

## Chapter Six

### The Synoptic Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke

#### Continuing the Morality “Map” of Paul

##### a. The Gospel of Mark – 70 AD

The writings of Paul’s immediate successors are an indication of the success of his eschatological teaching about morality, that is, insofar as people identify with the morality of Christ, so also will they share in his resurrected life.

There is a fairly general agreement amongst scholars that Mark’s gospel was the first gospel to be written down. The year was about 70 AD when Jerusalem was under siege by the Roman Army. It was a traumatic time for the Jews and followers of Jesus alike.<sup>155</sup>

Apart from the time the gospel was written, there is more uncertainty about the place where it was written down. Perhaps it was Rome.<sup>156</sup> The text has indications of a recent fearful history of Mark’s background community. This would coincide with Christian fortunes in the 60’s CE. In 67 AD after the fire of Rome, Nero the Emperor blamed the Christians for the catastrophe and had them cruelly

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<sup>155</sup> Brendan Byrne, *A Costly Freedom: A Theological Reading of Mark’s Gospel*, (Strathfield: St Pauls Publications, 2008), xv.

<sup>156</sup> Byrne, *A Costly Freedom*: xvii.

persecuted.<sup>157</sup> As soldiers went from house to house looking for Christians there were betrayals amongst community members. Fear was paramount and the text reflects this (cf. Mk 10:32-34). Then, around the time of writing the gospel there was disaster amongst the Jews world- wide. Stories about the Jerusalem siege and destruction of the Temple and its whole system of worship would have circulated. Some of the scenes of this disaster appear to be described in the text of Mark's gospel. (Mk 13:1).

In the wider context of the writing of Mark's gospel, stories from the life of Jesus had been talked about during the nearly forty year period between the life of Jesus and the writing down of the gospel (ca. 33-70 AD). For the purpose of re-telling these stories, they would have been compiled and edited at a verbal level. As with other story-telling they would have been re-told and "performed" in house churches.<sup>158</sup> Mark would have been able to work from such a story base.

As a follow-on from our previous discussion of Paul's isolation of three key social commandments in his teaching, the question can be raised. Was there a section or sections in Mark's gospel where these three social commandments are also isolated out and Mark continues on with Paul's "eschatological" interpretation of them? To recall, the three commandments are "Thou shalt not kill, commit adultery or steal?" (These are numbers five, six and seven in Traditional Catholicism).<sup>159</sup>

Other factors would also be in play here. For instance in the case of Paul's teaching as in First Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor.3:10), he puts himself forward as a model of morality. In

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<sup>157</sup> Cf. Moloney, Francis, J. *Mark, Storyteller, Interpreter, evangelist* Peabody, Massachusetts, Hendrickson Publishers 2004, 9.

<sup>158</sup> Antoinette Clark Wire, *The Case for Mark Composed in Performance* Biblical Performance Criticism 3 (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2011).

<sup>159</sup> Plenary Council, *Catechism*: 28.

the case of Mark, as one would expect, Jesus himself is put forward as the model of morality cf. “come follow me” in Mark 10:21.

This leadership challenge by Jesus in Chapter 10 needs consideration. Consider the earlier context of this challenge in Mark 9:2-8. The section when Jesus takes his leadership team of disciples, Peter, James and John up a mountain. Here Jesus is transformed and his garments become “white as snow” (v. 3). Jesus appears to be speaking to Moses who gave the law to the Jews and Elijah the prophet who went beyond Judaism as when he provided for a non-Jewish widow (Lk.. 4:25).

When Jesus was being transformed on the mount – with his garment “white as snow” there was a voice from heaven identifying him “This is my beloved Son.” (v. 7). After this, in the text, Jesus and the disciples come down from the mountain. Then they are met by another father and son (9:17-18). There is a contrast here. The son here was possessed by a demon (v. 18). The disciples were trying to get rid of the demon while the father looked on helplessly. Jesus intervenes and banishes the spirit. The text then goes on to talk about the situation of children in general (v. 36).. The need for a stable family background is stressed (10:2-16) as also the need for good example (v. 42).

It is in this setting that Jesus points out it is children who have a leadership role in the “kingdom of God”. Thus he says “Unless you become as little children you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.” (10:15). Mark’s introduction of “the child” image here, as a model of morality, appears to be a new element to Paul’s teaching. But we still find Paul’s approach is being developed.

Next in Mark’s Chapter 10, a man comes forward wanting to follow Jesus. At first Jesus tells him to keep the

commandments and here we are given an echo of Paul in Romans when he explicitly mentions the three key social commandments (Rom. 13:9) In Mark 10 Jesus says

You know the commandments: Do not kill, Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Do not defraud. Honour your father and mother.  
(Mk 10:19)

The man says he has kept the commandments from his youth. (Mk 10:20) The text then says that Jesus looked at the man with love (v.21). Then he challenged him “Go sell what you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come follow me.” (v. 21). As it turns out in the story, the man was quite wealthy. He did not want to take up this invitation and he went away sad (v. 22).

If we analyze out the invitation given by Jesus here it not only appears to be a continuation but also development of the approach of Paul. The man is asked to sell what he has and give the money to the poor. In this sense this is a “reversal” of the commandment “Thou shalt not steal.” At the practical level, if the man has no possessions then he is not in a position to set up a household and family. Thus there is an echo here of Paul’s teaching here about optional celibacy in 1 Corinthians Chapter 7. Also without being married the man would be a step further away from the likelihood of falling into adultery (cf. “Thou shalt not commit adultery.”(v. 19)) Jesus invites the man to “come follow me.” (v. 21). In such case the man would be devoting his whole life, like Jesus, to the betterment of others. He would be helping them towards their own self-determination. In that sense this is a call to a lifestyle that is the opposite of “Thou shalt not kill” (cf. v. 19).

Such a “reversal” of the three commandments, turns the negative prohibition of the commandments into a positive

lifestyle that is centred around the following of Jesus and towards an identification with him. Thus in the case of the three commandments which Paul had consistently isolated and moved towards “reversing”, we find that Mark the first gospel writer, is taking up the same theme and developing it further.

Historically speaking, we can probably assume that Jesus actually did say something on these lines to a man who wanted to do morally better in his life. Yet the line between leaving “everything” and what actually happened in the life of the early apostles is not quite so clear. In 1 Cor. 9:4-6 Paul refers to the custom of the apostles who took their wives with them on their travels. Only he and Barnabas were exceptions to this practice. Also, presumably the apostles had children. One imagines that responsibility towards children would not allow the first disciples to sell absolutely everything they owned. For instance we read of Jesus going into the house of Simon’s mother-in-law. (Mk 1:29-31). We could wonder to what extent Simon Peter was connected to the ownership of this house? Also there is an implied mention of property at Bethsaida, the township of Philip, Andrew and Peter (Jn. 1:44). Jesus and his followers would go there for a retreat (cf. Mk 6:45).

It would appear that over the forty year interim period between the life of Jesus and the writing of the gospel, the invitation of Jesus to follow him had become more crystallized. There were now followers of Jesus who did not have possessions, a home and family or worldly power because they had committed themselves to a following of Christ. There is a reference in Acts to a ceremony in the Temple when there were people taking a “vow” (Acts 21:23). As it turned out this ceremony “blew up” when Jews accused Paul of taking a pagan into the Temple for the ceremony (he didn’t!) (Acts 21:28). Secular authorities had to intervene on this occasion to save Paul. But the reference to the taking of

a vow suggests that commitment to a following of Christ was becoming more formalized .

Yet the choice of such a lifestyle remains the response to an invitation. It follows the pattern set out by Paul who had insisted that decisions on the lines of lifelong celibacy would need to be at the instigation of the Holy Spirit. This insistence in 1 Cor. 7 on free choice, parallels Paul's conditions set out in II Corinthians relating to donations. When he is asking people to help the church elsewhere in 2 Cor. 9:5 he insists that this donation is optional.

In the text of Mark, the call to follow Jesus in an 'idealized' way also remains an invitation and an option.

In the setting of the invitation by Jesus in Mark 10 the theme of "the child" is continued. When the disciples ask Jesus about their own status, when they say they have indeed followed him, Jesus uses the term "children" to address them (Mk 10:24). In the gospels there are more such references to "the child" as a model of morality, for example Mt. 5:9, Mt. 18:2-5, Mt. 19:13-15, Lk. 9:46-48, Lk. 18:15-17 etc. Also, at the beginning of both Matthew and Luke's gospels a whole introductory section is devoted to the story of Jesus as a child.

