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A NARRATIVE - CRITICAL READING OF GOD AS A CHARACTER
IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

A Paper
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Dong H. Kim
December 2005

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A NARRATIVE – CRITICAL READING OF GOD AS A CHARACTER
IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Dong Hyun Kim

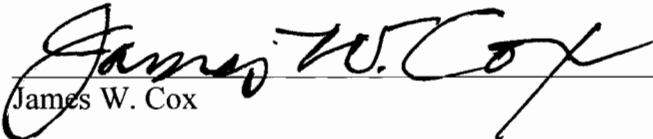
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John B. Polhill (Chairperson)



Mark A. Seifrid



James W. Cox

Date October 10, 2005

To Sung Hea, my beloved wife and best friend,
and to Samuel and Annie,
my children, gifts of joy and hope.

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PREFACE

Although this work bears my name, I could not have accomplished this task without support of many others. This preface allows me to express my deep appreciation to those who have been taken an active role in assisting my research. I am grateful to Dr. John Polhill, my supervising professor, who provided a helpful balance of criticism and encouragement along the way. Dr. Mark Seifrid and Dr. James Cox likewise provided valuable insights and needed guidance.

I am grateful to my parent, Nak Seang Kim and Young Hee Choi, for their encouragement and prayer. I also offer thanks to my parents-in-law, Jong Shin Kim and Wook Ja Oh. They have been supportive from the beginning of this endeavor, and their support and encouragement have often kept me going.

God has richly blessed me with the privilege of learning from many godly men. I want to thank to my mentor, Dr. Dong Cheol Yoon, who opened my eyes and has always believed that I could accomplish whatever task God set before me. I am also indebted to pastor Han Kyu Choi, who has invested in me by passing along what he has learned and living as example of pastor.

My special and immeasurable thanks goes to my wife, Sung Hea Kim. She has always supported me and loved me. There is no way I could have completed this journey without her. I love my precious two little children, Samuel and Annie (who still calls others, “Annie”). They are sparks of joy in my life.

Most of all, I am thankful to God who lead me through this process. What seemed to chance encounters, I now see as His guiding hand of providence. He has opened up doors of service and growth that I would never have imagined.

Dong Hyun Kim

Indianapolis, Indiana

August 2005

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The task of this thesis is to examine the narrative critical reading of God as a character in the Gospel of Matthew. The development of narrative criticism took place during the Markan Seminar in the Society of Biblical Literature in 1971.¹ During the 1970s various scholars expressed their dissatisfaction with historical critical methods for interpreting the New Testament, which had been reduced to the *redaktionsgeschichtliche* approach, for not being capable of doing justice to the Bible as it is.² In 1973, in his book *The Bible in the Modern World*, James Barr criticized historical criticism and called for the application of literary criticism in the study of Biblical interpretation. He said,

¹Petri Merenlahti and Raimo Hakola, "Reconceiving Narrative Criticism," in *Characterization in the Gospel: Reconceiving Narrative Criticism*, JSNT Supplement Series 184, ed. David Rhoads and Kari Syreeni (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 17. The resultant works by the seminar are very influential to narrative criticism in the Gospels. For example, Robert C. Tannehill, "Disciples in Mark: The Function of a Narrative Role," *Journal of Religion* 57 (1977): 386-405; Norman R. Petersen, "Point of View in Mark's Narrative," *Semeia* 12 (1978): 97-121; Robert C. Tannehill, "The Gospel of Mark as Narrative Christology," *Semeia* 16 (1979): 57-95; and David Rhoads, "Narrative Criticism and the Gospel of Mark," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50 (1982): 411-34.

²Andries Van Aarde, *God-With-Us: The Dominant Perspective in Matthew's Story*, Hervormde Teologiese Studies Supplementum vol.5 (Pretoria: University of Pretoria, 1994), 26. For helpful discussions on this issue, see E. McKnight, *Meaning in Texts: The Historical Shaping of a Narrative Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978); Archie L. Nations, "Historical Criticism and the Current Methodological Crisis," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 36 (1983): 59-71; N. R. Petersen, *Literary Criticism for New Testament Critics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978); Robert H. Stein, "What is *Redaktionsgeschichte*?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969): 45-56.

The modern scholarly expositor of the Bible works primarily, it would seem, in the second mode; he concerns himself not with the flat literary relations on the surface of the Biblical text as it is, but with the intentions of the writer in his historical setting. It is within this process of study that historical criticism has come into being, and one of its implications has been the breakdown of the old typological and allegorical interpretations, and therefore the breakdown of the unity of the Bible as it was once conceived, the unity of a seamless robe, a network of interrelated images. Thus biblical scholarship has tended to draw apart not only from the old traditional Christian understanding of scripture but also from the general aesthetic appreciation of literature as we would apply it, let us say, to Homer or to Shakespeare It will be asked, however, whether the time is now coming when a more fully literary study of the Bible will begin to assert itself, a study which will really concern itself with the imagery and structure of the text as it stands, probably ruling out as irrelevant for this purpose the historical and intentional concerns which have dominated technical biblical scholarship.³

From the beginning of the 1980s the literary critical reading of the Gospels has become one of the most prominent movements in New Testament study.⁴ Literary categories such as character, plot, and point of view have emerged out of non-biblical criticism and they have been applied to the reading of the Gospel. Non-biblical critics, such as Wayne Booth, Seymour Chatman, Baruch Hochman, Gerard Genette and Boris Uspensky were especially influential in terms of this movement. It was during the time when David Rhoads specified the study of the literary features in the Gospels as “narrative criticism.”⁵

³James Barr, *The Bible in the Modern World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 62-63.

⁴For the explanation of history and application of its technique, see David Rhoads and Donald Michie, *Mark As Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982); David Rhoads, “Narrative Criticism and the Gospel of Mark,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50 (1982): 411-34; Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990). For useful bibliography, Mark Allan Powell, *The Bible and Modern Literary Criticism: A Critical Assessment and Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Greenwood, 1992).

⁵Rhoads, “Narrative Criticism,” 411.

In the 1980s narrative critics' main interest was focused on the plot and story of the Gospels with little interest in character and characterization. In 1993 Fred W. Burnett urged that attention be given to characterization study in the Gospels: "Recent work on narrative criticism of the Gospels has emphasized plot and story, but very little has been done with characterization."⁶

Before Burnett's call for attention in 1993, these were some of the most comprehensive works devoted to character study in the Gospels: Mark Allan Powell, "The Religious Leaders in Matthew: A Literary Critical Approach" (1988)⁷; David Brian Gowler, "Socio-Narratological Character Analysis of the Pharisees in Luke-Acts" (1989)⁸; Joel Forrest Williams, "Other Followers of Jesus: The Characterization of the Individuals from the Crowd in Mark's Gospel" (1992);⁹ and William H Shepherd, Jr, "The Narrative Function of the Holy Spirit As a Character in Luke-Acts" (1993).¹⁰ Among these characterization studies, God is the most neglected factor. Nils A. Dahl called for attention to the study of God. He said, "Whereas a number of major works and monographs deal with the Christology – or ecclesiology, eschatology, etc. – of the New

⁶Fred W Burnett, "Characterization and Reader Construction of Characters in the Gospels," *Semeia* 63 (1993): 3; see W. J. Harvey, *Character and the Novel* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1966), 192.

⁷Mark Allan Powell, "The Religious Leaders in Matthew: A Literary Critical Approach" (Ph.D diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1988).

⁸David Brian Gowler, "Socio-Narratological Character Analysis of the Pharisees in Luke-Acts" (Ph.D diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989).

⁹Joel Forrest Williams, "Other Followers of Jesus: The Characterization of the Individuals from the Crowd in Mark's Gospel" (Ph.D diss., Marquette University, 1992).

¹⁰William H Shepherd, Jr, "The Narrative Function of the Holy Spirit As a Character in Luke-Acts" (Ph. D diss., Emory University, 1993).

Testament, it is hard to find any comprehensive or penetrating study of the theme ‘God in the New Testament.’”¹¹ Andrew Das and Frank J. Matera also point out that there are not many scholars who have directly addressed the question of God in the New Testament: “Few if any studies had directly addressed the question of God in the New Testament; theology was usually tackled only indirectly or tangentially.”¹² The reason for such “silence”¹³ on the study of God is because “the topic of God is generally broached only in contexts treating some other theme.”¹⁴

In 1983 R. Alan Culpepper said in his study on the Gospel of John that “God is characterized not by what He says or does but by what Jesus, His fully authorized emissary, says about Him God is characterized by Jesus and that having understood the gospel’s characterization of Jesus one has grasped its characterization of God.”¹⁵ Marianne M. Thompson maintains the same position nearly a decade later in her study on the characterization of God in the Gospel of John. She says that the “only access to God is through Jesus, the incarnate Word of God, who speaks so that God is heard God is known primarily through the agency of Jesus. And the reader encounters God in the

¹¹Nils A. Dahl, “The Neglected Factor in New Testament Theology,” *Reflection* 73 (1975): 5.

¹²A. Andrew Das and Frank J. Matera, *The Forgotten God: Perspectives in Biblical Theology* (Louisville: John Knox, 2002), 1.

¹³Marianne Meye Thompson states that there is a strange silence on the study of character(ization) of God in the Gospel of John. Marianne Meye Thompson, “‘God’s Voice You Have Never Heard, God’s Form You Have Never Seen’: The Characterization of God in the Gospel of John,” *Semeia* (63) 1993: 178.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 113.

pages of the Gospel only as mediated by the character of Jesus.”¹⁶ God in the Gospels is viewed and characterized through Jesus. As they state, the characterization on God mainly comes from Jesus. God in the Gospels is viewed and characterized through Jesus.

In this study, however, it will be argued that, if God is viewed and characterized only through Jesus, God loses His identity in that of Jesus. God would be situated as a secondary character dependent upon Jesus, which is not true, at least, in the case of the Gospel of Matthew. God’s distinct character identity should be found, not only as a result of Jesus’ characterization, but also as a result of the treatment of God as an independent narrative character. As Aida Besancon Spencer argues, we should be able to see “how the details of the Bible add meaning and should make us more appreciative of God.”¹⁷

There have been several works devoted to the study of God as a character in the Gospels.¹⁸ In the case of the Gospel of Matthew, however, works that engage in a characterization study of God are very limited.¹⁹ In addition there are no comprehensive

¹⁶Thompson, “‘God’s Voice’,” 188.

¹⁷Aida Besancon Spencer, “Literary Form,” in *New Testament Criticism & Interpretation*, ed. David Alan Black and David S. Dockery (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991): 231.

¹⁸Studies on God have been made from the Gospels; most of them are from the Gospels of Mark, Luke (- Acts) and John. For example, Charles Wade Bibb, “The Characterization of God in Luke-Acts” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1996); Paul Danove, “The Narrative Function of Mark’s Characterization of God,” *Novum Testamentum* 43 (2001): 12-30; Philip Reubin Johnson, “God In Mark: The Narrative Function of God as a Character in the Gospel of Mark” (Ph.D. diss., Lutheran Theological Seminary, 2000). Thompson, “‘God’s Voice’,” 177-204.

¹⁹For some works that briefly address God in terms of the Gospel of Matthew, see PHEME PERKINS, “God in the New Testament: Preliminary Soundings,” *Theology Today* (42) 1985: 332-41; Robert L. Mowery, “God, Lord and Father: The Theology of

character studies of God in Matthew. In fact, the Gospel of Matthew is the most neglected text in terms of narrative criticism. For example, David D. Kupp reports as follows:

Despite the narrator's critical function, only recently have students of the First Gospel given the topic much space. Although the categories provided by Booth, Uspensky, Chatman and Lanser are widely referred to by gospel critics, their application to Matthew's narrator receives extended commentary only in Anderson, Kingsbury, Weaver and Howell, and briefer reference by others. Similar comments can be made about "point of view" Within Matthean interpretation Anderson's, Weaver's, and Howell's analyses are the most comprehensive to date.²⁰

There is no thorough work that consciously addresses God in Matthew as a character from the perspective of narrative criticism. Such lack of attention is illustrated when Jack Dean Kingsbury, who is regarded as one of the most prominent narrative critics of the Gospel of Matthew, explains who the characters are. He takes into consideration Jesus, the disciples, the religious leaders, crowds, and even minor characters who are scattered throughout the pages of Matthew's story.²¹ Though

the Gospel of Matthew," *Biblical Research* (33) 1988: 24-36; Michael Goldberg, "God, Action, and Narrative: *Which Narrative? Which Action? Which God?*" *The Journal of Religion* (68) 1988:39-56; C. Clifton Black II, "Depth of Characterization and Degrees of Faith in Matthew," in *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 604-23; Robert L Mowery, "The Activity of God in the Gospel of Matthew," in *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 400-11; Mark Allan Powell, "Matthew as Pastor: The Presence of God," *Word and World* 18 (1998): 348-54.

²⁰David D. Kupp, *Matthew's Emmanuel: Divine Presence and God's People in the First Gospel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 34. Kathleen Weber also reports such lack of interest in Matthew: M. A. Powell's comprehensive bibliography lists 145 studies for Mark in comparison to only 96 for Matthew, a work nearly twice as long. Kathleen Weber, "Plot and Matthew," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1996 Seminar Papers* vol.35 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 409.

²¹Jack D. Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 11-28. See also David R. Bauer, "The Major Characters of Matthew's Story: Their Function and Significance," *Interpretation* (46) 1992: 357-367. In his study, Bauer designates the

Kingsbury appreciates Matthew's establishment of God's system of values as normative and rightly calls God an 'actor', he does not provide a separate study of God as a character as he does with the other characters.²²

The reason for such silence on God in character study is because God is regarded as never appearing and rarely speaking in the Gospels. Culpepper says in his study of the Gospel of John, "It is difficult to describe the characterization of God in the gospel because God never appears and the only words He speaks are 'and I have glorified it, and will glorify again' (12:28)."²³ However, this study argues that God should be understood as a character who is acting and involved. Even though Jesus seems to take immediate center stage in Matthew's narrative, it is God who is constructed as the character of central importance. Rather than obscuring God, Jesus reveals God and in fact it is the interaction between God and Jesus that is critical to understand God as a character. As this dissertation will argue, comprehending Matthew's narrative world and its theology requires the study of God as a character.²⁴

Though Culpepper is not interested in God as a distinct character, he states that "Yet in spite of the gospel's emphasis on the unity of the two, they are separate, Father

following as characters in Matthew Jesus, the disciples, and Israel. Though Bauer describes the relationship between Jesus and God, he fails to treat God as a character.

²²Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 11; 34; 51-52; 79; 90-91. Scripture quoted in this dissertation comes from the NRSV, unless otherwise stated.

²³Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 113.

²⁴Gabriel Fackre argues that "narrative theology is a discourse about God in the setting of story. Narrative (in its narrow sense) becomes the decisive image for understanding and interpreting faith. Depiction of reality, ultimate and penultimate, in terms of plot, coherence, movement, and climax is at the center of all forms of this kind of talk about God." Gabriel Fackre, "Narrative Theology: An Overview," *Interpretation* 37 (1983): 343.

and Son.”²⁵ This thesis argues that such separateness requires God to be regarded as an independent literary figure. Robert L. Brawley says, “Virtually all the characterization of God does have implications for the relationship between God and Jesus, but there are aspects that stand independently.”²⁶ C. Clifton Black is right when he says, “God’s activity differs from that of other characters in both quality and degree.”²⁷ God is “relatively external”²⁸ to the story of Matthew. Nevertheless, God in Matthew functions actively within the story. God is not personified as are the other characters in Matthew. This thesis will show various factors that function as character indications of God in Matthew. Among these indications, Jesus is the most significant factor for the understanding of God as a character. Jesus is the very existence of God’s abiding presence. God encounters human beings through Jesus.²⁹ Matthew shows a deliberate interest in this matter. For example, by citing Isaiah’s Emmanuel prophecy and adding his interpretation of the term, he emphasizes “God-with-us” as a special characteristic of the Gospel.

²⁵R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 113.

²⁶Robert L. Brawley, *Centering on God: Method and Message in Luke-Acts* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 111.

²⁷Black, “Depth of Characterization,” 612-13.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 613.

²⁹For the discussion on God in Jesus and its theological significance, see Goldberg, “God, Action, and Narrative,” 39-56; Samuel Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978); Thomas F. Tracy, *God, Action, and Embodiment* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984); Ronald F. Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise* (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1985).

According to Mark Allan Powell, this particular idea of Matthew is very well preserved in his use of the word, “προσκυνέω.”³⁰ He argues that “Jesus is repeatedly presented as an object of worship in this Gospel The word προσκυνέω is used with reference to Jesus only once in Mark (5:6-where it may just refer to an act of extreme respect) and only once in Luke (24:52-which is textually uncertain). Even John’s Gospel uses προσκυνέω with reference to Jesus only once (9:38). Matthew does so eight times.”³¹ The reason, Powell answers, is “because, for Matthew, God is present in Jesus to such an extent that worshiping Jesus counts as worshiping the Lord God.”³² Since God is present in Jesus, God and Jesus share the same point of view in the story. From the beginning to the end, the point of view of God and Jesus is continuously presented as the “standards of judgment” in a story.³³

In a narrative, every character has an evaluative point of view. Through the evaluative point of views of the characters, the author describes the story world. From among these views, however, the view which the author assumes reflects the perspective the author wants his reader to adopt.³⁴ The modern narrative critics of the Gospels have found God’s evaluative point of view to be the prevailing factor in the Gospels. It is especially true with the Gospel of Matthew. In Matthew, the reader comes to face the

³⁰Powell, “Matthew as Pastor,” 349-50.

³¹Ibid., 350.

³²Ibid.

³³Norman Petersen, “Point of View in Mark’s Narrative,” *Semeia* 12 (1978): 107.

³⁴Boris Uspensky, *A Poetics of Composition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 8.

prevailing point of view and be consciously reminded of God directly and indirectly.

Matthew makes certain that both his evaluative point of view and that of Jesus are in perfect accord with God's.³⁵ Consequently, as this study argues, God should be regarded as a character, since the presence of God's evaluative point of view which prevails in the story explicitly requires the presence of God as a character.

It has been suggested by Ulrich Luz that the Christological tenets most essential to Matthew revert to God. For Matthew, the theological significance of the story of Jesus is that Jesus is an occurrence of God. Luz says:

In the story of the man Jesus, God acts. In other words, his Christology from above is conceived from a narrative standpoint. But it remains a Christology from above in the sense that the Christological tenets most essential to the Gospel of Matthew do not revert to biblical statements about some divine emissary, such as a prophet or the royal messiah, but to God Himself. For Matthew, the story of Jesus has theological significance. For him, Jesus is an occurrence of God.³⁶

God is a divine character. God works in the Gospel of Matthew. God appears at crucial points. Since the function of God in Matthew is closely related with Jesus, character studies on God will contribute to issues in the area of Christology. For example, scholars debate over the interpretation of the Matthean terminologies "Son of God," "Son of Man," "Lord" and "Son of David."³⁷ Though this study is not intended to

³⁵Jack Dean Kingsbury, *The Christology of Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 48; idem, "The Figure of Jesus in Matthew's Story: A Rejoinder to David Hill," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 25 (1985): 63-65.

³⁶Ulrich Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1995), 32.

³⁷For a brief history of discussion on Christology in relation with these names, see Graham Stanton, "The Origin and Purpose of Matthew's Gospel: Matthean Scholarship from 1945-1980," in 25.3 of *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1984), 1922-25.

answer questions related to the “pre-eminent title in Matthew’s Christology,”³⁸ it will suggest that an important factor has been overlooked in the discussion of Matthean Christology: A character study of God.

In spite of the significant role God takes in Matthew, the current scholarship which explicitly addresses God as a character in the Gospel of Matthew is very limited. This thesis begins on the firm proposition that it is God as a character who holds the key to understanding the Gospel.

Narrative Criticism and the Gospel of Matthew

After Kingsbury wrote an article, “The Figure of Jesus in Matthew’s Story: A Literary Critical Probe”(1985), Sean P. Kelly reported that “up to half the scholarly books and articles on Matthew in English come from a literary perspective.”³⁹ However, before Kingsbury’s narrative critical approach to the study of the Gospel of Matthew, a growing number of Matthean scholars had attempted to incorporate the literary critical probe with their current methodology for the study of the Gospel. In fact, they began focusing on the overall structure of Matthew’s narrative. Though it is a later development to apply the modern literary techniques to the overall interpretation of Matthew under the categories of “literary criticism,” or “narrative criticism,” they should be credited as having paved a way for such development.

³⁸David Hill, “In Quest of Matthean Christology,” *Irish Biblical Studies* 8 (1986):137.

³⁹Sean P. Kealy, *Matthew’s Gospel and the History of Biblical Interpretation*, (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997), 2:736.

The probe into the structure of Matthew was first presented by B.W. Bacon. He argued that Matthew presents Jesus as a new Moses, dividing the Gospel into five blocks, as it is the case in the Pentateuch.⁴⁰ Though few contemporary scholars follow Bacon on this point, he can be credited for having attempted to see the structure of Matthew as a whole.⁴¹ After Bacon, attempts have been continuously made to see the overall structure of Matthew and requests for attention to it have been repeatedly made.⁴²

For example, in 1961, C. H. Lohr, in his study on the oral techniques in the Gospel of Matthew, appealed for greater focus on the function of various Matthean repetitions within the structure of the Gospel as a whole. He critiques, “comparatively little attention has been paid to the process by which the synoptic Gospels were given their eventual form . . . I believe . . . the individual message of each Gospel can only be understood in function of its total structure.”⁴³

Since the 70s more attention has shifted from the formative history of the text to the analysis of the structure of the text as a whole. In 1970 W. G. Thompson advocated a holistic approach to the Gospel of Matthew. She argued that the exegete should first do “vertical analysis,” which means to take the gospel as a whole, and then

⁴⁰B.W. Bacon, “The Five Books of Matthew against Jews,” *The Expositor* 15 (1918): 56-66.

⁴¹Ibid., 66. He asks, “What, then, may we conclude as to the evangelist’s structural plan?” Though his idea is not accepted as he presented, some are following the idea of dividing Matthew into five blocks to understand the overall structure of Matthew. See Marianne Meye Thompson, “The Structure of Matthew: A Survey of Recent Trends,” *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 12 (1982): 195-238.

⁴²For the representative works see Thompson, “The Structure of Matthew.”

⁴³Charles H. Lohr, “Oral Techniques in the Gospel of Matthew,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 23 (1961): 403-04.

do “horizontal analysis,” which means to compare materials in the Gospels.⁴⁴

Thompson’s suggestion was later carried out by Peter F. Ellis. He argued that “our understanding is that the true key to the interpretation of a gospel is the purpose of the author and that the author’s purpose is revealed primarily by an analysis of his work as a whole rather than by comparison with other gospels utilizing the same or similar source material.”⁴⁵ Ellis observes that the author’s intention is relevant to the meaning of the overall structure of Matthew. Their suggestions were followed and further extended by O. L. Cope, who argued for a linear reading of Matthew focusing on the logical links between the different narrative blocks and the narrative flow of the Gospel.⁴⁶ It was not until the scholars, such as Kingsbury and Combrink, began to focus on Matthew that the Gospel of Matthew was seen in terms of the narrative, the story and discourse.⁴⁷

⁴⁴W. G. Thompson, *Matthew’s Advice to a Divided Community: Mt 17, 22-18, 35* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1970), 7-12. C.f., Donald A. Hagner, *The Sitz im Leben of the Gospel of Matthew*, vol. 24 of *SBL 1985 Seminar papers* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985): 243.

⁴⁵Peter F. Ellis, *Matthew: His Mind and His Message* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1974), vi.

⁴⁶O. Lamar Cope, *Matthew: A Scribe Trained for the Kingdom of Heaven*, Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 5 (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1976).

⁴⁷H. J. Bernard Combrink narrates the importance of viewing the Gospel of Matthew as narrative. He asserts, “One thing is, however, clear: in whatever manner the genre of Matthew can be defined in more detail, it can be taken to be a narrative as it meets the two basic characteristics: ‘the presence of a story and a story-teller.’ And it is no simple narrative, to a large degree chronological as in a newspaper story, but it is a ‘narrative with plot,’ which is less often chronological and more often arranged according to a preconceived artistic principle determined by the nature of the plot.” H. J. Bernard Combrink, “The Structure of the Gospel of Matthew as Narrative,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 34 (1983): 66.

Characters in Matthean Research

David D. Kupp states that there are five basic characters or character groups in the Gospel of Matthew: Jesus, the Disciples, the crowds, the Jewish leaders and an assortment of Gentiles. He points out that in the Gospel of Matthew the corporate personality is utilized as an important element of characterization. Individuals are developed when they are significant for the plot, and in that case they work as representatives of a character group: For example, Peter is represented as the prototypical disciple, the Roman centurion (8:5-13) and Canaanite woman (15:21-28) as adding to the prototype of faith.⁴⁸ On the other hand, Kingsbury interprets the function of those individual characters as serving apologetic purposes in the Gospel: They see and confess Jesus as the Son of David, which Israel and religious leaders will not. The cry of Gentiles for Jesus as the Son of David alludes to Israel's blindness and ignorance of Jesus' real identity.⁴⁹

Jesus

Kingsbury asserts that Jesus is a "round character" who possesses "a variety of traits, some of which may even conflict, so that the behavior is not necessarily predictable." He argues that, because of Jesus' strongly contrasting traits in Matthew, He becomes a "real person" for the reader, which is characteristic of "round characters."⁵⁰ This is basically the same position maintained by David R. Bauer: The characterization of

⁴⁸Kupp, *Matthew's Emmanuel*, 35

⁴⁹Jack D. Kingsbury, "'Son of David' in Matthew's Gospel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95 (1976): 600-01.

⁵⁰Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 10.

Jesus in Matthew is that He is a living presence to the reader. Jesus promises that He will be with His disciples until the end of the age (28:20).⁵¹

On the other hand, studying the characterization of Jesus is closely related to the question of the Christology in Matthew. The allusions and labels of Jesus are important, and even more important when they are repeatedly referred to in the course of the narrative.⁵² Anderson argues that the characterization of Jesus can not be fully understood apart from His titles.⁵³

In 1984 J. D. Kingsbury wrote an article “The Figure of Jesus in Matthew’s Story: A Literary-Critical Probe.” In this article he advocates his view that Matthew’s Christology is a “Son-of-God” Christology which he argued elsewhere,⁵⁴ emphasizing God’s evaluative point of view. He says, “The literary-critical recognition that Matthew tells a story in which he posits God’s evaluative point of view as normative is of paramount significance for the study of the Christology of the First Gospel.”⁵⁵ According to him, the Christology lies in the center of the way God thinks about Jesus, namely, God’s evaluative point of view. It is the title “Son of God” which characterizes Jesus’

⁵¹David R. Bauer, “The Major Characters of Matthew’s Story: Their Function and Significance,” *Interpretation* 46 (1992): 361.

⁵²Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, *Calling Jesus Names: The Social Value of Labels in Matthew* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge Press, 1988).

⁵³Janice C. Anderson, *Matthew’s Narrative Web: Over, and Over, and Over Again*, JSNT Supplement Series 91 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 79-80.

⁵⁴Jack D. Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975).

⁵⁵Kingsbury, “The Figure of Jesus,” 7.

real identity for the reader since the title is in perfect accord with God's evaluative point of view of Jesus.⁵⁶

According to Kingsbury, the title "Son of man" characterizes Jesus as "the man" and does not show Jesus' identity. The title is employed "in view of the public."⁵⁷ He puts also the title "Son of David" as the counterpart of "Son of Man" in that this title serves as secondary to the title of the "Son of God." He argues that the Son of David is employed and characterized in the Gospel both positively and apologetically. Positively, it characterizes the earthly Jesus who is the promised Messiah from the house of the David and sent to Israel (1:1-17, 20-21, 25; 15:22-24; 21:5, 9). Apologetically, the title is used to give attention to Israel's repudiation of Jesus.⁵⁸

In 1992, Fred W. Burnett argued that the proper name "Jesus" is a key for the understanding of characterization of Jesus in Matthew: "Narrative, then, unlike the use of PNs (proper names) in ordinary language, transform PNs so that they not only refer but also signify. that is to say, the PN acquires a meaning which one might sum up in a

⁵⁶Ibid., 27-32.

⁵⁷U. Luz objects to Kingsbury's "public view." He argues that the title "Son of the Man" in Matthew also functions as an "inside title": "The Son of the Man sayings have something to do with the disciples' world: the son of man is a model of Christian discipleship (8:20), he is the origin of their power and freedom (9:6; 12:8), the model of their own suffering and martyrdom (16:3, 21, 24-26; 20:18-28) and also the Lord of the judgment over his disciples (24:37-44) as a warning to the Church." U. Luz, "The Son of Man in Matthew: Heavenly Judge or Human Christ," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 48 (1992): 12.

⁵⁸Jack Dean Kingsbury, "The Title 'Son of David' in Matthew's Gospel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95 (1976): 591-602. For a more through summary of various discussions about the title, "Son of David," see W. R. G. Loader, "Son of David, Blindness, Possession, and Duality in Matthew," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44 (1982): 570- 85.

semantic definition.”⁵⁹ The meaning which one might sum up around the proper name Jesus is to understand the characterization of Jesus. According to him, there are 150 possible occurrences of Jesus as a proper name, and understanding the characterization of the name “Jesus” is a key element to finding a dominant Christology in Matthew. He says, “This is because the PN can be dissolved into many characteristics and the characteristics can themselves be returned to textuality by returning them to the PN.”⁶⁰ The issue of Christology in Matthew is still the subject of ongoing debate, and the characterization of Jesus hangs on the debate.⁶¹

The Disciples

Redaction criticism has generally characterized the disciples in Matthew as

⁵⁹Fred W. Burnett, “The Undecidability of the Proper Name ‘Jesus’ in Matthew,” *Semeia* 54 (1991): 126.

⁶⁰Ibid., 128.

⁶¹For issues about Matthean Christology, see R. Gutzwiller, *Jesus der Messias: Christus im Matthäusevangelium* (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1949); Paul S. Minear, “The Coming of the Son of Man,” *Theology Today* 9 (1953): 489-93; Frank Stagg, “The Christology of Matthew,” *Religious Education* 59 (1962): 457-68; M. J. Suggs, *Wisdom, Christology, and Law in Matthew’s Gospel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970); M. D. Johnson, “Reflection on a Wisdom Approach to Matthew’s Christology,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 36 (1974): 44-64; Kingsbury, *Matthew*; idem, “Title ‘Son of Man’ in Matthew’s Gospel,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 37 (1975): 193-202; idem, “Title ‘Son of David,’” 591-602. David Hill, “Son and Servant: An Essay on Matthean Christology,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 6 (1980): 2-16; W.L. Kynes, *A Christology of Solidarity: Jesus as the Representative of His People in Matthew* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991). Jeffrey A. Gibbs, “Israel Standing with Israel: The Baptism of Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel (Matt 3:13-17),” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 64 (2002): 511-26.

those who understood Jesus' word and his mission.⁶² In contrast narrative critics generally portray the disciples in a mixed fashion: They are inconsistent followers of Jesus with "little faith"⁶³ and sometimes with "misunderstanding,"⁶⁴ but finally appropriate Jesus' evaluative point of view.⁶⁵ Richard Edwards is one of the early narrative analzers of the disciples in Matthew. He characterizes the disciples as "inconsistent followers." They are ambivalent, which is contrasted to the "stability of

⁶²G. Bornkamm, G. Barth, and H. J. Held, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963); F.W. Burnet, *The Testament of Jesus-Sophia: A Redaction-Critical Study of the Eschatological Discourse in Matthew* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1981), 393. U. Luz, "Die Jünger im Matthäusevangelium," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 62 (1971): 148.

⁶³Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 136. David Bauer, "The Major Characters of Matthew's Story: Their Function and Significance," *Interpretation* 46 (1992): 361-63. B. Rod Doyle states that the Greek word *oligopistos*, "little in faith," is a term Matthew uses exclusively for his disciples. B. Rod Doyle, "Matthew's Intention as Discerned by His Structure," *Revue Biblique* 95 (1988): 40.

⁶⁴Warren Carter, *Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 254.

⁶⁵Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 145; Richard A. Edwards, *Matthew's Narrative Portrait of Disciples: How the Text-Connoted Reader is Informed* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 100. However, this is where debates are located among narrative critics. Jeannine K. Brown explains that Kingsbury and Edwards opt for the disciples' growing knowledge in the course of the narrative and full knowledge of Jesus and themselves by the end of the narrative. Carter agrees with them but distinguishes himself by cautiously speaking of the little progress in disciples' knowledge from Matt 14 onward. On the other hand, Donald J. Verseput does not agree with them by arguing for no progress at all in the disciples' understanding. Donald J. Verseput, "The Faith of the Reader and the Narrative of Matthew 13.53-16.20," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 46 [1992]:1-24. So does Neil D. Nelson, "'This Generation' in Matt 24:34: A Literary Critical Perspective," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38/3 (1996): 369-73, 384. Cf. Jeannie K. Brown, *The Disciples in Narrative Perspective: The Portrayal and Function of the Matthean Disciples* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 24.

Jesus and his Father in heaven.”⁶⁶ Warren Carter also points to the “inconsistency” as an important dimension of the audience’s understanding of the disciples.⁶⁷ The inconsistency is found when the reader comes to identify the disciples “as they are” in their lives and “as they should be” in Jesus’ teaching. The inconsistency within the narrative is because the disciples’ understanding progresses as the narrative unfolds and they fail to live as their identities require.⁶⁸

The inconsistency of the disciples is represented by Peter who functions as a prototypical disciple. Anderson argues that the verbal similarities between Peter and the other disciples support Peter as a prototype of the disciples.⁶⁹ In the story of Peter’s walking on the water, he cries to Jesus “Lord, save me” (14:30b), which essentially repeats the disciples’ cry in 8:25, “Lord, save us,” and Jesus’ answer to Peter, “little-faith why did you doubt?” (14:31b) which repeats Jesus’ response to the disciples in 8:26, “why are you fearful little-faiths?” Anderson regards “inconsistency” and “little faith” as major characteristics of the disciples in Matthew.⁷⁰

Recently Edwards has come to articulate the distinction between the portrayal

⁶⁶Richard A. Edwards, “Uncertain Faith: Matthew’s Portrait of the Disciples,” in *Discipleship in the New Testament*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 47-61.

⁶⁷Carter, *Matthew*, 243.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Powell reports that it becomes usual that both “the disciples” and “the religious leaders” are treated as single characters in Matthew’s narrative. See Mark A. Powell, “Direct and Indirect Phraseology in the Gospel of Matthew,” in *SBL 1991 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 406 n.7.

⁷⁰Anderson, *Matthew’s Narrative Web*, 93-97.

of the disciples and the function of the portrayal. He maintains the position that the disciples are inconsistent followers of Jesus yet are still accepted as Jesus' followers. According to Edwards, there is a "Text-Connoted Reader"(T-CR).⁷¹ The T-CR, who is regarded as the authorial audience, is supposed by the author as being able to identify what the author has in mind in writing the Gospel.⁷² Edwards says that there is a Text-Connoted Author (T-CA) who is a "hypothetical construct based on the narrative world." He explains that "once we know how the T-CR has been informed throughout the story, we can now put it all together and seek to understand the primary emphasis of the T-CA."⁷³ According to Edward's T-CA, the T-CA understands disciples not as the ideal people who fulfill Jesus' expectation, but ones who "recognize Jesus and who will follow him, in a limited fashion, under most conditions."⁷⁴ Based on his methodology, he asserts:

The most important feature of this narrative world is that, at the beginning, the disciples are invited to become "fishers of people" by following Jesus. Then, at the conclusion of the narrative, they are told to make disciples of all nations. Jesus, the main character, who at the conclusion is described as having full authority, gives the eleven disciples the meaning of his metaphorical statement that they are to become fishers of people Despite the disciples' positive and negative characteristics in the flow of the story, they have been followers in enough ways to be asked to be "disciple-makers." The risen Jesus has also said that they are his brethren! So a disciple, according to the T-CA, is not an ideal individual who meets Jesus' expectations, but one who recognizes Jesus and who will follow him, in a limited fashion, under most conditions.⁷⁵

⁷¹Edwards, *Matthew's Narrative Portrait*, 7.

⁷²Carter, *Matthew*, 4.

⁷³Edwards, *Matthew's Narrative Portrait*, 143.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Edwards, *Matthew's Narrative Portrait*, 143. See Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 145.

Some scholars argue that the disciples in Matthew are portrayed in a more gentle manner than in Mark. For example, in the Transfiguration account (17:1-8) the disciples (represented by Peter) show a lack of understanding of Jesus' nature in one way and still receive acceptance and comfort from Jesus.⁷⁶ Robert H. Gundry says Peter's statement "if you wish" (εἰ θέλετε) in 17:4 "magnifies the emphasis on Jesus' Lordship."⁷⁷ Gundry argues that Matthew wants to portray disciples as having more understanding of Jesus (Peter addresses Jesus as "the Lord" instead of "Rabbi," as in Mark 9:5) than they have in Mark. Matthew omits Mark's portrayal of Peter's ignorance (Mark 9:6).⁷⁸ However, this point is still debated. For example, David B. Howell critiques, "Although Matthew has modified the portrait of the disciples which he took over from Mark so that the sense of repulsion may be less pronounced, the disciples are still inconsistent in their obedience to Jesus in Matthew, and actual readers should learn from their shortcomings."⁷⁹ The characterization of the disciples in Matthew is still under debate.

⁷⁶James A. Penner, "Revelation and Discipleship in Matthew's Transfiguration Account," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152 (1995): 208.

⁷⁷Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 344.

⁷⁸Ibid. However, many scholars still present Peter as being ignorant, or even sinful, due to his suggestion of the tents and the heavenly voice. For example, S. Lewis Johnson says, "The counsel that comes from Peter at this point is not only not infallible, it is senseless and sinful." Johnson, "The Transfiguration of Christ," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124 (1967): 138. Robert H. Mounce, *Matthew* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 169.

