Matthew

CHARLES H. TALBERT
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Foreword

*Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament* is a series that sets out to comment on the final form of the New Testament text in a way that pays due attention both to the cultural, literary, and theological settings in which the text took form and to the interests of the contemporary readers to whom the commentaries are addressed. This series is aimed squarely at students—including MA students in religious and theological studies programs, seminarians, and upper-divisional undergraduates—who have theological interests in the biblical text. Thus, the didactic aim of the series is to enable students to understand each book of the New Testament as a literary whole rooted in a particular ancient setting and related to its context within the New Testament.

The name “Paideia” reflects (1) the instructional aim of the series—giving contemporary students a basic grounding in academic New Testament studies by guiding their engagement with New Testament texts; (2) the fact that the New Testament texts as literary unities are shaped by the educational categories and ideas (rhetorical, narratological, etc.) of their ancient writers and readers; and (3) the pedagogical aims of the texts themselves—their central aim being not simply to impart information but to form the theological convictions and moral habits of their readers.

Each commentary deals with the text in terms of larger rhetorical units; these are not verse-by-verse commentaries. This series thus stands within the stream of recent commentaries that attend to the final form of the text. Such reader-centered literary approaches are inherently more accessible to liberal arts students without extensive linguistic and historical-critical preparation than older exegetical approaches, but within the reader-centered world the sanest practitioners have paid careful attention to the extratext of the original readers, including not only these readers’ knowledge of the geography, history, and other context elements reflected in the text but also their ability to respond.
Foreword

correctly to the literary and rhetorical conventions used in the text. Paideia commentaries pay deliberate attention to this extratextual repertoire in order to highlight the ways in which the text is designed to persuade and move its readers. Each rhetorical unit is explored from three angles: (1) introductory matters; (2) tracing the train of thought or narrative or rhetorical flow of the argument; and (3) theological issues raised by the text that are of interest to the contemporary Christian. Thus, the primary focus remains on the text and not its historical context or its interpretation in the secondary literature.

Our authors represent a variety of confessional points of view: Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Greek Orthodox. What they share, beyond being New Testament scholars of national and international repute, is a commitment to reading the biblical text as theological documents within their ancient contexts. Working within the broad parameters described here, each author brings his or her own considerable exegetical talents and deep theological commitments to the task of laying bare the interpretation of scripture for the faith and practice of God’s people everywhere.

Mikeal C. Parsons
Charles H. Talbert
What! Another commentary on Matthew? After decades of relative neglect, the First Gospel has in recent times been the object of intense scrutiny. Numerous very good commentaries have appeared: Davies and Allison (1988–97), Luz (1989–2005), Hagner (1993–95), Gundry (1982), Harrington (1991), Boring (1995), Carter (2000), Nolland (2005), Schnackenburg (2002), Gnilka (1986–88), Bonnard (1963), and Turner (2008), to mention only a few. When I reluctantly accepted the invitation from Baker Academic to do the volume on Matthew in the new Paideia series and began to read the recent commentaries and other secondary source materials, I wondered, Why does another need to be done? The level of accomplishment in these recent commentaries is very high. When I started through the Greek text of the First Gospel and tried to make systematic sense of Matthew’s narrative world, however, I found myself arriving at what seemed to be a “fresh” approach in nearly every section of the Gospel. It was then that I finally felt another commentary might be in order. What is offered here is an attempt at a fresh reading of the First Gospel, done hopefully with lucid brevity, that is accessible to upper-level undergraduates, seminarians, graduate students, pastors, and teachers.

The secondary literature on Matthew is enormous. A person could spend a career trying to master it. I am very grateful both to Baylor graduate students who in two seminars on Matthew did in-depth histories of research on key segments of the Gospel and to a couple of advanced undergraduate classes at Baylor that did similar surveys of periodical literature for me. Special thanks must go to several graduate assistants who did summer research assignments on ancient parables, miracle stories, conflict stories, and yes, the collection of even more periodical bibliography. Jim McConnell, Alicia Myers, Kalvin Budiman, and especially Jesse Robertson and Julien Smith, thank you for your indispensable efforts on behalf of this project. Thanks must also go to...
Preface

David Oakley, my graduate assistant for 2008–9, who did the work for the abbreviations, and to Tim Brookins, my current graduate assistant, who prepared the subject index. I also owe a lasting debt to my former colleague, Dr. Sharyn Dowd, who allowed me to teach her doctoral seminar on the Synoptic Gospels twice while she accepted responsibility for my Pauline seminar. It was but another of her gracious efforts on my behalf. It is not possible to express the depth of my appreciation to Dr. Stephen von Wyrick of the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor for his generous act of making available images for this volume from his large collection of pictures of biblical lands. Because recent commentaries by John Nolland (2005) and Craig Keener (1999) contain extensive bibliographies and because of the cumulative bibliography on Matthew and Q edited by F. Neirynck, J. Verheyden, and R. Corstjens (1998), I have chosen to include only a limited bibliography and to document in a representative, rather than an exhaustive, way. I hope my documentation and bibliography are enough to indicate my grounding in current research and to give an interested reader a lead into further study.


I am deeply indebted to my wife, Dr. Betty W. Talbert, director of spiritual formation at George W. Truett Seminary of Baylor University, for graciously allowing me to withdraw from family responsibilities for three successive summers and to think of one thing only: Matthew. Without her usual generosity, this project would never have reached completion.

Charles H. Talbert
Easter 2009
Introduction

This introduction will consist of three main sections: first, a brief survey of the type of historical questions usually associated with such introductions; second, a discussion of Matthean soteriology that provides the lens through which to read the First Gospel correctly; and third, a clarification of the commentary’s methodological assumptions.

Literary Issues

Authorship

Who wrote the Gospel of Matthew? The external evidence links the First Gospel and Matthew, one of the Twelve. Near the middle of the second century, Papias told what he thought about the authorship of Mark. It was followed by this statement: “Matthew composed the Sayings [logia] in the Hebrew language, and everyone translated them as he was able” (Eusebius, Hist. eccl. 3.39.16, author trans.). At the end of the second century, Pantaenus of Alexandria gave his opinion. When he went to India, he found the Gospel of Matthew had preceded him. Bartholomew, one of the apostles, he says, had preached there and had left the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew (Eusebius, Hist. eccl. 5.10.3). Irenaeus, near AD 180, says that Matthew wrote “a gospel . . . for the Hebrews in their own language” (Haer. 3.1.1, author trans.). Jerome wrote: “Matthew, also called Levi, . . . was the first in Judea to write a Gospel of Christ in Hebrew for those of the circumcision who believed; who translated it later into Greek, no one knows for sure” (Vir. ill. 3, author trans.). Ancient tradition was unanimous. Modern historical scholarship is dubious. The Greek Gospel of Matthew does not appear to be a translation from Hebrew or Aramaic. If, as most think, it uses the Gospel of Mark and Q as sources,
then it did not come from an eyewitness. The Gospel itself makes no claim about authorship (as John 21:24 does). Modern scholars regard it properly as an anonymous writing. One recent debate over whether its author was a Christian Jew (most scholars) or a Christian gentile (e.g., Nepper-Christensen 1954; Strecker 1962; Meier 1979; Sato 2001) has pretty well been settled in favor of the former claim. Another current argument over whether there was one author or the Gospel was produced by a group, as a school product (e.g., Stendahl 1968; Gale 2005), remains undecided.

**Date**

When was the First Gospel written? There have been recent arguments for a pre-70 date (e.g., Hagner 1995; Gamba 1998; Nolland 2005). Despite their claims, the general consensus is that Matthew was written after 70, most likely between 80 and 100.

**Locale**

Where was Matthew written? It “was situated in an urban environment, perhaps in Galilee or perhaps more toward the north in Syria but, in any case, not necessarily Antioch” (the words of J. Kingsbury, in Balch 1991, 264). Although Antioch of Syria has long been the preferred locale, it could have been Sephoris, Caesarea Maritima, Tiberius, Tyre, Sidon, Damascus, or less likely Pella across the Jordan (Viviano 2007, 4). Alexandria and Edessa are also improbable options.

