

The First Gospel and Matthew's Mission Narrative, Theological and Historical Perspectives

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Abstract. The theme of “mission” has long been recognized as one of the fundamental interests of the author of the First Gospel. Rather than focusing on one particular question, such as the relationship between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians, the role of Gentiles in Matthew’s community, or the missionary task of the church, the paper will survey and analyze three areas in which “mission” is a relevant concept in the First Gospel: Matthew’s narrative, the historical context of Matthew and his Gospel, and Matthew’s theology. An investigation of the theme of “mission” in the Gospel of Matthew, it is hermeneutically problematic to ignore any of these three areas. The Gospel of Matthew is a narrative, in the first century C.E. mission was not just a concept but a historical reality, and both Matthew’s Gospel and mission represent theological convictions. An analysis of relevant narrative, theological, and historical perspectives suggests that the author of the First Gospel wrote as a theologian who had an intense interest in the universal mission of the church, that he had perhaps personal experience of missionary activity leading people to faith in Jesus Christ and establishing churches, and that he also wrote as a historian who knew that Jesus focused his proclamation of the dawn of God’s kingdom on Israel rather than on Gentiles.

The theme of mission in the First Gospel has been discussed from many different angles.¹ Rather than focusing on one particular question, such as the relationship between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians according to Matthew, the role of

¹ Cf. Werner Bieder, *Gottes Sendung und der missionarische Auftrag der Kirche nach Matthäus, Lukas, Paulus und Johannes* (Theologische Studien 82; Zürich: EVZ-Verlag, 1964), 7-18; Hubert Frankemölle, “Zur Theologie der Mission im Matthäusevangelium,” in *Mission im Neuen Testament* (ed. K.Kertelge; QD 93; Freiburg: Herder, 1982), 93–129; Amy-Jill Levine, *The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Matthean Social History. “Go Nowhere Among the Gentiles...” (Matth 10.5b)* (Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 14; Lewiston/Lampeter: Mellen, 1988); John D. Harvey, “Mission in Matthew,” in *Mission in the New Testament. An Evangelical Approach* (ed. W.J.Larkin & J.F.Williams; ASMS 27; New York: Orbis, 1998), 119–36; Kun-Chun Wong, *Interkulturelle Theologie und multikulturelle Gemeinde im Matthäusevangelium. Zum Verhältnis von Juden- und Heidenchristen im ersten Evangelium* (NTOA 22; Fribourg/Göttingen: Universitätsverlag/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992); James LaGrand, *The Earliest Christian Mission to ‘All Nations.’ In the Light of Matthew’s Gospel* (ISFCJ 1; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995); Justin S. Ukpong, “The Problem of the Gentile Mission in Matthew’s Gospel,” *Vidyajyoti* 59 (1995): 388–408; Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (NSBT 11; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 87-109; J. Robert C. Cousland, *The Crowds in the Gospel of Matthew* (NT.S 102; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 288-93; Gene R. Smillie, “‘Even the Dogs’: Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew,” *JETS* 45 (2002): 73–97; Florian Wilk, *Jesus und die Völker in der Sicht der Synoptiker* (BZNW 109; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2001), 83-153; Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission. Vol. 1: Jesus and the Twelve. Vol. 2: Paul and the Early Church* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 1494-95. See also the studies on Mt 28:16-20.

Gentiles in Matthew's church, or the missionary task of the church, I will survey and analyze three areas in which "mission" is a relevant concept in the First Gospel: Matthew's narrative, the historical context of Matthew and his Gospel, and Matthew's theology. If we want to talk about "mission" and the Gospel of Matthew, it is hermeneutically problematic to ignore any of these three areas: the Gospel of Matthew is a narrative, in the first century C.E. mission was not just a concept but a historical reality, and both Matthew's Gospel and mission represent theological convictions.²

The main reason why it is appropriate to discuss "Matthew and mission" is not the commissioning text of Mt 10 or the so-called "great commission" in Mt 28:16-20, but the missionary reality of the church and her leaders in the first century. Even critics who are unwilling to regard the Book of Acts as a primary source for the history of the early church between A.D. 30 and 60 sometimes at least acknowledge that Luke's second volume demonstrates the missionary activity of the early church. The missionary vision and drive of the apostle Paul is beyond dispute.³ The traditions of the early church traditions are convinced that the First Gospel was written by the apostle Matthew who was called by Jesus together with the Twelve to be a "fisher of people" and who obeyed Jesus' missionary commission.⁴ The *Acts of Philip* state that Matthew preached "in the innermost regions of Pontus" (*Acts of Philip* 8.1),⁵ and Rufinus claims to know that the apostle Matthew went to Ethiopia as a missionary (Rufinus, *Hist. eccl.* 1.9-10). Scholars who are inclined to hold current reconstructions to be more reliable reject these traditions. All agree, however, that the author of the Gospel of Matthew displays great interest in the missionary task.

I suggest that we are warranted to regard the author of the First Gospel as a missionary. Two arguments seem important. First, any author of a book such as the

² For the interrelatedness of text, history and theology see N. Thomas Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God, Vol. 1; reprint, 1992; London/Minneapolis: SPCK/Fortress, 1993), 47-144.

³ See now extensively Clark, "General Hermeneutics", 923-1485.

⁴ The following texts, dating to the second part of the second century and later, assert that the Twelve embarked on an international missionary career after their initial ministry in Jerusalem: *Acts of Peter* 5; *Apollonius*, in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.18.14; *Acts of Thomas* 1:1 (with a specific reference to Matthew); *Origen*, in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.1.1. Other texts speak more generally about the universal mission of the Twelve: *1 Clement* 42:1-4; *Kerygma Petrou* 3a (Agraphon 10), in Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 6.5.43; *Kerygma Petrou* 3b (Agraphon 9), in Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 6.6.48; *Epistula Apostolorum* 30; *Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles* NHC 6.1; *Letter of Peter to Philip* NHC 8.2; *Fragments of Polycarp* a, 5-12; *Didascalia Apostolorum* 23; *Acts of Philip* 8:1 (Athen. 345); *Syriac Acts of John*. See Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1:527-33, with a critical evaluation of these traditions.

