

# “For He Will Save His People from Their Sins” (Matthew 1:21): A Christology for Christian Jews

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BORIS REPSCHINSKI

Leopold Franzens Universität Innsbruck  
6020 Innsbruck, Austria

THE SOCIAL LOCATION of the Gospel of Matthew with respect to Judaism has remained a much discussed question in recent years,<sup>1</sup> but the emphasis of this discussion has shifted to a considerable extent. Although the theory that Matthew’s Gospel reflects a thoroughly Gentile Christian community with a reserved attitude to its Jewish roots<sup>2</sup> has lost support among scholars, the exact nature of the Gospel’s relationship to Judaism has been studied extensively, with the expression “the parting of the ways” aptly depicting the nature of this discussion. Recent studies challenge the historical accuracy of describing a process that involved two large groups and stress more the interaction between localized com-

<sup>1</sup> For a recent *Forschungsbericht* on the matter, see Boris Repschinski, *The Controversy Stories in the Gospel of Matthew: Their Redaction, Form, and Relevance for the Relationship Between the Matthean Community and Formative Judaism* (FRLANT 189; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000) 13-61.

<sup>2</sup> In one form or another, this theory was held by Kenneth W. Clark, “The Gentile Bias of Matthew,” *JBL* 66 (1947) 165-72; Poul Nepper-Christensen, *Das Matthauevangelium: Ein judenchristliches Evangelium?* (ATD 1; Aarhus: Universitetsforlaget, 1958); Wolfgang Trilling, *Das wahre Israel: Studien zur Theologie des Mattheus-Evangeliums* (SANT 10; 3rd ed.; Munich: Kösel, 1964); Georg Strecker, *Der Weg der Gerechtigkeit: Untersuchung zur Theologie des Matthäus* (FRLANT 82; 3rd ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971); John P. Meier, *Law and History in Matthew’s Gospel: A Redactional Study of Mt. 5:17-48* (AnBib 71; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1976).

munities.<sup>3</sup> Other studies have argued for the sectarian nature of the Matthean community within a larger Jewish social context, though sometimes with the caveat that we have only Matthew’s Gospel as evidence.<sup>4</sup> But regardless of the size of the groups involved, the Gospel reflects Matthean Christians engaging with Jewish leaders over the future of a Jewish community.

Within this discussion two problems have emerged as central issues. The first of these is the question whether the Gospel needs to be read backwards, beginning with the Great Commission as the climactic text.<sup>5</sup> Such an approach often emphasizes the distance between the Jewish past and the Gentile present of the Matthean community.<sup>6</sup>

The assessment of Matt 28:16-20 as giving perspective to the Gospel’s message as a whole neatly ties in with the christology of the Gospel as the second issue playing into this debate.<sup>7</sup> The challenge to the theory of the Gospel as a Jewish writing asserts that the christology of the Gospel is such a new and foreign

<sup>3</sup> See the recent questions by Judith Lieu (“‘The Parting of the Ways’: Theological Construct or Historical Reality?” *JSNT* 56 [1994] 101-19) and others (Adam H. Becker and Annette Y. Reed, eds., *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* [TSAJ 95; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003]).

<sup>4</sup> Notable among them are J. Andrew Overman, *Matthew’s Gospel and Formative Judaism: The Social World of the Matthean Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); Anthony J. Saldarini, *Matthew’s Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1994); David C. Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism: The History and Social Setting of the Matthean Community* (Studies of the New Testament and Its World; Edinburgh: Clark, 1998). For the caveat, see Repschinski, *Controversy Stories*, 346; Martin Goodman, “Modeling the ‘Parting of the Ways,’” in *The Ways That Never Parted*, 119-29, here 119.

<sup>5</sup> Otto Michel (“Der Abschluß des Matthäusevangeliums,” *EvT* 10 [1950] 16-26, here 21, 26) writes: “Ja, der Abschluß . . . lehrt das ganze Evangelium, die Geschichte Jesu ‘von hinten her’ zu verstehen. *Matth. 28, 18-20 ist der Schlüssel zum Verständnis des ganzen Buches*. . . . Seit der Erhöhung Jesu Christi fällt die Scheidewand des Gesetzes hin, wird das Evangelium zur Botschaft für ‘alle Völker’, d. h. für alle Menschen, ohne Rücksicht auf die Gesetzesfrage. Als das Missionsbefehl in dieser letzten Form fixiert wurde, war der Weg in die Völkerwelt schon beschritten und die ἐκκλησία, die das Wort Jesu tradierte, war schon ausgebreitet” [emphasis original]. This interpretation from the end of Matthew has become very influential. See, e.g., Trilling, *Israel*, 36-51; Günther Bornkamm, “Der Auferstandene und der Irdische: Mt. 28, 16-20,” in *Zeit und Geschichte: Dankesgabe an Rudolf Bultmann zum 80. Geburtstag* (ed. Erich Dinkler; Tübingen: Mohr, 1964) 171-91; John P. Meier, “Nations or Gentiles in Matthew 28:19?” *CBQ* 39 (1977) 94-102; Terrence L. Donaldson, *Jesus on the Mountain: A Study in Matthean Theology* (JSNTSup 8; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985) 170-90.

<sup>6</sup> For an example, see R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (New Testament Profiles; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989) 316.

<sup>7</sup> Already Douglas R. Hare (*The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel According to St. Matthew* [SNTSMS 6; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967] 162) stated: “It is this relationship to the Messiah which marks off the new People of God as distinct from the nation which rejected him.”

concept that it excludes its community *ipso facto* from Judaism.<sup>8</sup> Donald A. Hagner formulates an antithesis between Christ and the Law in Matthew and connects this with Matt 28:20: “At the end of the Gospel Jesus calls his disciples to teach new disciples ‘to observe all that I have commanded you’ (28:20). They are finally called to obey not Torah, but Jesus.”<sup>9</sup> The Great Commission becomes the text that proves that, by the time Matthew was putting the finishing touches on the Gospel, his community had left the constraints of Judaism behind and had begun to include Gentiles in their fold on the authority of the risen Jesus, who “has taken the place of Torah.”<sup>10</sup>

There can be no doubt that the community had opened itself to Gentile converts, and the instruction in the Great Commission to make disciples of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη cannot but emphasize the universal dimension of the command of the risen Lord. In the present study, however, I attempt to show that the presence of Gentiles in the community and the universal mission of the disciples are not in themselves reasons to posit separation from Judaism. I suggest that reading backwards from Matthew 28 can obscure how the commission is prepared in the Gospel, what the implications of it are for a community expecting to accommodate Gentiles in their midst, and how the Matthean christology can fit into such an arrangement. For this reason it is necessary to go back to the beginning of the Gospel to see how the christology presented at the outset of Matthew’s story of Jesus prepares a road map for the reader. Because this can be done only briefly within the scope of a small study such as this, the dream of Joseph and the prophecy about Jesus (αὐτὸς γὰρ σώσει τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν [Matt 1:21]) will serve as an example of how profitable such an attempt might turn out to be.

