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Angela D. Ingram

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**OF DOGS AND DISCIPLES: GENTILES AND THE DISCOURSE OF IDENTITY
IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW**

A Masters Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of
Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts, Religious Studies

By

Angela D. Ingram

May 2015

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Department of Religious Studies

Missouri State University, May 2015

Master of Arts

Angela D. Ingram

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines some of the ways that the narrative of the Gospel of Matthew functions rhetorically, within the context of a broader first-century Jewish-Christian discourse of identity, to construct insider identity—i.e., to construct disciples—in relation to non-Jews. The focus, in particular, is on two key tensions regarding non-Jews in the narrative context of the gospel: 1) the tension between the negative stereotypical "Gentiles" of Jesus discourse and the very positive portrayal of some Gentile characters in the narrative; and 2) the tension between the two commissions of Jesus to his disciples, between his first command to "go nowhere among the Gentiles" (Matt 10:5) and his final command to "make disciples of all nations" (28:19). I argue, through my analysis of these two tensions within the narrative context of the gospel, that the Gospel of Matthew's narration of the life of Jesus functions for the narrative's implied reader as more (though certainly not less) than an etiology of Gentile inclusion; beyond explaining and defending the presence of non-Jews within the *ekklēsia*, the gospel itself forges an insider identity that includes people of *ta ethnē*, and it does this in part by negotiating the categories of *ethnikoi/ethnē* and *mathētai/ekklēsia* in relation to each other.

KEYWORDS: Gospel of Matthew, Gentiles, *ethnē*, *ethnikoi*, social identity theory, discourse, social construction, narrative criticism

This abstract is approved as to form and content.

Dr. Leslie Baynes
Chairperson, Advisory Committee
Missouri State University

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INTRODUCTION

“*[Jesus] answered, ‘It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs’*”
(*Matthew 15:26 NRSV*).¹

A sensitive reader of the Gospel of Matthew will note that an interesting tension exists between the way that Gentiles (*ethnē* and *ethnikoi*)² are portrayed in Jesus’ discourse within the gospel and the way that Gentile characters are depicted within the gospel’s narrative episodes. On the one hand, the Matthean Jesus, when he speaks of non-Israelites abstractly, often does so in very uncomplimentary, even pejorative, terms. On the other hand, the narrator of Matthew frequently portrays non-Israelite characters in the gospel as paradigms of virtue and faith. This tension cycles throughout the gospel narrative, and it does so in relation to a key theme of the narrative: the expectation and—with Jesus’ final commission at the end of the gospel—the inauguration of non-Israelites being included among God’s people in the kingdom. Prior to his death and resurrection, Jesus insists that his own mission and that of his disciples is limited to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt 10:6). Following his resurrection, however, he explicitly commands his disciples to “make disciples of all nations (*ethnē*)” (28:19). Something has changed between these two commissions, and the boundaries of “us”—i.e., the

¹ All Bible quotations will be from the NRSV unless otherwise noted.

² Throughout this thesis, I use the noun “Gentiles” to refer to non-Jewish persons and the adjective “Gentile” to identify the noun that it modifies as non-Jewish. There is some unavoidable incongruence between the English word “Gentiles” and the Greek words *ethnē* and *ethnikoi* as they are used in Matthew. Not only do *ethnē* and *ethnikoi* often denote much more than simply “non-Jewish persons,” *ethnē* is used to refer not to persons, but rather to nations or peoples (sometimes non-Jewish nations or peoples and sometimes nations or peoples including the Jews). Later in this introduction, I give a fuller explanation of relationship of the English word “Gentiles” and the semantic range of the Greek words *ethnē* and *ethnikoi* in the Gospel of Matthew.

narrative's insiders³—and “them”—i.e., those who are not “us”—have been re-drawn. Gentiles, who have been throughout most of the narrative positioned as outsiders simply on the basis of their ethnicity, have now become potential insiders. It is the gospel narrative's re-structuring of this particular boundary—that between Gentiles and disciples—that is the focus of this thesis.

In the pages that follow, I attempt to explicate this negotiation of identity through a historically sensitive analysis of the narrative rhetoric⁴ of the Gospel of Matthew's story of Jesus. Using the conceptual tools of narrative criticism and social identity theory, I explore how the narrator's depiction of Gentile characters interacts with the Matthean Jesus' deployment of the categories of *ethnē* and *ethnikoi* as stereotypes, and I consider some of the key ways that the overall narrative of Matthew shapes insider identity (*ekklēsia/mathētai*) in relation to *ta ethnē* and *hoi ethnikoi*. I argue that the Gospel of Matthew's narration of the life of Jesus functions for the narrative's implied reader as an etiology of Gentile inclusion, an explanation and defense of how it is that non-Jews have become part of the community of Jesus' followers, how it is that “dogs” have become “disciples.” More than this, however, I argue that the gospel does not merely reflect or defend an identity that precedes it or that exists outside of the text, but rather that the

³ The insiders of the Matthean narrative include Jesus, the disciples (*mathētai*), the church or community of disciples (*ekklēsia*), the narrator, the implied author, and the implied reader. In addition, Warren Carter identifies several other labels that are sometimes used to identify the gospel's insiders: children of God, prophets, scribes, the wise, infants, and little ones. Warren Carter, “Community Definition and Matthew's Gospel,” *Society of Biblical Literature 1997 Seminar Papers*, SBLSPS 36 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 637–638.

⁴ Narrative rhetoric has to do with all of the ways that a story can reasonably be expected to impact its implied reader. I discuss some of the key theoretical premises and specialized terminology of narrative criticism more later on in this introduction.

gospel itself participates in the discursive creation of identity, that it forges *ethnē/ethnikoi* and *ekklēsia/mathētai* in the presence of, and indeed out of, each other.

The Gospel of Matthew and its Intended Audience

A key theoretical assumption of this study, and of most recent studies of the Gospel of Matthew, is that histories—i.e., narratives about the past⁵—are never merely accounts of “what actually happened.” This is true first of all because our historical accounts are selective. We choose to mention some things and neglect to mention others, and this is necessarily so since we, as human beings, cannot recognize, much less describe, more than a very tiny fraction of everything that occurs in a particular place at any particular moment in time. In addition, historical narratives link certain events causally, when in fact it would take nothing short of omniscience to reconstruct the causal chains that converge to produce any event, be these causes dead or organic, mechanical or volitional. The narrative frame into which we organize events is thus always incomplete in its description of historical causality. Our stories about the past—our histories—“link certain events from the past together into a narrative that tells a meaningful story . . . believed to have implications for the present.”⁶ Histories, in other

⁵ I here make use of the perspective of Wesley Olmstead, who, following Meir Sternberg, contends that it is the “claim to historicity” that makes a text historical. Olmstead writes that “is precisely this claim—that the people introduced are historical figures and that the events portrayed actually happened—that separates history from fiction. The fundamental difference, then, is the nature of the agreement that an author enters into with his [or her] (envisioned) readers.” See Wesley G. Olmstead, *Matthew’s Trilogy of Parables: The Nation, the Nations and the Reader in Matthew 21.28–22.14* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 7–8. I find this definition useful for my purposes here because it conceptualizes history and fiction not in terms of “stories that really happened” and “stories that did not really happen,” but rather as two types of discourse, one of which appeals overtly to the authority of the past and cedes to its constraints (such constraints as, e.g., the ways that a story is remembered/retold by others), and the other which does not.

⁶ Stephen C. Berkwitz, *Buddhist History in the Vernacular: The Power of the Past in Late Medieval Sri Lanka* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2004), 26.

words, are not just written to tell about something that happened in the past; they are written to *do* something, to accomplish something, in the present.

Gospel interpreters have long recognized this rhetorical function of historiography, and most modern scholars take for granted that a gospel is not an objective, disinterested account of the life of Jesus, but rather a particular interpretation and narration of Jesus' life, one shaped by the socio-historically embedded concerns of a particular people in a particular place and time.⁷ For much of the modern history of interpretation of the gospels, therefore, scholars have devoted quite a lot of attention to trying to understand the social and historical contexts from and for which the gospels were originally created and the ways that the gospels functioned within those particular contexts.

Reconstructing the local community from which the Gospel of Matthew originated is made difficult by the fact that the extra-textual evidence that we have regarding the gospel's provenance is minimal and difficult to interpret.⁸ Therefore, though the text of Matthew explicitly identifies neither its author⁹ nor its intended

⁷ In terms of genre, the canonical gospels, including the Gospel of Matthew, have much in common with *bioi*, a category of ancient Greco-Roman biography. *Bioi*, while narrating the life of an important historical person, also function to instruct, elicit praise from, and offer a model for an ideal audience, and this is also true of the gospel's respective retellings of the story of Jesus; each narrates the past, as discussed above, in the service of the present. See Richard Burrige, *What are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*, SNTSMS 71 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 80–81, 240–243; Carter, "Community Definition and Matthew's Gospel," 637.

⁸ See Donald Senior, *What are They Saying about the Gospel of Matthew?* (New York; Ramsey: Paulist Press, 1983), 5.

⁹ At least as early as the second century, authorship of this gospel was attributed to Jesus' disciple Matthew, the tax collector (see Matt 9:9–12; 10:3). Irenaeus of Lyons' *Against Heresies*, which was written late in the second century, is "the first major extant writing to refer unambiguously to [this gospel as] the gospel 'According to Matthew.'" Warren Carter, *Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 16. Two other second-century sources—Papias (quoted by Eusebius in the third century) and the Gospel of the Ebionites (quoted by Epiphanius at the end of the fourth century) reference a gospel written in Hebrew that is attributed to Matthew. Because the Greek text of Matthew does

audience, it remains true that most of the clues that we have available to us about the community from which it originated and the audience for whom it was written come from inside the gospel itself. The gospel's apparent literary dependence on the Gospel of Mark and concern with the 70 CE Roman destruction of Jerusalem suggest a post-70 CE setting,¹⁰ and the familiarity with the gospel that is evidenced in some early second-century literature allows us to narrow the historical window of its composition to about the years 70–95 CE.¹¹ In addition, the focus on intra-Jewish conflicts and halakhic disputes in the gospel's narration of the life of Jesus and its rich and multifaceted intertextual relationship with the Hebrew Scriptures have led almost all interpreters to conclude confidently that "Matthew's conceptual world is predominantly Jewish."¹² The picture of the Matthean community that emerges from evidence inside the gospel is one of an embattled community of disciples of Jesus who, at the time the gospel was written, were still very near to (in terms of both socio-geographical proximity and religious

not seem to be a translation of a Hebrew or Aramaic text, it is difficult to make sense of the relationship of the text(s) referenced by these second-century sources and that of the Greek text of the Gospel of Matthew that we have today. See Craig A. Evans, *Matthew*, NCBC (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1–4; and Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Commentary*, trans. W. C. Linss (Augsburg; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 93–95.

¹⁰ Though this is not uncontested. See Evans' summary of the arguments for an earlier (66–70 CE) date of composition. Evans, *Matthew*, 4–5.

¹¹ See the discussion in Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 92–93.

¹² Brendan Byrne, "The Messiah in Whose Name 'the Gentiles will Hope' (Matt 12:21): Gentile Inclusion as an Essential Element of Matthew's Christology," *Australian Biblical Review* 50 (2002): 55; see also David C. Sim, "Introduction," in *Matthew and his Christian Contemporaries*, ed. D. Sim and B. Repschinski (New York: T & T Clark, 2008): 1–10.

theology and practice), and perhaps considered themselves to still be part of,¹³ the larger Jewish community of their surrounding population.¹⁴

Over the last few decades, interest in and emphasis on the Jewish roots of the Gospel of Matthew have reinvigorated scholarly conversations about the relationship of the Matthean community to Gentiles and the rhetorical impact that the text of Matthew would have had for this community. At present, there remains much debate about the Matthean community's ethnic composition and theological disposition in regards to non-Jews. On one end of the spectrum, some scholars have identified the Matthean community as one of the late-first-century mixed churches that were made up of both Jews and Gentiles (Gentiles who were not circumcised and not required to obey Torah), and which were becoming predominantly Gentile.¹⁵ Alternatively, other scholars have argued that the gospel is reflective of a community that, though experiencing growing tension with its Jewish contemporaries, still understood itself to be a Jewish community,¹⁶ and some argue that non-Jews who would become disciples of Jesus within

¹³ J. Andrew Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 148.

¹⁴ Anthony J. Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community*, CSHJ (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994): 196–197.

¹⁵ Douglas R. Hare, "How Jewish is the Gospel of Matthew," *CBQ* 62 (2000): 264–277; Donald Senior, "Between Two Worlds: Gentiles and Jewish Christians in Matthew's Gospel," *CBQ* 61 (1999): 19–22; Donald Hagner, "The *Sitz im Leben* of the Gospel of Matthew," in *Treasures New and Old: Recent Contributions to Matthean Studies*, ed. D. R. Bauer and M. A. Powell (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 47; Amy-Jill Levine, *The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Matthean Salvation History*, SBEC 14 (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1988), 239; Graham N. Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992); Sean Freyne, "Vilifying the Other and Defining the Self: Matthew's and John's Anti-Jewish Polemic in Focus," in *To See Ourselves as Others See Us: Christians, Jews, 'Others' in Late Antiquity*, ed. J. Neusner and E. S. Frerichs (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985), 117–144; John P. Meier, *Law and History in Matthew's Gospel: A Redactional Study of Mt. 5:17–48* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1976), 14–21. Meier argues that the author of Matthew was himself a Gentile. See also John P. Meier, *The Vision of Matthew* (New York: Crossroad, 1979, 1991), 17–25.

¹⁶ Dale C. Allison, Jr., and W. D. Davies, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 3 vols, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark: 1988–1997), 3.

this community were required to embrace distinctively Jewish markers of identity.¹⁷ The key point of debate here, as Brendan Byrne summarizes, “is whether Gentile converts to Matthew’s community are expected to become Jews (proselytes) when they become believers, or whether they join a new people of God, made up of Jews and Gentiles, who precisely as such, represent the fulfilment of what God indicated in the scriptures of Israel.”¹⁸

This debate about the Matthean community continues to be a centerpiece of many contemporary studies of the Gospel of Matthew’s representation of Gentiles. However, the diversity of these various portrayals of the Matthean community, as well as of those of the communities behind the other gospels, has led to some criticism about the methods by which these historical reconstructions are achieved.¹⁹ Richard Bauckham has pointed out that these efforts to reconstruct the local community behind a particular gospel are often based on the assumption that “the question about the context within which a gospel is written and the question about the audience for which a gospel is written are the same question.”²⁰ This assumption, he argues, has produced “reconstructions of communities

¹⁷ Overman, *Matthew’s Gospel and Formative Judaism*; Alan Segal, “Matthew’s Jewish Voice,” in *Social History of the Matthean Community: Cross-Disciplinary Approaches*, ed. D.L. Balch (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 35–37; Saldarini, *Matthew’s Christian-Jewish Community*, 692–704. Luz, *Matthew 1–7*; Carter, *Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist*, 20–24. David Sim, in fact, questions the existence of mixed churches—churches comprised of “Law-observant Jews and Law-free Gentiles”—in the first century. See David Sim, “A Response to Brendan Byrne,” *Australian Biblical Review* 50 (2002): 78.

¹⁸ Byrne, “The Messiah in Whose Name,” 55.

¹⁹ See a summary on the diversity of views in recent literature on the Matthean community in Stephen C. Barton, “Can we Identify the Gospel Audiences?,” in *The Gospels for all Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. R. Bauckham (Grand Rapids; Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 1998), 180–182.

²⁰ Richard Bauckham, “For Whom were the Gospels Written?,” in *The Gospels for all Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. R. Bauckham (Grand Rapids; Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 1998), 16.

each apparently unrelated to the rest of the Christian movement, each apparently treating itself self-sufficiently as *the* Christian social world.”²¹ Rather than envisioning the intended audiences of the gospels as being local and insular, Bauckham has proposed instead that “the gospels were written for general circulation around the churches and so envisaged a very general Christian audience. Their implied readership is not specific but indefinite: any and every Christian community in the late-first-century Roman Empire.”²² Bauckham and others have pushed gospel scholars to consider the possibility that the circumstances that the gospels address are broader than those of their local contexts of origin, and, therefore, that the readership that each gospel anticipates is not limited to the members of that particular evangelist’s local community.²³

Recent Literature on the Gospel of Matthew’s Representation of Gentiles and a Gentile Mission

Bauckham’s influential thesis has coincided with a literary turn in gospels studies, and in particular, a renewed emphasis on the gospels as narratives. Likewise, literature on the Gospel of Matthew’s representation of Gentiles and a Gentile mission has, over the past two decades, not only focused on reconstructing the Matthean community, but also on understanding the rhetorical impact of the gospel’s narrative within a broader first-century Jewish-Christian context. This increased focus and emphasis on the gospel’s

²¹ Bauckham, “For Whom were the Gospels Written?,” 21–22.

²² Bauckham, “Introduction,” in *The Gospels for all Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. R. Bauckham (Grand Rapids; Cambridge, U.K: Eerdmans, 1998), 1.

²³ See all of the essays in Richard Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for all Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids; Cambridge, U.K: Eerdmans, 1998).

narrative context has resulted in part in reaction to the ways that this context has been obscured in many historical-critical studies that focus on reconstructing the local community behind the gospel. In the review of the literature that follows, I briefly survey the ways that this conversation on the Gospel of Matthew's representation of Gentiles has evolved over the last twenty years and, in particular, its movement from the historical-critical concern of identifying, often in much detail, the local community behind the gospel to a concern with the socio-rhetorical impact of the overall gospel narrative for a broader first-century readership.

In recent years, the work of David Sim has been especially catalytic within this discussion of Gentile representation in Matthew. While scholars throughout most of the twentieth century basically took for granted that the tone of the gospel and/or the theology of the Matthean evangelist/community is very pro-Gentile, Sim has defended at length a revisionist thesis that the perspective of the Gospel of Matthew is not only Jewish, but anti-Gentile, and that the Matthean community, though accepting the legitimacy of a Gentile mission, was not itself involved in such a mission.²⁴ Sim's arguments are heavily dependent upon his situating of the Matthean community in post-70 CE Antioch and his interpretation of the extra-textual evidence concerning the social and political circumstances of the community in that time and place.²⁵ His revisionist

²⁴ See David Sim, "Christianity and Ethnicity in the Gospel of Matthew," in *Ethnicity and the Bible*, ed. M.G. Brett (Leiden, New York: Brill, 1996), 171–195; *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism: The History and Social Setting of the Matthean Community* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), especially pages 215–256; "The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles," 19–48; "The Attitude to Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew," in *Attitudes to Gentiles in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, LNTS 499, ed. David C. Sim and James S. McLaren (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2013): 173–190.

²⁵ Sim locates the Matthean community in Syrian Antioch in the aftermath of the Jewish War, and his reading of the gospel is conditioned upon his argument that the community, in this location, would have suffered severe persecution from Gentiles, both because of their continuing close connection to their Jewish contemporaries (objects of widespread mistreatment in the aftermath of the war) and, in addition, because

reading, however, is also driven by the tensions in the text of Matthew that are the subject of this thesis, tensions concerning the portrayal of non-Jews and the two commissions in the gospel. First, Sim argues that most literature on the subject of Gentiles and Matthew has failed to recognize and/or adequately account for the fact that “Matthew contains a number of pericopes which unambiguously betray an anti-Gentile perspective.”²⁶ Some scholars, assuming of the Matthean evangelist a very pro-Gentile stance, have attributed these texts in the gospel to the evangelist’s “conservative retention of his sources.”²⁷ Sim contends, however, that these redaction critics draw “too rigid a distinction between tradition and redaction.”²⁸ Because the evangelist retained these texts, he argues, it is more compelling to understand their “anti-Gentile sentiments” as being reflective of those of the evangelist and his community.²⁹

of their status as Christians. In these circumstances, he argues, this community would have understood the Gentile world as a place to be avoided. Sim, “The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles,” 30. Nonetheless, though he insists that the evangelist’s own community was not involved in a direct mission to Gentiles, he concedes that the community was aware of and affirmed a mission to non-Jews by other groups of followers of Jesus. He also suggests that the Matthean community probably did have some Gentile converts, but that these Gentiles were not welcomed into the church as Gentiles, but were required to obey Torah and, if male, be circumcised. Sim, “The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles,” 43–46. Other scholars who locate the Matthean community in Antioch have come to very different conclusions. See, e.g., John P. Meier, “The Antiochene Church of the Second Generation (A.D. 70–100—Matthew),” in *Antioch and Rome: New Testament Cradles of Catholic Christianity*, ed. R. E. Brown and J. P. Meier (New York; Ramsey, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1983): 46–51. Sim himself notes some of the difficulties of his arguments about the situation in Antioch. See Sim, “The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles,” 47.

²⁶ Sim, “The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles,” 25. In particular, Gentiles are sometimes “criticized implicitly” in the teachings of Jesus, and, in a passage that Sim sees as especially crucial to this conversation, Jesus tells his disciples to consider an unrepentant sinner as one would “a Gentile (*ethnikos*) and a tax collector” (Matt 18:17).

²⁷ Sim, “The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles,” 29.

²⁸ Sim points out that these arguments depend on the assumption that “Matthew expressed his own views only in those sections of his Gospel where he modified his sources” and, therefore, “that nothing of value [can] be learned about him when he followed his sources closely; in these cases he was merely reproducing his source material.” Sim argues, in contrast, that “each practice, revision or retention of source material is a redactional procedure in its own right and each contains important information about Matthew’s interest and concerns.” Sim, “The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles,” 29–30.

²⁹ Sim, “The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles,” 30.

Second, Sim emphasizes something that other scholars have also noted, that the two commissions of Jesus—“Go nowhere among the Gentiles” and “make disciples of all nations”—are difficult to reconcile within the narrative context of the gospel.³⁰ The key issue, to state it concisely, is that the gospel does not ever indicate that the initial mission, which is restricted to Israel, ever comes to an end.³¹ Sim, rejecting salvation history readings that see the final commission as a replacement or an extension of that first commission, opts instead for a redaction-critical interpretation. But while most redaction-critical readings of Matthew have understood the final commission, because of its culminating position within the gospel narrative, to be the one advocated by the evangelist, Sim argues that the *first* commission of Jesus is the one that the Matthean evangelist and his community would have understood to be their own.³² He suggests that the Matthean church accepted the legitimacy of a Gentile mission, but saw that “equally legitimate” mission to the non-Jewish peoples to be the task of other groups of Christians.³³

While Sim’s major theses about the Matthean community have not been widely embraced, most scholars in the last two decades who have addressed these two apparent tensions in the Gospel of Matthew’s representation of Gentiles and a Gentile mission

³⁰ Sim, “The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles,” 42–44; see also Brown, “The Two-Fold Representation of Mission,” 21–23.

³¹I give a fuller explanation of the interpretive issues at stake in this conversation on the two commissions in the literature review in chapter three.

³² Sim, “The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles,” This is, I think, the weakest point of Sim’s argument. I have not found a scholar who agrees with Sim on this point. Working from similar redaction-critical premises as Sim and reflecting the majority opinion on this issue, Senior argues that the final commission of the gospel is a “climactic and uniquely Matthean text,” and he therefore concludes that “Sim’s interpretation of the great commission of 28:19 as one not implying a Gentile mission for Matthew’s own church borders on the preposterous.” Senior, “Between Two Worlds,” 11.

