

The Origin and Purpose of Matthew 27:51b-53

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Abstract

The pericope, Matt 27:51b-53, a unique passage peculiar to the First Gospel, raises many questions about its origin and purpose. This thesis argues that Matt 27:51b-53 is not a Matthean literary creation but rather is a fragment of a very early Jewish Christian passion tradition, a tradition closely related to some Jewish expectations of what the Messiah's coming would achieve. This fragment Matthew has so incorporated into his narrative that it is an integral part of the message of the whole Gospel. The eschatological language of Matt 27:51b-53, reflecting that used elsewhere to characterize End Time events, creates a paradox – namely, that Matthew seems to suggest that with the death of Jesus the End came, yet clearly it did not! The thesis suggests that through the use of Matt 27:51b-53 Matthew was perhaps trying to reconcile two contradictory positions: (i) a Jewish belief that the Messiah's coming would initiate the final End, and (ii) the Christian belief that Jesus the Messiah's advent initiated the age of salvation but not the final End. In the light of the whole Gospel which, it is argued, reflects the thought of Israel as the covenant people of God, the thesis suggests that Matthew has used Matt 27:51b-53 to express, and highlight, the basic message of his narrative: that as the loyal and obedient vassal of the Lord God, Jesus, the Messiah, has through his death defeated Satan, initiated the final Eschaton, and created a whole new people of God – the Church. This new people consists of saints from both OT times as well as from the NT era. Further, and significantly, it includes Gentiles as well as Jews (Matt 27:54).

To develop these suggestions the thesis proceeds from broad, general considerations to more specific issues. Thus, after some Introductory Remarks, questions relating to the origin, authorship, date of writing, and especially the composite nature of Matthew's Gospel, are discussed in the opening chapter. In chapter two the Matthean themes of the kingdom of heaven and covenant are examined. Significant aspects of the Jewish and Christian understandings of the Messiah are then noted in chapter three. The controversial question of the Gospel's intended readership is investigated in the fourth chapter, followed in the fifth chapter by an inquiry into the beginnings of the Christian Faith. The significance of the position of Matt 27:51b-53, and its relationship to Matthew's "Special Material" is spelled out in chapter six. Chapter seven includes an in depth consideration of the prodigia associated with Jesus' death (Matt 27:45, 51-54) and an investigation of the alleged relationship between Matt 27:51b-53 and the Gospel of Peter. Chapter eight notes various peculiarities of the pericope and probes the issue of its authorship. The ninth chapter pursues the complicated topic of the provenance of Matt 27:51b-53 and especially examines the status and origin of the difficult phrase, μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ. Questions relating to the interpretation of Matt 27:51b-53 and the "historicity" or otherwise of the events depicted in the pericope are discussed in chapter ten. In the eleventh chapter the attempt is made to understand Matt 27:51b-53 in the light of the whole thrust of the First Gospel which, it is argued, rests on the assumption that Israel is God's covenant people. Finally, in Chapter 12 the findings of the thesis are summarized.

Preface

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Abbreviations

<i>Apoc. Ab.</i>	-	Apocalypse of Abraham.
<i>Ascen. Isa.</i>	-	Mart. Ascen. Isa. 6-11 (Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah).
<i>As. Mos.</i>	-	Assumption of Moses
Bar	-	Baruch.
<i>2 Bar.</i>	-	2 Baruch (Syriac Apocalypse).
<i>Barn.</i>	-	Barnabas.
BDAG	-	Bauer, W; Danker, F.W; Arndt, W.F; and Gingrich, F.W; <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature.</i> 3 rd Edition, 2000.
CD	-	Damascus Document.
1-2 Chr	-	1-2 Chronicles.
Dan	-	Daniel.
Deut	-	Deuteronomy.
DSS	-	Dead Sea Scrolls
<i>Ep. Apos.</i>	-	Epistle to the Apostles.
ED	-	Eschatological Discourse.
<i>1 En.</i>	-	1 Enoch (Ethiopic Apocalypse).
<i>2 En.</i>	-	2 Enoch (Slavonic Apocalypse).
1-2 Esd	-	1-2 Esdras.
Ezek	-	Ezekiel.
Gen	-	Genesis.
<i>Gos. Bart.</i>	-	Gospel of Bartholomew.
<i>Gos. Nic</i>	-	Gospel of Nicodemus..
<i>Gos.Pet.</i>	-	Gospel of Peter.
Hab	-	Habakkuk.
Hag	-	Haggai.
Hist.eccl.	-	Eusebius <i>History Ecclesiastical.</i>
Hos	-	Hosea.
ICC	-	International Critical Commentary.
<i>Ign. Magn.</i>	-	Ignatius, <i>To the Magnesians.</i>
Isa	-	Isaiah.
Jer	-	Jeremiah.
<i>Liv. Pro.</i>	-	Lives of the Prophets.
LXX	-	Septuagint.
1-4 Macc	-	1-4 Maccabees.
Matt	-	Matthew.
Mic	-	Micah.
mss	-	Manuscripts.
MT	-	Massoretic Text.
Neh	-	Nehemiah.
NT	-	New Testament.
NRSV	-	New Revised Standard Version.
Orac	-	Oracle.
OT	-	Old Testament.
1-2 Pet	-	1-2 Peter
Phil	-	Philippians.
PN	-	Passion Narrative.
Ps / Pss	-	Psalms.
<i>Pss. Sol.</i>	-	Psalms of Solomon.
Rev	-	Revelation.
Rom	-	Romans.
1-2 Sam	-	1-2 Samuel.
<i>Sib. Or.</i>	-	Sibylline Oracles.
<i>T. Ash.</i>	-	Testament of Asher.
<i>T. Benj.</i>	-	Testament of Benjamin.
TDNT	-	Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.
Tg	-	Targum.
<i>T. Jud.</i>	-	Testament of Judah.

<i>T. Levi</i>	-	Testament of Levi.
Tob	-	Tobit.
TWNT	-	Theologisches Wörterbuch Zum Neuen Testament.
Vg	-	Vulgate.
Wis	-	Wisdom of Solomon.
Zech	-	Zechariah.

The Origin and Purpose of Matthew 27:51b-53

(Matt 27:51b) καὶ ἡ γῆ ἐσειέσθη καὶ αἱ πέτραι ἐσχίσθησαν, (v. 52) καὶ τὰ μνημεῖα ἀνεώχθησαν καὶ πολλὰ σώματα τῶν κεκοιμημένων ἁγίων ἠγέρθησαν, (v. 53) καὶ ἐξελθόντες ἐκ τῶν μνημείων μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ εἰσῆλθον εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν καὶ ἐνεφανίσθησαν πολλοῖς.

“And the earth was shaken, and the rocks were split, and the tombs were opened and many bodies of the sleeping holy ones were raised and coming out of the tombs after his raising they entered into the holy city and were made visible to many.”¹

Introductory Remarks

To understand the ultimate purpose of a building the whole building, its origin, structure, location, and so on, must be investigated. To concentrate the investigation exclusively on just a couple of bricks of the building would be rightly deemed odd and a waste of time and effort. However, if those bricks were peculiar, unique, and found in no other building, then perhaps such a concentration of effort could be justified.

This scenario illustrates both the approach, and the dilemma, underlying this thesis. For in this dissertation much of the research has concentrated on the examination of just a couple of verses of Matthew’s Gospel: Matt 27:51b – 53. In justification of this concentration of effort it is to be noted that these verses are indeed unique, being peculiar to the First Gospel and found nowhere else.² Accordingly, it has been assumed that the very uniqueness of these verses warrants a more detailed examination of them. Further the position of these verses, relating to Jesus’ death, is noteworthy. As R. Aguirre says, “It is obvious that such an insertion at the culminating moment of the work is not made unless it is to be full of significance”.³ This being so one would naturally assume that this would be a key passage for Easter meditations. Yet when, if ever, does one hear an Easter sermon based around this text? With regard to these

¹ Author’s translation. Throughout the thesis when quoting Scripture the NRSV translation will be mainly followed.

² The apocryphal *Gospel of Peter* however seems to allude to this passage, suggesting that it, or at least a tradition related to it, was known from early times. See *Gos. Pet.* 18-22. See also *Gospel of Nicodemus* 8:2; 17:1-13; 21:1-6. For a detailed discussion of the *Gospel of Peter* see Appendix A .

³ Rafael Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo, 27, 51b-53: para una teología de la muerte de Jesús en el Evangelio de Mateo* (Vitoria: Editorial Eset, 1980), 25.

words there is a deafening silence! The passage being difficult and unusual is, more often than not, avoided. Accordingly, a basic aim of this thesis is to better understand the relevance and importance of these verses.

Basic Issues

Two fundamental contentions, both related to eschatology, underlie this thesis. First, the thesis argues that Matt 27:51b-53, reflects *something* of an understanding of the End Time held by some in Israel in New Testament times – specifically, that the End Time would be inaugurated along the lines of Jewish expectation – that is, by a hoped-for Messiah who would come just once. Contrast the later Christian belief that the Messiah was Jesus of Nazareth who would come again a *second* time at the end of time. It is, however, important to note that in NT times there was no real agreement among Jewish people about the nature of the hoped-for Messiah or what his coming would achieve.⁴ The nebulous expression “End Time” expresses both this expectancy and uncertainty. Thus, the inauguration of the End Time would have been understood to imply many things. For some it would have meant the end of the then present world order, the overthrow of the Gentiles, and the establishment of God’s supreme kingdom. For others, the End Time would imply an intrusion of the “supernatural” into this present world order. This, it is important to note, did not necessarily mean the end of the space-time universe, but rather its renovation (cf. Matt 19:28).⁵ The understanding of the End Time reflected in Matt 27:51b-53 implies that at the moment of Jesus’ death on the cross there was an intrusion of the supernatural. When Jesus died events associated with the End Time occurred – the earth shook, rocks were split, tombs were opened, and many holy ones were resurrected.⁶ Since the Jews never thought that a promised Messiah would be rejected, let alone crucified, I suggest that Matt 27:51b-53 reflects an early *Jewish Christian* understanding of Jesus’ messiahship and his accomplishments. Consequently, it is argued that Matt 27:51b-53 was understood by some as

⁴ See Chapter 3 below.

⁵ See N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (vol. 2 of N.T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*; 3 vols.; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 95-6.

⁶ For discussion of the alleged eschatological character of the language of Matt 27:51b-53, see Appendix B. See also 11.3.4 below.

declaring that Jesus the Messiah's earthly life and ministry, which culminated in his crucifixion, somehow initiated the End Time.⁷

In the second place, the thesis argues that Matt 27:51b-53 reveals, among other things, an understanding of the End Time which clearly contradicts what is to be found elsewhere in the Gospel, especially in sections of Matthew 24-25. In fact, even in Matt 24-25 two differing understandings of the End Time may be detected.⁸ In Matt 24:3, for example, we are told by the narrator that the disciples, having heard Jesus speak of the destruction of Jerusalem's temple, came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your *parousia* (παρουσία),⁹ and of the end of the age?" (ἐἰπὲ ἡμῖν, πότε ταῦτα ἔσται καὶ τί τὸ σημεῖον τῆς σῆς παρουσίας καὶ συντελείς τοῦ αἰῶνος;).¹⁰

The disciples clearly join together the destruction of Jerusalem and the consummation of the Age. From the Matthean disciples' point of view Jesus, the Messiah, has already come. He is now present with them. His physical presence (cf. his incarnation, birth, ministry, teaching, and so on) however has not yet initiated the End. Consequently, the disciples' expectation and hope is for a soon to be παρουσία - that is, a dramatic manifestation of Jesus' judgmental power, authority, and glory. This manifestation of power and glory by Jesus would, the disciples hoped, result in (sinful) Jerusalem's destruction, the consummation of the old Age, and the initiation of the new.

⁷ Whether one speaks of the "End Time" or of "events associated with the End Time" it comes to the same thing – when Jesus died there was a manifestation of God's miraculous power which raised to life many who had been long dead. A different age, reflecting continuity with the past and yet possessing supernatural newness, had been inaugurated.

⁸ Matthew however, as the following will show, distances himself from one of these understandings. In doing so Matthew, in effect, attempts to refute the particular understanding of the End Time found in Matt 24:3.

⁹ How this word is to be translated is very important. According to W. Bauer, F. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* [BDAG] (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 780, the word παρουσία has two basic meanings – (i) the state of being present at a place, *presence*; and (ii) arrival as the first stage in presence, coming, advent.

¹⁰ The majority of mss (⋈ B C L Θ ¹ 33. 565. 892 *pc*) have no article between καὶ and συντελείς τοῦ αἰῶνος. This implies that συντελείς τοῦ αἰῶνος explains Jesus' παρουσία. Thus, Jesus' παρουσία (understood as manifestation, presence) is, or will be, the end of the Age. There is no separation between the two, they are synonymous. Contrast Matt 27:54, ἰδόντες τὸν σεισμὸν καὶ τὰ γενόμενα, where the second article separates, and so distinguishes, the earthquake's aftermath from the earthquake itself.

In a detailed examination of Matt 24:3 J. A. Gibbs, writing from a Narrative Criticism point of view, says:

The sense of what the disciples say is clear enough, although the term “*Parousia*” is certainly unexpected. The challenge to the implied reader arises because it is the disciples and not Jesus who have explicitly joined together the consummation of the age and the destruction of Jerusalem that Jesus has predicted. The point of view that thus juxtaposes the two events is perhaps not unknown to the implied reader, given the cultural background when the Gospel of Matthew was written.¹¹

Further, in discussing the same theme, Gibbs writes:

Both the record of the disciples’ mistaken point of view throughout the story and Jesus’ opening response alert the implied reader to reject the disciples’ joining together of the predicted ruin of the temple and the consummation of the age. ... As the implied reader begins to experience and understand the ED [Eschatological Discourse], he or she knows to align himself or herself not with the disciples’ point of view but with the point of view that Jesus will reveal through his answer to the disciples’ question.¹²

Later, in summarizing his argument, Gibbs says: “His (Jesus’) answer to their first question also corrects the disciples’ invalid eschatological point of view, by which they have closely joined together the destruction of Jerusalem and the *Parousia*.”¹³

One can readily agree with Gibbs that in the ED Jesus is depicted as correcting the disciples’ understanding of the End Time. But what must be noted is that while in Matt 24:4-25:46 it is the earthly Jesus who speaks, yet the whole ED assumes that what is said refers to the coming of the crucified, risen and ascended Jesus. In other words, the whole concept of *parousia* is seen from a different, and much later, angle. It is seen in the light of Jesus’ resurrection and ascension to glory. At the *parousia* it is the exalted Son of Man who comes from heaven to act as judge.¹⁴

Accordingly, it is important to note that a subtle change in emphasis has occurred. In Matt 24:3 the disciples want to know, among other things, “when” Jesus, the Messiah now present with them, will manifest his power and glory, and so bring in the End. However, the contents of Matt 24:4-25:46 imply that it is not just a question of “when” but also of “who” and

¹¹ J. A. Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia: Jesus’ Eschatological Discourse in Matthew’s Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 179.

¹² Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia*, 181.

¹³ Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia*, 255.

¹⁴ See Matt 25:31-46.

“from where”. The modern reader, as well as the “implied reader”,¹⁵ know the answer to these questions: The One who will come is the Son of Man – that is, *the crucified and risen Jesus*. He will come, in glory, from heaven.¹⁶ In the Gospel story Jesus is depicted as clearly informing his disciples concerning the necessity of his death and resurrection.¹⁷ Thus, we are to understand that when they asked Jesus about these End Time matters, the disciples had still not comprehended the vital importance and necessity of Jesus’ passion (and resurrection).¹⁸

All this raises the question as to whether in Matt 24:4-25:31 we have the remembered words of Jesus, or whether we have traditions of Jesus’ teaching about the End Time which have been reinterpreted by the early Church.¹⁹ It would seem that Matthew is writing after the destruction of Jerusalem and is attempting, for apologetic purposes, to explain why the *parousia* is still delayed. As Gibbs points out the whole point of the ED is to stress that, contrary to what the disciples thought, the destruction of Jerusalem and the consummation of the End Time are not one and the same thing. These matters are important, but they will not be further pursued.

¹⁵ For an explanation of “implied reader” and other concepts associated with Narrative Criticism see Mark A. Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990); Mark A. Powell, ed., *Methods for Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). See also J. L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005).

¹⁶ The origin and meaning of the expression “Son of Man” are complex issues. While I assume that the expression is somehow related to Daniel 7:13-14 this is by no means generally agreed. (See E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 246-7; Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian’s Reading of the Gospels* (1st ed.; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 177-8.) Very briefly, my approach to Matthew’s understanding of Daniel 7 is along these lines: while the First Gospel does not mention, explicitly, Jesus’ ascension, yet in my view Matthew assumes that the risen Jesus ascended to heaven. In other words Daniel’s vision depicts, proleptically, the ascension of the risen Jesus. Hence, in his vision Daniel, among many other things, sees a heavenly judgment scene: the Ancient One (God) is on his Judgment throne and the books are opened. Absolute holiness prevails. A stream of fire issues from the presence of the Ancient One and consumes all that is unholy. Someone, however, has been able to cross this ordeal, this stream of fire. One like a human being approaches the very presence of the Divine One. Thus, in his vision Daniel sees “one like a human being (a son of man) coming with the clouds of heaven”. And this one is clearly “fit” to enter God’s holy presence. For he is not only presented to the Ancient One, he is also rewarded - he is given dominion, glory and kingship. And this everlasting kingship is shared with the holy ones of the most High (cf. Matt 28:16-20). It is this Jesus, vindicated, raised, ascended, and glorified, who exercises all authority in heaven and on earth, who, as the Son of Man, will descend at the last Day to judge mankind (Matt 25:31-46; cf. Acts 17:31).

¹⁷ “Jesus’ passion is explicitly predicted through internal prolepses (16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19) and is alluded to many times (e.g., 9:15; 17:9-12). It is also foreshadowed in the slaughter of the Bethlehem infants (2:16-18) and in the murder of John the Baptist (14:1-12; cf. 17:12).” (Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* 45).

¹⁸ Cf. John 12:34, “The crowd answered him, ‘We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up?’”

¹⁹ To put the question in a slightly different way: Is it possible to isolate Jesus’ pre-Easter understanding of the salvation he hoped to achieve from the early Christians’ post-Easter rethinking of what he achieved?

They are mentioned here however because they make very clear that in the early Church there were differing understandings of what exactly the End Time involved.

In the light of the above I would suggest that in Matt 24-25 the word παρουσία may be understood in two differing ways. From the disciples' point of view (24:3) Jesus, the Messiah, has already come.²⁰ They thus want to know when he will manifest his power and so bring the present Age to its End. Consequently, to translate παρουσία in 24:3 as "coming" is perhaps misleading. "Manifestation" would be a better rendering. However, in the rest of Matt 24-25 παρουσία definitely refers to the yet to be future coming, and manifestation, of the Son of Man from the realms of heavenly power and glory.

Accordingly, I suggest that the understanding of the End Time underlying the disciples' question in Matt 24:3 reflects a belief held by some very early Christians that through his birth and life, a hoped-for Messiah would change things and bring in a new order.²¹ The understanding of the End Time found in the rest of Matt 24:4-25:46 however, to my mind, reflects a more developed and later Christian understanding of the End Time. Thus, Jesus, the Messiah, has indeed come. And although rejected by Israel and crucified by the Romans, he has been raised to new life. And it is this raised and exalted Christ who will come again as the glorious Son of Man with the angels of heaven to judge humankind (Matt 25:31).²² Consequently, the Christian Church has come to speak of the Second Coming of Christ or of the Return of Jesus. Both these concepts however are alien to Jewish understandings of the End Time. According to D. C. Allison, Jr., "(T)he distinction between two advents cannot be found in the OT and is foreign to Jewish eschatology."²³

²⁰ Cf. Jesus' birth as Emmanuel, Matt 1:21-23.

²¹ There is, of course, considerable debate about what Judaism in New Testament times understood about the nature of the Messiah and what he would accomplish. See Chapter 3. Cf. *Pss. Sol.* 17:21-25, 31f; *IEn.* 52:4; *4 Ezra* 12:32; *Sib. Or.* 3:702-19, 772-73, 785-88; 1QS9:11; 4Q521; 4Q246.

²² That Matt 27:51b-53 and Matt 24:4- 25:46 reflect two differing, and even contradictory, statements about the End Time is further indicated by reference to earthquake(s). In Matt 27:51b-53 when Jesus dies there is an earthquake and End Time events happen - tombs are opened, and many holy ones are raised. In Matt 24:8 however earthquakes in various places are not associated with the actual End, but rather are "the beginning of the birth pangs" leading up to the eventual End.

²³ See Dale C. Allison, Jr., "Eschatology," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (ed. J. B. Green and S. McKnight; Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1992), 206-209, at 207.

The disciples' questions in Matt 24:3 thus reveal a very early Christian understanding of the End Time. Believing that Jesus was the Messiah they hoped that he would soon initiate the End which would coincide with Jerusalem's destruction. The End Time would thus be inaugurated by the earthly Messiah who was born in Bethlehem, grew up in Nazareth, and exercised a ministry of teaching and healing throughout Galilee. The ED (Matt 24:4 – 25:46) however attempts to correct this understanding of the End Time. It does so by declaring that the End Time would not coincide with Jerusalem's destruction. It would happen later, when the crucified and risen Jesus would return suddenly, and unexpectedly, in a second advent as the exalted Son of Man in order to judge humankind.

I would further suggest that in Matt 27:51b-53 yet another understanding of the End Time is to be found. When Jesus died on the cross events associated with the End Time happened – the bodies of many holy ones were miraculously raised and later, after Jesus' own resurrection, they appeared to many in the holy city. At first sight, Matthew seems to be declaring that, when at the moment of Jesus' death tombs were opened and the dead raised, the End had come. But, of course, in actual fact, the End did not occur! Earthly life clearly carried on.²⁴

Accordingly, this thesis attempts to make suggestions which help to explain, if possible, these apparent contradictions. To do so, it suggests that in the very early Church there were a number of differing, and even conflicting, understandings of the nature of the End Time, when it would happen, and so on. However, with the passing of time, one particular understanding became dominant. Consequently, the other understandings of the End Time either began to lose favour with, or were perhaps even suppressed, in relation to the main body of Christian tradition, or, as in the case of Matt 27:51b-53, were incorporated and reinterpreted in the light of the more dominant understanding.

²⁴ It would seem that even Matthew, despite the use of End Time language, understood that the End had not yet come. For in the same pericope Matthew declares that the raised holy ones, who had participated in the End Time events, appeared to many in the holy city (the earthly Jerusalem). The latter apparently still belonged to this present, ongoing age. Furthermore, Matthew clearly declares elsewhere in his Gospel that there would be a time factor before the final End in which the message concerning Jesus – his ministry, teachings, death and resurrection - would be proclaimed to all nations (see Matt 24:14; 28:16-20).

The particular understanding of the End Time which eventually prevailed reflects, for instance, what the Apostle Paul declares in 1Thess 4:13-18. That is, the hope arose that the crucified and risen Jesus, having ascended to heaven, would come again, unexpectedly, as the glorious Son of Man. As such, he would judge humanity and inaugurate fully the Kingdom of God. This final decisive event - the last great and longed for Day, the End - is known by many in the Church today as the *parousia* (that is, the coming, the manifestation, of the risen Jesus as the Son of Man).²⁵ Further, this hope of Jesus' triumphal return in glory has been incorporated into the great creeds of the Church.²⁶ A danger however exists and that is to assume that this understanding of the *parousia*, the End, albeit derived from Scripture and concretized in the ancient creeds, is what prevailed at the very beginning of the Christian Faith.

Accordingly, the possibility that such an understanding of the *parousia* did not prevail from the beginning of Christianity must be acknowledged. Other understandings of the *parousia*, and what would then happen, could well have been current among early believers in Jesus. R. D. Aus, for example, suggests that the verses, Matt 27:51b-53, had a life of their own before being incorporated by Matthew into his narrative. Thus, according to Aus, the pericope is, in fact, a remnant of an extremely old Christology and passion tradition, even earlier or as early, as the "after three days" tradition found in 1 Cor 15:3.²⁷ In Aus' view, the ancient tradition encapsulated in Matt 27:51b-53 suggests that in the very early Church some Christians believed that Jesus had experienced resurrection, along with others, at the moment of his death – that is to say, at the moment of his death Jesus, along with some holy ones, ascended, and so was elevated and exalted. Thus Jesus' death was the Day of Judgment, the Turning of the Ages.²⁸

²⁵ F.L. Cross, ed., *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), 1017 has this entry: "PAROUSIA (Gk. παρουσία, 'presence' or 'arrival'). In its English form, the word is employed (following NT usage) to denote particularly the future return of Christ in glory (the 'Second Coming') to judge the living and the dead, and to terminate the present world order. ..."

²⁶ See, for example, the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds.

²⁷ R. D. Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus: Three Early Palestinian Jewish Christian Gospel Haggadot*. (South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism 105; Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1994). For an outline of Aus' argument, with comments and criticisms, see Appendix F (Section B).

²⁸ In Johannine thought, Jesus' death was the moment of his glorification (cf. John 12:27-33).

Further, rightly or wrongly, Aus argues that at the beginning of the Christian Faith some understood Jesus' resurrection as the ascension of his *soul* to heaven from the cross.²⁹ Aus argues that because this understanding of Jesus' resurrection led to Docetism, it was eventually suppressed by the growing Church. Consequently, under the influence of OT Scriptures (e.g., Hos 6:2; Ps 22) there developed, according to Aus, the tradition, which really has no historical roots, that Jesus' corpse was buried in a tomb which, three days later, was found by some womenfolk to be empty. This manufactured account of Jesus' bodily resurrection, found in the four canonical Gospels has, it is surmised, drawn a veil over some initial beliefs which circulated in very early Christian circles.

Clearly, for a critical evaluation of Aus' radical approach, and other similar approaches, to Christian beginnings a detailed understanding of Matt 27:51b-53 is essential. Further, these verses, which Matthew has saved from oblivion, could well prove to be a window giving insights into the variegated, and tumultuous, life of the very early Church as it struggled to express its new faith. If Matthew's Gospel gives insights into issues troubling his Christian community in the middle of the ninth decade C.E., then an examination of Matt 27:51b-53 could well highlight problems and differences which troubled the Church decades earlier at its initial beginnings. Such is an underlying assumption of this thesis.

To summarize: the basic argument of this thesis, broadly speaking, is that Matt 27:51b-53 may be understood as a fragment of a very early Christian passion tradition³⁰ – a tradition closely related to, and reflecting, some Jewish expectations of what a hoped-for Messiah's coming would achieve. Furthermore, it will also be argued³¹ that by incorporating this fragment of tradition into his Gospel the writer, among other things, (a) gently corrects some misunderstandings about the End Time, especially with regard to its timing; (b) stresses the

²⁹ Traces of this belief are, according to Aus, to be found in Luke 23:43; Matt 27:51b-53, *Gos. Pet.* 19, Phil 2:6-11 and even Acts 2:29-36.

³⁰ It is very important to note that since Matt 27:51b-53 mentions Jesus' rising ("after his raising") it is assumed in all subsequent discussion that this conjectured fragment of an early Jewish Christian passion tradition was also aware of the importance of Jesus' resurrection on the first day of the week. However, in the pericope the stress falls initially on what happened at the moment of Jesus' death. The early Christians had to explain how Jesus, who had died an accursed death on a cross, could ever be the promised Messiah. An explanation of the necessity of Jesus' passion and its accomplishments was thus necessary.

³¹ See 11.3.6 and Chapter 12.

need for the Gentile mission, and (c) declares that through his death Jesus, the Messiah, as the loyal covenant vassal has initiated the final Eschaton by creating a new people of God – the Messiah’s ἐκκλησία, his community.³² In his Gospel Matthew makes it very clear that Jesus began forming his community long before his death (cf. 4:18-22; 9:9; 10:1-4; 18:15-20). However, it will be argued³³ that the ultimate establishment and continuation of this special community depended, in the last analysis, on Jesus’ death. This was because it was through his death that Jesus defeated Satan the enemy of God’s people.³⁴

Methodology

The methodology followed in this thesis to investigate the pericope, Matt 27:51b-53, is along the lines of that which has come to be known, broadly speaking, as the historical-critical method (or historical criticism). Seen nowadays as part of the legacy of the Enlightenment, the historical-critical method is a refusal to let the traditional religious authority ascribed to Scripture dictate the conclusions to which historical investigators might come. Some would trace its rise back to the Reformation which, in effect, asked: Was the meaning of biblical texts proposed by the later Church possible at the time the text was written? In other words, the underlying motivation of “historical” criticism is to free the text to speak. It is concerned with the “plain sense” or “rational sense” of the text – that is, with what the writer meant by the text.³⁵

³² This is not to be understood in any supersessionist manner. This community will include *all* God’s faithful people from the beginning of creation to the End of time. See Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* 57. Note: To translate ἐκκλησία as “church” (in the sense that this word is commonly understood today) is perhaps anachronistic. “Community” or “Assembly” would conceivably be better translations. The translation “church” however is widespread and deeply ingrained and so will be retained.

³³ See 11.3.6.

³⁴ In other words, through his death Jesus established the ultimate authority of God’s Kingdom.

³⁵ See John Barton, “Historical-Critical Approaches,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation* (ed. J. Barton: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 17.

According to J. Barton³⁶ four features have been central to the historical-critical method. First, on the assumption that knowledge of a literary work's origin contributes answers to the nature of the work, it asks genetic questions about a biblical text. It thus endeavours to discover the author, the date of writing and the intended readership of the text. Importantly, it seeks to discover if the text is a composite document, and if so, what sources underlie it, and how they came into a synthetic whole. To achieve all this, the historical-critical method resorts to the use of an array of disciplines, including textual criticism, and especially source, form and redaction criticism.

In the second place, the historical-critical method seeks to discover the "original" meaning of a biblical text – that is, what it had meant to its first readers, rather than what it might mean to a modern reader. To this end historical criticism applies philological and linguistic studies to a text in order to establish what the original author could have meant in his / her own historical period. It engages in genre and form criticism and seeks to find what the writer sought to express by the use of these literary forms.³⁷ It asks: what did the writer, in his own historical situation, and in accordance with the condition of his time and culture, actually mean to express with the help of literary forms in use during that time?³⁸ The historical-critical method accordingly argues that it is to misunderstand a text if it is taken to mean something that it could not have meant for its first readers.

In the third place, historical criticism attempts historical reconstructions – that is, it is concerned with the attempt to discover what actually happened in the past, rather than what the biblical writers believed (or wanted their readers to believe) had happened. This, in effect, assumes that the biblical writers were biased, that they had "an axe to grind." Accordingly, historical criticism attempts by source analysis to get back to the original, allegedly unbiased, sayings and deeds which are the foundation of the biblical texts, particularly of the Gospels.

³⁶ Barton, "Historical-Critical Approaches," 9-20. See also Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Interpretation of Scripture: In Defense of the Historical-Critical Method* (New York: Paulist Press, 2008), 63-66.

³⁷ See Donald A. Hagner and Stephen E. Young, "The Historical-Critical Method and the Gospel of Matthew," in *Methods for Matthew* (ed. M. A. Powell: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 24.

³⁸ See Fitzmyer, *The Interpretation of Scripture*, 8.

The concern is with how the texts have developed through time (that is, historically or diachronically), rather than with the finished product. The historical-critical method, in effect, assumes that the Gospel writers do not have direct access to the sayings and events of Jesus' life. Rather, in presenting their portrait of Jesus they are dependent on traditional material which reflects how the early Church, in its first decades of preaching, portrayed the original Jesus.

The fourth feature of the historical-critical method is closely related to the third feature – that is, historical criticism, especially in the latter 19th and early 20th centuries, advocated disinterested scholarship. In other words, the historical scholar was to be a neutral observer, who revoked any faith-commitment, in order to discover the truth. Expressed differently, the historical-critical method assumed that the neutral scholar was able to arrive at objective truth.

At one time, the historical-critical method was the dominant approach in the academic study of the Bible. However in more recent times, since the 1980s – and especially in English speaking circles with the rise of postmodernism – the historical-critical method has for a variety of reasons fallen into some disfavour.³⁹ According to Barton the crucial argument against the validity of the historical-critical method arises from an assumption inherent in its fourth feature – specifically that it is possible for a scholar studying a biblical text to be neutral. It is now acknowledged, even by advocates of historical criticism, that academic neutrality is not possible. There is no such entity as objective “truth”. This is because all alleged statements of “truth” belong within some human intellectual system or other and so are liable to subjective bias. Historical scholarship has thus been influenced by what is known as the “linguistic turn” – that is, the idea that reality is constituted by language.⁴⁰ And this idea, as Martti Nissinen explains, “dismisses the ideal of historical objectivity not only as unreachable but as entirely impossible”.⁴¹

³⁹ See Barton, “Historical-Critical Approaches,” 13. See also Roland E. Murphy, “Reflections on ‘Actualization’ of the Bible,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 26 (1996): 79.

⁴⁰ Cf. The postmodern contention that there is no reality outside the text itself.

⁴¹ Matti Nissinen, “Reflections on the ‘Historical-Critical’ Method: Historical Criticism and Critical Historicism,” in *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Petersen* (ed. Joel M. LeMon and Kent H. Richards; Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 479.

The inadmissibility of this fourth feature of the historical-critical method also undermines to some extent the validity of the assumptions associated with its first three features.⁴² Accordingly, it is argued that today there is need for a “paradigm shift” – that is, for a complete mental realignment which will result in styles of biblical study and interpretation that avoid the traps which historical critics have fallen into.⁴³ This in turn has led to an enormous emphasis on the “synchronic” reading of biblical texts – that is, the reading of texts exactly as they now lie before the reader.⁴⁴ In other words, the historical-critical method is accused of being “antiquarian” and so indifferent to the contemporary relevance of the biblical text. It is also accused of being too “narrow.” The full agenda of historical biblical criticism should now, it is maintained, include much more than the original concerns of the historical-critical method.⁴⁵

However, despite the fact that “historical criticism has been taken down from its pedestal of objectivity and the relativity of the historical knowledge is acknowledged,”⁴⁶ scholars, like Nissinen, argue that the original concerns of the historical-critical method, while in need of refinement, are still necessary in today’s academic world.⁴⁷

Further, although complete “objectivity” is now recognized to be impossible, those who approach a text may do so with an awareness of their presuppositions, and the way in which these shape their own interpretation. In other words, and this is a key point, one’s own prior

⁴² See Barton, “Historical-Critical Approaches,” 13.

⁴³ See Barton, “Historical-Critical Approaches,” 13-15.

⁴⁴ From 1980 onwards scholarly interest shifted from the “obsession with authorial intent” to a more intense focus on the literary dynamics of “the text itself.” Influenced by modern secular literary criticism, biblical scholars began to maintain that since texts come to mean things the author did not envision, the *meaning* of a text should not be constrained by authorial intent but should be determined by analysis of a work’s literary features. This in effect means that it is the reception by the reader that ultimately determines what any text means. See M. A. Powell, *Methods for Matthew*, 6.

⁴⁵ See Nissinen, “Reflections on the ‘Historical-Critical’ Method,” 481. Changes in perspective and ideology since NT times have affected how biblical texts are understood. Thus, globalization of biblical studies, new archaeological discoveries and the emergence of concerns rooted in issues related to ethnicity, gender, economics and cultural history have also led to new methodologies in the study of biblical texts – for example, feminist criticism, postcolonial / liberationist criticism and rhetorical criticism. Biblical texts, especially the Gospels, have also been studied by social-scientific approaches in the light of the values, institutions, social systems, and interconnected relationships that are intrinsic to the NT world. Cf. also Narrative Criticism (see below for discussion of this approach to biblical studies).

⁴⁶ Nissinen, “Reflections on the ‘Historical-Critical’ Method,” 482.

⁴⁷ See Barton, “Historical-Critical Approaches,” 9-20; Fitzmyer, *The Interpretation of Scripture*; Hagner and Young, “The Historical-Critical Method and the Gospel of Matthew,” 11-43.

belief systems are to be scrutinized, and the endeavour made to ensure that these do not unfairly precondition one's reading. Accordingly, I have attempted to undertake this thesis in the awareness of my own presuppositions. However, whether this awareness has prevented me from, unconsciously, misinterpreting what I have read, the reader must decide.

In addition, in this thesis the attempt is made to apply a number of concerns of the historical-critical method to the understanding of Matt 27:51b-53. Briefly, textual criticism is involved in the examination of the Greek text of Matt 27:51b-53, and especially with regard to the question of whether canonical Matt 27:51b-53 represents the original or a post-Matthean revised text. In the light of source criticism, the First Gospel is understood to be a composite document. It is thus argued that evidence suggests that the original source of Matt 27:51b-53 may have been a "snippet" of tradition expressing a very early Jewish Christian understanding of the significance of Jesus, the Messiah's, death. Further, the quasi-poetic structure of Matt 27:51b-53 raises questions about its initial "form". Finally, on the assumption that Matt 27:51b-53 is not a Matthean literary creation the thesis, in the light of redaction criticism, asks why Matthew has incorporated this early, and puzzling, pericope into his passion narrative, and indeed into his whole Gospel.

Approach

The title of the thesis indicates the direction of my approach to the study of Matt 27:51b-53. Two main, and related, areas will be investigated – namely, (A) the origin or provenance of Matt 27:51b-53, and (B) what purpose this pericope serves especially at this point in the First Gospel.

A) With regard to the origin of Matt 27:51b-53.

The word "origin" has a provocative edge. It is meant to raise questions and to suggest that initially this pericope was not a Matthean literary creation, but that it belonged to a different, and earlier, source of tradition. From a textual point of view Matt 27:51b-53 is indeed

an integral part of the First Gospel.⁴⁸ However, the supernatural tone and theme of Matt 27:51b-53 comes as a surprise to the reader. According to the pericope when Jesus, the Son of God, died there was an earthquake of sufficient magnitude to shake the surroundings, to split rocks, and to open nearby tombs. Further, many bodies of sleeping (that is, dead) holy ones were raised, apparently before Jesus' own resurrection.⁴⁹ Then after Jesus' resurrection (that is, three days later) these raised holy ones entered the earthly Jerusalem, designated as the holy city,⁵⁰ and appeared, presumably from some transcendent realm, to many of Jerusalem's inhabitants. And while these miraculous events were preceded by other strange happenings,⁵¹ yet they still strike the reader with peculiar and unexpected force.⁵² Accordingly, it will be argued that at this point the writer has incorporated into his story a fragment of a very early Christian passion tradition.⁵³

The suggestion that Matt 27:51b-53 is a fragment of an early passion tradition has a number of important consequences with regard to the method and approach adopted in this thesis. First, an underlying assumption of the thesis is that the First Gospel is basically a composite document incorporating a number of sources. There is thus in the thesis considerable reliance on the findings and conclusions of the Historical Critical Method – especially of Source Criticism.⁵⁴

Closely related to this assumption of the First Gospel's composite nature is another important presupposition – to the effect that one does not find in this Gospel “a systematically

⁴⁸ Even the difficult phrase μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ - “after his rising” - has sound textual support. See 9.2.1.

⁴⁹ See 9.2.1.

⁵⁰ See Appendix E – The Identity of “the Holy City”.

⁵¹ Cf. the three hours of darkness and the tearing of the Temple curtain (Matt 27:45, 51). See also Chapter 7 – The Prodigia.

⁵² It is as if the writer is declaring that at the moment of Jesus' death the End came about. Yet clearly it did not! However, it could well be that the writer intends these words to startle. He wants his surprised readers to ask: “But how can these things be?” See the remarks about the concept of “Defamiliarization” in Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*, 33-35.

⁵³ For review of arguments for and against Matt 27:51b-53 having a pre-Matthean origin, see 9.3.2.5.1.

⁵⁴ See Chapter 5. As a corollary to this there is in the thesis some marked hesitation to make use of the Narrative Criticism approach to the Gospels. For discussion of Narrative Criticism see below, pages 22-29.

developed body of thought.”⁵⁵ In their commentary on the First Gospel, Davies and Allison stress this point. They do so by drawing a parallel between Matthew and the Pharisees. Thus, “they (the Pharisees) were ... excavators in the inexhaustible mine of divine revelation (the Torah given on Mount Sinai) and brought to light the treasures beneath the surface.”⁵⁶ Accordingly, Davies and Allison suggest that, “[W]e should think something similar of Matthew. He too did not offer a theological system as an expression of his faith in Jesus. Rather he drew upon and applied texts he had reflected upon – the OT, Mark, Q, M.”⁵⁷

Another similar and important point, also stressed by Davies and Allison, underlies the approach of this thesis to the understanding of Matt 27:51b-53 – namely, that the assumption that Matthew reflects the unsystematic way of thinking prevalent among Pharisees virtually rules out the possibility of detecting schematization in the First Gospel. Contending that “messianism is endemically revolutionary,” Davies and Allison argue that, “Contradiction is endemic to any messianic situation. The newness of messianism does not make for logical rigidity or consistency.”⁵⁸ Hence, in their opinion, those who propose schematizations to cut the Gordian knots of Matthew’s contradictions “do not sufficiently recognize the complexity of the historical situation which Matthew’s faced.”⁵⁹ As an illustration of the contradictions found in the First Gospel Davies and Allison point to the difficulty in attempting to reconcile Matt 10:5 with Matt 28:18-20.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ From W.D. Davies & Dale C. Allison, *Matthew* (ICC; 3 vols.; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988, 1991, 1997) 3:704. This is reflected in the fact that there is no general agreement concerning the structure of the First Gospel. See 1.6 below.

⁵⁶ Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:705.

⁵⁷ Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:705. For discussion of the relation of Matt 27:51b-53 to M (the “Special Material” in Matthew’s Passion Narrative) see 6.2 below.

⁵⁸ Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:707.

⁵⁹ Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:707.

⁶⁰ Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:707. I would suggest the following as further examples, if not of contradictions, yet of difficulties found in the First Gospel: (i) Jesus’ understanding of the timing of the End Time (cf. 10:23; 16:28; 26:64); (ii) The view of the End Time found in Matt 27:51b-53 and that depicted in Matt 24:4-25:46; (iii) The relationship between the Kingdom of God and the Church; (iv) the question of whether the group associated with the calling of the 12 disciples is to be identified with the Church; (v) The relationship between the kingdom of God and the covenant; (vi) The identification of the Temple’s torn curtain; and (vii) The significance of the title, Son of God, when applied to Jesus. Matt 1:21 is ambiguous. (For the deity of Jesus see Christopher J. H. Wright, “Christ and the Old Testament,” in Murray A. Rae et al, “Christ in / and the Old Testament,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 2.1 (2008): 15-16).

In recent times there has been renewed interest in two very early approaches to the interpretation of Scripture – typology and Jewish midrash. In the thesis I will not adhere to, or be bound by, the use of either of these approaches. However, in attempting to understand this unique pericope, Matt 27:51b-53, I feel that some knowledge of the existence of these approaches should be kept in mind. Hence the following brief comments about typology and midrash.

Typology

P. J. Cahill speaks of typology as “[O]ne specific mode of the larger category of interpretation in which a present event, person, situation, or thing suggests a likeness to an event [like the Exodus], person [cf. David], situation, or thing [cf. the Tabernacle / Temple] of the past.”⁶¹ In other words, in typology a past tradition is reinterpreted in the light of new experience – reinterpreted in such a way as to make the past tradition (the type or pattern)⁶² relevant to the contemporary situation (the antitype).⁶³

The NT Scriptures are replete with typology.⁶⁴ That typology pervades the NT Scriptures is according to Cahill, not surprising since in OT times earlier documents were reinterpreted in later writings.⁶⁵ Basic to typology is the belief in the existence of God who shapes human existence and human history. This big picture of God’s overruling providence is

⁶¹ P. Joseph Cahill, “Hermeneutical Implications of Typology,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44 (1982): 267.

⁶² For comment on the terms “Type” and “Antitype” see Paul M. Hoskins, *That Scripture might be Fulfilled: Typology and the Death of Christ* (Longwood, Fla.: Xulon Press, 2009), 27-29.

⁶³ Contrast Allegory, “another type of interpretation which seeks latent meanings, which never seeks a correspondence between events, persons, and historical situations but is always an attempt to find a deeper meaning in one narrative or text.” (Cahill, “Hermeneutical Implications of Typology,” 273. See also Hoskins, *That Scripture might be Fulfilled*, 30-33).

⁶⁴ See Stephen’s speech in Acts 7:2-60; See also 1 Cor. 10:1-11; Rom 5:12-21; 1Peter 3:20-21; Heb 5:1-10; 7:1-10; 8:6-13; John 3:14; and so on. According to Davies and Allison, the First Gospel “displays a very striking Moses typology. It is especially strong in the infancy narrative and the SM [Son of Man] and indeed shapes all of chapters 1-7. It is also definitely present in the great thanksgiving of 11:25-30, in the narrative of the transfiguration, and in the concluding verses, 28:16-20.” (Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:719). Some suggest that typology helps to understand Matthew’s use of Hos 11:1 in Matt 2:13-15. See G. K. Beale, “The Use of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15: One more Time,” *Journal Evangelical Theological Society* 55 (2012): 697-715.

⁶⁵ Cahill, “Hermeneutical Implications of Typology,” 269. For the suggestion that the prophet Hosea has reinterpreted Numbers 23 & 24 see Beale, “The Use of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15.”

foundational. Thus, it is the divine activity that establishes the types and the antitypes. However, it is the task of the interpreter to discover and express this relationship. In other words, in typology there is a subjective hermeneutic act.⁶⁶

Typology also sees a historical continuity between type and antitype. In its own time and place the type represents an acceptable level of truth but hints at more to come. This “more” is established, and further developed and heightened, by the antitype. Further, in the NT typology has a christocentric dimension. Thus the types in the OT coalesce into the one antitype, the person of Christ, who realizes the eschatological dimensions of the biblical promise.⁶⁷ In other words, “Typology is not an exegetical method but rather the result of a conviction that salvation had taken place in the end-time through Jesus Christ.”⁶⁸

Finally, the question may be asked: does typology lie behind the origin and purpose of Matt 27:51b-53? Thus, what past events are suggested by Matt 27:51b-53? With regard to shaking – that is, to an earthquake – the following OT references may be noted: Amos 8:8-9; Hag 2:6; and perhaps Joel 2:10. Ezekiel 37 is particularly apposite - see Ezek 37:6⁶⁹ (cf. Ezek 38:19). The opening of tombs and the resurrection of many holy ones could conceivably have been suggested by Ezek 37:1-14.⁷⁰ The fact that after their resurrection the holy ones later entered Jerusalem (Matt 27:53) could reflect Ezek 37:12 where the Lord speaks of bringing his exiled people back to their own land. However, according to Matt 27:51b-53, the raised holy ones are not in exile but are near to Jerusalem. Further, and importantly, Ezek 37:1-14 relates a prophet’s vision. It is not an account of an actual event of history. Accordingly, while it is possible that typology has played a part in the creation of Matt 27:51b-53 yet, to my mind, this

⁶⁶ According to Cahill, “Hermeneutical Implications of Typology,” 274: “Typology exhibits the creativity that we associate with poetry or indeed with the creation of art. Typological thinking does not so much uncover as create a meaning which links the present to the past and still looks forward to the future.” According to Cahill, this creativity in effect makes “history into theophany,” (Cahill, “Hermeneutical Implications of Typology,” 275).

⁶⁷ See Cahill, “Hermeneutical Implications of Typology,” 274.

⁶⁸ See Cahill, “Hermeneutical Implications of Typology,” 274. For discussion of the belief that Jesus, the Christ, is to be found in the OT Scriptures, see R. W. L. Moberly, “Christ in All the Scriptures? The Challenge of Reading the Old Testament as Christian Scripture,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 1 (2007): 79-100; Rae et al, “Christ in / and the Old Testament,” 1-22.

⁶⁹ The “rattling” may have been caused by an earthquake. The LXX translation is “καὶ ἰδοὺ σεισμός”.

⁷⁰ This is discussed more fully in 9.3.2.5.1. See also Appendix D: “Legendary Jewish Interpretations of Ezekiel 37:1-14.”

seems unlikely. Another explanation for the origin of this unique pericope is needed. Thus, could the origin of Matt 27:51b-53 perhaps be attributed to midrash?

Midrash

In recent decades the importance of midrash in understanding, not just Judaism, but also Jesus and early Christianity, has been increasingly recognized. The term “midrash” denotes an ancient Jewish hermeneutic⁷¹ the aim of which was to contemporize tradition – that is, to interpret and apply ancient Scripture to people’s daily lives.⁷² The basic question was: “What does Scripture want to say for life today?” It was believed among the Rabbis that the answer would be revealed to those who knew how to search the Scriptures.

This searching, interpretation and application of the Scriptures to daily life was achieved not just by comment on the Scriptures but, in some cases, even by rewriting the tradition. Thus, in their searching of the Scriptures the Rabbis did not hesitate to change the word order, to make new sentences, to use different vocalizations, to split words or to group material together.⁷³ There was, accordingly, no systematic unity or agreement among the Rabbis.⁷⁴ In some cases, their conclusions may even have contradicted the original sense of the Scriptures. The important thing however was that there was always to be some connection, implied or explicit, between the biblical text and the new midrashic composition.

That some midrash is to be found in the NT is not in dispute.⁷⁵ Rather, the debate is about its nature and extent. J. W. Doeve, for instance, suggests that Mark 13 (and parallels) with

⁷¹ According to Miguel P. Fernández, “Midrash is creative interpretation of the Holy Scriptures of the kind most typically found in rabbinic literature” (Miguel P. Fernández, “Midrash and the New Testament: A Methodology for the Study of Gospel Midrash,” in *The New Testament and Rabbinic Literature* (ed. Reimund Bieringer: Leiden: Brill, 2010), 367.)

⁷² “A midrash is a work that attempts to make a text of scripture understandable, useful, and relevant for a later generation.” (Addison G. Wright, *The Literary Genre Midrash* (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, Pauline Fathers and Brothers of the Society of Saint Paul, 1967), 74). Midrash relating to conduct was called *Halakhah*; that which edified, comforted and admonished, *Haggadah*.

⁷³ See Wright, *The Literary Genre Midrash*, 74. See also Carol Bakhos, ed., *Current Trends in the Study of Midrash* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

⁷⁴ “Always divergent opinions are possible.” (See J. W. Doeve, *Jewish Hermeneutics in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts* (Assen: van Gorcum, 1954), 93.)

⁷⁵ See 1 Cor 10:1-5; 2 Cor 3; Gal 3:16. “(T)his type of interpretation [midrash] is found also in the New Testament and other early Christian literature, where it has a special purpose of its own. In our view, early Christian midrash is not concerned with a neutral or open inquiry of the Scriptures, but is conditioned by the prior assumption that all Scriptures bear witness to Jesus Christ.” (Fernández, “Midrash and the New Testament,” 367).

its many OT quotations could be spoken of as a “*haggadah* upon the end of the world” rather than as an “apocalypse”.⁷⁶ With regard to the First Gospel, D. C. Olson suggests that Jesus’ parable in Matt 22:1-14 may be understood as a Matthean midrash.⁷⁷ In Olson’s opinion, “Matthew evidently had at his disposal a traditional parable of Jesus about a man’s persistent and frustrating efforts to fill up his house with banquet guests”.⁷⁸ According to Olson, Matthew, on the one hand, has reshaped this traditional parable of Jesus under the influence of the first chapter of Zephaniah. The vagueness of Zeph 1:7, which speaks of the Lord’s guests, provided an opening for Matthew’s midrashic imagination. Zeph 1:9-18 further suggested the destruction of Jerusalem in the day of the Lord’s wrath (v. 18; cf. Matt 22:7). However, on the other hand, in reshaping Jesus’ original parable Matthew has, Olson suggests, also been influenced by the Book of Watchers (*I En.* 1-36). Thus, it is possible that in the reshaped parable Matthew somehow equates false disciples in his Christian community with Azazel, a leader of the fallen angels mentioned in *I En.* 10:4a, who is bound hand and foot and thrown into the darkness (cf. Matt 22:13).

Not surprisingly Olson concludes that “Matthew’s parable of the Great Feast is a complex composition. In Matthew’s hands, exegetical readings of Zephaniah and *I Enoch* were combined with a traditional parable of Jesus to create a new form of this parable, a king-mashal functioning as a midrash on Zephaniah / *I Enoch*.”⁷⁹ He then draws the following conclusions:

If we concentrate our attention on the king-mashal tradition, Matthew looks like an early rabbi, spinning out new forms of old parables with the intention of interpreting Scripture. If we concentrate rather on the apocalyptic background, Matthew writes like a latter-day contributor to the Enochic tradition. Matthew’s handiwork is a healthy reminder that Jewish Christians of the first century were drinking deeply from more than one stream.⁸⁰

In the light of the above comments about midrash, certain points may be noted about the First Gospel and especially about Matt 27:51b-53. First, if Matthew used the midrash

⁷⁶ See Doeve, *Jewish Hermeneutics in the Synoptics and Acts*, 49.

⁷⁷ See Daniel C. Olson, “Matthew 22:1-14 as Midrash,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 67 (2005): 435-453.

⁷⁸ See Olson, “Matthew 22:1-14 as Midrash,” 442.

⁷⁹ Olson, “Matthew 22:1-14 as Midrash,” 453.

⁸⁰ Olson, “Matthew 22:1-14 as Midrash,” 453.

approach this could explain the disjointedness of the First Gospel. Matthew was not averse to incorporating differing earlier traditions into his story about Jesus. To use Olson's words: Matthew drank deeply from more than one stream. Midrash could also explain the obtuseness of some of the contents of the First Gospel. It could well be that those who initially read, or heard read, the First Gospel understood the background to Matt 27:51b-53 and so comprehended the pericope's meaning and purpose. Since today the background to the passage is not known, its origin and purpose is a mystery. In this regard the following comment by R. Le Deaut is apposite:

The New Testament inherited an *interpreted* Bible in which midrash played a large role; many of the aggadic exegeses had become common and traditional and were continually repeated in the liturgy of the synagogues. This explains how our authors were able to appeal to text whose overtones are lost for us and to traditions for which we have to struggle to recover even the slightest echo. To present Jesus and his work they used a richer palette than the Old Testament alone, as well as very wide room for play in their use of the data.⁸¹

Midrash could also possibly help to explain the origin of the pericope, Matt 27:51b-53. Beginning from Ezekiel's vision of the dead being raised and returning to their own land, Matthew may have, via the use of midrash, developed the thought that at the moment of Jesus' death, there was an earthquake, tombs were opened, holy ones were raised to new life, and that eventually these raised ones entered Jerusalem, the Holy City, and appeared to many. Further, Ezek 37 also speaks of the eventual unity of God's ancient people (verses 15-28). The fact that Matt 27:54 speaks of the Roman soldiers, through witnessing the earthquake and the events associated with it, being converted to faith in Jesus as the Son of God is thus significant. The reader is perhaps being invited to see here the creation of an even greater unity – Jews (Matt 27:51b-53) and gentiles (Matt 27:54) both being united through the transforming power of God released by Jesus' death.

However, in the thesis it is argued that it is unlikely that Matt 27:51b-53 is a Matthean creation. Rather, it is argued that the pericope is best understood as a fragment of a very early

⁸¹ Roger Le Deaut, "Apropos a Definition of Midrash," review of Addison G. Wright, *The Literary Genre Midrash, Interpretation* 25 (1971): 259-82; at 277 (Emphasis original). In fn 65 of his article Le Deaut writes, "cf. the examples in which the verb *graphein* is not in fact followed by any quotation [listed in Doeve, *Jewish Hermeneutics in the Synoptics and Acts*, 96 (namely, Matt 26:24; Mark 9:12; Luke 18:31; 21:22)]: Jesus must be appealing to a traditional exegesis and applying it to himself."

Christian passion account which Matthew has incorporated into his Gospel. Of course, the early, unknown Christian(s) who created Matt 27:51b-53 could well have done so midrashically.⁸²

Finally, an understanding of midrash may help to explain how Matthew could include Matt 27:51b-53, and yet seem to distance himself from some of its implications. No matter how Matt 27:51b-53 is understood it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the pericope declares that at the moment of Jesus' death the hoped-for End, a supernatural transformation of reality, broke into the present. Many dead holy ones were raised. Yet clearly for Matthew the End is yet to come (see Matt 28:19-20).⁸³

Narrative Criticism⁸⁴

It has been noted⁸⁵ that the thesis relies on some assumptions associated with the earlier Historical Critical approach to Scripture. Aspects of the Historical Critical method - source, form and redaction criticism studies - are still pursued today. However, in many circles the stress is now laid on the narrative character of a text - especially that of the Gospels. Basic to this approach is the contention that each individual Gospel is to be read from its beginning to end as if it is a unity. It is assumed that there is a single plot running from the beginning to the end. And while in the story there may be conflicts, yet eventually these are all resolved. Further, Narrative Criticism studies the text that now exists, in its finished form, irrespective of what sources underlie it. The Gospels are not to be studied by dissecting them into units of tradition. Individual passages are to be interpreted in terms of their contribution to the story as a whole.

Consequently with regard to the Gospels, the four Evangelists, according to Narrative Criticism, are to be regarded as authors, not just editors. This has a number of important implications. First, it means that the Gospels are to be studied as general literature – that is, as

⁸² If Matthew has used midrash then questions have to be raised about the historical value of the First Gospel. See Robert H. Gundry, "A Theological Postscript," in Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1982), 623-40. See also Fernández, "Midrash and the New Testament," 369. The question of the "historicity" or otherwise of the statements of the pericope Matt 27:51b-53 is discussed in chapter 10 of the thesis.

⁸³ Cf. also Matt 24:30-31; Matt 25:31-46.

⁸⁴ For explanations of the Narrative Critical approach to the Gospels see Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* Powell, *Methods for Matthew*, 44-82; Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*.

⁸⁵ See above, p. 11.

narratives, as stories. Matthew's Gospel is, accordingly, understood as a theological statement about Jesus in story form. Since it is assumed that Matthew's theology is consistent, so it is assumed that a consistency pervades his whole story. Further, the style of expression used reveals what the author wishes to say. In other words, the Gospel narratives are to be understood first and foremost on their own terms. Thus, the interpretative key to a text is to be found within the text itself, not in some background information.⁸⁶

It is to be noted that this approach to a text has led to the charge that Narrative Criticism is antihistorical and so undermines the historical grounding of Christian faith. Thus some assert that in Narrative Criticism, "(T)he Gospels are not treated as testimonies to God's action in history but are envisioned as having some intrinsic worth in and of themselves, apart from that of the events they describe."⁸⁷ M. A. Powell refutes this charge that Narrative Criticism is at odds with the goals of historical interpretation. Still, he does concede that "to the extent that narrative criticism is *non*historical (or, better, nonreferential), its results might be regarded as incomplete."⁸⁸ However, he insists that "this objection merely indicates the limitations of the method without invalidating what contributions it does offer."⁸⁹ In his view, one could argue that no one approach (source, form, redaction, and so on) is sufficient for the "full task of interpretation."⁹⁰

In the second place, Narrative Criticism introduces various concepts such as "implied author", "implied reader", "Narrator" and "Narratee". It does so because it maintains that to determine the meaning of a story it is not necessary to know the historical situation of the real author or of the actual reader(s).⁹¹ The narrative itself is sufficient. Thus, the implied author's point of view can be determined without considering anything extrinsic to the narrative. The

⁸⁶ This important assertion of Narrative Criticism will be challenged in this thesis. Accordingly, it will be argued that to understand Matt 27:51b-53 it is helpful to go outside the First Gospel and to seek, if possible, background historical information.

⁸⁷ See Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* 96.

⁸⁸ Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* 96 (emphasis original).

⁸⁹ Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* 97.

⁹⁰ See Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* 97.

⁹¹ In fact, and importantly, independent access to the author, and the initial readers, is not available. All that is available is the text with the implied author – the author in the text. This is particularly relevant to the study of the four Gospels for they are all, in effect, anonymous writings. Likewise, the exact circumstances of those for whom they were initially written are unknown.

story is complete in itself. It means what it means. This is so even if it is known that the real author thought differently from what is in the story.

Likewise, Narrative Criticism interprets a text from the perspective of an idealized implied reader. It is thus not necessary to know the historical situation of the actual reader(s). “The implied reader” is a hypothetical concept. It is the reader presupposed by the narrative itself. Thus, the “implied reader” must be reconstructed from what is found in the text. M. A. Powell defines the “implied reader” as “(A)n imaginary person who always responds to the text with whatever knowledge, understanding, action or emotion is called for.”⁹² Further, Narrative Criticism reads the text as the implied reader would do. Thus, “the goal of narrative criticism is to discern the meaning of a text from the perspective of its implied reader.”⁹³ Consequently, it is necessary to know everything that the text assumes the reader knows and to “forget” (or to “bracket out”) everything that the text does not assume the reader knows.

Accordingly, “Narrative criticism demands that the modern reader have the historical information that the text assumes of its implied reader. ... It may also include recognition of social and political realities that lie behind the story.”⁹⁴ The implied author insists that the reader adopts a point of view consistent with that of the narrative. Consequently, Matthew’s implied reader is expected to know the Old Testament, and to know certain things about the Roman world, but he is not to know material from the other Gospels,⁹⁵ or doctrinal propositions from later Christianity. The implied reader accepts that God rules the world, that He guides by dreams, prophets and inspired scripture; he knows that there are demons who serve Satan; and, especially important, the implied reader accepts the beliefs and standards of the historical setting in which the narrative was produced (such as the institution of slavery).⁹⁶ Modern

⁹² Powell, *Methods for Matthew*, 60.

⁹³ Powell, *Methods for Matthew*, 60.

⁹⁴ Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* 97.

⁹⁵ W. Carter however suggests that the authorial audience, comprising followers of Jesus, would have been familiar with such traditions as Q (material common to Matthew and Luke but not to Mark), the Gospel of Mark, and M (material unique to Matthew). See Warren Carter, *Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (rev. ed.; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 47.

⁹⁶ See Powell, *Methods for Matthew*, 65-66. See also Margaret Davies, *Matthew* (2nd ed., Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), 24.

readers live in the world outside the story. Accordingly, the story Matthew tells should be interpreted in the light of the value system that its readers are assumed to possess.

The following words from M. A. Powell reinforce, and clarify, these important points:

(N)arrative critics may claim that Matthew's implied reader is expected to regard slavery as an acceptable social institution, or to believe that ghosts are real and dangerous beings, or to think that the dominion of men over women is divinely ordained (and therefore good), or any number of other things that many readers today would have trouble accepting. The point for literary criticism is not that modern readers should feel compelled to believe such things about the real world in which they live (the world outside the story); the point is simply that the story Matthew tells should be interpreted in light of the value system that its readers are assumed to possess.⁹⁷

This is all well and good. But it reflects a rather "Western" orientation and viewpoint. Thus, the question arises: Who decides what is the "real" world? For many people today throughout the world, "Ghosts are real and dangerous beings!" Consequently, what makes the Scriptures attractive, relevant and meaningful to many today is their reference to demons, exorcisms, and so on.

With regard to the message a text communicates it is important to note that the Historical Critical Method and Narrative Criticism operate from very different approaches. The goal of Historical-Critical study had been basically to elucidate the meaning which a particular text is thought to have had at a given stage in its composition. The text may be likened to a window – it enables the reader to discover something about another time and place, to discover the text's meaning back then, in a different age. Accordingly, for the Historical Critical Method discovery of the original meaning of the text is of crucial importance.

Narrative Criticism's approach to a text and the communication of its message is, in a sense, a reaction against interpretations that are excessively author-oriented. Thus, according to M. A. Powell:

Narrative criticism, then, does evaluate its interpretations according to objective criteria, but these criteria are defined in terms of the intention of *the text* rather than the intention of *the author*. The text, of course, includes what we have called the implied author and so takes into consideration authorial intent in so far as this has been incorporated in to the text itself. ... The real authors of biblical books are not available for interview, so any reconstruction of their intention that goes beyond what can be found in the text is bound to be hypothetical. For narrative criticism, the standard for

⁹⁷ Powell, *Methods for Matthew*, 66.

interpretation is the intention of the text to which we have access today, rather than the supposed intention of the authors, to which contemporary access is denied.⁹⁸

Thus, for Narrative Criticism the text is like a mirror. The main interest lies in what readers see and experience relative to their own world.

This thesis maintains that Matt 27:51b-53 presents a contradiction, an inconsistency, about the timing of the End Time event. Thus, Matt 27:51b-53 declares that events associated with the End Time occurred at the moment of Jesus' death, whereas in Matt 24:4-25:46 it is clear that such End Time events are still future, and will occur when the risen Jesus returns from heaven as the glorified Son of Man. The following comments by M. A. Powell, while not dealing directly with Matt 27:51b-53 indicates how Narrative Criticism could perhaps handle this contradiction, this inconsistency. According to Powell:

From the perspective of the implied reader, it will make no difference whether the narrative form was created accidentally or intentionally. It is there, and the reader must deal with it. The presence of inconsistencies in no way undermines the unity of a narrative but simply becomes one of the facets to be interpreted. They may, for instance signal gaps and ambiguities that must be explained or held in tension. This is true regardless of whether they are there by design or negligence. ... the real question is whether the poetic function of the Gospels in the form that we now have them is a worthwhile subject for investigation. If it is, the somewhat complex processes that led to the Gospel's composition will not inhibit the undertaking of such research.⁹⁹

In the light of these comments, how then do advocates of Narrative Criticism understand Matt 27:51b-53? The following may be given as some examples:

(i) Commenting on Matthew's account of Jesus' resurrection, M. A. Powell says:

The earthquake (28:2) recalls what happened at the moment of Jesus's death (27:51-54) – indeed, on that occasion, tombs were also opened and the dead were also raised. Thus, even though Matthew's narrative presents the resurrection of Jesus as “a new beginning,” it also portrays the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus as a single eschatological drama. The resurrection is both the culmination of what has happened and the start of something entirely new.¹⁰⁰

It is difficult, however, to understand how Matt 27:51b-53 helps to portray the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus as a single eschatological drama. Rather, because this pericope declares that the holy ones were raised at Jesus' death, *before* his burial and resurrection, it

⁹⁸ Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* 96 (emphasis original).

⁹⁹ Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* 92-3.

¹⁰⁰ Powell, *Methods for Matthew*, 74.

portrays the death of Jesus as the single eschatological drama. Powell's comments, to my mind, do not resolve the contradiction created by Matt 27:51b-53.

(ii) Referring to the tearing of the temple curtain, Margaret Davies notes that in the Matthaean version, "(T)hat event was also accompanied by the splitting of rocks so that 'tombs were opened and many bodies of saints who were dead arose [see Ezek. 37:7, 12-13] and, after his [Jesus'] resurrection, went out from the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many'"¹⁰¹. Davies comments:

Jesus' predictions of his suffering and death had also included predictions of his resurrection. The narrative here looks beyond the time of his death to his resurrection and pictures the saints who had died as martyrs in the past (see Dan. 7:18; 12:1-3) as fellow *witnesses*, restored from the tombs when Jesus' contemporaries had abandoned or rejected him. The narrative gives hope to the readers that those who died a martyr's death would be resurrected.¹⁰²

Who the raised holy ones were, is not known (they may have been martyrs as Davies suggests). But while they appeared to many in Jerusalem *after* Jesus' resurrection, yet their resurrection, according to the text, occurred at the moment of Jesus' *death*. To my mind Davies, in effect, acknowledges this. Thus events associated with the End Time occurred at the moment of Jesus' death. Consequently, attempting to identify the raised holy ones as martyrs does not resolve the real problem – that is, of how to reconcile this resurrection at the moment of Jesus' death with what is said concerning the End Time in passages like Matt 25:31-46.

(iii) In his literary and theological commentary on the First Gospel, David E. Garland makes some very helpful comments about the phenomena that occurred at the moment of Jesus' death. He suggests, for instance, that "(T)he risen saints' appearance in Jerusalem ... are God's witnesses against a faithless generation and city (see 12:41-42)."¹⁰³ However, since in Matt 12:41-42 Jesus is clearly referring to the final judgment this again would suggest that at Jesus' *death* events associated with the End Time occurred.

¹⁰¹ Davies, *Matthew*, 228.

¹⁰² Davies, *Matthew*, 228.

¹⁰³ David E. Garland, *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the First Gospel*. (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 261.

(iv) The difficulty which Matt 27:51b-53 creates for those who wish to understand Matthew's Gospel as setting forth a consistent message is well illustrated by these words of Warren Carter:

Earthquakes (27:51) figure prominently in scenes in which God judges enemies and sin before establishing God's reign and will. This event precedes the opening of the tombs, the raising of the bodies of those who had died, and their appearance to many in Jerusalem (27:53b) after Jesus' resurrection (27:53a).

This latter material recalls the audience to several scenes from the scriptural tradition. In Ezek 37, Ezekiel pictures the restoration of God's people from exile as God's resuscitating a valley of dry bones. Daniel associates resurrection with the final judgment in Dan 12:1-2, with some being raised to everlasting life and others, to condemnation. Resurrection is one of the events that belongs to the new age, that signifies God's action in bringing this age marked by sin, death, and Satan's power to an end with the establishment of God's reign and will.

Jesus' resurrection precedes that of the saints (27:53a). The scene emphasizes his resurrection as the first in the new age, enabling the resurrection of others.¹⁰⁴

In order to portray Matthew's message as consistent – that is, that Jesus' resurrection is the first in the new age and so enables the resurrection of others – Carter declares that “Jesus' resurrection precedes that of the saints (27:53a).” This is a surprising statement and contradicts what the text actually says. For Matt 27:51b-53 clearly declares that at the moment of Jesus' death, before his burial and resurrection, many holy ones were raised. Accordingly, it could be argued that it was the death of Jesus which initiated the new age. It would seem that Carter has followed the NRSV translation. This is unfortunate as the NRSV is misleading. In v. 53 the NRSV omits the word *καί* and transposes the phrase *μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ* to before *ἐξελεθόντος*. This leads to confusion. For, in actual fact what Matt 27:51b-53 declares is (i) that the many holy ones were raised at the moment of Jesus' death and (ii) that these *already raised* holy ones appeared in the holy city after Jesus' resurrection. Thus, Jesus has the precedence only in the matter of appearance.¹⁰⁵

Accordingly, these attempts by advocates of Narrative Criticism to bring Matt 27:51b-53 into harmony with the overall thrust of Matthew's message, while of interest, are not entirely

¹⁰⁴ Carter, *Matthew*, 197-8.

¹⁰⁵ See D. Wenham, “The Resurrection Narratives in Matthew's Gospel,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 24 (1973): 21-54. John W. Wenham, “When were the Saints raised?” *Journal of Theological Studies* 32 (1981): 150-152.

satisfactory.¹⁰⁶ Matt 27:51b-53 continues, stubbornly, to present an inconsistency which must either “be explained or held in tension.”¹⁰⁷ This thesis thus suggests that to understand the origin and purpose of Matt 27:51b-53 it is helpful to go outside the Gospel of Matthew and to note “insights gained from historical criticism.”¹⁰⁸ The possibility that it is a fragment of an early Jewish Christian passion tradition needs at least to be investigated.

B) The Purpose of Matt 27:51b-53.

With regard to the purpose of Matt 27:51b-53, I would acknowledge, along with Narrative Criticism, that today it is not really possible to discover the intention of the actual author.¹⁰⁹ Accordingly, answers to the question of the purpose of Matt 27:51b-53 are characterized by polyvalence. Thus, throughout the thesis a number of suggestions about the purpose of the pericope will be noted and discussed – e.g., that it speaks of a proleptic *parousia*; that it is a Matthean creation, with no historical reality, in order to explain the accomplishments of Jesus’ death; that it explains the significance of the temple’s torn curtain, and so on.

Concerning the purpose of Matt 27:51b-53 I would agree that in his Gospel Matthew writes a story, a narrative, and that this pericope needs to be understood in the wider context of Matthew’s story. The main character of Matthew’s narrative is, of course, Jesus. To understand Jesus, and his specialness, not just the titles designating him as Son of God, Son of Man, and so on, but his teachings and actions (healings, exorcisms, stilling a storm on the lake, and so on) must also be considered and their significance weighed. The plot of the narrative centres around the events leading eventually to Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. This plot involves various

¹⁰⁶ It is readily acknowledged that the approach of Narrative Criticism does indeed bring new, helpful insights to Matthew’s Gospel as well as other Scriptures. Scripture however may be approached from many different angles. No one approach has a monopoly.

¹⁰⁷ For these comments about the presence of inconsistencies in a narrative see Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* 92.

¹⁰⁸ Interestingly, when commenting on the literary use of Symbolism and Narrative Criticism, M. A. Powell says something similar. He notes that the symbols relating to cultural range pose a special problem for narrative critics, for “(A)ccess to the meaning of these symbols is not gained through the narrative itself, for the implied author simply assumes the reader will understand them. If modern critics are to read the narrative as the implied reader they must *at this point rely on insights gained from historical criticism.*” (Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* 29. Emphasis added). This, in effect, is what I suggest must happen when attempting to understand Matt 27:51b-53.

¹⁰⁹ If it was possible the mystery would be solved. The debate would be ended!

areas of tension and conflict. Jesus and his disciples do not always understand each other. Jesus comes into conflict with Israel's religious leaders, and eventually with the representative of Roman authority. In addition to all this, Jesus is depicted as being in conflict with spiritual powers, with Satan and his temptations.¹¹⁰ Accordingly, much of the narrative's plot revolves around the question of whose authority is ultimate – God's or Satan's? In other words, whose rule, whose kingdom – God's or Satan's – will prevail.¹¹¹ Thus, in the narrative Jesus is portrayed as being always obedient to his heavenly Father's will (as revealed in Scripture).

Further, and importantly, in the thesis Jesus' obedience is understood in terms of covenant.¹¹² A change in Matthew's emphasis may be noted. Matthew initially depicts Jesus as proclaiming the coming of the kingdom of heaven (Matt 4:17; 12:25-28). However, when Jesus explains the need for his death, Matthew depicts Jesus as using the concept of covenant (Matt 26:27-28). The concept of covenant makes clear that Jesus understands himself as the vassal and that his death is an act of obedience.¹¹³ Jesus, the covenant vassal, acts on behalf of others. His obedience to the will of his Heavenly Father results eventually in his crucifixion. However, because he has been faithful to the end, Jesus is vindicated. He is raised to honour and glory. All judgment is entrusted to him, the Son of Man, who one unknown day in the future will descend from heaven (Matt 25:31-46). Above all, through his obedience Jesus has defeated Satan and established God's Kingdom (cf. Matt 28:16-20).

If Matthew has written a narrative, a story, about Jesus the question arises: why and for whom has he written this story? The suggestion that he writes for some "implied reader" is helpful. Yet this suggestion could restrict the scope of the story, especially if the "implied reader" must be reconstructed from what is found in the text. To my mind, what is found in the text needs to be seen in the light of much which had happened, and was happening, in and

¹¹⁰ Cf. Jesus' temptations, Matt 4:1-11.

¹¹¹ In recent times the importance of understanding this conflict between Jesus and Satan in relation to the Kingdom of God has been stressed by Craig A. Evans, "Inaugurating the Kingdom of God and Defeating the Kingdom of Satan," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 15 (2005): 49-75. Commenting on Mark 3:23-27 (cf. Matt 12:25-37) Evans says: "Comparing a divided Satan to a divided kingdom strongly implies that Jesus understands his great foe as the head of a kingdom that, by further implication, opposes God's kingdom." (Evans, "Inaugurating the Kingdom of God," 67).

¹¹² This contention is foundational throughout the thesis. It is particularly argued and developed in 2.6 and 2.7 below.

¹¹³ For discussion of this point see 11.3.6. See also Appendix J: "The Concept of Covenant."

around Matthew's community. This information is not explicit in the Gospel itself but must be sought out by historical investigation. This is particularly true with regards to comprehending Matt 27:51b-53.

It is generally agreed that Matthew is writing around about 85 C.E.¹¹⁴ This means that belief about Jesus has already been in existence, developing and spreading, for a good forty or so years. Accordingly, what Matthew says in his Gospel would not necessarily have been new to the members of his community.¹¹⁵ They could well have heard much of it before.¹¹⁶

Further, there is evidence that in the first forty or so years of belief about Jesus, perhaps many differing understandings of Jesus and his significance circulated widely.¹¹⁷ Accordingly, some in the very early Church, and in Matthew's community, may have needed to have the way of God expounded to them more accurately.¹¹⁸ Some tending to antinomianism may have needed to be warned.¹¹⁹ Others, whose initial zeal had begun to wane, perhaps needed to hear the parable of the four soils.¹²⁰ In particular some, perhaps many, in Matthew's community needed to be fortified against criticism from unbelieving Jews who had rejected Jesus as Messiah and so denied his resurrection (cf. Matt 28:11-15). Further, in the thesis it will also be argued that Matthew writes to correct some who, it seems, had a wrong understanding of the End Time, and to encourage some others to be open to the Gentile mission. Matthew attempts to do this by incorporating into his Gospel the early tradition found in Matt 27:51b-53.

My suggestions about the pericope's purpose reflect my response as a modern day reader. They also, especially the suggestion that Matt 27:51b-53 may be understood in the wider context of covenant, reflect something of my Reformed Theological background. These suggestions, and conjectures, about the origin and purpose of Matt 27:51b-53 will no doubt be

¹¹⁴ See Chapter one below.

¹¹⁵ No doubt the members of Matthew's community would have been grateful to him for giving them a more "systematic", and permanent, account of the life of Jesus their Lord and what faith in him entailed.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Ulrich Luz's suggestion that Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer could well be that used by his community in its worship. (See Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Continental Commentary* (trans. W. C. Linss; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985), 77.

¹¹⁷ Unless Luke 1:1-4 is an exaggeration, there seems to have been initially numerous accounts of Jesus and the beginnings of the Christian Faith.

¹¹⁸ See Acts 18:24-26.

¹¹⁹ See Matt 7:21-27.

¹²⁰ See Matt 13:1-23.

challenged as being abstract, too speculative and lacking concrete proof. Unfortunately, the very uniqueness of this pericope makes it difficult to be otherwise. Nevertheless, I offer my suggestions as a new and different approach to the understanding of this obscure pericope.

Brief review of Scholarly Literature Consulted

The amount of scholarly literature relating to the pericope, Matt 27:51b-53, could not be described as of flood proportions. Yet in recent times there has been a steady stream of articles and papers exploring various aspects of this unique passage.¹²¹ The discovery towards the end of the 19th century of the so-called *Gospel of Peter* sparked renewed interest in Matt 27:51b-53. In some quarters this interest has continued up to recent times.¹²² In the 1970's Matt 27:51b-53 was also re-examined in the light of Codex Bobbiensis. This Latin manuscript, discovered in 1837, contains portions of Matthew and Mark. At Mark 16:4 it has a significant addition which reflects Matt 27:51b-53.¹²³

With regard to the origin of Matt 27:51b-53 the scholarly literature contains a bewildering number of differing suggestions. The assertion that the origin of Matt 27:51b-53 lies within the First Gospel and that the passage is, for some reason, a misplaced resurrection account, once enjoyed much support.¹²⁴ In recent times, there is more agreement that the origin of Matt 27:51b-53 lies outside the First Gospel.¹²⁵ This could mean that Matthew himself

¹²¹ Among major contributors the following may be mentioned: Donald P. Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew: A Redactional Study* (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 39; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1975); Maria Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu in der Stunde seines Todes? Zur Botschaft von Matt 27. 51b-53* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1978); Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo, 27, 51b-53*.

¹²² J. Dominic Crossan, for instance, relates Matt 27:51b-53 to a very early passion narrative which he calls the *Cross Gospel*. Traces of this *Cross Gospel*, Crossan argues, are to be found in the *Gospel of Peter*. See his *The Cross that Spoke: The Origins of the Passion Narrative* (1st ed.; San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988).

¹²³ See D. W. Palmer, "The Origin, Form, and Purpose of Mark XVI.4 in Codex Bobbiensis," *Journal of Theological Studies* 27 (1976): 113-122.

¹²⁴ See Benjamin A. Johnson, "Empty Tomb Tradition in the Gospel of Peter" (Th.D. diss., Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University, 1965); see also Delvin D. Hutton, "The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51b-53)" (Th.D. diss., Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University, 1970). This approach has been renewed, to a certain degree, in more recent times by J. Dominic Crossan. See his *The Cross that Spoke*, and his *Four Other Gospels: Shadows on the Contours of Canon* (1st ed.; New York: Winston Press, 1985).

¹²⁵ See Donald P. Senior, "The Death of Jesus and the Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51-53)," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 38 (1976): 312-329.

created the pericope and added it to his story of Jesus.¹²⁶ The other alternative, argued for in the thesis, is that Matt 27:51b-53 has a pre-Matthean origin, and that it existed in some form independent of the First Gospel until Matthew incorporated it into his passion narrative. Accordingly, since the 1970s there has been a number of papers arguing for, and against, Matt 27:51b-53 being a Matthean creation.¹²⁷

In contrast to the debate and ambiguity about the origin of Matt 27:51b-53, there is broad agreement about the purpose of these words. It is generally agreed that the pericope's purpose is to stress both the gravity and the accomplishments of Jesus' passion.¹²⁸ The pericope is Matthew's comment on the eschatological significance of Jesus' death,¹²⁹ although at least one writer¹³⁰ argues that the stress falls on the significance of Jesus' person rather than his work.

To my mind, however, the literature relating to Matt 27:51b-53 fails to adequately explain why the pericope declares that events associated with the End Time – the resurrection of many holy ones – occurred at the moment of Jesus' death. The centrality and significance of Jesus' death seems to me to have been overlooked. Accordingly, in the thesis I attempt an explanation of why there is this mention of the momentous repercussions of Jesus' death. I do so by arguing that in his Gospel Matthew employs, among other things, the concept of covenant. Jesus, the Son of God, is portrayed by Matthew as the loyal vassal. In contrast, the nation of Israel which was in a covenantal relationship with God, is portrayed as an unfaithful and disobedient vassal. Accordingly, Matthew presents Jesus' passion and death not just as a

¹²⁶ This is argued by Senior, "The Death of Jesus and the Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51-53) and in his *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*. It is also argued by Ingrid Maisch, "Die österliche Dimension des Todes Jesu: Zur Osterverkündigung in Matt 27, 51-54," in *Auferstehung Jesus – Auferstehung der Christen: Deutungen des Osterglaubens* (ed. F. S. A. Vogtle, Freiburg: Herder, 1986), 96-123.

¹²⁷ For arguments that Matt 27:51b-53 has a pre-Matthean origin see especially Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The End of the Ages Has Come: An Early Interpretation of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1985). More recently Ronald L. Troxel has argued that Matt 27:51b-53 is a Matthean creation based around *1 Enoch* 93:6. See his "Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered: Its Role in the Passion Narrative, Meaning and Origin," *New Testament Studies* 48 (2002): 30-47.

¹²⁸ According to D. D. Hutton, "(T)he entire thrust of the tradition in its Matthean form is to witness to the penetration of the eschaton into history at the crucifixion of Jesus." (Hutton, "The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51b-53)", 154).

¹²⁹ See, for instance, Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*. 318; See also his "The Death of Jesus and the Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51-53)," 312-329.

¹³⁰ Troxel, "Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered," 30-47.

tragic miscarriage of justice but, above all, as a supreme act of obedience to the will of his heavenly Father. Further, in the thesis it is argued that while not explicit, yet an implied contrast between the obedience of Jesus and the disobedience of Adam may be discerned. The implication is that the death of Jesus was for all of humankind, and not just for God's ancient people, Israel. This, the thesis argues, is strengthened by the fact that according to Matthew, the Roman soldiers were converted to faith in Jesus as the Son of God by experiencing the earthquake and observing its effects. Accordingly, in the thesis it is argued that there is a connection between the death of Jesus and the nature of the ἐκκλησία which he declared he would build. This matter I feel is not adequately attended to in the scholarly literature.

Procedure

In order to give some degree of order and clarity to the thesis the following procedure will be followed. Initially, the focus will fall on the whole Gospel, its basic message, and then proceed, step by step, to concentrate on increasingly smaller sections of the Gospel, and after that especially to issues relating to the pericope, Matt 27:51b-53.¹³¹

Chapter 1

In this opening chapter questions relating to the origin, authorship, date of writing, and so on, of the First Gospel are discussed. Further, since it is argued that Matt 27:51b-53 is a fragment of a very early tradition, the composite nature of the First Gospel is especially noted. The theory of the gradual formation of Matthew and the other synoptic Gospels in connection with political events in the Roman Empire,¹³² has been largely followed.

Chapter 2

By concentrating in depth on the study of Matt 27:51b-53 the thesis runs the very real risk of inflating the importance of this pericope within the context of the whole Gospel. To avoid this distortion the attempt will be made to understand these verses in the light of the entire

¹³¹ There will however be no hard and fast division between the various sections. The substance of some will overlap with that of others. Further, although the study of Matt 27:51b-53 is complicated shortcuts are to be avoided. All avenues need to be explored even if eventually they prove to be "*cul-de-sacs*".

¹³² See Gerd Theissen, *The Gospels in Context* (trans. L. M. Maloney; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992).

Gospel. Consequently, in this second chapter attention will be especially directed to understanding the over-riding theme of the First Gospel – that is, the coming of the kingdom of heaven. Possible parallels to, and harbingers of, the “message” of Matt 27:51b-53, as well as its relation to the concept of God’s kingdom, will be noted.

Chapter 3

Since Matt 27:51b-53 rests on Matthew’s assumption that Jesus of Nazareth was Israel’s promised Messiah, chapter three of the thesis discusses significant aspects of a Jewish and Christian understanding of the Messiah. It is noted that the Christian assertion of the Messiahship of Jesus led to further division within an already fractured Judaism.

Chapter 4

In any attempt to understand the purpose of Matt 27:51b-53 it is imperative to know, as far as possible, to whom Matthew was writing. Accordingly, in this fourth chapter the thesis directs attention to the important, but controversial, question of the Gospel’s intended readership and its social structure.

Chapter 5

A basic contention of this thesis rests on what is a tentative conclusion to my argument – that the initial *Sitz im Leben* of Matt 27:51b-53 is associated with the complexity of traditions which prevailed at the beginning of the Christian Faith. Accordingly, in Chapter five a brief investigation of the beginnings of the Christian Faith is presented. The need of the early Christians for an authoritative account of Jesus’ passion is first outlined. Secondly, evidence that a primitive passion account underlies Mark’s Gospel and, by inference, also Matthew’s narrative, is noted. It is thus assumed that initially in the very early Church a number of differing, and even competing, passion and resurrection traditions may have been in vogue. Thirdly, in the remainder of the chapter attention is devoted to the important question: “What exactly gave rise to the Christian Faith?”

Chapter 6

This sixth chapter notes the position of Matt 27:51b-53, (54) and suggests, in giving a general overview of Matt 26:1-28:20, that these verses constitute a bridge, as it were, which links Jesus' passion with his burial and resurrection. In considering Matt 26:1-27:50 this chapter notes (6.1) that Matthew's passion narrative is characterized by the note of eschatological and apocalyptic fulfillment – that is, that Matthew writes as if the crucified Jesus is already the victorious Son of Man, something which is in harmony with the message of Matt 27:51b-53. It also notes (6.2) that Matt 27:51b-53 belongs to Matthew's "Special Material", a considerable amount of which occurs in these verses, Matt 26:1-28:20. It argues (i) that this reveals that Matthew had access to early sources of tradition relating specifically to Jesus' passion and its aftermath, and (ii) that belonging to Matthew's "Special Material" anchors Matt 27:51b-53 in the whole narrative relating the passion and resurrection. In considering Matt 27:55-28:20 it notes (6.3) that a parallel of similar structure exists between Matt 27:51b-53 and Matt 28:1-6. This further links Matt 27:51b-53 with all the aftermath of Jesus' death. It also further notes (6.4) that Matthew perhaps wants the women of Matt 27:55-56 to be understood not merely as witnesses to Jesus' death and burial, but also as providing a clue to the meaning of Matt 27:51b-53.

Chapter 7

In order to more fully understand the pericope, Matt 27:51b-53, chapter seven looks at two particular matters. First, consideration is given to the prodigia of Matt 27:51b-53 in relation to those mentioned in its immediate context. The chapter then notes the significance of the torn curtain of the temple, Matt 27:51a, and the reaction of the Roman soldiers, Matt 27:54, to the events occurring at Jesus' death. While controversial, it is nevertheless assumed that the Roman soldiers experienced an epiphany. They were thus "divinely" converted to faith in Jesus as the Son of God.

Secondly, this Chapter seven gives consideration to the alleged relationship between Matthew's passion-resurrection narrative and the *Gospel of Peter*. This investigation is by no means a simple exercise. In fact, it is rather complicated and involved.

Chapter 8

This chapter pursues the argument of the thesis to the effect that Matt 27:51b-53 was not originally composed by Matthew, but rather was a fragment of an early Jewish Christian tradition which Matthew has adapted and incorporated into his Gospel. In pursuing this aim the chapter notes, and comments on, a number of peculiarities relating to the question of the authorship of Matt 27:51b-53. Thus, first, it notes the significance of manuscript and textual variants. Secondly, it investigates the literary construction and unity of Matt 27:51b-53. Thirdly, the chapter considers the difficult and divisive question of the word usage in Matt 27:51b-53 in relation to other parts of the First Gospel.

Chapter 9

Chapter nine pursues the important, but complicated, issue of the provenance of the pericope, Matt 27:51b-53. It begins by briefly considering the question as to whether canonical Matt 27:51b-53 is the original text. Despite the weighty arguments of W. L. Petersen¹³³ to the contrary, it is argued that the wording found in the canonical text is original. The status, and origin, of the enigmatic phrase, μετὰ κτλ, is next considered. The conclusion reached is that μετὰ κτλ is not a later gloss but belongs to the canonical text.

The remainder of chapter nine surveys critically various suggestions about the authorship and origin of Matt 27:51b-53. It notes the importance of the discovery of Codex Bobbiensis in suggesting answers to the question of the origin of Matt 27:51b-53. Suggestions that Matt 27:51b-53 implies that Matthew had exclusive access to a pre-Matthean tradition, traces of which are still to be found in Matt 27:62-66; 28:2-4 and 28:11-15, are examined.

The important suggestion of Delvin D. Hutton¹³⁴ that the origin of Matt 27:51b-53 is related to an old Easter [Sunday] tradition, associated with the apocryphal *Gospel of Peter*, is given special consideration. In relation to Hutton's approach the complicated, but challenging, suggestions of J. Dominic Crossan¹³⁵ are also closely examined. Crossan relates Matt 27:51b-53 to an original *Cross Gospel*, traces of which he finds embedded in the *Gospel of Peter*. His

¹³³ William L. Petersen, "Romanos and the Diatessaron: Readings and Method," *New Testament Studies* 29 (1983): 484-507.

¹³⁴ Hutton, "The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Mt 27:51b-53)".

¹³⁵ Crossan, *The Cross that Spoke*, and his "The Gospel of Peter and the Canonical Gospels: Independence, Dependence, or Both?" *Forum* 1 (1998): 1-51.

suggestion that the communal resurrection of the many holy ones is connected to the alleged dogma of the harrowing of Hell, the *descensus ad inferos*, is deemed unsatisfactory.

Wolfgang Schenk's proposal that Matt 27:51b-53 originated from a Jewish-apocalyptic hymn, the roots of which went back to Ezekiel 37, while in a sense similar to the position of this thesis, is nevertheless also deemed unsatisfactory. Likewise, his suggestion that Matt 27:51b-53 is to be understood as a "prolepsis *Parousia*" is also found problematic.

The controversy produced by the suggestion that Matt 27:51b-53 is a Matthean creation and reflects OT Scriptures like Ezek 37:1-14; Zech 14:1-21 and Dan 12:1-4, is especially discussed. This suggestion however is not accepted.

Lastly, note is made of Rafael Aguirre's seminal suggestion¹³⁶ that the origin of Matt 27:51b-53 could relate to the *legendary* interpretations of OT texts, like Ezek 37:1-14; Zech 14:1-21; Dan 12:1; Isa 26 and *I En.* 96, which were allegedly current in first century C.E. Judaism. The chapter closes with a brief summary of the various issues relating to the origin of Matt 27:51b-53. It is proposed that the creation of Matt 27:51b-53 was quite early and, that in all likelihood, it was part of a Jewish Christian interpretation of Jesus' death. That this interpretation of Jesus' death may have been influenced by some Jewish eschatological hopes enshrined in legends arising from passages like Ezek 37:1-14; Zech 14:1-21; Dan 12:1-4; Isa 26:19 and so on, is acknowledged as possible. I suggest that a fragment of this very early passion account Matthew has at Matt 27:51b-53 incorporated into his Gospel.

Chapter 10

In this chapter the question of the interpretation of Matt 27:51b-53 is further broached by examining the question as to whether the events depicted in Matt 27:51b-53 are to be understood to have had any historical reality or not. The approach, which evades these issues by concentrating only on the "theological" implications of the pericope, is acknowledged to be attractive, but judged to be inimical to Matthew's message. For, as will be argued, in Matt 27:51b-53 Matthew is announcing a Gospel, Good News – that as a result of Jesus' life and death something has happened in historical time and at a place on earth – specifically that

¹³⁶ Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo, 27, 51b-53*, 1980.

human *physical* death has, not just in theological theory, but in actual historical fact, been conquered, overcome and transformed.

Chapter 11

Chapter eleven highlights the significance, meaning and purpose of Matt 27:51b-53. It does so by attempting to understand Matt 27:51b-53 in the light of the whole thrust of the First Gospel. Various suggestions about why Matthew has included Matt 27:51b-53 with its prodigia are briefly examined and found wanting. The chapter then argues that the concept of Israel as God's covenant people underlies Matthew's narrative. Matt 27:51b-53 must therefore be understood in the context of the concept of covenant.¹³⁷ There is, accordingly, comment about covenant and its implications. The significance of John the Baptist and his baptism of Jesus is especially noted.

Thus, it is argued that whereas Israel under the old covenant failed, Jesus, the Son of God, embodying the new Israel, entered through baptism into a new covenant. Under the conditions of this new covenant Jesus engaged in battle with Satan and the hosts of evil, not just at his Temptation, but throughout his whole life. Finally, through his death on the cross he atoned for human sin and so disarmed Satan. The chapter further argues that Matthew found the very early fragment of tradition, Matt 27:51b-53, suitable to express the achievements wrought by Jesus the Christ through his covenantal death. Without endorsing the mistaken idea that the crucified Jesus ascended directly to heaven from the cross, Matthew nevertheless declares to be true what the pericope implies – namely, that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah and that through his death a new Age, the Eschaton of salvation, has been inaugurated (as some of the Jews believed would be the case when the Messiah came). For Matthew the fragment of tradition, Matt 27:51b-53 (i) reveals that a new people of God (the Church) has been established; (ii) it reveals the “spiritual nature” of this new people – the risen holy ones were able to appear, from a transcendent realm, to many living in Jerusalem, the holy city; (iii) it makes clear that this new people includes the faithful of both the Old and the New Covenants;

¹³⁷ In Chapter 2 it will be argued that the concept of covenant and that of the kingdom of heaven are closely related.

(iv) further, it reveals something revolutionary – this new people of God is to include Gentiles as well as Jews (cf. Matt 27:54).¹³⁸ Hence Matthew, while noting that Jesus’ mission was initially restricted to Israel, also stresses, in various places in his Gospel, the need for the Gentile mission. (v) and finally, this chapter suggests that the mysteriousness surrounding Matt 27:51b-53 and the events it depicts well illustrates the other-worldliness of the new situation created by Jesus’ death. However while, according to Matthew, Jesus has indeed come to, and is now with, his people (Matt 28:16-20; cf. 1:23), yet the End (Matt 28:20 – τῆς συντελέως τοῦ αἰῶνος) is still to come. This final, and conclusive, End will be manifested only when the Gentile mission is completed.

Conclusion

The arguments of the thesis with regard to the origin and purpose of Matt 27:51b-53 are briefly summarized.

¹³⁸ It also meant that the status of women had been uplifted (Matt 27:55-56).

Chapter 1 Brief Introduction and Approach to Matthew, the First Gospel

Since the pericope, Matt 27:51b-53, is found only in Matthew's Gospel, it is essential that the origin of the First Gospel be investigated, even if only briefly. Further, since it will be argued that in all likelihood Matt 27:51b-53 was a fragment of a very early passion tradition, the composite nature of Matthew's Gospel needs to be especially noted. Also, in seeking the origin of the Gospels it is important to remember that the existence of the Christian Faith, and of the Church, does not depend on the prior existence of the New Testament Scriptures. Rather, it is the other way around – the Gospels, and the other New Testament Scriptures, have come from the matrix of the early Church.

The first Christians, however, were never without a corpus of authoritative Scripture. Although the New Testament Scriptures did not yet exist, the very early Christians, as Jews, were familiar with Hebrew Bible.¹³⁹ They would also have been familiar with the Deuterocanonical Books (cf. the Apocrypha) and perhaps with many Pseudepigraphical writings.¹⁴⁰ Further, it seems, that the very early Christians, and even Jesus himself, referred to writings which were then regarded as "Scripture", but which today are no longer extant.¹⁴¹ Expressed briefly, and simply, in the light of their understanding of these many Scriptures the early followers of Jesus concluded that he was the One who "fulfilled" what were understood as Scriptural promises of a Christ ("Messiah") who should be sent to the Jews by the Lord God of Israel. Accordingly, to understand the creation and rise of the early Church and its claims about Jesus of Nazareth, as well as the significance of Matt 27:51b-53, the various "messianic" expectations which prevailed in first century CE Judaism need to be explored.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ The exact composition of the Hebrew Bible in the first century C.E., however, is disputed.

¹⁴⁰ See J. H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1983 (vol.1); 1985 (vol. 2)).

¹⁴¹ See Doeve, *Jewish Hermeneutics in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts*, 96.

¹⁴² See Chapter 3 below.

1.1 The Synoptic Gospels

The Synoptics are clearly related, having a similar structure and much common subject matter. Further, Matthew and Luke share in common a considerable body of material which has no parallel in Mark. This suggests that either Matthew or Luke have used the other as a source, or that both have had access to material from a common source. Acceptance of this latter suggestion has led to the development of “the Two Source Theory” to explain the relationship, literary or otherwise, between the Synoptics.¹⁴³ Thus, in writing their Gospels Matthew and Luke used Mark’s Gospel and incorporated into its overall framework another alleged source, known as the Sayings Source, Q. Q, which is now no longer extant, seems to have contained much of the moral and ethical teaching of Jesus.¹⁴⁴

It is generally agreed that underlying all the Gospels is a prehistory of oral tradition. Those who heard Jesus’ teaching would have remembered and communicated his words. And those who witnessed his miracles and exorcisms would likewise have related to others what they had seen. Accordingly, among the general public there would have circulated popular traditions about Jesus and about his deeds. Understandably, there would also have developed different versions of the same event which perhaps explains differing accounts of the same event found in the Gospels. There is however no agreement as to the extent and influence of this initial oral tradition. The importance of oral tradition in the formation of the Gospels has in the last decade or so been stressed, especially by J. D. G. Dunn. He argues that differences in the

¹⁴³ See Theissen, *The Gospels in Context*, 206. A strong advocate of the Two Source Theory, Theissen makes the plausible suggestion (291) that the Gospels came into existence as Christian responses to certain political events associated with historical upheavals. While Theissen’s conclusions may be challenged (the origin of the synoptic Gospels continues to be an unsolved mystery - no one theory can claim finality) yet his approach has the distinct advantage of reminding readers that, humanly speaking, the ultimate *Sitz im Leben* of the Gospels was the Roman Empire with all its political intrigue, military might and moral decadence. This point could well shed light on the purpose of Matt 27:51b-53.

¹⁴⁴ For discussion of Q see David Catchpole, *The Quest for Q* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993). See also Christopher M. Tuckett, *Christology and the New Testament: Jesus and His Earliest Followers* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 191-4; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2007), 20-1; David L. Turner, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008), 6-7. The distinctive nature of John’s Gospel, and its probable later origin, will not here be discussed.

Jesus tradition found in the Gospels arise not so much from the Evangelists editing of written sources - Mark, Q, and so on - but rather stem from their editing of differing oral traditions.¹⁴⁵

With the passing of time, and as the growing Christian community began to face severe challenges, it is assumed¹⁴⁶ that larger units of tradition about Jesus developed. These larger units were designed to encourage Christians to stand fast in face of opposition. Two such larger units of Jesus tradition were the passion story (Mark 14:1-15:47) and the apocalyptic discourse of Mark 13.¹⁴⁷

Moreover, with the passing of time these larger units, the Passion narrative (Mark 14:1-15:47) and the apocalypse (Mark 13), began to possess greater complexity, being increasingly shaped by theological reflection, and having scriptural quotations woven into them. Accordingly, the “literary character” of these larger units suggests that perhaps by 40 C.E. or so, the movement from oral tradition to the written Gospels was already under way, and that a written tradition was evolving.

1.2 The Sayings Source (Q)

¹⁴⁵ This has important ramifications for redaction criticism. See James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (vol. 1 of *Christianity in the Making*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans 2003); Dunn, “Altering the Default Setting: Re-envisaging the Early Transmission of the Jesus Tradition,” *New Testament Studies* 49 (2003): 139-175; Dunn, *A New Perspective on Jesus: What the Quest for the Historical Jesus Missed* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005). For criticism of Dunn’s approach see Bengt Holmberg, “Questions of Method in James Dunn’s *Jesus Remembered*,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26 (2004): 445-457; Samuel Byrskog, “A New Perspective on the Jesus Tradition: Reflections on James D. G. Dunn’s ‘*Jesus Remembered*,’” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26 (2004): 459-71; Richard J. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2006).

¹⁴⁶ See Theissen, *The Gospels in Context*, 123.

¹⁴⁷ Theissen, *The Gospels in Context*, 125-28, suggests that both of these units of tradition reflect the crisis of around 40 C.E. when Emperor Gaius Caligula attempted to make visible his self-deification by erecting a statue of himself in the Jerusalem Temple. This was not only a direct challenge to the Jews, but also to Jewish Christians – that is, to all who professed the monotheistic faith of Israel. This crisis also perhaps heightened tension between Christians and their fellow unbelieving Jews, and so may have been an early step toward the eventual separation of the two groups. For when the crisis was averted, and the Temple saved from desecration, this turn of fortune was naturally understood by the Jews as clear evidence of God’s intervention. This would have made it difficult for those Christians who, in the light of Jesus’ sacrifice for sins on the cross, tended to question the need for the Temple and its many sacrifices (cf. Hebrews 10:1-18).

According to some “the Sayings Source (Q)” could well have been written in Palestine by 40 C.E.¹⁴⁸ Containing the radical ethical teaching of Jesus, Q begins with the appearance of John the Baptizer (Matt 3:1-12; Luke. 3:1-20), together with the Temptation story (Matt 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13) and ends with Apocalyptic sayings (Matt 24:37-41; Luke. 17:22-37). Q thus outlines an active ethical way of life that takes Jesus’ radical demands seriously. Jesus’ commands are the authoritative expression of God’s will, and human beings must live in accordance with them. The message of Q is clear: unconditional fidelity to God’s will, even in seemingly hopeless situations, will at the final judgment bring God’s blessings.

1.3 The Gospels and their Provenance

The Gospels represent a further stage in the evolution of the New Testament Scriptures. Basically, in them the early Jesus traditions have been adapted to fit the needs of resident local Christian communities. Mark’s Gospel, it is contended, was written to prepare its Christian readers for the troublous times associated with the Jewish War, 66-73 C.E.¹⁴⁹ On the other hand, the Gospels of Matthew and Luke reflect a situation at an increasing distance from the war of 66-73 C.E. Accordingly, their Gospels were written to prepare the members of their Christian communities for life in times of peace. A plan for active living in everyday life is more significant for them than preparation to endure conflict and to conquer suffering. The circumstances of their readers was much more like those who first received the Q traditions. They needed a plan, an ethic, for their daily lives. Accordingly in their Gospels, Matthew and Luke describe not only Jesus’ “end”, his suffering and execution, but his whole life, from birth to the cross. Further, in writing their Gospels, Matthew and Luke reflect the fundamental structure of Mark’s Gospel – that everything in the life of Jesus moves to this end, his passion. Furthermore, they took the substance of Mark’s Gospel, and integrated into it the Q traditions (and so preserved this material for their, and future, communities). Thus, Luke’s Gospel, with

¹⁴⁸ Theissen, *The Gospels in Context*, 206 -10.

¹⁴⁹ Theissen, *The Gospels in Context*, 291, suggests that “He (Mark) incorporates the synoptic apoclyase because the fear of a desecration of the temple that had arisen under Gaius Caligula had been revived under his successors (Vespasian and Titus). And he uses the Passion account to prepare his community for the severe conflicts he expects in the near future.”

its “travel account” (cf. Luke 9:51-18:14) is full of ethical admonitions, derived from Q. Matthew, in contrast, incorporates the material from Q in five great discourses within his Gospel.¹⁵⁰ These are the critical content of his writing, in which the readers learn what must be taught to all people until the end of the world (cf. Matt 28:16-20). “All the Gospels are marked by the knowledge that the Jesus traditions are to be spread throughout the whole world. The writing of these Gospels probably is meant to assist that dissemination.”¹⁵¹

Thus to summarize: “In the Gospels, itinerant radicalism and popular belief in miracles were integrated in a story of Jesus in such a way that Christians living in settled communities could make this Jesus their guide for living.”¹⁵² Accordingly, in spite of all the changes in place, time and life situation the Gospels preserve Jesus traditions and so create continuity and identity in the midst of historical upheavals. It is also to be noted¹⁵³ that both Matthew and Luke have a “biographical” tendency. They both begin their narratives in the world of the family. And by including their independent infancy narratives they create a positive view of a family and so soften the ethic of discipleship, so difficult for the family, found in the Jesus tradition. Further, by incorporating Q into their narratives, the readers of the Gospels could come to terms with

¹⁵⁰ See France, *The Gospel of Matthew* [2007], 8-10. France understands Matthew’s five discourses “as anthologies of the remembered sayings of Jesus organized around some of the central themes of his ministry.” (8).

¹⁵¹ Theissen, *The Gospels in Context*, 291. See also Ben Witherington III, *Matthew* (Macon, Georgia: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2006). Witherington suggests that “the Gospel of Matthew is a presentation of the story of Jesus and his followers viewed through the lens of a Jewish sapiential way of looking at the believing and spiritual life.”(2) And since it reflects the Jewish sapiential tradition to appreciate Matthew’s Gospel one needs “to look more closely at sapiential scribes such as Qohelet and later Ben Sira and even the author of Wisdom of Solomon.” (7). Thus the First Evangelist “sees his task as interpreting and presenting the life and teachings of Jesus as revelatory wisdom from God.” (8). Further, Witherington suggests that in Matt 13:52 Matthew is declaring that as a teacher he “does not limit himself to the Torah, but also deals in new treasures, namely the various teachings of Jesus.” (9). Accordingly, Matthew, “has issues with the Pharisaic scribes who dwell on the Torah and its amplification and refuse to recognize the teaching of Jesus and his perspectives on earlier Jewish wisdom, including the Law.” (9). It should be noted that Witherington is critical of the idea of Christ as a new Moses. (16).

¹⁵² Theissen, *The Gospels in Context*, 292. Note (a) According to Theissen, unlike Q, all the Gospels were written outside of Palestine. He contends that Mark’s Gospel was written, not in Rome, but rather somewhere in Syria. Likewise he suggests that Matthew’s Gospel was written somewhere in the interior of Syria - away from the cosmopolitan city of Antioch – perhaps in Damascus, or the Decapolis. (See Theissen, *The Gospels in Context*, 251). This would give a date of 85 C.E. or so for the writing of the First Gospel. Contrast France, *The Gospel of Matthew* [2007], 18-20, who suggests that Matthew wrote his gospel in the sixties, before the destruction of Jerusalem, 70 C.E.. Likewise, Turner, *Matthew*, 13-15, argues that there is no need to date the gospel after 70 C.E. (b) Theissen’s approach implies that the *Sitz im Leben* of all the Gospel redactions is the “local community.”

¹⁵³ Theissen, *The Gospels in Context*, 287.

Q's radical ethical harshness. For in the Gospel narratives even Jesus' disciples, the first audience of this teaching, are depicted as failing to follow Q's demands, and yet they remain disciples of Jesus.

1.4 Our Knowledge of the *Sitz im Leben* of the Gospels.

In the study of Matt 27:51b-53 it is important to note some assumptions made by the Two Source Theory, in its endeavour to solve the "Synoptic problem" – (a) that the connection between the Synoptics is a literary one; (b) that the first Gospel to be written was Mark's (perhaps around 70 C.E.); (c) that in writing their Gospels, Matthew and Luke used two main sources: Mark's Gospel and "Q". In addition, Matthew and Luke may also have had access to other, now lost, written sources – designated "M" and "L"; and (d) that in the process of editing each writer shaped their Gospel so that it was relevant and dealt with the issues and problems of the particular community to which it was addressed. These assumptions led to the development of Redaction Criticism which has become the basis for suggestions about the *Sitz im Leben* of the Gospels. Redaction Criticism has also led some scholars to make the questionable assumption that Matt 27:51b-53, 54 resulted from Matthew's redaction of Mark 15:37-39.

In more recent times, the impact of Redaction Criticism has been increasingly muted by a number of considerations: (a) While the priority of Mark's Gospel is still maintained by many scholars, yet there is considerable debate not only about the nature of "Q" and whether it can be fully recovered, but even whether such a written document ever really existed at all.¹⁵⁴ (b) The assumption that the connection between the Synoptics was solely a literary one, fundamental to Redaction Criticism, is now being seriously challenged. J. D. G. Dunn, and others, have argued that the relationship between the Synoptics is not exclusively a literary one but is also an oral one. This is acknowledged, rather reluctantly, by J. Riches who writes:

¹⁵⁴ See C. S. Rodd, "The End of the Theology of Q?" *Expository Times* 113 (2001): 7-12. See also Martin Hengel, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Collection and Origin of the Canonical Gospels* (trans. J. Bowden; London: SCM Press, 2000), 206.

Perhaps the sources of the Synoptic Gospels were in a measure oral sources, oral traditions which had been circulating in a relatively stable form for some time and which were recorded in their own way (with, that is, minor variations) by the Evangelists. This is a by no means impossible but, in view of the close verbal agreements, still less likely explanation than that what we have in the Synoptic Gospels is the result of some kind of literary dependence.¹⁵⁵

However the point is, that if oral tradition is indeed involved, then differences between the Synoptics are not necessarily due to editorial manipulation by the Evangelists. This consideration thus casts an unfortunate shadow of doubt over the conclusions of Redaction Criticism.¹⁵⁶

1.5 Questions relating to the Composition of Matthew's Gospel.

With regard to how Matthew composed his Gospel the Two Source theory has been widely accepted as a reasonable explanation to account for the common material found in Matthew and Luke but not in Mark. This assumption that in writing his Gospel Matthew has used Mark should however be counterbalanced by the observation that Matthew displays a definite streak of independence – that is to say, there are significant differences between Matthew and Mark (and also between Matthew and Luke).¹⁵⁷

The “correctness” of the Two Source theory, however, has been, and continues to be, challenged. Granted the existence of an original source, perhaps even a written document, “Q”, the question arises as to whether it can be *fully* recovered from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. The possibility that “Q” may have existed in a number of differing recensions must also be reckoned with. Rather than Matthew (or Luke) having changed “Q”, they both may have quoted from differing recensions. And thus, as J. Riches acknowledges, “The less certain we are

¹⁵⁵ John Riches, W. R. Telford & C. M. Tuckett, *The Synoptic Gospels (With an Introduction by Scot McKnight)* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 56.

¹⁵⁶ It is to be noted that a scholarly reaction set in against Redaction Criticism. New approaches to the study of the Synoptics arose – e.g. (i) the *Compositional – Critical approach*. See Scot McKnight, “An Invitation to The Synoptic Gospels”, in Riches, Telford and Tuckett, *The Synoptic Gospels*, 25-29. (ii) the *Literary Criticism* approach. See Jack D. Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* (2nd ed.; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988). Somewhat similar to this approach is *Narrative Criticism*. (cf. also *Aesthetic Criticism*). Instead of reading Matthew as an adaptation of Mark, this method relates the parts of the first gospel to its whole – that is, it compares “the parts of each Gospel to the whole Gospel instead of its putative sources.” See Turner, *Matthew*, 7; Paul Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew's Gospel* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2, Reihe 177; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 15-18; (iii) *Wirkungsgeschichte* (that is, History of Effects). See McKnight, “An Invitation to the Synoptic Gospels”, 29-33.

¹⁵⁷ See Riches, Telford & Tuckett, *The Synoptic Gospels*, 47-52..

about the form of Q which Matthew used, the less confident we can be about Matthew's redaction of it."¹⁵⁸ M. Hengel has questioned whether a document "Q" ever actually existed. The conclusion of his investigations into the issue is that the peculiar relationship between the Synoptic Gospels may perhaps be best explained by Matthew's use of Luke.¹⁵⁹

Not only has the Two Source theory been challenged with respect to the existence and nature of "Q", its approach to Mark's Gospel has also been questioned. G. N. Stanton, for instance, points out that the original text of the Synoptic Gospels has by no means been fully established. He suggests that places where Matthew and Luke agree over against Mark could mean that there were differing versions of Mark and that Matthew and Luke used a version differing from our present-day Mark. He further draws attention to the possibility that Matthew's sources may have already been modified or conflated prior to his compilation of his Gospel, and that the text of our Matthew may include some redaction which took place *after* the Gospel had left the author's hands. Thus, according to Stanton, not every difference between Matthew and the sources on which he drew represents a modification introduced by the evangelist Matthew himself.¹⁶⁰ Consequently, the Redactional approach to Matthew's Gospel, and especially to Matt 27:51b-53, must be used with great caution.¹⁶¹

1.6 Matthew as a Person.

It would seem that Matthew was a Jewish Christian,¹⁶² influenced by the Septuagint and so at home in the Greek Bible. He may perhaps have known Hebrew and Aramaic. It is clear that he wrote for a Jewish Christian community, or communities. Whether he hoped his

¹⁵⁸ Riches, Telford & Tuckett, *The Synoptic Gospels*, 61.

¹⁵⁹ Hengel, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ*, 206.

¹⁶⁰ See Graham N. Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1993), 36- 40; See also Riches, Telford & Tuckett, *The Synoptic Gospels*, 60; O. Lamar Cope, "'To the Close of the Age': The Role of Apocalyptic Thought in the Gospel of Matthew," in *Apocalyptic and the New Testament: Essays in Honour of J. Louis Martyn*. JSNTSS 24 (eds. J. Marcus and M. L. Soards; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 114; Xavier Léon-Dufour, "Matthew et Mark dans le récit de la Passion," *Biblica* 40 (1959): 684-696.

¹⁶¹ See Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People*, 52.

¹⁶² For discussion of the suggestion that Matthew may have been a Gentile writing for Gentile Christians see Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 79-82; See also David C. Sim, "The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 57 (1995): 30; Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, 51.

readers would become increasingly open to the acceptance in their midst of Gentile Christians and to the wider Gentile mission, is a debatable point in scholarly circles.¹⁶³

In composing his Gospel Matthew perhaps did not work alone. He may have belonged to a school of scribes and, if so, his Gospel would reflect their interpretation (cf. Matt 13:52) as well as the atmosphere of the community. Thus Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer could well have been that used by his community in its worship.¹⁶⁴ But even if Matthew did belong to a school of scribes it is generally agreed that the Gospel is his own composition being characterized throughout by the distinctive stamp of his style. .

Concerning the structure of Matthew's Gospel there is no general agreement. Rather than search for verbal division markers (e.g. Matt 4:17; 16:21), R.T. France prefers to follow the geographical outline of Matthew's story of Jesus. Thus, in his opinion, "to read the Gospel of Matthew as a continuous narrative, structured around the geographical progress of the Messiah from his Galilean homeland to his rejection in Jerusalem, with its final triumphant scene back home in Galilee, is to begin to appreciate its power as a work of literature, not simply as a source for theological or historical data."¹⁶⁵

Matthew addresses many needs and problems in his target audience - that is, various Jewish Christian communities. However, in the light of Matt 28:19-20, it seems reasonable to assume that Matthew's ultimate aim in writing his Gospel was to present to as wide as possible an audience the life of a unique human being, Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. Thus Matthew's Gospel reveals that the faith of the early Christians was not just theocratic, as in Judaism, but also Christocentric - that is, it was faith in a very real historical person.

¹⁶³ See Chapter 4 below for discussion.

¹⁶⁴ See Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 77.

¹⁶⁵ France, *The Gospel of Matthew* [2007], 2-5. Turner, *Matthew*, 8-12, sets out a literary structure for the First Gospel based upon "the unique juxtapositioning of narrative and discourse materials" which is found within it. See also Witherington, *Matthew*, 14-16.

1.7 Matthew's Gospel in relation to the Roman Empire.

In recent years, the fact that Matthew's Gospel comes from, and addresses, a world dominated by the Roman Empire, has been seen as an important factor in understanding the First Gospel.¹⁶⁶ It could also be an important factor in understanding Matt 27:51b-53. For in these verses Matthew declares the release of a power infinitely greater than that of Rome and its Emperor, a supernatural power that can even raise the dead. This pericope then could well be part of Matthew's challenge to the power of the Roman Empire which dominated the contemporary political, social, cultural and even religious realms.

Accordingly, Matthew's Gospel, written perhaps in Antioch on the Orontes in Syria¹⁶⁷ and around 85 C.E., may be understood as a "work of resistance", a "counter discourse", a challenge to Rome's imperial claims.¹⁶⁸ To illustrate, Matthew in 2:2 speaks of Jesus as "king." In the biblical tradition kings, ideally, represent and manifest God's reign – that is, their reign should, in theory, reflect the perfect rule of God in all goodness, righteousness and justice (Cf. Ps 72: 1-4, 12-14; Isa 2:1-8). Further, Scripture indicated that the Davidic line of kings would enjoy an eternal reign on the throne of Israel's kingdom (2 Sam 7:1-17). Accordingly, among some Jews there arose, from time to time, the hope that there would come to Israel a righteous and just king. Thus,

A cluster of metaphors (e.g. "shoot") keeps the promise tradition alive, as do prophetic (Mic 5:1-3; Jer 23:1-6; Ezek 34:23-34) and psalmic (e.g. Ps 72) visions of a future ideal time in which a Davidic ruler enacts the divine rule marked by peace, abundance, justice and the absence of oppression (cf. *Pss. Sol.* 17:21) – "a son of David" king will remove Rome, purify Jerusalem, redistribute land and establish God's just, peaceful and compassionate rule over Israel and the nations (17:21-46)). In *4 Ezra* 11-12, the Davidic messiah establishes God's victory and reign over Rome.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ See Warren Carter, *Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001). See also Turner, *Matthew*, 44. Turner notes that, "The key motif in Matthew that moves the plot and portrays the struggle [cf. Matt 11:12] involved in the advance of the kingdom is conflict [over authority]."

¹⁶⁷ See Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 35-36.

¹⁶⁸ Matthew's Gospel is not the only Jewish response to Rome and its ways. Cf. *Pss. Sol.* 17 (a response to Pompey's capture of Jerusalem in 63 B.C.E.); The Qumran commentary on Habbakuk (1 QpHab 2:12-15) speaks of the Kittim (the Romans); *2 Bar.*, *4 Ezra*, and the *Apoc. Ab.* – all may be understood as literary responses to the Fall of Jerusalem to the Romans, 70 C.E. See P. F. Esler, "Rome in Apocalyptic and Rabbinic Literature," in *The Gospel of Matthew in its Roman Imperial Context* (ed. J. Riches and D. C. Sims; London: T & T Clark International, 2005), 9-33.

¹⁶⁹ W. Carter, "Matthean Christology in Roman Imperial Key: Matthew 1:1" in Riches and Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew in its Roman Imperial Context*, 160.

Further, in 2:15 Matthew speaks of Jesus as God’s “Son.” This is a difficult, and controversial, term, but clearly, among other things, it emphasizes that Jesus is God’s agent, the one who acts and speaks on God’s behalf (cf. Matt 3:17; 17:5 cf. Ps 2:7; Hos 11:1; Wisdom 2:1-24).¹⁷⁰ In the Roman Empire the emperor was regarded as “a son of God (s).” Thus, the significance of Matt 27:54. As Carter comments, “[A]mazingly, some soldiers, active agents of Rome’s militaristic power that subjugates and intimidates, the very basis of empire, recognize Jesus, not the emperor, as God’s agent.”¹⁷¹

It can be seen from the above that in challenging Rome’s worldview, its *theological* mindset, Matthew was also issuing a *social* challenge to Rome and its concept of community. In his Gospel, Matthew offers a vastly different expression of human community. The imperial mindset boasted that the emperor and the empire, the agents of the sovereignty and presence of the gods, brought well-being to a submissive world. Matthew’s claim is that not only has Rome not healed a sick world, but rather it has, to the contrary, sickened the world. Accordingly, in Matt 20:25-27 Jesus is depicted as calling his followers to form a community that is antithetical to everything the empire’s ruling aristocracy held to be important.¹⁷² Instead of “a hierarchical, exploitative, exclusionary community” based on “their great ones (being) tyrants over them” (Matt 20:25-26) they are to create an inclusive, merciful, egalitarian community based on practical, merciful, loving service to others.¹⁷³

1.8 Conflicting Cosmologies

The political power and corruption of the Roman Empire, with its pantheon, were not the only, nor the ultimate, forces of evil with which the people of Israel had to contend. Above and beyond these earthly forces there was also, it was believed, an overarching cosmology –

¹⁷⁰ Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 69. It is also important to note that the “Father- Son” connection suggests covenantal relationship, and that covenant is synonymous with kingdom. The significance of this in understanding Matt 27:51b-53 is developed in Chapter 11.

¹⁷¹ Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 179.

¹⁷² Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 9.

¹⁷³ See Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 553. Note how Jesus’ healings and exorcisms are presented by Matthew as demonstrations of God’s reign.

cosmic powers, hostile angelic forces - which wrought evil and havoc in everyday life.¹⁷⁴

However, according to J. K. Riches,¹⁷⁵ in the first century Jewish, and Christian, views of cosmology and its interaction with the world were by no means uniform. A study of the relevant literature reveals that two fundamentally opposed cosmic mythologies prevailed in New Testament times. These in turn gave rise to sharply opposed views about the nature of evil, its origin and its resolution in the divine plan, as well as differing understandings of Messianism.

Consequently, on the one hand, men and women's estrangement from their Creator may be understood as due entirely to human agency. On the other hand, people's estrangement from God may be understood as due to the forces of Satan. In other words, there are two quite distinct kinds of human dualism and it is important not to confuse them. Thus, as Riches explains, "It is one thing to choose evil rather than good, another to be 'born of evil'."¹⁷⁶

Accordingly, Riches stresses:

(I)t is important to know whether the notion of some final cosmological battle, when the forces of Satan will be overcome by the heavenly hosts is, or is not, an integral part of a given view of the nature of the overthrow of evil. And it seems to be clear that it cannot be an *integral* part of a view of the world which attributes evil entirely to human agency. It makes a crucial difference whether men and women have gone astray or have been led astray. If it is the latter, then until such time as the powers that lead astray are destroyed or bound, there can be no peace, no final overthrow of evil. If the former, then there may be time for people to repent, time for them to hear the proclamation of God's will, and then a time for judgment when those who have failed to respond will be cast out. These are two separate, opposed conceptions; the intriguing thing is that they are frequently to be found in the same writings.¹⁷⁷

While one does not have to agree with Riches and his conclusions, his approach does shed much helpful light especially on many aspects of the Gospels of Mark and Matthew. Further, this belief in the existence of conflicting cosmologies and spiritual forces of evil, could

¹⁷⁴ See John K. Riches, *Conflicting Mythologies: Identity Formation in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000). See also David C. Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew* (Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 88; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹⁷⁵ See Riches, *Conflicting Mythologies*, 145-179.

¹⁷⁶ Riches, *Conflicting Mythologies*, 266.

¹⁷⁷ Riches, *Conflicting Mythologies*, 266-7 (emphasis original). According to Riches both Mark and Matthew, in their own way, use these differing cosmic mythologies to give narrative expression to their view of the nature of Jesus' mission and salvation (see Riches, *Conflicting Mythologies*, 145-151; 264-272).

well shed light on the purpose of Matt 27:51b-53. This is especially so when it is noted that the resurrection of the sleeping holy ones was not due to their response to hearing the proclamation of God's will. Accordingly, the fact that their resurrection occurred at the moment of Jesus' demise may be understood to mean that by his death Jesus, the Son of God, overcame and defeated the hostile forces of Satan.

1.9 Brief Summary of Introduction and Approach to Matthew, the First Gospel

To summarize: in studying Matt 27:51b-53 it will be assumed that Matthew's Gospel was composed in the 80s C.E. That its writer used sources, written and oral, is recognized. Further, the attractiveness of the Two Source theory in explaining the relationship between the Synoptics is acknowledged. However, some cautious hesitation will be exercised concerning the acceptance in detail of this theory and its implications. In light of the increasing recognition of the importance of oral tradition the conclusions of Redaction Criticism will accordingly be considered with some reserve and caution.

It will be assumed that initially Matthew wrote with a "target audience" in mind. Thus, in the first place, the Gospel was addressed to a community, or communities, of predominantly Jewish Christians living in a Greek speaking area (perhaps Syria). That the writer also hoped for a much wider audience for his work, as advocated by R. Bauckham¹⁷⁸ and others, is readily assumed.

Whether these Jewish Christians were experiencing stress, and even opposition, from non-Christian Jews, or were managing to live amicably with them, will be discussed later (see chapter 4). That they, along with their fellow non-Christian Jews, were experiencing both the alleged "blessings" as well as the hardships associated with the imperialism of the Roman Empire, is taken as a given. Accordingly, it is readily acknowledged that Matthew's Gospel may be regarded as a "counter discourse", as Christian propaganda against the claims of Roman Imperialism.

¹⁷⁸ Richard J. Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1998). Cf. Matt 28:16-20.

With regard to the identity of the writer the anonymity of the Gospel will be respected. While some in the early Church identified the writer with Matthew the Apostle this has not yet been established (nor has it been disproved). Suffice to say that whoever the writer was he wrote with such authority that very early his Gospel was accepted by both Jewish and Gentile Christians.

Chapter 2 Matthew's Gospel and the Kingdom of Heaven¹⁷⁹

A parallel may be drawn between what Matt 27:51b-53 declares and what Matthew teaches concerning the kingdom of heaven / God. According to Matt 27:51b-53 when Jesus died what I will argue were End Time events – that is, what really in Jewish thought belongs to the eschatological future – happened within this present historical age. The bodies of many sleeping holy ones were raised and, after Jesus' own resurrection, appeared to many in Jerusalem. Thus, at the death of Jesus something of the future eschatological age invaded this present age.¹⁸⁰ Likewise with regards to the kingdom of heaven, in Jewish thought God's kingdom belongs to the age to come. But, as I will show, Matthew believed that in the person and mission of Jesus that eschatological kingdom has invaded history. In doing so, it has brought to those living in this present age the blessings of the age to come.¹⁸¹ The significance of the pericope, Matt 27:51b-53 must therefore be understood in the light of what Matthew declares concerning the kingdom of heaven. To facilitate this understanding the following brief outline of Matthew's teaching about the kingdom is given.

The expression "the kingdom of heaven"¹⁸² occurs something like fifty five times in the First Gospel. Both John the Baptist and Jesus announced to Israel that the kingdom of heaven was near, that a great turning point of history was at hand.¹⁸³ The concept was clearly central to Jesus' whole mission, to his preaching and teaching. Jesus, however, did not invent the expression, nor did he define it. The expression was already well known. Accordingly, both John and Jesus hoped for an immediate, and positive, response to their declaration of the kingdom's nearness.

¹⁷⁹ This chapter does not purport to examine all the many issues relating to the First Gospel and the Kingdom. A more detailed study with reference to the extensive literature is to be found in Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia*.

¹⁸⁰ Gibbs writes, "The implied reader understands that the passion of Jesus is an event of eschatological import, for he or she observes *the end-time signs that accompany Jesus' death* and concurs with the soldiers' confession, 'Truly this man was the Son of God' (27:45-54)." Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia*, 256 (emphasis added).

¹⁸¹ These blessings include justification, the gift of the Spirit, and future resurrection. See George E. Ladd, "Apocalyptic and New Testament Theology," in *Reconciliation and Hope: New Testament Essays on Atonement and Eschatology Presented to L. L. Morris on his 60th Birthday* (ed. Robert J. Banks; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 294.

¹⁸² Or "the kingdom of God." The two expressions are interchangeable. See Matt 19:23-24. Matthew uses "the kingdom of God" in 12:28; 21:31, 43 and perhaps 6:33.

¹⁸³ Matt 3:2; 4:17.

The word kingdom (βασιλεία) may suggest a realm which can be entered into now, in the present.¹⁸⁴ Like a house, the kingdom of heaven has keys.¹⁸⁵ It has rooms that can be entered into.¹⁸⁶ It is also spoken of as a realm which one may enter into in the future.¹⁸⁷ Basically, however, the word “kingdom” has a dynamic sense. It relates to royal administration, to the act of ruling, to kingship, the exercise of royal power.¹⁸⁸

2.1 The Kingdom of God and the Old Testament¹⁸⁹

The expression is not found in the Old Testament. However, the concept of God’s kingly rule, over realm or people, is deeply rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures.¹⁹⁰ In them, the Lord God is depicted as exercising universal, and victorious, power over chaos, creation, the whole world and all the nations.¹⁹¹ In particular it is stressed that the Lord exercises special kingship over his chosen people, Israel. He liberates them from slavery in Egypt and enters, through Moses, into a covenant with them.¹⁹² Israel is, thus, a theocracy – a special society under the Lord as king. And as such Israel is to be a new paradigm for all human society.

Although Israel became a monarchy, yet the Lord continued to be sovereign over his people. He ruled them through the one anointed to be the earthly king of Israel. This anointed one was, in theory, to be obedient to the Lord, to do his will and to be the protector of God’s chosen people from their many enemies. During the reign of Solomon, however, Israel began to revert back to a “Pharaoh-type” society. An elite ruled and the majority were reduced again to near slavery. Disillusionment with the monarchy arose. At least one prophet declared that the

¹⁸⁴ By submitting oneself in perfect trust to God’s rule here and now. Cf. Matt 6:33; 18:3.

¹⁸⁵ Matt 21: 31; 16:19.

¹⁸⁶ One can even be thrown out of the kingdom. Cf. Matt 8:12.

¹⁸⁷ Matt 7: 21; 8:11; 13:41, 43.

¹⁸⁸ Matthew’s summary of John’s (and Jesus’) declaration, “The kingdom of heaven has arrived” (Matt 3:1; 4:17) might be paraphrased as “God’s promised reign is beginning” or “God is now taking control.” See France, *The Gospel of Matthew* [2007], 102.

¹⁸⁹ In any study of Jesus and the kingdom of heaven two complex and interlocking questions must be kept in mind: (i) What was the relationship of Jesus to the Judaism to which he belonged? Did he accept, alter, or reject the then prevalent concept(s) of God’s kingdom? (ii) Did the early Christians, who perpetuated Jesus’ kingdom message, change or alter Jesus’ teaching? See Dennis C. Duling, “The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus,” *Word and World* 2 (1982):117-126.

¹⁹⁰ See 1 Chr 28:5; Ps 45:6; 103:19; 145:11-13; and so on. In later Jewish literature the concept is found in Wis 6:4; 10:10; Tob 13:1; *I En.* 41:1; *Pss. Sol.* 5:18; 17:3, 30-34; *As. Mos.* 10:1.

¹⁹¹ See Ps 74:12-17; 95:3; Pss 93-99. God can use mighty world powers for his own purposes.

¹⁹² Num 20:15-16; Deut 26:5-11.

covenant had been cancelled.¹⁹³ Eventually, Israel's intransigence led to the negative side of the covenant being enforced. Israel experienced exile in Babylon.

After its return from exile, Israel was a very different nation.¹⁹⁴ It now had no earthly king. Consequently, a new understanding of God's kingdom began to develop. On the one hand, Yahweh's kingship, it was believed, was to be expressed by Israel's adherence to the Torah and to priestly cultic celebrations. Scribes and priests became dominant. On the other hand, eschatological expectations began to develop. There would be a great "Day of the Lord," a decisive intervention in every day affairs by the God of the covenant. Israel would be restored as a great nation, her enemies would be subjugated. For some in Israel Yahweh would exercise his sovereign rule over Israel through a new Davidic ruler, the Messiah.¹⁹⁵ And through Israel the Lord God would rule over all nations.¹⁹⁶

Furthermore, with the passing of time a higher, spiritual and imperishable reality began to be envisioned. For some in Israel a new heaven and a new earth would come into existence, death would be annihilated, the dead would be raised, and the judgment would follow.¹⁹⁷ Evil constructions embedded in the historical, political and material side of life would be removed. And there would be a new spiritual emphasis – God's Spirit would be poured out,¹⁹⁸ and God's Torah would be written in the hearts of believers.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹³ Hos 1:9.

¹⁹⁴ For background material to Israel in the period after the Exile see: Jacob Neusner, W. S. Green, E. S. Frerichs, eds., *Judaisms and their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); J. H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992); John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and other Ancient Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1995); James C. van der Kam, *An Introduction to Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2001); Clay A. Ham, *The Coming King and the Rejected Shepherd: Matthew's Reading of Zechariah's Messianic Hope* (Sheffield : Phoenix Press, 2005).

¹⁹⁵ Isa 43:14-21; 52:7-10; Jer 23:5-6. See Gerbem S. Oegema, *The Anointed and his People: Messianic Expectations from the Maccabees to Bar Kochba*. Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series 27 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 39-102.

¹⁹⁶ God was not obeyed world-wide.

¹⁹⁷ Isa 25:7-9; 26:19; Dan 12:2.

¹⁹⁸ Isa 32:15; Joel 2:28-29.

¹⁹⁹ Jer 31:33; Ezek 36:24-28.

2.2 The Kingdom of God in Early Judaism (200 .C.E – 100 C.E).

Knowledge of this period comes from the pseudepigraphical and apocryphal writings and from the Qumran scrolls. The concept of the kingdom of God which emerges from these sources is by no means unanimous. However, generally speaking, two broad trends may be detected.²⁰⁰ First, the prophetic hope for the restoration of Israel, and the house of David, continued. Further the moral, ethical dimension, partaking of the spiritual, continued to develop. Thus it was believed that Israel's restoration would be hastened by the prayers and obedience of the people.²⁰¹ And through Israel's restoration the eventual restoration of humankind would result. And so the purpose of Israel's election would be fulfilled. The Messiah's coming would be the great Jubilee, the year of release and liberation.²⁰²

However, in the second place, in view of Israel's continuing political subjugation, and the people's suffering, a mood of pessimism developed. This world was deemed by some to be so evil as to be beyond all hope of restoration. Accordingly, there arose an apocalyptic expectation that hope lay only in the future. The belief arose that God would intervene, supernaturally, dramatically, and create a whole new age.²⁰³

In the light of the above it may be said that in New Testament times while the expression kingdom of heaven was known, and that God's kingdom was sought and hoped for,²⁰⁴ yet there was a multitude of views about its nature. In connection with all this there were various, and diverse, understandings of the nature of a coming Messiah. He would, according to some, be a this-worldly, nationalistic, political person. For others, he would be predominantly a transcendental, apocalyptic, universal figure.²⁰⁵ Thus, it may be maintained, that in the broader context of Jewish eschatology there was a close connection between the expectation of a coming Messiah and that of the revelation of the kingdom of heaven. However, surprisingly,

²⁰⁰ There would either be a golden age on earth (ruled directly by God or indirectly through a Messiah), or an eternal kingdom in heaven.

²⁰¹ Cf. Paul before his conversion. See Acts 22:3; Gal 1:14. See also Luke 2:25-26, 36-37.

²⁰² Isa 27:13; 61:1-2; Matt 11:2-6. For discussion of, and comment on, Jewish hopes concerning the kingdom of God see Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 202-10.

²⁰³ See *As. Mos.*, Dan, *1 En.*, *4 Ezra*.

²⁰⁴ "The coming kingdom was the talk of the day." (John Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God: The Message of Jesus Today* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 215).

²⁰⁵ See Charlesworth, *The Messiah*, 13-24. See also Neusner, Green and Frerichs, *Judaisms and their Messiahs*.

nowhere it seems is the thought found that the kingdom of the Messiah is the kingdom of heaven, or that the Messiah through his works would bring the kingdom of heaven.²⁰⁶

2.3 General Character of the Kingdom of Heaven as preached by Jesus in Matthew's Gospel.

First and foremost, the kingdom is theocratic – that is, it originates with the transcendent God.²⁰⁷ It is thus a revelation of God's royal majesty, power and might. Above all, it is a revelation of God acting as Redeemer of his people.²⁰⁸

In the second place, the kingdom has a dynamic, personal connotation. It is the coming of Jesus who engages in kingly rule. It is God's reign in action.²⁰⁹ The action of this special person creates a crisis. It calls for decision and demands repentance. Those who do not repent face eventual judgment.²¹⁰

Thirdly, and importantly, in Jesus' preaching the kingdom is depicted as having both a present and a future aspect. While difficult to translate, Matt 11:12 is a key verse in this regard.²¹¹ For John the Baptist the kingdom foretold in the Scriptures, while close at hand, was

²⁰⁶ See Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom* (ed. Raymond O. Zorn; trans. H. de Jongste; St. Catharines, Ontario: Paideia Press, 1978), 11-13. According to J. A. Gibbs, "It should not be assumed that expectation of the manifestation of the reign of heaven always included a role for a 'Messiah' as part of that expectation." (Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia*, 40).

²⁰⁷ Cf. Isa 64:1; Matt 16:27; 24:30.

²⁰⁸ Cf. Matt 9:13 – Jesus came not to call the righteous but sinners. Further, God's salvation has a universal aspect - it includes the material as well as the spiritual. Jesus healed the sick and raised the dead, as well as casting out demons. Eventually all things will be renewed. Cf. Matt 19:28. "In Jesus the criterion of the kingdom becomes incarnate and is made visible. Jesus shows us clearly in his incarnation, life and death that God intends to save us with our environment, not without it." (Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God*, 221).

²⁰⁹ "The kingdom demands the transformation of all human reality and the church must be an 'agent' of this transformation." (Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God*, 263).

²¹⁰ Matt 13:24-30.

²¹¹ Ridderbos gives this translation: "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven is pushing its way with force, and the violent take it as a booty." He comments, "There is no certainty about the way to translate this text but it cannot be denied that the kingdom of heaven is here represented as a present entity." (Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, 54). The NRSV translates Matt 11:12-13 as, "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John came." In G. N. Stanton's view this translation "suggests that the appearance of John has sparked off opposition to God's kingdom which has persisted up to Jesus' day." Accordingly, while these verses may, especially in the light of Luke 16:16, be understood to mean that everyone is pressing to enter the kingdom, yet, in Stanton's view, the original sense by Jesus almost certainly was "the kingdom of God is being opposed with violence." This implies that the kingdom is in some sense already present in the proclamation of Jesus. See Graham. N. Stanton, *The Gospels and Jesus* (2nd edition; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 211-213.

still in the future.²¹² However, for Jesus the kingdom in the eschatological sense had already become a present reality through his own coming and ministry. According to Jesus the kingdom of God arrived with him.²¹³ Thus, in Matt 12:22-28 Jesus argues that his casting out of demons was proof of the kingdom's presence. In other words, in Jesus the future of the Old Testament prophecies had passed into present fulfillment. Jesus' words, for example, in Matt 11:4-5 reflect OT passages like Ps 146:8 and especially Isa 29:18-24; 35:5, 6; 42:7, 18. The great kingdom of the future had become present.²¹⁴ For Jesus reconciliation and deliverance are now, within history, not for a far removed, apocalyptic, utopian future. This is made very clear in Matt 9:2-8 where before Jesus heals a paralytic he declares that the man's sins are forgiven. "The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" – and to do so right there and then!²¹⁵ God is penetrating the present and establishing his reign through Jesus right here and now.²¹⁶

This being so, a number of points need to be noted. First, while the kingdom has indeed come with Jesus, yet this kingdom also has a future aspect. When the divine, kingly, work in the history of the world is completed, then the consummation will finally come.²¹⁷ The era of salvation has indeed begun, yet there is still something in the future. This "futurity aspect" of the kingdom means that it cannot be conceived as an exclusively religious community or social order within the limits of this world. It also means that those who enter the kingdom will need

²¹² Cf. Matt 3:1, 11-12; 11:2-6.

²¹³ Cf. Matt 11: 4-5.

²¹⁴ "The final day, the future reign of God, has reached back into history as it were and appeared ahead of time with Jesus. The promised turn of the ages – from the present evil age to the future holy age – has invaded the present age and set itself up through the ministry of Jesus. This is the very promised, glorious kingdom end-time rule of God Himself that came in advance, but it came in a small, insignificant, and hidden way. It came with this lowly Jesus of Nazareth. That is the mystery of the kingdom. The kingdom came through Jesus, but the old age continues." P. R. Raabe, "The Gospel of the Kingdom of God," *Concordia Journal* 28 (2002): 295.

²¹⁵ Matt 9:6.

²¹⁶ It is to be noted that the kingdom is never presented simply as a private affair between God and the individual. Rather, it embraces the whole of reality with its social structures. Accordingly, the presence of the kingdom shows itself as a liberating force that aims at restructuring human society in terms of justice, peace and joy. (cf. Rom. 14:17). Thus, through his miracles of healing, exorcisms of demons, and his table fellowship with "down and outs", Jesus reintegrated outcasts back in to society, so that they became again full members of the community. He brought individuals back into social life. (For discussion of the kingdom message of Jesus see Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God*, 79-80).