**Recipients**

For whom was this Gospel produced? The long-standing consensus is that Matthew was produced for a community (a cluster of like-minded congregations in a limited geographical area; e.g., Stendahl 1968; Gale 2005; Riches and Sim 2005). Recently, some have recommended that we see the four canonical Gospels as written, not each for its own community, but for all Christians (e.g., Bauckham 1998). Richard Bauckham’s thesis is most plausible for Luke-Acts, impossible for the Fourth Gospel (because of the evidence of the Johannine Epistles), and less likely for Matthew. Even if it were written in the context of a specific community, however, it would not likely have been designed for that locale only. The Shepherd of Hermas (Herm. Vis. 2.4.3) indicates that by the time Matthew was written, even if one copy of a Christian writing was designed for a church in a local area, other copies would be sent to sister churches abroad for their edification.

Numerous efforts have been made to describe the Matthean community. In 1991, the volume edited by David Balch yielded the following descriptors: in an urban location, including gentiles but mostly Jews, considering itself a sect within Judaism, whose biblical interpretation reflects scribal culture.
A description of its social location has been attempted by Evert-Jan Vledder (1997), who discerns the following strata in advanced agrarian societies:

Urban elite: The top layer (possessing land and office), e.g., the Roman governor, Jewish chief priest, and Sanhedrin
Retainer class: Those who serve the political elite, e.g., tax collectors, Pharisees, and scribes
Urban nonelite: Merchants and artisans, e.g., Joseph the carpenter and fishermen like Peter, Andrew, James, and John
The degraded and expendable classes (outside the city walls): E.g., tanners, lepers, beggars, and robbers
Peasants: E.g., slaves and tenants

Matthew’s community was composed mostly of the nonelite. The author(s) of the First Gospel belonged to the retainer class (scribes), as did the community’s leaders. The community’s opponents were mostly from the ruling and retainer classes. Matthew’s community regarded itself as Jewish. It was a Christian Judaism, one species of the genus Judaism (Boccaccini 1991). Since Matthew’s community was still within Judaism, the conflicts reflected in Matthew’s Gospel were real and intense. Another front on which the Gospel fought was against Roman imperial ideology and power (Riches and Sim 2005). Though the Gospel may be understood within two contexts (Jewish and Roman), it is difficult to see the Roman imperial setting as equally central to Matthew’s concerns.

Sources

What sources did the First Evangelist use? Although its dominance has been challenged, the two-source theory continues to be the preferred explanation for Matthew’s sources. Mark and Q plus oral tradition, M, provide material for the First Evangelist to interpret. Of late, this source theory has been seen through fresh eyes. Gerad Genette (1982) provides one new perspective, using the categories “hypertext” and “pretext” or “hypotext.” A hypertext is a secondary text that is written entirely on the basis of a preceding pretext/hypotext but without being a formal commentary on its pretext/hypotext. For example, Virgil’s Aeneid is a hypertext to Homer’s Odyssey. Viewed through this lens, Mark is a pretext/hypotext for Matthew’s hypertext. Matthew is a secondary text written on the basis of its predecessor Mark but not as a commentary on Mark. Another new perspective for viewing the two-source theory is voiced by John Riches (2000, 304–5): Matthew retold the story found in Mark in a way analogous to the retelling of Genesis by Jubilees, Josephus (Ant.), Pseudo-Philo (L.A.B.), and the Genesis Apocryphon (1QapGen ar). The First Gospel, then, belongs to a category like rewritten Bible.
Introduction

Genre

To what genre does Matthew belong? The preponderance of recent opinion places the canonical Gospels within the genre of ancient biography (Burridge 1992; Talbert 1977). Within that larger circle, Matthew seems to be an encomiastic biography (written to praise its hero; Neyrey 1998; Shuler 1982) that also aims to defend its hero against attack. A gospel, then, is not a unique literary type but a Christian version of an ancient Mediterranean genre that focused on an individual’s life with the aim of exposing what was essential to that person’s being.

Plot

What is the plot of Matthew? While arguments about what exactly is meant by “plot” continue (e.g., Merenlahti 2002), of the three main efforts to describe the First Gospel’s plot (Matera 1987; Kingsbury 1992; Powell 1992), Mark Powell’s suggestion has found the greatest support (e.g., Branden 2006, 90–114). He argues that Matthew’s narrative embodies one main plot and at least two subplots. The main plot is God’s plan to save his people from their sins. This effort is opposed by Satan. Subplot one, derivative of the main plot, involves Jesus’s activity and its opposition at every turn by the religious leaders. Subplot two, also derivative of the main plot, consists of Jesus’s efforts in relation to his disciples. They assist in the accomplishment of the first part of God’s plan but hinder the accomplishment of the second part. Matthew’s plot, then, concerns the saving activity of God enacted through the narrative’s main character, Jesus. Only the main plot is resolved favorably. After the resurrection, Jewish opposition continues and some disciples continue to doubt.

Arrangement

How is the First Gospel organized? The obvious answer is that Matthew follows a rough chronological sequence: birth, baptism, Galilean ministry, journey to Jerusalem, and Jerusalem ministry leading to Jesus’s death and resurrection. This was one of the ways to structure an encomiastic biography (Neyrey 1998, citing Quintilian, Inst. 3.7.15). Beyond this fact, various options have been proposed.

1. Matthew consists of five discourses (5:1–7:29; 9:36–11:1; 13:1–52; 17:25–18:35; 24:3–26:1), each preceded by a narrative section that is linked to the subsequent sayings and each closed by a similar refrain (“and when Jesus had finished”). Birth narratives open the Gospel (chaps. 1–2), and the passion and resurrection narratives close it (chaps. 26–28). (Bacon 1930, e.g., associated this structure with a theory that it paralleled the five books of Moses and constituted a new law. This association has been widely critiqued.)
2. The First Gospel is arranged in a chiastic pattern (e.g., Lohr 1961; Fenton 1959): (A) chaps. 1–4; (B) chaps. 5–7; (C) chaps. 8–9; (D) chap. 10; (E) chaps. 11–12; (F) chap. 13; (E') chaps. 14–17; (D') chap. 18; (C') chaps. 19–22; (B') chaps. 23–25; (A') chaps. 26–28. (Cf. M. Thompson 1982 for a critique.)

3. Matthew is divided into three segments (1:1–4:16—the person of Jesus; 4:17–16:20—the proclamation of Jesus; and 16:21–28:20—the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus) signaled by the repetition of the phrase apo tote ἔρχατο ho Ἰησοῦς (from then Jesus began) in 4:17 and 16:21. (See Kingsbury 1989; cf. Neirynck 1988 for a critique.)

4. The Gospel consists of six units: 1:1–4:16 (God initiates the story of Jesus); 4:17–11:1 (Jesus manifests God’s saving presence in his public ministry of preaching and healing); 11:2–16:20 (Jesus’s action reveals his identity, necessitating a response from humans); 16:21–20:34 (Jesus teaches his disciples that God’s purposes involve his death and resurrection); 21:1–27:66 (in Jerusalem, Jesus is rejected by Jewish leaders and dies at their hands); 28:1–20 (God’s saving purposes are not thwarted). (So Carter 1992; as far as I know, no one else has yet supported this proposal.)


6. The First Evangelist did not think in terms of any fixed arrangement. There is no grand scheme to be found. The Gospel is structurally mixed (so Gundry 1982, 10–11; Hagner 1993, 1:liii).

W. D. Davies and Dale Allison (1988, 1:61) conclude their survey of the structural options: “The alternation in Matthew between narrative and discourse is firmly established, as is the number of major discourses, five. . . . These two certainties constitute the foundation stone upon which all further discussion must build.” Recent commentaries reflect this view (e.g., Fiedler 2006; Turner 2008). It is therefore upon these two certainties that this commentary’s reading of the First Gospel will build.