³³ Sim, “The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles,” 42–43.

have done so, at least in part, in response to Sim's provocative arguments. Sim tends to consider various pericopes in the gospel in isolation from the gospel's overall narrative context, and his primary focus is often on the way the evangelist has edited his sources, rather than on the way that discrete texts function as a part of the larger narrative.³⁴ In addition, Sim sometimes "treats the details of Matthew's story about Jesus as if they were transparent for life in the evangelist's community."³⁵ Several interpreters have, therefore, challenged Sim's interpretations of these various texts in Matthew and their significance for the Matthean community as being incompatible with a narrative reading of the gospel as a whole.

In the years since Sim first proposed his revisionist reading of Gentile representation in Matthew, studies by Donald Senior, Brendan Byrne, Wesley Olmstead, Gene Smillie, and Warren Carter have engaged in various ways, and to several different ends, the portrayal of Gentiles and a Gentile mission within the narrative of Matthew. Senior, responding directly to Sim, contends that the theme of Gentile inclusion is a central concern of the gospel, and he argues compellingly that the narrative makes use of Jesus' hesitations in the story to use his powers on behalf of Gentiles to anticipate and overcome the hesitations of the audience for which the gospel was written.³⁶ Byrne's

³⁴ As Brendon Byrne writes, "Debate around [the issue of Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew] has largely been conducted over a selection of texts from the gospel seen as particularly significant one way or the other. The tendency is to plunder or quarry texts from the full range of the gospel without much regard for context or, above all, the position of each within the overall narrative flow of the drama." Byrne, "The Messiah in Whose Name," 57.

³⁵ "How much weight can an argument like this carry," Olmstead asks, "in a narrative that purports to tell the story of a Jewish Messiah who deliberately limits his mission to Israel?" Olmstead, *Matthew's Trilogy of Parables*, 201, note 12.

³⁶ Here, Senior's reading places strong emphasis on the narrative episodes of Jesus' healings at the requests of the Roman centurion and the Canaanite woman. In both stories, Senior argues, Jesus' "initial hesitation about association with Gentiles and incorporating them within [his] mission seems to give way before the authentic and insistent faith of Gentiles." Senior suggests that these passages are evidence that,

reading compliments Senior's by exploring some of the ways that the gospel, through its elicitation of texts from the Hebrew Scriptures and its narration of a repeating pattern of Jesus' withdrawals to the non-Jewish peoples in the face of hostility from the Jews (and most often the Jewish elite),³⁷ presents Jesus "not only as Messiah but as a Messiah having essential reference to the Gentiles—the one in whose name 'the Gentiles will hope.'" ³⁸ Olmstead contributes to this discussion by interpreting the three parables that comprise Matt 21:28–22:14 within the context of what he identifies as a "Gentile subplot" in the gospel. He argues that there is a deliberate and sustained contrast in Matthew between the positive characterization of Gentiles and the negative characterization of the people of Israel, one that prepares the reader for what he sees as the key point of the three

though the evangelist himself was a proponent of a mission to non-Jews, some in his community remained resistant. The evangelist, he suggests, "far from demonizing this type of opposition to the Gentile mission by having it represented by hostile Jewish leaders or wayward disciples, shows respect for such hesitations and exercises an ingenious pastoral strategy by having such views voiced by Jesus himself." Senior, "Between Two Worlds," 19. Schuyler Brown makes a similar argument about the community behind the gospel in his redaction-critical interpretation of the two commissions of Jesus. Brown argues that the tensions in the two mission mandates are symptomatic of an evangelist who advocated a universalist mission, but who still "encountered a particularist current in his community which he was unable to ignore." Because both those in the community who advocated a universalist mission and those who advocated a restricted mission based their positions on traditions about Jesus' teaching, the evangelist acknowledged both traditions within the gospel. The evangelist's positioning of the final, universalist mission, Brown argues, is evidence that this is the one he supported. Schuyler Brown, "The Two-Fold Representation of Mission in Matthew's Gospel." *Studia Theologica* 31 (1977): 32.

³⁷ Byrne notes that there is a repeating pattern in the gospel in which rejection of Jesus by Jewish leaders results in Jesus withdrawing (*anachōrein*) to "Galilee ('Galilee of the Gentiles') and the Gentile regions of Tyre and Sidon." He interprets this pattern "as an anticipation of the final pattern whereby the rejection [Jesus] suffers from his people in Jerusalem paves the way for a 'withdrawal' as risen Lord not merely to Galilee, but to the nations of the world." Byrne, "The Messiah in Whose Name," 73. Amy-Jill Levine makes a similar case about the pattern of Jesus' withdrawals. See Levine, *The Social and Ethnic Dimensions*, 122–134.

³⁸ Byrne, "The Messiah in Whose Name," 58. Sim criticizes Byrne for opening his article—and thereby seeming to contextualize his own interpretation within—a discussion of recent literature on the Matthean community. See Sim, "Matthew and the Gentiles: A Response to Brendon Byrne," 74–79. Byrne, in response to this criticism from Sim, maintains that his purpose in the article was "to ask what the unfolding narrative seems to imply concerning a Gentile mission (a narrative-critical and theological question)," rather than "to speculate at length about the composition and placement of the community behind the gospel (a historical question)." Brendon Byrne, "A Response to David Sim," *Australian Biblical Review* 50 (2002): 79.

parables at the heart of his study: the judgment and resulting “loss of privilege” of Israel and the “*trans-ethnic* composition” of God’s new people (italics his).³⁹ In another insightful study, Smillie grapples with tension in the narrative between Jesus’ disapproving words concerning Gentiles and the positive portrayal of several significant Gentile characters. He discusses at length what Senior notes only in passing,⁴⁰ that Jesus’ pejorative references to Gentiles, are quite conventional within the context of first-century Jewish discourse.⁴¹ In contrast to Sim’s reading of these “anti-Gentile” texts,⁴² Smillie argues that Matthew⁴³

adopts a subtle strategy of acknowledging proverbial pagan characteristics on the lips of Jesus, and then countering the conventional Jewish identification of Gentiles with pagan-sinners by narrating numerous stories of Gentiles who either serve as examples of right(eous) behavior in regard to Jesus or else exemplify faith in Jesus’ merciful character.⁴⁴

³⁹ Olmstead, *Matthew’s Trilogy of Parables*, 96–97. Olmstead is very self-conscious about method, and he attempts in this study to combine a narrative-critical and redaction-critical perspective in order to explicate the intentions of the author. Olmstead qualifies this, however, by defining the sort of “authorial intent” that he seeks not in terms of “a psychological state that precedes, motivates, and is somehow distinct from what an author actually writes,” but rather in terms of “expressed intent” or “the goal towards which the written text points.” Olmstead, *Matthew’s Trilogy of Parables*, 12. In his reading, therefore, it seems to me that what he seeks in “authorial intent” is very close to what narrative theorists mean by the “implied author,” the author created by the text. I disagree with Olmstead that this perspective on the author is compatible with a redaction-critical reading, which reconstructs an author not simply on the basis of the text, but on the basis of the relationship of the text with its sources.

⁴⁰ Senior refers to the Matthean Jesus’ negative portrayal of Gentiles as “stereotypical and stock judgments,” conventions of the day that could be used to make a rhetorical point. Senior, “Between Two Worlds,” 16.

⁴¹ Gene R. Smillie, “‘Even the Dogs’: Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45 (2002) 74–75.

⁴² Sim, “The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles,” 25–30.

⁴³ By “Matthew” he means the Matthean evangelist. At times in his article, however, it is difficult to determine if the intent that he seeks is that of the evangelist or that of the historical Jesus. Smillie spends quite a lot of space in this article defending his argument that the encounters between Jesus and non-Jews in the story are historically plausible. See Smillie, “‘Even the Dogs,’” 76–84.

⁴⁴ Smillie, “‘Even the Dogs,’” 75.

Finally, the work of Warren Carter represents something of a paradigm shift in this conversation. Carter argues that because the focus of this conversation has revolved around “an evangelizing mission to convert individual Gentiles,” it has largely missed the gospel’s “larger systemic concern with God’s purposes to establish God’s just reign or empire that will transform the whole world.”⁴⁵ In his reading of Matthew, Carter points out the various and ubiquitous strategies whereby the gospel pits the Roman imperial claim of sovereignty against the sovereignty of God.⁴⁶

The Approach of this Thesis

In this thesis, I hope to contribute to this conversation about the Gospel of Matthew’s representation of Gentiles and a Gentile mission by interpreting the narrative of the gospel within the context of a broader first-century Jewish-Christian⁴⁷ discourse of

⁴⁵ Warren Carter, “Matthew and the Gentiles: Individual Conversion and/or Systemic Transformation?” *JSNT* 26, no. 3 (2004): 260.

⁴⁶ Roman sovereignty, Carter points out, while it “was accomplished through military threat and power, and by alliance with local elites and taxation,” was understood by Romans and many of those they conquered to be a gift of the gods, and the god Jupiter in particular. Carter, “Matthew and the Gentiles,” 262. Carter highlights how the gospel portrays the “Roman-run” world as being under the power of Satan and the people living under this unjust rule—both Jews and non-Jews—as living in a state of suffering. Against this backdrop, he argues, Jesus’ healings “demonstrate God’s rule, countering and transforming the present imperial order under Satan’s/Rome’s control.” The gospel portrays Jesus, Carter concludes, as “a Messiah in whom (non-elite) Gentiles can hope for deliverance from a world oppressed by Roman imperial rule.” Carter, “Matthew and the Gentiles,” 279. Carter interprets the Gentile characters in the narrative who demonstrate faith in Jesus as anticipating this fulfillment of God’s reign and the resulting “gathering of the peoples (both Jew and Gentile) to Mount Zion where God’s empire is encountered in feasting and healing for all people.” Carter, “Matthew and the Gentiles,” 274.

⁴⁷ I am using this category very self-consciously in the non-essentialist terms of Wittgenstein’s notion of “family resemblance.” From this perspective, some of the characteristics of each respective member of a group overlap with those of some of the other members of the group, but there is no one single thing that all members of the group must have in common, no single necessary common denominator. Michael Satlow provides a lucid explanation of this approach to categorization: “[Wittgenstein] noted that family members can resemble each other in a variety of ways or not at all. I might have my mother’s nose, and my mother might have her mother’s chin, but I might not look at all like my grandmother [Jonathan Z. Smith] put the problem somewhat differently, but, I think, drove at the same point when he argued for a polythetic definition of early Judaism (and, by extension, other religious traditions). Polythetic definitions differ from essentialist ones in that they focus on sets of overlapping characteristics. Out of a list

identity. The ambitions of this project are quite modest; I do not so much aspire to offer novel arguments about the rhetoric of the gospel concerning Gentiles and a Gentile mission as I do to consider familiar readings within a different theoretical context and thereby ascribe traditional and well-worn interpretations with new layers of significance. Utilizing the conceptual tools of narrative criticism and social identity theory, I offer an account of the various rhetorical strategies by which the Gospel of Matthew negotiates identity and difference, how it makes “us” and “them,” in relation to non-Jews. My goal is not to peer behind the gospel into the world of its original community, but rather, heeding the message of Bauckham that the purview of the gospels transcends their local contexts of origin, to consider the rhetorical work that the gospel has been designed to do on the reader envisioned in the text.

The reader envisioned in the text is the point of reference and the locale of meaning in this study. From the perspective of narrative criticism, the Gospel of Matthew constructs a model or implied reader, an “imaginary person who is to be envisaged, in perusing Matthew’s story, as responding to the text at every point with whatever emotion, understanding, or knowledge the text ideally calls for.”⁴⁸ When we talk of a narrative’s rhetoric, we attempt to give language to the experience of reading, to put into words the

of characteristics that all members of a class might share, there will be large overlaps of shared characteristics, but some members will have nothing common with others. There is no single shared component that is essential to a member’s inclusion.” Michael L. Satlow, *Creating Judaism: History, Tradition, and Practice* (New York: Columbia, 2006): 6–7.

⁴⁸ Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988): 38. The text anticipates and creates an implied reader (what Umberto Eco calls a “model reader”) by requiring “the reader to make interpretive choices and to fill in the gaps of a text and by forming expectations and drawing conclusions where encouraged by the narrative.” Berkwitz, *Buddhist History in the Vernacular*, 152–153. See Umberto Eco, *Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1979) 7–8. As David Howell puts it, the implied reader is “an image of the reader that the text invites one to become.” David R. Howell, *Matthew’s Inclusive Story: A Study of the Narrative Rhetoric of the First Gospel*. JSNT Supplement Series 42 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 39.

power of a text “to produce many strong and subtle combinations of feeling and thought” within its reader.⁴⁹ My goal in the rest of this thesis is to read as the implied reader created by the narrative of Matthew would read, as hypothetical and, admittedly, conditioned by this actual reader as that implied reader may be. This means supplying the knowledge that the text assumes its reader to have and “forgetting” any knowledge from outside the text that the text does not assume of its reader; it also means asking “the questions that the text assumes its reader will ask” without being “distracted by the questions that the implied reader would not ask.”⁵⁰ The risk of constructing the implied reader in my own image is a risk that is real, and even, I think, unavoidable.⁵¹ But what this concept allows me to explore is the narrative’s rhetoric, the way that the formal features of the story would be expected to influence the sort of reader that the story itself anticipates.

One interesting feature of the narrative of Matthew is that the implied reader is included within the story, is part of the gospel’s narrative world.⁵² The narrator of

⁴⁹ H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 40.

⁵⁰ Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, ed. D. O. Via, Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 20.

⁵¹ As Powell writes, “To the extent that the implied reader is an idealized abstraction, the goal of reading the text ‘as the implied reader’ may be somewhat unattainable, but it remains a worthy goal nevertheless. The concept is actually a principle that sets criteria for interpretation. With regard to any proposed reading, the question may be asked, Is there anything *in the text* that indicates the reader is expected to respond in this way? Narrative critics consider this question worth asking, even if it is not always possible to obtain an absolutely certain or perfectly clear answer.” Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, 21. Different readers bring different assumptions to their engagement with the text, and thus the impact of a particular text will vary from reader to reader. Imperfect though it may be, the use of the hypothetical implied reader allows for a common standard of interpretation, and one that is uniquely useful for considering the text as a discursive medium, a form of representation through which knowledge is negotiated within a particular cultural context.

⁵² See Howell, *Matthew’s Inclusive Story*, 13–118; 205–248. The narrative of Matthew creates a “world of the story,” a world that is not to be equated either with the world of the evangelist or that of the

Matthew⁵³ is not bashful about imparting information to the implied reader that is not available to most of the characters within the narrative, even occasionally addressing the reader directly.⁵⁴ From these asides, it becomes apparent that the temporal perspective of both the narrator and the implied reader is “between the resurrection and the Parousia”;⁵⁵ in other words, the narrator and the implied reader are assigned a place within the world of the story that lies at some distance beyond the events that are narrated, but prior to Jesus’ future coming that is foretold by Jesus within the story (see 24:15; 27:8; 28:15).⁵⁶

In addition to the narrative-critical notion of the implied reader, a second important theoretical premise of this study that I wish to unpack in this introduction concerns the social science concept of identity. Key to my interpretation in the following chapters is the assumption that identity—be it Jewish, Gentile, Christian, etc.—is “fluid,

historical Jesus; it is a world that is created by and can only be known from the text. Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 3.

⁵³ Literary theorists distinguish between the real author, the implied author, and the narrator. The real author is the historical figure who created the text. This person (or group of people) is different from the implied author, the author reconstructed by the reader on the basis of the text, and this difference is demonstrable when two narratives by the same author presuppose different implied authors (i.e., function in a different tone or with different values). The implied author is a “structural principle” created by the text, which, unlike the narrator, has “no voice, no direct means of communicating. It instructs us silently, through the design of the whole, with all the voices, by all of the means that it has chosen to let us learn.” Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, N.Y.; London: Cornell University Press, 1978), 148. The narrator, on the other hand, is the voice that tells the story. The distinction between the implied author and the narrator becomes particularly important when the narrator is unreliable; in fact, to say that a narrator is unreliable or untrustworthy is to say that it is at odds (at “virtual odds,” as Chatman puts it) with the perspective of the implied author. See the discussion in Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 147–151. Because in Matthew the perspectives and values of the narrator and implied author coincide, the two terms can be used interchangeably.

⁵⁴ See, e.g., Matt 24:15; 27:8; 28:15. For a fuller discussion of these asides, see Janice Capel Anderson, *Matthew’s Narrative Web: Over, and Over, and Over Again*, JSNTSup 91 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 47–49; and Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 32–33.

⁵⁵ Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 31.

⁵⁶ Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 38; see also Howell, *Matthew’s Inclusive Story*, 168–175.

fragmentary, contingent, and, crucially, *constituted in discourse*.”⁵⁷ I discuss at length the first three of these four characteristics of identity in chapter one, but here I want to consider the latter of these, that identity is constituted in discourse. As Kathryn Woodward summarizes, discourse, in the Foucauldian sense, refers to “sets of ideas and practices, ways of producing knowledge and of shaping conduct according to that knowledge.”⁵⁸ This discursively-produced knowledge is not only intellectual knowledge, but also tacit, embodied, and practical knowledge. As Woodward summarizes succinctly, “discourses create what it is possible to think by articulating different elements into a discursive formation at particular times.”⁵⁹ All symbolic communication and action both depend on and comprise discourse. As Stuart Hall writes, “Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But . . . since all social practices entail meaning, and meanings shape and influence what we do—our conduct—all practices have a discursive aspect.”⁶⁰ A discursive analysis of representation, such as the present study,

examines not only how language and representation produce meaning, but how the knowledge which a particular discourse produces connects with power, regulates conduct, makes up or constructs identities and subjectivities, and defines the way certain things are represented, thought about, practiced, and studied. The emphasis in the discursive approach is always on the historical specificity of a particular form or ‘regime’ of representation: not on ‘language’ as a general

⁵⁷ Bethan Benwell and Elizabeth Stokoe, *Discourse and Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 17.

⁵⁸ Kathryn Woodward, “Motherhood: Identities, Meanings, and Myths,” in *Identity and Difference: Culture, Media, and Identities*, ed. Kathryn Woodward (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 253. Kimberly Stratton describes a discourse as “a constellation of ideas, practices and institutions” that structures thought and behavior and is constantly being renegotiated. Kimberly Stratton, *Naming the Witch: Magic, Ideology, & Stereotype in the Ancient World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), x.

⁵⁹ Woodward, “Motherhood,” 255.

⁶⁰ Stuart Hall, “The Work of Representation,” in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 44.

concern, but on specific languages or meanings, and how they are deployed at particular times, in particular places. It points us towards a greater historical specificity—the way representational practices operate in concrete historical situations, in actual practice.⁶¹

To interpret a text as, or as part of, a discourse (in this case, a discourse of identity) is to extend the research question beyond what the text means to an exploration of what the text does.

Studies of the discursive construction of identity, like the present one, focus on how identity is configured through various forms of representation, various symbolic mediums through which meaning is communicated and generated. Narrative is one of these mediums, a field upon which what is thinkable about the self and its “others”⁶² is contested and re-worked. Historical narratives like the Gospel of Matthew, in other words, do more than reflect the intentions of their author or the circumstances of the people from which they come; they are written to do work in the world, to remake the present and future worlds of their readers in and through their re-tellings of the past. As Dominique Maingueneau writes, “literary discourse is one particular activity, but it is also an activity among others, participating in the world it is supposed to ‘reflect.’”⁶³ The story of Jesus that is told in Matthew has indeed been shaped by the concerns of the first evangelist and his community, including his/their theological conceptions of non-Jews,

⁶¹ Stuart Hall, “Introduction,” in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 6.

⁶² I here use the word “other” to refer to that which is not the self, that which is “they” or “them,” rather than “we” or “us.” In chapter one, I discuss how this concept of otherness functions within social identity theory.

⁶³ Dominique Maingueneau, “Discourse Analysis and the Study of Literature,” in *Discourse Analysis & Human and Social Sciences*, ed. Simone Bonnafous and Malika Temmar (Bern: Peter Lang, 2013), 113–114.

and it is a legitimate enterprise to search for those concerns there. The re-telling of that story in the Gospel of Matthew, however, is not just reflective of the concerns of the evangelist and/or his community; it is also constructive, forming an arena in and through which the world of its envisioned readers is refashioned.⁶⁴

The Gospel of Matthew and the First-Century Jewish-Christian Discourse of *Ioudaioi* and *Ethnē*

In order to grasp the rhetorical power of the Gospel of Matthew for a first-century Jewish-Christian reader (the sort of reader envisioned by the gospel), one must understand the dominant historical discourses of which the gospel is a part, the discourses it both depends on and transforms in its retelling of the Jesus story. One misstep here to which many studies of identity and the Gospel of Matthew have been prone is that of interpreting first-century identity in terms of the category of “religion,” an important category in modern discourse, but one that does not exist in the first century CE.⁶⁵ As

⁶⁴ As Judith Lieu writes, “Textuality is not simply the articulation of identity, but is also the field of its contestation.” Judith M. Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 30.

⁶⁵ Many studies about the identity and self-understanding of the Matthean community in relation to non-Jews are set in the context of a larger conversation about how “Christianity” and “Judaism” grew out of an originally undifferentiated Judaism to become distinct entities, the concern being to locate the Matthean community within this more expansive process of a “parting of the ways,” a model for which the category of religion is key. For a paradigmatic example of the way that this more general model has shaped the discussion and set the questions for much conversation on the Gospel of Matthew, see Wayne A. Meeks, “Breaking Away: Three New Testament Pictures of Christianity’s Separation from the Jewish Communities,” in *To See Ourselves as Others See Us*: *Christians, Jews, ‘Others’ in Late Antiquity*, ed. J. Neusner and E. S. Frerichs (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985): 93–116. This “parting” or “separation” model/narrative is an alternative to the traditional dominant model/narrative of Christian triumphalism (i.e., of Christianity superseding Judaism), another model which takes for granted that religion is a discrete category of experience in the first-century world. Sadly, this latter triumphalist model has often rendered many parts of the New Testament (including the Gospel of Matthew) quite useful in the service of anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic interpretations, and most contemporary scholars who embrace the model of parting or separation do so at least in part as a reaction to this older model. One thing that becomes apparent here, as in the exploration of the history of interpretation of any text, is that interpretation is not a disinterested,

Daniel Boyarin writes, there were, to be sure, “elements of what we call religion” in the first century world, but “‘religion’ was not a dominant and independent variable, ‘a discrete category of human experience’ . . . disembeddable from culture as a whole.”⁶⁶ The category of *Ioudaioi* (variously translated as “Jews” and “Judeans”) is, in the first century, better conceived in terms of ethnicity, rather than religion,⁶⁷ and the category of *Ioudaismos* is best conceived not as “Judaism,” but as “Jewishness.”⁶⁸ Alternatively, “during the first, second, and perhaps even third centuries,” the various categories by which followers of Jesus identified themselves and were identified by others were used to distinguish them primarily from other Jews; to put it differently, categories like “Christians,” “sect of the Nazarenes,” and Matthew’s “*ekklēsia*” were terms that operated within a different “semantic field” than that of *Ioudaioi*—“perhaps one that included such entities as ‘Pharisee,’ ‘Sadducee,’ and ‘Essene.’”⁶⁹ Within this discourse of identity, conversion to Jewishness (and, it follows, to Christian-ness as a sub-category within

“value-free” practice. See Judith M. Lieu, *Neither Jew nor Greek? Constructing Early Christianity*. (London; New York: T & T Clark, 2002), 3–4.

