

DISCERNMENT OF REVELATION IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

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ABSTRACT

In the biblical tradition revelation from God is frequently mediated through certain gifted individuals. This study describes and analyses the theological theme of discernment of revelation in Matthew's gospel, itself located within a tradition of revelation and in a historical milieu of competing claims to revelation. The focus here is on how one writer presents his claim that Jesus is the model of discernment, who is thus able to call the new people of God, and who exemplifies the godly life in the exercise of obedient, costly discernment. A composition critical approach is taken, although insights from literary criticism are also used.

After outlining the background to and contours of the study in chapter 1, chapter 2 demonstrates that discernment of revelation is a pervasive theme in Matthew's gospel. Chapters 3 and 4 show how revelation is given and discerned in selected OT and early Jewish texts. This significant background facilitates a close study of Jesus as the model of discernment in chapter 5, focussing on 11.25-30, and drawing out the implications of Jesus' intimate and reciprocal knowledge of God. Jesus himself transcends existing types as God's final, authoritative and eschatological mediator, even as someone the truth about whom needs to be discerned. Chapters 6 and 7 explore the dynamics of discernment by focussing on Peter as an example of the fragility of discernment, and the Jewish leaders as examples of those who fail to discern the truth about Jesus.

Matthew's claims to true revelation legitimate Jesus' status and authority as the Son of God. Furthermore, discernment of the truth about Jesus takes on a defining role in the formation and maintenance of community. Disclosure and hiddenness are both integral to revelation and Matthew uses various literary devices familiar in the apocalyptic and wisdom traditions to persuade his readers to accept the truth of his claim.



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CONTENTS

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1	Discernment of Revelation in Matthew's Gospel: historical background	8
1.2	Definition of Terms	12
1.3	Justification for the Study	17
1.4	Survey of Scholarship Relating to Discernment in Matthew	23
1.5	Questions of Method	28
1.6	Aims of the Study	32

Chapter 2

Matthew's Story of Discernment

2.1	Introductory Observations	35
2.2	Matthew's Story of Discernment	39
2.2.1	1.1-2.23, The Birth Narrative	39
2.2.2	3.1-4.25, John discerns the truth about Jesus, who receives revelation from God	42
2.2.3	5.1-9.38, Jesus' revelatory words and deeds	46
2.2.4	10.1-17.13, Response to Jesus' mission	47
2.2.5	17.14-26.46, Teaching and Confrontation	61
2.2.6	26.47-28.20, The Passion and Resurrection Narrative	63
2.3	Conclusion	67

Chapter 3

Discernment of Revelation in the Old Testament

3.1	Introductory Observations	69
3.2	Abraham and the Patriarchs	71
3.2.1	The Abraham Narrative and Matthew's Gospel	75
3.3	Moses and the Prophets	78
3.3.1	Traditions about Moses and Matthew's Gospel	92

3.4	Solomon and Wisdom Traditions	97
3.4.1	Wisdom Traditions and Matthew's Gospel	103
3.5	Conclusion	105

Chapter 4

Discernment of Revelation in Early Jewish Literature

4.1	Introductory Observations	108
4.2	Select texts from Qumran	111
4.2.1	Qumran texts and Matthew's Gospel	118
4.3	Sirach	123
4.3.1	Sirach and Matthew's Gospel	131
4.4	Daniel	135
4.4.1	Daniel and Matthew's Gospel	142
4.5	Select traditions from 1 Enoch	146
4.5.1	Enoch traditions and Matthew's Gospel	156
4.6	Conclusion	160

Chapter 5

Model Discernment

5.1	Introductory Observations	164
5.2	The Setting of 11.25-30	166
5.3	11.25-30: Jesus' Thanksgiving for Revelation	168
5.4	Jesus as the Model of Discernment	179
5.5	The Significance of Jesus as the True Discerner	185
5.6	Conclusion	191

Chapter 6

Fragile Discernment

6.1	Introductory Observations	195
6.2	The Setting of 16.13-20	197
6.3	16.13-20: Peter Discerns the Truth about Jesus	199
6.4	Peter and the Dynamics of Discernment	211
6.5	Discernment and Petrine Primacy	218
6.6	Conclusion	221

Chapter 7

Failed Discernment

7.1	Introductory Observations	224
7.2	The Birth Narrative	224
7.2.1	Summary	228
7.3	The Passion Narrative	230
7.3.1	Summary	241
7.4	Conclusion	242

Chapter 8

Summary and Conclusion	246
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Bibliography	255
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Declaration

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Novum Testamentum Graece, ed., B. Aland, K. Aland, J. Karavidopoulos, C.M. Martini, B.M. Metzger, 27th edn. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993 [1898].

Charlesworth, J.H., ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1983-85.

Vermes, G., *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, London: Penguin Books, 1997 (CDSSE).

Abbreviations for biblical books, standard reference works and periodicals follow that set out in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 107 (1988), 587-596.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Discernment of Revelation in Matthew's Gospel: Historical Background

Then if any one says to you, 'Lo, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.¹

These verses from Matthew's gospel draw attention to an aspect of religious belief characteristic of Judaism and Christianity: that for religions grounded in claims to revelation, discernment between true and false messiahs and prophets is a critical issue with eternal consequences. The aim of this study is to demonstrate and explain the importance of discernment of revelation as a significant motif in Matthew's gospel.²

'Christianity' and 'Judaism' were not sufficiently well defined to form separate entities in the first century AD, especially after the destruction of the temple when formative Judaism was taking shape.³ Groups, parties and 'sects' of differing persuasions were plentiful, including those with identifiable leaders.⁴ The records we have concerning these various leaders are not unbiased; they reflect a certain assessment of events and the claims of the persons concerned from the perspective of their authors. They also contain recognisable elements of polemic, reflecting attempts by marginalised groups to justify their positions, and dominant groups to exercise a form of social control.⁵

¹Matt. 24.23,24; also in Mark (13.21,22), but Matthew emphasises this theme by his own redactional insertions concerning false Christs and prophets: Matt. 24.5,11,26; cf. 7.15,21-23.

²While most of 24.1-36 is description, much of it is paraenesis. So the lesson in eschatology does not simply console: it also demands *discernment* and adherence to Jesus' commands.' Davies and Allison, *Matthew III*, 369; (my italics). In discussing Mark 13.22, Marcus, 'Epistemology', 572, notes, 'The qualifying phrase [if possible] indicates that by the grace of God the elect may escape deception; but their *discernment* will certainly be tested to the very limit' (my italics).

³Bockmuehl, *Revelation*, 19, suggests that 'the pillars of "mainstream" Jewish belief might be summarized as a) exclusive monotheism, b) "revelation" and orthopraxis, and c) election and redemption'.

⁴See Horsley and Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets*; Acts 5.33-39 refers to Theudas and Judas the Galilean.

⁵Alexander, 'Sixtieth Part', explores the scribal marginalisation of prophets and charismatics. Rowland, 'Apocalyptic Literature', 184: 'The claim to direct revelation is used just as much by those who control the levers of religious power as those who do not.'

Segal, for example, has demonstrated how charges of magic are likely to be made by one religious group against another, of whom it disapproved:

Thus, the charge of "magic" helps distinguish between various groups of people from the perspective of the speaker but does not necessarily imply any essential difference in the actions of the participants.⁶

Similarly, Stanton⁷ has shown that one way to denigrate opponents was to attribute their claim to power to demons or the devil, and to accuse an individual of being a magician, a sorcerer, a deceiver, or a false prophet (μάγος, γόης, πλάνος, ψευδοπροφήτης). Thus Jews accused Jesus of being a magician,⁸ and Christians accused Simon and Elymas of being magicians.⁹

Another and related way of claiming an authoritative position, was by appeal to inspiration or revelation. Hengel¹⁰ draws attention to the motif of 'higher wisdom through revelation' found in many religious traditions during the NT era. Josephus regarded all Jewish prophetic figures as imposters:¹¹

Imposters and demagogues, *under the guise of divine inspiration*, provoked revolutionary actions and impelled the masses to act like madmen. They led them out into the wilderness so that there God would show them signs of imminent liberation.¹²

The prophetic figures mentioned by Josephus from the period 44-70 AD, are all said to have promised signs, and Hooker,¹³ in her discussion of Jesus' prophetic actions, notes that it is possible that Matthew had some of them in mind in his warning against false Christs and false prophets (24.24). The NT writings reflect aspects of these disputes, and, since they are written from a Christian perspective, their authors

⁶Segal, *Other Judaisms*, 100.

⁷'Jesus of Nazareth' and *Gospel*, 169-180.

⁸*b.Sanh.* 43a; *b.Sanh.* 107b; both cited by Stanton, who also notes similar terms in Philostratus *Life* 5.12. Goodman, *Mission*, 158, refers to Mani from Manichaean mythology who claimed his own revelation was definitive and final.

⁹Acts 8.9f., 13.6-12, where Bar-Jesus/Elymas is described as a 'magician, a Jewish false prophet', and Paul is 'filled with the Holy Spirit'. See also Johnson, 'Anti-Jewish Slander'; and Matt. 12.22-32 where, according to Matthew, those who deny that Jesus' power is from God's Spirit are committing unforgivable blasphemy.

¹⁰*Judaism and Hellenism*, 210-18.

¹¹He refers to them as, γόης, ψευδοπροφήτης, πλάνος; *Ant.* 20.97-99; *Ant.* 20.169-72/*War* 2.261-63; *War* 6.283-87, 437-41.

¹²*War* 2.259; the parallel in *Ant.* 20.168 adds, 'For they said that they would display unmistakable signs and wonders done according to God's plan'.

¹³*Signs*, 14; 107, n.73.

wished to persuade their readers of the truth of their claim about Jesus. Paul's letters show that the identity of Jesus as crucified Messiah was a current question, and he argues for this from scripture and the work of the Spirit (1 Cor. 1-2). The evangelists also use their writings to make claims about the identity of Jesus and part of their literary style is to show, through their presentation of characters, how readers may understand, i.e. 'discern', the truth about Jesus.

Why Matthew?

We are here in the world of claims and counter-claims, and one that is not easy to assess and 'penetrate'. In order to narrow the focus of study, I shall examine the way in which the author of Matthew's gospel shaped his work by appeals to revelation in order to persuade his readers of the truth of his claims about Jesus. Matthew's gospel is particularly appropriate for several reasons:

1. Matthew has long been considered the most 'Jewish' of the four canonical gospels and thus reflects an engagement with both the scriptures and the on-going interpretation of that tradition. Judaism is a religion based on claims to revelation, mediated through gifted individuals, and throughout its history there were people claiming to be such mediators. In the scriptures, Moses, the prophets and wisdom teachers claimed such authority; in the later writings, Daniel, the Enoch traditions and the Teacher of Righteousness at Qumran, also made similar claims.

Matthew was thus located within a tradition of revelation and claims to revelation. There was an existing tension within Judaism between Torah as once given revelation, and claims to fresh revelation; between the law of God and case law; between scripture and tradition; and, as part of the Jewish/Christian debate, between the OT/scriptures and Jesus' teaching.¹⁴ As I shall demonstrate, one of Matthew's purposes in writing his gospel was to anchor Jesus within the received traditions and, at the same time, to demonstrate and legitimate his claims that Jesus was God's final and authoritative revelation.

An apologetic that would have any hope of persuading Jews that Jesus really was Israel's Messiah would have to explain both the religious rejection and the apparent political defeat. This apologetic, moreover, would have to be

¹⁴Dunn, *Partings*, 252. This tension is 'constitutive of the human attempt to recognise and respond to divine revelation'.

scripturally grounded, if it were to make any significant headway against the objections of the synagogue's teachers of Scripture.¹⁵

2. Claims by Christians that Jesus was the Son of God were plentiful and formed the main, and arguably crucial, area of dispute in the Jewish/Christian debate.¹⁶ Matthew's main, but not exclusive, designation for Jesus is 'Son of God',¹⁷ and he claims for Jesus an authority equal to that of God.¹⁸ The designation 'Son of God' was not of itself unusual, but Matthew's attribution of it to *Jesus crucified*, and his claim that the rejection of Jesus is the rejection of God (11.20-24; 10.33), make it highly significant.¹⁹

3. Of the four canonical gospels, Matthew has the strongest apocalyptic orientation, and this recognition is part of a growing appreciation that 'apocalyptic' does not only relate to and is not only found in 'apocalypses'.²⁰ Fiorenza²¹ describes apocalyptic motifs and motif-clusters in many NT writings including: the situation of persecution and trial of the community; a concern with opponent figures of demonic powers, false prophets and antichrists; the expectation of the parousia and the coming of the Son of Man for judgement; the time of salvation where motifs of, for instance, kingdom, resurrection and the eschatological banquet are especially developed. She also notes that these apocalyptic motifs are not only applied to the future but are also used to characterise the present situation of Christians; and that the combination of apocalyptic thought patterns with paraenesis is a feature of some early Christian works, including Matthew. As Marcus²² has demonstrated, we also find in this thought world an 'apocalyptic epistemology': here the idea of special knowledge and insight given to the elect by God's grace in revelation sets up a dualism between those 'inside' and those 'outside', and this also includes the theme of incomprehension within the elect community. Rowland chooses to discuss the

¹⁵Evans, 'Root Causes', 32. He also quotes Justin Martyr's Trypho requesting a proof 'by the Scriptures' that the Messiah 'must also be crucified and die such a disgraceful and dishonourable death, cursed by the Law. For we cannot bring ourselves even to consider this'. (*Dialogue*, 90.1).

¹⁶Dunn, *Partings*; Hurtado, *One God*; Rowland, 'Moses and Patmos', 295; for discussion of the Jewish 'two power heresy', see Segal, *Two Powers*.

¹⁷Kingsbury, *Structure* and 'Figure of Jesus'; and reply by Hill, 'Response'; see also Müller, 'Theological Interpretation', who discusses the difficulties of exploring christology by examining titles.

¹⁸*All things* (πάντα) *All authority* (πᾶσα ἐξουσία); 11.27; 28.18; see Bauckham, 'Throne', 64, and the authority of the one who sits on the heavenly throne of God; 25.31.

¹⁹The heightened eschatological urgency in the gospel may reflect one consequence of discernment, that is, persecution and death (5.11, esp. ψευδόμενοι, falsely; 10.17-18; 23.34).

²⁰Hagner, 'Apocalyptic Motifs'.

²¹'Phenomenon', 300f.

²²'Epistemology', 568f.

apocalyptic and mystical thread in Matthew,²³ and in a further article²⁴ concerning how apocalyptic functions, mentions only John and Matthew in his gospels section. We can readily see that many of these apocalyptic motifs are present in varying degrees in Matthew.²⁵ He also makes a sharp distinction between 'inside' and 'outside' groups and, as I shall show, there is an apocalyptic thread running through Matthew's narrative, and here also revelation is a dominant motif.²⁶

One of the ways in which Matthew enhances his claim to proclaim the truth about Jesus is by making appeal to revelation. We can thus see how the Jewishness of Matthew's gospel, with its tradition of revelatory mediators, along with the author's emphasis on Jesus as the authoritative Son of God, confirmed by God's revelatory voice, make Matthew's gospel particularly relevant for a study of revelation. Matthew's apocalyptic perspective, with its emphasis on revelatory dualism and heightened moral awareness, are also relevant here. For Matthew, the Law of Moses, as preserved and interpreted by Jewish tradition, no longer has final authority for the people of God; the Law and the prophets are not abolished, but rather fulfilled in Jesus. '[S]o those who *perceive* him as that fulfilment form the nucleus for the new people of God.'²⁷

Matthew promotes group cohesion in the context of a perceived threat from Judaism and Christianity's need for self-definition and legitimation. As we have begun to see, writings from this period, and Matthew's gospel in particular, are written in order to convince and persuade readers, and in doing so make use of recognisable polemic. Revelation has a certain 'givenness', and people also have a choice to make about whether to accept the truth of such claims. Thus, revelation itself needs to be 'discerned'. Since 'revelation' and 'discernment' are somewhat imprecise words, they require some closer definition for our purposes.

1.2 Definition of Terms

Revelation

Philosophical and systematic studies on various theories of revelation are

²³'Apocalyptic, the Poor and the Gospel of Matthew', 507.

²⁴'Sweet Science Reigns', 70.

²⁵Note also Matthew's 'apocalyptic' redactional additions to Mark: 13.24-30,36-43; 17.2,6-7; 24.3,30,31; 27.51b-53; 28.2-4.

²⁶See discussion by Clines, *Theme of the Pentateuch*, 17-23, on the distinction between 'theme' and 'motif'. For this thesis, discernment is a 'motif in' Matthew's gospel, and not necessarily a 'theme of' it.

²⁷McKnight, 'Loyal Critic', 66; my italics.

plentiful.²⁸ Yet even here it is not always immediately clear how the authors are using the term if no definition is offered.

'Revelation' is a term with a long and rich tradition, which is also a tradition of many misunderstandings. Its meaning has always been disputed.²⁹

The usual, mundane understanding of the word is 'the making known of something previously unknown'. In religious terms, this is 'the communication of knowledge to people by divine agency'. A definition such as, 'God's *encounter* with those to whom God wishes to communicate *God's own self*',³⁰ is epitomised in the records of God's self-revelation to Moses and Isaiah.

Such definitions are used in philosophical, systematic or hermeneutical discussions, and it is important to define terms within their working context. This study is concerned with a text within the scriptural tradition and our definition of revelation must therefore take account of that context.³¹ For the purposes of this thesis, 'revelation' is the unveiling by God of knowledge previously hidden from the world. It is always grounded in God's initiative and is a gift of divine grace. It includes a wide range of activities arising out of God's relationship with the world and with his people. Such a definition tries to take account of features of the Bible that do not necessarily conform to modern usage of the term. As Childs points out:

The knowledge of God is not outside a historical continuum, nor does it remove all obscurity. Yet the point to be made is that the knowledge of God in the Old Testament (and the New) involves a great variety of things transcending the simple, common-sense definitions offered. It includes events which both disclose and conceal, which are experiential and also cognitive, which are directed to the past and the future. The theological term 'revelation' is, in other words, an inadequate shorthand expression which seeks to encompass an enormous range of activities related to God's relation to his people.³²

²⁸For instance: Gunton, *A Brief Theology of Revelation*; Ward, *Religion and Revelation*; Dulles, *Models of Revelation*; Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology*; Williams, *Form and Vitality*; Knight, *Wrestling with the Divine: Religion, Science and Revelation*.

²⁹Sauter and Barton (eds.), *Revelation and Story*, 1. A difference of meanings is reflected in the works of Barr, *Old and New*, who argues that revelation implies hitherto unknown information; and Downing, *Has Christianity a Revelation?*, that revelation effects a removal of obscurity.

³⁰Sauter and Barton, *Revelation and Story*, 2.

³¹See Dunn, 'Biblical Concepts of Revelation', 1, who does discuss the meaning of the term.

³²Childs, *OT Theology*, 22.

'Revelation' is a theological construct, and no better term has emerged to convey the full range of meanings associated with disclosures of God in the Bible.³³ Some commentators tend to assume that revelation of God is self-evident and unambiguous; yet, as will become clear, this is not necessarily the case. The Bible contains many examples of a lack of understanding of what God is doing, and this suggests that disclosure and hiddenness are both integral to revelation.

Discernment

We are faced with similar issues in defining the word 'discernment'.³⁴ It is used as a 'shorthand' to cover many aspects related to an understanding of God and God's ways with the world. The word is usually used in connection with distinguishing between true and false prophecy in Old Testament,³⁵ and discernment of spirits in the New.³⁶ Both of these areas are relevant, but here our concern is to explore a broader understanding of the term in its biblical context.

'Discernment' is a gift from God *and* a practice exercised in the context of a godly life. In its human aspect, discernment is an activity which describes something more than a cognitive assent to revelation, and points to the necessity of response to and engagement with revelation, involving a move from observation to interpretation and appropriation. The imperfection of humankind points to various levels or degrees of discernment; it is incomplete and fragile. It is, as I shall demonstrate, also difficult and costly, and needs to be learned in the context of obedience. Discernment thus has a moral as well as a cognitive dimension.

Discernment and revelation together explore the paradoxes of living in a created world in relation to a Creator, where God is both mysterious and inaccessible (transcendent), intimate and accessible (immanent); and where there is a certain dynamic interplay between discernment, from the human side, and revelation from the divine side. Although my topic is specifically to do with discernment, this necessarily has to be explored in relation to and interaction with revelation.³⁷

³³Freyne, 'NT Concept', 32, draws attention to such Greek terms as: γινώριζω, 'to make known'; ἀποκαλύπτω, 'to unveil'; δηλώω, 'to indicate/disclose'; φανερόω, 'to manifest'.

³⁴The English word 'discernment' has come from the Latin *discernere*, originally 'to sift', hence 'to distinguish' or 'to discriminate'. In German 'discernment' may be *Erkenntnis* (knowledge); *Erkennen* (recognition); *Unterscheidung* (distinction). Αἰσθάνομαι (to perceive) and διακρίνω (to distinguish) are both used in the NT in the sense 'to discern' (Luke 9.45; Matt. 16.3).

³⁵So McNamara, 'Discernment Criteria in Israel'.

³⁶So Dunn, 'Discernment of Spirits'. He notes, 82, in 1 Cor. 12.10, the use of the plural 'discernings of spirits' (διακρίσεις πνευμάτων), referring to both the source and content of the prophecy.

³⁷In Mark there is a "mysterious interpenetration" between faith and the grace shown in revelation'; Marcus, 'Epistemology', 562, n.20.

Discernment and revelation are always gifts from God; yet the withholding or giving of those gifts is 'correlated with certain human actions and attitudes' such that the divine gifts are not shown to be arbitrary.³⁸

The Language of Discernment

Discernment is thus a broad topic, and one way to engage with it is by an analysis of language. Here we must bear in mind that specific language about the presence of God or describing an awareness of his activity is problematic, and in some sense always falls short of accurately conveying God's mysterious reality.³⁹ Nevertheless, certain words and phrases which indicate discernment and revelation are consistently used in the scriptural tradition.

Some of the complexities inherent in approaching the study of a topic by means of word analysis are highlighted in Smith's article.⁴⁰ He discusses the more general uses of ἀποκαλύπτω and ἀποκάλυψις, and specifically when they become associated with what is now understood to be 'apocalyptic' literature and the uncovering of divine 'mysteries' and 'secrets'. In connection with the gospels, Smith notes that ἀποκαλύπτω appears in four items about revealing secrets and two about revealing God', as well as John 12.38 and Luke 17.30. However, I note that none of the references given specifically describes 'revealing secrets',⁴¹ and this draws attention to the difficulties involved in the relationship between linguistic analysis and conceptual analogies.

Bockmuehl suggests that in the LXX ἀποκάλυψις is never, and ἀποκαλύπτω rarely, used to denote theological revelation. Instead, the two words carry a wide range of secular connotations, many of which broadly relate to the notion of 'uncovering' (*gālāh*), such as of the ear, eye and heart.⁴² Especially when God is the subject of the sentence, Bockmuehl's suggested difference between 'theological' and 'secular' uses of particular language is hard to sustain.⁴³

While being aware of the linguistic questions involved, it is nevertheless the case that a specific semantic field is used to convey the idea of discernment. Common

³⁸Moberly, *Bible, Theology*, 48.

³⁹Note, for instance, the tension between 'seeing' and 'not seeing' God in Ex. 33; Moberly, 'To Hear', 458; Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 566.

⁴⁰'History'.

⁴¹'History', 14: Matt. 10.26/Luke 12.2; Matt. 11.25/Luke 10.21; Matt. 16.17; Luke 2.35; revealing God, Matt. 11.27/Luke 10.22. Neither is it clear how he is counting these passages: if parallel passages are included, the numbers should be 6 and 2; if excluded, 4 and 1.

⁴²*Revelation*, 32f., 43, 101.

⁴³E.g., 1 Sam. 9.15; Job 33.16; cf. 1 Sam. 2.27; 3.7; 2 Sam. 7.27; Is. 52.10; 53.1; Job. 36.10,15.

ways of expressing mundane communication may be applied to spiritual discernment. In particular, we note the use of verbs to *see* (βλέπω, ὁράω, *rā'âh*, *hāzâh*), to *hear* (ἀκούω, *šāma'*), and to *understand* (συνίημι, γινώσκω, *bîn*, *yāda'*). The opposites of these verbs may also be used to express a lack of discernment: to be *blind* (τυφλός, *'iwwēr*), to be *deaf* (κωφός, *hārēš*), to *lack understanding* (ἀσύνετος).

The use of this kind of language is prevalent in Isaiah, where spiritual blindness and deafness, prominent in Second Isaiah, presupposes the earlier presentation of the motif in Is. 6.9-10.⁴⁴ Isaiah acknowledges that only God can bring about a reversal, and this is expressed in terms of release from some form of present bondage to life in a restored creation, as part of the eschatological blessings (sight, hearing, movement, speaking, light, release, Is. 29.18; 35.5-6; 42.6,7,16).

A further negative expression related to discernment is 'hardness of heart' (hard: *qāšâh*, σκληρός; also σκληροκαρδία, *'orlāt lēbāb*). As the longer quotation from Is. 6.9 in Matt. 13.14-15 shows, references to hardness of heart are frequently linked with unseeing eyes and unhearing ears (Jer. 5.21,23; Deut. 29.3; Ezek. 12.1; CD 1.6; 2.25f.). Mark uses 'hardness of heart' four times: 3.5; 6.52; 8.17 (ἡ καρδία πεπωρωμένη), all of which Matthew redactionally omits, the latter two in connection with his more positive portrait of the disciples; Mark 10.5 parallels Matthew's only use of σκληροκαρδία at 19.8, where, in the dispute concerning divorce, Jesus criticises his opponents in relation to the interpretation of Torah, and he appeals above Moses to the will of God. Matthew rather uses καρδία to describe an inner intention and attitude relating to integrity (6.21; 15.18). Negatively, Matthew favours instead the use of *blind*, as in 'blind guides' (ὁδηγοὶ τυφλοὶ; 15.14; 23.16,17,19,24,26, all redactional and not in Mark or Luke).

Within the context of a covenantal relationship, Israel is constantly urged to 'hear': expressing not only mundane hearing, but also, in relation to God's word and law, to 'understand' and 'obey' (expressed linguistically, ἀκούω, ὑπακούω; so *šema'yiśrā'ēl*, Deut. 30.14,17; cf. 28.1, Ps. 103.18). Matthew equates hearing and doing the words of Jesus with that of doing God's will (7.21,24). How Jesus' words are heard and understood is, for Matthew, of crucial importance (note the use of ἀκούω five times in the explanation of the parable of the sower, 13.18-23; cf. ὁ ἔχων ὅτα ἀκουέτω, 13.9).

⁴⁴See Evans, *To See*; McLaughlin, 'Their Hearts Were Hardened'; Lindars, *Apologetic*, 154-167; see further section 2.2.

The use of language to express the presence or experience of a mysterious God is inherently problematic. Nevertheless, these linguistic notes show that Matthew uses certain words and phrases which resonate with their scriptural use as terms signalling discernment. This does not necessarily mean that every time he uses such words discernment is implied. It is therefore important to examine the context to determine whether or not such themes may be present, and also to examine passages where the theme may be expressed in different terms or in an implicit way. We have already seen in relation to miracle and magic how use of particular language can be persuasive, reflecting the views of the writer. Thus Matthew frequently uses language of non-discernment to describe opponents. Other language may be used to express attributes and activities that facilitate or hinder discernment, and these will be discussed where appropriate.⁴⁵

1.3 Justification for the Study

This study aims to explore how one writer in the biblical tradition understands revelation to be both given and discerned, as well as the theological, literary and sociological implications of such discernment. As far as Matthew is concerned, the Jewish scriptures are his most obvious point of reference, and here the possibility of God communicating with people is not questioned. Given the basic biblical presuppositions concerning the reality of God and his self-revelation, it is legitimate to ask how that reality can be discerned by human beings. Asking a question of this sort does not deny, and is not intended to deny, the divine initiative in revelation. The question is more concerned with the dynamics of divine communication, and in particular the nature of *true* discernment.

The scriptural tradition affirms both the sovereignty of God as well as the free will of people, and that tradition can also be understood as a record of the relationship between God and his people. God reveals himself, and revelation always remains something given. Yet this revelation takes place, not in what might be described as unilateral and uncompromising ways which leave people no freedom of choice, but in more hidden, diverse and surprising ways, that are not necessarily immediately obvious. The scriptural tradition can thus be seen to reflect the relationship between

⁴⁵These include: to know, γινώσκω; to judge, κρίνω; to believe, πιστεύω; to obey, ὑπακούω; to seek, ζητέω; to follow, ἀκολουθέω; to stumble, σκανδαλίζω; to repent, μετανοέω; to pray, προσεύχομαι; to worship, προσκυνέω; being pure, ἄγνός; wise, σοφός; meek, πραῦς; humble, ταπεινός; childlike, νήπιος, παῖς, παιδίον. Revelatory significance may also be expressed in different ways by reference to: dream, ὄναρ; angel, ἄγγελος; heaven, οὐρανός; as well as the use of *Behold*, ἰδοὺ.

revelation and discernment. Implicitly, there is information about how, when and in what ways revelation is given; and how, under what circumstances and in what ways it can be discerned.

Turning to survey some relevant literature, volumes such as *Witness to the Spirit* (edited by Harrington, 1978) include articles on 'Revelation and the Old Testament' (Bartlett), 'The New Testament Concept of Revelation: Some Reflections' (Freyne); and *Divine Revelation* (edited by Avis, 1997), includes, 'Biblical Concepts of Divine Revelation' (Dunn), 'Jesus the Revelation of God' (Bauckham), and 'The Gospels as Revelation' (Houlden). These works do not set out to address the question of how revelation is discerned, although it is hinted at several times. Bartlett, in a subsection entitled 'Revelation and Response', notes:

But it is nowhere suggested that God's whole self or essential being is revealed; rather, revelation takes a variety of forms, in none of which is God revealed in any full sense. ... God was known in Israel's response to him; to know him is to obey him. The response is in a sense the revealing thing; but as no Israelite responded perfectly, so revelation is not perfect. The Israelites knew as well as the Christian knew that works are a response to grace. But where does grace stop and where do works begin? Where does 'revelation' stop and man's recognition of it begin?⁴⁶

Bartlett's use of the word 'perfect' here may not be the best choice; it would perhaps be better to assert that God's revelation is *partial*, and that human response is *limited*. Nevertheless, he does raise the issue here concerning the interaction between revelation and 'recognition', or, in our terms, discernment.

In the same volume, Freyne's article examines the gospels of Mark and John, setting out to answer two related questions: '1. How does the fullness of revelation unfold itself in the life of Jesus, and 2. how is this perceived from the human side?'⁴⁷ He first sets the context of Mark and John in terms of apocalyptic mystery and wisdom personified, respectively, and notes:

Our investigation of the concept of revelation in late-Judaism as this is expressed in the wisdom literature and the apocalyptic tradition suggest strongly that it is relational in character. Even though both traditions are

⁴⁶'Revelation and the OT', 27.

⁴⁷'NT Concept', 33.

keenly aware that Wisdom or the disclosure of the divine secrets for history is a God-given gift, they also stress that man's co-operation, especially in relation to his ethical conduct, is an integral part of the revelatory process.⁴⁸

For Mark, he argues that christology cannot be understood independently of discipleship and that the truth about Jesus emerges in relation to the disciples' varied responses to his actions. Here he notes some features of 'understanding' which, as we shall see later, are also found in Matthew. These include suggestions that a proper understanding is not easy; that mystery emerges only gradually; and that seeing, hearing, remembering and understanding become challenges. There is also a link between sacrifice and revelation, and the mystery's parabolic, paradoxical nature requiring special instruction.

Freyne develops some of these points in his later article 'God as Experience and Mystery: The Early Christian Understanding' (2001). He discusses the scriptural tension between the immanence and transcendence of God, in relation to the Pauline letters and, again, in relation to Mark and John, drawing similar conclusions to those of his earlier article, but giving more attention to the motif of 'discerning'⁴⁹ and the difficulty of understanding which 'the disciples (and we as readers) encounter as the narrative unfolds'. These two articles are valuable in the way they draw attention to aspects of discernment in early Jewish literature, Mark and John, and they show that such concerns are present here, as I shall also demonstrate is the case for Matthew.

Moberly's work in the field of biblical theology has also been helpful here. In relation to the OT he has drawn attention to the role of Moses, and especially to his *seeing* and *not seeing* God (Ex. 33.17-23) in his *At the Mountain of God* (1992). He has pursued this theme of discernment in his articles, 'To hear the Master's Voice: Revelation and Spiritual Discernment in the Call of Samuel' (1995), and 'On learning to be a True Prophet: The Story of Balaam and his Ass' (1999), as well as in *The Bible, Theology and Faith* (2000). Here he includes a wide-ranging discussion of the interpretation of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac (Gen. 22) and the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24). His chapter 'Jesus in Matthew's Gospel as Son of God' is particularly relevant for this thesis, with his discussion of divine testing and faithful human response in key passages (3.13-4.11; 11.25-30; 16.13-28; 28.16-20) relating to our discussion of Jesus and Peter (in our chapters 5 and 6) and will be referred to there.

⁴⁸'NT Concept', 37.

⁴⁹Twice on p. 80, in connection with Mark 4.1-20 and 15.39.

Like Freyne, he does not wish to question

the divine initiative in self-revelation, which is axiomatic both for scripture and for the faiths rooted in scripture. The point is whether the wording 'only from God' does justice to the necessary human engagement in the process of receiving and discerning that which is from God.⁵⁰

Moberly describes this theme as 'relatively neglected',⁵¹ and indeed I have found little scholarly material specifically concerned with this particular topic.

The question of discernment, how one sees and hears God, i.e. applied theological hermeneutics, is a recurrent motif throughout the biblical material and is obviously central and inescapable within a life of faith which is in any significant way conceived in biblical categories. Yet if one looks at the topics covered in the standard Theologies of both Old and New Testament in the 19th and 20th centuries one generally looks in vain for any discussion of discernment as a significant concern in its own right.⁵²

If this is the case for theologies, I have also found it to be so when consulting dictionaries. The *Anchor Bible Dictionary*⁵³ and the *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, do not include articles on discernment or revelation; although the *ABD* includes articles on apocalypses and apocalypticism, mysticism, prophecy, spiritual gifts and wisdom. *Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible* has an article on revelation, the heart, and one on discernment of spirits (under 'spirits, distinguishing'). The *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* includes articles on hardness of heart and light; Howard's short article on 'Blindness and Deafness' notes,⁵⁴ 'To see and hear God's revelation fully requires not only physical sensation but spiritual sensitivity'.

Bockmuehl's work *Revelation and Mystery in Ancient Judaism and Pauline Christianity* (1990) is an exception here, and has been of particular value. Taking the theme of revealed heavenly mysteries, his main interest is in the disclosure of divine secrets to humanity. After a brief chapter on the OT, he covers a wide range of Jewish literature (including Qumran, Wisdom, Philo, Josephus, Targums and early rabbinic texts). He notes that common to most of these writings is the view

⁵⁰'To Hear', 455, n.34.

⁵¹'Christian Biblical Theology', 157.

⁵²Moberly, 'To Hear', 466f.

⁵³The *ABD* tends to focus more on historical and archaeological information rather than theological topics.

⁵⁴P. 81.

that past revelation is centred in Torah, and that 'new revelation is always meta-revelation, given shape and texture by a charismatic reading of the old ... revealed to inspired, skilled, and ethically qualified exegetes'.⁵⁵ He moves on to discuss Paul's letters and his understanding of 'mystery' as a reference to revelation, whose content is Christ.

In order to limit the scope of his investigation he specifically excludes the subjects of miracles, epiphanies, and 'natural' revelation. For the purposes of his enquiry he takes the following as working definitions:

1. "Revelation" designates a) any divine disclosure communicated by visionary or prophetic means, or b) the manifestation of heavenly realities in a historical context.
2. By "Mystery" is meant any reality of divine or heavenly origin specifically characterized as hidden, secret, or otherwise inaccessible to human knowledge.⁵⁶

Specific reference will be made to his work in our later chapters, but, for this thesis, a more wide-ranging understanding of revelation is adopted than that of Bockmuehl, one which specifically includes particular moments of revelatory intensification, as well as miracles and revelation in the wisdom tradition. Our primary focus is on how that revelation can be discerned.

Recent work in both literary criticism of biblical texts and an interest in the ways those texts function in a community has led to an appreciation of claims to revelation and the way those claims function. Here Nickelsburg's article, 'Revealed Wisdom as a Criterion for Inclusion and Exclusion' (1985) is particularly relevant. He discusses two main issues: first, how 'early Christians, and some Jews before them, based their exclusivistic stance on the claim that they had received divine revelation'; and, second, the way in which such 'divine authority could not be controverted; people who held a contradictory position were ipso facto wrong and, hence, excluded from the community of the saved'.⁵⁷ He goes on to discuss Qumran material and *1 Enoch*, where wisdom is mediated through revelation possessed by the chosen, and outsiders are damned because they lack or reject such revelation; and contrasts this approach with ben Sira and 4 Ezra which have a

⁵⁵Revelation, 124f.

⁵⁶Revelation, 2f.

⁵⁷P. 73.

broad perspective as to who will be saved. He briefly discusses NT writings, including Matthew, and notes that,

In early Christianity the situation is more complex and, in a way, paradoxical. On the one hand, the early Church is marked by an increasing openness to the gentiles. On the other hand, the Church appears, from its inception, to have adopted the sectarian Jewish approach that asserted the validity of its position by claiming divine revelation. Salvation was tied exclusively to the person and activity of Jesus of Nazareth.⁵⁸

This valuable study shows how revelation is a theme in different strands of early Jewish and Christian literature. Nevertheless, Nickelsburg is not able to examine how these claims to revelation cohere with other themes in the works cited. He also has a tendency to assume that exclusivist claims to revelation specifically result in an exclusive community, and does not always pay sufficient attention to the polemic of such language, nor its heuristic value to believers.⁵⁹ Such rhetorical polemic not only denigrates 'outsiders', but also encourages and motivates 'insiders' to moral obedience. For instance, although Matthew's apocalyptic dualism, in terms of reward and punishment, is a strong feature in his gospel, in the context of the whole work, this is balanced by other moral imperatives, such as forgiveness, love of enemies, obedience, and being meek and humble. A 'sectarian' model helps to explain why various NT texts are concerned with defining and legitimating group boundaries. Yet, as our discussion of method will confirm, it is extremely difficult to make deductions from a written text to a specific community situation. For this reason it is not a central concern of this thesis.

The various scholarly works referred to above reflect a renewed interest in revelation, both from systematic and biblical perspectives. The discussion demonstrates that a study in this area is timely. The issue then becomes one of finding a more narrowly defined area to investigate in detail, which may then prove helpful in the broader spectrum. To this end, the aim of this study is to examine the theological theme of discernment of revelation, in one particular work, the gospel of Matthew. We shall see how discernment has a resonance with and informs many previously recognised features of this gospel, such as christology, ecclesiology and discipleship.

⁵⁸'Revealed Wisdom', 89.

⁵⁹This is also a tendency in Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism*.

1.4 Survey of Scholarship Relating to Discernment in Matthew's Gospel

We have noted above the theological significance of making a claim to revelation. The focus of this thesis is on how that revelation is to be discerned, and how Matthew presents his claim and uses literary devices to persuade his readers to accept the truth of his claim. Redactional and literary studies focusing on particular themes in the gospel have been helpful here, although, as discussed below under *Method*, strictly narrative critical readings concerned with the way readers 'would have responded' have not been so helpful here in elucidating our particular theological motif.⁶⁰

In *The Revelation of God and/as Human Reception in the New Testament* (1997) Via takes a narrative critical approach, and examines the 'divine-human transaction' in Paul, Mark, Matthew and John. He seeks to answer the question, 'In what historical settings did the Jesus tradition become revelation for the four Evangelists and - in varying ways and degrees - for their audiences?'⁶¹ He summarises his view of the theological significance of the historical setting of Matthew as follows:

First, the imaginative narrative world of the Gospel of Matthew would have been close enough to the real historical world of the readers for the latter to have had a meaningful point of contact with the narrative world. The narrative world would contain both familiar and defamiliarizing elements. Second, the Holy Spirit could use the meaningful point of contact to turn the story into revelation by imprinting it on the hearts of the readers.⁶²

In addition to the difficulties of being exact about the historical setting of the gospels which he acknowledges,⁶³ Via also makes an assumption that the Jesus traditions did in fact become revelation for the evangelists. I suggest that this may not necessarily be the case. It is unclear from the gospel text itself that Matthew viewed the traditions he recorded or his completed gospel as revelation (hinted at in 1.1; 28.19-20). From a literary perspective, the stories of discernment and revelation in the gospels became 'en-texted' in order to function as revelation for the reader. When and how the text of the gospels came to be viewed as written revelation is a

⁶⁰So, for instance, Powell, 'The Magi as Wise Men', 4, wants to 'determine how Matthew's readers might have been *expected* to bridge the gap concerning his 'non-narrated revelation'; see further our discussion in chapter 7.

⁶¹*Revelation*, 95.

⁶²*Revelation*, 122.

⁶³*Revelation*, 100.

complex area, and not addressed by Via.⁶⁴ Matthew is concerned with the historical nature of the Jesus traditions, a figure from the recent past, and his emphasis is not on the traditions as such, but on the person of Jesus, who comes in fulfilment of biblical prophecy and who brings the eschatological kingdom of heaven and final authoritative revelation. He is concerned to show how readers might encounter the person of Jesus through the traditions associated with him as revelatory testimony.⁶⁵ Matthew writes very much in the tradition of OT narrative rather than as a conscious author of revelation; there is no information about Matthew, and no claim that he was inspired, or received dreams or visions personally.

Via takes a single pericope (6.22-23)⁶⁶ and uses this to construct how Matthew understands revelation to take place within his hearers/readers. He puts a great deal of weight on this one pericope and, in my opinion, does not give sufficient attention to its context as one of Jesus' sayings in the Sermon on the Mount. While he alludes to other relevant gospel traditions, there is scope for a more comprehensive analysis of all the relevant material in order to assess its cumulative significance in relation to Matthew's theology. Via's work shows that this area of revelation and its reception is a current one. Different aspects of discernment relate to and form inter-related themes throughout Matthew's gospel. In addition to the studies noted above, I am dividing other works into four relevant areas:

1. *Jesus*

Studies on Jesus in Matthew's gospel are plentiful, but, as I shall show in chapter 5, as far as I am aware, there has been no specific study on Matthew's presentation of Jesus as the true discerner. Howell⁶⁷ describes Jesus as a model for discipleship in terms of his portrait of him as a 'righteous person who knows and obediently does the will of God'. This is certainly true, but our concern here is to examine *how Jesus knows* the will of God.

2. *Community Situation*

Many recent articles have addressed the question of the relationship between Matthew's community and formative Judaism.⁶⁸ The issues here are problematic

⁶⁴See Smith, 'When did the Gospels become Scripture?'

⁶⁵One of the reasons why later Christian interpretation of the NT did not of itself come to be regarded as revelation, in the way, over a much longer period, Jewish interpretation of scripture did, was because revelation in Jesus was seen to be final.

⁶⁶*Revelation*, 125-146; also explored in his 'Matthew's Dark Light and the Human Condition'.

⁶⁷*Inclusive Story*, 251-9.

⁶⁸For discussion, see Stanton, *Gospel*, 113-168 (1992); Davies and Allison, *Matthew III*, 692-704 (1997); also Senior, 'Between Two Worlds' (1999), and Hare, 'How Jewish is the Gospel of Matthew?' (2000).

due to the lack of information about the date and place of writing, as well as specific evidence for Matthew's 'community situation'.⁶⁹ These dilemmas are particularly evident in Sim's work, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism* (1998), which explores the history and social setting of Matthew's community. His case for a specific location of Matthew's gospel in Antioch, including visits by and disputes between Peter and Paul, seems to be based on building one unproven hypothesis upon another. The present thesis concentrates on a theological theme, but I shall point out, especially from a sociological perspective, where this would have implications for an implied community situation.

3. *Apocalyptic*

We have seen how Matthew's gospel has significant apocalyptic traits. In relation to our motif, due attention must be given to the purpose and function of apocalyptic. Revelation provides sure answers from God. Rowland⁷⁰ notes that indirect revelation could not provide the assurance and conviction people desired, and that direct and authoritative answers were felt to be needed; here apocalyptic provided answers, direct from the mouth of God. Matthew's opening of his gospel sets his story in the faithfulness of God, and Jesus' status as Son is confirmed by God's own voice from heaven (3.17; 17.5). Here also we find that the dualistic and deterministic aspects of Matthew's apocalyptic eschatology are supported by appeal to revelation.⁷¹

Apocalyptic revelation offers and encourages a different perspective on reality. In a different article, Rowland⁷² draws attention to the way in which apocalyptic wisdom 'works': i.e. 'to stimulate the imagination to a new assessment of reality'. He discusses this in relation to *1 Enoch*, 4 Ezra, Jubilees, Paul, the Gospels, and Revelation. He concludes:

The appeal to revelation may seem to promise solutions to intractable human problems through divinely bestowed insight. Apocalypses produce as much mystification as enlightenment, however, and reveal the extent of the problem of human perception and the complex strategies needed to drag an uncomprehending humanity to begin to see things differently.⁷³

⁶⁹See Bauckham (ed.), *Gospels for all Christians*.

⁷⁰*Open Heaven*, 10f.

⁷¹Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology*, 2-14.

⁷²'Sweet Science', 61.

⁷³'Sweet Science', 73.

In relation to the Gospels, he refers to John (Nicodemus in Jn. 3) and again to Matthew:

A concern with the difference of perspective on life, a different kind of wisdom, which characterises life in the Kingdom of God, is evident in Matthew's Gospel, in which one may explore the theme of the comprehension (or lack of it) in the differing reactions to Jesus. Revelation is once again a key factor in the narrative.⁷⁴

He also draws attention to Jesus' use of parables as a technique to get people to think again. Matthew's record of some of these parables for his readers serves the same end. In relation to Matt. 16.23, Rowland suggests that Peter's reply to Jesus indicates a certain 'fragility of understanding'; I shall demonstrate in my discussion of this passage in chapter 6, the significance of 'fragility' in relation to discernment.

Apocalyptic also gives moral exhortation. Hagner's article 'Apocalyptic Motifs' (1985) was an early analysis of both the presence and function of apocalyptic in Matthew and its sociological basis. He describes the role of apocalyptic in Matthew as: instruction, encouragement (including a different way of viewing the present), paraenesis and readiness. Similarly, Cope, 'The Role of Apocalyptic Thought in the Gospel of Matthew' (1989), building on Bornkamm's influential essay analysing apocalyptic influence on ecclesiology, ethics and christology,⁷⁵ views Matthew's weight of judgement language as emphasising warnings about punishment to come in the context of failure in discipleship. Thus, the vision of the future in Matthew is a double-edged motivation towards obedient discipleship.⁷⁶

4. Thematic Studies

Studies on the roles of various groups and characters are plentiful, especially in relation to disciples and discipleship, Jewish leaders and crowds.⁷⁷ The disciples, as the Twelve, serve as the authoritative link to Jesus; as typical disciples they characterise the role of discipleship. It is in this latter role that we find Matthew using metaphors and symbolic language to describe what it means to be a disciple. Matthew's softening of Mark's harsh presentation of the disciples who lack understanding, is well-known. Matthew's emphasis on the disciples as learners in the

⁷⁴'Sweet Science', 70.

⁷⁵'End-Expectation and Church in Matthew' (1956).

⁷⁶Freyne, 'Vilifying', 142f. notes how the disciples can also be described in the same terms as those used for 'outsiders'.

⁷⁷E.g., Edwards, 'Uncertain Faith'; Donaldson, 'Guiding Readers - Making Disciples'; Minear, 'Disciples Crowds'; Kingsbury, 'Developing Conflict'.

scribal tradition is explored by Orton, *Understanding Scribe*. Wise men and scribes claimed inspiration in the same tradition as the prophets for the on-going interpretation of scriptural texts. For Matthew, scriptural traditions provided categories and a framework for discerning revelation, and inspiration and discernment were needed to make past revelation contemporary.

Rowland⁷⁸ has examined the role of the 'poor' and the 'child', and suggests that Matthew uses the 'child', not as a cipher for the church member, but as one who is obedient, humble, and who possesses insight and intuition. As in some other discussions of the role of the 'child' in Matthew, it is not clear from Rowland's discussion, when he, as well as Matthew, is using 'child' in a literal sense, and when in a metaphorical sense. The same is also true in relation to the disciples: it is not always clear when Rowland is referring to the historical Twelve and when to the ideal of discipleship. The fact that, in the second half of the gospel 'the ideal of discipleship ceases to be embodied in the group of disciples', can be partly explained by an understanding of the dynamics of discernment, and our suggestion that, for Matthew, discernment is both hard and imperfect (see section 6.4). This is a useful article, and, as I shall show, Matthew certainly uses this theme of understanding and lack of understanding by various groups in his gospel as a persuasive literary device.⁷⁹

Studies in these four areas have proved helpful for my topic,⁸⁰ but, as far as I am aware, none has explored discernment of revelation as a consistent motif in Matthew's gospel. As I shall demonstrate in chapter 2, the way in which Matthew has shaped his sources and structured his gospel serves to enhance his claim that Jesus is God's final and authoritative revelation, and in chapter 5 I shall show that he is also one gifted in discernment. Studies of the figure of Jesus in Matthew will inform this discussion. Response to revelation brings division and studies of Matthew's community situation and his use of apocalyptic can inform our understanding of his theological position, and his belief in the divine authorisation for the community's understanding of itself. Part of the literary style of the evangelists is to show, through their portrayal of characters in their gospels, *how* readers may decide. Various thematic studies, especially of characters and groups in

⁷⁸'Apocalyptic, The Poor'.

⁷⁹Explored by Kingsbury from a narrative-critical approach in his 'Rhetoric of Comprehension'.

⁸⁰Kupp, *Matthew's Emmanuel*, 1996, has also been a helpful guide in terms of scope and presentation of material related to a theological motif in Matthew. German scholarship has generally been more concerned to reconstruct 'how it was', being less concerned with the social complexities and dynamics of people's lives and of the texts that has come to shape much English language discussion. See Lieu, 'Parting', 102.

the gospel, will inform our study of Peter (chapter 6, Fragile Discernment) and of the Jewish leaders (chapter 7, Failed Discernment). Discernment is thus related to both christology and ecclesiology.

1.5 Questions of Method

This analysis of discernment is concerned with a theological theme and an appropriate method of study must be used in order to investigate it. As Stanton⁸¹ has shown in his survey, gospel studies in the period from approximately 1945-1980 were dominated by the development of redaction critical and historical-critical studies.⁸² In the last 20 years or so, a growing awareness of the limits of this kind of criticism has led to significant changes in gospel research. The two most prominent recent methodologies are literary and sociological in nature.

Redaction Criticism

Redaction criticism refers to two distinct methods of investigation. The first concentrates on the changes the evangelist made to his sources, in the conviction that these changes reveal a recognisable theological position. The second method concentrates on the final achievement of the writer by looking at the overall structure, or on units and their placement within a writing, thus, 'composition criticism'.⁸³ Redaction criticism thus implies that the evangelists not only collected and handed on traditional materials, but were true authors in their own right, producing an independent whole with its own structure and meaning.

In this study I shall use a redaction/composition critical method, focusing on the final form of the text, with the following assumptions and concerns:

1. I shall assume Matthew's gospel was written after AD 70, probably between 80 and 100, possibly in Antioch. I shall assume Marcan priority and that the author Matthew carefully revised and extended Mark, using material now also found in Luke (Q) and his own material (M); bearing in mind that the sources on which Matthew drew may have been modified or joined both before and after Matthew wrote, although any criteria for establishing such changes remain elusive.

⁸¹'Origin and Purpose'. Also Harrington, 'Matthean Studies Since Joachim Rohde'.

⁸²See Donaldson, 'Mockers', section 1, 'From Redactional to Narrative Analysis, 3-7; Stanton, *Gospel*, chapter 2, 'Redaction Criticism: the End of an Era?', 23-53; Donahue, 'Redaction Criticism: Has the *Hauptstrasse* become a *Sackgasse*?'

⁸³An early example is Thompson, *Matthew's Advice*.

2. In concentrating on the changes Matthew made to his sources, redaction criticism has tended to ignore the importance of passages incorporated unchanged. Yet the two redactional methods of investigation mentioned above are not exclusive of each other. Thus, by attending to the way Matthew has shaped individual pericope, I intend to draw out his particular theological emphases and assume that editorial changes may reveal the perspective of the redactor, while recognising that this perspective may also be present in the material he included unchanged.

3. By analysing the text in this way, it is possible to draw out Matthew's own theological interests, concerns and perspectives, although I am aware of the dangers here of assuming that Matthew thereby exhibits a logical, consistent and coherent theology. By focusing on the final form of the text, the danger of attributing to some other source views that do not apparently conform to a consistent perspective is avoided. Matthew demonstrates his theology by means of his narrative, where several christological, ecclesiological and eschatological themes are woven together. In utilising a modified redaction critical method, and by paying attention to the final form of the text, Matthew's apparent inconsistencies concerning discernment may be viewed in a more constructive way.

4. 'Traditional' redaction criticism would argue that changes made by Matthew to his sources may also have served the needs of his own community, and that information about his community may be deduced from his text. Evidence from outside the text is severely limited, and commentators are now less assured that such information can be read from the gospel material.⁸⁴ There are several reasons for this. Matthew wrote a gospel, and therefore his primary focus is on Jesus of Nazareth and his story. His gospel is not designed with the purpose of giving 'community' information, and cannot be read as if it straightforwardly 'mirrored' a community.⁸⁵ Individual pericopae, and the gospel as a whole, may seek to challenge and change, rather than necessarily affirm and confirm, depending on specific circumstances, now unknown. There is also no specific evidence from the text that Matthew had a close relationship with a community. Details in the text might relate to Matthew's community or a community of a different geographic location, or an earlier period in time (e.g. Mark's community). This uncertainty

⁸⁴Bauckham, *Gospels for all Christians*, argues that the gospels were written 'for any and every Christian community' rather than the specific community of the evangelist; for a reply see Sim, 'Response'.

⁸⁵Cf. the difficulties involved in working back to the questions to which Paul was responding in his letters; the problem is more acute in relation to the gospels.

reflects the wider problems of dating, both the gospels and early Jewish texts.⁸⁶ Gospels are written by individuals and not by communities, and Matthew's work may reflect aspects of his personal outlook and background. Neither can we assume that Matthew as a document is internally consistent, or that his community held consistent views.

We are here investigating a theological motif, and while theology has a historical and social setting, a specific 'community setting' cannot easily be read from theological points in the text.⁸⁷ By focusing on the final text form, we are able to deduce how Matthew is presenting his material. In examining the theological claims Matthew is making, I shall point out where such claims would have implications for the beliefs, formation and ethics of community life, but my aim is not to translate these into a specific community situation, or to make judgements about how such a stance did in practice do so.⁸⁸

Literary Studies

Redaction criticism, in its compositional mode, is a good tool for isolating themes and topics, and of necessity stays close to the text. Yet this focus on the text forced scholars to ask literary questions of the text which this method was not designed or equipped to answer, since it used the text as a *window* to ascertain its pre-literary history, as opposed to a *mirror*, the surface of which reflects a self-contained world. In certain circles redaction criticism came to be regarded as a *cul-de-sac*⁸⁹ and the attention moved from the author to the reader and the way in which texts communicate and are received by readers.

'Narrative' criticism is a branch of literary criticism which studies the formal features of narrative texts.⁹⁰ Narrative critics focus on the plot and structure of the gospel

⁸⁶Reflected in the problems of dating the beginnings of the codification of the oral law; cf. the dating of the addition of the 12th benediction (*birkath ha-minim*) to the Eighteen Benedictions.

⁸⁷This is a tendency in Carter's commentary, *Matthew at the Margins*, where he can jump from theological assertions to statements about Matthew's community: 'As recipients of revelation about God's mysteries or purpose, the community of disciples is separated from all others (13.10-17)'. Also Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology*, who asserts that apocalyptic eschatology has 'an identifiable social setting'.

⁸⁸Riches, *Mythologies*, 22f.: 'Social historical studies have become divorced from and indeed often opposed to theological inquiry'. When we are concerned with the portrayal of the functioning of a community in the past, it is 'less important to know the precise setting, as have a keen awareness of the codes - linguistic, social, geographical, ritual, physical, through which the Jews and the evangelists expressed their sense of identity'.

⁸⁹Donahue, 'Redaction Criticism'.

⁹⁰There is sometimes some confusion between these terms, and 'narrative criticism' can be used loosely. Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, and 'Toward a Narrative-Critical Understanding of Matthew'; McKnight and Malbon, *The New Literary Criticism*.

without reference to any particular source theory or redactional layers.⁹¹ The reader can enter the story-world or narrative-world of a gospel through the act of reading.⁹² Radical a-historical or 'text immanent' approaches ignore the social and historical context of the original author and recipients. Narrative criticism more specifically recognises and pays attention to the purpose of both the whole gospel and individual units. This approach takes particular note of the overall rhetorical strategy, as well as numerous rhetorical devices used to urge the readers to adopt the author's point of view. These include, polemic, irony, favourable and unfavourable presentations of characters, use of OT quotations.⁹³

Focusing on the gospels as narrative texts draws attention to the evangelist's skills to teach, encourage and persuade his readers, and, as such, is appropriate for aspects of this study concerned with Matthew's desire to persuade his readers to see things differently. However, I am also aware of the disadvantages of a method which tends to separate the text from a particular first century religious and cultural setting. It is increasingly acknowledged that texts do need to be read in relation to the world in which they were produced and read, and to recognise the issues involved in applying modern literary criticism to the study of ancient texts.

Sociological Studies

A further area of recent growth has been in the number of NT studies from a social-scientific perspective.⁹⁴ Here, sociological exegesis asks questions concerning both how and why a particular text was designed to function as it does, and what sort of impact on the lives of recipients it was intended to have. Redaction-critical studies of the theology and themes of the gospels can be further enhanced by addressing the reasons *why* the evangelists wrote in this way; and, further, what implications for a particular early Christian community setting this might have. As a social-historical approach, this method, like redaction criticism, suffers from the lack of positive evidence for Matthew's location and the difficulties of knowing which details in his gospel originated in or were addressed to which community. As a method it can also be in danger of viewing Christianity and its documents solely as a social phenomenon, and losing sight of their claim to be witnesses to true revelation.

⁹¹Edwards, *Matthew's Story of Jesus* (1985); Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* (1986); Howell, *Matthew's Inclusive Story* (1990).

⁹²Edwards, *Matthew's Narrative Portrait of Disciples*, (1997).

⁹³Mack and Robbins, *Patterns of Persuasion in the Gospels*; Johnson, 'Anti-Jewish slander'.

⁹⁴See Horrell, *Social-Scientific Interpretation*; and earlier, Scroggs, 'The Sociological Interpretation of the NT'; Kingsbury, *Gospel Interpretation*.

Nevertheless, sociological studies do provide a different dimension to the text. Theological themes isolated by means of redaction criticism are not ends in themselves, but have an important setting and outworking in peoples' lives in a socially meaningful way. In so far as Matthew's gospel both comes from and is addressed to a particular community situation, sociological criticism offers valuable insights.⁹⁵ This area has seen a considerable growth of current interest, related to the on-going debates about Matthew's relationship with Judaism and the Jewish and Gentile communities.⁹⁶ Such studies pose different kinds of questions to the text, and those of particular relevance for this study concern issues of authority, specifically the authority Matthew claims for Jesus; and boundary definition and maintenance of his 'new people'.⁹⁷

The composition critical approach used here draws on two methods: using redaction criticism as a tool based on traditional exegetical interpretation, I shall not try to ascertain the teaching or intention of Jesus, or the specific *Sitz im Leben Jesu* of pericopae, but I shall focus on the intention of the author Matthew. This method enables us to see how Matthew has used and moulded his sources for his own literary and theological purposes. Using narrative and literary criticism as tools, which view the gospel as a whole with interrelated parts, including certain literary and rhetorical devices, I shall give attention to how Matthew presents his material in order to communicate to and persuade his readers. Sociological studies will also enable us to move towards some possible answers as to why Matthew wrote in this particular way, using these specific themes.

1.6 Aims of the Study

On the basis of the preceding justification for the study, and using the method outlined, the general aim of this study is to describe and analyse the motif of discernment of revelation in Matthew's gospel. Specifically this will involve the following:

1. In chapter 2, I shall demonstrate, on the basis of a compositional analysis, that discernment of revelation is a significant and pervasive motif running through Matthew's gospel. This concern with discernment is particularly evident in his own special material in the birth and passion narratives, as well as in his redaction of

⁹⁵See Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community*.

⁹⁶For summary of views, see Senior, 'Between Two Worlds'.

⁹⁷See Kee, *People of God*.

existing traditions in chapters 11-17. I shall show that isolating the motif in this way is not inconsistent with other previously proposed thematic readings of the gospel. The motif can thus be identified, but significant questions remain as to *why* Matthew chose to emphasise discernment of revelation as an important theological motif in his gospel, as well as why he chose to narrate his story of Jesus in this particular way. The following chapters explore answers to these questions.

2. In chapters 3 and 4, by means of a survey of relevant scriptural and early Jewish sources, I shall show that Matthew is located within a tradition of revelation, and competing claims to revelation. In the scriptures, we find a tradition of revelation being given to particular gifted individuals in particular ways. Here Moses functions as a model and as mediator of revelation between God and his people Israel. This is one area of special relevance to Matthew, who, as part of his christological claim, presents Jesus as one 'greater than' Moses. The people of Israel also have a responsibility to discern and test claims to revelation, as well as to embody, obey and pass on the demands of revelation.

3. By conducting a detailed analysis of relevant narrative and sayings traditions, I shall demonstrate (in chapter 5) that one aspect of Matthew's understanding of Jesus is that of the true discerner. Matthew presents Jesus in the tradition of both Moses and wisdom, who, as God's Son, is skilled in discernment as well as one who receives revelation. He is the authoritative interpreter of scripture and his coming also brings a new eschatological perspective.

I shall also show that this scriptural logic of revelation, where the elect are those to whom revelation has been given and who have the grace to receive it, is reflected in Matthew's portrayal of Peter and the disciples (chapter 6). Here, under the title 'Fragile Discernment' I shall show how Matthew portrays Peter both as an authoritative link with the Jesus of history, as well as being representative of the vulnerable and demanding nature of discernment for all disciples. Jesus is the authoritative Son and also serves as a model for discipleship, and Matthew thus forges a close link between his christology and ecclesiology.

4. In chapter 7, 'Failed Discernment', by drawing particular attention to Matthew's contrasting presentation of Peter and the disciples, on the one hand, and the Jewish leaders, especially the scribes and Pharisees, on the other, I intend to show how Matthew uses discernment of revelation to encourage and persuade his readers of the truth of his claims concerning Jesus, and to make, what for him, is the 'right' choice.

This is not presented only in terms of alternatives, as if all options might be equally acceptable, but in terms of eschatological blessing or woe. This reflects an understanding of the privilege of divine grace, as well as the continuing responsibility to the demands that grace engenders. This is expressed in terms of obedience and transmission, as well as a challenge to his readers to assess where they stand in relation to Jesus. Factors which help or hinder that process will also be examined.

5. Matthew's claims to revelation legitimate Jesus' status and authority as Son, and I shall demonstrate that, as a theological theme, discernment of the truth about Jesus takes on a defining role in terms of community. Loyalty to God now becomes loyalty to Jesus, and acknowledgement of Jesus as Son of God now defines the people of God. Thus, God's particular elect people, Israel, who through a failure to discern and respond to revelation given in Jesus, are now no longer God's people. Here Matthew takes up familiar apocalyptic themes of division between the elect community and those perceived to be 'outside'. As I have suggested, these theological themes do not necessarily provide information about Matthew's actual community situation, although Matthew's emphasis on the authority of Jesus and his words, thus relativising other sources of authority, would be particularly relevant at a time when formative Judaism was taking shape. Matthew's appeal to revelation serves to legitimate the position of his Christian community, and to provide a theodicy for persecution suffered as a consequence. I shall point out where the sociological aspects of discernment would bear upon Matthew's *Sitz im Leben*, and thus have relevance to the contemporary scholarly interest in this area.

6. The results of this study will be summarised in chapter 8, and some suggestions made as to why discernment of revelation is a significant motif in Matthew's gospel.

Chapter 2

MATTHEW'S STORY OF DISCERNMENT

2.1 Introductory Observations

The aim of this study is to describe and analyse one particular motif in Matthew's gospel, that of discernment of revelation. At first sight it may not be clear that this is a motif in the gospel, but, as I shall show in this chapter, a close reading of the text demonstrates that this is the case. Discernment of revelation is not, of course, Matthew's only motif, but it is one which provides a legitimate reading of the text, incorporates some other recognised motifs (such as, Jesus as Son of God, the role of disciples and opponents), and is not contrary to some previously suggested structures for the gospel.

