

## Chapter Five

# Matthew

The Gospel of Matthew provides a crucial contribution to a biblical theology of mission. Framed by references to Jesus, the son of Abraham, and the 'Great Commission', this Gospel furnished the (Antiochian?) church of the latter part of the first century with a solid theological foundation for its mission to the Gentiles and still stands as a reminder of the church's unfinished task to disciple the nations. How is it that in this Jewish Gospel, designed as it is to present Jesus as the Messiah fulfilling Old Testament predictions and typologies, we find a consistent, growing stream of references to the Gentile mission?<sup>1</sup> And how are we to explain the limitation of Jesus' and the disciples' mission to Israel in the earlier parts of the Gospel (10:5–6; 15:24) in light of the references to a universal mission of the church in the later sections of Matthew (24:14; 28:16–20)?<sup>2</sup>

As in the case of Mark, we will follow the narrative flow of Matthew, with special attention given to relevant mission passages.<sup>3</sup> In particular, we will seek to demonstrate that Jesus' final commission to his followers in 28:16–20 provides the unifying climax of the entire Gospel's teaching on mission that is anticipated in many ways throughout Matthew's narrative.<sup>4</sup> As one recent writer points out, 'This carefully crafted climax brings together several major strands of the

<sup>1</sup> Hagner (1993: lxvii) calls the tension between particularism and universalism the 'major puzzle' in the Gospel of Matthew. Blomberg (1992: 26) considers this cluster of motifs 'the most foundational or overarching theme of the book' (26).

<sup>2</sup> For helpful surveys of scholarship on the issue, see Legrand 1964: 87–104, 190–207; Sundkler 1937: 1–38; and S. G. Wilson 1973: 1–28. See also the comments by Schlatter 1999 [1922]: 80–81; and the interesting suggestion by Tan 1997: 239–240.

<sup>3</sup> For a helpful general overview, see Schnabel 1994: 37–58.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Frankemölle 1982: 110–111: 'The universalism does not merely catch the reader by surprise at the very end but rather accompanies him from the first verse of the Gospel' (AJK's translation). See also Michel 1983: 35: '*Matt. 28:18–20 is the key to the understanding of the whole book*' (original emphasis); Brooks 1981: 2: 'the concluding pericope (xxviii 16–20) has controlled the entire design of the Gospel of Matthew'; and Carson 1984: 36: 'the closing pericope (28:16–20) is ... the climax toward which the entire Gospel moves'.

story, including: mountain as a locus of christological significance; the manner and meaning of the risen Jesus' appearance; the disciples' obedience, worship and doubt; Jesus' claim to reception of divine authority; making disciples as a universal commission; baptism in the triadic name as ritual initiation into the community; the centrality of Jesus' *entolai* for the community; and the promise of his risen, continuous presence with his commissioned disciples.<sup>5</sup> The chapter concludes with a discussion of some general theological implications from mission in Matthew's Gospel.

## Genealogy, infancy narrative and early Galilean ministry: Jesus the representative 'son' (Matt. 1 – 4)

Matthew, in adaptation of Mark's 'Roman' Gospel for a (predominantly) Jewish audience,<sup>6</sup> introduces his account with a genealogy that presents Jesus Christ as the son of David and the son of Abraham.<sup>7</sup> This characterization reminds the reader of God's promise to Abraham that in his seed 'all the families of the earth' would be blessed (Gen. 12:1–3).<sup>8</sup> It also conjures up memories of God's promise

<sup>5</sup> See Kupp 1996: 201, who further claims, with reference to works by Lohmeyer (1945) and Michel (1950), that 'the last pericope of Matthew contains *in nuce* the essence of the Gospel; it provides the "abstract" for Matthew's "dissertation", but more, it is, in rhetorical and theological terms, both a digest and *telos* of the work'.

<sup>6</sup> In the following discussion, we will tentatively proceed on the basis of the hypothesis that Matthew used Mark in the composition of his Gospel. But little in the argument of this chapter rests on this view.

<sup>7</sup> See already the discussion of 'The Davidic kingship and the promises to Abraham' in ch. 2 above. Cf. further Bornkamm 1971: 225–227 and LaGrand 1999: 170–177. Some also note the inclusion of four Gentile women (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba) in Matthew's genealogy as evidence for this evangelist's interest in Gentiles, but it is doubtful whether Matthew includes these women in his genealogy *because they are Gentiles*. If so, how would this fit with Mary, the fifth woman included (so correctly Sim 1995: 22–23)? It is more likely that the women are featured to highlight the unusual circumstances that led to their incorporation in Jesus' ancestry: seduction, prostitution, kinsman-redemption, adultery – and a virgin birth! Cf. R. E. Brown (1977: 71–74), who does, however, allow Gentile inclusion as a secondary purpose; and Hagner 1993: 10. See further Freed (1987: 3–19), who adds the observation that Matthew may here seek to defend Jesus against the Jewish charge that he was the illegitimate son of Mary and thus disqualified from being 'son of David'. In response, the evangelist 1. points to the fact that God has worked through unusual circumstances in salvation history before; 2. shows how Joseph's initial reluctance was overcome by divine revelation; and 3. presents the virgin birth as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy (Is. 7:14).

<sup>8</sup> Note the reiteration of this promise in Gen. 18:18; 22:18; 26:4: *panta ta ethnē*; and see Carson's comment (1984: 62) that 'with this allusion to Abraham [Gen. 22:18], Matthew is preparing his readers for the final words of this offspring from Abraham –

to David that his line would inherit an 'eternal kingdom' (2 Sam. 7:13, 16).<sup>9</sup> Jesus, the paradigmatic, representative 'son', is therefore both the channel of blessing for the nations and the eternal, enthroned Davidic ruler (cf. also 2:5–6, quoting Mic. 5:2).<sup>10</sup> Jesus, the Saviour (1:21), is also Immanuel, 'God with us' (1:23), a truth reaffirmed at the very end of Matthew's Gospel, where Jesus promises his followers that he will be with them 'always, even to the end of the age' (28:20).<sup>11</sup>

While magi from the East (Gentiles), 'representing heathen thought and life' (LaGrand 1999: 180), come to pay homage to the child Jesus, Herod the king persecutes him (2:1–18).<sup>12</sup> Matthew interprets Jesus' flight to Egypt in terms of 'son' typology: like God's 'son' of old, Israel, Jesus experienced deliverance from his land of temporary exile (Rapinchuk 1996). But unlike Israel, whose faithless wilderness generation died without seeing the land God promised, Jesus, while tempted to pervert his calling as the 'Son of God', remains faithful to his call (4:1–11; cf. Exod. 4:22–23).<sup>13</sup> Jesus' settlement in Nazareth of

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the commission to make disciples of "all nations" (28:19). Contra Gundry (1994: 13), who, after acknowledging that the 'substitute may also imply that Jesus is Abraham's seed, a blessing to all nations in fulfillment of God's promise', comments, 'Since elsewhere Matthew will show little interest in Abraham, however, he may have intended his readers to understand David rather than Jesus as the son of Abraham.'

<sup>9</sup>See the discussion of 'The Davidic kingship and 2 Samuel 7' in ch. 2 above. Interestingly, the recognition of Jesus as 'son of David' comes in Matthew primarily from blind people and Gentiles (Blomberg 1992: 162–163, with reference to Gibbs 1963–64: 446–464). Milton (1962: 176) detects a chiasm between Matthew's genealogy focusing on Abraham and David and the conclusion of the Gospel.

<sup>10</sup>Later references to Jesus as 'Son of David' in Matthew's Gospel are: 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30–31; 21:9, 15; 22:42, 45. As Blomberg (1992: 53), Carson (1984: 69–70) and others point out, at the heart of Matthew's genealogy is a device called *gematria*, in which the ancient Hebrew numerical equivalent of the name 'David' (i.e.. fourteen) is used to highlight Jesus' identity as David's 'son' (but see the cautious assessments by Hagner 1993: 7; Keener 1999: 74).