Why the emphasis on "the child"? One point that could be raised here is that as compared with the three key social commandments and the invitation to the (young?) man in Mark Ch. 10, the child is without possessions, a sex life and/or physical power. In a more modern terminology the child in this sense is without money, power or sex, arguably the three key causes of social problems. Mark sets out a ground work for the exercise of a "reversal" of the three key social commandments and "prohibitions". This is used as a springboard for Matthew and Luke.

## b. The Gospel of Matthew:

### An Exegesis of Mt 5:17-20 and 10: 5-15

The Gospel of Matthew was written from the basis of a Jewish community around 85 CE.<sup>160</sup> It appears to continue on with the focus of Paul on three key social commandments and it develops Paul's approach to these even further.

The following historical critical exegesis of parts of chapters five and ten in Matthew's gospel is largely based on a chapter already published in the on-line book *Is There a Critique of Hellenism in the Gospels?*<sup>161</sup>. However the material is relevant to this discussion about Christian morality as well.

Both the passages of Mt 5:17-20 and 10:5-15 have an anomaly in them. In the Mt. 5 Jesus talks about the need for a strict observance of the commandments cf. "not one jot or tittle" (to be broken) (Mt. 5:18). But a closer look at his teaching here shows there is a strong stress on attitude rather than observance as such. Thus on a first look it looks as though his teaching is aligned with the meticulous observance taught by the Pharisees. But there is something extra and different here.

A second anomaly to be discussed later is that of the sending by Jesus of his twelve disciples to prepare the way for his own mission. Jesus tells the disciples they are only to go to "the lost house of Israel", presumably Jews (Mt. 10:5). But a closer look at the context of this missionary outreach shows

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<sup>160</sup> Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, (Collegeville, Minn. Liturgical Press, c. 1991), 22.

<sup>161</sup> Michelle Nailon, *Is there a Critique of Hellenism in the Gospels?* (Melbourne: Project Employment, 2016)

that almost half of the inner circle of Jesus, that is, the twelve disciples, had been heavily involved with the fishing industry around the Sea of Galilee. This geographical area was also where Jesus was to cross back and forth across the sea. Because of the social connections with the fishing industry, the industry itself would be the base where the disciples were preparing a “cradle community” The anomaly here is that it appears on the surface that the “cradle community” prepared by the twelve would be based on Jewish membership. True. But it would also be and arguably would be mainly based on the socio-economic network that was operating in a particular industry. In this sense the community so formed was based on a a secular context rather than a Jewish one.

### **Exegesis of Matthew 5:17-20**

To return to Matthew Chapter 5. The point at issue here is observance of “the law”. The verses of Matthew 5:17-20 in fact provide a summary of the tension that law observance was causing for the community of Matthew. Jesus is saying that he did not come to abolish the law or the prophets but to fulfil them (Mt. 5:17). This stated position is a warning to people (such as Jewish scribes) who may be teaching what Jesus would have considered to be a wrong approach to the commandments. Historically, teaching the commandments was a work of the scribes.<sup>162</sup> But Jesus warns in the gospel that his own approach to the commandments differs from that of the scribes and Pharisees. The same warning applied in the time of Matthew. The Pharisees in particular were taking on the role of leadership in the Jewish world and the scribes were involved here.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 189.

<sup>163</sup> Ulrich Luz *New Testament Theology: The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, J. Bradford Robinson, trans.(Cambridge:Cambridge University Press, 1993), 40.



Scholars such as Francis Moloney say the gospel of Matthew was written between 80-90 CE.<sup>164</sup> Recall the Temple of Jerusalem had been destroyed in 70 CE and the remnants of Jewish leadership would have fled to places such as Antioch where there was a large community of Jews. It is thought Matthew's gospel was written in the same locality.<sup>165</sup> Matthew's background community therefore would have had a large membership of Jewish Christians.<sup>166</sup> Who were the Jewish Christians?

At the time of Jesus the Jews had aligned themselves with a range of sub-groups. For instance there were the Herodians, the Essenes, the Sadducees, the priestly caste, the Zealots and so on. Such people would have thought that their base identity was Jewish. Thus they were Jews who belonged to this or that sub-group for example Jewish Zealots. At the time of Matthew, members of his community were also likely to think the same way – despite the efforts of Paul to take a different approach, for example with regards to circumcision. In any case, for many Jewish Christian converts they would have already been circumcised so this would not be an issue for them. They could still think themselves as being Jewish first of all.

There were some advantages to having a Jewish background when trying to understand the teaching of Jesus. For instance they were already familiar with the Old Testament and this should have helped in their understanding of teaching about “fulfilment”. At the same time they were conscious of their

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<sup>164</sup> Francis J. Moloney, *A Body Broken for a Broken People: Eucharist in the New Testament* (Melbourne: Collins Dove, 1990), 37.

<sup>165</sup> Luz *New Testament Theology*, 18.

<sup>166</sup> Luz, *New Testament Theology*,: 147.

wider Gentile environment. Matthew for instance shows a familiarity with the Greek Septuagint<sup>167</sup>

Matthew's gospel argues that Jewish Christians believed Jesus had indeed fulfilled the prophets.<sup>168</sup> In this sense they need not be so reliant on Jewish structures that taught that such fulfilment was still to come. Even while Matthew shows his appreciation of its heritage the Jewish Christians needed to feel more independent of Judaism as such,. Some scholars, for example Ulrich Luz say that by this time these people were no longer attending the synagogue. Also at the same time more people of a Gentile background with only a limited knowledge of Jewish heritage were joining the community. This comingling would have meant that Jewish Christians in the community would be feeling and were being viewed by the Jewish mainstream as being more cut off still from their own heritage.<sup>169</sup> Matthew set out to assure them of their own valid identity.

Return to the text of 5:17-20 in particular. When a closer look is given to the text it is realised these sentences rely on their fuller context if they are to be understood. Luz points out the need for reading a passage in its wider context is a characteristic of Matthew's writing.<sup>170</sup>

At the same time there is an anomaly in the verses themselves in Mt. 5:17-20. On the one hand Jesus is putting forward a stress on the detail of the commandments, "not one letter, not one stroke of a letter," (5:18). But in his disputes with the Pharisees he upbraids them for their own burdensome focus on the detail of the law cf. "They tie up heavy burdens, hard to

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<sup>167</sup> William Richard Stegner, "The Temptation Narrative: A Study in the Use of Scripture by Early Jewish Christians." *Biblical Research* 25 (1990), 7.

<sup>168</sup> Anonymous. "The Jews in the New Testament: The Gospel According to Matthew." *Scripture in Church* 38, no. 149 (2008),125.

<sup>169</sup> Luz, *New Testament Theology*, 144.

<sup>170</sup> Luz, *New Testament Theology*, 2.

bear, and lay them on people's shoulders" (Mt. 23:4). He accuses the Pharisees of failure to keep the real law. "You brood of vipers. Who warned you to fly from the retribution that is coming?" (Mt. 3:7)

The fuller context of the passage, leading on from the Beatitudes (Mt. 5:1-12), shows that there is a connection in 5:17-20 between the detail of the law and the spirit of the law. There is therefore an intermediate point about the people being addressed as being like "salt" (vv. 13-16) and this fits with the emphasis on the spirit of the law. Like good salt affecting all of the food, so a strong spirit in a community affects and strengthens everyone there.

The verses that follow 5:17-20, also give a clarification about what is meant by keeping the spirit of the law. Again there is a focus on the three key social commandments. First there is mention of murder cf. "You shall not kill..." (v. 5:21) This, Jesus points out, extends to the attitude one has towards others cf. "Everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment" (5:22) Then following this segment, in verses 27-32 Jesus deals with the attitude needed for observing the commandment of "You shall not commit adultery." Here, he accuses "everyone who looks at a woman lustfully....." (v. 28). Then, in the next group of verses (5:33-37) there appears to be an elaboration on the attitude needed behind "You shall not steal." In relation to this, Jesus says "if any one would sue you and take your coat let him have your cloak as well" (v. 40). He continues on "Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you" (v. 42). There is even a challenge here to let go of one's material goods even if one needs them.

The verses to follow apparently throw out an even greater challenge in relation to these commandments. Jesus says, "Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also" (v. 39) On the level of

practicality one could wonder about this behaviour and it appears rhetorical hyperbole is being used here. But at the same time, given the context with its quote about an “eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth” (v. 38) the hyperbole provides an effective prohibition against revenge and pay back. Rather it endorses the constant theme in the gospels about forgiveness. Forgiveness is primarily about attitude. Harper’s Commentary argues that these verses are about love <sup>171</sup>

There is also a connection here with Romans 13:8-10 when Paul is saying the commandments are summed up in “you must love your neighbour.” Love and forgiveness are both based on attitude. Attitude is being incorporated here as being intrinsic to an observance of the commandments.