Matthew's Structure

A variety of structures for the gospel has been proposed, often suggested by literary devices. Bacon's pentateuchal theory is well known, and is based on five repeated summary formulae. This draws attention to the clear alternation between blocks of narrative and discourse material, but may not thereby indicate a definite overall structure.¹ Kingsbury² has argued that the two formulae phrases in 4.17 and 16.21 correspond closely with two of the major geographical and dramatic turning points: the beginning of public preaching in Galilee and the introduction of the theme of messianic suffering, suggesting that the style of Jesus' ministry changes radically at each of these points. However, whether a form of words which clearly moves the story on to a new phase is therefore to be treated as marking off separate sections of the book is doubtful. This is especially the case in 16.21, which comes in the middle of the Caesarea Philippi episode, and may mark a new emphasis, rather than the end of the episode. Also the introductory section of the gospel could more logically be found to start at the beginning of chapter 3 than at 4.17.³ We also note that Matthew favours the use of summary statements⁴ throughout his work which move the narrative forward, but which may not necessarily indicate major division.

¹So Gundry, *Matthew*, 10f., who views them as reflecting conventional Jewish 'five-ness'.

²*Structure*; followed by Bauer, *Structure*; also Gnika, *Matthäusevangelium*, 2.523f.

³Note the repetition of words in 3.2 and 4.17.

⁴E.g., 4.23-25; 8.16-17; 9.35-38; 12.15-16; 14.13-14,34-36; 15.29-31; 19.1-2; 21.45-46.

Several commentators have found chiastic structure to be significant.⁵ Green⁶ finds broader parallels than Bacon's five books between the Pentateuch and Matthew's gospel, describing how the first part shows how Jesus fulfilled all the expectations of Israel and the second how Israel refused to recognise that fulfilment and rejected the Christ. He goes on to postulate a chiastic structure for the gospel with chapter 11 as a hinge, both looking backwards to the figure of Christ built up in the first half, and forward to that rejection of him which is the theme of the second. Combrink⁷ also finds a symmetrical, concentric pattern to the gospel, with chapter 13 forming a pivotal point, within a larger turning area (11.2 - 16.20).

Other commentators have defined Matthew's structure based on a view of salvation history, and the three epochs of Israel, Jesus and church.⁸ Davies and Allison,⁹ find significant triadic structures up to the end of chapter 12, which cease from 14.1 onwards where Matthew more closely follows Mark. They conclude, with Gundry,¹⁰ that the gospel is 'structurally mixed'. Due attention also needs to be given to literary conventions which may have influenced Matthew the evangelist: especially scriptural precedents, such as the narratives of Abraham and Moses, and contemporary literature, such as βίαι.¹¹ Here literary dependency is not being advocated, but spheres of possible analogy, as we shall see in our next chapter.

As these variations show, it may be easy for a modern commentator to discover a scheme by noting some recurrent motifs, and by plotting their incidence in different sections. Yet it is less easy to show that Matthew intended or would have recognised such schemes: the more elaborate and more symmetrical the structure, the more difficult it is to account for the presence of all the material.¹² The various sections of discourse and narrative may reflect more the skill of a teacher and preacher than an overall concern for a pattern. The gospel's primary form is that of *story*: it has a sense of direction, and its various parts are designed to build up towards the dramatic climax of the confrontation of Jesus with the authorities in Jerusalem.

⁵See Bauer, *Structure*, 36-40.

⁶'Structure', esp. 50-51.

⁷'Structure', 69-71.

⁸See Bauer, *Structure*, 45-54, for discussion of, amongst others, Strecker, Trilling, Frankemölle and Meier.

⁹*Matthew 1*, 58-72.

¹⁰*Matthew*, 11.

¹¹See particularly Burridge, *What are the Gospels?*

¹²France, *Matthew*, 147.

Proposed Outline

Viewing the gospel as a whole in relation to our motif, the following initial observations may be made:

1. While it is unsound to conclude that there is a necessary correspondence between words and themes, we note the occurrences of the word 'reveal' (ἀποκαλύπτω): 10.26; 11.25,27; 16.17. The absence of the word 'revelation' does not necessarily mean that the motif is lacking, since it can be expressed by various other word combinations, metaphors and actions; nor does its inclusion in these passages express all that Matthew wishes to say on the subject. Nevertheless, it is significant that this word is used in passages in chapters 11 and 16: first where Jesus describes his relationship with God as the basis for his revelatory activity; and, second where Peter discerns, by a gift of revelation from God, the truth about Jesus.¹³

2. We note the inclusion of other episodes which have significant revelatory dimensions: baptism, transfiguration, commission, at the beginning, middle and end of the narrative (3.13-17; 17.1-8; 28.16-20).

3. Clusters of scenes of discernment of revelation occur in Matthew's birth narrative, and these alternate with scenes depicting a lack of discernment (1.18-2.23; see section 2.2.1). We find a similar pattern at the end: after Jesus' death, Matthew also records alternating scenes of discernment of revelation, as well as a lack of discernment (27.51-28.20, see section 2.2.6). It is significant that these alternating revelatory episodes occur in Matthew's own material (M), and that this material also represents a particular characterization of Jesus (as Son and 'God with us'). Both these observations point to the importance of the revelatory motif for Matthew.

4. We note that four of these significant episodes of revelation are concerned directly with Jesus as Son (3.13-17; 11.25,27; 16.17; 17.1-8); with two further passages less directly (1.18-25; 28.16-20). This further suggests that, for Matthew, discernment of the truth about Jesus, is discernment of him *as Son*.

These observations show that discernment of revelation forms a motif in the gospel. This is *one* motif among others, but, importantly, one which resonates with other

¹³The use of 'reveal' in 10.26 is not inconsistent with its use elsewhere in Matthew. The two future passives (ἀποκαλυφθήσεται, γνωσθήσεται) indicate that God himself is going to make public that which is now hidden and secret. In 10.27 that which is hidden and secret is identified as that which Jesus himself has taught his disciples in private and which they are now to proclaim to others. As a result they face life-threatening persecution, but are told 'have no fear' (10.26,28,31) since they remain under God's fatherly care. See further, Weaver, *Missionary Discourse*, 107ff.

suggested compositional designs for the gospel. Thus the focus on Jesus as Son and the significant moment of revelation in chapter 16, resonates with Kingsbury's proposals;¹⁴ and the eschatological outworking of discernment in chapter 13, with those of Green. Jesus' most complete declaration concerning himself in chapter 11, and the clustering points in chapters 11-17 resonate with the Combrink's 'turning area'. We can thus see that examining the motif of discernment of revelation in the gospel produces an outline which is not at variance with other proposed structures, and may illustrate and enhance one structural aspect. With these observations in mind, the following outline for the gospel is suggested, and this is the one that will be used in the subsequent pages:

1. The Birth Narrative

- 1.1 - 1.17 genealogy
- 1.18 - 2.23 *alternating scenes of discernment and non-discernment*

2. John discerns the truth about Jesus, who receives revelation from God

- 3.1 - 4.25 John the Baptist and *Jesus' baptism*

3. Jesus' revelatory words and deeds

- 5.1 - 7.28 Jesus, Messiah in word
- 8.1 - 9.38 Jesus, Messiah in deed

4. Response to Jesus' mission

- 10 Jesus' mission to Israel
- 11 Israel's rejection of Jesus: *Jesus reveals himself*
- 12 beginning of a plot to destroy Jesus
- 13 parables *conceal and reveal*: eschatological consequences of this division
- 14-15 death of John the Baptist; miracles and disputes
- 16 *discernment by Peter of the truth about Jesus*
- 17.1-13 *transfiguration*

5. Teaching and Confrontation

- 17.14 - 26.46 teaching to disciples and confrontation with Jewish leaders

6. The Passion and Resurrection Narrative

- 26.47 - 27.54 passion narrative
- 27.55 - 28.20 *alternating scenes of discernment and non-discernment*

All formal gospel structures have disadvantages, and these divisions are not intended to represent a definitive structure. I suggest that discernment of revelation is important to Matthew and, as the italics show, this can be demonstrated in the way

¹⁴For the significance of Jesus as Son, see his 'Figure of Jesus'.

he has arranged the material in his gospel. I have also shown this to be a coherent and legitimate way of viewing this gospel. As far as I am aware, these significant moments of revelation have not been previously examined in detail, *as moments of revelation*: why they are positioned where they are; what, if anything, their positioning in the narrative tells us about the subject; and how they relate to the material in between. In this chapter I shall seek to show in more detail how discernment of revelation is important for Matthew and forms one motif, among many, in the gospel as a whole. This will include a more detailed analysis of the setting and importance of two key passages (11.25-30 and 16.13-23) as well as commenting briefly on other passages related to our theme not examined elsewhere.

2.2 Matthew's Story of Discernment

2.2.1 1.1 - 2.23, The Birth Narrative

The way in which a story begins is significant, particularly within a narrative framework, since this sets the tone, priorities and orientation for the whole work. In chapter 7 we shall examine the five pericopae in Matt. 2 with particular attention to the sustained contrast between Herod and the Jewish leaders, who do not discern revelation, and Joseph and the magi, who do. Here we are concerned to show how the inclusion of the record of Jesus' birth and the discernment and obedience of Joseph, form part of a repeated, alternating pattern of pericopae.

Following the genealogy, Matthew opens his gospel with a paradigmatic episode of revelation to Joseph and his obedient response to it. Joseph does not make a quick decision concerning Mary, but 'considers' or 'ponders' the matter (ταῦτα δὲ αὐτοῦ ἐνθυμηθέντος). It is specifically as he is doing this that he receives revelation, signalled typically by ἰδοὺ, and the appearance of ἄγγελος κυρίου κατ' ὄναρ (1.20).¹⁵ The righteous person who receives revelation in the form of a dream, is a recurrent theme in the OT and in later Jewish literature (see further section 3.4). Joseph responds in obedience, by doing exactly what the angel has said (1.24,25), given emphasis by being different from what he had previously *resolved* to do.¹⁶ This revelation is confirmed as God's will by Matthew's description of it as fulfilment of scripture (1.22-23). This same sequence of revelation, obedient response, and fulfilment as confirmation, forms, as we shall see, a repeated pattern in 2.13-15 and 2.19-23.

¹⁵See also 1.24; 2.13,19; 28.2 for 'the angel of the Lord' bringing God's revelatory message.

¹⁶Cf. later Jesus' encounter with the rich young man, and his parable of the two sons, 19.22; 21.28-32.

The shape of this pericope is similar to that of other scriptural revelatory encounters, especially call narratives in general and annunciations of birth in particular.¹⁷ Five elements from this pattern are reflected in 1.18-25:

1.18,19	Divine confrontation
1.20a	Introductory Word
1.20b,21	Commission
1.22,23	Reassurance
1.24,25	Sign

The usual element of 'Objection' is missing here, and this may be part of Matthew's heightening of the virtue of Joseph. In particular, he is described as 'being righteous' (δίκαιος ὢν, 1.19). This is the first adjective used to describe Joseph, and 'righteousness' is subsequently an important category for Matthew.¹⁸ He also emphasises that Joseph is of Davidic descent (esp. 1.17); that he in particular, not Mary, is the recipient of revelation, and especially that he discerns revelation by responding appropriately in obedience (1.20,24).¹⁹ He also stresses, four times, that Joseph is not Jesus' father (1.18 (twice), 20,25).

Following the genealogy, Matthew thus opens his gospel with a paradigmatic story of revelation and discernment. From this we may suggest that revelation takes place within the traditions of Israel, and is part of God's plan and purpose. The story also gives the sense of God being active in an immediate and specific way, signalling the beginning of a new era. There is also a heightened sense of God's miraculous power: the genealogy shows how God overcomes physical conditions such as those of age and barrenness.²⁰ Revelation legitimates Joseph's potentially irregular marriage with Mary, and draws attention to his obedient response. The opening pericope also has its own legitimating logic: that what the angel said would happen, did take place (1.21,25).

¹⁷See Brown, *Birth*, 155f., who notes Gen. 16.7-12; 17.1-18.15; Jud. 13.3-22; Luke 1.11-20; 26-37. The analogy could be extended to include verses 22-25; but at this point Brown is only examining what he considers to be pre-Matthean material. For further discussion of the *Gattung*, see our section 3.3.

¹⁸See Przybylski, *Righteousness*. If, as Brown, *Birth*, 125, suggests, the καὶ of 1.19 should be translated *but* and not *and*, this would make Joseph obedient to the law, as well as merciful; cf. 23.23.

¹⁹Matthew focuses more on Joseph's role than that of Mary, who has little independent identity here, especially when compared with Luke's account.

²⁰The genealogy also shows God at work through irregular and potentially scandalous unions, and there may be an element of justifying polemic here.

In this opening M material, the evangelist interweaves stories of discernment of revelation and lack of discernment in the following sequence:

- | | |
|---------|---|
| 1.18-25 | Joseph receives revelation: ἰδοὺ, <i>angel</i> , <i>dream</i>
obedient response: including verbal repetition, vv. 20,24
fulfilment as confirmation |
| 2.1-2 | The magi <i>see</i> a revelatory <i>star</i>
obedient response: they <i>came</i> , <i>seeking</i> , <i>in order to worship</i> |
| 2.3-8 | Herod receives revelation indirectly from the magi: he does
not see the star
he responds by inquiring about the birthplace
he acts <i>secretly</i> ; he does not go to Bethlehem |
| 2.9-12 | The magi go and receive more revelation: ἰδοὺ ὁ ἄστηρ
they <i>worship</i> and offer gifts
they receive further revelation in a <i>dream</i> |
| 2.13-15 | Joseph receives further revelation: ἰδοὺ, <i>angel</i> , <i>dream</i>
obedient response: including verbal repetition, vv. 13,14
fulfilment as confirmation |
| 2.16-18 | Herod receives no further revelation: he reacts with violence
fulfilment as confirmation |
| 2.19-23 | Joseph receives further revelation: ἰδοὺ, <i>angel</i> , <i>dream</i>
obedient response: including verbal repetition, vv. 20,21
fulfilment as confirmation. |

The way Matthew has interwoven these episodes reflects a pattern: one event of revelation, if discerned correctly, calls for a response of obedience, and is followed by subsequent events of revelation. If, however, revelation is given, and the response is not one of obedience, this is not followed by further events of revelation and a violent response arising from a failure in moral integrity may result.

Scholars have recognised many of Matthew's subsequent themes foreshadowed in his special material here,²¹ and this is also the case in relation to our motif of discernment. Revelation takes place within the traditions of Israel, yet, as the magi show, is not confined to Israel, and may be given in alternative ways to unexpected (Gentile) people.²² Claims to revelation bring division: this is reflected in Matthew's two ways presentation of alternative responses to revelation which are worked out in the rest of the gospel. Revelation is from God and remains his gift; but it is not an arbitrary gift. It is given, as Matthew shows, to those who respond with obedience. Jesus (as we shall see in our chapter 5) is a model of discernment.

2.2.2 3.1 - 4.25, John discerns the truth about Jesus, who receives revelation from God

3.1-12 John the Baptist

At 3.1 Matthew begins to follow Mark's account. This, along with the passing of years, and ἐν δὲ ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις, signalling eschatological significance, suggests the beginning of a new section here.²³ As a preparation for the first scene in Jesus' adult life, Matthew includes material about John the Baptist, and in relation to our motif of discernment, John is significant in several ways. John himself is able to recognise the times (ἔγγικεν γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν, 3.1) and their eschatological significance (3.10-12). He knows the correct response to the times: he calls for repentance. Out of a large crowd ('all Judea and all the region about the Jordan') he is able to distinguish one group from another (3.7):²⁴ he knows that the 'repentance' of the Pharisees and Sadducees is an outward act rather than a true repentance which results in a changed lifestyle (3.8). He recognises that the coming of the kingdom brings with it changed assumptions concerning inclusion and exclusion from its membership. Claims to revelation bring division, and previously recognised divisions are no longer valid (3.9,10). He understands himself as the forerunner to, and thus subordinate to, 'the one who is coming after me' (3.11). John

²¹E.g., presence theme; gathering of Jewish leaders; title 'King of the Jews' and the question of who is the rightful king; attempt of the ruling authorities to do away with Jesus; Gentile inclusion and mission; interpretation and fulfilment of scripture; persecution; saving from sin; see Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1*, 254; Hooker, *Beginnings*, 23-42.

²²The Abraham cycle begins and ends with episodes of revelation and is also preceded by a genealogy (Gen. 11-27); Moses (Ex. 3-4); cf. Luke's activity of the Spirit at the beginning of Jesus' life and that of the church (Luke 1-4; Acts 1-2).

²³Different Kingsbury, *Structure*, 28-30, and Bauer, *Structure*, 83f., who suggest that Matthew's prologue extends from 1.1 to 4.16.

²⁴He 'saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees'; historically an unlikely combination. Their lack of correct response here foreshadows their subsequent lack of discernment of the truth about Jesus; see further our chapter 7.

is thus one who comes in the scriptural tradition of prophets gifted in the practice of discernment.²⁵ It is not surprising, then, that he is able to recognise Jesus when he comes for baptism (3.14).

For Matthew, John the Baptist is part of a larger concern of preparation for the coming of Jesus. In an authorial note, this takes place according to scripture, as part of Matthew's concern to locate both John and Jesus in the scriptural tradition of prophetic anticipation and fulfilment. He draws attention to this by twice changing Mark's more imprecise ἐγένετο to a more definite παραγίνεται (3.1,13; Mark 1.4,9),²⁶ and the words from Isaiah also speak of preparation (ἐτοιμάσατε, 3.3).

3.13-17 Jesus receives revelation at his baptism

Matthew has built up a sense of anticipation and preparation from the beginning of his gospel and it is significant that the first scene concerning the adult Jesus, rather than 'the child', is one of revelation. In an important redactional addition (3.14-16a), Matthew records that John recognised Jesus when he came for baptism;²⁷ yet John was expecting to be baptised by Jesus (3.11). This suggests that discernment has to do with recognising the unexpected and that it may be both difficult and partial.²⁸ John is also unable to discern Jesus as *Son*, since this knowledge is a gift from God (3.17; 16.17). Matthew draws attention to John's immediate obedience to Jesus' word (τότε ἀφίησιν αὐτόν, 3.15). Although John is portrayed in traditional prophetic terms²⁹, he is not specifically described as a prophet; neither is there a record of a call narrative nor his receipt of a direct word from God. Matthew emphasises the importance of his role in other ways,³⁰ but the direct revelation from God here is reserved for Jesus, thus heightening his status.³¹ In terms of our theme, John is one who is able to discern the times, the motives of others, his own status and, significantly, is able to discern the truth about Jesus himself.

²⁵Matthew identifies John with Elijah: 11.14; 17.11-13; 2 Kings 1.8.

²⁶Only elsewhere at 2.1, perhaps thus stressing that the magi's arrival was not by chance.

²⁷See Meier 'John the Baptist', 383f., for details of other literature about John.

²⁸The same pattern can be seen in Peter's discernment of Jesus in 16.13-23, esp. vs. 16,22.

²⁹He preaches in the wilderness (a traditional location for revelation); is unconventional in dress and behaviour; speaks against the traditional location of power; calls for moral reform; brings an eschatological message.

³⁰John comes in fulfilment of scripture (3.3); he speaks the same words as Jesus (3.2,7,10; cf. 4.17; 12.34; 7.19); and especially 'it is fitting for us (ἡμῶν) to fulfil all righteousness', 3.15. See Anderson, 'Over Again', 237-42.

³¹A point not noted by Meier, 'John the Baptist', in his discussion of Matthew's subordination and parallelism between John and Jesus.

Although the language and imagery involved in Matthew's description of Jesus' baptism may be traditional,³² and this pericope functions in Matthew's gospel in a similar way to that of the prophetic revelatory call narratives, it is not recorded in the form of a traditional call *Gattung*. There may be several reasons for this. The traditional *Gattung*, contains features of objection to God's commission. For Matthew, Jesus is a model of righteousness, and it would therefore be inappropriate for him to object. His first words in the gospel speak of himself, and John, fulfilling 'all righteousness' (πᾶσαν δικαιοσύνην, 3.15), that is, 'moral conduct in accord with God's will'.³³ Although Jesus is described later as a prophet (14.2; 16.14; 26.68), and Matthew places him in the tradition of Moses,³⁴ Jesus is greater than Moses and the prophets and therefore does not need a call in the sense of commissioning (already at 1.21); the baptism confirms who Jesus is, and who the reader has known him to be from the beginning. As one greater than Moses and as the Son, Jesus himself is the one who calls others (4.18-22). Finally, the miraculous birth stories make a specific call redundant, and may be seen to take its place.

4.1-11 Jesus is tested as Son

Matthew has a considerably expanded account of Jesus' testing (using Q material, cf. Mark 1.12-13), and this forms part of a pattern of divine testing and faithful human response.³⁵ Following the baptism, this is part of what 'to fulfil all righteousness' entails. Jesus fasted alone in the wilderness, withdrawing from John and the crowds, making this episode his own, unique and unrepeatable experience.

The temptation narrative has many scriptural resonances: and the ones usually cited draw attention to the quotations from Deut. 6-8 and thus parallels between Israel's experience (exodus, followed by forty years of wandering, testing, hunger and temptation to idolatry in the desert) and Jesus' experience here (waters of baptism, followed by forty days of fasting, testing, hunger, temptation to idolatry), as well as resonances with the figure of Moses (note Matthew's addition 'and forty nights', 4.2; cf. Moses at Sinai, Deut. 9.9,11,18,25; and Elijah, 1 Kings 19.8). It is not entirely clear to which of these many echoes Matthew wanted to draw attention, and whether he had any specific parallels in mind. Nevertheless, it is possible that he was also

³²καὶ ἰδοὺ (twice) ἤνεόχθησαν οἱ οὐρανοί; πνεῦμα θεοῦ; φωνὴ ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν; 3.16,17. For discussion of imagery here, see Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 358-363.

³³So Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1*, 325-327; Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 178.

³⁴For Mosaic allusions, especially in the birth narrative, see Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1*, 282.

³⁵Described by Moberly, *Bible, Theology*, 184, as 'central to Matthew's Gospel (in a way that is not quite the case with the other three canonical gospels)'. So, for instance, Luke inserts the genealogy between the baptism and temptation, 3.21-4.13.

drawing on parallels with the figure of Abraham in an analogous way. He includes three references to Abraham in his opening chapter (1.1,2,17; M material), and also refers to him in connection with John (3.9, Q). The phrase 'beloved son' (*yehid*, ἀγαπητός) is used by God of Isaac and of Jesus (Gen. 22,2,12; Matt. 3.17); and this is, significantly, in relation to God's testing of Abraham (*nissâ*, πειράζω, Gen. 22.1; Matt. 4.1). We shall see later in chapter 3, how revelation, testing and obedience found in the Abraham stories are linked in a recognisable way, and this points to a similar connection here.

In Matthew we find the following sequence: first, revelation: God's voice at Jesus' baptism confirms him to be 'my beloved Son'. Second, testing: it is *as* the Son that Jesus is tested, εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ reflects a given status rather than a questioning; the testing concerns the misuse of power, the distinction between *testing* and *trusting* God, and false worship;³⁶ in each case Jesus' answers explore the nature of divine sonship. Third, vindication: God's presence with Jesus in the form of angels (ἰδοὺ ἄγγελοι, cf. 4.6).

The first major episode in the gospel in Jesus' adult life is thus one of revelation and testing, and this is part of a larger pattern: obedience ('to fulfil all righteousness', 3.15); revelation (baptism); testing/obedience (temptation); presence (angels).³⁷ So the pattern noted earlier in relation to Joseph, is repeated here in relation to Jesus, and is one which is also repeated at the centre and at the end of the gospel (Caesarea Philippi/transfiguration; Gethsemane/passion/resurrection). This suggests that, even for Jesus, revelation is continuing and demanding, as suggested by the threefold repeated testing here (4.3,6,9). There is for Jesus the temptation and the possibility for him 'to misconstrue his sonship and use God's power for his own advantage';³⁸ something which remains a possibility to the very end (cf. 27.43).

Summary

The material in 1.18 - 4.11 shows a 'clustering' of events concerning discernment of revelation, and this pattern is repeated later (11-17; 26-28). The word from God at

³⁶The significant addition of 'alone' (μόνῳ) to the quote from Deut. 6.13, suggests that the issue here is not only one of worship of God *or* Satan, but what exclusive commitment to God means.

³⁷Cf. 1 Kings 19.5-8, where Elijah is fed by an angel. Angels here (and 26.53f.) signify one of the ways in which God's presence and power is exercised on earth; see Hayward, 'Heaven and Earth', 69, on how the book of Tobit testifies to a belief that the angels are truly present with just and faithful Jews.

³⁸Moberly, *Bible, Theology*, 223. He also points out that, in terms of trust and obedience, the full relationship at the beginning of Jesus' ministry is not incompatible with its receiving new definition and depth in the course of his ministry, through various moments of testing.

the baptism demonstrates and legitimates Jesus' status and authority *as Son* before God and justifies his teaching and miraculous signs (5-9).³⁹ As we shall see in our discussion of Peter's discernment (chapter 6), the call narrative (4.18-22) is paradigmatic for discipleship. Matthew links the call narrative almost directly into the Sermon on the Mount: this is how their obedient response is to be exercised.

2.2.3 5.1 - 9.38, Jesus' revelatory words and deeds

In ancient biographical writing, a person's actions and words sum up the character of an individual more adequately than the comments of an observer.⁴⁰ Chapters 5-7 form Matthew's first block of discourse material, and while we shall not examine the contents of the discourse in detail, this is not intended to detract from the significance of this section. The following points may be made in relation to our theme:

Claims to new revelation had to be consistent with the previously given (for Matthew, written) revelation. The specific issue here is one of obeying God's will, given in Torah. Jesus' teaching does not dispense with Torah, but now gives the true, eschatological, meaning of Torah, such that obeying God's will is now equated with obeying Jesus' teaching (7.21,24).⁴¹ This is given authoritatively by the Son, legitimated by his receipt of the Spirit at baptism, and set εἰς τὸ ὄρος (5.1), a traditional place of revelation. With the grace of revelation, comes a greater demand: the antitheses are a re-interpretation, not an undermining, of the law, which heightens its demands. By means of Jesus' teaching, it is now possible to know the will of God in a more full and complete way than previously. Jesus himself embodies his own teaching, and his continuing presence with his disciples makes doing the Father's will possible. The eschatological nature of Jesus' teaching means that it is frequently paradoxical, radical and subversive (e.g., 5.44; 6.33; 7.5,21-23). Thus, the teaching in 7.15-20 concerns the exercise of discernment within the group,⁴² and is part of Matthew's desire to encourage moral obedience

³⁹So Kloppenborg, *Formation*, 261: the testing of the 'hero' in a Graeco-Roman context, legitimates and guarantees the reliability of his teachings.

⁴⁰Stanton, *Gospel*, 70.

⁴¹So Donaldson, *Mountain*, 114, describes the teaching as 'part of an event of eschatological fulfilment'. Howell, *Inclusive Story*, 132, seems to restrict the eschatological element of the Sermon to those sayings which warn about Gehenna or the final judgement; 5.29f.; 7.22.

⁴²7.15 suggests that this concern with false prophets refers to members of Matthew's church rather than to those 'outside' (cf. 13.24-30,37-43, where the wheat and weeds grow together). Part of the exercise of discernment is being able to distinguish between true and false prophets. Language and actions are of no value if they are not the result of moral obedience to God, since they will be *known* by their fruits (ἐπιγνώσεσθαι αὐτούς, 7.20; cf. 3.8; 12.33-37 and Jer. 23.9-15). See Schweizer, 'Observance'; Riches, *Mythologies*, 243, n.28.

which will have eschatological consequences. Such a claim for Jesus' revelatory teaching relativises all other claims, such that following Jesus' teaching rather than anyone or anything else becomes paramount (such as the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees or mammon; 5.17-20; 6.24). Such a claim creates a division between those who accept Jesus' teaching and those who do not (7.24,26). The episodes recorded in chapters 8 and 9 show how miracles also bring division. This is especially evident in the contrast between the reactions of the crowds and the Pharisees (9.32-34).

2.2.4 10.1 - 17.13, Response to Jesus' mission

From 11.2 to 16.28, Matthew sets out the response, both positive and negative, to the mission of Jesus to Israel (ch. 10) making this section a major turning area of the narrative.⁴³ This section contains two very significant episodes of revelation: Jesus' own declaration of his status and revelation as the Son (11.25-30), and Peter's discernment of Jesus' identity as Son (16.13-20). Here we shall give more attention to the significance of chapter 11 in Matthew's narrative.

11.1-30 Responses to Jesus

In chapter 11 Matthew starts his second block of narrative in his alternating sequence of discourse and narrative (signalled at 7.28; 11.1). The chapter begins with John's question to Jesus, and is followed by Jesus' question to the crowds about John. Both pericopae have to do with discernment: the first (11.1-6) refers to hearing and seeing Jesus' deeds; the second (11.7-15) has the floating phrase ὁ ἔχων ὦτα ἀκουέτω, indicating a cryptic saying that needs discernment to understand. Jesus' prayer at the end of the chapter is also an episode of discernment of revelation, using 'reveal' twice (ἀπεκάλυψας/ἀποκαλύφαι) and 'hidden' (ἐκρυφας) once. The two remaining pericopae, the children in the market place, and woes on the Galilean cities, are, as I shall show, also related to discernment (11.16-19; 20-24).

11.2-6

John's question to Jesus, σὺ εἶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος ἢ ἕτερον προσδοκῶμεν; immediately raises the question of Jesus' identity. John had earlier described Jesus as 'he who is coming after me' (ὁ δὲ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος, 3.11), but in the narrative he had not seen Jesus' deeds but only heard about them (ἀκούσας τὰ ἔργα, 11.2; cf.

⁴³Combrink, 'Structure', 89, following Kingsbury, finds the end of this section at 16.20.

4.12,17,23). John's disciples are to tell him what they *hear* and *see* (v.4), which parallels John's *hearing* and *looking*, (v.2,3). These are verbs which suggest discernment, and are taken up in Jesus' reply⁴⁴. This means that what Jesus does and says points to the significance of his identity. The way one sees and hears what Jesus does is important. At the end of the previous narrative block concerning Jesus' works (8.1-9.34), Matthew shows two ways of 'seeing' Jesus' miracles: the crowds marvel; the Pharisees ascribe his power and authority to the 'prince of demons' (9.32-34).

Jesus answers John's direct question with an indirect reply. He does not categorise himself in terms of conventional titles, but points to his identity in other ways. The conclusion is, καὶ μακάριός ἐστιν ὃς ἐὰν σκανδαλισθῇ ἐν ἐμοί. As well as its use in the Sermon on the Mount, μακάριός is used three times in Matthew, all in connection with revelation (11.6; 13.16; 16.17). The converse of blessing is 'stumbling' (σκανδαλίζω), or taking offence. Matthew can use this word in a more general sense or, as here, specifically in relation to Jesus (ἐν ἐμοί).⁴⁵ As blessing is eschatological blessing,⁴⁶ so stumbling is also eschatological stumbling. This is suggested by the use of θλίψις (13.21; 24.10), as well as the pronouncement of eschatological woes (11.21). Here in relation to John, in relation to the disciples (26.31), and in general terms in the parable of the sower (13.18-23), blessing and stumbling are juxtaposed. This suggests that it is possible to fall away, and points to the fragility of discernment. Meier⁴⁷ describes this pericope as the low point in Matthew's treatment of the Baptist, pointing to his 'uncertainty, if not disbelief', and a disappointment that Jesus was not the kind of Messiah he expected. Yet our motif suggests that, for John, discernment of Jesus as Messiah is exacting: it is also incomplete and costly.

11.7-15

Jesus' series of rhetorical questions are an invitation and challenge to discern who John the Baptist is. Since John is a witness to Jesus, by discerning the truth about

⁴⁴Referring to several passages in Isaiah, 26.19; 29.18; 35.5-6; 42.7,18; 61.1. They are arranged in a list of six items arranged in three pairs. A similar expectation is also found at Qumran (4Q521 2.8-12); noted by Dunn, 'Jesus: Teacher', 87, n.46.

⁴⁵Matthew uses σκανδαλίζειν 14 times (Mark 8, Luke 2); and σκάνδαλον 5 times (Mark 0, Luke 1); sometimes in a more general sense: 'if your eye/hand causes you to sin/stumble' (5.29,30; 13.41; 17.27; 18.6-9); or referring specifically to stumbling in relation to Jesus (ἐν ἐμοί, 11.6; 26.31; ἐν αὐτῷ, 13.57; ἐμοῦ, 16.23; or 'on account of the word' 13.21; or 'for my name's sake' 24.10).

⁴⁶There is a significant association of Jesus' beatitudes (esp. 5.3,4,5) and Isaiah 61 which was given a messianic and eschatological interpretation at Qumran (11QMelch) and in the NT (11.5/Lk.7.22; Lk. 4.18-19; Acts 10.38),

⁴⁷John the Baptist', 392f.

John, the crowds should be able to discern the truth about Jesus (cf. 21.23-27).⁴⁸ In 11.7-15 Jesus confirms various things about John: that he is 'more than a prophet' (v.9); that he has an important eschatological role (v.11); that he himself is the subject of prophecy (v.10); and that he is Elijah (v.14; Mal. 3.1; 4.5-6; cf. 17.12).

11.16-19

In 11.16-19 Matthew describes how people responded to Jesus and John by observing their lifestyles. In 11.20-24 he describes how they responded to Jesus' mighty works (11.2-6). 'This generation' (τὴν γενεὰν ταύτην) usually has negative overtones in Matthew.⁴⁹ In 16.1-4, this 'evil and adulterous generation', is epitomised by the Pharisees and Sadducees, since both seek for signs (16.1,4). Significantly, Jesus accuses them of being able to interpret (διακρίνειν) the appearance of the sky, but not the signs of the times, τὰ σημεῖα τῶν καιρῶν: God's last times, indicating that discernment has an eschatological connotation here. 'This generation' (11.16) is also unable to discern the truth correctly.

The parable of the children in the market place has usually been interpreted along the following lines: the children are disagreeable, hard-to-please and grumble because their playmates did not join in their games.⁵⁰ However, the direct comparison between 'this generation' and the children is not necessarily required.⁵¹ As Carson⁵² has demonstrated, ὁμοίᾳ ἐστὶν does not mean 'it is like', but 'it is like the case of' or 'as with', or perhaps, 'like the situation when'. The children are offering an invitation to join in their game, but the playmates refuse the invitation - either to dance or to mourn. The parable is therefore about a lack of understanding and response.⁵³

This theme of lack of understanding and response is continued in verses 18-19 (joined early in the Q tradition). The immediate referent for the 'they' of 'they say' (λέγουσιν) is 'this generation'; they again show by their responses to John and Jesus

⁴⁸See further, Wright, *Jesus*, 495-7.

⁴⁹An 'evil and adulterous generation' (12.39; 16.4) and with negative overtones (12.41; 17.17; 23.36); cf. Deut. 1.35; 32.5,20.

⁵⁰Jeremias, *Parables*, 161, describes them as 'domineering and disagreeable children who blame their companions for being spoilsports'. Dodd, *Parables*, 25, says they are 'petulant children who quarrel about their games'. In both cases the children are seen as passive spectators, because they are sitting (καθημένους).

⁵¹Against Davies and Allison, *Matthew II*, 262, who say it is 'crystal clear'.

⁵²OMOIOS', 277.

⁵³Etchells, *Reading*, 105, says of the children, 'They are, of course ... mimicking their elders. For those same adults they mimic are *also* immature, also rejecting of all the possibilities, joyful and stern, being offered to them.' Cf. the rich young man (νεανίσκος) who, by refusing to give up his possessions, demonstrates that he is too immature to become a 'child of the kingdom' (18.1-4; 13-15).

that they have not understood either correctly. Matthew says 'their' (λέγουσιν) assessment of John is incorrect; reinforced by the fact that Matthew himself has not mentioned John as demon-possessed elsewhere, and because the Pharisees have also wrongly accused Jesus of being possessed (9.34; cf. 12.24). 'Their' (λέγουσιν again) understanding of Jesus is also incorrect, although ironically declares the truth. Their assessment of Jesus as 'a glutton and a drunkard' (cf. 9.11) reflects biblical polemic⁵⁴, where a son, so described, can be brought by his parents before the elders at the city gate, who will then stone him to death.⁵⁵ For Matthew, in this context, their assessment of him as a 'rebellious son' contrasts with v.27, Jesus' own words about himself as the Son of the Father. Whichever way the message is presented they are, for Matthew, unable to make the correct assessment, and Israel's failure to respond correctly, either to John or to Jesus is emphasised.⁵⁶

11.20-24

Like ἀπὸ τότε ἦρξατο in 4.17 and 16.21, τότε ἦρξατο in 11.20 also marks a turning point in the gospel.⁵⁷ Jesus openly speaks against opposition, and John the Baptist's expectations of eschatological judgement are here pronounced by Jesus. Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum are condemned because of their lack of appropriate response to Jesus' works (δυνάμεις, ἔργα, 11.20,2), Both Jesus and John called for repentance (3.12; 4.17) 'because the Kingdom of Heaven is near'. The judgement on Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum (Jewish villages) will make the judgement on Tyre, Sidon and Sodom (traditionally pagan nations) look mild by comparison,⁵⁸ because they did not recognise Jesus' mighty works as signs of the Kingdom and respond appropriately in repentance.

These verses demonstrate the opposite of the blessing in 11.6. Jesus pronounces eschatological woes on the unrepentant cities who stumble at his mighty works.

Taking a bird's eye view of the First Gospel, 11.1-19 marks a turning point in the plot. ... Is Jesus the one who is to come, or should we expect another?

⁵⁴Cf. the assessment and charge that Jesus was a 'deceiver', 'imposter', 'magician' and 'false prophet', as detailed in Deut. 13, 18. See Stanton, 'Jesus of Nazareth'; Wright, *Jesus*, 440.

⁵⁵Deut. 21.20. Kee, 'Glutton', 390, suggests that Jesus, by using this reported phrase about himself, is prepared for his own execution; cf. 12.14.

⁵⁶Combrink, 'Structure', 82.

⁵⁷Kingsbury, *Structure*, and Bauer, *Structure*, view the use of this phrase at 4.17 and 16.21 as structurally significant. Its further use here suggests that the phrase may be part of a series of turning-points in the gospel.

⁵⁸The biblical understanding of response to a message of judgement is repentance (Jer. 18.1-12; Ezek. 33.10-16; Jonah 3); cf. 12.41.

The all-important question brings Mt. 1-10 to a close and introduces the rest of the gospel. The issue now becomes *response to Jesus*.⁵⁹

If the villages are taken to be representative of Israel as a whole, then the conclusion can only be that Israel has rejected both John and Jesus by failing to understand and respond correctly.

The disciples are not mentioned in chapter 11 (apart from the summary in v.1.), and this serves to emphasise that the response is to Jesus. It is Jesus who goes out to teach, preach and heal (9.35 and 11.1, framing the missionary discourse in chapter 10). Chapters 5-10 concern the good news to the poor and only Jesus has given this (11.5). The response by different people to Jesus is given in increasingly negative terms: John, while he may have doubts, is portrayed positively, since his role and that of Jesus are inseparable; the crowds are more neutral and receive teaching from Jesus about John, 'if they are willing to accept it' (11.14); 'this generation' is portrayed negatively because they have failed to understand either John or Jesus correctly; the cities' lack of repentance at Jesus' mighty works epitomises Israel's obduracy and leads to judgement.⁶⁰ Chapter 11, following Matthew's style of 'repetition with variation',⁶¹ is thus a summary of Matthew's gospel story so far, including Israel's rejection of Jesus.⁶² In 11.25-30 (examined in detail in chapter 5), Jesus, as Son, declares himself to have complete interdependence with his Father: therefore he is the only one who can now gather God's people.

Triadic Patterns in chapters 11 and 12

The theme of opposition and persecution in chapter 10 is 'carried out' in chapters 11-12.⁶³ Davies and Allison,⁶⁴ title chapters 11 and 12 as *Confrontation with 'this generation'*. They then go on to divide these chapters into three sections, each subdivided into three further units. The three sections are:

1. John, Jesus, and 'this generation' (11.2-30)
2. The ministry of mercy (12.1-21)
3. On discernment (12.22-50).

⁵⁹Davies and Allison, *Matthew II*, 294.

⁶⁰Jewish polemic frequently associated one's enemies with past generations designated as evil; cf. 24.37-9.

⁶¹Stanton, *Gospel*, 230.

⁶²So Green, 'Structure', 54, describes chapter 11 as a 'recapitulation of all that has gone before'. Luz, *Matthew I-7*, 42f., also views chapter 11 as marking a significant turning point in the gospel.

⁶³Gundry, *Matthew*, 203-4.

⁶⁴*Matthew I*, 68f.; *Matthew II*, 233f.; following Beare, *Matthew*, and Meier, *Vision*.

They also find a pattern in the sub-sections of chapter 12 to be:

1. unmasking the false (12.1-8 and 22-37)
2. unmasking the false (12.9-14 and 38-45)
3. revealing the true (12.15-21 and 46-50).

This double triadic structure is suggestive for our theme, and the whole of chapters 11 and 12 can legitimately be described as 'on discernment', as follows:

- a) 11.2-19 shows how 'this generation' failed to discern the truth about either John or Jesus;
 - b) 11.20-24 shows how the three Galilean cities failed to understand Jesus' works and repent;
 - c) 11.25-30 portrays Jesus as the one who truly knows the Father and is therefore both the means and the goal of true understanding.
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- a) 12.1-8 shows the lack of understanding by the Pharisees of who Jesus is, especially in relation to God's will;
 - b) 12.9-14 this lack of understanding culminates in their plot to kill Jesus;
 - c) 12.15-21 Jesus, the true discernor, is affirmed as God's humble servant; 'and in his name will the Gentiles hope'.
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- a) 12.22-37 shows the lack of understanding by the Pharisees of the source of Jesus' authority and identity;
 - b) 12.38-45 this lack of understanding is evidenced in their request for a sign;
 - c) 12.46-50 portrays Jesus as the one who discerns his Father's true family and invites others to join.⁶⁵

In chapter 11 the rejection of John and Jesus by Israel is thrown into sharp relief by Jesus' gracious, positive and welcoming words of invitation to all who will discern his message and come to him. A similar pattern is found in chapter 12, where Jesus' positive words of acceptance (12.46-50) contrast with the previous condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees, and 'this evil generation' (12.2,14,24,38,39; note esp. v. 7, 'if you had known what this means'; εἰ δὲ ἐγνώκετε τί ἐστίν). The disciples are set over against all these groups in 12.46-50. They are the ones who are with Jesus (not outside, v.47), and are included by Jesus in his circle (v.49) as against his natural

⁶⁵This triadic structure of chapters 11 and 12, and of the parables in chapter 13, ceases from 14.1 onwards, where Matthew more closely follows the order of Mark's material: Kingsbury, *Structure*, 20, n.85.

family. Both words of comfort offer an opportunity to join the new family of God,⁶⁶ and therefore, as we shall see, have implications for Matthew's community.⁶⁷ It seems legitimate to suggest, therefore, that discernment of the truth about Jesus is of particular importance to Matthew, as part of the way he demonstrates the division Jesus brings.

Parables in Chapter 13

The parables in chapter 13 continue this theme of separation and also demonstrate that discernment of Jesus brings division which has eschatological implications. The chapter offers an explanation for the failure of Israel to discern correctly who Jesus is, and we note the frequent use of verbs of hearing, seeing and understanding as metaphors for spiritual insight (cf. 11.2-6).⁶⁸ In chapter 13, Matthew is generally following Mark 4, but has also made some significant changes and included some other material. In terms of our theme, these emphases can be summarised as follows:

1. Matthew highlights the privileged position of the disciples as recipients of revelation. Matthew has changed Mark's general phrase, ἡρώτων αὐτὸν ... τὰς παραβολὰς (4.10), to a more specific question, διὰ τί ἐν παραβολαῖς λαλεῖς αὐτοῖς; 'Why do you speak to *them* in parables? (13.10).⁶⁹ He has divided the answer into two parts, thus giving more significance to the explanation. His redaction puts more emphasis on the reason why some have in abundance: διὰ τοῦτο, drawing attention to the division between the disciples and *them*; (RSV, *This is why I speak to them in parables*', 13.13). Matthew also changes Mark's ἵνα (so that) to ὅτι (because), thus making the parables a response to unbelief; they neither see, nor hear, nor understand (οὐδὲ συνιοῦσιν). This is Matthew's first use of the word συνίημι, which, as has been shown by Held,⁷⁰ is a significant term for him as an important characteristic of the disciples. Discernment is a gift of God's grace and, as the Isaiah text shows, the idea that God could harden people's hearts so that they could not understand is a concept already present in the scriptural tradition (see

⁶⁶So Gnilka, *Matthäusevangelium 1*, 470; cf. Barton, *Family Ties*, 178-191.

⁶⁷Kee, 'Glutton', 375, notes the 'dialectec' here between the two issues of Jesus as agent of renewal and the identity of those who are in the new community.

⁶⁸βλέπω: 13.13,14,16; ἀκούω: 13.13,14,16,17,18,19,20,22,23; συνίημι: 13.13,14,19,23,51; ὁράω: 13.14,17; καρδία: 13.15,19; οὖς: 13.15,16; ὀφθαλμός: 13.15,16; note also, ὁ ἔχων ᾧτα ἀκουέτω 13.9,43, suggesting insight is needed to understand.

⁶⁹It is unclear whether Mark's question refers to the meaning of parables, or to the purpose behind teaching in parables. Matthew opts for the latter, and Luke for the former ('his disciples asked him what this parable meant', 8.9).

⁷⁰*Tradition*, 106-112.

section 3.5).⁷¹ Matthew omits Mark 4.13, about the disciples' lack of understanding of parables, and includes 13.16-17 (from Q, Luke 10.23-24), which underlines the blessing and privilege of the disciples in seeing and hearing that which others longed for.⁷²

This contrast between the disciples and *them* continues to 13.35, at which point the audience changes and the contrast ceases.⁷³ These emphases are consistent with Matthew's more favourable presentation of the disciples,⁷⁴ culminating in 13.51 where they say they have understood *all this* (Matt. only), which is consistent with Matthew's emphasis on the disciples as the authoritative bearers of Jesus' teaching, as well as doers of God's will.

2. Although the disciples are in privileged receipt of revelation and do understand, they are also in need of further instruction: 'Blessed are ... your ears, for *they hear ... Hear then* the parable'; 'For to him who has will more be given' (13.16,18,12). This suggests that their understanding is vulnerable and needs constant attention: we note the emphasis on *understanding* the word of the kingdom which involves learning and training (13.19,52).⁷⁵ The appropriate response for those in positions of privileged receipt of revelation is one of moral activity (hearing, understanding and *bearing fruit*, 13.23; cf. 7.24-7; 21.41,43, redactional); as well as being wholehearted and single minded (13.44-46). In 13.36 there is a change in audience; Jesus turns away from the crowds, goes into the house and gives further explanations to the inner circle of disciples who do understand. 13.36 forms part of a series of Jesus' withdrawals to his circle of disciples; here in the second half of the parable discourse is the first of many sets of instructions to disciples.⁷⁶

This training is training for the kingdom, and thus they need further teaching *from Jesus* as the authoritative teacher of God's will. This is consistent with Matthew's concentration on the figure of Jesus throughout his gospel: it is he who speaks to the large crowds; he, like the sower, sows the good seed (13.37; note 13.1,3: ἐξελθὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς; ἐξῆλθεν ὁ σπείρων); and it is he who, as eschatological Son of Man, will act as judge on the final day (13.37-43, 49f.).

⁷¹Although included in all mss., many have viewed 13.14,15 as a post-Matthean interpolation; for discussion of this and the text itself, see Evans, *To See*; Lindars, *Apologetic*, 154-67.

⁷²Cf. 11.6: 'And blessed is he who takes no offence at me'.

⁷³13.3,34 are paralleled in Mark; 13.10,13,14,24,31,33 are redactional.

⁷⁴Compare especially 16.12 and 17.13 with Mark 8.21 and 9.13.

⁷⁵Cf. 15.15-17; 16.9,11,12; 17.10,13.

⁷⁶E.g., 15.12-20; 16.5-28; 17.9-13; 17.25-18.35; 19.23-20.16; 20.20-28; noted by Luz, *Theology*, 85.

3. In this chapter Matthew has an increased emphasis on apocalyptic separation, as a way of highlighting the division revelation and discernment bring. Matthew has strengthened and extended apocalyptic themes in his sources: he includes the parable of the weeds with its apocalyptic motifs (13.24-30, omitting Mark's parable of the seed, 4.26-29), the interpretation of the parable (13.36-43) and the parable of the net (13.47-50). These contain traditional apocalyptic motifs and vocabulary of division between the 'sons of the kingdom', the 'righteous' and the 'sons of the evil one', the 'evildoers'.⁷⁷ This is part of the cosmic battle with Satan; God's kingdom⁷⁸ although mysterious and hidden (esp. 13.33), will prevail. The assurance of eschatological blessing confirms the disciples in their position of privilege; but Israel's failure and the temporary mixture of good and bad serve as a warning as to which side the hearers belong. Those who have ears to hear the heavenly message, need to demonstrate their status and true discernment by means of good works.

The whole chapter thus both offers an explanation of why some discern, expressed in terms of hearing, seeing and understanding, and why some do not discern. It also sets out the eschatological consequences of that discernment, and clearly demonstrates that true reception of revelation cannot be separated from obedience. The inclusion of 12.46-50 and 13.53-58, concerning Jesus' new family, which frame the parables, make the divisions applicable to all readers. Those in Jesus' home synagogue who see for themselves his 'wisdom and mighty works' (ἡ σοφία αὐτῆ καὶ αἱ δυνάμεις, 13.54), still do not understand. They limit their concerns to Jesus' earthly family rather than considering his heavenly origins and 'take offence at him' (ἐσκανδαλίζοντο ἐν αὐτῷ, 13.57). They are thereby an example of the opposite of 11.6, 'Blessed is he who takes no offence at me'; they are therefore not blessed, and Jesus 'did not do many mighty works there' (13.58). This emphasis on the disciples, over against unrepentant Israel, as Jesus' true family serves Matthew's ecclesiological interests.⁷⁹

14.1 - 16.28 Discernment by Peter of the truth about Jesus

In Mark's gospel, Peter's confession is placed at the beginning of his central section concerned with Messiahship and discipleship and the mutual understanding of both (8.22 - 10.52). For Matthew the episode is also central, in a slightly different way,

⁷⁷Good seed, 13.24,27,30,37,38,48; sons of the kingdom/righteous, 13.38,43,49; enemy, 13.25,28,39; weeds, 13.25,26,27,29,30,38,40; sons of the evil one/evildoers, 13.38,41,48,49; harvest/close of the age, 13.30,39,49.

⁷⁸13.31,33; 13.19,24,38,41,44,45,47 (redactional).

⁷⁹Barton, *Family Ties*, 182.

for it is the point in the gospel where the reader's discernment of the truth about Jesus and that of the disciples, represented by Peter, meet.

From 14.1, Matthew follows Mark's sequence, and various redactional changes made by Matthew point to his concern with discernment, culminating in Peter's confession. The section begins with Herod's incorrect discernment of John (14.2). Matthew then omits Mark's and Luke's reference to the return of the disciples following their mission (Mk. 6.30; Lk. 9.10). Although Matthew records Jesus as sending out the twelve (10.5,16), he does not actually say that they went out or came back. This both gives more importance to Jesus himself, as well as delaying the actual mission to the future. They are, as yet, unable to teach others, since their understanding of and learning about Jesus is incomplete (10.1; contrast the inclusion of διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς in 28.20).

Following the feeding of the five thousand, Matthew's record of the stilling of the storm is more explicitly concerned with Jesus' identity than Mark's account. He omits references to the disciples' lack of understanding and records them worshipping Jesus as the Son of God (14.33; Mark 6.51b,52). Within this record, Matthew includes a further instance of Peter's recognition of who Jesus is. Peter calls out: κύριε, εἰ σὺ εἶ and κύριε, σῶσόν με.⁸⁰ 15.1-28 shows a series of contrasts between the Pharisees and scribes, the disciples and a Canaanite woman. The woman recognises who Jesus is: she calls him κύριε three times, addresses him as Son of David, kneels before him, and appeals for help. She also shows insight and faith (v.27,28). In a redactional addition, Jesus says he has been sent only to the 'lost sheep of the house of Israel' (15.24; cf. 10.6, redactional, and 9.36, where the addition of 'harassed and helpless' is also redactional). The earlier debate with the Pharisees and scribes (15.1-9) and explanation to the disciples, suggests why, for Matthew the 'sheep' are 'lost'. This is because those responsible for guiding them have failed, because they 'transgress the commandment of God', are hypocrites and blind guides (15.3,7,14). The disciples here still lack understanding (15.10,16), but are shown as coming to Jesus and asking for explanation (15.12,23,15), as well as needing Jesus to give that explanation (15.16,17).

Matthew more directly links the feeding of the four thousand with Jesus' healing of the crowds (15.29-39), giving the two incidents the same setting by omitting the record of deaf healing and Mark's introductory setting (Mk. 7.32-36; 8.1). In the next episode, the Pharisees ask for a sign and, if verses 16.2-3 are taken as part of

⁸⁰See further our chapter 6.

Matthew's text,⁸¹ then he has made the incident specifically concerned with their lack of discernment (διακρίνειν, v.3). The Pharisees and Sadducees are not genuinely seeking a sign, but come to test Jesus (πειράζοντες). The placing of this demand immediately following Jesus' miraculous feeding highlights their lack of discernment.⁸² This is confirmed by Matthew's redaction of the following episode in the boat. While the pericope is about Jesus' ability to meet the disciples' physical needs, as well as drawing attention to his skill as a teacher, the warning about the Pharisees and Sadducees stands out and frames the episode (v. 6, and 11b, not in Mark). It is being with Jesus (here in the boat), listening to him and being taught by him that leads to the disciples' understanding (16.9,11,12; different Mark 8.17,21). Matthew then omits Mark's two stage healing at Bethsaida (Mark 8.22-26) and moves straight on to the Caesarea Philippi episode.

These omissions and alterations show how Matthew has arranged and edited his material to reflect a division and a sorting out on the basis of discernment of the truth about Jesus. Characteristically the crowds follow Jesus and are ministered to by him (14.15-21; 15.32-39), while the Pharisees and Sadducees are in opposition. The disciples receive Jesus' teaching (their privileged position, 13.36; 15.15-20; 16.5-12), and as such are led by Jesus to an even deeper understanding, culminating in Peter's confession at 16.16, endorsed by all the disciples at 16.20.

We have seen how Matthew has organized his material to lead up to Peter's declaration as the central and most significant point so far concerning discernment of the truth about Jesus. It both reiterates and expands the disciples' previous discernment of Jesus as Son of God (14.33) as well as showing, in a narrative form, the separation that this discernment brings. Jesus' family, 'his own country', 'this generation', Herod, the scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees (foreshadowing the passion narrative), fail to discern. The crowds, as potential disciples, the disciples and the Canaanite woman (foreshadowing the Gentile mission) are those who discern the truth about Jesus.

17.1-13 The Transfiguration

In chapter 6, we shall analyse in more detail Peter's discernment of the truth about Jesus at Caesarea Philippi (16.13-20). Here our concern will be with the

⁸¹Retained in square brackets by Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 41; cf. 12.38-42; probably Q, and Luke 12.54-56; all of which suggests a fluid tradition.

⁸²Hooker, *Signs*, 18.

transfiguration narrative (17.1-13),⁸³ although this, as I shall show, has many resonances with the preceding episode, and reference will be made to both. The two episodes are immediately linked in time (μεθ' ἡμέρας ἑξ), and Jesus and Peter are prominent in both.

1. In relation to our theme, the transfiguration narrative reflects a larger pattern in terms of the dynamics of discernment. The scene is certainly one of revelation, indicated by: the setting on a 'high mountain', a traditional location of revelation;⁸⁴ Jesus' shining face⁸⁵ and white garments; Matthew's redactional addition of ἰδοὺ, three times (17.3,5); the 'bright cloud';⁸⁶ God's voice from the cloud;⁸⁷ the disciples' response of great fear;⁸⁸ and Jesus' description of the event as a 'vision' (τὸ ὄραμα. 17.9). We also note here that the revelation is given to a privileged few (Peter, James and John).

The revelation is only imperfectly understood, as indicated by Peter's response: he offers to 'make three booths'. Although Matthew has omitted Mark's 'For he did not know what to say, for they were exceedingly afraid' at this point (Mark 9.6), as if to confirm that this response is inadequate, while *he was still speaking*, the cloud of God's presence overshadows them, and God's words are spoken in opposition to those of Peter.⁸⁹

The event is immediately followed by instruction from Jesus, *as they were coming down the mountain*. The disciples then ask for further explanation about Elijah, which they then *understood* to be about John the Baptist, as opposed to the scribes who did not *recognise* him (οὐκ ἐπέγνωσαν; 17.9-13). This threefold sequence is part of a larger pattern of revelation/misunderstanding/instruction which is also found in 16.13-28.⁹⁰ This suggests that, while the reception of revelation itself may not be difficult (Peter, James and John were able to recognise Jesus in his transfigured state, along with Moses and Elijah), the implications and consequences of that revelation are difficult to understand and need interpretation; hence the

⁸³For further discussion see, for instance, Donaldson, *Mountain*, 146ff. His argument for an enthronement *Gattung* here places considerable weight on Matthew's redaction in 16.28 of Mark 9.1, which this change may not support.

⁸⁴εἰς ὄρος ὑψηλόν; cf. 4.8, 'a very high mountain'.

⁸⁵Cf. Moses' face, Ex. 34.29ff.

⁸⁶The cloud as a sign of God's presence: Ex. 13.21-22; 33.9-11; 40.34-38; Num. 9.15-23.

⁸⁷Ex. 24.16.

⁸⁸Cf. 9.8; 14.30; 27.54.

⁸⁹Peter's offer was inappropriate because it attempts to constrain and capture God's presence; God's freedom has to be retained and thus it is his presence which envelopes them; cf. Ex. 40.34-38; Luke 1.35.

⁹⁰16.13-21, revelation; 16.22-23, misunderstanding; 16.24-28, instruction.

instruction to *Listen to him* (ἀκούετε αὐτοῦ, 17.5; not included at 3.17). In the immediate context the teaching before and after this concerns the suffering of the Son of Man and the corollary that his followers must suffer too (16.24-28). This is difficult to accept, and requires further instruction from Jesus. This also suggests that the understanding or discernment of revelation is incomplete and something that needs to be worked out in on-going obedience.

2. The nature of the revelation at the transfiguration is one of a temporary moment of unveiling; a glimpse of Jesus' future, apocalyptic, glory, hidden in the present. This moment of intensity is brief; but we also find that one moment of revelation closely follows another. Here Matthew has added to Mark's account the record of the disciples falling on their faces in awe, Jesus coming to touch them and dispel their fear (17.6,7). This is a second revelatory encounter, and is similar in style and content to the episode of Peter walking on the water (14.28-31), again one revelatory encounter set in the context of another. This intensification is also shown in the narrative sequence whereby the revelation at Caesarea Philippi is immediately followed by revelation at the transfiguration.⁹¹ This clustering of revelatory events is a feature both of Matthew's gospel (here, and especially at the beginning and end), and is also found in the scriptural tradition.⁹² Its effect is to highlight the significance of revelation at critical moments in divine history.

3. We noted above how revelation is followed by instruction. Although the disciples' understanding remains incomplete, the narrative reflects some development. We note, in relation to Jesus' teaching, that he (the Christ, the Son of the living God) must suffer in Jerusalem; Peter rebukes Jesus, who then calls him Satan (16.21-23). The fact that the Christ must suffer is something very difficult to accept. The next time Jesus teaches about his death is in connection with the Son of Man being raised from the dead; the disciples now seem able to accept this, and then ask a question about Elijah (17.9-13).⁹³ Although after Jesus' next specific passion prediction, the disciples were 'greatly distressed', after the third prediction, there is no record of their reaction (17.23; 20.17-19). This suggests that understanding develops by being *with* Jesus and learning from him.

⁹¹Such specific chronological precision is not usual in the synoptic gospels; see Donaldson, *Mountain*, 142-43.

⁹²See, for instance, Exodus 3-4, 32-34, and further in our next chapter.

⁹³Possibly indicating that the Son/suffering servant being exalted in glory is easier to understand than the Son/Christ having to suffer.

4. The transfiguration concerns both the identity of Jesus as well as the identity of his followers. Revelation from God confirms and legitimates Jesus as God's Son; Matthew more obviously aligns the transfiguration with the baptism by repeating exactly the same words of God: οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός (17.5; 3.17, diff. Mark 1.11). As part of Matthew's 'greater than' Moses motif, these words serve to confirm that Jesus is neither Moses nor Elijah; there is no instruction to listen to them, and they appear to play no further part in the vision. In a similar way at 16.14-17, revelation confirms that Jesus is not John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. The sequence in 17.1-13 shows that, for Jesus, being Son, involves both glory and suffering ('So also the Son of man will suffer at their hands'; 17.12). This also forms part of a larger pattern found in the gospel of testing and vindication.⁹⁴

For the disciples, Jesus leads (ἀναφέρει, 17.1) his followers up the mountain; Jesus is transfigured *before them*; Moses and Elijah appear *to them*; they are also overshadowed by the cloud of God's presence;⁹⁵ the heavenly voice, as at the baptism, speaks in a public way, 'This is my beloved Son', thus confirming Peter's declaration (16.16). Jesus' face 'shone like the sun', and he had earlier said that the 'sons of the kingdom' or the 'righteous' would 'shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father'; and Jesus' white garments parallel the clothes of the resurrected saints (13.43; 22.11-14; Rev. 3.4f; 7.9,13f.; 1 Enoch 62.15f.). The disciples, thus, in some sense, participate in Jesus' glory; and, in a similar way, will participate in his suffering.

Christological revelation, announced at the baptism, developed in Jesus' declaration about the Father (11.25-30), reaches a 'peak'⁹⁶ here in his unique and unrepeatable experience. Ecclesiological revelation, beginning with the call to follow (4.18-22), developed in Peter's declaration about Jesus (16.16), reaches a 'peak' here also in their unique and unrepeatable experience of participation in Jesus' glory. Yet the superiority of Jesus remains: he does not fall down in fear, and they need his presence and touch to overcome their fear.⁹⁷

The transfiguration can thus be seen as a 'bridge' between two sections of the gospel. As we have just seen, it forms a peak in the revelatory experiences of both Jesus and

⁹⁴Baptism, temptation; Caesarea Philippi, transfiguration; Gethsemane, crucifixion, resurrection; see Barton, 'Transfiguration', 242f.

⁹⁵αὐτούς (17.5) could refer to Jesus, Moses and Elijah, but could also include the disciples.

⁹⁶So Luz, *Theology*, 103f.

⁹⁷Jesus himself is transfigured in glory, whereas in Ex. 33.22 God shields his glory from Moses.

the disciples. They seem to be caught up in the vision together, which is a foretaste of what is to come in terms of Jesus' glory. The subsequent teaching has no specific location and has moved to a general application ('any man', 'whoever', 16.24,25) and, as the references to suffering show, this is the path of obedience for Jesus to take. Jesus' experience in Gethsemane is 'almost a parody of the transfiguration',⁹⁸ and the account of Jesus' execution also has a 'remarkable twin of sorts'⁹⁹ in the transfiguration narrative.

2.2.5 17.14 - 26.46, Teaching and Confrontation

These chapters between the transfiguration and the passion contain Jesus' teaching to his disciples, interwoven with stories of confrontation between Jesus and his opponents. The *ekklesia*'s origin is set in the context of revelation (16.17-19). Chapter 18 concerns the ordering and life of Matthew's *ekklesia*, and its placing after significant moments of revelation suggests that discernment of the truth about Jesus as Son has implications for and is lived out within the community of believers. The authority given to Peter (16.19; to bind and loose) is also given to the *ekklesia* (18.18).¹⁰⁰ Jesus' continuing presence gives both sight and insight (two blind healings, 20.29-34). This healing story sets the context for chapter 21 which is more explicitly concerned with discernment of revelation. We note, briefly, the following points relevant to our motif.

Jesus confirms that the children (τοὺς παῖδας) who demonstrate one aspect of what it means to be 'humble' (ταπεινός, 18.4), are the ones to whom revelation has been given (νήπιος, 21.16, quoting Ps. 8.3, and specifically referred to in 11.25).¹⁰¹ They are opposed by those who should have known: the chief priests and the scribes 'were indignant' (21.15)¹⁰² when they *saw* 'wonderful things' (i.e., healing blind and lame, cf. 11.5). They then challenge Jesus' authority (ἐξουσία, twice in 21.23). As part of the answer to this question of authority, Jesus tells two parables. Luz¹⁰³ suggests that these parables are a 'classic example of speaking 'in parables' to those

⁹⁸Barton, 'Transfiguration', 242.

⁹⁹Davies and Allison, *Matthew II*, 706.

¹⁰⁰See further our chapter 6. Thompson, *Advice*, 266, views the material here as advice rather than regulations; and Riches, *Mythologies*, 185, 'a call to membership in a community of faith, schooled in Jesus' teaching, founded on Peter's confession, with its own group norms and discipline'.

¹⁰¹See Weren, 'Children', and our discussion in chapter 5. Note also the contrast between the child and the rich young man (18.4; 19.22).

¹⁰²Stanton, *Gospel*, 180ff, and Verseput, 'Role and Meaning', 533-7, note that in Matthew reference to Son of David consistently provokes hostility, and Stanton argues that this reflects claims and counter-claims about Jesus' identity in Matthew's community.