This volume’s understanding of the First Gospel’s organization is represented in the accompanying outline. One distinctive here is the recognition of two places where the narratives are divided into two parts. Also, as the second part of this introduction will show, this recognition of five discourses
Introduction

is not associated with the claim that the
First Gospel is a new Pentateuch and Je-
sus’s teaching a new law. There is, however,
throughout the Gospel a Mosaic typology
(Allison 1993). This typology is a part of
Matthew’s focus on the typological fulfill-
ment of sacred history, not a contention
that Jesus brings a new law.

Would the ancient auditor have been
aware of compositional arrangements in
a text such as Matthew’s (assuming that
they are present in the Gospel)? Cicero
gives his opinion:

Everybody is able to discriminate be-
tween what is right and wrong in mat-
ters of art and proportion by a sort of
subconscious instinct, without having
any theory of art and proportion of their
own . . . because these are rooted deep
in the general sensibility, and nature has
decreed that nobody shall be entirely de-
void of these faculties. . . . It is remark-
able how little difference there is between
the expert and the plain man as critics.
(De or. 3.50.195, 197, trans. Sutton and
Rackham 1942)

This commentary will assume, with Cic-
ero, that the auditors of the Gospel would
indeed have been conscious of the patterning
of the narrative and the discourses, even
if these auditors were uneducated in a clas-
sical sense.

Purpose

What is the purpose of the Gospel? As
long as a redactional-critical method held
sway in NT studies, the general method of
scholarship was to look for various ten-
dencies and motifs in a Gospel and then
to infer that some problem in the editor’s
milieu was a catalyst for each tendency
and motif. In that case, if one isolated a

An Outline of Matthew

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth narratives (1:1–2:23)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jesus’s ministry begins (3:1–8:1)</td>
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<td><strong>Narrative</strong> Jesus begins to fulfill all righteousness (3:1–4:17)</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Discourse</strong> Jesus reflects on the divided response (13:1–53)</td>
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<td>Jesus focuses on his disciples (13:54–19:2)</td>
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<td><strong>Narrative</strong> Jesus’s disciples understand more (13:54–16:20)</td>
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<td><strong>Narrative</strong> Jesus’s disciples understand even more (16:21–17:23)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Discourse</strong> Jesus tells disciples how to relate to insiders and outsiders (17:24–19:2)</td>
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<td>Jesus and judgment (19:3–26:1a)</td>
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<td><strong>Narrative</strong> Jesus pronounces about judgment in the present (21:1–24:2)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Discourse</strong> Jesus teaches about final judgment (24:3–26:1a)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Passion and resurrection narrative (26:1b–28:20)</td>
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</table>
dozen tendencies/motifs in Matthew, then the Gospel could be said to have a
dozen purposes. This eventually was recognized as so absurd that perspective
shifted. Given our limited knowledge, there would be no way to sort out such
a mixture. These days the four canonical Gospels are viewed not as occasional
writings responding to current problems but as foundation documents that
might reflect awareness of problems past, present, and (potentially) future. A
foundation document would provide the basic values upon which the readers’
lives would be based and by which their lives would be evaluated. It would
provide them their identity as followers of Jesus. In this light, the Gospel of
Matthew’s purpose is to form the Christian identity and character of its read-
ers. If so, then how does it do that? This question leads to the second part of
this introduction: Matthean soteriology.

Matthean Soteriology

In virtually all NT scholarship it is believed that, at least to some degree, the
relation of the indicative (gift) and imperative (demand) in Matthew constitutes
a theological problem for Christians. A spectrum of representative opinion
will indicate some of the shades of judgment about this issue. (For what fol-
lows, cf. Talbert 2001.)

The Perceived Problem

Some scholars contend that Matthew is legalistic. Willi Marxsen (1993) is
typical. He contrasts two types of ethics. On the one hand, if God is conceived
of as one who sets requirements and makes his relationship with people depen-
dent on their fulfilling these requirements, then the practice of ethics promises
realization of the relationship. It is assumed that humans are capable of meeting
the admission requirements. On the other hand, if God is conceived of as one
who has already come to humans with love—without any precondition—then
the relationship already exists and humans can act (ethics), out of gratitude. It
is assumed that humans can act rightly only if they are enabled by God’s prior
act. The former type (God sets requirements), Marxsen thinks, is a Pharisaic
ethic; the latter (God comes with love) is a Christian ethic. Marxsen believes,
moreover, that Matthew represents the first type of ethic. Matthew’s imperative,
then, consists of admission requirements for entering the kingdom of heaven.
Marxsen says, further, that to avoid this conclusion, one must demonstrate
that Matthew undergirds the imperatives with an indicative that enables the
doer to follow the imperatives. He does not believe this can be done. That is,
Matthew’s demand/imperative constitutes God’s requirement of humans if
they are to attain a relationship with him. There is no prior indicative/gift/
brace that bestows a relation, unconditionally, quite apart from human per-
formance and to which human performance can respond.
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Marxsen’s position is problematic on two counts. On the one hand, Matthew clearly sees a person’s entering into Jesus’s community as due to divine initiative. The disciples are called (4:18–22) before Jesus gives the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 28:19–20 specifies that the nations are to be made disciples and baptized before they are taught to observe all that Jesus commanded. That the kingdom has been inaugurated in Jesus’s ministry (12:28) means that repentance (4:17) is a response to a prior act of God. Matthew is clearly not legalism. A divine indicative enables one’s entry into the community of Jesus’s disciples. On the other hand, Marxsen represents a perspective on Pharisaic Judaism that is pre–E. P. Sanders, or for that matter pre–G. F. Moore. Most modern scholars would regard a Pharisaic ethic not as legalism (in which one gets into the covenant relation by works of law) but as covenantal nomism (in which one gets into the covenant by grace and obeys the law thereafter out of gratitude). To such scholars, Marxsen’s description of the second type of ethic (his Christian one) sounds much like the covenantal nomism many modern scholars associate with Pharisaic Judaism.

The issue of Matthew’s ethic is better focused by certain other scholars (e.g., Eskola 1997; Laato 1995) as to whether or not Matthew represents legalistic covenantal nomism (in which one enters the covenant relation by grace and then stays in it and enters the age to come by works of law). This legalistic covenantal nomism is seen in contrast to a new covenant piety, in which God or Christ or the Holy Spirit enables one to be obedient in an ongoing way after one is in the covenant relation. That is, in new covenant piety one enters the relation by grace, stays in the relation by grace, and enters the age to come by grace. In this view, the life of a disciple is by grace from start to finish. This grace is not a substitute for obedience to God’s will but enables it. The question must be refined beyond Marxsen’s statement of it. Properly put, the issue is this: does Matthew see the imperative as admissions requirements, either initially into Jesus’s community or ultimately into the age to come, that humans must meet in order to gain either or both of these benefits? For the reasons cited above, most scholars today believe that entry into Jesus’s community is by grace. The current debate is over what follows in the disciple’s life. Is there an indicative that underlies and enables fulfillment of the imperative in disciples’ lives after their entry into the community of Jesus?

Other scholars believe that Matthew reflects covenantal nomism. That is, Matthew employs an indicative/grace for the disciple to enter the relationship but has no developed notion of grace for staying in or entering the age to come. Petri Luomanen (1998b) represents this stance. He speaks of Matthew as reflecting a defective covenantal nomism. He contends that Matthew wanted to understand Jesus’s proclamation within the framework of traditional covenantal nomism and so pass it on to his Jewish contemporaries. There are differences, of course, between Matthew’s content and that of non-Christian Judaism, but from a structural point of view, Matthew has much in common with covenantal
nomism. God’s election forms the starting point. This grace enables one to join
the people of God. It remains a presupposition, however, that is not spelled
out. Jesus’s atonement, which is restricted to enabling one to stay in the people
of God rather than to initial inclusion, functions very much as sacrifice did in
non-Christian Jewish covenantal nomism. This is an aid to one’s staying in. It
is part of the synergism of staying in the people of God and entering the age
to come. This position is subject to the criticisms of people like Timo Eskola
(1997) and Timo Laato (1995), who regard synergism in the postentry period as
legalistic covenantal nomism. If Matthew represents covenantal nomism, then
the indicative allows one to join the people of God but is not solely responsible
for one’s staying in, or for entering the age to come.