<sup>8</sup> This newness, according to Petri Luomanen (“The ‘Sociology of Sectarianism’ in Matthew: Modelling the Genesis of Early Jewish and Christian Communities,” in *Fair Play: Diversity and Conflicts in Early Christianity: Essays in Honour of Heikki Räisänen* [ed. Ismo Dunderberg, Christopher Tuckett, and Kari Syreeni; NovTSup 103; Leiden: Brill, 1998] 107-30), proposes a deviation from Judaism to such an extent that one can no longer speak of the Matthean group as a sect. The Gospel does not propose a reform but a new religious group, which Luomanen defines as a cult.

<sup>9</sup> To be fair, in a footnote Donald A. Hagner (“Matthew: Apostate, Reformer, Revolutionary?” *NTS* 49 [2003] 193-209, here 203 n. 38) mellows the antithesis a little by saying that the Torah is in fact preserved, but only in the teaching of Jesus. Morna D. Hooker (“Creative Conflict: The Torah and Christology,” in *Christology, Controversy and Community: New Testament Essays in Honour of David R. Catchpole* [ed. David G. Horrell and Christopher M. Tuckett; NovTSup 99; Leiden/Boston/Cologne: Brill, 2000] 117-36, here 127) tries to relate christology to Torah by seeing the fulfillment of Torah in the person of Jesus as an eschatological event: “When the era of Christ *finally* takes over, the Torah given through Moses will no longer be necessary. But that time has not yet come. . . . In the meantime, the regulations of the law should be observed” [emphasis original].

<sup>10</sup> Hagner, “Matthew,” 205.

## I. The Importance of Beginnings and Matthew 1:21

“The disciples said to Jesus, ‘Tell us in what way our end will take place.’ Jesus said, ‘Have you indeed uncovered the beginning, so that you may seek the end? For in the place where the beginning is, there shall the end be.’” What in *Gos. Thom.* 18 is a saying about eschatological expectations among the early followers of Jesus might just as well be applicable to the art of reading the Gospel of Matthew. Reading the beginning prepares for the “hearing of the gospels as a whole.”<sup>11</sup> Aristotle (*Rhet.* 3.14.5-6) defines the function of προοίμια in forensic speeches as providing “a sample of the subject, in order that the hearers may know beforehand what it is about, and that the mind may not be kept in suspense, for that which is undefined leads astray; . . . So then the most essential and special function of the exordium is to make clear what is the end or purpose of the speech.”<sup>12</sup>

Modern literary theorists have dealt with the functions of narrative beginnings.<sup>13</sup> More recently, the findings have been applied to NT writings and to the Gospels in particular.<sup>14</sup> Beginnings occupy one of the most prominent positions in a narrative.<sup>15</sup> They provide the readers with an opening into the world of the text that allows them gradually to orient themselves within it.<sup>16</sup> They do so by providing tentative markers of space and time, of themes and topics, and of characters. Yet it is precisely their tentativeness that invites the readers into the story and sharpens readers’ views for the development of these markers within the story. These markers may be confirmed or discredited within the narrative through the repetition of confirming or contradictory material.<sup>17</sup> Thus, they are essential in giving coherence to a narrative. Furthermore, beginnings have the

<sup>11</sup> So J. Duncan M. Derrett (“Further Light on the Narratives of the Nativity,” *NovT* 17 [1975] 81-108, here 81), speaking of Matthew and Luke.

<sup>12</sup> Aristotle mentions explicitly the τῶν δραμάτων οἱ πρόλογοι καὶ τῶν ἐπῶν τὰ προοίμια as functioning in the same manner.

<sup>13</sup> For an overview of current research, see Moysés Mayordomo-Marín, *Den Anfang hören: Leserorientierte Evangelienexegese am Beispiel von Matthäus 1–2* (FRLANT 180; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998) 203-5.

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., “How Gospels Begin,” *Semeia* 52 (1990); Morna D. Hooker, *Beginnings: Keys That Uncover the Gospels* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997).

<sup>15</sup> Peter J. Rabinowitz (*Before Reading: Narrative Conventions and the Politics of Interpretation* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987] 58-59) defines endings as well as beginnings as being prominent places in a narrative.

<sup>16</sup> Mayordomo-Marín (*Anfang*, 204) speaks of beginnings and ends as a frame that allows the reader “die Perspektive des Textes einzunehmen und am Ende wieder aus ihr herauszutreten.”

<sup>17</sup> Modern literary theorists speak of the “primacy effect” of narrative beginnings, which can be offset by the “recency effect” of revising earlier material in a narrative. See the discussion and relevant literature in Mayordomo-Marín, *Anfang*, 205, esp. n. 9.

function of awakening within the reader the necessary predispositions for understanding the text. In more pragmatic terms, this means creating an implied reader who can serve as an identifying figure for potential actual recipients of the text. The beginning of a text seeks to steer this process of identification of an actual complex and multifaceted recipient with the implied reader.<sup>18</sup> Aristotle (*Rhet.* 3.14.1) calls this function οἶον ὁδοποίησις τῷ ἐπιόντι: a road map to what follows.

Matthew's Gospel begins with the genealogy of Jesus, which suggests to the reader three elements in the story of Jesus.<sup>19</sup> The first is the importance of Jesus' being the Son of David and the Son of Abraham. The second element is brought in by the appearance of the four women in the genealogy. Abraham's lineage opens itself to foreigners who join themselves completely to the Jewish people. Sometimes it is proposed that the Gentile status of the women explains their presence in the genealogy.<sup>20</sup> But this status is not explicitly mentioned by Matthew. Instead, the text stresses the union between a husband and his wife through the phrase ἐγέννησεν . . . ἐκ τῆς . . . (1:3, 5, 6). The women and their extraordinary, even irregular, unions with their partners are preparation for the extraordinary birth of Jesus through Mary.<sup>21</sup> The third element is the ordering of the genealogy into three times fourteen generations. Even though there does not seem to be a ready explanation for the number fourteen, it seems to indicate that Jesus is part of a divine plan. The genealogy is a first introduction into the story of Jesus as the Messiah, Son of Abraham and David, who fulfills the plan of God by not only drawing on the Jewish people but also reckoning with the Gentiles.<sup>22</sup>

Beyond these three elements, Matthew emphasizes two further points. The first of these is the recalling of Israel's history through the invocation of Abraham as the bearer of God's promises, through David as again the recipient of God's promises, and through the conclusion with Jesus. Abraham and the names of the ancestors in the genealogy represent a universalistic covenant tradition within

<sup>18</sup> David B. Howell (*Matthew's Inclusive Story: A Study in the Narrative Rhetoric of the First Gospel* [JSNTSup 42; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990] 115) calls this process the "education of the reader," yet this expression suggests, according to Mayordomo-Marín (*Anfang*, 205), a fiction of a "blank" recipient instead of readers within their own world.

<sup>19</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (4 vols.; EKKNT I; Zurich: Benziger; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1985-2002) 1. 93-95.

<sup>20</sup> Luz (*Matthäus*, 1. 94) connects this, in my view rightly, with the broader Jewish tradition, "die Abraham als den Vater der Proselyten sieht."