¹⁰³*Theology*, 118.

who 'look without seeing'...They fail to 'understand'.' Yet here Matthew specifically says that 'when they *heard* his parables, they *perceived* that he was speaking about them' (using ἔγνωσαν rather than συνίημι, 21.45, which Matthew more usually uses of disciples).¹⁰⁴ They gave the 'right' answers, the logical conclusions, to Jesus' questions within the parable context (21.31,41). The issue is in their lack of appropriate response, how they act upon their knowledge: i.e., they fail to repent and believe in response to John's message; and they, like the tenants, will kill the son (21.32,39,46; cf. 12.14, and Herod, 2.16-18). This points to levels or types of understanding, and the necessity for correct and active response, that is, 'producing the fruits of it' (i.e. doing God's will). The leaders are thus contrasted with the children and the blind and lame who discern the truth about Jesus and act appropriately.

The disciples are viewed as learners: they need both faith and instruction from Jesus (exclusively, 23.8f.), of whom they ask questions (18.1,21; 19.13,25; 21.21-2). The teaching confirms the disciples as 'insiders', the ones who know who Jesus is and what will happen to him (20.17-19,28; 26.2). Luz¹⁰⁵ notes that when Jesus speaks of the future passion and resurrection or future judgement of the Son of Man, he does so almost exclusively to the disciples (mostly after 16.21); others, especially therefore the Jewish leaders, remain 'in the dark'.

The division between insiders and outsiders is expressed in strongly apocalyptic terms, and Matthew combines both attacks on Jewish opponents and instruction for his own community.¹⁰⁶ For disciples, the coming judgement is both a comfort in time of need and suffering (19.28, cf. 10.32-3; 16.27-8), and a warning not to lapse but to live in accordance with Jesus' commandments.¹⁰⁷ They need to watch constantly, and beware of false prophets and messiahs (24.11,24).

Chapter 23 takes the literary form of a series of woes, concluding with Jesus' lament over Jerusalem (23.37-39). Here Matthew contrasts Jesus' desire to gather Jerusalem's children, with Jerusalem's children not wanting to be gathered (23.37).¹⁰⁸ This resonates with the scriptural theme of Israel's unresponsiveness to

¹⁰⁴See Held, *Tradition*, 106-112.

¹⁰⁵*Theology*, 114.

¹⁰⁶Freyne, 'Vilifying', 138.

¹⁰⁷This is a somewhat blunt moral tool for conformity: the coming judgement is the same for both failed disciples and Jewish opponents, i.e. exclusion from the Kingdom; 22.13; 24.51.

¹⁰⁸Note particularly the emphasis 'I wanted/you did not want'; ἠθέλησα, οὐκ ἠθέλησατε.

God, especially as described in Jeremiah 7.¹⁰⁹ Jerusalem has sealed its own fate by rejecting God's envoys in the past, and now the Son; in turn, it is rejected by Jesus, signalled by his physical departure from the temple and prediction of destruction (24.1f., esp. ταῦτα πάντα). If, as seems likely, Matthew's gospel was written after the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, there may be a hint here that Matthew viewed that event as the final outcome of the leaders' rejection of Jesus. Childs,¹¹⁰ while being critical of various theories of retrospective readings of OT texts, nevertheless, finds some 'genuine, retrospective components' reflected in Isaiah 6:

The radical formulation of the judgment of hardening - "houses without people ... the land utterly desolate" (v.11) - could well have been shaped in part by the events of 587, which were understood as the final outcome of Israel's hardening.

I suggest that Matthew here may be following a similar line: the fall of Jerusalem could well have shaped his redaction of this pericope, which he also understood as the final outcome of the leaders' hardening, resulting in God's judgement.¹¹¹

2.2.6 26.47 - 28.20, The Passion and Resurrection Narrative

We shall examine parts of the passion narrative in more detail later.¹¹² Here we note that in a similar way to the scenes in Matthew 1 and 2, 27.62 - 28.20 contains alternating scenes of discernment and lack of discernment. This reflects a pattern we have already observed, that one episode of revelation follows another, and that a lack of appropriate response to revelation, leads in the opposite direction.

- | | |
|----------|--|
| 27.62-66 | On the sabbath, the chief priests and Pharisees gather (συνήχθησαν) before Pilate and call him κύριε they <i>remember</i> Jesus' words incorrectly they call Jesus an imposter (πλάνως) and his whole life a deception (πλάνη) |
| 28.1-8 | After the sabbath, the two Marys <i>went to see</i> ἰδοὺ, earthquake, an <i>angel</i> descended <i>from heaven</i> |

¹⁰⁹Jer. 7.13-26; esp. 'yet they did not listen to me, or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck', phrases frequently used in relation to discernment.

¹¹⁰Isaiah, 53f.

¹¹¹For links between 23.38 and Jer. 12.7, see Knowles, *Jeremiah*, 185-8.

¹¹²In chapter 7, Failed Discernment; Jesus in Gethsemane in chapter 5; and Peter's denial in chapter 6.

- ἰδοὺ, you will *see* him
 ἰδοὺ, I have told you
 obedient response: they departed quickly, with *fear* and great joy
- 28.9-11a ἰδοὺ, Jesus met them: *worship, fear*
 obedient response: *while they were going*
- 28.11b-15 The chief priests and elders perpetrate a deception
 they are told the truth, but assemble to take counsel
 (συνχθέντες; συμβούλιόν)
 act with deception in bribing the soldiers to lie
 promise a further deception in relation to the governor
- 28.16-20 The disciples *see* Jesus, on a *mountain*, following their
 obedient response in going; *worship*
 ἰδοὺ I am with you.

28.16-20 The Great Commission

In 28.16-20 we come to Matthew's final scene which is, significantly, one of revelation. Some commentators view the form of the Great Commission as an enthronement hymn related to Daniel 7.13-14, while others find links with Deut. 6.4-5 (revelatory word, command, promise), or a royal decree (2 Chron. 36.23 and Gen. 45.9-11).¹¹³ Some find parallels with OT commissioning narratives, while others question whether a specific form can be found here, other than that of a general theophany.¹¹⁴ While some elements of 28.16-20 may reflect a traditional form, this lack of scholarly agreement argues against a more formal type.

If the form does not fit fully into a traditional *Gattung*, nevertheless, the revelatory context needs to be taken seriously. That it is such a scene, is signalled especially by εἰς τὸ ὄρος, a traditional location for revelation.¹¹⁵ *When they saw him*, records the moment of revelation in a very direct manner, and includes no details of what they saw in terms of the nature and details of Jesus' appearance, nor is it expressed in

¹¹³See discussion in Hubbard, *Matthean Redaction*.

¹¹⁴Meier, *Law and History*, 423, and *Matthew*, 367.

¹¹⁵E.g. Gen. 22.14; Ex. 3.1; 4.27; 18.5; in Matthew especially at 4.8; 17.1,9; also 5.1; 8.1; 15.29; 24.3.

traditional terms of a vision, ascent, dreams, clouds or angels. This has the effect of moving the focus to Jesus' words, confirmed by Jesus' use of ἰδοὺ (28.20).¹¹⁶

The revelation of Jesus is not of itself the climax of the scene: this may suggest that what is 'seen' is indescribable;¹¹⁷ that *what* is seen is not as important as the fact that revelation has taken place; and that it is the 'going' which enables the 'seeing'. This also suggests that the experience of the eleven is not something for which other disciples need to strive since the revelation of Jesus is not necessarily given in overwhelmingly convincing theophanies. The passage as a whole contains many Matthean redactional themes and phrases, and reflects Matthew's compositional habit whereby many themes of the discourses are repeated and elaborated with variations. It looks both backwards and forwards and has been seen both as a summary of or a key to the whole gospel. In terms of discernment, the passage draws together and enhances the following motifs in particular:

1. Revelation generates two kinds of response. We have seen how, in a similar way to the material in chapters 1 and 2, from 27.57 to 28.20 there are alternating scenes of discernment and non-discernment, and the last two scenes demonstrate the consequence of Jesus' death on two opposing groups: the chief priests and the Jews, on the one hand, and the disciples, on the other (28.11,15,16). The narrative thread of opposition and conflict ends in 28.15, and that of favourable response in 28.20.
2. Claims to revelation serve to legitimate not only the universal *authority* of Jesus, but also the significance of *Jesus* (πᾶσα ἐξουσία), and are therefore potentially subversive.¹¹⁸ The authority is derived from God (ἐδόθη μοι), and therefore justified in relation to other possible sources of authority. God's revelatory words at the transfiguration (ἀκούετε αὐτοῦ, 17.5), become Jesus' own words and teaching, now recorded as part of the gospel itself, πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην. Consistent with the focus on Jesus' authoritative word, the gospel ends with Jesus' own words, and not, as in Luke and John with an explanatory comment from the author.¹¹⁹ A claim to revelation therefore legitimates the significance of Jesus' words in relation to other authoritative words, such as those of the Torah. These authoritative words

¹¹⁶Compare 3.16 and 17.3 where ἰδοὺ is used earlier in the sequence.

¹¹⁷See criticism by Hill, 'Response', 47, of Kingsbury's, 'the disciples see Jesus Son of God as the resurrected one who remains the crucified one'.

¹¹⁸Only the words *Jesus* and *Son* are used in this passage rather than any other possible names or titles, thus reinforcing the identity of the earthly and risen Jesus.

¹¹⁹Cf. the concentration on Jesus' words in 17.7f.

command and justify mission to πάντα τὰ ἔθνη,¹²⁰ again reflecting the universal significance of Jesus and the inclusion of Gentiles in Matthew's *ekklesia*,¹²¹ with baptism and not circumcision as the initiation rite. Revelation from God also legitimates the eleven as the historical link with Jesus and justifies their authoritative teaching role.¹²² This, combined with Jesus' continuing presence,¹²³ facilitates the survival of the group after their leader's death. The record also justifies an alternative location both for revelation and God's presence; they are no longer focused at the traditional locations of Mount Zion, Jerusalem or the temple, or with Israel, but are now to be found in Jesus the Son and his continuing presence with his people.¹²⁴

3. The pericope highlights the theme of obedience. In relation to Jesus: the humble obedient Son on the mountain of temptation (4.1-11), and the vindicated, risen Son, on a mountain in Galilee, form a narrative inclusio. Here, Jesus gains what he refused to accept from the tempter earlier, not *all the kingdoms of the world*, but *all authority in heaven and on earth*. The scene also forms the culmination of the repeated theme of testing and vindication discussed above. Jesus' authority remains a derived authority from God (ἐδόθη), a gift of divine initiative in conjunction with obedient human response. In relation to the disciples' obedience: theirs is also a derived authority *from Jesus* (note the significant οὖν, 28.19; cf. 10.1). They too were obedient in going to Galilee, to the mountain, *to which Jesus had directed them*;¹²⁵ their obedience led to revelation, and revelation requires a response of obedience (πορευθέντες οὖν; 28.10,16,19).

4. The scene also draws attention to the difficulties involved in discernment. The issues involved in the juxtaposition here of 'worship' and 'doubt' (προσεκόνησαν, ἐδίστασαν, 28.17) have troubled commentators. We note that a similar combination is recorded at 14.31, where ὀλιγόπιστος, διστάζω and προσκυνέω also occur together in the context of revelation.¹²⁶ The syntax, οἱ δὲ with no contrasting οἱ μὲν, does not necessarily imply two groups. These points suggest that within the same group and at the same time, worship and hesitation (preferable to

¹²⁰Whether this is to be understood as nations, including or excluding Israel, is debated. It resonates with the visit of the Gentile magi in 2.1, and represents a widening of the mission charge to Israel in 10.5ff.

¹²¹See Goodman, *Mission and Conversion*.

¹²²Here as teaching, for the first time; they receive authority but are not instructed to teach in 10.1, because they need to teach about Jesus' death and resurrection.

¹²³Again emphasised by the lack of a record of his departure.

¹²⁴This would be especially significant after the destruction of the temple, AD 70.

¹²⁵Galilee is referred to in 28.7,10, although a mountain is not specified.

¹²⁶These are the only two places in the NT where διστάζω is used.

doubt) can coexist.¹²⁷ This further suggests that discernment is a struggle, not easy or straightforward, and may be fragile, as Matthew's mention of the eleven and not the Twelve, recalling Judas' betrayal, indicates. It is in this context that Jesus graciously 'comes' (καὶ προσελθὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς, 28.18; only here and 17.7 does Jesus 'approach' anyone), bridging the gap between human and divine.¹²⁸

5. Discernment also takes time: the disciples are directed back to Galilee, where they and Jesus came from, and the location of the revelatory teaching and deeds of Jesus. As the opposition's *story has been spread among the Jews to this day*, so their *making disciples* (μαθητεύσατε) in all the world continues.¹²⁹ The revelatory experience of the risen Jesus is not in the form of a 'dramatic' vision, nor does it so overwhelmingly convince in a way that dispenses all hesitation. This leaves room for increased 'faith' and further obedience, in an on-going process.

2.3 Conclusion

In this chapter we have shown how discernment of revelation can be traced as a significant motif running through Matthew's gospel. It is particularly evident in his special material in the birth and passion narratives, as well as in his redaction of traditions in chapters 11-17. The birth narrative sets the scene and foreshadows events which develop later in the narrative. The recognition of the motif in these areas does not necessitate a reading of Matthew contrary to other suggested structures for the gospel, but rather draws out a significant, but previously unrecognised theme.

Although this analysis has focused more on specific episodes in the gospel, we have also drawn attention to the importance of Matthew's discourses as an exploration of the outworking of discernment in terms of moral obedience, righteousness and suffering, as well as the significant eschatological implications involved. This has the effect of drawing the discourses into the overall proposed framework, rather than marginalising them.

From a literary point of view, individual episodes of discernment tend to cluster together in the gospel narrative. From a conceptual point of view, this suggests

¹²⁷Cf. 28.8: 'fear and great joy'; on this pericope, see also Moberly, *Bible, Theology*, 189-198.

¹²⁸It is not clear how Jesus' coming 'answers' their doubt, since the passage does not go on to say that they believed; *contra* Patte, *Matthew*, 399.

¹²⁹So too are the readers directed back to Galilee, where they came from at the beginning of the narrative, and the mission completes the story in the readers' context.

certain specific moments of intensity, both for Jesus and the disciples. These moments frequently concern Jesus' identity as Son, and this status is thus legitimated by revelation from God and vindicated through suffering. Although the importance of the divine disclosure of Jesus as Son, has frequently been recognised, the revelatory significance of these incidents has not, as far as I am aware, been examined elsewhere.

Matthew's gospel is set within the history of Israel as a people dependent on the grace and mercy of God. In our next chapter we shall examine selected episodes of discernment of revelation in the OT. This will enable us to see how God was understood as having revealed himself in the past, how such revelation was discerned, and what kind of beliefs and practices affected such discernment. We shall then be in a position to explore how far and in what ways Matthew utilised, enhanced and developed such traditions in his gospel.

Chapter 3

DISCERNMENT OF REVELATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

3.1 Introductory Observations

We have looked at some features of Matthew's portrayal of discernment of revelation as a significant motif in his gospel. For Matthew the Jewish scriptures are perhaps his most obvious point of reference and provide analogies which help our understanding of Matthew's account. Our investigation of discernment of revelation in the OT will necessarily be brief, not an undertaking in its own right, but in order to set the background and context from which Matthew's understanding was drawn. We will also need to examine how and in what ways he may have modified or developed that understanding.

We should be aware that the material we are examining is not necessarily designed to answer the questions we would perhaps most like to put to it, concerning the mechanics of hearing, seeing or 'experiencing' God. Language about God has to be the expression of the inexpressible, description of the indescribable. Describing an encounter with God strains the use of language, and one is forced to make use of 'metaphor, imagery and paradox'.¹ The OT narrative is the story of God's dealings and relationship with his people Israel. As Moberly² notes,

More generally the notion that a test of divine identity might ever be needed is quite alien to the writers of the Old Testament. They simply never raise as a significant possibility that one might need to establish that Israel's God, rather than some other deity, is speaking. Even when the issue of discernment is explicitly raised in the course of debates over true and false prophecy, the issue is never that of discerning YHWH as opposed to some other deity. ... Other gods may not always have their existence denied, but the possibility that they might speak to or within Israel or that they might be confused with YHWH is never entertained by any writer of the Old Testament.

¹Moberly, *Mountain*, 135; when the language of volcano or storm is used, as in Ex. 19, the writer's aim is mostly evocative of the awesomeness of the coming of Yahweh to his people, rather than descriptive.

²*OT of the OT*, 63

The OT shows an awareness of other peoples and other gods and a history-of-religions approach would consider Israel's understanding of discernment in relation to other ancient near-eastern views of the subject, as well as people's desire to know God.³ Yet the OT does not set out to answer questions concerning its understanding of revelation in relation to other such understandings, but to act as a record of a particular people's encounter with Yahweh. Childs⁴ notes,

From the perspective of the Bible, God's identity is primary and human response secondary. It is a truism of history-of-religions that man forms God in his own image. However, according to Israel's scriptures, this is blasphemy. God, not man, is the only creator.

The biblical tradition about knowledge of God reflects various tensions and it is important to hold these in some sort of balance, rather than to collapse them completely. The tension between God's transcendence and immanence is reflected by affirming that God is mysterious, wholly 'other', cannot be known, and beyond human reach; and yet can be known as intimately present. Thus, not being able to see God reflects his awesome transcendence, while being able to see God reflects his presence and immanence. The tension between God as universal and particular is reflected by affirming that God is God of all, is everywhere and omnipresent, the only true God; and yet is present in particular people, events, times and locations in more or in different ways than others.

In relation to our theme, God is sovereign and cannot be known at all, but chooses to reveal himself, disclosing something previously hidden and unknowable; revelation relies on his grace and mercy. At the same time, discernment is to do with the human response to revelation, and is conditional on a way of life which involves a responsiveness and receptivity to God, as well as obedience to his will. It is not a question of knowing God by name only, but a lifestyle of integrated beliefs and practices. The interaction and relationship between these two areas, the God-ward side and the human side, frequently also remain in a tension, and unresolved in detail. The affirmation of God's freedom is essential and his ways remain mysterious; revelation can be unpredictable and outside recognized and determined spheres.

³See Bockmuehl, *Revelation*, 8, who describes dreams, lots, portents, signs and symbols as 'recognisable traces' of ANE religious thought surviving in the OT.

⁴*Biblical Theology*, 357.

Our survey of OT literature in this chapter will be selective, isolating specific passages concerned with discernment from three different OT literary traditions, which are also significant background to Matthew's text. We shall look at Abraham and the patriarchs: here issues concerning the relation between discernment, testing and obedience are raised, some of which are reflected in Matthew's gospel, especially in relation to Jesus' baptism and temptation (3.13 - 4.11). Attention has frequently been drawn to Matthew's affinities with the Mosaic traditions and his portrayal of Jesus as a new Moses:⁵ we shall therefore examine Moses' paradigmatic Sinai experiences, as well as issues relating to true and false prophecy. Lastly, we shall consider Solomon and the wisdom traditions, which reflect a different mode of God's interaction with the world. Matthew also reflects an interest in wisdom and scribal traditions, and some have suggested that he portrays Jesus himself as Wisdom. In each tradition we shall suggest areas of relevance to our study of discernment in Matthew's gospel.

3.2 Abraham and the Patriarchs

Our examination of the patriarchs takes place in the context of on-going discussion about the religion of the patriarchs in relation to Mosaic Yahwism, compounded by debates concerning sources, as well as the Yahwistic editing of the patriarchal narratives. The portrayal of the newness of Moses' knowledge of Yahweh recorded in Exodus 3.4 does seem to mark a new beginning and separates the subsequent narrative from the previous patriarchal narratives.⁶ For our purposes here, we shall assume that Genesis 12-50 is about Israelite religion before Israel received the revelation of God as Yahweh. It is, however, acknowledged that the stories have been recorded from a Mosaic perspective, and have thus become part of the normative and authoritative account of Israel's story.⁷ The stories about Abraham in chs. 12-22 form the opening cycle, and have probably been retold and shaped by later editors. His role as the father of the Jewish nation, as well as Matthew's interest in him (Matt. 1.1,2; 3.9), make these chapters our main concern.

The record of descendants (Gen. 11.10-32) forms a link between the Noah/Babel stories and those of Abraham. Although the 'now' (RSV 12.1) is not found in the Hebrew, 12.1 marks a new section, where 'the Lord said to Abram ...' This is recorded as a matter of fact: there is no test of divine identity, that it is God speaking

⁵So recently, Allison, *New Moses*.

⁶For full discussion, see Moberly, *OT of the OT*.

⁷Note Abraham's observance of the law and the reference to 'Israel' (Gen. 26.5; 34.7).

rather than any other deity;⁸ nor does Abraham have any difficulty in hearing or knowing that it is God who is speaking to him. 'God said' occurs frequently in the patriarchal narratives,⁹ and on other occasions it is recorded that 'God appeared and said'.¹⁰ This 'appearance' can remain unspecified, or can be in the form of a man ('ish)¹¹ or an angel (*mal'āk*).¹² God also appears and speaks in dreams and visions.¹³

God commands Abraham, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you' (12.1). This entails a leaving behind and separation from that which gave him identity: homeland, people and family. God also gives Abraham a promise: 'I will make of you a great nation'. Abraham's response is described directly in terms of obedience: 'So Abram went, as the Lord had told him' (12.4a). It is following this first act of obedience that God 'appeared to Abram' again, and gives a second promise: 'To your descendants I will give this land' (12.7). There are two issues already raised in the text in regard to this promise. First, Abraham has no descendants: stated twice, to emphasize the point: 'Sarai was barren; she had no child' (11.30). Second, the land is already occupied: 'At that time the Canaanites were in the land' (12.6b). Nevertheless, Abraham's response to God is one of reverence and prayer: he built an altar, journeyed on, built another altar and 'called on the name of the Lord' (12.7b-8).

This paradigmatic story draws attention to several areas relevant to our motif. Revelation is given to an individual, but this also involves his family or people. This may reflect the situation of a semi-nomadic people where worship is based on the relationship between clan leader and clan god, and divine presence is linked not with definite places but with definite persons.¹⁴ Revelation is unmediated, having no prophet or priest; patriarchs do not speak or act on God's behalf, in a way that Moses does later. There is a lack of obvious preparation in order to discern revelation; little or no description of a searching for God, fasting, prayer or worship, as well as a lack of concern for holiness or links with special locations where one would go to receive revelation. There is no sense of 'holy place' or prescribed places of worship, the emphasis being more on the location of God's encounters with

⁸The need to choose between different gods, does not seem to be an issue: Abimelech also relates to God (Gen. 20.31).

⁹Gen. 12.1; 13.14; 17.9; 21.12; 22.1; 25.23.

¹⁰Gen. 12.7; 17.1; 26.2,23.

¹¹To Abraham: Gen. 18.1,2,9,10,22; to Jacob: Gen. 32.24,28.

¹²Gen. 16.7-12; 21.17; 22.11,15; 32.1f.

¹³15.1,12; 20.3; 28.10-17; 31.24. 46.2.

¹⁴So Kupp, *Matthew's Emmanuel*, 115.

individuals being subsequently marked, usually by building an altar, or setting up a pillar (12.7,8; 13.18; 28.18; although note 13.4).¹⁵ There is very limited, if any, description of details, such as appearance, what was seen, possible accompanying signs or the state of recipient.

The significant response to revelation here is that of obedience, and it is in this response of obedience that further revelation is given. Thus, 'Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go..." So Abram went, as the Lord had told him ... Then the Lord appeared to Abram, and said ...' (12.1,4,7). This pattern can be seen elsewhere: God instructs about covenant and circumcision; Abraham's obedience; the Lord appears to him again (17.10,23; 18.1); Hagar's obedience to the angel's message in returning to Abraham and Sarah, is followed by God enabling her to *see* the well, thus saving her life and giving renewed blessing for Ishmael (16.7-15; 21.8-21). This sequence further suggests that discernment takes place in stages, that it is on-going and that it takes time ('And Abram journeyed on', 12.9).

In this initial story about Abraham no difficulties are presented in discerning that it was God speaking; in believing the word and promise; and in obeying it. The issue of God's existence is not discussed, neither does there seem to be a problem here discerning God as God. This sets the context for the later stories about Abraham where difficulties arise in believing the content of God's message, his promise, and in discerning what God is doing. The first recorded words of Abraham to God are ones of questioning, both in relation to offspring and to the land. Abraham said to God, 'for I continue childless ... thou hast given me no offspring'; 'how am I to know that I shall possess it (the land)?' (15.2f.,8; cf. 16.1). Both Abraham and Sarah found it hard to believe God's promise to them and found it incredible (laughable; 17.17; 18.12). Even for the most faithful of God's servants, trust in God's promises does not come easily, and the story of Hagar forms a contrast with Abraham's difficulty. Hagar is a slave who has no choice in the action, is protected by God; and, although she is outside Abraham's family ('an Egyptian', 16.3; cf. 21.21), she is able to discern revelation and respond appropriately (21.17).¹⁶

These stories recognise that within a context of faith and piety, revelation and obedience, there can be questioning and difficulty in discerning God's purposes.

¹⁵The main exception to this is the narrative of Jacob's dream, partly told to explain how Bethel became a holy place (Gen. 28.12ff.).

¹⁶Revelatory language abounds: she acknowledges that she has *seen* God, and that God is a *God of seeing* (possibly in terms of 'knowing'); and also that God *opened her eyes* 21.19; the name Ishmael means *God hears* 16.11; God blesses his descendants, because he is Abraham's offspring (21.13; cf. 16.10; 17.20; 21.18; 25.12-18).

This questioning continues through the stories until the end of the Abraham cycle, where, once again, there is a paradigmatic story of Abraham's obedience (22.1-19). The story in chapter 12 is the first occasion when God speaks to Abraham, and that in chapter 22 is the last. The Abraham cycle thus, significantly, begins and ends with episodes of revelation.

12.1 and 22.2 contain the same phrase (*lek l'kā*), translated as 'Go'. In 12.1 this 'going' involves Abraham giving up his past, and in 22.2 the 'going' involves giving up his future. The significance of this for Abraham is emphasised in the three-fold description of Isaac as, 'your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love' (*yehid*, ἄγαπητός; 22.2,12). In 22.1 the writer unusually provides authorial comment to the story: 'After these things God tested (*nissā*) Abraham'. The particular test here is how much Abraham 'fears' (*yārē*) God ('for now I know that you fear God', 22.12), where fear is understood in terms, not of awe, but of moral obedience.¹⁷ This specific combination of 'testing' and 'fearing' is also found in Exodus 16.4; 20.20, and Deut. 8.2. As Moberly¹⁸ has pointed out, Exodus 20.20 is critical, because it outlines the purpose of the giving of the Ten Commandments. It suggests that although Yahweh gives the Torah to *test* Israel, the object and desired end result of this *testing* is to lead to fuller obedience.¹⁹ We may also add that this fuller obedience itself, as we have just seen, leads to further revelation. So after this testing, 'the angel of the Lord called to Abraham *a second time* from heaven' (22.15).

As Moberly notes: 'There is an emphasis in the story upon 'seeing' (*rā'ā*, 28.8,13,14; usually rendered 'provide' for reasons of sense in context), which is related as a general principle to one place where God supremely sees (22.14a) and is seen (22.14b).'²⁰ This link between 'seeing' and 'providing' (*yhwh yir'eh*) is also made in 22.13, with emphatic revelatory language: 'Abraham *lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold* behind him was a ram'. We should not imagine that God suddenly 'materialised' a ram, but that it was there all the time, and that Abraham had not seen it. Thus his obedience to God's command enabled Abraham physically to see the ram; his obedience also enabled him to *see* God, although no physical seeing of God is reported. This suggests that 'seeing' here is being used in the sense of 'understanding' or 'comprehending the encounter'. Similarly, Hagar's response, 'Have I really *seen* God?' comes after no actual seeing of God is recorded (16.13).

¹⁷See Deut. 5.29, 'keeping the commandments'; Job 28.28, 'departing from evil'. For extended discussion of this whole passage see Moberly, *Genesis 12-50*, 39-56; *Bible, Theology*, ch. 3.

¹⁸*Bible, Theology*, 81-84.

¹⁹While it is recorded that God can *test* (*nissā*, πειράζω) Israel, it is inappropriate for Israel to *test* God (Ex. 16.4; 17.1-7).

²⁰*Genesis 12-50*, 47.

This paradigmatic story of Abraham's obedience is followed by the strong reiteration of God's promises to Abraham and his descendants.²¹

3.2.1 The Abraham narrative and Matthew's Gospel

In relation to our theme of discernment, we find both similarities and differences between the patriarchal narratives and Matthew's gospel.

1. Both works focus on individuals as recipients of God's revelation. The accounts in Genesis focus on a series of individuals, with Abraham being the first and most significant. The Abraham cycle of stories in Gen. 12-22 is preceded by a genealogy of descent from Shem, Noah's son. Nothing is recorded of Abraham's early life and the cycle begins and ends with paradigmatic stories of his discernment of revelation and obedient response. The subsequent narratives concerning Jacob also describe his formative moments of revelation from God (28.10-17; 32.22-32; cf. Isaac, 26.2-5). Abraham was the recipient of God's initial covenant blessing, and the 'God of your fathers' or the 'God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob' became significant rhetorical phrases, signalling God's relationship with his people.

Little reference is made to Abraham and the patriarchs in the prophetic literature (but see Hosea 12.2). God showed his love in fulfilling the promise of the land to future generations (Deut 6.10), and the returning exiles claimed the land by appealing to God's promise to Abraham (Ezek. 33.24; cf. Is. 41.8). In the Hellenistic period there was an 'explosion of interest in Abraham'²² along with other patriarchs. Abraham became the 'Father' of the chosen people (Ps Sol 9.17); he was the one whom God loved and to whom he revealed his future purpose with Israel (4 Ezra 3.13ff.); he kept all the law before it was written (Sirach 44.19-21). Abraham thus became an authority figure in the developing tradition: he was the first patriarch; he was the recipient of God's first covenant; he was revered because of his 'faith'; and, not least, he was someone who received foundational revelation from God.

Whereas Abraham is a figure from the distant past, Matthew is writing about a person from the recent past, and is therefore closer to the traditions about him. In a similar way to the Genesis account of Abraham, Matthew also begins his record with a genealogy (1.2-17). The opening scene of Jesus' (adult) life is one of revelation

²¹The inclusion of Rebekah's name in the genealogy, 22.20-24, signals the story to come.

²²Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 128.

where God speaks to him, and the closing scene is also one of revelation where the risen Jesus speaks to his disciples (3.17; 28.18-20). Matthew is concerned to show that Jesus is a true Israelite and has a place in the continuing tradition of God's dealings with his people. At the same time he shows how Jesus, as the Son of God, is the eschatological fulfilment of Israel's history, and brings in a new age.

2. We noted that revelation is described in a variety of direct terms, such as, 'God spoke' or 'God appeared'. The biblical record does not suggest that Abraham had difficulty in discerning God as such, but that issues were encountered in believing the content of the message. Discernment is thus both particular and takes place at specific times and places; it is also something on-going, it takes time and it may be hard. Episodes concerning Abraham's paradigmatic example of discernment frame other stories concerning his continuing difficulties. As the cycle of stories shows, the primary response to revelation is that of obedience. Although God's promise and purpose are grounded solely in God's will and grace, they cannot be taken for granted. The *Akedah* demonstrated God's 'testing' of Abraham, to lead him to further obedience. As we have seen, the critical moment in the story involves Abraham's obedience, immediately followed by further revelation (22.11).

As far as Jesus is concerned, Matthew also presents him having no difficulty in discerning God. Twice he hears a *voice from heaven* and on each occasion the message is the same (οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα; 3.17; 17.5). For Matthew, these words of revelation serve to confirm the legitimacy of Jesus' sonship. Jesus serves as a paradigmatic model of discernment, testing and obedience, and Matthew takes up and develops this theme in several ways which resonate with the Abraham traditions. The Abraham cycle begins with revelation, and ends with testing and vindication; Matthew heightens this theme, since throughout the whole of the gospel there is a recurring pattern of revelation, testing and vindication.²³ In the gospel there is no equivalent to the sometimes morally dubious stories concerning Abraham (Gen. 13-21). The pattern of revelation, obedience, followed by further revelation, found in the Abraham stories, is found on a larger scale in Matthew's gospel, although both works suggest that discernment is demanding. While for Abraham, the testing is 'complete' at the point of lifting the knife (Gen. 22.10), for Jesus it is not 'complete' until he 'yielded up his spirit' (27.50). There is no 'rescue' here for Jesus as there was for Abraham, when 'the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven' (Gen. 22.11). Jesus' testing is the more

²³Baptism, temptation; Caesarea Philippi, transfiguration; Gethsemane, passion, resurrection; see Barton, 'Transfiguration', 241-3.

acute, since he knew he could have called on God his Father, who would have *at once sent more than twelve legions of angels*, but he chose not to exercise this choice (26.53).²⁴ These points reflect Matthew's concern to show Jesus as 'greater than' his predecessors: the temple, Jonah, Solomon are specified (12.6,41,42), and Moses and wisdom implied; in terms of 'testing', Jesus is also 'greater than' Abraham.²⁵

3. The consequences of discernment in relation to community formation are also of relevance here. The genealogy (Gen. 11.10-32) sets Abraham in the context of God's dealings, not only with Israel, but also with the world and its people, and God's blessing to nations is to come through Abraham. The time of the patriarchs has been described as one of 'ecumenical bonhomie'.²⁶ Israel did not yet exist as a people, although individuals especially Abraham and Jacob, exemplified the corporate life of Israel before God. The formation of Israel as a people is foreshadowed in the promise given to Jacob in the context of revelation (32.28).²⁷ The patriarchs do not act as Yahweh's agents and there is no formal sense of either mediation between God, the leader and the people, or that people need a mediator between themselves and God. There are no related commandments, and there is a distinct lack of moral emphasis,²⁸ moral choice, the idea of sin and holiness and consequent judgement. There is no polemic or threat directed against others, and no community as such in this loose association of clans.

God's original 'covenant' with Abraham is set out in terms of assurance and promise of blessing. The covenant with Abraham was not a prominent feature of the pre-exilic prophets, but gained more importance during and after the exile. Clements²⁹ notes: 'we find in Judaism a very great theological importance attaching to this claim to be a descendent of Abraham, and thereby to share in the privileges of the divine election'.³⁰ In parallel with this understanding of divine election and his authority, noted above, Abraham also had another role: he was said to be a Gentile by birth (*b.Hag.* 3a) and the first proselyte;³¹ through him blessing would come to all

²⁴See further, Moberly, *Bible, Theology*, ch. 6.

²⁵Cf. John 8.31-59, esp. v.53: 'Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died?'

²⁶Moberly, *OT of the OT*, 98.

²⁷Simon, *Story*, 17, suggests that this 'wrestling' with God here foreshadows Israel's future turbulent relationship with God.

²⁸See especially the stories concerning Jacob and Laban, and their mutual deception. There is a greater moral emphasis in the stories of Abraham (17.1; 18.19; 22.12; 26.5), probably reflecting later editing.

²⁹*Abraham*, 80f.

³⁰Cf. Is. 51.1-2; Jub. 12.24, 13.3; 4 Ezra 3.13-15.

³¹Josh. 24.2; Philo, *Mut.*16; see Ford, 'Thou Art "Abraham"', 299f.; Abraham and Sarah were regarded as the father and mother of proselytes.

nations, including Gentiles;³² this blessing for all was confirmed by God, by revelation and by name change, from Abram to Abraham.³³

The social situation of Abraham as depicted in Genesis was very different to what we know of Matthew's social situation as depicted in his gospel. In Matthew we find strong elements of polemic against current Jewish leaders, and an emphasis on the urgent choice to be made. Matthew picks up and develops several themes from the Abraham stories. By including Abraham's name twice in the opening sentences of his gospel, Matthew signals that Jesus is part of the continuing tradition of God relating to his people. Abraham's name in 1.1 foreshadows the fulfilment or outworking of the promise to Abraham that God's blessing would be for all nations (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, 28.19), and his use of Abraham motifs is one of the ways in which he defends inclusion of Gentiles.³⁴ While Matthew portrays certain similarities between Abraham and Jesus in relation to revelation, discernment and obedience, Matthew has a much stronger focus on discipleship and community than the Abraham material in Genesis. Matthew's particular moments of revelation for Jesus not only carry christological import, but are significant for ecclesiology also. The heavenly voice at Jesus' baptism and transfiguration is directed at the disciples too, and in their teaching they are to pass on what Jesus has taught them, in the assurance of his continuing presence (28.20).³⁵

In the scriptural tradition, Abraham forms a bridge between the patriarchal age and traditions and the new beginning of Israel's relationship with God through Moses, which, as we shall see, represents a slightly different model for discernment. In a similar way, for Matthew, Jesus, as Son of God, functions as a bridge, inaugurating another stage in God's relationship with his people, now no longer able to find their identity in a shared racial heritage. Matthew claims that Jesus brings God's decisive and eschatological revelation and that his followers are also heirs to the promises made to Abraham.

3.3 Moses and the Prophets

The three encounters between Moses and God at Sinai both form a new beginning in the relationship between God and Israel, as well as being paradigmatic for the future

³²From Gen. 1.1, God is God of the universe; Gen. 12.3; 17.5; 18.18. 1 Macc. 12.19-21.

³³Gen. 17.5: '*Abrāhām* meaning *father of a multitude*.

³⁴See Stanton, *Gospel*, 379. See further our discussion of 3.9 and 16.16f in chapter 6.

³⁵See further, Barton, 'Transfiguration', 244f.

relationship. The patriarchs are seen to have lived in a different period and are not specifically viewed as God's agents. This is not to deny that they had encounters with God and that those encounters were portrayed as real. Yet, as we shall see, it is Moses, his relationship with God and role as mediator, which become the normative pattern.

The first four chapters of Exodus describe the relationship between God and his people, and the role of Moses. The call of Moses in 3.1-12 takes the literary form of a call narrative. Habel³⁶ in his analysis of this *Gattung*, has suggested links between the call of Gideon (Jud. 6.11-17) and the call of Moses, and has identified six characteristic features:

1. *Divine Confrontation* (3.1-3): Although, as far as Moses is concerned, the encounter is unexpected and something for which he has made no preparation, the setting of the story is important. According to the narrative, Moses was going about his business of shepherding, and the reader may see the significance here: of God and his appointed persons shepherding his people; the contrast with the rude shepherds (2.17,19); that Moses does not appear to be seeking honour or status; highlighting that the call comes entirely from God. The location of 'wilderness' and 'Horeb, the mountain of God' are also known to the reader as places of future revelation, and serve here as preparation for a revelatory encounter with God.³⁷ The wider setting is in the context of God's previous protection and care for Moses since his birth (2.1-22; cf. Jer. 1.5), and his knowledge of the condition of Israel in Egypt (2.23-25). Although the narrator says that 'the angel of the Lord *appeared*'³⁸ to him' in the flame of the bush, Moses did not recognise this to be an angel: 'he *looked*, and *lo (hinneh)* , the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed'. Moses then turned aside to *see*. It is only at this point when God *saw* that Moses turned aside to *see*, that God called to him.

2. *Introductory Word* (3.4-9): When God called, "Moses, Moses", the response is , "Here am I".³⁹ Although this is a personal encounter and indicates a God who can be known, it also reflects an understanding of God as holy and transcendent. Moses

³⁶'Form'.

³⁷Cf. Gen. 22.2 where God directs Abraham to a mountain in the land of Moriah, known in the future as a place of revelation.

³⁸Magonet, 'Names', 82f., notes the use of the verb *ra'ah* (to see) in the *qal* (appeared) and *niphal* (looked) forms to give the reader two different perspectives on the same scene.

³⁹Cf. Gen. 22.11.

may *come near*,⁴⁰ but not too close; he is to take off his shoes because he is on holy ground (cf. Josh. 5.15); he hides his face because he is afraid to look at God.⁴¹ The sequence also suggests a difficulty in discernment of God, as well as levels of discernment and response. It appears that Moses does not yet know God as YHWH and that the God who has called him also required him to keep a distance.

God's words to Moses confirm that he is the 'God of your father' (singular),⁴² as well as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This sets Moses in the tradition of the people,⁴³ as well as drawing attention to God's past and present involvement in Israel's history, and promise for the future entry to the land.

3. *Commission* (3.10): Moses is commissioned by God to act as his agent. God says, '... I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians ... Come, I will send *you* to Pharaoh that *you* may bring forth *my* people ... out of Egypt' (3.8,10; cf. v.12).

4. *Objection* (3.11): If Moses' first words of response to God were, "Here am I", his second are ones of questioning: "Who am I that I should go ..." (3.4,11). While he has little difficulty in discerning God as God, he has trouble responding appropriately by obeying God's commands.

5. *Reassurance* (3.12a): God gives assurance of his presence: 'But I will be with you' (cf. Jud. 6.16).

6. *Sign* (3.12b): The sign is here described as taking place in the future. This will be a public and not a private demonstration of Moses' claims. God's signs are confirmed later, both to show Egypt how powerful God is, and also to show God's greatness to the coming generations (10.1,2). The sign also confirms that God's word is true; it is *when* you have brought, not *if* you bring.

⁴⁰*Come near* is used frequently in relation to priestly duties; by implication Moses here is the priest in a holy place. The language of holiness is closely connected with revelation of God as YHWH to Moses and Israel; there is no significant use of holiness language in Gen. 12-50.

⁴¹Although God is holy, Moses does not talk here about being sinful in God's presence, as appears in later prophetic call stories. The concept of sin in relation to the giving of the law and the people's disobedience, is explored in Ex. 32-34.

⁴²2.1; later named as Amram, 6.20.

⁴³Something of which Moses may not be fully aware: he has been rejected both by his fellow Hebrews and Pharaoh (2.11-15,19).

The call story serves several functions in the narrative. As Magonet⁴⁴ suggests:

(I)t enables the reader to know more than Moses does and observe the process whereby Moses comes to understand. But it also dramatizes the problem of the distance between our own human limited perception of a revelatory event and the divine reality that it enshrines.

The opening call of Moses which describes his revelation direct from God also legitimates him as a mediator of God's message. It also means that the subsequent words of God as well as Moses' objections are also set in a revelatory context. Moses' difficulty seems to be not in actually hearing what God has to say, but in believing what God promised would actually happen, and believing that he could do what God had told him to do.⁴⁵

Moses' objections are frequently understood as portraying Moses as being feeble and evasive, or that he has a genuine but immature faith.⁴⁶ Yet when viewed from within the context of the narrative in Exodus so far, his 'objections' may seem more reasonable. The descendants of Jacob/Israel are now 'the people of Israel' (contrast Pharaoh's people, 1.9); God was 'feared' and gave his blessing (1.17-20); they cried out to God for help; 'And God *heard* their groaning, and *remembered* his covenant ... *saw* the people, and *knew* their condition' (2.24f.). The people do not know Moses and may consider him to be foreign (cf. 2.19). From their perspective, it would be quite proper, and even possibly required, to test the legitimacy of someone who claimed to have been sent to them from God. Thus, Moses' first two 'objections' may in fact reflect Moses' ability to predict what the people will ask of him. He has received a personal, revelatory call from God, the truth of which the people legitimately test.

If the people ask, 'What is his name?' (or perhaps, 'What does the name mean?'), given the close connection between person and character in the OT), Moses is to reply, 'I am who I am' (*'ehyeh 'ăšer 'ehyeh*), bringing a new dimension to the way God has been known in the past (3.14,15). This *idem per idem* formula seems to have an intentional ambiguity about it: *I am that I am* or *I will be what I will be*.

⁴⁴'Names', 83; Magonet links this dramatic distance with the use of the different names, YHWH and Elohim.

⁴⁵Cf. the disciples' lack of understanding of Jesus' passion predictions, and Luke 1.34, 'How can this be?'

⁴⁶Childs, *Exodus*, 73: the questions fluctuate between 'genuine modesty, fear of the unknown, reproach of the people and excuse making'. Propp, *Exodus*, 211, 'hesitancy and stubbornness'. Houtman, *Exodus*, 324: Moses 'pretends not to be the right person for the mission'.

The revelation, on the one hand, seems complete, yet on the other hand, is also incomplete: God remains mysterious.⁴⁷

Moses' second objection also seems quite proper: the people will not *believe* or *listen*. How can he demonstrate the truth of his claim that God appeared to him, an essentially unverifiable claim? They will say, 'The Lord did not appear to you' (4.1). God answers this, not by revealing his name or confirming his promise, but by signs (rod/serpent; clean/leprous hand; water/blood; 4.2-9). This is God-given visible evidence of his claim, although it is quite possible for Israel not to believe God-given signs (Num. 14.11,22). The third objection is of a more personal nature: Moses' lack of eloquence⁴⁸ is answered by God's promise that 'I will be with your mouth'. Moses final request for God to send someone else, is met by God bringing his brother, Aaron, to meet him (4.10-17; 27-31).

We note that Moses' short objections are in fact taken seriously by God in the form of lengthy replies. Each question of Moses is answered by further words of revelation direct from God. This gives legitimacy to the questioning; suggests that discernment is hard; and that one piece of revelation closely follows another. From Moses' point of view, his questioning suggests both that discernment involves believing and doing, may be difficult and needs to be worked out in on-going acts of obedience. Thus, although the revelation in terms of the words spoken by God is clear and not hard to understand at one level, it is also demanding. Discernment of its implications and outworking is hard, and Moses needs reassurance from God. From the people's point of view, they exercise their discernment in testing the legitimacy of one who claims to speak on God's behalf.

The narrative describes how Moses and Aaron are obedient and do what God has instructed, speaking the words and doing the signs, and 'the people believed' (4.29f.; cf. 3.16). Moses' role as mediator and agent of God is confirmed: the people worshipped (God) when they heard that he had 'visited the people'; there is no record that God had directly spoken to the people, only that he had revealed himself to Moses and that Moses had mediated God's message to them. Perhaps Moses has good reason to be hesitant, since things get worse, not better (5.1 - 6.1) and the people will not listen (6.9). Moses has been obedient in doing what God told him,

⁴⁷Johnstone, *Exodus*, 105, notes that 3.14 may express not totality but vagueness; revelation and concealment; and that it safeguards the transcendence, otherness and freedom of God (cf. Gen. 32.29; Jud. 13.17). He also draws attention to Jewish tradition: *b.Pes.* 50a on Ex. 3.15, which reads not 'this is my name for ever' (*l'e'olam*), but the same consonantal text with different vowels, 'this is my name to be concealed' (*l'e'allem*).

⁴⁸Cf. Is. 6.5; Jer. 1.6.

and 'turned again to the Lord' (5.22). We note that one piece of revelation soon follows another, as in a cluster. Revelation is also set in a context of difficulty of understanding, and believing God's promise ('Thou hast not delivered thy people at all', 5.23). Moses had difficulty believing God's promise; the people refuse to believe Moses ('they did not *listen* to Moses', 6.9). It is not until after God's promise of deliverance has been fulfilled that 'they believed in the Lord *and* in his servant Moses' (14.31).

The revelation in 3.13-15 follows that in 3.1-6; and the revelation in 5.22 - 6.9 where name of Yahweh is added to 'God of your fathers', follows the earlier sequence.⁴⁹ We find here the beginnings of a more formal role for Moses as mediator between God and his people. There are only a few texts which speak of the revelation of the divine name, and each time this is to Moses only.⁵⁰ The words God 'has sent me to you' are also repeated (3.13,14,15). Thus what Israel knows about the name of God is mediated by Moses, to whom revelation is given. We find the idea emerging here that chosen people only can discern the mystery of God. We also find the people exercising their own ability to discern, and to acknowledge, or not, Moses as mediator (5.21; esp. 6.9). Here too the idea emerges of Israel as a people, under an appointed leader, as the ones who collectively discern God and his messengers (see esp. genealogy, 6.14-25, establishing the identity of the people).

The second and third revelatory encounters between God and Moses may be described more briefly. The second cluster of revelatory encounters for Moses (Ex. 19-24) is located both at the mountain of Sinai, and in the wilderness (19.1), with Moses going up and down the mountain on several occasions, and remaining forty days and forty nights (24.18).⁵¹ This suggests that discernment is incomplete and also that a deepening awareness may take time. The role of Moses as mediator and messenger is highlighted (19.3,8; 20.19), and certain classes of people are identified (people, priests, 70 elders, three companions, and in 24.1 leaving Moses alone with God on the mountain). This setting of boundaries between God and the people suggests that there are different levels of access to, and therefore discernment of, God, and points to both preparation and holiness in terms of regulation and purity (19.12-23). Moses, however, begins to take on the role of a priest, having access to God.

⁴⁹The two passages, 3.1-6 and 6.2-8, have caused problems for commentators in connection with the revelation of the divine name.

⁵⁰3.14-15; 6.3; 33.19; 34.5-7; 34.14.

⁵¹Generally, 'for a long time'; cf. 34.28; Deut. 9.9,11,25; 10.10; also at Gen. 7.4; 1 Kings 19.8, and Matt. 4.2. See Allison, *New Moses*, 166-68.

God's coming and presence is described in terms of thunder, lightening, cloud, smoke and trumpet sound, signs of God's awesome presence. He is knowable and recognisable, but also at the same time mysterious and intangible. Although 24.10-11 records 'they *saw* the God of Israel', what they saw of him is not described, and is in fact acknowledged as indescribable: '.. and there was under his feet *as it were* a pavement of sapphire stone'. God remains unseen.

The narrative draws attention to Moses' role as a mediator between the people and God, here in the covenant process. There are three stages: 19.1-8: Israel is 'encamped before the mountain', Moses 'went up to God' and returned to present the general principles of the covenant to the people, who respond, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do'; 24.1-3: Moses, having received detailed laws, including the Ten Commandments, from God, speaks to the people who again agree, 'All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do'; 42.4-8: the covenant is sealed with blood, and the people respond, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient'. The redaction of chapters 19-24, marking the beginning and end of one great covenant event, serves to emphasize the unique role which Moses played. The words of the covenant are given as revelation from God, and acknowledgement of revelation brings moral responsibility and, as suggested earlier in connection with Abraham, obedience also involves faith and trust.

The third cluster of revelatory encounters for Moses (Ex. 32-34) takes place in the context of the people's lack of obedience and trust in God when their mediator is absent (32.1). The denial of relationship, lack of trust and belief in God's promises, or what might be called a general disobedience, result in a specific disobedience, doing exactly what God had said they should not do, resulting in false worship (20.4,23; 32.1-6). The sequence also reflects a certain dynamic, that one act of disobedience leads to another; and that a particular lack of discernment leads further in that direction. The concentration on Moses as the exclusive human channel for Israel's encounters with its God, poses difficulties for the people in Moses' absence. It also suggests that continuing discernment of God is hard, and that obedience in terms of trust or faithfulness is something on-going and demanding in God's perceived absence.

Exodus 33 seems to be composed of various elements linked by the question of how God is going to lead his people after their departure from Sinai, and confirms that their survival as a people depends on his presence. The issue here becomes a moral one concerning sin, of persuasion of the 'stiff-necked' people, of polemic and urgent

religious choice. God is no longer present with his people, and the tent of meeting is 'outside' and 'far off' from the camp (33.7). Only Moses is allowed in the tent: 'Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend' (33.11). In discussing this passage, Allison⁵² notes that 'Deut. 34.9-12 was probably composed with Exodus 33 in mind', especially v. 10, 'And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face'. He also relates this to Numbers 12.1-8, where God says he speaks to Moses 'mouth to mouth'. He says that the three passages are thematically related 'for each concerns the reciprocal knowledge between Moses and God', and goes on to argue that the expression 'face to face' indicates reciprocal knowledge. The expression 'face to face' (*pānîm el-pānîm*) is used infrequently, only seven times, in the OT.⁵³ Four out of these seven references are set directly in the context of revelation, Deut. 34.10 of reported revelation, and Num. 14.14 describes God's presence. However, as the reference in Jer. 32.4 shows, while the knowledge referred to is intimate and direct, it is not specifically described as reciprocal knowledge. 'Face to face' is an expression that is used in a similar way to 'eye to eye' and 'mouth to mouth'.

Moberly,⁵⁴ in discussing Exodus 32-34, notes the theological problems in describing the presence of God, and especially the juxtaposition of 33.11 and 33.20, speaking 'face to face' and 'you cannot see my face'. These two verses affirm, on the one hand, that 'God can be known intimately', and, on the other, that 'he is beyond human reach and knowledge'. 'Indeed what matters is not to dissolve the tension but to recognize it as a paradox and describe it correctly.' Thus, in the biblical tradition, full reciprocal knowledge of God is not possible. Even one so great as Moses who can be described as one whom 'God knew face to face' (Deut 34.10), is not so described in the reverse way, i.e. that Moses knew God. The knowledge is therefore not fully 'mutual'.⁵⁵

This lack of full mutual knowledge is shown in Moses' prayer of intercession on behalf of the people: 'I pray thee, show me thy glory' (33.18). God's reply to Moses is given in terms of four affirmations of what he will do, followed by a negative:

I will make all my goodness pass before you,
and will proclaim before you my name, 'The Lord';

⁵²*New Moses*, 220.

⁵³Gen. 32.30; Jud. 6.22; Jer. 32.4; Deut. 5.4; Num. 14.14; and the two references to Moses already noted, Ex. 33.11, Deut. 34.10.

⁵⁴*Mountain*, 65f.

⁵⁵Against Davies and Allison, *Matthew II*, 284; although they go on to note, 'It is noteworthy that the Tanak nowhere brings the two notions - of God knowing Israel and Israel knowing God - together'.

and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious,
and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.
But you cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live.

Moberly suggests that in what follows, there is an appeal to the imagination.⁵⁶ The OT does not usually describe, or is very reserved in its descriptions of Yahweh and his activity, with an emphasis on the verbal content conveyed by divine revelation. Here there is a 'daring anthropomorphism' in an attempt to describe the presence and experience of Yahweh. Yahweh will reveal himself to Moses, in a genuine revelation which is yet partial. Moses is both close and keeps a distance: God himself 'covers' Moses so that he may live; he sees Yahweh's back and not his face. There is paradox here: Moses can speak with God intimately, face to face, and Moses' request for fuller revelation is granted. Yet the distance between person and God must be preserved, and even Moses, the mediator, whose relationship with God was unparalleled in the OT, must observe limitations.⁵⁷ This significant revelation is followed immediately by another, indicating that the restoration of God's relationship with his sinful people, depends entirely and only on his grace (34.6).

We noted Moses' request to see God's glory (*kabod*). This word is frequently used to describe the presence of God, and yet is one which is hard to define and maintains an element of mystery. The same may be said of the descriptions of God's presence as cloud or fire,⁵⁸ wind or earthquake.⁵⁹ The mysterious nature of God's presence is explored in the story of Elijah on the mountain (1 Kings 19.11-12), where God was not present in the wind, earthquake or fire, where perhaps Elijah expected him to have been, but rather in the 'still silence' or 'soft whisper'. This use of symbols expresses both God's presence and absence, and also reflects a certain difficulty in finding appropriate words to describe the indescribable.

The Sinai narrative in Exodus became and expressed the pattern of revelation and discernment for Israel, and the paradigm for Israel's knowledge of God. The narrative presents Moses as the archetypal prophet and agent of God's will, confirmed by the description of the events at Horeb (Deut. 5.22-23). The people are overwhelmed by God's 'glory and greatness', and fear they will die if God speaks

⁵⁶*Mountain*, 80f.

⁵⁷This is noted by Allison, *New Moses*, 222, n.194, who seems to equate reciprocal knowledge between God and Moses by reference to Ps. 103.7 ('He made known his ways to Moses') with Ex. 33.13.

⁵⁸Ex. 13.21f. describes God's presence as 'a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night'; 19.18; 24.17f.

⁵⁹Ex. 14.21; 15.8; cf. Jud. 5.4-5.

with them again. The result is that they ask Moses to be their mediator 'and speak to us all that the Lord our God will speak to you; and we will hear and do it'. This arrangement is approved by God (v.28), and later confirmed as the way in which God communicates with his people (18.15-19). This is set in the context of the question of what will happen after Moses' death when the people come into the land. God says: 'I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him' (v.18).

The three encounters with God at Sinai are formative events in the social, political and religious beginnings of Israel as a people. The events confirm God's holiness and mystery, as well as his presence with his people and his will for his people, expressed in Torah. They also serve to heighten Moses' exclusive role as intercessor and mediator of Yahweh's presence and give a divine legitimation of Moses as agent of God's will.

It seems legitimate to conclude that, in the biblical tradition, divine communication is channelled through the speech and action of prophets. If this human dimension is to be a genuine part of the communication, and, as we have seen, people are both sinful and untrustworthy, then claims to revelation may be open to abuse. There is also a responsibility on the part of the people to 'test' any such claims of revelation. If this human dimension is to remain a genuine one, the issue then arises of how to distinguish words and actions that are from God from those that are of solely human origin. Bartlett notes that, 'it is not always easy for the prophet's audience to distinguish between what is genuine and what is not ... then as now, the hearer had to exercise discernment'.⁶⁰ Hearers have both the ability as well as the responsibility to discern the prophets' message. On the other hand, the prophets were keen to persuade their hearers of the truth of their message, and issues of persuasion, polemic and justification have to be added.

We noted in connection with Moses the use of the prophetic call *Gattung*. The calls of Gideon, Moses, Jeremiah, Isaiah and Ezekiel reflect a similar pattern,⁶¹ and demonstrate a certain tension between immanence and transcendence. Although the prophets have no doubt that their experience is of God and that he can be known, descriptions of the actual appearance of what God is like are absent, and are designed to serve a different function in the narrative. Above all, they demonstrate

⁶⁰Bartlett, 'Revelation', 19f.

⁶¹See Habel, 'Form', who traces the origin of this *Gattung* to the commissioning of Abraham's servant in Genesis 24; also our discussion of Matt. 16.13-20, section 6.3.

the authority of the individual: they show he has a unique access to God; they serve to identify God to be the source of his message; and they show that it is God who has sent him. The call thus justifies and authorises the claim to truth of the prophet's message.

The people of God also have a responsibility: claims to speak on God's behalf can and must be tested. Passages relating to the issue of true and false prophecy do not give consistent criteria for discernment, and it seems that various tests could be applied. The only test that Bartlett notes is the Deuteronomic 'acid, but slow, test' concerning fulfilment (Deut. 18.21f.).⁶² But this is only one of several ways in which prophecy may be determined to be genuine, since it is also pointed out in Deuteronomy that even if the sign or wonder comes to pass, the prophet's message may still be false, because 'the Lord your God is testing you' (Deut 13.2; also 12.2-14; 1 Kings 31, 22.21-23; Ezek. 14.9). The message may be a false one, but still from God, or it may come from within the prophets themselves (Jer. 23.16-32; Ezek. 13.2-3,17).

This issue of true and false prophecy seems to have been particularly acute for Jeremiah. As a general principle, prophets are not to prophesy in the name of other gods, nor are they to speak in favour of other cultic practices (Jer. 23.13-14; Deut. 31.2; 18.20). For Jeremiah the confirmation of the truth of his message lay in the subjective impact it made on the prophet himself (20.1-9). He says he can only prophesy what the Lord has told him and not any dreamwork (23.26-32).⁶³ Similarly in the Balaam story, Balaam insists he can only bless those whom God blesses (Num. 23.11f.,26; 24.13; 1 Kings 22.14).⁶⁴ This stress on the prophet's own call and overwhelming experience of the vision of God is something that cannot be verified directly. Its truth has to be assessed in other discernible ways. Jeremiah criticises false prophets for both leading immoral lives (23.11,14,15),⁶⁵ as well as their lack of issuing a moral challenge to the people, to urge a wayward people back to obey God's covenant will (23.14,17,22; Micah 3.5-8; 1 Kings 22.8).

God's established way of communicating and revealing his purposes is through his mediators, paradigmatically, the prophets. We can see, acutely in the case of Jeremiah and his opponents, both that this office and function of prophet may be

⁶²'Revelation', 20.

⁶³Cf. Num. 12.6-7; although elsewhere dreams are used as an acceptable medium of revelation. Gen. 28.12-15; 31.11,24; 46.2; 1 Kings 3.5; see further section 3.4.

⁶⁴For discussion of the Balaam story, see Moberly, 'On Learning'.

⁶⁵Cf. false prophets in Matt. 7.13-23.

abused, and, if it is genuine, that the message may be misunderstood or rejected.⁶⁶ We have seen how the prophets themselves need to justify their authority and claims for the truth of their message. For Mosaic Yahwism, allegiance to one God is a matter of urgent religious choice, and a corollary of this is that persuasion and polemic against opponents is used in order to encourage people to make the 'right' choice. Thus the issue of true and false prophecy is made ever more complex by the use of rhetoric and polemic.⁶⁷ A general criticising of opponents becomes part of the on-going rhetorical presentation. Disputes between rival groups of prophets may reflect different understandings of the religious situation, yet we also have to be aware that the way in which the stories are told may also be significant. Thus the way the false prophets are described in 1 Kings 22 is designed to make them look foolish, and the 400 prophets in Job look ridiculous.⁶⁸

Coggins⁶⁹ in particular has drawn attention to this aspect of false prophecy. On some occasions, 'the 'falsity' of the prophets seems to lie primarily in their alleged inadequacy to perform the tasks to which they had been called' (1 Kings 22; Hos. 4.4-6; Isa. 28.7; Jer. 23.9-32; Amos 7.14). In other cases, the supposed incompetence arises when prophets are the 'victims of calumny from their rivals', and in particular when 'rival claims to understanding of the truth may excite bitter controversy'. This vilification on ideological grounds may well be a factor in the passages just listed. Coggins also argues that, for instance, in Micah 3.5, the author's description of 'the prophets who lead my people astray', may well reflect both 'calumny of rivals as part of one's role expectations', and also be 'part of an ideologically based condemnation of those who differed from himself'.⁷⁰

As Coggins has pointed out, this vilification of opponents as 'false' may also be reflected in the way in which the prediction/fulfilment motif has been recorded.⁷¹ Moses' predictive role, detailed in Deut. 18.15-22 where he is first called a prophet in Deuteronomy, is subsequently borne out in the whole of the Deuteronomistic history. The particular way in which a story is told can highlight, in a polemical

⁶⁶Carroll, 'Poets', 25, Crenshaw, *Conflict*, 103f., and Coggins, 'Prophecy', 92f., see the inability to resolve the question of true and false prophecy leading to confusion, although Childs, *Theology*, 139ff., sees this uncertainty as part of the canonical process.

⁶⁷Overholt, 'Seeing is Believing', examining the social function of prophetic acts of power.

⁶⁸Cf. opponents' desire to make Jesus look foolish on the cross; however, the way Matthew has told his story, turns this into irony; 27.37-44.

⁶⁹'Prophecy', 80f.

⁷⁰'Prophecy', 82f. An understanding of this rhetorical and polemical stance has not always been recognised by commentators; see Clines, 'Metacommentating', 151ff, who notes that Amos' criticism of the affluent and denying that he is a prophet, 'does not necessarily imply that other prophets are false or preach for money'.

⁷¹'Prophecy', 85ff.

way, that the words of the 'true' prophet are specifically recorded as being fulfilled, as opposed to those of the 'false' prophets:

Therefore thus says the Lord: 'Behold, I will remove you from the face of the earth. This very year you shall die, because you have uttered rebellion against God'. In that same year, in the seventh month, the prophet Hananiah died. (Jer. 28.16,17).⁷²

This combination of the predictive role of prophecy, polemic and the increasingly authoritative nature of scripture, resulted in a certain fragmentation and confusion. This was compounded by the need of particular religious groups to uphold the authoritative nature of texts, to show how predictions were now taking place, as well as to justify subsequent revelations.

The predicted negative response of the people to Moses (3.13; 4.1), introduces a theme which recurs later in Exodus and Numbers: in spite of God's promises the people exhibit a reaction of scepticism and unbelief to all that is going on around them. Although God is at work in the community, people do not recognise this to be the case.⁷³ If the question is asked *why* people do not see what God is doing, the answers given reflect an interplay between the God-ward side and the human side. God's grace gives revelation; God gives discernment, understanding and wisdom; God can also withhold such discernment. From the human side, through a lack of obedience, faith and trust, people make themselves unresponsive to God.

This lack of recognition of God at work is expressed in particular types of vocabulary. One of the main barriers to discernment is described as 'hardness of heart' (*'orlāt lēbāb*; σκληροκαρδία).⁷⁴ 'Hardening of the heart' refers to becoming insensitive and inflexible, stubborn and rebellious (Deut. 2.30; 10.16; Jer. 4.4; Sirach 16.10); while a 'softening of the heart' refers to a moving of the heart/will in terms of penitence and repentance (2 Chron. 34.27; Joel 2.12; Ps. 51.10.17). Hardness of heart is particularly explored in the narrative concerning Pharaoh in Exodus 4.21-12.42. Pharaoh's unwillingness is expressed in different ways - sometimes as a fact,

⁷²Cf. 1 Kings 13, 22; and our chapter 5, where Jesus' 'predictions' are specified as happening, especially relating to a death which can be verified.

⁷³Samuel hears Eli's voice, not that of God (1 Sam. 3.5); the ass, not Balaam, sees the angel (Num. 22.23); Tobias finds a man (Tobit 5.4); the disciples walk with a visitor (Luke 24.15-18); Mary sees the gardener (John 20.15).

