth scenes. The second scene is somewhat more complex. Here the quotation from the Hebrew Scriptures comes not direct from Matthew but from the “wise men” of Jerusalem, who provide a minor character contrast with the Magi.

Early in the sequence, the naming of Jesus sets up a number of important implicated premises for the whole of Matthew’s presentation. It shows the direct intervention of the Lord to complete the sequence in the Genealogy, providing the final element that will enable him to realize his promises of blessing to Abraham and David. The particular blessing which will be this child’s vocation to confer is also made explicit: σώσει τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν (1:21). We shall not yet attempt to infer precisely what the angel means by this.\(^{11}\) However, from its placement at the beginning of the sequence in 1:18–2:23, from its connection to such an unusual, divinely orchestrated event (a woman with child through the Holy Spirit), and from its connection to the very first fulfilment formula, a reader seeking communicative alignment may infer that Matthew is strongly highlighting this declaration of Jesus’ vocation. It is to be kept in mind. Those familiar with the Hebrew scriptures may have this reinforced by knowing that such divine birth annunciations are comparatively rare, the principal examples being those for Ishmael (Gen 16:11) and Isaac (Gen 17:19), at the “genesis” of the nation of Israel (cf. 1:2). The other major example is in Isa 7:14, which Matthew quotes in the very next verse.

This takes us to the fulfilment formulae, which explicitly state Matthew’s claim that what is happening in the birth of Jesus who will save his people from their sins (1:21) fulfils

\(^{11}\) But we shall begin to do so shortly, beginning at section 4.3 below.
the will of God spoken in the past through the Prophets. Matthew does not explain quite how this “fulfilment” functions in detail for each of the quotations. However, readers seeking communicative alignment may at least infer that something unrealised or lacking in an event or setting referred to in the quotation is now realized in the birth of Jesus.

Once readers have inferred the importance of Jesus’ birth, then there is more they can infer from the character contrasts Matthew sets up. The major character contrast is very strong — between Joseph (the son of David, 1:20) and Herod (the “king,” 2:1). Joseph is, we might say, “in the light” concerning the intentions of the Lord, spoken to in dreams by an angel of the Lord; while Herod is much more “in the dark,” having to make inquiries through others concerning what is happening in Bethlehem (2:4, 8). Joseph shows no doubt about what he is told; Herod either does not believe that the one “born king of the Jews” whom the Magi are seeking is the Christ (2:4), whom his experts associate with the ruler foretold by

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12 Richard Beaton argues that this is the scholarly consensus on the formulae: “They are to be understood as authorial comments that serve Matthew’s programmatic development of the theme of Jesus’ fulfilment of the will of God.” Isaiah’s Christ in Matthew’s Gospel, 23.
13 Compare Donald Hagner on the fulfilment formulae in Matthew 1–2: “The past events of the birth and infancy narratives are for the evangelist laden with eschatological significance. They are in themselves eschatological events that inaugurate a new era.” “Matthew’s Eschatology,” in To Tell the Mystery: Essays on New Testament Eschatology in Honour of Robert H. Gundry (ed. Thomas E. Schmidt and Moisés Silva; JSNTSup 100; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 51.
14 Readers familiar with the narrative settings of the quotations Matthew uses will know that they are not explicit promises concerning the last days (unlike the Scripture quoted by the chief priests and scribes of the people in 2:6). Rather, Matthew seems to be drawing a “correspondence in history”: a conviction that “the way God worked in the past is mirrored in the present and future.” Klyne R. Snodgrass, “The Use of the Old Testament in the New,” in New Testament Criticism and Interpretation (ed. David Alan Black; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1991), 416. However, we may add to this in the context of the current study by claiming that what was left lacking and unrealized in the original setting can be linked to the Servant mandate Jesus is about to take on and fulfil (section 4.3 below). This is most obvious for the formula in 1:22–23. Even after the birth of Isaiah’s son (Isa 8:3), and even after the national recovery under Hezekiah, the prophesy as a whole makes it clear that God cannot be God to or with his people (as he promised in Gen 17:7–8; cf. Deut 2:7) until the task of the Servant in Isaiah 40–55 has been completed. Likewise with the formula at 2:15 where, in Hosea 11 and following, what was lacking was the presence of God’s Son as he should be. Matthew is beginning to claim that Jesus is taking on this role, but we have also begun to argue that the program of the Servant will “fill out” what this means. Turning to 2:17–18, the weeping of Jer 31:15 cannot end until the people receive forgiveness of sins under a new covenant (Jer 31:31–34). This is precisely what we are arguing Jesus has come to fulfil by taking up the mandate of the Servant (cf. 26:28).
15 Some readers may also know that Herod could claim no royal genealogy as a “son of David.” He was a “client king” of Judea, crowned in Rome in 40BC. L. Levine, “Herod the Great,” ABD 3: 161–69; Josephus, Ant. 14–18.
Micah (2:5–6; cf. Mic 5:2), or wants to kill him anyway. Joseph responds to what he is told immediately and unequivocally, even when the personal cost is high; Herod responds first with deception (2:8) and then with violent anger (2:16). Joseph dominates the sequence in such an overtly commendable way that it is difficult not to infer that Matthew is working to align his compliant readers with Joseph’s unreserved trust and obedience.

The character contrast within the second scene (2:1–12) is between the experts in Jerusalem and the Magi. As Mark Allen Powell comments, this contrast is not fully seen if one assumes the Magi are either kings or wise men, as has been common in the history of interpretation. Rather, Matthew is more likely to be expecting readers to infer a negative association: the Magi are pagan servants and what they practise as servants is not wise but foolish. Powell concludes: “I think the implied readers [for which we may read compliant readers] are expected to conclude, “God revealed the truth about the Christ to a bunch of pagan fools while those who were wise enough to figure it out for themselves missed it.” That then the Magi ἐξάρησαν χαράν μεγάλην σφόδρα (2:10) contrasts sharply with what is apparently a passive indifference from the Jerusalem experts. Matthew thus completes his exposure of the dark “background” to the coming of Jesus, while encouraging his compliant readers to a contrasting joyful alternative.

As in the Genealogy, there is a great deal of possible weak implication across the five scenes and in the fulfilment formulae, with many suggestions in the history of interpretation of this passage. For example, over and above the fairly explicit allusion to the Exodus in 2:15, quoting Hos 11:1, there are many other (weaker) possibilities. Herod may evoke an association with Pharaoh and Jesus with Moses. But already Matthew is hinting that Jesus will go beyond Moses, as Servant. Even at his birth, Jesus is linked with a light which draws Gentile sinners

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16 Powell, Chasing the Eastern Star, 156; cf. 11:25 (see below, section 5.2).

17 Compare Davies and Allison: “Mt 2:1–12 has not only a foreground but a background. [...] The world into which the Messiah comes is in chaos and decay; things need to be righted. [...] In brief, the world is ill.” Matthew I–7, 254.
to come and worship (2:9–11; cf. Isa 49:6; 60:1–7).\(^\text{18}\)

Concerning the whole of 1:18–2:23, we may conclude that just as Matthew has set up the basic shape of his implied temporal framework in the Genealogy at the beginning of his account, he has likewise here (while also reinforcing that) set up the basic shape of the theocentric commitment that will be at the centre of the compliant response he hopes for from his Gospel. As exemplified in Joseph, it is to believe unreservedly that God is (somehow) acting to realize his promises in Jesus, and to act given that belief, doing unreservedly what God instructs.

Matthew’s strategy is again emphasising depth of compliance over width. Not all readers will want to comply with Matthew’s intentions. There is plenty here to offend, especially for anyone associated with establishment Jerusalem. Readers also have to invest sufficient emotional energy to picture and engage with the characters in the different scenes in order to want to align with some and dissociate from others. As in the Genealogy, the large amount of possible weak implication allows Matthew to suggest a great deal in a short space. It is unlikely that he expects this to be “decoded” in detail by every compliant reader. Rather, the strategy is more like painting an impressionistic picture — where the individual elements are imprecise, even ambiguous, but where the overall impression is of the Lord bringing into reality all that was left unrealized through Moses and exiled Israel. For readers prepared to have their imagination and their sense of divine history stimulated, however, the overall effect is likely to be persuasive.

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\(^{18}\) There are further possible allusions to Isaiah’s Servant program. For example, it could be that the הושע in Isa 49:6, while traditionally taken as a passive participle of the verb הושע (hence “the preserved”), is better taken as a patronymic (hence “Nazorean”). In this case, the verse would read: “He says, ‘It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and a Nazorean to restore Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.’” Hill, “Son and Servant,” 8. The formula at 2:23 could then be a direct allusion to this Servant text. However, Davies and Allison, Matthew 1–7, 275–80, conclude that the most likely allusions are to Isa 4:3 or 11:1. This still supports an allusion to the “Servant program” if we use the term (as we have been) to refer to the salvation program of Isaiah as a whole.
4.2.3 Continuation.

Matthew has described the conception of Mary’s child ἐκ πνείματος ἀγίου (1:18) and his vocational naming as Jesus through an angel of the Lord (1:21). We shall argue shortly (section 4.3 below) that in the baptism of 3:13–17 Matthew will be showing Jesus’ formally accepting this vocation, taking up what we have called the “Servant mandate” of the prophet Isaiah.

As noted above (4.1.3), the Magi are the first of many rank outsiders in the Gospel who exhibit a response to Jesus that shames those who “should know better.” Here, those who should know how to respond to the unfolding events (but do not exhibit such a response) are the experts in Jerusalem; later, this role will extend to Jesus’ disciples. Only after the death and resurrection of Jesus do we find his followers exhibiting a comparable great joy (departing from his empty tomb μετὰ φόβου κατ’ χαράς μεγάλης, 28:8; cf. 2:10) and reverence (his disciples προσεκώνησαν, 28:17; cf. 2:11).

The indifferent or negative response of the Jerusalem establishment in 2:1–12 foreshadows what we shall see at the end of the Gospel, where Jesus is also described as “king of the Jews” (27:11, 29, 37; cf. 2:2) and where the establishment likewise plot to kill him (26:3–4; cf. 2:16).

4.3 Matthew 3:1–4:22

The prolegomena of Matthew 1–2 thus establish the primary implied premises for the main story. These are that God is acting in a world dominated by antipathy towards himself rather than commitment, to discharge his own commitment to prior promises. The focus of his program of action is Jesus, “who is called Christ” (1:16), “who will save his people from their sins” (1:21). The main story begins in Matthew 3. Matthew 3:1–4:22 encompasses four distinct episodes, each of which would merit extensive analysis. Here, we shall limit ourselves to a brief analysis of the broad sweep of the narrative, focussing on the movement from John the Baptist’s proclamation in 3:2 to Jesus’ identical proclamation in 4:17.19

19 The content of this proclamation will be special focus of the next section, 4.4 below.
4.3.1 *A claim concerning communicative equilibrium.*

Matthew is claiming that although Jesus was born to fulfil God’s promises to Abraham and David, in accordance with the Prophets, this is not something which will satisfy expectations of an *instant* and complete fulfilment. The kingdom of heaven remains in the future. What Jesus has come to do is to complete the task set by his Father to bring the kingdom “near.” This is the salvation program of the Lord through his Servant, as outlined by the prophet Isaiah. Matthew wants to persuade readers that, at his baptism by John, Jesus was taking on this Servant mandate, to the approval of his Father. In the wilderness, Jesus then shows that taking on this mandate is taking on a cosmic conflict with Satan, and Matthew shows Jesus worthy to do this. Jesus then begins the mandate by preaching the gospel of the kingdom. Matthew wants his compliant readers to connect this mandate to the vocation assigned to Jesus in 1:21 and to see what Jesus has begun as like the dawning of a great light for those suffering under “the shadow of death”; once again, in line with Isaiah. Finally, Matthew sets up Jesus’ first disciples as one of the principal narrative means by which he will explain to readers seeking communicative alignment how they may benefit from the Servant ministry of Jesus — and even participate in it.

We shall look more closely in the next section at the imperative \( \mu \epsilon \nu \rho \sigma \nu \varepsilon \nu \tau \varepsilon \) (3:2; 4:17), its relation to Matthew’s claims concerning the “nearness” of the kingdom and argue that it is Matthew’s most general call to theocentric commitment. We shall also consider how Matthew illustrates compliance to the command; first with John’s baptism and the confession of sins, and then in the leaving-following pattern of the first disciples in 4:18–22.

Our focus in this section is therefore more on what readers seeking communicative alignment can infer concerning Matthew’s view on the task Jesus is taking on, and how that fits into the expectation of fulfilment raised by the prolegomena. They may infer how Matthew wants to develop his implied temporal framework from the way John the Baptist’s simple temporal expectation of fulfilment by \( \dot{o} \) [...] \( \circ \xi \iota \circ \omega \mu \omega \dot{e} \rho \chi \omicron \mu \omicron \nu \varsigma \) (3:11) is *temporally resolved* in the subsequent narrative.\(^{20}\) The “one coming after” him does come, but with no

\(^{20}\) What is meant by *temporal resolution* will be described in more detail below.
judgment. Then, given Jesus’ divinely stated vocation as one who σώσει τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν (1:21), it is possible to infer the basic shape of the task Jesus is taking on from his unexpected undertaking of a baptism rite intended for sinners. (This will be strongly reinforced by any background understanding of Isaiah’s Servant.)

The cosmic significance of the task is implied by the wilderness conflict with Satan and the quotation from Isaiah 9 in 4:15–16.

4.3.2 Expansion and further argument.

For the moment, we shall mostly be considering the development of Matthew’s implied temporal framework, leaving the shape of compliance implied by these episodes to the next section. From the prolegomenon, compliant readers have a simple scheme of past promises and prophecy somehow realized in the birth of Jesus. Matthew then presents John the Baptist as one expectantly waiting for the kingdom (3:2), preparing the way for a coming of the Lord in his Servant (3:3), expecting wrath (3:8, 10) and a separating judgment, a baptism by means of fire and Holy Spirit enacted by the mightier one coming after him (3:11–12). The temporal framework implied by John divides time very simply (and imprecisely) into present and future. The present is the time to repent — and to show it publicly through baptism and (by implication) through “fruits worthy of repentance” (3:8). A future change is imminent; the kingdom is near; there is wrath coming; the axe is at the root; there will be division. One is coming who will baptise ἐν πνεύματι ἅγιον καὶ πνεύματι παρθένου. Given the prolegomena, it is reasonable to infer that Matthew wants an association with the coming of Jesus here.

In all of this, Matthew is presenting John as a present day prophet and thereby implying his reliability. Indeed, John’s status as one who heralds the coming of the Lord is strongly implied in Matthew’s editorial comment in 3:3, citing a part of Isaiah closely preceding the description of the Lord’s activity through his Servant. For those familiar with, for example, the description of Elijah in 2 Kgs 1:8, the presentation of John as prophet is reinforced by the description in 3:4. Matthew will also continue to show John in a positive light — Jesus approves his baptism (3:13), confirms his proclamation (4:17) and asserts his greatness (11:11). In other words, John is to be respected and listened to. This suggests that Matthew is
in part using John the Baptist’s speech in Matthew 3 to encourage an empathy with a (highly significant) righteous Jew’s expectations of the coming kingdom: that the mightier one coming after John, whom the compliant reader of Matthew 1–2 will associate with Jesus, will come soon to bring a climactic, separating judgment.

However, the chapter as a whole serves to update these expectations. The mightier one coming after John (3:11) actually comes. John proclaimed the coming of a baptizer (3:11) and in Jesus recognizes a baptizer (3:14). But there is no judgment. The implied temporal framework is “temporally resolved”: given more precision as closely connected events are separated out. Two events given no temporal distinction in John’s speech are resolved in the subsequent narrative by one of the events happening but not the other.21 Nothing in the section suggests that Matthew wants compliant readers to think that John spoke incorrectly; John did not speak incorrectly, but imprecisely. Subsequent events separate the two events temporally, while retaining their close association.

We may illustrate this process thus:

21 This is using the verb “resolve” as it is used “of an object initially perceived indistinctly: to become identifiable, esp. as a number of discrete objects, when seen more clearly,” or as it is used in science: “to distinguish parts or components of (something) that are close together in space or time; to identify or distinguish individually.” Oxford English Dictionary, Draft Revision, March 2010.
The question this raises is: if the mightier one coming after John has not come to enact a final, separating judgment (at least, not yet), what has he come to do? We can argue from the evidence of Matthew 4 that the answer suggested by Matthew is that Jesus has come to take on the mandate of Isaiah’s Servant, to the approval of his Father. This is tantamount to beginning a cosmic conflict with Satan.

We shall continue the argument begun in section 3.3 above, broadly following that in Terence Donaldson’s 2005 paper, “The Vindicated Son.” Donaldson sets up his analysis as an application of A.J. Greimas’s structuralist conception of “narrative grammar.” However, the argument does not depend strongly on this theoretical framework. We need only to accept a model of narrative structure which splits a narrative into three main sequences: an initial sequence, where the unresolved issue is set up; a topical sequence, where the main story develops; and a final sequence, where everything is brought to completion. We suppose that the narrative moves from a state of relative disequilibrium at the beginning to a state of equilibrium at the end. The claim that most narratives generally follow such a pattern is sufficiently plausible to accept quite readily. The topical sequence in Greimas’s scheme is divided into further “elements,” but it is only the first of these which really interests Donaldson: the contract element of the story. This is where the main character is identified and “accepts a mandate to do what needs to be done in order to resolve the situation of disequilibrium.”

Donaldson suggests that the “initial sequence” of the Gospel sets up Israel’s need for a leader (the Christ, a Shepherd for God’s people) to deliver the nation from the consequences of its sins. In this, Jesus has already been identified as the one “who will save his people from their sins” (1:21). He then identifies the “contract element” of the main story as the baptism and temptation of Jesus in Matthew 3 and 4. John the Baptist is presented as the one whose “ministry addresses Israel’s situation of need,” in that through his baptism the people

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22 Donaldson, “The Vindicated Son,” 112.
acknowledge their sins (3:6). But John is also set up by Matthew as Isaiah’s voice in the wilderness, such that the one coming after him will fulfill the mandate to deal with Israel’s need:

In coming for baptism, then, and even insisting, over John’s objections, that baptism is necessary “to fulfil all righteousness” (3:15), Jesus identifies himself with John’s program — thereby accepting the mandate that has already been laid out for him.²⁵

That Jesus has accepted the mandate is given visible divine confirmation by the descent of the Holy Spirit (3:16; cf. 1:18, 20), who will be described later as the enabler of Jesus’ ministry (12:28). There is also aural confirmation from the voice from heaven, which identifies Jesus as ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἁγιασμένος, ἐν φωτίᾳ εὐδοκήσα (3:17; cf. 2:15). For readers familiar with Isaiah, the descent of the Spirit and the wording of 3:17 both strongly imply a connection to the Servant of the Lord described in Isa 42:1 — especially given Matthew’s paraphrase of this verse in 12:18, which reads in part ὁ ἁγιασμένος μου εἰς ὅν εὐδοκήσεν ἡ γυνή μου.²⁶ The implication is, as Matthew began to hint in 2:15, that Jesus will be recapitulating as an individual the story of Israel, God’s Son, but “unlike Israel, Jesus will remain faithful.”²⁷ But just as Israel is closely associated with the Servant in Isaiah, so here.²⁸ Matthew is interpreting Jesus’ Sonship in terms of the Servant mandate he has taken on.

According to Donaldson, the temptation sequence (4:1–11) then shows the tension in the mandate Jesus has taken on. On the one hand, Jesus is to be a Son of God in the sense of a

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²⁴ In getting baptised, Jesus is thus also identifying himself with such people. Matthew does not explicitly say why he does so. Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 321–23, list no less than eight possibilities. However, in accordance with our method, rather than attempt to speculate at this stage, we trust Matthew to make things more clear in due course.

²⁵ Donaldson, “The Vindicated Son,” 114.


²⁸ Israel is explicitly linked to the Servant at Isa 41:8 in the MT and at 42:1; 44:1–2, 21; 45:4; 48:20 and 49:3 in the LXX.
king with all power — this is what the tempter plays upon (4:3, 6). On the other hand, he is (first) to be Son in a quite different way: a humble Servant, doing what Israel failed to do — this is what Jesus remains faithful to.\(^\text{29}\) As we began to argue in section 3.3, the role of the Servant “fills out” what it means to be Son.

In coming as he does, Jesus is therefore not abrogating John’s proclamation. The future aspects of John’s temporal framework are clarified rather than changed. Jesus takes on John’s prophetic call verbatim (4:17) and will continue to proclaim a future separating judgment (e.g. 7:21–23; 10:26ff; 11:24; 12:36, 42; 13:36–43, 47–50; 16:27; 25:31–46). However, because of the Servant mandate he has taken on, to be fulfilled before the judgment, the proclamation of the kingdom of heaven can assume a more hopeful aspect. Under the Servant mandate, Jesus takes up his vocation to “save his people from their sins” (1:21). To signify the value of what this will bring, Matthew uses Isaiah’s metaphor of light shining in the darkness. For those under a “darkness” associated with judgment and death “light has dawned upon them” (4:16; cf. Isa 9:1 MT).

Finally, we can note that 4:18–22 is also concerned with vocation. Jesus may not explicitly issue a mandate, but does make a promise concerning a future vocation: ποιήσω ὑμᾶς ἀλείπις ἀνθρώπων. Moreover, the scene sets up (in broad outline) the pattern of dependent, derivative, incorporated Servanthood we shall be arguing will form the basic shape of the theocentric commitment Matthew wishes to evoke, and on which we shall see much more in the coming analysis. The disciples respond instantly to the call: implicitly professing their commitment to Jesus. They express their commitment in the costly leaving behind of occupation, possessions and family.\(^\text{30}\) And Jesus’ promise is that they will participate in something of his making.

Matthew’s strategy in these two chapters is thus to begin by aligning compliant readers with John, his view of the kingdom of heaven, and his distaste for those showing no evi-

\(^{29}\) Donaldson, “The Vindicated Son,” 114–16.

\(^{30}\) Although, as Warren Carter notes, “these actions cannot be understood as antisocietal, because Jesus also commissions them to mission among human beings.” “Matthean Discipleship,” 69. We have yet to see what this “societal participation” will look like in practice, although we can anticipate that Jesus will be wanting to instruct his disciples carefully on this very subject.
dence of repentance. Matthew then works to persuade those with such an outlook to update their basic beliefs concerning the state of the world in the light of Jesus’ coming and the Servant mandate he takes on. Quite what that implies in terms of detailed response remains to be made more precise, but Matthew is making it clear from the beginning of the Gospel that it will be Christocentric in essence.

4.3.3 Continuation.

These episodes have great warrant to be described as “kernels,” to use Chatman’s narrative terminology—events that “cannot be deleted without destroying the narrative logic.”31 Certainly, many themes and future events flow from these ones. Matthew personally confirms the Servant ministry of Jesus by employing Isaian fulfilment formulae at 8:17 and 12:17–21.32 The vocation to save people from their sins (1:21), subsumed in the Servant mandate Jesus took on at his baptism, will be re-asserted in future purpose statements. Jesus has come to call sinners (9:13) and to give his life as a ransom for many (20:28). To this we may add 26:28, where Jesus interprets his coming death in terms of the blood of the covenant, “poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” We shall argue in section 6.4 that Jesus then dies as Isaian Servant.

As Powell notes, the temptation sequence has raised Satan’s opposition to the purpose of the Lord to save his people from their sins: “This challenge represents Satan’s first, albeit unsuccessful, attempt to dissuade God’s agent and thwart the divine plan.”33 Further stages in the conflict are flagged at 16:22–23 and 27:40–43. But the conflict is resolved only when we see how the purpose of the Lord “came to be fulfilled, to some extent in Jesus’ ministry, but, ultimately, only in his death.”34

Matthew’s use of ἀναχωρέω to indicate a pattern of withdrawing so that the will of the Lord may be done, exemplified by the Magi in 2:12–13 and Joseph in 2:14, 22, is here taken

31 Chatman, Story and Discourse, 53.
32 “At least by the time they reach ch. 12, Matthew’s readers are fully aware of the close correspondences between the Isaian Servant, the nation Israel, and Jesus.” Donaldson, “The Vindicated Son,” 118.
34 Powell, “Plot and Subplot,” 196. We shall be drawing together conclusions on Matthew’s plot in section 7.1.
up by Jesus following the handing over of John (4:12) and is repeated in 12:15, 14:13 and 15:21. In 12:15 it is connected to Jesus’ Servant ministry (12:17–21). The principle is applied by Jesus to his followers in the command to flee (φευγετε) in the face of persecution (10:23), picked up in 24:16.  

Following on from the paradigmatic calling scene in 4:18–22, other instruction which will serve to incorporate those who follow after Jesus into his Servant program includes 5:14–16 (being the light to the world, cf. Isa 49:6), 10:24–25 (servants like their master, reflecting the pattern of the whole speech), 20:26–28 (servants serving like the Son of Man, reflecting all of 16:21–20:34), 24:45–51 and 25:14–30 (parables of diligence), and 20:16–20 (the “Great Commission”). We shall be arguing that this derivative Servanthood, where disciples depend upon the ministry of the Servant but are also incorporated into this ministry, is the essence of theocentric commitment according to Matthew.

**4.4 Focus on Matthew 3:2 and 4:17**

Taken together, 3:2 and 4:17 convey the first of four open-ended calls in the Gospel, the others being at 11:28–29, 16:24 and 28:19–20. We shall be arguing that the call in 3:2 and 4:17 is the most general call to theocentric commitment in the Gospel, predicated upon a general claim concerning the spatio-temporal state of affairs (the kingdom of heaven is near). It is introduced by John the Baptist (3:2) and then carefully repeated word-for-word by Jesus (4:17). We can connect the call as proclaimed by John the Baptist to the response pattern in 3:5–6, and (tentatively) connect the same call as proclaimed by Jesus to the response pattern in 4:18–22.

**4.4.1 A claim concerning communicative equilibrium.**

Matthew would like compliant readers to change their belief-structures concerning the state of the world to one which is “heaven-orientated”: one in which the heavenly rule of God will be vindicated. He is claiming that this should be an urgent concern to his readers, even if they

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35 See below (section 6.3).
do not yet know quite how or when it will happen. He wants post-resurrection readers to be persuaded to comply with the historically specific call to Israel issued by Jesus. Quite what this (re)commitment will look like in detail is left relatively open at this stage, although Matthew would like his compliant readers to begin to see that a theocentric commitment will in some way be linked to “following after” Jesus.

Readers seeking communicative alignment are able to infer this from the repeated call to repent (3:2; 4:1) in relation to the claim concerning the “nearness” of the kingdom, and the various example responses across the two chapters. These include the humble response of those baptized by John, the negative attitude exposed in the scribes and Pharisees, and the leaving-following response of Jesus’ first disciples.

4.4.2 Expansion and further argument.

The history of interpreting ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν has lead to various views on what Matthew expected the phrase to evoke.\(^{36}\) However, Matthew makes it easy to infer why John thought the “nearness” of the kingdom of heaven was an urgent concern. Its nearness implied coming wrath (3:7), judgment of the unfruitful (3:10) and final separation of “wheat” and “chaff” (3:12). The association of the kingdom of heaven with separating judgment is therefore a strong one. This would be reinforced for readers familiar with the LXX of Daniel, who might also infer that what John says is an interpretation of the victory of the kingdom of the God of heaven in the dreams and visions of Daniel 2 and 7.\(^{37}\)

Our approach allows us to defer a consideration of what kind of “nearness” Matthew expects compliant readers to infer — for example, whether this is to be taken spatially, temporally or both. There is no warrant in the narrative context for fixing on any of these, leaving

\(^{36}\) For example, should βασιλεία be thought of as “kingdom” in a locative sense, or “kingdom” in the sense of “reign,” “rule” or “sovereignty”? What is the significance of the plural οὐρανῶν? Jonathan Pennington sketches these and a number of other debates in *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew* (NovTSup 126; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 84–86, 127–31.

\(^{37}\) Note especially Dan 2:44; 7:13–15, 26–27. This suggestion is strongly supported by Pennington, *Heaven and Earth*, 285–93. If this is the primary association Matthew wants to make (as seems likely), then it will help his compliant readers to make a connection with the “coming of the Son of Man” sayings later in the Gospel. See also below (section 4.8) on 10:23.
the compliant reader to infer that Matthew is deliberately leaving things imprecise — with the expectation that they may be made more precise as the Gospel account proceeds.38

As we noted in our discussion of Guy Nave Jr.’s study of repentance in Luke-Acts (section 1.3 above), it is common for scholars to equate repentance with conversion of some sort. However, our approach encourages us to ask whether Matthew supplies sufficient warrant for inferring anything more than one would from the common usage of μετανοέω, which was simply to change one’s mind — with the additional possibility that in certain circumstances this may involve regret or remorse concerning the way one once thought.39 The simplest initial inference from the combination of μετανοεῖτε and Ἰγγίκεν γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν is therefore that this is an urgent call to change one’s basic beliefs concerning the state of the world such that one incorporates what is claimed in the explanatory clause and perhaps regrets the beliefs and attitude one once held.40

Although this suggests that to comply with μετανοεῖτε is primarily a cognitive activity, the belief change called for here is so radical that it carries with it a strongly implied expectation of further responsive action. Quite what kind of further action will be an on-going issue in the Gospel, but a preliminary picture can be inferred from the examples Matthew supplies in the supporting narrative. The first of these is provided by the pattern of response

38 However, compliant readers might be able to infer something from John’s use of the perfect tense for Ἰγγίκεν. The difficulty here is the lack of consensus regarding verbal aspect and the perfect. Fanning’s scheme would suggest perfective aspect, and here (with a stative lexeme) perhaps an ingressive sense. Buist M. Fanning, Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek (Oxford Theological Monographs; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 118. Thus we might translate: “the kingdom of heaven has become near.” Under Campbell’s scheme, on the other hand, we would infer an “imperfective aspect with heightened proximity,” and here a stative Aktionsart. Constantine R. Campbell, Verbal Aspect, the Indicative Mood, and Narrative: Soundings in the Greek of the New Testament (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 184–211; cf. Basics of Verbal Aspect in Biblical Greek (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2008), 107 (on Mark 1:15). We might translate: “the kingdom of heaven is near!” If so, then John may be using the perfect to highlight the intense urgency of the situation. This is consistent with the placement of Ἰγγίκεν in an emphatic position in the clause.

39 LSJ s.v. μετανοέω and μετάνοια. Although BDAG (s.v. μετανοέω) suggests “be converted” as one possibility after “change one’s mind” and “feel remorse,” there is no such suggestion in LSJ.

40 This reading goes some way to explaining why Matthew has dropped Mark’s πιστεῦσε ἐν τῷ εὐαγγέλῳ (Mark 1:15). Matthew’s use of μετανοεῖτε makes it redundant. Likewise, the omission of any imperative in the prescribed proclamation of the Twelve (10:7) can also be understood. A change of mind is implicit in the mere assertion of some radical claim concerning the state of the world.
in 3:5–6, which are expressed in three activities: going out to the Jordan, being baptized and confessing sins. This pattern is in contrast to the Pharisees and Sadducees, who John implies have not borne καρπὸν ἀξίον τῆς μετάνοιας (3:8) — i.e. have not exhibited the kind of responsive action that would indicate μετάνοια. In popular perception, they would have been the most obvious candidates to avoid any coming wrath, so John’s claim that they are in severe danger should give a very wide set of readers cause for concern.

The response pattern in 4:18–22 is ostensibly quite different. Suddenly we get a radical Christocentric focus. Now there is a call to follow after Jesus and to be incorporated into a task (to be made ἀλιτές ἀνθρώπων, 4:19).

For a number of reasons, compliant readers may infer from these response patterns that (even as post-resurrection readers in different circumstances, and regardless of ethnicity) Matthew expects them to check their compliance with the call in 3:2 and 4:17. First, the pattern of response in 3:5–6 suggests this is a call one might make to people outside the covenant promises of the Lord. Here Matthew does imply that remorse or regret are appropriate aspects of μετάνοια. Davies and Allison make the point that “John did not think of repentance as primarily a daily affair which served to maintain one’s status as a member of the covenant community.”

The lack of μετάνοια exhibited by the Pharisees and Sadducees renders their ancestry worthless (3:9), leaving them subject to the wrath to come. Those going out to the Jordan, on the other hand, are going back to the boundary of the Land (perhaps suggesting they have no right to dwell there?) and undergoing a rite in which the participants acknowledge a radical unacceptability before God. This reduces the distance between the hearers of the call in the (historical) context described in the narrative and later hearers, even Gentiles.

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41 Davies and Allison, Matthew 1–7, 306. That is, so far as John was concerned, the nation was in no position to enjoy the benefits of what recent scholars have called “covenental nomism,” even if this is a valid concept for the Palestinian Judaism of the time — which is not at all certain. The term “covenental nomism” was popularized by E. P. Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion (London: SCM Press, 1977), 422. Note also the strong qualifications to the concept suggested in D.A. Carson, Peter T. O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, eds, Justification and Variegated Nomism: Volume 1 - The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2001), passim.
That the command is repeated and taken up verbatim by Jesus in 4:17 also implies some ongoing, wider application, especially in the light of 28:20.\footnote{The wider applicability of the command is consistent with (although not proved by) the use of the present imperative. There is a reasonable consensus that this encodes an imperfective aspect that implies general exhortation — instruction issued with reference “to situations in general.” Constantine R. Campbell, \textit{Verbal Aspect and Non-Indicative Verbs: Further Soundings in the Greek of the New Testament} (Studies in Biblical Greek 15; New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 91.}

Matthew’s strategy is thus to focus on the need for a re-orientation of beliefs about the world and the spatio-temporal situation. It serves his purposes to withhold detail: he wants the call of 3:2 repeated in 4:17 to have the widest possible impact. He uses John’s speech to make a strong association between the nearness of the kingdom and a coming separating judgment, but the details are sufficiently imprecise to bring as many readers as possible to ask whether they are at risk. Such a “re-assessment of the situation” is an essential primary step in the theocentric commitment Matthew wishes to evoke. Persuade his readers of \textit{this}, and the other aspects of what he wants to evoke should follow.

4.4.3 Continuation.

As Jonathan T. Pennington notes, “Each of the Synoptics clearly portrays Jesus’ ministry as one that focuses on the kingdom, but Matthew stands out among the Evangelists.”\footnote{Jonathan T. Pennington, “The Kingdom of Heaven in the Gospel of Matthew,” \textit{Southern Baptist Journal of Theology} 12, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 44. That the message of the kingdom is a central theme in Jesus’ ministry is described by Pennington as “a rare example of a truth that is held in consensus among all Gospels scholars.”} The kingdom focus is certainly a key feature up to the end of Matthew 10. The preaching of τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας describes and brackets both discourse and narrative between 4:23 and 9:35. To proclaim ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν is precisely what the Twelve are sent to do in 10:7 (section 4.8 below).

Matthew’s use of the phrase ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν continues in a way that is consistent with what we have seen in 3:2. The plural οὐρανοὶ seems to denote the place of divine ruling activity, often contrasted with what happens ἐπὶ γῆς (e.g. 6:10, 19; 16:19; 18:18–19; 23:9; 24:30). There is a “standing tension between the realms of heaven and earth and this represents the tension between God and humanity.”\footnote{Pennington, “Kingdom of Heaven,” 47.} This can be pictured thus:\footnote{Pennington, \textit{Heaven and Earth}, 209.}
Pennington concludes that: “Matthew’s choice to regularly depict the kingdom as τῶν οὐρανῶν is designed to emphasize that God’s kingdom is not like earthly kingdoms, stands over against them, and will eschatologically replace them (on earth)” (his emphasis).\(^{46}\)

The “nearness” of the kingdom remains ambiguous throughout most of the Gospel. On the one hand, Jesus declares to the Pharisees in 12:28 that if it is by the Spirit of God that he casts out demons, then ἔφθασεν ἐκ τῆς ὑμνίας Ἰβασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ. On the other hand, most of the kingdom sayings have a strong future element to them.\(^{47}\) However, we shall be arguing below that the kingdom language that dominates the Gospel up to Matthew 24 is subsumed in the kingdom event of “the coming of the Son of Man” — which, although also ambiguous in reference at first, is “temporally resolved” by the end of the Gospel.\(^{48}\)

The language of μετάνοια is used very sparingly in the remainder of the Gospel. Primarily it is used in 11:20–24 and 12:41 to describe a failure to recognise the nearness of the kingdom: first, in Jesus’ “mighty works” (11:21); and then in the “something” Jesus is or has done that is greater than the preaching of Jonah (12:41). This is consistent with the view made above that Matthew is using μετάνοια as his most general call to re-orientate one’s view of the world in the face of something new, as the primary, preparatory step to an urgent (re)commitment to God. The remainder of the Gospel will develop what this means using more precise terminology and imagery.

We shall be arguing below (section 4.6) that one of the purposes of the speech in Matthew 5–7 is to expand and clarify the call in 3:2 and 4:17. The Beatitudes describe the one

\(^{46}\) Pennington, *Heaven and Earth*, 321.

\(^{47}\) Moreover, it may be significant that all four clear instances of ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ in Matthew (12:28; 19:24; 21:31, 43 — but excluding 6:33) can be taken to denote the present experience of the rule of God. “Entering” the kingdom of God (19:24; 21:31), for example, seems to indicate a present change of state with respect to God’s rule. If so, then Matthew is using his different kingdom terminology to distinguish whether he is referring to the present rule of God or the future, eschatological rule of God.

\(^{48}\) Final conclusions on Matthew’s implied temporal framework can be found in section 7.2.
who has responded to the call and has become in some way connected to the kingdom of heaven (5:3, 10). The first four clarify μετάνοια, the change of mind being called for. The second four can be said to describe the “fruits of” μετάνοια (cf. 3:8). These are further expanded in the rest of the speech: 5:21–48, for example, spell out explicit examples of the kind of “righteous” fruit of μετάνοια that the Pharisees (and Scribes) do not exhibit (5:20; cf. 3:8); while 6:1–7:12 exhort a change of mind in which a relational dependence on the heavenly Father is central — which neither Pharisees nor Gentiles have. The first half of the central prayer in 6:9–13 is a particularly strong expression of a mind that has acknowledged the nearness of the kingdom: calling for the kingdom of heaven, the Father’s kingdom, to encompass the earth.

Finally, following the call in 4:17 with a picture of following after Jesus in 4:18–22 begins a chain of narrative events focussed on Jesus’ disciples. As we noted above, there is a disjunction between this picture and the picture of μετάνοια in 3:5–6. The disciples are not described as confessing their sins. Moreover, as their storyline develops it becomes apparent that they have not (yet) re-orientated their basic beliefs about the world around the nearness of kingdom of heaven. They are ὀλγόπιστοι (6:30; 8:26; 16:8), needing to learn humility (e.g. 18:4). Indeed, their narrative can be described as a search for an awareness of the reality of the kingdom of heaven and the humility that should imply — something which they can only be said to have found after Jesus’ death and resurrection. The speech in Matthew 5–7 may begin to explain the incorporation of the disciples into the “Servant program” Jesus is pursuing (as we shall argue in section 4.6), but it is only at the climax of the Gospel that they are fully capable of becoming ὀλης ἀνθρώπων (4:19; cf. 28:19).

4.5 Matthew 4:23–9:38 as a rhetorical unit

Looking ahead, not only is this material clearly bracketed, but there is a unity in the portrayal of theocentric commitment. Although 4:23 (cf. 9:35) seems at first to describe three activities (teaching, proclaiming and healing), teaching and proclaiming are not strongly distinguished by Matthew (e.g. 11:1), while his healing/exorcism is described as a revelation of the near-
ness of the kingdom (cf. 12:28). To proclaim the kingdom seems to be the broadest description of Jesus’ activity (as in 4:17), but in the arrangement of Matthew 5–9 Matthew then focuses first on the aspect of formal teaching within that (founded on promises and warnings concerning the kingdom, Matthew 5 to 7) and then on healing and exorcism (as a proleptic demonstration of what has just been promised, Matthew 8 and 9). Commitment in response to the teaching in Matthew 5 to 7 is described using a wide variety of vocabulary and imagery. Commitment within the narrower demonstration of the kingdom in Matthew 8 and 9 is typically described using the πιστ- word-group (8:10; 9:2, 22, 29). There is a lexical point of contact between commitment in Matthew 8–9 and that in Matthew 5–7 in Jesus’ use of ὀλγοπιστος in 6:30 (cf. 8:26) to rebuke a lack of commitment. However, the conceptual connection is stronger than that, and we are hoping to show in what follows that the structure of commitment in both sections is essentially the same.

4.6 Matthew 5:1–7:29. The speech giving Jesus’ first instructions and declaration of kingdom blessing for those who will participate in his Servant program (also known as “The Sermon on the Mount”)

In the space we have available it will be impossible to do full justice to all that has been written on Matthew 5–7, or to attempt a verse-by-verse exegesis of the text. Despite this, it is hoped that what follows will make a significant contribution. In part this will come from thinking about Jesus’ speech in its wider narrative context. We shall be seeing that Matthew 1–4 have set up the essential premises for an analysis of the speech and also that the speech sets up unresolved issues that are only dealt with later in the narrative. However, the particular contribution of the pragmatic-critical method we have adopted will come in three areas. The method suggests:

1. A way of approaching and assessing variant readings and interpretations of the speech.

2. A way of thinking about the dynamic experience of processing this text and what sort of compliance this leads to. This will result in a particular claim concerning the contribution of the speech to the implied temporal framework Matthew is constructing and the particular kind of Servant-oriented theocentric commitment he wishes to evoke.

3. Most significantly, a way of seeing the decision-framework underlying the structure and purpose of the speech in its narrative setting. This will help us to better understand the unusual rhetorical techniques which Jesus uses to persuade his hearers within the narrative and which Matthew then uses to persuade his readers.

We shall begin by stating a summary of the proposed communicative equilibrium for these chapters.

4.6.1 A claim concerning communicative equilibrium.

Matthew wants compliant readers to know that they stand at a point of decision where their present choice has profound consequences at some single, unspecified time in the future. He wants them to know that the basic choice is two-fold:

1. The first choice-path may be summarized as trusting Jesus by actively trusting what he says. As in our discussion of the concept of the (English) term “trust” in section 2.2.4, this has both a belief element and an action element. Matthew wants readers to believe Jesus’ promises concerning the future consequences of compliance and his warnings concerning the future consequences of non-compliance. Sincere belief will then be expressed in action. This action requires further trust: a prayer-based trust in the provision of the Father. This is a humble trust: one which involves a complete transfer of dependency from self to God. What Jesus says, and the way he says it, implies a claim regarding his personal authority (cf. 7:28–29). However, to trust him in this is in particular to trust certain claims and promises he makes concerning his Father and to then become a dependent partner in the Servant mandate his Father has
given him. There are two stages to the response: it is first to adopt (or continue in) a humble disposition towards God as Father (a “vertical” dependency) of such a kind that the compliant reader then, secondly, earnestly desires to do the good works that will reveal the Father to the world (a “horizontal” righteousness in concrete situations). The first mirrors the filial relationship between Son and Father revealed at Jesus’ baptism; the second expresses part of a disciple’s participation in the Servant’s task to bring light to the nations.

2. On the other choice-path lies anything else (although scribes, Pharisees, tax collectors and Gentiles are used as points of comparison). Matthew wants compliant readers to know that the first choice certainly leads to life and blessing in the future and that any alternative leads to destruction. His basic strategy is to withdraw and allow Jesus to speak at length to his disciples within the narrative situation in such a way that post-resurrection readers are “drawn in” to stand alongside the disciples in the narrative situation. The expectation is then that, when the reader “returns” to his/her actual situation, he/she will factor-in the change of situation — including what happens from this point in the narrative to its end. The speech is then arranged and composed to emphasise the necessity of a “horizontal” righteousness in concrete situations, while strongly implying the prior necessity of a foundational “vertical” dependency. However, there are aspects of this vertical dependency that Matthew is waiting to clarify and expand on later in the narrative.

The chapters bifurcate Matthew’s wider readership. On the one hand, there are those who do not fully process the content of the speech. For example, they may relatively quickly conclude that the challenges of the speech are offensive, impossible or irrelevant. Or they may exclusively fix on one element of the speech without reconciling this with other elements. On the other hand, there are those who are motivated by the promises in the speech to continue searching for a resolution to the issues it raises. However, readers who continue to process the

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50 As we began to argue in section 3.2 above.
speech will infer the temporal framework and the basic choice Matthew wishes to convey, as set out above. If they are persuaded this represents the true state of affairs, then they comply with the kind of theocentric commitment Jesus outlines. There are some elements within the speech itself which work as persuasion. However, we shall be arguing that persuasion to comply also comes later in the Gospel, and that the issues raised in the speech are not fully resolved until we reach the account of the death and resurrection of Jesus later in the narrative.

4.6.2 The wider readership.

Our approach helps us to see varied reading or interpretation of the speech as example reader responses. Each interpreter has processed the text in the light of an existing set of beliefs or presuppositions and produced a revised set of beliefs, including an “interpretation”; each therefore supplies data concerning how the text actually functions for real readers.

There is an embarrassment of riches in the history of interpretation of this speech. Nevertheless, we may at least broadly sketch the main alternatives, and in this regard Jeremias’ oft-cited taxonomy remains useful.\textsuperscript{51} The first stream of this suggests Jesus teaches an ethical perfectionism, an obedience ethic that implicitly emphasises self-effort over grace. The second, which Jeremias calls “Lutheran orthodoxy,” suggests Jesus is setting out a deliberately impossible standard, compelling his hearers to cry for mercy. The third suggests Jesus is setting out an “interim ethic,” applicable until some near eschatological crisis (which could be the cross and resurrection in some versions, or some other event in others), but not relevant thereafter. To this, Jeremias adds a fourth option (not unique to him): the speech presupposes God’s grace received in the acceptance of the gospel proclamation and then “delineates a lived faith.”\textsuperscript{52}

Even in this thumbnail sketch we can see the bifurcation into those who cease processing the speech relatively early and those who continue to search for a resolution of its ten-


\textsuperscript{52} Jeremias, \textit{The Sermon on the Mount}, 34–35.
sions. The first stream (correctly) notices the emphasis in the speech on the necessity of an expressed “horizontal” righteousness but, perhaps mistaking necessity for sufficiency, stops at that point, effectively ignoring the remaining material. The second is similar but, rather than fix on this kind of righteousness as a condition for salvation, looks for an alternative outside the confines of the speech. The third infers an implied temporal framework in which we might well wonder why Matthew has related so much detailed instruction. The fourth, however, makes much more of an attempt to resolve the different elements of the speech — and roughly corresponds to what we shall argue below a reader in communicative alignment might say about it.

4.6.3 Communicative alignment and the role of the Beatitudes.

We shall argue first that within the speech the first eight Beatitudes (5:3–10) play a disproportionately significant role in bringing persistent readers into communicative alignment. They set up how a reader seeking alignment comes to form an understanding of the implied temporal framework Matthew wishes her to perceive. Within this framework, readers can then infer the kind of theocentric commitment Matthew wishes to evoke.

The Beatitudes certainly stand out as an unusual component of the speech. They are given emphasis in the speech through their form and through their position. In both respects there are similarities with the Genealogy of 1:1–17. The form Matthew is employing has similar associations with forms in the Hebrew Scriptures, especially from the Wisdom literature. In this context, we could translate μακάριοι by a phrase such as “favoured by God,” expressing something very similar to phrases such as ὁ μισθός ύμων πολύς ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς (5:12) and ὁ πατήρ σου ὁ βλέπων ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ ἀποδώσαι σοι (6:4, 6, 18) later in the speech. The basic repetition of an assertion beginning with the description μακάριοι implies the possibility and promise of blessing, while the rhythm, repetition and slightly awkward syntax slows the reading down, adding to the solemnity of the pronouncements. As in the Genealogy, other repetitions and parallels and the “edges” of the pattern also serve to

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highlight certain ideas, and we shall consider some of these in what follows. An obvious implication from Matthew’s placement of the Beatitudes at the beginning of the speech is that they are signalled to act as a basic premise for what follows. It is the Beatitudes that set up the very simple temporal framework which is reinforced in the rest of the speech, and under which the promises and warnings we find there are to be understood. It is in the Beatitudes that we have presented a composite portrait of the disciple who is blessed by God in his kingdom. This links back to the call to repent in 4:17 and 3:2 and forward to the more detailed instruction that follows.

We shall be arguing at further length below that part of the significance of the Beatitudes therefore comes from their function as a “map,” a “reference point” or a “dynamic attractor” in the speech. A reader who gets lost, confused or discouraged in the expanded instruction which follows may return to the Beatitudes for re-orientation. For example, in the dizzying moral heights expected by the instruction of 5:17–48, returning to the Beatitudes may comfort a discouraged reader that such expectations are founded on a humble self-assessment and the certainty of Jesus’ promises.

The Beatitudes are also then the primary source of motivation for processing the content of the speech and resolving its difficulties. The final ὡριον clauses in each Beatitude build a picture of what being within the bounds of the kingdom will be like in the future. This functions rather as the hidden treasure and the pearl will do in 13:44–46, articulating the incalculable value of being a part of the kingdom.55

54 The dichotomy between ‘entrance requirements’ and ‘eschatological blessings’ so common in the secondary literature is therefore a false one (cf. Davies and Allison, Matthew 1–7, 439ff). To say that the Beatitudes describe eschatological blessings is true but inadequate. To describe them as ‘entrance requirements’ is misleading. To suggest these are the only alternatives is also inadequate. Robert Guenther has this conclusion on the use of righteousness language in the Beatitudes: “In other words, righteousness for Matthew was, as in the OT, a relational concept and involved both the ‘eschatological gift’ of the new relationship between God and the individual as well as the resultant ‘ethical conduct’ towards God (6:1–18) and others (5:21–48) made possible through the ‘gift.’ It was all part and parcel with the Kingdom present and future (5:20; 6:33).” “The Matthean Beatitudes: ‘Entrance-Requirements’ or Eschatological Blessings?” JBL 95, no. 3 (1976): 430.

4.6.4 Communicative alignment: the implied temporal framework.

We shall have more to say on the dynamics of Jesus’ speech shortly, but we shall consider next the contribution of the speech to the formation of the Gospel’s implied temporal framework. The implied temporal framework we took as an initial premise from Matthew 1–4 was very simple. Matthew recounted a history of Israel that picked out especially Abraham, David and the deportation to Babylon. We then saw Jesus born “to save his people from their sins” (1:21) in an Israel where the leaders are less responsive than superstitious Gentiles (Matthew 1–2). In this setting, John the Baptist described the kingdom as “near” (3:2), with now as the time of repentance, and immediately went on to warn about the nearness of separating judgment to those not showing fruits of repentance. We noted above (section 4.3) that the circumstances surrounding the arrival of “the one greater” John foretold challenged and qualified his stated understanding of the future. Nevertheless, the basic implied temporal framework of his proclamation is explicitly retained by Jesus: the kingdom is “near” and now is the time to repent (4:17).