<sup>11</sup>So e.g. Blomberg 1992: 433–434; Gundry 1994: 597. On the Matthean 'presence motif', see esp. Kupp 1996.

<sup>12</sup>See the discussion in LeGrand 1999: 177–180. Carson (1984: 83) likens the magi to the men of Nineveh who 'will rise up in judgment and condemn those who, despite their privilege of much greater light, did not receive the promised Messiah and bow to his reign (12:41–42)'. Gundry (1994: 26) remarks that 'the coming of the magi previews the entrance of disciples from all nations into the circle of those who acknowledge Jesus as the king of the Jews and worship him as God'.

<sup>13</sup>Cf. Carson, Moo and Morris 1992: 84. Carson (1984: 112) draws attention to the parallels with historic Israel in the Matthean temptation narrative, noting both the 'combination of royal kingship and suffering servanthood attested at his [Jesus'] baptism and essential to his mission' and the 'twin themes of kingly authority and submission ... as the complementary poles of the life and self-revelation of Immanuel: "God with us"' (114). The mount of temptation is the first of several mountains featured

Galilee, originally prompted by fear of Archelaus' rule over Judea subsequent to Herod's reign (2:22–23) and reaffirmed at the beginning of Jesus' ministry (4:12–16), likewise is taken to fulfil Old Testament prophecy: in Jesus, a light had dawned for the people in darkness, even in 'Galilee of the Gentiles' (4:15, quoting Is. 9:1–2; cf. Is. 42:6).<sup>14</sup>

Thus even prior to the onset of Jesus' public ministry, Matthew has presented him both as the vicarious representative of Israel's destiny and as a light unto the Gentiles who will save 'his' people from their sins (1:21; cf. 26:28: 'for many').<sup>15</sup> And when Jesus' ministry begins, its impact quickly spreads beyond Jewish territory to Syria and the Decapolis (4:24–25). The Pharisees and Sadducees, on the other hand, are excoriated by John the Baptist for wrongly presuming upon their relationship with Abraham. God can raise up children for Abraham 'from these stones', and the axe is already at the root of the trees (3:7–10).

## The Sermon on the Mount: the arrival of God's kingdom (Matt. 5 – 7)

Another instance of Jesus' reenactment of Old Testament history is the Sermon on the Mount (5 – 7), the first of five major discourses in Matthew and reminiscent of God's giving of the Law through Moses at Mt Sinai (Allison 1993: 111–118; Gundry 1994: 65–66).<sup>16</sup> At the heart

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in this Gospel; see further the discussion under 'Transfiguration' below.

<sup>14</sup> To see this, as Gundry (1994: 59) does, as 'a prefiguring of worldwide evangelism', is perhaps a bit overblown. Better is his subsequent comment that 'Though Jesus will minister in Galilee mainly to Jews, this description ["Galilee of the Gentiles"] makes that ministry prefigure his disciples' wider mission to Gentiles' (60). See also Hagner (1993: 73), who appropriately remarks that 'Matthew does not refer to a mission of Jesus to the Gentiles, but Matthew's readers may well have seen in these words a foreshadowing of what would occur after the resurrection (28:19; cf. 24:14).'

<sup>15</sup> While 'his people' in 1:21 may appear to refer to Israel (cf. 2:6: 'my people Israel'), it becomes clear in retrospect that *laos* is here broader than Israel, including the Gentiles as well. Contra Luz 1989: 121.

<sup>16</sup> The question of the role of the Law in Matthew's Gospel is exceedingly complex and cannot be broached in the present context (for a thorough survey of the issue, without necessarily endorsing the conclusions drawn, see Stanton 1985: 1934–37; a briefer, still helpful overview is provided in Carson 1984: 29–31). Suffice it to say that the mission motif in Matthew can be comfortably accommodated within the framework proposed by Meier (1976): 'when the new age breaks in at the death-resurrection of Jesus (the culmination of the fulfilment of all prophecy), the latter will fall in favour of the prophetic, eschatological fulfilment of the Law which Jesus brings' (summarized by Stanton 1985: 1936–37). See also Carson (1984: 146), 'the precise form of the Mosaic law may change with the crucial redemptive events to which it points. For that which

of Jesus' message is the arrival of God's kingdom and the righteousness required of those who would receive it (cf. esp. 5:3–12, 20; 6:33). Jesus' followers are 'the salt of the earth' and 'the light of the world' (cf. 4:16, quoting Is. 9:2); they are to let their light so shine before others that they see their good works and glorify their heavenly Father (5:13–16). Jesus is even-handed in his criticism of both Jews and Gentiles: the prayers of the former group are hypocritical, while those of the latter are wordy (6:5–7).<sup>17</sup> Jesus' disciples, by contrast, are to utter prayers to their heavenly Father that are un hypocritical and to the point, so that his will may be done 'on earth as it is in heaven' (*hōs en ouranō kai epi gēs*). This phrase anticipates Matthew's characterization of Jesus as the one to whom all authority is given 'in heaven and on earth' at the end of his Gospel (28:19: *en ouranō kai epi gēs*). By implication, Jesus functions as the Father's plenipotentiary in pursuit of the latter's salvation-historical programme. Notably, Jesus' authority in Matthew pertains particularly to his teaching and his word (cf. 7:28–29; 28:20). Nevertheless, the *inclusio* of 4:23–25 and 9:35, framing chapters 5 – 7 and 8 – 9 respectively, points to the unity of Jesus' word and work.

## The mission of the twelve: 'to the lost sheep of Israel' (Matt. 10)<sup>18</sup>

Structurally, by delaying John the Baptist's enquiry regarding Jesus' messianic ministry until *after* the missionary discourse in chapter 10, Matthew connects the missions of Jesus and the disciples (cf. also 10:5–6 and 15:24; Frankemölle 1982: 126). This is further accentuated by the transitional pericope of 9:36–38, which links Jesus' compassion

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prophesies is in some sense taken up in and transcended by the fulfillment of the prophecy'; and Jeremias (1971: 141–151, 205–208).

<sup>17</sup> Other 'anti-Gentile' statements in Matthew include 5:46–47 (even Gentiles love those who love them); 6:31–32 (Gentiles concern themselves with mundane matters); 18:15–17 (unrepentant church member to be treated like a Gentile or tax-collector); and 20:24–28 (Gentile rulers lord it over others). Cf. Sim 1995: 25–30.

<sup>18</sup> For a (partial and not entirely unbiased) survey of the history of scholarship on the Matthean mission discourse, see Park 1995: 9–31. See esp. Park's discussion of McKnight (1986), whose redaction-critical study assigns to Matthew a date of around AD 85 and views the mission discourse as a Matthean attempt at polemicizing 'against the Pharisees as the false leaders of Israel' (376). McKnight's historical-critical assumptions, however, render him unduly sceptical regarding the authenticity of the material and cause him to pay inadequate attention to larger theological questions. On the basic literary, historical and theological questions surrounding Matt. 10, see also Carson 1984: 240–243.

for the crowds who are 'like sheep without a shepherd' (an allusion to Num. 27:17) with his exhortation to his followers to 'ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field' (cf. *m. 'Abot* 2:15).<sup>19</sup> Reference has already been made to the apparent tension between the restriction of Jesus' and the disciples' mission to 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (10:5–6 and 15:24: unique to Matthew) and the universal command to 'disciple all the nations' at the end of the Gospel (28:19).<sup>20</sup> However, it is not necessary to interpret these two sets of passages as reflecting different traditions found in the 'Matthean community'.<sup>21</sup> This is suggested by the fact that the discourse expresses the expectation of the bearing of future witness, not merely in Jewish synagogues, but also to Gentiles (10:18: Matthew adds *kai tois ethnesin* to Mark 13:9).<sup>22</sup> The movement rather proceeds along salvation-

<sup>19</sup> Hagner (1993: 260–262) notes the sense of eschatological urgency, accentuated further by the contrast between the multitudes to be reached and the scarcity of workers. For a similar piece of instruction, including 'harvest' imagery, see John 4:34–38; see also the Lukan parallel (10:2) at the occasion of the instruction of the seventy(-two). As Gundry (1994: 181) notes, the 'Lord of the harvest' is Jesus himself (10:5; cf. 13:37–43), who is here likened to 'one who hires workers and sends them to the field', in the present instance the 'mission field'. The term 'worker' recurs in 10:10, which suggests that the twelve were to be the answer to their own prayers for 'workers for the harvest'.