⁵ Note that MS Xenophon 32 (A) makes Matthew responsible for the missionary work in Judea; cf. François Bovon, et al., *Acta Philippi: Textus* (CCSA 11; Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), 237.

Gospel of Matthew, with 2500 *stichoi* or lines of text⁶—note that the average length of a book containing prose was 1500–2500⁷—belonged to the leading teachers of the early church, whether in the early or late first century. Second, the leading teachers of the first century church were not academicians or inhabitants of ivory-towers but church leaders in the sense that they were personally involved in the missionary outreach of the church, at least in the preaching ministry of local congregations which addressed both believers and outsiders.

The missionary reality of the early church and the missionary experience of the leaders of the church allow us to ask the following questions: How would a missionary describe Jesus' ministry? How would he describe Jesus' contacts with individuals? How would he describe Jesus' interaction with the crowds? How would he describe the later leaders of the church?

We begin with some introductory matters. The addressees of the First Gospel were sometimes linked with Christians in Galilee,⁸ usually however with churches in Syria.⁹ It is very unlikely that Matthew wrote his Gospel for a single church. At least two reasons support the view that Matthew wrote for all the churches, at least in the region in which he was active as a teacher and preacher. First, it is not very likely that an author writes an entire book for an intended audience of thirty, forty, or fifty people—the size of the average house church. Second, the New Testament evidence demonstrates that the churches of the first century had regular and lively contacts with each other.¹⁰ E. E. Ellis believes that the Gospel of Matthew was written in Jerusalem as the Gospel of the mission of James, the brother of Jesus, some time before he was killed in A.D. 66/67, when the leaders of this mission fled to Pella at the beginning of the Jewish Revolt.¹¹ While this view cannot be supported by unequivocal evidence, it is certainly correct to situate the Gospel of Matthew in the wider context of a church that directs missionary outreach.

⁶ See the stichometric lists provided by Theodor Zahn, *Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons* (2 Bände; Erlangen/Leipzig: Deichert, 1888/1892), 2:395.

⁷ Theodor Birt, *Das antike Buchwesen in seinem Verhältniss zur Litteratur* (Berlin: W. Hertz, 1882), 309-314; cf. Friedrich G. Lang, "Schreiben nach Mass. Zur Stichometrie in der antiken Literatur," *NovT* 41 (1999): 40–57, hier 49.

⁸ Cf. J. Andrew Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism. The Social World of the Matthean Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); Paul A. Hertig, "Galilean Christianity," *DLNT* (1997): 385–8.

⁹ Cf. Graham N. Stanton, "Revisiting Matthew's Communities," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1994 Seminar Papers* (ed. E. H. Lovering; SBLSP 33; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 9–23.

¹⁰ Cf. Stanton, "Revisiting Matthew's Communities"; generally Richard Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for all Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). This is not the place to interact with Bauckham's critics, cf. Philip P. Esler, "Community and Gospel in Early Christianity: A Response to Richard Bauckham's *Gospels for All Christians*," *SJTh* 51 (1998): 235–48; David C. Sim, "The Gospels for all Christians? A Response to Richard Bauckham," *JSNT* 24 (2001): 3–27; Margaret M. Mitchell, "Patristic Counter-Evidence to the Claim that 'The Gospels Were Written for All Christians,'" *NTS* 51 (2005): 36–79.

¹¹ Cf. Earle E. Ellis, *The Making of the New Testament Documents* (BIS 39; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 288-92.

1. Narrative Perspectives

In the opening sentence of his gospel, Matthew links Jesus with David and Abraham (Mt 1:1).¹² This programmatic beginning should probably be interpreted in terms of the author's conviction that the hope of a new creation is fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth who is Israel's messianic king and heir to the Davidic promises, and by whose ministry God's promise to the patriarchs that all the nations of the earth will be blessed is being realized.¹³ Jesus' designation as "son of Abraham" describes him both as a true Jew and as the instrument of divine blessing for the nations (taking up Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18). This is indicated by two observations: first, Abraham is regularly seen in critical distance to Israel (Mt 3:9; 8:11; 22:32); second, the end of the Gospel in 28:19-20 narrates the commission to evangelize the nations, clearly implying the universality of the salvation taught and brought by Jesus.¹⁴

The first reported direct speech by human beings is the inquiry of the Gentile *magoi* from the East as to the birth of a new King of the Jews (2:2). This is significant for two reasons: at this point in Matthew's narrative Jesus' ministry to Israel has not even begun, and it provides a stark contrast to the reaction of the reigning King of the Jews in Jerusalem. H. J. B. Combrink comments, "Thus the commission to be the Son of Abraham (1:1) is here already going into effect."¹⁵

The first "action" of Jesus, albeit a passive action, takes him to Egypt (2:13-15). This is another element in Matthew's narrative introduction that points outside Israel.¹⁶

The first episode of Jesus' ministry in Galilee and his first reported words in the main body of the narrative (4:18-22) are his commissioning of Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John to follow him and to be trained as "fishers of people"

¹² For the following survey see Eckhard J. Schnabel, "Jesus and the Beginnings of the Mission to the Gentiles," in *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ* (FS I. H. Marshall; ed. J. B. Green and M. Turner; Grand Rapids/Carlisle: Eerdmans/Paternoster, 1994), 37-58, here 43-45.

¹³ W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988-97), 1:159-60, who interpret βίβλος γενέσεως as "book of origin". Matthew's use of γένεσις suggests the author wants Jesus Christ to be understood as a new beginning in the sense of a new creation.

¹⁴ Cf. Joachim Gnilka, *Das Matthäusevangelium* (HThK I/1-2; Freiburg: Herder, 1986/1988), 1:7.

¹⁵ H.J. Bernard Combrink, "The Structure of the Gospel of Matthew as Narrative," *TynB* 34 (1983): 61-90, here 77; see also Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:253.