The implied temporal pattern in the Beatitudes reinforces this: there is the present and there is some point in the future at which the reality of the kingdom is actualized. The phrase ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν recalls 3:2 and 4:17 and, at the edges of the 4+4 pattern in 5:3–10, bracket the intervening material. The kingdom is said to be a present possession of οἱ πτωχοὶ τῶν πνεύματι and οἱ δεδιωγμένοι ἐνεκεν δικαιοσύνης (5:3, 10), but the future tenses in the intervening material strongly imply that the concrete blessings of the kingdom as described in these verses are to be realized in the future. These are therefore implicit promises for those whose present condition is described by the noun-phrases to which μακάριοι stands in first predicate position. Blessed are such people, because the kingdom is theirs (5:3, 10) and they will (therefore) enjoy in the future these good things.

We may note here that the final Beatitude uses the implicitly present phrase ὁ μισθός ὑμῶν πολὺς ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς in line with the future-orientated promises of 5:4–9. Having a reward “in heaven” is in some way a valuable present possession, but not yet realized.
The most accessible way to take the temporal patterns in the rest of the speech is to fit them to this simple scheme. So in 5:13–16 Jesus makes assertions concerning the present status and function of his followers. In 5:17–19, he describes the present status of the Law and the Prophets, up to the future point in time described by the parallel phrases ἓως ἂν παρέλθῃ ὁ οὐρανός καὶ ἡ γῆ and ἓως ἂν πάντα γένηται. Although this is contested, there is nothing in Jesus’ words which strongly indicates a different future point of time to the one implied in the Beatitudes. In 5:18–19, the most accessible inference is that the “naming” of people according to their attitude to “these commandments” will also take place at this future point in time. In 5:20, those whose righteousness fails to exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθητε εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν — an emphatic negation construction. That is, entry will not happen in the future — with such a degree of certainly that it will not even begin to happen in the present.

Moving on to the instruction in 5:21–48, we can argue that the aorists introducing each case study (5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43) do not have a strong temporal reference, but are rather used to summarise the present moral understanding of people who have been instructed by the scribes and Pharisees concerning the Law and the Prophets. Relative to this, Jesus gives authoritative instruction concerning present conduct. Whether this is complied with has future consequences. That is, once again, the dominant temporal framework is a simple relationship between present attitude or conduct and a future consequence. This is strongly implied by the future tenses used in 5:21–22: to the presently non-compliant on this issue Jesus warns, “You will be subject to judgment.” It is also implied in the warnings which follow. For example, present sexual infidelity puts one in danger of being destroyed in Gehenna (5:29–30). We can say similar things about references to the future in 6:1–18 and 6:19–34, often indicated though a future tense. To the compliant, Jesus promises: your Father will reward you in the future (6:4, 6, 18). The warning is that the non-compliant receive their...
reward in the present, whenever their “righteousness” is noticed by others (6:2, 5, 16). Likewise, the forgiving will be forgiven; the non-forgiving will not be forgiven (6:14–15). In 6:19–34, the metaphor of “laying up treasure” in the present (vv.19–21), sets up instruction concerning anxiety about life in the future (vv.25–34). The promise concerning the future is that the trust of the compliant will be vindicated: whatever is necessary for life in the future “will be added to you” (6:33). In 7:1–5, those who inappropriately take on the role of judge are warned of future judgment; in 7:7–11, those who dependently ask their Father are promised that he will give them “good things.” The climactic triple set of contrasts in 7:13–27 also portray promises and warnings concerning the future based on present choices. In 7:13–14, the wide gate and easy way leads to future destruction; the narrow gate and hard way leads to future life. In 7:15–23, the false prophet is compared to a tree that does not bear good fruit and (in the future, and recalling the warning of John the Baptist in 3:8, 10) is cut down and thrown into the fire. This is linked to a future “day” of judgment in 7:22–23 (Jesus uses the phrase, ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ). Finally, in 7:24–27, the compliant hearer and doer of Jesus’ words is like a man who builds a house on a rock in the present, which then withstands the future storm; while the non-compliant is like a man who builds a house on sand, which falls in the future storm.

SUMMARY.

We may summarise as follows: There is the present, which is the sphere of choice; for the compliant, it is (as we shall see more of shortly) the sphere of a humble and trusting attitude expressed in righteous behaviour to the glory of the Father. Such people are presently part of the kingdom (5:3, 10) and presently have “a reward” in heaven (5:12) and are encouraged presently to “store treasure” there (6:20). Such people presently believe and depend upon the promises expressed in the Beatitudes for the future. Beyond this, there is possibly a near future: the “tomorrow” of 6:25–34, which is a source of anxiety for those of little-faith (οἱ ὀλγόπιστοι, 6:30). However, the emphasis throughout is on some more distant point in the future: when blessings are fully realized, at which all things are accomplished; when the non-compliant who ignore Jesus’ teaching are subject to judgment, the fire of Gehenna and...
destruction; but when the compliant, those who listen and do, will receive their reward. Quite how distant or near remains to be seen.

4.6.5 Communicative alignment: the shape of compliance.

Given this kind of temporal framework, what then can a reader seeking communicative alignment infer concerning the kind of theocentric commitment Matthew wishes to evoke?

5:3–10.

We have already noted that the form and position of the Beatitudes within the speech proper gives them prominence, such that they act as a foundation for the rest of what Jesus says.

The first four Beatitudes ascribe blessing to οἱ πνεοχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι, οἱ πενθοῦντες, οἱ πραξίς and οἱ παινῶντες καὶ διψῶντες τὴν δικαιοσύνην. Jesus is not explicit here about who such people are, what situation they are in and why they are described as being in this condition. As we shall argue shortly, this keeps the applicability of the sayings as general as possible. However, the overall pattern of the sayings (Jesus ascribing blessing to those in need) helps to connect them with the description Matthew has used in 4:16, which then stands as an implicated premise. Using the words of Isaiah, Matthew has said that Jesus has come as one like light to those living under the shadow of death. These sayings articulate that further. As in the discussion of μετανοεῖτε above (4.4), our pragmatic-critical approach encourages us to pursue the most accessible inferences from individual words and phrases. Given that Jesus is coming to people living ἐν γῇρᾳ καὶ σκηνῇ θανάτω, it is then warranted to infer that these are promising blessing for those in need of “that which gives (God-honouring) life” (5:3, as πνεῦμα is used in, e.g., Isa 42:5; 57:16; 61:3), those suffering the presence and threat of death and everything associated with it (5:4), those who are “gentle” (5:5) — not aggressive or self-assertive in their reaction to the state they are in — but rather longing for δικαιοσύνην (5:6). Matthew’s prior use of this word-group suggests that this is a longing to do God’s will: not

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58 Compare Mark Allan Powell, “Matthew’s Beatitudes: Reversals and Rewards of the Kingdom,” CBQ 58, no. 3 (1996): 469, “In short, all of the first four beatitudes speak of reversal of circumstances for those who are unfortunate.”
just in a narrow ethical sense (cf. 1:19) but in the wider sense of participating in his Servant program (cf. 3:15).\textsuperscript{59}

Some readers will recognise a rough correspondence to the complex of vocabulary in Isa 61:1–3 LXX. \textit{If} Isaiah 61 announces the application of the Servant’s work to a post-exilic situation, then this would strongly reinforce the sense that Jesus is describing here \textit{the kind of people the Servant has come to serve.}\textsuperscript{60}

It is therefore implied that to be compliant here is first and foremost to recognise and regret the reality of being someone living under the shadow of death and powerless to change that by one’s own resources.\textsuperscript{61} That is, it is to accept and take on the noun-phrases in the sayings as a self-description, and to thereby open oneself up to be served by the Servant. That is: humble and dependent in a “vertical” dimension.

The second four Beatitudes ascribe blessing to \textit{οἱ ἔλεημονες}, \textit{οὶ καθαροὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ}, \textit{οἱ εἰρηνοποιοὶ} and \textit{οἱ δεδιωγμένοι ἔνεκεν δικαιοσύνης}. There does seem to be a movement to expressed behaviour here: righteousness in a “horizontal” dimension. This is then a composite picture of someone who in concrete situations is quick to forgive, makes morally consistent decisions, acts contrary to any impulse to anger and who is prepared to face personal cost in order to act with integrity.

Looking ahead, we shall argue below that it is these four Beatitudes which are expanded in the case-studies of 5:21–48. They summarise the “good works” which glorify the

\textsuperscript{59} As we shall see in 5:16, the latter includes the former.

\textsuperscript{60} The correspondence between “I have put my Spirit on him” in Isa 42:1 and “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me” in Isa 61:1 does suggest some sort of Servant connection, as argued in Blocher, \textit{Songs of the Servant}, 32–33. There are also possible connections between Isa 61:1 and Isa 11:1, leading some to describe the figure in Isaiah 61 as the “Messiah-Servant.” John N. Oswalt, \textit{The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 40–66} (NICOT; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1998), 562–63, is one example among many. However, Joseph Blenkinsopp, \textit{Isaiah 55–66} (AB 19B; New York: Doubleday, 2003), 208, argues that “the fate of the prophetic Servant finds no unambiguous echo in 60–62.” Perhaps the best solution is to see in Isaiah 61 a \textit{broad} range of allusion to the \textit{whole} program of YHWH in Isaiah 40–55, as argued by W.A.M. Beuken, “Servant and Herald of Good Tidings: Isaiah 61 as an Interpretation of Isaiah 40–55,” in \textit{The Book of Isaiah} (ed. Jacques Vermeulen; BETL 81; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1989), 411–42. But we should also note, following Davies and Allison, \textit{Matthew 1–7}, 436–39, that the connections between the Beatitudes and Isaiah 61 are not as strong as they could be. This could be, as we have been arguing, because Matthew also wants a broad range of allusion to the program of YHWH, taken from across the \textit{whole} of Isaiah.

\textsuperscript{61} This builds on our discussion of \textit{μετάνοια} above (section 4.4).
Father in 5:16, which we shall argue shortly express the disciples’ participation in the Servant’s mandate for the world (as expressed most concisely in Isa 49:6). That is, we may infer that in putting the two sets of Beatitudes together, Jesus is describing people who will first benefit from his Servant program but then, in a dependent and derivative fashion, participate in it. For readers aware of the context in Isaiah 61, this would be reinforced, since the work of the Servant-like figure there results in people who will be called “generations of righteousness planted by the Lord for his glory” (Isa 61:3 LXX). But even if these connections are not seen, it is clear that Jesus is ascribing blessing to the humble and contrite in heart who then express the fruit of their contrition in practice. This is the basic pattern of an appropriate, compliant response to the nearness of the kingdom, which is then expanded in more detail in the remainder of the speech.

5:11–16.

If the Beatitudes are one especially striking feature in the reading experience of these chapters, the other is the sheer shock value of the way Jesus then proceeds. He begins with the most challenging implications of what he has just outlined: the persecution his disciples will face (5:11–12), the responsibility and purpose they will bear (5:13–16), the relative height of the moral standards they are to display (5:17–20), and the real-life detail of the extraordinary behaviour this should result in (5:21–48). Each element here represents an extreme challenge. Resolving the apparent possibility of blessing in the Beatitudes with the apparent impossibility of displaying the behaviour in 5:11–48 provides a second major incentive to keep processing the content of the speech.

The final Beatitude in 5:11 acts as a transition verse from the basic model of commitment to its detailed expansion, and itself expands on the concept of persecution on account of (ἐνεκέχει) righteousness introduced in 5:10. It is persecution of various kinds on account of (ἐνεκέχει) Jesus; that is, derivative of the kind of extreme persecution will shall see Jesus fac-

62 Compare Powell, “Beatitudes,” 477, on what is being promised for such people: “Those for whom things have not been right are blessed by the changes it brings, and those who have been seeking to set things right are blessed by the accomplishment of what they have sought.”
ing as Servant later in the Gospel (cf. 10:22, 24–25). Moreover, it will be persecution of the extreme kind experienced by the Prophets (5:12). Nevertheless, the disciples are called to the seemingly impossible task of facing such persecution with rejoicing and gladness.

The simple generality of the Beatitudes suggests that when Jesus then uses an emphatic ἐκ to introduce verses 13 and 14 he is not therefore distinguishing the disciples standing before him from later disciples. The sense is rather: you, who have responded to the general call to repent (3:2, 4:17) and who, as repentant people seeking to express the fruit of your repentance (cf. 3:8), sit under the blessing of 5:3–12, you are the salt of the earth etc. That is, they are representatives of the general class of repentant followers of Jesus, in distinction from the wider people as represented by the crowd. This adds to the sense of something new happening, but also to the possibility of future persecution as a minority.

The open pursuit of a righteousness associated with Jesus that forms the climax to the Beatitudes is then linked to what amounts to a purpose statement for the disciples in 5:13–16. They are given the responsibility of being the “salt of the land” and, with more emphasis, the “light of the world.” William Dumbrell argues persuasively that these are in synthetic parallelism, matching the relationship between the two halves of the Beatitudes. 63 The salt suggests the durability of and fidelity to the covenant, making such people “the guarantee of the continuation of Israel’s vocation.” 64 This corresponds to the first four of the Beatitudes: what such people are like. If they are not like this, then they are useless (5:13b). The light indicates their function. They are to participate in Jesus’ Servant program to be a world light (recalling not just Isa 49:6 but Isa 2:2–4 and Isa 60:1; cf. 4:16), not to be hidden, but prominently displayed as an instrument to bring glory to the Father (5:15–16). 65

By beginning with μη νομίσητε ὅτι... (5:17), the (false) implication Jesus is addressing could be that in reaffirming the role and purpose once given to Israel, something other than the Law

or the Prophets will be necessary to make this work in the new regime, given that Israel’s past attempts to fulfil this purpose led to failure, deportation (1:11–12, 17) and “darkness” (cf. 4:16). However, Jesus is emphatic that the Law and the Prophets will not be set aside, that they do underlie the “good works” of 5:16, and that the righteousness of the disciples (here, their expressed compliance to the revealed will of God concerning their Servant-like purpose, 5:16) must indeed exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees (5:20). How this will be possible when previously for God’s people it proved impossible remains unresolved at this point.

The section 5:17–20 raises the question of what Jesus means when he says he has come to fulfil the Law and the Prophets (5:17). We should acknowledge that Jesus does not here explain explicitly what this will entail. However, a reader seeking communicative alignment should at this stage suspect that he or she is meant to infer that it will at least in part entail fulfilling the Servant mandate given him at his baptism. Moreover, Jesus has just begun the process of incorporating his disciples into the wider Servant program, such that they will participate in fulfilling it (5:13–16). Part of the Servant program (which Matthew will draw attention to again in 12:17–21) is to proclaim κρίσιν (translating שפת, Isa 42:1 MT) to the world. An accessible implication of why Jesus says οὐκ ἦλθον καταλῦσαι ἕλλα πληρῶσαι in the context is therefore that one of the ways he will do so is through evoking obedience to this instruction, and that those who hear and do what he says (7:24–27) will also thereby in some sense be fulfilling the Law and the Prophets where the scribes and Pharisees have failed (5:20). The pattern of good works capable of glorifying God in the world was to an extent specified in the Law but never fully actualized, and certainly is not being so under them. The Prophets longed for and foretold a time when it would be. Jesus has come not to put the Law and Prophets aside but to fulfil them in himself and in those he incorporates into his Servant program.66

The stronger inference from the repeated constructions in 5:18–48 is not therefore that they are “antitheses” or contrasts with the teaching of Moses, but rather that they are compari-

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66 This accords well with Matthew’s use of πληρώσω in the fulfilment formulae. See comments in note 14, p.152, and note 3, p.146, above.
sons with (and sometimes extensions of) the teaching and practice of the religious leaders. We shall therefore call them “corrective expansions” rather than “antitheses.” The allusions to Moses in the speech are relatively weak, and serve more to add to the aura of Jesus’ authority than to form part of the argument. On the other hand, there is strong, repeated and consistent comparison with the religious leaders throughout the speech, culminating in 7:28–29. The most accessible implication is that to fulfill his Servant mandate and to incorporate his disciples within his Servant program for the world, Jesus is correcting and expanding the current moral understanding of his disciples, shaped as it has been by the scribes and Pharisees —their example and their teaching of the Law of Moses.

This is confirmed by closer inspection of the six “corrective expansions” in 5:18–48. In each we find a general movement from incomplete teaching to complete teaching to a call to practical action. That is, when Jesus says ἒρρέθη...η..., the implicated premise is that the disciples have heard from their teachers of the Law certain things concerning the Law of Moses as recorded in the Scriptures. However, although this teaching is founded on something true (cf. 23:2–3), it is inadequate or distorted, especially when put into practice. Jesus goes on to explain in what way the teaching the disciples have received is inadequate or distorted. Four of the cases are then completed by practical examples or vivid illustration (5:23–26, 29–30, 37, 39b–42). This implies, again, that Jesus expects his instruction actually to be followed.

The case-studies are structured in two groups of three in terms of delivery (5:21–32 and 5:33–47), but there are similarities within the first two and the final four. The first two address inadequate application of two of the ten commandments. Other actions aroused by anger and lust, beyond the specific prohibition, will also incur judgment. The final four corrective expansions all address abuses of the Law. That is, using regulations on the conduct of divorce to sanction divorce (5:31–32); using the acceptance of oaths in the Law to by-pass simple honesty (5:33–37); using laws on public justice to sanction private revenge (5:38–42), and over-particularising the general law on love to sanction hatred (5:43–47).

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67 Compare, for example, Davies and Allison on 5:1–2: “...one feels that if the allusion to Sinai were indeed present in 5:1–2 it should not be so quiescent.” Matthew 1–7, 423.
The final case-study in 5:43–47 brings the section to a close in a way that recalls its purpose: that the good works this instruction engenders should bring praise to the Father (5:16). That is, the disciples will become visibly identifiable with their Father (they will become “sons of” their Father in heaven) if they imitate his impartial love to the evil and the good, the just and the unjust (5:45). Imitation of scribes and Pharisees (opening the section, 5:20) or tax-collectors and Gentiles (ending the section, 5:47) would fail to fulfil their purpose in the world. The concluding command ἵσεσθε [...] ὑμεῖς τέλειοι in 5:48 therefore does not stand alone, but relative to displaying the completeness (τέλειος) of the Father, as just described in 5:45. We might paraphrase, “Be complete and undivided in love, therefore, as your heavenly Father is complete and undivided in love.” Jesus’ exhortation is thus not perhaps as extreme as might be implied by a translation such as “Be perfect.” However, there is no suggestion here that such imitation of the Father will be simple matter. For Jesus to call his disciples to be like their Father does emphasise again the extreme challenge he is setting.

6:1–18.

The instruction in 6:1–18 continues the exhortation of 5:20, both in the use of the δικαίος ὄνη word-group and in the comparison with the Pharisees. The comparison is more explicit and straightforward than that in 5:18–48. The Pharisees, says Jesus, are concerned only with “horizontal” relationships: what they can gain from the approval of their peers (they do things ὁποív δοξασθῶσιν ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, 6:2; cf. 6:5, 16). In contrast, the disciples are encouraged to focus on the “vertical” dimension and to pursue a personal relationship with their Father. This should reflect the filial relationship between Father and Son in 3:17 (foundational to Jesus taking on the Servant mandate). The secrecy of giving, prayer and fasting (6:3–4, 6, 18) implies that it is necessary for the disciples to demonstrate to the Father that they trust him irrespective of their relationship with their peers. This “vertical” dimension is most explicit in the model prayer of 6:9–13. This expresses first an alignment with the purposes of the Father (6:9–10: for the honouring of his name, his kingdom and his will), and then a dependence on the future provision of the Father (6:11–13: for life, forgiveness and deliver-
ance from the evil one). We can see this as a prayer that demonstrates expressing an awareness of the reality of the nearness of the kingdom and then petitioning in the light of it.

6:19–7:11.

The comparison with the Pharisees seems to fade from explicit view in 6:19–7:11 in favour of a comparison with the Gentiles (6:32). However, the exhortation to pursue or “invest” in an on-going relationship with the Father continues. Warnings (6:19, 25; 7:1, 6) are coupled with promises (6:20, 33; 7:5, 7–11). The predominant metaphor is about storing treasure: with a warning about treasure-building “on earth” coupled with a promise about treasure-building “in heaven” (6:19–20). As with Matthew’s use of the plural οὐρανοὶ, and consistent with other pairings of heaven and earth, “heaven” seems here to be the place of divine ruling activity. Storing treasure in heaven is “investing in” God and his reign — especially his eschatological reign. However, just as in the prayer of 6:9–13, an eschatological focus (6:9–10) was linked to a focus on the Father’s provision in the present and immediate future (6:11–13), so here. The teaching in 6:25–34 goes on to encourage a simple trust in God’s provision “for tomorrow” (6:34), the opposite of which is a Gentile-like little-faith (6:30). This is summarised in 6:33 — seek the kingdom, and [your Father’s] righteousness, and your trust will be vindicated. Seeking τὴν δικαιοσύνην αὐτοῦ we may take to be seeking to reflect the Father’s will, as in 5:6 — seeking that which will enable one to fulfil the Servant-like role set in 5:16. “Treasure-building” on earth or being anxious like a Gentile both put one’s relationship with the Father in peril and the future at risk; so does inappropriately assuming God’s role as judge (7:1–2). The warning here is coupled with a positive promise that it is possible to help an erring brother or sister with appropriate, repentant humility (7:3–5). The warning in 7:6 is initially puzzling, but becomes less so if it is taken as a general warning

68 Compare David E. Garland, “The Lord’s Prayer in the Gospel of Matthew,” Review & Expositor 89, no. 2 (1992): 227, “The Lord’s prayer is not the prayer of the self-sufficient but of those who know that they need to ask, to seek, and to knock (7:7). It is the prayer of the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, and those who long to do what God requires.”

69 Pennington, Heaven and Earth, 142.
coupled to the *general* promises in 7:7–11. That is: do not throw away the blessings you have to appease the ungodly; rather, ask your Father for help.\(^7\) The final focus is once again on dependent prayer.

7:12.

As we have just noted, there is an emphasis throughout 6:1–7:11 on relational trust expressed in *prayer*: in the model prayer at the centre of 6:1–18 (possibly, as many suggest, at the centre of the speech as a whole), and in the climactic exhortation/promise in 7:7–11. This suggests one further possible inference. It has often been noted that the phrase ὁ νόμος καὶ οἱ προφήται forms an inclusion for the whole of 5:17–7:12. However, the nuance of the οὐν in 7:12 is difficult to establish. It could be a relatively non-causal way of introducing a summary: “the import of all this teaching is therefore...” etc. But it could also act, as with other uses of οὐν in the speech, as a causal connective between 7:7–11 and 7:12. This would mean that the kind of prayer described in 7:7–11 *facilitates* the fulfilment of the Law and Prophets in the actual behaviour of the disciples, with the rule in 7:12 summarizing the more detailed instruction in 5:21–7:11.

SUMMARY.

Readers seeking communicative alignment can infer from the teaching in 5:11–48 that it is an application and expansion of the attributes listed in the second half of the Beatitudes. Moreover, it may be that the flow of thought in 5:21–48 roughly follows that of Beatitudes 5–7 in reverse order. The disciples are to be *peacemakers* (5:9); not full of anger, but seeking reconciliation (5:21–26). They are to be *pure in heart* (5:8); consistently seeking relational fidelity through sexual self-control (5:27–30), marital faithfulness (5:31–32) and consistent honesty

\(^7\) The pearl metaphor (7:6) has often in the history of interpretation been taken to be Matthew’s way of balancing the imperative to not judge (7:1–5). Dale C. Allison Jr, *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination* (Companions to the New Testament; New York: Crossroad, 1999), 154–55. However, there is very little in the context to suggest or confirm this. If the suggestion made here that the pearl represents the blessings of the kingdom (cf. 13:46) is correct, then the warning perhaps repeats the idea of that in 5:13 at the beginning of the speech. If so, then 5:13 is about losing (covenant) distinctiveness in the face of persecution, while 7:6 is about losing blessing in the face of unholiness, with both using the verb καταπατέω to describe the consequences.
(5:33–37). They are to be *merciful* (5:7); not seeking revenge (5:38–42); not hating enemies, but praying for them (5:43–48).

Looking at 6:1–7:12 as a whole, although the pattern is not so explicit, we can see the outworking of the early Beatitudes. *Hungering and thirsting for righteousness* (5:6) implies “doing righteousness” (6:1) within a secret (6:3–4, 6, 18), uncompromised (6:19–24) relationship with the Father. It pushes aside Gentile-like anxiety about life and death, trusting God for the future (6:33), a trust expressed in prayer (6:9–13, 7:7–11). To be *humble* (5:5) means, at least in part, not pushing for relative position: neither seeking the approval of others (6:1–18) nor positioning oneself above them (7:1–5), but forgiving them (6:12, 14–15) and loving them (cf. 7:12). It perhaps also implies a low present concern for material possessions (6:19–34). To *mourn* (5:4) is to express to the Father (e.g. secretly, through fasting, 6:16–18; cf. 9:15) an attitude that is dismayed by the present state of affairs, and longs for the future the Father is promising (6:10, 20, 31–34). To be *poor in spirit* (5:3) is to acknowledge before God a desperate need for life, especially in prayer (6:11–13; 7:7–11).

These connections with the first half of the Beatitudes are one way in which the discomfort of the extreme challenge in 5:11–48 is relieved in the reading experience of these chapters. If we take the teaching of 5:11–48 as an expansion of Beatitudes 5 through to 8, and 6:1–7:11 as an expansion of Beatitudes 1 through to 4, then we should be able to see that the former depends and builds upon the latter. That is, the behaviour sketched in 5:11–48 would indeed be impossible taken on its own (as it has proved impossible in Israel’s past), but that impossibility is at least mitigated somewhat if we see such behaviour as founded upon a sincere, trusting, humble and dependent relationship with the Father (6:1–7:11).

Another way to see this is to notice a pattern in the comparisons made in different sections of the speech. We can tabulate the pattern like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(5:11–48) The extreme challenge of being God’s Servant people, bringing glory to him in the world.</th>
<th>With a “righteousness” that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees (5:20) and is clearly distinct from the Gentiles (5:47).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(6:1–18) The call to develop a secret relationship with the Father — especially in prayer.</td>
<td>(Which the Pharisees, especially, do not have.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The call to develop a trusting dependence on the Father — especially in prayer.

(Which the Gentiles, especially, do not have.)

What this table picks out is the provocative order in which Jesus is presenting the choices facing a new or potential disciple. The opening challenge is extreme, but is presented relative to two reference points: the scribes / Pharisees and the Gentiles. When in the later part of the speech Jesus tells the disciples to pursue that which the Pharisees and the Gentiles do not have, a strongly possible implication is that it is their deficiency in these areas that results in their failure to demonstrate the standards expected in his earlier teaching. That is, we may infer an implicit argument: your righteousness should exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, because theirs is not founded on a secret relationship with the Father. Likewise, your behaviour should be distinct from the Gentiles who do not know God, because they do not trust God for the future.

We may therefore summarise the present compliance desired by Matthew in chapters 5–7 using the tree–fruit metaphor already used by John the Baptist in 3:8–10 and applied by Jesus himself to the teaching and conduct of false prophets in 7:16–20 (see below, under section 4.6.7). Even if Matthew does not use the metaphor explicitly in summarising the material in these chapters, that he uses it in similar contexts suggests it is not alien to his way of thinking. The “tree” is a vertical dependency: an attitude of humble dependence on the Father, expressed secretly, uncompromised by rival dependencies. We have suggested that the first four Beatitudes express this attitude in embryonic form and that the teaching in 6:1–7:11 expands upon it. We have also suggested that these are the kind of people the Servant has come to serve. The “fruit” is a horizontal righteousness: an open and distinctive love which weights the approval and glory of the Father higher than the cost of persecution, low social esteem or the pain of moral self-control. We have suggested that Beatitudes 5 to 8 express this behaviour in embryonic form and that the teaching in 5:11–48 expands upon it, including appropriate case studies. We have also suggested that such behaviour is consistent with the Servant mandate expressed in 5:16. The dominant description throughout uses the δικαιοσύνη word-group. The “new” righteousness being called for is in continuity with the righteousness
called for by the Law and the Prophets. However, by emphasising the humble, relational underpinnings of true righteousness, Jesus is at least beginning to redress the deficiency that led to failure and deportation in the past, a deficiency represented by the scribes and Pharisees as he speaks. There is no suggestion that the pursuit of this righteousness (5:6, 6:33) is, as the apostle Paul described that of Israel in the past, ὀξεῖ δὲ ἔργον (Rom 9:32). Rather, the decision is driven by trust in the extensive promises the Father makes through Jesus concerning the future. Although Jesus does not use the πίστ- word-group to describe this trust, he does use ὀλγόπιστοι to describe its inverse (6:30), and we shall find some strong connections between the trust advocated here and that which Matthew uses the πίστ- word-group to describe in Matthew 8–9.

4.6.6 Convergence to compliance.

As we said above, the motivation to continue processing this speech from a reader point of view comes from the extremely high rewards posted up-front in the Beatitudes, and we have seen that these are in sharp contrast with the extreme warnings scattered throughout. With the stakes set so high, the incentive to at least investigate the claims is therefore also high. We also suggested that the dramatic structure of the speech also provides an incentive for further processing. The earlier portions of the speech set up a conflict between the apparent possibility of great blessings and the apparently extreme behavioural standards related to them, a tension only resolved (and then not fully) by further, quite careful, implication from the rest of the speech. We argued that such processing was capable of bringing readers into communicative alignment with Matthew’s purposes. However, a reader in communicative alignment comes to empathize with a compliant reader without necessarily becoming personally persuaded. The further question is: how might a reader then be persuaded to full compliance?

First, there is the credibility of the message-giver. The presumption of authority is what impresses the crowds (7:28–29) and, as many have noted, is breathtaking throughout the speech.⁷¹ Although we argued above that the contrast Jesus builds in 5:21–48 is primarily a contrast with the contemporary teaching of the Law (which is also the primary contrast in

7:28–29), he certainly is not subservient to the witness of Moses. He re-speaks into the new situation what was previously said in the Law and prophets with fresh purpose and vitality. As he does so, he speaks as one greater than a prophet: not τάδε λέγει κύριος or οὗτος λέγει κύριος, but ἐγώ δέ λέγω ὑμῖν. There is bold and risky assertion here. It is risky in that it is likely to divide his hearers, as with the more explicit division provoked by the parables later in the Gospel. Some will be alienated by the presumption (cf. 9:3; 13:57). But for those who through the cumulative engagement with Jesus and his self-claims in the narrative move beyond the tipping-point of persuasion, the promises and warnings of the speech come as if from God.

Second, Jesus does not merely assert the simple magnitude of the rewards and punishments, but rather brings out the emotive relational aspects corresponding to each. We have noted that the behavioural challenge in the six “corrective expansions” is extreme and sometimes perplexing, but the behaviour Jesus is correcting is also recognisably inadequate: anger, lust, casual divorce, dishonesty, personal vengeance and hatred. Likewise, the behaviour of the Pharisees is shown as ridiculously self-serving, with deliberate dark humour. The ungodly Gentile is also presented in a pitiable light: unable to love and unable to trust; frantic in prayer and anxious in daily living. The cumulative effect of these expertly painted moral portraits is to evoke a distaste for the current state of affairs, highlighting the relative attractiveness of the radical alternative Jesus is presenting. This alternative he presents not as a new list of rules but, as Dale Allison puts it, something much more like a “moral vision”:

The sermon’s primary purpose is to instil principles and qualities through a vivid inspiration of the moral imagination. What one comes away with is not a grossly incomplete set of statutes but an unjaded impression of a challenging moral ideal.72

Finally, there is the satisfaction of finding the tensions in the speech partially resolved. The speech begins with the apparent possibility of blessing and an apparently impossible chal-

72 Allison, The Sermon on the Mount, 11.
lenge. Readers who begin to see a possible resolution to that tension through a dependent relationship with their heavenly Father in the later portions of the speech might well be persuaded not to give up at that point.

However, it may well be that we cannot fully explain compliance within the scope of the speech alone. The credibility of the promises and warnings in the speech is also established within the wider plot of the Gospel. Moreover, the humble and trusting attitude presented as foundational in the speech is clearly lacking in the disciples: they are όλιγόπιστοι; consequently, they are not called δικαιοὶ but πονηροί (7:11). It seems reasonable to infer that, at this stage of his account, Matthew expects this to be true of most of his potentially compliant readers too, and there is much later on in the narrative which deals with this very issue. We shall argue below (sections 7.1 and 7.2) that it is the death and resurrection of Jesus that will finally resolve all of these deficiencies.

4.6.7 Authorial strategy.

The first task as we shift perspectives to consider the communication of these chapters from Matthew’s point of view is to describe in a little more detail what we can infer concerning his authorial strategy. The main contribution here will be to outline a way of seeing the decision-framework underlying the structure and purpose of the speech in its narrative setting. What we mean by this is the structure of the choice Matthew wants his compliant readers to make. For example, what are the alternative courses of action Matthew wants to present them with, and how does he then go about presenting them in his composition? Answering such questions will help us to better understand the unusual rhetorical techniques which Jesus uses to persuade his hearers within the narrative and which Matthew then uses to persuade his readers. We can outline the steps in Matthew’s strategy like this:

1. Matthew takes the opportunity to let Jesus be the primary messenger for his purposes. He withdraws and allows Jesus to speak. Rather than simply telling, he shows Jesus telling. The setting Jesus speaks into within the narrative connects with the post-resurrection setting Matthew wishes to address. Thus, as Jesus addresses his disciples within the hearing
of the crowd (5:1–2), Matthew addresses those who profess alignment with Jesus within the hearing of those who potentially might do so.73

2. Matthew makes the introductory material (the Beatitudes) distinctive and focal, partially revealing a basic underlying decision structure. We can picture that structure like this:

Those needing and willing to be served will also be willing to serve. Blessing goes to those with a humble and dependent attitude and disposition of such a kind that it leads to righteous behaviour in concrete situations. Or, to use the figure Jesus himself uses later in the speech (7:16–20; cf. 3:8, 10; 12:33f): good trees produce good fruit and bad trees produce bad fruit. While the actual decisions facing a disciple are extremely complex, both in terms of detail and the dynamic succession of decisions over time, this figure helps us to see that the underlying decision is very simple. The underlying choice is between, on the one hand, a humble submission and dependency on God as Father and, on the other, anything else.

3. Matthew then expands the introductory material by having Jesus work backwards through the decision tree, addressing certain issues, filling in some of the details and making the comparison with the alternative path concrete. There is not a rigid alignment with the Beatitudes, but certainly the overall flow of thought is very similar — but in reverse order, as we noted above (section 4.6.5). This gives a basic pattern:

73 This builds upon the discussion in section 3.2.
As we follow the flow and structure of the speech in this figure, also note that the language of righteousness helps to keep the presentation together. Thus we move through the Beatitudes from a humble attitude which seeks righteousness (5:3–6) to expressed righteousness (5:7–10). The eighth Beatitude deals with the persecution that may result from such openly expressed righteousness (5:10). This call to be open is picked up as the first point in the rest of the speech (5:11ff). Working backwards, Jesus then expands on the detailed nature of
expressed righteousness for his disciples (5:13–7:12). Theirs is the task of open faithfulness to the glory of the Father (5:12–16). This is not lawless, but rather fulfils the Law and the Prophets — in contrast to the “righteousness” brought about by the Law in the hands of the scribes and Pharisees (5:17–20). Jesus expands on the concepts of peacemaking, purity and mercy raised in the second half of the Beatitudes (5:21–48, as we noted in section 4.6.5). Then, from 6:1, he moves to consider the foundations of this righteousness. It seeks the approval of the Father, expressed secretly (6:1–18, in contrast to the public approval-seeking of the Pharisees). It expresses uncompromised trust in the promises of the Father (6:19–34, in contrast to the godless anxiety of the Gentiles). It respects God’s place as Judge, and is humble before him (7:1–5); and yet calls on him in prayer as a loving Father (7:7–11). Ultimately, the resources for “evil people” (7:11) to fulfil the Law and the Prophets with love (7:12) come from the Father.

So the flow of the sermon, having emphasised the promised blessing at its beginning, now returns back to the basic decision facing a disciple or a potential disciple. It is a stark one: between destruction and life, with the two gates and ways in 7:13–14 concisely summarising the decision tree outlined above. The tree/fruit metaphor in 7:16–20 we have already argued underlies the basic thought of the sermon; here it is brought out and used to test the false prophet. It is imperative not to be deceived from the right path by the false prophet. To identify the false prophet, Jesus suggests similar criteria to that he has been applying more generally: do they bear good fruit (7:16–20)? That is, do they bear good fruit in their teaching (unlike the scribes and Pharisees Jesus has corrected in 5:21–48). But also: do they do the will of the Father (7:21–23)? The final parable re-states the emphasis: it is those who do, who actively express their commitment, who are blessed and not destroyed (7:24–27). Trust in God’s eschatological deliverance needs to be actively expressed.

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74 It could be that the “narrow gate” corresponds to the “vertical dependency” we have been saying is foundational in the speech, the “tree” in the tree/fruit metaphor; while the “hard way” corresponds to the “horizontal righteousness” of the second four Beatitudes and 5:11–48, the “fruit” in the tree/fruit metaphor. But this may be overstretching things.

75 To bear “bad fruit” in teaching will also of course bear “bad fruit” in the conduct of those who are taught.
4. Much more could be said about the detail of Matthew’s arrangement. We have seen that the sermon conveys a basic two-fold pattern, comparing a path to life with a path to destruction; nevertheless Dale Allison is right to notice that the material is often arranged into oratorically effective groups of three.\footnote{Dale C. Allison Jr, “The Structure of the Sermon on the Mount,” *JBL* 106, no. 3 (1987): 423–45.}

5. The sermon has some distinctive vocabulary, and Matthew deploys it carefully. The way he deploys it reinforces what we have said about the arrangement, flow and rhetorical thrust of the speech. We have already noted the δικαίοςων language which provides the climax of each half of the Beatitudes. This is then picked up at key points in the rest of the speech. The “horizontal” righteousness to be expressed openly (5:10) should be recognisably better than the behaviour around it (5:20). The “vertical” dependency of the righteousness sought by those humble before God (5:6) should be sought in secret before him (6:1) as first priority, pushing all other concerns aside (6:33). Related to this, and also deployed carefully, are various combinations of kingdom, heaven and Father. “Kingdom of heaven” forms an inclusion around the main block of Beatitudes (5:3, 10). It then appears in two adjacent verses towards the beginning of the rest of the speech (5:19–20) and once towards the end (7:21). “Father in heaven” appears at the beginning and end of the material on “horizontal” righteousness (5:16, 45) and at the beginning and end of the material on “vertical” dependency (6:1, 7:11). The key vocabulary comes together in 7:21, which acts as a final summary of Jesus’ promises and warnings (especially if we take “doing the will of God” as synonymous with righteousness).

6. We have seen throughout that Matthew makes it quite explicit that he believes an active, openly public, “horizontal” expression of righteousness is necessary (albeit not sufficient) for the disciples to receive blessing (5:7–10), fulfil their purpose in the world (5:13–16) and to enter into the kingdom of heaven (5:20; 7:21). As such, we can understand his emphasis on evoking maximum depth of commitment from his compliant readers. A different arrangement of the speech would have weakened this considerably. Matthew knows that, logically, “horizontal” righteousness is founded on and follows from “vertical” humility and
dependency (as in the Beatitudes). However, he also knows that the temptation in a long exposition that followed the logical order would be to process and assimilate the “vertical” dimension to the neglect of the “horizontal,” erroneously supposing that to be sufficient. Reversing the logical order in 5:11–7:12, while in danger of bringing some readers to give up in the face of the challenge, prevents that particular false implication.

7. On the other hand, Matthew does in the end want to show that compliance is possible — he does not want to reduce the breadth of the compliant group to zero. Although in the flow of the speech, the weight of “horizontal” material in 5:11–48 is dominant, Matthew carefully positions key material related to the vertical dimension in structurally prominent positions. Thus the speech opens with four Beatitudes commending humility before God (5:3–6); at its centre is a prayer expressing alignment and dependence on God as Father (6:9–13); and the exposition of righteousness in 5:11–7:12 ends with a final exhortation to ask the Father for help (7:7–11). Without these helps, it is difficult to see how the speech could evoke anything other than despair.

4.6.8 Continuation.

As we complete our analysis of the speech, we may acknowledge that Matthew has left even compliant readers with unresolved issues. In this regard, the “Lutheran” interpretation is correct in suggesting that we need to look outside the speech for a complete resolution. However, this lies at a different level to the one usually suggested by that line of thinking. The question is not so much, “How is this behaviour possible,” but rather, “How is the humble dependency and trust that makes this behaviour possible, possible?” This is taken up as a major theme in the subsequent narrative. Its possibility in principle is demonstrated and illustrated in the πίστις responses of the suppliants in Matthew 8 and 9. However, the ὅληγόπιστοι of the disciples in that section and subsequently (especially 14:1–16:20) shows that such a response does not typically come easily. Those who are lacking in humility and faith need to be called (11:25–30), exhorted (16:24ff) and even, as in Peter’s case, humbled (26:75).

77 Compare Ulrich Luz: “Thus the Sermon on the Mount takes its readers on a way that leads them from God’s radical demands into the “interior” of faith where they experience the Father’s nearness in prayer.” Matthew 1–7, 172.
Jesus does not refer very much to himself in the speech. There is 5:11 (on being persecuted ἐνεκέν ἐμοῦ); 5:17–18, on his relation to the Law and prophets; and the ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν of the corrective expansions in 5:21–48. In 7:21–23, he is a central figure in the judgment of the last day. In 7:24–27, the outcome depends on hearing and doing his words. It is also perhaps implicit (as we argued above, 4.6.3) that the first four Beatitudes describe the kind of people he has come to serve. However, the dominant focus in the parenaesis is Patrocentric. The purpose of the Servant ministry the disciples are to participate in is the glory of the Father (5:16). They are to be like their Father (5:48), seek the reward of the Father (6:1–18), pray to their Father (6:9–15; 7:7–11), trust their Father (6:25–34) and do the will of the Father (7:21).

That is, although one can argue for a strong Christology in the speech, it is perhaps hidden behind the even stronger (and certainly more explicit) focus on the Father. This is entirely consistent with what we have seen Jesus doing so far in the narrative. He has received his Servant mandate from his Father (4:13–17) — it depends on his Father, concerns his Father and is for his Father. When Jesus draws others in to participate in that mandate (as we have argued he is doing, explicitly in 5:13–16 — see above 4.6.5) it is therefore not surprising to find a similar Patrocentricity. He is “opening up” his own relationship with the Father for them to share in. What remains relatively hidden in the speech, however, is the extent to which depending on the Father entails depending on Jesus. This is hinted at in the self-references just given, and implicit in the simple fact that to trust the Father one has to trust what Jesus claims and promises in the speech. But this is also something that develops strongly in the coming narrative. Even in Matthew 8–9 it is faith in Jesus which saves the suppliants (e.g. 9:22). Then in 11:25–30 the relation is made explicit. Knowing the Father depends on knowing the Son, so that the call becomes δεῦτε πρὸς με... (11:28). This is developed in 16:21–20:34, where many of the ethical issues in the speech are revisited in the context of following and depending upon the Servant work of Jesus. Finally, in the death and resurrection of Jesus something happens to make the role of “light to the nations” (cf. 5:14–16)
possible for the disciples, as they are sent out to participate in his Servant program in the Great Commission.\footnote{Compare Dumbrell: “As salt the disciples are by their very constitution as an established group the guarantee of the continuation of Israel’s vocation. It will be next, theirs to implement Israel’s mission to be a world light, to move from the scene of their call, the Galilean area where a messianic encounter has been experienced, with Jesus through his ministry until finally, after his resurrection, they will move out from their Jewish base into the gentile world.” Dumbrell, “The Logic of the Role of the Law,” 16.}

\section*{4.7 Matthew 8:1–9:38}

Having focussed on Jesus’ teaching in the speech, Matthew now turns to the healing ministry of Jesus, which he has also connected to the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom (4:23; cf. 9:35). The section ends with 9:35–38, which we shall suggest is transitional — an inclusion completing 4:23–9:34 but also an introduction to the speech in Matthew 10.

\subsection*{4.7.1 A claim concerning communicative equilibrium.}

Matthew is making implied claims concerning the blessings of the kingdom and a compliant response to the kingdom within a special compressed temporal scheme, a “model” of the true temporal situation. The blessings of the kingdom are shown as the \textit{restoration of life} through the Servant work of Jesus, something given to suppliants across a number of incidents, where the suppliants have afflications associated with death. Matthew connects this to Jesus’ vocation as the one who will bring forgiveness of sins (cf. 1:21). Matthew wishes to align his compliant readers with an attitude of exclusive dependence that is frequently described using the \textit{πιστ}-word-group, while beginning to warn them of the costs and persecution to be expected in an uncompressed time-frame.

Compliant readers are able to infer the nature of the kingdom blessings conferred in these chapters from a number of features apparent in the condition and circumstances of the suppliants, culminating in the daughter of the ruler in the double story of 9:18–26, who is explicitly dead. Jesus’ role as the Servant who brings such blessing is explicit in the fulfilment formula of 8:17. Compliant readers are further able to infer that Matthew wishes an
alignment with the attitude displayed by the suppliants (in contrast to that shown by the disciples) from the sheer weight of examples and Jesus’ frequent clear commendations of πίστις.

4.7.2 Expansion and further argument.

We shall begin with how it is possible to infer the nature of the blessing Jesus confers from the miracle stories of Matthew 8–9. The fact that as he begins his kingdom proclamation (4:17), encompassing all of 4:23 to 9:38, Jesus has been likened by Matthew to one bringing light τοῖς καθημένοις ἐν χώρᾳ καὶ σκιᾷ θανάτου (4:16), stands as an important implicated premise for these chapters. The condition of the suppliants in Matthew 8–9 then evidences this. Peter Bolt has argued persuasively that although the suppliants in Mark’s Gospel “are presented to the reader with a variety of conditions, these are all variants of the one problem, namely, mortality” (my emphasis). 79 Similar arguments apply here. So in the first triad of miracles (8:1–15), the skin of the leper (8:2) and the suffering, horizontal attitude of the centurion’s servant and Peter’s mother-in-law (8:6, 14) all suggest a close association with death. 80 This continues into the second triad of miracles (8:23–9:8), with danger at sea (8:25), δαίμονις ὡμένοι among the tombs (8:28) and another παραλυτικός in horizontal attitude (9:2). 81 The third triad of miracles (9:18–34) begins with an explicit example of death (9:18). This is interpolated with a story about a severely haemorrhaging woman (9:20–22) and is followed by healings of blind men (9:27–31) and a mute demoniac (9:32–34). 82 In each case there is an instantaneous restoration of life — Matthew uses expressions like εὖθες (8:3), ἐν τῇ ὀρᾷ ἑκείνῃ (8:13), ἀπὸ τῆς ὀρᾶς ἑκείνης (9:22). In 8:15, 9:6 and 9:25, he uses the verb ἐγέρω to describe the restoration of life. However, these events, although spectacular, do not represent a full realization of the promises Jesus has made in, for example, the Beatitudes. Those would seem to go far beyond the restoration of physical health. Moreover, apart from the ruler’s daughter in 9:18, none of the suppliants are actually dead. From this compliant

79 Bolt, Jesus’ Defeat of Death, 278.
80 Compare Bolt, Jesus’ Defeat of Death, 81–87, 93–101, on fever and death, and leprosy and death.
81 Compare Bolt, Jesus’ Defeat of Death, 106–15, 136–39, 147, on paralysis and death, the sea and death, and daimones and death.
82 Compare Bolt, Jesus’ Defeat of Death, 155–67, 170–78, 204–8, 211–15, on children and death, bleeding and death, μοριάλος and death, and blindness and death.
readers should infer that Matthew is using these account more as pictures or demonstrations of the kind of blessing the kingdom will entail: a partial expression, perhaps, but not a complete one.

Nevertheless, the final contrasting responses in 9:33–34 do suggest that at the very least compliant readers should come to accept what they have observed something exceptional in the history of Israel. The crowds “marvel” and say οὐδὲν ἐφάνη οὕτως ἐν τῷ Ἰσραήλ. That is, what they have observed is not only of divine origin, but a witness to the work of the Lord to rival any other. This is in contrast to the arguments from the Pharisees that dismiss the miracles as of demonic origin (9:34). But Matthew also wants compliant readers to go further and take the miracle stories as some sort of evidence that Jesus is engaged in fulfilling the Servant mandate given to him by his Father. This is strongly implicated by the fulfilment formula in 8:17.

We are suggesting, then, that the miracles are in some sense “models” of the kind of blessing Jesus has come to bring as Servant. What happens in each miracle illustrates the temporal scheme implied by the speech in Matthew 5–7 in an artificially compressed form. We saw in section 4.6.3 that the blessings of the Beatitudes were distinctly set in the future (even if in some way appropriated in the present), and the path to life depicted as hard, not instantaneous (7:14). In the “models” of Matthew 8–9, however, that future resolution is brought forward; the blessing for those with faith is not merely “near” but here. This is most explicit in the episode of the two demoniacs at 8:29, where Jesus is asked ἥλθες ὁδὲ πρὸ καροῦ βασανίσαι ἡμᾶς. This is a surprisingly neglected verse in discussions of Matthew’s eschatology, but does seem to indicate the proleptic nature of Jesus’ healing and exorcism ministry.83

Within this compressed scheme, commitment is simplified in the miracle stories. In apparent contrast with the Patrocentricity exhorted in the speech of Matthew 5–7, it is explicitly Christocentric. It is a positive, active, often public expression of belief that Jesus is able

83 Although it is noted in William Taylor, Understanding the Times: Living in the Light of the Arrival of the King (Fearn, Tain: Christian Focus, 2009), 40.
to heal. This is strongly implied through Matthew’s repeated use of δύναμις (8:2, 9:28), for example. The centurion believes Jesus is able to heal, even at a distance (8:8). The friends of the paralytic believe Jesus can heal him (9:2). The haemorrhaging woman believes a touch of his garment will be enough (8:21). The belief is expressed in costly action. The leper finds Jesus despite the crowds (8:2). The centurion is humble to seek help from a “heathen” healer (8:5). The ruler kneels before him in public (9:18). The haemorrhaging woman braves possible censure from Jesus (9:20–22).