⁷⁹David B. Howell, *Matthew's Inclusive Story: A Study in the Narrative Rhetoric of the First Gospel*, JSNT Supplement series vol. 42 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 248. Cf. Donald J. Versepunt says, "Matthew is less interested in chronicling the disciples' development in faith than in exploiting their shortcoming as a foil to impress upon the reader the greatness of Jesus' awesome power." Donald J. Versepunt, "The Faith

The Crowds

Paul S. Minear argues that Matthew characterizes the crowds in a highly positive way: The crowds follow Jesus and accept His prophetic authority from the beginning. Throughout the story they are a major objective of Jesus' vocation, a major purpose of God's sending Jesus. There is "little explicit criticism of the crowds" in Matthew.⁸⁰ Bauer does not agree with Minear. According to Bauer, there are positive and negative aspects to the crowds. Overall, they are positively inclined toward Jesus: They appreciate Jesus' authority (7:28-29; 9:8; 9:33; 12:23), and they accompany Jesus and experience Jesus' ministry. Also Matthew is very positive when the crowds are compared with the Jewish leaders.⁸¹

Though there are positive responses to Jesus from the crowd in the Gospel, these responses are still negative because the response is not eschatological. Bauer explains, "It is inadequate, in the first place, because it falls short of accepting Jesus' announcement of the kingdom; the crowds do not embrace the proclamation that the kingdom has come in the ministry of Jesus, nor do they respond to this proclamation with repentance (4:17; 11:20-24)."⁸² Furthermore, they reject Jesus and invoke Jesus' blood

of the Reader and the Narrative of Matthew 13.53-16.20," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 46 (1992): 23.

⁸⁰Paul S. Minear, "The Disciples and the Crowds in the Gospel of Matthew," in *Gospel Studies in Honor of Sherman Elbridge Johnson*, ed. Massey H. Shepherd, Jr. and Edward C. Hobbs, Anglican Theological Review Supplementary Series 3 (1974): 28-44.

⁸¹David R. Bauer, "The Major Characteristics of Matthew's Story: Their Function and Significance," *Interpretation* 46 (1992): 363-66.

⁸²*Ibid.*, 364.

upon themselves and their future generations (27:25). Matthew portrays the crowds as being ambivalent.⁸³

The characterization of the crowd serves to affirm the eschatological significance in the Gospel. Kingsbury may agree with Bauer in that he sees the crowds as being “well-disposed toward Jesus but without faith in him.” Kingsbury states, “In being without faith in Jesus, they contrast with the disciples. And in being well-disposed toward Jesus, they contrast with their leaders.”⁸⁴

The Religious Leaders

In the Gospel of Matthew there are various names which form the character group, the religious leaders.⁸⁵ In his narrative critical study on Jewish leaders, Kingsbury

⁸³John Paul Heil puts the crowd’s ambivalent character in this way: “Paradoxically because the whole Jewish people brought upon themselves the tragic ‘price’ . . . for shedding the innocent blood of Jesus . . . they make possible the forgiveness of the sins of all people.” John Paul Heil, “The Blood of Jesus in Matthew: A Narrative-Critical Perspective,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 18 (1991): 124. Cf. J.R.C. Cousland, *The Crowds in the Gospel of Matthew*, NovTSup, vol. 102 (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

⁸⁴Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 25.

⁸⁵Anderson counts them as follows: The Pharisees : 9.11, 14, 34; 12.2, 14, 24; 15.12; 19.3; 22.15 (and the Herodians), 34, 41. The Sadducees: 22.23, 34. Pharisees and Sadducees: 3.7; 16.1, 6, 11, 12. The Scribes: 7. 29; 9.3; 17.10. The Scribes and Pharisees: 5.20; 12.38; 15.1; 23.2, 13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29. The Chief Priests: 26.14; 27.6; 28.11. The presbyters-elders: not mentioned alone, except in 15.2 which only speaks of the elders in an attributive clause. The chief priests and elders(τοῦ λαοῦ): this formulation is peculiar to Mt: 21.23; 26.3, 47; 27.1, 3, 12, 20; 28.11-12. The chief priests and the Pharisees: 21.45 and 27.62. The chief priests and scribes: 2.4; 20.18; 21.15. The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin: 26.59. The scribes and the elders: 26.57 (and the chief priest also there). The elders and chief priests and scribes: 16.21 and 27.41. Herod, the King: 2.1,3,7 (9, the king), 12, 13, 15, 16, 19, 22. Herod, the Tetrarch: 14.1, 3, 6. Anderson, *Matthew’s Narrative Web*, 97 n. 1.

regards them as a single character.⁸⁶ He says, “Because the rhetorical effect of the way in which these several groups are presented is such as to make of them a monolithic front opposed to Jesus, they can, narrative-critically, be treated as a single character.”⁸⁷ They are “flat” characters pictured as being wicked, lawless, spiritually blind, in error and hypocritical enemies of Jesus.⁸⁸ He says, “The notion that ‘evilness’ is the root trait, or fundamental quality, characterizing the Jewish leaders is in full accord with the tenor of Matthew’s story.”⁸⁹

The conflict they have with Jesus is central to the flow of the plot. They are a character group that strongly influences the flow of events. That is why they are closely related to the story of Jesus. Kingsbury divides Matthew into three parts tracing the function of Jewish leaders in the story. In the first part of Matthew (1:1-4:16), they are characterized as being “evil” by John the Baptist. Such identification has been implied when the king Herod was presented as their “precursor” in the story in chapter two. There is an affinity between Satan and the religious leaders in the temptation story. As Satan attempted to test Jesus, they are the ones who put Jesus to the test throughout the

⁸⁶In his 1987 article on “The Developing Conflict between Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew’s Gospel: A Literary-Critical Study,” Kingsbury states that, to his knowledge, the Jewish leaders in Matthew have not been analyzed in narrative critical fashion. Jack Dean Kingsbury, “The Developing Conflict between Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew’s Gospel: A Literary-Critical Study,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49 (1987): 57-73.

⁸⁷Ibid., 58.

⁸⁸Ibid., 58-64; Anderson, *Matthew’s Narrative Web*, 98.

⁸⁹Kingsbury, “The Developing Conflict,” 60.

story.⁹⁰ In the second part of Matthew (4:17-16:20), the conflict anticipated in part one comes to be realized. The blasphemy charge is made by them for the first time to Jesus which eventually leads to Jesus' death. The conflict between them and Jesus develops in this part and it gives rise to their conspiracy to kill Jesus. There is irreconcilable hostility which can never be resolved. In part three (16:21-28:20) such hostility becomes realized by putting Jesus to death.⁹¹

Anderson explains that the most common way of characterizing Jewish leaders in Matthew is repetition. They include: "epithets; repeated reactions to, or descriptions of , the leaders by reliable characters; repeated words and actions of the leaders – some depicted, some described; doublets; Jesus offering an authoritative legal interpretation and the leaders challenging it in a later narrative; and the repetition by the leaders of the words of another character."⁹²

Thesis

The primary goal of this thesis is to examine how Matthew characterizes God and how God's characterization works in the Gospel. To achieve this goal, the following questions will be asked: (1) What makes God a character. In other words what are the character indications? (2) What is the mode of the existence of God as a character? (3) How does God work with other characters within the narrative? (4) Who is God in the Gospel of Matthew?

⁹⁰Ibid., 72; Anderson, *Matthew's Narrative Web*, 98.

⁹¹Kingsbury, "The Developing Conflict," 72.

⁹²Anderson, *Matthew's Narrative Web*, 102.

Culpepper states that “plot and characterization are both means by which they [the evangelist] fulfilled this task and requirement imposed upon every writer of narrative literature.”⁹³ As Culpepper states, a close examination of this relationship will help the understanding of the Gospel. What is the plot of Matthew? Frank J. Matera regards the “God’s act of fulfillment” as the unifying element in the story, which in turn contributes to a unified plot. He states, “the plot of Matthew’s Gospel has something to do with salvation history, the recognition of Jesus’ identity, His rejection by Israel, and with the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles In the appearance of Jesus the Messiah, God fulfills His promise to Israel. But Israel refuses to accept Jesus as the Messiah. Consequently, the Gospel passes to the nations.”⁹⁴ God’s act of fulfillment is closely related with the recognition of Jesus’ identity in the Gospel. Through the conflict and rejection motifs between Jesus and Israel, especially between Jesus and religious leaders over Jesus’ identity, Matthew’s story progresses, and becomes more intense until it reaches its culmination in His cross.⁹⁵ The interrelationship between God’s act of fulfillment and Jesus’ identity is a crucial indication by which a reader can construct God as a character and understand the thrust of the Gospel.

Conclusion

To examine the function of God as a character, and how the characterization of God works within the narrative, this thesis will focus on passages in Matthew where God

⁹³Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 80.

⁹⁴Matera, “The Plot of Matthew’s,” 243.

⁹⁵Kingsbury, “The Plot of Matthew’s,” 355-56.

is indicated, directly or indirectly, as a character. Chapter one presents a rationale for the study of God as a character. The purpose of the study and the current status of research has been stated. The study of existing scholarship provides a fair ground for current study. Chapter two presents discussions over the modern literary theory which is related to this study and specific application of the theory to the Gospel of Matthew.

Employing the primary research and methodology presented in chapters one and two, chapter three provides an exegetical analysis of passages in which God functions as a character. The passages include where: (1) God speaks or acts, (2) the references to God occur directly, (3) the references to God occur indirectly, (4) God's activity is recognized explicitly, and (5) God's activity is recognized implicitly. In addition, specific Matthean terminology, which is related to this study, is discussed.⁹⁶ Chapter four discusses God's relationship with other characters in Matthew and summarizes God's function as a character in the Gospel of Matthew.

⁹⁶For example: πατήρ, Robert L. Mowery, "God, Lord and Father: The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew," *Biblical Research* 33 (1988): 24-36; idem, "From Lord to Father in Matthew 1-7," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 59 (1997): 642-56; προσκυνέω, Powell, "Matthew as Pastor," 348-54; Richard A. Edwards, "Narrative Implications of *Gar* in Matthew," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 52 (1990): 636-55; Anderson, *Matthew's Narrative Web*.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

What is a narrative? C. Hugh Holman and William Harmon define narrative as “an account in prose or verse of an actual or fictional event or a sequence of such events; anything that is narrated.”¹ Narrative contains both a story and the one who tells the story.² Gabriel Fackre says that narrative “is an account of events and participants moving over time and space, a recital with beginning and ending patterned by the narrator’s principle of selection.”³

The story is narrated in a certain way, and Chatman describes the way the story is narrated as discourse. He distinguishes the story and discourse as the components of narrative: The story is *what* is depicted; the discourse is *how*. The story is “the content or chain of events (actions, happenings), plus what may be called existents (characters, items of setting).”⁴ The discourse is “the expression, the means by which the content is

¹C. Hugh Holman and William Harmon, “Narrative,” in *A Handbook to Literature* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1986), 319.

²Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 4.

³Gabriel Fackre, “Narrative Theology: An Overview,” *Interpretation* 37 (1983): 341.

⁴Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1980), 19.

communicated.”⁵ The way in which the content is communicated is a crucial factor in understanding the impact of the material on the reader.

The Gospel of Matthew, as it is experienced by the reader, is a narrative composed of the story and discourse. Kingsbury defines Matthew as a “unified narrative,” or “artistic whole.”⁶ Studying God as a character in Matthew assumes that Matthew is narrative. Though the precise distinction between the story and discourse in Matthew may not be made at once, it is clear that the Gospel of Matthew is a definable text: Matthew is a story of Jesus, who is the Son of David and Abraham (1:1), and the story is told in a certain way throughout the Gospel. Therefore, the critical reading of Matthew involves a study of the content and the narrative rhetorical elements by which the Gospel of Matthew is told.⁷

Because this study focuses on the function of God as a character in the Gospel of Matthew, we must answer “what do we mean by ‘character,’ and ‘characterization,’ in narrative?” In recent years, narrative scholarship has given a good deal of attention to these questions in relation with the Gospels’ plots. Therefore, to show how these theories can be applied to current study in the Gospel of Matthew, the theories of character, characterization and point of view in narrative will be addressed along with other narrative rhetorical elements: the narrator, the implied author and the implied reader.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 2.

⁷Ibid., 1.

Character and Characterization

The definition of “character” has been the ongoing issue among critics. Petri Merenlahti stresses that the definition of character remains a complicated issue: “The mystery of biblical characters is the mystery of the mustard seed: how does so much come out of so little?”⁸ Mieke Bal boldly claims that “no one has yet succeeded in constructing a ‘complete’ and ‘coherent’ theory of character.”⁹ This thesis does not intend to dispute Bal’s observation by constructing a “complete” and “coherent” theory of character. Rather, it exemplifies theoretical issues underlying character theory, so that a proper method should be applied to this study in order to read God as a character and to realize the characterization of God in Matthew.

In the discussion of character, the question will be about the mode of the character’s existence: Is the character a person who is developing as the story progresses, or a mere function of the plot? This question is, in other words, about the character indications. When the mode of a character’s existence is defined, the relationship between the character and plot, which is the question of the character’s function within the plot, will be discussed, for a character in a narrative cannot be discussed apart from the plot of the narrative. Presenting God as a character in Matthew also requires a study of its effect on the construction of God as a character. To study the construction of God as a character is to identify God’s characterization in Matthew.

⁸Petri Merenlahti, “Characters in the Making: Individuality and Ideology in the Gospels,” in *Characterization in the Gospel: Reconceiving Narrative Criticism*, ed. David Rhoads and Kari Syreeni, JSNT Supplement series vol. 184 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 49.

⁹Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, trans. Christine van Boheemen (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1985), 80.

Character

The ambiguity of defining character in literature has led many to speak of the death of character. Hochman illustrates this when he reports that “over the past fifty years the characters of literature have, in the works of our most innovative writers, often been reduced to schematic angularity, vapid ordinariness, or allegorical inanity.”¹⁰ The “death of character” in modern fiction,¹¹ however, cannot be accepted as a reading convention for the Gospel of Matthew. Fred W. Burnett argues that the death of character is usually due to the dissolution of the view of the stable self and cannot be assumed in the reading of the Gospels.¹² Rimmon-Kenan argues that, even if the “death” of the character is granted in contemporary literature, he or she cannot be killed in nineteenth-century fiction.¹³ This is especially true in the Gospels, in which characters explicitly exist and the reader can retrieve them from the text.

Mark A. Powell defines “characters” as “the actors in a story, the ones who carry out the various activities that comprise the plot.”¹⁴ His definition alludes to a great debate on characterization: Are the characters like real, fleshed-out people, or are they no

¹⁰Baruch Hochman, *Character in Literature* (London: Cornell University, 1985), 13.

¹¹Burnett claims that the “death of character” in modern fiction usually dates from D. H. Lawrence. Fred W. Burnett, “Characterization and Reader Construction of Characters in the Gospel,” *Semeia* 63 (1993): 6.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (New York: Methuen, 1983), 31.

¹⁴Mark A. Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 51.

more than mere signs of plot function? In what sense do the characters exist? In recent works on “characters,” there has been much discussion on this issue. The current character debates focus on the question of the mode of a character’s existence: as a person (-like) who is developing as the story progresses, or as a mere function of the plot.¹⁵

The Mode of a Character’s Existence

Two primary views are taken by scholars on the mode of existence of characters. The first position, which is called the “realistic” or “mimetic” view, gives characters “a kind of independence from the events in which they live, and that they can be usefully discussed at some distance from their context.”¹⁶ Because the realistic view sees characters as fleshed-out people, one may analyze the characters as if they actually are people. The characters will be alive in the reader’s vivid memory and imagination during and even after a reading. In such cases, the reader will try to bring characters to life by imagining them beyond the story. In this case, the characters become autonomous beings; there is an inevitable analogy between the characters and real people. Advocates of this view considers characters to be persons¹⁷ or imaginary persons.¹⁸

¹⁵Jeannine K. Brown, *The Disciples in Narrative Perspective: The Portrayal and Function of the Matthean Disciples* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 49.

¹⁶Marvin Mudrick, “Character and Event in Fiction,” *Yale Review* 50 (1961): 211.

¹⁷M.H. Abrams, “Character,” in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Holt, Rinehart and Winston York, 1985), 21.

¹⁸William F. Thrall and Addison Hibbard, *A Handbook to Literature* (New York: Odyssey, 1960), 79.

This realistic view argues for transparency of character, which means that the reader can completely understand the character. According to E.M. Forster:

In a daily life we never understand each other We know each other approximately, by external signs, and these serve well enough as a basis for society and even for intimacy. But people in a novel can be understood completely by the reader, if a novelist wishes; their inner as well as their outer life can be exposed.¹⁹

The mimetic view can go all the way back to Aristotle, who regards characters as real people-like. He assigns four points to them: characters should be good, appropriate, like reality, and consistent. The term good means any moral purpose that the character explains or demonstrates. Aristotle says, "Such goodness is possible in every type of personage."²⁰ The character is appropriate when he or she is perceived as playing the right part by the reader. The character is realistic when he or she becomes like reality to the reader's sense. The character is consistent when the necessary or probable outcome is consistently expected. According to Aristotle, "Whenever such-and-such a personage says or does such-and-such a thing, it shall be the necessary or probable outcome of his character; and whenever this incident follows on that, it shall be either the necessary or the probable consequence of it."²¹ As shown in his explanation, the mimetic view holds a position that there is an inevitable analogy between the characters and real people.

¹⁹E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1955), 47.

²⁰Aristotle, "Poetics," in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon, trans. Ingram Bywater (New York: Random House, 1941), 1469.

²¹*Ibid.*, 1469-70.

On the other hand, the “purist” or “semiotic” view regards characters as signs (or plot) functioning in the text. This stance, which is adopted by formalists or structuralists, considers characters as a part of the narrative structure. The text and its elements are analyzed; no attention or consideration is given to character.²² According to Baruch Hochman, they argue that:

The text and the play of elements within it were to be studied, and no special interest or attention was to be paid to the people engendered by the text and operative within it. If character was to be spoken of at all, it was to be grasped as a more or less irrelevant figment of the reader’s imagination, inimical to adequate perception of the work in which it figures.²³

Abstracting characters from the text to present them as real people is misunderstanding the nature of literature. In purist theory, characters are no longer equated with real people, they just dissolve into text.

Both views have trouble carrying out their techniques.²⁴ It should be observed that it is possible for characters to be an effect of reading, which transcends the text and becomes part of (or is reduced to) the textuality simultaneously. This is the position taken for granted in this study. It should be realized that these two different views – realistic and purist – are showing different aspects of characters and, consequently, there should emerge an alternative theory of understanding character. Rimmon-Kenan contends that this conciliation is needed because “in the text characters are nodes in the

²²William H. Shepherd, *The Narrative Function of the Holy Spirit As a Character in Luke-Acts*, SBL Dissertation Series 147 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1994), 54-55.

²³Hochman, *Character*, 18.

²⁴For example, the purists have difficulty with Chaucer and Shakespeare because their characters manifest an individual vitality. The realists have trouble with allegory writers since their characters manifest only “as much individual vitality as is necessary to suggest their function in the event.” Mudrick, “Character,” 211.

verbal design; in the story they are – by definition – non (or pre-) verbal abstractions, constructs. Although these constructs are by no means human beings in the literal sense of the word, they are partly modeled on the reader’s conception of people and in this they are person-like.”²⁵ Burnett agrees with this when he defines characters both as “literary indications” and as an “effect of the reading process.”²⁶ Characters are constructed from the literary indications all over the text. In other words, characters “can be reduced to textuality.” And characters are alive due to the effect of the reading process. In other words, characters can “transcend the text.”²⁷

E. M Forster provides the other somewhat simple description of character. According to him, there are flat characters and round characters. Flat characters are “constructed round a single idea or quality.”²⁸ They are simple and do not develop. Flat characters have a great advantage because the reader easily recognizes and remembers them.²⁹ Round characters are complex and multidimensional. Round characters have the ability of surprising in a convincing way.³⁰ They are complex and developing.

Scholars widely accept Forster’s category with caution. Rimmon-Kenan says there are some weaknesses: (1) The term “flat” does not reflect depth and life, while many flat characters feel alive and create “the impression of depth.” (2) The dichotomy

²⁵Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 33.

²⁶Burnett, “Characterization,” 5.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Forster, *Aspects*, 67.

²⁹Ibid., 68-69.

³⁰Ibid., 78.

obliterates “the degrees and nuances found in actual works of narrative fiction.” (3)

There are some characters who are “complex but undeveloping,” and others who are “simple but developing.”³¹ Burnett also observes that Peter – in the Gospel of Matthew – is a flat-type character with momentary transformation into a rounder character.³²

Though Forster’s category is too simple and has some weaknesses many contemporary narrative critics have adopted his idea. For example, Kingsbury legitimates Forster’s division by adding “stock” characters to Forster’s category: “Stock” characters are those with only one trait, such as the leper who exhibits the single trait of “faith” (Matt 8:1-4).³³

John A. Darr shows another possible division of characters in the Gospels, following that of W. J. Harvey.³⁴ In his study on Luke-Acts, he divides characters into three categories: “background or tertiary figures,” like the crowds; “intermediate or secondary personae,” such as the Pharisees; and “protagonists, or primary characters,” like Jesus.³⁵ Although Darr cautions that the application of this division to the text “exhibits an uncomplicated plot structure and a rather plainly-ordered set of characters,”³⁶ it is applicable to Matthew’s characters. There are background characters, such as the

³¹Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 40-41.

³²Burnett, “Characterization,” 19.

³³Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 10.

³⁴W. J. Harvey, *Characters and the Novel* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1965), 67.

³⁵John A. Darr, *On Character Building: The Reader and the Rhetoric of Characterization in Luke-Acts* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1992), 45.

³⁶*Ibid.*

crowds or people; intermediate or secondary personae, the Jewish leaders and the disciples; and protagonists, or primary characters, Jesus and God.

Baruch Hochman provides a fairly large range of categories to define, more accurately, the various aspects and modes of a character's existence. He proposes eight categories to describe character aspects, and each category has its "polar opposite." These are: Stylization - Naturalism / Coherence - Incoherence / Wholeness - Fragmentariness / Literalness - Symbolism / Complexity - Simplicity / Transparency - Opacity / Dynamism - Staticism / Closure - Openness.³⁷ Hochman's categories are broad and there are more selections from which narrative critics can choose.

The Plot and a Character

The mode of a character's existence is related to the issue of how character functions in a narrative. Since character can be reduced to textuality and transcend the text as well, the function of character falls within the question of the relationship of character to the narrative's plot.

The plot is almost equivalent to the discourse because the plot concerns the order of the events.³⁸ Chatman explains that "the events in a story are turned into a plot

³⁷Because an explanation of Hochman's categories requires much space, it will not be presented here. See his work, *Character*, 86-140. For a summary, see David B. Gowler, *Host, Guest, Enemy and Friend: Portraits of the Pharisees in Luke and Acts* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1991), 305-17.

³⁸For a helpful discussions of the plot in Matthew, see J. D. Kingsbury, "The Plot of Matthew's Story," *Interpretation* 46 (1992): 347-56; Warren Carter, "Kernal and Narrative Blocks: The Structure of Matthew's Gospel," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 54 (1992): 463-81; Janice Capel Anderson, *Matthew's Narrative Web: Over, and Over, and Over Again*, ed. Stanley E. Porter, JSNT Supplement series 91 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 133-91; Frank Matera, "The Plot of Matthew's Gospel," *Catholic Biblical*

by its discourse, the modus of presentation.”³⁹ The plot can be either simple or complex.

Aristotle writes in his *Poetics*,

Plots are either simple or complex, since the actions they represent are naturally of this twofold description. The action, proceeding in the way defined, as one continuous whole, I call simple, when the change in the hero's fortunes takes place without Peripety or Discovery; and complex, when it involves one or the other, or both.⁴⁰

The complexity of the plot depends on the manner in which the author arranges the events. Frank Matera analyzes the plot in terms of the arrangement of the events.

There are two significant categories of time and causality in organizing events into plot.

He summarizes:

First, plot is an organizing principle which gives logic and meaning to disparate events. Second, discourse organizes events according to the categories of time and causality. In terms of time, the conclusion of the narrative is of paramount importance. In terms of causality, the relationship between events and the final

affective response the narrative endeavors to produce must be taken into account. Third, not all events are equal. Some are cruxes, and so they are more important than others. Fourth, plot organizes events into larger narrative blocks.⁴¹

In terms of time, Matera points out that “the ending of the narrative is of paramount importance.” Matera observes that in Matthew, the time span covers from the time of Abraham to the close of the ages. Even though the Gospel of Matthew concerns the life of Jesus, there is a broader perspective, which is the time between Abraham and

Quarterly 49 (1987): 233-53; and Mark. A. Powell, “The Plot and Subplots of Matthew's Gospel,” *New Testament Studies* 38 (1992): 187-204.

³⁹Chatman, *Story*, 43.

⁴⁰Aristotle, “Poetics,” 1465.

⁴¹Matera, “The Plot,” 240.

the Parousia. Matera notes that the plot of Matthew's Gospel relates to salvation history.⁴²

Causality relates the development of the plot to the sense of inevitability, so that by the conclusion everything is necessary.⁴³ Matera argues that, in Matthew, the plot develops from the possible to the inevitable. In the beginning, there is the possibility that Israel will accept Jesus as the Messiah. The Jews make many positive responses to Jesus as the Messiah (7:28-29; 9:33). As the Gospel progresses, there are growing possibilities that Israel will not accept Jesus as the Messiah. By the middle of the Gospel (11:2-16:12), the hostility toward and rejection of Jesus increase. Near the end of the narrative, it is inevitable that the Gospel will pass to the nations because of Israel's rejection of Him.⁴⁴

In terms of time and causality in relation to the plot in Matthew, Matera also emphasizes that the plot of Matthew's Gospel has something to do with "salvation history, the recognition of Jesus' identity, his rejection by Israel, and with the preaching of the

⁴²Ibid., 241.

⁴³In Matthew, connectives are used to indicate the inevitability of the story. Richard A. Edwards notes that out of 124 instances of *gar* in Matthew, 108 are causal; fourteen are explanatory; and two introduce an answer. A distinctive feature of those *gar* clauses spoken by Jesus is that the reasons given refer not only to the past, but to the present and future as well. With this observation, Edwards argues that the implied reader realizes that the implied author is building suspense. Through the suspense, the implied reader is guided to anticipate the inevitable outcome of the story. Richard A. Edwards, "Narrative Implication of *Gar* in Matthew," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 52 (1990): 641-42.

⁴⁴Howell terms causality as the "configurational dimension of the Gospel's narrative." He argues also that, in Matthew, the configurational dimension and the concept of salvation history are mingled to produce some kind of meaningful whole. According to him, the theme of "promise/fulfillment and acceptance/rejection" is what the configurational dimension produces, and Jesus is seen as inaugurating the time of fulfillment. David B. Howell, *Matthew's Inclusive Story: A Study in the Narrative*

gospel to the Gentiles.” Matthew organizes his Gospel according to the time and causality categories. In Matthew, time and causality work together to produce a coherent Matthean plot.

When studying the plot element in a narrative, narrative’s “how” aspect is scrutinized. The “how” aspect of each Gospel is different. The narrator’s choice of “how” produces certain effects, especially when it is engaged in a sequential reading. These effects produce certain ways of evaluating characters during the character-construction process. God – as a character in Matthew – may be different than He is in other Gospels because the “how” of the Gospel of Matthew is somewhat different than it is in other Gospels.

Characterization

Characterization is the way that an author brings a character to life.⁴⁵ Powell defines characterization as “the process through which the implied author provides the implied reader with what is necessary to reconstruct a character from the narrative.”⁴⁶ There are various characterization methods. Robert Alter illustrates – as a means of characterization – the actions; gestures of character; appearance; posture; costume of character; comments from another character; direct speech by the character; inward

Rhetoric of the First Gospel, ed. David Hill, JSNT Supplement series vol. 94 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 94.

⁴⁵David Rhoads and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 101.

⁴⁶Powell, *Narrative*, 52.

speech, whether summarized or quoted; and statements about attitudes and intentions.⁴⁷

Among these means, what he considers to be the most reliable components providing the reader with certainty and explicitness of character are speech by characters and statement by the narrator.⁴⁸ Alter says, “The main burden of the story is carried by dialogue, which is at once an instrument of characterization and a vehicle of thematic argument.”⁴⁹ The author can describe a character by having others speaking about him, the character speaking for himself, or a narrator simply telling the reader about him.⁵⁰ The techniques of both showing and telling are frequently found in Matthew. For example, in Matthew

⁴⁷Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 116-17.

⁴⁸Meir Sternberg emphasizes the importance of narratorial statement by ranging rhetorical devices through which the characterization is shaped. He lists rhetorical devices, from the most significant to the least as follows: (1) narratorial evaluation of an agent or an action through a series of epithets (or their equivalent); (2) through a single epithet, with the evaluation still solid but deprived of cumulative force and perceptibility; (3) through a choice of loaded language, without at all interrupting the onward rush of the plot; (4) explicit judgment left ambiguous between narrator and characters, by way of perspectival montage; (5) as in (1), (2), and (3), except that the judgment is delegated to characters; (6) judgment through a nonverbal objective correlative, in the form of a drastic act that speaks for itself; (7) charged dramatization, lingering over and thus foregrounding the plot elements designed for judgment; (8) informational redundancy; (9) direct inside view of the characters; (10) the play of perspectives; (11) order of presentation, its effects deriving from the structural flexibility of literature as a time art, where elements and patterns unfold in a sequence devised by the artist but imposed on the reader to form a determinate process of (mis) understanding; (12) order of presentation involving the displacement of conventional pattern; (13) analogical patterning; (14) recurrence of key words along the sequence, which forms a special case or analogy and miniaturizes its principles; (15) neutral or pseudo-objective narration, where incidental details seem to gain not just equality but even priority to essentials. Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 476-80.

⁴⁹Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 57. Hochman, *Character*, 73.

⁵⁰Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 9-10. For showing and telling, see Wayne

23, Jesus speaks of the scribes and Pharisees as being “hypocritical”; Jesus calls Himself “gentle and humble” in 11:29; and Matthew introduces Joseph as a “righteous man” in 1:19.

Moreover, it has been pointed out that both direct definition and indirect presentation are used to describe characters.⁵¹ When there is a direct definition, the reliability of the indication is dependent upon the trustworthiness of the voice-bearer. If the voice bearer is very reliable and gives an exceptional quality to the character, it implies that the reader is to accept the voice bearer’s definition of the character.⁵²

Rimmon-Kenan explains how the definition works in building characterization:

Definition is akin to generalization and conceptualization. It is also both explicit and supra-temporal. Consequently, its dominance in a given text is liable to produce a rational, authoritative and static impression. This impression may be alleviated if the definition seems to emerge gradually from concrete details, or is immediately exemplified by specific behavior, or presented together with other means of characterization.⁵³

For instance, in Matthew, Jesus – a trustworthy voice bearer – calls God “my Father” and “your Father” – a definition that is conceptualized to the reader.⁵⁴ Because Jesus is a very reliable character in Matthew, His frequent direct definition of Father as “my” and

Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 3-16.

⁵¹Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 59-67.

⁵²Ibid., 60.

⁵³Ibid., 61.

⁵⁴James M. Dawsey explains how the naming plays an important role in characterization in the Gospel of Luke. He observes three aspects of it: (1) how other characters refer to Jesus in different ways; (2) how He receives different designations, which tell us “not only something about Jesus but also about the other characters in the story”; and (3) how the third-person narration is used to guide the interpretation of the narrative. James M. Dawsey, “What’s in a Name?: Characterization in Luke,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 16 (1986): 143-47.

“your” produces a “rational, authoritative and static impression” of Father to the reader. Through Jesus’ repetition of calling God as His Father and our Father, the reader comes to conceptualize God as a character in the Matthean plot. In fact, God is called “Father” more often in Matthew than in any other Gospel. In comparison with its appearance four times in Luke and never in Mark, Matthew uses “My Father” fifteen times. In addition, compared with its appearance three times in Luke and once in Mark, Matthew says “your Father” fifteen times as well.⁵⁵ Compared with Luke, in scenes where there is no term “Father,” Matthew seems to have intentionally inserted it.⁵⁶ Naming God as the Father of “Jesus” and “us” is one of the most prominent ways for God to be characterized in Matthew. The reader comes to accept God as a character by the repeated definition of “God” by Jesus.

Rimmon-Kenan categorizes the indirect presentation as follows: action, speech, external appearance, and environment.

Action: Action is divided into one-time (or nonroutine) and habitual acts. They are also categorized as follows – acts conducted by the character; acts that the character should perform, but does not; and unrealized plans or intentions.⁵⁷

Rimmon-Kenan explains one-time and habitual acts: “One-time action tends to evoke the dynamic aspect of the character, often playing a part in a turning point in the narrative.

⁵⁵Marianne Meye Thompson, *The Promise of the Father: Jesus and God in the New Testament* (Louisville: John Knox, 2000), 105.

⁵⁶They are Matt 5:45=Luke 6:35; Matt 6:26=Luke 12:24; Matt 7:21=Luke 6:46; Matt 10:20=Luke 12:12; Matt 10:29=Luke 12:6; Matt 10:32=Luke 12:8; Matt 18:14=Luke 15:7. Robert Hamerton-Kelly, *God the Father* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 89.

⁵⁷Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 61-63.

By contrast, habitual actions tend to reveal the character's understanding or static aspect, often having a comic or ironic effect, as when a character clings to old habits in a situation which renders them inadequate."⁵⁸ Although a one-time action does not reflect "*constant* qualities," sometimes it can dramatically impact the quality of characterization.⁵⁹

Speech: Speech, which is not a character's direct definition for characterization, is used as an indirect indication through its content and form of style. The form of style is the means of characterization where "the character's language is individuated and distinguished from that of the narrator."⁶⁰ The language style of character shows "origin, dwelling place, social class, or profession."⁶¹

External appearance: The external appearance functions as a self-description or relation to the character's traits. At times, the external appearance speaks for itself; at other times, the narrator can explain the significance of appearance.⁶²

Environment: A character's physical and human environment can play an important role in characterization. A character's physical environment (room, house, street, town) and human environment (family, social class) are often considered to be "trait-connoting metonymies."⁶³

⁵⁸Ibid., 61.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid., 64.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid., 66.

⁶³Ibid.

The Point of View

In his classic book, *A Poetics of Composition*, Boris Uspensky identifies four planes of point of view.

1. The point of view on the ideological or evaluative plane: It concerns the prevailing perspective which the author assumes when he evaluates the world he describes.
2. The point of view on the phraseological plane: It deals with the choice of the words which the author uses in his telling of story.
3. The point of view on the spatial and temporal planes: It concerns the place and time from which the narrator describes the story and the characters are described.
4. The point of view on the plane of psychology: It deals with specific means of expression of points of view in terms of a character's inner feelings, thoughts, omniscient intervention of the author . . . etc.⁶⁴

In Matthew, these four points of view are variously applied to the narrative.

Matthew shows his characters to the reader, using one or more of points of view, and the reader, in turn, is challenged to decide what to accept.

The Ideological or Evaluative Point of View

The evaluative point of view, which is “a particular way of looking at things,”⁶⁵ is always present. This point of view is the most fundamental one in narrative. Booth argues that “the author’s judgment is always present, always evident to anyone who knows how to look for it.”⁶⁶ The narrative’s evaluative point of view produces

⁶⁴Boris Uspensky, *A Poetics of Composition* (Berkeley: University of California, 1973), 1-100.

⁶⁵Jack Dean Kingsbury, “The Figure of Jesus in Matthew’s Story: A Rejoinder to David Hill,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 25 (1985): 63.

⁶⁶Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1968), 20.

conflict among the characters, as well as between the narrator and the characters. The different points of view shape the plot of the narrative.⁶⁷

Chatman asserts the importance of distinguishing the narrator's evaluative point of view from that of character when the voice of the narrator is different from that of the story's protagonist.⁶⁸ In this case, there is a great need to distinguish them for clear understanding of the narrative.⁶⁹ In Matthew, however, there is no urgency for such distinction because the narrator is "reliable": the narrator is in perfect accord with Jesus, who is the protagonist. Matthew, as the narrator, also shares the evaluative point of view of the implied author. If the narrator's value is strikingly different from that of the implied author, he or she becomes an "unreliable narrator" and the rest of the narrative conflicts with the narrator's presentation.⁷⁰

Through the conflict between characters, which is due to the different points of view, the normative value of the narrative world is constructed. Uspensky explains that the single normative value "will subordinate all others in the work; if some other point of view should emerge, non-concurrent with the dominant one (if, for example, some facts should be judged from the point of view of one of the characters), this judgment will in turn be reevaluated from the more dominant position, and the evaluating subject (the character), together with his system of ideas, will become the object, evaluated from the

⁶⁷Norman R. Petersen, "Point of View in Mark's Narrative," *Semeia* 12 (1978): 100.

⁶⁸Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 151.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 158.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 149.

more general viewpoint.”⁷¹ The most common case of the reader not recognizing the dominant point of view is when the reader is culturally distant from the text.⁷²

In Matthew, there are basically two kinds of values: what is true and what is untrue, which is to be discerned and constructed by the implied reader.⁷³ Kingsbury is correct when he says, “The evaluative point of view of the narrator and of each character or group of characters is to be judged at any given juncture as being ‘true’ or ‘false’ to the degree that it is in alignment with, or diverges from, the evaluative point of view of God.”⁷⁴ God’s evaluative point of view is dominant in Matthew. The narrator, the implied author, and Jesus all align with God’s evaluative point of view. Warren Carter argues that the reader of the Gospel of Matthew “quickly learns, and is frequently reminded through a variety of conventions, that the author tells the story from God’s point of view. This point of view evaluates all actions, characters, and perspectives.”⁷⁵

The Phraseological Point of View

Uspensky defines the phraseological point of view as “the strictly linguistic means of expressing a point of view.”⁷⁶ This view analyzes the linguistic features of the

⁷¹Uspensky, *A Poetics*, 9.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 125.

⁷³J. M. Lotman, “Point of View in a Text,” *New Literary History* 6 (1975): 341-43. The implied reader is distinguished from the real reader in that the former is created by the text, and the latter is actual.

⁷⁴Kingsbury, “The Figure of Jesus,” 63.

⁷⁵Warren Carter, *Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 121.