²¹⁷ See Matt 4:17; 8:11; 16:28; 24:14; 25:31-46; 26:29. The kingdom's fulfillment is in history; its consummation at the end of history. Matt 24:14 makes it clear that the consummation of this historically present kingdom will include Gentiles.

to exercise patience and perseverance. The blessings of God's kingly rule will not always be evident or immediate.²¹⁸

Secondly, that God's kingdom would, according to Jesus, start *before* the time of the great judgment, that the time would be fulfilled before "the end of the world", particularly while Israel was still in the hands of Rome would have been strange to Jesus' contemporaries.²¹⁹ Thus, those who understand and grasp this mystery will be increasingly blessed. Those who lack this insight will go from bad to worse.²²⁰

Thirdly, since with the coming of Jesus, something "new" – that is, the kingdom of heaven – has appeared, the old understandings of, and the forms to express the kingdom, are now inadequate. Accordingly, new wine must be put into new wineskins.²²¹

2.4 Evidence that the Kingdom, God's Kingly Rule, has come with Jesus, and the Implications of this concerning the person of Jesus.

First, the kingly rule of God is demonstrated by Jesus' exorcisms. Deliverance from Satanic power can be experienced now, not just in the future.²²²

Secondly, the kingdom was manifested in Jesus' authoritative preaching.²²³ In the Beatitudes, Jesus promises the kingdom of heaven to the poor and the persecuted.²²⁴ In Matt 9:2-8 Jesus actually grants forgiveness, he does not merely announce it.²²⁵

²¹⁸ See Matt 13:24-30..

²¹⁹ See Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, 54-56. For those who knew only the Old Testament the suggestion that the kingdom would come quietly, unobtrusively, secretly – through persuasion rather than by power – and that it could even be rejected, was a staggering thought! How could Jesus be the bearer of the kingdom while sin and sinful institutions remained unpunished (cf. Isa 2:1-4)? When God's kingdom came it would surely come with unresistable power. But this is exactly the mystery of the kingdom – it is here, but it can be rejected!

²²⁰ This is the import of Matt 13:11-17.

²²¹ See Matt 9:16-17.

²²² Matt 12:28. Note: As Messiah, Jesus has divine authority, power. This power however must be used in the way ordained by God. Cf. Matt 4:1-11; 16:23; 26:38-46; 27:40-43. That is to say, Jesus is to be obedient to his Father even unto death. Note also that the real battle of Jesus' ministry "was not a round of fierce debates with the keepers of orthodoxy, but head-on war with the satan." (See Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 195).

²²³ Matt 13: 16-17. Note that people sensed Jesus' claim to absolute authority (cf. Matt 22: 15, 22).

²²⁴ Cf. Matt 5: 1-12.

²²⁵ This implies that Jesus had already, in obedience to his Father, committed himself to the death of the cross. (cf. Matt 16:21- 23; 26:26-28). This, to my mind, is confirmed by Jesus' insistence that his death was an inescapable necessity. Jesus' prayerful struggle in the garden of Gethsemane (Matt 26:36-46) can

Thirdly, Jesus' miracles, his deeds of salvation, demonstrate the presence of God's kingdom. Thus, when asked by John's disciples if he was indeed the one who was to come Jesus tells them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them."²²⁶ Note that Jesus' deeds have an eschatological character. Thus, in his raising of the dead²²⁷ that future kingdom in which there will be no more death²²⁸ was beginning to be realized.

Thus in Jesus, the kingdom of God is revealed (i) as a power - Satan is cast out, disease and death are overcome; (ii) as an authoritative proclamation of a message of salvation; and (iii) as a gift (cf. Matt 21:43).²²⁹ The kingdom, accordingly, is an already present possession of a salvation which will be more fully received and perfected in the future.²³⁰

The fact that the kingdom of heaven has come with Jesus is to be explained, according to Matthew, by the secret of his person – that is, by Christological considerations. Thus, both at his Baptism²³¹ and at his Transfiguration²³² Jesus is divinely declared to be God's Son. It is to be noted, that as important as Christ's death and resurrection are, yet the beginning of the kingdom is not to be found in them. Rather, the beginning of the kingdom is to be found in

be understood in a number of ways (see Craig A. Blaising, "Gethsemane: A Prayer of Faith," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 22 (1979): 333-343). However to my mind it does imply, along with other factors, that only by going the way of the cross could Jesus be obedient to his Father's will. In other words, all divine forgiveness is ultimately contingent on Jesus' act of obedience which resulted in his drinking the cup of suffering associated with the cross.

²²⁶ Matt 11:4-6; Cf. 12:22-28. Thus, Jesus preached the kingdom with deeds as well as with words. According to N. T. Wright, "Jesus' healing miracles must be seen clearly as bestowing the gift of *shalom*, wholeness, to those who lacked it, bringing not only physical health but renewed membership in the people of YHWH." (*Jesus and the Victory of God*, 192).

²²⁷ See Matt 9:18-26.

²²⁸ Cf. Rev 21:4; 20:14.

²²⁹ The coming of the kingdom is an unmerited gift. Some tried to bring it by adherence to the Torah and by prayer. Others (cf. the Zealots) by armed violence. The Sermon on the Mount outlines the conditions of entrance into the kingdom of heaven. (cf. Matt 5:20).

²³⁰ Cf. Matt 13:24-30, 38. The "field" is not the church, but the world. The kingdom invades history unobtrusively – without a visible interruption of the present worldly structures. "Good and evil will exist side by side and only in the future, when the kingdom will come in fullness will there be a separation of both." (Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God*, 263).

²³¹ Matt 3:16-17. Cf. Isa 11:2; 61:1-4. Note that the Holy Spirit coalesces with the coming of the kingdom – that is, with Jesus' coming – and so turns Jesus' words into deeds (cf. Matt 12:28).

²³² Matt 17:5.

Jesus' coming – that is, in his incarnation and birth.²³³ And this kingdom, begun at his birth, was progressively manifested through Jesus' ministry, his passion and resurrection.

2.5 The Provisional / Incomplete Character of the Kingdom

The kingdom has indeed come. In Jesus' person and work the kingdom is manifested as the present fulfillment of the OT prophecies regarding salvation.²³⁴ However, the great moment of the kingdom's consummation – that is, the final judgment, the separation of the righteous and the evil – has not yet come.²³⁵ Jesus' contemporaries found this difficult to comprehend. For them, the coming of the kingdom meant the arrival of the Day of the Lord. It meant the judgment of the world and the end of the present earthly reality.²³⁶ Further, while the kingdom is now present, and Jesus is victorious over Satan,²³⁷ yet Satan's power has not ended. He continues to be a never ceasing menace.²³⁸ Jesus' exorcisms however are the sign and guarantee of Satan's eventual downfall.

Likewise, Jesus' miracles have an eschatological character.²³⁹ They are signs of the truth of his proclamation that with his coming the kingdom has broken into the world - forgiveness, salvation may be received now.²⁴⁰ Thus, while Jesus performed miracles, yet he was not only a miracle worker. Rather, first and foremost, he was a preacher.²⁴¹ His miracles must thus be understood in relation to his proclamation of the Gospel of the kingdom and its presence.

²³³ Matt 1:18-25. Note that Matt 11:27 presupposes the pre-existence of Jesus' person. G. R. Beasley-Murray notes that: "The gospels, unlike the New Testament letters, make it plain that God's saving action in Christ was already operative in his ministry, prior to his death." (G. R. Beasley-Murray, "Jesus and the Kingdom of God," *Baptist Quarterly* 32 (1987): 143). Note too King Herod's reaction when word reached him that magi from the East had come seeking "the child who has been born king of the Jews." (cf. Matt 2:1-18).

²³⁴ Matt 11: 5, 12-15.

²³⁵ In Jesus' message of the kingdom the end of history has come into history itself. Thus, the "already" and "the not yet" are some how to be held in dialectical tension.

²³⁶ Cf. Matt 24:3. See Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, 106.

²³⁷ Matt 12:29. Satan has received a preliminary but decisive defeat (cf. Luke 11:14-22).

²³⁸ Matt 13:25; cf. Matt 6:13.

²³⁹ It should be noted that Jesus' miracles did not always create faith. Cf. Matt 12:22-32; 12:38-45; 16:1-4.

²⁴⁰ See Matt 9:1-8; cf. Mark 2:1-12.

²⁴¹ Matt 11:1; cf. Mark 1:38.

Basic to Jesus' preaching was his use of parables to illustrate the mysterious nature of the kingdom of heaven – that it possessed both a present and also a future reality.²⁴² The kingdom, salvation and forgiveness, was already present in Jesus, the Messiah. Scripture promises had been fulfilled in him. But the ultimate end, the consummation of the kingdom, still lay in the future. The discernment of this mystery could only be achieved by faith – that is, by the grace of God.²⁴³

Further it is to be noted, as N. T. Wright explains, that:

The parables are not simply *information about* the kingdom, but are part of the *means* of bringing it to birth. ... They are part of the primary activity itself. ... They invite people into the new world that is being created, and warn of dire consequences if the invitation is refused. Jesus' telling of these stories is one of the key ways in which the kingdom breaks in upon Israel, redefining itself as it does.²⁴⁴

Thus,

The parables functioned the way all (good) stories function, by inviting hearers into the world of the story. They were designed to break open world views and to create new ones, encouraging listeners to identify themselves in terms of the narrative. To see the point of the parable was to make a judgment on oneself.²⁴⁵

The parable of the sower²⁴⁶ well illustrates Jesus' teaching about the kingdom and its coming. For Jesus' listeners the eschatological all-conquering coming of God's kingdom would have conjured up thoughts of the image of harvest time.²⁴⁷ When the kingdom came the sickle would be put in, the righteous would be gathered, and the evil, the chaff, would be burned up. Jesus however eschews such end-time speculation. Rather, he likens the presence of the kingdom to the sowing of seed which develops slowly with the passing of time.²⁴⁸ Here is the mystery of

²⁴² Jesus never defined the expression kingdom of God in concrete terms. He presented its meaning by symbolic actions – by table fellowship with sinners, by healings and exorcisms. He also used parables, similes, images and metaphors. See Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God*, 70-2.

²⁴³ Matt 11:25; 13:16-17; 16:17. Wright speaks of "paradoxical fulfillment." "The kingdom is present, and the Messiah is present, but neither looks like what had been anticipated. The kingdom-announcement opened the possibility that the herald was himself the kingdom-bringer." (Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 531).

²⁴⁴ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 176.

²⁴⁵ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 181. Cf. Matt 21:45. When the religious leaders heard Jesus' parables, "they realized that he was speaking about them."

²⁴⁶ Matt 13:1-23. "The parable of the sower tells the story of the kingdom." See Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 230-8.

²⁴⁷ Matt 13:39.

²⁴⁸ This sowing of the seed of the gospel is a messianic work. The preaching of the gospel is itself the guarantee of the ultimate manifestation of the kingdom. The gospel is simply that the great turning point

the kingdom. God's kingly rule has arrived with the coming of Jesus, the Christ, but the consummation, the harvest, the final judgment, has been delayed.²⁴⁹

It was this postponement of judgment²⁵⁰ even after Jesus, the Christ, had come which had to be explained to the disciples. Accordingly, in the parable of the Tares²⁵¹ Jesus declares that while the kingdom has come, yet the "separation" of good and bad is postponed until the future harvest. Thus, even after the Messiah's coming good and evil continue to mingle. The same mysterious truth is set forth in the parable of the fishing net.²⁵² With Jesus the kingdom has come. But first, through the preaching of the gospel, there is to be an in-gathering. Only afterwards, when the net has been dragged ashore, comes the judgment which entails a separation.

Finally it is important to note, as N. T. Wright points out, that Jesus' message concerning the coming of the kingdom was, in the ears of the Jewish religious leaders of the day, highly subversive. Consequently, if as a prophet Jesus was not to perish away from Jerusalem, he had to clothe his message in a disguise which only the seeing eye could penetrate. This means, to quote Wright, that:

Jesus' parables, ... , belong with, rework, reappropriate and redirect Israel's prophetic and apocalyptic traditions. They belong substantially, as they stand, within the specific period of his public career and ministry, of his work as a prophet of judgment and renewal.

They do not properly belong, in fact, anywhere else. Once the early church was established, the secret was an open one. The very form, the parable-as-apocalyptic-allegory, belongs only at the time when the warning and summons must needs be cryptic and veiled: that is, to the time of Jesus' public career.²⁵³

2.6 The Kingdom, the Cross, and the Covenant²⁵⁴

According to Matthew the good news of the presence of the kingdom in Jesus, the Christ, proclaims that salvation has come. This raises the important question: What is the nature

of the times has come. The kingdom is here present (despite all its mystery). Divine redemption can be sought and found only in Jesus, the Christ. See Matt 11:28 "Come unto me ..."

²⁴⁹ Jesus did not abandon judgment – he postponed it. He who does not heed the message of the kingdom *now* will have to face judgment when the fullness of the kingdom comes. (Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God*, 141).

²⁵⁰ In reality a time of grace and a call to repentance.

²⁵¹ Matt 13:24-30, 36-43.

²⁵² Matt 13:47-50.

²⁵³ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 180.

²⁵⁴ See Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, 156-174.

of this salvation? In attempting to answer this question it is to be noted that in this thesis the concern is to understand how Matthew has depicted Jesus and the salvation he has achieved. For clearly, in his Gospel Matthew writes from a post-Easter point of view - he writes as a Christian believing in Jesus as the Messiah who died on the cross and was raised by God on the third day.²⁵⁵ The assumption is thus made that Matthew's depiction of Jesus and the significance of his death, as seen by Matthew in the light of the resurrection, is what is paramount.²⁵⁶

According to Matthew, the salvation which Jesus, as herald of God's kingdom, achieves involves himself personally and at great cost. I will argue on the one hand that this salvation involves deliverance for humankind from a form of bondage, a slavery. And, on the other hand, I will argue that it also means for humankind entry into a covenant, a new relationship of freedom and fellowship with the Creator. Two key statements, found in the First Gospel, attribute these achievements to Jesus. Significantly, both statements require Jesus to subject himself in obedience to his Father's will – a divine will which requires Jesus eventually to yield up his life in death on the cross.²⁵⁷

The first statement is found in Matt 20:28 where Jesus is depicted as declaring: “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.” (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου οὐκ ἦλθεν διακονηθῆναι ἀλλὰ διακονῆσαι καὶ δοῦναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν). In its context the statement speaks of the true nature of anyone who desires to be a disciple of Jesus.²⁵⁸ Thus, those who follow Jesus must be characterized by a humility which finds expression in true servanthood just as “the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

²⁵⁵ See 6.1.

²⁵⁶ In his book, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, N. T. Wright offers a different approach to the understanding of Jesus and his salvation (see Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 589-648). Wright believes it is possible to isolate Jesus' pre-Easter understanding of salvation from the early Christians' post-Easter rethinking of Jesus and his achievement. The issues raised by Wright will not be entered into in this thesis. His approach, however, is a salutary reminder that in NT times there was a great variety of understandings concerning the Messiah and what he would accomplish at his coming.

²⁵⁷ Grounds for this claim are discussed below.

²⁵⁸ See Matt 20:17-28.

The word “ransom” (λύτρον, ου, τό) has the meaning of *price of release* (cf. the ransom money paid for the manumission of slaves).²⁵⁹ The concept of ransom in the sense of price paid for release underlies a number of OT events and rituals. For example, the Passover (Exod 12:27); Exod 30:12 (LXX λύτρα τῆς ψυχῆς. NRSV “a ransom for (their) lives.”); Lev 4; 25:51-55 (LXX τὰ λύτρα – NRSV translates as “redemption”); Num 18:15, and so on. In Matt 20:28 the nature of the bondage is not explicitly mentioned. However, the context makes it clear that it is something related to the human “spirit” – a wrong attitude which seeks power and glory for itself at the expense of others. Just exactly how Jesus by giving his life as a ransom for many will release people from this sinful attitude is also not clear. Furthermore, the verse does not reveal to whom the ransom price is to be paid. It is to be noted, however, that the word “ransom” (λύτρον, ου, τό) doesn’t necessarily presuppose a payment to someone. Rather, as here in Matt 20:28, it is more a metaphor meaning “costly.” Thus, Matthew depicts Jesus as declaring that by yielding up his life – that is, by dying – others will be freed from the bondage of wrong attitudes. Further it is to be noted that there is a connection between Matt 20:28 and LXX Isa 52:13-53:12. The word “many” (πολλῶν) in Matt 20:28, as well as the concept of servanthood, calls to mind this Isaianic passage which speaks of the Lord’s servant and his sufferings.²⁶⁰

The second key statement which, according to Matthew, explains the nature of the salvation associated with Jesus and the coming of the kingdom of God is found in Matt 26:28.²⁶¹ Matthew here depicts Jesus as declaring that by his blood – that is, by his death – a covenant will be established for many.²⁶² This covenant is between God, the Creator – the One whom Jesus speaks of as his Father (Matt 26:29) – and humankind. Since the establishing of this covenant involves above all the forgiveness of sins, the assumption is that the relationship

²⁵⁹ See BDAG, 605.

²⁶⁰ Cf Isa 53:12: καὶ αὐτὸς ἀμαρτίας πολλῶν ἀνήνεγκε – NRSV translates, “yet he bore the sin of many.”

²⁶¹ The word “many” (πολλῶν) links this verse to Isa 52:13- 53:12, and also to Matt 20:28. For the need to understand Isa 53:12 in the wider context of Isa 40-55 see Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 613.

²⁶² It is best here to understand the word “many” (πολλῶν) in an inclusive, rather than a restrictive, sense. Thus, Jesus is to be understood as acting for all of humankind.

between the Creator and humankind has been broken and so is in need of restoration.²⁶³ Matthew thus depicts Jesus as declaring that his coming death will be in the nature of an atoning sacrifice which will bring divine forgiveness and reconciliation,²⁶⁴ and so create a new covenantal relationship²⁶⁵ between God and humankind.²⁶⁶ It is also to be noted that according to Matthew Jesus spoke these words in the context of the Jewish Passover (Matt 26:17-30). At the Passover the people of Israel celebrated their escape from Egypt, the land of bondage. This further stresses that Jesus' death has the characteristics of a ransom which facilitates escape from bondage and slavery.²⁶⁷

It is possible to understand Jesus' sufferings and death as an example of how one should eschew the temptations of power and glory, and instead humbly submit to personal injustice trusting in God for eventual vindication. However, as an example Jesus could only help and inspire those who after his death heard the story of his patient sufferings and unjust execution. As an example Jesus could never have had any moral effect upon those who lived and died before his birth. Yet in Matt 27:51b-53 Matthew declares that Jesus' death did have a profound effect on many who had already lived and died before his coming. According to

²⁶³ See Jer 31:31-34; cf. Exod 24:1-8.

²⁶⁴ Commenting on Matt 26:28 M. Eugene Boring writes, "The forgiveness of sins is Jesus' primary mission (1:21; cf. 9:1-7). Forgiveness is accomplished by Jesus' death, understood here in terms of the sacrifice that seals the bond between God and the covenant people (cf. Exod 24:8; Isa 53:12; but see Matt 9:2). In Exod 24:8, the covenant sacrifice is unrelated to forgiveness of sins, for which there were other sacrifices. But Jesus' death is pictured by Matthew as replacing the sacrificial blood of the old covenant law, so he adds 'for forgiveness of sins'." (M. Eugene Boring, "The Gospel of Matthew," in *New Interpreter's Bible* (ed. Leander E. Keck et al.; 12 vols. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 8:471).

²⁶⁵ According to Eduard Schweizer, "In Isaiah 42:6; 49:7-8 the Servant of God himself is referred to as God's 'covenant' with his people, and according to Jeremiah 31:34 the forgiveness of sins, albeit in such a way that the forgiveness is exercised by the community (18:18 as well as 9:8) and that only the man who forgives others can receive forgiveness. ... Matthew thus probably sees Jesus going to his death less an atoning sacrifice to God's obduracy – although this idea does appear in 20:28 and 26:28 – than as a pioneer, who opens the way of a new life to those who follow him." (Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News according to Matthew* (trans. David E. Green; London: SPCK, 1976), 491.)

²⁶⁶ It seems reasonable to assume that in this new dispensation would be seen the fulfillment of Jer 31:31-34 when the Torah would be written on people's hearts and, as a consequence, certain commands would become redundant. For comments on Jesus' claim to be a new lawgiver see Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 645-6. See also George R. Law, "The Form of the New Covenant in Matthew," *American Theological Inquiry* 5 (2012): 17-32. Law argues that with the arrival of the New Covenant, a new Law has replaced the Law of Moses. This new Law is found in Matt 5-7, a passage in which standard covenants can be recognized.

²⁶⁷ For comment on the relationship between the Jesus' last supper and the Jewish Passover see Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 555- 9. According to Wright, to a first-century Jew, the Passover meal said, in effect, that Israel's God was about to become king. Thus, Jesus' last supper with his disciples brought Jesus' own kingdom-movement to its climax. It indicated that the new exodus, and all that it meant, was happening *in and through Jesus himself*. This, in Wright's opinion, is extremely controversial.

Matthew, at the moment of Jesus' death "the bodies of many sleeping holy ones were raised." Since death is the result of human disobedience²⁶⁸ Matt 27:51b-53 implies, among other things, that Jesus' death in atoning for sin freed humankind from the bondage and grip of death, the penalty of human disobedience. Consequently, in explaining the atoning effects of Jesus' sufferings and death, it is important to stress that he was much more than a mere volunteer.²⁶⁹

This highlights an important argument of this thesis – to the effect that Matthew understands Jesus himself to have been in a covenantal relationship with God, his heavenly Father. This being so, it is argued that Matthew presents Jesus as being under divine obligation to lay down his life as a ransom for others. To my mind, the following points support this argument.

First Israel, and consequently Jesus, can really only be understood in the whole context of covenant. The very existence of Israel as a people living in a special God-given land cannot be separated from the concept of covenant and also that of kingdom. Exod 6:2-8 makes it clear that it was because of the covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, that God delivered their descendants from the slavery of Egypt. After the destruction of Pharaoh's army Moses and the Israelites sang the praises of their God, acknowledging that the Lord was their king who reigned over them (cf. Exod 15:3, 18). At Sinai the Lord God, Israel's king, entered into a covenant with them (cf. Exod 24:1-8). During their wanderings in the wilderness the Lord God accompanied his covenant people who acclaimed him as their king (cf. Num 23:21b). When the people of Israel crossed the river Jordan the Lord their king fought for them enabling them to take possession of the land of Canaan.²⁷⁰ The Israelites possession of the land was climaxed by a covenant renewal ceremony (Josh 24:25). Many other illustrations of the connection between

²⁶⁸ See Gen 3:1-24.

²⁶⁹ Rightly or wrongly, to my mind this is in effect the position of N. T. Wright – Jesus' was a volunteer who took upon himself the sufferings due to Israel for her disobedience. There is truth in this approach to Jesus' passion. But it overlooks the fact that Jesus, the Son of God, took the sin of Israel – indeed of all humankind – upon himself because he was commanded by his heavenly Father to do so. Jesus is depicted as suffering according to his Father's will (cf. Matt 26:36-46). In other words, Jesus' passion was fundamentally an act of obedience, not just an altruistic act.

²⁷⁰ Thus a covenant promise to Abraham was fulfilled (cf. Gen 12: 15).

kingdom and covenant, between God as king and his covenant people, are to be found in the OT Scriptures.²⁷¹

In the second place, in Matt 2:13-15 Matthew draws a parallel between Jesus and the ancient nation of Israel. He does so by quoting Hos 11:1 which, admittedly, is “a notoriously difficult and debated text.”²⁷² However, it does seem clear that “what Hosea attributes to the nation Israel, Matthew attributes to the individual Jesus.”²⁷³ The existence of the Israelites as a people goes back to God’s covenant with Abraham (Gen 15:17-21). Their existence as a nation under God their king goes back to the covenant at Mt Sinai (Exod 24:1-8). Accordingly, in drawing a parallel between Jesus and the nation of Israel Matthew, in effect, is declaring two things. First, he declares that Jesus is the fulfillment of the covenant and its promises made to Abraham (cf. Matt 1:1-17). Secondly, he declares that like the nation of Israel Jesus is in a covenantal relationship with God.

This last point to my mind receives confirmation from the fact that throughout his Gospel Matthew depicts Jesus as one who was very conscious of his need to be obedient to the will of his heavenly Father. Consider, for instance, (i) how Jesus is depicted as reacting to the temptations of Satan (cf. Matt 4:1-11); (ii) how Jesus is depicted as reacting sharply to the suggestion of Peter that he should put thoughts of suffering and death far from his mind (cf. Matt 16:21-23. Note the word $\delta\epsilon\iota$ (“must”) implying necessity. See BDAG, 213-4). (iii) how Jesus is depicted in the garden of Gethsemane as being in great agony of mind as he wrestles

²⁷¹ See Judges 8:23; Ps 47:1-9; Isa 33:22; 44:6; Jer 10:6-7a, and so on.

²⁷² Beale, “The Use of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15,” 697.

²⁷³ Beale, “The Use of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15,” 697. A detailed examination of Hosea 11:1 will not here be entered into. However, it is of interest to note that Hosea’s reference in 11:10-11 to Num 23:22a and 24:7-9 may suggest the theme of eschatological kingdhip. Beale’s conclusion to his study of Hos 11:1 and Matt 2:15 is as follows: “Matthew contrasts Jesus as the ‘son’ (2:15) with Hosea’s ‘son’ (11:1). The latter who came out of Egypt was not obedient, and was judged but would be restored (11:2-11), while the former did what Israel should have done: Jesus came out of Egypt, was perfectly obedient, did not deserve judgment but suffered it anyway for guilty Israel and the world in order to restore them to God. Matthew portrays Jesus to be recapitulating the history of Israel because he sums up Israel in himself. Since Israel disobeyed, Jesus has come to do what they should have, so he must retrace Israel’s steps up to the point they failed, and then continue to obey and succeed in the mission Israel should have carried out. The attempt to kill the Israelite infants, the journey of Jesus and his family into Egypt and back to the Promised Land again is the same basic pattern of Israel of old. Hence, Jesus did what Israel should have done but did not do. This use of Hos 11:1 also is an example of how important exodus patterns were to Matthew and the other NT writers in understanding the mission of Jesus and the church. Jesus’ journey out of Egypt is identified as Israel’s eschatological exodus out of Egypt ro which Israel’s first exodus out of Egypt pointed.” (Beale, “The Use of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15,” 710).

with his inward conviction that it is his Father's will that he should drink the cup of suffering (Matt 26:36-46). Matthew clearly depicts Jesus as desiring, if possible, to avoid his coming sufferings and death. He pleads with his Father to be able, somehow, to escape having to drink the cup of suffering.²⁷⁴ When, however, his prayers are not answered Jesus submits in obedience, and in faith, to his Father's will. He does so, according to Matthew, by quietly surrendering to those, led by Judas, who had come to arrest him.

Thus, as a loyal vassal, as the Lord's Servant, Jesus submits, not without a struggle, to his Father's will. And the Father's will for Jesus is not just that he should lay down his life, but that he should do so as a sin offering for humankind.²⁷⁵ Support for this assertion is found in what Matthew depicts Jesus as declaring in the upper room at the last supper (see Matt 26:26-29).²⁷⁶ According to N. T. Wright, by his action in the upper room, Jesus "drew on to himself the judgment he had predicted for the nation and the Temple."²⁷⁷ While there is much truth in this statement, it needs to be further developed. For while Jesus drew on to himself the judgment others deserved, he did so as an act of obedience to his heavenly Father. In other words, Jesus' action in the upper room, especially when seen in the light of Isa 52:13-53:12,²⁷⁸ reflects the language of covenant. The vassal's task, his commission, laid on him by the Lord, is to bear the sin of many, to atone for the wrong doing of others (cf. Isa. 53:12).

This was the most "revolutionary" part of Jesus' messianic self-revelation and of the revelation of the kingdom. In other words, the salvation Jesus proclaimed to others he had, according to Matthew, to gain by subjecting himself in obedience to his Father's will. Jesus, the Son of Man, knew that he could only exercise his power and glory according to God's will.²⁷⁹ Matthew presents Jesus as the Servant of the Lord called ultimately to the obedience of suffering and death.²⁸⁰ Incidents like that recorded in Matt 12:39-40 reveal that Matthew's Jesus

²⁷⁴ Matt 26: 39, 42, 44.

²⁷⁵ See Matt 26:28 where Jesus is depicted as using the language of sacrifice to describe the wine: "this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

²⁷⁶ These verses have already been discussed in pages 65-69 above.

²⁷⁷ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 615.

²⁷⁸ Note how the word "many" links Matt 26:28 and Isa 53:12.

²⁷⁹ See Matt 4:1-11.

²⁸⁰ Cf. Matt 3:17; Isa 42:1-9; Isa 52:13-53:1-12.

was well aware that the cross inescapably lay ahead of him. For Matthew, it was the necessary fulfillment by Jesus of his messianic mission.²⁸¹

It is important to note that while with the coming of Jesus the kingdom of God did indeed break in, yet it was only very partially realized. The fuller disclosure of the kingdom of heaven required not just the incarnation, the coming of Jesus and his ministry, but also his suffering, death and resurrection.²⁸² Thus, especially in the light of Matt 26:28, it becomes evident that Jesus' death (and resurrection) was both a fuller disclosure of the kingdom of heaven, *and* the establishment of the new covenant between God and his people. In other words, these two concepts, "kingdom of heaven" and "the covenant", are very closely related. The one implies the other.²⁸³ To be in the covenant is to be under God's kingly rule which he exercises through his Son, the Messiah.²⁸⁴ To be in the kingdom of heaven is to belong to God's covenant people and so to be bound to obey God's Son, the Messiah.²⁸⁵ Consequently, to understand Matt 27:51b-53 in the context of covenant²⁸⁶ is to understand this unique pericope in the light of the kingdom of God.

It is, furthermore, to be especially noted that Jesus' death and resurrection brought about a great change in the manner in which the kingdom would be proclaimed. No longer would its secret hiddenness be stressed – rather the mystery of the kingdom would now be fully revealed.²⁸⁷ Thus, the new covenant which God had promised to make with his people in which

²⁸¹ Matthew's Jesus could foresee his death. Cf. the fate of the prophets and the fate of John the Baptist.

²⁸² It is important to note that if the kingdom had already come during the ministry of Jesus it could not be said that the Cross was the condition of its coming. Jesus' death however was a necessary, and crucial, step toward the consummation of the kingdom. In other words, every aspect of Jesus – his incarnation, ministry, death and resurrection – must be seen as one, as a totality. According to G. R. Beasley-Murray, "[S]ince the kingdom of God means above all life from God that conquers death, in Biblical terms 'resurrection life', he who mediates it by his living and dying completes his mediation in resurrection and final consummation of the kingdom. In the teaching of Jesus the salvation of the kingdom is one (redemption for the perfected Kingdom of God), and the process of mediating it is one, through the Christ who dies, rises and is to be manifest in his *parousia* glory (his 'coming' again)." (Beasley-Murray, "Jesus and the Kingdom of God," 143).

²⁸³ See Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (trans. J. Baker; 2 vols; London: SCM Press, 1961), 1:40, 66-7.

²⁸⁴ See Ps 2; 110; cf. 2 Sam 7:1-17.

²⁸⁵ See Matt 28:16-20. For discussion of the relationship between the Lord's agent, the Messiah, and the Lord himself, see Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 624-9.

²⁸⁶ As this thesis does – see Chapter 11:3.6 below.

²⁸⁷ Cf. Matt 10:16-27. See section 2.5 above.

he would forgive their sins and write his law in their hearts²⁸⁸ is declared by Matthew to have been inaugurated by Jesus' death.²⁸⁹

The death and resurrection of Jesus, the Christ, has also opened up a new phase in the revelation of God's kingdom and its ultimate consummation.²⁹⁰ Before the end, before Jesus could come as the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven, he had first to suffer and be rejected.²⁹¹ But, further, before the risen and ascended Jesus comes in judgmental glory²⁹² the message, the gospel, concerning the significance of his birth, life, teachings,²⁹³ sufferings, death and resurrection must also be proclaimed to all nations.²⁹⁴ The final consummation of the kingdom has thus been delayed. In other words, the "day of grace" – the time of conversion – has been extended. This delay is possible because by his suffering, death and resurrection Jesus has laid the judicial foundation of the entire preaching of the gospel of the kingdom.²⁹⁵ Accordingly Jesus' incarnation, his ministry, his sufferings, death and resurrection may now be understood to belong, as it were, to a preliminary phase of the revelation of the kingdom of God. Through the events of the cross the great redemptive process has been accomplished. On the basis of this accomplishment, the kingdom of heaven is now developing and gaining its purpose in the world

²⁸⁸ Jer 31:33-34.

²⁸⁹ Matt 26:28. Thus, "Jesus the preacher of the kingdom of God becomes after Easter the object of preaching, Jesus the Christ." In other words, for the ultimate understanding and interpretation of God's kingdom, one must start with the person of Jesus. (See Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God*, 211).

²⁹⁰ The revelation of the coming of God's kingdom is clearly a progressive phenomenon. Beginning with Jesus' incarnation and birth, it continued to be revealed through his ministry, and was especially more fully disclosed by his passion and resurrection. However, the ultimate manifestation of the kingdom's coming is still in the future. The first generation of Christians while declaring, in the light of Jesus' resurrection, that Jesus had in principle succeeded in establishing the kingdom, yet stressed that before the kingdom's future consummation Jesus' followers were to attempt to implement what he had taught (cf. Matt 28:16-20). Accordingly, early Christianity was characterized by a tension between present realization and future hope. (N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 216, 322, 659-60).

²⁹¹ Matt 16:21; 21:42; 17:9.

²⁹² Matt 25:31-46.

²⁹³ The proclamation of the message about Jesus is also to include the implementation of his teachings. See Matt 28:20.

²⁹⁴ Matt 24:14; 28:16-20. According to Howard Marshall, in the early Church "the person in whom the kingdom was revealed replaced the kingdom in Christian preaching." (Howard I. Marshall, "Preaching the Kingdom of God," *Expository Times* 89 (1977): 13-16.) In other words, "The action of God in saving his people was so completely fulfilled in Jesus, that the thought of 'God's saving action as king' tended to be replaced by the thought of 'Jesus as king.'" This, as Marshall points out, led to changes in terminology. Initially, the description of Jesus as "king" was developed in terms of Jesus as the Messiah or Christ. However, since these terms did not speak to non-Jews, "Messiah" dropped from use, and "Christ" was reduced to a proper name. The "kingly" aspect of Jesus was expressed by the title of "Lord". Further, "the term 'kingdom' as a symbol for divine blessings was replaced by such terms as 'salvation' and in the Fourth Gospel especially by 'eternal life'".

²⁹⁵ See Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, 172.

through the preaching of the gospel of the cross of Christ. The progress of this preaching, along with the acceptance of, and the practical implementation of, Jesus' teachings, is a measure of the progress of the kingdom and of the nearing of the time of salvation and the ultimate consummation of all things.²⁹⁶

2.7 The Kingdom and the New Covenant

It has been argued²⁹⁷ that in Matthew's Gospel the good news of the kingdom proclaimed by Jesus is influenced by the concept of covenant. Accordingly, in this section some further implications of this will be noted and developed.

Basic to the concept of covenant is the faithfulness of Israel's God. The Lord God, Israel's king, will not forsake his covenant people but will save them from their enemies. The idea of covenant thus raised the hope of the coming of a king who would bring the salvation promised to the people of Israel.²⁹⁸ Thus, Matthew presents Jesus as preaching the gospel of the kingdom from the standpoint of the Old Testament theocracy and of the covenant between God and Israel.²⁹⁹ Accordingly, Matthew wants it to be understood that Jesus' birth, his incarnation, is the fulfillment of the promise of the covenant to Israel concerning salvation. God, in the person of the new born child, is with his people, something that strikes fear into the heart of the false king, Herod.³⁰⁰

This helps, first, to understand Matthew's depiction of Jesus' attitude, his relationship, to the then people of Israel. According to Matthew Jesus, at least initially, addressed only the Israelites. All of Israel were, for Jesus, God's people to whom the kingdom and its deliverance

²⁹⁶ Matt 24:14.

²⁹⁷ See 2.6 above.

²⁹⁸ "It is this thought of 'God acting on behalf of his people' which seems to me to sum up the meaning of the phrase [the kingdom of God]. The basic thought is that God is acting to defeat the enemies of his people and to bring them the blessings of salvation. Hence the phrase can refer both to God's saving action and to the salvation which his action produces, and at a secondary level it conveys the thought of the obligations laid upon God's people by his action on their behalf." (Marshall, "Preaching the Kingdom of God," 15).

²⁹⁹ Exod. 24:8. The theocratic relation of Yahweh to Israel *as a people* in the covenant was also expressed by the Father-son relationship (Exod. 4:22; Deut. 14:1; Hosea 11:1-7). God is Father because he is king over Israel.. Cf. Matt 11:27 – Sonship is a sheer impossibility outside of faith in Jesus as the Christ sent by God.

³⁰⁰ Matt 1:21; Cf. Luke 2:10, 11, 32; Matt 2:1-18.

had been promised.³⁰¹ But, according to Matthew, Jesus also stressed the need for repentance and a change of heart if the blessings of God's covenant and its salvation were to be received.³⁰² It would seem that when Israel failed to respond to Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom, he envisaged the forming of a new people of God represented by his twelve disciples.

Matthew thus declares that Jesus chose twelve disciples and sent them out to proclaim the good news of the kingdom (cf. Matt 9:35-11:1). Significantly, they were not to go to Gentiles or Samaritans but only to Israelites (Matt 10:5-6). Matt 19:28 may imply that Jesus envisaged some form of a literal "restoration" of the nation of Israel, with the twelve disciples being the new leadership. Thus, S. McKnight suggests that when Jesus uses "kingdom" he has in mind the fulfillment of the Jewish expectations that involved the restoration of Israel – along with the realization of its covenant expectations and hopes.³⁰³

However, Israel's lack of repentance and, as a consequence, their rejection as God's people (cf. Matt 21:33-46; esp. v. 43) did not annihilate the idea of the covenant but rather imparted to it a new, or at least a more definite content. Thus, as already noted, in 26:28 Matthew depicts Jesus, at the last supper, declaring that his death would establish a covenant which would bring salvation, the forgiveness of sins, to many. We are thus to understand that there is a "broadness" in the scope of the covenant and its salvation.

³⁰¹ Matt 15:21-28; 21:43.

³⁰² Matt 21:40-41, 43; 22:8-10; 23:37-39.

³⁰³ S. McKnight, "Jesus and the Twelve," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 11 (2001): 223, fn 61. McKnight also wonders whether Joshua's renewal covenant was the background to Jesus' choice of the twelve. He writes: "The Twelve being sent by Jesus *correspond in potentially suggestive ways with the Covenant renewal and the ancient story of crossing the Jordan, entering into and capturing the land by the strong hand of Joshua* (see Josh 4:1,3,7,9,20). Just as tribal representatives of ancient Israelites were to go throughout the land to capture it for YHWH and then to "rule" over the land, so the Twelve sent by Jesus were to go throughout the land (esp. Galilee and then beyond) and declare the Kingdom so that the nation could be reclaimed for YHWH's covenant. Just as twelve tribal leaders formed the ancient leadership, so with Jesus the leadership comprised twelve men." (McKnight, "Jesus and the Twelve," 228, emphasis original). In his summary McKnight writes: "There is significant evidence for us to think that Jesus had in mind a restored Israel – twelve new leaders, the land under control, a pure Temple, and a radically obedient Israel. The two themes of covenant and eschatology that swirl around the number "twelve" form a combined witness to the centrality of Jesus' vision for Israel: salvation-historical fulfillment – that is, covenant reestablishment - in his mission's inauguration of the Kingdom and the embodiment of leadership in his twelve special leaders, who will rule and liberate the twelve tribes of Israel in the Kingdom." (McKnight, "Jesus and the Twelve," 231). See also Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 103-4.

Accordingly, it seems reasonable to assume that Matthew wants the enigmatic words of Matt 27:51b-53 to be understood in relation to the covenant established by Jesus' death. In Matt 27:54 Matthew relates how the Roman soldiers, witnessing the effects of the earthquake at the moment of Jesus' death, were "converted"- that is, their whole lives were radically changed by what in effect, was a divine epiphany.³⁰⁴ This is Matthew's way of suggesting that the salvation associated with the covenant established by Jesus' death extended even to gentiles.

Secondly, the relationship between kingdom and covenant helps to understand that the kingdom of heaven has, like the covenant, two parts in an unbreakable unity. The kingdom, like the covenant, offers a free and full redemption, but it also demands obedience to the stipulations and commands of the King. Consequently, conversion, entrance into the kingdom, requires a turning away from sin and evil, and also the doing of works of righteousness.³⁰⁵

In the third place, an understanding of the covenantal nature of the kingdom helps to appreciate the relationship between the kingdom and the church. The church has a definite place in Jesus' preaching of the Kingdom of God.³⁰⁶ The Messiah must have a people.³⁰⁷ The church are those united into one community by the preaching of the gospel.

There is thus a connection and yet a difference between the kingdom and the church. The kingdom is larger and more comprehensive. It is the great divine work of salvation in its fulfillment and consummation in Christ. The kingdom brings grace and judgment; it is the consummation of all history; it has cosmic dimensions – it fills time and eternity.

The church, the *ekklesia*, is the people elected and called, through the preaching of the gospel, by God and sharing the bliss and gifts of the kingdom, the *basileia*. This sharing is provisional now – the Messiah has come – but it will be a perfect, full sharing, at the *parousia*

³⁰⁴ The significance of Matt 27:54 is discussed more fully in 7.1.4.3.

³⁰⁵ Matt 3:8; Cf. Matt 25:31-46. See also Matt 6:10 – the doing of God's will is a gift that must be asked for of God. For Jesus, the kingdom of God meant conversion of the people to the covenant idea. This in turn required the restructuring and transformation of the social-political structures and institutions. (See Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God*, 128).

³⁰⁶ See Matt 16:17-19. For comment on the suggestion that the organized Church was created by the early Christians in response to the non-fulfillment of the Son of Man's *parousia*, see Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, 334-342.

³⁰⁷ Matt 1:21; 13:41-43.

of the Son of Man. The church is the true people of God, known by Jesus.³⁰⁸ The kingdom is revealed in and by the church.³⁰⁹ The church thus has a historical nature – it partakes of history – as well as an eschatological nature.

H. Ridderbos summarizes the relationship between the two as follows: “The *ekklesia* is the fruit of the revelation of the *basileia*; and conversely, the *basileia* is inconceivable without the *ekklesia*. The one is inseparable from the other without, however, the one merging into the other.”³¹⁰ Thus, the church is not to be identified with the kingdom. The two, however, are correlated – hence they are not to be separated either.

2.8 The Future of the Kingdom of Heaven / The Consummation of the Kingdom

It may be said that what people of New Testament times considered one event – the decisive intervention of God in history – Matthew’s Jesus split into two related but separate events. Jesus is depicted by Matthew as bringing the beginning of the eschatological time into the “now” and postponing the consummation as a future event.³¹¹ The question thus arises: when, according to Matthew’s Jesus, would this future event, the consummation of the kingdom, occur? Jesus, of course, is depicted by Matthew as acknowledging ignorance of that day and hour.³¹² Nevertheless it is clear that for Jesus the consummation of the kingdom was an event that could be described as “imminent”.³¹³ The nearness of the eschatological judgment meant that family commitments, essential for a continuing world, became marginal.³¹⁴

³⁰⁸ Cf. Matt 7:23. “The church, the eschatological community, is the sphere in which Christ makes himself constantly present through the power of his Spirit.” (See Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God*, 245).

³⁰⁹ This is the import of Matt 28:16-20. God’s kingdom in this world will always remain mediated by a visible community. Thus, has the position of ancient Israel been transferred to the community of Jesus’ disciples? Cf. Matt 21:43. (See Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God*, 148). The Church’s task is (i) Evangelism – to proclaim, by word and sacrament, that the kingdom of God has come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth; (ii) to be a “contrast society”, to be a challenge to society as a whole. Thus justice, freedom, respect for human rights, should be evident in the church. (See Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God*, 269).

³¹⁰ See Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, 355.

³¹¹ See Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God*, 274.

³¹² See Matt 24:36. cf. Mark 13:32.

³¹³ Cf. 3:17; 10:7.

³¹⁴ Cf. Matt 19:12. See Davies, *Matthew*, 52.

Certain statements³¹⁵ attributed by Matthew to Jesus have, and still, cause much debate.³¹⁶ Matt 10:23, for instance, could perhaps be understood to mean that Jesus believed that he would be manifested as the glorious Son of Man even within his earthly lifetime. If so, one would have to conclude that Jesus' hopes for a speedy inauguration of God's kingdom were thwarted by the unbelief of the then people of Israel. Matt 16:28 (cf. 24:34) suggests that Jesus

³¹⁵ Cf. Matt 10:23, 16:28; 24:34, and 26:64.

³¹⁶ It is important to note that in the last two centuries there has been little agreement among scholars as to what exactly Jesus taught regarding the kingdom of God, its nature, and the time of its manifestation. This brief survey of scholarly discussion about Jesus and his teaching concerning the kingdom follows Duling, "The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus," 117-126. See also Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, 18-56; Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God*, 188-94; Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 13-16.

In the 1830's F. Schleiermacher suggested that the "nearness of the kingdom" as proclaimed by Jesus was to be understood individually, as a subjective and immediate feeling, of being absolutely dependent on God. This feeling of God consciousness had been perfectly expressed in the inner experience of Jesus. The kingdom was thus already present in the individual's spiritual relationship to God (Luke 17:21 was understood to mean: "The kingdom of God is *within* you").

This stress on the inward rule of God led to the gospel of the kingdom being understood as a social movement which would so progress as to harmoniously unite all of humankind. This progressive development of the kingdom would eventually be concluded with the final judgment. Furthermore, the growth of the church became coordinated with the progress of the kingdom.

However, towards the end of the 19th century, J. Weiss questioned the coordinating of church and kingdom, as well as the interpretation of the kingdom as religious experience and ethical action. Weiss argued that the basis of Jesus' teaching about the kingdom was the Jewish apocalyptic eschatology. In other words, the kingdom did not come with Jesus. Rather, Jesus waited for God to bring in the kingdom sometime in the unknown future. Hence, Jesus' ethical teaching was only preparatory. It was a setting out of the conditions for entering into the kingdom – that is, of the need for righteousness. Consequently, the judgment conducted by Jesus, the Son of Man, would precede the coming of the apocalyptic kingdom.

According to A. Schweitzer, Jesus' thought was dominated by apocalyptic eschatology. Thus, when his kingdom expectations (see Matt 10:23) did not materialize, Jesus sought to precipitate the kingdom's coming by embodying, in his own passion, the messianic woes which were to precede the coming of God's kingdom. Jesus' suffering and death however did not bring about the kingdom. Consequently, Schweitzer argued that the early Church concluded that the kingdom would come when the risen Jesus returned as the apocalyptic Son of Man at a still future *eschaton*.

As a reaction to Schweitzer's "consistent (or thoroughgoing) eschatology", C.H. Dodd developed the concept of "realized eschatology" – that is, the idea that the kingdom was already present and realized in Jesus' own ministry (cf. Matt 12:28 – "the kingdom of God *has come* upon you"). Through Jesus the eternal came into present time. This emphasis made Jesus' teaching more relevant to everyday modern life. And while some passages (cf. Mark 9:1 which speaks of the kingdom coming "with power") may suggest a future transcendent kingdom, yet Dodd maintained that the idea of a present kingdom was not thereby destroyed.

R. Bultmann interpreted Jesus' kingdom teaching in existential terms. He thus attempted to "demythologize" the apocalyptic kingdom mythology in order thereby to make it relevant for present modern times. Thus, according to Bultmann, through Jesus the future apocalyptic kingdom was already being inaugurated in such a way that it determined the present and demanded an existential decision right now. According to Howard Marshall, "For Bultmann the kingdom is presented by Jesus as future, but this does not mean that we are to await some future event; rather the message is a means of making men realize that here and now they are at the point of decision and must respond to the message with obedience." (Marshall, "Preaching the Kingdom of God," 14).

In more recent times, scholars have suggested that to speak of the kingdom of God as either "present" or "future is to use inadequate terminology. Accordingly, the kingdom of God is now referred to, not just as a symbol, but as a "tensive symbol". In other words, the kingdom of God is a concept which cannot be exhausted or adequately expressed by any single referent.

understood that the consummation – the Son of Man coming in his kingdom – would occur within the lifetime of some of his listeners. Further, Matt 26:64 can be understood to mean that within a short time after his death, the religious leaders of Israel would see Jesus as the glorified Son of Man. They would see him, not only seated at the right hand of Power, but also coming on the clouds of heaven (cf. Daniel 7:13-14). In the light of Matt 24:30 it is difficult not to conclude that the reference here is to Jesus' *parousia* and the final consummation of the kingdom.

Some writers simply accept that in light of what Matthew says Jesus is to be understood as being mistaken concerning the imminence of the eschaton. Accordingly they suggest that modern readers may apply the message of the urgency of this ancient expectation to their own situation by transforming eschatology into teleology.³¹⁷ Thus Margaret Davies writes:

The fact that Jesus' and the narrative's expectation of an imminent eschatological transformation proved to be wrong does not rob this way of life of its value. It raises the question whether the long-term aims of modern Christians to obviate injustice in God's world should ever be attempted through violent means, and it requires of Jesus' followers that they be prepared to meet persecution from day to day.³¹⁸

Other writers, however, are most reluctant to acknowledge that Jesus, as depicted by Matthew, may have been mistaken with regards to the timing of the kingdom's final inauguration. J. A. Gibbs, writing from a Narrative Critical point of view, concludes that the implied reader does not find in the story of Matthew's Gospel a near-expectation of the consummation of the age in the life of the disciples. Thus, he writes: "[I] reiterate that the implied reader of Matthew's Gospel knows that there is no near-expectation of the consummation of the age in the teaching of Jesus."³¹⁹

³¹⁷ See Davies, *Matthew*, 114. According to Davies, for modern readers, "a sense of urgency comes not from belief in the imminence of God's judgment but from revulsion at the evils still perpetrated in the world."

³¹⁸ Davies, *Matthew*, 137. Davies also makes this important observation: "[T]he expectation of an imminent kingdom implies that someone would be king. Even an implied claim to kingship in the future would be politically significant in the present. If God had sent his Christ to lead people into his eschatological kingdom, many people might respond by throwing off the Roman Yoke." (Davies, *Matthew*, 204).

³¹⁹ Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia*, 72.

From a Narrative Critical point of view Matthew's story, his narrative, must be consistent.³²⁰ This is decided *a priori*. It is a predetermined conclusion. In other words, inconsistencies are ruled out in advance. Consequently, from Narrative Criticism's approach, the main character of the First Gospel, Jesus, cannot be portrayed as being mistaken with regard to the eventual timing of the *parousia*, the final inauguration of God's kingdom. Thus, in his detailed study of Jesus' Eschatological Discourse (Matt 24:4- 25:46), Gibbs argues that Jesus rejects the disciples' mistaken view which linked the *parousia* and the end of the age with the destruction of Jerusalem. Rather, Jesus declares that the End, the *parousia*, will occur suddenly, at some unexpected time after Jerusalem's destruction. This future time not even Jesus knows, but only the Father (Matt 24:36).

Accordingly, Gibbs reinterprets from his Narrative Critical point of view such passages as Matt 10:23; 16:28; 24:34 and 26:64. Thus, with regard to 10:23 Gibbs declares that according to the narrator the events (cf. 10:17-23) project beyond the Gospel's story-time, into the time after the resurrection of Jesus and before the consummation of the age. In other words, the implied reader understands that the events described in 10:17-23 can be expected to occur during the life time of the Twelve in the time after the resurrection of Jesus.³²¹ Consequently, in Gibbs' view, the implied reader does not understand the temporal limitation of 10:23b as a reference to the *parousia*, but rather to the destruction of the Temple and city of Jerusalem that Jesus elsewhere predicts (cf. 23:34-38; 24:2).³²²

With regard to Matt 16:28 Gibbs argues that:

[J]esus' words in 16:28 are most importantly fulfilled when in Gethsemane he obediently accepts the Father's will that he drink the cup that leads to his suffering and death (26:36-46). In this scene, which opens the door to and sets in motion the passion narrative, Jesus paradoxically shows himself as "this man coming with his royal power" (16:28).³²³

³²⁰ See Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia*, 15-16.

³²¹ See Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia*, 65.

³²² See Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia*, 66.

³²³ See Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia*, 256. Cf. also 125. For Gibbs' understanding of the expression "Son of Man" see his comments on Matt 8:20 at page 60 in his book.

Matt 24:34 is central to Gibbs' whole thesis. As already noted, Gibbs argues that the *parousia* of the Son of Man is not to be linked with the predicted destruction of Jerusalem. Rather, it will suddenly occur at a later, but unknown, time.

Concerning the interpretation of Matt 26:64 Gibbs sums up his position as follows:

I have argued that, given the entire context of the Gospel's story, the implied reader will know that Jesus' words to the high priest in 26:64 find a threefold fulfillment. First, the signs at Jesus' death and especially the tearing of the temple curtain give evidence that this man is seated at God's right hand and has been invested with power by the Ancient of Days, as Ps 110:1 and Dan 7:13-14 declare. Further, the Tomb guards' testimony also reveals the same truth to the obdurate religious leaders (28:11-15). Finally and most climactically, the destruction of Jerusalem's temple, which will come upon this generation (23:36), is God's judgment in fulfillment of Jesus' words to the high priest.³²⁴

The question of the rightness or otherwise of Gibbs' Narrative Critical approach to these matters will not be entered into here. Suffice to say that with regard to the ED (Matt 24:4-25:46) I would agree that the Gospel writer does indeed depict Jesus as correcting his disciples' view regarding the End Time. The disciples did assume that Jesus' *parousia* (the manifestation of his glorious power) and the consummation of the Age would coincide with Jerusalem's destruction. However, I would argue that what we have in the ED is, in effect, some early Church apologetics. It must be remembered that whereas Jesus' spoke about these matters *before* his passion, Matthew writes *after* Jesus' death and resurrection. Consequently, for Matthew the *parousia* is not the manifestation of the power of the earthly Jesus, as the disciples once assumed, but the later coming of the risen, ascended, Jesus as the glorious Son of Man. Further, Matthew writes after the destruction of Jerusalem. And since the End did not come when Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 C.E., the continuing delay in the *parousia* had to be explained. Thus in the ED various teachings of the earthly Jesus about the End Time have been developed and reinterpreted from a post 70 C.E. point of view. Consequently, the First Gospel

³²⁴ Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia*, 257. For further comment on Matt 26:64 see 6.1.3 below.

depicts the earthly Jesus as declaring in Matt 24:4-25:46 that the ultimate End will come suddenly, at some unknown future time after Jerusalem's destruction.³²⁵

I disagree, however, with Gibbs' attempts, through the Narrative Critical approach, to explain away the clear implication of Matt 10:23, 16:28, and so on, to the effect that the implied reader is not to think that Jesus during his ministry expressed other views.³²⁶ In these passages Jesus, to my mind, *is* depicted as believing the End to be imminent, as well as having different understandings of the time of the End, of the *parousia*.³²⁷ While it may be agreed that Matthew wants his readers to understand 10:23, and so on in light of the ED (Matt 24:4-25:46),³²⁸ yet the question arises: Why has Matthew included these earlier comments by Jesus about the nearness of the End Time? He could surely have omitted this confusing material. Matthew is perhaps saying to his readers that with regard to the End Time it is a matter of faith. They are thus to follow the example of Jesus who in his earthly life believed, and hoped that the End, the establishment of God's kingdom, was imminent.³²⁹ The corollary of this is that those who believe that the kingdom, the *parousia*, is imminent will be better prepared for its sudden appearance.

The relevance of all this to the subject of this thesis, the study of the pericope Matt 27:51b-53, is as follows: the diversity found in Matthew's Gospel concerning the nature and timing of the *parousia*³³⁰ reflects the diversity which existed in the very early church about this matter. Accordingly, it is argued that Matt 27:51b-53 is yet another interpretation, current in the

³²⁵ The very existence, and need, for the Eschatological Discourse implies that when Matthew wrote there were current understandings of Jesus' *parousia*, of the End Time, perhaps even claiming the support of the disciples, which needed correction.

³²⁶ Gibbs is quite emphatic: "[T]he implied reader of Matthew's Gospel knows that there is no near-expectation of the consummation of the age in the teaching of Jesus." (Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia*, 72).

³²⁷ Jesus, of course, was not mistaken, for he is depicted as never setting an exact date for the End (Matt 24:36). But he did hope for the speedy coming of God's Kingdom in all its fullness.

³²⁸ Matt.24:4-25:46 is known as the Eschatological Discourse [ED]. Some material in the ED teaches the delay of the *parousia* (Matt 24:48; 25:5; 25:19). Further Matt 24:14 (cf. 26:13) implies a long period of mission outreach to the nations.

³²⁹ Cf. Hebrews 12:2 which speaks of the earthly Jesus as "the pioneer and perfecter of faith".

³³⁰ Cf. Matt 10:23; 16:28; 24:14; 26:64. Even Matt 28:16-20 may be included. Some see here another understanding of the *parousia* – the risen, glorified Jesus comes to his church. (See Allison, *The End of the Ages Has Come*, 49). In the Fourth Gospel Jesus' *parousia*, his coming, may be equated with the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Book of Revelation with its reference to a millennium reign (Rev 20) may reflect yet another understanding in the early Church of the End Time.

very early church, about the nature and timing of the End. This unique interpretation Matthew has seen fit to include in his Gospel.³³¹

It may be agreed with Narrative Criticism that the First Gospel is indeed a story, a narrative. But the First Gospel is not exactly a seamless garment. It does have inconsistencies which are not just apparent but very real. While it is not a “pot-pourri” of traditions, yet it does contain material which is difficult, if not impossible, for the modern reader to mould into a coherent whole. The pericope, Matt 27:51b-53, is one example of such material.³³²

³³¹ The challenge is to discover why Matthew has done so. Could it be that just as in Matt 24:4-25:46 Matthew attempts to correct the mistaken view that the *parousia* coincided with Jerusalem’s destruction in 70 C.E., so by including Matt 27:51b-53 the writer is attempting, in a subtle way, to change the mistaken view, perhaps current among some members of his community, that the End occurred at Jesus’ death?

³³² Matt 27:51b-53 declares that End Time events occurred at Jesus’ death, and that many holy ones were raised *before* Jesus’ own resurrection.

Chapter 3 Various Conceptions and Understandings of the Messiah.

Jesus of Nazareth was crucified by the Romans³³³ as a king not sanctioned by Roman rule.³³⁴ However, according to Matthew, at the very moment of Jesus' death events associated with the End Time occurred (cf. Matt 27:51b-53).³³⁵ In other words, by means of this pericope Matthew declares that the crucified Jesus was indeed a king – that he was, in reality, the Christ.³³⁶ In other words, while in the second Temple period “messiah” was not a term with a fixed royal connotation, yet from the Christian point of view, it was indeed such. This Christian claim concerning Jesus was thus unacceptable to many Jews.³³⁷

It is to be noted that this line of argument assumes that among the Jews in NT times it was accepted, by some at least, that such End Time events, as depicted in Matt 27:51b-53, would occur at the messiah's coming. Proof for this sort of argument also, to a certain extent, rests on the allegedly mistaken idea that in NT times there was a “standard” conception of the messiah (into which Jesus fitted).³³⁸ Accordingly, to avoid confusion, a number of matters need to be investigated. First, what in NT times was the Jewish understanding of the term משיח, messiah? Secondly, what did the early Christians, themselves Jews, understand by the same term? And thirdly, why did they apply the title messiah (in Greek, “Christ”) to Jesus?

These questions are important in the argument of this thesis. In chapter 2³³⁹ it was argued that as God's agent Jesus, the messiah, is depicted by Matthew as being in a covenantal

³³³ See 1.7 above.

³³⁴ Cf. the title on the cross (see Mark 15:26; Matt 27:37; Luke 23:38; John 19:19). This was not exactly a Christian title; it would have been politically embarrassing to the early followers of Jesus.

³³⁵ See discussion in Basic Issues in the Introductory Remarks above.

³³⁶ The Greek translation of the Hebrew title, messiah (משיח).

³³⁷ R. T. France draws attention to the sociopolitical tensions in first century Palestine between the Galilean north and the Judean south. He suggests that the fact that Jesus of Nazareth was a Galilean would have been an additional obstacle to his being accepted as a credible “messiah” especially in Jerusalem. See his *The Gospel of Matthew* [2007], 5-6.

³³⁸ It seems that as attempts were made to clarify Christian origins a composite notion of “the” messiah was created from various Jewish texts designated as messianic. This scholarly composite creation, in actual reality, had no real existence. Further, in the light of this, the following assumptions, while at one time common, are now considered invalid – (i) that one can move smoothly from Jewish messianology to Christian Christology; (ii) that what the Jews expected was fulfilled in the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth (so, therefore, he is the messiah); and (iii) that Jesus' followers were convinced of his messiahship because they saw how he filled the portrait of the messiah. See Charlesworth, *The Messiah*, xv.

³³⁹ See 2.6 and 2.7.

relationship to God, his heavenly Father. Accordingly Jesus not only received divine authority, but that this delegated authority was to be used by him in a divinely prescribed manner (cf. Matt 4:1-11). Thus, it will be argued that the concept, messiah, includes the element of obedience. Consequently, it will be suggested that, according to Matthew, the extraordinary events related in Matt 27:51b-53 occurred because, as the promised messiah, Jesus' death was his supreme act of obedience to his Father's will.

3.1 Jewish Understandings of Messiah.

With regard to various Jewish understandings of "messiah" it must first be noted that at root the term means "anointed" or "commissioned" by God. The Hebrew Scriptures reveal that down through Israel's history numerous people were anointed or commissioned by God to perform various roles – e.g. prophets (1Kgs 19:16); priests (Lev 4); kings (Ps 2:7); even a Gentile ruler to deliver Israel from Babylonian control (Isa 44:28-45:1); and a ruler to overcome the Romans (*Pss. Sol.* 17; *4 Ezra* 11-12). And further, it must be noted that the concept of messiah is a peculiarly Jewish idea, and can be appreciated only by an understanding of the history of the Jewish people.³⁴⁰

At least three factors gave rise to the concept of messiah. (a) First, what may be called "the faith" of the Jewish people – that is, their conviction that they were a special community, with a "future hope." The Jewish people believed that they had been chosen by the Lord their God who had promised to bless them as a nation, and through them, the nations of the world.³⁴¹ Further, messiah is not so much a title as an epithet used to designate someone in a range of roles whose function is seen to be essential for fulfilment of the (conceived) divine purpose for the future of the covenant community. Hence, the title "messiah" in the second Temple period was not a term with a fixed royal connotation. There was thus no sharp distinction between the titles prophet, priest, and king. This was because the messiah or redeemer is in every case a

³⁴⁰ "No equal to the messianic idea – its essence and its diversity – can be found outside the framework of the Judeo-Christian culture and belief systems." (From S. Talmon, "The Concepts of Māšīah and Messianism in Early Judaism," in Charlesworth, *The Messiah*, 83).

³⁴¹ See W. S. Green, "Messiah in Judaism: Rethinking the Question" in Neusner, Green and Frerichs, *Judaisms and their Messiahs*, 6-7.

mediator between the divine purpose and the aspirations of a community. The values and assumptions of the community are, therefore, always reflected in the image of the redemptive agent. Thus, if the community's goal is political independence, then the rhetoric is that of royalty, of dominion, of triumph over foes. If for purity, the agent is seen as priestly in function, reconstituting the cultic system and purging God's chosen people. If the group despairs of the present epoch, the agent is one who radically transforms the present epoch, replacing it with a new Age. If the ethos is intellectual in nature then the agent, through wisdom, effects order and rationally.³⁴²

(b) Secondly, the conviction that these divine promises and "future hope" were to be found in the Hebrew Scriptures fostered the growth of the messianic concept. Cf. Num 24:15-19; Isa 9:2-7; 11:1-10; Jer 23:5-6; Amos 9:11; Mic 4; 5:2-5; Ezek 17; Hos 3.³⁴³ (c) Thirdly, the vagaries of historical events created a desire for the establishment of the messiah's reign. In certain historical circumstances, especially when Jewish communities were either oppressed by foreign powers, or troubled by internal disputes, people saw in some texts in the Hebrew Bible references to the hope that a special person, a messiah, a liberator, would come to their help. As J. Neusner puts it, "Israel constituted a defeated people, driven from its holy place, yet reminded, every time they opened their ancient Scriptures, of God's special love for them and of their distinctive dealing among nations. Israel lived out an insufferable paradox between God's word and world, between promise and postponed fulfilment."³⁴⁴

It is important to note that the understanding of a text as messianic was, and is, a hermeneutic process. That is to say, texts were, and are, understood in a greater framework created by the reader(s).³⁴⁵ For instance, in Num 24:15-19 no "anointed" king or messiah is mentioned. Yet in various writings (e.g. 1QM11.6; CD 7:18-19; Rev 22:16) the "Star" of Numbers 24:17 is interpreted as the Davidic or messianic king. This text (Num 24:15-19 cf.

³⁴² See H. C. Kee, "Christology in Mark's Gospel," in Neusner, Green and Frerichs, *Judaisms and their Messiahs*, 187-208. In the Christian context all this means that Christology is to be understood in direct relationship to ecclesiology, to the Christian community and its understanding of itself.

³⁴³ See discussion of these passages in (c) below.

³⁴⁴ J. Neusner, "Mishnah and Messiah," in Neusner, Green and Frerichs, *Judaisms and their Messiahs*, 277.

³⁴⁵ See Oegema, *The Anointed and his People*, 20-26.

also Gen. 49:10) was understood as a divine promise which must be fulfilled and whose fulfilment was projected into the future. Likewise passages like Jer 23:5-6; Amos 9:11; Mic 4; 5:2-5; Ezek 17 and Hos 3 could also be understood as messianic even though the word “messiah” did not occur within them. In other words, these texts could, and were, understood in a wider hermeneutic framework.

Further, the noun “anointed” or (“anointed one”) occurs something like 38 times in the Hebrew Bible. It is applied twice to the patriarchs, six times to the high priest, once to the gentile Cyrus and 29 times to the Israelite king. And as W. S. Green points out, “In these contexts the term denotes one invested usually by God, with power and leadership, but never an eschatological figure.”³⁴⁶ However, while משיח means simply “anointed” it came eventually in many circles to refer to an eschatological figure with an authoritative role in the End Time, a figure whose coming would inaugurate an era of salvation. In other words, the adjective “messianic” is not automatically synonymous with “eschatological.”³⁴⁷

3.1.1 Historical Developments.

In the Persian period it seems that the prophets Haggai and Zechariah (around 520 B.C.E.), encouraged by a favourable turn of political events, had high hopes that through Zerubbabel (who was of Davidic descent – 1 Chr 3:16-19) the Davidic monarchy would soon be restored, the temple rebuilt, the gentiles overthrown, and a new age ushered in (Hag 2:6-9; 2:21-23; Zech 3:8-10; 4:7).³⁴⁸ Despite their enthusiasm, these hopes were not fulfilled.

In the Book of Sirach there are no clear messianic expectations, probably because in Sirach’s time the kingdom was subordinated to the priesthood.³⁴⁹ “There is no doubt that Sirach viewed the High Priest Simon as the main mediator of God’s blessing in his own time (50:1-

³⁴⁶ Green, “Messiah in Judaism: Rethinking the Question,” in Neusner, Green and Frerichs, *Judaisms and their Messiahs*, 2. See also J. J. M. Roberts, “The Old Testament’s Contribution to Messianic Expectations” in Charlesworth, *The Messiah*, 39-51.

³⁴⁷ Charlesworth, *The Messiah*, 19.

³⁴⁸ Zech 4:14 speaks of “two sons of oil” suggesting that in this new age there would be dual leadership of priest and king. It would seem that the king was to be bound by the priest’s interpretation of the Law. (cf. Deut 17:18; Jer 33:14-16).

³⁴⁹ See Oegema, *The Anointed and his People*, 54.

21). The sage's lack of interest in Davidic messianism is a consequence of his satisfaction with the priestly theocratic regime."³⁵⁰ Thus politically, down to 150 B.C.E. or so, the hopes of most Jews were not for national independence but rather for a benevolent overlord (a Ptolemy perhaps) who would promote and protect the Jewish people.³⁵¹

In the first century B.C.E. however things changed dramatically. Dormant messianism was aroused, not only in resistance to foreign powers, but in reaction to the flawed restoration of Jewish kingship by the non-Davidic Hasmoneans. Thus, according to J. H. Charlesworth,

Jewish messianology developed out of the crisis and hope of the non-messianic Maccabean wars of the second century BCE. Palestinian Jews yearned for salvation from their pagan oppressors ... The yearning centered on the future saving acts by a divinely appointed, and anointed, supernatural man: the Messiah. This eschatological figure will inaugurate the end of all normal time and history.³⁵²

This change and new expectation is reflected in the Dead Sea Scrolls [hereafter cited as DSS].³⁵³ Understanding the DSS is a complex and difficult task. Nevertheless these scrolls have shed new light on how, in some circles, the concept of messiah was understood in the first century B.C.E. and the first century C.E. Basically, "the Qumran texts have shown that Jewish messianic doctrines were open to greater variation than earlier assumed."³⁵⁴ In them משיח refers to prophets, priests, kings, as well as to past and future figures. Further, the activity of the Messiah, son of God and an anointed eschatological king, is linked to the Interpreter of the Law, as well as the "end of days."³⁵⁵

Thus, the Qumran covenanters' conceptions of an eschatological judgment and their longing for a restoration of justice in Israel were born of constant conflicts, both external and internal. The War Scroll³⁵⁶ reflects the Kittim, the occupying Roman power,³⁵⁷ and the Community Rule reflects the expectation of two messiahs – "Until there shall come the Prophet

³⁵⁰ Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 34.

³⁵¹ See Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 39.

³⁵² Charlesworth, *The Messiah*, 3.

³⁵³ See Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 56-68.

³⁵⁴ See N. A. Dahl (Revised by D. H. Juel), "Messianic Ideas and the Crucifixion of Jesus" in Charlesworth, *The Messiah*, 383.

³⁵⁵ Thus, "There is the lack of a set function or status for the future Messiah." See Charlesworth, *The Messiah*, 21.

³⁵⁶ 1QM; 4Q285.

³⁵⁷ See Oegema, *The Anointed and his People*, 114.

and the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel.”³⁵⁸ This idea of a bifurcation of authority in the messianic era although embedded in the life of the community was not unique to Qumran (cf. *T. Levi* 18 and *T. Jud.* 24).³⁵⁹ What the idea of a dual authority, royal and priestly, reflected was dissatisfaction with the Hasmonean regime which controlled both the secular and priestly aspects of Jewish life. “The plurality of the messianic figures in question ... was itself a political statement, since it implicitly rejected the combination of royal and priestly offices by the Hasmoneans.”³⁶⁰ Thus, according to Charlesworth, “The complexity of messianic ideas, the lack of a coherent messianology among the documents in the Pseudepigrapha and among the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the frequently contradictory messianic predictions prohibit anything approximating coherency in early Jewish messianology.”³⁶¹

Further, according to J. Neusner, “Judaism as we know it presents no well-crafted doctrine of the Messiah.”³⁶² This was due, on the one hand, to the fact that “Judaism” was not a fixed entity but a swirling dynamo of life and contradiction. But, on the other hand, it was also due to the fact that Jewish understandings of a messiah depended very much on historical circumstances, as to whether these were favourable or unfavourable to the Jewish people.³⁶³ Thus, according to J. H. Charlesworth, “there was no single, discernible role description for a ‘Messiah’ into which a historical figure like Jesus could be fit. Rather, each group which entertained a messianic hope interpreted ‘Messiah’ in light of its historical experiences and reinterpreted Scripture accordingly. Consequently, it is inappropriate to speak of a single normative stream of Judaism in the postexilic period or throughout the period of the Second temple. Diverse interpretations of common traditions were entertained by different groups.”³⁶⁴

More examples of how the concept of messiah reflected and changed according to the historical situation are found in two later Jewish writings – the Syriac Book of Baruch (*2 Bar.*)

³⁵⁸ 1QS9.11.

³⁵⁹ All this is questioned by Charlesworth, *The Messiah*, 26. He maintains that according to 4Q Florilegium there are not two messiahs.

³⁶⁰ Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 95.

³⁶¹ Charlesworth, *The Messiah*, 28.

³⁶² From R. D. Hecht, “Philo and Messiah,” in Neusner, Green and Frerichs, *Judaisms and their Messiahs*, 139.

³⁶³ See Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 25; Oegema, *The Anointed and his People*, 70.

³⁶⁴ See Charlesworth, *The Messiah*, xv.

and *4 Ezra*. These apocalypses have been described as “Books of Lamentation” over the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple. Written around ca. 80 C.E. *2 Bar.* depicts the Messiah as a warrior, the slayer of Israel’s enemies (the Romans). The “end” is near (23:7), a time of affliction will suddenly arise, judgment will come. The messiah initiates a period of transition after which the new world, the resurrection of the dead, and the new heavenly Jerusalem become realities.

Like *2 Bar.*, *4 Ezra* was written after Jerusalem’s destruction (ca. 90-100 C.E). While the messiah initiates the messianic age, this is only a period of transition to the world to come. (The messiah even dies after 400 years).³⁶⁵ Accordingly, the stress is on what God will do – the “end” with all its many wonders and spiritual blessing will come through God alone, not even through the messiah. The Jewish hope is now centred on God alone.

3.1.2 Distinctive Traits of Jewish Messianism.

According to J. J. Collins, “[J]ewish expectations around the turn of the era were not for a generic ‘messiah’, but for a royal messiah who would be the branch of David, or a priestly messiah like Aaron, or a prophet like Moses There were different messianic paradigms, not one composite concept of Messiah.”³⁶⁶ To these messianic paradigms – king (cf. David)³⁶⁷; priest (cf. Aaron)³⁶⁸; prophet / teacher (cf. Moses)³⁶⁹ – may be added Son of God³⁷⁰ and

³⁶⁵ See *4 Ezra* 7:28-29.

³⁶⁶ Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 195.

³⁶⁷ For concept of “Son of David Messiah,” see 2 Sam.7:1-17; *4 Ezra* 11-12, esp. 12:32; *2 Bar.* 40, 72. See also Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 68, 95.

³⁶⁸ For concept of “Son of Aaron Messiah,” see 1QS9.11; *T. Levi* 18; *T. Jud.* 24. See also comments by Charlesworth, *The Messiah*, 26.

³⁶⁹ For concept of “a Mosaic Messiah,” see Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 119.

³⁷⁰ For concept of “Son of God Messiah,” see 2 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:7-8; Ps. 89:26-27; 4Q174 (Florilegium); 4Q246; *4 Ezra* 7:28; 13:37; 14:9; *Pss. Sol.* 17:21-44; 18:3-9; Luke 1:32, 35. See Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 154-169. See also Turner, *Matthew*, 34-5. According to Turner, Matthew presents Jesus as the virginally conceived Son who uniquely signifies the presence of God with his people (Matt 1:23; cf. Isa 7:14; ...). Jesus’ sojourn in Egypt recapitulates the history of Israel (Matt 2:15; cf. Hos 11:1). At his baptism, Jesus is endorsed as the Father’s beloved Son and endowed with the Spirit for ministry (Matt 3:17; cf. Isa 42:1). When tempted by Satan Jesus shows divine sonship by submission to the will of the Father. Further, in Matthew, Jesus’ divine sonship is shown through his authority over evil spirits and the weather (Matt 8:29; 14:33). At Jesus’ transfiguration Jesus’ divine sonship is declared by God (Matt 17:5). Cf. also Matt 21:33-41; 22:2-14; 22:45; 26:63 (cf. 16:16); 27:40, 43, 54).

heavenly messiah (cf. Son of Man)³⁷¹. And while these paradigms often merged yet in Judaism in NT times there was no standard composite understanding of the nature of the messiah. Thus there is no script for the messiah to act out, and no clear, widely accepted Jewish description of the messiah. Nor were there any discernible developments in messianic beliefs from the first century B.C.E. to first century C.E.³⁷²

The following points should also be noted in relation to the concept of the messiah within Judaism in the first century C.E. – (i) The death of the Messiah. In *4 Ezra* and *2 Bar.* the messiah dies. His death, however, does not involve suffering and has no atoning significance. (cf. *4 Ezra* 7:29-30; *2 Bar.* 30:1). In other words, a suffering messiah is a Christian concept. “There is no evidence that any one in the first-century Judaism expected such a figure, either in fulfillment of Isaiah 53 or on any other basis”.³⁷³ (ii) The Resurrection. In some writings of the first century C.E. the resurrection is associated with the messianic age (cf. *2 Bar.* 30:2; *4 Ezra* 7). But the messiah does not raise the dead (cf. 1 Cor 15 – where Christ is the first fruits of the resurrection, not the agent).³⁷⁴ (iii) The End Days.³⁷⁵ This expression, the End Days, implies the coming of the messiah along with a decisive change at a future time. This change, however, would not be the end of history or of the world. Rather, it would be the end of one era and the beginning of another. It would not be a period of perfection and peace but would include the final turmoil and at least the dawn of the messianic age, as well as the building of the eschatological Temple.³⁷⁶ Further, the End of Days would involve the presence of a Teacher and also “the Interpreter of the Law” (cf.4Q174).³⁷⁷

³⁷¹ For concept of “Son of Man Messiah” see Dan 7:13-14; *1 En.* 37-71; Ps 147: 4; *1 En.* 45:3 cf. Matt 19:28; 25:31; *4 Ezra* 13; 12:11; *2 Bar.* 29-30; Rev 20:4; See Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 172-189. Note: in the writings of the first century C.E. there is a tendency to combine traditions about a Davidic messiah with the expectations of a heavenly savior. In other words, “Davidic messiah” and “Son of Man” are not mutually exclusive concepts. Collins wonders whether the emphasis on the heavenly character of a savior king in the period after the revolt of 70 C.E. reflects disillusionment with messiahs of human, earthly origin. See Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 189.

³⁷² See Charlesworth, *The Messiah*, 31.

³⁷³ Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 126. For discussion of the suggestion that the concept of the suffering servant is to be found in the Qumran writings see Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 123-126.

³⁷⁴ See Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 119.

³⁷⁵ Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 102-4.

³⁷⁶ See Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 109.

³⁷⁷ The Teacher of Righteousness of Qumran however was not a future figure but belonged to the past.

In the light of the above one can understand the following comment by W. S. Green, “It is no longer possible to justify the standard, homogenous reading of the varied Jewish writings or to assume that different groups, even within Palestine, shared a single outlook, social experience, or religious expectation simply because they were Jews. ... preoccupation with the messiah was not a uniform or definitive trait, nor a common reference point, of early Jewish writings or the Jews who produced them.”³⁷⁸

3.2 The Christian understanding of Jesus as Messiah.

One thing is certain: despite his crucifixion the followers of Jesus insisted that he was the Christ, Israel’s promised messiah.³⁷⁹ In fact, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that according to Matthew, the prodigia which allegedly occurred when Jesus died (cf. Matt 27:51-53) are to be construed as proof that Jesus was indeed the messiah. It is thus the argument of this thesis that among these prodigia were events associated with the End Time (cf. especially Matt 27:51b-52a) which imply that Jesus was indeed the messiah and that with his death the eschatological age had begun. It is important to note that, according to Matt 27:51b-52a, it was Jesus’ death, not his resurrection, that initiated these events associated with the End Time.³⁸⁰

The differences between what the Christians declared concerning Jesus and various Jewish expectations about the messiah highlight the radicalness of the Christian claims about

³⁷⁸ Green, “Messiah in Judaism: Rethinking the Question,” in Neusner, Green and Frerichs, *Judaisms and their Messiahs*, 10. See also J. H. Charlesworth, “From Messianology to Christology: Problems and Prospects,” in Charlesworth, *The Messiah*, 35. Charlesworth writes, “The major conclusions of this study may be summarized as follows: (i) Jewish messianology exploded into the history of ideas in the early first century B.C.E., and not earlier, because of the degeneration in the Hasmonean dynasty and the claim of the final ruling Hasmoneans, especially Alexander Jannaeus, to be “the king”, and because of the loss of the land promised as Israel’s inheritance to the gentile and idolatrous nation Rome. (ii) Jews did not profess a coherent and normative messianology. (iii) New Testament scholars must read and attempt to master all the early Jewish writings; there is much to admire about the genius of early Jewish theology. The Jewish social and ideological contexts of Christian origins are not the background for, but the foreground of, Jesus and his earliest followers. (iv) One can no longer claim that most Jews were looking for the coming of the Messiah. (v) The gospels and Paul must not be read as if they are reliable sources for pre-70 Jewish beliefs in the Messiah.”

³⁷⁹ Since the messiah when he came had to reveal himself, the claim to be the messiah was considered to be neither heresy nor blasphemy. Whether Jesus actually claimed to be the messiah is, however, debatable. In the light of Mark 8:29-30 it has been argued that Jesus rejected the title, or at least what he perceived to be Peter’s understanding of the title.

³⁸⁰ It is readily agreed that Jesus’ resurrection, conceived as an entrance into heavenly glory, implies the onset of the End of days. (See Dale C. Allison, Jr., “The Eschatological Jesus: Did he believe the End was Near?” *Biblical Research*, 12(1996): 34-41, 54-55). But according to Matt 27:51b-53 this onset of the End occurred *before* Jesus’ resurrection. Many holy ones were raised before Jesus.

Jesus' messiahship. As already seen there was in NT times no one definitive understanding of the nature of the coming messiah.³⁸¹ Further, Jewish sources from 100B.C.E. to 100C.E. reveal a variety of messianic expectations.³⁸² In addition, the actual functions attributed to Jesus by his followers were not those often associated with the messiah in NT times. For instance, whereas in the Gospels Jesus is portrayed as a miracle worker, in early Judaism the messiah was not so portrayed.³⁸³ While in *4 Ezra* 7:29 the messiah dies yet his death involves no suffering and has no atoning value. On the contrary, according to Jesus' followers, his sufferings were essential and inescapable, being efficacious for humankind's salvation. If Jewish messianic hopes looked for "a son of David", the Christians, in addition to stressing Jesus as "a son of David", also proclaimed him as "Lord" and "Son of God", "Son of Man".³⁸⁴

In the opinion of some, when Jesus' followers were pressed to prove their claim that he was the expected messiah, they resorted to finding in OT Scripture (cf. Pss 22, 110, Isa 53) the proof that it was necessary for Israel's messiah to be rejected, to suffer and to die.³⁸⁵ Be that as it may, the fact remains that the followers of Jesus did proclaim him as the promised messiah. And this, as scholars concede, creates a problem (intensified if Jesus did not accept the claim of Peter's confession, Mark 8:29-30) – the problem of why and how Jesus' followers concluded that the title "the messiah" was appropriate for him.³⁸⁶

³⁸¹ According to N. A. Dahl, "At the time of Jesus there existed no normative doctrine of the Messiah. Hence, distinctions between national, this-worldly, eschatological, and apocalyptic expectations have only limited value as tools of classification. An overarching unity was, however, provided by the common faith in the one God, the God of Israel and the entire world, who had given the Law and would keep His word and do what he had promised. The divergent, or even conflicting, 'messianic' ideas and movements operated within this framework." (Dahl, "Messianic Ideas and the Crucifixion of Jesus" in Charlesworth, *The Messiah*, 389).

³⁸² See Charlesworth, *The Messiah*, 7-8. Charlesworth mentions the following as examples: (i) the messiah would serve as the eschatological high priest (DSS T 12P); (ii) he would be the consummate and all powerful king (*Pss. Sol.* 17); (iii) he would judge the wicked (*Pss. Sol.* 17, *4 Ezra* 12, *2 Bar.* 40); (iv) he would destroy the wicked (*Pss. Sol.* 17, 18; *4 Ezra* 12, *2 Bar.* 72. Cf. Isa 11); (v) he would deliver God's people (*Pss. Sol.* 17, *4 Ezra* 12, cf. Zech 9) and (vi) he would reign in a blessed kingdom (*Pss. Sol.* 17, 18; *2 Bar.* 40; cf. Ps 2). And, according to Charlesworth, "Jesus is acknowledged by Paul and the Evangelists to have performed none of these functions attributed to the [Jewish] Messiah."

³⁸³ But cf. *4 Ezra* 13.

³⁸⁴ See Matt 9:27; 12:23; 21:9, 15; Acts 2:36; Rom 1:4; Acts 7:56; Rev 1:12-20.

³⁸⁵ See Charlesworth, *The Messiah*, 6-13. But see also Eduard Lohse, "Die alttestamentlichen Bezüge im neutestamentlichen Zeugnis vom Tode Jesu Christi," in *Zur Bedeutung des Todes Jesu* (ed. F. Vierung; Gutersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1967), 97-112.

³⁸⁶ See Charlesworth, *The Messiah*, 9.

Thus, Charlesworth asks, “If most Jews were not looking for the coming of the ‘Messiah’, and if Jesus’ life and teachings were not parallel to those often or sometimes attributed to the coming of ‘the Messiah’ or ‘the Christ’, then why, how, and when did Jesus’ earliest followers contend that he was so clearly the promised Messiah that the title ‘Christ’ became his proper name by at least 40 C.E. or ten years after the crucifixion?”³⁸⁷

In other words, why was a prophet from Nazareth, a sage and teacher who performed miracles proclaimed, after his crucifixion by the Romans, to have been raised from the dead and so divinely vindicated as Israel’s messiah?³⁸⁸ Commenting on this paradox, Dahl writes:

The resurrection experiences would not have led the disciples to affirm that Jesus was the promised Messiah unless he had been crucified as an alleged royal Messiah. Post-mortem appearances, an empty tomb, an assumption to heaven were not aspects of messianic ideology, and the messiahship of Jesus plays little, if any, role in the resurrection stories, with the exception of Luke 24 where vss 18-27 and 44-49 represent Luke’s own theology. ... the appearances of the risen Christ were, no doubt, of crucial importance for the radical Christian transformation of the concept ‘Messiah’, but they can only have had this effect because they convinced the disciples that God had vindicated the crucified King of the Jews. The narratives about the life and the death of Jesus are all informed by this conviction.³⁸⁹

C. A. Evans also writes, “In my view, the messianism of Jesus should be a given. Two data warrant this position: (1) Jesus’ crucifixion as ‘king of the Jews’; and (2) among his following the universal post-Easter confession of him as ὁ χριστός are most plausibly explained as due to a messianic self-understanding prior to Easter.”³⁹⁰

Thus, despite Jesus’ rejection and crucifixion, his disciples continued to regard him as the messiah, the Christ. In the light of Matt 16:13-23 (cf. Mark 8:27-33), where Jesus’ passion

³⁸⁷ Charlesworth, *The Messiah*, 10. See also M. Hengel, “Christological Titles in early Christianity,” in Charlesworth, *The Messiah*, 425-447.

³⁸⁸ See Dahl, “Messianic Ideas and the Crucifixion of Jesus” in Charlesworth, *The Messiah*, 389. (cf. also the relationship between, and the interpenetration of, prophetic and royal categories.)

³⁸⁹ Dahl, “Messianic Ideas and the Crucifixion of Jesus” in Charlesworth, *The Messiah*, 390-1. Dahl proposes this thesis: The designation of Jesus as “the Messiah” was primarily connected with his crucifixion (and vindication).

³⁹⁰ C. A. Evans, “The New Quest for Jesus and the New Research on the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *Jesus, Mark and Q: The Teaching of Jesus and its Earliest Records* (Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 214; eds. Michael Labahn and Andreas Schmidt; Sheffield: Sheffield Academy Press, 2001), 183. In fn 41 Evans adds, “The Easter proclamation alone does not provide an adequate explanation of the universal confession of Jesus as Israel’s Messiah. Had no messianism been present in the pre-Easter ministry, then the resurrection would not have generated it. Jewish messianism of Jesus’ day cannot account for a shift from a pre-Easter non-messianism to a post-Easter messianism in the dominical tradition”.

prediction is a corrective to Peter's messianic confession, it is clear that Jesus' suffering and death are at the very heart of the Christian gospel. Thus, '[O]nly in terms of the suffering, dying, rising Son of Man do Christians confess Jesus as the Messiah.'³⁹¹

Further, it is to be noted that if in NT times, much of Jewish messianic expectations centred and dwelt on a Davidic political Liberator, then Mark lays no stress on this. Rather, by stressing the eschatological (cf. Mark 14:61-62) he plays down any continuity between Christian and Jewish messianic expectations. However, if Mark's comments about Jesus' messiahship in relation to Jewish expectations exhibit an abruptness, Matthew's comments are much smoother and irenic. This is because Matthew wishes to situate the Gospel in the line of what he understood to be Jewish messianic expectations. Thus, according to Matthew, Jesus, the Messiah, emerges not abruptly in a contemporary crisis, but rather as the ultimate fulfillment of centuries of hope and expectation.³⁹²

Matthew portrays the gradual revelation of Jesus' messiahship as follows: (1) First, by means of his opening genealogy (cf. Matt 1:1-17).³⁹³ Matt 1:1 – βίβλος γενέσεως – for instance, takes one back to Gen 1:1, to the creation of the universe, and of Adam and Eve. Thus Matthew's messianism is *cosmic* in scope. Jesus initiates a whole new creation.³⁹⁴ Also by this genealogy, Matthew declares that God is sovereign, that He controls all history, past, present, future. Further, this genealogy roots Jesus, the messiah, in history, and it "legitimizes" Jesus, by giving him an Israelite pedigree. Thus Jesus is a son of Abraham and a son of David.³⁹⁵ This latter expression is a clear messianic designation (cf. 2 Sam 7:16; cf. Isa 11:10; Jer 23:5; 33:15)

³⁹¹ See G. Macrae, "Messiah and Gospel," in Neusner, Green and Frerichs, *Judaisms and their Messiahs*, 175.

³⁹² According to W. D. Davies, the origins of Matthew's messianism are to be found (i) in the actual messianic ministry of Jesus; (ii) in Jewish sources – the Tanak, the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha; and (iii) in the social, political and religious conditions of the day. See W. D. Davies, "The Jewish Sources of Matthew's Messianism," in Charlesworth, *The Messiah*, 510.

³⁹³ See Turner, *Matthew*, 25-32.

³⁹⁴ Does Matthew here reflect 4 Ezra 7:30, which suggests that with the coming of the Messiah the world would once again be as it was in the beginning? Cf. also Matt 19:28 which speaks of another "genesis", another creation, which would occur when Jesus, the Son of Man, comes in Judgment. See also David C. Sim, "The Meaning of παλιγγενεσία in Matthew 19:28," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 50 (1993): 3-12.

³⁹⁵ Descent from Abraham was ground for membership in Jewish people. So in Matt 1:1 Jesus is declared to be a true member of people of Israel, and a son of David (1:1, 17).

which Matthew frequently applies to Jesus.³⁹⁶ According to W. D. Davies, “[I]n the genealogy in 1:2-17 ... Matthew traces the descent of Jesus through Solomon, a Son of David, who later became famous as a mighty healer, exorcist, magician (Josephus, *Ant.* 8:45-49). It is significant that Matthew connects Jesus as Son of David precisely with healings and exorcisms (9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30, 31).”³⁹⁷

(2) Secondly, Matthew shows that Jesus fulfills messianic expectations of Israel, as understood by Matthew, by declaring that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the place foretold by the prophet (Mic 5:2) where the Messiah would be born (cf. Matt 2:1-6). (3) Thirdly, Matthew shows that Jesus belongs to Jewish messianic expectations, as understood by Matthew, by using the “promise-fulfillment” motif.³⁹⁸ That is to say, Matthew, and other Christians, found in the Hebrew Scriptures announcements, harbingers, of Jesus’ career, suffering, and death (cf. 1:21-23; 2:17-18; 2:33; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:35; 21:4-5). His whole life, even his death, had been predetermined. Jesus was thus no novelty. He was connected with the past in time and space. Furthermore, this finding Jesus in all the Scriptures helped to root the new Christian community into Israel’s history, giving it a needed tradition.³⁹⁹

To summarize: This chapter has attempted, first, to establish that among the Jews in NT times there was much variation with regards to messianic doctrines and beliefs. Diverse interpretations of Messianic traditions, reflecting various historical situations, were to be found. Such was the variation that there was no one standard composite understanding of the Messiah and his function. However, despite this great variation there was one thing in common – namely, that when the Messiah did come he would be welcomed.⁴⁰⁰ This highlights an astonishing difference between the Jewish and Christian concepts of the Messiah. For the Christians proclaimed as Messiah the crucified Jesus – that is, one who had been *rejected* and

³⁹⁶ See Matt 12:23; 21:9, 15.

³⁹⁷ See Davies, “The Jewish Sources of Matthew’s Messianism,” in Charlesworth, *The Messiah*, 500.

³⁹⁸ That is, the so-called “formula quotations” (cf. Matt 1:23; 2:15; 2:17; 2:23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 27:9. See also 13:14; 26:54; 26:56). See France, *The Gospel of Matthew* [2007], 10-12. France suggests that the formula-quotations reflect Matthew’s “pervasive midrashic agenda”. Thus, at times, Matthew was “willing to modify the wording of the text in order to draw out more clearly for his readers the sense in which he perceived it to have been fulfilled in Jesus.” (13). See also Turner, *Matthew*, 19-22.

³⁹⁹ The whole concept of “Messiah” is incomprehensible apart from the people of Israel and their understanding of their own, and the world’s, existence.

⁴⁰⁰ See Allison, “Eschatology,” 207.

who had been judged, by both Israel's leaders and the Romans, as unfit to live. Yet, in Matt 27:51b-53, Matthew declares that it was when this *rejected* Messiah died that events associated with the End Time occurred.

Chapter 4 The Wider Jewish Setting of Matthew's Community and his Gospel.

According to Matt 27:51b-53 when Jesus died “many bodies of the sleeping holy ones were raised”- that is, at the moment of Jesus’ death, resurrection, an event associated with the End Time, occurred. Thus, this thesis argues that Matt 27:51b-53 reflects a belief, held by some Jews in NT times, that at the Messiah’s coming the final and absolute End would occur. However, despite the very “Jewish” nature of Matt 27:51b-53, Matthew also declares that Gentiles, Roman soldiers, also experienced something of these events. The soldiers “saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, ‘Truly this man was God’s Son’” (Matt 27:54 NRSV). It would seem that Matthew endeavours to link two opposites – a very conservative Jewish belief that the Messiah’s coming would inaugurate the End, and a liberal Christian belief that the salvation achieved by Jesus, the Messiah, was also to be available to Gentiles. This conservative - liberal dichotomy could well reflect the actual situation which prevailed in Matthew’s community – that is, that there was a palpable tension among these Jewish Christians. While some of them avoided Gentiles, others sought to encourage Gentiles to have faith in Jesus. Consequently, to help in the understanding of Matt 27:51b-53 it is necessary to have an appreciation of the wider Jewish setting of the First Gospel and especially of Matthew’s attitude to Gentiles. This, as this chapter 4 will reveal, is a rather controversial area of investigation.

It is generally agreed that Matthew wrote his Gospel for a largely Jewish Christian community (or communities) somewhere in Syria or Palestine. However, with regard to the relationship of this Matthean Christian Jewish community to non-Christian Judaism, and also to Gentile Christianity and to the wider Gentile world there has, in recent years, been considerable scholarly discussion and argument. First, with regard to Matthew’s Christian Jewish community and non-Christian Judaism it has been suggested that, on the one hand, by 85 C.E. or so such was the tension between the two groups that they were very close to separating or had already separated. On the other hand, however, others argue that while there may have been differences

yet by 85 C.E. or so there had been no decisive rupture between the two communities. Rather, the Jewish Christian group(s) were still in more or less amicable relations with their local synagogues, and if separation was occurring then it was only very gradual. The former view⁴⁰¹ will be outlined first and then other, more recent, approaches will be mentioned.

4.1 Separation Imminent and Inevitable.

W. D. Davies notes that the Davidic messianic hope was essentially a hope of, and for, Israel. It was, accordingly, unmistakably ethnic (cf. 2 Sam 7:23). This, in turn, had led to a narrow, exclusive Jewish nationalism which, when Matthew wrote well after the destruction of Jerusalem, was still alive.⁴⁰² Accordingly, it is suggested that by mentioning Abraham in his opening genealogy (Matt 1:1, 17), and also the coming of the *Magi* (Matt 2:1-7), Matthew was declaring that Jesus had a saving role for Gentiles as well as Jews (cf. Gen 12:3; 15:1-6; 18:18). As Davies explains, “God had called Abraham before God had established the covenant with him – before there were Jews, so to put it. ... By birth Abraham was a Gentile, and the covenant that God had initiated through him was to be a blessing not only to Jews but to all nations (Gen 12:3, 18:18). ... (Thus) Abraham ... (was) the father of all nations (Gen 17:5; 1 Macc 12:19-21).”⁴⁰³ In Davies’ opinion Matthew, in 8:11-12, and possibly in 3:9 and 1:1, appeals to an Abrahamic strain in Judaism itself to serve his Gentile interests.⁴⁰⁴ Further, Matthew introduces into the genealogy (1:2-17) women of foreign origin – Tamar, a Canaanite or Aramaean; Rahab, a Canaanite; Ruth, a Moabite; and Bathsheba, a Hittite. This could also be understood to imply that Matthew intended to redefine the people of Israel to include Gentiles.⁴⁰⁵

Further, since the messianic age has been inaugurated, it does not close with Jesus’ death (cf. the promise of the risen Jesus, Matt 28:20; cf Matt 1:23). And as at the beginning of

⁴⁰¹ Advocated, among others, by Davies and Allison in their ICC commentary on Matthew (Davies & Allison, *Matthew*).

⁴⁰² See Davies, “The Jewish Sources of Matthew’s Messianism,” in Charlesworth, *The Messiah*, 501-3.

⁴⁰³ Davies, “The Jewish Sources of Matthew’s Messianism,” in Charlesworth, *The Messiah*, 502.

⁴⁰⁴ Davies, “The Jewish Sources of Matthew’s Messianism,” in Charlesworth, *The Messiah*, 503.

⁴⁰⁵ See Turner, *Matthew*, 46.

the Gospel (cf. 2:1-18), so at its close Matthew again stresses that the messianic age is also for the Gentiles (Matt 28:16-20). Further, while the Gospel writers declared Jesus to be the messiah yet, as G. Macrae points out, “[O]ne may be surprised to observe, not how central the messianic idea is to the gospel, but how it is in a sense peripheral.” For, as Macrae explains:

In all the Gospels the designation of Jesus as Messiah is subsumed under the categories of Son of Man or Son of God or both understood in specific ways. These categories may be said to be Jewish messianic categories also, but are not the central ones in the Judaism of the period. It is important in studying the Christian usage to give due weight to the variety of understandings of the Messiah. There is indeed an *interpretation christiana* of the notion, but it is neither simple nor unified.⁴⁰⁶

Another strand of Matthew’s messianism also needs to be noted. This is that according to Matthew Jesus is a greater Moses, who initiates a new Exodus and a new Law. In Matthew, the narrative of Jesus’ infancy recalls the circumstances at the birth of Moses (Exod 1:8-2:10. Cf. Matt 2:13-15). Matthew 3 & 4 recall the story of the Exodus – Jesus’ baptism parallels the crossing of the Red Sea; Jesus’ forty days of fasting parallels the forty years the Israelites spent in the wilderness; Israel’s worship of the golden calf parallels Jesus’ temptation to idolatry (cf. Deut 8:2-3); and the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai parallels Jesus’ sermon on the mount (cf. Jesus’ claim in Matt 11:27-30 to be the recipient of special divine revelation).⁴⁰⁷

One important reason why Matthew drew a parallel between Jesus, the messiah, and Moses was, in all likelihood, because his Jewish Christian community was encountering increasing opposition from unbelieving Jews. Before the destruction of Jerusalem, 70 C.E., many of the Jews had been fiercely divided among themselves. Accordingly, the debatable suggestion has been made that those who survived the devastation of 70 C.E., realizing that Jewish disunity had been a serious contributing factor in the upheaval, endeavoured to unite the Jews. Thus, it is said, the Pharisees (the, supposedly, now dominant group) began to revise, update and reorganize the “Jewish Religion”. And according to tradition these Pharisees

⁴⁰⁶ Macrae, “Messiah and Gospel,” in Neusner, Green and Frerichs, *Judaisms and their Messiahs*, 184.

⁴⁰⁷ See France, *The Gospel of Matthew* [2007], 63-4. Witherington, however, cautions against over stressing the parallels between Moses and Jesus. See his *Matthew*, 55-6.

gathered at Jamnia and there “set in motion a *process* which was to allow Judaism to continue and even thrive after defeat.”⁴⁰⁸

Further, it is suggested that this pharisaic reorganization of “Jewish Religion” came into conflict with other groups who had survived the disaster of 70 C.E. – especially the Jewish Christians and the Jewish Apocalyptists. Thus, in the opinion of Davies and Allison, “it is highly probable that the rabbis formulated or expanded the *birkat ha-minim* at this time, perhaps in part to bar Jewish Christians from officiating at synagogue services, but in any case to make heretics feel unwelcome. This was part of the task of self-definition.”⁴⁰⁹ The point to underline in all this “is that in the time of Matthew a highly self-conscious, deliberate and probably aggressive Pharisaism was asserting itself to reunite the people of Israel; and this involved defining itself in opposition to others, including Christians.”⁴¹⁰

The significance of the fact that the Pharisees in the years after 70 C.E. possessed a power and authority which they did not possess in the years of Jesus’ ministry has been noted by J. Riches. For instance, he suggests that in the first Gospel there are indications that Matthew wrote in an atmosphere in which this Pharisaic power prevailed. In other words, Matthew’s Gospel reflects two historical situations. While relating events in Jesus’ life (around 30 C.E. or so), yet the pressures and concerns of Matthew’s *Sitz im Leben* pervaded his thoughts and so intruded, subtly, into his Gospel. To establish this assertion, Riches notes the following points which he suggests reflect “Matthew’s situation rather than that of the stated situation in the life of Jesus”⁴¹¹ - (1) Matthew refers to “their synagogues” (4:23; 9:35; 10:17; 12:9; 13:54. cf. Mark 1:23); “their scribes” (7:29); “their cities” (11:1). These expressions, it is suggested, reflect the antagonistic situation between Matthew and the unbelieving Jews which prevailed in the post 70 C.E. era. (2) Matthew portrays the Pharisees as Jesus’ main opponents, adds them into

⁴⁰⁸ Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:692; cf. Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 88; See J. Neusner, *The Formation of Rabbinic Judaism: Yavneh (Jamnia) from A.D. 70 to 100* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1979). See also Adam H. Becker & Annette Yoshiko Reed, eds., *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).

⁴⁰⁹ Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:694. See Claudia J. Setzer, *Jewish Responses to Early Christians: History and Polemics, 30-150 C.E.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 87-90.

⁴¹⁰ Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:694. See Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People*, 8.

⁴¹¹ See Riches, Telford & Tuckett, *The Synoptic Gospels*, 74-75.

Mark's account (12:24, 38; 21:45; 22:34-35, 41) and specifically targets them in 5:20, 15:12-14; 23:1ff). (3) Matthew often pairs the Pharisees with the Scribes (5:20; 12:38; 15:1; 23:2, 13, 14, 15, 23, 27, 29). "This linking is specific to Matthew and may reflect a situation after 70 C.E. when there were only Pharisaic scribes."⁴¹² (4) In 21:45 Matthew links the Pharisees and the Chief Priests (cf. Mark 11:27 which, in the same context, mentions the chief priests, scribes and elders). In 27:62-66 the Pharisees, along with the Chief Priests, ask Pilate that Jesus' tomb be sealed. "This puts the Pharisees in a position of authority which they did not hold during Jesus' lifetime but did after 70. We have here a kind of double reference, on the one hand to the situation at the time of Jesus and on the other to that of Matthew's church."⁴¹³ (5) Further, in Riches' opinion, "when Jesus refers to the church in 16:18 and 18:17 (the only two occurrences of the word in all the Gospels) we are clearly being transported from the world of Jesus' Galilean ministry to the life of the early Christian community."⁴¹⁴ Thus, according to J. Riches, "there are at least some indications that Matthew's Gospel was written in a situation where the church was in process of developing its structures and where there was a sense of both antagonism and separation between the Christian community and the Jewish community."⁴¹⁵

This pressure from unbelieving Jews, whether Pharisees or extreme apocalypists, helps to explain the nature of Matthew's messianism, and why he has drawn parallels between Moses and Jesus,⁴¹⁶ why he has stressed the significance of Abraham, and why he makes mention of the Son of Man and of the suffering Messiah. As W.D. Davies expresses it:

Matthew's messianism ... is not utopian but restorative. This is largely because its sources are not simply the Jewish tradition in the Tanak and in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha but also, indirectly, the actualities, social, political, and religious, of the situation he faced after the collapse of Jerusalem and the rise of rabbinic Judaism. The necessity to formulate a parallel attraction to Pharisaism at Jamnia was among the factors which led to his presentation of a new Moses with a new messianic torah; the necessity to break the chrysalis of an increasingly privatized Judaism, when Judaism turned in more and more on itself to develop into its rabbinic form, brought forth the Abrahamic emphasis; the presentation of the Son of Man as judge and of the Suffering Messiah, whose words are in the sermon on the mount, was possibly not unrelated to a

⁴¹² Riches, Telford & Tuckett, *The Synoptic Gospels*, 75.

⁴¹³ Riches, Telford & Tuckett, *The Synoptic Gospels*, 75.

⁴¹⁴ Riches, Telford & Tuckett, *The Synoptic Gospels*, 75.

⁴¹⁵ Riches, Telford & Tuckett, *The Synoptic Gospels*, 75.

⁴¹⁶ See Witherington, *Matthew*, 90-1, who points out that in Matt 4:1-11 "the Evangelist is stressing that Jesus is tried as the unique Son of God, not merely as Israel or just another Israelite."

recrudescent triumphalist apocalyptic which was finally to lead to Bar Kokhba, although it was endemic to parts of the tradition Matthew had received.⁴¹⁷

In the light of the above suggestions about the imminent separation of Matthew's community from Judaism a number of possible scenarios have been proposed.⁴¹⁸ For example

(1) Matthew and his community were still just within Judaism but wished to reach out to Gentiles. While mainly Jewish, Matthew's community also had contact with local Gentile Christian groups.⁴¹⁹ On the one hand it desired to be included within Judaism and to share Judaism's faith. Matthew 23:3 strongly suggests that the community was still within Judaism. Yet, on the other hand, Matthew's community desired "the expansion of Judaism beyond strictly Jewish confines" and so challenged Judaism to shed its tendency to ethnic exclusiveness.⁴²⁰

(2) Matthew and his Community had declared themselves independent of Judaism. That is, Matthew's community had recently become a sect outside Judaism by declaring itself independent of its parent faith.⁴²¹

(3) Matthew and his Community desired to remain within Judaism but had been expelled as a deviant Sect. This position has been advocated by A. J. Saldarini.⁴²² Saldarini rejects those "Christian salvation-history schemes which claim that Matthew sees the time of Israel as past and Israel as irrevocably lost (except for those Jews who have become members of the Matthean community)."⁴²³ In his view, Matthew and his group⁴²⁴ regarded themselves as Jewish and sought to promote the keeping of the whole law, albeit as interpreted through the Jesus tradition. Matthew thus affirmed the validity of Jewish law understood in this way (5:17-

⁴¹⁷ Davies, "The Jewish Sources of Matthew's Messianism," in Charlesworth, *The Messiah*, 509-10.

⁴¹⁸ These scenarios may also be considered from the angle of "Social Scientific criticism". See Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, 10-14, 22-24.

⁴¹⁹ Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:695; Contrast Sim, "The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles," 19-48. Sim argues that the Gospel of Matthew is not pro-gentile and that the Jewish Matthean community largely avoided contact with gentile society.

⁴²⁰ Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:695.

⁴²¹ Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 88; See also Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People*, 85-107.

⁴²² Anthony J. Saldarini, "The Gospel of Matthew and Jewish-Christian Conflict in the Galilee," in *The Galilee in Late Antiquity* (ed. L. I. Levine; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992), 23-37. See also Riches, *Conflicting Mythologies*, 205-9.

⁴²³ Saldarini, "The Gospel of Matthew and Jewish-Christian Conflict in the Galilee," 25 fn 6.

⁴²⁴ See Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, 36-40.

20) and the authority of Jewish community leaders, though he denied their practices and legal interpretations (23:1-36, esp. 2-3).⁴²⁵ He mitigated Christian rejection of purity and dietary laws (15:1-20; cf. Mark 7:1-23, esp. 19) and felt the need to justify letting his disciples pick grain on the Sabbath (12:1-8; cf. Mark 2:23-28). Matthew's silence on the issue of circumcision, Saldarini suggests, could well imply that his community simply took it for granted.⁴²⁶ Further, since the members of Matthew's group found their core identity and "master status" in being believers-in-Jesus "all other aspects of their Jewish life and world view were filtered through this central commitment which alienated them from fellow Jews and colored all their activities and relationships."⁴²⁷ Consequently, Matthew's group while viewing "itself as authentically and faithfully Jewish ... was regarded by its parent community as a deviant form of Judaism."⁴²⁸

(4) Matthew and his Community accepted that they were deviants but still desired, for social reasons, to remain within the Jewish Community. Davies and Allison point out that in Matthew's time "to leave Judaism meant not simply to exchange one religious group for another but to move from one society to another: it involved the painful severing not only of family and cultic ties but being cut off from the whole life of a community upon which one was socially and economically dependent. Such a step was not easily taken, and we incline to believe that despite its positive association with Gentile Christians, Matthew's community was still a deviant Jewish association."⁴²⁹

4.2 Tensions but still no Decisive Separation.

In more recent times doubts have been raised as to whether by 85 C.E. or so a decisive break between Matthew's Christian Jewish community and unbelieving Judaism had occurred or was even imminent. It has been pointed out that by 85 C.E. or so the *Birkat ha-Minim* could

⁴²⁵ Saldarini, "The Gospel of Matthew and Jewish-Christian Conflict in the Galilee," 26.

⁴²⁶ Saldarini, "The Gospel of Matthew and Jewish-Christian Conflict in the Galilee," 30.

⁴²⁷ Saldarini, "The Gospel of Matthew and Jewish-Christian Conflict in the Galilee," 37.

⁴²⁸ Saldarini, "The Gospel of Matthew and Jewish-Christian Conflict in the Galilee," 36.

⁴²⁹ Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:695.

not have been universally imposed by some central Jewish authority at one time.⁴³⁰ R. T. France locates Matthew and his community in “a period of uncomfortable tension.”⁴³¹ On the one hand, France notes that Matthew’s Gospel is characterized by elements of continuity with Judaism (cf. its deeply rooted Jewishness and pride in the Old Testament heritage). But on the other hand, Matthew’s Gospel has equally prominent elements of discontinuity, such as its sharp antipathy to the Jewish establishment and its conviction that the future of the kingdom of heaven lies not in the institutions of Judaism but in a newly constituted people of God focused on allegiance to Jesus the Messiah.⁴³² Jesus, according to Matthew, is indeed the Messiah, for he not only fulfills the OT Scriptures but God’s purposes for his people are also fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. But Matthew especially stresses that the new covenant is not only for the descendants of Abraham but is also for the Gentiles. And because of this emphasis on the Gentile mission (cf. Matt 28:16-20) inevitably Matthew’s community became increasingly distinct from that of the synagogue.⁴³³

According to D. L Turner, Matthew’s Gospel was written to a group of Christian Jews who were still in contact with non-Christian Jews in the synagogues. He writes:

This view avoids the anachronistic reading of Matthew as promoting Christianity as a new religion for Gentiles in opposition to Judaism, a monolithic old religion for Jews. Matthew and his community were part of a process in which Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, followers of Jesus, and others were presenting somewhat diverse competing versions of Judaism. Judaism had not yet become unified by the ascendancy of the Jabneh (Jamnia ...) rabbis after the 70 C.E. destruction of Jerusalem.⁴³⁴

4.3 A Social Scientific Approach to Matthew and his Community.

Any appreciation of Matthew and his gospel must take note of the historical, geographical, cultural and especially the social context of those for whom he wrote. Thus

⁴³⁰ See France, *The Gospel of Matthew* [2007], 16. See also J. Marcus, “Birkat ha-minim Revisited,” *New Testament Studies* 55 (2009): 523-551.

⁴³¹ See France, *The Gospel of Matthew* [2007], 17.

⁴³² France, *The Gospel of Matthew* [2007], 17.

⁴³³ See France, *The Gospel of Matthew* [2007], 17.

⁴³⁴ Turner, *Matthew*, 3.

Matthew's gospel, while it tells the story of Jesus, is also a window into the social conditions prevailing in Matthew's community.⁴³⁵ Accordingly, in Matthean studies (especially from the mid 1980's onwards) social scientific approaches have been applied to the study of Matthew and his Christian community. These studies have given rise to much productive scholarly debate. They have also resulted in strong polarization with regard to the question as to whether Matthew and his group were a deviant movement still operating within the orbit of Judaism (that is, were *intra muros*) or whether they had broken with Judaism (that is, were *extra muros*).⁴³⁶ It is to be noted that this *intra / extra muros* debate gives a wider understanding of the context of Matt 27:51b-53 and its implications.

According to the *intra muros* school of thought Matthew's Christian community, while still participating in the life of synagogue worship was nevertheless under considerable strain. Accordingly, references to "their synagogues" and "your synagogues"⁴³⁷ are understood to imply not just differences of opinion, but conflict, and intensity of polemic (cf. Matt 23). And this in turn is taken to mean that in its social setting Matthew's community is in close proximity to its Jewish opponents – that is, it is still in association with the Jewish synagogue.⁴³⁸

Further, after 70 C.E. and Jerusalem's destruction the traditional Jewish structures no longer really existed. Matthew's Christian group was thus contending rather with "formative rabbinic Judaism",⁴³⁹ especially with its leadership. Formative Judaism, with its stress on the study of Torah and exact observance of *halakah*, found unacceptable Matthew's community's claims about Jesus as Messiah and his ultimate authority. It also found unacceptable (and this, in the light of Matt 5:17-20, is debatable) Matthew's seemingly lax attitude to Torah

⁴³⁵ See Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, 254.

⁴³⁶ For a survey of the issues, and the protagonists, see Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, 1-12.

⁴³⁷ Matt 4:23; 9:35; 10:7; 12:9; 13:54; 23:34.

⁴³⁸ From the *extra muros* approach the same references suggest that division exists between the two competing communities. Further, it is argued, that reference to Church order (Matt 18:15-20) and discussion of the status of teachers (Matt 8-12) suggest that Matthew's community is independent of the traditional Jewish stream.

⁴³⁹ See David C. Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism: The History and Social Setting of the Matthean Community* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 13-15.

observance.⁴⁴⁰ But especially unacceptable was the allegation that Matthew's community engaged in Gentile mission.

This last point has proved particularly divisive among Matthean scholars. The fact that in the last third of Matthew's gospel (from Chapter 15 onwards) the references to Gentiles are seen by some to be especially positive⁴⁴¹ suggests that Matthew's Christian Jewish community was in a period of transition – that is, that they were being urged to become open to the concept of a Gentile mission. That this was indeed so, and the nature and purpose of such a mission has caused much debate. If Matthew's group was a Jesus centered Torah observant Jewish community were Gentile male converts expected to be circumcised?⁴⁴² And did Matthew's community (assuming that it did) become open to the proselytizing of Gentiles in order to increase its numbers? The stronger, and more established, emergent Judaism may have been so persecuting the Matthean community that it was becoming marginalized with a corresponding dwindling in its membership. On the other hand, Matthew's community may have concluded that a mission to the Gentiles would trigger the seemingly delayed *parousia*. Perhaps it was thought that such action would precipitate an eschatological deliverance of Matthew's community from all its alienation and troubles.⁴⁴³ In the midst of all this debate scholars have attempted to clarify the issues and to remove confusion and uncertainty. The contributions of two such scholars, D. C. Sim and P. Foster, will now be outlined.

4.3.1 The Contribution and Challenge of D. C. Sim.

⁴⁴⁰ For Matthew's attitude to fasting see Matt 9:14-17; to the Sabbath see Matt 12:1-8; and to food laws see Matt 15:1- 20. Note that Matthew does not have Mark's redactional comment: "Thus he [Jesus] declared all foods clean" (Mark 7:19).

⁴⁴¹ Cf. also Matthew's use of Mark (a Gentile source), his giving greater status to Peter (associated with the gentile mission in Acts 10), and his placing of 28:19-20 on the lips of Jesus. See Davies, "The Jewish Sources of Matthew's Messianism," in Charlesworth, *The Messiah*, 502-3; Turner, *Matthew*, 46; Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:695; Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, 226-7.

⁴⁴² But Matt 28:19-20 speaks of baptism, not circumcision, as the rite of entrance to the community.

⁴⁴³ In other words, Matt 28:19 was taken to refer to eschatology rather than concern for Gentiles and their salvation.

According to Sim, the social setting of Matthew's church is that of a group of Jewish Christians standing alone, struggling to support itself against great odds.⁴⁴⁴ In other words, in Sim's view, Matthew's Christian Jewish group was a hard-pressed sectarian movement still within Judaism and which perceived itself to represent the true version of Judaism.⁴⁴⁵ In fact, in Sim's opinion, Matthew's group was not just alienated from (i) the Jewish world, but also from (ii) the Gentile world, and even from (iii) the wider world of the broader Christian movement (that is, from Gentile Christianity).⁴⁴⁶

Sim arrives at this view of Matthew's group through a detailed study of Apocalyptic Eschatology in relation to the First Gospel.⁴⁴⁷ Sim notes that after the crisis of the Jewish war, 70 C.E., a number of pseudepigraphical Jewish writings, known as apocalypses, appeared – e.g. the *Apoc. Ab.*, *4 Ezra* and *2 Bar.* These writings, by claiming divine authority and expressing a new world view, attempted to explain why the Lord God of Israel had allowed Jerusalem, its temple, and his people to be destroyed by godless gentiles, the Romans. Further, according to Sim, "Apocalypticism, whether it be expressed in an apocalypse or not, arises in minority groups as a direct response to a situation of great crisis or distress."⁴⁴⁸

Sim notes the following characteristics of Apocalyptic Eschatology:

A) *Cosmic Dualism* – that is, apocalyptic eschatology functions within a dualistic understanding of the nature of the cosmos, of reality.⁴⁴⁹ The supernatural order, the whole cosmos, is divided into two realms which are struggling against each other for supremacy: God and his holy angels, and Satan and his fallen angels. Further, there are two ages, the present age (which began at creation) and a new future age (the Eschaton). The conflict between the two supernatural realms will only be resolved at the coming of the Eschaton.

⁴⁴⁴ See Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, 181. For a helpful critique of Sim's whole position see Riches, *Conflicting Mythologies*, 215-222, 265-69.

⁴⁴⁵ See Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 142.

⁴⁴⁶ See Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, 210.

⁴⁴⁷ Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*.

⁴⁴⁸ Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, 54.

⁴⁴⁹ Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, 35.

B) *Human Dualism.*⁴⁵⁰ Two spirits or mind sets (truth and error) are at work in each human individual – that is to say, the distinction and struggle in the cosmic order is reflected in the human realm.⁴⁵¹

C) *Determinism.* Central to apocalyptic eschatology is the belief that the whole of history has been totally foreordained. The course of history has been schematized into distinct divisions and so the future unfolds as predicted. Thus, one's lot in the afterlife is predetermined, and yet the individual is still free and responsible.⁴⁵²

D) *The End Time will come.* The final battle between good and evil, an all-out eschatological conflict of cosmic scale, will be heralded by disasters and the breakdown of human society. There will be plagues, earthquakes, wars, the appearance of abominable human prodigies, and the disruption of the wider cosmic order.⁴⁵³ In some apocalyptic schemes the End Time woes conclude, the eras turn, with the appearances of a Saviour figure.⁴⁵⁴ Further, at the End Time there will be bodily resurrection.⁴⁵⁵

E) *Judgment.* According to apocalyptic eschatology the dead, both the righteous (those who correctly obey the law) and the wicked (those who have thrown their lot in with Satan) will be raised to face the final judgment.⁴⁵⁶

According to Sim the above characteristics of Apocalyptic Eschatology are also to be found in Matthew's Gospel.⁴⁵⁷ For instance, cosmic dualism is reflected in Matthew's use of a wide variety of antithetical or dualistic terms.⁴⁵⁸ The cosmic struggle between God and Satan

⁴⁵⁰ Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, 38-9.

⁴⁵¹ See *T. Ash.* 1:3-5; 1:7; 6:4. The concept of Dualism is also found at Qumran. (cf. The Community Rule, 1 QS 3:13-4:26. "The Qumran community believed that it was caught up in a cosmic conflict between God and the supernatural forces of evil." See Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 111).

⁴⁵² See Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, 41-2.

⁴⁵³ See Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, 42-3.

⁴⁵⁴ There is debate as to when this will happen and who this saviour figure will be – God, His agent, the Messiah, the Son of Man?

⁴⁵⁵ It is debatable whether resurrection is to be understood literally or metaphysically. See 1QH6:34-5; 1QH3:19-22. Debatable also is whether the raised have the same status as the angels of God (cf. 1QS11:5-9).

⁴⁵⁶ See Dan 12:2; *T. Benj.* 10:6-10; 51:1; 62:15; 67:8-9; *Sib. Or.* 4:181-2; *4 Ezra* 7:32; *2 Bar.* 30:1-2; 42:8; 50:1-3; 51:1-6.

⁴⁵⁷ See Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, 75-78.

⁴⁵⁸ Cf. Matt 5:45; 7:17-18; 7:24-27; 12:34-35; 22:10; 24:45-51; 25:14-30.

appears in Matthew's use of the expression "the evil one",⁴⁵⁹ and the concept of two warring realms.⁴⁶⁰ Further, the parable of the tares (Matt 13:36-48) reveals that for Matthew the dualism on the cosmic level is also to be found on the human level. In addition, this parable, and also Matthew's stress on the fulfillment of prophecy,⁴⁶¹ suggests determinism and presumes the mechanistic nature of the historical process.⁴⁶²

Not only that, but if history runs its fixed course, it will also come to its destined End – and that End, according to Matthew, is imminent.⁴⁶³ Furthermore, this nearness of the End is not, it is alleged, countered by such passages as Matt 16:18-19, 18:15-35 and 28:19-20 which suggest that Matthew's church, since it had an apparently developed notion of organization and discipline, was not expecting things to End in the near future. Compare, however, Qumran where the imminent end was definitely expected, yet there was also rigid structures and concern about discipline and order. Nor do such passages as Matt 24:45-51 and Matt 25:1-30, which warn against complacency and urge vigilance, mean that the End has been long delayed. Rather, the End is imminent but no one knows the exact time (Matt 24:36).⁴⁶⁴

And when the End does come it will be marked by the *parousia*, the manifestation, of Jesus the Son of Man.⁴⁶⁵ According to Sim, Matthew has conformed the Christian notion of the return of Jesus to an apocalyptic- eschatological perspective.⁴⁶⁶ Thus, at the *parousia* Jesus will suddenly return as a saviour figure who relieves the plight of the righteous in their darkest hour

⁴⁵⁹ See Matt 5:37; 6:13; 13:19, 38.

⁴⁶⁰ Matt 4:1-13.

⁴⁶¹ Cf. Matt 1:22f; 2:15; 2:17.

⁴⁶² Riches notes a contrast between the parable of the tares and Matt 28:20. Matt 28:20 "implies that human beings are faced with an essential choice: whether or not to accept the authority of the Son of Man and to do what he commands; the parable of the tares simply does not leave any room for human choice at all. Either you are a tare or you are wheat. The one cannot change into the other. You are either born of God or of the devil (1 John 3)." See J. Riches, "Matthew's Missionary Strategy in Colonial Perspective," in Riches and Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew in its Roman Imperial Context*, 133.

⁴⁶³ See Matt 10:23; 16:28; 24:34.

⁴⁶⁴ See Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, 148-51.

⁴⁶⁵ See Matt 26:64-68 (cf. Mark 14:62). Is ἄπ' ἄρτι ("from now on") a Matthean redaction of Mark? Clearly for Matthew Jesus is revealed as the Son of Man not at the Parousia (so Mark), but at the resurrection (or did Jesus mean at his death? Or did Jesus perhaps assume that his resurrection would immediately follow his death?) "Immediately (or perhaps almost immediately in view of 28:16-20) after his resurrection Jesus will be seated at the right hand of God." (See Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, 95).

⁴⁶⁶ See Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, 109.

(Matt 24:22, 27). Also, the *parousia* of Jesus, the Son of Man, will be the eschatological judgment when the final and decisive defeat of Satan and his angels takes place (cf. Matt 25:41).⁴⁶⁷ Accordingly, Sim suggests that Matthew has constructed “a symbolic universe” to reinforce and legitimize the beliefs and hopes of his group, and especially to encourage and help them through their difficult times. And further, “Just as apocalyptic authors used great figures of the past to present and lend authority to their views of reality, so too does Matthew. By adopting the gospel genre from Mark, Matthew uses no less a figure than Jesus the messiah, son of God and Son of Man to convey and authorize this new symbolic universe.”⁴⁶⁸

In Sim’s opinion it was the social setting of Matthew’s community that explains Matthew’s heavy emphasis on apocalyptic eschatology. Accordingly, to answer the question as to what was the social setting that gave rise to Matthew’s pronounced apocalyptic-eschatological scheme, he argues that “the Matthean community faced a number of related crises occasioned by the Jewish war, and that these provided sufficient cause for its adoption of apocalyptic eschatology.”⁴⁶⁹ For, after the troubles of 66-70 C.E., Matthew’s group found itself alienated, and in retreat, from the Jewish world, from the Gentile world, and from even the wider world of “the broader Christian movement” (that is, from Gentile Christianity). Thus, “the social setting of Matthew’s Church is that of an entirely alienated group with no home or support system outside its own borders.”⁴⁷⁰

Note the following:

1) *Matthew’s Community and the Jewish World*. Although thoroughly Jewish in outlook and affirming the basic and distinctive tenets of Judaism (cf. Matt 5:17-19), yet within Judaism Matthew’s Christian Jewish group was regarded as but a sectarian movement. The point of

⁴⁶⁷ Cf. Matt 25:31. Sim notes that “[M]atthew emphasizes that the angels belong to Jesus the *Son of Man* ... (that is) ... Matthew here has brought his angelology into line with his christology; the angels of heaven belong to and serve Jesus the Son of Man.” Sim also points out the significance of the fact that at the *parousia* Jesus will preside as Judge *on his throne of glory* (Matt 19:28; 25:31). This expression is attested nowhere else in early Christianity, although it reflects *I En.* 45:3 “my Elect One shall sit on the seat of glory.” Sim suggests that Matthew and the author of *I En.* 37-71 probably had access to a common Son of Man tradition. See Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, 76, 119-22.

⁴⁶⁸ Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, 222.

⁴⁶⁹ Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, 179.

⁴⁷⁰ Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, 181.

contention was whether belief in Jesus' messiahship could be compatible with the Jewish faith.⁴⁷¹

2) *Matthew's Community and the Gentile World.* Sim argues that basically Matthew and his community had a negative attitude towards Gentiles (cf. Matt 18:17). This was because as Jews Matthew's group would have been subject to pogroms (cf. Matt 24:9) and, as Christians, liable to persecution by the Romans for adhering to an illicit religion. Thus, understandably, the members of Matthew's group would have avoided Gentiles and shunned their society. Sim suggests that Matt 24:4-14 was understood as a timetable of events leading up to the destined End. Matt 24:9 spoke of Gentile persecution – in fact the group was now experiencing the conditions predicted in vv. 11-12.⁴⁷² If, by chance, any Gentiles did come to belong to Matthew's group then, according to Sim, they would as converts have been under the whole law. For, Sim understands Matt 5:17-19 to imply that the whole law, including circumcision, remains valid up to the *parousia*.⁴⁷³

⁴⁷¹ The intensity of Matthew's polemic reveals that he is describing contemporary opponents – its very purpose is to distance one party from the other. Cf. Matt 16:18-19. According to Sim, having parted company with the local synagogue, its scribes and practices, and to make this clear and distinct, Matthew's community referred to itself as the ἑκκλησία, but not in the Pauline sense. Rather Matthew by redefining the term in a non-Pauline sense, makes clear that the community, although a rival assembly, was still within the confines of Judaism. See Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 121, 144-8, 200-1.

⁴⁷² See Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, 198-200. This approach may be challenged as these verses imply that Jesus' disciples are to have contact with Gentiles.

⁴⁷³ See Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, 208-9. Note that John P. Meier argues that the phrase "until all is accomplished" (Matt 5:18) is to be understood in the light of the apocalyptic event (Matt 27:51b-53) in which Jesus' death and resurrection bring about the turning of the eras. Hence, according to Meier, the Law was valid only until the new age introduced by the death and resurrection of Jesus. (See his book, *Law and History in Matthew's Gospel: A Redactional Study of Matt 5:17-48* (Analecta Biblica 71; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1976). See also 4.3.3 below). Sim rejects Meier's approach (See Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 123). He also rejects the suggestion that Matt 27:51b-54 implies that because of the extraordinary events associated with Jesus' death, the Roman soldiers were converted to faith in Jesus as the Son of God. For Sim the soldiers are not examples of good and faithful gentiles but rather gentiles of the worst type. The whole scene is "a proleptic judgment". Their confession comes solely from fear and prefigures the awful fate that awaits all such torturers and murderers who will one day stand in the judgment before Jesus' throne of glory (cf. Matt 25:31-46). The position of Sim regarding Matthew's attitude towards the Gentiles warrants special mention. In a challenging article (Sim, "The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles," 19-48) Sim disputes the prevalent view that the first Gospel is pro-Gentile. He thus denies that Matthew and his community were heavily involved in a mission to the Gentiles. Rather, in the light of a number of anti-Gentile statements found in the Gospel (cf. 5:46-47; 6:7-8; 6:31-32; 18:15-17) he argues that Matthew's community distanced itself from its Gentile neighbours. This was because the community had experienced much persecution from the Gentiles. Accordingly, in Sim's judgment the missionary focus of Matthew's Church had always been the Jews and not the Gentiles. If any Gentiles did join the community they would have been circumcised – that is, they would have been regarded as Jews. Sim's

3) *Matthew's Community and the Gentile Church.* Before 66-70 C.E. the Jerusalem law abiding Church had attempted to exercise control over the diaspora churches and the gentile mission.⁴⁷⁴ However after the upheavals of 70 C.E. the Jerusalem Church disappeared and so the progress of the Law free church was unimpeded. According to Sim there were radical differences between Matthew's Law abiding church and the Law free churches of Paul. Thus, while Matthew's community was "Christian" yet its religion could not be described as "Christianity". This latter term describes rather the Law free version of the Christian Faith as propagated by Paul.⁴⁷⁵ Further, in the face of the aggressive Law free Church Matthew's group, it is said, felt vulnerable. Thus, in Sim's view, one finds in Matthew's gospel evidence of polemic against Paul and the Law free Church. For instance, Matt 7:2-23 is, according to Sim, leveled at antinomian missionaries (like Paul and his followers); Matt 5:18; 13:25 are attempts by Matthew to discredit Paul and his message; and Matt 16:16-17 promotes Peter, not Paul, as the authority in the Church (although in Acts 10 Peter is portrayed as a leading missionary to the Gentiles).⁴⁷⁶

Matthew's community, however, still engaged in mission, but it was to Jews only (thus the injunction of Matt 10:5-6 was understood to be still in force – the mission to the Jews must continue until the Parousia).⁴⁷⁷ Consequently, if any Gentiles joined Matthew's community they

position is not to be dismissed out of hand. Matthew's Gospel is, in some places, quite anti-Gentile. It thus seems reasonable to assume that Matthew's community did display anti-Gentile attitudes. However, in view especially of Matt 28:11-15, and in light of comments by Foster in his work *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, I incline to the view that despite his ambivalence Matthew wants to be understood as being more pro- than anti- Gentile. Accordingly, my approach is along these lines: initially Matthew and his community were anti-Gentile. But for some reason Matthew, as it were, saw the light – he changed his position. Thus, in his Gospel he attempts to persuade his readers to be open to the mission to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews. Whether Matthew succeeded in this endeavour to promote Gentile mission is open to debate. (See comments by Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:721-4).

⁴⁷⁴ Cf. Gal 2:11-14. For the Apostolic Council of Acts 15 see Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 79, 96, 100-4.

⁴⁷⁵ In Sim's view, according to Paul the coming of Christ had (i) led to the abandonment of ritual law (cf. Gal 5:1-6), and (ii) caused the ethnic religion of Judaism to be superseded by a new religious tradition based on faith in Christ alone (cf. Gal 3:28). For Matthew, on the other, (i) Jesus had affirmed and validated all aspects of the Torah (cf. Matt 5:17-20), and so (ii) faith in Christ was only possible within the context of Judaism. (See Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 200).

⁴⁷⁶ See Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, 216-8; "Matthew's anti-Paulinism: A neglected feature of Matthean Studies," *Harvard Theological Studies* 58 (2002): 767-783; "Matthew and the Pauline Corpus: A Preliminary Intertextual Study," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 31 (2009): 401-422.

⁴⁷⁷ See Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 158-9.

would need to become Jews – that is, to be circumcised and to keep the letter of the Law (cf. Matt 5:17-19).

It is in regard to the relationship of Matthew's community to the mission to the Gentiles that Sim's approach comes in for most criticism. With regard to Matt 28:19 Sim agrees that it definitely implies a Gentile mission.⁴⁷⁸ But he argues that the members of Matthew's community did not understand this verse to be a command to them to pursue a mission to the Gentiles.⁴⁷⁹ According to Sim, for the writer of the first Gospel the Gentile mission was only binding upon the Matthean community in the eschatological age (or just prior to the End, cf. Matt 24:14). Thus, understanding the Gentile mission to be an eschatological event, Matthew's community did not become involved.⁴⁸⁰

4.3.2 P. Foster's Challenge to Sim's Position.

Foster notes⁴⁸¹ that, according to Sim, Matthew's community was a sectarian movement, a religious ghetto of exclusivist messianic Judaism, which demonized its synagogue opponents. And while the life of Matthew's group was outside the synagogue, yet it passionately desired to hold its Jewish identity. To this end it affirmed the basic tenets of Judaism and adhered to Jewish traditions.⁴⁸² And since Matthew's group was alienated from all of society this, according to Sim, created among its members an upsurge of interest in apocalyptic eschatology.⁴⁸³ Thus, Foster sums up Sim's position and argument as follows: "By its very nature, adherence to an apocalyptic worldview reflects a group (Matthew's community) which feels sociologically marginalized, and consequently portrays itself as persecuted yet looks for a future vindication."⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁷⁸ See Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 243.

⁴⁷⁹ See comments by Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, 242.

⁴⁸⁰ For Foster this is "a bewildering interpretation." See his *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, 63.

⁴⁸¹ Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, 54-5, 256-7.

⁴⁸² This is debatable, especially if Matthew's group was not operating within the locale of the synagogue.

⁴⁸³ See Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, 44.

⁴⁸⁴ Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, 57.

Further, according to Foster, because of his approach Sim cannot integrate the (allegedly) positive statements in Matthew's gospel about the Gentiles⁴⁸⁵ into his scheme. Nor, because of his rigid interpretation of Matt 5:17-19 can Sim incorporate Gentiles into Matthew's ἑκκλησία, since to be members the Gentiles would need to be circumcised and heed all the Jewish ceremonial Law.⁴⁸⁶ And especially, Sim's failure to integrate a plausible reading of the Great Commission into his overall understanding is reason, according to Foster, "to question his portrait of the social setting of the Matthean community."⁴⁸⁷ Accordingly, Foster argues that the attitude of Matthew's community towards the Gentile mission "more naturally reflects a community that had stepped outside the bounds of Judaism."⁴⁸⁸

Before looking in more detail at Foster's approach it will be helpful to briefly summarize the main issues involved in this important debate with its far reaching implications. First, both sides agree that Matthew's community was outside the Jewish synagogue (cf. references to "their" or "your" synagogues, Matt 4:23; 9:35; 10:17; 12:9; 13:54; 23:34). But although outside the Jewish synagogue Matthew's community, according to Sim, still regarded itself as being within the strict bounds of Judaism. This had two important ramifications. (A) Matthew's community took Matt 5:17-19 seriously, and literally. The whole Torah was still binding. Gentile converts would have to be circumcised. (B) It dictated the understanding by Matthew's community of both the Jewish and Gentile mission. This involved first, that the Jewish mission (Matt 10:5-6) was still binding on the community until the *parousia*, and secondly, while Matt 28:19-20 (and Matt 24:14) definitely implied a Gentile mission, yet this Gentile mission was understood to belong to the eschatological End – it would take place at the *parousia*. So, while elsewhere other Law observant Jewish Christian groups may have engaged in Gentile mission, yet Matthew's community was not involved in such a mission.

Foster's approach is virtually the direct opposite of Sim's. Thus Matthew's group, realizing its permanent marginalized existence outside the Synagogue, began to redefine its

⁴⁸⁵ Cf. Matt 12:21; 21:43; 24:14; 25:32; 28:19.

⁴⁸⁶ See Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, 58.

⁴⁸⁷ Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, 64.

⁴⁸⁸ Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, 78. This approach to Matthew's community is also advocated by Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People*.

status as an independent entity outside the borders of Judaism.⁴⁸⁹ This gave rise to two results: (A) Matthew's community sought a higher righteousness, and (B) Matthew's community became more inclusive of Gentiles.

With regard to (A), in Matthew's community the authority of Jesus, the Messiah, overrode that of the Torah. Jesus' behavior and attitude became the basis of ethics. (These messianic claims for Jesus had led to the group's rejection by Judaism). And so, with regard to the problematic pericope, Matt 5:17-20, these verses were understood in the wider context of vv. 13-16 and the antitheses, Matt 5:21-48. The expressions salt, light and lampstand in vv. 13-16 were understood to imply a universalism – Jesus' disciples were to be noticed, not just by Jews, but throughout the whole world – that is, by Gentiles.⁴⁹⁰ And in Matt 5:21-48 Matthew has, by redaction, expressed his understanding of the Law and especially of Jesus' words in Matt 5:17-20. Matthew's group does indeed suppress the literal observance of the Law but, paradoxically, in doing so it actually upholds the Law by advocating an abounding, and higher, righteousness. Thus, according to Foster, the composition of the antitheses (Matt 5:21-48) reflects both the community's social circumstances and Matthew's creative manner in presenting his understanding of Jesus so as to address the pastoral needs of the community.⁴⁹¹ For, in effect, Matthew is saying that by adhering to Jesus' teaching the law is more satisfactorily fulfilled even down to its smallest requirements.⁴⁹²

With regard to the key expression in Matt 5:18, ἕως ἂν πάντα γένηται, “until all is fulfilled” (NRSV has “until all is accomplished”) Foster mentions the following ways it may be understood: (a) to do or to obey the OT commands; (b) it can imply that the Law was fulfilled by Jesus' life and / or by the salvific acts of Jesus' death and resurrection (cf. the “fulfilment” of prophecy); (c) it may imply the teaching of the Law so as (i) to “establish” and “uphold” the Law; (ii) to add to, and so “complete” the Law; or (iii) so as to bring out the intended meaning

⁴⁸⁹ Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, 141-2.

⁴⁹⁰ Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, 160.

⁴⁹¹ See Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, 142.

⁴⁹² See Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, 191.

by an interpretation.⁴⁹³ Further, the words “until heaven and earth pass away” (Matt 5:18) raise the issue of when the eschaton may be seen as taking force. Foster asks, “Is it to be understood from Matthew’s perspective as being inaugurated only at the Parousia with the triumphant return of Jesus, or does his community already live in the eschatological age in which a new form of adherence and fulfillment of the law has taken sway.”⁴⁹⁴

(B) To appreciate Foster’s understanding of what Matthew says about mission, some texts relating to mission, and examined by Foster, will now be considered.⁴⁹⁵

(i) Matt 8:11: – do “the many” (cf. Matt 22:1-14; 25:32; 28:19) from east and west include Gentile believers? While Matt 8:11 reveals interest in the ultimate salvation of the Gentiles, yet Foster concedes that it does not establish that Matthew insisted on a Gentile mission before the end.⁴⁹⁶

(ii) Matt 10:5-23:⁴⁹⁷ For Sim these verses imply that for Matthew’s community only the Jewish mission was valid and that this mission was to continue until the *parousia*.⁴⁹⁸ Foster agrees that Matt 10:5-23 (cf. also 15:21-28) places a limitation on the scope of the missionary activity for Jesus’ disciples during the period of his ministry.⁴⁹⁹ However, he maintains that to determine Matthew’s intention this seemingly initial limitation must be read against the overall attitude to Gentiles in the whole of the First Gospel. Accordingly, Foster points out that especially in the last third of the Gospel there are references to the Gentiles which may be understood in a positive sense.⁵⁰⁰ Consequently, the problem Matt 10:5-6 creates is how to hold together the injunction in 10:5 not to go to Gentiles, with statements that the gospel of the kingdom is to be proclaimed to the ends of the earth (cf. Matt 28:16-20). Either Matthew’s community cancels entirely its mission to the Jews (because of lack of response?) and concentrates on winning Gentiles to faith in Jesus, or Matthew’s community expands and

⁴⁹³ Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew’s Gospel*, 185.