¹⁶ Cf. R.T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist & Teacher* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1989), 233. More cautious are Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:281 n.53, who find it doubtful whether the references to Egypt furthers the Gentile theme; similarly Ulrich Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (EKK I/1-4; Zürich/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Benziger/Neukirchener, 1985-2001), 1:129 who allows, however, that such a hint is entirely possible.

(ἀλιεῖς ἀνθρώπων, 4:19). Since the last words of Jesus in Matthew’s narrative commission the Twelve to make disciples of all nations (28:18-20), the ἀνθρώποι in 4:19 may well imply a universal dimension.¹⁷

When Matthew outlines “the program of Jesus’ active ministry” in 4:23-25,¹⁸ he implies that the Galilean ministry (4:23) had an impact on non-Jews as well—the news about Jesus reaches Syria and the Decapolis. Coming after a reference to “all Galilee” and determined by ἐν ὅλῃ, Syria is most likely not a reference to the Roman Province which includes Galilee, nor to the Jewish population living in *Palaistine Syrie*, but to the territory extending from Damascus to Antioch and eastwards, which implies that non-Jews heard of Jesus.¹⁹ We should note that the geographical term Συρία is *hapax legomenon* in the Gospel of Matthew. Whether the reference to the Decapolis (4:25) is intended to imply Gentiles among the “great crowds” who followed Jesus is unclear. The reference to the Decapolis may refer, together with the other regions listed in 4:25—Galilee, Jerusalem, Judea, and Perea [πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου]—with salvation-historical significance to the ancient “holy land”.²⁰ If the reference is determined by the contemporary historical situation at the time of the composition of the Gospel of Matthew, the Gentile majority of the Decapolis cannot *a priori* be excluded.

In the Sermon on the Mount, the followers of Jesus are described as “the salt of the earth” (τὸ ἅλας τῆς γῆς, 5:13) and “the light of the world” (τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου; 5:14). Both γῆ and κόσμος cannot be made to refer to the land of Israel,²¹ they have a universal reference. These two metaphors communicate a universal mission of the disciples,²² at least for the evangelist. The significance of this

¹⁷ Similarly Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:398: “Perhaps Matthew thought of the Gentiles as included in the *anthropon*”.

¹⁸ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:412, quoting Birger Gerhardsson, *The Mighty Acts of Jesus according to Matthew* (Lund: Gleerup, 1979), 23.

¹⁹ Thus recently Gnllka, *Matthäusevangelium*, 1:108; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:417. Luz, *Matthäus*, 1:181 with n.16, sees a reference to the entire Roman province but interprets in terms of Gentile recipients of the news of Jesus’ ministry as well.

²⁰ Cf. Gerhard Lohfink, “Wem gilt die Bergpredigt? Eine redaktionskritische Untersuchung von Mt 4.23–5.2 und 7.28f,” *ThQ* 163 (1983): 264–84, here 275–6; R.T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary* (TNTC 1; Grand Rapids/Leicester: Eerdmans/InterVarsity Press, 1988), 105; Gnllka, *Matthäusevangelium*, 1:108–9; with caution Luz, *Matthäus*, 1:180–1.

²¹ As does William J. Dumbrell, “The Logic of the Role of the Law in Matthew 5.1–20,” *NovT* 23 (1981): 1–21.

²² Cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:472, 479; Gnllka, *Matthäusevangelium*, 1:135–6. Both regard the statements as the result of redaction which presupposes the Gentile mission. Adolf Schlatter, *Der Evangelist Matthäus. Seine Sprache, sein Ziel, seine Selbständigkeit. Ein Kommentar zum ersten Evangelium* (6. Aufl.; reprint, 1948; Stuttgart: Calwer, 1963), 146, states: “Der Beruf der Jünger hat keine Grenzen; sie sind zur Menschheit gesandt. Das letzte Wort des Evangeliums: *eis panta ta ethne* 28,19 ist auch das erste, das den Jüngern ihren Beruf zeigt”. Similarly Georg Strecker, *Die Bergpredigt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), 52: “An der Durchführung des Missionsauftrages entscheidet sich das Jüngersein”.

universal dimension is highlighted by the fact that the pericope 5:13-16 can be regarded as a “summary statement of the task of the people of God in the world.”²³

The narrative section 8:1–9:34 which reports on Jesus’ healing ministry recounts Jesus’ encounters with Gentiles: the healing of the centurion’s servant (8:5-13) and the healing of the Gerasene demoniacs (8:28-34). The fact that these narratives occupy a central position in this section of the Gospel underlines their significance.

The centurion (ἑκατόνταρχος) was a Gentile. Jewish-Christian readers of the Gospels would have understood the significance of this fact immediately.²⁴ For Matthew’s audience a *hekatontarchos* was a centurion who served in the Roman army or in the army of a vassal king of the Roman Empire, a military officer who generally was not a Jew.²⁵ The centurion came to Jesus with the request that he should heal his slave (παῖς, 8:6; Lk 7:1 has δοῦλος).²⁶ The request that Jesus should speak a word from a distance without visiting his house (8:8) has been interpreted in two ways. First, it may suggest that the centurion wanted to spare Jesus from coming personally for a visit.²⁷ Second, Jesus asks a question which is either friendly, or disapproving or a test (“should I come and heal him?”),²⁸ implying that Jesus does not want to come to the centurion’s house because he does not want to be involved with Gentiles. The pagan centurion refuses to be turned away. He declares that he has full confidence in the unlimited power of healing inherent in Jesus’ word—as he can command his soldiers and his slaves who obey him, so Jesus can issue a command and grant healing (8:9). Jesus responds to the centurion’s request with the statement: “Go; let it be done for you according to your faith” (8:13). This response suggests that according to Matthew, the miracle happens for the benefit of the centurion. It is the slave who is healed, but the miracle happens “for” the centurion (γεννηθήτω σοι) who is concerned for his sick slave.²⁹

²³ Thus the heading for this pericope in Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:470. Gnilka, *Matthäusevangelium*, 1:133, categorizes the statements as “Definitionssätze”.

²⁴ Cf. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 333; cf. *ibid.* 333-5, for the following comments.