⁷⁶Uspensky, *A Poetic*, 15

narrative and distinguishes various character voices (including narrator). Uspensky explains that, through this analysis of a character's language, we can find out "whose point of view the author has adopted for this narration."⁷⁷

Powell distinguishes "direct phraseology" from "indirect phraseology." In direct phraseology, the subject (that is evaluated by the sender) and the recipient (who hears or receives the evaluation) of the subject are identical. For example, when Jesus answers the Canaanite woman, "Great is your faith" (Matt. 15:28), the subject (her faith) and the recipient (the Canaanite woman) are the same. In indirect phraseology, the subject and the recipient of the subject are separate. For instance, when Jesus says, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees" (Matt 23), to His crowds and disciples, the scribes and Pharisees are the subjects, and the crowds and disciples are the recipients.⁷⁸

Powell deals with two components of the phraseological point of view: the subject and the recipient. There is a need, however, to distinguish direct phraseology from indirect phraseology in the case of the sender. While the subject and the recipient are identical (for direct phraseology) and they are separated (for indirect phraseology), the sender and the subject can be either identical or separated. For example, when Peter provides his evaluation of Jesus' statement, "God forbid it Lord, this must never happen to you" (16:22), Jesus designates "Satan" – not Peter – as the sender of the subject (Peter's statement). In return, Jesus rebukes Peter, saying, "Get behind me, Satan" (16:23). In this case, there is one subject and two senders: Peter and Satan. In this dual-

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Mark A. Powell, "Direct and Indirect Phraseology in the Gospel of Matthew," *SBL Seminar Papers* vol. 30 (1991): 407-08.

sender case, Jesus the recipient, recognizes the real sender. This observation is important in the current study to better understand God's role as a character in Matthew.

For instance, L. Hartman asserts that Matthew quotes the Old Testament because he "wants to reinforce his opinion with the authority of somebody else," and "an author and his readers have in common the appreciation of the authoritative person."⁷⁹ The Old Testament was uttered through the lips of the prophets, but the real sender who the reader recognizes is not the prophets, but God. The "reinforcement" is maximized when God is found to be the real sender. As God spoke through the prophets, He speaks through the Old Testament quotations in Matthew. In fact, it will be observed in this thesis when there are clear indications that God is a real sender of the subject.⁸⁰

The Spatial and Temporal Point of View

The spatial and temporal point of view pertains to the description of characters and events in relation to space and time. Spatially, the narrator in Matthew is "omnipresent," for the narrator moves freely inside and outside of the story. Temporally, the narrator is beyond his time. Matthew's story goes back as far as Abraham's time and is beyond the resurrection, but is short of the Parousia (24:15; 27:8; 28:15).⁸¹ The spatial and temporal point of view is clearly aligned around Jesus. Though there are some

⁷⁹L. Hartman, "Scriptural Exegesis in the Gospel of St. Matthew and the Problem of Communication," in *L'Évangile selon Matthieu*, ed. M. Didier (Gembloux: Duculot, 1970), 134.

⁸⁰It is frequently found in Matthew that God simultaneously functions as the sender, the subject and the recipient. It will be discussed in detail later in this thesis.

⁸¹Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 35.

instances when the spatial and temporal point of view does not remain around Jesus, all the exceptions are centered on minor points.⁸²

Dorothy Jean Weaver notices that the narrator uses the historic present tense to align himself with the story's characters, and Jesus is the one chosen most often in Matthew. The historic present tense is significant because the narrator uses it instead of the "past." The purpose of using the present tense is "to take the listener directly into the action of the narrative, and to put him into the same position as that occupied by the characters of the story."⁸³ By this device, the words that the characters speak are addressed to the implied reader; the reader becomes associated with the words of the characters; and, in turn, the reader is required to make a judgment.⁸⁴

The evaluative point of view is more directly associated with the reader through the spatial and temporal point of view. It is important for the current study in that the reader becomes associated with the words of Jesus, who aligns His evaluative point of view with that of God. As a result, the reader is allowed to sense God's voice through Jesus and is required to make a judgment on the characterization of God, who is present in the story.

The Psychological Point of View

⁸²See 2:1-10, 12, 13, 16-18; 3:1-12; 8:33; 9:26, 31; 11:2; 12:14; 14:1-12; 21:6-7, 10-11, 25-26; 22:15; 26:3-5, 14-16, 58, 69-75; 27:3-10, 51-53, 57-58, 62-65; 28:1-8, 11-15. David D. Kupp, *Matthew's Emmanuel: Divine Presence and God's People in the First Gospel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 40 n. 41.

⁸³Uspensky, *A Poetics*, 71.

⁸⁴Anderson, *Matthew's Narrative Web*, 66. For examples of the use of the present tense in Matthew, see also pages 65-66 of the same work.

The psychological point of view results when the author relies on the indications of the character's inside views. The author is in and out of the character's consciousness (or perception).⁸⁵ In this respect, the narrator is "omniscient" because the narrator has full knowledge of the characters; M.H. Abraham calls that the "omniscient point of view":

This is a common term for the assumption in a work of fiction that the narrator knows everything that needs to be known about the agents and events; that he is entirely free to move as he will in time and place, and to shift from character to character, reporting (or concealing) what he chooses of their speech and actions; and also that he is "privileged" access to a character's thoughts and feelings and motives, as well as his overt speech and actions.⁸⁶

The psychological point of view is also important for the current study in that it reveals God's evaluative point of view through the characters' inside views. The narrator provides the inside views of the characters, which are ultimately dependent upon the narrator's judgment of any character. The evaluative point of view that the narrator chooses to follow thus is revealed. It is that of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel. Kingsbury argues:

Matthew, again, as narrator, by leading the reader, through the use of inside views, always to regard Jesus sympathetically and to regard other characters sympathetically or unsympathetically depending upon whether they draw close to Jesus or oppose him, furthermore enhances Jesus' stature as the supreme exponent of God's evaluative point of view.⁸⁷

God's evaluative point of view shows that He can be constructed as a character. In summary, these four points of view show the levels of narration by which Matthew reveals God as a character, though Matthew does not equally utilize them in the story.

⁸⁵Uspensky, *A Poetics*, 81.

⁸⁶Abrams, *A Glossary*, 134.

⁸⁷Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 37.

Other Narrative Rhetorical Elements

Narrative critics regard the Gospel's text as a medium of communication between the author and the reader. In the narrative, the reader is primarily influenced by the narrator of the story. The narrator tells this particular story to the reader, controlling the story by determining what will be shown and what will not be shown. Modern narrative critics also have added the implied author to the real author and the implied reader to the real reader, making a distinction between them. The implied author and the implied reader are encoded in the text because they are "linguistically present in the text in the form of first and second person pronouns or their equivalents in the subjects and predicates of verbs."⁸⁸

The Narrator

Mark A. Powell understands the narrator as functioning in two ways. He holds the position that, though the narrator may serve as an index of the real author's thought, the narrator's concern can transcend those of the real author.⁸⁹ Powell says,

The perspective of the narrator also transcends the concerns of the Gospel's historical author in significant ways. For example, the narrator's perspective may be less tied to specific historical circumstances. To illustrate, redactional analysis of Matthew 15:1-20 usually relates the verses to first-century controversies concerning the relevance of Jewish purity laws for Christian communities. Such a connection, however, is not actually made by the narrator within the text of Matthew's Gospel. Because of this, narrative critics would be more likely to interpret these verses as a dramatic presentation of four different "points of view" (those of religious leaders, Jesus, the disciples, and the crowd). From this angle, Matthew 15:1-20

⁸⁸Norman Peterson, "The Reader in the Gospel," *Neotestamentica* 18 (1984): 39.

⁸⁹Some scholars use the terms narrator and implied author without suggesting a major distinction between them. Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 1:7.

demonstrates the difference between divine perspective and human perspective with regard to one exemplary topic, namely, purity.⁹⁰

In Matthew, the narrator is very reliable because it is Jesus whom the narrator chooses to reflect his view, value, and belief. As long as there is no significant factor to indicate conflict between the view of the narrator and Jesus, it should be assumed that the narrator is very reliable. Many Matthean narrative critics agree that, in the Gospel of Matthew, the narrator serves as the voice of the implied author.⁹¹

Robert C. Tannehill affirms this when he rejects Marshall Dawsey's argument⁹² that the Lukan narrator is unreliable. Tannehill says that the narrator in Luke should be reliable because "it is a common highlighting technique of narrators to put the most important material into the direct speech of central characters We should assume that Jesus' words are understood and accepted by the narrator who is presenting them to us unless there are convincing indications to the contrary."⁹³ Furthermore, Tannehill explains that the view of the character and the implied author is shared "unless our initial impression is undermined by events later in the story."⁹⁴

The Implied Author

⁹⁰Mark Allan Powell, "Toward a Narrative-Critical Understanding of Matthew," *Interpretation* 46 (1992): 342.

⁹¹Kupp, *Emmanuel*, 33.

⁹²Dawsey contends that the view of the narrator in Luke is different from that of Jesus. See James M. Dawsey, *The Lukan Voice: Confusion and Irony in the Gospel of Luke* (Macon: Mercer University, 1986), 349.

⁹³Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity*, 7.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 8.

Booth defines the implied author as “the creating person who is implied by the totality of a given work when it is offered to the world.”⁹⁵ This voice in the text is the authorial presence, which the reader experiences throughout the progression of the story. Chatman identifies the voice as “not the narrator, but rather the principle that invented the narrator, along with everything else in the narrative, that stacked the cards in this particular way, had these things happened to these characters, in these words or images.”⁹⁶

The implied author is found and constructed from the narrative by the reader. In other words, the implied author decides the reader’s response to the narrative and the reader’s mental image of the character, by the “sum of choices reflected in the writing of the narrative, choices of the use of settings, irony, characterization, the handling of time, suspense, distance, and all the problematic and potential of narrative writing which must be dealt with in one way or another.”⁹⁷ Culpepper argues that the picture of the implied author, which a reader inevitably constructs, is “one of the most important effects,” and he will “never be neutral toward all values.”⁹⁸

The implied author is different from the narrator because the implied author, who has no voice, cannot make a direct communication with the reader. Wayne C. Booth also states that “‘narrator’ is usually taken to mean the ‘I’ of a work, but the ‘I’ is seldom

⁹⁵Wayne Booth, *Critical Understanding* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1979), 269.

⁹⁶Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 148.

⁹⁷R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 6-7.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 71.

if ever identical with the implied image of the artist.”⁹⁹ Chatman explains the interrelationship between the implied author and the narrator in the text:

What makes a narrator unreliable is that his value diverges strikingly from that of the implied author’s; the rest of the narrative – “the norm of the work” – conflicts with the narrator’s presentation, and we become suspicious of his sincerity or competence to tell the “true version.” The unreliable narrator is at virtual odds with the implied author; otherwise his unreliability could not emerge.¹⁰⁰

Though it is a common phenomenon among narrative critics to distinguish between the narrator and the implied author, sometimes they can overlap. In this respect, Howell asserts that “the distance between author, implied author and narrator can be expressed along a spectrum of possibilities ranging from equivalence to separation A public, undramatized, reliable, and omniscient narrator, for example, is the type of narrator who most closely approximates the implied author.”¹⁰¹ M. H. Abrams provides a good summary of the implied author when he says,

All these diverse critics agree, however, that the sense of a convincing authorial presence, whose values, beliefs, and moral vision are the implicit controlling forces throughout a work, serves to persuade the reader to yield to the work that unstinting imaginative consent without which a poem or novel remains nothing more than an elaborate verbal game.¹⁰²

The Implied Reader

Rhoads and Michie define the implied reader as “an imaginary reader with the ideal responses implied or suggested by the narrative . . . an extension of the narrative, a

⁹⁹Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 73.

¹⁰⁰Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 149.

¹⁰¹Howell, *Inclusive Story*, 164

¹⁰²Abrams, *A Glossary*, 125.

reader that the author creates (by implication) in telling the story.”¹⁰³ The implied reader, who is the counterpart of the implied author is provided by the real author. Chatman says, “When I enter the fictional contract I add another self: I become an implied reader.”¹⁰⁴ Booth shares Chatman’s idea: “The author creates, in short, an image of himself and another image of his reader; he makes his reader, as he makes his second self.”¹⁰⁵ Chatman and Booth emphasize the implied author as a creation of the real author in telling the story.¹⁰⁶

The implied reader is present inside the text as the real author and the real reader are outside of the written text. Therefore, it is important to find a perfect agreement for the understanding of the text between the real reader and implied reader. Booth contends that “the author . . . makes his reader, as he makes his second self, and the most successful reading is one in which the created selves, author and reader, can find complete agreement.”¹⁰⁷ Though the role of the real reader is indispensable to the transaction of reading in a practical sense,¹⁰⁸ the implied reader should be taken up as a necessary element in reading to avoid any fallacy that reduces a work solely to the real

¹⁰³David Rhoads and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of A Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 137.

¹⁰⁴Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 150.

¹⁰⁵Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 138.

¹⁰⁶Cf. Susan Sniader Lanser, *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 116.

¹⁰⁷Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 138.

¹⁰⁸Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 151.

reader's apprehension of the text.¹⁰⁹ In this thesis, the term implied reader refers to this idea, and of course, the interplay between the text and the real reader will be taken into consideration as necessary.

Conclusion

This chapter covers narrative theories relevant to the study of God as a character. The thesis holds the view that characters can be the effect of reading, which transcends the text and becomes part of (or reduced to) the textuality simultaneously. This means that the effects of reading and textuality cannot be treated separately. Rather, they should be treated together in search of a character in the narrative. Thus, there are two basic components, as an application of the theory, for finding God as a character: the reader and the text.

The reader interprets the text. Modern literary critics have found that there are several rhetorical elements closely involved in the interpretation of the text with the reader: the narrator, the implied author, and the implied reader. Their function in finding God as a character is important, especially when there is perfect alignment of their evaluative points of view with that of God. Such alignment may strongly point to the fact that God is a (central) character in the narrative.

¹⁰⁹The "authorial audience" is different from "the implied reader." The authorial audience is the "intended reader," whom the author has in mind when creating the text. Carter asserts that "this audience is a 'contextualized implied reader,' not 'present in' the text, as an implied reader is usually said to be, but 'presupposed' by the text." The authorial audience's sociocultural knowledge and interpretive skills are presupposed by the author in creating the text. Warren Carter, "Recalling the Lord's Prayer: The Authorial Audience and Matthew's Prayer as Familiar Liturgical Experience," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 57 (1995): 518-19. For Matthew, the authorial audience is "the author's image or impression of the community, or communities, of disciples of Jesus for whom he writes." *Ibid.*, 519.

In Matthew, God rarely speaks or appears. In other words, God does not appear physically as do other characters. God's evaluative point of view, however, can be observed. His evaluative point of view is revealed by investigating the evaluative point of view of the narrator, the implied author, and the implied reader. For instance, the narrator in Matthew uses the Old Testament fulfillment quotations throughout the Gospel to establish Jesus' ministry as the fulfillment of God's promise to His people. Every time that the narrator does this, the implied reader comes close to constructing God's presence in the narrative, which is revealed by the Old Testament quotations.¹¹⁰ Through the progression of the narrative, the reader will have a clearer understanding of God's role as a character in the narrative. Therefore, the major concern of this thesis as its methodology, is *how God's presence is revealed* in Matthew. By investigating the ways God's presence is shown in Matthew, what is special about God in Matthew will be revealed.

Various components of narrative criticism for the investigation of God's activity have been presented in this chapter. The narrator's statement and characters' speech, which reflect the presence of God, will be the most important source for describing Him as a character and for His characterization in this thesis. They are very reliable components that provide the reader with certainty and the explicitness of God as a character. For the investigation of the statement or speech, a theological or exegetical

¹¹⁰The implied reader comes to accept the narrator's evaluative point of view as the story progresses because the narrator aligns his or her evaluative point of view with that of God from the beginning of, and throughout, the Gospel of Matthew. For instance, from the start of Matthew, the implied reader is told of Jesus' mission as the fulfillment of God's promise (1:1; 1:2-17, 23; 2:15, 17-18, 23). This point of view is maintained throughout the Gospel. Therefore, as long as there is not any contradiction in the

study will be made if necessary, but such a study will not attempt to present a unique solution to any current debate related to the selected passage. Rather, the study will be limited to the explanation of the function of the statement or speech, which will be under consideration for the study of God within the narrative, so that the way He is revealed will be explained.

The narrator's evaluative point of view also will be compared with that of other characters. The relationship and the function of the relationship – between the narrator and other characters, and among the characters – may play a significant role in showing God's presence in the narrative.

Characters' evaluative points of view do not stand alone. It is very likely that the author may use several points of view to show the same character from several different positions. For this reason, the evaluative point of view is partially aligned with the other points of view. For example, Anderson asserts, "The point of view of the narrator and the character Jesus are aligned on the ideological plane. They are partially aligned on the phraseological, temporal, spatial, and psychological planes. These partial alignments support the ideological alignment."¹¹¹ Consequently, it will be necessary to study the function of other planes (points of view) and their interrelationship with the evaluative (ideological) point of view in the narrative whenever they are needed for the study of God as a character.

In addition, there are various ways of indirect presentation to be utilized in this thesis for the study of God's character presentation. Characters' action, speech, external

narrator's presentation of the evaluative point of view in Matthew, the implied reader is to accept the presented view of the narrator.

¹¹¹ Anderson, *Matthew's Narrative Web*, 56.

appearance, and environment play a significant role in the construction of God as a character. Each component will be examined, and the function within the narrative will be explained to demonstrate God's presence. In some cases, comparing the texts of other Gospels may be necessary, for any intentional change will indicate Matthew's purpose. This thesis, however, will not be heavily dependent upon redaction criticism, but such comparison will be utilized whenever the author's intention is to be judged.

Besides these, there may be some other textual indications that claim attention to the study of God. For instance, God's presence is discovered when He is called "God," "Father," or "Lord." God's presence in Matthew is identified by these names, and such identification requires a necessary treatment of God as a character. The names of God are sufficient factors for arguing that He is a character in Matthew, because the name creates a character under the name.¹¹² Like names, there are other textual indications that produce God as a character. Robert L. Brawley asserts – when he explains "what produces characters in literary work" – that characters are made up of signs whose basic units are "semes." These are elementary units, "such as emotions, personal traits, and actions."¹¹³

The combination of semes signifies a character's existence to the reader. The character's repeated semes ultimately result in the characterization of the character. Though God is divine, and God's characterization cannot be made as simple as a human being's characterization, the semes of God – like human characters – can be found in

¹¹²J. Weinsheimer asserts that a name is a sufficient condition for creating a character. J. Weinsheimer, "Theory of Character: Emma," *Poetics Today* 1 (1979): 187.

¹¹³Robert L. Brawley, *Centering on God: Method and Message in Luke-Acts* (Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 107.

Matthew; such findings demand that God be interpreted in the same way as the human characters are interpreted. Moreover, narrative criticism does not provide a different category for divine character interpretation. Most of the semes, if any, may be treated in the course of discussion of other narrative components, such as the narrator's statement, a character's speech, indirect presentations, and various points of view.¹¹⁴ Besides the narrative components that have been discussed in this chapter, this thesis will utilize any necessary rhetorical components in the interpretation of a passage to find God as a character.

The criteria by which God is recognized as a character in Matthew should be mentioned for practical purpose. In other words, the way that the thesis will determine where God is present in the narrative should be indicated. There should be a practical guideline for the selection of passage, because this thesis cannot cover all the passages in Matthew due to the limited space.

First of all, the Gospel of Matthew will be studied in sequential reading, which is ideal. It is the way that both the reader encounters God as a character and God's characterization is constructed for the reader. The passage(s) in each chapter will be selected on the basis of having the greatest impact on the establishment of God as a character and on His characterization. In Matthew, all characters have their roles to play. God's role will be the most decisive – and fundamental – factor to guide the flow of the narrative if God is found to be a character.

¹¹⁴Philip Reubin Johnson, "God in Mark: The Narrative Function of God as a Character in the Gospel of Mark" (Ph.D. diss., Lutheran Theological Seminary, 2000), 68-72.

The passages in which God speaks or God's activity is clearly shown will have priority. Allusions to God's presence should be the focus if God's presence is not physically shown in the narrative. The fact that God does not physically appear in the narrative does not mean that He cannot be presented as a character. Instead, it should be understood as a particular method by which God is shown to be a character in Matthew. God's presentation is different from that of human beings. According to Meir Sternberg,

Though God is the Bible's hero, his portrayal may yet appear a special case. After all, most dimensions associated with character – physical appearance, social status, personal history, local habitation – do not apply to him at all. They are meant to be conspicuous by their absence, which impresses on the reader from the very beginning the message that the whole Bible will dramatize with variations: the qualitative distance that separates God from humans and pagan gods, both existing in matter and time and space and society.¹¹⁵

As Sternberg says, God's portrayal may be different from that of human characters. God in Matthew, however, shares various dimensions associated with human characters: He is called by other characters; God has names; He shares His point of view with other characters; and, most of all, God acts. God can appear in a different way from human characters in the narrative and He can act in different ways because God is God. God is personified as a character by finding His various components.

The current writer will choose a passage that describes such dimensions of God very well. How God is revealed as a character will be explained. Different components of narrative criticism will be used to find textual identifiers of God. A more functional guideline for passage selection is as follows: (1) The passage will be examined if there is a reference to the divine names – such as God, Father or Lord – or

¹¹⁵Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 323.

there is an appellation to the divine name. It will be determined if they refer to God because His names will support that He exists as a character. (2) The narrator's statement and characters' speech will be examined to find character indications (semes) that indicate God's presence or activities. In this case, the textual indications will include the study of the passage's grammar. For example, if a verb refers to God as its implied subject, it will be indicated. If God is called in the genitive form, "God's, God of, or, of God . . .," it will be studied. If God is the subject of a character's speech, or of speech between characters, He will be viewed as a character because God is being constructed as a character to the reader through character speech; (3) Where there is no clear mention of God or of His activity, the current writer will analyze the narrative to see if it can be regarded as indicating the *cause* of God's activity or the *effect* of God's activity. Discovering the cause or effect of God's activity is finding the way that the passage generates the impression of God's activity to the reader. Even if there is no clear indication of God's activity, where God is viewed as being responsible for certain action will be chosen.¹¹⁶ (4) God's statement or action in Matthew will be compared with other statements of God in the Bible, because His statement or action in Matthew should confirm God's previous speech and actions as described in the Bible.

Following such discernment, the current writer will decide which passages should be discussed in each chapter and which should not. After deliberation, I will debate God as a character in the passage. The overall methodological element for the discussion of the thesis will be that of narrative criticism as presented in this chapter.

¹¹⁶For instance, there are some miracle stories of Jesus, in which God can be viewed as an ultimate source of the miracle of Jesus.

Various character indications will be discussed, and their function in constructing God as a character will be covered.

CHAPTER 3
GOD AS A CHARACTER
IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Introduction

The study of the Gospel of Matthew's plot has received some attention from narrative scholars.¹ The simplest form of study on Matthew's plot is that of Richard A. Edwards. He tries to find the Matthean plot through sequential reading. He studies plot by following "the flow of the narrative" from the viewpoint of a reader who starts to read it from the beginning.² Edwards' plot of Matthew is a product made after a "cumulative reading process."³

On the other hand, David Howell studies Matthew's plot by focusing on the elements that unfold the narrative as story and discourse to the reader. He argues that "literary critics have shown that a narrative is always composed of more than a mere chronological succession of events. Rather, the narrative world is interpreted and given significance through the rhetorical strategies utilized to plot events so that they tell the

¹ Richard A. Edwards, *Matthew's Story of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 8; Jack D. Kingsbury, "The Figure of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel: A Literary-Critical Probe," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 21 (1984): 3-36; idem, "The Plot of Matthew's Story," *Interpretation* 46 (1992): 347-56; Frank Matera, "The Plot of Matthew's Gospel," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49 (1987): 233-53; and Kathleen Weber, "Plot and Matthew," *SBL Seminar Papers* 35 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996): 400-31.

² Edwards, *Matthew's Story*, 9.

³ Ibid.

story of the Gospel in a certain way.”⁴ Most Matthean scholars agree with Howell in that they have searched the element that leads the story in Matthew in a “certain way.”

According to Jack D. Kingsbury – one such scholar – “conflict” is the central element that leads the story of Matthew, and Jesus is at the center of that conflict. Tracing the conflict around Jesus, he recognizes three story lines: the main story line of Jesus, the story line of the religious leaders, and the story line of the disciples.⁵ The story lines are placed in “story-time,” which “refers to the chronological order in which all the events cited in a narrative occur,”⁶ and the great interest in Matthew’s story-time lies with the time that extends from Abraham to the consummation (1:1-17; 28:20).⁷

As Kingsbury relates it, Matthew’s story-time reverts to Abraham’s time and, therefore, God is involved in this story-time as an important figure who had promised to Abraham that his offspring would bless all the people of the earth (Gen 12:1-3). God’s involvement from the beginning of the story makes it possible to trace His story line in Matthew. Frank Matera also says that Matthew’s plot concerns salvation history and describes Matthew’s plot as follows: “In the appearance of Jesus the Messiah, God fulfills his promises to Israel. But Israel refuses to accept Jesus as the Messiah. Consequently, the Gospel passes to the nations.”⁸ He gives a paramount importance to

⁴David Howell, *Matthew’s Inclusive Story: A Study in the Narrative Rhetoric of the First Gospel*, ed. David Hill, JSNT Sup 42 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 93-94.

⁵Jack D. Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 129.

⁶Ibid., 41.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Matera, “The Plot,” 243.

Matthew's ending. Matthew's conclusion, which points to the close of age (28:2), requires a broader perspective: "the time between Abraham and the parousia."⁹

Mark A. Powell recognizes Matthew's main plot as "God's plan and Satan's challenge."¹⁰ Powell also recognizes "conflict" as the most important element guiding Matthew's story. He argues that God's point of view in the story is what Matthew is to "establish" against Satan's.¹¹ Powell says "Ostensibly a story about Jesus, it is, at its deepest level, a story about God."¹² God's story line can be found in the Gospel of Matthew as those narrative critics' argument reveals.

This chapter engages the Gospel of Matthew in a sequential reading. The sequential reading is preferred, because it is the way that a reader cumulates the characterization of God. A topical reading is avoided as S. G. Wilson has cautioned: "This can result in distortion both of the intention of the author, insofar as this is recoverable, and of the impression the narrative would have had on its first readers."¹³ It will not be necessary to discuss every textual indications of God in each chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, because not every indications demands the same attention for this study, and some may function in the same way for the characterization of God.¹⁴

⁹Ibid., 241.

¹⁰Mark A. Powell, "The Plot and Subplots of Matthew's Gospel," *New Testament Studies* 38 (1992): 199.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid., 12.

¹⁴For example, God's care is emphasized both in Matt 6:26 ("Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father

This study's goal is determining how God functions as a character in the Gospel of Matthew. The study will focus on this objective and avoid discussing in detail any theological issues in the chosen passages. Passage selection will be based on the current writer's judgment concerning the passages that appear to be important for achieving the established goal. Passage-selection criteria are, as mentioned in the first chapter: where (1) God speaks or acts, (2) references to God occur directly, (3) references to God occur indirectly, (4) God's activity is recognized explicitly, (5) God's activity is recognized implicitly, and (6) specific Matthean terminology is related to this study.

God Is Faithful (1:1-17)

Matthew's opening section reminds the reader of God's previous work with Israel.¹⁵ Warren Carter contends that "the names in the genealogy invoke stories of Israel's experience with God. In the context God, unnamed but assumed throughout, emerges as the main character. God is the one controlling the events and bringing

feeds them"), and 10:29 ("Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from our Father"). They function in the same way to indicate God's care for His children.

¹⁵Richard A. Edwards argues that a narrative's opening section is crucial because it gives the implied reader the appropriate framework for adjusting to the story's specifics as they are presented. The purpose of placing a genealogy at the very beginning of the narrative is to impress on the reader that the story, which focuses on Jesus, can revert as far back as Abraham's time. The reader is constantly reminded throughout Matthew's story that Jesus is the integral component of God's long-established plan for salvation. Edwards says, "The reader should expect God's control over events whether it is explicitly stated or not." Richard A. Edwards, "Narrative Implication of God in Matthew," *Catholic Biblical Journal* 52 (1990): 642.

Israel's history to the point of the appearance of Jesus."¹⁶ Through genealogy, the reader meets God, who has been at work. In 1:1-17, God – as a character – not only enters the story, but initiates it as well.

Fred Burnett is correct when he explains the “primacy effect” of characterization: “The information (as content), attitudes, characters, etc, presented at the beginning of a text will be retained by the reader, and he or she will interpret every subsequent item in their light unless the text sets up a mechanism to oppose them.”¹⁷ The primacy effect in the Gospel's first section (1:1-17) concerns God's preparation for the fullness of time. As Brian M. Nolan holds, what is asked in the genealogy is not about “is this man Jesus the Messiah?” but “what sort of a Christ is Jesus?”¹⁸ The question of Jesus implied in genealogy leads the reader to Jesus' true identity as God's promised Messiah. God's initial evaluative point of view with regard to Jesus is presented here that is supported throughout Matthew's story. Therefore, an ideological orientation to the rest of the Gospel is made in the introduction of Jesus' genealogy.

Through Jesus' name, the primary effect of God's activity is retained for the

¹⁶Warren Carter, *Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 123.

¹⁷Fred W. Burnett, “Prolegomenon to Reading Matthew's Eschatological Discourse: Redundancy and the Education of the Reader in Matthew,” *Semeia* 31 (1985): 95. Cf. Meir Sternberg, *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 93-94. Richard A. Edwards notes that the arrangement of material should have an immense effect on the reader's attitude toward the implied author as well as specific characters in the story. Edwards, “Narrative Implications,” 641.

¹⁸Brian M. Nolan, *The Royal Son of God: The Christology of Matthew 1-2 in the Setting of the Gospel* (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 28. Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993), 3.

reader as well.¹⁹ The name “Jesus” in 1:1 is tightly connected with the designation as the “Son of David” and the “Son of Abraham.” Bernard Brandon Scott utilizes the effect of focalization²⁰ for Jesus’ designation as the Son of David and Abraham. According to Scott, “This genealogy begins with Abraham and not Adam. ‘Son of David, Son of Abraham’ not only marks the first two movements of the genealogy but also defines the focalization.”²¹ The reader comes to a very focused reading of Jesus in the context of Hebrew history by this focalization on Jesus as the Son of David and Abraham.

In turn, Jesus’ designation as the Son of David and Abraham strongly focuses on the fulfillment of God’s promise. God as a character is clearly indicated from the start of Matthew. Kingsbury says that “the message of the genealogy is plain: the whole of Israel’s history has been so guided by God that the promises made to Abraham and to King David which ostensibly had come to naught in the Babylonian captivity have attained their fulfillment in the coming of the heir of Abraham and David, namely, the

¹⁹ It is in line with the use of name in the Old Testament. J. Nolland asserts that Old Testament names given from heaven (an angel gives the name of “Jesus” in Matthew) point to “the actions and purposes of God rather than of the named figure.” For example, the name “Abraham” is given by God, and it functions as having something to do with God’s purpose. J. Nolland, “No Son-of-God Christology in Matthew 1.18-25,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 62 (1996): 9.

²⁰The literary term “focalization” was first used by Gérard Genette in his work *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981) to indicate the way by which the text presents a story. The narrators usually verbalize the focalization. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Methuen, 1983), 71.

²¹Bernard Brandon Scott, “The Birth of the Reader,” *Semeia* 52 (1991): 85.

Messiah.”²² The genealogy shows Jesus in terms of Israel’s past: He is the fulfillment of God’s interactions with Israel beginning with Abraham.

Each time the reader encounters Jesus’ name throughout the Gospel, it brings him or her to the inseparable link between Jesus and God because the name of “Jesus” is closely related to God’s activity. From the very beginning, the reader is reminded of God’s presence as an unforgettable figure, and this is continuously repeated during the course of the story. Burnett argues that “the narrative function of the proper name Jesus is to provide referential stability for the reader, it also functions as a signifier which impels the reader to read for a signified.”²³ The name “Jesus” signifies “God’s activity.” The reader begins to perceive God’s activity in the person of Jesus, in His speech and actions,²⁴ and to perceive God’s evaluative point of view through the name “Jesus”: Jesus is *God’s* Messiah, sent by *God*, to fulfill *God’s* plan.

The reader starts to expect God’s activity in the following events in the narrative at this point. The narrator demonstrates that God is not only active in the events, but also the ultimate cause behind them. Matthew’s use of the word “origin” (γένεσις) in 1:1, rather than the more common word of “birth” (γέννησις), shows his intention to connect the past and present with Jesus’ birth.²⁵ By this word, the narrator

²²Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 45.

²³Fred W. Burnett, “The Undecidability of the Proper Name ‘Jesus’ in Matthew,” *Semeia* 54 (1991): 124.

²⁴For the 150 possible occurrences of Jesus’ name in Matthew, see Nolan, *The Royal Son of God*. Because the name “Jesus” means “God [is] salvation,” God is indicated in the name of Jesus. See also, Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 45.

²⁵However concerning the interpretation of “Βίβλος γενέσεως” there are several different proposals: (1) The words introduce “the entire gospel” meaning “the book of

emphasizes Jesus' messianic origin and God's role in the preparation for the Messiah.²⁶ God is at the center of the past and present and, therefore, the point of view that the narrator adopts in Matthew is God's point of view. This is important because the narrator's point of view is decisive concerning the way in which the narrative is presented.²⁷

The plot of God's fulfillment of His promise begins with the genealogy and continues throughout Matthew. Marshall D. Johnson claims that the distinctive mark of Matthew's genealogy is "eschatological." The time is up, and the Messiah has come. The genealogy leads the reader to expect the *telos* of the messianic age.²⁸

history" or "the book of the (new) creation" (W. D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964] 67-72. (2) The words introduce "Matthew 1:1-4:16," meaning "the book of the generation" or "the book of origin" (E. Krentz, "The Extent of Matthew's Prologue: Toward the Structure of the First Gospel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 83 [1964]: 414). (3) The words introduce "Matthew 1:1-2:23," meaning "book of the generation" (W. C. Allen, *St. Matthew* [Edinburg: Clark, 1912], 1-2). (4) The words introduce "only the genealogy, Matthew 1:1-17," meaning "book of the origin" (W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew* [Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1971], 1-2). (5) The words are intentionally ambiguous, introducing both the genealogy and the entire gospel (H. C. Waetjen, "The Genealogy as the Key to the Gospel According to Matthew," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95 [1976]: 215). The majority of commentators opt for the fourth view. Blaine Charette, *Restoring Presence: The Spirit in Matthew's Gospel*, JPT Supplement Series vol. 18 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 38 n. 20.

²⁶Raymond E. Brown notes that the divine preparation is manifested in that the name of Jesus is given before His birth. Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1977), 138.

²⁷For the decisive influence of the narrator in the Gospels, see David Rhoads and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of A Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 39.

²⁸Marshall D. Johnson, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 208.

God – at this stage – is depicted as what Foster would call a “flat” character. God has not been fully revealed yet. He will become more complex and difficult to understand, however, rather than being constructed around a single idea or quality. Through the progress of Matthew’s story, God will be recognized as an active actor who is responsible for unusual events. Such tension alludes to the name of Abraham because it unfolds God’s promise that will expand to the Gentile people.

God With Us (1:18 - 25)

In 1:20, the angel confirms to Joseph that Mary conceived through the Holy Spirit: “Joseph, the son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived (γεννηθῆν) in her is from the Holy Spirit.” The conception by the Holy Spirit, which underlines the passive roles of Joseph and Mary, signifies God’s initiative in the activity.²⁹ In order to support that God is behind this event, Matthew notes that everything has happened to fulfill the Scripture: “Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel” (1:23).

The particle γὰρ in both 1:20 and 21 confirms God’s activity. The first γὰρ in verse 20 provides a reason for Joseph “not to be afraid for the conception of Mary is by the will of God.” Jesus’ birth is a result of the Holy Spirit’s work. Matthew’s use of the word “origin”(γένεσις) in 1:18 is significant in connection with the Spirit. According to Blaine Charette, “Through this association of γένεσις with πνεύμα Matthew conveys to

²⁹Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, World Biblical Commentary, vol. 33 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 19.

his readers that the Holy Spirit is bringing about the new creative work of God through the conception of the Messianic redeemer.”³⁰

The second γὰρ in verse 21 supplies a reason based on a future event: “Call his name Jesus for He will save his people from their sins.” At this point, the reader has a reliable anticipation of this narrative’s scope because of the use of γὰρ in verses 20 and 21. God’s faithful saving actions from the past to the future have been confirmed. Jesus’ role as a Savior of people indicates an imminent renewal of God’s presence with His people (28:20). Moreover, God’s involvement in the saving activity is reflected in the name of “Jesus,” the Hebrew form of which is “Joshua,” meaning “Yahweh is salvation,” “Yahweh saves,” or “Yahweh will save.”³¹

God’s activity which is confirmed by the use of γὰρ in verse 21 is also supported by the previous statement about the Holy Spirit introduced by the first γὰρ in verse 20. The Holy Spirit’s presence and God’s presence are closely related, as is frequently found in the Old Testament. In Ezekiel 39: 29, God proclaims, “I will never again hide my face from them, when I pour out my spirit upon the house of Israel.” Here, the new age, which will be characterized by the pouring of God’s Spirit, is closely related to God’s affirmation that God will never hide His face. Charette asserts that the context of Ezekiel 39:29 “concerns the future time when God will restore his people from exile. At that time he will pour out his Spirit upon the house of Israel and will never again hide

³⁰Charette, *Restoring Presence*, 38.

³¹F. C. Grant, “Jesus Christ,” in vol. 2 of the *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), 869.

his face from them. Here God's Spirit and his presence are once again related and within an eschatological context."³²

The information provided in this episode is very dependable because its source is an angel of the Lord: "An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said" The reader adopts the angel's voice as God's; the angel's statement enhances God's role. Jesus' birth manifests God's activity.

Direct characterization is not found here but, according to David Gowler, God is presented indirectly. Gowler says that indirect presentation "displays or exemplifies the qualities and traits of the characters, leaving the reader to make the appropriate inference."³³ In this episode, the angel informs the reader of Jesus' role in God's unfolding plan, which is made certain by the angel. The angel is reliable and authoritative to the reader because it is the angel of the Lord (verses 20 and 24). In this episode, the event occurring between the angel and Joseph indirectly constructs God's characterization, and the narrator's statement of the event further supports this characterization.