If, as argued, communicative alignment in these chapters entails taking the miracles as models of kingdom blessing, then this renders the discussion surrounding whether the faith of the suppliants is a “mere” Wunderglaube or something “more” somewhat redundant. Matthew is simply using πίστις as a catch-all term to capture the exclusive dependency of the suppliants on Jesus, including their belief that he is able to achieve and do what he has promised. Such faith is a great thing (cf. 8:10; 15:28). Compliant readers are aligned with this attitude but then expected to translate it to the wider temporal scheme Matthew is building.

The episodes surrounding those with an explicit trust response help this translation to the wider temporal scheme. Not all the miracle stories describe an explicit response. Peter’s mother-in-law, the Gadarene demoniacs and the ἄνθρωπος κωφός δαιμονιζόμενος are all restored without the explicit involvement of the suppliants. This builds confidence in Jesus’ Servant activity happening regardless. These are concrete foretastes of life breaking into a world under the shadow of death. Those witnessing the acts are either for the kingdom they signify or against it — those against it being aligned with the those in the town (8:34), the scribes (9:3) and the Pharisees (9:11, 34). The miracles demonstrate the nearness of the kingdom and that this should therefore be a joyful time; for celebration, not for mourning (9:14–17). The two exchanges in 8:18–22 are perhaps most significant for translating from the πίστις of the suppliants (which operates in a compressed temporal scheme) to the longer and harder temporal scheme Matthew is building more widely. Both of these highlight the longer-term costs of commitment: discomfort (8:19–20) and family breaks (8:21–22). Both, signifi-

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84 We encountered a sample of this debate in section 1.3 above.
cantly, use ἄκολοθος language rather than πίστις language. The first seems to be a rebuke for the scribe who recognises Jesus only as one διδάσκαλος among many; the second, a challenge (albeit one expressed in almost offensive terms) to one who is already a disciple, and who calls Jesus κύριος, to focus on the life that stands ahead of one on the way (cf. 7:14) rather than the death that lies behind.

The associations Matthew makes between the specific healing/exorcism ministry in these chapters and his wider vocation to bring forgiveness of sins (1:21), which we have linked to the Servant mandate he took up at his baptism, are also significant for translating to the wider temporal scheme. To begin with, there is the ambiguity of ἰάομαι (8:8, 13) and σῴζω (8:25; 9:21–22). The fulfilment formula of 8:17 similarly suggests a connection to a wider context. Matthew seems keen to translate Isa 53:4 so as to suggest the taking away of physical ailments, which then accords with what Jesus is doing in these chapters. But some of his readers will also know that Isa 53:4 MT more suggests the bearing of spiritual distress, and is located in the context of the fourth Servant song (Isa 52:13–53:12), where a major emphasis is on the bearing of sin. Furthermore, the episode in 9:1–8 explicitly links an authority to heal physically to the authority to forgive sins. Likewise, there are links made in 9:12–13 between sickness and sin, and the need for a physician and the call of Jesus to sinners. The quotation from Hos 6:6 in 9:13 is an allusion to a context where the nation desper-

85 Sections 4.3 and 4.4 above. Compare Peter Bolt, who argues with respect to Mark’s Gospel that the healing miracles and exorcisms are part of the promised restoration of all things through the Servant which includes the forgiveness of sins. They are real, physical occurrences that give a taste of the good things to come: “The exorcism and healing miracles are not so much a sign of the kingdom being present, but they are the works of the Servant of the Lord, who has arrived to bring the promised forgiveness to Israel. The kingdom would follow in due course.” Bolt, “Forgiveness of Sins,” 59–64.

86 The verb ἰάομαι can be used of restoring someone to health after a physical malady, but also of delivering (someone) from a variety conditions that lie beyond physical maladies. In 13:15, Matthew will use it, quoting Isa 6:10 LXX, of restoring someone from sin and its consequences. BDAG, s.v. ἰάομαι. The verb σῴζω may mean preserving someone from death or disease. Or it may be used with respect to salvation (from sin and its consequences), as in 19:25. BDAG, s.v. σῴζω; cf. LSJ, s.v.

ately needs deliverance from sins. The proximity of the quotation to Jesus’ self-designation as νυμφιος in 9:15 suggests that Matthew may have this context in mind (Hos 2:14–20).

Matthew’s strategy is thus to focus on Jesus and on faith, but with consideration of longer-term discipleship and commitment. He presents the deeds of Jesus (Matthew 8–9) alongside the words of Jesus (Matthew 5–7) as a combined witness to the Lord acting decisively in Jesus to bring his kingdom “near.” He uses the deeds as proleptic demonstrations of kingdom blessing. He uses the supplicants to align compliant readers to a trust in Jesus’ willingness and ability to do as he promises. These acts of “model” trust are uniformly described using the πιστ- word-group. However, Matthew uses ἀκολοθέω (8:19, 22) to describe a longer-term trust and commitment. Moreover, he uses the negative responses of scribes and Pharisees to imply that a longer-term trust will be under attack.

4.7.3 Continuation.

Matthew 8–9 paves the way for Matthew 10 by exposing the great need of people living under the shadow of death without any help from their leaders. After the summary in 9:35, Jesus shows compassion on the remaining crowds of needy people, which provides the transition to him expanding his kingdom proclamation to the Twelve (and, implicitly, beyond) in the speech of Matthew 10.

That these chapters fulfil Isaian expectation will be confirmed in 11:4–6. That is, Matthew has composed Matthew 8–9 to make claims based on Isa 35:5–6, which he seems to be assuming is a standard text for discerning ὅ ἐρχόμενος. Furthermore, in Matthew 11–12, we then observe a movement from such expectation to a clarifying emphasis on Jesus’ Servant ministry. This mirrors the similar movement in Matthew 3, also related to John the Baptist. Once again, however, this fulfilment of expectation is subsumed in Jesus’ Servant mandate, as Matthew makes clear in 12:17–21.

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88 This summary accords well with Held’s redactional analysis of these chapters. Held argues at length that Matthew retold the miracle stories according to particular themes of interpretation. “The themes of interpretation under consideration are Christology, faith and discipleship.” Heinz Joachim Held, “Matthew as Interpreter of the Miracle Stories,” in Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew (Günther Bornkamm, Gerhard Barth, and Heinz Joachim Held; London: SCM Press, 1963 [German: 1960]), 169.

89 See below, section 5.1.
The section also introduces the kind of kingdom opposition that will be the focus in
11:1–16:20 (chapter 5 below). In particular, the conflict with the Pharisees in 12:22–37 takes
the final incident in 8:32–34 (or one very similar) and expands considerably on the implications of denying the Servant ministry of Jesus.

4.8 Matthew 10:1-42. The speech on extended kingdom proclamation.

This speech fits into the narrative thus: as we noted above (section 4.5), Jesus’ proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom in 4:23 can be divided into two complementary components. There is teaching (διδάσκων, 4:23) which is founded on promises and warnings concerning the kingdom (Matthew 5 to 7). Then there is healing (θεραπεύων, 4:23) as a proleptic demonstration of what has been promised (Matthew 8 and 9) — in particular, the demonstration of death overcome by life. The basic exhortation, explicit and implicit across both sections, may be summarised as to trust that Jesus has the authority to deliver on what he is promising. The exposition of Jesus’ kingdom proclamation is ended by the inclusion in 9:35. However, 9:35–38 also encourages the compliant reader to sympathize with Jesus’ compassion for τὰ πρόβατα μὴ ἔχοντα ποιμένα and to thereby be pleased when his kingdom proclamation is extended and the Twelve are sent to τὰ πρόβατα τὰ ἀπολολοῦτα οἶκον Ἰσραήλ (10:6). The subsequent speech therefore builds upon the basic choice set out in the first major speech of Matthew 5–7 by adding a deeper level of association between Jesus and his disciples. Not only are they to trust him (and his Father), and on that basis to seek to express his “better” righteousness, they are also to imitate him as heralds of the kingdom.

Using a pragmatic-critical method at this point helps us in a number of ways. It will help us to think through the key interpretative difficulty of the speech, which is how to relate Jesus’ intentions when he spoke in the historical setting being described and Matthew’s intentions in recounting what he said. As in Matthew 5–7, it will also help to expose the decision-structures underlying the argument and composition of the speech.

4.8.1 A claim concerning communicative equilibrium.

Matthew ultimately wants to address post-resurrection disciples engaged in the mission to the nations. However, in this chapter he chooses not to do so directly or explicitly. Rather,
this is towards the beginning of a narrative trajectory that will culminate in the (direct and explicit) Great Commission of 28:16–20. Matthew’s purpose at this point is to show the origins of such mission: that it is an extension of the kingdom proclamation of Jesus depicted from 4:23–9:35 and therefore proceeds according to servants following their master (cf. 10:24). That is, when Jesus’ followers are incorporated into the Servant program he is pursuing, they will participate in the kingdom proclamation that lies at the heart of it. But this pattern is first demonstrated within a deliberately restricted and specific mission, with specific, named proclaimers (10:2–4) acting within clear ethno-geographic constraints (10:5–6), within a near time-horizon (10:23). This is a real mission that also acts as “model” for its extension into the mission to the nations.

The pattern commanded by Jesus involves following his example in proclaiming the kingdom, in such a way that clearly exposes the true response and allegiance of hearers of the message. He wants them to do so with an awareness not just of likely rejection and conflict but also an awareness of coming judgment, and to be so trusting of vindication from their Father in heaven as to proclaim without anxiety or fear (even of death). Matthew expects compliant readers to understand the nature of the restricted, “model” mission of Matthew 10 and to make inferences for the wider, post-resurrection mission. The speech is structured in such a way as to help this.

By veiling to some extent the instruction to post-resurrection readers, Matthew bifurcates his readership into those prepared to continue processing the speech in the light of the wider narrative and those who are not. However, readers who continue to process the speech achieve a “constructive empathy” with the Twelve.\(^90\) When they then return to a post-resurrection mission situation, they then implicitly infer the double referentiality of the instruction and translate the pattern outlined above into their own context.

4.8.2 The wider readership.

On the major issue of how to reconcile elements of the speech that seem particular to the mission of the Twelve to Israel alone and those elements that seem to have a wider reference and

\(^90\) As defined in section 3.2 above.
relevance (e.g. 10:18), Dorothy Weaver suggests three streams of interpretation. The first she calls the “Galilean” approach. This achieves reconciliation by taking the whole speech to be historically particular, with a setting that does not go beyond geographic Israel. So, for example, when Jesus warns that the Twelve will be led away εἰς μαρτύριον αὐτοῖς καὶ τοῖς ἔθνεσιν (10:18), the implied setting is a witness to the Jews of 10:17 (claimed as the antecedent to αὐτοῖς) and the “Gentile” secular officials in Palestine (connected to the “governors” and “kings” earlier in the verse). The difficulty here is that, as Weaver notes, 10:18 is syntactically independent from 10:17b, making it more likely that the Gentiles are a distinct, previously unmentioned group. The second approach she calls the “dual” approach. This simply divides the speech in two, such that, for example, 10:5–15 apply to the mission to Israel and 10:16–42 to the wider post-resurrection mission. The difficulty here is that “Matthew does not in any way announce his intention to shift from one setting to another” but rather “clearly presents 10:5b–42 as a unified discourse.” The third she calls the “Matthean” approach. That is, there are two settings: the historical event set by the narrative context in 9:35–10:5a and 11:1, and the setting of Matthew’s own church. The latter is superimposed on the former, giving a kind of “double exposure.” Weaver thinks that the difficulty here is that this approach “virtually loses sight of” the ostensive historical setting, reducing the speech to a sermon aimed at the members of Matthew’s own church.

All three approaches thus have their difficulties. However, we have been arguing since section 3.2 that Jesus’ instruction to his disciples can be read with a “constructive

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91 Dorothy Jean Weaver, *Matthew’s Missionary Discourse* (JSNTSup 38; Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1990), 17–19.
92 Take, for example, the conclusion of Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: a Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (trans. W. Montgomery and F.C. Burkitt; London: Adam and Charles Black, 1910 [German: 1906]), 363, who says that the speech is “historical as a whole and down to the smallest detail.”
94 For example, this movement from historical particularity to general application as the speech progresses is argued by Robert Morosco, who sees the mission of Matthew’s community as “a continuing extension of the earlier mission of the Twelve and Jesus.” “Matthew’s Formation of a Commissioning Type-Scene Out of the Story of Jesus’ Commissioning of the Twelve,” *JBL* 103, no. 4 (1984): 553.
empathy.” This avoids the difficulty Weaver raises for the third approach, and will allow us to take both historical setting and latter, post-resurrection application seriously in what follows.

4.8.3 Communicative alignment: the temporal framework implied by the speech.

So far in the narrative, the implied temporal framework has been quite simple: there is “now,” the moment of assessment and decision, and there is some climactic point in the future at which those choices result in either reward or punishment. This basic pattern is also present in the speech of Matthew 10. A town which rejects the proclamation of the kingdom will suffer worse than Sodom and Gomorrah ἐν ἡμέρᾳ κρίσεως (10:15; cf. 11:22, 24; 12:36; 23:33).

On the other hand, there is future salvation for those who endure tribulation for Jesus’ sake. Jesus says, ὅ [...] ὑπομείνας εἰς τέλος οὗτος σωθήσεται (10:22). There is some point in the future at which Jesus will either acknowledge (ὁμολογήσω, 10:32) people before his Father, or deny them (ἀρνήσομαι, 10:33). At that time, some will find life and some will lose it (10:39). Those who receive the disciples will not lose their future reward (10:42).

Within this basic pattern, Jesus initiates a program of proclamation to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (10:6). This is followed by warnings at two levels. The first level of warning is that such proclamation is likely to provoke strong opposition (10:16–23). At the second level, Jesus warns against avoiding such opposition to the detriment of the proclamation. Instead, he encourages trust in the Father (10:26–42).

This program potentially disrupts the implied temporal framework in two ways. The first potential disruption from an individual disciple’s point of view is that death may intervene before the program is complete (10:21, 28). The second is that the program will be unfinished ἕως ἐν ἐλθῇ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου (10:23). Jesus has previously associated himself with the Son of Man (8:20; 9:6), but does not explain what he means by this saying, and this is Matthew’s first mention of the Son of Man “coming,” “arriving” or “visiting.” A warranted preliminary inference might be to associate it with the climactic point in the future Jesus has already been talking about. However, Jesus will have more to say about the coming of the Son of Man later in the Gospel.
From 10:26 onwards, however, the implied temporal framework retains its simple present–future character. Present acknowledgement or denial results in acknowledgment or denial in the future (10:32–33). Whoever is presently “worthy” of Jesus, “losing” life now, will find it in the future (10:38–39). Whoever presently “receives” the disciples will surely not lose a future reward (10:40–42).

4.8.4 Communicative alignment: the shape of compliance.

Potential disruptions notwithstanding, the shape of compliance within the basic pattern of present conduct with future consequences is fairly simple. It consists of the disciples being like their teacher (10:25) — following him despite the cost (10:38). However, the presentation of this develops as the speech progresses.


Matthew flags the specificity of this instruction very clearly. There are specific, named proclaimers (10:2–4) acting within clear ethno-geographic constraints (10:5–6). The program of proclamation is by the Twelve alone to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” The most obvious antecedent for this group lies in the crowd in 9:36 whom Jesus described as “sheep without a shepherd.” That is, a group we can relate broadly to the whole of the geographic region associated with the nation of Israel, as in 4:25.97

However, this sets the stage for the less specific instruction that follows. It does so first because what the disciples are sent to do strongly aligns with Jesus’ own program of proclamation. This is most explicit in 10:7–8, where the message of the kingdom and its attendant miraculous demonstrations are identical to what Jesus has displayed in 4:23–9:35.

97 So Davies and Allison, Matthew 8–18, 167. Joel Willetts wishes to narrow “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” to a much smaller group. They are the remnant of the lost northern tribes. The mission to the “lost sheep” is then part of a wider “Land-Kingdom” motif in the Gospel whereby the territory of Israel is to be restored. Joel Willits, Matthew’s Messianic Shepherd-King: In Search of ‘the Lost Sheep of the House of Israel’ (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 221–24. However, the evidence within Matthew for either claim seems very slight. We have already mentioned the broad composition of the crowd suggested by 4:25. Moreover, twelve disciples are being sent out in Matthew 10 — which does suggest a concern for all Israel. And while we have found plenty of evidence that Matthew is concerned with the “geography” of heaven and earth, we have found little to suggest that he is especially interested in the geography of the Land — certainly not to the point of making it foundational to Jesus’ kingdom proclamation.
But it is also implicit in 10:9–10. Matthew has made it clear that Jesus came into the world in the humblest of circumstances (1:18–2:23) and has implied that this has continued into his itinerant ministry (e.g. 8:20). Foregoing money, provisions and extra clothing places the Twelve in a similar position. If it is transparent that this condition is a deliberate choice, then the cost incurred adds credibility to their message (as discussed in section 2.2.4). But the humble condition of the Twelve also serves to emphasise and highlight the response they receive. That is, it contributes to the “test of worthiness” of 10:11–14. It is one thing to turn away a messenger who is well provided for; but to turn away someone in need of food, drink and shelter exposes a very strong rejection indeed. That is, the rejection is compounded by the lack of care shown to a fellow Israelite—which may lie behind the reference to the similarly inhospitable response received by messengers of Yahweh in Sodom and Gomorrah in 10:15 (cf. Gen 19:1–22). Jesus says that rejecting (needy) messengers of the kingdom deserves an even greater punishment than those towns received.

Although we have as yet in the narrative seen only strong hints of the rejection of Jesus and his proclamation (8:34; 9:3, 11, 34), this will become the major theme in coming chapters. 10:5b–15 forms part of that narrative trajectory, one which culminates in the Temple disputations of Matthew 21–22 and the woes of Matthew 23. What Jesus says here serves the rhetorical purpose of showing that any rejection by “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” of Jesus’ kingdom proclamation will not be for lack of opportunity.

Nevertheless, Matthew is also striving to evoke a compassion for those who are “lost” (9:35–38) which need not be bound by ethno-geographic Israel. The general pattern set in 10:5b–15 (if not the specifics) of a servant imitating the work of his master continues into the remainder of the speech (10:24–25, 40–42).


We may infer from these verses that Matthew wants his compliant readers to accept the warnings that Jesus makes here concerning the open proclamation of the kingdom. Being sent out to proclaim and bear witness for “Jesus’ sake” is like sheep being sent into the midst of wolves (10:16) and will indeed provoke opposition. The basic warning is προσέχετε (10:17).
That is, the disciples should not be surprised by persecution from the formal establishment (10:17–18), or even by the betrayal of people close to them (10:21–22), because they are following the path of their master (10:24–25). This pattern is apparent throughout these verses. The promise regarding a very particular situation of stress in 10:19 (bearing witness in court-like settings before hostile rulers) contains one of the comparatively few references to the Spirit of God in the Gospel (here, το πνεῦμα τοῦ πατρὸς υμῶν), and the only reference to the Spirit at work in the lives of disciples. We argued above (section 4.3) that the Spirit of God descending upon Jesus marked his taking up the Servant mandate from his Father at his baptism (3:16; cf. 12:18). 10:19 therefore connects with the strong Servant theme in the Gospel. The Twelve are equipped to participate in the Servant program just as Jesus was equipped. Significantly, here we are seeing something of the proclamatory element of the Servant mandate extended to at least the Twelve, prefiguring the more comprehensive incorporation at the Great Commission (see below, chapter 7). Moreover, even though the setting in 10:5b–15 means that a compliant reader is still “overhearing” instruction to the Twelve at this point in the speech, Jesus says nothing to indicate that the kind of persecution he is describing will be peculiar to the Twelve περ ὡς. Rather, it is in line with 5:11 — persecution ἐνεκεν ἔμοι (cf. 10:18). It may then be appropriate to take the reference to witness τοῖς ἔθνεσιν as a significant further hint that the warning will apply more widely. The conditional command to flee in 10:23 extends that in 10:14 — flee not only as a display of coming judgment on those who will not receive the messenger and his message, but in order to continue to witness in the short time available. As noted above, Jesus does not here explain what he means by the time when ἔλθῃ ὁ νιὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, but compliance depends only on recognising that the opportunity for proclamation and witness will be limited.

This kind of persecution will be displayed and modelled by Jesus in the subsequent narrative, especially as he is handed over to the courts and death in Matthew 26 and 27 (which corresponds to the warning in 10:17–18). As he says, the disciples will be like their master (10:25). In 10:24–25, Jesus gives a further suggestion that his warnings will apply beyond the Twelve: all members of Jesus’ household are likely to be treated like their master.

This builds on speech of Matthew 5–7, where Jesus was depicted encouraging a fear of γῆνα (5:22, 29–30) and was shown attacking those more concerned with their peers than with God (6:1–18). He was also shown encouraging the kind of dependence on the divine Father that should result in a lack of anxiety for future life (6:19–34). Those emphases are similarly strong here. If we take the future passives in 10:26 as divine passives, then the full authority of God himself is behind the revelation of the nearness of the kingdom, so one need not be afraid to participate. The persecutors to not have ultimate authority to destroy even when they kill; only the Father does (10:28). Only the Father, as the one with both control over death in his creation and with care for Jesus’ followers, is trustworthy (10:29–31). But, as in Matthew 5–7, the trust expected here is not merely Patrocentric. Implicitly, one has to trust what Jesus promises about the Father before one can trust the Father. Trusting Jesus is once again aligned with trusting the Father. Once again, trusting Jesus brings his followers into a relation where they can call God “Father” just as he does.


While there is clearly a cost from an open allegiance to Jesus, his purpose here is to persuade compliant readers that the cost of denial is far greater (10:33). Even present family division is a cost worth bearing, and tests the worthiness of the disciples — just as they are testing the worthiness of others. Only ὅς [...] λαμβάνει τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ and follows him is worthy of him (10:38). Jesus does not here explain what he means by “taking up one’s cross,” and Matthew offers no editorial comment, but the parallel in 10:39 makes it clear that this is some sort of loss of present life. For the post-resurrection reader, this is then consistent with, and clarified by, the forthcoming narrative of Jesus’ own path to the cross from 16:21ff. Once again, the servants are called to follow their master.

98 Compare Davies and Allison: “Whatever the original meaning of 10:38, and whether or not it goes back to Jesus or not, Matthew’s intention is plain enough. 10:38 is interpreted by its context. ‘Cross’ is in the first instance a vivid metaphor which stands for utter self abnegation.” Davies and Allison, Matthew 8–18, 223.
10:40–42.

Jesus promises that he and the Father will personally reward those receive the disciples. While the ὑμᾶς of 10:40 might be restricted to the Twelve, εἰς δόνομα μαθητῶν in 10:42 is quite general. Compliant readers who believe the promise can take comfort from being agents of God himself (10:40). If the call to be compassionate (9:36–38) and generous with the blessings of the kingdom (cf. 10:8 — δορεάν ἐλαβέτε, δορεάν δότε) has gripped them, then this will also encourage them that even the smallest response indicates that God’s reward is being spread. Notice that the condition for reward here is minimal (“even one cup of cold water”), while the condition for judgment in 10:14–15 was maximal — it followed a clearly outrageous inhospitality to a fellow Israelite in need.

SUMMARY.

As Davies and Allison note, “the imitatio Christi runs like a bright thread through 10:5–25” — and, we might add, to the end of the speech. The imitation is patterned precisely on the preceding ministry of Jesus in 10:5b–15, but broadens to an imitation of his endurance under tribulation in 10:16–42, described as “taking up one’s cross” and following him in 10:38. This broader imitation cannot be fully followed or understood until after the events up to and including the cross, suggesting that Matthew does indeed have Jesus here addressing that later situation — even if indirectly. However, we shall suggest below (section 4.8.7) that in the broader context of the Gospel, the “imitatio Christi” is best seen as a consequence of the disciples’ participation or incorporation into Jesus’ Servant program.

4.8.5 Convergence to compliance.

The warning of persecution to come will already be credible to those currently engaged in kingdom proclamation. For such readers, the warning may indirectly act as a reassurance. It reminds them that what they are experiencing is to be expected and encourages them that what they are experiencing expresses a worthy imitation of their Master (10:24–25). However, from the outside, for those less committed, the claim that people exist who are voluntar-

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99 Davies and Allison, Matthew 8–18, 197.
ily prepared to undergo such a great immediate cost adds greatly to the credibility of the message of the nearness of the kingdom (10:7). Such behaviour is entirely irrational unless it is accompanied by a strong belief in the truth of the message and the possibility of future vindication. Readers approaching communicative alignment can see this within the narrative in Jesus and (to some extent) in his followers. It may also be reinforced by the costly behaviour of other disciples of Jesus they may know of.

Against this, the warning of immediate high personal cost obviously makes commitment harder to make. Jesus now has to make it clear that the long-term benefits of commitment exceed the short-term cost. This is spelled out implicitly in 10:39 — whoever “finds” his life (now) will lose it later; whoever “loses” his life (now, ἐνέκεφεν ἐμοὺ; cf. 5:11; 10:18; 16:25) will find it (later). The long-term cost of rejecting the message is portrayed as extreme: a worse judgment than that of Sodom and Gomorrah (10:15). On the other hand, the reward from commitment, despite its short-term cost, is portrayed as accessible and dependable. The accessibility of the reward is portrayed at the beginning and end of the speech. While rejection of the kingdom message is signified by a determined act of inhospitality (10:14), acceptance can be signified by the very slightest of acts (10:42). The dependability of the reward is portrayed at the centre of the speech. This emphasises first the control of the Father over the future: Jesus claims that of the sparrows, ἐν ἑστὶν οὐ πεσεῖται (future middle) ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἄνευ τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν (10:29). But it also stresses the care of the Father, which is trustworthy even in the face of death (10:31). As in Matthew 6, this dependability is emphasised by placing it within the context of uncertain and dangerous alternatives.

4.8.6 Authorial strategy.

Turning to consider the speech from Matthew’s point of view, we can outline the major components of his strategy as follows:

1. As before, Matthew lets Jesus act as primary messenger for his purposes. The setting Jesus speaks into maps onto the post-resurrection situation Matthew wishes to address in such a way as to retain the connection with that original historical foundation.
2. Matthew structures the chapter in such a way that there is a general movement from specific pre-resurrection application to general post-resurrection application, helping the reader to translate from the former to the latter.

3. From verse 5, Matthew chooses to do this with a palistrophic structure. While many claims are made for palistrophic structures in the Gospel on the basis of limited evidence, the structure in Matthew 10 seems relatively clear. Importantly, we can also specify how it serves Matthew’s rhetorical purposes. As Davies and Allison suggest, the structure is as follows:

A 10:5–15. The test of worthiness applied to Israel, prefiguring judgment.
C 10:24–25. A warning that Jesus’ followers will experience what he experiences.
D 10:26–31. The comfort of the sovereign, providential care of the Father.
C’ 10:32–33. A warning to follow Jesus and not to deny him.
A’ 10:40–42. The test of worthiness applied generally, prefiguring reward.

4. This serves Matthew’s purpose by enabling the speech to use the test of worthiness in two ways: first, it is applied to those to whom the Twelve proclaim the kingdom (A and A’ above); second, it applies to the Twelve themselves (and those like them — B–B’ above). We shall argue below that this sets an implicated premise for the judgment scene in Matthew 25 (section 6.3). We also get two warnings balanced against one another. The first is that tribulation and persecution is inevitable for servants following a persecuted master. The second is a warning not to avoid or shirk such tribulation and persecution. In the centre is the promise: that even under the threat of death the sovereign Father is able to protect those who depend on him. This is matched by a corresponding warning that he also has the authority to cast those who deny Jesus into Gehenna.

100 Giant (sometimes asymmetric) palistrophic structures in the end fail to convince — especially if the one proposing such a structure seems to be the only reader to have noticed it. There is a particularly impressive example in David E. Garland, Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the First Gospel (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 122, on the structure of 11:2–16:20. However, this does not seem to play a prominent role in his subsequent analysis.

101 Davies and Allison, Matthew 8–18, 160–62.
5. There are therefore two closely related decision-structures underlying the logic of the speech, as illustrated in the figure above. The wider structure (left-hand side) concerns the choices of those encountering the proclaimers of the kingdom. This is expressed in the material on testing worthiness in 10:5b–15 and 10:40–42. This summarises what Jesus has said on responding to the proclamation of the kingdom thus far in the Gospel, and here in Matthew 10 in the context of extended kingdom proclamation. This response is not a merely passive acceptance of its truth, but an active trust in the newly revealed reality. That is, a belief that the kingdom is near ("tree") necessarily results in an actively expressed response ("fruit"). We saw this pattern in 3:2, 4:17 and, in some detail, Matthew 5 to 7. Here, the actively expressed response is care of the (needy) messenger. In the opening material on the test of worthiness (10:5b–15), Jesus focuses on the negative consequences of an inhospitable response from a town of "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (10:6) — worse on the day of judgment than that facing Sodom and Gomorrah (10:15). In the concluding material on the test of worthiness (10:40–42), he then focuses on the positive consequences of a hospitable response of "whoever" gives even a cup of cold water to one of Jesus' disciples — ὦ μὴ ἀπολέσῃ τὸν μισθὸν αὐτοῦ. As noted above, the actively expressed response looked for by Jesus is minimal rather than maximal.
6. The second decision-structure applies to the disciples themselves. This encompasses the material between the two sections on testing worthiness — i.e. 10:16–39. What Matthew is doing here is expanding the decision structure of Matthew 5–7 (see section 4.6.7 above) and placing it within a larger context which involves not just situational behaviour but kingdom proclamation. As before, the explicit foundational decision is concerning whether or not to trust the Father: whether he is providentially caring, as described in 10:26–31, and whether the warning there is taken as credible. As in Matthew 5–7, implicit throughout is the decision whether to trust Jesus: what he says about the Father and about the consequences of the decision being presented. We have the same tree-fruit pattern to the response as before. Here, the actively expressed response is an open witness to Jesus despite the threat of persecution — even to death. As before, the flow of the speech maps out the decision and its consequences, as shown in the figure.

7. Jesus begins this second decision-structure with instruction concerning the expression of trust (10:16–25, “good fruit”): combining warning, encouragement and command. He then outlines the central issue of trust (10:26–31, “tree”). He then warns about the consequences of shirking openness to avoid conflict and opposition (10:32–39, “bad fruit”). It is here that the consequences of the basic decision are outlined. Those who acknowledge him will be acknowledged; those who “lose” life will find it. Those who do not acknowledge him will not be acknowledged; those who “find” life will lose it. As noted above, it now becomes clear that the disciples themselves are facing a test of worthiness (10:37–38).

8. The speech has its own distinctive vocabulary and imagery. Matthew uses εἰρήνη twice in 10:13 to summarise the eschatological message of reconciliation the disciples are bringing to fellow Israelites.\(^\text{102}\) He then uses it twice again in 10:34 to contrast the break-up that results from its partial acceptance within a family. The verb δέχομαι is used in 10:14 to describe the response to a message as expressed in a response to one of the Twelve. It is then used the same way but with more general application six times at the end of the speech (10:40–41). The description ἀξιως appears seven times in the speech. The worker is worthy of

\(^{102}\) Compare Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, 176.
his food (10:10); he is sent out to test worthiness (10:11, 13); but anyone who rates family peace over Jesus and his eschatological peace is not worthy (10:37–38). Finally, Matthew repeats μισθός three times at the very end of the speech to emphasise the accessibility of his reward.

4.8.7 **Continuation.**

The speech plays a major narrative role by introducing an explicit and extended warning concerning opposition and persecution to come. This will be a resistance to the proclamation of the kingdom experienced first by Jesus and then by those he sends ὡς πρόβατα ἐν μέσῳ λόκων (10:16; cf. 10:24–25). While we have seen elements of this resistance already in the narrative, the speech paves the way for it to be seen fully formed in Matthew 11 and following (chapter 5 below). Indeed, as the narrative continues, we shall witness Jesus encountering every kind of tribulation described in 10:16–23. This is the kind of resistance Jesus is here saying he wants his disciples to follow him in facing.

Moreover, the speech of Matthew 10 provides the essential background to the longer speech of Matthew 24–25. We shall argue later (section 6.3) that the basic call of the speech is the same: to keep going as disciples under persecution and tribulation, as exemplified by the repeated phrase ὁ δὲ ὑπομένας εἰς τέλος οὗτος σωθήσεται (10:22b; 24:13). However, the later speech proceeds and introduces the narrative of Jesus’ suffering, death and resurrection. We shall argue below that many of the temporal and referential ambiguities of that speech are resolved by seeing those narrative connections. This simultaneously resolves some of the lack of clarity in Matthew 10. For example, we can best relate the coming of the Son of Man in 10:23 to his vindication following suffering and death in resurrection. This supports the suggestion that the mission in Matthew 10, circumscribed by the coming of the Son of Man in the death and resurrection of Jesus, is intended to act as a foundation for, and model of, the global mission begun in 28:16–20, circumscribed by the coming of the Son of Man in a global, separating judgment.103

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103 Final conclusions on Matthew’s implied temporal framework can be found in section 7.2.
As we noted above, Davies and Allison describe the pattern in 10:18, in which the disciples are warned of a tribulation that will closely mirror the experience of Jesus later in the Gospel, as part of an *imitatio Christi* motif that runs through the Gospel. However, the more precise label we have begun to use is that the disciples are being called to an *incorporated Servanthood* — depending upon and following Jesus as Isaian Servant. This encompasses imitation, but goes further, suggesting both a temporal and logical order. Jesus goes first and sets the pattern — but does not merely set a pattern. His Servant-work *enables* the derivative but different Servant-work of his followers. That is, they are dependent upon what Jesus will do for them as Servant, but they are then incorporated into the Servant task of being a light to the Gentiles, and then imitate his example as they take the salvation of the Lord to the end of the earth.

**4.9 Conclusion to chapter 4**

While Matthew 1 and 2 set up an expectation of fulfilment in Jesus, Matthew 3–10 expand that as an expectation of the nearness of the kingdom. The expectations of righteous Jews like Joseph or John the Baptist are temporally resolved and refined to incorporate the necessary Servant work of Jesus as he completes his vocation to bring forgiveness of sins for the people of God. Given this, kingdom entry is for the humble, dependent and faithful, who trust Jesus’ promises concerning the future and follow in the narrow path that he both pioneers and enables. What is required is first an awareness of the true state of the world, expressed here as the nearness of the kingdom, and then a consequent total reliance on the Lord — visible in the way the disciples follow their teacher. That is, the opening ten chapters of the Gospel show theocentric commitment in broad outline to be a dependence that is both Patrocentric and Christocentric, expressed “Paidologically” — as those incorporated into Jesus’ Servant program. However, quite why Patrocentricity entails Christocentricity, and quite what it will entail to follow the path of the Servant are yet to be spelled out.

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Chapter 5

Matthew 11:1–16:20. Come to me (despite prevalent kingdom-blindness)

Having established Jesus as the one taking up and pursuing the Servant mandate in Matthew 3 through 10, the rest of the Gospel will tell the narrative of Jesus’ particular Servant experience, followed by his vindication. This begins with a double confirmation of his role: he is “the one who is to come” (11:4–6), who comes in the role of Servant of the Lord (12:17–21). The section 11:1–16:20 that we shall consider in this chapter then shows the mixed response to Jesus’ kingdom proclamation, preparing his disciples to face something similar with faith rather than disillusionment. In terms of his Servant ministry, this section of the Gospel depicts both the resistance Jesus encounters and his compassionate determination to continue to serve—alongside an intensified call to benefit from and participate in this program. The resistance he encounters begins the tribulation that will culminate in his death in Matthew 27. A common motif across 11:1–16:20 is a failure to hear and see who Jesus is and what he is proclaiming, frequently using physical sight as a metaphor for what we might call eschatological perception. We shall call this failure a “kingdom-blindness.” It begins with John the Baptist in 11:4, continues with the kingdom-blindness of “this generation” (11:16; 12:38–42; 16:4), the Pharisees (e.g. 15:14, 16:3; cf. 13:14–17) and is finally also applied to the disciples (16:9).

The pragmatic-critical method we are using suggests that we may think of what Matthew is doing in these chapters as exploring the second, uncommitted branch of the decision structure he has had Jesus set up in Matthew 5–7, and expanded in Matthew 10.1 We shall be arguing that he is presenting a particular historical example of what it looks like to be unresponsive to the new proclamation of the nearness of the kingdom, highly significant in its

1 See the figures in section 4.6.7, pp.193, 194; section 4.8.6, p.216.
own right. However, this also serves as a warning to post-resurrection readers of the burden of future judgment such unresponsiveness places one under. Likewise, Matthew is exposing the dangers of pushing to one side the “rest” and forgiveness of sins Jesus is working to achieve. Even in contexts (such as the one depicted) where such responses are prevalent, Matthew is directing a tailored call to compliant readers not to be the “blind following the blind” (cf. 15:14) but to have confidence in what Jesus is doing — expressed in a commitment that is centred on him and the mandate he is pursuing.

5.1 Matthew 11-12

The narrative in Matthew 11–12 shows both doubt from those close to Jesus and open hostility from the unrepentant. As such, it expands upon the kind of negative response already seen in Matthew 8–9 and warned of in Matthew 10. However, Matthew’s focus here is different. Whereas the emphasis in Matthew 8–9 was very much on the witness to Jesus and the kind of kingdom blessing he is offering, the emphasis here is more on the consequences of missing or rejecting that witness. The groups in Matthew 11–12 represent a historically significant instance of such rejection, but also illustrate the danger such rejection places one under more generally. As a number of commentators have observed, Matthew 11 does then constitute a major plot development in the Gospel. The focus on rejection evokes a sense of crisis. However, there is also strong continuity, in that Matthew depicts Jesus resolute in the Servant mandate he has taken on.

5.1.1 A claim concerning communicative equilibrium.

Matthew wants his compliant readers to be more deeply persuaded of how foolish it would be to fail to respond to the nearness of the kingdom, even when such unresponsiveness is prevalent. This is a foolishness that ignores the significance of Jesus’ deeds and expresses itself in words that slander the work God is achieving through his Spirit. Matthew wants to convince

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them that this will result in judgment and missing out on the (Sabbath) “rest” of the Lord and the forgiveness of sins. However, “rest” is still possible for those who would “come to Jesus” (11:28). Matthew especially does not want readers experiencing the kind of doubt expressed by John the Baptist at the start of the section to have their doubts compounded by observing negative responses from others.

Readers seeking communicative alignment will find the unresponsiveness Jesus is warning against described first in the reactions of “this generation” to the proclamation of first John and then Jesus (11:16–19), especially in the unrepentant response of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, and then in the condemning and dismissive response of the Pharisees to Jesus’ healings and exorcisms, including those occurring on the Sabbath. The warnings in both cases are explicit (11:24; 12:32) and their proximity to 11:25–30 helps to emphasise the more positive exhortation (the content of which we shall consider at further length below, section 5.2).

5.1.2 Expansion and further argument.

The prominent positioning of John the Baptist’s question in 11:3 implies that Matthew is addressing readers who find themselves somewhat aligned with John’s expectations. We argued above (section 4.3) that in Matthew 3, John’s expectations of the one coming after him represented those of a righteous Jew looking for the kingdom and the vindication of the Lord in the world. We argued that the expectation that the one coming after him would bring a final separating judgment (3:10–12) was “temporally resolved” by the narrative of Jesus’ baptism and temptation (3:13–4:11). Despite some confusion, John recognised Jesus (3:14); but rather than bring a separating judgment, Jesus took up the Servant mandate that must be fulfilled first.

We see a similar overall pattern in Matthew 11–12. John remains confused. He has not seen the evidence that Jesus is the one bringing God’s vindication that would confirm to his satisfaction that Jesus is ὁ ἐρχόμενος. This was perhaps compounded by the need for vindication he may have felt while imprisoned by Herod. In the “narrative time” covered by Matthew 5–11, however, Matthew has had Jesus witness to his own identity as the one bringing
the kingdom near in word (Matthew 5–7, 10) and deed (Matthew 8–9). In his reply to John
the Baptist, Jesus insists that this is sufficient witness. Jesus tells John’s disciples
πορευθέντες ἀπαγείλατε ἵω ἄννη ἅ ἀκούετε καὶ βλέπετε (emphasis added). The pattern of
action and teaching exactly fits the prophetic expectation (11:4–6); picking up on, especially,
Isa 35:5–6.3 However, although this witness does not include the explicit exercise of judg-
ment, that does not mean that judgment has been put to one side, but rather has been delayed
for a reason. This is what Jesus goes on to say. Judgment is coming for the unresponsive
(11:24). But, first, Jesus is engaged in the task of revealing and calling (11:25–30). There is
therefore an open opportunity to avoid the coming judgment.

The pattern of a delay in judgment in order to pursue a mandate (that given to Jesus by
his Father) is reinforced in 12:15–21. When the Pharisees conspire to destroy Jesus (12:4), he
does not respond in kind but rather withdraws in order to continue his Servant ministry
(12:15–16). Matthew himself makes this explicit in the fulfilment formula in 12:17–21 — the
longest in the Gospel. As Luz warns us, the wording of the quotation is so open that exegetes
have tended to find a controlled interpretation difficult.4 However, given the steady stream of
allusion to the role of Isaiah’s Servant we have seen thus far in the Gospel, a long and direct
quotation at this point in the narrative does seem to imply that Matthew is confirming the
association between Jesus and the role of the Servant.5 In the immediate context of Matthew
12, following the disputations in 12:1–14, Matthew seems to be arguing that by withdrawing
and keeping himself relatively hidden Jesus is evidencing his Servant role, in that the Servant

3 But also Isa 26:19; 29:18; 42:7, 18; 61:1. The breadth of allusion, culminating in Isaiah 61,
implies that what is being brought into realisation by Jesus is the complete Isaian program of the
Lord re-establishing his worldwide sovereignty through his Servant.
4 “It is amazing how differently the exegetes explain Matthew’s interest in Isa 42:1–4. [...] The
interpretation is difficult, because the wording of the quotation is so open that often one cannot
say which associations Matthew intends for his readers and where the arbitrariness of
5 Compare Donaldson, “The Vindicated Son,” 118.
in Isa 42:1–3 (especially in Matthew’s paraphrase) is faithful in his task until it is done and justice is fully established.\(^6\)

The nature of the unresponsiveness of “this generation” can be inferred from Jesus’ speech to the crowds in 11:7–24. They should have recognised John as the climactic Prophet (11:9), suffering violence like previous Prophets (11:12); he is no less than Ἡλίας ὁ μέλλων ἔφησθαι (11:14). They should hear Jesus’ testimony concerning him now (11:15) and, by implication, therefore should have listened to his message concerning the kingdom and the one coming after him. That is, they should have changed their minds (see above on μετανοέω, section 4.4) concerning the significance of the times in which they lived, recognising that the kingdom will surpass all that came before is upon them (11:11), and the time of forward-looking prophecy is coming to an end in John (11:13). However, “this generation” remain woefully unresponsive to both John and Jesus (11:16–19). Moreover, whole cities also did not repent (μετανοέω) and see the kingdom significance of his deeds (οἱ πλείσται δυνάμεις, 11:20). The consequences on the day of judgment (ἐν ἣμέρᾳ κρίσεως) will be severe (11:24).

Just as the cities of 11:20–24 misread Jesus and his deeds, so too do the Pharisees. In the first two episodes of Matthew 12, they misread both the significance of the Sabbath and Jesus’ relation to it. The immediately preceding call to a future rest (using the ἀνασπασμος-word-group) in 11:28–29 stands as a significant implicated premise to these Sabbath references (12:1–2, 5, 8, 10, 11–12). If the Sabbath signifies such a future rest from current burdens,

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\(^6\) Hence in 12:20 Matthew shortens Isa 42:3b–4 to ἐν ἔκβαλη εἰς νῦκος τὴν κρίσιν, emphasizing the “until” and implying a future climactic moment where victory is brought about for justice (BDAG, 5, s.v. ἔκβαλλο), but before which the Servant ministry of 12:19–20 (cf. Isa 42:2–3a) must continue. Given this, it may be that Matthew wants the “bruised reed” (κάλαμος συντετριμμένος) and “smouldering wick” (λίνος τωρόμενος) in the quotation to be associated with the weak people Jesus is healing in 12:15. To associate these images in some way with the “broken-hearted” does seem to be the dominant association in the history of interpretation. Luz, Matthew 8–20, 194–95. Moreover, in the interpretation of Isaiah it is common to take them simply as metaphors for “being weak.” Klaus Baltzer, Deutero-Isaiah: A Commentary on Isaiah 40–55 (trans. Margaret Kohl; ed. Peter Machinnist; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 129. However, an alternative, which also fits the context, is that Matthew wants an association with the opponents of the Servant — i.e. the Pharisees in 12:1–14. The implication is then that these opponents will be “broken” and “quenched” when justice comes. In Isa 36:6 LXX, unreliable Egypt is described by Rabshakeh as “that broken reed of a staff” (ὁ ῥύθος ὁ κυλύμονος ὁ τεθλασμένος). In Isa 7:4 LXX, the enemies of Judah are described as “these two smouldering stubs of firebrands” (τὰ δύο ξύλα οἱ δαλοὶ οἱ καπνιζόμενοι).
then Jesus is demonstrating what it means for him to be “lord of the Sabbath” (12:8) — in the two miracles people are “delivered from the shadow of death and restored to the unblemished image of God.” In unmercifully begrudging relief from current suffering (hunger, 12:1; a withered hand, 12:10), the Pharisees reveal both their disdain for that future blessing and the one who is bringing it. Likewise in 12:22–37, the Pharisees’ words also reveal a disdain for the work of God. Matthew has just made explicit in 12:18 that the Holy Spirit is the “equipment” of the Servant (to use Peter Bolt’s expression), implying that he is an essential means by which the witness to the kingdom in Jesus’ deeds (as seen in Matthew 8–9 and reprised here in 12:22) is accomplished. Given the connection between those deeds and Jesus’ vocation to bring forgiveness of sins established in Matthew 9 (see above, section 4.7), to deny or slander this work is therefore to forego that forgiveness (12:31–32). The Pharisees’ failure to see these deeds as signs leads them to ask for one (12:38). Jesus says there shall be a clear sign for those who have missed the signs — the Son of Man three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (12:40). However, again, the consequences for “this generation” of missing who and what the signs signify will be severe at the judgment (12:41–42), leaving them worse off than before (12:43–45).

Matthew’s strategy is thus first to evoke a partial alignment with John the Baptist, representing a righteous but uncertain response to the activity of the Lord through Jesus his Servant. Certainly, some of his readers seeking compliance are likely to have residual expectations similar to John’s. We could then say that here he is working on the “fringes” of his compliant group — those in most need of persuasion and at risk of influence from sceptics (represented here by the Pharisees). What Jesus says in these chapters is very much reinforcing the implied temporal framework we have seen since the “temporal resolution” of Matthew 3 (see section 4.3). The expectation of judgment is not thwarted but modified. There is a delay in the

bringing of justice (12:20). Now is not the time of final judgment, rather the time of kingdom proclamation and decision — but these will have consequences at a future separating judgment. Moreover, Matthew is exploring at more and further depth the second arm of the decision structure we saw set up in the speech of Matthew 5–7. Unresponsiveness, whatever form it takes, will lead to condemnation at the judgment. However, the first arm is still there: against the largely negative backdrop there is a renewed call to commitment in 11:25–30 (see below, section 5.2).

5.1.3 Continuation.

The unresponsiveness of “this generation” and disdain of the scribes and Pharisees for the work Jesus is doing, and their tendency to dispute it, continues as a major trajectory in the narrative, culminating in the Temple disputations of Matthew 21–23 (section 6.2 below).

At this earlier point in Matthew’s account, these adverse responses raise a number of questions and issues. The first is the doubt it may raise about whether this could credibly be considered part of the plan of God. Matthew has Jesus address this issue in 11:25–27, by talking about the Father’s choice concerning to whom he reveals the kingdom. This claim to divine control will then be expanded in the “parables” speech-complex of Matthew 13. The narrative problem of the disciples’ being οὐλογίστοι in 14:1–16:12 is then at least partially resolved by the Father revealing the Messianic identity of Jesus to Peter (16:17).

The pattern of a withdrawal and a delay in judgment in order to pursue Jesus’ Servant mandate that we have seen in 12:15–21 is repeated in the three cycles of 14:1–16:12 — in response to Herod Antipas (14:13), the Pharisees and scribes (15:21) and the Pharisees and Sadducees (16:4).

The request for a sign from the scribes and Pharisees in 12:38 reoccurs as a request from Pharisees and Sadducees in 16:1–4. This is after the great feeding miracles of 14:13–21 and 15:32–39. Once again, Jesus says that the only sign given will be the “sign of Jonah”

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Note that our adaptive inference rule (section 3.4) suggests that the proclamation and bringing of justice (κρισίς) in 12:18 and 12:20 is not to be separated from the proclamation and bringing of judgment elsewhere in the Gospel. Compare Beaton: “a sharp division between the two may be artificial.” Isaiah’s Christ in Matthew’s Gospel, 161.
The “Son of Man three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (12:40) is of course a sign only seen at the end of the Gospel. Jesus seems to be implying this will be the sign to subsume all other signs. We argued above (section 4.7) that the deeds of Matthew 8–9 were “resurrection” miracles, foretastes of a kingdom blessing that takes people from under the shadow of death and restores them to life. This suggests that Jesus’ resurrection will be the ultimate such sign of the nearness of the kingdom — a suggestion that will be reinforced in the narrative to come.

5.2 Focus on Matthew 11:25–30

This is the second of four open-ended calls issued by Jesus in the Gospel, the others being at 4:17, 16:24 and 28:19–20. Compared to its precursor in 4:17 (cf. 3:2), it is both more specific and more explicitly Christocentric.