<sup>21</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (Anchor Bible Reference Library 1; 2nd ed.; New York: Doubleday, 1993) 73-74; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (3 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: Clark, 1988-97) 1. 170-71.

<sup>22</sup> See the excellent study on the connection between the Son of David and the Messiah by Lidija Novakovic, *Messiah, Healer of the Sick* (WUNT 170; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

Second Temple Judaism.<sup>23</sup> David and his descendants represent the tradition of a national state as the place of God’s interaction with Israel. The names following the Babylonian exile are all names of priests, symbolizing the rebuilding of the nation around not a king but a place: the temple.<sup>24</sup> Just as prominent is the use of the Babylonian exile as the principle of ordering the genealogy. This draws attention to Israel’s repeated failure in its relationship to God. Israel’s history with the ancestors, with the kings, and with the temple is described as a history that is in need of redemption. The readers are alerted to the necessity of watching closely how Matthew will continue this history and will bring it to a conclusion in the story of Jesus.

The next step in the construction of Matthew’s story is a short account of how Joseph takes Mary to be his wife at the behest of an angel.<sup>25</sup> Matthew titles the account of Joseph and Mary τοῦ δὲ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἡ γένεσις (1:18). From what follows it is clear that the term γένεσις cannot mean simply the birth of Jesus, which seems a marginal note to close the account in 1:25.<sup>26</sup> Rather, Matthew views the conception, Joseph’s decision to separate from Mary, and the ensuing dream as part of a story of origins beginning with the genealogy.<sup>27</sup> The expectations of the reader raised with 1:18a are an explanation of the curious statement in 1:16 that even though Jesus is not the child of Joseph, through Joseph he is a son of Abraham and David. Matthew serves these expectations matter-of-factly by saying that Mary is pregnant through the Holy Spirit, a statement neither explained nor elaborated.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Joseph’s decision to separate from Mary is told without adornment.<sup>29</sup> In 1:20, however, the sober language changes. The reader’s attention is heightened through ἰδοῦ as the angel appears in

<sup>23</sup> See James T. Burtchaell, *Philemon’s Problem: A Theology of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

<sup>24</sup> Andreas Lindemann, “Literatur zu den synoptischen Evangelien 1992-2000 (III): Das Markusevangelium,” *TRu* 69 (2004) 369-423.

<sup>25</sup> The pericope is neatly structured by an *inclusio* through τοῦ δὲ Ἰησοῦ in 1:18 and Ἰησοῦν in 1:25. See Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew* (2 vols.; WBC 33; Dallas: Word, 1993) 1. 15.

<sup>26</sup> This argues against Hagner (*Matthew*, 1. 16-17), who views this pericope as a full birth narrative. Those critical of such a view include Krister Stendahl (“Quis et Unde? An Analysis of Mt. 1–2,” in *Judentum, Urchristentum, Kirche: Festschrift für Joachim Jeremias* [ed. Walter Eltester; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1960] 94-105).

<sup>27</sup> Many commentators prefer to translate γένεσις as “birth.” But Luz (*Matthäus*, 1. 98-103) is probably right in his assessment of 1:18 as a continuation of 1:1 (βίβλος γενέσεως).

<sup>28</sup> Luz (*Matthäus*, 1. 99) observes that the story “ist eigenartig, weil sie so prosaisch und nüchtern wie nur irgend möglich erzählt.”

<sup>29</sup> Verses 18-19 lack the more important sentence conjunctions in Matthew: v. 18b follows asyndetically; v. 19 is connected just with δέ, indicating that “continuity is not maintained at this point in the discourse.” See Stephanie L. Black, *Sentence Conjunctions in the Gospel of Matthew: καί, δέ, τότε, γάρ, οὖν and Asyndeton in Narrative Discourse* (JSNTSup 216; London/New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002) 144.

the narrative. But the appearance itself does not seem worthy of special note. The emphasis shifts to the message the angel brings, which is divided into two parts.

The first part begins with the rather formal address of the angel, Ἰωσήφ υἱὸς Δαβίδ, emphasizing the connection of the dream to the genealogy. The statement τὸ γὰρ ἐν αὐτῇ γεννηθὲν ἐκ πνεύματός ἐστιν ἁγίου is merely a reminder of Matt 1:18. In 1:20 the reader is not given any new information about Jesus. It is in the second part of the angel's annunciation that the reader finally receives new information about Jesus. Thus, the whole weight of the annunciation story comes to rest on this second part of Joseph's dream.

The weightiness of the second part is marked by sudden changes in the manner of narration. Where the previous material looked to the past, the γένεσις of Jesus, now the reader is turned toward the future. First, the angel encourages Joseph to take Mary to be his wife without fear. Then, looking into the future, the angel makes three statements regarding what will happen in the future. The three statements are constructed in a parallelism consisting of a future-tense verb with a direct object: of Mary is said, τέξεται δὲ υἱόν; of Joseph is said, καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦν; and of Jesus is said, σώσει τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν. The object becomes progressively more elaborate, indicating a greater weight in content as this triad progresses.

The formulation itself leaves no room for speculation. It is an announcement of what will take place in the future. Joseph is not given a choice. He is told what will happen to Mary and what he has to do with the child. Within the scope of the present pericope, two of the verbs have already come to fulfillment: Matt 1:25 says of Mary, ἕως οὗ ἔτεκεν υἱόν; and of Joseph, ἐκάλεσεν τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦν. The double fulfillment tells the reader that the angel's announcement is reliable. As a consequence, the reader will, by the end of the pericope, expect to see the third announcement fulfilled in the remainder of the story. The weightiest of the angel's announcements leaves the readers in suspense, with the task of discovering for themselves how the angel is proved right in the story of Jesus.

For the reader to find out what exactly the meaning of the angel's third prophecy is, the text provides several pieces of a puzzle, so to speak. The first of these is the naming of Jesus. Joseph is told that the name must be Jesus because of his saving activity.<sup>30</sup> This connects the Hebrew יֵשׁוּעַ through the name יֵשׁוּעַ with the Greek σώζειν, which seems to have been a common play on words.<sup>31</sup> It

<sup>30</sup> Brown (*Birth*, 130-31) interprets the γὰρ as an indicator of the "etymological interpretation of the name given to the child." It is possible to see God as the subject of the phrase αὐτός γὰρ σώσει, but Matthew associates the verb σώζειν with Jesus in other places (8:25; 9:21-22; etc.). Furthermore, αὐτός right after Ἰησοῦν emphatically states that Jesus is the one who saves. See Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1. 210.