The narrator continues to describe Jesus as the purpose of God's promise and the manifestation of God's presence by the word "Ἐμμανουήλ": "And they shall name him Emmanuel, which means 'God with us' " (verse 23). God's presence is highlighted by the narrator's comment on "Ἐμμανουήλ", "God with us." Jesus' authoritative status and God's presence in Jesus are the most fundamental reasons that the Gospel of

³²Charette, *Restoring Presence*, 41 n. 26.

³³David B. Gowler, "Characterization in Luke: A Socio-Narratological Approach," *Biblical Theological Bulletin* 19 (1989): 56.

Matthew is full of “conflict,” which leads the story as the most important plot element.³⁴ The religious leaders continuously challenge Jesus’ authority, while the divine presence continuously defends His authority.

Matthew accentuates that Jesus is God’s presence, which guarantees Jesus with God-given authority. Kingsbury notes that, in this section, Matthew states the story of Jesus’ birth less cryptically to ensure that Jesus’ birth is from God: Mary’s conception is by the Holy Spirit (1:18); Mary is a virgin when she has Jesus (1:23); Joseph does not have any relations with Mary until after she has given birth to her Son (1:25); and God – through the prophet – shows the true significance of Jesus, God with us (1:22-23).³⁵

God Who Leads (2:1-18)

Jesus’ birth is a direct result of God’s activity through the Holy Spirit. After Jesus’ birth, God intervenes in Herod’s plot to kill Jesus and rescues Jesus from Herod. The reader is surprised about the narrator’s comment regarding the negative reactions to the Magi’s report (“When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him” [verse 3]), which is soon settled when the chief priests and scribes of the people cooperate with Herod (verses 4-6), and Herod calls the wise men “secretly” (verse

³⁴For example, Maarten J. J. Menken contends that in 17:17 when Jesus says in the context of healing an epileptic boy (“You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you?”), Matthew intentionally changes “πρὸς ὑμᾶς” – in Mark’s parallel (9:19) – to “μεθ’ ὑμῶν.” This change indicates “the withdrawal of God’s presence in him from those who do not believe in him.” This is found in 26:29 when Jesus says to His disciples during the Last Supper, “I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” The words “with you” are not found in the Markan parallel of 14:25. Maarten J. J. Menken, “Isaiah 7:14 in Matthew 1:23,” *Novum Testamentum* 43 (2001): 158.

³⁵Jack D. Kingsbury, *Jesus Christ in Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 67.

7). The Magi, Herod, and an angel of the Lord are major characters who contribute to the characterization of God in this episode. The first reaction to Jesus is highlighted through them, and it foreshadows the future conflict within Matthew's story as a plot. With the religious leaders' connection to Herod and Matthew's approval of the Magi's evaluative point of view toward Jesus, Matthew implies the expected conflict of Jesus with the people of Israel and the religious leaders. According to Frank Matera, "At the beginning of a narrative, the narrator establishes the setting, introduces the characters, and lays the foundation for the plot."³⁶ The conflict between Jesus and the other characters is for the first time introduced as a major component of Matthew's plot, and God's role is decisive in solving the conflict.

The star that appeared to the Magi is God's guidance.³⁷ God is again the scene's initiator. Although the star's historical credibility is debatable,³⁸ how the author plans to affect his reader is quickly achieved: The bright star, which leads the Magi from the East, is something beyond human ability. Francis J. Moloney says that the "heavenly sign leads foreigners on a search for something that God is doing."³⁹ By the appearance

³⁶Frank J. Matera, "The Prologue as the Interpretative Key to Mark's Gospel," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 34 (1988): 3.

³⁷Ulrich Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1995), 27.

³⁸Dale C. Allison, "What Was the Star That Guided the Magi?," *Biblical Review* 9 (1993): 20-24; Raymond E. Brown, "Meaning of the Magi: The Significance of the Star," *Worship* 49 (1975): 574-82; Colin J. Humphrey, "The Star of Bethlehem," *Science and Christian Belief* 5 (1993): 83-101; and Simo Parpola, "The Magi and the Star Babylonian Astronomy dates Jesus' Birth," *Biblical Review* 17 (2001), 16-23.

³⁹Francis J. Moloney, *Beginning the Good News* (Collegeville, MN: A Liturgical Press, 1992), 88.

of the star, the reader knows that God also guides all the Magi's steps. The star guides their arrival and an angel of the Lord guides their departure, both of which are God's providential works.

The Magi's divine guidance is functional because the reader is invited to judge the Magi's response to Jesus as being correct. Through this judgment, the reader becomes aware that the narrative is proceeding along with God's plan, in spite of Herod's threat to kill Jesus. Matthew shows that the Magi's evaluative point of view toward Jesus is right because it is in accordance with that of God. God's approval for the Magi's viewpoint is continued until they leave the land: They are warned (χρηματισθέντες) in a dream to avoid meeting Herod (2:12). The passive verb, *χρηματισθέντες*, implies to the reader that the dream originated from divine activity, which is God's activity.

The divine involvement with the Magi (being warned in a dream) and the lack of such involvement with Herod support that the Magi's evaluative point of view concerning Jesus is true and that Herod's viewpoint is untrue.⁴⁰ This judgment is further supported by the characters' psychological viewpoints: The Magi are full of joy (2:10), compared with Herod, who still is fearful (vv. 3 and 16). The psychological viewpoint of the Magi and Herod points to the valid viewpoint with which the narrator aligns himself. D. D. Kupp explains that "by making the implied reader privy to a character's inward thought or feeling the narrator is able to bring the implied reader quickly into his confidence and establish a positive 'personal' relationship – a mutually shared,

⁴⁰The narrator later supports this more through a phraseological and psychological point of view by quoting the prophet Jeremiah. He cites the words of lamentation and, by citing them, aligns himself with such feeling.

privileged viewpoint which shapes the implied reader's response to and assessment of the characters."⁴¹

Matthean plot points to Jesus as the rightful king of Israel appointed by God through the comparison between the Magi and Herod. God's activity in this appointment is also confirmed by various degrees of indirect indications.⁴² Matthew confirmed that Jesus is the "Son of David" (1:1) in the previous chapter. Jesus' designation as the "Son of David" emphasized His kingship, which again is in focus with the Magi's question, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?" (2:2). The citation of Micah 5:1(2) supports Jesus' kingship by adding a description of Jesus as a shepherd ruler from the Davidic village of Bethlehem: "And you, Bethlehem . . . from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel" (verse 6). David R. Bauer argues, "The notion that Jesus is a Davidic king illuminates the relation between the kingship of Jesus and that of God. Even as David and his successors were kings in the sense that they were intended to function as agents of God's rule over the people, and ultimately over the nations (as in Psalm 2), so Jesus is king in the sense that God establishes God's rule through the

⁴¹D. D. Kupp, *Matthew's Emmanuel: Divine Presence and God's People in the First Gospel*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 90 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 37.

⁴²For example, the "τεχθεῖς" (2:2) is a divine passive, which informs the reader that God is an active agent in the birth of Jesus: "Ποῦ ἐστὶν ὁ τεχθεὶς βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων." Matthew shows that Jesus is born with purpose by God. God's action is implied. Sidebottom does not agree, however, with the idea of "divine passive." He argues that "the passive voice lends itself more readily to the description of the unfolding of events than to the personal and direct action of God." C. F. E. M. Sidebottom, "The So-Called Divine Passive in the Gospel Tradition," *Expository Times* 87 (1976): 200-04.

kingship of Jesus. Jesus functions, then, as God's viceroy."⁴³

God's involvement is apparent at an early stage of the story's development. The chief result of God taking the initiative will affect the rest of the story. The chief result prepares the reader for God's kind of activity at a later point in the narrative. In light of Jesus' role in the eschatological events later in the story, God's close involvement in Jesus from the beginning causes the reader to expect God's consistent activity in Jesus until the world's eschatological transformation (28:20). God's plan or intention in this episode is strongly alluded to as the plot's controlling element. It is clear that God is becoming a complex character, and tension is felt in the plot: He has been the God of Israel, but His plan also includes the Gentiles.

God's Messenger (3:1-12)

The story of Matthew 3:1-4:11 functions as a preparation for Jesus' public ministry, and God initiates the preparation. John the Baptist is introduced as the fulfillment of the Old Testament, which leads to God's activity in Matthew's third chapter. Jesus is led into temptation by the Holy Spirit, which designates God's action in the fourth chapter. Craig Blomberg confirms this: "The events of chaps. 3-4 . . . focus on God's preparation for the beginning of Jesus' public ministry."⁴⁴

The words at the beginning of the third chapter, "now in those days," show that

⁴³David R. Bauer, "The Kingship of Jesus in the Matthean Infancy Narrative: A Literary Analysis," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 57 (1995): 311.

⁴⁴Craig Blomberg, *Matthew* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 71.

“a new heightened period of eschatological revelation is dawning.”⁴⁵ Kingsbury argues that these words designate “the eschatological period of time that breaks upon Israel with the public ministry of John the Baptist and will continue until the parousia of Jesus Son of Man.”⁴⁶ The eschatological period is inaugurated according to God’s plan, and God’s action regarding the establishment of the new age is further emphasized with the Baptist’s claim of repentance for the kingdom of God.

Matthew’s introduction of John as “the Baptist” (ὁ βαπτιστής) rather than as “[the one] baptizing” ([ὁ] βαπτίζων) in Mark 1:4 demonstrates Matthew’s intended focus on John’s identity.⁴⁷ This focus on John the Baptist’s identity appeals to the reader of God’s activity when it is read with this: In comparison with Mark’s passive verb, “It is written in Isaiah,” Matthew emphasizes John the Baptist as the fulfillment of prophetic anticipation by saying, “This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke” (3:3). In this

⁴⁵John P. Meier, “John the Baptist in Matthew’s Gospel,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99 (1980): 387-88.

⁴⁶Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 30. According to Kingsbury, each pericope in Matthew 1-4 begins in one of only two ways: with a circumstantial participle of time (2:1, 13, 19; 4:12), or with the adverb *tote* (2:16; 3:13; 4:1). Because the phrase “in those days” disrupts these patterns in chapters 1-4, the question arises concerning whether it has a special significance. He notes that this phrase appears five times in 3:1 and chapter 24, and Matthew makes certain that these words possess a thoroughly eschatological connotation. He argues, “At 24:3b-c, Matthew follows Mark 13:4 word-for-word through the first part but departs from it radically in the second part. As a result, Matthew makes it clear that in his Gospel the eschatological Discourse is related, not to the destruction of the temple (cf. 24:3b), but to the parousia of Jesus and the consummation of the age. Indeed, historically the destruction of the temple lies behind Matthew (cf. 22:7), and while he expends no word throughout chs. 24-25 on this event, his text is replete with instruction and exhortation aimed at strengthening the church in the tribulations it encounters” (29).

⁴⁷Cf. Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 42.

case, Matthew's focus on John's identity indicates the presence of God, who realized the prophecy by sending John the Baptist and further emphasized John's ministry. Robert H. Gundry contends that "this substitution points toward God as the ultimate source of the prophecy."⁴⁸

John the Baptist is also identified with the eschatological prophet, Isaiah. Matthew describes John's appearance in a way that it reminds the reader of Elijah: "Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey" (3:4). John is introduced, on the presumption that the reader knows him very well, as appearing as the counterpart of the prophet Elijah.⁴⁹ In light of the Jewish motif of Elijah's return at the end of the days, which is clearly stated in Malachi 4:5, ("I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes"), the reader appreciates God's implied action toward His plan for salvation through John the Baptist. John and the prophet Isaiah are more or less identical in terms of their roles. The reader grasps the notion that God prepares and sends John the Baptist because of their similar activities. Walter Wink asserts that "John's significance is defined always in terms of his relation to Jesus in God's plan for salvation."⁵⁰

John the Baptist proclaims, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (3:2). The key themes announced by John are placed in relation to God: the coming of the kingdom of heaven, the eschatological judgment, and confessing sins.

⁴⁸Ibid., 44.

⁴⁹Margaret Davies, *Matthew* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 41.

⁵⁰Walter Wink, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 32.

These are God's unique activities. To John, repentance is in conjunction with the kingdom of heaven. Matthew omits "forgiveness of sins" in repentance, as it is in Mark 1:4: "John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." Instead, Matthew provides the coming of the kingdom of heaven as the immediate reason for repentance. Gundry notes that the "kingdom" (βασιλεία) denotes a sphere of rule, or the rule itself; and "heaven" (οὐρανῶν) indicates the source of the rule, namely, God. Therefore, John's claim for repentance reflects God, who is the ultimate reason for repentance. John the Baptist's proclamation, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near," immediately alerts the reader to "the fullness of God's power and presence."⁵¹

When many Pharisees and Sadducees come to be baptised, John the Baptist says to them, "Out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham" (verse 9).⁵² The hostility between John – as the forerunner of Jesus – and the religious leaders is in line with the second chapter's previous conflict between Jesus and Herod; it functions as

⁵¹Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 51. As it is well known, "the kingdom of heaven" is a circumlocution for the "kingdom of God." Recently, Robert Foster raised a question, however, regarding the "kingdom of God" as a circumlocution for the sake of his audience. He explains that the divine name of God (*theos*) occurs some fifty times in Matthew, and it is not likely that Matthew simply put "heaven" for "God." It is rather more likely that Matthew purposely used "kingdom of heaven." Foster holds that "'kingdom of heaven' combines with other 'heavenly' language (especially 'Father in heaven') to reaffirm the readers' identity as the true people of God. This language defends Jesus as a Davidic messiah, showing that he came to establish a heavenly, not earthly, kingdom." Robert Foster, "Why on Earth Use 'Kingdom of Heaven'?: Matthew's Terminology Revisited," *New Testament Studies* 48 (2002): 487. Gundry shares Foster's observation. He argues for Matthew's use of "heaven" as an expression of "the majesty of God's universal dominion." Gundry, *Matthew*, 43.

⁵²And John the Baptist observes God's power (δύνατα) of new creation: "God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham" (3:9c).

a pointer to future conflict in Matthew. According to Janice C. Anderson, “Indeed, it would be not be too much to say that the character of John is introduced in order to *establish the identity and character of Jesus* as well as to foreshadow the fate of Jesus.”⁵³ Anderson also remarks that Jesus shares John’s words, in 3:1-12 later in the narrative, when Jesus addresses the religious leaders.⁵⁴

Such word sharing is an indication of the phraseological alignment between John and Jesus, and it also points to the fact that John and Jesus are sharing the same evaluative point of view in the narrative.⁵⁵ The reader perceives God’s presence through this mental exercise. God has been advocating Jesus as the Messiah from the beginning of the narrative, and Jesus will align His point of view with that of God. Therefore, the reader comes to fully understand that John the Baptist is in perfect alignment with God’s point of view throughout the story’s progress.

God Speaks (3:13-17)

⁵³Janice C. Anderson, *Matthew’s Narrative Web: Over, and Over, and Over Again*, ed. Stanley E. Porter, JSNT Supplement Series 91 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 87.

⁵⁴Jesus shares John’s words of “brood of vipers” (v. 7) in 12:34 (to Pharisees) and 23:33 (to Pharisees and Scribes): “Brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?” (v. 7) in 23:33: “Serpents, brood of vipers, how flee you from the judgment of Gehenna?”: John’s words of bearing fruit, “Bear fruit worthy of repentance” (v. 8), are shared in 7:15-20: “In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit” (v. 17). Finally, John’s eschatological harvest image, “Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (v. 10), is shared by Jesus in 13:42: “And they will throw them into the furnace of fire.” *Ibid.*, 87-88.

⁵⁵Anderson, *Narrative Web*, 88.

God reveals Jesus as a very reliable character through this episode. Robert Alter notes that characters are revealed through appearance and gestures; through comments on one another; and through the character's direct speech.⁵⁶ Among these, Robert Brawley points out that "divine speech occupies the highest level of reliability."⁵⁷ God's divine words to Jesus provides the reader with Jesus' absolute reliability as the Son of God. In this episode, God's actions are indicated by narrated action and character speech: "the Spirit of God descending like a dove"(v. 16), and "this is my beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased" (v. 17). God chooses to be known publicly at this point.

In this scene, God opens the heavens: "The heavens were opened." Though God is not mentioned as an actor in this event, what happens designates God as the subject of the activity.⁵⁸ Seymour Chatman argues that "events are either *actions (acts)* or *happenings*. Both are changes of state. An action is a change of state brought about by an agent or one that affects a patient. If the action is plot-significant, the agent or patient is called a character."⁵⁹ "Heavens being opened" is a change of state, which demonstrates action. The opening of heaven naturally indicates God's action because heaven is where God rules.

⁵⁶Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 117.

⁵⁷ Robert L. Brawley, *Centering on God: Method and Message in Luke-Acts* (Louisville: John Konx, 1990), 110.

⁵⁸Hagner designates this verb as the divine passive, so God is the acting subject. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 57.

⁵⁹Seymour B. Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 44.

The Spirit of God like a dove descends upon Jesus (v. 16). The reader knows that God reveals Himself through this picture. Here again, it can be inferred from the phrase that it is God who generates the motion. The dove comes down from the heavens, or God's residing place. Leander E. Keck contends that the Spirit's arrival, which is compared to a dove's flight shows "God-sent motion."⁶⁰ He supports his view by saying that "there was a Jewish precedent comparing divine activity, motion, and speaking, with movements and chirping of doves."⁶¹

God's inner disposition is revealed in His addressing Jesus from the heavens. God discloses his inner thought, feeling, attitude, and so on, in the form of His address to Jesus: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (v. 17). God opens the heavens, and the Spirit of God is sent upon Jesus, but God still remains in the heavens. This fact clearly indicates that God and Jesus are distinctive figures, but at the same time, they are inseparable. God is with Jesus and, simultaneously, God is in heaven. Sometimes God – as a character – appears to be distinctive, and sometimes there seems to be no fine distinction between Him and Jesus.

The narrator is interested in showing Jesus as God-sent Messiah. It is not clear whether the people see the event in 3:16-17. The narrator does not hint anything about this matter; rather he refreshes the reader's attention by opening the scene with the word "behold" (ἰδοὺ): "Behold the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him" (v. 16 NKJ). This is because the

⁶⁰Leander E. Keck, "The Spirit and the Dove," *New Testament Studies* 17 (1970): 66. The Old Testament often shows that God is doing something extraordinary through the Spirit (Ezek 11:24; 37:1).

⁶¹Cf. Sirach xliii. 14, 17.

narrator's sole intention is describing God's action that identifies Jesus as God-sent Messiah.⁶²

God has decided to reveal Himself. His own decision to be revealed in this episode clearly shows the importance of Jesus' ministry. Jesus is God's selection, and Jesus' mission is given by God. Here God approves Jesus, and, therefore, God's activity consists of the "very essence of Jesus' being and behavior."⁶³

God Leads Jesus (4:1-11)

The temptation narrative is related to the previous baptism scene. Jesus' temptation story is presented as the testing of Jesus' reaction to His mission as the Son of God.⁶⁴ According to Howell, "The links between the baptism/temptation stories and later incidents in the Gospel underline the importance of these early stories in establishing the nature of Jesus' sonship and ministry: He is the Son of God who is fully obedient to God's will."⁶⁵

The same Spirit who was upon Jesus at the baptism immediately leads Him into the wilderness, which indicates God's prompt action toward Jesus. The meaning of the passive infinitive, "to be tempted (πειρασθῆναι)" in 4:1 shows that the temptation is

⁶²France asserts that "the whole focus of the account is on Jesus' 'commissioning,' not on a public revelation of his mission." R. T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 95.

⁶³Bauer, "The Kingship of Jesus in the Matthean Infancy Narrative," 310.

⁶⁴France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 96.

⁶⁵Howell, *Matthew's Inclusive Story*, 126.

purpose-driven.⁶⁶ Active voice could have been used here, “so that the devil could tempt Him.”⁶⁷ Matthew uses a passive verb, however, to signify that Jesus is *being led* (by God) to be tested. Though Jesus is tempted by the devil (Satan), Jesus’ subjection to God’s leading and plan is before the devil’s temptation.⁶⁸ The fact that the Spirit leads Jesus to the wilderness demonstrates that Jesus’ wilderness test is not accidental but, rather, a divinely planned and carried-out event. The initiative is with God, who is again behind all the events as an ultimate cause of what happens to Jesus.⁶⁹

The wilderness setting reminds the reader of Israel’s experience, Yahweh’s testing of Israel.⁷⁰ Jesus’ quotation from the sixth and eighth chapters of Deuteronomy strongly supports the wilderness image, which the reader cannot miss. Jesus’ answer to the devil, which is derived from the sixth and eighth chapters of Deuteronomy, implies God’s lessons to the Israelites in the wilderness (v.4-Deut 8:3; v. 7-Deut 6:16; v. 10-Deut 6:13). But the Israelites failed to keep these lessons. R. T. France says, “Now the true son of God, at the outset of His mission, faces the same tests in the wilderness and succeeds.”⁷¹ The temptation scene stresses Jesus’ perfect obedience to God’s will.

⁶⁶Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 71.

⁶⁷Robert G. Bratcher, *A Translator’s Guide to the Gospel of Matthew* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1981), 27.

⁶⁸Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 64.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰“And you shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments, or not” (v. 2). See also Deut 8:2, 16.

⁷¹France, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 97.

The period of “forty days and forty nights” parallels Israel’s forty years in the desert as well. According to Deuteronomy 8:4-5, God disciplines the Israelites under His provision: “The clothes on your back did not wear out and your feet did not swell these forty years. Know then in your heart that as a parent disciplines a child so the Lord your God disciplines you.” As God disciplines the Israelites like a parent disciplines *a child*,⁷² for forty years by testing them, it is God who leads Jesus, the *Son of God*, for forty days of temptation.

In the first temptation, the devil challenges Jesus, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread” (v. 3b). In the previous chapter, John the Baptist ascribes to God the power to raise up children to Abraham with stones: “Do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham” (3:9b), The devil tempts Jesus to use power to change stones into loaves of bread.⁷³ God’s power, which is associated with the word “stone” is recalled once again.

The temptation does not concern doubting that Jesus is God’s Son. The temptation points to Jesus’ obedience to God’s will. Jesus would cease to obey God if Jesus followed the devil’s demand. Jesus’ response to the devil, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God’” (v. 4), points to God as the supplier of food to relieve hunger. Robert H. Mounce explains, “For

⁷²See Exod 4:22-23, in which God designates Israel as His son.

⁷³Robert L. Mowery, “From Lord to Father in Matthew 1-7,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 59 (1997): 645-46.

Jesus to have turned stones into bread would have been to place personal physical need ahead of obedience and trust in God.”⁷⁴

The devil takes Jesus to the holy city and places Him on the temple’s pinnacle during the second temptation. The devil’s testing of Jesus’ obedience to God at the temple is ironic because the temple is the place where God’s divine presence is manifested. Harrington also suggests that the Greek diminutive form, “πτερόγιον” which is derived from the word “wing,” has some Old Testament motif of God’s protecting “wing.”⁷⁵ The psalmist says, “He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge” (Ps 91:4). As the temptation is made through the theme of God’s protection (“If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down” [v. 6], and “Do not put the Lord your God to the test” [v. 7]), God is indicated as the central factor in this temptation.

The third temptation also shows the temptation’s centrality. The devil tempts Jesus by showing Him “all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor” (v. 8). “All the kingdoms of the world” and “their splendor” signify the creator God and the glory that only He deserves. Warren Carter comments on this: “The world is the realm of everyday political, social, economic, and religious life. Though created by God and the object of God’s purposes (Ps 24:1), it is claimed by the devil and in need of saving (5:14; 13:38; 24:21).”⁷⁶ Carter continues, “Glory often denotes the splendor of God’s power and presence in the world especially in liberating people from Pharaoh (Num 14:10-12, 22,

⁷⁴Robert H. Mounce, *Matthew* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 29.

⁷⁵Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 66-67.

⁷⁶Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Socio-Political and Religious Reading* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 110.

linked with testing God), here it is usurped by the devil.”⁷⁷ In this temptation, “All these I will give you if you will fall down and worship me” (v. 9), the devil’s demand is directed against God’s sovereignty. If Jesus follows the devil’s demand, it would mean Jesus’ subjection to the devil’s authority. Jesus’ response, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him,” (v. 10) shows Jesus’ total allegiance to God.

God Sent Jesus to Fulfill (5:17-20)

In 5:1-7:29, Jesus teaches about the lifestyle in the kingdom of heaven. This section’s function is clear because it indicates an appropriate response to Jesus’ call to repentance: “Repent, *for the kingdom of heaven has come near*” (4:17). The urgent call for repentance is based on the coming of the kingdom of heaven, and the coming of the kingdom of heaven denotes that God’s reign is near at hand. Therefore, God is in the central position of the rationale of Jesus’ proclamation. It is God who will offer His kingdom to His followers. Bonnie Bowman Thurston asserts that “the Sermon represents primarily the theme of human activity or law, delineating the kinds of responses that the followers of Jesus should make to God’s gift of the kingdom.”⁷⁸ The Sermon on the Mount requires a changed life. In the background of the required life, there is God who is the ultimate demander of such a life.⁷⁹

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Bonnie Bowman Thurston, “Matthew 5:43-48,” *Interpretation* 41 (1987): 175.

⁷⁹Kingsbury defines the life as “great righteousness.” J. D. Kingsbury, “The Place, Structure, and Meaning of the Sermon on the Mount within Matthew,” *Interpretation* 41 (1987): 136. Lisa Sowle Cahill defines the life as “imitation of God.” Lisa Sowle Cahill, “The Ethical Implications of the Sermon on the Mount,” *Interpretation* 41 (1987): 149. William Spohn defines the life as “participation in the life

Glen H. Stassen asserts that the triadic structure in 5:21-7:12 shows “Jesus teaching transforming initiatives that participate in the reign of the gracious God who acts in love toward enemies, who is present to disciples in secret, who is faithful and trustworthy, and who brings deliverance from the vicious cycles that cause violations of traditional righteousness.”⁸⁰ Ellen T. Charry argues also that the issue for Matthew in the Sermon on the Mount was “the new moral and spiritual order in light of the grace of God in and through Christ.”⁸¹ Therefore, it should be noted that God is present in the Sermon on the Mount as the ultimate demander of the new life.

The meaning of “fulfill” (πληρῶσαι) has been at the center of the ongoing debate in Matthean study. France suggests three main options for the interpretation of “fulfill”: “(a) to accomplish or obey; (b) to bring out the full meaning; and (c) to complete by giving the final revelation of God’s will to which the Old Testament pointed forward, and which now transcends it.”⁸² It is not difficult to view God as the One who sent Jesus to fulfill in spite of such ambiguities related to the interpretation of “fulfill.” This idea is clear in light of the plot of 1:1-4:16. The governing plot of 1:1-4:16 is Jesus’ obedience to God’s will. From the genealogy to Jesus’ temptation, Matthew has incorporated his materials into one topic, “Jesus as the Messiah sent by God.” The

of God.” William Spohn, *What Are They Saying About Scripture and Ethic?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 122.

⁸⁰Glen H. Stassen, “The Fourteen Triads of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew: 5:21-7:12),” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122 (2003): 308. See pp. 267-308 for his discussion of the triadic structure in Matthew 5:21-7:12.

⁸¹Ellen T. Charry, “The Grace of God and the Law of Christ,” *Interpretation* 57 (2003): 41.

⁸²France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 113-14.

prominent position of David and Abraham in the genealogy show that the genealogy is “a resume of salvation history, of God’s way with Israel.”⁸³ The “fulfillment motif” must be interpreted as God’s activity, which is reflected in 1:1-4:16. The fulfillment motif works as the primary effect for the entire Gospel’s interpretation.⁸⁴ What Jesus is about to fulfill is what God has planned to do.

France holds that “the essential key to all Matthew’s theology is that in Jesus all God’s purpose has come to fulfillment. This is, of course, true of all New Testament theology, but it is emphasized in a remarkable way in Matthew.”⁸⁵ One of the most prominent ways Matthew utilizes for this purpose is a particular use of Old Testament quotations, which are known as the “formula-quotations” (*Reflexionscitate*).⁸⁶ In Matthew, the formula begins this way: “This was to fulfill (or ‘then was fulfilled’) what was spoken by the prophet.” Though the wordings are slightly different from each other, they are important because Matthew inserts them at crucial points in his narrative, and the prophet is the one who proclaims God’s message. France argues, “In each case, if the

⁸³W. Barnes Tatum, “Origin of Jesus Messiah (Matt 1:1, 18a): Matthew’s Use of the Infancy Traditions,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96 (1977): 527.

⁸⁴For a helpful explanation of the plot theme of “promise/fulfillment and acceptance/rejection” in Matthew, see Howell, *Matthew’s Inclusive Story*, 93-160.

⁸⁵France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 38.

⁸⁶The formula-quotations are “a commentary function, in as much as they are ‘asides’ of the evangelist, and not part of his narrative.” The earliest mention of them was made with regard to the Gospel of Mark by Holtzmann, who spoke of the “*Reflexionscitate*” in contrast to the “*Contextcitate*.” The use of the English term “Formula-quotations” is quite recent, probably by S. E. Johnson in his article, “The Biblical Quotations in Matthew,” *Harvard Theological Review* 36 (1943): 135-53. Johnson does not suggest, however, that the term is something new, and it may have been used earlier, but clearly not much earlier. George M. Soares Prabhu, *The Formula*

quotation and its formula were removed, the story would flow on without an obvious gap, which suggests that they are comments added to existing stories; and yet in each case the claim to the fulfillment of Scripture seems to be the main point being made by the section of text in which they occur.”⁸⁷ Although the formula-quotations can be studied in different ways from various point of views, it is apparent that what is being (or will be) fulfilled is what God wants to do. Therefore, as is the case with the formula-quotations, what Jesus says about “fulfillment” in 5:17 is to be understood as fulfillment according to God’s will.⁸⁸

Pray to Your Father (6:7-15)

The Lord’s Prayer has been handed down to us in two forms, as it is in Matthew 6:9-13 and in Luke 11:2-4. Joachim Jeremias regards Matthew’s prayer as being more original in wording, and Luke’s prayer as preserving the oldest form with respect to length.⁸⁹ It has been suggested that these two different versions are from

Quotations in the Infancy Narrative of Matthew (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1976), 19-21.

⁸⁷France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 39.

⁸⁸Moule counts three sets of correlatives in the fulfillment concept: prediction/verification, beginning/completion, and covenant obligation/consummation. He explains that the mentality behind most of the Matthean “formula-quotations” is the prediction/verification idea because they prove God’s faithfulness in accomplishing His plan. C. F. D. Moule, “Fulfillment-Words in the New Testament,” *New Testament Studies* 14 (1968): 297.

⁸⁹Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayer of Jesus* (London: S. C. M. Press, 1967), 93. For those who regard Luke’s version as the original, see R. E. Brown, “The Pater Noster as an Eschatological Prayer,” in *New Testament Essays* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing, 1965), 218-20; and E. von Dobschütz, “The Lord’s Prayer,” *Harvard Theological Review* 7 (1914): 299-300. Philip B. Harner provides three reasons for Lukan priority: (1) The early Christians would have been reluctant to remove anything from the Lord’s Prayer. They might have added to it, but would not have abridged a prayer that was as important

different occasions in Jesus' ministry.⁹⁰

In the Lord's Prayer, the central figure is God alone. His name is indicated as being significant in the first petition, "Our Father, who is in heaven, May your name be sanctified." God should be known for who He is, and for His care, authority, and power. In the second petition, "May your kingdom come," God's kingly rule is stated; in the third petition, "May your will be done, as in heaven, so on earth," His will is acknowledged. In the fourth petition, "Give us today the bread we need," God as the ultimate provider is underscored. In the fifth and last petition, "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven those in debt to us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one," the reader is reminded of God's sole authority as forgiver and leader. It is on one's forgiveness of others that his or her own forgiveness by God depends (verse 15). Therefore, the reader comes to perceive God, whose activity includes being the Lord of the earth and heaven.

The word "Father" shows God's intimate relationship with His children, and may have the Aramaic original, "*abba*."⁹¹ Jeremias says that Jesus' phrase of "Our

as the Lord's Prayer (2) The general principle is that a religious text tends to get longer rather than shorter. (3) The addition to the Prayer in Matthew makes itself more suitable to the use of the church. Such suitability shows later addition. He also introduces six reasons for Matthean priority: (1) Matthew would not contradict himself. He records Jesus' saying, "And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words" (6:7). Matthew records this saying just before the Lord's Prayer (2) There are no superfluous phrases or clauses that could be left out in Matthew. (3) Matthew's version is very carefully worded and arranged. (4) Matthew's version is much more "Jewish." (5) The *Didache* gives the Lord's Prayer in almost the same form as in Matthew. (6) Luke's tendency to omit details. Philip B. Harner, *Understanding the Lord's Prayer* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 11-13. See also E. F. Scott, *The Lord's Prayer: Its Character, Purpose, and Interpretation* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), 1-126.

⁹⁰Blomberg, *Matthew*, 119.

Father (*abba*)” demonstrates that He shares His relationship with God with His disciples: They are authorized to say “*abba*,” as Jesus does.⁹² By not being limited to Jesus’ God, and becoming “Our Father,” God as Father more closely approaches the reader. He is characterized as having authority over us and caring for our needs like a father having authority over his children and caring for them.

Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan mentions “reinforcement of characterization by analogy”: its characterization is based on the prior establishment, by other means, of the traits on which it is based.⁹³ When Jesus addresses God as “Father,” the word “Father” is characterized by the common use of “Father”(*abba*) in Jesus’ time. According to Jeremias, in the Near East, from the early stage – when they called their god “Father” – it encompassed both aspects of absolute authority and tenderness.⁹⁴ He says, “Whenever the word ‘Father’ is used for a deity . . . it implies fatherhood in the sense of unconditional and irrevocable authority.”⁹⁵

As was the case in the Near East, the name had two meanings in Palestinian Judaism as well: (1) obligation to obey God; and (2) He is the One who helps in the time of need.⁹⁶ Thus, we must assume that – with the name of “Father” in Matthew – the

⁹¹Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 148.

⁹²Jeremias, *The Prayer*, 63.

⁹³Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London; New York: Methuen, 1983) 67.

⁹⁴Jeremias, *The Prayer*, 11-12. This is characteristic of the Old Testament word about God as Father. He is called Father fifteen times. When God is called Father, He is honored as Creator. God’s authority is recognized as the creator.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 11.

reader should have acquired God's main trait as a character: (1) He has authority; and (2) God cares for His people.⁹⁷

As God is recognized, His name is hallowed: "Hallowed be your name" (verse 9c). God is the subject of this action. Through the petition to God, He is introduced as an actor who will hallow His name in heaven and on the earth. Heinz Schürmann points out that the "passive form can hardly avoid introducing God as an active Being."⁹⁸ Raymond E. Brown suggests that "many writers . . . have understood it as a prayer that men would come to bless God's name. Yet the fact that this petition is a prayer addressed to God suggests that it concerns divine action, a request for God to make manifest the sanctity of His own name."⁹⁹ God's sanctification of His name is God's divine activity. In Ezekiel 36:22-27, God promises to "vindicate the holiness of His great name."¹⁰⁰

God's spatial boundary is in expansion in this prayer. His kingdom comes, and His will is done (verse 10). The coming of God's kingdom and His will deny the earth autonomy to determine its actions. The narrator depicts an order that will

⁹⁶Ibid., 18-19.

⁹⁷The words "in heaven," which denote God's sovereignty and reign, may add more flavor of God's authority to the name of "Father."

⁹⁸Heinz Schürmann, *Praying with Christ: The "Our Father" for Today* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964), 118 n. 92.

⁹⁹Raymond E. Brown, *New Testament Essays* (New York: Paulist Press, 1965), 229.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 230.

ultimately legitimate actions on earth by God's will.¹⁰¹ Through the coming of the kingdom, there will be a perfect harmony by which the heaven and earth will be run.¹⁰²

God is depicted as the One who forgives us: "And forgive us our debts" (6:12a). The forgiveness is solely God's activity, which is granted to those who repent through Jesus. God bestows Jesus' authority to forgive sins on earth. When Jesus forgives people's sins, it shows His very positive alignment with God.¹⁰³

Additionally, Robert A. Guelich observes that there are three "you" petitions in 6:9b-10: "Let your name be made holy"; "Let your kingdom come"; and "Let your will be done on earth as in heaven." He asserts that the three "you" petitions are oriented toward the final consummation, which God's action will reveal. They are closely related to the "we" petitions in 6:11-13, because "one can hardly pray for God's will to be done in the future without also committing oneself to the doing of his will in the present."¹⁰⁴ Consequently, the next four "we" petitions – "Give us this day our daily bread"; "Forgive us our debts"; "Do not bring us to the time of trial"; and "Rescue us from the evil one" – focus on God's action, which becomes an essential part of one's present experience.¹⁰⁵ God is placed in the center of the Lord's Prayer.

¹⁰¹Warren Carter, "Recalling the Lord's Prayer: The Authorial Audience and Matthew's Prayer as Familiar Liturgical Experience," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 57 (1995): 523.

¹⁰²Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 95.

¹⁰³Paul Danove, "The Narrative Function of Mark's Characterization of God," *Novum Testamentum* 43 (2001): 19.

¹⁰⁴Robert A. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for Understanding* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 311.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, 315.

The Father Gives Good Things (7:7-11)

Compared with the Gospel of Luke, this part has no immediate connection with the material that precedes or follows it. This section appears in Luke after the Lord's Prayer and the parable of the unwilling friend (11:1-8).

Dale Goldsmith indicates a six-member complex of parallel sayings in the seventh and eighth verses.

- A1: Ask, and it will be given you;
- B1: seek, and you will find;
- C1: knock, and it will be opened to you.
- A2: For everyone who asks receives;
- B2: and he who seeks, finds;
- C2: and to him who knocks, it will be opened.