⁷⁴In the biblical tradition the function of the heart corresponds more closely to a modern understanding of the mind, as the centre of the consciously living person. See Wolff, *Anthropology*, 44. In 1 Sam. 25.37f. Nabal's heart is said to have 'died' ten days before his death.

and sometimes that he himself hardened his heart, or that God was responsible.⁷⁵ Pharaoh's stubbornness is linked to his lack of obedience, his sin, as well as his complete lack of integrity.⁷⁶ This hardening terminology also has links with the giving of signs. Childs⁷⁷ notes that the only other reference to Pharaoh is at 1 Samuel 6.6, where the Philistines are confused as to what to do with the ark. The priests ask, 'Why should you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts?', implying that they too are in danger of refusing to learn from the divine signs. The implication from both stories is that those with hard hearts are unable to discern God at work in signs. Three times in the Pharaoh narrative we find the phrase, 'he hardened his heart, and would not listen to them; as the Lord had said' (7.13,22; 8.19). Listening and hearing, seeing and perceiving, are frequently used to describe discernment, and again we find that they are linked with obedience.

The Deuteronomic history constantly urges the people to hear and obey the words of the Lord. 'The word is very near you; it is in your heart so that you can do it ... But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear ...' (Deut. 30.14,17; cf. 28.1; also Ps. 103.18). The people's response to Moses is, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do' (Ex. 19.8; Deut. 28.1; 30.11-14). Israel is to *hear* the commandments and statutes and be careful to do them, as she is to *hear* that 'the Lord our God is one Lord' (Deut. 6.3f.). We saw earlier how Moses made an impassioned plea to God on behalf of the people following their sin (Ex. 32-34). Yahweh proposed to destroy the nation because 'it is a stiff-necked people', and will not 'go up among you' for the same reason (32.9; 33.3,5). The people remain 'stiff-necked', and the renewal of the covenant and its terms rely solely on God's grace (34.6,9). People can make themselves unresponsive to God, and God himself can also make people unresponsive to him. The classic expression of this comes in Isaiah 6.9-10 where God sends Isaiah to '*this people*' (not 'my people') making them unable to hear and understand, to see and perceive. In his study of this passage, Evans⁷⁸ notes that the verbs in the text in Isaiah are in the imperative mood. The prophet is to go and make the people blind and deaf, *so that* they will not be able to understand. The LXX changes the tenses to the indicative. The prophet is to keep understanding from the people *because* they are deaf and blind. When Matthew quotes Is. 6.9-10 in 13.14f, changing Mark's ἵνα to ὅτι, he 'makes the parables a *response* to unbelief; they are

⁷⁵'Pharaoh's heart was/is/remains hardened', 7.13,14,22; 8.15,19,32; 9.7; 'he hardened his heart', 8.15,32; 'God/the Lord hardened his heart', 4.21; 7.3f.; 9.12; 10.1,20,27.

⁷⁶7.16; 9.27,34; 10.16; 8.8, 15, etc.

⁷⁷*Exodus*, 172ff.

⁷⁸*To See*, 62.

uttered *because* people see and do not see, because they hear and do not hear. This puts the emphasis unambiguously on human responsibility.⁷⁹

Part of this being responsive to God is putting oneself in the right place in order to discern. God is universally present but there are also particular locations where he is to be found in special or different ways. Altars, the wilderness and especially mountains become special places of revelation;⁸⁰ the travelling ark of the covenant, culminating in the temple, where God chose Jerusalem to be specially present with his people, is in keeping with their more settled existence. Kupp⁸¹ notes that Israel's worship combined 'an emphasis on YHWH's coming in theophany with the idea of his dwelling among them, making Solomon's structure not just a 'dwelling-temple' but also the place where YHWH manifested himself'.

Being responsive to God is also a skill that needs to be exercised. We see this is the record of the call of Samuel (1 Sam. 3). Samuel appears to have led an exemplary life, dedicated to God's service since his birth. Yet the voice of God, mediated through Eli, is not obvious to him. Significantly, Samuel hears God's voice, but hears it as the voice of Eli, not as that of a stranger, since he does not ask, 'Who are you?' We also note that the story ends with further revelation, 'And the Lord appeared *again* at Shiloh, for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord' (1 Sam. 3.21).

Thus, going to certain places, both in the going and at the place itself, may facilitate and encourage an on-going discernment of God. This is not easy and requires the exercise of dedication and skill.

3.3.1 Traditions about Moses and Matthew's Gospel

Parallels between Moses the law-giver and Jesus, giver of a new law, as well as literary comparisons between the Pentateuch and Matthew's gospel, have frequently been drawn. In terms of our theme of discernment, three areas are of particular relevance.

1. The first area concerns the focus on gifted individuals who receive revelation from God, paradigmatically Moses, in order for them to mediate it to the

⁷⁹Davies and Allison, *Matthew II*, 392. See also: McLaughlin, 'There Hearts Were Hardened'.

⁸⁰For analysis, see Donaldson, *Mountain*.

⁸¹*Matthew's Emmanuel*, 133.

community. Moses was the one to whom God first revealed himself as YHWH, and this event is recorded in the form of a call narrative. Set at the beginning of Moses' story, this establishes his legitimate authority as such a mediator, one who had spoken with God 'face to face'. The law, given by God to Moses and then to the people, remains the foundational content and model of revelation. Other individuals, especially prophets, justify and legitimate the authority of their message by appeal to their call from God. Moses' role as mediator is confirmed and heightened in the tradition, especially as recorded in Deuteronomy: '... I stood between the Lord and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the Lord; for you were afraid because of the fire, and you did not go up into the mountain' (Deut. 5.5; cf. 5.22). Moses is the prophet *par excellence*, who speaks on God's behalf to Israel, because he has unique access to God's presence, and in some Jewish circles there was a hope that a new prophet, like Moses, would appear.⁸²

For Matthew, we also find a concentration on an individual: revelation comes from God, is given to Jesus who is the perfect model in terms of receiving revelation. He stands within the tradition of the OT, but is also described by Matthew as greater than Moses. One of the ways in which he does this is by using the rhetorical technique of 'comparison' (σύγκρισις).⁸³ Allusions to the story of Moses are particularly clear in 2.13-23,⁸⁴ and again especially in 5.1 where Jesus goes up the mountain in order to speak to the people. Significantly, these are not specifically described as words of revelation from God, but are Jesus' own words of teaching, offering the true and authoritative meaning of Torah. While God spoke with Moses personally, 'face to face', Jesus declares that only the Father *knows* the Son, and only the Son *knows* the Father, indicating, not only personal, but also reciprocal knowledge (11.27). For Matthew, Jesus is not only one in a long line of mediators, but, as God's Son, is his final, eschatological envoy, and also one the truth about whom needs to be discerned. The absence of both the mediator and perfect example is overcome by the promise of Jesus' continuing presence (28.20; cf. Ex. 3.12).

We have seen how the call plays an important part in justifying the prophet's message. Matthew does not record a specific call narrative for Jesus: rather he locates his coming in fulfilment of God's eternal purposes. Jesus' baptism serves to demonstrate and confirm his status before God, and justifies his teaching and his

⁸²Hooker, *Signs*, 8.

⁸³See Stanton, *Gospel*, 78ff.; Freyne, 'Vilifying', 130f.

⁸⁴Killing male children (Ex. 1.16; Matt. 2.16f.); departure from land of birth because of threat to life (Ex. 2.15; Matt. 2.13-15); return to homeland (Ex. 4.18-20; Matt. 2.19-23); esp. the almost identical words: τεθνήκασιν γὰρ οἱ ζητοῦντες τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ παιδίου (Matt. 2.20); τεθνήκασιν γὰρ πάντες οἱ ζητοῦντές σου τὴν ψυχὴν (Ex. 4.19).

miraculous signs. One of the main ways in which he was described was that of 'prophet', although, Matthew also presents him as greater than Jonah and the prophets (12.41; 21.11; cf. 16.14).

2. Revelation 'creates' the people of God, in that they acknowledge Moses to be a mediator of God's will between themselves and God. The emergence of chosen individuals as the ones who can discern God's mystery, is paralleled by the emergence of a chosen people who corporately are able to exercise discernment. Discernment thus takes place primarily within the people of Israel, although not exclusively so.⁸⁵ It has to be admitted that there is an on-going tension involved in the understanding of the 'people of God': between Israel as a historical nation and Israel as a theological construct. The beginnings of the tradition are found in the promise to Abraham, but the move from a history of families to that of a people is made at the beginning of Exodus, supremely through the redemption from Egypt. The theological dimension is set out particularly in Deuteronomy and continues through and after the exile. The people of God to whom revelation is given, also have a responsibility to discern that revelation, in particular individuals who claim to have received revelation from God, as well as having a responsibility to discern what God might be doing in and around them. Later this discernment also included interpretation of written accounts *in scripture*.

Discernment takes place within the people, and also at certain locations. The re-enactment in the temple of the way in which God came to his people at Sinai, draws attention to the fact that, in the biblical tradition, what God said and did in the past is relevant for the present. Thus 'remembering' is not just a calling to mind of facts, but a realization or discernment that those facts are of present relevance. Knight⁸⁶ in his discussion of the relation between revelation and tradition, concludes that the idea cannot be sustained of there being some sort of 'primal revelatory datum' to which tradition simply witnesses or preserves in memory. When an event is perceived to be a given act of revelation, it is not a single event limited to the original historical situation in which it occurred, but rather is a 'durative confrontation'. God's acts in the past resulted both in benefits for, as well as claims upon, future generations. God's revelation of his name to Moses in the rhetorical phrase, 'the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob', continues, 'this is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations' (Ex. 3.15). This is also evident in terms of the covenant, which was not made with our fathers only, 'but

⁸⁵Balaam speaks God's words from outside Israel (Num. 22); the Ninevites repented (Jonah 3.6-10); although it is not recorded that these people thereby become Israelites.

⁸⁶'Revelation', 152.

with us, who are all of us here alive this day (Deut. 5.3).⁸⁷ The covenant is to be 'remembered', that is both discerned and obeyed at the celebration of feasts and by participation in the cult (Ps. 42,77).

This remembering in terms of a recital of an oral and later a written tradition of words in the context of calendar and cult, may be one of the reasons why hearing rather than seeing becomes so important.⁸⁸ There is a constant urging of the people to *hear*, not only in a physical sense, but a hearing of the narrative in such a way that its significance for the present is discerned, expressed both in terms of understanding and obedience.⁸⁹ The repeated calls to hear also reflect that hearing and obeying are not something undertaken just at one point in time, but there needs to be a constant hearing again, and a renewal of obedience as a continuous process. We can thus say that discernment is on-going and a skill that needs to be exercised and continually renewed. The repetition, as well as indicating a way of overcoming resistance to discernment, also suggests that it is not easy.⁹⁰

We have seen in the Mosaic traditions how both individuals and Israel are called upon with some sense of urgency to make a choice between two ways. This means that the writings themselves reflect not only a rhetorical presentation of different choices in order to persuade people to make the 'right' one, but also claim that this right choice is the truth, and establishes the people of God in the truth. The function of revelation is to establish the validity of the message and to persuade others of it. Revelation thus has a certain 'givenness', used to justify claims, and a 'persuasiveness', used to counter rival claims. This element of choice is evidenced in the language of polemic: the rhetoric of encouragement, on the one hand, and a vilification of enemies, on the other. We have seen how this is particularly the case in connection with discernment of true and false prophecy.

Revelation establishes the validity of Matthew's claim to the truth about Jesus, and this revelation also brings division. Relationship with God is now mediated through Jesus, and a new people is thereby created, legitimated by revelation. The elements of urgent choice, of polemic and persuasion are significant features of Matthew's

⁸⁷Cf. Deut. 31.10,24ff; Lev. 10.8-10; Josh. 1.8. The Deuteronomistic history could be said to develop a 'theology of remembering'. For discussion, see Childs, *Memory and Tradition*.

⁸⁸So Is. 22.14, 'The Lord of hosts has revealed himself in my ears'; noted by Bartlett, 'Revelation', 12, as one of only four passages where the Lord is said to 'reveal himself'; also Gen. 35.7; 1 Sam. 2.27; 3.12. Although the scarcity of specific language using the word 'reveal' does not necessarily point to an absence of the theme.

⁸⁹Expressed linguistically in ἀκούω and ὑπακούω.

⁹⁰Moberly, 'Solomon and Job', 17, who suggests that the difficulty of understanding is probably intrinsic to the issues at stake.

gospel. This is found especially in his 'two ways' tradition, and encouragement to distinguish between rival claims (7.13-29). For Matthew, too, people take responsibility in making such a choice, and discernment of Jesus becomes critical, although it is not easy and needs constant attention. Jesus sets an example to be followed, as the one who is gifted in discernment. Although certain texts may indicate that Matthew saw his community as a separate entity, distinct from existing Judaism (8.11f.; 21.43), whether this theological construct of a new people was matched by a physical, communal entity, has been very difficult to determine.⁹¹ Matthew records Jesus founding a new people of God, *my church* (μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν), and, significantly, this too is set in the specific context of revelation to Peter (16.17f; see further ch. 6).⁹²

3. Revelation tends to be linked with the main events in Israel's history, and 'clusters' around certain episodes. Thus the naming of Israel, the formation of the people, the name of YHWH, the Exodus, the giving of the law, the establishment of the covenant and the building of the ark, are all set in the context of revelation. This not only establishes their validity and legitimates their practice but also establishes a claim to their truth. Here revelation could be described as particular, has a certain intensity, and takes place at defining moments in the history of God's people. Although this particularity may reflect the way the narrative has been shaped and is told, if that shape itself is to be taken seriously, these defining, revelatory moments must be seen to govern and, to some extent, control the subsequent narrative.⁹³ God is both everywhere, and also especially present in special times and at specific places.⁹⁴

Discernment, in the context of these significant moments, could also be said to be particular. Yet both revelation and discernment are also to be found in the on-going way and practice of living life under God in response to the demands of his love, as well as in the practice of obedience, seen in terms of doing what is right, as well as faith and trust in God. Because of human freedom and the weakness of human beings, the relationship established by revelation is fragile, and needs to be constantly renewed and practised. Discernment is normally exercised within Israel,

⁹¹See discussion in Stanton, *Gospel*, 85-168; Senior, 'Between Two Worlds'; Hare, 'How Jewish is Matthew?'

⁹²Viviano, 'Peter', finds parallels in the roles of Moses and Aaron, and Jesus and Peter, although, in view of Aaron's somewhat ambiguous relationship with Moses (Ex. 32.1-6) and, as noted in the same article by Allison, the influence of Ex. 4.10-17 on Matt. 16.13-20 is far from obvious.

⁹³See Eaton, 'Memory and Encounter', 189.

⁹⁴Described by Fretheim as 'watershed moments'; noted by Thompson, 'Prayer', 43.

and this suggests both the corporate nature of discernment and that it takes place in the context of the community.

As revelation clusters round significant events in the OT, so in Matthew's gospel, revelation is particular and clusters in certain places: the birth narrative and baptism; the central section, including Jesus' prayer, Peter's confession and the transfiguration; Jesus' death and resurrection. It is often in these episodes that we find the motif of location becomes important: putting oneself in the right place in order to discern correctly, becomes, symbolically, 'following Jesus'.

3.4 Solomon and Wisdom Traditions

An understanding of God's revelation in the history of his people as being 'from above', and his revelation in creation as being 'from below', is a simple dichotomy that does not do justice to the variety of forms of revelation. The issue is more a matter of a range of modes of God's interaction with the world. The Psalms, especially, affirm that something of God can be known and recognised in creation (Ps. 8.3-4; 19.1; cf. Rom. 1.19-20). Here we are in touch with the wisdom traditions. In describing the *theological importance of wisdom literature in the canon* Childs notes:⁹⁵

It is not a 'foreign body' nor an original secular philosophy which achieved religious status for Israel by being brought within the orbit of *Heilsgeschichte*. Nor can its role be accounted for by a process of nationalization. It is an independent witness to God's revelation which functions like the Law and the Prophets as sacred scripture for the people of God.

Earlier last century, scholars tended to marginalise wisdom traditions because theological import was seen to be grounded in the great acts of God in Israel's history, such as, election, covenant and people of God. More recent studies have tried to do justice to the wisdom literature itself, as well as appreciating that a general wisdom type approach may be more integral to the body of scripture than previously allowed.⁹⁶ Part of the difficulty lies in the fact that 'wisdom' (*ḥokmāh*) as such is hard to define and also that it is expressed in many different ways and it

⁹⁵*Introduction*, 557; although not all scholars would agree with his view.

⁹⁶For summary see Weeks, 'Wisdom', 19-21; Witherington, *Sage*, 75, n.1.

can be hard to isolate specific wisdom traditions.⁹⁷ In general, wisdom refers to three areas: wisdom is a way of referring to God's self-revelation; wisdom can refer to a body of literature and knowledge; wisdom also describes a way of seeing reality and a way of living. There is a general overlap and interaction between these three categories.

Wisdom as God's self-revelation: the description of wisdom in Prov. 8 reflects a universal and cosmic understanding. In a development from 3.19 ('The Lord by wisdom founded the earth'), wisdom is a personified entity who was created before the world and assisted God in his creative work:

The Lord created me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of old ...
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
then I was beside him, like a master workman;
and I was daily his delight,
rejoicing before him always,
rejoicing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the sons of men. (Prov. 8.22, 29b-31)

Wisdom is thus both an attribute of God and a mode of God's presence in the world. She informed the work of creation, and thus by observing the created order, it is possible to discern something of God himself (Ps. 19.1).

Wisdom as a body of literature: since the world was created by and with wisdom, there is a certain order in creation which can be discovered. This international, universal quality of wisdom is reflected in general human experiences and can be set out in the form of analogies and the general predictability of life. Collections of proverbs, aphorisms and wisdom-type material, often showing no significant ordering (e.g. Prov. 10ff), are familiar from ANE wisdom schools,⁹⁸ although this does not necessarily mean that later editors transformed 'secular' wisdom into 'religious' wisdom, but rather that they developed a religious understanding of wisdom which was always implicit in the material. There was, however, a focusing and particularisation of generally established wisdom traditions in terms of Torah.⁹⁹

⁹⁷Weeks, 'Wisdom', also argues against a single, separate wisdom tradition, and in favour of a more personal and common interest in how to live well and continue in the way which leads to life.

⁹⁸So Prov. 22.17-23.14 is similar to the *Teaching of Amenemope*.

⁹⁹See Weeks, 'Wisdom', 26; and our section 4.3 on Sirach.

The third aspect of wisdom refers to both a way of seeing and a way of living, the two being intimately connected; and it is here that we find similarities between the desire for wisdom and the practice of discernment. If wisdom is the means by which God created the world, then wisdom is needed to act in obedience to the creator, summarised as 'fear of the Lord' (Prov. 1.7). This 'fear' refers to a commitment to God, bound up with the search for knowledge and a turning from evil (3.7; 9.10). Thus wisdom is also a moral concept, and in a collection like Proverbs, exhortations to be wise and righteous may not only come with age, but also involve following the path laid down by God.¹⁰⁰ This path or way is passed on from father to son, older generation to younger, experienced sage to inexperienced (1.2-9); as reflected in chs. 10ff., wisdom is a process seeking to discern patterns of truth within experience. Wisdom is both an acquisition needing to be actively pursued (*cry out, raise your voice, seek it, search for it*), as well as a gift from God ('For the Lord gives wisdom') (Prov. 2.3-6).

This choice is expressed in an invitation to follow wisdom's path or way, epitomised by the contrast between two opposing female figures in Prov. 7-9. The loose woman, adventuress or harlot whose 'house is the way to Sheol' and death (7.5,10,27; cf. 9.18; 2.16-19) is contrasted with lady wisdom who invites people to 'attach' themselves to her, to follow her *path of counsel, wisdom, insight and strength*, being better than fine gold and choice silver, because 'he who finds me finds life' (8.14,35). This choice is a *moral* choice, since wisdom walks 'in the way of righteousness and in the paths of justice' (8.20).

These descriptions of the three aspects of wisdom suggest some sort of coherence: wisdom in the act of creation, wisdom literature describing creation, and wisdom as a way of seeing/living. Yet wisdom remains an expression of God's mystery and transcendence, and scripture is practical and realistic in terms of how life is actually lived and experienced. Affirming that God has revealed himself as creator can lead to the danger of saying that God is known *through* nature, leading to idolatry and superstition (cf. Is. 45). An order in creation can be discovered via analogies and predictability, but wisdom also recognises that there are limits to human understanding and that God's ways remain mysterious. Thus wisdom has the potential to be both paradoxical and subversive, because it is hidden or found in unexpected places. Job, for instance, explores the paradox of hidden wisdom: Job who acts in accordance with God's will ('one who fears God' 1.1), but who still

¹⁰⁰Weeks, 'Wisdom', 25f. suggests that readers will already know what it is that constitutes wisdom or righteousness, and that there is no advice in Proverbs contrary to Torah.

becomes poor and ill, confirms that God acts according to his own mysterious and unpredictable will. Qoheleth exhibits both fear and despair in trying to understand the way God has designed or works in the world.

The collection of wisdom literature has been traditionally associated with Solomon and his court, with scribes and the general education and background of an administrative class.¹⁰¹ The Book of Proverbs has the title, 'The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel', and Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes are also attributed to Solomon. Although Solomon's 'wisdom' has been understood traditionally as 'proverbial',¹⁰² the description in 1 Kings 4.29-34 sets this type of wisdom in the context of *God* giving Solomon 'wisdom and understanding beyond measure and largeness of mind' (4.29). This refers to the earlier event at Gibeon that Solomon's wise and discerning mind was a gift from God (3.3-15). The dynamics of this story are relevant to our theme of discernment.

The story is set within Solomon's exemplary life before God; he was already in an continuing relationship with and obedience to God, reflected in his observance of cultic practice: 'Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father' (3.3). It is in this context that 'the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night' (3.5,15). Solomon is aware, both of his inadequacy in relation to the position of being Israel's king (3.9) as well as of his humble position before God (servant 3.7; cf. 3.6). He describes himself as a 'little child' (LXX, καὶ ἐγὼ εἶμι παιδάριον μικρὸν), a characteristic phrase for one aware of their humble status before God.¹⁰³

He was able to recognise that which was of over-riding importance, rather than that to which he was entitled ('long life or riches or the life of your enemies', 3.11; described as God's blessing in Ps. 21.4,8-12). The fact that he does *not* ask for these things is given as the reason why God grants his request; he has recognised that discernment is of greater value than 'riches' (cf. Job 28.15-19). He asks for an 'understanding mind'¹⁰⁴ to govern thy people' that he may 'discern (LXX διακρίνειν) between good and evil'. Discernment is a gift from God, yet remains incomplete; the exercise of some discernment leads to a further gift from God. The discernment given here by God is as a particular gift, but is exercised in the

¹⁰¹For a critique of this association, see Weeks, 'Wisdom', 21-24; Clements, 'Wisdom', 78.

¹⁰²1 Kings 4.32f. describes his personal wisdom as 3,000 proverbs (*mashal*), 1005 songs (*shir*), knowledge of trees, plants and animals.

¹⁰³See further our discussion of νήπιος (Matt. 11.25) in ch. 5.

¹⁰⁴Solomon asks for an 'understanding mind' (*leb shomea*, LXX καρδίαν ἀκούειν) literally a 'hearing mind'; God is described as giving a 'wise and discerning mind' (*leb hakam wenavon*, LXX καρδίαν φρονίμην καὶ σοφίην).

continuing government of the people and in the discernment between good and evil (3.9). This gift/skill is demonstrated immediately in the following story of Solomon's judgement between the two harlots, where it is specifically stated that there were no witnesses he could call on. This gift of discernment is, then, a way of seeing which gives true insight into how things really are, rather than how they appear on the surface (3.16-28). At the end of this story, this exercise of discernment between good and evil is described as the 'wisdom of God ... to render justice' (3.28). The exercise of discernment is a moral concept, a reverence for God expressed in living in accordance with God's way: 'if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments' (3.14).

In this paradigmatic story, we find a significant combination of revelation and discernment. Here the gift of discernment and the gift of wisdom become virtually synonymous. All wisdom ultimately comes from God, but it is still something which needs to be striven for, sought, desired and developed in both reason and intellect. One of the most significant of Israel's wisdom traditions is found in the work of Ben Sira, discussed in our next chapter. Wisdom traditions are also found, for instance, in the Joseph cycle, where Joseph both receives and interprets dreams (Gen. 37.5-11; 40-41). God is acknowledged to be the source of the interpretation, giving special insight and wisdom to Joseph the seer (40.8; 41.16). Pharaoh does not address God directly, but through Joseph, who is twice described as 'discreet and wise' (41.17,33,39). Significantly the hinge of the whole Joseph story is in his continued obedience to God's laws (39.7-9), and this is 'rewarded' with God's presence ('The Lord was with Joseph', 39.2,21), both in good circumstances and bad.

Although God appeared to Solomon in a dream, and Joseph received and interpreted dreams, there is a certain ambivalence in the biblical tradition about forms of divination. While there is a negative picture of divination and mantic arts in general, VanderKam¹⁰⁵ has shown how such arts are referred to in conjunction with prophets, and the similarity between prophecy and divination is indicated by the fact that prophets divine and diviners prophesy (Micah 3.6,7,11).¹⁰⁶ Within Israel, there are references, for instance, to *Urim* and *Thummim*,¹⁰⁷ the ephod, and casting

¹⁰⁵'Origins', 171ff., suggesting that mantic wisdom and biblical prophecy may have more in common than previously allowed and that both can be seen as part of the roots of apocalyptic thought.

¹⁰⁶Also Is. 44.25-6; 47.12f.; 48.3-8; Jer. 27.9-10, 29.8-9.

¹⁰⁷For a detailed study see van Dam, *Urim and Thummim*. Van Dam concludes that Israel's neighbours had divinatory practices, but because *Urim* and *Thummim* were linked with prophecy, this 'reaffirms the primacy of word-revelation for Israel', p.225. This conclusion does not seem to take seriously the biblical evidence that revelation, which he does not define, is not always and necessarily through the word. Ford, 'Jewel', discusses *Urim* and *Thummim* in connection with the jewels in Aaron's breastplate and precious stone symbolism.



sacred lots, as well as receiving word from God in dreams (Num. 27.21; Ezra 2.63/Neh. 7.65; 1 Sam. 23.9-12; Josh. 18.6; Lev. 16.8-10; Num. 12.6; Deut. 13.1-6; Job 33.14-18). The negative assessment of such arts is probably because they are practised in foreign and pagan cultures, as paradigmatically expressed in Deut. 18.9-22:

For these nations, which you are about to dispossess, *give heed* to soothsayers and to diviners ... The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren - him you shall *heed* (18.14f).

Jeffers,¹⁰⁸ in her extended study of magic and divination, concludes that this condemnation of the magical arts and of divinatory techniques as foreign is probably a Second Temple reading, reflecting a narrowing of perspective towards 'pure Yahwism', uncontaminated by foreign 'harlotries'.¹⁰⁹ The elevation of the role of Moses is emphasised here and this effectively marginalises other ways of practising discernment.

Within Israel, the role of dreams and visions may have been greater than is sometimes acknowledged. Bockmuehl¹¹⁰ suggests that a return to dreams and visions in apocalyptic literature 'after the passionate resistance e.g. of Isa. 28.7; Jer. 23.25ff; Ezek. 13.6ff. Zech. 10.2; even Sir. 34.1-8, etc. may be possible *inter alia* because of the emerging "canon" '. Yet I suggest that dreams were never very far beneath the surface as one way of receiving revelation. Each of the examples quoted here reflects an argument about authority, not exclusively about the use of dreams. Opponents speak from their own minds, and not words from God (Ezek. 13.2f.); they have not stood in God's council (Jer. 23.18,22); and, they do not lead morally upright lives, as visible evidence of their claim (Is. 28.7f.). This last point is particularly important and is reflected in the positive assessment of dreams received by the morally upright and obedient, such as Joseph, Daniel and Enoch.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸*Magic*, 251.

¹⁰⁹Balaam is a somewhat ambiguous figure: although he is from outside Israel and may receive fees for divination (the reading is unclear), he only receives messages from Israel's God, and thus can only speak to Israel what God declares. See Moberly, 'On Learning'.

¹¹⁰*Revelation*, 26, n.14.

¹¹¹See Matt. 1.19,20; 2.13,19,22, where Joseph is righteous and receives word from God in dreams; cf. 27.19.

3.4.1 Wisdom Traditions and Matthew's Gospel

Wisdom in its three different aspects (God's self-revelation; a body of literature; a way of seeing/living) forms an important dimension of our theme, and wisdom traditions in general provide a contrast to the historical scriptural traditions in a number of ways.

1. The description of wisdom as a self-revelation of the divine, as intimately connected with God's act of creation, serves as an implicit and authoritative truth claim that something of God's character and purpose can be known *within* creation. The inclusion of wisdom literature within the canon of scripture supplements Israel's historical traditions where God's revelation takes a more particular shape. By way of contrast, Matthew is recording the recent history of Jesus, and firmly places him in the history of God's dealings with his people (see esp. 1.1-17). The suggestion that Matthew presents Jesus as wisdom personified will be discussed later (in sections 4.3.1 and 5.3).

2. We have seen how collections of both 'mundane' and 'religious' wisdom came to be made, resulting in a body of literature to be treasured and studied. Although such collections do not of themselves have either a historical setting or a focus on an individual, the figure of Solomon as one gifted by God in the practise of wisdom, came to be associated with such collections, thus giving them authority as godly wisdom. This is not passed on in a line of succession, as Moses to Joshua, but is, nevertheless, passed on from father to son in the written traditions of Israel. There is no suggestion that Solomon himself passed on his specific skills which others had come to admire and recognise. 1 Kings 3 emphasises that Solomon's wisdom is a gift from God, and the paradigmatic story of the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10.1-13) illustrates the ability of people to recognise that gift in others: she came, from outside Israel, to enquire because she had 'heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, and she came to *test* him with hard questions' (cf. many others who came to hear Solomon's wisdom, 4.34). When 'she had *seen* all the wisdom of Solomon', she blessed the Lord (10.4,9).

Matthew too records that many came to hear Jesus' teaching described as 'wisdom' in 13.54 (5.1; 8.1 cf. 3.5-7). He used parables, aphorisms and wise sayings, and there are similarities between his words and mode of teaching and other wisdom

teachers.¹¹² Yet his name is not associated with an existing body of material, and Matthew records Jesus bringing his own teaching and speaking in his own name, specifically unlike teaching 'of old' (5.21f.). He accuses his opponents of being unable to discern this fact by comparing them unfavourably with the Queen of the South (Sheba), who 'came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon'; Matthew's use of σύγκρισις (comparison)¹¹³ as a rhetorical strategy, shows that Jesus as the Son is greater than Solomon, traditionally the wisest of the wise (12.42).

The context in which Jesus gave his wisdom-type teaching is of crucial importance, and wisdom's general lack of life-setting, is here given a specific setting in the life of Jesus. Jesus is not just a wisdom teacher, but his particular type of wisdom is set in an eschatological context. It does not rely solely on observing creation, although examples are drawn from there, but points rather to a hidden wisdom, discerned only by faith. Part of that discernment is the recognition of Jesus himself as the bearer of eschatological revelation, frequently expressed by Matthew as 'the kingdom of heaven'.

3. Wisdom refers to a skill to be learned, practised and taught, as well as to be passed on in instruction. Some wisdom may be mundane in nature, but has an underlying moral dimension, since what is being urged is to lead a *godly* life. Much wisdom teaching is set out to draw attention to the choice involved between good and evil. Recognition that God remains mysterious and unknown, points to a need to search and strive for such wisdom. Wisdom in this context does not appear to lead to a specific division within the community, between those on the 'inside' and those on the 'outside', nor does it have eschatological implications. It is more concerned with living a moral life in relation to God and his creation.

It is in this area of wisdom as a skill that we find significant parallels with our theme of skill in relation to discernment of revelation. Matthew has a certain emphasis on scribal skill and learning, and part of this skill is being able to discern what constitutes wisdom. For Matthew this involves recognising Jesus as the Son of God and the following of his way when compared with other 'wisdoms'. Matthew presents Jesus both as a teacher of wisdom and as a teacher of the law; his teaching emphasises more sharply the element of choice involved, as well as the eternal, eschatological consequences of that choice (7.13f., 24-27). Discernment of

¹¹²See Witherington, *Sage*; Downing, *Christ and the Cynics*; and discussion in Borg and Wright, *Meaning*.

¹¹³Stanton, *Gospel*, 77ff.

revelation thus leads to a division between those understood to be 'inside' and those 'outside'.

The wisdom tradition affirms that something of God can be known through creation (immanence), and that valuable lessons can be learned about right living from long experience of the world. Yet this tradition also affirms that God can never be fully known and he remains mysterious (transcendence). God's ways and their manifestation in creation remain mysterious and unpredictable, and this, especially when combined with a life which is moral and upright, can lead to a sense of human frustration in the face of an unattainable wisdom, resulting in the severe doubt of Job or the cynicism of Qoheleth.¹¹⁴ This sense of the mysterious and surprising nature of wisdom is reflected in its paradoxical nature. Here wisdom is found in unexpected places as well as unlikely people. This paradoxical strand is not explored to any great extent in traditional wisdom, but the potential is present here and is, as we shall see, pressed to further limits by Jesus. Wisdom is elusive, and cannot be obtained or attained solely within the human context: it remains a gift from God, to those in a relationship with him.

3.5 Conclusion

Our coverage of OT traditions to do with discernment of revelation has necessarily been selective. In this chapter we have looked at the patriarchal period focusing on Abraham, and especially his obedience when 'tested' by God; Moses and his paradigmatic revelatory encounters with God at Sinai, and the formation of the people of God; and wisdom traditions with their attention to God's revelation in creation. In each of these areas we have found certain recurring themes.

Revelation is given by God to certain gifted individuals who become mediators of revelation. The patriarchal period is one of a loose association of family clans, yet the stories centre on a series of individuals who receive revelation, the most significant being Abraham. The wisdom traditions give their attention to discerning God in creation. The figure of Solomon as one gifted by God in the exercise of wisdom came to be associated with collections of wisdom material. Yet it is Moses and the Mosaic traditions which form the largest and most significant area for our motif. Here the model of Moses as a mediator of revelation between God and his people becomes paradigmatic. This focus on gifted individuals as mediators of

¹¹⁴Explored by Davidson in 'Some Aspects of Doubt'.

God's revelation, demonstrates their authority and legitimates their claim to the truth, not only of their message, but also of traditions which became associated with their names.

It is through Moses and the revelatory events at Sinai that Israel as a people is formed. God's grace expressed in the logic of revelation establishes Israel as a people: the elect to whom revelation has been given. They are given the grace to receive it humbly and transmit it truthfully, as well as a responsibility to discern and test claims to revelation, to embody God's commands, obey them and pass them on. As we shall see in the next chapter, Ben Sira brings together more specifically wisdom and law, although this connection is already present in Deuteronomy:

Behold, I have taught you statutes and ordinances, as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land which you are entering to take possession of it. Keep them and do them; for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people' (4.5-6).

People do not always recognise what God is doing, and the main obstacle to discernment is a lack of obedience to God's will, understood not only in terms of not obeying God's law, but also of not being responsive to God in terms of trust and faith. This is the same in both the prophetic and the wisdom traditions where the 'fear' of God is a repeated theme, as well as a call for commitment to God and his divine order. Both traditions also indicate that discernment can be difficult and incomplete; it is a skill that needs to be exercised and continually renewed.

Ultimately, both discernment and revelation are gifts from God, but the tradition shows that they are not arbitrary gifts. There are those who are gifted by God in the practice of discernment, and are able to perceive that things are not always what they appear. Thus they may bring an unpopular message in prosperous times (the fall of Jerusalem or the exile); or they may bring hope in times of despair (renewal and God's presence and healing). In the wisdom tradition especially, this discernment may result in paradoxical claims - that the foolish are really wise, the weak strong, and that God can be present in powerlessness (Job).

In the opening of his gospel (esp. 1.1-17) Matthew outlines a story whose surety is God and establishes that Jesus comes in fulfilment of the divine will, revealed

beforehand in scripture. If the patriarchs related to God in one way in a period of history, and knew God as the 'God of our Fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob', and then in the Mosaic period he was known as Yahweh, it is not impossible for Matthew to understand people relating to God in another different way, through Jesus. Although, for Matthew, a new order has arrived, this does not remove the legitimacy or value of the old order. Significantly, the start of these different periods is signalled by clusters of revelatory events.¹¹⁵ Matthew claims that God's revelatory initiative of mercy and grace has formed a new people, composed of those who have discerned the truth about Jesus. From a literary perspective, the way he presents his story legitimates that claim.

Matthew's scriptural tradition also provided him with other patterns. If, in the tradition, Moses himself could be presented as a model, around whom archetypal functions, such as those of prophet, priest, king and mediator, could gather, so elevating his status, it is not entirely without precedent for Matthew to present Jesus in a similar way, as 'greater than' others. Also within Matthew's tradition, Abraham could be seen as a model, and could be presented in the story of the patriarchs in very similar ways to Moses and Israel.¹¹⁶ These presentations of figures from his past history, provided Matthew with analogies for the way he recorded his narrative of Jesus: he focuses on an individual within the tradition, who brings the true interpretation of the law and who also uses a wisdom style of teaching. In relation to our motif, he also presents Jesus as one who receives revelation and is skilled in the exercise of discernment.

The scriptural theme of Israel as a whole having a responsibility to exercise discernment and yet, at the same time, being blind, without knowledge and deaf to the call of God, also forms a part of Matthew's tradition. It is not entirely without precedent for him to take up this theme in his gospel. Discernment is demanding and partial, and response to revelation causes division. We shall draw attention to other resonances with the OT in our closer study of Matthew's text in chapters 5-7 of the thesis. A further setting for Matthew's gospel must first be examined, that of early Jewish literature, including apocalyptic and the further development of wisdom traditions.

¹¹⁵In a similar way, Luke sees both the start of Jesus' ministry and the start of the era of the church signalled by the activity of the Spirit.

¹¹⁶For details of Abraham's 'model' life, see Moberly, *OT of the OT*, 135ff.

Chapter 4

DISCERNMENT OF REVELATION IN EARLY JEWISH LITERATURE

4.1 Introductory Observations

Movement into exile in the sixth century created a new situation for Israel. Throughout the period of the monarchy there had been some sort of national identity with land, monarchy and cult. While the exile brought about physical and external changes, it also brought theological and religious changes to the nation. The period of exile led to deep reflection on the tragedy, a re-shaping of beliefs and consolidation, through both the preservation of traditions, and the nourishing of hopes of restoration. Questions of self-definition and self-understanding were also acutely raised.¹ Who could claim to be the legitimate successors of old Israel became a matter of great importance, and there was conflict over both the adoption and interpretation of laws concerning ethnic, cultic and ethical qualifications of members of the new community.²

Ezra and Nehemiah undertook the task of consolidation around the law of Moses. Ezra's reading of the law to the people was highly symbolic and significant (Neh. 8.1-8). The public affirmation of obedience to the law was an important step towards the establishment and acceptance of the authoritative record of God's word as revelation, both in terms of God's acts in their history and the instructions for continuing conduct. The recognition of a group of *writings*, both the law and prophetic collections, as scriptural (but not necessarily canonical) was significant. The development of a written, and therefore in some sense, fixed Torah, including the covenant promises, could not be abandoned or disregarded. Fishbane³ notes, especially in relation to Psalm 119, that a whole series of terms was transferred to scripture and its study 'which originally, or independently, served to express an immediate religious relationship with God'; e.g. 'Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law' (Ps. 119.18; cf. vs. 66,135).

The question of how to keep the Torah on a day to day basis was answered by the development of case law. The question of both how to justify new views not contained in the scriptures, as well as how to interpret the views found therein, was

¹Urbach, 'Self-Isolation', 273.

²Mach, 'Conservative revolution?', 61.

³Revelation and Tradition', 350.

answered either by inspired exegesis of the existing text⁴ or by appeal to new revelation. It was important for all 'techniques' to show continued loyalty to the now written revelation, which created a context and ethic for the present in God's relationship with his covenant people. The revelation provided by God to Moses at Sinai became paradigmatic and all subsequent revelation had to be in some relation to this initial given revelation. All subsequent claims to revelation are thus progressive or 'meta-revelation', i.e., 'revelation which in some way takes previous revelation as its object or starting point'.⁵

This written Torah in the context of narrative involved a looking back to the period before the exile as a distinct age or period in the past, in terms of covenant and giving of the law, as well as a direct communication of God's word. 'Thus says the Lord', and the 'word of the Lord' are perceived to predominate. References to 'the former prophets' and 'his servants the prophets' suggests that the prophetic era had come to an end.⁶ Although commandments from God are prefaced with 'thus says the Lord' (Zech. 1.2f; 6.9ff.), there is a movement away from direct words to an inspired interpretation of prophecy, seen in the visions of Zechariah (1.7 - 6.8). Although 'the word of the Lord came to Zechariah', it comes in the form of a vision which then has to be explained by an angel, although there is no ascent recorded here. Here the prophetic claim to authority is taken over by the angelic interpretation of a vision.⁷

Thus, late scriptural prophecy took on an interpretative nature, and we find a similar trend in the wisdom tradition. With the end of the period of the monarchy and the rise in the importance of the law, the role of the scribe became more important. The two scribal functions, collector and purveyor of pragmatic wisdom and interpreter of law, often became merged into one, and, as we shall see, Ben Sira exhibits a combination of prophetic, wisdom and scribal traits.

Aspects of both prophetic and wisdom traditions developed into apocalyptic thought. VanderKam has suggested that, given the divinatory aspects of prophecy, a sharp

⁴Fishbane, 'Revelation and Tradition', 349. 'Texts believed to be divinely revealed had a fixed and controlling legitimacy about them in relation to all new developments. As a partial consequence of this phenomenon, study and exegesis of the revealed materials developed.' Cf. the use of midrash and targum, expanded paraphrases to make the word relevant to the day.

⁵Bockmuehl, *Revelation*, 29, n.35.

⁶Zech. 1.4,6; 7.7,12. Ps. 74.9 ('We do not see our signs; there is no longer any prophet, nor is there any among us who knows how long'), may reflect a later view; cf. Zech. 13.3; Lam. 2.9.

⁷'We can hardly exaggerate the importance of this shift whereby the prophetic claim to authority is taken over by the interpreter of prophecy.' Blenkinsopp, 'Interpretation', 10; VanderKam, 'Origins', 169; Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 200.

distinction should not be drawn between mantic wisdom and biblical prophecy as influences on apocalyptic thought; neither should 'prophecy' be limited to what the few great literary prophets taught or did.⁸ This observation is significant for our theme, since both divination and mantic wisdom are concerned with ways of discerning revelation. We have seen in the previous chapter how revelation is significant in both the law and the prophets, and we shall see in this chapter how discernment of revelation is also a feature in different types of literary works from the inter-testamental period.

The role of prophecy may have changed, yet individuals claimed an inspiration in continuity with scripture. They claimed to be the ones through whom God mediated his revelation. This was of relevance within the community, since those who discerned and accepted as true their claims to inspiration and inspired exegesis formed, in some sense, their own community, although these have frequently been particularly difficult to isolate with any degree of certainty. Obedience to the law, and obedience to the specific interpretation of the law as given by an inspired mediator, is one factor in the formation of a group. In order to remain within the group, discernment and obedience also need to be on-going and have eschatological consequences for members.

Only a limited number of representative texts can be examined here, ones which are significant background to Matthew's text, as well as appropriate to Matthew's thought world. Attention has been drawn to the apocalyptic perspective of Matthew,⁹ and it is therefore appropriate to examine our topic in the literature from Qumran, coming as it does from a different group also with an apocalyptic outlook. Matthew's text also reflects a scribal background and shows affinities with wisdom traditions.¹⁰ We shall therefore look at Sirach as an example of scribal wisdom literature, and this is particularly relevant in discussion of the relation between wisdom and Torah and how to live a godly life. Our third text will be the Book of Daniel whose visions of the kingdoms and the Son of Man, as well as themes of obedience, wisdom and discernment are also relevant to Matthew. Lastly, we shall consider sections of *1 Enoch*, a composite work written and/or collected about the time at which Matthew was writing, and which, like Matthew's gospel, also reflects a concern with the authority of new revelation.

⁸'Origins', 174ff.

⁹Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology and Christian Judaism*; Hagner, 'Apocalyptic Motifs'.

¹⁰Orton, *Understanding Scribe*; Suggs, *Wisdom, Christology*.

4.2 Select Texts from Qumran

The exact origins of the community which settled at Qumran remain in debate, but the sect's main strategy was one of religious and cultic separation from the current Jewish establishment in Jerusalem, leading to a physical separation in a settlement by the Dead Sea. Scriptural writings as a whole were of fundamental importance to both the existence and way of life of the community, as evidenced by their constant copying of, commenting on and engaging with the texts. In the three rules (CD, 1QS, 1QM), although explicit citations from scripture with an introductory formula are not common, there are many allusions, developments and re-interpretations of scriptural themes.¹¹

A significant passage in 1QS illustrates several points in respect of our motif.

And when these become members of the Community in Israel according to all these rules, they shall separate from the habitation of unjust men and shall go into the wilderness to prepare there the way of Him; as it is written, *Prepare in the wilderness the way of ..., make straight in the desert a path for our God* (Isa. 40.3). This (path) is the study of the Law which He commanded by the hand of Moses, that they may do according to all that has been revealed from age to age, and as the Prophets have revealed by His Holy Spirit. (1QS 8.12-16)

The passage affirms that the law was given by God to Moses; that is, the community accepted it to be revelation. The writings of the prophets were also considered to be revelation, having been 'revealed by His Holy Spirit'. The *study* of the law is of the utmost importance. The interpretation of the verse from Isaiah here takes both a figurative sense (interpreting *path* as the study of the law¹²), and a literal sense (interpreting *prepare in the wilderness*, as literally 'in the desert').¹³ We also note the strong element of separation from 'unjust men'. An acceptance of a particular discipline is a sign of belonging to the group and the study of the law is to enable them to do 'according to all that has been revealed'.

¹¹CD 4.12-19 uses the word 'interpretation' (*peshet*). It remains unclear whether these documents were composed at Qumran or originated elsewhere.

¹²'This' in the feminine, could refer to 'way' or 'path', both feminine nouns; so VanderKam, *Scrolls Today*, 104.

¹³Both scriptural allusions: the desert was understood to be a place of revelation and the law as a way or path.

The Community shared with Judaism the study of given, written foundation documents and obedience to the laws therein, but their particular interpretations of the scriptures as well as their own additional writings, needed justification and legitimation. One of the main ways of achieving this was by appeal to revelation. The eschatological perspective of the Community, seeing itself as living in the last days, as the true remnant of Israel and inheritor of the covenant, meant they interpreted scripture as applying directly to the age in which they were living, when the true meaning of the secrets had finally been revealed.

It is this study of the scriptures that forms the basis of the whole focus of the Community, and the *Habakkuk Commentary* is particularly instructive here. The well-preserved text of 1QpHab consists of the text and a commentary (*peshet*) on the first two chapters of Habakkuk, and is one of the main sources for the study of the origins of the Qumran community as well as their biblical exegesis. The actual methods used in such exegesis are not our prime concern here,¹⁴ but rather the fact that it was through study of the scriptural writings, revelation, that God gave the Teacher further revelation.¹⁵

... and God told Habakkuk to write down that which would happen to the final generation, but He did not make known to him when time would come to an end. And as for that which He said, *That he who reads may read it speedily*: interpreted this concerns the Teacher of Righteousness, to whom God made known all the mysteries of the words of His servants the Prophets. (1QpHab 7.1-5)

From this passage we may deduce they understood their situation in the following ways. The writer of the original prophecy referred to the 'latter days' and not to his own time. The commentator on the text assumed that he was living in the 'latter days' and that therefore the prophecies were addressed to him. The meaning of the text is not obvious; the words of the prophets and the law, although accepted as revelation, *need* interpreting, and that God had revealed the true meaning to the Teacher.¹⁶ The Teacher is thus the one 'to whom God made known all the

¹⁴Brooke, 'Scrolls', 74, sees this as an area for further research; also Marshall, 'Assessment', 10ff.

¹⁵Described by Mach, 'Conservative revolution', 68, as a 'second revelation, this time revealing not necessarily a new text but rather the interpretation of shared scripture'.

¹⁶Bockmuehl, *Revelation*, 47, suggests that their exegesis of the Torah 'seeks to uncover the "hidden" (but nevertheless *given*) intentions of the Mosaic Law, the prophetic word is in fact limited and *incomplete* in itself'.

mysteries'; who has received word 'from the mouth of God';¹⁷ and is the Priest,¹⁸ '[in whose heart] God set [understanding] that he might interpret' (1QpHab 2.1-9; 7.5).

Dimant¹⁹ suggests that 1QpHab 2.7-9 and 7.3-5 do not necessarily imply 'that only the Teacher was privy to the true meaning of the divine oracles', although this is how the statement is often understood. She suggests that it points to the character of the biblical prophecy as a 'progressive revelation' similar to that of the revelation of the Torah laws. This is correct in so far as revelation at Qumran was 'progressive' or 'meta-revelation', that is, built upon and subsequent to a previously given revelation; but her statement does not give sufficient weight to the position of the Teacher as one who is inspired and qualified to receive such revelation, nor the way revelation 'works' through its passing on to others.²⁰

The Teacher is not only the most gifted interpreter of given revelation, he is also the mediator of further revelation.²¹ There is, thus, a chain or hierarchy, from God to the Teacher, to the Council and thence to the members. This focus on an individual or select group is in line with the attention in the OT to certain figures as recipients of revelation.²² While it remains unclear who is the speaker of the Exhortation in the *Damascus Document*, the focus is on an specific person, a skilled interpreter and one who passes on revelation: 'I will unstop your ears'; 'I will uncover your eyes' (CD 2.2,14).

The real issue in the *Habakkuk Commentary* concerns the authority of the Teacher²³ and his claims to be the true and correct interpreter of scripture. He justifies his claim by appeal to revelation from God. Claims to revelation bring division, and in this Commentary we find many examples, expressed in severe and rhetorical terms, concerning those who do not acknowledge the Teacher's claim. The scene is set at the beginning with the stark opposition of 'the wicked' and 'the righteous': '[*The wicked* is the Wicked Priest, and *the righteous*] is the Teacher of

¹⁷Cf. Jer. 23.16; Ezek. 3.17.

¹⁸Assuming that the Teacher and the Priest are the same person; so 4Q171.2.16.

¹⁹'Early Judaism', 53.

²⁰Bockmuehl, *Revelation*, 49,n.43, notes a certain ambiguity here as to whether the council of twelve elders and three priests and the Instructor are recipients of revelation; 'it remains unclear in the texts whether these figures do anything more than to preserve and handle received revelation'.

²¹He may be designated 'Master' or *maskil*. See Dan. 11.33; 12.3; Ezra 8.18.

²²Figures referred to in the Scrolls are: Moses, 1QS 1.3,1Q22 1.1f.; Samuel 4Q160; the prophets 1QpHab7.

²³Stendahl, *School*, 190, n.1. Brownlee, *Midrash*, 34, in describing the purposes of *peshet*, lists as the first two: to vindicate the Righteous Teacher against his enemies; to vindicate the followers of the Teacher against their opponents; cf. 4QpNahum.

Righteousness...' (1.12). This is followed in 1.15-2.9 by the claim of the Teacher to have received revelation from God, especially 'from the mouth of God'. Opponents 'despised the Law of God' (1.10); they 'were unfaithful, together with the Liar' because they 'did not listen to the word' (received directly from God by the Teacher) (2.1f.); 'the [wicked ...] they shall not believe in the laws of [God] (2.12); '[the wicked] shall double their guilt upon themselves [and it shall not be forgiven] when they are judged..' (7.15).

8.1-3 'concerns all those who observe the Law in the House of Judah', that is, the law as interpreted within and by the community, and have faith in the Teacher of Righteousness. These are the ones whom God will deliver from the House of Judgement. In the following section, from 8.4 to the end of the document, the text from Habakkuk is divided up into eleven short sections, and the *peshet* for eight of them makes an explicit reference to the Wicked Priest/Priest/Spouter of Lies and those who follow him. The rhetorical language concerning his evil ways builds up to a climax; because he 'pursued the Teacher' in order to 'confuse him with his venomous fury', did not keep the holy days, especially the Sabbath, did not repent, and defiled the temple, so will God condemn him to destruction' (10.14-12.9).

It thus appears that the argument takes the following shape: a *distinction is asserted* between the wicked and the righteous, confirmed to be because the wicked have not received (listened to) the revelation received by the Teacher from God, nor have they kept the Law 'correctly', that is as interpreted by the community; the Teacher's authority in terms of his receipt of direct revelation from God is then confirmed; and then the opposition is vilified, culminating in their destruction by God on the Day of Judgement.

The same rhetorical style is also to be found in a different type of document, the Exhortation of the *Damascus Document*. The aim of the preacher here, possibly a 'Guardian' of the Community, is to encourage members of the group to remain faithful and, using examples from Israel's history, he demonstrates that 'fidelity is always rewarded and apostasy chastised'.²⁴ Here the rhetorical style of the sections can be seen in regularly alternating pictures of the righteous and the wicked, the

²⁴Vermes, CDSSE, 126.

former being described in terms of discerning and receiving God's revelation, while the latter have failed to do either.²⁵

The Teacher of Righteousness is thus set over against the Wicked Priest as an 'outsider', and the community of the Teacher's followers is set over against the wicked as 'outsiders'. In 1QS 5.11f, a distinction is made - the 'outsiders', that is those who are 'not reckoned in His Covenant', firstly, 'have neither inquired nor sought after Him concerning His laws that they might know the hidden things in which they have sinfully erred'; and, secondly, 'matters revealed they have treated with insolence'. This suggests that they have not discerned as revelation the matters accepted by the community to be revelation.²⁶

Certain passages in 1QpHab (especially 1.17-2.10 and 6.12-7.5) are frequently cited for the valuable information they provide concerning the Qumran Community's understanding of the interpretation of scripture, prophecy and other theological concerns. The references in the document to the Wicked Priest and the Liar are also frequently referred to in connection with trying to trace the history of the Community and their departure from Jerusalem.²⁷ Yet I suggest that if the Commentary is viewed as a whole from a more literary perspective, it is significant, but not surprising, that the two motifs of revelation and separation are found together in the same document. To my knowledge, the significance of the occurrence of these motifs together in the same document has not been recognized in previous research.

There are other factors which suggest that this arrangement was deliberate. The scriptural text on which the comments were based had not yet received its final shape, as evidenced by the inclusion of many variants.²⁸ Their comments on the text could, therefore, be very fluid,²⁹ and capable of sustaining various

²⁵The righteous are described in many ways, and the following are among those that relate to discernment of revelation: 'all you who know righteousness'; 'they sought Him with a whole heart'; 'He made known His Holy Spirit to them .. and He proclaimed the truth (to them)'; 'God .. revealing to them the hidden things .. He unfolded before them'; 'God .. raised from Aaron men of discernment and from Israel men of wisdom, and He caused them to hear'. The wicked are similarly described in many ways, and the following relate to discernment of revelation: 'when they were unfaithful and forsook Him, He hid His face from Israel'; 'God chose them not .. He hid His face from the Land'; 'they chose their own will and walked in the stubbornness of their hearts'; '*for it is a people of no discernment* (Isa. 28.11), *it is a nation void of counsel inasmuch as there is no discernment in them*' (Deut. 32.28).

²⁶For discussion of 'hidden things' and 'matters revealed' see Bockmuehl, *Revelation*, 42f.

²⁷So Brownlee, *Midrash*, 21f.

²⁸Dimant, 'Early Judaism', 47.

²⁹Stendahl, *School*, 190, 'We must rather presume that DSH (=1QpHab) was conscious of various possibilities, tried them out, and allowed them to enrich its interpretation of the prophet's message, which in all its forms was fulfilled in and through the Teacher of Righteousness'.

interpretations.³⁰ The poem/prayer in Habakkuk 3 is not explained and the manuscript has space for additional material. The work thus ends on an eschatological climax of judgement against opponents. These factors suggest a deliberate shaping of the text, rather than something accidental. VanderKam³¹ notes that the space 'suggests that the interpreter wrote as much as he intended; the poem in chapter 3 did not serve his purposes'. He does not go on to say explicitly what he considers the interpreter's purposes to be, but I suggest that one of them is specifically to contrast the Teacher of Righteousness and his followers with the Liar/Wicked Priest and his followers. The difference between the two was not only foretold but is further justified by being deliberately expressed in terms of discernment and non-discernment of revelation.

The *Habakkuk Commentary* does not state the means by which the Teacher received this revelation, but indications may be gleaned from elsewhere. The *Community Rule* (1QS) is a composite document containing rules, regulations and instructions for the Community, and finishing with a hymn of confession and praise (10.6-11.22). The hymn is written in the first person and may have been intended for the *maskil* or Teacher to recite. Some of the praise elements both acknowledge and thank God as the source of his knowledge and discernment, and suggest a visionary experience of the presence of God.

For my light has sprung
from the source of His knowledge;
my eyes have beheld His marvellous deeds,
and the light of my heart, the mystery to come.

My eyes have gazed
on that which is eternal,
on wisdom concealed from men,
on knowledge and wise design
(hidden) from the sons of men;

Blessed art Thou, my God,
who openest the heart of Thy servant to knowledge! (1QS 11.3,6,16)

³⁰So when some genius decides that in one verse of Habakkuk there is a prophecy of the wicked priest, it is natural to look in other verses for further references and to clear away obscurity or lack of message by assuming that the verse must have something to say within this frame of reference.' Marshall, 'Assessment', 14.

³¹*Scrolls Today*, 46.

Other manuscript fragments related to heavenly worship appear to be based on a Merkabah vision (so 4Q405 20 ii,21-2, based on Ezek. 1,10,40-48; see also 1QM 10.10-12). Visionary experience was therefore not unknown in the Community, but from the manuscript evidence it is hard to be certain how much of a major part this played in the life of the Community. The inclusion of the hymn in 1QS may serve a similar function to that of a prophetic call narrative. The other rules and instructions are therefore justified and legitimated by reference to revelation.

Taking this legitimation a stage further, the on-going exegesis and interpretation of the Torah and prophets, could itself acquire the status of revelation. This study and re-working of the scriptural text combined with the high and revelatory status of the exegesis,³² reaches its culmination in the *Temple Scroll*. Here, the biblical text, mostly from the Pentateuch, is presented in the first person singular, with no introductory formula, and presented as the direct words of God, that is, as though it were Torah, spoken directly by God to Moses at Sinai. By setting additional laws alongside biblical laws, and by using the first person singular for both, it elevates the whole work to the status of revelation, and thus goes beyond, for instance, the *pesher* of the *Habakkuk Commentary*, as well as interpretations of the Torah in rabbinic writings.³³

The 'hierarchy' of revelation forms only one side of the picture, since members of the Council themselves not only pass on, but also receive revelation. Community members make a commitment to keep 'every commandment of the Law of Moses in accordance with all that has been revealed of it to the sons of Zadok, the Priests, Keepers of the Covenant and Seekers of His will' (1QS 5.9; cf. 1Q22 2.6f.; 1QS 8.1-2). While the whole community can be described as 'addressees', they are, at the same time, more than that. By their very situation, that is choosing to be members of the Community, they are the ones who have discerned and therefore accepted the claim that the teaching is revelation and the Teacher to be the mediator of it. They thus have a more active role to play than that of passive recipients. This further suggests that they are *able to* discern, by positively choosing to accept the discipline and physical separation, as well as by a gift from God.

The liturgy from the entry ceremony into the Community (1QS 1.16-2.18), includes a blessing from the Priests, in a paraphrase of Num. 6.24-26.

³²Brownlee, *Midrash*, 31.

³³Chester, 'Citing the OT', 147.

May He bless you with all good and preserve you from all evil! May He lighten your heart with life-giving wisdom and grant you eternal knowledge! May He raise His merciful face towards you for everlasting bliss!

We note the significant interpretation in the second sentence, as a paraphrase of, 'The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you' (Num. 6.25). Those who lack revelation and discernment are outside the Community, in the same way that sin is located outside the Community.³⁴ This ceremony is repeated annually by the members (2.19), suggesting both that sin needs to be dealt with continually, and also that discernment is both incomplete and on-going.

In a similar way to that which acknowledges and deals with sin located within the Community, lack of discernment within the Community is also acknowledged. The 'enlightenment of the heart of man' in 4.2-6 includes 'understanding, and intelligence; (a spirit of) mighty wisdom' and 'a spirit of discernment in every purpose'. This is contrasted, not with those outside the Community, but with the 'ways of the spirit of falsehood' within the community, amongst which are 'blindness of eye and dullness of ear, stiffness of neck and heaviness of heart' (4.10f.). Within each person a battle goes on between the Angel of Darkness and the Prince of Lights, a struggle between the spirits of truth and deceit (4.23). The status of a member is not obvious since these things take place within the heart (2.11f. cf. 2.26; 3.4), and the final destiny of a person remains with God (2.15f.). This suggests an issue here of theological anthropology, relevant to our exploration of the ability to receive the gift of the knowledge of God.

4.2.1 Qumran Texts and Matthew's Gospel

In relation to our motif of discernment, we find some significant analogies between some Qumran texts and Matthew's Gospel.

1. The Teacher of Righteousness claims an authority as recipient and mediator of revelation.³⁵ He is thus similar to Moses and the prophets, yet is not presented as a lawgiver or prophet,³⁶ but as a teacher. His words are therefore meta- or progressive revelation, based on and derived from a previously given revelation.

³⁴Stuckenbruck, 'Wisdom and Holiness', 52.

³⁵"Through me Thou hast illumined the face of the Congregation' (1QH 12.27).

³⁶Bockmuehl, *Revelation*, 49.

This attention to individuals is found throughout the history of Israel,³⁷ and raises the pertinent question of what to do after that person's death. After the Teacher's death ('gathering in', CD B 2.14), the Community is still to 'heed' and 'listen to the voice of the Teacher' (CD B 2.27f.), and some of the 4QMMT manuscripts may reflect on-going legal debate after the Teacher's death. If the Teacher was understood to be the coming Prophet, his death may have heightened the Community's eschatological expectations.³⁸ The *War Scroll* especially was seen as proleptic revelation of the imminent intervention of God, although other texts appear to have allowed for a longer time-frame (1QS 7.20f.)

For both Qumran and Matthew, revelation 'works' in a similar way, with an individual claiming an authority, on behalf of the people of God, as recipient and mediator of revelation,³⁹ and for Matthew we shall discuss Jesus in this role in chapter 5. Discernment also 'works' in a similar way in both communities. Discernment is needed in order to obey, and obedience is needed in order to discern. Knowledge and understanding are gifts from God.⁴⁰ At Qumran discernment comes through obedience to the law, as interpreted by the Teacher, as mediator of revelation. The Zadokite priests may also have had a role in controlling the exegesis by which the secrets were revealed,⁴¹ and this is in keeping with the regulated life of the Community. In both communities one of the main reasons for an initial separation from the 'parent body' was disputes over halakha,⁴² and these in turn were dependent on the authority of their respective interpreters. Although the scriptures form an essential background and setting for Matthew, the intensive searching of the scriptures and detailed exegetical tradition are not the prime location for revelation. For Matthew discernment comes through obedience to the words of Jesus, as mediator of revelation who gives the true interpretation of the law and who has reciprocal knowledge of God. His followers are also to continue to obey Jesus' words after his death (7.24; 24.35; 26.13; 29.20), as well as endure persecution (10.20ff.; 24.13), but are sustained by Jesus' abiding presence with them (1.23; 28.20).

³⁷Cf. 1 Macc. 2.50-61; CD 2.15 - 3.10.

³⁸Brownlee, *Midrash*, 22, suggests that the tenses in 1QpHab may indicate that the Teacher of Righteousness and main opponents belong to the past, while the Kittim belong either to the present or the imminent future.

³⁹Against Deutsch, *Hidden Wisdom*, 79, who asserts that 'it is only logical that the Teacher should receive revelation because of his function in the community'.

⁴⁰Vermes, CDSSE, 75.

⁴¹1QS 5.2f., 9. Sanders, *Paul*, 242. Mach, 'Conservative Revolution', 68, notes that the idea of second revelation 'makes it impossible for others to argue about a given interpretation'.

⁴²Mach, 'Conservative Revolution', 64.

Matthew and Qumran may share similar eschatological expectations in that both believed the final prophet to have come: in the Teacher (at Qumran); in John the Baptist and, to the extent that he was understood as a prophet, Jesus (in Matthew). Yet Matthew's understanding of the end-events is rather different. Like other early Christian apocalyptic literature, Matthew is written 'from the belief that the end events have already been inaugurated in the person of Jesus Christ who was dead and is alive again. ... The same Jesus who spoke in the past and who will return as the eschatological judge in the imminent future is now active within the Christian community'.⁴³

2. Qumran and Matthew also share certain sectarian tendencies reflected in community organization. The Qumran Community is one based on claims to revelation, comprising those who have discerned the Teacher of Righteousness to be the one to whom God has given revelation. This resulted in a physical and geographical separation from the 'centre' in Jerusalem.⁴⁴ The Community offered an alternative and saw itself as a kind of substitute for the temple in Jerusalem,⁴⁵ as well as observing a different calendar and feast days.⁴⁶ Although the rhetorical language speaks strongly of separation, the Community still appears to think of itself as within Judaism. Rabbinic Judaism taught how Israelites should behave within the covenant and thus *remain* in it. Sectarians, even though they are already Israelites, must make a conscious decision to join a different, but related covenant.⁴⁷ Hence the Community's stress on knowledge, insight and understanding, and, in this sense, knowledge is election.⁴⁸

'Everyone who had voluntarily earned the right to enter the community pledged to live by the divine will *as understood by the group*'.⁴⁹ The separate Community had a hierarchy and ranking of members, and the Council examined a member concerning his 'understanding and deeds' (1QS 5.20ff. and 6.16-23 repeat this phrase several times), so that he may be 'advanced' or 'moved down'. Discernment is thus needed in order to remain within the Community: to be taught and practised, as well

⁴³Fiorenza, 'Phenomenon', 312. Hagner, 'Apocalyptic Motifs', 69, 'The Messiah cannot come without altering the present order'.