Another group of scholars believe that Matthew has both an indicative and
an imperative but that the former does not control the latter. At least three
shades of opinion must be noted:

1. Some see the imperative as explicit in Matthew but the indicative as
   only implicit. Roger Mohrlang (1984) is representative of this opinion.
   He is concerned with the question of how the concept of grace enters
   into Matthew’s understanding of ethics. He summarizes:

   Matthew does not exploit this assumed structure of grace, and does not
   build his ethics explicitly upon it (rarely is ethical behavior motivated by
   considerations of grace); for the most part, it remains in the background,
   simply taken for granted—the largely unspoken context in which the
   Gospel is set. (80)

   Subsequent summary statements add clarification. “The concept of
   Jesus’s continuing presence with the community is as little explicitly
   integrated with the evangelist’s ethics as his view of the Spirit” (112).
   Further, Matthew’s Gospel, with its emphasis on demand and obedi-
   ence, results in a Gospel “almost totally devoid of explicit reference to
   God’s aid in the moral-ethical realm” (114). For scholars who hold this
   view, only the imperative is explicit; the indicative is merely implicit.

2. Others believe that both indicative and imperative are present in Mat-
   thew but that the link between them is not clearly spelled out (e.g.,
   Luz 1995). The miracle stories, for example, have a central function of
   announcing salvation (the indicative) in the earthly career of Jesus. It is
   not the kerygma of the death and resurrection of Jesus that conveys the
   indicative in Matthew, however; it is the abiding presence of Jesus in the
   community. Jesus’s ethics constitute the imperative. Both components,
   indicative and imperative, stand together, but their relationship is not
   clearly defined. It is not apparent how demand and gift belong together.
   This is a weakness in Matthew’s theology.
3. David Seeley (1994, 21–52) argues that Matthew contains multiple perspectives that cannot be blended into a smooth unity. On the one hand, there is the claim that Jesus’s atoning death provides salvation: Jesus is the one who brings salvation. On the other hand, there is a focus on Jesus as the spokesperson who describes a way of life to be followed. In this perspective, salvation does not involve Jesus. It takes place between a person and God the Father. Whether it occurs or not depends on the person’s own initiative. There is no need for Jesus’s atoning death. Jesus is, however, the end-time judge who decides on the basis of a person’s deeds in this life. There is nothing that would lead one to see the first perspective as the underlying structure embracing all else. So in Matthew, the emphasis on the law is very much at odds with the parts of Matthew that focus on Jesus as redeemer. Matthew never consolidates these two portraits of Jesus presented by the building blocks he has used. “We can see Matthew wrestling with his traditions, and we can see them wrestling back. In this case, they seem to have won the match” (52). Matthew never quite brings the two, the indicative and the imperative, together. “They are . . . there, like an unharmonious choir demanding to be heard” (52).

Yet another group of scholars see indicative and imperative as present in Matthew and attempt to explain how the indicative has priority. Hubert Frankemölle (1997, 2:552–60) and David Kupp (1996) represent this stance. Both affirm that the concept of Jesus’s presence with the disciples, rooted in the OT view of God’s compassionate and caring presence among his people, is Matthew’s leading idea. Out of the God-with-us theme, Matthew’s entire plot is constituted. The expressions “with us/you” and “in your midst” are synonyms both in the OT and in Matthew. Over one hundred occurrences of this formula are found in the OT, mostly in the historical books and with individuals, though sometimes with the whole people. It mostly drops out of use in postbiblical Judaism. The formula signals empowerment of God’s people. This expression applied to Jesus (1:23; 18:20; 28:19–20) is part of Matthew’s Christology and makes possible his soteriology. This is a significant advance toward understanding the relation of indicative and imperative in Matthew. It enables one to see how God is present in Jesus; how Jesus is present with the disciples or in their midst; how this presence enables both church discipline (18:20) and mission (28:20). On at least these two fronts, the indicative is clearly prior to the imperative, and God’s grace explicitly enables his people’s obedient response in the period subsequent to their entry into Jesus’s community. In the form in which it is presented, however, the proposed quilt is too small to cover the whole Matthean bed. Where, for example, is the indicative that covers ethical activity of the disciple? More work needs to be done in the direction in which these scholars are pointing.
It is usually thought, then, that Matthew emphasizes the imperative at the expense of the indicative, demand over gift. If one wanted to falsify this perception, what would be necessary? Two things at least. First, one would need to identify Matthew’s indicative, if there is one. Second, one would need to show how this indicative controls Matthew’s imperative. In the pages that follow, these two points will be pursued.

**Identifying Matthew’s Indicative**

How would one recognize Matthew’s indicative, if there is one? It seems obvious that Matthew does not operate in the Pauline conceptual world (e.g., divine indwelling). Could it be that there are other conceptual worlds besides those used by Paul for speaking about divine enablement of human activity? If so, then the failure to recognize Matthew’s indicative may be due to the reader’s failure to recognize the First Evangelist’s conceptual repertoire. It is my contention that Matthew has a strong indicative if one knows where to look. An attempt to clarify Matthew’s conceptual world needs to indicate both (1) the type of narrative approach he uses and (2) at least some of the techniques employed in such an approach. We begin with the type of narrative approach used.

Matthew begins and ends his Gospel with narratives that attest repeated divine inbreaks into human affairs. Here God very much has the initiative, and humans respond. For example, the birth narratives begin with a miraculous conception of Jesus (1:18), about which Joseph is reassured by an angel of the Lord (1:20–21). The wise men from the East are directed to Jesus by a miraculous star (2:2) and are sent on their way by a warning in a dream (2:12). Joseph is warned by an angel of the Lord to flee to Egypt (2:13). After Herod’s death, an angel tells Joseph it is safe to return to Israel (2:19–20). At the end of the Gospel, when Jesus dies, the earth shakes, rocks split, and bodies of saints are raised and appear to many in Jerusalem (27:51–53). In connection with the stories of Jesus’s resurrection, there is a great earthquake, and an angel descends from heaven, rolls back the stone from before the tomb (28:2), frightens the soldiers nearly to death (28:4), and tells the women that Jesus has been raised (28:6). The beginning and ending of the First Gospel are full of explicit divine interventions into human affairs. The main body of the Gospel, which contains the five big teaching sections (Matt. 5–25), is narrated in a very different way. Especially when the text concerns disciples’ obedience to the teachings of Jesus, divine intervention appears to be either absent or well hidden in the background. Hence the problem about the indicative and the imperative in the First Gospel.

There are different ways to explain such shifts in the narrative. Gerhard von Rad (1962, 1:52–53) tries to understand the different approaches to God’s action in history in OT narrative by setting up a dichotomy between an early view and a later one. The older idea of God’s action in history involves Yahweh’s...
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immediate visible and audible intervention (e.g., Gen. 28:17; similar to the beginning and ending of Matthew’s Gospel). A later idea dispenses with any outwardly perceptible influence of Yahweh on history. God’s guidance comes in hidden ways (e.g., the narrative of the wooing of Rebecca, the Joseph stories, Ruth, the history of the succession to David; more like Matt. 5–25). A new way of picturing Yahweh’s action in history led to a new technique in narrative.

An era which no longer experienced Yahweh’s working mainly in the sacral form of miracles . . . could therefore no longer satisfactorily express its faith in a sacral narrative-form. . . . Nature and History . . . became secularized, and was as it were, overnight released from the sacral orders sheltering it. In consequence, the figures in stories now move in a completely demythologized and secular world. . . . In order to show Yahweh at work, these story-tellers have no need of wonders or the appearance of charismatic leaders—events develop apparently in complete accord with their own inherent character. (von Rad 1962, 1:56)

Psychological processes (e.g., Saul’s love-hate relation with David) dominate in a world that has slipped into the habit of looking on human affairs in such a secular way.

Meir Sternberg (1985, 106) is surely right, however, when he notes that in the Hebrew Bible the books mix overt and implicit guidance by God. The difference in style is due not to a historical development in the way God’s activity in the world was seen but to a “compositional alternative of treatment, in the interests of plotting and variety” (106). Take Genesis, for example. Genesis starts out with “God said, and it was so.” This has a long-range effect on one’s perceptual set.