<sup>20</sup> See the general sketch by Blomberg (1992: 26), who proposes to resolve this tension by pointing to the pattern adopted by Paul throughout the book of Acts (13:46; 18:6; 19:9) and articulated in his epistles (Rom. 1:16), i.e. going to the Jews first and then also to the Gentiles. By analogy, Blomberg 'sees Jesus as going first to the Jews and then also to the Gentiles. God's chosen people get first chance to respond to the gospel, but then Jesus and his disciples must expand their horizons to encompass all the earth' (Carson's solution is similar: 1984: 23). But the analogy from Paul's life should not be so facily applied to Jesus retroactively. Rather, salvation-historically, the line should be drawn between *Jesus going to the Jews and his disciples* (but not also Jesus, other than proleptically) *going beyond the Jews also to the Gentiles* after the sending of the Spirit at Pentecost (see e.g. John 10:16 where Jesus speaks of his bringing in of yet 'other sheep', i.e. the Gentiles, through the agency of his disciples *as still in the future* from his pre-crucifixion vantage point).

<sup>21</sup> Contra S. Brown 1977: 21–32 and 1980: 193–221. For a helpful categorization of attempted resolutions, see Frankemölle (1982: 100–103): 1. both words are from Jesus, characteristic of different stages of ministry, with the second superseding the first (Jeremias, Lohmeyer, Meinertz, Schlatter, Vögtle, Zahn); 2. both words originate with the early church, reacting to two stages of its missionary activity (Bornkamm, Bultmann, Käsemann, Strecker, Trilling, J. Weiss); 3. the first is a word of Jesus, the second of the early church (Goppelt, Harneck, Kümmel, Manson); 4. the two words reflect two competing groups in 'Matthean community' (Barth, Bornkamm, Hahn, Strecker, Trilling). A somewhat different view has recently been proposed by Park (1995: 140), who assigns the first word to 'pre-Matthean tradition' (though not originating with Jesus himself), because 'it is very unlikely that Mt would have composed a saying ... which directly contradicts his view on mission'. However, Park's position depends on the highly speculative theory of plural recensions of Q.

<sup>22</sup> So, rightly, Carson 1984: 241.

historical lines, portraying a dynamic that is well corroborated by the other Gospels and Acts: Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, offers the kingdom to Israel; Israel rejects Jesus, issuing in his crucifixion; the kingdom is offered universally to all those who believe in Jesus the Messiah, Jew and Gentile alike.<sup>23</sup>

The message of the twelve<sup>24</sup> to Israel, then, is that ‘the kingdom of heaven is near’ (10:7), in continuity with the preaching of both John the Baptist (3:2) and Jesus (4:17).<sup>25</sup> Their mode of travel must be ‘unencumbered, relying on hospitality and God’s providence’ (10:9–10).<sup>26</sup> Pervading the Matthean mission discourse are references to the prospect of rejection of the gospel message (10:11–16, cf. 40–42), issuing in persecution of the messengers (10:17–20, 23–33) and division even among a person’s own family (10:21–22, 34–39). Even such division, however, is shown to fulfil Old Testament Scripture (10:35–36, par. Luke 12:53, citing Mic. 7:6). Also pervasive is the principle of the close identification of Jesus’ messengers with their sender, Jesus, as they embark on their mission. In keeping with the Jewish concept of the *šāliḥ* (messenger), a man’s agent was considered to be like the man himself (*m. Ber.* 5:5).<sup>27</sup> For better or worse, then, Jesus’ emissaries have thrown in their lot with their master: if people welcome him and his message, they will also receive his followers; if people reject Jesus, his followers will likewise be rejected (10:11–14, 40–42). Thus following Jesus entails radical discipleship. Anyone who would be his disciple must forsake all other ties and loyalties in favour of unreserved, committed allegiance to Jesus (10:37; cf. 4:22; 8:21; 12:46–50)<sup>28</sup> and take up his cross (10:38–

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Hagner (1993: 271), who appropriately speaks of ‘a salvation-history perspective, which sees a clear distinction between the time of Jesus’ earthly ministry and the time following the resurrection and thus a movement from particularism to universalism’. Carson (1984: 146), citing Meier 1976, similarly speaks of ‘the centrality of the death and resurrection of Jesus as the pivotal event in Matthew’s presentation of salvation history. Before it Jesus’ disciples are restricted to Israel (10:5–6); after it they are to go everywhere.’

<sup>24</sup> Called ‘disciples’ (*mathētai*) in v. 1 and ‘apostles’ (*apostoloi*) in v. 2, the twelve are mentioned again in v. 5; 11:1; 20:17; 26:14, 20, 47 (cf. 19:28). The term *apostolos* (Gk. for Heb. *šāliḥ*, ‘messenger’) appropriately appears only here in Matthew and is thus reserved for Jesus’ twelve disciples. The number twelve unmistakably suggests a parallel with the twelve tribes of Israel (cf. 19:28).

<sup>25</sup> See also the ‘kingdom parables’ in chs. 13 and 18 and the additional parables in chs. 21, 22 and 25.

<sup>26</sup> Carson 1984: 245; see also Keener 1999: 317–319.

<sup>27</sup> For a discussion of the ancient background, see Keener 1999: 313–315.

<sup>28</sup> The demand is phrased in even more categorical terms in Luke: ‘If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and

39; cf. 16:24–26).<sup>29</sup> Even so, there is no need for fear (10:26–31). Should Jesus’ followers get arrested, the ‘Spirit of your Father’ (cf. 28:19) will speak through the disciples (10:19–20). The mission discourse ends with Jesus promising eternal rewards to those who are faithful in accomplishing the mission mandate (10:40–42; cf. 10:32–33; 16:27; 19:27–30).

## Jesus’ ministry to Gentiles in Galilee and the regions beyond (Matt. 8:1 – 16:12)

Even during his earthly ministry, Jesus exceptionally ministers to Gentiles in response to their believing request, though he never takes the initiative. What is more, sometimes he seems to take positive steps to avoid ministry to Gentiles (esp. 10:5–6; 15:24, 26). An example of Jesus’ exceptional ministry to Gentiles is his healing of the centurion’s servant in Capernaum, in the course of which he commends the centurion’s faith as greater than that of ‘anyone in Israel’ (8:10). The healing also prompts Jesus’ utterance, ‘I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside into the darkness’ (8:11–12). According to Matthew, Jesus therefore clearly foresees the Gentiles’ full future participation in God’s promise to Abraham.<sup>30</sup> Notably, Matthew strikes a note of judgment on Israel even more strongly than the Lukan parallel (13:28).

This is similar to the Parable of the Wicked Tenants in 21:33–46, where Matthew adds to Mark 12:1–2 the statement that ‘the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit’ (21:43).<sup>31</sup> Indeed, God’s judgment on Tyre and Sidon, even Sodom, will be more tolerable than that on Korazin and Capernaum (11:20–24). And the men of Nineveh and the Queen of the South will condemn the unbelief of Jesus’ contemporaries (12:41–42).

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sisters – yes, even his own life – he cannot be my disciple’ (14:26). As Matthew’s wording makes clear, however, what Jesus calls for is not literal hate of one’s family but a refusal to love one’s natural associations *more* than Jesus (Matt. 10:37).

<sup>29</sup> As Gundry (1994: 200) rightly notes, ‘Matthew’s context makes the disciple’s cross stand for persecution to the point of martyrdom.’

<sup>30</sup> So Jeremias 1958: 55–63. Contra Allison 1989: 158–170; Davies and Allison 1991: 2:26–31, who claim that the many from east and west are not Gentiles but diaspora Jews.

<sup>31</sup> See the discussion of this passage below.