⁴⁴Here, as well as in relation the Christianity, it is hard to speak of sectarian separation from a 'parent body', since that body in Judaism was so diverse of itself.

⁴⁵For bibliographical references to this discussion, see Mach, 'Conservative Revolution', 74f., n.36,37.

⁴⁶Also justified by revelation, CD 3.14f; cf. 4Q320-30; 4QMMT; 1QpHab 11.6-8.

⁴⁷Sanders, *Paul*, 270.

⁴⁸For election by God and individual choice, see 1QH 7.14-19; also CD 2.2-7; 2.13; 6.3; and discussion in Sanders, *Paul*, 266f, 318.

⁴⁹VanderKam, *Scrolls Today*, 113.

as to be examined and judged.⁵⁰ Thus many of the manuscripts contain teaching and exhortation to 'choose that which pleases Him' rather than to 'chose their own will' or walk 'in the stubbornness of their heart' (repeated several times in CD 2.15 - 3.13; also 4Q473). Offences and their punishments are graded, and there is also the possibility of exclusion from the Community (1QS 7.20ff.; cf. Matt. 18.15-17). Failure of discernment and lack of obedience within the Community is thus dealt with in a formalised way, and while members seek forgiveness from God, they do not appear to seek forgiveness of each other (cf. Matt. 6.12,14; 18.21f.).

As we shall see, Matthew's claims that the revelation and interpretation Jesus gives is both certain and binding. Those who discern this truth about Jesus as Son of God constitute a community. This resulted in a separation from Judaism, but the form and degree of that separation has proved very hard to define, due to lack of specific early evidence. Nevertheless, certain parallels between the community at Qumran and Matthew's fictive community may be suggested. Both offered a choice of two ways, alternatives, justified by appeal to revelation. The two communities expect members to take the same conscious decision to join a new movement, not only as individual choice, but in response to a new initiative on the part of God. For Matthew, God had arranged things so that 'outsiders' could not see or hear and thus believe (13.10-17; cf. interpretation of Hab. 1.5 in 1QpHab 2.1-9; Acts 13.38-41). Both communities combined a positive view of their group as the elect, and a corresponding strong negative view, that those not part of the group were not elect. They both emphasised knowledge and understanding, as well as acceptance of discipline, as a sign of belonging. The Qumran's Community's 'cultivated hostility'⁵¹ to those outside, while also present in Matthew, was balanced by his understanding of forgiveness and the universal significance of Jesus and mission.⁵²

Matthew's gospel shows some evidence of a hierarchical structure, with Peter and the twelve disciples assuming significant roles (16.18-20; 19.28), although all are also of the same status before God (23.8-10; 20.20-28).⁵³ The way of coping with a

⁵⁰So knowledge must be purified, and further knowledge received (1QS 1.12; 3.13f.); and some elements can be gained only after entry (1QS 5.11f.).

⁵¹Sanders, *Paul*, 314.

⁵²The combination of a strict apocalyptic 'sect' and one which engages in mission, is not necessarily incompatible, although there is little evidence that the Qumran Community engaged in mission. See Goodman, *Mission*, 170, who suggests that Matt. 28.19 is included to counter hostility 'inside their own ranks to the indiscriminate acceptance of gentiles by declaring that this was not only permitted, it was positively desirable'.

⁵³'Christians welcomed converts into their communities with a warmth far distinguished from the ambivalence of contemporary Jews. Converts were given immediately a status equal in theory to that of existing members of the community.' Goodman, *Mission*, 105.

lack of discernment (failure) is through restoration and a desire to be with Jesus (14.30; 28.18), although, as at Qumran, sin against other members may result in exclusion from the community (18.17; cf. 1QS 5.24-6.1; CD 9.2-8; and Judas, probably drawing on Lev. 19.15-18).

Matthew's general social setting amongst both Jews and Gentiles, means that for him there is more concern with the threat of false prophets and false teaching (7.15-23; 24.23f.), and this may explain his stress on Jesus as teacher and paraenesis for his followers. Obedience is exercised in the doing of Jesus' words, enabled by Jesus' presence with the community, understood, not as at Qumran as the elect, remnant and true Israel, but in terms of household and brotherhood of believers (18.15.ff., 21-35; 23.8). Both words reflect an understanding of the setting of boundaries for God's people.

From a literary perspective, we note that Matthew also includes sections that alternate between discernment and non-discernment, especially at the beginning and end of his gospel (2, 27.57-28.20; see further chapter 7), and his rhetorical language, particularly in reference to opponents, is very forceful. The Qumran Community's manuscripts contain a variety of literary styles and genres. Matthew was writing a gospel, and while it may contain elements of apocalypse, liturgy, interpretation and teaching, it is primarily a narrative. Within this record there is an element of paradox, of the radical, counter-cultural teaching and actions of Jesus, not present at Qumran.⁵⁴

Although no direct relationship between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament texts has been established, we have seen how some of the Qumran community's writings and Matthew's gospel share some common motifs. For both, response to revelation causes division, and this is expressed in the similar use of rhetorical language and results in separation of a group from its parent body. Both follow the scriptural model that revelation from God is mediated through certain gifted individuals, and that their discernment of revelation vests them with a certain authority. Matthew further claims that Jesus is God's final, authoritative and eschatological revelation, the truth about whom also needs to be discerned.

⁵⁴Cf. for example, the beatitudes in 4Q525 and Matt. 5.3-11.

4.3 Sirach

We saw in the last chapter how the OT wisdom traditions indicate another important dimension of the variety of forms of revelation. If the tradition of the Qumran community reflects an emphasis on the intensive searching of the scriptures and detailed exegetical study of Torah, wisdom traditions emphasise that something of God can be known and recognised in creation. The work of Ben Sira is a collection of wisdom type instruction and he reasons that the wisdom universally sought is particularised and finds true expression in the Torah.

The cultural tensions of the diaspora brought differing Jewish reactions: some were attracted to the Greek way of life; others wanted to preserve the traditions more strictly; and others tried to find a viable synthesis between the two.⁵⁵ Ben Sira lived in Jerusalem and his work, written in Hebrew about 190-180 BC, was later translated into Greek by his grandson, who also added the Prologue, in Egypt about 117 BC.⁵⁶ It generally reflects the power, prestige and importance of the scribal class. In common with other collections of wisdom type instructions, the work is loosely structured, and attempts to formulate a literary structure have met with limited success,⁵⁷ although certain more discrete smaller units can be found. Scribal themes, such as learning and discipline, as well as attention to wisdom and Torah are important for Ben Sira. They are important also for *Matthew*, and Suggs,⁵⁸ for instance, has argued that Matthew presents Jesus as wisdom personified.

As suggested at the end of the last chapter, 'wisdom' (*hokmāh*) may refer to three different areas: a self-revelation of God, a body of literature and knowledge, and a way of seeing and of living. Each of these different aspects of wisdom is to be found in Sirach, although it is in the third area that we find more similarities between the desire for wisdom and the practice of discernment. With reference to a self-revelation of God, the hymn to wisdom in chapter 24 comes at a central position of the work, and this may suggest its importance for the author. The universal and cosmic understanding of wisdom expressed here is similar to that in Proverbs 8, and

⁵⁵de Silva, 'Honor, Shame', 436.

⁵⁶The fact that the work has an explicit author, unlike most other scriptural works of the time, may reflect its Hellenistic background. For Prologue, cf. Lk. 1.1-4.

⁵⁷Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 45; Coggins, *Sirach*, 24ff.; Skehan/Di Lella, *Ben Sira*, 4ff.

⁵⁸*Wisdom, Christology*; for discussion of historical Jesus' role as sage, see Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*.

may also be in part drawn from Greek philosophy.⁵⁹ At the beginning of the hymn of self-praise by wisdom, she is specifically located in the 'assembly of the Most High',⁶⁰ and addressed herself to God's people on earth. Wisdom is older than the universe and gives order to all that exists (24.2-6); she covers the earth 'like a mist' (cf. spirit; Gen. 1.2); so by observing the created order, one is observing an expression of God. In the following verses (7-12), there is a particular emphasis on the way in which wisdom has been manifested to the people of God. Thus, wisdom sought a resting place among all the nations, but God 'assigned a place' for her, in locations becoming ever more specific: in Jacob/Israel, in Jerusalem/Zion, and then in the holy tabernacle (temple). Here she flourished, and here is also the place where God offers knowledge of himself.⁶¹

In relation to wisdom as a body of literature: since the world was created with wisdom, it is capable of being understood. There is an order in creation and it can be discovered. This order is implicit in the collection of proverbial material throughout the book, where there is a setting out of analogies and the predictability of life in general. A large part of Sirach contains advice and instruction, familiar in ANE wisdom schools, and thus having a universal tone, e.g. selecting friends, looking after sons and daughters, eating, lending possessions, government, etc.⁶² This is a collection of worldly wisdom, wise maxims and descriptions of 'the way things are'. In a significant development, not found, for instance, in Proverbs or Job, 'all this', for Ben Sira, is equated with, and finds true expression in 'the book of the covenant of the Most High God, the law which Moses commanded us' (24.23). The wisdom universally sought is particularised in Torah, as the history of the world and its people is particularised in Israel (17.12,17). As shown by Weeks⁶³ in relation to Proverbs, what we seem to have here, as in other wisdom literature, is a focusing and particularisation of mundane wisdom in the 'religious' wisdom of Israel in the form of the Law. Thus the generally well-established wisdom tradition, 'help a poor man', is to be defined in terms of Torah, 'for the commandment's sake' (Prov. 29.9).⁶⁴ The

⁵⁹Whether wisdom here is a distinct personality, and if so, in what sense, or a poetic personification, remains unclear, although as an expression, or self-revelation of God, it reflects in some sense a way in which God can be known. Clements, 'Wisdom', 76, finds an apologetic motive here, a conforming of Israelite-Jewish teaching with that acceptable to the Hellenistic world.

⁶⁰That is, council (*ṣodh*), or presence of God; Jer. 23.18,22; Ps. 89.8; Job 15.8.

⁶¹Hayward, 'Wisdom's Dwelling', 37.

⁶²11.29-34; 30.1-13; 42.9-11; 10.1-5; 8.1-19.

⁶³'Wisdom in the OT', 26.

⁶⁴Clements, 'Wisdom', 76, suggests that the Torah came to combine the uniquely revealed law of God and a natural law, applicable to wide human experience, and that these are not properly reconcilable functions. Sanders, *Paul*, 332, speaks of a 'dialectical relationship' between the two.

dwelling of Wisdom, in the temple and in the form of the Book of the Covenant, does not preclude her presence elsewhere (24.8-9).

The third aspect of wisdom refers to a way of seeing: of seeing both that which can be observed, as well as 'perceiving' that which is hidden. This way of seeing is bound up with a way of living. If wisdom is the means by which God creates, then wisdom is needed to act wisely in obedience to the creator. So 'prudential behaviour' which all wisdom teachers extol, is equated with obedience to the commandments of the Jewish covenant, summarised in the expression, 'fear of the Lord'.⁶⁵ This 'fear of the Lord' is demonstrated in five passages on wisdom (1.1-10; 4.11-19; 6.18-37; 14.20-15.10; 24.1-34). The opening verse of the work states the theme: 'All wisdom comes from the Lord', and in 1.8, that God is the one who is wise. *All wisdom* covers the three referents to wisdom: as God's self-revelation (1.9a); as order in creation and collections of advice and commandments (1.9b; 25.26); and as a way of seeing and living (shown, for example, in concern for parents and humble behaviour; 3.1-24).

Wisdom is thus both an ideal to be sought and a skill to be exercised, and it is here in particular that we note similarities between desiring wisdom and the practice of discernment. True wisdom can be achieved only by one who fears God and keeps the commandments. All this devoted human effort, while necessary, is incomplete without the knowledge and understanding that is a gift from God. Here we find an interplay between revelation and discernment.⁶⁶

It is this inspiration and awareness that wisdom comes from God, in the context of loyalty to Torah, which distinguishes true wisdom from 'cleverness' and mundane 'intelligence' (19.20-24; cf. 15.7-8). Since true wisdom is a *godly* wisdom, he also emphasises a relationship of humility before God:

My son, perform your tasks in meekness (ἐν πραΰτητι);
then you will be loved by those whom God accepts.
The greater you are, the more you must humble (ταπεινοῦ) yourself;
so you will find favour in the sight of the Lord.
Many are lofty and renowned,

⁶⁵Ten times in chapter 1; also 2.15-17; 43.15-17.

⁶⁶Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 48, notes that 'wisdom is a gift of God' as well as a 'disposition of the mind and character'.

but to the meek he reveals his secrets.⁶⁷
 (ἀλλὰ πράεσιν ἀποκαλύπτει τὰ μυστήρια)
 For great is the might of the Lord;
 he is glorified by the humble (ὑπὸ τῶν ταπεινῶν).
 Seek not what is too difficult for you,
 nor investigate what is beyond your power.
 Reflect upon what has been assigned to you,
 for you do not need what is hidden. (3.17-22)

These verses are part of a section addressed to 'my son', suggesting instruction and education in a wider sense than from just father to son (2.1; 3.17; 4.1; cf. 3.1). Ben Sira's words about not investigating matters not meant to be searched, is part of his stress on the sufficiency of Torah. There is, therefore, no need of other sources, either of the Hellenistic type mystery speculation linked with Greek philosophy, or Jewish wisdom or apocalyptic speculation. Torah is sufficient, provided, as we shall see, it is examined and explained by one qualified to do so. *There is some tension* here between a polemic against that type of wisdom which rests solely on human understanding, and the assumed high status of the one considered to be wise. Ben Sira himself was probably of high social class, but appears also to have been aware of his humble relationship with and status before God.⁶⁸

In 6.18-22⁶⁹ (cf. 15.15) we learn that following wisdom is a deliberate choice, 'choose instruction'. The achievement of wisdom is not easy, 'you will toil'; 'she seems very harsh'; on-going effort is required, 'until you are old', and it is 'not manifest to many'. Wisdom is also something to be exercised and practised and not hidden (20.27-31); so instruction and wisdom (παιδεία, σοφία) are found at the beginning of the Prologue and at the end of the work (51.25 Heb.). Such an element of choice is demonstrated by wisdom's invitation:⁷⁰ 'Come to me, you who desire me, and eat your fill of my fruits' (24.19). The right choice brings its own rewards, but is also something on-going: 'Those who eat me will hunger for more, and those who drink me will thirst for more' (22.19-22). The images of eating and drinking

⁶⁷3.19, is not included in all mss. The 'mysteries' here appear to refer to Godly mysteries; whereas other uses in Sirach refer to mundane secrets or confidences: 22.22; 27,16,17,21.

⁶⁸His use of πραῦς (meek) and ταπεινός (humble) may also suggest an attitude opposed to a Hellenistic view of people, where lowliness is considered shameful and to be avoided. See *TDNT*, 8.11.

⁶⁹Commenting on this passage, Skehan/Di Lella, *Ben Sira*, 195, note: 'Persistence, determination, and unflagging energy are required for one to acquire wisdom; there is no other way'.

⁷⁰Cf. the crying out in the streets by wisdom in Prov. 1.20, expanded further in the description of the choice between the two female figures in Prov. 8-9.

suggest an intimate relationship,⁷¹ as has been recognised in the more sensual images of lady wisdom's appeal, but also suggest wisdom as a nourishment for living.

The contents of wisdom as mundane 'know-how' and religious precepts in the law, are combined in Ben Sira's description of the wise scribe as the one who

will seek out the wisdom of all the ancients,
and will be concerned with prophecies;
he will preserve the discourse of notable men
and will penetrate the subtleties of parables;
he will seek out the hidden meaning of proverbs
and be at home with the obscurities of parables...
he will travel through the lands of foreign nations,
for he tests the good and the evil among men. (39.1b-5; cf. 6.32-37)

These could be the activities of any wise man,⁷² and may reflect the idea of the 'wandering sage'; but this description is not of any scribe, but an *ideal* scribe, and for him, his primary occupation is the 'study of the law of the Most High' (39.1a,5). Reference is made in the Prologue three times to 'the law and the prophets and the other books of our fathers', and this suggests knowledge of some sort of canon of scripture. Although there are no formal quotations of scripture, the work is full of scriptural reference and allusion. It is assumed that the scribe is to be occupied with constant study and interpretation of scripture (38.24-39.3; cf. 32.15f.; 33.3). The description of himself as 'one who gleans after the grape-gatherers' may reflect his position as a follower of scribes who had set the Torah in writing (33.16).⁷³

In order to be able to pursue this occupation, the ideal scribe needs the 'opportunity of leisure' and 'little business' to become wise (38.24). References to the ideal scribe here in 38.24 (σοφία γραμματέως) and in 39.1-5 form an *inclusio* and are deliberately contrasted with those who 'rely upon their hands'. While their work is not denounced ('they keep stable the fabric of the world, and their prayer is in the practice of their trade', 38.31,34), nevertheless, it is clear that the ideal scribe is of a different order. This may reflect the prestige and social importance of the scribal

⁷¹Cf. Matt. 9.10-13; John 6.56.

⁷²Russell, *Divine Disclosure*, 22. Nicklesburg, *Jewish Literature*, 56, suggests that 'wisdom of all the ancients' (39.1) refers to the wisdom lore of other parts of the ANE.

⁷³Coggins, *Sirach*, 62. He also points out the difficulties of tracing direct quotations because the work has been translated, the Hebrew not necessarily following the Hebrew scriptures, nor the Greek the LXX.

class, since he will 'serve among great men and appear before rulers' (39.4; cf. Dan. 2.48).

His study takes place in the context of worship, prayer and repentance,⁷⁴ and this is continued in 39.12-16.⁷⁵ This context of piety and obedience form the setting and preparation for discernment of revelation, but that revelation remains the gift of God:

If the great Lord is willing,
he will be filled with the *spirit of understanding*;
he will pour forth *words of wisdom*
and give thanks to the Lord in prayer. (39.6)

He is inspired by God's spirit. In 24.3 wisdom herself is described in similar terms to the spirit, having come forth 'from the mouth of the Most High, and covered the earth like a mist' (cf. 50.27; Gen. 1.2). Here this is the 'spirit of *understanding*' (σύνεσις; cf. 39.9). Special insight is a gift and may be described as 'inspired discernment' (note esp. ἐκφαίνει in 39.8),⁷⁶ which occurs in the context of a relationship with God.⁷⁷

This revelation that is mediated through an individual is to be passed on. Wisdom, particularized in Torah, is compared to the pouring out of water in various great rivers and her 'stream' is so abundant it can be channelled into many rivulets (24.23-29; cf. Gen. 2.10-13). Ben Sira then likens himself and his own achievement as a scribe to a channel, passing on this water to others: 'I will again pour out teaching like prophecy, and leave it to all future generations' (24.33).⁷⁸ It is significant here that prophecy is regarded as teaching rather than being concerned with the future, and he does not claim his teaching *is* prophecy, but *like* prophecy, since he recognises 'The Prophets' as a literary collection as well as figures from the past

⁷⁴This specific setting in relation to God suggests that the scribe described here (39.1-5) and the one described in vv. 6ff. refer to the same person. See discussion in Orton, *Understanding Scribe*, 70.

⁷⁵So, for instance, references to incense, thanks, praise and songs; it is also possible that the 'praise of ancestors' in 44-50 may be linked to the cult, and Simon son of Onias blesses the people in the temple, 50.1-21.

⁷⁶Orton, *Understanding Scribe*, 70.

⁷⁷It thus seems unnecessary to argue 'which came first', revelation or prayer, if both are regarded as dependent on each other and as on-going. See discussion in Orton, *Understanding Scribe*, 69 and Stadelmann, *Ben Sira*, 184.

⁷⁸Cf. 1QH 16.15ff.

But Thou, O my God, hast put into my mouth
as it were rain for all [those who thirst]
and a fount of living waters which shall not fail.

(Prologue 44-50). As Orton notes,⁷⁹ the prime reason for the ease with which the connection between scribe and prophet was made 'seems to be the common factor of *inspiration*'. This mixture of prophetic and wisdom traits is also found in Proverbs 8, which suggests that by the time of Ben Sira, scribes had begun to assume an authority for their own teaching similar to that claimed by the past prophets.⁸⁰ Thus inspired prophecy and a more literary inspiration drawing on the scriptures both come from God and there is an emphasis on learning and teaching (51.23-27).

Ben Sira thus makes a significant claim for himself in terms of passing on wisdom's teaching; he is like a senior sage addressing someone in search or need of instruction.⁸¹ In some places there are autobiographical references: 24.30-4 has already been noted; along with 33.16-18, 39.12; 42.15; 51.23-30. Elsewhere it is not immediately obvious who is speaking, whether the 'I' refers to Ben Sira himself or wisdom (24.30ff.; cf. 39.12-16; 51.23-30).

In the final unit which forms the conclusion to the whole work (51.13-30), Ben Sira, the teacher, invites the unlearned to come to him for instruction, so that they themselves may acquire the wisdom he passes on. His invitation to 'come aside' (*sûrû*) is also used in the invitations by wisdom and folly in Prov. 9.4. The passage is an elegant autobiographical acrostic poem on wisdom. The invitation to 'lodge in my school' may be a metaphor, or it may suggest that Ben Sira himself ran a wisdom school in Jerusalem.⁸² In 51.13-22 he sets out his credentials and his authority as a wisdom teacher, and demonstrates here that he has been the perfect example of following his own advice: when he was young, he kept seeking wisdom, and will do so until the end (51.13-14; cf. 6.18); though recognising that wisdom is a gift from God, she still needs to be sought (51.17; cf. 1.26); he kept the law faithfully from his youth (51.15), in the context of prayer and worship (51.13,14,20,22). Being wise is thus a process of *paideia* or formation. Although he earlier stresses the need to be humble, here he is confident in what he has learnt; zealous for the good and will never be put to shame (51.18). This invitation stresses, not the hard work, but the comparative ease with which wisdom can be acquired: wisdom doesn't cost

⁷⁹*Understanding Scribe*, 75.

⁸⁰'The scribe and the prophet are no longer distinguished in principle, but merely in degree,' Hengel, *Judaism I*, 136; and from a later date, 'Since the day when the Temple was destroyed, prophecy has been taken from the prophets and given to the wise (sages),' *Baba Bathra* 12a.

⁸¹Harrington, 'Jewish Approaches', 26. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 45, suggests that the work grew by a series of additions, like lecture notes.

⁸²This same poem is found in 11QPs^a.

anything; it is to be found nearby; with just a little effort, the rewards are great; God himself will reward your work (51.25-30).⁸³

Ben Sira focuses on inspired study, teaching and understanding, and for him these are the areas where discernment and revelation take place. It is not surprising, therefore, that he is critical of those who claim to receive revelation through dreams. The passage in 34.1-20 reflects his views concerning dreams: it is those who have *no understanding* and who are *fools* who take them seriously, and the hopes they gain from them are *vain and false*, like catching a shadow or chasing the wind (v. 1f.). 'Divinations and omens and dreams are folly' and reflect the dreamers' own concerns (v. 5). The only exception to this disapproval of dreams is 'unless they are sent from the Most High as a visitation' (v. 6); but he gives no indication as to how one would distinguish between them. As noted in our earlier discussion (section 3.4), the dreams of those who live morally upright and obedient lives, such as Joseph, Daniel and Enoch, are acceptable. Their lives form part of the visible evidence of their claim to have received a dream *from God*. Thus, although dreams have 'deceived many', they are not totally disregarded, as long as they are in the context of keeping the law and exercising wisdom in speaking the truth, which take priority.

Although universal/cosmic wisdom is particularised in Israel, and the everyday practice of wisdom in obeying the Torah, for Ben Sira this does not seem to give rise to a sharp division between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. This may reflect his desire to present the faith in a way that would be more attractive to a Greek way of life. Thus he does not pay much attention to the fate of 'outsiders'. There is only one passage which reflects a more nationalistic Jewish character (36.1-17): here he assumes that on the day of the Lord, God will save all the tribes of Jacob; he calls on God to destroy the Gentile nations, but the fate of righteous Gentiles is not raised.⁸⁴ The work of Ben Sira reflects a significant achievement in the extensive collection of wisdom-type instruction, as well as a bringing together of wisdom traditions and Torah. Thus true wisdom as an ideal to be desired is to be found in the exercise of obedience to Torah, summarised in his phrase 'fear of the Lord'. For Matthew, however, this exercise and practice of wisdom is now to be found in obedience to the words of Jesus, also often expressed in wisdom-type sayings, now in an eschatological context.

⁸³Stanton, *Gospel*, 369.

⁸⁴See Sanders, *Paul*, 331f.

4.3.1 Sirach and Matthew's Gospel

Wisdom themes in Sirach are instructive for our motif of discernment of revelation in Matthew's gospel in three main areas.

1. Discernment is a skill to be practised, and it is here that we find a correspondence between the exercise of wisdom and the practice of discernment. For Ben Sira, in regard to revelation, wisdom is a self-revelation of God, particularised in the Torah. Earthly, mundane wisdom also finds its true expression in the Torah. Concerning discernment, wisdom as a way of living is expressed in obeying the law, and wisdom as a way of seeing that which is given and that which is hidden, is a gift from God. Discernment is needed to understand a previously given revelation, reflecting both a continuity as well as something on-going (39.6-11). The setting certainly reflects a general educational context, e.g. the 'you' addressed in many places, and the prominence of the themes of instruction and learning (παιδεία), suggesting that discernment is something to be learned and practised.⁸⁵

Part of this skill is being able to discern what constitutes wisdom or being wise; for Ben Sira this is following Torah as well as being prudent and sensible,⁸⁶ exercising piety and self-control, being generous and kind, since folly brings its own inevitable consequences (27.25-29).⁸⁷ Wisdom is a gift, but it is given by God to the humble. Wisdom traditions in general, and particularly as found in Proverbs, Qoheleth and Job, lack references to the distinctive historical traditions of Israel; nor are they legal proclamation or interpretation, although, as Weeks⁸⁸ has shown, the Law is not far below the surface. On the other hand, Ben Sira greatly valued his scriptural tradition as references in the Prologue and the Praise of Ancestors (44-49) show.

Matthew also presents discernment (and righteousness) as a skill to be practised and learned.⁸⁹ Matthew includes a great deal of Jesus' teaching which he arranges in blocks, also addressed to 'you'. As in Sirach, part of this skill is being able to discern what constitutes wisdom or being wise; for Matthew this involves, not social graces, but repentance and faith to recognise the truth about Jesus and to follow his

⁸⁵51.23 may suggest a wisdom school, although the evidence for formal schools is inconclusive: ABD II, 312-17.

⁸⁶So Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 32f. Cf. 21.15-28; 31.12-32.13.

⁸⁷A similar approach underlies Proverbs; see Coggins, *Sirach*, 66.

⁸⁸'Wisdom in the OT', 24-26.

⁸⁹Stendahl's book, *School of Matthew*, may be referred to here, where he suggests that there was some kind of corporate study of the OT in the early Christian churches, although the use of the word 'School' may be misleading. See Marshall, 'Assessment', 10ff.

teaching. Jesus often takes as his starting point observation of the world, and, in the wisdom tradition, he uses maxims and proverbs, although his use of parables is distinctive. His teaching is set in an eschatological framework and must be interpreted in relation to his person. Thus, there is no teaching about the 'fear of the Lord' or seeking wisdom for its own sake; no references to hard work, character building, or the ' sluggard'.⁹⁰ Jesus takes common wisdom traditions, but turns them round or pushes them to extremes, so making his wisdom imprudent, paradoxical and subversive.⁹¹

2. Both works also focus on a gifted individual who receives revelation and exercises the practice of wisdom in the context of a godly life. As an ideal scribe, Ben Sira himself does not record a vision of God or the equivalent to a prophetic call story. He does, however, still make a claim to authority by being in the same tradition as previous prophets; he shows 'prophetic' traits of inspiration by the Spirit and describes his teaching as being 'like prophecy' (24.33). His teaching is not based on an immediate 'word of the Lord', as in the prophets, but on the inspired interpretation of the law, and in this sense is more similar to the rabbis coming after, than to the prophets before.

The ideal scribe is not named, although some seem to be 'more ideal' than others, and one senses a certain claim to confidence (or perhaps superiority) by Ben Sira himself. Although his attitude is one of humility in relation to God, he is obviously from an upper, leisured class, well-established and prosperous.⁹² Ben Sira 'was no revolutionary; the existing social order is regarded as sacrosanct'.⁹³ Through this disciplined lifestyle of piety and learning, as well as travelling and collecting, God's wisdom can be channelled and passed on. Ben Sira gives his own teaching an elevated status, and the passages in the first person are similar in style to those of wisdom herself, although there is no suggestion that he is identifying himself with wisdom. He justifies his invitation by his own exemplary lifestyle.

We find certain similarities here with Matthew's way of presenting Jesus, both his person and his teaching. As we shall see in chapter 5, Matthew presents Jesus as the model of discernment: one who receives revelation and truly discerns. Matthew certainly presents Jesus as a teacher of wisdom and in this sense he is like a wise

⁹⁰See Witherington *Sage*, 161f.

⁹¹Compare, for instance, Matt. 5.42 and Sirach 42.7; love of enemies; hindrance of riches, etc.

⁹²Cf. 33.19-38.23 which is concerned with the treatment of servants, respect for doctors of medicine, and reflects Greek learning and lifestyle in general.

⁹³Coggins, *Sirach*, 29.

scribe, inspired by the Spirit and having understanding. Yet as Wright⁹⁴ points out, the description of Jesus as a sage should not be played off against other designations, as if he were a wisdom teacher and not a prophet; spoke of the present and thus not of the future; was concerned with wisdom and not apocalyptic. All the motifs described by Orton in *Understanding Scribe* are certainly present in Matthew's gospel, although his presentation of Matthew himself as an inspired scribe may not be entirely satisfactory, because it does not take sufficient account of the gospel genre itself. Ben Sira is a consciously named author of inspired wisdom (32.12; 50.27), a polished work of literature in the scribal art, in a way that Matthew's gospel is not. It is not hard to see how Jesus could be presented as wisdom personified (11.19,29 23.34),⁹⁵ yet Matthew's main emphasis is on Jesus as the Son. I suggest that if portraying Jesus as wisdom had been one of his main concerns he would have made the links more explicit.⁹⁶ The idea of universal wisdom particularized in Jesus is found in John's Gospel where the Word became flesh, but such an idea is implicit, as best, in Matthew.

3. The wisdom mediated and taught by Ben Sira takes on a corporate sense, and in theory, inspired interpretation and receipt of revelation are available to all who study and learn. In practice, there is a heightened sense of honour and shame in Ben Sira's Hellenistic milieu.⁹⁷ We note the contrast between the Praise of the Fathers (44-49) and the Satire of Trades (38-39), along with his priestly connections and instructions on the treatment of servants. This suggests that wisdom is to be found in traditional places, and the whole work has a sense of being traditional and conservative.

Ben Sira's Judaism does not seem to present stark alternatives resulting in sharp divisions between those 'inside' and 'outside', between the righteous and the wicked, but is more concerned with how to live a good life. True scriptural interpretation is not regarded as limited to a particular community, as for instance at Qumran, but rather to those engaged in the search for true wisdom. While apocalyptic writings do not necessarily arise only in times of crisis, the lack of eschatological urgency in

⁹⁴*Jesus*, 311. See also his discussion with Borg in *Meaning*.

⁹⁵See discussion in Stanton, *Gospel*, 364-377.

⁹⁶The need to search for such links is reflected the scholarly disagreement between, for instance, Suggs, *Wisdom*, and Johnson, 'Reflections'.

⁹⁷So the motif of an 'everlasting name' is prominent; Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 49.

Sirach may reflect a more stable political situation.⁹⁸ There is less explicit distinction between Jew and Gentile (36.1-17 is an exception), as well as a lack of reference to judgement, eschatology,⁹⁹ or messianic expectation.¹⁰⁰ The purpose of the work is to help 'those living abroad who wished to gain learning, being prepared in character to live according to the law' (Prologue).

Jesus was probably one of the tradesmen of whom Ben Sira speaks in a rather patronising way (38.27). This attitude is also reflected in Matt. 13.54f., where the implication is that the combination of wisdom with being a carpenter's son is somehow not credible. Yet Jesus demonstrates that wisdom is now to be found in unexpected places. In Matthew there is also a sharper contrast between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. Response to revelation brings division, and although relations between Matthew's 'community' and Judaism remain ill-defined, there is conflict with Jewish leaders and a rejection of Jesus by Israel. The disciples are encouraged to study the scriptures and learn lessons from the created world, although these are not the prime location of revelation, now to be found hidden and revealed in Jesus' person and teaching. Sirach offers a particularisation of wisdom in Torah, whereas Matthew presents an alternative wisdom in Jesus.

Witherington¹⁰¹ argues that Matthew (and John) 'forge a bond' between two kinds of wisdom, 'hidden wisdom which can only be known through revelation, and wisdom derived from careful study of material from some given source'. His wording implies that Matthew was doing something innovative here, but I suggest that such a 'bond' is already present in wisdom literature such as Sirach. Matthew's presentation of wisdom, in the sense of discerning both that which is given as well as that which is hidden, takes up and continues a theme already identified in Sirach. Finally, Sirach provides a very extensive witness to early Jewish wisdom tradition. For both Sirach and Matthew, wisdom and discernment are gifts to be exercised in

⁹⁸The work does not reflect signs of the political tensions or war in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes (175-164), as reflected in Daniel and Maccabees. Orton, *Understanding Scribe*, 74, implies that because Ben Sira claims a prophetic inspiration to describe an experience of a scribe's inspiration, that this therefore makes him an 'apocalypticist', although he does not define exactly what he means by this term. Ben Sira's lack of eschatological interests places his work more in line with rabbinic exegesis, than apocalyptic works; though see discussion by VanderKam, 'Origins'.

⁹⁹Acquiring wisdom avoids great suffering at the time of death: those who obey God's commandments will have a long life, an easy death, righteous children and an everlasting name (15.1; 49 41.1-4); whereas the sinners and ungodly will have a short life, painful death, and 'abominable' children (41.5-10).

¹⁰⁰This may serve as a corrective to the impression from the NT, as well as some scholarship, that speculation about the coming and identity of a messianic figure was prevalent in Judaism.

¹⁰¹*Sage*, 363.

the context of an on-going godly life of obedience to Torah; for Matthew, this obedience is specifically to Jesus' words, in an eschatological context.

4.4 Daniel

Our third representative text is the book of Daniel, which, along with the book of Revelation, shows apocalyptic features, as well as having the form of an apocalypse. In this sense, the genre is different from that of the Qumran material and the book of Sirach, but we shall see that the motif of discernment of revelation is also prominent. Daniel's visions of the kingdoms and the Son of Man also form part of the background to Matthew's presentation of Jesus, and there is a specific reference to Daniel (24.15) as well as more general allusions in chapters 24 and 25.

The book of Daniel reached its final form around 164 BC, in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, but the material it contains is about Daniel, a Jewish exile living in Babylon in the sixth century BC. It has traditionally been divided into two sections: chapters 1-6, written in the third person, contain stories or court tales about righteous Jews, giving examples of fortitude and religious fidelity, as well as the interpretation of two dreams; chapters 7-12, written in the first person, contain visions that are predictions of events from the beginning of the Babylonian exile to the culmination of history.

Chapters 1-6

In this section there is a series of stories describing confrontations between Daniel and his companions and a Babylonian king and his wise men. Each of these stories manifests the sovereignty of the God of Israel. Four stories describe God-given revelation: 'God gave them learning and skill in all letters and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams' (1.17); 'the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night' (2.19); Daniel's interpretation of the king's dream is confirmed by a 'voice from heaven' (4.31); God's hand writes on the palace wall (5.5,24). Two stories describe God's specific saving actions: God 'sent his angel and delivered his servants' (3.28); God sent his angel to 'shut the lions' mouths' (6.22).

Each of these stories illustrates, in a paradigmatic way, the various qualities of Daniel. The four young men have already been singled out and chosen from Israel because they were 'skilful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning' (1.4). The way in which they are described here may reflect some sense of

irony, since they are to be 're-educated' for three years in a foreign language and cult.¹⁰² They live in a foreign land with foreign names, education and food, all powerful cultural forces. By refusing to eat the king's food, Daniel has reached one point where he seeks to maintain his purity and identity through obedience to God's law, not only to avoid uncleanness, but also assimilation.¹⁰³ His obedience is rewarded immediately, 'favour and compassion', a better appearance, and, more significantly, by a gift of discernment from God (1.17).¹⁰⁴ This gift of discernment, combined with obedience, is then tested and proved in two subsequent stories of the companions in the fiery furnace and Daniel in the lions' den. Both stories describe how the 'heroes' refuse to worship anything other than the God of Israel (3.12,18; 4.10), and their subsequent divine protection and rescue.

Discernment takes place in the context of worship, prayer and piety,¹⁰⁵ and, although Daniel is singled out as an individual, his piety is practised in the company of others, his three companions (1.10f.,19; 2.17f.). The first specific example of the exercise of Daniel's gift of discernment comes after a threat to the lives of 'all the wise men of Babylon' for their lack of knowledge about and interpretation of the king's dream (1.12). Daniel and his companions 'seek the mercy of God' in prayer, in his house (2.17f.).¹⁰⁶ God reveals to Daniel both the content and interpretation of the dream (2.17-19), and this gives rise to Daniel's prayer of thanksgiving:

Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever,
to whom belong wisdom and might
He changes times and seasons;
he removes kings and sets up kings;
he gives wisdom to the wise
and knowledge to those who have understanding:
he reveals deep and mysterious things;
(αὐτὸς ἀποκαλύπτει βαθέα καὶ ἀπόκρυφα)
he knows what is in the darkness
and the light dwells with him.
To thee, O God of my fathers,

¹⁰²'Chaldeans' can refer to the people of Babylonia in general as well as to an influential group of Babylonian sages, with a reputation for learning in astrology, divination and the magical arts.

¹⁰³This is a significant moment in this story and provides a model for the subsequent stories; cf. Joseph, Gen. 39.9, where obedience to God's law is a turning point in the story.

¹⁰⁴Goldingay, *Daniel*, 3f.,13, translates verses 4 and 17 as, 'discerning in all aspects of learning', and 'God gave knowledge and discernment'.

¹⁰⁵Orton, *Understanding Scribe*, 68.

¹⁰⁶For examples of revelation *in the house*, see Matt. 8.14; 9.10; 13.36; 26.6.

I give thanks and praise,
 for thou hast given me wisdom and strength,
 and hast now made known to me what we asked of thee,
 for thou hast made known to us the king's matter. (2.20-23)

Although the specific setting is the disclosure of the king's dream, Daniel's prayer of blessing and thanksgiving to God is much wider in its scope. The dream is referred to as a 'mystery' (*rāz/μυστήριον*).¹⁰⁷ As Bockmuehl¹⁰⁸ has shown, running alongside a commitment to what is presented as the 'adequacy and clarity of received revelation' in the OT (e.g. Deut. 30.11-14; cf. 29.29), there is the development of an understanding that God's future plans are determined and 'stored' in heaven, to be made known at the proper time. Apocalyptic works frequently claim to be revelations or disclosures of divine 'secrets' or 'mysteries',¹⁰⁹ concealed in heaven, and so not known to people in general, but made known by God to certain specific, gifted people. Such 'mysteries' are of a broadly cosmological or eschatological kind. The detailed descriptions of these areas are designed to reflect both the comprehensiveness of the given revelation, as well as an understanding that God is sovereign Lord over all reality, creation, the heavens and history, including the eschatological climax of that history. Thus in his prayer, Daniel acknowledges that God controls the 'times and seasons' (cosmology); he also 'removes kings and sets up kings', which has an eschatological interpretation ('the latter days'; 'hereafter'; 2.28,45).

Similar prayers of thanksgiving for revelation occur elsewhere.¹¹⁰ Here in particular we note that Daniel thanks God for giving 'wisdom to the wise' and 'knowledge to those who have understanding'. The story in chapter 1 has already established that Daniel is wise and understanding and that these skills are a gift from God (1.17; cf. 2.28,29, 'God in heaven who reveals mysteries').¹¹¹ Being wise and understanding, godly and fearing the Lord, following an obedient way of life, departing from evil, from the human side, the *practice* of discernment, which leads to God's gift of revelatory wisdom. Daniel's prayer reflects an interplay between

¹⁰⁷8 times in this chapter: 2.18,19,27,28,29,30,47 (twice); and 4.6. This word is also frequently used in the Qumran literature: see Bockmuehl, *Revelation*, 53, for a list of approximately 65 occurrences.

¹⁰⁸*Revelation*, 14, 31f.

¹⁰⁹See Brown, 'Mystery'.

¹¹⁰1QH15.26; 19.1ff.; Sirach 39.6-8; 15.9f.; 51; *1 Enoch* 39.9-11; 69.27; and especially cf. Matt 11.25f.

¹¹¹The repetition of 'God gave' in 1.2,9,17, shows that God is in control of history, of other people, as well as understanding; Goldingay, *Daniel*, 27.

revelation as a gift from God, that is of grace, and discernment as something to be practised and sought.¹¹²

As Gnuse has shown, Daniel's success in interpreting the dreams of a foreign king after the professional diviners have failed, is an example of a familiar Jewish motif.¹¹³ Such success for Daniel serves to heighten his status and draws attention to his moral and spiritual qualities: he is 'skilful in all wisdom', shows prudence and discretion, and is faithful and blameless (1.4; 2.14; 2.2; 6.4); he is a man of prayer, courage and fortitude, a worshipper of God, opposed to idolatry (1.18; 6.10; 3.12-16); he seeks God's mercy, is humble in relation to God and king, and acknowledges God, and not his own skill, as his source of wisdom, in possession of the spirit (2.18; 2.28,30; 2.19,23,28f.; 4.8,18).

Daniel's success is contrasted with the failure of his opponents, as well as their moral and spiritual deficiencies: they are devious, morally suspect and malicious (3.8; 6.5,6-9); they practice idolatry (2.11) and are described (repeatedly) as 'the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans' (1.12; 2.2,10,27; 3.2,3,27); they are also ironically described as 'wise' (2.12,13,14,18,24,48). Daniel is also contrasted with the kings Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar and Darius, who, although legitimate rulers, lack political acumen (6.16-18), react in anger (2.12; 3.13,19) and defile themselves by using the temple vessels (1.2; 5.2f.).

There is a consistent interplay here: as God the giver of wisdom is superior, so Daniel's wisdom is superior because it comes from God (ten times better 1.20); and as Daniel's wisdom is shown to be superior, so his God, as source of that wisdom, is also superior to their gods (2.11). Daniel and his companions were educated in the learning and magical practices of the times: for three years they were taught the 'letters and language of the Chaldeans', who were expected to be able to interpret dreams (2.4), and Daniel is later described as 'chief of the magicians' (1.4; 4.9; cf. 2.48). Daniel's way of working was not therefore totally different from his surrounding culture.¹¹⁴ Daniel, while practising such arts, acknowledged that his source of wisdom and insight was different, i.e. from God (2.11,27f.). Although, as

¹¹²Goldingay, *Daniel*, 9, notes that 1.8,9 'indicates that the possibility of Daniel's remaining undefiled is based on God's grace as well as on Daniel's determination'.

¹¹³Jewish Dream Interpreter'; he cites the examples of Joseph (Gen. 37, 39-50); Daniel (Dan. 2.4); Archelaus (in Josephus *War* 2.111-13; *Ant.* 17.345-48). He suggests, not only a form-critical similarity in the Joseph and Daniel narratives, but also that the latter is a rewritten version of the former; for details see 40-41.

¹¹⁴Against Russell, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 55, who describes the divine wisdom given to Daniel as 'altogether different from the magical enchantments and prognostications of the Chaldeans'.

we have seen (section 3.6), divination and mantic arts in general are portrayed negatively in scripture, this is not necessarily because such practices in themselves are evil, but because they are associated with foreign and pagan cultures (Deut. 18.9-22).

Chapters 7-12

Chapters 1-6 establish Daniel's authority as a 'man of proved discernment and faithfulness',¹¹⁵ and set the context for the subsequent chapters. Here Daniel himself receives revelation in the form of dreams and visions which then need to be interpreted by an angel.¹¹⁶ The literary setting of the visions is during the exile and they each 'foretell' the course of history, including God's judgement on kings and kingdoms, and the coming of God's eternal kingdom at the end of time. The actual setting (c.165 BC) is thus placed in a larger historical framework, and the work shows that the current crisis is not a random event, but the final phase in the predetermined history of God.

The vision of God in chapter 7 forms part of a developing Merkabah tradition. Rowland¹¹⁷ has shown how the brief description of the form of a figure of God on the throne in Ezek. 1.26, offered an opportunity to later generations to speculate with varying degrees of extravagance about the form of the God of Israel (cf. *1 Enoch* 14.8ff.; Rev. 4.6ff.). In a similar way to the prophet's call, the vision forms a setting for and justifies the contents to be revelation from God. The vision enables the seer to see or be shown events and heavenly objects and authenticates an inspired interpretation. Daniel's gift as a seer enables him to understand contemporary events from a different perspective, and his vision of the kingdoms enables him to see that in the current persecution of Jews by Antiochus, he is also fighting against heavenly angelic patrons, and when judgement is passed in heaven, earthly kings and kingdoms fall: *dominion in heaven* and *dominion under heaven* (7.27).

The description of the fourth vision is the longest and forms the last three chapters of the book (10-12). In 10.2-21, Daniel's vision is recorded in a similar way to that of the prophetic call stories. The main elements are:

¹¹⁵Goldingay, *Daniel*, 311.

¹¹⁶In three out of the four visions there is a pattern of vision followed by interpretation: 7.1,7,16; 8.1-2,15-17; 10.7,18. In the remaining 'vision', Daniel *'perceived* in the books' of the prophet Jeremiah, and while he was 'speaking in prayer', Gabriel, whom he had 'seen in the *vision* at the first comes to give him 'wisdom and understanding' (9.2,21f.).

¹¹⁷*Open Heaven*, 85ff.

divine confrontation: 'I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold .. I saw this great vision' (2-9)
 word: 'give heed to the words that I speak to you' (10-14)
 objection: 'How can my lord's servant talk with my lord?' (15-17)
 reassurance: 'fear not, peace be with you; be strong and of good courage' (18-21).

There is no specific commission or sign given to Daniel here, but, after the extended message to him (11.2 - 12.4), the angel says to him twice, 'Go your way till the end' (11.9,13). We also note that the account stresses that Daniel alone, and not others with him, saw the vision, and that the reassurance consists not only of words but also of touch (10.7,10,16,18).¹¹⁸ In common with other call narratives, it takes place at a specific time, 'on the twenty-fourth day of the first month', and at a specific location, 'on the bank of the great river, that is, the Tigris' (10.4; cf. 9.21). Along with mountain and desert, there is a tradition of locating revelation near water (8.2,16; 12.5).¹¹⁹ In 10.2-21, therefore, there is an implicit claim to revelation, in the prophetic tradition: what follows is an extended message from God himself.¹²⁰

As we have seen, preparation for revelation frequently takes a more general, but nevertheless demanding, sense of obedience and leading a godly life, and in this respect, chapters 1-6 form the setting for chapters 7-12. In these later chapters there is a specific sense of preparation for discernment of revelation: reading of scripture, followed by 'prayer and supplications with fasting and sackcloth and ashes', confession of sin (9.3,20f.); mourning, fasting and lack of anointing (10.2f.).¹²¹ The accounts here follow a certain pattern: brief record of revelation of disaster (Daniel *perceived* the desolations of Jerusalem; a word about a great conflict was *revealed* to Daniel, 9.2; 10.1); Daniel's response is one of prayer and fasting (9.3; 10.2f.); Daniel then receives a further revelation (9.20-23; 10.5-21). Both initial revelations are described as 'visions' (9.23; 10.1), although they do not take the form of the more lengthy visions described earlier (7.2; 8.2). Reactions of fear are mentioned earlier (7.15,28; 8.27; 10.8,15) although not specifically here at the

¹¹⁸Cf. Is. 6.7; Ezek. 3.2.

¹¹⁹Cf. Ezek. 1.1; 10.15; *1 Enoch* 13.7; Matt. 3.13-17. Nickelsburg, 'Enoch', 590f., notes Josephus' (*Ant.* 15.10.3) reference to Caesarea Philippi, located on the southern slope of Mount Hermon, where the eastmost headwaters of the Jordan welled up from a bottomless cave; here Matthew records a significant episode of revelation, 16.13-20.

¹²⁰Nickelsburg, 'Enoch', 577.

¹²¹For fasting, see 4 Ezra 5.20; 6.31,35; 2 Esd. 9.24; 12.51; Syriac Baruch 5.7; 9.2; 12.5; 21.1; 47.2; Apoc. Abr. 9; Matt. 4.2,11; for special food and drink as preparation, see Dan. 1.12; Ezek. 4.9-17; Asc. Is. 2.11; 4 Ezra 9.24f.; 14.37ff. (Hengel, *Judaism II*, 137, n.632, suggests that this drink might reflect the use of drugs); Matt. 3.4. For Daniel's fasting, see also Satran, 'Daniel'.

beginning of chapters 9 and 10. The sequence outlined here indicates the interplay between revelation and discernment: revelation takes place in the overall context of obedience, and prayer is both the appropriate response to that revelation,¹²² as well as the preparation for further discernment of revelation.¹²³

This concentration on the figure of Daniel himself as an individual heightens his function as a mediator of revelation. Daniel is a wise *maskil* (literally 'causing to know'; 1.4,17). He is to pass on his wisdom to *maskîlîm* (11.33,35; 12.3,10), and they in turn are to instruct the *rabbîm*, the 'many' (11.33; 12.3). We find here the familiar theme that revelation brings division. Further references to *many* and *some* (11.34,35) make a particular group hard to define, but this may be cryptically intentional. There is a certain development in how this division is portrayed through the book. In chapters 1-6, it is acknowledged that God has given foreign kings their power which may come and go (1.2; 2.44), and, although they come to recognise this power, and revelation is given to those outside Israel, they do not become worshippers or converts (2.46f.; 3.28; 4.2f.,34-37; 6.26f.), and the court remains resolutely opposed to Daniel and unable to discern revelation from God. In chapter 7 the foreign kingdoms are evil and will be judged (7.11f.), and God's kingdom will be given to the 'saints of the Most High' (7.18,27). Chapters 11 and 12 reflect a further division, not between Israel and those outside, but within Israel: 'the men of violence among your own people' (11.14; cf. 10.14). A distinction is made between 'those who forsake the holy covenant', 'those who violate the covenant' and 'the people who *know* their God', 'those among the people who are *wise*' (11.32-33). The latter 'shall stand firm and take action', recalling the actions of Daniel and his companions in chapters 1-6. We noted how Daniel thanked God for giving 'wisdom to the wise' (2.21), and 'the wise' here are those who oppose the 'abomination', pass on their understanding to others, and although many will be killed, in the end they will be exalted, not only by a restoration to life, but to positions of honour, like the stars:

And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament;
and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever
(12.3).¹²⁴

¹²²Against Freyne, 'Disciples', 14, who suggests that fasting and prayer 'counteract' the feelings of dread and awe found in the visions.

¹²³Bockmuehl, *Revelation*, 29f., n.38, notes that authors such as Daniel go out of their way to describe the means by which such visions are 'induced'. I suggest 'preparation' would be a better term, since revelation is always a gift from God. See also discussion in Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 235f., who objects to Lindblom's first criteria of authentic visionary experience as that of 'spontaneity'.

¹²⁴Cf. Matt. 13.43: 'Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father'.

Parallels have been drawn here between the suffering one in Isaiah (esp. 52.13; 53.11) and the *maskîlîm*. The Servant in Isaiah is one who understands, suffers, and, by his death, justifies the many (*rabbîm*). The *maskîlîm* in Daniel also understand and suffer, although it remains unclear whether they are portrayed as suffering on behalf of others.¹²⁵ The parallel between their role in making many *understand* and turning many to *righteousness* suggests that they are not primarily portrayed as suffering.¹²⁶

The *maskîlîm* are thus in a privileged position as recipients of revelation from God, highlighted by the motif of secrecy. Daniel is told to 'seal up the vision' (8.26f.; cf. 7.28), and to 'shut up the words, and seal the book' (12.4,9), until 'many days hence' or 'the time of the end' (8.26; 12.4,9; cf. 10.14). As God has ordained history, so he has knowledge of those to be delivered, 'every one whose name shall be found written in the book' (12.1). Those 'outside' are now called *wicked in contrast to* those 'inside' who are again called wise (12.10). Throughout the book, and in some similar ways to Matthew, it is the discerning wise who are called upon both to give understanding and to face suffering, in the assurance that God is in control of history.

4.4.1 Daniel and Matthew's Gospel

In relation to our motif of discernment, we find significant similarities between Daniel and Matthew.

1. Both concern the authority of an individual as recipient and mediator of revelation. In the book of Daniel, the tales in chapters 1-6 draw attention to and establish Daniel's ability to discern revelation, as well as demonstrating his moral and spiritual qualities, such as obedience and prayer, which enable him to do so. Daniel's ability to discern brings him status and honour in society, confirms his status before God, and his trust in God ensures his divine protection and escape from certain death. Although Daniel is skilled at discernment, he needs an angel to disclose the true meaning of scripture and to interpret his own visions of history and the end times. The fact that it is Daniel as both wise man and seer who received these visions, as well as an angel who gives the interpretation, provides a double confirmation of their truth.

¹²⁵The interpretation of 11.35 is unclear.

¹²⁶See Freyne, 'Disciples', 9; he also refers to the study by Ginsberg, 'The Oldest Interpretation of the Suffering Servant', VT, 3 (1953), 400-4. See also discussion by Davies, *Daniel*, 110.

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus is not presented as a 'hero' in quite the same way as Daniel, although there is a similar initial combination of revelation, testing and obedience (3.17; 4.1-11). The narrative demonstrates his spiritual and moral qualities of prayer and fasting, and his own status and authority is confirmed in his miraculous acts of healing and exorcism, as well as in his teaching. Jesus is one skilled at discernment and does not need an interpreting angel; what he 'predicts', happens (20.17-19; 21.1-7; 26.34); he gives his own interpretations and explanations, based on his reciprocal knowledge of God (11.26-27; 17.9-13). Thus Jesus himself, as God's Son, mediates true knowledge of God.

In terms of the general structure of the two works, there are certain parallels between chapters 1-6 forming the background and setting for Daniel's later visions, and the record of Jesus' temptations at the beginning of the gospel which serve, amongst other things, to 'legitimate and guarantee the reliability of his teachings or the revelations which have been entrusted to him'.¹²⁷ Daniel's trials are set in the context of exploring what it means to be obedient to God's law and retain a Jewish identity in exile. Jesus' testing is set in the context of exploring what it means to be Son of God, as revealed to him (3.17; repetition of *על*, 'since'; 4.3,6). God keeps Daniel safe; for Matthew, paradoxically, it is when God does not keep Jesus safe from certain death, that a major revelation of his power occurs (27.51-54).

2. Both works describe the sorting out revelation brings. We have seen that through the book of Daniel, there is a progression in the way in which this division is presented. Earlier, the division is between Israel (in exile) and those outside Israel; while later in the book divisions are made within Israel, and these are expressed in traditional language: those on the 'outside' are described as 'wicked' and those who forsake the covenant; those on the 'inside' are described as 'wise' and 'understanding' (11.30; 12.10; 11.33). One aspect of being 'wise' is reading the book of Daniel now being unsealed. Two verses express these divisions clearly:

He shall seduce with flattery those who *violate the covenant*;
but the people who *know* their God shall stand firm and take action.
... and none of the *wicked shall understand*;
but those who are *wise shall understand*. (11.32; 12.10)

As we have seen, one of the ways in which Matthew shapes his gospel reflects the division brought by revelation, and this division is presented in a similar literary way

¹²⁷Kloppenborg, *Formation*, 261; and quoted by Moberly, *Bible, Theology*, 145.

to that of Daniel. Initially, although revelation can be given to those outside Israel (2.1-2), the division is between Israel, to whom Jesus takes his message, and those outside. On Israel's rejection, he takes his message to those outside, and the division becomes more universal in scope between those who 'come' to Jesus, and those who do not (11.20-30). Such division is also expressed in traditional language of the 'wise and understanding'; the 'foolish and blind' (7.24-27; 13.51; 23.16).

This division is related, in both works, to the author's understanding of community. We have seen how Daniel is a wise *maskil* who passes his wisdom on to *maskîlîm*, and they in turn instruct the *rabbîm*. They are thus privileged recipients of God's revelation and as such 'insiders'. Being 'wise and understanding' is crucial, and there is no suggestion that the *maskîlîm* do not understand. The group itself is not well defined, and this may be reflected in the secret books motif, and the cryptic allusions (e.g. 11.31): their knowledge saves, but exactly who this will be remains part of the mystery. Although those 'outside' 'violate the covenant', it is not clear exactly what this means, or what constitutes obedience to the covenant. Adherence to certain laws relating, for example, to food, worship and prayer is portrayed as important.¹²⁸ The narrative presents a historical determinism in the unfolding of God's plan for the world, and this knowledge is only available to those who discern correctly.

Freyne¹²⁹ has noted how Mark's presentation of both Jesus and the disciples, reflects some apocalyptic ideas found in Daniel. Matthew, too, reflects an apocalyptic perspective,¹³⁰ although here the disciples have a more defined role as the Twelve, while they also represent disciples and discipleship generally. They are also *given to know* (ὅμῃν δέδοται γνῶναι, i.e. by God) the mysteries (τὰ μυστήρια) of the kingdom of heaven (13.11). As in Daniel, this in itself does not save from suffering and death, but there is here the *expectation* that discipleship leads to suffering. Matthew also shows that the disciples do not fully understand and therefore fail. He thus makes more direct links between how they are to act now in light of coming judgement: his five teaching discourses each end with eschatological teaching, making more explicit what now constitutes obedience, that is, obedience to the teaching of Jesus. This suggests that discernment, in the context of obedience, is difficult, requires perseverance, and has eternal consequences. The content of revelation is given in teaching rather than in visions and their

¹²⁸Davies, *Daniel*, 13, suggests that Nebuchadnezzar and the exiled Jews in 1-6 are both *predecessors* and *prototypes* of the persecuting king Antiochus IV and persecuted Jews; although other essential Jewish observances, such as sabbath and circumcision are not mentioned.

¹²⁹'Disciples'.

¹³⁰Hagner, 'Apocalyptic Motifs'.

interpretation, and there is an invitation and challenge to discern events and times in chapter 24.¹³¹ As we have seen above, there are also some similarities between the *maskîlîm* in Daniel and the disciples in Matthew, although the *maskîlîm* are not portrayed as disciples as such.

3. Apocalyptic literature in general has an underlying indebtedness to scripture and Torah as a way of life, in spite of a lack of reference to specific scriptural texts.¹³² Similarities to the prophetic call *Gattung* (10.2ff.) establish a link with the past history of Israel, and place Daniel in that tradition of the way God relates to people via mediated revelation. Daniel's indebtedness to scripture is also shown in his developing Merkabah mystical tradition from Ezekiel (from where he develops Ezekiel's image of the tree¹³³), and the desire to understand scripture, Jeremiah's 'seventy years' (9.2).¹³⁴ This interpretation of tradition forms part of the process of making past revelation contemporary, and can also be seen in the use of sealed books to contain the writings from the past, which are now being made known (8.26; 12.9). Daniel is thus able to discern the real significance of contemporary people and events in history. The revelation given to him shows the overall picture from a different viewpoint. For those who discerned correctly, the revelations received in visions enabled those who were currently suffering to stand firm in their convictions and remain righteous before God. The 'Son of Man' vision is concerned, not only with the future vindication of the saints of the Most High, but also demonstrated the significance of history from a divine perspective and the temporary nature of the dominance of the world power.

Matthew shows a more direct indebtedness to scripture and Torah as a way of life. Similarities to the prophetic call *Gattung* (4.18-22; 16.13-20; 28.16-20), the genealogy (esp. 1.1), and especially the motif of attention to and *fulfilment* of scripture, place Jesus in the tradition of Israel. For Matthew, too, interpretation of tradition forms part of the process of making past revelation contemporary. While interpretation and cryptic images are hallmarks of apocalyptic tradition, needing discernment to understand, Matthew is more concerned with discernment of the truth about a figure, i.e. Jesus, within history, and is concerned to show that history and christology are intimately connected.¹³⁵

¹³¹See Fiorenza, 'Phenomenon', 313, for different focuses in apocalyptic.

¹³²See Rowland, 'Apocalyptic literature', 170ff. for details.

¹³³4.10-12,20, probably based on Ezek. 31 and 28.

¹³⁴Daniel's understanding of Jeremiah is itself interpreted at Qumran and in *1 Enoch*: see Adler, 'Daniel's Prophecy'.

¹³⁵Davies and Allison, *Matthew III*, 369: 'The evangelist plainly believed that if history's conclusion is not christological, then Christology itself becomes a question.'

The stories in Daniel, when taken collectively, and Matthew's gospel narrative, both stress that revelation is a gift from God, accompanied by repeated and on-going discernment and obedience, set in the context of community, prayer and worship. There is a similarity in the way in which kings are portrayed in the tales, and Herod and Pilate in the gospel: all are confronted by revelation and partly discern it to be true, but they fail to respond in an appropriate way. Both Daniel and Jesus, in their own ways, serve as exemplars of someone who is obedient, gifted in discernment, and a recipient of revelation, although Matthew also presents Jesus himself as the revealer and the subject of revelation.

4.5 Select Traditions from 1 Enoch

Our fourth area of investigation will be some of the writings now contained in the composite book of *1 Enoch*. Although there are problems with the dating of some of this material, a time span of between third century BC and first/second century AD is likely.¹³⁶ There is thus some overlap with the time Matthew was writing. Both writings are from within the Jewish tradition and reflect a concern with the authority of new revelation. The focus on Enoch as a figure who received revelation in the form of visions, and the combination of wisdom, eschatological and apocalyptic motifs makes the work appropriate background for our study of Matthew. We will see that both works reflect a shared interest in revelation, as well as making claims for new revelation.

Gen. 5.18-24 notes twice that 'Enoch walked with God' (22a,24a), and since verse 24 falls outside the genealogical pattern, this may reflect a special tradition about Enoch. Brueggemann¹³⁷ notes that whereas Abraham or 'the people' 'walked *before* God' (17.1; 24.40; 13.5), *the exact phrase 'walked with God' only occurs here in* reference to Enoch and in 6.9, referring to Noah. He goes on to suggest that the phrase is often understood to refer to moral uprightness and obedience (cf. Heb. 11.5-6; Jude 14-15), but that here the tradition is not concerned with obedience, which is presumed, but with privileged entry into the secrets of God. According to Enochic tradition, Enoch had spent 300 years with the angels (*hā'ēlōhīm*), and returned to earth for one year to pass on to his son the mysteries seen there before his translation to be with God (*'ēlōhīm*) (81.5-6; 82.1). The fact that, like Elijah, Enoch

¹³⁶The chronological order is generally thought to be: chs. 72-82 and 1-36, third century BC; 91-108 and 83-90, second century BC; 37-71, first century BC/AD. Pieces from each of these sections, except 37-71, were found at Qumran, Cave 4.

¹³⁷*Genesis*, 68.

did not die ('and he was not, for God took him'; cf. 2 Kings 2.1,5,9,10) meant that he was able to continue to be with God and to understand the secrets of the heavens. This secret information is now represented as recorded in the books in his name. Our main focus will be on chapters 1-36, the *Book of Watchers*, since here Enoch is introduced as a righteous seer and undertakes two cosmic journeys. The story of the Watchers explains the origin of evil in the world and draws attention to the different claims for legitimate and illegitimate revelation. The *Book of Watchers*, is usually divided into five sections, and we will look at each of these in turn.

a) Chapters 1-5

The opening sentence of the work appears to be based on Moses' blessing of the children of Israel before his death (Deut. 33.1). The following verses (1.2-3a) include several phrases in common with the Balaam stories in Numbers 22-24, and we note in particular that three of these phrases (*eyes opened, saw a vision, heard everything*) are specifically concerned with revelation and discernment.¹³⁸ We have seen in our study of OT traditions how both Moses and Balaam are connected with traditions of discernment of revelation: Moses as the most revered biblical character, one who received and passed on revelation from God; and Balaam, someone from outside Israel, with mantic divinatory skills, who was (eventually) able to discern God, and bless Israel.¹³⁹

The opening section does not follow the form of a traditional prophetic call story, but, nevertheless, the description of Enoch and his words is justified by appeal to revelation. The description of Enoch as 'the *blessed* and *righteous* man of the Lord, [who] took up (his parable) while his *eyes were open* and he *saw*, and said', confirms both that he has received revelation from God and that he is qualified to do so. The description by Enoch confirms that he is describing received revelation: 'a holy vision from the heavens which the *angels showed me*: and I *heard* from them everything and I *understood*' (1.2).