²⁵ Cf. Christoph Burchard, “Zu Matthäus 8,5–13,” *ZNW* 84 (1993): 278–88, here 278-9; Uwe Wegner, *Der Hauptmann von Kafarnaum (Mt 7.28a; 8.5–10,13 par Lk 7.1–10): Ein Beitrag zur Q-Forschung* (WUNT 2/14; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1985), 60-69. An exception is mentioned by Josephus, *B.J.* 2.578.

²⁶ Gnilka, *Matthäusevangelium*, 1:301; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:21; other scholars interpret in terms of a son, e.g. Luz, *Matthäus*, 2:14.

²⁷ David R. Catchpole, “The Centurion’s Faith and its Function in Q,” in *The Four Gospels 1992* (FS Frans Neiryneck; vol. 1; ed. F. Van Segbroeck et al.; BETL 100; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992), 517–40, who interprets the request in Mt 8:7 as consent or as a friendly question; other scholars interpret in terms of showing respect for Jewish sensibilities, cf. Christoph W. Stenschke, *Luke’s Portrait of Gentiles Prior to Their Coming to Faith* (WUNT 2/108; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1999), 105.

²⁸ Wegner, *Hauptmann*, 375-80; Gnilka, *Matthäusevangelium*, 1:301; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:21-22; Luz, *Matthäus*, 2:14.

²⁹ Burchard, “Zu Matthäus 8,5–13”, here 285.

Matthew reports Jesus' commenting on the surprising confidence of the Gentile centurion by asserting, "Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith" (8:10). The great faith of the Gentile centurion does not only consist in his confidence in Jesus' unlimited power, as C. Burchard asserts, but also in his confidence "that Jesus brings salvation even to those who do not belong to Israel and who have no natural claims for this. And this is exactly what the crowds are lacking. They believe in Jesus' miracle working power as well, they later accept miracles performed λόγῳ ('with a word,' 8:16), Jesus attests for some of them that they have faith (9:2, 22, 29). But they do not believe in Jesus' universal mission."³⁰ In 8:11, Jesus takes up the tradition of the nations' pilgrimage to Zion and adds the promises of the coming messianic time of salvation and of the kingdom of God, "I tell you, many [πολλοί] will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." The term "many" refers to the Gentiles who are contrasted in 8:12 with the "heirs of the kingdom," i.e. with the Jews.³¹ Jesus does not teach the future salvation of a great number of Gentiles in contrast to a future condemnation of Israel, nor does he teach the return of the Jews from the Diaspora.³² Rather, Jesus emphasizes the fundamental nature of the centurion's faith who is a Gentile,³³ and he reminds the listeners that the nations will be called by God in the eschaton when they will receive salvation at the "table" of the patriarchs. According to Matthew, Jesus separates the kingdom of God from the conditions stipulated in Israel's Scriptures and in Second Temple Judaism—he challenges the privileged position of Israel, he revokes membership in Israel as *conditio sine qua non* for salvation, and he teaches the future integration of Gentiles, as Gentiles, in the kingdom of God.

The healing of the demon-possessed man in Gadara (8:28-34) narrates a miracle that is located in Gergesa on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. The man who was healed was evidently not a Jew but a polytheist. The repeated reference to pigs "underlines that this is not a negligible detail of the narrative" but conveys to the readers that the man was a pagan and that the miracle took place in a pagan context.³⁴

³⁰ Burchard, "Zu Matthäus 8,5–13", here 285-6.

³¹ E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 119-20; D.C. Allison, "Who will Come from East and West? Observations on Matt 8.11–12 - Luke 13.28–29," *Irish Biblical Studies* 11 (1989): 158–70, and others relate those who come from east and west to the Jewish diaspora.

³² Cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:27-28; Gerd Theißen, *The Gospels in Context: Social and Political History in the Synoptic Tradition* (ET; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 45-46.

³³ Cf. Gnllka, *Matthäusevangelium*, 1:303.

³⁴ Franz Annen, *Heil für die Heiden. Zur Bedeutung und Geschichte der Tradition vom besessenen Gerasener (Mk 5,1–20 parr.)* (FThS 20; Frankfurt: Knecht, 1976), 182; cf. Jostein Adna, "The Encounter of Jesus with the Gerasene Demoniac," in *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus* (ed. B. Chilton & C. A. Evans; NTTS 82.2; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 279–301, here 293-94.

Several chapters later, the story of the woman in Syro-Phoenicia (15:21-28) relates the third main encounter of Jesus with a Gentile, in this case a woman, perhaps from the city of Tyre which controlled the area, who continues to ask Jesus for the healing of her demon-possessed daughter despite being rejected several times. Matthew notes, as he does in the case of Jesus' encounter with the centurion, that Jesus praises the woman's faith as "great faith" (15:28). The account demonstrates that Jesus does not limit the mercy of the dawning reign of God to Jewish people who are plagued by demons—he makes this divine mercy available to Greeks as well, when they approach him with believing expectation.³⁵

Jesus' demonstration in the Temple (21:12-13), when interpreted as a prophetic symbolic action, provides greater clarity for Matthew's understanding of the status of the Gentiles. Crucial for the correct understanding of Jesus' action is the direct speech that the Gospel writers use to summarize Jesus' teaching on this occasion. Jesus quotes Is 56:7 and Jer 7:11: "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you make it a den of robbers." The reference to the "nations" (ἔθνη) and the designation of the Temple as a "den of robbers" (σπήλαιον ληστῶν) provide the decisive clues for the interpretation of the Temple action. The quotation from Jer 7:11 is taken from a prophecy in which Jeremiah announces the destruction of the Solomonic Temple. Jesus proclaims (with Jer 7:11) the end of the Temple cult and thus the end of the significance of the Temple for procuring holiness for Israel. The quotation from Isa 56:7 emphasizes the universal significance of Yahweh's presence in Israel.³⁶ Matthew recounts Jesus' dramatic action in the Temple to indicate that the time of the end of Israel's sacrificial cult and at the same time that the transformation of Zion as a place of prayer for the nations has arrived. It is important to note in this connection that according to Matthew, Jesus saw his impending death and resurrection as "the beginning of a new spiritual temple in the form of the community of his disciples"³⁷—Peter and his confession of Jesus as Messiah is the foundation of a new "house", which is now being established in Israel (16:16-29).