<sup>31</sup> This explains why Matthew can state the connection without explaining it in detail. Philo (*Mut. Nom.* 121) shows himself knowledgeable about the same wordplay. See further Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1. 209-10.

serves to guide the readers very effectively toward an understanding of Jesus’ life as one of a saving activity. Salvation is linked with the sins of the people. Throughout his Gospel Matthew prefers the verb ἀφίημι in connection with the forgiveness of sins. It is probable, though, that Matthew was persuaded to use σώζειν in 1:21 because of the possibility of the wordplay on the name of Jesus.<sup>32</sup>

Another piece of the puzzle is provided by the object of this saving activity. It is to be τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ. The precise meaning of λαός in Matthew’s Gospel is a matter of intense debate. The issue is whether Matthew means the people of Israel invariably, only sometimes, or not at all.<sup>33</sup> In the present instance, many commentators favor the view that here Matthew refers to a new people of God, or the church, arguing for the whole phrase αὐτὸς γὰρ σώσει τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν as a rendering of Ps 130:8 (129:8 LXX: καὶ αὐτὸς λυτρώσεται τὸν Ἰσραὴλ ἐκ πασῶν τῶν ἁνομιῶν αὐτοῦ).<sup>34</sup> There are several differences in the texts, but the most relevant question is why Matthew might have felt the need to change Ἰσραὴλ into τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ if he really meant the people of Israel.<sup>35</sup> First, if this really is a quotation, Matthew obviously felt very free to change a great number of things. But more important, this particular alteration ensures that the focus remains on Jesus, because of the emphasis that it is his people who are going to be saved from their sins. Furthermore, the narrative does not give much indication that Matthew here has the church in view. Up to this point, the Gospel seems intent on establishing Jesus’ roots in Israel. Even the women in the geneal-

<sup>32</sup> So Petri Luomanen, *Entering the Kingdom of Heaven: A Study on the Structure of Matthew’s View of Salvation* (WUNT 101; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998) 224.

<sup>33</sup> The first view is preferable because of the language used in 21:43 to describe how the kingdom is given to a new ἔθνος, not a new λαός. I agree with J. Robert C. Cousland (*The Crowds in the Gospel of Matthew* [NovTSup 102; Leiden: Brill, 2002] 85) that this shows that Matthew regards his community or church not as a new people of Israel but as a new entity comprising both Jews and Gentiles. Others who hold that λαός refers to Israel include Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “Anti-Semitism and the Cry of ‘All the People’ (Mt 27:25),” *TS* 26 (1965) 667-71, here 669; Hagner, *Matthew*, 1. 80; Luz, *Matthäus*, 1. 105; Luomanen, *Entering*, 225. Saldarini (*Community*, 28-29) argues the second view, and the third view is held by Hubert Frankemölle (“λαός,” *EWNT* 2. 837-48, here 846).

<sup>34</sup> Hubert Frankemölle, *Jahwebund und Kirche Christi* (NTAbh 10; Münster: Aschendorff, 1974) 211-18; Jack D. Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, and Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 85; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1. 210; Hagner, *Matthew*, 1. 20; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 22-23; Novakovic, *Messiah*, 66.

<sup>35</sup> The pertinent question is asked by Novakovic (*Messiah*, 65-66). She answers by pointing out that in Matthew’s Gospel λαός does not usually appear with a genitive, but that words such as ἐκκλησία or βασιλεία frequently do. She goes on to interpret 21:43 as stating that the kingdom is being taken from the Jews and concludes that in 1:21 λαός, therefore, must mean the church. Novakovic, however, is stretching the evidence of the genitive unconvincingly far. More persuasive is Hagner’s (*Matthew*, 1. 19) careful suggestion that the psalm was probably “in Matthew’s mind (indeed, he may be giving a targumic rendering of it). . . .”



ogy, although perhaps signaling the inclusion of Gentiles,<sup>36</sup> are women who have become part of Israel. The description of Jesus as the son of David and Abraham and the emphasis on the Davidic descent serve to show Jesus as a member of Israel and as having the same importance to Israel as David and Abraham had. Nevertheless, the church, or a new people of God, has so far not entered the story. Consequently, any supposition that λαός in this case refers to the church must look for confirmation elsewhere. For the reader, ὁ λαὸς αὐτοῦ is, at this point, the people from whom Jesus comes. The phrase suggests that in his saving activity Jesus will be taking possession of his people, and this people is Israel.<sup>37</sup>

Jesus' prophesied activity concerns his own people Israel; it is the saving from their sins. Sinfulness has not yet appeared as an explicit theme in the Gospel, and neither has salvation as an explicit topic. The description of Jesus as the Messiah in 1:1, 17, 18, however, might be a hint that salvation will be his task.<sup>38</sup> The sins from which Jesus will save are not explicitly mentioned, but are hinted at in the genealogy. There the recurring theme of the Babylonian exile alerts the reader to the fact that the relationship between Israel and God is not perfect, but is fraught with infidelities on the part of Israel and consequent withdrawal on the side of God. Israel's history of unfaithfulness put a distance between God and the people, expressed in the image of the exile. Thus, if Jesus is his people's Messiah, he will have to save Israel from its sins and thus put an end to the rift between God and the people. Salvation through Jesus, then, is much more comprehensive than a distinction between a moral and a political or social level might indicate.<sup>39</sup>

The fulfillment quotation of 1:22-23 reinforces this understanding of salvation from sins, although at face value it seems to reflect more on the virgin birth.<sup>40</sup> But the introduction τοῦτο δὲ ὅλον γέγονεν ἵνα . . . (1:22) leads the reader to assume the fulfillment quotation to be a direct reflection on 1:21. A parallelism is a further marker for the reader for the interpretation of the saving activity of Jesus. In 1:21 the naming of Jesus is explained with the wordplay on salvation. In

<sup>36</sup> Interestingly, Brown (*Birth*, 131) maintains, without really arguing the point, that "Israel, for Matthew, included both Jews and Gentiles."

<sup>37</sup> "Der Evangelist deutet also, wie schon durch den Stammbaum und wiederum 2,2 an, daß Jesus der Messias Israels ist" (Luz, *Matthäus*, 1. 105).

<sup>38</sup> Luz (*Matthäus*, 1. 104, and n. 45) points out that Jewish tradition holds that the Messiah will save his people. Novakovic (*Messiah*, 69-73) discusses a wide variety of sources to illustrate this connection.

<sup>39</sup> Davies and Allison (*Matthew*, 1. 210) argue for the moral level; Hagner (*Matthew*, 1. 19) for a political or social level.

<sup>40</sup> Important phrases in 1:21 that recur in 1:23: τέξεται υἱόν, καὶ καλέσουσιν τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ. . . . Furthermore, the quotation is a "remarkably felicitous" correspondence with the virgin birth (Brown, *Birth*, 149).

1:23 there is a naming in almost the same words, yet here the name is Emmanuel, explained as “God with us.”<sup>41</sup> The narrative force of the parallelism is enhanced by the introduction of the quotation with the fulfillment formula. Thus, the fact that Jesus is saving his people leads the reader to assume that they will call him Emmanuel. The explanation given for this name suits this approach well. The result of salvation from Jesus will be the realization that God is with us (μεθ’ ἡμῶν). The rift between Israel and God is healed in the activity of Jesus, while the reader is guided to view the activity of Jesus as the realization of God’s presence to the people.

The fulfillment quotation illuminates to some extent the result of the saving activity of Jesus, but the actual means of salvation remains open.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the dream of Joseph formulates, at the beginning of Matthew’s story, the task that the newly born child will face, and it asks the reader to discover the answers to the questions raised in the story that unfolds.