Matthew stresses the “being given,” instead of the “intensity of prayer.”¹⁰⁶ The three verbs (ask, seek, and knock) assume that God will respond.¹⁰⁷ The words “will be given” in A1 are connected to the active verb, “receive,” in A2. Basically, there are no verb changes in B1 and B2. Such redundancy in parallels shifts the focus from asking to giving. The efficacy of the prayer of petition is anchored in God, who – as a Father – is willing to answer His children's prayer.¹⁰⁸ According to Goldsmith, “It is a relationship within which all sorts of requests are heard, and in fact, even granted Clearly this similitude shifts the focus from asking to giving and from the character of the act of

¹⁰⁶Alan Hugh McNeile argues that the focus is on the importance of “asking”: “With the symmetrical tautology of the verses, the emphasis is on the imperatives (v. 7) and participles (v. 8); it is only by asking, that the desired end can be won.” Alan Hugh McNeile, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1965), 91.

¹⁰⁷Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 103.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 105.

asking to the character of the giver.”¹⁰⁹ Blomberg also notices that the key word throughout the seventh through eleventh verses is “give.”¹¹⁰

In this passage, God is recognized as the One who always gives “good things” to His people. Alfred Plummer comments that God’s “desire to help is always there: by perseverance in asking, we appropriate it.”¹¹¹ God’s characterization is presented by the words of Jesus in this passage. In addition, God’s action of giving good things is depicted to be consistent with actions as Matthew describes them. Jesus, as the Son of God, listens to – and answers – the requests made by those in need in Matthew. This activity of Jesus, as the Son of God, answering those in need in Matthew implies a high degree of coherence and wholeness regarding the evangelist’s portrayal of God: (1) God’s characterization is being built on a decisive unifying principle. (2) God’s characterization is presented with a picture of a character, analogous to the whole of a real person.¹¹²

Two examples of human faithfulness are presented, in question format, as an assertion of God’s faithfulness: “Is there anyone among you, if your child asks for bread, who will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake?” The intent of these two questions is confirming God’s faithful image, which previous verses have

¹⁰⁹Dale Goldsmith, “Ask, and It will be Given . . .”: Toward Writing the History of a Logion,” *New Testament Studies* 35 (1989): 256.

¹¹⁰Blomberg, *Matthew*, 130.

¹¹¹Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Minneapolis: James Family Christian, 1978), 113.

¹¹²Baruch Hochman, *Character in Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 97-116.

presented as giving good things. According to Hagner, the rhetorical questions with the negative (μη) amount to affirmation of God's righteousness and goodness.¹¹³

The Quieting of the Sea (8:23-27)

This story is a visible illustration of God's presence in Jesus. Just like God, Jesus demonstrates that He has the power to control chaotic nature for the disciples. In line with God's fulfillment plot in Matthew, the evangelist shows Jesus as the One who can save people, and His disciples need to be saved. Fredrick Bruner says, "Matthew uses this miracle to teach that *disciples* also need salvation. It is not just outsider lepers, Gentiles, and marginal women who need Jesus' help. Disciples, the insiders par excellence, need saving."¹¹⁴ The focus is placed on the disciples from the beginning. Matthew abbreviates Mark's story (4:36-41) to highlight the necessity for the disciples' salvation. In Mark, the disciples get into the boat with Jesus: "And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat" (v. 36). But in the Gospel of Matthew, to keep the disciples in focus, Matthew has Jesus get into the boat first, and then His disciples follow Him: "ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ."¹¹⁵

The disciples shout to Jesus, "Lord, save" (8:25). This is Matthew's intentional change from Mark's "teacher" (Διδάσκαλε), and an insert of "save" instead of Mark's "do you not care that." The name of Jesus is given by an angel of the Lord, and the name's meaning is the One who will save his people from their sins (1:21, 22). Thus,

¹¹³Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 174-75.

¹¹⁴Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 1: 397.

¹¹⁵Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 220.

it is very plausible that Matthew emphasizes Jesus as the savior of the disciples, and God's active involvement is linked with Jesus' saving activity by the disciples' words, "Lord, save."

According to Maarten J. J. Menken, "God's presence in Jesus means salvation for the disciples."¹¹⁶ Such a portrayal of God as being actively involved in saving His people reminds the reader of God's activity in Jesus' saving actions. God's involvement in saving the disciples is consistent with the previous covenant with His people in the Old Testament. As it is the case in this episode, God is a transparent character in the Gospel of Matthew. According to Hochman's scheme, characters are more or less open to the reader.¹¹⁷ Hochman explains that a character's transparency, which is dependent upon the reader's greater access to direct perception of the character's inwardness, leads to coherence.¹¹⁸ In the case of God in Matthew, God's inwardness for His people's salvation is clearly perceived by the reader from the start of the Gospel. God is a transparent character because His inwardness is open to the reader.

It is also revealed to the reader, at the beginning stage of Matthew, that God's intention for salvation does not remain within Israel's boundaries: God is also saving Gentiles. Matthew shows this theme repeatedly in his narrative. Therefore, it is no surprise to the reader when there is a sudden change of interest to save Gentiles as well as

¹¹⁶Menken, "Isaiah 7:14 in Matthew 1:23," 159. God's presence in relation to the salvation motif also is apparent in the "walking on the water" scene (14:22-23). Peter says to Jesus, "Lord save me." Because God is present in Jesus ("Emmanuel"), and Jesus' name invokes "God's salvation activity," it is safe to say that the reader is reminded once more of God when the disciples and Peter call on Jesus to "save."

¹¹⁷Hochman, *Character*, 125.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*

Israel. God's transparency is marked at the beginning of narrative and is being maintained. Part of God's plan is revealed in Jesus' episode of quieting the sea.

Response to Demons (8:28-34)

In the next pericope, God's presence in Jesus is maintained in exorcising the Gadarene demoniac. This story concerns Jesus' encounter with two demon-possessed men from the tombs. They shout to Him, "What have you to do with us, Son of God?" (v. 29). Because the men acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God – like Satan does at Jesus' temptation – and Jesus accepts the Son of God title by not rebuking their designation, the reader accepts their designation of Jesus as being reliable. Jesus' designation as the Son of God, once again, stresses His relationship with God and reminds the reader of the source of Jesus' power to exorcise demons: God is the source of Jesus' exorcism.

Jesus' activity demonstrates the inauguration of the kingdom of God (cf. 12:28).¹¹⁹ According to Blomberg, "To the demons His arrival seems premature; Judgment Day has not come The end times were breaking into human history with Jesus' exorcism, demonstrating the inauguration of God's kingdom."¹²⁰ Within the conflict between Jesus and the demons, the time that God sets is positioned as the

¹¹⁹Jesus' action is the evidence that God's power is working in Jesus, which is the validation of Jesus' ministry.

¹²⁰Blomberg, *Matthew*, 151.

pericope's central factor.¹²¹ God is presented as the exorcism' source, and His time is highlighted.

God-Given Authority (9:2-8)

Matthew shows that God gave Jesus the authority to heal human beings in this story concerning a miracle. The evangelist is concerned about focusing on the dialogue that accompanies this event. Thus he does not provide the episode's description in details. All discussion concentrates on the dialogue between Jesus and the religious leaders.¹²²

When Jesus sees the men carrying the paralytic, Matthew reports that Jesus sees "their faith." Matthew is an omniscient narrator. He is in and out of the characters' consciousness, including Jesus and the religious leaders. Seeing "their faith," not that of the paralytic is a bit odd. The paralytic may have faith, however, because he consents to come to Jesus¹²³ The conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders is once again

¹²¹The demons recognize that they will experience God's future judgment upon them, and the time has not yet come. Jesus has come too early to shake their realm too soon. Hagner says, "This fits in with Matthew's perspective of realized eschatology: the kingdom has come, but in advance of its fullest and final coming (cf. 12:28; 13:30). Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 227.

¹²²France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 165. For a comparison with Mark and Luke, see Bo Reicke, "The Synoptic Reports on the Healing of the Paralytic: Matt. 9:1-8 with Parallels," in *Studies in New Testament Language and Text*, ed. J. K. Elliott (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976), 320. Reicke explains that Matthew has a dramatic effect because of his concentration on the conflict between Jesus and the scribes (321). Daniel J. Harrington says the result of such a dramatic effect is that "the role of Jesus is highlighted and the theme of the forgiveness of sins is emphasized." Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 121.

¹²³Davies, *Matthew*, 88.

reported from the psychological point of view.¹²⁴ The scribes' inner thought is revealed to the reader, and Jesus' response follows them: "Some of the scribes said to themselves, 'This man is blaspheming.' But Jesus, perceiving their thoughts, said, 'Why do you think evil in your heart?'" (vv. 3-4).

At the outset (v. 2) Jesus declares that "your sins are forgiven" (ἀφίενταί σου αἱ ἁμαρτίαι). The passive (ἀφίενταί) is a divine passive: God is acting, forgiving the paralytic's sins. In other words, Jesus observes that "your sins are forgiven by God." Because this word of forgiveness is from the most reliable character – Jesus – God is constructed for the reader as a reliable character. At the end of the story, Matthew confirms this by having the crowd glorify God for giving such authority to Jesus (v. 8).¹²⁵ Such designation of God as the final authority can be counted as His direct characterization. Rimmon-Kenan explains that direct characterization happens "only if it proceeds from the most authoritative voice in the text."¹²⁶ Jesus says the healing comes from God. Matthew, who is also a reliable voice as the narrator, concludes the story and reports the crowds' reaction to this event by ascribing the final authority to God who is behind all this.¹²⁷

¹²⁴The psychological point of view is important for this study because it furnishes God's evaluative point of view through the character's inside view.

¹²⁵Matthew is the only one who writes it this way.

¹²⁶Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 60.

¹²⁷Matthew is a reliable narrator because his point of view is in perfect accord with that of Jesus, who is the most reliable character with God. Therefore, the readers are supposed to take Matthew's statement of God – as the final authority – as an authoritative account. Rimmon-Kenan presents the main sources of unreliability of the narrator: (1) the narrator's limited knowledge, (2) his personal involvement, and (3) his problematic value-scheme. For more, see Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 100-01.

Forgiveness of sins is found several times in Matthew. Actually, it is a prominent theme in Matthew. Jesus' birth and death are plainly described in relation to the forgiveness of sins: Jesus came to save His people from their sins (1:21). He describes His death as an act of saving people from their sins (26:28). Such information on Jesus at the story's beginning and near its ending has a crucial influence upon the reader's character-perception process. The statements about Jesus coming to save people from their sins at the beginning and near the end of the story produce a static impression on God in Matthew. Jesus' commission is a God-given one to save people from their sins, and God's activity is manifested along with this mission (1:23).¹²⁸

When the scribes mutter to themselves, accusing Jesus of blaspheming (v. 3), Jesus knows "their thoughts" (v. 4). The scribes' muttering and Jesus' recognition suddenly move the scene's focus to the conflict between Jesus and the scribes.¹²⁹ The conflict is all about Jesus' authority. Edwards observes that the scribes' own resistance is highlighted in a situation in which Jesus has the ability to read the scribes' mind and the authority to say, "Your sins are forgiven."¹³⁰ The conflict between Jesus and the scribes

¹²⁸Carter states that "from the commissioning the audience knows that Jesus is the central character in God's purposes, knows what his mission is, and knows that this is God's will in accord with the Scriptures. It has learned that God's will and purposes for Jesus provide the defining perspective or point of view in which all that follows is to be evaluated." Warren Carter, "Jesus' 'I Have Come' Statements in Matthew's Gospel," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 60 (1988): 48.

¹²⁹This is one of the few times that the reader is given any direct indication of Jesus' own ability to "read minds." Edwards says it adds further weight to the reader's recognition of the authority of both Jesus and the narrator. Edwards, *Matthew's Story*, 29.

¹³⁰*Ibid.*

thus is coming to the fore, and their internal rebellious disposition against God's will is revealed.

Jesus replies to their thoughts, "Why do you think the evil (πονηρὰ) in your heart?" (v. 4b). Hanger says that "πονηρὰ" "implies a malice toward Jesus From Matthew's perspective, to oppose Jesus is to oppose God."¹³¹ To show that Jesus has the authority on earth to forgive sins, He commands the paralytic, "Stand up, take your bed and go to your home" (v. 6b). Jesus' rebuke to the scribes and manifestation of His authority are in the story's continuum. In the storm narrative (8:23-27), Jesus' authority over the powers of chaos and, in the story of the pigs, His authority over internalized evil power (8:28-34) are stressed. So, this story presents Jesus, who has authority over evil.¹³²

Jesus' healing of the paralytic and the crowds' praise of God with awe (οἱ ὄχλοι ἐφοβήθησαν καὶ ἐδόξασαν τὸν θεόν) illustrate overcoming conflict. The crowds are very positive when they are compared with the scribes. The crowds' reaction toward God, instead of Jesus, shows that God is a main character. The reader perceives God, who is behind the story and yet, is a main character. God is the source of Jesus' authority, and the God-given authority is confirmed by both healing the paralytic and forgiving his sins. Jesus' power over human sickness demonstrates God's divine empowerment, which establishes Jesus' identity as God's Son.

The Spirit of Your Father (10:17-20)

¹³¹Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 233.

¹³²Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993), 101.

This section is positioned in the midst of the discourse regarding the disciple's mission: (1) task and commission (9:35-10:16); (2) persecutions and sufferings (10:17-25); and (3) challenge and encouragement (10:26-42).¹³³ The great harvest pericope in 9:35-38 introduces the whole section (9:35-10:42). This pericope deals with persecutions and sufferings that Jesus' followers will endure. Matthew appears to bring together the sending out of the Twelve and the seventy-two in Luke 9 and 10 and materials from Mark 13.¹³⁴ Because verses 17-22 closely follow Mark 13:9-13 – the apocalyptic discourse – Matthew is understood as looking beyond the disciples' persecution. Those who will confess Jesus as their Lord should be prepared for suffering. If Jesus suffers for His ministry, then His followers can expect to be no less.

Jesus' followers will be opposed and delivered to religious leaders (v. 17) and gentile authorities (v. 18). Jesus instructs His followers, however, not to worry about how they are to speak or what they are to say (v. 19) because "it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you" (v. 20).

This particular expression is found only in this New Testament verse. Mark (13:11) and Luke (12:12) both refer to "the Spirit" instead of "the Spirit of your Father." "The Spirit of your Father" (πνεῦμα τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν), though, clearly refers to the Holy Spirit as in Mark and Luke.¹³⁵ Leon Morris observes that "this form of expression relates

¹³³For the chiasmic structure of Matt 10, see Dale C. Allison Jr., "Matthew 10:26-31 and the Problem of Evil," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* (1988): 296.

¹³⁴Gundry, *Matthew*, 190.

¹³⁵Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 255, Mounce, *Matthew*, 94. M. B. Turner, "Holy Spirit," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1992), 341.

the Spirit more closely to the Father.”¹³⁶ In light of the Spirit’s activity in the Gospel of Matthew as the One who empowers Jesus (3:16; 12:18, 28), the Spirit’s designation as “the Spirit of your Father” recalls the heavenly Father’s empowerment of, and care for, Jesus’ followers. God’s presence in the action of care is emphasized by the expression, “the Spirit of your Father.”

Matthew shows God’s timely intervention by saying “in that hour” (ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ὥρᾳ). The future passive, “will be given” (δοθήσεται), indicates that God is the subject of the giving. With the Spirit who originates from God, your Father, and the promise that God will surely intercede in the moment of suffering, it is promised that “God will speak” through the Holy Spirit.

God Cares (10:26-31)

In this pericope, Jesus’ followers are encouraged not to fear men because they are under God’s care. The body and soul of Jesus’ followers are under God’s supervision as is the fallen sparrow. God’s care, which was promised in Matthew 6:26 (“Look at the birds of the air Your heavenly Father feeds them”), is once again confirmed: “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father” (v. 29). The preposition “apart from” (ἄνευ), emphasizes God’s sole authority, and it may have been influenced by Amos 3:5 LXX.¹³⁷

¹³⁶Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 255.

¹³⁷Amos 3:5 LXX shares the preposition and makes a nice comparison with the current verse (εἰ πεσεῖται ὄρνειον ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἄνευ ἰξευτοῦ εἰ σχασθήσεται παγὶς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἄνευ τοῦ συλλαβεῖν τι). “ἄνευ,” which is found in 1 Pet 3:1; 4:9, means “without,” or “apart from.” Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 263 n. 70.

The words “kill the soul” are not found in the Lukan version (12:4, “Λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν τοῖς φίλοις μου, μὴ φοβηθῆτε ἀπὸ τῶν ἀποκτεινόντων τὸ σῶμα καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα μὴ ἔχόντων περισσώτερόν τι ποιῆσαι.”). Matthew’s inclusion of “kill the soul” suggests that Jesus’ followers should not fear those who can destroy the body, but cannot kill the soul (v. 28). This verse, which concerns the true meaning of death, is placed at the heart of the pericope (vv. 26-31). Dale C. Allison Jr. illustrates that 10:26-31 is built around a “fear not” sentence.

- 26a General admonition: “Do not fear” (Μὴ οὖν)
- 26b-c Statement about revelation in compound parallelism: “Nothing is hidden”
- 27a-b Command to preach in compound parallelism: “What I say to you in the dark”
- 28a-b Command not to fear the executioner: “Do not fear those who kill”
- 28c Command to fear God: “Fear rather the one able”
- 29a Observation about nature in interrogative form: “Are not two sparrows”
- 29b Interpretation of observation: “Not one of them falls”
- 30 Proverb: “All the hairs of your head”
- 31a Inferential negative imperative: “Do not fear” (Μὴ οὖν)
- 31b Conclusion of argument *a fortiori*: “You are worth more”¹³⁸

As the above pattern shows, Jesus’ command sets the theme: Notwithstanding all circumstances, fear the One who is able to kill both the body and soul. This section’s thematic movement flows as follows: (1) proclamation not to fear (vv. 26-27), (2) God’s power to judge people, and (3) God’s care for His people.

God’s portrait in verse 28 is somewhat terrifying. Matthew compares God’s authority and power, however, with that of those who have limited power and authority, and thereby sets a ground for comfort for those who rely on His providence. Dorothy Jean Weaver asserts that “the scene depicted is that of the ‘day of judgment’ (cf. 10:15)

¹³⁸Allison, “Matthew 10:26-31,” 299.

on which God will exercise His awesome prerogative to destroy those human beings on whom His judgment falls.”¹³⁹ It is God, therefore, who is at the center of this pericope. God’s sovereignty is focused, and such sovereignty leads to His care for Jesus’ followers in the next verses, 30 through 31.

Many commentators considers verses 30 through 31 to be about God’s care.¹⁴⁰ In verses 30 and 31, Matthew indicates that God’s primary concern is not with sparrows, but rather with His more precious followers: “And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.”

God’s action and power are implied in Jesus’ statement characterizing God as the central actor or agent. God is the proper object of fear and care. The reader’s previous knowledge with regard to the promise of God’s providential care (6:25-34) is now once again strengthened by the unmistakable contrast between sparrows, hairs, and His people. Accepting Jesus’ teaching about God will equip the reader to understand all the more clearly the God who keeps His promise.

God’s Reward (10:40-42)

Jesus ends the mission discourse by telling His disciples that the reward for welcoming them is ultimately from God. Jesus’ words, “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me” (v. 40), remind of His relationship with the Father, who is presented as having the final authority to reward people (verses 41 and 42). Hagner notes that these verses reveal “the close

¹³⁹Dorothy Jean Weaver, *Matthew’s Missionary Discourse: A Literary Critical Analysis*, JSNT Supplement Series 38 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 109.

¹⁴⁰For instance, Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 100.

relationship between the disciples and Jesus, on the one hand, and Jesus and God, on the other.”¹⁴¹ Jesus is positioned in the middle, between human beings and God. God stands behind Jesus, and Jesus is behind the disciples. God is presented as the most important figure; all the events in this episode point to God, who will reward anyone who accepts His message.¹⁴²

God is at the center of Jesus’ words on rewards in the next verses. Jesus says, “Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward” (v. 41). The prophet is one sent by God, and a prophet’s reward is given by God. Edwards notes, “Receiving a prophet as a prophet, that is, as a person guided by the Father, will bring a prophet’s reward.”¹⁴³ This is the same for anyone who receives a righteous person in the name of a righteous person, for a righteous person is one who does what the Father requires.¹⁴⁴

The Kingdom of Heaven (11:11-15)

Verse 11 makes the point that John is a transitional figure between two separate orders, and this point is pursued in verses 12 through 14.¹⁴⁵ Many commentators

¹⁴¹Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 295.

¹⁴²Accepting the disciples’ message is accepting Jesus’ message and His person because Jesus cannot be separated from the message. This message, in turn, is the message of God, who sent Jesus into the world. Therefore, accepting the disciples’ message is God’s message, and thus accepting His grace. Ibid.

¹⁴³Edwards, *Matthew’s Story*, 36.

¹⁴⁴Ibid.

¹⁴⁵Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 305.

have found it difficult, though, to agree on the exact meaning of verses 11:12-14.¹⁴⁶ The problem seems to be the interpretation of “βιάζεται” and “βιασται.” S. G. F. Brandon comprehends “βιασται” as Zealots, and opts for the uncertainty that Jesus is accusing the Zealots.¹⁴⁷ Davies and Allison take “βιάζεται” as a passive, and interpret verse 12 as meaning that “for Jesus and Matthew, the great redemption must be preceded by a conflict between the forces of good and the forces of evil. Further this conflict has already been joined, from the days of John the Baptist until now.”¹⁴⁸ What Davies and Allison mean is that the kingdom of heaven is being violently hampered at this time; it shows that Davies and Allison take the kingdom of heaven as having present reality.¹⁴⁹ On the other hand, Margaret Pamment explains verse 12 by contending that “βιάζεται”

¹⁴⁶For instance, Walter Wink says that “we are dealing with a very primitive tradition, already unintelligible by the time of the Evangelists.” Wink, *John the Baptist*, 20.

¹⁴⁷S. G. F. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots: A Study of the Political Factor in Primitive Christianity* (Manchester: Manchester U.P., 1967), 200 n. 5. O. Lamar Cope considers v. 12 to be an implication of the conflict between Jewish patriots and the Romans, which resulted in the Jewish War. O. Lamar Cope, *Matthew: A Scribe Trained for the Kingdom of Heaven*, Catholic Biblical Quarterly MS 5 (Washington, DC: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1976), 76.

¹⁴⁸Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 256. See pp. 254-55 for various “βιάζεται” interpretations.

¹⁴⁹Davies and Allison understand the term “kingdom of heaven” as a simple stylistic variation of the “kingdom of God,” *Ibid.*, 389.

signifies the kingdom forcing its way forward.¹⁵⁰ She advocates the kingdom of heaven's imminence. Pamment understands the kingdom of heaven as a totally future reality.¹⁵¹

The kingdom of heaven, however, has a present dimension along with its future reality because the kingdom of heaven currently suffers violence (“βιάζεται”), and is being taken (ἀρπάζουσιν) at the present time by “βιασται” in verse 12.¹⁵² Daniel J. Harrington suggests this interpretation for verse 12: “The kingdom is enough of a present reality as to suffer violence and opposition. The time of God’s activity as king is now.”¹⁵³ The fact that the kingdom of heaven is a present reality signifies that God’s activity is a present reality as well. Gundry indicates that the kingdom (βασιλεία) denotes a sphere of rule, or the rule itself, and understands heaven (οὐρανῶν) as meaning its source.¹⁵⁴ Matthew shows that God is not acting in a temporal and spatial vacuum because the kingdom of heaven is a present reality that confronts people, and will be consummated in the future.¹⁵⁵ God’s rule is established at the present and future time.

¹⁵⁰ Margaret Pamment, “The Kingdom of Heaven According to the First Gospel,” *New Testament Studies* 27 (1981): 228.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² For instance, the kingdom of heaven’s parables in Matt 13 show the kingdom’s future consummation with its current reality.

¹⁵³ Daniel J. Harrington, *God’s People in Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 24.

¹⁵⁴ Gundry, *Matthew*, 43.

¹⁵⁵ Kingsbury asserts that the spatial and temporal nature of the drawing near of the kingdom of heaven is part of its eschatological nature. He understands the kingdom as an eschatological reality in Matthew. Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 60.

Because the kingdom of heaven terminology establishes the text's indication for God, the reader understands Him as a character when the relationship between the kingdom of heaven and "βλαστει" is revealed. Though many scholars present different interpretations for "βλαστει," the kingdom of heaven's existence firmly establishes that the present reality and nearness of the kingdom have ultimate significance for both Israel and the Gentiles.

Robert Foster argues that Matthew intentionally uses the kingdom of heaven language "as part of a larger 'heavenly' discourse in the gospel."¹⁵⁶ According to Foster, Matthew uses heavenly language, in conjunction with other language, to reaffirm the identity of Jesus' disciples' – to show that their identity is in heaven, not on earth, against the leaders of formative Judaism (and others who choose not to follow Jesus).¹⁵⁷ When one notices that the heavenly language is frequently used in conjunction with Father in Matthew, who cares for His children (e.g., 5:45; 6:25-34; 7:11; 18:14), such an interpretation is acceptable: Matthew uses the kingdom of heaven language to emphasize the identity of Jesus' disciples (and others who choose to follow Jesus) as sons of God.

Relationship is an important context for establishing character. The kingdom of heaven language demonstrates that God – in Matthew – possesses a relationship with other characters. This language grants God a unique characterization. Although His establishment is being challenged, God will fulfill that for which He has been planning. In the middle of such sufferings, He will be the God of the people who are willing to risk such violent challenge. The kingdom of heaven suffers violence from the days of John

¹⁵⁶Robert Foster, "Why on Earth Use 'Kingdom of Heaven'?: Matthew's Terminology Revisited," *New Testament Studies* 48 (2002): 489.

¹⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 490.

the Baptist until now. God will establish His kingdom, however, and those who are able to accept that John is Elijah – the one who is supposed to come before the Messiah (v. 14) – will participate in the kingdom.

God is characterized – through the language of the kingdom of heaven – as the one who has sovereignty over His kingdom, who is the Father of those willing to risk suffering because of the kingdom, and who fulfills His promise.

Father, Lord of the Heaven and Earth (11:25-27)

The Galilean villages' unbelief and rejection of Jesus and His message lead to Jesus' confirmation of His definitive relationship with God. Jesus claims Himself to have electing grace on behalf of God: "All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (v. 27). Hagner comments, "Jesus acknowledges the reality of the mystery of election. The Father remains Lord of heaven and earth despite the Galilean refusal of the Son. To refuse the Son, however, is to refuse the Father (cf. 10:40)."¹⁵⁸ The reader again is reminded that God is the central character because this scene emphasizes His sovereign will. Obviously, the Galilean villages' unbelief and denial of Jesus are ascribed to God's sovereignty.¹⁵⁹

Jesus' prayer is divided into two subsections: thanksgiving to the Father for His way of revelation (vv. 25 and 26), and a claim about the revelation's content (v. 27).¹⁶⁰ The Father's praise is followed by Jesus' woes to unrepentant cities (verses 20-

¹⁵⁸Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 316.

¹⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 318.

24). Matthew places this passage in the middle of Jesus' Galilean ministry. In the Gospel of Luke, the return of the seventy and their success precede the passage (10:1-20).

The eschatological contour is present.¹⁶¹ It is located following woes to the unrepentant cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida (11:20-24). Jesus warns about the final day of judgment in verse 22. "At that time" (Ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῷ καιρῷ), in 11:25a, points to a close connection with the preceding verses.¹⁶² With the continuation of the eschatological contour, Jesus thanks the Father, whom He designates as the "Lord of heaven and earth" (11:25a). According to Hagner, the phrase, "Lord of heaven and earth," clearly demonstrates that "the sovereignty of God is in view."¹⁶³ The designation of God as "Father"¹⁶⁴ may characterize His intimacy with Jesus.

"Lord of heaven and earth" emphasizes that Jesus' authority is given by God, the primary figure who judges the world in the age to come. In 28:18, the risen Jesus declares, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given (Ἐδόθη) to me." Bruce J.

¹⁶⁰Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew 1-12* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 527.

¹⁶¹W. D. Davies, "Knowledge in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Matthew 11:25-30," *Harvard Theological Review* 46 (1953): 137-38; Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 318.

¹⁶²France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 198.

¹⁶³Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 318.

¹⁶⁴Matthew frequently combines "Father" with "heaven" in Matthew. God – as a Father who cares for Israel – is not foreign in the Hebrew Bible (Deut 1:31; Isa 63:8; 46:3). Celia Deutsch indicates that Matthew's use of "Father" with "heaven" shows "tannaitic influence, for the use of the title 'our Father in heaven' is peculiar to the rabbinical sources." Celia Deutsch, *Hidden Wisdom and the Easy Yoke: Wisdom, Torah and Discipleship in Matthew 11.25-30, JSNT Supplemt Series* vol. 18 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 152 n. 40. George Foot Moore argues that "Father in heaven" in Matthew is a good reflection of the type of piety, a characteristic attitude of piety, in which Jesus and his immediate disciples were raised. George Foot Moore, *Judaism: In the First Centuries*

Malina claims that the passive aorist, Ἐδόθη, can be explained as a “circumlocution for the divine name,” God.¹⁶⁵ With the given authority, Jesus promises that He will be with us to the end of the age (v. 20).

God once again is called as a character by the very reliable character, Jesus who gives a direct definition of God as “Father” and “Lord.” The reader is required to accept Jesus’ direct definition of God as the “Lord of heaven and earth,”¹⁶⁶ who will judge the world through Jesus on judgment day. God’s presence and His work are not limited to heaven.¹⁶⁷ The reader acknowledges God as a major character who is behind Jesus’ ministry and authority because Jesus defines God as the “Lord of heaven and earth.” All the revelation comes from God: “You have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants” (11:25b). Jesus affirms God’s choice, God’s sovereignty: These things are hidden from the wise and the intelligent *by God* and revealed to infants *by God*.

All things have been delivered (παρεδόθη) to Jesus (by God). The transmission of “all things” in a passive form shows God as the subject of this verb. “All things”

of the Christian Era, The Age of the Tannaim (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950), 2:211.

¹⁶⁵Bruce J. Malina, “The Literary Structure and Form of Matt. 28:16-20,” *New Testament Studies* 17 (1970): 89.

¹⁶⁶Rimmon-Kenan says such a direct definition will produce “a rational, authoritative and static impression” of the character for the reader. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 60.

¹⁶⁷Kari Syreeni, “Between Heaven and Earth: On the Structure of Matthew’s Symbolic Universe,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 40 (1990): 3-4.

refers to the revelation of God, the knowledge of God,¹⁶⁸ and the knowledge of God may include the knowledge of His eschatological will.¹⁶⁹ Jeremias argues that it is important for understanding the current passage to realize that the father-son relationship was used in Palestinian apocalyptic literature to explain how the revelation is transmitted.¹⁷⁰

Jeremias contends that, with this father-son comparison, Jesus wants to say:

Like a father who personally devotes himself to explaining the letters of the Torah to his son, like a father who initiates a son into the well-preserved secrets of his craft, so God has transmitted to me the revelation of himself, and therefore I alone can pass on to others the real knowledge of God.¹⁷¹

Jesus gives the reader a direct definition of His intimacy with God by calling God “Father” five times. On the other hand, God’s sovereignty is emphasized by Jesus’ same direct definition, “Lord of heaven and earth.” It should be mentioned that tension exists between these two names. Jesus calls God “Father,” in intimate terms; and “Lord of heaven and earth,” which shows God’s sovereignty. God’s total disposition to hide the truth from His people and reveal the truth to His people is further proof of God’s sovereignty (v. 25).

Jesus’ alternative designations of God generate conflict for the reader in understanding God as a character. According to Boris Uspensky, Jesus demonstrates “subjective description” when He calls God “Father,” and “objective description” when

¹⁶⁸Jeremias, *The Prayer*, 49.

¹⁶⁹Hare, *Matthew*, 128.

¹⁷⁰For the use, see Jeremias, *The Prayer*, 50-51.

¹⁷¹*Ibid.*, 51. Raymond Schwager also comments on this: “Jesus understands himself to be the true and legitimate interpreter and ‘exegete’ of the divine will (cf. John 1:18).” Raymond Schwager, “Christ’s Death and the Prophetic Critique of Sacrifice,” *Semeia* 33 (1985): 112.

He calls God “Lord,” with the statement of God’s sovereign disposition toward the people (vv. 25-27).¹⁷² In Baruch Hochman’s category, such objective description of God evokes complexity for the reader because it shows God’s mysterious disposition toward the people.¹⁷³ It also provides the reader with God’s inner trait, which is accessible only through Jesus. Therefore, God is transparent at this time and, as a character, He will become more transparent as the story progresses.

God’s Chosen Servant (12:15-21)

The assessments of the role of Isaiah 42:1-4 in Matthew 12:18-21 have demanded Matthean scholars’ continuous attention. Frederick Dale Bruner says that the quotation from Isaiah 42:1-4 is intended both “(1) to explain Jesus’ retreat, with His attendant command of silence, and (2) to give a mid-Gospel review of Jesus’ whole mission.”¹⁷⁴ Jerome H. Neyrey gives another reason that Matthew quotes Isaiah 42:1-4: illuminating the whole twelfth chapter narrative. According to Neyrey, “It points less to an ideal christological portrait of Jesus as the meek servant and more toward the situation

¹⁷²Uspensky explains that “subjective” description is using some individual perception or psychological point of view, while “objective” description is the way the author merges his or her point of view with that of the character. Boris Uspensky, *A Poetics of Composition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 18-81. Jesus’ calling of God as “Father” five times is subjective description and as “Lord of heaven and earth” is objective description: The author merges himself with Jesus’ point of view by allowing Him to speak of God’s inner trait.

¹⁷³Charles Wade Bibb, “The Characterization of God in Luke – Acts” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1996), 102.

¹⁷⁴Bruner, *Matthew*, 1: 555. For more, see Cope, *Matthew*, 32-52.

of Matthew's church in conflict with the synagogue."¹⁷⁵ On the other hand, Richard Beaton claims his idea that a definition of κρίσις is "justice" rather than "judgment" (v. 18). He explains that, in the Old Testament, the context in which κρίσις is linked shows that κρίσις should be understood to mean "justice," which is central to the servant's ministry. Jesus provides justice to the oppressed, while the Pharisees exercise injustice by insisting on the strict *halakic* observation.¹⁷⁶ Beaton is correct because κρίσις is frequently used in LXX in this sense; the right of the oppressed is vindicated by a judge.¹⁷⁷

The passage is structured as follows: Jesus' withdrawal (v. 15) and command not to make Him known (v. 16), the Old Testament quotation with introductory formula (v. 17), and text (vv. 18-21). Hagner observes that the Isaiah quotation is, for the most part, non-Septuagintal and does not follow the Hebrew masoretic text either. He argues that Matthew may well have formed the translation from sources (e.g., the targums) available to him or produced his own translation to suit his own purposes.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵Jerome H. Neyrey, "The Thematic Use of Isaiah 42:1-4 in Matthew 12," *Biblica* 63 (1982): 459.

¹⁷⁶Richard Beaton, "Messiah and Justice: A Key to Matthew's Use of Isaiah 42:1-4," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 75 (1999): 5-23.

¹⁷⁷Friedrich Büchsel, "κρίσις," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 3:941-42. Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure*, 93-95.

¹⁷⁸For "κρίσις" as "justice," see F. W. Beare, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew: A Commentary* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), 275; M. Davies, *Matthew* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 95; Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 336. See also R. H. Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel*, NovTSup 8 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), 111-16; K. Standahl, *The School of St. Matthew* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968),

In verse 18, Jesus is depicted as God's select servant: "Here is my servant, whom I have chosen, with whom my soul is well pleased." God's words about His pleasure with the servant remind the reader of the baptismal scene, in which the Spirit-endowed Son is deeply pleased by God (3:17; cf. 17:5). God is the subject of all the activities occurring in the servant selection in verse 18 because of the use of "μου" four times (Ἰδοὺ ὁ παῖς μου ὃν ἠρέτισα, ὁ ἀγαπητός μου εἰς ὃν εὐδόκησεν ἡ ψυχὴ μου· θήσω τὸ πνεῦμά μου ἐπ' αὐτόν). God is presented in definitive fashion as the One who sent Jesus. God is the subject of all the activities in this passage.¹⁷⁹

God is at the center of verse 18. The verse establishes the character God. In addition, Beaton notes that the future tense of θήσω, "in place of LXX's aorist ἔδωκα for the perfective יָתַן, contributes to a sense of anticipation, suggesting that the bestowal of the Spirit is perceived as an eschatological event."¹⁸⁰ Since the Spirit is God's Spirit, such anticipation contributes to the reader's apprehension of the future conflict related to Jesus' mission, and invites the reader to expect God in conflict.

The point of conflict concerns justice. God's servant will "proclaim justice (κρίσις) to the Gentiles." Justice should be taken in the sense of God's divine verdict (cf.

109-15. Cf. John Grindel, "Matthew 12:18-21," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 29 (1967): 110-15.

¹⁷⁹Kingsbury, *Matthew*, 95.

¹⁸⁰Beaton, "Messiah and Justice," 8. Donald Verseput also contends that the "future tense of θήσω, in contrast to the perfect form of the MT, conforms to the tense of the subsequent lines and therefore draws a tighter connection between the reception of the Spirit and the fulfillment of the servant task." Donald Verseput, *The Rejection of the Humble Messianic King: A Study of the Composition of Matthew 11-12* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1986), 197.

Matt 10:15; 11:22, 24; 12:36, 41, 42), not in the sense of the justice or righteousness in Jesus' teaching.¹⁸¹ Beaton argues,

In Judaism the concept of **מִשְׁפָּט** was fundamentally rooted in the concept of ethical monotheism, in which God, as king and judge, was the dispenser and guardian of **מִשְׁפָּט**. Oppressive rulers or structures that propagated injustice caused the Jewish people to look to their God as their advocate for vindication and justice. It was this point of tension between the reality of injustice and the theological affirmation of judgment that contributed to the development of an eschatological perspective, which viewed God's punishing judgment . . . as a final act of vengeance to end history.¹⁸²

God's final act, as an eschatological figure who will enforce justice by declaring final judgment upon the ungodly, helps the reader understand Jesus' act of withdrawing (vv. 15-16): This has been predicted by the prophet. Matthew cites Isaiah, saying, "He will not wrangle or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. He will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick until he brings justice to victory" (vv. 19-20). Hagner thus comments, "Matthew understands these words to refer to the humility and gentleness of Jesus as the servant Messiah (cf. 11:29). The focus here is on what Jesus surprisingly does not do."¹⁸³

Jesus is shown as confining Himself within the boundary of Isaiah's prophecy, so that the role of Messiah – which Isaiah announced – is now being fulfilled. Jesus fulfills the prophecy. Such fulfillment shows that God is the central acting character, and that God's relationship with the Son is central to the prophecy.