The composite work of Enoch, as it now stands,¹⁴⁰ thus commences with an appeal to revelation, and, as we have noted before, revelation immediately brings

¹³⁸Set out by VanderKam, *Enoch*, 116: 'took up his parable and said' (23.7,18; 24.3,15,20,21,23); 'whose eyes were opened by the Lord' (22.31; 24.3-4,15-16); 'he saw a vision of the holy one' (24.4,16); 'heard everything from them' (cf. 24.4,16); 'not for this generation, but for a distant generation which will come' (cf. 24.14,17).

¹³⁹Josephus (*Ant.* IV.326) says that Moses, too, did not die, but was carried up to heaven.; and Balaam held a significant position in some rabbinic authorities: he was one of the seven prophets to the nations (*b.B.Bat.* 15b), and in some respects was greater than Moses (*Num.Rab.* 20.1).

¹⁴⁰Charles, *I Enoch*, 2, says these chapters 'look like an introduction to the entire book written by the final editor'.

division.¹⁴¹ The heading for chapters 1-5 is 'The righteous and the wicked', and, whereas Moses blessed 'the children of Israel' (Deut. 33.1), and Balaam blessed 'Israel' (Num. 23.8,20; 24.9f.), Enoch blesses 'the *elect* and the *righteous* who would be present on the day of tribulation at (the time of) the removal of all the *ungodly ones*' (1.1). This theme is continued in 1.3-9 which describe a future, eschatological theophany of God concerning judgement, again reminiscent of Deut. 33.2, of the coming of God to his holy mountain. At that time God will 'preserve the *elect* .. they shall prosper and be *blessed*; and the light of God shall *shine* unto them'; and he will 'destroy the *wicked ones*' because of 'that which the *sinners* and the *wicked ones* committed against him' (1.8,9).

Enoch then makes an appeal to his readers to discern the orderliness of God's creation and how it is subject to divine law (2.1 - 5.2). They are to *examine, look at the earth and turn in your mind, behold, examine and observe* (twice), *pay attention*, and they will see that 'all his work prospers and *obeys* him'.¹⁴² VanderKam¹⁴³ notes that '(A)ppeal to natural order as a foundation for parenesis is unprecedented in the OT' and that in Enoch, 'it is assumed that humankind can and does have a grasp of the fundamental principles by which nature operates. Only in this way would it be possible to appeal to natural laws as examples of obedience to the creator and as a spur to ethical conduct'. Yet I suggest that Enoch is not arguing in exactly this way here. He reasons that as everything is ordered and consistent in creation, so God's judgement is ordered, and there is a fixed gulf between the righteous and the sinners. He is not urging the sinners to become righteous, or saying, 'Look at nature and you will learn how to behave'; but rather that, 'As the laws of nature are fixed, so God's judgement is fixed', and thus urges the righteous and elect not to forfeit their position. Thus in this passage, Enoch is not moving directly from the laws of nature to paraenesis, but rather he is moving from the consistency in God's creation to the fixed nature of God's judgement, and that this is the basis for paraenesis.

The work is addressed to the 'elect' and the 'righteous' (1.7,9). All, including the righteous are to be judged, but the righteous elect will be protected by God's mercy. Wisdom shall be given to the elect, and all 'those who have wisdom shall be humble

¹⁴¹Although VanderKam, *Enoch*, 131, notes that God's universal judgement serves as an appropriate introduction to the book, 1.3b - 7.9, he does not draw attention to the fact that this is set in the overall context of the revelation described in 1.1-2.

¹⁴²2.1,2,3; 3.1; 4.1; 5.1,2. 'Turn in your mind' has a footnote: Lit. "understand," "take notice," "think," "be mindful of."

¹⁴³*Enoch*, 120f. He also notes (122, n.47) another OT strand that stresses humanity's inability to comprehend the ways of God and his creation, e.g. Eccl. 8.17; 11.5; Job 38-41.

and not return again to sin' (1.8). Sanders¹⁴⁴ suggests that the turning away (or transgression) by the sinners, 'like their hard-heartedness, may well indicate a refusal to turn to God, that is, to repent'. Yet it is also possible for this to be a reference to the fact that, from the writer's point of view, they do not recognise or discern Enoch and his writings as revelation from God and have therefore put themselves outside the sphere of God's mercy and salvation. Thus here at the beginning of the book, and, as we shall see at the end, response to Enoch's words has an eschatological dimension.¹⁴⁵ There follows alternating descriptions of the two groups, in the type of traditional language we have noted before:

But as for you, you *have not been long-suffering* and you *have not done the commandments* of the Lord; you *have transgressed* and *spoken slanderously*; you are *hard-hearted*; you shall *curse* your days.

But to the *elect* there shall be *light, joy, and peace*, and they shall *inherit the earth*.

To you, *wicked ones*, on the contrary, there will be a *curse*.

And then *wisdom* shall be given to the *elect*; those who have *wisdom* shall be *humble*; *gladness and peace* all the days of their life. (5.4-10)

In these opening, introductory chapters, then, Enoch is presented in terms and language reminiscent of Moses and Balaam, two biblical figures associated with revelation. The focus here on Enoch as a discerner and receiver of revelation, is the context in which the whole of the book of *Enoch* is to be understood. Revelation immediately creates eschatological division, and this is portrayed in conventional biblical language.

b) Chapters 6-11

Chapters 6-11 are not directly concerned with Enoch, but form the necessary prelude to his subsequent intercession for the fallen Watchers (in 12-16).¹⁴⁶ Two narrative strands have been woven together here. In a story based on Gen. 6.1-2,4, the leader of the Watchers, Semyaz, descended to earth with other Watchers, 'took wives', 'began to go unto them', and 'taught them magical medicine, incantations, the cutting of roots, and taught them (about) plants' (7.1f.). In a second story, Azaz'el, the tenth leader in Semyaz's group (6.8; cf. 69.2), taught the people how to make weapons of war, along with 'colouring tinctures and alchemy', 'committed adultery and erred',

¹⁴⁴Paul, 360f.

¹⁴⁵Nickelsburg, 'Revealed Wisdom', 77.

¹⁴⁶Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 93, suggests that these legends were well-known in Jewish tradition and are used here as a 'backdrop' to the revelations given to Enoch.

and taught various divinatory arts, such as incantation, astrology, signs, seeing of the stars and the moons, 'as well as the deception of man' (8.1-4). Thus, although the primary sin in the Semyaz tradition is intercourse with humans, and in the Azaz'el tradition, improper revelation, the two are interwoven, and both result in the crying out of the people (7.6; 8.4). A similar interweaving can be seen in 9.6-8.

c) Chapters 12-16

Enoch's dream vision in chapters 12-16 presupposes the previous record of the Watchers. This, along with Enoch's subsequent journeys, 'present a proper revelation, in contrast to the improper revelation to the Watchers'.¹⁴⁷ In a development of the story in Genesis 6, where there is no moral evaluation, Semyaz, although the leader of the Watchers, is morally corrupt. He knows from the beginning that the proposal is a 'great sin', and does not want to take responsibility for it (6.3). The other watchers swear an oath and bind each other by this curse ('swear and bind' is repeated three times in 6.4,5,6). The Watchers themselves are described as 'wicked': 'they committed adultery and erred, and all their conduct became corrupt' (8.2). They are also described as 'all conferring together' (13.9).¹⁴⁸ It is not surprising, therefore, that what they *taught*¹⁴⁹ and *showed* the people is described in very negative terms.

Azaz'el is also described as corrupt: 'he taught all (forms of) oppression upon the earth', and this sets the context for the revelation of 'eternal secrets which are performed in heaven' (9.6). Semyaz is also described as one who 'revealed to them every (kind of) sin' (9.8). This negative assessment is confirmed by God himself to Enoch: the only mysteries the Watchers know are 'rejected mysteries' (or 'worthless mysteries') which lead to evil on the earth (16.3). Bockmuehl¹⁵⁰ comments that these rejected mysteries represent 'a kind of true but inferior celestial knowhow'. I suggest that in terms of the consistently sharp divisions drawn in these chapters, 'true but inferior' is not a recognizable category. Mysteries are either true or rejected as false, and revelation is either legitimate or illegitimate. In terms of the divisions here, both the *content* of the mysteries and the *act of* revealing are improper. No

¹⁴⁷Collins, 'Apocalyptic Technique', 101.

¹⁴⁸Cf. the negative connotations of συμβούλιόν λαβόντες in Matt. 26.3.; 27.7; 28.12.

¹⁴⁹7.1 (twice); 8.1,3 (three times). See also 13.2, 'because you have *taught* injustice and because you have *shown* to the people deeds of shame, injustice, and sin'.

¹⁵⁰*Revelation*, 40.

other combinations are possible;¹⁵¹ thus, it is not possible to have legitimate revelation of rejected mysteries, or illegitimate revelation of true mysteries.¹⁵²

This negative portrayal of the Watchers serves to heighten the status of Enoch. He is described as a 'righteous man' and a 'scribe of righteousness' (12.4; 15.1). 'Fear and trembling' seize the Watchers when he speaks to them, similar to the fear and trembling occasioned by the appearance of God (1.5; cf. 65.3-5). Enoch is sent from his dwelling with the (good) 'Watchers and the holy ones', to 'go and make known to the (evil) Watchers of heaven who have abandoned the high heaven, the holy eternal place' their judgement. The Watchers beg Enoch to intercede on their behalf, to 'raise their memorial prayer unto the Lord of heaven' (12.2,4; 13.4). The Watchers, although evil, are able to recognise that Enoch is able to intercede for them with God, in a way that they themselves cannot (13.4-5). Enoch acts as an official mediator of God's revelation to them, and hence the sentence he eventually gives is also legitimate (14.3-7; 16.3). While Enoch is offering their prayers, he falls asleep and has a dream vision which he then describes (14-16). The description of the vision (14.8 - 15.1) includes features of both a prophetic call story and a throne vision. Elements similar to a prophetic call story are as follows, although objection and reassurance are not included: specific location, 13.7; revelation, in a dream he sees a vision, 13.8; 14.8; fear and trembling, 14.24; God replies, 'Do not fear', and gives Enoch his message, 'And tell the Watchers of heaven ...', 15.1f.

In contrast to the prophetic call stories, the vision in chapters 14-16 also has certain similarities to Ezekiel 1, but here Enoch ascends to heaven, while Ezekiel remains on earth. Although he remains a silent and passive recipient of what the angel shows and tells him,¹⁵³ his actual ascent and journey through various rooms on the way to God's throne, suggest a more active role.¹⁵⁴ Enoch *sees* the clouds and is called in a *vision* (14.8, twice; also 14.14), and this mystical ascent and the detail surrounding his vision of the throne are developed in Merkabah mysticism.

There are several other details relevant to our theme. The location at which Enoch makes his petition for the Watchers is very specific: 'And I went and sat down upon the waters of Dan - in Dan which is on the southwest of Hermon' (13.7). We have already noted both how revelation is often described as taking place at specific

¹⁵¹Cf. 65.6-12 where both the content of the secrets is evil and the revelation of them is illicit.

¹⁵²Cf. Moberly, *Mountain*, 166, who suggests that, from the writer's perspective syncretism (illegitimate worship of the true God) is not possible; the only alternatives are legitimate worship of the true God, or illegitimate worship of a false god.

¹⁵³Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 200; 219ff.

¹⁵⁴Nickelsburg, 'Enoch', 580.

locations, and also that there are locations where one would go in order to receive revelation. As Nickelsburg¹⁵⁵ has shown, the whole area round Hermon and Dan, in upper Galilee, was recognised as sacred territory and a place to which one would go in order to receive revelation. Although the Watchers had previously descended to the summit of Hermon (6.6), they are now in 'Lesyael, which is (located) between Lebanon and Sanser' (13.9). They are thus now near, but nevertheless away from the specific location of revelation.

There is a certain ambiguity here between seeing and not seeing God.¹⁵⁶ Ezekiel's description of the holy God enthroned in glory is quite tentative: '.. there was the *likeness* of a throne, in *appearance like* sapphire; and seated above the *likeness* of a throne was a *likeness as it were* of a human form' (Ezek. 1.26). In Enoch there is more willingness to describe the form of God: 'And the Great Glory was sitting upon it - as for his gown, which was shining more brightly than the sun, it was whiter than any snow' (14.20).¹⁵⁷ Although Enoch *observed* and *saw* the lofty throne, and describes 'the Great Glory sitting upon it', 'it was difficult to *look* at it', and 'none of the angels was able to come in and *see* the face ... and no one of the flesh can *see* him' (14.18-21). Enoch's reverence for God is emphasised, as well as the fact that it is God, and only God himself, who can give Enoch revelation. This is demonstrated in the following double sequence (14.24 - 15.1):

- a) Until then I was prostrate on my face covered and trembling.
- b) And the Lord *called me with his own mouth* and said to me, "Come near to me, Enoch, and *hear*¹⁵⁸ my Word".
- c) And he lifted me up and brought me near to the gate,

- a) but I (continued) to look down with my face.
- b) But he raised me up
- c) and said to me *with his voice*, "Enoch." I (then) *heard*, "Do not fear, Enoch, righteous man, scribe of righteousness; come near to me and *hear my voice*."

This sequence confirms that God is holy, transcendent and dwells in heaven, and also draws attention to the 'rare righteous person' who can penetrate into the

¹⁵⁵'Enoch', 582f. He also notes that in *T. Levi* 2-7 and Matt. 16.13-19, revelation is located in upper Galilee, 590f., near water.

¹⁵⁶Cf. Moses, Ex. 33.23.

¹⁵⁷The physical features of the Ancient of Days are described in more detail in 71.10f. ('His head is white and pure like wool'); cf. Dan. 7.9f.

¹⁵⁸Charlesworth reads 'my holy Word', but a footnote records that Charles prefers "hear".

presence of the inaccessible God.¹⁵⁹ Enoch's message of judgement on the Watchers, therefore, consists of words direct from God. Enoch is righteous, and a mediator of God's true word (16.3).

d) Chapters 17-36

Enoch's throne vision and message of judgement for the Watchers is followed by his first visionary journey round the earth (17-19). Again he is *lifted up* and *sees*, and the vision ends, '(So) I, Enoch, I *saw the vision* of the end of everything alone; and none among human beings *will see as I have seen*' (19.3). This again emphasises Enoch's elevated status: he, and he alone, is the one who has discerned God's revelation. Chapter 20 gives the names of the archangels and it is now angels who accompany Enoch on his journey, and who *show* and *describe* things to him (21.5; 22.3; 23.4).

Enoch's second journey round the earth (20-36), is divided into shorter sections, many of which start with the phrase, "Then I went to another place, and he *showed* me ..", or 'And from there I went and *saw* ...'¹⁶⁰ At several places in this journey we find expressions of praise and thanksgiving. These function as a structuring device round the tour¹⁶¹ and take a similar form of words.

At that moment I blessed the Lord of Glory and I said, "Blessed be my Lord, the Lord of righteousness who rules forever" (22.14; cf. 25.7; 27.5; 36.4).¹⁶²

The blessing of the Lord of Glory in 36.4 forms a summary of and a conclusion to both the second journey and the Book of Watchers as a whole. Enoch's first journey is not so concerned with eschatological judgement, and the second part of the second journey (28-36) also lacks explicit eschatological focus.¹⁶³ Yet the other three, similarly worded, expressions of praise each occur after revelation of eschatological judgement,¹⁶⁴ which is both true (it is *seen* by Enoch and given by an *angel*), and determined by God. This judgement is in favour of the righteous and against the wicked, thus giving the elect comfort and assurance.¹⁶⁵ Enoch, who by reason of

¹⁵⁹Nickelsburg, 'Enoch', 581.

¹⁶⁰21.1; 22.1; 23.1; 24.1; 26.1; 28.1; 29.1; 33.1; 34.1; 35.1; 36.1.

¹⁶¹VanderKam, *Enoch*, 140.

¹⁶²Cf. similar words of blessing and thanksgiving, related to revelation 'at that moment': 39.9-11; 81.1-4; 83.11; 90.40; cf. 12.3; 69.27.

¹⁶³Collins, 'Apocalyptic Technique', 104.

¹⁶⁴1. 21.6; 22.9f. 2. 25.3-5. 3. 26.3-6; 27.1-4.

¹⁶⁵Cf. Matthew 11.25, where Jesus' thanksgiving for revelation immediately follows his words of judgement in 11.20-24.

his elevated status, encyclopedic knowledge of everything and his having been in the presence of God, still blesses and praises God. Although he is established as an exceptional, gifted and righteous person, he acknowledges that his skills of discernment of revelation are gifts from God.

Space does not permit a more detailed study of the remaining chapters of *1 Enoch*. The following points are selected as of relevance to our theme:

1. In the *Parables or Similitudes* (chs. 37-71) attention is drawn to a certain figure (or figures), described as the Righteous One, the Anointed One, the Chosen One (Elect One), the Son of Man. 62.7-14 describes the hiddenness of the figure of the Son of Man and the revelation of him to the chosen, set in the context of final judgement. After the wicked are judged, the righteous will be with the Son of Man for ever.¹⁶⁶ In a combination and development of texts in *1 Enoch* 14 and Daniel 7, Enoch himself is exalted as judge and in 71.14 is identified with the Son of Man, showing that at the time of writing, it was possible to identify the man Enoch with an exalted heavenly figure.

2. The Animal Apocalypse (85-90)¹⁶⁷ is a dream vision¹⁶⁸ which extends Enoch's already encyclopedic knowledge. It covers biblical history as well as the future, and the 'turning point' is generally agreed to be between 90.16 and 90.17. In the course of this history the opening of the eyes of the sheep (Israel)¹⁶⁹ is a recurring motif,¹⁷⁰ and refers primarily to obedience to God's law, especially as the first reference to this theme is after the Exodus (89.28). We have seen how the 'opening of eyes' and 'uncovering of ears' can refer to discernment of revelation, and how this is related to obedience to the law. This connection between open eyes and revelation is further elaborated in 90.6-7:

Then, behold lambs were born from those snow-white sheep; and they *began to open their eyes and see*, and cried aloud to the sheep. But as for the sheep, they (the lambs) cried aloud to them, yet they (the sheep) *did not listen* to

¹⁶⁶Cf. Matt. 19.28; 25.31.

¹⁶⁷83-84 also takes the form of a 'mini-apocalypse': Enoch is given a vision of the flood and its sequel; parallels between the flood and judgement are drawn; Enoch blesses and prays to God.

¹⁶⁸85.1,2,3,9; 86.1,3; 87.2; 89.7,36,70; 90.2,8,39,40,42.

¹⁶⁹Cf. other passages where the Lord shepherds his flock Israel: Ps. 78.52; 80.1; Jer. 50.6-7; Ezek. 34; Zech. 9.16; 10.2-3; cf. Matt. 9.36; Jn. 10.1-10.

¹⁷⁰Seven times positively ('began to open their eyes and see'): 89.28,40,41,44; 90.6,10,35; and seven times negatively ('their eyes became dim-sighted' or 'blind'): 89.32,33,41,54,74; 90.7,26.

what they (the lambs) were telling them but became *exceedingly deafened*, and their eyes became *exceedingly dim-sighted*.

This is the only reference to lambs being born from the sheep. The fact that the sheep *did not listen* to the lambs, but became *deafened* and *dim-sighted* suggests differences over claims to have discerned revelation. Up to this point the sheep have represented Israel, but here the lambs are a group within Israel, presented positively, and Israel, the sheep, negatively.

Enoch himself is the one who 'saw in a vision' and 'kept seeing' (90.8,9, etc.) The whole of the Animal Apocalypse is *shown* to him in a dream vision, reinforcing as divine revelation his interpretation of Israel's past history, as well as what is to come. At the very start of the work he is referred to as the one whose 'eyes were open' (1.2; cf. 19.3). His own elevated and legitimate status is confirmed by the three archangels who set him down 'in the midst of those [surviving] sheep' (90.31,39). The apocalypse thus serves as an encouragement to the readers of Enoch at the time, that their perseverance in the face of opposition would be rewarded and, in identifying themselves with the 'seeing' sheep, justify and legitimate their discernment of revelation in the words of Enoch.

3. The fifth book, or *Epistle* of Enoch, includes *The Two Ways of the Righteous and the Sinner* and the *Apocalypse of Weeks*. Both works claim to be revelation. In the former the revelation now takes the form of a testament to be passed on to Enoch's 'children' (91.1f.; 93.1; cf. 82.2f.). In the latter, Enoch is the legitimate mediator of revelation asserted in a three-fold confirmation: 'that which was *revealed* to me from the *heavenly vision*, that which I have *learned* from the words of the *holy angels*, and *understood* from the *heavenly tablets*' (93.2).¹⁷¹ The information contained in the *Epistle* concerns the judgement of God between the righteous and the wicked and, since it is written on tablets that Enoch has *seen* and *understood*, the judgement will certainly occur as he has said.

Two other devices serve to heighten the status, both of Enoch himself and of his words: the *vaticinia ex eventu* device, and the questions posed in 93.11-14 along with the presumed positive response, confirm that he has *heard the voice* of the Holy One and *understood* the activities of heaven. The elevated status of Enoch himself is thus confirmed, as is the elevated status of his writings as true revelation, with a

¹⁷¹'Heavenly tablets' also at 103.2; 106.19; cf. 81.1-2; 107.1.

warning not to alter 'the word of truth'¹⁷². Enoch predicts that this is what *sinners* will do: 'they will speak evil words ... and write out my Scriptures *on the basis of their own words*' (104.10; cf. 94.5; 98.14f.).¹⁷³ Enoch writes all this in a book for Methuselah to be passed on 'to the generations that are *discerning* .. they shall cause their *ears to listen* in order that they may *learn this wisdom*' (82.2f.). An implicit claim is made here both for the status of Enoch's book as revelation, as well as for the status of those who are able to discern its truth.

Here is a claim to the truth of revelation (100.6) and an appeal to readers to discern and accept that claim, since not doing so has eschatological consequences (99.6-10). Although the status of the righteous and wise is confirmed and God's judgement is fixed, that status is still something which needs to be sought and practised, and these two understandings are held in a certain tension. Nickelsburg has shown that the *Epistle* consistently exhorts the righteous and wise and admonishes the sinners and fools, and this is set out in a recognizable pattern, using revelatory formulae (94.1-5; cf. 91.19).¹⁷⁴ All of Enoch's books, and the elect who read them now, in a way similar to those who read Matthew's gospel, are enabled to see present events in the context of God's future, and live accordingly.

4.5.1 Enoch Traditions and Matthew's Gospel

In comparing *1 Enoch* and Matthew's gospel in relation to our theme of discernment, we find that there are differences of subject (Enoch and Jesus) and of genre (apocalyptic and gospel), as well as some similarities of form and language.

1. In common with the biblical material we have examined, *1 Enoch* is concerned with the authority of an individual as a recipient and mediator of revelation. The brief statement in Gen. 5 about Enoch not dying was elaborated to show that he spent 300 years in angelic company in heaven and returned to earth to pass on this revelation before his final 'translation'. Great figures of the past tended to accumulate titles and functions: Moses 'attracted' the function, not only of law-giver, but also of prophet and priest. In later traditions, in a somewhat idealized

¹⁷²104.9,10. The text reads, 'just verdict', with 'word of truth' as footnotes *r* and *x*.

¹⁷³Adler, 'Introduction', 27, notes that such stern injunctions about preserving intact the precise words of the revelation 'suggest that their authors recognised the temptation to tamper with the text'. Cf. Rev. 22.18-19.

¹⁷⁴Apocalyptic Message, 319f.: using phrases such as 'Know!', 'Be it known!', 'I say to you', 'I show (or make known to) you', 'I swear to you'; and including blessings and woes.

picture of the patriarchs, they could be elevated to a status approaching deity.¹⁷⁵ Thus, especially in the *Similitudes*, Enoch the seer 'attracted' the function of Chosen One, Elect One, Messiah and Son of Man, although the relationship between these various 'titles' has been hard to define (48.2-7; 51.3; 52.4; 60.10).¹⁷⁶

The figure of the Son of Man has given rise to extended scholarly debate, but for our purposes it is sufficient to note that in some Jewish circles there may have been speculation on the Son of Man in Daniel as a particular individual, or as a pre-existent heavenly being, or as a divine being who shared in God's glory and the authority that is God's alone.¹⁷⁷ The different figures occupying the throne of glory (the Son of Man, 62.5; Enoch himself, 71.14f.; Abel, *Test. Abr.* 11 Rec.A; or Melchizedek, 11Q13),¹⁷⁸ may suggest an uncertainty or rivalry between differing claims to authority. Thus there may have been some dispute about the authority related to Enoch's role: so, for example, 'But it is not Enoch's business to give sentence; rather, the Lord is the one who gives sentence, and it is this one's (Enoch's) task only to write' (*Test. Abr.* Rec.B., 11.6f.).

Revelation of God is discerned by Enoch in dreams and visions, frequently in the context of heavenly journeys, and we have seen some affinities with the Merkabah mystical tradition, and that of Balaam, one who used mantic and divinatory techniques. The role of dreams and visions in the biblical tradition is rather ambiguous (section 3.4): they are acceptable when received by one who is considered to be morally upright, obedient and righteous, such as Enoch (12.4; 71.14; cf. 99.6-10). Enoch's transition from the earthly world to the heavenly world confirms his righteousness and authenticates his source of knowledge, as well as symbolizing the destiny of the righteous.

For Matthew, his focus is on Jesus as an historical individual claiming an authority as recipient and mediator of revelation. Jesus is a figure from the recent past, and, in contrast to Enoch, much more is known about his earthly life, including his death. In a similar way to Enoch, names and functions 'cluster' around him: prophet, law-giver, teacher, healer, wise man, Messiah, Emmanuel, Son of David, and as Son of Man he will sit on his glorious throne, judging the nations (25.31f.; cf. 19.28, both

¹⁷⁵Dunn, *Christology*, 17.

¹⁷⁶See Davila, 'Methodology'.

¹⁷⁷For discussion in relation to early Christology, see Dunn, *Christology*, 81ff.

¹⁷⁸Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 105ff. Melchizedek, like Enoch, is referred to very briefly in the OT (Gen. 14), and in 11Q words from Ps. 82.1 originally referring to God have been applied to him.

only in Matthew).¹⁷⁹ Matthew also claims that it is Jesus, as the Son of God, who has mutual knowledge of God (11.27), and gives revelation which is both final and authoritative. As Rowland¹⁸⁰ has pointed out, the problem was not so much that Christians assigned these titles to Jesus, but that 'God shared power with (this) man executed on a cross'.

Matthew presents Jesus as the exemplary model of discernment and obedience, and there are two references to his own visionary experience (3.16; τὸ ὄραμα, 17.9). Joseph receives word from God in dreams, and is specifically described as righteous (δίκαιος, 1.19f.; cf. 2.12,13,19; 27.19). Both Enoch and Jesus are described as righteous and, in that they are both designated as Son of Man, they can both symbolize the destiny of the righteous.¹⁸¹ Yet Jesus himself is a model for conduct in a way that Enoch is not. He has an earthly life of obedience to God's will, suffers¹⁸² and dies, and expects his followers to do the same. Since, according to Matthew, obedience and discernment are closely connected, Jesus can also serve as a model for discernment in a way that Enoch cannot.

2. A feature of Jewish apocalyptic literature was for claims to be made for an individual to have received revelation in the form of dreams or visions, and to have been shown mysteries beyond human knowledge. Enoch became a 'clustering point for apocalyptic traditions'¹⁸³ and Jewish legends developed about him: how he had been taken to the very presence of God and shown the secrets of the cosmos. In a literary sense, each of the five sections of *1 Enoch* is presented as the true record of divine disclosures made to Enoch,¹⁸⁴ in the genre of a pseudepigraphical writing. Scriptural imagery is used and recast in a symbolic, apocalyptic and esoteric mode, recorded in 'sealed' books.

For Matthew, Jesus is a figure from the recent past, and therefore, in contrast to the books of *Enoch*, he is recording the narrative history of that person's life, interpreted as the fulfilment of scripture and the final revelation of God's will. Although there is

¹⁷⁹Knibb, 'Date', 350f., notes scholars who have suggested some knowledge by Matthew of *Enoch*, although he argues that since many of the motifs are commonplace direct influence is unlikely. The problems with the dating of many of the Enoch traditions and Matthew's gospel itself, does not rule out the possibility of *1 Enoch* 37-71 having been influenced by Jewish Christian motifs. Matt. 19.28; 25.31, cf. *1 Enoch* 45.3; 47.3; 62.5; 69.27,29; Matt. 13.40-43, cf. *1 Enoch* 54.6; 39.7; 58.3.

¹⁸⁰'Moses and Patmos', 295. He also points out that the subordination of the Son to the Father meant that Christianity did not 'lapse into the two power heresy known to us from the rabbinic sources'.

¹⁸¹Collins, 'Heavenly Representative', 126.

¹⁸²VanderKam, 'Righteous One', 437, notes that in the *Similitudes*, the chosen one/son of man does not suffer and the focus is rather on his exaltation and status.

¹⁸³Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 68.

¹⁸⁴VanderKam, *Revelation to Canon*, 24.

some evidence of sayings which originated in early churches being added to the Jesus tradition,¹⁸⁵ Matthew, as an author, is much closer to the historical origins of his tradition than the writings in *Enoch*. If some of the development of Enoch traditions can be seen as filling gaps during Enoch's absence, Matthew also has filled in some perceived 'gaps' in Mark's account (1-2; 4.1-11; 27.57-28.20).¹⁸⁶

In a literary sense, Matthew is writing a gospel and makes a more muted claim for it to be revelation (1.1; 28.19-20). He places Jesus more in the tradition of Moses as law-giver, rather than Enoch as visionary. The circulation of Mark's gospel, as well as that of Matthew, suggests a lack of secrecy, although the disciples are described as 'blessed', not because they have *read*, but because they have *seen* (13.16). Following the resurrection, Jesus has an existence beyond and outside the text itself, and for Matthew, becoming an 'insider' involves a relationship, a 'coming' to an acknowledgement of Jesus as Son of God rather than by access to secret texts.¹⁸⁷

3. Within their two different literary genres, there are certain limited similarities of form and language. Both draw attention to particular figures as recipients and mediators of revelation, and use the terms and shape of biblical call narratives.¹⁸⁸ Both speak of two ways, and rhetorically, discernment of revelation is a factor shaping the community. Division is expressed in traditional biblical language. As shown especially in the Animal Apocalypse, those outside the community are culpably blind and wicked, whereas those who read Enoch's books are wise, elect, and ultimately saved.¹⁸⁹ Matthew too describes those 'outside' as blind guides and hypocrites, and those on the 'inside' as wise and blessed.¹⁹⁰ While there are some similarities in form and language, there are also certain significant differences. Enoch's teaching is quite esoteric, but there is little or no indication about 'how an individual might *transfer* from the group of the unrighteous to the righteous',¹⁹¹ that is, how to become an 'insider'. In Matthew's gospel there is a much more direct appeal to readers to move from 'outside' to 'inside', expressed in terms of repentance and invitation (3.2; 4.17; 11.28).

¹⁸⁵Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, 74f., cites Mark 13.10; Matt. 11.28-30; 18.20; Luke 11.49-51, as possible examples.

¹⁸⁶This trend can be seen continuing further in, for instance, the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* and the *Gospel of Peter*.

¹⁸⁷See discussion by Frankfurter, 'Legacy', 152f., of the concepts of gnosis and the authority of the written text in Jewish apocalypses.

¹⁸⁸Although Matthew does not include a traditional call narrative for Jesus himself, he does use the form (4.18-22; 16.13-20; 28.16-20).

¹⁸⁹VanderKam, *Enoch*, 120, comments on how the 'penchant of the righteous' for noticing God's orderliness in nature serves 'as a contrast to the behaviour of sinners'.

¹⁹⁰Freyne, 'Vilifying', 132f.

¹⁹¹Sanders, *Paul*, 357; VanderKam, *Enoch*, 151f.

Finally, any form of direct literary dependence between *1 Enoch* and Matthew remains unproven, but certain similarities of ideas may reflect a common background and concerns. References in Matthew to false prophets and to false Christs may indicate a certain anxiety about revelatory activity, both within Matthew's own circles and in the wider community (7.15ff.; 24.11,23-26).¹⁹² *Enoch* and Matthew reflect a general interest in revelation and claims to new revelation, and are keen to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate revelation. They also share a use of traditional biblical language and apocalyptic motifs, but beyond that the agents, media and the content of revelation are very different. This is because Matthew's focus is on Jesus as a historical figure from the recent past, the truth about whom he wants his readers to discern.

4.6 Conclusion

Our coverage of early Jewish literature is necessarily selective, but sufficient for our purposes. We have found a widespread concern with both revelation and discernment in different strands and genres of early Jewish tradition. In this chapter we have looked at works from Qumran, a strongly sectarian group with an apocalyptic perspective; Sirach, reflecting scribal and wisdom traditions; Daniel, a combination of court tales and more traditional apocalypse; and *1 Enoch*, a composite document reflecting both eschatological and esoteric themes. In each of these areas we have found certain recurring themes relating to our motif of discernment.

Particular gifted individuals claim authority as recipients and mediators of revelation. This is consistent with the scriptural focus on special figures, both as those privileged to receive the grace of revelation as well as those skilled at discerning it. The different works witness to a variety of types of mediator (teacher, interpreter, visionary, sage), as well as to a variety of ways in which revelation is received (vision, dream, interpretation, study). Yet discernment is always both a gift from God, as well as being a skill exercised in the context of a godly life. Scribal and visionary activities represent different ways of integrating the text and social setting,¹⁹³ but both need divine inspiration to work.

¹⁹²See also Jude's concern with false teachers within the community (v.12,18), and references to angels and 'dreamings' by those who lead an immoral life-style (v.4,8.). Jude 14b-15 is the only reference in the NT to *1 Enoch*, 1.9, although v.6 alludes to material in *1 Enoch* 6-11. Jude's use of the word 'prophesied' (ἐπροφήτευσεν) here is in the sense of 'predicted', rather than indicating that Jude regarded *1 Enoch* as canonical scripture; so VanderKam, '1 Enoch', 36.

¹⁹³Rowland, 'Apocalyptic Literature', 183.

Each of the works discussed has a relationship with, and is in some sense dependent on, the revelation given paradigmatically to Moses at Sinai.¹⁹⁴ This concentration on the given, revelatory event, now 'entexted', did not necessarily lead to stagnation. The text could become a 'living reality':¹⁹⁵ whether for study, inspired exegetical scribal activity or as 'a door of perception' in the imaginations of apocalyptic visionaries. The possibility of being innovative was there, but this had to be consistent with the deep-rooted tradition of scripture, not reflecting personal opinion, but a new, meta-revelation from God. So the scriptures provided the categories for understanding,¹⁹⁶ and some would claim had a 'hidden meaning'. Claims to revelation needed to be consistent with scripture, while asserting the authority of other complementary and supplementary revelation.¹⁹⁷

Disputes about claims to revelation are inherent in a religion based on revelation, as the arguments about true and false prophecy witness.¹⁹⁸ Ideological factors, particularly the need within the religious community to legitimate certain voices and exclude others, also play an important part here. We have seen how claims to revelation are divisive.

A vital part of sectarian life is the belief in special revelation, whether through dreams, visions or prophecies, or through new interpretations of scripture (whether legal or prophetic). The sect needs to sustain and legitimate its position by appeal to sources of knowledge not available to the parent group.¹⁹⁹

In order for the group to be cohesive, its members must consist of those who have discerned and accepted that the claim to revelation is legitimate. Interpretations of scripture and claims to new revelation have to be tested, understood and accepted as true.

We have noted various terms applied to members of groups to differentiate themselves from others. In each of the works examined, including Sirach, where

¹⁹⁴In discussing the oral law, Scholem, 'Revelation and Tradition', 289, notes that 'the achievement of every generation is projected back into the eternal present of the revelation at Sinai', and that 'revelation comprises everything that will ever be legitimately offered to interpret its meaning'.

¹⁹⁵Rowland, 'Apocalyptic Literature', 173. Bockmuehl, *Revelation*, 14f.

¹⁹⁶Goldingay, *Daniel*, 311.

¹⁹⁷Collins and Nickelsburg, *Ideal Figures*, 10.

¹⁹⁸The debate concerned whether and when prophecy was considered to have ceased, as well as the nature and definition of prophecy itself. See Coggins, 'Prophecy'; Carroll 'Poets not Prophets'; Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict*; Alexander, 'Sixtieth Part'; Wright *Jesus*, 154, n.38; Hooker, *Signs*, 6f.

¹⁹⁹Wright, *People*, 257.

there is little obvious polemic against others, 'insiders' are described as 'wise', while 'outsiders' are 'fools' or 'sinners'. The 'insiders' are also full of understanding, holy and faithful, the righteous, the elect (who will be vindicated), and members of the new covenant, true Israel; while the 'outsiders' are unrighteous, wicked, hard of heart, stubborn, unfaithful, blind, and destined for destruction. Such descriptions draw attention to a recognised element of vilification of opponents here.²⁰⁰ In relation to our motif, such vilification may focus on a people's failures in discernment, including being deaf, blind and hard of heart.

The use of such rhetorical language does not always define actual communities, since theological and social boundaries are not necessarily co-terminous.²⁰¹ A claim about discernment of revelation is a factor in the formation and maintenance of different groups;²⁰² yet particular groups have been notoriously difficult to specify, and may vary between movements within a diverse Judaism, to a sect separating itself from a parent body.²⁰³ We should not therefore be surprised that the relationship between Matthew's community and its parent group is also hard to pin down.

Finally, as we shall see in the next chapter, Matthew presents Jesus, God's Son, as one who is skilled in discernment as well as one who receives revelation. Here Matthew follows in the scriptural tradition of revelation being mediated through certain individuals, and he presents Jesus in the tradition of both Moses and wisdom.²⁰⁴ Matthew also points to Jesus himself as someone the truth about whom is to be discerned. His teaching describes a new way of living: a godly life of obedience consistent with Torah is still needed, but the focus is now different in the sense that in Jesus, the kingdom of heaven has broken in, thus bringing a new eschatological perspective. This calls into question in a paradoxical way the identity of those who can really see. Although Matthew's gospel draws on an apocalyptic tradition and world view, he did not write in the genre of an apocalypse.²⁰⁵ In a similar way, although he draws substantially on scribal and wisdom traditions, he

²⁰⁰See Freyne, 'Vilifying', and Johnson, 'Anti-Jewish Slander'.

²⁰¹Lieu, 'Parting', 109.

²⁰²See Nicklesburg, 'Revealed Wisdom'.

²⁰³E.g., the relationship between the Essene community at Qumran and the wider community, and the development of the *hasidim*.

²⁰⁴Orton, *Understanding Scribe*, 123, notes references to a 'spirit of understanding' being given to an 'eminent personage', and that this is co-terminous with the 'spirit of the Lord' (4 Ezra 5.21; 1 Enoch 49.3; Ps. Sol 17.42; Test Levi 2.3; 18.7). He is concerned to show how Matthew's gospel as a whole, and his portrait of the disciples in particular, reflect a scribal ideal, rather than specifically in connection with the person of Jesus.

²⁰⁵See Sim, *Apocalyptic*, 23-31, on the relationship between 'apocalypticism' and literary genre.

did not focus solely on wisdom-type sayings.²⁰⁶ He was writing a gospel and his record remains particularized in history, and it is to that record we now return.

²⁰⁶It remains unclear how far a scribal ideal has influenced the way Matthew has shaped his material. Wisdom and apocalyptic perspectives can both be present; see Harrington, 'Jewish Approaches'.

Chapter 5

MODEL DISCERNMENT

5.1 Introductory Observations

In our previous two chapters we have examined discernment of revelation in Matthew's literary background in scripture and early Jewish texts. Here we found that revelation is given to certain gifted individuals who act as mediators between God and his people. Revelation legitimates both claims to speak for God, as well as particular interpretations of the written scriptural record. Early Jewish literature evidenced a variety of types of individually gifted mediators, such as teachers, interpreters, visionaries or sages. Although now the given, revealed text acted as a starting point, it was understood that God could not be confined within this written record, and new, on-going revelation was seen as part of the process of making past revelation contemporary. Inspired interpretations of scripture and claims to new revelation needed to be discerned, involving a process of testing. Claims about discernment of revelation became a factor in the formation and maintenance of different groups. Such background and analogies are important because they enable us to see how discernment of revelation was a feature of Matthew's tradition. We are therefore now in a position to examine how far Matthew uses similar motifs in his portrayal of Jesus as the model of discernment, and in our next two chapters to explore who is able to discern the truth about him.

We demonstrated in chapter two that discernment of revelation is a pervasive concern of Matthew and noted how significant episodes of revelation are concerned directly with Jesus as Son (3.13-17; 11.25-27; 16.17; 17.1-8). The most significant of these is found in 11.25-30 where Jesus describes his personal relationship with God as the basis for his revelatory activity. Blair's¹ note on the end of chapter 11 is suggestive:

The Gospel of Matthew as a whole is simply a commentary on the crucially important passage 11.27-30. The Father has revealed his secrets to the Son. The Son in turn reveals them to his disciples. He thus invites men to come and learn from him and if they do, they will find rest for their souls. The Son

¹*Jesus*, 108.

is the world's teacher and savior (28.18-20). Upon their comprehension of his teaching their salvation rests.

While this comment by Blair picks up some of our themes concerning the importance of the passage and the passing on of revelation, two particular aspects may be questioned. First, he takes as his passage 11.27-30, which ignores the more usual and obvious division between verses 24 and 25. He thus does not set the whole passage in the context of revelation by the Father. Second, he goes on to state that the invitation to learn and understand Jesus' teaching leads to salvation. This may be so in a general sense, yet for Matthew, God's grace is always primary in giving revelation and enabling the discernment of the truth about Jesus. As I shall show, this has to be worked out, in humble obedience, in the context of being in a filial relationship with God.

Discussion of Matthew's style and christology in these particular verses has frequently not taken sufficient account of their setting in the chapter as a whole. As far as I have found, little attention has been given to the fact that these words are set in a context of revelation. Davies and Allison² suggest that v. 28-30 were composed 'in order to further the Exodus allusion and the comparison/contrast between Jesus and Moses and their two revelations', and Allison³ has also studied it in connection with his examination of a Moses typology in Matthew. The analogies with Moses are certainly a feature here, but, as I shall show, these associations are part of a broader picture here, which also encompasses features of the wisdom traditions and an apocalyptic perspective.

Deutsch⁴ has included a short survey of scholarship on this passage in her work. Her purpose is to study 11.25-30 in relation to deuterocanonical literature and other extant materials of the late Second Temple and Tannaitic periods, as well as to examine the relationship of the passage to Matthew's third unit of narrative and discourse material in 11.2 - 13.58. Deutsch understands Matthew as portraying Jesus as wisdom incarnate, a view shared by Suggs.⁵ Yet, as I shall demonstrate, the case in favour of Matthew's portrayal of Jesus as wisdom remains unproven.

John's question in 11.3 points to discernment of the truth about Jesus as the key question for the whole chapter. It is answered at the end by one of the most specific

²*Matthew, II*, 238.

³*New Moses*, 218ff.

⁴*Hidden Wisdom*, 13f.

⁵*Wisdom*, 2.

statements in the gospel about the relationship between Jesus and the Father in verses 25-30.⁶ Here Matthew tells his readers that Jesus is the Son of the Father; he has received full and complete revelation from him (παρεδόθη), and, at the same time, he and the Father have mutual, reciprocal knowledge (ἐπιγινώσκει). These verses are also important because they form one of the few passages in Matthew's gospel where the word 'reveal' is used (twice: ἀπεκάλυψας, ἀποκαλύψαι v.25,27).

11.25-30 is thus a passage where the language of revelation abounds, and one which forms a significant turning point in the gospel. It establishes a christological claim for Jesus the Son as the model of discernment, and legitimates Jesus' authority to reveal God. It also establishes an ecclesiological claim: the new, elect people of God are those who discern the truth about Jesus. We shall explore how far Matthew understands Jesus to serve as a model of true discernment, as well as how far, and in what respects Jesus transcends this pattern, as someone himself to be discerned. In chapter two we demonstrated how each pericopæ in Matthew 11.2-24 described different responses to Jesus, including Israel's rejection of Jesus,⁷ and how this chapter is part of a larger, very significant turning point in the gospel. We shall begin by examining in more detail the specific setting of 11.25-30.

5.2 The Setting of 11.25-30

We demonstrated in chapter two how discernment is a dominant concern through the whole of chapter 11. 11.25-30 forms primarily a conclusion to that chapter, but it also sets out something new and moves the narrative forward. Here we shall examine the significance of various aspects of its setting, specifically here in chapter 11.

Matthew introduces the pericope with two phrases. He begins, 'at that time' (ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῷ καιρῷ),⁸ which he uses only three times. At 14.1 the phrase introduces material about Herod and John. The lives of Jesus and John are closely connected, and what happens to John affects the timing of what Jesus does (4.12,17). Matthew's other use of the phrase is at 12.1. Its use here, immediately after Jesus' prayer, and in 11.25, immediately before, thus frames this passage, linking the pericopæ in a

⁶ Much attention has been paid to these verses in terms of analysing Matthew's sources. Verses 25-27 also occur in Luke, while verses 28-30 are unique to Matthew, and have been described as a 'Johannine thunderbolt', being untypical of Matthew's style.

⁷McKnight, 'Loyal Critic', 71: 'so, John and Jesus have played "God's music" and warned of judgement to their contemporaries ... the rejection of their ministries is rejection of God'.

⁸Different from Luke's characteristic ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ ὥρᾳ, 10.21; also 12.12, 13.31, 20.19, 24.33.

literary way.⁹ The use of the phrase here suggests that Jesus' first direct confrontation with the Pharisees is linked with the claim for Jesus' authority. The use of the phrase in 11.25 thus suggests that the thanksgiving is in specific reply to some event, and that therefore Jesus' words are in direct response to Israel's lack of discernment of the truth about himself, and rejection of him. This is confirmed by Matthew's second phrase: although ἀποκριθεὶς ... εἶπεν can be seen as an elaboration of 'said',¹⁰ the phrase could also imply Jesus is answering or reacting to what has gone before. Luke (10.17-20) refers back to the divine power seen in the exorcism of demons by the disciples and Jesus' sense of victory over Satan. In Matthew's narrative sequence, the lack of discernment and repentance at Jesus' mighty works by the cities of Galilee immediately precedes: the wording thus suggests that, for Matthew, there is a deliberate connection between the pericopae.¹¹

If the setting in Matthew's sequence is one of rejection of Jesus by Israel, the setting is also one of fulfilment. Matthew's use of scripture in general, both anchors the events of Jesus' life in history and shows how they are part of God's saving purposes.¹² Jesus answers John's question in terms of his fulfilment of prophecies from Isaiah (26.19; 29.18; 35.5-6; 42.7,18; 61.1); Jesus speaks of John himself as the one who fulfils the prophetic words in Malachai (3.1; 4.5-6); it is therefore implied that the rejection of Jesus by Israel also forms part of the fulfilment of God's will. This fulfilment is also eschatological in nature. We shall see how ταῦτα and πάντα (11.25,27) refer to eschatological knowledge, and how 'rest' embraces eschatological, sabbath rest. There are other indications which point to an eschatological setting for the whole chapter. John's question about 'he who is to come', looks both backward to something written in the past and forward to fulfilment in the present: discernment of 'the times' thus also becomes significant.¹³ The healings of Jesus are eschatological signs, discernment of which leads to eschatological blessing or woe and judgement. The description of the feasting in 11.19, suggests the eschatological, messianic banquet, in contrast with the eschatological judgement of the cities refusing to repent.¹⁴

A further aspect of the setting concerns that of place. The place of 11.25-30 appears to be Galilee (v.20). This is the place of Jesus' mission to Israel (4.12-17; 15.29-31)

⁹Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 42.

¹⁰The phrase is used in response to specific situations at 15.15, 17.4, 22.1, 28.5; and at 15.3,13, is not.

¹¹So Verseput, 'Role and Meaning', 553, n.52.

¹²Riches, *Matthew*, 62.

¹³'What is the time now?' If John is Elijah, the last in the line of prophets, then Jesus must be 'he who is to come'; so Wright, *Jesus*, 497.

¹⁴Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 39, notes that the word κρίσις occurs seven times in 11.20 - 12.45.

and the place where Jesus has healed and taught (4.23-25; 19.1). It is also the place where he has been rejected (9.32-34; 12.14) and the place where he pronounces judgement on Israel (11.20-24). The other 'place' specifically mentioned is the wilderness (ἔρημος, 11.7), traditionally a place of both testing and revelation.

Thus Jesus offers a thanksgiving to God at the very moment when Israel's rejection of him is confirmed, suggesting that this rejection too is in fulfilment of God's will, as part of his eschatological purposes. For Jesus, this further suggests that he remains under God's fatherly care (cf. 2.13-23). 11.25-30 form an oasis of calm and assurance between the mission struggle in chapter 10 and the disputes in chapter 12.

5.3 11.25-30: Jesus' Thanksgiving for Revelation

The main focus of the whole of chapter 11 and of 11.25-30 in particular, is Jesus; and here we find one of the few passages where Jesus speaks specifically about himself (also 9.13b). This pericope divides into three sections: vv. 25,26, Jesus' prayer of thanksgiving to the Father for revelation; v. 27, a christological declaration concerning the relationship between the Father and the Son; vv. 28-30, an invitation to come to Jesus and the promise of rest. I shall look at shape of each section and discuss some of the issues each raises in relation to Jesus as the model of discernment.

11.25-26

ἐξομολογοῦμαί σοι, πάτερ, κύριε τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τῆς γῆς, ὅτι ἔκρυψας ταῦτα ἀπὸ σοφῶν καὶ συνετῶν καὶ ἀπεκάλυψας αὐτὰ νηπίοις.
ναὶ ὁ πατήρ, ὅτι οὕτως εὐδοκία ἐγένετο ἔμπροσθέν σου.

These verses reflect similarity in form and words to those used in the thanksgiving psalms, where the speaker praises God for something he has done.¹⁵ This form may also be used to thank God specifically for revelation. We saw in our discussion of Daniel (section 4.4), how he gives thanks to God for revelation (Dan. 2.20-23). This form is also found at 1 Enoch 39.9-11 and 69.27, as well as in the Qumran literature:

¹⁵So, ἐξομολογήσομαί σοι κύριε (Ps. 138.1); ἐξομολογεῖσθε τῷ θεῷ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ (Ps. 136.26); see also Ps. 7.17; 18.49; 22.25; 33.2; 35.18; 71.22; 138.1; cf. Sirach 51.1.

I [thank Thee, O Lord],
 for Thou hast enlightened me through Thy truth.
 In Thy marvellous mysteries,
 and in Thy loving-kindness to a man [of vanity,
 and] in the greatness of Thy mercy to a perverse heart
 Thou hast granted me knowledge. (1QH15.26)

The Matthean verses also show certain significant differences from the traditional form. First, although ἐξομολογέω with σοι and with κύριε is a phrase common in the LXX for addressing God, and one which Jesus uses here, he also significantly addresses God as πᾶτερ, signalling the significance of this relationship further described in v.27. Second, in both the Daniel and Qumran passages, we note that the thanks is for revelation given *to me* (the speaker). In 11.25 Jesus does not thank God for giving *him* revelation, but thanks his Father for what he has done, i.e., giving revelation to one group (babes) and not to another (wise and understanding). The revelation given is not *to* Jesus but is revelation *about* Jesus. This is confirmed by the use of ταῦτα: what it is that God hides and reveals. Orton notes that ταῦτα πάντα seems to be a semi-technical term in Matthew.¹⁶

'[T]he very least we can say is that the phrase is very frequently used of the things *revealed* by Jesus to the disciples with eschatological or apocalyptic reference. We might also look to 11.25-27 for exactly the same associations of the words ταῦτα and πάντα.'¹⁷

In the immediate context, ταῦτα in 11.25 refers to the mighty works (δυνάμεις) in 11.20, as well as the deeds (ἔργα) in 11.2,9, and these in turn, refer back to Jesus as mighty in word and deed, as set out in chapters 5-7 and 8-9. Thus the 'things' that are revealed refers to the whole realization of eschatological hope in the coming of Jesus.¹⁸

'These things' have been revealed, not to the *wise and understanding* (cf. the wise in Dan. 2.21), but to *babes*. 'Child' is generally παῖς, παιδίον or τέκνον, but the word used here is νήπιος. Bertram¹⁹ notes that in general Greek usage νήπιος refers to 'the concept of a child as well as that of the person who in various ways is without

¹⁶Used in the parables chapter: 13.34,51,56; the apocalyptic section: 23.36; 24.2.8.34; and also at 4.9; 6.32,33; 19.20.

¹⁷Orton, *Understanding Scribe*, 147.

¹⁸Verseput, 'Role and Meaning', 543, n.53; broader than Gnllka, *Matthäusevangelium 1*, 435, who identifies ταῦτα with Jesus' sonship.

¹⁹νήπιος, 912f.

understanding', and that 'from the very first the word can also be used with no obvious reference to childhood'. In its scriptural use, νήπιος translates various Hebrew words²⁰ which are used in a variety of mundane ways to describe children. However, Bertram²¹ suggests the position is different where the term occurs in connection with the concept of simplicity expressed in the underlying root *peṭṭ*, and that this root can be taken in both a good sense and a bad. The root form is translated eight times by ἄφρων (foolish/simple), five times by ἄκακος (innocent/simple), and five times by νήπιος, which is always used in the good sense in the LXX, as he demonstrates by the Greek textual variants of Proverbs 1.22 and 32.

Of particular interest here are the three places in the Psalms where *peṭṭ* is translated νήπιος:

the testimony of the Lord is sure,
 making wise the *simple* ...
 the commandment of the Lord is pure,
enlightening the eyes;
 the fear of the Lord is clean,
 enduring for ever; (19.7b,8b,9a)

Gracious is the Lord, and righteous;
 our God is merciful.
 The Lord preserves the *simple*;
 when I was brought low, he saved me. (116.5-6)

Thy testimonies are wonderful;
 therefore my soul keeps them.
The unfolding²² of thy words gives light;
 it imparts *understanding* to the *simple*. (119.129-130)

The words shown in italics draw attention to the settings in Psalm 19 and 119 as being ones of revelation. Each reference is also set in a relational context of praise and thanksgiving, showing that the psalmist is aware of his position before God. It is in this context of a creature in relation to the creator (esp. 19.1-6), of small human

²⁰ἰαῖ, γόνεα, ὀλῆ, ναῖα, *peṭṭ*.

²¹νήπιος, 916f.

²²Anderson, *Psalms*, 2.839, notes that 'unfolding' is probably 'revelation, manifestation' (so LXX), but other commentators (e.g. Jerome) suggest 'gate' (Heb. *petah*).

wisdom in relation to God's supreme wisdom, that νήπιος is used in the sense of foolish and simple; not necessarily those 'who are simple as the world sees it',²³ nor someone who is a simpleton.²⁴ νήπιος thus can be used in the tradition to signify those in receipt of revelation, and its use in a context of revelation is not unprecedented. Yet the context in Matt. 11.25 sets a specific contrast with and opposition to the σοφοί καὶ συνετοί.²⁵ This contrast signals the unexpected, paradoxical nature of revelation, and confirms that it is an act of grace.

We can thus see how the form of verses 25-26 is in the traditional shape of a thanksgiving for revelation. This resonance with scriptural tradition, combined with the location in chapter 11, give the passage added weight and significance. The thanksgiving confirms revelation as an act of God's grace and gracious will. The verses also signal that the truth about Jesus is the object of revelation and that it is eschatological in nature. Revelation in general, and the coming of Jesus in particular, brings division.

11.27

In 11.27 Matthew, following Q, continues, not with a prayer of Jesus addressed to the Father, but with Jesus' words about his relation with the Father and the promise of revelation. The verse can be divided into four strophes:

- a. πάντα μοι παρεδόθη ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς μου
- b. καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐπιγινώσκει τὸν υἱὸν εἰ μὴ ὁ πατήρ
- c. οὐδὲ τὸν πατέρα τις ἐπιγινώσκει εἰ μὴ ὁ υἱός
- d. καὶ ὃ βούληται ὁ υἱὸς ἀποκαλύψαι

a. and d. reflect the distinction between Father and Son; b. and c. their personal, reciprocal knowledge. In 27a. speaks of Jesus have received all things from the Father. Πάντα and παρεδόθη here are of particular significance for our theme.

πάντα here is sometimes understood to refer to concepts of power and authority, with particular reference to 28.18 and Dan. 7.13-14. Matthew certainly places emphasis on the authority of Jesus, but in terms of the dynamic of the gospel, this is not specifically in view here.²⁶ The authority which the Son refused to take in the

²³Bertram, νήπιος, 917. He also sets νήπιος alongside the weak, poor, little ones, unskilful/ignorant and simple/perfect (ἀσθενής, πτωχός, μικρός, ἄπειρος, ἀπλοῦς), although his designation of these also as 'righteous' is perhaps unfortunate, as that term carries so much other weight. He also suggests a parallel with Paul's use of 'fool' (μωρός).

²⁴Anderson, *Psalms*, 1.171 (19.7, 'making wise (even) the simple'), and 2.840 (119.130, '(even) to the simple').

²⁵Together in LXX, Prov. 16.21; Dan. 1.4; cf. Sirach 16.28.

²⁶Gundry, *Matthew*, 216, views πάντα as 'all the items of revelation' (not all authority), although he does not specify what this includes.

wilderness (4.8f.), is only rightfully his after complete obedience on the cross. In 11.25 Jesus addresses the Father as 'Lord of heaven and earth', and it is not until 28.18 that Jesus says, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me'.

If παραδόθη is taken to refer to the handing down of knowledge, then πάντα could also be understood in terms of knowledge: God has given all knowledge to the Son. The difficulty with this interpretation is that the relationship between Father and Son is specifically expressed in terms of 'knowing' in 27b and c, and thus would be redundant here. If, as suggested earlier, ταῦτα πάντα has an eschatological reference, then πάντα here may refer to the whole of God's eschatological plan. The difficulty in defining πάντα may also reflect part of its particular function here: that is, to specify the 'absence of limitation' of Jesus' relationship with God as Father. *All* is unrestricted.²⁷

The meaning and reference of παραδόθη here is also debated. The word can refer to the handing on of knowledge or tradition (so Mk. 7.13; Lk. 1.2), and thus the meaning in 27a could be that Jesus' tradition has been handed on to him direct from God, in contrast to the handing on of the tradition of the scribes and Pharisees in the human sphere. This reading would certainly make sense in the general context of Matthew's gospel, but other factors point against it here. Παραδίδωμι usually refers to the handing on of tradition in the human sphere and does not refer to revelation coming from God. Also, the scribes and Pharisees are not in evidence here in this passage to form an obvious contrast.

A related meaning of παραδίδωμι is to 'deliver' or to 'hand over'.²⁸ If πάντα refers to the whole of God's eschatological plan, then this delivering of *everything* might well include the notion of full revelation,²⁹ but I suggest encompasses more than that. Not only has the Father 'revealed' everything to the Son, as if the Son received full information about the plan, but further, the Son is himself an integral part of this eschatological plan.

The context does not appear specifically to be one of power and authority, nor of the handing on of tradition, nor of revelation given by the Father to the Son; although all

²⁷So Moberly, *Bible, Faith*, 205.

²⁸Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 166: παραδίδωμι in the sense of hand over or betray does not seem to be in view here, although the sense of God delivering Jesus over to death is prominent later: 17.22; 20.19; 26.15f,21,24,46,48; 27.2,26.

²⁹So Jeremias, *Theology I*, 59, who understood the meaning as, 'My Father has given me a full revelation'. See discussion in Marshall, *Luke*, 436; against Deutsch, *Hidden Wisdom*, 33, who understands πάντα μοι παραδόθη to refer to Jesus' sonship.

these elements may be present. Rather, here is an exclusive statement: that God has given his whole eschatological plan to Jesus.³⁰ The universal scope and significance of this is highlighted by its context: that of Israel's rejection of the Son outlined earlier in chapter 11.

27 b. and c. refer to the mutual knowledge of the Father and the Son. There has been much discussion of the meaning and scope of the word 'know'. Γινώσκω is part of the broad vocabulary of revelation, in terms of knowing and understanding: in 1 Sam. 3.7 'know' and 'reveal' appear to be used in parallel.³¹ This meaning of γινώσκω as 'reveal' would work for the first clause: Jesus knows God because God has given him revelation. But it does not work the other way round, since the second clause would then read: God knows Jesus because Jesus has given him revelation.

Γινώσκω here could be understood in terms of election: God calls those whom he knows and loves.³² The verse would then describe 'election by the Father and acknowledgement by the Son'.³³ Yet since the relationship is described in a symmetrical way, the concepts of election and acknowledgement do not seem appropriate here. The Father could choose or elect the Son: but the Son, by being the Son, cannot choose or elect the Father.³⁴ In a related way, when the subject is the human knowledge of God, the idea of obedience is frequently associated with it; and this is particularly the case in relation to Israel. Thus God 'knows' Israel³⁵ and Israel should know God,³⁶ although it is significant that these two kinds of knowledge are not spoken of together in the OT.³⁷ It would be possible to suggest that Matthew understands and portrays Jesus as the Son who embodies the perfect obedience and ideal of Israel (2.15). Again, if the symmetry of these particular verses is to be retained, this 'knowing' would not work the other way round: the Father could not be said to respond in obedience to the Son.

In our discussion of discernment in the Old Testament in chapter 3, we saw how Moses is portrayed as having a personal and direct knowledge of God. We also argued that although this description of Moses elevated his status, the text of Exodus

³⁰Bauckham, 'Throne', 64, notes that participation in God's cosmic rule is frequently expressed by the formulae 'all things' or 'heaven and earth' or, for emphasis, both, as Matt. 11.25-27.

³¹Moberly, 'To Hear', 456; also Num. 12.6.

³²Amos 3.2; Jer. 1.5.

³³Schweizer, υἱός, TDNT 8, 373

³⁴So Luz, *Theology*, 98.

³⁵Hos. 5.3; Amos 3.2.

³⁶LXX Is. 1.2-3; 26.13; Jer. 9.1-6; Hos. 8.2.

³⁷Davies and Allison, *Matthew II*, 287.

33 does not dissolve the tension between knowing God personally, while continuing to affirm that full knowledge of God is not possible.³⁸ Thus even Moses, whom God *knew* face to face (Deut. 34.10), is not described in the reverse way - that Moses knew God. The knowledge is not therefore fully mutual.³⁹ In 11.27 Jesus, unlike Moses, does not need to ask for knowledge of God, and, as we have seen, the two clauses about the relationship between Father and Son describe mutual and reciprocal knowledge,⁴⁰ unprecedented in the scriptural tradition. While Moses received revelation from God and had intimate knowledge of him, it is Moses' inability to have reciprocal knowledge of God that makes him inferior to Jesus.⁴¹ Thus, not only is Jesus superior to Moses because of his reciprocal knowledge of God, but Matthew also affirms that this is an exclusive relationship: no one knows the Father *except* the Son (εἰ μὴ).

It is because of and on the basis of this mutual knowledge that the Son is able to reveal the Father (11.27d). Ἀποκαλύψαι has no object here ('him', RSV).⁴² In 16.17 ἀπεκάλυψέν also has no object ('this', RSV). Although Jesus says it is God who reveals (11.25; 16.17), because of their intimate, reciprocal relationship, Jesus himself is also able to reveal. It is also Jesus, and only Jesus, who can reveal true knowledge of God. The 'pleasing' (εὐδοκία) of the Father is parallel to the 'willing' (βούλομαι) of the Son. Thus, in 11.27 Jesus describes his personal relationship with the Father, who has given him his whole eschatological plan. This both affirms Jesus' status before God, as well as relativising all other claims to know God in such a way, and all other claims to reveal knowledge of God.

11.28-30

These verses can be set out in following pattern:

- 28a. δεῦτε πρὸς με πάντες οἱ κοπιῶντες καὶ πεφορτισμένοι
- b. καὶ γὰρ ἀναπαύσω ὑμᾶς.
- 29a. ἄρατε τὸν ζυγὸν μου ἐφ' ὑμᾶς
- (καὶ μάθετε ἀπ' ἐμοῦ ὅτι πραῦς εἰμι καὶ ταπεινὸς τῇ καρδίᾳ)
- b. καὶ εὐρήσετε ἀνάπαυσιν ταῖς ψυχαῖς ὑμῶν

³⁸Expressed linguistically, 'the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face'; and 'but you cannot see my face'; Ex. 33.11,20.

³⁹Against Allison, *New Moses*, 220.

⁴⁰Jeremias *Theology*, 58, notes that the linguistic form 'no one knows ... except' (οὐδεὶς ἐπιγινώσκει... εἰ μὴ) is a semitic linguistic (roundabout) way to describe a reciprocal relationship, since the language does not have a word for 'one another'.

⁴¹This failure of Moses to have seen God, contrasted with the intimate and reciprocal knowledge between Father and Son described in John 1.18, is noted by Brown, *John I*, 36, and referred to by Allison, *New Moses*, 223.

⁴²A point not noted by Deutsch, *Hidden Wisdom*, 38.

c. ὁ γὰρ ζυγὸς μου χρηστὸς καὶ τὸ φορτίον μου ἑλαφρόν ἐστιν.

None of these verses appears in Luke, and the second part of v.29a. seems to be an addition by Matthew. It interrupts the flow and structure of the verses and also reflects his own emphases on Jesus as the one teacher and humble servant, and the life of a follower of Jesus as that of a learner.⁴³

Jesus, as Son, with mutual, exclusive knowledge of the Father, is able to offer the invitation to δεῦτε πρός με. We note the similarity to Jesus' earlier call to the brothers in 4.19: δεῦτε ὀπίσω μου.⁴⁴ There, the two pairs of brothers immediately leave everything to follow Jesus, emphasised by the repetition of ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ. The paradigmatic quality of these two call stories expresses for Matthew the meaning of discipleship: unqualified and costly personal commitment.⁴⁵ In 11.28 the focus is still on personal commitment, but the rewards to be gained from this are also emphasised.