In a subtle christological typology, Jesus is presented as a ‘greater Jonah’ who, after three days and three nights in the depths of the earth, will go and preach salvation to the Gentiles (12:39–41). Not all Gentiles welcome Jesus, however. In the country of the Gadarenes, Jesus, after healing two demoniacs, is urged by the whole city to depart from their region, a clear indication of the rejection of Jesus’ ministry by this Gentile community (8:34; Sim 1995: 23).

In a very telling fashion, and in import not unlike Luke’s quotation of Isaiah 62:1–2 in Luke 4:18–19, Matthew inserts a lengthy quotation of Isaiah 42:1–4 between his account of the Pharisees’ criticism of Jesus’ behaviour on the Sabbath (12:1–14) and their charge that he does his works by the power of Beelzebub (12:22–30). ‘Thus he interprets Jesus’ healing ministry, not so much in terms of “Son of God” or even royal “Son of David” christology, but in terms of Yahweh’s Suffering Servant’ (Carson 1984: 285). What is particularly striking is the prominence given to the Gentiles in this Isaianic passage. Matthew thereby seeks to draw attention to the fact that Jesus’ ministry fulfilled the prediction of Isaiah’s Servant song that ‘he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles’ (12:18) and ‘in his name the Gentiles will hope’ (12:21, NRSV).<sup>32</sup> ‘It is remarkable how Matthew is able to intertwine the parallel themes of God’s providential work in the sending of the Messiah; the fulfillment of OT prophecy in the arrival of Jesus; and the mission of Jesus being simultaneously received by the Gentiles and repudiated by Israel’ (Keathley 1997: 19).

Often overlooked is the fact that not merely Luke, but also Matthew portrays Jesus as concerned about those of low status in society. Matthew, however, uses such people, in particular children, to illustrate the nature of God’s kingdom revealed through Christ. In 11:25–27, a passage that in turn anticipates 28:16–20, Jesus is portrayed as saying, ‘I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children ... All things have been committed to me by my Father. No-one knows the Son except the Father, and no-one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.’ In many other pericopes, Jesus uses little children to teach lessons about the kingdom.<sup>33</sup> Discipleship, including a person’s need to grow in faith, is one of the major themes of Matthew, constituting an indispensable prerequisite for mission. Once again, these themes culminate in 28:16–

<sup>32</sup> See already the discussion of ‘The ministry of the Servant of Isaiah – Israel and the world’, and here especially ‘Introducing the Servant (Is. 42:1–4)’ in ch. 2 above.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. 10:42; 18:2–6, 10, 14; 19:14–15; 21:14–16. Cf. Arias 1991: 416–418.

20. This draws attention to the fact that discipleship *entails* mission and without it remains incomplete. While not necessarily involving cross-cultural ministry, the kind of discipleship mandated by Jesus involves a commitment to 'seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness' (6:33) as well as service to one's fellow-man, including the teaching of others to obey Jesus' commandments as the disciple does himself (28:20).

The disciples' own need for growing in faith is the point of the pericope of Jesus' walking on the water. When Peter expresses his desire to follow Jesus' example, he is encouraged to step out in faith and walk on the water just like Jesus did. But after a few steps, Peter looks at the wind and begins to sink. 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?' Jesus chides Peter (14:31). In this instance, it is clear that 'doubt' does not imply complete unbelief, but merely lack of adequate faith, leading to a hesitant, tentative approach.<sup>34</sup> This is significant for an understanding of the Gospel's final pericope in 28:16–20, the only other passage in the New Testament where the same Greek word for 'doubt' (*distazō*) is used. As will be argued further below, when it is said there that the disciples worship Jesus but doubt, this may be taken to connote a certain amount of reluctance towards Jesus that the latter assuages by reassuring his followers of his authority and continued presence. After further controversy with the Pharisees and scribes, Jesus, while withdrawing into the region of Tyre and Sidon (15:21–28; cf. 11:20–24) encounters a Canaanite woman.<sup>35</sup> In a pericope reminiscent of the healing of the centurion's servant in 8:5–13, Jesus yields to the woman's request for healing on behalf of her demon-possessed daughter, but not until she has acknowledged Israel's salvation-historical privilege (15:24–27; cf. John 4:22).<sup>36</sup> As in the case of the

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Hagner (1995: 885) following I. P. Ellis (1967–68: 574–580), who notes that the evangelist had available *apistein* for 'disbelieve' and *aporein* for 'be perplexed'. However, neither word is ever used by Matthew (though the noun *apistia* and the adjective *apistos* appear in 13:58 and 17:17 respectively). Ellis documents the meaning of hesitation or indecision for *distazō* in Plato and Aristotle. See also the discussion in Carson 1984: 593–594.

<sup>35</sup> The account is also featured in Mark 7:24–30 (though, puzzlingly, not in Luke, despite his interest in Gentiles). On the Matthean reworking of the material, see Hagner 1995: 439–440.

<sup>36</sup> Beare (1981: 341–342) calls Jesus' statements at this occasion 'brutal', 'offensive', 'insolent', 'embarrassing', 'atrocious' and 'chauvinistic'. All he can hope for is that these statements are a later 'retrojection into the life of Jesus'. France (1989: 234), on the other hand, takes strong exception, calling Beare's comments 'remarkably hostile', noting that 'The whole story is one which, if read with wooden literalism, gives good reason to complain of the "chauvinistic" attitude it displays, but which, if read within total literary context and with a due openness to a dialogue conducted not so much by sober propositions as by verbal fencing, fits well into Matthew's theology of Jesus as the

centurion, Jesus commends the woman for her great faith (15:28).<sup>37</sup>

## Jesus' ministry to his disciples: the formation of Jesus' community and the Matthean mountain motif (Matt. 16:13 – 20:34)

But scattered ministry to individual Gentiles is merely incidental at this point in Jesus' ministry. The major share of his ministry is devoted to the training of Jesus' (Jewish) disciples, particularly the twelve. At a pivotal point in Matthew's Gospel, Peter, speaking for Jesus' inner circle, confesses Jesus to be 'the Christ, the Son of the living God' (16:16), eliciting Jesus' prediction, and promise, that 'on this rock' he will build his (messianic) community (*ekklēsia*).<sup>38</sup> Notably, in the only other occurrence of the term *ekklēsia* in the Gospel (18:17–20), Jesus assures his followers that where two or three are gathered in his name, there he will be in their midst (18:20: *ekei eimi en mesō autōn*). This anticipates Jesus' promise at the end of Matthew that, as his followers disciple the nations, he will be with them (28:20: *egō meth' hymōn eimi*). How Jesus' community will be built is likewise further developed in the Gospel's final pericope: this will be accomplished by the messianic community's discipling of the nations, which involves the building of communities by way of baptism and instruction in Jesus' teachings (28:18–20). It is also possible that a thread of predictions of the glorious coming of the Son of Man finds its culmination in the risen Lord's final commission to his followers.<sup>39</sup>

An anticipation of Jesus' future glory is given to the inner circle of Jesus' inner circle on the Mount of Transfiguration (17:1–8; Carson 1984: 383–387).<sup>40</sup> The Mount of Transfiguration is one of seven

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Messiah of Israel – and of all those who respond in faith'.

<sup>37</sup> Gundry (1994: 314) detects in Matthew's version of this account a heightening of the obstacles to the woman's faith for dramatic effect. Rather than implying a bias against Gentiles on Matthew's part, Gundry suggests, this 'casts the faith of that Gentile in all the better light and by this means justifies a mission to Gentiles now that Jewish officialdom has rejected Jesus'. See also the excellent discussion in Hagner 1995: 440–442.

<sup>38</sup> This pattern of passion predictions (of which this is the first; though see allusions to Jesus' death in 9:15; 10:38; and 12:40) is already a familiar feature of Mark's Gospel: see discussion there. Later passion predictions in Matthew include 17:22–23 (cf. 17:12b) and 20:17–19. See also the discussion in Carson 1984: 375–377.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. 16:27–28; 26:64; cf. also the allusion to Dan. 7:14 in 28:19.