The Kingdom of God (12:22-32)

¹⁸¹Verseput, *The Rejection*, 197.

¹⁸²Beaton, "Messiah and Justice," 11.

¹⁸³Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 338.

Jesus' healing of a demon-possessed man provokes a bitter controversy with the Pharisees. The connector "then" (Τότε), in verse 22, creates a thematic tie between the Pharisees' previous accusation about the Sabbath activities of Jesus and His disciples and Jesus' healing and exorcisms.¹⁸⁴ The crowds are amazed at the miracle and begin questioning Jesus' identity as "the Son of God" (v. 23).

The crowd is portrayed as a "round character" due to doubting Jesus' identity as God's Son. The crowds are very positive in 9:2-8, because they recognize Jesus as the One with God-given authority (9:8). In this miracle narrative, though they are partly negative toward Jesus for they are not sure about His identity.¹⁸⁵ Simultaneously, they are partly positive because they are at least curiously excited. The crowds are more positive when their reactions are compared with the hostility toward Jesus.

Between these two evaluations of Jesus – the Son of God and Beelzebul – the reader does not have much of a problem, however, deciding who Jesus is. His connection with the Son of David is already proclaimed earlier (1:1-17) in the story, and Jesus' kingship as the Son of God is carefully maintained. Thus, the reader accepts the narrator's judgment of Jesus.¹⁸⁶

The Pharisees reject Jesus by accusing Him of being Beelzebul, the ruler of the

¹⁸⁴Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 446.

¹⁸⁵"Can this be the Son of David?" (Μήτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς Δαυίδ;) – in 12:23 – shows the crowd's uncertainty. This can be translated as either expecting a negative answer or as expressing uncertainty. Barclay M. Newman and Philip C. Stine, *A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew* (London: United Bible Societies, 1988), 282.

¹⁸⁶Edwards, *Matthew's Story*, 44.

demons (12:24). Jesus defends himself by applying an analogy from civil warfare to the Pharisees' accusation that Satan is empowering Him (vv. 25-27). Jesus' next argument concerning the source of His power, "by the Spirit of God" (v. 28) shows His testimony that God's power is working in Him. This (πνεύματι θεοῦ) apparently is Matthew's own emphasis. Matthew uses "Spirit" in place of "finger" (δακτύλῳ), as it is in the Gospel of Luke 11:20.¹⁸⁷ The change apparently reveals that God empowers Jesus' ministry. The words, "the kingdom of God," appear in verse 28 for the first time in Matthew.

According to Edwards,

This is the first time that the kingdom has been described as "of God" and probably because of the phrase "the Spirit of God" used earlier in the verse. The immediate context would lead the reader to think of the kingdom of God as the reign of the one who casts out demons and thus it answers the immediate problem, that is, that Jesus' power is from God.¹⁸⁸

Matthew presents the idea of God's activity through Jesus by stating that Jesus' exorcism is "by the Spirit of God." God's activity is emphasized even more when Jesus says that the "kingdom of God has come to you" (v. 28b).¹⁸⁹ The coming of God's kingdom should be read from the Old Testament perspective: It means Israel's defeat of

¹⁸⁷Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 343. For a different view, cf. Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly, "A Note on Matthew XII. 28 par. Luke XI. 20:167-68," *New Testament Studies* 11 (1964): 167-69.

¹⁸⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹The word "ἔφθασεν" (has come) has some sense of arrival. Blomberg, *Matthew*, 202. George Eldon Ladd refutes any objection to this idea by arguing that if this word means the nearness of the kingdom, not an arrival in some sense, the entire message and mission of Jesus are under a cloud. George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 140. This thesis agrees with Ladd because as the Spirit of God in and through which Jesus casts out the demons is real and present with Jesus, the kingdom of God is real and present with Jesus in some sense.

the enemy and godless nations (Mic 4:11-13; Zeph 3:8; Isa 31:4-9; Ezek 38, 39; Joel 3:9-15; Zech 12:1-9; 14:1-3). Jesus interprets the political conflict in terms of a spiritual one. The coming of the kingdom of God means the defeat of evil from the spiritual perspective. The kingdom's arrival shows God's victorious power over Satan.¹⁹⁰ Ladd argues that "the meaning of Jesus' exorcism of demons in its relationship to the kingdom of God is precisely this: that before the eschatological conquest of God's kingdom over evil and the destruction of Satan, the Kingdom of God has invaded the realm of Satan to deal him a preliminary but decisive defeat."¹⁹¹ The coming of God's kingdom implies His direct intervention. Through Jesus, God is characterized as Jesus' only source of power for casting out demons.

The True Family of God (12:46-50)

The true family of God is the one that follows Jesus' teaching. The disciple's requirement is doing the will of My Father in heaven (τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πατρός μου τοῦ ἐν οὐρανοῖς). The subject of authentic relationship to God serves as a motif in this pericope, which precedes the similar story of Jesus' visit to Nazareth (13:54, 58). After this, the parables of the kingdom of heaven in the thirteenth chapter present the nature of the kingdom and the resultant division among people based on their response. The thirteenth chapter is thematically related to 12:46-50 because the reader is reminded of what it is that establishes a proper relationship with Jesus to enter the kingdom of God: "whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (v. 50).

¹⁹⁰Ladd, *The Presence*, 150.

¹⁹¹Ibid., 151.

Matthew omits the material negative to Jesus in Mark 3:20-21. Jesus' relatives attempt to seize Jesus in Mark 3:21 (καὶ ἀκούσαντες οἱ παρ' αὐτοῦ ἐξῆλθον κρατῆσαι αὐτόν· ἔλεγον γὰρ ὅτι ἐξέστη). Matthew supplies the reader with a gentler picture in verse 46: "His mother and His brother were standing outside, wanting to speak to Him" (οἱ ἀδελφοὶ αὐτοῦ εἰστήκεισαν ἔξω ζητοῦντες αὐτῷ λαλῆσαι). The hostility between Jesus and His family is greatly reduced by comparison with the Gospel of Mark. Jesus' kin summoned Him (καλοῦντες αὐτόν) in Mark, but in Matthew they are much more deferential: they "seek to speak to Him" (vv. 46b, 47b).¹⁹²

Moreover, Matthew, replaces "θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ" in Mark 3:35 with "θέλημα τοῦ πατρός μου τοῦ ἐν οὐρανοῖς" (v. 50). The emphasis of this change falls on the relationship between Jesus and His disciples, based upon Jesus' position as the Son of the heavenly Father.¹⁹³ Stephen Barton says, "For Matthew, as for Mark, membership of this family is not by natural ties, but by doing the will of the heavenly Father, with Jesus the Son as the authoritative revealer and teacher of the Father's will."¹⁹⁴ Jesus' statement of the heavenly membership encourages readers to play those roles. Throughout the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus has revealed the Father's will (e.g., 3:8-10; 5:19; 6:1-3; 7:12-26; 12:2, 3, 12, 33), and has been fulfilling God's will. The reader has known, too, that Jesus is

¹⁹²Stephen C. Barton points out that – in Matthew – the crowd is not seated stereotypically περὶ αὐτόν (as in Mark 3:32, 34; cf. 4:10), and Jesus' kin are not distinguished sharply as they are in Mark. Stephen C. Barton, *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 179.

¹⁹³D. R. Bauer, *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1988), 62.

¹⁹⁴Barton, *Discipleship and Family Ties*, 180.

presented in the form of God, in which Jesus' activities are marked by healing, forgiving, exorcising, and feeding the multitudes. Therefore, the reader comes to know that the words about doing the heavenly Father's will are not only reflective of Jesus' will, but also of God's will. The reader understands God, who speaks through Jesus.

In narrative theory, a narrator tells a story from a certain point of view that governs the whole story. Such a point of view is called the "ideological point of view."¹⁹⁵ Events and characters are evaluated in this way.¹⁹⁶ In this pericope, the single most important ideological point of view is that of God because it is the most crucial task to do the will of My Father in heaven. God is established as the most important character in this pericope.

The Parables of the Kingdom (13:1-50)

The thirteenth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew contains Jesus' presentation of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, made in response to the religious leaders' rejection of Him (12:1-45).¹⁹⁷ In reaction to their rejection, Jesus introduces the kingdom parables to show them that "they were no longer the privileged people to whom God would impart His revelation, but instead they were in danger of being judged by the Son

¹⁹⁵Uspensky, *A Poetics of Composition*, 8.

¹⁹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷"That same day," in v. 1, indicates that this chapter is a continuation of the previous one (Ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ ἐξελθὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τῆς οἰκίας ἐκάθητο παρὰ τὴν θάλασσαν).

of Man for having spurned their Messiah.”¹⁹⁸

The thirteenth chapter’s structure can be divided into two main parts: verses 1-35 and verses 36-52. Kingsbury notices that these sections reveal that they possess a remarkably similar structure: each section has its respective setting (vv. 1-3a, 36a) with “excursus” (vv. 10-23, 36b-43), and each section has an appropriate conclusion (vv. 34f, 51f).¹⁹⁹ Such structure may reflect that Matthew had a purpose for so structuring the chapter.²⁰⁰ Kingsbury explains that the parables have an apologetic purpose and a paraenetic purpose. Apologetically, the parables warn Jewish leaders about regarding themselves as having exclusive rights to God’s kingdom of God; and, paraenetically, the parables encourage the disciples by revealing the kingdom’s mysteries to them.²⁰¹ Kingsbury is correct because the context of the eleventh and twelfth chapters shows the confrontation between Jesus and the religious leaders. In the culminating scene of 12:46-50, the question concerns the true family of God: the one that does the will of My Father in heaven. The contrast between Jesus’ disciples and the religious leaders moves into the message of the parables, which focuses on having the right attitude toward God’s will in order to receive the “mystery of the kingdom.”

¹⁹⁸Mark L. Bailey, “The Parable of the Sower and the Soils,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155 (1998): 172.

¹⁹⁹Jack D. Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13: A Study in Redaction-Criticism* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1969), 12.

²⁰⁰For the example of chiasm which serves as the framework of the parables, see Bailey, “Parable of the Sower,” 174.

²⁰¹Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus*, 13. C. E. Carlston, *The Parables of the Triple Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 148.

Craig A. Evans suggests that the sower parable (of v. 18) reflects the broader concern of Isaiah 55:10-11: “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it”; the emphasis is on the efficacy of God’s Word.²⁰² Some commentators, who interpret this parable as emphasizing the soils/seed relationship, thus fail to give proper attention to the sower.²⁰³ Although the sower appears only at the parable’s beginning, Jesus interprets it as the sower parable in verse 18 (Ἑμεῖς οὖν ἀκούσατε τὴν παραβολὴν τοῦ σπείραντος). Consequently, the parable focuses on the sower, who is God.²⁰⁴

The seed is sown on paths (v. 4), in rocky places (vv. 5-6), among thorns (v. 7), and on good soil (v. 8). The seed in the good soil continuously grows until it yields a range of one hundred, sixty, or thirty times what originally was sown. The fruitfulness of growing from good soil indicates the overflowing of divine fullness. Joachim Jeremias notes that the fruitfulness of growing symbolizes “the eschatological overflowing of the

²⁰²Craig A. Evans, “On the Isaianic Background of the Sower Parable,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47 (1985): 466.

²⁰³For example, Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1990), 226-29. W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Outline Studies in the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 188.

²⁰⁴Bailey also argues that God is the sower. According to him, though Jesus does not explicitly identify the sower as God, the imagery of God as sower and the people as different soil types was well known in Jewish circles (cf. 2 Esdr 4:26-32). Bailey, “The Parable of the Sower,” 179. In the Old Testament, God is found several times as sower (Hos 2:23; Jer 31:27; Ezek 36:9; Zech 10:9). Therefore, sowing is “a

divine fullness.”²⁰⁵ The hundredfold-productivity concept as God’s blessing is well preserved when Jesus explains the parable’s concern as “the mystery of the kingdom” (τὰ μυστήρια τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν) in verse 11. The mystery of the kingdom has been “given” (δέδοται) and “not been given” (οὐ δέδοται): “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.” The verb’s passive form indicates God’s sovereignty over revealing the mysteries. According to Peter Rhea Jones, “God moves toward all persons. He sows with cheerful abandon.”²⁰⁶ The kingdom of heaven’s image is steady and gradual because the seed’s growth continues until it reaches full production.

In the parable of the weeds among the wheat (vv. 24-30 and 36-43), Jesus identifies the sower as the Son of Man and the seed as good (v. 37). The good seed is sown, and then the sower’s enemy sows weeds among the good seed (v. 25). The enemy’s intention is apparent in the planting of “weeds” (ζιζάνια). The sower’s purpose is fulfilled, however, because the good seed will grow until the harvest (v. 30). In this parable, the kingdom of heaven is considered as growing until it reaches its fullness. The parable starts at the sowing and continues until the children of the kingdom shine like the

recognized metaphor for God’s action.” K. Grayston, “The Sower,” *Expository Times* 55 (1943-44): 139.

²⁰⁵ Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1972), 11. For the understanding of such productivity as meaning God’s blessing in Jesus’ day, see Philip Barton Payne, “The Authenticity of the Parable of the Sower and Its Interpretation,” in *Gospel Perspective: Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels*, ed. R. T. France and David Wenham (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980), 1:163-207. Both Jeremias and Wenham understand that the parable’s emphasis is on the sower, who blesses such a good harvest.

²⁰⁶ Peter Rhea Jones, *The Teaching of the Parables* (Nashville: Broadman, 1982), 72.

sun in their Father's kingdom. For this reason, at issue in the parable is the kingdom of heaven's growth to its fullness, which shows God's continuous activity. William G. Doty explains, "The reigning of God is the issue. With what can it be compared? Matthew's Jesus does not say that the reigning is such and such. But it is Jesus who says that the nature of the reigning which he announces is such that it can be compared to a human event."²⁰⁷

The next parable resembles the previous one due to the fact that it focuses on kingdom growth. Jesus says, "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed (κόκκω σιναπίτεως)," in verse 31. The seed maintains growth until it becomes the greatest of shrubs and a tree (v. 32).

The parable of the yeast begins with the introduction, "The kingdom of heaven is like" as it is for the parable of the mustard seed in the previous section (13:31-32). This is the fourth parable in the thirteenth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. After this parable, Jesus explains the reason that He uses parables with the crowds.

Jesus' choice of points of comparison for His parable is from everyday life. God's kingdom is explained through the parable of the yeast: "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened" (v. 33). The parable of the leaven shows the manner in which God's kingdom grows until it meets its fullness. Archibald M. Hunter notices that the parable of the yeast does not concern yeast, but "what happens when you put leaven into a batch of meal – a heaving, panting mass, swelling and bursting with bubbles, and all the

²⁰⁷William G. Doty, "An Interpretation: Parable of the Weeds and Wheat," *Interpretation* 25 (1971): 186.

commotion indicating something alive and at work below.”²⁰⁸ In this parable, God’s activity is indicated by the continuous change of the kingdom of heaven’s growth: It is God who causes the kingdom’s increase.²⁰⁹ His activity is manifested in the words, “until all of it was leavened” (13:33). These words indicate a continuous growth, and God’s present activity in the kingdom’s growth. Kingsbury asserts, “God is at present active in power to bring about the advent of his end-time kingdom.”²¹⁰

Through the picture of the leaven’s continuous growth (as in the parable of the mustard seed in 13:31-32), God is characterized for the reader as “coherent, unchanging.” The reader perceives the image of the leaven’s continuous growth and transfers such image to God, who is actively present in the kingdom of heaven’s growth. According to Rimmon-Kenan, a character’s activity can be presented as either a one-time act or as habitual acts. He says, “Habitual actions tend to reveal the character’s unchanging or static aspect.”²¹¹ God is introduced as a coherent character through the parable of the leaven.

²⁰⁸Archibald M. Hunter, *Interpreting the Parables* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 44.

²⁰⁹David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew* (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1972), 233.

²¹⁰Jack Dean Kingsbury, *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13: A Study in Redaction-Criticism* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1969), 87. J. Dwight Pentecost argues that the Holy Spirit and His work is emphasized. J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1990), 223. In light of Matthew’s overall plot of God’s fulfillment, however, it is more legitimate to regard God as an internal factor who causes the kingdom to grow.

²¹¹Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 61.

After reporting a series of Jesus' parables and their explanations, Matthew adds his own words that "Jesus told the crowds all these things in parables; without a parable he told them nothing" (v. 34). Matthew inserts the Old Testament citation following his words, "So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet: 'I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world'" (v. 35). The words in verse 35 are from Psalm 78, in which Asaph proclaims God's mighty deeds in Israel's past. In Psalm 78:2, Asaph reveals that God's message is delivered in "parable form" (v. 2a). The parable must be understood if Israel is to remain the people of God.²¹² By mentioning the Old Testament quotation, Matthew indicates that God is speaking through the parable, which reminds the reader of God's continuing activity through Jesus.

God is revealed as a character through the Old Testament citation. He can be classified in Hochman's category of "coherence." According to Hochman, the coherent character shows a great degree of unity or consistency. God is coherent because God speaks through Jesus, in the form of parables in Matthew, as God said He would do through the prophet. According to Psalm 78:2, God reveals His message in parable and, in Matthew, Jesus fulfills this role.

The incoherent characters at the scale's opposite end, "coherence incoherence," reflect lesser degrees of unity or lack "any decisive unifying principle within themselves."²¹³ This cannot be the case with God, who is coherent in a way of speaking and coherent by fulfilling what He promises to do. This fulfillment quotation

²¹²Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, WBC, vol. 20 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 288.

²¹³Hochman, *Character in Literature*, 98.

once again emphasizes God's fulfillment. Matthew's citation of Psalm 78:2 implies that God speaks through Jesus.

A. H. McNeil says that the hidden-treasure and pearl parables (vv. 44 and 45) illustrate an aspect of the kingdom for which any sacrifice is made,²¹⁴ with overwhelming joy. The kingdom is hidden (κεκρυμμένω). These parables stress the hidden kingdom, and the point that people are willing to sacrifice everything to acquire the hidden treasure is well-taken. God's characterization in the parables is most clearly appreciated in the kingdom of heaven's relationship to people. They are willing to obtain the treasure, and such willingness is God's blessing. Jesus earlier used the sower parable to illustrate the kingdom of heaven's exclusive nature (cf. 7:6). Those who oppose Jesus' teaching are behind to the kingdom of heaven's magnitude, whereas His disciples understand the kingdom of heaven's hidden value. The kingdom of God is the subject of these parables, and God's activity is implied.

Jesus utilizes the parable of the net (vv. 47-50) to describe the end-of-the-age judgment, when the good will be separated from the bad. This parable is similar to the parable of the weeds (vv. 24-30), which additionally describes the end-of-the-age separation (v. 30). Good people and evil people coexist in the present time, but God will judge between the good and evil, when the time comes. God's action toward evil people in verses 49-50 ("The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth"). Thus, the reader completely expects God's action.

²¹⁴ A. H. McNeile, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (London: Macmillan, 1949), 203.

Feeding of the Five Thousand (14:13-21)

Matthew's story of Herod's response to Jesus' fame begins, "At that time Herod the ruler heard reports about Jesus; and he said to his servants, 'This is John the Baptist; he has been raised from the dead'" These verses 1 and 2 present the reader with some difficulties when they are read with the account of John the Baptist's execution (vv. 3-12). It is clear at the beginning that John is already dead, but later Jesus seems to withdraw because of the news of John's death. For this reason, Rudolf Bultmann argues that Matthew makes a simple error of forgetting how he started the story. Bultmann states, "How much the picture of continuity is but appearance is shown, as is well known, in the junction of the end of the story of the death of John the Baptist with the continuing story of Jesus, when Matthew in 14:12b, 13a, has forgotten the parenthetic nature of the story of the Baptist."²¹⁵ Some others contend that this may just be Matthew's "flashback" to John the Baptist's death.²¹⁶ In verses 3-12, Matthew returns to an earlier time, providing an explanation of John's death by Herod. The problem is not easily solved, though, when one reads it with Jesus' hearing this and withdrawing Himself. Davies and Allison claim that "one may even wonder whether our evangelist gave much thought at all to the internal arrangement of the structure of 14.1-12."²¹⁷

Matthew writes, "When it was evening, the disciples came to him" (v. 15). The

²¹⁵Rudolf Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. John Marsh (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 352.

²¹⁶Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 417; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 231.

²¹⁷W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 463.

word “came” (προσῆλθον) points to God’s presence in Jesus. James R. Edwards holds that the word “προσέρχασθαι” carries “unmistakable cultic connotations; that is, it is used of those who approach God or bring sacrifices to an altar, or of those who approach someone of cultic importance either to make a request or to render some form of sacral service” in the LXX and Hellenistic literature.²¹⁸ Edwards also says that especially in the Pentateuch this word designates approaching God or altar; or often designates Moses, who offers sacrifices as God’s representative. In the case of Matthew, the word may denote Jesus’ authority as the Messiah whom God sends.²¹⁹ According to Edwards, this word “doubtlessly signaled Jesus as one sent from God and suggested his messianic status.”²²⁰

Matthew appears to establish God’s presence and activity in Jesus by the repeated use of “προσέρχασθαι” in his narrative. Of the approximately ninety occurrences of “προσέρχασθαι” in the New Testament, fifty-two of them appear in Matthew. It is more evident that this word carries Matthew’s special flavor when Matthew is compared

²¹⁸James R. Edwards, “The Use of ΠΡΟΣΕΡΧΕΣΘΑΙ in the Gospel of Matthew,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106 (1987): 65. See pp. 65-66 of his article for his illustrations of the usage in LXX and Hellenistic literature and other supportive documents from scholars.

²¹⁹In nearly three-fourths of its use, Jesus is the object of the verb (4:3, 11; 5:1; 8:2, 5, 19, 25; 9:14, 18, 20, 28; 13:10, 36; 14:15; 15:1, 12, 23, 30; 16:1; 17:14, 19; 18:1, 21; 19:3, 16; 20:20; 21:14, 23; 22:23; 24:1, 3; 26:7, 17, 49, 50, 60 [two times]). *Ibid.*, 67. Edwards also mentions that ten of these uses are made by those who approach Jesus with the intent to test or trap Him. Yet, even in these cases, Matthew “demonstrates that Jesus’ opponents come to him because he has authority and that in every instance the authority of Jesus is vindicated.” *Ibid.*, 68.

²²⁰*Ibid.*

with the other Gospels: Mark uses this word five times; Luke uses it ten times; and John employs it only once.²²¹

The emphasis of this passage is on the care and provision God offers through Jesus. He looks up to heaven to speak to God: “He looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves” (14:19). Jesus’ gesture may mean that He “thanked God for them,” or “asked God’s blessing upon them.”²²² Such an action indicates Jesus’ prayer to His Father.²²³ Hare comments, “The miracle story assures Jesus’ followers and the readers of the Gospel that God will hear them when they pray.”²²⁴

The relationship between Jesus and God once again is reinforced for the reader. Jesus’ gesture reminds the reader of God’s relationship with Jesus as Father and God, the ultimate giver. Jesus recognizes God as a character to confirm God’s compassion for human needs. While the reader is not given the physical description of God, the reader is given information about God’s quality or integrity through the feeding story. His further characterization is emphasized in relation to its Old Testament background. According to Blomberg, “Feeding the five thousand – providing bread for Israel in the wilderness – almost certainly was meant to call to people’s minds God’s supernatural feeding of the

²²¹Ibid., 67.

²²²Newman and Stine, *A Translator’s Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew*, 475.

²²³Hagner describes Jesus’ gesture of looking up to heaven as reflecting a common practice in connection with prayer. Hagner, *Matthew*, 418.

²²⁴Hare, *Matthew*, 166.

Israelites with Manna in their wilderness wanderings in Moses' day."²²⁵ The evangelist's presentation of God in this episode is in line with that of the Old Testament: God cares for His people.²²⁶ The narrator in Matthew is familiar with a view of God who is perceived to be compassionate toward His people and – according to Hochman's schemes – it shows God's coherency. God, who acted in the Old Testament, is now characterized with the same traits.

God of Israel (15:29-31)

In this episode, when Jesus cures many, the narrator reports that the crowds praise the "God of Israel" (v. 31). God is characterized as the God of Israel. Thomas J. Ryan comments, "Matthew concludes with this quasi-liturgical doxology which stresses the fact that Jesus fulfills in this scene one of the principal expectations of the messianic era."²²⁷ He continues that "the formula, 'the God of Israel,' was a frequent liturgical confessional formula in the Old Testament (Psalms 67:35; 40:13) which of itself was capable of recalling the great benefits and promises God had granted now fulfilled in the person and activity of Jesus."²²⁸

The crowd's words imply God's attribute. In this case, Matthew characterizes God by "telling" the reader what God is like. The description is implicit, and in the form

²²⁵Blomberg, *Matthew*, 233.

²²⁶Blomberg notices that the promise in Ps 132:15, "I will abundantly bless its provisions; I will satisfy its poor with bread," is important background, as well as the somewhat similar miracles of 1 Kgs 17:9-16 and 2 Kgs 4:42-44. Ibid.

²²⁷Thomas J. Ryan, "Matthew 15:29-31: An Overlooked Summary," *Horizons* 5 (1978): 41.

²²⁸Ibid.

of other character speech referring to God's action. It is questionable, however, whether or not the "God of Israel" phrase comes from the mouth of Jewish crowds. Though it is appropriate for Jews to glorify God in this way, and the phrase is a familiar Old Testament one,²²⁹ it should be noted that Jesus is curing people in Gentile territory,²³⁰ so it is more likely that the Gentiles glorify the God of Israel."²³¹

God's characterization in this episode may need "a mental effort on the part of the reader,"²³² which is one effect of indirect characterization. It requires more effort from the reader to understand God's characterization. God is called as a character by other characters, and God's concern for the Gentiles is indicated by Jesus' work among the Gentiles.

A Sign From Heaven (16:1-4)

Matthew's sixteenth chapter is important to the flow of the Gospel story. Jesus turns to His disciples after the increasing threat to His messianic ministry (12:9-14, 22-37; cf. 14:1-12). He teaches them to more clearly understand His identity and mission (13:35-38; 14:13-21; 14:22-36; 15:1-20, 21-23).²³³

²²⁹Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 446; J. R. C. Cousland, "The Feeding of the Four Thousand Gentiles in Matthew? Matthew 15:29-39 as a Test Case," *Novum Testamentum* 41 (1999): 14-23.

²³⁰Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 407.

²³¹France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 248; Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook*, 319; Mounce, *Matthew*, 154.

²³²Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, vol. 70 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989), 64.

²³³Wilkins, *Matthew*, 553.

Jesus is once again confronted with the religious leaders in this episode. The Pharisees and Sadducees this time ask Him to show them “a sign from heaven” (σημεῖον ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ). Because heaven is where God is, and He rules, the sign from heaven indicates “a miracle that God Himself allows or does in order to reveal some truth about Him.”²³⁴ The Pharisees have previously asked for a sign. Jesus replies to their request by saying, “No sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah” (12:39). According to Wilkins, “The sign of Jonah is not some kind of sign that Jonah brings. Rather, Jonah is the sign. His appearance was the sign to the people of Nineveh that his message was from the God who had rescued him from death.”²³⁵ By mentioning Johah’s sign, Jesus indicates God’s past action of sending Jonah to the people of Nineveh, and relating such activity to Himself. This episode shapes God as an acting character; His activity as a character is indicated through the statement of the sign of Jonah. God’s activity is similar – yet different this time – compared with His earlier activity. God’s action in the past was sending His prophets, but now it is His own Son.

The similarity between Jonah’s spending three days and three nights in the belly of a fish (Jonah 2:1) and Jesus’ resurrection after three days brings the message that, as God rescues Jonah from the fish’s belly, it is God who raises Jesus from the dead. By Jesus’ rejection of His opponents because of their unbelief, God’s vindication of Jesus is implied. Such vindication leads the reader to expect the final judgment, which will fall upon those who reject Jesus.

²³⁴Newman and Stine, *A Translator’s Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew*, 524.

²³⁵Wilkins, *Matthew*, 555.

The reader is more engaged with God and His relationship with Jesus, through the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders. Although other characters' relationships with Jesus have evolved and developed so far within the narrative of the Gospel of Matthew, they do not replace the central position of God's relationship with Jesus. This central position is once again emphasized by the "sign of Jonah" as God's vindication of Jesus.

God and the Disciples (16:13-17)

This scene reveals the relationship between God and the disciple Peter. The Gospel of Matthew has demonstrated the direct relationship between God and the disciples. By commissioning the Twelve, Jesus commands them to "cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons" (10:8), which are clear signs of God's power and promises to them that the Father's Spirit will speak through them in the time of persecution (10:20).

In this episode, Jesus asks His disciples a question concerning His relationship with God: "Who do you say that I am?" (v. 15). Peter answers, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (v. 16). Jesus responds, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood have not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven" (v. 17). Jesus' words constitute a clear indication of the relationship between God and Peter, the disciple.

The initial presentation of Peter (and the disciples) is positive to the reader. The disciples answer Jesus' call without hesitation (4:18-22). When they pluck grain on the Sabbath, He defends their action's legitimacy (12:1-8). Jesus summons His twelve disciples and gives them "authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure

every disease and every sickness” (10:1). When the twelve are named, Judas, “the one who betrayed him,” is separated from the rest of them (10:4). In the parables of the kingdom of heaven, the disciples are given the secret in contrast to those who object to Jesus (13:11). Jesus commends Peter for his correct response about Jesus’ identity during this scene.

The disciple’s favorable characterization, however, does not continue. The reader’s general impression of the disciples is positive up to this point. In the following episode, Jesus severely rebukes Peter for hindering His messianic mission (16:21-23). When Jesus returns from the transfiguration, He criticizes the disciples for their “little faith” (17:20). Matthew describes the disciples’ distress when Jesus foretells His death and resurrection (17:22-23), indicating earlier hints of the tension between Jesus and the disciples and the betrayal. These sequential events create certain reader expectations regarding the disciples’ attitude and action toward Jesus, and God’s characterization in dealing with them, which culminates at the Gospel’s end.

The relationship between Jesus and the disciples nearly collapses while Matthew’s story progresses: Judas betrays Jesus (26:14-16), and Jesus predicts the disciple’s denial (26:31). The final result seems to be a crisis of the relationship between Jesus and His disciples and, therefore, of the relationship between God and the disciples. The current writer, however, argues that – although the relationship between God and the disciples seems to be critical near the end of the story – God shows His acceptance of them by commanding them and promising the disciples that He will be with them to the end of the age (28:20).

The Things of God (16:21-23)

James M. Efird says, “From a literary standpoint it is obvious that this passage forms a major watershed in the development of the story.”²³⁶ Hagner also comments, “The second main part of the Gospel begins at this point, signaled by the opening “ Ἀπὸ τότε, ” “from that time,” placing Jesus on the road to Jerusalem and the cross.”²³⁷ Such division does not mean that the Gospel, however, is now unrelated to the preceding events. The Ἀπὸ τότε phrase should not be understood in isolation from the preceding story. As a matter of fact, Matthew begins to focus on Jesus in Jerusalem from now on.

Jesus’ response to Peter’s rebuke, “Ὑπαγε ὀπίσω μου, Σατανᾶ” (v. 22) reminds the reader of Jesus’ words to Satan at the temptation scene: “Ὑπαγε, Σατανᾶ” (4:10). Using the same words establishes a link between the two events for the reader, who is invited to view Peter as a tempter thinking the things of men, instead of God’s. Jesus’ commitment to God’s plan is tested once again. In depth, the reader perceives Satan’s ongoing challenge of God’s plan.

The real conflict is between God and Satan. Jesus’ call to Peter as “Satan” leads the reader to know that Satan is in the path of the accomplishment of God’s plan. The conflict between Satan and God points to God as a character. Character speeches between Jesus and Peter indicate God as a character. The existence of conflict demonstrates that there is a character. Characters and conflict are closely related. If there is a conflict, there are at least two characters. At this time, there is conflict between God and Satan, who exist as characters. God is presented as an acting figure in this episode. Speeches of other characters – Jesus and Peter – provide clues for understanding the

²³⁶James M. Efird, “Matthew 16:21-27,” *Interpretation* 35 (1981): 284.

²³⁷Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 477.

kind of character that is under analysis: God, who is in conflict with Satan.

Through Jesus' words against Peter, "Get behind me, Satan, You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things" (v. 23), the reader judges Peter because Jesus has been a reliable character: Peter reflects Satan's viewpoint rather than that of God. Jesus thinks about things of God, and the disciples often think about the things of men (v. 23). The reader once again will accept Jesus' evaluative point of view concerning God's plan, because Matthew has once again presented Jesus as the most reliable and trustworthy character. In turn, the reader remembers God – who is at work in Jesus' life – still fulfilling what He has promised in the past.

Kingsbury explains, "The basis of Jesus' evaluative point of view is devotion to God and love of the neighbor, which lead him to suffering and death. The basis of the disciples' evaluative point of view is self-concern, which is the opposite of servanthood."²³⁸ Jesus' words remind the reader of God's viewpoint. This episode enhances the reader's comprehension of Jesus' commitment to God's plan.

While the reader does not receive a physical description of God, He is constructed as a character through the dialogue between Jesus and Peter. God's quality and integrity are reflected through Jesus' rebuke of Peter. God's characterization is magnified when Jesus strongly indicates that Peter represents Satan's view. This episode's implied reader is also familiar with Jesus' temptation in the fourth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew.

The two episodes provided are important for the reader to understand God's

²³⁸Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 141.

role in Matthew's plot. The reader recognizes the real conflict, which is between God and Satan. The reader may speculate concerning possible future events about Jesus based on information conveyed through these two episodes on the conflict between God and Satan.

Follow Me (16:24-28)

The reason to take up one's cross is given in this section. Verses 25-27 each begins with "for," which supplies rationale for living such a life: "For those who want to save their life will lose it" (v. 25); "For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life?" (v. 26); and, "For the Son of Man is to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will repay everyone for what has been done" (v. 27). In this pericope, Jesus' call for cross and self-denial is derived from a certain perspective. There is a system of concepts guiding Jesus' statement: He asks the disciples for their participation in His suffering and death. Bruner presents two kinds of interpretations: a more passive one and a more active one. He says,

The more passive interpretation believes that Jesus' invitation to cross-bearing is the invitation to take up the trials and troubles that come in the life of discipleship and to bear them bravely as faithful followers of Jesus The more active interpretation believes that cross-bearing is the calling actively to become a definite kind of disciple (where the cross is seen more as an active lifestyle than as a passive endurance of life events).²³⁹

Because Jesus' bearing the cross is following God's will, Jesus' invitation of His disciples to His cross is an invitation to follow God's will. Consequently, the dominant idea governing this scene is obeying God's will. In other words, Jesus aligns His ideological point of view with that of God. By relating Jesus' story, the Gospel of

²³⁹Bruner, *Matthew*, 2:150.

Matthew's narrator demands the reader's ideological point of view, which is aligned with that of Christ. The result is there is a single ideological point of view, which is that of God.

The Transfiguration (17:1-8)

The reader encounters God, who speaks for the second time. The Father's voice through the cloud is a direct presentation of character. The character speech provides a rich resource for God's characterization. God's speech is important because it offers an implication of the relationship between God and Jesus, and among God and other characters. The words in God's direct voice, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him" establish an immediate recall of Jesus' baptism for the reader.²⁴⁰ As God spoke at Jesus' baptism, God speaks again.

Jesus is being transfigured before the three disciples: Peter, James, and John. Jesus' transfiguration (or transformation) is "an epiphanic motif describing his external, proleptic, and temporary transformation by God into a heavenly being while still on earth."²⁴¹ His transfiguration is made by God. By the divine passive (μετεμορφώθη), the reader presumes that God is the acting agent of the passive verb.

Some scholars have argued for Mosaic connection to the background of Jesus' transfiguration. Hagner argues, "The disciples see Jesus as they had never seen him

²⁴⁰For the significance of God's voice as His manifestation in the Old Testament see James Muilenburg, "Speech of Theophany," *Harvard Theological Review* 28 (1964): 35-47.

²⁴¹John Paul Heil, *The Transfiguration of Jesus: Narrative Meaning and Function of Mark 9:2-8, Matt 17:1-8 and Luke 9:28-36* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2000), 76.

before. What they saw must surely have reminded them of what they had often read in the narratives concerning Moses on Mount Sinai (cf. Exod 24).²⁴² But there are some differences between the two events. John Paul Heil states that there are some flaws in Hagner's idea : (1) Moses' transformation affects only the face of Moses and follows his speaking with God. Jesus' transformation, which involves both His face and clothing, precedes the meeting with the heavenly figures of Moses and Elijah. (2) The change in Moses face is the result of talking with God (Exod 34:29), while Jesus' change occurs before the heavenly encounter.²⁴³ In spite of such criticism, however, it may well be that Old Testament elements lie behind the transfiguration story.²⁴⁴ The reader should recognize God, who is present around such elements.

Jesus' clothes become white as the light. On the significance of Jesus' clothes that are white as the light, H. Ritt says,

The optical motif of "light" is characteristic of epiphany narratives (theophanies and angelophanies: Matt 17:2; Acts 9:3; 22:6, 9, 11; 26:13). In the same way the numinous divine power of the saving God is shown in the liberation of prisoners (Acts 12:7; 16:29). The portrayal of heavenly figures of light with other-worldly radiance identifies such events as originating within God's transcendent realm: From that realm, where the 'Father of lights' lives (Jas 1:17), come the messengers of God's saving intervention for mankind in the accompanying light of epiphany.²⁴⁵

Through the white clothes of Jesus as light, the reader is invited to think about God who is in white clothing. In Daniel 7:9, Daniel watches the Ancient One take His

²⁴²Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 493.

²⁴³Heil, *The Transfiguration of Jesus*, 78-79.

²⁴⁴Muilenburg, "Speech of Theophany," 36.