Luz points out that Matthew’s gospel has an approach that groups things into three’s. <sup>172</sup> In 5:20-42 for instance one is again reminded of the three key social commandments listed by Jesus in Mark 10:19. There is a parallel with Mark here, in the sense that both Mark and Matthew require the followers of Christ to push beyond external observance of the commandments. Consider the words in Mark “You lack one thing” (Mk 10:21). These were addressed to the man who had said he had kept the commandments from his youth. Jesus then challenges him to “Go sell what you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure. Then come and follow me.” (Mk 10:21). This suggests that if people only follow the “letter” of the law (as taught for example by the Pharisees) they are also lacking in something. In Mark’s gospel Jesus throws out a challenge to reach beyond the commandments. In Matthew Chapter 5 Jesus elaborates on the spirit and attitude that is required beyond their observance.

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<sup>171</sup> James L. Mays gen. ed. *The HarperCollins Bible Commentary*, (San Francisco: Harper and Rowe, 1988), 956.

<sup>172</sup> Luz, *New Testament Theology*, 117-121.

The verses of Matthew 5:17-20 have particular relevance to the historical situation of Matthew's Church which was possibly in Antioch. Antioch was featured in the Council of Jerusalem in about 51 CE.<sup>173</sup> Acts 15 tells of Paul's close association with the Church there. But in the letter to the Galatians, which included Antioch, Paul tells of how he is now estranged from this community. "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you...?" (Gal. 3:1a.) He upbraids Peter (and Barnabas) about eating apart from Gentile Christians (Gal. 2:11). In Antioch there was an "over-observance" in external law.

For a re-cap on the environment here, recall some of the discussion about Galatia in the pages above. As regards Galatia, the scholar Jerome Murphy O'Connor considers that the group of people exerting pressure for eating apart may have been separate from those persuading the Galatians to undergo circumcision.<sup>174</sup> The historical background shows the Emperor Nero came into power in 54 CE. Carl R. Holladay estimates that Galatians was written shortly after this in 54-55 CE.<sup>175</sup> Paul implies "the circumcisers" were apparently trying to avoid potential persecution by getting Gentile Christians to join mainstream Judaism (Gal 6:12). However after 70 CE and the Roman army's destruction of Jerusalem, the situation would have shifted. It was now Jews who would have fear of persecution and death. Therefore, one could assume that around 80-90 CE. social pressure in the Antiochan church towards circumcision was likely to be more relaxed. Also, as stated above, many of the church members would already be circumcised so this was not an issue for them

With the circumcision debate largely behind them, Matthew was in a position to deal more fully with the antinomianism

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<sup>173</sup> Murphy O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 51.

<sup>174</sup> Murphy O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 141.

<sup>175</sup> Holladay, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament: Interpreting the Message and Meaning of Jesus Christ*, 382-383.

accusations (i.e. rejection of established moral laws) that had been levelled at Paul and indirectly at Jesus.

He could now elaborate on the meanings of “fulfilment” (v. 17) and “righteousness” (v. 20) and show how these were connected to “attitude.” The theme of “fulfilment” actually stretches from the first Chapter in Matthew (cf. Isaiah 7:14) until Chapter twenty-eight when the disciples are challenged to go out into the whole world and make disciples of others (Mt. 28:19) . Thus the idea of fulfilment pervades the gospel and is intrinsic to its themes.

The use of the word “righteousness” also has relevance here. It reflects the efforts of groups such as the Pharisees and Qumran members at the time of Jesus to distinguish themselves favourably from others. But Matthew’s use of the word “righteousness” in the context of 5:17-20 has a dimension of irony to it. The word does not describe external observance at all.<sup>176</sup> Rather, Jesus is redefining the word in terms of attitude and, the verses to follow “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” (v. 20) elaborate on what sort of attitude is needed for “the kingdom of heaven”.

Scholars such as Benjamin Bacon view the text between 5:1 “And he opened his mouth and taught them saying” and verse 7:23 which says “After Jesus had finished these words” as all being part of the one gospel section.<sup>177</sup> Bacon sees the repetition of this one sentence through the gospel as dividing it up into other sections as well.<sup>178</sup> Thus the meaning of 5:17-20 extends in this sense to the whole of the section of Mt. 5:1-7:23.

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<sup>176</sup> cf. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 71.

<sup>177</sup> Benjamin Bacon, *Studies in Matthew* (London: Constable, 1930).

<sup>178</sup> Bacon, *Studies in Matthew*

Ironically the scholar Luz argues for a fuller reading of Matthew's text (cf. Bacon's sections). Yet Luz appears to consider 5:17-20 on its own when comparing Matthew's approach with that of Paul. He says "The Matthean principle of fulfilment of the Law and the Pauline principle of freedom from the Law, are mutually exclusive."<sup>179</sup> In fact he suggests that in the large metropolis of Antioch, Matthew barely knew of Paul.<sup>180</sup> Luz may see Matthew and Paul as being, in a sense, at odds with one another. But in the full context of the section from 5:2 to 7:28 Matthew is actually putting forward a positive interpretation of the law, one that is based upon attitude. And, this helps to clarify Paul's teaching about law rather giving an opposite viewpoint to his approach.

In Matthew's Chapter Five there is an implication here that the disciples of Jesus in Matthew's gospel are more advanced in being "able to penetrate the mystery of Jesus' identity" than were the disciples in Mark's gospel.<sup>181</sup> Again, one is reminded here of the wider context of the chapter. After the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:2-10 Jesus says "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets," (5:17) and here he puts out challenges that go beyond the external observance of the law.<sup>182</sup> For instance he says "If your right hand causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away..."(5:30). Even if hearers/auditors of Matthew were to take this sentence metaphorically, there is still the implication that severe self-discipline is part of the culture of Matthew's community and the disciples are being told to spread this approach. Such challenges were likely to arouse hostility amongst people who either wanted to downplay the observance of the Commandments altogether and/or those who only wanted detailed external compliance with Jewish law. With the

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<sup>179</sup> Luz, *New Testament Theology*, 152.

<sup>180</sup> Luz, *New Testament Theology*, 147.

<sup>181</sup> Donald Senior *What are they Saying about Matthew?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 91.

<sup>182</sup> Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 17.

emphasis here on an ascetic attitude, not only righteousness would be required of the followers of Jesus but a 'greater righteousness.'<sup>183</sup>

There is relevance here to the book by Dale Allison called *The New Moses*. Allison points out a comparison between Matthew's text and the Hellenistic tradition that stressed the need for teachers "to live as they taught." Allison notes how Socrates was the great model for Hellenists. Philo (a Jewish philosopher) transferred this sort of status to Moses. Matthew on the other hand "gives the palm" (of this position as a model) to Jesus. The key point being made here was to establish congruity between word and deed. Thus in Matthew, Jesus is presented as the Torah incarnate and animate law.<sup>184</sup> At the same time there is a shift being taken here from a 'holiness code' to a 'mercy code.' A difference here, it should be noted is that "holiness" relates to one's own spiritual state. "Mercy" on the other hand relates to one's interaction with others. Such a shift would apply to both Matthew's interpretation of the situations of Jesus and the social context of Matthew as well.<sup>185</sup>

Again, there is an underlying theme that observance of the law in Matthew's gospel entails a development in one's understanding of the law.

## **Exegesis of Matthew 10:5-15**

Consider another section of Matthew using the method of interpretation called Historical Critical Exegesis. Matthew

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<sup>183</sup> David M. Bossman, "Christians and Jews Read the Gospel of Matthew Today," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 27, no. 2 (Albany, NY: Biblical Theology Bulletin Inc., 1997), 46.

<sup>184</sup> Dale Allison, Jr, *The New Moses* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, c. 1993), 145.

<sup>185</sup> Klyne Snodgrass, "Matthew's Understanding of the Law," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology*, 96 (Richmond Va.: Union theological Seminary, 1992), 368-78.



10:5-15 is in the middle of a gospel section in which Jesus sends his twelve selected disciples to “the poor of Israel”. He warns them not to go to the Gentiles and not to go into Samaritan towns and villages (v. 5). He also provides a “check list” of the ways in which they are to travel (v. 9) and he tells them to respect any hospitality given to them (v. 12-13). On the other hand he tells them to “shake the dust off their feet” if people do not want to hear their message (v. 14). He gives a warning about those who reject the message (v. 15). This passage goes on to warn the disciples of the conflict which is likely to occur when they preach (v. 17), even between family members (v. 21). Matthew concludes this instruction to the twelve disciples with the words “And when Jesus had finished giving instructions to his twelve disciples he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities (Mt 11:1). According to Bacon’s analysis of the gospel, this sentence ends a section.