⁶⁶ Daniel Boyarin, “Semantic Differences; or ‘Judaism’/‘Christianity,’” in *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. A. H. Becker and A. Yoshiko Reid (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 70. Boyarin explains that “signifiers, as we have known since Saussure, only function differentially, that is, by virtue of their difference from other signifiers within a signifying system such as a language. Consequently, a ‘term’ in a signifying system only exists when there are others which it is not. . . . The oppositional term to the various religions of the Ancient Near East with which the Israelites were in contact has to have been ‘the Israelite cult,’ in the broadest sense of ‘cult/ure’ The other terms within the paradigm to which this signifier belongs are ‘the cult/ure of Assyria,’ ‘the cult/ure of Egypt,’ ‘the cult/ure of Canaan,’ and ultimately ‘the cult/ure of Greece’ as well. As the terms of this paradigm suggest, the set of oppositions that it comprised was peoples and their lands and the practices and beliefs associated with them, not religions and *their* beliefs, practices, and so forth.” Boyarin, “Semantic Differences,” 70.

⁶⁷ Steve Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Antiquity,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 38 (2007): 457

⁶⁸ Boyarin, “Semantic Differences,” 68.

⁶⁹ Boyarin, “Semantic Differences,” 69.

Jewishness) was, as Boyarin contends, similar “to becoming a Spartan or an Athenian (not in the full political sense of these latter, as there was no formal civic identity of ‘Jew’).”⁷⁰

As Steve Mason argues, because in the first century the category of *Ioudaioi* is better conceived in terms of ethnicity (rather than religion) use of the oppositional categories of “Judaism” and “Christianity” by scholars who study the first-century “creates conceptual mismatches at each step.”⁷¹ “It becomes increasingly clear,” he says,

that being a “Judaean” and being a follower of Jesus were incommensurable categories, rather like being a Russian and a Rotarian, a Brazilian or a Bridge player. . . . Whereas the *Ioudaioi* were understood not as a “licensed religion” (*religio licita*) but as an *ethnos*, the followers of Jesus faced formidable problems explaining who they were, and increasingly so as they distanced themselves, and were disavowed by, the well-known *ethnos*.⁷²

It is precisely these problems that followers of Jesus faced of “explaining who they were” that are obscured within historiography that deploys the English categories of “Jews” and “Christians,” conceived in terms of religion, as tools for mapping these communities. As Boyarin argues, the category of “religion” as distinct from ethnicity came into being only later in antiquity, and its coming into being had everything to do power and identity, with the work of Christian and Jewish heresiologists to create boundaries between who “we” are and who “we” are not, boundaries that would eventually result in the emergence of

⁷⁰ Boyarin, “Semantic Differences,” 69.

⁷¹ Mason, “Jews, Judeans, Judaizing, Judaism,” 512. Mason points out that there is a place in sound historical inquiry for categories that are “etic,” that are independent of the category formations of the people we are studying. Examples include the concepts of demographics, economics, and anthropological and sociological categories (such as the concept of identity) that allow us to compare practices cross-culturally. However, etic categories must be “precise, observer-independent, publically arguable, [and] falsifiable” if they are to illumine, rather than confuse and “de-historicize,” our analysis. Mason, “Jews, Judeans, Judaizing, Judaism,” 458–459.

⁷² Mason, “Jews, Judeans, Judaizing, Judaism,” 512.

“Christianity” and “Judaism” as mutually-exclusive categories.⁷³ To read these categories, conceived in terms of religion, back into the first century is to import meaning into that world, to reconfigure the discourse of those peoples into the shape of our own.

Like the category of “Jews,” the category of “Gentiles” is not as transparent and unproblematic as many studies of Matthew might leave one to assume. As Terence Donaldson notes, the English word “Gentiles” as a designation for those who are not Jews developed under the influence of the Jerome’s oppositional pairing of *gentilis* and *Iudaei* in the Vulgate, and the reception of “Gentiles” in the 1611 King James Version of the Bible has “provided the vocabulary and shaped the discourse for scholarly discussion of matters pertaining to Jews and non-Jews in studies of the Bible and Christian origins” since that time.⁷⁴ Donaldson points out that even when *ethnē* is used in the New Testament in an exclusive sense to denote non-Jewish peoples or persons, the word “Gentiles,” while it accurately captures that element of non-Jewishness, obscures the “element of ‘nations’ that *ethnē* usually denotes or evokes”⁷⁵ and thus “inevitably filters out the ethnic-national sense of *ethnē* that would have always been present, to a greater or lesser extent, when the term was spoken or written, heard or read, in the contexts we are attempting to understand and reconstruct.”⁷⁶

⁷³ Boyarin, however, argues that many Jews of late antiquity did not accept the terms of this discourse of religion; they refused to be classified in this way. Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 202–226.

⁷⁴ Terence L. Donaldson, “‘Gentile Christianity’ as a Category in the Study of Christian Origins,” *HTR* 106, no. 4 (2013): 441–442.

⁷⁵ Donaldson, “‘Gentile Christianity’ as a Category,” 449.

⁷⁶ Donaldson, “‘Gentile Christianity’ as a Category,” 451.

It is also important to note that use of the categories of *ethnē* and *ethnikoi* in the first century, when they are used to refer to non-Jews, betray a non-Gentile point of view. To state the problem succinctly (even if, admittedly, tautologically), the first-century category of *ethnē*, in those contexts in which it serves as a designation for those who are not Israelites/Jews,⁷⁷ only exists in relation to the Jews;⁷⁸ it is a term for Jewish “others” in particular, not a term by which those who understood themselves to be “not Jews” would have referred to themselves.⁷⁹ As an Israelite and then Jewish identity hardened over the centuries, this category of *ethnē* (and *goyim*, the Hebrew word that it is translated from in the Hebrew Scriptures) came to be used by Israelites/Jews in one sense (though its use was certainly not limited to this sense) to denote non-Israelite peoples.⁸⁰ This was a mutually constructive process: the “us” (Israelites and Jews) and the “not us” (*goyim* and *ethnē*) were formed simultaneously. In addition, as Jews began to commonly deploy *ethnē* in a specialized sense to denote those who are not Jews, *ethnē* came to commonly connote those negative characteristics that Jews associated with those who are “not us”: ignorance about God, idolatry, and immorality.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Again, the semantic range of *ethnē* is not limited to “non-Israelites” (as is exemplified by its various uses in Matthew), but this is one key way in which the term is applied.

⁷⁸ See Donaldson, “‘Gentile Christianity’ as a Category,” 451.

⁷⁹ Donaldson points out that “no one in the first century whom we might refer to as a Gentile would have naturally thought of himself or herself in these terms. . . . Left to their own devices and self-definitions, Phrygians, Parthians, or Bithynians would describe themselves—well, as Phrygians, Parthians, or Bithynians.” Donaldson, “‘Gentile Christianity,’” 451.

⁸⁰ See a fuller discussion in Donaldson, “‘Gentile Christianity’ as a Category,” 437–441.

⁸¹ For a paradigmatic example, see *Jub.* 1:9. As Lieu notes, “‘not as the Gentiles’” becomes a catch-phrase” in Second Temple literature, and it relies on this very negative construction of “Gentiles.” Lieu, *Christian Identity*, 281.

In the Second Temple Period, some of those who were not born Jews but wished to become Jews would do just that, throwing off their Gentile (*ethnē*) identity by renouncing idolatry and accepting Jewish scriptures and practice (including, notably, circumcision)⁸² in the manner and to the degree required by the particular community of insiders;⁸³ these proselytes (*prosēlutoi*) would thereby cross, and in the process *preserve*, the boundary between “us” (Jews) and “them” (not Jews).⁸⁴ Those who were attracted to Jewish religious beliefs and practices, but who were unwilling or unable to embrace the essential markers of Jewish identity (whatever these markers were considered to be by any particular Jewish community in any particular place and time), were categorized by insiders differently, sometimes as “God-fearers,” thus positioning them closer to, but still firmly outside of, “the Jews”; they remained *ethnē* (in the sense of “not Jews”).⁸⁵

⁸² See Shaye J. D. Cohen, “Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew,” *Harvard Theological Review* 82, no. 1 (January 1989): 27.

⁸³ Scot McKnight points out that “what counted as conversion for one group of Jews may not have been seen as conversion for another.” Scot McKnight, *A Light among the Gentiles: Jewish Missionary Activity in the Second Temple Period* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991): 7. Likewise, Cohen emphasizes that “Gentile” and “Jewish” identity are and were a matter of perspective: “A gentile who engaged in ‘judaizing’ behavior may have been regarded as a Jew by gentiles, but as a gentile by Jews. A gentile who was accepted as a proselyte by one community may not have been so regarded by another. Nor should we assume that the proselytes of one community were necessarily treated like those of another because the Jews of antiquity held a wide range of opinions about the degree to which the proselyte became just like the native born.” Cohen, “Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew,” 14.

⁸⁴ Cohen, however, concludes that while Jewish writers of the Second Temple Period and Late Antiquity stress that the proselyte “is like an Israelite in all respects,” the status of a proselyte was never equivalent to that of “native born” Jews. He points out, first of all, that proselytes are identified as such by the label “proselyte” in literature and on epitaphs and synagogue inscriptions. In other words, the label of proselyte was itself a way of marking difference. Also, the same Jewish texts that state that a proselyte is a Jew also often contain prohibitions for proselytes that native-born Jews are not subject to. Cohen, “Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew,” 28–30.

⁸⁵ Cohen, “Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew,” 31–32.

The key tension in first century discourse, the problem that some early followers of Jesus had of “explaining who they were,”⁸⁶ arose from the conviction of many people who understood themselves to be the rightful inheritors of Israel’s sacred traditions that the boundaries of God’s chosen people were no longer limited to “Jews,” but now extended to embrace *ta ethnē*, the Gentile peoples. For some, “non-Jews” no longer had to become “Jews” for the purpose of being insiders, and indeed their status as *ethnē*, as non-Jews, carried deep theological significance for many of these early followers of Jesus, who believed that the Messiah’s coming would lead all peoples to embrace Israel’s God. Thus it is Gentiles as *ethnē*, as “not Jews,” who are now positioned as insiders, who are now part of “us.” As Lieu notes, however, it seems in much first-century literature that the category of *ethnē* “cannot shake off its legacy of moral and religious perfidy.”⁸⁷ The difficulty here, she goes on to explain, is most visible in the fact that many of these texts address as “Gentiles” followers of Jesus “who had never been Jews, but at the same time identify ‘Gentile’ as ‘the other who does not know God.’”⁸⁸

This discursive tension is well-alive in Matthew. Even a hasty reading of the Gospel reveals that the semantic range of “Gentiles” (*ethnē* and *ethnikoi*) far exceeds that of simply “non-Jews.” Smillie notes that the meaning of *ethnē* in Matthew varies, depending on context, from the politically neutral translation “the nations” or “the

⁸⁶ To borrow Mason’s words. Mason, “Jews, Judeans, Judaizing, Judaism,” 512.

⁸⁷ Lieu, *Christian Identity*, 287.

⁸⁸ Lieu, *Christian Identity*, 287. In other words, some texts/authors both address their readers as “the Gentiles” (*ta ethnē*) and warn them against living like “the Gentiles” (*ta ethnē*). See, e.g., Rom 11:13; 1 Cor 5:1; Gal 2:15; 3:8; Eph 2:11; 4:17–19.

peoples,”⁸⁹ to the more ethnically-limited “Gentiles” or “non-Jews,”⁹⁰ to the more religiously specific and pejorative term, “pagans.”⁹¹ While *ethnē* is used in Matthew to refer to non-Jewish peoples, *ethnikoi*, the substantive adjective of *ethnē*, is used to refer to non-Jewish persons, individual representatives of the non-Jewish peoples. This difference becomes most apparent when the nouns are singular: an *ethnikos* is a Gentile person (see Matt 18:17), but an *ethnos* is an ethnic-national people group (see 21:43; 24:7). The semantic range of *ethnikoi* is, in addition, much more limited in Matthew than is that of *ethnē*, exclusively denoting “pagans,” those who do not know Israel’s God.⁹² Lieu suggests that Matthew’s use of *ethnikoi* is an attempt to overcome some of the tensions in first-century discourse concerning *ta ethnē*: “Matthew . . . is no less aware [than other early Jewish-Christian writers] that the real outsider who stands beyond the boundary is the Gentile (Matt 5:46–47; 18:17), but, by coining a new term, *ethnikos*, he hints at the need for redefinition now that there are Gentiles, *ethnē*, within.”⁹³ But while the semantic range of *ethnikoi* is much more limited in the gospel than that of *ethnē*, Matthew does, at times, use *ethnē* in much the same sense as *ethnikoi*, not just to refer to non-Israelite peoples, but also to highlight their ignorance of and alienation from God.

⁸⁹ Matthew 12:18, 21; 24:7, 9, 14; 25:32; 28:19.

⁹⁰ Matt 4:15; 6:32; 10:5; 10:18; 20:19; 20:25.

⁹¹ Smillie, ““Even the Dogs,”” 74. See also John P. Meier, “Nations or Gentiles in Matthew 28:19?,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 39 (1977): 94–102.

⁹² See Matt 5:47; 6:7; 18:17.

⁹³ Lieu, *Christian Identity*, 132.

While this does not perhaps invalidate Lieu's claim, it is certainly evidence that, as she goes on to say, the use of *ethnikoi* in Matthew does not succeed in resolving the tension.⁹⁴

For my purposes in this study, it is important to recognize that just as neither of the categories of *Ioudaioi* and *ethnē* is an exclusively outsider designation in the Gospel of Matthew,⁹⁵ neither are they the terms by which the community of insiders is classified.⁹⁶ The community of insiders envisaged by the gospel is called the *ekklēsia*,⁹⁷ and the key term for individual insiders is *mathētai* (disciples). Therefore, while studies of Matthew that attempt to classify the Matthean community using the terms "Jew" and "Gentile" have been incredibly insightful for comparing that community to its contemporaries, what is lost⁹⁸ in these studies is the process of identification, the project of explaining who "we"—the gospel's insiders—are. What can be seen playing out in and through much of the literature of followers of Jesus in the first century, including the

⁹⁴ Lieu, *Christian Identity*, 288.

⁹⁵ When Pilate asks Jesus if he is the king of the Jews (*ho basileus tōn Ioudaiōn*), Jesus answers in the affirmative (27:11). Alternatively, in 28:15, the narrator tells the implied reader that the story concocted by the chief priests concerning what had happened to Jesus' body is a story that is "still told among the Jews to this day," a statement which seems to distinguish the *Ioudaioi* from the group of insiders of which the implied reader is a part (28:15). Likewise, as I will discuss in detail in the pages that follow, while *ta ethnē* are, by default, outsiders throughout most of the narrative, members of *ta ethnē* become potential insiders in the gospels closing scene. In contrast, *ethnikoi* is, in the gospel, exclusively used as a term for outsiders, a term for the "other."

⁹⁶ Levine, *The Social and Ethnic Dimensions*, 10–11.

⁹⁷ Trebilco argues persuasively that early followers of Jesus adopted the self-designation of *ekklēsia* because the more common term in the LXX for the community of God's people, *sunagōgē*, was already in use by contemporary Jewish communities, first to refer to the assembly of God's people and later to refer to the buildings in which they assembled. Trebilco contends that *ekklēsia* was "used to distinguish the Christian assembly from that of *hē sunagōgē* without suggesting that they were no longer part of *hē sunagōgē*." Paul Trebilco, "Why Did the Early Christians Call Themselves *hē Ekklēsia*," *New Testament Studies* 57 (2011): 440–460.

⁹⁸ And indeed something is always lost, always obscured, just as something is always gained, always illumined, from a particular hermeneutical perspective.

Gospel of Matthew, is a struggle to capture with language who “we” are now that “we” are comprised, in some sense, of both Jews and non-Jews.

Overview of Chapters

In the chapters that follow, I wrestle with the two tensions in the narrative discussed above: 1) those between the negative stereotypical "Gentiles"⁹⁹ of Jesus discourse and the very positive portrayal of some Gentile characters in the narrative; and 2) those between the two commissions of Jesus to his disciples. I begin chapter one by laying the theoretical groundwork for a social identity theory reading of Matthew, and in the second half of the chapter I put this theory to use in an analysis of the stereotypical *ethnē* and *ethnikoi* that are constructed in Jesus' discourse in the gospel. The Gentile characters that feature in the narrative of Matthew are the focus of chapter two. In the first part of the chapter, I consider the characterization of non-Jews within the narrative, and I conclude the chapter by analyzing the rhetorical effect of this characterization in relation to the Gentile stereotypes of Jesus' discourse within the overall context of the gospel narrative. The final chapter of the thesis wrestles with the two commissions of Jesus, “Go nowhere among the Gentiles” (10:5) and “make disciples of all nations” (28:19). In this chapter, I consider the various rhetorical means by which the narrator of Matthew moves the implied reader from the first commission to the second, and, therefore, the ways that the gospel contextualizes and normalizes the remapping of the

⁹⁹ From this point on in the thesis, when I speak of a Gentile “other” or put “Gentiles” or “non-Jews” in quotation marks, I mean the stereotypical *ethnē* and *ethnikoi* of the Matthean Jesus' discourse. When I use Gentiles without quotation marks, I mean non-Israelites in the conventional way that the term is used in contemporary scholarly discourse, to denote non-Jewish persons in the case of *ethnikoi* and non-Jewish peoples in the case of *ethnē*, with the understanding that exactly what it means to be or not be an Israelite and/or Jew varies in different contexts.

boundaries of *mathētai* (“us”) to include *ethnē*. Through these chapters, I hope to glimpse the process of an expansion of categories in the Gospel of Matthew, the re-working of discourse—the reconfiguring of what is thinkable about the self and its “others.” As Mason notes, the categories available to early followers of Jesus, and especially to those whose communities included Gentiles, made “explaining who they were” a challenge,¹⁰⁰ and a challenge that would eventually result in the formation of new categories.¹⁰¹ In the pages that follow, I hope to shed some light on part of the complex process of boundary construction at work in the text, a process not merely of “explaining who they were,” but indeed of *making* who they were.

¹⁰⁰ Mason, “Jews, Judeans, Judaizing, Judaism,” 512.

¹⁰¹ Boyarin, *Borderlines*, 202–225.

CHAPTER ONE:
MAKING A DIFFERENCE: THE CONSTRUCTION OF A GENTILE “OTHER”
IN THE TEACHINGS OF THE MATTHEAN JESUS

“When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him” (Matthew 6:7–8).

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus often tells those who would follow him who they are, and he does this, in part, by telling them who they are not. Key to this negation is his rhetorical deployment of several groups of people characterized by traits that the ideal disciple ought to neither emulate nor embody. By far the most pervasive and negative of these stereotyped groups is that of the Jewish religious leaders, whom Jesus often refers to metonymically as “the hypocrites,” those who prefer to seem, rather than to be, righteous.¹⁰² But another important group, evoked in a tone less scathing but perhaps more condescending, are the “Gentiles” (*ethnikoi* and *ethnē*), non-Israelite persons and peoples who are ignorant of God and whose lives reflect this fundamental ignorance.

In this chapter, I explore the Matthean Jesus’ discursive construction of this Gentile “other” from the perspective of social identity theory. In the first part of the chapter, I discuss social identity theory, unpacking the theoretical assumptions and terminology that enable and facilitate this perspective on identity. The latter part of the chapter focuses on the key texts in Matthew in which Jesus discursively assumes and creates *ethnē* and *ethnikoi* otherness for the purpose of forging *ekklēsia* and *mathētai* identity. My primary concern is with the way that the identity of the ideal disciple and

¹⁰² See Matt 6:1–16; 7:5; 15:7; 22:18; 23:1–36; 24:51.

community of disciples is juxtaposed to that of *hoi ethnikai* and *ta ethnē*, and, in particular, with identifying the attributes and behaviors that are associated with “Gentiles” in these statements by Jesus and the discursive effect of this association on boundaries of identity. The major argument of this chapter is that from a social identity perspective, this construction of a negative Gentile stereotype functions in the gospel to create a clear, essentialized difference between Gentiles and disciples of Jesus, a boundary between “us” (*mathētai/ekklēsia*) and “them” (*ethnikoi/ethnē*).

Social Identity Construction Theory

Identity has become an increasingly popular social science concept for studying the ways that different people situated in different times and places make sense of who they are, who they are not, and where they belong in the world.¹⁰³ Studies of identity have revealed important patterns of human self-understanding, misunderstanding, and conflict, of how people (both individuals and groups) come to identify with some people and distinguish themselves from others.¹⁰⁴ An important result of this research has been the development of alternative theories of identity to the oft-taken-for-granted conception of cultural identity (in both popular and scholarly discourse) as something that is static and trans-historical, “a sort of collective ‘one true self,’ hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves,’ which people with a shared history and

¹⁰³ Judy Yates Siker, “Unmasking the Enemy: Deconstructing the ‘Other’ in the Gospel of Matthew,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 32, no. 2 (2005): 110.

¹⁰⁴ Identity, like all social science concepts, is a general, universal category that is used to illumine particular situations. As Jerome Neyrey puts it, scholars who use social science methods “seek what is typical in [a] society in order to highlight all the better the particular and distinctive.” Jerome Neyrey, “Preface,” in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*, ed. J. H. Neyrey (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997), xii.

ancestry hold in common.”¹⁰⁵ From this essentialist perspective, a cultural group’s true identity is something grounded in a set of “natural” or “essential” attributes and/or a shared history, and this identity, if it is perceived to be lost, only has to be found and recovered.¹⁰⁶ More recent studies of identity, however, have, as opposed to focusing on similarities and continuities, highlighted shifts and discontinuities, the ways by which group identities and the attributes and symbols around which they form are constantly changing. This has led theorists to look for a more dynamic way to account for how and why people come to conceive of themselves and others as belonging or being outsiders to a particular social group in a particular place and time. Social constructionist theorists have attempted to make sense of this complexity by helping us to re-imagine identity, not as something static and clearly-bounded, but as something that is fluid and constantly changing.¹⁰⁷ Identity, from this perspective, is not an outcome but a process, “not something uncovered so much as it is something constructed,”¹⁰⁸ not about being but about perpetually becoming.

A key insight of constructionist theories is that identity is relational, i.e., that identities are forged in relation to other identities.¹⁰⁹ The construction of the self (be it an individual or collective self) is a perpetual process of definition, delineation, and

¹⁰⁵ Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” in *Identity and Difference: Culture, Media, and Identities*, ed. Kathryn Woodward (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 51.

¹⁰⁶ Karen A. Cerulo, “Identity Construction: New Issues, New Directions,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 23 (1997): 386.

¹⁰⁷ Cerulo, “Identity Construction: New Issues, New Directions,” 387.

¹⁰⁸ Siker, “Unmasking the Enemy,” 111.