⁴⁹⁴ Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew’s Gospel*, 190, fn 163. This is an important question and its ramifications will be discussed in more detail below. See 4.3.3 below.

⁴⁹⁵ Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew’s Gospel*, 218-9.

⁴⁹⁶ See Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew’s Gospel*, 60.

⁴⁹⁷ One wonders why these restrictions were necessary. Were Jesus’ disciples eager to go out among the Gentiles and Samaritans?

⁴⁹⁸ Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 158.

⁴⁹⁹ Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew’s Gospel*, 219.

⁵⁰⁰ cf. Matt 20:1-16; 21:28-32; 21:43; 22:1-14; 24:14; 25:31-46; 26:13; 27: 19, 54; 28:16-20.

enlarges its mission to Jews to include Gentiles. Foster makes a strong case for the latter position. He writes:

It would appear ... that Matthew is writing for a community that knew the words of 10:5-6 as part of its repository of dominical material, and moreover, had applied its limitation to some early phase of its activity of recruiting new members among Jews. However, the relative failure of that endeavour leads Matthew to advocate a new way forward. An enterprise that was already bringing new members into the group, and also had a history of some decades as a successful endeavour (at least in the circle of Pauline churches), namely preaching primarily to the Gentiles. The Jewish ethnicity of the Matthean group is not denied, for 10:23 stipulates that their responsibility to proclaim their message to Jews is still valid, but this appears now to take only a subordinate position in the group. ... In effect, it appears that Matthew is treating the issue of mission in much the same manner as he approached the question of Torah observance. He is aware of the conservative elements in his group who wish to maintain strict adherence to an exclusive Israel mission. Rather than ostracise such people from a small and marginalized community, he attempts both to affirm the traditions they hold dear, but also to reshape them to demonstrate their limited validity.⁵⁰¹

This approach is rejected by Sim. As already noted, Sim offers only two possibilities – either Matthew’s community totally ruled out Gentile inclusion in their community,⁵⁰² or the Gentile mission occurs in the eschatological age. For instance, in Matt 24:14b τότε (“then”), according to Sim, implies that the other events described in the earlier verses, are historically, prior. Thus, the Gentile mission only occurs in the final apocalyptic age.⁵⁰³ Foster however maintains that Sim’s eschatological scheme cannot be supported. The Gentile mission is not delayed until the Eschaton. Rather, just as “remain steadfast until the end” (Matt 24:13) implies endurance *now*, so likewise Matt 24:14 implies, not postponement, but action now – that is, Matthew’s community must now be actively engaged in Gentile mission in order to hasten the Eschaton.⁵⁰⁴

(iii) Matt 28:15-20. Foster’s insightful comments on Matt 28:15 are also important. The words, μέχρι τῆς σήμερον (“until this day”) imply that even when Matthew wrote (85 C.E. or

⁵⁰¹ Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew’s Gospel*, 226-7.

⁵⁰² While Matthew’s community did not engage in Gentile mission, Sim concedes that they may have “in principle” approved of other Christian Jewish groups conducting a law-observant mission to Gentiles (in contrast to the Pauline law free type of mission). For comment and criticism see Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew’s Gospel*, 244-5.

⁵⁰³ For comment see Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew’s Gospel*, 234-5.

⁵⁰⁴ See Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew’s Gospel*, 234-8, 244. Thus, Foster asks, could Matt 28:18-20 perhaps be understood to mean that even now, through the disciples’ commission to world wide mission, the present cosmological order is already being remade into sacred space?

so) some Jews⁵⁰⁵ were still denying Jesus' resurrection. In other words, the mission of Matthew's community to Israel had failed. Accordingly, Foster suggests that Matthew is here doing something new and controversial – he is redefining his community's mission. They are now to engage in mission to the ἔθνη – that is, the Gentiles (cf. Matt 28:19). And this Gentile mission, Matthew declares, has already decades ago, been authorized by the Risen Jesus – the very Jesus whose resurrection the unbelieving Jews continue to deny.⁵⁰⁶ Foster also notes that Matt 24:9-14 could suggest that the Gentile mission was already underway in the Matthean community. Did perhaps the rejection of the gospel by the Gentiles create dissent and division among the more conservative members of Matthew's group?⁵⁰⁷ Thus Foster suggests that Matthew, pastorally and pedagogically, was trying to hold together a Christian community whose heritage was in Judaism, and which was struggling with its new task of incorporating recent Gentile converts into its midst.⁵⁰⁸

4.3.3 The Nature and Timing of Jesus' Parousia. J. P. Meier's Contribution.

It has been noted that Sim insists that Matthew's community did not engage in Gentile mission. The Gentile mission, he contends, belongs to the eschatological age.⁵⁰⁹ In attempting to refute Sim's position Foster, in a footnote, makes the following comments which are pertinent to the subject of this thesis – namely, the significance of Matt 27:51b-53. According to Foster:

Sim couples the statements in 10:5b-6 with a reinterpretation of 24:14, to attempt to blunt the clear implication of 28:19. He argues that the gentile mission was not a present reality for the Matthean community, but on the basis of 24:14 was only an imperative in the eschatological age. Thus the injunction of 10:5b-6 still held force for Matthean adherents. Even if one were to accept Sim's reading of the mission being suspended until the eschatological age (a point that is far from certain), it still appears that Matthew views his community as living in such a period already, at least in an embryonic form. The Matthean redactional description in 27:51b-53 of the splitting of the rocks, the opening of the tombs and the reanimation of the dead saints, all are

⁵⁰⁵ Matthew does not explain who these were, except that they did not believe in Jesus' resurrection.

⁵⁰⁶ See Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, 249.

⁵⁰⁷ See Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, 251.

⁵⁰⁸ See Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, 257.

⁵⁰⁹ See Sim, "The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles," 19-48.

illustrations that the post-crucifixion era inaugurates a new age. (See Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, esp. 236-47).⁵¹⁰

Sim acknowledges that Matt 24:14 and Matt 28:16-20 do imply that there is to be a Gentile mission. And since Matthew urges his community members to engage in Gentile mission (cf. Matt 28:16-20) this, if Sim's contention that the Gentile mission belongs to the eschatological age is correct, raises acutely the question: Does Matthew view his community as *already* living in an eschatological period?

In the light of Matt 27:51b-53 Matthew could be understood to mean that through the death of Jesus, the Messiah, a new Age, the Eschaton, has been inaugurated. At the end of this new Age, which includes the mission to the Gentiles, the End, will finally occur (cf. Matt 28:20). This is an attractive approach, but it fails to reckon with Matt 27:51b-52a. For, these verses declare that at the death of Jesus events associated with the End Time – that is, with the final End, – occurred. They declare that “many *bodies* of the sleeping holy ones were raised.” Either it is to be understood that there are two resurrections – one when Jesus died and the other at the *parousia*,⁵¹¹ or another explanation is to be sought. Accordingly, in this thesis, it is suggested that Matt 27:51b-53 reflects a belief and hope, held by some Jews in NT times, that when the Messiah came, the End would occur. The challenge is to discover why Matthew uses this tradition when clearly even he indicates that the final End has not yet occurred (and will do so only at the second coming of Jesus, cf. Matt 25: 31-46).

In another footnote, later in his book, Foster again returns to this question of the timing of the eschatological age. He writes:

Pre-empting the discussion slightly, the debate revolves around the issue of when the eschaton may be seen as taking force. Is it to be understood from Matthew's perspective as being inaugurated only at the Parousia with the triumphant return of Jesus, or does his community already live in the eschatological age in which a new form of adherence and fulfillment of the law has taken sway. Allison has suggested that for Matthew the eschatological age has already dawned. He contends that “Matthew and his tradition associate the death and resurrection of Jesus with eschatological

⁵¹⁰ Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, 20 fn 68.

⁵¹¹ Rev 20:5-6 is not relevant to this discussion.

motifs; the end of Jesus is spoken of as if it had concurred with the end of the age.” (Allison, *The End of the Ages has Come*, 49).⁵¹²

While Foster has relegated this question, whether for Matthew the eschatological age has already dawned, to the footnotes, yet clearly it is an important issue. For this question has far-reaching implications for Matthew’s understanding of Law and of Gentile mission.⁵¹³ This question and its wider implications was studied earlier by J. P. Meier. While Meier wrote some time ago, and although his conclusions are not satisfactory, yet his comments should be discussed as they shed some light on the pericope, Matt 27:51b-53.

In a redactional study of Matt 5:17-48, Meier⁵¹⁴ investigated whether in Matt 5:17-20 Matthew implied that the Mosaic Law was, or was not, still literally binding on the members of his Christian Jewish community. Meier contended that the hermeneutical key for unlocking the puzzle of Matthew’s position on Law (and the Gentile mission) was his salvation-history scheme.⁵¹⁵ Meier drew attention to seeming contradictions in Matthew’s Gospel. Matt 10: 5b-6 and 15:24 limit Jesus’ public ministry (and that of the disciples) to the territory and people of Israel. Yet in 28:19-20 the eleven are ordered by the Risen Jesus to make disciples from among all nations. Further, 5:17-20 implied that the members of Matthew’s community were to be faithful to the substance, or even the letter, of the Mosaic Law. However, Matt 28:19-20 with its stress on Baptism, rather than circumcision, as the rite of entrance into the community struck at the very heart of the Mosaic Law. Consequently, Meier wrote: “For Rabbinic Judaism, a faithful observance of the Mosaic Law that dispensed *in principle* with circumcision was a contradiction in terms.”⁵¹⁶

The solution to these seeming contradictions was, according to Meier, to be found in Matthew’s salvation-history scheme – namely, that the “death-resurrection” of Christ was *Die*

⁵¹² Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew’s Gospel*, 190, fn 163. See also Allison, “Eschatology,” 206-209.

⁵¹³ And for the significance of Matt 27:51b-53, the subject of this thesis.

⁵¹⁴ Meier, *Law and History in Matthew’s Gospel*.

⁵¹⁵ Meier, *Law and History in Matthew’s Gospel*, 25.

⁵¹⁶ Meier, *Law and History in Matthew’s Gospel*, 29. See also 34.

Wende der Zeit, the eschatological turning point. Referring particularly to Matt 27:51-54; 28:2-3; and the appearance of the Son of Man in 28:16-20, Meier wrote:

Matthew has quite skillfully woven together the death and resurrection of Christ to make one eschatological event. The proleptic resurrection of the saints is associated with the eschatological event of the crucifixion. Yet both the *idea* of the resurrection of the saints caused by the life-giving death of Christ and the *manner* of its portrayal (accompanied by the apocalyptic motif of the earthquake) tie it together with the resurrection of Christ in Matt 28. We are justified, then, in speaking of the death-resurrection in Matt as one eschatological event. If all these images and themes mean anything, they mean that, in a hitherto unrealized sense, the *basileia* breaks into this age as a result of the death-resurrection of Christ.⁵¹⁷

Accordingly, Meier concluded that Matthew had “apocalypticized” the basic kerygma of Jesus’ death and resurrection. This, he argued, explained why the limitations of territory, nation, and Mosaic Law should be observed during the public ministry of Jesus, while all these restrictions fell away after the death-resurrection – that is, after the enthronement of the Son of Man which, according to Meier, was not coterminous with the complete ending of the old aeon. Thus, since these restrictions belonged to the old aeon, they have been transcended for the believing disciple. Hence, according to Meier, any examination of the Law in the First Gospel (especially Matt 5:17-20) must be understood within this Matthean schema of salvation history.⁵¹⁸

Commenting on Matt 28:20b Meier also wrote:

Matt still awaits the *synteleia tou aiōnos* (a phrase which in this precise form is peculiar to Matt in the NT). The breaking-in of the Kingdom has put an end to the old aeon in principle, but not in full-blown reality. The old age continues, the world is a *corpus mixtum* in which the devil as well as the Son of Man can plant seed (Matt 13:36-43). The final, visible separation that destroys the old age once and for all still lies in the future, since the harvest is expressly said to be the *synteleia aiōnos* (v. 39, repeated in vs 40).⁵¹⁹

And in a footnote he added:

“Another reason why the establishment of the Kingdom cannot be identified with the cross and resurrection *simpliciter* is that Matt sees the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 as also part of the eschatological drama.”⁵²⁰

⁵¹⁷ Meier, *Law and History in Matthew’s Gospel*, 33.

⁵¹⁸ See Meier, *Law and History in Matthew’s Gospel*, 38.

⁵¹⁹ Meier, *Law and History in Matthew’s Gospel*, 39.

⁵²⁰ Meier, *Law and History in Matthew’s Gospel*, 39 fn 35.

Further, and importantly, Meier noted that in Matthew's Gospel the expectation of the imminent *parousia* has receded, so that the emphasis in 28:20 is on the abiding presence of the enthroned Lord *pasas tas hēmeras* rather than on the *synteleia tou aiōnos*.⁵²¹ Consequently, Meier maintained that "Matt 28:16-20 presents a proleptic parousia. The exalted Son of Man does not ascend *from* his church; he rather comes *to* his church, with all power in heaven and on earth. The death-resurrection has ushered in a new era of realized eschatology."⁵²² Thus, the glorified Son of Man is now with his church, sustaining it in its missionary task, and will do so until the old age passes away completely (28:20). And so with regard to the *Sitz im leben* of Matthew's Gospel Meier saw it as a church in transition from a narrow Jewish-Christian past to a predominantly Gentile future. And this shift in its Christian existence required from the church's members a reinterpretation of many primitive and venerable Jewish-Christian traditions.⁵²³

Meier's approach, especially with regard to Matt 5:17-20, did not meet with widespread acceptance. Foster agrees that Matthew certainly operates with a two ages scheme,⁵²⁴ yet he comments:

[D]espite the significant wider links that are found in the macronarrative for linking the death and resurrection of Jesus with eschatological events, it is somewhat detrimental to Meier's overall thesis that no similar link is found in the immediate context of Matt 5:17-20. Perhaps it could be argued (and this in fact is Meier's thesis) that the passing of heaven and earth is indeed apocalyptic, but this in itself does not establish the thesis that not only is the eschaton prefigured in the passion, but it also terminates the law in a way that would be readily recognized.⁵²⁵

⁵²¹ See Meier, *Law and History in Matthew's Gospel*, 39.

⁵²² Meier, *Law and History in Matthew's Gospel*, 164.

⁵²³ See Meier, *Law and History in Matthew's Gospel*, 163.

⁵²⁴ Foster refers the reader to Allison, *The End of the Ages has Come*, 46, 49. See also J. D. Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 34 for further criticism of Meier's position.

⁵²⁵ Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, 193. See also 210-15. According to Jack Kingsbury, the trouble with Meier's view "is that it places the days of Jesus, the time following Easter, and the consummation, respectively, on a graduated scale whereby each period is regarded as more intensely eschatological than the previous one, a schema that does not fit the relationship Matthew establishes between the days of Jesus and the time following Easter." (Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom*, 34).

While agreeing that the events depicted in Matt 27:51b-53 (and Matt 28:2-3) are apocalyptic-eschatological happenings, and even of great significance, yet Sim feels that Meier has greatly exaggerated the importance of the eschatological nature of these events. Accordingly, he wonders if these events can really be equated with the turning of the ages. Further Sim notes, correctly, that “whatever eschatological import Matthew gave the death and resurrection of Jesus, it is quite clear that when they occurred heaven and earth did not pass away in any meaningful sense.”⁵²⁶ (cf. Matt 5:18).

Thus Sim questions Meier’s proposal that Matthew intended to portray the death and resurrection of Jesus as the turning of the ages. In his view, “Such an interpretation must either play down or ignore the wealth of apocalyptic-eschatological material in the Gospel which directly identifies the end of the present age with the *parousia* and the final judgment.”⁵²⁷ If Meier’s approach to Matt 27:51b-53 (in conjunction with Matt 28:2-3, Matt 28:16-20) is unsatisfactory, then what is the purpose of these unique words which occur at this important place in Matthew’s narrative?⁵²⁸ Accordingly, in the following chapters of the thesis the re-examination of the pericope, Matt 27:51b-53, will be continued in the hope of discovering the reason(s) why Matthew has included these words.

4.4 Brief Summary

With regard to questions relating to the ethnicity of Matthew’s community and of Matthew’s attitude to Gentiles, the diversity of scholarly opinion concerning these issues is recognized. The position⁵²⁹ adopted in this thesis is that initially Matthew’s Christian community was composed virtually only of Jews. However, with the passing of time more and more Gentile Christians joined Matthew’s community. Thus, finally, Matthew seems to have changed his attitude towards the Gentiles, and so closes his gospel by depicting the risen Jesus instructing the eleven disciples to proclaim the Gospel to all nations (that is, to Gentiles as well

⁵²⁶ Sim, “The Meaning of παλιγγενεσία in Matthew 19:28,” 10.

⁵²⁷ Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 125; See also Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, 93-174.

⁵²⁸ See Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 25.

⁵²⁹ See Theissen, *The Gospels in Context*, 251-55.

as Jews, Matt 28:16-20). This approach seems to be a reasonable way to explain what cannot be denied – that with regard to the Gentiles Matthew’s Gospel displays a distinctly ambivalent character. On the one hand, it is strongly Jewish, stresses the keeping of the Law (cf. Matt 5:17-20), and is quite uncomplimentary to Gentiles (cf. Matt 6:7, 32; 18:17). Yet, on the other hand, the First Gospel reveals a marked openness to Gentiles – cf. the foreign women mentioned in Matt 1:1-17; the coming of the magi (Matt 2:1-12), the faith of the Roman Centurion (Matt 8:5-13).

Consequently, it will be assumed that when Matthew wrote his Christian Community was, ethnically, a rather mixed group consisting of both Jews and Gentiles. Likewise, morally, it would seem that the members of Matthew’s community were far from perfect – if some were “saints” others, it seems, had not realized that to call Jesus “Lord” also required obedience to his teaching (cf. Matt 7:15-20; 22:1-14). In the light of this it will be assumed that Matthew’s community had its fair share of problems, that internally its members were troubled, stressed and divided. Thus, as a pastor as well as a theologian, Matthew sought by his story of Jesus to encourage and unite these troubled Christians. Particularly, he urged the Jewish Christians to continue to keep the Torah (as interpreted by Jesus), to seek righteousness, and to understand their unique and privileged position. As Jewish believers in Jesus, the Messiah, they were the link, the bridge, between the Israel of the old covenant and the new Israel (which would include both Jews and Gentiles). Matthew thus especially seeks to persuade his Jewish readers to embrace the Gentile mission (cf. Matt 28:16-20).

Chapter 5 What happened at the beginning of the Christian Faith?

A basic argument of this thesis rests on a tentative assumption – that the initial *Sitz im Leben* of Matt 27:51b-53 was not around 85 C.E. when Matthew composed his Gospel. Rather, the pericope had its origins in the creative period which prevailed at the very beginning of the Christian Faith. In other words, it is assumed that Matt 27:51b-53 is not a Matthean literary creation.⁵³⁰ On the contrary, it is conjectured that these words belonged originally to a very early account of Jesus' passion. This early account arose in the confused situation associated with Jesus' death and his alleged resurrection.

In fact, it is assumed that this initial period was not only complicated but also highly productive. It gave rise to various, and even conflicting, traditions relating to Jesus' death, his resurrection, and even to his *parousia*. Some of these early traditions were modified, and eventually incorporated into the Gospels. Others were either overlooked, or perhaps deliberately suppressed. Accordingly, it is suggested that the pericope, Matt 27:51b-53, is the remnants of one such early tradition. The challenge is thus to discover the reason why Matthew has seen fit to incorporate it into his Gospel.⁵³¹

The following is a brief outline of some of the grounds and reasoning underlying this conjecture concerning the initial origins of Matt 27:51b-53:

1) Its matrix. The pericope arose, along with other traditions, because the early Christians needed an authoritative account of Jesus' passion. The first believers declared that one who had been rejected by both Israel's leaders and the secular Roman authorities was the Messiah. Further, they announced that, in the light of Scripture, it had been necessary for the Messiah to have died the accursed death of the cross.⁵³² Accordingly, it seems reasonable to assume that to help explain their astonishing proclamation, the first Christians began to create an authoritative account of Jesus' passion. This account would have attempted to portray Jesus,

⁵³⁰ This will be argued in detail in Chapter 9, especially in 9.3.2.5.1.

⁵³¹ If Matthew, around 85 C.E. or so, did not create this pericope, then he must have found it, or at least fragments of it, circulating in some oral, or written, tradition. It is difficult however to understand how this brief pericope could have circulated unless it was somehow part of an early passion account tradition.

⁵³² Cf. Deut 21:23.

and especially his suffering and death, as a “fulfillment” of ancient Scripture.⁵³³ Thus, it was asserted, that Jesus’ passion being in accordance with Scripture was also God’s will, and so was, in effect, the fulfillment of the hopes of Judaism.

2) Evidence suggests that this quest for an authoritative passion account began early. It also suggests that initially there were perhaps a number of competing passion accounts reflecting various understandings of Jesus’ death and resurrection. It was noted, for example, by the early proponents of Form Criticism⁵³⁴ that sufficient evidence exists to support the presence of a primitive passion account even earlier than that found in Mark’s narrative.⁵³⁵ In academic circles scholarship has moved on from the contentions of Form Criticism. However, a brief outline of some of the form critical arguments is apposite, since some of its observations are still valid and also pertinent to the arguments of this thesis. Put simply: Form Criticism revealed that the passion and resurrection accounts in the Gospels are not “seamless garments”. Rather, at places the passion and resurrection narratives display a distinct “disjointedness”. This, to my mind, suggests that at the very beginning of the Christian Faith there was a rich variety of traditions relating to the interpretation of Jesus, his death, resurrection and even his *parousia*.⁵³⁶ This body of tradition underwent considerable redaction, modification and, in some cases, even rejection.⁵³⁷ To my mind, the “disjointedness” of the passion and resurrection accounts leaves space for the existence of a very early Jewish Christian tradition that at Jesus’ death the resurrection of many holy ones occurred (cf. Matt 27:51b-53).

⁵³³ Certain OT passages (e.g. Pss 22, 31, 69, Isa 53) were seen by the Christians as announcing beforehand the passion of the Lord’s anointed one. The important question of whether this use of Scripture influenced, or even created, the historical account of Jesus’ passion, will not be entered into. See Martin Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel* (trans. Bertram Lee Woolf; Cambridge & London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1971), 188; trans. of *Die Formgeschichte des Evangelium* (rev. 2nd ed.); Ham, *The Coming King and the Rejected Shepherd*, 47-8; Doeve, *Jewish Hermeneutics in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts*, 185-90.

⁵³⁴ See R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (trans. J. Marsh; Oxford: Blackwell, 1963). Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*.

⁵³⁵ If Matthew and Luke used Mark’s Gospel then this primitive passion story was the foundation of all three Synoptic passion accounts.

⁵³⁶ The important question of whether the alleged findings of Form Criticism impinge on the trustworthiness of the information in the Gospels about the historical Jesus will not be entered into.

⁵³⁷ Whether this very early redaction of these traditions was overseen and controlled by those with Apostolic authority is a debatable point. See Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*.

The following observations, arising from Form Critical studies, are relevant to the argument of this thesis:

A) Form critics argued that since the description of events set out in Mark 14:1-2, 10-11 contradicts Mark's chronology, it must therefore be earlier than Mark's Gospel.⁵³⁸ In Mark Jesus and the Jews celebrate the Passover, yet Mark 14:1-2, 10-11 seem to imply that Jesus was arrested *before* the feast.⁵³⁹

B) Form Critics alleged that the earliest passion story had another ending than that now found in Mark. It is argued that Mark 14:28 (cf. Mark 16:7) suggests that the writer was originally preparing for an epiphany – that is, the appearance in Galilee of the risen Jesus to Peter, and the other disciples. Mark's Gospel however has the story of the womenfolk finding the empty tomb. Thus, if Mark has replaced the original epiphany ending with a later empty tomb tradition then this, it is alleged, confirms the contention that behind Mark is an earlier passion account.⁵⁴⁰

C) In the third place, the form critics alleged that evidence suggests that Mark also reinterpreted an earlier account of Jesus' resurrection. Discussion of this allegation is both complicated and controversial. Contrasts between the stories of the appearances of the risen Jesus recorded in 1 Cor. 15:5-11, and those in the Gospel accounts were noted. For instance:

(i) While 1 Cor 15:5-11 indicates the very early existence of traditions about the appearances of the risen Jesus, yet it lays no stress on their locality. Further, the geographical position of these appearances are not found in the Synoptics.⁵⁴¹ In contrast, the Gospel accounts stress geographical locality. In Luke and John the risen Jesus appears only in or near Jerusalem.⁵⁴² In Matthew Jesus appears to his disciples in Galilee (Matt 28:16-17), and to the womenfolk in or near Jerusalem (Matt 28:9-10). Mark makes no mention of the appearance of

⁵³⁸ See Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*, 181; Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 262.

⁵³⁹ See Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*, 161-3.

⁵⁴⁰ See Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*, 181.

⁵⁴¹ 1 Cor. 15:5 is perhaps reflected in Luke 24:34. See H.-W. Bartsch, "Das Auferstehungszeugnis (Sein Historisches und sein Theologisches Problem)," *Theologische Forschung* 41 (1965): 7- 31.

⁵⁴² Although John 21 mentions an appearance to the disciples by the sea of Tiberius in Galilee. See also *Gos. Pet.* 60.

the risen Jesus to anyone. However, both Mark 14:28 and Mark 16:7 may be understood to imply that the disciples will see the risen Jesus – but only in Galilee.⁵⁴³

(ii) It was noted that the formula in 1 Cor 15:3-5, embodying a very early pre-Pauline tradition, speaks of “on the third day”. The origin and significance of this “on the third day” expression is disputed. Some see it as evidence that resurrection events actually began on the third day after Jesus’ crucifixion.⁵⁴⁴ However, since 1 Cor 15:3-5 embodies theological reflection, rather than merely conveying historical detail, some suggest that the passage is best understood as a form of Jewish *midrash*.⁵⁴⁵ In contrast to the third day formula in 1 Cor 15:3-5, the empty tomb stories in the Gospels contain the expression “on the first day of the week” (Mark 16:2; Matt 28:1; Luke 24:1; John 20:1). Furthermore, strong arguments can also be made to show that the empty tomb tradition in the Gospels must be regarded as early, rather than as a later creation.⁵⁴⁶ However, reconciliation of these two early, but differing, time indications is by no means an easy task. In fact, it is virtually impossible to accomplish.⁵⁴⁷ Accordingly, it seems reasonable to assume that this lack of harmony points to an independent and ancient source for the empty tomb tradition.

(iii) It was noted that the early tradition embodied in 1 Cor 15:3-5 makes no *explicit* mention of an empty tomb.⁵⁴⁸ In contrast, the accounts in the Gospels stress that Jesus’ tomb was found by the womenfolk to have been empty.

In the light of these considerations, it is evident that in the very early Church the Easter stories fell into *at least* two different groups.⁵⁴⁹ Clearly, there were stories of the appearances of the risen Jesus. There were also stories of the discovery of the empty tomb. Consequently, a difficult, but inescapable, question arises: what actually gave rise to the Christian Faith – that is,

⁵⁴³ See Edward L. Bode, *The First Easter Morning: The Gospel Accounts of the Women’s Visit to the Tomb of Jesus* (Analecta Biblica 45; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1970), 31-6; Reginald H. Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1971), 57 -65.

⁵⁴⁴ See PHEME PERKINS, *Resurrection: New Testament Witness and Contemporary Reflection* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1984), 86, 89- 92; Bode, *The First Easter Morning*, 105-8.

⁵⁴⁵ See Bode, *The First Easter Morning*, 125-6; Perkins, *Resurrection: New Testament Witness and Contemporary Reflection*, 90.

⁵⁴⁶ See Bode, *The First Easter Morning*, 161.

⁵⁴⁷ See Bode, *The First Easter Morning*, 161.

⁵⁴⁸ At best, it is only implied by these words of tradition. See Bode, *The First Easter Morning*, 96-99.

⁵⁴⁹ See Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 287- 90.

to the belief that Jesus conquered death? Thus, was the scandal of Jesus' death overcome *only* by the resurrection appearances?⁵⁵⁰ Or did the discovery of Jesus' empty tomb also play some part?

It seems a reasonable assumption that in first few years of the early Church, a fecund period of creativity, these seemingly divergent traditions were brought together. Thus, while not perfectly harmonized, they are now found united in the Gospels. However, and importantly, while this rapport was developing evidence suggests that other interpretations of Jesus, his death and resurrection, were also contending for acceptance. Some of these may even have prevailed and been dominant for a length of time.

The original Easter happenings which resulted in the Christian Faith were, according to some, the appearances of the risen Jesus. The discovery of the empty tomb played no part at all.⁵⁵¹ Thus in the kerygma, the early official proclamation of the Church, the stress was on Jesus' immediate exaltation. No mention was made of the empty tomb.⁵⁵² Support for this contention was sought in the early speeches in the Book of Acts⁵⁵³ and in the poem found in Phil 2:5-11. An important corollary followed – namely that originally there was no difference between the resurrection of Jesus and his ascension.⁵⁵⁴

However, it is argued, that with the passing of time the appearance traditions became overlaid by (supposedly) legendary stories relating to the discovery of the empty tomb.⁵⁵⁵ The result of this was that belief in the idea of Jesus' instant exaltation at the moment of his death

⁵⁵⁰ Cf. how the early Christians stressed that they served "a living Saviour". See Luke 24:23; Acts 1:3; 25:19; Rev 1:18.

⁵⁵¹ The correctness or otherwise of these views, some of which are speculative, will not be entered into. They are briefly outlined here because they help to give an insight into the background and context of the pericope, Matt 27:51b-53.

⁵⁵² If its tradition was known it was treated as a subordinate theme.

⁵⁵³ Cf. Acts 2:14-36; 3:12-16; 4:8-12. But cf. Acts 13:29.

⁵⁵⁴ Cf. Phil 2:8-9 where Jesus' death is followed by his immediate exaltation. Some statements in John's Gospel may perhaps be understood to suggest that Jesus' death was also his glorification (cf. John 12:27-32). That Jesus ascended direct from the cross may also be implied by *Gos. Pet.* 19.

⁵⁵⁵ See Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 289-90; cf. also Bode, *The First Easter Morning*, 45-50; Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives*, 79, 151-2, 163-4.

had to be modified. Hence, eventually there developed the story of the ascension of the risen Jesus only after forty days of “earthly sojourn” (Cf. Acts 1:1-11).⁵⁵⁶

Further, and in particular, it is argued that the initial passion story⁵⁵⁷ did not contain the legend of the empty tomb, but rather contained the account of the appearance of the risen Jesus to Peter as demanded by Mark 14:28.⁵⁵⁸ Thus, it is maintained that for some reason in his Gospel Mark replaced the narrative of the appearance of the risen Jesus to Peter in Galilee by a legend of the discovery of the empty tomb. As a result of all this Jesus’ resurrection was historicized.⁵⁵⁹ It meant that resurrection implied “bodily” resurrection.⁵⁶⁰ And so by this means the various traditions of the appearances of the risen Jesus were conformed to some Jewish concepts of resurrection as involving a body.⁵⁶¹

As mentioned above scholarship has in many ways moved on from Form Criticism with its stress on source-critical studies.⁵⁶² However, while many of its conclusions are contentious and debatable, yet its observations cannot all be ignored. The passion and resurrection accounts in the Gospels do possess “disjointedness”. At the beginning of the Christian Faith there were various, even conflicting, traditions about Jesus’ death and resurrection. The evidence, although

⁵⁵⁶ See Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 290; Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives*, 69, 123-27.

⁵⁵⁷ Which underlies Mark’s Gospel, and which may be deduced from it.

⁵⁵⁸ See Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*, 190.

⁵⁵⁹ Cf. Paul’s argument in 1 Cor 15. Those whom Paul reasons with had not denied Jesus’ resurrection but had spiritualized it. That is, what they had denied was that the *crucified* Jesus had been raised. Consequently, Paul argues that if Christians did not rise, then neither did Jesus – the two being so closely linked. Thus, “The Gnostics in Corinth denied not the actuality of the appearances, but that the *crucified* appeared ...,” H.-W. Bartsch, “Die Bedeutung des Sterbens Jesu nach den Synoptiken,” *Theologische Zeitschrift* 20 (1964): 97; See also Bode, *The First Easter Morning*, 100-106.

⁵⁶⁰ This incorporating of the empty tomb tradition may have been necessary as an apologetic against the spiritualizing tendency of, perhaps, some incipient form of Doceticism.

⁵⁶¹ See Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*, 191.

⁵⁶² In recent years a more holistic approach, known as narrative criticism, has been widely adopted. This approach views the Gospels as theologically interpreted history written for the edification of Christian communities. Accordingly, it attempts to draw conclusions about meaning and theology “by comparing the parts of each Gospel to the whole Gospel instead of its putative sources.” Turner, *Matthew, 7*; See also Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*. An illustration may be in order: When one buys a garment, or suit of clothes, one may at first examine its seams and note how the tailor has joined the pieces of cloth together. But after this initial examination the suit is used, it is worn. Likewise it is with the Gospels. One may initially examine how Matthew, for instance, has crafted his Gospel. One may discover that at Matt 27:51b-53 Matthew has stitched in material the appearance of which seems to jar and clash with the rest of his narrative. However, instead of ignoring this embarrassing pericope, the attempt must be made to understand it in the light of the fabric of the whole Gospel.

meager, is sufficient to establish that some initial declarations about Jesus, his passion, resurrection and *parousia* were modified. In other words, the early Church in proclaiming its message of salvation took cognizance of other teachings and of current trends. It accordingly took steps to safe guard its basic message from distortion and misunderstanding.

The crucial question, however, still remains to be answered: Why in Matt 27:51-53, (54), does Matthew speak of apocalyptic signs associated with the final End, that is, with the *parousia*, as occurring at the moment of Jesus' death?⁵⁶³ In my view, this reflects the belief, held by some Jews in NT times, that the *one* manifestation, the *one* advent of the Messiah's coming, would inaugurate the End – that is the general resurrection, and the final judgment.⁵⁶⁴

It may also explain the existence of some evidence which suggests that at the beginning of the Christian Faith there was a very early tradition that at his death Jesus was raised and so ascended direct from the cross to heaven.⁵⁶⁵ And, while debatable, this evidence may also be construed to support another contention. This contention is that initially there circulated a passion narrative which related no account of Jesus' burial and did not know the story of the empty tomb. This again echoes the belief that the Messiah's death was the culmination of his manifestation and so inaugurated the final End Time.⁵⁶⁶

⁵⁶³ It is difficult, if not impossible, to regard the raising of the *bodies* of many holy ones (Matt 27:52a) as anything other than an End time event.

⁵⁶⁴ All this, admittedly, is debatable. Note also that the word 'Advent' means 'coming' – especially of one who is awaited. Whether in the time of Jesus all the Jews were looking for the coming – that is, the Advent – of a Messiah, is highly debatable. But the evidence would suggest that at least some had this hope (see 3.1 above). However, it is important to note that today the word 'Advent' is used in differing ways. For, in the Christian Church the word has come to be used in a liturgical context, with special reference to the ecclesiastical season immediately before Christmas. The word has also come to be used for what in the Christian Church is spoken of as the return or second coming of Jesus. Thus, sometimes in the Christian Church reference is made to two Advents – the first Advent (meaning the birth and life of the earthly Jesus) and the second Advent (meaning the future coming, manifestation, of the risen and exalted Jesus). Cf. Second Advent Christians (see F. L. Cross, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 20). Consequently, when in this thesis the word Advent is used in relation to the Jewish understanding of the Messiah's coming, it will be spoken of as the *one* (meaning the one and only) Advent of the Messiah. Cf. Allison's remark, "The distinction between two advents [of the Messiah] cannot be found in the OT and is foreign to Jewish eschatology." (Allison, "Eschatology," 207).

⁵⁶⁵ See again Phil 2:5-11; Acts 2:22-36; 13:33-37; and *Gos. Pet.* 19 which reads: "And the Lord cried out, saying, 'My power, my power, Thou hast forsaken me.' And when he had said this he was taken up."

⁵⁶⁶ Cf. Jesus' final shout from the cross (Matt 27:50; cf. Mark 15:37). In the light of such verses as Isa 40:9; 58:1; Jer 33:11 it may be understood that in the OT a shout was understood as an apocalyptic sign – that is, an End Time sign. (cf. 1 Thess 4:16). Accordingly, the question arises: was Jesus' final shout, or rather scream, from the cross understood by some very early Jewish Christians to mean that at the moment of his death the End, the Eschaton, occurred? Was it understood by some that at his death Jesus

The aim of this chapter has been to reveal something of the complexity, and alleged confusion, which reigned at the beginning of the Christian Faith. Traditions relating to Jesus' passion, resurrection and *parousia* not only overlapped and merged with one another, they also changed and developed with the passing of time. It would seem that the early belief, that with Jesus the Messiah's death the *parousia* occurred, was, if not abandoned, redefined and restated to express the reality of the actual historical situation. Since Matt 27:51b-53 may be understood to reflect this early belief that with Jesus' death the End Time had been inaugurated, the question arises as to why Matthew has included this pericope. For, clearly, it seems to clash with the overall drift and development in the early Church concerning the nature and timing of the *parousia* which, even Matthew declares, would occur only after the Gospel had been taken to all nations (cf. Matt 24:14; 28:16-20).

began his reign as Messianic King? If so, then this would perhaps explain why in Matt 27:51-54 Matthew speaks of apocalyptic signs associated with the final End, as occurring when Jesus died.

Chapter 6 The Position of Matt 27:51b-53

The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate, by various means, that Matt 27:51b-53 is an integral part of Matthew's passion and resurrection narrative.⁵⁶⁷ Despite, at first sight, its seeming incongruity, this pericope is not an alien intrusion into the narrative. Rather, Matt 27:51b-53 acts, as it were, as a bridge linking Jesus' passion with his burial and resurrection.

According to M. Riebl⁵⁶⁸ form and content criteria point to an unevenness between v. 51a and vv. 51b-52a. Verse 51a has, it is said, a "richness" about it. It is introduced with "and behold" (καὶ ἰδοὺ; the curtain has an objective genitive, "of the temple", and then there follows three propositional statements – namely, (that the curtain) was split, from top to bottom, into two. On the other hand, the three clauses of vv. 51b-52a have a "leanness" about them, each being introduced by "and" (καὶ), - thus, "and the earth shook, and the rocks split, and the tombs were opened".

Further, whereas the subject of v. 51a – that is, "the curtain" is a "verifiable" thing, in an exact location,⁵⁶⁹ the events mentioned in vv. 51b-53 are vague and indefinite. Which earth shook? Was the tremor local or worldwide? Which rocks split? Which tombs were opened? Form and content also, it is maintained, point to differences between v. 53 and v. 54. Whereas vv. 51b-53 have a rhythmic sentence structure and contain no speech, in v. 54 the rhythmic structure ceases and there is given the speech of the centurion and soldiers. Further, v. 54 has participles allied with the accusative objective ("guarding Jesus"; "beholding the earthquake"), whereas v. 53 has no accusative objective and only a "*participium coniunctum*" (ἐξελεθόντες...). Verses 51b-53 have no adverbs, whereas v. 54 has two (σφόδρα, ἀληθῶς). Significantly, whereas the clauses of 51b-53 are each time introduced by "καὶ", v. 54 is introduced by "δε".⁵⁷⁰ Then, whereas vv. 52-3 refers to the resurrection of dead saints who are not identified or referred to again, v. 54 refers to a relatively accurately defined group – the

⁵⁶⁷ And so of the whole Gospel.

⁵⁶⁸ See Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 15-16.

⁵⁶⁹ But there is uncertainty as to which temple curtain is being referred to.

⁵⁷⁰ For the subtle nuances of meaning between "καὶ" and "δε" see Stephanie L. Black, *Sentence Conjunction in the Gospel of Matthew (καί, δε, τότε, γάρ, οὖν) and Asyndeton in Narrative Discourse*. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series 216*. Studies in New Testament Greek 9. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 333.

centurion and the soldiers (see 27:33-37). According to v. 53 the resurrected holy ones (eventually) go into the holy city and appear to many. In v. 54 there is an abrupt change of subject – the reference is back to v. 51, to the events associated with the place and time of Jesus' death.

If it is assumed that Matthew's original *Vorlage* was the written Mark (as we have it today)⁵⁷¹ then the discrepancy between Mark 15:38 and Matt 27:54 has, if at all possible, to be explained. In Riebl's opinion, the word group "who saw the earthquake and the associated events" (Matt 27:54) is not to be considered as a clue pointing to an original connection between both verses (Mark 15:38 and Matt 27:54), but rather as an early redactional comment serving to bridge over an obvious disharmony.⁵⁷² Riebl's approach however is not convincing. The reference in v. 54 to the earlier earthquake, v. 51b, is clearly meant to connect Matt 27:51b-53 with v. 54. Riebl's difficulty arises because she makes the (now increasingly questioned) assumption that Matthew is following *only* our written Mark.

According to Riebl, literary critical considerations force the conclusion that vv. 51b-53 are clearly out of phase with the context. She thus concludes that the Matthean texts, 27:51a (with some minor changes) and 27:54 (with considerable changes), follow the Markan tradition (Mark 15:38, 39), whereas the verses in between (vv. 51b-53) are a "peculiarity" of Matthew.⁵⁷³ But again is it not because Riebl begins with the assumption that at this place Matthew has redacted the written Mark that she is forced to conclude that there is disharmony between vv.

⁵⁷¹ An assumption made by Riebl in her work, *Auferstehung Jesu*. For a comparison of Matthew's and Mark's passion accounts, and comments as to whether Matthew has used only the *written* Mark, see Appendix G.

⁵⁷² On the assumption that Matthew's *vorlage* is our written Mark, Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 61, argues that Matthew has because of his apocalyptic tendencies redactionally altered Mark 15:39 by adding soldiers who feared (the reaction of men to unusual Epiphanic events). Matthew further strengthens this by changing Mark's "a son of God" to "God's Son" (which cannot be misunderstood) and removing the word "man". "*Nach der Endfassung des Mattäus-evangeliums bezeugen der Hauptmann und die Soldaten das Erdbeben und die anderen Gesschehnisse; doch lässt der Vergleich mit Mk 15,38 vermuten, dass die Wortgruppe 'die das Erdbeben und the Geschehnisse sahen' (Matt 27, 54) nicht als Indiz für einen ursprünglichen Zusammenhang zwischen den beiden Versen zu erachten ist, sondern eher eine redaktionelle Wendung darstellt, die dazu dient, eine vorliegende Unausgeglichenheit zu überbrücken.*" (Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 16).

⁵⁷³ Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 16: "Ein weiterer redaktionskritischer Hinweis kann die bisherige literarkritische Betrachtung erhärten: In den Versen 51a und 54 folgt der mattäische Text (vers 51a mit geringfügigen, vers 54 mit beträchtlichen Abweichungen) der matkinischen Überlieferung, während in den dazwischenliegenden Versen (51b-53) Sondergut des Mattäus vorliegt."

50-51a and v. 53 and v. 54? If however this assumption is set aside, then the way is perfectly clear to see an obviously intentional connection between 27:51b-53 with v.50a on the one hand and with v. 54 on the other. Thus these verses, Matt 27:51b-53, (54) are a bridge which link Jesus' death with his burial and resurrection. In confirmation of this the following points will be noted:

6.1 The Harmony of Matthew's Passion Account with Matt 27:51b-53

Whether Matthew has used the *written* Mark or a tradition underlying both the Gospels, it may be said that he has made many things in Mark's passion account clearer, has added special material (see 6.2), and has given his own interpretative slant to Jesus' sufferings and death. Accordingly, to highlight the uniqueness of Matthew's passion story, and some of its differences from the accounts of Mark and Luke, attention will be drawn to a number of points which Matthew stresses, or which arise from his account. These include: the fulfilment of Scripture; the apocalyptic atmosphere; the eschatological expectation associated with the events of Jesus' suffering and death; problems relating to the End Time, the *parousia*, and the seeming non-appearance of the New Temple; the Christological stress (for Matthew Jesus is both Messiah, the Christ, and Son of God); and the achievements of Jesus' obedient suffering. All these points are not only related but, as will be seen, are closely intertwined, and so are dependent upon one another. Further, and importantly, it is to be observed that Matthew writes as if the crucified Jesus is indeed, already, the victorious Son of Man, something which resonates with the thrust of Matt 27:51b-53. Among many possible examples the following will be noted:

6.1.1 The Fulfilment of Scripture

Matthew stresses the alleged fulfilment of Scripture and prophecy in the events of Jesus' passion:⁵⁷⁴

⁵⁷⁴ J. Andrew Overman, *Church and Community in Crisis: The Gospel according to Matthew* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1996), 391 comments: "A number of the events and personalities in the Gospel of Matthew relating to Jesus' death are informed by Matthew's rereading of scripture in the

Matt 26:20-29 (cf. Mark 14:18-25). See Ps 41:9. The word “many” (Matt 26:28) suggests that the promise of Isaiah 53:12 was fulfilled in Jesus’ suffering and death. Matthew thus wants it to be understood that Jesus acted for the “many” – that is, for the totality of humanity. This suggests that the reaction of the Gentile soldiers at Jesus’ death (Matt 27:54; cf. Mark 15:39) is to be understood in terms of their conversion.⁵⁷⁵

Matt 26:30-32 (cf. Mark 14:27). The flight of the disciples is a fulfilment of the Divine will as revealed in Scripture (see Zech 13:7 cf. Mark 14:49).

Matt 27:27-31 (cf. Mark 15:6-20). It seems reasonable to assume that Matthew understood the mocking of Jesus by the soldiers in Pilate’s headquarters as reflecting the messianic prophecy of Isa 50:6; 53:3, 7.⁵⁷⁶

Matt 27:32-56. Jesus’ Crucifixion.⁵⁷⁷ While there are no direct quotations, yet Matthew’s thinking in these verses is immersed in, and is influenced by, Old Testament Scriptures such as Pss 22, 69; Ezek 37; Amos 8:9; Zech 14:4-5. The overall effect of this is to suggest that Jesus’ death was not a tragic twist of fate, but was according to God’s will.

Matt 27:34 (cf Mark 15:23). See LXX Ps 69:21, 22.⁵⁷⁸ Matthew’s account indicates that the drink was offered (presumably by the soldiers) not according to a Jewish custom (cf. Prov 31:6) out of compassion (as seemingly in Mark), but out of mockery (cf. Matt 27:48; Mark 15:36; *Gos. Pet.* 5:16).⁵⁷⁹ If so, should the words of the centurion and those with him (27:54) perhaps

light of that death. There is a great deal of ‘prophecy historicized’ and far less ‘history remembered’ than the traditional treatment of Jesus’ death in Western Christendom usually has recognized.”

⁵⁷⁵ For discussion of the continuity between this present earthly cultic meal and the eschatological heavenly banquet see Hutton, “The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51b-53)”, 48-50.

⁵⁷⁶ Admittedly, this is debatable as the word “messiah” is not found in these verses. But neither does the word “messiah” occur in Num 24:15-19 which was definitely regarded by some Jews as “messianic” (See 3.1 above).

⁵⁷⁷ For a discussion of the structure of these verses see Joachim Gnilka, *Das Matthäusevangelium*. II Teil (Zweite Auflage) (Freiburg: Herder, 1992), 468-9; for a detailed discussion of the whole passage see Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 272-334.

⁵⁷⁸ See Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 277.

⁵⁷⁹ See Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:612-3; Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave. A commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels* (2 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1994), 2:942. Since in the LXX *χολή* also translates words for poison (e.g. hemlock), Davies and Allison wonder if the offered drink was an invitation to commit suicide. Was suicide regarded as a form of atonement for one’s sins (cf. Judas’ death)?

be understood as sarcastic mockery rather than as the first confession of Gentiles of Jesus' true nature?⁵⁸⁰

Matt 27:35 (cf. Mark 15:24).⁵⁸¹ Jesus died naked on a cross – that is, he died a slave's death, the most humiliating of all deaths.⁵⁸² The crucifixion was, for Matthew, a fulfilment of Jesus' own predictions about his death (cf. 20:19; 26:2) and the soldiers' dividing of his clothes was a fulfilment of LXX Ps 21 (22):18. Thus for Matthew, Jesus' tragic end was in accordance with God's will as revealed in Scripture. Further, since this is the first of three places in Matthew's passion story where Psalm 22 is clearly to be discerned, the question arises as to whether the whole Psalm has moulded Matthew's account of Jesus' sufferings (cf. Matt 27:43, 46).⁵⁸³

Matt 27:43 "Let God now deliver him if he wills ..." These words allude to LXX Ps 21:8/9 (cf. also Judg 10:14; LXX 2 Chr 16:7; Isa 36:7, 20). It is to be noted that Wisdom 2:12-24 especially has a number of striking parallels to the context of Matt 27:43.⁵⁸⁴ Commenting on Matt 27:43 D.P. Senior says:

All of the converging texts emphasize, albeit in ironic terms, Jesus' claims to have a unique, intimate relationship with his Father ... There is a fundamental current present here: what is spoken in irony will be vindicated at the moment of Jesus' death. The awesome signs that confirm Jesus' trust in his Father and the victorious confession of 27:54 stand behind Matthew's creative intensification of the mocking scene. The mustering of Old Testament texts in 27:43 reassures the Christian reader that God's plan is in effective control even of events as scandalous as the mockery of his Son.⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸⁰ See Daniel Patte, *The Gospel according to Matthew: A Structural Commentary on Matthew's Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 384. Patte stresses that the essential feature for Matthew is not so much the crucifixion but that it happens according to Scripture. Jesus voluntarily submits to humiliation, suffering, and crucifixion because it is the will of God that he should do so. See also David C. Sim, "The 'Confession' of the Soldiers in Matthew 27:54," *Heythrop Journal* 34 (1993): 401-424. Sim argues that the Roman soldiers were not converted.

⁵⁸¹ Note that in some mss Matt 27:35 has a longer ending (cf. NRSV; cf. John 19:24.). Harmonization may have played a role here. Commenting on something similar in Matt 26:39, Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 1:183, suggests that "Because Matt was used most frequently in public reading, it was supplemented from the other Gospels with passages that it hitherto lacked."

⁵⁸² For the shame and disgrace of nudity see Gen. 9:20-23. For other references see Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 679.

⁵⁸³ According to U. Luz, *Matthew 21-28* (trans. W. C. Linss; Minneapolis, Augsburg: Fortress Press, 2005), 538: "The author consciously directs the reader's attention to Psalm 21 LXX."

⁵⁸⁴ See Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:609; Donald P. Senior, *Matthew* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 331; Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 288; Eduard Schweizer, *Matthäus und seine Gemeinde* (Stuttgart: K. B. W. Verlag, 1974), 512.

⁵⁸⁵ Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 290.

Matt 27:45 – The three hour darkness – cf. Exod 10:22-23.⁵⁸⁶ Since darkness was the last plague in Egypt before the death of the first-born it appears that Matthew understood this three-hour darkness as a fulfilment of the three-day darkness in Egypt.⁵⁸⁷

Matt 27:46 “Jesus cried out in a great voice” – cf. Gen 27:34; Num 20:16; 1Sam 4:13; Isa 36:13; Ezek 11:13. Since in both Jewish and Christian eschatology the last things are often introduced by a loud cry (cf. Jer 25:30; Amos 3:1-11; John 5:28; 1Thess 4:16) it seems it could be that Matthew wants Jesus’ loud cry from Ps 22:2 to be understood as an apocalyptic sign, which indicates that Jesus’ death introduced a whole new eschatological age (cf. Matt 27:51-53).⁵⁸⁸ This is debatable. But if Matthew understands Jesus as the great High Priest the suggestion could carry weight.⁵⁸⁹

Some reluctant to imagine that Jesus breathed his last with a cry of dereliction on his lips - Luke and John (cf. 8:29) make no reference to Psalm 22:2 - suggest that Jesus repeated the whole of Psalm 22 (cf. v. 5) so that the Psalm’s happy ending (which flows into the praise of God, v. 24-31) applied to Jesus.⁵⁹⁰ But according to U. Luz, “Nothing in the text [Matt 27:45-50] suggests that one is to think of vv. 23-32 [of Ps. 22].”⁵⁹¹ Further, according to Davies and Allison, this suggestion that Psalm 22’s happy ending applies to Jesus dulls the impact of v. 46 – which is the culmination of a Matthean theme – Jesus’ abandonment – by his own country

⁵⁸⁶ For the suggestion that since Matthew’s text is closer to LXX Exod. 10:22 than to his [alleged] Markan source, and that this is one of many indications of the formative influence exercised by the Bible (OT) on the formation of Matthew’s passion story, see Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” 492.

⁵⁸⁷ See J. C. Fenton, *Saint Matthew* (The Pelican Gospel Commentaries; ed. D. E. Ninehan; London: Penguin Books, 1963), 442; Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 685.

⁵⁸⁸ See Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:625, fn 71; Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1044.

Note also that with reference to this cry of Jesus from the cross both Matthew and Mark refer to the MT of Ps 22:2. Mark 15:34 has Jesus’ words in an Aramaic form. In Matthew ‘Eli’ is Hebrew (perhaps to better explain the misunderstanding that Jesus was calling on Elijah) while the remaining words are in Aramaic. For discussion of the differences between Matthew and Mark (especially if Matthew is following Mark) see Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:624; Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1062; Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 294-99; Schweizer, *Matthäus und seine Gemeinde*, 514; H. Benedict Green, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (New Clarendon Bible; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 233; R. T. France, *The Gospel according to Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1985), 399; U. Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus 4 Teilband (Matt 26-28)* (Düsseldorf und Zurich: Benziger Verlag, Neukirchener Verlag, 2002), 332; Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom*, 75.

⁵⁸⁹ See André La Cocque, “The Great Cry of Jesus in Matthew 27:50,” in *Putting Body & Soul Together: Essays in Honor of Robin Scroggs* (ed. V. Wiles, A Brown and G. F. Snyder; Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1997), 138-164.

⁵⁹⁰ Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” 492.

⁵⁹¹ Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 550.

(13:53-8); by his disciples (26:56, 69-75); by the crowds (27:15-26); and lastly even by God himself. However, “the abandonment, although real, is not the final fact. God does finally vindicate his Son.”⁵⁹² Also as D. P. Senior⁵⁹³ points out the bystanders interpreted Jesus’ words from Psalm 22:2 as a cry for help, and so it is the theme of abandonment and dereliction that is being indicated by Matthew and Mark. Nevertheless, Senior contends, “the prayer of Psalm 22 is answered in an overwhelming fashion by the apocalyptic events that result from the death of Jesus and the confession of the Gentiles.”⁵⁹⁴

Matt 27:50 (cf. Mark 15:34,37a). “And Jesus cried again...” (cf. *Gos. Pet.* 19). According to some, the cry of v. 50 is a prayer like that in v. 46⁵⁹⁵ and so related to Ps 22 with its fundamental theology of the just man’s confident prayer to Yahweh for deliverance. This suggests that Ps 22 is the basic mode of proclamation for Matthew’s entire death pericope. Thus, according to D. P. Senior, who maintains this position, “the triumphant resolution of the Psalm – the faithful deliverance of the just man from his anguish and the proclamation of Yahweh’s glory among the peoples (Ps 22:23-32) – will find full expression in the climax of Matthew’s death scene.”⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁹² Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:625; Gnllka, *Das Matthäusevangelium*, 474-5. See also Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 1:230; Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus (Matt 26-28)*, 342-6.

⁵⁹³ Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 298-9.

⁵⁹⁴ Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 298. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 683, draws attention to the contrast with the explicit Johannine emphasis that Jesus’ Father remains with him in his passion (John 16:32. cf. Ps 139:7-12).

⁵⁹⁵ Luz, *Matthew, 21-28*, 552 fn 101, points out that Jesus’ last cry (v. 50) was not necessarily wordless as the contents of the last prayer in Gethsemane (26:44) and of the last mocking (27:44) are also not developed.

⁵⁹⁶ Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 304. See also La Cocque, “The Great Cry of Jesus in Matthew 27:50,” 138-164. La Cocque suggests that Jesus’ great cry is ‘a double-entendre’ – that is, “by not specifying the content of the exclamation, Matthew leaves room for a plurivocal interpretation.” (140). Consequently, “the shout ... has a double sense, one plain meaning for the Gentiles, one profounder meaning for the Jews.” (144). Further, La Cocque suggests that the great Cry motif “must be understood as apocalyptic. It ‘unveils’ and inaugurates; it reveals and ushers in; it is an end and a beginning. A Janus-like phenomenon, it signifies that the old world sinks into darkness with the sound of a shriek, and that the new world is born at the sound of a העורר [shout].” (146). La Cocque also notes that “Matthew sets the Passion ostensibly within the framework of Passover, but compositionally within a context of Yom Kippur!” (156). Thus “to the Jewish ‘initiates’, the Great Cry evokes still another perspective, namely, that of the high priest shouting the Name of God three times behind the veil of the temple on the Day of Atonement. It is the [shout] par excellence, the cry that, at long last, utters the unuttered and the unutterable. Matthew left his readers to fill the gap: What kind of Great Cry did the Messiah shout? ... In Matthew’s Passion narrative, the effect of the Great Cry is overpowering: human witnesses confess that ‘this one was the Son of God,’ and the whole universe enters into convulsions. In the beginning was the Word and the Word was God; it is fitting that the last historical Word be the ineffable Name ... [thus] ... the last words of Jesus on the cross are less a

In the light of this brief survey it is clear that Matthew regarded Jesus' death as a fulfillment of Scripture. In other words, for Matthew Jesus' death was according to God's will. Further, for Matthew Jesus enjoyed a unique and intimate relationship with the Father. And, although seemingly abandoned by God, yet Jesus accepted his sufferings and death as God's will for him. Consequently, Jesus' submission is to be understood as an act of obedience, and of trust, in the justice of God and in the Divine power to vindicate the innocent. Further, according to Matthew, as a result of this obedience and trust exercised by Jesus, a whole new eschatological age has been inaugurated: "The bodies of many holy ones were raised."⁵⁹⁷ All this implies that for Matthew the relationship between Jesus and his Father was one which may be described as covenantal. This contention will be further developed later.⁵⁹⁸

6.1.2 Apocalyptic Atmosphere evident in Matthew's passion account.

Matt 26:29 (cf. Mark 14:25) may be regarded as apocalyptic prophecy. Jesus' words will be fulfilled in the new age which will come when the End Time, the Eschaton, breaks in.

Matt 27:45 (cf. Mark 15:33). A range of OT texts allude to darkness as a prelude to, and accompaniment of, a decisive and terrible intervention by God in human affairs (see Gen 15:12; Exod 10:22; Deut 28:28-29; Amos 5:18-20; 8:9; Joel 2:2-3, 10; 2:30-31; Zeph 1:15). This Divine intervention may result in both judgment and blessing. Thus the darkness of Matt 27:45 implies Divine intervention bringing both judgment and salvation. Note also that according to Matthew cosmic forces were in play at the birth of Jesus (cf. Matt 2:2), and will be manifested at the last great Day (cf. Matt 24:29). Thus, the darkness as Jesus hung on the cross may be understood as an apocalyptic sign which could herald the in-breaking of the End.⁵⁹⁹

conclusion to a story than a prelude to history in its newness. Jesus' last words are thus inaugural, they are words of foundation, whose import cannot be overstated. To interpret them as a last inarticulate cry is hardly fitting." (162-3). (It is also to be noted that La Cocque's approach clearly implies that Matt 27:51b-53, 54 is to be understood as an integral part of the whole of Matthew's passion narrative).

⁵⁹⁷ Cf. Matt 27:51b-53.

⁵⁹⁸ See Chapter 11. See also Appendix J on the Concept of Covenant.

⁵⁹⁹ For the suggestion that the darkness was due to redaction, and so without any factual basis, see Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, xv; Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:621-23; Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 544, fns. 24 & 26. Other suggestions about the meaning and purpose of the darkness include (i) it was meant to recall the creation narrative (Gen 1:2-3) and to presage the eschatological consummation (cf. Matt 24:29-31; LXX Zech 14:6-7). Note that in some writings creation and eschatological themes belong together (cf.

D. P. Senior⁶⁰⁰ suggests that by means of the eschatological signs that occurred at Jesus' death (cf. Matt 27:51-53) Matthew amplifies the eschatological significance of the three hour darkness. It is however debatable as to whether the darkness belongs together with the events which followed Jesus' death. For in v. 51 there is a clear-cut change of style and καὶ ἰδοὺ indicates that something new begins – that is, Matthew distinguishes between what happened before and immediately after Jesus' death.⁶⁰¹

6.1.3 Eschatological Expectations (these also reflect the apocalyptic atmosphere)

Matt 26:36-46 (cf. Mark 14:32-42) The Gethsemane episode, while illustrating the need for Christians to “watch and pray” especially prepares for the *eschatological* event of Jesus' sufferings, death and resurrection. Judas is not openly condemned for his part, for Jesus' betrayal is according to the will of God (cf. παραδίδοται). According to H.-W. Bartsch, Luke differs from Matthew and Mark in that he moves the emphasis away from eschatology by depicting Jesus' wrestling in prayer as the wrestling of the martyrs (Luke 22:39-46).⁶⁰²

Matt 26:64 (Mark 14:62). For both Matthew and Mark the sentencing of Jesus to death sets off End Time (apocalyptic) events – that is, the passion story is part of the End Time happenings. It thus fulfills Scripture – cf. Isa 50:6; 53:3, 7.

Liv.Pro. Hab 13; 4 Ezra 7:30-44). (ii) it was meant to be a negative event – a warning, an omen, of divine displeasure. (Cf. Amos 8:9-10; Jer 15:9) “The frown of God's displeasure,” (John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2005), 1203. See also Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 543 fn 21; Gnilka, *Das Matthäusevangelium*, 474). (iii) On the other hand, it may have been meant to remind readers of the Exodus, of the Passover, and so of God's salvation. (cf. Exod 20:21) (see W. D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 84-5). Note that passages like Exod 20:21 and 2 Sam. 22:10-16 suggest that God can be present even in darkness. (iv) It may have been meant as “a token of nature's sympathy and sorrow” at the sufferings of God's Son; and (v) was darkness meant to suggest the activity of Satan, the triumph of evil (cf. Matt 4:16)? (see Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1205).

⁶⁰⁰ Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 294.

⁶⁰¹ See Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus (Matt 26-28)*, 322; Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 260, suggests that the events after Jesus' death are of far greater significance being introduced “by the solemn ‘and behold’ which elsewhere appears in Matthew to announce divine intervention (2:9; 3:17; 4:11; 8:24; 17:5; 28:2-3, 9).”

⁶⁰² See H.-W. Bartsch, “Die Passions- und Ostergeschichte bei Matthäus,” *Theologische Forschung* 26 (1962): 82.

Assuming that Matthew has used the written Mark a question arises: Does Matthew's addition of ἀπ' ἄρτι ("from now on") intensify Mark 14:62? Thus, if Mark 14:62 is a prophecy about the Son of Man, then Matt 26:64 stresses that the Lord of the Church will *now* sit at the right hand of God and work in the world. According to M. De Jonge, "ἀπ' ἄρτι ... seems to emphasize the definitive, irrevocable element in the situation. At this very moment the period of power and majesty, including judgment, begins."⁶⁰³ Accordingly, Mark 14:62 affirms, and Matt 26:64 especially stresses, that Jesus' sufferings and death, triggered by his condemnation by the religious leaders, would result in his vindication and exaltation. Jesus' death would so usher in End Time events that his enemies would see him, the Son of Man, "seated at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Significantly, in Luke's account of these proceedings the last words are missing (cf. Luke 22:69). While Jesus will indeed from now on be seated at the right hand of the power of God, yet this exaltation of his to royal kingship and authority will be hidden from the eyes of his enemies. According to Luke, Jesus' enemies have not, and will not, see the coming of the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven. These events, with their apocalyptic features, have not yet been fulfilled. They are still to come. Thus, for Luke the events of Jesus' suffering and resurrection are completed with his ascension.⁶⁰⁴ According to M. de Jonge, Luke depicts Jesus' kingship in another way – by relating how he bestowed salvation upon the repentant

⁶⁰³ Marinus de Jonge, *Jewish Eschatology, Early Christian Christology and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: Collected Essays of M. de Jonge* (ed. H. J. de Jonge; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 77. According to F. W. Burnett, "Characterization and Christology in Matthew: Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew," *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* 28 (1989): 597, "The high priest seems to be attaching the titles 'Messiah' and 'son of God' to the description given by the accusers in 26:61 who imply that Jesus is able to destroy the temple. It is to that description and to the high priest's application of the titles that Jesus is asked to answer (26:62). 'So you have said,' then, does not seem to be an affirmation of his sonship but a descriptive acknowledgement of what the high priest has said. Thus I agree with David Hill that in 26:64 'it is as if Matthew wishes to show Jesus distancing himself from the language and titles used by immediately appealing (with a strong adversative) to the Son of man designation and imagery.' (David Hill, "The Figure of Jesus in Matthew's Story: A Response to Professor Kingsbury's Literary-Critical Probe," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 21 (1984): 46) This answer conveys to the reader that, like the PN [Proper Name] Jesus, SM [Son of Man] points away from itself towards the parousia when the SM will be signified by the Judgment and the presence of God's kingdom. The exaltation language in 26:64 seems to confirm this point."

⁶⁰⁴ See Bartsch, "Die Passions- und Ostergeschichte bei Matthäus," 83; Bartsch, "Die Bedeutung des Sterbens Jesu nach den Synoptiken," 94.

criminal (cf. Luke 23:39-43). “Luke obviously is at pains to emphasize that Jesus will begin to exercise his royal authority ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν as xxii, 69 has made clear.”⁶⁰⁵

Matt 27:39-44 Jesus is mocked.⁶⁰⁶ In a very real sense in this section Matthew is working up to a climax which will become evident with the event of Jesus’ death and its aftermath (cf. Matt 27:45-53). Thus Davies and Allison note that:

(T)hroughout vv. 39-44 the jeering parties unwittingly speak the truth. Jesus *is* the Son of God (vv. 40, 43). The destruction of the Temple (vv. 40) – which will almost immediately be foreshadowed by the veil rending – is a consequence of the rejection of his ministry. Jesus raises up a new temple (v. 40), the church ... He is the king of Israel (v. 42). He trusts in God (v. 43). And if he does not come down from the cross and save himself (vv. 40, 42), he does, in God’s good time, overcome death. The ridicule discloses the truth.⁶⁰⁷

Matt 27:50 (cf. Mark 15:37a) “Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last.” Jesus’ last cry from the cross has been understood as having apocalyptic overtones, as something which inaugurated eschatological events, and as a sign through which Christians expounded the significance of Jesus’ death.⁶⁰⁸ Others, however, are rather cautious about this approach. U. Luz, for instance, says: “In reality the accents lie elsewhere. Jesus’ last cry does not justify thinking of judgment, victory, and the coming of a new eon. ... Matthew says merely that Jesus cries to God one last time and then dies.”⁶⁰⁹

⁶⁰⁵ De Jonge, *Jewish Eschatology, Early Christian Christology and the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, 80.

⁶⁰⁶ Since there are three different groups of mockers there are three separate scenes. For a discussion of the structure of these three groups and the fact that it is the same as the compositional technique used in Matt 26:36-46, see Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3, 617; see also Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus (Matt 26-28)*, 323 (cf. Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 536). A number of writers also note a parallel with Matthew’s earlier temptation narrative where Jesus undergoes three temptations just as here there are three mockeries and there the devil prefaces his speech with εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ~ (Matt 4:3, 6). See Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3, 618; Senior, *Matthew*, 330; France, *The Gospel according to Matthew* [1985], 397; David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew: New Century Bible* (London: Oliphants, 1972), 354. According to Luz. “the baptism and temptation stories (3:17; 4:3,6) and 27:40, 43, 54 constitute an inclusion.” (Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 538 fn 20).

⁶⁰⁷ Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:619; see also Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus (Matt 26-28)*, 328: “soon would the great change happen, God would intervene and make visible, who this crucified One in reality is ...”

⁶⁰⁸ See Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1087.

⁶⁰⁹ See Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 553.

In the opinion of H.-W. Bartsch⁶¹⁰ Matt 27:50 φωνῆ μεγάλης allows the interpretation that the original meaning of Jesus' scream was that it was an expression of the extremest desperation, resulting in death through exhaustion.⁶¹¹ Bartsch however suggests that in the Synoptics this original meaning received corrective reinterpretations along the following lines: In Matthew it received a "soteriological" presentation – that is to say, in the light of the "drink episode" (Matt 27:48-49; cf. Mark 15:36) Jesus' scream and death were interpreted in the light of the messianic Psalm 69 – (cf. Ps 69:21-29). Thus Jesus' suffering was understood as messianic suffering (cf. the suffering Servant of the Lord, Isa 53).⁶¹² Further, since a great scream, or shout, could be understood as an apocalyptic End Time sign⁶¹³ Jesus' scream from the cross could have been understood by the early Christians as a sign declaring that at his death the End occurred, that the Eschaton was inaugurated, and that Jesus had begun immediately to

⁶¹⁰ Bartsch, "Die Bedeutung des Sterbens Jesu nach den Synoptiken," 95; See also H.-W. Bartsch, "Historische Erwägungen zur Leidensgeschichte," *Evangelische Theologie* 22 (1962): 449-459.

⁶¹¹ This is highly debatable. According to A.D. Plummer, "the Messiah did not die of exhaustion, struggling for life. Of his own will He let go what he could have retained." Alfred D. Plummer, *The Gospel according to S. Matthew* (London: Elliot Stock, 1910), 400. See also Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:628; Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1080; V. Taylor, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (London: MacMillan, 1957), 596; Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus (Matt 26-28)*, 345; Boring, "The Gospel of Matthew," 492-3; Leon L. Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1992), 723. For the suggestion that Jesus is here dispersing the Holy Spirit see W. F. Albright & C. S. Mann, *Matthew* (The Anchor Bible; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1971), 351; Green, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 224; A. Marcus Ward, *The Gospel according to St. Matthew* (Epworth Preacher's Commentaries; London: The Epworth Press, 1961), 157. For a contrary view, see Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 305-6. For comments on the suggestion that, in the light of Ezek 37:6, Matt 27:50 implies that the sleeping ones (Matt 27:52) received Jesus' released spirit, see Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1123, fn 64 & 1181-2. See also Rafael Aguirre, "El Reino de Dios y la muerte de Jesús en el evangelio de Mateo," *Estudios Eclesiásticos* 54 (1979): 368-72. According to Aguirre the Matthean expression ἀφῆκεν τὸ πνεῦμα ("to surrender the spirit") is unusual. He notes that in the LXX τὴν ψυχὴν ἀφίεναι is encountered in 1 Esd 4:21 and Gen 35:18 - texts which are associated with the birth of a new life. Accordingly, in his opinion, the use of so unusual an expression suggests that Matthew does not pretend to describe merely the death of Jesus, but that it is possible he alludes also to the surrender of the Spirit on the part of Jesus. Thus, in the light of this and with reference to Ezek 37:13-14, Aguirre concludes that at his death Jesus surrendered the Spirit of God which resulted both in the irruption of the eschatological into history (cf. the new life of Matt 27:51b-53) and the revelation of Jesus' divine nature (cf. the soldiers' confession of Matt 27:54). According to David Hill, "Matthew 27:51-53 in the Theology of the Evangelist," *Irish Biblical Studies* 7 (1985): 79: "It is possible that Matthew's use of the unusual phrase ἀφῆκεν τὸ πνεῦμα (lit. 'delivered over the spirit') to describe Jesus' act of dying is intentional. The eschatological, life-giving spirit promised in Ezekiel's vision is actually conferred in Jesus' death."

⁶¹² According to Bartsch, "Historische Erwägungen zur Leidensgeschichte," 449-459, Mark 15:23 (Matt 27:34) relates an actual historical event whereas Mark 15:36 (Matt 27:49) has been "constructed" from the Old Testament, the word of Scripture.

⁶¹³ cf. Isa 40:9; 58:1; Jer 33:11; 1 Thess 4:16.

reign as Messianic King.⁶¹⁴ This suggestion is open to challenge. But if accepted, then the apocalyptic signs which occurred at Jesus' death (cf. Matt 27:51-53) could be understood as portraying Jesus' as Messiah – that is, as one with kingly authority. Matthew thus presents the death of Jesus as life-giving, the dead rise at the cross of Christ.⁶¹⁵ In other words, in their account of the sufferings of Jesus, the first Christian community testified to its understanding of the person of Jesus as the risen and exalted Lord.⁶¹⁶

Furthermore, both Jesus' suffering and death, as well as his appearance in glory, were understood as events which belonged to the coming of God's kingdom. Thus, the salvation of the day of Yahweh meant not only the cleansing from, and forgiveness of, sin (Isa 40:2-11; 1Cor 15:3) but that this was accomplished by the sufferings and death of Jesus. The Messianic (birth) pains had their base in the sin of the people.⁶¹⁷ Thus what through the prophet was promised: "I, I wipe out your misdeeds for my sake" (Isa 43:25) had happened with the sufferings of Jesus.

This is clearly attested in the last supper which for the Synoptics was a passover meal. And since the Jewish Passover meal was always celebrated with an eschatological outlook – that is, as a continual renewal of the expectation of the coming End which would bring Israel's salvation – the last Supper likewise has eschatological overtones. In celebrating this last supper with his disciples Jesus was looking forward to the inbreaking of God's Kingdom (his next meal would be a new one with them in the kingdom of God (Matt 26:29 cf. Mark 14:25; Luke 22:16-20)).

All four accounts of the last Supper (Matt 26: 17-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-20; 1Cor 11:23-26) have differing words of interpretation. Both Matthew and Mark (perhaps the

⁶¹⁴This harmonizes with the suggestion that there was a very early tradition that at his death Jesus was raised direct to heaven. Thus the original passion story perhaps related no account of Jesus' burial, and did not know the story of the empty tomb. (See Phil 2:5-11; Acts 2:22-24; 13:33-37; cf. *Gos. Pet.* 19: "And the Lord cried out, saying, 'My power, my power, Thou hast forsaken me.' And when he had said it he was taken up.")

⁶¹⁵ This is perhaps to be understood as a fulfilment of the promise of God in Ezek 37:12. See John P. Meier, *Matthew: New Testament Message. A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1980), 352, who writes: "We may speak of the death-resurrection in Matthew as one great eschatological event which ushers in a new age, the age of the church (28:16-20)."

⁶¹⁶ See Bartsch, "Die Bedeutung des Sterbens Jesu nach den Synoptiken," 95-6.

⁶¹⁷ See Bartsch, "Die Bedeutung des Sterbens Jesu nach den Synoptiken," 95.

oldest account) stress that Jesus acts for the “many” – that is, for the totality of humanity (cf. Isa 53:12). This reflects an eschatological understanding of the supper – that in the sufferings and death of Jesus the promise of Isaiah 53 has been fulfilled. Jesus by acting, by deputizing for humanity, took the punishment upon himself and so the coming of God’s Kingdom had been brought about (or at least had been made possible). Thus, Mark (15:39) and Matthew (27:54) by mentioning the conversion of Gentiles stress that Jesus brings the salvation of the many, of humanity.⁶¹⁸ In contrast, the tradition in Luke’s account of the last Supper, and especially in that of Paul, reflects cultic development. Thus, there is a command to repeat the supper: “Do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19) and, most importantly, the supper and what it signifies has been personalized by the transformation of the πολλῶν (Matt 26:28) into ὑμῶν (cf. 1 Cor 11:24). The tradition underlying Luke’s and Paul’s account has moved from the eschatological understanding of Mark and Matthew’s account. For in the eschatological understanding of the last Supper, with its assumption that the End was soon to come with Jesus’ death, there is no room for any cultic activity.⁶¹⁹

A quite different understanding of Jesus’ scream and death is presented by Luke.⁶²⁰ As has been seen Mark and Matthew stress the apocalyptic, the eschatological, aspect of Jesus’ death with its soteriological implications. They present Jesus’ passion as a fulfilment of the Old Testament, the accomplishment of the Divine will, and as the completion of salvation. On the other hand, Luke writing as a theologian and a historian endeavours to give a human and psychological presentation of Jesus’ passion. Consequently, Luke presents the Passion as a martyrdom. Thus Jesus, “dies with an expression of reliance upon God on His lips⁶²¹ and in this way convinces the centurion by His patience. ... It is not paganism which now speaks, as in Mark, and confesses the Son of God; rather a single person speaks who expresses something

⁶¹⁸ See Bartsch, “Die Bedeutung des Sterbens Jesu nach den Synoptiken,” 98. Cf. Sim, “The ‘Confession’ of the Soldiers in Matthew 27:54,” 401-424. Sim maintains that the gentile soldiers were not converted.

⁶¹⁹ Nor for any mission to the Gentiles.

⁶²⁰ For what follows see Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*, 199-200.

⁶²¹ Luke 23:46; cf. Ps 31:5; Has this replaced Ps 22:1 which is found in the earlier tradition?

very much less, namely, the conviction of Jesus' innocence which is all that can be reached at this moment by human criteria: 'This was a righteous man'."⁶²²

Further, in Matthew's soteriological presentation the multitude defiantly takes the responsibility (for Jesus' death) upon itself (Matt 27:25) and thus brings the curse upon the Jewish people. However, in Luke's presentation the multitude strikes its breast and goes home, frightened by the martyr's blameless suffering (cf. Luke 23:48).⁶²³

6.1.4 The New Temple⁶²⁴ and the Problem of its Non-Appearance

According to Matthew at Jesus' "trial" before the High Priest (Matt 26:59-68) two false witnesses came forward, and said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.'" (Matt 26:60-61). Mark (14:58) relates that some gave false testimony against Jesus saying, "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.'" These slight differences may be due simply to the vagaries associated with the transmission of oral stories which reached the ears of the common people, as well as the ears of the Gospel writers.⁶²⁵ If however it is assumed that Matthew is using the written Mark, then Matthew has so changed Mark's words about Jesus making a prophecy of a new temple as to give them a Christological stress – that is, Jesus is depicted by Matthew as expressing his authority to dispose of, and to reinstate, the temple.⁶²⁶

If Mark 14:58-61 relates the original accusation against Jesus, "I will destroy this temple ... " then this charge may have arisen from words Jesus spoke when he cleansed the temple (see Mark 11:16; cf. Isa 56:6-7). That there would be a new temple belonged to the

⁶²² See Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*, 203. Does not this approach, in effect, declare that the ability to believe that Jesus is the Son of God is a result of a divine supernatural act?

⁶²³ For the view that in Matt 27:32-50 Matthew does *not* recount the glorious death of a martyr, see Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:638-9. For discussion of Jesus' prayers and agony, see Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:228.

⁶²⁴ See Richard J. Bauckham, "The Parting of the Ways: What happened and Why," *Studia Theologica* 47 (1993): 135-151.

⁶²⁵ Cf. how in 26:67-8 Matthew, absent mindedly as it were, omits Jesus being blindfolded (an oversight which suggests that Matthew is passing on a very familiar tradition).

⁶²⁶ cf. Matt 27:53 – μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ - in the LXX ἔγερσις is used to refer to the erection of the temple (1 Esd 5:62). See Hutton, "The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51b-53)", 145.

apocalyptic tradition of the events of the End Time. It was central to some messianic expectations that God would miraculously create the new Temple (Ezek 40-48; *I En.* 90:28-29; cf. Acts 6:14).⁶²⁷ Consequently, Jesus' words and actions in the temple could well have been understood by others as messianic behaviour – a claim to be the Messiah.

However, while Matthew (and Mark) stress that Jesus' passion and death were eschatological, apocalyptic events, yet no new temple was evident. Thus since the new Temple had not yet materialized, the appearances of the risen Jesus, initially understood as evidence of the reality of the End Time, had to be reconsidered. In the light of this problem and its resulting confusion it is suggested that the early Christians did two related things.

First, Jesus' sufferings, death, and resurrection were reinterpreted. Thus, while these events were still looked on as apocalyptic happenings, as belonging to the eschatological End Time, yet they were now regarded as signs, still within history, for the imminent End, - that is, as the firstfruits, as it were, which indicated the near closeness of the manifestation of God's Kingdom.⁶²⁸

Then, secondly, as a result of this reinterpretation, and contemporary with it, the early Christians adopted a different understanding of the time scale relating to the End Time, the appearance of the new Temple, and of the coming of the fullness of the Kingdom of God. Consequently, while it was acknowledged that the ultimate End had not yet come, yet the Christian community must be ready and expect the Lord's coming, the *parousia*, at any moment.

Thus, the early Christian community, which had originally believed the End had already come with the appearances of the risen Jesus was called to the expectation of a future, albeit imminent, End (the *parousia*). The members of the Christian community were to realise

⁶²⁷ cf. John 2:19. "That the new building of the Temple should follow in three days, emphasizes, that the passage is dealing here with God's miracle that belonged to the events of the End Time." (See Bartsch, "Die Passions- und Ostergeschichte bei Matthäus," 82.)

⁶²⁸ See Bartsch, "Historische Erwägungen zur Leidensgeschichte," 452-3.

that the sufferings, death and resurrection of Jesus were events within history,⁶²⁹ events within the historical story to which they looked back.

Although the expectation of an End as still belonging to the future replaced the original understanding of the *parousia* (as being identical with the appearances of the risen Jesus), it is clear that the early Christian community nevertheless expected Jesus' coming to be imminent, certainly within the life time of some of Jesus' contemporaries (cf. Mark 9:1). Accordingly, after the destruction of Jerusalem the delay of the already postponed *parousia* became problematic. Basically, the expectation continued steadfastly to be held, but the setting of a date, a time limitation, was discouraged.⁶³⁰

It should also be noted that since the new temple did not materialize with Jesus' death and resurrection some suggest that Luke in his passion story removed all reference to its destruction and rebuilding. Thus Luke's account of Jesus' "trial" before the religious leaders (Luke 22:66-71) is significantly different from that found in Mark and Matthew. It has no reference at all to Jesus' threat to destroy the temple (although Acts 6:14 reveals that Luke was aware that such charges were in circulation). Likewise in the crucifixion scene while both Mark (15:29) and Matthew (27:40) stress that those who mocked Jesus made mention of his threat to destroy and rebuild the temple, Luke is silent on this matter (cf. Luke 23:35).⁶³¹

Finally, it is to be noted that the problem of the non-appearance of the Eschaton was further exacerbated by the fact that the original understanding of the sufferings and death of

⁶²⁹ cf. how the story of the empty Tomb "historicizes" the resurrection.

⁶³⁰ See Bartsch, "Die Bedeutung des Sterbens Jesu nach den Synoptiken," 101-2. See also James D. G. Dunn, "The Significance of Matthew's Eschatology for Biblical Theology," *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* 35 (1996): 150-162. According to Dunn, "Matthew, like the other Synoptics, seems to be remarkably untroubled by the fact of the present / future tension in his tradition." (151). He further notes that, "a tension between partial or delayed fulfilment and hope redefined and re-expressed was a regular feature of biblical and post-biblical hope. In other words, the tension within Matthew's eschatology is very much of a piece with the tradition of eschatological hope in the Jewish writings of the period." (155).

⁶³¹ For Luke a last eschatological event is always still to come. Thus he reports the heavenly journey / ascension (not the *parousia*) as the End of the events of the suffering and resurrection story. See Bartsch, "Die Passions- und Ostergeschichte bei Matthäus," 82-3. Another approach to the seemingly non-appearance of the new temple is found in John 2:19-22. According to John, the risen Jesus is the new Temple (the meeting place of God and mankind). Thus Jesus is the End, he is the Last Day (see John 11:23-27; 5:25-29).

Jesus as the actual inception of the final End continued, it seems, to live on in some heretical groups. The thought that the End with its new existence had come with the death and resurrection appearances of Christ appealed to these groups. Accordingly, perhaps through some special “knowledge” they claimed to have entered into this new existence. Consequently, believing themselves already to be in the resurrection state, they expected no future resurrection (cf. 1 Cor 15; 2 Tim 2:18) and thus considered themselves free from lawful relationships and commitments.⁶³²

6.1.5 The Mystery and Unity of Jesus’ Person.

For Matthew Jesus *is* the Christ, the Messiah. He *is* also the Son of God. On the one hand as Messiah Jesus is a man under authority.⁶³³ On the other hand, as Son of God he is imbued with Divine power. For Matthew these two features coalesce in the person of Jesus and are not to be separated. The importance of this mysterious unity for Matthew is that it explains, as nothing else can, the soteriological achievements of Jesus’ sufferings and death. However, in Matthew’s opinion, while those who mock the crucified Jesus use this language they neither understand or believe what they utter.

Accordingly, in Matt 27:39-44 Matthew refers to three groups of people who mock the crucified Jesus. Their words are correct, but they lack understanding and insight into the mystery of the suffering Jesus. First, Jesus is mocked by the Roman gentiles. Verses 39-44 continue the ridicule expressed in earlier verses that one crucified could ever be a king. Thus vv. 27-31 describes a sham coronation: Jesus is given a robe, a crown, a sceptre and is hailed by the soldiers as king; and in vv. 32—38 Jesus is portrayed by the Romans as a king enthroned on a cross.

⁶³² See Bartsch, “Die Bedeutung des Sterbens Jesu nach den Synoptiken,” 98; It is debatable whether these groups represent an early form of incipient Gnosticism. Certainly, against Gnosticism the early Church sought to find the grounds of its faith in the historical Jesus. See P. Seidensticher, “Die Auferstehung Jesu in der Botschaft der Evangelisten,” *Stuttgarter Bibelstudien* 26 (1967): 35-38, 146-148.

⁶³³ Cf. Matt 8:5-13.

Secondly, Matt 27:39-44 reveal that instead of lauding Jesus as king, “passers-by” and the Jerusalem leaders mock him.⁶³⁴ However, these very words of mockery reflect what Matthew wishes his readers to understand and believe about the person of Jesus – that Jesus is the Christ, the true king of Israel (see Matt 27:42). In Matt 27:11, 29, 37 Jesus is spoken of as “the King of the Jews.” However, whereas “‘Jews’ is simply an ethnic designation, ‘Israel’ connotes the religious identity of the people chosen by God and therefore ‘King of Israel’ has strong messianic implications.”⁶³⁵

These same verses, Matt 27:39-44, also sum up the case against Jesus – that he claimed to be the Messiah, the Son of God, and that he would destroy and rebuild the temple in three days (cf. Matt 26:61, 63).⁶³⁶ This feat could only be accomplished by one possessing divine, miraculous power.

The third group who mock Jesus are the two robbers crucified along with Jesus. They also “taunted him in the same way” (Matt 27:44; cf. Mark 15:32b). There may be allusions here to LXX Ps 21 (22):7 and LXX Ps 68:9. But, more importantly, the words “in the same way” seem to suggest that the robbers also derided Jesus as “Son of God.”⁶³⁷

The question arises as to what those who mocked Jesus understood by the expression “Son of God.”⁶³⁸ Matt 27:40 suggests that they understood the designation to imply Jesus’ full divinity. As Son of God he was not to look to some higher power outside of himself but was “to save himself by coming down from the cross.” Verse 43, however, suggests that “Son of God” implies rather that Jesus stood in a special relationship to God. Thus, he was to trust not in

⁶³⁴ See Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:616.

⁶³⁵ See Senior, *Matthew*, 331; See also Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 285-6; Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 539. Note also that in Zeph 3:15 Yahweh is called “King of Israel.”

⁶³⁶ For discussion of the Messiah as the eschatological Carpenter, and the (Re) Building of the Temple, see Aus, *Samuel, Saul, and Jesus*, 87-90.

⁶³⁷ This seems to have been Matthew’s way of preparing for the eventual sincere acclamation of Jesus as “Son of God” by the centurion and his soldiers (cf. 27:54) – an avowal which undid the earlier mockery. See Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:618. That 27:54 is to be understood as a sincere avowal of Jesus as “Son of God” is challenged by D. C. Sim who suggests that “the utterance of the centurion and his fellow soldiers is best viewed as an admission of guilt and a cry of defeat.” (Sim, “The ‘Confession’ of the Soldiers in Matthew 27: 54,” 34 (1993): 419).

⁶³⁸ See Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 282-4.

himself but in God and so could be assured of deliverance (cf. verse 49 which suggests that for some Jesus was a mere mortal man in dire need of supernatural help).

In the light of these verses, Matt 27:39-44, it would seem that in Matthew's view to appreciate Jesus he must be seen and understood, at the one and the same time, from two differing angles. On the one hand he is the Son of God with all divine power at his disposal.⁶³⁹ On the other hand, although the Son of God, he is also the Messiah – that is, he is a person under covenantal authority. He, accordingly, must trust in, and be obedient to the will of his suzerain, who is also his Father. This duality is well expressed by T. L. Donaldson who writes:

(T)hroughout Matthew Jesus' divine sonship takes up two OT models. On the one hand God's Son is the enthroned king, victorious over his enemies; on the other hand, God's Son is true Israel, called to a life of humble obedience and service. Those who mock the crucified are like the devil in that they set these two concepts over against each other and propose a path without affliction. But Jesus refuses to sunder the two concepts of sonship; he refuses to reign without the suffering of obedience. He rather eschews self-serving acts of power and lets God save him in God's own time. Sonship does not mean leaving the cross but staying on it. In this way travail and exaltation become cause and effect: Jesus reigns *because* he gives his life as a ransom for many.⁶⁴⁰

The power of Matthew's passion narrative is thus found in the interplay of these two, seemingly conflicting, concepts of Sonship. The two concepts – God's Son as the enthroned, victorious King, and God's Son as the humble, obedient Israel⁶⁴¹ - create a tension. If Jesus' obedience leads to his death, how can he be the King over all? According to Matthew this tension finds its resolution in the eschatological events of Matt 27:51b-53, by the soldiers' confession of Jesus as God's Son (27:54), by Jesus' resurrection, and especially by Matt 28:16-20. Commenting on this final scene, Matt 28:16-20, Donaldson writes, "[I]t becomes fully clear to the reader that the two aspects of Sonship are not antithetical but are instead related in a causal sequence: the Son is enthroned ('all authority has been given to me') precisely because

⁶³⁹ Cf. Matt 26:52-54.

⁶⁴⁰ See Terence L. Donaldson, "The Mockers and the Son of God (Matthew 27:37-44): Two Characters in Matthew's Story of Jesus," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 41 (1991): 3-18.

⁶⁴¹ In Matt 2:15, Matthew comes very close to, if not actually identifying, Jesus, God's Son, with Israel. See Hosea 11:1. See pages 70-74 above.

of his obedience and faithfulness under testing. It is by accomplishing the mission of obedience given to God's Son Israel that Jesus is exalted as God's Son the king."⁶⁴²

6.1.6 Jesus' obedience and the soteriological effects of his Suffering and Death.

Matthew's concern is not just to depict Jesus as an innocent person who suffered and was crucified by the Romans for claiming to be a king. He wants above all to make it clear that Jesus suffered and died in obedience to God's will (as revealed in the Scriptures) and that through this obedience Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, achieved salvation for humankind.⁶⁴³ This is a fundamental concern of Matthew's and is reflected in various ways throughout his passion narrative. Consider, for instance, the following examples:

Matt 27:42 - The religious leaders in their mockery of Jesus declared: "He saved others; he cannot save himself." The first part of the statement not only acknowledges Jesus' wonders but, for Matthew, sums up the Gospel message – that is, "Others he saved." However the second part, from Matthew's point of view, is false. Jesus could have saved himself (cf. Matt 26:53) but he chose not to do so. Thus, Matthew reminds his readers that Jesus suffers willingly in obedience to God's will so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled. Accordingly, D. E Garland writes: "The scoffers' notion of a messiah is one who vindicates himself through sensational acts of power. As the son of God, Jesus must fulfill a divine mission; and only God can vindicate him. Jesus will not be delivered from death by his own powers but through death by the power of God. Consequently, he will not come down from the cross (27:40) because he is obedient to God's will (4:6; 26:39, 42)."⁶⁴⁴

Matt 27:46 – "And about the ninth hour (three pm) ..." It is suggested that these words would have lead Matthew's Jewish readers to associate Jesus' sufferings and death with the thought of sacrifice and atonement. In addition to being the hour of afternoon prayer (cf. Acts 3:1; 10:3-

⁶⁴² Donaldson, "The Mockers and the Son of God (Matthew 27:37-44)," 11-12.

⁶⁴³ It is also important to note that Jesus' divinely sanctioned mission – established in the key scene of Matt 1:21-23 to manifest God's saving presence – is carried out through his whole ministry, including his life, teaching and actions. It is not carried out only in relation to his death.

⁶⁴⁴ Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 259.

30), the ninth hour was the time of the daily bringing of the sacrificial lamb into the temple (Ex 29:39, 41; Num 28:4, 8; cf. John 1:29, 36; Heb 9:12, 14, 26, 28).⁶⁴⁵ The ninth hour was also the time when the slaughtering of the Passover lambs began (cf. 1 Cor 5:7) – a time when the Jewish people recalled the liberation out of the slavery in Egypt and focussed hope on the End Time redemption.⁶⁴⁶

Matt 27:49 (Mark 15:36b) - According to some the words “to save him” (σώσων αὐτόν), meaning to “deliver” or “rescue” from harm or calamity, have a theological flavour and can refer to eschatological deliverance on the last day (cf. Matt 1:21). Thus it is maintained that these words have definite soteriological overtones. D. P. Senior⁶⁴⁷ notes that the word σώζω recurs in LXX Ps 22:2, 6, 9, 22 and so he suggests that Ps 22 could well have provided the background and model for Matthew’s presentation of Jesus’ death.⁶⁴⁸

Matt 27:45 – Not everyone, however, is of the opinion that a soteriological emphasis is to be found in every aspect of Jesus’ sufferings. For instance, commenting on Jesus’ cry of despair from the cross (Matt 27:45) U. Luz writes:

Seeing a soteriological dimension in this prayer-cry, perhaps in terms of 1:21; 20:28; and 26:28, is remote from the text. Here in the total darkness there is nothing more to be seen of the sovereignty of Jesus, who was aware of his hour and of the divine plan of events (cf. 26:2, 18, 45). Instead, Jesus cries out his suffering and his inner abandonment, loudly and audibly, not resigned to the will of God. Suffering here is not inwardly overcome or accepted; it is simply there, painfully and darkly, like the

⁶⁴⁵ Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Church Book, Matthew 13-28* (vol.2 of *Matthew. A Commentary*; rev. and exp. ed.; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2004), 746.

⁶⁴⁶ See Gerhard Maier, *Matthäus-Evangelium 2 Teil* (Bibel Kommentar Band 2; Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hansler Verlag, 1980), 456; Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 684, writes: “By expiring at 3 pm, Jesus died close to the official time of the evening lamb offering in the temple, especially significant in a paschal context ...”

⁶⁴⁷ Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 303.

⁶⁴⁸ At the end of v. 49 some mss add the following words: “ἄλλος δὲ λαβὼν λόγχην ἔνυξεν αὐτὸ τὴν πλευράν, καὶ ἐξηλθεν ὕδωρ καὶ αἷμα” (cf. John 19:34). While Brown (see Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1065) doubts that they were originally part of Matthew, Davies and Allison are inclined to think them original (see Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:627, fn 82). For comment on the suggestion that John 19:34, and this variant reading in Matthew, may reflect Gen 2:21-22 (Eve from the side of Adam) or that the piercing of Jesus’ side with the sword symbolized the opening up of the garden with the tree of life that had been fenced in with a sword after Adam’s sin (Gen 3:24) see Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1180.

blackness around him. Jesus does not merely cry into an anonymous darkness, however; he cries aloud, almost accusingly, to his God. ...⁶⁴⁹

Luz's comments are a timely reminder of the "mysteriousness" of Jesus' sufferings. Matthew thus stresses that the salvation obtained by Jesus through his sufferings and death is beyond human understanding.⁶⁵⁰

This section (6.1) has made it clear that in his account of Jesus' passion Matthew stresses the profound eschatological, apocalyptic and soteriological repercussions of Jesus' death. For Matthew Jesus' passion brought about tremendous change. The nature and extent of this change however has been, and is, subject to much debate. It has already been noted⁶⁵¹ that in NT times there was no one standard Jewish understanding of the nature of the End Time that would be initiated by the Messiah's coming. In the midst of this diversity it could well be that there were some who believed Jesus to be the Messiah and who understood that through his sufferings and death he had indeed inaugurated the new Eschaton – that is, that the *parousia* had occurred. This could explain the thrust of Matt 27:51b-53, especially of Matt 27:51b-52 which speaks of "the *bodies* of many holy ones being raised". However, not everything belonging to this understanding of the End Time had become evident. Wrongdoing and suffering still continued. The new Temple had not materialized. Accordingly, a tension can be detected. Matthew, along with the early Church, seem to want to move from this understanding of the End Time as something that has happened to something which, while imminent, is still not yet. However, by retaining Matt 27:51b-53 Matthew seems to imply that the End Time, in some way or other, has actually been inaugurated. This is the conundrum to be solved.

⁶⁴⁹ Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 551.

⁶⁵⁰ This element of "mysteriousness" is also reflected in the pericope, Matt 27:51b-53.

⁶⁵¹ See chapter 3 above.

6.2 The relation of Matt 27:51b-53 to Matthew’s “Special Material” in his Passion Narrative

It is to be noted that Matt 27:51b-53 belongs to what is known as Matthew’s Passion Narrative’s “special material”. In an important article⁶⁵² D. P. Senior considers the issues posed by the Matthean *Sondergut* in Matthew’s passion narrative – Matt 27:3-10;⁶⁵³ 27:19, 24-25;⁶⁵⁴ 27:51b-53.⁶⁵⁵ Senior contends that Matthew used no significant source for his passion story other than Mark’s Gospel which was thus the source of much of Matthew’s linguistic and theological inspiration.⁶⁵⁶ Consequently, Senior concludes: “that even in significant segments of his special material, Matthew did not depend on a formal source other than Mark.”⁶⁵⁷ Since with regards to his special material Matthew’s account is clearly different from that of Mark’s, how then does Senior account for Matthew’s special material? He does so by regarding this material, particularly Matt 27:51b-53, as composed by Matthew himself through drawing on OT

⁶⁵² Donald P. Senior, “Matthew’s Special Material in the Passion Story (Implications for the Evangelist’s Redactional Technique and Theological Perspective),” *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*, 63 (1987): 272-294.

⁶⁵³ Has Matthew cast Judas’ confession into OT language? Are we to understand that Judas’ suicidal action follows the pattern of Ahithophel, 2 Samuel 17:23? See Hutton, “The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51b-53)”, 66-7.

⁶⁵⁴ Cf. Deut 21:1-9. Did Matthew cast the tradition of Pilate’s handwashing into the Deuteronomic legal and cultic pattern of blood–vengeance? See Hutton, “The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51b-53)”, 75-80. For discussion of Matt 27:25 in relation to Luke 23:28-31, see Hutton, “The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51b-53)”, 78.

⁶⁵⁵ For Senior, Matthew’s passion narrative begins at 26:1 and ends at 27:56 (the womenfolk being connected by ἐκεί with the acclamation of the soldiers. The burial narrative, 27:57-66, is, in Senior’s opinion, orientated to Matthew’s resurrection narrative. (See Senior, “Matthew’s Special Material in the Passion Story,” 273, fn 4). Others, e.g. Hutton, “The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51b-53)”, 56-60, would, in addition to the above verses, also include 26:52-54 (Jesus’ renunciation of his power and authority so that Scripture (that is, God’s will) might be fulfilled); 27:62-66; 28:2-4, 9-10, 11-15, 16-20 in Matthew’s “Special Material.” For, according to Hutton, “Jesus’ passion and resurrection are viewed by Matthew as inseparably bound to the establishment of the church as the eschatological people of God (27:3-10; 27:19, 24-25) and to the revelation of the Son of Man at the *parousia* (26:52-54; 28:9-10, 16-20).” (see Hutton, “The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51b-53)”, 3). Thus, according to Hutton, “Jesus’ submission to the divine ‘must’, now beginning to express itself in the events of the passion, is regarded by Matthew as the prerequisite for his exaltation as the Son of Man ... The passion of Jesus is understood by Matthew as an eschatological event which stands in an anticipatory relation to the final events of world history.” (see Hutton, “The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51b-53)”, 64).

⁶⁵⁶ Senior, “Matthew’s Special Material in the Passion Story,” 275.

⁶⁵⁷ Senior, “Matthew’s Special Material in the Passion Story,” 276.

and intertestamental Jewish apocalyptic materials.⁶⁵⁸ Senior thus voices approval of D. Hill's assessment of the question of the "source" of Matt 27:51b-53. According to Hill, "(L)ittle or nothing is gained by the hypothesis of an already existing apocalyptic fragment edited by Matthew; it is likely, if not more so, that the evangelist himself brought together a number of well-known apocalyptic images in order to convey his own distinctive message."⁶⁵⁹ Further, in Senior's opinion, "The interrelationship of the special materials and their close interweaving with the overall narrative of Matthew are further arguments in favor of their Matthean origin. The possibility of a pre-existing source or sources providing Matthew with such a body of material so suited for his theological perspective seems unlikely."⁶⁶⁰

Further, the material in the special passages (Matt 27:3-10; 27:19, 24-25; 27:51b-53) reflects similar themes. This coordination of themes is unlikely to have arisen spontaneously, as it were, from independent and pre-existing sources. Rather it suggests, in Senior's view, composition by the Evangelist's hand.⁶⁶¹ Senior's position has important implications with regards to the question of the origin of Matt 27:51b-53.⁶⁶² However, what needs to be especially noted here is that Senior (along with Hill, and others) have made a strong case linking Matt 27:51b-53 with the other special material in Matthew's passion narrative. This is further support for an argument of this thesis: that Matt 27:51b-53, although a fragment of an early passion tradition is, nevertheless, to be understood as an integral part of the whole of Matthew's Gospel.

⁶⁵⁸ Senior, "Matthew's Special Material in the Passion Story," 278. Hutton suggests that "Matthew has utilized extra-Markan traditions available to him from his religious community." (Hutton, "The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51b-53)", 2, 58).

⁶⁵⁹ Hill, "Matthew 27:51-53 in the Theology of the Evangelist," 77.

⁶⁶⁰ Senior, "Matthew's Special Material in the Passion Story," 285. But does another possibility exist? Could it perhaps be that this material was not prepared by "Matthew" in Syria (?), in and around 80-85 C.E., but prepared by "Matthew", or at least by those who were the sources of "Matthew's" Jesus tradition, at Jerusalem in the early years of the fourth decade C.E., deposited in their memories, and "communicated", "passed on", as oral tradition? See Bauckham's argument in *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 305-12.

⁶⁶¹ See Senior, "Matthew's Special Material in the Passion Story," 290-1. In his work, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1137-40, Brown criticizes Senior's position. For a defence of his approach, see Senior, "Revisiting Matthew's Special Material in the Passion Narrative: A Dialogue with Raymond Brown," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 70 (1994): 417-24.

⁶⁶² See later in Chapter 9 (especially 9.3.2.5).

6.3 The Relationship between Matt 27:51b-53 and Matt 28:1-6⁶⁶³

Of the Gospel writers only Matthew reports earthquakes, both at Jesus' death and also at his resurrection. The following comparison highlights the parallels between these two passages (similar expressions are underlined – these, incidently, appear much more evident in translation than in the original Greek):

<u>Matt 27:51a ff</u>		<u>Matt 28:1-6</u>	
<u>v. 51a</u>	καὶ ἰδοὺ	<u>v.2</u>	καὶ ἰδοὺ
<u>v. 51b</u>	ἡ γῆ ἐσειέσθη	<u>v.2</u>	σεισμός ἐγένετο μέγας
<u>v. 52</u>	τα μνημεῖα ἀνεώχθησαν	<u>v. 2b</u>	ἄγγελος...ἀπεκύλισεν τὸν λίθον
<u>v. 54</u>	<u>ὁ δεῦτερον ἀρχὸς καὶ οἱ</u> <u>μετ' αὐτοῦ τηροῦντες</u>	<u>v.4</u>	ἐσειέσθησαν οἱ τηροῦντες
<u>v.55</u>	γυναῖκες πολλὰ	<u>v.5</u>	ταῖς γυναῖξιν

Similarities:

- (i) Both passages are introduced with καὶ ἰδοὺ (in order to stress the significance of what follows).
- (ii) In both passages the order of events are basically the same – the earthquake; opening of the tomb(s); fright of the guards; and the mention of womenfolk.
- (iii) The word for shaking / earthquake (σειώω / σεισμός) is found seven times in Matthew, four times in the passages about the death and resurrection of Jesus (Matt 27:51b, 54; 28:2, 4). That is, this word links not only these two passages but also these two passages with the whole Gospel (cf. Matt 8:24; 21:10; 24:7).
- (iv) In Matt 27:51b the earthquake is in verbal form (ἐσειέσθη) (which perhaps suggests the use by Matthew of a *Vorlage*). In Matt 28:2 the earthquake is in substantive form (which may suggest Matthean redaction.) According to M. Riebl, “The Matthean preference for the rhetoric

⁶⁶³ See Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 63-66. According to Johnson, “Empty Tomb Tradition in the Gospel of Peter”, the verbal parallels between Matt 27:51, 54 and Matt 28:2-4 supports his hypothesis that Matt 27:51b-53 was originally part of the story of the guard at the tomb. For further comment on Johnson's hypothesis see 7.6.4 below.

of shaking - especially in the expression 'and a powerful earthquake happened' - suggests also in this place the independent addition of the theme by the author."⁶⁶⁴

In Matt 27:52b the aorist (without reference to the originator of the action) may be described as a "divine passive." This, while debatable, could be understood to imply that it is God who opens the tombs. On the assumption that Matthew is following Mark it is argued that in Matt 28:2 Matthew has replaced Mark's "young man" (a messenger, Mark 16:5) with "an angel of the Lord", who is not just a messenger of God among others, but the absolute representative of God (and who is often equated with Yahweh Himself).⁶⁶⁵ Thus, it is argued, Matthew wants it understood that it is really God Himself who opens both the tombs of the saints (27:52) and Jesus' tomb (Matt 28:2).⁶⁶⁶

(v) The theme of fear appears in Mark 16:5, 6, 8. This, along with his mentioning of the youth in white apparel (suggesting an Angel), indicates that Mark, writing in the apocalyptic tradition, speaks of an Epiphany. According to Riebl,⁶⁶⁷ Matthew following Mark has accepted Mark's epiphanic stress but has also made alterations to Mark's account. For, while according to Mark the womenfolk were frightened (Mark 16:5), and through the Angel were comforted (Mark 16:6), yet according to Matthew, it was the guards at the tomb who were frightened (Matt 28:4), but nevertheless the "words of comfort" were still addressed, as in the Markan account, by the angel to the womenfolk (Matt 28:5). Logically, Matthew should have said either (a) that the womenfolk were frightened and then comforted (as in Mark), or (b) that the frightened guards were comforted. Instead he seems to jump from the frightened guards to the comforting of the womenfolk.

Perhaps we are to understand something along the following lines: by the fearful reaction of both sets of guards, those guarding the crucified Jesus (Matt 27:54) and those guarding Jesus' tomb (Matt 28:4) Matthew wishes, by redaction, to portray not only his Easter

⁶⁶⁴ Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 66: "Die mattäische Vorliebe für die Rede von Beben – zumal in der Wendung 'und ein gewaltiges Beben geschah' – legt auch an dieser Stelle die selbständige Einfügung des Motivs durch den Verfasser nahe."

⁶⁶⁵ See Gerhard von Rad, "ἄγγελος," TWNT, 1:75-79.

⁶⁶⁶ See Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 64.

⁶⁶⁷ Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 64.

[Sunday] report but also his report of events immediately after Jesus' death, as Epiphanies, as occasions when God Himself was especially near.

Differences: There are, however, differences between the two passages.

- (i) The Matthean Easter Sunday report uses, it is said, more concrete terms than Matt 27:51b-53. Note in this regard how the Angel of the Lord is described in 28:3.
- (ii) Matt 28:2-4 is clearly, and immediately, connected with the Matthean burial story (cf. the involvement of the womenfolk and the story of the sealing of the stone); Matt 27:51b-53, on the other hand, seems, to be rounded off and not clearly linked with the Matthean passion account. This, however, is debatable and raises the question whether the passage originally belonged to the death scene of Jesus.
- (iii) In Matt 27:51b-53 the earthquake is the reason for the events that follow, whereas in Matt 28:2-4 the earthquake appears as a side effect of the action of the Angel.
- (iv) In Matt 27:51b-53 the earthquake opens the tombs; in Matt 28:2-4 it is the angel who opens Jesus' tomb.
- (v) Matt 27:51b-53 expressly mentions the saints' resurrection, "they were raised"; in Matt 28:2-4 there is no actual mention of Jesus' resurrection. Rather, it is assumed that he has been raised (cf. Matt 28:6).
- (vi) In Matt 27:54 the soldiers acknowledge Jesus' divine Sonship; in Matt 28:4 the soldiers are struck dumb.

In the light of the above similarities and differences Riebl comes to this conclusion:

The portrayal of events, which accompany the death of Jesus, Matthew owes to an existing [pre-Matthean] tradition. The Easter [Sunday] report, Matt 28:2-4, however is based, by and large, on Mark. Where Matthew differs from the Markan version this is due to Matthean redaction. Thus Matthew had two passages of different form, origin, and intention. These he carefully placed in relationship to one another, thereby making a direct connection between the events of Jesus' death and resurrection.⁶⁶⁸

⁶⁶⁸ Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 67.

This is a significant and important conclusion. Like Riebl one may (i) make the assumption that Matthew has used Mark (as it exists today) and so must resort to redaction to explain differences between the two Gospel accounts, or (ii) one may assume that some pre-Matthean source lies behind Matt 27:51b-53. Further, one may take a broader approach and assume greater independence for Matthew from Mark by postulating that for his passion and resurrection accounts Matthew had access not only to written but also to oral traditions. Whatever approach one adopts the conclusion that Matthew through his editing of his sources has made a direct connection between the events of Jesus' death and resurrection is indisputable. And so the passage, Matt 27:51b-53, is clearly to be understood as an integral part of Matthew's passion account and, indeed, of his whole Gospel.

6.4 The Significance of the Women, Matt 27:55-56

Matthew relates that many courageous women⁶⁶⁹ watched the crucifixion "from afar" (cf. Pss 38:11; 69:8, 20; 88:8). It is perhaps to be understood that these women are expressly *not* included in the passion story. Contrast the centurion and soldiers who were near and within earshot. However, it seems better to assume that these women are to be understood as a bridge linking the story of Jesus' crucifixion to the story of Jesus' burial and the Easter story. Since they were witnesses of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection there is thus no possibility of mistake as to the reality of the death of the one who subsequently rose from dead.

In a recent paper, Serge Wüthrich suggests some novel approaches to the understanding of these womenfolk in relation to Matt 27:51b-53.⁶⁷⁰ Assuming that Matt 27:51b-53 is to be understood symbolically rather than historically, Wüthrich contends, among other things, that as mothers, these women were watching for a "bringing forth". And so Wüthrich suggests that: "The death of Jesus reveals itself to be, paradoxically, the place and time of a birth ... (thus) ... Death is no longer the ultimate step, a disappearance or an annihilation, it is possible to be born

⁶⁶⁹ For discussion of their identification see Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:638.

⁶⁷⁰ See Serge Wüthrich, "Naître de mourir: la mort de Jésus dans l'Évangile de Matthieu (Matt 27.51-56)," *New Testament Studies* 56 (2010): 313-325.

of death.”⁶⁷¹ Furthermore, according to Wüthrich, “If one can say that the death of Jesus is ‘interpreted’ by his resurrection, it is good above all to understand that this event confers on Jesus the right to be called the ‘first-born from the dead’.”⁶⁷²

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter 6 has been to demonstrate that the pericope, Matt 27:51b-53, is an integral part of Matthew’s passion and resurrection narrative.⁶⁷³ This has been attempted by the following means:

- 1) It has been noted that the apocalyptic atmosphere and eschatological expectation evident in Matthew’s passion account is in harmony with the marked eschatology of Matt 27:51b-53. Further, Matthew’s stress on Jesus, the Messiah and Son of God, who through his sufferings and death secures salvation, is reflected in the positive confession of faith by the Roman soldiers (Matt 27:54).
- 2) It has been noted that Matt 27:51b-53 is in harmony with the themes found in other “special material” (cf. Matt 27:3-10; 27: 19, 24-25) found in Matthew’s passion narrative. This links all these together.
- 3) It has been argued that the relationship between Matt 27:51b-53 and Matt 28:1-6 is such that it may be concluded that Matthew has made a direct connection between the events of Jesus’ death and those of his resurrection. Thus, Matt 27:51b-53 is to be understood as an integral part of Matthew’s passion account, and indeed, of his whole Gospel.

⁶⁷¹ Wüthrich, “Naître de mourir: la mort de Jésus dans l’Évangile de Matthieu (Matt 27.51- 56),” 322.

⁶⁷² Wüthrich, “Naître de mourir: la mort de Jésus dans l’Évangile de Matthieu (Matt 27.51- 56),” 324. Whatever one may think of Wüthrich’s approach it has this merit: it sees Matt 27:51b-53, not as some alien intrusion, but as rightfully belonging to the whole scheme of Matthew’s Gospel.

⁶⁷³ This thesis argues that according to Matt 27:51b-53 it was the *death* of Jesus that inaugurated the End. However, this stress on the death of Jesus does not imply that his resurrection was unimportant. Rather, Jesus’ resurrection is the proof that he perfectly obeyed his Heavenly Father and that his death was sufficient to inaugurate the covenant between God and humankind (Matt 26:27). See 11.3.6 below.

4) Finally, it has been suggested that the presence of the womenfolk (Matt 27:55-56) may also be construed to mean that Matt 27:51b-53 belongs to the whole scheme of Matthew's Gospel.

Chapter 7 The Prodigia (Signs and Wonders) (Matt 27:51-54)

7.1 The Immediate Context of Matt 27:51b-53

In any endeavour to understand the position, provenance and purpose of the pericope, Matt 27:51b-53, the immediate context of these verses – Matt 27:51-54 – is obviously of crucial importance. However, regarding these verses a number of debatable questions arise.

7.1.1 For instance, (a) concerning *their extent* – that is, where exactly do they begin and end?

(i) While both darkness (cf. 27:45) and earthquake (27:51b) may be understood to belong together as cosmic apocalyptic events,⁶⁷⁴ yet it seems that the darkness of 27:45 should not be linked with the events of vv. 51-54. For in v. 51 the style changes and καὶ ἰδοὺ (“and behold”) indicates that something new is beginning – that is, Matthew distinguishes between what happens before and immediately after Jesus’ death.⁶⁷⁵

(ii) Whether 27:54 should be included with 27:51-53 is also debatable. However, while 27:51b-53 is unique to Matthew, yet it seems to be closely interwoven with 27:51 and 27:54 (as argued earlier in Chapter 6). The latter verse looks back to, and depends on, 27:51b-52. Thus, “(T)he context of the passage demands that both the tearing of the temple curtain (51a) and the confession of the soldiers are integral to the passage.”⁶⁷⁶ Accordingly, “These cosmic events in vv. 51-53 must be seen not as isolated occurrences at the death of Jesus but within the context of Matthew’s total story of Jesus.”⁶⁷⁷

⁶⁷⁴ See Walter Grundmann, *Das Evangelium Nach Matthäus* (Theologischer Handkommentar Zum Neuen Testament; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1968), 560-63.

⁶⁷⁵ See Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 543.

⁶⁷⁶ Ronald D. Witherup, “The Death of Jesus and the Raising of the Saints: Matthew 27:51-54 in Context,” *Society of Biblical Literature 1987 Seminar Papers*, No. 26 (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1987), 579-80.

⁶⁷⁷ Witherup, “The Death of Jesus and the Raising of the Saints,” 579. This is also stressed by Nolland who writes: “Matthew is likely to have noted with approval a correlation between the heavens opened in Matt 3:16 and the tombs opened in 27:52; this gives him yet another correspondence between the beginning of Jesus’ ministry and its ending. ... Matthew ... is concerned here with proleptic manifestations of eschatological realities, not with the full substance of those realities ... cf. 24-25 ... Matthew seems to be saying that with the death of Jesus history has begun its final rush to the eschatological denouement. That which happens now in miniature is an intimation, an anticipation, of what is due to happen on a grand, even a cosmic, scale.” (Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1214).

7.1.2 Concerning *their Structure*. Assuming that Matt 27:51-54 belong together, there is still debate about the structure of these verses, and while various structures have been suggested, there is no real agreement among commentators.⁶⁷⁸

7.1.3 Concerning *their Timing*: With regard to the timing of these prodigia it is significant that according to Matthew they happened not at Jesus' resurrection but at the moment of his death. Some ask: did Jesus' resurrection begin in his death?⁶⁷⁹ This is similar to the view that at his death Jesus was immediately exalted to heavenly glory.⁶⁸⁰ Thus, does Matthew want it to be understood that Jesus' death and resurrection form one whole unity, a close-fitting solidarity, and so must be seen, as it were, fused together (cf. "after his rising" – v. 53)? It is clear, however, that Matthew did not hold to this position. He mentions Jesus' burial and speaks of the tomb being found empty on the first day of the week (Matt 28:1-7).⁶⁸¹ Yet Matt 27:51b-53 clearly asserts that at the moment of Jesus' death eschatological events occurred – "many sleeping holy ones were raised and came out of their tombs."

7.1.4 Concerning *their Meaning*. This question will, at this stage, be approached from two angles. First, a brief, general overview will be given, and then there will be a closer, more detailed consideration of the implications of the tearing of the temple curtain and of the reaction of the Roman soldiers.

⁶⁷⁸ See, for instance, Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28* (Word Biblical Commentary 33B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), 848; Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:628; Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1118-9; Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 560; W. G. Essame, "Matthew xxvii. 51-54 and John v. 25-29," *Expository Times* 76 (1964-65): 103, sees here a dramatization of a saying preserved in the Johannine tradition. The literary structure and unity of Matt 27:51b-53 will be discussed in detail below.

⁶⁷⁹ I. Maisch suggests that a delation of time, as it were, occurred. Thus, "the centurion and men on guard see things at the moment of Jesus' death which first happened after his resurrection ..." ("Wom Wortlaut her wäre jedenfalls anzunehmen, das der Hauptmann and die Wachmannschaft im Augenblick des Todes Jesu bereits Dinge „sehen“, die sich erst nach seiner Auferstehung ereignen; bei einer Streichung der Zeitangabe waren auch die in v. 53 genannten Ereignisse von den Zeugen zu sehen.") Maisch, "Die österliche Dimension des Todes Jesu: Zur Osterverkündigung in Matt 27, 51-54," 98. Also Riebl writes: "Matthäus zieht keine straffe trennung zwischen dem tod und der Auferstehung Jesus; er sieht darin zwei Aspekte eines einzigen Geschehens: Jesus stirbt in seine Auferstehung hinein." (Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 75); see also Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo 27, 51b-53*, 200-1.

⁶⁸⁰ See Chapter 5 above. Cf. Acts 2:14-36; 3:12-16; 4:8-12; Phil 2:5-11; John 12:27-32; *Gos. Pet.* 19.

⁶⁸¹ According to Luz, "(O)ne should not speak of an identity of Jesus' death and resurrection in Matthew. Matthew clearly distinguishes between the impotent dying of the man Jesus and God's powerful intervention." Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 570-1. Note too that according to Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (Matt 26-28), 348, in speaking and writing a person can say things only one after the other. Thus, Matthew reports the darkness of Jesus' sufferings and only afterwards can he report the intervention of God. However, as Luz explains, in a painting one can see such things simultaneously, and also past and present may merge. If this thought is applied to Matt 27:51-54 it means that the whole picture of the pericope must be seen rather than just understanding it as depicting a series of events.

7.1.4.1 A General Overview:⁶⁸²

The miracles of Matt 27:51-53 suggest a theophany – a self-revelation of God. God intervenes after Jesus' death and confirms that Jesus is indeed the Son of God (contrast the mockery of Jesus during the crucifixion – Matt 27:40, 43, 44). Further, *earthquakes* (cf. Joel 2:10; Amos 8:8-9; Hag 2:6; *1En.* 1:3-9; *As.Mos.* 10:4; *4 Ezra* 6:13-16; 9:3; *2 Bar.* 70:8; Rev 6:12; 8:5; 11:13, 19; 16:18) and *resurrection* (Isa 26:16; Dan 12:2; Ezek 37:12; Zech 14:4-5; *1 En.* 51:1-5; *2 Bar.* 50:2-4) are stock apocalyptic motifs associated with the last days and salvation (cf. Zech 14:5; Ezek 37:1-14).⁶⁸³ The question thus arises: what does Matthew wish to signify by projecting this imagery of End Time events onto Jesus' death? According to some⁶⁸⁴ Matthew wishes to signify that with the death of Jesus the salvific moment that marks the turning point of the ages (cf. the decisive "from now on" peculiar to Matthew's eschatology, Matt 23:39; 26:29; 26:64) has occurred. Thus, the signs of vv 51-53 are victory signs – Jesus' death is a victory – it is a life-giving victory. Others go even further and see these signs as evidence for the beginning of the *parousia*. According to H.-W. Bartsch, "Earthquake and resurrection of the dead are not signs (of a later *parousia*) but belong themselves already to the events which, with the death of Jesus, began the *parousia*."⁶⁸⁵ Others, however, hesitate to adopt this position. In the opinion of U. Luz, for Matthew the apocalyptic turning point (that is, the *parousia*) did not occur at Jesus' death but would occur in the near future when the Son of Man would appear in glory (Matt 24:29-31) – this future moment would be the *parousia*.⁶⁸⁶ Consequently, Luz writes: "(I)n my opinion it makes no sense to 'overload' the text apocalyptically and then later to determine that the Matthean eschatology cannot be understood in categories of linear time. What is here portrayed takes place entirely within the old world; it may let the readers catch glimpses of the coming new age but nothing more. That is in keeping

⁶⁸² See Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 260-1; Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 570-1.

⁶⁸³ See Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 260-1.

⁶⁸⁴ Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 260-1; Bartsch, "Die Passions- und Ostergeschichte bei Matthäus," 89.

⁶⁸⁵ Bartsch, "Die Passions- und Ostergeschichte bei Matthäus," 86-8.

⁶⁸⁶ But is Luz here evading the basic issue – namely, as to whether Matthew's present understanding of the *parousia* (as deduced from his whole Gospel), as occurring at the final End, is a later reinterpretation, that is, a correction of an earlier understanding, current in the very early Church, which associated the final End, the *parousia*, with the actual events associated with the death of Jesus?

with the view that vv 52-53 do *not* speak of Jesus' descent into hell and of his final victory over Satan and death."⁶⁸⁷

Fortunately, there is more, but not unanimous, agreement that the events of vv 51-54 have a definite salvation history dimension – that is, they signify that a new phase has begun in God's dealing with Israel and the nations (cf. v. 54). Whereas Jesus' messiahship was bound up in his mission to Israel (Matt 10:5-6), Matt 27:54 (cf. Matt 28:16-20) indicates that the salvation through faith in Jesus, the Messiah, will be available also to the Gentiles. Jesus' death on the cross has nullified the restrictions of the old aeon. With the death of Jesus faith in him as the Messiah has become a universal religion.⁶⁸⁸

7.1.4.2 A Closer look at Matt 27:51a

The tearing of the Temple curtain, a Divine event, could perhaps furnish a clue to Matthew's purpose for including Matt 27:51b-53. Unfortunately, however, as the following reveals, complicated questions arise as to which curtain is being referred to. Nevertheless the relationship between Matt 27:51a and the pericope, Matt 27:51b-53, needs, if possible, to be ascertained.

“And behold (καὶ ἰδοὺ) – expresses suddenness, links the following events closely with the moment of Jesus' death, and recommends them to the special attention of the readers.”⁶⁸⁹

“The curtain of the temple (τὸ καταπέτασμα τοῦ ναοῦ).⁶⁹⁰ While there were a number of curtains in various parts of the temple complex, it is generally agreed that the one Matthew

⁶⁸⁷ Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 570-1. These words of Luz are important for they highlight once again the inconsistency between Matt 27:51b-53 and the rest of Matthew's Gospel. To his credit Luz recognizes this. Luz thus realizes that to understand Matt 27:51b-53 “apocalyptically” means that “the Matthean eschatology cannot be understood in categories of linear time.” He therefore opts to put Matt 27:51b-53 back entirely within the order of the old world. Contrast Gnilka, *Das Matthäusevangelium*, 479, who contends that God's blessing “reaches the deceased righteous of the Jewish people, to whom the dead Christ descends. The idea of the descent to Hades we think should not be excluded from vv. 51b-53.”

⁶⁸⁸ See Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 570-1; Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 260-1. Uncircumcised Gentiles were forbidden to go beyond a certain point in the Court of the Gentiles. See Acts 21:27-29; Josephus, *Ant.* 15.11.5.

⁶⁸⁹ See Senior, “The Death of Jesus and the Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51-53),” 312; Maisch, “Die österliche Dimension des Todes Jesu: Zur Osterverkündigung in Matt 27, 51-54,” 116; Witherup, “The Death of Jesus and the Raising of the Saints,” 579.

refers to is either the inner curtain that covered the Holy of Holies (see Exod 26:31-5; 40:21; Lev 16:2; 2 Chr 3:14, 19), or the outer curtain that separated the sanctuary (the holy place) from the temple's forecourt (see Exod 26:37; 38:18; Num 3:26). It is not really possible however to determine with certainty which curtain Matthew meant. In the LXX καταπέτασμα can designate both curtains,⁶⁹¹ and the word, ναός, while usually referring to the inner shrine can also designate the entire temple complex (cf. John 2:20; Matt 27:5). D. M. Gurtner concludes that it is most likely the inner curtain which is meant,⁶⁹² while Davies and Allison feel that the outer curtain is being referred to.⁶⁹³ While debatable v. 54 perhaps implies that the soldiers witnessed this event, the massive outer curtain being around 24 metres (about 80 feet) high. If so, then it must have been the outer curtain. Some suggest that the events happened as natural

⁶⁹⁰ For the suggestion that originally it was the "intel of the temple" which was damaged (cf. Isa 6:4; Amos 9:1) see Marinus de Jonge, "Matthew 27:51 in Early Christian Exegesis," *Harvard Theological Review* 79 (1986): 72-3.

⁶⁹¹ For references see BDAG, 524, 665.

⁶⁹² According to Daniel M. Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 199, "Scholars have generally been right to see the inner veil as the one in view and to see that this veil served to separate the holy place from the holy of holies." See also Daniel M. Gurtner, "The Tearing of the Temple Curtain: A Look Back and a Way Forward," *Themelios* 29 (2004): 4-14. According to Gurtner (13) since "Synoptic scholars are largely agreed that the rending of the veil expresses the cessation of its function ...," and since, "of three curtains in the tabernacle / temple structures of the Old Testament, only that which refers to the inner veil before the Holy of Holies is designated any explicit function ..." it is to be concluded that it was the inner veil which was torn. Gurtner notes that the function of the inner veil included keeping people out of the Holy of Holies, separating the holy from the unholy, and possibly reminding the priest presenting the sin offering (Lev 4:6, 17) that his sacrifice was incomplete and pointed to its completion on the Day of Atonement. In Gurtner's judgment the rendering of the veil could depict the cessation of these functions. Thus, "no longer are people prohibited from the presence of God, no longer is there 'separation' of the holy from the unholy, no longer is atonement impeded, and no longer are there cherubim blocking the Garden of Eden (a noted soteriological expression, cf. *T. Levi* 18:11)."

⁶⁹³ See Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:631; Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 308, fn 2. According to Nolland, "If God leaves the Temple, he must come past two curtains. If only one is mentioned, it is likely to be one that, like the shaking of the earth and the splitting of the rocks, can make a 'public appearance' of God: the outer curtain is most likely to be in view ..." (Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1213). For discussion of the historicity of the rending of the temple curtain (it is not explicitly mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament, although the letter to the Hebrews, which however is speaking of the ancient tabernacle, seems to be aware of the tradition (cf. Heb 9:3; 10:20)) see Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 687; Bruce K. Modahl, "Interpretation of Matthew 27:32-54," in *Reading the Bible in Faith* (ed. W. H. Lazareth; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2001), 45; F. W. Beare, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), 536; Fenton, *Saint Matthew*, 444; Plummer, *The Gospel according to S. Matthew*, 401. Plummer suggests that some of the converted priests (cf. Acts 6:7) could well have witnessed the event.

phenomena and accordingly are to be understood as symbols of the eschatological events that occurred in Jesus' death – these latter being invisible are received by faith.⁶⁹⁴

Answers to the important question of the significance for Matthew of the torn curtain – that is, its theological meaning and purpose - depend on what curtain Matthew had in mind. If the reference is to the inner curtain then, on the one hand, the torn curtain, occurring at the moment of Jesus' death, could have a negative connotation, implying the end of the Jewish temple cult (cf. John 4:21-24). Since the Holy of Holies was now open to view, the temple had lost its holiness – it had, as it were, been desecrated by God Himself. In this regard note the wording: it “*was split from top to bottom into two*”, with the passive implying divine action.⁶⁹⁵

However, on the other hand, the tearing of the inner curtain may be understood to have had a positive connotation - it meant that salvation was now available for all (cf. Heb 2:14-15; 6:19-20; 9:1-28; 10:19-22). Thus, the letter to the Hebrews (through reference to the wilderness tabernacle) is perhaps a later interpretation of the event, a commentary on the split curtain. According to G. E. P. Cox “the death of Jesus has opened the way to the throne of God (cf. Eph

⁶⁹⁴ cf. Schweizer, *The Good News according to Matthew*, 515. For discussion of the view of J. P. Meier that in Matthew we should not speak of apocalyptic “signs” [symbols] but rather of apocalyptic events, which proclaim that the turning-point of the ages, the definitive breaking-in of the kingdom, has occurred, see 4.3.3 above. Suggestions about the meaning of the rent curtain include: (i) God Himself laments over the death of Jesus by tearing the “garment” of His House, the temple; (ii) it is to be connected with the rending of the high priest's garments (26:65) (see Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1135, fn 95); (iii) it is related to the division of Jesus' clothing (27:35); (iv) it is connected with the eschatological splitting of the heavens (cf. Isa 40:22; Ps 102:26, etc). Was the curtain of 27:51a perhaps that referred to by Josephus (*B.J.* 5, 212-14) as hanging before the main entrance of the sanctuary and having embroidered on it “the whole vista of the heavens.” (see Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:631; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel of Matthew* (trans. R. R. Barr; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2002), 290. See also Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, 61, 87-8, 171, 188. Thus is there a connection, an inclusio, between the rending of the Temple curtain and the rending of the heavens at Jesus' baptism (Matt 3:16)? With regard to Mark, some would say “yes” as there is the same word, σχίζω (cf. Mark 1:10; 15:38); but not in Matthew as in Matt 3:16 he uses a different word, ἀνοίγω (see Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:631, fn 107; Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1134; Riches, *Conflicting Mythologies*, 136). Schnackenburg, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 290, notes: “Both veils, according to Philo, *Life of Moses* 2.87-88, with their four colors, corresponding to the four elements, represent the created universe as also in Josephus, *Jewish War* 5:210.” [See also Eph 2:14; Heb 9:8-10; Josephus, *J. W.* 6:299 (288-309); Letter of Jerome (120:8); The Talmud (TB, Yoma 39b); y. Yoma 6:43c; cf. *b.Yoma* 39b; *b.Git.* 56b for Titus and splitting of the temple curtain.]

⁶⁹⁵ “(T)he Divine passive, where the actor is not identified for reasons of reverence.” Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew* (Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching; Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993), 324. Thus, a miracle is to be understood which declares the miraculous vindication of Jesus. God “desecrates” his own temple; (“into two” implies total destruction; it was irretrievably torn). Yet the Jewish Christians continued afterwards to go to the temple and to pay the temple tax, so as not to give Israel offence. (cf. Matt 17:24-27; Acts 3:1-10; 5:12, 42; Rev 21:22). See Maier, *Matthäus-Evangelium*, 460.

2:16-18). An alternative and perhaps better interpretation is that, as in Matt 23:38, there was no longer any divine presence to be veiled.”⁶⁹⁶

Further, the torn inner curtain may be understood as a symbol of the change brought about by the Messiah’s death. The special sanctity of the Holy of Holies was now at an end, because the purpose for which the temple and its services had been continued no longer existed. Once screened off from the world it is now thrown open. Once accessible only to the High Priest, once a year, it is now open to all Christians, at all times. Even to go into the Holy Place and see the curtain before the Holy of Holies one had to be specially chosen (Luke 1:9). Thus, “Every barrier between the soul of man and the presence of God was removed by the death of the Messiah.”⁶⁹⁷

If the reference is to the lengthy outer curtain, then the event was a publicly dramatic sign, foreshadowing the temple’s destruction (cf. Matt 24:1-2; Mark 13:1-2). Its being torn was a warning, an omen, of the eventual destruction of the temple in 70 C.E.; it was the “firstfruits” of coming judgment on the priests, whose shameful behaviour was exposed;⁶⁹⁸ and it was a vindication of Jesus’ prophetic words (Matt 24:2; 27:40).

It should however be noted that the Gospel accounts do not seem to be interested in the question as to which of the two curtains of the temple is meant (only Hebrews 9:3 introduces distinction between the two).⁶⁹⁹ According to U. Luz,⁷⁰⁰ “Basically ... both curtains are suitable for both interpretations, because the destruction of the temple means the end of the cult.”

⁶⁹⁶ George E. P. Cox, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1952), 164. For Eph 2:13-16 see Erich Fascher, “Das Weib des Pilatus (Matthew 27, 19): Die Auferweckung der Heiligen (Matt 27, 51-53). Zwei Studien zur Geschichte der Schriftauslegung,” in *Hallische Monographien*, Nr. 20 (Herausgegeben von Otto Eissfeldt; Halle: M.Niemeyer, 1951), 37; Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew* (The New American Commentary, Vol. 22; Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1992), 421.

⁶⁹⁷ Plummer, *The Gospel according to S. Matthew*, 402. For the thought that the tearing apart of the inner curtain symbolizes the release of the Holy Spirit from the Holy of Holies into all the world (cf. Ezek 10:1-22; 11:22-5) see de Jonge, “Matthew 27:51 in Early Christian Exegesis,” 75-6.

⁶⁹⁸ Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:630.

⁶⁹⁹ See de Jonge, “Matthew 27:51 in Early Christian Exegesis,” 67-8; Raymond E. Brown, “Eschatological Events Accompanying the Death of Jesus, Especially the Raising of the Holy Ones from Their Tombs (Matt 27:51-53),” in *Faith and the Future* (ed. J. P. Galvin; New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 48 fn. 5.

⁷⁰⁰ Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 565-6. According to Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 309-10, “(T)he rending of the veil can also signify a new beginning. The veil not only indicated the locus of God’s presence at the heart of Israel’s cultic life, but served as a wall of separation between Yahweh and

7.1.4.3 A Closer Look at Matt 27:54 (The Reaction of the Roman Soldiers to Jesus' Death)

In contrast to Mark, Matthew has extended the circle of participants (the centurion and his soldiers) who react to Jesus' death. To the question "why"? various answers have been given – for example: to heighten the effect of the action;⁷⁰¹ to have a confessing group to balance the mockers (vv. 39-43, 49); to suggest the fulfillment of Ps 22:27-28 "all the families of the nations ...;" and to suggest that with the coming of Jesus salvation history has taken a new shift⁷⁰² – that is, the centurion's and the soldiers' positive reaction foreshadow the conversion of the Gentiles. This last point suggests why Matthew mentions these Roman soldiers. Their conversion to faith in Jesus, as the Son of God, is for Matthew a further prelude to, and a divine authorisation, for the Gentile mission.⁷⁰³

What caused these hardened Roman soldiers to react as they did ("They feared greatly")? Whereas in Mark 15:37 it was the manner in which Jesus died,⁷⁰⁴ according to Matt 27:54 it was *the earthquake and the things that happened*⁷⁰⁵ that affected the soldiers. That is to say, their reaction was triggered not through the death of Jesus but by what happened at the

his people ... Hence the tearing of the veil might also suggest the opening of the way between heaven and earth ... Eph 2:11-19 ... speaks to the Gentiles in terms of Christ's sacrifice making access to God possible ... Rom. 3:25 ... Heb. 6:9-10; 10:19-20 ... the suggestion in each case is that Jesus has inaugurated a new economy of salvation through his death, substituting for the temple cult." (Note: the connection between v. 51a and vv. 51b-53 is highlighted by this comment of Nolland, "If the splitting of the temple curtain signals God on the move, the shaking of the earth can be seen in imagination as the impact of his footsteps and the splitting of the rocks (same verb as for the curtain) can readily point to the fact that nothing stands in his way." (Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1212). Senior also observes that in Mark, "At almost the identical moment the temple veil is rent, the gentile centurion confesses that Jesus was the Son of God. Hence the symbolism appears to have soteriological overtones. The temple economy is ended and the way is free for transmission of faith to the gentiles. Matthew's presentation consists in a *development* of the materials provided by Mark. ..." (Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 310-11).

⁷⁰¹ Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 324. D. C. Allison, Jr. notes that ἐφοβήθησαν σφόδρα (they feared greatly) occurs only in Matt 17:6 and Matt 27:54. He suggests that Matthew refers to the centurion "and those with him" so that there would be an exact correlation between 17:6 and 27:54. Matthew thus wants his readers to understand Matt 27:51-54 in the light of Matt 17:1-8. See Dale C. Allison, Jr. "Anticipating the Passion: The Literary Reach of Matthew 26:47-27:56," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 56 (1994): 708 fn 28.

⁷⁰² Witherup, "The Death of Jesus and the Raising of the Saints," 583.

⁷⁰³ Cf. Jesus' birth, Matt 2:2, 11; contrast 2:4, 20. "As in 2:1-12 those who first acknowledge Jesus as King of Israel are those outside God's household," (Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 688).

⁷⁰⁴ See Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 325; Alan H. McNeile, *The Gospel according to St. Matthew* (London: Macmillan, 1915; repr., New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), 424; Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*, 577.

⁷⁰⁵ "Which were happening" – see Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom*, 75.

moment of Jesus' death. In other words, they reacted to a revelation, to a manifestation of divine power, to a theophany. The term ἐφοβήθησαν (cf. 28:4-5) expresses the notion of reverential awe, the appropriate attitude in the context of divine power being manifested (cf. Matt 4:30, 33; 17:6,7).⁷⁰⁶

"Truly God's Son was this one..." (ἀληθῶς θεοῦ υἱὸς ἦν οὗτος)

These words read as "a confessional," as "a large and even international, conclusion." They have been described as "a Choir ending."⁷⁰⁷ Accordingly, the suggestion arises: have they been created by Matthew and so designed to reflect Ps 22:27-31?

The word, "truly", implies certainty, not merely a suggestion. "Truly" also implies that the soldiers were well aware that there was some dispute about who Jesus was, and in this dispute that led to Jesus' death they affirm that truth was on Jesus' side.⁷⁰⁸ For the soldiers Jesus was not just another man – rather, he had a special relationship to God. The words "God's Son was this one" (θεοῦ υἱὸς ἦν οὗτος) are emphatic, "this One who died on the cross." Their affirmation contrasts with the earlier words of mockery (cf. 26:61; 27:37, 47). "(T)he use of ἀληθῶς ... serves to underline the contrast with the scepticism being expressed in 27:40, 43 about Jesus' identity as the Son of God ..."⁷⁰⁹ Further, "ἀληθῶς" strengthens the link with the disciples' confession – cf. Matt 14:33. Thus, Matthew's readers are to understand that the Gentiles can have the same faith, and salvation, as the disciples. Compare the directive in 28:19 to make disciples of all nations.⁷¹⁰

According to D. P. Senior, "Truly, God's son was this one" is "The keynote statement of the entire Passion story."⁷¹¹ However, if Matthew has used the written Mark, then he has changed what according to Mark the centurion declared. He may have done so to avoid confusion. For, "While with Mark the article-less 'Son of God' could also admit the unclear interpretation '[a] Son of God (besides many others)', the reading of Matthew would, through

⁷⁰⁶ See Witherup, "The Death of Jesus and the Raising of the Saints," 683; Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 326; Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 570.

⁷⁰⁷ Maisch, "Die österliche Dimension des Todes Jesu: Zur Osterverkündigung in Matt 27, 51-54," 97.

⁷⁰⁸ See Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1148.

⁷⁰⁹ Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1220.

⁷¹⁰ Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1221.

⁷¹¹ Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 327.

the changing of ‘Son of God’ (ὁ υἱὸς Θεοῦ) to ‘God’s Son’ (θεοῦ υἱὸς) establish the right understanding. This was the only Son of the only God ... The significant change lies in the deletion of the word ‘man’ – (thus) the Matthean narration reports not just something more about the man Jesus, that he could be recognized as [a] Son of God, but it reports concerning God’s Son.”⁷¹²

The question arises: could Roman soldiers have understood and so uttered such a full Christian confession which in effect implies the innocence of Jesus and the guilt of the Romans?⁷¹³ If the soldiers in the Roman army based in Jerusalem had been recruited from Aramaic speaking Syria, then these Roman soldiers would have easily understood the Aramaic of the Jews. However, whether they also inwardly understood what “God’s Son” meant, or whether they looked at Jesus as one of their heathen “sons of God” (see Acts 14:11-18) is another question. The use of ἦν (“was”) may perhaps suggest that the soldiers regarded Jesus as at one time being, but now no longer, the Son of God.⁷¹⁴ However, according to Davies and Allison ἦν does not mean that Jesus “was, but is not now, the Son of God. The verb simply reflects an evaluation of his earthly life in its entirety.”⁷¹⁵ In Filson’s opinion, “They [the soldiers] would not mean by these words what ‘Matthew’ would mean, but he [‘Matthew’] sees in them an expression of faith which Christians can hear with deeper understanding.”⁷¹⁶

⁷¹² See Maisch, “Die österliche Dimension des Todes Jesu: Zur Osterverkündigung in Matt 27, 51-54,” 98; According to Troxel, “Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered; Its Role in the Passion Narrative, Meaning and Origin,” 34: “(T)he word order Θεοῦ υἱὸς, a Mattheanism, occurs only in 14:33; 27:54 and 27:40 ... in both 14:26 and 27:54 the witnesses respond with fear ... a feature absent from Mark 6:44f.” For a detailed defence for understanding Θεοῦ υἱὸς to mean ‘the Son of God’ see Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1146-52; See also Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 569.