5.2.1 A claim concerning communicative equilibrium.

The claim is that Matthew wants compliant readers to be assured of the control of the Father over the process of kingdom revelation and to take the opportunity to respond with Christocentric commitment. He is especially addressing those on the fringes of his compliant group who have found it hard to repent and to be aligned with the program of Matthew 5–7. He wants them to accept the direct appeal here that Jesus himself is able to provide the “rest” they need; that is, relief from the current burden of being under the shadow of death. Compared to 4:17, this is a more explicit call to benefit from the Servant program Jesus is pursu-

Readers seeking communicative alignment with Matthew may infer these things firstly from the exhortation in 11:28–29 “Come to me” (δεῦτε πρὸς με), as expanded in the double aorist imperatives “take my yoke upon you” and “learn from me,” and the explanatory clause complex which follows. The kind of person Jesus is calling may be inferred from the nominative phrase in 11:28, in which they are described as “all who grow weary and are burdened with a load” (πάντες οἱ κοπιῶντες καὶ πεφορτισμένοι), and the surrounding material in 11:28–30. The prolegomena to the call in 11:25–27 should evoke in such readers a confi-
dence in its credibility and effectiveness. The *kind* of “rest” Jesus is promising may be inferred not simply from these verses but from previous claims concerning Jesus made by Matthew, previous promises made by Jesus himself and the model “rest” illustrated in Jesus’ response to the πίστις of the suppliants in Matthew 8–9. Links to Jesus’ Servant mandate as Matthew has hitherto presented it may be inferred from the self description πρόθες εἰμί καὶ ταπεινός τῇ καρδίᾳ (in its relation to the first four Beatitudes, especially 5:5) and from parallels with the baptism scene in 3:13–17.

5.2.2 Expansion and further argument.

Warren Carter supplies a useful chart summarizing the decisions of some recent scholars with respect to four key interpretative questions raised by 10:25–30. We shall begin by expanding what has just been said concerning communicative equilibrium relative to these questions, and follow this with a brief defence of each answer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is Jesus’ identity as speaker?</th>
<th>The Son, “fleshed out” in the role of the Servant (as in 3:13–17)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who are Jesus’ addressees?</td>
<td>Those who remain under the “burden” (11:28) of “the shadow of death” (4:16; cf. Isa 9:1 MT), as amplified by the accounts in Matthew 8–9.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the nature of the call? (What is the meaning of “yoke” in 11:29?)</td>
<td>It is a primary call to <em>benefit</em> from the Servant ministry of Jesus, in which he identifies with the “humble and lowly of heart” (11:29) and (implicitly) deals with their condition. (The “yoke” is the associated <em>participation</em> in that same Servant program, which Jesus has <em>begun</em> to teach on in Matthew 5–7 and 10.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the promise or reward? (What is the meaning of “rest” in 11:28–29?)</td>
<td>The vindication of resurrection life found in the future kingdom of heaven and the completion of God’s purposes. (The “rest” is thus the kind of “Sabbath-rest” Matthew will allude to in 12:1–14.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What we are doing, then, is to think about how this call links to previous material and how Matthew may be using that material to supply implied premises for the concepts and terminology he is using here. Thus we can argue that the simplest antecedent for the unqualified “Son” of 11:27, who is in such close relationship with his Father (11:25–27), is the “Son”
of 3:17. Moreover, just as we argued for the baptism scene in 3:13–17 that Matthew was beginning to “flesh out” the meaning of “Son” with the role of the Servant taken on by Jesus (sections 3.3 and 4.3 above), so here. Graham Stanton is happy to identify Jesus quite directly with the Servant in these verses. However, as Warren Carter notes, the key self-description in 11:29 that Jesus is “gentle and lowly in heart” (πραθεί καί ταπεινός τῇ καρδίᾳ) shares no vocabulary with the “Servant” quotations in 8:17 and 12:18–21. It might therefore be going to far to claim that Matthew is establishing Jesus as Isaiian Servant in these verses. Nevertheless, Jesus’ self-description here is consistent with the pattern of Sonship “fleshed out” in Servanthood already established in 3:13–17, and consistent too with the program of Servant ministry Jesus has pursued since then. We can add that a simple inference from Jesus’ claim that his “yoke” is light in 11:30 is that this is because he is taking the trouble to serve his disciples. Here we see him taking on some of the characteristics of the needy described in the first four Beatitudes (5:3–6), especially in the quality of being πραθεί (5:5). We argued in section 4.6.5 this implies an absence of aggressive self-assertion — a quality amenable to both being served and serving. We have already seen Jesus-as-Servant humble himself in order to get alongside and serve the needy in, for example, his baptism (3:13–17) and in the deeds of Matthew 8–9, most controversially in associating with “tax collectors and sinners” in 9:10–13. (However, Matthew has not yet indicated how this identification with the lowly functions to serve them.)

We suggested in section 4.4 that Matthew left the identity of Jesus’ addressees in 4:17 quite general and open, such that compliant readers could be aligned with the challenge. The proclamation of that call was linked by Matthew to the image of light dawning for people living under the shadow of death (4:16; cf. Isa 9:1 MT). We further argued in section 4.6 that this image helped to process the descriptions of spiritual, physical and moral need in the first four Beatitudes (5:3–6). To such people, Jesus promised the kind of comfort described in the ὅτι clauses of the Beatitudes. The whole process of receiving such

11 Carter, Matthew and Empire, 111.
blessing was modelled proleptically in the miracle stories of Matthew 8–9, where suppliants with spiritual and physical needs were restored to full life. We saw in section 4.7 that these needs were strongly linked to the need for the forgiveness of sins. The simplest inference for 11:25–30 is therefore that Jesus is continuing to call people living under the shadow of death and in need of forgiveness for their sins, and that is summarised here in the description οἱ κοπιῶντες καὶ πεφορτισμένοι.\(^{12}\)

However, we might add that Jesus now seems to be targeting as-yet unresponsive people, who have not yet repented despite his kingdom proclamation (or, perhaps, are wavering in their convictions in the face of widespread unresponsiveness).\(^{13}\) They are certainly not yet aligned with the programs of Matthew 5–7 and 10. If so, then such commitment-shy people need something more than the mere claim that “the kingdom is near” to persuade them or guide them to a response. As we discussed in section 2.2.4 the danger here is that widespread unresponsiveness can lead to a negative “informational cascade.” The more people respond negatively, the more those who are as yet undecided may conclude that there must be some good reason for the negative response, especially if those

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\(^{12}\) This encompasses all of the suggestions made for Jesus’ addressees in the table in Carter, Matthew and Empire, 111. This includes, for example, those who are being kept “trapped” under the shadow of death by the example and teaching of the (scribes and) Pharisees, which Jesus has begun to critique in Matthew 5–7 and whom he will finally condemn in Matthew 23. It also includes Carter’s own suggestion: those labouring and burdened under Roman Imperial oppression. Carter, Matthew and Empire, 111, 113–18. We are simply arguing that Matthew implies a wider category—especially after Matthew 8–9.

\(^{13}\) As Davies and Allison, Matthew 8–18, 283–87 suggest, the inference that Jesus is targeting the unresponsive might be reinforced for readers familiar with the LXX of Exodus 33. The mutual knowledge between Jesus and his Father in 11:27 has some similarities to that between the Lord and Moses in Exod 33:12–13. Moses is interceding for a “stiff-necked people” (λαός σκληροτράχηλος, Exod 33:5 LXX) and the Lord promises to be with him, saying, “I will give you rest” (καταπαύσω σε, Exod 33:14 LXX). The pronoun is singular, but Moses has made himself inseparable from those he describes to the Lord as ὁ λαός σου (Exod 33:16). See also Dale C. Allison Jr., “Two Notes on a Key Text: Matthew 11:25–30,” JTS 39, no. 2 (1988): 477–85. Mutual knowledge is also of course a feature of the relationship between the Lord and his Servant in Isaiah 40–55, already alluded to in 3:17 and explicitly referenced in 12:18 (cf. Isa 42:1). The Servant is also instrumental to the Lord bringing comfort for his people (e.g. Isa 49:8–13; cf. Isa 61:1–4). As we have been suggesting, it may then be best to think of what Jesus is doing here as fulfilling a role which was promised by the prophet, serving the same kind of role performed by Moses for God’s people. Nevertheless, the possible connections with Exodus 33 do tell against the suggestion that 11:25–30 have a Hellenistic origin or are a “thunderbolt from the Johannine sky” — a phrase originating from Karl von Hase, Die Geschichte Jesu (2nd ed.; Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1876), 422.
doing so are perceived to be in some way “wise.” The explanation of the unresponsiveness of the “wise” in 11:25–27 can be seen as an attempt to break such a cascade. Jesus’ claim is that far from being evidence of greater knowledge or understanding, the lack of response from the “wise” is evidence that revelation has been kept from them. Those who have begun to respond positively may be further encouraged by the suggestion that is they who are the privileged ones in terms of revelation.

The δέοτε πρός με that opens the exhortation should recall the δέοτε ὑπίσω μου with which Jesus called Simon and Andrew in 4:19. This suggests that the call here is similarly a primary call. This suggested that what Jesus is doing here is generalising that specific call, such that we have a general call that is more explicitly Christocentric than the exhortation from 4:23 to this point. Matthew has previously implied that Jesus would somehow be the means through which the blessings of the Beatitudes, for example, would be realized — especially in his claiming to have come to fulfil the Law and the Prophets (5:17). Moreover, in the restoration of life modelled proleptically in the miracle stories of Matthew 8–9, the source of the blessing was very clearly Jesus himself. But now Jesus is explicitly made the means for people to appropriate “rest.” The “hidden Christology” of Matthew 5–7 is uncovered. This begins to address some of the unresolved difficulties in those chapters. For example, as we saw in Matthew 5–7, Jesus made the necessity of Patrocentric dependence foundational in that speech, especially in prayer, without saying anything explicit about how such a relationship with the Father could be established if it did not already exist. Here Jesus sets himself up as the exclusive gateway to the Father: “no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (11:27, ESV).

The exhortation in 11:28 is thus δέοτε πρός με, expanded in the double aorist imperatives ἄρατε τὸν ζυγόν μου ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς καὶ μάθετε ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ (11:29, emphasis added). The image of “taking on a yoke” builds upon the description οἱ κοπιῶντες καὶ παρορισμένοι in the previous verse. The simplest inference is that Jesus is exhorting an exchange of burdens — light for heavy — with the lighter burden representing what is
entailed in becoming one of his disciples. This is made explicit in 11:30. Thus μάθητε ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ stands in synthetic parallelism to the first imperative. To “take on Jesus’ yoke” is to become a dependent disciple, learning from him. Or, as we have been suggesting, it is to be incorporated into Jesus’ Servant program. The stated reason why one may do so without fear is “because I am gentle and lowly of heart” (πραδός εἰμι καὶ ταπεινῶς τῇ καρδιᾷ, 11:29). That is, Jesus is like a servant — from which can be inferred, like the Servant — from whom one can therefore learn Servanthood.

Finally, with respect to what Jesus is promising here, the simplest inference is again that it is in continuity with what he has promised before. Previously, Jesus has summarized his promises of comfort and blessing in the ὁρτι clauses of the Beatitudes. Moreover, in Matthew 8–9, we saw such blessings illustrated prophetically in a restoration of life that was linked to the forgiveness of sins. Here, such blessing is summarised with the ἀνάπω- word-group. As we suggested above (section 5.1), this allows Matthew to make a connection to the “Sabbath” incidents in 12:1–14.

Thus, in contrast to the cities in 11:20–24, which — as a consequence of not responding to Jesus’ kingdom proclamation in word and deed — will end up worse off on the day of judgment than before, the one who responds to Jesus’ call here will attain a distinctly better outcome than before: an impossible burden exchanged for a lighter one.

14 Compare Isa 9:3 LXX, where the “yoke” (ζυγός) burdening the nation is broken by one called “son” in Isa 9:5 LXX.
15 Stanton, A Gospel for a New People, 375.
16 Taking the ὁρτι as a causal conjunction rather than a content conjunction (contra, e.g., Strecker, Der Weg der Gerechtigkeit, 174). This is not to deny that Jesus’ disciples will learn that he is πραδός καὶ ταπεινῶς τῇ καρδιᾷ — but Jesus has already made it clear in chapters 5–7 and 10 that dependent discipleship will involve learning much more than that!
17 Jesus here describes his yoke as good, pleasant, easy, light (11:30); while he described the way in 7:14 as “hard.” The resolution lies in the different implied temporal reference. In 11:28–30, the comparison is implicitly a future one: between someone who has persisted under the shadow of death, burdened at the eschatological judgment, and someone who has “taken Jesus’ yoke.” In 7:13–14, the initial comparison is between two immediate paths: Jesus’ suggested way is “hard” and the other way is “easy” (or at least seems so at the point of decision). The future comparison, however, matches that in 11:28–30. Jesus’ suggested way leads to life and the other way to destruction. Likewise in 10:39 (cf. 16:25–26): “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”
5.3 Matthew 13

The speech-complex in Matthew 13 both explains and exemplifies the mixed response to Jesus’ proclamation. The mixed response and its consequences at the future judgment is the topic of the parables. A pragmatic-critical method helps to show how the high processing cost of the parables bifurcates hearers of the parables into those who seek compliance and those who do not. The method will thus address at least two of the key research questions raised by Craig Blomberg as needs in parables research. These are “What is the balance between the revealing and concealing functions of the parables?” and “How helpful [are] models from the disciplines of communications and linguistics for interpreting Jesus’ parabolic rhetoric?”18

5.3.1 A claim concerning communicative equilibrium.

Building on Jesus’ statement in 11:25–27, Matthew wants his compliant readers to know that the whole process of general proclamation and selective revelation they have witnessed thus far in the Gospel is under divine control, helping them to retain their confidence in situations of mixed or minimal response. He wants them to understand and value their privileged status as those to whom the secrets of the kingdom, newly revealed, have been given, fulfilling what those of old longed for. Within this process, he wants them to see themselves in distinction from non-compliant hearers or readers, making the effort to process the parables, to be those “with ears” (to hear). As they “understand” (συνίημι), he wants this to bear the kind of “fruit” already outlined in Matthew 5–7 and 10. To evoke this response, he wants to confirm once again the basic temporal framework he has been suggesting since Matthew 3 and to show that the bifurcation of responses to the kingdom magnified by the parables will be paralleled in the final judgment, both positively and negatively. Finally, he wants what he has done in the speech-complex — as the Servant who brings comfort, confidence and strengthened commitment by showing the new things of the kingdom fulfilling what was known of old — to function as a model for the biblically literate disciple.

It is in this speech that the bifurcation of the wider readership we have noticed in previous speeches becomes most explicit and is integral to Jesus’ argument. However, compliant readers may infer that the main issue being addressed here is a situation of mixed or minimal response from the wider context that began at 11:1, the two family incidents that bracket the speech in 12:46–50 and 13:53–58, and the detail of the individual parables. The purpose of the parables as a selective revelation can be inferred from 13:10–17 and the three-fold pattern of public teaching and private explanation. The connection between this and final judgment is implicit from the detail of the parables. Processing the parables reveals the same kind of spatio-temporal scheme and decision structure we have already seen in the Gospel, but this time viewed from a more divine perspective. This is then able to function as a new form of persuasion to trust in the promises and warnings being made and comply with the former.

5.3.2 The wider readership and the purpose of the parables.

It is difficult to give a history of interpretation of Matthew 13 as a whole, since its various components have typically been treated in a piecemeal fashion. Studies of the structure of the chapter in more recent interpretation do, however, implicitly supply something of a general interpretation. For example, Luz notes that splitting the chapter at 13:23, as some do, “favours a paraenetic interpretation of the discourse,” since both main sections then end with an emphasis on eschatological outcomes. Luz’s own proposed structure divides at the narrative interruption in 13:34–36, making the emphasis a narrative movement from (and contrast between) speech to the people and instruction for the disciples. The lack of consensus on structure reveals a lack of consensus in interpretation.

Turning to the parables within the speech-complex, there is a separate history of interpretation. There is a wide spectrum here, from the allegorizing tendency that dominated until the end of the nineteenth century, to the anti-allegorical polemic of Adolf Jülicher, to the

19 Luz, Matthew 8–20, 230.
more nuanced approaches in recent scholarship.\(^\text{20}\) The individual parables have also been variously interpreted. The parable of the sower has most often been interpreted paraenetically — as exhortation to be “good soil” — but other interpretations have more emphasised the confidence the parable gives in the midst of present failures that the kingdom will prevail.\(^\text{21}\) The parable of the tares (and likewise the parable of the net) has stubbornly been taken to suggest a church or community application throughout its history of interpretation, with interpretations taking seriously the claim that ὁ ἁγρός ἐστιν ὁ κόσμος (13:38) in a minority.\(^\text{22}\) The parables of mustard seed and leaven have most often been taken to be expressions of confidence in the expansion of the church, but more recently have been taken to be concerning the transformation of the world or taken as simple contrasts between current and future states and not really about growth at all.\(^\text{23}\) The parables of the treasure and the pearl have been taken to be about finding Christ or salvation, or as exhortation to renounce current wealth for future gain.\(^\text{24}\)

What can we say concerning this great diversity in interpretation? Our main claim here shall be that this diversity is consistent with what is said in the speech-complex concerning the purpose of the parables and how they are intended to function. The pragmatic-critical method we have adopted helps us to think through this key issue. Are parables intended to conceal (as elements of the aside in 13:10–17 might imply)? Or are they to reveal and uncover (as Matthew’s editorial comment in 13:35 and Jesus’ final comment in 13:52 might

\(^{20}\) Adolf Jülicher’s objections to allegory and allegorizing can be found in Adolf Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1969 [first published 1888–9]). By “allegorizing,” Jülicher meant reading a parable as a series of related metaphors. He argued that they should rather be read as an expanded simile. However, most scholars would now define “allegorizing” in distinction from allegory, as interpretation that reads in theological material not originally intended. Klyne Snodgrass notes that before Jülicher, Tertullian, Chrysostom, Luther and Calvin all protested against the abuses of allegorizing, at least to some degree. “From Allegorizing to Allegorizing: A History of the Interpretation of the Parables of Jesus,” in *The Challenge of Jesus’ Parables* (ed. R.N. Longenecker; McM NTS; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2000), 5. A century after Jülicher, Craig Blomberg welcomes a renewed interest in the role of metaphor, analogy and allegory in the interpretation of parables. “The Parables of Jesus,” 237–40.


imply)? Our method helps us to articulate in a new way what some commentators have already suggested: that the parables do both.

We commented in section 2.2.3 above on the concept in Relevance Theory of the “poetic effect.” Metaphor, irony, stylistic choices, and so forth, “achieve relevance by weakly suggesting a wide array of possible implications.”25 On the one hand, this may increase processing efficiency. A single metaphor may evoke a wide range of implicatures that would take a long and complex series of utterances to spell out explicitly (and, as in section 2.2.3, we might add that in so spelling it out, one would almost certainly lose something). On the other hand, poetic language may also increase the processing effort required to achieve relevance — especially the initial processing effort. To process complex metaphor, for example, or poetic language that is relatively detached from an explicit context, may require considerable effort to sort through the different referential possibilities. However, once that initial processing effort has been made, the yield in terms of relevant implicatures may be considerable. This seems to be how the parables in Matthew 13 function. There is a threshold of processing effort to overcome. Those who are relatively uncommitted see no good reason to pursue the comparison or metaphor: they are those who hear but do not hear (cf. 13:13–15). Those who are relatively committed will want to find out more: they are oi ἔχοντες ὅτα (cf. 13:9); to them δέδοται γνώσις τὰ μυστήρια τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν (13:11). To re-use the parables of the treasure and the pearl: those who have seen something of the value of the kingdom will go to every effort to seek it and find out more.

A comparison with the miracles in Matthew’s Gospel is also helpful here. We have seen something like this division before in the responses to Jesus’ deeds. We might even say that miracles are themselves “dramatic parables.” They reveal truths about Jesus and about the kingdom, but only for those with eyes to see. Some have responded to the miracles negatively, accusing Jesus of casting out demons by the Prince of Demons, for example (9:34; 12:24). Some were merely amazed (8:27; 9:8, 33). But some responded with faith: believing the power of Jesus over death and evil, and coming to him with worship, trust and a “desper-

ate dependence” (e.g. 8:10; 9:2, 22, 29). In other words, the miracles have had the effect of pushing some away and drawing some closer. This seems to parallel the effect of the parables in particular — but also Jesus’ ministry in general.

Taking this all together, given the high processing cost associated with processing the parables, and the complexity of the referential and inferential possibilities, we would be surprised not to find a wide diversity of interpretation.

5.3.3 Communicative alignment: the implied temporal framework.

In many respects, what Jesus says here simply serves to reinforce the basic implied temporal framework we have seen so far in the Gospel. There is now, the time of proclamation and choice, and there is some decisive point in the future. Within the parables, “now” is represented in the time of broadcasting the seed/word (13:3) and the result in terms of taking root or otherwise, in the time of wheat mixed with weeds (13:25–26, 38), in the time of sowing a mustard seed (13:31), of mixing leaven in flour (13:33a), of finding treasure (13:44a) or a pearl (13:46a) and of casting a net (13:47). The decisive point in the future is the time of reaping a yield (13:8, 23), of reaping and sorting (13:30, 40–43), of full growth (13:32), of full leavening (13:33b), of personally owning treasure or a pearl (13:44b, 46b), of sorting and separation (13:48–50).

However, the parables also add to some of the unresolved tensions in Matthew’s spatio-temporal plane. The question “How near is near?” is in some ways complicated by the variety of comparison across the different parables. The more agricultural imagery, for example, in the parables of the sower, tares, and mustard seed, might suggest a relatively slow and gradual path to completion. On the other hand, leavening flour (13:33, paralleling the parable of the mustard seed) or gathering fish (13:47–48, paralleling the parable of the tares) are rela-

26 As we noted in section 2.3.2, N.T. Wright attempts to infer a quite different temporal frame from the parable of the sower. Jesus and the Victory of God, 230–39. The parable (at least from one point of view) tells the story of Israel and, in particular, the story of the return from exile. We may add to the previous discussion by noting that it is hard to find support for this temporal framework in the other parables of the speech-complex, and hence a consistent implied temporal framework across the chapter.
tively quick processes. The man and the merchant in the parables of treasure both have to wait patiently for what they have found — but they still receive it within their own lifetime.

5.3.4 Communicative alignment: the shape of compliance.

Given this well-ordered but imprecise time-frame, our major claim here will be that taking 11:25–30 as an implicated premise for this speech-complex sets the basic two-fold shape of present compliance: first, to believe and accept God’s control of revelation and response (cf. 11:25–27); second, to ensure that one has responded appropriately (cf. 11:28–30). The first of these is the emphasis of the speech-complex. The narrative context is focused on mixed responses to Jesus and his proclamation of the kingdom, with stories of mixed or poor responses in the two “family” incidents that bracket the speech-complex in 12:46–50 and 13:53–58. Both involve a failure to recognize Jesus’ heavenly “family connections” — i.e. his Sonship. Matthew has already claimed that as Son, Jesus shares the revelation of the kingdom with his Father (10:25–27). Within the speech-complex, the use of parables and the narrative to-and-fro between public proclamation and private instruction then illustrate Jesus’ control over the revelation of the kingdom. This corresponds to the imagery within the parables themselves, which give something of a divine, “apocalyptic” perspective on the revelation or “uncovering” of the kingdom, and the separation of responses. The second aspect of compliance has been so clearly stated in 11:28–30 that Matthew does not need to re-state it here quite so explicitly. If a reader comes to accept (“hear,” 13:9, 43) that the separation of responses is as Jesus claims it is, with consequences at the future judgment, then it is strongly implicit that compliance will entail ensuring one is on the right side of the separation, and that it is worth undertaking a high cost to be there.

How this may be inferred from the different sections of the speech-complex will be outlined in what follows.


In its unexplained state as given to the crowd (13:3–9), the parable of the sower illustrates a single activity (sowing) resulting in a four-fold separation of outcomes. However, the separation is only initially four-fold: at the conclusion it is two-fold — the first three situations
have resulted in failure and only the fourth in success. The aside in 3:10–17 also indicates a two-fold separation: into those who have been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven and those who have not been given this (13:11). Some are kept from what is being revealed, as they were with respect to the proclamation of Isaiah (13:14–15; cf. Isa 6:9–10). The explanation in 13:18–23 then connects this kind of separation back to the parable. The seed in the parable is taken to be “the word of the kingdom” (ο λόγος τῆς βασιλείας) and the different soils, different kinds of hearers of this word.

Given that the revelation in 11:25–27 was ultimately under the control of the Father, readers seeking communicative alignment may infer that this is also true here. The two instances of δέδοται in 13:11 are therefore likely to be taken as divine passives. Thus, although the responses to the proclamation of the kingdom may seem scattered and uncertain — sometimes promising but then finally disappointing — the aside in 13:10–17 makes it clear that behind this lies Jesus’ divinely mandated authority to give the secrets of the kingdom of heaven to some and to withhold them from others. That is, Matthew (through Jesus’ words) is claiming once again that prevalent “kingdom-blindness” should not result in a reduction of confidence either in Jesus, the kingdom he is proclaiming or in the necessity to proclaim it.

A warranted inference from this material is that Jesus is at least in part describing his own kingdom proclamation, of which speaking the parable in 13:3–9 was one instance. However, given that Jesus has already begun to expand the proclaiming of the kingdom to others (10:7), it seems warranted to extend what he says to all proclamation of the kingdom. Just as God has been operative through Isaiah (13:14–15) and is now operative through the proclamation of the Son/Servant, so he may be operative through others. This includes Matthew’s proclamation of the kingdom in this very Gospel. As we noted in section 2.3.2, readers or hearers who reach some degree of communicative alignment with Matthew are then repre-

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27 For example, Luz observes that for the Reformers, “the parable becomes a comfort for preachers who might despair at the success of their sowing.” Luz, Matthew 8–20, 240, referring to one of Luther’s sermons from 1524. Martin Luther, Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Weimar: H. Böhlau, c2000-), 15:426.
sent by the final three types of soil: they hear the word and receive it (13:20, 22, 23). Readers who attain compliance are represented only by the fourth type: they hear the word, understand it (using συνίημι) and “bear fruit” (13:23; cf. 3:8, 10; 7:19; 12:33).

In 11:25–30, the control of Father and Son over the revelation of the kingdom (11:25–27) led automatically to the explicit exhortation of 11:28–30. That Matthew wants readers seeking communicative alignment to infer a similar exhortation here is implicit in the details he provides for the second and third types of soil. These are what compliant readers must avoid: first, fear of “tribulation or persecution” (θλίψις ἡ διωγμός, 13:21; cf. 10:21–23; 24:9–14); and, second, “the anxious concerns of the age and the deceitfulness of riches” (ἡ μέριμνα τοῦ αἰῶνος καὶ ἡ ἀπάτη τοῦ πλοῦτου, 13:22; cf. 6:19–24; 19:16–23; 23:25).

13:24–43.

In its unexplained state as given to the crowd (13:24–30), the parable of the tares describes a two-fold distinction between good seed sown by a man in a field and tares (ζίζάνια, 13:25) sown by his enemy. However, only at the harvest and not before may they be separated (13:30). The kingdom may be compared to this, says Jesus (13:24). It may also be compared to the smallest of seeds sowed in a field becoming a tree (13:31–32) or leaven placed in wheat flour becoming fully leavened dough (13:33). According to Matthew, what Jesus is doing here is revealing what has previously been hidden concerning the kingdom (13:34–35; cf. Ps 77:2 LXX, 78:2 ENG) — a process comparable to what Asaph does with the history of Israel in Psalm 78, but now completing that testimony. However, as before, the revelation is selective, and only the disciples are given more (13:36–43; cf. 13:12). This clarifies that the sower in the parable of the tares is the Son of Man, the field is the world, the good seed represents the “sons of the kingdom” and the harvest is the final separating judgment at the end of the age. Again, the final exhortation is ὁ ἔχον ὅτα ἀκούετω (13:43).

Readers seeking communicative alignment may infer from all this that, once again, Matthew wants to address a lack of confidence in the promise of the kingdom. The co-existence of evil or evil people in the world alongside the good is neither evidence against the kingdom nor against the separating judgment associated with it: evil shall be dealt with in due
time (13:40–43). The apparent insignificance of the proclamation of the kingdom or the patchy response to it is also not evidence against the future reality of the kingdom. The kingdom is like something unnoticeable becoming fully grown or widespread (13:31–33). However, it may be inferred once again that it is imperative to get on the right side of the separation. This is especially implicit in 13:40–43, where the consequences are spelled out in graphic detail.


The final three parables are part of the special revelation to the disciples in private. The parables of the treasure and pearl both describe someone discovering something of great value and consequently undergoing high cost to possess it. The parable of the net describes gathering a mixed supply of fish and sorting into good and bad. Jesus immediately explains this as a similitude of the final separating judgment; what he says summarises the climax of the explanation of the parable of the tares (13:39b–43). There is then a final exchange between Jesus and his disciples (13:51–52), asserting Jesus’ success in bringing understanding. This brings Jesus to compare the “scribe made a disciple for the kingdom of heaven” (γραμματεύς μαθητεύεις τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν) with a hospitable householder bringing out of his storehouse both new things and old. 28

Readers seeking communicative alignment may infer from all this that Matthew is doing something similar to what he has done at the end of the other major speeches in the Gospel, especially that in Matthew 5–7 (7:13–27). That is, he is presenting as clearly as possible the final options for the future: one is hugely valuable, worth giving everything for (13:44–46); the other is unimaginably terrible and real (13:49–50). In processing the parables of the pearl and treasure, we do not have to choose between them being concerned to convey

28 Luz suggests that γραμματεύς should here be taken in an open, nontechnical sense as one who is “biblically literate.” Luz, Matthew 8–20, 286. BDAG, s.v., suggests an “interpreter of teaching connected with the ministry of Jesus.” Translating τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν as a dative of advantage (“made a disciple for the kingdom of heaven’) better suggests the sense of service implied by the comparison with a hospitable householder. Alternatively, one could translate the phrase as a dative of relation (simply, “made a disciple of the kingdom of heaven”).
the value of the kingdom or the cost of discipleship. They function to convey both, and the latter relates to the former — the value of the kingdom making the cost worthwhile.

It is then possible to infer from the final exchange (13:51–52) that Matthew wants his compliant readers to reflect on what Jesus has been doing in the speech-complex as a whole. *Consistent with his Servant mandate*, he has been bringing comfort, confidence and strengthened commitment by showing that the new things of the kingdom realise what was known of old (e.g. 13:16–17, 34–35). His claim, building on that in 11:25–27, has been that what he has been doing is consistent with a divine control of the selective revelation of the kingdom: both negatively (13:11–15, expanding the pattern of Isa 6:9–10) and positively (13:34–35, expanding the pattern of Psalm 78). The efficacy of his instruction to these disciples is implied by the positive answer in 13:51 to the question “Do you understand all these things?” (συνήκατε ταῦτα πάντας). From the final similitude in 13:52, compliant readers can infer that Jesus wants this way of *serving* the sons of the kingdom to act as a model for the “scribe made a disciple for the kingdom of heaven.”

5.3.5 *Convergence to compliance.*

By dealing with possible counter-evidence to the nearness of the kingdom, Matthew is dealing with potential barriers to compliance. Readers or hearers who are wavering in their convictions in the face of widespread unresponsiveness may thereby be persuaded to reinterpret the evidence in the light of the selective divine revelation of the kingdom.

As we have seen before, the warnings of punishment and promises of rewards connected to the future separating judgment motivate the deep processing of this speech-complex, and this may be sufficient in itself to persuade compliance. Here, however, this is expressed in a rich diversity of imagery — some quite graphic. The one who fails to hear and understand is compared to seed being “devoured” (κατεσθιοῦ, 13:4) or young plants being “scorched” (καυματίζω, 13:6) or “choked” (πνίγω, 13:7). The “sons of the evil one” in opposition to Jesus (οἱ νἱοὶ τοῦ πανηγοῦ, 13:38; who are τὰ σκάνδαλα and οἱ ποιοῦντες τὴν ἀνομίαν, 13:41) are compared to tares that are gathered, bound and burned (13:30). In that place there will be the “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (ὁ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὁ βρυγμὸς τῶν
όδόντων, 13:42, 50; cf. 8:12; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30). On the other hand, the one who hears and understand is compared to fruitful seed (13:8, 23). Such a person is blessed (μακάριος, 13:16; cf. 5:3–11; 11:6; 16:17; 24:46), more privileged than the Prophets (13:17). He or she will be vindicated when the kingdom comes (13:31–33). The sons of the kingdom will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father (13:43). They will finally possess something of incalculable value (13:44–46).

5.3.6 Authorial strategy.

As mentioned above, there is no consensus in the wider readership on the structure of the speech. However, a good case can be made for the three-fold structure suggested by Davies and Allison — not least because Matthew seems to have a habit of arranging things in threes, as we have observed before. This divides the speech into three groups, where each group subdivides into a parable presentation followed by explanation — of both individual parables and the purpose of the parables as a whole:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>First group</th>
<th>Second group</th>
<th>Third group</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Public parable:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Public parables:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Private parables:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Parable of the sower</td>
<td>Parable of the tares</td>
<td>Parable of the treasure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13:23–3</td>
<td>13:45–6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parable of the mustard seed</td>
<td>Parable of the pearl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13:33</td>
<td>13:47–8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parable of the leaven</td>
<td>Parable of the net</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Private purpose and interpretation:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Private purpose and interpretation:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Private purpose and interpretation:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the parables</td>
<td>Purpose of parables part II</td>
<td>Interpretation of the net</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanation of the sower</td>
<td>Interpretation of the tares</td>
<td>Purpose of parables part III</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The narrative structure within this — alternating between public proclamation and private explanation — allows Matthew to reinforce the relationship between the general proclamation of the kingdom and the selective revelation of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven.29

29 This “alternation of audiences” is noted by John Paul Heil, “Narrative Progression of the Parables Discourse in Matthew 13:1–51,” in Matthew’s Parables: Audience-Orientated Perspectives (Warren Carter and John Paul Heil; CBQMS 30; Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1998), 64–95. However, Heil does not draw many conclusions from his observation.
Dividing the parables into three groups like this allows Matthew to have a progression, building confidence step by step. Thus the first group deals with a basic lack of confidence given mixed responses to the kingdom proclamation, the second group encourages confidence in final vindication and the third group encourages confidence in the relative value of the kingdom.

Matthew is thus building on the decision-structure we have seen implied by earlier speeches (sections 4.6.7 and 4.8.6), reinforcing the kinds of consequences that will obtain in the future. However, he is also giving a somewhat different perspective, focussing not just on individual or group choices, but placing them in a wider context, where each decision-maker has choices being made around her. As we raised in section 2.2.4 and applied to our discussion of 11:25–27 above (section 5.2), the danger is that observing poor responses can lead to a negative “informational cascade.” The more people respond negatively, the more those observing them may conclude that there must be some good reason for the negative response. Jesus’ claim here in the parable of the sower, for example, is that far from being evidence of greater knowledge or understanding, poor responses are part of the deeper cosmic struggle between God and ó πονηρός (“the evil one,” 13:19; cf. 13:38), or are made from lack of nerve under persecution or anxiety (13:20–22). As in 11:25–27, there is also the suggestion of some sort of divine control over the revelation of the kingdom (13:11–17).

As before, we can argue that Matthew is emphasising depth of compliance over the width of the compliant group. As with the Genealogy (1:1–17) and the Beatitudes (5:3–10), Matthew sets a high processing cost, selecting for those who think that cost worthwhile. The targeting of readers is even more explicit here, with Jesus linking his speaking in parables to the selective revelation of the secrets of the kingdom. However, also as before, the cost is not set impossibly high. It is possible for anyone “with ears” to make sense of the parables, and Matthew allows extensive access to Jesus’ private explanations to help with this.

5.3.7 Continuation.

These are not, of course, the final parables in the Gospel. Parables play a significant negative role in the Temple disputation of 21:23–22:46, and a significant positive role in the second
half of the final speech to the disciples in 24:36–25:46. The parables in the Temple build on the parables of tares and net to emphasise the judgment coming on those who have responded poorly to the nearness of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus does not use them to hide his verdict: the chief priests and the Pharisees perceive that he is speaking about them (21:45). Rather, the function seems to be more to expose the rightness of the judgment to the observer. The parables in 24:36–25:46 are, like those here in 13:44–50, private parables to the disciples. They build on the issue of the imprecise nearness of the kingdom by emphasising both the vigilance and diligence necessary for those who eagerly await it (see below, section 6.3).

Mark Saucy claims that Matthew 13 marks a turning point in the narrative, being Jesus’ reaction to his rejection in Matthew 11–12 and a distinct change in direction. In the parables “the kingdom originally proclaimed as ‘near’ became far.”30 We argued above that it is not warranted to infer such a conclusion from the parables alone. We shall also be arguing against it in what follows. That is, we shall argue that having adopted Daniel’s kingdom language from the beginning of the Gospel, the progression of its plot requires Matthew to focus down on the agent associated with the kingdom’s arrival: the Son of Man. The question of the nearness of the kingdom is then subsumed under the question of the timing of the coming of the Son of Man. Matthew has already suggested that this will be a near event in 10:23 and will say so again in 16:28 and (possibly) 26:64. On the other hand, there are elements of the final speech in Matthew 24 and 25 that suggest an event further in the future.31 It will be a major claim in what follows that Matthew does, however, resolve the timing of this event before the end of the Gospel.

That the disciples claim understanding at the end of the speech-complex in Matthew 13 (13:51) might seem puzzling in the coming narrative given the frequent lack of understanding they exhibit. Jesus does not explicitly confirm their self-assessment, but he does not deny it either. Matthew seems to be using σωθήνω for what the disciples should understand from Jesus’ instruction (cf. his use in 16:12; 17:13). This then becomes the basis of what the


31 Indeed, already Jesus has suggested some might die before the event takes place — 10:28; cf. 24:9.
post-resurrection reader should take back to their situation. Nevertheless it is also important within the disciples’ story-line that they exhibit limited perception and understanding (e.g. 15:16; 16:9, 11 — using άπονετος and, negated, νοεω) — something which can only be properly addressed after Jesus’ resurrection.

Jesus finishes with an implicit encouragement for biblically literate people who have come to an understanding of the kingdom (the “scribe made a disciple for the kingdom of heaven”) to copy the way he has served within the speech-complex as he has brought confidence in the newly revealed secrets of the kingdom relative to older revelation and expectation (13:52). This is made explicit in the final verse of the Gospel, as the disciples are fully incorporated into his Servant program for the nations, and sent out in part to teach (28:20).

5.4 Matthew 14:1–16:20

The section 14:1–16:20 continues the focus we have seen since 11:1 on negative responses to Jesus and his kingdom proclamation. We shall end the analysis at 16:20. Although this may lie in the middle of the exchange at Caesarea Philippi that runs from 16:13–28, we shall see that Peter’s confession in 16:16 (building on that in 14:33) does seem to resolve the story of the disciples from 14:1 — at least partially. Moreover, 16:21 begins a new focus on the coming events in Jerusalem: the first of three such predictions (the others being at 17:22–23 and 20:17–19). It may also be, as many have suggested, that Matthew inserts ἀπὸ τότε ἤργατο (16:21; cf. 4:17) to make the division clear.32

5.4.1 A claim concerning communicative equilibrium.

The claim here is that Matthew wants all his compliant readers to believe, to see the rationality of belief, the offensiveness of unbelief and the importance of continuing to serve despite unbelief. He also wants them to be aware in themselves and others of the difficulty of belief. As before, these are beliefs concerning Jesus, the nearness of the kingdom and the nature of kingdom blessings. In this, he is continuing to encourage a dissociation from a poor response

32 Following Kingsbury, Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom, 7–25.
to Jesus and a movement away from the little-faith of the disciples noted at 6:30 and 8:26 — exposed even more clearly here at 14:31 and 16:8. Matthew’s compositional strategy is, over three cycles (14:1–21; 15:1–28 and 16:1–12), to pair a prominent example of unbelief with a withdrawal or departing of Jesus, followed by Servant ministry that involves the disciples much more than previously and should evoke faith.

Readers seeking communicative alignment may infer that Matthew is trying to persuade them that unbelief is offensive through the examples of Herod and other establishment figures (official and lay): scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees. That (extraordinary) belief is possible may be inferred especially from the encounter with the Canaanite woman in 15:21–28. That there is sufficient evidence to warrant belief is apparent from the deeds performed by Jesus, especially the two feeding miracles. But that belief is difficult is very apparent in the slowness and little-faith of the disciples throughout the whole section.

5.4.2 Expansion and further argument.
The claim is thus that Matthew has arranged this material in three cycles, followed by Peter’s “confession” (16:13–20):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unbelief</th>
<th>14:1–12 Herod</th>
<th>15:1–20 Pharisees and scribes</th>
<th>16:1–4 Pharisees and Sadducees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal</td>
<td>14:13 Withdrawal</td>
<td>15:21 Withdrawal</td>
<td>16:4 Departure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the first cycle (14:1–36), readers seeking communicative alignment may infer that Matthew wants them to be offended by unbelief from the story of Herod and the death of John the Baptist. That Herod does not believe is clear from his interpreting Jesus’ miracles as empowered
by the ghost of John (14:2). That unbelief is worthy of judgment is clear from the flashback in 14:3–12. Herod is depicted as lawless (in his marriage and imprisonment of John), fearful, manipulated by immoral influences and, finally, culpable in a particularly squalid murder.

Readers seeking communicative alignment may then infer from Jesus’ withdrawal in 14:13 the importance of continuing to serve with compassion despite such dangerous unbelief. They may infer that belief is warranted from the healing miracles in 14:14 and 14:34–36, the feeding of the five thousand in 14:15–21 and Jesus’ walking on water in 14:25. The feeding of the five thousand stands in particular contrast to Herod’s feast in 14:6–12. As with the other miracles, Jesus seems to be giving a proleptic demonstration of future blessings, but this time on a very large scale. They can infer that Matthew is targeting little-faith from the story of Peter in 14:28–33. Peter shows some initial faith in getting out onto the water, but then wavers when he sees the wind (14:30). As he saves Peter, Jesus rebukes his doubt and, as the wind ceases, evokes an expression of faith: “Truly you are [the] Son of God” (ὑληθοζο θεο ιωζ ει, 14:33).

In the second cycle (15:1–39), readers seeking communicative alignment may infer that Matthew wants them to be “offended” by unbelief (here: a defilement of the heart, 15:18)

33 Compare the Pharisees in 9:34 and 12:24, who also ascribe the miracles to the power of the underworld. Matthew does not say anything explicit on how Herod thinks the dead and beheaded John the Baptist is connected to the miracles. However, Peter Bolt supplies a number of examples from ancient magical material where the language of “raising” is used of magicians reanimating corpses for spectacular performances. By saying that John has been “raised,” Herod is using similar language. Commenting on the parallel in Mark 6:14–29, Bolt adds that “A beheaded man, as a βιοοθανατοζ, would make a powerful ghost and would be highly sought after by the magicians. An άκιφαλος may have been an additional sub-category of useful ghosts.” Bolt, Jesus’ Defeat of Death, 188–92. Further examples (including pictures!) are provided by K. Preisendanz, “Acephalos,” in RAC, vol. 1, 211–16.

34 Terence Donaldson describes this as an “unresolved” flashback, because the next incident (beginning in 14:13) follows from John’s death rather than Herod’s statement in 14:2. Donaldson explores the idea that by leaving Herod’s interest in Jesus’ identity (tied to John) “hanging” and unresolved, the reader is better prepared for the focus on Jesus’ identity in 16:13–20 and 17:1–13 — both of which also refer to John. Terence L. Donaldson, “For Herod Had Arrested John” (Matt 14:3): Making Sense of an Unresolved Flashback, Studies in Religion 28, no. 1 (1999): 35, 43–48.

35 Compare Schweitzer, The Quest of the Historical Jesus, 374: “Because He is the future Messiah, this meal becomes without their knowledge the Messianic feast. With the morsel of bread which He gives his disciples to distribute to the people He consecrates them as partakers in the coming Messianic feast, and gives them the guarantee that they, who shared His table in the time of His obscurity, would also share it in the time of His glory.”
from the disputation with the Pharisees and scribes and its aftermath in 15:1–20. They may infer that the Pharisees and scribes do not believe from (at least) Jesus quoting Isa 29:13 LXX: “but their heart is far from me” (15:8). They may infer that such unbelief is worthy of judgment from the images of uprooting (15:13) and falling into a hole (15:14). Moreover, following such people is to be the “blind following the blind” (15:14), and not understanding that what comes out of the heart is what defiles someone may place one in similar danger (15:15–20).

Readers seeking communicative alignment may then infer the importance of continuing to serve despite such unbelief from Jesus’ withdrawal in 15:21. They may infer that belief is warranted from the healings in 15:28 and 15:29–31, and the feeding of the four thousand in 15:32–39.\(^{36}\) They can infer that Matthew is targeting little-faith from the exchange with the Canaanite woman in 15:21–28 where, in high contrast to his earlier rebuking of Pharisees and scribes, Jesus warmly commends her faith: “O woman, great [is] your faith” (ὁ γόνατι, μεγάλη σου ἡ πίστις, 15:28).\(^{37}\)

In the third cycle (16:1–12), readers seeking communicative alignment may infer that Matthew wants them to be offended by unbelief from the exchange with the Pharisees and Sadducees in 16:1–4. That they repeat the demand made in 12:38 should, in compliant readers, evoke a feeling of exasperation given the spectacular signs of 14:13–21 and 15:32–39.\(^{38}\)

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\(^{37}\) Compare his words concerning the centurion in 8:10, παρ’ οὐδὲνι τοσαύτην πίστιν ἐν τῷ Ἰσραήλ εὑρόν — similarly in a context in which there is allusion to the eschatological banquet (8:11–12).

\(^{38}\) In some manuscripts from the fifth century onwards, the unbelief of the Pharisees and Sadducees is here described by Jesus as an inability to interpret τὰ σημάτα τῶν κυριῶν (16:3). This would accord well with our discussion of μετάνοια above (section 4.4). The external evidence against 16:2–3 is, however, very strong — although it may *just* be that they were omitted by copyists in climates such as Egypt where (apparently) “red sky in the morning does not announce rain.” Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament: A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament (Fourth Revised Edition)* (2nd ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 33.
That the unbelief deserves judgment may be inferred from the description “an evil and adulterous generation” (γενεὰ πονηρὰ καὶ μοιχαλίς) and the refusal to give a sign apart from the universal “sign of Jonah” (16:4; cf. 12:39–42, section 5.1 above).

Readers seeking communicative alignment may infer the importance of continuing to serve despite unbelief from Jesus’ departure in 16:4. They can infer that Matthew is targeting little-faith from the strong rebuke in 16:8–11, which uses the address ὀλαχόπιστοι (16:8). Belief is warranted at least from the two feeding miracles, and to fail to understand this is to succumb to the “leaven” of the Pharisees and Sadducees (16:6, 11–12).

Peter’s confession in 16:13–20 then constitutes a (partial) resolution of the narrative in 14:1–16:12 and a significant development of the plot of the Gospel as a whole.39 The narrative problem of the disciples being ὀλαχόπιστοι in 14:1–16:12 is at least partially resolved by the Father revealing the Messianic identity of Jesus to Peter (16:17).40 This is significant not just in Peter’s narrative or that of the other disciples, but in the narrative of Jesus’ Servant program as a whole. If Jesus has called the disciples to participate in his Servant mandate (4:19; 5:13–16; 10:26–27), then their little-faith stands as a significant obstacle to them fulfilling this purpose. That obstacle is broken down if little-faith can be dealt with through the revelation of the Father (16:17; cf. 11:25–27; 13:11). Peter and his confession stand as a visible (concrete!) example of this principle, and on this basis the assembly of theocentrically committed people can now grow unimpeded (16:18). It also gives Peter and those like him what they need to fulfil their purpose within Jesus’ Servant mandate and thereby to open up access to the kingdom for others (16:19b). The role of the Servant in proclaiming justice to the nations (12:18; cf. Isa 42:1) can then be fulfilled through them, as they “bind” and “loose” in accordance with the coming kingdom of heaven (16:19b; cf. 6:10; 28:20).

Matthew’s strategy across the whole of 14:1–16:20 is therefore paradoxical. On the one hand, he seems to be reducing the width of his potential compliant group to zero. Not

39 See also below on Matthew’s plot, section 7.1.
40 In the plot of 14:1–16:20, the disciples seem to forget quickly their confession “Truly you are the Son of God” in 14:33, or at least do not seem to believe it consistently. Certainly, by 16:8–11, they are as much ὀλαχόπιστοι as Peter was in 14:31 — lacking perception and understanding. We shall argue shortly that the episode in 14:28–33 also serves a wider function in the remainder of the Gospel.
even the disciples are able to perceive the kingdom. They too are affected by “kingdom-blindness.” It seems that Matthew has narrowed down the class of “true Israelites” to Jesus alone, making the inclusivity of his Servant program apparently impossible to fulfil. On the other, by placing the revelation of the kingdom ultimately under the control of the Father through the Son, he opens up the possibility of perceiving the kingdom universally. This allows the call in 11:28–29 to stand out with particular clarity to ο έχειν οίκον.

5.4.3 Continuation.

Davies and Allison note the parallels between the death of John the Baptist and that of Jesus later in the Gospel. Not only does John’s death mark the end of an important ministry — that of herald to the kingdom begun in 3:1 — it also anticipates the end (or goal) of Jesus’ ministry. Just as Jesus withdrew after John’s arrest to begin his Servant ministry (4:12), so John’s death evokes an expectation of the completion of that ministry.

There is also a remarkable correspondence in vocabulary between the feeding miracles and the Last Supper as described in 26:20–29. If, as argued above and in common with the other miracles, the feeding miracles give a proleptic experience of future blessings, then we would expect the Supper to serve a similar function — but this time on the basis of τὸ αἷμα [...] τῆς διαθήκης (26:28).

The episode on the water in 14:28–33 re-introduces Peter as a major character and representative disciple and begins a storyline which ends specifically for Peter with his weeping at 26:75. However, we can also argue that 14:28–33 prefigure the storyline of the disciples as a whole to the end of the Gospel. There are some recognisable parallels:

| Peter responds to the identity of Jesus on the water (14:28–29) | Peter responds to the identity of Jesus revealed by the Father (16:16–17) |
| Peter wavers in his trust when he “sees the wind” (14:30a) | Peter (and the other disciples) waver in their commitment in the face of tribulation (e.g. 26:56, 69–74) |

41 Davies and Allison, Matthew 8–18, 476.

42 These are listed in a table in Davies and Allison, Matthew 8–18, 481; cf. Joachim Gnilka, Das Matthäusevangelium Teil 2: Kommentar zu Kap 14,1–28,20 und Einleitungsfragen (Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament; Freiberg: Herder, 1988), 8–9.
That is, Matthew seems to be using the disciples’ storyline from this point to deal with the kind of wavering commitment and doubt that remain an impediment to participating in Jesus’ Servant program.