<sup>40</sup> Gundry (1994: 342–345) sees in the transfiguration another instance of Matthew's casting Jesus as the 'new and greater Moses'.

mountains featured in Matthew's Gospel which include:

1. the mountain of temptation (4:8–10);
2. the mountain of teaching on God's kingdom (5 – 7);
3. the mountain of prayer (14:23);
4. the mountain of ministry (15:29–38);
5. the mountain of transfiguration (17:1–8);
6. the mountain of private instruction regarding the end (24 – 25);
7. the mountain of commission (28:16–20).<sup>41</sup>

It is possible to detect in this arrangement a chiasmic structure, with the 'mountain of ministry' at the centre (4) and with three pairs of two mountains respectively forming corresponding elements:

- the mountains of temptation (1) and commission (7);
- the mountains of teaching on God's kingdom (2) and private instruction regarding the end (6);
- the mountains of prayer (3) and transfiguration (5).

If this observation is correct, the Matthean mountain motif highlights, among other things (but cf. already Old Testament precedents such as Mt Sinai or Mt Zion; see further below), the correspondence between Jesus' temptation to pursue his calling as the Son of God in worldly terms (cf. also 16:21–28 and 27:40) and his comprehensive authority subsequent to his vindication and exaltation as the risen Son who issues the 'Great Commission' (Donaldson 1985: 188–189). This also allows the various strands of the 'son' (particularly 'Son of God') motif in Matthew to converge in the final pericope (Kingsbury 1974: 573–584).

## Jesus' final parables and discourses and the passion narrative: increasing references to a universal mission and geographical symbolism (Matt. 21 – 27)

Nearing the end of the Gospel, one finds increasing references to the eschatological implications of Jesus' death, especially in terms of mission. The Parable of the Wicked Tenants includes the statement that 'the kingdom of God will be taken away from you [Israel] and given to a people who will produce its fruit' [the Gentiles] (21:43).<sup>42</sup> As Carson

<sup>41</sup> On the Matthean mountain motif, see esp. Donaldson 1985, esp. 87–190. Note also the discussion of Mt Zion under the heading 'The nations within God's plan in the Psalms' in ch. 2 above.

<sup>42</sup> Overman 1996 (esp. 303–304; see also 1990), following Saldarini 1994, claims that 'nation' in 21:43 refers, not to the Gentiles, but to a group other than the leaders of Israel, that is, the 'Matthean community'. But this is to substitute social reconstruction

rightly points out, strictly speaking this does not refer to ‘transferring the locus of the people of God from Jews to Gentiles, though it may hint at this insofar as that locus now extends far beyond the authority of the Jewish rulers; instead, it speaks of the ending of the role the Jewish religious leaders played in mediating God’s authority’ (1984: 454). The Parable of the Wedding Banquet, likewise, speaks of the unworthiness of those invited to the wedding feast (Israel), which leads to the invitation of others (22:8–10). In Jesus’ final eschatological discourse, the preaching of the ‘gospel of the kingdom’ (24:14)<sup>43</sup> for a witness *to all the nations* will precede the end (cf. Mark 13:10; Thompson 1971: 18–27).<sup>44</sup>

The universal preaching of the gospel is also anticipated in Jesus’ pronouncement at the occasion of his anointing, ‘Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done shall also be spoken of in memory of her’ (26:13, NASB). An instance of the opposite procedure is 21:13, where Matthew omits the final phrase from Jesus’ statement, uttered at the occasion of his cleansing of the temple, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer *for all the nations*’ (quoting Is. 56:7; cf. Mark 11:17, NRSV).<sup>45</sup> The phrase ‘all the nations’ (*panta ta ethnē*) is, however, found in 24:9, 14; 25:32; and 28:19, in each of these instances referring to the nations *including Israel* (see also 21:43).<sup>46</sup> This phrase links Jesus’ mission thrust as

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for the salvation-historical substructure of Matthean theology. For interpretations of this parable along salvation-historical lines, see Carson 1984: 450–454; Hagner 1995: 615–624.

<sup>43</sup> Earlier instances of this term are 4:23 and 9:35; cf. also 13:19 (NRSV): ‘word of the kingdom’ and 26:13: ‘this gospel’.

<sup>44</sup> Amazingly, Park 1995: 7 *assumes* at the very outset of his study that the universal mission spoken of in 24:14, 25:32, and 28:19 is not reflective of Jesus’ own vision but rather represents the creation of the evangelist Matthew (‘his idea’, 191). According to Park, at this stage the Matthean community ‘has already outgrown the notion of the exclusive Jewish mission and is now beginning to open the door to the gentiles’; ‘This universalism is Matthew’s own development’ drawn from the notion of the Abrahamic promise in Gen. 12:1–3. But this is highly implausible historically, since the book of Acts shows the early Christians already engaged in the Gentile mission much earlier than the composition of Matthew’s Gospel. Moreover, Park fails to take account of passages such as Acts 1:8, which clearly attribute this universal vision to Jesus himself.

<sup>45</sup> See already the discussion of ‘The nations within God’s plan in the Psalms’ in ch. 2 above.

<sup>46</sup> Contrast with this the occurrences of the phrase ‘the nations’ with reference to the Gentiles in 4:15; 6:32; 10:5, 18; 12:18, 21; and 20:19, 25. See esp. Meier 1977b: 94–102 and the summary discussion in Carson 1984: 596; contra Hare and Harrington 1975: 359–369, R. Walker 1967: 111–112, and Lange 1973: 302–305. Scholars favouring the inclusion of the Jews among the term ‘all the nations’ in 28:19 include Bosch, Donaldson, Frankemölle, Hagner, Hahn, Hill, Hubbard, Meier, Michel, O’Brien, Senior and Stuhlmüller, Strecker and Trilling.

traced in Matthew's Gospel (see already 1:1 and below on 28:18–20) with God's promise to Abraham that all the nations would be blessed through him (Gen. 12:3; note *panta ta ethnē* in Gen. 18:18; 22:18, LXX). Towards the end of the Gospel, likewise, the expectation is nurtured that, just as Jesus' base for his ministry was Galilee (4:12–16; cf. 2:22–23), Galilee would be the place for Jesus' commissioning of his disciples for ministry (cf. 26:32; 28:7, 16; Carson 1984: 116).

This favourable attitude towards Galilee stands in marked contrast with Matthew's focus on the inimical reaction of Israel and Jerusalem to Jesus.<sup>47</sup> From chapter 10 onward, one observes a distinct and rising note of hostility towards Jesus. While the crowds continue to grow, there is no indication that Israel as a whole accepts her Messiah. A telling series of events occurs in chapters 12 – 14 when the Pharisees plot to kill Jesus (12:14) and accuse him of healing by the power of Beelzebul (12:24); a sign is demanded (12:38); his home town of Nazareth takes offence at Jesus (13:57); and John the Baptist is beheaded (14:1–12). In response, Jesus delivers a series of scorching denunciations against Israel (11:20–24; 12:31–32, 39–42; 16:1–4), culminating in a blistering attack on Israel's leadership in chapter 23. Israel's repudiation of Jesus is complete when Barabbas is chosen over Jesus and the nation accepts the consequences of their action (27:21–25).<sup>48</sup> This is further underscored by Matthew's switch from *ochlos/ochloi* ('crowd[s]') in 27:15, 20, 24 to *laos* ('nation'), a term frequently employed by Matthew with reference to Israel (e.g. 2:6, citing Mic. 5:2), in 27:25 to seal Israel's culpability.

In terms of geographical symbolism, Matthew, by employing the pilgrimage motif in his narration of Jesus' journey from Galilee to Jerusalem in four stages (16:21; 17:22–27; 19:1; 21:1 – 23:39), casts the entire story of 16:21 – 23:39 as the return of the exiled king to confront the city of the throne of his forefather David. This dramatic presentation highlights the scandalous nature of Israel's response to her Messiah. By dethroning the holy city and the old-covenant community from their place of pre-eminence in salvation history, Matthew draws attention to the fact that Jesus' gospel of the kingdom radically undercuts Jewish presumptions of God's partial favour. The import of Jesus' mission, according to Matthew, is rather that a universal gospel

<sup>47</sup> On Jerusalem, see already the discussion entitled 'Jerusalem in the purposes of God' in ch. 2 above. For some of the material in the next two paragraphs, we are indebted to Keathley 1997: 20–21 and Verseput 1994: 105–121.