## II. Tracing Sin and Salvation in the Gospel of Matthew

After 1:21 Matthew does not link the words σώζειν and ἁμαρτία again.<sup>43</sup> Σώζειν occurs in the context of physical affliction or eschatological salvation.<sup>44</sup> Forgiveness of sins usually occurs with the verb ἀφίημι (9:2, 5, 6; 12:31; 26:28). This does not necessarily mean, however, that 1:21 is an unwanted addition in Matthew’s redactional work.<sup>45</sup> If σώζειν is regularly linked with physical heal-

<sup>41</sup> Stendahl (“Quis,” 98) remarks that “the title Emmanuel underscores the messianic function of Jesus, who is to set his people free from their sins.” Frankemölle (*Jahwebund*, 217) argues similarly, yet indicates that he sees Jesus as the earthly presence of God among his people. The translation μεθ’ ἡμῶν ὁ θεός draws attention to the importance of the fulfillment quotation. Since Matthew implies a reader who does not need an explanation of the connection between the name of Jesus and σώζειν, the explanation of Emmanuel is probably more a signal for attention than a necessary explanation.

<sup>42</sup> Davies and Allison (*Matthew*, 1. 210) state, “our verse is not very illuminating with regard to exactly *how* Jesus saves” [emphasis original], concluding that perhaps Jesus saves in “a variety of ways.”

<sup>43</sup> Even in other writings of the NT the connection is only rarely made, and then not in a christological context; see Luke 1:77 and Jas 5:15, 20.

<sup>44</sup> In the context of physical affliction: 8:25; 9:21; 9:22 (2x); Luomanen (*Entering*, 38) includes among this group also 14:30; 27:40; 27:42 (2x); 27:49. With regard to the occurrences in Matthew 27, however, I have strong reservations. Eschatological overtones are found in 10:22; 16:25; 24:13; 24:22.

<sup>45</sup> Luomanen’s otherwise excellent study fails, in my opinion, in its treatment of 1:21. Because the verse does not fit readily with the two categories Luomanen establishes for the meaning of σώζειν—either physical affliction and healing or eschatological salvation—he treats it as an exceptional case that occurs because of the naming of Jesus and the connection with עִשׂוּ. Luomanen (*Entering*, 224) writes: “Apparently, Matthew was bound by tradition. . . .”

ing, but the forgiveness of sins is usually linked with ἀφίημι, it is likely a reconditioning of the readers through the recency effect of the repeated, and now consistent, use of ἀφίημι.<sup>46</sup> This is even more plausible if σῶζειν in 1:21 is suggested by the connection to the name of Jesus. Furthermore, in 9:2-8 the attention to physical disease becomes part of the forgiveness of sins.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, the saving activity of Jesus becomes tangible in the forgiveness of sins. The preaching of John the Baptist is the first reminder of this fact. Matthew reports the preaching of John in 3:7-12 and prefaces it with the setting of a scene at the banks of the Jordan River. He points out that people from Ἱεροσόλυμα καὶ πᾶσα ἡ Ἰουδαία (3:5) come to listen to John and to confess their sins (ἐξομολογούμενοι τὰς ἁμαρτίας αὐτῶν). Yet nowhere does Matthew indicate that the baptism of John or the confession of sins at the Jordan has a salvific effect.<sup>48</sup> The preaching of John becomes a platform to foretell judgment against the Jewish leadership for not bringing fruit desired of them. As part of the description of the judgment befalling the γεννήματα ἐχιδνῶν (3:7), Matthew lets John describe the purpose of the baptism: it is a sign of repentance (εἰς μετάνοιαν) for those receiving it, but in itself it has no power to save or forgive sins (3:11). This power rests with the one coming after John who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire, which will be the judgment of the unrighteous and the end-time (3:11-12). The one coming after John, however, is Jesus. Matthew explains this with the little scene between Jesus and John, when John declares that he is the one who ought to be baptized by Jesus (3:14).

The reader is told several things in this account. First, John's baptism in and of itself is not salvifically effective. It is possible to confess sins and receive the baptism, yet not be saved from the final judgment, just like the Jewish leaders at the Jordan. The criterion for salvation is not the confession of sins, then, but the confession that is accompanied by the bringing of good fruit (καρπὸν ἄξιον τῆς μετάνοίας, 3:8). Second, being a child of Abraham is no guarantee of salvation, either. It is possible to be a Jew and still be felled like a useless tree (3:10). Conversely, God decides who will be counted among the children of Abraham. Third, forgiveness of sins is, therefore, a prerogative of the Messiah. It is Jesus who makes the ultimate decision regarding salvation or condemnation.

Several elements in this account are reminders of things that are known from the infancy narrative and from 1:21 in particular: the christological dimension of

<sup>46</sup> Mayordomo-Marín, *Anfang*, 205.

<sup>47</sup> Novakovic (*Messiah*, 73) makes a similar observation concerning the connection between healing and forgiveness. She overstates her case, however, when she writes that "it is highly likely that Jesus' healing ministry is viewed by Matthew as saving his people from their sins."

<sup>48</sup> This is certainly a Matthean redaction, since the Synoptic parallels link the baptism of John with the forgiveness of sins; see Mark 1:4 and Luke 3:3: βάπτισμα μετάνοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν.

salvation, the connection of salvation with sins, the concentration on Israel, and the hinted opening to new members of God’s people. The people of Israel remain as a constant point of reference for those who are chosen to be saved, together with an ethical standard on which judgment is rendered. New in this context is the eschatological framework in which the theme of salvation is set. Again, the christological perspective is dominant: Jesus is the judge who will separate the wheat from the chaff.

The next passage to throw further light on the forgiveness of sins is 9:2-8. It depicts a controversy with the scribes surrounding the forgiveness of sins, accompanied by a miracle that legitimates the forgiveness. Jesus speaks the word of forgiveness to a paralytic. Matthew, however, does not let Jesus formulate the forgiveness in the first person but chooses the passive voice, ἀφιενταί σου (9:2, 5). The paralytic experiences forgiveness through Jesus, but it does not seem to be Jesus who actually forgives. This is borne out by a second appearance of the passive in 12:31, this time in the future tense (ἀφεθήσεται). The complicated nature of the forgiveness of sins becomes apparent in 9:6; Jesus does not speak of himself directly as having the power to forgive sins. Matthew uses the phrase ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς to predicate the power of forgiveness of sins. The reader knows, of course, that when Matthew speaks of the Son of Man he speaks of Jesus. On another level, however, the title carries with it also the association to Dan 7:13-14, which sets the power to forgive sins into relation with eschatological judgment.<sup>49</sup> Since this connection was made explicit already in the preaching of John the Baptist, such an allusion is all the easier to discern. Matthew still takes a step forward in this story, in that he hints that this power to forgive sins is not predicated simply of the Son of Man but also of the community living in his name. In 9:8 Matthew emphasizes the astonishment of the crowds at the power given τοῖς ἀνθρώποις.<sup>50</sup>

The community discourse in Matthew 18 expands the theme of the ability of the community, as a group, to exercise forgiveness. In 18:15-18 Matthew treats the case of a sinning member of the community (ὁ ἀδελφός σου, 18:15). A member of the community who remains in her or his sin is to be treated like ὁ ἔθνικὸς καὶ ὁ τελώνης (18:17). For the reader, this is not just a guideline of how to deal with transgressors in the community, but it is also a reminder that those outside the community are ἔθνικοί, pagans outside the fold of the Jewish people. This marker for the reader is important not only because it reiterates themes already present in 1:21 but even more so because here the community is in plain view. Thus, a historicizing view of Judaism as a reflection on bygone times is highly unlikely. At this point Matthew has guided the reader to two social locations

<sup>49</sup> For this point, see Luz, *Matthäus*, 2, 69-70.