So although Peter’s confession at Caesarea Philippi marks a partial resolution to the problem of little-faith, there remain considerable obstacles to the disciples’ participation in the divine plan for the world. These are what Matthew will go on to address in the coming narrative. We may summarise them as an unwillingness to be served by the Servant (or to see the need for it) and an unwillingness to serve in the pattern of the Servant. These are obstacles which are shown up in sharp relief by the passion-vindication predictions that begin in 16:21 and to which we shall now turn.
Chapter 6

Matthew 16:21–28:15. Take up your cross (in the light of the coming of the Son of Man)

This may seem a large section of text to treat as a unit of analysis. However, it does have a recognisable thematic unity. It begins with a prediction of Jesus’ suffering, death and resurrection and ends with the realization of that promise in historical events. We shall be arguing that Matthew is claiming that this is how Jesus fulfils that part of Isaiah’s Servant program peculiar to himself. Moreover, he does so as the Danielic Son of Man, such that his completion of the task can be described as a vindication which establishes the victory of God’s kingdom over every rival.

Nevertheless, Matthew constantly has in mind the extension of the Servant mandate to Jesus’ disciples. We shall be arguing that Matthew sets this up in the section structured around the three passion predictions, before Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem (16:21–20:34). The disciples are called to depend upon and follow in the pattern of the Servant which Jesus is setting by denying themselves and “taking up their crosses” (16:24). This call is motivated by the coming, separating judgment (16:25–27), which is in turn connected to the “coming of the Son of Man” (16:28). We shall then argue that the narrative from 21:1–28:15 is concerned not only with the fulfilment of Jesus’ particular Servant task, but also with relating the events described in Jerusalem to the future judgment and the “coming of the Son of Man” event. Using the terminology we introduced in section 4.3, we shall describe that event as “temporally resolved” by the narrative. This will then support the central exhortation outlined in the speech of chapters 24–25 to be undiverted in Servant-like faithfulness in the expectation of vindication to come.
6.1 Matthew 16:21–20:34 (including the third general exhortation in 16:24 and the fourth major speech-complex in 18:1–35)

The three passion-vindication predictions (16:21; 17:22–23; 20:17–19) and their aftermaths span this section, followed by a final double healing (20:29–34). The section includes the third general exhortation in the Gospel: “if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself [ἀπαρνησόμεθα ἑαυτῶν], take up his cross [ἀράτω τὸν σταυρόν] and follow me [ἀκολουθείω μοι]” (16:24). It also contains the fourth of Jesus’ major speech-complexes in the Gospel, in chapter 18. In a departure from our previous practice, we shall not be separating out the analysis of these components in what follows. The exhortation in 16:24 and the speech in chapter 18 are so integrated with the argument as a whole that there will be gains from analysing the section as one piece.¹

6.1.1 A claim concerning communicative equilibrium.

Matthew wants compliant readers first to begin to accept the necessity of Jesus giving his life for others (as Isaian Servant) but also the certainty of his vindication in so doing (as Danielic Son of Man). Where this fits into the temporal framework he is building is left imprecise. Nevertheless, he then wants to emphasise the necessity of following a derivative pattern to the one Jesus is setting in order to benefit from a similar (derivative) vindication. In particular, this will involve a humble, dependent, servant-hearted attitude that he shows to be sorely missing in the disciples at this stage in the narrative. He wants compliant readers to accept that this attitude should be expressed across a range of familiar situations, but also that it does not come easily. Indeed, it can only come from being incorporated into what Jesus is doing.

Readers seeking communicative alignment may infer the necessity of his death and the certainty of his vindication from the three passion-vindication predictions that dominate

this section (16:21; 17:22–23; 20:17–19), but also from the account of the Transfiguration (17:1–8) and the final purpose statement of 20:28. They may infer the necessity of following a derivative pattern to the one Jesus is setting most explicitly from the exhortation in 16:24 and the explanation which follows (16:25–28). However, this necessity is repeated in various ways throughout the section. The current distance of the disciples from this pattern is also apparent throughout. What the pattern will entail in concrete situations can be inferred most obviously from the case studies which run from 17:24–20:16. Despite the slowness of the disciples, the possibility of following the Servant pattern is suggested at the beginning, middle and end — at the Transfiguration and following (17:1–20), in the exchange in 19:23–30 and in the final purpose statement and double miracle (20:28 and 20:29–34). It is at least implied that this is made possible by Jesus’ work as Servant.

6.1.2 Expansion and further argument.

The claim is thus that Matthew has again arranged his material in three cycles:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First cycle</th>
<th>Second cycle</th>
<th>Third cycle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16:21</td>
<td>17:22–23</td>
<td>20:17–19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First passion-vindication prediction</td>
<td>Second passion-vindication prediction</td>
<td>Third passion-vindication prediction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchange with disciples: the Servant paradigm spelled out</td>
<td>Case studies raised by Peter and the other disciples, ending with a parable</td>
<td>Exchange with disciples: the Servant paradigm repeated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Transfiguration and aftermath</td>
<td>Case studies raised by others, ending with a parable</td>
<td>A double healing from blindness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Although these are frequently described as “passion predictions” it is important to recognise that these are predictions of suffering, death and resurrection. Jesus also uses the title Son of Man here, which Matthew is increasingly associating with the future vindication suggested by the phrase “the coming of the Son of Man.” (Readers familiar with Daniel will also thereby infer a link to the victory of God’s kingdom.) It is thus better to describe them as “passion-vindication predictions.”
That Jesus is also continuing to imply the coming fulfilment of his Servant mandate is most obvious in 20:28, where he explicitly says that giving up his life will be in order “to serve” (διακονήσομαι). However, readers familiar with Isaiah may also infer the fourth Servant song as an implicated premise. There is certainly some correspondence in vocabulary — especially that of being “given over” (παραδίδομαι, 17:22; 20:18–19; cf. Isa 53:6, 12 LXX). Readers familiar with the LXX of Daniel will also know that παραδίδομαι is well used there. Especially important is its use in Dan 7:25 LXX, where it is used to describe the tribulation (“wearing down,” καταπταθω) of “the holy ones of the Most High,” before their kingdom-vindication described in Dan 7:26–27. Once again, it seems that Matthew has the simultaneous fulfilment of the Isaian Servant program and Daniel’s kingdom-vindication program in mind.

Jesus does not explicitly say anything here about his own passion-vindication that allows us to relate it closely to the other features in the developing temporal framework. However, the description of his own tribulation-vindication seems slightly detached from the framework and the general pattern of tribulation-vindication already established. It is certainly not strongly connected. But Matthew will have much more to say on these things in what follows.


Following the first passion-vindication prediction, Peter exposes his distance from the pattern being set by Jesus by rebuking it altogether (16:22). This sparks off the second major crisis in the Gospel. The first crisis, beginning at 11:1 (see above, section 5.1) was partially resolved by Peter’s confession in 16:16. The crisis now is that Peter does not want a Christ who conforms to the tribulation-vindication pattern in 16:21.

That this is indeed opposing the Servant mandate Jesus took on at his baptism can be inferred from Jesus’ reply in 16:23. In saying ὅποτε ὅπιστο μου, σατανᾶ, Jesus is suggesting that Peter is in opposition to that mandate much as Satan himself opposed it in 4:1–11, just after Jesus was given it.
So in 16:24 Jesus expands on the consequences of his own passion-vindication prediction. It is also necessary for those coming after him to follow in this pattern. He has, of course, already said this — both implicitly in the speech of Matthew 5–7 (e.g. in the Beatitudes) and more explicitly in the speech of Matthew 10. Indeed, 16:24 simply extends 10:38, turning a conditional statement into a (third person) imperative. Jesus adds the parallel imperative ἀπαρνησάσθω ἐαυτόν (“let him deny himself,” following LSJ, s.v. ἀπαρνέομαι; cf. Peter’s denial of Jesus in 26:34–35, 75). This reinforces the sense of self abrogation we argued with respect to 10:38 (section 4.8.4 above).

The explanation in 16:25–28 repeats the pattern of 10:39 (“The one who finds his life will lose it and the one who loses his life because of me will find it”) and then expands it. Readers seeking communicative alignment can infer the same basic temporal framework that we saw back there. There is now: the time of either saving one’s life or losing it for Jesus’ sake (16:25). At this time one may even gain ὁ κόσμος ὁ λος (16:26; cf. 4:8–9). And there is later: the time of losing or finding one’s life at the final, separating judgment. As in 13:41–43 and 13:49–50, this is linked with the Son of Man enacting the judgment through his angels (16:27). As in 10:23, Jesus suggests this will be seen sometime soon (16:28). Putting all this together also summarizes the basic decision structure we have seen across the speech-complexes so far.

Drawing the decision-structure to highlight its relation to the relevant parts of the temporal framework gives something like this:
The vertical axis is the path of the Servant. This is the path Jesus claims he must follow, and his disciples must follow after him. It is the path of humility, suffering service and dependence, but it leads to vindication and life (cf. 7:14), an event associated with “the Son of Man coming in his kingdom” (16:28). The alternative path does not lead to life (cf. 7:13).


Readers seeking communicative alignment may infer the claimed certainty of Jesus’ death and vindication from the account of the Transfiguration and its aftermath in several ways. It presents Jesus as a new and greater Moses, a role which we have been arguing is to some extent subsumed under his Servant mandate (beginning at section 3.3 above). The vision as a whole suggests the glorification of Jesus, especially if the allusions to Moses are recognized.

However, the context suggests it is a vision of a future glory: it illustrates the claim that the Son of Man is going to come ἐν τῇ δόξῃ τοῦ πατρός (16:27) and Jesus suggests the vision will only make sense after the Son of Man is vindicated by being raised from the dead (17:9). The voice from the cloud (17:5) strongly recalls the voice in 3:17, reproducing exactly οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ νιός μου ὃ ἀγαπητός, ἐν ὧ εὐδόκησα — and suggesting similar connections to Matthew’s paraphrase of the Isaian Servant text at 12:18 (cf. Isa 42:1). The filial relationship being claimed implies that the present imperative “listen to him” (ἀκούετε οὗτοῖ) has general application. However, this means that the most recent failure to listen is certainly covered. This was a failure to see the necessity of Jesus’ passion-vindication (16:22). Putting these observations together, an accessible inference from 17:5 is then that, by divine confirmation, the passion-vindication of the Son is necessary for the completion of the Servant mandate given to him at his baptism.

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2 Compare Davies and Allison, Matthew 8–18, 685–89.
3 The LXX of Exod 34:29 reads, referring to Moses coming down from the mountain, δεδόξασται ὁ ὄψις τοῦ χρώματος τοῦ προσόπου αὐτοῦ.
4 Section 4.3 above. Compare Davies and Allison, Matthew 8–18, 686: “With whom I am well pleased’ occurs in the narrative of Jesus’ baptism, but originally it is from Isa 42.1, where it refers to the suffering servant of Deutero-Isaiah. Matthew appears to have added the phrase in order to signify Jesus as the one who is destined to bring his law to the nations (Isa 42.4).”
5 For example, the imperative will apply to Jesus’ extended instruction in the discourses.
Finally, Jesus links the necessity of his coming suffering to the pattern set by his prophetic herald, John the Baptist (17:10–13).

The current distance of the disciples from this pattern is apparent in those on the mountain and those at its base. The extreme fear exhibited by Peter, James and John on the mountain with Jesus (implied in 17:4 and explicit in 17:6) suggests they simply do not know what to make of it. The impotence of the other disciples at the base of the mountain apart from Jesus suggests they are not yet participating in his Servant ministry. Jesus makes it clear in his rebuke that their little-faith remains an obstacle (17:16, 20).

However, the possibility of following the Servant pattern some time in the future is suggested here by the very fact that Jesus invites Peter, James and John to witness the vision on the mountain and expects them to relate it to others after he has been raised (17:9). Moreover, Jesus asserts that if the disciples were to have even the smallest belief, what is currently impossible for them will no longer be so (17:20).

17:24–18:35.

Following the second passion-vindication prediction, the disciples continue to expose their lack of understanding of the pattern being set by Jesus in their “distress” at what he has said (17:23b). Nevertheless, Matthew continues to detail what following the pattern will entail in concrete situations.

Readers encountering the phrase καὶ ἐγένετο ὁ Ἱησοῦς τοῦ Ἰησοῦς τούτους in 19:1 are likely to recall the similar expressions used after previous major speech-complexes in the Gospel (cf. 7:28; 11:1; 13:53). However, although what they have just read is similarly speech from Jesus comprised of a number of sayings and covering a range of related topics, it is a great deal shorter than the previous examples and it is perhaps less obvious where it begins. Moreover, as already noted, it is in a section of the Gospel conditioned by the three passion-vindication predictions and their implications.

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6 While almost all studies take the speech or discourse to start at 18:1, there is a case for including 17:24–27. That way, we get two exchanges with Peter forming an inclusion around the question and extended answer in 18:1–20 — with the final exchange (18:21–22) prompting a parable (18:23–35). 17:24–27 is also linked to what follows by the catchword σκονδαλίζω (17:27; cf. 18:6, 8, 9).
In the context of these passion-vindication predictions, Jesus is here returning to a number of issues first raised in the speech in chapters 5–7. We argued earlier that the ethical case studies in 5:21–48 expanded and applied (especially) Beatitudes five through seven, which promised blessing for the merciful (5:7), the pure in heart (5:8) and the peacemaker (5:9). These character qualities are likewise applied here first through the exhortation not to cause “stumbling” (σκανδαλίζω; cf. 5:29–30) — either in others (17:24–27; 18:5–7) or oneself (18:8–9). The instruction on dealing with sin in 18:15–20 likewise emphasises a merciful, peacemaking attitude which aims to restrain the damaging community impact of sin and to effect reconciliation (cf. 5:23–24). Finally, of course, Peter’s question in 18:21 explicitly raises the issue of the application of mercy and the forgiveness of sins (cf. 6:12, 14–15). That Jesus returns to such issues reinforces our earlier conclusion that his first major speech left many things unresolved. Moreover, as before, the question we are left with is not so much, “How is this behaviour possible,” but rather, “How is the humble dependency and trust that makes this behaviour possible, possible?” (cf. section 4.6.6 above).

Indeed, the current distance of the disciples from the Servant pattern Jesus has outlined in the Gospel so far is apparent most of all from their question in 18:1, concerning who is “greatest” in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus’ immediate response to this suggests the disciples have not yet seen the necessity of humility (18:2–4). He uses a child to illustrate this: probably, a picture of dependent need — as in the first four Beatitudes (5:3–6). Just as those Beatitudes articulated the paradox that the needy are blessed, so here — the humble are “greatest” (18:4). Moreover, recalling the “test of worthiness” at the end of Jesus’ second major speech (10:40–42), how one treats and responds to such people — whether one recognises their value in the eyes of the Father — is in itself significant (18:5, 10–14). This undergirds the warning in 18:6 and the encouragement to seek reconciliation in 18:15–20.

If there is a new situational aspect to the principles Jesus is revisiting, it is on the implications for community life in 18:15–20, where the final decision to treat someone “as a

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7 See above, section 4.6.5. Recall that the inability to show mercy exhibited by the Pharisees in the two “Sabbath” miracles of 12:1–14 placed them in direct opposition to Jesus (12:14).
Gentile and a tax collector” (i.e. outside a relationship with the Father) lies with the ἐκκλησία. This illustrates the dependent, incorporated Servanthood Jesus is calling his followers to. Those within the ἐκκλησία are given the Servant role of bringing κρίσις (cf. 12:18; Isa 42:1 and see above on 16:19, section 5.4). But this is not an independent justice: it is incorporated into, and derivative of, the justice of heaven — what they “bind” and “loose” on earth will be “bound” and “loosed” in heaven (18:18). Moreover, this Servant role is enacted within the presence of the Servant himself (18:20; cf. 1:23 and, especially, 28:20). That Jesus promises this suggests at least the possibility of following the Servant pattern some time in the future, even if the disciples are currently incapable of it.

According to Luz, it is customary to describe this speech as the “Discourse on the Church.” Given the new community-focused aspect, this is perhaps understandable, so long as one remembers that its scope is actually wider than that, contributing to the broad sweep of narrative in 16:21–20:34 concerned with the difficulty of “taking up one’s cross” and following Jesus. That is, the most significant aspect of the speech may lie in its location within the narrative framed by Jesus’ passion-vindication predictions. This may well imply that the current distance of the disciples from the Servant pattern they are being called to is connected to their lack of understanding of those predictions. Once that lack of understanding is addressed by the passion-vindication itself, the possibility of following the Servant pattern is opened up (see below on 28:16–20, section 7.4).


Readers seeking communicative alignment may infer the necessity of following a derivative pattern to the one Jesus is setting as he continues to return to a number of issues first raised in the foundational speech on participating in his Servant program in chapters 5–7. These are divorce and marriage (19:1–12; cf. 5:31–32) and money and wealth (19:16–22; cf. 6:19–24). Jesus also continues to maintain the necessity of receiving the promise of the kingdom of

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8 Compare Pennington, Heaven and Earth, 210: “as the church awaits the kingdom, they are given doctrinal and ecclesial authority on earth that receives sanction from heaven (16:19; 18:18–19).”

9 However, Luz himself prefers “community discourse.” Luz, Matthew 8–20, 423.
heaven with dependent humility. As before (18:2–4), he uses the image of a child to illustrate this, but now adds the catch-phrase: “many who are first will be last, and the last first” (19:30; cf. 20:16) — a re-expression of the explanation we saw at 16:25 (cf. 10:39). One implication of “the last will be first” is expanded into a parable in 20:1–16. However, whereas the case studies in 17:24–18:35 were raised by Peter and the other disciples, these are raised by others: Pharisees (19:3), children (19:13) and a young man (19:16).

Without agreeing with all his conclusions, Warren Carter may therefore be right to suggest that these episodes are chosen to cover situations of everyday “household” life. Jesus is teaching a radically more humble and servant-hearted approach to marriage (19:3–12), children (19:13–12) and the acquisition of wealth (19:16–30).

The disputation about divorce repeats and reinforces the prohibition of casual divorce in 5:31–32. It also directly exposes the hardheartedness of the Pharisees (19:8; cf. 15:3–9); their attitude can therefore have nothing to do with God’s purposes “from the beginning” (19:16–22) reinforces the warning that one cannot serve both God and μακροκοινοκοπή in 6:24. The omissions in the list of commandments in 19:18–19 are especially significant here. Jesus tests his love of God (cf. Exod 20:3–11; Deut 5:7–15; 6:5) relative to his love of possessions (cf. Exod 20:17; Deut 5:21) with a particular application (19:21) of the call to self-abnegation and following he made more generally in 16:24 (cf. 10:38). But the test is also a genuine offer. What stands as insufficient for eternal life in the young man’s commandment-keeping can be made complete (τελείος) by “denying” his possessions and following Jesus (19:21). In keeping with the development of the narrative since Matthew 7, theocentric commitment and love of God is thus expressed Christologically (cf. section 5.2 above on 11:25–30). The blessing of eternal life comes through a dependent incorporation into Jesus’ Servant program — an incorporation expressed in following his pattern of passion-vindication.11

10 Carter, Households and Discipleship, 205.
11 Compare Bornkamm, “End-Expectation and Church,” 29: “In following Jesus the perfection demanded by the law is thus fulfilled.” However, in the light of our analysis we might want to modify and expand this: “In dependently following Jesus the Servant, benefiting from and participating in his Servant program, what is fatally lacking in even the ‘best’ of the house of Israel is made complete (τελείος), fulfilling the Law and the Prophets.”

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In refusing Jesus’ offer, the young man therefore stands as an illustration of the one who “would save his life” (16:25), especially in contrast to the children in the verses preceding, who illustrate those who will find life — or, as Jesus will shortly express it, they illustrate the principle “the last will be first” (19:30). The necessity of receiving the promise of the kingdom of heaven with dependent humility is also applied and illustrated in the concluding parable (20:1–16). Quite how it does so has perplexed readers at least as far back as Chrysostom. But readers who are keeping in mind at all times the Servant program to which Jesus is calling the disciples should be able to see the connections with 19:28–29. In those verses, Jesus is moving the disciples’ focus away from their own promised blessing (although he affirms that) to the blessing of those who come after — everyone who leaves behind houses, brothers, sisters etc. will be blessed (19:29). Jesus then uses the parable to rebuke an anti-Servant attitude that focuses on personal, relative reward and opposes blessing going to others. This is preparatory to the disciples’ full incorporation into the Servant mandate for the world in 28:16–20.

The current distance of the disciples from the Servant pattern being affirmed throughout is apparent from their surprise in 19:10 and, especially, 19:25 — “Who then can be saved?” Moreover, when Peter claims that he and the other disciples have done what the young man in 19:22 refused to do, his attitude is still inadequate and needs to be corrected.

However, the future possibility of benefiting from the Servant program (which will then open up the possibility of participating in it) is suggested here by Jesus’ statement concerning entry to the kingdom of God in 19:26 — “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” He also explicitly affirms their future blessing ἐν τῇ παλιγγενεσίᾳ (“at the rebirth,” 19:28).¹⁴

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¹² For example, “What is to us the intent of this parable? For the beginning doth not harmonize with what is said at the end, but intimates altogether the contrary.” John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew (ed. Philip Schaff; NPNF 1 10; New York: Christian Literature Publishing, 1886), 64.3, 2439.

¹³ Compare Klyne Snodgrass, who says that “the parable addresses speculation about reward in comparison to others. [...] no one should begrudge God’s goodness and mercy” (his emphasis). Snodgrass, Stories with Intent, 377.

¹⁴ There is no warrant for inferring from this unusual expression (a hapax legomenon in Matthew) a different time of future blessing to the one already established in Matthew’s implied temporal framework. The term can easily be connected to the motif of resurrection throughout the Gospel.

Following the third passion-vindication prediction, the mother of the sons of Zebedee (i.e. James and John, 4:21) exposes the disciples’ continued distance from the pattern being set by Jesus by asking for privileged status for her sons in the kingdom. Jesus has just promised some sort of privileged status in 19:28 — while also warning against begrudging blessing to others. However, this request seems to go beyond that. Moreover, Jesus’ reply suggests they have not properly understood what is necessary before the blessing, in terms of suffering service.

Readers seeking communicative alignment may continue to infer the necessity of Jesus’ death and the certainty of his vindication from his phrase “the cup I am to drink” (20:22) — for which the nearest antecedent is his suffering and death in 20:18–19. Even more explicit is the purpose statement in 20:28, declaring that he has come to serve by giving his life. They may infer the necessity of following a derivative pattern to the one Jesus is setting from the question in 20:22, implicitly linking future blessing to following him in suffering and death. More explicit still is 20:26–28 which repeats the necessity of being “last” in order to be “great,” but links that strongly to the example set by the Son of Man as Servant. The current distance of all the disciples from this pattern is apparent from his need to emphasise this so strongly.

However, the possibility of following the Servant pattern is suggested here first by Jesus’ promise in 20:23 — “you will drink my cup.” It is also at least implied in 20:28 that the disjunction between the disciples’ current condition and future life (as conditioned by, e.g., 16:25) will somehow be addressed by the Son of Man giving his life as a λύτρον (“ransom”).

20:29–34.

The final double healing miracle serves a similar function to the exhortation to pray in the speech of chapters 5–7 and the πίστις responses of the suppliants in chapters 8–9, by locating the solution to the challenges that Jesus has set those who would come after him in dependency. Readers seeking communicative equilibrium should recognise the same narrative pat-
tern as the incident with the children in 19:13–15. Just as the disciples rebuked the people (ἔπτυμάω, 19:39) for bringing children to Jesus, so here the crowd rebuke the two suppliants (ἔπτυμάω, 20:31) for appealing to Jesus for mercy. Just as Jesus affirms with his hands blessing on the children (19:14–15, as representatives of the humbly dependent), so with a touch he has pity on the blind suppliants (20:32–34). In both cases, blessing depends on the humility to be served by Jesus (cf. 20:28).

6.1.3 Authorial strategy.
Matthew’s strategy is thus to recapitulate many of the ideas, themes and exhortation from earlier in the Gospel in the light of Jesus’ imminent passion-vindication. If anything, the challenge is set even higher than before. However, by placing the challenge within the framework of Jesus’ three passion-vindication predictions, and by showing the disciples to be profoundly deficient in their understanding of that event, Matthew sets the stage for a resolution based on that event in the narrative to come.

6.1.4 Continuation.
Davies and Allison observe that in the Transfiguration (17:1–8), “the great light of 4:16 becomes visibly radiant to those who are being called, in 5:14, to be the light of the world.”

That is, what Peter, James and John see is nothing less than a vision of the future fulfilment of the Servant program, an event which Matthew in his arrangement is associating with “the Son of Man coming in his kingdom” (16:28). However, Davies and Allison also note some striking contrasts in detail with the account of Jesus’ crucifixion in 27:32–54. Here Jesus stands between two great prophets. It is blindingly light. Then he will stand between two thieves, and darkness will cover everything. Thus in the narrative to come we shall have the claim that passion must come before vindication reinforced.

15 Compare Carter, *Households and Discipleship*, 203: “After the uncompromising demand of chs. 19–20 [...], this pericope underlines that God’s compassionate mercy and power are available for all disciples who, in the midst of difficult circumstances, recognise their inadequacy and call for God’s help.”


17 There are other contrasts and points of contact too, Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, 706–7.
The timing of Jesus’ passion-vindicaton relative to the future, separating judgment and the “coming of Son of Man” will be major concerns in the narrative to come. Matthew will be clarifying his temporal framework with respect to these events.

Readers familiar with the law on the Temple tax (Exod 30:11–16) will know that it was a tax levied on each Jewish male over the age of twenty as part of the census to fund the daily sacrifice in the Temple. It is described in Exod 30:12 LXX as λότρα τῆς ψυχῆς αὐτοῦ. Collectively, it is said “to propitiate for your lives” (Exod 30:15, 16 LXX, ἐξιλάσσομαι περὶ τῶν ψυχῶν ὑμῶν). This is the tax Jesus claims that he — and, derivatively, Peter — are free from (17:26). He then describes himself as the one who has come “to give his life as a ransom for many” (20:28, δοῦναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ λότρον ἀντί πολλῶν). Already, then, Jesus is claiming a role for himself which replaces some of the key functions of the Temple. We shall see this extended in the following three chapters (21–23), especially as Jesus judges the Temple a failure with respect to its purpose (21:13).

Matthew has said enough about physical blindness as a symbol of lack of kingdom perception (e.g. 13:10–17; 16:9) for that to stand as an assumption (or implicated premise) here. We have also suggested that the title “son of David” represents in the Gospel the Christ of popular expectation, and Matthew will continue to use it this way in 21:9, 15 and 22:41–45. A weak implication from the double healing miracle concluding this section could then be that what is lacking is a full revelation of the Christ — which Matthew will then endeavour to supply in his account of the events leading up to and including the death and resurrection of Jesus.

We have noted throughout this section there are many hints suggesting the future possibility of following the Servant pattern. What we shall see in what follows is that that possibility is only realized after the death and resurrection of Jesus (28:16–20).

6.2 Matthew 21:1–23:39

The claim in what follows will be that the section running from 21:1–28:15 both expounds and narrates the event labelled by Jesus as the “coming of the Son of Man” in such a way that post-resurrection compliant readers can be sure of future vindication if their allegiance to and
dependence on Jesus remains steadfast. Within this, the narrative in Matthew 20–23 describes a kind of proleptic “coming” or “parousia,” as Jesus arrives in Jerusalem in order to visit the Temple. The Temple setting links the chapters together and the quotation from Ps 118:26 (117:26 LXX), “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,” acts as an inclusion (21:9; 23:39).

6.2.1 A claim concerning communicative equilibrium.

Matthew wants his compliant readers to look back and see Jesus’ coming to Jerusalem and the Temple as a proleptic judgment scene. He wants them to see Jesus as like a prophet, but more than a prophet: a king coming to Zion to test and issue in advance a verdict of judgment against the city (and nation) for its failure as Servant. He wants them to know that despite the apparent prophet-like vulnerability of Jesus, future vindication lies with him (and his disciples) alone, as he and his followers take on and replace the role of the Temple and the Jewish establishment in the Lord’s Servant program for the world. However, at this stage the relative timing of the execution of judgment is left unresolved. This is a judgment scene, but it is more specific and targeted relative to the more general, separating judgment Jesus has been warning of throughout the Gospel. Matthew then wants his compliant readers to extrapolate from this scene and believe the certainty of coming judgment against all those who oppose the Lord’s Servant and kingdom programs, against the irony of judgment apparently falling on those enabling and participating in them. He thereby wants his compliant readers to be prepared for future opposition, secure in their role within the Lord’s purposes for the world.

Readers seeking communicative alignment may infer Jesus’ coming to Jerusalem and the Temple in the name of the Lord to issue notice of judgment from the description of his entry (21:1–11), from his action in the Temple (21:12–17), from the disputations (21:18–22:46) and, most explicitly, from the woes of chapter 23 that culminate in him leaving the Temple in 24:1. Despite the consequence of his actions leading inexorably to his trial and execution, such readers may infer that Matthew wants them to believe that vindication nevertheless lies with Jesus from the triad of parables (21:28–22:14), from his victory of authority in the disputations (21:18–22:46), from his self-description as one greater than David (22:41–
46), and from the final lament over Jerusalem (23:37–39). They may infer that this is a *proleptic* judgment scene from the parable of the tenants (21:33–46) and the fact that the actual execution of judgment does not come here (cf. 3:13–17, see section 4.3 above). Belief and compliance follows for those who are persuaded by the rightness of the judgment and the authority of Jesus to exercise it.

6.2.2 *Expansion and further argument.*

We can begin by commenting on what these chapters add to Matthew’s implied temporal framework. Jesus makes a number of statements that seem to refer to the future judgment of the people he is engaging with in the Temple. In the parables, there is the destruction of the tenants by the vineyard owner (21:41) and then the destruction wrought by a king who first has his invitation spurned (22:7) and then has it treated lightly (22:13). At the end of the Temple disputations, Jesus refers to the one whom even David called Lord, whose enemies will be put under his feet. At the end of the woes against the scribes and Pharisees in chapter 23, Jesus says that “all these things will come upon this generation” (γενέσθαι, 23:36; cf. 11:16; 12:39–42; 16:4). That is, the woes will come against the wider generation aligned with the scribes and Pharisees against the will of God, with a possible additional implication that this will happen soon.18

Finally, there is Jesus’ promise in 23:39 that “you will not see me again until [ἀπρόφητος ἄριτ] you say ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’” These are of course the same words from Psalm 118 which were used to greet Jesus in his coming to Jerusalem in 21:1–10. An accessible inference is that Jesus is warning of a future event that will follow a similar pattern. That is, just as Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem this time should have been a time of joy and blessing, but has been mixed with judgment as Jesus has declared the religious leadership in their Temple context “fruitless,” so it may be at this future event.19

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18 So W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Matthew: Vol. 3, Matthew 9–28* (ICC; London, New York: T&T Clark International, 1997), 319. However, they concede that the statement is ambiguous. Is Jesus limiting the time frame, widening the referent group, or both?

However, Matthew does not have Jesus give an explicit time-reference for this future event, or for the other future references in chapter 23 related to the specific judgment of “this generation.” Without further guidance, it might seem natural at this stage of the narrative to align them all with the separating judgment we have seen already in the Gospel (cf. 12:41–42). But there are hints in the parable of the tenants, for example, that the Servant program continues (with different people) after the judgment of the tenants (21:41–43). This, then, may be a special act of judgment brought forward in part to guarantee the more general judgment to come — functioning as a model of that future judgment, rather than the separations in chapters 8–9 function as a model of future blessing and the mission to Israel in Matthew 10 functions in part as a model of the global mission to come. However, we shall have more to say on this, since Jesus will make further future references, including two that also use the phrase ἀρχὴ ἀρχῶν (26:29, 64; cf. 23:24). The issues of future timing surrounding these sayings are yet to be resolved in the coming narrative.

The basic temporal shape implied by these chapters is thus that Jesus is declaring in advance a judgment that will take place sometime (possibly soon) against “this generation.” With this in mind, we can now turn to consider what else readers can infer concerning the compliance Matthew wishes to evoke.

20:1–17.
Readers seeking communicative alignment may infer that Jesus is entering Jerusalem as the anointed of the Lord coming to Zion most obviously from the manner of his entry and Matthew’s editorial comment in 21:4–5. Jesus’ advance planning concerning the donkey and colt implies that he is self-consciously choosing to perform a symbolic act. Matthew comments that this act fulfils a Scripture that says the one coming to Zion, the heart of Jerusalem, riding on a donkey is the king. To an extent, the import of the act is recognised, as the crowd spreads cloaks and branches on the road before him and cry out with the words of Psalm 118 — a cry taken up by the children in the Temple in 21:15.20

20 Compare 2 Kgs 9:13, when Jehu announced himself king. Note that the crowd here (21:8–10) is set in contrast to the people of the city (21:10) who explicitly do not recognise him. It may be that the crowd is (mostly) comprised of people who have been travelling with Jesus.
In responding this way, the crowd may be expecting that in Jesus the Lord is returning to Zion to bring final vindication (cf. the expectation of John the Baptist in chapter 3). However, by choosing to enter on a donkey, Matthew suggests Jesus wishes to emphasise his humility (προσέγγισε, 21:5; cf. Zech 9:9 LXX). This should recall 11:29. We argued in section 5.2 above that in 11:29 προσέγγισε was a mark of Jesus’ determination to bring blessing as Son and Servant.

It is then apparent from Jesus’ prophetic sign act in the Temple (21:12) that he has come to issue notice of judgment. Matthew’s description is very brief, but what Jesus does strikes at the heart of how the Temple functions. An accessible inference is that Jesus is indicating the Temple should be shut down. This is reinforced by the reason Jesus gives (21:13). The Temple has failed in its purpose as a “house of prayer” (cf. Isa 56:7). It has become a (false) refuge for λῃστατ (cf. Jer 7:11).

Readers looking back on this event from later in the narrative may identify this as the key event which provokes the sequence that leads to Jesus’ execution. Despite this, it seems that Matthew is claiming right from the beginning of the sequence that the vindication nevertheless lies with him. Jesus remains the source of divine blessing (21:14), recognised as praiseworthy by children (representing οἱ πρεσβύτες; cf. 5:5; 11:25; 18:2–4; 19:14).


The day of the Temple disputation begins with another prophetic sign act (21:18–19). This reinforces the conclusion that Jesus has come to Jerusalem to judge fruitlessness (cf. 3:8, 10; 21:13).

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21 This is consistent with their using the title “son of David.” We have been suggesting since section 3.3 that Matthew tends to use this title (especially from 12:23 onwards) to designate the Christ of popular expectation. That this might include a hope of imminent vindication would be reinforced if the crowd shouted “Hosanna” as urgent petition involving the agency of the “son of David” — “[O Yahweh,] save us through the son of David.” Compare Ps 118:25 MT, κύριε Κυρίου, ἴδε, κύριε (Ps 117:25 LXX, ὥσπερ ἐσώσαν δῆ). One would then have to translate the end of the verse (ὁσαναν ἐν τοῖς ὁσιόστοις) something like, “Save us, [you who are] in the highest heaven” (cf. BDAG, s.v. ὁσιόστος). However, the dative of agency is very rare, so it is more usual to take ὁσαναν as a festal cry of praise (so Davies and Allison, Matthew 19–28, 124–25).

22 Readers familiar with Jeremiah 7 will know that part of the indictment against the men of Judah in the Temple sermon is that they failed in their vocation among the nations. They become the nation of which it is said, “This is the nation that did not listen to the voice of Yahweh their God” (Jer 7:28 MT; 7:27 LXX).
The question and answer in 21:20–22 might at first seem to move to a different topic. Jesus repeats and reinforces what he has said before concerning the efficacy of truly dependent prayer (cf. 7:7–11). However, Jesus has also recently judged the failure of the Temple as “a house of prayer” (21:12–13). The promises in 21:21–22 then encourage then disciples to take on this role for themselves.

In the disputations themselves, Jesus exposes that the chief priests and elders either do not respect the authority of a true prophet or that they themselves have no authority over the crowd (21:23–27). He implies that the Pharisees do not render to God what they should (22:15–22). Finally, he argues that the Sadducees “know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God” (22:23–33). In each case, Jesus asserts and demonstrates his authority over his questioners and claims that they are enemies of God and his Servant program for the world. They are the ones left vulnerable to future judgment under the one greater than the son of David, as Jesus hints in his final counter-question (22:41–46).

This warning of judgment is reinforced by the triad of parables in 21:28–22:14—a fact that Jesus’ opponents clearly recognise (21:45–46). If we take it as a now well-established implicated premise that Jesus has come to address the failure of the nation in its Servant mandate (they are “in darkness” rather than a light to the nations), then the figure of “working in the vineyard” in the first two parables can be seen in the light of this. In the parable of the two sons, the second son says he will participate, but does not. It is the son who “changed his mind” who participates with the vineyard work in the end (μεταμελέομαι, 21:29, 32; cf. 27:3).23 Jesus explicitly relates the first son to the tax collectors and sinners who have believed the proclamation of the kingdom beginning with John, and the second son to his opponents who have not (21:31–32). Likewise in the parable of the tenants, the tenants fail in their duty with respect to the task given them by the owner—exposed most explicitly in them killing his son, a thinly veiled figure for Jesus’ coming death (21:37–39). Again, the task is given to others (21:40–44). In both these parables, Jesus is implying that God’s Ser-

23 Compare our discussion of μετανοεω in section 4.4 above. This suggests that μετανοεω and μεταμελεομαι are functionally equivalent in Matthew’s usage.
vant mandate shall continue in the future apart from those to whom it was first given, and in
spite of their opposition. In the parable of the wedding feast, the participation of “this genera-
tion” in the kingdom is thus implied to be in great jeopardy: they have either offensively
refused the invitation (22:5–6); or, if they claim to have accepted it, their unworthiness will
be exposed (22:11–12).24


As Jesus begins to address the crowds and the disciples (23:1), we can see that this is now
quite explicitly a judgment scene — but one in which the response of those observing the
issuing of judgment is given a high profile. Readers seeking communicative alignment should
infer not that Jesus is issuing these judgments and woes on a new basis, but rather bringing
together evidence from throughout the Gospel so far and presenting it in a concentrated form.
The connections with the speech in Matthew 5–7 are especially strong, although there are also
connections with other occasional judgment warnings in 11:1–20:34. Indeed, this chapter can
be seen as a recapitulation of this material, drawing out and emphasising the second arm of
the decision structure we noted in sections 4.6 and 4.8 above, and applying it to a specific
group for the instruction of others.

Thus in the prolegomena to the woes the fault of the scribes and Pharisees is not the
material they are teaching from (“so practice and observe what they tell you...,” 23:3; cf.
5:17–19), but in their failure to do what they teach (“...but not what they do,” 23:3; cf. 5:20;
7:26–27). They tie up “heavy burdens” for others (φορτία βαρέα, 23:4; cf. τὸ φορτίον

24 It is common to describe the parable of the wedding feast as a “two-stage parable.” Snodgrass,
Stories with Intent, 299. Quite where to split it is less obvious. Although he later argues for the
integrity of the parable, Snodgrass does comment that verse 10 “seems like the conclusion to the
parable.” Snodgrass, Stories with Intent, 320. That is, the story is then extended in 22:11–14.
Davies and Allison, Matthew 19–28, 193–94 have a better suggestion, which is that there are two
parallel sequences: 22:2–7 and 22:8–13. If this is right, then Jesus is not talking about a two-stage
judgment, he is giving two almost separate stories about the same judgment, each making slightly
different points, but each passing judgment on the religious establishment. The first story simply
says to them: you have been issued an invitation from God himself, but you have refused it, and
mistrusted the messengers. The consequence will be judgment (22:7). The second story asks them
to think about it another way. Suppose someone thinks they have “accepted the invitation.” Jesus
warns them that will not be enough alone. The question remains: do you respect the king? If you
insult the king (in the story: by being “inappropriately dressed”), then the consequence will again
be judgment (22:13).
έλαφρόν of Jesus, 11:30), and, rather than seeking the glory of God (cf. 5:16), seek the approval of others (23:5–6; cf. 6:1–18). In this self-promotion (which extends to self-given titles) they are not to be imitated (23:8–12) — just as the Gentiles “lording it over others” were not to be imitated (20:25–28). In the first and second woes, their fault is denying the kingdom not just to themselves but to others (23:13–15; cf. causing others to stumble in 18:6–7). In the third and fourth woes, they are “blind guides” (23:16; cf. 15:14), distorting to their own advantage the practice of oaths (23:16–22; cf. 5:33–37) and tithing; thus they have neglected τὴν κρίσιν καὶ τὸ ἔλεος καὶ τὴν πίστιν (23:23–24).25 In the fifth and sixth woes, their concern is in outward appearance to the neglect of purity of heart (23:25–28; cf. 5:8; 15:1–20). In the seventh woe, they are “sons of those who murdered the Prophets” (23:31; cf. 5:12; 21:35–39; 22:6).

The final lament (23:37–39) expresses this judgment in an address to Jerusalem. Although Jesus may be using “Jerusalem” simply as a synecdoche for those within it who over its history have “killed the Prophets” (in which group Jesus has just placed the scribes and Pharisees, 23:31), many readers will be aware of the significance it has in itself — especially in being the location of the Temple. So when in 23:38 Jesus says “your house [ὁίκος; cf. 12:4, ὁίκος τοῦ θεοῦ] is left to you desolate” he is almost certainly implying that the judgment he is talking about is being in part directed at the functioning of the Temple — most especially its function as the nexus of the Lord’s presence with his people.26 As with the overturning of tables in 21:12–13 at the beginning of the section, Jesus physically leaving the Temple in 24:1 is also therefore a kind of prophetic sign act. But it is also more than the sign act of a mere prophet: this is Immanuel leaving the Temple (cf. 1:22–23).27

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25 Compare Mic 6:8. Thus they have neglected what the Lord requires of them.
26 One expression of this (which may lie behind the disciples’ pointing out the buildings in 24:1) is Ps 48:13–15 MT.
27 Compare David Garland: “By making 23:37–39 the conclusion of the woe discourse and the prelude to the eschatological discourse in chap. 24, Matthew has underscored the repudiation of the city and Temple in vivid terms which would call to mind the departure of the glory of God in Ezekiel 11. When Jesus leaves the Temple, ‘God with us’ departs with all the disastrous ramifications which that withdrawal entails.” David E. Garland, The Intention of Matthew 23 (NovTSup 52; Leiden: Brill, 1979), 204.
The crowd, disciples and later readers may infer that the declarations in Matthew 23 constitute a judgment brought forward from the fact that the actual execution of judgment does not come here (cf. 3:13–17, see section 4.3 above). This is thus different from the judgment scene briefly sketched in 7:21–23, and the one to be described in 25:31–46, where the execution follows immediately. The woes in chapter 23 also differ in being more targeted on a specific group and in being in part for the benefit of the crowds and disciples. However, as we have already noted, quite how far they have been brought forward remains to be resolved.

6.2.3 Authorial strategy.

We suggested above for Matthew 11–12 (section 5.1) that Matthew was exploring at further depth the second arm of the decision structure we saw set up in the early chapters of the Gospel.28 Unresponsiveness, whatever form it takes, will lead to condemnation at the judgment. His strategy in Matthew 21–23 goes further still. It is to draw out the opponents of Jesus in Jerusalem and the Temple as a specific and explicit instance of those who reject the will of God in Jesus his Servant. This then is a case study on the second arm of the decision structure. The group are shown to be opposed to the will of God, “fruitless” with respect to his intentions for the world, and judgment is duly passed.

We can compare this constructively to the conclusion of David Garland’s composition/redaction critical study of Matthew 23, that Matthew’s intention (as the climax to Matthew 21–23) is two-pronged. It is, first, to explain Jerusalem’s rejection of the Messiah and the subsequent destruction of the city and its Temple; and, second, to be a warning for the Christian church not to follow suit.29 However, we have not seen in our analysis much that suggests Matthew’s strategy is to address Jerusalem’s rejection of the Messiah as a “problem to be solved”; rather, it is presented more as a historical given that has certain dire consequences. It is true that Matthew’s strategy may express in part an intention to explain the later destruction of the city and Temple and to issue a warning to subsequent generations not to be like this one. However, our analysis suggests that if it does these things, it does so as part of a

28 See the figures in section 4.6.7, pp.193, 194, and section 4.8.6, p.216.
wider strategy. If Matthew can set up the judgment of a specific group of opponents to the will of God and then show that to be credible in the subsequent narrative, then this will serve to reinforce the credibility of his more general claims concerning future judgment. Matthew 21–23 will serve then not just as a warning, but as an encouragement that future vindication is certain for those aligned with Jesus according to God’s will. This focus on the certainty of future vindication is what Matthew will have Jesus expand upon in the speech of Matthew 24–25.

6.2.4 Continuation.

There is strong continuity between the end of Matthew 23 and the beginning of Matthew 24. The Temple and the various strands of leadership associated with it have been declared “fruitless,” woes have been issued, and Jesus leaves decisively (24:1). The disciples point out the Temple buildings, after the manner of Ps 48:13–15 MT (47:13–15 LXX) — i.e. as that which signifies Zion as the locus of interaction between God and humanity. Jesus responds with a prediction of the Temple’s future collapse (24:2) — a statement that provokes a question from the disciples which in turn provokes the speech of Matthew 24–25.30

Jesus’ promise in 24:1 is one of several statements in the Gospel that some readers may associate with the (partial) destruction of the Temple in AD70 (along with 22:7 and 23:38). However, if Matthew is writing after AD70 (as most, though not all, contemporary scholars conclude) it is remarkable that he does not make more explicit reference to those events as an act of judgment on the Temple. Rather, Matthew seems to be making the coming of Jesus to Jerusalem in AD33, as described in Matthew 21–27, the locus of the judgment against the Temple — in the disruption of 21:12–13, in the leaving in 24:1 and, most especially, in the tearing of the curtain in 27:51. He seems to be treating what happens to the Tem-

30 The connections between Matthew 23 and 24–25 might then suggest taking them together as a united “speech-complex,” much as we took the different elements of Matthew 13 together. This is argued for by Jason Hood, “Matthew 23–25: The Extent of Jesus’ Fifth Discourse,” JBL 128, no. 3 (2009): 527–43. However, it is hard to get very excited by the debate on quite how to label the subdivisions, given that even if we did designate Matthew 23–25 a “speech-complex,” we would still have to acknowledge and consider the scene change at 24:1. As it happens, we shall also be arguing in what follows that one of Jesus’ concerns in Matthew 24–25 is to move the disciples’ attention away from the Temple, such that they are not distracted or diverted by it.
ple buildings thereafter as relatively unimportant. That is, 24:2 is not so much a prediction of future judgment as a corrective to the disciples’ implicit assumption in 24:1 concerning the Temple’s continuing function. A consequence of the irrelevancy and non-functioning of the Temple is its now inevitable physical collapse.

Indeed, we shall argue below that if there is any reference in the speech of Matthew 24–25 to the events of AD 66–70 (e.g. in 24:15), then it is deliberately obscured by Matthew. Matthew is rather focusing the disciples’ attention away from the Temple, to a future where the Temple is no longer relevant but where an undiverted faithfulness to Jesus under tribulation most certainly is. If there are allusions to the events of AD 66–70 in the speech, then Jesus is using them as examples of the kind of extreme tribulation from which the disciples should flee (cf. 10:23) but by which they should not be led astray.

By the end of the Gospel, we shall see the irrelevancy of the Temple firmly established. God’s Servant program will be proceeding as intended, but centred around the risen Jesus, without the Temple or the leadership that opposed and killed him. The resurrection and aftermath establish Jesus as the one greater than David, the one under whose feet God will place his enemies (cf. 22:44). “God with us” has left the Temple (24:1), but nevertheless resides with his people as promised (28:20).

6.3 Matthew 24:1–25:46. The speech encouraging undiverted, vigilant Servanthood to the end

The final major speech in the Gospel is another which has generated a huge literature. Once again, no attempt will be made to survey this, although we shall attempt to discern its broad contours (section 6.3.2 below). As before, there will advantages from seeing the speech in its wider narrative context. In particular, it will be helpful to see that in some respects the speech simply recapitulates and expands some of the key concerns of the speech in Matthew 10—in response to a specific question from the disciples concerning what seems to be a deeply troubled future. In addition to this, the contribution of the particular pragmatic-critical method we have adopted will be three-fold:
1. We shall see that neither a reader-orientated approach alone, nor an author-orientated approach alone is adequate to explain how this speech functions: both are needed, working together. We shall notice that many proposed understandings of this speech do not attempt to describe the rationality of Matthew’s communicative strategy and, especially, how the paraenesis in the speech is supported by what Jesus says in response to the disciples’ question concerning the timing of events.

2. A pragmatic-critical approach will be especially helpful when it comes to discerning the contribution of the speech to the temporal framework Matthew is building for his compliant readers. The recent history of interpretation of the speech exhibits a huge variation on this particular issue. However, our approach will help us to infer the simplest frame consistent with the evidence, and to see how that frame is then “resolved” or made more precise through the subsequent narrative.

3. As in the speeches in Matthew 5–7, 10 and 13, the method will suggest a way of seeing the decision framework underlying the composition of the speech. Especially significant here will be the observation that in order to elicit the appropriate response Jesus withholds information just as much as he gives it. Once this has been seen, much of the apparent referential obscurity or complexity of the speech will disappear.

It will be as important with this speech as elsewhere to remember that Matthew is building on foundations already established earlier in the Gospel, and using the speech within the narrative plot-line that culminates in the death and resurrection of Jesus. However, there are particular connections with previous material that will be worth noting before proceeding with the analysis.

For instance, Jesus has already at an early stage begun warning ὡς τῶν ἁπατητῶν (7:15). This is a warning picked up in 24:11 and 24:24. In the same context in chapter 7, he taught against lawlessness (7:23, ἀνομία) having promoted love (7:12). In 24:12, he warns that the former will subdue the latter.
The connections with the speech in Matthew 10 are even more extensive and significant. This is especially noticeable in 24:9–14. In 10:17, Jesus warned that “men” will “deliver over” (παραδώσουσιν) the disciples; a warning picked up in 24:9 (retaining the deliberate imprecision in the subject, as we shall consider below). 10:22 is repeated in chapter 24, but split: ἔσεσθε μισοῦμενοι ὑπὸ πάντων διὰ τὸ ὄνομά μου appears in 24:9b and ὁ δὲ ὑπομείνας εἰς τέλος οὗτος σωθήσεται forms 24:13. In 10:34–37, Jesus warned of discord within the family provoked by Jesus; in 24:10, he warns more generally that πολλοί [...] ἀλλήλους παραδώσουσιν καὶ μισήσουσιν ἀλλήλους. In 10:23, Jesus warned that persecution is to be expected; but that when it occurs in one town, the command is: φεύγετε εἰς τὴν ἐτέραν. In 24:16, the same verb is used in the exhortation οἱ ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ φευγέτωσαν εἰς τὰ ὀρη, applied to the “great tribulation” (θλίψις μεγάλη). In 10:23, the mission to Israel was circumscribed by the arrival of the Son of Man; ἡ παρουσία τοῦ νεότο τοῦ ἀνθρώπου then becomes a major repeated idea in Matthew 24–25 (24:27, 30, 37, 39; cf. 24:44; 25:31). (We shall argue below that 10:23 forms an important implicated premise in understanding the logic of the speech in Matthew 24–25.) Finally, the general test of worthiness expressed in care for ἑν τῶν μικρῶν τούτων (10:42) may well be picked up in the judgment criterion which concerns the treatment of one τούτων τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου τῶν ἐλαχίστων (25:40; cf. 25:45).