³⁵ Cf. Schnabel, "Beginnings", here 52-53.

³⁶ Cf. Rudolf Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium* (HThK 2; Freiburg: Herder, 1976/1977), 2:199.

³⁷ Cf. Rainer Riesner, "Das Jerusalem Essener Viertel und die Urgemeinde. Josephus, Bellum Judaicum V 145; 11QMiqdasch 46,13-16; Apostelgeschichte 1-6 und die Archäologie," *ANRW* II.26.2 (1995): 1775-922, here 1869; similarly Jostein Ådna, "Jesus' Symbolic Act in the Temple (Mark 11:15-17): The Replacement of the Sacrificial Cult by his Atoning Death," in *Gemeinde ohne Tempel. Zur Substituierung und Transformation des Jerusalemer Tempels und seines Kults im Alten Testament, antiken Judentum und frühen Christentum* (ed. Beate Ego, et al.; WUNT 118; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 461-75, for Mk 11:15-17.

In the parable of the wedding (22:1-10), the invitation of substitute guests has often been interpreted in terms of the universal mission of the church.³⁸ The traditional barriers for friendly relations with the king are removed, the expected invitees refuse to come, and the servants of the king go out to the places “where a main street cuts (through) the city boundary and go (out) into the open country”³⁹ to invite anyone they can find as new wedding guests. The readers of Matthew’s Gospel are familiar with the Gentile mission as a historical and contemporary reality; they would surely have interpreted the substitute guests as a reference to the Gentile mission. Such an interpretation has a basis in the text on account of the reference to the banquet feast of the substitute guests in 22:8-10 and on account of the reference to the servants who “went out” (ἐξελθόντες).

In Jesus’ eschatological discourse, the last element of Matthew’s general description of the “signs” indicating that Jesus is coming back (24:4-14) is the feature that “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations” (24:14). The end of the world cannot come until the gospel has penetrated ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ οἰκουμένῃ, i.e. until the gospel has reached outside the Jewish world to “all the nations” (εἰς μαρτύριον πᾶσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν).⁴⁰

The first pericope of the passion narrative (26:6-27, 66), Jesus’ anointing at Bethany (26:6-13), ends with the pronouncement that “this gospel will be preached in the whole world” (26:13). The phrase ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ κόσμῳ is even more all-inclusive than the corresponding phrase in 24:14.⁴¹

The resurrection narrative (28:1-20) ends with Jesus declaring his universal authority and giving the disciples the commission to “make disciples of all nations” (μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη). The great commission is the last and therefore perhaps the most relevant definition of the λαός, whom Jesus will save according to the announcement of the angel (1:21). The identification of “his people” as people of all nations is the resolution of a theme that has been implied (2:1-12), predicted (8:11-12) and clarified (15:21-28) earlier in the Gospel.⁴²

This brief analysis leaves no doubt that Matthew has strong universalistic or missionary interests. Time and again he explicates or alludes to the significance of

³⁸ Ferdinand Hahn, *Das Verständnis der Mission im Neuen Testament* (WMANT 13; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1963), 28-29; Anton Vögtle, *Gott und seine Gäste. Das Schicksal des Gleichnisses Jesu vom großen Gastmahl* (Lukas 14,16b-24; Matthäus 22,2-14) (BthSt 29; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1996), 26-27; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:202; Luz, *Matthäus*, 3:237-38, 243-44.

³⁹ BDAG s.v. διεξοδος, 244; cf. W. Michaelis, *ThWNT* 5:112 (*TDNT* 5:108-109); G. Schneider, *EWNT* 1:776 (*EDNT* 1:322); Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:203.

⁴⁰ Cf. James W. Thompson, “The Gentile Mission as an Eschatological Necessity,” *RestQ* 14 (1971): 18-27.

⁴¹ Thus France, *Matthew*, 363.

⁴² Cf. Mark Allan Powell, “The Plot and Subplots of Matthew’s Gospel,” *NTS* 38 (1992): 187-204, here 196 n.27.

Jesus' life, ministry, death and resurrection that reaches beyond the villages of Galilee, indeed beyond the Jewish people.

2. *Theological Perspectives*

As we summarize the theological convictions of Matthew against this background, at least the following five points need to be emphasized.

First, Matthew describes Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection in a salvation-historical framework which has a universal perspective and which is focused on Jesus' person and ministry.⁴³ He begins his history of Jesus in 1:1 with Abraham and David and with the history of Israel condensed in the genealogy in 1:2-17, a history which culminates in Jesus the Son of David, the "Immanuel," the "God with us" (1:23)—the Son of God in whom God's presence in Israel has become a reality. Matthew concludes his story of Jesus with the commission to the Twelve to make all nations disciples of Jesus, continuing and expanding the ministry of Jesus while experiencing Jesus' presence (28:16-20).⁴⁴ As Florian Wilk observes, Matthew wants to strengthen his readers in the conviction that "the work that Jesus completes *for Israel* as 'Messiah' leads into his ministry *for the nations* as 'Son of Man.' Because Jesus is the son of Abraham who leads Israel's history of election to its goal and who thus fulfills God's promise to make Abraham into a 'large nation' that exists as a light for the nations. On the other hand, his ministry as Son of Man is based on his work as Messiah; Jesus is 'Lord' of the nations only on the basis of his mission to Israel."⁴⁵

Second, Matthew points out that according to Jesus, the responsibility for living as sons of Abraham has been transferred from Israel's leaders to the disciples. Several texts in Matthew's Gospel discuss the role of Israel, i.e. of the Jews, as sons of Abraham (3:7-12; 8:6-13; 21:33-44; 25:31-46). Jesus calls his contemporaries to live as Abraham's children and thus as light for the Gentiles. Since he is rejected by many, particularly Israel's leaders, he transfers this task to his disciples (21:33-44; 25:31-46).⁴⁶ Jesus' rejection by a majority does not imply, however, that Israel as a whole has been rejected: as Jesus was sent to Israel, so are the disciples (10:1-8). It is possible that the tension between particularism and universalism in Matthew's Gospel reflects the author's knowledge of Christians who struggle "to define and

⁴³ For the following comments see Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1494-95.