⁷¹³ See Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:636.

⁷¹⁴ Maier, *Matthäus-Evangelium*, 463.

⁷¹⁵ Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:636; See also Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1151; Witherup, “The Death of Jesus and the Raising of the Saints,” 583. Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Socio-Political and Religious Reading* (Journal for the Study of the New Testament. Supplement Series 204; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 537.

⁷¹⁶ Floyd V. Filson, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to Matthew* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1960), 298. Note: Since in Matthew the soldiers no longer see the unspectacular death of Jesus (as in Mark) but the violent earthquake and its consequences, E. Schweizer is led to comment, “One might even ask why, in face of such obvious miracles, all Jerusalem does not speak in this vein – a thought that already occurred to the author of the *Gospel of Peter* ...” (Schweizer, *The Good News according to Matthew*, 516). For a discussion of the suggestion that the fear of the centurion and those with him was an exclamation of defeat by those who had mocked Jesus rather than a confession of faith, see Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 326-7.

For Matthew the identity of Jesus as Son of God has been the main concern throughout the Passion story. The refusal of Jesus' enemies to accept him as "Son of God" has been highlighted by Matthew (26:62; 27:40, 43). In the trial before the religious leaders Jesus solemnly assumes the title (cf. 26:64). Thus, whereas in Mark the centurion's confession comes, as it were, as the first sudden dramatic *revelation* of Jesus' true nature (Mark 15:39 - cf. however 14:61), in Matthew the confession by the centurion and his companions is rather a *confirmation* of Jesus' identity as Son of God – something Matthew has stressed throughout his Gospel. Thus the Gentile confession in 27:54 uses the exact formula which Matthew in 14:33 places on the lips of the disciples when they first confess Jesus as Son of God.⁷¹⁷ In similar vein, U. Luz⁷¹⁸ points out that whereas the Jewish mockers (vv. 39-44) demanded of the crucified man who claimed to be the Son of God that he verify who he was with his *own* demonstration of power, the Gentile soldiers state on the basis of what *God* has done that Jesus really was God's Son. Thus Jesus, when confronted by his mockers refused to perform any demonstration of power, but verified his Sonship only in his obedience. In other words, only God himself can reveal Jesus as his Son, and it is to this revelation that the human confession responds. Further, that the Gentile soldiers take up the disciples' confession of 14:33 and 16:16 is, according to Luz,⁷¹⁹ significant. It demonstrates for the readers what often had been suggested in the Gospel (cf. the Gentile women in 1:2-16; the *magi* in 2:1-12; see also 4:15; 8:10-13; 10:18; 15:24-28; 21:43; 22:8-10) and what the risen Jesus will command his disciples at the end – that the gospel is to come to all nations (28:19-20). That, in Luz's view, is the other side of the references to the coming judgment on Israel in vv. 51-53.

Further, since in 27:51-53 all the events are expressed by means of the divine passive, it is to be understood that it is really God who stands behind the soldiers' confession of faith. Having mocked and humiliated Jesus (27:29) and denied that he could be the King of the Jews, the soldiers now confess that Jesus is Son of God because they see manifestations of divine

⁷¹⁷ For parallels between Matt 14:22-33 and 27:51-54 see Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 327-8; For discussion of the titles "king of the Jews" and "Son of God," and the associated conception of authority and power, see Patte, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 387-8.

⁷¹⁸ Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 570.

⁷¹⁹ Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 570.

power (cf. Matt 16:16-17 – Peter’s faith results from revelation).⁷²⁰ This is confirmed by the words of the confession itself (27:54) which reiterates God’s own view of his Son expressed at the baptism (3:17), the transfiguration (17:5), and the confession spoken by Peter (16:16). R. D. Witherup also notes that with the confession of the Roman soldiers there is no command to silence, for “they have not only witnessed to the *identity* of Jesus; in contrast to Peter and the disciples (cf. 16:21-28) they have witnessed the *mission* of Jesus as the implied reader understands it – to die on the cross and give his life as a ransom for all (20:28; 26:28). The way is now opened for the gospel of the kingdom to be spread to all the world (cf. 8:10-12; 24:14; 26:13; 28:18-20).”⁷²¹

J. D. Kingsbury⁷²² also stresses the change accomplished by Jesus’ death. He asks why Matthew is so concerned to stress the fact that Jesus hangs upon the cross and dies particularly as the Son of God? He notes that in v. 43 divine Sonship is associated with trust. When challenged (cf. 27:40 “If you are Son of God ...” cf. Matt 4:6) Jesus does not come down from the cross, but chooses to do the will of God (cf. $\delta\hat{\epsilon}\hat{\iota}$ in 16:21). That is, Jesus is obedient, and so resists temptation even unto death. All this, according to Kingsbury, is associated with Matthew’s doctrine of the forgiveness of sins (1:21; 20:28; 26:28), that is, with atonement. “To Matthew, however, only one who relies totally upon God and renders to him perfect obedience can atone for sin, and this person, in turn, can be none other than Jesus, Son of God, ideal Israelite (cf. Exod 4:22-23).”⁷²³ Matthew, therefore, stresses that Jesus hangs upon the cross and dies in his status as the Son of God because “it is only the death of God’s perfectly obedient and trusting Son that accomplishes the forgiveness of sins.”⁷²⁴

Thus, to summarize, the supernatural portents (Matt 27:51-53), are God’s immediate response to Jesus’ death. They mean, from Matthew’s standpoint, first of all, the destruction of the temple for by virtue of the atonement accomplished by the Son of God, Israel’s sacrificial

⁷²⁰ Just how the divine power changed the hearts of the soldiers is not explained. It remains a mystery.

⁷²¹ Witherup, “The Death of Jesus and the Raising of the Saints,” 583.

⁷²² Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom*, 75-8.

⁷²³ Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom*, 76.

⁷²⁴ Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom*, 76.

system has been brought to an end. Secondly, the raising of the saints (vv. 51b-53), the result of divine action, and the confession of the Roman soldiers (v. 54) due to an epiphany, prefigure, for Matthew, his own Church of Jewish and Gentile Christians, who are sons of God because the Son of God has died for their sins and been raised (cf. v. 53).⁷²⁵

7.2 The Composite Nature of Matthew's Passion Account

Enough, hopefully, has already been said to establish that among the Prodigia mentioned in Matt 27:51-53 (54) the rent temple curtain, in itself, is *sufficient* to explain the achievements of Jesus' death – that the old sacrificial cultus based around the Jerusalem Temple has been abolished and that now the way of salvation is open to all humanity, Gentile as well as Jew, as witnessed by the conversion and confession of the Roman soldiers. This raises the question of why Matthew has included vv. 51b-53.⁷²⁶ These words may be tautological, repeating in a different way what the torn curtain declares. According to some Matthew has created these words and added them to Mark.⁷²⁷ I would rather suggest that Matthew has incorporated some early fragment of tradition not into Mark's account, but rather into another early passion tradition. Whatever may have happened this thesis argues that the pericope, Matt 27:51b-53, (54), reveals that behind Matthew's passion (and Easter) accounts there lay an earlier tradition which reflected some Jewish ideas about events associated with the End Time.

⁷²⁵ Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom*, 76. Others also have seen here in the death of Jesus the beginning of the Church. See Bruner, *The Church Book, Matthew 13-28*, 764-5; Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:636.

⁷²⁶ With Jesus' death full atonement has been made, Satan has been defeated, and so the community of Jesus no more needs the temple with all its sacrifices (Matt 1:21b; 26:28; Hos 6:6; Matt 9:13; 12:7). Thus, the old worship is over, having been divinely cancelled. See Maier, *Matthäus-Evangelium*, 459. "Death has already been robbed of its power and the course of the world has been interrupted. And this is not even limited by the irreversibility of time. God, who stands above time, includes in the new life here coming into being even those who have long been dead. Thus the question posed by Matthew's account is not whether these bizarre events are credible or not, but whether we can follow the evangelist in seeing as he does the death of Jesus as the epochal event from which to date a change in our way of living, seeing the final power of love over death." (Schweizer, *The Good News according to Matthew*, 517). "By portraying the impact of Jesus' death in colors drawn from these apocalyptic biblical texts (Dan 12:1-2; Ezek 37:11-14) ... , Matthew affirms that the death and resurrection usher in the final age of salvation and that all of these events fulfill the promise of the Scriptures." (Senior, *Matthew*, 335).

⁷²⁷ Cf. Senior, "The Death of Jesus and the Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51-53)," 321.

To appreciate this point it is important to note the evidence that in Matthew's passion (and Easter) account different strands of tradition have been woven together.⁷²⁸ Accordingly, H.-W. Bartsch⁷²⁹ is of the opinion that Matt 27:52, in particular, suggests that the passage belonged to a separate tradition which did not originally belong to Matthew's present passion story. Thus, in his opinion, only with difficulty can Matthew connect Matt 27:52 with Jesus' resurrection on the third day.⁷³⁰

Furthermore, in Matt 27:51-53 both the death of Jesus and End Time events are directly associated with one another. The *bodies* of many sleeping holy ones are raised at the moment of Jesus' death. They are thus raised *before* Jesus' own resurrection. Accordingly, it may be argued that in Matt 27:51b-53 the events which follow the crucifixion of Jesus are to be understood as inaugurating the End. Consequently, the earthquake, the splitting of the rocks, the opening of the tombs, and the resurrection of the holy ones are not signs pointing to a later End which is still to come, but belong themselves already to the End events which the death of Jesus has inaugurated. This suggests that while Matt 27:51b-53 (54) does now belong to Matthew's present passion-resurrection account, yet originally it had an independent existence. For Matthew's present narrative does indeed mention various events happening between Jesus' death and the End.⁷³¹ All this strongly suggests that two differing traditions about the commencement of the End time may be detected in Matthew's passion-resurrection narrative.

In the above paragraph the word "*parousia*" has been deliberately avoided.⁷³² Today, the term "*parousia*" is almost unanimously understood to mean that final event which will occur after the Gospel has been proclaimed to all nations (cf. Matt 28:16-20). This "*parousia*" will be a future, unknown, moment when the risen and ascended Jesus intervenes, supernaturally, as the Son of Man to execute the final judgment against all evil and wrong (cf. Matt 24:30-31, 44;

⁷²⁸ See Chapter 5 above.

⁷²⁹ See Bartsch, "Die Passions- und Ostergeschichte bei Matthäus," 85-6.

⁷³⁰ The appearance of the risen holy ones at Jesus' *death* clearly contradicts 1 Cor 15:20, 23 which speak of the risen Jesus as the *firstfruits* of those who have fallen asleep in death.

⁷³¹ Cf. Jesus' burial, his resurrection, his appearances, and the preaching of the Gospel to all nations. Note too that Matthew's stress on the appearances *in Galilee* implies that even Jesus' resurrection appearances are not to be understood as the End.

⁷³² This has been done, hopefully, to avoid confusion.

25:31-46).⁷³³ This decisive moment will also be “the renewal of all things” (cf. Matt 19:28). Understandably, this perception of the “*parousia*” is also sometimes spoken of as Jesus’ *second* coming, or as the Return of Christ. So entrenched is this understanding of Jesus’ “*parousia*” that it is difficult to even imagine that other understandings of “*parousia*” may also once have existed.

However, this thesis argues that in the very early Church other perceptions of the “*parousia*”- that is, of the final End – did exist. Some evidence would suggest that one such view equated Jesus’ resurrection with his ascension.⁷³⁴ Thus, Jesus was understood to have ascended directly from the cross to heavenly glory.⁷³⁵ In other words, this one event, the death of Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of Man, inaugurated the End. It would be quite misleading to suggest that this understanding of the event of Jesus’ death would have been in accord with *the* Jewish understanding of what would happen at the End Time. Recent scholarship has made it abundantly clear that in New Testament times there was great variety in Jewish concepts of both the Messiah and of the End Time.⁷³⁶ However, it seems reasonable to assume that among the various Jewish concepts of the End Time this particular understanding could have been held, initially and mistakenly, by some Jewish people who accepted the crucified Jesus as Israel’s promised Messiah. It is thus my opinion that Matt 27:51b-53 reflects this alleged Jewish understanding that the one (meaning the one and only) advent of the Messiah would initiate the End Time. If it is incorrect to assert that in NT times one standard understanding of the Messiah prevailed, it could also be incorrect to maintain that in the very early Church only one understanding of Jesus’ “*parousia*” existed. The significance of these matters in relation to the *Gospel of Peter* will now be considered.

⁷³³ The controversial issue of a millennial reign by the risen Jesus will not here be entered into.

⁷³⁴ Cf. again such passages as Acts 2:22-28; 13:33-37; Phil 2:5-11; *Gos. Pet.* 19.

⁷³⁵ This, of course, contradicts 1 Cor 15:3-5, a passage which also reflects very early Christian tradition, and which stresses Jesus’ burial.

⁷³⁶ See Chapter 3 above. Also, the idea that there would be *two* advents of the Messiah was, it seems, foreign to Jewish thought. According to D. C. Allison, Jr., “(T)he distinction between two advents cannot be found in the OT and is foreign to Jewish eschatology.” (See his article, “Eschatology,” 207.)

7.3 Matthew's Passion and Easter Narrative⁷³⁷ and Peter's Gospel.

For completeness a study of Matt 27:51b-53 must investigate the suggestion, made by a number of writers, that Matt 27:51b-53 (54) reflects a very early (*parousia*?) tradition which also underlies both Matt 28:2-4 and the *Gospel of Peter*.⁷³⁸ If this is indeed the case, then questions again arise as to whether Matthew has woven together early traditions, and, if so, why? Answers to these questions further the enquiry of this thesis as to the provenance and purpose of Matt 27:51b-53.

7.3.1 The discussion will begin with some questions relating to Matt 28:1-10.

First, if Matt 28:1-10 is dependent on the written Mark 16:1-8 then the variations may be explained either by redaction, or by assuming that Matthew perhaps had access to another source besides Mark. This is the contention of N. Walter who declares: "It is to be accepted that Matthew has two lines of narratives awkwardly woven with one another."⁷³⁹

To explain the nature of the alleged "special" traditions which underlie Matthew's Easter account the suggestion is made that in Matt 28:2-10 a reflection of Greek-hellenistic miracle liberation stories is to be seen.⁷⁴⁰ Reference is made to the stories in Acts 5:17-26 (about the Apostles); Acts 12:3-11 (concerning Peter); and Acts 16:23-35 (in relation to Paul and Silas). The part played by the prison officers in these incidents is especially to be noted.

The presence of the guards [Matt 28:4] has been allowed above all to emphasize how surprising, overwhelming, free from all human influence and unpreventable, was the freeing of the "prisoner", that is, the buried Jesus out of the death event. The Angel would therewith have had the same function as in Acts 12:7ff: he woke up the sleeping one – that is, the dead Jesus, and took him out of the prison – that is, out of the tomb – which in connection with the earthquake had already opened itself (see also Matt 27:52).⁷⁴¹

⁷³⁷ "In comparison with Mark the Matthean account shows an expansion along two lines, the kerygmatic and the apologetic. In Matthew it is expressly an angel, the angel of the Lord, who proclaims the Easter message in the name of God ... [and concerning apologetics it is stressed that] ... the apostles were not involved with the tomb, which was sealed and guarded under the supervision of the Jewish leaders. ... The Jewish attack implicitly admits the fact of the empty tomb but would explain it by the fraudulent act of the apostles." (Bode, *The First Easter Morning*, 57).

⁷³⁸ For an extensive and detailed discussion of the *Gospel of Peter* see Appendix A.

⁷³⁹ Nikolaus Walter, "Eine Vormatthäische Schilderung Der Auferstehung Jesu," *New Testament Studies* 19 (1973): 416-7. This position will be considered later.

⁷⁴⁰ Walter, "Eine Vormatthäische Schilderung Der Auferstehung Jesu," 419-20.

⁷⁴¹ See Walter, "Eine Vormatthäische Schilderung Der Auferstehung Jesu," 421.

Thus, this liberation tradition stresses that it was God Himself through His angelic messenger who raised his “faithful” witness (cf. Rev 1:5). It is not that Jesus sovereignly raised himself (contrast John 10:18). It is not a story about the self-freeing of a God or Godman (that is, about an Epiphany) but about God’s power (Rom 4:24; 8:11; 10:9; 1 Cor 15:15; Acts 2:24; cf. Rom 1:4; Phil 2:6-11).⁷⁴²

7.3.2 Secondly, it is suggested that something of the pre-Matthean source used by Matthew (cf. 27:51-53; 28:2-4) has been preserved in the *Gospel of Peter*⁷⁴³ which relates a description of the actual event of Jesus’ resurrection (cf. *Gos. Pet.* 35-42).⁷⁴⁴ This suggestion rests on the assumption that the *Gos. Pet.* is not dependent on canonical Matthew and, if not written before Matthew, at least contains traditions predating Matthew. It also assumes that *Gos. Pet.* may be understood as a type of “liberation story” akin to those found in Acts.⁷⁴⁵

The alleged independence of the *Gospel of Peter* and Matthew’s Gospel is shown, it is maintained, by the following points:

- 1) In *Gos. Pet.* 31-34 Jesus’ tomb is guarded by Roman soldiers *and by Jewish elders* (*Gos. Pet.* 38).
- 2) *Gos. Pet.* 35-42 describes the actual event of Jesus’ resurrection. Note the following:

⁷⁴² See Walter, “Eine Vormatthäische Schilderung Der Auferstehung Jesu,” 421.

⁷⁴³ Does *Gos. Pet.* unite two different legends – (a) Jesus’ ascension at his death (cf. *Gos. Pet.* 19) and (b) the burial, resurrection, and empty tomb (cf. *Gos. Pet.* 34-45)? (See Bartsch, “Die Passions- und Ostergeschichte bei Matthäus,” 87).

⁷⁴⁴ Note that the old latin translation, Codex Bobbiensis (k) (dating from perhaps the second century) inserts a report of the resurrection event itself between Mark 16:3 and v. 4 (see Walter, “Eine Vormatthäische Schilderung Der Auferstehung Jesu,” 422).

⁷⁴⁵ In recent years the importance of the *Gospel of Peter* in New Testament studies has been increasingly recognized. A detailed discussion of the *Gospel of Peter* is to be found in Appendix A. Very briefly, my position concerning the *Gospel of Peter*, its authorship, date of writing, and so on, may be summarized as follows: I can agree that *Gos. Pet.* is pseudepigraphical and that in all likelihood it was written, perhaps in Syria, in the first part of the second century. However, I find it difficult, almost impossible, to conclude that whoever wrote *Gos. Pet.* had access to the canonical Gospels in their present written form. Along with others I ask: why did the writer of *Gos. Pet.* “remember the canonical accounts so strangely and compose so differently from them?” Accordingly, I conclude that the sources underlying *Gos. Pet.* were in the form of oral traditions that reached back to the 80s (the time of the writing of “Matthew”) and perhaps even earlier. I am also open to the suggestion (See Bauckman, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*) that the traditions incorporated in the canonical Gospels were authorized and controlled by Apostolic authority. Accordingly, I conjecture that the early oral traditions found in *Gos. Pet.* were on the periphery of those controlled by Apostolic authority, and consequently, with the passing of time went, as it were, to seed. Hence, the marked differences between *Gos. Pet.* and the canonical Gospels. For other views see P. M. Head, “On the Christology of the Gospel of Peter,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 46 (1992): 209-224, and Paul Foster, *The Gospel of Peter: Introduction, Critical Edition and Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

First, according to *Gos. Pet.* 35-37 the earthquake (= “a great voice in heaven” cf. Ezek 37:7) and the opening of the tomb occurred in the middle of the night. In Matthew these events coincide with the women’s arrival in the early morning.⁷⁴⁶

Secondly, in *Gos. Pet.* 36-42 (cf. Codex Bobbiensis, k) two men (angels), come down from heaven and enter the open tomb. Matthew has only one angel (as in Mark 16:5) who stays outside sitting on the stone.

Thirdly, according to *Gos. Pet.* 39 the two angels lead the crucified and interned Jesus out of the tomb and return with him to heaven. Matthew says nothing about this.

Fourthly, according to *Gos. Pet.* 35-39 the appointed guards could not prevent the freeing of the “imprisoned one” (cf. Acts 5:17-26; 12:3-11; 16: 23-35). Matthew says that the guards became as “dead men” – that is, according to Matthew the risen Christ did not show himself first to his enemies (the guards, and so on) but to the women (Matt 28:9-10) and the disciples (Matt 28:16-20; cf. 1 Cor 15:5-11).

3) According to *Gos. Pet.* 45-49 the centurion, soldiers, and (it seems) the Jewish elders having witnessed these events went at night direct to Pilate, and in great distress (although not “dead scared” as in Matthew), declared to him all that they had seen, saying “Truly, he was the Son of God.”⁷⁴⁷ Under pressure from the Jewish elders and scribes Pilate commanded the centurion and soldiers to say nothing about what they had seen (that is, about the actual resurrection event). The suggestion that the disciples had stolen the body is not mentioned (contrast Matthew 28:11-15), neither is mentioned made of an empty tomb.

4) According to *Gos. Pet.* 44 one of the two angels descends from heaven for a second time, and enters the tomb to await the arrival of the womenfolk (*Gos. Pet.* 50-57). The womenfolk thus do not witness the supernatural opening of the tomb (as in Matthew).

5) Further, whereas *Gos. Pet.* 39 suggests the weakness of the raised Jesus (he seems to have had to be supported by the angels),⁷⁴⁸ yet *Gos. Pet.* 41-42 suggests that in his buried state

⁷⁴⁶ This is debatable as Matt 28:1 is open to different interpretations.

⁷⁴⁷ That is, they were converted!

⁷⁴⁸ This could also be understood as an act of strength. Jesus is escorted in triumph from the tomb by the angels.

Jesus exercised his sovereignty by being active and preaching to the sleeping ones (that is, to the dead in Hades). Since neither of these two things can be deduced from Matthew's Gospel, they clearly indicate the independence of *Gos. Pet.* from the first Gospel.

According to N. Walter⁷⁴⁹ the texts of both *Gos. Pet.* and Matthew are independent of each other and both deal with an earlier underlying story. This, Walter suggests, is shown, first, by the fact that in *Gos. Pet.* both the resurrection (appearances) story and the womenfolk finding the open tomb story stand one after the other almost unconnected (cf. *Gos. Pet.* 28-49 and 50-57), while in Matthew both blocks are, while not exactly smoothly, interlocked into one another (cf. Matt 28:1-10); and, secondly, by the fact that *Gos. Pet.* does not know Matthew's redactional variants from Mark 16:1-8.

With regard to this last point (that Matthew has redacted Mark 16:1-8) Walter notes the following: First, *Gos. Pet.* 50-54 presupposes the intention of the women to anoint Jesus' body (cf. Mark 16:1. Matthew makes no mention of this, simply saying that "they went to see the tomb"); and also mentions the women's worry about how to remove the great stone (*Gos. Pet.* 53-54) (cf. Mark 16:3). *Gos. Pet.* 50b and 54b reveal that the women had an alternative plan if they could not open the tomb. Again, Matthew knows nothing about this.⁷⁵⁰

Secondly, if Matthew is following Mark then he has limited the number of women to two. *Gos. Pet.* 50-51, like Mark 16:1 and Luke 24:10, mentions more than two women. Matthew also omits Mark's identification of Jesus as the Nazarene (Mark 16:6) and the special reference to Peter (Mark 16:7).⁷⁵¹

Thirdly, *Gos. Pet.* 57 follows Mark, knowing nothing of an appearance of the risen Christ before the women (cf. Matt 28:9; John 20:11-18).

Fourthly, *Gos. Pet.* 56-57 knows nothing of the joyful conveyance of the angel's message to the disciples (cf. Matt 28:7; Luke 24:9; cf. John 20:18) but rather follows the abrupt ending of Mark 16:8.⁷⁵² With regard to Mark 16:7 it is suggested that Matthew has cancelled Mark's cross

⁷⁴⁹ Walter, "Eine Vormatthäische Schilderung Der Auferstehung Jesu," 427.

⁷⁵⁰ Has Matthew replaced Mark 16:3-4 with Matt 28:2-8?

⁷⁵¹ See Bode, *The First Easter Morning*, 53.

⁷⁵² This assumes that Mark 16:7 is a redactional addition to Mark.

reference (cf. Matt 28:8). Thus R. H. Fuller writes: “It looks therefore as though Matthew has cancelled Mark’s cross reference to the earlier prediction in order to prepare the way for the repetition of the charge by the Risen One in verse 10, reinforcing the angel’s injunction. The result is to rivet firmly together the angelophany, the Christophany to the women, and the final appearance to the disciples.”⁷⁵³

Fifthly, *Gos. Pet.* 58-60 is the fragmentary beginning of the story of an appearance of the Risen Christ to Peter and the other disciples at the sea, that is, the Lake of Galilee. *Gos. Pet.* 58-60 certainly did not develop this thought from Matthew’s Gospel.⁷⁵⁴ Further, did a story of an appearance of the risen Christ to Peter, and the other disciples, follow Mark 16:8, or was such a story in Mark’s *vorlage*? Note that Mark hints often that the Easter [Sunday] event should be embraced (cf. 8:31; 9:31; 10:34; esp. 14:28; 16:7), yet in Mark this plan is never fulfilled.

If the independence of *Gos. Pet.* from Matthew is assumed as established, then questions arise: Was *Gos. Pet.*, or at least traditions contained in it, a source for Matthew? And since the genre of *Gos. Pet.* can be understood as reflecting that of liberation stories (cf. Acts 5:17-26, and so on), and since Matthew seems to have felt that no such liberation story could ever portray the event of Jesus’ resurrection (Matthew, in fact, seems to have believed that it could not be portrayed), did therefore Matthew alter this source just as he must have altered Mark if he used Mark as a source? Thus, Matthew does not portray the risen Christ as showing himself first to his enemies, since he depicts the guards as “dead men”, but to the women (v. 9-10) and to the disciples (v. 16-20).

7.3.3 Further consideration of Matt 28:1-10

With regard to Matt 28:1-10 the question also arises: In place of the story of the empty tomb did there originally stand an appearance of the risen Jesus at the tomb? This appearance of Jesus at the tomb may have been an appearance to Peter and so the starting point of the

⁷⁵³ Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives*, 77.

⁷⁵⁴ It may perhaps have been developed from John 21:1-14 or even from Luke 5:1-11. See Walter, “Eine Vortatthäische Schilderung Der Auferstehung Jesu,” 428-9.

resurrection testimony (cf. 1 Cor 15:5; Luke 24:34; John 20:2-10). In this regard we note the following:

Matt 28:1 Since the tomb was sealed and guarded Matthew knows the women cannot anoint Jesus' body, so he simply says: "They went to see the tomb". (v.1b).⁷⁵⁵ Further, the women being the only witnesses of Jesus' crucifixion and burial, are therefore the first witnesses of the resurrection. The women may have seen all this happen, but (cf. v. 5) it may have happened before they reached the tomb. However, according to E. L. Bode: "It seems more likely that Matthew intends the angel's action to have been witnessed by the women for the action interrupts the narrative about the women and the words to the women are immediately joined to the angel's effect upon the guard by the particle *de* ... [furthermore it] ... seems to shore up the apologetic intention ... Thus the tomb would have been guarded until the arrival of Christian witnesses and there would have been no time when the tomb remained open but unobserved".⁷⁵⁶

Matt 28:2-4 These verses have been seen as a relic of early tradition belonging to the pre-Matthew and pre-Markan passion story and so as part of an original apocalyptic End Time appearance report.⁷⁵⁷ As evidence that Matt 28:2-4 contains apocalyptic speech and so describes an event of the End happening (that is, the *parousia*) the following may be noted.

First, "The angel of the Lord"⁷⁵⁸ is an OT expression which suggests Divine action. "Often in the OT the angel of Yahweh speaks in the first person while giving the words of Yahweh (cf. 2 Kgs 18:31; Gen 16:10; 21:17-18; Gen 22:15-18)."⁷⁵⁹ Hence when the angel says: "*Lo, I have told you*" (cf. Mark 16:7 "as he told you"), it is in effect the Lord who is speaking.

Secondly, the earthquake heightens the apocalyptic impression of the appearance of the angel (Matt 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11). An earthquake is also associated with coming judgment

⁷⁵⁵ But did the women know that the tomb was sealed and guarded? For a Feminist approach to the womenfolk and Jesus' resurrection see E. M. Wainwright, "Feminist Criticism and the Gospel of Matthew," in Powell, *Methods for Matthew*, 83-117.

⁷⁵⁶ Bode, *The First Easter Morning*, 53.

⁷⁵⁷ See the detailed argument of Bartsch, "Die Passions- und Ostergeschichten bei Matthäus," 80-92; See also Seidensticker, "Die Auferstehung Jesu in der Botschaft der Evangelisten," 35-38, 146-148.

⁷⁵⁸ See von Rad, TWNT, 1:76-77.

⁷⁵⁹ Bode, *The First Easter Morning*, 53.

(cf. Rev 8:5; 11:13; 16:18 ; Isa 29:6 (Ariel = Jerusalem cf. v. 1-12); Ezek 37:7; 38:19; Joel 2:10; 3:16; Isa 13:13; Jer 4:24; 51:29). The earthquake also emphasizes the apocalyptic nature of the resurrection.⁷⁶⁰ The apocalyptic earthquake indicates that “Jesus’ work of redemption, climaxed in his death and resurrection, marks the beginning of the eschatological age, the sign and promise of the resurrection of all men. With Christ the general resurrection has begun, has its cause.”⁷⁶¹

Thirdly, the earthquake and lightning appearance at the tomb imply a divine visitation (cf. Matt 28:2-4) Further, the events related in Matt 28:2-4 parallel the similar events at the death of Jesus (cf. Matt 27:51b-53 (54). P. Perkins expresses this connection as follows:

Fear is the expected consequence of such a [Divine] visitation. The guards fall to the ground as though they were dead. Matthew has linked them to those who had seen the apocalyptic signs of the crucifixion by using the same word in 28:4, *terountes*, as he had for the associates of the centurion in 27:54. Thus, these details make it clear that the power of God has been responsible for all the events that have occurred. It has frustrated the human attempts to keep the crucified in the tomb.⁷⁶²

Furthermore, a comparison of Matt 28:2-4 with Rev 1:13-17 suggests that Matt 28:2-4 contains apocalyptic language (cf. Dan 10:6; 7:9; *1 En.*71:1) and so describes an event of the End happening. Thus Matt 28:2-4 originally may not have been a report about the angel of the Lord, but about an appearance of the Son of Man. If so, then Matthew may have combined this original appearance report of the risen Jesus, the Son of Man, with a legend about the empty tomb; or he may have combined two stories, Mark 16:1-8, and a legend of the actual resurrection (cf. *Gos. Pet.* 36-45).⁷⁶³ Thus, if the resurrection was no more understood as the End Time event, the *Parousia*, then the story of the empty tomb could have had its origin.⁷⁶⁴ Accordingly, Matthew has the tomb being opened by the angel but gives no report of the

⁷⁶⁰ Bode, *The First Easter Morning*, 51.

⁷⁶¹ Bode, *The First Easter Morning*, 57.

⁷⁶² Perkins, *Resurrection: New Testament Witness and Contemporary Reflection*, 127.

⁷⁶³ See Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives*, 75.

⁷⁶⁴ See Bartsch, “Die Passions- und Ostergeschichte bei Matthäus,” 90.

resurrected Jesus actually coming out of the tomb (cf. *Gos. Pet.* 39).⁷⁶⁵ Matt 28:6 presupposes that this has already happened.⁷⁶⁶

On the assumption that Matt 28:2-4 is a fragment of an early appearance tradition incorporated with changes by Matthew into his Gospel, Bartsch places Peter in this supposed fragment as the first recipient of an appearance of the risen Jesus. Thus, Bartsch suggests the following scenario: “And behold, there was a great earthquake; because the Son of Man, the Lord, descended from heaven and his appearance was as lightning and his garment as snow. And from fear of him, I, Peter, trembled, and fell to his feet as a dead man. But the Lord stepped up to me and said: ‘Fear not’ “ (cf. 1Cor 15:5; Luke 24:34).⁷⁶⁷ However, according to R. H. Fuller, “The tradition accessible to Matthew knew nothing of the primary appearance to Peter.”⁷⁶⁸

Further, since the appearance reports of the risen Jesus (cf. 1 Cor 15:5-7; Luke 24:34) took an apocalyptic character they were seen as fulfilment of the OT promise (cf. Dan 7:13-14) reproduced in Jesus’ words in Mark 14:62 (cf. Matt 26:64).⁷⁶⁹ This, it is said, supports the contention that the initial appearance reports spoke of the coming of the Son of Man, the Lord, from heaven. This suggestion however faces two problems. First, Mark 14:62 (cf. Matt 26:64) implies that the risen Christ who comes “with the clouds of heaven” must have first ascended to heaven. When did this happen? Did he ascend direct from the cross to heaven? This could be the explanation of *Gos. Pet.* 19: “And the Lord cried out, saying, ‘My power, my power, Thou hast forsaken me.’ And when he had said it he was taken up.”⁷⁷⁰

⁷⁶⁵ “This is the nearest that the canonical Gospels ever come to narrating the actual resurrection.” (Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives*, 74).

⁷⁶⁶ Further, does Matthew here combine the legend of the empty tomb with an appearance of the risen Christ before the women (Matt 28:9-10)? Thus, if Matt 28:2-4 is a Christophany, then Matt 28:9-10 is not necessary. But since Matthew has included the appearance of the Risen Jesus in v. 9-10, the angel who descended to free the raised Jesus is in 28:5ff reduced to the role of ‘*Angelus Interpres*’.

⁷⁶⁷ See Bartsch, “Das Auferstehungszeugnis (Sein Historisches und sein Theologisches Problem),” 13-14.

⁷⁶⁸ Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives*, 76.

⁷⁶⁹ See Bartsch, “Das Auferstehungszeugnis (Sein Historisches und sein Theologisches Problem),” 13-14.

⁷⁷⁰ cf. ‘καὶ εἰπὼν ἀνελήφθη’ – it is debatable whether this can be understood to mean: “as he said he would be lifted up.” For text see M. G. Mara, *Evangile de Pierre: Introduction, Texte Critique, Traduction, Commentaire et Index* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1973), 48. For discussion whether this expression means “death” or “ascension” see Foster, *The Gospel of Peter: Introduction, Critical Edition and Commentary*, 330. See also Head, “On the Christology of the Gospel of Peter,” 214-15.

The second problem is that in Mark and Matthew, and also in *Gos. Pet.*, the report of the resurrection appearance of Jesus as the coming of the Son of Man has, it seems, been replaced by an account of the Empty Tomb legend.⁷⁷¹ The net effect of this was that the appearances of the risen Jesus were not now considered to be the *parousia*, but the *parousia* was still nevertheless close (cf. Mark 16:7)⁷⁷² And, as already mentioned, since Jesus' resurrection was no longer understood as the event of the *parousia*, the story of the empty tomb could, and did, have its origin.⁷⁷³

Further, it is to be noted that since the appearances of the risen Christ were initially understood both as the *parousia* and as a fulfilment of the OT promises, the Christian community at first understood, and proclaimed, itself as the eschatological community of the End time. Thus, for at least some of the very first Christians the Eschaton had broken in – that is, the Kingdom was not soon to come, it had come, and they already lived in it, experiencing eschatological delight (cf. Acts 2:46-47; 4:32-37 cf. Matt 8:11-12). In other words, they acted out their new life in accordance with the ideas which, at least for some of the Jewish people, would characterize the coming Kingdom.⁷⁷⁴

Very quickly, however, this initial euphoria was dampened down and changed. First of all, the suffering of the Christian community proved that the new Existence was not yet established, but existed only to faith. Hence Christians became interested in the passion story, the way into the Kingdom it was realized would be, as for Jesus (Luke 24:26), through suffering to glory; and the original resurrection evidences were reinterpreted. The apocalyptic report of the appearance to Simon Peter, it is suggested, was deleted and replaced by the empty tomb

⁷⁷¹ Perhaps to counter some early form of Gnostic spiritualizing. Note also that *Gos. Pet.* 39 clearly presupposes the story of the empty tomb.

⁷⁷² See Bartsch, "Das Auferstehungszeugnis (Sein Historisches und sein Theologisches Problem)," 15.

⁷⁷³ See Bartsch, "Die Passions- und Ostergeschichte bei Matthäus," 90.

⁷⁷⁴ Bartsch, "Das Auferstehungszeugnis (Sein Historisches und sein Theologisches Problem)," 17. Note: According to Allison, *The End of the Ages has Come*, 46, "The pre-Matthean and indeed primitive character of Matt 27:51b-53 is suggested by the following consideration: the account falls in with what we otherwise know of primitive Christian eschatology. As the church moved away from its beginnings, Jesus' resurrection came to be viewed as an isolated event in history. There are indications, however, that in the earliest period his resurrection was more closely joined to thought of the general resurrection." Allison refers to Rom 1:4. Thus, in his opinion, "There is much to argue that the primitive Christian community believed that the new age was dawning in their time, that eschatological events had been and were unfolding before their eyes. Matt 27:51b-53 finds a fitting home within such an environment. So the suggestion that the passage preserves a piece of primitive Christian tradition commends itself."

legend. This made the appearances of the risen Jesus to be events of history rather than “subjective, spiritual” experience and so to have a miraculous character.

However, some logia which put the *parousia* in the time of the historical Jesus’ contemporary generation were *not* reinterpreted (cf. Luke 9:27; 21:32 cf. Luke 17:20-21). These logia suggest that *parousia* would itself occur, or at least the Kingdom, the rule, of God would in some way be decisively manifested, before the last of that living generation had died. This hope either failed, or the near expectation in these logia, having been concretized, was expected to be eventually experienced. Thus, Luke has expressly rejected a terminus.⁷⁷⁵

The discussion in this section (7.3) has provided further grounds for the assumption that in preparing his Passion and Easter narratives Matthew has adapted and moulded various sources of tradition. This further reinforces the contention that an understanding of Matt 27:51b-53, its provenance and purpose, must be seen against this wider background of the Matthean weaving together of varied, and perhaps conflicting, traditions. In the final section of this chapter (7.4) this question of underlying sources of tradition will be concluded with a discussion relating to traditions about the empty tomb and the suggestion by B.A. Johnson that Matt 27:51b-53 is related to these tomb traditions.

7.4 B. A. Johnson’s approach to the Relationship between Matt 28:2-4; 27:62-6; 28:11-15 and Matt 27:51b-53.

In an unpublished Th.D. thesis,⁷⁷⁶ B. A. Johnson examines whether the *Gospel of Peter* (*Gos. Pet.*) is dependent on the four canonical Gospels, and investigates what light *Gos. Pet.* throws on the development of the empty tomb tradition in the early Church.⁷⁷⁷ Johnson suggests that in the early Church there were *two* empty tomb stories – namely, the story of the women at the tomb, and the story of the guard at the tomb. Consequently he examines critically,

⁷⁷⁵ See Bartsch, “Das Auferstehungszeugnis (Sein Historisches und sein Theologisches Problem),” 30.

⁷⁷⁶ Johnson, “Empty Tomb Tradition in the Gospel of Peter”. A review of Johnson’s thesis is to be found in Appendix A.

⁷⁷⁷ In the course of his study Johnson also makes some pertinent suggestions about the position and origin of Matt 27:51b-53, the subject of this present thesis. Some of his comments are noted in this section.

first, the suggestion that the story of the women at the tomb in *Gos. Pet.* 50-57 is based on Mark 16:1-8; and, secondly, whether the story of the guard at the tomb in *Gos. Pet.* 28-49 arises from Matthew.

First, concerning the suggestion that the story of the women at the tomb in *Gos. Pet.* 50-57 is based on Mark 16:1-8 Johnson comes to a negative conclusion. He concludes rather that while *Gos. Pet.*'s story of the women at the tomb is closely related to that of Mark, yet differences suggest that the source of *Gos. Pet.*'s story of the women at the tomb was pre-Markan.⁷⁷⁸

Secondly, with regard to the suggestion that the story of the guard at the tomb in *Gos. Pet.* 28-49 arises from Matthew, Johnson first argues that Matt 27:62-66 (placement of the guard); 28:2-4 (experience of the guard); and 28:11-15 (the guards' report) are all related to one another. Further, if Matthew is following the written Mark, then in adding Matt 28:2-4, which once must have belonged to an independent tradition, to Mark, Matthew has distorted Mark's account.

Thus, for Johnson the guard story (Matt 28:2-4), perhaps originally a resurrection authentication story, becomes in Matthew an apologetic argument against a body stealing charge.⁷⁷⁹ Matthew has accomplished this by modifying the guard story and subordinating it, rather disjointedly, to Mark's account of the women's discovery of the empty tomb. In Johnson's view⁷⁸⁰ both Matt 28:1-3 and *Gos. Pet.* 28-49 speak about an epiphany at the tomb. However, while *Gos. Pet.* 39-42 completes the description of the epiphany, that is, the guards see Jesus being assisted out of the tomb, Matthew at 28:4 returns to Mark's account of the women at the tomb. Hence, while epiphanic features in Matthew – darkness, earthquake, light, descent of angel(s) – all give promise of a resurrection account, yet in Matthew this account is subordinated to the women at the tomb story. In Matt 28:2-4 Matthew, in effect, declares that Jesus' resurrection had *already* occurred before the tomb was opened. Thus there was, Matthew stresses, never a moment when the open, and empty, tomb was not under observation.

⁷⁷⁸ See Johnson, "Empty Tomb Tradition in the Gospel of Peter", 10-36, 120.

⁷⁷⁹ Johnson, "Empty Tomb Tradition in the Gospel of Peter", 103.

⁷⁸⁰ Johnson, "Empty Tomb Tradition in the Gospel of Peter", 84-5.

Further, according to Johnson,⁷⁸¹ the reaction of the centurion and his soldiers at the moment of Jesus' death (Matt 27:54) may be described as an epiphanic response. Johnson thus links Matt 27:54 to the witness setting of the story of the guard at the tomb (Matt 28:2-4).⁷⁸² Consequently, Johnson feels that the original situation, the context, of Matt 27:51b-53 was after Jesus' resurrection. The words μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ ("after his raising"), Johnson suggests,⁷⁸³ were added by Matthew to indicate the original position of the words, Matt 27:51b-53. He further suggests that Matt 27:51b-53 may have been "carried" [transmitted] as part of the story of the guard at the tomb tradition, since the *Gos. Pet.* version of the guard at the tomb reports a preaching to those that sleep (*Gos. Pet.* 41).⁷⁸⁴ Thus, Johnson contends, "It (Matt 27:51b-53) functioned originally, as the centurio-witness presently does in *Gos. Pet.*, as a response to the events connected with Jesus' resurrection."⁷⁸⁵

Johnson's overall conclusion is that *Gos. Pet.*'s story of the guard at the tomb suggests that another empty tomb story, an epiphany, survives partially in Matthew (28:2-4). Nevertheless, *Gos. Pet.* is not in this respect dependent on Matthew's story of the guard at the tomb. Thus, he contends that *Gos. Pet.* is primitive. It is important to note that the conclusions of Johnson become for some a clue to explain the enigma of the origin of Matt 27:51b-53.⁷⁸⁶

Conclusion:

This chapter 7 has been difficult, and, in places, complicated. It has looked, first, at the relationship of the events of Matt 27:51b-53 to the other prodigia mentioned in Matt 27:51-54. Secondly, it has considered the pericope, Matt 27:51b-53, in relation to the *Gospel of Peter*. Special note has been taken of the conclusions reached by B. A. Johnson in his thesis.⁷⁸⁷ The findings of this chapter thus reinforce the argument of this thesis that the original matrix of Matt

⁷⁸¹ Johnson, "Empty Tomb Tradition in the Gospel of Peter", 87.

⁷⁸² Matt 27:54 also, Johnson suggests, reflects *Gos. Pet.* 45, the report by the guards of the epiphany.

⁷⁸³ Johnson, "Empty Tomb Tradition in the Gospel of Peter", 90-1.

⁷⁸⁴ That is, the *Gos. Pet.* version by reporting a preaching to those that sleep (*Gos. Pet.* 41) implies their resurrection, something which Matt 27:51b-53 asserts without however mentioning any act of preaching.

⁷⁸⁵ Johnson, "Empty Tomb Tradition in the Gospel of Peter", 91.

⁷⁸⁶ See below, Chapter 9.

⁷⁸⁷ Johnson, "Empty Tomb Tradition in the Gospel of Peter".

27:51b-53 was the “pot pourri” of varied, and even conflicting, traditions which circulated at the very beginnings of the Christian Faith. Matt 27:51b-53 may thus be described, as it were, as a “stray gene”, as a “throw back” to this early period in the Church. Accordingly, Matt 27:51b-53 reflects a very early belief that the one (meaning the one and only) advent of the Messiah would inaugurate the final End.

Chapter 8 The Peculiarities and Authorship of Matt 27:51b-53

The argument of this thesis is that these unique verses, Matt 27:51b-53, being an integral part of the First Gospel, have been included by Matthew at this point immediately after Jesus' crucifixion, because they were, to his mind, explanatory of the significance of Jesus and his death.⁷⁸⁸ This thesis also argues that the initial *Sitz im Leben* of this pericope was, in all likelihood, the confused situation which existed at the beginning of the Christian Faith. In other words, Matt 27:51b-53 was not composed by Matthew, but rather was a fragment of early tradition which Matthew has adapted and incorporated into his Gospel. Accordingly, this chapter pursues this argument by a more detailed examination of these verses, Matt 27:51b-53.

The pericope, Matt 27:51b-53, has a surprising number of peculiarities all of which need some explanation if the passage's meaning and purpose are to be discovered.⁷⁸⁹ These peculiarities in turn raise the question of the authorship of these verses. Matthew may have composed them; or the passage is perhaps an alien insertion, the work of a Redactor. If Matthew was the author then he either created these words, in whole or in part, from scratch, as it were; or, he was dependent on some earlier source(s). If the latter was the case, then was that source(s) either a written document or an oral tradition?⁷⁹⁰ To begin to answer these questions about the peculiarities and authorship of Matt 27:51b-53 the following three points will be considered:

8.1 The Evidence of Manuscript and Textual Variants.

(v. 51b) καὶ ἡ γῆ ἐσεισθη καὶ αἱ πέτραι ἐσχίσθησαν, (v. 52) καὶ τὰ μνημεῖα ἀνεώχθησαν καὶ πολλὰ σώματα τῶν κεκοιμημένων ἁγίων ἠγέρθησαν, (v. 53) καὶ ἐξελθόντες ἐκ τῶν μνημείων μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ εἰσῆλθον εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν καὶ ἐνεφανίσθησαν πολλοῖς.

⁷⁸⁸ These unique verses also throw light on certain important, but controversial, issues which may have been causing concern in Matthew's community around 85 or so C.E. – that is, the question of the fate of the Gentiles, the nature and composition of Jesus' church, and the seeming delay in the coming of the *parousia*.

⁷⁸⁹ See Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 9.

⁷⁹⁰ cf. Luke 1:1-4. Even if the words, in whole or in part, go back to a Redactor similar questions need to be asked: did the Redactor create them or did he (or she) adapt some written or oral source?

The text followed is that found in Nestle-Aland's 27th edition. The text of Matt 27:51b-53 has been well preserved having been handed down with few textual variations.⁷⁹¹ In v. 52 in place of ἠγέρθησαν some early mss (A C W 090 M) read ἠγέρθη but the first reading has strong support. The letters σαν may perhaps have been accidentally omitted by some copyist, or ἠγέρθη may have been an attempt, at an early stage in the Church tradition, to apply the raising to Jesus.⁷⁹² Some later manuscripts leave out the word group “μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ,”⁷⁹³ or change it to “μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτῶν” [“after their (that is, the dead holy ones) resurrection”]. It is generally agreed however that these changes are clearly attempts to remove tensions created by the words “μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ,”⁷⁹⁴ A few manuscripts in v. 52 have “ἠνεώχθησαν” instead of the synonymous “ἀνεώχθησαν” (perhaps to link it with Matt 3:16b). Thus, in the opinion of M. Riebl, textual and manuscript considerations would not support the suggestion that Matt 27:51b-53 has been added by a redactor.⁷⁹⁵

There is, however, another question which must be seriously considered: is canonical Matt 27:51b-53 the original text or does it represent a post-Matthean *revised* text? In an important article, W. L. Petersen⁷⁹⁶ argues that the latter is the case. As a result of his study of the Diatessaron and related literature Petersen concludes that originally Matt 27:52-53 read along these lines: “καὶ τὰ μνημεῖα ἀνεώχθησαν καὶ οἱ νεκροὶ ἠγέρθησαν, καὶ ἐξελθόντες

⁷⁹¹ “The text is solidly established.” (Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo 27,51b-53*, 29). According to Kenneth L. Waters, “Matthew 27:52-53 as Apocalyptic Apostrophe: Temporal Spatial Collapse in the Gospel of Matthew,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122 (2003): 503, fn 41: “μετὰ κτλ is so strongly and widely attested in our earliest manuscripts, I am persuaded that it is original to the text of Matthew.”

⁷⁹² Tim McLay, “Death, Descent, and Deliverance in Matthew 27:51b-53,” in *You Will Be My Witnesses: Festschrift Allison A. Trites* (Marcon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2003), 82 fn 4.

⁷⁹³ See Petersen, “Romanos and the Diatessaron: Readings and Method,” 502.

⁷⁹⁴ See Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:634, fn 130; Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 15; According to Hutton, “The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51b-53)”, 151-2: “In favor of an original αὐτῶν are codices 30, 220, 1689, Lectionary 32, and the Ethiopic Version, while codex 243 omits αὐτοῦ. ... The Jerusalem or Palestinian Syriac Version ... omits the entire phrase. ... The reading of the Palestinian Syriac is a more significant textual witness, but it is unlikely that it reflects a textual tradition more primitive than that contained in the Greek uncial manuscripts extant from the fourth and fifth centuries. The significance of this Version is its witness to a Palestinian Jewish-Christian community which unambiguously related this tradition of the resurrection of the holy ones to the crucifixion of Jesus”. See also Philippe Luisier, “Mt 27, 53 dans une variante égyptienne et ses ramifications,” *Orientalia* 77 (2008): 359-376 (this paper unread).

⁷⁹⁵ Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 15: “Der text is demnach gut überliefert. Der handschriftliche Befund legt jedoch die Vermutung nahe, dass die Verse 51b-53 von Abschreibern als sprachlich holprig und inhaltlich schwierig empfunden wurden.”

⁷⁹⁶ Petersen, “Romanos and the Diatessaron: Readings and Method,” 484-507. A detailed discussion and evaluation of Petersen's article is to be found in Appendix H.

ἐκ τῶν μνημείων εἰσῆλθον εἰς τὴν πόλιν καὶ ἐνεφανίσθησαν πολλοῖς”. Thus, according to Petersen, the Diatessaronic reading οἱ νεκροὶ and its chronology⁷⁹⁷ is more primitive than the reading and chronology of canonical Matthew.⁷⁹⁸ Suffice to say here that, while challenging, his suggestions are not sufficient to overthrow the priority of the canonical text of Matt 27:51b-53. Further, as is argued in Appendix H, his original text does not really help to solve the problems associated with the understanding of Matt 27:51b-53.

8.2 The Literary Construction and Unity of Matt 27:51b-53⁷⁹⁹

The internal literary construction of Matt 27:51b-53 is peculiar, determining both the passage’s literary genre and the significance of its contents. The passage consists of seven (six if v. 53a and v. 53b are joined) phrases:

1	v.51b	καὶ ἡ γῆ ἐσεισθη
2	v. 51c	καὶ αἱ πέτραι ἐσχίσθησαν
3	v.52a	καὶ τὰ μνημεῖα ἀνεώχθησαν
4	v.52b	καὶ πολλὰ σώματα τῶν κεκοιμημένων ἁγίων ἠγέρθησαν
5	v.53a	καὶ ἐξελθόντες ἐκ τῶν μνημείων μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ
6	v.53b	εἰσῆλθον εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν
7	v.53c	καὶ ἐνεφανίσθησαν πολλοῖς.

The conjunctive καί is repeated six times, almost continuously throughout. The first three phrases are short and of the same construction, that is conjunction, article, substantive and an aorist passive verb, always situated at the end of the phrase. Further, these three short phrases constitute a species of “crescendo”. In each phrase the number of syllables increases (5 - 7 - 9), while the number of accents remain the same in each phrase, that is, three. Also, there is a clear concatenation of the contents of these three phrases: the “shaking” results in “shattering”, which in turn, causes “opening”. This “crescendo” reaches its culmination in phrase 4 with the resurrection of many bodies of sleeping holy ones. While much longer (19

⁷⁹⁷ The absence of μετὰ κτλ implies that both the resurrection and the appearances of “the dead” took place at the time of Jesus’ death on the cross.

⁷⁹⁸ See Petersen, “Romanos and the Diatessaron: Readings and Method,” 502.

⁷⁹⁹ This section is dependent on, and follows, Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo 27, 51b-53, 57-71*; See also Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 17-19.

syllables and six accents), nevertheless phrase 4 is united with phrases 1 – 3 by καί and ends with the aorist passive verb. In the light of the above, R. Aguirre concludes: “This construction ‘in crescendo’, united by means of καί, with verbs situated always at the end and always in the same form and time, produces a clear impression of rhythm.”⁸⁰⁰ Thus, in pictorial form:

Accents	Phrases	Syllables
3	καὶ ἡ γῆ ἐσεισθη	5
3	καὶ αἱ πέτραι ἐσχίσθησαν	7
3	καὶ τὰ μνημεῖα ἀνεώχθησαν	9
6	καὶ πολλὰ σώματα ⁸⁰¹ τῶν κεκοιμημένων ἁγίων ἠγέρθησαν	19

From v. 53 onwards, however, the construction is clearly quite different.⁸⁰² First of all, the rising “crescendo” of the earlier phrases seems now to begin to descend.⁸⁰³ Secondly, the text’s meaning in v. 53 is not so clear cut. The word group μετὰ κτλ (see further below) creates difficulties, and there is debate about punctuation, that is, should a comma be placed after ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ or after τῶν μνημείων ? Furthermore, the impression of rhythm is not so evident. In the third place, the participle ἐξελθόντες, being a “*partizipium coniunctum*”, interrupts the regular, well-ordered sequence of the earlier conjugated verbal forms and is a “back reference” repeating the word “tombs”. That is, it is a “connector” which joins v. 53 with

⁸⁰⁰ Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 62.

⁸⁰¹ The question arises: was perhaps πολλὰ σώματα in v. 52b added by the ultimate redactor? (This “ultimate redactor” is an hypothetical person(s) arising from the assumption that the First Gospel may not have been “finished” all at once, but may have experienced some editing and fine tuning, as it were, in its early years). Arguments supporting this are as follows: (a) If these words are a later addition, then this fourth phrase would originally have had less syllables (14) and so be better balanced with phrases 1 – 3; (b) Further, since the rest of the text, it is said, supposes a masculine subject (cf. ἐξελθόντες – v. 53a) this could suggest that the previous subject was once ‘κεκοιμημένοι ἁγίων’. But in all likelihood the participle is masculine because it takes the saints (τῶν ἁγίων) as its antecedent rather than the neuter πολλὰ σώματα. See Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 62. (c) The words, τὰ μνημεῖα ἀνεώχθησαν, imply, logically, that all the saints buried in that area were raised. (See Petersen, “Romanos and the Diatessaron: Readings and Method,” 498). But the words πολλὰ σώματα suggest, so it is argued, that some were excluded (particularly if “many” is understood to imply not “all”). Thus, removal of πολλὰ σώματα favours, so it is said, the logic of the narrative. (See Aguirre *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 63, for a critical discussion of this point). (d) In Matt 5:29-30 and 10:28 (cf. Luke 12:4-5) the ultimate redactor has not only introduced the word σῶμα but used it in its Greek sense (that is, as part of man). Thus, it is possible that the ultimate redactor added the same word (with the Greek sense) in Matt 27:52. Text-wise, however, there is no mss evidence to suggest that these words were not an original part of the passage.

⁸⁰² See Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 17-19.

⁸⁰³ This however is debatable, since it could be argued that the climax of the passage lies in the entrance of the risen saints into the holy city and their manifestation to many.

v. 51b-52. Also, with this participle the gender changes to masculine.⁸⁰⁴ In the fourth place, the verbs in v. 53 now precede their phrases and have an active rather than passive sense.⁸⁰⁵ In the fifth place, whereas the subject of v. 51b – 52 changes with each new phrase, the awakened holy ones are now the subject of the three happenings mentioned in v. 53 – it is they who come out of the tombs, who enter the holy city and who appear, or are made to appear, to many. And finally, as noted above, the word group, μετὰ κτλ appears out of place. The word ἔγερσιν is the only abstract expression in 27:51b-53 being a *hapax legomenon* in the New Testament. Further, in the immediate preceding verses there is no masculine noun to which “his” (αὐτοῦ) could be referring. Verse 50 refers to Jesus and his crucifixion, not to his resurrection. Thus, the reference to Jesus’ resurrection comes, as it were, “out of the blue” and assumes that the readers knew well what is later related in chapter 28 about Jesus being raised. M. Riebl’s conclusion is that the unexpected “after his resurrection” is a “foreign body” (*fremdkorper*) in the verse group, Matt 27:51b-53.⁸⁰⁶

According to R. Aguirre: “(T)he rhythmic character and structure of the first part of this pericope (Matt 27:51b-52) stimulates us to see some resemblance likewise for the second part [v. 53].”⁸⁰⁷ That is to say, in his opinion, while the rhythmic character of v. 53 is not so evident, it nevertheless is sufficient to suggest that it reflects the literary structure of v. 51b-52. According to Aguirre the text, 27:51b - 53, before it was integrated by Matthew into his Gospel may have had a much more perfect structure, especially in the second part, a structure in which the difficult words, μετὰ κτλ ,were lacking.

⁸⁰⁴ Note too that whereas vv. 51b-52a describe objects and events in the inanimate world and dead holy ones (expressing, in a veiled way, a divine action), in vv. 52b-53 the substantives describe persons.

⁸⁰⁵ The last verb, ἐνεφανίσθησαν, is in a passive form but can have a reflexive meaning – “they were manifested to many”. It can also have an active sense – cf. Heb 9:24. See Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1132, fn. 89.

⁸⁰⁶ Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, p. 17.

⁸⁰⁷ Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo, 27, 51b-53*, 65.

Aware of the danger of imposing “a priori” a foreign structure on the second part of the passage, Aguirre nevertheless draws attention to some *hypothetical* structures for this passage. He notes, for example, that if μετὰ κτλ (with its three accents and eight syllables) is set aside as a later gloss, the participle sentence beginning “καὶ ἐξελθόντες” may be joined in a literary sense with εἰσηλθον. This gives three sentences of the same number of accents (3 – 3 – 3) and of almost the same number of syllables (10 – 10 – 9). Further, the subject is the same as that of the central phrase – καὶ ... κεκοιμημένοι ἅγιοι, who engage in three consecutive actions after their resurrection – they leave their tombs, enter the holy city, and reveal themselves to many. Expressed schematically:

Accents	Phrases	Syllables
6	καὶ πολλὰ σώματα τῶν κεκοιμημένων ἁγίων ἠγέρθησαν	19
3	καὶ ἐξελθόντες ἐκ τῶν μνημείων	10
3	(μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ)	8
3	εἰσηλθον εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν	10
3	καὶ ἐνεφανίσθησαν πολλοῖς	9

This hypothetical construction for the second part of this passage however differs from vv.51b-52 in that its first phrase has a participle and the second is not introduced by καί.

A second approach, noted by Aguirre⁸⁰⁸ is as follows: μετὰ κτλ is again set aside, and “καὶ ἐξελθόντες ἐκ τῶν μνημείων εἰσηλθον εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν” is regarded as a unity. This gives a large sentence (six accents and 20 syllables) which parallels “καὶ πολλὰ σώματα τῶν κεκοιμημένων ἁγίων ἠγέρθησαν” (which has six accents and nineteen syllables). Schematically this may be represented as:

⁸⁰⁸ Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 65.

Accents	Phrases	Syllables
3	καὶ ἡ γῆ ἔσεισθη	5
3	καὶ αἱ πέτραι ἔσχισθησαν	7
3	καὶ τὰ μνημεῖα ἀνεώχθησαν	9
6	καὶ πολλὰ σώματα τῶν κεκοιμημένων ἠγέρθησαν	19
6	καὶ ἐξεληθόντες ἐκ τῶν μνημείων εἰσῆλθον εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν	20
3	καὶ ἐνεφανίσθησαν πολλοῖς	9

Another interesting approach to the understanding of the structure of Matt 27:51b-53 has been suggested by R. E. Brown. On the assumption that Matthew is redacting Mark, Brown⁸⁰⁹ suggests that to the complicated v. 51a, which is derived from Mark and perhaps reflecting much earlier tradition,⁸¹⁰ Matthew has first added the quatrain, vv. 51b-52b, which has an aorist passive style and uses apocalyptic portents to interpret Jesus' death. "(T)he symbolic, poetic, and popular apocalyptic character of the four lines of 27:51b-52b with the phenomena they describe ... are clearly attached to the death of Jesus on Friday afternoon, whence the ominous judgmental tone that precedes the raising of the holy ones."⁸¹¹ The style (not typically Matthean) and the vivid, imaginative character of the phenomena suggest, according to Brown, that this quatrain was "a preMatthean poetic piece circulating in popular circles."⁸¹²

Such poetic pieces, in Brown's view, "are often a part of the popular presentation of an event, and are attested in NT references (cf. 1 Pet 3:18-19; Eph 4:8; 1 Tim 3:16) to the aftermath of death of Jesus."⁸¹³ Thus, in this quatrain, 27:51b-52b, the four signs which echo Scripture⁸¹⁴ offer "a dramatic way in which ordinary people familiar with OT thought could understand that the death of Jesus on the cross had introduced the day of the Lord with all its aspects, negative (divine wrath, judgment) and positive (conquest of death, resurrection to

⁸⁰⁹ Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1118-33.

⁸¹⁰ Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1138.

⁸¹¹ Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1126.

⁸¹² Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1138.

⁸¹³ See Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:119, fn 50.

⁸¹⁴ (i) for *shaking* – see Judg 5:4; Isa 5:25; 24:18; Ezek 38:19; Jer 4:23-24; Joel 2:10; *T. Levi* 3:9; *1 En.* 1:3-8; Ps 77:18; 2 Sam 22:7-8; (ii) for *rocks being rent* – see LXX Isa 2:19; 1Kgs 19:11-12; Zech 14:4; Nah 1:5-6; *T. Levi* 4:1; (iii) for *tombs being opened* – see Ezek 37:12-14; (iv) for *sleeping holy ones being raised* see *1 En.* 91:10; *4 Ezra* 7:32; Dan 7:22; 12:2.

eternal life).”⁸¹⁵ In fact, Brown makes the important suggestion that the quatrain could well have originated among Jerusalem Christians – that is, from the same circles that supplied some material found in the infancy narrative and the account of Judas’ death. This material “almost totally composed from interwoven echoes of Scripture and to a degree unattached elsewhere in Matt gives free rein to symbols.”⁸¹⁶

Then, in the second place, to this poetic quatrain of 27:51b-52b, Matthew, according to Brown, has added in v. 53 his own reflection on the events of v. 52ab. Brown argues that “the style of writing changes noticeably when we pass from the short coordinated lines of the quatrain (27:51b-52b), phrased in the aorist passive, to the complex participial active phrasing (much closer to Matt’s normal style) in 27:53.”⁸¹⁷

Now, if in v. 53 Matthew has added his commentary to a preMatthean quatrain, then the question arises as to why he has done so? Brown suggests two reasons. First, since in v. 53 not only the style but also the focus of theological interest changes (from Jesus’ death to his resurrection) Matthew’s purpose in v. 53 is to extend the eschatological symbolism from the events of Easter Friday to Easter Sunday and to connect it to Jesus’ own resurrection. Knowing the theological tradition that Jesus was the firstborn from the dead, the first fruits of the resurrection,⁸¹⁸ Matthew thus attempts to do more justice to the priority of Jesus’ resurrection by having the holy ones who had been raised on Friday enter the holy city and be made visible only “after his raising.” It is important to note that because he considers the enigmatic phrase $\mu\epsilon\tau\grave{\alpha}\ \kappa\tau\lambda$ as a key to Matthew’s theological outlook Brown rejects the suggestion that it represents post-Matthean editing.⁸¹⁹

Matthew’s second reason in adding v. 53 was, Brown suggests, in order to illustrate the fulfilment of Scripture. Since the first part of Ezek 37:12-13: “I will open your tombs” probably shaped the third line of the quatrain of Matt 27:51b-52b (“and the Tombs were opened”), so here Matthew goes beyond the quatrain by offering in 27:53 the fulfilment of the rest of the

⁸¹⁵ See Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1137.

⁸¹⁶ See Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1138.

⁸¹⁷ Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1129.

⁸¹⁸ See 1 Cor 15:20; Col 1:18; 1 Thess 4:14.

⁸¹⁹ See Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1139, fn 106.

Ezekiel passage: “And having come out from the tombs ... they entered into the holy city (of Jerusalem).” Brown also suggests that Matthew’s last clause in v. 53, “and they were made visible to many” may reflect the words of Isa 26:19 (LXX): “The dead shall rise, and they that are in the tombs shall be raised, and they that are in the earth shall rejoice.” Brown translates the last part “καὶ εὐφρανθήσονται οἱ ἐν τῇ γῆ” as “those in the land (or on the earth) shall rejoice.” Brown concludes: “Thus in what he has added to Mark (both the quatrain taken over from popular tradition and his own commentary on it), Matthew has developed the theological insight. In apocalyptic language and imagery borrowed from Scripture he teaches that the death of Jesus and his resurrection (cf. ‘his raising’) marked the beginning of the last times and of God’s judgment, shaking the earth as an accompaniment to the threatening darkness that spread over it, and raising the holy ones to a new life.”⁸²⁰

However, Brown’s suggestion that v. 53 is a Matthean comment on a pre-Matthean quatrain, v. 51b-52b, raises questions both about the unity of the whole passage, Matt 27:51b-53 and about the passage’s origin and authorship. R. Aguirre, for instance, agrees that Matt 27:51b-52b reflects Ezek 37:12a: “I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves”, and that the events related in v. 53 can be correctly understood as suggesting the fulfilment of the rest of the Ezekiel passage (cf. Ezek 37:12b: “I will bring you back to the land of Israel” and Ezek 37:14: “I will place you on your own soil” with Matt 25:53b: “They entered into the holy city”). However in his opinion this is an argument, not for the composite authorship of Matt 27:51b-53, but for its basic unity.⁸²¹ Likewise, those who wish to defend the Matthean authorship (that is, literary creation) of the whole passage, Matt 27:51b-53, must also maintain the unity of its authorship.

A further, rather more radical approach, to Matt 27:51b-53 and its rhythmic character has been suggested by W. Schenk in his commentary on Mark’s Gospel.⁸²² Commenting on

⁸²⁰ Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1140.

⁸²¹ Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 65.

⁸²² Wolfgang Schenk, *Der Passionsbericht nach Markus: Untersuchungen zur Überlieferungsgeschichte der Passionstraditionen* (Leipzig: Gutersloh, 1974), 74-87.

Matt 27:51 Schenk notes⁸²³ (a) that Matthew introduces the apocalyptic event of the tearing of the Temple curtain with what for Matthew is a favourite expression – καὶ ἴδού (“and behold”),⁸²⁴ and then (b) that Matthew adds seven further separate happenings: (i) the shaking of the earth; (ii) the splitting of the rocks; (iii) the opening of the tombs; (iv) the resurrection of the bodies of the holy ones; (v) their coming out of the tombs; (vi) their entry into the holy city; and (vii) their appearance before many.

Schenk argues that the raised holy ones’ coming out of the tombs and their entry into the city must be connected with Jesus’ resurrection on the third day – that is to say, the events related in v. 53 belonged to a separate tradition which Matthew has laboriously connected to his passion story. On this view, μετὰ κτλ, must be seen as an interpretative redactional addition made by Matthew to ensure that it would be clearly understood that Jesus was the first to rise from the dead.

Schenk further notes (a) that the unsemitic preceding of the attributive adjective before the noun is found three times in vv. 52-53 (πολλὰ / πολλοῖς; κεκοιμημένων; ἅγιος) and (b) that in v. 52 a participle is used as an adjective (κεκοιμημένων) (cf. Matt 28:13). These features, in Schenk’s opinion, are redactional comments added by Matthew.

In addition, Schenk notes that the first three statements of Matt 27:51b-53 (that is, those in vv. 51b-52a) are brief, pithy sentences, similar in structure (conjunction, article, substantive, verb) and free from any redactional features. Further, according to Schenk, the fourth statement (v. 52b) must also be understood as having, originally, continued the same structure as the first three statements. Thus, in his reconstruction, Schenk removes as redactional elements πολλὰ, κεκοιμημένων, and ἁγίων and adds the article (τὰ) to bodies (σώματα). In Schenk’s view these four statements (vv. 51b-52a) stand in a clear and special sequence. The first three are prerequisites for the fourth which is the apocalyptic resurrection of the bodies. Thus, the earth shakes, the rocks shatter, the tombs open, and the dead are raised by God. Furthermore, the next

⁸²³ Schenk, *Der Passionsbericht nach Markus*, 75-6.

⁸²⁴ Found 32 times in the First Gospel; see especially Matt 28:2, 9.

three statements are to be understood as continuing this same basic structure. However, there are differences: (a) In the first four statements the Divine behaviour is passively stressed, while in the last three the resurrected ones are the actors; and (b) the word order is different – in each case the verb precedes the noun. Further Schenk justifies substituting a finite verb ἔξελθον for the participle ἔξελθοντες on the grounds that the participle was necessitated by Matthew’s addition of μετὰ κτλ. He also suggests that this participle added by Matthew made the καί (which was in the sixth line in the alleged original tradition used by Matthew) superfluous.⁸²⁵

Schematically, Schenk’s reconstruction may be represented as follows:

- (1) καὶ ἡ γῆ ἐσεισθη
- (2) καὶ αἱ πέτραι ἐσχίσθησαν
- (3) καὶ τὰ μνημεῖα ἀνεώχθησαν
- (4) καὶ τὰ σῶματα ἠγέρθησαν
- (5) καὶ ἐξελθον ἐκ τῶν μνημείων
- (6) καὶ εἰσῆλθον εἰς τὴν πόλιν
- (7) καὶ ἐνεφανίσθησαν πολλοῖς

As a result of his analysis and reconstruction Schenk concludes that the seven statements of Matt 27:51b-53 represent an organized, rhythmic construction in which each line regularly shows two accented syllables. To Schenk this suggests that underlying Matt 27:51b-53 is a Jewish-apocalyptic hymn describing the end time resurrection of the dead. Adapting this Jewish hymn, accordingly, enabled Matthew in Matt 27:51b-53 to describe and interpret apocalyptically both the death and resurrection of Jesus.⁸²⁶

Schenk’s reconstruction of Matt 27:51b-53 however has met with little approval. One can agree with R. Aguirre who writes: “the whole of the reconstruction which he [Schenk] proposes seems to me excessively adventurous. When it is heaped together, with very little objective base, hypothesis after hypothesis, the final result is not of much value.”⁸²⁷ In R. Aguirre’s opinion, “it is better to limit it – in the case of this short text, difficult and without parallel – to a hypothesis more modest and which respects more the contents of the actual text.

⁸²⁵ Schenk, *Der Passionsbericht nach Markus*, 76.

⁸²⁶ Schenk, *Der Passionsbericht nach Markus*, 78.

⁸²⁷ Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 71.

For finally, I believe to have previously demonstrated ... that Matt 27:51b-53 does not reflect a Hebrew text, but rather one originally in Greek.”⁸²⁸ In my opinion while Schenk’s reconstruction may indeed be excessive, yet his tracing Matt 27:51b-53 back to a Jewish-apocalyptic hymn is significant. For to my mind these verses do reflect a Jewish understanding of what the one (meaning the one and only) advent of the Messiah would achieve.

The following is a brief summary of the investigations of this section (8.2) concerning the Literary Structure and Unity of Matt 27:51b-53.⁸²⁹ In the light of the above analysis the following tentative conclusions have been suggested:

- (i) Matt 27:51b-53 presents a very special construction.
- (ii) Matt 27:51b-53 could have existed before being integrated by Matthew into his Gospel perhaps in a somewhat different form with a more perfect rhythmic structure, especially in its second part (v. 53). Whatever the original structure it did not include the words μετὰ κτλ although even this last point is open to challenge.
- (iii) Matt 27:51b-53 presents an “in crescendo” movement which culminates in the central affirmation in v. 52b of the resurrection of the saints; then there is a logical and literary downward movement of descent presenting consecutive phenomena. However this later phenomena, the entry of the saints into the holy city, and their appearance to many, could be the intended climax.

⁸²⁸ Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo, 27, 51b-53*, 71. The fact that the words πολλὰ σώματα (v. 52b) may be regarded possibly as a later addition and that Schenk in his reconstruction eliminated πολλὰ (v.52b) but retained πολλοῖς (v. 53c) warrants at this stage a brief discussion of some aspects of this adjective, πολὺς. (See Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo, 27, 51b-53*, 58-61). The adjective πολὺς appears frequently in Matthew’s Gospel in a variety of forms. Accordingly, the fact that it occurs in two differing forms in Matt 27:51b-53 is not sufficient grounds for Schenk’s suggestion that in v. 52b πολλὰ has been added by a redactor. To establish this point R. Aguirre draws attention to the remarkable similarities between Matt 27:51b-53 and Matt 24:10-12. Like Matt 27:51b-53 this passage is also peculiar to Matthew’s Gospel: it has short phrases connected with καί; and is inserted in an eschatological discourse within an apocalyptic environment, with three verbs in the passive voice (the passive voice being preferred by apocalyptic writings as it suggests invisible and impersonal agents). Further, Matt 24:10-12 has differing forms of πολὺς – namely, πολλοὶ (vv. 10 & 11); πολλοῦς (v. 11); and πολλῶν (v.12). (Repetition of this adjective being very frequent in apocalyptic texts). And as R. Aguirre says, “to nobody has it occurred to attribute each employment (of this adjective) to a different stratum of the text (Matt 24:10-12).” (Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo, 27, 51b-53*, 63). Accordingly, the double use of πολλῶς in Matt 27:51b-53 doesn’t necessarily suggest that the former occurrence has been a later addition.

⁸²⁹ See Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo, 27, 51b-53*, 65-66; Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 17-24.

(iv) The phrases of Matt 27:51b-53 are almost all linked by καὶ.

(v) The first part and the central phrase produce a clear impression of rhythm.

R. Aguirre suggests that it is possible “to see in Matt 27:51b-53 a preexistent hymn which was utilized in the Easter / Passover liturgy, possibly already in the Jewish community, from where the Christian community received it, [and] which re-elaborated it in the light of its faith.”⁸³⁰

While only a conjecture, yet this hypothesis is significant. It links Matt 27:51b-53 with Jewish thought. According to R. Aguirre it is confirmed by the use which Judaism made of Ezek 37:1-14, which, he contends, is the matrix, the “*transfondo veterotestamentario*” of Matt 27:51b-53.

(vi) Matt 27:51b-53 was originally written in Greek. While the rhythmic parallelism and the καὶ conjunctions could suggest a semitic original, yet “the existence of three attributive adjectives situated in front of the substantives (πολλὰ, κεκοιμημένων, ἁγίαν) is very difficult to attribute to a tradition of semitic origin.”⁸³¹

⁸³⁰ Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo, 27, 51b-53*, 64, fn 16: “El estudio formal de este capítulo y el aterial del capítulo siguiente nos conducirán a ver en Mt. 27, 51b-53 un himno preexistente que se utilizaba en la liturgia pascual, posiblemente ya en la judía, de donde la tomó la comunidad cristiana, que lo reelaboró a la luz de su fe.”

⁸³¹ Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo, 27, 51b-53*, 66. Note: According to Aguirre, (*Exégesis de Mateo, 27, 51b-53*, 67-8) in Matthew’s Gospel there is the presence of rhythmic or poetical texts. These texts could be described as among the key or the more important texts of the Gospel – e.g. 1:20-21; 11:25-27; 11:28-30; 16:18-19; 28:18-20. It would seem that Matthew used sources which had precise literary structure which were based on numbers or on symmetries of traditional character. (Did these structures originate in early oral tradition?) However, in order to introduce more material (especially for doctrinal reasons) Matthew broke up, disfigured, and altered these structures in his sources. For example, Matt 6:7-15 disrupts an original systematic structure encountered in Matt 6:1-18. According to Aguirre, in Matt 27:51b-53 we encounter a very exact literary structure, which was anterior to Matthew. (This exact structure is still recognizable although it cannot now be fully reconstituted with certainty). This structure, however, has suffered a very important alteration through the introduction by someone (for doctrinal reasons) of μετὰ κτλ. Aguirre refers to Floyd V. Filson’s article: “Broken Patterns in the Gospel of Matthew,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 75 (1956): 227-231. Filson’s closing remarks are relevant to the study of Matt 27:51b-53. He writes, “if the Gospel of Matthew is the work of an author who represented a vigorous school of teaching and interpretation, that school was not the earliest circle of Jewish-Christian teachers in Palestine, but a later group which knew Mark and other written materials. The writer of Matthew was remote enough from the earliest days of oral tradition to be free from its control. He was concerned to use material from diverse sources, and he felt no qualms when breaking an early pattern to insert other topically related material. He reflects but does not directly record early oral tradition.” (Filson, “Broken Patterns in the Gospel of Matthew,” 231). (Or could it be that the writer of the First Gospel, through historical connections (?), possessed the authority to break into the patterns of earlier, authoritative, oral material?).

8.3 The Word Usage

The basic question to be answered here is whether or not the words found in Matt 27:51b-53 are consistent with usage in other parts of the first Gospel. To answer this question is by no means an easy task. Further, the presuppositions of the reader will, perhaps unwittingly, intrude into his, or her, understanding of which words are characteristic of Matthew and which are not. Moreover a word count, the frequency of occurrence of words, likewise is no reliable guide to whether the words are characteristic of Matthew. If Matthew was following an earlier source, either written or oral, the frequency or infrequency of certain words would reflect the concerns of those who composed that earlier source. Of course, by using that source Matthew makes these concerns his own, but by doing so he does not necessarily thereby reveal his preference for various words. If, however, Matthew used Mark's Gospel as one of his sources, and made changes to Mark, then these changes could well indicate Matthew's preference for certain words (e.g. σεισμός – “earthquake” – cf. Matt 8:24 and Mark 4:37). However, the assumption that the differences between Matthew and Mark can best be explained as being due to the fact that in using the written Mark, as we have it today, Matthew changed and redacted it, must be questioned, especially in the light of the increasing recognition of the importance and influence of oral tradition in New Testament times.⁸³² Consequently, with regard to Matt 27:51b-53 word usage can at best be only a very tentative guide to whether the passage is in harmony with the rest of Matthew's Gospel. Thus in addition to vocabulary, other factors like whether the theme of the passage is consistent with its immediate context, and so on, need also to be considered. Various writers have made detailed technical studies of the word usage in Matt 27:51b-53 in relation to the whole Gospel.⁸³³ They have done so, it should be noted, on the questionable assumption that Matthew has used, and changed, the written Mark. A review of their findings is to be found in Appendix I.

⁸³² See Appendix G for comparison of, and comment on, Matthew's and Mark's passion accounts.

⁸³³ e.g. Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 25-41; Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 29-56; Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 312-323. Senior interprets Matt 27:51b-53 as a free editorial composition by Matthew. His approach is challenged by Allison, *The End of the Ages Has Come*, 40-44.

The conclusions of two such writers may be briefly mentioned. On the basis of word statistics and usage Riebl concludes, on the one hand, that the passage, Matt 27:51b-53, in its entirety does not go back to Matthew. It contains language foreign to Matthew's normal usage. On the other hand, however, certain words and expression do have a Matthean feel. Accordingly, Riebl surmises that underlying Matt 27:51b-53 is a source (*Vorlage*) which Matthew has changed and incorporated into his Gospel.⁸³⁴

Generally speaking R. Aguirre comes to a conclusion similar to that of Riebl. On the one hand, he agrees that the study of the vocabulary rules out the attribution of the passage in its entirety to Matthew,⁸³⁵ that is to say, Matt 27:51b-53 reflects, in addition to Mark, a pre-Matthean source. Thus, according to R. Aguirre, "The repetition of the verb *σχίζω* in v. 51a and in v. 51b finds its best explanation in the fidelity of Matthew to two different sources."⁸³⁶

Further, words and expressions like "the earth shook" (*ἡ γῆ ἐσεισθη*), "they were opened" (*ἐσχίσθησαν*), "many" (*πολλά*), "they were raised" (*ἠγέρθησαν*), "they went into the holy city" (*εἰσῆλθον εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν*) carry a distinct, theological sense which may reflect the hand of Matthew.⁸³⁷ If so, then Matthew played some part in the composition of these verses. However, since this passage is peculiar to Matthew, and so cannot be compared with the other synoptics, all conclusions about the origin of individual words and word connections can ultimately only be speculative. This, basically, is my own conclusion in this matter. By the study of vocabulary alone it is practically impossible to know if the ultimate redactor (Matthew?) modified some tradition he had received.⁸³⁸

⁸³⁴ See Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 56, "Zahlreiche Wörter und Wortverbindungen der Texteinheit weisen einen Sprachgebrauch auf, der Mattäus fremd ist. Es darf als sicher gelten, dass die Verse in der uns vorliegenden Gestalt nicht zur Gänze auf Mattäus zurückgehen, sondern dass er dafür eine Vorlage benützte. Doch wurden auch Entsprechungen zu der sonstigen Ausdrucks- und Darstellungsweise des Mattäus beobachtet. Sie lassen darauf schliessen, dass er die mutmassliche Vorlage verändert wiedergegeben hat."

⁸³⁵ Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 50: "El estudio del vocabulario no aboga por las atribución de esta pericopa al último redactor mateano."

⁸³⁶ Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 50.

⁸³⁷ See Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 38-41; 58-61.

⁸³⁸ Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 51: "Por el solo estudio del vocabulario es prácticamente imposible saber si el último redactor modificó algo la tradición recibida. Los elementos que podrían suponerse mateanos son débiles y pueden atribuirse a un medio familiarizado con la Biblia."

Riebl acknowledges the difficulty of attempting to reconstruct Matthew's *Vorlage* and to ascertain his redactional activity. With this word of caution in mind, she does however suggest the following tentative reconstruction:⁸³⁹

<u>Range of the Vorlage</u>		<u>Redactional Operations</u>	
<u>Vocabulary Foreign to Matthew's Gospel</u>	<u>Vocabulary Consistent With Matthew</u>	<u>Added by Matthew</u>	<u>Added by Later Redactor</u>
Καὶ ἡ γῆ and the earth	ἐσεισθη was shaken		
Καὶ αἱ πέτραι ἐσχίσθησαν and the rocks were split			
Καὶ τὰ μνημεῖα and the tombs	ἀνεώχθησαν were opened		
καὶ And	πολλά many		
σώματα τῶν κεκοιμημένων ἁγίων bodies of the sleeping holy ones	ἠγέρθησαν were raised		
καὶ And		ἐξελθόντες ἐκ τῶν μνημείων coming out of the tombs	μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ after his raising
	εἰσῆλθον they went into εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν into the holy city		
καὶ ἐνεφάνισθησαν and they showed themselves	πολλοῖς to many		

On the assumption that in Matt 27:51b-53 Matthew used a *Vorlage* two questions arise. First, was this *Vorlage* an oral tradition or a written source? Among considerations in favour of it being an oral tradition are the fact that the passage is told in an easily understandable way,

⁸³⁹ Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 58.

that it has clear demarcations, such as καί placed at regular intervals, and that it rises to a climax with an increasing level of tension.

On the other hand, if it is assumed that the structure of the passage is not normal for Matthew then this would perhaps suggest that the *Vorlage* was a written source. Differences in style and vocabulary between Matt 27:51b-53 and Matthew's style and vocabulary elsewhere in the Gospel may indicate that a written source has here been interpolated. However, despite arguments for and against, no decisive answer can be given to this question as to whether the *vorlage* was an oral tradition or a written source.⁸⁴⁰

The second question which arises relates to the issue as to where this assumed pre-Matthean *Vorlage* originated. Riebl suggests that the passage's semitic style, its choice of words, and its picture of the world, could indicate that it came not out of Greek, but rather out of Palestinian Jewish circles, in which apocalyptic thinking was especially alive, and passages like Ezekiel 37:1-14 were studied.⁸⁴¹ This is an attractive suggestion. For it implies that at least the main substance of Matt 27:51b-53 goes back to the very beginnings of the Christian Faith and reflects Jewish thinking about End time events.

8.4 Concluding Summary

The aim of this Chapter has been (i) to note the peculiarities of this passage, Matt 27:51b-53, and (ii) to inquire whether Matthew could have written these words. With regard to (ii) the conclusion, generally speaking, is ambiguous. I would however hesitate to affirm that it must be left an open question. Some evidence may be understood to suggest that the passage is foreign to Matthew; other considerations however suggest that the passage could well go back to Matthew himself. To my mind, the suggestion that Matthew in this passage has changed and incorporated a pre-Matthean source is a definite, and strong, possibility. I would thus agree with Riebl when she writes: "The passage, Matt 27:51b-53 ... is not combined seamlessly with the

⁸⁴⁰ See Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 59, fn 55.

⁸⁴¹ Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 58-9.

Matthean passion account.”⁸⁴² However, I hesitate to endorse what she then says, “Numerous tensions as regards the context make it appear uncertain if the original place of these verses lay in the death scene of Jesus.”⁸⁴³

With regards to the words μετὰ κτλ there is more agreement that they are a post-Matthean gloss. Enthusiasm for this conclusion however is tempered by the fact that the manuscript evidence establishes these words as part of Matthew’s Gospel as it has come down to us today. In view of this indecisiveness about the authorship of these verses, Matt 27:51b-53, more consideration will now in Chapter 9 be given to the question of their “Origin.”

⁸⁴² Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 65: “Die Texteinheit Matt 27, 51b-53 hingegen ist nicht nahtlos mit der mattäischen Passionsgeschichte verknüpft. Zahlreiche Spannungen gegenüber dem Kontext lassen es fraglich erscheinen, ob der ursprüngliche Ort der Verse in the Todesszene Jesu liegt.”

⁸⁴³ For discussion of the controversial suggestion that these words of Matt 27:51b-53 originally belonged, as Riebl implies, to the *resurrection scene* of Jesus see Chapter 9.

Chapter 9 Provenance: the Origin of Matt 27:51b-5

This is an important, but complex, chapter. It is so because a surprising number of suggestions regarding the possible authorship, and so of the origin, of this passage, Matt 27:51b-53, have been proposed. And, as will become evident, all these differing possibilities result in a “parting of the ways” among writers with regard not only to the question of the authorship and origin of this passage but also to its purpose. Thus some acquaintance with these differing suggestions concerning authorship and origin is essential. That this pericope can give rise to such diversity suggests that it has profound depths. It is, as it were, a very important statement of what Matthew is attempting to declare through his Gospel. This assertion will be more fully developed, and defended, in Chapter 11 which will consider the significance, meaning and purpose of Matt 27:51b-53.

However, before grappling with the many issues relating to authorship and origin, two important questions, in particular, must be addressed. These questions are foundational in any consideration of the origin of Matt 27:51b-53.

9.1 Is Canonical Matt 27:51b-53 the Original Text?

In discussing the origin of Matt 27:51b-53 this question must first be asked: Is canonical Matt 27:51b-53 the original text or does it represent a post-Matthean *revised* text? It has already been noted⁸⁴⁴ that according to W. L. Petersen the latter is the case. However, despite Petersen’s scholarly arguments⁸⁴⁵ it will be assumed that canonical Matt 27:51b-53 does indeed represent the original text.

9.2 The Status, and Origin, of the Phrase, μετὰ κτλ

If the canonical text is assumed to be original, then a second important question must be asked: Does Matt 27:51b-53 contain a later gloss (or even glosses)? That is, what in particular is the status, and origin, of the phrase, μετὰ κτλ? These words may have been added by Matthew

⁸⁴⁴ See chapter 8.1 above.

⁸⁴⁵ See Appendix H where arguments are given for rejecting Petersen’s approach.

himself, or they may have been added by a later redactor but at such an early date as to be part of the canonical text.

9.2.1 “A Problem Phrase within a Problem Passage” (a closer look at the origin of μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ)⁸⁴⁶

In investigating the many issues relating to the status and origin of the phrase μετὰ κτλ certain questions connected with the translation, punctuation and the text of this phrase need first to be asked. For instance, questions must be asked about the translation of the words, μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ. The word ἔγερσιν (a hapax legomenon in the New Testament) may be understood as transitive – thus, αὐτοῦ (“of him”) is objective and so the phrase is to be translated “after the raising of him (Jesus).” On the other hand, it may be intransitive – that is, αὐτοῦ is possessive of ἔγερσιν and so may mean “after his (Jesus’) raising.” Fortunately, both translations have the same basic meaning. Thus, the purpose of the words μετὰ κτλ appear to be to set the events of 27:53, time wise, in the context of Easter Sunday.⁸⁴⁷

Further, ἔγερσιν may perhaps be regarded as transitive with an implied object and so may be translated “after his (Jesus’) raising [them, namely, the bodies of the fallen-asleep holy ones].” This would involve a double objective genitive – “after the raising of him [of them]”⁸⁴⁸. It would also, time wise, link the events of v. 53 more closely with Jesus’ death on Friday.⁸⁴⁹ This suggestion may find support in the fact that a few manuscripts (30, 220, Eth.^{ms}) have αὐτῶν instead of αὐτοῦ (that is, “after their raising”). However, this weakly attested variant is better understood as an attempt “intended to obviate the difficulties of the text as it stands.”⁸⁵⁰

⁸⁴⁶ According to J. Simpson, “These words ‘after His resurrection’ complicate, if anything, the difficulties of a passage difficult enough without them.” John Simpson, “Matthew xxvii. 51-53,” *Expository Times* 14 (1902-3): 527-8.

⁸⁴⁷ See Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1129-30.

⁸⁴⁸ The mentioning of these possible translations does not mean that they are acceptable.

⁸⁴⁹ See Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1130.

⁸⁵⁰ See Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:634, fn 130. See also Luisier, “Mt 27, 53 dans une variante égyptienne et ses ramifications,” 359-376 (unread).

The understanding of the words μετὰ κτλ, and so of the whole passage vv. 51b-53, is also complicated by the question of punctuation. If, for instance, a full stop is placed at the end of v. 52, it would mean that all the events of v. 53 belong to the period after Jesus' resurrection. The words of v. 53b, μετὰ κτλ, would then need to be understood as "a parenthetical aside modifying the whole."⁸⁵¹ But if this is so then should not the phrase μετὰ κτλ appear first in the sentence and so indicate that it modifies all that follows?⁸⁵² Further, if all the events of v.53 happened after Jesus' resurrection then, logically, should they not be recorded along with the events found in chapter 28?⁸⁵³

A comma may perhaps be placed after "raising". This would give "and coming out of the tombs after Jesus' raising (that is, on or after Sunday), they entered into the holy city". This punctuation implies that though the holy ones were raised on Friday at the time of Jesus' death, yet they waited inside their open tombs until Sunday, when it was evident (to mortal humans) that Jesus had been raised from the dead, and then ventured out.⁸⁵⁴ A comma placed after tombs would give "and coming out of the tombs (on Friday), (and then) after Jesus' raising (early Sunday) they entered into the holy city and were made visible to many".⁸⁵⁵ According to R. E. Brown this second punctuation moves from the Friday of v. 51b-52 to Easter Sunday "at least the aftermath of the emerging from the tombs, namely, the appearances, and thus (it produces) ... a setting that gives priority to Jesus' resurrection."⁸⁵⁶

However, this second punctuation (placing a comma after tombs) is really only a case of "maneuvering" which side steps the basic issue. For vv. 51b-52 clearly declare that at the moment of Jesus' death on Friday afternoon some sleeping – that is, dead - holy ones were

⁸⁵¹ From Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1130.

⁸⁵² As in the translation of the NRSV.

⁸⁵³ See Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1130; See also D. Wenham, "The Resurrection Narratives in Matthew's Gospel": 46, fn 74.

⁸⁵⁴ It is debatable whether this is a reasonable assumption.

⁸⁵⁵ This, of course, still leaves unanswered the question of where these raised holy ones were, and of what they were doing, from Friday evening to Sunday morning. But was Matthew himself concerned about such questions? Further, these sorts of questions probably arise because a grossly materialistic concept of resurrection is involved.

⁸⁵⁶ See Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1131. Brown contends that the μετὰ ("after") of 27:53b has a causative tone: Jesus' resurrection makes possible the entry of the raised holy ones into the holy city and their appearances.

raised to new life. Thus, putting a comma after tombs “still gives the saints priority in resurrection. The only thing in which Jesus has precedence is in appearing to witnesses.”⁸⁵⁷

Further, just as questions must be asked about the “source” of Matt 27:51b-53 and whether it is part of the original text of Matthew’s Gospel, so likewise the same must be asked about this phrase, μετὰ κτλ – are these words part of the original text of Matt 27:51b-53? Since there is no manuscript evidence to suggest that they are a later gloss added to the canonical text of the First Gospel⁸⁵⁸ the answer would appear to be in the affirmative. However as already noted above (8.1), W.L. Petersen has raised the question as to whether our present canonical text of Matthew is a revised version of the original and has suggested that the words μετὰ κτλ could represent very early post-Matthean editing. All this raises further questions about how the First Gospel was written. It may have been completed all at once, at a particular point of time. Or, it may have been composed, added to, and revised, over a number of years by Matthew and various other writers.⁸⁵⁹

If Matthew used a source for the passage (Matt 27:51b-53) it either contained the phrase, μετὰ κτλ, or Matthew added it to this source. Or, on the other hand, if Matthew created this passage, Matt 27:51b-53, it either had μετὰ κτλ from the very beginning of its existence, or Matthew saw fit at a later date, but before he released his Gospel, to add the words of this phrase. Both scenarios assume that from the beginning μετὰ κτλ was a genuine part of the passage, Matt 27:51b-53, and that Matthew desired it to be so. Manuscript evidence suggests that this is a valid assumption, raising the question as to why Matthew included these words.⁸⁶⁰

⁸⁵⁷ See D. Wenham, “The Resurrection Narratives in Matthew’s Gospel,” 46, fn 74. It may even be asked: did Jesus appear to witnesses before the raised holy ones did so? This involves the question of when did Jesus rise? Not necessarily at the moment when the empty tomb was discovered. See Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1180, fn 83, “the Gospel resurrection accounts do not actually say that Jesus was raised on Easter Sunday (although this is implied by some of the ‘third day’ formulas). Rather, they indicate that he had been raised by Sunday since on that day his tomb was found empty. ...”

⁸⁵⁸ See Chapter 8.1.

⁸⁵⁹ See Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 49-50, 78; See also Bauckham, *The Gospels for all Christians*, 36.

⁸⁶⁰ The genuineness of μετὰ κτλ is defended by Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 316-7; Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*, 576; Hill, “Matthew 27:51-53 in the Theology of the Evangelist,” 78; Witherup, “The Death of Jesus and the Raising of the Saints,” 581-2.

On the assumption that part, or even all, of Matt 27:51b-53 (except for μετὰ κτλ) is pre-Matthean⁸⁶¹ and was incorporated by Matthew into his Gospel, R. E. Brown suggests that the words, μετὰ κτλ, may be regarded as a redactional explanatory comment made by Matthew. Having come across the words of this passage in the tradition (either oral or written) at his disposal, and having included them into his Gospel, Matthew sensed that some clarification was needed. Thus, Matthew added this comment (μετὰ κτλ) in order to do more justice to the priority of Jesus' resurrection by having the holy ones who, according to the source had been raised on the Friday, enter the holy city and be made visible to many only "after his (Jesus') raising".

Another frequent suggestion is that these words, μετὰ κτλ, are an explanatory comment made by Matthew to rectify a theological problem implicit in these verses – that is, that many holy ones were raised to life *before* Jesus himself. This assumes that Matthew was aware of, and even pressurized by, the weight of theological tradition enshrined in such passages as 1 Cor 15:20-23; Col 1:18; 1 Thess 4:14; Acts 26:23; Rev 1:5 which stress that Jesus was "the firstborn from the dead". It is difficult however to discover to what extent Matthew was aware of, and troubled by, this theological tradition, and what knowledge he had of Paul's writings and their theological emphasis.⁸⁶²

It should also perhaps be asked whether this "theological problem," which the addition of μετὰ κτλ was meant to have rectified, is itself a recent creation. This "problem" could well arise from the questionable assumption that in composing his passion narrative Matthew added the substance of 27: 51b-53 to Mark's written passion account. Hagner, for instance, suggests that Matthew, inheriting the substance of 27: 51b-53 (from either oral or written tradition) joined it to other signs and wonders inherited from Mark (the three hour darkness, the rendering of the temple veil) because he believed that "it foreshadowed the reality of the eventual resurrection of saints, which in turn corresponded to and depended upon the resurrection of

⁸⁶¹ See Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1129.

⁸⁶² See Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:721.

Jesus.”⁸⁶³ But, then, to his embarrassment, Matthew realized that this conflation of traditions resulted in the holy ones being raised before Jesus. Consequently, it is suggested that Matthew added the words μετὰ κτλ so as to postpone the resurrection of the saints (or, at least, their appearance) until after Easter Sunday morning. Put more bluntly, this approach in effect implies that Matthew, in his naivety, made a botch of things. In attempting to remove a possible theological misunderstanding he created, by adding these words, even more confusion.⁸⁶⁴

Not surprisingly this assumption that the words μετὰ κτλ are a genuine part of Matt 27:51b-53, having been added by Matthew to rectify a “theological problem” has been challenged. For instance Davies and Allison⁸⁶⁵ ask: “Would Matthew not have inserted the tradition later in the narrative if he were so sensitive to Jesus not being the first to rise from the dead?” And how could he write in v. 54 that the centurion and those with him “saw the earthquake and what took place (καὶ τὰ γινόμενα) if ‘what took place’ includes events of a later date?”⁸⁶⁶ Thus, Davies and Allison conclude that the phrase μετὰ κτλ is an early gloss. “We judge the phrase secondary.”⁸⁶⁷

Likewise, in R. Troxel’s opinion “μετὰ κτλ” is a tendentious scribal insertion into Matthew’s creation.⁸⁶⁸ Troxel gives the following reasons for this seemingly harsh judgment:

“First, it creates problems for the narrative logic. Given that καὶ ἐξεληθέντες ἐκ τῶν μνημείων is syntactically dependent on εἰσῆλθον εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν,⁸⁶⁹ μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ applies to the saints’ exit from their tombs as much as their entrance into Jerusalem. And yet Matthew’s summary of what the centurion’s detail saw – τὸν σεισμόν καὶ τὰ

⁸⁶³ Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 852; See also Senior, “The Death of Jesus and the Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51-53),” 322, fn 30; Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:643.

⁸⁶⁴ Hare, *Matthew*, 324, suggests that Matthew does not mean to present the appearance of saints as an *event* in the history of salvation but as a *sign* only. This suggestion has merit only if the language of Matt 27:51b-53 is to be understood symbolically rather than as relating to actual events in history.

⁸⁶⁵ See Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:634.

⁸⁶⁶ That is, how could the centurion and the other soldiers, on Easter Friday have seen the resurrected holy ones coming out of their tombs, if this happened on Easter Sunday after Jesus’ resurrection? This, in turn, raises the question of what the expression, καὶ τὰ γινόμενα, actually includes. It also involves the question of the nature of the “bodies” of the raised holy ones. If they were “spiritual” bodies could they have been seen?

⁸⁶⁷ Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:634-5.

⁸⁶⁸ Troxel, “Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered,” 36.

⁸⁶⁹ That is, the raised saints come out of the tombs *in order to* enter the holy city.

γεγόμενα – surely includes the saints’ exit from their tombs that rendered them visible to the witnesses.”⁸⁷⁰

Secondly, according to Troxel, “construing v.53 as a note about subsequent developments conflicts with Matthew’s typical marking of parenthetical comments with the slightly adversative particle δὲ (e.g. 1:22; 21:4; 26:56). It is unlikely that the same writer would introduce what amounts to a disjunctive temporal clause with καὶ. In fact, in v. 54 he marks the first break since v. 51 with ὁ δὲ ἑκατόνταρχος.”⁸⁷¹

In the third place, equally infelicitous, according to Troxel, “is the possessive pronoun in μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ. Its evident referent, Jesus, was last mentioned in v. 50, leaving an ungainly breach between pronoun and antecedent. This awkwardness is, however, understandable for a scribe, for whom the referent was prominent in his thought.”⁸⁷²

Troxel concedes, however, that the genuineness of μετὰ κτλ as part of the original text is defended by some important writers. He notes that D. P. Senior “attributes this reference to the saints’ subsequent appearance to Matthew’s narrative tack.”⁸⁷³ According to Senior: “None of the signs that follow the death of Jesus ... have the smack of chronological continuity that the mockeries or even the confession of the centurion have. This is why Matthew (and Mark in the case of the veil) can shift from Golgotha to the unseen Holy of Holies to an earthquake to unidentified tombs and finally to an event that is projected three days later.”⁸⁷⁴ Senior continues: “It is the unity of these various elements *on the level of symbolism* (i.e. abstracted from purely narrative chronology) that makes it possible for Matthew to include an event that takes place ...at a later time.”⁸⁷⁵ Troxel criticizes Senior’s approach as follows: “Matthew’s specification of events witnessed as τὸν σεισμόν καὶ τὰ γεγόμενα by passes the rending of the

⁸⁷⁰ Troxel, “Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered,” 36. All this is very debatable and raises again the important question of the nature of the resurrected holy ones.

⁸⁷¹ Troxel, “Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered.” 36. Note that by removing μετὰ κτλ from the text Troxel has not only established a clear continuity between v. 52 and v. 53abc, but also suggests that all these events happened at the time of Jesus’ death.

⁸⁷² Troxel, “Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered,” 36.

⁸⁷³ Troxel, “Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered,” 36.

⁸⁷⁴ Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 321.

⁸⁷⁵ Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 322 (his italics).

veil, something those at Golgotha could not have seen. Moreover, while vv.51-3 do not contain the temporal adverbs abundant in vv. 1-50, their events are linked in tight paratactic sequence. Such features deny that Matthew wanted to present symbols outside a realistic chronology.”⁸⁷⁶

Troxel also notes that R. D. Witherup defends the genuineness of the words, μετὰ κτλ. Witherup contends that the phrase μετὰ κτλ is an instance of “Matthew’s ... tendency to jump ahead and complete a story line that he interjects into the main plot.”⁸⁷⁷ As examples of this Matthean tendency Witherup cites Matt 14:1-12 and Matt 27:3-5 as parallels. In criticizing Witherup’s suggestion Troxel says:

(T)he digression to recount John’s arrest and execution (14:3-12), spurred by Herod’s inference that Jesus was John the Baptist *redivivus* (14:1-2), is not evidence of a Matthean tendency, since that passages derives from Mark 6:14-29. On the other hand, Matthew’s unique material about Judas’ repentance and suicide, as well as the priests’ purchase of a field with the money he had returned (27:3-5), is skillfully woven into the narrative by sequencing it with the main action (Τότε ἰδὼν Ἰούδας ... ὅτι κατερίθη) and using δὲ to rejoin the main story (Ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς ἐστάθη ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ ἡγεμόνος) – a method quite different from the jarring phrase of v. 53.”⁸⁷⁸

In the light of the above, Troxel’s conclusion is that μετὰ κτλ “is a scribal insertion meant to coordinate this scene with the designation elsewhere of Jesus as ‘firstborn from the dead’.”⁸⁷⁹

While acknowledging that nearly all extant manuscripts preserve this phrase,⁸⁸⁰ yet Troxel points out that “its earliest attestation is in uncials of the fourth century (Σ, Β).”⁸⁸¹ Thus Troxel asserts: “Certainly tendentious scribal modifications of the text occurred before that, and such a scribal insertion could easily have found its way into all extant manuscripts. We cannot prefer a reading simply because it is widely attested (no matter how early the first witnesses)

⁸⁷⁶ Troxel, “Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered,” 36-7. (In fn 36 Troxel adds: ‘While those at the cross equally could not have witnessed the saints’ appearance in Jerusalem, that is simply a local extension of an event they did witness.’)

⁸⁷⁷ Witherup, “The Death of Jesus and the Raising of the Saints,” 581.

⁸⁷⁸ Troxel, “Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered,” 37, fn 38.

⁸⁷⁹ Troxel, “Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered,” 37, fn 39: “While the delay of the saints’ entrance into Jerusalem has the possibility of reserving for Jesus priority of appearance in ‘the Holy City’, Matthew reports for Jesus no post-resurrection appearances in Jerusalem.”

⁸⁸⁰ Troxel, “Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered,” 37, fn 40, notes that “It is absent from the Diatessaron, Egerton Papyrus 3 frag. 1 (recto), and from the Palestinian Syriac lectionary (Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:634-5), as well as codex 243 (Brown, [*The*] *Death [of the Messiah]*, 2:]1129 n. 78).”

⁸⁸¹ Troxel, “Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered,” 37. In fn 41 Troxel mentions that “The earliest fragments for Matthew (P 64 & P 67, ca. 200) lack Matt 27-28, as do all the papyri.”

when strong arguments can be mounted against its legitimacy.”⁸⁸² However, in the opinion of R. E. Brown, the phrase μετὰ κτλ should be regarded as part of the original text of the First Gospel. He writes, “This is the most difficult phrase in Matt 27:51-53, but we should reject attempts to remove or neutralize it, whether ancient (Codex 243; Palestinian Syriac) or modern (Klostermann). While one might judge that this phrase is an editorial addition to v. 53, that addition would have been made by the time the Gospel first appeared; and so it must be treated as a part of Matt”⁸⁸³

To summarize: If the original passage (either from a source or created by Matthew) is deemed to never have had the phrase μετὰ κτλ, and was never meant to have had these words, then the question arises: “why therefore does the present canonical text of the First Gospel have them?” The answer seems, inescapably, to be that given by writers like M. Riebl, Davies & Allison, R. Troxel and W. L. Petersen – namely, that they are an early gloss added, in all-likelihood, to bring the statements of Matt 27:51b-53 into harmony with the theological belief (found especially in the Pauline writings) that Jesus was the firstborn from the dead. If, on the other hand, the phrase, μετὰ κτλ, (especially in the light of manuscript evidence) is deemed as, for example, by R. E. Brown, D. P. Senior, and R. D. Witherup, to have been always an original part of Matt 27:51b-53, then the question: “for what purpose was this phrase included?” has to be answered. Either (i) μετὰ κτλ is regarded as a clumsy redactional theological comment made by Matthew in order to stress the preeminence of Jesus’ resurrection; or (ii) a completely different approach to these verses, Matt 27:51b-53 (including μετὰ κτλ) may be adopted. Irrespective of how Matthew composed his Gospel, and what sources he used, the passage, 27:51b-53, along with the phrase μετὰ κτλ, should be regarded as an integral part of Matthew’s passion account, and indeed of his Gospel, and so be understood in the light of his whole work. In other words, perhaps the most satisfactory way to refute the arguments of Troxel and others against the genuineness of μετὰ κτλ would be to suggest a purpose for Matt 27:51b-53,

⁸⁸² Troxel, “Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered,” 37 (fn 42 Pace Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1129).

⁸⁸³ Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1129, fn 78.

including the phrase μετὰ κτλ, which makes good sense in relation to the whole thrust of Matthew's Gospel.⁸⁸⁴

9.3 The Origin(s) of Matt 27:51b-53

In the following survey various suggestions about the authorship and origin of Matt 27:51b-53 will be outlined. The attempt will also be made to assess the correctness or otherwise of these suggestions. This will be done in light of the argument of this thesis. Broadly speaking, this thesis argues that Matt 27:51b-53 is a fragment of a very early Jewish Christian passion tradition.⁸⁸⁵ This tradition was closely related to, and reflected, some Jewish expectations of what the Messiah's one advent (that is, his earthly life) would achieve. Accordingly, in assessing these proposals about Matt 27:51b-53's authorship and origin, the following criteria will be especially sought for: (i) Does the suggested origin reflect Jewish thought? Matt 27:52 definitely asserts that many holy ones were raised *before* Jesus' resurrection, which is contrary to Christian insistence that Jesus was the first to be raised.⁸⁸⁶ (ii) Does the suggested origin stress that the final climax (the resurrection) was achieved by the *one* advent of the Messiah? This thought does not harmonize with the teaching of the NT. Even Matthew understands that there will be two advents – two comings - of the Messiah and that the general resurrection unto judgment will be at the Messiah's second advent (cf. Matt 24:14; Matt 25:31-46; Matt 28:16-20).

⁸⁸⁴ See Chapter 11.

⁸⁸⁵ The pericope, Matt 27:51b-53, unequivocally declares that "the holy ones" were raised before Jesus, at the moment of his death – even before his burial. Further, as pointed out in fn 22 above Matt 27:51b-53 and Matt 24:4-25:46 reflect two differing, and even contradictory, statements about the End Time. Accordingly, it is difficult to conclude that Matthew would have created this pericope. Rather, it seems better to regard it as a fragment of tradition which Matthew has seen fit to incorporate into his passion narrative. See 9.3.2.5.1 for review of arguments for and against Matt 27:51b-53 having a pre-Matthean origin.

⁸⁸⁶ See Acts 26:23; Col 1:15, 18. Cf. also Boring's insightful comment on Matt 27:51b-53: "[T]he first people affected by the eschatological event of Jesus' death were Jewish people who had made no Christian confession." (Boring, "The Gospel of Matthew," 493, fn 599).

In more recent times⁸⁸⁷ there has been increasing agreement that the signs of Matt 27:51b-53 suggest that the “matrix of interpretation” must be sought within the biblical perspective of apocalyptic. “Earthquakes, splitting of rocks, opening of tombs, and the raising of the dead, are part of the common ‘furniture’ of apocalyptic descriptions of the End Time and examples in biblical and intertestamental literature are numerous.”⁸⁸⁸ In other words, Matt 27:51b-53 may be understood as Matthew’s comment on the eschatological significance of Jesus’ death. Accordingly, the origin of Matt 27:51b-53, and its function within the Gospel, is to be broadly explained in this light.

9.3.1 Origin of Matt 27:51b-53 in Light of the Discovery of Codex Bobbiensis (k)

In 1837 in a monastery at Bobbio, northern Italy, a Latin manuscript containing portions of Matthew and Mark was discovered. Now known as Codex Bobbiensis (k) this fifth century manuscript may be based on an original dating back to the 2nd or 3rd cent. C.E.⁸⁸⁹ At Mark 16:4 Codex Bobbiensis has a significant addition, not found in the corresponding Greek text – namely, the words: “*subito autem ad horam tertiam tenebrae diei factae sunt per totum orbem terrae, et descenderunt de caelis angeli, et surgent in claritate uiui di, simul ascenderunt cum eo, et continuo lux facta est. Tunc illae accesserunt ad monimentum ...*”⁸⁹⁰ A translation is as follows: “But suddenly at the third hour darkness of the day was made [= it became dark] over all the earth, and from the heavens descended angels and *surgent* [they (the angels) will arise??] in the clarity / light of the living God, together ascended with him, and immediately it was made light [= it became light]. Then they came to the tomb (monument) ...”.⁸⁹¹

⁸⁸⁷ For examples of earlier suggestions about how Matt 27:51b-53 was to be understood see Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 305-6; Hutton, “The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51b-53)”, 7-12; Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo, 27, 51b-53*, 52-6; See also Raymond E. Brown, “The Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” *New Testament Studies* 33 (1987): 321-343; E. Klostermann, *Matthäusevangelium: Handbuch Zum Neuen Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1927), 225; Senior, “The Death of Jesus and the Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51-53),” 313.

⁸⁸⁸ Senior, “The Death of Jesus and the Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51-53),” 314.

⁸⁸⁹ See Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo, 27, 51b-53*, 123-6; Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 171-2.

⁸⁹⁰ See Palmer, “The Origin, Form, and Purpose of Mark XVI.4 in Codex Bobbiensis,” 113-122.

⁸⁹¹ For another translation, see Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 171-2.

The discovery of this Latin manuscript with its addition to Mark 16:4 stimulated much interest in Matt 27:51b-53. For it suggested that in the very early Church Jesus' resurrection was understood by some to have been in the nature of an ascension, assisted by angels, direct from the cross to heavenly glory. This in turn implied that in the very early Church there were differing traditions about the nature of Jesus' resurrection. Matt 27:51b-53 could, accordingly, be understood as a fragment of one such very early tradition.

However, the interpretation of these words is difficult. For within this addition to Mark 16:4 the word *surgent* is in need of emendation. According to R. Aguirre, *surgent*, being in the future makes no sense in the context.⁸⁹² Suggested emendations include *surgentes* (nom. pl. pres. participle – “arising”) and *surgebant* (3rd p. pl. imperfect – “they were arising”).⁸⁹³ The intention of this interpolation, which does not fit well in the context of the Markan empty-tomb pericope, is, it seems, to give the impression of a visible resurrection from the tomb.⁸⁹⁴ However, as D. W. Palmer points out, within the interpolation proper there is no reference to the tomb. Rather, certain features suggest the quite different context of Jesus' crucifixion. Compare, for instance, the mention of darkness, and of “the third hour” (*ad horam tertiam*). On the other hand, the mention of angels, “*et descenderunt de caelis angeli*” suggests the context of the empty tomb (see, for instance, Matt 28:2; *Gos. Nic.*13:1; *Gos. Pet.* 36, and perhaps *Ascen. Isa.* 3:15). But, as Palmer notes, “the Gospel of Bartholomew (1:6) has ‘angels descending from heaven’ (though for a different purpose: worship of the crucified) between the time of the crucifixion and the coming of darkness. Thus, if the interpolation of k originally

⁸⁹² Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo 27, 51b-53*, 123.

⁸⁹³ See Palmer, “The Origin, Form, and Purpose of Mark XVI.4 in Codex Bobbiensis,” 114-5. Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo, 27,51b-3*, 123-4 mentions the following five suggested emendations: (1) “*et surgentes in claritate vivi dei simul ascenderunt cum eo.*” (“and arising in the light of the living God they ascended together with him”); (2) “*et surgit (surgente eo) in claritate vivi dei simul ascenderunt cum eo.*” (“and he arose (upon his rising) in the light of the living God together they ascended with him.”); (3) “*et surgit in claritate et viri duo (angeles) simul ascenderunt cum eo.*” (“and he arose in splendour and two men (angels) with him.”); (4) “*et surgentes eum in claritate vivi dei simul ascenderunt cum eo.*” (“and (they) lifting him up in the splendour of the living God, together ascended with him.”); (5) “*et surgunt in claritate vivi dei simul ascenderunt cum eo.*” (“and they arise in the splendour of the living God together they ascended with him.”).

⁸⁹⁴ See Palmer, “The Origin, Form, and Purpose of Mark XVI.4 in Codex Bobbiensis,” 115.

belonged to a crucifixion account, the descent of angels in such a context would not be completely without parallel.”⁸⁹⁵

Palmer further notes that in the *Gos. Bart.* in the interplay between Jesus and Adam (who has been brought up from the underworld by Jesus and who continues his ascent to heaven) “there is at least an actual report of an ascension in the context of the crucifixion, which has some similarities with the interpolation in k.”⁸⁹⁶ Thus, according to Palmer, if the original context of this interpolation was indeed the crucifixion scene, then “it would have to be understood as the description of an ascension from the cross.”⁸⁹⁷ “An ascension from the cross” is also perhaps implied in *Gos. Pet.* 19 by the term ἀνελήφθη (from ἀναλαμβάνω – to lift up and carry away; take up – cf. Mark 16:19; Acts 1:11). And, in Palmer’s opinion, “When the *Gospel of Peter* later (35-42) adds a resurrection account to this notice of the ‘assumption,’ that only points to the original independence of the two motifs.”⁸⁹⁸ Palmer cites evidence⁸⁹⁹ which suggests that some early Christian writers spoke both of the assumption of Jesus as well as of the death and resurrection of Jesus. While, like all humans, Jesus died – that is, suffered separation of soul from body – yet he also, at death, experienced an assumption from the cross, a being “taken up” to God. Thus, the interpolation in Codex Bobbiensis (k), if consistent with a crucifixion context, would provide a brief description of an angelically assisted ascent to heaven.

Inspiration for the origin of this interpolation in k could have come from OT passages like 2 Kgs 11:1-12 (the assumption of Elijah), or Gen 5:24 (the translation of Enoch). In these cases the assumptions are a substitute for death and provide an honourable conclusion to a righteous life. Palmer notes that while the structure of the interpolation in k is similar to that of

⁸⁹⁵ Palmer, “The Origin, Form, and Purpose of Mark XVI.4 in Codex Bobbiensis,” 117.

⁸⁹⁶ Palmer, “The Origin, Form, and Purpose of Mark XVI.4 in Codex Bobbiensis,” 117-8.

⁸⁹⁷ Palmer, “The Origin, Form, and Purpose of Mark XVI.4 in Codex Bobbiensis,” 118.

⁸⁹⁸ Palmer, “The Origin, Form, and Purpose of Mark XVI.4 in Codex Bobbiensis,” 119.

⁸⁹⁹ Palmer, “The Origin, Form, and Purpose of Mark XVI.4 in Codex Bobbiensis,” 119-20 – for example, *As. Mos.* fragment in Clem. Alex. *Strom.* VI. xiv. 132.2 and Origen’s remarks on Matt 27:50 in his commentary on Matthew.

2 Enoch,⁹⁰⁰ yet literary dependence is unlikely. “Rather, the two passages are independent examples of one form of assumption account.”⁹⁰¹

In the light of the above discussion it seems reasonable to conclude that this addition to Mark 16:4 in Codex Bobbiensis originally purported to be an account of Jesus’ assumption from the cross. However, when Mark was translated into Latin this account was transferred to Mark 16:4. This was done, it seems, in order to give the impression of a visible resurrection of Jesus from the tomb (cf. a similar account found in *Gos. Pet.* 35-42).⁹⁰²

To my mind the importance of this interpolation in Codex Bobbiensis is that it is further evidence that in the very early Church there was a variety of differing traditions relating to events of Jesus’ passion and resurrection. While the traditions now embedded in the canonical Gospels eventually predominated, other traditions survived for some time. Thus, it seems plausible to conclude that Matt 27:51b-53 is a fragment of one such early tradition which Matthew has seen fit to incorporate into his narrative.⁹⁰³

9.3.2 Origin of Matt 27:51b-53 from Outside Matthew’s Gospel

The following are some examples of numerous suggestions that the origin of Matt 27:51b-53 is to be found outside of Matthew’s Gospel:

9.3.2.1 Origin from an old Easter [Sunday] Tradition, attested in apocryphal Texts⁹⁰⁴

It was suggested that the origin of Matt 27:51b-53 could be best explained if it was assumed that Matthew had access to a special tradition. This tradition, unknown to the other Gospel writers, Matthew used and perhaps introduced into Mark. This special pre-Matthean

⁹⁰⁰ To be dated perhaps late first century C.E. See Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:91-100.

⁹⁰¹ Palmer, “The Origin, Form, and Purpose of Mark XVI.4 in Codex Bobbiensis,” 122.

⁹⁰² See Palmer, “The Origin, Form, and Purpose of Mark XVI.4 in Codex Bobbiensis,” 122. For a survey of the impact of Codex Bobbiensis, and how it gave rise to the assumption that the origin of Matt 27:51b-53 was to be traced to a misplaced fragmentary Easter [Sunday] account within Matthew’s Gospel, see Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo, 27, 51b-53*, 109-126.

⁹⁰³ In chapter 11 the attempt will be made to give reasons why Matthew has done so.

⁹⁰⁴ See Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo, 27, 51b-53*, 115-126.

tradition appears, so it was said, in passages like Matt 27:62-66; 28:2-4; 28:11-15. Furthermore, some writers connected this special pre-Matthean tradition with the *Gospel of Peter* (*Gos. Pet.*). The *Gos. Pet.* was assumed to be independent of Matthew's Gospel, and so was considered to offer an amplification of this tradition peculiar to the First Gospel. Two examples of this approach may be mentioned.

(a) According to N. Walter in Matt 27:62-66; 28:2-4; 28:11-15 is encountered a pre-Matthean tradition, encountered also in Acts 5:17-25; 12:3-11; 16:23-32, and described as "a narration of miraculous liberation / Deliverance."⁹⁰⁵ The *Gos. Pet.* 29-49, independent of Matthew, witnesses to this pre-Matthean tradition as does the Codex Bobbiensis.⁹⁰⁶ This pre-Matthean tradition narrated the descent from heaven of an angel (or of two angels according to *Gos. Pet.* and Cod. Bob.) who, through an earthquake, opened the tomb, took the body of the crucified One, and with him flew to heaven, while the guards were able to do nothing to impede what was happening. The actual Matthean account of all this, Matt 28:2-4 has, so it is suggested, been modified (perhaps due to the influence of Mark's resurrection account which is regarded as being earlier than this pre-Matthean tradition).

(b) J. Denker⁹⁰⁷ after a special study of the *Gos. Pet.* concluded that it was independent of the four Canonical Gospels. However, in his opinion, there was a clear relation between:

Matt 27:62-66	and	<i>Gos. Pet.</i> 28-33
Matt 28:2-4	and	<i>Gos. Pet.</i> 35-44
Matt 28:11-15	and	<i>Gos. Pet.</i> 45-49

Comparison between these texts demonstrates, according to Denker, that Matthew "tuned" the tradition which he had in common with *Gos. Pet.* (and which is also encountered in *Ascen. Isa.* 3:14-16). Denker detected in Matt 28:2-4 the presence of the remains of the tradition which is

⁹⁰⁵ See Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 115-126; Walter, "Eine Vormatthäische Schilderung Der Auferstehung Jesu," 415-429.

⁹⁰⁶ X. L. Dufour (see Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 116), who has an approach similar to Walter, suggests that this pre-Matthean tradition is also encountered in the *Ascen. Isa.* 3:14b-17 (see Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:160).

⁹⁰⁷ Jürgen Denker, *Die theologiegeschichtliche Stellung des Petrus-evangeliums: ein Beitrag zur Frühgeschichte des DOKETISMUS* (Europäische Hochschulschriften, Reihe xxiii, Theologie; Bd. 36; Bern: Herbert Lang, 1975), 43-48. See also Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 117-126.

encountered and best preserved in *Gos. Pet.*. However, with regard to Matt 28:2-4 and *Gos. Pet.* 35-44 Matthew's "tuning" was so drastic that there was little trace of this common tradition left in Matt 28:2-4. Thus, the resurrection story of *Gos. Pet.* is not the basis of Matthew's special construction in Matt 28:2-4.

Furthermore, the confession of the centurion and his companions in Matt 27:54 is reflected in the tradition of *Gos. Pet.* 45. However, the confession of *Gos. Pet.* 45 is not a response to the crucifixion, but rather to the resurrection, of Jesus (*Gos. Pet.* 35-44) – that is, it is a reaction to an Epiphany. Matthew, however, aware of the tradition encountered in *Gos. Pet.*, nevertheless has the frightened centurion and his fellow soldiers, who had been guarding Jesus, confess Jesus' Sonship, and they do so in view of the extraordinary phenomena which accompanied Jesus' death (Matt 27:54). In other words, since Matthew had drastically "tuned" the resurrection epiphany of *Gos. Pet.*, he had to move the reaction of the soldiers of *Gos. Pet.* 45 to the moment of Jesus' death. This in effect brought the Centurion's reaction to where it was in the Markan tradition (cf. Mark 15:39).

With regards to Matt 27:51b-53, Denker suggests that the passage is related to *Gos. Pet.* 41-42 which says, "And they heard a voice arising from the heaven which said: 'have you preached to the sleeping ones?' And the after effect was to hear from the cross an answer 'Yes'." And since these words are suggestive of Christ's alleged Descent to the Inferno, Denker further suggests that Matt 27:51b-53 presupposes the Descent to the Inferno when Jesus raised many dead who had obtained liberation through him.

I do not endorse all that these two writers, N. Walter and J. Denker, assert. However, generally speaking, I think that they do support one of my arguments – that in the very early Church there were a variety of traditions attempting to explain the significance of Jesus' death and the nature of his resurrection. The uniqueness of Matt 27:51b-53 may suggest that it was wholly a Matthean literary creation. Nevertheless, in the light of the above, it may be said that there are good grounds for the contention that Matt 27:51b-53 represents a fragment of a very early Jewish Christian passion-resurrection narrative.

9.3.2.2 **Origin from an old Easter [Sunday] Tradition, associated particularly with the apocryphal *Gospel of Peter*.**

This approach is associated with D. D. Hutton who in an unpublished Th.D. Dissertation⁹⁰⁸ suggested that behind Matt 27:51b-53 there lies a “transposed resurrection account.” To appreciate Hutton’s approach to Matt 27:51b-53 it must be noted that his aim is to place Matt 27:51b-53 in the larger context of Matthew’s theology of Jesus’ Passion. Hutton’s central thesis is that the prodigies at Jesus’ crucifixion relate to the inbreaking of the Messianic Age and so reveal the eschatological significance of Jesus’ passion and death. The passion of Jesus is understood by Matthew as participating in the eschatological events.⁹⁰⁹ Jesus thus becomes the Son of Man through his passion, death and resurrection.

Hutton suggests that in his description of the events associated with Jesus’ death and resurrection Matthew has used an Epiphany story which was also used independently by the writer of the apocryphal *Gospel of Peter*. Thus, the text behind Matt 27:51b-53 can be reconstructed from this common Epiphany story. Hutton’s approach rests on a number of assumptions:⁹¹⁰

- (1) First, Hutton’s approach assumes that parallels between Matt 27:51b-53 and Matt 28:2-6 suggest that the source of Matt 27:51b-53 is a resurrection narrative tradition.
- (2) Hutton’s second assumption is that: “a common primitive epiphany story of the resurrection of Jesus lies behind the guard at the tomb motif in Matthew (27:62-66; 28:2-4, 11-15) and in the *Gospel of Peter* (28-49).”⁹¹¹ Hutton accepts the thesis of B. A. Johnson⁹¹² that Matt 28:2-4 originally belonged to the same tradition as Matt 27:62-66 and Matt 28:11-15. As Hutton notes⁹¹³ Johnson concludes that Matt 27:62-66; 28:2-4; 28:11-15 reflect a truncated epiphany story which has been subordinated by Matthew to the Markan empty Tomb account in

⁹⁰⁸ Hutton, “The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51b-53)”.

⁹⁰⁹ Hutton, “The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51b-53),” 29-30.

⁹¹⁰ See Senior, “The Death of Jesus and the Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51-53),” 314-21.

⁹¹¹ See Senior, “The Death of Jesus and the Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51-53),” 314.

⁹¹² Johnson, “Empty Tomb Tradition in the Gospel of Peter”.

⁹¹³ Hutton, “The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51b-53),” 84.

order to give an apologetic shift to demonstrate the origin and falsity of the Tomb robbery charge.⁹¹⁴

R. Aguirre,⁹¹⁵ who contends that the origin of Matt 27:51b-53 is to be related to Ezekiel 37:1-14, challenges Hutton's assumption that a primitive resurrection epiphany tradition lies behind Matt 28:2-4. While acknowledging the considerable difference between Mark 16:2-5 and Matt 28:2-4 Aguirre maintains that these differences may be satisfactorily explained by Matthew's redaction of Mark. Thus, in his view, Matthew has "profoundly reelaborated" Mark by characteristically adding apocalyptic motifs – e.g., "earthquake"; "the angel of the Lord" (cf. Matt 1:20, 24; 2:13, 19).⁹¹⁶

The need for this redaction by Matthew arose, according to Aguirre, because of the guards which Matthew's tradition situated at the Tomb (Matt 27:62-66). These guards had to be "eliminated" in order for the womenfolk to receive the angel's message. Thus, in Matt 28:4 Matthew says nothing about the womenfolk, and transfers the fear element to the guards. Then, in Matt 28:5 the womenfolk reappear and the angel addresses the words of comfort to them. After this the text of Matthew flows parallel to Mark 16:6-7. Consequently, after his detailed study of Matt 28:2-4 Aguirre concludes: "[O]ne is not able to detect in Matt 28:2-4 traces of an old apocalyptic tradition which might have been originally bonded with Matt 27:51b-53".⁹¹⁷

(3) Hutton's third assumption is to the effect that in describing Jesus' resurrection both writers (of Matthew and *Gos. Pet.*) used this tradition independently but, in Matthew's case, only partially, because of his dependence on the Marcan empty tomb tradition and the canonical Gospels aversion to describe Jesus' resurrection.

⁹¹⁴ For a more detailed examination of Johnson's thesis, see Appendix A.

⁹¹⁵ Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 126-32.

⁹¹⁶ See Hutton, "The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51b-53)", 92-3. While Hutton accepts that Matthew has indeed redacted Mark, yet he maintains that the material in Matt 27:62-66; 28:2-4; 28:11-15 is not due to redaction but comes from early (oral?) tradition current in Matthew's religious community.

⁹¹⁷ Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 132.

Comparison of Matt 28:1-3 and *Gospel of Peter* (35-37)⁹¹⁸

	Mt. 28:1-3	<i>Gos. Pet.</i>
i) a nocturnal setting:	v.1 “... as the first day ... was dawning”	v.35a “in the night in which the Lord’s Day dawned”
ii) cosmic sign	v. 2a “... a great earthquake”	v.35b “a loud voice in heaven” ⁹¹⁹
iii) descent of heavenly figure	v. 2b “... an angel of the Lord descending...”	v.36a “two males ... (from opened heavens)
iv) appearance of light	v. 3 “... like lightning, white as snow”	v.36b “much radiance”
v) opening of the tomb	v. 2c “... rolled back the stone”	v.37 “... that stone ... rolled by itself”

The above comparison does, at first sight, suggest that both Matthew and the writer of *Gos. Pet.* may have independently used a common resurrection narrative. However, I hesitate to endorse Hutton’s position. His suggestion that Matthew’s partial use of this tradition was due to his dependence on Mark’s empty tomb tradition is open to dispute. Behind Matthew and Mark there is a basic tradition. Further, it is quite possible that Matthew may have known Mark’s Gospel. But that Matthew redacted the *written* Mark is debatable. As mentioned earlier I prefer another approach. Matthew and Mark wrote their Gospels independently using slightly differing versions of a basic tradition.⁹²⁰

(4) Hutton’s fourth assumption is that at this point in his narrative (28:5) Matthew broke off from the resurrection epiphany story and returned to the Marcan tradition of the women at the tomb (Mark 16:6-8). The *Gospel of Peter* however continued to use the epiphany story of Jesus’ resurrection mentioning the following:

(a) that a number are associated with rising from the dead – three males are seen coming out of the tomb, the two supporting the other one, and a cross following them (*Gos. Pet.* 39);

(b) a voice from the heavens asking about proclamation to the fallen-asleep (*Gos. Pet.* 41);

⁹¹⁸ Translation of *Gos. Pet.* from Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1318.

⁹¹⁹ “Great earthquake” and “loud noise in heaven” are both regarded as cosmic phenomena by advocates of this position.

⁹²⁰ See 1.4. See also Appendix G “Comparison of Matthew’s and Mark’s Passion Accounts.”

(c) the agony of the guards and their confession to Pilate: “Truly he was God’s Son” (*Gos. Pet.* 45b);

(5) In the fifth place, Hutton suggests that these truncated elements of the epiphany tradition may be recognized in Matt 27:51-54 – that is, (i) the resurrection of the sleeping saints (Matt 27:52 – cf *Gos. Pet.* 3-40f, 41); (ii) the response of fear by the Roman guards (Matt 27:54 cf. *Gos. Pet.* 45b); and (iii) their cry, “Truly this was the Son of God”(Matt 27:54 cf. *Gos. Pet.* 45b). Thus, whereas the *Gospel of Peter* has used the resurrection epiphany story as a witness to Jesus’ resurrection, Matthew has seen fit to divide it and to use each part for a different purpose.

The important question arises: why this transfer by Matthew? Two answers, according to Hutton, may be given:

First, for literary reasons.⁹²¹ Thus, initially, Matthew subordinated his own guard at the tomb story (an epiphany account of the Risen Jesus) to Mark’s story of the women at the empty tomb (Mark 16:1-8). Proof of this reworking is found in the “extraneous” (out of place) character of Matt 28:2-4 which implies that the women witnessed all that these verses report, yet Matt 28:5 seems to imply that they know nothing of these events. According to Hutton, “These incongruities within Matt 28:1-5 are best explained as being due to the amalgamation of two originally independent traditions. (i) The epiphany of the resurrected Lord to the grave watchers (cf. *Gos. Pet.* 35-37), and (ii) the encounter of the women with the *angelus interpres* at the empty tomb (cf. Mark 16:1-6). Is it possible to separate the strands of these two traditions?”⁹²² But having made this subordination, Matthew found no place for “the resurrection of the saints” motif. So, influenced by Mark 15:39, Matthew transferred this motif along with his similar account of the guards’ confession, to the crucifixion narrative. Thus, whereas *Gos. Pet.* retains the epiphany story which witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus, Matthew in 28:2-4 retains only a vestige of this original epiphany story, and does so as apologetic material against the grave robbery charge.

⁹²¹ See Hutton, “The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51b-53)”, 107-8.

⁹²² Hutton, “The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51b-53)”, 109.

Secondly, for theological reasons. Basic to Hutton's theological approach is the contention that Jesus' passion is the prelude to his *parousia* in glory.⁹²³ In Matt 27:52-54 Matthew sets forth Jesus as the Son of Man *designatus*. In Matt 28:9-10; 16-20 he sets forth Jesus as the *de facto* eschatological *Kyrios*. However, since Matt 27:62-66; 28:2-4, 11-15 reflect apologetic concern to confirm the reality of the resurrection, a temporal distance is presupposed between Jesus' death and his *parousia*. Thus, in Hutton's view,⁹²⁴ Matthew differentiates between (i) the death – resurrection – enthronement of Jesus (he is proleptically the eschatological Son of Man), and (ii) the final *parousia* which the Church anticipates by being faithful to the transmitted teaching of the eschatological *Kyrios*. Thus, by transferring this tradition (Matt 27:51-53), although it was associated in an earlier stage of development with the resurrection of Jesus, and anchoring it into the framework of the crucifixion narrative, Matthew thereby secured "the understanding of the eschatological significance of Jesus' death."⁹²⁵

D. P. Senior sums up Hutton's position as follows: "The reaction of the guards is grafted onto Mark's empty tomb tradition and is used as an apologetic against the grave robbery charge. The remaining elements are added to Mark's account of the effect of Jesus' death and the confession of the centurion, and are transformed into apocalyptic signs which testify to the eschatological significance of Jesus' death. The death (and resurrection) of Jesus inaugurate the new age."⁹²⁶ Compare I. Maisch's summary of Hutton's position: "Matt 27:51b-53 is the conclusion of an old Easter[Sunday] story and relates in a veiled manner to the resurrection of Jesus itself."⁹²⁷

There are however considerable difficulties with Hutton's thesis:

(a) The relationship between the *Gospel of Peter* and Matthew's Gospel is debatable. Is the *Gospel of Peter* really independent of Matthew? Do both draw independently from a

⁹²³ Hutton, "The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51b-53)," 92-3.

⁹²⁴ Hutton, "The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51b-53)," 95.

⁹²⁵ Hutton, "The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51b-53)," 104.

⁹²⁶ Senior, "The Death of Jesus and the Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51-53)," 315.

⁹²⁷ Maisch, "Die österliche Dimension des Todes Jesu: Zur Osterverkündigung in Matt 27, 51-54," 102.

primitive resurrection-epiphany tradition? Or is the *Gospel of Peter* dependent in some areas on Matthew?⁹²⁸

(b) Granted the mutual independence of Matthew and the *Gospel of Peter*, yet the parallels drawn by Hutton begin to break down, according to Senior, when the *functions* of these materials are examined. For example, the two males (angels) in the *Gospel of Peter* bring the third male (Jesus) out of the tomb (39). This is, in effect, a description of Jesus' resurrection. In Matt 28:2-7, however, there is no description of the actual resurrection. Rather, the angel announces that Jesus has been raised, and confirms Jesus' prophetic word (cf. Matt 28:6 & 27:63). Thus, "In Matthew his [the angel's] function is part of the evangelist's effort to discredit a counter explanation of the resurrection (cf. Matt 27:62f). The angel in Matt 28:5... [cf. 28:6 'as he said' with 27:62-3] ... ratifies the Christian proclamation of the resurrection and disarms the Jewish polemic apparently still confronting Matthew's community (28:15)."⁹²⁹ Consequently, the functions of the angels in Matt 28:2-7 and *Gos. Pet.* 36 are quite different. Furthermore, as D. Senior suggests, Matthew could well have drawn his apocalyptic description in Matt 28:2-7 from some common biblical tradition. He refers to R. Kratz, who in his book, *Auferweckung als Befreiung*, compares the structure of Matt 28:1-7 to the "liberation stories" of Acts (cf. 5:17-25; 12:1-11; 16:22-35).⁹³⁰ Thus, in D. P. Senior's opinion, "If the parallel between Matthew's empty tomb story and the *Gospel of Peter's* resurrection account breaks down, then the rest of Hutton's hypothesis regarding the origin of Matt 27:51b-53 also comes into question."⁹³¹

⁹²⁸ In the opinion of N. T. Wright, "It is much easier historically to envisage the *Gospel of Peter* as a later text dependent on both Matthew and 1 Peter as well as other texts, than to see it as source for them or any other canonical writings." (N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (vol. 3 of N.T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*; 3 vols.; London: SPCK, 2003), 634); For other approaches to the Gospel of Peter see Appendix A.

⁹²⁹ See Senior, "The Death of Jesus and the Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51-53)," 316.

⁹³⁰ Senior summarizes Kratz's position as follows: "This literary form, which has a number of parallels in non-biblical literature, portrays the hero's liberation from prison as an act of God. The divine origin of the act is enhanced by such elements as the deliberate setting of a guard and the sealing of the prison, by the sudden appearance of an angel as a messenger of God, and by such confirmatory signs of power as an earthquake, opening of doors, terror or even death on the part of the guards, and, of course, the safe escape of the entrapped hero. Kratz concludes that this kind of literary form is operative in Matt 28:1-7, rather than a transformed epiphany narrative or resurrection story." (See Senior, "The Death of Jesus and the Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51-53)," 316, fn 11).

⁹³¹ Senior, "The Death of Jesus and the Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51-53)," 317.

Further, the parallels found by Hutton between Matt 27:51b-53 and the supposed pre-Matthean epiphany tradition are questionable. For instance, consider:

(i) The sleeping saints (Matt 27:52). In the *Gospel of Peter* (41) a voice from the heavens asks: “have you made proclamation to the fallen asleep?” Both texts have a common term for the dead (κοιμάω) which is used in intertestamental Judaism.⁹³² However, the *Gospel of Peter* makes no mention of their resurrection, whereas Matt 27:52-53 stresses their resurrection.

(ii) The response of fear by the Roman guards (Matt 27:54) and the cry of the soldiers, “Truly this was the Son of God” (ἀληθῶς θεοῦ υἱὸς ἦν οὗτος) (Matt 27:54). Compare the *Gospel of Peter* (45) which reads as follows “having seen these things, those around the centurion hastened at night before Pilate (...) and described all the things that they indeed had seen, agonizing greatly and saying ‘truly he was God’s Son’...” (ἀληθῶς υἱὸς ἦν Θεοῦ). In Senior’s opinion these two elements in Matthew – the fear of the soldiers and their confession – “find a much more convincing explanation in Matthew’s reaction to Mark 15:47 [*sic*: 15:39].”⁹³³ In Mark 15:39 the centurion on seeing Jesus die confesses him as a son of God (ἀληθῶς οὗτος ὁ ἄνθρωπος υἱὸς θεοῦ ἦν). Matthew in 27:54 (i) adds the other soldiers’ confession to that of the centurion; (ii) makes the earthquake and the other events the cause of their fear; and (iii) makes their confession correspond to that of the disciples in Matt 14:33.

Thus, Senior concludes:

The inspiration for Matt 27:54 is thoroughly Marcan and the unique features introduced by Matthew are completely consistent with his usual redactional patterns. The need to appeal to a pre-Matthean tradition here is extremely remote. ... We may conclude, therefore, that the origin and function of Matt 27:51b-53 are not to be explained on the basis of a transposed resurrection account. Other roots must be found for Matthew’s material, roots which do not overlook the function of this material within the structure of Matthew’s passion narrative.⁹³⁴

⁹³² See Isa 43:17 (LXX); 2 Macc 12:45. Cf. also Gen 47:30.

⁹³³ Senior, “The Death of Jesus and the Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51-53),” 317. See Mark 15:39.

⁹³⁴ Senior, “The Death of Jesus and the Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51-53),” 317-8. For further criticism of Hutton’s position see Senior, “The Death of Jesus and the Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51-53),” 321-2.