There are more connections, outside Matthew 10. For example, in the explanation of the parable of the sower, the seed sown on rocky ground has no root, ἀλλὰ πρόσκαιρος ἐστιν, γενομένης δὲ θλίψεως ἡ διωγμός διὰ τὸν λόγον εὐθὺς σκανδαλίζεται (13:21). Matthew has Jesus use the verbal form διώκω to indicate the likelihood of persecution for his followers in 5:10, 11, 12, 44 and (as noted above) 10:23. He uses it to charge the scribes and Pharisees in

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23:34. In 13:21 it is tightly linked with θηνιζζ, which Jesus uses in 24:9 and 24:21, as noted above. The danger of “stumbling” in one’s commitment to God in 13:21 is part of a long stream of warning from Jesus (also using σκανδαλίζω, 5:29, 30; 11:6; 18:6, 8, 9). This danger is restated in 24:10.

These connections are strong evidence of Jesus building on previous instruction. Once again, he is addressing a future situation where his disciples can expect persecution and tribulation on account of their association with him, and where there is the danger of stumbling, hatred and betrayal. While the emphasis in the speech in Matthew 10 was on faithful witness in such a future, we shall see below that the emphasis in this speech is more on constancy under the deception that will accompany tribulation and under the uncertain timing of the vindication Jesus has promised. What is explicitly new here (as we shall consider further below) is an admission, prompted by the suggestion that the Temple will one day fall (24:1–2), of the possibility of an extreme tribulation — which will in turn provide an extreme opportunity for deception and raise an urgent demand for vindication.

We argued that in Matthew 10 (section 4.8 above) Matthew is employing a double referentiality to allow a speech to the disciples in a specific historical situation to address post-resurrection readers in a parallel but different situation. As he builds on that teaching, we may therefore expect him to use similar devices in the speech in Matthew 24–25. In this regard, it will be helpful to keep in mind another key theme emphasised in Matthew 10: that a servant is like his master and can therefore expect to experience what the master experiences (10:25). This of course has been a theme throughout the Gospel. Since 16:21, however, it has become an integral part of the plot. In 16:21 Jesus first began to teach his disciples that he “must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things [...] and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” At that time he also called on his disciples to deny themselves, take up their crosses and follow him on that path (16:24). So although the immediately preceding context of this speech is found in the Temple disputations of Matthew 21–23, and we are therefore looking for some resolution of the conflict of authority expressed there, we need to remember that this fits within a wider narrative context. In Matthew’s narrative, this wider context finds its resolution in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Quite how that impacts upon the speech of Matthew 24–25 will be explored further below.
6.3.1 A claim concerning communicative equilibrium.

Matthew wants compliant readers to know that tribulation is coming for them just as (at this point in the narrative) it is coming for Jesus. He wants them to remain undivertedly faithful to Jesus under even the most extreme tribulation, just as Jesus will remain undivertedly faithful (to the Father, on their behalf) in the extreme tribulation soon to come to him. The basic paradigm in Jesus’ speech is that turmoil and tribulation will inevitably be followed by vindication. They are the (ironically) comforting signs that vindication is “near,” just as leaves on a fig tree are signs that summer is near (cf. 24:32). Therefore, in the midst of turmoil and tribulation, he does not want his disciples to mistake the signs for what they signify and thereby be deceived and led astray. Vindication will be clear when it comes. By deliberately withholding the exact nature of the tribulation they will face, Jesus makes the decision simple: unless they see the absolutely clear vindication he describes, they should not be deceived (cf. 24:27). The end is not yet (cf. 24:6); this is the time of global gospel proclamation (24:14) and if the disciples need to flee from tribulation (such as that in 24:15–21) to continue in that, then they should do so (24:16–18; cf. 10:23). Moreover, because the timing of vindication is also withheld, the disciples are encouraged to keep awake, as servants awaiting their master.

As in previous major speeches, Matthew’s basic strategy is to draw his post-resurrection readers in to stand alongside the disciples in the narrative as fellow hearers of the speech. As before (but this time it is especially important), he does not expect them to return to their post-resurrection situation without reading and processing the subsequent narrative concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus. At the beginning of the speech, Jesus keeps the referentiality of his statements deliberately ambiguous. This keeps the connection between what is about to happen to Jesus and what will happen to the disciples as close as possible. This ambiguity is only fully dealt with when Matthew uses the narrative of Jesus’ death and resurrection to resolve the implied temporal framework, much as he did with the baptism of Jesus relative to the speech of John the Baptist in chapter 3. The effect of this will be described below.

Once again, the speech bifurcates Matthew’s wider readership. As in Matthew 13, the poetic effect is strong. Not only are there are a large number of parables, or parable-like fig-
ures, the problems of reference-resolution in the sections on τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἔρημώσεως (24:15ff) and the description of the coming of the Son of Man in 24:29–31 are considerable. It seems that just as Matthew expects undiverted and patient faithfulness under future tribulation, so he expects it in processing this speech! However, readers who continue to process the speech will infer the basic paradigm of vindication following tribulation. If they are persuaded that this promise is trustworthy, then they comply with the kind of theocentric commitment Jesus outlines: undeceived, watchful — in short, undivertedly faithful to him. The speech leaves them more resilient to the kinds of false prophesy surrounding great tribulation. They will be less inclined to search for specific signs of “the end” and more content to be constant in their service towards others, ready at any time to face their Master. However, they do not yet fully resolve the temporal framework. The powerful rhetorical effect when they do so will be described below.

6.3.2 The wider readership.

The history of interpretation of this speech (and its parallels in Mark and Luke) is enormously complex. In particular, there are significant differences of reference resolution. These begin with the disciples’ question in 24:3 and the reference of the terms ταύτα, παρουσία and συντέλεια τοῦ αἰῶνος, and then proceed in Jesus’ answer to debate the reference of τὸ τέλος in 24:6, 14, τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἔρημώσεως [...] ἐστὸς ἐν τῷ πόλις ἁγίῳ in 24:15, ἡ παρουσία τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἁνθρώπου in 24:27, 37, 39 and the similar expressions in 24:30, 44 and 25:31. Roughly following Luz, we may divide the alternatives into three main streams.32

The oldest stream of interpretation takes the speech as having an exclusively future-orientated reference. That is, from the point of view of Matthew’s contemporaries, everything Jesus talks about lies in the future, and concerns the climactic vindication and judgment

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32 Luz actually has five streams, but the final two (the “church history” interpretation, which links the speech to events in much later history, and the “spiritual interpretation,” which dehistoricizes and individualizes the speech) are less significant. Ulrich Luz, Matthew 21–28: A Commentary (trans. James E. Crouch; volume editor Helmut Koester; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 184–89. Luz then goes on to consider alternative interpretations of the disciples’ question in 24:3, and the reference of the terms παρουσία and συντέλεια τοῦ αἰῶνος. Luz, Matthew 21–28, 190–91.
expressed in the imagery of \( \eta \piαρουσια \tauου \ \\upsilonioi\ \tauου \ \alphaνθρωπου \). As an answer to the disciples’ question in 24:3, the speech thus ignores or rejects any reference to the end of the Temple. Luz argues that this stream goes back at least as far as the Didache, which uses expressions similar to every part of Matthew 24 to talk about what will happen \( \epsilonν \ [\ldots] \tauαίς \ \εσχάταις \ \ \ημέραις \).\(^{33}\)

The second stream takes the different elements of the speech as having variegated reference.\(^{34}\) This goes back at least to Chrysostom, for whom the wars in 24:6–7 are those that led to the siege of Jerusalem, and the events surrounding AD70 are in view up to verse 22.\(^{35}\) From the point of view of Matthew’s contemporaries, these parts lie in the near past or (possibly) the near future. There are of course a plethora of possibilities when it comes to allocating different parts of the speech to different events. However, most interpreters in this stream, including Chrysostom, take references to \( \eta \piαρουσια \tauου \ \\upsilonioi\ \tauου \ \alphaνθρωπου \) to be to a final, global judgment, as pictured in 25:31–46, some arguing along the lines of Luz that \( \piαρουσια \) “became after Paul a technical term in early Christianity for the second arrival of Jesus as the heavenly judge of the world.”\(^{36}\) That is, this approach divides the disciples’ question in 24:3

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\(^{33}\) Didache 16:3–8. There is of course a debate on the dependency of the Didache on Matthew which need not concern us here.

\(^{34}\) Luz calls this stream “historical” although, confusingly, there are examples of the stream he calls “mixed” in this category too. For example, Augustine, Ep. ad Hesychium in, e.g., Augustine, Letters Volume IV (165–203) (trans. Wilfred Parsons; The Fathers of the Church; Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1955), 356–401.

\(^{35}\) Chrysostom, Homilies, 432–60.

\(^{36}\) Luz, Matthew 21–28, 190. However, there are still plenty of exceptions. France, The Gospel of Matthew, 885–946, takes 24:29–31 to be a description of the actual end of the Temple, expressed in terms of OT prophetic imagery, inaugurating the new age of ingathering. Jesus only turns to address the timing of the end of the age in 24:36–25:46. N.T. Wright adapts his reading of Mark 13 in Jesus and the Victory of God, 339–68, for Matthew in his popular work Matthew for Everyone: Part 2, Chapters 16–28 (London: SPCK, 2002), 111–49. He also thinks 24:29–31 has some reference to the end of the Temple, but also to Jesus’ resurrection and ascension and the spread of the “news of victory” (pp.122–123). He does not believe Jesus makes any reference to a climactic, future separating judgment in Matthew 24–25. He takes 24:36 to be concerning the timing of this historical vindication of the Son of Man just described in 24:29–31. He then reworks the parables in 24:36–25:30 compared to usual interpretation so that they end roughly in the present (or near future) relative to the date of the Gospel. The warning to keep awake “was primarily directed to the situation of dire emergency in the first century, after Jesus’ death and resurrection and before his words about the temple come true” (pp.127–8). Likewise, the judgment scene in 25:31–46 is reworked and taken to refer to a largely ahistorical separation: “Should we not say, then, that this scene of judgment, though in this picture it is spoken of as a one-off, future and final event, may actually refer to what is happening throughout human history, from the time of Jesus’ resurrection and ascension to the present?” (p.143). We shall not be following this line in what follows. However, we shall be agreeing that Matthew shows the
into two: the first half concerns the end of the Temple; the second half concerns the παρουσία and the συντέλεια τοῦ αἰώνος. Different parts of the speech address different parts of the question.

The third stream takes at least some elements of the speech to have multiple reference. That is, a given statement may signify, for example, both the destruction of Jerusalem and a more distant “end.” Davies and Allison cite Ephrem as an early example of this approach. As in the previous stream, the disciples’ question is taken to be in two parts but statements ostensibly answering the first half of the question may do double work, also addressing the second half. For example, John Meier says this on 24:15–22: “The intended vagueness of this apocalyptic manner of speaking allows the past historical event to act as a model and forewarning of the greater sacrilege still to come, hence, the admonition to read with understanding. The ‘great tribulation’ of the destruction of Jerusalem foreshadows the great tribulation of the end.”

We have the space here neither to describe the many alternatives within these streams in any detail, nor to assess them fully. However, we may note in passing two significant weaknesses across many of the suggestions. The first is that the processing of the speech is often limited to the information provided in the speech itself. Sometimes there is an effort to include as an implicated premise the narrative of Matthew 21–23, but rarely is a narrative context beyond this considered relevant. This leaves the speech underprocessed. The second weakness leaves the speech underprocessed in a different way, in that many of the interpretations encompassed above fail to give an adequate account of Matthew’s rhetorical purpose in constructing these chapters the way he has. Jesus is talking to his disciples before the events

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Notes

37 Ephrem is actually commenting on a sentence taken from Jesus’ speech in Luke 21:36 (“Remain in prayer, so that you may be worthy to escape from all that is going to take place”). Ephrem’s comment is: “It is said that he was speaking of the punishment in Jerusalem, and at the same time, referring to the end of the world.” Carmel McCarthy, Saint Ephrem’s Commentary on Tatian’s Diatessaron: An English Translation of Chester Beatty Syriac MS. 709 with Introduction and Notes (Journal of Semitic Studies Supplement 2; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 18.14, 278. The commentary is dated between AD363 and AD373. Cited in Davies and Allison, Matthew 19–28, 331.

of the cross and resurrection (and before the destruction of the Temple and the final judgment he has warned about). Matthew is showing his readers Jesus telling his disciples, but showing them after the events of the cross and resurrection and, quite possibly, after the events of AD70. That is, we need to bear in mind that it is likely Matthew is reporting this question-answer session for some purpose applicable to post-resurrection (and probably post-AD70) readers.

If it is true that many readers stop processing the speech before reconciling every difficulty, then it is perhaps not surprising to witness in the history of interpretation a degree of special pleading. For example, interpretations in the future-orientated stream struggle to reconcile a (presumably lengthy) global mission (24:14), near expectation (24:34) and the hints of a delayed return in the parables (24:48; 25:5). The interpretations in the second (variegated reference) stream tend to struggle in being clearly warranted and consistent in their allocation of statements to events, and may struggle to describe the temporal relation of events — the εὐθείας in 24:29 causing particular trouble. As Luz notes, interpretations in the third stream may suffer from being too “comprehensive,” leaving Jesus saying too little.39

6.3.3 Communicative alignment: the implied temporal framework within the speech.

Although alternative readings of this speech infer many things concerning the temporal framework implied by Matthew at this point in the narrative, our main claim here is that extended processing of this speech does not initially alter to any great extent what Matthew has said thus far in the narrative. There is now and there is some climactic point in the future: of uncertain distance, but near enough to impact current decisions. The picture has been complicated by Jesus’ announcement of his suffering, death and resurrection (16:21; 17:22–23; 20:18–19), but this simply does not yet fit into the frame and we shall see that Matthew may well be using that apparent incongruity creatively in the speech and in the following narrative.

We can note first that the disciples’ question does concern the temporal framework. Throughout the narrative, Jesus has been talking about some climactic point of time in the

39 Luz, Matthew 21–28, 188.
future. In asking πότε ταύτα ἔσται καὶ τί το σημεῖον τῆς σής παρουσίας καὶ συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος; a simple inference is then that they are asking about the relationship between the fall of the Temple Jesus has just spoken of (ταύτα) and that climactic moment, and possibly whether the former will be a sign of the latter. However, we do not need to be precise here. Matthew does not encourage us to psychologise concerning the disciples’ exact thoughts.

Strikingly, Jesus initially ignores the first part of the question: πότε ταύτα ἔσται; What we get instead in 24:4–14 is an expanded repetition of what he has said before. Here we see the basic temporal pattern of the speech spelled out quite clearly and explicitly. What Jesus does is expand upon his teaching in Matthew 10 to address (but not yet answer) the second part of the disciples’ question. The general pattern is the same: a period of proclamation will be characterised by tribulation, even to death, and then will come “the end” — τὸ τέλος (24:6, 13, 14). Jesus seems to use τὸ τέλος to encompass and address both his παρουσία and the συντέλεια τοῦ αἰῶνος raised in the disciples’ question; it also relates to the time when ἀν ἔλθη ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἁνθρώπου (10:23) in the corresponding pattern in Matthew 10. However, whereas in Matthew 10 the proclamation was specifically limited to Israel, albeit with an expanded mission strongly implied, here the proclamation is explicitly global (24:9, 14). Nevertheless, as we noted above, the kinds of tribulation described in 24:9–13 are strikingly similar to those in Matthew 10. Undiverted faithfulness and service under such tribulation is the focus of the paraenesis in the speech.

It is only when Jesus then focuses on the “great” tribulation associated with τὸ βόδελυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως [...] ἔστος ἐν τόπῳ ἁγίῳ in verse 15 that he says something which might be related to the question πότε ταύτα ἔσται; However, he does not explicitly specify its location within the temporal framework. There is no warrant for being too quick to locate it precisely, or even for making it highly specific. Several features of verses 15–28 stand out:

1. It is structurally similar to verses 6–14, in that there is a movement from warning of tribulation (24:15–22; cf. 24:6–8) to more specific warning concerning false prophets
within the tribulation (24:23–26; cf. 24:9–14), both picking up on the headline warning in 24:4–5.  

2. However, the warnings in 24:15–26 have a more restricted focus in at least two respects. The first is the obvious geographical restriction. In verse 14, Jesus was talking about proclaiming the gospel ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ οἰκουμένῃ, while in verse 16 the attention has focused down onto Judea. The second is a temporal restriction. The tribulation in 24:15–22 is observed at a particular point in time (ὁταν ὁν ἰδητε..., 24:15) has a single, punctiliar response — to flee (24:16). These suggest it is a single event of limited duration. Indeed, the length of the event is “cut short” (using κολοβώω, verse 22).  

3. The ending is also different. While 24:6–14 ends with καὶ τότε ἥξει τὸ τέλος, 24:15–28 ends in 24:23–24 with a repetition of the general warning in 24:4–5. If anyone claims to be the Christ, he is not (24:26). In other words, this is an instance which is not the end. The end, the coming of the Son of Man, will be clear when it comes: like lightning spanning the sky from east to west (24:27).  

4. It may then be right to see at least a degree of inferentiality in the ὁν of 24:15. The logic goes like this: if the general rule is not to be deceived (24:4–5) and if the general pattern of tribulation until τὸ τέλος is as in 24:6–14, then consequently that same rule applies in a specific instance of tribulation, even (and especially) when it is very great. If the description in 24:9–14 also evokes the similar description in 10:16–23 and the command there to flee in the face of persecution (10:23), then the command to flee in

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40 Compare the structure suggested in Luz, Matthew 21–28, 182.  
41 These considerations suggest that Luz, Matthew 21–28, 182, is wrong in taking 24:6–14 and 24:15–28 as two parallel descriptions that “announce the same events from different perspectives.”  
42 These considerations suggest that Davies and Allison are probably wrong to see a simple temporal sequence in these verses in which mild tribulation (24:4–14) is followed by intense tribulation — “the climax of the woes” — (24:15–28), which is followed by the coming of the Son of Man (24:29–31). Davies and Allison, Matthew 19–28, 333–66. If the intense tribulation of 24:15–28 is not the end, and does not directly signal the end, then it cannot immediately precede the end. It is better, then, to take its temporal location as ambiguous.
24:16 is also a consequence of Jesus’ general teaching on facing tribulation.

A warranted inference from what Jesus says (albeit one which takes some extended processing) is therefore that this is a specific example (within the frame) of the general tribulation (across the frame) warned of in 24:6–14: a particularly extreme tribulation, possibly related to the Temple, but not explicitly identified.

The events of 24:29–31 are promised by Jesus to happen ἐνθέος μετὰ τὴν θλίψιν τῶν ἡμερῶν ἐκείνων. The immediately preceding use of θλίψις is in verse 21, followed by αἱ ἡμέραι ἐκεῖναι in verse 22. It may then be that τὴν θλίψιν τῶν ἡμερῶν ἐκείνων refers back to that specific instance of great tribulation. It is quite possible, perhaps even likely, that many readers will initially make such an identification, a possibility we shall return to in section 6.3.7 below. However, as we have just argued, readers prepared to process the speech deeply will also notice that the specific instance of “great” tribulation in verse 21 is but one example of the tribulation generally described in 24:4–14. We can therefore argue that readers who reach communicative alignment will take “the tribulation of those days” in 24:29 to be tribulation such as the great tribulation of verse 21 but encompassing all of the tribulation between now and τὸ τέλος described in 24:4–28. We shall see shortly that this wider reference is necessary for the implied argument behind the clear exhortations in the speech to work effectively.

Notice also that τὸ σήμειον τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου is part of the description surrounding ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐρχόμενον ἐπὶ τῶν υἱῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ (24:30). However one takes the expression, the sign is built into the event — or at least inseparably associated with it.43

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43 If the genitive in τὸ σήμειον τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου is exegetical — “the sign which is the Son of Man” — then the relation is very close indeed. So Meier, Matthew, 287. Alternatively, Jonathan A. Draper, “The Development of ‘the Sign of the Son of Man’ in the Jesus Tradition,” NTS 39, no. 1 (1993): 1–17, following Thomas Francis Glasson, “Ensign of the Son of Man (Matt 24:30),” JTS 15, no. 2 (1964): 299–300, argues that the background to σήμειον is the Hebrew צֵּס — a “totem,” a wooden pole with some insignia on top, erected on a hill as a signal for the tribes to gather for war. We could then link this with the trumpet call and gathering described in 24:31. These signs accompany the coming of the Son of Man as described in the second half of 24:30.
Given this background, the parable in 24:32–33 now goes some way to summarising an answer to the second part of the disciples’ question. Readers seeking communicative alignment may infer that the parable explains the temporal relationship between 24:4–28 and 24:29–31. On a fig tree, leaves are an indication that summer is near. Likewise, seeing πάντα ταῦτα (which they will do within a generation, 24:34) is a general indication that the coming of the Son of Man is εἰγγύς. Jesus therefore does not add much to what he has said before. Although tribulation is a general indication that vindication is εἰγγύς, there will be no advance sign of his coming, and Matthew studiously avoids using σημεῖον in verses 32–33. Indeed, we can see that if there were such an advance sign, then this would destroy Jesus’ implied argument. An advance sign would give the disciples knowledge of the timing of the end, contradicting 24:36 and lessening the need to be undiverted, undeceived and to persevere. Rather, the implied argument seems to be that even if something huge happens, such as the fall of the Temple (or any “great tribulation” like it), the disciples are to do what they have been told to do in other instances of tribulation and to flee (cf. 10:23). By no means are they to be deceived even by a “great” tribulation. Vindication will be clear when it comes (24:27–28); it will be its own sign (24:30). This leaves the disciples being told that the coming of the Son of Man is εἰγγύς just as they were told that the kingdom ἡγάγηκεν (3:2; 4:17; cf. 10:7). Nevertheless, the promise of vindication still stands and believing it is essential for the paraenesis of the speech: hence the bold assertion of 24:35.

Moreover, to reinforce the need for undiverted faithfulness (the connective in 24:36 is δὲ rather than ὥσπερ), the timing of that day of vindication is left open. Again, Jesus is not adding much to the detail of the temporal framework beyond what he has said before. He has not said before when “that day” will be; here he says he cannot (24:36).

Davies and Allison construct a very useful summary of the speech from 24:36 onwards which shows the unity of the section, which is a great deal more straightforward than the first half of the speech.44 There is a repetition of key words around a basic exhortation: “because you do not know the day or hour of the coming of the Son of Man, keep watch”.

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This exhortation appears in close to its full form four times: in 24:42, 44, 50 and 25:13; otherwise, different parables and figures emphasise different aspects of the basic theme. The coming of the Son of Man as a clear and climactic future event may be ἔγγυς, but the final timing is known only by the Father.

The final section in 25:31–46 seems to be an unambiguous picture of the climactic future already firmly established in the implied temporal framework throughout the Gospel.

SUMMARY.

The overall picture so far as it can be discerned at this point can thus be pictured like this:

![Diagram of climactic future events]

Although this picture differs in some details from that implied in Davies and Allison, there is some significant similarity in its overall shape. In particular, it agrees with the following summary sentence. Davies and Allison conclude that if there is some reference to the fall of Jerusalem in 24:15ff, then Jesus’ answer to the disciples’ two-part question in 24:3 is this:

the temple will be destroyed during the tribulation of the latter days, which runs from the first advent to the second; and after that tribulation the end — whose date cannot be known — will come.⁴⁵

We should note again that the suffering, death and resurrection of the Son of Man is not

explicit in this summary, despite its emphasis in the Gospel narrative since 16:21. We shall take up this apparent omission in sections 6.3.7 and 7.2 below.

6.3.4 Communicative alignment: the shape of compliance.
Most of the processing effort required from this speech lies in inference concerning the temporal framework; what it means to be compliant flows from this relatively straightforwardly.

Jesus begins his answer with a general warning against being led astray: βλέπετε μή τις όμως πλανήσῃ (24:4). The placement of this warning at the opening of the speech, especially since it seems at first disconnected from the question in 24:3, gives it emphasis and urgency, over and above the strength it already has from being an imperative plus a prohibitive subjunctive. The ground for the warning is the fact that “many” will come in Jesus’ name, saying “I am the Christ,” without the event being Jesus’ coming (24:5; cf. 24:3). Similarly, tumultuous events in the future, both political and natural, are the grounds for 24:6 — ὀρᾶτε μή θροέσθε, “See that you are not alarmed.” In this context, βλέπετε (verse 4) and ὀρᾶτε (verse 6) appear to be synonymous, with the sense of taking personal responsibility for something (not) to happen — in this case, not being led astray or alarmed.46 Nevertheless, they also encourage clear sightedness, given that many things will happen that may look like the end, but “the end is not yet” (24:6). These are but “the beginning of the birth pangs” (αἱ ἀρχῇ ὁδίνων, 24:8). So, do not be deceived by false “comings” or alarmed by false “ends.” This sets the paraenetic tone for everything which follows.

In 24:9–14, the warning focuses down on tribulation that is directed at the disciples, via persecution or betrayal. Faced with this, there is a strongly implicit call to long-term endurance: ο δὲ ὑπομένας εἰς τέλος ὁτὸς σωθήσεται (24:13; cf. 10:22). Given 24:9 and the warning that the disciples may be put to death (ἀποκτενοῦσιν όμως; cf. 10:21), an endurance “to the end” may here, from an individual point of view, be taken as an endurance to death.

46 This particular lexical overlap is noted in Louw and Nida §13.134.
However, in the wider picture, the disciples need to endure because “the end” is delayed, so that the gospel can be proclaimed throughout the whole world (24:14).

Jesus then focuses down again and introduces a tribulation described as τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἔρημώσεως [...] ἐστὸς ἐν τόπῳ ἀγίῳ in verse 15. From the aside ὁ ἀναγινώσκων νοεῖτο, we may infer that Matthew expects at least some readers to form implicated premises from the allusion to τὸ Βδέλυγμα, which is βδέλυγμα τῶν ἔρημώσεων (Dan 9:27 LXX), βδέλυγμα ἔρημώσεως (Dan 11:31 LXX) and τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἔρημώσεως (Dan 12:11 LXX). However, his purpose in doing so does not seem to be to provide an explicit identification. After all, unlike 1 Macc 1:54 (cf. 1 Macc 1:59; 6:7; 2 Macc 6:1–5), the visions in Daniel 9 and 10–12 also do not explicitly identify τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἔρημώσεως. It is more reasonable to suppose that Matthew is flagging that Jesus will be arguing and exhorting along the lines of Daniel 8–12. For example, as John Collins suggests, the intention of the angelic discourse in Dan 9:22–27 seems to be to assure persecuted Jews “that the time of trial is coming to an end by locating it within an overview of history.”47 Similarly here, whatever the “great tribulation” is, it is of finite length (24:22) and should neither deceive nor divert those experiencing it (24:23–28).

Thus, while it may be entirely plausible to infer some degree of reference to the events preceding AD70, it is not actually necessary to do so, or indeed to link it to any specific event, to understand the exhortation. Whatever the tribulation is in 24:15ff, the same principles apply. In the context of proclamation (24:14), the exhortation to those experiencing this kind of tribulation is: φευγέτωσαν (24:16). Moreover, do not mistake the experience for Jesus’ coming as Son of Man and thereby be deceived by false prophets or false “comings.” Jesus is simply expanding 10:23 to a context of global proclamation (24:9, 14) and a situation of exceptionally extreme tribulation. Otherwise, the main difference is that this is a situation

47 John J. Collins, Daniel: With an Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature (FOTL 20; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1984), 93. Compare John J. Collins, Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 360: “The angel’s revelation specifies the whole post-exilic period as seventy weeks of years. The profanation of the temple is to last for half a week [...] This is a short period of history when viewed against the larger backdrop of history.”
where Judea itself becomes an unsafe place for the elect (24:16), not just an individual town (10:23).

This is not to say that Matthew wants to exclude an association with the fall of the Temple. The end of the Temple is hugely significant in the narrative, as is made clear in 21:12–13, 24:1–2 and 27:51. However, rather than be distracted, disciples at that time can take comfort that such tribulation is cut short by God (24:22). Similarly, disciples looking back on AD70 facing similar great tribulation can look back on that event (or, as we shall see, on the finite tribulation faced by Jesus in the coming narrative) and be reassured that vindication will always come in the end for those who remain faithful.

24:29–35.

Rather than see this merely as a prediction or prophecy, a compliant reader seeking to respond to the exhortation in the speech will recognise 24:29–31 as its foundational motivating promise. It is a promise of vindication following tribulation, couched in language that recalls similar promises in the Hebrew scriptures.\(^{48}\) In isolation, it is referentially ambiguous — hence some of the multiple streams of interpretation noted above. We shall see below how Matthew uses this initial ambiguity creatively in the subsequent narrative (sections 6.3.7 and 7.2 below). However, in context it is preceded by a statement that suggests it will be globally visible (24:27) and is followed by a sequence of references (24:37, 39, 44) that culminate in the scene of final, global judgment in 25:31–46.

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\(^{48}\) For example, the language seems to reflect at least Isa 13:10; 34:4; Joel 2:10; 4:15–16 MT and, most explicitly, Dan 7:13–14. Isa 13:10 is part of a prophetic announcement of the “day of Yahweh” (Isa 13:9–16) which is then applied to Babylon and Israel (Isa 13:17–14:23), vindicating the latter against the former. Isa 34:4 is part of a warning to the nations concerning Yahweh’s anger against them, warning of their destruction (Isa 34:2–4). Joel 2:10 is part of another “day of Yahweh” (Joel 2:1–11) this time directed against Zion, prefigured by a plague of locusts (Joel 1:1–2). But in Joel 4:15–16 MT the judgment is directed against the nations, vindicating the people of Israel. None of these allusions is explicit. As Craig Blomberg puts it, “A constellation of allusions rather than an actual quotation seems to be a more accurate description of Matthew’s form.” Craig L. Blomberg, “Matthew,” in Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament (ed. G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007), 87. The more explicit allusion is to the vindication of “one like a son of man” in Dan 7:13. We may also note that in the arrangement of Daniel 7, this is parallel to the vindication of the “holy ones of the Most High” (Dan 7:27) in the interpretation of the vision. In the broader arrangement of Daniel as a whole, it is parallel to the vindication of the kingdom of the God of heaven in Dan 2:44.
The exhortation stemming from the parable in 24:32 is therefore, in the midst of tribulation, to believe that vindication will surely follow. A compliant belief here has the strength of knowledge: γινώσκετε ὅτι ἐγγὺς ἐστίν, where it is appropriate to take γινώσκετε as a present imperative. It takes Jesus’ words as eternal (24:35).

We have already argued that the general pattern of paraenesis here is: “because you do not know the day or hour of the coming of the Son of Man, keep watch.” However, it will be useful to consider briefly the significant addition to this in the detail of the individual parables.

We may summarise the kind of compliance being called for here as vigilance combined with diligence in service. Vigilance is the positive counter-part to the clear-sightedness exhorted earlier in the speech. Keeping one’s attention off false prophets, christs and “comings” means keeping one’s attention on the true Master and his return. To this, Jesus adds diligence in service. Compliance is more than patient waiting and watching. This builds on the instruction in 16:21 to 20:34 (which, as we noted above in section 6.1, in turn built upon, contextualised and resolved some of the difficulties of the speech in Matthew 5–7). In the concluding verses of that section, the disciples were called to serve (20:26–27) ὁ νῦς τοῦ ἄνθρωπον ὡκ ἤλθεν διακονηθήαι ἀλλά διακονήσαι (20:28).

The combination of vigilance and diligence is expressed in the triad of parables or figures in 24:37–44 combined with the parable of the servant in 24:45–51. A comparison with the days of Noah begins three parables on vigilance (24:37–39). Like the judgment at the time of Noah, the final judgment will burst in unexpectedly and many will be caught off guard. This is followed by two examples, in perfect parallelism, of one taken, one left. Just as βλέπετε μὴ τις ὑμᾶς πλανήσῃ set the paraenetic tone of 24:4–35, so here γηγορεῖτε οὖν (24:44) sets the tone for 24:36–25:46. The reason is, “for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.” In the next parable, the coming of the Son of Man is compared to the uncertain timing of a thief coming in the night (24:43–44). The application is again: “Therefore, you must also be ready.” The focus then shifts from vigilance to diligence in the parable of the servant (24:45–51). Nevertheless, this continues the idea of an unexpected coming: 24:50,
“the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him.” If the servant is diligent, then he is a faithful and wise servant (24:45) and will be rewarded (24:47). Diligence here is pictured as *serving and feeding a household*. If the servant uses the delay of his master to indulge in self-serving activity, he is a wicked servant (24:48) and when the master returns unexpectedly (24:50), will be severely punished (24:51; cf. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13).

We get the same pattern of vigilance and diligence encouraged in the pair of parables in 25:1–30. The scene in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins is a wedding celebration. This is a classic five act story.⁴⁹ Five wise virgins take oil for their lamps and five foolish virgins do not (setting, 25:1–4). The bridegroom is delayed (complication, 25:5).⁵⁰ In the middle of the night (i.e. unexpectedly), the arrival of the bridegroom is announced and the foolish virgins ask for oil from the wise virgins, but there is none to spare (conflict, 25:6–9). Then the bridegroom arrives and only the wise virgins go in to the marriage feast (climax, 25:10). Afterwards, the foolish virgins are denied entry (dénouement, 25:11–12). Jesus makes the vigilance exhortation explicit in 25:13: “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.” This is then coupled with the parable of the talents which, while lacking the elements of unexpected and sudden return and the call to watchfulness, adds a focus on diligence using the analogy of the responsibility and financial productivity of servants awaiting the return of their Master.⁵¹ There are three servants and three scenes. Property is entrusted variously to the three servants; they employ it variously; and then the Master returns to settle accounts. Despite the groups of three, the point here is a division into two. The first two servants trust the goodness of their Master and his future reward, and invest productively. The third servant rather thinks that the Master is σκληρός ἄνθρωπος, that he will take any profits, and the servant therefore simply buries his one τάλαντον. Trust in the Master expressed in

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⁵⁰ Compare Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 516: “One cannot delete the delay as a secondary or unimportant feature. The parable is framed on the fact of the delay, and without the delay there is no parable.”

⁵¹ Notice now that rather than there being a “delay,” the master is simply away “for a long time” (25:19).
present productivity is richly (though variously) vindicated. This is the diligence in service commended here. A lack of trust, expressed in self-service, is severely punished. The punishment of casting into τὸ σκότος τὸ ἔξωτερον where there will be ὁ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὁ βρυγμὸς τῶν ὀδόντων (25:30) matches that which ended the previous vigilance-diligence sequence in 24:51.

The final scene in the speech uses the image of a shepherd dividing his flock to portray the judgment of the nations when the Son of Man finally appears in his glory. Davies and Allison, following Thomas Manson, describe this as “a word-picture of the Last Judgment,” rather than a parable.52

This is a conventional judgment scene. The scene is set in 25:31–34, with the nations gathered before the King, who will separate them into two groups, “as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.” The King speaks first to those on his right (25:34–40) and then to those on his left (25:41–45). Jesus concludes: the second group will go away to eternal punishment; the first to eternal life (25:46). The two speeches follow an identical pattern. The King speaks, declaring reward or punishment on the basis of whether or not the group gave him food or drink, welcomed him, clothed him, visited him when he was sick, or came to him in prison (25:34–36, 41–43). The group then ask when these things happened (25:37–39, 44). The King responds: “Truly I say to you, as you did (not do) it to one of the least of these (my brothers), you did (not do) it to me” (ἐνὶ τοῖν τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου τῶν ἔλαχιστῶν; 25:40, 45).

Establishing quite what this criterion means will of course be the chief concern of a compliant reader. Taken in isolation, the criterion could be taken a number of ways. However, the compliant reader should already have in mind at this stage 1) the nature of the speech as an expanded repetition of that in Matthew 10, 2) the general setting of tribulation and persecution for Jesus’ disciples, and 3) the added emphasis on trust expressed towards an

“absent master” through diligent service in the parables of the servant (24:45–51) and the talents (25:14–30).

The first of these considerations suggests that the criterion here almost certainly builds on the test of worthiness in Matthew 10. In its most general form at the end of Matthew 10 this is: “whoever gives one of these little ones [Ἐνα τῶν μικρῶν] even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward” (10:42). The term οἱ ἐλαχιστοί (25:40, 45) is the superlative of οἱ μικροί used in 10:42 and elsewhere in the Gospel of those who believe in Jesus (18:6, 12, 14). Moreover, when Jesus speaks of οἱ ἀδέλφοι μου (25:40) elsewhere in the Gospel, he always means his disciples (12:49–50; 28:10). How one treats the messenger shows how one responds to the message; and how one treats the “brothers,” the “least of these” or “little ones” shows how one treats Jesus and the one who sent him (cf.10:40). David Garland concludes: “The nations are judged according to the way they treated Jesus’ humble brethren who represented Christ to them.”53 We may add: that is a measure of their reception of the proclamation of the kingdom.

The second consideration brings to mind the tribulation and persecution directed at disciples which Jesus described as διὰ τὸ ὄνομα μου (24:9). In 10:17, this included being delivered over to courts (τις συνέδρια). Such treatment might well result in the need to be fed, given drink, welcomed, clothed and visited (25:35–36).54

The third consideration suggests that what is being tested here is whether people have taken on the mandate of being servants of the King and whether they have expressed their devotion to him and trust in him with diligent service. That is, this is like the moment when the master (ὁ κύριος) returns in the parable of the servant (24:46–41) and in the parable of the talents (25:19–30). The kind of service expected by the master in the latter was a quite general productivity on his behalf. However, the kind of service expected by the master in the

53 Garland, Reading Matthew, 243.
54 Compare the evidence of early persecution of Christians in Heb 10:32–34 — “sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property” (ESV).
former was directed ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκετείας αὐτοῦ and specifically involves feeding the household (24:45; cf. 25:35).

Putting these considerations together suggests that compliant readers of 25:31–46 will be warned and encouraged to serve others diligently as an expression of love for the King (25:40, i.e. the Son of Man in Glory, 25:31, who the disciples are learning to associate with Jesus), with a particular emphasis on serving one another — Jesus’ “brothers” — especially if they are suffering tribulation in Jesus’ name. Nevertheless, it is noticeable that Jesus does not identify oi ἐλαχίστοι explicitly in this section.55 It is also significant that the righteous did not know when they were serving the King in 25:37–39 (cf. 25:44). Jesus has of course previously commended and commanded a general, unqualified expression of mercy (e.g. 5:7), which extended even to enemies (e.g. 5:43–47). Compliant readers should infer that Matthew is not therefore exhorting an exclusive or overly partial expression of service.56

6.3.5 Convergence to compliance.

A certain curiosity concerning how Jesus might answer the disciples’ question in 24:3 might motivate the initial processing of the speech. By having Jesus not address the question directly at all at first, and by only explicitly focusing on Jesus’ “coming” from 24:7, Matthew keeps the expectation live. The speech requires a great deal of processing before it can be discerned that Jesus is only going to give a partial answer. By this stage, other considerations should begin to dominate, as Jesus makes it clear that the disciples should have more basic concerns about the future. Jesus reinforces the general warning he has given in earlier speeches that the future will extremely difficult. This introduces a motivation to discover how Jesus expects such tribulation to be overcome. When Jesus has given the basic answer to this — which, as we saw above, is to believe that vindication will surely come (24:29–35) — he continues to insist that the disciples face an urgent demand arising from the uncertain timing

55 Some close readers of this section are consequently unpersuaded by the narrower emphasis argued for here, including Davies and Allison, Matthew 19–28, 428–29 (who cite further examples either way) and Snodgrass, Stories with Intent, 543–63.

56 If this conclusion is right, then the comparison with the Pauline ethic in Gal 6:10 is striking: ἔργαζόμεθα τὸ ἀγαθὸν πρὸς πάντας, μᾶλλον δὲ πρὸς τοὺς οἰκείους τῆς πίστεως.
of vindication (24:36). The motivation to continue processing the speech then comes, as in previous speeches, from the combination of promised high rewards from compliance and extreme warnings about going astray.

As with the speech in Matthew 13, the high processing costs in this speech (especially up to 24:35) mean that readers will effectively have to be persuaded to compliance in order to also be persuaded to seek communicative alignment. A reader may be persuaded to compliance through the desire to seek vindication, given the high contrast between the vindication portrayed in 24:29–31 and the tribulation that precedes it. The costs of non-compliance in 24:36ff are similar to those warned of earlier in the Gospel. For example, to be put in a place where there is said to be ό κλαυθμός καὶ ό βρυγμός τῶν ὀδόντων (24:51; 25:30) was a consequence of non-compliance in 8:12; 13:42, 50 and 22:13. The rewards of compliance in 24:46 self-consciously recall the Beatitudes of Matthew 5. This reinforces the suggestion we made there (section 4.6.3) that to be blessed (μακάριος) by God is to be shown favour by him. Here, there is the reward of further responsibility (24:47; 25:21, 23) and verbal commendation (25:21, 23).57

However, as before, it may well be that we cannot fully explain compliance within the scope of the speech alone. The promise at the heart of the speech — that vindication will surely follow tribulation — is strongly made (24:32–35), but remains open to the accusation of being “just words.” Unless that promise is believed, the exhortation of the speech is in danger of falling flat. However, the promise cannot be made fully credible until the creative ambiguities of the speech are resolved by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

6.3.6 Authorial strategy.
As we shift perspective to consider the composition of this speech from Matthew’s point of view, there are a number of additional points we can make:

1. As we have noted, the speech is an expanded repetition of that in Matthew 10. However, while the ostensive focus in Matthew 10 was on the present mission to

57 We shall note a little later the connection with the authority given to Jesus in 28:20.
Israel, with allusions to a future and wider Gentile mission; the focus here is ostensibly on the mission to the Gentiles, but with a significant allusion (as we shall see) to the event that ends the exclusively Jewish mission.

2. The speech is structured around a paraenesis that depends upon the certainty of future vindication and judgment. The exhortation is to not be deceived or alarmed by tribulation, to know that clear vindication in “near,” to be vigilant because the timing of vindication is not known, and to be diligent in service because that is what will be assessed when your “master” returns.

3. The label “apocalyptic” applied to all or parts of the speech is unhelpful if it suggests that this is merely a revelation of the future in coded symbolic form, such that the main reading task is to decode the references. It is true that there is some unveiling of the future. Moreover, as in other literature dubbed “apocalyptic,” future events are depicted in such a way that may comfort a disciple that God is in battle and will be victorious on their behalf (especially in 24:27–31). However, a key characteristic of the speech is the way in which Jesus deliberately withholds information. He withholds information on the precise nature of tribulation. The “apocalyptic” language allows him to talk generally about great tribulation — that, for example, whatever it is, it should not be taken as a specific, advance “sign” of his coming, beyond the general sign that all tribulation indicates that vindication is “near.” Most explicitly, he withholds information on the timing of vindication

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58 Compare N.T. Wright on inferring a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in the speech: “Matthew, like Mark at this point, knows that the only way he can write of this is in the code of biblical imagery, and that the most appropriate source is the book of Daniel” (my emphasis). Matthew for Everyone: Part 2, Chapters 16–28, 117. Wright uses similar “code” or “decoding” language on pp.122, 164, 225, 223. Behind this seems to lie an understanding that “apocalyptic” language is used to encode or denote specific socio-political events. N.T. Wright, The New Testament and the People of God (Christian Origins and the Question of God 1; London: SPCK, 1992), 302–7. William Dumbrell is more convincing in suggesting that “apocalyptic thought” points “in its presentation to the way in which the problems of any historical era are to be solved in the light of divine decisions already taken” (my emphasis). In this, Daniel 7 stands as “a parade example of apocalyptic thought.” Through it, “the optimism of faith is able to penetrate [...] beyond the empirical world which seems so unpromising.” William J. Dumbrell, “Daniel 7 and the Function of Old Testament Apocalyptic,” RTR 34 (1975): 17, 23.
(24:36). We have also seen that, to some extent, withholds the exact identity of the objects of service that play a role in the judgment criterion in 25:31–46.

The withholding of information can have a powerful effect in decision-making situations. Too much information can make the decision unravel, taking away any element of dynamic flexibility. In particular, it may encourage complacency or laziness.

4. One effect of this veiling of the future is to evoke a sense of strangeness, especially in the temporal and referential confusion of the first part of the speech. However, this is entirely appropriate to Matthew’s purposes. He expects the post-resurrection situation he is hoping to address through the speech to be one of considerable confusion. The style of the speech reflects the expected reality.

5. Against this imprecise temporal and referential backdrop, the exhortation then stands out in clear relief, as under point 2 above: do not be deceived or alarmed; flee when necessary; know that vindication is “near”; be vigilant and be diligent in service.

However, the temporal and referential imprecision of the speech serves another purpose. They are creative ambiguities, which allow Matthew to use the subsequent narrative to give decisive credibility to its central promise, as we shall explore in the next section.

6.3.7 Continuation: the implied temporal framework as resolved in the subsequent narrative. We have pursued a communicative equilibrium that does not pin down how long it will take for vindication to come, aside from repeating that it is “near” and certain but the day is unknown. However, the lack of temporal clarity in the speech (we have argued: a deliberate lack) does mean that it may suggest an expectation of complete vindication within a generation. We have argued above that the εὐθεῖας in 24:29 best relates to immediacy of vindication after all the tribulation described in 24:4–28, and that πάντα ταῦτα taking place within a generation (24:34–35) includes 24:4–28 but excludes 24:29–31. But one must concede that these
conclusions can only be reached after some extensive processing of the speech. The immediate impression in 24:4–35 is that *everything* is happening soon.\textsuperscript{59}

However, there are also within the speech some elements which do not fit such a restricted time-frame very well. As we noted above, how it can be true that κηρυχθησεται [...] τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ οἰκουμένῃ within such a tight frame is unclear. Some of the parables in Matthew 24:36–25:46 also seem to suggest a delay before the coming of the Son of Man (24:48; 25:5) — time enough, certainly, for a disciple to become unfaithful. Quite how this all fits together remains unresolved at this point.

What we shall explore here is the possibility that these apparent inconsistencies are however resolved in the subsequent narrative, in a manner very similar to the “temporal resolving” we noted in Matthew 3. In Matthew 3, we saw how two events described within a speech as contemporaneous were separated or *resolved* in the subsequent narrative by one of the events happening but not the other. John the Baptist described the imminent arrival of one after him (3:11) who will execute a separating judgment (3:12). However, when this one does arrive in the very next narrative episode (3:13ff), there is no separating judgment. We argued in section 4.3 that it is not that John spoke incorrectly, but that he spoke imprecisely. Subsequent events separate the two events temporally, while retaining their close association. This was confirmed when Jesus took on John’s prophetic mandate and continued to proclaim a future separating judgment.

We shall argue here for a similar temporal separation of what at first appears to be a single event. We shall argue below that Matthew describes the death of Jesus (27:45–54) and his subsequent post-resurrection reception of authority (28:18–20) in language that deliberately reflects 24:29–31. In other words, by the end of the Gospel the Son of Man has *come*. As Jesus promised, “all these things” happen within the current generation (cf. 24:33). However, it is also clear at the end of the Gospel that τὸ τέλος has *not* yet come. The global proclamation has only just begun (28:19–20; cf. 24:14) and ἡ συντέλεια τοῦ αἰῶνος lies in the future (28:20).

\textsuperscript{59} Compare the parallel speech of Matthew 10, where Jesus says the Twelve will not have finished their work of proclamation in all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes (10:23).
What this suggests is that by the end of the Gospel Matthew wants his readers to separate “the coming of the Son of Man” into two events: temporally separated but nevertheless retaining a tight connection. There is the vindication of the Son of Man (objective genitive) — *he* is vindicated. And there is the vindication of the Son of Man (subjective genitive) — the vindication he enacts for others in the separating judgment of the whole world. Nevertheless, these remain tightly connected. The first event confirms and guarantees the second.

We shall return to describe this “temporal resolution” fully in the next chapter (section 7.2), once we have considered in more detail the narrative which resolves Matthew’s implied temporal framework.


In one sense, this is a relatively straightforward section of text, narrating a simple sequence: the events leading up to Jesus’ arrest and abandonment (26:1–56), the events of his trials and execution (26:57–27:54), and finally the events preparatory to and flowing from his resurrection (27:55–28:20). However, in terms of the development and resolution of Matthew’s plot, we find that the role played by this section is profound. (Chapter 7 below will begin with a summary of this contribution to the wider plot-line of the Gospel.) There is also a distinct change of narrative pace as we begin chapter 26, which continues to the end of the Gospel. We can see this clearly if we look at the frequency of scene changes by plotting the cumulative number of scene changes against the cumulative number of verses. This gives some indication of the “speed” of the narrative. We get slightly different results depending on how we define a “scene change” (here it is: a major change in geographic setting or in participating characters), but the overall shape remains the same:
The traditional narrative-discourse divisions show up best for Matthew 1–10 (regions A–D), with the speeches showing as horizontal sections (B and D). Region E (Matthew 11–20) is much more of a mix of narrative and speech, and progresses more awkwardly. The speech-complex in Matthew 13 only just shows up, being broken by two scene changes, and the speech in Matthew 18 is barely distinct, being both very short and broken by a scene change. The narrative slows down still further in region F, as Jesus enters Jerusalem (Matthew 21–25). The first disputation in the Temple (21:23–22:14, which ends with three parables), the “woes” of Matthew 23 and the speech in Matthew 24–25 show as distinct horizontal sections. But in section G, beginning at 26:1, we have a clear reversion to the kind of rapid-fire, uninterrupted narrative we saw at the beginning of the Gospel (regions A and C).

We shall be arguing in what follows that a compliant reading of 26:1–28:15 leads to a belief that what takes place serves both to enable true discipleship that was otherwise impossible and to model true discipleship after the pattern of the tribulation-vindication of Jesus. Before doing so, it will be helpful to summarise the ways in which an expectation that this is what we shall see has been raised by the preceding narrative.