<sup>48</sup> See further Kingsbury 1973: 50–52 as to how the repudiation of Jesus by Israel signals an extension of the mission to the Gentiles.

is preached to all the nations transcending ethnic boundaries.

This reality comes into even sharper focus in the Matthean passion narrative. At the occasion of Jesus' death, Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator, unsuccessfully seeks to shift blame for Jesus' crucifixion on to the Jews (27:24), while the nation accepts full responsibility for Jesus' death (27:25).<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, the fact that Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, 'the king of the Jews',<sup>50</sup> was 'handed over into the hands of the Gentiles' fulfilled Old Testament prophecy. The blasphemous treatment of Jesus by the Roman soldiers preparing him for crucifixion indicates that Matthew's Gospel does not have a 'Gentile bias'.<sup>51</sup> Regarding the Jews, Matthew, in material unique to him, seeks to counter a rumour that Jesus' disciples stole his body, in an effort to discredit reports of Jesus' resurrection (27:62–66; 28:11–15).<sup>52</sup> In this obduracy, the Jewish people are confirmed 'to this [Matthew's] day' (28:15). Thus the Gospel presents both certain Gentiles and Jews as hardened toward Jesus and his messianic claims. A core group of followers, the twelve, which is composed of Jews, is the nucleus through whom Jesus intends to build his messianic community by way of his followers' discipling of the nations.

## Jesus' resurrection and the 'Great Commission' (Matt. 28)

This leads us to a treatment of the final pericope, the famous 'Great Commission' passage (28:16–20).<sup>53</sup> The previous discussion has

<sup>49</sup> On 27:25, see esp. McKnight 1993: 55–79, esp. 72, n. 64. McKnight rightly asserts that the passage 'speaks as much of the suspension of national privilege and the extension of the gospel to the Gentiles as it does of Jewish guilt'. Cf. also Fitzmyer 1965: 670–671. Contra Cargal 1991:101–112.

<sup>50</sup> 27:11, 29, 37, 42; cf. 21:5, quoting Zech. 9:9.

<sup>51</sup> 27:27–31; cf. 20:19. Cf. recently Sim (1995: 19–48), who, however, interprets his findings not in relation to Jesus but with reference to the Matthean community. According to Sim, the 'anti-Gentile' statements found in Matthew's Gospel are evidence that the Matthean community took steps to distance itself from its Gentile neighbours in response to persecution following the first Jewish war against Rome. But the exact opposite seems to be demonstrable. Rather than portraying the post-AD 70 church as reverting back to the initial mission to the Jews, Matthew's Gospel shows how Jesus engaged in a mission to the Jews that, after his exaltation, was broadened to include the Gentiles.

<sup>52</sup> This may, by way of *inclusio*, mirror Matthew's defence of Jesus' Davidic provenance at the onset of his Gospel against Jewish charges of the illegitimacy of Jesus' birth (see Freed 1987: 3–19).

<sup>53</sup> Regarding the plethora of treatments of Matthew's 'Great Commission', see the detailed bibliography in Hagner 1995: 878–880, plus now also Keener 1999: 715–721.

already indicated that this passage is intricately interwoven with the Gospel as a whole,<sup>54</sup> a fact that confirms the impression that the pericope was composed (or at least thoroughly reworked) by the evangelist rather than merely having been taken from traditional material.<sup>55</sup> Some significance rests on the genre of this section. Rather than dealing with this issue in terms of competing, mutually exclusive options, we may detect elements of enthronement, covenant renewal and commissioning (O'Brien 1976: 66–71). In an echo of Daniel 7:14, Jesus is portrayed as the exalted eschatological ruler of the world's kingdoms (enthronement);<sup>56</sup> by assuring the disciples of his continuing presence, Jesus reaffirms his covenant with them (covenant renewal); and, reminiscent of Old Testament commissioning narratives, Jesus issues to his followers his final charge (commissioning).<sup>57</sup> In the end, it is not any particular genre, or even a combination of these, that accurately describes Matthew's final pericope. The evangelist rather brings his own Gospel to his own intended conclusion.<sup>58</sup>

By omitting reference to the name of the mountain in Galilee ('into Galilee' echoes 26:32; 28:7, 10) where the event took place and by providing no description of Jesus' external appearance, Matthew focuses attention on Jesus' words uttered on this occasion.<sup>59</sup> Before

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Apart from the sources listed above, see esp. Bornkamm, Barth and Held 1963: 131–137.

<sup>54</sup> Cf., apart from references previously quoted, also Brooks 1981: 2–18; Scaer 1991: 245–266.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Kingsbury 1974: 573–574; Schlatter 1948: 801: 'the ending of the first Gospel [is] ... written by Mt.'; Kilpatrick 1946: 48–49; and Bosch (1991: 57), who calls this the 'most Matthean' pericope in the entire Gospel. Contra Bornkamm, Hahn, Michel and Strecker. See also LaGrand (1999: 235–247), whose chapter on the 'Great Commission' is given almost entirely to a discussion and defence of the passage's authenticity.

<sup>56</sup> This is the view of Bornkamm, Barth and Held (1963: 133–134); Meier (1977a: 413) (with reference to previous publications); Michel (1983: 36); and others. Donaldson (1985: 181–188) contends that many important features of Dan. 7:13–14 are missing in Matt. 28:16–20: the coming on the clouds of heaven, the terms *basileia*, *doxa*, and the term 'Son of Man' itself. He prefers to view the mountain setting, the terms *edothē*, *exousia*, and 'Son' christology as pointers to a background of a Zion eschatology.

<sup>57</sup> Note, however, that this commissioning is given to a group rather than to individuals as in Old Testament narratives.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Bosch (1983: 222): 'we have here a pericope which is *sui generis* and eludes the labels of form criticism'; Meier (1977a: 424): 'no form-critical category yet proposed fits Matt 28:16–20 ... the pericope is so *sui generis* ... that it defies the labels of form criticism' (but see the qualifications by Carson 1984: 592).

<sup>59</sup> The authenticity of the event is highly probable, contra Barth (1961: 57), who claims that the event is recounted, not in the style of history but, like the creation story, in the style of historical saga.



focusing on Jesus' words, we may briefly discuss the response Jesus encountered on the part of his disciples: 'When they saw him, they worshipped him; but they (or: some) doubted' (28:17, NRSV). The instance of 'doubt' in 14:31 has indicated that, for Matthew, doubt did not necessarily amount to unbelief; it rather indicated people's wavering or lack of resolve.<sup>60</sup> Together with the fact that the Greek plural article *hoi* is usually used by Matthew in the sense of 'they' rather than 'some',<sup>61</sup> the emphasis here appears to be on the disciples' lack of resolve (Bauer 1988: 110; Hagner 1995: 884–885). This interpretation coheres well with the fact that Jesus' final charge concludes with a strong assurance that he would be with his followers until the end of the age as they carried out his commission.<sup>62</sup>

'All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth' (28:18, NASB): the divine passive 'has been given' (*Edothē*) indicates that it is *the Father* who gave Jesus all authority.<sup>63</sup> What kind of authority has the Father given to Jesus? All we are told is that Jesus' authority is comprehensive (*pasa*). In fact, 'all' dominates the entire 'Great Commission' passage: Jesus has 'all authority' (v. 18); his followers are to go and make disciples of 'all nations' (v. 19); and Jesus will be with them 'always' (lit. 'all the days'; v. 20).<sup>64</sup> In the present instance, the authority spoken of pertains to his mission, to be carried out through the disciples as his emissaries, on the basis of his word.<sup>65</sup> The image in mind here may be that of a victorious military general who assures his followers of his unlimited authority (Borgen 1996: 59–60).