<sup>50</sup> See Repschinski, *Controversy Stories*, 71.

where the forgiveness of sins is taking place. On the one hand, based on 1:21, it is the people of Israel who will or will not experience the forgiveness of sins. On the other hand, developing from 9:8, it is the community where such forgiveness is dispensed. By referring to the sinning member of the community as ὁ ἔθνικὸς καὶ ὁ τελώνης, Matthew creates a link for the reader that connects the mission of Jesus to save Israel with the forgiveness of sins taking place within the community.

The community as the place where forgiveness is requested and granted comes even more to the fore in the question of Peter and the parable of the wicked servant (18:21-35). Peter wants to know how often he has to forgive (ἀφήσω, 18:21) a sinning member of the community. Jesus answers with the number 77 and the parable of a servant who cannot forgive a debt and therefore is himself not forgiven. The parable concludes with the saying that just like the king, God will act on all who cannot forgive a fellow community member. Here it is not Jesus who forgives, nor does he appear, albeit veiled, in the parable. Matthew makes sure that the reader understands the parable as speaking of God (ὁ πατήρ μου ὁ οὐράνιος, 18:35). But the reader is by now also aware of the intimate relationship between Jesus and God, whether from the baptism or the transfiguration, or from Jesus' own words in 11:25-30. Thus, the reader is introduced to two ambivalent features of the forgiveness of sins: the placement of forgiveness within Israel and within the community, and forgiveness coming through Jesus but from God. Forgiveness, therefore, links the community with Israel, just as intimately as it links God with Jesus.

A further development appears at the Last Supper (26:26-29). Here Matthew combines the forgiveness of sins with the purpose of Jesus' death.<sup>51</sup> His blood is to be poured out for many εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν; the death of Jesus is firmly linked with the forgiveness of sins.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, the signs of Jesus' body and blood are signs for the eschatological feast in the kingdom, when Jesus will drink wine again in the company of his disciples (26:29). The cultic language is obvious: the word ἐκχυννόμενον is sacrificial vocabulary that occurs not only in the context of a violent death but also in connection with Passover and the paschal lamb.<sup>53</sup> The blood poured out is a constitutive element in the sacrificial

<sup>51</sup> This development is not paralleled in the accounts of Mark 14:22-25 or Luke 22:15-20. Novakovic (*Messiah*, 74) assumes that Matthew transposed the forgiveness from the preaching of the Baptist.

<sup>52</sup> Luomanen's (*Entering*, 226) assertion that in "Matthew's view, Jesus was not sent to die for his people, but to heal their diseases, preach repentance, and lead them into eternal life through his authoritative interpretation and proclamation of the law" is a deficient description of Matthew's narrative.

<sup>53</sup> The strongly cultic context of the language does not suggest a connection with Jer 31:34,

rites performed in the Jewish temple. Within this context, the blood has cleansing effects on those who are sprinkled with it.<sup>54</sup> This aspect is particularly prominent in Exod 24:1-11,<sup>55</sup> a passage often cited as a parallel. First, it contains all the elements of a complete sacrificial ritual: the building of the altar, the selection and separation of young men to perform the ritual acts, the pouring of blood around the altar, and the burning of the offering implied by the use of עלה in v. 5. Second, the rite contains the unusual reservation of half of the blood to be sprinkled on the attending crowd. It is unusual because this is the only place in the OT where the blood of an עלה is used for such a rite of sprinkling. Sprinkling occurs more often in the context of a מלואים at a priestly ordination, as in Exodus 29 or Leviticus 8. Third, the account closes with a meal, typical for a sacrifice of the זבח שלמים type, celebrating the closing of the new covenant. The parallels are striking because the account of the Last Supper includes not just the pouring out of the blood but also the connection with the closing of a covenant. The sacrificial language of blood poured out, together with the forgiveness of sins, in Matt 26:28 is not only “a partial exegesis of 1.21”;<sup>56</sup> it is also a creative reimagining of Exod 24:1-11. The saving act of Jesus is his death on the cross as a sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. Now it is also clear why the baptism of John was an occasion for the profession of sins, but not their forgiveness. The salvation brought in the passion of Jesus is the forgiveness of sins that sets the believer into a new relationship with God.<sup>57</sup>

The reader has been brought a long way from the first statement of Jesus’ purpose stated by the angel in Joseph’s dream. Salvation from sins was at first an

as suggested by William D. Davies (*The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966] 59) or Gundry (*Matthew*, 528-29). The wording is quite different. Davies and Allison (*Matthew*, 3. 475) suggest a connection with Exod 24:8 and the tradition represented in Heb 9:19-22 and the Targumim, which interpret the Sinai offering in expiatory terms. Joachim Gnllka (*Das Matthäusevangelium* [2 vols.; HTKNT 1; Freiburg/Basel/Vienna: Herder, 1986-88] 2. 402) makes the connection with the paschal sacrifice.

<sup>54</sup> For an overview of the ritual use of blood in the temple sacrifices, see Christian Eberhart, *Studien zur Bedeutung der Opfer im Alten Testament: Die Signifikanz von Blut- und Verbrennungsriten im kultischen Rahmen* (WMANT 94; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2002) esp. 222-88.

<sup>55</sup> For the analysis of Exodus 24, see Eberhart, *Opfer*, 270-73.

<sup>56</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3. 474.

<sup>57</sup> This is a common theme in early Christianity; see Rom 3:25-26; 5:9; Heb 9:11-15; 1 Pet 1:2, 19; Rev 1:5. Francis W. Beare (*The Gospel According to Matthew: Translation, Introduction, and Commentary* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1981] 509) holds that Matthew intended to show that forgiveness is not given in baptism but through the dying of Jesus on the cross. This fits very neatly with John’s baptism as one of confessing sins; however, the connection with the baptism that Jesus enjoins in Matthew 28 is less secure. We know too little of the connection between the baptism of Matthew’s church and the death of Jesus.

open question with a strong christological starting point. The christology of salvation was emphasized by the preaching of John and shown with authority in the healing of the paralytic. The people of Israel and the community of believers in Jesus were shown to be the place where such forgiveness is obtainable, but with a strong eschatological undercurrent as well. Furthermore, the forgiveness that is the task of Jesus is brought about by God himself. Finally, the death of Jesus is the defining moment for the forgiveness of sins. Thus, in the passion one can expect Matthew to draw the various threads together into a complete picture.