An expectation that something will happen to enable true discipleship (or at least something which Matthew will claim enables it) is an implication, first, of the material at the beginning of the Gospel on the neediness of the people Jesus has come to serve. This was an
implication of at least the Genealogy (with its reminder of the deportation), of the purpose statement in 1:21 (emphasising the need for forgiveness of sins; cf. 9:13), of the lack of response from Herod and Jerusalem in 2:1–8, of the description (built upon Isaiah 9) of Jesus coming like a great light in the darkness (4:12–17) and of at least the first four Beatitudes, which, we argued above, describe the kind of person the Servant has come to serve. There are also reminders of this neediness as the Gospel continues (e.g. throughout Matthew 8–9). Given also that Jesus has been given the Servant mandate by his Father (3:13–17; cf. 12:17–21), the expectation is thus that this need to be served will somehow be satisfied by Jesus before the end of Matthew’s account.

The second source of such an expectation lies in the huge disjunction between the Servant-like role the disciples are being called to (e.g. 4:19, 5:16) and their “little-faith.” This disjunction was first raised in 6:30, but was a major theme in 14:1–16:20 (see section 5.4 above) and then again in 16:21–20:34 (see section 6.1 above). We shall see this continue well into the current section, culminating in Peter’s denial (26:69–75). However, despite the little-faith of the disciples, we also found that the possibility of following the Servant pattern was implied at the beginning, middle and end of 16:21–20:34 — at the Transfiguration and following (17:1–20), in the exchange in 19:23–30 and in the final purpose statement and double miracle (20:28 and 20:29–34). We thus have the expectation that the obstacle of little-faith will somehow be overcome before the narrative ends.

Alongside this expectation, there is also plenty in the narrative so far to build an expectation that as Jesus goes to the cross, he will be modelling true discipleship. Recall that in 10:16–24 (see section 4.8.4 above), Jesus sent the Twelve out as sheep amongst wolves, warning them to expect to be put on trial before both Jew and Gentile — because “a disciple is not above his teacher.” In 26:1–28:15, we shall see the Teacher and Master setting the pattern, remaining steadfast under persecution to the end, on trial before both Jew and Gentile.

The explicit exhortation to the disciples from 16:24 has been to deny themselves and “take up their crosses” and follow him (cf. 10:38). The necessity of following Jesus’ example is then reinforced at the end of the section: “whoever would be great among you must be your servant” (γενέσθαι ἔσται ὁ μόνον διάκονος, 20:26; ) just as (ὡσπερ) the Son of Man came “not
to be served but to serve [...]” (20:28). We remarked that Jesus says nothing explicit to explain what “taking up one’s cross” might involve, although parallel statements suggested some sort of loss of life. 10:38 and 16:24 are the only instances of σταυρός before chapter 27. The expectation is thus that Jesus’ previous use of the term will be explained in the narrative of his experience of the cross (with σταυρός mentioned explicitly in 27:32, 40, 42).

In the speech of Matthew 24–25, the call was not to be diverted or led astray in times of confusion and tribulation, but rather to keep awake, faithfully waiting for vindication from God. We shall shortly see Jesus exemplify this perfectly: keeping awake in Gethsemane, standing firm as the “sheep” flee and are scattered, staying on the cross despite the taunts, knowing divine vindication is certain.

6.4.1 A claim concerning communicative equilibrium.

The claim is that compliant readers will recognise in the death and resurrection of Jesus the successful realisation of the tribulation-vindication pattern Matthew has been preparing them for, one which pioneers and enables its future imitation. Within this, they infer from the narrative that Jesus is uniquely able to pioneer the pattern. There are also elements of the Servant ministry peculiar to Jesus himself — most especially in securing life and forgiveness of sins for those who dependently follow after. Jesus’ completion of the pattern is comprehensive: as promised, the tribulation of Jesus in his suffering and death is followed by his vindication in resurrection, completing both “Servant” and “kingdom” programs and sealing a “new covenant” for his followers. Compliant readers infer from his vindication the certain condemnation of those who have opposed him, people who have unwittingly served his purposes but nevertheless remain morally culpable. The completion of the pattern “temporally resolves” hitherto ambiguous elements of Matthew’s temporal framework. Within a parallel time-frame, those “taking up their crosses” and following after Jesus in his faithfulness under tribulation are thereby guaranteed vindication.

Readers seeking communicative alignment may infer that this is the definitive expression of the tribulation-vindication pattern from the connections in the narrative with Jesus’ previous descriptions of the tribulation to come. That Jesus is taking on this tribulation
in order to complete his vocation and the Servant mandate he took on at his baptism is implied by the climactic placement of the narrative and specific connections with previous material, and is reinforced by scriptural allusion. That Jesus is thereby bringing vindication and satisfying the description of vindicated Son of Man is implied by the realisation of the passion-vindication predictions (16:21; 19:22–23; 20:17–19), by connections with the speech of Matthew 24–25 and by other direct statements, such as Jesus’ own interpretive words at the supper in 26:26–29, his confession in 26:64 and other details, such as the raising of those “fallen asleep” in 27:52–53. That Jesus is uniquely able to fulfil these tasks is especially apparent in the first cycle of material (26:1–56) — from contrasts throughout the section between the faithfulness of Jesus to his task and the repeated failure of the disciples. The guilt (and future condemnation) of those who oppose him is apparent most of all from the second cycle of material (26:57–27:54) — from contrasts between the implied innocence of Jesus and the determination of the religious leadership to kill the one Matthew is claiming to be God’s Son and King, and from details such as the tearing of the Temple curtain in 27:51. But that Jesus is decisively vindicated in his vocation and mandate is especially apparent from the final cycle of material (27:55–28:20) — with the truth of his resurrection unable to be held back. From this it may be further inferred that what Jesus has done guarantees a derivative vindication for those who follow him.

6.4.2 Expansion and further argument.

As we have already begun to argue (section 6.3.7), the main contribution of this section of the Gospel to Matthew’s implied temporal framework is to resolve it. However, in a departure from previous practice, we shall delay completing this argument until we have considered the content of these final chapters at further depth. This is because it will be important to establish the connections between the narrative and Jesus’ previous teaching concerning tribulation before making further inferences.

We shall be arguing again that Matthew has arranged his material in three broad cycles — this time roughly corresponding to the pattern of the earlier passion-vindication predictions: handing-over (26:1–56), trial and execution (26:57–27:54) and resurrection
(27:55–28:20). In each cycle, we shall argue that there is an alternation of episodes from which it is possible to make certain specific inferences. We shall also argue that in the first two cycles Matthew is stressing the tribulation voluntarily taken on by Jesus in pursuit of his mandate (with hints of the vindication this will secure), while the third stresses the vindication itself. The arrangement can be pictured thus:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>First cycle</th>
<th>Second cycle</th>
<th>Third cycle</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Handing over</td>
<td>Trial and execution</td>
<td>Resurrection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition to Jesus</td>
<td>Witnesses or bystanders</td>
<td>The uncovering of Jesus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jesus’ determination to complete his mandate</td>
<td>Jesus before Jewish and Gentile leadership</td>
<td>The attempted hiding of Jesus</td>
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<tr>
<td>26:1–5</td>
<td>26:57–58</td>
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<td>26:6–13</td>
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<td>26:30–35</td>
<td>27:15–26</td>
<td>28:5–10</td>
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26:1–56.

For readers seeking communicative alignment, the rapid-fire narrative progression in this section of the Gospel will be accentuated by experiencing a notable contrast between adjacent episodes. As John Paul Heil observes, the first thread of this pattern emphasises “the theme of

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60 The pattern will roughly follow that suggested by John Paul Heil, *The Death and Resurrection of Jesus: A Narrative-Critical Reading of Matthew 26–28* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), with differences noted where appropriate.
opposition to and separation from Jesus on his way to death."61 So the Jewish leaders plot his arrest and death (26:3–5), Judas plans to hand him over (26:14–16), the betrayal is predicted by Jesus at the Passover meal (26:20–25), Jesus further predicts his abandonment by the disciples (26:30–35) and then, finally, the arrest, betrayal and abandonment take place (26:47–56). The second thread, interwoven with the first, seems to emphasise Jesus’ determination to prepare for and embrace the events leading to his death — events that are necessary to complete his Father’s mandate. So Jesus willingly interprets an anointing as a preparation for burial (26:6–13). He then arranges preparation for the Passover meal (26:17–19) and at the meal itself he embraces his death (τὸ αἷμα μου, 26:28) as that which will bring forgiveness of sins for many (26:26–29). Finally, in prayer at Gethsemane he faces up to his death (τὸ ποτήριον τοῦτο, 26:39; cf. 20:22–23) and the scale of the task he has been given, but submits to the will of his Father (26:36–46).

That Jesus is taking on the kind of tribulation he has warned about previously in the Gospel is apparent from the first of these sequences. A heavily repeated word in this sequence is παραδίδωμι, used 10 times in relation to Jesus’ betrayal (26:2, 15–16, 21, 23–25, 48; also in 26:45–46). This is the term Jesus used in 10:17, 19, 21 and 24:9–10 to warn the disciples of “handing over” to arrest, death and tribulation (θλίψις). At Gethsemane he is uniquely alert to the tribulation he will personally face, praying and keeping awake (26:36, 37) in the manner he has called the disciples to keep awake and be ready (24:42–44) — but to which they are conspicuously failing to comply (26:40, 43, 45).

That there is something unique and enabling, but also pattern-setting, about what Jesus is doing is also apparent from the second sequence. This implies that he is taking the tribulation on in order to complete his particular vocation and that this will lead to vindication for himself, but also vindication derivatively for others. Jesus interprets the anointing in 26:6–12 as a preparation for what is to happen to him. In his preparations in 26:17–19, he describes the moment with the words “My time is at hand” (ὁ καιρὸς μου ἐγγὺς ἔστιν, 26:18; cf. 24:32–33). At the supper, he plays a unique role in giving out the bread and wine. Moreover, from

61 Heil, Death and Resurrection, 54. See also the chart on pp.4–6 of the same work.
the Gethsemane account, it is possible to infer the necessity of his undertaking the coming tribulation to complete his mandate. Jesus’ prays three times that the “cup” be taken from him (26:39, 42, 44) — if it is possible (εἰ δύνατον ἐστιν). When this part of the prayer is not answered, it is warranted to infer that it was not possible. That is, for the will of the Father to be done with respect to Jesus, the “cup” must be drunk. Just as Jesus accepted the will of his Father in undergoing John’s baptism, taking on the Servant mandate “to fulfil all righteousness” (3:15; see section 4.3 above). And yet Jesus is also looking beyond his own unique contribution to the Servant program, anticipating its success both in value and global impact (as part of the on-going Servant mandate to proclaim the gospel to the nations, 26:13; cf. 24:14). Likewise, at the Passover meal, as well as anticipating the success of his death in bringing forgiveness of sins for many (26:28), he also looks beyond the completion of his mandate to being with the disciples in his Father’s kingdom (26:29).

26:57–27:54.

The pattern of two sequences of material forming an alternating pattern seems to continue into this next group of episodes. The first sequence focuses on a series of witnesses to the arrest, trial and execution of Jesus. They are all somewhat removed from direct involvement in the mainline events (mostly described in the second sequence), but respond to and comment on them. First there is Peter, across two episodes (26:57–58, 69–75), then Judas (27:3–10), the crowd (27:15–26) and, in the climax of the sequence (27:45–54), there are both bystanders (οἱ ἐκείνοι, 27:47) and the centurion (and “those with him,” 27:54). The second sequence also has an internal integrity. In this case, the focus is on Jesus in his interaction with Jewish and Gentile leadership. This begins with the trial before the high priest and scribes and elders (26:57–68), followed by the trial before Pilate, across two episodes (27:1–2, 11–14) and ends with the execution of the sentence (27:27–44), within which agents of both the Gentile leadership (the soldiers in 27:27–31) and Jewish leadership (the chief priests, scribes and elders in 27:41–44) openly mock the crucified Jesus as “King of the Jews” and “King of Israel.”
In addition to the general contrast between the two sequences, there are two further contrasts suggested by the arrangement. The first can be inferred from the Peter–Jesus–Peter intercalation (26:57–75). The false denials of Peter in his “trial” before a servant girl and others contrasts with the bold confession of Jesus before the high priest. The second can be inferred from the Pilate–Judas–Pilate intercalation in 27:1–14 (and on into 27:15–26). Judas and Pilate are alike in recognising the innocence of Jesus (compare 27:4 with 27:18–19, 24). However, they differ in that Judas is prepared to accept his culpability, while Pilate attempts to “wash his hands” of his (27:24).

That Jesus is taking on the kind of tribulation he has warned about previously in the Gospel is apparent first from his facing false witnesses (26:59–60) and being mocked and reviled (ὁνιβασίζω, 27:44). This compares with the warning in 5:11 (also using ὠνιβασίζω). He is led before first Jewish leaders (26:57) and then Gentile leaders (27:2) — as in the pattern warned of 10:17–18. He is led out to be crucified (27:26, 31, 35) — establishing the pattern of “taking up” one’s cross (cf. 10:38; 16:24). But it may also be inferred that the tribulation he faces goes far beyond that which he has warned the disciples of. The mocking words about rebuilding the Temple in three days (27:40; cf. 26:) compare with what Jesus has said about his resurrection after three days (16:21; 17:23; 20:19; cf. 12:40). This aligns with what we have seen already about Jesus replacing the role of the Temple. A possible implication is therefore that such words are an assault on the Temple comparable to the “abomination” in 24:15 — a “great tribulation” (24:21) which the disciples are told not to face but to flee from (24:16; cf. 26:56).

That he is taking on this tribulation in order to complete his vocation is most explicit from the continuing realisation of the three earlier passion-vindication predictions (16:21; 17:22–23; 20:17–19). Much of the detail in the last of these (20:17–19) is realized in this section: Jesus is handed over to chief priests and scribes (26:57), condemned to death (26:66), handed over to Gentiles (27:1–2) to be mocked and flogged (27:27–31) and crucified (27:35). The final passion-vindication prediction was also followed by Jesus’ final vocational purpose statement: he has come to serve by giving his life for many (20:28). The current section (26:57–27:54) includes the moment when he actually does give up his life. Matthew seems to
be stressing that he does so voluntarily: “he gave up the spirit” (ἀφήνεν τὸ πνεῦμα, 27:50). Given all we have seen throughout the Gospel concerning Jesus taking up the Servant mandate from his Father, this would seem to be the point where he completes the task. This is implicit in the “blasphemy” (βλασφημεῖος) of the passers by in 27:39–40. Just as the Satan attempted to divert Jesus away from his recently taken-up Servant task in 4:1–11, with a series of jibes beginning “If you are the Son of God...” (4:3, 6; see section 4.3 above), so here the jibe is, “If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross” (27:40). With all the background on Jesus’ Servant mandate up to this point, it is therefore not surprising to see many connections here to the fourth Servant song. We have already seen Jesus shun violence (26:52; cf. Isa 53:9). Here we see him facing unjust and oppressive judgment (26:66; cf. “by oppression and judgment he was taken away,” Isa 53:8), silent before unjust accusation (27:12; cf. “he opened not his mouth,” Isa 53:7), despised and rejected (e.g. 26:67–68; 27:22–25; cf. Isa 53:3), crucified alongside two robbers (27:38; cf. “numbered with the transgressors,” Isa 53:12), apparently forsaken by God (27:46; cf. Isa 53:4) and pouring out his soul to death (27:50; cf. Isa 53:12).

However it is also striking that the more explicit Scriptural allusions in this section are actually to Psalm 22 (21 LXX). These appear in 27:35, 39–43, 46 (in reverse order to Ps 21:2, 7–9, 17–19 LXX). It seems that it is only at this point that Matthew can revert to his initial description of Jesus as “son of David” (with “Christ” implied) without fear of misunderstanding. Matthew’s emphasis in the main part of the Gospel has been on Jesus is the realization of the Servant. But it is also true that David was the forerunner of the Servant (as a comparison of Psalms such as Psalms 18, 22 and 69 to the fourth Servant song will confirm). By

62 Compare Davies and Allison, Matthew 19–28, 628, who note that the construction ἀφήνεν τὸ πνεῦμα is “an expression common in Greek literature,” including the LXX (e.g. the death of Rachel in Gen 35:18 LXX).
64 See section 4.1 above on the Genealogy and following, where “son of David” and “Christ” are emphasised (e.g. 1:1, 16–17, 20). Notice that in returning to this description, Matthew does not use the titles explicitly (the closest to doing so being 26:63–64). He seems to want his compliant readers to infer the connection for themselves.
65 See also the discussion in section 3.3 above.
fulfilling the mandate of the Servant in his suffering, death and resurrection, Matthew seems to be implying that Jesus is demonstrating what it truly means to be “Christ.”

That what Jesus is undergoing will thereby secure a future vindication is a fairly explicit claim of Jesus before Caiaphas. In response to the demand for Jesus (on oath) to “tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God” (26:63), Jesus’ response is “You have said so” (σο ἔσπας, 26:64), followed by, “But I tell you, you will certainly see [or: ‘from now on you will see’] the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

Given that Matthew has already had Jesus set up the Danielic coming of the Son of Man as an image of vindication and judgment (esp. 24:29–31; 25:31–46), compliant readers may infer this is a circumlocution for “Yes, and you will see me vindicated over you.”66 That is: vindicated in such a way as to place his accusers under judgment. This is then picked up and confirmed in the imagery surrounding the death of Jesus. Just before his death, there is darkness at noon (27:45), recalling the sun darkening in 24:29.67 As Jesus dies, the veil of the Temple (τὸ καταπέτασμα τοῦ ναοῦ, 27:51) is torn from top to bottom — implying a divine judgment against it and those associated with it.68 The earth shakes (27:51).69 Many of “the saints” (οἱ ἅγιοι) are released from the tombs (27:52).70 These signs are sufficient for a Gentile centurion

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66 On σο ἔσπας as an affirmative, see Davies and Allison, Matthew 19–28, 528–29. On the prepositional phrase πρ ἀρτι, BDF §12.3 suggests it should be read as ἀρτι = ἀμν, “definitely,” while BDAG, s.v. ἀρτι, suggests “from now on.” The latter perhaps fits less well in the context, given that it implies the Sanhedrin will begin to see Jesus’ vindication at that immediate moment.

67 The darkness may have been a more general allusion: the kind of “cosmic sign that typically attended the death of kings and other greats.” Garland, Reading Matthew, 260. Alternatively, Peter G. Bolt, The Cross from a Distance: Atonement in Mark’s Gospel (NSBT 18; Leicester: IVP, 2004), 125–27, suggests (with respect to the parallel in Mark) that darkness is to be associated with judgment (cf. Exod 10:21–22; Isa 59:10; Jer 15:9; Amos 8:9–10). It shows “Jesus is subject to the judgment of God.” We shall expand on this suggestion shortly. However, as Allison suggests, quite possibly Matthew intended multiple complementary allusions and associations, all adding to the gravity of the event. Dale C. Allison Jr, Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005), 79–105.

68 This is true whether one takes τὸ καταπέτασμα τοῦ ναοῦ to be the inner veil or the outer curtain. Dale C. Allison Jr, The End of the Ages Has Come: An Early Interpretation of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 30–33.

69 Compare the vindication of “the saints of the Most High” in Dan 7:27. David Garland describes earthquakes as “stock apocalyptic motifs associated with the last days and salvation,” citing Joel 2:10; Amos 8:8–9; Hag 2:6, among others. Garland, Reading Matthew, 261.

70 Some readers may recognise this as an allusion to the splitting of the Mount of Olives in Zech 14:4–5, as argued by Dale Allison, who goes on to conclude that this is “one more trace of the early church’s conviction that the end of Jesus could be depicted as though it marked the eschatological turning point.” Allison, The End of the Ages, 43–46.
and those with him to confess Jesus as “Son of God” (27:54; cf. 26:63). Even as Jesus dies, Matthew is beginning to imply his (eschatological) vindication.

In addition to this, there are striking inferences to be made from the pattern of imprecation in the first sequence we looked at above. In the alternating pattern of episodes, this sequence focuses on Peter, then Judas, then the crowd, and finally on witnesses to the death of Jesus. Peter begins “to curse and to swear” in his denial in 26:74 (καταθεματίζειν καὶ ὀμνόειν). While this could be an implied cursing of Jesus, it seems more natural in the context to infer that Peter is backing up his oath with a conditional self-imprecation of the form, “May I be cursed if this is not true.”71 Judas is also implicitly aware that he has called down a curse upon himself “by betraying innocent blood” (παραδοῦς αἶμα ἄθροιν, 27:4; cf. Deut 27:25 LXX, where a curse is declared against the one who takes a bribe to kill αἶμα ἄθροιν). In the next element of the sequence, the crowd (indeed, πᾶς ὁ λαὸς, 27:25) similarly accept responsibility for the blood (death) of Jesus.72 Finally, in 27:46 Jesus cries out “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Most discussions of the cry have focused on Jesus’ personal experience as he made it.73 However the point of view in 27:45–50 is external, with the focus on what the witnesses made of what they saw and heard. An obvious inference from the cry, coupled with the fact that this is a man hung on a tree (cf. Deut 21:22–23), is that this is a man under the curse of God.74

Across the sequence, then, we find people placed in different ways under the curse of God, culminating with Jesus himself. However, it is those who mishear Jesus who infer that

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71 So Louw and Nida §33.472. This may explain the lack of direct object for καταθεματίζειν and its close association with ὀμνόειν. Compare the parallel in Mark 14:71 and BDAG, s.v. ἀναθεματίζω — which appears to be synonymous with καταθεματίζω.

72 That is, while this may not be directly a “self-curse” (Davies and Allison, Matthew 19–28, 591), it places the people in the similar position to Judas according to Deut 27:25.

73 For a survey, see Bolt, The Cross from a Distance, 127–35.

74 Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “Crucifixion in Ancient Palestine, Qumran Literature, and the New Testament,” CBQ 40, no. 4 (1978): 493–513, presents evidence of a pre-Christian understanding of crucifixion as a “hanging on a tree” from two Qumran texts. 4QpNah 3–4 i 7–8 uses the phrase “hanges as live men” to refer to an event described in Josephus (Ant. 13.14.2 §380) when 800 Jews were crucified by Alexander Janneus. This is interpreted in the text (in line with Deut 21:22–23) as an expression of God’s wrath against those who died. Further evidence that so being “hanged on a tree” was interpreted as the curse of God is then found in 11QTemple 64:12, which reads: “for what is hanged upon the tree is accursed by God and men.”
he is seeking salvation (from his cursed state) through Elijah (27:47–49) — i.e. is looking to a future eschatological salvific turning point which Matthew is claiming has already begun (cf. 3:4; 17:3–4, 10–13). Those who hear will understand the irony of the cry as the cry of God’s anointed, suffering under God but actually on the verge of vindication (compare Ps 22:1 with Ps 22:22–31). Moreover, his curse-bearing would seem to have derivative curse-related effects. His unjust accusers from the Temple establishment are effectively cursed as the veil is torn. Simultaneously, many of “the saints” have a curse (the curse of death) lifted from them (27:52–53).


The pattern of two threads of material forming an alternating pattern seems to continue, although it is perhaps less distinct here.

The background (inner) sequence (27:57–60, 62–66, 28:2–4, 11–15) depicts events which involve in different ways the attempted hiding of Jesus — ultimately futile attempts (innocent or otherwise) to restrain him in death. Thus Jesus is laid in a sealed tomb (27:57–60), which is then secured further and guarded (27:62–66). An angel of the Lord then exposes the inability of the stone and the guards to contain Jesus (28:2–4) and Matthew then exposes the lie that the body was stolen (28:11–15).

Against this background, the mainline sequence (27:55–56, 61; 28:1, 5–10, 16–20) depicts the uncovering of Jesus: a progression of reliable witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus, the first of whom have seen the death of Jesus. The women followers from Galilee witness the death of Jesus (27:55–56); witness his tomb sealed (27:61); come to see the tomb on the first day (28:1); see the stone rolled away, the angel of the Lord and then Jesus himself (28:5–10). The eleven disciples then go to Galilee and see the risen Jesus for themselves (28:16–20). Matthew uses θεωρέω (27:55; 28:1) and then ὅραω (28:6–7, 10, 17) to describe this pattern of sight which then contrasts with the “kingdom-blindness” we noted earlier in the Gospel (chapter 5 above). This sequence thus completes the fulfillment of Jesus’ passion-

75 The bystanders mishear ηλία (27:46) as Ἡλία (vocative of Ἡλίας).
vindication predictions. As we shall consider further in the next chapter, it also completes the portrait of Jesus as vindicated Son of Man, and sets the stage for a derivative Servanthood and a future vindication at the end of the age.

6.4.3 Authorial strategy.

Matthew’s strategy at a micro-level is thus to arrange his episodes to generate three cycles of contrast. John Paul Heil posits that these contrasts are made within each cycle through seven overlapping intercalations.76 This is possible, but the reading experience in the end is simply an alternation of themes. We have suggested above that these contrasts are made in order to show Jesus’ determination to prepare for and embrace the events leading to his death against the background of opposition and betrayal (26:1–56); Jesus’ unjust trial and execution against a background of mixed witnesses (26:57–27:54); and Jesus’ resurrection and vindication against a background of attempts to contain him (27:55–28:20). These cycles of contrasts then serve Matthew’s wider purpose, which is to show Jesus faithfully completing his Servant mandate and being vindicated as a result — which then enables and initiates a derivative Servanthood from his disciples among the nations.

6.4.4 Continuation.

We can see 28:16–20 as the final element in one of the interwoven sequences in 27:55–28:20. However, the final five verses will prove to be so important that they will be treated separately in the next chapter. We shall consider there the final resolution of Matthew’s temporal framework and the claim this implies concerning a guaranteed future vindication under a new covenant. We shall also consider the continuation of the whole Gospel narrative to the final scene or dénouement, and the credibility given to Matthew’s claims by Jesus’ death and resurrection.

76 Heil, Death and Resurrection, 2–6.
Chapter 7

Matthew 28:16–20. Therefore Go and Make Disciples

We have almost completed our basic analysis of the Gospel. However, this is the point in the narrative where the vindication of Jesus is formally announced, as Jesus declares that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him (28:18). We may therefore also say that this is where the “plot” of the Gospel is declared to have been resolved. This is therefore a good point to review our previous analysis in order to consider Matthew’s plot and to highlight how successive “crises” have all found their resolution in the death and resurrection of Jesus. We shall then be in a better position to consider the final resolution of Matthew’s implied temporal framework, and then to consider the contribution of the final open-ended commandment in the Gospel (28:19–20) to its overall communicative equilibrium.

7.1 The resolution of Matthew’s “plot”

We have considered the structure and arrangement of the Gospel at the micro level in our analysis above by approaching it as a component of Matthew’s communicative strategy. However, our analysis has so far stopped short of thinking through the structure and arrangement of the Gospel at a macro level and the contribution that makes to Matthew’s overall communicative strategy. We have packaged the analysis in broad blocks of material in the previous four chapters, largely driven by how shorter sections seem to work together, but this is a good opportunity to say more about such decisions and to progress a macro analysis still further. Our approach to structure and arrangement as we do so will be broadly in line with studies that have addressed the narrative structure of the Gospel. While almost every analysis of Matthew’s Gospel includes some discussion of its structure, not all stop to consider at any
length why structure might be important and what role it serves.\(^1\) Studies which address that narrative structure or “plot” of the Gospel are notable exceptions.

The “plot” of a narrative has been defined variously. In reviewing previous narrative studies of the plot of Matthew’s Gospel, Mark Allen Powell isolates three broad approaches.\(^2\) The first emphasises narrative flow or sequential arrangement; the second emphasises some sort of conflict analysis; and the third emphasises the causal relationships between different episodes. This last emphasis often builds upon Seymour Chatman’s work on narrative structure.\(^3\) A prominent case in point is the seminal work on Matthew’s plot by Frank Matera, who defines a plot as a sequence of events which are arranged and connected together causally to produce a “particular affective or emotional response.”\(^4\) Some events are more important than others, and Matera uses Chatman’s term “kernel” to describe an event that is essential to the plot:

(1) A kernel advances the plot. (2) A kernel occasions a puzzling or difficult problem (crux) in the narrative. (3) A kernel cannot be deleted without destroying the logic of the plot. (4) One kernel calls for completion by another kernel and so kernels form a sequence of action.\(^5\)

Identifying what are and what are not the kernels in the Gospel will then provide an outline of

\(^{1}\) One of the most striking feature of Matthew’s Gospel is the presence of the long speeches from Jesus, and it has long been noticed that the five longest end with the phrase καί ἐγένετο ὁ Ἰησοῦς (7:28–29; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). Benjamin Bacon used this to argue that the Gospel is thereby divided into five “books,” intended to parallel the Pentateuch. B. W. Bacon, Studies in Matthew (New York: H. Holt, 1930). As a detailed proposal this does not stand up well to close scrutiny. Nevertheless, the simple observation that the speeches divide up the narrative still stands, and plays a role in most discussions of the structure of the Gospel. The other repetition that many, since Kingsbury, have taken as structurally significant is the ἅπα τότε ἔρχεται at 4:17 and 16:21. Kingsbury, Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom, 7–25. As Allison notes, most modern structural analyses of Matthew fall into one of these two camps. Allison, Studies in Matthew, 135. In what follows, we shall take the ἅπα τότε ἔρχεται to be not so much a structural marker (of narrative sections or divisions, competing with other such markers), but more of a narrative marker, indicating a new narrative emphasis (on Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom at 4:17 and on teaching concerning Jesus’ suffering, death and resurrection at 16:21). This will allow us to draw on insights from both camps.


\(^{3}\) Chatman, Story and Discourse. See section 2.2.2 above.

\(^{4}\) Matera, “Plot,” 236; Chatman, Story and Discourse, 43.

\(^{5}\) Matera, “Plot,” 237.
its narrative structure. However, the process of identification need not be straightforward. Warren Carter follows a very similar approach and identifies some kernels that are different from Matera and some that are broadly similar.

The kernels Matera and Carter most strongly agree on are: the question of John the Baptist (11:2–6), the episode at Caesarea Philippi (16:13–28, with a new emphasis at 16:21) and the cleansing of the Temple (21:1–17 or 21:1–27). We noted the importance of these events in the micro analysis above (sections 5.1, 6.1 and 6.2) and we shall be agreeing in what follows that they play a significant role in the plot of the Gospel. However, in one key regard we shall be departing from Chatman’s approach to plot. Chatman suggests that “kernels” are events which generate problems or “cruxes” which need to be resolved further down the plot. One odd effect of this is that it excludes any event which resolves previously generated problems but does not obviously generate new problems or cruxes. Such episodes may not get the emphasis in the outline of the plot that they warrant, despite being essential for its logic. In Matthew’s Gospel, the death and resurrection of Jesus stands out as an obvious candidate for such an event.

This curious side-lining of the death and resurrection of Jesus is redressed by Mark Allen Powell in his 1992 paper, “The Plot and Subplots of Matthew's Gospel.” Powell suggests an integration of the three approaches to Matthew’s plot that he has discerned in the literature, such that each of them point to Jesus’ death (and resurrection) as especially signifi-

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6 According to Matera, the kernels in Matthew are: the birth of Jesus (2:1a), the beginning of Jesus’ ministry (4:12–17), the question of John the Baptist (11:2–6), the recognition of Jesus as Christ at Caesarea Philippi (16:13–28), the cleansing of the Temple (21:1–17) and, finally, the Great Commission (28:16–20). Matera, “Plot,” 237. These then divide the book up into blocks of narrative which deal with the questions and issues raised by those major events. This gives a narrative in which Jesus appears to Israel as Messiah in fulfilment of God’s promises, but Israel refuses to accept the Messiah, so the gospel passes to the nations. “Plot,” 242–43, 245–46. (This sounds like a kind of strong supercessionism or “replacement theology.”) We shall see later in our study that it might have been better to have said “…so the proclamation of the gospel (broadens to the nations.”) Along the way, Matera concludes that the affective response Matthew wishes to produce is one of worship and confidence, based on the authority given to Jesus at the end. “Plot,” 242.

7 According to Carter, the kernels are: God’s initiating action by which Jesus is conceived (1:18–25), Jesus beginning to preach and heal (4:17–25), John the Baptist’s question (11:2–6), the declaration that Jesus’ suffering, death and resurrection are necessary to his identity (16:21–28), the conflict with the Jewish leaders (21:1–27) and Jesus’ resurrection (28:1–10). Carter, “Kernels and Narrative Blocks,” 472–81.
cant. Thus, with respect to the first approach (taking the story as a simple sequence of events), Powell notes that the two explicit indicators of narrative flow (the ἄρα τότε ἤρξατο in 4:17 and 16:21) focus our attention first on the preaching of the kingdom but ultimately on the death of Jesus. With respect to the third approach (based on the causal relationship between events), Powell draws our attention to three direct purpose statements which offer significant clues as to what is “driving” the plot. These are: 1:21, Jesus will save his people from their sins; 9:13, he has come to call sinners; and 20:28, he has come to give his life as a ransom for many. From these, Powell concludes that Matthew is fundamentally about how Jesus came to save his people from their sins. The plot of Matthew's Gospel describes how this purpose came to be fulfilled, to some extent in Jesus’ ministry, but, ultimately, only in his death.

With respect to the second approach (based on some sort of conflict analysis), while previous writers have noticed the conflict between Jesus and the religious authorities and the “conflict” between Jesus and his disciples when they have “little-faith,” Powell notices a deeper conflict:

What this narrative is really about is conflict on a deeper level, conflict between God and Satan. [...] This conflict is also resolved in Matthew’s passion narrative, but this conflict is clearly resolved in Jesus’ favour. When Jesus dies on the cross, he fulfils the will of God (cf. 26:39, 42) and defeats the will of Satan (cf. 16:21–3).

We shall be building on Powell’s analysis in what follows, while drawing in some of our results from previous chapters. Putting these insights together, and adding a little more about the wider biblical context, suggests that Matthew’s plot has the following shape to it (in very broad outline), culminating in the death and resurrection of Jesus:

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8 Powell, “Plot and Subplot,” 193–94.
9 Powell, “Plot and Subplot,” 196.
10 Powell, “Plot and Subplot,” 198. In section 1.3 above, we noted Kingsbury’s analysis of conflict in Matthew as Story.

In sections 4.1 and 4.2 above, we saw that the background crisis to the events of the Gospel was the fact that Israel has fallen back to the level of the nations following the exile, forcing an appeal not only to the promises to David, but the global promises to Abraham. We saw this suggested in both the Genealogy (1:1–17) and the poor response of Herod and “all Jerusalem” to news of the Messiah. Quoting Isaiah, Matthew will later describe the people as “dwelling in darkness” and living “in the region and shadow of death” (4:16). In this troubled setting, Jesus is born to fulfil the need for a leader who can “save his people from their sins” (1:21).

7.1.2 Matthew 3:1–10:42. The “Servant” mandate to solve the crisis and bring the kingdom of heaven near is taken on by Jesus.

In sections 4.3 to 4.8, we also saw that there is an integrity to Matthew 3 through to 10. The proclamation of the kingdom of heaven spans these chapters (3:2; 4:17, 23; 9:35; 10:7). These are foundational chapters: they establish Jesus and what he is doing as the fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets, bringing the kingdom of heaven near. While Matthew is most explicit in 12:17–21 that he does so by taking on the role of Isaiah’s promised Servant of the Lord, there is already within these earlier chapters sufficient warrant for drawing this implication. In Matthew 3–4, Matthew shows Jesus taking on the Servant mandate (section 4.3 above). We have argued that implicit within this is a mandate to save people from their sins.\footnote{Beginning in section 3.3, and drawing on Bolt, “Forgiveness of Sins”.}

The general imperative here is to recognize the nearness and certainty of the kingdom of heaven (3:2; 4:17), given Jesus and what has taken on (section 4.4 above). In the next narrative section of Matthew 8–9, we then see something of the purpose of the Servant mandate as Jesus serves and brings blessing to those who are in desperate need, know it and depend on Jesus to serve them. In section 4.7, we described what Jesus was doing as taking people from under the shadow of death in a way that was connected to their need for forgiveness of sins. Interwoven with these two narrative sections are the first two of Jesus’ major speeches, both
of which begin to address the extension of the Servant program to his followers. In these, Jesus begins to outline both the necessity of being incorporated into the program and also what it will entail — essentially, being a light that glorifies the Father to others in deed (Matthew 5–7) and being a source of revelation to them in word (Matthew 10).

7.1.3 Matthew 11:1–28:15. Jesus takes the lead in executing the role of Servant, and is vindicated for so-doing.

There is also an integrity to Matthew 11 through to the resurrection of Jesus in chapter 28, as we argued in chapter 5. Matthew 3 through 10 establish Jesus as “the one who is to come” (as Jesus confirms in 11:4–6), the one who comes in the role of Servant of the Lord (as Matthew confirms in 12:17–21). These chapters also begin to outline what being part of his Servant task will entail (in the speeches of Matthew 5–7 and 10). Then in Matthew 11 though to the resurrection of Jesus in Matthew 28 what we have is the narrative of Jesus’ particular Servant experience, followed by his vindication.

There are more interwoven themes here. The mainline narrative portrays the increasing tribulation of Jesus. This begins with the unbelief of “this generation” and the little-faith of his disciples (11:1–12:40; 13:53–16:20). Jesus then predicts further and deeper tribulation (to be followed by vindication, 16:21–20:34) He faces opposition in Jerusalem and the Temple (21:1–23:39), he is arrested and abandoned (26:1–56), and then tried and executed (26:57–27:54). Finally, he is vindicated in his resurrection (27:55–28:20). Interwoven with this narrative are three more speeches which, like the first two, draw Jesus’ followers into his experience. The speech-complex in Matthew 13 provides them with the reassurance of his (implicitly divine) perspective on mixed responses to kingdom proclamation (section 5.3 above). Interwoven with the narrative in 16:21–20:34 is teaching on costly humility and service — including the speech-complex in Matthew 18, which focuses on humility and forgiveness within the community (section 6.1 above). Finally, the speech in Matthew 24–25 is a reassurance that the pattern of tribulation-vindication that Jesus is undergoing will equally well apply to his followers too — this therefore underwrites an exhortation to persevere in vigilance and diligence (section 6.3).
However, we can also think of this section of the Gospel as comprised of a sequence of dramatic complications which all then find their resolution in the death and resurrection of Jesus:

11:1–16:20. THE FIRST COMPLICATION.
The first complication is that “this generation,” to which Jesus is proclaiming and within which he is healing, fails to recognise him as “the one who is to come” and change its mind concerning the nearness of the kingdom. Beginning with John the Baptist, doubts creep in and opposition increases. The general imperative here is to depend on the Father through Jesus despite this “kingdom-blindness” (11:25–30; section 5.2 above). Moreover, such kingdom-blindness is to be expected (Matthew 13) and Jesus himself does not falter in compassionate, powerful outreach. This is even as the conflict extends to the disciples and their “little-faith.” Some partial resolution is found as they recognise him as Son of God (14:33) and as Christ (16:16).

16:21–20:34. THE SECOND COMPLICATION.
The second complication is that the disciples (and Peter in particular) fail to recognise the necessity of Jesus’ coming tribulation as Servant, and so unwittingly side with Satan (16:23). But Jesus continues to emphasize in his teaching both the necessity of his Servant-death and the necessity of following his lead. The general imperative here is to follow Jesus in the path he is taking (16:24; section 6.1 above). The instruction in this section applies this to practical expressions of servanthood within the Christian assembly.

21:1–27:50. THE THIRD COMPLICATION.
The third complication occurs as Jesus comes to Jerusalem and the Temple in direct confrontation, in such a way as to set in motion the events leading directly to his death. The nature of his death as one which will fulfil his (Servant) mandate to bring forgiveness of sins is confirmed at the Last Supper (26:26–29). The necessity of his death is confirmed in the Gethsemane episode (26:36–46). Jesus is then unjustly arrested, tried and executed. Just before his death he is apparently abandoned by God.
27:51–28:15. THE FINAL RESOLUTION.

The climax in the overall plot of the Gospel is actually half way through the final episode in the sequence running from 26:57–27:54, just after Jesus (voluntarily) gives up his spirit (27:50). That is, the final resolution comes within the death and resurrection of Jesus. The death and resurrection of Jesus deals not only with each of the complications listed above, but also with the initial, background crisis. In reverse order:

(1) First of all, the death and resurrection of Jesus reverses the unjust verdict of his trial, shows where true victory lies and whom is vindicated. This verdict against his accusers is signified in the tearing of the curtain in 27:51. This deals with the third complication.

(2) Next, the death and resurrection of Jesus shows the necessity of his Servant-death, as he completes the task he has been given to do and would have avoided if it had been possible (cf. 26:36–46). This deals with the second complication.

(3) The death and resurrection of Jesus also successfully reveals (or “fills out”) his identity as Son of God (e.g. 27:54). This deals with the first complication.

(4) Finally, the death and resurrection of Jesus fulfils his vocation as Servant to bring forgiveness of sins for many, as he gives his life as a ransom (cf. 20:28) and pours out the “blood of the covenant” (cf. 26:28). This success is signified through the breaking of tombs and raising of the dead in 27:52–53. It deals with background crisis (section 7.1.1 above).

7.1.4 Matthew 28:16–20. The dénouement: the disciples are formally incorporated into the Lord’s Servant program for the nations.

With the crisis dealt with at such a fundamental level, the stage is set to take the benefits of Jesus’ Servant work on behalf of many to the nations, as we shall consider in more detail below (section 7.4). But in 28:16–20 Matthew will also claim that Jesus has won a victory
over the little-faith and doubt of his disciples. Readers who have been engaging in a “constructive empathy” with the disciples are thereby prepared and encouraged to comply with the general imperatives to recognize the kingdom (4:17), depend on Jesus (11:28–30) and follow his path as Servant (16:24).

To demonstrate how readers might be brought to such a theocentric commitment, it will be helpful to outline how the death and resurrection of Jesus has made his promises and warnings concerning the future credible (section 7.3 below). Before that, however, we shall consider the final resolution of Matthew’s implied temporal framework.

7.2 The final resolution of Matthew’s implied temporal framework

We began to argue in section 6.3.7 that just as we saw a “temporal resolution” in the implied temporal frame at the end of Matthew 3, as the “one coming after” John came without judgment, so we see something similar at the end of the Gospel narrative. Events that have apparently been portrayed as contemporaneous are teased out and shown by the subsequent narrative to be separate.

We can picture the implied temporal framework as it stood at the end of chapter 25 thus:

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tribulation</th>
<th>Vindication and Judgment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jesus Christ's birth</td>
<td>John the Baptist</td>
<td>The coming of the Son of Man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John the Baptist</td>
<td>Beginning of Jesus Christ's ministry as Servant of the LORD</td>
<td>Resurrection of Jesus?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning of Jesus Christ's ministry as Servant of the LORD</td>
<td>Suffering and death of Jesus? A 'great tribulation'?</td>
<td>Judgment of 'this generation' (end of Temple)?</td>
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The basic pattern is essentially the same as it stood at the end of Matthew 10, with a period of tribulation preceding the vindication that Jesus described there as the time when “the Son of Man comes” (10:23). However, since then we have seen a number of potential complications to the pattern. In section 6.1.2 we noted that while Jesus’ passion-vindication predictions could be aligned to the existing tribulation-vindication pattern, they also seemed slightly
detached from that framework and that Matthew says little to connect them strongly. Likewise, the future judgment of “this generation,” which culminated in the woes of chapter 23, could also be aligned with the existing framework. But again the “fit” was not entirely clear. Finally, we noted in section 6.3.3 the difficulty of quite where to place the “great tribulation” of 24:15–28.

The final resolution of the framework can be seen if from Matthew 26–28 we review the ways in which Jesus uniquely experiences in himself the tribulation-vindication pattern he has outlined previously. In section 6.4, we noted this as an implication of the first strand of the alternating sequences running from 26:1–56. In his betrayal, Jesus is “handed-over” just as he warned his disciples they would be (10:17, 19, 21; 24:9–10). In the next cycle, we saw him led before first Jewish leaders (26:57) and then Gentile leaders (27:2) — as in the pattern warned of 10:17–18. Finally, Matthew describes the death of Jesus (27:45–54) and his subsequent post-resurrection reception of authority (28:18–20) in language that deliberately reflects 24:29–31, including an act of judgment on the Temple, as the curtain is torn (27:51). In other words, by the end of the Gospel the Son of Man has come. As Jesus promised, “all these things” happen within the current generation (cf. 24:33). However, it is also clear at the end of the Gospel that τὸ τέλος has not yet come. As we shall be reminded of shortly, the global proclamation has only just begun (28:19–20; cf. 24:14) and ἡ συντέλεια τοῦ αἰῶνος lies in the future (28:20).

As we began to suggest in section 6.3.7, what this suggests in particular is that by the end of the Gospel, Matthew wants his readers to separate “the coming of the Son of Man” into two events: temporally separated but nevertheless retaining a tight connection.

As we did for Matthew 3–4, we can picture the “temporal resolution” of the implied temporal framework:

12 These observations on Jesus’ experience of the tribulation-vindication pattern he has previously outlined are a corollary of Dale Allison’s claims concerning the “foreshadowing” of the passion throughout the Gospel. Studies in Matthew, 217–35.
The final picture that emerges certainly has an attractive simplicity to it. Rearranging the lower panel of the figure gives this:
This way of arranging the implied temporal framework highlights the pattern-setting function of Jesus’ completion of the Servant mandate. It also removes most of the oddities, tensions and incongruities we have noted in our analysis along the way. The top line represents Matthew’s realized eschatology; the bottom, his future eschatology. The one prefigures the other. The top line contains the fulfilment of all the imminence sayings; the bottom line accommodates the necessary delay.¹³

The only element we have not located precisely within the framework is the “great tribulation” raised by the speech in Matthew 24–25. By the end of the Gospel Jesus has of course experienced a tribulation “such as has not been seen since the beginning of the world” (cf. 24:21). This locates a “great tribulation” in the top line of the figure above, in the suffering and death of Jesus. But where do we fit a “great tribulation” in the parallel scheme? We could simply align it with the judgment of the Temple — an “aftershock” of the tearing of the curtain (27:51) experienced in the events of AD 66–70, as most commentators suppose. Or it could be, as we began to suggest in section 6.3.4 above, that Jesus keeps its identity and temporal location deliberately ambiguous. This allows the exhortation of his final speech to have full effect. Whatever happens, even under a “great tribulation” (even perhaps like the fall of the Temple), the exhortation is: do not be deceived, keep vigilant in watching and keep diligent in service — knowing your vindication is secure.

7.3 The credibility of Matthew’s promises and warnings

We have been arguing in previous chapters that a reader in communicative alignment with Matthew has come to the view that Matthew wants him or her to become incorporated into Jesus’ Servant program: served by him and then serving in a similar but derivative pattern. But how does a reader in communicative alignment with Matthew become compliant? That is, once readers have understood what Matthew through Jesus is claiming in the Gospel con-

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¹³ Further implications of the final implied temporal framework can be found in Cooper, “Adaptive Eschatological Inference from the Gospel of Matthew”.
cerning the future, and the warnings and promises related to that, how might they then come to be persuaded that this is indeed the case? Alternatively, how might a fragile compliant reader (under persecution for her compliance, perhaps) be kept from becoming non-compliant? These are some of the key questions we have been addressing in this study and as we come to the end of the more detailed analysis of the Gospel, this is a good time to bring together and expand upon the two key elements of the answer that is forming, in preparation for the final claims and exhortation of the Gospel in 28:16–20.

The implied decision-structure we have inferred in our analysis in one sense is quite simple. On the one hand lies the call to follow Jesus, to come to Jesus and be served, and to join and participate in his Servant task for the nations. On this path Jesus promises blessing. On the other hand lies anything else. On this path Jesus warns of destruction. However, in another sense the decision-structure is complex. If a reader could know for sure that the promises and warnings were genuine, then the decision would be straightforward. But the reader is confronted with multiple alternative claims and needs to be persuaded.

The first element of Matthew’s case for credibility that we have noticed concerns the role of the cost Jesus has voluntarily undertaken in shaping reader beliefs. In section 2.2.4 we raised the possibility that one of the ways Matthew’s Gospel functions to evoke theocentric commitment is to present Jesus as a “costly messenger.” That is, a messenger who voluntarily undertakes a cost in order to demonstrate his credibility (the kind of cost a false messenger would not be prepared to face).

As we review the Gospel narrative it has been clear from the beginning that Jesus has taken on the cost of the Servant mandate voluntarily. He voluntarily undergoes John’s baptism as a mark of accepting the mandate (3:13–17; to “fulfil all righteousness,” 3:15). He voluntarily refuses to abandon the mandate or forgo the cost associated with it when placed under pressure to do so by Satan (4:1–11; cf. 16:22–23). He voluntarily undertakes the strenuous task of proclaiming the kingdom and serving through healing and exorcism (cf. 8:20b, “the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head”). He voluntarily heads for Jerusalem, knowing what this will entail; and then, having entered Jerusalem, he voluntarily confronts and provokes the authorities in the Temple (21:12–13). In Gethsemane, in a passage that in many
ways recapitulates his initial taking on of the Servant mandate at his baptism, he voluntarily submits to the will of his Father (26:36–46). He then voluntarily declines to confront his opponents at his trials (26:62–63a; 27:14), voluntarily chooses not to come down from the cross (27:39–44) and voluntarily “gives up his spirit” (27:50).

That the cost of pursuing the Servant mandate is extremely high has also been apparent throughout. This is most apparent in the Gethsemane episode. Here we can infer that the cost is so high that unless it were not absolutely necessary to undertake it, the Father would not expect his Son to do so. Matthew then shows us the very high cost associated with Jesus’ betrayal and abandonment, his unjust trial, the mockery “blasphemously” directed at him, the physical suffering endured before and during his crucifixion, and his sense of abandonment by God just before his death. That a high cost is incurred voluntarily works to persuade readers about the sincerity of Jesus’ claims concerning the future.

The second element of Matthew’s case for credibility comes from seeing this voluntary cost within a wider package. This is necessary because one might conclude (e.g. on the basis of the high voluntary cost) that Jesus is sincere in his claims but mistaken. An external confirmation is also needed. Matthew suggests, for example, that this is provided by the tearing of the Temple curtain and the events surrounding it (27:51–53). This is an external sign act (i.e. not performed by Jesus). As we noted in section 6.4, the wording of 27:51 (the curtain is torn from top to bottom) suggests that Matthew wants it to be interpreted as a divine act. Most significantly, external confirmation is provided by Jesus’ vindication in resurrection stressed in 27:55–26:20. That Matthew is working to persuade his readers concerning concrete historical matters is particularly apparent in the two “apologetic” element of this sequence (27:62–66 and 28:11–15).