I agree with Hutton's central thesis – that the prodigies at Jesus' crucifixion relate to the Messianic age and so reveal the eschatological significance of Jesus' passion and death.⁹³⁵ However, I find his explanation for the origin of Matt 27:51b-53 rather too complicated and so unconvincing. Further, the opening part of Matt 27:51b-53 asserts that the resurrection of the holy ones took place *before* Jesus' own resurrection. It occurred at the moment of Jesus' death. This suggests, to my mind, that Matt 27:51b-53 is a fragment of a very early tradition. This early tradition reflects a Jewish concept that the *one* advent of the Messiah would be sufficient to bring salvation. Further, if Matt 27:51b-53 was a "transposed resurrection account" would it not have been so worded as to connect the resurrection of the many holy ones to Jesus' own resurrection? Even if μετὰ κτλ is understood as attempting to make this connection, yet it really fails. For it only gives preference to the risen Jesus in the matter of appearance. Matt 27:52 still declares that the holy ones were raised not as a result of Jesus' resurrection but because of, and at the moment of, his death.

9.3.2.3 The Contribution of J. D. Crossan

J. D. Crossan's understanding of, and approach to, Matt 27:51b-53 is, to my mind, broadly similar, *mutatis mutandis*, to that of Hutton's and so may be considered at this point.⁹³⁶ To appreciate Crossan's approach to Matt 27:51b-53 it needs to be noted that whereas in the canonical Gospels Jesus' burial is followed by the discovery of the empty tomb, the *Gospel of Peter* has a significant addition. Between Jesus' burial (*Gos. Pet.* 21-24) and the discovery of the empty tomb (*Gos. Pet.* 50-57) the *Gospel of Peter* has a miraculous epiphanic account of Jesus' resurrection (*Gos. Pet.* 28-49).

Embedded in the *Gospel of Peter* there is, according to Crossan, to be found (i) a very early passion narrative along with (ii) an account of the miraculous epiphany of Jesus' resurrection. With regard to (i) Crossan suggests that this embedded passion narrative, which he

⁹³⁵ Hutton, "The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51b-53)", 29-30.

⁹³⁶ Although Crossan himself says his position is closer to that of B. A. Johnson. See Crossan, "The Gospel of Peter and the Canonical Gospels," 42.

calls the *Cross Gospel*, eventually became the single source for the later passion and resurrection narratives.⁹³⁷ According to Crossan, the *Cross Gospel* “[F]lowed into Mark, flowed along with him into Matthew and Luke, flowed along with the three synoptics into John, and finally flowed along with the intracanonial tradition into the pseudepigraphical *Gospel of Peter*.”⁹³⁸ Thus, in Crossan’s opinion, *Gos. Pet.* is both independent of, and yet indebted to, the canonical Gospels. Further, in Crossan’s view, this approach explains why in contrast to the various differing stories concerning the appearances of the Risen Jesus in the Gospels, the narrative of Jesus’ passion in the Gospels is virtually the one and same account. It is also important to note that Crossan agrees with such scholars as H. Koester, A. J. Dewey, and G. W. E. Nickelsburg, Jr.,⁹³⁹ that scriptural exegesis rather than historical reminiscence – that is, that prophecy historicized rather than history remembered – lies at the origin of the passion-resurrection narratives.⁹⁴⁰

With regard to *Gos. Pet.*’s miraculous epiphany account of Jesus’ resurrection Crossan, along with other scholars, suggests that various fragments of this epiphany story have been preserved in the canonical Gospels. For example, *Gos. Pet.* 45: “Truly, he was the Son of God” is, it is alleged, rather awkwardly preserved in Mark 15:39. Likewise, in Matt 27:51b-53, 54, Matthew also links these words to the moment of Jesus’ death but associates them with a larger number of witnesses. Other fragments, e.g. *Gos. Pet.* 36-37 are, it is said, found in Matt 28:2-4, while in Matt 27:62-66, Matthew has used *Gos. Pet.* 28-33 for apologetic purposes.

⁹³⁷ “Resurrection” in the sense that this passion narrative contained a reference to the open tomb. According to Crossan the embedded *Cross Gospel* is to be found in *Gos. Pet.* in the following verses: 1-2, 5b-22, 25, 28-36, 38-42, 45-49.

⁹³⁸ Crossan, *The Cross that Spoke*, 404. Note that according to G. J. Swart, “Twee aardbewings of een? Die assosiasie van literêre motiewe in die eksegeese van Matteus 27:51-54 & 28:2-4,” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 49 (1993): 256: “Crossan’s approach is nowhere to be found in the early Christian exegetical writings.”

⁹³⁹ See Helmut Koester, “Apocryphal and Canonical Gospels,” *Harvard Theological Review* 73 (1980): 105-130; Arthur J. Dewey, “‘Time to Murder and Create’: Visions and Revisions in the *Gospel of Peter*,” *Semeia* 49 (1990): 101-127; George W. E. Nickelsburg, Jr., “The Genre and Function of the Markan Passion Narrative,” *Harvard Theological Review* 73 (1980): 153-184.

⁹⁴⁰ Crossan quotes with approval from Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 224: “[T]he only historical information about Jesus’ suffering, crucifixion, and death was that he was condemned to death by Pilate and crucified. The details and individual scenes of the narratives do not rest on historical memory, but were developed on the basis of allegorical interpretation of Scripture.” See Crossan, “The Gospel of Peter and the Canonical Gospels,” 12.

In Crossan's view, "[T]he displaced presence of the Jesus-epiphany's corporate resurrection best explains that extremely strange unit [Matt 27:51b-53] and especially the somewhat intolerable tension between resurrection in 27:52 and apparition in 27:53. Matthew was doing his best to affirm and deny, admit and negate, accept and avoid that corporate resurrection-apparition wherein Jesus rises / appears simultaneously with and at the head of those who sleep."⁹⁴¹

Crossan also notes that there is some tension between "an immediate and communal Resurrection-ascension" and that of "an ascension separated from the Resurrection by a period on earth involved primarily with the sending forth of the disciples. It is also at some tension with a salvation dependent upon acceptance of their preaching."⁹⁴² According to Crossan, "Jesus did not die alone and neither did he rise alone. The holy and righteous ones of Israel were always present in that process. He died in their passion, they rose in his resurrection. And that, of course, is the heart of the *Cross Gospel's* theology ... He died in their pain, they rose in his glory."⁹⁴³ Thus, in Crossan's opinion, in Matt 27:51b-53 "one can still catch a glimpse of Jesus' resurrecting and ascending at the head of the holy ones of Israel."⁹⁴⁴

To explain Matt 27:51b-53's location and connection with Jesus' death, Crossan reasons along these lines. According to Crossan, Matthew "wanted to follow Mark in having no VISION of Jesus' actual Resurrection, but he also wanted to follow the *Cross Gospel* in having some VISION of the resurrection of Israel's holy ones. His solution was to relocate that latter element [the resurrection of the many holy ones] from after the resurrection to a much earlier position under the cross."⁹⁴⁵ Accordingly, the communal resurrection of the many holy ones now appears only in the awkward verses of Matt 27:52-53. This, in Crossan's view, is best explained as an attempt by Matthew to fit the resurrection of the holy ones somewhere into the

⁹⁴¹ Crossan, "The Gospel of Peter and the Canonical Gospels," 14.

⁹⁴² See Crossan, *The Cross that Spoke*, 370.

⁹⁴³ Crossan, *The Cross that Spoke*, 388.

⁹⁴⁴ Crossan, *The Cross that Spoke*, 388.

⁹⁴⁵ See Crossan, *The Cross that Spoke*, 389.

Markan framework.⁹⁴⁶ This again raises the debatable question of whether in composing his Gospel Matthew used the *written* Mark, or another similar tradition.

In an appendix at the end of an article⁹⁴⁷ Crossan makes these helpful comments about his approach to Matt 27:51b-53:

My own proposal is closer to Johnson⁹⁴⁸ than to Hutton. I think Matthew displaces and dissects a corporate resurrection similar to that in Peter 10:4-5 [= *Gos. Pet.* vs 41-42] into that strange final clause in Matt 27:53.

Matt 27:51b-53 has “characteristically Matthean” language and characteristically stylized format “as a reflection of stereotyped Septuagintal apocalyptic traditions, particularly of the ‘day of the Lord’ type.” (Hutton, “The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51b - 53”, 99, 103). But its final verse is both formally and chronologically striking. Compare it, for example, with the similar sixfold-paratactic poem in Rev 6:12-14 ... Something very strange has happened to Matt 27:53, especially when compared to 27:51b-52. In terms of form: the καί parataxis holds for another strophe / antistrophe; the noun-verb order changes to verb-noun (more or less); the terminal aorist passive verbs give way to aorist participle, aorist active, and one aorist passive. In terms of content: probably the less said the better. Whether Matthew adopted a poem already formulated in 27:51b-53 and inserted parenthetically the verse about “coming out of the tombs after his resurrection,” or, better surely, added 27:53 to an established 27:51b-52, or, maybe best of all, created the entire unit, that convoluted 27:53 demands some very good explanation. Why give, as it were, an Easter Sunday event on Good Friday afternoon?

My answer is that Matthew (1) knew that corporate Jesus-epiphany which involved Jesus rising and appearing at the head of those who sleep, (2) did not want to use it as such, but (3) did not want totally to ignore it either. Hence his strange hybrid. Matthew dissects and distributes the simultaneous story of Jesus rising and appearing at the head of the rising and appearing sleepers into the successive story of sleepers arise, Jesus arises, the sleepers appear, Jesus appears. It is the best he could do to include *and* exclude a corporate Jesus-epiphany such as still visible in the Peter 9:2-10:5 [= *Gos. Pet.* vs. 36-42].

In other words, the harrowing of Hell, the *descensus ad inferos*, or whatever term is used to avoid a more simple term like corporate or communal resurrection did not come late into Christian tradition but came in very, very early and is already starting to be erased when first we see its presence. It is magnificently mythological and lives most comfortably in the poetry of prayer, cult, and creed. But it raised serious problems for theology. Were the sleepers baptized? Were their sins forgiven? Of course, says the *Epistula Apostolorum* 27 (‘I ... have given them the right hand of the baptism of life and forgiveness’). Did the apostles have no part in this mission of salvation? Of course, says the *Shepherd of Hermas* in *Similitude* 9.16.5:

Those apostles and teachers, who preached the name of the Son of God, having fallen asleep in the power and faith of the Son of God, preached also to those who had fallen asleep before them, and themselves gave to them the seal of the preaching.

⁹⁴⁶ See Crossan, *The Cross that Spoke*, 401. (For a more detailed discussion of Crossan’s approach to Mat. 27:51b-53, and a criticism, by R. E. Brown and others, of Crossan’s claim that the Gospel of Peter presents a more original account of Jesus’ passion than any of the canonical Gospels, see Appendix A, the Gospel of Peter).

⁹⁴⁷ Crossan, “The Gospel of Peter and the Canonical Gospels,” 42-3.

⁹⁴⁸ See Appendix A.

It also raised even more serious problems for narrative. How should this be described in story? How, especially, could it be integrated with the giving of apostolic mandate? How could Jesus be present on earth between resurrection and ascension if he rose at the head of the holy ones to lead them straight to heaven? The communal resurrection was, however, a doomed mytheme and it was one whose loss we well might mourn.

This is a long and difficult quotation. However, it deserves careful attention since it is the studied conclusions of a recent scholar concerning Matt 27:51b-53. With regard to the origin of the content of Matt 27:51b-53 Crossan acknowledges that Matthew may have adopted or redacted an already formulated poem. This supports a basic contention of this thesis. Crossan however thinks it is best to assume that the verses are a Matthean creation.

Further, when Crossan asks, “Why give, as it were, an Easter Sunday event on Good Friday afternoon?” he correctly highlights the basic issue. However, I find unacceptable his suggestion that the communal resurrection of the many holy ones is connected with the alleged dogma of the harrowing of Hell, the *descensus ad inferos*.⁹⁴⁹ Later in chapter 11 I will argue for what I regard as a better explanation of Matthew’s use of Matt 27:51b-53. There in chapter 11 I will argue that Matthew uses Matt 27:51b-53 because he understands Jesus as being in a covenantal relationship with his heavenly Father. His death on the cross was thus an act of covenantal obedience. This obedience unto death secured for Jesus covenantal blessing, even the salvation of a redeemed, servant people, his Church.

9.3.2.4 Origin from a Jewish-apocalyptic Hymn

W. Schenk suggested that Matt 27:51b-53 originated from a Jewish-apocalyptic hymn⁹⁵⁰ the roots of which went back to Ezekiel 37 and were also reflected in the lower frieze of the north wall of the Synagogue of Dura Europos (c. 250 C.E.).⁹⁵¹ Schenk’s approach has

⁹⁴⁹ A critical discussion of this dogma is to be found below in 11.3.2.

⁹⁵⁰ Schenk, *Der Passionsbericht nach Markus*, 74-87; See also Maisch, “Die österliche Dimension des Todes Jesu: Zur Osterverkündigung in Matt 27, 51-54,” 105-12; Senior, “The Death of Jesus and the Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51-53),” 318-21.

⁹⁵¹ See Schenk, *Der Passionsbericht nach Markus*, 77; For description of the Dura Europos paintings see Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo, 27, 51b-53*; L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (trans. H. Szold and P. Radin; 7 vols.; Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1936-47); Erwin R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (ed. and abridged J. Neusner; Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988); Rachal Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Diaspora* (Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 1998); Emil G. Kraeling, “The Meaning of the Ezekiel Panel in the Synagogue at

already been considered (see 8.2 above). It should however be noted that Schenk rejected the suggestion that the death and resurrection of Jesus constituted the “*parousia*”. Passages like Matt 24:1-31 and Matt 28:20 made it clear that the “*parousia*” was a purely future event. This future expectation was not to be toned down in favour of an already happened and completed salvation.⁹⁵² However, according to Schenk, Matt 27:51b-53 (and Matt 28:1-7) may be understood as a prolepsis of the “*parousia*”. For both passages make certain the future completion of salvation by declaring Jesus to be the coming universal end time Judge – that is to say, the Jesus who died is to be understood as already now the future Son of Man, the Judge of the world (cf. Matt 25:31-46). Matt 27:51-53 thus has a twofold message. On the one hand, Jesus’ death means judgment against rebellious Israel (cf. the torn temple curtain, Matt 27:51a). But, on the other hand, his death also brings salvation (cf. v. 52 – the holy ones are raised). Likewise, Matt 28:1-10 has a double message: it speaks both of judgment (cf. 28:4 – the fear of the soldiers) and of salvation (cf. 28:8 – the great joy of the women folk).

Schenk also stressed that for Matthew the death and resurrection of Jesus may only be understood as an anticipation of the decisive salvation “*parousia*” event, if the two happenings (Jesus’ death and resurrection) are regarded as a united whole. This, according to Schenk, is the reason why in Matt 27:53, by the peculiar use of μετὰ κτλ, Matthew has the raised holy ones appearing only after Jesus’ resurrection.⁹⁵³

Schenk’s suggestion that Matt 27:51b-53 may be understood as a prolepsis of the *parousia* is interesting, but problematic. Part of the problem is determining how the word “prolepsis” is to be understood. According to *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (6th Edition, 2007) prolepsis means: “The representation of a future act, state, etc., as already done or existing; anticipation; an instance of this.” *The Collins English Dictionary* (NZ Edition) (9th

Dura,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 78 (1940): 12-18; E. L. Sukenik, “The Ezekiel Panel in the Wall Decoration of the Synagogue of Dura Europe,” *The Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* 18 (1938): 57-62; Rachel Wischnitzer-Bernstein, “The Conception of the Resurrection in the Ezekiel Panel of the Dura Synagogue,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 60 (1941): 43-55.

⁹⁵² Schenk, *Der Passionsbericht nach Markus*, 79.

⁹⁵³ See Maisch, “Die österliche Dimension des Todes Jesu: Zur Osterverkündigung in Matt 27, 51-54,” 107 for discussion of this point.

Edition, 2007) has: “1) a rhetorical device by which objections are anticipated and answered in advance. 2) use of a word in anticipation of its becoming applicable through the action of the verb, as *flat* in *hammer it flat*.” Thus, to speak of Matt 27:51b-53 as a prolepsis of the *parousia* implies that the events depicted in these verses are yet to occur in the future. I find this to be a misunderstanding of the pericope, Matt 27:51b-53. For it is clear, at least to my mind, that in Matthew’s view the resurrection of these many holy ones has actually *already* happened. The soldiers who crucified Jesus see “the earthquake and what took place” (v. 54). The tombs are, at the moment of Jesus’ death seen to be opened. The sleeping holy ones, now raised from death, come out of the tombs, and later, after Jesus’ own resurrection, enter Jerusalem, the holy city, and appear to many. Accordingly, it is difficult to conclude that Matt 27:51b-53 is only speaking of a prolepsis of the *parousia* – that is, of a yet-to-be future event when the risen and ascended Jesus will return, a second time, in great glory.⁹⁵⁴ Rather, it seems much more reasonable to conclude that the pericope is declaring that somehow the actual End has indeed already occurred at the moment of Jesus’ death. This conclusion, of course, creates problems! It contradicts other statements found in Matthew to the effect that the End is yet to occur (cf. Matt 24:14; 25:31-46; 28:20). To suggest an explanation, other than that of prolepsis, which helps to satisfactorily explain this contradiction created by Matt 27:51b-53, is the aim of this thesis.

The question of how the concept of prolepsis is to be understood, and applied, can become a contentious issue. Generally speaking, prolepsis is a description of yet-to-be future events as if they have already been accomplished. The advantage of applying this understanding of prolepsis to Matt 27:51b-53 is that it helps to bring consistency to Matthew’s teaching about eschatology, about ultimate End Time events. Instead of having to conclude that the First Gospel speaks of the End Time as involving two distinct series of historical events – those which actually happened at Jesus’ death (cf. Matt 27:51b-53), and those which will happen at the coming of the risen, exalted, Son of Man (cf. Matt 24:14; 25:31-46; 28:20), it means that the one future ultimate End Time event may be understood as being described, in various ways, on

⁹⁵⁴ In fact, to speak of Matt 27:51b-53 as a proleptic *parousia* is to acknowledge that these verses are concerned with the occurrence of End time events.

two different occasions. It is evident that some writers find this proleptic approach a valid, and satisfactory, way to explain the statements of Matt 27:51b-53.⁹⁵⁵ In fact, in view of the uniqueness of Matt 27:51b-53 I would concede that eventually it may well be established that to understand this difficult pericope proleptically is indeed the correct approach! However, I am not yet convinced that this is so. While others may understand Matt 27:51b-53 proleptically, I still incline to the view that the Gospel writer wants the events depicted in this pericope to be understood as belonging to actual historical time and so somehow having already occurred. The strange events of Matt 27:51b-53, according to the Gospel writer, are to be understood in the sense of first fruits – that is, as the actual historical precursors, the forerunners, of what will eventually happen at the ultimate End. This approach, of course, means that I have to acknowledge that with regard to eschatology, End Time events, the First Gospel may be accused of being inconsistent, even contradictory.

9.3.2.5 Origin resulting from a Literary Creation by Matthew using the texts of OT and Intertestamental Scriptures.

This important subsection will begin, first, with a review of arguments for and against suggestions that Matt 27:51b-53 has (a) a pre-Matthean origin (and so is not a Matthean literary creation), and (b) that it reflects not just the LXX text of Ezek 37:1-14 but also that of Zech 14:1-11, and perhaps other passages (e.g. Dan 12:1-4). Then, secondly, in the light of the above, a detailed assessment of D. P. Senior's contention that Matt 27:51b-53 originates from a Matthean redaction of an OT Jewish theme, will be given. In the third place R. Troxel's suggestion that the origin of Matt 27:51b-53 is related to *I En.* 93:6 will be considered. And finally, the suggestion that the origin of Matt 27:51b-53 is related to popular and legendary interpretations, current in the Judaism of NT times, of some OT Scriptures will be noted.

Wider background knowledge relevant to the above four areas of discussion is to be found in two main, but controversial, sources for information about Judaism and its beliefs in

⁹⁵⁵ See **11.3.4** and **11.3.5** below. See also Allison, *The End of the Ages has Come*, 49.

NT times – (a) the Jewish Aramaic Targums, and (b) the paintings of the Dura Europos synagogue.⁹⁵⁶

9.3.2.5.1 **Review of Arguments for and against Matt 27:51b-53 having a pre-Matthean origin, or being a Matthean redactional composition based on texts of passages like Ezek 37:1-14; Zech. 14:1-11, and so on.**

In more recent times debate about the origin of Matt 27:51b-53 has revolved around two possibilities – that Matt 27:51b-53 either (i) belongs to a pre-Matthean early Church tradition which Matthew has, with modifications, incorporated into his Gospel (perhaps by redactionally adding it to Mark’s Gospel; or perhaps the passage originally belonged to a very early passion account, and this account Matthew has redactionally added to his Gospel); or (ii) it is a Matthean redactional work (that is, it is a free editorial composition and so has an editorial genesis).

Evidence adduced to establish that Matt 27:51b-53 has a pre-Matthean origin⁹⁵⁷

(A) Some⁹⁵⁸ argue that the paratactic style of Matt 27:51b-53 implies that it has a preMatthean origin. The arguments for and against this contention are set out in detail below.

(B) Matthew’s Gospel contains two differing interpretations of the “holy ones” in Zechariah 14:5 – namely, Matt 25:31 and Matt 27:51b-53. If Matt 25:31 is based on Zech 14:5 then the holy ones of Zech 14:5 have been interpreted as angels, and the fulfillment of Zech 14:5 is still in the future.⁹⁵⁹ In Matt 27:51b-53 the holy ones are raised saints. Their entry into Jerusalem could perhaps be related to the fulfillment of Zechariah’s vision. But this is very debatable. Zech 14:5 speaks of people fleeing *from* Jerusalem, not entering it. Nevertheless, since in Matt 25:31 the interpretation of Zechariah’s “holy ones” as “angels” is probably due to Matthean

⁹⁵⁶ See A. Díez Macho, “‘Un segundo fragmento del Targum Palestinense a los Profetas’ (Tg. Jerushalmi [Palestinian] of Ezekiel 37:1-14),” *Biblica* 39 (1958): 198-205. For Book of Ezekiel see Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel* (Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990); Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel* (trans. Cosslett Quin; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970); Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37* (The Anchor Bible, Vol. 22A; New York: Doubleday, 1997); J. Grassi, “Ezekiel XXXVII.1-14 and the New Testament,” *New Testament Studies* 11 (1965): 162-4.

⁹⁵⁷ See Allison, *The End of the Ages has Come*, 44-5.

⁹⁵⁸ See, for instance, Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 56-7.

⁹⁵⁹ See Ham, *The Coming King and the Rejected Shepherd*, 98-9.

redaction, it is argued that Matt 27:51b-53, with its differing interpretation (“holy ones” are “raised saints”) implies that it is based on a pre-Matthean tradition.

(C) The chronological gap created by the phrase “after his resurrection” between the opening of the tombs and the holy ones’ departure therefrom can, it is argued, be ascribed to an imperfect conflation of pre-Matthean tradition and Matthean redaction. Matthew’s joining of the early tradition (Matt 27:51b-53) to other signs (from Mark’s Gospel) resulted in the holy ones rising before Jesus. Troubled by this, Matthew added the words “after his resurrection” as a means of correcting things – that is, the phrase “after his resurrection” is a Matthean redactional insertion qualifying a traditional story. However this is very debatable as the added phrase only gives Jesus priority with respect to appearance.

(D) The pre-Matthean and primitive character of Matt 27:51b-53 is suggested, it is argued, by the fact that it reflects very early Christian eschatology. In early Christian thought (cf. Rom 1:4) Jesus’ resurrection was understood in its cosmic function as the beginning of the general resurrection and the new eschatological age. While with the passing of time Jesus’ resurrection came to be viewed as an isolated event in history Matt 27:51b-53, it is argued, reflects the conviction that with Jesus’ death and resurrection the new age had already dawned.⁹⁶⁰

Evidence adduced for the position that Matt 27:51b-53 is a redactional composition prepared by Matthew when he put his Gospel together.⁹⁶¹

(A) The vocabulary and syntax of Matt 27:51b-53 is typically Matthean and so suggests authorship by Matthew. This is challenged by D. C. Allison⁹⁶² who maintains that the language of Matt 27:51b-53 does not unambiguously testify to Matthean creativity. Since Matthew usually refers to the “saints” as “the righteous”, Allison suggests that the expression “the holy ones” in Matt 27:52 could mean that the passage came from another, earlier hand. Further, as we have noted the phrase “after his resurrection” reads, according to some, like an insertion correcting a theological inconsistency (“the saints rise before Jesus”). Since it is unlikely that a redactor would need to emend his own composition this, in Allison’s view, suggests that

⁹⁶⁰ See Allison, “Eschatology,” 206-209.

⁹⁶¹ This position is held, for example, by writers like D. P. Senior and R. Troxel. For a discussion of their approach see below.

⁹⁶² Allison, *The End of the Ages has Come*, 40-50.

Matthew is emending a preMatthean passage. Allison concludes, “a review of the language of Matt 27:51b-53 neither excludes nor verifies the hypothesis of a redactional origin”.⁹⁶³

(B) The apocalyptic and eschatological signs of Matt 27:51b-53 are in harmony with Matthew’s theology - that is, Matthew thought of Jesus’ end, his death and resurrection, as an “eschatological event”. Allison concedes this point but argues that it does not necessarily mean that Matt 27:51b-53 has a Matthean redactional origin.⁹⁶⁴

(C) The ideas or motifs in Matt 27:51b-53 may be found in the Old Testament Scriptures. Matthew could have accessed them from there. There is, accordingly, no need to assume that Matthew found these thoughts in some early Church tradition. Thus, Matt 27:51b-53 is probably a product of Matthean reflection on the Scriptures – primarily on Ezek 37:1-14.

Allison questions all this.⁹⁶⁵ (a) Even if Matt 27:51b-53 has drawn on the OT Scriptures, this does not exclude a pre-Matthean origin. The pre-Matthean tradition itself would have drawn heavily on the OT Scriptures. (b) Further, links between Ezek 37 and Matt 27:51b-53 are, in Allison’s opinion, not extensive. Matthew’s text has been little coloured by Ezek 37:1-14. Allison grants (i) that Matt 27:52 may reflect Ezek 37:12; and (ii) that LXX Ezek 37:7⁹⁶⁶ and Matt 27:51b do both speak of an earthquake; but (iii) he maintains that the return of the exiles to Israel (Ezek 37:12) does not precisely match the entry of the holy ones into Jerusalem (Matt 27:53) and (iv) he asks why in Matt 27:51b-53 is there no mention of bones which are so prominent a feature of Ezek 37?⁹⁶⁷

Accordingly, Allison suggests that Matt 27:51b-53 could reflect LXX Zech 14:4-5.⁹⁶⁸ As evidence that LXX Zech 14:4-5 refers to resurrection, and so could be a basis for Matt

⁹⁶³ Allison, *The End of the Ages Has Come*, 42.

⁹⁶⁴ Allison, *The End of the Ages Has Come*, 44.

⁹⁶⁵ Allison, *The End of the Ages Has Come*, 42-3.

⁹⁶⁶ For the suggestion that the meaning of σεισμός here denotes “rustling” rather than “earthquake” see Ham, *The Coming King and the Rejected Shepherd*, 103, fn 88.

⁹⁶⁷ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 634, observes: “Matthew, or his tradition, may simply have invented a story to fit with, and ‘fulfill’ Ezekiel 37, Isaiah 26, Zechariah and Daniel 12 ... But it would be strange for a first-century Jew to imply, as these biblical resonances would, that the final national restoration of Israel had occurred, or that the general resurrection had itself happened, when clearly neither of them had.”

⁹⁶⁸ Allison, *The End of the Ages Has Come*, 43.

27:51b-53, it is argued that the paintings on the north panel of the Dura-Europos synagogue (250 C.E.) reveal that in ancient Judaism, LXX Zech 14:4-5 was indeed understood as a prophecy of future resurrection. Thus (a) Zech 14:4 and the paintings of Dura both have the Mount of Olives split in two. In Zech 14:5 and the Dura paintings the revived dead emerge from the crack in the Mt. of Olives. Are these to be identified with the “holy ones” of Matt 27:51b-53? (b) Zech 14:4 mentions an earthquake, and the Dura paintings depict a collapsed house; (c) This interpretation of Zech 14:4-5 is, according to Allison, supported by (i) one MS of Tg Zechariah which interprets Zech 14:4 as referring to the resurrection by adding to the beginning of Tg Zech. 14:4 the words: “At that time the Lord will take in his hand the great trumpet and will blow ten blasts upon it to revive the dead.”⁹⁶⁹ (ii) the Targum on Song of Songs 8:5 which declares: “When the dead rise, the Mount of Olives will be cleft, and all Israel’s dead will come up out of it, also the righteous who have died in captivity; they will come by way of a subterranean passage and will emerge from beneath the Mount of Olives;” and (iii) later rabbinic uses of Zech 14:5 identifies the holy ones not with the angels but with the ancient prophets.⁹⁷⁰

Relevant to all this is an important and detailed article by John Curtis.⁹⁷¹ Curtis argues that the Mount of Olives was, from the time of the reigns of David and Solomon, the seat of a Nergal cult which persisted even into New Testament times.⁹⁷² While the god Nergal had a benevolent side, since he protected those who worshipped him, yet basically he was “the destroyer”, the god of war, of destruction, of death and of the underworld. Accordingly, with regard to the Ezekiel panel of the Dura Europos Synagogue Curtis feels that while the cleft mountain (cf. Zech 14:4) does not in any way fit into Ezekiel’s vision (cf. Ezek 37:1-14), yet it was logical for the artist to make this combination. For, as Curtis argues, “if there was a popular reminiscence that the Mount of Olives was sacred to the god of the dead and of the underworld, it could be assumed to contain an entrance to the realm of the dead. The deep crevasse, which is

⁹⁶⁹ See Ham, *The Coming King and the Rejected Shepherd*, 104, fn 92.

⁹⁷⁰ See Midrash Rabbah on Song of Songs 4.11.1; on Ruth 2; and on Eccles. 1:11.1 (cf. Ign. *Magn.* 9).

⁹⁷¹ John B. Curtis, “An Investigation of the Mount of Olives in the Judaeo-Christian Tradition,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 28 (1957): 137-180.

⁹⁷² Curtis, “An Investigation of the Mount of Olives in the Judaeo-Christian Tradition,” 168.

enigmatic in Zechariah, has a real meaning in the mural, for here is the exit from the nether world for the dead.”⁹⁷³

While some see a definite literary relationship between LXX Zech 14:4-5 and Matt 27:51b-53, others do not.⁹⁷⁴ Arguments for, and counter arguments against, such a relationship are as follows:

(a) In both passages (Zech 14:4-5(LXX); Matt 27:51b-53), according to Allison, there is the resurrection of the dead which takes place just outside of Jerusalem. But that Zech 14:4-5 speaks of resurrection is not immediately apparent. Rather this is a deduction made by Allison on the basis of the Dura-Europos paintings and references in the Jewish Targums.⁹⁷⁵ Contrast Ezek 37 where there is indeed resurrection but which occurs far from Jerusalem – a great distance away in the Babylonian diaspora.

(b) In both passages there is mention of an earthquake. However, it has to be assumed that the split mountain in Zech 14:4 was the result of an earthquake. Further, in Zech 14:5 the earthquake referred to happened a long time ago since it appears only as a side reference to the earthquake back in the days of Uzziah.⁹⁷⁶ Thus, as C. A. Ham points out, “Zech 14:4 does not record or predict an earthquake but commands a particular action during a future crisis that is comparable to one during a past catastrophe, that is, ‘the earthquake in the days of King Uzziah of Judah.’”⁹⁷⁷

(c) In both passages, the verb σκίζω is used in the passive, in Zech 14 with regard to the mountain; in Matt 27 with regard to the rocks. But Matthew’s split rocks do not necessarily rely on the split mountain of Zech 14. Further, Matthew’s use of σκίζω in the passive could be due to the preceding ἐσχίσθη (v.51a) which Matthew inherited from Mark.⁹⁷⁸ And furthermore C. A. Ham points out that, “phrases similar to the one in Matt 27:51, which contain the noun γῆ

⁹⁷³ Curtis, “An Investigation of the Mount of Olives in the Judaeo-Christian Tradition,” 171.

⁹⁷⁴ See, for instance, Troxel, “Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered,” 43. In order to establish his thesis that the likely source for Matthew’s phrase the ‘the holy ones’ was *I Enoch’s* ‘Apocalypse of Weeks’ (especially the passage *I En.* 93:6) Troxel down plays the relationship between Zech 14:4-5 (LXX) and Matt 27:51b-53.

⁹⁷⁵ See Allison, *The End of the Ages Has Come*, 43-4.

⁹⁷⁶ See Troxel, “Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered,” 43, fn 73.

⁹⁷⁷ Ham, *The Coming King and the Rejected Shepherd*, 103-4.

⁹⁷⁸ See Troxel, “Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered,” 42, fn 72.

and the aorist passive ἑσείσθη, appear at other places in LXX, suggesting that Matt 27:51 may not draw upon the language of any specific Old Testament text”.⁹⁷⁹

(d) Both passages have the expression, the holy ones (οἱ ἅγιοι). But in the light of Matt 25:31 it can be argued that in Zech 14:5 the expression refers to the angels rather than to raised saints as in Matt 27:51b-53. This can be understood to mean (i) that Zech 14:4-5 was not a source for Matt 27:51b-53 or (ii) that Matthew received 27:51b-53, with its different interpretation of the “holy ones”, as tradition.⁹⁸⁰

To summarize: Allusions to the events mentioned in Matt 27:51b-53 are to be found in the OT. However it is difficult to align the events of Matt 27:51b-53 with specific OT texts. In C. A. Ham’s opinion⁹⁸¹ Dan 12:2 and, in particular, Ezek 37:12-13, provide the more probable sources for what is found in Matt 27:51b-53. Consequently, in my judgment, in this matter of seeking some Scriptural source underlying Matt 27:51b-53 it is best to avoid an either / or approach – either Ezek 37:12-13, or Zech 14:5, or Dan 12:2, and so on. In my view Matt 27:51b-53 originally belonged to a very early Jewish Christian account of Jesus’ passion, and reflects traditions from many OT and Intertestamental passages.

9.3.2.6 Origin as a result of Matthean Redaction of an Old Testament Jewish theme⁹⁸²

With regard to the origin and function of Matt 27:51b-53 D. P. Senior concludes that Matthew himself has constructed this special passage. In doing so Matthew was able to draw on a rich fund of apocalyptic imagery – earthquake, splitting of rocks, opening of tombs,

⁹⁷⁹ Ham, *The Coming King and the Rejected Shepherd*, 103.

⁹⁸⁰ Troxel, “Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered,” 42; Allison, *The End of the Ages Has Come*, 45; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1216-7, notes that: “In Zech 14:5 the holy ones come with God, presumably to Jerusalem (cf. v. 2). Given the likely role of Zech 14:4-5 in the formation of the material used by Matthew in Matt 27:51b-52, Zech 14:5 may be echoed in ‘entered into the holy city.’ (fn 487 cf. also Ezek 37:12 but this seems more remote). ‘Holy city’ echoes Matthew’s own language in Matt 4:5, giving another correlation between beginnings and endings.” Nolland also observes (Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1217) that “‘Many’ in ‘appeared to many’ is designed to create confidence: multiple appearances of many different figures from the past mean that more than private imaginings are involved.”

⁹⁸¹ Ham, *The Coming King and the Rejected Shepherd*, 104-5.

⁹⁸² See Senior, “The Death of Jesus and the Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51-53),” 312-21; Maisch, “Die österliche Dimension des Todes Jesu: Zur Osterverkündigung in Matt 27, 51-54,” 110-12.

resurrection of those who sleep in death, victorious return to the Holy City. This material was available to Matthew through biblical and other intertestamental texts and traditions. Thus while the use of an already fixed apocalyptic literary source, such as a hymn, cannot be ruled out yet, according to Senior, there seems to be no compelling reason either on literary or tradition-history basis for concluding that Matthew has in fact inserted one in his text.”⁹⁸³

M. Riebl however argues that Matthew did use a source for Matt 27:51b-53. D. P. Senior⁹⁸⁴ notes that: “The decisive basis for attributing the passage to a source for Riebl is not vocabulary but the paratactic style of the passage.”⁹⁸⁵ However, Senior argues⁹⁸⁶ that while Matthew generally avoids parataxis in Markan parallels, yet in a number of passages Matthew does employ a paratactic style *for the purpose of heightening the drama of the narrative*. In several instances this parataxis stands in contrast to parallel formulations in either Mark or Luke.⁹⁸⁷ This Matthean parataxis is particularly evident in Matt 7:25-27 where Senior alleges that Matthew has “reformulated a Q story paratactically” (cf. // Luke 6:47-9).⁹⁸⁸ Thus, according to Senior⁹⁸⁹ Matthew could well have created Matt 27:51b-53 with its parataxis.

In a recent paper R. Troxel also argues⁹⁹⁰ that the parataxis of Matt 27:51-52 does not controvert Matthean composition. Agreeing with D. P. Senior that in Matt 7:25 Matthew has “reformulated a Q story paratactically (// Luke 6:47-49)” Troxel⁹⁹¹ notes something that Senior does not mention – that in Matt 7:25 the parataxis persists through the report of the outcome which is marked by a change of subject from the forces that assailed the house, to the house

⁹⁸³ Senior, “The Death of Jesus and the Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51-53),” 321. See Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 307-323; See also Maisch, “Die österliche Dimension des Todes Jesu: Zur Osterverkündigung in Matt 27, 51-54,” 115. Maisch concurs with Senior’s position.

⁹⁸⁴ Senior, “Matthew’s Special Material in the Passion Story,” 281.

⁹⁸⁵ See Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 56-7.

⁹⁸⁶ Senior, “Matthew’s Special Material in the Passion Story,” 282.

⁹⁸⁷ (cf. Matt 2:11-12; 4:23-25; 9:35 (cf. Mark. 6:6); 11:4-6 (cf. Luke 7:22-23); 15:31 (cf. Mark 7:37); 17:27; 21:33-34 (cf. Mark 12:1 and Luke 20:9); 25:35-36, 37-39, 42-43, 44).

⁹⁸⁸ Cf. Matt 7:25 : “καὶ κατέβη ἡ βροχὴ καὶ ἦλθον οἱ ποταμοὶ καὶ ἔπνευσαν οἱ ἄνεμοι καὶ προσέπεσαν τῇ οἰκίᾳ ἐκείνῃ, καὶ οὐκ ἔπεσεν, τεθεμελίωτο γὰρ ἐπὶ τὴν πέτραν ...” and Luke 6:47-8 “... πλημμύρης δὲ γενομένης προσέρηξεν ὁ ποταμὸς τῇ οἰκίᾳ ἐκείνῃ, καὶ οὐκ ἴσχυσεν σαλευῖσαι αὐτὴν διὰ τὸ καλῶς οἰκοδομηθῆσαι αὐτήν.”

⁹⁸⁹ Senior, “The Death of Jesus and the Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51-53),” 320.

⁹⁹⁰ Troxel, “Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered,” 35-6.

⁹⁹¹ Troxel, “Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered,” 35.

itself: “*and* it did not fall” (καὶ οὐκ ἔπεσεν). Similarly, in 27:51b-53 the outcome continues the paratactic sequence although marked by a change of subject: “and coming out of the tombs ... they entered the city and appeared to many.” In Troxel’s opinion, this unique parallelism strongly suggests that if Matt 7:25 is to be attributed to Matthew, then so likewise may Matt 27:51b-53. In a footnote Troxel mentions that “Brown (*Death*, 1138 fn 104) notes this, although considers it as “a weakness in the parallel.”⁹⁹²

M. Riebl, however, objects to this conclusion reached by Senior (and more recently by Troxel). Whereas Senior and Troxel contend that Matthew himself could have, and did, compose Matt 27:51b-53, Riebl in an extensive footnote⁹⁹³ argues that in Matt 27:51b-53 Matthew is quoting a source, a *vorlage*. Riebl’s arguments against the position of Senior and Troxel and those for her own position may be summarized as follows: First, Riebl argues that the texts which Senior adduces as evidence that Matthew was capable of constructing paratactically compounded sentences are not entirely convincing. For (i) some of these texts (e.g. Matt 2:11-12; 17:27; 25:35-36) belong to Matthew’s special material (and so may not have been created by Matthew); (ii) texts like Matt 4:23-25 and 9:35 suggest that Matthew is using as a source already paratactically compounded sentences to which by the use of “and” (καὶ) he adds further elements (cf. Matt 11:4; 21:33; 24:38 where there is parataxis but no extra use of καὶ); (iii) the parataxis of Matt 24:9-14 is indeed more pronounced than that of Mark 13:13 but this may be explained by the use of apocalyptic style.

Even in Matt 7:25-27 (the only text in Riebl’s view which shows similarity with Matt 27:51b-53) the parataxis cannot with certainty be traced back to Matthew. For (i) in Matt 7:25 the first three statements consist only of subject (substantive) and predicate (in the indicative active) and are tacked onto one another paratactically through “and”. Further, in Matt 7:25 each time the subject follows the predicate (καὶ κατέβη ἡ βροχὴ, and so on) whereas in Matt 27:51b-53 the reverse is the case; with the predicate following the subject (καὶ ἡ γῆ ἐδείσθη, and so on); (ii) Further, the relevant Lukan text (Luke 6:48b, 49b) does not necessarily suggest

⁹⁹² Troxel, “Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered,” 35, fn 30.

⁹⁹³ Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 57, fn 54.

that in Matt 7:25,27 this Lukan text has been paratactically elevated. Thus, could not the differences between Matt 7:25, 27 and Luke 6:48b, 49b be due to Matthew's revision of the original source (behind the two passages)? Thus even the unusual features in the structure of Matt 27:51b-53 could perhaps be traced back to Matthew's revision of his source. Or, the differences between Matt 7:25, 27 and Luke 6:48b, 49b could perhaps be due to Matthew and Luke using different versions of the "Q" ("sayings") source.

To establish this last point Riebl notes the following: in Matt 7:25, 27 Βροχή (rain) is a NT *hapax legomenon*; προσκόπτω (to dash) occurs only in Matt 7:27 and Matt 4:6 (where Matthew is reproducing LXX Ps 91:12); πνέω (to blow) and προσπίπτω (to fall down) are found nowhere else in Matthew except here in Matt 7:25-27; θεμελιόω (to be founded) is also found in Luke 6:48.

In Luke 6:48b, 49b there are three NT *hapax legomena*: πλήμμυρα (flood), προσρήνυμι (to bump into), συμπίπτω (to collapse). Further, σχύω and σαλεύω both occur more frequently in Luke than in the other Synoptics.⁹⁹⁴ In the light of this survey Riebl argues that it is accordingly acceptable to assume a separate source for Luke which he perhaps has strongly redactionally changed. She thus concludes that both passages of Matthew's Gospel (that is, Matt 7:25-27 and Matt 27:51b-53) are from foreign authors and so are not characteristic of Matthew and therefore at least to be attributed in part to a prior source.⁹⁹⁵

In answering this criticism of his position by Riebl, Senior replies as follows:

The question in 51b-53, ... , is *what* source. The pattern for the material in 51b-53 is set by the first in the series, the tearing of the Temple veil, which is drawn from Mark 15:38. There the pattern is already found: καὶ (conjunction) τὸ καταπέτασμα τοῦ ναοῦ (subject) ἔσχίσθη (verb in passive); Matthew accepts this pattern for his parallel description of the tearing of the Temple veil (27:51a) and retains it for the series of events that follow in 51b-53. As Maisch observes, by concentrating too much on 51b rather than including 51a, Riebl may have overlooked the origin of Matthew's pattern here.⁹⁹⁶

⁹⁹⁴ Thus, ἰσχύω (to be strong) – Matt 4 times; Mark 4 times; Luke 8 times. σαλεύω (to shake) – Matt 2 times; Mark once; Luke 4 times.

⁹⁹⁵ Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 57, fn 54: "Beide Stellen des Mattäusevangeliums sind unserem Autor fremd und deshalb zumindest zum Teil auf eine Vorlage zurückzuführen."

⁹⁹⁶ Senior, "Matthew's Special Material in the Passion Story," 282 (fn Maisch, "Die österliche Dimension des Todes Jesu: Zur Osterverkündigung in Matt 27, 51-54," 114-5)

Hence, Senior concludes, if the need to appeal to a pre-existing source for Matt 27:51b-53 depends on its paratactic style, then this need evaporates.

Senior's assertion that Matt 27:51b-53 is a Matthean literary creation is a challenge to the basic argument of this thesis. In my view Matt 27:51b-53, or at least some form of it, was in existence well before Matthew wrote his Gospel. Matt 27:52 declares that at Jesus' death End Time events, the resurrection of many dead, occurred. This does not square with Matthew's insistence that the End, with its general resurrection and final Judgment, will occur only at Jesus' second advent, which itself will happen only after the Gospel has been proclaimed to all nations (cf. Matt 24:14; 25:31-46; 28:16-20). Matthew thus seemingly contradicts himself. Whether he was conscious of, or troubled by, this contradiction is debatable. In chapter 11 reasons will be outlined as to why Matthew at this point in his Gospel has, it seems, used a very early passion tradition.

9.3.2.7 Origin of Matt 27:51b-53 from *1 Enoch* 93:6

In a recent, and detailed, study R.L.Troxel⁹⁹⁷ suggests that Matt 27:51b-54 are a Matthean creation in which his scene of risen saints has been drawn from *1 Enoch* 93:6, where "visions of the Holy ones" accompany the gift of the Torah. Further, in examining what Troxel writes concerning the origin of Matt 27:51b-53, his understanding of the purpose of this passage, which is to make clear the true identity of Jesus,⁹⁹⁸ must constantly be kept in mind. Accordingly, Troxel points out⁹⁹⁹ that prodigies accompanying the death of an individual (e.g. Matt 27:51b-53) and those attending the destruction of a city (cf. Cassius Dio, *History*, 51:17:5) must be distinguished. He says, that "is especially true here, where the goal of the narrative is to affirm something about Jesus."¹⁰⁰⁰ Troxel continues: "Whatever Matthew considered the

⁹⁹⁷ Troxel, "Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered," 30-47.

⁹⁹⁸ Troxel, "Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered," 47.

⁹⁹⁹ Troxel, "Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered," 41.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Troxel, "Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered," 41.

function of these appearances, it doubtless dovetails with that goal. This, once again, has implications for determining the source of Matthew’s special material.”¹⁰⁰¹

Concerning the origin of Matt 27:51b-53 Troxel concedes that there is no readily identifiable source for this pericope.¹⁰⁰² Troxel notes the following: Evidence *for* Matthean construction of Matt 27:51b-53 (a) the appearance of distinctively Matthean vocabulary: ἐσεισθη, πέτραι, ἠγέρθησαν, τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν. But ἐμφανίζω appears only in Matt 27:53, while φαίνω (in the passive voice) occurs 14 times in Matthew. But, in Troxel’s view, “the singular ἐμφανίζω does not counter-indicate Matthean authorship, given the overwhelming number of uniquely Matthean words in this passage.”¹⁰⁰³ Evidence *against* Matthean authorship: (a) Those raised are designated ἁγίων, “holy ones”. Nowhere else does Matthew use ἅγιος substantivally. (b) Elsewhere Matthew calls the deceased pious δίκαιοι rather than ἁγίων (cf. Matt 13:17 and Luke 10:24).

In the light of the above Troxel concludes that the passage, 27:51b-53 is largely Matthean, and yet has peculiar features. Consequently, with regard to the question of the origin of these verses, Troxel’s aim is to identify literature that has influenced features of this pericope – including τῶν ἁγίων – and thus account for the peculiarities of the passage.¹⁰⁰⁴ In particular his aim is to especially identify the origins of the phrase, “the holy ones”. Where did Matthew obtain it from?

In answering this question Troxel notes that there is general consensus that Matt 27:51b-53 is indebted to Ezek 37’s portrayal of resurrection. According to Troxel, “v.52’s initial phrase, καὶ τὰ μνημεῖα ἀνεώχθησαν, echoes the LXX 37:12 (ἐγὼ ἀνοίγω ὑμῶν τὰ μνήματα), while the LXX’s continuation of that verse (καὶ ἀνάξω ὑμᾶς ἐκ τῶν μνημάτων

¹⁰⁰¹ Troxel, “Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered,” 41.

¹⁰⁰² In an extensive footnote [41, fn 62] Troxel summarizes various suggestions concerning the origin of Matt 27:51b-53 including D. P. Senior’s suggestion that the passage is a creation by Matthew (see his *Passion Narrative*) and R. E. Brown’s hypothesis (see his *The Death of the Messiah*, 1120) that a pre-Matthean quatrain underlying vv. 51b-52 has been supplemented by Matthew’s own composition in v.53. Brown’s approach, according to Troxel, fails to take into account Matthew’s composition of paratactic sentences in specific circumstances (cf. Matt 7:24-27).

¹⁰⁰³ Troxel, “Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered,” 41, fn 62.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Troxel, “Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered,” 42.

ὑμῶν) is mirrored in v. 53's καὶ ἔξελθόντες ἐκ τῶν μνημείων."¹⁰⁰⁵ Troxel, accordingly, suggests that a more likely source for Matthew's phrase "holy ones" appears in *1 Enoch's*¹⁰⁰⁶ "Apocalypse of Weeks", "which maps out history until the great assize, the destruction of the present world, and the creation of a new one."¹⁰⁰⁷

Troxel uses the translation of *1 Enoch* from Matthew Black, *The Book of Enoch* (Leiden: Brill, 1985). Black translates *1 Enoch* 93:6 as follows:

"And thereafter, in the Fourth Week, at its close,
A vision of holy ones and righteousness shall be revealed,
And a law for generations upon generations,
And the court be made for them."¹⁰⁰⁸

Troxel suggests that "a law for generations upon generations" is the Torah. The interpretation of the important clause "a vision of holy ones and righteousness shall be revealed" is complicated by a number of textual variants. However, according to Troxel, "Whichever variant is original, "visions of the holy ones" is a stable element in the evidence and conceivably stood alone in the copy available to Matthew."¹⁰⁰⁹

Further, in the light of passages such as *1 En.* 61:12 which, following Black's translation, reads:

All the holy ones who are in heaven shall bless him
And all the elect who dwell in the Garden of Life.¹⁰¹⁰

¹⁰⁰⁵ Troxel, "Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered," 42. (It has already been noted that Troxel rejects the suggestion that in addition to Ezek 37:1-14, Matt 27:51b-53 may also depend upon Zech 14:4-5).

¹⁰⁰⁶ For comment on *1 Enoch* see E. Isaac, "1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch," in Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:6-12.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Troxel, "Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered," 43. For a review of difficulties facing this suggestion of Troxel's, see Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1216, fn 486.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Isaac, "1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch," in Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 74, translates *1 Enoch* 93:6 as follows: "After that at the completion of the fourth week (or Sabbath) visions of the old and righteous ones shall be seen; and a law shall be made with a fence (or with an enclosure), for all the generations."

¹⁰⁰⁹ Troxel, "Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered," 43, fn 78. Does this not prejudge the situation as it assumes that Matthew used this text? Is this not what has to be established?

¹⁰¹⁰ Isaac, "1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch," in Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 42, translates *1 Enoch* 61:12 almost exactly as does Black: "all the holy ones who are in heaven shall bless him; all the elect ones who dwell in the garden of life (shall bless him).

Troxel feels it is reasonable to understand the “holy ones” of *I Enoch* 93:6 as Israel’s departed pious. This identity, in Troxel’s opinion, is also supported by 51:1-2:

And in those days shall the earth give back
what has been entrusted to it.
And Sheol shall give back that which has been committed to it,
And Abaddon shall repay that which it owes.
And he shall choose the righteous and holy from among them,
For the day has drawn nigh that they should be saved.¹⁰¹¹

Troxel maintains that the “righteous and the holy”, although only one group among those restored to life, are the pious. Further, Troxel suggests that the equation here of the “holy ones” with the “righteous” may have encouraged Matthew, when constructing 27:51b-53, to adopt from *I Enoch* 93:6 the (for him) unique epithet “the holy ones” for the deceased pious rather than his usual δίκαιοι.

Troxel supports his hypothesis that “Matthew authored 27:51b-53 under the influence of *I Enoch* 93:6, along with Ezek 37:1-14” with the following observations:

First, it is likely that Matthew was familiar with some version of the Apocalypse of Weeks. Matt 22:13a reflects *I En.* 10:4a and Matt 25:31-46 has numerous similarities with *I En.* 70-71. Further, “because the Apocalypse of Weeks is extant in the Aramaic copies of *I Enoch* found in the caves near Qumran, just as in later manuscripts, there is no basis to doubt whether an author acquainted with other parts of *I Enoch* would have had access to this apocalypse.”¹⁰¹²

¹⁰¹¹ Isaac, “1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch,” in Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 36 translates *I Enoch* 51:1-2 as follows: “In those days, Sheol will return all the deposits which she had received and hell will give back all that it owes. And he shall choose the righteous and the holy ones from among (the risen dead) [Lit. ‘from among them’], for the day when they shall be selected and saved has arrived.”

¹⁰¹² Troxel, “Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered,” 45.

Second, in Matt 27:51b-53 the raised saints “appear to many”. Similarly, in the Apocalypse of Weeks appearances of “saints” accompany the giving of the Torah. Further, Matthew’s saints appear in Jerusalem which parallels *I Enoch*’s holy ones’ appearance to Israel at the giving of the Torah. In Troxel’s opinion “this parallel function ... accounts for Matthew’s ambiguous ‘appearances to many’ and his honorific designation of Jerusalem as ‘the holy city’.”¹⁰¹³

However, *I Enoch* 93:6 speaks of “visions of the holy ones”. Matt 27:51b-53 speaks of their *resurrection*, followed by appearances. According to Troxel the reason for Matthew’s “reformulation of *visions* of holy ones into the *resurrection* of holy ones was the need for an event significant enough to elicit the acclamation of Jesus as God’s son; Matthew needed something as phenomenal as the sundering of the temple curtain. In the face of death, the logical contrast was resurrection to life, a motif already at hand in the proclamation of Jesus’ resurrection in the next chapter.”¹⁰¹⁴

For Troxel there is thus a parallel between Jesus’ resurrection (Matt 28:1-4) and that of the holy ones (Matt 27:51b-53). Jesus’ resurrection implies the disciples’ mission (Matt 28:16-20). Likewise the resurrection of the holy ones implies that Jesus was indeed the “son of God”, despite all the denials to the contrary. So, in Troxel’s opinion, to describe the resurrection of the holy ones Matthew drew on the imagery of Ezekiel 37. But to describe the *identity* of the holy ones Matthew turned to *I En.* 93:6 because in this passage an appearance by “holy ones” marked the Torah’s *divine* origin. Correspondingly, according to Troxel, “the spectre of risen saints validated for Israel what had been disputed by Jerusalem’s religious leaders: Jesus’ identity as God’s son”.¹⁰¹⁵

¹⁰¹³ Troxel, “Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered,” 45.

¹⁰¹⁴ Troxel, “Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered,” 45.

¹⁰¹⁵ Troxel, “Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered,” 45. But (a) Matthew is writing fifty or so years later not to Jerusalem’s religious leaders but to his Christian community. Did his Christian readers need to be convinced that Jesus was God’s Son? That is to say, was there not something else Matthew was trying to say by these words to his Christian readers? (b) Troxel’s expression “something as *phenomenal* as the sundering of the temple curtain ... “ (45) raises questions. Is it perhaps an unwitting admission by Troxel that Matthew thought he was describing an historical event in time and space? Cf. Troxel’s comment (44, fn 81): “The judgment that 51b-53 is a Matthean creation carries an obvious conclusion about historicity.

Troxel also suggests that there is a correspondence between the way Matthew identifies Jesus' role in salvation history and the fact that in *1 Enoch* 93:6 the visions of the "holy ones" are at the *end* of the fourth week. Troxel notes that the Gospel's opening genealogy (Matt 1:2-17) reveals Matthew's interest in epochal structure, and also his belief that Jesus appeared as the capstone of an era. Accordingly Troxel asserts, "that the 'saints / holy ones' should appear in the waning moments of this era is a fitting corollary to the 'visions of the holy ones' at the culmination of an epoch in the Apocalypse of Weeks."¹⁰¹⁶ Troxel acknowledges however that these comments could be understood to mean that, according to Matthew, Jesus' death *did* introduce "the end of the age".¹⁰¹⁷ Troxel nevertheless insists that Matthew did not intend Matt 27:51b-53 to mark "the end of the age". Rather, according to Troxel, these verses "constitute the resolution of the dispute over Jesus' identity that Matthew made central to his crucifixion narrative."¹⁰¹⁸

Troxel's approach to Matt 27:51b-53 is both fresh and innovative. I would however disagree with him for a number of reasons. First, through Matt 27:53b-53 Matthew does indeed declare that Jesus was the Son of God. Notwithstanding this, through Matt 27:51b-53 Matthew also declares that at the death of Jesus there was a great turning point in the scheme of salvation history. While, admittedly, it may be difficult to explain succinctly what Matthew meant, yet he clearly indicates that something momentous and decisive happened when Jesus, the Son of God, died.¹⁰¹⁹

Secondly, Troxel's argument raises the question as to who actually saw the risen holy ones.¹⁰²⁰ Troxel declares that "the spectre of risen saints validated for Israel what had been

..." If, fifty years later, Matthew is trying to convince his readers that Jesus is God's Son one wonders whether this could be achieved by the creation of make believe events.

¹⁰¹⁶ Troxel, "Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered," 46. Note: In 46, fn 94, of his article, Troxel acknowledges that: "While this could be seen as subverting the assertion that Jesus' death does not introduce 'the end of the age', we should note that Matthew does not specifically structure his genealogy with 'the end' in view. He simply presents Jesus as the capstone of the genealogical era." The purpose of Matt 27:51b-53, according to Troxel, is thus not to declare that the end of the age has come, but that Jesus is God's Son.

¹⁰¹⁷ Troxel, "Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered," 46, fn 94.

¹⁰¹⁸ Troxel, "Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered," 47.

¹⁰¹⁹ This matter will be developed later in chapter 11.

¹⁰²⁰ See Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1132.

disputed by Jerusalem’s religious leaders: Jesus’ identity as God’s son”.¹⁰²¹ But who is to be included in the term “Israel”? While we are told that the risen holy ones “entered into the holy city and appeared to many” (Matt 27:53), yet we are not told who the “many” were (whether pious or otherwise) or what conclusions they came to. Further, while the Roman soldiers guarding the cross declared Jesus to be God’s Son, yet it is not said that they actually saw the risen holy ones. Rather what terrified them was “the earthquake and what took place” (τὸν σεισμόν καὶ τὰ γυνόμενα) (Matt 27:54). The whole expression suggests an Epiphany. But what the latter words (“what took place”) include is debatable.¹⁰²²

Another problem with Troxel’s approach is that it questions the “historicity” of the events described in Matt 27:51b-53.¹⁰²³ On the more positive side, the fact that Troxel relates Matt 27:51b-53 to Moses and the giving of Torah¹⁰²⁴ supports the argument that initially Matt 27:51b-53 originated in a Jewish milieu.

9.3.2.8 Origin from Popular and legendary Interpretations current in the Judaism of New Testament Times of some Old Testament Scriptures.

It has been seen that the assumption of the priority of Mark’s Gospel, and its use by Matthew in composing his Gospel, led to the assumption that Matt 27:51b-53 had been added to Mark’s passion account. This, in turn, sparked a search for the literary origin of Matt 27:51b-53. According to some this could be found within Matthew’s Gospel itself as for example a misplaced resurrection account.¹⁰²⁵ Others suggested that its origin lay outside of Matthew’s Gospel – as, for example, in a Jewish resurrection hymn.¹⁰²⁶ The search proved both elusive and

¹⁰²¹ Troxel, “Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered,” 45.

¹⁰²² I would agree with Brown (*The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1132, fn 89) that, “in the instance of the raised dead only God can make them appear.” Thus, it is to be understood that the holy ones having been raised into a transcendent realm were, by the agency of divine power, made visible to some mortals in Jerusalem. If the holy ones were raised into a transcendent realm then, to my mind, they were not seen coming out of their tombs by the soldiers at the cross. This in turn dictates how the expression καὶ τὰ γυνόμενα (v. 54) is to be understood and its contents ascertained.

¹⁰²³ See Troxel, “Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered,” 44, fn 81. Questions relating to the “historicity” of the events of Matt 27:51b-53 will be considered in chapter 10.

¹⁰²⁴ See Troxel, “Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered,” 46.

¹⁰²⁵ See Johnson, “Empty Tomb Tradition in the Gospel of Peter”; Hutton, “The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51b-53)”.

¹⁰²⁶ See Schenk, *Der Passionsbericht nach Markus*.

unsuccessful. Consequently, this failure to find a satisfactory literary source led some¹⁰²⁷ to suggest that Matt 27:51b-53 was a literary creation based on OT texts like Ezek 37:1-14, *I En.* 93:6; and so on made by Matthew himself. This suggestion however was strongly challenged by those¹⁰²⁸ who argued that Matt 27:51b-53 had a pre-Matthean origin. In a very real sense a stalemate has been reached regarding the question of the origin of Matt 27:51b-53. However, another approach about the origin of this passage has been suggested, for example by R. Aguirre,¹⁰²⁹ which warrants attention. According to this approach the passage, Matt 27:51b-53, has no direct literary connection with either the Hebrew or LXX texts of OT passages (like Ezek 37:1-14; Zech 14:1-21; Dan 12:1; Isa 26; *I En.* 96, and so on) but rather reflects the *legendary* interpretation of these passages current in the Judaism of NT times. This is an important and seminal suggestion. The problem, however, is to find information about these legendary interpretations which, allegedly, were current in first century C.E. Judaism. That such Jewish legendary traditions did indeed exist is evident from the Targums, the Talmud, and the Ezekiel panel of the Dura Europos synagogue.¹⁰³⁰ But whether the existence of these legends may be “extrapolated back” to the first century C.E. is highly debatable.

Nevertheless, on the assumption that they may be, R. Aguirre suggests that parallels with these legends are to be encountered in Matt 27:51b-53. Consequently, he concludes that, “It seems without doubt that Matt 27:51b-53 supposes an interpretation of Ezek. 37:1-14 of the style of that reflected in the paintings of the Synagogue of Dura, in the traditional Jewish line, closer to the targum than that of the Hebrew or Greek text.”¹⁰³¹ However, in the opinion of R. E. Brown, “None of this material is a totally reliable guide to 1st cent. AD folkloric understanding

¹⁰²⁷ For example: Senior, “The Death of Jesus and the Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51-53)”; Troxel, “Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered.”

¹⁰²⁸ For example: Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*.

¹⁰²⁹ Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo, 27, 51b-53*, 94-97.

¹⁰³⁰ See Curtis, “An Investigation of the Mount of Olives in the Judaeo-Christian Tradition,” 137-179. For description of the Dura Europos paintings see references in 9.3.2.4 above.

¹⁰³¹ Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo, 27, 51b-53*, 94. “Parece indudable que Matt 27, 51b-53 supone una interpretación de Ezek 37, 1-14 del estilo de la que reflejan las pinturas de la sinagoga de Dura, en la línea de la tradición judía, más cerca del targum que del text hebreo o griego.”

of the raising of the dead, but it may well be closer to that understanding than is modern exegesis of OT texts pertaining to the subject.”¹⁰³²

Aguirre’s suggestions are interesting and could perhaps prove a challenge to some of the arguments of this thesis. For, if a parallel does exist between Matt 27:51b-53 and the Jewish legends found in the Targums, or depicted in the Dura Synagogue paintings, and so on then this could mean either (a) that these legends were current in New Testament times, or (b) that Matt 27:51b-53 belongs to a time late in, or even later than, the first century C.E. This could be construed as evidence that this passage has been added at a late date to the First Gospel, and yet added early enough to still be part of the canonical text. However, Matt 27:51b-53 does have a distinct “Jewish” tinge¹⁰³³ which implies that its origin is to be found at the beginnings of the Christian Faith and not in the second or third centuries C.E. Further, Matt 27:51b-53 is not just a superficial addition, an interpolation, as it were, in Matthew’s Gospel. It is woven into the fabric of Matthew’s passion-resurrection account and so is an integral part of the whole First Gospel.

9.3.2.9 Brief Summary of Suggestions relating to the Origin of Matt 27:51b-53

In this Chapter 9 various questions relating to the origin of Matt 27:51b-53 have been raised, if not answered.¹⁰³⁴ Obviously, some person (or persons) created this passage, Matt 27:51b-53. But who this person(s) was, when these words were penned, how they were composed, and, as chapter 11 will enquire, why they were composed, and why they were included in the First Gospel, really remains a mystery.

That the origin of Matt 27:51b-53 lies within the First Gospel and that the passage is, for some reason, a misplaced resurrection account, has been well tried but found wanting. However, the fact that in recent years this approach has, to a certain degree, been revived (at

¹⁰³² Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1123, fn 62.

¹⁰³³ Matt 27:52 implies that the *one* event of the Messiah’s death resulted in End Time resurrection.

¹⁰³⁴ These questions have been made on the assumption that the pericope, Matt 27:51b-53, including the phrase μετὰ κτλ, belongs to the original text of the First Gospel.

least to my mind) by, for instance, J. D. Crossan¹⁰³⁵ means that it cannot be completely dismissed. It remains a possibility.

Whatever answer is given concerning its authorship there is some general agreement that Matt 27:51b-53 reflects Jewish apocalyptic and eschatological themes, and that it perhaps goes back to reflection on Old Testament passages like Ezek 37:1-14; Zech 14:1-21; Dan 12:1-4; Isa 26:19 and *1 En.* 96, or that it may reflect a Jewish apocalyptic hymn (describing the end-time resurrection of the dead), or a Jewish Passover liturgy.¹⁰³⁶ This unfortunately, is where the agreement ends. For, inevitably, various questions again arise. Matthew around 85C.E. or so may, on the basis of the *texts* of the above passages, have created Matt 27:51b-53 and then incorporated it into his own, or into Mark's, passion account?¹⁰³⁷ This would perhaps explain why the passage is unique and appears only in the First Gospel.¹⁰³⁸ Matthew may perhaps have used an earlier literary source, a *Vorlage*, whose writer(s) had used the *texts* of the above OT passages. Matthew may then have redacted this source, by adding μετὰ κτλ. However, the use by Matthew either directly, or indirectly (that is, via the use of a *vorlage*) of the *text* of OT passages (especially of Ezek 37:1-14) should perhaps be challenged. For it is debatable whether "Matthew" in 27:51b-53 actually quotes the texts of these passages.

Accordingly, it could well be that Matt 27:51b-53 reflects not the *texts* of passages like Ezek 37:1-14 and Zech 14:1-21, but, as mentioned above, the Jewish legends about these and other texts which circulated in New Testament times.¹⁰³⁹ That such legends existed in later times is evident from the Targums, the Talmud, and the paintings of the Dura Europos synagogue. That these legends existed and circulated in Jewish circles in NT times however is an assumption which is open to challenge. Nevertheless, if these legends did to some extent

¹⁰³⁵ See Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 145; Crossan, *The Cross that Spoke*, 404. For further discussion of Crossan's approach to Matt 27:51b-53 see 8.3.2.3 above and Appendix A.

¹⁰³⁶ See Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 58-9; Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27,51b-53, 64, fn 16; 65-6; 72-84; Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1118-9; 1138-9; Senior, "The Death of Jesus and the Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51-53)," 320; Senior, "Matthew's Special Material in the Passion Story," 272-6; Troxel, "Matt 27.51-4 Reconsidered," 30-33; Schenk, *Der Passionsbericht nach Markus*, 78.

¹⁰³⁷ As argued by Senior, "The Death of Jesus and the Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51-53)" and Troxel, "Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered."

¹⁰³⁸ But in the light of the Gospel of Peter (see Appendix A) even this alleged uniqueness of Matt 27:51b-53 may be questioned.

¹⁰³⁹ Cf. the important remarks of Le Deaut, "Apropos a Definition of Midrash," 259-82, especially 277.

permeate the “atmosphere”, as it were, which the common people in NT times breathed, it could well be that some saw in Matt 27:51b-53 a reference, and even a “fulfilment” of the hopes these legends enshrined and expressed. The events recorded in Matt 27:51b-53 may have been designed to act as a catalyst and so crystallize in the minds of the average Jewish person a sense, a belief, that the legendary hopes of centuries had been at last fulfilled. This could well explain why these words are found only in the First Gospel. The largely Gentile audiences, for whom Mark and Luke seem to have written, would have had no real knowledge of these peculiar Jewish legends and so would accordingly have found Matt 27:51b-53 quite incomprehensible.

Furthermore, the acknowledged “Jewishness” of this passage, Matt 27:51b-53, and its possible connection, via Ezek 37:1-14, to the “*Haftorah*” of the Jewish Passover¹⁰⁴⁰ suggests that its origin was not only quite early but that originally it belonged from its beginning to some passion account. At this point attention may once again be drawn to R. E. Brown’s suggestion that to an original quatrain, vv. 51b-52, Matthew added the words of v. 53.¹⁰⁴¹ This approach has problems. If the quatrain (vv. 51b-52) “floated” around by itself in early tradition it would have been quite meaningless. Thus, it is difficult to understand how the quatrain could have continued very long in tradition unless it was connected in some way to an account of the death of Jesus. Consequently, Matt 27:51b-53 must have belonged to some sort of passion account from the earliest beginnings.

Accordingly, with regard to the origin of Matt 27:51b-53 it may be argued that its creation was quite early, that it was part of a Jewish Christian interpretation of Jesus’ death (cf. the passover “*Haftorah*” and Matt 26:17-29), and that it reflects, and even possibly hints at, some Jewish eschological hopes enshrined in legends arising from passages like Ezek 37:1-14; Zech 14:1-21; Dan 12:1-4; Isa 26:19; and so on.¹⁰⁴² This early passion account¹⁰⁴³ Matthew,

¹⁰⁴⁰ There is evidence from the time of the Seleucids that in synagogue worship the reading of the Law / Torah was followed by a related prophetic text (called ‘*Haftorah*’ – cf. *b.Meg.* 31a; Luke 4:16; Acts 13:15). See Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo, 27, 51b-53*, 94-5.

¹⁰⁴¹ See Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1118-9.

¹⁰⁴² For traces of these Jewish legends see *b.Sanh.* 90b; *b.Sanh.* 92b; *b.Meg.* 31a; *b.Ketub.* III a,b.

around 85 C.E. or so, incorporated into his Gospel. Thus, Matthew did not create these words, or obtain them from an earlier *vorlage*, and then add them to Mark's passion account. Rather, these words belonged to a very early passion account which went back perhaps even to the mid fourth decade C.E. Various traditions, versions, of this basic passion account came into being, one of which "Matthew" redacted and made his own. And if Matt 27:51b-53 belongs to early Christian tradition then the question arises as to who composed it. Accordingly it is possible, although highly debatable, that the person(s) behind this piece of Matthean tradition could well have been the early Apostles themselves.¹⁰⁴⁴

Another controversial matter also arises: does Matt 27:51b-53 reflect a very early tradition, traces of which are perhaps found in writings like the *Gospel of Peter*, cf. v. 19, that at his death Jesus ascended direct from the cross to the heavenlies? Since the language of Matt 27:51b-53 implies that at Jesus' death something supernatural happened this may have been understood by some to have been the *parousia* or something akin to the *parousia*. However when Matthew, around 85 C.E. or so, wrote his Gospel it is clear that he has distanced himself from this suggestion that at the death of Jesus the final End occurred.¹⁰⁴⁵ Consequently, by incorporating Matt 27:51b-53 into his passion-resurrection narrative Matthew seems to have contradicted himself. In chapter 11 an attempt will be made to explain why at this point in his Gospel Matthew saw fit to include this fragment of very early tradition.

¹⁰⁴³ Transmitted orally or in writing? cf. Luke 1:1-4.

¹⁰⁴⁴ See the comments and suggestions of Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, esp.351-355.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Cf. such references as Matt 24:14; 25:31-46; 28:16-20. These verses suggest a period of Gospel mission before the final End.

Chapter 10 Matt 27:51b-53. The Problem of Interpretation

(v. 51b) “Καὶ ἡ γῆ ἐσεισθη καὶ αἱ πέτραι ἐσχίσθησαν (v. 52) καὶ τὰ μνημεῖα ἀνεώχθησαν καὶ πολλὰ σώματα τῶν κεκοιμημένων ἁγίων ἠγέρθησαν (v. 53) καὶ ἐξελθόντες ἐκ τῶν μνημείων μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ εἰσῆλθον εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν καὶ ἐνεφανίσθησαν πολλοῖς”

(v. 51b) “And the earth was shaken and the rocks were split (v. 52) and the tombs were opened and many bodies of the sleeping holy ones were raised (v. 53) and coming out of the tombs after his raising they entered the holy city¹⁰⁴⁶ and were made visible to many.”

These verses raise acutely the important question of hermeneutics – that is, of interpretation, of genre, and especially of “historicity”. This is an issue which runs like a fault line through the many studies of these verses creating division between various writers and their suggestions about the meaning and purpose of this passage. Granted that Matt 27:51b-53 has been composed by someone, the question arises as to what sort of literary creation it is. The passage was written either to convey “historical fact” – that is, to convey correct information about events which actually happened in time and space, or it was written to express, symbolically, religious truth. The lack of unanimity with regard to this question finds expression in some words of Davies and Allison: “We discern in vv. 51-53 not history but a poetic or mythological expression of the profound meaning of Jesus’ death. We none the less admit that a literal interpretation has dominated Christian history.”¹⁰⁴⁷

Various reasons for denying outright the “historicity” and the “factuality” of the events mentioned in Matt 27:51b-53 have been suggested.¹⁰⁴⁸ For example:

10:1 The Outright Rejection of the Supernatural.

¹⁰⁴⁶ It is generally accepted that this expression refers to the earthly city of Jerusalem. For discussion see Appendix E.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:632.

¹⁰⁴⁸ The question of how such terms as “historicity” and “fact” are to be defined also creates debate. Suffice to say here that it has to be conceded that “bare facts” do not exist – knowledge of facts, events, in history cannot be separated from the subjective reception and interpretation made by those who report such matters. Cf. J. D. G. Dunn’s comment that Jesus’ words were only remembered because they were deemed, by humans, to be important. See Dunn, *A New Perspective on Jesus*, 30. See also Holmberg, “Questions of Method in James Dunn’s *Jesus Remembered*,” 445-457.

(i) A reluctance to accept the possibility of the supernatural has led some to deny the “historicity” and “factuality” of the events mentioned in Matt 27:51b-53.¹⁰⁴⁹

(ii) Further, the “historicity” of the events of Matt 27:51b-53 has been rejected because the pericope is regarded as a literary creation composed by Matthew from various sources.¹⁰⁵⁰ This, according to some, would perhaps explain why these sensational events have left no trace in the other New Testament writings.¹⁰⁵¹ Likewise some note that if the many resurrected holy ones had already appeared in Jerusalem, then why did not the Apostles in their Jerusalem sermon (Acts 2:14-36) seize that which had been factually given concerning the beginning of the messianic reign and declare it as proof of Jesus being the Messiah?¹⁰⁵²

(iii) The “historicity” of the events of Matt 27:51b-53 has been rejected by some in order to achieve harmony with other NT Scriptures. Matt 27:52’s declaration that “the bodies of many sleeping holy ones” were raised before Jesus himself contradicts Paul’s insistence that Jesus was the firstborn from the dead.¹⁰⁵³

10.2 Arguments for a Literal Understanding of the Events Depicted in Matt 27:51b-53.

These include:

(1) The chronology of the passage. While the pericope itself contains no absolute chronological statement, the words μετὰ κτλ (v.53) give a relative chronological meaning.¹⁰⁵⁴ They tie the events of vv. 51b-52, time-wise, in with the events of v. 53. Thus if, in the light of the empty tomb, Jesus’ raising is to be understood as an event in history, then the inference is that so are the events of vv. 51b- 52. Accordingly, in Riebl’s opinion, “Obviously, he (Matthew)

¹⁰⁴⁹ See comments by Bruner, *The Church Book, Matthew 13-28*, 761.

¹⁰⁵⁰ See Troxel, “Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered,” 44, fn 81.

¹⁰⁵¹ See Senior, “Matthew’s Special Material in the Passion Story,” 278.

¹⁰⁵² See A. Winklhofer, “2. Corpora Sanctorum (Matt 27, 51ff): Zu H. Zellers gleichnamigen Beitrag in *Zeitschrift fuer katholische Theologie* 71, 1949,” *Theologisch-praktische Quartalschrift* 133 (1953): 40; also A. Winklhofer, “4. Corpora Sanctorum (Fortsetzung von Heft 1/53),” *Theologisch-praktische Quartalschrift* 133 (1953): 215.

¹⁰⁵³ Acts 26:23; 1 Cor 15:20-21; Col 1:18; 1 Thess 4:14; Rev 1:5. See Winklhofer, “2. Corpora Sanctorum (Matt 27, 51ff),” 33. The important question as whether in Paul “firstborn” could mean “first in significance” rather than “first in time” will not be pursued.

¹⁰⁵⁴ See Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 22-3.

understands the report literally and interprets it in the sense of the ancient Jewish resurrection picture, according to which the dead would arise out of the Tomb.”¹⁰⁵⁵

(2) While the events of Matt 27:51b-52 find echoes in OT Scripture, and so may be regarded as being derived there from,¹⁰⁵⁶ yet the words “and they appeared to many” (καὶ ἐνεφανίσθησαν πολλοῖς) cannot be identified as a quotation from the OT or related literature. Accordingly, A.Winklhofer¹⁰⁵⁷ grants, albeit reluctantly (he is not in favour of a literal understanding) that this gives Matt 27:51b-53 its historical character.

(3) That Matthew understood the events of vv. 51b-53 as actually having happened seems confirmed beyond all doubt by the words of v. 54. Here Matthew declares that “the centurion and those with him guarding Jesus beholding *the earthquake and the things that happened* feared greatly.” (ὁ δὲ ἑκατόνταρχος καὶ οἱ μετ’ αὐτοῦ τηροῦντες τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἰδόντες τὸν σεισμὸν καὶ τὰ γενόμενα ἐφοβήθησαν σφόδρά). With regard to historicity v. 54 seems quite decisive – it implies that Matthew understood the events of Matt 27:51b-53 to have actually happened. The centurion and his soldiers saw the earthquake and its aftermath.¹⁰⁵⁸

¹⁰⁵⁵ See Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 61. According to Turner, *Matthew*, 670: “There are many difficulties concerning the nature and sequence of events in this extremely unusual pericope. ... but it is not helpful to take it as a non historical literary-theological creation. If this resurrection is intended to preview the ultimate resurrection of humanity ... it is important that it be as genuine as that of Jesus. Only a historical resurrection can be an effect of Jesus’s resurrection and an omen of the final resurrection (cf. 1 Cor 15:20-28).”

¹⁰⁵⁶ (i) for *shaking* see Judg 5:4; Isa 5:25, 24:18; Ezek 38:19; Jer 4:23-24; Joel 2:10; *T. Levi* 3:9; *I En.* 1:3-8; Ps 77:18; 2 Sam 22:7-8; (ii) for *rocks being rent* see LXX Isa 2:19; 1 Kgs 19:11-12; Zech 14:4; Nahum 1:5-6; *T. Levi* 4:1; (iii) for *tombs being opened* see Ezek 37:12-14; (iv) for *sleeping holy ones being raised* see *I En.* 91:10; *4 Ezra* 7:32; Dan 7:22; 12:2; (v) for *entry into the holy city* - perhaps Ezek 37:14.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Winklhofer, “2. Corpora Sanctorum (Matt 27, 51ff),” 60.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Some, e.g. Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew’s Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, 156-7, seem to suggest that Matt 27:54 implies that the soldiers experienced not a literal earthquake, but rather a *vision* of such. Note: The verb ἐμφανίζεῖν (see v. 53) in the passive can, it seems, have an active meaning, “to appear” (cf. Heb 9:24 ὡς ἐμφανισθῆναι τῷ προσώπῳ τοῦ θεοῦ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν). However, I would agree with Brown (*The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1132, fn 89) that, “in the instance of the raised dead only God can make them appear.” Thus, it is to be understood that the holy ones having been raised into a transcendent realm were, by the agency of divine power, made visible (for a brief moment?) to some mortal humans in Jerusalem. Since the words, “and were made visible to many” can scarcely apply to heaven, they imply that the expression “holy city” is to be understood as the earthly rather than the heavenly Jerusalem. Further, this also implies that the raised holy ones were not seen coming out of their tombs by the soldiers at the cross, but were seen only, later, after Jesus’ resurrection, by some in Jerusalem. This in turn dictates how the expression καὶ τὰ γενόμενα (v. 54) is to be understood and its contents ascertained.

10.3 The Words of Matt 27:51b-53 are to be Understood Figuratively

Basic to this approach is the thought that while events are mentioned which could belong to actual history, yet these seemingly historical events are to be understood symbolically, as conveying, as it were, only theological truth.¹⁰⁵⁹ While this approach is popular yet among its advocates there is no unanimity. Accordingly, while some may grant that the contents of Matt 27:51b-53 have perhaps some claim to historicity, others are adamant that these verses are to be regarded as but a theological interpretation of the import of the death of Jesus, an interpretation in the language and imagery of apocalyptic. Thus, the six phenomena mentioned in Matt 27:51b-53, and even the three hours of darkness and the rending of the temple curtain (27:45, 51a) are, according to some, not to be understood as actually having occurred in time and space. Rather, it is said, they should be understood as a human attempt to express the significance of Jesus' death in a language and genre other than history – that is, in the language of apocalyptic and eschatology found in the OT Books (e.g. Ezek 37; Zech 14), and in the writings of the Intertestamental period. Thus, for instance:

(a) Rudolf Schnackenburg writes, “(T)he text (Matt 27:51b-53) is to be understood only as a theological concept portrayed as an event (cf. death of Caesar: Virgil, *Georgics* 1, 475; appearances of the dead, Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 51, 17.5).”¹⁰⁶⁰ Consequently, in his opinion, “the entire passage belongs to a stylistic genre peculiar to Matthew and is not to be analyzed historically (cf. Matthew 1, 2). Matthew imagines that the centurion and his men saw the earthquake and these happenings, and, seized with great fear, acknowledged Jesus as the Son of God.”¹⁰⁶¹

(b) Others, while understanding Matt 27:51b-53 figuratively, agree that the passage does have a historical tinge, as it were.

¹⁰⁵⁹ France, *The Gospel of Matthew* [2007], 1081, writes: “As with many of Jesus' scientifically unexplainable miracles, Matthew is not interested in satisfying our natural curiosity or answering empirical skepticism. He tells the story for its symbolic significance.”

¹⁰⁶⁰ Schnackenburg, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 290.

¹⁰⁶¹ Schnackenburg, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 290. See also Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 100-8.

(i) A. Winklhofer, for example, speaks of Matt 27:51b-53 as a “mixed quotation” (consisting of history, prophecy and typology)¹⁰⁶² in which the plain of historical reality crosses into another (that of future, eschatological salvation).¹⁰⁶³ According to Winklhofer, Matt 27:51b-53 speaks, first, of the present (that is, Jesus’ Easter Friday death) as the moment when Jesus seized power, when as Messiah he was “elevated / exalted”¹⁰⁶⁴. Then, secondly, Matt 27:51b-53 says that Jesus’ seizure of power attests to a future symbolic resurrection of many dead.¹⁰⁶⁵ Thus in Matt 27:51b-53 there is genuine prophetic display in which the present (Jesus’ death) and the future perfection of salvation (resurrection of many) are blended, mixed, together.¹⁰⁶⁶

Winklhofer agrees that the expression “they entered the holy city and appeared to many” gives Matt 27:51b-53 its historical character. But while the earthly Jerusalem is thought of first of all, at the same time it stands as a type for the heavenly Jerusalem of the messianic fulfilment.¹⁰⁶⁷ Thus, according to Winklhofer, the saints’ entering the holy city is a messianic future End Time event and so need not to be taken as the attestation of an historical fact.¹⁰⁶⁸ Consequently, Winklhofer concludes that this mixing of historical and typological elements relieves the exegetical problems of Matt 27:51b-53 and means that the historical understanding of the passage plays no more role.¹⁰⁶⁹ Basically, Winklhofer’s view is that Matt 27:51-53 reports events simply in OT pictures, as a *sign* that salvation has dawned.¹⁰⁷⁰

(ii) The Approach of R. E. Brown.¹⁰⁷¹

R. E. Brown regards Matt 27:51b-52 as a preMatthean quatrain and understands its four phenomena as eschatological symbolism. To this quatrain, received from popular tradition,

¹⁰⁶² That is “Matt 27:51b-53 represents an OT *Mischzitat* composed on the basis of Isa 2:19; 26:19; Ezek 37:12; Dan 12:2; Nah 1:6 and Wis 3:8, which is to be taken literally, but not historically.” (from Hutton, “The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51b-53),” 150-1.

¹⁰⁶³ Winklhofer, “2. Corpora Sanctorum (Matt 27, 51ff),” 52-5.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Winklhofer wonders (“2. Corpora Sanctorum (Matt 27, 51ff),” 50) if there is a parallel with Zeph 3:8 (LXX).

¹⁰⁶⁵ Winklhofer, “2. Corpora Sanctorum (Matt 27, 51ff),” 55.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Winklhofer, “2. Corpora Sanctorum (Matt 27, 51ff),” 59.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Winklhofer, “2. Corpora Sanctorum (Matt 27, 51ff),” 59-60.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Winklhofer, “2. Corpora Sanctorum (Matt 27, 51ff),” 60-1.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Winklhofer, “2. Corpora Sanctorum (Matt 27, 51ff),” 67.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Winklhofer, “4. Corpora Sanctorum (Fortsetzung von Heft 1/53),” 212.

¹⁰⁷¹ Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1139-40.

Matthew in v. 53 has added his own comment and thereby extended (cf. especially the words μετὰ κτλ) the eschatological symbolism associated with Jesus' death to Easter and Jesus' own resurrection.¹⁰⁷² By doing this Matthew, according to Brown, has done more justice to the Pauline insistence on the priority of Jesus' resurrection¹⁰⁷³ by having the holy ones who had been raised on Friday enter the holy city and be made visible only "after Jesus' raising."

Further, according to Brown, Matthew has in v. 53 supplemented the quatrain of vv. 51b-52 in order to illustrate the fulfilment of Scripture. Brown¹⁰⁷⁴ conjectures that the first part of Ezek 37:12-13, "I will open your tombs" probably shaped the third line of the quatrain of Matt 27:51b-52, "And the tombs were opened."¹⁰⁷⁵ And since the Ezekiel passage continues, "And I will bring you up out of your tombs, and I will lead you into the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the Lord," Brown suggests that in v. 53 the words "And having come out from the tombs ... they entered into the holy city (cf. Jerusalem)" are designed by Matthew to be understood as a further fulfilment of the Ezekiel passage.¹⁰⁷⁶

Basic to Brown's approach is the assumption that the early Christians felt free to attach eschatological symbolism to any one of the events in the sequence death-resurrection-ascension-gift of the Spirit (which from God's viewpoint are only different aspects of one timeless moment).¹⁰⁷⁷ This freedom, according to Brown, finds illustration in Acts 2:16-20, a passage which sees fulfilled at Pentecost the prophecy of Joel that before the coming of the day of the Lord there would be wonders in heaven above and signs on earth below (blood, fire, a

¹⁰⁷² Does this mean that the language about Jesus' resurrection is also to be understood as symbolic and so not historical? The corollary also holds. If Jesus' resurrection belongs to history, then by this linkage does Matthew want the contents of vv. 51b-52 to be understood as history and not just as a symbolic theological construction? If so, then Matthew wants it to be understood, as an historical reality, that at the moment of Jesus' death many sleeping holy ones in the vicinity of Jerusalem were raised to new life.

¹⁰⁷³ Cf. Col 1:18.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1139-40.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Others contend that if there has been any OT influence here a more likely passage would have been Zech 14:4-5.

¹⁰⁷⁶ This also is debatable. Ezek 37:12-13 happens in the *diaspora* and the return is to the land of Israel. In Matthew the sleeping saints are in the land of Israel, and their resurrection takes place near the city of Jerusalem. Also unconvincing is the suggestion by Brown that Isa 26:19 (LXX) "and those in the land (or, on the earth) shall rejoice ..." reflects Matthew's "and they were made visible to many." For, how the many to whom the raised holy ones were made visible (v. 53) reacted – whether with joy, fear, or indifference – is not disclosed.

¹⁰⁷⁷ See Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1139. The theological implications of these words in brackets should perhaps be noted. They could imply that God's saving event (as proclaimed in the Gospel) took place in eternity and not in historical time and space.

cloud of smoke, sun turned to darkness, moon turned to blood). This Acts passage, Brown suggests, is the Lucan equivalent of Matt 27:51b-53 in emphasizing apocalyptic signs. It cautions against too readily historicizing the symbolic. Brown notes that there have been few attempts to claim that on Pentecost the moon actually turned to blood, while there have been many attempts to treat the Matthean eschatological signs as historical.¹⁰⁷⁸

(iii) The Contribution of D. M. Gurtner

A more recent approach to the question of how Matt 27:51b-53 is to be understood – figuratively or otherwise – has been suggested by D. M. Gurtner.¹⁰⁷⁹ Gurtner assumes that the Temple veil which was torn in two at the moment of Jesus’ death was the “inner veil” – that is, the one which separated “the holy place” from “the holy of holies.” This veil, with its embroidered Cherubim (Exod 26:31; 36:35; 2 Chr 3:14) “prohibited *physical* and *visual* accessibility to the holy of holies”,¹⁰⁸⁰ that is, to the presence of God.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Does Brown here perhaps prejudge the issue? Has he not assumed that what Matthew says in Matt 27:51b-53 is to be understood as eschatological and apocalyptic, and not as history? But is this not what has to be established? Further, Brown seems to have overlooked the fact that on the day of Pentecost literal, extraordinary historical events did actually occur. There was, according to Luke, “a sound like a rush of violent wind” (Acts 2:2); “divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among the disciples” (2:3); and the disciples “began to speak in other languages”. So real were these events that they attracted an astonished crowd (2:5-13). Further, to correct this crowd’s mistaken (and naturalistic) interpretation of these events, Peter stood up and, by quoting from the prophet Joel, explained that the same historical events they had witnessed were of Divine origin and were a fulfilment of the apocalyptic words of Joel (Acts 2:14-21). If, as Brown suggests, the Acts passage (Acts 2:16-20) is “the Lucan equivalent of Matt 27:51b-53 in emphasizing apocalyptic signs ...” the question arises: What are the extraordinary historical events to which the (alleged) apocalyptic signs of Matt 27:51b-53 refer to and explain? On this approach, being advocated by Brown, what the words of Matt 27:51b-53, understood as apocalyptic signs (cf. Joel 2:28-32) correspond to, are not events in historical time and space (as in Acts 2:2-13) but rather to cerebral theological truths – that is, to a verbal illustration of the theological achievements which Jesus accomplished by his crucifixion. Thus, according to Brown, “All the phenomena ... (in Matt 27:51b-53) ... represent a theological interpretation of the import of the death of Jesus, an interpretation in the language and imagery apocalyptic ... (and) ... to make a matter of major concern their literal historicity is to fail to understand their nature as symbols and the literary genre in which they are presented.” (See Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1133 and 1140. The problem with this approach is that Matthew clearly links vv. 51b-53 with v. 54 (the soldiers see the earthquake, and its aftermath). Thus, for Matthew the contents of vv. 51b-53, in addition to expressing theological truths, also indicate the occurrence of real historical events. Further, the Christians to whom Matthew wrote were in conflict with unbelievers (Jewish and Gentile) who denied the historical events on which the Christian Faith rested. (See Matt 28:11-15). It would, accordingly, seem strange if in Matt 27:51b-53 Matthew stresses the theological-apocalyptic at the expense of the factual-historical.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew’s Exposition of the Death of Jesus*.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew’s Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, 64 (Emphasis original).

Further, Gurtner suggests that a relationship is to be understood to exist between the veil's Cherubim and Gen 3:24¹⁰⁸¹ - that is, the garden of Eden (cf. the Temple's "holy of holies") is a temple-like sanctuary, the way to which is guarded by Cherubim. Thus in Gurtner's opinion, "it seems possible that the *velum scissum* in Matthew's gospel could depict the removal of the angelic guardianship against entering into the (edenic) presence of God."¹⁰⁸²

Gurtner also draws attention to Rabbinic sources which, in the light of Gen 1:6, depict the temple veil as symbolic of the heavenly firmament.¹⁰⁸³ Accordingly, the temple may be understood as a gateway from earth to heaven, and its veil as a barrier between heaven and earth, behind which divine secrets are kept. Consequently, the veil's removal depicts revelation of biblical truths.¹⁰⁸⁴

Thus, Gurtner suggests that the Matthean *velum scissum* depicts two striking "comments" on the significance of Jesus' death. First, it occasions an apocalyptic opening of heaven whereby the following material¹⁰⁸⁵ is conveyed as a heavenly vision depicting the sovereignty of God despite the tragic event of Jesus' death.¹⁰⁸⁶ And, secondly, the Matthean *velum scissum* depicts the cessation of its function, which is generally to separate God from people; hence its rending permits accessibility to God in a manner not seen since Genesis 3.¹⁰⁸⁷

With regard to the "historicity" of the events of Matt 27:51b-53 Gurtner reasons as follows: "Within a pericope that employs apocalyptic imagery there is a disclosure of *heavenly* secrets and the 'events' viewed need not occur anywhere in a visionary experience. Instead, the importance of such a vision lies in the fact that it is revealed from heaven and seen in an apocalyptic vision."¹⁰⁸⁸ Accordingly, Gurtner notes that, "scholars who press this pericope into

¹⁰⁸¹ Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, 57-8.

¹⁰⁸² Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, 69.

¹⁰⁸³ Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, 88-9.

¹⁰⁸⁴ See Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, 95.

¹⁰⁸⁵ The "following material" refers to Matt 27:51b-54. Both the "special material" (that is, Matt 27:51b-53) and the "centurion's profession" (that is, Matt 27:54) function as commentary on Jesus' death. See Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, 142.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, 139. Note also that Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, 141, draws attention to καὶ ἰδοὺ (27:51a) – a visual term – which seems to assert the unexpected, theophanic nature of the events following Jesus' death.

¹⁰⁸⁷ See Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, 139.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, 156.

a temporal / spatial grid, rather than its occurring in a visionary context, have characteristically had trouble dealing with the problem that despite its enormous apologetic value, we have no reports of any raised holy ones being seen outside of Matthew's account of this startling event."¹⁰⁸⁹

Gurtner, however, acknowledges that his approach raises questions. He writes, "If then, there are apocalyptic images, they occur in a visionary context and their precise location is likely immaterial. This raises several issues that now must be addressed."¹⁰⁹⁰ The first issue is: what did the soldiers "see" (27:54)? According to Matthew they saw "τὸν σεισμὸν καὶ τὰ γενόμενα." This raises the difficult question of what exactly "τὰ γενόμενα" includes.¹⁰⁹¹ In Gurtner's opinion, "τὰ γενόμενα" "clearly refers to the incidents recorded subsequent to the earthquake."¹⁰⁹² He further notes that D. Hill¹⁰⁹³ refers to these incidents as "apocalyptic events" rather than signs. If "apocalyptic" means eschatological, or symbolic (non-literal)¹⁰⁹⁴ then these incidents are to be understood as visionary and so outside of normal history. In Gurtner's opinion, "that the soldiers are seeing a heavenly vision is underscored by the nature of their first immediate response: fear (designating the manifestation of divine power)."¹⁰⁹⁵ Thus Gurtner concludes: "What they saw in this heavenly vision included all the 'events' from the earthquake onward (excluding the veil). They are, then, having an apocalyptic vision, without necessarily having any reality outside the vision itself."¹⁰⁹⁶

The second issue Gurtner's approach raises is: can Gentiles be said to be recipients of a heavenly (Jewish) vision?¹⁰⁹⁷ In the light of Acts 10:4-7 Gurtner replies positively – for this passage declares that Cornelius, a Gentile, was given a "Jewish" vision (of salvation and not of

¹⁰⁸⁹ Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, 157.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, 163.

¹⁰⁹¹ See, for instance, Waters, "Matthew 27:52-53 as Apocalyptic Apostrophe," 491-2, 504.

¹⁰⁹² Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, 165.

¹⁰⁹³ Hill, "Matthew 27:51-53 in the Theology of the Evangelist," 76.

¹⁰⁹⁴ See Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, 153.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, 166.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, 157.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, 163.

judgment).¹⁰⁹⁸ Gurtner also notes that an eschatological conversion of Gentiles at the end of the age was expected.¹⁰⁹⁹

The third issue raised by Gurtner's approach merges into the important question of the purpose of Matt 27:51b-53, 54. Thus, he asks: "what is the nature of the 'events' seen in a visionary context? Are they comments simply on the present situation at Golgotha, or are they predictions of some future reality on earth?"¹¹⁰⁰ Gurtner's answer to this question rests on his contention that "if the *velum scissum* is associated with the opening of heaven¹¹⁰¹ ... then what follows serves as the content of the revelation".¹¹⁰² What then has been revealed by the *velum scissum*? First, the so-called "special material" of Matt 27:51b-53. Gurtner sums up this revelation as follows: "That is, Jesus' death has itself occasioned a revelatory assertion indicating its own significance. Upon the opening of heaven it is revealed, through the use of apocalyptic images, that Jesus' death has brought about the onset of the turning of an eschatological age from Ezekiel 37,¹¹⁰³ in which God will dwell among his people."¹¹⁰⁴ In the second place, as a result of the *velum scissum*, it has been revealed that Jesus is "son of God" (cf. Matt 27:54). According to Gurtner, "the action of the soldiers is specifically the result of something that was revealed to them, culminating in the ἀληθῶς θεοῦ υἱὸς ἦν οὗτος statement."¹¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁹⁸ Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, 168.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, 166. See Matt 12:41-42; Isa 2:2-3; 11:9-10; 25:6-7; 45:20-25; Zech. 8; Tob 13:11; *Pss. Sol.* 17:32-35 (30-31).

¹¹⁰⁰ Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, 163.

¹¹⁰¹ That is, with the giving of divine revelation.

¹¹⁰² Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, 178.

¹¹⁰³ Gurtner regards Ezek 37 as an important source from which Matthew drew. See, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, 168.

¹¹⁰⁴ Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, 178.

¹¹⁰⁵ Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, 179. In the concluding summary of his thesis, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, 200, Gurtner notes that, "as early as Mark or Josephus, and probably earlier, the veil of the temple was part of a larger Jewish cosmology, dating perhaps to Ezekiel but surely at least to Ben Sira. This cosmology saw the different parts of the temple as representative of different parts of the universe; the veil, in this scheme, represented the heavenly firmament from Gen 1:6 ... Its rending then connoted the opening of heaven, a well-attested apocalyptic image introducing a revelatory assertion. The veil, as the heavenly firmament, was thought to conceal heavenly secrets, with its removal depicting the revelation of biblical truths. This revelatory assertion, taken over from Mark, is enhanced by Matthew and designates the following special material (27:51b-53) as apocalyptic images. These images have been widely seen to reflect the eschatological prophecy of Ezek 37. It is important that for Matthew these remarkable eschatological events designate the turning of the page in God's soteriological saga, the dawning of the messianic age which Matthew uniquely and clearly indicates is inaugurated by the death of Jesus. Matthew asserts that the life-giving

10.4 The Impasse concerning the Historicity of the Events of Matt 27:51b-53.

In the light of the various approaches outlined above, it would seem that with regards to the question of the historicity of the events depicted in Matt 27:51b-53, that an impasse has been reached. For, the inescapable question constantly arises: What, according to Matthew, actually happened when Jesus died? Does he really want his readers to conclude that there was in fact an earthquake, a real resurrection of the bodies of some holy ones, and so on? Or, does Matthew want all these events to be understood symbolically? Further, if none of these events actually happened in time and space, must it be concluded, as it would be perfectly right to do so, that no matter how much one praises and eulogizes Jesus and the achievements of his death, whether in apocalyptic or any other language, it is all cerebral, a creation of the human mind?

Not surprisingly this combination in Matt 27:51b-53 of language that may be understood as both historical and figurative has puzzled many. J. Nolland, for instance, acknowledges that there is “uncertainty about the boundary between symbol and event in the account.”¹¹⁰⁶ D. A. Hagner notes that “the passage contains obviously symbolic and apocalyptic motifs yet continues in the genre of historical narrative.”¹¹⁰⁷ In his opinion, since “this passage is a piece of theology set forth as history ... (we may regard it) ... as a piece of realized and historicized apocalyptic depending on OT motifs found in such passages as Isa 26:19, Dan 12:2 and especially Ezek 37:12-14 ...”¹¹⁰⁸

The suggestion, however, that Matt 27:51b-53 is best understood as metaphorical or symbolic is not entirely convincing. For chapter 27 of Matthew has all the appearance of being in intention a straightforward description of historical events. The Roman soldiers (27:54), very real historical persons, experienced the earthquake. The resurrected saints are said to have entered the holy city, the earthly Jerusalem, and appeared to many. It is unlikely that this report

death of Jesus inaugurates a new age in which God’s presence now dwells among his people and permits a fellowship between man and God not seen since the Garden of Eden.” It is important also to note that Gurtner’s thesis makes it clear that the pericope, Matt 27:51b-53, is to be seen as an integral part of the whole of Matthew’s Gospel.

¹¹⁰⁶ Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1203.

¹¹⁰⁷ Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 848.

¹¹⁰⁸ Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 851.

of historical events and persons would suddenly be interrupted at vv. 51b-53 with mythological or symbolic language.¹¹⁰⁹

I would agree with N. T. Wright when he writes:

[T]he events Matthew describes in 27:51-53, as well as being without parallel in other early Christian sources, are without precedent in second-Temple expectation, and we may doubt whether stories such as this would have been invented simply to “fulfil” prophecies that nobody had understood this way before. This is hardly a satisfactory conclusion, but it is better to remain puzzled than to settle for either a difficult argument for probable historicity or a cheap and cheerful rationalistic dismissal of the possibility. Some stories are so odd that they may just have happened. This may be one of them, but in historical terms there is no way of finding out.¹¹¹⁰

10.5 Is Matt 27:51b-53 to be understood as an example of Haggadah or Christian Midrash?

The importance of *midrash* in understanding, not just Judaism, but also Jesus and early Christianity, has, in recent decades, been increasingly recognized. *Midrash* is a very *Jewish* category for which there is no equally “comprehensive” analogy in Western categories and vocabulary. This in turn has given rise to debate about what exactly *midrash* is, and how it is to be understood by “outsiders”, as it were. For a discussion of *midrash*, along with two important alleged examples of *midrash* in relation to the understanding of Matt 27:51b-53, see Appendix F.

10.6 My Conclusion concerning the “Historicity” of the events depicted in Matt 27:51b-53.

The basic question is: How did “Matthew” himself understand the events in the passage (symbolically or historically), and how did he want his readers to understand them?

Crucial in answering this question is the expression μετὰ κτλ. Assuming that it belongs to the original text of the Gospel, and that it is from the hand of Matthew and not from a later redactor, this expression links the events of vv. 51b-52 with Jesus and his resurrection. It could,

¹¹⁰⁹ See D. Wenham, “The Resurrection Narratives in Matthew’s Gospel,” 43. See also France, *The Gospel according to Matthew* [1985], 401.

¹¹¹⁰ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 636.

of course, be argued that statements about Jesus' resurrection, the empty tomb, and so on, are also to be understood symbolically, as expressions of hope. However in the light of Matthew's apologetic concern (cf. Matt 27:62-66; 28:11-15) it seems that he regarded all these events (Jesus' rising, and so also the rising of the holy ones) as belonging to actual history.

Further, the assumption that the expression μετὰ κτλ reveals Matthew's embarrassment¹¹¹¹ and is an attempt by him to make clear that Jesus was really the first to rise from the dead (cf. 1 Cor 15:20; Col 1:15) supports the argument that Matthew understood the events of 27:51b-53 as belonging to history. For, if Matthew was troubled by this matter why did he not change, or even omit the whole presentation? If 27:51b-52b were but a construction of his expressing theological truth in OT apocalyptic language, this alteration could surely have been easily made. The fact that Matthew saw fit to neither omit nor change the quatrain, but rather attempted (unsuccessfully in v. 53)¹¹¹² to ease the conflict suggests, first, that vv. 51b-52b was a source being used by Matthew, and, secondly, that Matthew had concluded that the contents of this source were to be understood as historical and not just as a symbolic theological construction. In other words, Matthew had understood, as an historical reality, that at the moment of Jesus' death the bodies of many sleeping (that is, dead) holy ones in the vicinity of Jerusalem were raised to new life. Of course, it could well be that "Matthew" misunderstood the nature of his source. As F. V. Filson says, "This puzzling story may originally have been a figurative teaching but 'Matthew' takes it as a real event."¹¹¹³

Furthermore Matt 27:54, as noted above, seems to clearly confirm that Matthew understood that the events which allegedly occurred at Jesus' death, belonged to real history. The centurion and his fellow soldiers saw the earthquake and its physical aftermath – the ground shaking, the rocks splitting, tombs opening.¹¹¹⁴

¹¹¹¹ See, for instance, the comments of Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 852.

¹¹¹² The words μετὰ κτλ only give Jesus priority in the matter of the *appearances* to witnesses.

¹¹¹³ Floyd V. Filson, *The Gospel according to St. Matthew* (Black's New Testament Commentaries; 2nd edition; London: Adam & Charles Black, 1971), 297. It should be noted that Filson's comments imply that Matt 27:51b-53 had a preMatthean origin.

¹¹¹⁴ I am, however, open to the suggestion that the soldiers did not actually see the holy ones rise. This was because the holy ones were raised into an "eschatological" realm from which later they appeared, and became visible, and so were seen by many in the holy city (Jerusalem). Nevertheless, the resurrection

Finally, the fact that Matt 27:51b-53 is consistent with the whole “supernatural” thrust of Matthew’s Gospel – to wit, that God has intervened in history in order to redeem humanity – supports the contention that Matthew understood the events depicted in these verses to have actually occurred in time and space.

Consequently, in view (a) of Matthew’s alleged embarrassment, and his awkwardness, reflected in v. 53, (b) the assertion of v. 54, and (c) the harmony of 27:51b-53 with the over all aim of his Gospel, it seems reasonable to conclude that Matthew regarded the phenomena in vv. 51b-53 as historical – that is, as actually having occurred in time and space. This, let it hasten to be said, does not, of course, really settle the question concerning the historicity of the contents of these verses. For, conceivably, Matthew could have been mistaken in all these matters. But what it does mean is that any attempt to understand Matt 27:51b-53, and why Matthew felt the need to include these verses, must proceed on the basis that he, at least, regarded the phenomena mentioned therein as belonging to historical time and space. Thus, for Matthew, “the historical produces the theological, not the theological the historical.”¹¹¹⁵

of the holy ones was connected with historical events – there was indeed an earthquake, the tombs were opened, and found to be empty. The explanation for these events – that, according to Matthew, there had been a resurrection of the dead – cannot be proved but ultimately must be accepted by faith. Cf. Jesus’ resurrection - that this was due to God’s activity, as claimed by Christianity, and not just a chance event, has to be accepted by faith. For, according to the canonical New Testament no one saw God raise Jesus from the dead – at least, no one saw the actual resurrection event. (But cf. the Gospel of Peter 35-42). For discussion, relevant to this issue, see Holmberg, “Questions of Method in James Dunn’s *Jesus Remembered*,” 445-457.

¹¹¹⁵ The complex question of the “historicity” of the events depicted in Matt 27:51b-53 is one of those areas where writers must, graciously, “agree to disagree”. (cf. Rom 14:5-6). I would readily acknowledge that to understand Matt 27:51b-53 metaphorically by-passes a host of difficulties. To understand the passage literally can open a flood of awkward, unanswerable, and really unnecessary questions, such as: did the raised holy ones have corporal bodies, were they dressed in clothing, were they seen as they went from the cemetery into the holy city (Jerusalem), could they be recognized, did they eventually die once again, and so on.

Chapter 11 The Significance, Meaning and Purpose of Matt 27:51b-53

11.1 Introduction

The basic question is: Why among the prodigia associated with Jesus' death such as the darkness and the torn curtain has Matthew added those of Matt 27:51b-53? The rent curtain in itself is sufficient to explain the achievements of Jesus' death: that the old sacrificial cultus associated with the temple has been abolished and that salvation is now open to all, including even the Gentiles.¹¹¹⁶ However, by adding the prodigia of Matt 27:51b-53 Matthew seems to imply much more, that the final End Time, in some way or other, has actually been inaugurated through Jesus' death.¹¹¹⁷

This highlights the enigma, and challenge, of Matt 27:51b-53. Accordingly, a brief review of the problem at this point is warranted. First, it can be argued that the prodigia mentioned in Matt 27:51b-52 are those which, in some Jewish circles, were associated with the *parousia*, understood as the final End Time. Certainly, from some Jewish perspectives these prodigia – shaking of the earth, splitting of rocks, opening of tombs and the resurrection of the dead – belong to the End Time to be inaugurated by the one advent of the Messiah's coming.¹¹¹⁸ Since Christians believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah they must, from a Jewish point of view, maintain either (i) that the End Time has come, or (ii) that Jesus is not the Messiah, or (iii) create a new understanding of the whole concept of the End Time.

This third alternative is what has happened in Christian circles. Christians believe that Jesus the Messiah has indeed come, and that through his life, death and resurrection has established God's Kingdom. Yet Christians believe that the *parousia*, the ultimate End (with the final judgment) has not yet come. Rather, it will be inaugurated when Jesus, the Messiah, comes again in glory (cf. Matt 25:31-46). Christians, in effect, have split a Jewish expectation of the

¹¹¹⁶ This surely is what Mark implies – see Mark 15:37-39.

¹¹¹⁷ Some may ask: Why does Matthew bother to tell the story of Jesus for twenty six chapters if everything centers on Jesus' death? The answer is that according to Matthew the whole story of Jesus does indeed center, and depend, on his death. Matt 26:27-28 makes it abundantly clear that without the death of Jesus there would be no covenantal relationship between God and humankind.

¹¹¹⁸ See Introductory Remarks above. See also Appendix B: The Eschatological Language of Matt 27:51b-53.

one Advent of the Messiah into two events. Consequently, Christians today speak of “the return of Christ” or of “Jesus’ second coming”. This two-fold Messianic coming is foreign to Jewish thought.¹¹¹⁹

In the second place, this thesis has also suggested that Matt 27:51b-53 may reflect the belief, allegedly held by some very early Christians, that Jesus may have ascended direct to heaven from the cross, Thus, Jesus’ resurrection appearances may have been understood to imply that the *parousia*, the absolute End, had been initiated at his death. However, in his account of Jesus’ end Matthew, along with the other Gospel writers, mentions events which strongly suggest that Jesus’ body had not been “translated” at the moment of his death. He mentions, for instance, Jesus’ burial and the guarding of the tomb. Further, Matthew’s stress that Jesus’ appearances would be in *Galilee* implies that the resurrection appearances were not the *parousia* (although the *parousia* was imminent). In addition, note also that according to Matthew (Matt 27:53) the raised holy ones appeared to many in the holy city (Jerusalem). If the final End had occurred there would be no need to speak of the holy ones “appearing” as if from another realm.¹¹²⁰ In the light of this, it is suggested that Matt 27:51b-53 while it now belongs to Matthew’s *present* passion story, yet originally it belonged to a very early independent passion tradition. Be that as it may, Matt 27:51b-53 with its language which may be understood as implying that the final End has, in some way or rather, occurred is now an integral part of Matthew’s Gospel. And so the question arises as to the significance, meaning and purpose of this pericope.

In attempting to suggest some answers to this question, two points need to be noted. First, that according to Matthew Jesus was a very special person, and secondly, that the prodigia of Matt 27:51b-53 occurred at the moment of Jesus’ death - that is, there was something very special, and important, about Jesus’ death. With regard to the first point it may be said that

¹¹¹⁹ Cf. Allison, “Eschatology,” 207: “(T)he distinction between two advents cannot be found in the OT and is foreign to Jewish eschatology. It is not likely that Jesus thought in terms of or spoke about two messianic advents. More probably the end time was for him constituted by a sequence of events, some of which had already occurred. ...”

¹¹²⁰ See Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1132, fn 89.

Matthew was compelled to engage in apologetics. Not all Matthew's fellow Jews were prepared to accept Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of David, or as the Son of Man, or as Son of God (cf. Matt 12:22-32).¹¹²¹ Thus Matthew stresses that Jesus was greater than the Temple (12:6), greater than Jonah (12:41) and Solomon (12:42), and even David (22:41-45). Further, he was as a teacher (28:18-20) greater even than Moses.¹¹²² But especially through the titles attributed to Jesus in his passion account (Matt 26:1-27:54) does Matthew stress Jesus' uniqueness. While in this passage Jesus is spoken of as a teacher (26:18), the Shepherd (26:31) and as Rabbi (26:49), he is especially designated as (a) the Messiah (26:63, 68; 27:17, 22) – that is, the Christ (a title which could also include such titles as “son of David” and king of the Jews (27:11, 29, 37; 27:42 (Israel)); (b) as the Son of Man (26:1, 24, 45, 64); and (c) as the Son of God (26:63; 27:40, 43, 54).

There has been debate about the relationship between the titles “Son of God” and “Son of Man”. J. D. Kingsbury argued that “the content of the title Son of God alone” was sufficient to mark it as the “central Christological category of Matthew's Gospel.”¹¹²³ According to Kingsbury, “Son of God” was a confessional title used to set forth the earthly activity of Jesus. On the other hand, “Son of Man” is hardly ever used by Matthew for Jesus' earthly activity (it is first mentioned in 8:20); rather it sets forth Jesus' activity at the *parousia*. Thus, whereas the disciples confessed Jesus as “Son of God”, and Saviour, others (outsiders who opposed Jesus) will only at the *parousia* know the vindicated Jesus as “Son of Man” – that is, as the cosmic, eschatological Judge.¹¹²⁴

Further, according to Kingsbury, “at the point of the *parousia* and the Last Judgment ... the *secret* of the person of Jesus will be disclosed to every eye, and what the church has hitherto

¹¹²¹ It can surely be assumed that Matthew hoped that some of his unbelieving fellow Jews would read his Gospel and be persuaded that Jesus was indeed the Son of God. Matt 28:19-20 does not mean that the mission to Jews ceased.

¹¹²² See Riches, *Conflicting Mythologies*, 283.

¹¹²³ See Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom*, 82.

¹¹²⁴ See Jack D. Kingsbury, *Matthew* (Proclamation Commentaries; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 56, 63.

known by revelation of God the world, too, is given to perceive. In Christological categories, what the latter signifies is that the titles Son of God and Son of Man have coalesced.”¹¹²⁵

A different approach to the relationship between the titles “Son of God” and “Son of Man” has been suggested by J.K. Riches who argues that in his gospel Matthew has combined two differing eschatological traditions. Accordingly, the figure of Jesus which Matthew presents is characterized by some ambiguity – an ambiguity reflected in the titles Son of God and Son of Man, as well as also in two different strands of Messianism which were then current within Judaism: utopian and restorationist. Thus, in Riches’ opinion Matt 16:13-28 explains the meaning of the title “Son of Man”. He writes:

[P]eter’s confession “you are the Christ”, with its Matthaean addition “the Son of the living God”, is embedded in a discussion of the Son of Man’s identity which Jesus conducts with his disciples. Peter’s confession thus becomes both an implicit acknowledgement of Jesus as Son of Man (“*you are the Christ ...*”) as well as an explicit clarification of the Son of Man title: it is in terms of Messiahship and sonship of God that the title is to be understood.¹¹²⁶

Riches further suggests that in Matt 16:13-28 the two Messianic views, the utopian and the restorationist, are seen, as it were, to merge. For, the Christ, the Son of the Living God, is depicted as having “a cosmic function, the subjection of the powers of darkness, which outstrips that of the Messiah Son of David, whose role is to restore the Davidic kingdom. ... (That is to say) ... God’s kingly rule will finally be established through his Son, when he, the Son of Man, comes in judgment to apportion punishments and rewards.”¹¹²⁷ Jesus, according to Matthew, was a very special person – the Messiah, the Son of God, the Son of Man. Consequently, one purpose of the signs of Matt 27:51b-53 is to reveal God’s vindication of Jesus as His Son (cf. v. 54). And since the raised “holy ones” ultimately appear to many in the holy city (Jerusalem)

¹¹²⁵ Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom*, 121.

¹¹²⁶ Riches, *Conflicting Mythologies*, 278. For Riches’ comments on Mark 8:31-9:1; 14:62 see 158-62. For comment on why in Matt 16:16, the Gospel writer depicts Peter as declaring Jesus to be “the Messiah, *the Son of the Living God*” see Beale, “The Use of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15,” 709.

¹¹²⁷ See Riches, *Conflicting Mythologies*, 279-81.

they thus “symbolize the vindication by God of his Son in the very city where he was rejected.”¹¹²⁸

And, according to Matthew, Jesus’ humiliating death was also something very special. First, because it was God’s will for him¹¹²⁹; and, in the second place, because of what his death achieved. According to D. C. Allison, Jr.¹¹³⁰, three categories of Matthean texts simultaneously anticipate the passion narrative – or more precisely, anticipate 26:47-27:56 – and are in turn interpreted by it. In the first place, there are predictions, both explicit and implicit, of Jesus’ passion.¹¹³¹ Secondly, as he writes his Gospel Matthew has a developing plot – the growing strife between Jesus and the Jewish religious establishment which eventually results in the passion.¹¹³² In the third place, Matthew has throughout his Gospel scenes which seem to anticipate the tragic end of Jesus. For instance, the infancy narratives, Matt 2:1-23. These speak of the chief priests and scribes of the people conspiring with the secular authority to kill the king of the Jews. Matthew’s account of the untimely death of John the Baptist has an uncanny parallel to Jesus’ demise. Further, four passages in particular – Matt 5:38-42 (turning the other cheek); Matt 10:17-23 (the afflictions awaiting missionaries); Matt 17:1-8 (the transfiguration of Jesus) and Matt 20:20-28 (false ambition and true service) all, according to Allison, seem to borrow language from the passion narrative – that is, all are scenes in which the end of Jesus is foreshadowed by both event and language. Allison speaks of “intratextual allusions” for in these places “the text is like precognition: we feel the future.”¹¹³³ The fact that all through the First Gospel Jesus’ death is anticipated, highlights the importance of Matt 27:51-54. For in this brief pericope Matthew explains what Jesus actually *achieved* through his death. Conversely Matt 27:51-54, and especially vv. 51b-53, have to be understood in the light of who Jesus was and the need for his passion.

¹¹²⁸ Witherup, “The Death of Jesus and the Raising of the Saints,” 582-3. See also Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:634; Maisch, “Die österliche Dimension des Todes Jesu: Zur Osterverkündigung in Matt 27, 51-54,” 119.

¹¹²⁹ This has been argued above, 2.6 & 2.7, in relation to the covenantal relationship between Jesus and his heavenly Father.

¹¹³⁰ Allison, “Anticipating the Passion: The Literary Reach of Matthew 26:47-27:56,” 701-714.

¹¹³¹ Explicit: 16:21-23; 17:12, 22-23; 20:17-19, 28; 26:2. Implicit: 9:15; 12:40; 20:22-23; 21:38-39.

¹¹³² See 9:1-13, 32-34; 12:1-14, 22-45; 15:1-14; 16:1-12; 19:1-12; 21:12-17, 23-46; 22:15-46.

¹¹³³ Allison, “Anticipating the Passion: The Literary Reach of Matthew 26:47-27:56,” 702.

11.2 The Significance of Jesus' Baptism by John the Baptizer¹¹³⁴

Surprisingly, Allison makes no mention in his paper of Jesus' baptism by John. Yet, in a very real sense, Jesus' baptism by John is, for Matthew, an important template, setting the guidelines for much that he has to declare concerning Jesus and the events associated with his passion. Further, John's call for repentance and his declaration of the nearness of the Kingdom (Matt 3:2) sets Jesus in the context of God's covenantal, but wayward, people. Consequently, for this thesis, the implications of Jesus' baptism by John are, when seen in relation to covenant, an important key in understanding what Matthew asserts in Matt 27:51-54 as to what Jesus achieved by his life, and especially by his death.

11.2.1 The Nature of John's Baptism

To appreciate John's Baptism something of the Covenant Background of Israel needs to be understood.¹¹³⁵ At Sinai God as the suzerain, the great King of heaven, entered, through the mediation of Moses, into a covenant with his chosen people, Israel, whom he had rescued from slavery in Egypt. And although, as Exod 20:1-2 makes clear, their deliverance was due entirely

¹¹³⁴ For comment about John the Baptist see Everett F. Harrison, "The Son of God among the Sons of Men," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 102 (1945): 74-83; John P. Meier, "John the Baptist in Matthew's Gospel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99 (1980): 383-405; R. L. Webb, "The Activity of John the Baptist's Expected Figure at the Threshing Floor (Matthew 3.12 = Luke 3.17)," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 43 (1991): 103-111; John C. Hutchison, "Was John the Baptist an Essene from Qumran?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159 (2002): 187-200; Fergus J. King, "'De Baptista nil nisi bonum': John the Baptist as a Paradigm for Mission," *Mission Studies* 26 (2009): 173-191; Lisa M. Bowens, "The Role of John the Baptist in Matthew's Gospel," *Word and World* 30 (2010): 311-318.

¹¹³⁵ For a survey of the Concept of Covenant see Appendix I. See also Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 1:36-69; Dennis J. McCarthy, "Covenant in the Old Testament: The Present State of Inquiry," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 27 (1965): 217-240; F. Charles Fensham, "The Covenant as Giving Expression to the Relationship Between Old and New Testament," *Tyndale Bulletin* 22 (1971): 82-94; Meredith G. Kline, "The Old Testament Origins of the Gospel Genre," *Westminster Theological Journal* 38 (1975): 1-27; Walter R. Roehrs, "Covenant Theme of the Old Testament," *Concordia Journal* 3 (1977): 25-32; Francisco O. Garcia-Treto, "Covenant in Recent Old Testament Studies," *Austin Seminary Bulletin* 96 (1981): 10-19; Bruce K. Waltke, "The Phenomenon of Conditionality within Unconditional Covenants," in *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison* (ed. Avraham Gileadi; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1988), 123-129; Gordon J. McConville, "ברית," in *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (ed. Willem A. VanGemeren; 5 vols.; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1997), 747-55; Frank H. Polak, "The Covenant at Mount Sinai in the Light of Texts from Mari," from Frank H. Polak, *Sefer Moshe: The Moshe Weinfeld Jubilee Volume* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 119-34; Scott Hahn, "Covenant in the Old and New Testaments: Some Current Research (1994-2004)," *Currents in Biblical Research* 3 (2005): 263-292.

to God's grace and power, yet this covenant was "not a unilateral promissory commitment from the divine side."¹¹³⁶ Rather, it was a law covenant, for as Exod 24:7 reveals, the people of Israel swore an oath of allegiance to be both loyal and obedient to the Lord their God. Thus, "election to covenant *privilege* implied obligation to covenant *service*."¹¹³⁷ In other words, "The great King of heaven bound a people to himself in a relationship of service ... (namely) ... the duty to walk before him in perfect loyalty."¹¹³⁸

In swearing allegiance to their God the Israelites thus placed themselves, and their descendants, under the dual sanctions of the covenant, under its promises of blessing and curse. Obedience would bring blessing, disobedience curse. Further, the fact that a copy of the covenant with its stipulations was to be placed in the ark beneath the mercy seat (cf. Exod 25:10-22) was an intimation that the Lord God was conscious of the weakness of his covenant people and would be merciful and forgive their failings.¹¹³⁹ However, God's mercy would not be at the expense of his justice. If the covenant people failed, they would on repentance be forgiven, but the sanctity of God's Law, an expression of his holiness, would need to be

¹¹³⁶ Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1968), 18. (Note: Kline's robust approach to baptism is followed because, by understanding baptism as an ordeal, he is able to link it to both the rite of circumcision and the concept of covenant. Matthew makes no mention of circumcision and an explanation for this omission has often been sought. To my mind, if baptism and circumcision may both be regarded as ordeals then, while the two rites appear dissimilar, yet basically they are equivalent. Cf. Col. 2:11-15 where, it may be argued that, circumcision and baptism are linked. See Meredith G. Kline, "Oath and Ordeal Signs," *Westminster Theological Journal* 27 (1965): 115-139. For comment on Kline's approach to Col 2:11-12, see Paul D. Gardner, "Circumcised in Baptism—Raised through Faith. A Note on Col. 2:11-12," *Westminster Theological Journal* 45 (1983): 172-77). See also William S. Morrow, "Ordeal, Judicial," in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (ed. K.D. Sakenfeld; 5 vols.; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006-2009), 4:338.

¹¹³⁷ See Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, 13 (emphasis added).

¹¹³⁸ See Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, 37.

¹¹³⁹ "Since the divine throne under which the tables were located was the place of atonement, the witness of the tables against Israel never ascended to Yahweh apart from the witness of the blood advocating mercy." (Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1972), 125. The importance of this in understanding the purpose of Matt 27:51b-53 may be expressed as follows: according to Matthew such was the nature of Jesus, the Son of God, that his death, somehow dealt with the demands of divine justice, and so obliterated the need for the Temple and its sacrifices. Consequently, the Temple curtain was torn in two (Matt 27:51a). Expressed differently: the death of Jesus, the Son of God, was a sacrifice which atoned for the sins of Israel, and indeed, for those of the whole world (cf. Matt 27:54). The effectiveness of Jesus' sacrifice *for others* was, according to Matthew, established by the resurrection of the bodies of many sleeping holy ones (Matt 27:51b-52). This assumes that since sin, disobedience, is the cause of death (Gen. 3:1-24), its removal by atonement results in resurrection.

satisfied. This was achieved through the appropriate sacrifice, something which the Tabernacle and the later Temple with their sacrifices instilled into the minds of the Israelites.¹¹⁴⁰

11.2.2 John's Baptism: A Sign of Eschatological Judgment

In ancient societies regulated by covenant protocol, when a vassal rebelled the suzerain would institute a *rib* – that is a so-called “covenant lawsuit”. Messengers would be sent reminding the wayward vassal of covenant stipulations and warning of consequences of continued rebellion. If this legal process failed war – or rather, trial by ordeal – would result. Much of the history of Israel found in the Old Testament may be understood as reflecting a covenant lawsuit – that is, the Lord God through his messengers (cf. the prophets) reminding his rebellious people of the covenant stipulations.¹¹⁴¹

The mission of John the Baptist may also be understood in a covenant context. Thus, John was sent with the word of ultimatum from the Lord God to his covenant violating vassal, Israel (cf. Matt 3:2). “Repentance was the subjective condition for the reception of the Messiah.”¹¹⁴²

¹¹⁴⁰ According to Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, 33: “The Great King of the covenant is unchangeable in his holiness and justice. Merciful he may be according to his sovereign will; but all his works are in righteousness and truth. The satisfaction of the divine law underlies every administration of divine promise.”

¹¹⁴¹ It is alleged that Covenant lawsuit structure is found, for example, in Isa 5:1-30 and Mal 3:1-18. For discussion of other examples see Herbert B. Huffmon, “The Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 78 (1959): 285-295. For the prophets as God’s messengers (lawyers) reminding the people of the covenant stipulations see Fensham, “The Covenant as Giving Expression to the Relationship Between Old and New Testament,” 82-94. According to Michael de Roche, “Yahweh’s *RÎB* Against Israel: A Reassessment of the so-called ‘Prophetic Lawsuit’ in the preexilic Prophets,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102 (1983): 569-72, *rib* does not mean “lawsuit” but describes the ordinary experience of confronting someone with a complaint. Further, in his opinion, it is doubtful whether the actions taken by a suzerain against a disloyal vassal were conceived in the same way as the action taken by Yahweh against Israel. Accordingly, he suggests that the terms “prophetic lawsuit” and “covenant lawsuit” should be abandoned.

¹¹⁴² Harrison, “The Son of God among the Sons of Men,” 76. See also Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, 61. M. Barth, “Baptism,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*. Supplementary Volume (ed. K. Crim; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976), 85-89; W. F. Flemington, “Baptism,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (ed. G. A. Buttrick; 4 vols.; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), 1:348-353; Lars Hartman, “Baptism,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (ed. D. N. Freedman; 6 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:583-594; Joan E. Taylor, “Baptism,” in Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 1:390-395; Robert G. Hall, “Circumcision,” in Freedman, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1:1025-31; J. P. Hyatt, “Circumcision,” in Buttrick, *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 1:629-31; M. L. Soards, “Circumcision” in Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 1:667-669; G. E. Mendenhall, “Covenant,” in Buttrick, *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 1:714-23; G. E. Mendenhall and G. A. Herion, “Covenant,” in Freedman, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1:1179-1202;

Accordingly, John warns of “the wrath to come” and declares the vanity of reliance on external earthly relationships, even descent from Abraham (Matt 3:7-10. cf. Luke 3:7-9).¹¹⁴³ However, while John appeared “proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins,”¹¹⁴⁴ yet his baptism, it is argued, was much more than a symbolic washing away of the uncleanness of sin. Rather John’s water rite is to be understood “as an ordeal sign rather than as a mere ceremonial bath of purification.”¹¹⁴⁵

To modern ears trial by ordeal seems both strange and repulsive. In ancient times however ordeals were a means used to determine a legal verdict when the customary legal procedures failed to provide a conclusive judgment. Thus, when a case of litigation was above the competence of human judges it was referred by some rite to the heavenly court for a decision.¹¹⁴⁶ The Old Testament speaks not only of trial by the casting of lots¹¹⁴⁷ but also of trial by water ordeal.¹¹⁴⁸ Further, the Noahic deluge (Gen. 7-8; cf. 1 Pet 3:20-21; 2 Pet. 3:5-7), the crossing of the Red Sea at the time of the Exodus (Exod 14:15-31; cf. 1 Cor 10:1-5), and the fording of the flooded Jordan River (Joshua 3-4) may all be understood as “ordeals by water” –

John Goldingay, “Covenant, OT and NT,” in Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 1:767-778; P. A. Riemann, “Covenant, Mosaic,” in Crim, *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*. Supplementary Volume, 192-197; M. Weinfeld, “Covenant, Davidic,” in Crim, *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*. Supplementary Volume, 188-192; R. D. Nelson, “Davidic Covenant” in Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 2:41.

¹¹⁴³ Interestingly, Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, 54, suggests that these verses are to be understood in the light of Lev 19:23-25. If so, then is a relationship to be seen between circumcision and John’s baptism?

¹¹⁴⁴ See Mark 1:4; Lk. 3:3. But according to Matthew John’s Baptism does not confer the remission of sins. Rather, forgiveness of sins comes only through the sacrificial death of Christ (cf. Matt 3:2 and Matt 26:28). See Meier, “John the Baptist in Matthew’s Gospel,” 388.

¹¹⁴⁵ Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, 56.

¹¹⁴⁶ See Karel van der Toorn, “Ordeal Procedures in the Psalms and the Passover Meal,” *Vetus Testamentum* XXXVIII (1988): 427-445; See also Julian Morgenstern, “Trial by Ordeal among the Semites and in Ancient Israel,” *Hebrew Union College Annual*. Special Issue (1925): 113-143; Kline, “Oath and Ordeal Signs,” 115-139; Adam Miglio, “Ordeal, Infidelity, and Prophetic Irony in Jeremiah 2, 1-9,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 24 (2010): 222-234.

¹¹⁴⁷ See Joshua 7:14-26; Jonah 1:7; cf. also Urim and Thummim (Exod. 28:30); Cf. Acts 1:23-26.

¹¹⁴⁸ Water ordeals, involving the throwing of a suspect into a river, are found in the Hammurabi Law code. See P. Kyle McCarter, “The River Ordeal in Israelite Literature,” *Harvard Theological Review* 66 (1973): 403-412. Water ordeals also included trial involving the drinking of water mingled with the ashes of a red heifer (Num 5). Cf Exod 32:20 and perhaps Exod 15:22-6. See Richard S. Briggs, “Reading the *Sotah* Text (Numbers 5:11-31): Holiness and a Hermeneutic Fit for Suspicion,” *Biblical Interpretation* 17 (2009): 288-319. Briggs speaks of Num 5:11-31 as being “morally abrasive.” For the suggestion that the Passover meal (Exod 12:1-27), the Covenant meal (Exod 24:9-11), and even the Lord’s Supper (cf. 1 Cor. 11:27-30) were ordeals see van der Toorn, “Ordeal Procedures in the Psalms and the Passover Meal,” 443-4. Note: Ordeal by drinking polluted water was certainly known in NT times. See *Protoevangelium of James* XI, 17-20 where by this means the innocence of Joseph with regard to Mary’s pregnancy is established.

that is, as “acts of redemptive judgment wherein God vindicated the cause of those who called upon his name and condemned their adversaries.”¹¹⁴⁹

With regard to John and his baptism, three points may be especially noted. First, John was baptizing “in the river Jordan”. Centuries before the Israelites, trusting in their God whose presence was symbolized by the ark of the covenant, had miraculously crossed the swollen Jordan and entered the promised land. At that moment of history, by enabling the people to cross the flooded Jordan, God had, in effect, declared Israel to be the rightful owners of Canaan.¹¹⁵⁰ However now here at the Jordan River, where once God had declared through an ordeal of water that the promised land belonged to Israel, he was requiring the Israelites, through John’s baptism, to confess that they did not deserve the blessings of God’s kingdom but rather his wrath.¹¹⁵¹ But, as John stressed, repentance (evidenced by a changed life and good works, Matt 3:8) would secure a verdict of remission of sin against the coming judgment.

Secondly, the urgency of John needs to be noted. For, according to John, the coming judgment was imminent, for the Messiah, the Judge, was about to appear. And whereas John’s baptism only symbolized the coming messianic judgment, the Messiah himself would baptize people in an actual ordeal with the very elements of divine power (cf. Matt 3:11-12; Luke 3:16-17; Mark 1:8). “[T]he coming one will plunge men into the fiery, punitive yet purifying experience of God’s spirit, poured out in the end time.”¹¹⁵²

An important question arises: did Jesus as the Messiah actually plunge people into a fiery, punitive and purifying End Time experience? This highlights the third point to be noted concerning John – namely, his doubts, and disappointment, with Jesus. It also throws important light on the pericope Matt 27:51b-53 and its purpose. From prison John sent to Jesus a blunt

¹¹⁴⁹ Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, 56.

¹¹⁵⁰ See Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, 56.

¹¹⁵¹ See Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, 57.

¹¹⁵² See Meier, “John the Baptist in Matthew’s Gospel,” 390; Cf Matt 21:33-41. According to Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, 52, “Jesus, as the final messenger of the covenant, was declaring the verdict against Israel in the very process of speaking unto them this parable.”

question: “Are you the one who is to come?” (See Matt 11:2-6. Cf. Luke 7:18-23¹¹⁵³).

Commenting on Matt 11:2-6 J. P. Meier writes:

The list of miracles, culminating in the still greater miracle of proclaiming good news, not fiery judgment, to the poor, echoes Isa. 29:18-9; 35:5-6; 25:8; and 61:1-2. Obviously, then these activities which so precisely fulfill the messianic prophecies, demonstrate that the time of salvation is at hand and that Jesus is the prophesied Messiah. But this end-time is not as John had pictured it. Hence, John’s bewilderment and question. In a concluding beatitude, Jesus gently appeals to John not to stumble and fall from faith, not to be led into the sin of disbelief like most of Israel, not to take offense (*mē skandalisthē en emoi*) because Jesus is a different type of Messiah from the one the Baptist and indeed all Israel had expected. Blessed is he who does not “look for another” because, if he does, he is looking for the fulfillment of his own fantasies rather than of God’s prophecies.¹¹⁵⁴

And a more recent commentator writes:

John’s question in 11:3 arises from the works that he hears Jesus *is* engaging in as well as from disappointment concerning the works Jesus is *not* engaging in, which allow suffering to continue. From John’s viewpoint, Jesus’ inaction allows John’s imprisonment, his suffering, and the suffering of Israel to persist, and so he apparently begins to have reservations about his earlier confidence in Jesus’ identity. John, like Peter in 16:22-23, does not fully grasp Christ’s mission. Hence, John’s question can be paraphrased as follows: “If you are the coming one, why am I still in jail? Why have I not been set free? And why is Israel still suffering under Roman rule?” No matter what he may have been sure of before, the future has now come into question and so have John’s hopes.¹¹⁵⁵

It would seem that as a Jew John believed that the Messiah’s coming would inaugurate the End which would include blessings, but also judgment.¹¹⁵⁶ Here we think of Isa 61:1-2 which speaks of “the day of recompense” – that is, the day of God’s vengeance. Significantly, in alluding to this Scripture in his reply to John, Jesus omits these words about coming judgment. Understandably, the works of Jesus did not square with the Baptist’s messianic expectations –that is, “a judge with a winnowing-fork surrounded by fire (Matthew 3:11-12).”¹¹⁵⁷

In the light of Matt 27:51b-53 the question may be asked (tentatively): In recording this episode between John and Jesus is Matthew declaring that Jesus is indeed the Messiah and that the “End” has been inaugurated, but not as John, and perhaps others, expected? John, it seems,

¹¹⁵³ See J. A. Sanders’ comments on Isaiah 61:1-2 as recorded in Luke 4:16-20 in Appendix F, Section A.

¹¹⁵⁴ Meier, “John the Baptist in Matthew’s Gospel,” 393.

¹¹⁵⁵ Bowens, “The Role of John the Baptist in Matthew’s Gospel,” 315.

¹¹⁵⁶ Just how widespread in NT times John’s understanding of the End Time was is debatable.

¹¹⁵⁷ King, “De Baptista nil nisi bonum’: John the Baptist as a Paradigm for Mission,” 180.

expected the Messiah at his advent to execute straightaway judgment as well as blessing. According to Matthew, when Jesus died on the cross, in a sense the “End” did come. For his death was a Divine judgment (not for his transgressions but for those of others – cf. Isa 53:4-6). And at his death there was blessing (cf. Matt 27:52 – “The bodies of many sleeping holy ones were raised”). For Matthew Jesus’ death was a great turning point. However, in Matthew’s view, before the final judgment, with its great separation, came there would be a period, as it were, of amnesty, a period of grace.¹¹⁵⁸

The above approach deserves comment as it highlights the impasse associated with Matt 27:51b-53. It brings one back to the, admittedly unsatisfactory, position that Matthew is declaring that the End has come and yet that it hasn’t! If the End has not come then why does Matthew mention the occurrence of End Time events at Jesus’ death (cf. Matt 27:51b-52)? And if the End has come then why does life continue as it has from the beginning of creation? A satisfactory solution to this dilemma is perhaps along these lines: From Matthew’s point of view humankind is now enjoying a period of grace – judgment is delayed while the message of the salvation achieved by Christ, and his teaching, is being proclaimed to all nations. Those who through faith belong to Christ’s people escape the judgment which will be manifested at the final End, and which will fall on all who have not acknowledged Christ (cf. Matt 28:16-20).

In other words Matthew, through the words of Matt 27:51b-53, combines, perhaps unwittingly, two differing eschatologies. One of these expected the Messiah’s one advent to be characterised by judgment as well as blessing. This expectation prevailed in some quarters in Judaism and among John the Baptist and his disciples, and perhaps also among some in Matthew’s community. The other view was found in Christian circles. It declared that Jesus the Messiah had come and had inaugurated a new age, the day of salvation. But the Messiah would come a second time to execute the final judgment.

¹¹⁵⁸ It should be noted that “judgment foretold” is not “judgment inflicted” (see Matt 11:20-24).

11.2.3 Jesus' Baptism¹¹⁵⁹ (Matt 3:13-17)

According to Matthew despite the Baptist's protests Jesus chose to undergo John's baptism – a baptism expressing repentance (Matt 3:14). He did so in order that he and John should “in this way fulfill all righteousness” (Matt 3:15). Clearly, Jesus was convinced that it was God's will for him to be baptized by John. Thus, in obedience and in faith, Jesus submitted to what was in effect a trial, an ordeal by water – he submitted himself in baptism to the searching judgment of God.

Two results of this obedience by Jesus may be noted. First, Jesus was vindicated, and acknowledged, by God. “The heavens were opened to him” (3:16a). This implies that Jesus received “revelatory wisdom” (cf. Matt 11:25-27). Further, “he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him” (3:16b). This suggests a coronation scene. Jesus is anointed, crowned as king, and so set aside for a new role. Thus, the Spirit comes to empower and equip him. Moreover, a voice from heaven, God's voice, acknowledges Jesus, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” Here is God's own view of Jesus.¹¹⁶⁰ The reference to Isa 42:1 “with whom I am well pleased” links Jesus with the servant spoken of in the “servant poems” found in Isa 42:1; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; and Isa 52:13-53:12.

This also highlights a second point to be noted – that Jesus' submission to John's baptism, understood as an ordeal trial, implies not only his obedience as a member of the covenant, but also his willingness as a covenant member to serve the Lord, to do the Lord's will. And, in the light of the voice from heaven which links Jesus with the servant of Isa 42:1-9, it seems reasonable to assume that the Lord's will for Jesus was to suffer on behalf of others (cf. Isa 52:13- 53:12).¹¹⁶¹ This approach, linking Jesus' baptism and his death, may be challenged.

¹¹⁵⁹ See Witherington, *Matthew*, 80-6; France, *The Gospel of Matthew* [2007], 116-20; Turner, *Matthew*, 117-22. Dean B. Deppe, *All Roads Lead to the Text: Eight Methods of Inquiry into the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmann, 2011), 142.