Most scholars consider that the text of this gospel section 10:5-15 is based on Mark’s gospel, as also a source called Q and also material peculiar to Matthew (M).<sup>186</sup> On a cursory reading, the verses of Mt. 10:5-15 may appear to describe the directions of Jesus as being for on a “one-off” occasion. Yet right through the passage there are constant references to a much wider context. This includes the socio-economic situation in which Jesus, and later Matthew, found themselves. There are also some contradictions here as mentioned above. How so?

On the one hand Jesus tells his disciples not to go to the Gentiles (Mt. 10:5). Yet it appears he himself was using Hellenistic social models when telling the disciples how to behave. For example the disciples would move around in ways that were similar to that of the itinerant Cynic preachers whose philosophic background was from the Greek Stoics<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 5.

<sup>187</sup> Downing, *Cynics, Paul and the Pauline Churches*, 85 pp.

Such similarities imply that in the long term, the message of Jesus and the mission of the disciples would be applicable to Gentile people as well. The passage also includes allusion to the historical friction between Jews and Gentiles that Jesus faced in his own day (cf. 30 CE). There were also similarities here with the historical conflict that was being faced by Matthew and his community (cf. 85 CE).<sup>188</sup> In terms of the immediate text, one can note that the redactions Matthew was making of Mark's text showed up such a relevance to his own situation. Consider. On the one hand Matthew uses Mark's text of 6:8-11 as a base for his text of Mt 10:5-15. But the follow-ups to both texts have a significant difference. On the one hand Mark follows up with the statement "So they went out and preached that men should repent" (Mk 6:12). But Matthew puts a focus on the need to be "wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (Mt 10:16). The implication here, is that the disciples in Matthew's context would be preaching about something that was more likely to arouse hostility than (only) preaching about repentance. We know from the previous chapter five that this would involved teaching about Jesus as fulfilling the law and teaching about how the law should be followed. This was the issue Matthew's community was dealing with.

The statement in Mt 11:1 that Jesus "went on from there to teach and preach in their cities," provides a background social context for the instructions that is given in 10:5-15. In verses 10:5-6 Jesus says "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." With regards to the historical situation of Jesus in saying this, it not only implies that the disciples were to go to Jewish towns. It also implies that they would go to towns and villages where they already had social networks. These places were "their" cities and Jesus would follow them

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<sup>188</sup> Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 22.

there (cf. 11:1). In their outreach to Jews only, the disciples would build on the networks they already had and basic understanding that people had of the Torah and Law. It would be later on they could go out beyond Jewish boundaries or develop people's understanding of the law further.

On one level Matthew reflects on the social situation of Jesus in the 30's CE. Yet right through the passage of Mt 10:5-15 one can detect the voice of Matthew and his own problems fifty years later. Thus in the front of the text we see the mission of Jesus unfolding. In the under-tone of the text we hear the voice of Matthew and his own concerns.

In looking at these verses in Matthew Chapter 10, both threads of concern are being developed at the same time. Again, consider the story at the "front" of the text. Here one needs to be particularly conscious that Matthew is describing a specific methodology of mission that was being taken by Jesus himself.

An article by K. C. Hanson "The Galilean Fishing Economy and the Jesus Tradition," has special relevance to such a methodology. Hanson brings a different dimension into a discussion about the missionary journey altogether. She points out that the social setting of the fishing industry around the Sea of Galilee has been underestimated in importance amongst biblical commentators.<sup>189</sup> Consider. Of the twelve disciples sent out, (Mt 10:5), Simon, Andrew, James and John had a fishing background. Also, Philip came from the same town of Bethsaida and he knew Nathanael (John 1:43-50). Also the gospel shows that Jesus is moving around the Sea of Galilee and crossing backwards and forwards across this sea (7 miles by 12.5 miles diameter). As well, and for a while Jesus himself was living at the fishing town of Capernaum.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> K. C. Hanson, "The Galilean Fishing Economy and the Jesus Tradition," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 27, no. 2 (Albany N.Y.: Biblical Theology Bulletin Inc., 1997), 100.

<sup>190</sup> Hanson, "The Galilean Fishing Economy and the Jesus Tradition," 109.

Consider the wider context here. Within the Roman Empire at the time, the fishing industry involved a complex system of networking, not only amongst family members who usually worked together but including amongst labourers and people in other sub-industries. Fishing was regulated by the State. Thus when Jesus was moving amongst a network of acquaintances, many of whom were already known to his disciples, he was also moving within the State-regulated environment of the Greco-Roman Empire. Hanson points out that the sorts of people involved in this fishing industry included a wide range of people. There were fishing families, tax collectors, toll collectors, hired labourers, suppliers of raw goods, fish processors, shippers, carters etc.<sup>191</sup> In other words the first area of mission for the disciples was in their own established networks of people and these operated in a state-regulated industry as well as from a family base.

It made strategic, missionary sense for the disciples to give the message of Jesus to people they knew first of all. For a start the disciples could find out who, amongst these people, was interested in their message. Thus, Matthew adds a sentence to Mark's text by saying "Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy," (presumably of their message) (v. 11 b). In terms of the mission of Jesus, the twelve disciples were building a base of 'believers' that consisted of the economic community from which they came. Then Jesus himself went around these same towns and villages (11:1). He was addressing these same communities where the disciples had already done a ground work of preparation. This consideration throws a different perspective on the assumption that the disciples "only" followed Jesus. Rather they not only shared in his mission, they prepared for it. In their own social context it was likely people were feeling disillusioned with a minute observance of law, such as taught by the Pharisees and scribes. They were also strained by Roman taxes and

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<sup>191</sup> Hanson, "The Galilean Fishing Economy and the Jesus Tradition," 99.

regulations. Recall that at the Council of Jerusalem Peter stands up and says he found the Jewish law was too burdensome to observe (Acts 15:10). It is likely within the fishing industry around the Sea of Galilee, people were looking for a different interpretation of the law – one that would help them deal with the stresses of their situation.

Matthew 10:5-15 gives further indications that the missionary journey of the twelve key disciples is a “step” in the wider context of the gospel. As well as it being a logical strategy for Jesus to send the disciples to the people they already knew, (v. 5) in the early stages of their discipleship it was also unlikely they had the skills or maturity or self-confidence to face people in either a Gentile community or in Samaritan villages. That is, the twelve disciples were not yet ready to move outside the circles of Judaism.

Again, beneath the surface of the “front” story in Matthew about the inadequacy of the disciples there is the undertone of Matthew’s own situation. He was likely to consider that his own Jewish-based community was in a similar situation of unreadiness. Thus while the “Do not” narrative of the mission is about the twelve disciples, there are hints that Matthew’s community also is being addressed here. Such a hint is apparent when he makes an addition to Mark’s text of Mk 6:8 and says “take no gold or silver” (v. 9). This detail reflects that the “implied readers” (thirty years later) come from a more affluent background as compared with than the background of the twelve disciples themselves.<sup>192</sup>

To return to a comparison between Matthew Chapter 10 and the time of Jesus. One of the problems of the people in the fishing sub-industries in the time of Jesus was the unjust tax system. Roman taxes kept workers at a subsistence level.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, c. 1988), 125

<sup>193</sup> Hanson, “The Galilean Fishing Economy and the Jesus Tradition,” 100.

Such economic pressures of people in the fishing industry in the 30's CE also throws light on the meaning of the "lost sheep of the house of Israel." As it was, the system of governance was biased towards wealthier families and the Roman Emperor and there was widespread discontent about this <sup>194</sup> Thus the word "lost" as used by Matthew (v. 6) was likely to include lower classes of the fishing industry whose economic poverty was having a negative affect not only on their religious observance but also on their religious identity. One positive outcome of this would have been that their common plight would have been a factor of bonding amongst them.

An understanding of the fishing social context at the time of Jesus, allows one to accept the likelihood that the wording of the text Mt 10:5-15 does in fact date back to Jesus. It also challenges the idea that the sentence about the "lost sheep of Israel" was added later by Matthew to refer to a mission to Jews because they were scattered amongst the Gentiles. <sup>195</sup> There could of course be a double meaning here.