It develops a first impression of a world controlled by a prime mover and coherent to the exclusion of accident. Reinforced at strategic junctures by later paradigms and variants, it also enables the narrative to dispense with the continual enactment of divine intervention that would hamper suspense and overschematize the whole plot. (105)

This way of dealing with the divine activity (indicative) he calls “omnipotence behind the scenes.” It is seen at work in the stories about Joseph and about David’s accession to the throne. In the NT, other scholars have seen the same technique in the activities of Paul in Acts 23–28, for example. I suggest, then, that we look for techniques appropriate to a narrative style that often deals in “omnipotence behind the scenes.” It is this type of narrative that one encounters in Matt. 5–25, insofar as disciples are concerned. It is, therefore, for techniques that allow the evangelist to speak in terms of “omnipotence behind the scenes” that one should search.

At least four techniques in Matthew fit such a method of narration: (1) I am with you/in your midst; (2) invoking the divine name; (3) it has been revealed
to you/you have been given to know; and (4) being with Jesus. Each of these
devices will be examined in order.

*God with us.* Let us begin with the formula “with you” or “in your midst,”
a technique of speaking about divine enablement that has been the subject
of some discussion in NT circles. The definitive work on the formula is by
W. C. van Unnik (1959, 270–305). He examined the more than one hundred
passages using this formula in the LXX and grouped them in about six cat-
egories. He noted that the formula is found rarely in Psalms and Prophets
but frequently in the Historical Books (i.e., in narrative). It is used mostly
with individuals but sometimes with the nation. It involves the empowering
or enabling of someone or some group involved in a divine task. Certain
ey early Christian writers also used the formula (e.g., Luke 1:28; Acts 7:9–10;
10:38; 18:9–10; John 3:2; 8:29; 14:16–17; 16:32; Rom. 15:33; 2 Cor. 13:11;
Phil. 4:9; 2 Thess. 3:16; 1 Cor. 14:25; 2 Tim. 4:22; Matt. 1:23; 28:20; 18:20).
Josephus and Philo, however, do not retain the formula. Later Jewish exegeti-
cal material, moreover, does not use the phrase as the OT did. One of the
most interesting observations made by van Unnik is about the connection
between this formula and the Spirit. The relation between God’s “being
with” someone and the Spirit’s involvement is too frequent to be accidental.
Consider these examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Passage(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td>God was with Joseph (Gen. 39:23).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>God’s Spirit was in Joseph (Gen. 41:38).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moses</td>
<td>God will be with Moses (Exod. 3:12).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Spirit is on Moses (Num. 11:17).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joshua</td>
<td>God will be with Joshua (Josh. 3:7).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Joshua was full of the Spirit (Deut. 34:9).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gideon</td>
<td>God is with Gideon (Judg. 6:12).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Spirit of the Lord took possession of Gideon (Judg. 6:34).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saul</td>
<td>God is with you (1 Sam. 10:7).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Spirit came upon you (1 Sam. 10:6).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>The Lord was with David (1 Sam. 18:12, 14).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Spirit came upon David (1 Sam. 16:13).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>I am with you (Hag. 2:4).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My Spirit abides among you (Hag. 2:5).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus</td>
<td>God was with him (Acts 10:38b).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>God anointed him with the Spirit (Acts 10:38a).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>The Lord is with you (Luke 1:28).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Holy Spirit will come upon you (Luke 1:35).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus’s disciples</td>
<td>to be with you (John 14:16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Spirit will dwell with/in you (John 14:17).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>church at Corinth</td>
<td>One convicted declares that God is among them because of prophecy,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>which is a manifestation of the Spirit (1 Cor. 14:24–25).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Van Unnik concludes that the expression “with you” refers to the dynamic activity of God’s Spirit enabling people to do God’s work by protecting, assisting, and blessing them. Given this background, one would have to conclude that when Matthew uses the formula “with you” or “in your midst,” he is speaking of God’s prior enabling activity (the indicative), activity that empowers individuals to do the tasks set before them. It also may explain why Matthew’s discussion of the Spirit is so underdeveloped. This formula (with you/in your midst) was an alternative, but less explicit, way of speaking of God’s activity among his people.

In Matthew scholars have frequently noted the use of the phrase “with you” or “in your midst” in three texts: 1:23; 18:20; and 28:20. The first (1:23) says the name of the one to be born will be called Emmanuel (which means, God with us). This is Matthew’s controlling image when speaking of the divine presence in Jesus. The ripple effect of this statement is seen throughout the Gospel:

| 3:17          | the voice from heaven at the baptism |
| 8:23–27       | What sort of man is this?            |
| 12:6          | Something greater than the temple is here. |
| 12:18         | I will put my Spirit upon him.       |
| 14:32-33      | Those in the boat worshiped him.     |
| 9:8; 15:29–31 | After Jesus’s acts, God is glorified. |
| 17:5          | the voice from heaven at the transfiguration |
| 21:9; 23:39   | the one who comes in the name of the Lord |
| 28:9, 17      | worshiped him                        |

The auditor is never allowed to forget that when Jesus is active, God is present. What Jesus does and says, God is doing and saying through him. In Matthew, Jesus mediates the divine presence; he is God with us.

There are more “with us” phrases in Matthew than the remaining two (18:20 and 28:20). They may be grouped in terms of where they fit on a time line in salvation history. Regarding Jesus’s earthly life, consider the following:

| 9:15          | Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? |
| 17:17         | How long am I to be with you?                               |
| 26:11         | You do not always have me [with you].                        |
| 26:18         | I will keep the Passover with my disciples.                  |
| 26:20         | He sat at table with the twelve disciples.                   |
| 26:36         | Jesus went with them to Gethsemane.                          |

For the period between Jesus’s resurrection and parousia, there are the oft-noticed duo 18:20 (“Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there
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among them” [NRSV]) and 28:20 (“I am with you always, to the end of the age” [NRSV]). For the period of the age to come, there is 26:29 (“I will never again drink . . . until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom” [NRSV]). In Matthew’s schema, when Jesus is with the disciples, God is present with them. Moreover, in most cases the presence is obviously an enabling one. This is one way that the First Evangelist speaks about divine enablement of the disciples. It is subtle and can be easily missed if one has not first been sensitized by the evidence from the OT background.

“The name.” A second technique employed by the First Evangelist to speak about divine enablement of disciples (the indicative) is associated with “the name.” In the Scriptures of Israel, the name was considered part of the personality (Bietenhard 1967). So the name is used interchangeably with the person (Pss. 7:17; 9:10; 18:49; 68:4 [68:5 MT]; 74:18; 86:12; 92:1 [92:2 MT]; Isa. 25:1; 26:8; 30:27–28; 56:6; Mal. 3:16; also in the NT: Acts 1:15; 5:41; 18:15; Rev. 3:4; 11:13; 3 John 7; Matt. 6:9). Furthermore, the OT uses the name as a way of speaking about the presence of God involved with humans. For example, when one swears (1 Sam. 20:42; Lev. 19:12), curses (2 Kings 2:24), or blesses (2 Sam. 6:18), invoking the name of Yahweh, the name thus pronounced evokes Yahweh’s presence, attention, and active intervention. Or again, the name of Yahweh is said to assist humans (Ps. 54:1 [54:3 MT]: in response to prayer, where name is used in synonymous parallelism with might/power [cf. Jer. 10:6]; Ps. 89:24 [89:25 MT]: where God’s steadfast love’s being with him is used in synonymous parallelism with “in my name shall his horn be exalted”; Ps. 20:1 [20:2 MT]: in response to prayer, where name is used together with God’s protection [cf. Prov. 18:10]). The same motif of divine assistance is found in the NT related to the name of Jesus:

1 Cor. 6:11 The name of the Lord Jesus is used in parallelism with the Spirit of God, and the two are credited with the converts’ being washed, sanctified, and justified.

Acts 4:12 We are saved only through the name of Jesus.