¹¹⁶⁰ Cf. Gen 22:2; Ps 2:7; Isa 42:1; Exod 4:22-23. For discussion as to whether the Father-Son relationship has covenantal overtones see Fensham, “The Covenant as Giving Expression to the Relationship Between Old and New Testament,” 93-4.

¹¹⁶¹ Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, 58, expresses this rather forcefully: “As covenant Servant, Jesus submitted in symbol to the judgment of the God of the covenant in the waters of baptism. But for Jesus,

However, it provides a satisfactory explanation for why Matthew, and the other Gospel writers, devote so much attention to the events of Jesus' passion. Not only was Jesus, the Son of God, a special person, his death was extraordinarily special. His whole life was, as it were, a preparation for this final event. It inaugurated the new covenant (cf. Matt 26:27-29).

11.2.4 Jesus' Temptation (Matt 4:1-11)

In submitting to John's baptism, understood as a covenant ordeal trial, Jesus had placed his life under the scrutiny of God's judgment, and had received God's approval. In the same act of baptism, he had also consecrated himself to the service of God – a service which in the light of God's identifying Jesus with the servant spoken of by Isaiah (Matt 3:17; Isa 42:1- 9) implied a vicarious suffering on behalf of others (cf. Isa 52:13-53:12).¹¹⁶²

Further, not only was God's verdict concerning Jesus challenged by Satan, it was also God's will that the sincerity of Jesus' act of consecration should be tested. Thus, Jesus was "led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil" (Matt 4:1). Moreover Matthew, it seems, draws a parallel between Jesus and the forty years' wilderness experience of God's

as the Lamb of God, to submit to the symbol of judgment was to offer himself up to the curse of the covenant. By his baptism Jesus was consecrating himself unto his sacrificial death in the judicial ordeal of the cross." (cf. Luke 12:50; Mark. 10:38). Fensham, "The Covenant as Giving Expression to the Relationship Between Old and New Testament," 92, expresses a similar view: "It is clear that Christ was cursed on the cross as a violator of the covenant, but in His case it was done as a substitute." In Kline's view (Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, 59-60) further background for Jesus' conceptualizing of his sufferings as a water ordeal is to be found (a) in those supplicatory Psalms in which the righteous servant pleads for deliverance from overwhelming waters – cf. Ps 69; Pss 18:16, 17 (15, 16); 42:8 (7); 68:23 (22); 124:4,5; 144:7. Cf. also Jonah 2:2-9 – and (b) in those scriptures where ordeal is by combat with sea-monsters. Cf. Isa 51:9, 10; Pss 74:12-15; 89:10, 11 (9,10). In other words, the Lord was present with his people in the passage through the sea, he underwent their ordeal, and thus their salvation depended on their identification with him, Significantly, Rev 12 symbolizes Satanic enmity as both dragon and flood.

¹¹⁶² "By his baptism Jesus was consecrating himself unto his sacrificial death in the judicial ordeal of the cross. Such an understanding of his baptism is reflected in Jesus' own reference to his coming passion as a baptism: 'I have a baptism to be baptized with' (Luke 12:50; cf. Mark 10:38). Jesus' symbolic baptism unto judgment appropriately concluded with a divine verdict, the verdict of justification expressed by the heavenly voice and sealed by the Spirit's anointing, Messiah's earnest of the kingdom inheritance (Matt 3:16,17; Mark 1:10, 11; Luke 3:22; cf. John 1:32, 33; Ps 2:7-8.). This verdict of sonship was contested by Satan, and that led to the ordeal by combat between Jesus and Satan, beginning with the wilderness temptation immediately after Jesus' baptism and culminating in the crucifixion and resurrection-vindication of the victorious Christ, the prelude to his reception of all the kingdoms of the world (the issue under dispute in the ordeal; cf. esp. Matt 4:8-10.; Luke 4:5-8)." (Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, 58-59).

ancient people.¹¹⁶³ Jesus shares with Israel the title “Son of God” (cf. Matt 3:17; Exod. 4:22-3; Deut 1:31; 32:5, 6, 18-20; Hos 11:1). And like Israel he is tempted by hunger and tempted to idolatry. Acknowledging that Jesus is indeed the Son of God, the devil first tempts Jesus to doubt God’s care of him and so to misuse his special powers to preserve himself (Matt 4:3-4). Jesus, however, continues firmly to trust God’s faithfulness, a trust which arises from confidence in God’s written word. Accordingly, in the second place, the devil tempts Jesus to misuse this trust in God and the Scriptures by acting in such a way as to force God to intervene on his behalf (Matt 4:5-7).

Finally (Matt 4:8-11), the devil tempts Jesus’ covenant loyalty. Two “spiritual” persons contend for mastery and obedience. The issue is: whose authority is ultimate – the devil’s or that of the Lord God? Referring to Matt 28:16 Davies and Allison write: “Only after the passion, and then only from the Father in heaven, can Jesus accept all authority. There is no getting around the crucifixion. The Scriptures must be fulfilled (26:54).”¹¹⁶⁴ Jesus’ consecration to God’s service thus requires perfect obedience and loyalty. The old Israel stumbled and fell. To be the new Israel¹¹⁶⁵ Jesus, the Christ, must stand firm.¹¹⁶⁶ And through his passion account Matthew declares that Jesus did indeed stand firm. His obedience, culminating in the shameful death of the cross, introduced a whole new era (cf. Matt 27:51-54).

11.2.5 What, according to Matthew, did Jesus accomplish by his death?

By various means, Matthew throughout his Gospel stresses both the “specialness” of Jesus (he may be designated by many titles, but especially by Messiah, Son of God, and Son of

¹¹⁶³ Cf. Jer 2:2; Ezek 16:8; 20:35-37. “The highlighting of the wilderness setting of the opening events of Jesus’ career thus advises us from the very outset that we are to view his mission as a leading forth of the new Israel-bride to the ratification of the covenant with the Lord, her husband.” (Kline, “The Old Testament Origins of the Gospel Genre,” 13).

¹¹⁶⁴ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:369.

¹¹⁶⁵ If not explicitly, yet implicitly, the words of Matt 2:15, “out of Egypt I have called my son”, support the contention that Matthew wants Jesus to be understood as the new Israel. This new Israel however is not to be understood in a supersessionist way. The new, redeemed, Israel includes all faithful believers from the beginning of time to the last day.

¹¹⁶⁶ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:372 feel that “Away with you, Satan!” (or “Begone, Satan!”) suggests there is a significant link between verse 10 [of Matt 4] and Matt 16:21-3. They write: “In both places Jesus is choosing the path of duty: the end ordained by the Father is to be achieved by the manner ordained by the Father, namely, the cross. And any opposition to this is satanic. To reject the way of the cross is to be on the side of the devil.”

Man) and the importance of his death. Further, when Jesus died on the cross a number of supernatural prodigia occurred (Matt 27:51-53). While some¹¹⁶⁷ would question their historicity, yet it is difficult to regard these prodigia as purely symbolic especially when in Matt 27:54 the soldiers are said to have witnessed the earthquake and its aftermath.¹¹⁶⁸

Whether these prodigia are perceived literally or symbolically, it may be agreed that Matthew wants it to be understood that when Jesus died something very important happened, a change occurred. The old was gone, the new had come. At least one voice however has been raised in protest at this assumption. For, according to R. Troxel, the purpose of Matt 27:51b-53 is not to mark the end of the age, but rather to resolve the dispute over Jesus' identity as the Son of God.¹¹⁶⁹ Despite Troxel's protest other scholars understand Matthew to be declaring that at the death of Jesus a great change occurred. Various commentators, for instance, have suggested that in the light of both Jewish and Christian eschatology Jesus' cries from the cross (Matt 27:46, 50) could indicate that his demise introduced a whole new eschatological age.¹¹⁷⁰

If there is agreement that at Jesus' death change occurred, there is much less harmony about the nature of that change. J. D. Kingsbury suggested that Matthew stresses that the first reaction to Jesus' death came from God himself. He writes, "The supernatural portents ... constitute the immediate response of God to the death of Jesus (27:51-53). In view of the charge levelled against Jesus in 26:61 and the blasphemy of the crowds in 27:40, the tearing of the curtain of the temple described in v. 51 can only be interpreted from Matthew's standpoint in terms of the destruction of the temple: by virtue of the atonement accomplished by the Son of God, the sacrificial system of Israel has been brought to an end."¹¹⁷¹ Assuming, correctly, that Matthew portrays Jesus' death as a sacrifice for sin, Kingsbury further declares, "It is only the death of God's perfectly obedient and trusting Son that accomplishes the forgiveness of

¹¹⁶⁷ For example, Senior who regards Matt 27:51b-53 as redactional. See his *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 207-23; "The Death of Jesus and the Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51-53)," 312-29; and "The Death of God's Son and the Beginning of the New Age," in *The Language of the Cross* (ed. A. Lacomara: Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977), 31-59.

¹¹⁶⁸ These historical events which occurred in time and space could, of course, have deeper symbolic connotations.

¹¹⁶⁹ See Troxel, "Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered." See also 9.3.2.7 above.

¹¹⁷⁰ See Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:625 fn 71; Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1044; Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus (Matt 26-28)*, 335-40.

¹¹⁷¹ Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom*, 76.

sins.”¹¹⁷² And since sins have been forgiven through Jesus’ death, there is now no need for the temple and its many sacrifices (cf. Heb 10:18). With the tearing of the curtain, its destruction and eventual obliteration has begun.

Consequently, when commenting on Matt 23:37-39, Kingsbury notes, “When he (Jesus) leaves the temple, it is said to be “empty”,¹¹⁷³ which attests to the circumstance that God has chosen to replace it with his Son (23:38; 26:61; 27:51)...”¹¹⁷⁴ And in the same vein J. K. Riches, referring to Matt 27:53, writes, “[T]he phrase [holy city] occurs immediately after the tearing of the Temple veil, which indicates the end of the Temple and the departure of the *Shekhina* from it.”¹¹⁷⁵ Riches then notes this comment by Davies and Allison:¹¹⁷⁶ “‘Here the expression [holy city] is ironic.’ The eschatological signs of the shaking of the earth, the splitting of the rocks and the resurrection of the saints (whether before or after Jesus’ resurrection) indicate that Jesus’ death on Golgotha inaugurates a new world (cf. 19:28). It all starts in the ‘holy city’ but it inaugurates a world without a temple, for one greater than the Temple is here (12:6).”¹¹⁷⁷ Thus, in the light of Matt 26:61 and 27:39, 40, it would seem that Matthew is saying not just that the temple has been destroyed but that Jesus himself is the new temple, that he is the meeting place between God and human beings, that he is both the priest and the sacrifice which effects reconciliation between the holy God and his wayward creatures.¹¹⁷⁸

All this means that the death of Jesus, in the light of the resulting prodigia, can be said to have “inaugurated the eschatological age of salvation.”¹¹⁷⁹ The significance of Matt 1:21-23

¹¹⁷² Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom*, 76.

¹¹⁷³ ἔρημος – desolate, deserted.

¹¹⁷⁴ Kingsbury, *Matthew* (Proclamation Commentaries), 52.

¹¹⁷⁵ Riches, *Conflicting Mythologies*, 237.

¹¹⁷⁶ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:635.

¹¹⁷⁷ Riches, *Conflicting Mythologies*, 237.

¹¹⁷⁸ Justification for these assertions is to be found in Matt 26:27-28 where Jesus speaks of establishing the covenant through his death. In Exod 24:1-8 the covenant, the special relationship between the Lord and his people, was established by the shedding of blood – that is, by the death of sacrificial animals. Likewise, Jesus declares that like a priest he will offer his own blood – that is, his life – as a sacrifice. Thereby he will procure the forgiveness of sins for many and also establish a covenantal relationship between God and humankind. Thus, if in OT times one met with God through the Temple and its sacrifices, now one meets with God through a new Temple, even Jesus and his sacrificial death.

¹¹⁷⁹ Kingsbury, however, suggests that the age of salvation began earlier. He writes: “The central thought of the First Gospel is that in the person of Jesus Messiah, his Son, God has drawn near to dwell to the end

however must not be overlooked. God's saving presence was manifested through the whole of Jesus' ministry, his life, teaching, actions, but supremely by his obedient death.¹¹⁸⁰

All this (the abolition of the Temple and the creation of a new age of salvation for all humankind) is established by Mark by mention of the torn temple curtain and the reaction of the Roman centurion.¹¹⁸¹ Consequently, what concerns us in particular is why Matthew has seen it necessary to include the prodigia of 27:51b-53. To this question we must now turn and suggest some reasons.

11.3 Why has Matthew included the Prodigia of Matt 27:51b-53?

11.3.1 For a Particular Reason which is now no longer knowable

It could be that Matt 27:51b-53 was part of a very early tradition¹¹⁸² which Matthew incorporated into his passion account and did so for a particular reason but which today is beyond our knowledge. Certainly, if Matt 27:51b-53 did belong to very early tradition, then no doubt Matthew and his readers, knowing its original context, would have understood its significance. Knowledge of this original context, communicated by oral tradition, has long since

of time with his people, the church, thus inaugurating the eschatological age of salvation (cf. 1:23; 18:20; 28:20)." Kingsbury, *Matthew* (Proclamation Commentaries), 30. This raises the question as to when exactly the decisive change occurred. This thesis argues that it occurred ultimately at the moment when Jesus, the Son of God, died. This, however, does not for a moment deny the importance of the incarnation of Jesus, or of his ministry with its teachings, healings, exorcisms, and so on. The whole of Jesus' life was, as it were, a preparation for the decisive moment of his death. For, as Matt 26:27-28 declares it was Jesus' death, his blood poured out, that established the covenant between God and humankind. The death of Jesus established for humankind a new relationship with God based on the forgiveness of sins. During Jesus' ministry people, of course, experienced forgiveness and received the assurance of salvation (See Matt 9:2-8). But all this divine mercy and forgiveness was in view of, and made possible, only by Jesus' atoning death on the cross. In this context, it should be noted that while according to Matt 1:21-23 the name of Jesus was *revealed* by the angel of the Lord, yet the child's actual naming did not take place at his conception. The promised child was named after his birth by Joseph (Matt 1:25). This presumably took place at the child's circumcision.

¹¹⁸⁰ If Jesus' divinely-sanctioned mission was to manifest God's saving presence (cf. Matt 1:21-23) then this was surely carried out through his whole ministry, including his life, teaching and actions. Yet, this raises the question: why does Matthew (and the other Gospel writers) stress the importance of Jesus' sufferings and death? It would seem that God's saving presence – that is, reconciliation with humankind – could not be fully manifested until the event of the crucifixion had occurred. Thus, what was the barrier which had to be overcome, and which could only be taken away, by the death of Jesus the Son of God? This raises the whole question of the nature of salvation.

¹¹⁸¹ See Mark 15:37-39.

¹¹⁸² Its rhythmic character suggests that Matt 27:51b-53 was perhaps originally part of some early oral tradition, or perhaps was connected with liturgical usage in the very early Church. Was it part of a pre-existent hymn which the very early Christians used in their Easter liturgy to explain the meaning of Jesus' death? See Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1137-8; Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 65-66; Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 17-21.

been lost, and so for us today Matt 27:51b-53 has been left, high and dry, as a strange curio.¹¹⁸³ This would be particularly so if Matthew here engages in some Christian *Midrash*¹¹⁸⁴ or, as R. Aguirre has suggested, Matt 27:51b-53 reflects *legendary* interpretation in NT times of some OT passages.¹¹⁸⁵

Further, if the pericope Matt 27:51b-53 was indeed very early, then the question may be asked whether it might perhaps reflect the alleged early belief that at death Jesus ascended direct from the cross to heaven? Thus, is Matt 27:51b-53 perhaps to be understood as a relic, a vestige, of a very early understanding of Jesus' *parousia* – that it occurred at the moment of Jesus' death? Some have argued that various verses of Scripture (Rom 1:4; Phil 2:6-11; *Gos. Pet.* 19) reflect a tradition that at the very beginning of the Christian faith there was no difference between Jesus' resurrection and his ascension. His death, resurrection and ascension were all the one and the same event.¹¹⁸⁶

In this connection Matt. 26:63, 64 calls for special consideration. Allison notes that the qualification (“henceforth” ἄπ’ ἄρτι) “seems to suggest that the enthronement and *parousia* of the Son of Man lie in the near future.”¹¹⁸⁷ Clearly for Matthew Jesus is revealed as the Son of Man not at the *parousia* (so Mark) but earlier at the resurrection, or even at his death. Thus, is Jesus depicted as believing that his death would usher in the End - that is, the *parousia*, and that his enemies would see him, the Son of Man, “seated at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven”?

This does not seem to have happened at the moment of Jesus' death. Thus, is it to be understood that Jesus, as depicted, was mistaken, or is it to be understood that he was perhaps speaking in faith? Allison suggests that the closing scene of Matthew's Gospel, 28:16-20, may

¹¹⁸³ Cf. 1 Cor 15:29. Even the origins of baptism are hazy.

¹¹⁸⁴ See Appendix F.

¹¹⁸⁵ See 9.3.2.8 above.

¹¹⁸⁶ See Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 290; Allison, *The End of the Ages Has Come*, 40-50. According to Allison, “There is much to argue that the primitive Christian community believed that the new age was dawning in their time, that eschatological events had been and were unfolding before their eyes. Matt 27:51b-53 finds a fitting home within such an environment. So the suggestion that the passage preserves a piece of primitive Christian tradition commends itself.” (46).

¹¹⁸⁷ Allison, *The End of the Ages has Come*, 48. Relevant to this whole discussion is Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*. (See Appendix F, Section B)

hold an answer to this dilemma. Assuming that Matt 28:18b-19a recalls Dan 4:14a (LXX) where the future victory of the Son of Man is described, Allison suggests that Matt 28:16-20 may be understood as setting forth a proleptic *parousia*, or the enthronement of the Son of Man. According to Allison,

The proposal is plausible and suggests that the promise of Matt 26:64 finds its partial or initial fulfillment in the resurrection: Jesus has already received authority in heaven. That is, for Matthew – and perhaps for the tradition before him – although the Son of Man has not yet come on the clouds of heaven, he has indeed been enthroned. The *parousia*, which will coincide with “the end of the age” (28:20), will only make manifest on earth a fact already established in heaven.¹¹⁸⁸

But the problem with this suggestion is that according to Jesus the High Priest would henceforth, soon, see Jesus’ exaltation and his coming on the clouds of heaven. We are not told when this happened. In fact, we are not told that the High Priest ever did see the Risen Jesus.

J. D. Kingsbury has another approach to this matter. In Kingsbury’s view Matt 26: 63-64 must not be so interpreted to mean that the title Son of Man is made to supersede that of Son of God. Rather, the point of Jesus’ reply to the High Priest is that because he (the High Priest), with the consent of the Sanhedrin, has stated with evil intention the truth of Jesus’ divine sonship, then at the later *parousia* he (Jesus, revealed then as the Son of Man - that is, the Judge) will hold them accountable. By this approach Kingsley avoids the conclusion that Jesus is depicted as mistakenly thinking that his death would usher in the *parousia*.¹¹⁸⁹

However, Matthew (along with the other Gospel writers) stresses that the crucified Jesus was buried (27:57-61) and so distances himself from this allegedly early view that at his death Jesus ascended directly from the cross to heaven. Nevertheless, the question of why Matthew has projected images of events associated with the End Time onto Jesus’ death still remains to be answered. Among responses to this question the following may be especially noted:

¹¹⁸⁸ See Allison, *The End of the Ages has Come*, 48-9. For discussion of these words of Allison’s from a different angle see pages 239-41 above.

¹¹⁸⁹ See Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom*, 74.

11.3.2 The Harrowing of Hell / Hades, and Jesus' Descent to the Inferno.

This was a popular explanation of Matt 27:51b-53 in the early Church and, in modern times, it still has some strong advocates.

11.3.2.1 A brief look at Post New Testament Interpretation of Matt 27:51b-53.

The question of how the early Church Fathers understood Matt 27:51b-53 lies outside the compass of this thesis. However, for completeness' sake, the following summary of a very large, and complicated, field of research may be given. This will reveal to the reader that the early Church Fathers were also divided in their understanding of Matt 27:51b-53 and had no satisfactory answer concerning its purpose.¹¹⁹⁰ After the summary I will then discuss a recent advocate of the "harrowing of hell" view.

This survey mainly follows the study of Matt 27:51b-53 by Herman Zeller.¹¹⁹¹ Zeller looked (i) at the Apocryphal writings (e.g. the *Greek Apocalypse of Ezra*, the *Barnabas* letter, the *Odes of Solomon*, the *Ascension of Isaiah*, the *Gospel of Nicodemus*,¹¹⁹² and so on), and (ii) at thirty two of the early Church Fathers in the period up to 500 C.E. Middle Eastern Fathers considered by Zeller include Ignatius of Antioch (d. c. 110);¹¹⁹³ Justin (d. c. 165).¹¹⁹⁴ Melito of

¹¹⁹⁰ This could perhaps be construed to suggest that any oral tradition underlying, and thus helping to explain Matt 27:51b-53, was so early that by the turn of the first century it had been lost.

¹¹⁹¹ Hermann Zeller, "Corpora Sanctorum: Eine Studie zu Matt 27, 52-53," *Zeitschrift fuer katholische Theologie* 71 (1949): 385-465; See also Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo, 27, 51b-53*, 153-171; Fascher, "Das Weib des Pilatus (Matthew 27, 19): Die Auferweckung der Heiligen (Matt 27, 51-53)," 32-51; Swart, "Twee aardbewings of een?" 255-265; Richard J. Bauckham, "Descent to the Underworld," in Freedman, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 2:145-159.

¹¹⁹² In the Latin version of this work Carinus and Leucius, the sons of Simeon (Luke 2:25-35), who are resurrected jointly with Jesus, testify in secret before the Sanhedrin. Very legendary references to Matt 27:52b-53 are clear.

¹¹⁹³ Ignatius, *Magnesian* 9:2 contains perhaps an allusion to Matt 27:52-53.

¹¹⁹⁴ See Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo, 27, 51b-53*, 156-7 for Justin's reference to the *Apocrypha of Jeremiah* (perhaps a Christian midrash on the canonical book of Jeremiah). Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 72:4, cites a text which he affirms belongs to the canonical book of Jeremiah, but which the Jews had eliminated. Some see a relationship of this text to Matt 27:52-53. A. Resch, for instance, saw this text of the Apocryphal Jeremiah as the source of Matt 27:52-53. This same text is cited six times by Irenaeus (although he attributes it not just to Jeremiah but to other authors as well!). K. Gschwind regarded the *Apocrypha of Jeremiah* as a Jewish work, pre-Christian, which presented a text of the prophet Jeremiah amplified with midrash. The text originally, it was maintained, spoke of the descent of Yahweh to Sheol – an idea known in Judaism and which Christians transferred to the Messiah. (This is very debatable – for this *logion* of Justin and of Irenaeus can be explained as a Christian interpolation into the canonical book of Jeremiah (in the first half of the second century) in order to justify the reference of Matt 27:9. It is possible that Matt 27:52-53, joined with 1 Peter 3:19; 4:6 and Dan 12:2, may have been influential in the formation of the quote, which presents itself, in some cases, as of Jeremiah. Perhaps it is attributed to this

Sardis (d.c. 180); Irenaeus (d.c. 200); Clement of Alexandria (d.c. 215); Origen (d.c. 253/4);¹¹⁹⁵ Eusebius of Caesarea (d.c. 339); Cyril of Jerusalem (d.c. 386); Aphraates (d.c. 344); Ephraem (d.c. 373); Athanasius (d.c. 373); Epiphanius (d.c. 403); Gregory of Nazianzus (d.c. 390); Chrysostomus (d.c. 407) and Cyril of Alexandria (d.c. 444). Western Church Fathers referred to by Zeller include Tertullian (d. c. 220); Theodoret; Hippolytus; Novatian (d. c. 250); Hilarius of Poitiers (d. c. 367), Ambrose (d. c. 397); Prudentius (d.c.405); Hieronymous (d. c. 420) and Augustine (d.c. 430).

The following points, arising from Zeller's study and which contribute to the wider appreciation of Matt 27:51b-53, may be noted:

- (1) First, Matt 27:51b-53 was known and commented on by a great variety of the Church Fathers in three of the main languages of those days – Greek, Syriac (Aramaic) and Latin. However, in a number of cases it is debatable whether Matt 27:51b-53 is being referred to.
- (2) There was however considerable diversity of opinion about how the passage was to be understood and what it meant. For example:
 - (a) There was debate as to whether it was to be understood as real, as “historical”; or as “symbolic”, as a vision.¹¹⁹⁶
 - (b) There was debate as to whether the passage referred to the souls or the bodies of the dead; to whether the events happened before, along with, or after Jesus' resurrection; and as to the identity of the holy raised ones.
 - (c) There was no agreement as to whether the resurrection of Matt 27:51b-53 was eschatological (that is, that it had inaugurated the End Times) or whether it was only temporary.

prophet, the most prestigious in Judaism, in order to give to the Christian doctrine of the descent to the Inferno a biblical authority.

¹¹⁹⁵ In his commentary on Matthew, Origen gives a profoundly allegorical interpretation of Matt 27:51b-53. In a discourse on Rom 6:8, he relates Matt 12:29 and Eph 4:8 with Matt 27:52-53. He links Matt 27:51b with the descent to the Inferno and the liberation of the dead (but the battle and victory over Satan is not in the Inferno but on the cross – cf. Col 2:15 – for the abode of the demons was considered to be in the air).

¹¹⁹⁶ A. Winklhofer notes that “the Fathers, the nearer they are to the time of the Apostles, take Matt 27:52-53 literally.” See Winklhofer, “2. Corpora Sanctorum (Matt 27, 51ff),” 35.

According to Zeller¹¹⁹⁷ Chrysostom (d. 407) was the first to suggest that the resurrected ones of Matt 27:52-53 again died (thus this opinion was first maintained very late). Ambrose was of the same persuasion. For Ambrose, “the eschatological resurrection in Matt 27:51b-53 was not real, but only typically given.”¹¹⁹⁸ Augustine also, it seems, held that the resurrected ones of Matt 27:52-53 died again (that is – that death, in effect, had not been permanently overcome). It was maintained that Hebrews 11:40 allowed no “perfection” of the OT Patriarchs – there was to be only one “coronation day” for all the saints (both OT and NT).

(d) There was debate as to whether the “holy city” of Matt 27:53 was the earthly or the heavenly Jerusalem.

(3) The understanding of Matt 27:51b-53 by the Church Fathers was complicated by the teaching of Chiliasm (Millennarianism) and by the Gnostic denial of a future general resurrection.

(4) Matt 27:51b-53 became, in the Church Fathers, linked with the teaching of Jesus’ Descent to the Inferno (Hades). According to R. Aguirre¹¹⁹⁹ there is ample testimony that among the early Christians, both in the East and in the West, the resurrection of the saints of Matt 27:52-53 was interpreted as a consequence of the descent of Christ to the Inferno, the place of the dead. But reference to Matt 27:51b-53 is not equally clear and there is much ambiguity (the descent to the Inferno was affirmed with distinct grades of clarity by the Church Fathers). Further, there was division about where the victory over Satan was obtained - in the Inferno or on the cross (cf. Col 2:15)? The doctrine of the descent of Christ to the Inferno (“Sheol” in the Jewish world; “Hades” in the Greek) was, it seems, an answer to the problem of the salvation of the righteous dead before Christ’s birth (that is, of how they participated in Christ’s redeeming work). There is evidence that with regard to this matter there was development of ideas. First, there was the preaching of Christ to the OT righteous – that is, the announcing of their liberation (cf. *Gos. Pet.* 41-42). But later the activity of Christ in the Inferno was not limited to preaching but included the defeat of the Devil and liberation of souls (some later texts have the Apostles

¹¹⁹⁷ Zeller, “Corpora Sanctorum: Eine Studie zu Matt 27, 52-53,” 437.

¹¹⁹⁸ See Zeller, “Corpora Sanctorum: Eine Studie zu Matt 27, 52-53,” 446-7.

¹¹⁹⁹ Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo, 27, 51b-53*, 164-71.

descending to the Inferno to preach, to baptize and to save the OT righteous). Still later texts have Christ at his baptism descending to the Inferno, and so conquering the Devil, and have his ascent from the Inferno equated with his resurrection. Eventually the descent to the Inferno became a form to express the reality of Christ's death.

(5) The study of the Church Fathers raises another question, relevant to the study of Matt 27:51b-53, - with the passing of time, did the Jewish teaching about Hades (as an intermediate state) "tone down" the early Church's teaching that the death of Christ had inaugurated the *Eschatoi*, the End times? Some of the Church Fathers,¹²⁰⁰ it seems, thought of the raised holy ones as immortal, like Enoch and Elijah, and that they had entered Paradise (the "land of the waiting" - that is, a place of bliss but still not heaven in the eschatological sense) there to wait for the actual transformation of their bodies to become like the eternally immortal body of Christ. This, it was felt, preserved the "firstborn from the dead" status of Christ.

(6) In this thesis the relationship of Matt 27:51b-53 with respect to Matt 28:1-8 has been investigated (see 6.3 above). Accordingly, it is of interest to note that G.J. Swart¹²⁰¹ draws attention to a peculiar relationship between Matt 27:51-54 and Matt 28:2-4 to be found in certain writings of the Church Fathers. In some Church Fathers there is an actual amalgamation of the two earthquakes and the accompanying events which are found in the two passages. Thus, the rolled away stone (Matt 28:2-4) is associated with the liberation of the dead out of Hades, that is, the guards are understood to be guarding the gates of Hades. The reader is invited to see the immediate events: that is, the rolling away of the stone and the reaction of the guards - in a wider perspective - that is, in terms of Christ's victory over death. To be able to round this association off, the resurrection of the deceased (Matt 27:52) is added - for a good reason, on the grounds of the indication of μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ (Matt 27:53). In other words, through the contrast of the raised dead (Matt 27:52-53) with the guards who became like the dead (Matt 28:4), it appears that in some of the Church Fathers, the two reports of the

¹²⁰⁰ For example, Tertullian. See Zeller, "Corpora Sanctorum: Eine Studie zu Matt 27, 52-53," 441.

¹²⁰¹ Swart, "Twee aardbewings of een?" 257-60.

earthquakes in Matthew are integrated within a literary unity with the main theme: Christ rose, the underworld is defeated.¹²⁰²

Zeller's conclusions about the Church Fathers and Matt 27:52-53 may be summarized as follows.¹²⁰³ In general in the early Church the words of Matt 27:52-53 were understood eschatologically – thus, basically, both the Eastern and Western Church Fathers were united that Matt 27:52-53 implies that death (the end point of sin), and the underworld power, have been conquered. Thus, Jesus' death on the cross has brought about the change of the world, the *μετάνοια*. The rejection of an actual genuine, permanent resurrection of the holy ones came very late with Tertullian who, it seems, came to this position as a result of pressure from the Jewish requirements of a "between state" for the dead.

According to A. Winklhofer¹²⁰⁴ the Fathers (quoted by Zeller) faithfully reflect the confusion inherent in Matt 27:52-53 itself. Many of the Fathers do not entirely conclude that Matt 27:52-53 implies a real eschatological resurrection of OT saints. In other words, according to Winklhofer, the tradition of the first five centuries neither supports nor denies an eschatological interpretation, or an historical interpretation. For Winklhofer, Matt 27:52-53 remains difficult. It is an "erratic block" in the holy writing which cannot be easily incorporated into the modern structure of our faith world. This is because the eschatological thought of

¹²⁰² G. J. Swart's *Gevolgtrekking* (Conclusion) is as follows: "Uit die ondersoek na die verwerking van die σεισμος- motief van Matteus 27:51-54 en 28:2-4 deur verskeie Patristiese en Bisantynse outeurs, het geblyk dat daar baie verskillende interpretasies van die betrokke Matteus-passasies voorkom. Die aardbewing(s) is meer dikwels voorgestel as reaksie van die skepping op die kruisiging, maar soms ook as teken van Christus se oorwinning oor die dood, of as sleutel tot die opstanding in die laaste dag. Dit is egter veral deur die kontrastering van die dooies wat opgewek word met die wagte wat soos dooies word, dat die twee aardbewingberigte in Matteus geïntegreer word tot 'n literere eenheid met die hooftema: Christus het opgestaan die doderyk is verslaan. (Swart, "Twee aardbewings of een?" 264). ('Out of this investigation on the treatment of the *seismos*-motive of Matthew 27:51-54 and 28:2-4 by several Patristic and Byzantine authors, it appeared that there are many different interpretations of this concerned Matthew-passage. The earthquake(s) is more frequently seen as reaction of the creation on the crucifixion, but sometimes also as sign of Christ's victory over death, or as a key for the resurrection in the last day. It is however notably through the contrast of the raised dead with the guards who became like the dead, that the two reports of the earthquakes in Matthew are integrated within a literary unity with the main theme: Christ rose, the underworld is defeated.')

¹²⁰³ Zeller, "Corpora Sanctorum: Eine Studie zu Matt 27, 52-53," 458-9.

¹²⁰⁴ A. Winklhofer, "4. Corpora Sanctorum (Fortsetzung von Heft 1/53)," 214-5.

Christendom has itself changed.¹²⁰⁵ Hence it is helpful to bear in mind, as Winklhofer notes, that every eschatological question is overshadowed by a mystery – namely, how history (literal fact) and non-history (the beyond, the eschatological) interpretations relate to one another.¹²⁰⁶

11.3.2.2 A Recent Advocate of the Harrowing of Hell Dogma

In an important article¹²⁰⁷ Tim McLay notes that Matthew 12:40, 16:18 and 27:51b-53 all belong to Matthew’s special material. Then, based on this special material and its background and linguistic connections with the psalm in Jonah 2, he suggests “that Matthew exhibits a nascent form of the ‘Descent into Hades’ motif.”¹²⁰⁸ McLay argues that the resurrection of the saints (Matt 27:51b-53) is the proleptic fulfillment of Jesus’ promise of resurrection in Matt 16:18.¹²⁰⁹

Thus, concerning the origin of Matt 27:51b-53, he contends that it is to be found in the context of Matthew’s own theology. Two passages, special to Matthew, prepare for the resurrection of the saints in 27:51b-53. There are (a) the sign of Jonah (Matt 12:39-42. cf. Luke 11:29-32), and (b) Matt 16:18.

¹²⁰⁵ See Winklhofer, “4. Corpora Sanctorum (Fortsetzung von Heft 1/53),” 215. Since this change in the eschatological thought of the Church occurred very early, does this not imply, as argued in this thesis, that Matt 27:52-53 is even earlier – that it is, in fact, a relic of a very early Jewish Christian eschatology?

¹²⁰⁶ Winklhofer, “4. Corpora Sanctorum (Fortsetzung von Heft 1/53),” 215. Note: Matt 27:51b-53 and the Blessed Virgin Mary (BVM). It is perhaps worth noting that Zeller’s interest in Matt 27:52-53 arose, partly, from the thought that there was, perhaps, a theological congruence between Matt 27:52-53 and the teaching of the bodily assumption of the BVM. The bodily resurrection / transfiguration of the holy ones at the death of Jesus (that is, before the Last Day) suggests, according to Zeller, likewise the possibility of the bodily reception of Mary, the mother of Jesus, into heaven – that is, of the bodily perfection of the mother of God. (See Zeller, “Corpora Sanctorum: Eine Studie zu Matt 27, 52-53,” 464). Zeller however acknowledges that the early Church Fathers never made this connection. “Many speak of an absolute vacuum regarding this teaching [about Matt 27:52-53 and the BVM] in the Church Fathers.” (See Winklhofer, “4. Corpora Sanctorum (Fortsetzung von Heft 1/53),” 216). Winklhofer (“2. Corpora Sanctorum (Matt 27, 51ff),” 31-34) makes the following comments on this matter: 1) If Matt 27:52-53 implies that the saints rose literally and historically, and if the BVM is connected with these verses, would this not endanger her privileged uniqueness? 2) If the least NT saint is greater than the greatest of the OT saints (Matt 5:19), then why has no NT saint been bodily transfigured? 3) The bodily transfiguration of Mary lies on a completely different plain than that of the OT saints. Mary is from the start to be seen in the framework of the NT redemption order. [cf. the Eve-Mary parallel (or antithesis)]. Thus, according to Winklhofer, it would be good if the statement of Matt 27:52-53 be wholly removed out of the Mariological perspective. In other words, the doctrine of the bodily assumption of the BVM is wholly from revelation. (See Winklhofer, “2. Corpora Sanctorum (Matt 27, 51ff),” 33).

¹²⁰⁷ McLay, “Death, Descent, and Deliverance in Matthew 27:51b-53,” 81 – 93.

¹²⁰⁸ McLay, “Death, Descent and Deliverance in Matthew 27: 51b-53,” 93. See also John Woodhouse, “Jesus and Jonah,” *The Reformed Theological Review* XLIII (1984): 33- 41.

¹²⁰⁹ McLay, “Death, Descent, and Deliverance in Matthew 27:51b-53,” 82.

(a) According to McLay, Matt 12:40 is a Matthean insertion (it is not found in Luke 11:29-32). Further, Matt 12:40a is an exact quotation from LXX Jonah 2:1. And since in Jonah 2:3b God hears Jonah’s prayer ἐκ κοιλίας ᾗδου “from the belly of Hades [Hebrew: Sheol]” there is an explicit identification between κοιλίας τοῦ κήτους (belly of the fish, 2:1) and ἐκ κοιλίας ᾗδου (belly of Hades, 2:3b). Thus McLay interprets Matthew’s insertion of 12:40 (cf. Luke 11:29-32) as a reference to Jesus’ being in Hades, the realm of the dead, and not merely as a reference to the grave. Also resurrection is suggested by the expression “three days and three nights”, which implies an end to the time in the earth, and by the fact that Jonah did not remain in the fish’s belly.¹²¹⁰

(b) With regard to Matt 16:18, McLay contends that there are three linguistic connections between Matthew’s Gospel and the psalm of Jonah 2, connections which suggest that Matthew intentionally links Matt 16:17-18 with Jonah 2. (i) LXX Jonah 2:7 ἦς οἱ μοχλοὶ αὐτῆς κάτοχοι αἰώνοι (“whose bars constrain / imprison forever”) and Matt 16:18b πύλαι ᾗδου (“the gates of Hades”); (ii) Jesus’ reference to Peter as Simon Βαριωνᾶ “the son of Jonah” (contrast John 1:42); and (iii) Matt 16:4: “a sign will not be given this generation except the sign of Jonah.” According to McLay “the gates of Hades” (Matt 16:18b) is a metaphor for death rather than a reference to demonic forces which challenge the church, although he agrees that there is indeed some type of struggle between the church and “the gates of Hades”.¹²¹¹ In the light of all this McLay concludes: “The inability of death to prevail over the church in this passage [Matt 16:18] is then understood to mean there will be a resurrection of the church from the realm of the dead. ‘I will build my church and the gates of death will not prevail against (that is, contain) it.’ The triumph of the resurrection is fulfilled in Matthew by Jesus’ death, which signals the final victory over the power of death and initiates the proleptic resurrection of the saints in 27:51b-53.”¹²¹²

¹²¹⁰ McLay, “Death, Descent, and Deliverance in Matthew 27:51b-53,” 84-91. See also Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 1:356.

¹²¹¹ McLay, “Death, Descent, and Deliverance in Matthew 27:51b-53,” 87-91. See also Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 2:633 fn 110.

¹²¹² McLay, “Death, Descent, and Deliverance in Matthew 27:51b-53,” 89.

That Jesus' church, ἑκκλησία, (Matt 16:18) could have included Old Testament saints (the ἅγιοι, "holy ones" who rose, Matt 27:52, were OT saints) is, according to McLay, indicated by the essential continuity Matthew maintains between Jesus and the OT.¹²¹³ Further, since in the LXX ἑκκλησία can be translated simply as "people of God" it follows that in Matthew's usage, "the referent of those included by the terms ἑκκλησία and ἅγιοι overlap. Therefore, it is possible to view the raising of the 'holy ones' as a fulfillment of Jesus' statement to Peter in 16:18 where Jesus promises to build his 'church' and the gates of death will not be able to contain it. [Thus] The proleptic resurrection of the saints in 27:51b-53 is the evangelist's theological affirmation of Jesus' promise to Peter in 16:18 that death will not overcome and contain his people of God. There will be a resurrection!"¹²¹⁴

According to McLay, since a "descent into Hades" is found in Jonah (2:3b), so likewise it is to be found in Matthew's Gospel. For, in the psalm of Jonah 2, are the seeds for Matthew's special material in 12:40, and 16:18 (and by implication 27:51b-53), and the three dominant themes in Jonah's prayer – depth / Hades, a descent to Hades, and deliverance / salvation from Hades, provide the necessary origins for a "descent into Hades" motif for Matthew's Gospel.¹²¹⁵

The fact that McLay is able to link Matt 27:51b-53 with Matt 16:18 supports, in a very real sense, an aspect of the argument of this thesis – namely, that Matt 27:51b-53, far from being an extraneous insertion into Matthew's Gospel, must be understood as an integral part of the whole of the First Gospel. However, McLay's assertion that Matt 12:40 is to be understood as a reference to Jesus' being in Hades, the realm of the dead, and not merely in the grave must be questioned. For while in Jonah 2:1-2 "the belly of the fish" and "the belly of Sheol" are indeed equated, yet Jonah was still in his body – he was still alive physically – his soul and body had not been separated. Accordingly, Matt 12:40 can only be taken as a reference to Jesus being in Hades, Sheol, if, assuming the correctness of the Greek understanding of a human being as body and soul, the crucified Jesus is equated with his soul, his body being in the tomb.

¹²¹³ For example, Matt 1:1 with its declaration of Jesus being a descendant of David and of Abraham connects Jesus with the OT covenant people of God.

¹²¹⁴ McLay, "Death, Descent, and Deliverance in Matthew 27:51b-53," 90-93.

¹²¹⁵ See McLay, "Death, Descent, and Deliverance in Matthew 27:51b-53," 92.

However, Matt 12:40 makes much better sense on the Hebrew understanding of a human being – that is, that the reference is to the crucified Jesus’ lifeless body being in the tomb. Thus, it is to be questioned whether Matt 12:40, 16:18 and 27:51b-53 provide the necessary origins for a “descent into Hades” motif for Matthew’s Gospel.

Another modern scholar who advocates a “descent into Hades” motif is J. D. Crossan, although his approach is rather ambivalent. According to Crossan, “[T]he harrowing of Hell, the *descensus ad inferos*, ... did not come late into Christian tradition but came in very, very early and is already starting to be erased when first we see its presence.”¹²¹⁶

As the following section, 11.3.2.3, will make clear, the harrowing of Hell dogma is not really found in Matt 27:51b-53. Further, as mentioned above, the fact that McLay is able to link Matt 27:51b-53 with Matt 16:18 is significant for this thesis. For this linkage supports the argument that these verses are to be seen, and so understood, as an integral part of the whole covenantal scheme of Matthew’s Gospel.

11.3.2.3 The NT and the Doctrine of the descent of Christ to the Inferno

It is exceedingly doubtful that the dogma of the descent of Christ to the Inferno is to be found in the NT.¹²¹⁷ Passages like 1 Pet 3:18-19 (cf. 1 Tim 3:16); 1 Pet 4:6 and Eph 4:8-9 do not really support this teaching. Nor, according to Winklhofer¹²¹⁸ does Matt 27:51-53 support this dogma. For, the dogma of the descent of Christ to Hades concerns only the preaching of the Gospel in the Underworld, not the bodily resurrection of the righteous, and definitely not their appearance in the “Holy City”. Further, the victory of Christ was announced to the rebel demons not in the Inferno but in the air (cf. Eph 2:2; 6:12). The Church Fathers, it appears, read this particular teaching out of Isa 9:2; 1 Pet 3:19, Rev 1:12-20, Eph 4:8-9. This last reference, Eph. 4:8-9 was understood to mean that the souls of the dead were taken to heaven in

¹²¹⁶ See Crossan, “The Gospel of Peter and the Canonical Gospels,” 42-43. See 9.3.2.3 above.

¹²¹⁷ See Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*, 270-1.

¹²¹⁸ Winklhofer, “2. Corpora Sanctorum (Matt 27, 51ff),” 63.

the heavenward journey of the Lord. In Eph 4:8-9, however, the reference is to the incarnation rather than to the Inferno. It thus seems difficult to admit that this doctrine of descent to the Inferno, which is not encountered in any other NT text, is found in Matt 27:52b-53 in this already developed form. In other words, the descent of Christ to the Inferno is a later theological theory and it is anachronistic to consider it affirmed in Matt 27:51b-53, or in any other NT text.¹²¹⁹

11.3.3 Defeat of the sinful Angels and evil Cosmic Forces

There is the possibility that in Matt 27:51b-53 Matthew is suggesting that through his death Jesus overcame and destroyed hostile spiritual powers. Thus, Matt 27:51-53 could perhaps be understood as depicting victory signs. Jesus' death is a victory which in some sense marks a turning point of the ages (cf. Matt 23:39; 26:29; 26:64 – the “from now on” has occurred).¹²²⁰

This would be more convincing if the sleeping holy ones were clearly declared to have been raised into a transcendent rather than an earthly realm. For this would perhaps have reminded the readers that in the “heavenlies” there was a struggle between God and the forces of evil. Certainly, Matthew's Gospel reflects the dualistic understanding of the nature of the cosmos which prevailed in New Testament times (cf. Matt 4:1-11).¹²²¹ Further, if Jesus' death resulted in the forgiveness of sin, it would be strange if his death did not also deal a blow to the evil forces behind sin – that is, Satan and his angels.

¹²¹⁹ See also Aguirre *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 169.

¹²²⁰ According to Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1214, “Matthew ... is concerned here with proleptic manifestations of eschatological realities, not with the full substance of those realities ... That which happens now in miniature is an intimation, an anticipation, of what is due to happen on a grand, even a cosmic scale.” The question may be asked: do the words “that which happens now in miniature” suggest that Nolland understands the concept of “prolepsis” in the sense of “first fruits”?

¹²²¹ See Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, 35-40; Riches, *Conflicting Mythologies*, 60-67.

However, Matt 25:41 is clear that the final and decisive defeat of Satan and his angels takes place at the *parousia*¹²²² of Jesus, the Son of Man. Accordingly, and this is the difficulty with this suggestion, if Matt 27:51b-53 relates to the defeat of Satan and evil powers this would mean that the *parousia*, or at least a proleptic *parousia*, occurred when Jesus died.

11.3.4 Matt 27:51b-53 implies that a proleptic *Parousia* occurred at the moment of Jesus' Death

According to J. P. Meier¹²²³ in Matthew's salvation-history scheme the death / resurrection of Christ was *Die Wende der Zeit*, the eschatological turning point. Thus, the apocalyptic events of Matt 27:51b-53 implied that Jesus' death and resurrection had introduced a whole new age. Accordingly, he argued that the need for strict, literal adherence to the Law as seemingly advocated by Matt 5:18 had been valid only up to the introduction of this new age. Meier's approach however did not receive widespread acceptance. Yet the language of Matt 27:51b-53 is definitely eschatological, other worldly.¹²²⁴

Furthermore, many other scholars have seen in Matt 27:51b-53 evidence for some form of eschatological turning point. Thus, according to D. P. Senior, "the signs of 27:51-53 ... are the immediate result of Jesus' death (καὶ ἰδου 27:51), and serve in the text as a symbolic description of God's seal of approval on *the life-giving death of his Son*."¹²²⁵ In other words, Matt 27:51b-53 stresses that Jesus and his death affects the whole creation. Thus, according to Senior "the additions [to Mark] are a result of Matthew's christological interest – the death of Jesus has cosmic relevance".¹²²⁶

Consequently, many writers understand that the purpose of Matt 27:51b-53 is to declare that through his death Jesus, the Son of God, has inaugurated a *new age* – the age of salvation – that is, Jesus and his death must be understood apocalyptically, eschatologically. So, according

¹²²² Understood as the final End.

¹²²³ See 4.3.3 above.

¹²²⁴ See Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 260-61; Ham, *The Coming King and the Rejected Shepherd*, 104-5.

¹²²⁵ Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 325. (Emphasis added).

¹²²⁶ Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 311.

to D. P. Senior, “The portents have ‘an eschatological’ flavor, signifying that the death of Jesus has ushered in a new era of salvation.”¹²²⁷ Likewise, in the opinion of I. Maisch, “Here (Matt 27:52b-53) one must reckon with an eschatological happening, that is, with a conclusive proof of power (over death).”¹²²⁸

Various writers draw attention to the eschatological significance of the signs mentioned in Matt 27:51b-53.¹²²⁹ Accordingly, the “earthquake” (Matt 27:51b) especially suggests more than judgment – rather, it is a supernatural event, affecting the whole creation, marking the end of one age and the beginning of another, the age of salvation. The clause “and the earth was shaken” inaugurates the compound sentence which follows, wherein the events are chronologically and causally related, and so prepares for the resurrection of the saints.¹²³⁰ Thus, in v. 54, τὸν σεισμὸν καὶ τὰ γινόμενα, the earthquake is stressed by being separated out from the other events.¹²³¹ Furthermore, the expression “the resurrection of the dead” was definitely associated with the Messianic Endtime.¹²³² Likewise, the expression “holy ones” belonged to the vocabulary of Endtime events. Thus, according to M. Riebl, “In apocalyptic writings the word (holy ones) carried endtime connotations. The ‘righteous, the holy ones and the elect’ would come through the turmoil of the last evil time and experience the pleasures of the new eon”.¹²³³ Consequently, D. P. Senior writes, “earthquakes, splitting of rocks, opening of tombs,

¹²²⁷ Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 311.

¹²²⁸ Maisch, “Die österliche Dimension des Todes Jesu: Zur Osterverkündigung in Matt 27, 51-54,” 119; According to Hill, “Matthew 27:51-53 in the Theology of the Evangelist,” 77, “Matt 27:51b-53 is affirming that Jesus’ death is the moment of God’s eschatological intervention, which includes the general resurrection of the dead.” (cf. Ezek 37:7, 12-14). See also John P. Meier, “Salvation-History in Matthew: In Search of a Starting Point,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 37 (2001): 207-8.

¹²²⁹ According to Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1137, the quatrain, 27:51b-53, the four signs of which echo Scripture, offers “a dramatic way in which ordinary people familiar with OT thought could understand that the death of Jesus on the cross had introduced the day of the Lord with all its aspects, negative (divine wrath, judgment) and positive (conquest of death, resurrection to eternal life).”

¹²³⁰ See Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 319.

¹²³¹ Note also that the earthquake connects the events associated with Jesus’ death with those of Easter Sunday morning (Matt 28:2).

¹²³² See Herman L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (6 vols.; Munich: C. H. Beck, 1922-1961), 4:1175-1198; A. Oepke, “ἀνίστημι,” TWNT, 1:368-372.

¹²³³ Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 33.

and the raising of the dead, are part of the common ‘furniture’ of apocalyptic descriptions of the Endtime and examples in biblical and intertestamental literature are numerous.”¹²³⁴

Another way of understanding what Matthew is saying in 27:51b-53 is to see the events associated with Jesus’ death as declaring that there has been a theophany. God Himself has been shown as God. The eschatological salvation that some in Israel expected from Yahweh at the last day has now been revealed, along with the fact of Jesus being the Son of God.¹²³⁵ Thus, in the events of Matt 27: 51b-53 Yahweh proves Himself to be the faithful covenant God.¹²³⁶ Accordingly, “the resurrection [of the holy ones] is an eschatological gift of salvation, which marks the beginning of salvation time.”¹²³⁷

Other writers have also sensed Matthew’s stress on the importance of Jesus’ death and its connection with the End Time salvation. Thus, according to Davies and Allison, “Jesus’ death is a resurrecting death: the dead are revived by his dying. As he passes from life to death they pass from death to life.”¹²³⁸ In similar vein, D. A. Hagner says “the death of Jesus breaks the power of death itself.”¹²³⁹ In the opinion of F. V. Filson, “The story infers that Christ’s death opens the tombs and gives life to the dead (cf. John 6: 25-29).”¹²⁴⁰ This almost unanimous recognition of Matthew’s stress on the importance of Jesus’ death and its eschatological effects

¹²³⁴ Senior, “The Death of Jesus and the Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51-53),” 314; See also Maisch, “Die österliche Dimension des Todes Jesu: Zur Osterverkündigung in Matt 27, 51-54,” 116; Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1138; Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus (Matt 26-28)*, 364; Witherup, “The Death of Jesus and the Raising of the Saints,” 581. Since Commentators have found in Matt 27:51b-53 traces of Ezek 37; Zech 14 and Dan 12 (and also of 1Kgs 19:11-12; Isa 2:19, 48:21 and Nah 1:5-6), the passage may perhaps be compared to an alloy, an amalgam of precious metals – gold, silver, platinum, and so on. Such an amalgam would not have come into existence after one working, but only after being worked on over and over again until all was fused together. For Matthew to have produced the amalgam which is Matt 27:51b-53 he must have revised, and honed, the passage many times over. Or has Matthew perhaps used some oral tradition which had been mulled over and over as it was passed down by the early Christian community? If so, then why is there no trace of it in other contemporary sources?

¹²³⁵ This is stressed by Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew’s Exposition of the Death of Jesus*. See also Harry L. Chronis, “The Torn Veil: Cultus and Christology in Mark 15:37-39,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 101 (1982): 97-114.

¹²³⁶ See Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 41.

¹²³⁷ See Maisch, “Die österliche Dimension des Todes Jesu: Zur Osterverkündigung in Matt 27, 51-54,” 118-9.

¹²³⁸ Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:633.

¹²³⁹ Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 850.

¹²⁴⁰ Filson, *The Gospel according to St. Matthew*, 297.

is well summed up by D. P. Senior who writes: “It is the *death* of Jesus which triggers the resurrection of the saints – this is the new feature Matthew brings to the synoptic tradition.”¹²⁴¹

Unfortunately, however, this unanimity recedes rather rapidly when it is asked: Does Matthew want it to be understood that with the death of Jesus the End Time *parousia* has actually come, and that thus we are now living in the last days; or does he imply that the events described as occurring at the moment of Jesus’ death are to be understood, not literally, but as a figurative anticipation of the still future *parousia*? This is a complicated, but important, issue. Accordingly, some argue that the purpose of Matt 27:51b-53 is to assert that the End Time, in sense of the *parousia*, has actually come. Others stress that the purpose of the passage is to indicate that something less sensational, as it were, has occurred – that in the death of Jesus a prolepsis of the yet-to-be *parousia* has been given.¹²⁴²

The fact that some writers can understand the death of Jesus, and the events associated with it, as a prolepsis of the yet-to-be *parousia* is most significant. It is really an admission that Matt 27:51b-53 does speak of final End Time events.¹²⁴³ Thus, in the light of Matt 27:51b-53 and other passages like Matt 24:14; Matt 25:31-46 and Matt 28:16-20, Matthew, as already noted, seems to contradict himself. Accordingly, in attempting to understand Matt 27:51b-53 this point needs to be acknowledged.

¹²⁴¹ Senior, “The Death of Jesus and the Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51-53),” 328 (Emphasis original).

¹²⁴² Thus, according to Luz, while the language of Matt 27:51b-53 does indeed strongly suggest God’s action, yet it falls short of portraying the expected apocalyptic end time resurrection of the righteous. Rather, the reader is to understand that *something* of the apocalyptic end time has already happened. See Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus (Matt 26-28)*, 365 (Emphasis original); In his commentary on Matthew, Gundry writes, “The rest of v. 51 and the whole of vv. 52-53 are an insertion by Matthew. In it he adds to the tearing of the veil several more supernatural events. Because these events focus on the resurrection of the saints and of Jesus the crucified, they sound the note of eschatological vindication for persecuted disciples. In short, this preview of the end guarantees the hope of those who suffer in the way of righteousness.” (Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*, 575). Commenting on these words, Hill (“Matthew 27:51-53 in the Theology of the Evangelist,” 84), says, “Robert Gundry takes an entirely different view of the significance of our pericope, 27:51-53. In his opinion, Matthew does not want to show that the end has come, or begun, with Jesus’ death and resurrection: he wants only to show a preview of the end which will guarantee the hope of those who suffer in the way of righteousness: the apocalypse is a way of encouraging persecuted disciples. But, even if the encouragement of disciples is a feature of Matthew’s passion narrative (as it is in Mark), the presence of that motif is utterly insufficient to account for the compilation and introduction of this highly-charged apocalyptic pericope.”

¹²⁴³ See 9.3.2.4 above for comments about W. Schenk’s suggestion of a prolepsis *parousia* in relation to Matt 27:51b-53.

11.3.5 **Matt 27:51b-53, understood as a proleptic Parousia, was Matthew’s way of explaining the Delay in the Parousia**

P. Foster asks: “Is it (the Eschaton) to be understood from Matthew’s perspective as being inaugurated only at the *parousia* with the triumphant return of Jesus, or does his community already live in the eschatological age in which a new form of adherence and fulfillment of the law has taken sway?”¹²⁴⁴ In other words, for Matthew has Jesus already come – at least to his Church?¹²⁴⁵ Commenting on Matt 28:20b, P. Perkins says, “The abiding rule of the Son of Man is expressed in Jesus’ permanent presence with his disciples... [and she wonders if this could be described as] ... a ‘proleptic *parousia*’ ... [Further] ... The presence of the Lord in the Christian assembly is seen as an anticipation of his future coming.”¹²⁴⁶ Thus, Jesus’ presence with his Church is Matthew’s answer to the dilemma created by the delay in the *parousia*. Jesus has come to, and is with his people,¹²⁴⁷ yet the *parousia*, the final judgment, is still to come.¹²⁴⁸

The question arises as to why there is this delay in the coming of the *parousia*. To my mind the answer is that the *parousia*, in the sense of the final judgment, has been delayed so

¹²⁴⁴ Foster, *Community, Law and Mission in Matthew’s Gospel*, 190, fn 163.

¹²⁴⁵ Cf. The Holy Spirit and the Apostles’ miracles. Cf. The Lord with his people Israel (see Matt 1:23; 18:20; 28:20).

¹²⁴⁶ Perkins, *Resurrection: New Testament Witness and Contemporary Reflection*, 135. According to Meier, *Law and History in Matthew’s Gospel*, 39, “The breaking-in of the Kingdom has put an end to the old aeon in principle, but not in full-blown reality ... The final, visible separation that destroys the old age once and for all still lies in the future.”

¹²⁴⁷ Cf. Matt 1:21-23.

¹²⁴⁸ Allison, *The End of the Ages Has Come*, 49 writes: “Our review of Matt 27:51b-53, 54, 28:2-4; 26:64; and 28:18a-19a reveals that, independently of Mark, yet like him, Matthew and his tradition associate the death and resurrection of Jesus with eschatological motifs; the end of Jesus is spoken of as though it had concurred with the end of the age. Yet an interesting difference exists at this point between the first and second Gospels. Mark is primarily concerned with interpreting the passion of Jesus in terms of the ‘messianic woes.’ Events expected on the far side of tribulation are not brought into the passion narrative. Accordingly, although the old temple has passed away, no new temple is said to have come, and the resurrection of Jesus (assuming that Mark as we know it is complete) is not even recounted. It is as though the evangelist stands altogether on this side of the age to come. In Matthew, by way of contrast, this age and the age to come seemingly overlap. Although the consummation lies ahead, although this age is still full of tribulation, and although the Christian casts his hope upon the future coming of the Son of man, saints have already been raised, the Son of man has already been enthroned in the heavenly places, and the resurrected Jesus is ever present with his followers (28:20). If we may so put it, Matthew’s eschatology is, in some ways, more realized than that of Mark.”

that there may be a mission especially to the Gentiles.¹²⁴⁹ To use a military analogy: Jesus' death on the cross was "D-Day" (Victory Day), the turning of the tide. At that moment the decisive conquest over sin and evil was achieved. But there is still much to be done before God's rule is established here on earth. Accordingly, in Matt 28:16-20 the victorious and risen Jesus is depicted as ordering his disciples to do two things. First, they are to go and make disciples of all nations. Those who believe the message of Jesus' conquest over sin and death, and who surrender to him in an act of baptism, receive divine pardon. In the second place, and importantly, the disciples are to teach those baptized to obey Jesus' teachings and so in their daily lives reflect the standards of the Kingdom of God.

11.3.6 Matt 27:51b-53 is to be understood in the Context of Covenant

Another approach to Matt 27:51b-53 is to understand the form of Matthew's Gospel as covenant ratification witness – that is, to understand Matthew's Gospel as a document reflecting

¹²⁴⁹ See N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (vol. 1 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God*; by N. T. Wright; Minneapolis: Fortress Press; 1992). Wright notes that in NT times covenant theology was "the air breathed by the Judaism of this period," 262. YHWH, the one creator God, had chosen Israel and entered into a covenant with her, in order that Israel should be light to a corrupt world. Thus, Jewish belief in one God entailed eschatology (the creator must restore what he had made; evil was not to triumph) and Jewish belief in the covenant implied that God would restore the world *through Israel* (252). Hence Wright stresses that "If the Gentiles and the ultimate divine purpose for them are ignored, then Israel's claim to be the one people of the one creator god is itself called into question." 268. Israel failed, and under the terms of the covenant they were punished with 'exile.' However, the Gospels, in their own way, declare that God has redeemed Israel, his people, through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, His Son, Israel's promised Messiah. Wright notes that the prediction that Jesus 'will save his people from their sins,' (Matt 1:21) presupposes a previous story (Israel's failure and 'exile') (386). However, after their restoration Israel (for Matthew those redeemed through faith in Jesus the Messiah) again faced a covenantal choice – would they be, or not be, a light to the Gentiles? Thus, in Matt 28:16-20 the risen Jesus, like Moses, goes up the mountain and departs from his people, leaving them with a commission to go in and possess the land (that is, the whole world). (388). Thus, according to Wright, "Matthew has woven this covenantal choice into the very structure of his gospel, portraying it as the choice set before his contemporaries by Jesus, and thereby himself setting the same choice before the church of his own day. There is a way by which Israel can be rescued from her exile, can receive the promised forgiveness of sins rather than the ultimate curse. It is the way of following Jesus. Those who come by this way are not a *new* Israel, as though created suddenly from nothing. They are the true descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." (388). For Matthew Jesus is Emmanuel, Israel's God in person (Matt 1:23). He comes with them as they emerge from their long exile (cf. the Exodus) and remains with them as they go to possess the land (that is, the whole world). (Cf. Matt 28:20). And, "so the ministry of Jesus, which at the time was only to the 'lost sheep of the house of Israel' [Matt 15:24; cf. 10:5-6] will result in a salvation for 'all nations.' (389). Wright concludes with this important comment, "The evangelists, in telling the story of Jesus as the climax of Israel's story, are thereby implicitly saying that this story is not the absolute end. ... It is, rather, that which enables the final end now to come into sight. ... There is now a further task, that of bringing the world into subjection to its creator, through the redeemed Israel; and this further task is as yet unrealized, The evangelists were not, then, expecting the imminent end of the space-time order ... (rather) ... the end of the present world order." (401). Unfortunately, Wright only makes a very brief reference to Matt 27:52 (399, fn. 95).

the establishing in OT times of the covenant people, Israel.¹²⁵⁰ However to appreciate more fully this section a brief review of the argument of this thesis is in order. Throughout this thesis two seemingly contradictory positions have been stressed. First, it has been argued that the pericope, Matt 27:51b-53, is not a Matthean literary creation. Rather, it is best understood as being a fragment of a very early Jewish Christian passion tradition. This early tradition was closely related to, and reflected, some Jewish expectations of what the Messiah's one advent (that is, his earthly life) would achieve.¹²⁵¹

In the second place, this thesis has argued that despite its uniqueness and incongruity the pericope, Matt 27:51b-53, is nevertheless an integral part of the First Gospel, especially of Matthew's passion and resurrection narrative.¹²⁵² Accordingly, the question arises: how can Matthew in his narrative hold together these two contradictory positions? The answer, this thesis argues, is along these lines: Matthew can, and does, because he sees and understands Jesus not only in relation to the coming of God's kingdom, but also in the context of covenant. Thus, according to Matthew, not just the nation of Israel, but Jesus himself was in a covenantal relationship with God, his heavenly Father.¹²⁵³

Being in this covenantal relationship Jesus was at all times obedient to his Father's will (contrast the disobedient Israel). According to Matthew, Jesus' obedience eventually resulted in his death on the cross. From Matthew's point of view Jesus' death was not only a miscarriage of justice – it was also the supreme moment of his life of obedience. Accordingly, this thesis suggests that to express the significance and accomplishments of Jesus' supreme act of covenantal obedience, Matthew made use of Matt 27:51b-53. We today may wish that Matthew had used a different and less controversial pericope. But this is what he used, and through it he

¹²⁵⁰ See, for instance, Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*. Much in this section is indebted to Kline's seminal writings.

¹²⁵¹ See 9.3. Matt 27:52 declares that many holy ones were raised *before* Jesus' own resurrection. This is contrary to Christian insistence that Jesus was the first to be raised (cf. Acts 26:23; Col 1:15, 18). Further, since events associated with the End Time occurred at the moment of Jesus' death, the implication is that this is when the final End Time happened, and that it was achieved by the one coming – that is, the earthly life – of Jesus. This also contradicts the teaching of the NT. Even Matthew understands that there will be two advents – two comings – of the Messiah and that the final, general resurrection unto judgment will be at the Messiah's second advent (cf. Matt 24:14; 25:31-36; 28:16-20).

¹²⁵² This is argued in some detail in Chapter 6.

¹²⁵³ This is argued in Chapter 2 – especially in 2.6 and 2.7.

stresses that at the *death* of Jesus, the Christ, a whole new relationship between God and humanity was established. In what follows some further implications of understanding Matt 27:51b-53 in the context of covenant are suggested.

The Book of Exodus reveals three stages in the establishment of Israel's initial nationhood. First, the Lord God, in order to deliver his enslaved people, the descendants of Abraham, entered into battle with the hosts of evil (cf. the Egyptians). Ps 74 13-14 speaks of the Lord at the time of the Exodus breaking and crushing the heads of the dragons and of Leviathan (cf. also Isa 51:9-10; Ezek 29:3-9; 32:2-16). These references suggest that the real enemy at the Exodus was Satan and the forces of evil. This thought is reflected in the NT – see Rev 12:7-9 where the dragon is identified as “that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan.”

Next, as a result of his victory, God's people escaped from slavery, came to Sinai where, through the mediation of Moses, the Lord entered into a covenant with them, sealed through sacrifice and the shedding of blood (Exod 24:3-8). Through this covenant the Lord God entered into a special and personal relationship with His people (Exod 20:1-21). God's people, in effect, became a priestly kingdom, a holy nation (Exod 19:6), a people who would be separated out from others by their obedience to the stipulations of the covenant. It is important to note that God's people could never attain kingdom status until they had been delivered from the dominion and rule of the Egyptians. And in a higher, spiritual sense, God's people can never be in his kingdom, and so under his rule, until they are delivered from the dominion of Satan.

And then, thirdly, the Lord gave instructions about the building of a house for his dwelling place in the midst of his people.¹²⁵⁴ That is, the Lord, through his theophanic presence, would be in the midst of Israel as God-king. The following points need to be noted:

(a) This house must be built – that is, a seat of kingship must be established for the exercise of the victorious God's eternal sovereignty.

¹²⁵⁴ The same thought of battle, victory and the Lord building a house, a sanctuary to abide with his people, is found in Exod 15:1-18.

(b) In effect the Lord built two houses (i) Israel as a living house of God's habitation (cf. Book of the Covenant – Exod 20:22-23:33; Exod 24:7; cf. Matt 1:23; 18:20; 28:20); (ii) a more literal house – the Tabernacle which was to be built according to God's strict instructions (Exod 24:40) and which symbolized the Lord's presence with his covenant people. However, the kingdom-people-house was the true residence of God. He would dwell in the midst of his people. The Book of Exodus closes by bringing together these two covenant-built houses in a summary statement concerning Yahweh's abiding in the cloud of glory in his tabernacle house "in sight of all the house of Israel." (Exod 40:34-38).

(c) All Israel's life - moral and ceremonial, civil and cultic, individual and corporate - fell under the covenant through participation in the cult.

(d) The palace of the Lord, the Great King, was the same as Israel's sanctuary, the Tabernacle. In effect Israel was a theocracy. The political, the covenant rites, coalesced with the religious, with the system of cultic sacrifice.¹²⁵⁵ Furthermore, the tables of the covenant in the ark in Israel's sanctuary declared the coalescence of covenant and cult in Israel (Exod 25:16, 21; 40:3, 20).

(e) Note also that Yahweh, as the suzerain, not only imposed stipulations on Israel but He, the God of Israel, was also the divine witness-avenger. There was no third party who acted as witness. Israel's copy of the covenant witnessed both to and against them (Deut 31:26). It thus spoke of curse and blessing according to their deserts as vassal. Obedience would bring blessing, disobedience would bring the curse of the covenant. Consequently, the sacrificial cult had been given by the Lord to be the means for Israel to make amends for their offences against the covenant stipulations. Thus, mercy prevailed but not at the expense of justice, for "since the divine throne under which the tables were located was the place of atonement, the witness of the tables against Israel never ascended to Yahweh apart from the witness of the blood advocating mercy."¹²⁵⁶ The thought of sacrifice calling for mercy was in effect a divine guarantee assuring a realization of the blessing sanctions of the covenant.

¹²⁵⁵ cf. the three annual pilgrimages by the Israelites to the Lord's sanctuary throne (Exod 23:14-33).

¹²⁵⁶ See Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, 125.

It is to be noted also that the same trio: battle, victory, and the building of a house for God (that is, a temple) is found in 2 Sam 7 which speaks of a covenant with David in which the dynastic house of David was established and its permanence guaranteed.¹²⁵⁷ When Yahweh, through his servant David, had completed the conquest of Israel's earthly enemies, David then began to think of erecting a Temple-house for the Lord.¹²⁵⁸ The victorious God must dwell among his redeemed people.

It may be argued that in Matthew's Gospel these thoughts concerning covenant find expression in Jesus and his ministry: (a) First, as the incarnate Son of God, Jesus is the saviour of his enslaved people (Matt 1:23, and so on); (b) But to save his people Jesus must first fight a battle and defeat Satan. (c) Accordingly, as a member of God's ancient people Jesus, by submitting to John's baptism, not only placed himself under the scrutiny and judgment of God (the Lord was well pleased with him!), he also consecrated himself to serve the Lord and do his will whatever the cost (cf. Matt 3:17). (d) Thus, having made this commitment of service, Jesus immediately enters into battle with the enemy, resisting Satan's temptations (Matt 4:1-11). (e) Another insight into the battle being fought by Jesus is found in Matt 16:21-23 where he again resists Satan's temptations which unexpectedly comes to him through Peter. Having ascertained that his disciples correctly understood concerning his person ("You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God," Matt 16: 16), Jesus proceeds to instruct them about his work. He declares that he will build his Church (μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν) – that is, a people of God. It is important to note that Jesus uses the future tense (οἰκοδομήσω "I will build"). Before this building can commence Jesus has to accomplish something. And in the light of Matt 16:21-23 that something is nothing less than his passion, his suffering, death, and resurrection. To attempt to persuade Jesus to abandon this path of suffering, as Peter attempted, is, according to Jesus, Satanic – it is to "set the mind not on divine things but on human things." It is, as Jesus' words

¹²⁵⁷ With reference to the Davidic covenant, while the term *bērît* is not found in 2 Sam. 7, it is found in poetic texts (cf. Ps 89:3-4; 28-29; 34-37).

¹²⁵⁸ It was of course Solomon, the son of David, who actually accomplished this building of a material temple.

in Matt 26:26-29 imply, to disobey the covenant stipulations.¹²⁵⁹ Having consecrated himself to God's service Jesus must, as the Lord's servant (Isa 42:1; Isa 52:13-53:12) be the one who through his death makes atonement for many and so saves, "his people from their sins" (Matt 1:21-23). By this obedience, even unto death on the cross, Jesus will build his church, establish a community of redeemed people. And so, having in the Garden of Gethsemane, further successfully resisted Satan's attacks, Jesus submits to his enemies, is arrested, tried, condemned, mocked and finally crucified.

For many Jesus' tragic death was nothing but utter defeat. Yet for Matthew and his fellow Christians Jesus' death was a great victory – confirmed by his resurrection whereby God vindicated him and reversed the judgments of sinful humans. What then, according to Matthew, did Jesus, the Son of God, achieve by this victory wrought by his obedience and crucifixion?

In the light of the trio: battle, victory and house building, the following points may be noted:

a) Jesus' battle was against a "spiritual" enemy in heavenly places. It was a battle against the enticements of Satan. Through the temptation narrative (Matt 4:1-10) and especially through the Peter episode (Matt 16:23) Matthew makes this abundantly clear. In various ways, and in different guises, Satan tempted Jesus to *disobey* God's will for him. And, as Matthew makes clear, for Jesus, God's will for him was found in the Scriptures. His arrest, trial, sufferings and death had to happen according to Scripture (cf. Matt 26:54). Jesus was determined to allow nothing to cause him to deviate from this divinely ordained path. However by this tenacious obedience which resulted in his sufferings and death, Jesus defeated Satan and received God's approval. The significance of Matt 28:18 is to be noted. Jesus has received all authority in heaven as well as on earth. Contrast Satan's offer of "all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour" (Matt 4:8-10).

b) Jesus' victory over Satan means for God's people a turning point, redemption, the beginning of a journey of deliverance from the bondage of sin to a whole new life.¹²⁶⁰ It also means

¹²⁵⁹ Jesus thus certainly understood his sufferings and death in the context of covenant.

¹²⁶⁰ Cf. the Passover – see Matt 26:17-29. The slain Passover lamb spoke of liberation, freedom from bondage, the defeat of enemies and entry into new life.

reconciliation – the entering into a new covenantal relationship with God.¹²⁶¹ Matthew, in a number of ways, stresses that through Jesus’ death great changes have occurred. He declares that the temple curtain was torn in two from top to bottom – that is, the barrier between the holy God and his wayward creatures has been permanently removed.¹²⁶² Full atonement for all sins has been accomplished. The Jerusalem temple and its many sacrifices is thus no longer needed. It is destined for destruction.¹²⁶³ Further, Matthew indicates that not only sin but also Jewish concepts of impurity have now been done away with. Thus, the holy ones who are raised, enter into the holy city and appear to many (Matt 27:51b-53). Commenting on the holy ones who leave their tombs, Serge Wüthrich writes, “they pass from a closed place to an open place; the impurity which surrounds death and the separation from the living which it implies, are lifted.”¹²⁶⁴ Jesus’ atoning death has resulted in the opening up of a whole new realm.¹²⁶⁵

c) In the third place, it may be said that for Matthew Jesus’ death and the resulting victory meant the establishing of a dwelling place for the Lord God – that is, the creation of “a people of God.” Here is the fulfillment of Jesus’ words, “I will build my Church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.”

¹²⁶¹ See Matt 26:26-28.

¹²⁶² This, of course, assumes that Matthew is referring to the temple’s inner curtain. If Matthew was referring to the outer curtain, he probably meant that Jesus’ death had removed the barrier between Jew and Gentile. Perhaps Matthew wants the torn curtain to indicate that both these events have happened. André La Cocque speaks of the “double-entendre” of Matthew’s gospel – that is, that in his Gospel Matthew addresses both Jews and Gentiles. Thus, according to La Cocque, Matthew “knows that what he writes will be interpreted by one group of readers differently from the other group. He is a great deal more ‘Jewish’ in his record of the Passion than all the other evangelists. When Matthew speaks, for instance, of ‘the’ temple curtain, without specifying which of the two, it is assuredly to be interpreted by the Gentile audience as the curtain that used to separate Jewish males from women and non-Jews, and by the Jewish audience as referring to the veil that used to hide the Holy of Holies.” (La Cocque, “The Great Cry of Jesus in Matthew 27:50,” 139).

¹²⁶³ According to La Cocque, “The Great Cry of Jesus in Matthew 27:50,” 144, “The time of the temple is gone, as Matthew 27 will make clear, the omphalic and centripetal (Isa 2; Micah 4; Isa 42:6) temple becomes centrifugal and extends to the confines of the earth.”

¹²⁶⁴ See Wüthrich, “Naître de mourir: la mort de Jésus dans l’Évangile de Matthieu (Matt 27.51- 56),” 319: “l’impureté qui entoure la mort et la separation qu’elle implique d’avec les vivants sont levees.”

¹²⁶⁵ An important question arises: How does one explain the connection between Jesus’ death and the resurrection of the holy ones? Their resurrection was certainly not because they had been influenced by the example of Jesus’ life, sufferings and death. For they had been long dead when all this happened. Yet, somehow, there must have been a connection, a bond, between Jesus and the holy ones. Further, it needs also to be asked: how could the death of an innocent man, even one who could be designated “Son of God,” result in salvation for many? For an innocent, righteous person to die in the place of the guilty would be a crime, an injustice – unless there was some bond between the innocent and the guilty, an arrangement, as it were, which authorized the innocent to act on behalf of the guilty (cf. 2 Cor 5:21). While many questions arise, yet in Matt 27:51-53 the detailed nature of the atonement is not developed.

Matthew, it seems, found Matt 27:51b-53, possibly a scrap of a very early passion account, ideal to illustrate this new creation, the Church. For Matthew, this new structure, the Church, unites, at least ideally speaking, seemingly opposites.

(i) First, there is a union of the transcendent, the “heavenly” and the “earthly”.

In the light of Matt 27:53 Serge Wüthrich speaks of “the division between the world of the dead and that of the living being made hazy; of the dead mixing with the living, of numerous saints showing themselves to a great number of people.”¹²⁶⁶ Accordingly, it may be understood that in Matt 27:51b-53 Matthew assumes¹²⁶⁷ a parallel between Adam, a “son of God” (cf. Luke 3:38), endowed with divine authority to rule God’s creation (cf. Gen. 1:26, 28), and Jesus (the “Son of God” cf. Matt 1:18-25; Luke 1:34-38) also endowed with Kingly authority and anointed to rule.

Thus, in Matt 27:51b-53 the message, the good news, that Matthew wishes to communicate is as follows: Jesus, the Son of God, by his correct use of delegated authority, and by his obedience, which led to his sufferings and death, reversed the effects of Adam’s disobedience. When Adam rebelled and disobeyed he, the representative of the human race, came under the judgment of his Creator, and so was expelled from the close presence of God and eventually experienced death, the dissolution of his physical body. Consequently, Matthew declares that a supernatural dimension, a spiritual factor, a special, intimate closeness to the divine Creator, lost by Adam’s disobedience,¹²⁶⁸ has now been, by the obedience of Jesus, the

For discussion of the concept of Atonement see Lohse, “Die alttestamentlichen Bezüge im neutestamentlichen Zeugnis vom Tode Jesus Christi,” 97-112; Birger Gerhardsson, “Sacrificial Service and Atonement in the Gospel of Matthew,” in *Reconciliation and Hope: New Testament Essays on Atonement and Eschatology presented to L. L. Morris on his 60th Birthday* (ed. R. Banks and L. Morris; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 25-35; D. E. Garland, “The Life-Giving Death of the Rejected Messiah,” in Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 246-261; Christopher M. Tuckett, “Atonement in the New Testament,” in Freedman, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1:518-22; Howard I. Marshall, “Some Thoughts on Penal Substitution,” *Irish Biblical Studies* 26 (2005): 119-151.

¹²⁶⁶ See Wüthrich, “Naître de mourir: la mort de Jésus dans l’Évangile de Matthieu (Matt 27.51- 56),” 319: “Deux extrémités qui caractérisent l’opposition catégorielle vertical *céleste vs terrestre*. On observe, ..., un mouvement complémentaire du précédent avec le déplacement des corps des saints des tombeaux ala Ville sainte. Par ce mouvement *horizontal*, la limite entre le monde des des morts et celui des vivants est rendue floue, les morts se mêaux vivants, de ‘nombreux saints ... se manifestèrent a un grand nombre de gens.’

¹²⁶⁷ As did the Apostle Paul – cf. I Cor 15:20-28, 42-49; Rom. 5:14-21.

¹²⁶⁸ In discussing the question of the “historicity” of Adam and Eve, and of the Garden of Eden, G. W. Bromiley writes, “an obviously imaginative element is combined with a certain factuality...” (G. W.

Son of God, not merely restored, but replaced by something much better, the presence of God, the King. Thus Matthew, through Matt 27:51b-53, wants it to be understood that somehow Jesus' death made atonement, that it negated the divine judgment against sin, and so freed humanity from the power of death. And this good news, according to Matthew, has been publicly declared – for when Jesus died the tombs were opened, many holy ones were raised, entered the holy city after Jesus' resurrection, and appeared to many.¹²⁶⁹

The main objection to this “Adamic” approach to Matt 27:51b-53 is, as Davies and Allison point out, that “the name, ‘Adam’, does not even appear in Matthew’s gospel.”¹²⁷⁰ While this may be granted, yet the concept of “Adam”, if not explicitly yet implicitly, does underlie Matthew’s thinking.¹²⁷¹ “Adam” hovers, as it were, in the background. For instance, Matthew’s account of Satan’s temptation of Jesus (Matt 4:1-11) suggests a parallel with the temptation of Adam. Further, according to Matthew, when Jesus died the curtain of the Temple

Bromiley, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1979–c. 1988), 1:48). Could it be that what in Gen 1-3 Bromiley includes under “an obviously imaginative element ...” be due, not to human imagination, but to a “spiritual,” supernatural dimension associated in the beginning with the close presence of the Creator? The mention of Cherubim (invisible angelic creatures) in Gen 3:24 implies that the members of the human race are presently not only debarred from, but also unable to see and appreciate, this real but “spiritual” realm. (Cf. 2 Kgs 6:15-17; Acts 17:27-34). Has entry to this realm been restored by the death and resurrection of Jesus? (Cf. also Luke 24:41-43; Acts 10:41. If it is assumed that these mysterious statements have an element of historicity and are not pure myth, then the question arises, pointedly, “What exactly happened to this very earthy, material food which the Risen Jesus consumed?” All this would suggest that present human experience is not the final, authoritative, standard as to what may, or may not, exist in God’s restored creation.)

¹²⁶⁹ This approach, of course, assumes that Matthew understood the events of Matt 27:51b-53 historically, as having actually occurred in time and space. If, however, Matt 27:51b-53 is regarded as a Matthean creation, and so has no historical basis (see Troxel, “Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered,” 44, fn 81), it could be argued that Matthew’s *theological* point can still be maintained. But what exactly is the theological point Matthew is here making? Is it not that through his death Jesus has made an “atonement” the end result of which is that human physical death has been overcome? Whatever the origin of Matt 27:51b-53, it is clear that it was Jesus’ death (an event which occurred within history, in time and space) and not Jesus’ resurrection which resulted in the raising of the holy ones. This raises the further question of the relationship of Jesus’ death and his resurrection in the achievement of salvation. According to J. Stott, “it was by his death, and not by his resurrection, that our sins were dealt with. Even in the earliest apostolic *kerygma* ... Paul writes that ‘Christ died for our sins.’ Nowhere in the New Testament is it written that ‘Christ rose for our sins.’ But was it not by his resurrection that Christ conquered death? No, it was by his death that he destroyed him who holds the power of death (Heb. 2:14). Of course the resurrection was essential to confirm the efficacy of his death, as his incarnation had been to prepare for its possibility. But we must insist that Christ’s work of sin-bearing was finished on the cross, that the victory over devil, sin and death was won there, and that what the resurrection did was to vindicate the Jesus whom men had rejected, to declare with power that he is the Son of God, and publicly to confirm that his sin-bearing death had been effective for the forgiveness of sins. If he had not been raised, our faith and our preaching would be futile, since his person and work would not have received the divine endorsement.” [John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Leicester: Inter Varsity Press, 1986), 238].

¹²⁷⁰ Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 1:149.

¹²⁷¹ Cf. how passages like Num 24:15-19; Gen 49:10; Jer 23:5-6; Amos 9:11; Mic 4:5:2-5; Ezek 17 and Hos 3 have been understood as ‘messianic’, yet the word ‘messiah’ does not occur in them.

was torn in two from top to bottom (Matt 27:51a). It seems reasonable to assume that Matthew wants the inner curtain, separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, to be thought of. And since this inner curtain was embroidered with Cherubim (Exod 26:31)¹²⁷² one's thoughts are taken back to Gen 3:24 where the Cherubim and the flaming sword¹²⁷³ denote, as it were, a "spiritual – that is, divine" barrier to the tree of life.¹²⁷⁴ Thus, in Matt 27:51-53 Matthew, in effect, declares that to reach the tree of life (which was in the garden of Eden), and so obtain for humanity salvation, life eternal, Jesus had to pass through that barrier and that in doing so he was smitten.¹²⁷⁵ But, although smitten, yet through his death (in effect an atonement for the sin of the world) Jesus reached the tree of life and so brought resurrection life, eschatological life, to the sleeping holy ones (cf. Rev 2:7; 22:2, 14).¹²⁷⁶

Further, if Matthew's Gospel is understood as a piece of propaganda levelled at the power and might of the corrupt Roman Empire¹²⁷⁷ then Matt 27:51b-53 may be seen as Matthew's challenge to Rome's assumed superiority. If Rome has the power to take life, to put to death, then the crucified and risen Jesus, the Lord of the Church, has the power to raise the dead. The continuing existence of the Church is the visible proof of Jesus' claims to be the Christ, the Son of God. Destroy the Church and Jesus' claims are proved false. Accordingly, the Church can expect to be constantly under attack. But Jesus' words still stand defiantly: "I will build my Church and the gates of Hades (Death) will not prevail against it" (Matt 16:18).

(ii) The union in Christ of the OT saints and those of the new Age.

In addition to the union of the transcendent and the earthly, Matthew, through Matt 27:51b-53, speaks of the union in Christ's Church of the OT saints¹²⁷⁸ and those of the new age.

¹²⁷² See Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, 52-4.

¹²⁷³ "A keep out on pain of death," sign.

¹²⁷⁴ See Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, 58-60.

¹²⁷⁵ Cf. Zech 13:7 – "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is my associate."

¹²⁷⁶ Matt 27:51b-53 may be likened to an amalgam – many OT streams of thought have been fused, welded together to form the pericope. So while direct references to Adam, Eden, and so on, may not be explicit in these verses, yet they are there implicitly.

¹²⁷⁷ See 1.7 above.

¹²⁷⁸ According to Boring, "The Gospel of Matthew," 493, "these saints are Jewish people who are brought to life by Jesus' death - but not 'this generation', which has rejected him." (Cf. Matt 27:24-25). In a footnote (Boring, "The Gospel of Matthew," 493, fn 599) Boring adds this significant comment:

In other words, the Church has *not* replaced God's ancient people, Israel. Rather, the faithful of all generations belong to Christ's people.

(iii) The union of Jew and Gentile in the Church

Moreover Matt 27:51b-53, 54 implies the union in the Church of Jew and Gentile. The Roman soldiers profess faith in Jesus as God's Son.¹²⁷⁹ Thus, the Church, the dwelling place of God, which Christ builds, is not bound by time, by land or territory, or by race. According to J. D. Kingsbury, "The raising of the saints (vss 51b-53) and the confession of the Roman soldiers (v. 54), both of which, according to Matthew, are the result of divine action, prefigure for him his own church of Jews and Gentile Christians, who are sons of God because the Son of God has died for their sins and been raised ... v. 53."¹²⁸⁰

Further, at the Exodus the people of Israel through the defeat of their enemies, and their deliverance from slavery, became, under God, a kingdom.¹²⁸¹ Thus the defeat of Satan, and the delivery of people from their sins, means that Jesus, by his passion, has established God's kingdom as well as his Church. Certainly God's people could attain kingdom status only by being freed from the dominion of Satan. The nature of God's Kingdom and its relationship to the Church lie beyond the scope of this thesis. Suffice to say that in the light of Matt 16:19 it is possible to call the Church the kingdom of heaven. But whether the reverse is true – whether the kingdom in all its manifestations can be identified with the Church is most unlikely. According

"Interpretation of Matthew's views of the fate of Jewish people as a whole should not forget that the first people affected by the eschatological event of Jesus' death were Jewish people who had made no Christian confession."

¹²⁷⁹ This, of course, assumes that the soldiers in v. 54 were converted to faith in Jesus, as the Son of God. This is challenged by some scholars. See Sim, "The 'Confession' of the Soldiers in Matthew 27:54," 401-424. See also 4.3.1 above.

¹²⁸⁰ Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom*, 76. The alleged conversion of the Roman soldiers, v. 54, raises various other questions. Is Matthew, by mentioning this, hoping to encourage his fellow Jewish Christians to be more open to the evangelizing of the Gentiles? Matthew has already dropped hints that the Gentiles are to hear the Gospel (cf. the mention of Gentile women in Jesus' genealogy, Matt 1:2-17; the coming of the magi, Matt 2:1-12; the Canaanite Woman's great faith, Matt 15:28; and so on. But how appropriate at this point for Matthew, when describing the inclusive nature of Jesus' Church, to encourage his readers to reach out to the Gentiles! This would be even more so, if Matt 26:1-27:54 had existed initially, before its inclusion in the First Gospel, as an early independent passion account.

¹²⁸¹ See Exod 19:6; cf. 1 Sam 12:12.

to J. D. Kingsbury, “Matthew steadfastly refuses to identify the church with the kingdom of heaven. Instead, he associates it with the kingdom.”¹²⁸²

The concept of covenant is especially evident in the concluding verses of Matthew’s Gospel, Matt 28:16-20. The risen, victorious and exalted Jesus, depicted as invested with cosmic authority, proceeds, through his disciples, to build a royal residence. Thus, “[I]n this messianic son of David the dynastic house firmly established by God’s covenant with David¹²⁸³ culminated; he is the son of David who builds the true and eternal house of God.”¹²⁸⁴ And the house of God which Jesus builds is his Church (οἰκοδομήσω μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν – Matt 16:18).

Entry into Christ’s Church, his people, is through submission to the ordeal of baptism (Matt 28:19). For a person to submit to baptism in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit involves both repentance and confession. It requires the person to acknowledge that as a sinner he must pass through the curse of God’s judgment. Baptism, however, also calls for faith. It calls for a believing acceptance of the promise that all who through faith are united with the risen Jesus, who are to be found in him, will safely pass through the cursed waters of the ordeal, and so have salvation.¹²⁸⁵

It is important also to note that membership, through baptism, in the covenant people of God entails obligations. For, just as those in OT times revealed their obedience to the Lord of the covenant by obeying his Law, so those baptized must reveal their submission to Jesus as their Lord and King, by actually putting into practice his teaching (cf. Matt 28:20a; 7:21-23). Further, since membership in God’s covenant people involves consecration to the Lord’s service, all believers, like the eleven disciples, are obligated to assist in the proclamation of the Gospel to all nations.

¹²⁸² Kingsbury, *Matthew* (Proclamation Commentaries), 91; It is important to note, as Kingsbury stresses, that the Church “[i]s by no stretch of the imagination a pure community of the holy ...” (91). See also John Bright, *The Kingdom of God: The Biblical Concept and Its Meaning for the Church* (Nashville, New York: Abingdon, 1958); Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of Jesus concerning The Kingdom and the Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans 1958).

¹²⁸³ See 2 Samuel 7:1-17.

¹²⁸⁴ Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, 84.

¹²⁸⁵ See Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, 82.

The question of the meaning and purpose of the pericope, Matt 27:51b-53, raises acutely the issue of “authorial intent”. It is debatable as to whether it is possible for us today to discover what an author, in the first century, wished to convey by his writing. It could well be, as suggested in 11.3.1 above, that the original purpose Matthew wished to communicate via Matt 27:51b-53 has been lost and is now beyond ever being retrieved. One, however, is reluctant to make this judgment. For clearly Matt 27:51b-53 comes, at this point, as a climax in Matthew’s passion narrative.¹²⁸⁶ Further, while the Gospel writers addressed their own immediate communities, yet it seems reasonable to assume (cf. Matt 28:16-20) that they also hoped that their narratives would perhaps reach wider audiences.¹²⁸⁷ If so, then it would seem that Matthew assumed that Matt 27:51b-53 would be understood by a wider circle of readers and at later times. These considerations encourage one to persevere in the attempt to fathom the significance of Matt 27:51b-53.

Furthermore, in endeavouring to ascertain the purpose of Matt 27:51b-53 the question of the origin of these verses, discussed at length in chapter 9, needs to be kept in mind. The uniqueness of Matt 27:51b-53 arises, according to some, because it was Matthew’s own literary creation.¹²⁸⁸ However, it has been argued that the pericope’s uniqueness is to be explained another way. It is to be understood to have belonged initially to a very early passion narrative created by some of the first Jewish Christians. In Chapter 5 it was suggested that Matt 27:51b-53 may have been related to the early belief that at Jesus’ death the End Time occurred, the raising of the holy ones being clearly an End Time event. How prevalent in NT times the belief that the coming of the Messiah would usher in the End Time is a highly contentious issue in scholarly circles.¹²⁸⁹ Nevertheless, enough evidence exists to assume that some, even if only a

¹²⁸⁶ Aguirre’s comment in his *Exégesis de Mateo, 27, 51b-53*, 25, is worth repeating: “It is obvious that such an insertion at the culminating point of the work is not made unless it is to be full of significance.”

¹²⁸⁷ See Bauckham, *The Gospels for all Christians*.

¹²⁸⁸ As argued, for example, by Senior, “The Death of Jesus and the Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51-53)” and Troxel, “Matt 27:51-54 Reconsidered.”

¹²⁸⁹ See Chapter 3 above.

few, Jews who accepted Jesus as the Messiah also believed that at his death the supernatural End, the turning of the Ages, had happened. Be that as it may, other evidence also strongly suggests that if Matthew was aware of this belief (that the *parousia* had occurred at Jesus' death) then he distanced himself from it by, for example, stressing that far from experiencing translation at the moment of his death, the crucified Jesus was interned in a tomb.

It was also noted that two events – the rent temple curtain and the “conversion” of the Roman centurion¹²⁹⁰ are sufficient to explain the achievements of Jesus' death – namely, the abolishing of the temple's sacrificial cultus and the opening of salvation to all, including even the Gentiles.¹²⁹¹ All this raises the question, sharply if the First Gospel was based on Mark, of why Matthew has added the prodigia of Matt 27:51b-53? For this addition seemingly implies that for Matthew the End Time, in some way or other, has actually been inaugurated through Jesus' death.

In this thesis it has been argued that Matt 27:51b-53 is best understood in the context of the concept of covenant (11.3.6). It is argued that this approach, if adopted, helps more fully in the understanding of the purpose of these verses. However, I also readily acknowledge that this contention reflects my own background and subjective presuppositions. While using various aspects of the historical-critical method to study Matt 27:51b-53, I do not claim to be completely disinterested, or to have achieved anything like objective truth. Accordingly, I have been open to, and have considered in chapter 11, a number of other approaches, ancient and modern, to the understanding of this pericope. And while I have settled on understanding Matt 27:51b-53 in the context of covenant, I hesitate to completely dismiss all these other approaches as of no value.¹²⁹²

In 11.3.1 the approach which declares that it is now impossible to discover the original purpose of Matt 27:51b-53 is considered, but set aside. The attempt to understand this difficult

¹²⁹⁰ See Mark. 15:37-39.

¹²⁹¹ As already noted this last point is challenged by some scholars. See, for example, Sim, “The ‘Confession’ of the soldiers in Matthew 27:54”.

¹²⁹² The various comments of scholars about these few words of Matt 27:51b-53 may be likened to rays of light being reflected from a rare, solitary, diamond. Each ray comes from a slightly different angle, but all of them together help to reveal something of the profound mysteriousness, and importance, of this passage.

passage needs to be made. It is noted in 11.3.2 that, according to some, Matt 27:51b-53 relates to a “Harrowing of Hell” motif. While I conclude that this motif is a later development in Christian thought, yet I note with interest that some recent scholars understand it to have developed very early in Christian thought.¹²⁹³

In 11.3.3 it is noted that, according to some, the pericope highlights the defeat of the sinful Angels and evil cosmic powers. 11.3.4 notes that for some the passage, Matt 27:51b-53, could suggest a proleptic *parousia*. 11.3.5 notes that for others Matt 27:51b-53 may be seen as a Matthean attempt to explain the delay in the coming *parousia*. I do not deny that these three approaches, or even a combination of different aspects of them, may help some in their understanding of Matt 27:51b-53. However, I find them inadequate because to my mind they do not lay sufficient stress on the significance and accomplishments of Jesus’ actual death on the cross. In my understanding of this passage Matthew is declaring that Jesus’ death was the great turning point in the relationship between God and humankind. And to my mind, it is the concept of covenant and its implications which not only most clearly stresses this, but also links this pericope with the overall thrust of the message of the First Gospel – to wit: “God is with his covenant people” (Matt 1:23; 28:20).¹²⁹⁴

Accordingly, in this thesis it has been argued that the last suggestion is an approach which, if adopted, helps more fully in the understanding of Matt 27:51b-53. These verses are thus to be seen and understood in the context of covenant. They are not a strange extraneous addition but an integral part of the whole message of the First Gospel.¹²⁹⁵ According to Matthew Jesus, the Son of God, through his baptism accepted the role of the Lord’s suffering Servant – that is, he undertook to be the representative of fallen mankind before the judgment throne of God. Despite Satanic attacks Jesus was obedient to this undertaking right up to his death on the

¹²⁹³ See J. D. Crossan, “The Gospel of Peter and the Canonical Gospels,” 42-43. See also T. McLay, “Death, Descent and deliverance in Matthew 27:51b-53,” 81-93.

¹²⁹⁴ This brief passage, Matt 27:51b-53, may be likened to a colourful loose thread which the Gospel writer has woven into the fabric of his work. Accordingly, while at first sight, it may appear to “jar”, to be unnecessary, yet this seemingly “loose thread” is the key to the design of this Gospel. Remove it and a vital, if not the ultimate, purpose of Matthew’s work disintegrates.

¹²⁹⁵ As stressed by Allison, “Anticipating the Passion: The Literary Reach of Matthew 26:47-27:56,” and McLay, “Death, Descent, and Deliverance in Matthew 27:51b-53.”

cross. Accordingly, Jesus has not only been vindicated by God and by his resurrection declared to be the Son of God – he has also redeemed a covenant people and thereby established, as proof of his victory over Satan and the hosts of evil and sin, a house – his ἐκκλησία, his Church (cf. Matt 16:18). Matthew makes it abundantly clear that from a human point of view this building is far from a perfect structure (cf. Matt 7:13-23; 18: 15-20, and so on). Yet from the Divine point of view, “the gates of Hades will not prevail against it” for Jesus’ Church already partakes of End Time characteristics (cf. Matt 27:51b-53). And, since Jesus is Lord over all, his Church is inclusive of all nations (cf. Matt 27:54). Further, members of the Church as the covenantal people of God’s anointed One, the Messiah, are obliged to obey the stipulations of their Lord (cf. Matt 5-7; Matt 28:19,20a) as well as be willing to serve him by going and making disciples of all nations. When this task is completed the final End will come (cf. Matt 24:14; Matt 28:20).

In the light of this scenario what answer is to be given to the question: Does Matthew in Matt 27:51b-53 imply that the *parousia*, the ultimate End, has occurred? If the *parousia* is understood in the absolute sense of the final reckoning (cf. Matt 13:36-43; 25:31-46) then the answer must clearly be “no”! Yet, undeniably, Matt 27:51b-53 speaks of events associated with the End Time. The pericope speaks of events actually happening which were believed to occur only at the End Time.¹²⁹⁶ Accordingly, is Matthew here using a rhetorical device? Is he declaring that at the moment of Jesus’ death a proleptic *parousia*, a figurative foreshadowing of the events to be associated with the End Time, occurred?¹²⁹⁷

¹²⁹⁶ According to K. Stendahl, “Matthew,” in *Peake’s Commentary on the Bible* (ed. M. Black; London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1962), 797: “The resurrection of the righteous (‘saints’) was expected to take place at Jerusalem when the Mount of Olives split in two; out of that split the dead were to appear. Here the earthquake at Jesus’ death (cf. also 28:2) performs the first part of this event while a second (their appearance) comes first after Jesus’ resurrection ... the point made in 51-2 is clear: with Christ the general resurrection has begun. Cf. also Ign. *Mag.* 9:2.”

¹²⁹⁷ Note too that from a Johannine point of view, for the believer in Jesus the End has indeed already come. Judgment is passed. See John 5:24. Commenting on John 5:24, C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to John* (London: SPCK, 1956), 217, writes: “The thought is closely akin to the Pauline doctrine of justification, according to which the believer does indeed come into judgement but leaves the court acquitted.”

This approach is difficult to accept¹²⁹⁸ for Matt 27:54 relates that the soldiers “saw the earthquake and what took place”. Matthew thus wants his words to be understood in a literal sense. When Jesus died these strange events occurred here on earth and in historical time. Rather than “prolepsis”, perhaps a better concept to apply to Matt 27:51b-53 is that of “firstfruits.” At the death of Jesus something of the End actually happened, but more of the same will eventually happen. This approach however is not without its problems! It suggests that the End may occur in stages. Yet, surely, there can be only *one* End Time event.

Another possible explanation exists – that is, that Matthew here in 27:51b-53 is being purposely ambivalent – that is, he wants it to be understood that a great mystery prevails here – the End Time has indeed happened, but yet it is not fully manifested. Thus, Matthew declares that since the death of Jesus two Ages, the last Age and the present evil age,¹²⁹⁹ now exist concurrently. This is perhaps the explanation of the enigmatic phrase μετὰ κτλ. Matthew through these words wishes to link the raised holy ones (who now belong to the eschatological End Time) with those who are still living this earthly life in on-going historical time (cf. v. 53. The raised holy ones “appeared to many in the holy city”).

Consequently, for some (cf. the raised holy ones) the End Time has actually occurred; for others, holy ones now living in historical times, the End Time is still future. For these, the presence and reality of the End Time is known and experienced only through faith in Jesus, the Son of God, the Christ. And for those who do not in faith recognize Jesus as the Messiah – these have no understanding of this eschatological Age and so when it is eventually manifested at the last day, they will be caught unawares (cf. Matt 13:36-43; 25:31-46). Thus, in effect, Matthew here declares that there is no salvation outside of the Risen Jesus, for he is the realm of God’s Kingdom, the End Time reality, the eschatological Age.¹³⁰⁰

¹²⁹⁸ See 9.3.2.4 above for discussion of this approach.

¹²⁹⁹ Cf. Gal. 1:4.

¹³⁰⁰ Commenting on Matt 1:17 F. W. Burnett declares, “‘Jesus Christ’ [the Messiah] indicates that Israel’s entire salvation history culminates in Jesus.” (Burnett, “Characterization and Christology in Matthew: Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew,” 591). Note also that the concluding statement of Matthew’s opening genealogy “from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations” (1:17) suggests that the end of the exile is not only associated with the Messiah’s coming, but that the ultimate promised land is the Messiah. (cf. Paul’s expression to be ‘in Christ.’). Thus, the promised land is something

This thesis accordingly suggests that Matthew has in effect preserved a very early tradition, Matt 27:51b-53, which associates the coming of the End Time with the death of Jesus, the promised Messiah. Even when it seems that Mark and Luke were distancing themselves from this tradition, Matthew has seen fit not merely to retain reference to it, but to integrate it into his account of Jesus' passion – indeed into his whole Gospel. The challenging question thus arises: Why then has Matthew preserved this pericope?

The answer may be expressed, briefly, by three words: First, because Matthew believed that there had been a great *victory*. Matthew was convinced that through his sufferings and death Jesus, the Son of God, had atoned for sin, defeated Satan, and made possible reconciliation between humanity and the Creator God. Secondly, because Matthew believed that a great *mystery* had been revealed. The Eschaton had happened. The age of salvation had been truly inaugurated. The bodies of many holy ones had already been raised. Nevertheless the final End had not yet come. While the old Age still continued, it did so concurrently with the New (which could be apprehended only by faith). And thirdly, because Matthew was persuaded that there was a *challenge* to set before his readers. Throughout his Gospel Matthew, in various ways, had hinted that the Gospel, the good news about Jesus, was also for the Gentiles.¹³⁰¹ And while not all agree, yet it may be argued that by relating the reaction and words of the Roman soldiers (27:54), Matthew was declaring that through God's mercy the door of salvation had now been thrown open to the Gentiles. Consequently, if the full supernatural blessings of the End Time were not presently evident, let alone being enjoyed, it was because the mission to the Gentiles had not yet been accomplished. Matthew's concern was that God's current people, the Church, did not fail, as God's ancient people did, to be a light to the whole world. Thus, through Matt 27:51b-53 and 54, Matthew continued to challenge some Jewish Christians in his community who were, it seems, inimical to such a Gentile mission, to change

apocalyptic, eschatological. Is there significance in the fact that Matthew keeps the risen Jesus out of the earthly Jerusalem? That the theme of the establishment by the Messiah of a new eschatological Age is to be found both in Matt 27:51b-53 and Matt 1:17 supports the contention that Matt 27:51b-53 is an integral part of the whole of Matthew's Gospel.

¹³⁰¹Cf. the mention of Gentile women in Jesus' genealogy, Matt 1:2-17; the coming of the magi, Matt 2:1ff; the Canaanite woman's great faith, Matt 15:28; Matt 24:14; and so on.

their attitude, and to hasten the manifestation of the End (Matt 28:20) by at least asking, in prayer, the sovereign Lord of the harvest “to send out labourers into his harvest.” (Matt 9:38).¹³⁰²

To summarize: The broad argument of this thesis has been that Matt 27:51b-53 is a fragment of a very early Jewish Christian passion narrative. It has been further suggested that this early tradition reflects some Jewish expectations of what the Messiah through his coming would achieve. It has been argued however that Matthew, for the most part, distanced himself from these expectations. Nevertheless the thesis has suggested that Matthew, especially in the light of the covenantal relationship between God and Israel, has used this fragment to express the view that Jesus, as the loyal vassal – that is, as the Messiah – has, by his obedience which lead to his death, initiated the final Eschaton by creating a new servant people of God – the Church. This new people of God includes those from both the Old and New Testament eras, and significantly, Gentiles as well as Jews.

¹³⁰² It may be possible perhaps to liken Matthew and his Jewish Christian community to being at one time a group of very exclusive brothers and sisters who, while believing Jesus to be the Messiah, yet shunned all association with Gentiles and even with Gentile Christians (see 4.3.1 above). However, in the light of P. Foster’s approach (see 4.3.2 above) I conclude that at least Matthew eventually saw the light, experienced a change of heart and attitude, and so in his Gospel urges the members of his community to be open to the evangelization of the peoples of all nations.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A **The Gospel of Peter**

Since it is alleged by some that the *Gospel of Peter* (*Gos. Pet.*) has significant implications with reference to the wider background and understanding of Matt 27:51b-53 a closer look at this document will be undertaken in this appendix. The document raises a number of important issues – especially the question of the date of its origin. Did the document exist (in part or whole) before the writing of the Canonical Gospels? If so, have parts of it been incorporated into the Canonical Gospels? Or, is the document later than the Canonical Gospels and so in some sense dependent upon them? As will become evident scholars are divided over the answers to these questions.¹³⁰³

1 **Introduction**

In 1886, in a grave in the Christian necropolis at Akhmîm (Panopolis) in Upper Egypt, a codex parchment was found. Published in 1892¹³⁰⁴ this parchment (dated by paleographical considerations between the 8th and 12th centuries), in addition to the *Gos. Pet.*, also contained

¹³⁰³ As will be seen, some scholars – e.g. P. A. Mirecki, H. Koester, J. D. Crossan and A. J. Dewey - argue not only that the Gospel of Peter could be as early as, if not earlier than, the Canonical Gospels, but that some parts of *Gos. Pet.* have even been incorporated into the later Canonical Gospels. However, other scholars – e.g. R. E. Brown, P. M. Head and P. Foster – place *Gos. Pet.* in the 2nd century. That is, in their view *Gos. Pet.* shares the thought world and vocabulary of a Christianity that has links with Jewish apocalyptic. Since, in their opinion, the cumulative evidence for a second century date for *Gos. Pet.* is strong, they conclude that *Gos. Pet.* is a redaction of the material of the Canonical Gospels (as well as perhaps having been influenced by early oral tradition).

¹³⁰⁴ For the Greek Text, with suggested emendations, and English translation see Foster, *The Gospel of Peter: Introduction, Critical Edition and Commentary*. The Greek text, with suggested emendations, may also be found in Mara, *Evangile de Pierre: Introduction, Texte Critique, Traduction, Commentaire et Index*, 40-67. English translation by J. Armitage Robinson, in *Ante-Nicene Christian Library: additional volume, containing early Christian works discovered since the completion of the series, and selections from the Commentaries of Origen* (ed. Allan Menzies; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1897), 11-31. Menzies also gives a Synoptical Table showing where the Petrine narrative agrees with and where it varies from those verses supplied by the canonical gospels. Another recent, and literal, English translation is to be found in R. E. Brown's "Appendix 1: The Gospel of Peter – A Noncanonical Passion Narrative," in Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*. 2:1318-1321. A brief introduction and English translation may be found in Christian Maurer, "The Gospel of Peter," in *New Testament Apocrypha* (ed. E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher; vol. 1; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963-1965), 179-187.

fragments of the *Apocalypse of Peter*, a fragment of the *Book of Enoch* (*1En.* 1:1-32:6, already known in its Ethiopian text) and a fragment (in Greek) of the *Acts* of the martyr St. Julian.¹³⁰⁵ To explain the presence of these diverse texts in the tomb of a monk some have suggested that they formed “an anthology of passages concerning the mystery of the beyond.”¹³⁰⁶

The *Gos. Pet.* fragment is incomplete. Beginning in the middle of the history of the Passion, just after Pilate has washed his hands of all responsibility for Jesus’ death, it ends in the middle of a sentence with the departure of the disciples into Galilee at the end of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It would thus seem that the version from which the copyist worked was already fragmentary. “Ornaments¹³⁰⁷ at the beginning and end of the manuscript indicate that the copyist knew no more than the text that is known to us. Accordingly conjectures as to the compass and contents of the whole have no foundation.”¹³⁰⁸

1.1 Early References to a Gospel of Peter¹³⁰⁹

According to Eusebius¹³¹⁰ Serapion (Bishop of Antioch, 190-203) composed a work “on the gospel of Peter, as it is called; which, indeed, he wrote to refute the false assertions which it contains, an account of some in the church of Rhosse, who by this work were led astray to perverted doctrines.” From the brief extracts which Eusebius gives of Serapion’s work it seems that Serapion having “not perused the gospel presented by them under the name of Peter ...”¹³¹¹ had sanctioned its use. But later, realizing that the gospel in question was being used by the Docetic heretics (Marcianus’ group),¹³¹² he withdrew his approval.¹³¹³ Further, it appears

¹³⁰⁵ See Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 126; Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:Appendix 1: *Gos. Pet.*, 1317-8.

¹³⁰⁶ See Mara, *Evangile de Pierre: Introduction, Texte Critique, Traduction, Commentaire et Index*, 16.

¹³⁰⁷ For example, Crosses, the Greek letters Alpha, Omega.

¹³⁰⁸ Maurer, “The Gospel of Peter,” in *New Testament Apocrypha* (ed. Hennecke and Schneemelcher), 179.

¹³⁰⁹ See Mara, *Evangile de Pierre: Introduction, Texte Critique, Traduction, Commentaire et Index*, 21-34.

¹³¹⁰ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* (H. E.) VI, 12.

¹³¹¹ H. E. VI, 12.

¹³¹² “The heresy had something to do with an otherwise unknown Marcianos, presumably a local character, who was not consistent in his thought” (Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:Appendix 1: *Gos. Pet.*, 1337).

¹³¹³ See P. Gardner-Smith, “The Date of the Gospel of Peter,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 27 (1925-26): 401.

that Eusebius regarded this gospel of Peter, along with other writings ascribed to Peter, as pseudepigraphical (that is, as a forged heretical document).¹³¹⁴ But whether Eusebius himself was actually acquainted firsthand with the *Gospel of Peter* is uncertain.¹³¹⁵ Likewise, while Origen (died c. 253 C.E.) in his commentary on Matthew (10:17) mentions “the Gospel according to Peter” it is very much open to debate as to whether he had a knowledge of its contents.

It is important to note that the Akhmîm document known today as “the *Gospel of Peter*” when first found had no title. Since both Eusebius (H. E. XII, 2) and Origen (Comm. on Matt 10:17) both mention a writing: τὸ κατὰ πέτρον εὐαγγέλιον it was assumed that they were referring to this newly discovered document. Hence, it was baptised by the name “the *Gospel of Peter*”. This identification of the Akhmîm document with the text referred to by Eusebius and Origen, while widespread, is however but an hypothesis.¹³¹⁶ Consequently, in addition to remembering this point, one should also bear in mind, as R. E. Brown stresses, that:

[T]he Akhmîm codex gives us a copy made some six hundred years after the original of *Gos. Pet.* was written; and we can be sure that copyists made changes in that long course of transcription – probably all the more freely because this work, circulated privately, was widely deemed as heterodox, and was not read publicly, as were the canonical Gospels where greater supervision was exercised and changes would have been noticed. When the vocabulary or even the sequence of *Gos. Pet.* agrees with that of the canonical Gospels, there is always the danger that some copyist has substituted the more familiar canonical wording or patterning for what originally stood in *Gos. Pet.*.¹³¹⁷

1.2 The “Docetic” Nature of the Akhmim Fragment

While the gospel fragment found at Akhmîm is indeed pseudepigraphical, yet its early identification with the *Gospel of Peter* mentioned by Eusebius and Origen was not only unfortunate but, according to some, misleading. For, since from Eusebius it was evident that Bishop Serapion eventually came to regard the gospel of Peter as docetic, it was readily

¹³¹⁴ See H. E. III, 3 and III, 25.

¹³¹⁵ See Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to AD 325* (10 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1897; American repr. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1978-79), 10:4.

¹³¹⁶ See Mara, *Evangelie de Pierre: Introduction, Texte Critique, Traduction, Commentaire et Index*, 16-17.

¹³¹⁷ Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:Appendix 1: *Gos. Pet.*, 1321.

assumed by many of those who first studied the Akhmîm fragment that it likewise was docetic with gnostic overtones. Accordingly, “since it was already known from Eusebius that *Gos. Pet.* was allegedly a docetic gospel, critics understandably expected and consequently found docetism in the fragment of the apocryphal gospel.”¹³¹⁸

According to J. W. McCant, “Docetism (δοκητισμός) developed as an explicit effort to protect the person of Jesus from involvement in matter and suffering ... docetism ... (is thus) ... ‘a testimony to the tenacity of the conviction that Christ had to be God, even at the cost of his humanity’.”¹³¹⁹ And since the main tenet of docetism was “the non-corporeality of the Lord,” the humanity and sufferings of the earthly Christ only seemed (cf. δοκεῖν – “to seem”) to be real. Accordingly, the basic question with regard to the Akhmîm fragment is: “Is the content of this gospel (of Peter) docetic, that is, does it deny the reality of Jesus’ humanity and claim that it was only an appearance?”¹³²⁰

The debate has revolved around the meaning and implications of a number of statements found in *Gos. Pet.* – namely:

1.2.1 The Silence of the Lord on the Cross

Gos. Pet. 10b¹³²¹ declares that the crucified Lord “held his peace as though having no pain.” This statement, at best, is ambiguous neither affirming nor denying that the Lord experienced pain. As Crossan notes, “There is a difference between ‘as if he felt no pain’ and ‘because he felt no pain’.”¹³²² Further, if *Gos. Pet.* reflects Isa 53:7, as some suggest, then the context of the disputed words is of one who suffers and dies.¹³²³

1.2.2 The Cry from the Cross

¹³¹⁸ Jerry W. McCant, “The Gospel of Peter: Docetism Reconsidered,” *New Testament Studies* 30 (1984): 270.

¹³¹⁹ McCant, “The Gospel of Peter: Docetism Reconsidered,” 259.

¹³²⁰ Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 130.

¹³²¹ After its discovery *Gos. Pet.* was eventually divided into sixty verses by A. von Harnack and also into fourteen chapters by J. A. Robinson. In quoting *Gos. Pet.* some writers combine the two systems and cite both chapter and verse; others, however, cite only the verse number.

¹³²² Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 131.

¹³²³ See McCant, “The Gospel of Peter: Docetism Reconsidered,” 259-60; Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 325.

Gos. Pet. 19a says: “And the Lord cried out, saying ‘My power, my power, thou hast forsaken me’...” (‘... ἡ δύναμις μου, ἡ δύναμις, κατέλειψάς με.’) For some these words reflect the gnostic system of Cerinthus (c. 100) – “that Jesus began his earthly life as a mere man, though at his baptism ‘the Christ’, a higher Divine power, descended upon him, only to depart from him again before the crucifixion.”¹³²⁴ Others however maintain that since the words imply anguish, even suffering, they really argue against impassibility and docetism. According to R. E. Brown the words, “My power, O power, you have forsaken me” are “not plausibly an indication that the divinity left the body of Jesus before death because the body of the dead Jesus still has miraculous power to cause an earthquake (6:21), and the one who comes forth from the tomb is supernatural and has preached to the fallen-asleep between his death and resurrection (10:40-42).”¹³²⁵ Furthermore the *Gos. Pet.* document does not actually report Jesus’ baptism, nor does it mention the name Jesus or the title “Christ”. Accordingly, some suggest that ἡ δύναμις is best understood as a circumlocution for God (as it is in Matt 26:64).¹³²⁶

1.2.3 The words of *Gos. Pet.* 19b: “And when he had said it he was taken up” (καὶ εἰπὼν ἀνελήφθη ...).

The vital question here is whether ἀνελήφθη (3rd per. sing. aor. 1, ind. pass of ἀναλαμβάνω) is a synonym for Jesus dying or whether it indicates an ascension of the Divine Christ from the cross. The word has a variety of meanings and since it can imply both “dying” and “ascending” no easy answer is available. J. W. McCant asks: “if one argues that ἀνελήφθη is a euphemistic expression for dying, one must answer the question, ‘Where does the spirit of the Lord go when he dies?’” Accordingly, he concludes: “Implicit in the text is the assumption of some kind of separation but it does not follow that ἀνελήφθη implies a docetic Christology.”¹³²⁷

¹³²⁴ From Cross, *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* .

¹³²⁵ Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:Appendix 1: *Gos. Pet.*, 1338.

¹³²⁶ See McCant, “The Gospel of Peter: Docetism Reconsidered,” 262-3.

¹³²⁷ McCant, “The Gospel of Peter: Docetism Reconsidered,” 266. See also Mara, *Evangile de Pierre: Introduction, Texte Critique, Traduction, Commentaire et Index*, 138-9, 220. See Foster, *The Gospel of Peter: Introduction, Critical Edition and Commentary*, 330. According to Foster, “Admittedly, in the narrative the use of the term ἀνελήφθη may potentially result in some confusion between the language of death and ascension. If this is the case, then it appears to stem from lack of authorial skill rather than a

1.2.4. The Walking and Speaking Cross

Gos. Pet. 39 speaks of: “three men coming forth from the tomb, and two of them supporting one, and a cross following them...” and *Gos. Pet.* 42 says: “And a response was heard from the cross, Yea.” (Emphasis added.) According to Christian Maurer, “the walking and talking cross (v. 39, 42) stands most easily in closer connection with the later Gnostic speculation about the cross, yet here also ... the literary starting point must be sought in Matt 24:30 ...”¹³²⁸

1.2.5 The Titles of the Lord in Gos. Pet.

Those who maintain that *Gos. Pet.* is not docetic attach importance to the various titles used by *Gos. Pet.* to designate the Lord – ὁ κύριος (14 times); ὁ υἱὸς θεοῦ (4 times); ὁ Βασιλεὺς τοῦ Ἰσραήλ (twice); σωτήρ (once); while Ἰησοῦς and Χριστός are never used. In the light of this J. W. McCant writes:

Significantly, κύριος is used synonymously with Ἰησοῦς in the canonical gospels. “Peter” has historicized a Christological title which has become a proper name despite the fact that it remains in titular form, ὁ κύριος. This usage is so consistent that it can be said with certainty that κύριος in *Gos. Pet.* is the equivalent of Ἰησοῦς in the canonical gospels. There is never a shift away from the title “Lord” in favour of the name “Jesus” in *Gos. Pet.*. The Lord of *Gos. Pet.* is so identified before, during and after his death, pointing to the fact that the historicization and transformation of a Christological title into a proper name does not necessitate a docetic Christology.¹³²⁹

Referring to the above passages of *Gos. Pet.* which have been alleged to disclose docetic and Gnostic speculation Christian Maurer writes: “All these odd statements are at most to be regarded as fingerholds upon which the Gnostic remodelling of the Gospel accounts could get a grip, and later did very thoroughly.”¹³³⁰ Accordingly, Maurer concludes: “thus the *Gospel of Peter* stands on the one hand through its comparative sobriety nearer to the canonical

conscious desire to introduce a fresh theological standing.” See also Head, “On the Christology of the Gospel of Peter,” 214-20. Head points out that “there would be no need for any resurrection narrative at all if the ascension was regarded as having happened directly from the cross.”

¹³²⁸ Maurer, “The Gospel of Peter,” 181

¹³²⁹ McCant, “The Gospel of Peter: Docetism Reconsidered,” 268.

¹³³⁰ Maurer, “The Gospel of Peter,” 181.

Gospels than to the later Gnostic embellishments, but on the other hand it prepares a way for them.”¹³³¹ And in R. E. Brown’s opinion, “we are more likely dealing with a work (*Gos. Pet.*) in which ambiguous phraseology could be read in a docetic way ... not forgetting the possibility that the few instances where it agrees in exact wording with the Canonical Gospels might have resulted from later scribal harmonizing.”¹³³²

1.3 Relationship of *Gos. Pet.* to the Four Canonical Gospels

Allan Menzies¹³³³ notes that *Gos. Pet.* follows the main lines of the canonical tradition, but with important variations in detail. Especially is this so of the events between the burial and the resurrection of our Lord, its account in this area being much more ample and detailed than anything in the canonical tradition. Menzies also notes (i) that *Gos. Pet.*’s resurrection narrative is very different from that of the canonical Gospels, assigning prominence to Mary Magdalene; and (ii) that *Gos. Pet.*’s author puts the resurrection and ascension on the same day, or, rather, did not know the latter as a separate event.¹³³⁴ M. G. Mara gives a “sympathetic” explanation of the seeming synthesis of Jesus’ resurrection and ascension in *Gos. Pet.*¹³³⁵ Thus, according to Mara, “When our author describes the resurrection with terms which agree more properly with the account of the ascension ... he thinks of the Johanne theology which associates the elevation on the cross with the glorification of Christ. In order to indicate the summing up in glory of the passion and of the death of the Κύριος, the ascension of the Lord near to his Father is placed on the day of his resurrection in numerous passages of the New Testament.”¹³³⁶

Accordingly, there has been considerable debate about the origins of the traditions found in *Gos. Pet.*. Does *Gos. Pet.* reflect and depend on the traditions found in the four canonical Gospels? Or does *Gos. Pet.* contain traditions which, while similar, are yet

¹³³¹ Maurer, “The Gospel of Peter,” 182.

¹³³² Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 325.

¹³³³ Roberts and Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 10:4.

¹³³⁴ Roberts and Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 10:5.

¹³³⁵ See Mara, *Evangile de Pierre: Introduction, Texte Critique, Traduction, Commentaire et Index*, 175-190.

¹³³⁶ Mara, *Evangile de Pierre: Introduction, Texte Critique, Traduction, Commentaire et Index*, 219-220.

independent, and even perhaps earlier, than those found in the canonical Gospels? Christian Maurer may be taken as a representative of those who hold the first position. In his opinion, *Gos. Pet.* “is a further development of the traditional material of the four canonical Gospels. These are used as remembered, whilst the oral transmission of the material in the preaching of the gospel has also told upon it ...”¹³³⁷ Maurer¹³³⁸ suggests: (i) that Matthew with its special material forms the basis of the composition (washing of hands, v.1; guarding and sealing of the grave, v. 29-33; attempt to hush up the resurrection of Jesus by influencing the Roman soldiers and Pilate, v. 47-49); (ii) that to John there go back the dating of the day of the death (of Jesus), v. 5; the crurifragium, v. 14; the appearance of the risen Jesus at the sea, v. 60, as also many particular traits; and (iii) that Luke contributes the participation of Herod in the condemnation of Jesus, v. 2-4, and the episode of the thief, v. 13-14. According to M. G. Mara, “for the episodic account, he [the author of *Gos. Pet.*] follows the preference of the Synoptics, above all Matthew and Mark, but for the theology, for the profound sense, he follows John.”¹³³⁹

Matters however are much more complicated. Accordingly, Maurer notes that “Whilst the different sources, often as far as particular expressions, are woven into one another, the impression made upon us is that of a completely new account. What alterations have resulted are in part unintentional and in part have known theological motives hid behind them.”¹³⁴⁰

Furthermore, while it may be conceded that the author of *Gos. Pet.* deliberately purposes to keep to the line of the hitherto existing Gospels – that is, to prove through all details that Christ is Lord – yet as Maurer acknowledges “the crucial problem ... lies in the fact that in their entirety the statements of the *Gospel of Peter* have an undertone which already indicates a climate that is strange to the NT.”¹³⁴¹ In view of this Maurer notes the following sharp differences between *Gos. Pet.* and the canonical Gospels: (i) Its massive apologetic reasoning.

¹³³⁷ Maurer, “The Gospel of Peter,” 180.

¹³³⁸ Maurer, “The Gospel of Peter,” 180.

¹³³⁹ Mara, *Evangile de Pierre: Introduction, Texte Critique, Traduction, Commentaire et Index*, 100.

¹³⁴⁰ Maurer, “The Gospel of Peter,” 180.

¹³⁴¹ Maurer, “The Gospel of Peter,” 181.

The testimony of belief (as in the canonical Gospels) is replaced by apparently direct proof of truth. (Thus, as well as fantastic accounts of wonders, the apostle Peter gives “professedly ocular testimony”, cf. v. 26-27; v. 59-60); (ii) Jesus’ resurrection takes place openly before the enemies of Jesus – that is, before the heathen soldiers and Jewish authorities. The result, according to Maurer, is that *Gos. Pet.*’s apologetic aim is not attained, but “rather the passion and resurrection of Jesus, yea He himself, are loosened out of the soil of real history and transferred to the realm of legend and myth.”¹³⁴²; (iii) *Gos. Pet.*’s seeming ignorance of the political relationships and Jewish customs which prevailed in Palestine in the period before 70 C.E.; (iv) *Gos. Pet.*’s misunderstanding of the OT scriptural proofs found in the four Gospels. For example, whereas the crurifragium (*Gos. Pet.* v. 14) in John’s Gospel is referred to as proof of the fulfillment of OT Scripture (John 19:28-30), in *Gos. Pet.* (v. 17) it is said to fulfill the sins of the Jews; (v) *Gos. Pet.* loses sight of the Gospels’ stress on Jesus’ death as an expiatory passion for the world (thus in *Gos. Pet.* no mention is made of the fact that, according to the canonical Gospels, Jesus died instead of Barabbas, that he prayed for his enemies’ forgiveness, that he spoke a word of hope to the repentant malefactor, that he was the passover lamb, and that he forgave Peter and the other disciples for their cowardly denial of him).

P. Gardner-Smith may be taken as an early representative of those who regard *Gos. Pet.* as basically independent of the four canonical Gospels. Back in the 1920s Gardner-Smith reacted against the many scholars who, in his opinion, had declared that *Gos. Pet.* was but “a poor harmony of the four canonical gospels, containing no original features, and owing its peculiarities to the carelessness and partiality of the writer.”¹³⁴³

In a detailed study Gardner-Smith compared *Gos. Pet.* with each of the four canonical Gospels, noting both similarities and differences.¹³⁴⁴ And while there were obvious resemblances, in some cases striking (cf. “garden / κήπος” in *Gos. Pet.* 24 and John 19:41), yet these, especially in the light of marked differences, were not, in his opinion, sufficient to establish *literary* dependence.

¹³⁴² Maurer, “The Gospel of Peter,” 181.

¹³⁴³ P. Gardner-Smith, “The Gospel of Peter,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 27 (1925-26): 255.

¹³⁴⁴ Gardner-Smith, “The Gospel of Peter,” 255-60.

Among the conclusions Gardner-Smith reached the following two may be mentioned.

(a) First, with regard to “Peter’s” method of writing his gospel he suggested that “he (‘Peter’) did not sit down with four finished documents before him and reduce them to a harmony with such original features as suited his heretical opinions or his unaccountable caprice. He collected all the traditions he could find; some were early, some were late; some were valuable, some were worthless; some were sober, some were fantastic; ‘Peter’ was no critic, and he took them all as he found them, and put them down with little or no attempt to construct a consistent narrative. If ... an early form of a tradition differed greatly from its later form or forms, he included all the accounts as though they referred to separate events.”¹³⁴⁵ This contention of Gardner-Smith may be illustrated by two of his comments: (i) With regard to the earthquake mentioned by *Gos. Pet.* (v. 21) and by Matthew (27:50-53) he says: “‘Peter’s’ is decidedly the more sober narrative. Both evangelists knew a story about an earthquake, but the tradition was vague as to the exact moment when it had taken place, and each inserted it at what seemed to him the most appropriate point. It happened that their judgment did not agree. It is unfair to ‘Peter’ to represent him as wilfully muddling the canonical narrative unless there is better evidence that he was acquainted with it. What reason could he have had for making such an alteration as this? It is more probable that he, like the other evangelists, found themselves surrounded with a number of vague and contradictory stories, and that he, like the others, did his best to fit them together into a consistent whole.”¹³⁴⁶

(ii) With regard to the descent from heaven of two gigantic angels who raised Jesus from the dead (*Gos. Pet.* 34-37) and of another who enters the tomb and greets the women (*Gos. Pet.* 44) Gardner-Smith contends that “there can hardly be a doubt that here we have what in synoptic criticism is called a doublet. There were two forms of one tradition; according to one (Matthew xxviii: 2), a single angel descended from heaven to assist at the resurrection, according to the

¹³⁴⁵ Gardner-Smith, “The Gospel of Peter,” 268.

¹³⁴⁶ Gardner-Smith, “The Gospel of Peter,” 261.

other (Luke xxiv: 4), there were two angels whose business was to announce the resurrection to the women (cf. John xx: 12). ‘Peter’ knows both these traditions, and not recognizing them as variant accounts of the same event, he puts them both into his narrative.”¹³⁴⁷

(b) Secondly, in Gardner-Smith’s view some of the traditions in *Gos. Pet.* could well be earlier than those found in the canonical Gospels. For example, *Gos. Pet.*’s account of the women’s visit to the tomb reflects, he contends, a tradition even more primitive than that of Mark. Thus with regard to *Gos. Pet.* 56 – which relates the story of the young man (an angel?) in the tomb who speaks to the women – Gardner-Smith is of the opinion (i) that while “we cannot be sure whether he (the young man) did or did not distinguish between the resurrection and the ascension, ... (yet) ... ‘Peter’ in this passage identifies them unmistakably, and this is an indication of the very early date of his tradition”¹³⁴⁸ and (ii) the fact that “‘Peter’ knows nothing of the command of the young man to the woman that they should deliver a message to the disciples (and) ... if we omit Mark xvi:7 (Go, tell his disciples,...), we have a perfectly consistent narrative, which has been obscured in Mark by the addition of a later tradition” implies for Gardner-Smith that “he (‘Peter’) represents an earlier form of the tradition in which the important addition ‘Go, tell his disciples’, had not yet been introduced.”¹³⁴⁹ And for Gardner-Smith this means that “the theory that ‘Peter’ used the Marcan gospel is finally disposed of.”¹³⁵⁰

Consequently, as a result of his comparison of *Gos. Pet.* and the four canonical Gospels Gardner-Smith comes to this important conclusion: “the strength of the evidence for the dependence of ‘Peter’ upon the canonical gospels has been greatly overestimated, and on the other hand, not enough has been made of the independent features of the Petrine narrative which are very difficult to explain on the hypothesis of literary dependence. It is my contention that the similarities which exist between the canonical accounts and the apocryphal gospel can be explained on the hypothesis that all the evangelists, including ‘Peter’, collected the floating

¹³⁴⁷ Gardner-Smith, “The Gospel of Peter,” 268.

¹³⁴⁸ Gardner-Smith, “The Gospel of Peter,” 270.

¹³⁴⁹ Gardner-Smith, “The Gospel of Peter,” 270.

¹³⁵⁰ Gardner-Smith, “The Gospel of Peter,” 270.

traditions with which they were familiar and made of them the best narrative they could. The many divergences of ‘Peter’ from the canonical gospels are best explained, not by supposing that the author had an inexplicable passion for tampering with his sources, but by supposing that he did not know the work of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.”¹³⁵¹ Accordingly, “if it be established that ‘Peter’ with all his faults is an independent witness to the traditions current in the early Church, then his gospel gains a new value which all its defects are not sufficient to destroy.”¹³⁵²

2 Theological Features in the Gospel of Peter

R. E. Brown¹³⁵³ discerns the following theological features in *Gos. Pet.*.

2.1 It manifests a very high christology. While the personal name Jesus, and the title Christ, are never used, yet the following titles are: “Lord” (*Gos. Pet.* 2, 3, 6, 8, 10, 19, 21, 24, 50, 59, 60); “Son of God” (*Gos. Pet.* 6, 9, 45, 46); “Saviour of humanity” (*Gos. Pet.* 13); “king of Israel” (*Gos. Pet.* 7, 10). Thus, for *Gos. Pet.*, “the incarnate Christ, the Christ of the passion, of the outrages, of the crucifixion, is above all the Κύριος.”¹³⁵⁴

2.2 It has a strong antiJewish animus, especially against the religious authorities.¹³⁵⁵

2.3 It reflects a knowledge of the Scriptures, but mostly implicit. The most explicit reference seems to be to a combination of Deut 21:22-23 and Deut 24:15 (LXX 24:17). In her commentary on *Gos. Pet.* M. G. Mara argues that these scriptural references, far from being trivial, contain deep theological insights. For example, in 3:6 she detects a reference to the “scapegoat”¹³⁵⁶ and to Isa 59:7¹³⁵⁷; and in 3:7 she sees in the expression “judge with justice, King of Israel” a reference to Scriptures like Pss 9:8; 96:13; 98:9; Isa 11:4-5; 58:2; Jer 11:20

¹³⁵² Gardner-Smith, “The Gospel of Peter,” 270.

¹³⁵³ Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:Appendix 1: *Gos. Pet.*, 1338-1341.

¹³⁵⁴ See Mara, *Evangile de Pierre: Introduction, Texte Critique, Traduction, Commentaire et Index*, 214. See Head, “On the Christology of the Gospel of Peter,” 209-24.

¹³⁵⁵ See Setzer, *Jewish Responses to Early Christians*, 117, 124; Mara, *Evangile de Pierre: Introduction, Texte Critique, Traduction, Commentaire et Index*, 33-34.

¹³⁵⁶ Mara, *Evangile de Pierre: Introduction, Texte Critique, Traduction, Commentaire et Index*, 74.

¹³⁵⁷ Mara, *Evangile de Pierre: Introduction, Texte Critique, Traduction, Commentaire et Index*, 89.

(cf. Rev 19:11).¹³⁵⁸ According to some the central theme of *Gos. Pet.* is that each event of the passion, of the death and resurrection, of the Lord had been announced in the Old Testament – e.g. the darkness at noon (*Gos. Pet.* v. 15, 18) being a “fulfilment” of Amos 8:9; Isa 59:10; Jer 15:9; Deut 28:28-29.¹³⁵⁹ In the light of this Mara writes, “the author of the fragment is inexperienced and awkward when he touches on the history of Palestine in general, and in that which concerns the Jewish institutions and the milieu of the life time of the Κύριος in particular. But as much as he is inexperienced in this domain, he is as much in measure and advised in the theological re-elaboration of the Gospel data. Not only does he know the canonical Gospels, the Apocalypse (Revelation), the Old Testament and other texts of the apocalyptic literature, but he has borrowed freely, with the precise intention of situating the passion, the death and the glory of the Κύριος in the light of that which had been announced in the Old Testament. It is difficult to say if the knowledge that our author possessed of the Old Testament ought to be reduced to that which one calls the *Testimonies*. It is certain that the references to the Old Testament are extremely numerous, frequently unsuspected, and are not of those which are usually known. If the author of *Gos. Pet.* ignored the history of the Jewish institutions prior to 70, he was acquainted, in a style a little banal and which is not without interest, with the spirit and the mentality of the texts of the Old Testament in their most profound significance.”¹³⁶⁰ Accordingly, the author of *Gos. Pet.* may be spoken of as a “connoisseur of Scripture....”¹³⁶¹ Furthermore, all this suggests that the author of *Gos. Pet.* was a Jewish Christian writing for his fellow Jews. Accordingly, Mara writes, “the author knew well the Jewish spirit. He could allow a discourse, which, for us moderns, is not always easy to understand – made from recalls, from leaps, from confusion – always joining it up to messianic prophecies and to key texts from the Old Testament, precisely because his audience is aware of these references. The pagans do not have this sensitiveness.”¹³⁶²

¹³⁵⁸ Mara, *Evangile de Pierre: Introduction, Texte Critique, Traduction, Commentaire et Index*, 91-94.

¹³⁵⁹ See Mara, *Evangile de Pierre: Introduction, Texte Critique, Traduction, Commentaire et Index*, 124-5.

¹³⁶⁰ Mara, *Evangile de Pierre: Introduction, Texte Critique, Traduction, Commentaire et Index*, 213-4.

¹³⁶¹ Mara, *Evangile de Pierre: Introduction, Texte Critique, Traduction, Commentaire et Index*, 126.

¹³⁶² Mara, *Evangile de Pierre: Introduction, Texte Critique, Traduction, Commentaire et Index*, 127.

2.4 It seems to be confused about the Jewish feasts.

Did the author know little about Jewish practice? M. G. Mara suggests that in *Gos. Pet.* “history has been rethought into an edifying account.” She writes, (while) “the author of *Gos. Pet.* seems by no means to hold by the truth of the events which he recounts ... (yet) ... he is (held) by the truth of their interpretation; it is there (in the interpretation) that which interests him. In subordinating the first to the second he does not (make his work a forgery).”¹³⁶³ And again Mara writes, “the time flow between the passion of the Κύριος and the period of the composition of *Gos. Pet.* has lead our author to serve up (a discourse) from the Old Testament as from a simple collection of prophetic texts relating to the Lord. We living today are sometimes perplexed when the author does not know to root his text in a precise manner in the history of Israel and in its institutions. But it does well to remember that after 70 many things changed radically. The author speaks of the *great event*, not because he has lived it, but because he has the profound knowledge that has given him faith.”¹³⁶⁴

2.5 It contains hints of already established Christian cultic patterns.

Sunday, for example, is known as “the Lord’s Day.” (cf. *Gos. Pet.* 35). With regard to the question: “what type of Christian background does *Gos. Pet.* reflect?” Brown writes: “I would see the ethos of *Gos. Pet.* as later but not far removed from the ethos that Matt tapped in the 80s-90s for what I have called the popular material ... that he used to supplement Mark’s PN [Proper Name]: the stories of Judas’ suicide and the silver pieces contaminated by innocent blood, of the dream of Pilate’s wife, of Pilate’s washing his hands of this man while all the people took responsibility, of the phenomena that accompanied Jesus’ death (shaking of the earth, opening of tombs, emergence of the fallen-asleep holy ones), and of the guard at the sepulchre frightened by a descending angel and earthshaking – as well as the infancy story of the magi and the star and the wicked Herod slaughtering the Bethlehem male children.”¹³⁶⁵

Accordingly, Brown argues “*Gos. Pet.* is a gospel reflecting popular Christianity, i.e., the Christianity of the ordinary people not in the major center of Antioch, where public reading

¹³⁶³ See Mara, *Evangile de Pierre: Introduction, Texte Critique, Traduction, Commentaire et Index*, 29.

¹³⁶⁴ Mara, *Evangile de Pierre: Introduction, Texte Critique, Traduction, Commentaire et Index*, 127-8.

¹³⁶⁵ Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:Appendix 1: *Gos. Pet.*, 1345.

and preaching would have exercised greater control, but in the smaller towns of Syria, not unlike Rhossos where Serapion became acquainted with it. *Gos. Pet.* was not heterodox, but it incorporated many imaginative elements that went beyond the canonical Gospels and the writings of bishops like Ignatius.”¹³⁶⁶

Brown’s approach, it is interesting to note, rests on the assumption that “the canonical PNs [Proper Names] are the product of a development that has involved considerable dramatization,¹³⁶⁷ so that exact history is not a category applicable to them.”¹³⁶⁸ Brown however continues in a positive vein, “I have no doubt that Mark’s PN has a greater historical component than has *Gos. Pet.*’s PN, in part because it represented something like a common preaching that was associated with apostolic tradition – a line of descent that exercised a control over basic facts, despite rearrangements and simplification. That is why it received official church recognition (canonical status) and was seen to be part of God’s provision for the Christian people (recognized as inspired). Gospel stories such as those of *Gos. Pet.*, composed in more popular circles, were not under the same controlling influences, and imagination was allowed freer rein. Nevertheless, at times they could function quite happily in enabling ordinary Christians to imagine the passion.”¹³⁶⁹

3 Authorship, Place of Origin, and Date of Writing of *Gos. Pet.*

3.1 Authorship

The author identifies himself in v. 60 as Simon Peter, brother of Andrew, and as one of the twelve disciples of the Lord (v. 59). However, it is generally agreed that the work is pseudepigraphical.¹³⁷⁰ In v. 26 the writer speaks of himself in the first person: “And I with my companions was grieved, and being wounded in mind we hid ourselves ...” This language,

¹³⁶⁶ Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:Appendix 1: *Gos. Pet.*, 1345-6.