¹⁰⁹ Kathryn Woodward, “Concepts of Identity and Difference,” in *Identity and Difference: Culture, Media, and Identities*, ed. Kathryn Woodward (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 35.

negation, and it is accomplished in large part through the construction of difference, the construction of what “we” are not. Because of this, the process of identity construction often takes place through polarization, through the construction of an “us” and “them” dichotomy.¹¹⁰ As Lieu writes, “whenever we look for the emergence of ‘the self’ there looms the spectre of ‘the other.’”¹¹¹ We come to know ourselves (or more precisely, our self-understanding of who “we” are is constructed and reconstructed) by knowing (i.e., by the construction and reconstruction of) who we are not. This recognition of the “not us”—the “other”—makes it possible to speak of the “us.” Just as, for example, “light” is made knowable (made thinkable? made *real*?) by “darkness,” by what it is not, so “man” is made thinkable by “woman” and “human” by “animal.” It is the need to differentiate, and to articulate that difference, that makes these binaries useful; in turn, it is the binaries themselves—the categories of language—that actualize difference, that make it perceptible and meaningful.

This process of differentiating the self from its “others” is, like that of all taxonomy, a means of making the world intelligible, thinkable, speak-able. In Foucauldian terms, it is a discursive process, a process of producing and embodying knowledge. Jonathan Z. Smith, for example, in an insightful and instructive essay on one particular discourse of otherness, summarizes the discovery and colonization of the Americas by Europeans as follows:

In the same way that, according to one historian of science, “Ptolemy’s model of the earth was the weapon by which the real earth was conquered intellectually,” so, too, here. The “conquest of America,” for all its frightful human costs, was primarily a linguistic event. Once recognized (in the face of an intact,

¹¹⁰ Siker, “Unmasking the Enemy,” 113.

¹¹¹ Lieu, *Christian Identity*, 269.

linguistically embedded world-view), “otherness” was, on the one hand, a challenge to “decipherment”; on the other hand, it was an occasion for the “stretching” of language—both for the creation of new linguistic entities (“new world” and the like) and the attempt, through discourse, to “give to those strange worlds the shape of our own.”¹¹²

This project of making the world knowable, this “stretching of language,” is one that takes place within and through representation, through communicative symbols and practices.¹¹³ In addition, this ongoing project of taxonomy, this struggle to name and thereby tame the world, is not a project in which a knowing subject exists outside of objects that are known. As Bruce Lincoln writes,

For the most part taxonomies are regarded—and announce themselves—as systems of classifying the phenomenal world, systems through which otherwise indiscriminate data can be organized in a form wherein they become knowable. Knowers do not and cannot stand apart from the known, however, because they are objects as well as subjects of knowledge; consequently, they themselves come to be categorized within their own taxonomic systems. Taxonomy is thus not only an epistemological instrument (a means for organizing information), but it is also (as it comes to organize the organizers) an instrument for the construction of society.”¹¹⁴

Categorization, in other words, does more than just organize objects outside the self into a knowable form; it positions those objects in relation to the subject, i.e., positions the “other” in relation to the self. The self and the “other” do not exist independently, but only in relation to each other.

¹¹² Jonathan Z. Smith, “What a Difference a Difference Makes,” in *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2004), 274.

¹¹³ By “representation,” I mean “the signifying practices and symbolic systems through which meanings are produced and which position us as subjects.” Woodward, “Concepts of Identity and Difference,” 15. Representation can take many different forms, and discourses of identity are constantly being negotiated through these different mediums, including (but certainly not limited to) the various terms that are used to distinguish a self and its “others,” as well as larger literary contexts of meaning such as narratives like the Gospel of Matthew.

¹¹⁴ Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 7–8.

As a discursive process, the ongoing project of identity construction, or making the self and its “others” knowable, is also a transmission and reproduction of power.¹¹⁵ “Difference,” as Smith points out, “is rarely something simply to be noted; it is, most often, something in which one has a stake.”¹¹⁶ The differences created by the binaries mentioned above—light/darkness, man/woman, human/animal—are types of knowledge that have, at various times, made certain things possible and certain things impossible, certain things thinkable and other things unimaginable. In terms of power, the latter two binaries have often been part of historical discourses that have legitimated the persecution, exploitation, and even the elimination of the “other”; conversely, they have also been key components of discourses of liberation and resistance. The structural relationship between insiders and outsiders, the “us” and the “not us,” is commonly one of hierarchy; the “other” is usually not created as an equal, but in some important sense as a subordinate to the self.

Finally, an important point about the construction of “otherness” is that “difference is never absolute, even if it is represented as such.”¹¹⁷ This is where the

¹¹⁵ I am also conceptualizing power in the Foucauldian sense, as something dispersed throughout a social body, something that is simultaneously the property of everyone and no one and that is “both intentional and nonsubjective”—i.e., something that transcends, even as it includes, the choices and decisions of individuals. Relations of power, Foucault argues, are the “immediate effects of the divisions, inequalities and disequilibriums which occur in [discursive networks], and conversely, they are the internal conditions of those differentiations.” Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction* (New York: Random House, 1978), 94. Woodward summarizes the Foucauldian view of power nicely: “Foucault sees power as everywhere; its operations are diffuse and it is exercised from innumerable points, but no one can ever be outside the exercise of power. . . . [He] challenges the notion that power is exercised in one direction (downwards, from above, by the powerful) by seeing power within discourse as both enabling and constraining, positive and negative.” Woodward, “Motherhood: Identities, Meanings, and Myths,” 255.

¹¹⁶ Smith, “What a Difference a Difference Makes,” 252.

¹¹⁷ Lieu, *Christian Identity*, 270.

mutually exclusive categories of “light” and “darkness” become a rather unsuited analogy (at least in their most literal sense) for the construction of categories of cultural identity and difference. The creation of a boundary between “us” and “them” always involves the selective foregrounding of one or more traits and the obscuration or omission of others. So, for example, the categories of “man” and “woman” create difference by highlighting particular anatomical and physiological differences and subsuming other traits that (anatomically defined) men and women have in common. Likewise, the “human”/“animal” binary creates difference by emphasizing traits that animals are perceived as lacking (e.g., such things as language, a soul, laughter and tears, and/or a supposed “higher consciousness”) and downplaying accepted commonalities, traits shared across these categories (e.g., sentiency, emotion, and volition). The selected differences become a boundary marker, a line between “us” and “them.”

The Gentile “Other” of Jesus’ Teachings in Matthew

From the perspective of social identity theory, the Gospel of Matthew becomes an arena, a form of representation, where identity is not merely assumed and reflected, but also contested and re-worked. In her essay on the creation of a “Jewish other” in Matthew, Judy Yates Siker is correct—but incompletely so—in her observation that “Matthew’s Gospel is . . . a story of ‘us’ and ‘them.’”¹¹⁸ More precisely, the gospel becomes, through the lens of social identity theory, a story of “us” and “thems.”¹¹⁹ In

¹¹⁸ Siker, “Unmasking the Enemy,” 109.

¹¹⁹ Warren Carter, “Matthew’s Others: Scholarly Identity-Construction and Absentee Gentile Great Men (Matt 20:24–27),” in *Text, Image, and Christians in the Graeco-Roman World: A Festschrift in Honor of David Lee Baulch*, ed. A. C. Niang and C. Osiek (Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2012), 146–150.

other words, the contours of the “us” that are constructed by the gospel narrative are not forged through the creation of a single “other,” but through the creation of several “others,” each of which functions in part to exemplify what the “us” or the “we” is not. In the remainder of this chapter, I examine the construction of one of these “others,” the “Gentiles” (*ethnē* and *ethnikoi*), as it emerges from the teachings of Jesus in the gospel. The negotiation of insider identity in relation to non-Jews in Matthew is complex, and it is accomplished in and through a variety of different literary contexts in the gospel. This chapter considers merely one of these contexts, the ways in which the character of Jesus, addressing the narrative’s insiders (his disciples), deploys and uses a negative Gentile stereotype for the construction of the ideal disciple and the ideal community of disciples.

Jesus makes use of the categories of *ethnē* and *ethnikoi* four times in the Gospel as a foil against which he defines true righteousness and faithfulness, and in one additional instance he uses the implicit outsidership of *ethnikoi* to instruct his community in matters of church discipline. Three of these deployments of the “Gentiles” occur very early in the narrative, in the Sermon on the Mount, the first of Jesus’ five extended discourses in the Gospel.¹²⁰ The first occurs in the section of the sermon that is sometimes referred to as “the antitheses,” but is, I think, more aptly characterized as the teachings on the “greater righteousness” (5:21–48).¹²¹ Here, Jesus presents a series of six

¹²⁰ Matthean interpreters commonly use the term “discourses” to refer to the sections of Jesus’ extended teaching in Matthew. The five major discourses are 1) the Sermon on the Mount (5:1–7:28), 2) the Mission Discourse (10:1–42), 3) the Community Discourse (18:1–35), 4) the Parable Discourse (13:1–52), and 5) the Apocalyptic or Olivet Discourse (24:3–25:46). See Donald Senior, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 180.

¹²¹ To refer to these six teachings on the law as “antitheses” sets the teachings of Jesus *a priori* against the commandments of Torah that he engages. Immediately prior to these six teachings on the law in the Sermon, Jesus says, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets,” implying that it might be this very thing that the reader will be tempted to think. He continues, “I have not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of

teachings, each engaging either a specific commandment of Torah or a particular interpretation of a commandment. The beginning of each of these six teachings is structured in the same formulaic way: “You have heard that it was said But I tell you” Each calls the disciple to go beyond the written requirements of the Law, and two—the teaching on divorce and the teaching on oaths—even seem to condemn practices that Torah condoned and regulated. It is in the last of these six teachings that Jesus deploys the “the Gentiles” as an “other” whom his ideal disciple is to define him/herself against:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles (*hoi ethnikai*) do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (5:43–48)

In this passage, *hoi ethnikai* are portrayed as those who “greet only [their] brothers and sisters,” those who prefer those with whom they have familial ties. In addition, the reason that Jesus gives to his audience for why they should love their enemies is so that they “may be children of [their] father in heaven,” that they may “be perfect . . . as [their] heavenly father is perfect.” The disciple’s knowledge of God’s grace should in turn make that disciple gracious, and it follows that how one treats one’s enemies is, in part, an indication of how well one knows God. The *ethnikai* are portrayed by Jesus here as

a letter will pass from the Law until all is accomplished” (5:17–20). My use of the descriptive label, “teachings on the greater righteousness” reflects my interpretation that Jesus is not, in these subsequent six teachings, setting aside the commands of Torah, but is rather teaching about how Torah is to be lived out—i.e., teaching about the righteousness that “exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees” (5:20).

those who greet only their friends because of their ignorance of the gracious character of God. Thus this section of the sermon about how Torah is to be lived out concludes by impressing upon the disciple that obedience to Jesus' interpretation of Torah should make the disciple different—visibly and practically different—from “Gentiles” who are ignorant of God and God’s law.

The second time that the Matthean Jesus uses “the Gentiles” as a foil occurs in the next section of the Sermon, a section on true piety. The primary “other” that is employed in this section of the Sermon is the “hypocrite,” the person who gives alms, prays, and/or fasts for the purpose of being noticed by others.¹²² But breaking what is otherwise a very consistent tripartite structure in this part of the Sermon is an extension of teaching on prayer,¹²³ and “the Gentiles” (*hoi ethnikai*) are here called upon by Jesus once again, this time for the purpose of giving nuance to the prayers of the ideal disciple, and more precisely, to the way that the disciple ought to conceptualize and respond to God: “When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles (*hoi ethnikai*) do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him” (6:7–8). The stereotypical tendencies of the *ethnikai* are expanded by Jesus here from that of greeting only their brothers and sisters to include multiplying words in their prayers to God. Again, it is the ignorance of the *ethnikai* that is on display, their ignorance of who God is, what God is capable of, and, as a result, of how to properly petition God. In contrast to their long prayers, Jesus

¹²² See Matt 6:2–4, 5–6, 16–18; 7:5.

¹²³ Dale C. Allison, Jr., “The Configuration of the Sermon on the Mount,” in *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 185–187.

goes on to offer his own concise alternative (6:9–13). Thus once again, Jesus portrays “Gentiles” as those who “you”—the disciple—are not to be.

Jesus’ final use of “Gentiles” as an “other” in the Sermon on the Mount also involves a generalization about their ignorance of God’s character and, therefore, the futility of their labor:

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For it is the Gentiles (*ta ethnē*) who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (6:25–33)

Jesus here characterizes the Gentile peoples as those who worry and strive for life’s basic necessities, never knowing that God, who feeds the birds and clothes the lilies, knows all needs and provides for those who strive to do God’s will. Though Jesus uses *ethnē* in this passage, rather than *ethnikoi*, he attributes the category of *ethnē*, the Gentile peoples, with the same key characteristic—ignorance of God and lives that reflect that ignorance—that he has previously attributed to *hoi ethnikoi*, Gentile persons, in the Sermon. Just as Siker notes that the creation of the Jewish leaders as an “other” in Matthew involves a “blurring” of specific categories,¹²⁴ so, too, here do the similar characterizations of two slightly different labels for non-Jews have the effect of blurring together *ethnē* with

¹²⁴ Siker, “Unmasking the Enemy,” 116.

ethnikoi, stereotyping the non-Jewish peoples and persons as being, in essence, ignorant, idolatrous, and immoral. Thus, in summary, the Gentile “other” that is created by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is characterized, primarily, in terms of being ignorant of the ways of God. Because they do not know what God is like, the stereotypical Gentile does not love enemies and heaps up empty words in long prayers, and the stereotypical Gentile people group strives for all of the things that only God can provide, rather than striving for God’s reign and God’s justice.

Later in the narrative, just prior to his final journey to Jerusalem, Jesus evokes the *ethnikoi* again for the purpose of constructing the boundaries of his community. This time, however, he does not tell his disciples to avoid certain behaviors that are associated with *ethnikoi*, but rather uses the assumption of *ethnikoi* otherness—an assumption shared by Jesus, his audience of disciples in the story, and the implied reader of Matthew—to position those who are unrepentant in the church. In the context of a series of teachings on humility, righteousness, forgiveness, and the responsibilities that his disciples have to one other, Jesus instructs his disciples on how to handle disputes within the church (the *ekklēsia*), and, in particular, how to deal with a situation in which one member of the church believes that she or he has been wronged by another church member. If one’s efforts and the efforts of the community to confront the wrong-doer are unsuccessful, Jesus teaches, the community is to consider that person to now be an outsider to the group: “let such a one be to you as a Gentile or a tax collector” (18:17). While this text is not best read, I think, as a command to the community to shun the unrepentant offender,¹²⁵ it is clear that, as David Sim puts it, “being treated in a manner

¹²⁵ Indeed Gentiles and tax collectors are hardly shunned within the story of Jesus in Matthew. See Carter, “Matthew and the Gentiles,” 281.

approximating the way tax-collectors or Gentiles are treated is a fate to be avoided.”¹²⁶

The text assumes the association and conflation of “Gentiles” and “sinners” that is common in much first century literature,¹²⁷ and it uses this association to mark the boundary line between insiders and outsiders, between “us” and “them.”

The final time that Jesus evokes the Gentiles as a pedagogical foil occurs during his final journey to Jerusalem, the journey that, as he has just informed his disciples, will result in his death (20:17–19). Immediately following this revelation, the mother of James and John, two of Jesus’ twelve apostles, comes to Jesus requesting that her sons be given privileged status in his kingdom. This request angers the other apostles, and it is in these circumstances that Jesus calls the disciples together and says,

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles (*ethnē*) lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.” (20:25–28)

While “Gentiles” have been depicted in the Sermon on the Mount as poor examples of piety and altruism, what is in view here is power. As Jesus and his disciples journey to Jerusalem, straight into the teeth of the rulers of the Gentiles, Jesus characterizes his own type of ruling, as well as that of anyone who wishes to follow him, in contrast to that of Gentile “tyrants.” Implicit here, too, is a second contrast, one of social structures, that

¹²⁶ Sim, “The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles,” 27.

¹²⁷ Gene Smillie points out that “sinners” in Matthew seems to be set “in implied proverbial apposition with ‘Gentiles,’ as it often is in the Jewish literature of the period.” He notes that these two categories are even associated and conflated in the letters of Paul, the self-described apostle to the Gentiles (See, e.g., Gal 2:15; Eph 4:17–19). Smillie, “‘Even the Dogs,’” 74–75.

Jesus makes between “you”—the community of disciples that he is addressing¹²⁸—and “them,” those “Gentiles” who are ruled by tyrants. Thus Jesus sets in relief one way of structuring a community (with leaders who are servants¹²⁹) against another (with rulers who “lord it over” their subjects). Once again, he portrays “Gentiles” in such a way as to set them apart from the ideal disciple and/or the community of followers of Jesus, and this final picture of Gentile leadership as tyrannical rounds out the negative stereotype of “the Gentiles” in the Gospel.

The rhetoric alive in each of these passages depends upon the unspoken assumption that Gentiles, in the sense of non-Israelites who do not worship Israel’s God, are “not us.” Within these passages, however, that assumption of ethnic and religious difference that is inherent in the term is expanded and reworked to include certain propensities and vices, certain attributes that Gentiles have that the ideal disciple and the ideal community of disciples do not. In other words, in these passages, the categories of *ethnē* and *ethnikoi* come to carry more meaning than simply that of “non-Jewish peoples” and “non-Jewish persons”; they come to mean “pagans” in the most derogatory sense, those who are ignorant, immoral, and idolatrous. This meaning of *ta ethnē* and *hoi ethnikoi* as it is used in these passages is not one that is limited to the Gospel of Matthew.

¹²⁸ Which includes, as David Howell argues, the implied reader. See Howell, *Matthew’s Inclusive Community*, 14–18.

¹²⁹ For a brief discussion of this image of the slave in Roman society, see Carter, “Matthew’s Others,” 155–157. Carter writes insightfully that, “having othered the Gentiles, Matthew utilizes an entity othered by Gentile rule, slavery, to identify Jesus-followers.” He argues, however, that “slavery is not about chosen self-sacrifice or ‘service,’ nor, given its systemic economic, social, political, and imperial dimensions, is it about a personal characteristic of humility.” Carter’s argument is based partially on his reading of this passage in which he understands Jesus to be commanding his disciples to be his (i.e., Jesus’) slave. However, Jesus tells his disciples to be slaves to each other and he connects this appropriation of the role of the slave with that of his own self-sacrifice. These details of the text, I think, support the more traditional reading of chosen self-sacrifice, rather than Carter’s reading, in which becoming a slave means being “both brutalized and brutal.” Carter, “Matthew’s Others,” 156–157.

What we see here, as Smillie notes, is “Jesus accepting and adapting conventional Jewish stereotypes of pagans as the quintessence of unrighteousness.”¹³⁰ It is important to note, however, that the Matthean Jesus is not content to let his audience supply the content of the categories of *ethnē* and *ethnikoi*; rather, he foregrounds a very negative construction of these categories.

Conclusion

From the lens of social identity theory, all of this stereotyping has every bit as much to do with the emergence of “us” as it does with the “othering” of “them,” as these categories of *ethnē* and *ethnikoi* becomes repositories for some of those things that the “us” would expel from itself. The picture of “Gentileness” that Jesus constructs through these teachings is one characterized by tribalism, excessive and misdirected piety, unnecessary strife, a basic ignorance about and alienation from God, and finally, tyrannical leadership. In contrast to this Gentile “other,” the ideal disciple emerges from Jesus’ words as one who loves even enemies, who addresses God with directness and trust, who trusts God’s provision, and who, if he/she wishes to lead, voluntarily becomes a slave. Likewise, the ideal community of disciples is one that works for God’s kingdom and justice and that is led, counterintuitively, by leaders who are slaves.

The stereotypical “Gentiles” of the teachings of Jesus is neither, as will be developed in the last two chapters of this thesis, the final nor the definitive word on Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew.¹³¹ It is, however, an important word, and it serves, as

¹³⁰ Smillie, ““Even the Dogs,”” 75.

¹³¹ While David Sim has interpreted these texts as reflective of a strong anti-Gentile bias of the evangelist and the community behind the text, most interpreters have been more sensitive to the larger

I hope to demonstrate, a key rhetorical function within the larger narrative of Matthew's Gospel. Thus, while considering these passages from the discourse sections of the Gospel in isolation from that larger narrative context creates a division that is admittedly artificial (and potentially misleading), it is also pedagogically useful for revealing the rhetorical interplay of the various dynamics of identity construction at work in the narrative of Matthew. Here, in Jesus' construction of a Gentile "other," any ambiguity between "us" and "them," any overlap between the categories of *mathētai/ekklēsia* and *ethnē/ethnikoi*, is obscured. "Gentiles" are represented, in essence, as outsiders, and the danger that the disciple and the community of disciples risk is that of being like the outsider—or indeed of becoming the outsider¹³²—by doing those things that Jesus says these outsiders do. But this essentialized and absolutized construction raises a question: what if Gentile (in the sense of non-Jewish) persons display those virtues that Jesus ascribes exclusively to the ideal disciple? What if some *ethnē* show themselves to be inadequately mapped, unfairly conceptualized, by the discourse of Jesus examined in this chapter? This, as I hope to demonstrate in the next chapter, is a question with which the implied reader of the Gospel of Matthew is invited to grapple.

literary context within which these texts reside. Sim's interpretation of Gentiles in Matthew centers on Jesus' instructions to his church in Matthew 18:17: "If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector." See David C. Sim, "The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 57 (1995): 27–30. As Donald Senior notes, Sim's reading prioritizes those texts that portray Gentiles as outsiders or in a negative light and gives insufficient attention to those texts that portray Gentiles more positively. Senior, "Between Two Worlds," 10–11.

¹³² See Matt 18:17.

CHAPTER TWO:
DRAMATIZING DIFFERENCE: GENTILE CHARACTERIZATION IN THE
GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

“Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith” (Matthew 8:10).

In the narrative of the Gospel of Matthew, Gentile characters stroll the stage alongside the Gentile “other” of Jesus’ discourse. They emerge in various places within the story, from Jesus’ birth to the aftermath of his awful death, sometimes living into the negative stereotype, but at other times demonstrating themselves to be inappropriately typecast by his words. In this chapter, I examine how these non-Jewish characters are portrayed within the narrative of the gospel and consider the relationship of these various portrayals with the stereotypical *ethnē* and *ethnikoi* of Jesus’ teachings. The construction of the “Gentiles” in Jesus’ discourses is also part of a larger process of constructing “us” and “them” in relation to non-Jews that is accomplished rhetorically through the narrative rhetoric of the entire gospel. I argue in this chapter that the characterization of various Gentiles and their locations within the gospel’s narrative function, on the one hand, to undermine some of the key characteristics that are ascribed to the Gentile “others” of Jesus’ teachings, and, on the other hand, to develop and reaffirm some of these imputed attributes. While the “Gentiles” of Jesus’ sermons represent an essentialized generalization of non-Israelites, of the “not us,” the narrator of Matthew portrays Gentile characters with a diversity that not only transcends, but indeed challenges, that stereotype.

Characterization in the Gospel of Matthew

While many studies of the Gospel of Matthew have considered Gentile characterization, few have done so from a purely narrative-critical perspective. As noted in the introduction, most recent studies of the gospel's representation of non-Jews have been primarily driven by historical-critical questions concerning the Matthean community and/or redaction-critical questions regarding the intentions of the evangelist. Some of these studies have interpreted the various episodes that feature Gentile characters as reflecting, rather transparently, the relationship of the Matthean community with the non-Jews of its time.¹³³ Most have analyzed Gentile characterization not solely on the basis of the text of Matthew itself, but also in comparison to the sources of the Gospel of Matthew (and the Gospel of Mark in particular).¹³⁴ What is gained in such endeavors is a view into the social world by and for which the text was written and clues to the motivations of the final redactor; what is lost is the way that the reader anticipated by the text, the implied reader, would experience these characters within the literary context of the narrative of Matthew.