⁴⁴ Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1494-95; Wilk, *Jesus und die Völker*, 81-89.

⁴⁵ Wilk, *Jesus und die Völker*, 151.

⁴⁶ Wilk, *Jesus und die Völker*, 111-23; Köstenberger and O'Brien, *Salvation*, 108 and passim.

defend a Jewish Christianity to the Jews, on the one hand, and to realize their identity with gentile Christians, on the other hand”.⁴⁷

Third, Matthew understands Jesus as Israel’s Messiah and also as the Lord of the nations. Jesus’ mission to Israel is the basis for the disciples’ mission to the nations. This is implied in the narrative strategy of including stories about contacts of Jesus with Gentiles, and this is indicated in Jesus’ statements about Gentiles (2:1-12; 8:5-13; 8:28-34; 10:14-15; 11:20-24; 12:41-42; 15:21-28; 27:11-26; 27:27-54).⁴⁸

Fourth, Matthew sees the Twelve as responsible for the mission to Israel (10:5-42; 23:34, 37) and for the mission to the nations (22:2-14; 24:14; 26:13; 28:18-19). Jesus’ commission to go to “all nations” abrogates the restriction of missionary work to Israel (10:5), without excluding Israel from the mission of the disciples.⁴⁹ This is confirmed by the following five observations. 1. The term ἔθνη signifies in Mt 24:7; 24:14; 25:32 “all nations” without any restrictions.⁵⁰ 2. Jesus asserts in the immediate context of 28:19 that he has been given “all authority in heaven and on earth.” This claim, formulated on the background of Dan 7:13-14, permits no restriction of the missionary commission. 3. Matthew relates that Jesus gave his disciples unambiguous instructions, when he restricted their missionary work to the Jewish population of Galilee in Mt 10:5. After his resurrection, Jesus repealed this restriction. If he introduced at the same time a new restriction, then we would expect that Matthew related clear information concerning the exclusion of Israel from their sphere of missionary ministry. If Matthew replaces in 28:19 Israel with Gentiles, “the narrative expectation suggests that Matthew would prepare the Gentile mission among non-Jews with the help of unmistakable text signals . . . in order not to ask too much of the reader at the end.”⁵¹ 4. In Mt 10, Matthew does not report the return of the Twelve from their missionary work in Israel. This means in terms of the narrative structure of the Gospel of Matthew that the mission to Israel has not ended.⁵² 5. According to Matthew, Jesus experienced not only opposition

⁴⁷ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew* (WBC 33A-C; Dallas: Word, 1993/1995), 1:lxvi.

⁴⁸ Wilk, *Jesus und die Völker*, 133-46.

⁴⁹ Contra e.g. Levine, *Dimensions*, 186-92; Axel von Dobbeler, “Die Restitution Israels und die Bekehrung der Heiden. Das Verhältnis von Mt 10,5b.6 und Mt 28,18–20 unter dem Aspekt der Komplementarität. Erwägungen zum Standort des Matthäusevangeliums,” *ZNW* 91 (2000): 18–44, here 31-32. For a fuller discussion see Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 361-63.

⁵⁰ In Mt 4:15; 6:32; 10:5, 18; 12:18-21; 20:19 the term *ethnē* refers to non-Jews, i.e. “Gentiles;” the references in 20:25-26 and in 24:9 is unclear, but probably “all nations” are meant.

⁵¹ Günter Wasserberg, *Aus Israels Mitte - Heil für die Welt. Eine narrativ-exegetische Studie zur Theologie des Lukas* (BZNW 92; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1998), 204.

⁵² Peter Stuhlmacher, “Matt 28:16–20 and the Course of Mission in the Apostolic and Postapostolic Age,” in *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles* (ed. J. Adna & H. Kvalbein; WUNT 127; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2000), 17–43, here 30.

and rejection, but also acceptance and faith. There were thousands of sympathizers and followers in Galilee. This suggests that for Matthew there was a realistic hope for future missionary successes among the Jewish population. Thus, Matthew asserts in 28:18-19 that Israel is absorbed into the world of the nations; Israel's status of preeminence as the one and only people of God is relativized—there will be others who are added to God's people. We do not know whether this conclusion of the Gospel was shocking for Matthew's Jewish-Christian readers.⁵³ Matthew implies that Israel has fulfilled her salvation-historical role with the conclusion of the salvific work of Jesus the Messiah in his death on the cross, his resurrection and his exaltation to the right hand of God.

Several salvation-historical explanations have been advanced with regard to the relationship between the mission to Israel (10:5-6) and the mission to the nations (28:19). First, according to the “substitution model” (*Substitutionsmodell*) Matthew believed that the people of Israel have lost their salvation-historical status to the Gentile church: the sending of the disciples to Israel in ch. 10 is replaced by the commission to go to the nations in ch. 28. The reason for the substitution is Jesus' rejection by the Jews.⁵⁴ This explanation is implausible for several reasons. The most important argument against this view is that Matthew never speaks in general terms of the guilt of the Jews for the death of Jesus, and he never asserts that Israel as a whole has been rejected (the passages 21:43 and 27:25 are not to be interpreted in this sense). Second, the “delimitation model” (*Entschränkungsmodell*) interprets the commission of 28:19-20 as a revocation of the particularistic limitation of the missionary activity of the disciples who had been directed to minister only among Jews in 10:6. The disciples understood their commission to be an expansion of their earlier commission.⁵⁵ Florian Wilk relates the phrase πάντα τὰ ἔθνη in 28:19 to Gentiles, while asserting that this does not mean that one has to decide whether the missionary commission limited to Israel in 10:5-8 is expanded or repealed in 28:18-20,⁵⁶ since the overall concerns of Matthew show that the commission of 10:5-8 is

⁵³ Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:887; cf. also Peter Stuhlmacher, “Zur missionsgeschichtlichen Bedeutung von Mt 28,16–20,” *EvTh* 59 (1999): 108–29, 117 n. 52.