The reward Jesus offers to this coming and taking is that of *rest* (ἀναπαύσις). The giving of rest, like the words earlier in 11.27, resonates with Exodus 33. God says to Moses, 'My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest' (33.14; LXX καὶ καταπαύσω σε). Here God's presence with his people and his rest are parallel statements. For Matthew, it is both *coming* to Jesus and coming to *Jesus* that brings God's presence and God's rest. For Matthew, Jesus is God's presence (1.23; 28.20), and it is specifically Jesus, and no other, who is able to give God's rest; and this includes what only Jesus makes known, that is, the Father. The future, eschatological age was understood to be a time of rest,⁴⁶ and could also be thought of as a great sabbath.⁴⁷ Given the eschatological fulfilment motif of chapter 11, as well as the debates about the sabbath immediately following in chapter 12, an interpretation of 'rest' as an eschatological sabbath seems likely. Again, it is only Jesus who is able to offer this kind of rest.

Rest for your souls is also the promised result for taking Jesus' yoke. The phrase in 11.29c, καὶ εὐρήσετε ἀνάπαυσιν ταῖς ψυχαῖς ὑμῶν⁴⁸ is also found in Jeremiah 6.16:

Thus says the Lord:

"Stand by the roads, and look,

⁴³See Stanton, *Gospel*, 340ff., 369f., and Matthew's modifications of Is. 42.1ff.

⁴⁴Cf. λάβετε φάγετε, 26.26

⁴⁵Barton, *Family Ties*, 131.

⁴⁶Ezra 7.36,38; 8.52; SB 1,607.

⁴⁷Is. 66.23; 1 *Enoch* 62.14; 2 *Enoch* 33.1-2; Heb. 4.9.

⁴⁸Matthew uses ἀνάπαυσιν here where Jeremiah has ἀγνισμὸν, thus making a parallel with v. 28b.

and ask for the ancient paths,
where the good way is; and walk in it,
and find rest for your souls.
(LXX: καὶ εὐρήσετε ἀγνισμὸν ταῖς ψυχαῖς ὑμῶν)
But they said, 'We will not walk in it'."

Earlier, in condemning the people for not obeying God, Jeremiah has twice said, "For long ago you broke your yoke and burst your bonds; and you said, 'I will not serve.'" (2.20; 5.5). Although yoke (ζυγός) could be used as a metaphor for obedience and servitude, the taking on of the yoke of the commandments was seen as a sign of God's grace, not of slavery; a placing of oneself in a covenant relationship under the direct rule of God. 'Yoke' and 'rest' are also found together in scriptural tradition.⁴⁹ Here in Matthew, we find Jesus as the Son offering his yoke and promising God's eschatological sabbath rest.

Those who come to Jesus are to *learn* from him, and the particular qualities mentioned here are those of being *meek* and *humble*. *πραῦς* occurs only four times in the NT (Matt. 5.5; 11.29; 21.5; 1 Peter 3.4). At 21.5 Matthew has modified Zech. 9.9 in order to emphasise Jesus as the humble king.⁵⁰ What it means for Jesus to be a humble king is shown by Matthew in his description of Jesus as the lowly servant in 12.17-21. Again Matthew has modified (or chosen a different version of) the quotation, from Is. 42.1ff., in order to emphasise Jesus as God's chosen servant (*παῖς*), and as *my beloved on whom my favour rests*. That this is God's will is confirmed by the same words from the heavenly voice at the baptism and transfiguration (3.15; 17.5). This has the effect of confirming these qualities as those approved by God, as well as demonstrating that Jesus is the one who fully embodies them.⁵¹

There is a further connection here with our theme of discernment. Num. 12.3 describes Moses as 'very meek, more than all men that were on the face of the earth'. This is in the context of a dispute about the authority of Moses. Miriam and Aaron claim that God has spoken through them also, but their claim is dismissed by God,

⁴⁹Charette, 'To Proclaim Liberty', 291f. Deut. 28.47ff. (v. 65, ἀναπαύω, LXX). Restoration is seen as a time when the 'yoke' of foreign domination will be broken and the people will enjoy 'rest' in their own land, while faithfully serving under Yahweh's yoke (Is. 9.4; 14.3,5; 65.10; Jer. 30.8; Ezek. 34.15,27; Zeph. 3.9).

⁵⁰Matthew omits 'righteous and saving is he' from the LXX of Zech. 9.9, which has the effect of emphasising Jesus' meekness.

⁵¹ταπεινός, although not specifically linked with revelation, is found in conjunction with *πραῦς* (Is. 26.6; Zeph. 3.12); and for Matthew reflects an attribute of life before God to be sought and practised (18.4; 23.11-12).

who says this of Moses: 'With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in dark speech; and he beholds the form of the Lord' (12.8). Num. 12.1-8 therefore suggests that being meek is a quality that enables Moses to receive God's revelation. A similar connection between meekness and revelation is also found in Sirach 3.19: 'Many are lofty and renowned, but to the meek he reveals his secrets'.⁵² We may thus suggest that these attributes enable Jesus to discern revelation. They also represent the pattern of Jesus' life which his followers must learn; and the implication is also that if these attributes enable Jesus to discern revelation correctly, then the same must be true for his followers.⁵³

The form and content of 11.28-30 have led some commentators to find parallels here with the wisdom tradition. As Orton⁵⁴ has demonstrated, Matthew undoubtedly shows some affinities with a wisdom tradition, but whether he goes so far as to identify Jesus as wisdom personified remains unclear. Thus some scholars have argued that Matthew does identify Jesus with wisdom,⁵⁵ while others have argued that he does not.⁵⁶

Jesus' mode of speech is certainly indebted to the wisdom tradition in his use of parables and aphorisms, and this raises the question as to whether Matthew goes on to suggest that Jesus was therefore the living embodiment or personification of wisdom.⁵⁷ This issue can be illustrated by the debate concerning 11.19d. This is the only place in Matthew where Jesus could be identified with wisdom.⁵⁸ The question here is how far the parallel between τὰ ἔργα τοῦ Χριστοῦ (11.2) and τῶν ἔργων of wisdom should be pressed. If they are seen as a formal parallel, then Matthew has moved beyond Q and identified Jesus as wisdom rather than as wisdom's messenger. If the parallel between the two 'works' is not pressed, then 11.19d, itself perhaps a type of proverb,⁵⁹ could mean, 'God's wisdom is shown to

⁵²πολλοί εἰσιν ὑψηλοὶ καὶ ἐπίδοξοι, ἀλλὰ πράεσιν ἀποκαλύπτει τὰ μυστήρια αὐτοῦ (not in all LXX texts); Skehan, *Ben Sira*, 159, suggests that this verse underlies the sayings of Matt. 11.25,29. See Bockmuehl, *Revelation*, 67.

⁵³Μάθετε ὅτι can mean learn *because*, or learn *that*; both senses apply here.

⁵⁴*Understanding Scribe*.

⁵⁵Witherington, *Sage*; Suggs, *Wisdom, Christology*; Betz, 'Logion'; Deutsch, *Hidden Wisdom*.

⁵⁶Johnson, 'Reflections'; Stanton, *Gospel*, Davies and Allison, *Matthew II*; Kingsbury, *Structure*; earlier, Manson, *Sayings*.

⁵⁷So Witherington, *Sage*, 204f., who, from a historical Jesus perspective, refers to the idea as 'especially daring' and 'shocking'.

⁵⁸καὶ ἐδικαιώθη ἡ σοφία ἀπὸ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῆς, Matt. 11.19; καὶ ἐδικαιώθη ἡ σοφία ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν τέκνων αὐτῆς, Luke. 7.35.

⁵⁹Johnson, 'Reflections', 58.

be right in view of these works'.⁶⁰ This would be consistent with Jesus' thanksgiving to the Father in v. 25, for what he, God, has done.⁶¹ It may be significant here that Jesus thanks God for what he has done, i.e. given revelation, rather than, for instance, giving him wisdom.⁶²

Witherington⁶³ suggests that Matthew (and John) presents his story in sapiential fashion on the basis of his frequent use of Father and Father-Son language. Yet I suggest that Matthew's use of Father-Son language is more complex and wide-ranging than that found in the wisdom tradition. Thus, Matthew can use 'son' to refer to Jesus as Israel (2.15); to the eschatological heir to God's promises to David, the builder of the temple (16.16-18); as the suffering righteous one (27.43); as well as to the unique relationship between the Father and the Son referred to here (11.27). Only the Son has reciprocal knowledge of the Father and therefore only the Son can reveal the Father to others. It is difficult to explain how Matthew would be able to combine a wisdom christology with his emphasis on Jesus as the Son in this passage,⁶⁴ especially as the addition by Matthew in 11.29b coheres well with his presentation of Jesus as the meek and humble servant. It is on the basis of this reciprocal knowledge as the Son of the Father that Jesus is able to offer the invitation in vs. 28-30.

Jesus' style of speech in the wisdom tradition has led to comparisons being made between 11.25-30 and Sirach 6.18-31 and 51.23-7, where some similar terms and language are used.⁶⁵ Sirach 51 is a combination of various elements and other manuscript evidence, notably 11QPs^a, suggests a fluid textual tradition.⁶⁶ We saw earlier in our discussion of Sirach, how in the final unit (51.13-30) Ben Sira the ideal scribe, sets out his credentials and authority as a wisdom teacher. In the last verses (23-30) Ben Sira himself appears to be speaking and issues a confident invitation to

⁶⁰So Winton, *Proverbs*, 140. He suggests 11.19b is a 'metaphorical personification of wisdom'; an appropriate way of commending wise action, or ironically rebuking those whose actions were foolish. He also argues, p. 20, that 11.19b is 'not a clear enough allusion to invoke the thought of wisdom personified'.

⁶¹So Verseput, 'Role and Meaning', 453, n.51. 'There is no equation of Jesus with Wisdom, but rather a defence of God's wise purposes in carrying out the eschatological programme.'

⁶²At 23.34-36, as Johnson, 'Reflections', 55, has noted, Matthew can only be said to identify Jesus with wisdom if it is assumed that he knew and changed Luke's text (11.49), and that his readers were aware of this, since there is nothing in Matthew's text, as it stands, which makes this identification. While wisdom's difficulty in finding a place to dwell (as Enoch 42; 94.5; Job 28.21; Baruch 4.20ff.), may be echoed elsewhere in Matthew, e.g. 8.20, and in the journey motif generally, in the gospel as a whole it does not seem to be a dominant theme. But see Witherington, *Sage*, 202f.

⁶³*Sage*, 339.

⁶⁴So Johnson, 'Reflections', 59.

⁶⁵E.g.: ζυγόν, ψυχή, εὑρεῖν, ἐκοπίασα, ἀνάπανσιν.

⁶⁶Stanton, *Gospel*, 368; Davies and Allison, *Matthew II*, 293.

come to learn in his school. The context does not require wisdom herself to be speaking here; and neither is it suggested that Ben Sira himself is understood as wisdom personified since he speaks about wisdom, not as wisdom.⁶⁷ We also note that elsewhere in Sirach wisdom is shown to be confident, if not arrogant in her words and attitude,⁶⁸ and this does not accord well with Matthew's emphasis here on Jesus as the humble servant. Matthew 11.25-30 is also composed of differing elements, not all occurring in Luke. This suggests that the underlying traditions here are somewhat fluid and direct dependence of Matthew on Sirach cannot be established here.

Matthew certainly presents Jesus in the style of a wisdom teacher and one who teaches the practice of wisdom, but the case for his presentation of Jesus as personified wisdom is not proven. The practice of wisdom is a skill to be learned from an inspired, gifted teacher: for Matthew this is Jesus the Son and no other. The reward for this practice will be eschatological rest, which can also only be given by Jesus. The wisdom Jesus teaches is unconventional in nature, being paradoxical, radical and subversive, and his behaviour challenges established norms (11.18f.). Yet, as our passage also shows, there is more than this involved here: that is the need, not only to discern Jesus as a teacher of wisdom, but to discern the truth about Jesus himself. The teaching Matthew records encourages a particular way of discerning and perceiving something hidden in Jesus: not only what he teaches about God but the recognition of Jesus himself as the bearer of eschatological revelation. For Matthew, it is because Jesus has received full revelation from the Father, and because he has personal and reciprocal knowledge of the Father, that he is able to reveal the Father. Thus a godly life of obedience consistent with Torah is still needed, but the focus is different now that the eschatological Kingdom has broken in. The exercise of wisdom does not rely solely on observing creation or observing the law, as interpreted by Jesus, but points to a wisdom hidden and revealed in Jesus, which can only be discerned by faith.

5.4 Jesus as the Model of Discernment

We shall now examine how far Matthew's portrayal of Jesus' own discernment of revelation may be seen as an example to be followed (model *for*), and how far Matthew understands Jesus to be qualitatively different in this respect (model *of*).⁶⁹

⁶⁷Gundry, *Matthew*, 220.

⁶⁸24.1; 51.27; cf. Prov. 1.20ff; 8.1ff.

⁶⁹So *Vorbild* (example) and *Urbild* (archetype).

The Model for Discernment

The dynamics of discernment in the life of Jesus exemplify the dynamics of discernment in the life of disciples and discipleship. Matthew records Jesus receiving revelation from God at particular moments in his life, and at those moments he has no difficulty in discerning God, expressed by way of hearing his voice (3.17; 17.5). Between these events of revelation, part of the exercise of living in relation to God for Jesus is found in episodes of testing and obedience. This is part of a larger pattern in the gospel of revelation, testing and vindication,⁷⁰ and of Jesus' obedience to the Father's will. Thus the revelation given to Jesus at baptism is tested and proven in the wilderness; in a scene where revelation is given, Peter tests Jesus' understanding of his role, and this is followed by further revelation and proleptic vindication at the transfiguration; testing in Gethsemane and the events of the passion are followed by vindication in resurrection. Each episode of testing concerns the nature of Jesus' sonship, and in each case Jesus is shown to 'complete' the test and remain faithful to God's will. This forms part of a broader portrayal of Jesus doing the will of the Father, as embodied his own teaching.

This dynamic suggests that Jesus too needed to remain receptive to God's gift, facilitated by sustained obedience. It is in this particular sense that Jesus learned the practice of discernment, although he is not described as a 'learner' in the way that the disciples are to be learners (11.29; 13.52). If this dynamic of discernment is the case for the Son, we find a similar dynamic in Matthew's record of discernment for the disciples. They receive revelation at particular moments (14.28-33; 16.17), and between these events, he also records the disciples living and exercising God's will in their lives. The dynamic is the same, but the disciples consistently fail to exercise their discernment correctly.⁷¹ The particular and paradigmatic example of testing for Jesus is found in the Gethsemane account where he is portrayed as a model for prayer. Here the issue is not so much knowing the Father's will, since Jesus has already indicated that he knows what this is (26.1-2), but rather the issue is the struggle in obedience to that will. Here he stays awake to watch, as he has earlier instructed his disciples to do (25.13; 26.41); he continues to pray, as he has taught his disciples to do: in secret, not heaping up empty phrases, obeying God's will (6.5-10; 26.39,42).

All this is in contrast to the disciples in general, and Peter, James and John, in particular, who, despite their presence at Jesus' transfiguration, conspicuously fail

⁷⁰Barton, 'Transfiguration', 241-3.

⁷¹See further chapter 6.

here. They fall asleep, being unable to watch or pray (26.40,43); they are unable to do what they say they will do (26.35); and Peter's threefold negation of his predicted betrayal contrasts with Jesus' threefold persistence in prayer (26.30-5). Their lack of obedience is worked out in Judas' betrayal (26.47-50); when one takes up the sword (26.51, resisting evil, 5.39), and when they all flee (26.56, the opposite of saving life by losing it, 16.25). This shows they are not following Jesus' earlier teaching, as well as drawing attention to their misplaced earlier confidence that they were able to 'drink the cup I am to drink' (20.22).

This failure of the disciples, increases and highlights Jesus' isolation. Jesus goes with his disciples to Gethsemane; takes Peter, James and John further away; and then leaves them to go 'a little farther' (26.36,37,38). Although he asks them 'watch with me' twice (26.38,41), they are unable to do this.⁷² The second time Jesus comes to them, he does not wake them, but leaves to pray alone (26.43f.), thus emphasising the sense of the disciples' failure when Jesus turns to them. The culmination of this isolation comes when all the disciples flee (26.56). Thus in Gethsemane, Jesus is isolated from his disciples, and the issue for him is one of volition rather than insight, and of obedience of will rather than perception.

Luz⁷³ suggests that at his baptism Jesus also becomes a model for followers to imitate. He argues that the reference to *πᾶσαν δικαιοσύνην* (3.15) transcends the situation of baptism and now refers to the total will of God which all are commanded to do. By accepting, Jesus becomes the example to Christians. At the same time, John's acquiescence points to the way in which Jesus is to be emulated. 'The sentence receives a programmatic character: Jesus, obedient to the will of God, becomes the prototype and example of the Christians'. In this, Jesus' first saying in the gospel, he is presented as the exemplary obedient and humble one (cf. *πραῦς* and *ταπεινός*, 11.29). So Jesus as the ideal disciple, is the exemplar of the one who is meek and humble, so his disciples should also be meek and humble, in order to continue to discern.

The effect of these similarities and differences may be summarised as follows: the experience of discernment of revelation in the life of Jesus as both particular and on-going is paralleled in the life and experience of the disciples. For both, the revelation received has to be worked out in a life of obedience to the Father's will. In this way the nature of Jesus' sonship (christology) and the nature of discipleship

⁷²μετά + genitive at 26.18,20,29,36,38,40,51,69,71.

⁷³Matthew 1-7, 178.

as children of God are connected (ecclesiology).⁷⁴ For both discernment is continuing and costly. The 'reward' for Jesus is found in the vindication of resurrection, and the disciples' life of faith will be rewarded in eschatological rest.

Jesus exemplifies certain attributes and attitudes which facilitate discernment. The disciples are to learn from Jesus and to do what Jesus does. This is seen in terms of: giving up worldly possessions and security (8.20; 4.20,22; 19.27); losing life (27.50; 16.24-28; 10.38f.); prayer (26.39,42,44; 6.9f.); obedience to the Father's will (26.39,42; 6.6; 12.50); going on mission (10.1; 11.1; 28.19); and, above all, exhibiting meekness and child-like humility (11.28-30; 5.5; 18.4). All this takes place in the context of God's grace and protection, for Jesus (2.13-23) and for the disciples (10.26-33).

Although there may be limits to Jesus' knowledge, there is no suggestion that he does not understand in the way the disciples do not understand.⁷⁵ Jesus is portrayed as the perfect example in terms of discernment and this has the effect of creating a distance and certain isolation of Jesus from the disciples.⁷⁶ Although Matthew softens Mark's rather harsh portrayal of the disciples, here too they still consistently fail to live up to Jesus' standards, particularly in terms of the fragile nature of discernment and the difficulty of sustained obedience to the Father's will (16.5-12; 17.9-13).⁷⁷ Jesus is an example of putting the words he says into practice and exemplifying the link between appearance and conviction. We saw in our discussion of true and false prophecy,⁷⁸ how, for true prophets, there is a correlation between outward appearance and inner conviction, and that something publicly visible will emerge (fruit) so that it is possible to gauge the inner condition (7.15-20; 12.33-37).

The Model of Discernment

The dynamics of revelation suggest that discernment is a process of learning and formation, and, as an example of paraenesis, Jesus offers an invitation to learn *from*

⁷⁴There is perhaps a sense in which the testing of Jesus' role as Son and the testing of his followers in recognising him in that role, come together in 16.21-23; see Moberly, *Bible, Theology*, 211.

⁷⁵Blair, *Jesus*, 90, n.5, suggests that Jesus' knowledge is limited also at 4.12; 14.12-13 and 15.12. However, these are all comments by the narrator and serve to move the narrative forward.

⁷⁶Only Jesus engages in mission immediately following the mission discourse in chapter 10 because he is a model disciple; cf. 14.13,23; 6.6.

⁷⁷Bauer, *Structure*, 105: 'Jesus is presented as a perfect model, by which all others 'fail'.' Howell, *Inclusive Story*, 258: Matthew presents Jesus as a lonely, 'unobtainable, qualitatively different figure, a perfect model to which the disciples will never attain'. See also Edwards, 'Uncertain Faith' and Lincoln, 'Teachers', 105.

⁷⁸See chapter 3.

him. His perfection in terms of discernment and obedience mean that his followers will continually need to strive towards this goal.⁷⁹ While we have seen how Jesus' exercise of discernment serves as a model *for* that of the disciples, there is also a sense in which Jesus' experience of revelation is shown to be superior and qualitatively different to that of others: a model *of* discernment.

In contrast to the lack of understanding of all the characters in the story, Jesus stands out as the one who does have true discernment. He perceives the thoughts and motives of others,⁸⁰ and is aware of unfavourable attitudes towards himself.⁸¹ Jesus also knows what will happen in the future, as shown in the predictions of passion and vindication,⁸² as well as at the anointing and the last supper (including finding the room, knowing about his betrayal and denial, and in the complex decision surrounding the choice of Judas as a disciple⁸³). He knows that the kingdom will come soon,⁸⁴ as well as 'the times' (9.14-17; 16.1-4) including the right time (4.12; 11.25). This kind of knowledge is striking in the introduction to the passion narrative (26.1-5): after he has finished *all* his teaching (πάντας τοὺς λόγους τούτους). Jesus knows what will happen to him (crucifixion), when (at Passover), openly says so, and knows he is obeying God's will (παραδίδοται). His opponents, on the other hand, have to plan to arrest Jesus by deceit (δόλω), kill him in an unspecified way, at an unspecified time (not during the feast) and they are afraid of the people.⁸⁵

This type of deeper perception, as well as knowing the future, is frequently linked in biblical tradition with prophetic figures. Jesus was called a prophet, although did not describe himself as such (14.2; 16.14; 26.68; cf. Luke 7.39). He was also like a prophet in possession of the spirit (at baptism, 3.16; exorcism, 12.28; 12.18; 21.31-32). Yet Matthew also demonstrates that Jesus is more than a prophet (greater than Jonah, 12.41). Jesus does not need divination (cf. 1.20; 2.13) and there is no record

⁷⁹This perfection is reflected in the impossible ideal detailed in the sermon on the mount. These qualities, 'by their very nature, cannot in any straightforward sense be fully possessed or mastered, exhausted, perfected, either by the community or the individual'; Davies and Allison, 'Reflections', 306f.

⁸⁰9.2,22,24; 19.21f.

⁸¹9.4, 'knowing their thoughts' (εἰδὼς); 12.15, 'aware of this', i.e. their plan to destroy him, (γνοῦς); 22.18, 'aware of their malice (γνοῦς); emphasised by comments from the narrator that the Pharisees asked their question to 'accuse him'.

⁸²16.21-23; 17.22f.; 20.17-19, introduced by ἰδοὺ.

⁸³26.12; 26.17-19; 26.26-29; 26.21,23,34; 10.4; 26.25.

⁸⁴16.28. The problematic 24.36, if taken at the beginning of the section 24.36-25.30, would suggest that Matthew is encouraging watchfulness and moral preparation, because the end may come at any time.

⁸⁵However the chronology of the passage is determined, the literary contrast is deliberate dramatic irony: Combrink, 'Structure', 85.

of a call narrative for him. Such calls were, as we have seen, crucial for prophets to justify and authorise that their words were from God. For Jesus, such a call is replaced by the birth narrative, signalling that the whole of Jesus' life is part of, and in fulfilment of God's plan. Jesus is thus more than a prophet, since he has received full revelation from God. This authorises his call to others: 'Come to *me*'.

Jesus' prayer of thanksgiving in 11.25f., while recorded at a certain point in the narrative, also has a timeless quality and does not specify a particular moment at which Jesus received all things from God. At 11.27 we saw how the Father delivered all things to Jesus. The aorist *παρεδόθη* might suggest an event, or point in time, and has been taken, for example, by Jeremias,⁸⁶ to refer to Jesus' baptism. Matthew, however, does not appear to link this giving of revelation here to a specific point in time, rather to an unspecified time in the past. Jesus' experience of revelation at baptism and transfiguration is both unique and unrepeatable, and is also mirrored in the experience of the disciples.⁸⁷ The revelatory event described in 11.27 is not mirrored in the experience of the disciples, who are not in view in chapter 11. The revelation described here also stands outside the pattern of revelation, testing and vindication we noted above. These features combine to emphasise the qualitative difference of Jesus' experience of revelation.

Part of the reason for this separation of Jesus from his disciples in terms of discernment, is that Matthew portrays Jesus himself as someone about whom the truth needs to be discerned. Although God gives revelation, this has to be worked out in obedient learning, seen in terms, not only of learning from God, but from Jesus himself. Being obedient to the Father is now seen in terms of following Jesus and obeying his words (*ὁδός*, 7.13-14). This suggests that discernment is something more than a cognitive assent to propositions: but a response to the person of Jesus. This also points to the necessity of some move from observation to interpretation and engagement, as demonstrated by Jesus' cryptic answer to John's question in 11.2-6.⁸⁸

This discussion draws attention to a certain distinction between what is unique in Jesus' experience of revelation and exercise of discernment, and what serves as a pattern of discernment for all disciples. On the one hand, there is a clear sense in

⁸⁶*Theology*, 61.

⁸⁷*This is my beloved Son* in 3.17, is more public than Mark's *You are my beloved Son* (Mark 1.11); they are caught up in Jesus' glory (17.1-8) and experience his risen presence (28.16-20).

⁸⁸Including *ὁ ἔχων ὅσα ἀκούετω*, indicating a cryptic revelatory saying that needs unpacking, 11.15. We also note that Jesus rarely gives straightforward answers to questions asked of him (9.11,14; 12.2; 21.23-27; 26.64).

which Jesus' discernment is particular and unique to him in his role as Son; he is the only one who has received full revelation from God, as well as the only one who has exercised discernment to its ultimate limits of obedience to God's will by giving up life on cross, knowing that he had the power to call for help (26.53). On the other hand, Jesus also offers a living pattern for discernment, one which is to be repeated in the lives of disciples. For Jesus discernment of revelation at specific moments does not appear to be difficult and neither is it explicitly fragile in nature. The main emphasis here is that of very costly obedience to God's will. It is here in the exercise of obedience that Jesus becomes the paradigmatic model for his followers.⁸⁹

5.5 The Significance of Jesus as the True Discerner

We come now to discuss some of the wider implications of Jesus as the true discernor. Matthew has described the complete interdependence of Jesus and the Father, and it is on this basis that Jesus is able to offer an invitation that is both personal and exclusive: 'come to *me* ... and *I* will give you rest'; 'take *my* yoke upon you, and learn from *me*; for *I* am gentle'; '*my* yoke is easy, and *my* burden is light'. The exclusive nature of this invitation has implications for Jesus' authority in relation to the law and tradition. The way in which it is given reflects Matthew's persuasive literary strategy; and both aspects have wider sociological dimensions.

1. The Authority of Jesus

The scriptural logic of revelation indicates that it is mediated by particular people in particular ways. The paradigmatic example here is that of Moses:

It is crucial to observe that Jesus, according to Matthew 11.27, not only received revelation directly from God: he also passed on revelation. So what we have in the Gospels is precisely what we have in Judaism, namely a chain of tradition through which the divine revelation is canalized through human intermediaries. If Moses received the law and handed it on to Joshua, Jesus likewise received revelation and in turn made it known to others.⁹⁰

⁸⁹'If being Christian means becoming sons in the Son, then Christian discernment must have a structure similar to the discernment of Jesus, which can only be achieved by following him.' Sobrino, 'Following', 15.

⁹⁰Allison, *New Moses*, 231.

As we have seen, especially in 11.27, Matthew consistently portrays Jesus as greater than Moses. Jesus has personal, reciprocal knowledge of the Father; thus he, and only he, has the authority to pass this revelation on *to anyone whom he chooses*. Jesus' invitation to take 'my yoke upon you' (11.29) is often understood as an alternative and in opposition to the many, and by implication, burdensome commandments of the law.⁹¹ Yet, as the Sermon on the Mount shows, Jesus' words do not lessen or weaken the law, but intensify it (5.20). Taking a yoke also has to do, not only with obeying the law, but being in a covenant relationship with God and under his direct rule.⁹² Thus Matthew states that by taking Jesus' yoke, believers are able to enter a true covenant relationship with God.

Matthew's belief that the law and the prophets were still valid, as well as that the Gentiles were included in God's salvation and that something new had happened in Jesus, led him to hold in a tension the desire to preserve as well as to reform (13.52). The past is now interpreted in relation to Jesus and loyalty to him.⁹³ Matthew offers and justifies an alternative by showing Jesus to be the authoritative interpreter of scripture. In chapter 11 the healings spoken of in Isaiah are fulfilled by Jesus' actions and the complex sayings about the messenger are interpreted to be about John the Baptist (11.2-15). The debates either side of chapter 11 also reflect a fundamental difference concerning the authority of Jesus, expressed in the assessment by opponents that his power to exorcise is because he is a sorcerer/deceiver/blasphemer (9.32-34; 12.22-32). As Hurtado notes,⁹⁴

For Matthew, disputes over Halakah and other matters were corollaries of more fundamental differences over the significance and authority of Jesus. Opponents do not claim Jesus is wrong or inferior in halakhic views, but utterly condemn him as a sorcerer and in league with the devil.

Matthew does not present Jesus as bringing a new Torah or teaching in opposition to the given Torah (5.17), but rather shows how Jesus, as God's Son, now offers the

⁹¹So Schweizer, *Matthew*, 438, commenting on 23.4; Scroggs, 'Eschatological Existence', 136, argues that Jesus' interpretation of Torah must be one that makes sense to the 'uneducated' (i.e. babes) and cuts through perceived 'tedious legalisms'.

⁹²So, 'the yoke of his grace', 1 Clem. 16.170; the followers of Christ 'bore the yoke of his word', Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 53.1.

⁹³At many points in Israel's history, it was precisely the misuse and misinterpretation of past tradition that caused severe problems for the people. Much of prophetic preaching was directed precisely at this point'; Knight, 'Revelation through Tradition', 175.

⁹⁴'Jewish Opposition', 40.

true and authoritative meaning of Torah, understood eschatologically.⁹⁵ The revelation of God in Jesus now makes it possible to know God's will in a more complete way than was previously possible, and this claim to authority marginalises all other such claims.

2. *Matthew's strategy of persuasion*

We have seen how Matthew was writing in a historical milieu of claims to revelation, and one of his purposes in writing was to persuade his readers of the truth of his claims for Jesus.⁹⁶ 11.25-30 exhibits several kinds of rhetorical strategies to further his aim.

The coming of Jesus provokes conflict, and response to revelation creates division. The image of the yoke also signifies not so much a question of the presence or absence of a yoke, but which one it will be. 11.25-30 Jesus' gracious and welcoming words of invitation and comfort here form a positive contrast to the series of conflicts earlier in the chapter. A similar pattern is found in the next chapter where there is a contrast between the earlier disputes and words of welcome into Jesus' new family (12.46-50). Part of Jesus' call to discern concerns the need to recognise how the paradoxical nature of his teaching suggests a counter-order revelation which goes against traditional, worldly wisdom. This sense of the distinctiveness of Jesus' teaching serves to confirm Matthew's community's awareness of a common identity which is not shared with those 'outside'. This particular teaching in 11.25-30 also gives an assurance of the Father's care for those who have come to Jesus, in the face of continued opposition.

If revelation has a polemical edge, it also has a legitimating function to erect and confirm social boundaries. It is *God's* gracious action which results in the paradoxical situation where the wise and understanding do not receive revelation but the babes do, where Jesus' yoke is easy and his burden light. Jesus is not just a user of proverbs and aphorisms as, for example, other wisdom collectors, but he uses them for a purpose, frequently to illustrate a paradoxical, counter-order now prevailing.⁹⁷ This paradoxical teaching of Jesus is given in the context of revelation by the Father. In a similar way, Jesus' most paradoxical teaching of all,

⁹⁵'The following of Christ and the radical fulfilment of the law are one and the same': Barth, *Tradition*, 102f.; Allison, *New Moses*, 232.

⁹⁶Carter, *Margins*, 258: 'In a context of diverse and competing claims, the verse [11.27] asserts definitive revelation of God's purposes in Jesus'.

⁹⁷'This new vision challenges old ways of thinking and acting. In order to show people how radical the challenge is, he often uses images that are extreme or even paradoxical.' Witherington, *Sage*, 160, quoting Perkins, *Jesus as Teacher*, 44.

'whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it' (16.25), is also given in the context of revelation by the Father (16.17).⁹⁸ Jesus himself is the supreme example of paradox, being both Davidic Messiah and the meek and humble servant,⁹⁹ reflected in a certain tension between his modesty and self-awareness, humility and importance.

Matthew uses several recognised literary features of an apocalyptic perspective. Acknowledgement of revelation brings moral responsibility, and the order here is significant, as demonstrated in 11.25-30. The gift of God's grace in revelation remains primary. This is the case, even for Matthew, with his strong emphasis on the exercise of moral obedience in the tradition of Torah.¹⁰⁰ We have seen how Jesus' yoke offers, not an alternative which lessens or weakens the Torah, but an intensification of its demands (5.20). Intensified obedience to the law often plays an important part in group self-definition.¹⁰¹ There is thus a sense in which receipt of divine revelation is properly reserved for those who are qualified. For Matthew this is not found in a sense of achieving various levels of attainment (cf. 1QS 1-9), but rather serves as encouragement to remain faithful, reflecting the on-going and serious nature of proper discernment.¹⁰²

The rhetorical style of reversal is evident throughout chapter 11. John is here seen in a reverse situation of questioning whether Jesus is indeed 'the one who is to come' (11.3). This is followed by the series of reversals Jesus brings in his healing and preaching. This is followed by describing the cities of Galilee whose expectation for salvation is reversed: not 'exalted to heaven' but 'brought down to Hades' (11.23). In a similar way, the expectation of revelation being given to the 'wise and understanding' is reversed, by being given instead to 'babes': a reversal of those who should know, but don't; and those who apparently don't know, receive revelation.

The positive alternative, correct discernment of Jesus, results in eschatological blessing (11.6). Eschatological blessings (such as Dan. 12.12; Tob. 13.14; 1 Enoch 58.2-3) are frequently addressed to those in hostile situations, with an assurance of future consolation, thus reversing the present situation. The harsh alternative for

⁹⁸See also 10.39, as noted by Stanton, *Gospel*, 375.

⁹⁹While the suffering of the Servant may have been expected (Is. 53.7), this would not have involved a shameful and dishonourable crucifixion; Evans, 'Root Causes', 33.

¹⁰⁰Kupp, *Matthew's Emmanuel*, 240; against Scroggs, 'Eschatological Existence', 141, who considers that for Matthew acceptance of the gentle yoke of the Torah as taught by Jesus comes first, leading to God's gift of life as grace, leading subsequently to further obedience to God's will.

¹⁰¹So the *pētāyyim* at Qumran are 'the simple of Judah who keep the Law' (1QpHab. 12.4; also 4Q169 3.5,7); see Dupont, 'Les "simples" '.

¹⁰²Bockmuehl, *Revelation*, 159f.

those who do not respond to Jesus' works, is judgement, expressed as eschatological woes (11.21).¹⁰³ If Jesus' coming in some way brings that future blessing to the present, this offers comfort and reassurance to those currently being addressed. This also bolsters 'insiders' sense of being 'right' and their corporate identity.¹⁰⁴

3. *Sociological Dimensions*

Matthew's audience was developing a common identity at the same time that Judaism was re-shaping itself and increasingly finding authority in synagogue and Torah rather than temple and cult.¹⁰⁵ The social aspects of discernment of revelation are especially relevant when considering the relations between members of Matthew's community and those considered to be 'outside'. Yet we need to recognise that Matthew's primary purpose in writing was to bear witness to and demonstrate the truth of God's revelatory gift for the world in Jesus, not to provide information about his community. In 11.25-30 he provides a theological justification for Jesus' gathering of a new people.

The passage, especially the thanksgiving, confirms that revelation is a gift from God: he reveals and hides. The corollary is that if Israel has failed to discern the truth about Jesus and to respond appropriately, this must also be God's will. This is confirmed by the significant weight given to this passage at a turning point in the narrative following Israel's rejection of Jesus. This exclusive and decisive claim for Jesus to know God and issue his invitation, relativises all other allegiances, and refers to the gathering of the new eschatological people of God.¹⁰⁶

Various suggestions have been made concerning the identity of different groupings referred to in this passage. This is made more complex by the fact that Matthew describes certain qualities and attitudes to refer both to a given state, as well as something for which to strive. Thus references to 'being a child' both in 11.25 and also in 24.14-16 suggest a state given by God's grace and not something achieved in any way. In 21.14-16 children (παῖδας) in the temple recognise and cry out to Jesus, 'Hosanna to the Son of David'. Matthew goes on to quote from Psalm 8.3 (LXX) and rhetorically sets babes and sucklings (νηπίων, θηλαζόντων) in opposition to the chief priests and scribes. In other places, 'becoming like a child' is

¹⁰³Note the development of eschatological woes: Is. 5.8-23; 1 Enoch 103.5; in 2 Enoch 52.1-14 there is a series of both blessings and woes.

¹⁰⁴See Freyne, 'Vilifying', 123-7; and Coggins, 'Prophecy', 81f.

¹⁰⁵Overman, *Formative Judaism*, 70: 'Matthew's community and formative Judaism agreed on the importance of the law, but differed on how to interpret and who should do it'.

¹⁰⁶Persons who rejected the revelations on which the Christian proclamation was based were excluded from the community of the saved': Nickelsburg, 'Revealed Wisdom', 82.

presented as a way to live, a habit to cultivate and an ideal to strive for: in chapter 18 a series of case studies show what being a child involves.¹⁰⁷ The main feature of being a child, described in the opening verses (18.3-4), is that of humility.¹⁰⁸

In 11.25 the νηπίους are contrasted with the σοφῶν καὶ συνετῶν. In this particular context, 'babes' refers to anyone to whom God has revealed the truth, and the contrast with the wise and understanding places all the emphasis on God's grace rather than any kind of human wisdom. Yet, since 'being a child' is used elsewhere as a metaphor for discipleship, we may infer that 'babes' are disciples: those who have discerned the truth about Jesus are, by definition, his disciples. Elsewhere, the disciples are said to have understood, and are encouraged to be wise (7.24; 13.51; 25.1-13). Yet the historical disciples present with Jesus are not in evidence here in chapter 11. This contrast arises partly because Matthew is setting side by side 'discipleship' as an ideal for which to strive and the historical disciples. He is also holding in a tension revelation received from God, on the one hand, and discernment by people, on the other. Thus it is possible for the disciples to be both not wise and understanding, but babes, in their receipt of revelation given by God, at the same time as being urged to be understanding and wise in their on-going discernment of Jesus (7.24; 13.51; 25.1-13).¹⁰⁹

Various suggestions have also been made concerning the identity of οἱ κοπιῶντες καὶ πεφορτισμένοι: those labouring under the weight of sin and in need of forgiveness; the disciples, since in light of chapter 10, discipleship is hard;¹¹⁰ the crowds, who are in need and on whom Jesus shows compassion; those labouring under the burdens of Pharisaic law.¹¹¹ None of these options is conclusive. Bearing the weight of sin is not a Matthean theme. The disciples appear not to be on the scene (11.1; 12.1). The 'crowds' are the last mentioned audience (11.7), and Jesus offering an invitation to all would cohere with Matthew's portrayal of the crowds as potential disciples. Although Matthew is vociferous in his attacks against the Pharisees elsewhere, this is not a specifically anti-Pharisaic passage, and they are not mentioned until 12.2. The πάντες itself is perhaps significant, since the

¹⁰⁷See Thompson, *Advice*, 241f.

¹⁰⁸See Fowl, 'Receiving the Kingdom', 154; cf. Luke's different presentation of being child-like as 'single-minded, unrelenting pursuit of an object of desire'.

¹⁰⁹Suggs, *Wisdom*, 85f., notes the complexity of thought in the contrast between the mighty and the humble, the wise and the innocent: 'the ideal of humility in ancient wisdom, the pessimism of sceptical wisdom, the essentially eschatological distinction between the unrighteous great and the pious humble, and the prophetic opposition of revelation to worldly wisdom'.

¹¹⁰Stanton, *Gospel*, 372ff.

¹¹¹Barth, 'Matthew's Understanding of the law', 148, n.2.

invitation is addressed to them. All who have not come to Jesus, and received his rest must, by default, be weary and heavy laden.

The definition of the identity of different possible groups here remains allusive, as the variety of discussion shows. This reflects a broader and more universal picture here, in which the focus on Jesus relativises all other allegiances. Jesus' invitation 'Come to me' indicates that, for Matthew, Jesus has replaced Jerusalem and the temple as the focus of God's presence and the centre of eschatological fulfilment.¹¹² In a similar way, Matthew's claim for the authority of Jesus, relativises all other such claims; and we have seen how he uses various rhetorical strategies, especially from an apocalyptic perspective, to persuade his readers of the truth of his claims.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter we have explored Matthew's presentation of Jesus as a model for and a model of discernment, and conducted an analysis of 11.25-30 with this motif in mind. The pericope evidences a number of resonances with a variety of scriptural traditions. The opening verses take the traditional form of a thanksgiving prayer for revelation found in the apocalyptic traditions. Verse 27 evidences strong echoes of the Moses traditions; and the last two verses show many similarities to the wisdom traditions. As we have seen, in each of these Mosaic, wisdom and apocalyptic traditions, there is a focus on a gifted individual who receives and mediates revelation. In 11.25-30 Matthew thus locates Jesus within this tradition, as well as establishing certain differences. The heading of our chapter, 'Model Discernment', itself reflects a certain distinction found in our analysis: that of model as an example to follow, and that of model as the perfect, only one of its kind. There are three areas where this tension is particularly relevant to our topic.

1. Particularly by means of his birth narrative, Matthew locates Jesus within God's history and his coming as fulfilment of God's eschatological plan. Jesus comes in the tradition of inspired prophets and teachers of the law. This continuity with the past is shown by the way, like Moses, revelation is given and discerned by a chosen and skilled mediator, who passes it on to others. 11.25-30 also locates Jesus within the wisdom tradition: here again we find inspired discernment given to gifted individuals. Here in the wisdom tradition the paradoxical and hidden nature of wisdom is also expressed.

¹¹²Kupp, *Matthew's Emmanuel*, 240.

As part of Matthew's well known literary device of 'comparison', he claims that Jesus is greater than Moses. In terms of discernment whereas Moses has to ask to 'know' God, Jesus' knowledge of God is intimate and reciprocal.¹¹³ This has the effect of making Jesus the most important mediator between God and his people, while retaining the line and tradition of Moses. But Matthew also claims that Jesus is not only the most important revealer among many, but is the bearer of God's final and authoritative revelation. He himself is part of God's eschatological plan, and is someone the truth about whom needs to be discerned, for what he makes known of God. Part of this discerning of the truth about Jesus, is the ability to recognise the unexpected found there. A Jesus found discontinuous with Jewish tradition could not have been Israel's Messiah: but, at the same time, Jesus did not completely align with current expectations. Matthew's redactional emphasis on Jesus as meek and humble may be a counter argument and response to Jewish claims that the 'unsuccessful' life of Jesus did not correspond to scriptural tradition concerning the triumphant Messiah or Son of David.¹¹⁴ The wisdom tradition recognises paradox and the unexpected in both mundane and godly wisdom. Here Matthew demonstrates and encourages his readers to recognise the paradoxical and unexpected nature of the person of Jesus himself: the truth is both revealed and hidden here.

2. We have seen how Jesus' own discernment serves as a model, in terms of what attributes and attitudes facilitate discernment: he exemplifies the meek, humble servant of God. This is shown in the dynamic interplay between particular episodes of revelation and on-going discernment and obedience to God's will. Jesus serves as an example of the exercise of obedience in the godly life and the need to remain receptive and obedient to the divine will. This demonstrates both that grace cannot be taken for granted, as well as a corresponding growing capacity to receive.¹¹⁵ The more significant the revelation, the greater the testing; the more acute the testing, the greater the discernment. Jesus serves as a living pattern which his followers are to emulate, but one in which they consistently fall short: their discernment is limited and fragile. If, as suggested by Schweitzer,¹¹⁶ Matthew stresses the quality of obedience to the divine will because of the possible threat of antinomian charismatic tendencies in early Christianity, then this may also, in part, explain his lack of emphasis on Jesus' inspiration by the Holy Spirit. He may not

¹¹³As Allison, *New Moses*, 275 points out: 'given Jesus' assumed superiority, the more one exalted Moses, the more one exalted Jesus'.

¹¹⁴Stanton, *Gospel*, 186f.

¹¹⁵Moberly, *Bible, Theology*, 223.

¹¹⁶'Observance', 218.

have wanted to draw attention to parallels between Jesus and enthusiasts.¹¹⁷ It is Jesus' continuing presence rather than that of the Spirit which enables obedience (28.20).

There is also here a clear sense in which Jesus serves not only as an example to follow, but as someone of a different order and bringing a certain finality and eschatological fulfilment. Only Jesus has been raised by God and only he has received all authority. Only Jesus has full discernment, not only of the person and nature of God, but also in the exercise of that discernment. His discernment was not learnt or partial in quite the same way as that of his followers; but remains very costly.

3. In chapter four we saw how claims about revelation formed a vital part in the formation and maintenance of a common life. Interpretations of written scripture, justified by appeal to God-given revelation as a source of knowledge not available to all, sustained and legitimated a group's position. This is reflected in the use of certain vocabulary to distinguish those 'inside' and those perceived to be 'outside'. In 11.25-30 we find 'babes', 'easy', 'light' and 'rest' set against 'wise and understanding', 'labour and heavy laden' and 'burden'.

The grace of revelation established Israel in the truth as God's covenant people, over against other peoples. Election is part of the logic of revelation, whereby God works through particular people. The elect are those to whom revelation is given and who have the grace to receive it. Matthew has set 11.25-30 in the situation of the rejection of Jesus by Israel. The consequence of this is the establishment of a new people of God gathered round Jesus, justified by appeal to Jesus' intimate and reciprocal knowledge of God, in a universal and eschatological setting. Matthew does not describe this new people in terms of a new Israel or a true Israel, but offers a theological justification for the gathering of God's new people, based on Jesus' legitimate authority. Those who come to Jesus form a group whose members consist of those who have received and accepted Jesus' claim, not only to reveal God, but himself to be eschatological revelation. If obedience to Torah was one part of the way to define God's people, obedience to Torah is now expressed through obedience to Jesus' words. Thus membership of God's new people is not based on ethnic allegiances, and allows for social inclusion of those previously considered to be

¹¹⁷Although the Spirit is mentioned at important points in Jesus' life (1.18,20; 3.16; 4.1; 12.18,28,31,32; 28.19), the Spirit does not play a part in 11.25-30; contrast Luke 10.21.

'outside'.¹¹⁸ Disciples learn from Jesus their teacher, and this ethic of humility has the potential to enhance group solidarity.

Finally, chapter 11 explores different dimensions of the dynamics of response to a message from God, and 11.25-30 reflects the balance and interplay between revelation and discernment. In 11.25, we have the first reference to God in this chapter. If all the previously mentioned individuals and groups have failed to discern who Jesus is, this suggests that all human efforts to discern are of no avail. In order to know the truth about Jesus, God has to reveal it. Discernment remains God's gift, but, as we have seen, not an arbitrary gift. Jesus serves as a model for discernment for his followers to emulate. He also transcends that model as one himself to be discerned, here giving self-revelation for true discernment by the reader. Jesus' receipt of complete revelation from God is based on the Son's exclusive relation with the Father:¹¹⁹ revelation takes place in a context of divine-human relationship. What Jesus offers those who come to *him*, and no other, is a share in this relationship with the Father. All the difficulties of discernment and the appropriate way to respond to Jesus described earlier in the chapter, are in direct contrast with the short, direct and apparently simple, invitation of Jesus, 'come to me'. This is not to suggest that all the questions and difficulties do not matter, but, rather, that coming to Jesus is all that is ultimately necessary.

¹¹⁸Jesus as the 'rebellious son' (glutton and drunkard) is honoured by God, and this suggests that all 'rebellious sons' (including tax collectors, sinners and Gentiles) can similarly be honoured. Jesus' table-fellowship with outsiders is the practical outworking of the social implications of 'coming' to Jesus (9.10-13).

¹¹⁹Veresput, 'Role and Meaning', 538.

Chapter 6

FRAGILE DISCERNMENT

6.1 Introductory Observations

Scholars have frequently regarded Matthew as an 'ecclesiastical' gospel; Jesus founds the *ekklesia* on 'Peter the rock' (16.18, unique to Matthew). This section of our study is not an exhaustive analysis of the many issues connected with this verse, but seeks to examine how Matthew's presentation of Peter in the gospel as a whole, and the key passage 16.13-20 in particular, develops and relates to our motif of discernment of revelation. 16.13-20 is also relevant since this is one of the few passages where the word 'reveal' (ἀποκαλύπτω) is used (also 10.26; 11.25,27).

Although Cullmann¹ could write in 1959, 'there is no difference between the individual Synoptists in their treatment of Peter', though 'we find a rather different picture in John's Gospel', it is now recognised that the individual gospels do have their differences in presentation and emphasis. There have been many studies of this passage over the years, and since 16.17-19 is taken by many to be a Matthean addition to Mark's text, these verses have been the centre of attention,² both from a history-of-traditions perspective and from a Petrine office point of view.

On the one hand, there are those who see these verses as composed by Matthew, his church or tradition. Matthew would thus be creating a role for Peter that he had not had or not had so prominently before. Manson argued that Matthew needed to do this in order to counteract a Pauline party³, and Davies that Matthew was opposing a party in favour of James.⁴ Goulder sees these verses as Matthew's own embroidery.⁵ On the other hand, there are those who hold that the sayings go back to Jesus. Some hold they were spoken in another context, such as a post-resurrection

¹Πιέτρος, TDNT, 6, 102.

²For a helpful summary of views, see Wilkins, *Disciple*, 185, n.55; for a summary of literature up to 1973, see Brown, *Peter*, 169-77; and 'contemporary' literature on Peter (1973-1987) in Davies and Allison, *Matthew II*, 647-48, n.1.

³*Sayings*, 203-4.

⁴*Setting*, 338-9.

⁵*Midrash*, 386.

setting,⁶ the Last Supper,⁷ or in the temple,⁸ and then re-located by Matthew; while others argue that they were spoken by Jesus in this context.⁹ While acknowledging these questions, our study here is not primarily concerned with the history-of-traditions aspect. These verses in Matthew are an addition to the Marcan text: they are therefore important for Matthew, and there may well be some polemic here.¹⁰

Although some earlier attention was given to the revelatory setting of 16.13-20 in the search for the origins of traditions (see further section 6.5), in the volume of more recent literature on these verses, little attention has been paid to the overall shape of the passage, nor its relation to 16.21-23. Nor, as far as I am aware, has due attention been given to the fact that the whole episode takes place in the context of revelation. Nickelsburg¹¹ has drawn attention to the similarities in form between this passage and epiphanic commissioning stories, located in upper Galilee. Kingsbury¹² has shown how Matthew uses 'comprehension' as a persuasive rhetorical device. He focuses especially on Jesus' use of parables in chapters 13, 21 and 22. His divisions between those characters who understand and receive Jesus and those who oppose and repudiate him, certainly reflect one aspect of Matthew's sharp distinctions. Such division is inherent in varying responses to revelation. Yet in our analysis of the dynamics of discernment, we shall offer a balance to this view by drawing attention to other aspects of discernment, such as its partial and demanding nature, as exemplified by Peter. Kingsbury¹³ earlier explored the role of Peter in Matthew as a 'Theological Problem', in which he analysed Matthew's statements about Peter and also wanted to integrate them into the theology of Matthew. We shall discuss his views in section 6.5. Davies and Allison include a helpful Excursus on Peter in Matthew,¹⁴ and mention 16.13-20 in connection with their view that Matthew presents Peter as one like father Abraham, standing at the birth of the new people of God. Although discernment is not mentioned, the links with Abraham are strengthened when Peter is viewed from the perspective of revelation, as I shall show.

⁶Brown, *Peter*, 85; Kümmel, *Theology*, 129; Meier, *Matthew*, 181; Kähler, 'Zur Form-', 46; Bultmann, *History*, 258-9, who also argues that v. 17-19 form the original conclusion to the pericope.

⁷Cullmann, *Peter*, 182-4.

⁸Robinson, 'Peter and his Successors', 93.

⁹Meyer, *Aims*, 185-197; Schmidt, ἐκκλησία, TDNT 3, 518-526.

¹⁰Sim, *Christian Judaism*, 200, sees these verses as a direct response to Paul's denial of Peter's role.

¹¹'Enoch'.

¹²'Rhetoric of Comprehension'.

¹³'Figure of Peter'.

¹⁴*Matthew II*, 647-652.

As far as I am aware, there has been no study of discernment of revelation in relation to Peter. In chapter 2 we saw how Matthew organized his material to lead up to Peter's declaration as the central and most significant point so far concerning discernment of the truth about Jesus. We shall look in some detail at the setting of the passage, before conducting a more detailed analysis of the text. The relation between 16.13-20 (Peter's declaration and commission) and 16.21-23 (his striking failure) as high and low points, have caused problems for interpreters over the years, and this relationship will be explored in an examination of the dynamics of discernment. Lastly we shall see how aspects of discernment can contribute to an analysis of the role of Peter in Matthew.

6.2 The Setting of 16.13-20

We saw in chapter 5 how Israel's refusal of Jesus culminated in Jesus' invitation to all to come to him (11.25-30). Israel's lack of discernment is worked out by opposition to Jesus, characterised by testing (πειράζοντες; 16.1; 22.18,35; cf. 4.1,3; 13.53-8). This is counterbalanced by a progression of understanding by the disciples. They worship Jesus as Son of God (14.33), understand Jesus' teaching in the boat (16.5-12), and reach a significant climax in 16.13-20. Kingsbury based his tripartite division of the gospel on the phrase ἀπὸ τότε ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς in 4.17 and 16.21. Whether or not Kingsbury's divisions are accepted in full, certainly Peter's declaration here marks a significant turning point in the gospel. As far as Peter is concerned, we also note that revelatory episodes concerning him occur at the beginning and end of the Galilee section: the call to obedience is also a call to that brotherhood characteristic of the *ekklesia* (4.18,21; 16.18).

The immediate setting of 16.13-20 is in the 'district of Caesarea Philippi'. Matthew has omitted Mark's ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ, and describes Jesus and the disciples as being in the region/area (εἰς τὰ μέρη)¹⁵, rather than going to the villages (εἰς τὰς κώμας) of Caesarea Philippi. For Mark, Jesus is still travelling and teaching 'on the way' (Mark 8.22 - 10.52), whereas in Matthew Jesus has arrived at a destination. The location is of significance for several reasons. Caesarea Philippi was located at the foot of Mount Hermon,¹⁶ and Nickelsburg¹⁷ has shown how the whole area round Hermon and Dan, in upper Galilee, was recognised as a place to which one would go in order

¹⁵Cf. 15.21, different Mark 7.24.

¹⁶Mount Hermon is also one of a number of locations suggested as the mountain of the transfiguration.

¹⁷Enoch', 582f.; including a temple dedicated to Pan.

to receive revelation.¹⁸ It was also located in Gentile territory, being the furthest point north recorded that Jesus travelled.

The preceding episodes also reflect a certain separation and distancing from the Pharisees and Sadducees, traditionally associated with Jerusalem (so 15.1). At the end of the feeding of the four thousand, Matthew records that Jesus went by boat to the 'region of Magadan'. After the 'testing' question by the Pharisees and Sadducees, he records that Jesus 'left them and departed'. This sequence implies that the disciples were not present, thus reinforcing the separation from opponents. Magadan appears to be a small, unknown settlement, reinforcing the view that Jesus' opponents are nowhere in particular.¹⁹ In 16.5 it is not clear whether the disciples travelled with Jesus in the boat, or whether they were 'on the other side' when Jesus arrived. Apparently they have not been present in this discussion (16.1-4) and in the next pericope, Jesus, in an *inclusio*, warns them to beware of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees (16.6,12). This suggests that the disciples are no longer part of what the Pharisees and Sadducees represent.

As well as spacial and temporal settings, 16.13-20 has an eschatological setting. Jesus accuses his opponents of being unable to discern 'the times' (τῶν καιρῶν) (16.3; cf. 21.41), which both in the singular and plural in the biblical tradition has an eschatological sense (16.3; 21.41; cf. 3.7-12).²⁰ Jesus' teaching immediately following Peter's declaration, is also eschatological in nature. In 16.27-28 Matthew has heightened and extended apocalyptic themes found in his sources,²¹ and this is followed by the transfiguration, an anticipation of Jesus' eschatological glory (17.1-8). As we shall see, μακάριος and the 'gates of Hades' also signal an eschatological setting.

Thus in 16.13-20 Matthew records a significant episode of revelation, taking place at a specific location; at an actual location where one would go for revelation. This points to an alternative location to Jerusalem and the temple, as the expected locus of revelation.²² The division response to revelation causes also has eschatological implications.

¹⁸Especially 1 Enoch 13.7, locating the place where Enoch's heavenly journey originated, 'in the Land of Dan, which is southwest of Hermon'; cf. T. Levi 2-7.

¹⁹Μαγαδάν is an NT *hapax legomenon*, as is Mark's Δαλμανουθά; along with textual variants.

²⁰Cf. LXX Ezek. 12.27; Dan. 7.25; 9.27; 11.14.

²¹Doublets: v.27, 10.32-33 and Luke 12.9; v.28, 10.23; and parallels in Mark 8.34 - 9.1. Whether 16.28 is taken to refer to the resurrection, the parousia or the transfiguration, the eschatological glorification and vindication takes up themes from Daniel associated with the Son of Man.

²²Davies, *Gospel*, 235: note also the irony that Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem where he must go to suffer (16.21).

6.3 16.13-20: Peter discerns the truth about Jesus

Chapter 16 is concerned with the identity of Jesus, Peter's declaration of the truth about him, and the consequences of this declaration for the constitution of the *ekklesia*. The pericope is similar to that of Mark (8.27-30), which Matthew has expanded with the addition of verses 17,18 and 19.

16.13-16

Jesus questions his disciples, 'Who do men say that the Son of man is ?' (τίνα λέγουσιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι εἶναι τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου; diff. Mark 8.27, τίνα με λέγουσιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι εἶναι;). Matthew's use of Son of Man here may be deliberate. This is one of the instances used by Kingsbury to suggest that for Matthew, Son of Man is used primarily in connection with Jesus' relation to the world at large.²³ The effect of the question is to contrast the understanding of the people with that of the disciples, thus representing a narrowing of the identity of those who understand.²⁴ Jesus himself has taught his disciples about his role as Son of Man (esp. 13.37, note Jesus *left the crowds* and teaches in the house; cf. 13.41; 10.23). Matthew deliberately has Jesus speak only to his disciples about the identity of the Son of Man, and from 16.13 no longer speaks publicly of the Son of Man.²⁵ Thus, the next saying about the Son of Man in 16.28 is addressed to the disciples.²⁶

To Mark's list of possible answers, John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets, Matthew has added Jeremiah (also a redactional addition at 2.17 and 27.9). Although certain parallels can be drawn between Jesus and Jeremiah,²⁷ the shape of the question and answer here suggests that each of these assessments is only partly correct, reflecting the views of 'men'. Jesus' second question to the disciples, instead of asking them who οἱ ἄνθρωποι declare him to be, emphatically asks of *you* (ὁμεῖς, placed first). So, the question of Jesus' identity is explicitly raised, and this also gives rise to an expectation of an answer here.

Peter answers, both as an individual and on behalf of all the disciples. In reply, to Mark's σὺ εἶ ὁ χριστός, Matthew has added ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ζῶντος. For Matthew, 'Son of God' is a key christological title, and we saw in the previous chapter the

²³Structure, 114f.

²⁴Luz, *Matthew* 8-20, 360, 390.

²⁵Except at the trial scene, 26.64; see our discussion in section 2.7 of that scene as a parody of Peter's declaration here.

²⁶Different from Mark's 'multitudes and disciples', 8.34; in 16.21 Matthew omits the phrase from Mark's 8.31.

²⁷See Knowles, *Jeremiah*.

breadth and variety of meaning Son of God is capable of supporting,²⁸ and how Matthew uses other themes and titles to give content and expression to his understanding.²⁹ At this point in the narrative, the reader knows that Jesus is the Son of God, having been declared so by God (3.17), Jesus (11.27), the devil (4.3,6), demoniacs (8.29), and the narrator (1.18-25; 2.15), as well as by the disciples themselves (14.33). The reader also knows that Jesus is the Christ (1.1,16,18; 2.4; 11.2).³⁰ This is the first time in the gospel that a disciple has called Jesus 'the Christ'. This double declaration³¹ is a culmination for Matthew of his story so far - that this person, Jesus, is both Son of God and Christ. The readers' understanding and the characters' understanding meet at this point. The same combination of ὁ χριστός, ὁ υἱός and τοῦ θεοῦ ζῶντος is also found at 26.63, where Caiaphas, ironically, declares the truth. Here, Caiaphas makes a personal declaration about Jesus, not one revealed to him by God. Thus, although the statement declares the truth, he does not recognise it to be the truth about Jesus, but blasphemy.³²

16.17-19

Verses 17, 18 and 19 are not included in Mark's account and we may therefore conclude that they are of significance for Matthew. In response to Peter's declaration, Jesus pronounces him to be μακάριος. μακάριος formulae³³ occur in wisdom traditions (so Job 5.17; Ps. 1.1-2; Sir. 25.8), and later in eschatological contexts, where group solidarity and future consolation are frequently in view (Dan. 12.12; *1 Enoch* 58.2-3). Beatitudes set in a context of eschatological revelation occur elsewhere in Matthew. 11.2-5, interpreted eschatologically and resonating with Is. 61, and ends with a beatitude in 11.6. Such a blessing is given to the disciples for their privileged position as recipients of revelation in being able to see and hear in Jesus what others longed for (13.16).³⁴

²⁸Such as: Jesus' unique relationship with the Father (11.25-30); as part of an Israel typology (2.13-15); the messianic promise to David's son as builder of the temple (16.16-18; 26.61-63); and the suffering righteous one (27.43).

²⁹Kingsbury's work, *Structure*, 40-83, tends to subsume all other christological titles under Son of God. Meier, *Vision*, 119, notes that if the section is read as 16.13-28, three aspects of the Son of Man title are evident: the earthly Jesus, the suffering servant, and the eschatological judge in glory (16.13,21,27), the last suggesting that Son of Man is not always and necessarily subordinate to Son of God.

³⁰Edwards, 'Uncertain Faith', 52, notes that readers tend to 'suppose that the disciples know what the reader knows about Jesus'.

³¹See Sutcliffe, 'Peter's Double Confession'.

³²For further parallels between the two passages, see section 2.4.4; for Jesus' trial before Caiaphas, see section 7.3.1.

³³As in 16.17: μακάριος + subject + ὅτι clause; cf. 5.3-12.

³⁴Cf. John 20.29; Kähler, 'Zur Form-' has noted examples of such beatitudes given to those in receipt of revelation elsewhere in Jewish tradition (particularly 4 Ezra 10.57; Jos. Asen. 16.14). Although the dating and status of the traditions referred to may be uncertain, they show that this use of a μακάριος formula is not unprecedented.

Jesus declares Peter blessed because God has 'revealed to him' (ἀπεκάλυψέν σοι, with no direct object here, RSV, 'this').³⁵ The absence of an object here also suggests eschatological revelation. The truth about Jesus is not something Peter learned by human means, 'flesh and blood'. σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα followed by the verb in the singular (ἀπεκάλυψέν), suggests a recognized phrase, and this was a technical term in rabbinic texts, meaning human agency in contrast to divine agency.³⁶ The content has been revealed to him by God (ὁ πατήρ μου ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς; frequently redactional). The opposition between the two phrases serves to emphasise the difference between the two sources and that revelation is a gift of God's grace.³⁷

In the context of revelation Jesus gives Simon Bar-Jona the new name of Peter. Matthew does not use the name 'Simon' by itself: it is either followed by 'the one called Peter' (4.18; 10.2), or it is combined with Peter (16.16) or Bar-Jona (16.17). The only exception is at 17.25, where Jesus addresses him as Simon, although in the previous verse the tax collectors address him as Peter. The name Peter is much more frequently used and Gundry concludes that Matthew's references to 'Peter' earlier 'take away the point of a name-giving here' and he views the earlier references as 'anachronisms'.³⁸ However, several points argue against this conclusion. The present tense of σὺ εἶ, suggests that the naming takes place at this point, not in the future (you will be Peter) nor in the past (you are already Peter). This is confirmed by the parallelism between Peter's statement about Jesus, and Jesus' statement about Peter (σὺ εἶ ὁ χριστός, σὺ εἶ Πέτρος). This parallelism is also heightened by the fact that this is the first time in the narrative that a character names Jesus as the Christ; it is also the first time in the narrative that a character (Jesus) names Simon as Peter. Readers of the gospel have known the truth of both earlier (1.1, 16-18; 2.4; 11.1-2), so Simon is *known as* Peter from the very beginning, just as Jesus is *known as* the Christ from the beginning.