In any case, whether the phrase about the lost sheep of Israel was added by Matthew or not, it was likely to have a different meaning for the implied reader of the gospel in the 80's CE as distinct from the twelve disciples in the 30's CE. The implied reader would obviously understand it in terms of their own historical situation.

As already mentioned scholars such as Francis Maloney and Jack Dean Kingsbury reflect on the fact that the the gospel was probably written between 85 and 90 A.D. well after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. <sup>196</sup> This was a time of crisis for Jews or "Israelites" as they were also called. There were attempting to clarify their identity. Also as mentioned

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<sup>194</sup> Hanson, "The Galilean Fishing Economy and the Jesus Tradition,"103.

<sup>195</sup> Cf. Douglas Hare *The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel According to St Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1967), 146.

<sup>196</sup> Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 27.

above, it is considered that the gospel could have been written in Antioch where there was a large Jewish population.<sup>197</sup> At that time in the 80's CE the Pharisees were emerging as leaders within the Jewish mainstream. Recall that other leadership groups such as the priests and Sadducees had been wiped out around 70 A.D., as also the Qumran community. It was a time of transition. The Pharisees were gradually replacing the rituals of the Temple with detailed observances in the Jewish home and in the local Synagogue.<sup>198</sup> This same period, when the gospel was being written, was also a time of tension between the Pharisees and the Jewish Christians. Matthew and his community believed it was themselves who could provide the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" with an identity by centring identity on the teachings and person of Jesus. They believed they were the true inheritors of the promises of the Old Testament. In the text of the gospel Matthew constantly referred back to the prophets of the Old Testament to show that Jesus had fulfilled their promises.<sup>199</sup> For Matthew's Jewish community, identity should pivot around the Jesus event and for them righteousness would be defined as fidelity to the teachings of Jesus.<sup>200</sup>

But the historical situation of Matthew in 85 CE differed from what his community would have preferred. On the one hand the Pharisees were referring back to the leadership they had given about external observance prior to the destruction of the Temple. Matthew and his community on the other hand had shifted instead to a "mercy code" with an emphasis on attitude and love.

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<sup>197</sup> Daniel W. Ulrich, "The Missional Audience of the Gospel of Matthew," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 69 (Washington DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2007), 73.

<sup>198</sup> Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 15.

<sup>199</sup> Cf. Snodgrass, "Matthew's Understanding of the Law."

<sup>200</sup> Senior, *What are they saying about Matthew*, 74.

Therefore, just as conflict with the Jewish leadership at the time of Jesus was inevitable, so also it was inevitable that in the time of Matthew there would again be conflict with Jewish leadership. In fact, in Matthew's time and around 85 CE a crisis point of conflict was reached. It was then that the Jewish leadership, meeting in Jamnia, put out an edict that required that people who attended the Synagogue to recite a prayer that would curse Christians. Effectively this banned Jewish Christians from the Synagogues altogether.<sup>201</sup>

At the present time there is disagreement amongst scholarship as to whether Matthew's community considered themselves to be still within Judaism or whether by this time they had been expelled from it. But in any case, in such a situation the community of Matthew could also use the phrase about "the lost sheep of Israel" as referring to themselves.

Scholars such as Saldanarini hold that the gospel was written from within Judaism and for a community that was well acquainted with the Old Testament.<sup>202</sup> This familiarity is apparent in the Matthew's reliance on Isaiah's Servant Songs (Isaiah 50)<sup>203</sup> There are also obvious parallels here with a sense of failure.<sup>204</sup> One would expect such a feeling of failure would exist amongst Matthew's community as it appeared they had failed to inspire mainstream Judaism with the figure and teaching of Jesus. At the same time Daniel Ulrich points out that in any case in Matthew's account of the mission of the disciples, Jesus said not all the missionaries would be welcomed by all Jews.<sup>205</sup> This would also apply later on to Matthew's community.

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<sup>201</sup> Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 15-16.

<sup>202</sup> Anthony Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994), 107.

<sup>203</sup> Vicky Balabanski, "Mission in Matthew against the Horizon of Matthew 24," *New Testament Studies*, 54 (London: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 173.

<sup>204</sup> Senior, *What are they Saying about Matthew*, 60.

<sup>205</sup> Ulrich, "The Missional Audience of the Gospel of Matthew," 78.



Consider the expectation echoed in Mt 10:17 with the verse, “they will deliver you up to Councils and flog you in their synagogues,” Here the phrase “their synagogues” suggests that by this time Matthew and his community did not consider themselves to be within Judaism at all. Or, at the very least they thought themselves to be one group of Jews as distinct from other groups of Jews.<sup>206</sup>

In any case Douglas Hare says it is apparent in the text that in its past history, Matthew’s community experienced a painful rupture with mainstream Judaism.<sup>207</sup> His community would have been feeling increasing isolation from Judaism as such, because at that time most Israelites were opting to follow the Pharisees rather than the Jewish Christians. Senior points out that besides being rejected from the synagogues and the trauma that resulted from this there was also an influx of Gentiles into the community who had little knowledge or understanding of the Old Testament.<sup>208</sup> This point has already been made above.

At the time of Matthew, the Jewish Christian leadership needed to clarify and strengthen the identity of their own community. It is in this context that the instructions given by Jesus in 10:5-15 have particular relevance. In his book *House of Disciples*, Michael H. Crosby says a key to understanding Matthew’s context is to recognise the importance of the household structure in the first century Greco Roman world. On the one hand the disciples (both at the time of Jesus and of Matthew) were establishing a community that extended beyond the blood family. The disciples and their recruits

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<sup>206</sup> Anonymous, “Biblical Essay, The Jews in the New Testament: The Gospel According to Matthew,” *Scripture in Church* 38, n. 149 (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 2008), 125.

<sup>207</sup> Douglas Hare *The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel According to St Matthew*.

<sup>208</sup> Senior, *What are they saying about Matthew*, 49.

became in effect members of the household of Jesus.<sup>209</sup> The missionary task given in Mt 10 was an opportunity for the disciples, whether of the time of Jesus or Matthew, to bond more closely and to strengthen their sense of belonging to the household of Jesus. In terms of the text of Mt 10:5-15 it appears that the standards of asceticism “take no gold etc.” (v. 9) were directed towards the twelve disciples. But it also reflects that a culture of asceticism and a sense of mission was now applied to all, just as identification with Jesus and his mission was also extended to all.

Re-consider the passage of Mt 10:5-15. There appears to be some contradiction in the statement “You received without pay, give without pay.” (v. 7) and then the statement to follow, “the labourer deserves his food.” (v.10). This in fact draws a fine line between the acceptance of hospitality and the abuse of it. Sensitivity was required here, and the disciples were urged to move on if they realised they were not welcome (v. 14).

All of these factors show that the apparently "one off" mission of the twelve disciples was in fact a stage in the progress of the disciples themselves towards establishing a missionary base and obtaining a greater bonding and a greater competence and maturity in their missionary outreach. This step would help prepare them for being given the much larger mission of going out to the whole world, cf. the socio-economic world. Thus there is not a contradiction between Mt 10:5 and later at the end of the gospel in Mt 28:19, when Jesus commissions the disciples to “make disciples of all nations.” John Meier describes the two texts as showing “difference within continuity.”<sup>210</sup> But Vicky Balabanski claims that in fact the gospel as a whole leads into the “Great Commission” that is delivered by Jesus to the disciples at the gospel’s end in

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<sup>209</sup> Michael H. Crosby, *House of Disciples: Church, Economics and Justice in Matthew* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, c. 1988), ix.

<sup>210</sup> John Meier, *The Vision of Matthew: Christ, Church and Morality in the First Gospel* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 30.

Matthew 28:19.<sup>211</sup> Moreover this development towards a world mission runs parallel to the narrative of the gospel.

When Matthew 10:5-15 is read as a “stage” in a process of disciple maturation the reading alters frequent interpretations of the gospel, that claim that Jesus (and Matthew the writer) at first wanted and tried to convert all the Jews into a following of Jesus. Such interpreters argue that there was later friction about this cf. “they (scribes and Pharisees) bind heavy burdens and put them on the shoulders of people. They are not willing to move these things with their finger.” (Mt. 23:4) This resulted in a change of viewpoint about missionary outreach. It was then thought that if there were to be any sort of future for the good news it would instead be found in a mission to the Gentiles. Amongst scholars there still appears to be some equivocation about this interpretation. Harrington implies that he agrees with this interpretation when he talks of the “rejection of Jesus (by the Jews) resulting in inclusion of the Gentiles.”<sup>212</sup> This can also imply that in turn, there was a rejection of the Jews (or Israelites), on the part of the Matthean community (cf. “shake off the dust from your feet” Mt 10:14). A further inference could be made here that thinking behind such a verse was that the promises of God in the Old Testament would now go to the Jewish Christians and not the Jews. This apparently fits with the verse of Mt 27:25 “And all the people answered. “His blood be upon us and our children.” But, as Allison points out, “content demands context,”<sup>213</sup> Balabanski as well as a majority of other scholars, now refute this view about rejection of the Jews.<sup>214</sup> In fact Harrington himself contradicts this view when he says that Christians are

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<sup>211</sup> Vicky Balabanski, “Mission in Matthew against the Horizon of Matthew 24,” 162.