Acts 10:43 Forgiveness comes in his name.

1 John 5:13 Eternal life comes through his name.

Mark 9:39 Mighty works are in his name.

Acts 3:6 The lame man is told to walk, in the name of Jesus.

Acts 9:34 The language is Jesus Christ heals you, so walk, indicating the interchangeability of name and person.

Acts 4:7 By what name or power do you do this?

Rom. 10:13 Those who call on the name of the Lord [Christ] will be saved.

In the NT, one meets the phrase “to be baptized in the name of.” Three different prepositions are used in such phrases for “in”: epi (Acts 2:38), en (Acts 10:48), and eis (Acts 8:16; 19:5; 1 Cor. 1:13, 15; Matt. 28:19). Although W. Heitmüller (1903) thought there was a difference between en and epi on
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the one hand and eis on the other, the three prepositions do not seem to offer significantly different meanings (e.g., Justin Martyr, 1 Apol. 61, who uses epi onomatos with his trinitarian formula whereas Matthew uses eis). Generally speaking, “in the name of” conveys the meaning “under the authority of,” or “with the invocation of.” Given its background, however, it can also carry the connotations of “in the presence of” (“name” and “presence” are interchangeable concepts; cf. Ps. 89:24; 1 Cor. 6:11) and/or “in the power of” (“name” and “power” are parallel concepts; cf. Ps. 54:1; Acts 4:7). Since name and person are interchangeable (cf. Acts 3:6 with 9:34), moreover, there does not seem to be any significant difference between being baptized in (en)/into (epi) the name of Christ and being baptized into (eis) Christ.

Matthew 28:19–20 indicates that evangelization involves baptizing new disciples into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. At least three inferences may be drawn. First, such a one is in a relation of belonging to/being under the authority of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This bonding is reflected in Matt. 10:40 (“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me” [NRSV]); 18:5 (“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me” [NRSV]); and 25:31–46 (“As you did it to the least of these followers of Christ, you did it to me”). This is not all that is implied, however. Second, Matt. 18:20 shows that the invocation of Jesus’s name evokes his presence among the disciples. By extension, whenever the disciples pray the “Our Father” (6:9–13), the invocation of the name of the Father would evoke his presence in and provision for the disciples’ lives (including leading not into temptation and delivering from the evil one). To invoke the name of God unleashes the power that makes intelligible the words “With God nothing is impossible” (19:26). Third, it is at least possible and perhaps probable that the First Evangelist understood Christian baptism in terms of Matt. 3:11 (He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit). If so, then the Spirit’s presence is presumed by Matthew to be a part of the disciples’ lives to enable them. To be baptized into the triune name, therefore, is to enter into a bonded relationship that will provide one with the divine resources to enable following the guidance of what comes next (all that I have commanded you).

Revelation. A third technique employed by the First Evangelist to indicate the divine indicative in the lives of Jesus’s disciples is associated with revelation by the Father and/or Jesus to them. In Matt. 11:25–27, in a context of chapters 11–13, where the focus is on revelation and concealment, the Matthean Jesus offers thanks to his Father, who has revealed “these things” to babes rather than to the wise. In light of the previous paragraph (11:20–24), “these things” must refer to the kingdom’s breaking in through the ministry of Jesus (so eschatological secrets having to do with the divine plan of salvation for the world). The larger context would indicate, moreover, that the “babes” are Jesus’s disciples. Then Jesus states, “No one knows the Son except the
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Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (11:27b–c NRSV). The second part of this statement portrays Jesus as the one with a knowledge of heavenly mysteries who can reveal them to others. Two backgrounds have been proposed as an aid to understanding this text. The first is wisdom. Just as God knows wisdom (Job 28:12–27; Sir. 1:6–9; Bar. 3:32), so also the Father knows the Son. Just as wisdom knows God (Wis. 8:4; 9:1–18), so the Son knows the Father. Just as wisdom makes known the divine mysteries (Wis. 9:1–18; 10:10), so also Jesus reveals God’s hidden truth. Just as wisdom calls people to take up her yoke and find rest (Sir. 51:23–30), so Jesus extends a similar invitation. The second background is the Teacher of Righteousness. The similarity with the Teacher of Righteousness at Qumran has been noted since at least the 1950s. God has disclosed the mysteries to the Teacher of Righteousness (1QpHab 7.4–5; 1QH+ 4.27–28), and he has disclosed them to many others (1QH+ 4.27–28 [col. 12]; 2.13–18 [col. 10]). In both cases the revelation has to do with the proper understanding of the eschatological moment. The Matthean Jesus’s disciples have been given this revelation by the Son. Both sets of comparative materials enable one to read the Matthean text in light of ancient Jewish thought. The two sides of the revelatory focus are treated in Matthew in other texts.

This theme of revelation comes up again in chapter 13. Here the focus is on the revelatory function of the Son. In 13:10–17 Jesus tells his disciples: “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven [cf. 13:16–17]. . . For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance” (vv. 11–12b NRSV). The latter part of the statement surely points to a post-Easter setting, when the revelation will continue. In 13:16–17 Jesus says to them: “Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it” (NRSV). The disciples are recipients of revelation. In 13:23 the good soil is interpreted to mean the one “who hears the word and understands it . . . [and] bears fruit.” (Note: Mark 4:20 has “hear the word and accept it”; Luke 8:15 has “hold it fast in an honest and good heart”; only Matt. 13:23 has “understands it.”) So the understanding is given by Jesus to the disciples, and it produces fruit. That is, the revelation is empowering, enabling in their daily lives. The emphasis on “understanding” continues to the end of the section on parables. In 13:51, only in Matthew does Jesus ask the disciples: “Have you understood all this?” They answer: “Yes.” The Son has made his revelation to them, and it has been effective to enable and empower. They will yield fruit as good soil.

That the Father knows the Son was the first part of the sentence in 11:27b. The Son’s revelation to the disciples has been confirmed in chapter 13. Now several passages indicate the Father’s role in the revelatory process as well.
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15:13 Jesus says: “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind guides” (NRSV). The reference is to scribes and Pharisees. The language contrasts these “wise ones” with the disciples/babes. There are echoes of the parable of the weeds among the wheat (13:24–30). The blind ones are planted not by the Father but the enemy. They are to be left alone until the judgment. They have not been given the revelation.

16:16–17 Peter makes his confession: “You are the messiah, the son of the living God.” Jesus responds: “Blessed are you [cf. 13:16]. . . . Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven” (NRSV). The Father knows the Son and has revealed his identity to Peter.

17:5–6 On the mount of transfiguration, a voice comes from heaven to the three disciples: “This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” This echoes an earlier declaration (to John the Baptist at least) at the baptism in 3:17: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (RSV).

7:1–12 We find a thought unit that makes two main points. First, 7:1–5 contends that one should not judge others until having first judged oneself. Second, 7:6–12 affirms that it is necessary to discern between good and bad (7:6), that this may be done with wisdom gained from God through prayer (7:7–11), and that any judgments made as a result should be in line with the golden rule (7:12). In this text, moral discernment is the result of prayer to the disciples’ Father in heaven. One should remember that Matthew considered such insight empowering, as also the invocation of the Father’s name.

In sum: a third technique used by the First Evangelist to indicate God’s omnipotence behind the scenes for enabling Jesus’s disciples is the concept of revelation—from Jesus and from the Father.

*Being with Jesus.* The fourth technique employed by Matthew to point to the divine indicative in the lives of Jesus’s followers involves the notion of being “with Jesus.” Writings of this period speak of four types of teachers with adult followers: (1) philosophers (e.g., Socrates); (2) sages (e.g., Sirach); (3) interpreters of Jewish law (e.g., scribes, Pharisees, Essenes); (4) prophets or seers (e.g., John the Baptist; the Egyptian Jew mentioned by Josephus, J.W. 2.261–73; Ant. 20.169–72; Acts 21:38). When auditors of Matthew’s Gospel heard the story of Jesus and his followers, into which of these categories would they have unconsciously slotted Jesus and the disciples?

The overall picture of Jesus and his disciples in Matthew can be sketched with four stokes of a brush.