On this basis, Jesus' disciples are to 'go and make disciples': the aorist participle 'go' (*poreuthentes*) modifies the aorist imperative

<sup>60</sup> See the treatment of 14:31 above.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. 2:5; 4:20, 22; 14:17, 33; 15:34; 16:7, 14; 20:5, 31; 21:25; 22:19; 26:15, 67; 27:4, 21, 23; 28:15.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. 28:20: *synteleia tou aiōnos*; cf. 13:39–40, 49; 24:3.

<sup>63</sup> McNicol (1989: 37) plausibly suggests that Matt. 28:18–20, the last unit in Matthew, echoes 2 Chr. 36:22–23, the last unit in the Hebrew Bible. LaGrand (1999: 238), referring to Barth 1961: 56, considers Matt. 28:18b 'the decisive fulfillment of 10.23'. Note also the tie-in with the temptation narrative in Matt. 4:9 ('"All this I will give you," Satan said, "if you will bow down and worship me"'); par. Luke. 4:6: 'I will give you all their authority and splendour, for it has been given to me'). At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus had resisted the devil's temptation and gone the way of the cross. At this climactic high point in Matthew's Gospel, subsequent to the resurrection, Jesus proclaims that he has in fact been given 'all authority' – but now the giver is God, and the authority has been legitimately obtained (cf. Gundry 1994: 595; Keener 1999: 716, who also cites France 1985: 413).

<sup>64</sup> This is noted by Carson 1984: 594 et al.

<sup>65</sup> Though it is of course true that all of God's authority is mediated through the risen Christ this side of his resurrection and ascension.

## SALVATION TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

'make disciples' (*mathēteusate*) as an auxiliary reinforcing the action of the main verb.<sup>66</sup> The making of disciples (the term occurs elsewhere only in 13:52; 27:57; and Acts 14:21) entails the bringing of a person into the relationship of student to teacher in order to take the teacher's yoke upon himself and learn from him (11:29). In effect, successful disciple-making therefore presupposes the committed discipleship of the disciple-makers themselves.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, in the context of Matthew's Gospel, pursuing the road of discipleship 'means above all to follow after righteousness as articulated in the teaching of Jesus'.<sup>68</sup>

Perhaps the most striking element of the present command, however, is the fact that Jesus' followers are called not merely to disciple *individuals*, but entire *nations*, indeed, *all* nations. This vision is as startling as it is grand.<sup>69</sup> Apart from Jesus' promise of his continuing presence with his own, it would surely have to be judged hopelessly ambitious and beyond reach. As already argued, 'all the nations' includes Israel.<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, the primary focus in the present context may well be said to lie on the evangelization of the (Gentile) nations other than Israel.<sup>71</sup> The two present participles 'baptizing' (*baptizontes*)

<sup>66</sup> The closest Matthean parallels featuring the aorist participle of *poreuomai* plus an aorist imperative are 2:8 ('go and search'); 9:13 ('go and learn'); 11:4 ('go and report'); 17:27 ('go and throw'); and 28:7 ('go and tell'). In each case, the weight of the phrase rests, not on 'go' (though a mild imperatival force extends to this term as well), but on the subsequent imperatival expression (Luke adds several additional examples: 7:22 = Matt. 11:4; Luke 13:32; 14:10; 17:14; and 22:8; the occurrence of the construction – not elsewhere featured in Mark – in Mark 16:15 suggests an assimilation to Matt. 28:19). Likewise, what is stressed in 28:19 (contrary to popular notions) is not going, but the making of disciples (though the latter may well imply the former). Compare with this the use of the *imperative* of *poreuomai* plus a second imperative in 28:10 ('go and tell'), where proportionately more weight may rest on the going itself; and the use of the *present* participle of *poreuomai* plus an imperative in Matthew 10:7 ('as you go'), where the participial force may receive greater emphasis (the contention by Culver [1968: 243–253] that we are simply to make disciples 'as we go' rather than going somewhere for the express purpose of making converts is unduly extreme; see the proper qualifications registered by Carson 1984: 595). See on these matters esp. Rogers 1973: 258–267; cf. Donaldson 1985: 184 and O'Brien 1976: 72–73.

<sup>67</sup> As Carson puts it, all of Jesus' disciples are 'to make others what they themselves are – disciples of Jesus Christ' (1984: 596).

<sup>68</sup> Hagner 1995: 887, referring to Kvalbein 1988: 48–53.

<sup>69</sup> Keener (1999: 719) calls it a 'drastic innovation'.

<sup>70</sup> See the helpful summary discussion by Carson (1984: 596), complete with a critique of the 'church growth movement'. Contra Park (1995: 190), who claims that the 'Kingdom is not simply *expanded* to accommodate the gentiles but is *transferred* from the Jews to the Gentiles (21:43)' (emphasis original).

<sup>71</sup> So rightly Keener (1999: 719), who also notes that the present commission extends beyond the boundaries set in the commissioning of the twelve in ch. 10.

and ‘teaching’ (*didaskontes*) specify the characteristic mode<sup>72</sup> of making disciples, whereby baptism and instruction are to be construed in complementary terms.<sup>73</sup> In both cases, further qualifiers are given.

Baptism is to be administered in (*eis*) the name (singular) of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, the most straightforward trinitarian formula in the entire New Testament.<sup>74</sup> In light of the fact that the early church is shown to have baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38; 10:48) or ‘the Lord Jesus’ (Acts 8:16; 19:5) and Paul refers merely to baptism in the name of Christ (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3), the question arises whether this formulation reflects later baptismal practice. If Matthew was written prior to AD 70,<sup>75</sup> however, there is hardly enough time for a trinitarian practice of baptism to evolve. It appears more likely that the early church felt no contradiction between Jesus’ command to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and its practice of baptizing in the name of Jesus, since the latter implied the former (Riggenbach 1903).

Regarding teaching, the disciples are enjoined to teach others ‘to obey everything I have commanded you’ (28:20a; cf. Deut. 4:1; 6:1). This brings into play the entire body of Jesus’ teaching presented in the course of Matthew’s Gospel (cf. esp. 5:17–20; 7:21–27), similar to the way in which the disciples’ commissioning in John 20:21 rests on the Fourth Gospel’s sending christology. Moreover, the present charge makes clear that mission entails the nurturing of converts into the full obedience of faith, not merely the proclamation of the gospel.<sup>76</sup> This was perhaps most admirably carried out by the apostle Paul, whose

<sup>72</sup> Though not the means: see Carson 1984: 597.

<sup>73</sup> As Carson aptly notes, ‘The NT can scarcely conceive of a disciple who is not baptized or is not instructed’ (1984: 597). Hagner (1995: 887) notes that the mention of baptism here comes somewhat as a surprise, since baptism is mentioned earlier in Matthew only in ch. 3 (and 21:25) with reference to John the Baptist, and we know nothing about Matthew’s view of Christian baptism.

<sup>74</sup> As Blomberg (1992: 432) points out (with reference to Mounce 1985: 277), ‘Jesus has already spoken of God as his Father (Matt 11:27; 24:36), of himself as the Son (11:27; 16:27; 24:36), and of blasphemy against God’s work in himself as against the Spirit (12:28) ... “That Jesus should gather together into summary form his own references ... in his final charge to the disciples seems quite natural”’ (cf. the positive assessment by Keener 1999: 717). Neither Blomberg nor Carson 1984: 598 (followed by Hagner 1995: 888; see also Osborne 1976 and 1978), however, thinks it likely that the present phrase preserves Jesus’ *ipsissima verba*.

<sup>75</sup> While most commentators favour a post- AD 70 date for Matthew’s Gospel (see survey chart in Davies and Allison 1988: 127–128 and the authors’ own conclusion on 138), a date prior to AD 70 is not without its advocates (e.g. Carson, Ellis, Gundry, Maier, Meinertz, Moule, Reicke and Robinson). For a summary of the discussion and a defence of a pre- AD 70 date, see Carson, Moo and Morris 1992: 76–79.