⁵⁴ Cf. R. Walker, *Die Heilsgeschichte im ersten Evangelium* (FRLANT 91; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), 1967, 145.

⁵⁵ Hahn, *Das Verständnis der Mission im Neuen Testament*, 111; Anton Vögtle, “Das christologische und ekklesiologische Anliegen von Mt 28,18–20,” *Studia Evangelica* 2 (1964): 266–94, here 284–85; Georg Strecker, *Der Weg der Gerechtigkeit. Untersuchungen zur Theologie des Matthäus* (3. Auflage; FRLANT 82; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971), 18; Hubert Frankemölle, *Jahwe-Bund und Kirche Christi: Studien zur Form- und Traditionsgeschichte des “Evangeliums” nach Matthäus* (2. Auflage; NTA NF 10; Münster: Aschendorff, 1984), 121; Gnilka, *Matthäusevangelium*, 1:362–63; 2:508–509; Alexander Sand, *Das Matthäus-Evangelium* (EdF; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1991), 596.

⁵⁶ Thus Luz, *Matthäus*, 2:92, who argues for the alternative view.

complemented in 28:19.⁵⁷ The disciples have “two different assignments: on the one hand, they are to gather Israel around Jesus as the messianic shepherd; on the other hand, they are called to integrate the nations into their own community as disciples of the Son of Man.” Wilk emphasizes that these two commissions are not unrelated: they are connected in Jesus as the one who commands both missions and in Abraham whose children they are, both as restored Israel and as converted Gentiles. It seems preferable, however, not to think of two commissions with two different assignments, as this might imply that the Twelve were expected to gather the Jewish followers of Jesus and the Gentile Christians in separate communities—a notion that would contradict the common status as descendants of Abraham. Wilk’s analysis demonstrates that scholars should consider whether 28:18-20 might not indeed be interpreted in terms of a single assignment: a commission to preach the good news to “all nations” which expands the commission of 10:5-8 as the scope of the disciples’ missionary ministry now includes both Jews and Gentiles. This leads us to the third solution. The “complementary model” (*Komplementaritätsmodell*) assumes that “early Christian ears” would not have heard tensions between 10:5-8 and 28:19-20. The sending to Israel and the sending to the Gentiles have different goals and different assignments. For Israel, the proclamation of the kingdom of God signifies the restoration of the people of God. For the Gentiles, the focus is on the conversion from dead idols to the living God.⁵⁸ The third explanation seems to account best for the evidence.

Matthew’s emphasis on the responsibility of the Twelve for the mission to Israel and the mission to the Gentiles means that the leadership in the churches, for which Matthew writes his Gospel, must not focus on teaching the followers of Jesus. Rather, an integral part of their responsibility is the outreach both to Jews and to polytheists. According to Matthew, “mission” in the literal sense of the word, involves being sent by Jesus to places where his message of the dawn of God’s kingdom has not yet been preached and made a reality, however provisional this reality might be.

Fifth, Matthew focuses on the authority of Jesus and on the teaching of Jesus in his programmatic final section which commissions the Twelve to go and make disciples of all nations (28:16-20). Both subjects had been highlighted in the previous sections of the Gospel. Ulrich Luz suggest that the call to teach the commandments of Jesus in 28:20 implies “an indirect but very important statement about the significance of the Matthean book” that contains Jesus’ commandments

⁵⁷ Wilk, *Jesus und die Völker*, 126-31, the following quotation *ibid.* 129.

⁵⁸ Dobbeler, “Die Restitution Israels und die Bekehrung der Heiden. Das Verhältnis von Mt 10,5b.6 und Mt 28,18–20 unter dem Aspekt der Komplementarität. Erwägungen zum Standort des Matthäusevangeliums”, especially 27-41.

“which are to be proclaimed as ‘gospel of the kingdom’ to all nations.” He argues that Matthew’s understanding of the missionary proclamation of the Christians “renders his book indispensable. We might speak of a ‘self-canonization’ *in nuce*.”⁵⁹ This interpretation remains unconvincing. There is no evidence in the last forty words of the Gospel of Matthew that would suggest that the author wanted to make his book indispensable: the First Gospel contains much more than “commandments of Jesus” that the disciples are directed in 28:20 to teach—Matthew’s book cannot be reduced to Jesus’ commandments. Clearly, however, Matthew’s conclusion to his Gospel reflects and describes the reality of the early Christian missionary movement, a reality that the author himself and the churches for whom he wrote his book are familiar with, a reality that is reinforced by the reference to the great missionary commission that remains valid for the church in the future.

3. *Historical Perspectives*

Matthew is clearly interested in the universal dimension of the faith of the followers of Jesus, and more particularly in the universal scope of their mission which is directed to Israel and to the Gentiles. When we evaluate this interest in the context of the realities of the early Christian missionary activity as it is described by Paul in the letters which he writes to churches that he has founded as a missionary, and as it is described by Luke in the second volume of his history of Jesus and his followers, it becomes quite evident that Matthew does not use his account of Jesus’ life and ministry to address let alone solve problems that arose in the context of the missionary activity of the churches. This fact should have given pause to redaction critics more often than not, whose theories were not infrequently quite removed from the actual historical situation of the churches in the second half of the first century.

The major problem of the early Christian missionary work was the status of the Gentiles in the ἐκκλησία, understood as the eschatological people of God.⁶⁰ Both Paul’s letters and the Book of Acts inform us that the question of whether converted Gentiles, whether God-fearers or polytheists, should be circumcised and follow the Mosaic stipulations concerning clean and unclean food (Acts 11:1-18; 15:1-35; Gal 2-3; Rom 3:28-31; 4:9-12; Col 2:20-22; Eph 2:11-22). In Matthew’s Gospel, these themes are not even hinted at. The redaction critics’ tendency to trace

⁵⁹ Luz, *Matthäus*, 4:455.