And indeed he does so. The first indication is the return of the imagery of blood in the trial before Pilate (27:24-25). The reader is guided to view the scene of Pilate's hand washing and the cry of all the people as the abdication of responsibility, on the one hand, and the taking over of responsibility, on the other. The formulation of Pilate's hand washing calls to mind Deut 21:1-9, which describes purification from the blood of a murder victim.<sup>58</sup> The rite, however, ends not in the invocation of God as in Deut 21:8 but in the simple profession of his innocence of the blood of Jesus. Pilate, the Gentile, uses a Jewish rite for cleansing and muddles it. His innocence remains pretense.

The response of the mob before Pilate is the taking on of responsibility through its cry, τὸ αἷμα αὐτοῦ ἐφ' ἡμᾶς καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ τέκνα ἡμῶν (27:25). But Matthew guides the reader further. It is not just the mob before Pilate crying out, but πᾶς ὁ λαός. On the level of the plot of Matthew's story, it is, of course, the crowd before Pilate crying out.<sup>59</sup> For Matthew, however, the whole people of Israel is again in view.<sup>60</sup> The change from the use of ὄχλος to refer to the crowd before Pilate to λαός in 27:25 suggests as much.<sup>61</sup> For the reader, the responsibility for the death of Jesus is laid at Israel's doorstep.<sup>62</sup> The Jewish people acknowledge their responsibility for the death of Jesus, just as the Roman governor separates himself from it.<sup>63</sup> This interpretation also accords well with the

<sup>58</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3. 590; Luz, *Matthäus*, 4. 276-77.

<sup>59</sup> Therefore, Saldarini (*Community*, 28-32) equates λαός and ὄχλος. Neither lexical evidence nor the use of both terms within the Gospel, however, bears this out. See LSJ, 9th ed., 1029-30; Cousland, *Crowds*, 75-86.

<sup>60</sup> This is suggested by the prevalent use of λαός throughout the Gospel (Cousland, *Crowds*, 75-86).

<sup>61</sup> Luz, *Matthäus*, 4. 277-78.

<sup>62</sup> This is the traditional interpretation of the cry. Frankemölle (*Jahwebund*, 210) has most poignantly formulated it: "27,24f ist eine von Mt in Szene gesetzte Ätiologie für das Ende 'Israels' . . ." In his later commentary on the Gospel (*Matthäuskommentar* [2 vols.; Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1994-97] 2. 484) Frankemölle retracts this position to some extent: "die vielfach belegte Rede von der Kollektivschuld ganz 'Israels' [entspricht] m.E. nach nicht den biblischen Vorgaben und den Leserlenkungen des mt Textes."

<sup>63</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3. 591.

prophecy contained in 23:35: ἔλθῃ ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς πᾶν αἷμα δίκαιον ἐκχυννόμενον ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. Matthew 23 does not take the whole people in view, however, but only the scribes and the Pharisees. When the prophecy of chap. 23 is spoken in reference to the Jewish leaders and the whole people comes into view in chap. 27, the shift reveals to the reader that, in the trial before Pilate, Matthew wants to tell the reader that something besides the leaders’ guilt is at issue.

There is an undercurrent of meaning in this passage that goes beyond the question of guilt for the death of Jesus, a *double entendre*.<sup>64</sup> The readers’ attention is drawn to this by the use of the terms λαός and αἷμα. Readers will recall that the purpose of Jesus’ mission as stated in 1:21 is to save his people from their sins. Furthermore, the way this salvation is brought about is by the death of Jesus, in which his blood will be poured out for the forgiveness of sins (26:28). As the mob in front of Pilate’s court demands the crucifixion of Jesus, salvation is being brought about for the whole people of Israel.<sup>65</sup> The situation of the mob before Pilate demanding the death of Jesus is preserved. At the same time, the switch from ὄχλος to πᾶς ὁ λαός enables Matthew to guide the readers to the recognition that the death of Jesus has salvific importance for the whole people of Israel. As the readers drew on Exodus 24 to interpret Matt 26:28, here they are led again to remember Exod 24:3 and how it formulated the promise of “all the people” to keep the covenant: ἀπεκρίθη δὲ πᾶς ὁ λαός φωνῇ μιᾷ λέγοντες πάντα τοὺς λόγους οὓς ἐλάλησεν κύριος ποιήσομεν καὶ ἀκουσόμεθα. With his own phrase ἀποκριθεὶς πᾶς ὁ λαός εἶπεν in 27:25, Matthew encourages the reader to draw a line from the covenant in the desert to the death of Jesus. The blood of the covenant sprinkled on Israel in the desert finds its complement and its fulfillment in the cry of all the people for the blood of Jesus to come on them. Thus, the prediction of 1:21 finally gains fulfillment as the readers realize that the events before Pilate’s court bring about the prediction at Jesus’ Last Supper that his blood would be given for the forgiveness of sins. Again Matthew plays with different meanings on different levels: just as λαός signifies the crowd before Pilate on the level of the plot and the people of Israel on the level of guiding the reader, so αἷμα ἐφ’ ἡμᾶς καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ τέκνα ἡμῶν signals the crowd’s guilt before Pilate on the level of the plot, while it affirms the salvation of Israel on the level of the story.

<sup>64</sup> Timothy B. Cargal, “‘His Blood Be upon Us and Our Children’: A Matthean Double Entendre?” *NTS* 37 (1991) 101-12; D. Sullivan, “New Insights into Matthew 27.24-5,” *NBI* 73 (1992) 453-57.

<sup>65</sup> Davies and Allison (*Matthew*, 3. 592) call the interpretation of Cargal and Sullivan “excessively subtle” because it “goes against the context.” But the distinction between the level of the plot and the level of what the reader can recognize in the story is the crucial point of this interpretation. Furthermore, the recognition of the *double entendre* is brought about by the context, particularly with the switch from ὄχλος to λαός.



This impression deepens with the scene on Golgotha, where Matthew brings the theme of salvation to the fore. Matthew's description of the inscription over the cross significantly recalls the name "Οὗτος ἐστὶν Ἰησοῦς . . ." (27:37). The formulation with the name, unique among the Synoptics, draws attention to the significance of Jesus' death by recalling the giving of his name and the attendant play on its relationship with salvation in 1:21. The mockery of Jesus hanging on the cross (27:39-43) deepens the sense of fulfillment of 1:21. This time the verb σῶζειν is employed again. First the passersby call on him, σῶσον σεαυτὸν (27:40). Then the chief priests, scribes, and elders are singled out in particular as attesting, ἄλλους ἔσωσεν, ἑαυτὸν οὐ δύναται σῶσαι (27:42). The passersby accuse him of saying that he would tear down the temple and rebuild it in three days; the accusation is familiar from 26:61. The readers may treat this as an ironic fulfillment of 12:6.<sup>66</sup> The Jewish authorities lay another charge against Jesus: he is the Son of God, or at least claims to be. The wording recalls the temptation (4:3, 6) and Matthew's general preference to speak of Jesus as the Son of God.<sup>67</sup> The threefold mocking of Jesus as the Son of God (27:40), as the king of Israel (27:42), and as trusting in God as his Father (27:43) is another temptation. The emphasis of the passage lies in the triple repetition of σῶζειν. The reader recognizes that Jesus' nonresponse to those mocking him is not powerlessness but the fulfillment of his teaching in 16:25: "Whoever wants to save (σῶσαι) his life will lose it."<sup>68</sup>

As Matthew has first connected the image of forgiveness of sins with Jesus' death, so now the term "salvation" comes to take on its ultimate meaning in the cross. Again Matthew uses a *double entendre*. Although the figures in the narrative pity Jesus because he does not save himself from the cross, the reader is guided to see in the death of Jesus that ἄλλους ἔσωσεν. Finally, when Jesus' death draws near and he calls out to God, bystanders misunderstand him as calling for Elijah and wonder whether Elijah will come σώσον αὐτόν (27:49). But

<sup>66</sup> The formulation in 12:6 is slightly different: λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν ὅτι τοῦ ἱεροῦ μεῖζόν ἐστὶν ὁδὲ. Davies and Allison (*Matthew*, 3, 618) see 27:42 as ironic because for them it serves as a reminder that the rejection of Jesus is responsible for the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E.. Those reviling Jesus would then themselves be responsible for Jerusalem's misfortunes. These two interpretations do not exclude each other.