<sup>76</sup> See already the expression ‘make disciples’ (*mathēteuō*) in v. 19.

ambition it was to ‘present everyone perfect in Christ’ (Col. 1:28). Finally, as the church disciples the nations, it is assured of its risen Lord’s continued spiritual presence until his bodily return: ‘And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age’ (28:20b; cf. Deut. 31:6).<sup>77</sup>

## Mission in Matthew: some theological soundings

Matthew 28:16–20 marks the culmination and fulfilment of Jesus’ mission: the fulfilment of Israel’s destiny as the representative, paradigmatic Son, with the result that God’s blessings to the nations, promised to Abraham, unrealized through Israel (despite Exod. 19:6), would be fulfilled through Jesus in the mission of his followers,<sup>78</sup> which nevertheless remains his own mission.<sup>79</sup> Jesus thus has become the eschatological replacement of Israel as God’s locus of blessing for the nations (cf. John. 15). He is the replacement of Mt Zion, God’s holy mountain, to which the nations would come in the last days (Donaldson 1985: 183–186). He also is the agent of God’s restorative programme focused on Zion (Tan 1997). This alleviates the tension between the restrictive statements of chapters 10 and 15 and the universal affirmations in chapters 24 and 28: Israel is subsumed under the ‘nations’ of chapter 28, and chapters 10 and 15 merely affirm the salvation-historical primacy of Israel prior to Jesus’ death and resurrection.

During Jesus’ earthly ministry, one already finds indications that he will also attract people beyond the boundaries of Israel, albeit not at his own initiative. Jesus is shown to exercise salvation-historical restraint and to wait for the period subsequent to his own death when he would reveal himself to the disciples as the risen Messiah to whom the nations are now to be summoned by the proclamation of the gospel (J. J. Scott Jr 1990: 161–169). In the following pattern, Matthew concurs with the other evangelists: Jesus’ commission to Israel – rejection by Israel – judgment on Israel – opening of the kingdom to the Gentiles, with the

<sup>77</sup> Hagner (1995: 888) also notes the parallel in Hag. 1:13 and a series of Old Testament passages that promise the presence of Yahweh with his people: Gen. 28:15; Exod. 3:12; Josh. 1:5, 9; Is. 41:10.

<sup>78</sup> See the important recent study by LaGrand (1999).

<sup>79</sup> Cf. 28:20b; cf. also John 14:12; Acts 1:1. Beale (1997: 28–29) ties in the Great Commission with his proposed ‘new creation’ motif as the centre of New Testament theology. Where Adam, Noah and Israel failed, Christ succeeded as the Last Adam and true Israel. He ‘subdued’ and conquered for God as his vicegerent, and thus is in a position to authorize the church to go on its mission to the ends of the earth.

goal of forming communities of Christian disciples (Frankemölle 1982: 112–113). By conceiving of mission in terms of discipleship rather than mere gospel proclamation, and by conceiving of discipleship in terms of righteous living rather than mere believing, Matthew appears to share a certain degree of affinity with the Petrine concept of mission.<sup>80</sup>

Similar to John's Gospel, Matthew presents Jesus' mission from two vantage points: his earthly mission ('God with us', 1:23), which is devoted to his gathering of an embryonic *ekklēsia* (16:18; cf. 18:20: 'in their midst', NASB), initially climaxes in his rejection by Israel issuing in his crucifixion, yet is superseded by his resurrection and commissioning of his followers; and the mission of the exalted Jesus who promised his disciples to be with them 'always, even to the end of the age' (28:20b, NASB).<sup>81</sup> The movement from the first to the second stage of Jesus' mission therefore involves no relinquishing of Jesus' pre-eminent role, but rather merely represents a transposition on to a higher plane of activity and salvation-historical realization.<sup>82</sup>

## Conclusion

In conclusion, how was the 'Great Commission' intended to function among the original recipients of Matthew's Gospel? Perhaps it was designed to further reinforce the notion (or correct any misperceptions) that the Gentile mission in which the early church engaged (after some hesitation) was rooted in a command of the risen Lord Jesus Christ himself. The reference to Jesus' all-encompassing authority, the charge to disciple *all* the nations by baptizing and teaching them, and the assurance of Christ's presence until the parousia would strengthen and undergird further missionary work.<sup>83</sup>

As Hagner (1993: lxx) suggests, Matthew's original readers were in a position between their Jewish brothers and sisters on the one hand and Gentile Christians on the other, 'wanting to reach back for continuity with the old and at the same time to reach forward to the new work God

<sup>80</sup> Cf. ch. 9 on mission in the General Epistles, particularly 1 Peter.

<sup>81</sup> The phrase 'end of the age' is also found in 13:39–40, 49; 24:3. Note that Jesus' missionary vision encompassed both a temporal component ('to the end of the age', Matt. 28:20b) and a spatial, geographical dimension ('to the ends of the earth', Acts 1:8).

<sup>82</sup> For a discussion of the relationship between the missions of Jesus and the church in the Gospel of Matthew, see Powell 1994: 77–89, esp. 78–79.

<sup>83</sup> Note the suggestion by Gundry (1994: 9) that Matthew wrote his Gospel 'to keep persecution of the church from stymieing evangelism'. 'Wherever the church ... loses its vision of worldwide evangelism', Gundry writes, 'there the Gospel of Matthew speaks with power and pertinence' (10).

was doing in the largely gentile church'. The particularist sayings preserved in Matthew, then, were to reassure Jewish believers of God's faithfulness to his covenant people, stressing 'the continuity of God's salvific promises and the actuality of their fulfillment in the first instance to Israel, as the Scriptures promised'.

At the same time, however, Matthew's Gospel serves as a reminder that the Jewish nation as a whole rejected the Messiah. Only a righteous remnant, vis-à-vis the religious establishment of Pharisaic Judaism, remained to form the nucleus of the new messianic community that consisted of followers of the Messiah irrespective of ethnic identity. Perhaps Hagner is right when he finds the audience of Matthew's Gospel 'struggling to define and defend a Jewish Christianity to the Jews, on the one hand, and to realize their identity with gentile Christians, on the other' (1993: lxxi).<sup>84</sup>

To be sure, Jesus and his followers and Israel stand in painful tension in Matthew.<sup>85</sup> Jesus is presented as superior interpreter of the Law (7:28–29) who scathingly denounces the scribes and Pharisees (23:32–33) and predicts Jewish persecution of the church (10:17; 23:34). What may be perceived as 'anti-Judaism' (though not anti-Semitism), however, in fact provides salvation-historical justification for the reconstitution of the messianic community as a new entity distinct from ethnic Israel, legitimizing a mission that reaches out to Jews and Gentiles alike with a message of repentance and faith in Jesus the Messiah in light of the imminence of God's kingdom.

Finally, together with 10:23 and 24:14, the concluding commission of 28:16–20 also places the Christian mission firmly within an eschatological framework: mission is the church's primary task between Christ's first coming and his return. The striking open-endedness of the commissioning scene, similar to the open-endedness of the book of Acts, is pregnant with anticipation and potential.<sup>86</sup> The eleven, as representatives of later generations of believers, are to

<sup>84</sup> Hagner's masterful description of the tension between particularism and universalism in Matthew's Gospel and his thoughtful discussion of the life-setting of Matthew's community (1993: lxxv–lxxi) are well worth pondering.

<sup>85</sup> See esp. 4:23; 7:29; 9:35; 10:17; 12:9–10; 13:54; 23:34; 28:15.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Hahn (1980: 30) with reference to Bornkamm (1970: 290): 'This means at the same time that the pericope remains "entirely open-ended concerning the present" and must in no way be understood as a "farewell discourse"' (our translation). See also Carson (1984: 599), who notes that while previously in Matthew's Gospel narrative units starting with an account of Jesus' ministry always concluded with a block of Jesus' teaching, in the present instance the Gospel ends with the expectation of continued mission and teaching, but now *on the part of his disciples*: 'In this sense the Gospel of Matthew is not a closed book till the consummation.'

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embark on their mission, at the command and on the basis of the authority of the exalted Christ, the eschatological ruler, the Son of God.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>87</sup> For an interesting recent historical study related to the history of interpretation of the 'Great Commission', see Friesen 1998.