From a narrative-critical perspective, the Gospel of Matthew constructs a narrative world, a world of the story, which, while unrelated neither to the past that it narrates nor to the present for which it was produced, "is autonomous in its own right."¹³⁵

¹³³ See, e.g., Sim, "The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles," 25–35.

¹³⁴ Sim, Saldarini, and Senior, for example, all focus on the ways that the Gospel of Matthew's characterization of particular non-Jewish characters differs from that of its Markan source. Sim, "The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles," 23–25; Sim, "Christianity and Ethnicity in the Gospel of Matthew," 184–195; Saldarini, *Matthew's Jewish-Christian Community*, 72–75; Senior, "Between Two Worlds," 13–18.

¹³⁵ Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 3; See also the discussion in Howell, *Matthew's Inclusive Community*, 25–27.

When we as readers enter the world of the story, we get to know the various actors who populate that world, the characters, and we only know them as the narrator of the story reveals them.¹³⁶ Characterization, as Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie write, “refers to the way a narrator brings characters to life in a narrative. A narrator may ‘tell’ the audience directly what characters are like. Or the narrator may ‘show’ the characters to the audience by having them speak and act and by having other characters talk about them and interact with them.”¹³⁷ Although the Matthean narrator does occasionally “tell” the reader about characters and composite characters in the story,¹³⁸ characterization in Matthew is most often accomplished through “showing.” In the case of Gentile characters, characterization is achieved exclusively through showing; the narrator never gives the reader an authoritative aside on who a particular Gentile or Gentiles in general are. The reader is left to know and evaluate these characters through their words and actions, as well as the words and actions of other characters, within the story. In the pages that follow, I analyze the various depictions of non-Israelite characters in Matthew, the traits with which they are ascribed, their roles within the various scenes in the Gospel in which they appear, and the respective relationships that the text creates between the implied reader and each of these Gentile characters and/or groups of characters.

¹³⁶ In their influential narrative study of Mark, Rhoads, Dewey, and Mitchie write: “All we know of a given character is what we know from the story. We cannot go beyond what the Markan narrator has told us or implied in order to speculate about the character’s actions or motives—either on the basis of the treatment of that character in other Gospels or through efforts to reconstruct the historical character. We are treating these figures only in terms of their characterization in Mark—even when we are using helpful background information from the culture to understand the portrayal of the character better.” David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Mitchie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 99.

¹³⁷ Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 100.

¹³⁸ As, for example, in Matt 1:19.

Gentile Characters in Matthew

The Magi (2:1–12). The first Gentile characters¹³⁹ to appear in the story of Jesus in Matthew are magi from the East, who, by reading the sky, learn of the birth of Israel's awaited king and journey to Judea to pay him homage (2:1–12). Upon hearing of the arrival of the magi and the purpose of their pilgrimage, King Herod plots to exploit their piety and kill the newborn king. The magi, however, learn in a dream of Herod's devious intentions, and after honoring Jesus with their gifts, they return to their homeland by another route to avoid alerting Herod to the child's location (2:3–8). While an enraged Herod goes on to massacre all of the infants in Bethlehem, Jesus and his family escape, aided not only by the cunning of the magi, but also by an angel, who warns Joseph in a dream to flee with the family to Egypt (2:13).

These pious magi become the first of a repeating type in the gospel: Gentiles who honor and demonstrate faith in Israel's Messiah. By acknowledging Jesus' kingship and prostrating themselves before him, these non-Jews become paradigms of righteousness, models of true faith and devotion that are to be admired and emulated by the implied reader. As Smillie points out, the devotion of these Gentile magi "is set in stark relief by comparison with the attitude of the Jerusalem hierarchy, as portrayed in 2:3–8."¹⁴⁰ Just as Herod's vile reign is portrayed as a parody of kingship in this story, so those gathering around Herod in the scene, the chief priests and the scribes, are subtly set in contrast to these magi who journey to kneel before Israel's long-awaited Messiah in Bethlehem.

¹³⁹ Sim suggests that these magi are potentially diasporic Jews, but his arguments have not proven to be very persuasive. David C. Sim, "The Magi: Gentiles or Jews?," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 55, no. 4 (1999): 980–1000. For a critique of Sim's argument, see Byrne, "The Messiah in Whose Name," 60–61, note 23.

¹⁴⁰ Smillie, "Even the Dogs," 85.

It is important to note that the characterization of these magi, though very positive, is also very flat; there is no depth or hidden complexity to their portrayal and they do not grace the narrative long enough for the reader to know them well or watch them develop and/or change in any meaningful way.¹⁴¹ They are, therefore, not characters that the implied reader is able to strongly relate to or empathize with (though the reader is invited to empathize with their evaluative point of view of Jesus as the true Messiah). Their portrayal in the narrative is, like that of the stereotypical “Gentiles” of Jesus’ teachings, very condensed or essentialized; but while the “Gentiles” of Jesus’ teachings are identified by their ignorance of God and futile piety, the reductive portrayal of these magi is one of people of insight and true piety. These few, though very significant, character traits with which they are ascribed are precisely the opposite of the traits ascribed to “the Gentiles” in Jesus’ teachings in the Sermon on the Mount.

The Roman Centurion (8:5–13).¹⁴² On two occasions during his ministry, the Matthean Jesus himself expresses surprise and amazement at his encounters with

¹⁴¹ Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 133.

¹⁴² I am choosing to forego analysis of two potentially non-Jewish composite characters in the narrative, the crowds that converge around Jesus in his early ministry (Matt 4:23–25) and the crowd of about 4000 that Jesus feeds in the wilderness following his encounter with the Canaanite woman (Matt 15:29–39). The ethnic composition of both of these crowds has prompted much interesting debate among interpreters, but I think that rehashing these debates here will distract from the overall purpose of this chapter. While I think that the implied reader of Matthew is anticipated by the text as one who is at least open to the possibility of these crowds being comprised of some non-Jews, the lack of emphasis on the ethnic identity of the crowds is evidence, I think, that the socio-economic status of the crowds is much more in view in these pericopes than is their ethnic identity. In addition, whether or not one finds it compelling to interpret one or both of the crowds as being comprised of some non-Jews does not significantly affect my arguments, since neither crowd is portrayed in a way that is exceptional from that of the non-Jewish characters considered in this chapter. The characterization of both of these crowds is minimal, but quite positive: they come to Jesus seeking mercy, and what they seek, they find (Matt 4:24; 15:30–31, 37–39). For more discussion of the ethnic identity of these crowds and their roles in the story, see the competing interpretations of Byrne, “The Messiah in Whose Name,” 63–65, 68–69; Carter, “Matthew and the Gentiles,” 265–266, 274; and J. R. C. Cousland, “The Feeding of the Four Thousand Gentiles in Matthew? Matthew 15:29–39 as a Test Case,” *Novum Testamentum* 41, no. 1 (1999): 1–23.

individual Gentile characters, encounters in which these characters show themselves to be neither easily nor accurately conceptualized in terms of the Gentile “other” of his sermons. The first of these occasions involves a Roman centurion, and the location at which this centurion arrives in the story is significant; Jesus has only just come down from the mountain following the Sermon on the Mount, and the negative Gentile caricature that has been created in that sermon—that of Gentiles as those who are ignorant of God and whose piety and ethics reflect this basic ignorance—still hangs fresh in the air. In his encounter with Jesus, however, this Roman centurion demonstrates himself to be surprisingly adept at recognizing and trusting the ways of God. As Jesus arrives in Capernaum, the centurion comes to him and tells him that his servant “‘is at home paralyzed, in terrible distress’” (8:6). This centurion, who is already marginalized (i.e., already an outsider) in Jewish society simply on the basis of being a Gentile, becomes even more so by his association with a sick slave.¹⁴³ Due to ambiguity in the Greek text, there is no consensus among commentators on how to translate Jesus’ response to the centurion’s request. It can be translated as a statement: “I will come and cure him”; but it can also be translated—and I think is best translated—as a question: “Am I to come and cure him?”¹⁴⁴ The centurion, as Senior notes, “expresses profound respect for Jesus as a Jew and does not insist that Jesus come under his roof.”¹⁴⁵ Rather, comparing Jesus’ authority to heal with his own authority over the soldiers and servants

¹⁴³ Evert-Jan Vledder, *Conflict in the Miracle Stories: A Socio-Exegetical Study of Matthew 8 and 9* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press: 1997), 180.

¹⁴⁴ See Evans, *Matthew*, 187; Senior, “Between Two Worlds,” 17, note 36. Translating it as a question would indicate an initial hesitation from Jesus to heal the Gentile’s servant, a hesitation that parallels that to come in his encounter with the Canaanite woman in chapter 15.

¹⁴⁵ Senior, “Between Two Worlds,” 20.

under his command, the centurion says to Jesus, ““Only speak the word, and my servant will be healed”” (8:8). Hearing the centurion’s request, Jesus is amazed at his faith (8:10), and just before healing the servant, he voices honor for the centurion in the presence of the crowd that is with him: ““Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”” (8:10).

The story of this centurion blurs the boundary that has only just been created by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount between “Gentiles,” those who are ignorant of God, and true disciples, those who know and trust God. The centurion’s request to Jesus is remarkable not only because he correctly places faith in Jesus, but also because he exercises that faith on behalf of his sick servant. As Vledder points out, the centurion’s “faith was more than just believing in Jesus’ ability to cure. He perceived Jesus as having the power to help the weak, and had the insight to act in the same way as Jesus.”¹⁴⁶ Unlike the Gentile “others” of the Sermon who lack knowledge of the character and power of God, and who therefore neither imitate God’s benevolence nor seek that benevolence appropriately, this centurion reflects the gracious character of God by acting on behalf of his social inferior and perceptibly recognizes God’s character and power in Jesus by seeking his assistance with directness, humility, and trust. Thus Jesus’ subsequent proclamation that non-Israelites will be kingdom-of-heaven-insiders comes immediately after the narrative subverts some of the key differences that have been discursively created by Jesus between “Gentiles” and the people of God.

¹⁴⁶ Vledder, *Conflict in the Miracle Stories*, 182.

The relationship between this Roman centurion and the implied reader is more complex than that between the implied reader and the composite character of the magi. His role in the overall narrative is also minor one, and though he acts in surprising ways (Jesus himself is amazed that a non-Israelite shows this sort of faith), he still acts consistently; there is no visible change or development in his character, no growth with which the reader can relate or sympathize. The relationship between this centurion and the implied reader, however, is different from that of the magi and the implied reader because of the relationship that the narrative develops between the centurion and Jesus. Jesus is the primary protagonist of the Gospel of Matthew, and the narrator allows the implied reader not only to journey with Jesus and see his words and deeds, but sometimes even to know his inner thoughts and emotions. Although the empathy that is created between Jesus and the implied reader is most often best described as “idealistic empathy,”¹⁴⁷ the reader has already been tutored by the narrative to assume that Jesus’ evaluative point of view is the correct view (indeed a voice from heaven has already affirmed this¹⁴⁸), and, therefore, to assume that view him/herself. Therefore, while little empathy is developed between the centurion and the reader (the exceptions being, again, with the centurion’s evaluative point of view of Jesus and also, perhaps, his need), the implied reader, who agrees with and, in this case, is allowed insight into Jesus’ emotions, is led to sympathize with and ultimately marvel at the faith of the centurion because of

¹⁴⁷ Powell notes that though identification with Jesus is encouraged by the narrative of Matthew, even explicitly at times, Jesus embodies certain traits and identities that the implied reader neither can nor should emulate (e.g., he is described as saving, authoritative, and eternally present, and he alone is given the title and role of Messiah). Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, 56.

¹⁴⁸ See Matt 3:17.

that closer, more empathetic relationship with the protagonist, Jesus, who himself experiences the centurion in these ways.

The Gadarenes (8:28–34). While the non-Israelite characters who have entered the narrative to this point have been figured very positively, the overall portrayal of Gentile characters in Matthew is not uncomplicated. When the crowds overwhelm him in Capernaum (8:18), Jesus crosses the Sea of Galilee and comes to “the country of the Gadarenes” (8:28). The implied reader would be aware that Gadara, one of the cities of the Decapolis, was, in the first century, primarily inhabited by Gentiles, but also had a large Jewish population.¹⁴⁹ Should the reader have doubts, however, about whether the Gadarenes that appear in this story are non-Jews, that reader need only consider another composite character in the story: a herd of categorically-unclean swine.¹⁵⁰ Finding two demoniacs in the land of the Gaderenes, Jesus drives the demons into this herd of pigs, which consequently, bent on its own destruction, plunges off a steep bank and into the sea (8:28–32). When the swineherds inform the townsfolk of Gadara about what has happened, the Gadarenes do not rejoice in the ways of God, but beg Jesus to leave (8:33–34).

The narrative portrays the Gadarenes here as neither recognizing nor trusting the power of God, even when it has been demonstrated in their midst. More than that, though, the Gadarenes find themselves *at odds* with that power. As Vledder notes, the conflict in this story arises from the fact that Jesus puts the interests of “the expendables”

¹⁴⁹ Craig S. Keener, *Matthew*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 183. See also Evans, *Matthew*, 197.

¹⁵⁰ Vledder, *Conflict in the Miracle Stories*, 195.

(the demoniacs) above the economic interests of the swineherds and the pagan city with which they traded.¹⁵¹ These Gentiles neither know nor appropriately respond to God, and their society, reflecting Jesus' generalization of Gentile leadership and social organization (20:24–28), is hierarchically structured in a way that subordinates the interests of the weak to those of the strong. Thus unlike the other Gentile characters considered so far, the characterization of these Gadarenes reaffirms the negative stereotypes of Gentiles that are created in Jesus' discourse.

The Canaanite Woman (15:21–28). As Jesus continues teaching and healing around the Sea of Galilee, a heated halakhic dispute with the Pharisees and scribes sets the stage for another important encounter between Jesus and a Gentile character. When these Pharisees and scribes question Jesus about why his disciples “break the tradition of the elders” by not washing their hands before eating (15:2), Jesus responds with an accusation of his own, and one that is far more serious, that of using tradition to undermine the commandment of God to honor one's father and mother (15:3–9). After this tense encounter, he calls the crowds to him and defends his position on hand-washing with a more general maxim concerning uncleanness (15:11).

Jesus' teachings here about things clean and unclean transition in the very next pericope into “a direct encounter between Jesus and a representative of the (unclean) Gentile world.”¹⁵² Having journeyed to the region of Tyre and Sidon, Jesus is confronted by a Canaanite woman whose daughter is “tormented by a demon” (15:22).¹⁵³ His

¹⁵¹ Vledder, *Conflict in the Miracle Stories*, 198.

¹⁵² Byrne, “The Messiah in Whose Name,” 68.

¹⁵³ Senior notes that the author of Matthew has altered his Markan source material to portray Jesus' ministry as one more limited to Israel. In this pericope in Matthew, the woman comes out to Jesus (Jesus goes in to her in Mark) and it is not clear—as it is Mark—that he even enters Tyre and Sidon.

initial response to the woman's appeal for help seems very cold: he does not answer her. His disciples, wearied by her persistence, ask him to send her away, but Jesus, honoring neither their request nor hers, responds, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (15:24). The woman, on her knees before him now, says simply, "Lord, help me" (15:25). Jesus replies, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs" (15:26). The woman is undeterred by the de-humanizing insult: "Yes, Lord," she says, "yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table" (15:27). Jesus responds with the same sort of amazement with which he reacted to the words of the Roman centurion: "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish" (15:28). And he heals her daughter. As with the Roman centurion, the attribute that is most associated with *ethnē/ethnikoi*, the single common denominator of the stereotypical "Gentile"—ignorance of God and God's ways—is shown not to be present in this Canaanite woman. She recognizes the ways of God at work in Jesus, something that, as the surrounding narrative demonstrates, the Jewish religious leaders, those who should have recognized it most clearly, do not or will not see.

The reader's relationship with the Canaanite woman is, like that with the centurion, one that is augmented by the reader's relationship with the protagonist, Jesus. Jesus—like the reader assumed and created by the text—is hesitant to see Gentiles as the beneficiaries of his work. He sees this woman's need, and his refusal to send her away at the request of his disciples suggests to the reader, I think, a sort of internal conflict, one between his self-understanding of his mission as being limited to the lost sheep of the

Senior, "Between Two Worlds," 12–13. In a narrative reading, however, these details become much less significant. What matters is not how the author of Matthew has edited his sources, but rather the details of the final form of the text.

house of Israel on the one hand, and the need with which he is confronted on the other. But Jesus “*does change* and does accede to the Gentile woman’s request.”¹⁵⁴ It is not too much, I think, to say that the persistence of this woman “drags the Jewish Messiah from an understanding that his powers were at the disposal of his own people to one where, because of the faith he encountered,” those powers are available for “a representative of the Gentile world.”¹⁵⁵ And along with the Messiah, so is dragged the reader.

Pilate (27:1–26 and 27:62–66). The next Gentile character that the reader meets in the narrative is Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea. Here again, the character of Pilate reveals that the characterization of Gentiles in Matthew is hardly monolithic. Embodying Roman dominion, Pilate holds in his hands (so he believes) the power of life and death as he faces Jesus, who has just been condemned by the Jewish leaders (26:65–66). As Warren Carter points out, “the scene depicts a collision of claims of sovereignty, Rome’s represented by Pilate and God’s manifested by Jesus.”¹⁵⁶ While the Sanhedrin had questioned Jesus about and ultimately convicted him of charges of blasphemy, Pilate is interested in charges of sedition against the empire: ““Are you the King of the Jews?”” (27:11).¹⁵⁷ ““You say so,”” Jesus replies, but Pilate watches in amazement as Jesus remains silent before his Jewish accusers. Realizing that Jesus is standing before him because of the envy of his accusers rather than the content of their accusations (27:19), and having been warned by his wife ““to have nothing to do with that innocent man””

¹⁵⁴ Senior, “Between Two Worlds,” 19.

¹⁵⁵ Byrne, “The Messiah in Whose Name,” 69.

¹⁵⁶ Carter, “Matthew and the Gentiles,” 276.

¹⁵⁷ Byrne points out that only non-Jews in the narrative of Matthew refer to Jesus as “King of the Jews.” Byrne, “The Messiah in Whose Name,” 61.

because of a dream she has had (27:19), Pilate falls back on a custom he has of releasing one Jewish prisoner every year at Passover. He gives the crowds the option of choosing who will be pardoned, Jesus or a notorious criminal named Barabbas. At the provocation of the chief priests and elders, the crowd opts that Barabbas be pardoned and demands that Jesus be crucified. Pilate, wishing to avoid a riot, takes some water and washes his hands in front of the crowds, saying, “I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves” (27:24). The crowd answers, “His blood be on us and on our children!” (27:25). Pilate then releases Barabbas, has Jesus flogged, and hands him over to be crucified. Following Jesus’ death, Pilate appears one more time in the story, releasing Jesus’ body to Joseph of Arimathea and conscripting a guard, at the request of the Jewish leaders, to secure Jesus’ tomb. That guard proves ineffective, and Jesus’ defeat of death is simultaneously a defeat of Roman power.

While I agree with Carter that empires are in collision in this scene, I think that certain details in the narrative portray Pilate as a somewhat reluctant party to Jesus’ death. Pilate’s amazement at Jesus’ silence before his accusers, his recognition of the envious motives of Jesus’ accusers, the warning from his wife, his offer to the crowds to release either Jesus or Barabbas, and the fact that he gives in to the crowds only after he “saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning” (27:24)—these details do not fit easily, I think, with Carter’s interpretation that the narrative exposes Pilate’s “self-interested rule and manipulation of this crowd in alliance with the Jerusalem elite.”¹⁵⁸ This is not to say that the Gospel of Matthew’s portrayal of Pilate is positive. On the contrary, Pilate embodies the very essence of tyranny, of “lording it

¹⁵⁸ Carter, “Matthew and the Gentiles,” 276.

over,” that Jesus has earlier ascribed to the “rulers of the Gentiles/nations” (Matt 20:25–28). In this scene, two types of ruling come into view, that of the Gentile whose power resides in his ability and willingness to kill, and that of Jesus, whose power resides, paradoxically, in his willingness to die. Thus the character of Pilate does not challenge, complicate, or subvert the stereotype of Gentile tyranny that has been constructed by Jesus’ teachings to his disciples, but rather fills that stereotype with life, actualizes it and dramatizes it within the narrative.

The Roman Soldiers (27:27–28:15). Roman soldiers in the episodes of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection comprise the next composite Gentile character in the narrative. In the governor’s headquarters, after Pilate has handed Jesus over to be crucified, the soldiers strip Jesus and dress him with a scarlet robe and a crown of thorns (27:31). Having handed him a reed, they kneel before him and mock him, saying, “‘Hail, King of the Jews!’” They spit on him and beat him with the reed, then redress him in his own clothes and lead him away to be crucified (27:31). Upon coming to a place called Golgotha, they crucify him between two condemned thieves with a sign above his head that says, with more truth than they can know, “‘This is Jesus, the King of the Jews’” (27:32–27).

These Gentiles, like Pilate, represent Rome and embody the stereotypical Gentile social structure of “lording it over.” Although they are not the ones holding the reins, they are nonetheless complicit within a system in which power is gained and maintained by might and ruthlessness; thus they, like Pilate, are typed here in the narrative in the mold of the Gentile tyrannical “other” constructed in the teachings of Jesus. Their composite portrayal is not improved by the portrayal of the soldiers posted to guard

Jesus' tomb. These soldiers are depicted as cowards as they tremble and become "like dead men" when they see the angel of the Lord roll back the stone at the entrance to the tomb (28:4), and they are portrayed as mercenaries when they exchange the truth of what they have seen for a story concocted by the Jewish leaders (a story about Jesus' disciples stealing his body during the night) and a large sum of money (28:12–15). The narrative's characterization of these soldiers—as does the characterization of Pilate—inspires antipathy in the gospel's implied reader.

The Centurions at the Cross (27:54). A particular group of Roman soldiers, however, play a significantly different role in this climactic part of the narrative from that of their comrades. After Jesus has been crucified, the narrator informs the reader that passers-by taunt him with words reminiscent of Satan's in the wilderness (4:3, 6): "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross" (27:40). At noon, darkness comes over the land, and at about three o'clock, Jesus cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" a cry which those listening mistake for a plea of help to Elijah (27:46–49). Then, having refused a sponge filled with sour wine, he cries out again and breathes his last (27:50). As he dies, the curtain of the temple is torn in two, the earth shakes, and the tombs are opened and many people who have been long-dead come back to life (27:53). The centurion and those with him keeping watch over Jesus see these things happen at Jesus' death and exclaim, "Truly this man was God's Son!" (27:54).