1. Jesus gathers followers, through either a summons (4:18–22; 9:9) or attraction (4:23–25).
2. They follow him (4:20, 22, 25; 9:9).
3. They are with him.
   - The Twelve: 17:1, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John; 26:51, one of those with Jesus; 26:69, you were with Jesus; 26:71, this man was with Jesus.
   - The crowds: 15:32, they have been with Jesus for three days.
4. They derive benefit from his company.
   The Twelve: 8:23–27, safety in a storm; 19:27–29, eschatological benefits promised; 17:1–8, vision of Jesus and message from heaven
   The crowds: 4:23–25, healings; 8:1–4, healing; 9:10, tax collectors and sinners accepted; 14:13–21, feeding; 19:2, healing

For a Mediterranean auditor of this Gospel, the closest analogy would have been a philosopher and his disciples. The four strokes with which the Gospel paints Jesus and his followers would have seemed familiar from depictions of philosophers in antiquity (Robbins 1984, 89–105).

1. Philosophers gathered disciples either by summons (e.g., Aristophanes, Nub. 505, has Socrates tell Strepsiades to “follow me”; Diogenes Laertius, Vit. phil. 2.48, tells of Socrates meeting Xenophon and saying “follow me” and learn) or by attraction (Philostratus, Vit. Apoll. 1.19, says Damis was drawn to Apollonius).

2. A philosopher’s disciples followed him (e.g., Philostratus, Vit. Apoll. 1.19, has Damis say to Apollonius: “Let us depart, . . . you following God, and I you”; 4.25 has Demetrius of Corinth follow Apollonius as a disciple; Josephus, Ant. 8.354, influenced by the philosophical schools, depicts the Elijah-Elisha relation as that of philosopher-teacher and disciple).

3. The disciples are with him (e.g., Philostratus, Vit. Apoll. 1.19, has Damis stay with the philosopher and commit to memory whatever he learned; Josephus, Ant. 8.354, says that Elisha was Elijah’s disciple and attendant as long as Elijah was on earth).

4. The disciples receive benefit from being in the company of the philosopher (see the sidebar).

These statements about the benefits that disciples received from “being with” a philosopher do not refer to the disciples’ imitation of their teacher but rather to their being enabled by their association with him. This is a philosophic variation on the general Mediterranean belief that being in the presence of a deity causes transformation of the self. Pythagoras, for example, declared that “our souls experience a change when we enter a temple and behold the images of the gods face to face” (Seneca the Younger, Ep. 94.42). This conviction was widespread in antiquity (e.g., Corp. herm. 10.6; 13.3; Philo, Mos. 1.158–59; 2.69; Legat. 1.5; Contempl. 2.11, 13, 18; 4.34; Congr. 56; Praem. 114; 2 Cor. 3:18; 1 John 3:6; Diogn. 2.5). All such cases involve human transformation by vision. In the case of the philosopher, the vision is not of a god but of a godlike man. The effects are the same: human transformation.
The benefits, it was believed, were not limited to being with the philosopher in person. First of all, recollection had its impact. Xenophon, *Mem.* 4.1.1, speaks about the recollection of Socrates by his disciples when they were separated as an aid to virtue. “The constant recollection of him in absence brought no small good to his constant companions and followers” (trans. Marchant and Todd 1923). Furthermore, books and the use of the imagination also played a part. Seneca, *Ep.* 52.7 and 11.8–10, advocates looking to the ancients for models with whom to associate. In *Ep.* 25.6, he says that if one cannot be in a philosopher’s presence, one should come to know him through books, acting as if he were constantly at one’s side. Epistles 25.5; 11.10; and 11.8 advocate using the imagination to picture the teacher as ever before one and oneself as ever in the teacher’s presence. The presence of the disciples with their master through books and imagination was regarded, however, as second best. Seneca, *Ep.* 6.5, writes: “The living voice and the intimacy of a
common life will help you more than the written word” (trans. Gummere 1970–79). The point is that disciples’ being with their teacher was an aid to personal transformation. Being with him conveyed benefits in their moral progress. Being with him enabled them to do good and to be better people. Plutarch captured part of why that is so. In *Virt. prof.* 84d, he says that being in the presence of a good and perfect man has this effect on a person: “Great is his craving all but to merge his own identity in that of the good man” (trans. Perrin 1914–26).

Matthew used the idea of disciples being with their teacher to convey part of his indicative. During Jesus’s earthly career his disciples were with him. They heard him teach and saw him act. They saw the correspondence between his life and teaching. They could ask him questions and hear his answers. Ancient auditors would have assumed that this common life enabled the disciples’ progress in their formation by Jesus. In the Sermon on the Mount, for example, Jesus says to his disciples that they are salt and light (5:13–14) and are sound trees that bear good fruit (7:17–18). That is, Jesus assumes that transformation of the disciples’ characters has begun to take place. From the Gospel’s plot, the only thing so far that could explain their transformation is the fact that, having been called, they followed Jesus (4:20, 22). That is, they were with him, and this association had a transforming quality.

If being in a philosopher’s presence was regarded as transforming in a way that was more than disciples’ imitation of their master, so likewise the disciples’ being with Jesus in Matthew speaks of more than their imitation of him. Transformation by vision is heightened in the First Gospel by the fact that Jesus is depicted as divine. In Matthew, God is present in Jesus (1:23). The evangelist, as a consequence, speaks of the worship of Jesus before his resurrection (e.g., 2:11; 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 20:20, all unique to Matthew) as well as after it (28:9, 17, also unique to Matthew). Since in 4:10 Jesus says that worship belongs to God alone and since Jesus does not reject the worship, he must be viewed as Emmanuel, the one in whom and through whom God is present (1:23). By presenting Jesus as an appropriate object of worship, the evangelist “does, for all practical purposes, portray Jesus as divine” (Powell 1995b, 58). Hence, the disciples’ being “with him” has not only the philosophic frame of reference but also the overtones of being changed by beholding deity. In Matthew, then, for the disciples to be “with Jesus” is for them to be transformed by their vision of God-with-us.

After Jesus’s departure, they could have been with him early on, in part, through their memory and recollection of him. Later it would have been through their reading of the First Gospel. They were with Jesus as they moved through the narrative plot with him. The being with him made possible by the story powered their transformation.

The power of the story to enable change is captured in an old Hasidic tale:
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When the Baal Shem had a difficult task before him, he would go to a certain place in the woods, light a fire and meditate in prayer—and what he set out to perform was done. When a generation later the “Maggid” of Meseritz was faced with the same task he would go to the same place in the woods and say: We can no longer light the fire, but we can still speak the prayers—and what he wanted done became reality. Again a generation later Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sassov had to perform this task. And he too went into the woods and said: We can no longer light the fire, nor do we know the secret meditations belonging to the prayer, but we do know the place in the woods to which it all belongs—and that would be sufficient; and sufficient it was. But when another generation had passed and Rabbi Israel of Rishin was called upon to perform the task, he sat down on his golden chair in his castle and said: We cannot light the fire, we cannot speak the prayers, we do not know the place, but we can tell the story of how it was done. And the story-teller adds, the story which he had told had the same effect as the actions of the other three.

(Scholem 1995, 349–50)

Being with him and experiencing the vision of God-with-us—in person, by means of recollection, or by means of the book (the First Gospel)—powerfully assisted their life of obedience.

How Matthew’s Indicative Controls His Imperative

The four techniques discussed above function in the Gospel of Matthew to provide an indicative of divine enablement that underlies the imperative in an ongoing way. This section will show how this is so.