<sup>212</sup> Senior, *What are they saying about Matthew*, 19.

<sup>213</sup> Dale Allison Jr, *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation past and present*, 147.

<sup>214</sup> Vicky Balabanski, “Mission in Matthew against the Horizon of Matthew 24,” 174.

obliged to share the message of Jesus with all others including and especially with the Jews.<sup>215</sup>

One of the ways the text of Mt 10:5-15 can be understood as describing a “stage” in the development of the disciples, can be demonstrated by looking at the structure of the gospel as a whole. For some time, starting with Benjamin Bacon, scholars have been aware of his proposal that the gospel is structured by sections of narrative followed by sections of a discourse. Bacon pointed out that the repetition of the words “after Jesus had finished (these words)” is a break in the gospel structure.<sup>216</sup> He also suggested that the gospel was written as a “new Pentateuch.” Though the latter view has not been widely accepted, his observation of a break in the text “after Jesus had finished these words...” has generally been used as a starting point when attempts are made to work out the gospel structure.<sup>217</sup> On the other hand, some scholars have seen this wording as a transitional statement only.<sup>218</sup>

An observation to support the idea of a “transition” sentence between one part of the gospel’s structure and another, is to consider a description apparently of a disciple, just before each statement of “After Jesus had finished these words.” Such descriptions appear to show steps being taken by a disciple in the process of becoming more identified with Jesus, “the suffering servant.” Thus consider: Just before the first statement of “after Jesus had finished” in Mt 7:28, there is reference to “a prudent man” (v. 24). The next “break” or transitional clause in Mt 11:1 is preceded by “one of these little ones” (10:42). The next break in Mt 13:53 is preceded by a reference to a “householder” (v. 51). (David Orton suggests

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<sup>215</sup> Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 144.

<sup>216</sup> Bacon, *Studies in Matthew*, 81.

<sup>217</sup> Dale Allison Jr., “Matthew: Structure, Biographical Impulse and the *Imitatio Christi*,” in F. Van Segbroeck et al. (eds.), *The Four Gospels, Vol. II* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992), 1203-21.

<sup>218</sup> Senior, *What are they saying about Matthew*, 27.

that the description about a householder (13:52), which also involves the description of a scribe, may have referred to Matthew himself being a converted rabbi.)<sup>219</sup> The next “break” in Mt 19:1 is immediately preceded by a reference to forgiveness of one’s “brother” (18:35). Then, just before the next “break” in Mt 26:1, Jesus says failure to help one of these “least ones” (25: 45) is a failure to assist himself. These five transitional descriptions lead to the final commission given in 28:19 when the disciples are challenged to go out and “disciple” others. In such case they could be described here as “disciplers,” especially as the word “disciple” is in the imperative (v. 19).<sup>220</sup> There is a progression from a “prudent” man to “one of these little ones” to a “householder” to “brother” to “one of these least ones” and finally to “disciplers”.

The apparent “breaks” between possible structure sections of the texts thus show a gradual development in the maturity of the disciples and their preparedness to go out to the whole world as mandated by Jesus at the gospel’s end “Go and disciple all nations” (Mt. 28:19). This gradual development description also braces the Jewish-based community of Matthew in the challenge they face as well in looking outward towards “the whole world” and taking with them an understanding of the commandments that would enable all peoples to observe them.

## **Some Conclusions about Paul and Matthew**

Where does this text fit as compared with the isolation of the three key commandments by Paul, writing in the 50’s CE, and

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<sup>219</sup> David Orton, *The Understanding Scribe: Matthew and the Apocalyptic Ideal* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic, 1989).

<sup>220</sup> Ulrich, “The Missional Audience of the Gospel of Matthew,” 71.

later Mark writing in 70 CE.? Recall that in 1 Corinthians Paul had to clarify where the followers of Jesus “fitted” as compared with Hellenists (cf. Gentiles or non-Jews). Many if not most of the latter believed they as persons possessed a “divine spark” which identified them as sharing in divinity as such. Paul had to teach the followers of Jesus they were “possessed” by the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit remained (as in the Jewish tradition) completely “other”. It was when this sort of difference was sorted out that Paul’s teaching about the commandments and morality was given a clearer context. The gospels to follow could then develop this understanding of the presence of the Divine Spirit being within oneself further.

Mark set the groundwork for this in his basic gospel structure (to be discussed further in Part Two of this research project).

With regard to Matthew there are similarities between the situation that is described by Matthew and his own situation later on. But in the case of Matthew his focus was to be on a clarification between Jews and Christian Jews (rather than Christians and Greeks). On the one hand Matthew continued the teaching of Paul in isolating and underlining the importance of three key social commandments, as pointed out in the exegesis of Matthew Chapter 7. Following on from this he then set out to clarify the differences between the followers of Jesus and mainstream Judaism. The context Matthew provides is to stress that the approach of the disciples to the law has to be based on a developing maturity that emphasises the attitude of mercy. This attitude takes precedence over external observances. It is when the followers of Jesus embrace such an attitude that they are able to identify with Jesus and go out into the Gentile world, confident of their own position.

The “cradle community” from which the disciples were to make their outreach consisted of the socio-economic base of a “working world”. Such a base would enable the members of

Matthew's community to make an outreach that was just as relevant to the wider world as it had been for the the disciples of Jesus some decades before them. It was to be in the socio-economic forums of the world that the main issues of Christian morality would be thrashed out.

At this stage, an overview of points covered so far would be appropriate. We considered Paul's practice of isolating out the three key social commandments and encouraging people to practice an idealised version of these if they were called to do this by the Holy Spirit. We saw how Mark also isolated out these three commandments and turned them into the challenge of taking on a lifestyle geared towards the close following of Jesus and identification with him. It was here that an association between this lifestyle and that of the child was introduced. We then saw how Matthew in the section above, also isolated out the three commandments. He insisted that the attitude with which these are practiced is crucial. He also fixed the practice of these commandments into the context of the industrialised world.

Where does Luke, the third synoptic writer, fit in with these developments? Matthew was writing for a Jewish Christian society. Luke was writing for a Gentile Christian society and as one would expect his text, also largely based upon that of Mark, would be geared towards his own auditor-/readership and the special challenges that it faced.

## c. The Gospel of Luke

### **Narrative Exegesis of Luke 4:16-30 and Acts 15**

In the gospel of Luke we find there is a continued focus on and development of three key social values, based on the 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> commandments. Luke not only threads reference to these commandments into the general text. References can also be found in central themes that he develops as well. The passage of Luke 4:16-30 shows that Jesus, back in his home town of Nazareth, infers that he is about to set up a new, inclusive type of society. This passage also shows that the people of Nazareth reject him. Then an exegesis of Chapter 15 of Luke's Acts shows how the Church Council of Jerusalem based the position of the Church on a re-interpretation of the same three key commandments relating to money, power and relationship. In one sense therefore the observance of these commandments was simplified. But at the same time the "bar" of their observance was raised.

#### **Luke 4:16-30**

#### **A Narrative Criticism Interpretation**

Luke 4:16-30 does not specifically refer to the three key commandments discussed above. But it shows how Luke, the interpreter of Mark 6:1-2, relates the story of Jesus' return to Nazareth. Luke elaborates on this story to show that Jesus wanted to set up a new type of society which would be inclusive. Also there would be a difference from Judaism in the way the commandments would be observed. In the chapter four story as told by Luke, Jesus goes into the Synagogue, (v. 16) reads from the prophet Isaiah, (v. 17) claims that the time Isaiah prophesied about has now come to pass and he (at first)



pleases the people there (v. 21). However Jesus then says he will not be performing miracles in his hometown as expected (v. 23). He says that he, like other prophets is not recognised as a prophet in his own country (v. 24). He points out that Elijah, the great prophet of Kings 1 and 2 in the Old Testament, was not sent to Jews, but rather to an outcast widow in Sarepta (v. 26) (c/f 1 Kings 17: 9-24). These words of Jesus to the people of Nazareth enrage those in the synagogue (v. 28). They hustle him out of the town to the brow of the hill where the town is situated and attempt to throw him over this (v. 29). However Jesus passes through their midst and goes away (v. 30).