The narrator of Matthew lets the centurions' remark stand without comment, and there has been some debate among interpreters about how to evaluate the significance of this comment. Sim has argued that the centurions' acknowledgment of Jesus as God's son

is best interpreted as a Roman “cry of defeat in the face of divine power.”¹⁵⁹ I find this interpretation difficult to accept due to the fact that Jesus himself is still dead at this point in the story (and therefore still seems, despite the wonders that occur at his death, to have been defeated). More compelling, I think, is the traditional interpretation of this confession as a rhetorical device, much like that at work in the stories of the magi, the centurion in Capernaum, and the Canaanite woman, in which the faith of an outsider is set in direct contrast to the rejection of Jesus by insiders (in this case, the Jewish crowds and their leaders who have clamored for Jesus’ death).¹⁶⁰ These centurions give to Jesus the honor that his own people should have given him, and, in addition, attribute to him a title (God’s son) that is, in the socio-political context in which this story is set, a royal title reserved for Caesar.¹⁶¹ Also, as Ulrich Luz writes, “that the Gentile soldiers take up the disciples’ confession of 14:33 and 16:16 is significant.”¹⁶² Jesus had promised his disciples that persecution at the hands of Gentiles would result in the gospel being heard by Gentiles (10:18; 24:14). Here at his death these non-Jews see a demonstration of the power of God at work in him, and they recognize and honor this power. The role of these centurions, therefore, fits into the repeating pattern in the gospel of Gentile characters whose reverence for Israel’s Messiah is to be emulated by the gospel’s implied reader.

¹⁵⁹ Sim, “The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles,” 24; for a fuller defense of this position, see David C. Sim, “The ‘Confession’ of the Soldiers in Matthew 27:54,” *HeyJ* 34 (1993): 401–424.

¹⁶⁰ See, e.g., Senior, “Between Two Worlds,” 16; Evans, *Matthew*, 468; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 578; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21–28: A Commentary*, Hermeneia, ed. Helmut Koester, trans. James E. Crouch (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 570.

¹⁶¹ Evans, *Matthew*, 468.

¹⁶² Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, 570.

Conclusion

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus constructs “Gentiles” (*ethnē* and *ethnikoi*) as foils for the ideal disciple. The *ethnikoi*, he says, greet only their brothers and sisters (5:47) and address God with unnecessarily wordy prayers (6:7–8). Likewise, the *ethnē* strive for their basic needs instead of striving for the reign and justice of God, who alone is able to supply those needs (6:32–33). Gentile nations (*ethnē*) and Gentile individuals (*ethnikoi*) are caricatured as those who do not know God and whose actions reflect that fundamental incomprehension. To those who would follow him, who would be insiders to his community, Jesus says of the “Gentiles,” ““Do not be like them”” (6:8).

Later in the narrative, with Jerusalem looming ominously in the distance, Jesus again deploys *ta ethnē* as a foil, this time to throw into relief the structures of power and honor that are to characterize his community of disciples. Here he portrays Gentile leadership (*hoi archontes tōn ethnōn*) and greatness (*hoi megaloi*) in terms of ruling over and having authority over other people. Just as in the Sermon on the Mount, this *ethnē* “other” is not created for its own sake, but for the sake of the emerging self, the emerging “us”; as Jesus tells his followers bluntly, ““it will not be so among you”” (20:26). In contrast to this *ethnē* leadership, Jesus conceptualizes his own rule and greatness, as well as that of his would-be followers, not in terms of the exercise of authority and power, but rather by voluntary and self-sacrificial service, by assuming the role of a slave (*doulos*) within the community. The social structures of the *ekklēsia* are forged in contrast to those of the *ethnē*.

The Gentile characters that the reader encounters in Matthew, however, do not always live into these stereotypes of *ethnē* and *ethnikoi* in Jesus’ discourse. Some do. The

Gadarenes neither recognize nor embrace the ways of God within their midst, and their economic concerns set them at odds with God's reign and justice as enacted in Jesus' healing of the demoniacs. Likewise, the character of Pilate is little more than a caricature of stereotypical *ethnē* leadership as portrayed in Jesus' discourse, and the social structures of which Pilate and the soldiers under his command are a part, those of power maintained by might and force, are precisely those structures that Jesus forbids in his community and for which his own type of ruling is the antithesis.

Other non-Israelites, however, challenge Jesus' negative constructions of *ethnē* and *ethnikoi*. The magi who come to worship Israel's newborn Messiah, the Roman centurion who solicits Jesus' healing power on behalf of his slave, the Canaanite woman who demonstrates great faith through her insistence that Jesus heal her daughter, and the centurions at the cross who see the miracles that occur at Jesus' death and proclaim him God's son—these characters form a type, a repeating pattern in the gospel of Gentiles who demonstrate righteousness and faith. All of these characters recognize, even if imperfectly, the power and justice of God at work in the actions of Jesus, and each honors Jesus through her or his words and/or actions.

As Malbon writes, “minor characters can play major roles; discipleship is more significant than disciples, characterization is more important than characters.”¹⁶³ What emerges from these various portrayals of Gentile characters are two pictures of “Gentileness” that function more prominently in the gospel than does any single Gentile character. Levine argues, and rightly I think, that the appropriation of the analytic

¹⁶³ Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, “Characters in Mark's Story: Changing Perspectives on the Narrative Process,” in *Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. K. R. Iverson and C. W. Skinner (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 61.

categories of “elite and marginal sharpens the outlook of the social axis” in the narrative of Matthew. There are many pious Jews in the narrative, just as there is a major Gentile villain (Pilate). The key pattern in Matthew is that of “the cross-ethnic association of faithlessness with the leaders of the community and its inverse, the equation of the marginal with the faithful.”¹⁶⁴ What happens in Jesus’ discourse is a blurring together of “Gentileness,” as non-Israelites are portrayed, in essence, as ignorant of God’s ways and therefore unrighteous. The characterization of Gentiles in Matthew, however, creates a division within the blurred categories of *ethnē* and *ethnikoi*; in other words, the gospel confronts the reader with the reality in the narrative that some non-Israelites are not *ethnē/ethnikoi* as Jesus has stereotypically portrayed *ethnē/ethnikoi*.

The negative, stereotypical portrayal of *ta ethnē* and *hoi ethnikoi* in Jesus’ discourse is hardly unique to the Gospel of Matthew. What we see here, as Smillie notes, is “Jesus accepting and adapting conventional Jewish stereotypes of pagans as the quintessence of unrighteousness.”¹⁶⁵ Smillie goes on to argue that Jesus’ comments about Gentiles are strategic, that his “real policy towards Gentiles is inclusive even while he is mouthing ostensibly Jewish conventionalisms.”¹⁶⁶ The narrative of Matthew, however, gives no indication that the character of Jesus thinks these “conventionalisms” are inaccurate or misleading. I think Smillie is right, however, that a strategy is at work here. This strategy is part of the rhetoric of the narrative, though, not the rhetoric of the Matthean Jesus. Indeed, the authority of the character of Jesus is the primary tool by

¹⁶⁴ Levine, *The Social and Ethnic Dimensions*, 6.

¹⁶⁵ Smillie, ““Even the Dogs,”” 75.

¹⁶⁶ Smillie, ““Even the Dogs,”” 93.

which the narrator attempts to guide and re-configure the implied reader's conceptions of non-Israelites. Jesus—like the reader assumed and created by the text—sees non-Israelites as categorical outsiders, and the “outsiderness” that is inherent in the categories of *ethnē/ethnikoi* is, in his discourse, explicitly widened from being defined merely in terms of ethnicity to also include the negative character traits of ignorance, idolatry, and immorality. In the stories of the Capernaum centurion and the Canaanite woman, however, Jesus himself comes into contact with people who are non-Israelites (and thus, in the ethnic sense, *ethnē/ethnikoi*), but who at the same time exhibit remarkable faith (and therefore are not *ethnē/ethnikoi* in the sense of being ignorant of God, idolatrous, and immoral). Jesus' experience of the faith of the Roman centurion prompts and justifies his declaration that “many will come from East and West” (8:11), and the persistence of the Canaanite woman compels him, as he heals her daughter, to act in a way that is inconsistent with his own understanding of his mission and purpose at this point in the story (15:24, 28). These two narrative episodes foreground the place of Gentiles as outsiders to Jesus' ministry and mission, and then work to challenge and subvert that outsider status. As the implied reader identifies with Jesus, accepts and assumes the Gentile caricature that is created in his discourse, and then sees that caricature being undone in the narratives, the reader is led to identify with the experience of Jesus, the experience of marveling (8:10) at the ways in which one's “others” can exceed one's expectations, can resist the conceptual boxes in which they are placed.

CHAPTER THREE:
THE TWO COMMISSIONS OF JESUS AND THE NARRATIVE-RHETORICAL
CONSTRUCTION OF *ETHNĒ* AND *MATHĒTAI* IN THE GOSPEL OF
MATTHEW

“Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom” (Matthew 21:43).

The narrative of the Gospel of Matthew ends with Jesus on a mountain in Galilee, commissioning his disciples for the second time. Earlier in the narrative, prior to his journey to Jerusalem and subsequent arrest, he had sent out his disciples to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of heaven, emphasizing that that they were, in congruence with his own mission, to “go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (10:6). In case the reader might overlook or misinterpret the exclusivity of this command, it is also stated negatively: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles (*ethnē*), and enter no town of the Samaritans” (10:5). While Jesus’ ministry of healing and exorcism has already touched some of the non-Jews living around the Sea of Galilee, he continues to draw a stark line between non-Israelites and Israelites, a boundary that is assumed and re-inscribed in his both his discourse and his encounters with non-Jewish characters in the narrative. Although they may at times reap the benefits of his mission, throughout the bulk of Matthew, Gentiles are still firmly on the outside.

With Jesus’ final commission, however, the scope of the disciples’ mission is broadened considerably to include “all nations”:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations (*mathēteūsate panta ta ethnē*), baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to

obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (28:18–20)

These words are not only the final words spoken by Jesus in the gospel, but are indeed the final words of the gospel itself. Whereas earlier in the narrative non-Israelites were positioned as perpetual outsiders simply on the basis of their ethnicity, they have at this point in the gospel become potential insiders. Or to state it differently, with these final instructions, Gentile believers are effectively mapped into the community of Jesus’ disciples.

In the two preceding chapters, I have begun explicating part of the negotiation of insider identity in relation to *ta ethnē* and *oi ethnikoi*, focusing on the way that the gospel foregrounds a very negative construction of the *ethnē/ethnikoi* through the discourse of the character of Jesus and then complicates, modifies, and, in important ways, subverts this construction through its characterization of non-Israelites within the narrative. This is, I think, an important and, in contemporary scholarship on Matthew, oft-unrecognized part of the gospel’s narrative rhetoric concerning Gentiles; it by no means, however, exhausts that rhetoric. The complication and subversion of this negative stereotype, while it certainly clears ground in preparation for people of all *ethnē* to become *mathētoi*, does not by itself result in non-Israelites being included as insiders among God’s people. That *ethnē/ethnikoi* are outsiders is assumed throughout almost all of the narrative, and it is only at the end of the gospel with Jesus’ final commission that the status of Gentiles as potential insiders is clearly solidified. In this chapter, I consider some of the key ways in which the narrative moves the reader from the first commission to the second, and, in the process, redefines insider identity in relation to *ta ethnē*.

Literature Review

In recent literature on the relationship between these two commissions of Jesus—“Go nowhere among the Gentiles” (10:5) and “make disciples of all nations” (28:19)—most scholars have agreed that the climactic position of the final commission within the literary context of the gospel is evidence of its priority, i.e., evidence that this universal mission is the one advocated by the evangelist and/or is the one with which the implied reader and/or intended audience of the gospel is tasked.¹⁶⁷ The significance that is attached to this claim, however, and the logic by which it is defended have varied widely. Traditionally, a common strategy among interpreters has been to read the two conflicting commissions within the context of a salvation history reading of the gospel. Scholars who advocate this salvation history reading understand the two missions to correspond to two temporal periods: 1) the pre-resurrection mission of Jesus and the twelve disciples to Israel; and 2) the risen and exalted Jesus and the mission of the church to all nations.¹⁶⁸ Some interpreters, however, have argued that the two commissions are

¹⁶⁷ Schuyler Brown, “The Matthean Community and the Gentile Mission,” *Novum Testamentum* 22, no. 3 (July 1980): 217; Meier, “The Antiochene Church,” 60–63; Senior, “Between Two Worlds,” 45; Byrne, “The Messiah in Whose Name,” 54; David Sim is the exception here. See Sim, “The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles,” 41–43. Scholars have also debated whether *ethnē* in the final commission should be interpreted as “the nations” (including Israel) or as “the Gentiles” (excluding Israel). The key issue here is whether the final commission replaces the first particularist mission to Israel or whether it extends it. Hare and Harrington have made a case that *ethnē* is best translated here as “Gentiles” (and indeed that *ethnē* is best translated as “Gentiles” in every instance in the gospel) and, therefore, that the final commission is one to the Gentiles in particular. Douglas A. Hare and Daniel J. Harrington, “Make Disciples of All the Gentiles’ (Mt 28:19),” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 37 (1975): 359–369. Meier, in contrast, argues (convincingly) that the semantic range of *ethnē* in Matthew is quite broad, and that *ethnē* in the final commission is best interpreted as meaning “nations” or “peoples” including Jews. Meier, “Nations or Gentiles in Matthew 28:19?,” 94–102. Levine takes an intermediary position, arguing that the *ethnē* of the final commission is best interpreted as “Gentiles,” an interpretation that highlights the focus on a Gentile mission in particular; however, Levine sees this final commission to the Gentiles to be complimentary to the continuing mission to the Jews that Jesus entrusted to his disciples in chapter 10. See Levine, *The Social and Ethnic Dimensions*, 185–192.

¹⁶⁸ Levine, *The Social and Ethnic Dimensions*, 273–278; Senior, “Between Two Worlds,” 19.

difficult to reconcile within this tidy, metanarrative framework, particularly since there is no indication in Jesus' first commission to his disciples in Matt 10:5–23 that their *direct* missionary activity will, at a future point in time, be extended to include non-Israelite peoples.¹⁶⁹ Indeed in the first commission, Jesus says to his disciples, “you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man come’s” (Matt 10:23), thereby indicating, some have argued, that the particularist¹⁷⁰ mission is “open ended and continues until the parousia”¹⁷¹ (an event which, at the conclusion of the gospel, remains situated in the indefinite future).¹⁷² This leads Schuyler Brown to argue that the final commission takes the form of a *deus ex machina* in the narrative of Matthew.¹⁷³ Brown is among a group of interpreters who understand the tension between the two commissions to be a reflection of the contested nature of a Gentile mission within the Matthean community and/or a product of the relationship of the evangelist’s sources and his redaction.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁹ Brown, “The Two-Fold Representation of Mission,” 23; and Sim, “The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles,” 42–44. The first missionary discourse does indicate, however, that the disciples’ missionary activities and resulting persecutions will be an indirect “testimony” to Jews as well as Gentiles. See Matt 10:18.

¹⁷⁰ I use “particularist” to indicate, in a way conventional among Matthean scholars, the first mission of the disciples that is limited to Israel.

¹⁷¹ Sim, “The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles,” 43. Scholars whose readings compare the texts of Matthew and Mark also note that, unlike in Mark’s gospel, the disciples do not return from this first particularist mission in Matthew. See Sim, “The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles,” 43.

¹⁷² See Matt 24:1–44, especially v. 44. Alternatively, Levine argues that this “coming of the Son of Man” in 10:23 does not refer to the end of the eschaton (the event that remains anticipated at the end of the gospel in Matt 28:20), but rather to the resurrection of Jesus. Levine, *The Social and Ethnic Dimensions*, 51.

¹⁷³ Brown, “The Two-Fold Representation,” 30–32.

¹⁷⁴ Brown argues that the tensions in the two mission mandates are symptomatic of an evangelist who advocates a universalist mission, but who still “encountered a particularist current in his community which he was unable to ignore.” Brown, “The Two-Fold Representation of Mission,” 32. Senior makes a similar argument. Senior, “Between Two Worlds,” 19. David Sim, too, uses a redaction-critical

Over the last two decades, several studies have attempted to shift this conversation about the two commissions back to the narrative context of the gospel, and this is a project to which the present chapter is designed to contribute. While the question, How is it that Gentiles can now be disciples of Jesus?, is not raised or addressed explicitly by the narrator or any of the characters in the gospel's closing scene, this can hardly be considered evidence of its lack of importance within the narrative. To the contrary, that the gospel ends with the inclusive command of Jesus in the Great Commission after so strongly emphasizing the outsider status of Gentiles through much of the narrative suggests that a key function of the gospel for its implied reader is both to raise the question and work out its answer through the medium of the story.

In this thesis, I am considering the text of Matthew as a literary representation of the past, and my primary interest is in how the text works to transform the worlds of its envisioned readers through its retelling of the story of Jesus. Within this theoretical framework, I view the two commissions of Jesus as representing, and in fact creating, two distinct configurations of the relationship between *ethnē* and *mathētai* within the gospel's narrative world. Throughout most of the gospel, Jesus conceptualizes his own mission and that of his disciples as being limited to the people of Israel, and the narrative works, in a variety of ways, to create and defend a very clear boundary between disciples of Jesus and non-Jews. In the final commission, however, Jesus commands his disciples to make disciples of all peoples—to make *mathētai* from *ethnē*—and this command

perspective, but he argues that the first commission of Jesus is the one advocated by the Matthean evangelist and the one that the Matthean community would have understood to be its own. See Sim, "The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles," 41–43.

reconfigures insider identity to include those non-Jews that are baptized and taught to obey everything that Jesus has commanded (28:20). In this chapter, I document three strategies by which the narrative of the gospel prepares the reader and provides justification for this final extension of the disciple's mission to all peoples. First, it positions the story of Jesus as the climax of a larger story of Israel and the nations and thereby situates the final commission of Jesus as a long expected outcome of that larger story. Second, the teachings of Jesus and John in the narrative emphasize repentance, doing the will of God, and faith in and obedience to Jesus, rather than citizenship within the people of Israel, as the key criteria for insider identity, and these teachings help prepare the reader for the expansion of *mathētai* to include believing and obedient *ethnē*. Finally, the narrative tells the story of Jesus' life in such a way as to anticipate and overcome certain hesitations about Gentile inclusion in its envisioned readers; it does this by emphasizing that Jesus' own self-understanding of his mission is that of being sent exclusively to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel," a self-understanding that is challenged not only by his surprising experiences with the faith of Gentiles (as discussed in chapter two), but also by the rejection that he experiences from many of his own people. Through these three strategies, I argue, the narrative of Matthew, far from dropping the final commission on the reader rather abruptly and unexpectedly, works to contextualize and normalize¹⁷⁵ Gentile inclusion for its implied reader, to situate it both

¹⁷⁵ Normalization, in the specialized narrative-critical sense, refers to the way that a narrative "accounts for things," how it gives coherence to the events that it describes, offers causal explanations, and ultimately renders those events plausible for the narrative's implied reader. Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 44–45.

as an anticipated *telos* of the larger story of Israel and as an organic outcome of the story of Jesus.

The Story of Jesus as the Climax of the Story of Israel and the Nations

One important strategy by which the Gospel of Matthew makes sense of Jesus' final command and the overlap of *ethnē* and *mathētai* that this command accomplishes is by situating the story of Jesus as the climax of a larger story, the story of the people of Israel. As Howell writes, "reference is made in Matthew to characters and events both anterior and subsequent to the plotted story of Jesus' life," and the gospel thereby "projects a narrative world," the temporal parameters of which are much broader than those of Jesus' own life.¹⁷⁶ In addition, the gospel guides its reader to interpret this larger story and the scriptures in which it is grounded in particular and selective ways, and the larger story of Israel that emerges from the gospel is one in which the relationship between Israel and the non-Jewish peoples is foregrounded. The status of Gentiles as outsiders throughout most of the narrative and the final "mapping in" of *ethnē* in the gospel's concluding episode are, therefore, not only part of the story of Jesus' own life, but are also part of this larger story of Israel and the nations and derive meaning from that larger context.

Temporal Emplotment and the Voice of the Narrator. The gospel assumes in its reader a deep familiarity with the scriptures of Israel, and the narrator of Matthew anchors the story of Jesus within the larger story of Israel through the use of analepsis,

¹⁷⁶ Howell, *Matthew's Inclusive Story*, 97.

the evocation of events occurring prior to those being narrated in the story of Jesus.¹⁷⁷ In the gospel's opening genealogy, the reader learns that the temporal parameters of the narrative world that is created by the gospel begin with a long-dead patriarch,¹⁷⁸ Abraham,¹⁷⁹ the one to whom God had promised that his descendants would be many, that they would inherit forever the promised land of Canaan, and that through them all of the nations of the world would be blessed.¹⁸⁰ That the implied reader is encouraged, in particular, to remember God's promise to Abraham to bless the nations is suggested by the anomalous presence of four women in this otherwise exclusively patriarchal lineage. Though scholars continue to debate the significance of these women in the genealogy, it is striking that each of the four either is a non-Israelite or is closely associated with non-Israelites in the stories of the Hebrew Scriptures in which they are cast. Two of these women function very explicitly in the narratives of the Hebrew Bible as Gentiles who come to be part of the people of Israel (Ruth and Rahab). Another can easily be understood to be a Gentile (Tamar),¹⁸¹ and the other (Bathsheba), though herself perhaps

¹⁷⁷ Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980) 40.

¹⁷⁸ Or is he dead? See Matt 22:32.

¹⁷⁹ Howell points out that "the easiest way to determine the temporal boundaries of Matthew's narrative world is to look for the earliest and latest events referred to in the Gospel," and he locates the temporal boundaries of the narrative world projected by Matthew to stretch from Abraham (Matt 1:1–17) and "extend into the indefinite future of the coming of the Son of Man (19:28; 24:29ff.; 25:31ff., for example)." Howell, *Matthew's Inclusive Story*, 97–98. However, the narrative evokes characters and events that come before Abraham in the Book of Genesis (see, e.g., 24:38). Depending on how much significance one is willing to read into the opening sentence in the gospel (1:1), one might even be justified in arguing that the temporal parameters of the narrative world stretch all the way back to creation.

¹⁸⁰ See Gen 12:1–3; 15:1–7; 17:2–16; 22:15–18.

¹⁸¹ John Nolland gives examples of Second Temple Jewish literature that identifies Tamar as a Canaanite and, alternatively, Second Temple Jewish literature that identifies her as an Aramean (which would establish an ancestral link with the family of Abraham and, therefore, position her as no more of a Gentile outsider than the matriarchs Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah). See the discussion in John

an Israelite,¹⁸² is identified in Matthew not by her name, but rather by her marriage relationship to a righteous Gentile (Matt 1:3, 5, 6).¹⁸³ Before the curtain even opens on the story of Jesus' own life, the reader is confronted by the narrator's claim that the story of Israel of which Jesus is a part is also a story of the peoples other than Israel.

However, the opening genealogy also situates Jesus within a story of Israel and the nations in another way. The genealogy includes other annotations¹⁸⁴ in addition to these four women, including a key event: the deportation to Babylon. Indeed this most awful of periods in Israel's collective memory is mentioned not once, but three times in the genealogy (1:11, 12, 17), and it provides one of the three temporal breaks around which the genealogy is structured (1:17). Although with the advent of the reign of Cyrus, Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the demolished temple, literature from the Second Temple period indicates that Jews of that period wrestled with the sense that the problem of exile had not yet been resolved, that God's deliverance was still to

Nolland, "The Four (Five) Women and Other Annotations in Matthew's Genealogy," *New Testament Studies* 43 (1997): 535–536.

¹⁸² She is identified as the daughter of Eliam in 2 Sam 11:3, and at least one late antique source (*b. San.* 101b) identifies this Eliam as the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite and one of David's mighty men in 2 Sam 23:34. See Nolland, "The Four (Five) Women," 528–529, note 6.