We begin with Matt. 28:19–20. On the basis of all power being given (by God) to him (cf. Matt. 11:27; Dan. 7:13–14), the Matthean Jesus issues a command to his followers. As you go, make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them (28:19–20a). A promise follows: “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (28:20b NRSV). Jesus’s promise is that he will empower them so they can fulfill the mission he has just commanded them to undertake. How else could the work of Jesus be accomplished if he did not enable it? (Indeed, 13:37 says that it is the son of man who sows the seed!) There is a widespread consensus that 28:18–20 is the key to understanding the whole Gospel. For this reason some have sought to use 28:20 as the indicative underlying the imperative throughout the First Gospel. This seems impossible, however. Matthew 28:19–20 limits the presence of Jesus with the disciples to their mission. Jesus is with those evangelizing. What about those being evangelized (baptized and then taught to observe all that Jesus commanded)? Matthew 28:19–20 is silent about this dimension. Surely the general answer to this question is Matt. 19:26, all things are possible with God. The issue is this: how does Matthew see this divine enablement being worked out?

The four techniques that speak of divine activity behind the scenes are relevant here:
Matthean Soteriology

1. Revelation enables both the confession of Jesus (16:17) and the bearing of abundant fruit (13:23, which surely includes ethical living).

2. Baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit opens the door to divine assistance. For example, when two or three are gathered in Jesus’s name, then he is present in their midst (18:20). This logion, which seems to be a Christian variant of a non-Christian Jewish saying about the Shekinah’s presence in the midst of two or three who discuss torah (m. Avot 3.2b [3]; Avot R. Nat. [B] 34), is set in the context of church discipline. It indicates that when Christians are involved in the task of settling disputes among church members, the presence of Jesus is with them to empower their decisions. Or when disciples are brought before hostile authorities, “what you are to say will be given to you at that time; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you” (10:19–20 NRSV). Here a revelation given to disciples is combined with the activity of the Spirit, in whose name one has been baptized (cf. 3:11). Or again, when disciples invoke the name of their heavenly Father (6:9–13; 7:7–11), this evokes his answering response (e.g., leading us not into temptation, delivering us from the evil one, giving us discernment about the difference between good and evil).

3. Jesus’s being with his disciples affects the way they behave (9:15 NRSV: “The wedding guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they?”) and provides them aid when their faith is weak (17:17, 19–20).

4. When the disciples are with Jesus, their character is shaped for the better. The Gospel assumes one’s actions arise out of one’s character (12:33 NRSV: “The good person brings good things out of a good treasure, and the evil person brings evil things out of an evil treasure”; 15:18–19 NRSV: “What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander”). The Sermon on the Mount assumes that Jesus’s disciples have been transformed (5:13, 14: “You are the salt of the earth”; “You are the light of the world”; 6:22; 7:17–18). How is this possible (in the plot of the First Gospel)? All that has gone before is their call and their following Jesus, that is, being with him (4:18–22). Being with him, it is implied, has changed their character. As one moves through the Gospel, it is not difficult to see how this takes place. When Jesus teaches with a “focal instance” (e.g., 5:38–42; see Tannehill 1975, 67–77), it requires the reorientation of the hearer’s values; when he teaches in certain parables that shatter one’s old world (e.g., 20:1–15) and help form a new one, it necessitates reorienting one’s life. When Jesus’s parables jolt their hearers out of the continuity of their lives (e.g., Matt. 5:44; 16:25; 19:24), it demands a reorientation. When Jesus behaves in certain provocative ways (e.g., 8:2–3; 9:10–13; 12:1–14), it forces disciples to reorient their lives. When the disciples encounter Jesus’s healing as visual teaching (e.g., 15:29–30), they join the crowds in glorifying the God of Israel (15:31).
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Being with Jesus is a constant aid to transcending one’s old ways, to being transformed by the renewing of one’s mind (Rom. 12:2). No area of life is left untouched by one or more of Matthew’s four techniques for alluding to divine assistance in a disciple’s experience.

Another angle from which to view the four techniques is to look at how they relate to the five major teaching sections of the First Gospel (“all that I have commanded you,” i.e., Matthew’s imperative). (1) The link with Matt. 18 is explicit. Both the name of Jesus and Jesus’s presence in the disciples’ midst are employed. (2) A connection with chapter 13 is seen in Jesus’s revelation to the disciples of the eschatological plan of God. (3) Matthew 10 is covered under 28:20’s “with you” in the disciples’ mission and by the invocation of the name of the Spirit of the Father, who speaks through the disciples. (4) The Sermon on the Mount utilizes the invocation of the name in prayer to the Father and speaks of discernment being given to those who ask. The disciples’ being with Jesus explains how their character could be salt and light. (5) In the eschatological chapters of the fifth teaching section, 26:29 comes into play: Jesus will be with his disciples even beyond the resurrection/judgment, when they share the messianic banquet together. There is no big teaching section that is not linked to Matthew’s techniques for speaking about the enabling presence of God in the disciples’ lives.

Two reminders are helpful at this point. First, one should remember that functionally these techniques are virtually interchangeable in a biblical context. (a) The presence of God “with you” is virtually synonymous with “assistance by God’s name” (Ps. 89:24 [89:25 MT]: “My faithfulness and steadfast love shall be with him; and in my name his horn shall be exalted”; cf. Matt. 18:20). (b) The presence of God “with you” is an alternative way of saying “God’s Spirit is in your midst” (Hag 2:4–5: “Take courage, all you people of the land, says the LORD; work, for I am with you, says the LORD of hosts, according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My spirit abides among you; do not fear”; cf. Luke 1:28, 35). (c) The presence of God “with you” is closely associated with revelation given to one (1 Kings 1:37: the Lord will be with Solomon; 4:29: God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding; cf. John 14:16–17, 26). (d) “In the name of” and Spirit are closely linked (1 Cor. 6:11: in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit, you were washed, sanctified, justified). Anyone familiar with this biblical way of speaking would have been sensitive to Matthew’s use of his conceptual repertoire. Second, one should remember that in the First Evangelist’s scheme of things, when the narrative speaks of Jesus’s presence, it is God who is with us in Emmanuel (Matt. 1:23).

At every point in a disciple’s life and at every stage of salvation history, therefore, Matthew speaks of the divine indicative, divine enablement for the whole of a disciple’s existence from its beginning to the messianic banquet. Granted, all of this is unobtrusive, almost invisible to the eye that is focused
on the surface of the plot of the Gospel. That is as it should be, given that in Matt. 5–25, as far as disciples are concerned, the evangelist is telling his story in terms of omnipotence-behind-the-scenes. This is not the way Paul or the Fourth Evangelist would tell the story, but it is Matthew’s way. Matthew’s way, moreover, is neither soteriological legalism nor legalistic covenantal nomism. Like Paul, his soteriology is by grace from start to finish. Matthew just uses a different conceptual repertoire. Surely he cannot be faulted for that!

When the reader proceeds to a reading of the First Gospel and to a reading of this commentary, it should be with a recognition that Matthean soteriology is grace-oriented from start to finish. Read in this way, Matthew comes across as a soteriological ally of Paul and the Fourth Gospel, not their antithesis.

Methodological Assumptions

The first presupposition of this volume is that its purpose is to interpret the final form of the First Gospel. It is Matthew’s narrative world with which we are engaged. While the tradition behind the redaction is a legitimate historical question, it is not the same thing as interpreting the Gospel of Matthew. Volumes that try to pursue both tasks at the same time usually slight one or the other of the objectives (e.g., Blomberg 1992, whose concern to validate the historicity of Matthew’s tradition results in a less-than-adequate engagement with Matthew’s narrative world). To do Matthew’s theological project justice, no effort will be expended in this volume on the question of the historicity of the tradition. This is not a denial of such historicity but a methodological decision to bracket that question for the moment.

A second presupposition is that interpretation is best done by reading with the authorial audience (Rabinowitz 1977; 1987; 1989). The final form of the text is given a close reading, and then the question is asked, how would an ancient auditor have heard Matthew’s narrative? This move, of course, requires some knowledge of the cultural repertoire of ancient Mediterranean peoples. This explains the use of a variety of “parallels,” Jewish and Greco-Roman, throughout the volume. When the modern reader encounters such parallels, it does not mean that this commentary assumes that the biblical author(s) borrowed the material, with the result that Christianity is a syncretistic religion. Rather, it is assumed that the Christian movement has its own religious integrity. The question is, how would a communication by the Jesus movement, with its own identity derived from its unique relation to the one God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—have been heard by Jews and pagans alike?