²⁴⁵H. Ritt, "φῶς," in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 3:448.

cloud and the glory (of the Lord) are associated. Ezekiel 1:4 mentions a luminous cloud, which conveys a theophany “like the appearance of the glory of the Lord” (1:28).²⁵⁰ In Matthew, the bright (φωτεινή) cloud signifies its heavenly character. The Gospel of Matthew is the only Gospel that emphasizes the cloud’s brightness:

Matthew 17:5 - While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them.

Mark 9:7 - And a cloud came and overshadowed them.

Luke 9:34 - While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them.

Through Matthew’s bright-cloud image, the reader is reminded of Exodus 24:17, in which God’s glorious presence is manifested by means of the luminous cloud.²⁵¹

Moses and Elijah are the key representatives of the law and prophets. They are God’s servants. Liefeld holds “it was appropriate that Moses, by whom the covenant was given, and Elijah, who in effect brought about a renewal of covenant in a transitional period, should bear witness together to the One who established the New Covenant.”²⁵² Even though Liefeld designates Jesus as “the One who established the New Covenant,” Jesus’ role in this event is secured by God, who bestowed such a mission on Him.

Moses and Elijah appear to them (ὄφθη αὐτοῖς Μωϋσῆς καὶ Ἡλίας), which means that God is in action. A prophet is the one sent by God. He has the authority of the one who sends him and sometimes bears the authority of God. According to James F. Ross,

The existence of this close relationship between master and servant may also account for the occasional confusion between Yahweh and his *mal’āk*. The *mal’āk*

²⁵⁰Liefeld, “Theological Motifs in the Transfiguration Narrative,” 169-70; Mounce, *Matthew*, 168.

²⁵¹Heil, *The Transfiguration of Jesus*, 210.

²⁵²Liefeld, “Theological Motifs,” 172.

Yhwh appears and speaks to Hagar, but she thinks she has seen God himself (Gen. 16:7-13) It is the *mal'āk Yhwh* who appears in the burning bush, but it is Yahweh himself who sees that Moses has taken notice (Ex. 3:2-4).²⁵³

As representative Old Testament characters, Moses and Elijah provide Jesus with the identity of the God-sent Messiah. There are also comparisons between Jesus and the disciples: Jesus is the only One who is transfigured. It is Jesus whom God advocates. Such discrimination between Jesus and the disciples characterizes God as having sole authority over them.

This episode reminds the reader once more of God, who is at the story's center. His words play a vital role in establishing the relationship between Jesus and God. Jesus is God's Son and God is Jesus' Father. The reader comes to know that not only is Jesus God's Son, but that God is Jesus' Father. God, as an acting figure, is manifested in His own words.

God's Little Ones (18:10-14)

In this parable, the "little ones"²⁵⁴ are introduced as being under angel's care: "For I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven" (verse 10). There are biblical examples of angelic care for individuals, individual churches, and nations (Gen 48:16; cf. Pss 34:7, 91:11; Dan 10:13; Rev 1:20). The little ones' importance is emphasized by reference to "their angels" and the lost-sheep parable.

²⁵³James F. Ross, "The Prophet as Yahweh's Messenger," in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage*, ed. Bernhard W. Anderson and Walter Harrelson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 101-02.

²⁵⁴Bruner notes that the little ones are "the disciples who have humbled themselves to be like powerless children (cf. 18:2-6)." Bruner, *Matthew*, 2: 615. See also Newman and Stine, *A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew*, 578.

Angels perform God's ministry. Scripture witnesses that angels are His agents.²⁵⁵ God thus cares for these "little ones" by entrusting them to their angels. The point of the parable concerns the care of the shepherd, too. The Lukan parallel (15:3-7) presents a similar point, but the Lukan parallel is more concerned with God's joy due to the repentance of the tax collectors, the sinners. In Matthew, the little ones are prone to wander away from God. His care and attention are well-reflected by the parable in terms of angelic and human care (shepherd).

The shepherd image is very clear in the Old Testament. The contrast between Israel's false shepherds and the true shepherd is well-maintained by Ezekiel 34.²⁵⁶ The Lord is the flock's owner, and He would take it over as shepherd (vv. 11-16).²⁵⁷ In this parable, the typical Old Testament feature of God's long relationship with His people, Israel – as their Shepherd – is compared to the shepherd's relationship with the lost sheep. Therefore, God's image is embedded in the image of the shepherd who searches for the one who goes astray in this parable.

My Father, Who is in Heaven (18:18-20)

²⁵⁵George Foot Moore, *Judaism: In the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, vol. 1, *The Age of the Tannaim* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1946), 401-13. For a view of "their angels" as disembodied spirits, D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in vol. 8 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 401; as spiritual counterparts of human individuals, J. H. Moulton, "It Is His Angel," *Journal of Theological Studies* 3 (1902): 514.

²⁵⁶Ezek 34 LXX has very close contact points with this parable: (1) "ὄρει" in Ezek 34:6 and "ὄρη" in Matt 18:12; (2) "ζητεῖ" in Ezek 34:12 and "ζητεῖ" in Matt 18:12; (3) "πλανώμενον" in Ezek 34:4 and "πλανηθῆν" in Matt 18:12. Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, *World Biblical Commentary* vol. 33b (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 527.

²⁵⁷Cf. Ps 119:176; Jer 23:1-4; 50:6; Isa 53:6.

This passage is located at the center of 17:22-20:19. David McClister proposes the chiasmic structure in the 17:22-20:19:

- 17:22-23: Jesus foretells his death
 A. 17:24-27: Giving freely; money; sacrifice
 Challenge
 “Parable” (Who should pay taxes anyway?)
 B. 18:1-7: Little children are the essence of the kingdom of heaven
 C. 18:8-9: Sacrifice of the body for the sake of the kingdom
 D. 18:10-14: Do not despise what God values
 Parable (Lost sheep)
 E. 18:15-17: What to do when a brother sins
 F. 18:18-20: Agreement between heaven and earth
 E’. 18:21-35: What to do when a brother sins
 Parable (Unforgiving servant)
 D’. 19:1-9: Do not separate what God has joined
 C’. 19:10-12: Sacrifice of the body for the kingdom of heaven
 B’. 19:13-15: Little children are the essence of the kingdom of heaven
 A’. 19:16-20:16: Giving freely; money; sacrifice
 Challenge
 “Parable” (Laborers in the vineyard)
 20:17-19: Jesus foretells his death²⁵⁸

John Breck says that the chiasmus “produces balanced statements, in direct, inverted, or antithetical parallelism, constructed symmetrically about a central idea.”²⁵⁹

There are parallels in this section between 17:22 through 18:15-17 and 18:21 through 20:17-19, and the central idea is located in 18:18-20. The concept of 18:18-20 concerns agreement between heaven and earth, and the central figure in the agreement is God.

Much discussion has been made about the meaning of “the binding and loosing

²⁵⁸David McClister, ““Where Two or Three Are Gathered Together””: Literary Structure as a Key to Meaning in Matthew 17:22-20:19,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39 (1996): 550.

²⁵⁹John Breck, “Biblical Chiasmus: Exploring Structure for Meaning,” *Biblical Theological Bulletin* 17 (1987): 71.

on earth and in heaven” in verse 18.²⁶⁰ The words in verse 19 show that the principal authority embedded in this binding and loosing act in verse 18 ultimately comes from God: “Again, I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask it will be done for you by my Father in heaven” (v. 19). God is designated as the One who has ultimate authority to grant people’s requests.

In verse 19, the promise is maintained that is made in the previous verse about binding and loosing. It is repeated to emphasize that the decision on earth will be ratified only by God, who is in heaven. He is positioned in verses 18 and 19 as the central figure concerning what will be done between earth and heaven. Consequently, God is presented as the central character.

The reader is reminded about God when Jesus speaks of promising His presence among the people: “I am there among them” (ἐκεῖ εἰμι ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν). According to Gundry, “‘I am in the midst of them’ agrees with Matthew’s habit of taking phraseology from the OT, where the Lord often promises to be with and in the midst of his people. The evangelist has combined the meaning of ‘Immanuel’ in 1:23 – viz., ‘God with us’ – with ‘in the midst of them’ in v 2 of the present chapter.”²⁶¹ Jesus promises that He will be among the people where they gather in His name. God’s presence in Jesus, though, provides the reason for answering prayer.

²⁶⁰For bibliography, see J. Duncan M. Derrett, “Binding and Loosing (Matt 16:19; 18:18; John 29:23),” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102 (1983): 112-17; Richard H. Hiers, “‘Binding’ and ‘Loosing’: The Matthean Authorizations,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104 (1985): 233-50.

²⁶¹Gundry, *Matthew*, 370.

God is characterized as being faithful by Jesus' promises. His power is not limited to heaven, but rather extended to the earth. God's activity is mentioned in relationship to the disciples' activity. He will respond to them according to their activity.

God's Fiery Judgment (18:23-35)

This parable follows Jesus' reply to Peter's question: "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" (v. 21). With the answer, "Not seven times, but, seventy times seven" (v. 22), Jesus begins the unforgiving servant parable.

The parable comprises four sections: the first servant (vv. 23-27), the second servant (vv. 28-30), the first servant's punishment (vv. 31-34), and the parable's principle (v. 35).²⁶² The mention of "torturers" (βασανιστᾶις) would mean eternal punishment. Hagner comments, "Given the enormity of the debt, the imprisonment would have been permanent. This together with the reference to the torturers may hint (cf. v. 35) at eschatological punishment."²⁶³ In this parable, the master (κύριος) is God, and eternal punishment also will be made by Him because Jesus considers the master as symbolizing God: "So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart" (v. 35).²⁶⁴

²⁶²Wilkins, *Matthew*, 623-25.

²⁶³Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 540.

²⁶⁴In Matt 8:29, the demon asks Jesus, "What have you to do with us, Son of God? Have you come here to torment (βασανίσαι) us before the time (πρὸ καιροῦ)?" The demon's words of "βασανίσαι" with "πρὸ καιροῦ" indicates that God's final judgment will be upon them. As a result, the master's handing him over to the torturers

God is directly characterized in this parallel. The reader is intended to interpret it as an indication of God's offer of free forgiveness: As God's mercy – to those who sin against Him – is free, the disciples should freely forgive others who sin against them. God will not forgive them if they do not forgive others. The quality or integrity of God is found through comparisons between the first servant and the second servant. The force of the comparison is emphasized by the amount of their debts. The first servant owes "ten thousands talents" (v. 24) to his lord, and the second one owes "a hundred denarii" (v. 28) to him. The comparison shows another comparison between the quality of forgiveness of God and the unforgiveness of the first servant; such a comparison stresses God's sincere forgiveness toward sinners. The reader later is challenged by Jesus' words, "My heavenly Father will also do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart" (v. 35).

A similar teaching from Jesus is recorded in Matthew 5:23-26. The love of others is concerned and presented as the relationship with God is dependent on the love of others. This presentation of God's trait furnishes the reader with consistency in the characterization of God.

God's eternal punishment of the unforgiving servant provides yet another aspect of God's characterization. God is love, and He is gracious. God, though, does not forgive those who do not forgive others. His eternal torture, as the eschatological punishment, is well-preserved in the Gospel of Matthew.²⁶⁵ Therefore, the reader

and his huge debt indicate God's eternal punishment. Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology*, 138-39.

²⁶⁵See Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology*, 134-39. Sim notes that the Gospel of Matthew contains no less than seven references to the wicked's eternal torture by eschatological fire.

acquires the same effect of consistency as in the case of God's forgiveness. The reader's experience of such coherent and multiple aspects of God leads him or her to the characterization of God as a whole. In Hochman's model, wholeness is closely related to the reader's experience of the character as "real person." Hochman says,

We experience wholeness in a character when the character's qualities appear to cohere in such a way as to convince us that what we are given of the character – the segment of his or her putative experience – represents the whole of that character, analogous to the whole of a real person. We feel that the characterization, despite its limitedness, is an exhaustive account of the imagined person that this particular character is meant to be.²⁶⁶

God's multiple characters in the Gospel of Matthew enhance the reader's understanding of God as a whole.

All Things Are Possible (19:16-26)

In this episode, a man who is approaching Jesus asks a question: "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" (v. 16). This question leads to a discussion of the difficulty of the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven: "Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven" (v. 23).

During His conversation with this man, Jesus does not forget to mention God, who is alone the ultimate measure of good.²⁶⁷ "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only One who is good," "εἷς ἐστὶν ὁ ἀγαθός" (v. 17). According to Davies and Allison, "The point now seems to be that one needs not to ask about 'the good' because the good is clear and can be known: God is good, and His commandments are good.

²⁶⁶Baruch Hochman, *Character in Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 103.

²⁶⁷Cf. Robert L. Thomas, "The Rich Young Man in Matthew," *Grace Theological Seminary* 3 (1982): 256.

God has revealed His commandments.”²⁶⁸ By indicating that God’s commandments are “good, ” Jesus’ evaluative point of view of God’s attribute is explicitly revealed to the reader: The commandments are good because they are from God, who is good.²⁶⁹

A discussion about wealth and entering the kingdom is presented after dialogue between the rich man and Jesus. The man’s commitment to his faith is challenged because of the man’s unwillingness to follow Jesus’ invitation to become His disciple: “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me” (v. 21). After the man left, the difficulty of the rich man entering God’s kingdom is explained in terms of the proverbial analogy of a camel passing through the eye of a needle. The disciples are very surprised at this explanation and immediately seek an answer: “Who then is able to be saved?” (v. 25). Jesus replies, “With God all things possible” (v. 26). Blomberg notes that “God can and does regenerate hearts, making it possible to serve him rather than mammon, which is otherwise everyone’s ‘bottom line.’”²⁷⁰

Jesus directly addresses God’s attribute and power. According to this episode: (1) God is the One who can save people; (2) having eternal life means entering God’s kingdom, which is God’s reign; and (3) keeping God’s commandments and following Jesus are starting points for entering God’s kingdom. God exists as a character around Jesus’ presentation of Him and His kingdom.

²⁶⁸Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 42.

²⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 43.

²⁷⁰Blomberg, *Matthew*, 300.

The Owner of the Vineyard (20:1-16)

This parable develops from an encounter between Jesus and a wealthy young man (19:16-22), especially after Jesus' answer to Peter's question, "Look, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?" (19:27). The parable, which is presented as part of Jesus' answer to Peter, serves as an illustration of 19:30: "But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first." The parable's structure is apparent – verses 1-7: hiring the workers; verses 8-12: payment and controversy; and verses 13-15: the owner's defense.

The parable's vineyard is a very important metaphor for understanding God as a character. The Scripture passage of Isaiah 5:1-2 describes Israel as God's vineyard.²⁷¹ He prepares the land and plants it with the choicest vines, only to discover that it bears stinking things. As God takes the initiative in Isaiah 5:1-2 by preparing the vineyard, He does so in the parable by seeking laborers: "The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard" (v. 1). He makes a promise to the laborers: "after agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage" (v. 2). The owner makes a promise to other laborers who start work at the third hour, the sixth hour, and the ninth hour (vv. 3-5).

²⁷¹Isa 5:1-2: "Let me sing for my beloved my love-song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; he expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes." God's dealing with Israel is described through the Old Testament metaphor of the owner. The vine turns bad: Isa 5:2; Jer 2:21; Ezek 17:5-6; Hos 10:1. The vineyard's destruction: Isa 5:5-7; 16:8; Jer 5:10, 17; 12:10; Hos 2:12; Amos 4:10. The blessing and Restoration of the vineyard: Jer 31:5; 32:15; Amos 9:14. Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, eds., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1998), s.v. "Vine, Vineyard." It is unmistakably accepted by many that the owner of the

The parable's focus is on those who arrive at the eleventh hour, showing the grace of the owner, and the owner's autonomy in rewarding his workers.²⁷² The laborers who are invited to work at the eleventh hour are first asked, "Why are you standing here idle all day?" (v. 6). They had stood in the market place all day because no one hired them (v. 7). Hagner comments on the purpose of the insertion of the sixth and seventh verses, which break the previous hiring pattern: It is "to underline the fact that these are the ones rejected by other employers as unworthy. These 'last' ones . . . are analogous to the tax collectors and the harlots invited to the kingdom by Jesus."²⁷³ The hiring indicates God's compassion on those people. Joachim Jeremias also observes, "God is depicted as acting like an employer who has compassion for the unemployed and their families. He gives to publicans and sinners a share, all undeserved, in His kingdom."²⁷⁴

God's grace is open in God's way, not in man's way. Peter's question ("Look, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?" [19:27]) represents the laborers who came first and complained about receiving the same wage as the last ones: "These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat" (v. 12). The owner's rebuke and his choice ("I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you") in verse 14 establish his privilege. God, who is the creator of universe, is sovereign over all His creatures. The

vineyard is God. For example, John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, WBC, vol. 24 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 56.

²⁷²Cf. Isa 45:9-11: "Does the clay say to the one who fashions it, 'What are you making'? . . . Will you command me about my children, or command me concerning the work of my hand?"

²⁷³Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 571.

²⁷⁴Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 139.

quality of God's action is reflected by the owner's rebuke in verse 13 and verse 15: "Friend, I am doing you no wrong" (Ἐταῖρε, οὐκ ἀδικῶ σέ). God's activity is not wrong. His activity is right. The owner also says, "Is your eye evil because I am good (ἀγαθός)?" (NKJ). Warren Carter notes that the owner "asserts that in paying them all the same and treating them as equals, not only has he done 'what is right' but he has done something good, something that, given the echo of 19:17, reflects God's ways."²⁷⁵ God's way is emphasized by the word "your evil eye" (ὁ ὀφθαλμός σου πονηρός)²⁷⁶ because it is opposed to His action, which is good. In this case, the words "your evil eye" are used as an indirect indication of God's characterization.

Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like the owner's action. The owner has sole authority, as is the case in the parable, because the kingdom of heaven is a place where God rules. The narrator in Matthew pictures God, who is the ruler of the kingdom, by connecting the kingdom of God with the action of the vineyard owner. The parable emphasizes God's grace and His sole authority.

The Wicked Tenants (21:33-45)

The parable of the two sons precedes this parable of the wicked tenants in the Gospel of Matthew. The first parable appears after the chief priests and the elders of the

²⁷⁵Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 398. Jesus reserves the "good" for God during the conversation with the rich man in 19:17. When the vineyard owner describes himself as "doing no wrong," he speaks of himself as good. B. Rod Doyle proposes that the divine attribute is associated with this owner, though Doyle takes the owner as Jesus. B. Rod Doyle, "The Place of the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard in Matthew 20:1-16," *Australian Biblical Review* 41 (1993): 52.

²⁷⁶"The evil eye" refers to an envious eye, which is opposed to the grace of God and is reflected in the earliest laborers' complaint. John E. Elliott, "Matthew 20:1-

people challenge Jesus regarding His authority (21:23). Jesus responds to them with a question: “Did the Baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?” (21:25). Because John declares that Jesus is the Messiah and God’s heavenly voice confirmed Jesus’ authority, Jesus is implicitly asserting His authority from God by asking about John’s authority. When the chief priests and elders do not answer Jesus, He also refuses to answer their question.

God’s repeated sending of messengers – and of Jesus as His final messenger – is announced in the parable of the wicked tenants. It is significant that the parable’s plot is parallel with the entire narrative’s plot: As the landowner’s son is the final messenger, Jesus is God’s final messenger. John R. Donahue asserts that God is this parable’s main character. Donahue says, “Though the traditional title suggests that it is the tenants, it is not really their actions which give either unity or suspense to the narrative. A close reading of the text reveals that the story is permeated with verbs that describe the activity of the owner.”²⁷⁷ God is a main character because He plants the vineyard, builds it, and rents it to the tenants. He sends His slaves; additional slaves, and, finally, His son. The pericope ends showing God’s action: His vineyard will be taken from the evil people and will be given to those who will bear the fruit of the kingdom.

Kingsbury remarks that, in verse 37, Jesus “speaks of the son, or of himself, he presents the owner of the vineyard, or God, as referring to him as ‘my son’ (They will

15: A Parable of Invidious Comparison and Evil Eye Accusation,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 22 (1992): 61.

²⁷⁷ John R. Donahue, *The Gospel in Parable: Metaphor, Narrative and Theology in the Synoptic Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 53-54.

respect my son).”²⁷⁸ The phraseological point of view is enhanced by “my son” because it takes a special emphasis: It would have been easy to use the simple word, “him,” instead of “my son.” Using “my son” reminds the reader of the heavenly voice spoken at the baptism and the transfiguration (“This is my beloved son,” from 3:17 and 17:5).²⁷⁹ After all, it is clear that Jesus recognizes God as the story’s main figure and brings God’s evaluative point of view to vindicate His own identity.²⁸⁰

Jesus ends the parable by asking a question: “When the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” Though there is no response to this question, the answer is clear. Jesus’ statement of God’s kingdom thereby reveals the nature of the parable. This shows that God, who is at the center of the parable, is acting decisively in history. It is aimed at the religious leaders’ repudiation and ignorance of God’s evaluative point of view. They do not accept Jesus’ authority as the God-sent Messiah, Jesus.²⁸¹ Matthew, who is “omniscient,” shows the inside of the religious leaders at the

²⁷⁸Jack Dean Kingsbury, “The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen and the Secret of Jesus’ Divine Sonship in Matthew: Some Literary-Critical Observations,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105 (1986): 653.

²⁷⁹Ibid.

²⁸⁰This is ultimately the narrator Matthew’s point of view. Uspensky explains the relationship between the evaluative point of view and the phraseological point of view. By observing the use of speech, one can find whose point of view the author has adopted for his narration. Uspensky, *A Poetics*, 15. Jesus’ use of “my son” shows that Matthew adapted Jesus’ evaluative point of view of Himself. Both Matthew and Jesus are in accord with God’s point of view.

²⁸¹For questions and debates with regard to the interpretation of the parable’s main target, see Graham N. Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992). In his book, he argues that Israel is replaced by the church, which is “new people,” over against both Jew, and Gentiles (11); David L. Turner, “Matthew 21:43 and the Future of Israel,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159 (2002): 46-61.

end of the story: They realize that Jesus is speaking about them. They want to arrest Him, but they fear the crowds (v. 45).

The religious leaders understand Jesus' message intellectually, but fail to respond existentially. This means that the parable is in line with Matthew's overall plot of "acceptance/denial." Jesus' authority as God-sent is challenged, and God's vindication is quite consistent with Jesus' message. According to Neal F. Fisher, "The parable is at once a warning and a source of assurance in the judgment that is to come and the gift of God's reign to those who are prepared to receive it."²⁸² Rejecting Jesus' message is renouncing the evaluative point of view of God concerning Jesus' identity (cf. 21:37 to 17:5 and 3:17).²⁸³

The Old Testament focuses on Jesus' rejection. The stone that the builders rejected now has become the cornerstone (v. 42). The narrator employs God's past action when he cites Psalm 118:22-23 (117 LXX): "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, this is the Lord's doing" (v. 42). God is heard through the speech of the other character, Jesus, whom the narrator considers to be reliable. The reader can assume that what is heard is trustworthy because of the narrator's alignment with the reliable character of Jesus.

God as a King (22:1-14)

Turner contends that the replacement is of Israel's present religious leaders, not of the nation. Israel continues to be God's people with new leaders (47).

²⁸²Neal F. Fisher, *The Parable of Jesus: Glimpses of God's Reign* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 128.

²⁸³Kingsbury, "Divine Sonship," 653.

God is represented as the authority figure in the previous chapter. In the parable of the two sons (21:28-32), God is the father with two sons; in the parable of the wicked tenants (21:33-40), God is the landowner who sends His slaves and son. The effect of this arrangement gives the reader a textual indication for God. The reader is equipped to engage God in this parable: In line with the description of God as the authority figure, the parable of the wedding banquet establishes God as the King, and the King's son as Jesus.²⁸⁴

The vivid eschatological motif is apparent in this parable: Because Israel fails to respond to God, the call is made to others. The failed invitations stand for Israel's refusal to reply to God, which, causes His punishment (v. 7). In the parable, God is figured as a main character. God, as a king, sends His slaves again and again to call those who are invited to the wedding banquet. He is enraged, sends His troops, destroys those murderers and burns the cities. God once again orders His slaves to find and invite everyone, both good and bad. He casts out those who are unprepared. God orders, "Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness" (v. 13b). He acts as a main character in the parable, and the kind of description of the King's order against the unprepared dramatizes God's activity.²⁸⁵

God's relationship with Israel and His activity with people in the present and future are manifested very well in this parable. Warren Carter says,

The son's wedding feast invokes several traditions. The marriage metaphor depicts God's covenant relationship with Israel (Hos. 1-3; Jer. 3:1-10). Eating and feasting

²⁸⁴Jesus as God's Son has been established throughout Matthew (2:15; 3:17; 11:27; 16:16; 17:5; 20:18). Warren Carter, "Resisting and Imitating the Empire: Imperial Paradigms in Two Matthean Parables," *Interpretation* 56 (2002): 269.

²⁸⁵Edwards, *Matthew's Story*, 76.

express participation in God's purposes both in the present (Prov. 9:1-2; Isa. 55:1-3) and in the future completion of God's purposes. Then all the nations will gather at Zion to acknowledge God's reign and to share "for all peoples a feast of rich food" (Isa. 25:6-10; Matt 8:11). Throughout the gospel, meals have provided the context in which Jesus manifests God's justice Meals demonstrate God's inclusive mercy The wedding feast provides a multivalent image of the establishment of God's empire and purposes already underway, in part, in Jesus' ministry.²⁸⁶

God of the Living (22:23-33)

The Sadducees attempt to challenge Jesus after the Pharisees' departure. The Sadducees²⁸⁷ approach Jesus to challenge Moses' command that, if a man dies without offspring, his brother should bear his responsibility by marrying the widow (cf. Deut 25:5-6). The Sadducees' question refers to the "levirate" law, which is based on Deuteronomy 25:5. The question's end demonstrates their inquiry's intention: "In the resurrection, then, whose wife of the seven will she be? For all of them had married her" (v. 28). Carter remarks that "the question mocks the notion of resurrection, challenges Jesus the teacher to find a solution to an absurd and apparently impossible situation, and seems intent thereby on undermining his credibility."²⁸⁸

Jesus answers, and points to their ignorance of the Scripture and God's power: "You are wrong, because you know neither the scripture nor the power of God" (v. 29). Jesus points to God's creative power that will transform the nature of existence, and bases His whole argument on God's power. The reader, who already knows all things are

²⁸⁶Carter, "Resisting and Imitating the empire," 269-70.

²⁸⁷They are presented in 3:7 as opponents of God's purpose. Thus, their presence and rejection of "resurrection" in this episode make the reader expect the same opposition against God. Such opposition indirectly supports God's narrative presence.

²⁸⁸Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 442.

possible with God (cf. 19:26), thereby makes the argument of His power as the right foundation for understanding the resurrection. At this point, the reader recognizes God as a character; and, God's characterization as the Almighty One is again generated between the reader and the character God. Such a character trait of God as being almighty, and especially in the matter of the resurrection, prepares the reader for God's powerful work in raising Jesus from the dead. Chatman defines a "trait" as a "narrative adjective out of the vernacular labeling a personal quality of a character, as it persists over part or whole of the story."²⁸⁹ In Matthew, the reader realizes God's power. Therefore, the pericope promotes the reader's consciousness of God's power.

The case is applied to angels, who do not belong to marriage categories in the current age. Those who are resurrected will be like angels in heaven. The passive verb, "given in marriage," (γαμίζονται) implies God as the divine agent, who controls the matters in heaven. Jesus reminds the Sadducees about Exodus 3:6, in which God speaks to Moses as "the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." This refers to the Sadducees' ignorance once again. Jesus rebukes them: "Have you not read what was said to you by God?" (v. 31). According to Carter, "The phrase 'to you by God' personalizes God's address to them and their rejection."²⁹⁰ God is indicated as a character who speaks to them through scripture. In this case, Jesus indicates God's (indirect) voice through scripture. God's voice is employed; the reader hears Him.

²⁸⁹Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 125.

²⁹⁰Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 443.

God's indirect speech offers a rich resource for His characterization in the Gospel of Matthew. Several times, Jesus questions the religious leaders' Scripture reading (12:3, 5; 19:4; 21:16, 42) and points to their ignorance and rejection of God. His correction of the Scripture's meaning provides the religious leaders with the true will of God. The reader recognizes Jesus as the true interpreter of God's will. In this way, religious leaders and the Gospel of Matthew's reader hear God's voice. It is significant to understand that Jesus is not a mere vehicle for bearing God's speech; namely, God speaks through Him. The narrator uses Jesus to ensure that God's voice is heard. It is God who speaks. The implication of God's speech is important because His speech has the greatest reliability for the reader. He or she will accept God's speech as the most dependable source for accepting Jesus' evaluative point of view on the matter of the resurrection.

Jesus quotes Exodus 3:6, omitting "of your Father," "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (v. 32). God defines His relationship with them in the present (ἐἶμι), indicating that they are alive and He is God of the living. As a result, the essence of resurrection is shown to be God's living power. John MacArthur comments, "The present tense is used because God is not the God of the dead but of the living, and if He is presently the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, then those men obviously are still alive in another realm. They would also still have to be living so that God could fulfill His promises to them which were not fulfilled during their lifetimes."²⁹¹

²⁹¹John MacArthur, *Matthew 16-23* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 334.

This pericope concentrates on God's power and faithfulness to His promise. He has not forgotten His pledge to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The creator of the universe has the power to accomplish His covenant. Consequently, God is not static. He is "doing." The reader perceives His continuous action.

God Retaliates (23:29-36)

The word "blood" appears eleven times in the Gospel of Matthew, and four of these occurrences are found in 23:30-36.²⁹² The blood accentuates a vivid image of killing the prophets or other righteous people of God.²⁹³ Killing the prophets clearly means rebellion against God because He strictly guided them, and they were allowed to speak what was in perfect accordance with His plan. Jesus' graphic word of "blood" supports His previous parables and rejection and hostility references (10:17-42; 16:24-28; 17:22-23; 20:17-19; 21:33-22:14).²⁹⁴ Jesus' description indirectly characterizes the prophets, God, and the relationship between the prophets and God. Jesus' word is sufficient as a character indication for God because it implies God's activity, which the rebellious people have rejected.

The word "snakes" (v. 33) pronounced by Jesus to designate the religious leaders is reminiscent of earlier statements by John the Baptist and Jesus against the religious leaders in 3:7 and 12:34. The religious leaders are presented to the reader as the

²⁹²Clay Ham, "The Last Supper in Matthew," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 10 (2000): 67.

²⁹³"Shedding the blood" is a Hebrew idiom meaning "kill" or "murder." Newman and Stine, *A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew*, 743.

²⁹⁴Blomberg, *Matthew*, 348.

most scathing figures in the narrative, and God's judgment is upon them. David E.

Garland explains as follows:

Verse 33, "Snakes, sons of vipers, How shall you escape from the judgment of Gehenna?" . . . recalls the earlier words of John the Baptist. Matthew picked up the epithet, once again, in 12:34 and used it against Pharisees (γεννήματα ἑχιδνῶν, πῶς). As a result, the phrase would bring to mind a matrix of associations for the reader. It would recall the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to John for baptism without repentance. This prompted John's earth-shattering announcement in 3:9-10 that relation to Abraham did not assure God's eternal protection: God could raise up a new people from inanimate rocks, and they should take heed for they are barren trees about to be cut down and thrown into the fire. The context of judgment also permeates 12:33-34 . . . The inclusion of v. 33 in chap. 23 with these associations serves to magnify the implication that God will soon bring about a final judgment.²⁹⁵

Only the Father Knows (24:36-44)

This section is devoted, in part, to the disciples' second question about the Parousia and the end of the age. The disciples ask Jesus two questions in 24:3: (1) "Tell us, when will this be?" and (2) "what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" The first question concerns God's judgment upon the temple and Jerusalem, and the question is answered in 24:4-35. David E. Garland asserts that "this interpretation is only one of many ways to treat this much-disputed passage, but it best explains why everything in this section is described in terms of what the disciples are able to witness and experience (24:6, 9, 10, 15, 20, 23, 25, 26, 33)."²⁹⁶

Verse 36, "But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" – together with the following parable (verses

²⁹⁵David E. Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979), 170-71.

²⁹⁶David E. Garland, *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the First Gospel* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 235.

45-51) – serves in two ways: (1) To warn the reader of the sudden coming of the Son of Man, and (2) To encourage the reader to live wisely because of judgment day.²⁹⁷ The day and hour are known to no one. Jesus says that only God knows. The adjective “only” (μόνος) emphatically indicates that God is the only One who controls the day and hour.²⁹⁸ Jesus’ relationship with God is also emphasized by Jesus’ word, “the Son” (ὁ υἱός), in verse 36. Jesus calls Himself “the Son” as if “he enjoys an absolutely unique relation with God the Father.”²⁹⁹ This relationship of Jesus with God implies that Jesus’ lack of knowledge does not come from His ignorance, but rather from His intentional limitation of His knowledge due to the humbleness of the incarnation.

God’s sole knowledge is stressed again by the angels’ ignorance of the day and hour. Angels have a close relationship with God. They have the privilege of access to Him (18:10), but they also do not know the eschatological time. According to Harold Fowler, “This automatically disarms in advance any false prophet who tries to claim inside information on this critical date on the basis of claimed angelic revelations.”³⁰⁰

Jesus’ Parousia is repeatedly presented in Matthew (10:23; 13:41; 16:27; 19:28; 24:27, 30, 36-37, 39, 44; 25:31, and 25:64). The same idea’s consistent presentation is important for the narrative’s plot development.

²⁹⁷Newman and Stine, *A Translator’s Handbook*, 775.

²⁹⁸Newman and Stine contend that Matthew’s use of “only” in the Greek is emphatic, though not according to Mark. Ibid. Gundry, *Matthew*, 492.

²⁹⁹Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew, A Commentary* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1990), 2:879.

³⁰⁰Harold Fowler, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1985), 520.

The Parable of the Talents (25:14-30)

This parable underlines the master's absence and the servants' responsibility. Hagner identifies the master as Jesus, the Son of God.³⁰¹ It would be more plausible, however, that Jesus' audience would have thought first of the delay of God's coming to bring the day of the Lord.³⁰² Blomberg says,

In the historical context of Jesus' life the master's going away for a long time would refer first of all to God's delaying of the Day of the Lord, a problem with which Jews had already been wrestling for several centuries. This day of the Lord, by Matthew's time understandably reinterpreted as also including Christ's return, will thus catch all unbelievers by surprise and result in judgment for them.³⁰³

Therefore, it is to be said that Matthew's narrator pictures God in Jesus, and God's actions in the master's activity of entrusting, blessing, and judging.³⁰⁴ The first and second servants are rewarded for their faithfulness upon their master's return. The wicked servant is rebuked because of his unfaithfulness to the master. The future passives, "will be given" (δοθήσεται) and "will be taken away" (ἀρθήσεται), illustrate that God is the acting subject at the eschatological event.³⁰⁵

Those who are good and trustworthy will "enter into the joy of your master"

³⁰¹Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 734.

³⁰²Blomberg, *Matthew*, 373.

³⁰³*Ibid.*, 368.

³⁰⁴The master's identity and his trip are left undeveloped in Matthew. In Luke 19:12-27 the nature of the noble man's trip is explained and thus his absence is emphasized. Carolyn Dipboye, "Matthew 25:14-30: To Survive or to Serve?," *Review and Expositor* 92 (1995): 508.

³⁰⁵Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 736. David C. Steinmetz, "Matthew 25:14-30," *Interpretation* 34 (1980): 173. J. Rhode, *Rediscovering the Parables of the Evangelists* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), 84-86.

(v. 23). The expression of “ἔσσελθε εἰς τὴν χαρὰν τοῦ κυρίου σου” carries eschatological overtones. E. Carson Brisson notes that Matthew employs the verb “enter” regularly in the sense of “being invited into the reign of God (5:20; 7:13, 21; 19:23).”³⁰⁶ Brisson also says that the noun “joy is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word for joy, which reaches its most significant use in the Hebrew canon in reference to the festive ethos of God’s final and fully effective presence with Israel and the gathered nations (Ps 14:7; Isa 9:3; Zech 2:10-11).”³⁰⁷

God as character actively appears again, functioning as the Lord of an eschatological event. The parable allows the reader to justify the master’s judgment of the wicked servant, as will be the case on the day of judgment. The parable depicts the character God by contrasting the servants. The wicked servant rejects the master’s favor by presuming that the master is a harsh man (v. 24), while the others accept the talents that the master entrusts to them by multiplying these talents. This parable maintains Matthew’s acceptance and rejection theme. Matthew’s characterization of God, who will fulfill His plan in spite of rejection, continues to move along the same lines as before, and such rejection is intensified toward the Gospel’s conclusion.

My Blood of Covenant (26:26-29)

Jesus interprets the bread as His body and the cup of wine as His blood during the Last Supper. He blesses (εὐλογῆσας) the bread and says, “Take, eat, this is my body” (v. 26). Jesus also gives thanks and says, “Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood

³⁰⁶E. Carson Brisson, “Matthew 25:14-30,” *Interpretation* 56 (2002): 308.

³⁰⁷*Ibid.*

of the covenant” (vv. 27 and 28). By designating the bread as His body and the cup of wine as His blood, He relates His death to the sacrificial death. Jesus’ blessing of the bread refers to “invoking God’s blessing on the bread.”³⁰⁸ God is indicated as a character by Jesus’ blessing. By blessing the bread, Jesus points to the relationship of His death with God. Jesus later confirms such a relationship with “my blood of covenant” (v. 28) and “my Father’s kingdom” (v. 29). The reader fully appreciates God in the Gospel of Matthew. God’s personification presents Him as a character with this relationship in the same way that Jesus and other characters experience relationships.

Jesus connects His sacrificial death with God even though God is not explicitly present in this episode. Through this relationship, God is indicated as a character and His activity – which has a deep connection to Jesus’ death – is implied to the reader. God is more clearly presented when Jesus interprets the cup of wine as His blood of the covenant. Jesus’ words remind the reader of Moses’ words in Exodus 24:8: “See the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.” God made a covenant with the Israelites, and He also initiated the new covenant that the prophet Jeremiah pronounced (Jer 31:31-34). Therefore, the reader realizes that “Jesus indicates that the blood of his death will effect the fulfillment of the ‘covenant’ by which God will unite himself permanently with his people in a salvific relationship.”³⁰⁹

³⁰⁸Gundry, *Matthew*, 528.