¹⁸³ In his interpretation of the intentions of the author in including these women, Sim argues that Matthew, even if he expected his reader to interpret these women as being Gentiles, would have also expected his reader to see them as proselytes, converts to Israel (Gentiles who had renounced their pagan status). "Thus," he argues, "unless we accept that the Gentiles in Matthew's church were likewise proselytes [to Judaism], it is difficult to see how they would have identified with these women." Sim, "The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles," 22. Nowhere in the Gospel of Matthew, though, does Jesus call non-Jews to embrace those practices that most clearly separate Jews from non-Jews in the first century: circumcision, dietary restrictions, and purity laws (in fact, he does not emphasize these things in his teachings to his disciples at all). I judge, therefore, that Sim says too much when he infers from Jesus' final command (to teach the new disciples from all nations "to obey everything" that he has commanded) that these new disciples from the non-Jewish peoples must become Jewish proselytes, that they must embrace, to some degree, circumcision, dietary restriction, and concerns with ritual purity.

¹⁸⁴ I.e., supplemental notes that pad this paternal list with the mention of certain mothers and siblings, royal titles (King and Messiah), and an event (Exile).

come.¹⁸⁵ This is precisely what the early part of the Gospel of Matthew communicates to its reader, the sense that the problem of exile still needs resolution. The tripartite structure of the genealogy gives order to the narrative of Israel that it evokes, and it positions Jesus within that larger narrative as the answer to a problem that precedes him, the problem of exile (which is also, as the angel tells Joseph in the birth narrative that follows, the problem of sin).¹⁸⁶

This emphasis on the nations in this larger story of Jesus and Israel is also overtly achieved by the narrator in two of the conventionally-labeled “formula quotations,” narrative asides in which a specific passage or a conglomeration of passages from the Hebrew Scriptures is said to have been “fulfilled” (*plērōthē*) by certain details or events in the story of Jesus.¹⁸⁷ The first of these is positioned at the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry, when, hearing that John the Baptist has been arrested, Jesus withdraws to Capernaum in Galilee (4:12). The narrator, quoting from Isaiah, informs the reader that Jesus’ relocation from Nazareth to Capernaum has theological significance: “Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the

¹⁸⁵ While some Hebrew literature composed during and after the Babylonian Exile writes of exile as an historical event that comes to an end with the return (e.g., Jeremiah; Deutero-Isaiah; 1 and 2 Chronicles), other literature, especially that composed in the aftermath of the Exile, the resettlement of Jerusalem, and the construction of the second temple, theologizes and typologizes exile, depicting it “as a continuing state that persisted beyond the return in the sixth century B.C.E.” (e.g., Ezra; Nehemiah; Dan 9; 1 Enoch; Tobit 13–14; Trito-Isaiah). See Bradley D. Gregory, “The Postexilic Exile in Third Isaiah: Isaiah 61:1–3 in Light of Second Temple Hermeneutics,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126, no. 3 (2007): 475–496.

¹⁸⁶ Mervyn Eloff, “Exile, Restoration, and Matthew’s Genealogy of Jesus ὁ Χριστός,” *Neotestamentica* 38, no. 1 (2004): 83–84.

¹⁸⁷ The form of these statements is so regular that interpreters have labeled them the “formula quotations,” though debate continues about exactly which fulfillment statements qualify. See, e.g., the alternative definitions given by Prabhu and Luz. George M. Soares Prabhu, *The Formula Quotations in the Infancy Narrative of Matthew* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1976), 19; Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 156.

Gentiles (*Galilāia tōn ethōv*)—the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned” (4:15–16).¹⁸⁸ Here, the narrative references the Hebrew Scriptures in such a way as to invest the setting of Jesus’ early ministry with significance, and significance that has much to do with *ta ethnē*. While some scholars have argued that “Galilee of the Gentiles” is best interpreted to mean that the Gentiles of Galilee are the “people who sat in darkness” who have now “seen a great light,”¹⁸⁹ I find it more compelling to interpret “Galilee of the Gentiles,” as Carter does, as meaning Galilee under Gentile rule.¹⁹⁰ Carter argues persuasively that the narrative’s use of two citations from Isa 7–9 in the opening four chapters of Matthew evokes metaleptically that larger context in Isaiah and forges an analogy between the situation of imperial threat in Isaiah and that of Jesus’ day.¹⁹¹ From this anti-imperial perspective, the “people who sat in darkness” in Matt 4:16 are people who suffer under Gentile/Roman rule,¹⁹² but even this includes, as the larger narrative of Matthew demonstrates, both Israelites and non-Israelites.¹⁹³ This citation from Isaiah positions

¹⁸⁸ Quoting from Isa 9:1–2.

¹⁸⁹ Byrne, “The Messiah in Whose Name,” 62–63.

¹⁹⁰ Carter, “Matthew and the Gentiles, 265–266; and Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 115.

¹⁹¹ Warren Carter, “Evoking Isaiah: Matthean Soteriology and an Intertextual Reading of Isaiah 7–9 and Matthew 1:23 and 4:15–16,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119, no. 3 (2000): 507–508.

¹⁹² See not only Isa 9, but also 1 Macc 5:15.

¹⁹³ In contrast to David Sim’s reading of this passage as exclusively good news for Israelites, Warren Carter argues, and rightly, I think, that “Jesus’ proclamation of the establishment of God’s empire means justice for the Gentiles/nations because it ends Roman imperial tyranny under which at least 95% of the population suffers.” Carter, “Matthew and the Gentiles” 272, fn. 38. This is supported by the narrative section that follows this formula citation, in which crowds converge on Jesus from Syria (4:25), Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan (4:25). While the narrator does not directly tell the reader that these crowds contain non-Israelites, neither does the narrative give any indication that the crowds are comprised exclusively of Jews.

Jesus within the story of Israel as God’s answer to “the rod of the [foreign] oppressor” (Isa 9:4), the one through whom God will establish the throne of David and “uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore” (Isa. 9:7).

The second formula quotation that very explicitly sets the story of Jesus in relation to a larger story of Israel and the nations is located in the central part of the narrative where the conflict between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders is beginning to escalate.¹⁹⁴ Following two disputes between Jesus and the Pharisees about the Sabbath (Matt 12:1–13), the narrator reports that “the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him” (12:14). Jesus, however, continues to teach and heal, and the narrator interprets Jesus’ work as the fulfilment of a passage from Isaiah:¹⁹⁵

Here is my servant, whom I have chosen, my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice (*krisin*) to the Gentiles (*ethnesin*). He will not wrangle or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. He will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick until he brings justice to victory. And in his name the Gentiles (*ethnē*) will hope. (12:18–21)¹⁹⁶

Many Bible versions, including the NRSV that is quoted above, translate *krisin* in v. 18 as “justice,” but it can also be translated as “judgment.”¹⁹⁷ Ulrich Luz argues for this latter translation, pointing out that with only one exception (outside of this quotation from

¹⁹⁴ While Jesus has already directed harsh criticism toward the Jewish religious leaders in his Sermon on the Mount, his actual clashes with them have not been as “acutely confrontational” as those that begin at this point in the story. Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 6.

¹⁹⁵ It is unclear if the passage has been taken from a version of Isaiah that we do not have access to or if, rather, the evangelist has freely edited his Isaianic source material. See Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on his Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 229–230; and Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8–20: A Commentary*, Hermeneia, ed. Helmut Koester, trans. James E. Crouch (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 191–192.

¹⁹⁶ Quoting Isa 42:1–4.

¹⁹⁷ The NRSV, NASB, and NIV all opt for “justice.” The NKJV goes with “judgment.”

Isaiah), *krisis* is used in Matthew to indicate not only judgment, but the day of final judgment in particular.¹⁹⁸ The exception, however, is a big one, as Jesus, in his biting remarks aimed at the Jewish religious elite in chapter 23, positions *krisis* as one of the “weightier matters of the law,” alongside of mercy and faithfulness, that he accuses the scribes and Pharisees of neglecting (23:23). Also, as Richard Beaton points out in a survey of Second Temple literature,

Messianic texts that address the issues of judgment and justice suggest that a sharp division between the two may be artificial. While it is true that the linkage of judgment to an eschatological worldview shifted the focus from this world to the future consummation, the arrival of [the] messiah and the resulting messianic age was thought to be characterized by judgment upon the ungodly and the establishment of justice for the righteous.¹⁹⁹

Beaton goes on to argue that the theme of justice is key to understanding this Isaiah passage within its Matthean context, as the Matthean narrator uses this passage, which links Jesus with the Isaianic servant, to contrast the justice of God demonstrated in Jesus’ merciful acts with the injustice inherent in the Pharisees’ particular type of halakhic rigor.²⁰⁰ In addition, and of particular interest here, the justice/judgment that Jesus proclaims to the peoples (perhaps to the non-Jewish peoples in particular, and most certainly including them) results, in the final line of the citation, in the peoples (*ethnē*)

¹⁹⁸ Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 193–194.

¹⁹⁹ Richard Beaton, “Messiah and Justice: A Key to Matthew’s Use of Isaiah 42.1–4?,” *JNST* 75 (1999): 13. “No doubt part of the difficulty,” Beaton writes, “is terminological. The term ‘judgment’ in a broad sense encompasses both the verdict of the judge and the punishment/reward. More narrowly, it may be employed for either the decree or its resulting effects. ‘Justice’ also possesses a broad semantic range requiring greater specificity. The term may be defined either morally, as a quality of just conduct or dealing, or judicially, in which the maintenance of the right and the assignment of reward or punishment are in view. Thus, justice is the cardinal virtue that undergirds judgment.” Beaton, “Messiah and Justice,” 11.

²⁰⁰ Beaton, “Messiah and Justice,” 17–23.

placing their hope in Jesus' name.²⁰¹ The narrator uses this passage from Isaiah to interpret Jesus' just and merciful actions and, in turn, encourages the implied reader to imagine the role of the Isaianic servant afresh in light of Jesus' assumption of that role. In this way, the narrative presents Jesus as God's servant, anticipated by the scriptures, whose work of bringing justice extends beyond Israel to touch the nations.

The fulfilment motif looms large in the Gospel of Matthew, and its presence is not limited to the genealogy and the formula quotations. The gospel evokes the Hebrew Scriptures in less overt ways as well in order to "underwrite the story of Jesus," and these more subtle evocations include "numerous allusions that tie the details of the narrative to Old Testament texts and perspectives" and "several key events that are, in effect, shadow stories from the Old Testament suggesting that events and motifs of the Hebrew Scriptures are being fulfilled in the life of Jesus."²⁰² Very early on in the gospel, the narrator deploys both of these literary strategies to embed the story of Jesus within a larger story of Israel and the nations. In chapter two of this thesis, I considered the characterization of the magi from the East who come to worship Israel's Messiah at his birth. Here I want to note a second significance of their inclusion within the gospel's narrative, that of eliciting the promises of the prophets that non-Israelites would one day journey to worship Israel's God. The gifts that the magi bring—gold, frankincense, and myrrh (2:11)—allude to Ps 72:10–15 and Isa 60:6, and thereby evoke the larger literary context of these passages and the prophets' anticipated pilgrimage of the nations to

²⁰¹ See Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on his Literary and Theological Art*, 229–230; and Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 195.

²⁰² Donald Senior, "The Lure of the Formula Quotations: Re-Assessing Matthew's Use of the Old Testament with the Passion Narrative as a Test Case," in *The Scriptures in the Gospels*, ed. C. M. Tuckett (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 1997), 115.

Zion.²⁰³ Indeed the Matthean narrator does not merely evoke these promises, but suggests their fulfillment and actualization in the actions of the magi.²⁰⁴

At the same time that this early part of the narrative evokes promises of the nations streaming to Zion, however, it also forges a rich typological connection between the situation of Roman occupied Palestine in Jesus' day, Israel's slavery under and eventual exodus from Egypt, and Judah's sixth century deportation to Babylon. After the magi (who are from the East, the land of Exile) leave to return to their own country, Joseph is warned by an angel of the Lord in a dream that Herod is intent on destroying Jesus. At the direction of the angel, Joseph flees with his family to Egypt, and they remain there until Herod's death (Matt 2:13–14). The geographical regions of Babylon and Egypt, each important places of displacement in Israel's collective memory, are evoked in this narrative, as the loyalty that Jesus receives from the magi and the safe haven the family finds in Egypt are, with no shortage of irony, set in contrast to Jesus' own exile from Judea.²⁰⁵ But Jesus' exile to Egypt is only one edge of the typological connection that the narrator forges between the story of Jesus' life and the stories of Exodus and Exile. In the story of Jesus in Matthew, Herod, infuriated at having been tricked by the magi, massacres all of the children in and around Bethlehem who are two years of age or under (2:16), and this event is narrated in such a way as to echo that of the Exodus story of Pharaoh's attempt to massacre the Israelite boys in Egypt (Exod 1:15–22). Herod's destruction of the children of Bethlehem, says the Matthean narrator in

²⁰³ See the larger literary context of Ps 72 and Isa 60; 66:18–23.

²⁰⁴ Byrne, "The Messiah in Whose Name," 61.

²⁰⁵ Smillie, "'Even the Dogs,'" 85.

another formula quotation, “fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: ‘A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more’” (Matt 2:17–18). As Eugene Eung-Chun Park writes, “this citation has an evocative power emanating from the multiple layers of the biblical tradition embedded in it regarding the oppression of great foreign empires and the suffering of colonized peoples.”²⁰⁶ The imagery is that of Rachel, the mother of two of the sons of Israel, mourning her progeny at the town of Ramah, the site where the captives of Jerusalem and Judea were rounded together before being deported to Babylon in the sixth century BCE.²⁰⁷ The narrator draws this imagery together with that of the suffering in Bethlehem at the hands of Herod (the puppet of Rome), condensing into a common type the suffering of God’s people under foreign oppression throughout the ages. Once the typological connection between the imperial context of Jesus’ day and those of Israel’s past has been recognized by the reader, several of the other formula quotations in Matthew, too, can be seen to carry deep anti-imperial resonances.²⁰⁸ Exile continues, God’s people suffer under imperial rule, and Jesus is God’s Messiah, sent to rescue the people of Israel from foreign bondage.

Jesus’ Understanding of his Role in this Larger Story. The backstory of Israel and the nations becomes even more rounded in the discourse of the character of Jesus. Jesus not only reaches back to evoke a remembered past, but also, unlike the narrator, points forward, speaking proleptically about the ways in which the story of Israel and the

²⁰⁶ Eugene Eung-Chun Park, “Rachel’s Cry for her Children: Matthew’s Treatment of the Infanticide by Herod,” *CBQ* 75 (2013): 474.

²⁰⁷ See Jer 40:1.

²⁰⁸ Such as Matt 3:3 (quoting Isa 40:3), 2:5–6 (quoting Mic 5:2), and 21:4–5 (quoting Zech 9:9).

nations will play out even beyond the gospel's closing scene. Fairly early in the gospel's narration of Jesus' ministry, Jesus, in reaction to his encounter with the surprising faith of the Roman centurion, foretells of a future banquet in the kingdom of heaven in which non-Israelites will have a seat at the table: "I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (8:11–12). His promise here, directed at his Jewish followers, that non-Jews will be insiders to the kingdom of heaven, is simultaneously a pronouncement of blessing for non-Israelites and judgment for Israelites.

In addition to foretelling that non-Jews will one day enter God's kingdom, Jesus also presents himself as the anticipated eschatological judge of all peoples, and on a number of occasions he describes this future final judgment as one in which all peoples will stand before the Son of Man and be judged on the basis of their deeds. In two passages, Jesus' use of this final judgment scene takes the form of an accusation. In the first, Jesus declares that the day of judgment will be "more tolerable" for some of the notorious cities of Israel's past—Tyre and Sidon, and even Sodom— than it will be for those Jewish cities in which he has done deeds of power (11:21–24). Likewise, when the scribes and Pharisees request a sign from him, he tells them that the only sign they will receive is the sign of Jonah, which is to be for them a sign of judgment:

"The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here. The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now something greater than Solomon is here." (Matt 12:41–42)

The most striking of Jesus' descriptions of a final judgment that includes all nations comes toward the end of the gospel, at the conclusion of a fairly long discourse in which Jesus tells his disciples what to anticipate and how to prepare for the destruction of the temple, for his future coming, and for the final judgment (24:3–25:46). The court scene that he describes here is one of all peoples assembled before his throne and a judgment in which the peoples are, on the basis of their deeds, divided “one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats” (25:32). Those at his left hand, the “goats” who have failed to give to those in need (and, therefore, have failed to give to Jesus in his need) are consigned to eternal punishment. The “sheep,” those at his right hand who have given to the needy, are granted eternal life (25:46). It is important to note that, unlike Jesus' other predictions in which non-Jews are involved, the rhetoric of this passage is not directed at a Jewish audience in particular; it is not an accusation or a judgment on Jewish unrighteousness or unfaithfulness in which a comparison with Gentile “others” is used to illumine just how unrighteous and how unfaithful the Jews of “this generation” are. In this scene, rather, all nations are gathered before the Son of Man (25:31), the ground is level, and the only basis of judgment is one's deeds.

The title “Son of Man,” a key self-designation of Jesus, also functions to embed his own story deeply into the larger story of Israel and the nations.²⁰⁹ Though scholars continue to debate the function of this title²¹⁰ and its intertextual relationship with the

²⁰⁹ This appellation is “so strongly associated with Jesus in Matthew that it is equivalent to the first-person pronoun and is interchangeable with it.” Adela Yarbro Collins, “Son of Man,” *NIDB* 5:345. In other words, Jesus basically substitutes “Son of Man” in place of “I” or “me” when he uses the phrase. See Matt 8:20; 9:6; 10:23; 11:19; 12:8, 32, 40; 13:37, 41; 16:13, 27, 28; 17:9, 12, 22; 19:28; 20:18, 18; 24:27–44; 25:31; 26:2, 24, 45, 64.

²¹⁰ Scholars even debate whether or not it is a title. See Delbert Royce Burkett, *The Son of Man Debate: A History and Evaluation*, SNTSMS 107 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 82–96.

various “sons of man” of the Hebrew Scriptures and other Second Temple literature,²¹¹ I am persuaded that the implied reader of Matthew (who is, by definition, familiar with any text that the Gospel of Matthew alludes to, quotes, or echoes) would sense deep resonances between several of the Son of Man passages in Matthew and Daniel’s heavenly throne-room vision in Dan 7.²¹² Jesus’ use of this title in Matthew, however, reflecting the Enochian interpretation of Daniel’s Son of Man, casts Jesus as “the exalted, eschatological son of man” whose future coming and exaltation does not occur after God’s judgment of the peoples (as it does in Dan 7:11–14), but in fact accomplishes that judgment.²¹³ In his explanation to his disciples of the parable of the weeds and wheat, it is the coming of the Son of Man that will result in judgment, the ultimate division of the weeds (“all causes of sin and all evildoers”) from the wheat (the righteous, Matt 13:36–43). Likewise, after forewarning his disciples that discipleship comes with a terrible cost, Jesus assures them that “the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done” (Matt 16:27). Later he tells his disciples that they will be judges alongside of the Son of Man: “Truly I tell you,

²¹¹ The phrase “Son of Man” continues to be an interpretive crux, not only in Matthean studies, but within studies of Hebrew Bible, New Testament, and Second Temple literature in general. In the Hebrew Bible, it is often used generically to denote “a human being,” individualizing “a noun for humanity in general.” George W. Nickelsburg, “Son of Man,” *EDEJ*, 1249. In some Second Temple literature (much of which demonstrates interaction with Dan 7 and the Servant songs of Deutero-Isaiah), the designation comes to denote an anticipated figure whose arrival would bring deliverance for Israel and judgment for Israel’s enemies. In the New Testament, Son of Man sayings sometimes refer to the Son of Man as eschatological judge and/or king, sometimes to the Son of Man as persecuted and vindicated servant, and sometimes to “the earthly existence of Jesus” as a human being. See Nickelsburg, “Son of Man,” 1250–1251.

²¹² I certainly do not think, however, that this intertext exhausts the meaning of the “Son of Man” designation in the gospel. Sometimes, e.g., echoing other Second Temple literature (such as *I Enoch* and *Wisdom of Solomon*), the Son of Man (and, therefore, Jesus) is linked with the suffering servant figure of Deutero-Isaiah. See Matt 17:12, 22; 20:18, 28; 26:2. Nickelsburg, “Son of Man,” 1250–1251.

²¹³ Nickelsburg, “Son of Man,” 1249–1251. See Matt 13:37–43; 16:27–28; 19:28; 24:27–31; 25:31–46; 26:64.

at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (19:28). In his Olivet discourse, he compares the coming of the Son of Man to that of the flood in the days of Noah (24:38–41), and he warns his audience to be ready, “for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour” (24:44). In the great judgment scene that concludes the Olivet discourse, all nations are gathered before the Son of Man, who is seated on “the throne of glory” (25:31), and it is he who pronounces sentence (25:31–46). While Jesus does not refer to himself as the Son of Man in the gospel’s closing scene, many interpreters have noted the various ways in which his final and universalist commission to his disciples in this scene echoes Dan 7:13–14.²¹⁴ In these various passages, Jesus positions himself as the one who is to be given, by the Ancient of Days, “dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him” (Dan 7:14).

Jesus also evokes the larger story of Israel and the nations by attributing to his disciples a missionary role to non-Jewish peoples that is anchored in Israel’s past and extends beyond the gospel’s horizon into the indefinite future. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells his followers that they are the “light of the world,” an image that elicits the servant’s role as “a light to the nations” in Isaiah: “It is too small a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation will reach to the end of the earth” (Isa 49:6). In Isaiah, God’s salvation of the one who is “deeply despised and

²¹⁴ For a very insightful, even if quite brief, interpretation of these intertextual relationship of these passages (Dan 7 and Matt 28:16–20), see Richard Hays, “The Gospel of Matthew: Reconfigured Torah,” *HTS* 61 (2005): 185–186.

abhorred by the nations” (49:7) is a testimony, a “light,” to the nations and their rulers (49:6–7). In the Sermon on the Mount, this role of “light of the world” is ethicized, but this does not diminish its intertextual relationship with Isa 49. By their good works, Jesus’ disciples are to be a “light” that illumines not only Israel, but the whole world, and a light that brings glory to God (Matt 5:14–16). This indirect missionary role of the disciples, however, is an outcome not only of their deeds, but also of their suffering. In his first missionary discourse, Jesus tells them, “[the Jews] will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles” (10:18). Likewise, in the Olivet discourse, Jesus says to them, “they will hand you over to be tortured and will put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of my name And this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to the nations” (24:9–14). Within the context of the story of Israel and the nations, the abuse that these disciples endure, like the abuse of God’s people in Exile, has a purpose that extends beyond the disciples/Israel, that of disclosing the power of the God of Israel to the non-Jewish peoples.

Summary of the Story of Jesus as the Story of Israel and the Nations. To summarize, the narrator positions Jesus within a larger story of Israel and the non-Jewish peoples that is double-edged. Within this story, exile and all it signifies (Israel’s sin and, consequently, God’s punishment) is set up as the problem for which Jesus is the much-anticipated resolution (the fulfillment of God’s promise to redeem). Jesus is the Davidic messiah, the long-anticipated liberator of Israel from foreign imperial rule, but he is also the fulfilment of God’s promise to Abraham that through his offspring all peoples would

be blessed. Within this broader narrative context that is created by the narrator of Matthew, Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom is, with respect to non-Israelites, the "good news" of Gentile defeat; it is also, however, the "good news" of Gentile blessing.