However, these are more than isolated acts of confirmation. They complete a pattern which demonstrates the Father’s determination and ability to bring judgment on his enemies and vindicate his Son. This sets a pattern that may be repeated for Jesus’ followers. This may then persuade readers concerning the decision facing them in that what God has done in Jesus then acts as a guarantee for what he has promised, through Jesus, to do for them, as their Father in heaven. Moreover, Matthew has placed all of this within a wider pattern: the deter-
mination of the Lord to complete the program of the Servant, re-establishing the recognition of his worldwide sovereignty, a determination expressed predominantly in Isaiah but also across the Hebrew scriptures (section 3.3 above). Matthew’s claim has been (most explicitly in the fulfilment formulae) that the realization of this expectation is centred on Jesus.

7.4 Matthew 28:16–20. The command to go and make disciples (also known as “The Great Commission”)

Finally we get to Galilee (see 28:7, 10 and 26:32). It is possible (as we noted in section 6.4) to see this episode as the final element in a sequence of episodes running from 27:55 which uncover the vindication of Jesus in his resurrection. However, we have also begun to argue that it serves a distinct purpose in the wider Gospel too. In the discussion of “plot” above (section 7.1), we described this as the dénouement. This is what is able to happen once the main action of the plot is complete. The activity of “making disciples” (28:19) can take place in all nations. It is also of course the start of a new story, one in which Matthew’s readers can participate, using the story they have just read as orientation, motivation and instruction.

7.4.1 A claim concerning communicative equilibrium.

The claim is that Matthew wants to commit compliant readers to worship and service, such that they are fully incorporated by Jesus into his Servant program for the nations. Just as he was given a mandate, so they are given a mandate.¹⁴ That is, he wants them to participate in making disciples in all nations, commissioned by Jesus. He does so using the eleven disciples as a paradigm for later disciples. Matthew works to address the doubts (or little-faith) of potentially compliant readers by persuading them that Jesus has indeed been divinely vindicated as promised. They may therefore participate in his mandate for the nations under the security of a covenantal promise.

¹⁴ Compare the claim made by Thomas Moore concerning the Lucan “Great Commission” (Luke 24:46–49): “Luke not only presented Jesus as the fulfilment of the Isaianic Servant, but also worded his version of the commission to depict the disciples as those who were to take up the Servant’s mission after Jesus’ departure.” Thomas S. Moore, “The Lucan Great Commission and the Isaianic Servant,” BSac 154, no. 613 (1997): 47.
Readers seeking communicative alignment with Matthew may infer that this is an incorporation into Jesus’ Servant program for the nations (and a call to incorporate others) from the command in 28:19–20, especially when seen in relation to Jesus’ own taking on of the Servant mandate in 3:13–17. Readers may infer this as a command addressed to them (and not merely a historical record of Jesus’ interaction with the eleven remaining disciples) from their previous alignment with the disciples and the lexical equation here between the eleven disciples (28:16) and the disciples the eleven are commanded to make (28:19). They may infer that Matthew wants to address their doubts from the clause “but they [or some] doubted” (28:17), coupled with previous material on the little-faith of the disciples. That Matthew wants to show these doubts as unwarranted may be inferred from Jesus’ assertion in 28:16, coupled with previous material promising Jesus’ vindication. That Jesus commissions his disciples under a covenantal promise may be inferred from the oath in 28:20, coupled with previous material on the relationship between Jesus and his disciples and the sacrificial nature of Jesus’ death.

7.4.2 Expansion and further argument.

We shall begin by arguing further for the claim that this is an incorporation into Jesus’ Servant program for the nations (and a call to incorporate others). We can then consider how Matthew works to address any residual doubts in his compliant readers.

To begin with, the mountain in 28:16 recalls the similar locations in 5:1 and 17:1. Recalling 17:1 suggests that this will be the kind of vindication the Transfiguration looked forward to, as we shall consider shortly. But recalling the mount of 5:1 should alert us that what is happening here begins the completion of the Isaiah program outlined in Matthew 5–7.\textsuperscript{15} We can therefore expect this to be the moment where the disciples are incorporated into

\textsuperscript{15} We noted above (section 4.6.5) that the allusions to the program of Isaiah 60–62 in the Beatitudes may well presuppose the Servant work of Isaiah 40–55 (see note 60 on p.180). When Jesus spoke in Matthew 5–7, his own fulfilment of that work was incomplete. However, Matthew has made it clear that in the death and resurrection of Jesus, the particular task of the Servant in Isaiah 40–55 has been completed, even if there are residual aspects of the program to complete in taking light and salvation to the nations. However, the foundations of the program in Isaiah 60–62 (which is a continuation of the Servant ministry, with a global scope) have now been laid.
Jesus’ Servant program for the nations. This has, of course, been long prepared for in the narrative — especially in the speeches, as we have observed throughout our analysis.

The formal incorporation is effected through the command in 28:19–20a: “Go and make-disciples of all nations.” The construction is the same as 9:13 (“Go and learn...”): an aorist passive participle with an aorist imperative. The imperative is from μαθῆτεω, here used transitively (i.e. make disciples of; LSJ, s.v. μαθητεύεις), the perfective aspect reinforcing that this is a specific task for the disciples in the nations. The aorist participle πορευόμενος is a participle of attendant circumstance, taking on a contemporaneous imperatival force from the main verb.16 That is, making disciples is the main idea, but they are being sent out to make disciples. Making disciples is what Jesus has been doing (e.g. 4:19, 21; 9:9). That is, Jesus is incorporating them into the task — and what Jesus has done in the geographic region associated with the nation of Israel, his followers are now to do globally. In this they will be fulfilling a wide range of expectation in the Hebrew Scriptures, beginning with the promise to Abram that through him πᾶσαι οἱ φυλαί will be blessed (Gen 12:3 LXX). In Gen 18:18 LXX, the Lord refers back to this promise using the phrase πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, as here in 28:19.17 The same phrase is extensively used in the LXX of Isaiah (Isa 2:2; 25:6–7; 52:10; 56:7; 61:11; 66:18, 20). We can also relate this to the explicit Servant task to be εἰς φῶς ἔθνων (Isa 42:6; 49:6; 51:4), which Jesus has alluded to in summarizing the disciples’ task in the world in 5:14–16. Matthew’s paraphrase of the Isa 42:1–3 also emphasised the role of the Servant in relation to τὰ ἔθνη (12:18, 21).18 Jesus’ interaction with Gentiles in the Gospel has been notably limited (8:5–13; 15:21–28). In 28:16–20 it therefore seems that this aspect of his Servant task is to be fulfilled through his disciples.

16 Campbell, Basics of Verbal Aspect, 126–27.
18 Compare Benjamin Hubbard’s comments on Isa 49:1–6 — “the Servant has already been ‘honoured’ with a mission to Israel (v.5); now it is extended to all the nations of the earth (v.6).” Benjamin J. Hubbard, The Matthean Redaction of a Primitive Apostolic Commissioning: An Exegesis of Matthew 28:16–20 (SBLDS 19; Missoula, Montana: SBL, 1974), 59.
The clause πάντα τὰ ἔθνη should also be related to the identical phrase in 25:32, where it was used in the context of universal judgment. That is, Jew and Gentile. The mission to the lost sheep of the house of Israel is expanded, not replaced.19

Whether we see a temporal order in the following participial clauses — such that disciples are to be baptized and then taught — or whether we infer that baptism and teaching simply expand what it means to “make disciples,” both clauses suggest an incorporation in what Jesus has been doing.20

The command to baptize and the “Trinitarian” formula in 28:19 both recall Jesus’ baptism in 3:13–17, where Father, Son and Holy Spirit were all involved in the giving and taking up of the Isaian Servant mandate (section 4.3). This suggests that baptism marks the incorporation of a disciple into the same program. That is, Jesus is issuing a derivative mandate to the one he received.

The command to “teach them to observe all that I have commanded you” (28:20a) serves a similar purpose. Jesus’ teaching to his disciples has largely been on how to participate in the Servant program. Passing this teaching on (with attendant promises and warnings) is therefore a part of the incorporation of future disciples. Given that we can think of compliant readers as such future disciples, this confirms the relationship we have been suggesting between them and the disciples in the narrative since section 3.2.

Further evidence that Matthew wishes to align future disciples with the disciples in the narrative comes from the lexical connection here between the eleven disciples (μαθητής, 28:16) and the disciples the eleven are commanded to make (μαθητεύω, 28:19). As Peter O’Brien comments “the Eleven are to make men and women as they themselves are.”21 We

19 So Peter O’Brien, “The Great Commission of Matthew 28:18–20. A Missionary Mandate or Not?” RTR 35 (1976): 73–74. As Luz notes, the discussion as to whether τὰ ἔθνη should be translated “nations” or “Gentiles” may be flawed: “’Ethnη is not a homonym that means either ‘nations’ or ‘Gentiles’; in the Judaism of that day it meant both. It is not the either-or of the translation but the direction and breadth of the expression πάντα τὰ ἔθνη that must be determined by the individual context.” Luz, Matthew 21–28, 629. Here we have concluded that it refers to all the nations, which includes the Gentiles.
may add that this implies that those they make disciples are expected to do likewise in their turn.

Finally, we need to address the issue that previous to this point in the Gospel such an incorporation was apparently impossible. This was the main unresolved issue from the speeches in Matthew 5–7 and 10, which described in part what participation in the Servant program would entail. Throughout the Gospel, but culminating in their abandonment of Jesus before his passion, the little-faith of the disciples has proved an obstacle to the disciples’ involvement and obedience. That Matthew wishes to resolve this problem before he ends the Gospel seems to be the best explanation for his inclusion of the curious addition of “but they [or some] doubted” in 28:17. We have already noted the connection between doubt (διστάζω), little-faith (ὁλιγόπιστος) and worship (προσκυνῶ) in 14:31, 33 (section 5.4 above). John Meier is right to say that in 28:17 Matthew is “giving us a paradigm of what discipleship will always mean until the close of the age: believers caught between adoration and doubt.”22 But it seems reasonable to suppose that Matthew wants to do more than simply acknowledge bewilderment or doubt in the Christian community — he also wants to do something about it. We shall argue that he addresses the issue in two ways: first, in the claim to authority Jesus makes in 28:18; and, second, in the “word of assurance” in 28:20b, which we shall compare to a “covenantal oath.”

Jesus asserts his final vindication with the words “all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” This brings to fulfilment all previous promises of his vindication. We may compare 4:8–9. Jesus is given the world by his Father, not Satan; his patient faithfulness is now rewarded. Implied is that this is the consequence of having completed the mandate he was given. The authority encompasses heaven as well as the earth, signalling the kind of rejoining of heaven and earth looked forward to in, for example, the prayer of 6:9–13.23 The

22 Meier, Matthew, 369.
23 Jonathan Pennington classifies 28:18 as an example of a primarily “antithetic” heaven-earth pair. That is, there is a contrastive tone: the realm of heaven as well as the earth. Previously Jesus has had authority on earth (e.g. 9:6), now he has all authority, both in heaven and on earth. Because he has achieved authority in both realms, “his followers can now live in hope for his heavenly authority to be manifested [eschatologically] throughout the earth.” This authority thus opens up a mission that will take place throughout the earth. Pennington, Heaven and Earth, 168, 203–6.
emphasis on Jesus’ authority also pervades the surrounding verses. Jesus directs the disciples (28:16), he is given all authority (28:18), disciples are baptized in his name, alongside that of the Father and the Holy Spirit (28:19), they are taught to observe his commandments (28:20a), and he is with them to the end of the age (28:20b). Moreover, the extent of Jesus’ dominion is emphasised by the repeated “all”: all authority, all the nations, all things, all the days. Some readers will also recognise that the pronouncement recalls Dan 7:14a — “And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him” (ESV). That is, as we discussed above concerning the final resolution of Matthew’s implied temporal framework (section 7.2), with respect to Jesus, the Son of Man has come.

Turning to the “word of assurance” in 28:20b, Peter O’Brien (drawing on work by H. Frankemölle and B.J. Hubbard) argues persuasively that these verses have the overall form of an Old Testament commissioning narrative, with particular affinity to those establishing covenants.24 He then concludes that:

Matt. 28:20 which climaxes the Gospel may thus be regarded as the renewal of the covenant through Jesus. It is ultimately the fulfilment of the covenant promise to Abraham of Gen 12:1ff.25

That is, this is not an isolated promise, but one which stands in a line of solemn promises from God to his people. To reinforce this conclusion, we may add one further insight comparing these verses to other biblical descriptions of cutting covenants. In his work on the biblical

24 According to Frankemölle, 28:16–20 is formally dependent on 2 Chr 36:22–23, a renewal or confirmation of the covenant through Cyrus, king of Persia. In the LXX of 2 Chr 36:23, Cyrus promises the one returning that ἀποστέλλω ὁ θεός αὐτοῦ μετὰ αὐτοῦ. Likewise, 28:20b is a “Segen als Verheißung der Gegenwart Christi.” Frankemölle, Jahrebund, 50–61. According to Hubbard, the commissioning narratives in the Hebrew Bible “provide a model for Matthew’s account of Jesus’ commission of the disciples in 28:16–20.” Hubbard bases his conclusion on an examination of the literary form of twenty-seven commissioning narratives, including Abraham’s call (Gen 11:28–30; 12:1–4a), the commissioning of Moses (Exod 3:1–4:16), the commissioning of the Prophets (Isaiah 6; Jer 1:1–10; Ezek 1:1–3:15) and the commissioning of the Servant of the Lord (Isa 49:1–6). Hubbard, Commissioning, 25–99.

Theology of covenants, Paul Williamson notes that in biblical usage a covenant 1) ratifies an already forged or existing collective relationship and 2) the ratification of the covenant involves the making of solemn promises by means of a verbal and/or enacted oath. Under “enacted oath,” we may note that the ratification is often accompanied by a sacrifice. By this stage of the Gospel we already of course have a clear existing relationship between Jesus and his disciples. We also have had, according to Matthew, a covenant sacrifice. Jesus’ words at the Passover meal in chapter 26 interpreted Jesus’ blood shed in death as the “blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (26:28). It may then be that 28:20b supplies the verbal covenant oath: “Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

The command which incorporates the disciples (and future disciples) into Jesus’ Servant program for the world in 28:19–20a is thus sandwiched between two statements from Jesus which address the little-faith of the disciples, which was seen at its most extreme in the Passion narrative and is raised here in the doubt of 28:17b. The suffering, death, resurrection and now formal vindication of Jesus in 28:16 make credible the promise of their future vindication. The promise that Jesus will be with them in their task until its completion is confirmed with covenantal language in 28:20b. These things make faith transparently rational. With such a faith as a foundation, it now becomes possible for disciples to trust the provision and promise of the Father, display him to the world in their behaviour, and face the kind of opposition Jesus faced. The limits to the proclamation in Matthew 10 are lifted and the salvation of the Lord may now spread to the end of the earth.

26 Paul R. Williamson, Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose (NSBT 23; Nottingham: Apollos, 2007), 43.
27 The form of words here recalls the promise to Jacob in Gen 28:15 LXX — ἵδον ἐγὼ μετὰ σοῦ. But as Hubbard notes, the phrase “I am (will be) with you” is extremely common in the Hebrew Bible, appearing at least in Gen 17:4, 19, 21; 24:7; 26:3; 28:15; 46:4; Exod 3:12; 4:15; Deut 31:23; Josh 1:5, 9; Judg 4:9; 6:12, 16; Jer 1:8; 1 Chr 22:11, 16; Ezra 1:3. Hubbard, Commissioning, 67. These are connected with the establishment or renewal of a covenant relationship, or serve to remind someone of an existing covenant relationship.
Chapter 8

Conclusion

8.1 Review of the construction and application of the method

The aim of this study has been to contribute to the characterization of the concept of discipleship in Matthew’s Gospel by asking how the process of entrusting oneself to God (or “theocentric commitment”) is described within it, and how reading or hearing the Gospel may function to evoke such a response. We began with a deliberately loose definition of theocentric commitment as whatever characterizes the kind of positive human orientation to God that exists within a long-term divine-human relationship (section 1.2 above). This was a concept that we found to encompass a number of important concepts in Matthew, identifiable using English labels, as well as a number of word-groups, images and metaphors employed by him. By surveying the Matthean literature and beyond, we were able to build a composite portrait of theocentric commitment in the Gospel, but it was patchy and underdeveloped.

8.1.1 Constructing a “pragmatic-critical” method.

When it came to building a more precise picture of theocentric commitment, the survey in section 1.3 suggested that existing analytical methods may not be adequate — especially when used in isolation. However, we then pursued the possibility that methods that treat texts as part of a “communication event” could provide a way forward. We found helpful methodological insights to be drawn from speech-act theory, narrative theory, relevance theory and game-theoretic pragmatics.

Drawing these together, we developed a “pragmatic-critical” method (section 2.3). This can be seen as an integration of reader-orientated and author-orientated approaches to discourse analysis. The method characterises the “communicative equilibrium” between the author and the subset of readers who process the text compliantly. On the one hand, this is a
state of affairs in which the group are able to infer the compliant response desired by the author (that is they reach “communicative alignment” with the author), and are further persuaded to comply with those desires. On the other, it is a state of affairs in which the author, given his expectations concerning the overall response of his readers, composes the text to maximise some function of the size of the compliant group and the depth of the compliant response.

8.1.2 The application of the method.

In chapter 3, we began to apply the method to the Gospel as a whole, using it to begin a defence of some necessary preparatory claims. These concerned how the narrative functions at a broad level to evoke the kind of theocentric commitment expected by Matthew. The first of these used the communication model developed in chapter 2 to claim that the Gospel is an “unbounded” message; that is, the set of expected readers is not closed. The second claim was that post-resurrection readers seeking communicative alignment are “drawn in” to stand alongside the disciples in the narrative in “constructive empathy.” They are then, as they return from the narrative, expected to “translate” what they hear to apply to their actual situation. The third and fourth claims were in part an acknowledgement that in order to study the theme of discipleship in the Gospel we cannot ignore Matthew’s Christology or eschatology. In both cases, preparatory claims were made which exploited the element of dynamic processing in the communication model. So, in the case of Matthew’s Christology, it was claimed that Matthew has constructed his narrative to adapt progressively certain expectations raised at its outset. Jesus is the “one who is to come” — to complete the kingdom program outlined especially by the prophet Daniel — but this is progressively qualified to insist that, in order to do so, Jesus must take on and complete the “Servant program” of the prophet Isaiah. In the case of Matthew’s eschatology, it was claimed that Matthew progressively builds an “implied temporal framework” — again beginning from certain expectations raised at the outset of the narrative.

Applied to Matthew 1–10 (Chapter 4 above), the method suggested, first, that Matthew 1–2 establishes the primary implied premises for the main part of the communication
event. These are that God is acting in a world dominated by antipathy towards himself rather than commitment, to discharge his own commitment to prior promises. The focus of his action is Jesus “who will save his people from their sins.” We then suggested that Matthew uses John the Baptist’s speech in Matthew 3 to encourage an empathy with a righteous Jew’s expectations of the coming kingdom: that “one greater” than John will come to bring a climactic, separating judgment. However, Matthew 3 as a whole serves to update these expectations. The “one greater” comes, but there is no judgment. We said that Matthew’s implied temporal framework is thereby “temporally resolved”: given more precision as closely connected events are teased out. We then argued that the baptism and temptation scenes show Jesus taking on the Servant mandate from his Father, and thereby begin to establish the basis of the incorporated Servanthood that will characterise Matthew’s understanding of theocentric commitment. We also argued that the open command in 4:17 is a general and preparatory call to theocentric commitment: a call to a change of mind concerning the state of the world, conditioned upon a general claim concerning the spatio-temporal state of affairs (the kingdom of heaven is near).

We then used the communication model to suggest that the speech in Matthew 5–7 and the narrative in Matthew 8–9 work together to show the basic shape of Jesus’ Servant ministry and the shape of a compliant response. The speech in Matthew 5–7 is especially important for our thesis topic, in that it spells out a compliant response in considerable (albeit incomplete) detail. The pragmatic-critical method highlighted the decision structure of the speech. We argued that it is primarily a call to trust Jesus by actively trusting what he says: in particular, to trust certain claims and promises he makes concerning his Father and to then become a dependent partner in the Servant program his Father has given him. There are two stages to the response: a “vertical dependency” on God as Father for help and vindication, especially in prayer, which is then expressed in a “horizontal righteousness” that reveals the Father to the world. The first mirrors the filial relationship between Son and Father revealed at Jesus’ baptism; the second expresses part of a disciple’s participation in the Son’s Servant mandate to bring light to the nations. The second stage depends upon the first. However, in the main part of the speech, Jesus begins with the extreme challenge of the second stage, only
then turning to the dependency. This is shown relative to those who do not have it: first the Pharisees and then the Gentiles. What we found left unresolved at the end of the speech is quite how such dependency can be possible in disciples already described as having “little-faith.” However, that it is possible in principle we found illustrated in the subsequent narrative. We argued that the healing and exorcism ministry of Jesus in Matthew 8–9 sets up a compressed temporal framework in which such humble dependency is successfully modelled in the faith-responses of the different suppliants.

We then argued that the speech in Matthew 10 sets up a model of an extended compliant response, in which the Twelve expand the kingdom proclamation of Jesus within a limited situation. A pragmatic-critical method highlights how the choice demanded in the speech of Matthew 5–7 is augmented by kingdom proclamation. This prefigures the global proclamation of the Great Commission — and sets the pattern for it, which is that disciples will follow the example of their teacher and experience what he experiences. But if the disciples have the little-faith identified in previous chapters, then it is unresolved at this point how they will withstand the kind of opposition experienced by their Master. This opposition is what Jesus takes the lead in facing in the subsequent chapters of the Gospel.

Applied to Matthew 11:1–16:20 (Chapter 5 above), the method suggested that the section as a whole shows the mixed response to Jesus’ kingdom proclamation, preparing his disciples to face something similar with faith and not disillusionment. Moreover, the narrative in Matthew 11–12 shows both doubt from those close to Jesus and open hostility from the unrepentant, but Jesus resolute in his Servant ministry. Within this, it was argued that the open call in 11:25–30 shows Jesus as Son and Servant in control rather than diverted by the mixed response — compassionate rather than defensive. This call goes beyond the mere call to repentance in 4:17 by highlighting Jesus as the focus of a compliant response. The Christocentricity implied previously is made the explicit and exclusive foundation for a (largely future) blessing described as “rest for your souls.”

We then argued that the speech in Matthew 13 both explains and exemplifies the mixed response to Jesus’ proclamation. The mixed response (and its consequence at the future judgment) is the topic of the parables. A pragmatic-critical method helped to show how
the high processing cost of the parables bifurcates hearers of the parables into those who seek compliance and those who do not. We then saw the ways in which the narrative in 14:1–16:20 encourages dissociation from a poor response to Jesus and a movement away from little-faith.

Applied to Matthew 16:21–28:15 (Chapter 6 above), the method suggested that the section as a whole expounds the nature of and reasons for the incorporated Servanthood that is foundational for a compliant response to Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom. The section provides the basis for trust in future vindication and thereby provides resources to face opposition and persecution. Within this, we argued that the section running from 16:21–20:34 establishes the pattern of following and depending upon the costly Servant ministry of Jesus as a necessary basis for the kind of lives that will participate in his resurrection. Moreover, the open command in 16:24–28 makes this explicit and urgent in the light of the “coming of the Son of Man.”

We saw that within this section and in light of this pattern, Jesus returns to many of the ethical issues raised by the speech of Matthew 5–7, suggesting that the answer to its unresolved issues lies in the Servant-work of Jesus, and a dependent imitation of it. The speech in Matthew 18, for example, applies the principles of purity and forgiveness to the problem of sin within the Christian community.

We then argued that the section running from 21:1–28:15 both expounds and narrates the “coming of the Son of Man” in such a way that post-resurrection compliant readers can be sure of future vindication if their allegiance to and dependence on Jesus remains steadfast. Within this, the narrative in Matthew 21–23 describes a kind of “divine parousia.” In the conflict of authority in the Temple, Jesus exposes opposition to God and passes proleptic judgment. The conflict also provokes those opposing him to pursue their opposition to its logical end in his suffering and execution. In the light of this intensification, and building on the speech in Matthew 10, the speech in Matthew 24–25 prepares the disciples to face the kind of tribulation he has been and (in particular) is just about to face. The promise is that faithfulness under tribulation will certainly be followed by vindication. This vindication is described in the language and imagery of the “coming of the Son of Man.”
We then saw that Matthew 26:1–28:15 narrates the completion of the Servant pattern by Jesus himself. Jesus alone is faithful under tribulation, but his Servant work guarantees life and forgiveness for those who will dependently follow in the pattern. As promised, the tribulation of Jesus in his suffering and death is followed by his vindication in resurrection. At this point, we argued that, as in Matthew 3, the implied temporal framework is *temporally resolved*. That is, as with the coming of the “one greater” in Matthew 3, the “coming of the Son of Man” is resolved into two separate but closely related events. The first of these is the vindication of the Son of Man himself. The description of the death of Jesus deliberately deploys vindication imagery. The second is the *future* vindication “of” the Son of Man — in the sense of the vindication he thereby enables and guarantees for those who dependently follow him.

Finally, applied to Matthew 28:16–20 (Chapter 7 above), the method suggested that this is the point where the plot of the Gospel is declared to have been resolved by the vindication of Jesus. Looking back, we could see how successive “crises” in its plot have all found their resolution in the death and resurrection of Jesus. We claimed that the vindication of Jesus is here formally announced with further “vindication of the Son of Man” language, as Jesus declares that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him. This is therefore the point at which the little-faith of the disciples, seen in the Passion narrative and even in the doubt of 28:17, can be finally addressed. The suffering, death, resurrection and formal vindication of Jesus guarantee their future vindication in a way that makes faith transparently rational. With such a faith as a foundation, we argued that it now becomes possible for disciples to trust the provision and promise of the Father, display him to the world in their behaviour, and face the kind of opposition Jesus faced. The limits to the proclamation in Matthew 10 are thereby lifted. That is, this is the point at which full incorporation into the Servant program of Jesus becomes possible and imperative. Jesus is formally extending to his disciples the Servant mandate to bring light to the nations. The promise of vindication is sealed by a covenantal oath: “Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (28:20).
8.1.3 An assessment, with suggestions for further application.

Probably the greatest potential disadvantage of the particular pragmatic-critical method we have adopted is its complexity. Compared to, say, traditional historico-grammatical exegesis, with its comparatively limited field of inquiry, or redaction-critical approaches, which apply mainly to the differences between texts rather than whole texts, the sheer number of potential avenues of inquiry raised by using a model as comprehensive as this one is enormous. The model has the potential to encompass the approaches just mentioned, and others, as special cases. Likewise, compared to the communication models implied in speech-act, narrative or relevance theories, which focus on the case of a single receiver, expanding the communication event to encompass a wide potential audience is also a step up in complexity. It has been apparent at each point while conducting this study that there is a huge amount one could say concerning the breadth of reader responses, the nature of authorial strategy and so forth. Using the model requires some care to make sure the analysis does not become unwieldy.

However, we may claim that the model itself is an improvement on communication models previously used in literary analysis — largely in its greater precision in describing the communication event. It contributes to the literature on literary communication events in at least two important respects. First, it provides a new way to think about the issue of “uptake” of a message. Receivers may be said to have “understood the meaning of a message” if they reach communicative alignment with the sender. That is, they have true beliefs concerning how the sender wishes them to respond. However, a given receiver may choose not to comply with these wishes. That is the next stage: those who are persuaded we call “compliant readers.” We may describe the communication between the author and his or her compliant readers as successful — at least, from the author’s point of view. Second, we also argued in section 2.3.6 that the concept of a compliant reader is an improvement on that of an implied reader. The term “implied reader,” as we noted, is used variously, but it is sometimes difficult to relate the concept to the real readers of the text. Many narrative studies consequently leave something a gap between the narrative world of the text and the world in which it is actually read. The concept of compliant reader is related to that of implied reader, but compliant readers are real readers. For this well-defined subset of real readers there is an appropriate connection between the narrative world and their own.
The complexity of the model also brings some advantages. As we have noted, it allows us to think about the history of interpretation of a text in a slightly different way. No interpretation or reading need be discarded as useless; each can be seen as a datum point in the wider pattern of real reader response. Even self-consciously “resistant” readings, such as feminist readings, fit into this wider picture, under non-compliant responses.

There are also ways in which we can claim that the relative complexity of the model is able, perhaps paradoxically, to simplify some problems. Once we have acknowledged the wider and more complex picture, that Matthew is attempting to persuade a diverse group of people with perhaps a wide variance of understanding or expectations, it becomes less surprising that the Gospel contains so much repetition of ideas or presents things with such a diverse range of vocabulary or imagery. Repetition is necessary to ensure that what some readers may miss first time, they are able to pick up second time, and so forth. Likewise, presenting a single concept with a diversity of vocabulary, imagery or (in some cases) titles, may help to ensure that what is missed by a given reader is later picked up when the concept is described another way. The element of dynamic processing in the communication model (which it shares with some other approaches, such as Wolfgang Iser’s phenomenological approach, as we noted in section 2.3.6) has also proved fruitful. This has helped us to give due attention to the narrative structure or plot of the Gospel. It has also helped us to simplify or untangle concepts in the Gospel that are presented in a diverse fashion. The dynamic, linear processing of the text (beginning with a certain set of expectations, which are then progressively adapted as the narrative unfolds) helps to take away some of the apparent complexity on certain issues—especially Matthew’s eschatology and Christology.

We have not found the method to be “destructively anachronistic,” as defined in section 2.3.1. Indeed, we have found it helpful in taking seriously both the original historical context and the intended impact of the Gospel on later readers. As such, we could certainly expect the approach to bear fruit in a wide range of other applications. An obvious place to start would be the other New Testament Gospels. But there seems no good reason why the approach could not be used (or adapted for use) across the biblical canon and beyond. Certain key issues in New Testament studies also stand out as particularly amenable to this kind of
analysis. It would be very interesting, for example, to compare implied temporal frameworks across the New Testament canon as one way of assessing the degree of eschatological agreement. But the methods could be similarly applied to texts from quite different provenances.¹

Finally, it is worth commenting on the potential ethical implications of both the approach we have taken and the particular results thereby obtained for Matthew’s Gospel. In this study, we have held back from making ethical judgments between compliant and non-compliant readings. We can get a long way in our analysis while remaining largely descriptive of the communication event. However, as Wayne Booth ably argues, at some stage we cannot avoid issues of ethics in any literary analysis or criticism.² Still less can we avoid them when it comes to any text purporting to make direct claims about the state of the world. Were we to pursue this issue, it would of course not be true that compliance is necessarily the ethically superior response. As we noted in section 2.3.5, most people would agree that the ethically superior response to a racist joke, for example, is to resist compliance — i.e. do not laugh, do not adopt or be confirmed in racist beliefs etc. We have seen that Matthew’s Gospel makes some radical claims about the state of the world and the different outcomes that will obtain from different responses to his message, and that he wants to persuade his readers that what he says is true. Were we to conclude these claims to be false, then we might want to compare Matthew with the hare of our timid hare fable: badly mistaken and in danger of causing havoc wherever compliance results. Some might even suspect a more sinister or manipulative agenda. On the other hand, finding the claims persuasive would give the message of the Gospel a very different ethical status — and, given the concern for deep humility in the Gospel, would probably also challenge what we mean by “ethical” and the right of the critic to be an arbiter on such issues. Although we have described some ways in which some readers might be persuaded of the truth of Matthew’s claims (summarized in section 8.3.2 below), there is clearly much more one could say. We may have declared such issues beyond the scope of the current study, but they would constitute a warranted line of further inquiry.

¹ Other persuasive narratives could be amenable to similar analysis: polemical histories, such as Edmund Burke’s Reflections on the Revolution in France, even didactic fiction — Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress, Victorian socio-political fiction like Gaskell’s North and South, Steinbeck’s The Grapes of Wrath, Orwell’s 1984, spring to mind.
8.2 The relationship between Matthew’s eschatology, Christology and his call to discipleship

We have remarked throughout this study that in order to study the theme of discipleship in the Gospel we cannot ignore Matthew’s Christology or eschatology. As we draw the study to a close, this is a good opportunity to make a final statement concerning the relationship between these three key elements of the narrative and to highlight some implications. This will also help to show how our analysis intersects with some important discussions in Matthean studies. In some ways these implications are integral to the argument of the thesis; in some ways, they could be examined and developed further in their own right.

We can summarise our conclusions here by saying that Matthew’s eschatology provides the framework for understanding his Christology and, derivatively, his call to discipleship. We have tracked the essential features of Matthew’s eschatology by tracing the evolution of the implied temporal framework as it unfolds progressively over the course of the Gospel. At the beginning we noted past promises concerning God’s future arrival to bless and vindicate his people and judge his enemies. John the Baptist then made the claim that this was sufficiently “near” to impact present choices. But the coming of the Lord was then “temporally resolved” into the coming of Jesus to take on the Servant mandate of the Lord, leaving the separating judgment of the world that will vindicate God and his people still in the future. This future vindication was prominently described by Jesus throughout the rest of the Gospel as the “coming of the Son of Man” (evoking the vision in Daniel 7) but further resolved into the vindication of Jesus in his resurrection and the future vindication this enables and guarantees for his followers.

The final shape of the framework we saw in section 7.2 then looked like this:

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2 Booth, *The Company we Keep.*
The most obvious first point of intersection with wider questions in Matthean studies is the question of eschatology. One expression of the current consensus on this question is Donald Hagner’s 1994 survey piece, which summarises the main features Matthew’s eschatology under two main theses. The first is that there is a present-future tension in his presentation: the coming of Jesus fulfils some eschatological expectations (a “realized eschatology”) and yet there is an even stronger emphasis on the future judgment of the wicked and blessing of the righteous (a “future eschatology”).\(^3\) The second is that there is an imminence-delay tension in Matthew’s presentation: some sayings suggest a fulfilment within a generation, while others suggest a significant interim period or substantial delay.\(^4\) And yet, as James Dunn astutely observes, Matthew himself “seems to be remarkably untroubled by the fact of the present/future tension in his tradition,” making seemingly contradictory statements “without any sign of strain.”\(^5\) The implied temporal framework we have derived may provide one

\(^3\) Hagner, “Matthew’s Eschatology,” 65–66.


explanation. This way of arranging the framework highlights the pattern-setting function of Jesus’ completion of the Servant mandate. It also removes most of the oddities, tensions and incongruities we have noted in the literature. The top line represents Matthew’s realized eschatology — the completion of the Servant mandate by the Servant himself. The bottom, represents Matthew’s future eschatology — the continuation and completion of the Servant program through Jesus’ disciples in all the nations. The one prefigures the other. The top line contains the fulfilment of all the imminence sayings; the bottom line accommodates the necessary delay.

This overlaps with Matthew’s Christology. As we have just noted, the top line expresses Jesus’ particular mandate as Servant of the Lord, supporting approaches to Matthew’s Christology that have emphasized this role (section 3.3 above). Matthew has presented Jesus as having come with a particular focus on the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He has come to face a particular tribulation and to experience a particular vindication. He has come to fulfil that part of the whole Servant program (associated with the fourth Servant song in Isaiah) that will bring forgiveness of sins (cf. Isa 40:2; 53:5, 11–12). The plot of the Gospel, as discussed in section 7.1, then gives focus to this. Successive crises in the plot indicate the kind of tribulation Jesus endures as Servant — a death for many, for the forgiveness of sins. However, when he is vindicated, it is clear that in some ways the Servant program has only just begun. At the close of the Gospel, Jesus incorporates the disciples into the program for the nations, restoring the Servant status expected of God’s people.

Thus (bottom line) the disciples begin a parallel and derivative pattern of tribulation-vindication as they are commissioned to make disciples of every nation. They have been prepared for the role in advance through Jesus’ teaching, especially in the great speeches of the Gospel. They, in turn, will prepare others for the role by passing on the same teaching (28:20). This does suggest that the “historized versus transparent” debate in the literature on discipleship we noted in section 1.3 is indeed a false dichotomy, and confirms the coherency of the approach we began to take in section 3.2. The figure above helps to show that as readers “stand alongside” the historical disciples in the narrative, they do not do so in ignorance of where they stand in reality or — ultimately — in ignorance of the significant events that take
place between these two locations in time. In particular, they can be expected to process what they hear in the light of the death and resurrection of Jesus. As they do so, they know that his vindication, his resurrection, his authority to bring judgment already expressed, guarantees the vindication, resurrection and judgment to come.

Likewise, some of the other debates in the Matthean literature begin to look strangely limited in the light of this analysis. The question of whether the “Matthean community” has or has not separated from Judaism is a good case in point. We have already voiced some doubts about the concept of the “Matthean community” (section 3.1). But even if we were to put such doubts to one side, the analysis above suggests that the issue is not so much where (Matthean) Christians stand in relation to Judaism per se. The issue is first and foremost where they stand in relation to the Servant program of the Lord being fulfilled by Jesus. Their allegiance now is with the Servant figure himself. Their relation to “Judaism” in its various guises (and indeed their relation to any grouping or movement) is derivative of this. Since establishment Judaism has failed in its Servant role and now rejects the Servant leadership of Jesus, they are to dissociate from it — just as (so Matthew claims) the Lord is dissociating himself from it.

To use the speech of Matthew 5–7 merely as a debating point in such questions now looks inadequate. To use a statement such as “not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the Law” (5:18) just as something to place on the scales of this debate in favour of a “Christian Judaism” misses the point. Our analysis has suggested that the point Jesus is making at the beginning of his speech in Matthew 5–7 is that he is by no means in opposition to the Law because he is fulfilling the Law and the Prophets — by fulfilling the Servant program of the Lord in himself and (by incorporation) through his followers. Again, other questions are subservient to this main point. By fulfilling the Law and the Prophets through the Servant program he has taken on, Jesus is demonstrating a dynamic continuity with what has

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6 Andrew Overman, for example, uses 5:17–18 as part of his argument that the Matthean community forms part of a “shared matrix” with emergent rabbinic Judaism, a minority “sectarian group” struggling with its parent group, formative Judaism. Overman, Matthew’s Gospel and Formative Judaism, 86–90, 154–61.
gone before. This includes an element of “ethical” continuity, narrowly defined. The self-same behaviour expressed in the Law that should have served God’s purposes in the nations (Exod 19:5–6) can now do so (appropriately applied to the new situation) as Jesus’ disciples are incorporated into his Servant program (5:16). This actually serves to separate (Matthean) Christians from other groups in Judaism. In particular, it separates them from the scribes and the Pharisees, whose lack of willingness to follow the will of the Lord expressed in his Servant program for the world (a lack of righteousness in Matthew’s usage of the term) serves as a point of negative comparison throughout the speech, beginning at 5:20.

8.3 Final conclusions

Our basic research questions (section 1.4.2) have been: first, concerning the characterization of discipleship in Matthew’s Gospel, how is the process of entrusting oneself to God (or “theocentric commitment”) described within it? — and, second, how might such a response be evoked or sustained by hearing or reading the Gospel?

8.3.1 How is theocentric commitment described within the Gospel?.

Given the kind of implied temporal framework described above (sections 7.2 and 8.2), theocentric commitment in Matthew may be summarized as incorporated Servanthood. To be committed to God is to be a disciple of Jesus, incorporated into the divine Servant program for the world. This Servanthood into which disciples of Jesus are incorporated is dependent, derivative and participatory.

We have discerned three basic stages or levels to such a response:

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7 We are thus disagreeing with Overman when he says that “Matthew is interested in community formation, and not primarily with world transformation.” Overman, Matthew’s Gospel and Formative Judaism, 154. Rather, the purpose of transforming the disciples through Jesus’ instruction is to impact the world (5:14–16). As Warren Carter puts it: “Jesus’ words and actions create an alternative community and demonstrate God’s empire that is yet to be fully established.” Warren Carter, “‘To Save His People from Their Sins’ (Matthew 1:23): Rome’s Empire and Matthew’s Salvation as Sovereignty,” in Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 2001), 89. That is, while we have said that a particular component of Jesus’ Servant program is to bring forgiveness of sins, this certainly does not exclude some sort of “political” element to the wider Servant program this enables. After all, following Sweeney, in section 3.3 we have summarized the Servant program as “the realization of YHWH’s plans for worldwide sovereignty at Zion.” Sweeney, Isaiah I–39, 39–40.
1. The first level is to believe the state of affairs claimed in the message of the Gospel (a propositional belief). That is, especially, to believe that the kingdom is near, brought near by the coming of God’s eschatological agent to fulfil his Servant program for the world. To believe that this agent is Jesus.

2. The second level is a consequent humble trust. This is a childlike, Christocentric dependency. This is to acknowledge the need to be served by Jesus, a desperate eagerness to be served and a consequent eagerness to serve. The dependency is primary and absolute. It is a trust in Jesus’ authority and ability to provide forgiveness of sins. It is a trust in the vindication to come based exclusively on the suffering, death, resurrection and formal vindication of Jesus. This trust is thus founded on, and surrendered to, the prior commitment of God to the world and to his covenantal promises, expressed in the coming of Jesus.

3. The third level is then to be incorporated into the Servant program for the nations, participating in it actively. This is simultaneously to be incorporated into the Sonship of Jesus, empowered by the same Patrocentric dependency displayed by him — especially in prayer. This is an expression and demonstration of the humble trust described at level two above, and is inseparable from it. It involves following Jesus in a pattern that is derivative of Jesus’ own Servant ministry. This is both following what he prescribes in terms of conduct that brings light to the nations and following the pattern of his kingdom proclamation. Both may then result in following the tribulation he experienced under opposition, persecution, suffering and death.

We have argued that the basic shape of this response is set up in Matthew 1–10 of the Gospel.

8 Henry Pattarumadathil examines the twenty-one passages where God is portrayed as the Father of the disciples using πατήρ, and concludes that in Matthew’s Gospel “discipleship is viewed as a process of becoming children of God.” Pattarumadathil, Your Father in Heaven, 203. This is a corollary of the approach we are taking. However, “becoming children of God” may not be a sufficient description of discipleship according to Matthew. Just as we have argued that Jesus’ identity as “Son” or “Son of God” has been “fleshed out” by the role of the Servant, so it is with the disciples. Disciples will be called “sons of God” or sons of their Father (5:9, 45) because they are participating in his Servant program.
We argued that attaining the first level of a committed response described above is portrayed in the Gospel in part using language of repentance (μετανοέω, μετάνοια) — a change of mind (with associated remorse) concerning the state of the world. The Beatitudes opening the speech in Matthew 5–7 then set up the next two levels of a committed response. The Beatitudes in 5:3–6 describe the kind of dependent humility and eagerness to serve of the second level of commitment defined above. The Beatitudes in 5:7–10 summarise what such service will look like in practical expression (level three). Both levels of commitment are expanded in the rest of the speech. The response of humble trust and dependency (level two) is further described with images of “laying up treasure in heaven” (6:20), “seeking God’s kingdom and his righteousness” (6:33) and “entering by the narrow gate” (7:13). Matthew uses the language of righteousness (δίκαιος, δικαιοσύνη) to describe active participation in the Servant program of the Lord: both for Jesus himself (3:15) and then, extensively, for his disciples in the speech of Matthew 5–7. We have argued that this is equivalent to an alignment with the will (θέλημα) of the Father (6:10; 7:21; 12:50; 18:14; 21:31; 26:42), taken especially as the Father’s will to complete his Servant program. This (level three) participation in the Servant program is further described with the images of “bearing fruit” (7:17–20) and building a house on the “rock” of Jesus’ instruction (7:24–27), and the effect of such behaviour is described as a light that brings glory to the Father (5:14–16, evoking Isa 42:6; 49:6). Likewise, the (level three) participation in Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom is described with such images as “speaking in the light” and “proclaiming on the housetops” (10:26).

Matthew uses the language of faith (πίστευω, πίςτις) to describe a level one response which is then expressed in a level two response and beyond. This is modelled by the suppliants in Matthew 8–9 (and 15:21–28), who trust Jesus’ promised authority to serve them, believe he is willing to do so and then humbly come to him to be served. Faith is what the disciples are lacking in throughout the narrative (δολερόπιστος, διστάζω). This failing explains their inadequate behaviour, especially when Jesus is betrayed and arrested. In Matthew’s usage faith is related to understanding (συνίημι), which is also a response to the word of the kingdom which bears fruit (13:23). The disciples in the narrative may be said to have an
active alignment teaching and are thus prepared in advance for the Servant ministry laid out for them. They have understanding inasmuch as they have reached a degree of what we have called “communicative alignment” with Jesus’ instruction, but do not yet have the level one belief necessary for full “compliance.” Once they do, they will be able to pass on Jesus’ teaching as scribes made disciples of (or for) the kingdom of heaven, like hospitable householders bringing out of their storehouses both new things and old (13:52). This only becomes possible right at the end of the Gospel account (28:20).

Level two humility in this scheme is actually derivative of Jesus’ humility as Servant, for which Matthew uses the term πράστευσ (11:29; 21:5; cf. 5:5). As we have already noted, the first four Beatitudes summarise this attitude (section 4.6.5 above): It is to be poor in spirit (5:3) acknowledging before the Father a desperate need for life, especially in prayer (6:11–13; 7:7–11). It is to mourn (5:4), expressing to the Father a dismay at the present state of affairs, and a longing for the future the Father is promising (6:10, 20, 31–34). It is to be humble (5:5), to be like Jesus (11:29), not pushing for relative position. It is then to be hungering and thirsting for righteousness (5:6): an eagerness to be served flowing into an eagerness to serve. While the dependency in the speech of Matthew 5–7 is primarily Patrocentric, Jesus later implores people to depend on him as Servant using the imagery of exchanging a heavy “yoke” for a light one (11:28–30). The need for complete dependence from disciples is described further as a need for childlikeness (18:1–6; 19:13–15).

Although Matthew uses the language of following Jesus (ἀκολουθείν) to describe an initial response to his kingdom proclamation (4:18–22; 19:27), and thereby to describe the physical act of being with Jesus in his itinerant ministry, he also makes it clear that following Jesus ultimately has to be following Jesus in the pattern of the Servant. This is most explicit

9 We are thus disagreeing with redaction critics, such as Gerhard Barth, who claim that faith (πιστεύω, πίστις) and understanding (σοφήματι) are separated for Matthew, such that the disciples “have understanding but they lack faith.” Barth, “Law,” 113–14. (See section 1.3 above) As we noted in section 5.3.7, Jesus never explicitly says that the disciples have understanding, although does imply that it will not be held back from them (13:10–17, 52). The understanding they display in 16:12 and 17:13 is partial. That is, the disciples in the main narrative lack both faith and understanding, a lack that can only addressed after Jesus’ death and resurrection (28:16–20).
in the command in 16:24, which uses the imagery of taking up a cross and following Jesus.\textsuperscript{10} To do so requires acknowledging Jesus (ὀμολογέω, 10:32), loving Jesus above all others (φιλέω, 10:37), which cannot be done until he has been fully recognised in his vindication with due reverence (προσκυνέω, 28:17). Only when Jesus is afforded such respect can the calls in Matthew 24–25 to vigilance, like a servant awaiting his master’s return, and diligence, like a servant making good use of his master’s resources, make sense.

Such servants can then express the (level three) commitment described in the second four Beatitudes, displaying the Father to the world (5:14–16). They can seek to be merciful (5:7); not seeking revenge (5:38–42); not hating enemies, but praying for them (5:43–48). They can seek to be pure in heart (5:8); consistently seeking relational fidelity through sexual self-control (5:27–30), marital faithfulness (5:31–32) and consistent honesty (5:33–37). They can seek to be peacemakers (5:9); not full of anger, but seeking reconciliation (5:21–26). They can seek to do these things even under persecution (5:10). Furthermore, they can seek to do them together, as a community or household, facing internal problems with justice, mercy and forgiveness (16:21–20:34). A servant in such a household serves Jesus’ “brothers” (12:49–50; 25:40; 28:10). This includes participating in the task of making new disciples (28:19–20), reapplying the model of Matthew 10 to a global situation and watching that one is not diverted from the Servant task by lack of confidence or by deception (Matthew 13; 24–25). Such a servant is worthy (ἀξίως) of the master he or she follows (10:34–39).

\textit{8.3.2 How might such a response be evoked or sustained by hearing or reading the Gospel?}. It should be apparent from this account that the major impediment to commitment is likely to lie in the very first stage or level: the stage of basic beliefs about the state of the world. A problem must be addressed for anything else to follow. We have argued in this study that the major means Matthew uses to give credibility to Jesus’ message and claims is through his narrative leading up to his death and resurrection. We argued in section 7.1 that the plot of the Gospel is constructed to highlight this, such that every dramatic crisis finds its resolution

\textsuperscript{10} Similarly in 10:24–25, a disciple is to be like his teacher, a servant like his master.
there. We further argued in section 7.3 that the suffering and death of Jesus gives him the credibility of a “costly messenger,” while the resurrection gives external confirmation of his claims. These work together to give the promise of future vindication a credibility it previously lacked for those of little-faith.

In this, the disciples within the narrative stand as a particular example of little-faith and doubt. This is not to suggest that the struggles of every reader will match their peculiar struggles with little-faith. Rather, as compliant readers are brought to empathize with the disciples in the story, their (perhaps very different) struggles may well be dealt with too. They are shown both the irrationality, even wickedness, of unbelieving responses and the possibility of being incorporated in Jesus’ Servant program opened up by his death and resurrection. Matthew is showing within this both the possibility of incorporation and its relative value and attractiveness.

Along the way, we have also noted a sequence of more open commands, which address potentially compliant readers more directly. There is the call to repent (3:2; 4:17), to recognize the nearness of the kingdom. The call is given credibility by Jesus proclamation of the kingdom in word and deed (4:23–10:42). There is the call to come to Jesus to be served (11:28–30). The call is given credibility in the face of negative responses as Father and Son are shown in control of the revelation of the kingdom (11:1–16:20). There is the call to take up one’s cross and follow Jesus (16:24), the necessity of following in the Servant pattern of obedient tribulation and vindication. This call is made credible by the necessity of Jesus’ own obedient tribulation and vindication (16:21–28:15). Finally can come the call to make disciples and thereby participate fully in the Servant program (28:19–20). All these calls, then, are supported by a compliant reading of the narrative. They give an overarching shape to the call to theocentric commitment in Matthew’s Gospel: to be served by the Servant and to be incorporated into, and participate in, his Servant program for the world.
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