³⁰⁹John Paul Heil, “The Blood of Jesus in Matthew: A Narrative-Critical Perspective,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 18 (1991): 119. See also other scholars who say that Jesus’ words, “This is my blood of the covenant,” appear to echo Exod 24:8: Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 511; I. Howard Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord’s Supper* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 43.

God is thus presented as the covenant's source and, even more, He is presented as its fulfillment: God is fulfilling His promise through Jesus' sacrificial work.

Edwards notes that Jesus' words, "I will never drink of this fruit of the vine" (v. 29), help "to establish the point that the decisive event is imminent: Jesus anticipates the arrival of the father's kingdom."³¹⁰ With these words, Jesus emphasizes His imminent death and relates it to the arrival of the Father's kingdom.

Jesus' Prayer in Gethsemane (26:36-46)

Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane deeply concerns His inner reaction to the coming passion and His obedience to God's will. Compared with the Gospel of Mark, Matthew contains Jesus' intense surrender to God's will: "My Father, if this cup cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done" (v. 42). This verse echoes Jesus' previous teaching on the Lord's Prayer, "Your will be done," in 6:10.³¹¹

At the beginning of the scene, Matthew presents Jesus in agony concerning His destiny: "I am deeply grieved, even to death" (v. 38). By describing Jesus' agony, Matthew portrays Jesus to the reader as the One who shares human emotions. Such a portrayal, however, may lead the reader to an unexpected surprise. Craig A. Blaising states, "Questions immediately arise concerning the will (or wills) of Christ in relation to the will of the Father. The sinlessness and impeccability of Christ are questioned."³¹²

³¹⁰Edwards, *Matthew's Story*, 86.

³¹¹Schnackenburg, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 271.

³¹²Craig A. Blaising, "Gethsemane: A Prayer of Faith," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 22 (1979): 333.

Oscar Cullmann suggests that perhaps Jesus is facing the fear of death.³¹³ Jesus, however, may be expressing His agony about death (by following God's will) on behalf of human sins, which is the consequence of God's wrath.³¹⁴ Jesus' submission to God's will and wrath³¹⁵ is found in verse 39. Jesus' inner conflict is resolved in verse 42 by His total submission to God's will: "My Father, if this cup cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done," thereby making God and His will the most important factors in Jesus' action. According to R. S. Barbour, Matthew emphasizes Jesus' agony less than does Mark to emphasize Jesus' determination to obey God's will.³¹⁶ The hour of God's activity is highlighted when Jesus says, "My time is near" (v. 18), and finally submits Himself to God's will (v. 42). Jesus' submission to God's will is again stressed when He is arrested. Jesus shows Himself as the One who is able to appeal to His Father for sending more than twelve legions of angels (v. 53). We thus can argue that God's presence in the narrative is clearly indicated.

The Death of Jesus (27:45-54)

The description of Jesus' death marks the climax of the plot of the Gospel of Matthew. In this narrative, Matthew's interest is not focused on the detailed description

³¹³Oscar Cullman, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead: The Witness of the New Testament* (London: Epworth, 1958), 21-22.

³¹⁴Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 782. Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 234.

³¹⁵The "cup" is frequently used in the metaphor for God's wrath. Anthony Tyrrell Hanson, *The Wrath of the Lamb* (London: S.P.C.K, 1957), 27-36.

³¹⁶Barbour notices that the change of λυπεῖσθαι--instead of ἐκθαμβεῖσθαι--in 26:37, and the reformulation of the prayer are relevant. R. S. Barbour, "Gethsemane in the Tradition of the Passion," *New Testament Studies* 16 (1970): 238.

of Jesus' death, but on a clear allusion to Old Testament passages "to point to Jesus' death as the moment of fulfillment."³¹⁷ Matthew expands the role of Psalm 22 "both by absorbing Mark's citations and adding additional ones."³¹⁸ For example, Matthew adds the mocker's words in 27:43. Donald Senior observes that Matthew describes Jesus' death scene in terms of the Psalm. He says, "Matthew's version of the death scene seems to imply that Jesus recites the psalm at the very instant of his death."³¹⁹ Jesus cries out the opening verse of the Psalm in Matthew 27:46 and, at the very moment of His death, He cries again (27:50). The word, "cried" (κράξαας) is repeatedly found in Psalm 22 to describe the Psalmist's lament (vv. 2, 5, 24). Matthew's use of the Psalm shows his intention to indicate that Jesus died to fulfill God's will for the salvation of people. According to Hagner, "At the heart of the story is Jesus' death in fulfillment of God's will."³²⁰ Jesus suffered in silence throughout the passion narrative until His cry to God.³²¹ There are several important indications of God as a character in this passage.

The imagery of darkness, "From noon on, darkness (σκότος) came over the whole land until three in the afternoon" (v. 45), is closely related to God. Some scholars recall the Old Testament for the darkness in this episode and contend that it shows God's

³¹⁷France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 399.

³¹⁸Donald Senior, *Matthew* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 332.

³¹⁹Ibid.

³²⁰Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 843.

³²¹Matera comments that this cry expresses the anguish that comes from experiencing God's absence. The cry is not an existential cry of despair, however, but a protest born of trust. Frank J. Matera, "Matthew 27:11-54," *Interpretation* 38 (1984): 58.

creative activity. In the creation narrative of the first chapter of Genesis, the darkness was upon the face of the deep, and God's creative work was performed upon the darkness.³²² Blomberg says the darkness in Matthew symbolizes evil power, "great evil, apocalyptic upheavals."³²³ However, his idea is subject to dualism. The darkness is under God's control and reveals God's activity. Kenneth Grayston argues, "If God indeed is the leader of the forces of light, he is also the controller of the forces of darkness, and he may make them serve his purposes."³²⁴ It is reasonable to say that God's activity to establish a new age is seen through the imagery of darkness.

Jesus' cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (v 46) points to God's presence in the narrative. Jesus identifies God as being able to rescue Him from His painful agony, but God seems unwilling to do so. The separation from God is temporary, however, as Carter explains, "God's deliverance and goodness are encouraged again, just as Jesus will subsequently encounter God's vindication."³²⁵ Jesus' life and death are depicted in conjunction with God's reign. God is noted as having sole authority over Jesus' life: Jesus had to endure temporary abandonment from His Father, and Jesus still shows His trust of God by saying, "My God," in spite of the abandonment into

³²²Raymond E. Brown asserts that this episode's scene should prompt the reader to think of the Old Testament background: (1) Jesus' mockers echo Ps 22:8; (2) Jesus' dying scream echoes the opening of the same Psalm (22:2); and (3) giving Jesus vinegar wine fulfills Psalm 69:22. Brown says, "Thus the context presses readers to think of an OT background for this unusual darkness employed dramatically by God." Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grove* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 2:1035.

³²³Blomberg, *Matthew*, 419.

³²⁴Kenneth Grayston, "The Darkness of the Cosmic Sea," *Theology* 55 (1952): 126.

³²⁵Carter, *Matthew and the Margin*, 535.

death.³²⁶ The significance of Jesus' cry to God, as "My God," is impressed upon the reader and establishes God's evaluative point of view as being prevalent in the narrative. At this time, God's portrait seems to be more complex and difficult to understand. It is clear, however, that the narrative should be interpreted in the light of Matthew's overall plot of God's fulfillment.

The curtain of the temple, which separates the holy of holies from the rest of the building, is torn in two, from top to bottom (v. 51). Matthew indicates that this happens because of Jesus' death, and further implies that the way is open into the place regarded as God's dwelling place on earth. Leon Morris notes that "Matthew emphasizes this truth by saying that the *curtain was torn in two from top to bottom*, which indicates more than a minor tear."³²⁷ The curtain's split indicates God's activity. The passive verb, "was torn" designates God as the One behind the event. After Jesus' death, the earth is shaken, and the rocks are split (v. 51). The passive verbs, "was shaken" and "were split," also point to God's activity in these events.

Following Jesus' death, the tombs are opened, and many bodies of the saints are raised (v. 52). Newman and Stine state that "this verse continues the sequence of events from verse 51. If translators have made God the agent of the earth shaking and rocks splitting, then for the tombs also to have been opened they may have either 'and God also opened the tombs' or 'and the tombs opened.'"³²⁸

³²⁶Jack D. Kingsbury, *The Christology of Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 130.

³²⁷Morris, *Matthew*, 724.

³²⁸Newman and Stine, *A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew*, 892.

God is the main character in this episode. Jesus died to fulfill God's promise. When Jesus cries to God, God is not willing to respond. At the last moment, Jesus cries out, "My God," which indicates God's presence; the curtain is torn by God. The way into God's presence is now opened by Jesus' death. The earth is shaken, and God raises the dead saints' bodies.

God's Fulfillment (28:1-20)

Matthew begins this chapter by describing a "great earthquake" (v. 2). The earthquake is a sign of God's mighty activity. His mighty acts are frequently indicated by an earthquake.³²⁹ According to Senior, "An earthquake is part of the traditional biblical description of the apocalyptic events and it seems likely that Matthew is drawing from this fund of symbolism. Several Old Testament sources refer to a shaking of the earth at the moment of Yahweh's visitation."³³⁰

An angel of the Lord, God's messenger, appears descending from heaven, the place where God reigns. An angel coming from heaven shows the messenger's direct contact with God, and the reader knows that God has sent the messenger. The angel says to the women, "I know that you are looking for Jesus" (v. 5). God's complete knowledge of the human heart is revealed and is later strengthened by the announcement of Jesus' resurrection.³³¹ Paul Minear thus comments concerning the messenger's report

³²⁹France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 400.

³³⁰Judg 5:4; 2 Sam 22:8; Ps 68:8, 104:32; Joel 4:14-17. Donald P. Senior, *The Passion Narrative According to Matthew: A Redactional Study* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1975), 313.

³³¹Paul S. Minear, "Matthew 28:1-10," *Interpretation* 38 (1984): 60.

of Jesus' resurrection, "Here the angel speaks with the knowledge and authority of God. This is an announcement that no human being could make; the act of resurrection is something that no person is able to witness."³³²

Terence Donaldson remarks that this chapter, especially verses 16-20 is carefully crafted – even its mountain setting – and serves as a summary and climax of such themes as Christology, ecclesiology, and salvation history.³³³ According to him, the mountain setting shows a link between heaven and earth, because the mountain is located between the earth and heaven.³³⁴ And Jesus' proclamation of His authority on the mountain, "in heaven and on earth" (28:18b), supports this idea of the mountain representing the connection between heaven and earth.

In the Old Testament, mountains are significant as sites where encounters with God occur, or where He appears.³³⁵ Especially the mountains of Sinai and Zion are the places where God dwells and God's reign is proclaimed.³³⁶ So Donaldson argues that

³³²Ibid. He also notices the women's fear (v. 5) as a fear of God's activity. Minear says, "Biblical narratives often speak of the terror that occasions God's unexpected intrusions into ordinary affairs" (60).

³³³Terence L. Donaldson, *Jesus on the Mountain: A Study in Matthean Theology*, JSNT Supplement Series, vol. 8 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 170.

³³⁴Donaldson argues for the cosmic notion of *axis mundi* – the sacred place linking heaven, earth, and the underworld. During the Second-Temple period, the axis mundi appears in connection with mountains that are regarded as the revelation points for entrance into the heavenly realm. Ibid., 61.

³³⁵The Garden of Eden is on a mountain (Ezek 28:13-15); Abraham's encounter with God takes place on a mountain (Gen 22:1-14); Moses' encounter with God occurs on Horeb (Exod 3:1-2), on Sinai (Exod 19); and Elijah's encounter with God is on Horeb (1 Kgs 19:8-18). Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman III, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 573.

³³⁶Exod 19:23; Ps 43:3; Isa 11:9, 24:23.

“Mount Zion and Mount Sinai stand as the two historical-theological pivots on which all OT *Heilsgeschichte* turns.” They are the mountain’s background image for the reader of Matthew 28 and, therefore, the reader is able to perceive God as the main force behind Matthew 28’s events with no difficulty.

On the mountain, Jesus’ statement of His authority indicates God as a main figure. Jesus identifies God as the One who gives Him all authority in heaven and on earth: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given (Ἐδόθη) to me” (28:18b). The words, “has been given,” designate God as the implied subject, and God’s activity is climaxed by Jesus’ fulfillment of His plan.³³⁷ Although God is not explicitly indicated as the subject, another word needs to complete the passive word and God is the most appropriate agent who can fill that gap.³³⁸ Kathleen Weber asserts that “action does not down at the end of Matthew. More intense action is projected, on the part of believers in their vigorous service to the Lord, and on the part of God in the promised eschatological intervention that will assert full divine control over the universe.”³³⁹ Jesus’ proclamation at this point intensifies God’s presence and activity for the reader.

As it was in the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew (1:21), the name of Jesus reveals God, who is accomplishing the salvation. The name of Jesus, which points to

³³⁷“Has been given,” an aorist passive verb, shows this bestowal of authority as a definite act.

³³⁸Danove presents three criteria for finding God as a subject when the subject noun is missing. He notes (1) a word that appears to require completion by another word; (2) that required word is not present in the text; and (3) God is an appropriate agent of the character designated by the missing word. Danove, “Mark’s Characterization,” 13.

³³⁹Weber, “Plot and Matthew,” 411.

God's activity through Jesus, reminds the reader of God.³⁴⁰ Ultimately, salvation is God's work. Matthew shows that God initiates and fulfills salvation through Jesus. God is behind all Jesus' activities. According to Meye, "Throughout the Old Testament, which is specifically emphasized by Matthew, salvation is the prerogative of God alone To say that Jesus the Christ will save his people from their sins is to say that he is invested with the ultimate authority of God himself."³⁴¹

Jesus concludes His ministry in Galilee. He comes to Nazareth, in Galilee, in accordance with the words of the prophets (2:23). Matthew mentions His arrival in Nazareth, "to be called Nazorean," in the early chapter and its importance in connection with Isaiah 9:2 in Matthew 4:16. This illustrates that the Galilee region plays a part in the Matthean plot.³⁴² In 4:15, Galilee is called "Galilee of the Gentiles," and Isaiah proclaims that "the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned" (4:16). Jesus' ministry in "Galilee of the Gentiles," as the fulfillment of the prophet Isaiah's words supports the fact that Jesus' ministry is in alignment with God's plan for the Gentiles. In the last chapter of Matthew, Jesus' return to Galilee (28:16), commanding His disciples to "go and make disciples of all nations," is in perfect accordance with the previous motif in

³⁴⁰Grant, "Jesus Christ," 869.

³⁴¹Robert P. Meye, "The Christological Conclusion of Matthew's Gospel," *Foundations* 11 (1968): 17.

³⁴²Donald J. Versepunt observes its importance. He says, "When considered in its narrative sequence, the citation of Isa. 9:1-2 in Matt. 4:15-16 assumes a pivotal importance for the plot of the First Gospel by laying a foundation for the whole Galilean ministry." Donald J. Versepunt, "The Davidic Messiah and Matthew's Jewish Christianity," in *SBL Seminar papers* 34 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 102-16.

Matthew 4:15-16. Consequently, God's evaluative point of view of the Gentiles in the Matthean plot is consistently kept in the beginning and at the end of Matthew. God's purpose, its accomplishment, and further command are narrated through Matthew's Galilean theme. According to Richard Gardner,

Inasmuch as Galilee is a part of the area of Zebulun and Naphtali, it represents God's fidelity to the old land of promise. Inasmuch, however, as Galilee is a land of *the Gentiles*, a gateway as it were to other nations, it represents God's freedom to expand the boundaries of holy geography and claim new lands for his purpose.³⁴³

Minear observes that "each message is a link in a long chain of messages, addressed by God to the readers in the Gospel."³⁴⁴ When Jesus proclaims that He will be with them always, to the end of the age, this notion of His presence with them is linked with 1:23: "God with us." Such a structural device points toward the presence of God's saving activity from the beginning to the end of the story.

Conclusion

This study's purpose is examining God as a character in the Gospel of Matthew. This chapter shows that God functions as a character, and stands firmly in the narrative world of the Gospel of Matthew. God acts, speaks, and reveals Himself through relationships with others. The relationship is the most important means for Him to be revealed as a character, especially as far as Jesus is concerned. Most of God's characterization is accomplished by "showing" rather than by "telling." His

³⁴³Richard Gardner, *Matthew* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991), 78. For the opposite viewpoint, see D. C. Sim, "The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 57 (1995): 19-48. Sim argues a radically different view. Sim contends that the Matthean community had a good reason to avoid contact with the surrounding Gentiles (21).

³⁴⁴Minear, "Matthew 28:1-10," 59.

characterization is derived from “indirect presentation.” The reader’s mental activity is required to find God and His characterization.

God is the central figure from the beginning (1:1) to the end (28:20). Jesus fulfills God’s will (5:17) throughout the narrative. God’s action is continuously indicated throughout the narrative. He functions not only as a character, but as the main character. Character identifications in narrative theory are applied to show God as a character and His characterization. God, as the divine character, is described as the ultimate force behind the Gospel of Matthew’s narrative, which is persistent in indicating that God’s will and His action are the major components guiding the Gospel’s plot flow.

God stands firmly within the Matthean literary world. God’s sufficient character indications are presented in this chapter. The following chapter will offer a summary of such indications in the Gospel of Matthew.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

This study has explored God in the Gospel of Matthew, focusing on God as a character. God stands firmly as a character in the Gospel's narrative. The character indication within a sequential reading provides the reader with God's character construct as well as engagement with Him as a character. He shows consistent ways of acting as a character and being a character. Such consistent ways develop a picture of God in Matthew and produce a full characterization of God.

God is both directly and indirectly presented to the reader as a character, and indications for Him as a character are varied. This chapter will summarize the study's outcome by answering the first chapter's questions: (1) What makes God a character? (2) What is the mode of His existence as a character? (3) How does He work with other characters within the narrative? And this chapter will conclude with some of the fundamental aspects of God's characterization that is revealed to the reader.

God as a Character

The Gospel of Matthew demonstrates that God is a character in several ways. The most explicit narrative illustration of His presence is the designation of "God." A character (or the narrator) saying "God" is a direct presentation of Him as a character. Jesus is the character who most often reminds the reader of God by referring to God.

The term “God” (θεός) appears forty-seven times. It usually is in the genitive phrase.¹ Although the inclusion of “God” in the phrase, sometimes, refers to others (or other things) rather than God Himself (e.g., “The Son of God,” “The commandment of God,” “Angels of God,” etc.) the presence of the name “God” is a good indication for God’s narrative presence as a character.²

Other frequent and direct uses of His designation are “Lord” and “Father,” which function as proper names for God.³ The term “Lord” appears fifty-six times in Matthew, though both God and Jesus share the term.⁴ All forty-three uses of “Father” refer to God.⁵ God as the Father shows His care (5:45; 6:26, 32) and grace (16:17; 20:23; 25:34), and asks the disciples to depend on Him as Father in the face of persecution

¹“The Spirit of God” (3:16; 12:28); “The Son of God” (4:3; 14:33; 26:63; 27:40, 43, 54); “The mouth of God” (4:4); “Sons of God” (5:9); “The kingdom of God” (6:33; 12:28; 19:24; 21:31, 43); “The house of God” (12:4); “The commandment of God” (15:3, 6); “The God of Israel” (15:31); “The Son of the living God” (16:16); “The things of God” (16:23); “The temple of God” (21:12; 26:61); “The way of God” (22:16); “The power of God” (22:29); “Angels of God” (22:30); “The throne of God” (23:22); “The living God” (26:63).

²However, the implicit meaning behind the genitive phrases is God’s activity or description. There are other instances prescribing God’s action without His name. The most popular one in Matthew is the “kingdom of heaven,” which implicitly conveys the idea of God’s action of ruling. Numerous indications of God or His activity are present in the Gospel of Matthew. This study concentrates on some selected instances.

³Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1996), 61.

⁴1:20, 22, 24; 2:13, 15, 19; 3:3; 4:7, 10; 5:33; 7:21, 22; 8:2, 6, 8, 21, 25; 9:28, 38; 11:25; 12:8; 13:51; 14:28, 30; 15:22, 25, 27; 16:22; 17:4, 15; 18:21; 20:30, 31, 33; 21:3, 9; 22:37, 43, 44, 45; 23:39; 24:42; 25:11, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 37, 44; 26:22; 27:10; 28:2, 6.

⁵5:16, 45, 48; 6:1, 4, 6 (two times), 8; 6:9, 14, 15, 18 (two times), 26, 32; 7:11, 21; 10:20, 29, 32, 33; 11:25, 26, 27 (three times); 12:50; 13:43; 15:13; 16:17, 27; 18:10, 14, 19, 35; 20:23; 23:9; 24:36; 25:34; 26:39, 42, 53; 28:19.

(10:19-20) because everything is under His control (10:29). God as Father cares for the least of the disciples (18:10-14) and, indeed, even the smallest thing is under the Father's control (10:29). The "Father" in the Gospel of Matthew emphasizes God's care and control and, therefore, requires the disciples' total obedience to God's will, even to persecution (5:44-45) and the point of death (10:28-29). Jesus is the primary example of this obedience to the will of God, and such obedience demands complete accord with God's point of view in the narrative.⁶

Characters (and narrator) designate God differently on a variety of occasions throughout the narrative. This could mean that various characters hold different points of view regarding God, or that some characters describe God from different positions. The predominant position, which the narrator assumes in the Gospel of Matthew is that of Jesus. The narrator and Jesus share God's point of view. The reader accepts God's initial evaluative point of view concerning Jesus as the most reliable one because of such sharing by Jesus, God, and the narrator.

From the Gospel of Matthew's beginning, the reader is reminded of God's previous work with Israel. The genealogy leads the reader to Jesus' true identity as God's promised Messiah. God's initial evaluative point of view with regard to Jesus is established for the reader from the start, and works as the "primacy effect" for the reader. The primacy effect, which concerns God's preparation for the fullness of time at the narrative's initial stage is retained by the reader and expands to the Gospel's end. The

⁶3:14-15; 4:1-11; 16:21; 26:39, 53-54.

narrative, which presents ample indications of Jesus' role as the One who comes to fulfill God's will (5:17), is climaxed by Jesus' complete obedience to that will on the cross.⁷

The most apparent indication of God as a character appears when He either speaks or acts. Speech or action means there is a character. God's direct speech is recorded in 3:17 and 17:5. Most of His speech and activity, however, occurs indirectly or implicitly in the speech of other characters (or in that of the narrator).⁸ The narrator "shows" instead of "tells" about God through characters' speech.

The indirect and implicit presentations of God's action demand the reader's mental exercise. For example, His activity is indicated when He is the implied subject of the "divine passive."⁹ The passages concerning Jesus as miracle worker suggest that

⁷The reader encounters the name of "Jesus" about 150 times, and it recalls Jesus' identity every time. Warren Carter, *Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 191.

⁸Besides character speech, the narrator utilizes the Old Testament quotation, so that the reader hears God's word (1:22; 2:15; 15:4; 22:31). In light of the presentation of Jesus' mission as the fulfillment of Scripture in the Gospel of Matthew, the reader clearly hears God's action and voice (1:22-23; 2:5-6, 15, 17-18, 23; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:14-15, 35-36; 21:4-5; 26:56; 27:9-10). Jack Dean Kingsbury, "The Figure of Jesus in Matthew's Story: A Literary-Critical Probe," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 21 (1984): 6-7.

⁹Joachim Jeremias reports that most occurrences of the divine passive are found in Jesus' words, and that there are twenty-seven particular occurrences in the Gospel of Matthew: "παρακληθήσονται" (5:4), "ἐλεηθήσονται" (5:7), "κληθήσονται" (5:9), "κληθήσεται" (5:19 - twice), "βληθη" (5:29), "εἰσακουσθήσονται" (6:7), "γενηθήτω" (6:10), "κριθήσεσθε" (7:2), "βάλλεται" (7:19), "ἐκκόπεται" (7:19), "γενηθήτω" (9:29), "δικαιωθήση" (12:37), "καταδικασθήση" (12:37), "ἐκριζωθήσεται" (15:13), "ἀπεστάλην" (15:24), "δεδεμένον" (16:19), "λελυμένον" (16:19), "δεδεμένα" (18:18), "λελυμένα" (18:18), "δέδοται" (19:11), "δοθήσεται" (21:43), "ἀρθήσεται" (21:43), "ἠτοιμασμένην" (25:34), "ἠτοιμασμένον" (25:41), "κατηραμένοι" (25:41), "γενηθήτω" (26:42). Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 11 n. 4.

God's action is present as the most important factor behind Jesus' activities. The particular aspect of God's action in the Gospel of Matthew is that God's action is not limited to the narrative passages, Jesus' birth, and His ascension to heaven. God's activity has happened long before the story begins (1:1), and His action is promised to the reader after the story is over (28:20). This observation indicates His existence even outside the story. This could mean that the mode of God's presence and His activity are very different from that of the human characters. God's action is past, present, and future in the Gospel of Matthew.¹⁰

The Mode of God's Existence

God is constructed from His indications in the Gospel of Matthew. In other words, He can be reduced to textuality. God shares human characterization; He is alive to the reader even after the narrative's ending. God transcends the text. In Matthew, God resembles an actual person. God talks, acts, and feels. He becomes like reality for the reader's senses. God is realistic, and shares analogy with human characters. On the other hand, Matthew does not furnish the reader with God's physical description. God exists as a character without physical description, and His spatial and temporal existence is unique by nature. As a result, the reader of the Gospel of Matthew is required to possess a certain amount of "indetermination" regarding the interpretation of God's mode of existence.

According to E. M. Forster's scheme, God is not a "flat" character. God is a

¹⁰Cf. 19:4, 8; 13:41-43, 49; 19:28; 24:3, 21; 25:31, 34; 26:64; 28:20.

“round” character, being capable of “surprising” the reader¹¹: God chooses the Gentiles (Magi) to report the Messiah’s birth instead of Israel, considered to be God’s people (2:1-12). Jesus, who shares God’s evaluative point of view, commands His disciples to proclaim that the kingdom of heaven has come near (10:7) to the lost sheep of the house of Israel instead of the Gentiles (10:5-6). When Jesus, who is God’s miracle worker, hears about John the Baptist’s death, He withdraws to a deserted place (14:13). God forsakes Jesus (27:46) who is His beloved Son (3:17). God is no longer the God of Israel. He is the God of all nations (28:19-20).

As shown, the mode of God’s existence is closely related to His characterization. God exists as a “round” character, and such “roundness” accommodates a degree of “surprise” concerning His characterization.¹² Consequently, the reader is required to accept God as He is rather than to define His existence with a definite term.

God and Other Characters

Jesus

Apart from God, the Gospel has four major characters: Jesus, the disciples, the religious leaders, and the crowd. Jesus is the most reliable character to the reader because His evaluative point of view is in complete accord with that of God. Kingsbury says that “the attitude Jesus takes toward characters and events determines to what extent the reader, too, gives them his or her approval.”¹³ In Matthew, the reader

¹¹Robert L. Brawley, *Centering on God: Method and Message in Luke-Acts* (Louisville: Westminster, 1990), 123.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Jack D. Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 11.

comes to define Jesus' attitude as one of complete obedience to God's will (26:42), which gives full approval to Jesus' characterization of God.¹⁴

Jesus reveals that God is His Father, and He is God's Son. This language indicates Jesus' close relationship with God and Jesus' unique role in accomplishing God's salvation plan. By calling God Father, Jesus shares with the reader His intimate relationship with God. His Father cares (10:26-31), gives good things (7:7-11), and rewards (10:40-42). He is also the Lord of heaven and earth (11:25-27), with willingness to give Jesus authority for saving people from their sin (9:2-8). The single most important aspect of the relationship is that Jesus fulfills God's plan (1:21).¹⁵ This aspect is clearly indicated as an urgent call in Jesus' proclamation to repent (4:17). Jesus' relationship with God, as the Son of God, additionally points to Jesus' role that God has called Him to perform. Jesus is the agent of God's saving will toward people.¹⁶

However, Jesus' relationship with God is not "flat." Even though Jesus maintains His own identity as God's Son and, God maintains His identity as Jesus' Father, Jesus maintains oneness with God (11:27). They are one and, at the same time, they are separate. Such unity and separateness illustrate that the narrator is not simply employing God and Jesus as independent figures, or God for Jesus' epithet (or vice versa). The diversity of this relationship between God and Jesus is important in recognizing God as a character in a pericope with no visualization of God.

¹⁴Jesus' speech is the most significant source for God's characterization.

¹⁵Though this is true of all other Gospels, it is emphasized in the Gospel of Matthew. The most prominent way is the use of Old Testament quotations, which are known as the "formula-quotations."

¹⁶Carter, *Matthew*, 195.

The significant implication for the reader of the relationship between Jesus and God is that, if the reader is to respond to Jesus, he or she must accept God as the most reliable figure in the Gospel of Matthew; Jesus bears the greatest significance for God's characterization, giving His full obedience to God's will.

The Disciples

The disciples share a direct relationship with God: He is their Father (5:9). They are allowed to share the authority (10:1) given by God to Jesus (28:18), and Jesus teaches them to follow God's will (5:45, 48; 6:1, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 14, 15, 18, 26, 32; 7:12, 21; 12:50; 13:38). They confess God as "living" (16:16),¹⁷ God makes such knowledge possible (16:17). During Jesus' transfiguration, the disciples hear God's direct voice spoken to them, "This is My Son, the Beloved; with Him I am well-pleased; listen to Him" (17:5).

The disciples' initial presentation in regard to their relationship with God is positive to the reader because they act positively toward Jesus: They answer Jesus' call without hesitation (4:18-22). The disciples appeal to Jesus when they are in trouble (8:25; 14:30). They recognize Jesus as the "Son of the living God" (16:16). Jesus also maintains His favorable attitude toward them: He defends their action's legitimacy when the disciples pluck grain on the Sabbath (12:1-8). Jesus gives His God-given authority to them, commissioning them to cast out demons and cure every disease and sickness (10:1). In the parable of the kingdom of heaven, the disciples are given the secret as opposed to others (13:11). Moreover, the narrator of the Gospel of Matthew is careful to

¹⁷The disciples are treated as a single character in this study.

distinguish Judas from the rest of the disciples when the Twelve are named (10:4).

The disciples' positive characterization with God, however, seems to collapse when they reveal negative aspects with regard to Jesus, especially following Peter's confession of Jesus as the Son of the Living God: Jesus rebukes Peter (16:21-23). When Jesus returns from the transfiguration, He criticizes the disciples for their "little faith" (17:20). The disciples are distressed when they hear about Jesus' death and suffering (17:22-23), and they betray Him at last (26:56, 69-75).

In the Gospel of Matthew, the disciples' characterization in relation to God is a mixture of positive and negative elements.¹⁸ Their overall characterization is positive because the narrative places the disciples' positive relationship with Jesus at the start (4:18-22), and at the end of the Gospel (28:18-20). Such a structural position is important for understanding God's evaluative point of view concerning the disciples in the Gospel of Matthew because the narrator aligns his point of view with that of God. In other words, God's evaluative point of view about the disciples is revealed through that of the narrator. At the end of the narrative, Jesus, who was named "Emmanuel" (2:22-23) – "God is with us" – at the beginning of the Gospel, declares that He will be with the disciples always, "to the end of the age" (28:20). Jesus' last words establish the disciples' relationship with God as positive.

According to Frank J. Matera, the conclusion is of paramount importance in terms of the narrative's plot. Matera insists that, in terms of the causality of the narrative's plot, "The relationship between events and the final affective response the

¹⁸Many scholars have claimed it to be so. For various views, see Ulrich Luz, "The Disciples in the Gospel According to Matthew," in *The Interpretation of Matthew*, ed. Graham Stanton (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 98-128.

narrative endeavors to produce must be taken into account.”¹⁹ The last words of Jesus to His disciples, in Matthew 28:19 through 20, produce a new challenge – for them to “make disciples” of all nations. The grounds of the disciples’ commission reveal God’s approval toward them. As God has been with Jesus, He will be with the disciples.

The Religious Leaders

From the beginning of the narrative, the religious leaders’ affinity with Herod (2:4) and John the Baptist’s attitude toward the religious leaders (3:7) characterize their relationship with God as “hostile.” The religious leaders reveal their evaluative point of view of Jesus when they say that He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons (9:34; cf. 9:2-3). In the narrative a character’s attitude toward Jesus determines the character’s attitude toward God. The religious leaders’ negative attitude toward Jesus indicates that they are against God, too.

In fact, the religious leaders have an affinity with Satan’s point of view of God and Jesus because Satan is characterized as opposing God and Jesus in the narrative as well (3:13-17; 4:1-11; 16:23). They are evil as Satan is “evil” (cf. 3:7; 12:34; 23:13-39). Kingsbury insists that “In Matthew’s world of thought, the one who is ‘good’ is God himself (19:17), and the one who is the ‘Evil One’ is the devil (13:19, 38-39).”²⁰ Because the religious leaders have an affinity with the devil,²¹ the reader comes to know that the outward conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders reflects the inward one

¹⁹Frank J. Matera, “The Plot of Matthew’s Gospel,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49 (1987): 240.

²⁰Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 19.

between God and Satan. In the Gospel of Matthew, the religious leaders are “flat” characters, who are characterized as “against God and His will.”

The Crowds

The crowds’ characterization in regard to God is “indeterminate”: Their attitude toward Jesus is positive and, at the same time, negative. They appreciate Jesus’ authority (7:28-29) and identity (12:23). They glorify God (9:8) and accompany Jesus, experiencing His ministry (4:25; 8:1; 12:15; 14:13; 19:2; 20:29; 21:9). On the other hand, they are not allowed to know the secrets of the kingdom (13:11) and they are supportive of the religious leaders’ conspiracy to kill Jesus (27:20, 23, 25, 39).

The Gospel of Matthew ends without establishing the crowds’ renewed relationship with God as it does to the disciples who receive a commission and promise from Jesus. Therefore, their relationship with God remains as it is both “positive and negative.” The primary impact of the crowds’ description is that it produces an open challenge to the reader’s evaluative point of view of God and the reader’s decision of God. The crowds as a character stand between the disciples, who are positive characters, and the religious leaders, who are negative characters. The narrative of Matthew produces an open challenge to the reader to decide to which world he or she might want to belong, through the characterization of the crowds in relation to God.

²¹Satan is established as the “tempter” (4:1, 3, 5, 8, 10, 11) who opposes God’s will and the narrator of Matthew uses the same verb, “to tempt” or “to test” to indicate the purpose of the religious leaders’ action toward Jesus (16:1; 19:3; 22:18, 34-35). Carter, *Matthew*, 144-45.

God and the Gospel of Matthew

This dissertation has demonstrated that God is not a “background character,” but the main character in the Gospel of Matthew. God as a main character, His thought, speech, and action are indirectly revealed to the reader. Some of the fundamental aspects of God’s characterization that are revealed to the reader will be stated as concluding remarks.

First of all, the reader recognizes that God is present from the beginning to the end of the Gospel. Furthermore, the reader is expected to accept Him beyond the text’s boundary. God’s existence precedes the beginning of the Gospel. His promise to be with the reader to the end of the age – even after the Gospel’s end – makes the reader understand God, not only as the main character within the Gospel of Matthew, but also as creation’s main character.

Second, the reader is required to consider the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders as a visualization of the inner conflict between God and Satan.²² Matthew presents Jesus’ story as one of “conflict.” Jesus is in constant conflict with the religious leaders throughout the narrative, and it is resolved in the pericope of His death and resurrection. Therefore, the reader comes to understand that, though Jesus occupies most of the space in the Gospel of Matthew, it is God who is the main character, and who is characterized as overcoming Satan’s power.

²²The conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders is shown directly and indirectly in Matthew: 2:1-6; 3:7-12; 5:17-20; 7:28-29; 8:19-20; 9:1-17, 32-34; 12:1-14, 22-45; 15:1-20; 16:1-12, 21-23; 17:9-13, 22-23; 19:3-9; 20:17-19; 21:14-17, 33-46; 22:1-10, 15-40, 41-46; 23:1-7, 13-36; 26:3-5, 14-16, 47-56, 57-68; 27:1-26, 33-44, 62-66; 28:11-15.

Third, God in Matthew acts as He promised in the past. The most explicit example of this is shown through the fulfillment of Old Testament passages. Therefore, the reader accepts God as being “faithful to His promise.” Such characterization enhances the reader’s reliance on Jesus’ promise that He will be with the reader to the end of the age.

Fourth, the reader accepts Jesus as the most reliable character because of His relationship with God. Jesus is the most reliable because He calls God “My Father.” Other characters’ reliability depends on their acceptance of Jesus. According to the characters’ attitude toward Him, the scale of characters’ reliability is as follows: the disciples, the crowd, the religious leaders, and Satan.

Fifth, the most important way for the reader to recognize God as a character is through characters’ evaluative points of view. The reader judges the character’s evaluative points of view as being “true” or “untrue” based on the character’s alignment with God’s evaluative point of view. In the Gospel of Matthew, God’s evaluative point of view is manifested in Jesus. The conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders shows that these leaders are unwittingly opposing God’s will, thereby consistently requiring His eschatological judgment.

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ABSTRACT

A NARRATIVE – CRITICAL READING OF GOD AS A CHARACTER IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005
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This dissertation examines the function of God as a character, and how the characterization of God works within the narrative of the Gospel of Matthew.

Chapter 1 presented a rationale for the study of God as a character. The purpose of the study and the current status of research has been stated. The study of existing scholarship provided a fair ground for current study.

Chapter 2 presented discussions over the modern literary theory which is related to this study and specific application of the theory to the Gospel of Matthew.

Employing the primary research and methodology presented in chapters 1 and 2, chapter 3 provided an exegetical analysis of passages in which God functions as a character. The passages included where (1) God speaks or acts, (2) the references to God occur directly, (3) the references to God occur indirectly, (4) God's activity is recognized explicitly, and (5) God's activity is recognized implicitly. In addition, specific Matthean terminology, which was related to this study, was discussed.

Chapter 4 discussed God's relationship with other characters in Matthew and summarizes God's function as a character in the Gospel of Matthew.

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