<sup>67</sup> See, e.g., Jack D. Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 49-58; Birger Gerhardsson, "The Christology of Matthew," in *Who Do You Say That I Am? Essays on Christology* (ed. Mark A. Powell and David R. Bauer; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999) 14-32, here 21-23.

<sup>68</sup> "[Jesus] demonstrates that, even in his own case, salvation is not of oneself!" (Jack D. Kingsbury, "The Cross within the Plot of Matthew," in *The Synoptic Gospels* [ed. Camille Focant; BETL 110; Leuven: Peeters, 1993] 263-79, here 274).

what they see at the death of Jesus is the temple curtain tearing, the earth shaking, tombs opening, and dead saints walking. The captain of the guard then puts into words what the readers have understood all along: “Truly, the Son of God was this one” (27:54). With the mocking about the temple still ringing in the readers’ ears, they realize that the tearing down of the temple has begun, and that in three days a new temple will be built—the risen Jesus.<sup>69</sup> In this resurrection at the moment of Jesus’ death, Matthew tells them that the death of Jesus is salvific and the mission of Jesus is accomplished.

### III. Conclusion: A Christology for Jews

The christology of Matthew’s Gospel, viewed from beginning to end rather than from end to beginning, implies a reader who is firmly rooted in the traditions of Israel. Matthew’s Jesus has come to save his people from their sins, and his people is Israel. Jesus is rooted in Israel through Abrahamic and Davidic descent, and his mission throughout remains one to Israel. Jesus saves in his blood, and Matthew’s language implies a reader familiar with the sacrificial traditions of Israel. Jesus replaces the sacrificial cult by offering his own blood to be poured out for many. His death is witnessed by Jerusalem and proves that he is indeed greater than the temple and in his death replaces this temple. Finally, even the Gentile Roman centurion bears witness to what the implied reader has been shown from the beginning.

Matthew’s christology is not an exclusive one. What began as a mission of Jesus to save τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ continues among his disciples with a mission to πάντα τὰ ἔθνη to make disciples of them. The horizon of Matthew’s community is broadened to include Gentiles as well as Jews.<sup>70</sup> Yet in the Great Commission, the faithfulness to law and prophets is still upheld. The eleven are not just to make disciples of Gentile nations; they are also to teach them what Jesus has commanded. The word ἐνετελείμην reflects on Jesus’ authority to teach the Law and may well be an allusion to the Moses typology visible in other parts of the

<sup>69</sup> What exactly the split in the temple curtain means is a matter of some debate, summarized by Davies and Allison (*Matthew*, 3. 630-32), who conclude that it is probably a reference to the destruction of the temple in the Jewish war. This is a plausible explanation, and yet the closeness to the mockery in 27:40 and the christological significance of the whole passage in explaining the death of Jesus as the saving event concluded by the confession of the centurion suggest that the replacement of the temple through the risen Jesus is more to the point.

<sup>70</sup> There is some debate as to whether ἔθνη in 28:19 includes or excludes Jews. Exclusion is argued by Douglas R. Hare and Daniel J. Harrington (“‘Make Disciples of All the Gentiles’ [Mt 28:19],” *CBQ* 37 [1975] 359-69); inclusion by Meier (“‘Nations or Gentiles?’”).

Gospel.<sup>71</sup> Matthew's view of Jesus' commission is framed in a Jewish horizon such that one can speak in terms of a Jewish-Christian mission to the Gentiles. The disciples are following the commission because Jesus promises to be with them until the end of the ages. The final commission of the disciples thus contains a double retrospect. The first is the reminder of the earthly Jesus' teaching; the second is the reminder of the angel's original prophecy—the fulfillment of the Scripture speaking of Emmanuel as healing the distance between God and his people.

In the present study I have taken one aspect of Matthew's christology and followed its traces throughout the Gospel. Obviously, the focus is very narrow, yet it has shown that there is a viable possibility of viewing Matthew's Jesus in terms of salvation for the people of Israel. Matthew unfolds this theme in the course of the Gospel by rethinking and remodeling the OT thought on cult, sacrifice, and cleansing. Rather than introduce something completely new, he puts creative perspectives on traditional topics. Obviously, this is not a complete picture of Matthew's christology, but it fits in neatly with other aspects of Matthew's Jesus, for example, Jesus as the teacher of the law and the prophets, as the new Moses or the new temple, as the one who knows the Father and reveals him to the community, and as the one who defends his disciples against other Jewish leaders.

Was this christology so new as to put Matthew's community *ipso facto* outside of Judaism? There are probably several answers to this question. The first is an answer from Matthew's perspective. It seems very likely that the Gospel reflects a community that saw itself as the rightful heirs to God's promises to Israel. These promises had begun to be fulfilled in Jesus. The community perceived itself as God's faithful people, fulfilling the Law as proclaimed by Jesus the Messiah. It had embarked on a mission to Gentiles to make them part of the people saved by Jesus through his death and resurrection.

Other possible answers are determined by the reaction of the various Jewish groups to the claims of the Matthean group. To judge from the way Matthew presents the debates between Jesus and the Jewish leaders as heated and acrimonious, their reaction was hostile. It is probable that they, like most Jewish people after them, rejected the messianic claims for Jesus made by Matthean Christians. It is conceivable that they thought that the Matthean group had put itself outside of Judaism with its claims about Jesus. Direct evidence of contemporary Jewish reactions to Matthew's Gospel, however, is lacking.

The result of this study, at least with regard to the social location of the Matthean group *extra* or *intra muros* of Judaism, remains inconclusive. This is

<sup>71</sup> In the LXX the word occurs in 408 verses, in most cases referring to the commands and laws of God.

necessarily so, because much depends on who defines the walls and which criteria are used. The study reveals, however, the theological position of the Gospel with regard to this matter. By couching the christology in terms of salvation for Israel, Matthew shows that he thinks of this community as Jewish. He does not use christology as the means of leading the community away from its Jewish heritage into a Gentile world. Matthew's Jesus opens this Jewish-Christian community in order to lead Gentiles into God's people. For Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is the Messiah who ensures the continuity of God's presence with the people Israel.