Both of these themes are also embedded in the discourse of the character of Jesus. Jesus is the Son of Man who is given all authority over all the nations and before whom all peoples will stand in judgment. While Jesus, prior to the final commission, explicitly limits his own mission and that of his disciples to Israel, he nonetheless ascribes to his disciples a missionary function (indirect to be sure) that will touch the non-Jewish peoples. And of great significance, he assures his audience that a day will come when non-Jews will feast alongside of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. Thus a key expectation that moves that plot of Matthew, and one that is anchored in the larger story of Israel, is that of the eventual inclusion of non-Israelites in the kingdom of heaven. This expectation is foregrounded explicitly in the teachings and parables of Jesus, functioning both as a word of hope to non-Jews and as a warning to Jews who do not "think the things of God."²¹⁵ What is left indeterminate in Jesus' teachings prior to his final commission, however, is when exactly this inclusion of non-Jews as insiders to God's kingdom will come to pass. Within this context of the larger story of Israel, in other words, the question that the reader is pressed to ask throughout the narrative is not *if* Gentiles will become insiders to the kingdom of heaven, but *when*.

²¹⁵ Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 34–35.

Not Blood, but Fruit: Defining Insider Identity

The anticipation of Gentiles being included in God's kingdom is developed side-by-side with another theme in the narrative: that insider identity is determined by one's actions, by the fruit that one bears. This theme is initially developed in the message of Jesus' predecessor, John the Baptist. The reader first meets John in the wilderness, prior to the beginning of Jesus' ministry, where John is teaching that people should repent because God's kingdom is at hand (3:2). People from across the region of Judea are coming to him to confess their sins and be baptized in the river Jordan, but when Pharisees and Sadducees come to him to be baptized, he denounces their self-preserving motives and tells them to "bear fruit worthy of repentance" (3:8). He goes on to tell them that they are wrong if they rely on their Israelite identity to save them from "the wrath to come" (3:7): "Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (3:9–10). Using imagery that will be well-worn by the end of the gospel, John tells his audience that the fruit they bear is more important than the blood in their veins.

Later in the narrative, Jesus, upon hearing that John the Baptist has been arrested, relocates from Nazareth to Capernaum, and John's message becomes his own: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (3:2; 4:17). Jesus' teachings, like those of John, emphasize the "fruit" that one bears as the determinant of one's place within or outside of the kingdom, and he expounds at length on what is implied in John's message (3:8–10), that one's fruit is an accurate indicator of the state of one's heart. Towards the

end of the Sermon on the Mount, a sermon in which righteousness is a predominant theme, Jesus tells his audience, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves” (Matt 7:15). The true measure of a prophet, he continues, is the “fruit” that the prophet bears, for “every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit” (7:16–18). Later, when he is accused by the Pharisees of being in league with Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons (12:24), his accusatory response takes a similar form:

“Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers! How can you speak good things, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. The good person brings good things out of a good treasure, and the evil person brings evil things out of an evil treasure.” (12:33–37)

A little further on the narrative, in one of a series of parables directed to the crowds (and subsequently interpreted for the disciples), Jesus compares to seed sown in good soil the one who “hears the word and understands it” and who “bears fruit and yields” (13:3–23). The metaphor is an important one, and it resonates throughout the gospel: good fruit originates in good hearts. Alternatively, just as bad fruit comes from bad trees, so too do evil words and deeds originate in the hearts of evil people.²¹⁶

Jesus’ teachings on the sort of fruit, the sort of righteousness, that is to characterize the disciple—a righteousness that surpasses that of the scribes and the Pharisees—emphasize stringent obedience to every “jot” and “tittle” of Torah (5:18 KJV). As Richard Hays writes, Jesus calls his disciples to a righteousness that

is a matter not only of outward actions, but of inner dispositions and motivations. . . . Such radical obedience is possible only through a transformation of character,

²¹⁶ This metaphor of fruit comes to life a later pericope in the gospel, when Jesus, on his way into Jerusalem, encounters a fig tree in his path that has no figs; he curses the tree and it immediately withers (21:18–22).

enabling not merely outward obedience to the Law's requirements but also an inner obedience from the heart. In light of such a vision Jesus summons his disciples to renounce not only murder but also anger, not only adultery but also lust (Mt 5:21–30).²¹⁷

According to Jesus, all of the Law hangs on two commandments: ““You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”” (22:37–39). Complementary to this, Jesus' stringent expectations for his disciples are counterbalanced by his demand for mercy, a key theme of both his teachings and his practice. Indeed, one's willingness to be merciful, he says, corresponds directly with whether or not one will be the recipient of mercy (5:7; 18:35).²¹⁸

In addition, while Jesus teaches that the commands of Torah remain fully in force (5:17–19), he also hierarchically subordinates some commands to others, and there is, as Hays points out, a notable lack of emphasis in Jesus' teachings regarding those laws that most clearly distinguish the Law-abiding Jew from the Gentile outsider.²¹⁹ There is no mention of circumcision in the gospel,²²⁰ and Jesus himself does not, as the Law prescribes, avoid contact with dead bodies (9:18–26) or with those who are ritually unclean due to illness²²¹ or bleeding (9:20–22). When confronted by the Pharisees, he

²¹⁷ Hays, “The Gospel of Matthew: Reconfigured Torah,” 177.

²¹⁸ See also Matt 6:9–15, the quotation of Hosea 6:6 in Matt 9:13 and 12:7, and the entire parable of the unforgiving servant in Matt 18:23–35. As Richard Hays writes, “the moral rigor of the Sermon on the Mount, to be rightly understood and practiced, must be framed both by the recognition that we are weak and fallible, and by the willingness to forgive one another as freely as God forgives us, even seventy times seven (Mt 18:21–22).” Hays, “The Gospel of Matthew: Reconfigured Torah,” 180.

²¹⁹ Hays, “Reconfigured Torah,” 178–179.

²²⁰ There is no mention in Matthew even of Jesus' own circumcision.

²²¹ There are many instances in which Jesus heals the sick, but see especially 8:1–4, where Jesus reaches out and touches a man with a skin disease.

defends his disciples for gleaning a field on the Sabbath and defends his own healing work on the Sabbath by subordinating Sabbath observance to the requirement of mercy (12:1–8). Perhaps most striking, following his dispute with the scribes and Pharisees about the tradition of hand-washing, he says to the crowds, “It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles” (15:11). He elaborates on this at the request of his disciples:

“Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? But 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. These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile.” (15:17–20)

With these words, Jesus defines purity and defilement—categories of Jewish thought and practice that function to distinguish insiders from outsiders—in terms of what comes out of the heart, rather than what goes into the body. His teachings and his actions demonstrate that the ultimate goal towards which the disciple is to strive, that of being perfect (*teleios*) as God is perfect (5:48, 19:21), requires going beyond the requirements of the written law; sometimes, however, as in the example of the issues of Sabbath obedience and ritual purity, striving for *teleios* requires subsuming a lesser commandment to the greater commandment of love and the overarching hermeneutic of mercy.

Jesus’ teachings on righteousness in the gospel culminate in his assurance to his various audiences that a final separation of the righteous from the wicked will occur at a final judgment, a judgment to which all peoples/nations will be subject. In a series of parables, he compares weeds and wheat growing together in the field (13:24–30, 36–43) and all kinds of fish caught in a net (13:47–50) to the presence of both the righteous and

the wicked in the world until the final judgment and the final separation of the righteous from the unrighteous. In the judgment scene that concludes his Olivet discourse, the difference between the sheep and the goats, those destined for eternal life and those for eternal punishment, is how they have treated ““the least of these”” (25:31–46). The judgment he depicts is based on deeds, on whether one’s actions are righteous or evil, not on ethnic and national ties. This ultimate line of identity, that between wheat and chaff (3:12), weeds and wheat (13:24–30), and sheep and goats (25:31–46), is one that crosses not between but through peoples, one that transects lines of ethnic-national identity.

All of these ethical teachings of Jesus are directed to various Jewish audiences in the gospel, and they function to create a division between righteous Jews and unrighteous Jews.²²² However, by emphasizing righteousness (fruit) over Jewish identity, and defining righteousness in terms of love and mercy towards ““the least of these,”” they also prepare for an overlap between the category of *ethnē* and that of the righteous, those who bear fruit. When his encounters in Jerusalem with the chief priests and elders of the people grow increasingly hostile, Jesus tells a parable of wicked tenants who abuse and murder the landlord’s servants and eventually kill the landlord’s son. ““The kingdom of God,”” he tells these Jewish leaders, ““will be taken away from you and given to a people (*ethnos*) that produces the fruits of the kingdom”” (21:43). The line that is drawn throughout the gospel between those who will inherit the kingdom and those who will not

²²² The division of people into those who do the will of God and those who do not is one that even subverts and redefines kinship relationships (see Matt 12:46–50). John K. Riches, *Conflicting Mythologies: Identity Formation in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 318.

is based on whether one's deeds are good or evil,²²³ and this division, Jesus says, will ultimately result in the creation of a new *ethnos*, a new people.

Jesus' Experiences of Jewish Rejection within the Plot of the Gospel

A third rhetorical strategy by which the narrative of Matthew carries the reader from the first commission to the second is by its narration of the story of Jesus' life, and in particular its narration of Jesus' rejection by many of his own people. Conflict drives the narrative of the gospel, and a key part of this conflict occurs in Jesus' encounters with Jewish political and/or religious leaders. Brendan Byrne notes, in fact, that there is a repeating pattern in the gospel's narration of the life of Jesus in which rejection of Jesus by Jewish leaders results in Jesus withdrawing (*anachōrein*), and often withdrawing to Gentile regions and/or Gentile peoples.²²⁴ This conflict and these withdrawals begin early in the gospel, with Herod's threat to Jesus and the family's "withdrawal" from Bethlehem to Egypt (2:1–18). Likewise, it is the assumed threat of Herod's son Archelaus that prompts the family's "withdrawal" to Nazareth (2:22–23), and it is the arrest of John the Baptist by Herod the Tetrarch that occasions Jesus "withdrawal" to Galilee and the dawn of his public ministry of teaching and healing (4:12).

Jesus' direct encounters with the Pharisees in Galilee hint at what is to come later in Jerusalem. The Pharisees attribute his ability to drive out demons to his alliance with "the ruler of the demons" (9:34), and later when, to the infuriation of the Pharisees,

²²³ There is, however, the rather enigmatic parable of the wedding banquet (Matt 22:1–14), in which an attendee to the banquet is tossed out into "outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" for not wearing proper wedding attire.

²²⁴ Byrne, "The Messiah in Whose Name," 73.

Jesus heals a man's withered hand on the Sabbath, the Pharisees begin plotting his demise (12:14).²²⁵ When, in the very next pericope, Jesus' healing of a demon-possessed man prompts the Pharisees once again to attribute his power to Beelzebul (12:24), Jesus criticizes both the logic of their accusation (12:25–29) and their character (12:33–37). When they ask him for a sign to validate his authority, he responds that the only sign they will be given, the sign of Jonah, will be to them a sign of judgment (38:39–42). The conflict continues to build as Herod, due to an impulsive and poorly-considered oath, has John the Baptist executed on the whim of his wife Herodias. When Jesus hears that Herod has executed John, he “withdraws” to a deserted place (14:13), and it is another “withdrawal,” this time provoked by his dispute with the Pharisees over hand-washing and things clean and unclean, that takes him to the district of Tyre and Sidon and results in his encounter with the Canaanite woman (15:21). Some time later, the Pharisees and Sadducees again ask him to give them a sign, and again he tells them that the only sign they will be given is the sign of Jonah (16:4).

As Jesus travels around the Sea of Galilee, his relationship with the crowds that are flocking to him also becomes quite complicated.²²⁶ Following an exchange between Jesus and the disciples of an imprisoned and disheartened John the Baptist (11:2–6), Jesus reproaches “the cities in which most of his deeds of power had been done, because

²²⁵ This is another instance where, as Byrne points out, rejection by Jewish religious elite causes Jesus to “withdraw.” Though there is no mention here of him withdrawing to a Gentile region or to Gentile peoples, it is significant, as Byrne highlights, that the narrator here, as the tension heats up with these Jewish religious leaders, interprets Jesus ministry with a passage from Isaiah that mentions hope and justice for the Gentiles (or the nations). Byrne, “The Messiah in Whose Name,” 67–68.

²²⁶ Kingsbury suggests that “the conflict on which the plot in Matthew’s story turns is that between Jesus and Israel,” and further, that this conflict is with both of the groups that comprise Israel in the narrative, the crowds and the Jewish leaders. Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 4.

they did not repent” (11:20). Later he begins teaching the crowds about the kingdom of heaven through parables, explaining to his disciples that he does this because they, in fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah, ““listen, but never understand”” (13:14–15, quoting Isa 6:9–10). When he comes to Nazareth, his home town, the crowds, rather than gathering around him, for the first time in the narrative “took offense at him” (Matt 13:57).

The conflict between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders reaches its peak in Jerusalem. As Jesus enters Jerusalem, the crowds spread their cloaks and branches in front of him, praising him as he comes into the city: ““Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name for the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”” (21:9). Upon entering the temple, he drives out those who are exploiting its commercial potential (21:12–13), and he heals the blind and the lame who come to him there (21:14). The Jewish leaders are appalled by his reception in Jerusalem, and they confront Jesus the next day as he is teaching in the temple. Although the chief priests and the elders of the people press Jesus to tell them by what authority he is doing these things, he outwits them by telling them that he will answer their question only if they will tell him whether or not John’s baptism, which they had rejected but which the crowds had embraced, was from human or divine origin. Having been painted into a rhetorical corner, forced to either offend the crowds or indict themselves, they say that they do not know. Since they have refused to answer, Jesus also refuses their question, escaping for the moment the terrible consequences that the answer to that question would have brought (21:23–27). Still directing his words to the chief priests and elders, he tells a series of three parables, each of which indicts his audience of Jerusalem leaders, the first for not repenting at the

teaching of John, and the latter two for rejecting God's prophets and, ultimately, God's Messiah.²²⁷ Following the second of these parables, he tells them that the kingdom will be taken away from them and "given to a people (*ethnos*) that produces" its fruit (21:43). Angered by his audacity, the Pharisees plot to entrap him with his words by asking him a question, the answer to which is sure to put him at odds either with Roman power or with the anti-imperial sentiments of the crowds that surround him: "Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" (22:17). Aware of their scheme, however, Jesus asks them to show him a coin used for the tax, then asks them whose head and title are on the coin. "The emperor's," they reply (22:21). Jesus says to them, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the thing that are God's" (22:22)—a response which foils their trap by affirming the payment of taxes to Rome, while simultaneously divesting that duty of its symbolic acquiescence to Roman sovereignty. Though the Sadducees and the Pharisees continue to test him, and he them, his responses leave them speechless, and after that day, no one dares to ask him any more questions (22:46).

As the Passover approaches, the chief priests and leaders of the people gather in the palace of the high priest, Caiaphas, and conspire to kill Jesus (26:3–5). Though they originally opt to wait until Passover is finished to avoid a riot among the people, their decision to wait is rescinded due to the materialization of an unexpected opportunity: Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus' own disciples, comes to the Jewish leaders and, for thirty pieces of silver, agrees to hand him over to them (26:14–16). Judas accompanies a large, armed crowd sent from the chief priests and elders of the people, and they go to where

²²⁷ See Olmstead, *Matthew's Trilogy of Parables*, 161–164.

Jesus is praying with his disciples in Gethsemane, arrest him, and take him to Caiaphas (26:47–57).

Jesus is led before the Sanhedrin, the official Jewish court. Although many people come forward to accuse him falsely, the council can find no reason to have him executed. Finally a witness comes forward and testifies that Jesus has proclaimed himself able to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days (26:61). Jesus remains silent at the accusation, which prompts the high priest to put to him the fateful question, the answer to which will seal his fate: “I put you under oath before God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.” “You have said so,” Jesus replies evasively. But he continues by evoking the Son of Man passage from Daniel: “But I tell you, from now on, you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven” (26:64–65). The high priest screams, “He has blasphemed!,” and the council agrees, sentencing him to death (26:65–66). In the scene of Jesus’ trial before Pilate, the narrative emphasizes the culpability of the Jewish leaders and the complicity of the Jewish crowd in Jesus’ execution. Indeed, Pilate can find no good reason to sentence Jesus to death, and it is only the persistence of the crowds—at the manipulation of the chief priests and the elders—that persuades him. Pilate refuses to take responsibility for Jesus’ death, but the crowds are eager to do so: “His blood be on us and our children!” (26:25). When Jesus is buried, the chief priests and Pharisees appeal to Pilate to post a guard at his tomb (27:62), and when the guards at the tomb tell the chief priests about the tomb being opened by an angel of the Lord, the chief priests pay the guards to say that Jesus’ disciples have taken the body (28:11–15).

Against this backdrop of Jewish rejection, Jesus' understanding of his own mission and the mission of his disciples as being limited exclusively to Israel throughout the majority of the narrative takes on new significance. The narrative depicts Jesus as devoted to Israel, and devoted to Israel *exclusively*. It is they towards whom his mercy and healing is directed, they whom he calls to repentance, and it is for them that he proclaims God's kingdom. His people, however, do not receive him, and the consequent message that he delivers in Jerusalem concerning the judgment of Israel to come is not one in which Jesus himself delights; indeed it is with real pathos that he laments the coming destruction of Jerusalem (23:37–39). The reader cannot accuse Jesus of turning his back on his own people and going to the Gentiles; the story leaves no doubt that it is not he who rejects them, but they who reject him. They turn their backs on him and demand that his blood be on their own heads and on the heads of their children (26:25), and by so doing they bring down his blood not only on their own heads, but also on those of all peoples, in a sense in which they could never have imagined.²²⁸

²²⁸ See Timothy B. Cargal, "His Blood be Upon Us and Upon our Children': A Matthean Double Entendre?" *NTS* 37, no 1 (1991): 101–112. Cargal argues persuasively that the crowds' acceptance of the responsibility for Jesus' execution—"his blood be on us and our children" (27:25)—is best interpreted as an instance of double entendre. On the one hand, the crowds accuse and condemn themselves. On the other hand, however, Jesus is presented early on in the gospel as the one who will "save his people from their sins" (1:21), and in his final Passover meal with his disciples, he gives his disciples the cup and tells them that it is his "blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (26:28). In addition, there are strong intertextual resonances between Deut 28:1–9 and the scene in Matthew in which Pilate washes his hands of Jesus' blood and the crowds demand responsibility for it. When one reads all of these passages together, Cargal argues, the blood that the crowds call down on their own heads is not only the innocent blood for which they are responsible, but is also "the blood of Jesus upon his people which saves them from their sins." Cargal, "His Blood be Upon Us and Upon our Children," 111.

Conclusion

Having suffered this decisive rejection by his own people in Jerusalem, Jesus, following his resurrection, meets his disciples in Galilee. In this closing scene of the gospel on the mountain in Galilee, Jesus stands among his disciples as one who has, as the prophet Daniel dreamed he would, everlasting “dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him” (Dan 7:14). Throughout the gospel, the reader has been tutored to expect the eventual inclusion of non-Jews among God’s people. On the basis of this world-wide dominion, Jesus answers the question of when this inclusion will happen with “now”: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . .” (Matt 28:19). Just as he had promised that the kingdom would be given to a people who bear its fruits (21:43), so he here commands his disciples to baptize people of all nations and teach them to obey everything that he has commanded (28:20). This final commission reconfigures insider identity, creating, for the first time in the narrative, an overlap of what previously in the story had been two mutually-exclusive categories, those of *mathētai* and *ethnē*. The kingdom has been turned over to a new *ethnos*, a people who will bear its fruits.

CONCLUSION:

TA ETHNĒ AND THE IMPLIED READER

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . .” (Matthew 28:19).

One thing that I have attempted to demonstrate in the chapters of this thesis is that the Gospel of Matthew anticipates a reader for whom Gentile inclusion is not unproblematic, is not something so familiar as to be taken for granted. From the opening pages of the gospel and continuing up until the final scene on the mountain in Galilee where Jesus commissions his disciples for the last time, *ethnē* are by default positioned as outsiders in relation to the community of God’s people. Jesus is presented as Israel’s messiah, the messiah who will rescue his own people from the clutches of foreign oppression, and he insists throughout most of the narrative that he has been “sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (15:24). When he sends out his disciples to extend his ministry of preaching, healing, and exorcism, he limits their mission likewise (10:5–6). There is a line drawn here that the implied reader is to recognize, a line between Israel (“us”) and the peoples other than Israel (“them”). Though both the narrator and the character of Jesus, two voices of authority in the narrative, hint throughout the narrative that this inherent “otherness” of the non-Jewish peoples will not always be so, and though some of the Gentile characters in the narrative push against this boundary, much of the logic of the narrative and of the teachings of Jesus depends on this assumption that Gentiles (*ethnē* and *ethnikoi*) are “not us.” In this way the gospel both assumes and reinforces the oppositional pairing of *Ioudaioi* and *ethnē* as they functioned in first-century Jewish discourse.

Through the pages of the gospel, however, both sets of identities—*Ioudaioi* and *ethnē*—undergo fracture and reconfiguration. The teachings of John the Baptist and Jesus call the people of Israel to repentance, and they emphasize fruit, “doing the will of God,”²²⁹ as the defining characteristic of those who will inherit the kingdom of God. Their teachings thereby create a division within the category of *Ioudaioi*, one that is common in Israelite and Jewish literature, between righteous and unrighteous Israelites/Jews. In the Gospel of Matthew, the righteous from among the people of Israel are called to be part of the *ekklēsia*, the community of disciples. The unrighteous, those who do not do the will of God and who have rejected Jesus as God’s messiah, are outsiders, and their outsidersness, much like that of the outsidersness of *ethnē*, is often used in the gospel to throw into relief what the people of God are not.

But just as the boundaries of Israel ultimately break down under the parameters of identity that Jesus establishes (parameters that separate those who do the will of God from those who do not), so too do the parameters of *ethnē*. While Jesus’ teachings work to blur together the categories of *ethnē* and *ethnikoi*, creating a picture of “Gentileness” that is very essentialized and hardly laudatory, the gospel’s characterization of non-Jews problematizes and diversifies “Gentileness.” Some members of the *ethnē*, the gospel demonstrates, are people of surprising faith and virtue. Therefore, while the category of *ethnikoi* remains, as best the reader can tell, a term for the “other” at the gospel’s conclusion,²³⁰ fruit-bearing people from among the *ethnē* become, in the gospel’s closing

²²⁹ See Matt 7:21–23.

²³⁰ Matthew 18:17—“let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector”—is the final word on *ethnikoi* in the gospel.

scene, *mathētai*, insiders to the community of God’s people. This reconfiguring of language does more than just explain and give apology for *ethnē* insiders to the gospel’s implied reader. It remakes the implied reader—who is also an implied disciple²³¹—by reconfiguring the parameters not only of the “other,” but also of the self.

²³¹ The implied reader of Matthew is one who not only hears the words of Jesus, but who does them—i.e., one who bears fruit. See Howell, *Matthew’s Inclusive Story*, 249–259.

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