The tightly written, dramatic story is set near the beginning of Luke's narrative of Luke-Acts. It is apparent that Luke the writer deliberately took this story from a later section of Mark's gospel (Chapter 6:1-6 a), and placed it towards the front of his narrative.<sup>221</sup> Matthew on the other hand, who also lifted the story from Mark, left it well back in his gospel (c/f Matt 13:53-58).

One wonders why Luke put the story into an introductory position for his Gospel and Acts. The writer L. T. Johnson says that this placement was in order to present Jesus as a specifically prophetic Messiah.<sup>222</sup> Parsons on the other hand notes he is heralding a Jubilee Year (c/f. Lev 25) and the start of a new society.<sup>223</sup>

In the wider context of this story about Nazareth there are references to both the Holy Spirit and to bad spirits. Leading up to the story, in Lk 4:16-30, Luke says Jesus "was full of the

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<sup>221</sup> William Loader, *The New Testament with Imagination: a Fresh Approach to its Writings and Themes* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 192-194.

<sup>222</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson. *The Gospel of Luke*, Vol. 3, Sacra Pagina, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991), 77.

<sup>223</sup> Mark Allan Powell, *What are They Saying About Luke?* (New York/ Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1990), 86./

Holy Spirit”. Then after the temptations by the Devil in the desert, Jesus returned from there “in the power of the Spirit”. In the Nazareth episode Jesus reads from Isaiah “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me” (v. 18). Later on in the gospel, in the passages to follow this episode, there is a further suggestion of the presence of the Holy Spirit because it is said Jesus teaches with authority. (Lk 4:32) Then Jesus confronts an unclean spirit.

Before and after the event at Nazareth, Jesus is preaching in synagogues. On the one hand it cannot be claimed that this wider section of the gospel shows a clear “sandwich” literary structure as described by the narrative critic James Edwards. The Nazareth event does not interrupt a wider story as with a sandwich construction as for example, in Mark when the journey to cure the daughter of Jairus is interrupted by a woman with a bleeding problem (Mark 5:21-43).<sup>224</sup> But there are at least some parallels here with a ‘sandwich’ construction. The Nazareth event occurs between episodes of preaching in synagogues. Also there is the sense of Jesus being “impelled by the Spirit,” prior to his trip to Nazareth and this kind of ‘spiritual’ drive appears to continue later on when he is curing all those brought to him in Capernaum (Luke 4:40). Overall, one gets the sense that the Holy Spirit is very much part of the action and the movement of the story. This compares with the view of Parsons who considers that the main actor in the Lukan narrative is in fact God.<sup>225</sup>

The Nazareth story is tightly constructed and has the hall marks of a standard narrative as described by Daniel Marguerat.<sup>226</sup> There is the introductory setting of a synagogue

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<sup>224</sup> Cf. James R Edwards “Markan Sandwiches: The Significance of Interpolations in Markan Narratives” *Novum Testamentum 13* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company 1989), 193-216.

<sup>225</sup> Powell, *What are They Saying About Luke?* 12.

<sup>226</sup> Daniel Marguerat and Yvan Bourquin, *How to Read Bible Stories: An Introduction to Narrative Criticism* (London: SCM Press, 1999), 40-57.

on the Sabbath and the sense of an ordinary meeting taking place there. Even the action of Jesus in taking and reading from a scroll has a sense of normality about it. Then complications (a necessary component of a story) are introduced. Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah showing Isaiah's preference for an outreach to the marginalised and Jesus identifies with this preference (v.22). In terms of the story structure and its wider context, one would expect an implied reader to think that tensions in the synagogue would increase at this point. In fact the mention is made of all eyes being upon Jesus (Luke 4:20) and this does add to the tension. But it appears that the people in the synagogue of Nazareth were thinking that it was they themselves who fitted into the categories of 'poor,' 'captives,' 'blind,' and 'oppressed' as mentioned in the Isaiah reading. There was therefore acceptance and praise amongst them. But at that point Jesus told the crowd that he did not intend to meet their expectations of performing the same miraculous deeds that they had heard he performed at Capernaum.

In the context of the story it appears the people in Nazareth felt entitled to such miracles because of their prior connections to the family of Jesus. In fact it appears they thought of themselves as being "more deserving" than the people in Capernaum. But in actual fact they were not ready to accept Jesus for who he really was. So in a dramatic turnaround, it appears that Jesus in a sense rejects the people in the synagogue before they reject him. He refuses to conform to their expectations. For the implied readers of the gospel (possibly Gentile Christians in Syria) they themselves are challenged at this point to consider their own position. They may for instance think of themselves as poor and marginalised. But Jesus talks of Elijah going to a widow outside Judaism. The underlying point made in the scene is that these people cannot think this puts them into a privileged position. They cannot expect 'instant' miraculous action. Rather they should

accept the true role of Jesus and be prepared to wait for the saving action of God as this unfolds.

In his dialogue with the people of Nazareth, Jesus identifies with the situation of previous Old Testament prophets who also refused to be 'defined' by the people around them. He recalls Elijah the great prophet of Kings 1 and 2. One is reminded here of this key figure whose presence is threaded throughout both Luke's Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. Elijah for instance is pictured at the Transfiguration (Mark 9:2-13) and in relation to Herod who worries that Elijah has returned through Jesus (Luke 9:18). Again in Acts, at the time of the Ascension, the disappearance of Elijah in a fiery chariot into heaven is recalled when Jesus ascends into Heaven in a similar way (Acts 1:9). At the first Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descends in the form of tongues of fire one is again reminded of the Theophany with Elijah.

The references to Elijah through the writings of Luke, witness to a major theme and concern that Luke and his community are dealing with. This is the theme of succession. What will happen after the ascension of Jesus and Luke's community is gradually taken over more and more by Gentiles? A large part of the Elijah story is also taken up the question of succession. In the case of Elijah it is about his succession by Elisha (1 Kings 19:16). Behind the text of both Luke's gospel and Acts, Luke is asking a similar question. Will these people who have never been part of the Jewish tradition be able to carry on the message of Jesus?

With the mention of Elijah in Luke Chapter 4, there appears to be a clarification that the Jews in Nazareth will not (in any case) be the "successors" of Jesus' mission. Rather, in the immediate context of the Nazareth story, 'succession' to his mission would be carried over to people in Capernaum (a fishing village) as that is where Jesus heads after Nazareth rejects him. In Chapter 4, Luke deliberately draws a contrast

between the people in Nazareth and the people in Capernaum. Those at Nazareth hear him with praise. But the people in Capernaum recognise his authority (Luke 4:32) Jesus tells the people that he grew up with, that what has happened at Capernaum will not be happening for them in Nazareth. Then he goes on to Capernaum, teaches in their synagogue and performs there the miracles he refused to perform in Nazareth. Soon, in Luke's Chapter 5, Jesus begins to single out those specific people who will be the successors to his mission. Capernaum provides a background setting for these people. It was in fact the town of Peter and Andrew, James and John and also Matthew.<sup>227</sup> In one sense, in a Jewish sense, Capernaum was on 'the outer.' It was situated on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee and it was near the highway of the Roman Empire.<sup>228</sup> But here the authority of Jesus was accepted.

In terms of narrative, the rejection of Jesus from the Nazareth synagogue could be described as a "transformative action". After this Jesus was 'free' of his previous community. The "ousting" of Jesus from Nazareth could also be described as a "pivot" in the story because the people there turn on him so suddenly. Again it could also be described as a story kernel as described by Allan Powell.<sup>229</sup> Why so? It has an essential, causal impact on the events that are to follow. Jesus leaves Nazareth and goes on to preach at the place where he will be recruiting his successors.

In the passage of Luke 4:16-30, Luke the writer, also clarifies the type of tension that will continue to be threaded through his gospel and Acts between Jesus and the people (mainly the Jews) who expect privilege. Such a tension will continue to be

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<sup>227</sup> BibleWalks.com "Capernaum"

<http://www.biblewalks.com/Sites/capernaum.html> [ accessed 30 August 2013]

<sup>228</sup> BibleWalks.com "Capernaum".

<sup>229</sup> Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 35-50.

a cause of action and conflict into future years with the mission of Paul, for example in the later debates about circumcision. Such debate almost split the church community. At the more general level, the mutual rejection at Nazareth shows that people cannot expect privilege. Rather they will be expected to both participate in the mission of Jesus and also be part of its succession.