⁶⁰ On this understanding of ἐκκλησία see e.g. Jürgen Roloff, *Die Kirche im Neuen Testament* (Grundrisse zum Neuen Testament 10; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 83-85, 117-31, 192-207, 273-6, 282-5; on Matthew *ibid.* 148-60.

sayings of Jesus that Matthew reports as statements which Jesus uttered to the creative genius and to situational necessities of early Christian prophets completely fails at this point. I recognize that this is an *argumentum e silentio*, but in this case the silence of the First Gospel speaks rather loudly. It is possible, of course, to argue that Matthew's church was not involved in these debates which thus did not need to be addressed when he wrote his Gospel. This argument completely ignores the historical situation of the church in the first century. While we should not assume that every church was involved in the debates about circumcision and clean and unclean food, the fact that the church in Jerusalem—not only the first church but evidently for a long time also the largest and for many years certainly the most influential church—as well as the church in Antioch—another very influential church in the first century—had to deal with these matters which caused a rift between Peter and Paul,⁶¹ leaves no doubt that none of the leaders of the early church was unaware of these issues. An author who composes an extensive narrative of the life and work of Jesus and who has an overt interest in missionary activity would certainly leave no stone unturned to include in his narrative a word of Jesus that addresses these issues. The fact that Matthew provides no logion that addresses circumcision and the food laws⁶² suggests that early Christian prophets did not create such logia attributing them to Jesus, and it suggests that Matthew's narrative concerning Jesus' encounters with and statements about Gentiles deserves to be evaluated as historically reliable.

Another pertinent question is this: since mission involves an encounter with individuals, how would Matthew describe Jesus' encounters with individuals? The Book of Acts relates numerous conversion stories. Matthew is strikingly reticent when he describes Jesus' encounters with individual people. The encounters with some Jews leads to what one might call conversion; prime examples are the encounters with Galilean Jews who become his disciples (4:18-22; 8:9). In Matthew's story of the scribe who came to Jesus, saying "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go" (8:19), Jesus gives an answer that amounts to a refusal.⁶³ The encounters with Gentiles are positive, but Matthew never suggests that a Gentile "followed" Jesus. We have already pointed out the fact that in Matthew's version of

⁶¹ On the Antioch incident see the recent discussions of Lothar Wehr, *Petrus und Paulus - Kontrahenten und Partner. Die beiden Apostel im Spiegel des Neuen Testaments, der Apostolischen Väter und früher Zeugnisse ihrer Verehrung* (NTA 30; Münster: Aschendorff, 1996), 60-73; Markus Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches: Halakhah and the Beginning of Christian Public Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 49-83; Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1003-6.

⁶² References to cleanness occur only in connection with leprosy which makes unclean (8:1-4; 10:8; 11:5) and concerning demons who are called "unclean spirits" (10:1; 12:43).

⁶³ Cf. John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (3 vols.; Anchor Bible Reference Library; New York: Doubleday, 1991-2001) Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 3:50-54.

the healing of the Gerasene demoniac (8:28-34) he omits Mark's (and Luke's) reference to the request by the healed man to join Jesus' disciples and Jesus' response to "go home" (*oikos*, "house, family") and tell his family and friends "how much the Lord has done" and "what mercy" he was shown (Mk 5:18-19), i.e. a tradition that has Jesus directing a Gentile to proclaim among his (Gentile) family and friends the good news of the mercy that the God of Israel extends to the Gentiles,⁶⁴ singular in the Synoptic miracle tradition.⁶⁵ This clearly indicates that 8:28-34 is not a "missionary story".⁶⁶ While the text reflects Matthew's interest in the Gentiles, it does not explicitly promote outreach to non-Jews. Matthew's story about Jesus' encounter with the woman in Syro-Phoenicia (15:21-28) prompts W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison to assert correctly that this text "does not really solve anything" leaving "the status of the Gentiles hanging in the air."⁶⁷ While Matthew relates the fact that Jesus speaks of the faith of the women, as he spoke about the faith of the centurion (8:10), which is certainly conversion language, he does not use these opportunities to present pagans as followers of Jesus or to highlight Jesus' technique of convincing pagans to believe in Israel's God and in the significance of his mission as God's messianic son.

Similarly, the Book of Acts occasionally reports mass conversions (Acts 2:41; 4:4; cf. 21:20). Matthew's description of Jesus' effect on crowds is cautious—he usually only comments that they "followed" him (Mt 4:25; 8:1; 12:15; 14:13; 19:2; 21:9), which is certainly a positive statement but it is not conversion language.

When we compare Matthew's texts about "mission" with missionary texts in the Book of Acts and in Paul, there are naturally many points of contact: Jesus and his disciples travel from town to town and from village to village; they teach in synagogues; they speak before crowds; they converse with individuals; they address theological and ethical issues; they provide practical help for the sick; they experience opposition. This is what the apostles do as well. But the reality of the early Christian mission, particularly the outreach to Samaritans, proselytes, God-fearers and polytheists, as well as the theological debates that the Gentile mission provoked, is *not* reflected on the pages of Matthew's Gospel. The most plausible historical conclusion contends that Matthew was very careful to distinguish between the time of Jesus before Easter and the time of the apostles after Easter. Matthew did not write a theological tract under the guise of a historical narrative,

⁶⁴ Cf. Zenji Kato, *Die Völkermission im Markusevangelium: Eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (EHS.T 252; Frankfurt/Bern: Lang, 1986), 59.

⁶⁵ Cf. Pesch, *Markusevangelium*, 1:293.

⁶⁶ Thus the classification of Mk 5:1-20 by Pesch, *Markusevangelium*, 1:293; note, however, the arguments against this view advanced by Annen, *Heil*, 187.

⁶⁷ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2:543, 544.

surreptitiously attempting to solve matters that were debated among his peers. Matthew certainly wrote as a theologian who had an intense interest in the universal mission of the church; indeed, he may have been personally involved in missionary activity, leading people to faith in Jesus Christ and establishing churches. But Matthew also wrote as a historian who knew that Jesus focused his proclamation of the dawn of God's kingdom on Israel. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the commission that is traditionally called the "great commission" is the conclusion of the First Gospel.

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