¹³⁶⁷ Would not perhaps a better word be ‘interpretation’?

¹³⁶⁸ Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:Appendix 1: *Gos. Pet.*, 1346. (In footnote 59 Brown writes, “may I point out that this is not necessarily a liberal view, e.g., it was espoused in reference to the Gospel account of Jesus’ whole ministry both by the Roman Pontifical Biblical Commission and by the Second Vatican Council (NJBC 72:35,15)”).

¹³⁶⁹ Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:Appendix 1: *Gos. Pet.*, 1346.

¹³⁷⁰ For a “sympathetic” approach to the pseudonymous character of the *Gos. Pet.* see Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:Appendix 1:*Gos. Pet.*, 1344 fn 54.

according to some, is reminiscent of the language of 2 Peter (cf.1:16-18), a letter alleged by certain scholars to be pseudepigraphical.¹³⁷¹

3.2 Place of Origin

Gos. Pet.'s complete omission of the local place names that appear in the canonical passion narratives suggests, according to some, that it was composed outside Palestine.¹³⁷²

Since the Akhmîm document was found in Egypt some initially advocated an Egyptian origin for its composition. However, it is now generally agreed that the most likely place of its origin was somewhere in Syria.¹³⁷³

3.3 Date of Writing

If it is assumed that the Akhmîm document is to be identified with “*Gospel of Peter*” mentioned by Bishop Serapion and by Origen in his commentary on Matthew then this would mean that *Gos. Pet.* was in existence towards the end of the 2nd century. Thus, according to Gardner-Smith, “for a church (at Rhossus) which was not consciously heretical to cling to a non-canonical gospel in 190 seems to imply for that gospel a very respectable antiquity. It does not seem at all likely that the gospel read in the church of Rhossus could have been written later than A.D. 150.”¹³⁷⁴

According to some, confirmation of this 2nd century dating comes from the Oxyrhynchus papyri which also show the existence of *Gos. Pet.* in Egypt around ca. 200. Oxy P 2949, fragment 1, lines 5-12 seem to be “a slightly different version of *Gos. Pet.* 2:3-5a”, both texts having the very unusual phrase “friend of Pilate.”¹³⁷⁵ In Crossan’s opinion this similarity of Oxy P 2949 and *Gos. Pet.* v. 3-5a “pushes the manuscript evidence for *Gos. Pet.* back ... to the ‘late second or early third century’ ...” and thus, in his view, “manuscript evidence for *Gos.*

¹³⁷¹ See Mara, *Evangile de Pierre: Introduction, Texte Critique, Traduction, Commentaire et Index*, 211.

¹³⁷² See Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 338.

¹³⁷³ See Maurer, “The Gospel of Peter,” 180.

¹³⁷⁴ Gardner-Smith, “The Date of the Gospel of Peter,” 401.

¹³⁷⁵ See Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 127.

Pet. is now as good as that, say, for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.”¹³⁷⁶ However, according to D. F. Wright, the most obvious inference to be drawn from the “considerable divergences” of Oxy P 2949 from the much later Akhmîm text is that “the Akhmîm text of *Gos. Pet.* is a markedly developed one, and cannot any longer with much confidence be presumed to present *Gos. Pet.* in its original form.”¹³⁷⁷

And in recent times P. Foster has seriously questioned the use of the Oxyrhynchus papyri in dating the Akhmîm codex. Foster examines critically four separate pieces of textual evidence identified by scholars as fragments of the *Gospel of Peter* (P. Oxy 2949; P. Oxy 4009; P. Vindob G 2325 (Fayyum Fragment) and P. Egerton 2), and an ostrakon (van Haelst Nr. 741) which purports to describe Peter as ὁ εὐαγγελιστής (the Gospel writer).¹³⁷⁸ According to Foster, one should exercise caution before too quickly identifying the Akhmîm text with the *Gospel of Peter* that Serapion declared open to docetic interpretation. Thus, in his opinion, “[T]he Akhmîm codex provides a sixth to ninth century manuscript which contains a passion and post-resurrection narrative with heightened miraculous element and sensational details. To make claims about the pre-history of this text in the second century (or even earlier) is to go beyond the available evidence.”¹³⁷⁹

Some who maintain that the author of *Gos. Pet.* had no knowledge of the four canonical Gospels have suggested a quite early date for its composition. According to Gardner-Smith, “After the close of the first century it would be difficult for any well-instructed Christian to have no knowledge of any of the gospels, though few if any churches possessed more than one or two. If ‘Peter’ did not know any of the canonical gospels the probability is that he wrote in the first century, conceivably as late as 100, possibly considerably earlier.”¹³⁸⁰ Thus, in his opinion, “The safest conclusion seems to be that ‘Peter’ was written neither very late nor very

¹³⁷⁶ See Crossan, *The Cross that Spoke*, 9.

¹³⁷⁷ David F. Wright, “Four other gospels: review article.” Review of J.D. Crossan, *Four Other Gospels: Shadows on the Contours of Canon*, *Themelios* 12.2 (1987): 59.

¹³⁷⁸ See Foster, *The Gospel of Peter: Introduction, Critical Edition and Commentary*, 57- 65. See also Paul Foster, “Are there any Early Fragments of the So-Called *Gospel of Peter*?” *New Testament Studies* 52 (2006): 1-28; Paul Foster, “The Disputed Early Fragments of the So-called *Gospel of Peter* – Once Again,” *Novum Testamentum* 49 (2007): 402-406.

¹³⁷⁹ Foster, *The Gospel of Peter: Introduction, Critical Edition and Commentary*, 90.

¹³⁸⁰ Gardner-Smith, “The Date of the Gospel of Peter,” 404.

early, but in the same generation which witnessed the composition of Matthew and Luke, that is, in the last thirty years of the first century. ... later than Matthew and Luke, and earlier than the Fourth Gospel. ...”¹³⁸¹

In more recent times, P. A. Mirecki has declared that “The *Gospel of Peter* was a narrative gospel of the synoptic type which circulated in the mid 1st century under the authority of the name Peter.” Thus he suggests that, “An earlier form of the gospel probably served as one of the major sources for the canonical gospels.”¹³⁸²

On the other hand, those who maintain that the author of *Gos. Pet.* was dependent on the canonical Gospels, or at least on oral tradition stemming from the canonical Gospels, suggest a later date for its composition – sometime in the first quarter of the 2nd century. For example, M. G. Mara writes that *Gos. Pet.* is “a narrative of the mystery of the Κύριος strongly connected to the Johannine theology localized in Asia Minor, and appearing between the redaction of the Fourth Gospel and that of the pascal Homilies of the 2nd century.”¹³⁸³

R. E. Brown mentions three points which, to his mind, suggest a date for *Gos. Pet.*’s composition in, at least, early 2nd century. First, according to Brown, “the implausibilities in *Gos. Pet.* make an early date in Palestine unlikely.”¹³⁸⁴ As examples of historical implausibilities Brown mentions (i) that “*Gos. Pet.* has no problem attributing to Herod a kingly role in Jerusalem, so that Pilate has to make requests of him. Indeed this Herod sentences Jesus to the Roman punishment of crucifixion.” Brown asks, “could a story like that have developed in Palestine while there were still Roman governors with political authority over Judea?”¹³⁸⁵ (ii) Brown also asks, “Does the reference to ‘the twelve disciples of the Lord after the resurrection (14:59) mean that the *Gos. Pet.* author did not know the Judas story (cf. Matt 28:14)?” These, and other remarks, according to Brown “point to a date after 70 if *Gos. Pet.* was composed in Palestine.”¹³⁸⁶ In the second place, the fact that “*Gos. Pet.* shows a sharp alienation from

¹³⁸¹ Gardner-Smith, “The Date of the Gospel of Peter,” 406.

¹³⁸² See P. A. Mirecki, “Peter, Gospel of,” in Freedman, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 5:278-281.

¹³⁸³ Mara, *Evangile de Pierre: Introduction, Texte Critique, Traduction, Commentaire et Index*, 218.

¹³⁸⁴ Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 338.

¹³⁸⁵ See Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 338.

¹³⁸⁶ Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 338.

Judaism and its leaders, to the point of extreme hostility” suggests, according to Brown a later date for *Gos. Pet.*¹³⁸⁷ In the third place, Brown draws attention to parallels between *Gos. Pet.* and writings like the *Didache*, *Barnabas*, *Protevangelium*, and so on, which belong to the first half of the 2nd century. These parallels suggest that *Gos. Pet.* came from the same environment and time.¹³⁸⁸

P. M. Head likewise suggests a second century date for *Gos. Pet.* According to Head:

[G]P shares the thought world and vocabulary of a Christianity that has links with Jewish apocalypticism. There are many indications of second (rather than first) century concerns. Thus, the martyr parallels; the ambiguity concerning the death / ascension of Jesus; the vocabulary; the great height of the resurrected Jesus; the descent motif; the speculation on the cross etc. The Christology of *Gos. Pet.* is shaped in particular by martyrological and apocalyptic motifs. In addition there is a distinct emphasis upon the elevated status of Jesus – the consistent use of κύριος, the restructuring and heightening of the miraculous in the passion narrative; the general emphasis on the resurrection – including the impact of the resurrection on an increased number of witnesses, the speculation, the shifting of the confession.

Consequently, in Head’s opinion:

The cumulative evidence for a second century date is strong and adds to the impression that *Gos. Pet.* is a redaction of the canonical material (perhaps also influenced by oral traditions). As such *Gos. Pet.* offers a window on the process by which the gospel traditions were re-interpreted through the (not necessarily consistent) framework of a particular second-century Christian, subject to various influences. These influences might be summed up as: a belief in the deity of Christ, the canonical gospel traditions (however mediated), an emphasis on the miraculous, an apocalyptic world-view, and a measure of literary ability.¹³⁸⁹

4. The Relevance and Importance of *Gos. Pet.* in Relation to the Understanding of Matt 27:51b-53.

According to *Gos. Pet.* v. 45, “having just witnessed a transcendental epiphany” (*Gos. Pet.* 35-44), “the centurion and they that were with him ..., hastened in the night to Pilate, leaving the tomb which they were watching, and declared all things which they had seen, being greatly distressed and saying, Truly he was the Son of God.” (ταῦτα ἰδόντες οἱ περὶ τὸν κεντυρίωνα νυκτὸς ἔσπευσαν πρὸς Πειλᾶτον, ἀφέντες τὸν τάφον ὃν ἐφύλασσον,

¹³⁸⁷ See Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 338-9.

¹³⁸⁸ See Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 339.

¹³⁸⁹ See Head, “On the Christology of the Gospel of Peter,” 118-9.

καὶ ἐξηγήσαντο πάντα ἅπερ εἶδον, ἀγωνιῶντες μεγάλως καὶ λέγοντες, Ἀληθῶς υἱὸς ἦν θεοῦ)

At the conclusion of an important article,¹³⁹⁰ in which he suggests that some so-called apocryphal gospels are perhaps at least as old and as valuable as the canonical gospels as sources for the earliest developments of the traditions about Jesus, H. Koester refers to this epiphany story found in the *Gospel of Peter*. And, with regard to the question as to whether this resurrection account of the *Gospel of Peter* has perhaps preserved older traditions of resurrection stories, Koester notes the following:

In the passion narrative which was used by both the Gospel of Mark and the Gospel of John, the story of the discovery of the empty tomb by the women must have followed immediately upon the account of the burial of Jesus. The actual resurrection was not told in that common source. The *Gospel of Peter*, however, reproduces after the account of the burial (*Gos.Pet.*6.21-24) and before the discovery of the empty tomb (*Gos.Pet.*12.50-13.57) a resurrection narrative that has all the proper features of a miraculous epiphany story (*Gos.Pet.*8.28-11.49).¹³⁹¹

In Koester's opinion:

That such a miraculous epiphany story is a sign of later tradition is a rationalistic prejudice. What is secondary here is the attempt to relate the story to the rest of the gospel and to connect it with the exoneration of Pilate. The story as reconstructed here is well preserved in its form and could be very old.¹³⁹²

Further, and importantly, according to Koester:

It seems that various parts of this [miraculous epiphany] story are in fact preserved in the canonical gospels; however, they have been inserted into different contexts and are fragments of an older story that only the *Gospel of Peter* has preserved intact. The reaction of the witnesses and their confession "In truth he was the Son of God" appears in Mark 15:39; but it is poorly placed here after the death of Jesus and clumsily motivated by the remark, "when he saw that Jesus died in this way." Matthew has recognized the inappropriateness of this fragment and inserted an account of several miraculous occurrences in order to create a better reason for the centurion's confession (Matt 27:51b-53). Another displaced fragment seems to be preserved in Matt 27:2-4: ...Indeed, in this context the appearance of the angel, with all appropriate features of an epiphany, only serves as a courtesy to the women: Jesus had already left the tomb – and why was the tomb closed again after Jesus' resurrection? Matthew wanted to use material from the epiphany story which the *Gospel of Peter* reported in full. That Matthew knew this story is clear from Matt 27:62-66, the report of the setting of the guard at the tomb. This Matthean section is usually labelled an apologetic legend. As it appears in Matthew, it is not a legend at all, but only a fragment, the introduction of an

¹³⁹⁰ Koester, "Apocryphal and Canonical Gospels," 105-130.

¹³⁹¹ Koester, "Apocryphal and Canonical Gospels," 128.

¹³⁹² Koester, "Apocryphal and Canonical Gospels," 129.

epiphany story, which Matthew has used for apologetic purposes. Finally, what about the epiphany account itself? Mark 9:2-8 and par. has been designated as a displaced resurrection account. Jesus appears “in garment glistening, intensely white,” together with two angelic figures, identified as Moses and Elijah. This epiphany [Mark 9:2-8] may indeed be nothing else but a very faint echo of the old account of a resurrection-epiphany which the *Gospel of Peter* has preserved in full.¹³⁹³

Another scholar, J. D. Crossan, also notes the close correspondence of the words at the end of *Gos. Pet.* v. 45, ἀληθῶς υἱὸς ἦν Θεοῦ with the words of the centurion found in Mark 15:39, ἀληθῶς οὗτος ὁ ἄνθρωπος υἱὸς Θεοῦ ἦν. Crossan concludes that both verses refer to the same epiphany tradition, except that in Mark 15:39 it is (i) linked not to the moment of Jesus’ resurrection but to the moment of his death, and (ii) it is the confession of the centurion alone.¹³⁹⁴ These changes, Crossan argues, agree completely with Mark’s Christology – a Christology which stresses the *suffering* of the Son of Man in contrast to a concept of Messiahship which laid stress on the demonstration of miraculous power.¹³⁹⁵

Crossan further notes, on the assumption that the third Gospel has used Mark as a source, that in Luke 23:47 “Luke mutes the incident by connecting it not just to Jesus’ death as in Mark(15:39) but more vaguely ‘to what had taken place’(το γενομενον)¹³⁹⁶ and (that) he renders the (centurion’s) confession more juridical than christological: ‘Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, and said, Certainly this man was innocent.’”¹³⁹⁷ Furthermore, in Crossan’s opinion, Matthew 27:54 “reads more like a full conflation” of *Peter* (v. 45) and Mark. That is, in Matt 27:54 *Peter’s* intention (about the effects of the divine epiphany) have been placed within Mark’s location (that is, at the moment of Jesus’ death). Crossan draws attention to the fact that Matthew 27:54 has a plural confession (“the centurion and those with him”) as in *Peter*, and suggests that the phrase “keeping watch over Jesus” (cf. Matt 27:36) is more suitable “to guarding a tomb than finishing a

¹³⁹³ Koester, “Apocryphal and Canonical Gospels,” 129-30.

¹³⁹⁴ See Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 140.

¹³⁹⁵ See Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 140-1.

¹³⁹⁶ The same expression is found in Matt 27:54. This suggests that both Luke and Matthew reflect the same tradition that at the moment of Jesus’ death a number of extraordinary events happened. Luke’s use of to genomenon in 23:47 has caused commentators some difficulty. For example, Le P. M.-J. Lagrange, *Évangile selon Saint Matthieu* (Paris: Libraire Lecoffre, 1941), 533, fn 54 says: “L’accord avec Lc [Gospel of Luke] sur ce dernier point est difficile a qualifier.”

¹³⁹⁷ Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 141.

crucifixion.”¹³⁹⁸ Likewise in M. G. Mara’s opinion, “By several features of this account, this v.45 (of *Gos. Pet.*) attaches itself to Matt 27:54.”¹³⁹⁹

In the light of all this Crossan asserts that “the most plausible understanding of those relations is that Mark knew and used *Peter* and that Matthew knew and used both *Peter* and Mark. (Thus) Matt 27:54 is an almost classic Matthean conflation of twin sources, of Mark 15:39 with *Gos. Pet.* 11:45.”¹⁴⁰⁰ In other words, in Crossan’s view, *Gos. Pet.* is earlier than Mark’s Gospel. Not surprisingly, Crossan writes, “My conclusion is that *Peter* is not dependent on them (the canonical Gospels) but rather that all four of them are dependent on *Peter*, at least for their passion narrative. That is to say *Gos. Pet.* 1¹⁴⁰¹ (1:1-6:22): Crucifixion and deposition is the source of Mark 15:15b-39 = Matt 27:24-54 = Luke 23:6-48 = John 19:16-37. It is this single unified source which is the primary reason for the remarkably homogeneous passion narrative in all four intracanonical gospels.”¹⁴⁰²

In a later work (*The Cross that Spoke*) Crossan speaks (i) of the original *Cross Gospel* as “the one passion and resurrection narrative from which all four of the intracanonical versions derive ...”¹⁴⁰³ (He acknowledges however that “one cannot ... prove that there were no other sources, and one cannot prove that there might not be an earlier source from which the *Cross Gospel* and intracanonical tradition both derive.”¹⁴⁰⁴ (ii) This early or original passion narrative (consisting of what is present in *Gos. Pet.* 1:1-6:22 [without 2:3-5a] and 7:25-11:49 [without 7:26-27 and 9:37; 11:43-44])¹⁴⁰⁵ was drawn on by all the Canonical Gospels who rearranged and omitted sections. Matthew and Luke used nothing else but Mark and the original *Gos. Pet.* passion narrative, and each restored different elements omitted by Mark. John used nothing else

¹³⁹⁸ See Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 141.

¹³⁹⁹ Mara, *Evangile de Pierre: Introduction, Texte Critique, Traduction, Commentaire et Index*, 193.

¹⁴⁰⁰ Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 141.

¹⁴⁰¹ For his own convenience Crossan divided the contents of *Gos. Pet.* into six major units designated as *Gos. Pet.* 1, *Gos. Pet.* 2, and so on. See Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 130-1. For an elaboration, and criticism, of Crossan’s approach see Arthur J. Dewey, “‘And an Answer was Heard from the Cross ...’ A Response to J. Dominic Crossan,” *Foundations and Facets Forum* 5 (1989): 103-111. See also Dewey, “‘Time to Murder and Create’: Visions and Revisions in the *Gospel of Peter*,” 101-127.

¹⁴⁰² Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 145.

¹⁴⁰³ Crossan, *The Cross that Spoke*, 17.

¹⁴⁰⁴ Crossan, *The Cross that Spoke*, 17.

¹⁴⁰⁵ That is, the *Cross Gospel* is found in *Gos. Pet.* in verses 1-2, 5b-22, 25, 28-36, 38-42, 45-49.

but the three Synoptics and the original *Gos. Pet.* passion narrative.¹⁴⁰⁶ (iii) Then, this early *Cross Gospel* was later combined, by a redactor, with “an intracanonial stratum” resulting in the *Gospel of Peter*. In his epilogue, Crossan writes: “This book has argued for the existence of a document which I call the *Cross Gospel* as the single known source for the Passion and Resurrection narrative. It flowed into Mark, flowed along with him into Matthew and Luke, flowed along with the three synoptics into John, and finally flowed along with the intracanonial tradition into the pseudepigraphical *Gospel of Peter*. I cannot find persuasive evidence of anything save redactional modifications being added to that stream once it departs its *Cross Gospel* source.”¹⁴⁰⁷

The Approach of A. J. Dewey.

While expressing admiration for Crossan’s “major redactional advance and intertextuality” yet A. J. Dewey ventures to disagree with Crossan about the *Cross Gospel* being the source for the Passion and Resurrection narrative. In his article, “‘Time to Murder and Create’: Visions and revisions in the *Gospel of Peter*,”¹⁴⁰⁸ Dewey presents “a critical counterpoint to Crossan.” According to Dewey, the *Gos. Pet.* developed along the following lines: The original layer (2.5c-5, 15a; 5.16-6.21; 8.28b) was a fragmentary early passion narrative which recounts the death and exaltation of the Lord through the employment of the genre of the story of the vindicated righteous one.¹⁴⁰⁹ This genre was a creative response to earlier ideological and political speculations over the fate of Jesus. Thus, according to Dewey, “Recent writers contend that the passion tradition begins not as a simple historical description but as an imaginative response to the trauma of Jesus’ fate, expressed in the stock form of the Jewish tale of the righteous one who is unjustly persecuted and subsequently vindicated.”¹⁴¹⁰

¹⁴⁰⁶ For this summary of Crossan’s approach see Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 325.

¹⁴⁰⁷ Crossan, *The Cross that Spoke*, 404.

¹⁴⁰⁸ Dewey, “‘Time to Murder and Create’: Visions and Revisions in the *Gospel of Peter*,” 101-127.

¹⁴⁰⁹ See Nickelsburg, “The Genre and Function of the Markan Passion Narrative,” 153-184.

¹⁴¹⁰ Arthur J. Dewey, “Resurrection Texts in the *Gospel of Peter*,” *Foundations and Facets Forum* 10 (1984): 181.

To this original layer, which was earlier than Crossan's *Cross Gospel*, was added a secondary layer – namely, an epiphany story (8.28a; 8.29b-9.37; 10.39b; 10.40; 11.45). This epiphany material intensified the vindication side of the story.

Next, a tertiary layer (fragments and redactional elements) was added (2.3-4; 6.23b-24; 10.41-42; 1.1-2; 2.5a,b; 5.15b; 6.22-23a; 8.29a; 10.38-39a,c; 10.43; 11.46-49). According to Dewey these additions reflect the political upheavals emerging before the siege of Jerusalem. Thus, the introduction of this epiphany material may indicate social redefinition – that is, an attempt to adjust to a more Gentile audience while simultaneously maintaining Jewish ties. This would suggest an early stage of missionary advancement by the Jesus movement.

Then, a final redactional layer was added to give the *Gospel of Peter* (7.25; 7.26-27; 11.44; 12.50-13.57; 14.58-60). In these additions the community's attitude over against the "Jews", an "us versus them" mentality, comes to the fore (which, in Dewey's opinion, suggests a post 70 C.E. period). According to Dewey, his "proposed line of composition may well fit in with what is emerging as the picture of historical development of the many-sided Jesus movements in the first century."¹⁴¹¹

"History Remembered" or "Prophecy Historicized"

It is important to note that underlying the whole approach of Crossan, Koester, and others to the question of the relationship between *Gos. Pet.* and the four canonical Gospels is the more basic and important assumption that what gave rise to the creation of the passion narrative was not historical recall but a desire to show that in Jesus biblical prophecy had been fulfilled. The following are examples of how this assumption influences Crossan's approach to the Gospels and some of the difficulties it creates:

¹⁴¹¹ Dewey, "Time to Murder and Create": Visions and Revisions in the *Gospel of Peter*." 124.

(a) Noting that *Gos. Pet.* and the Synoptic Gospels all declare that Jesus was silent during his passion (*Gos. Pet.* 10b; Mark 14:61=Matt 26:63; Luke 23:9; Mark 15:5= Matt 27:14) Crossan asks: “Is this all or any of this historical memory or is it fulfilment of Isa 53:7 ...?”¹⁴¹²

(b) Psalm 2:1-2 links “in conspirational conjunction both ‘kings’ and ‘rulers’ together, against the Lord and his anointed.” (A tradition clearly reflected in Acts 4:25-27 which links both Herod and Pilate in opposition to the Lord’s anointed one.) Accordingly, if the matrix of the trial tradition is Psalm 2:1-2 and if the *Cross Gospel* is creating a narrativization of that text, then why, Crossan asks “this separation between Herod and Pilate (*Gos. Pet.* 1, 46), why is one made responsible and the other innocent? ... Why did *Gospel* set asunder what psalm had joined together?” According to Crossan, “one could answer ... that the *Cross Gospel* wished to have the Romans play no part in the scourging and crucifixion either to increase the responsibility of ‘the Jews’ and / or to prepare for the climactic Roman confessions of Jesus as ‘Son of God’ in *Gospel of Peter* 11:45-46.”¹⁴¹³

(c) Crossan proposes that “in terms of the historical passion those closest to Jesus knew only that he was crucified “during” the Passover time but knew nothing more specific about the exact day. Thereafter, it was primarily a question of symbolism and, since there was no dominant historical datum, this could move in different directions.”¹⁴¹⁴ Consequently, Crossan suggests (i) that “the *Cross Gospel* had Jesus crucified on the eve of the festival primarily with an eye on Amos 8:9-10 according to which the feast itself would be turned into mourning.”¹⁴¹⁵ He also notes that “in both Amos 8:9 and *Gospel of Peter* 5:15 it is a case not just of darkness in daylight but precisely of darkness at noon.”¹⁴¹⁶ (ii) In the second place, Crossan suggests that since Mark wanted a paschal meal between Jesus and the disciples he had to place the Crucifixion on the Passover Day (15th Nisan. The Passover lambs were killed from 3pm onwards on the 14th Nisan. The new day (15th) began at sunset and the Passover meal was held from then until midnight). Thus, according to Crossan, “both Matthew and Luke faced with a

¹⁴¹² Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 147.

¹⁴¹³ See Crossan, *The Cross that Spoke*, 95.

¹⁴¹⁴ Crossan, *The Cross that Spoke*, 110.

¹⁴¹⁵ Crossan, *The Cross that Spoke*, 110.

¹⁴¹⁶ Crossan, *The Cross that Spoke*, 198.

contradiction between their twin sources (*Gos. Pet.* and Mark) easily chose Mark in order to retain his Last Supper which, of course, was totally absent from the *Cross Gospel* they would have known.”¹⁴¹⁷ Crossan further notes that John was also faced with two contradictory versions, but, since John “did not intend a paschal meal and found much more symbolic appropriateness in Jesus’ death on Passover Eve (14th Nisan), he chose to follow the *Cross Gospel*.”¹⁴¹⁸

(iii) In the third place, Crossan notes that what the *Gospel of Peter* says about the darkness (how it started, 5:15; how it affected people, 5:18; how it included the rent veil, 5:20, and the earthquake; and then ended, 6:22) “is an important and necessary preparation for the repentance of the people in 7:25.”¹⁴¹⁹ Furthermore, “it is this repentance which leads directly to the guards at the tomb in 8:28-30. ... (for) ... the miracles at the death of Jesus lead to the repentance of the people and this leads in turn to the fear of the authorities and hence to the guards at the Tomb.”¹⁴²⁰ In order to explain why the guarding of the tomb tradition is absent from Mark and yet found in the later Matthew Crossan suggests that *Gos. Pet.*’s Tomb and Guard unit (7:25-9:34) “was original to *Peter*, was omitted by Mark, but was reinserted into his Markan source by Matthew.”¹⁴²¹

(d) Crossan notes that in *Gos. Pet.* 10:41-42 “there is the belief that while he was in the tomb Jesus preached and saved the just who had died before his advent ... cf 1Pet 3:18-19 ... 1Pet 4:6 ...”¹⁴²² However, according to Crossan, “Matthew wishes to use this tradition but he does so rather awkwardly. He puts the resurrection of the earlier dead among the miracles at the crucifixion (Matt 27:51b-53) and then has, of course, to delay it until after the resurrection of Jesus (by adding the phrase, ‘after his rising’).”¹⁴²³

¹⁴¹⁷ Crossan, *The Cross that Spoke*, 110.

¹⁴¹⁸ Crossan, *The Cross that Spoke*, 110.

¹⁴¹⁹ Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 150. Note: Since this tradition about the signs is so diverse (found in *Gos. Pet.*, Matt 27:51b-54, and even in Luke 23:47-48) it must go back earlier than all the written Gospels. This suggests that Matt 27:51b-53 is not a creation added by Matthew to Mark but rather belongs to the original tradition which forms the basis of Matthew’s passion account.

¹⁴²⁰ Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 150.

¹⁴²¹ Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 149.

¹⁴²² Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 166.

¹⁴²³ Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 166.

(e) Strong support for Crossan's whole approach to the question of the formation of the Passion tradition arises from the fact that while the four intracanonial gospels agree quite harmoniously in the sequence and detail of the passion narrative yet they disagree almost totally on the place and time, the setting and content of Jesus' apparition to the apostles to give them their missionary mandate for the world. Crossan asks: "If both those traditions are based on historical recall, why are they so radically different in result? Even if one concedes a certain disagreement due to the vagaries of human memory, why is that memory so very much better on the passion than on the resurrection? Surely, the details of that last meeting between the apostles and their Lord, that meeting wherein they received their mandate to worldwide mission, was at least as memorable as the details of the passion?"¹⁴²⁴

To these questions, Crossan gives this answer:

[T]he agreement on the passion narrative in the four intracanonial gospels stems from the fact that they all have a common origin in the Passion-Resurrection Source [embedded in *Gos. Pet.*]. Mark himself used this text, and the other three intracanonial gospels used only it and Mark for their own compositions. No wonder, then that they have remarkably similar accounts of the passion. Exactly the opposite happened with regard to the resurrection narrative. Once again, the earliest tradition is that of the Passion-Resurrection source. But Mark was totally unwilling to accept this account. He relocated it into his transfiguration scene at 9:2-8 and replaced it with the Women and Tomb scene at 16:1-8. That left the other three intracanonial gospels on their own. They could not end their gospels, as Mark had done, with the harsh negativity of the empty tomb, but neither could they follow the model of the Passion-Resurrection Source and conclude with the climatic confession of the Son of God from both Jewish and Roman authorities (*Gos. Pet.* 45). So they adopted and adapted Mark 16:1-8 into their own texts as Matt 28:18; Luke 23:1-11; and John 20:1, 11-13, but after that, they each went their own individual way. It is the acceptance or rejection of the Passion-Resurrection Source that accounts for the unity of the passion and the diversity of the apparition narratives in the four intracanonial gospels.¹⁴²⁵

Underlying Crossan's approach to the relationship between *Gos. Pet.* and the four canonical Gospels is the assumption that "the Old Testament played a significant creative role with regard to the passion story."¹⁴²⁶ This assumption is well articulated by H. Koester whom Crossan quotes, approvingly, as follows: "In the beginning there was only the belief that Jesus' suffering, death, and burial, as well as his resurrection, happened 'according to the Scriptures'

¹⁴²⁴ Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 179.

¹⁴²⁵ Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 180.

¹⁴²⁶ See Joel B. Green, "The Gospel of Peter: Source for a Pre-Canonical Passion Narrative?" *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 73 (1987): 294.

(1 Cor 15:3-4). The very first narratives about Jesus' suffering and death would not have made the attempt to remember what actually happened. Rather, they would have found both the rationale and content of Jesus' suffering and death in the memory of those passages in the Psalms and Prophets which spoke about the suffering of the righteous."¹⁴²⁷ For Crossan the pressing question is: "(Can one) ... accept such radical intertextuality in which biblical prophecy dictates the very details of what otherwise reads like an historical account?"¹⁴²⁸

The position advocated by H. Koester and J. D. Crossan, etc. has been challenged. J. B. Green, for example, maintains that "While we may not categorically rule out the possibility that its author had access to non-canonical material, we have found ample support for the conclusion that the canonical Gospels have been employed as sources in the writing of the *Gospel of Peter*. The *Gospel of Peter*, therefore cannot be employed as a separate, independent witness to a prototypical passion narrative."¹⁴²⁹ And R. E. Brown in a number of articles has especially challenged "J. D. Crossan's claim that *Gos. Pet.* presents a more original account of the passion than any canonical Gospel."¹⁴³⁰

Brown begins by noting that Crossan's approach is part of a wider challenge to the authority of the Canonical writings. Historically, Christianity pre-existed the canonical writings – its message being initially spread by "oral tradition" – that is, by word of mouth. Thus, when Mark, and others (cf. Luke 1:1-4) wrote their Gospels they would have "narrowed down the much wider range of oral presentation about Jesus."¹⁴³¹ It is, accordingly, the contention of some that these "New Testament writings distort what preceded."¹⁴³² That is to say, "the canonical NT and the apostolic writings of the 2nd cent are seen as attempting to suppress strains of Christian thought and behaviour that survived only in the apocrypha."¹⁴³³

¹⁴²⁷ Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 147. See Koester, "Apocryphal and Canonical Gospels," 127.

¹⁴²⁸ Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 147.

¹⁴²⁹ Green, "The Gospel of Peter: Source for a Pre-Canonical Passion Narrative?" 301.

¹⁴³⁰ Brown, "Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority," 323; For a summary of Brown's refutation of Crossan's thesis see Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:Appendix 1: *Gos. Pet.*, 1332-36; See also Wright, review of Crossan, "*Four Other Gospels*," 56-60.

¹⁴³¹ See Brown, "Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority," 321.

¹⁴³² Brown, "Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority," 321.

¹⁴³³ Brown, "Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority," 322.

In the second place Brown notes that “the real issue is the methodology by which Crossan and others ... have concluded that some of *Gos. Pet.* was used by the canonical Gospels rather than vice versa.”¹⁴³⁴ Accordingly, Brown reviews some of the methodological arguments used by Crossan, etc.

(A) For example, the argument from Scriptural memory. Koester’s assertion that in the beginning there was only the belief that Jesus’ passion and resurrection happened according to the Scriptures (1 Cor 15:3-5) and thus that “the very first narratives of Jesus’ suffering and death would not have made the attempt to remember what actually happened” raises, according to Brown the “chicken or egg” problem of which came first with regard to the factual element in the passion. Brown asks: “Did narrators create incidents to give scriptural flavour, or from what occurred did they select and dramatize those capable of echoing the Scripture?”¹⁴³⁵ Brown notes that “the study of the DSS pesharim show the latter mindset at work: Actual events in history and the life of the community (verifiable from other DSS works and elsewhere) are seen as fulfilling Scripture.”¹⁴³⁶

With regard to Psalm 69:22 (21) Brown notes that, according to Crossan, *Gos. Pet.* 5:16 which speaks of Jesus being given “gall and vinegar” to drink is more original than Mark 15:23, 36 and Matt 27:34, 48 which “diminish the scriptural resonance by splitting the twin elements into two drinks separated by hours on the cross.” (In fact, Mark does not mention gall at all but only wine mingled with myrrh).¹⁴³⁷ Brown however asks: “Cannot one argue that the development went in the other direction? From a very early period Christians saw a relation between a drink offered to Jesus on the cross and Ps 69. Mark reflected that implicitly by having vinegar or harsh wine offered to Jesus just before he died. Matthew, with his love for scriptural exactitude, made the reference to the psalm clearer by splitting the parallelism and having Jesus offered wine mixed with gall (instead of myrrh) at the beginning of the crucifixion

¹⁴³⁴ Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 326.

¹⁴³⁵ See Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 326.

¹⁴³⁶ Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 326.

¹⁴³⁷ See Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 327.

and vinegar or harsh wine at the end. *Gos. Pet.* made it even more explicit by simplifying the two drinks to one consisting of ‘gall and vinegar.’”¹⁴³⁸ Brown also notes that the scriptural usage in *Gos. Pet.* here is close to that of *Barn.* 7:3, 5 even as the psalm echo in *Gos. Pet.* 4:12 is close to that of Justin, *Dialogue* 97. He asks, “One may argue that all three works reflect pre-Gospel tradition, but is it not plausible that in *Gos. Pet.* we are close chronologically to Justin and *Barnabas*, and witnessing in the mid-2nd century a simplified Gospel memory?”¹⁴³⁹

(B) Secondly, Brown examines Crossan’s methodological argument from Redaction. According to Mark, both the malefactors (δύο ληστές, bandits, revolutionaries, Mark 15:27) crucified with Jesus taunted him (Mark 15:32). On the assumption that Luke used Mark it is argued that in order to join his story of the “repentant malefactor” (Luke 23:40-43) to Mark’s passion account Luke had to use a redactional verse (Luke 23:39) which declares that only one of the malefactors (κακούργοι – criminals, evil-doers) actually taunted Jesus. *Gos. Pet.* refers both to the two malefactors (4:10 – δύο κακούργους) and to the repentant malefactor (4:13 – “And one of those malefactors reproached them (the Jews), saying, We for the evils that we have done have suffered thus, but this man, who hath become the Saviour of humankind, what wrong hath he done to you?”) but makes no reference to Luke’s redactional verse. Since, like *Gos. Pet.* 4:10, 13; Luke 23:32, 33, 39 identifies the malefactors with the word κακούργοι rather than ληστές, as in Mark, Crossan argues that Luke is dependent on *Gos. Pet.* The words of the unrepentant malefactor, Luke 23:35, Luke derived, according to Crossan, redactionally from Mark 15:30, 32 (= Matt 27:39-43 = Luke 23:35). In rejecting Crossan’s argument, Brown suggests that “both Luke and *Gos. Pet.* might be drawing independently on different forms of the same story, and the fact that Luke chose to combine it with Mark while *Gos. Pet.* did not tell us nothing about which form of the story is more original. In Luke the penitent wrongdoer

¹⁴³⁸ See Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 327. Brown’s reasoning here is not entirely convincing. Could it not be that while Mark and Matthew wished a connection to be seen with Ps 69: 22 (21), yet they knew that the reference was not clear cut (as *Gos. Pet.* implies) for in actual historical reality things were much more complicated – not only were two drinks offered at different times, their contents were also different. This could well be construed as an argument in favour of the priority of Mark and Matthew – being closer time-wise to the passion scene they knew what actually happened drink-wise.

¹⁴³⁹ Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 327.

rebukes his fellow wrongdoer; in *Gos. Pet.* he rebukes the Jews. A visible tendency of *Gos. Pet.* is to put all the blame on the Jews and on their leaders, so the *Gos. Pet.* form of the story might be secondary and redactional. Indeed, many scholars think that there was no pre-Lucan tradition of a penitent wrongdoer and that Luke created the story to illustrate the theme of the forgiving Jesus. If that were the case, the appearance of the story in *Gos. Pet.* would be clear proof that the apocryphon depended on Luke.”¹⁴⁴⁰

Further, according to Brown the redactional argument could even be used *against* the priority of *Gos. Pet.*. For example, *Gos. Pet.* names the Roman centurion involved in the passion as Petronius (8:31). Thus Brown asks, “if, as in Crossan’s hypothesis, the four canonical evangelists had independent access to *Gos. Pet.*, could all four have decided not to include that name?”¹⁴⁴¹

C) The Argument from Better-Flowing Narrative. To illustrate this rather subjective argument reference may be made to Matt 27:51-52 which describes a series of events absent from Mark 15:38 – “And the earth shook, and the rocks split, and the tombs were opened, and many bodies of the sleeping holy ones were raised”. According to Brown and others, these words may be thought of as “a primitive piece of popular apocalyptic that Matthew has adapted to the Marcan sequence by adding a concluding sentence: ‘And coming out of the tombs after his resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.’”¹⁴⁴² *Gos. Pet.* 6:21 also speaks of an earthquake – “And then they drew out the nails from the hands of the Lord, and laid him upon the earth, and the whole earth quaked, and great fear arose.” In Crossan’s view: “(This) ... earthquake is very well integrated into the narrative sequence of *Peter* ... (being) ... specifically the earth’s reaction to the deposition of Jesus ...”¹⁴⁴³ In contrast, according to Crossan, “In Matt 27:51 ... the earthquake is one of the presumably eschatological phenomena at the death of

¹⁴⁴⁰ Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 328.

¹⁴⁴¹ Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 328.

¹⁴⁴² Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 330.

¹⁴⁴³ Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 142.

Jesus which are recorded without apparently having any effect on anyone....”¹⁴⁴⁴ He therefore considers that the earthquake in *Peter* is more original than in Matthew, and so he concludes that *Gos. Pet.* is original to Matthew.¹⁴⁴⁵

Crossan’s conclusion leaves Brown rather non-plussed, and in the light of Matt 27:54 declares that “if anything, Matthew narrates more effect than does *Gos. Pet.*!”¹⁴⁴⁶ Brown suggests that the lateness of *Gos. Pet.* is perhaps revealed by the fact that it is “an ‘improvement’ on Matt by one who is interested precisely in a miraculous eye-catching story.”¹⁴⁴⁷ Further, according to Brown, the antiquity of Matthew’s scene (27:51ff) is indicated (i) by its poetic format, and (ii) by the fact that Matthew’s scene “is much closer than is *Gos. Pet.* to a group of eschatological Scripture passages: Joel 4:16 has the earth shake; Ezek 37:12 has the graves opened, raising from the graves, and bringing home to the land of Israel; 1 Cor 15:20 associates Christ being raised from the dead with ‘the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep’, using the same term Matthew uses to describe the *sleeping* saints. One would be very hard pressed to show that Matthew’s eschatological conception of death and resurrection is posterior to *Gos. Pet.*’s interest in the miraculous power inherent in the corpse of Jesus when placed on the earth.”¹⁴⁴⁸

Crossan considers that “the *Tomb and Guards* unit was original to *Peter*, was omitted by Mark, but was reinserted into his Markan source by Matthew.”¹⁴⁴⁹ That is to say, for Crossan Matthew’s story of the guards at the sepulchre (Matt 27:62-66) is dependent on *Gos. Pet.* 7:25-9:34. However, in the light of the fact that the early followers of Jesus were Jews who would have known Jewish customs, Brown asks: “Would they have fashioned the rather

¹⁴⁴⁴ Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 142.

¹⁴⁴⁵ Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 142. Note: If *Gos. Pet.* is understood as containing (oral?) tradition going back at least to the time when Matthew composed his Gospel, then *Gos. Pet.* 10:41 could be construed as an independent, but rather vague, witness to the events reflected in Matt 27:51b-53. This in turn could suggest that rather than a creation of Matthew, Matt 27:51b-53 is an early tradition which either he added to, or which was already part of, the passion account which he incorporated into his Gospel.

¹⁴⁴⁶ Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 331.

¹⁴⁴⁷ Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 331.

¹⁴⁴⁸ Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 331.

¹⁴⁴⁹ Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, 149.

unlikely story that Jewish elders and scribes and the crowd from Jerusalem spent the Sabbath at a sepulchre containing a corpse? Is not Matt 27:62-66 more coherent in terms of a story that might arise among Jewish believers in Jesus ...”¹⁴⁵⁰

Brown also notes that while “both works (*Gos. Pet.* and Matthew) have the theme that the interstice between the death and resurrection of Jesus involved some action on behalf of the dead (cf. *Gos. Pet.* 10:41 and Matt 27:52-53) ... (yet) ... the manner of describing it varies greatly and *Gos. Pet.* is closer to 1Pet 3:18-19.”¹⁴⁵¹

With regard to the Relationship between *Gos. Pet.* and the Canonical Gospels, R. E. Brown is of the opinion that “overall, the canonical Gospels did not depend literarily on *Gos. Pet.*.”¹⁴⁵² In order to justify this conclusion Brown argues as follows:

1) In light of the argument for the existence of a source Q (that Matthew and Luke agree closely with each other in large bodies of sayings material absent in Mark) Brown notes that “in the passion narrative where Matt, Luke, or John have material not in Mark but found in some form in *Gos. Pet.*, they do *not* agree with each other.”¹⁴⁵³ After giving a number of examples (for instance, over against Mark, *Gos. Pet.* and *Matt* agree on the washing of the hands, Pilate’s declaring himself innocent of Jesus’ blood, and the guard at the tomb - none of these incidents being in John or Luke) Brown concludes “it is most unlikely that such exclusive selectivity could have taken place if independently Matthew, Luke and John used *Gos. Pet.*. This phenomenon is far easier to explain if the *Gos. Pet.* author combined details from the canonical Gospels, ...”¹⁴⁵⁴

2) Further, as Brown notes, “although *Gos. Pet.* and the canonical Gospels share many scenes, there is remarkably little exact verbal identity in word or form.”¹⁴⁵⁵ In Brown’s

¹⁴⁵⁰ Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 331.

¹⁴⁵¹ Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 332.

¹⁴⁵² Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 333.

¹⁴⁵³ Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 333.

¹⁴⁵⁴ Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 333.

¹⁴⁵⁵ Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 333.

judgment “only a few instances are sufficiently long and close to offer significant vocabulary identity.” (cf. *Gos. Pet.* 8:30 and Matt 27:64; *Gos. Pet.* 12:53-54 and Mark 16:3-4).¹⁴⁵⁶

3) There are, according to Brown, “noticeable inconsistencies in the narrative of *Gos. Pet.*, so numerous that they are not explicable even by Crossan’s literary thesis of an earlier self-coherent passion and a later redaction under the influence of the canonical Gospels.”¹⁴⁵⁷ Even within Crossan’s posited primitive stage of *Gos. Pet.* there are inconsistencies – for example, cf. *Gos. Pet.* 7:25 and 8:28; 4:14 and 5:15.

4) There is, Brown maintains, “a massive transferal or switching of details affecting the dramatis personae when incidents in *Gos. Pet.* are compared to similar incidents in the canonical Gospels.”¹⁴⁵⁸ For instance, cf. John 20:2 and *Gos. Pet.* 12:50; John 18:23 and *Gos. Pet.* 4:13; Luke 23:6-12 and *Gos. Pet.* 2:3-4; and so on. In Brown’s opinion, “neither deliberate redaction nor fluidity of written textual transmission in the early period plausibly explains so many transferals.”¹⁴⁵⁹ As a solution to this phenomena visible in *Gos. Pet.*, Brown suggests “oral dependence of *Gos. Pet.* on some or all of the canonical Gospels.”¹⁴⁶⁰ Accordingly, he writes: “I would argue strongly that while scholars have discussed the influence of oral tradition on Gospel origins, there has been inadequate consideration of a second orality that must have dominated in the 2nd century when, because of a dearth of copies, most Christians’ knowledge of written Gospels was through hearing and an oral communication that combined and confused details.”¹⁴⁶¹

¹⁴⁵⁶ Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 333.

¹⁴⁵⁷ Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 334.

¹⁴⁵⁸ Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 334.

¹⁴⁵⁹ Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 335.

¹⁴⁶⁰ Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 335.

¹⁴⁶¹ Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 335; Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:Appendix 1: *Gos. Pet.*, 1329-1331. Note: Martha K. Stillman, “The Gospel of Peter: A Case for Oral-Only Dependency?” *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 73 (1997): 114-120, considers whether the Gospel of Peter is dependent on the canonical gospels through oral but not written transmission. Accordingly, she asks the question whether, assuming that the *Gos. Pet.* is dependent on the canonical gospels, it is possible to establish criteria and find evidence consistent with the hypothesis that transmission was “oral only.”

This theory of oral dependence, Brown suggests, explains several other aspects of *Gos. Pet.* – (a) It explains why “there is a highly developed dramatic and imaginative tone in *Gos. Pet.*, more that of vivid storytelling than of distilled kerygma.”¹⁴⁶² For example, “In *Gos. Pet.* 7:26 and 14:59 Peter and ‘the twelve disciples of the Lord’ speak in the first person, lending a tone of participant and eyewitness lacking in the Synoptic Gospels”, and so on.¹⁴⁶³

(b) In the second place, the theory of oral dependence helps to explain why “in total content and in the vividness of special material, *Gos. Pet.* is closer to Matt than to the other Gospels.”¹⁴⁶⁴ This is because, as Brown suggests, (i) “some of the material proper to Matt among the canonical Gospels seems likely to have had popular origins different from the kerygmatic preaching,”¹⁴⁶⁵ and (ii) because *Gos. Pet.* has perhaps developed and dramatized some of this Matthean material of popular origins. To illustrate, Brown notes that with regard to the story of the guards at the tomb (Matt 27:62-66; 28:2-4, 11-15), *Gos. Pet.* 8:28-11:49 is notably longer and more vivid. Rather than explaining one account as directly dependent on the other, Brown suggests that “we may be dealing with another form of the same basic story.”¹⁴⁶⁶ If, according to Brown, “sometime in the 80s/90s Matthew added to the tomb story he derived from Mark (involving the women) another tomb story about guards, a story that probably developed in popular circles, partially as a scripturally-nourished dramatization of the eschatological import of the resurrection, partly as apologetic against ‘the Jews’ (Matt 28:14), ... [then perhaps] ... *Gos. Pet.* may be presenting at a later period a more developed form of the story involving two angels that descend from heaven, Jesus preaching to the dead, and the ascent of Jesus with the angels.”¹⁴⁶⁷ In confirmation of this approach, Brown adds the following comments: “We know such elements were in circulation among the early Christians from the *Ascension of Isaiah* 3:13b-18; 1 Pet 3:19; 4:6; and the Codex Bobbiensis addition to Mark 16:3. This story of *Gos. Pet.* may have drawn not only from oral memories of Matt but also from other ongoing oral

¹⁴⁶² Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 336.

¹⁴⁶³ See Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 336.

¹⁴⁶⁴ Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 336.

¹⁴⁶⁵ Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 336.

¹⁴⁶⁶ Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 337.

¹⁴⁶⁷ See Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 337.

traditions similar to that received in Matt in an earlier stage. Throughout much of the 2nd century the combining of canonically derived tradition with non-canonical tradition is well attested (e.g. Papias, *Prot. Jas.*, Tatian). If the Gospel number had not yet been set at four, there would have been far less sensitivity to what was contained in the written Gospels as distinct from oral tradition of a similar nature.”¹⁴⁶⁸

(c) In the third place, according to Brown, “the likelihood that *Gos. Pet.* depended (mostly orally) on both canonical and ongoing non-canonical material should make us cautious about the number and extent of canonical Gospel dependency.”¹⁴⁶⁹ If, for instance, *Gos. Pet.* is depended on Luke, then did *Gos. Pet.* draw the Herod story from Luke’s passion narrative? According to Luke (3:1, 19; 9:7) Herod was a tetrarch, not primarily a king, and not involved in putting Jesus to death. Brown points out that in fact “*Gos. Pet.* is actually closer to a different tradition attested with scriptural support in Acts 4:25-27 where Herod is a king and conspires, along with the people of Israel, against Jesus.”¹⁴⁷⁰

As a result of his study Brown concludes: “despite recent claims, *Gos. Pet.* does not constitute or give the earliest Christian account or thoughts about the passion.”¹⁴⁷¹ However, he does not dismiss *Gos. Pet.* as worthless. Rather, he sees *Gos. Pet.* as “another window into popular Christianity of the 1st half of the 2nd century, where Jesus was honoured as Lord, where church life included the Lord’s Day and fasting, where there was a knowledge of canonical Gospels (esp. Matthew), even if that knowledge rested on having heard or once having read them, but where now they had been blended into a confused but vivacious story – one made all the more vivid by the inclusion of imaginative details and popular traditions.”¹⁴⁷²

5) Some of my own thoughts concerning *Gos. Pet.* and Matt 27:51b-53

¹⁴⁶⁸ Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 337.

¹⁴⁶⁹ Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 337.

¹⁴⁷⁰ Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 337.

¹⁴⁷¹ Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 339.

¹⁴⁷² Brown, “Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” 339. For further comment on Crossan’s approach see Foster, *The Gospel of Peter: Introduction, Critical Edition and Commentary*, 34. According to Foster, 37, the dominant position today held by scholars is to see *Gos. Pet.* dependent on one or more of the canonical accounts as sources, but with the possibility that the author of *Gos. Pet.* had access to non-canonical gospel material.

It can be agreed that *Gos. Pet.* is pseudepigraphical and that in all likelihood it was written, perhaps in Syria, in the first part of the 2nd century. The important question however is the nature and date of the sources underlying *Gos. Pet.*. While *Gos. Pet.* reflects much of what is found in the Passion narratives of the four canonical Gospels, yet it is difficult, almost impossible, to conclude that whoever wrote *Gos. Pet.* had access to the canonical Gospels in their present written form. Direct literary dependence of *Gos. Pet.* on the four Gospels seems highly improbable. Likewise literary dependence of the four canonical Gospels on parts of *Gos. Pet.* in written form seems also to be unlikely.

R. E. Brown's suggestion of *Gos. Pet.*'s oral dependence on some or all of the canonical Gospels¹⁴⁷³ has merit. No doubt after the writing of the four Gospels there developed "a second orality" arising from the hearing and oral communication of their written words. Also, of course, the sources of the tradition "frozen" in the canonical Gospels would not have ceased to exist but would have continued, along with the newly written Gospels, to be propagated.¹⁴⁷⁴

The big problems however are (a) how to explain the obvious similarities of *Gos. Pet.* with the canonical Gospels and yet also the distinct differences; (b) how to understand *Gos. Pet.*'s overall alien atmosphere in comparison to that of the canonical Gospels; and (c) how to account for the material peculiar to *Gos. Pet.* and not found in any canonical Gospel (e.g. that Petronius was the centurion who watched the tomb, that it was sealed with seven wax seals, and so on).¹⁴⁷⁵ It is very difficult to understand how anyone with a knowledge of the canonical Gospels (either through their written form or their oral transmission) could have created this different material.

Accordingly, I would suggest that the sources underlying *Gos. Pet.* were in the form of oral traditions reaching back at least to the 80s (the time of the writing of "Matthew") and even earlier. The whole early Christian community must have been awash with stories of Jesus'

¹⁴⁷³ Brown, "Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority," 335.

¹⁴⁷⁴ See Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 309.

¹⁴⁷⁵ For a list of such material see Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:Appendix 1: *Gos. Pet.* 1331-2.

teaching and actions.¹⁴⁷⁶ Luke (1:1-4) indicates that in his day many were attempting to make orderly accounts (that is, logical interpretations) of this fluid Jesus tradition – both oral and written. (Note: With reference to the words καθὼς παρέδοσαν ἡμῖν (Luke 1:2) R. Bauckham writes: “the reference could be to or could include written accounts by the eyewitnesses. The language of tradition, as used in the New Testament and related literature, entails neither cross-generational distance nor even orality to the exclusion of written records.”¹⁴⁷⁷ Some of these traditions were “ordered” – that is authorized by the early apostles (cf. 1Cor 11:23-26; 15:1-11). These carefully controlled and interpreted oral traditions were in solution, as it were, and when written down were “crystallized” and so became “concretized”. *Gos. Pet.*, I would suggest, contains early oral tradition on the periphery of that controlled by Apostolic authority and, consequently, with the passing of time, went, as it were, to seed. (But how then does one explain *Gos. Pet.*’s scriptural insights which reveal a depth of spiritual and theological understanding?)

All this raises the question of whether in the early Church there was an “official” version of the Jesus story (and especially of his passion and resurrection) or whether it was a case of “open slather” – whether the story of Jesus was carefully controlled or whether anyone could write a “gospel”? In his recent book¹⁴⁷⁸ Richard Bauckham maintains that the former position was the actual case – that is, that the transmission of the Jesus story was from the very beginning carefully and deliberately controlled by the Apostles and the Jerusalem Church.

If what Bauckham contends is correct, then the question arises as how to explain the actual extent of variations in the Jesus traditions as we observe them in the Gospels. Can these variations be attributed to memory lapses? Did Jesus expect his disciples to memorize his sayings? “Our extant examples of differing versions show that exact wording is much more likely to be preserved in the case of sayings of Jesus than in that of narratives about Jesus.”¹⁴⁷⁹ Hence, according to Bauckham, “a formal transmission of Jesus’ teaching by authorized

¹⁴⁷⁶ Cf. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*.

¹⁴⁷⁷ Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 37.

¹⁴⁷⁸ Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*.

¹⁴⁷⁹ Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 284.

tradents, his disciples, began already during Jesus' ministry. The same probably cannot be said, however, of the stories about Jesus' activity."¹⁴⁸⁰ Were notebooks used as aids to memory? cf. 2 Tim 4:13. It is wrong, Bauckham asserts, to assume "that before the Gospels the Jesus tradition was purely oral and made no use of writing."¹⁴⁸¹

It is also important to note, as Bauckham readily concedes that there was an interpretative part played by the Gospel writers. He writes, "the Gospel writers should be seen as sophisticated authors who ordered and shaped their traditions into narrative wholes with distinctive understandings of Jesus and Christian faith. It is unlikely that the traditions as formulated and recounted by the eyewitnesses were able to do this to more than a fairly small extent (with the exception of the eyewitness who wrote the Fourth Gospel ...). It was left to the Gospel writers to integrate their testimonies into biographies (bioi) of Jesus."¹⁴⁸² Consequently, allowance must be made for "the Gospels' faithful preservation of the eyewitnesses' testimony as they themselves recounted it and also for the creative work of the Gospel writers as true authors ..."¹⁴⁸³ Furthermore, the importance of the Old Testament Scriptures in the formation of the Jesus tradition must also be recognized. Bauckham notes, "the memories of the passion and death of Jesus must have been the most obstinately meaningless and at the same time the most unforgettable of the traditions, even in the light of the resurrection. It took scriptural interpretation, which is now woven into the passion narratives, to make these memories even tolerable, but also unexpectedly full of inexhaustible meaning."¹⁴⁸⁴

Bauckham sums up his approach to the Jesus tradition found in the Gospels with these words: "the writing of a Gospel was significantly an interpretative act in a variety of ways (the selection and arrangement of testimony in a unified narrative are themselves interpretative and were entirely unavoidable in the writing of a Gospel). But the interpretative act of writing a Gospel intended continuity with the testimony of the eyewitnesses who, of course, had already interpreted, who could not but have combined in their accounts the empirically observable with

¹⁴⁸⁰ Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 285.

¹⁴⁸¹ Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 251.

¹⁴⁸² Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 309.

¹⁴⁸³ Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 310.

¹⁴⁸⁴ Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 353.

the perceived significance of the events. They were not just reminiscing but telling stories of significance. The Jesus the Gospels portray is Jesus as these eyewitnesses portrayed him, the Jesus of testimony.”¹⁴⁸⁵ And since “testimony is irreducible; we cannot, at least in some of its most distinctive and valuable claims, go behind it and make our own autonomous verification of them; we cannot establish the truth of testimony for ourselves as though we stood where the witnesses uniquely stood. Eyewitness testimony offers us insider knowledge from involved participants. It also offers us engaged interpretation for in testimony fact and meaning coinhere, and witnesses who give testimony do so with the conviction of significance that requires to be told. Witnesses of truly significant events speak out of their own on going attempts to understand.”¹⁴⁸⁶ In other words, what we have in the Gospels purports to be the testimony of authoritative eyewitnesses of Jesus – that is, their “biased” interpretation of his significance. If the original Jesus, the “Jesus of history” was different from this “Jesus of testimony”, then knowledge of that original Jesus is lost – at least, it cannot now be discovered from the present New Testament Scriptures.

On the assumption that *Gos. Pet.* represents, or rather reflects oral tradition that reaches back at least to the 80’s, and perhaps even earlier, which unfortunately, with the passing time, went wild, grew rank and was not pruned (that is, its transmission was not controlled by authentic eyewitnesses as was the tradition contained in the canonical Gospels as argued by Bauckham), I suggest the following connections between *Gos. Pet.* and Matt 27:51b-53:

First, *Gos. Pet.* agrees with Matthew that earthquake activity was associated with Jesus’ passion. While Matthew says that there two earthquakes – one at the moment of Jesus’ death (Matt 27:51b), and the second when Jesus’ empty tomb was revealed to the womenfolk (Matt 28:2) – *Gos. Pet.* speaks of only one, which occurred, not at the moment of Jesus’ death, but when, after the nails had been drawn out of Jesus’ hands, his corpse was laid upon the earth (*Gos. Pet.* v. 21). *Gos. Pet.*’s account is so different from that of Matthew’s (27:51b) that it is very difficult to assume that he was following the written Matthew, or even an oral account

¹⁴⁸⁵ Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 472.

¹⁴⁸⁶ Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 505.

based on Matthew. Thus *Gos. Pet.* v. 21 implies that the writer of *Gos. Pet.* was in touch with another parallel tradition which also spoke of earthquake activity.

In the second place, *Gos. Pet.* supports what Matt 27:51bff asserts – namely, that at the death of Jesus there were a *number* of extraordinary events in the physical realm (contrast Mark 15:39). *Gos. Pet.* v. 28 reads “when they heard that all the people murmured and beat their breasts, saying, If by his death these most mighty signs have come to pass, see how just he is.” Just what “these most mighty signs” were *Gos. Pet.* does not say (they probably included the uncanny darkness as many people were aware of them). Since this tradition about a number of extraordinary events associated with the death of Jesus is also reflected in Luke 23:47-48, it must go back earlier than our written Gospels. This could support my contention that Matt 27:51b-53 was not created by Matthew and added to Mark’s passion narrative. Thus, either (i) Matt 27:51b-53 was a piece of independent oral (or written?) tradition which Matthew incorporated into his passion narrative (most unlikely as Matt 27:51b-53 is quite meaningless unless seen in the context of Jesus’ death (cf. the proverbial chook without a head,) or (ii) it was from the beginning an integral part of a passion narrative, which went back to the first Apostles, and which Matthew incorporated into his wider Gospel. (Does the poetic / rhythmic nature of Matt 27:51b-53 point to its antiquity and to its transmission as oral tradition?)

Some further thoughts about *Gos. Pet.*:

- (a) The writer appears to have a general, if rather confused, knowledge from early oral tradition of the events of the Passion and Resurrection.
- (b) Did he have a series of OT proof texts (“Testimonies”) and did he “create” stories, or incorporate already “created” stories, into his “gospel” to show the fulfilment of these OT texts – e.g. v. 7 “Judge righteously, O King of Israel.” (The writers of the four canonical Gospels have been accused of doing this – but they were more restrained, knowing that in actual historical reality some of the events of Jesus’ passion did not coincide perfectly with the OT texts).

(c) Does the writer of *Gos. Pet.* put too much stress on trying to prove Jesus' resurrection? Maurer's comment about *Gos. Pet.*'s apologetic aim is worth recalling. According to Maurer, *Gos. Pet.*'s apologetic aim, "despite the minutely recorded details, is simply not attained ... Rather the passion and resurrection of Jesus, yea He himself, are loosened out of the soil of real history and transferred to the realm of legend and myth..."¹⁴⁸⁷ In contrast, the four canonical Gospels (especially the Synoptics) concentrate on the passion of Jesus and do not really try to prove Jesus' resurrection. Rather they assume that their readers already believe that Jesus has risen. The question of why in the canonical Gospels the passion accounts are so detailed and exact while their resurrection accounts are rather patchy, should perhaps be considered from this angle. In other words, the Gospel writers are stressing above all the significance of Jesus and his death. The Gospel writers, in a very real sense, just had to do this. For, in the light of Scripture (Deut 21:23) Jesus having been crucified, having been "hung on a tree" was clearly accursed of God. The first Christians cut this "Gordian Knot" by agreeing that Jesus had indeed been "accursed of God", but, in the same breath, they declared that as the Son of God he had become a curse for the sake of others, for the salvation of humanity. (cf. Gal 3:13-14). Thus, has *Gos. Pet.* lost sight of what the canonical Gospels are declaring – namely, that when Jesus, the Son of God, died an atonement for humanity's sin had been accomplished? (With regard to *Gos. Pet.*, Maurer notes that "those traits are lacking through which the death of Jesus is shown to be an expiatory passion for the world ..." ¹⁴⁸⁸) Since, according to Scripture, human sin is the root cause of death (Genesis 3:1-23), then if sin has been atoned for, death must have been abolished (at least potentially) and resurrection must be a fact, not just for Jesus, but for all joined to him. (This, to my mind, is what Matthew is saying in 27:51b-53 – that with the death of Jesus, the Son of God, atonement for humanity has been accomplished, and so there is resurrection. The risen holy ones are, as it were, the firstfruits of that resurrection.) Hence the canonical Gospel writers concentrate on the passion of Jesus (cf. the Lord's Supper where Jesus asked his disciples to remember him and his death – 1 Cor 11:23-26.)

¹⁴⁸⁷ Maurer, "The Gospel of Peter," 181.

¹⁴⁸⁸ Maurer, "The Gospel of Peter," 182.

6. B. A. Johnson's Thesis and its Suggestions about the Gospel of Peter

In an unpublished thesis, "Empty Tomb Tradition in the Gospel of Peter,"¹⁴⁸⁹ B. A. Johnson examines whether the *Gospel of Peter* (*Gos. Pet.*) is dependent on the four canonical Gospels, and investigates what light *Gos. Pet.* throws on the development of the empty Tomb tradition in the early Church. In his thesis Johnson also makes suggestions about the original position of Matt 27:51b-53.

Johnson suggests that in the early Church there were *two* empty tomb stories – (a) the story of the women at the tomb, and (b) the story of the guard at the tomb. He examines critically the suggestion that the story of the women at the tomb in *Gos. Pet.* 50-57 is based on Mark and whether the story of the guard at the tomb in *Gos. Pet.* 28-49 arises from Matthew.

6.1 The Story of the Women at the Tomb

Mark 16:1-8 is assumed, by Johnson, to be the earliest surviving *written* version of the story of the women at the empty tomb (John 20:1, 11-15 may be an independent rendering of the story suggesting that John and Mark could reflect a common tradition). The purpose of Mark 16:1-8 is (a) to prove the reality of Jesus' resurrection, and (b) to provide a platform for the announcement of the anticipated reunion of Jesus and the disciples in Galilee. (cf. Mark 14:28; 16:7).

With regard to the question as to whether there is a literary relationship between Mark 16:1-8 and *Gos. Pet.* 50-57 the following points should be noted: Both accounts have common features, describing (i) the women coming to the tomb, (ii) their discovery of the empty tomb, (iii) the presence of the *angelus interpretis*, and (iv) the reaction of the women. However, on the other hand, *Gos. Pet.* 50-57 lacks two things found in Mark 16:1-8. First, *Gos. Pet.* 50-57 lacks the words 'οὐδενι οὐδεν εἶπεν' (cf. *Gos. Pet.* 57 and Mark 16:8). (Note: Matthew and Luke also omit these words because in their account the women *do* say something. Also, since Mark

¹⁴⁸⁹ Johnson, "Empty Tomb Tradition in the Gospel of Peter".

16:8 can be understood to mean that the women disobeyed the angel's command, these Markan words, according to some,¹⁴⁹⁰ serve an apologetic purpose – that is, they explain why the story of the empty tomb remained unknown for so long in the early Church). Secondly, *Gos. Pet.* 50-57 does not have the angelic command (there is no correlate to Mark 16:7) and so in *Gos. Pet.* the women do not report to the disciples. Yet *Gos. Pet.* 60 reveals that the writer of *Gos. Pet.* knew that the disciples did eventually go to Galilee, so there was no need for him to delete Mark 16:7. Accordingly, to account for this and for the lack of the phrase, οὐδενί κτλ, Johnson suggests that *Gos. Pet.* used a pre-Markan version of the story of the women at the tomb.

Confirmation of this may be found in the history of the development of the women at the tomb story.¹⁴⁹¹ Matt 28:1-10; Luke 24:1-11; 24:21b-24; John 20:1-18; and the *Epistle to the Apostles* (*Ep. Apos.*) 9-10 are all versions of the women at the tomb story. Whether they are dependent upon Mark or not, all these versions reflect the above-mentioned form of the women at the tomb story (see points (i), (ii), (iii) and (iv) above). Further, in the canonical Gospels both apologetic and novelistic developments may be detected in the story of the women at the tomb. It is argued, for example, that with the passing of time attempts were made, for apologetic purposes, to connect the disciples with the story of the women at the tomb. Thus, while Mark 16:7 may connect the story of the women at the tomb to the future experience of the disciples, yet Mark 16:8 is quite negative (the women say nothing to anyone). Matt 28:16-20, however, is much more positive. The disciples actually see the risen Lord. Luke 24:9, 24 stress that the fact of the empty tomb was not just depended on the witness of the womenfolk, but was also attested by the disciples. (cf. *Ep. Apos.* 10). In John 20:2-10 the witness of the disciples is given priority. They not only enter, but also make a detailed inspection of, the tomb. According to Johnson, “It is clear that the tendency is to give the disciples a greater and greater role in the story, even though an analysis of the constants of the story demonstrates that they originally played no

¹⁴⁹⁰ See Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 285.

¹⁴⁹¹ See Johnson, “Empty Tomb Tradition in the Gospel of Peter”, 18-22.

part.”¹⁴⁹² It is important to note that in *Gos. Pet.*’s account of the women at the tomb there is no reference to the presence of the disciples.

Furthermore, it is argued that with the passing of time, for apologetic purposes (that is, to make explicit the meaning of the empty tomb), an appearance of the risen Lord was added to the story of the women at the tomb. Thus, while Mark (and Luke) has no such appearance, Matt 28:9 does. In John 20:11-18 the function of the *angelus interpres* is undermined (cf. *Ep. Apos.* 10 where the *angelus interpres* is totally removed. The Lord appears. Compare also the longer ending of Mark (16:9-20)). In John 20:11-18 there is a later appearance of the risen Lord, not to the womenfolk, but to an individual, Mary Magdalene. Once again it is to be noted that in *Gos. Pet.* 50-57, the story of the women at the tomb, there is no evidence of an appearance of the risen Jesus.

Also, in the canonical Gospels and other versions of the story of the women at the tomb there can be detected “novelistic” developments – that is, evidence that the various traditions of the story were still alive and developing in the environment, the matrix, from which *Gos. Pet.* emerged. While all versions of the story mention more than one woman¹⁴⁹³ yet with regard to the women’s names the tradition is irregular (Mary Magdalene is common to all, including *Gos. Pet.*). Were various names assigned to the womenfolk as the tradition developed? With regard to the number of angels who appeared to the womenfolk there is variation. Mark and Matthew mention one (as does *Gos. Pet.* 55); Luke 24:4 has two, while Luke 24:23 suggests many (“a vision of angels”).

There is some evidence that in *Gos. Pet.* some things are stressed, e.g. (a) the spices. These are not mentioned in John (cf. 19:40) and Matt (cf. 26:12) but are in Mark 16:1; Luke 23:56; 24:1 and *Ep. Apos.* 9. *Gos. Pet.* 53 and 54 indicate that the womenfolk took something (presumably spices, etc.) with them when they went to the tomb; (b) the grief of the women. *Gos. Pet.* 52, 54b give prominence to the women’s desire to mourn for the crucified Jesus (cf.

¹⁴⁹² Johnson, “Empty Tomb Tradition in the Gospel of Peter”, 21.

¹⁴⁹³ While John concentrates on Mary and Jesus, John 20:2 – οἰδαμεν – suggests a number of womenfolk.

John 20:11; 20:13, 15; *Ep. Apos.* 9, 10). Matt, Mark and Luke make no reference to any mourning; (c) The women's fear of the Jews – this is stressed in *Gos. Pet.* 50, 52, 54.

In the light of these differences between the tradition of the women at the tomb as found in the canonical Gospels and that found in *Gos. Pet.*, Johnson concludes that for the author of *Gos. Pet.* there was available a pre-Markan account of the women at the Tomb.

6.2 The Guard at the Tomb Story in Matthew

The special material found in Matthew, Matt 27:62-66; 28:2-4; 28:11-15 (none of which is found in Mark) creates problems. Bultmann¹⁴⁹⁴ regards 27:62-66 and 28:11-15 as apologetic legend. Matt 28:2-4 he regards as an elaboration of Mark's empty tomb story. In Johnson's opinion however Matt 27:62-66 (placement of the guard), 28:2-4 (experience of the guard) and 28:11-15 (guard's report) are all related to one another. Arguments for this position: (1) Logically speaking, should not the legend of the guards at the tomb also contain an account of their experience of what happened at the tomb? (2) Common to all three sections is the guard and each section needs the other two. (3) If Matthew is following Mark then Matt 28:2-4, a foreign body, as it were, creates problems and tensions. Consider the following points: (A) There is no (expected) description of Jesus' resurrection. When the tomb is opened, Jesus is already gone. In Johnson's opinion Matt 27:51b-53 suggests that it was necessary for the tombs to be opened before the saints could come out.¹⁴⁹⁵ (B) In Matt 28:3 the angel plays a larger role than in Mark, acting both as the tomb opener as well as the event's interpreter. (C) According to Matt 28:11 the guard reported "all the things that happened." But according to Matt 28:4 they had become "as dead" (an expression suggesting an epiphany – cf. Rev 1:17; Mark 9:26). Thus, did they see the angel rolling the stone away? Did they hear what the angel said?¹⁴⁹⁶

Accordingly, Johnson asks: Is $\omega\varsigma\ \nu\epsilon\kappa\rho\iota$ a literary device to remove the guard to make way for

¹⁴⁹⁴ Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 287-8.

¹⁴⁹⁵ Cf. (O. Weinreich) "(w)ho rightly says that in the story of the empty tomb it is not the 'how' but the 'fact' of the Resurrection that is decisive." (from Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 290 fn 3).

¹⁴⁹⁶ That this passage created problems in the early church is evidenced, Johnson suggests, by its treatment in the *Gospel of Nicodemus* (the *Acts of Pilate*), chapter 10.

the women, or is it the remnant of an epiphany story about the guard? Thus, Johnson reasons, that A, B, and C suggest that Matt 28:2-4 was once independent tradition and that in adding it to Mark, Matthew distorted Mark's account.

Johnson notes¹⁴⁹⁷ that outside of Matthew the story of the guard at the tomb survives in both the *Ascension of Isaiah* (*Ascen. Isa.*) 3:14b-17¹⁴⁹⁸ and in the *Gospel of Peter* (*Gos. Pet.*). *Ascen. Isa.* has three points of specific contact with material in Matthew and which have no contact with Markan parallels – (a) the use of the word ἡ τήρησις for the guard (Matt 28:4; *Ascen. Isa.* 3:14); (b) the angel opening the tomb (Matt 28:2; *Ascen. Isa.* 3:16); and (c) a commissioning scene, commanding the disciples to teach all nations (Matt 28:19; *Ascen. Isa.* 3:16).

Johnson further notes that *Gos. Pet.* (a) does not use the word τηρεῖν (or some variant of it) to describe the guard; (b) that in *Gos. Pet.* 37 the stone rolls away by itself; (c) that *Gos. Pet.* 60 breaks off before describing a scene which may have included a commissioning. Like Matthew, *Gos. Pet.* has the request for the guard and the guard's report, but unlike Matthew *Gos. Pet.* 39 speaks of the removal of Jesus from the tomb, as does *Ascen. Isa.* 3:15-17a likewise. Matthew is silent on this issue.

While Matthew, *Gos. Pet.* and *Ascen. Isa.* have in common the presence of the guard, the appearance of the divine figure(s) and the opening of the tomb, yet *Ascen. Isa.* is distinct from Matthew and *Gos. Pet.* in that its empty tomb story is related to the story of the guard at the tomb. Elements which Matthew took from Mark 16:1-8 (that is, Mark's story of the discovery of the empty tomb by the women) are absent in *Ascen. Isa.*. Hence it is unlikely that *Ascen. Isa.* was dependent upon Matthew. In fact, it is difficult to explain either *Ascen. Isa.* or *Gos. Pet.* as outgrowths of Matthew.

¹⁴⁹⁷ Johnson, "Empty Tomb Tradition in the Gospel of Peter", 52-3.

¹⁴⁹⁸ See Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:143- 54.

For Johnson¹⁴⁹⁹ the guard story, originally a resurrection authentication story, becomes in Matthew an apologetic argument against a body stealing charge. Matthew has accomplished this by modifying the guard story and subordinating it, rather disjointedly, to Mark's account of the women's discovery of the empty tomb.

6.2.1 Comparison of Matthew's and Gos. Pet.'s guard at tomb story (has *Gos. Pet.* preserved, or altered, a more original form of the guard story? Has *Gos. Pet.* been influenced by Matthew?)

Introduction: Jewish leaders request guard from Pilate.

- (a) Matt 27:62 – chief priests and *Pharisees*; *Gos. Pet.* 28 – scribes, *Pharisees* and elders. The Pharisees are not mentioned in the passion narrative of Mark and Luke. Their mention in Matthew (and John 18:3) may indicate lateness reflecting the controversy which developed between Pharisees and Christians after the destruction of Jerusalem.
- (b) Matt 27:66; *Gos. Pet.* 31b-33 – the tomb was sealed by both Jewish leaders and the guard.
- (c) In addition *Gos. Pet.* mentions the great size of the stone, that there were seven seals, that a tent was erected, and (*Gos. Pet.* 34) that many witnessed the sealing of the tomb.

Description of the Event of Jesus' resurrection

Johnson suggests that in Matt 28:1-4, Matthew has combined material from the guard at the tomb story with Mark 16:1-5. Compare, for example, the following Markan features in Matt 28:1-4: (1) Matt 28:1b and Mark 16:1-3 – the women arrive at the tomb. (In Matthew after their arrival the women “disappear” until Matt 28:5); (2) Matt 28:2 - one angel; Mark 16:5 – one young man. (Note: *Gos. Pet.* 36 and *Ascen. Isa.* 3:16 speak of at least two angels). (3) Matt 28:2 – angel sits (outside) on stone; Mark 16:5 – the young man sits at right side (inside); (4) Matt 28:3b – white light; Mark 16:5 – white robe. None of these Markan features are found in *Gos. Pet.*'s guard at the tomb story and if removed would, according to Johnson, give: “Late on the

¹⁴⁹⁹ Johnson, “Empty Tomb Tradition in the Gospel of Peter”, 57-72.

Sabbath, when the first day of the week was approaching, behold, there was a great earthquake. For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and when he had come, he rolled away the stone. His visage was as lightning, and from the fear of him the keepers were shaken and became as dead men.”¹⁵⁰⁰

Johnson further points out that while Matt 28:1 (ὁψὲ δὲ σαββάτων, τῇ ἐπιφωσκούσῃ εἰς μίαν σαββάτων) has been assumed to mean what Mark 16:2 says – namely, “at or about sunrise on Sunday morning”, it really refers to sunset on Saturday evening (when the Sabbath was over) – that is, to the time when the women bought their spices. Accordingly, Johnson asks: Did Matthew believe the angel appeared to the women on Saturday evening? Or, was Matthew going to mention that the women bought spices on Saturday evening, but then omitted this to mention another story about nocturnal events (cf. *Gos. Pet.* 35) taking place at night? (In other words, is there a “fracture” here?).

Thus, according to Johnson, (a) in Matt 28:2-4 Matthew’s Markan material and his special guard at the tomb material may be distinguished; (b) *Gos. Pet.*’s guard at the tomb story has none of the material shared by Matthew and Mark; and (c) in 28:1 Matthew introduces a story which takes place at night. In the light of these three points a comparison of Matt 28:2-4 and *Gos. Pet.* 28-49 shows that both passages refer to (i) darkness (Matt 28:1; *Gos. Pet.* 35); (ii) a cosmic sign (Matt 28:2 – earthquake, shaking; *Gos. Pet.* – a great voice: thunder? – cf. Rev 8:5; 11:19); (iii) descent of divine being(s): Matt 28:2 – an angel; *Gos. Pet.* 36 – two men; (iv) light – Matt 28:3, “like lightning”; *Gos. Pet.* 36 – great light; (v) the tomb being opened: Matt 28:2 – by the angel; *Gos. Pet.* 37 – by itself (cf. Acts 12:10).

In Johnson’s opinion (i - v) clearly refer to a night time epiphany (cf. Mark 9:2-3 //s) of the eschatological, end time type (cf. 2 Thess. 2:7). However, Johnson notes, that at Matt 28:4 there is a sharp divergence from *Gos. Pet.* 38. In *Gos. Pet.* 38 everyone is awakened to see the

¹⁵⁰⁰ Johnson, “Empty Tomb Tradition in the Gospel of Peter”, 76.

epiphanic events which are happening (*Gos. Pet.* 39-42). (Note: that the contents of *Gos. Pet.* 39-42 – Jesus in company of angels, his preaching to the sleeping ones, the cross moving and speaking, the great size of those coming out of the tomb – clearly suggests that this purports to be a description of an eschatological epiphany.) However, in Matt 28:4 the guards, who have become as dead men, are not awakened. This is because, as Johnson suggests, at this point Matthew begins to follow Mark again.

Thus, according to Johnson, both Matt 28:1-3 and *Gos. Pet.* 35-37 speak about an epiphany at the tomb. However, while *Gos. Pet.* 39-42 completes the description of the epiphany Matthew at 28:4 returns to Mark's account of the women at the tomb. Hence, while the epiphanic features in Matthew – darkness, earthquake, light, descent of angel(s) – all give promise of a resurrection account, yet in Matthew this account is subordinated to the women at the tomb story.¹⁵⁰¹ The question arises as to why Matthew has done this? One suggestion, which is inimical to Johnson's whole approach is that in Matt 28:2-4 Matthew is stressing that Jesus' resurrection had *already* occurred before the tomb was opened.

The Witness of the Guards

According to Matt 28:11 *some* of the guards reported to the chief priests what had happened at the tomb. Since these guards sensed no fear nor made any confession of Jesus as the Son of God Johnson suggests that Matt 28:11 cannot be construed as an expected response to an epiphany. On the other hand, the report of the guards as depicted by *Gos. Pet.* may be understood as such. According to *Gos. Pet.* 45 the guards are in deep agony and confess to Pilate Jesus' divine Sonship – these reactions being the expected response to an epiphany – that is, to the event of Jesus' resurrection. Thus, the report in Matt 28:11 is not a response to the resurrection (as in *Gos. Pet.*) but an informing of the Jewish leaders of what had happened at Jesus' tomb.¹⁵⁰²

¹⁵⁰¹ May Matt 28:5-8; 9-10 be construed as a description of the epiphanic event?

¹⁵⁰² It is important to note that the presence of the women at the tomb, as mentioned by Matthew, explains the difference between Matthew's account and that of *Gos. Pet.*'s. In *Gos. Pet.* Pilate orders the soldiers to say nothing about the events and the empty tomb. However, the witness of the womenfolk about the empty tomb could not be silenced even by an order from Pilate. Accordingly, as Matthew reports, the

Johnson further notes that in Matt 27:54 the reaction of the centurion and his soldiers at the moment of Jesus' death may be described as an epiphanic response. Johnson, accordingly, compares Matt 27:54 and Mark 15:39 and notes the following points: (a) in Mark the centurion is alone. In Matthew the centurion is with soldiers – οἱ τηροῦντες – which is the same term used in Matt 28:4 to describe the guards at the tomb; (b) in Mark Jesus' death evokes the centurion's confession. In Matthew the confession is prompted by the earthquake and the things that happened, τὰ γινόμενα. Matt 28:2 speaks of an earthquake and Matt 28:11 says that the guards reported all that happened (ἅπαντα τὰ γινόμενα); (c) In Mark the centurion is rather "matter of fact", while in Matthew the centurion and soldiers fear exceedingly. Thus, according to Johnson, the above three points link Matt 27:54 to the witness setting of the story of the guard at the tomb. Matt 27:54 also reflects *Gos. Pet.* 45 (the guards report of the epiphany).

In the light of all this, Johnson feels that the original situation of Matt 27:51b-53 was after Jesus' resurrection. The words μετὰ τῆν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ ("after his rising"), Johnson suggests, were added by Matthew to indicate their original position. Further, since the *Gos. Pet.* version of the story of the guard at the tomb reports a preaching to those that sleep (*Gos. Pet.* 41), Johnson suggests, that Matt 27:51b-53 may have been "carried" as part of the story of the guard at the tomb tradition, the *Gos. Pet.* version of which reports a preaching to those that sleep (*Gos. Pet.* 41). Thus, Johnson contends, "It (Matt 27:51b-53) functioned originally, as the centurio-witness presently does in *Gos. Pet.*, as a response to the events connected with Jesus' resurrection."¹⁵⁰³

To the question as to why Matthew changed the position of Matt 27:51b-53 Johnston answers as follows: First, he follows Mark 15:39 which has the centurio-witness story in connection with Jesus' death. (Note that Matthew also shifts to this position - the death of Jesus – the tradition of the resurrection of the holy ones (cf. *Gos. Pet.* 41 which associates the rising of the saints with Jesus' resurrection)). In the second place, Matthew subordinates his own

Jewish leaders could not keep secret the fact of the tomb being empty – they could only bribe the soldiers to spread the rumour that the tomb was empty because Jesus' disciples had stolen his body.

¹⁵⁰³ Johnson, "Empty Tomb Tradition in the Gospel of Peter", 91.

guard at the tomb story to Mark's women at the tomb story. Thus, according to Johnston, there were two primitive centurio-witness stories: (a) Mark 15:39 and (b) that which survives (i) in place and content in the *Gos. Pet.* (here the climax of the guard at the tomb story is that (neutral) witnesses have been convinced of the divine character of Jesus by witnessing his resurrection), and (ii) in content but not in place in Matthew.

Johnson's conclusion:

- (1) While *Gos. Pet.*'s story of women at the tomb is closely related to that of Mark, yet differences suggest that the source of *Gos. Pet.*'s story of the women at the tomb was pre-Markan.
- (2) *Gos. Pet.*'s story of the guard at the tomb suggests that another empty tomb story, an epiphany, survives partially in Matthew. Nevertheless, *Gos. Pet.* is not in this respect dependent on Matthew's story of the guard at the tomb. Thus, *Gos. Pet.* is primitive.

In his recent commentary on the *Gospel of Peter*¹⁵⁰⁴ Paul Foster gives this criticism of

B. A. Johnson's thesis:

Its central thesis is that the "women at the tomb" narrative is based upon a version of that story prior to its incorporation into Mark and that the "guard at the tomb" story also "existed prior to Matt and that it was actually an epiphany story which described the resurrection." (Johnson, 8). In relation to the "women at the tomb" account, Johnson contends that the *Gospel of Peter* does not show a knowledge of the developed form of the tradition with the twin apologetic concerns of the additional reference to the disciples (Mark 16:7) and the report of an appearance of the risen Lord. It is in relation to this last point that Johnson's thesis is weakest, for there is no appearance of the risen Lord in the final chapter of Mark unless one notes that "[t]he longer ending of Mark (16:9) does provide an appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene on the morning of the resurrection." (Johnson, 22, n 15). Johnson also draws attention to the fact that the *Gospel of Peter* in its version of the story of the women at the tomb contains many novelistic details. Taking these observations together, he concludes that this tradition was still "alive and developing" and that the *Gospel of Peter* develops "a form of the story that is older than any of the accounts in the canonical gospels." (Johnson, 36). In reality, this conclusion is based solely on the lack of any parallel in the *Gospel of Peter* to the reference to the disciples in Mark 16:7. Johnson should, however, be acknowledged as generating much of the ensuing interested (sic) in the proposal that a unified pre-existing guard at the tomb story might account for the form of the story (again with novelistic expansions) contained in the *Gospel of Peter*.

¹⁵⁰⁴ Foster, *The Gospel of Peter: Introduction, Critical Edition and Commentary*, 32.

A Translation of the *Gospel of Peter*

(By J. Armitage Robinson, in Menzies, ed., *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, 11-31).

1. But of the Jews none washed his hands, neither Herod nor any one of his judges. 2 And when they had refused to wash them, Pilate rose up. And then Herod the king commandeth that the Lord be taken, saying to them, What things soever I commanded you to do unto him, do.

3. And there was come there Joseph the friend of Pilate and of the Lord; and, knowing that they were about to crucify him, he came to Pilate and asked the body of the Lord for burial. 4. And Pilate sent to Herod and asked his body. 5. And Herod said, Brother Pilate, even if no one had asked for him, we purposed to bury him, especially as the sabbath draweth on: for it is written in the law, that the sun set not upon one that hath been put to death. And he delivered him to the people on the day before the unleavened bread, their feast.

6. And they took the Lord and pushed him as they ran, and said, Let us drag away the Son of God, having obtained power over him.

7. And they clothed him with purple, and set him on the seat of Judgment, saying, Judge righteously, O King of Israel. 8. And one of them brought a crown of thorns and put it on the head of the Lord. 9. And others stood and spat in his eyes, and others smote his cheeks: others pricked him with a reed; and some scourged him, saying, With this honour let us honour the Son of God.

10. And they brought two malefactors, and they crucified the Lord between them. But he held his peace, as though having no pain.

11. And when they had raised the cross, they wrote upon it, This is the King of Israel. 12. And having set his garments before him, they parted them among them, and cast lots for them. 13. And one of those malefactors reproached them, saying, We for the evils that we have done have suffered thus, but this man, who hath become the Saviour of men, what wrong hath he done to you?

14. And they, being angered at him, commanded that his legs should not be broken, that he might die in torment. 15. And it was noon, and darkness came over all Judaea: and they were troubled and distressed, lest the sun had set, whilst he was yet alive: [for] it is written for them, that the sun set not on him that hath been put to death.

16. And one of them said, Give him to drink gall with vinegar. And they mixed and gave him to drink, 17. And fulfilled all things, and accomplished their sins against their own head.

18. And many went about with lamps, supposing that it was night, and fell down. 19. And the Lord cried out, saying, My power, my power, thou hast forsaken me.

And when he had said it he was taken up.

20. And in that hour the vail of the temple of Jerusalem was rent in twain.

21. And then they drew out the nails from the hands of the Lord, and laid him upon the earth, and the whole earth quaked, and great fear arose. 22. Then the sun shone, and it was found the ninth hour: 23. And the Jews rejoiced, and gave his body to Joseph that he might bury it, since he had seen what good things he had done. 24. And he took the Lord, and washed him, and wrapped him in a linen cloth, and brought him into his own tomb, which was called the Garden of Joseph.

25. Then the Jews and the elders and the priests, perceiving what evil they had done to themselves, began to lament and to say, Woe for our sins: the judgment hath drawn nigh, and the end of Jerusalem.

26. And I with my companions was grieved; and being wounded in mind we hid ourselves: for we were being sought for by them as malefactors, and as wishing to set fire to the temple. 27. And upon all these things we fasted and sat mourning and weeping night and day until the sabbath.

28. But the scribes and Pharisees and elders being gathered together one with another, when they heard that all the people murmured and beat their breasts, saying, If by his death these most mighty signs have come to pass, see how just he is – 29. the elders were afraid and came to Pilate, beseeching him and saying, 30, Give us soldiers, that we may guard his speculchre for three days, lest his disciples come and steal him away, and the people suppose that he is risen from the dead and do us evil. 31. And Pilate gave them Petronius the centurion with soldiers to guard the tomb. And with them came the elders and scribes to the speculchre, 32. And having rolled a great stone together with the centurion and the soldiers, they all together who were there set it at the door of the speculchre; 33. And they affixed seven seals, and they pitched a tent there and guarded it.

34. And early in the morning as the sabbath was drawing on, there came a multitude from Jerusalem and the region round about, that they might see the speculchre that was sealed.

35. And in the night in which the Lord's day was drawing on, as the soldiers kept guard two by two in a watch, there was a great voice in the heaven; 36. And they saw the heavens opened, and two men descend from thence with great light and approach the tomb. 37. And that stone which was put at the door rolled of itself and made way in part; and the tomb was opened, and both the young men entered in.

38. When therefore those soldiers saw it, they awakened the centurion and the elders, - for they too were hard by keeping guard; 39. and, as they declared what things they had seen, again they see three men coming forth from the tomb, and two of them supporting one, and a cross following them. 40. And of the two the head reached unto the heaven, but the head of him that was led by them overpassed the heavens. 41. And they heard a voice from the heavens, saying, Hast thou preached to them that sleep? 42. And a response was heard from the cross, Yea.

43. They therefore considered one with another whether to go away and shew these things to Pilate. 44. And while they yet thought thereon, the heavens again are seen to open, and a certain man to descend and enter into the sepulchre. 45. When the centurion and they that were with him saw these things, they hastened in the night to Pilate, leaving the tomb which they were watching, and declared all things which they had seen, being greatly distressed and saying, Truly he was the Son of God. 46. Pilate answered and said, I am pure from the blood of the Son of God: but ye determined this.

47. Then they all drew near and besought him and entreated him to command the centurion and the soldiers to say nothing of the things which they had seen: 48. For it is better, say they, for us to incur the greatest sin before God, and not to fall into the hands of the people of the Jews and to be stoned. 49. Pilate therefore commanded the centurion and the soldiers to say nothing.

50. And at dawn upon the Lord' day, Mary Magdalen, a disciple of the Lord, fearing because of the Jews, since they were burning with wrath, had not done at the Lord's sepulchre the things which the women are wont to do for those that die and for those that are beloved by them – 51. She took her friends with her and came to the speculchre where he was laid.

52. And they feared lest the Jews should see them, and they said, Although on the day on which he was crucified we could not weep and lament, yet now let us do these things at his sepulchre.

53. But who shall roll away for us the stone that was laid at the door of the sepulchre, that we may enter in and sit by him and do the things that are due? 54. For the stone was great, and we fear lest some one see us. And if we cannot, yet if we but set at the door the things which we bring for a memorial of him, we will weep and lament, until we come unto our home.

55. And they went away and found the tomb opened, and coming near they looked in there; and they see there a certain young man sitting in the midst of the tomb, beautiful and clothed in a robe exceeding bright; who said to them, 56. Wherefore are ye come? Whom seek ye? Him that was crucified? He is risen and gone. But if ye believe not, look in and see the place where he lay, that he is not [here]; for he is risen and gone away thither, whence he was sent. 57. Then the women feared and fled.

58. Now it was the last day of the unleavened bread, and many were going forth, returning to their homes, as the feast was ended. 59. But we, the twelve disciples of the Lord, mourned and were grieved: and each one, being grieved for that which was come to pass, departed to his home. 60. But I, Simon Peter and Andrew my brother, took our nets and went to the sea; and there was with us Levi the son of Alphaeus, whom the Lord ...

APPENDIX B **27:51b-53**

The Eschatological Language of Matthew

Throughout the thesis it will be argued that the language of Matt 27:51b-53 is eschatological – that is, that it relates events associated with the End Time. Since this is both a complicated, and controversial, subject some elaboration of it, and its consequences, will be briefly outlined in this Appendix.

First, it is to be noted that the immediate context of Matt 27:51b-53¹⁵⁰⁵ is Jesus' last words, his final shout from the cross (Matt 27:50). There is however much debate about the significance of Jesus' φωνὴ μεγάλη. In addition to using it in Matt 27:46 & 50, Matthew uses the word φωνή in 3:3 (the prophetic voice of John the Baptist. Cf. Isa 40:3) and in 3:17 (God's voice. Cf. 17:5).¹⁵⁰⁶ In the LXX φωνή often renders קָרַע- the usual term in the OT for "a cry for help."¹⁵⁰⁷ The fact that in Matt 27:50 Matthew adds πάλιν could mean that the reader is to refer back to v. 46 and is to remember Psalm 22:1 with its cry for help. Thus, according to U. Luz, "Matthew has understood Jesus' last cry clearly as a second ... cry of prayer." In Luz's view, "Matthew says merely that Jesus cries to God one last time and then dies."¹⁵⁰⁸

Other writers however see in the expression definite eschatological features. Thus, André La Cocque writes:

Whether articulate or inarticulate, the last cry of Jesus is a crucial moment in the Gospel. Matthew has it coincide ("at that moment") with a series of significant events, all of which point to the eschatological era: the curtain of the temple is torn; there occurs an earthquake; tombs are opened and saints arise; the centurion and the Roman soldiers who proceeded to the crucifixion of Jesus are confessing "this man was the son of God." In short, the whole scene is set by Matthew within an apocalyptic framework.¹⁵⁰⁹

And again he insists:

[I]t is to be stressed that the Great Cry motif ... must be understood as apocalyptic. It "unveils" and inaugurates; it reveals and ushers in; it is an end and a beginning. A

¹⁵⁰⁵ For a detailed study of the words of this pericope, Matt 27:51b-53, see Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 25-41.

¹⁵⁰⁶ The word is also found in some mss at Matt 24:31.

¹⁵⁰⁷ See La Cocque, "The Great Cry of Jesus in Matthew 27:50," 140.

¹⁵⁰⁸ Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 553.

¹⁵⁰⁹ La Cocque, "The Great Cry of Jesus in Matthew 27:50," 138.

Janus-like phenomenon, it signifies that the old world sinks into darkness with the sound of a shriek, and that the new world is born at the sound of a תרועה [shout].¹⁵¹⁰

The ambiguity in scholarly circles regarding the interpretation of Jesus' φωνὴ μεγάλη must be acknowledged. However, in my opinion, Jesus' final "shout" may be understood to imply that at Jesus' death an extraordinary divine intervention happened. The immediate results of this divine intervention are related in Matt 27:51-52a. The curtain of the Temple is torn from top to bottom, the earth shakes, the rocks split, the tombs open, and many dead are raised. It is the contention of this thesis that, in the light of the OT and other intertestamental writings, these four statements - the earth shakes, the rocks split, the tombs open, and many dead are raised - may, *in the context of the death of Jesus, the Son of God*, be understood as End Time events and imply that with the death of Jesus a great change occurred.¹⁵¹¹

With regard to shaking, or an earthquake,¹⁵¹² the following references are apposite. Amos 8:8-9 shows that when the Lord intervenes and judges his people there will be darkness and trembling, shaking (רגז). In Hag 2:6 however the shaking (רעש) will be in relation to the Lord's coming to bless. And while Joel 2:10 refers to shaking in the context of a plague of locusts, yet the chapter clearly associates the shaking with the nearness of the coming of the "day of the Lord" (2:1). According to the vision of *1 En.* 1:3-9 the last judgment involves widespread and terrible shaking. *4 Ezra* 6:13-16 declares that great shaking will be among the

¹⁵¹⁰ La Cocque, "The Great Cry of Jesus in Matthew 27:50," 146.

¹⁵¹¹ It is debatable as to whether the term "the End" should be used to describe this great change. However, consider these words of La Cocque: "Matthew wants to convey the idea that Jesus' death inaugurates the end of times; it is the final act that pushes history over the edge and ushers in the 'world to come,' the kingdom of heaven so dear to the evangelist Matthew. Whereas death reigned in 'this world,' the coming world is the world of life. The righteous dead arise and enter the Holy City; that is, they are enthroned in Zion with the one whose reign is still for a while hidden to many eyes. The risen righteous are the visible aspect of their Lord about to be or already risen ('many saw them'). In the Gospel, only those saints arise who are in the close vicinity of the cross, because the tradition is unanimous in stating that resurrection will start with those buried on the Mount of Olives. That tradition explains why so many pious Jews through the centuries have wanted to be buried there." (La Cocque, "The Great Cry of Jesus in Matthew 27:50," 149).

¹⁵¹² It is to be noted that Matthew has a predilection for earthquakes. See, for instance, Matt 8:23-27; 21:10; 24:7; 27:51b, 54 and 28:2, 4. A detailed discussion of the significance of earthquakes for Matthew is to be found in Appendix C: "'Shaking' in Matthew's Gospel." It may be said, very briefly, that for Matthew earthquakes (i) relate to the identity and greatness of Jesus as the promised Messiah, and (ii) connote signs which foreshadow the eschatological presence of the kingdom of heaven and of the End Time.

signs of the End of the Age. And *4 Ezra* 9:3 says that earthquakes will prevail when the Most High is about to visit the world. Likewise, *2 Bar.* 70:8 includes earthquakes in the coming judgment (“the whole earth will devour its inhabitants”, v.10). And the first century C.E. *T. Mos.* 10:4 speaks of the Holy One’s judgment causing the earth to shake and tremble.¹⁵¹³

With regard to “rocks being split” the following passages may be noted: *Isa* 2:19 (LXX) associates God’s judgment and the clefts of rocks. Thus, in “the day of the Lord” God’s sinful people will attempt to hide their idols in the clefts of the rocks (σχισμοῦ τῶν πετρῶν). While in *1 Kgs* 19:11-12 the Lord comes to Elijah in a moment of “sheer silence”,¹⁵¹⁴ yet earthquakes and the splitting of rocks are a prelude to this divine coming which calls Elijah to account. According to *Nah* 1:5-6 when the Lord comes to take vengeance on his adversaries the rocks will be broken in pieces. Further, *Zech* 14:4-7 suggests that on the last great day when the Lord comes with all the holy ones (angels) the Mount of Olives will be split into two. And likewise the *T. Levi* 4:1 asserts that when the Lord inflicts judgment on the sons of men “stones will be split”. In the light of these passages it seems reasonable to assume that when *Matt* 27:51b declares that “rocks were split” Matthew’s readers would understand that at the death of Jesus God’s divine power was so present that events associated with the End Time occurred.

This startling assertion receives support from the next two events Matthew mentions – that at Jesus’ death tombs were opened and the *bodies* of many dead holy ones were raised. While in the NT there are very few explicit references to *Ezek* 37:1-14,¹⁵¹⁵ yet there is a general consensus that *Matt* 27:51b-53 is indebted, in some way, to the references in this OT passage about the opening of tombs and the portrayal of the resurrection of those long dead.¹⁵¹⁶ In order to create hope in the possibility of the eventual restoration of the people of Israel from exile in Babylon to their earthly homeland, Ezekiel’s vision likens the revived nation to risen corpses

¹⁵¹³ See Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:919-20.

¹⁵¹⁴ For the suggestion that this expression may be better rendered as “a roaring, crushing voice (sound)” see Meredith G. Kline, “Primal Parousia,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 40 (1978): 247.

¹⁵¹⁵ Grassi, “Ezekiel XXXVII.1-14 and the New Testament,” 162-64, mentions the following: (i) *Rev* 11:11 – cf. *Ezek* 37:14; (ii) *1 Thess* 4:8b – cf. *Ezek* 37:14; (iii) *Matt* 27:51b-53 – cf. *Ezek* 37:12.

¹⁵¹⁶ See Appendix D: “Legendary Jewish Interpretations of Some Old Testament Scriptures”.

emerging from out of their opened tombs (Ezek 37:11-14). This national “resurrection” would be the work of God through his life giving Spirit.

Reference to resurrection occurring at the time of God’s intervention (for judgment and salvation) is also found in Dan 12:1- 4 (cf. Dan 7:22; see also 2 Macc 7:9; 12:44; 14:46; cf. also Isa 26:19). It is debatable whether the Dead Sea Scrolls suggest that at the End Time there would be bodily resurrection, as the language may be allegorical.¹⁵¹⁷ The following references may also be understood to suggest that in the days of the Messiah the saints of Israel would rise in order to associate themselves with his reign (cf. *1 En.* 51:1ff; 61:5; 90:33; 91:10; *T. Sim.* 6; *T. Jud.* 25; *T. Benj.* 10; *Sib. Or.* 2:221-235; 4:180-192; *4 Ezra* 7:32; *2 Bar.* 30:1; 50:2). It will be argued that in Matt 27:51b-53 Matthew is declaring that Jesus is Israel’s promised Messiah and that at his death events associated with the End Time occurred (resulting in the inauguration of God’s salvation).

¹⁵¹⁷ Cf. 1QHIII, 19-22, ‘I know there is hope for him whom Thou has shaped from dust for the everlasting Council ...’; 1QHVI, 34-35, ‘Hoist a banner, O you who lie in the dust! O bodies gnawed by worms, raise up an ensign ...’; 1QHXI, 10-14, ‘That bodies gnawed by worms may be raised from the dust ...’; (cf. 1QSXI, 5-9 which may suggest that the raised have the same status as the angels of God).. (Translations from G. Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, London: Penguin Books, 3rd Edition, 1987). According to Michael O. Wise, Martin G. Abegg, Jr., and Edward M. Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (rev. and updated ed.; New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 530, the account of Jesus’ response to the Baptist (Matt 11:2-5; cf. Luke 7:22) parallels the Dead Sea Scrolls *Redemption and Resurrection [Messianic Apocalypse]* (4Q521) in a remarkable way. They write: “Both the Gospels and this scroll presuppose that during the age of the messiah, the dead will be resurrected, either by God himself or through his messianic agent. Yet nowhere in the Old Testament do we clearly read of this belief. This fact suggests that the Gospel writers may have known *Redemption and Resurrection* – or at least been familiar with the traditions it contains.” 4Q521, 2, 12 reads: ‘For He (the Lord) shall heal the critically wounded, He shall revive the dead, He shall send good news to the afflicted ...’ See also Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 117- 122 for comments on 4Q521.

APPENDIX C “Shaking” in Matthew’s Gospel¹⁵¹⁸

These comments about “shaking” (earthquakes) are included here as they “tie” Matt 27:51b-53 in with the whole of the First Gospel. Ulrich Luz notes¹⁵¹⁹ that Matthew often hints at his themes by the repetition of key words. These key words, or lead words, are detected through a sequential reading of Matthew’s Gospel. One such theme is that of “shaking” (associated with earthquakes). Like a connecting thread this theme of shaking runs through the whole length of Matthew’s Gospel, uniting it and strongly suggesting its overall unity. In this regard the following may be noted:

(1) In Matt 24:7 (paralleling virtually word for word Mark 13:8) σεισμός is used in its literal sense, as an earthquake. For Matthew, earthquakes connote signs relating to the End Time. The shaking belongs to the catastrophe which forms the beginning of the birth pangs (Matt 24:7f) and which accompanies the Parousia of the Son of Man (Matt 24:29-31).¹⁵²⁰

(2) Matthew’s predilection for “shaking” becomes more evident in a comparison of Matt 8:23-27 and Mark 4:35-41. On the assumption that Mark’s account of this incident is here being used Matthew has, it is claimed, made a number of redactional changes to stress Jesus’ sovereign lordship. That is, Matthew here writes in the light of Jesus’ resurrection. Thus, “The Matthean habit of portraying the pre-Easter Jesus with the loftiness of the Resurrection One dominates this small scene.”¹⁵²¹ For instance:

(a) Compare Matt 8:23 and Mark 4:36. Matthew stresses that the disciples “followed” Jesus, their Lord (cf. Matt 8:18-22).¹⁵²²

(b) In 8:24 Matthew, through redaction, uses “shaking” (σεισμός) whereas Mark (4:37) uses “storm” (λαίλαψ).

(c) In Matt 8:25 Matthew has “Lord” (an Easter sovereign predicate) whereas Mark has “Master” (4:38).

¹⁵¹⁸ See Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 67; Witherup, “The Death of Jesus and the Raising of the Saints,” 580.

¹⁵¹⁹ Luz, *Matthew*, 1-7, 36-40.

¹⁵²⁰ Maisch, “Die österliche Dimension des Todes Jesu: Zur Osterverkündigung in Matt 27, 51-54,” 116.

¹⁵²¹ Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 67.

¹⁵²² See G. Bornkamm, “The Stilling of the Storm in Matthew,” in *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* (ed. G. Bornkamm, M. Barth and H. J. Held; Philadelphia: Westminster Press: 1963), 52-57.

(d) In Matt 8:26-27 Matthew changes Mark's order of events (cf. Mark 4:39-41) and so underlines Jesus' sovereignty by having him first reproach his disciples before stilling the storm.

(3) In Matt 21:10 (cf. Mark 11:11) "shaking" is used figuratively (as in Matt 28:4) to express the people's astonishment concerning the power and authority of Jesus. "Matthew's use here of the fear theme and the people's question: 'Who is this?' suggests that Matthew saw Jesus' entry into Jerusalem as an Epiphany style event."¹⁵²³ Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is thus already a sign of the Passion. Jesus is not the triumphalistic type of Messiah which some people were hoping for, but one who suffers.¹⁵²⁴

Thus for Matthew "shaking" stands not only for the eschatological distress / torment of the disciples, community, (Matt 24:7), but also for the greatness of their Lord. Matt 8:24 and 21:10 reveal that "shaking" is used by Matthew to attest Jesus' unique greatness, as the promised Messiah, in whom all promises are fulfilled. He is the Easter [Sunday] Lord, the disciples follow him, and he alone can deliver out of all distress.

In Witherup's opinion, "the motif of 'quaking' either in literal or metaphorical terms is loaded with christological significance and indicates God's action in the person of Jesus."¹⁵²⁵ Commenting on Matt 8:27; 21:10; 27:54 Witherup asserts that "In all three of these passages the motif of the earthquake or quaking is tied to the issue of Jesus' identity. There is, in fact, a progressive revelation in these three passages from questioning, to inadequate confession, to a fully adequate confession which coincides with God's own view."¹⁵²⁶ According to Maisch, "The shaking can, according to context, be a sign of judgment or of salvation; in each case it is an overwhelming, powerful sign of the appearance of God."¹⁵²⁷

¹⁵²³ Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 69.

¹⁵²⁴ For discussion of Matt 21:1-11 in the light of Zech 9:9 see Ham, *The Coming King and the Rejected Shepherd*, 20-47.

¹⁵²⁵ Witherup, "The Death of Jesus and the Raising of the Saints," 580.

¹⁵²⁶ Witherup, "The Death of Jesus and the Raising of the Saints," 580.

¹⁵²⁷ Maisch, "Die österliche Dimension des Todes Jesu: Zur Osterverkündigung in Matt 27, 51-54," 116.

It is important to note that this “progressive revelation” developed through Matt 8:27; 21:10 and 27:54 (cf. also Matt 28:2-8) supports the argument of this thesis – that whatever its original provenance Matt 27:51b-53 is an integral part of the whole of the First Gospel.

APPENDIX D Legendary Jewish Interpretations of Ezekiel 37:1-14

The origin of Matt 27:51b-53 could well be related to popular and legendary interpretations, current in the Judaism of NT times, of some OT Scriptures, especially Ezek 37:1-14. Accordingly, this Appendix will look more closely at Ezek 37:1-14 and consider, briefly, the Jewish Aramaic Targums relating to these verses.

1) Ezekiel 37:1-14

There is a general consensus that Matt 27:51b-53 is indebted, in some way, to the portrayal of resurrection in Ezekiel 37:1-14.¹⁵²⁸ The initial phrase of Matt 27:52, καὶ τὰ μνημεῖα ἀνεώχθησαν, seems to echo the LXX translation of Ezek 37:12, ἐγὼ ἀνοίγω τὰ μνήματα ὑμῶν, while the continuation of the same verse (καὶ ἀνάξω ὑμᾶς ἐκ τῶν μνημάτων ὑμῶν) mirrors the words of Matt 27:53: καὶ ἐξελθόντες ἐκ τῶν μνημείων. Further, the concluding words of Matt 27:53: εἰσῆλθον εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν ... may perhaps reflect the last part of LXX Ezek 37:12: καὶ εἰσάξω ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν γῆν τοῦ Ἰσραήλ. However, this is where the agreement ends! For a number of questions arise: First, even if Matt 27:51b-53 reflects Ezek 37:1-14 does that mean that it is actually based on the text of Ezek 37:1-14? Secondly, if it is based on the text of Ezek 37:1-14 is it based exclusively on this OT passage, or is it based on Ezek 37:1-14 and other scriptures, especially Zech 14:1-21 and Dan 12:1-4? That is to say, does a pre-Christian formulation about resurrection that associated Ezek 37:1-14 with Zech 14:1-21 (and perhaps other scriptures) lie behind Matt 27:51b-53? Or, in the third place, could it be perhaps that behind Matt 27:51b-53 are not so much the Hebrew and LXX texts of Ezek 37:1-14 and Zech 14:1-21, and so on, but rather *the legendary interpretation of these passages which was current in the Judaism of New Testament times*. Thus, it could be that Matthew does not quote literally, or even refer to, the Hebrew or LXX of Ezek. 37, and so on,

¹⁵²⁸ It is to be noted, however, that in the New Testament there are very few explicit references to Ezek: 37:1-14. Grassi, "Ezekiel XXXVII.1-14 and the New Testament", 162-64, mentions the following: (i) Rev 11:11 – cf. Ezek 37:14; (ii) 1Thess 4:8b – cf. Ezek. 37:14; (iii) Matt 27:51b-53 – cf. Ezek 37:12)

but rather alludes to the popular understanding which these texts had in some circles of Judaism in Jesus' time.

Written in the Babylonian exile, Ezek 37:1-14 falls into two sections:

(a) vv. 1-10 in which is narrated an account of a vision experienced by the prophet in which he was transported to a valley full of very old, dry bones. It is to be understood, it seems, that long ago some army had been exterminated in a battle. Ezekiel was commanded by the Lord to act in faith, and with urgency, to prophesy first to the bones (v.4), and then later to prophesy to the breath, to come upon the bones (v. 9). He obeyed, did so, and through the power of God the bones, amid much noisy rattling,¹⁵²⁹ came together. Eventually, a vast army arose, animated by God's spirit, "*ruah*". (This key word "*ruah*" occurs ten times, and depending on the context, may mean "spirit", "breath", or "wind").

(b) In the explanation of the vision, vv.11-14, the scene shifts from a battlefield to a cemetery. It is to be noted that the purpose of the vision is not to inculcate belief in the bodily resurrection of the dead (the possibility of such an event is assumed and underlies the vision). Rather, the purpose of the vision is to create hope in the possibility of the reanimation, reunification and eventual restoration of the people of Israel from exile in Babylon to their earthly homeland. Thus, "the original form of this symbol retreats into the background in the words of promise which next follow, so that the revival of the nation now resembles that of a corpse made to rise out of its grave. Here the land of exile has become a grave ... the opening of the grave is the breaking through of the prison door of Babylon."¹⁵³⁰

Note the following:

(a) Ezekiel's vision was indeed a vision, not actual historical fact. "The transportation was in prophetic vision, not in reality."¹⁵³¹ But later Jewish commentators took as actual fact, what the vision said.¹⁵³² This influenced the interpretation of Ezek 37 found in Judaism. Ezekiel's

¹⁵²⁹ Caused perhaps by an earthquake? –cf. LXX Ezek 37:7 'καὶ ἰδοὺ σεισμὸς'.

¹⁵³⁰ Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 510.

¹⁵³¹ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 742.

¹⁵³² Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 750.

images, rich in suggestiveness and seeming to point to more, were open to deeper interpretation, and so a more profound sense was read into them.

(b) Ezekiel, Elijah and Elisha.

Ezek 37:7, 10 imply that Ezekiel not only witnessed, but actually initiated, the resurrection by his prophecy. Thus in the Old Testament, Ezekiel, Elijah (1Kgs 17:10-24) and Elisha (2Kgs 4:18-37) are three figures who have raised someone from the dead. Hence Ezekiel, Elijah and Elisha were understood to be special precursors of the Messiah, performing now, in the present world order, future world miracles “in miniature.”¹⁵³³ Note also this comment by J. Grassi: “If Matthew is thinking in terms of Ezek. xxxvii, this may throw some additional light on the mysterious reference to the coming of Elias in [Matt] xxvii. 49. Jewish tradition pointed to Elias as the herald of the resurrection. This was explained through a development of Mal iv.5. The words of the soldiers, ‘Let us wait to see if Elias comes to save him,’ may then be prophetic: that the resurrection of Jesus was about to initiate the eschatological regeneration of Israel, of which Elias was to be the harbinger. This belief is reflected in Mark ix:11, where in reference to the resurrection the disciples ask, ‘Why do the Scribes say that Elias must come first?’”¹⁵³⁴

(c) The resurrection of the dry bones, it seems, is to be understood as happening into two distinct stages: (i) the bodies are restored from the graves (cf. 37:13b). This may refer to the exiled people being freed from the bondage of the Babylonian captivity and returning to their promised land. (ii) The entrance of the Spirit (37:14) – It is perhaps to be understood that the Spirit conforms the returned exiles to God’s law and so assures the permanence of their settlement in the land of promise.

(d) Ezek 37: 15-28 speak of reunification (cf. Hos 1:10-11; Isa 11:12-13; Jer 3:6-18; 30:1-3, 8-9) of the Northern Kingdom (Ephraim) and Judah. There will be one nation (which must not come between God and the people); in one land, with one King (a Davidide) and

¹⁵³³ See Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 82-3.

¹⁵³⁴ Grassi, “Ezekiel XXXVII.1-14 and the New Testament,” 163.

characterised by holiness (no more apostasy). Thus, as R. Wischnitzer-Bernstein says, “Resurrection in terms of the visions of Ezekiel means rebirth of the nation of Israel.”¹⁵³⁵

(e) Ezek 37: 28 suggests missionary work (cf. Israel’s failure in this regard: Ezek. 5:5-12, cf. Matt 28:16-20)

(f) Ezekiel 37:1-14 may have been the “*Haftora(h)*” of the Passover week.¹⁵³⁶ There is evidence that from the time of the Seleucids in synagogue worship the reading of the Law / Torah was followed by a related prophetic text (called “*haftora(h)*”). (cf. Luke 4:16; Acts 13:15) Also for the Israelites the Exodus was not just a past event but was, in the annual Passover celebrations (Exod 12) repeated and participated in. Furthermore, the Exodus event became a theological category by which Jewish commentators interpreted successive interventions of God in their history. Understandably, the Exodus theme was applied to Ezek 37:1-14¹⁵³⁷ For example (i) Babylon (cf. Egypt) was thought of as “the place of bondage”; (ii) Ezek 37:12-13 was understood as “release from oppression”, and (iii) Ezek 37:3-5,6,9,10, 14 was construed as a “leading to the homeland” (that is, to true life). Accordingly, some argue that Ezek 37:1-14 was the “*haftora(h)*” for the week of the Passover. If so, then the reading of Ezek 37:1-14 at Passover would have stirred up expectations of messianic liberation, and perhaps suggested an ancient connection between Passover and resurrection.¹⁵³⁸

In the light of the above points, the question arises: Are references to Ezek 37:1-14 to be found in Matt 27:51b-53? The following are some such alleged, and disputed, references:

(a) Ezekiel’s stress on the Spirit of Yahweh (37:5, 6, 8, 9a, 9b, 10, 14 cf. 36:26, 27), according to some, relates to the Matthean passage. The Spirit of Yahweh unleashes the process which results in the resurrection of the dead. cf. Matt 27:50-53 – Some suggest that at his death

¹⁵³⁵ Wischnitzer-Bernstein, “The conception of the Resurrection in the Ezekiel Panel of the Dura Synagogue,” 47.

¹⁵³⁶ See Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo, 27, 51b-53*, 94-5. See *b.Meg.* 31a.

¹⁵³⁷ See Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo, 27, 51b-53*, 72-3.

¹⁵³⁸ Grassi, “Ezekiel XXXVII.1-14 and the New Testament,” 164, asks: if Ezek 37 was a Passover reading, then is there a connection to be seen between “the dry bones” and “Golgotha” (Matt 27:33 – cf. Massoretic Text of Judg 9:53 & 2 Kgs 9:35 [תַּלְמֵי לֵבַי] cf. Luke 23:33 which has κρονίον).

Jesus' surrendered the (Holy) Spirit (and so set in progress resurrection.)¹⁵³⁹ Note: Since in Ezekiel Spirit and life go together (cf. 37:5, 6, 9, 10, 14), as they do in Genesis 2:7, some suggest that for Ezekiel the resurrection of the bones is to be understood as a new creation.¹⁵⁴⁰

(b) In both Ezekiel and Matthew resurrection is preceded by an earthquake (see LXX Ezek 37:7;¹⁵⁴¹ cf. Ezek 38:19 and Matt 27:51b-52). Earthquakes were understood to have eschatological overtones (that is, such events were God's doing).¹⁵⁴²

(c) Both passages speak of the opening of tombs (Ezek 37:12-13 cf. Matt 27:52).

(d) According to Ezek 37:12, 14 the raised people will be conducted to the land of Israel. Cf. Matt 27:53 where the resurrected saints enter the holy city (that is, Jerusalem, the centre of Israel).¹⁵⁴³

(e) In Ezekiel there is the promise of special revelation (cf. 37:6, 13, 14: "You shall know that I am Yahweh"). Cf. Matt 27:54 (although, here, the recipients of the revelation were Gentiles, not Israelites, and the revelation was about the crucified Jesus).

(f) In Ezekiel, there is promise of a more perfect, new sanctuary – a sign of an intimate presence of God with his people (37:26-28 cf. Ezek 40-48).¹⁵⁴⁴ Cf. Matt 27:51 – The rending of the Temple curtain, symbolizing the destruction of the Temple, could also suggest a new, more perfect meeting place of God with his people.

In the light of the above points an important question arises: If Matt 27:51b-53 reflects, or is even shaped on the basis of Ezek 37:1-14, then, since Ezek. 37:1-14 was associated with the Passover liturgy of Judaism, was Matt 27:51b-53 also associated with the Passover theme? The liturgy of the Jewish Passover included the singing of songs – cf. *Jubilees* 49:6.¹⁵⁴⁵

¹⁵³⁹ See Albright & Mann, *Matthew*, 351. But is this not rather a case of ellipsis – through releasing his spirit, that is, giving up his physical life, Jesus obtained the gift of the (Holy) Spirit for his people?

¹⁵⁴⁰ See Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 74.

¹⁵⁴¹ But see Ham, *The Coming King and the Rejected Shepherd*, 103, fn 88.

¹⁵⁴² See Richard J. Bauckham, "The Eschatological Earthquake in the Apocalypse of John," *Novum Testamentum* 19 (1977): 224-33.

¹⁵⁴³ See Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 75.

¹⁵⁴⁴ See Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 75.

¹⁵⁴⁵ See Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:140.

Accordingly, some suggest that the rhythmic structure of Matt 27:51b-53 may indicate that it was associated with a Passover liturgical hymn.¹⁵⁴⁶

Thus, the early Christian community, in order to distinguish the Christian Passover, could well have “Christianized” a text used in the celebration of the Jewish Passover. This “Christianized” text (reflected in Matt 27:51b-53), made the death of Jesus appear as the new Passover and sang the decisive victory of Yahweh. And with the passing of time it was eventually incorporated, via an early passion account, into the First Gospel. Thus, Matt 27:51b-53 declares that “Jesus is the Messiah or, more exactly, his death is the moment of the establishment of the messianic kingdom, the eschatological intervention of God in the world. It is the realization of the new exodus, which has its goal (its promised country) in the final life.”¹⁵⁴⁷

2) The Jewish Targums relating to Ezek 37:1-14.

The Targums are Aramaic versions of the Jewish Bible (that is, the Old Testament). However, rather than literal translations of the Hebrew texts they are paraphrases which introduce explanations and ideas originating from “the apocryphal, from the apocalyptic, and in addition from Hellenism.”¹⁵⁴⁸ Representing “the traditional interpretation of Scripture in the synagogues”, they may be described as the Bible of the simple people in New Testament times.

In attempting to discover the teachings of Judaism current in New Testament times from the Jewish Aramaic Targums the following points need to be kept in mind: (i) the question of dating. The Targums come from a time later than the New Testament period, so it is debatable as to whether their traditions reflect the Judaism of NT times. Judaism was not a static set of teachings, rather it was constantly evolving, developing to meet new situations. However, for some, “there is no doubt that the material we encounter in the Targums is very old

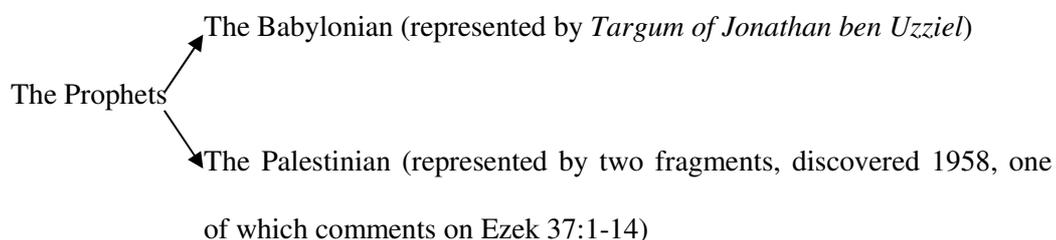
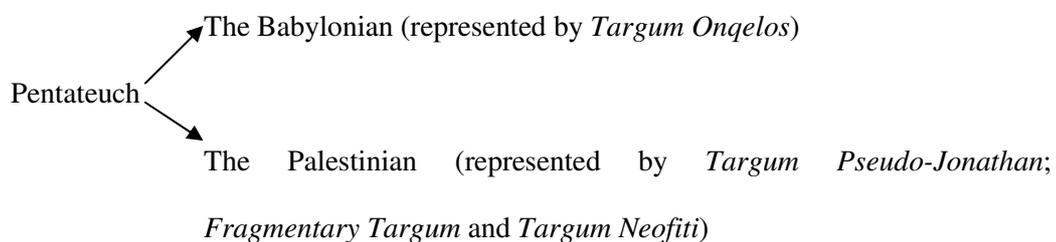
¹⁵⁴⁶ See Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 98-108.

¹⁵⁴⁷ Aguirre *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 99. “Jesús es el Mesías o, más exactamente, su muerte es el momento de la instauración del reino mesiánico, la intervención escatológica de Dios en el mundo. Es la realización del nuevo éxodo, que tiene su meta (su tierra prometida) en la vida definitiva.” See also Curtis, “An Investigation of the Mount of Olives in the Judaeo-Christian Tradition,” 137-80.

¹⁵⁴⁸ See Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 84.

and carries us to the time of Jesus and of the Gospels.”¹⁵⁴⁹ (ii) Within Judaism there was a pluralism of ideas (this was especially true with regard to Divine Eschatology). Jewish thought was divided into different streams. Yet it was able to harmonize seemingly contrary teachings – e.g. particularism and universalism. It was also able to relate texts of different historical epochs, subjecting the original sense of a passage to bold reinterpretations in light of new historical situations.¹⁵⁵⁰

Furthermore, there are two traditions of the Aramaic version (Targum) of both the Pentateuch and the Prophets – the Babylonian and the Palestinian.¹⁵⁵¹



2.1) A closer look at the fragment of the Palestinian tradition of the Aramaic (Targum) version of Ezek 37:1-14.¹⁵⁵²

According to this fragment:

- (a) *The prophet Ezekiel was taken to the valley of Dura, v. 1* (that is, to an actual geographical place). **Note:** The episode of the three young men of Dan 3:1-30 also happened in

¹⁵⁴⁹ See Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 84.

¹⁵⁵⁰ See Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 77-97, who sums up Judaism by quoting Frey: “The most characteristic feature of Jewish systematic theology is that it has no system.”

¹⁵⁵¹ See Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 85-97.

¹⁵⁵² For the Aramaic text, Spanish translation, and comments on this Palestinian fragment see Díez Macho, “Un segundo fragmento del Targum Palestinense a los Profetas,” 198-205.

the Dura valley. And with the passing of time it seems that the traditions of Dan 3:1-30 and Ezek 37:1-14 became mixed up in Jewish legends. Thus, according to the Talmud, on the same day that the young men were saved from the blast furnace (Dan 3:1-30), the resurrection (Ezek 37:1-14) took place.¹⁵⁵³

(b) In this fragment of the Palestinian tradition of the Aramaic Targum version of Ezek 37:1-14 *there is concern about the fate of those who have died in exile.* (Those who have died in Palestine, and the question of the national restoration of Israel, present no problems.) In v.1 of the fragment Ezekiel relates how in his heart he thought: “What shall happen to the dead who had died in the exile?” Then in v.1b and v. 2 he says, “Immediately the Spirit of prophecy from Yahweh rested upon me and it put me in the middle of the plain of Dura which was full of human bones. And it made me pass close to them all around. They were the bones of 30,000 Ephraimite infantrymen who departed from Egypt thirty years before the end (of the Egyptian bondage) and the Philistines killed them...”¹⁵⁵⁴

In the Palestinian Targum of the Pentateuch, as represented by *Targum Neofiti*, Exod 13:17 reads: “And it came to pass when Pharaoh let the people go, the Lord did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near, because the Lord said, ‘Lest the heart of the people be broken when they see the battle array and they return to Egypt.’” This is similar to the Hebrew Massoretic Text. However, the Palestinian Targum of Exod 13:17, as

¹⁵⁵³ See Philip S. Alexander, trans., *Targum of Canticles* (Vol 17a of *The Aramaic Bible (The Targums)*); ed. Jacob Neusner; Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1987- c. 2004), 7, v.10. In fn 49, on page 184, Neusner writes: “The Midrash implies that it was through the merit of the three children that the dead were raised by Ezekiel, the ‘valley’ where Ezekiel performed the feat being identified with the Plain of Dura where Nebuchadnezzar set up his image, and the resurrection occurring on the very day of the Hebrews’ defiance. cf. *b.Sanh.* 92b, ‘Our Rabbis taught: When the wicked Nebuchadnezzar threw Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah into the fiery furnace, the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Ezekiel: *Go resurrect the dead in the plain of Dura.*’... .” Various Jewish traditions exist as to who the raised ones were. According to one tradition the resurrected were young Jewish men who had been killed and cut up into pieces by Nebuchadnezzar because their beauty had inflamed the passion of the Babylonian women. Thus, according to *b.Sanh.* 92b “Amongst the Israelites whom Nebuchadnezzar drove into exile there were young men who shamed the sun by their beauty. The Chaldean women, looking upon them, were inflamed with passion. Their husbands, being informed thereof, reported it to the king, who ordered the execution of these exiles, yet they still burned with desire: so by royal command they were trampled [out of recognition]. In another tradition (*Pirqa Rabbi Eliezer* XXXIII) the resurrection (Ezek. 37:14) took place exactly twenty years after the miracle of the blast furnace. In this case the resurrected were the Jews whom Nebuchadnezzar had killed after the liberation of the three young men. (See Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 88-9).

¹⁵⁵⁴ See Díez Macho, “Un segundo fragmento del Targum Palestinense a los Profetas,” 203.

represented by *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, has a much longer comment. It says: “Now when Pharaoh let the people go, the Lord did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines, although it was nearer, for the Lord said, ‘Perhaps the people will change their minds when they see their brothers who died in the war, two hundred thousand men, men of valor from the tribe of Ephraim.’ Seizing shields and spears and (other) weapons, they went down to Gath to plunder the livestock of the Philistines. And because they transgressed the decree of the Memra [the Command] of the Lord and went forth from Egypt thirty years before the appointed time, they were delivered into the hands of the Philistines, who slew them. These were the dry bones which the Memra [the Command] of the Lord brought to life through the mediation of Ezekiel the prophet in the valley of Dura. If (the departing Israelites) had seen that, they would have taken fright and returned to Egypt.”

Accordingly, it is clear that both Targums (Babylonian and Palestinian) have the resurrection of the dry bones (by Ezekiel) in the context of the Exodus story. The Targums thus may be understood to have seen the events of the Exodus typologically.

(c) It is also important to note that, according to Jewish tradition, the Hebrews killed by Nebuchadnezzar were likewise descendants of Ephraim. All this reflects the concern within Judaism of how those Ephraimites (perhaps to be understood as the ten “lost” tribes) who had died outside of the promised land could share in the glorious events of the Messianic salvation which would have their centre in Jerusalem.¹⁵⁵⁵

(d) The key happenings in the Targum are the same as in the massoretic text of Ezek 37:1-14 – the prophet prophesies; there is an earthquake; the bones join together; the Spirit comes; then there is resurrection.

(e) According to v.7 of this fragment, when the prophet prophesied, King Baltashar (= Belshazzar¹⁵⁵⁶) was drinking from vessels taken by Nebuchadnezzar from the Jerusalem Temple. At that very moment, as “bones approached other bones”, an angel beat king Baltashar

¹⁵⁵⁵ See Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 88-9.

¹⁵⁵⁶ See Dan 5:1-2.

in the mouth. (The reference is perhaps to a Jewish legend according to which the bones of the dead Ephraimites had been made into vases / cups by the king of Babylon).¹⁵⁵⁷

(f) All but one were raised (v.10). An angel of the Lord explained to the prophet that the unraised one had been an usurer who had charged excessive interest.

¹⁵⁵⁷ See Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53 , 87. See also *b.Sanh.* 92b which reads: “Our rabbis taught: When the wicked Nebuchadnezzar threw Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah into the fiery furnace, the Holy One, blessed be he, said to Ezekiel: ‘Go and resurrect the dead in the plain of Dura.’ This being done, the bones came and smote the wicked man upon his face. ‘What kind of bones are these!’ he exclaimed. They [his courtiers] answered him, ‘Their companion is resurrecting the dead in the plain of Dura.’ Thereupon he broke into utterance, *How great are His signs, and how mighty are His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion is from generation to generation!* R. Isaac said: May molten gold be poured into the mouth of that wicked [sc. Nebuchadnezzar]! Had not an angel come and struck him upon his mouth he would have eclipsed all the songs and praises uttered by David in the Book of Psalms.”

APPENDIX E: The Identity of “the Holy City” (Matt 27:53)

It is generally accepted that this expression means that the raised holy ones entered into the earthly city of Jerusalem, the expression “holy city” being at that time an established designation for Jerusalem [Matt 4:5 (cf. Luke 4:9); Isa 48:2; 52:1; Rev 11:2; 21:2,10; 22:19].¹⁵⁵⁸ Its “holiness” arose as an extension of the “holiness” of the Temple, the dwelling place of the “holy” God.¹⁵⁵⁹

That the “holy city” is to be identified with the earthly Jerusalem has however in recent times been challenged – especially by K. L. Waters. In an extensive article¹⁵⁶⁰ he argues that the expression, “the holy city”, implies that the raised holy ones entered the heavenly Jerusalem. (cf. Heb 13:14; Rev 21:2, 10; 22:19). In Waters’ opinion, Matt 27:52-53 exhibits the temporal-spatial collapse characteristic of most apocalyptic. Thus he argues that in this passage the yet-to-be-future has been historicized - that is, future events are related in the past tense.

Waters’ article, while controversial, nevertheless deserves consideration. For, in addition to raising the issue of “apocalyptic temporal-spatial collapse”, it also draws attention to the many real similarities between the First Gospel and the Book of Revelation. It is also a contribution to the larger debate over the character of the Gospels and of the Gospel writers themselves, and attempts to answer such questions as: “Do the Gospel writers ever present theology as history?” and “Do they ever invent historical events?”¹⁵⁶¹ However, while acknowledging Waters’ concerns yet I can only conclude that his approach to Matt 27:51b-53 creates more problems than it solves.

¹⁵⁵⁸ See Hutton, “The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51b-53)”, 154. In Hutton’s opinion, it is unlikely that Matthew refers to the heavenly Jerusalem, for “the entire thrust of the tradition in its Matthean form is to witness to the penetration of the eschaton into history at the crucifixion of Jesus. This thrust would be vitiated if the witness could not be given to that holy city which traditionally stood at the center of Jewish salvation history.”

¹⁵⁵⁹ Did Matthew write proleptically? That is, since when he wrote Jerusalem had been destroyed, did he write as if it was the new, holy city?

¹⁵⁶⁰ Waters, “Matthew 27:52-53 as Apocalyptic Apostrophe,” 489-515.

¹⁵⁶¹ Waters, “Matthew 27:52-53 as Apocalyptic Apostrophe,” 515.

The question of the identity and nature of the “holy city” and of its inhabitants (that is, the “many” to whom the raised holy ones appeared) depends also on how the words “καὶ ἐνεφανίσθησαν (3 pers. pl. aor. 1, ind. pass. of ἐμφανίζειν πολλοῖς)” are to be understood. First of all, while the verb ἐμφανίζειν in the passive can, it seems, have an active meaning, “to appear” (cf. Heb. 9:24 ἄνθρωποι ἐμφανισθήναι τῷ προσώπῳ τοῦ θεοῦ ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν) yet I would agree with R. E. Brown who writes, “in the instance of the raised dead only God can make them appear.”¹⁵⁶² Thus, it is to be understood that the holy ones having been raised into a transcendent realm¹⁵⁶³ were, by the agency of divine power, made visible (for a brief moment?) to some mortal humans in Jerusalem.¹⁵⁶⁴ In R. E. Brown’s opinion these words, “and were made visible to many” can scarcely apply to heaven.¹⁵⁶⁵ Consequently, these words imply that the expression “holy city” is to be understood as the earthly rather than the heavenly Jerusalem.¹⁵⁶⁶

The above understanding of the expression “they entered into the holy city and were manifested to many” (that is, that the “holy city” is the earthly Jerusalem and the “many” to whom the risen saints were manifested (or manifested themselves) were some of its earthly inhabitants) leads to the following conclusion:

(a) The sleeping holy ones are to be understood as having experienced an “apocalyptic” event – they had been raised and transferred to some transcendent realm (v. 52). Their risen bodies were thus no longer carnal, fleshy, but “spiritual”. That is to say, they had not experienced a resuscitation, a return to an earthly life, and so subject once again to mortality. As R. E. Brown points out, the apocalyptic thrust of the phenomena in verses 27:51b-53, “scarcely

¹⁵⁶² Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1132, fn 89.

¹⁵⁶³ Cf. heaven; eternal life; the Spirit. Cf. 1 Cor 15:45.

¹⁵⁶⁴ See S. P. Botha, “‘n Opstanding met verheerlikte liggame in Matteus 27:51b-53? ‘n Noukeurige lees van die teks,” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 52 (1996): 270-284; Hutton, “The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51b-53),” 156-59, suggests that “Perhaps Matthew thought of these appearances as analogous to the post-resurrection appearances of the risen Lord.” That is, the raised holy ones did not take up spatial-temporal existence in Jerusalem – “rather, it was to witness by their mysterious apparition that something decisive had taken place in the drama of salvation history.” According to Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1204: “The raising of the holy ones appears to be in some sense only temporary, a brief anticipation of the ultimate eschatological raising of the dead. Their appearance in Jerusalem is not unlike the appearance of Moses and Elijah in Matt 17:3, and like their appearances it has a primarily symbolic significance.”

¹⁵⁶⁵ Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1131. See also D. Wenham, “The Resurrection Narratives in Matthew’s Gospel,” 43, fn 66.

¹⁵⁶⁶ According to A. Winklhofer, if the term refers to the heavenly Jerusalem then “it is a Matthean anachronism.” (“2. Corpora Sanctorum (Matt 27, 51ff),” 33).

allows us to think that the culmination was a resuscitation to ordinary life. Those who were resuscitated by Jesus during his ministry did not have to appear or to be made visible to some; that description makes sense only of those who are raised to another sphere, even as Jesus was raised and appeared.”¹⁵⁶⁷

(b) Secondly, here can be seen the answer to the question of where the raised holy ones were, and what they did, from the moment of their resurrection to their later appearance in the holy city after Jesus’ resurrection on the third day. They certainly were not sitting around shivering in some damp tomb! They were, body and soul, in some transcendent spiritual realm.¹⁵⁶⁸

(c) In the third place, this approach implies that the raised holy ones were not seen coming out of their tombs by the soldiers at the cross, but were seen only later, after Jesus’ resurrection, by some in Jerusalem. This in turn dictates how the expression “καὶ τὰ γενόμενα” (v. 54) is to be understood and its contents ascertained.¹⁵⁶⁹

The word πολλοίς – “to many”, coming at the end of the whole episode, is also pivotal in the understanding of the purpose of these verses, Matt 27:51b-53. In fact, in a very real sense this word could be construed as being the climax of this whole passage. That is, it could perhaps suggest that there occurred a revelation to many in Jerusalem concerning the “effectiveness” of Jesus’ passion – that through his sufferings and death Jesus had “effected” atonement and so inaugurated the End Time. Caution, however, must be exercised for, frustratingly, we are not informed as to the identity of these “many”. Not a word is said as to whether they were earthly

¹⁵⁶⁷ Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2:1132. It has to be conceded however that the words of v. 52c and v. 53a could imply that the raised holy ones possessed some sort of “material” bodies. If in their resurrection they entered a transcendent, “spiritual” realm, then why did they have to leave, seemingly, via the entrances of the tombs? (contrast John 20:19). Or, was this a way whereby Matthew declared that the consequences of death had been completely reversed? If death meant entry into the tombs, then resurrection meant exit from the tombs.

¹⁵⁶⁸ Cf. Luke 23:43. This approach, in effect, dismisses the problem as, according to Hutton, “The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51b-53)”, 148, B. Weiss seems to have done by saying “that since there is here no allusion to a reawakening to earthly existence, there is no need to make anxious inquiries as to where they dwelt during this interim.” (Bernhard Weiss, *Das Matthäus-Evangelium* (8. Aufl., neu bearb.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1890), 495: Weiss, *Das Leben Jesu* 2 (3. Aufl., Erschienen; Berlin: Hertz, 1888), 547). Further, in this matter is it possible “to lose sight of the forest while examining the trees”? Could it be that Matthew was so thrilled with the thought, that through Jesus’ death the holy ones had actually been raised, that he was not taken up with the pedantic question of their exact whereabouts between their resurrection and their appearance?

¹⁵⁶⁹ See Waters, “Matthew 27:52-53 as Apocalyptic Apostrophe,” 493, fn 13.

saints, or sinners, or a mixture of both. Furthermore, we are not enlightened as to what effect this appearance of the raised holy ones had upon these “many” who saw them. Did it fill them with joy, with fear, or did it leave them apathetic and unmoved?

Consequently, each person who desires to understand the purpose of Matt 27:51b-53 has to make their own decision about the identity of these “many”. A degree of subjectivism is thus inescapable. If they were “sinners” is it to be understood that the appearance of the raised holy ones was an omen of coming judgment and / or a call to repentance? If the “many” were saints, righteous ones, believers, then was the appearance of the raised holy ones to them a confirmation of their salvation and future bliss? Or was it to convey some message, revelation, about Jesus, his death and resurrection?¹⁵⁷⁰

What then is Matthew’s reason in asserting that the raised holy ones after Jesus’ resurrection “entered the holy city and were manifested to many”?

- (a) In referring to Jerusalem as the “holy city” was Matthew perhaps being ironic, even sarcastic – did he mean the “so-called holy city”?
- (b) By mentioning their entry into the holy city is Matthew attempting to root all the

¹⁵⁷⁰ According to Witherup, “The Death of Jesus and the Raising of the Saints,” 582-3: “The significance that Jerusalem plays as the setting for the entire passion (cf. 16:21; 20:17-18; 21:1, 10; 2:3) also makes it appropriate that the appearances of the holy ones should take place there. They symbolize the vindication by God of his Son in the very city where he was rejected. The city where Jesus had earlier refused to perform signs now is made to witness the signs that confirm the significance of Jesus for salvation history.”

Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 39, writes: “In the coming salvation-time Jerusalem and its Temple would be renewed and so be the chief city of the messianic kingdom. This new Jerusalem already prepared in the Heavens, would, at the start of the end time, be lowered down to earth (cf. Rev 21:1ff). Thus, Matthew’s comment about the raised holy ones entering into the holy city is to be understood to mean that they entered into salvation, into the fullness of the life of their God.” [However, while the holy ones appeared to many in Jerusalem, they did not, it seems, continue to abide there].

Commenting on the verb ἐνεφανίσθησαν, Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 318, says: “a more suggestive aspect of the verb is its *juridic* quality. The word is repeatedly used in the New Testament to indicate witness to an event (fn 2 Acts 23:15, 22; 24:1; 25:2, 15. Note that in Heb 9:24 the word is used of Christ’s role as ‘advocate’ before the Father ...) The choice of this word in view of its ‘testimonial’ nature is particularly apt for a context such as 27:53 where the resurrection appearances of the Old Testament saints are undoubtedly meant to be confirmatory witness to the power of Jesus’ death.” Also, according to Senior: “The witness to the exaltation of Jesus is not the general resurrection but a symbolic expression of the implication of Jesus’ life-giving death (fn 5 Acts 10:41 puts the same sort of ‘limitation’ on the resurrection appearances of Jesus as well; ...)” (Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 318).

events following the death of Jesus in actual history, real time and space? ¹⁵⁷¹ If so, then it has to be conceded that he could perhaps have better achieved this, and avoided possible ambiguity, by using the name Jerusalem (cf. Luke 4:9) rather than the term “holy city.”¹⁵⁷²

(c) The question thus arises: Why then did Matthew use this term “holy city” rather than “Jerusalem”. The answer may lie in the fact that in both Matt 4:5 and Matt 27:53 the exact same words, εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν, are used. Does Matthew, through a deliberate choice of the same formulation wish an inner connection to be seen between the stories of the passion and the temptation? In Matt 4:3-7 Jesus is portrayed as totally obedient to his heavenly Father’s will by refusing to use his divinely given power for his own personal advantage. This theme of utter, and costly, obedience is found throughout the First Gospel (see Matt 16:22-3, cf. Mark 8:32-3; Matt 26:36-46; and Matt 27:40, 42). Thus does Matthew want it to be understood that the resurrection of the holy ones at the moment of Jesus’ death is the fruit, the achievement, of Jesus’ obedience? Is their resurrection (i) the proof of Jesus’ Messiahship, that he is God’s Son; (ii) the evidence of his perfect obedience even unto death; (iii) the proof that his suffering and death was in complete harmony with the salvation plan of his heavenly Father, and (iv) that his suffering and death opened for mankind and the world a whole new situation.¹⁵⁷³

(d) Thus, does Matthew want the entry of the raised holy ones into the holy city to convey, as it were, a deeper, more “spiritual” meaning? A. Winklhofer, for instance, suggests that “the earthly Jerusalem is thought of first of all, but at the same time stands as type for the heavenly Jerusalem of the messianic fulfilment.”¹⁵⁷⁴ Further, if the term “holy city” (that is, the earthly Jerusalem) is meant to suggest the new heavenly Jerusalem, the place of God’s presence and his community, then why were the raised holy ones manifested to the inhabitants of the earthly Jerusalem? One suggestion is that the words καὶ ἐνεφανίσθησαν πολλοῖς are perhaps related

¹⁵⁷¹ See Winklhofer, “2. Corpora Sanctorum (Matt 27, 51ff),” 60.

¹⁵⁷² In the opinion of Hutton, “The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Matt 27:51b-53),” 159, “in such a highly apocalyptic narrative the motif of appearing suggests a historicizing intent on the part of the redactor. However vague, the phrase ‘they appeared to many’, places the eschatological resurrection of the holy ones into the same historical context as the other prodigies which Matthew connects with the crucifixion of Jesus.”

¹⁵⁷³ See Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 55.

¹⁵⁷⁴ Winklhofer, “2. Corpora Sanctorum (Matt 27, 51ff),” 59.

to the question of the identity of these raised holy ones. According to *2 Bar.* 50:3-4¹⁵⁷⁵ while the earth gives back the dead in the same form, yet after their transformation into the heavenly glory the resurrected dead are no longer recognizable by mortal humans. Hence, the dead must first be raised in material-earthly bodies and so be recognizable by other mortal humans, before being transformed into their new mode of being. But, as I. Maisch points out, Matthew himself presents things differently. The appearance of the raised holy ones before the living in Jerusalem is not for the purpose of their identification, but rather as evidence that their resurrection has already happened in actual history.¹⁵⁷⁶ Thus, this passage implies that Jesus' death had consequences, not just for himself, but also for others.

To summarize: At the moment of Jesus' death there was a resurrection of deceased Old Testament Jewish saints into a "spiritual", transcendent realm. These raised holy ones, after Jesus' resurrection on the third day, appeared to "many" unidentified persons dwelling in the earthly city of Jerusalem referred to as the "Holy City."

With regard to the identity of these "many" who were raised I assume with others¹⁵⁷⁷ that they were devout Jewish people who had believed in the God of Israel and died waiting for the fulfilment of his promises concerning the Messiah and his salvation. (cf. Luke 2:25; 2:36-38). Their being described as "holy ones" implies that they had been "separated out", by God's grace, and so belonged to the Lord God. The expression certainly does not mean that these raised ones had, in their earthly lives, been morally perfect and had kept the Law of Moses in every detail (as if their resurrection was a reward merited by their obedience). While they could be spoken of as "holy ones", yet they were "sleeping" (that is, dead) holy ones. In other words, they were under the power of death which, according to Old Testament Scripture, results from sin, disobedience to the revealed will of God (cf. Gen. 3:1-24). This, I contend, is very important in understanding the purpose of Matt 27:51b-53.

¹⁵⁷⁵ See Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:638.

¹⁵⁷⁶ Maisch, "Die österliche Dimension des Todes Jesu: Zur Osterverkündigung in Matt 27, 51-54," 120-1.

¹⁵⁷⁷ For example, Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:633.

APPENDIX F Is Matt 27:51b-53 to be understood as an example of *Haggadah* or Christian *Midrash*?

As background to this question it is to be noted that in addition to the NT Scriptures themselves, knowledge of Judaism in NT times comes from two broad categories of writings - the apocryphal-pseudepigraphical literature and the rabbinical literature. The DSS are also important, shedding a flood of light on especially one particular group within Judaism – probably the Essenes. How close Jesus was to the apocalyptists is debatable,¹⁵⁷⁸ as also is the extent to which rabbinic Judaism can assist in the understanding of Jesus. Further, to appreciate rabbinic Judaism and its influence, the peculiar role played by Scripture in Judaism must be recognized. For, Judaism conceived itself as a revealed religion. The Jews above all were a people of a Book.¹⁵⁷⁹ The possibility of new divine communication, however, was reckoned with (cf. the Apocalyptists). Oral tradition was considered a source of revelation (something accepted by the Pharisees, but rejected by the Sadducees). Furthermore, everything – the Law, the words of the prophets, even oral tradition – was conceived as going back to Moses. The contemporizing of tradition – that is, the interpretation and application of Scripture to people’s daily lives was known as *Midrash*. “The term *Midrash* denotes both the occupation, the expounding and searching of Scripture, and its result, the exposition arrived at.”¹⁵⁸⁰ *Midrash* relating to conduct is called *Halakhah*; that which edifies, comforts and admonishes, *Haggadah*. (Rabbinic Judaism thus claimed the whole person).

In recent decades the importance of *midrash* in understanding, not just Judaism, but also Jesus and early Christianity, has been increasingly recognized. This in turn has given rise to debate about what exactly *midrash* is, and how it is to be understood by “outsiders”, as it were. For, as Le Deaut points out, *midrash* is a very *Jewish* category for which there is no

¹⁵⁷⁸ See Doeve, *Jewish Hermeneutics in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts*, 49- 54.

¹⁵⁷⁹ The Babylonian exile had meant the death of the old Israel, but the birth of Judaism. And the life-giving power of Judaism resided in the belief that God had spoken. Thus, the Torah (inclusive of the Pentateuch, the Prophets, the Psalms, the Writings, even the Talmud (oral Torah) all come to mean Judaism itself. See James A. Sanders, “From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4,” in *Christianity, Judaism and other Greco-Roman Cults* (ed. J. Neusner; 3 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1975), 1:77.

¹⁵⁸⁰ See Doeve, *Jewish Hermeneutics in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts*, 54-60.

equally “comprehensive” analogy in our Western categories and vocabulary.¹⁵⁸¹ In the opinion of A. G. Wright, “rabbinic *midrash* is a literature concerned with the Bible (the Christian OT); it is a literature about a literature. A *midrash* is a work that attempts to make a text of Scripture understandable, useful, and relevant for a later generation. It is the text of Scripture which is the point of departure, and it is for the sake of the text that the *midrash* exists.”¹⁵⁸² Wright continues, “The treatment of any given text may be creative or non-creative, but the literature as a whole is predominantly creative in its handling of the biblical material. The interpretation is accomplished sometimes by rewriting the biblical material, sometimes by commenting upon it. In either case the *midrash* may go as far afield as it wishes provided that at some stage at least there is to be found some connection, implicit or explicit, between the biblical text and the new *midrashic* composition. At times this connection with the text may be convincing, at times it may be desperate; it is sufficient merely that a connection be there. Frequently the *midrashic* literature is characterized by a careful analysis of and attention to the biblical text.”¹⁵⁸³

Le Deaut, who hesitates to speak of *midrash* as “a literary genre”, says that it “may be described but not *defined*.”¹⁵⁸⁴ In his opinion “the term *midrash* expresses the conviction that the ultimate answer (to the question: what does Scripture want to say for the life of today?) is to be found in searching the Scriptures, where it will be revealed to whoever knows how to search.”¹⁵⁸⁵ The revealed Word has, as it were, a magnetic influence on the Jewish soul, resulting in figurative embellishment of religious thought.¹⁵⁸⁶ Put another way, “*midrash* in the Jewish world designates above all an attitude, the concrete translation of the way in which the relationship between Scripture and the people of God was conceived in Israel.”¹⁵⁸⁷

To begin to understand *midrash* one must be ready to accept this attitude which, in effect, means accepting an ancient hermeneutics which is often diametrically opposed to

¹⁵⁸¹ R. Le Deaut, “Apropos a Definition of Midrash,” 268. (Emphasis original).

¹⁵⁸² Wright, *The Literary Genre Midrash*, 74.

¹⁵⁸³ Wright, *The Literary Genre Midrash*, 74. Wright’s book, while dated, is nevertheless a helpful, and readable, introduction to Midrash. For more recent discussion of Midrash, see Bakhos, *Current Trends in the Study of Midrash*. Unfortunately these studies do not refer directly to Matt 27:51b-53.

¹⁵⁸⁴ Le Deaut, “Apropos a Definition of Midrash,” 269-71.

¹⁵⁸⁵ Le Deaut, “Apropos a Definition of Midrash,” 270.

¹⁵⁸⁶ Le Deaut, “Apropos a Definition of Midrash,” 270.

¹⁵⁸⁷ Le Deaut, “Apropos a Definition of Midrash,” 272-3.

modern scientific requirements. Consequently *midrash*, the most ancient form of oral tradition, must be “put back into its original setting, that is, the liturgy of the synagogue, the *beth hammidrash* or the rabbinic academy.”¹⁵⁸⁸ For, “the rabbis were the men of the synagogue. With their Halakhah they sought to keep the people in the right track, with their Haggadah they sought to edify them.”¹⁵⁸⁹

Note: (1) According to this understanding of Judaism as a revealed religion everything in the Scriptures had meaning. Thus, to discover this meaning for daily life the Rabbis did not hesitate to change the word order of Scripture, to make new sentences, to use different vocalizations, to split words, and to group material together.¹⁵⁹⁰

(2) Not surprisingly, this “creative exegesis” (which became part of the constitutive elements of *midrash*) gave rise to problems.¹⁵⁹¹ It resulted in a tension between the two poles of *midrash* – namely, the biblical text and its adaptation to the contemporary conditions of God’s people. “It was above all for the benefit of the community that the contemporary meaning of the Word of God was sought.”¹⁵⁹² Consequently, sometimes, in order to respond to the actual circumstances of the people, the text often became “little more than a *stimulus* for a composition which was developed in complete independence of it.”¹⁵⁹³ Thus, as Le Deaut explains, “the rabbis were sometimes compelled to explain passages *in contradiction* to their true meaning in order to make observance of them possible in their time”.¹⁵⁹⁴ Accordingly, in “rabbinism” there is no systematic unity. “Always divergent opinions are possible.”¹⁵⁹⁵

Further, this whole approach means that for some (particularly in the more modern western world) rabbinic *midrash* is more or less synonymous with legend, moral fable or the

¹⁵⁸⁸ Le Deaut, “Apropos a Definition of Midrash,” 272.

¹⁵⁸⁹ See Doeve, *Jewish Hermeneutics in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts*, 48.

¹⁵⁹⁰ See Doeve, *Jewish Hermeneutics in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts*, 89.

¹⁵⁹¹ See Le Deaut, “Apropos a Definition of Midrash,” 274-75.

¹⁵⁹² Le Deaut, “Apropos a Definition of Midrash,” 274.

¹⁵⁹³ See Le Deaut, “Apropos a Definition of Midrash,” 274. (Emphasis original)

¹⁵⁹⁴ Le Deaut, “Apropos a Definition of Midrash,” 275. (Emphasis original)

¹⁵⁹⁵ See Doeve, *Jewish Hermeneutics in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts*, 93.

antithesis of history.¹⁵⁹⁶ For instance, according to R. H. Gundry, “we have to say that Matthew did not write entirely reportorial history. Comparison with *midrashic* and haggadic literature of his era suggests he did not intend to do so.”¹⁵⁹⁷ Thus, in his opinion, “(T)he first gospel repeatedly offers data leading to the conclusion that to make certain didactic and hortatory points Matthew edited historical traditions in unhistorical ways and in accord with *midrashic* and haggadic practices to which he and his first readers were accustomed.”¹⁵⁹⁸ However, Gundry goes on and maintains that “because he (Matthew) intended not only to pass on historical information but also to elaborate on its significance by embellishing it, the judgment ‘unhistorical’ concerning this or that element in his gospel ought not to carry negative overtones.”¹⁵⁹⁹

(3) The important question arises: Where today are examples of *midrash* to be found?

(a) Perhaps in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

(b) In the Targums. Thus, according to Le Deaut “the Targum itself is *midrashic* precisely to the extent that it suggests new meanings, often very far from the texts in which they originated (cf. Targum to Lev. 18:21).”¹⁶⁰⁰

(c) In the Jewish *Mishnah* (compiled 135 - c. 220 C.E.) and the Talmud (compiled c. 500 C.E.). With regard to these two sources the important question arises: do they give reliable information about conditions, and so on, which prevailed in Judaism before 70 C.E.?¹⁶⁰¹

¹⁵⁹⁶ See Le Deaut, “Apropos a Definition of Midrash,” 262.

¹⁵⁹⁷ Gundry, “A Theological Postscript,” 629.

¹⁵⁹⁸ Gundry, “A Theological Postscript,” 639.

¹⁵⁹⁹ Gundry, “A Theological Postscript,” 639. Interestingly Gundry, who holds that the First Gospel was written by the Apostle Matthew, draws attention to a paradox – that the establishing of the Matthean Apostolic authorship of the First Gospel does not necessarily increase or guarantee its historical reliability, for “apostolic authorship of Matthew and *midrashic* and haggadic style go well together.” (See Gundry, “A Theological Postscript,” 636).

¹⁶⁰⁰ Le Deaut, “Apropos a Definition of Midrash,” 275. (Emphasis original). According to Le Deaut for the New Testament it is important to study the tendency to “targumization”, a phenomenon of (rabbinic) hermeneutics. He thus refers to the Johannine discourses as an example of “an inspired targumizing of an Aramaic sayings tradition.” (See Le Deaut, “Apropos a Definition of Midrash,” 279-80).

¹⁶⁰¹ Doeve, *Jewish Hermeneutics in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts*, 41-45. See Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*. 52, who warns that the *Mishnah* may not be employed indiscriminately to describe Galilean life as such prior to the end of the Bar Kosiba rebellion (135 C.E.). For more recent discussion of ancient Jewish literature see Charlotte E. Fonrobert & Martin S. Jaffee, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

(d) In the New Testament Scriptures. The suggestion that the New Testament Scriptures are to be approached and understood as Christian *midrash* and Haggadah has in recent decades created much debate, and in some quarters, considerable disquiet.¹⁶⁰² That the NT Scriptures do contain some *midrash* seems beyond doubt. The debate is, thus, about its nature and extent. J. W. Doeve, for instance, suggests that Mark 13 (and parallels) with its many OT quotations could be spoken of as a “haggadah upon the end of the world” rather than as an “apocalypse.”¹⁶⁰³ He further suggests that passages like Luke 2:40-52, Luke 19:10-11, and those depicting Jesus’ baptism reflect *midrash*.¹⁶⁰⁴ The Apostle Paul, in 2 Cor 3, and certainly in 1Cor.10:1-5 (cf. also Gal. 3:16), resorts to the *midrashic* approach to Scripture.¹⁶⁰⁵ Consequently, Doeve concludes, “In our opinion ... the Jewish method of using and expounding Scripture seems to contain the key to the solution of more than one problem in the New Testament.”¹⁶⁰⁶ Further, a flood of light is shed on some NT passages by the following very important observation made by R. Le Deaut – namely, “The New Testament inherited an *interpreted* Bible in which *midrash* played a large role; many of the aggadic exegeses had become common and traditional and were continually repeated in the liturgy of the synagogues. This explains how our authors were able to appeal to text whose overtones are lost for us and to traditions for which we have to struggle to recover even the slightest echo. To present Jesus and his work they used a richer palette than the Old Testament alone, as well as very wide room for play in their use of the data.”¹⁶⁰⁷

Two Examples of Christian Midrash.

A) J. A. Sanders Isaiah 61:1-2 as recorded in Luke 4:16-20.

¹⁶⁰² See Gundry, “A Theological Postscript,” 623-640; See also D. A. Carson, “Gundry on Matthew: A Critical Review,” *Trinity Journal* 3 (1982): 71-91; Norman L. Geisler, “Is there Madness in the Method? A Rejoinder to R. H. Gundry,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 26 (1983): 101-108; J. W. Scott, “Matthew’s Intention to Write History,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 47 (1985): 68-82.

¹⁶⁰³ Doeve, *Jewish Hermeneutics in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts*, 49.

¹⁶⁰⁴ See Doeve, *Jewish Hermeneutics in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts*, 105, 143, 159.

¹⁶⁰⁵ See Doeve, *Jewish Hermeneutics in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts*, 110-1.

¹⁶⁰⁶ Doeve, *Jewish Hermeneutics in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts*, 207.

¹⁶⁰⁷ Le Deaut, “Apropos a Definition of Midrash,” 277. (Emphasis original). In fn 65 Le Deaut writes: “cf. the examples in which the verb *graphein* is not in fact followed by any quotation [listed in Doeve, *Jewish Hermeneutics in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts*, 96 (Namely, Matt 26:24; Mark 9:12; Luke 18:31; 21:22)]: Jesus must be appealing to a traditional exegesis and applying it to himself.”

Since the rabbinic *midrashic* approach to Scriptures was prevalent in NT times the question arises: did Jesus himself in his teaching use the *midrashic* method, and did the NT writers use *midrash* (that is, is there Christian *midrash*)? According to some this question is to be answered positively. For instance, in the opinion of J. A. Sanders¹⁶⁰⁸ a good example of Jesus', and also early Christian *midrash*, is to be found in Jesus' comments on Isaiah 61:1-2 as recorded in Luke 4:16-30. Luke depicts Jesus¹⁶⁰⁹ saying: "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21) In effect, Jesus is depicted as declaring that with his coming "the acceptable year of the Lord" ("the year of the Lord's favour") (Luke 4:19; cf. Isa 61:2a) has arrived.¹⁶¹⁰ Jesus' *midrash*, his interpretation of Scripture, however caused his listeners to take deep offence. Thus, as Sanders notes, "Luke forces us to ask what it was that happened within verses 23 to 37 that would cause a receptive congregation to turn into an angry mob."¹⁶¹¹ To answer this question Sanders contrasts the beliefs and hopes of the Qumran sectarians with those of the early Christians as portrayed by Luke. (The contrast, as will be seen sheds interesting light on the passage, Matt 27:51b-53, the concern of this thesis.)

According to Sanders "there were two hermeneutic axioms operative at Qumran."¹⁶¹² The first was eschatological, relating to the End Time. Thus, "at Qumran prophecy had as its content the End Time, and the present is the End Time."¹⁶¹³ The second hermeneutic axiom was constitutive – "that is, it marshalled scriptural authority in service of Qumran ideology."¹⁶¹⁴ And this ideology was in essence, that the Qumran covenanters "were to fulfill the role of the central *personae dramatis* of the End Time ... (they were)... the true Israel of the End Time."¹⁶¹⁵ Thus, despite their imperfections and failings they believed that "when the great day came they would

¹⁶⁰⁸ See Sanders, "From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4."

¹⁶⁰⁹ The important question of whether the historical Jesus actually spoke these words, or whether they have been attributed to him by Luke, will not be discussed here. Luke's point remains valid whatever answer is adopted.

¹⁶¹⁰ It would seem that Luke wants it to be understood that that which the rabbis taught as being in the future, Jesus taught as being now, in the present.

¹⁶¹¹ Sanders, "From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4," 93.

¹⁶¹² Sanders, "From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4," 94.

¹⁶¹³ Sanders, "From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4," 94.

¹⁶¹⁴ Sanders, "From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4," 95.

¹⁶¹⁵ Sanders, "From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4," 94. (Emphasis original.)

be the objects of the blessings the Bible would allow.”¹⁶¹⁶ Consequently, in the Eschaton God’s wrath would be directed against an “out group”¹⁶¹⁷ while his mercy would be directed toward the “in group” (who, of course, were the Essenes, the members of the Qumran community). There was, it seems, no one among the Qumran covenanters, like the prophet Jeremiah, to challenge their self-confidence. Thus, “the Essenes never in their commentaries interpreted scripture as judgmental of themselves in terms of their basic claims ... No scripture is ever interpreted as a judgment or challenge to their own theology or ideology, or to their confidence in their blissful destiny in the End time.”¹⁶¹⁸

Like the Essenes the early Christians were also convinced that the relevance of scripture was to the End time of their day. Thus for them, Christ “was the true Israel and, in him, the Church the New Israel of God. In their belief, the truth of the OT was revealed only when contemporized to their day through the Christ figure as initial fulfilment of all that was there.”¹⁶¹⁹ Consequently, according to Sanders, in the NT literature is “the actual self-expression of a people who regarded Christ and everything surrounding him as the embodiment of the fulfillable Word of God.”¹⁶²⁰

Furthermore, Luke 4:23-30 reveals the radicalness of Jesus’ *midrash*. By an “enriching juxtaposition of the acts of Elijah and Elisha and Isaiah 61”¹⁶²¹ Jesus shows *who* the poor, the captives, the blind and oppressed would be. These words do not apply exclusively to any in group like the Essenes but, on the contrary, “apply to those to whom God wishes them to apply. God *sent* ... Elijah and Elisha to outsiders, the Sidonian Widow and the Syrian Leper.”¹⁶²²

¹⁶¹⁶ Sanders, “From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4,” 95.

¹⁶¹⁷ That is, the enemies of the Essenes. Note that in quoting Isa 61 Jesus omitted the phrase “and the vengeance of our God.”

¹⁶¹⁸ Sanders, “From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4,” 95.

¹⁶¹⁹ Sanders, “From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4,” 96.

¹⁶²⁰ Sanders, “From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4,” 96.

¹⁶²¹ Sanders, “From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4,” 97.

¹⁶²² Sanders, “From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4,” 97.

Thus, in the Eschaton it is not what humans have pleasure in, or accept, but what is acceptable to God that matters.

It is important to note that in effect Jesus is depicted as turning Isa. 61:1-2, a very popular passage, into a word of judgment and a challenge to the prevailing definitions of “Israel”. Verse 23 makes it clear that Jesus anticipated that his words would incite great anger (as vv. 28-9 confirm). Further, as Sanders explains, if Jesus was a true prophet then, in a certain Elijah-type biblical tradition, he “must cast a light of scrutiny upon his own people from the very source of authority on which they rely for their identity, existence and self-understanding.”¹⁶²³ Jesus, however, not only claimed to be a prophet, he also claimed to be the one anointed by the Spirit spoken of in Isa. 61:1 – that is, to be the Messiah. According to Sanders “at Qumran the mebasser¹⁶²⁴ of Isa. 61:1 was interpreted as the Melchizedeq of Ps 110:4, a heavenly judging and redeeming figure who would come at the head of the angelic armies to redeem the true Israel, i.e. Qumran, and wreck vengeance and retribution on all her enemies, human and cosmic.”¹⁶²⁵ However, “Jesus, by contrast, arrogates this passage of unique prophetic authority ... to himself and apparently insists that what is *dektos* [δέκτος = acceptable], *eudokia* [εὐδοκία = good pleasure, favour] or *razon* [Hebrew רָצוֹן = goodwill, delight] is totally God’s free choice alone. It must be emphasized that in the highly charged eschatological atmosphere of Qumran and the NT, this would not have been divine largesse to outsiders on the way to final truth, it would be, as so often elsewhere in Luke, the final demonstration of the meaning of election.”¹⁶²⁶ In other words, “Luke’s point is that the Nazareth congregation rejected Jesus precisely because he preached Isa.61 in the way he did – by applying the hermeneutic axiom of prophetic critique even to the End Time.”¹⁶²⁷

I have outlined Sanders’ comments on Luke 4:16-30 at some length because what is said in Luke 4:16-30 is, to my mind, broadly similar to the message of Matthew 27:51b-53, 54. Both

¹⁶²³ Sanders, “From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4,” 99.

¹⁶²⁴ “The herald of the great Day.” See Sanders, “From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4,” 93.

¹⁶²⁵ Sanders, “From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4,” 103.

¹⁶²⁶ Sanders, “From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4,” 103.

¹⁶²⁷ Sanders, “From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4,” 103.

passages are concerned about the Eschaton, and about who will constitute the true Israel of the End Time. As we have seen, according to Luke Jesus declared that with his coming the End Time, “the acceptable year of the Lord” had arrived (cf. Luke 4:21: “*Today...*”). And with regard to the membership of the true Israel Jesus was emphatic, much to his listeners chagrin, that the Lord God had determined that among the true Israel would be outsiders, Gentiles (cf. Luke 4:25-28).¹⁶²⁸

Likewise in Matt 27:51b-53, 54 there is the combination of factors relating to the End Time, and suggestions about the constitution of God’s redeemed people. With the death of Jesus the last Age (or at least a new, different Age) is inaugurated (cf. Matt 27:51b-52), and the reaction of the Roman soldiers (cf. Matt 27:54) suggests that God’s mercy will extend even to the Gentiles. Thus, Matt 27:51b-53, 54 reflects two concerns which were clearly divisive issues at the beginning of the Christian Faith – namely, the timing of the Eschaton and the membership of God’s redeemed people (cf. Acts 22:21-22).

B The Contribution of R. D. Aus

A recent major contribution to the understanding of Matt 27:51b-53 in the context of Jewish *midrash* has been attempted by R. D. Aus.¹⁶²⁹ While perhaps rather radical, yet Aus’ comments are nevertheless important. Accordingly, some space will be devoted to an analysis of his approach.

Concerned about the lack of recognition of Samuel’s relevance to the “New” Testament, Aus’ book is an attempt to partly alleviate this deficit.¹⁶³⁰ Accordingly, in chapter 1

¹⁶²⁸ See Sanders, “From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4,” 104. Note: “Jesus was rejected at Nazareth ... at the beginning of his ministry for the same reason that he was put to death at its end – his refusal to limit salvation to his own fatherland.” (J. Bajard, cited in Sanders, “From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4,” 104).

¹⁶²⁹ See Aus’ book, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*.

¹⁶³⁰ Aus finds evidence for the “early and extensive Palestinian haggadic development of 1 Samuel 28” in the Septuagint, Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), Pseudo-Philo and Josephus (See Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 113-14). In addition to the Judaic interpretation of 1 Sam. 28, Judaic interpretation of Psalm 22, and especially of Esther 4:16-5:2, also provides background to the prodigia at Jesus’ death (See Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 124-127; See also Roger D. Aus, “The Release of Barabbas (Mark 15:6-15 par.; John 18:39-40) and Judaic Traditions on the Book of Esther,” in *Barabbas and Esther and Other Studies in*

Aus interprets the narrative of the 12 year old boy Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:41-51a) in the light of the Judaic traditions regarding the boy Samuel in the Temple (1 Sam 1-3). In chapter 2 Aus deals with Jesus' rejection at Nazareth (Mark 6:1-6a) in the light of the Judaic tradition about the rejection of Saul who had been anointed King by Samuel (1 Sam. 9-15). In chapter 3 Aus describes the Judaic background of the three prodigia at Jesus' crucifixion – namely, the earthquake and the saints rising from the dead (Matt 27:51b-53), the sun's eclipse (Mark 15:33 //s), and the tearing of the Temple curtain (Mark 15:38 //s).

According to Aus none of the three pericopes analyzed are historical. The stories of the 12 year old Jesus, and his later rejection at Nazareth, “were constructed decades later by Palestinian Jewish Christians on the basis of ‘Old’ Testament and Judaic models in order to express *religious truths* ... (something) ... typical of Judaic *haggadah*. (Further) ... the 3 hour solar eclipse at Jesus' crucifixion ... is astronomically impossible. For the first Christians, all Jews, it expressed however the religious truth that God was in mourning for His only Son.”¹⁶³¹

Further, it is Aus' contention that the Judaic tradition relating especially to 1 Sam. 28:15, “Samuel said to Saul, ‘Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?’”, provided the background for a Palestinian Jewish Christian (or possibly Christians) who composed the account of the prodigia at the death of Jesus on the cross. It also, Aus contends, provided a Palestinian Jewish Christian with the background for the words of Jesus to the criminal crucified with him: “Today you will be with me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:43).

Beginning with the earthquake and the saints rising from the dead (Matt 27:51b-53), Aus maintains that in view of its peculiar terminology and grammar it is most probable that Matthew appropriated this pericope from elsewhere.¹⁶³² Aus also accepts as original in v. 53, and this is central to his whole argument, the weakly supported text, οὐτῶν (“their”) rather

the Judaic Illumination of earliest Christianity (ed. Roger D. Aus; Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1992).

¹⁶³¹ Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, xiv- xv.

¹⁶³² But from where? I argue that this pericope, Matt 27:51b-53, to have had any sense, must from its beginning have been part of some version of Jesus' passion.

than the much better supported text, αὐτοῦ (“his”)¹⁶³³ He argues that a later editor, or copyist, made the change “for reasons of piety” in order to make clear that Christ was the “first fruit” of the resurrection of all those who had fallen asleep (1 Cor 15:20, 23; cf. Col 1:18). Aus explains that this (alleged) later change (from αὐτῶν to αὐτοῦ meant that “the dead saints were now raised *after* Jesus on Easter Sunday and not together with him on Good Friday.”¹⁶³⁴ These last few words “and not together with him on Good Friday” require some explanation. Aus’ argument here has, as it were, experienced an ellipsis - some important steps have been missed out. Thus, unless one is aware of some of his basic assumptions, his words here seem to be quite misleading. For, Matt 27:52 clearly implies that the holy ones were raised at the moment of Jesus’ death. (And μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ (v. 53)) can only mean that these raised holy ones later *appeared* in Jerusalem *after* Jesus’ rising on Easter Sunday). Matt 27:51b-53 thus does not say that Jesus was raised on Good Friday, nor that some holy ones were also raised with him on Good Friday (as Aus’ words seem to imply).

However, on the other hand, and this is the explanation of Aus’ enigmatic words (and the crux of his argument), Aus assumes that in the very early Church some did believe that Jesus had experienced “resurrection”, together with others, at the moment of his death. Hopefully in what follows, Aus’ reasons for making this assumption, and the ensuing implications, will become clear.

According to Aus the connection between 1 Samuel 28 and the events of Jesus’ crucifixion lies in the fact that in Judaic interpretation 1 Samuel 28 was understood as relating to the Day of Judgment which involved the premature rising of many deceased righteous. Aus¹⁶³⁵ draws attention to the fact that in the Judaic understanding of the last Judgment the Lord gathers all the nations against Jerusalem to battle (cf. Ezekiel 38-39, the forces of Gog and Magog) and especially Zech. 14:1- 5 where mention of the splitting of the Mt. of Olives (v.4), earthquake (v.5), and holy ones (v.5) reflect the events depicted in Matt 27:51b-53. Further, Ezek. 37 was the “*haftarah*” or prophetic reading for the second day of Passover in

¹⁶³³ Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 73, fn 304.

¹⁶³⁴ Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 117 (Emphasis original).

¹⁶³⁵ Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 117-8.

Babylonia.¹⁶³⁶ Accordingly, Aus notes¹⁶³⁷ that in 1 Sam 28:24 the medium of Endor hastily bakes “unleavened bread” for Saul and his servants, which is reminiscent of Passover (Exod 12:15-20; Deut 16:3-4). And since Jesus was crucified at Passover (Mark 14:12-16, 26 //s), Aus suggests that a Palestinian Jewish Christian could have associated Ezek 37:12-14 with the holy ones coming out of their tombs and entering the holy city (Matt 27:52-53).

According to Aus in Judaic tradition the raising of Samuel (1 Sam 28) was associated with the final resurrection “of the dead, immediately preceding the Final Judgment, as in Matt 27:51b-53.”¹⁶³⁸ Pseudo-Philo, for example, shows that 1 Sam. 28:15 was already interpreted in a Palestinian pre-Christian Judaic source as Samuel’s believing the final judgment had arrived. For this reason the prophet now rose from the dead.¹⁶³⁹ Aus refers to rabbinic sources which corroborate this thought.¹⁶⁴⁰ One such source¹⁶⁴¹ has Samuel, thinking that it was the Day of Judgment, bringing Moses with him so that Moses could attest that he (Samuel) had fulfilled everything in the Torah.¹⁶⁴² However, other Rabbinic sources¹⁶⁴³ suggest that it was not Moses but “many righteous persons” who ascended with Samuel from the dead at that time. Aus thus suggests that in light of the Mount of Olives setting (Zech 14) for the rising of the dead at Jesus’ crucifixion, the Palestinian Jewish Christian author of Matt 27:51b-53 changed “the many righteous” to “many saints / holy ones” (cf. Zech 14:5).¹⁶⁴⁴ Consequently, Aus continues: “the

¹⁶³⁶ See *b.Meg.* 31a (Soncino 189).

¹⁶³⁷ Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 120.

¹⁶³⁸ Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 120.

¹⁶³⁹ Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 121.

¹⁶⁴⁰ Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 121-2.

¹⁶⁴¹ *Lev. Rab.* ‘Emor 26 / 7 on Lev. 20:27.

¹⁶⁴² Aus notes (Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 122) that in 1 Sam 28:15 the word “disturbed” is the hiphal of רָדַד, which in the qal can mean “quake, tremble, shake” and is frequently employed of the earth’s quaking, trembling and shaking (cf. 1 Sam 4:15; Joel 2:10 (associated with a solar eclipse); Amos 8:8 (also associated with a solar eclipse in v.9); Ps. 77:19/18; Prov 30:21; Isa 14:16; Job 9:6; Isa 5:25; Ps 18:7/8. Accordingly, Aus suggests a link between “disturbed” of 1 Sam 28:15 and “the earth shook” of Matt 27:51b-53.

¹⁶⁴³ See Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 123.

¹⁶⁴⁴ Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 123-4. The question also arises: Was the author of Matt 27:51b-53 also influenced by Daniel 12:2? But (i) Dan 12:2 speaks not of any specific group but only of “many” being raised; and (ii) in Dan 12:2 the many dead awakened are not associated with a specific person, whereas in Judaic comment on 1 Sam. 28:13 & 15 the many righteous people who arise do so at the rising from the dead of the individual, Samuel. Cf. the parallel with Matt 27:51b-53. The supposed parallel, however, breaks down if, as Matt 27:51b-53 declares, the “many holy ones” rise not at Jesus’ rising but at his

many righteous who accompany Samuel err, thinking the resurrection of the dead and the day of Judgment have arrived. It is not stated what they do after rising with Samuel. The same is true in Matthew for the many saints who, when the individual dies, rise from their tombs near Jerusalem and enter the holy city, Jerusalem, appearing to many people. They, too, err, thinking that at Jesus' death, he immediately rises, and that the general resurrection, the turn of the ages before the Final Judgment, has thus arrived. After they enter Jerusalem, they too, are never heard of again."¹⁶⁴⁵

In the light of all this Aus concludes that Matt 27:51b-53 was not composed by Matthew, is not concerned with Jesus' "descent to Hades", is not of Hellenistic origin, is not a Jewish apocalyptic hymn describing the resurrection of the dead in the final age, is not a dramatization of John 5:25-29, and so on.¹⁶⁴⁶ All of these suggestions about the origin of Matt 27:51b-53 fail to recognize the major background of these verses – that is, the Judaic tradition on 1 Sam. 28 which speaks of the rising of many righteous persons who thought the Day of Judgment had arrived, but who, in this matter, erred.¹⁶⁴⁷

Aus sums up his understanding of the pericope, Matt 27:51b-53 with these words, "a good case can be made for Matt 27:51b-53 as a remnant of an extremely old tradition, one which was even earlier than, or at least as early as, the "after three days" tradition Paul notes in 1 Cor 15:3."¹⁶⁴⁸ By "an extremely old tradition" Aus is referring to the (alleged) very early, and very Jewish, Christian belief that "already at Jesus' death the turn of the ages had arrived."¹⁶⁴⁹ Further, it is alleged that this very early Christian tradition declared that at his death Jesus ascended to God, that at that very moment he was elevated and exalted from the Cross, not three days later.¹⁶⁵⁰

death. Aus' argument, of course, assumes that the original author of Matt 27:51b-53, under the influence of the Judaic interpretation of 1 Sam 28, equated Jesus' death with his resurrection.

¹⁶⁴⁵ Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 124.

¹⁶⁴⁶ Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 129 (For Aus' reference to John 5:25-29, see Essame, "Matthew xxvii. 51-54 and John v. 25-29," 103).

¹⁶⁴⁷ See Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 130.

¹⁶⁴⁸ Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 133.

¹⁶⁴⁹ Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 131.

¹⁶⁵⁰ Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 131. Cf. how in John's Gospel Jesus' death is depicted as bringing glorification (John. 12:20-33). Cf. also 2 Kgs 2:12 – Elisha's tearing of his own garments into two at the

Consequently, in the light of the Judaic interpretation of 1 Sam. 28 Aus suggests that at Jesus' death, and his elevation from the cross, many of the pious dead thought the general resurrection had arrived and so arose with him.¹⁶⁵¹ However, in this they erred.¹⁶⁵² And, according to Aus, the very earliest Christians also erred. Despite "their original eschatological fervor" they came "to the realization that first the gospel must be preached to all the nations (Mark 13:10 //s), allowing others also to partake in the salvation God offers in the Messiah Jesus. Only then would God cause all the dead to rise and the Final Judgment to take place."¹⁶⁵³

Not surprisingly, according to Aus, Matt 27:51b-53 was not meant to be taken literally. Rather, using metaphysical language, it stated theologically that already at Jesus' death the turn of the ages had arrived.¹⁶⁵⁴ Thus, while not "historical" yet Matt 27:51b-53 is "true" in a religious sense.¹⁶⁵⁵ In Aus' opinion the early Jewish Christian who was the author of Matt 27:51b-53 "intended it for use in the early Palestinian congregations, when they pondered the meaning of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. He therefore most probably composed it in his native Aramaic ..."¹⁶⁵⁶ Matthew, being bilingual, may have translated it into Greek or perhaps found it already translated and appropriated it from there.¹⁶⁵⁷

An important question arises: Why was this initial interpretation of Jesus' death (assuming that this was indeed the case) as the time of his ascension (understood also as his exaltation, and as his resurrection), at which others also rose from the dead, thinking the general resurrection and the Day of Judgment had arrived – why was it eventually discarded and replaced by the now more familiar thought that Jesus rose from the dead on the third day and

ascension of Elijah. Is there a parallel to be seen here with Jesus' dying, the tearing of the temple curtain into two, and Jesus' (alleged) "ascension" from the cross?

¹⁶⁵¹ This assumes that the pious dead somehow were conscious and so had some say as to when they would rise again. They were in the wings, as it were, eagerly awaiting the "cue", the green light, to spring up!

¹⁶⁵² See Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 131.

¹⁶⁵³ Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 131.

¹⁶⁵⁴ Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 131.

¹⁶⁵⁵ Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 132.

¹⁶⁵⁶ Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 133.

¹⁶⁵⁷ Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 133.

that the final End is still to happen?¹⁶⁵⁸ The following reasons have been suggested: (a) The realization that the news of the salvation achieved by Jesus through his death was to be first proclaimed to the Gentiles before the End would come. (b) The influence of OT passages such as Hosea 6:2 was so strong that the thought that something decisive happened on the third day came to predominate the Christians' thinking.¹⁶⁵⁹ (c) The whole concept that Jesus' death was also his "resurrection", while in harmony with the OT Jewish understanding of the End Time, created difficulties of interpretation, led to theological errors (cf. Docetism), and so was eventually changed. How then was this concept that Jesus' death was also his "resurrection" to be understood? (i) Did it mean that Jesus (body and soul) was "translated" from the cross to heavenly glory? (cf. Enoch and especially Elijah – see Matt 27:47-49). This approach opened the way to the Docetic contention that Jesus did not really die. (ii) Did it mean (as Matt 27:51b-53 suggests) that the resurrection at the moment of Jesus' death was confined to that of "the many holy ones" and that Jesus' resurrection was delayed until the third day? or (iii) Did it mean, as Aus suggests, that it was Jesus' soul that rose, ascended, to God from the cross?

According to Aus, the application of the Judaic interpretation of 1 Sam 28 to Matt 27:51b-53 only makes sense if they (the many bodies of deceased saints who were raised and who rose with Jesus) "are pictured as thinking Jesus' soul ascended to God from the cross."¹⁶⁶⁰ Aus finds support for this view in the following: (i) Luke 23:43 (which, according to Aus, is dependent on Judaic interpretation of 1 Sam. 28) has Jesus promising the repentant criminal: "Today you will be with me in Paradise." Not only is there no mention of "after three days", Jesus' words also presuppose that his soul ascends to heaven at the time of his death.¹⁶⁶¹ (ii) Luke 23:46 where Jesus quotes Ps 31:6/5 "Into Your hand I commit my spirit." Aus assumes that the rest of the Psalm verse, "you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God" describes Jesus

¹⁶⁵⁸ See Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 132.

¹⁶⁵⁹ Aus notes that at Jesus' crucifixion the darkness over the whole earth took place *before* his death. This, Aus suggests, was so that Amos 8:9 could be exactly fulfilled (noon = sixth hour, Mark 15:33). Aus writes, "The fulfillment of Scripture was so important for the Palestinian Jewish Christian author of this prodigium that he intentionally changed God's mourning for His only Son, Jesus, from the moment of his death to three hours before." (Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 137).

¹⁶⁶⁰ Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 173.

¹⁶⁶¹ Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 173.

“as being confident that God will redeem him from death at the moment he expires on the Cross, and not just after three days.¹⁶⁶² (iii) Aus¹⁶⁶³ draws attention to *Gos. Pet.* 19: καὶ ὁ κύριος ανεβόησε λεγὼν ἡ δύναμις μου, ἡ δύναμις, κατέλειψας με. καὶ εἰπὼν ἀνεληφθῆ¹⁶⁶⁴ “And the Lord called out and cried, ‘My power, my power, You have forsaken me!’ And having said this he was taken up.” The meaning of this passage depends on how “he” is understood. If “he” refers to Jesus (that is, body *and* soul) then the passage supports the concept of Jesus’ translation. (This would perhaps explain why the Docetists favoured this *Gospel of Peter*; for if Jesus was translated into heaven then it could be argued, as the Docetists did, that Jesus did not really suffer or die.) On the other hand, if “he” refers to Jesus’ soul then the implication is that Jesus suffered death – his body and soul were separated.

The origin of this view that Jesus’ soul ascended from the cross, Aus traces back to the Servant song of Isa 52:13-53:12.¹⁶⁶⁵ Since the exaltation of Isa 52:13 can only be thought of as taking place at the time of the Servant’s death (Isa 53:8-9) Aus suggests that the early Palestinian Jewish Christians would have understood Isa 53:8-9 as not applying to Jesus’ being “taken off “ to be crucified but rather that his soul was “taken away” to heaven at the moment of his death, before his body was placed in the grave of a rich man, Joseph of Arimathea. Further, this understanding of Jesus’ “resurrection” / exaltation as the heavenly ascent of his soul is reflected, according to Aus,¹⁶⁶⁶ in the quotation of Isa 53 found in Acts 8:32-33 where Jesus’ “humiliation” (on the cross) parallels his being “taken up from the earth.” Aus notes that “nothing is said here of a resurrection three days later.”

Aus also argues that the “Christ Hymn” found in Paul’s letter to the Phil 2:6-11, is “one of the earliest testimonies as to how the first Palestinian Jewish Christians viewed Jesus’ humiliation on the Cross and exaltation. To do so, they employed motifs and vocabulary from

¹⁶⁶² Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 173. However, could not Jesus’ use of Ps 31:6/5 also be construed to mean that he expected to be redeemed, that is “resurrected” (body and soul) at the moment of his death?

¹⁶⁶³ Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 174.

¹⁶⁶⁴ See Mara, *Evangile de Pierre: Introduction, Texte Critique, Traduction, Commentaire et Index*, 48.

¹⁶⁶⁵ Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 174-5.

¹⁶⁶⁶ Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 176, fn 313.

the Suffering Servant Song of Isa 52:13-53:12, including the servant's being "exalted" at the time of his death, when he was "taken away."¹⁶⁶⁷ Consequently, for Aus, "the Christ Hymn of Philippians, most probably originally in Aramaic, is thus a major support for the thesis that the idea of the ascent of Jesus' soul from the Cross, his 'exaltation', basically derives from the Suffering Servant Song of Isa 52:13-53:12, especially verses 52:13 and 53:8. When the repentant crucified criminal is described in Luke 23:43 as being with Jesus in Paradise on the same day, and many of the deceased saints rise from their tombs already at Jesus' death in Matt 27:51b-53, these two passages from the Synoptics reflect the same early Christology found in the Christ Hymn of Philippians two: Jesus was exalted already at his death on the Cross, or expressed differently, his soul already then ascended to his heavenly Father."¹⁶⁶⁸

Aus' words are challenging and call for comment. First, can Luke 23:43 and Matt 27:51b-53 be regarded as parallel? While Luke 23:43 may be construed to mean that Jesus' "soul" ascended from the cross at the moment of his death, yet Matt 27:51b-53 stresses that it was the *bodies* of the sleeping holy ones which were raised, not their "souls". This, in turn, raises the question of what concept of human nature Aus is using. His stress on the ascension of Jesus' "soul" from the cross seems to be more akin to the Greek understanding of the nature of humans – namely, that the human essence lies in the "soul" and that the physical body is something to be eventually discarded. In contrast, the Jewish understanding of humanity stresses the importance of the human body.¹⁶⁶⁹ Further, if as Aus stresses, Matt 27:51b-53 is to be understood in the context of *Jewish midrashic* interpretation, this surely means that the raising of the holy ones implies bodily resurrection, not the ascension to heaven of the "soul" freed from the earthly body.

¹⁶⁶⁷ Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 176-8.

¹⁶⁶⁸ Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 178. Aus also finds support for his proposal about the ascension of Jesus' soul from the cross in what 2 Macc 7 relates about a special resurrection to heaven directly after a martyr's death. (See Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 178-80).

¹⁶⁶⁹ Matt 22:31-32 makes this clear. The Patriarchs had experienced death yet, according to Jesus, they were still alive. God was their God. Death had not broken the union between God and the Patriarchs. But this survival of the "soul" is not resurrection – however, as Jesus explains, it implies future resurrection. The Patriarchs live, but until they have their resurrected bodies they are not complete.

Another question may also be asked: when Jesus (in Luke 23:43) said: “Today you will be with me in Paradise” what did he mean by “me”? To say that he meant his “soul” (apart from his body) is to read an alien meaning into his words. For, in actual fact, as a Jew, and with a Jewish understanding both of the nature of humans and of the eschatological EndTime, Jesus in all likelihood meant himself, his soon to be glorified body and soul. This seems to be clearly implied by Jesus’ words at the Last Supper (Matt 26:29) and especially his words addressed to the High Priest (Matt 26:64). Jesus was a man of faith. From Scripture he believed that it was God’s will for him to suffer on the Cross for the sin of the world. He also believed, on the basis of Scripture, that by doing so he would precipitate the last days, the supernatural Eschaton which he, and his fellow Jews, longed for. Did these hopes actually eventuate as a result of Jesus’ death? This is a difficult, and perhaps uncomfortable, area which is surrounded by great mystery. When did Jesus drink wine with his disciples in the Kingdom? When did the High Priest see Jesus coming with the clouds of heaven? Have these expectations been fulfilled, or do they still lie in the future? In the light of these questions, is Matthew saying in Matt 27:51b-53 that Jesus by his death did indeed bring in the End Times, but that – surprise, surprise – things turned out differently from what everyone, even Jesus, expected? God, in His wisdom, did a new thing – He made a new revelation – to the effect that His mercy and salvation was to be proclaimed also to the Gentiles. (This, to my mind, is the clear import of Matt 27:54 – the Roman soldiers, Gentiles, are converted – they confess Jesus to be the Son of God.) Accordingly the appearance of the new Age, already inaugurated through Jesus’ death and partially underway (cf. the resurrection of the holy ones), has been placed, according to Matthew, on temporary hold. When, however, the task of the mission to the Gentiles is achieved, the Eschaton which has been initiated, and is even now hovering in the wings, chaffing at the bit, as it were, will then suddenly be fully manifested.

Returning now to Aus’ argument - his contention is that right at the very beginning of the Christian faith Jesus’ “resurrection” was understood as the ascension of his soul to heaven

from the cross. This, however, requires him to explain why the Gospels also understand “resurrection” to mean that the crucified body of Jesus which was interred in a tomb was miraculously raised to new life on the first day of the week so that Jesus’ tomb was found to be empty.¹⁶⁷⁰ Aus’ answer is that the very early Christians, for a variety of reasons, found it necessary not only to suppress the belief in the ascension of Jesus’ soul to heaven from the cross, but also to stress that it was indeed his body that had been raised.¹⁶⁷¹ Accordingly, Aus notes that when Jesus was taken captive in the Garden of Gethsemane, *all* his followers forsook him and fled (Mark. 14:50 //s; cf. v. 27). Thus, “no one knew any longer exactly where Jesus was buried near Jerusalem because, out of fear, *all* his adherents had fled far north to escape the same fate as their master.”¹⁶⁷² However the rise of Docetism, which maintained that Jesus had only apparently died, created problems for the early Christians. Consequently, to counter Docetic speculation the (unknown) whereabouts of Jesus’ body had to be explained. Thus, by relating the burial of Jesus (cf. Mark 15:42-47 //s), the fact that his tomb was guarded (Matt 27:62-66) and that the risen Jesus possessed “a tangible body” (John 20:25, 27 cf. Luke 24:39), the Gospel writers countered the Docetic claim that Jesus had only experienced an apparent death. Accordingly, the historicity of all these accounts is dismissed by Aus. For him, “the entire narrative of the burial of Jesus by Joseph of Arimathea, in a specific tomb, the site observed by some female followers of Jesus, is a typically Jewish haggadic development to explain what actually happened to Jesus’ body, whose burial site was simply unknown.”¹⁶⁷³ Furthermore, according to Aus, the very strong influence of Scripture, especially Hos 6:2 (“After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up”) “made it extremely difficult for the early Palestinian Jewish Christian view that Jesus’ soul had already ascended to heaven from the Cross to maintain itself.”¹⁶⁷⁴ Thus, in Aus’ opinion, “to resolve the question of

¹⁶⁷⁰ This point also requires to be answered by those who maintain that initially “resurrection” was understood as the “translation” of Jesus rather than the ascension of his soul from the cross to heaven.

¹⁶⁷¹ See Aus, *Samuel, Saul, Jesus*, 180-87.

¹⁶⁷² Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 182. (Emphasis original). Aus’ argument, it seems, requires a strictly literal understanding of the word ‘*all*’.

¹⁶⁷³ Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 182. For a different, more positive, approach to the question of the “historicity” of these accounts, see Scott, “Matthew’s Intention to Write History,” 68-82.

¹⁶⁷⁴ Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 180.

the unknown burial site of Jesus' body, and to fulfil Scripture (important for gaining Jewish converts) the ascension or resurrection of his soul from the Cross was later modified to mean that God raised him, soul *and* body, 'after two days,' 'on the third day,' from a specific tomb into which Joseph of Arimathea had placed him."¹⁶⁷⁵ Thus "the problem of the unknown site of Jesus' grave, leading to Docetic reproaches, was solved via the Joseph of Arimathea narrative, and Scripture (Hos 6:2) was simultaneously fulfilled. For these reasons, already at a very early time there was little interest in retaining traditions such as Luke 23:43 and Matt 27:51b-53. They were suppressed by the great majority of Christians."¹⁶⁷⁶ In fact, according to Aus, "in light of the extremely great influence scriptural texts exerted which were associated in early Judaism with God's rescuing an Israelite from the greatest peril "after three days" and with resurrection, it is remarkable that the earlier view of Jesus' soul ascending to heaven already at his death on the Cross was not suppressed by the mainstream tradition even more. In retrospect, we must be grateful to the Palestinian Jewish Christian communities which dared, probably in spite of great opposition, to preserve traditions such as Luke 23:43, Matt 27:51b-53, and the *Gospel of Peter* 5:19. The ascension of Jesus' soul from the Cross at his death, to be with God today in Paradise, and the concomitant rising from the dead of many deceased saints, are indeed remnants of a very early Christology, part of bedrock tradition. ..."¹⁶⁷⁷ Aus concludes as follows: "I therefore suggest that early Palestinian Jewish Christians borrowed Hos.6:2 from the context of the 'agony of death' of Israel's redeemer Esther, which included use of Psalm 22, and applied it to describe God's rescuing His only Son, the Redeemer Jesus, from the agony of his Crucifixion, also described in terms of Psalm 22, by raising him 'after two days', 'on the third day,' i.e., on Easter Sunday from the grave."¹⁶⁷⁸

¹⁶⁷⁵ Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 183 (Emphasis original). Since in Judaic tradition Esther was revered as a "redeemer" of Israel, Aus suggests that motifs of Esther's most terrible hour were applied by the Palestinian Jewish Christians to Jesus' own "agony of death." He further suggests that Esth 5:1 (cf. Gen 22:4; 42:17; Jonah 2:1[1:17]), as well as Hos 6:2, may be cited as examples of God's never leaving His children alone for more than three days when they are in a terrible situation. (See Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 184. See also Aus, "The Release of Barabbas," 1-27).

¹⁶⁷⁶ Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 187. But why then have Luke, Matthew, and also *Gos. Pet.* 19 retained these traditions?

¹⁶⁷⁷ Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 187.

¹⁶⁷⁸ See Aus, *Samuel, Saul and Jesus*, 185.

APPENDIX G Comparison of Matthew's and Mark's Passion Accounts

Since a number of approaches to the understanding of Matt 27:51b-53 rest on the assumption that Matthew's account of Jesus' crucifixion is dependent, perhaps solely, on Mark's written account, the implications of the influence of oral tradition, raised by J. D. G. Dunn and others,¹⁶⁷⁹ must here be briefly considered. To accomplish this, some of the differences between Matthew's account of the crucifixion (from 27:32 to 27:56)¹⁶⁸⁰ and Mark's (15:20b-41) will first be noted.¹⁶⁸¹

- a) In the two accounts there is, in places, a different use of tenses. Matt mostly uses the past tense (except for v. 38 which has the present). Mark 15:20b-22a, 24, 27 have the present tense. Cf. Mark 15:22 – “they bring him” and Matt 27:33 – “they came”.¹⁶⁸²
- b) v. 32 - Matt says less about Simon from Cyrene than does Mark (15:21).
- c) v. 34 - Matt has “μετὰ χολῆς” (“with gall” cf. Ps 69:21). Mark 15:23 has “ἔσμυρνισμένον οἶνον” (“wine mixed, flavoured, with myrrh”).
- d) v. 35 – Matthew's account of the disposal of Jesus' clothes is briefer than that of Mark's (15:24).
- e) v.35f - Matthew omits Mark's reference to the third hour (Mark 15:25).
- f) v. 36 - There is no parallel in Mark to the soldiers sitting and guarding Jesus. (The same basic word for guarding (τηρεῖν) occurs in Matt 27:54 & 28:4).
- g) v. 37 - The inscription over Jesus' head is different from that in Mark's account (15:26).
- h) v. 40, 43 - The mockers use the title “Son of God”, whereas in Mark they do not use this title.

¹⁶⁷⁹ See Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*.

¹⁶⁸⁰ These verses are the immediate context, the matrix, of Matt 27:51b-53 the subject of this thesis.

¹⁶⁸¹ See Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:609.

¹⁶⁸² See Gnllka, *Das Matthäusevangelium*, 469.

- i) v. 41 - According to Matthew all three factions of the Sanhedrin were represented at the mockery: Chief priests, scribes and elders (presbyters). Mark only mentions chief priests and scribes (15:31).
- j) v. 46 - The transcriptions of the quotation of Ps 22:2 (both in the Semitic and the Greek) are different from those in Mark (15:34).
- k) v. 48-9 - Matthew makes a distinction between the “one” who ran and “the rest” who speak. In Mark it is all the same person who acts and who speaks (15:36).
- l) v. 50 – ἀφῆκεν τὸ πνεῦμα - describes Jesus’ death differently from Mark (15:37).
- m) vv. 51b-53 – found only in Matthew.
- n) v. 54 – The centurion (ἐκατόνταρχος) and his fellow soldiers see the earthquake and its aftermath, and confess Jesus as God’s Son (ἀληθῶς θεοῦ υἱὸς ἦν οὗτος). In Mark 15:39 only the centurion (κεντυρίων) confesses Jesus as Son of God (ἀληθῶς οὗτος ὁ ἄνθρωπος υἱὸς θεοῦ ἦν and he does so from witnessing the way in which Jesus dies. If Matthew is following Mark, then has he purposely deleted Mark’s “man” and changed “Son of God” (υἱὸς θεοῦ to “God’s Son” (θεοῦ υἱὸς in order to stress Jesus’ divine Sonship?
- o) v. 55-6 – While both Gospel writers name three women witnesses, the names are not exactly the same. Matthew mentions Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. Mark (15:40) speaks of Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and of Joses, and of Salome. Further, Matthew refers to these womenfolk in a different order from Mark. He mentions (i) their following Jesus, (ii) their ministry to his needs, and (iii) their names. Mark mentions (i) their names, then (ii) their following Jesus, and lastly (iii) their ministry to him.¹⁶⁸³ While these differences may be ascribed to Matthew’s revision of Mark, yet as J. Gnilka says, the influence of earlier oral tradition may also have to be reckoned with.¹⁶⁸⁴

¹⁶⁸³ Cf. this comment by Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 51: “my proposal that the women who were well known to them as witnesses to these crucial events in the origins of the Christian movement explains the variations among their lists of women as no other proposal has succeeded in doing.”

¹⁶⁸⁴ Gnilka, *Das Matthäusevangelium*, 469: “Im wesentlichen wird man diese Eingriffe MtR zuschreiben können. Doch wird man auch mit dem Einfluss vorgeprägter mündlicher Tradition rechnen dürfen.”

In the light of the above survey, some observations and comments may be made. It is clear that Matthew's account of Jesus' crucifixion is very close to that of Mark's (and vice versa). The outline and order of the two accounts are virtually identical. The differences, as the above survey shows, reside in the details. And further, as N. A. Dahl points out, "To compare Matthew and Mark with Luke and John makes the similarity between the first two especially striking. *They contain two variations of one and the same account.*"¹⁶⁸⁵ Thus, the issue is not so much the priority of Mark, or whether Matthew was acquainted with his Gospel. Rather, the vital questions are (i) what was the original account, the *Vorlage*, used by Matthew (and perhaps by Mark?) and (ii) how to explain the variations between the two crucifixion accounts.

To answer these questions two broad approaches currently contend for consideration:¹⁶⁸⁶

(a) The original account of Jesus' crucifixion used by Matthew was a written source - Mark's Gospel (or perhaps a written Ur-Mark). Accordingly, the differences between Matthew's and Mark's accounts are to be explained by Matthew's redaction of Mark. To illustrate: With regard to Matt 27:34 it is that Matthew has changed Mark's "myrrh" to "gall" in order to create an allusion to Ps 69: 21/22. Thus, whereas Mark's comments could be understood that the wine was given to Jesus out of compassion, as an anodyne, Matthew's alleged redaction stresses that it was, in line with his whole depiction of Jesus' crucifixion, given in mockery. If this is indeed the case then it could further be argued that the words of the centurion and those with him (Matt

¹⁶⁸⁵ Nils A. Dahl, "The Passion Narrative in Matthew," in *The Interpretation of Matthew* (ed. G. N. Stanton; Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1995), 53-58. Reprinted from N. A. Dahl, *Jesus in the Memory of the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976), 37-51. (Emphasis added). Note: Luke's account of the crucifixion, while broadly similar to that of Matthew and Mark, contains two additional blocks of material - Jesus' words addressed to the daughters of Jerusalem (23:27-31), and his words to the dying thief (23:39-43). Luke also mentions the tearing of the temple curtain *before* he relates the death of Jesus (23:45-46). With regard to contacts between Matthew's and John's accounts of the crucifixion the following have been noted: (i) In both accounts the name of Jesus is included in the inscription on the cross (Matt 27:37; John 19:19); (ii) There is a similarity in the way both describe Jesus' death - namely, an active giving up of the spirit. (Matt 27:50; John 19:30); (iii) The same word *διεμερίσσαντο* occurs in both (Matt 27:35; John 19:24). But this is probably because both are quoting Ps 22:19 (LXX 21:18).

¹⁶⁸⁶ It should be noted that the actual situation is not as black and white as the following brief outline might suggest. Thus, some who maintain that Matthew's Gospel is a literary revision of Mark's, also acknowledge that an intermingling of written and oral tradition must be reckoned with in Matthew's Gospel. See Dahl, "The Passion Narrative in Matthew," 54.

27:54) should perhaps be understood as sarcastic mockery rather than as the first confession by Gentiles of Jesus' true nature.¹⁶⁸⁷

(b) However, the similar structure and outline of Matthew's and Mark's passion accounts, along with their variations in details, can also, it is maintained, be just as satisfactorily explained, perhaps even more so, by the hypothesis of "informal, controlled oral tradition"¹⁶⁸⁸ which stresses the continuity of the main outline in an oral account, and yet allows flexibility in detail. On this approach, the variations between Matthew and Mark's account of Jesus' crucifixion arise basically because they are redacting differing, and even contradictory, oral traditions of the event. Thus, some of the differences between Matthew and Mark may be attributed simply to the vagaries which arise in the course of the transmission of oral tradition. For instance, whereas Mark says, "the curtain of the temple was torn *in two* from top to bottom" – "εἰς δύο ἀπ' ἄνωθεν ἕως κάτω" (15:38), Matthew says that it was torn "from top to bottom *in two*." – "ἀπ' ἄνωθεν ἕως κάτω εἰς δύο" (27:51). It is hard to see any reason why Matthew should have made this slight change.¹⁶⁸⁹ It can, however, be readily explained as the sort of thing that happens in oral transmission.¹⁶⁹⁰

Much more difficult to explain is why Matthew should have radically changed, or rather omitted, what Mark says in 15:39. According to Mark the centurion (κεντυρίων) in charge of the execution "stood facing Jesus" (ὁ παρεστηκὼς ἐξ ἐναντίας αὐτοῦ) when he died, and having thus witnessed his decease was so moved that he confessed Jesus as Son of

¹⁶⁸⁷ See Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 3:612; Schweizer, *The Good News according to Matthew*, 511; Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 277; See Sim, "The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles." Sim contends that Matthew's Gospel is basically hostile to the Gentiles.

¹⁶⁸⁸ As advocated by K. E. Bailey and championed by J. D. G. Dunn.

¹⁶⁸⁹ But see Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27,51b-53, 206, who feels that Matthew's alteration of Mark gives a more logical statement since it first enumerates the action and then afterwards its results. "La forma mateana es más lógica ya que enumera primero la acción misma y después su resultado." See also Maisch, "Die österliche Dimension des Todes Jesu: Zur Osterverkündigung in Matt 27, 51-54," 97, who suggests that by rearranging Mark's word order and by adding 'behold' to Mark's simple 'and', Matthew thereby recommends the events of vv.51-53 to the special attention of his readers.

¹⁶⁹⁰ Among the mss of the first Gospel there is considerable variation in the word order of v.51. Could this be interpreted to mean that behind our Matthew there was initially no fixed written source?

God (ἀληθῶς οὗτος ὁ ἄνθρωπος υἱὸς θεοῦ ἦν).¹⁶⁹¹ Matthew, on the other hand, has something quite different (27:54) and virtually contradicts Mark. Using a different word for the centurion (ἐκατόνταρχος), he links him with his fellow soldiers, and attributes their confession of Jesus as God’s Son to their witnessing the earthquake and its effects. Mark’s account is deeply moving. The hardened Roman soldier looking into the face of a dying man, Jesus, sees the revelation of the Son of God. And while various reasons have been suggested for Matthew’s change of Mark (e.g. he wanted (i) a plurality of witnesses to the events associated with Jesus’ death; or (ii) a confessing group to balance the mocking group of 27:39-43, 49; or (iii) to foreshadow the conversion of the Gentiles to Jesus, the Christ), yet could he not have achieved all this, and more, by including Mark’s words? Could not Matthew have said something along these lines: “And when the centurion facing Jesus saw him die he was so moved that he confessed, ‘Truly this man was (a) Son of God.’ And likewise his fellow soldiers seeing the earthquake and its effects echoed the same confession”? Was Matthew insensitive to the moving pathos and depth of Mark’s words, was he correcting Mark, or was he following a different tradition?

Arguments for, and against, these two differing approaches, (a) and (b), have been, and are being, put forth. Neither position has been fully established. Accordingly, no decision for one or the other of these two approaches will be made in this thesis. Rather, the whole complex issue of Matthew’s *Vorlage* will be left as an open question. Consequently, in this study of Matt 27:51b-53 the conclusions of both approaches will be considered and weighed.

The importance of considering these matters is that, if it is assumed that Matthew’s knowledge of Jesus’ passion depends *solely* on Mark’s written account then the question arises: where did Matthew obtain this unique material, Matt 27:51b-53, as well as other special

¹⁶⁹¹ Chronis, “The Torn Veil: Cultus and Christology in Mark 15:37-39,” 110, notes that “Mark’s description of the position of the centurion vis-à-vis the dying Jesus, ἐξ ἐναντίας αὐτοῦ (15:39), may possess a subtly cultic force. It utilizes ... one of the idiomatic expressions for entering the temple, for standing “in the presence” or “before the face” of God.” Thus in Chronis’ opinion, “while the rendering of the Temple veil does serve as a cipher for ‘temple destruction and rebuilding’ ... (it is also) ... a powerful index for divine self-disclosure and revelation. In Mark’s mind, the torn veil describes the ultimate theophany. The God whose פָּנֵי יְהוָה, whose ‘face’ or ‘presence’, was veiled within the *sanctum sanctorum* (Exod 33:11, 14) himself rips away the veil and shows his ‘face’, manifests his ‘presence’.”

material (e.g. 27:3-10; 19)? Was Matthew dependent on other literary sources or did he “create” this material? Further, if it is assumed that Matthew’s knowledge of Jesus’ passion rests solely on Mark, then this will get one off on the wrong foot, as it were, with regards to the understanding of the origin and purpose of Matt 27:51b-53. It would rule out, *a priori*, the possibility that Matt 27:51b-53 reflects a very early Jewish Christian understanding of what happened when Jesus, the Messiah, died on the cross. At the worst it may suggest to the reader that this enigmatic passage is an unwarranted, alien intrusion into the simple Markan account. This could result in the passage being “skipped over” as if it had no real contribution to the meaning not only of Jesus’ crucifixion but for his whole life.

Accordingly, a distinct advantage of the oral tradition hypothesis (that is, that Matthew had access to authoritative oral tradition as well as to written sources) is that it allows the reader to assume that Matthew had flexibility in the work of composing his Gospel. It enables the reader to sense that right from the beginning of his Gospel, Matthew intended to include these words of Matt 27:51b-53. This, in turn, encourages the reader to see these words not as a strange, abrupt, and unnecessary insertion into Mark’s account, but rather as an integral part of the whole of Matthew’s passion account and so to be understood in the light of all that Matthew has to say concerning Jesus.

APPENDIX H Is Canonical Matt 27:51b-53 the Original Text?

With regard to the question of whether canonical Matt 27:51b-53 represents the original or a post Matthean revised text, W. L. Petersen argues that the latter is the case. This contention is of importance and consideration of it cannot be evaded. If correct it would, in a very real sense, stymie much of the endeavour of this thesis which, among other things, is to discover why Matthew, and not a later redactor, included the words of Matt 27:51b-53 in his Gospel.

In a detailed article¹⁶⁹² which attempts to demonstrate “that Romanos ‘the Melodist’ is a witness to the Diatessaron of Tatian,”¹⁶⁹³ Petersen presents evidence¹⁶⁹⁴ which indicates that Romanos was familiar with Syriac textual traditions and with the works of Ephrem, “the Syrian Shakespeare”, including Ephrem’s *Commentary* (on the Diatessaron). But did Romanos know the Diatessaron as well? Petersen conjectures that Romanos would have faced the same problem which confronts anyone trying to retell the life of Jesus: the reconciliation of the often contradictory gospel accounts. Accordingly, “A harmonized gospel would have offered Romanos what he needed: a single, unified account of Jesus’ life.”¹⁶⁹⁵ (That Romanos knew and used the separate gospels in the Greek language is not questioned.)¹⁶⁹⁶

¹⁶⁹² Petersen, “Romanos and the Diatessaron: Readings and Method,” 484-507.

¹⁶⁹³ Petersen, “Romanos and the Diatessaron: Readings and Method,” 484, explains that Romanos (c. 485-555?) was a Christian poet who composed his hymns in Greek in Constantinople.

¹⁶⁹⁴ Petersen, “Romanos and the Diatessaron: Readings and Method,” 485-6.

¹⁶⁹⁵ Petersen, “Romanos and the Diatessaron: Readings and Method,”.

¹⁶⁹⁶ At this point it should be noted, as Petersen explains in another article, that: “No copy of the Diatessaron in its original form exists today. Its text must be reconstructed from over 160 individual sources, extant in more than a score of languages.” (William L. Petersen, “From Justin to Pepys: The history of the harmonized gospel tradition,” *Studia Patristica* 30 (1997): 76). Consequently, as J. Joosten writes, “The field of Diatessaronic studies is easily one of the most arduous ones within the discipline of biblical philology. The crucial difficulty is the absence of a base text. All one has to go on are quotations, translations, daughter-translations, and reworkings of the Diatessaron – all of them involving their own linguistic, philological and historical problems – from which the original has to be pieced together bit by bit. The procedure is of daunting complexity. During more than a century of research, a number of methodological guidelines have been developed to steer researchers through the labyrinth. ...” (Jan Joosten, “The Dura Parchment and the Diatessaron,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 57 (2003):162). These many complications and difficulties need to be kept in mind as Petersen’s argument, that Matt 27:51b-53 represents a post Matthean revised text, is examined.

Did Romanos know Tatian's Diatessaron?

To establish that Romanos did indeed know Tatian's Diatessaron Petersen first outlines three criteria for isolating Diatessaronic readings.¹⁶⁹⁷ Then, on the basis of these criteria Petersen presents three parallels between Romanos and the Diatessaron, one of which centres on the passage Matt 27:51b-53. (The following comment by Petersen should also be kept in mind: "Since the history of the text is the history of the church, the [following] readings also illustrate certain points of tension within early Christianity.")¹⁶⁹⁸

These three parallels may be very briefly summarized as follows:

Matt 16:24: ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ κολουθείτω μοι. (cf. Mark 8:34 & Luke 9:23). "Take up his cross and follow me". Romanos, in his *Hymn on the Mission of the Apostles* (XLVII, 2) has ...σταυρον βασταζειν ἐπ' ὠμοισιν ... "to carry the cross upon one's shoulders" ... (Likewise "shoulders" are mentioned in Romanos' *Hymn on the Adoration at the Cross* (XXXIX, 5). Petersen suggests that this interpolation could go back to Justin who, in his *Apology*, 35,2 quotes Isa 9:6¹⁶⁹⁹ and proceeds to apply it to Jesus: "There are the following predictions: 'Unto us a child is born, and unto us a young man is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulders'; which is significant of the power of the *cross, for to it* when He was crucified, *he applied his shoulders* (ὠμους) ..." ¹⁷⁰⁰ According to Petersen, "It is not difficult to imagine this connection, once offered (first by Justin?), being taken up (by Tatian, Justin's pupil?) and inserted into the text of the Diatessaron at appropriate points. The same logic, however, indicates that the canonical text is earlier, for, if the interpolation were part of the original text, there would appear to be no reason for its later omission, as the canonical

¹⁶⁹⁷ See Petersen, "Romanos and the Diatessaron: Readings and Method," 489-91. To be considered Diatessaronic (i) a reading should be found in both eastern and western branches of the Diatessaronic tradition. (Eastern witnesses include the hymns and commentaries of Ephrem, and Isho'dad's commentary. Western witnesses include the harmonies of Liege, Venetian and Pepsian, and the Heliand. See Petersen, "From Justin to Pepys," 71-96); (ii) The reading should *not* be found in non-Diatessaronic texts, from which the "Diatessaronic" witnesses might have acquired it; (iii) The *genre* of the sources should be the same. All should, in one fashion or another, represent harmonized *Vitae Iesu*.

¹⁶⁹⁸ Petersen, "Romanos and the Diatessaron: Readings and Method," 491.

¹⁶⁹⁹ Isa 9:6 (LXX): "οὗ ἡ ἀρχὴ ἐγενήθη ἐπὶ τοῦ ὠμοῦ αὐτοῦ ..." "whose government is upon his shoulder ..."

¹⁷⁰⁰ Petersen, "Romanos and the Diatessaron: Readings and Method," 492.

witnesses all do. Therefore, the inverse must be the case: the addition of ‘on his shoulders’ is a later Diatessaronic interpolation into the canonical text.”¹⁷⁰¹

Matt 8:4: “ὑπάγε σεαυτὸν δεῖξον τῷ ἱερεῖ καὶ προσένεγκον τὸ δῶρον ὃ προσέταξεν Μωυσῆς, εἰς μαρτύριον αὐτοῖς...” - “go, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a witness to them...” (NRSV). (Cf. Mark 1:44; Luke 5:14). Romanos, in his *Hymn on the Healing of the Leper* (XX, 15) has “ὑπάγε, νομον πληρῶσον καὶ ἑαυτὸν δεῖξαι σπεύσον τῷ ἱερεῖ καὶ προσενεγκε το δωπον ὅπερ προσεταξε προσφερειν Μωωσής ὁ παις μου καθαρθεντας ἐν τῷ ἔθνει λεπρους...” – “Go, fulfill the Law and show yourself quickly to the priest...”

Petersen points out that Romanos, and the Western witness, Liege Harmony, do not substitute “Law” for “Moses” but have added “Law” to “Moses”. In his opinion, this conflation, along with other evidence, “makes it a virtual certainty that νομον πληρῶσον is the reading of the Diatessaron”.¹⁷⁰² According to Petersen, “It is to be observed that the Diatessaronic reading ‘fulfil the Law’, in which Jesus orders someone to keep the Law, is more in keeping with the Jerusalem centred, Judaic (Hebraic) form of Christianity than is the canonical text. The canonical version, ‘offer the gift which Moses commanded’, avoids having Jesus order someone (in this case, the leper) to ‘fulfil the Law’. When one remembers that this controversy, whether the OT Law was still binding upon Christians, especially Gentile Christians, was the first great crisis which racked the church, then the origin of the less demanding, more conciliatory canonical text becomes understandable. This same logic, however, also forces one to acknowledge that the rigorous version of the text preserved by these Diatessaronic witnesses, a version which would have been offensive to gentile Christians, is, by all the laws of criticism, more primitive than the text of Matthew which we now find in the canon.”¹⁷⁰³

¹⁷⁰¹ Petersen, “Romanos and the Diatessaron: Readings and Method,” 492.

¹⁷⁰² Petersen, “Romanos and the Diatessaron: Readings and Method,” 493.

¹⁷⁰³ Petersen, “Romanos and the Diatessaron: Readings and Method,” 494.

The third parallel Petersen presents centres on Matt 27:52-53:

[52] καὶ τὰ μνημεῖα ἀνεώχθησαν καὶ πολλὰ σώματα τῶν κεκοιμημένων ἁγίων
ἠγέρθησαν, [53] καὶ ἐξελθόντες ἐκ τῶν μνημείων μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ εἰσῆλθον εἰς
τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν καὶ ἐνεφανίσθησαν πολλοῖς.

These words are clearly reflected in Romanos' *Hymn on the Victory of the Cross*:

(XXXVIII,7) – ἔκλονησε γῆν, ἔκαλυψεν ουρανόν,
ἐρρηξε πέτρας ὁμοῦ καὶ τὸ καταπετάσμα,
καὶ βοῶσιν οἱ νεκροὶ Ἅϊδη, καταλαβε
ὁ Ἄδαμ γὰρ ὑπάγει παλιν εἰς τὸν παραδεισαν.

“He agitated the earth, he covered the heaven,
He rent the rocks and the veil at the same time,
And he raised up those in the tombs,
And the dead cry: ‘Hades, restrain (him);
For Adam again goes into Paradise.’”

A connection with Matt 27:52-53 is also apparent in Romanos' *Hymn on the Ten Drachmas*
(XLV, 17):

Ἄφνω νεκρῶν τὰ σώματα ἐψυχώμενα ἠγέρθη καὶ κατεπατοῦν τὸν Ἅϊδην,
Ὡ ἄδικε, κραυγαζόντες, ποῦ σου νίκος, ποῦ σου κεντπόν, ὦ Θανατε;
Ἦνεώχθησαν μὲν οὖν πάντα εὐθύς ἐξ αὐτομάτου τὰ μνηματα
οἱ νεκροὶ δὲ ἐξ αὐτῶν παντες ἐξηλλοντο καὶ ἔχορευον
ἄλλ' ἄγγελος κατελθὼν κυλιεὶ τὸν λίθον
ἐκ τοῦ ταφου τοῦ σωτήηπος

Suddenly, the bodies of the dead, being animated, were raised and trampled on Hades,
Crying, “O Unrighteous One, where is your victory? Where is your sting, O Death?”

Then suddenly all the tombs were opened of themselves.

And from them all the dead sprang out and danced.

But an angel descending rolls the stone From the tomb of the Saviour.

After careful consideration of the various witnesses, Petersen concludes that οἱ νεκροί is the reading of the Diatessaron. “When all the evidence is weighed, one is left with no alternative but to conclude that Romanos, Ephrem and the author of the *Heliand* are all dependent upon a common tradition, taken from the Diatessaron.”¹⁷⁰⁴ Accordingly, two questions arise: First, (a) has οἱ νεκροί been substituted for the canonical “πολλὰ σώματα τῶν κεκοιμημένων ἁγίων” ? (or is the reverse the case?), and, secondly, (b) does the absence of μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ from the Diatessaronic witnesses suggest a different understanding for the chronology of the rising and appearing of the dead (holy ones)?

With regard to (a) Petersen assumes that the conjectured Diatessaron reading οἱ νεκροί is earlier, more primitive, than the reading of the canonical Matthew. To support this assumption Petersen draws attention to the following points:¹⁷⁰⁵

In the canonical text of Matt 27:52-53 there is tension between the fact that “*the* tombs” are opened (implying that *all* the tombs are opened) and the fact that only “many” (πολλά) of the bodies of the “saints” are resurrected (does this tension suggest perhaps the possibility of a join in the text?). By contrast, the Diatessaronic account is entirely consistent: “*the* tombs” are opened, and “the dead”, implying all the dead, are raised.¹⁷⁰⁶ But (i) the word πολλά is difficult to translate since it can mean “all”¹⁷⁰⁷ (ii) if “*all* the dead” are raised this would include sinners as well as the pious. Thus, would it not imply at least an anticipation of the last Judgment? But is this what Matt 27 52-53 is endeavouring to say?

In the second place Petersen, noting that the terms κεκοιμημένοι and ἅγιοι are favourites of the Apostle Paul (1 Cor 15:20; 1 Thess 4:14), suggests that one must consider the possibility of a connection between canonical Matt 27:52-53 and Pauline thought.

¹⁷⁰⁴ Petersen, “Romanos and the Diatessaron: Readings and Method,” 498.

¹⁷⁰⁵ Petersen, “Romanos and the Diatessaron: Readings and Method,” 498-9.

¹⁷⁰⁶ Petersen, “Romanos and the Diatessaron: Readings and Method,” 494-5. See especially Romanos’ *Hymn on the Ten Drachmas* (XLV, 17), lines 3 & 4.

¹⁷⁰⁷ See J. Jeremias, TWNT, 6:536-7.

A further connection with Pauline thought is found, by Petersen, in the word σώματα (Matt 27:52). Whereas the Diatessaronic οἱ νεκροί is ambiguous, σώματα clearly indicates the mode of resurrection as being bodily. And, according to Petersen, Paul is the only NT writer who specifies the mode of resurrection as being bodily (cf. 1 Cor 15:35-44). He also notes that since the debate over the mode of resurrection – bodily or without a body – was a major point of contention in the earliest church, Matthew’s more specific reading takes on a polemic edge as well.¹⁷⁰⁸

In the fourth place Petersen suggests that the possible direction of evolution must be kept in mind. Assuming that the *less* theologically developed reading is the earlier, he declares “It is ... inconceivable that the ‘saints who had fallen asleep’ should have been demoted to the vague, inferior status of ‘the dead’. On the other hand, it is not difficult to imagine ‘the dead’ being promoted to ‘sainthood’ by a later redactor.”¹⁷⁰⁹

In light of the above Petersen declares: “These four points uniformly suggest that the Diatessaronic reading is earlier than the Matthean reading, for the Matthean text is extraordinarily specific and imbued with the flavour of a particular brand of theology. It tells us *who* were raised (‘saints who had fallen asleep’); it describes *how* they were raised (in bodies); and it tells *how many* were raised (‘many’), even though this latter item clashes with the more general opening of ‘the tombs’. By contrast, the Diatessaronic reading ‘the dead’ is stark in its simplicity. It is general, that is, non-specific as to who, how or how many are raised. And, as a general resurrection of ‘the dead’, it is entirely consistent with the general opening of ‘the

¹⁷⁰⁸ But, contrary to Petersen, this could well suggest that Matt 27:52-53 is very early. The sharp polemical note evident in Matt 27:62-28:15 reveals that from the very beginning of the Christian faith there was debate about why Jesus’ tomb was empty (that it was found to be empty is not questioned). An empty tomb can only imply that something had happened to the entombed corpse. Was that something the result of the divine resurrection of Jesus body, or was it the work of grave robbers?

¹⁷⁰⁹ Petersen, “Romanos and the Diatessaron: Readings and Method,” 499. This however assumes that originally Matt 27:52-53 spoke of all the dead (righteous and unrighteous) being raised. But this is not necessarily what the passage was attempting to say. Rather, it could well have wished to assert that at the death of Jesus not all the dead (pious or otherwise) but only “many holy ones” were raised.

tombs'. On the basis of this evidence, then, the conclusion that the reading preserved in the Diatessaron is more primitive than the reading of Matthew is warranted."¹⁷¹⁰

Accordingly, Petersen next asks: "If the Diatessaronic text does reflect an earlier version of Matthew, what reasons are there for its modification into the more-evolved text which now constitutes Matthew?"¹⁷¹¹ In answering this question Petersen suggests that since the changes toward greater specificity result from the use in Matt 27:52-53 of vocabulary redolent of the catch phrases and technical terms of Pauline theology, the changes "are the result of a redactor of Matthew who, being a Christian of the Pauline stripe, replaced the less specific and, from a Pauline perspective, 'inaccurate' descriptions with more specific terminology which was in accord with Pauline thought. By these changes, the text of Matthew was brought into line with what was becoming – and *did* become – the dominant theology of the western church, namely, Pauline theology."¹⁷¹²

The Chronology implied in μετὰ κτλ.

Petersen notes the following:¹⁷¹³ All but one (the Venetian harmony) of the sources which have the Diatessaronic "the dead" also place their resurrection *at the same time* as Jesus' death.

Furthermore, three of the sources make it absolutely clear that these resurrected ones were, in the words of the *Heliand*

... *revealed*

As a marvel to men. This was a mighty thing,

That so much should feel, should recognize, too,

The *death* of the Christ...¹⁷¹⁴

¹⁷¹⁰ Petersen, "Romanos and the Diatessaron: Readings and Method," 499.

¹⁷¹¹ Petersen, "Romanos and the Diatessaron: Readings and Method," 499-500.

¹⁷¹² Petersen, "Romanos and the Diatessaron: Readings and Method," 500. But the similarity of Matt 27:52 and Pauline language and thought doesn't necessarily mean that a later redactor has changed Matthew to conform with Paul. It could well be that the similarities between Matt 27:52 and Pauline thought and vocabulary indicate that Matt 27:52-53 belongs to a very early tradition contemporary with the emphasis found in Paul.

¹⁷¹³ Petersen, "Romanos and the Diatessaron: Readings and Method," 500.

Thus Petersen concludes that “The resurrection – and, therefore, the *appearance* – of the resurrected persons is placed here, at the death of Jesus on the cross, as one of the natural wonders which accompanied Jesus’ death, and which signified its gravity.”¹⁷¹⁵ Consequently to his mind this phrase, μετὰ κτλ, (Matt 27:53), which clearly serves to delay the appearance of these resurrected persons until after Jesus’ resurrection on the third day, is inconsistent with the obvious intent of the tradition and defeats the entire purpose of placing the report at this point in the narrative (that purpose being to signify the gravity of Jesus’ death).¹⁷¹⁶

Petersen also points out that Romanos and the Pepsian Harmony both speak of the raising of the dead once at the death of Jesus¹⁷¹⁷ and once at his resurrection.¹⁷¹⁸ Accordingly, Petersen concludes that “Romanos and the author of the Pepsian Harmony were confronted by two traditions, one of which placed the resurrection of these people at the resurrection of Jesus (so canonical Matthew), and one which placed it among the upheavals which accompanied Jesus’ death on the cross (so the Diatessaron).”¹⁷¹⁹ The question thus arises: which of these two traditions – the Diatessaronic, and its chronology, or the canonical Matthew, and its delaying chronology, is the original? To answer this question Petersen asks a further question: “Why should the persons resurrected delay their appearance for three days, until ‘after his resurrection’?”¹⁷²⁰ To Petersen’s mind an answer is suggested by Pauline theology which declares Jesus to be the “first fruits” of the resurrection (cf. 1 Cor 15:20, 23; Acts 26:23). Therefore, “the chronology of canonical Matthew conforms to the schematic of Pauline theology, while that of the Diatessaron does not.”¹⁷²¹ Thus, according to Petersen, just as the words “many bodies of the sleeping holy ones” of the canonical Matthew reflect a revision of

¹⁷¹⁴ Petersen, “Romanos and the Diatessaron: Readings and Method,” 500.

¹⁷¹⁵ Petersen, “Romanos and the Diatessaron: Readings and Method,” 500.

¹⁷¹⁶ Petersen, “Romanos and the Diatessaron: Readings and Method,” 500. But who actually saw the raised ones? That is to say, does Matt 27:52 actually want it to be understood that the enemies of Jesus, those taunting him as he hung on the cross, also saw the raised holy ones?

¹⁷¹⁷ Petersen, “Romanos and the Diatessaron: Readings and Method,” 494-50. cf. Romanos, *Hymn on the Victory of the Cross* (XXXVIII, 7) and Pepsian Harmony (C).

¹⁷¹⁸ Petersen, “Romanos and the Diatessaron: Readings and Method,” 494-50. cf. Romanos, *Hymn on the ten Drachmas* (XLV, 17) and Pepsian Harmony (CII).

¹⁷¹⁹ Petersen, “Romanos and the Diatessaron: Readings and Method,” 500. But canonical Matthew places their *resurrection* at the moment of Jesus’ death (v. 52); it places their *appearance* to others after his resurrection (v.53). Cf. also *Gos. Pet.* 19 which seems to equate resurrection and ascension.

¹⁷²⁰ Petersen, “Romanos and the Diatessaron: Readings and Method,” 501.

¹⁷²¹ Petersen, “Romanos and the Diatessaron: Readings and Method,” 501.

an earlier version (still recoverable in the Diatessaron) of the events by a redactor seeking to bring this earlier version into line with Pauline theology, so likewise the phrase μετὰ κτλ has been added by a redactor to bring the earlier version into line with the Pauline stress on Jesus being the first to rise from the dead.¹⁷²²

It should also be noted that the relevant text of the Middle Dutch Liege Diatessaron, which may be traced back to a semitic original (that is, to Tatian's Syriac Diatessaron)¹⁷²³ reads as follows:

“At that same moment (that is, when Jesus gave up his spirit and died) the veil of the temple was rent from the top to the bottom in two pieces, and the earth quaked, and the rocks were cleft deep downward, and tombs were opened and many bodies of the holy people who were buried arose and went out of their graves and showed themselves after his resurrection to many people in the city of Jerusalem....”¹⁷²⁴

This could be construed to imply that canonical Matt 27:51b-53 (cf. “many bodies of the holy people”; “after his resurrection”) is indeed the original text and that the text deduced by Petersen to have belonged to the Diatessaron is a later revised text. However, on the other hand, it could mean that the text of the Liege Diatessaron has, over the years, experienced a process of “vulgarization” – that is, that readings, taken from the local standard text of the four gospels, have been substituted for the original Tatianic text.¹⁷²⁵

Petersen's arguments are erudite. However, they rest on some questionable assumptions. For instance, as noted earlier, his approach implies (i) that *all* the dead (sinners as well as pious) were raised; (ii) that those raised at the moment of Jesus' death stressed the

¹⁷²² But if so, then the redactor bungled things, for Matt 27:52 clearly declares that the sleeping holy ones were raised at the moment of Jesus' death – that is, well before Jesus' resurrection.

¹⁷²³ See Petersen, “From Justin to Pepsys,” 79-85.

¹⁷²⁴ See Daniel Plaoij, C. A. Phillips and A. H. A. Bakker, eds., *The Liege Diatessaron*. Edition with a Textual Apparatus. (English translation of the Dutch Text by A. J. Barnouw; Amsterdam: Noord-Hollandsche Uitgevers Maatschappij, 1965), 745-746.

¹⁷²⁵ See Joosten, “The Dura Parchment and the Diatessaron,” 165.

gravity of that death, and so *were actually seen* by those who had crucified Jesus (this is debatable); and (iii) that the words μετὰ κτλ imply that the holy ones *rose after* rather than *appeared after* Jesus' resurrection (cf. v. 52). Accordingly, in view of these weaknesses in Petersen's arguments, it will be assumed that the text of canonical Matt 27:51b-53 is the earliest and so the original text.

APPENDIX I A Review of Word Usage in Matt 27:51b-53 in Relation to the Whole Gospel of Matthew¹⁷²⁶

This Appendix relates to 8.3 of the Thesis and inquires as to whether or not the words found in Matt 27:51b-53 are consistent with their usage in other parts of the first Gospel. A positive answer would perhaps strengthen the contention that Matt 27:51b-53 is to be understood not as a (later) insertion, as it were, but as an integral part of the whole Gospel. The results of these studies of word usage however are inconclusive. Whether the same Matthew who wrote the Gospel also penned Matt 27:51b-53 must, it seems, on the basis of word usage be left “an open question.”

Matt 27:51b καὶ ἡ γῆ ἐσεισθη - “and the earth was shaken”

καὶ – According to M. Riebl the repeated and regular use of the conjunction καὶ, “and”, expresses, but only implicitly, a temporal, causal and logical connection between the repeated events. Through the earthquake the rocks were torn and the (rock) tombs were opened. And while the passage itself contains no absolute chronological statement, the words μετὰ κτλ (v. 53) gives a relative chronological meaning.¹⁷²⁷ (Note that this matter of chronology has relevance for the question of the “historicity” of these events.).¹⁷²⁸ With regards to καὶ and δὲ (cf. Matt 27:51-54) Stephanie Black concludes as follows: “καὶ signals to the audience that the proposition it conjoins is to be integrated into their mental representation of the discourse without significant change in that representation... While καὶ indicates unmarked continuity, δὲ functions as a signal of low- to mid- level discontinuity. Far from being an adversative particle as it is often traditionally understood, its use signals those in the audience to make some adjustment in their current mental representation of the discourse.”¹⁷²⁹

¹⁷²⁶ Based on Word Studies by Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 25-41; Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-5, 29- 56; Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 312-323.

¹⁷²⁷ See Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 22-24.

¹⁷²⁸ For a detailed study of “καὶ” see Black, *Sentence Conjunction in the Gospel of Matthew*.

¹⁷²⁹ Black, *Sentence Conjunction in the Gospel of Matthew*, 333.

ἡ γῆ¹⁷³⁰ - This word is found in Matthew reasonably frequently (43 times); the Book of Revelation is the only NT writing in which the word occurs more often (82 times) than in the first Gospel. This frequent occurrence of γῆ in the Book of Revelation suggests, according to M. Riebl, that the word “was part of the standard vocabulary of Jewish Apocalyptic discourse.”¹⁷³¹ Thus, in her opinion, it is uncertain if the reference to γῆ in Matt 27:51b goes back to Matthew himself. This doubt arises from the fact that only in this place in Matthew’s Gospel is “earth” a subject of a sentence and where it actually means “earth as ground”. Further, since the individual nouns in this passage are used very generally the question arises: does “earth” mean that soil around Calvary, or the whole of Israel, or the whole earth – that is, all of nature (cf. “cosmic vibrations”). According to Senior, “The word ἡ γῆ is used here most likely to refer to the immediate area; a cosmic quake is not necessarily implied. Each of the signs – the temple veil, the rocks and tombs – are localized.”¹⁷³² Note also that this combination of “earth” and “shaking” occurs only in one other place in the rest of the NT – Heb 12:26 (where it is a free rendering of Hag 2:6).

ἔσεισθη¹⁷³³ This verb (σειῶ) never occurs in Mark. While all three Synoptic writers describe the rending of the temple veil Matthew alone mentions an earthquake at the time of Jesus’ death.¹⁷³⁴ The same word is used in 28:4 to describe the shaking, provoked by the angel’s presence, of the guards (that is, to depict a psychological reaction)¹⁷³⁵ and in 21:10, describing

¹⁷³⁰ See H. Sasse, TWNT, 1:677-681.

¹⁷³¹ Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 49.

¹⁷³² Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 312; Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-5, 30, is of the same opinion

¹⁷³³ See G. Bornkamm, TWNT, 7:196-200.

¹⁷³⁴ According to France: “There is no record of such an event outside of Matthew.” (*The Gospel according to Matthew* [1985], 400). But cf. the Gospel of Peter which relates: “And then they drew out the nails from the hands of the Lord, and laid him upon the earth, and the whole earth quaked and great fear arose.” ((καὶ ἡ γῆ πᾶσα ἐσεισθη καὶ φόβος μέγας ἐγένετο) (*Gos. Pet.* 21). There is debate about the date of the writing of *Gos. Pet.* (See Appendix A). But since this tradition found in *Gos. Pet.* is different from that in Matthew’s Gospel – it speaks of the earthquake occurring not at the moment of Jesus’ death but later when he was taken down from the cross – it can be seen as a further witness to seismic activity at the time of Jesus’ passion. For instances of earthquakes in the Jerusalem area see Denis Baly, *The Geography of the Bible* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1957), 22.

¹⁷³⁵ Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 312.

the effect created by Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, it has the metaphorical meaning of "being agitated" or "stirred up". The related noun, σεισμός, is used in 8:24 (cf. Mark 4:37); 24:7 (cf. Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11); 27:54; 28:2 (cf. also Amos 8:8; Zech 14:5; *Gos. Pet.* 6:21).

According to M. Riebl, "The substantive '(earth) quake' is always encountered in Matthew in its original meaning; and except in Matt 24:7 (where Matthew is following Mark 13:8), the insertion of this word can be attributed to Matthew's pen."¹⁷³⁶ Riebl also notes that in Matt 8:24 and 28:2 the sentences in which "quake" occurs are (i) introduced on each occasion with the typical Matthean conjunction καὶ ἰδοὺ "and behold"¹⁷³⁷; (ii) that the word "earthquake" is qualified by the attribute "great" (μέγας), and (iii) that in each sentence the word "earthquake" is combined with the predicate "was."¹⁷³⁸ Furthermore, in other N.T. Books the substantive "earthquake" is regularly encountered in combination with the adjective "great" (as in Matt 8:24 and 28:2). See, for example, Luke 21:11; Acts 16:26; Rev 6:12; 11:13; 16:18.

In the light of these observations Riebl writes: "The reference to a shaking of earth and heaven is clearly commonplace in the conceptual and expressive universe of Jewish apocalyptic discourse. In particular the word combination 'and there was a great earthquake' is probably a formulaic expression familiar in apocalyptic discourse; the fact of Matthew's use of this phrase (Matt 8:24; 28:2) suggests the author's closeness to this literary movement. The word combination 'the earth shook' (in Matt 27:51) may therefore go back to Matthew himself. However, a comparison with his use of language elsewhere, and consideration of the frequent appearance of this motif in Revelation, might lead us to consider a second possible explanation: Matthew's predilection for the earthquake concept is not necessarily only manifest in his own compositional activity; it may also impact on his selection of sources (*Vorlagen*) in which earthquakes are mentioned."¹⁷³⁹

¹⁷³⁶ Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 50. Note that Luke, who presumably also followed Mark 13:8, has added the adjective "great" (Luke 21:11).

¹⁷³⁷ See Black, *Sentence Conjunction in the Gospel of Matthew*, 134-5.

¹⁷³⁸ Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 50.

¹⁷³⁹ Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 50. (To my mind the expression ἡ γῆ ἐσεισθη may have been "created" by Matthew and added to Mark, but more likely the passage Matt 27:51b-53 belongs to a passion tradition (oral or even written?) which lies behind Matthew's passion account).

Matt 27:51c καὶ αἱ πέτραι ἐσχίσθησαν - “and the rocks were split / cracked” – that is, due to the earthquake fissures appeared in the ground (presumably in and around the place of Jesus’ crucifixion).

The word “rock” (πέτρα)¹⁷⁴⁰ occurs only rarely in the New Testament.¹⁷⁴¹ Four times Matthew uses the word in its original meaning (Matt 7:24, 25; 27:51b, 60) and once in a metaphorical sense (Matt 16:18). M. Riebl¹⁷⁴² suggests that Matt 7:24, 25 may be attributed to the Logia (“Q”) source and that in Matt 27:60 Matthew has taken the word over from Mark (15:46). Accordingly, the occurrences in Matt 16:18 (rock) and 27:51 (rocks) are unique to Matthew. Further, according to Riebl, at no point in Matthew’s Gospel can the insertion of πέτρα on the author’s own initiative be demonstrated. She further suggests that since this word (particularly in the plural form) is rare and similar in form with Rev 6:15 “(they) hid ... among the rocks of the mountains”¹⁷⁴³ (“ἐκψυψαν ἑαυτοὺς... εἰς τὰς πέτρας τῶν ὀρέων”) it is not impossible that the word “rocks” (πέτρας) “has received a special shade of meaning through its use in apocalyptic writings.”¹⁷⁴⁴

The word σχίζω¹⁷⁴⁵ (to split, crack) occurs in Matthew’s Gospel only here and in 27:51a (“the temple curtain was split into two”).¹⁷⁴⁶ According to Riebl, “Since the verb ‘split’ in Matt 27:51a clearly goes back to an earlier source (Mark 15:38), the possibility of a pre-Matthew tradition may also be considered for the form ‘they were split’ in v. 51b.”¹⁷⁴⁷ Thus has Matthew formed v. 51b in analogy with v. 51a (despite the nouns, “curtain” and “rocks” being

¹⁷⁴⁰ See O. Cullmann, TWNT, 6:95-99. According to Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 52b-53, 32: “*Petra* is the constituent rock of the pavement and is to be distinguished from *Lithos* which is the loose stone.”

¹⁷⁴¹ 5 times in Matt; once in Mark.; 3 times in Luke; and 6 times in the rest of the NT – namely, 1 Cor 10:4 (2 times); Rom 9:33; 1 Pet 2:8 and twice in the plural in Rev 6:15, 16.

¹⁷⁴² Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 50-1.

¹⁷⁴³ NRSV.

¹⁷⁴⁴ Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 50.

¹⁷⁴⁵ See C. Maurer, TWNT, 7:959-963.

¹⁷⁴⁶ It occurs twice in Mark (1:10; 15:38); three times in Luke (5:36 (2x); 23:45) and four times elsewhere in the NT (John 19:24; 21:11; Acts 14:4; 23:7).

¹⁷⁴⁷ Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 51: “Da das Verbum, spaltete sich Matt 27:51a offensichtlich auf eine Vorlage (Mark 15,38) zurückgeht, darf auch für die Form, sie spalteten sich” Ver 51b eine vormattäische Tradition erwogen werden.”

quite dissimilar)? Or is Matthew being faithful to two sources? That is, is he combining Matt 27:51b-53 (from an unknown source) with Mark's gospel?¹⁷⁴⁸

Matt 27:52 καὶ τὰ μνημεῖα ἀνέωχθησαν καὶ πολλὰ σώματα τῶν κοιμημένων ἁγίων ἠγέρθησαν - “And the tombs were opened and many bodies of the sleeping holy ones were raised.”

The word μνημεῖον¹⁷⁴⁹ occurs seven times in Matthew.¹⁷⁵⁰ On the assumption that Matthew has used Mark it could be said that in 8:28 and 27:60 Matthew follows Mark 5:2 and 15:46 respectively. If Matt 23:29 goes back to “Q” it should be noted that in this verse Matthew has two different words for tomb (τάφος and μνημεῖα) whereas Luke 11:47 has only μνημεῖα.¹⁷⁵¹ Τάφος seems preferred by Matthew. He uses it six times, whereas the word does not occur at all in Mark, Luke and Acts). In three places, Matthew has τάφος while Mark and Luke have μνημεῖα. (cf. Matt 23:27 and Luke 11:44; Matt 27:61 and Mark 15:46f; Matt 28:1 and Mark 16:2-5). In Matt 27:60 Matthew uses the word μνημεῖον whereas Mark and Luke use the synonym, μνήμα. Also, while Mark (6:29) says that the disciples of the beheaded John laid his body in a tomb (ἔθηκαν αὐτὸ ἐν μνημείῳ), Matthew (14:12) simply says that his disciples buried John's body (καὶ ἔθαψαν αὐτὸν).

In the light of all this Riebl concludes that while μνημεῖον is not a word foreign to Matthew, yet no particular preference for this word by Matthew can be demonstrated. Hence the expression τὰ μνημεῖα in v. 52a is not necessarily to be attributed to Matthew's pen.¹⁷⁵² With regard to ἀνόγειν (cf. ἀνέωχθησαν) it may be said that Matthew displays a distinct liking for this verb, using it significantly more often than the other Gospel writers.¹⁷⁵³

¹⁷⁴⁸ As suggested by Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo, 27, 51b-53, 50.*

¹⁷⁴⁹ See O. Michel, TWNT, 4:680-83.

¹⁷⁵⁰ Six times in Mark; 7 times in Luke; and 37 times in the NT.

¹⁷⁵¹ According to O. Michel, “τάφος is primarily the burial ground, μνημεῖον or μνήμα the actual grave or tomb or monument.” (Michel, TWNT, 4:681 fn 2).

¹⁷⁵² See Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 51.

¹⁷⁵³ It occurs 11 times in Matt; 7 times in Luke; and only once in Mark (7:35). Altogether, it occurs 78 times in the NT.

The word πολὺς (much) occurs twice in Matt 27:51b-53 and each time in the plural (v. 52 πολλὰ; v. 53 πολλοί). The plural form of the word occurs 32 times in Matthew. If Matthew has used Mark then it must be concluded that on many occasions Matthew has made changes to Mark (for instance, cf. Matt 4:25 and Mark 1:7).¹⁷⁵⁴ It is important to note that the exact meaning of πολλοί is difficult to determine. This is because, as J. Jeremias explains,¹⁷⁵⁵ the Hebrew and Aramaic languages have no word for “all”. Accordingly, in Jewish Greek writings πολλοί is used in an inclusive sense meaning “all”. On the other hand, according to Jeremias, “in Greek πολλοί is differentiated from πάντες (ὅλος) by the fact that it is the antonym of a minority. It is thus used exclusively for many (but not all).”¹⁷⁵⁶ Thus, in Matt 27:51b-53 it would seem that πολλοί is to be understood in the Greek fashion (many, but not all).¹⁷⁵⁷

With regard to the word σῶμα (body)¹⁷⁵⁸ Riebl contends that throughout his Gospel Matthew has (i) used the word in a personal sense and only in the singular¹⁷⁵⁹; (ii) that like other New Testament writers, he never combines the word with activity verbs with an active sense; and (iii) that the “body” is never used in the Gospel expressly in connection with the process of resurrection. In Matt 27:52f the word is probably used in a personal sense, and so is consistent with its use elsewhere in Matthew’s Gospel.¹⁷⁶⁰ However, the fact that in 27:52-53 the use of σῶμα in the plural, and its combination with several action verbs, deviates from the familiar

¹⁷⁵⁴ See Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 52.

¹⁷⁵⁵ Jeremias, TWNT, 6:536-545; see also Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 32.

¹⁷⁵⁶ Jeremias, TWNT, 6:536.

¹⁷⁵⁷ The logic of Peter’s argument on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:29-36) assumes that David’s Tomb (cf. 1 Kgs 2:10) if inspected would be seen to still contain the decayed remains of Israel’s great king (cf. Acts 13:36). Either Peter was unaware of the assertion of Matt 27:51b-53; or David was not among “the holy ones”; or the word “many” does not mean “all”. Likewise, it is most unlikely that the raised saints on entering the holy city (if assumed to be the earthly Jerusalem) would have appeared to “all”, “everyone” (which would have included even the enemies of Jesus. But, if they did appear to “all” then perhaps their appearance in Jerusalem is to be construed as an omen of judgment, a foretelling of the city’s coming destruction.)

¹⁷⁵⁸ See E. Schweizer, TWNT, 7:1024-1044. The word occurs 14 times in Matt; 4 times in Mark; 13 times in Luke; and 142 times altogether in the NT.

¹⁷⁵⁹ But cf. Matt 27:52.

¹⁷⁶⁰ This would support the contention that Matt 27:51b-53 is an integral, and original, part of the whole Gospel.

patterns of Matthew and other NT writers, leads Riebl to conclude that 27:51b-53 could well reflect an earlier *vorlage*.¹⁷⁶¹

According to R. Aguirre¹⁷⁶² it is difficult to determine the precise meaning of σῶμα since in the LXX tradition it is used to translate eleven Hebrew words for none of which there is a Greek word of exact semantic sense. In Aguirre's opinion the challenge is to determine whether in Matt 27:52 σῶμα is used in the semitic sense (designating the entire person, in his / her totality) or in the Greek sense (designating part of the person – the body in contrast to the soul). According to Aguirre, "For the semitic mentality, the cadaver is not the body / corpse separated from the soul, but rather the entire man [person] who is encountered in a state of weak half-life."¹⁷⁶³

Verse 52 could be understood in this semitic sense. Consequently, this could mean that Matt 27:51b-53 goes back to a pre-Matthean text of Judeo-Christian origin and that Matthew used such a text. However, on the other hand, it can be argued that the ultimate redactor of Matthew's Gospel introduced the word σῶμα and used it with a clearly Greek sense (in harmony with passages in Matthew like 5:29; 6:22; 6:25; 10:28 – which distinguish between the body and the soul, or between the body and the totality of the body's members). In Aguirre's judgment it was Matthew who introduced the words πολλὰ σώματα but he concedes that this is impossible to prove.¹⁷⁶⁴

The word κοιμᾶσθαι (κοιμάω – I sleep) occurs only 18 times in the NT.¹⁷⁶⁵ Since Matt 27:52 and 28:13 belong to Matthew's "special" material it is clear that this word is not characteristic of the Synoptics (cf. Matt 9:24 where Matthew seems to have followed Mark 5:39 and used the word καθεύδω). In both biblical and non-biblical texts the description of death as sleep is frequent. For Christians it became a technical term for the faithful who had died. In the

¹⁷⁶¹ See Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 52: "Doch weicht die Verwendung der Vokabel im Plural sowie die Verbindung mit mehreren Handlungsverben von den Gepflogenheiten des Mattäus und der Verfasser der anderen biblischen Schriften ab. Deshalb ist die Annahme einer Vorlage nicht auszuschliessen."

¹⁷⁶² Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 33, fn 7.

¹⁷⁶³ Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 34.

¹⁷⁶⁴ Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 34.

¹⁷⁶⁵ Twice in Matt (27:52; 28:13); once in Luke (22:45) and not at all in Mark.

NT Scriptures it refers always to persons who in one form or other had been close to God or to Christ during their life: the saints (Matt 27:52); Stephen (Acts 7:60); David (Acts 13:36); the Fathers (2 Pet 3:4); Christians (1 Cor7:39; 11:30; 15:18, 51; 1 Thess 4:13-15). In Aguirre's judgement, its use here is in line with the semitic anthropology which does not treat of the human-soul which separates itself from its corpse, but rather of the fleshy human who loses the vital breath and sleeps in the dust of the earth, reduced to the state of shade / shadow devoid of life. Resurrection thus implies that "those who have been put to bed in the earth are awakened."¹⁷⁶⁶ According to M. Riebl, while the description of death as sleep is familiar to Matthew yet "he never uses the expression as an independent metaphor. It is therefore possible that the form 'the sleeping (saints)' in Matt 27:52 is based on a pre-Matthean tradition."¹⁷⁶⁷

The meaning of the word ἅγιος ("holy")¹⁷⁶⁸ goes back to the Hebrew word שׁוֹדֵד and has, basically, a negative feel – to divide or separate. Thus, for a person to be holy was to be separated from others (cf. the concept of "the Remnant"). In later Judaism the word also acquired an ethical sense. The "holy ones" were righteous, chaste. The holy ones were thus those in a state of separation relative to other people and of consecration relative to God. They were the esteemed saints who received the destined inheritance, and entered into the future Jerusalem, and participated in the Kingdom of the Messiah (cf. Isa 4:3; Dan 7:18, 21, 22, 27).¹⁷⁶⁹

In Zech 14:4-5 there is debate as to whether οἱ ἅγιοι refers to earthly humans (who have been transformed) or to angels. In the Qumran texts the word seems to refer to angels (1QM1.16; X.12; XIII, 04, 7; 1QH). In later Judaism it appears, with an earthly perspective, as a designation of the true people of God (cf. *T. Levi* 18:11, 14; *2 Bar.* 66:1, 2). In the primitive Church οἱ ἅγιοι was the ordinary designation of Christian believers (cf. Acts 9:13, 32, 41; Rom 15:25-26 ; 1 Cor 16:1, 15; 2 Cor 8:4). In the Book of Revelation ἅγιος is used in a

¹⁷⁶⁶ Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 35.

¹⁷⁶⁷ Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 52-53.

¹⁷⁶⁸ See O. Procksch & K. G. Kuhn, TWNT, 10:88-100.

¹⁷⁶⁹ See Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 36-7.

number of different ways. In Rev 20:6, 9 it seems to refer to those who participate in the millennium reign. In Rev 11:2; 21:2; 22:19 it describes the “holy city” and in Rev 14:10 it is applied to angels. However, in the majority of places where it is found in the Book of Revelation it is used to describe believers in Jesus (some of whom are already in the celestial city) who suffer, or have suffered, persecution (5:8; 8:3,4; 11:18; 13:7, 10; 14:12; 16:6; 17:6; 18:20, 24; 19:8). R. Aguirre suggests that this use of “ἅγιος” in the Book of Revelation to describe a persecuted minority may be spoken of as “apocalyptic-prophetic” and that it connects with the OT prophecies about the “Rest” (the “Remnant”).¹⁷⁷⁰

While the word ἅγιος occurs 233 times in the NT, it is not especially characteristic of Matthew’s Gospel occurring only ten times (it is found 7 times in Mark and 20 times in Luke). According to Aguirre the use of ἅγιοι in Matt 27:52 is exceptional, not being equivalent to how it is used anywhere else in the Synoptics. Aguirre contends that in Matt 27:52 the word is used more as it was in primitive Christianity.¹⁷⁷¹ (Likewise the expression τῶν κεκοιμημένων ἁγίων does not answer to the usual style of the Synoptics but rather reflects the ethos of primitive Christianity). He notes, for instance, that in certain NT texts, which reflect primitive Christianity, the concepts of οἱ ἅγιοι and “inheritance” appear together in a unity (cf. Acts 20:32; Eph 1:18; Col 1:12). These same concepts are also joined by the OT prophets (cf. Isa 4:3 – “the remnant” / “holy ones” enter the inheritance / Jerusalem). Thus, Aguirre argues that the same relationship of “saints” / “holy ones” and “inheritance” found (i) in the Book of Revelation; (ii) in primitive Christianity and (iii) in the Old Testament is also found in Matt 27:51b-53 – namely, “the raised ‘holy ones’ – enter – the holy city / Jerusalem / the promised inheritance”. Especially in his opinion does Matt 27:51b-53 enclose the thought of Ezek 37:12: “I shall open you tombs and you shall come out of your tombs and you shall receive the land of Israel (i.e. the promised inheritance).” Ezek 37:12 is thus, according to Aguirre, the OT basis of Matt 27:51b-53.

¹⁷⁷⁰ Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 38.

¹⁷⁷¹ Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 38.

It should also be noted that in the Gospel of Matthew the word, δίκαιος (“righteous one”) is used frequently.¹⁷⁷² It occurs 17 times (only twice in Mark, 11 times in Luke and 6 times in Acts). Likewise δικαιοσύνη (“uprightness”) occurs 7 times in Matthew (not at all in Mark, once in Luke and 4 times in Acts). Logically, in order to designate the just / righteous of the OT (as in Matt 27:52) Matthew could have chosen δίκαιος in 27:52 (as he does in Matt 23:35 – cf. Luke 11:50). The fact that he has not suggests, according to Aguirre, that Matt 27:51b-53 either reflects a tradition preexistent to Matthew, or that the verses are from the hand of the ultimate Redactor.¹⁷⁷³ M. Riebl comes to a similar conclusion as R. Aguirre. In view of the special form of ἅγιος and its frequency in the Book of Revelation she concludes that: “an earlier model (*vorlage*) may therefore be assumed for the form ‘of the saints’ (v. 52).”¹⁷⁷⁴

It is generally agreed that ἐγείρω (“I awake”, “I rise”)¹⁷⁷⁵ is one of Matthew’s “favourite words”. It is found much more frequently in his Gospel than in the other Synoptics. The following statistics reveal his definite preference for this word rather than for ἀνίστημι which is of identical meaning:

[ἐγείρω – Matt 36 times; Mark 19 times; Luke 18 times

ἀνίστημι – Matt 4 times; Mark 17 times; Luke 26 times].

(Note the following pairs of passages: Matt 16:21 & Mark 8:31; Matt 17:9 & Mark 9:10; Matt 17:23 & Mark 9:31; Matt 20:19 & Mark 10:34. If Matthew has used Mark then he has changed Mark’s ἀνίστημι to ἐγείρω; or, it could perhaps suggest that Matthew was using a source (*vorlage*) differing from that used by Mark. Note also that Matt 11:5 (cf. Luke 7:22) has

¹⁷⁷² See Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 315.

¹⁷⁷³ Aguirre, *Exégesis de Mateo*, 27, 51b-53, 38. In fn 19 Aguirre points out that some extra-canonical testimonies (e.g. the ancient Church writers Efreñ (Ephraem) and Afrates (Aphraates) have δίκαιοι in place of ἅγιοι in Matt 27:52. Were they trying to normalize the text of Matt 27:51b-53 in relation to the rest of the Gospel?

¹⁷⁷⁴ Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 53.

¹⁷⁷⁵ See Oepke, TWNT, 2:333-339.

particular significance for Matt 27:52 for it lists resurrection of the dead (νεκροὶ ἐγείρονται as one of the signs of the authenticity of Jesus' mission.¹⁷⁷⁶

In the opinion of M. Riebl the form “they were awoken” (Matt 27:52) “is thoroughly normal for Matthew, and may have been inserted by Matthew himself. Given his distinct preference for this word, it is also possible that he had encountered another expression for ‘awoken’ in the text he was working from, and replaced it with this form.”¹⁷⁷⁷

Matt 27:53 - The word ἐξέρχασθαι (“to go out”)¹⁷⁷⁸ occurs 43 times in Matt; 39 times in Mark; 44 times in Luke; and altogether 216 times in the NT. It seems that Matthew liked to use the aorist participle [cf. Matt 26:71 (ἐξελθόντα) and Mark14:68 (ἐξηλθεν)] and preferred ἐξέρχασθαι over the similar meaning verb, ἐκπορευεσθαι (cf. Matt 10:14 and Mark 6:11; Matt 15:19 and Mark 7:21). According to M. Riebl:

Matthew often uses this form [aorist participle] of the verb in conjunction with a main verb, also put in the aorist, to describe a new section, or – more frequently – to introduce a new aspect in the narration. The primary sense of the verb then recedes into the background. Matthew rather uses the participle as a stylistic device, to present events more vividly. The effect is to demarcate the narrative, link different text sections, and avoid abrupt transitions. It is therefore likely that the participle ‘gone out’ was probably inserted by Matthew himself, since the choice of the verb ‘go out’, the form of the aorist participle in combination with a main verb, also in the aorist, and the function of the participle in the narration of events, are characteristic patterns for our author.¹⁷⁷⁹

Furthermore, according to Riebl: “The word group ‘gone out of the tombs’ constitutes an anomaly in the narration of events, since this is the only backward reference in the group of verses. The rhythm of the text unit contains a new [form of] accentuation. A redactional intervention by Matthew at this point can therefore be assumed as very likely.”¹⁷⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷⁶ See Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew*, 315-16.

¹⁷⁷⁷ Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 53.

¹⁷⁷⁸ See C. Schneider, TWNT, 2:666- 684; esp. 680-1.

¹⁷⁷⁹ Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 54.

¹⁷⁸⁰ Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 54. “Deshalb darf mit grosser Wahrscheinlichkeit für die Wortgruppe, herausgegangen aus den Gräbern ein redaktioneller Eingriff durch Mattäus angenommen werden.”

μετὰ – “The use of the preposition ‘after’ (μετὰ) is consistent with the use of language elsewhere in Matthew’s Gospel, and the rest of the New Testament.”¹⁷⁸¹

The word ἔγερσις (“awakening”, “resurrection”) is a *hapax legomenon* of the NT. The Septuagint uses the word three times, but never to denote the awakening or resurrection of the dead (1 Esd 5:59/60; Ps 138:2(139:2); Judg 7:19a). There is however evidence that in the world of NT times the word did have the sense of resurrection.¹⁷⁸² Furthermore, early Church writers used the word to describe Jesus’ resurrection, or the awakening of Lazarus.¹⁷⁸³ Still the rarity of the occurrence of this expression makes it difficult to determine its origin in this passage (Matt 27:53). In Riebl’s opinion, “the word group ‘after his resurrection’ constitutes a ‘foreign presence’ within Matthew’s narrative. This is clearly an addition by a later (Christian) editor, which must however have been made very early since the word group is attested in the oldest and best manuscripts.”¹⁷⁸⁴

εἰσερχεσθαι (‘to enter’, ‘to go in’)¹⁷⁸⁵ is used by Matthew in such a variety of different ways that, according to M. Riebl, “examining the patterns in Matthew’s use of this verb gives no clear indication for or against his authorship of our passage (27:51b-53).”¹⁷⁸⁶ In Riebl’s opinion to resolve this question, it is necessary to consider the combination of the word with the expression “into the holy city” and the distinctive meaning of “to go in” in Matthew’s Gospel. In this regard it should be noted that both in the Old and the New Testament the expression “to go / enter in” often has theological and cultic overtones.¹⁷⁸⁷ For instance, when the enslaved people of Israel “go into the sea” (Ex. 14:16, 22) it is the beginning of their deliverance / salvation. At Sinai Moses “goes into the cloud” (that is, into the presence of the Lord God) (Exod 24:18). The cultic service of the priests involves “going into” the shrine of the Temple (cf. 2 Chr 29:16). The people of Israel “go into the (promised) land and inherit it.”(Deut 6:18).

¹⁷⁸¹ Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 54.

¹⁷⁸² For references see ἔγερσις in BDAG, 272.

¹⁷⁸³ See Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 54.

¹⁷⁸⁴ Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 55.

¹⁷⁸⁵ See Schneider, TWNT, 2:676-678.

¹⁷⁸⁶ See Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 55.

¹⁷⁸⁷ See Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 38.

This entry into the land brings them into fellowship with their God and, eventually, under the rule of His representative, the King. “To go into” the land thus meant for Israel entry into the fullness of salvation; it meant the presence of God with His people (cf. particularly Ezek 37:12-14).

In the New Testament the expression is used, especially by Matthew, in connection with entry into the Kingdom of God / Heaven (Matt 5:20; 7:21; 18:3; 19:23-4; 23:14) and into the true life (Matt 18:8-9; 19:17). This fact that in Matthew’s Gospel the words “to go in” have a distinct theological meaning relating them to salvation, and that in Matt 27:53 these words are combined with the unique expression “holy city” [found only in Matthew (4:5; 27:53) and the Book of Revelation, 21:10] could well suggest that the statement εἰσῆλθον εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν is to be attributed to Matthew. It should also be noted that this combination is perhaps a clue as to how Matthew wants the expression “the holy city” to be understood.

The expression, “the holy city” (ἡ ἁγία πόλις¹⁷⁸⁸) is found in the New Testament only in Matthew and the Book of Revelation (see Matt 4:5; 27:53; Rev 11:2; 21:2, 10; 22:19). In both Matt 4:5; 27:53 the expression is in combination with εἰς (“into”) (cf. Luke 4:9 which has εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ). Accordingly M. Riebl asks: “was the Gospel writer perhaps, through a deliberate choice of the same formulation, pointing towards the inner connection between the story of the passion and the temptation, which is also found at several other places in his gospel.”¹⁷⁸⁹ In Jewish literature of NT times this expression “the holy city” was in frequent use. Consequently, Matthew may on his own initiative have used it. But the expression’s rare occurrence in the NT makes it difficult to conclude clearly as to its origin. Thus, its use in Matt 4:5 may be because it belonged to an earlier source (*Vorlage*) – namely, the logia source, “Q”.¹⁷⁹⁰

The word ἐμφανίσειν (“to lay open to view”, “to make visible”)¹⁷⁹¹ is used by Matthew only at this point and seldom occurs elsewhere in the rest of the NT. Where it does occur it is in mainly different semantic contexts. (See John 14:21, 22; Acts 23:15, 22; 24:1; 25:2, 15; Heb

¹⁷⁸⁸ For πόλις see H. Strathmann, TWNT, 6:516-535.

¹⁷⁸⁹ Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 55-6.

¹⁷⁹⁰ See Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, 55-6.

¹⁷⁹¹ See R. Bultmann & D. Luhrmann, TWNT, 9:7-10.

11:14. cf. also LXX Exod 33:13, 18; Wis 16:21; 17:4). Given the rarity of this verb in Matthew and in other Biblical Books Riebl conjectures that “an extra-Biblical source can be assumed with a high degree of probability for the form ‘they showed themselves’.”¹⁷⁹²

¹⁷⁹² Riebl, *Auferstehung Jesu*, p. 56.

APPENDIX J The Concept of Covenant

In recent decades the understanding of the concept of covenant has undergone considerable development. For Wellhausen the ancient concept of covenant implied that “Israel was literally the son of God and somehow physically shared in the divine nature.”¹⁷⁹³ However, through the prophetic movement with its stress on “Ethical monotheism” there developed the understanding of covenant as involving morality. Union with God was thus not a matter of natural relationship or magical rite but depended on Israel’s keeping of God’s Law.

In 1955 the appearance of articles about Law and Covenant by George Mendenhall marked the beginning of an important epoch in the understanding of the covenant concept. Through a formal comparison of the Biblical material with the suzerainty treaties of the Hittite Empire coming from 1450-1200 B.C.E., Mendenhall concluded that the Decalogue (cf. Exod 20:1-17) reflected a covenant form parallel to the Hittite suzerainty treaties. Accordingly, Mendenhall conjectured that Israel’s unity and relationship with God was founded on a covenant with religious overtones. The conditions of this covenantal relationship were expressed as Law.

However, in Mendenhall’s opinion the Biblical picture of the Israelites escaping as slaves from Egypt and conquering Canaan as tribal desert nomads was a construction with little historical basis. Rather, Mendenhall¹⁷⁹⁴ suggested that the covenanted God of Israel gave a rallying point for the poor and oppressed peasant population of Canaan, a land divided between upper and lower classes. (This rallying of downtrodden peasants to the covenanted God of Israel was encouraged by the preachers of Yahwism who were against Canaan’s stratified society). Consequently, when Israel eventually became a kingdom with an earthly ruler some (e.g. the prophets) in Israel feared that there would be a falling away from the egalitarianism of

¹⁷⁹³ McCarthy, “Covenant in the Old Testament: The Present State of Inquiry,” 217.

¹⁷⁹⁴ See McCarthy, “Covenant in the Old Testament: The Present State of Inquiry,” 223.

the “Mosaic Law” and a return to the old Canaanite social order. Although they rarely used the word translated as “covenant” (*bērît*), yet during Israel’s monarchy the prophets kept the idea of covenant alive. According to them, unfaithfulness to God and his law would bring disaster; repentance however would result in new hope. Some have understood the prophets’ preaching as a kind of divine prosecution against Israel - that is, that they engaged in a form of covenant law-suit (the *rîb*).¹⁷⁹⁵ If this was the case it would be a strong indication that the prophets were indeed concerned with the covenant, even though they avoid the use of the word for covenant, ברית.

Implications of the Relationship between the Hittite documents and the Biblical Material.

1) Some in the light of the similarity of the Biblical covenant form to that found in the second millennium B.C.E. Hittite documents argued for the early dating of some of the OT books (e.g. Deuteronomy).¹⁷⁹⁶ This argument however was countered by the fact that the Biblical covenant form is also similar to that found in Assyrian treaty documents from the post-Hittite period of the seventh century B.C.E.

2) W. Eichrodt¹⁷⁹⁷ defining covenant in terms of its theological meaning, saw it as the central theme of the OT (despite the fact that some of the OT books make no mention of covenant). Eichrodt further suggested that the covenant concept could be a “guiding thread” with regard to understanding the NT (cf. Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20). According to Eichrodt,¹⁷⁹⁸ covenant suggests “kingdom” a concept central to the New Testament. Further, evidence suggests that the father-son relationship was a treaty concept.¹⁷⁹⁹ In the OT the father-son relationship was a basic analogy for the relationship between Yahweh and Israel (in an

¹⁷⁹⁵ It is debatable as to whether the *rîb* was a law-suit. See de Roche, “Yahweh’s RÎB against Israel: A Reassessment of the so-called ‘Prophetic Lawsuit’ in the Preexilic Prophets,” 563-574.

¹⁷⁹⁶ See Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963).

¹⁷⁹⁷ Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 1:36-69.

¹⁷⁹⁸ See Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 1:40, 66-7.

¹⁷⁹⁹ Fensham, “The Covenant as Giving Expression to the Relationship Between Old and New Testament”, 82-94. According to Fensham, “It is clear from a comparison of treaty material from Mari, el-Amarna and the Old Testament that father-son was used as a treaty-concept” (93). This, according to Fensham, raises the question, “whether the father-son relationship between God and Christ can be explained only by a filial relationship or whether we should also expect covenantal overtones in it.” (93).

adoptive sense) and in the NT it expresses the relationship between God and Jesus. In addition it was noted that in the Book of Exodus there was the combination of two major kinds of literary material – historical narrative and legislation.¹⁸⁰⁰ Since this combination is also found in the NT Gospels, it suggests that they are to be understood as covenant documents. Thus, the saving acts of Christ are portrayed as a new exodus led by a new Moses.

3) The relationship between the Hittite documents and the Biblical material led to debate about the nature of covenant with regard to Israel and to the conclusion that the meaning of the word ברית was to be determined by a study of its usage.

The following points about covenant in relation to Israel were noted: First, covenant was not a bilateral agreement between two equals. Rather, covenant was a matter of grace – that is, it was imposed by Yahweh (the suzerain) on Israel (the vassal). Secondly, covenant involved a personal relationship between God and Israel. Accordingly, it included terms of agreement, requirements. Law was thus part of covenant. In the third place, covenant was a conditional affair – Israel’s keeping of the Law would result in blessing. Thus there was need among the Israelites for genuine ethical behavior. The mere formal performance of rites and sacrifices was not enough. Rather, the keeping of all the prescriptions and prohibitions of the Law was to be an expression by the Israelites of an inner life of undivided devotion to God. Heart, soul and mind had to be surrendered to the God of the covenant.¹⁸⁰¹ Thus, as B. K. Waltke writes, “The relationship between YHWH and Israel was not contractual but covenantal – devoting and loving toward one another. But the arrangement ... had one flaw: it could not compel the consent of Israel because of her hard heart, forehead of bronze, and stiff neck (Exod 32:9).”¹⁸⁰²

4) Study of the covenant concept lead to discussion of the relationship to one another of the various covenants in the OT (and to the New Testament).

¹⁸⁰⁰ See Garcia-Treto, “Covenant in Recent Old Testament Studies,” 11-12.

¹⁸⁰¹ See Roehrs, “Covenant Theme of the Old Testament,” 27-8.

¹⁸⁰² Waltke, “The Phenomenon of Conditionality within Unconditional Covenants,” 135.

A) The Noachic Covenant (cf. Gen 8:22-9:7; 9:8-17)¹⁸⁰³

B) The Abrahamic Covenant (see Gen 15:18; 17:2; 22 (cf. Gen 12:1-3). Among the promises to Abraham in this covenant was that his descendants would be greatly multiplied (Gen 17:2-3), he and descendants would inherit the land of Canaan (Gen 17:8), and he and his offspring would be a blessing to other nations (cf. Gen 12:1-3; Isa 42:6b; Isa 49:6b; Luke 2:32; Acts 13:47; 26:23).¹⁸⁰⁴ Abraham's response to the Lord's covenant was to consist of a walk of faith, a blameless life, and obedience to the command relating to the administration of circumcision (Gen 17:1; 9-14. These latter verses virtually equate the covenant and circumcision.)¹⁸⁰⁵

C) The Mosaic, or Sinai, Covenant (cf. Exod 19-24).

Note: (i) This covenant is clearly linked to that with Abraham (cf. Exod 3:7-15; 6:2-9). The great multitude who escaped from Egypt at the Exodus reveals that the Lord's promise to multiply Abraham's descendants has indeed been fulfilled. Further, the promise to Abraham that his descendants would eventually possess the land of Canaan is repeated (cf. Exod 23:23-33).

(ii) Central to the Mosaic covenant was the overpowering experience of *theophany*. The Lord appeared on Mt. Sinai to his people (cf. Ex. 19:7-25). This frightening encounter created a unique, mutual relationship between the Lord and the Israelites.

(iii) The Sinai covenant has a number of features which reflect the suzerainty / vassal treaties of the Hittite Empire of the second millennium B.C.E. Thus, the Lord, the sovereign suzerain who has delivered the Israelites from Egypt, imposes upon them the terms of his covenant (cf. Exod 20:1-17). The Israelites, the vassal party, express their consent with an

¹⁸⁰³ Since in these references there is clear verbal connections with the story of creation the question arises as to "whether the relationship between God and humanity at creation should be read as covenant, even though the specific terminology of covenant is absent." See McConville, "ברית", 74-75.

¹⁸⁰⁴ "The (Abrahamic) covenant requires that God's purposes of salvation would finally extend to the whole world and not just one chosen race." (McConville, "ברית", 752.

¹⁸⁰⁵ For the contention that circumcision and baptism may both be understood as judicial ordeals, and so are basically equivalent, see Kline, *By Oath Consigned*.

oath promising to be obedient (cf. Exod 24:3-8). Reward for their loyalty is guaranteed by the oath of the Lord, the suzerain.¹⁸⁰⁶

Accordingly, covenants were not purely secular, legal contracts but cultic, liturgical acts “made in the presence of divinity at a cultic site, following a ritualized pattern, with explicit appeals to the divinity as witness.”¹⁸⁰⁷ This was also true of the Sinai covenant. Assent by the Israelites to the written text of the Lord’s commands alone did not establish the Mosaic covenant (cf. Exod 24:3-8). In addition the relationship between the Lord and his people was cemented by blood and sacrificial rite (Exod 24:5-8) and by a covenant meal (Exod 24:9-11).¹⁸⁰⁸ Further, the creation of the Tabernacle (Exod 25-27; 35-40), and the consecration of Aaron and his sons as priests to perform various rituals (cf. the Book of Leviticus) there in, is additional evidence that the Sinai Covenant was to be sustained in an environment of cultic and liturgical worship.

D) The Davidic Covenant

G. J. McConville¹⁸⁰⁹ notes that the Davidic covenant arose as a concession to the disobedient demand by Israel for a king (cf. 1 Sam 8:5-8; Deut 33:5)¹⁸¹⁰ and yet that it promised that Israel would always have a king. Further, the word “covenant” is not used in 2 Sam 7:8-17 where the institution of the Davidic covenant is described. The word however is found in related poetic texts (cf. Ps 89:3-4, 28f, 34-37). McConville also notes that the relationship of the Davidic covenant, with its promissory dimension, to earlier covenants is problematic.¹⁸¹¹ Gileadi explains the relationship between the Mosaic and Davidic covenants as follows: “The Davidic covenant did away with the necessity of all Israel – to a man – maintaining loyalty to YHWH in order to merit his protection.”¹⁸¹²

¹⁸⁰⁶ Among the Hittites the covenant action was witnessed by some “divine presence” in the form of various gods.

¹⁸⁰⁷ See Hahn, “Covenant in the Old and New Testaments: Some Current Research (1994-2004),” 268.

¹⁸⁰⁸ Cf. The Lord’s Supper with its mention of covenant—see Mark 14:22-25; Matt 26:26-29.

¹⁸⁰⁹ McConville, “ברית”, 750.

¹⁸¹⁰ In covenantal terms the Lord God was already Israel’s king.

¹⁸¹¹ McConville, “ברית”, 750.

¹⁸¹² From Waltke, “The Phenomenon of Conditionality within Unconditional Covenants,” 135.

In essence the promises of the Davidic covenant implied the continuity of Israel. The Davidic line would be the vehicle by which the covenant would be carried on. If the people, and even the king, were faithless grace would prevail – the covenant would continue (although the blessings might be lost). Note too that according to Isaiah (55:3-5) the Davidic line would bring blessings to the nations.¹⁸¹³ This is in harmony with the prophetic thought¹⁸¹⁴ that God's purposes of salvation would finally extend to the whole world and not just one chosen race. This "universalism" is even implicit in Gen. 12:1-3.¹⁸¹⁵

E) Covenant in the Prophets

The prophets seem to avoid the word covenant, ברית. The word however is found in Hos 6:7 and 8:1. Further, it may be argued that underlying the words of the prophets is the supposition that a covenantal relationship exists between God and Israel.¹⁸¹⁶ Thus the exile, while a manifestation of the curses of the covenant, was not its cessation. Rather, as McConville says: "[I]n passages like Hos 11:8-9 and Jer 31:20, the impulse of God to invoke the curses of the covenant is overcome by his own compassion for his people. The existence of the covenant depends ultimately on God's love, which is prepared to deal even with the hardness of his people's heart in order to bring them finally to himself."¹⁸¹⁷

Accordingly, the answer to the problem of how the covenant is to continue in view of the chronic apostasy of the people is found in passages like Jer 31:31-34; 32:39-40 and LXX Jer 38:31 which speak of God's initiative in creating a new covenant. This new covenant will include forgiveness and the writing of God's laws on the hearts of his rebellious people. Forgiveness rules out the possibility of curses, and the acquired inward knowledge of God (cf.

¹⁸¹³ See Hahn, "Covenant in the Old and New Testaments: Some Current Research (1994-2004)," 277.

¹⁸¹⁴ See Isa 42:6b. cf. Isa 49:6b; Luke 2:32; Acts 13:47; 26:23.

¹⁸¹⁵ McConville, "ברית", 752.

¹⁸¹⁶ Cf. the so-called "lawsuit-pattern" of Hos 4:1-3 and Mic 6:1-5, in which God calls Israel to a kind of legal tribunal. See McConville, "ברית", 750-54.

¹⁸¹⁷ McConville, "ברית", 751-54

Jer 31:33b-34) enables God's people to live as they ought to. Thus, "the new covenant successfully resolves the tension between YHWH's oaths and Israel's obligations."¹⁸¹⁸

F) Covenant in the New Testament

According to S. Hahn, "The covenant structure of biblical history was already clearly seen in Judaism prior to the dawn of the Christian era."¹⁸¹⁹ (cf. Sir 44-45). Thus, in the light of the OT, the deuterocanonical books, and the writings of Qumran, it is not surprising that, according to some, the concept of covenant (cf. διαθήκη) pervades the NT writings. Commenting on the words of the institution of the Lord's Supper (Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25) McConville says: "The OT covenant is evidently seen as having its fulfillment in the life, and especially the death, of Christ. The reference to his blood in these texts recalls Exod 24:3-8."¹⁸²⁰

Thus, the sacrifice of the cross may be understood as a covenantal transaction. F. C.

Fensham writes:

It is noticeable that most of the words of Christ spoken on the cross and also what happened to Him during His crucifixion can be paralleled by curse-material from ancient Near Eastern treaties and the Old Testament, e.g. the violent death of Christ, the fact that He was forsaken, His thirst, and so on. It is clear that Christ was cursed on the cross as a violator of the covenant, but in His case it was done as a substitute for the people. The old covenant was breached and consequently the curses of that covenant came into effect. Christ took all these curses on Him and, with His death as a sacrifice, formed the new covenant of His blood.¹⁸²¹

Likewise, M. G. Kline is adamant that Jesus' death is to be understood covenantally. He writes:

[A]t the institution of the Lord's Supper Jesus called the blood of his imminent sacrificial death the 'blood of the new covenant,' so interpreting it in terms of the covenant ratifying blood in the ritual described in Exodus 24:3-8 (cf. Heb. 9:20). Since the symbol adopted by Jesus as the sign of his covenant blood was the sacramental cup of the transformed Passover meal, Jesus' death answers both to the sacrifice offered in preparation for the Passover and to the ratification sacrifices of the Sinaitic Covenant.

¹⁸¹⁸ See Waltke, "The Phenomenon of Conditionality within Unconditional Covenants," 125.

¹⁸¹⁹ Hahn, "Covenant in the Old and New Testaments: Some Current Research (1994-2004)," 278.

¹⁸²⁰ McConville, "ברית", 753.

¹⁸²¹ Fensham, "The Covenant as Giving Expression to the Relationship Between Old and New Testament," 92.

Thus, the significance of the blood ceremonies that introduced and consummated the exodus-event fuse in the meaning of the Cross.¹⁸²²

Further, the use of διατίθεμαι (related to διαθήκη) in Luke 22:29 associates the idea of the new covenant closely with kingdom.¹⁸²³ This relationship between covenant and kingdom is also maintained by Kline who declares:

The coming of the kingdom of God announced by the gospel tidings is very much the same event as the inauguration of God's covenant. For a divine covenant 'is a sovereign administration of the kingdom of God. Covenant administration is kingdom administration.' The establishment of the covenant order is the coming of God to dwell enthroned in a reign of salvation among his people. Therefore, to say the New Testament gospels testify to the ratification of the new covenant is tantamount to saying that they declare the arrival of the age of God's kingdom.¹⁸²⁴

5) Summary

In his synopsis of Covenant Research in the years 1994-2004 S. Hahn notes that "by the early 1980s, interest in covenant studies had begun to wane, although some excellent work continued to be done."¹⁸²⁵ Hahn gives the following summary:

The reductionist idea that covenant means only "obligation" and is essentially one-sided has been largely abandoned. Most scholars contributing to the field recognize that the covenant always involves mutuality and relationship; indeed, even when the terms only express obligations for one party, there seems to be the assumption of reciprocal loyalty on both sides. Covenants have not only legal but social, ethical, familial and cultic-liturgical aspects. In the Scriptures the influence of covenant thought cannot be limited only to passages where the terms ברית or διαθήκη occur. Covenant is a multifaceted theme encompassing a variety of phrases, terms and concepts (e.g. the "covenant formula"), and is tied to other important biblical themes such as creation, wisdom and the eschaton.¹⁸²⁶

¹⁸²² Kline, "The Old Testament Origins of the Gospel Genre," 12-13.

¹⁸²³ McConville, "ברית", 753-4.

¹⁸²⁴ Kline, "The Old Testament Origins of the Gospel Genre," 24-5.

¹⁸²⁵ Hahn, "Covenant in the Old and New Testaments: Some Current Research (1994-2004)," 264.

¹⁸²⁶ Hahn, "Covenant in the Old and New Testaments: Some Current Research (1994-2004)," 285.