In Luke 4:16-30 there is an ‘undercurrent’ theme of moving outwards. This fits with the gospel as a whole. Jesus is on a journey and the story here picks up on that. When he passes through the midst of the townspeople on the brow of the hill at Nazareth, there is a sense of direction in his movement and this refers to an on-going theme of moving towards Jerusalem. Such a sense of movement is continued on into the Acts of the Apostles as Paul heads towards Rome and the world at large. The implied reader is challenged here to identify with the movement, join in with it and carry it on themselves.

There is a parallel here with Matthew’s challenge thrown up at the end of his gospel to take the gospel and morality of Jesus to the world stage. Yet Luke goes one step further here. In fact he makes this the key goal that is implicitly and explicitly built into both of his books. Luke not only aims for the socio-economic world stage but the political world stage as well. The aim was to create a new type of society.

### **Luke Continuing on the Morality Themes of Paul**

In the latter study an interpretation of narrative criticism (a synchronic method of interpretation ) was used. In the preceding pages it was demonstrated, using Historical Critical Exegesis, how Paul isolated three key social commandments “thou shalt not kill, commit adultery, or steal” and wove them into his teaching without explicitly pointing out their connection to the commandments themselves.

One wonders to what extent and in what way, did Luke also pick up the thread of isolating out the three key commandments and then integrating these into the text of Jesus' teaching, again without explicitly mentioning them. One also wonders if Luke continues on the theme of the child in association with these commandments (as presented in Mark) and whether or not he puts his own "stamp" on how to develop observance of these commandments.

To answer a couple of the above questions. Like Matthew, Luke devotes the opening section of his gospel to a description of a child. In Luke's case this child fits in with the Gentile background of his auditor/readers.<sup>230</sup> Some examples are as follows:

A One can also find that Luke does thread into his gospel veiled references to the three key commandments. As in Matthew, the "child" section at the start of the gospel shows the three temptations put to Jesus (Mt 4). The three temptations "echo" the three key commandments. How so? The devil tempts Jesus to multiply stones into bread for material benefit (c/f "Thou shalt not steal"). He tempts him to jump from the pinnacle of the Temple so God, the Father of Jesus would send angels to save him (c/f presumption about one's basic social group). The devil tempts Jesus to worship him in order to gain power over the kingdoms of the earth (cf. "Thou shalt not kill")

B Consider a further example of a veiled reference to the three key social commandments in the text. A man comes into the synagogue and he says "I thank you God that I am not grasping (cf. "Thou shalt not kill"), unjust (cf. "Thou shalt not steal" ) or adulterous (cf. Thou shalt not commit adultery" ) like the rest of mankind." (Luke 18:9-14)

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<sup>230</sup> Mark Allan Powell, *What are They Saying About Luke?* (New York/ Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1990),51.

C Another example again of a veiled reference is as follows: In Luke 9:51-62, the background story of Luke continues on as Jesus makes his way to Jerusalem. Against this background there are invitations made by Jesus to people to follow him. Responses to these show the readiness or otherwise of people to follow him. In Luke Chapter 9 three people come forward with an apparent readiness to do this. But they had reservations. The first says he will follow Jesus wherever he may go. But Jesus warns him “foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” In other words Jesus warns him such a following involves chosen poverty (a reversal of stealing). Another man was invited by Jesus to follow him. But the man replied “Let me go and bury my father first.” (that is, wait until his father dies). Jesus answered “Leave the dead to bury their dead; your duty is to go and spread the news of the kingdom of God.” There is a veiled reference here to the duty of obedience and one’s own self-determination, both of which are associated with “thou shalt not kill.” Jesus is asking the man to put his own self-determination (and will to power) aside. Then a third man said to Jesus “I will follow you sir, but first let me go and say good-bye to my people at home.” Jesus said to him. “Once the hand is laid on the plough, no one who looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” There is a veiled reference here to say that a following of Jesus means putting this following above the priorities of family living, (cf. thou shalt not commit adultery).

If we pick up on these themes in terms of “money, power and sex”, (as expressed in the three key commandments) we find that the teaching of Jesus as Luke presents this not only puts priority on these commandments. It requires the “reversal” of all three key social commandments, changing these from negative prohibitions into a positive lifestyle which enables a follower with Jesus to be identified with him.



Luke's Acts of the Apostles develops this approach further and applies the same approach to the whole church. How so? A pivotal event in which this approach was extended to the whole church is narrated in Acts Chapter 15. In the interpretation of this chapter a narrative criticism of the text will be given as well as a historical critical exegesis. Both approaches fit fairly comfortably together even though narrative criticism is a synchronic method of interpretation while historical critical exegesis is a diachronic approach.

In order to put Acts 15 into its wider context consider an overview of what Luke wrote. He wrote two books for the one auditor/reader whom he called Theophilus (a Greek name). Theophilus was apparently a Gentile Christian community. The first book was his gospel which has been considered and is quoted here. The second book is known as "The Acts of the Apostles". This provides a history of the early life of the Church and its dilemmas. Up to about Chapter Fifteen of "the Acts" the story of the apostles are alluded to as continuing on in the background of the church's emergence. But after this chapter, focus in the story is put instead on Paul. Paul, we recall had not actually met Jesus Christ, but he claimed to be an apostle as well. This was because Jesus had appeared to him with the question "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:4). Paul (who was then called Saul) was on his way to Damascus to arrest Christians.

Paul considered himself to be an apostle to the Gentiles (Gal. 1:15-16). But there is an underlying question running through the gospels and especially in Matthew's gospel as to where the Gentiles stood with regard observance of the Jewish Law. In Chapter Fifteen of Acts, Luke provides an account of a Council at Jerusalem in which this question could be dealt with. Apparently at the Council this question is resolved once and for all (or so they thought). According to "Acts" Paul and Barnabas return after the Council to Antioch with the worked out 'solution' and they are (according to Luke's Acts) greeted

enthusiastically (Acts 15:31). Luke the narrator presents a very positive account of the Council and its aftermath.<sup>231</sup> But was the positivity exaggerated and if so why? Luke in Acts is dealing with a question of succession of membership and leadership in the emerging church. Gentile Christians are taking over the majority of the church membership and church leadership as well. Timothy for instance and as referred to in above pages, was a trusted supporter of Paul and even involved in the writing of his letters (2 Cor.1:1). But his father was a pagan (Acts 16:1). As regards Luke's account of the Jerusalem Council, a positive approach to its outcome would help to encourage the emerging leadership and provide stability.

However Paul's letter to the Galatians (which included Antioch) shows that the Council's "solution" or "transition" to Gentile dominance was not as smooth as Luke would have the reader believe. The discussion on Paul's letter to the Galatians in pages above above demonstrates this. Some of the above discussion points are raised here again and are discussed further below. In Acts 15, it is the apparent church leader James who puts forward the "solution" that the Council had been convened to sort out. Yet in Paul's letter to the Galatians it is apparently this same James who had sent messengers to Antioch who had deterred Peter and even Barnabas from continuing to eat with the Gentile Christians (Gal. 2:13). In Paul's view this separation was a contradiction of the Eucharistic Meal (cf. 1 Cor. 11:17-24). As well as the eating conflict going on in Galatia where Antioch was located, there were also people (whether from James or not) who wanted Gentile converts to be circumcised (Gal. 2.. Paul, now with an apparent loss of status in Antioch exclaims "Galatians have you gone mad?" (Gal 3:1)

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<sup>231</sup> Ernst Kasemann, *Essays on New Testament Themes*, vol. 41 of *Studies in Biblical Theology*. Trans. W. J. Montague (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1964), 66.

Scholars still debate as to whether the Council of Jerusalem came before Paul's letter to the Galatians or after it.<sup>232</sup> But in any case there was a situation of contradiction between Acts 15 and the Galatian letter. One also wonders here if there was more implied in the resolution of the Council of Jerusalem than what all the parties involved in the Council actually realised. Acts 15 says everyone agreed to the resolution (Acts 15:25). But did all of them understand the implications of this? Even to this day there are differences in interpretation (to be discussed below) as to what was implied in the Council's ruling.

The narrative criticism of Acts 15 to follow here in the form of an exegesis, relies to a considerable extent on the methods of the historical critical exegesis approach. The exegesis will consider in particular the resolution of the Council and how it in fact picks up on and develops the thread of the three key social commandments which involve money, power and relationship.



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<sup>232</sup> Cf. Charles M. Laymon, ed., *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1971. 748