Meier³⁹ argues that 'Peter' was not a proper name in the first century AD and that, therefore, Jesus is not giving Simon a second name with a symbolic meaning. Πέτρος 'meant "rock," and only rock' and so 'the designation Jesus gives to Simon is just as much a title of office as the titles Simon addresses to Jesus'. However, against this it may be noted that Matthew nowhere else suggests that Peter held an

³⁵See also 11.27, where ἀποκαλύψαι has no object ('him', RSV).

³⁶Gal. 1.17; Sir. 14.18; SB 1, 730-1. Schweizer, TDNT, σὰρξ, 7,124, notes that the phrase refers not to mortality, but to the human 'inability to know God'.

³⁷Note the similar opposition between ἐξ οὐρανοῦ and ἐξ ἀνθρώπων in 21.25; cf. Gal. 1.11f.

³⁸Matthew, 335.

³⁹Vision, 107, n105 and Matthew, 181.

office, and neither does he allow his followers to give each other names or titles, since these must all belong only to Jesus (10.24-25; 23.8). If, as argued below, there are parallels here with the new name given to Abram, this suggests that 'Peter' is in fact a proper name with symbolic meaning.

There have been numerous suggestions on the wordplay and various allusions here to be found in Peter's name. The ones discussed below are of relevance to our theme of discernment of revelation. The parallel between the phrases, 'you are the Christ' and 'you are Peter', noted above, suggests that rock/πέτρος refers to Peter the person, rather than to anything else, such as Peter's faith, confession or preaching office, Jesus or Jesus' teaching.⁴⁰ The two different Greek words, masculine and feminine, Πέτρος and Πέτρα, probably both refer to the Aramaic *kephā*, the masculine form denoting a person, and the feminine form an aspect of that person.

Although there are references to rabbinic teachers giving their students nicknames that reflected character or appearance,⁴¹ the positioning and importance of this pericope suggests that Peter's name change has more significance than a nickname.⁴² In Jewish tradition, the giving of a new name could be used to mark an important event or a change of status.⁴³ Prophets give names to register theological convictions,⁴⁴ as well as using names in a parabolic way.⁴⁵ James and John are recorded as having the name Boanerges, 'sons of thunder' given to them by Jesus (Mk. 3.17),⁴⁶ and it may be significant that James, John and Peter, all of whom were given different names, are present at Jesus' transfiguration (17.1). Of OT figures to receive a new name, the most significant are Abram, Sarai and Jacob. These name changes are also linked with the giving of a promise by God:

No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. (Gen. 17.5)

As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her; I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall come from her. (Gen. 17.15,16)

⁴⁰See Davies and Allison, *Matthew II*, 627, for details of these and other suggestions.

⁴¹So SB, 5-6.

⁴²Against Robinson, 'Peter', 91, who says it is a 'playful reference to Simon's appearance or character'; and Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 362, who argues for Jesus' interpretation of Peter's name rather than bestowal.

⁴³Is. 62.2-4; cf. Zech. 8.3; Bar. 5.4. Rev. 2.17; cf. Is. 65.15; Jos.Asen. 15.7.

⁴⁴Is. 7.3; 8.3-4; Jer. 20.1-6; Hos. 1.4-9.

⁴⁵Is. 7.14; 9.6; Jer. 23.6; Zech. 6.12.

⁴⁶Hooker, *Signs*, 39, n.14, although she notes that the significance is obscure; omitted by Matthew in 10.2, which emphasises the parallelism between the two pairs of brothers.

Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed ... Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat ... (Gen. 32.28,32)

Significantly for our theme, these name changes and promises are given in the context of revelation, and both are thus legitimated by God (17.1,3,15; 32.28.30). In Matt. 16.17-19, Peter's name change, as well as the promise concerning the *ekklesia*, are also set in the context of revelation by God to Peter.

References to the word 'rock' itself, also allude to Abraham. Isaiah 51.1-2 reads:

Hearken to me, you who pursue deliverance,
you who seek the Lord;
look to the rock (LXX πέτρᾱν) from which you were hewn,
and to the quarry from which you were digged.
Look to Abraham your father
and to Sarah who bore you;
for when he was but one I called (LXX ἐκάλεσα) him,
and I blessed (LXX εὐλόγησα) him and made him many.

Here Abraham is described both as a rock and as a father, as well as being called and blessed by God. In the context of revelation, God changed Abram's name and raised a people through Abraham, who was also referred to as a 'rock' and 'father' in scriptural tradition. In a similar way in Matthew 16, Jesus, in the context of revelation, changes Simon's name and raises a new people (the *ekklesia*) through the one he calls 'rock'.

Matthew traces Jesus' genealogy back to Abraham, showing that Jesus is a true Israelite (1.1,2). If the opening verse is seen as describing the whole gospel and not just the first chapters, it is Matthew's intention to portray Jesus as the culmination of the history which began with Abraham. There are also firm connections between Abraham and the Gentiles. Abraham himself was a Gentile by birth, and in Jewish tradition, was regarded as an outstanding man because, significantly, of the unique revelation he experienced in contrast to his father, Terah, an idolater.⁴⁷ God promised to Abraham that 'all the nations' would be blessed in him (Gen. 12.3; 18.18; 22.18; 26.4) and that he would be the 'father of a multitude of nations' (Gen.

⁴⁷Ford, "Thou art "Abraham" ", 299; Gen. 11.31; 12.1.

17.5), and that Sarah 'shall be a mother of nations (Gen. 17.16). God's promise to Abraham begins to be fulfilled here (continued at 28.19).

If Jesus' words, 'You are Peter' suggest reference to Abraham, 'on this rock I will build my *ekklesia*' takes this theme further by using different allusions. The reference here to both 'building' and *ekklesia* suggests that the 'rock' referred to is that of the temple and its foundation stone. The Aramaic *kephā'* behind πέτρος (John 1.42) appears to have carried the meaning 'stone' as well as rock.⁴⁸ The temple in Jerusalem was said to be founded on a rock/stone. Although this reference to 'rock' suggests the foundation stone of the actual temple in Jerusalem, in a wider sense, this foundation stone was said to be a cosmic rock at the centre of the world, giving entrance to heaven and hell.⁴⁹

This wider, metaphorical sense can be seen in two further allusions. As has frequently been noted,⁵⁰ major themes of this passage also stem from Davidic messianism, especially Nathan's oracle to David, and here we find that 'house' refers to both the physical temple (built by the son, Solomon), as well as the people of God (to be built by Israel's eschatological king/son⁵¹) (2 Sam. 7.4-16; 1 Chron. 17.3-15). The self-understanding of a group as the eschatological fulfilment of Nathan's prophecy is found at Qumran, viewing themselves as the 'pure' community over against the 'impure' temple. Thus, they can be described as a new eschatological community established on a rock foundation, as well as the eschatological temple (1QH 15.8-9; 14.25; 1QS 8.5).⁵² We also note here the focus on a leader, chosen by God: God chose the teacher of righteousness as a pillar and 'established him to build for him a congregation'.⁵³ The assembly at Qumran also described themselves as the *qēhal* 'El,⁵⁴ *qāhāl* being translated as ἐκκλησία (LXX, Deut. 4.10; 9.10). Jesus' words to Peter in Matt. 16.18 resonate with some of these themes. Here too the rock imagery speaks of an alternative to the Jerusalem temple, and reference to the Son speaks of fulfilment of Nathan's prophecy. We also note the focus in both on a gifted individual. Jesus here does not speak of building the ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ but μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν.

⁴⁸See Davies and Allison, *Matthew II*, 626. Cf. Is. 28.16.

⁴⁹For literature, see Davies *Gospel*, 8, n.10.

⁵⁰See Betz, *Jesus*, 91-2; Robinson, 'Peter', 90-1.

⁵¹See Jeremiah, 31.4; also 12.16; 18.9; 31.28; Amos 9.11.

⁵²See Robinson, 'Peter', 91, n.31.

⁵³4QpPs^a frags. 1-10, col. 3.15-16; as noted by Davies and Allison, *Matthew II*, 628.

⁵⁴1QM 4.10; 1Qsa 2.4; CD 7.17; 11.22; 12.6.

If the people being built on a rock resonates with temple imagery, there are further links with Abraham here also. The name of Abraham is again here linked with stones (λίθων).⁵⁵ From Abraham, a lifeless rock because of his age (Gen. 17.17), God, in a miraculous way, caused to be born Isaac and many descendants.⁵⁶ In 3.9 Matthew records John the Baptist arguing that God is able to do this again, and that those who are to be the new children of Abraham, are the ones who 'bear fruit that befits repentance', rather than claiming Abrahamic descent as sufficient for membership of the covenant community, to escape the wrath to come. This contrast between being fruitful and unfruitful is typical of Matthew's two ways, the eschatological consequences of response represented by the chaff destined for the fire or the wheat for the granary (3.12). Matthew's habit of foreshadowing events is evident here, and 16.17-19 are the realisation of John's prophecy in 3.9. Jesus, by building his church, is creating a new people.⁵⁷

16.18a,b thus contain many resonances with scriptural traditions that can be difficult to disentangle. There are strong links with the Abraham traditions and in some respects Peter is like a new Abraham. Like Abraham, Peter receives revelation from God, a change of name, and he is the rock on which God's new people will be founded. Jesus himself comes in fulfilment of the promises both to Abraham and to David. Although Jesus recognises that the revelation given to Peter is from God, it is Jesus himself who gives Peter a new name, and Jesus who will build the new people of God in *his ekklesia*.

Interpretations of καὶ πύλαι ᾧδου οὐ κατισχύουσιν αὐτῆς, have been many and various. 'It' (αὐτῆς) more logically refers to the last referent, i.e. the *ekklesia*, rather than to Peter (ταύτη τῇ πέτρᾳ). Gates can be personified (Ps. 24.7,9; Is. 3.26; Jer. 14.2) and can be a metaphor for might, especially for military, attacking might.⁵⁸ This suggests that 'gates of Hades' is to be understood as an active force, rather than something static. This is reinforced by the use of the verb κατισχύω in the LXX, which is always active in sense when followed by the genitive, so meaning to 'triumph over, overpower, vanquish' (so Luke 21.36; 23.23.). Hades itself denotes

⁵⁵See Jeremias, TDNT 4, 274-5, who argues for the Aramaic *kepā* behind λίθων with the sense of 'rock'.

⁵⁶ἐγείρειν ἔκ τινος means 'to cause to be born' (Deut. 18.15,18; 2 Sam. 7.12; Acts 13.23). Ford, "Thou art "Abraham" ", 296, also notes a wordplay on 'beget' and 'build'.

⁵⁷Ford, "Thou art "Abraham" ", 291, notes the reference: 'But when God looked on Abraham, who was to arise, he said: "See, I have found a rock on which I can build and found the world." Therefore he called Abraham a rock.' (*Jalqut Shimon*, I / 766, on Num. 23.9, in SB 1, 733). Davies and Allison, *Matthew II*, 624, suspect Christian influence here because of the lateness of the text, but also note that this shows how the roles of Peter and Abraham lent themselves to comparison.

⁵⁸Meier, *Vision*, 112, n.111.

not only the abode of the dead, but the power of demonic agents of death and destruction.

We have seen how Matthew describes the *ekklesia* founded in the context of revelation, as well as how response to revelation causes division. Here this understanding is placed in a larger eschatological setting of opposing forces. Jesus himself has overcome demonic power in his miracles (12.26), and so the corporate body of the *ekklesia*, founded by him and belonging to him, will also not be defeated by demonic powers.⁵⁹ God alone has power over death,⁶⁰ but here it is Jesus, who, as the Son, also has the same power. At his death and resurrection Jesus defeated the powers of death,⁶¹ so at this particular point in Matthew's story, the future 'I will build' is appropriate (οἰκοδομήσω).

16.19 concerns the authoritative teaching of Jesus which he hands on to Peter. That teaching is in mind here is demonstrated by the following points. The wording here is similar to that of God to Eliakim: 'And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open' (22.22). This giving to Eliakim the power of the keys was interpreted in later rabbinic thought as conferring teaching authority.⁶² In 16.19 and 23.13 references to opening and closing (κλείετε) the kingdom of heaven refers to the importance of finding the way to God through the exercise of a godly life by following correct teaching.

In the pericope at the end of the Sermon on the Mount concerning the wise man who built his house ἐπὶ τὴν πέτραν, 'rock' here most naturally refers to the teaching of Jesus as set out in the Sermon. Jesus' teaching sets out the true meaning of Torah. Also pointing to a connection between 7.24 and 16.18 is the fact that these are the only two NT verses where οἰκοδομέω and πέτρα are directly combined.⁶³

If 'keys' is taken to refer to teaching, this suggests that 'binding' and 'loosing' continue this theme, rather than referring, for instance, to exorcism or forgiveness of

⁵⁹Compare 1QH 16.22-9, in a setting of eschatological conflict, where the author describes being protected from the gates of death by entering a fortified city founded on a rock and relying on God's truth.

⁶⁰Is. 38.10, 17-18; Wis. 16.13.

⁶¹27.51-4; 28.2-4; also Rev. 1.18, where Jesus, as Son of Man says, 'I have the keys of Death and Hades' (καὶ ἔχω τὰς κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾗδου), in the context of his triumph over death by his resurrection.

⁶²Sanhedrin 38a; Gittin 88a; and texts in SB 1, 738-41.

⁶³In Luke's expanded version (6.47), 'build' and 'rock' are not used in the same phrase.

sins.⁶⁴ 'Binding and loosing' was a technical term referring to authoritative halakic decisions concerning what is prohibited and what is permitted.⁶⁵ 'Binding and loosing' is also referred to in a context suggesting discipline in 18.18.⁶⁶ The future tense, 'I will give you' (δώσω) suggests that Jesus cannot pass on his teaching authority until after his death and resurrection (10.1; 28.20). In the section immediately before this, 16.5-12, Jesus warns his disciples to 'beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees', and Matthew understands this to refer to their teaching (v.12).

In 16.19 Matthew describes Peter receiving the most significant revelation of the truth about Jesus in the gospel so far. The greater the significance of revelation, the greater the ensuing authority, demands and responsibility. Jesus thus gives Peter both the authority and the responsibility to pass on Jesus' teaching, and both are legitimated by revelation. The significance of this authority is confirmed by stating that decisions made 'on earth' by Peter are confirmed 'in heaven' (future perfects, 'having been bound', 'having been loosed', δεδεμένον, λελυμένον; cf. 6.10).⁶⁷ Peter is thus given legitimate authority to transmit Jesus' teaching, because he has received the grace of revelation from God about Jesus.

In 16.20 Matthew returns to following his Marcan source. In Mark (8.30), the disciples are to tell no one about him (περί αὐτοῦ), while in Matthew the disciples are to tell no one that he is the Christ (ὅτι αὐτός ἐστιν ὁ χριστός). The understanding that Jesus is the Christ, although revealed to Peter by God, remains incomplete.⁶⁸ In Matthew's first formal passion prediction, Jesus *begins* (ἤρξατο) to show his disciples what will happen to him. Matthew adds, 'must go to Jerusalem' (δεῖ), and the verb 'show' (δείκνυμι) (contrast Mark's 'teach'), suggesting not just tell but explain, demonstrate, convince. This in turn suggests that the subject matter is hard to understand, as confirmed by vv. 22-23 (see section 2.2.4).

In Mark's version of this event, his passion christology dominates with an emphasis on Jesus' 'secret' messiahship. In Matthew, this passion christology is linked with his ecclesiology, the foundation, formation and membership of God's new people.

⁶⁴So Nickelsburg, 'Enoch', 595ff.

⁶⁵Büchsel, δέω, TDNT 2, 60-61.

⁶⁶Bornkamm, 'Authority', 93, notes that 'teaching' and 'discipline' cannot be sharply separated. The kinds of authority referred to in 16.19 and 18.18 may not necessarily be the same: the former referring to teaching authority in the universal *ekklesia*, and the latter to judicial authority in the local *ekklesia*. See further Luz, *Matthew* 8-20, 365, 454.

⁶⁷See discussion by France, *Matthew*, 247, referring to Carson, *Matthew*, 370-374.

⁶⁸See Hill, 'Response', 46, the disciples 'do *not* really know who Jesus is'.

Peter's authority for passing on this revelation, specifically in terms of teaching, is legitimated by the blessing Jesus bestows on him. The passage also highlights Matthew's tendency both to historicize and generalize. Peter has a unique historical role as the first to discern the truth about Jesus, as well as providing the historical link between the *ekklesia* and Jesus. As the question in 16.15 shows, Peter also has a representative role as an example of any and every disciple who also needs the grace of God's revelation in order to discern the truth about Jesus. Peter truly discerns because God has revealed Jesus' messianic identity to him.

Literary Shape

Having examined the text of 16.13-20 in more detail, we move on to consider the literary shape of this passage. We saw in our chapter 3 how there is an identifiable call *Gattung* in scriptural tradition. One of the other significant references to Peter in Matthew's gospel is at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry (4.18-22). Here the call narrative itself has been shaped according to the pattern of biblical call stories, such as that of Elijah's call of Elisha (1 Kings 19.19-21).⁶⁹ Habel⁷⁰ in his analysis of OT call narratives has drawn attention to their literary *Gattung* and the relevance of this form for the prophetic message.⁷¹ If literary convention can be found in the call narrative, Jesus' first public action in the gospel, a similar literary form has been found at the end of the gospel in the Great Commission. In our discussion of this passage (section 2.2.6), we noted that while some elements of 28.16-20 reflected a traditional form, the *Gattung* itself remained fluid. Of significance for our theme here, is that these call narratives are governed by and set in the context of revelation. Given this fluid *Gattung* which Matthew has reflected in his call narrative at the beginning and the commission at the end, are there any grounds for viewing Peter's declaration at Caesarea Philippi, placed in the centre of his gospel, as reflecting a similar form? Using the characteristic features as identified by Habel, we note the following:

1. *Divine Confrontation* (16.13-14): We have noted the location, as both specific (cf. 4.18a), and of significance as a place one would go to receive revelation. These two features serve as a preparation for revelatory encounter. 16.13-14 is similar to a divine confrontation: here, the disciples are confronted, not by God, but by Jesus (Son of God) who questions them about his identity. In this confrontation with the

⁶⁹See Hengel, *Leader*, 4f.; Dahlberg, "Typological Use".

⁷⁰"Form".

⁷¹Gideon, Judges 6.11b-17; Moses Exodus 3.1-12; Jeremiah 1.4-10; Isaiah 6.1-13; Ezekiel 1.1-3.11; Isaiah II 40.1-11 (to a lesser extent). The same form can also be found in the descriptions of Paul's call, Acts 9.22,26.

divine, an angel does not appear (as to Gideon and Moses), nor does Peter see a vision of God's glory here (as Isaiah and Ezekiel; but see 17.1-8). On the other hand, in common with other calls, it contains rational dialogue in terms of questions and answers, and does not take place in an ecstatic context.⁷²

2. *Introductory Word* (16.15-17): Jesus' second question makes the first more specific, and Peter's answer demonstrates that he has discerned the truth about Jesus. Jesus' declaration of unqualified divine blessing on Peter confirms that Peter has received revelation from God. This relationship between Peter and God provides both the setting as well as the legitimation for the following commission.

3. *Commission* (16.18-19): Jesus commissions Peter to be the rock on which his *ekklesia* will be founded. This commission reflects part of the scriptural logic of revelation: that it is mediated through particular individuals, here Peter, who has the grace to receive it and thereby also has the legitimate authority to transmit it truthfully.

4. *Objection* (16.21-23): Habel⁷³ interprets the objection to a divine commission as not 'merely a sign of the prophet's innate humility or sense of inadequacy, but rather a part of his office as servant, mediator and agent of Yahweh'.⁷⁴ However, the objection may also be part of a misunderstanding and flawed perception of the ways of God (Gideon: 'How can I deliver Israel?' Jud. 6.15; Moses: 'Who am I ...?' Ex. 3.11; or Ezekiel's fear and rebelliousness Ez. 2.6,8). In Peter's case, he too objects to the will of God by rebuking (ἐπιτιμᾶν) Jesus when he learns that this will involve Jesus' suffering and death (δεδεικνύμενον). Thus, although Peter has little difficulty in discerning the truth about Jesus, he has only partial understanding, and has trouble responding appropriately.

5. *Reassurance* (16.24-28): Reassurance to objection comes in phrases like: 'You shall speak all that I command you' (Jer. 1.7, Ex.7.2, cf. Deut. 18.18) or 'I am/will be with you' (Jer. 1.8, Ex. 3.12, Jud. 6.16). For Peter, Jesus gives the paradoxical assurance that 'whoever loses his life for my sake will find it' and that some here 'will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom'.

⁷²See Habel, 'Form', 298.

⁷³'Form', 319.

⁷⁴Clements, *Prophecy*, notes that in written prophecy the vision serves to identify the one who sent the prophet and rejection or hostility 'serves to allay the objection that if the message had truly come from God the people would have listened to it.'

Reassurance is also given to Peter by his presence at Jesus' transfiguration: further revelation of Jesus' proleptic, risen glory (17.1-8).

6. *Sign*: For Matthew, Mark and Luke (different in John) signs generally have a negative connotation, something opponents ask for as proof. At 16.1 the Pharisees and Sadducees come to *test* Jesus by asking for a sign.⁷⁵ If the 'sign of Jonah' (16.4) is taken to refer to Jesus' death and resurrection, then Jesus' passion prediction in 16.21 could be understood as the description of a sign, and the following transfiguration a sign of resurrection. Although both Habel⁷⁶ and Allison⁷⁷ have referred to confirmation of the call in terms of a sign, for Gideon, Moses, Jeremiah and Ezekiel (though not Isaiah), they have not drawn attention to the fact that the call narrative itself is followed by further revelation (Jud.6.25-40; Ex.3.13-22; Jer. 2.1ff.; Ezek.3.22-27).⁷⁸ A similar pattern is found here in Matthew where the revelation given to Peter is followed by further revelation at Jesus' transfiguration.

The redactional inclusion of Jeremiah in 16.14 has lead Dahlberg to argue that Matthew found in Jeremiah's call, 'a typological antecedent for his reconstruction of the conversation at Caesarea Philippi'.⁷⁹ We have seen that while specific call narratives follow a conventional pattern, other call or commissioning narratives are much more fluid, and, as shown above, 16.13-28, while containing some elements of an OT call narrative, does not follow the pattern closely.⁸⁰ If Matthew had specifically wanted to model this passage on a prophetic call narrative, the evidence and parallels would have been more obvious. The fact that Matthew has included Jeremiah's name in 16.14 does not necessarily mean that the whole passage is modelled on *Jeremiah's* call, but could be following a more general pattern of prophetic revelatory encounter. Matthew is not presenting Peter as being called to the prophetic office, in the classic sense, and the insertion of 'Jeremiah' in 16.14 is

⁷⁵This may be a rhetorical device. See Hooker, *Signs*, 17ff.: in every case the demand for a sign follows a miracle because opponents are unable to see the significance of what Jesus has already done.

⁷⁶'Form', 312.

⁷⁷*New Moses*, 57.

⁷⁸Significantly, Ezekiel 3.23: 'So I arose and went forth into the plain; and, lo, the glory of the Lord stood there, like the glory which I had seen by the river Chebar' (cf. 1.3).

⁷⁹'Typological Use', 78.

⁸⁰Viviano, 'Peter', suggests the influence of Moses' call in Ex. 4.10-17 on Matt. 16.13-20; although see comments by Allison in the same article, p.339.

making a comparison between Jeremiah and Jesus, not between Jeremiah and Peter, as suggested by Dahlberg.⁸¹

16.13-28 can be seen to follow a similar pattern to the OT call narratives, both in terms of its content and literary structure. The six elements identified by Habel are all present to a greater or lesser extent in Matthew 16.13-28, and the order in which they occur is the same. In spite of the absence of a formal literary relationship between these call and commissioning accounts, it is significant that each is set in a revelatory context. Each also includes a commission: to be 'fishers of men', to have the responsibility of the 'keys of the kingdom', to 'go and make disciples' (3.19; 16.19; 28.19). The revelation of God's grace requires an obligation of obedience.

6.4 Peter and the Dynamics of Discernment

The fact that Matthew records Peter's discernment of the truth about Jesus and then immediately follows this with Peter's rebuke of Jesus, and Jesus calling Peter 'Satan' (16.21-23), has caused many problems for interpreters over the years.⁸² Some have seen it as early Christian polemic against Peter, while others have proposed a rearrangement of the text. Sutcliffe⁸³ suggests that Peter acknowledged Jesus' messianic character at Caesarea Philippi, but confessed Jesus' divinity after the resurrection. Yet, as will be shown, discernment followed by a lack of understanding emerges as a recognizable pattern which can be found in the narrative sequence. Another pattern is also evident which can be described as an affirmation, failure and restoration: both of these patterns suggest that discernment is difficult and needs constant attention.

Discernment followed by lack of understanding

As we have seen, Matthew intensifies and heightens the significance of Peter's declaration about Jesus, by making 16.16 the first time a character in the gospel has

⁸¹See Knowles, *Jeremiah*, 84. Some of the specific parallels between Jer. 1.4-19 and Mat. 16.13-23 suggested by Dahlberg, 'Typological Use', are also rather forced: 'keys' refers to teaching authority, rather than building (Jer. 1.10, p.75f.); the designation of Jeremiah as a 'fortified city' and a 'strong bronze wall' not overcome (Jer. 1.18-19), is said to be similar to Jesus' designation of Peter as the rock on which he will build his church, against which the 'gates of Hades' shall not prevail (p.74), but it is the church, and not the person of Peter, which will not be defeated; it is unclear how Peter's declaration 'Son of the living God' is connected with Jeremiah's description of his call (Jer. 1.5, p.80); it is also not clear that a 'comparable contrast' can be drawn between Peter as a rock and a stumbling block, and Jeremiah as a fortified city, an iron pillar and bronze walls (Jer. 1.17, p.80).

⁸²Not in Luke; viewed as early Christian polemic by Bultmann, *History*, 258, and Tyson, 'Blindness', 261-8; and as impossible by Stock, 'Matthew's Presentation', 65.

⁸³'Peter's Double Confession', additional note, 275-76.

called Jesus the 'Christ'; by having this confirmed as revelation from God; and by the addition of the blessing of Peter and a description of his important role in the *ekklesia*. Yet Matthew has also intensified the depth of Peter's scant discernment of Jesus' subsequent teaching about his death. This section is without parallel in Luke, and Matthew adds to Mark's account: 'God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you' (16.22),⁸⁴ as well as, 'You are a stumbling block to me' (σκάνδαλον εἰ ἐμοῦ).⁸⁵ Jesus also describes Peter as 'Satan'. A similar connection between 'Satan' and 'stumbling block' is made in 13.41 (only in Matthew), where human failure is seen as part of the cosmic struggle between God and Satan, and those opposing the Messiah are 'sons of the devil'. This connection is also confirmed by the meaning of σκάνδαλον as 'trap', 'object of offence' or 'temptation to sin' (18.7).⁸⁶ The sequence here of a quick succession of changes is shown by Matthew in a literary way by a series of contrasts: receiving revelation from God, rather than flesh and blood; to be on the side of men, rather than the side of God. This contrast is also enhanced by the word-play on Peter as a rock (πέτρος, πέτρα, 16.18) and the rock of stumbling (πέτραν σκάνδαλου, Is. 8.14).⁸⁷

This pattern of discernment of revelation followed by lack of understanding of its implications is found elsewhere in Matthew's presentation of three episodes concerning Peter. In the episode of Jesus walking on the water (14.22-27,33): Matthew has been following his Marcan source, and he has then inserted the record of Peter walking on the water to Jesus (14.28-32). Peter has recognised and discerned that the 'ghost' is Jesus: he addresses him as κύριε; and then says εἰ σὺ εἶ. The RSV translates, 'if it is you', but can also read, 'since it is you', as in 4.3.⁸⁸ Peter is obedient to Jesus' command, 'Come' (ἐλθέ, v.29); and Matthew indicates that he 'came to Jesus' (ἦλθεν πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦν, v.29), which may suggest that he had arrived at Jesus' side. It is at this point that he 'saw the wind' (βλέπων δὲ τὸν ἄνεμον ἰσχυρὸν, v.30; the wind having been against them earlier, v.24); he is afraid and begins to sink. So Peter had already recognised Jesus and was present with him; but he is unable to recognise the fact that Jesus is in control of the wind and the waves, and is able to save him (v. 24,31,32).

⁸⁴So RSV; see Davies and Allison, *Matthew II*, p. 662, for reasons for their preference for the KJV translation of 'Be it far from thee'.

⁸⁵Paul also uses 'stumbling block' in connection with understanding the cross of Christ: Gal. 5.11; 1 Cor. 1.23.

⁸⁶The verb σκανδαλίζω is a Matthean favourite: 5.29; 11.6; 13.21,57; 18.6,8,9; 24.10; σκάνδαλον at 13.41; 18.7.

⁸⁷So Schweizer, *Matthew*, 345.

⁸⁸Bauer, *Lexicon*, I.1.

A similar pattern can be found in Matthew's record of the transfiguration, an occasion of significant revelation, as well as having an emphasis on Peter (17.1-8). Matthew changes Mark's 'let us make three dwellings' (9.5), to 'I will make' (17.4). This has the effect of singling out Peter by his response, and suggests he acted on his own without James and John. He omits, 'For he (Peter) did not know what to say, for they were exceedingly afraid' (Mark 9.6). This eliminates the suggestion that Peter's response was inappropriate (contrast Luke, 'not knowing what he said', 9.33). It also suggests that Peter had correctly recognised, both Jesus in his transfigured state, as well as Moses and Elijah talking with him. Matthew places the reaction of great fear (ἐφοβήθησαν σφόδρα), not in response to the transfiguration of Jesus and the appearance of Elijah and Moses (Mark), nor in response to the descent of the cloud (Luke), but in response to God's voice. While falling down and fear are a part of many revelation stories, the fear here does not appear to have been due to a defective recognition. They heard God's voice confirming Peter's earlier insight about Jesus, echoing the voice at Jesus' baptism (3.17; 16.16).

The lack of understanding comes afterwards on their way down the mountain, and in response to Jesus' command, 'Tell no one the vision, until the Son of man is raised from the dead' (17.9). According to Matthew, they do not question what 'raised from the dead' means (different in Mark 9.10); neither do they question or misunderstand the fact that 'the Son of man will suffer at their hands' (v. 12). Instead they ask Jesus about the teaching of the scribes concerning Elijah (v. 10). Jesus replies that Elijah has already come; the disciples, by obediently listening to Jesus, then understand (17.5,13; contrast 'they did not know him', 17.12).

This want of understanding of the implications of revelation is also found in Matthew's account of Peter's denial. During the course of the Last Supper, the disciples accept that Jesus knew about his betrayal, 'and they were very sorrowful' (26.21,22); they even accept the possibility that one of them might betray Jesus, "'Is it I, Lord?'" (v. 22). After the Supper, on the Mount of Olives, Jesus gives a brief outline of what will happen. The disciples accept and understand that Jesus knew about his death (v. 31; cf. v.28), his resurrection (v. 32), and that this is part of God's eschatological providence (by quoting Zech. 13.7). Peter's failure comes when he does not continue to recognize that everything Jesus says is correct. Jesus says, 'You will *all* fall away'; 'You will deny me'. Peter says, 'I will *never* fall away'; 'I will *not* deny you' (v. 31,33,34,35). Peter thus contradicts Jesus, does not accept Jesus' application of scripture and therefore God's will, and considers himself to be more loyal than the other disciples.

In his narrative, Matthew confirms that what Jesus has said about himself and about Peter is true. Peter's failure is emphatically confirmed by Matthew's record of Peter's denial (26.57-75). Matthew is following Mark (14.53-72) at this point, but has made some significant changes to the wording which serve to heighten Peter's denial. In Gethsemane, Peter and the two sons of Zebedee are with Jesus; Jesus, returning to them the first time, addresses only Peter, 'Could you not stay awake *with me* one hour?' (26.40, and 38). Jesus' steadfastness in the face of temptation is emphasised by his three-fold prayer, to be mirrored later by Peter's three-fold denial. Peter follows Jesus 'at a distance' and 'sat with the guards *in order to see how this would end*' (26.58). Along with the irony of being with the guards, Peter has become an observer rather than a doer, and, from the teaching given earlier, should have known how it would end. Three times Peter is said to be associated with Jesus (*also* with Jesus, with Jesus, *also* one of them; v.69,71,73). He moves from being *inside* with the guards, to being *outside* in the courtyard, and then to the porch, each time moving further away from Jesus (v.58,69,71). He has forgotten his coming to Jesus on the water, and Jesus' invitation, 'Come to me' (10.29; 11.28). The depth of Peter's denial is also increased: he denied it *before all of them, with an oath*, he began to curse and swore an oath (v.70,72,74). He went out and wept *bitterly* (v.75). Peter is not mentioned again by name in Matthew, as there is no specific reinstatement of him (as at least implicitly in Mark: 16.7, 'Go tell his disciples, *and Peter*'). Rather Matthew includes, at the end of his gospel, Jesus' commission to the eleven disciples, including Peter (28.16-20).

These episodes show that Peter correctly discerned the truth about Jesus, as revealed to him by God. The failure or lack of understanding comes when this truth is then qualified and the implications and consequences spelled out, by Jesus describing his death (16.21), as well as in his further teaching (16.24-28). This suggests that discernment itself has a certain dynamic, expressed in the Sermon on the Mount in terms of hearing without doing constituting foolishness rather than wisdom (7.24,26). A declaration about Jesus can lead to unexpected and paradoxical truths, and this dynamic provides a balance to the view, for instance, of Combrink, that the disciples' failure to understand is 'almost incomprehensible'.⁸⁹

Intensification of discernment

The narrative structure of the passages just examined shows a pattern of discernment followed by a lack of understanding. They also show a further pattern, which can be

⁸⁹'Structure', 83.

described as an intensification of discernment.⁹⁰ The story of Peter walking on the water has been set by Matthew within the context of another revelatory episode, that of Jesus walking on the water and calming the storm (14.28-31, set within verses 22-33). The stories of Jesus walking on the water and then Peter walking on the water have many verbal similarities:

ἦλθεν πρὸς αὐτοὺς περιπατῶν ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν, v.25, is similar to ἐλθεῖν πρὸς σε ἐπὶ τὰ ὕδατα, and περιεπάτησεν ἐπὶ τὰ ὕδατα καὶ ἦλθεν πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦν, vv. 28,29;

ἐγώ εἰμι, v. 27, is similar to εἰ σὺ εἶ, v.28;

ἄνεμον, ἐφοβήθη, ἔκραζεν in vv.24,26 and 30.

These similarities suggest an intensification of the larger episode for Peter. A similar pattern can be observed in Matthew's record of the event at Caesarea Philippi. Peter answers Jesus' question, and Matthew's redactional addition of vs. 17-19 intensifies Peter's discernment, by confirming that it is revelation from God, and has significant implications for the newly founded *ekklesia*.

Affirmation, failure and restoration

Matthew frequently uses foreshadowing as a literary technique, and commentators have noted that the record of Peter walking on the water can be viewed as foreshadowing Peter's role in the passion narrative. The sequence of his bold start on the water, sinking and rescue by Jesus (14.28-31), is repeated in his self-confidence, denial and restoration (26.30-35, 69-75; 28.16-17). Two other episodes in chapter 14 also point forward to the gospel's conclusion: John the Baptist's death (14.1-12) points forward to Jesus own death;⁹¹ and the feeding of the five thousand foreshadows the Last Supper (14.13-21; 26.20-9).⁹²

We also find a further observable literary pattern in these three episodes concerning Peter:

'Since it is you'

sinking

rescued by Jesus (14.28-31)

⁹⁰Both these patterns may be reflected in the different kinds of reception to the word in the parable of the sower (13.3-9,18-23).

⁹¹It may also be significant that John was recognised as a prophet, but not as Elijah (17.13), and Jesus was also recognized as a prophet, but not as Son (16.14).

⁹²See especially 14.19 and 26.26, 'blessed, broke, gave'.

'You are the Christ'
rebuking
with Jesus at transfiguration (16.16-17.8)

'I will never deny you'
denial
Jesus appears in Galilee (26.35-28.20)

These sequences form a literary pattern in terms of affirmation, failure and restoration. We noted in the discussion of 14.28-33 that Peter had recognised Jesus, but his failure to understand that Jesus was in control of the wind and waves had caused him to sink, before being rescued by Jesus. A similar sequence is also reflected in 16.13-23: Peter had been given to know Jesus' identity, but his lack of understanding of Jesus' interpretation of his role as Christ caused him to rebuke Jesus, before being given revelation of Jesus in glory at the transfiguration. In a related way, after the Last Supper, Peter knows who Jesus is and what will happen to him, but does not accept the truth that what Jesus says about him will happen, before the risen Jesus appears in Galilee.⁹³

Discernment is difficult and needs constant attention

Peter's lack of understanding is also reflected in some of Matthew's other references to Peter and the disciples. Peter is the one who comes to Jesus to ask for explanation of 'the parable' (15.15).⁹⁴ In this section (15.1-28) Matthew makes a contrast between the scribes, Pharisees, their tradition and Israel on the one hand, and the disciples, their tradition in the words of Jesus and a new people on the other. In the middle it is Peter who asks for an explanation of Jesus' teaching (different Mark 17.17, where the disciples ask). The disciples are contrasted favourably with the Pharisees, but then unfavourably with the Canaanite woman, showing that they still do not understand fully (15.21-28). She comes, kneels and asks for help; calls Jesus 'Lord' three times, and Son of David; she shows persistence and wit in interpreting proverbial sayings; and she is commended by Jesus for her faith. The disciples, however, beg Jesus, 'Send her away, for she is crying after us' (15.23). They do not yet 'see' (ὁρᾶτε), i.e. perceive with the mind (15.17).

⁹³This sequence argues against the suggestion by Nickelsburg, 'Enoch', 597, that Peter's 'disavowal of Jesus annuls his own confession'.

⁹⁴Although 'parable' more logically refers to the saying about blind guides (referred to as a parable in Luke 6.39), Jesus' reply refers back to v. 11 about defilement.

Matthew portrays the disciples more positively than Mark. He does not describe them as being deaf, blind or having hard hearts, terms which he reserves for opponents.⁹⁵ Defective understanding is used by Matthew only in relation to disciples, or potential disciples, and not in relation to opponents.⁹⁶ Positively, this shows the disciples' understanding to be incomplete and their need to learn of Jesus.⁹⁷ It is an encouragement to disciples to understand more. 'Are you also *still* without understanding?' 'Do you not *yet* perceive?' (15.16; 16.9; contrast, '*then* they understood', 16.12; 17.13). A link between faith and discernment is also implied when Matthew consistently uses the phrase 'of little faith' (ὀλιγόπιστος) in relation to believing disciples, thus suggesting an inadequacy in relation to faith rather than absence (6.30; 8.26; 14.31; 16.8; 17.20). The tension with opponents arises because they are actively hostile and without integrity, but the tension with disciples arises because they fail to understand the significance of what Jesus says and does; they try and fail, but are not rejected. This tension may also reflect Matthew's dualistic stance: it is the 'insiders' who understand, while the 'outsiders' remain ignorant.

This development of discernment reflects Matthew's broad paraenetic approach. Discernment is something that has to be learned and practised. It also suggests that discernment can be difficult and that insufficient understanding is to be expected. This literary pattern argues against those who would see specific anti-Peter polemic here; as well as against those who argue that, because of his misunderstanding, Jesus could not have chosen Peter. Rather the opposite is true, that Peter's preeminence makes his misunderstanding all the more representative.

While this lack of understanding points to a development in discernment, this is not exactly the same as intensification. We have seen how *some* discernment is 'rewarded' with more discernment, developed by being with Jesus and learning from him. We have also observed how, for Peter, this being with Jesus is punctuated by specific moments where an intensification of discernment occurs (14.22-33; 16.13-20). This also suggests that, because these incidents are few, this type of intensification in moments of discernment is not sustainable all the time. Critical

⁹⁵14.33; 16.9; 13.13-17; cf. Mark 6.52; 8.18. Matthew only uses σκληροκαρδία once, in reply to the Pharisees, 19.8.

⁹⁶Much of the criticism against the scribes and Pharisees in ch. 23 can also be directed against disciples; see list in Freyne, 'Vilifying', 143, which does not include understanding.

⁹⁷This provides a balance to those interpreters, like Rowland, 'Apocalyptic Poor', 515, who read this lack of understanding to indicate that in the second half of the gospel, Matthew's ideal of discipleship ceases to be embodied in the group of disciples; and also to Verseput, 'Faith', 11, who sees the disciples as largely static figures who show no linear development from 'fundamental incomprehension or unbelief, through uncertainty, to full faith or full understanding'.

moments of discernment, or a 'flash of insight',⁹⁸ take place within the on-going Christian life of worship and service and are mutually interpreting (14.33; 16.24-28).⁹⁹ Peter represents an example of the dynamics and fragility of discernment.

6.5 Discernment and Petrine Primacy

Having discussed issues related to Peter's failure, we now turn to the debate about Petrine primacy. 'On this rock I will build my church': these words have generated a steady stream of debate and secondary literature. Earlier studies were more concerned with the origin and precise meaning of these words, whereas more recently there has been debate over how these words contribute to Matthew's overall presentation of Peter. For our study, it remains to examine whether a consideration from the perspective of discernment of revelation makes a contribution to one aspect of this debate.

Two main views concerning the role of Peter have emerged. In his summary, Kingsbury¹⁰⁰ notes that Hummel, Bornkamm and Kähler (later Meier and Davies), view Peter as a 'supreme Rabbi' who is the guarantor and transmitter of the church's tradition of teaching and, for Kähler, he is uniquely invested as the bearer of revelation. A different view of Peter is put forward by Strecker and Walker (later Goulder), who view Peter's role as 'typical in nature, providing individual members of Matthew's church with an example of what it means, positively and negatively, to be a Christian'. Kingsbury himself concludes that Strecker and Walker, in acknowledging that Peter is typical of the Christian disciple, 'ascribe too modest a role to him' and that 'one must grant Peter the full weight of his "salvation-historical primacy"'.¹⁰¹ Yet neither does he side with Hummel and Kähler's teaching office and guarantor role, since the disciples only have one Teacher, and the exalted Son of God remains with his disciples to guide them (23.8,10; 28.16-20; 18.20).

⁹⁸Rowland, 'Apocalyptic, The Poor', 509.

⁹⁹This also provides a possible answer to Riches' question, *Mythologies*, viii, as to whether Christian discipleship is a 'struggle between divine and human will, a slow leading to greater obedience and understanding' (so Best); or whether it is 'fundamentally determined by a moment of apocalyptic illumination, by the giving of a mystery' (so Marcus). The dynamic here is similar to that of the Kingdom. The Kingdom is always *God's Kingdom*: it has a particular, decisive aspect, something to be entered and grasped (4.17; 7.21; 18.3,9; 19.23f.); it is also something that grows slowly, quietly and mysteriously (13.3-9,31-33).

¹⁰⁰'Figure', 67f.

¹⁰¹'Figure', 81.

These different assessments of the role of Peter reflect a wider debate concerning Matthew's use of the term 'disciple'. Literary studies have shown that Matthew can view disciples, both as the unique Twelve in the time of the historical Jesus, and, at the same time, as examples of any and every Christian disciple. In a similar way, I suggest, Peter can function both as spokesperson for the disciples and authoritative link with the Jesus of history; at the same time as being typical or representative of every disciple of Jesus.¹⁰²

Peter's Authority

We have seen how in scriptural and early Jewish tradition, revelation is given to certain gifted individuals. The encounter is recorded in a traditional way, and justifies the authoritative position of the person concerned. There are two areas where such a justification is important to Matthew.

Peter's prominence in chapters 14-18 seems to be a function of Matthew's ecclesiology.¹⁰³ Peter is called along with others; he is not alone in being designated μακάριος, nor does he alone discern the truth about Jesus (13.16; 14.33). This reinforces Peter's position as a disciple and one of the Twelve. Yet Matthew records Peter as the first disciple to be called,¹⁰⁴ and the first to discern the truth about Jesus: so it is significant that Simon is known as Peter right from the beginning (4.18). He alone receives this extended μακάριος and on him alone is Jesus' *ekklesia* founded. These assertions give Matthew's audience an assurance of the apostolic foundations of the church, with Peter as the guarantor of the truth of the revelatory traditions of Jesus.¹⁰⁵

In relation to Jewish revelatory tradition, Peter's revelatory event guarantees the truth of the teaching being transmitted. Streeter¹⁰⁶ describes Peter as 'supreme Rabbi in whom resides the final interpretation of the New Law given to the New Israel by Christ'. This is also the view of Hummel¹⁰⁷ and Kähler.¹⁰⁸ Kähler finds here a common scheme which involves the giving of a beatitude by a heavenly

¹⁰²Kingsbury is not always clear in what sense he is using the term 'disciple': thus, 'Figure', 72f., the disciples are 'representative members of Matthew's church' and 'the circle of the Twelve disciples'.

¹⁰³The majority of Matthew's additional references to Peter occur here: 14.28-31; 15.15; 16.17-19; 17.24-7; 18.21.

¹⁰⁴Also comes first at 10.1-4. Judas comes last, perhaps forming a contrast here.

¹⁰⁵'Fels ist Simon als Bürge und Garant der Lehre Jesu', Gnlika, *Matthäusevangelium*, 2.64.

¹⁰⁶*Four Gospels*, 515.

¹⁰⁷*Kirche und Judentum*, 60ff.

¹⁰⁸Although Kähler also recognises Peter's representative role, he places more emphasis on Peter as 'Garant der treuen Überlieferung der Offenbarung', and describes Matthew's gospel as a 'Petrusevangelium'; 'Zur Form-', 56f.

figure to an individual from the sacred past, and uses this to support his theory that Matt. 16.16-19 was originally part of a resurrection story. Tracing the specific origins of Matthew's traditions is not part of our task here. Although details of Kähler's specific argument may be questioned,¹⁰⁹ he has demonstrated the development of a general revelatory *Gattung*, and has drawn attention to the importance within the Jewish understanding of the transmission of tradition, the truth of which is guaranteed by revelation. Matthew's use of such revelatory tradition is therefore not unprecedented, but whether this tradition gave rise to a specific office, such as that of 'supreme Rabbi', remains uncertain, although this may have developed after Peter's death. Such a focus may reflect Matthew's desire to establish the authority of Christian revelatory tradition over against scribal and Pharisaic tradition.

Peter as representative disciple

If the historical Twelve serve as the authoritative link to Jesus, so the disciples also serve as examples of any and every disciple. Peter is thus typical of every disciple, who needs to be called by Jesus, who needs to receive the grace of revelation from God and who is called to the brotherhood of the *ekklesia*. Matthew's record of Peter as a representative disciple also draws attention to the on-going and demanding nature of discernment. Peter's denial and failure show that all disciples need to rely on God's grace. They also serve to emphasise the humility and fragility involved in the exercise of continuing discernment in the context of a godly life.

From an ecclesiological point of view, the model of discipleship represented by Peter and the Twelve and Peter's discernment of Jesus, also applies to Matthew's *ekklesia*. 'Peter says and hears *in an exemplary way for all disciples* what every disciple could say and hear'.¹¹⁰ This is reflected in the absence of characterization of Peter, both in the call narrative and at Caesarea Philippi and in the gospel as a whole. Questions of motivation, character development, preparation etc. are not mentioned, nor are characteristics sometimes assigned to him such as rugged, bold or rocky.¹¹¹ 16.16, can be seen as a programmatic statement: '... for one truly to know that Jesus is the Son of God is for one to have become the recipient of divine revelation'.¹¹² Thus Peter answers for any and every disciple: every disciple needs to discern that Jesus is 'the Christ, the Son of the living God'.

¹⁰⁹See Kingsbury, 'Peter', 75, n.26. Kingsbury's assertion that Peter is the 'rock' only because he is the first apostle to be called (p.76), does not give enough weight to the significance of this passage for Matthew.

¹¹⁰Schweizer, 'Church', 136 (italics original).

¹¹¹Against Wilkins, *Concept*, 198: courage and boldness.

¹¹²Kingsbury, 'Figure', 74, n.25.

6.6 Conclusion

We have now completed a detailed analysis of Matthew 16.13-20 and examined other texts relevant to the fragile nature of Peter's discernment. The results may be summarised in the following points.

1. The parallels we noted between the conventional quality of the call story and the revelatory commissioning in 16.13-20 give weight to the significance and authority of this passage. Peter's commission is thus based on scriptural precedent and this enables the passage to function as a model. The traditional styling of the call narrative makes it paradigmatic for the gospel: being called by Jesus and responding in obedience. Similarly, the question posed by Jesus to the disciples serves as a question to any and every reader of his gospel: 'But who do you say that I am?' This further suggests that the declaration of the truth about Jesus as 'Son of the living God' also becomes paradigmatic. *The assurance of eschatological blessing confirms* disciples in a position of privilege: they are blessed recipients of a gift of revelation from God.

16.13-20 also confirms Peter as a unique disciple with the authority to pass on Jesus' teaching. In an author and group which set great importance on the authority of Jesus' words, the passage shows the means by which they may be handed on and accessed in the present. This was especially important after Jesus' death:¹¹³ the passing on of tradition takes place through Peter and within the *ekklesia*. This is also why, for Matthew, the fact that the disciples understand Jesus' teaching is so important (13.51).

The continuing significance of the application of Jesus' teaching and of Peter's authority, is confirmed by the accounts of Peter asking Jesus how to apply the law in certain situations (15.15; 17.24).¹¹⁴ Matthew's warnings against false teachers and the possibility of being 'led astray' point to the importance for him of guarding the integrity of religious teaching and practice.¹¹⁵ His stress on 'doing' may reflect a polemic against 'lawlessness',¹¹⁶ particularly charismatic antinomianism, reflected

¹¹³Overman, *Formative Judaism*, 139f., drawing on insights of Weber, notes that the two main ways in which authority can be transferred and the problem of succession resolved, are by 'designation' and divine disclosure through revelation, and that Matthew has combined both of the means of legitimisation and transference of authority.

¹¹⁴Here teaching concerning eating and the temple tax, both affect the relationship between Jews and Gentiles in the Christian community.

¹¹⁵7.15-17; 18.12; 24.5,11,24. Thompson, *Advice*, 260.

¹¹⁶Ἀνομία, of the evangelists, only in Matthew: 7.23; 13.41; 23.28; 24.12.

in the contrast between doing God's will and reliance on prophetic inspiration (7.15-23; 24.10ff.) This may partly explain his lack of reference to inspiration by the Holy Spirit, only at 10.20 with reference to disciples. Matthew's emphasis on the authority of Peter may reflect something of the dispute between Peter and Paul at Antioch, probably Matthew's own city (Gal. 1.18; 2.7-14), or a disagreement with James, although specific details remain unclear.¹¹⁷

2. Matthew was writing a gospel for his present, and this results in a blurring of the edges between past report and present experience, and a tendency to historicize and generalize. Matthew's presentation of Peter merges both the unique and the typical, and, sociologically, this concerns both intramural and extramural relations. The question addressed to 'you', the readers (16.15), is answered in terms of *ekklesia*. The emphasis on Peter and the disciples as recipients of revelation thus serves Matthew's ecclesiological interests. Revelation establishes a brotherhood of those who have discerned the truth about Jesus (23.8), and also indicates the location where on-going discernment now takes place.¹¹⁸

If revelation establishes the *ekklesia* and Peter's authority within it, this division is also seen over against those perceived to be 'outside'. If we understand Matthew to be writing after the destruction of the temple, in a situation of reorganisation under the leadership of the Pharisaic party, with an increased focus on scribal authority, then his emphasis on Jesus' *ekklesia* as an alternative to the Jerusalem temple, and the teaching authority given by Jesus to Peter, is understandable. Matthew's ecclesiology reflects the growing separation, not only between *ekklesia* and synagogue,¹¹⁹ but also between the *ekklesia*, including Gentiles over against unrepentant Israel (11.20-24).¹²⁰ The rock saying reassures the *ekklesia* under assault that it cannot be destroyed, and confirms Peter as the guarantor of Jesus' authoritative, revelatory teaching, over against rabbinic authority figures.¹²¹ Although there are certain parallels between the roles of Abraham and Peter, Matthew does not portray Peter specifically as the 'Father' of the *ekklesia*. Rather, his emphasis is on God as Father, and Jesus the Son who founds the new,

¹¹⁷For a possible reconstruction, see Sim, *Christian Judaism*.

¹¹⁸Overman, *Formative Judaism*, 136-140.

¹¹⁹Matthew carefully distinguishes between ἐκκλησία and συναγωγή; 4.23; 9.35; 10.17; 12.9; 13.54; 23.34; Duling, 'Matthean Brotherhood', 163ff.; Saldarini, *Christian-Jewish*, 116-23; discussion in Ascough, 'Community Formation'.

¹²⁰Hare, 'How Jewish is Matthew?', 269; cf. 18.20. Verseput, 'Faith', 10, notes Matthew's 'unmistakable tendency to place the disciples over against Israel as the recipients of divine revelation'.

¹²¹Grundman, *Das Evangelium*, 383; Meier, *Vision*, 100-106, 113.

eschatological people of God, membership of which is determined by faith in Jesus, not descent from Abraham (3.9; 8.5-13).

3. The dynamics of discernment reflect an interplay between revealed knowledge and worldly obedience. While Peter is the first to discern the truth about Jesus, his failures in understanding point to a universal need for continued learning. Episodes show discernment to be incomplete and costly. Peter's failure, especially his sinking in the water, has frequently been seen to reflect the needs of Matthew's community, as the struggling church requiring Jesus' help. Peter's role here serves to emphasise that every disciple needs to discern the truth about Jesus; any disciple can also fail and lack understanding; any disciple can be restored by Jesus, and may receive specific exceptional moments of revelation from God.

Finally, it is important for Matthew to establish the truth of his claim that Jesus is the Son of God, and the truth of the traditions concerning Jesus, passed on faithfully and truthfully. Thus, revelation comes from God, is transmitted faithfully through Peter and the *ekklesia*. Jesus' continuing presence and the apostolic tradition establish continuity in the present after the deaths of Jesus and of Peter. For Peter and the other disciples, Matthew gives little or no information about their background, motivation or character analysis. The focus of the gospel remains on Jesus: this both legitimates and standardises discernment of the truth about Jesus, and also suggests that, ultimately, discernment is a divine mystery and gift. The division which response to revelation generates, is reflected in Matthew's presentation of opponents, who, throughout his gospel, remain opponents, with no record of any 'changing sides'. For Matthew, they exemplify failed discernment.¹²²

¹²²Space does not permit a longer study of Judas here, (see, for instance, Van Unnik, 'Death of Judas' and Senior, 'Fate of the Betrayer'), although the following observations are of relevance to our theme:

1. The woman with the ointment has discerned the truth about Jesus. Her sacrificial act is the outcome of this and appears to propel Judas' actions, although he remains 'one of the twelve' (26.14).
2. Judas is the last named disciple in the gospel, creating a literary contrast between him and Peter. Judas' lack of moral resolve and search for the truth leads him actively to seek an opportunity for betrayal, and there is no suggestion he tries to resist or struggles with this decision.
3. Judas, as one of the twelve, *sits at table* with Jesus, who speaks *as they were eating* (26.20f.). Judas is then mysteriously absent until Jesus' arrest (26.47); that is, he is not *with* Jesus (cf. 26.38). His discernment of Jesus' identity is flawed, addressing him as ῥαββί (26.25,49; cf. 23.8).
4. Matthew's fulfilment motif (27.3-10) points to a certain givenness about Judas' betrayal. God's will is sovereign and he gives revelation to whom he chooses, and withholds it also from whom he chooses.
5. The story of Judas suggests that discernment involves an appropriate response to revelation, and must be on-going, since followers can fall away (18.15-20). One serious act of moral laxity can lead remorselessly to others. This reinforces Matthew's moral stance and from a social perspective points to the severe consequences of once being a follower of Jesus and then lacking the moral resolve to sustain obedience (cf. 25.46). This is a stark warning both for those already in Matthew's community, as well as those who wish to become members. Judas is an example of the fragility of discernment, set in the context of God's grace in revealing to whom he wishes.

Chapter 7

FAILED DISCERNMENT

7.1 Introductory Observations

In the previous two chapters we have identified discernment of revelation as a significant motif in Matthew's presentation of Jesus, as well as of Peter and the disciples. In this chapter we shall examine Matthew's presentation of failure in discernment of revelation.

We have seen that a fundamental aspect of claims about revelation is that they bring division, and for Matthew this division is reflected in polemic against opponents. Matthew's very negative portrayal of the Jewish leaders is part of his general rhetorical presentation of categories of opposites: there are those who are in or out, for or against. Matthew's sustained anti-Jewish polemic is well known,¹ and one aspect of this is his assertion that their leaders were not able fully to discern revelation when they encountered it, or to respond appropriately. We demonstrated in chapter 2 how Matthew's special material in his birth and passion narratives evidenced an alternating pattern of pericopae concerning differing responses to revelation. In this chapter, we shall examine this material further, as well as the rest of Matthew's passion narrative, in order to pursue our theme of the dynamics of discernment.

7.2 The Birth Narrative

The birth narrative clearly shows the contrasts between those who discern revelation, Joseph and the magi, and those who do not, Herod, the chief priests and scribes. Brown² in his significant work on the birth narrative notes the sequence of 'revelation, proclamation and twofold reaction'. From a narrative perspective, Kingsbury³ has examined the 'rhetoric of comprehension' in Matthew, and Powell,⁴ in a series of articles, has studied Matthew's presentation of the magi from a reader

¹Examined redactionally by Stanton, *Gospel*, 148ff.; and from a narrative perspective by Kingsbury, 'Developing Conflict'. Opponents are predominantly the scribes and Pharisees, although Matthew can also link the Pharisees with Sadducees (3.7; 27.62); see van Tilborg, *Jewish Leaders*.

²*Birth*, 183.

³'Rhetoric of Comprehension'.

⁴'The Magi'.

response perspective. I shall draw on their insights in this section where appropriate, since I have not found other works where the subject of discernment has been treated in a sustained way. Our main focus will be on Matthew 2 where each of the five pericopae has to do with episodes of discernment of revelation.

2.1-6

The immediate setting for this pericope is one of fulfilment of divine will in the coming of God's Son, revealed beforehand in scripture. We saw in our chapter 2 how, following the genealogy, Matthew opens his gospel with a paradigmatic episode of revelation to Joseph, and his obedient response to it. Joseph, a righteous Jew, has received God's gift of revelation, yet as soon as Jesus is born, there is unexpected revelation outside this traditional setting. The magi are generally understood to represent the wisdom of the Gentile world (note, *King of the Jews*, 2.2), signalling the universal significance of Jesus and the beginning of the eschatological pilgrimage of the nations (Is. 60; Ps. 72; cf. Matt. 1.1f.). Their arrival is indicated by the dramatic use of ἰδοὺ (2.1). Traditionally used to signal revelation (1.20), its use here may suggest that the magi are, themselves, bearers of revelation. They have *seen his star* (εἶδομεν τὸν ἀστέρα).⁵ How they knew that his was a significant star (*his star*, 2.2), and that it signalled the birth of the King of the Jews, Matthew does not explain,⁶ but he does indicate in several ways that they had responded correctly to the revelatory signs. They travelled to Jerusalem; they seek, asking, 'Where is he ...?'; they act with integrity, saying openly what they have seen (the star) and why they have come (to worship him).

This giving of revelation, discernment and positive response is placed in sharp contrast to the reaction of Herod and the chief priests and scribes. The magi have received revelation and are now themselves bearers of revelation, but Herod does not discern this. ἀκούσας (3.1; RSV, hearing *this*), implies that Herod heard about the magi's question rather than hearing direct from them. His first reaction is to be 'troubled'⁷; his second is not one of direct engagement with the bearers of revelation, but to assemble⁸ all the chief priests and scribes of the people, since they too were also 'troubled' ('all Jerusalem with him', 2.3).

⁵Repeated in vvs. 9,10: καὶ ἰδοὺ ὁ ἀστήρ ὃν εἶδον ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ; ἰδόντες δὲ τὸν ἀστέρα.

⁶ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ is probably a technical phrase meaning 'at its rising' rather than 'in the east'. Whether the phrase carried messianic content is uncertain (Num. 24.17; CD 7.18-26), but bright stars were associated with the birth of Roman emperors, and traditionally Abraham and Moses. See Brown, *Birth*, 173f.

⁷ἐταράχθη, literally, stirred up, so troubled; also 21.10, ἐσεισθη, shaken, referring again to Jerusalem; cf. 14.26; see Verseput, 'Jesus' Pilgrimage', 116.

⁸συναγαγὼν, which later in the passion narrative has negative connotations; 26.57; 27.17; 27.62; 28.12.

Matthew has informed his readers from the beginning of the gospel that Jesus' birth was no accident but has taken place according to God's plan in the scriptures. When the Jewish leaders consult these scriptures about the location of the birth, they find the answer, 'Bethlehem'. The quotation implicitly confirms for Matthew's readers that the location of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem is consistent with scripture, even though the words are given by the chief priests and scribes, characters in the story, and not by the narrator as the fulfilment quotations elsewhere in the birth narrative (1.22; 2.15,17,23). The chief priests and scribes are given revelation in two ways. They know about the magi, but do not themselves engage with these bearers of revelation or go to see the star for themselves. They search the scriptures, not on their own initiative but at Herod's summons. Although they find the truth in their scriptures, there is no suggestion that they do anything with this knowledge, follow it up or check upon the way in which Herod is using it. They are portrayed as sympathizers and servants of Herod, and implicitly acknowledge Herod as their king, rather than the Christ (2.4). 2.1-6 thus sharply distinguishes between differing responses to revelation, and in the rest of the chapter we see how this is worked out.

2.7-12

Herod summoned the magi 'secretly' (λάθρᾱ). This suggests both that he lacks integrity and that he is using the information given by the Jewish leaders in a devious way. He is also deceptive in suggesting that he would both 'go' and 'worship'; rather he sends others to search, while he himself remains stationary.⁹ In each of the four instances in chapters 1 and 2 where instructions are given by God, it is specifically reported that these were carried out, signalled by verbal repetition.¹⁰ Although Matthew says that the magi 'heard' King Herod (οἱ ἀκούσαντες), and hearing is frequently linked with understanding and obeying (7.24, 13.23), it is clear from the context that they do not obey Herod. They do not 'go and search diligently' for the child; there is no need, because the revelatory star is guiding them to the exact house where Jesus is to be found. In response to further revelation, again in the form of a dream, they do not bring word to Herod. Matthew records the reaction of the magi on seeing the star: 'they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy' (ἐχάρησαν χαρὰν μεγάλην σφόδρα, 2.10).¹¹ On seeing the child, they did what they said they would do, worshipped him. Having obediently offered worship and gifts, they

⁹Contrast 6.33; 7.7f.

¹⁰1.20f and 24f.; 2.12; 2.13 and 14; 2.20 and 21.

¹¹Matthew uses σφόδρα 7 times (Mk. 1; Lk. 1); twice in a revelatory context in connection with fear (17.6; 27.54) note also 'fear and great (μεγάλης) joy', 28.8.

gifts, they receive further revelation κατ' ὄναρ, and, contrary to Herod's instructions, leave by *another* way (δι' ἄλλης ὁδοῦ).¹²

Powell¹³ argues that Matthew's readers would regard magi generally, not as wise men but as fools. He draws attention to Daniel 2 where 'Daniel is presented as the bearer of true wisdom; magi and other so-called 'wise men' (σοφοί, 2.27) are exposed as fools'.¹⁴ While it may well be true that Matthew's readers would expect the magi to be fools, this is not supported by the text here. Powell argues that the main character trait of the magi is that of 'ignorance'. Thus, their first questioning words emphasise what they don't know rather than what they do (2.2); it is Herod who perceives the connection between the King of the Jews and the Christ (2.4); the star 'appears to function as a divine portent so blatant that any fool could follow it'; they give no indication that they are suspicious of Herod's deception (2.9). This trait of 'ignorance' follows because Powell sets in opposition the traits of the wise and the ignorant. He sees the Jewish leaders as 'wise' and therefore the magi must be 'ignorant'; but we have seen how, for Matthew, the trait 'wise' is set against that of being 'humble' (11.25). Hence the magi realise and admit their knowledge is incomplete, they are open and receptive, and come to the traditional place of revelation, *seeking*. Asking questions for Matthew does not always indicate ignorance, but a desire for further knowledge (13.10; 18.21; 19.16). 'Any fool' could in theory follow the star, but Matthew does not record that anyone else *noticed* the star (2.3), or discerned its meaning. Saying they were not suspicious of Herod's deception, is an uncertain argument from silence.

In Exodus 7-9 and Daniel 2, while the magi may be presented as fools, a further distinction is being made between different kinds of wisdom. In these passages the wisdom of the magi is inadequate because it does not originate with God. In Matthew 2 a similar point is being made: that the knowledge and wisdom of Herod and the Jewish leaders is insufficient, whereas, that of the magi is superior, because it comes from God, and they are obedient to it and humble enough to recognize it. The magi represent an alternative and unexpected gift of wisdom, revealed to unexpected people (outside Israel) and to be found in an unexpected place (the child in a house).

¹²Cf. RSV translation of ἐπορεύθησαν at 2.9 as 'went *their* way'.

¹³'Magi'; one of Powell's aims is to determine how Matthew's readers might have been *expected* to bridge the gap of non-narrated revelation. For this thesis, the gap here suggests the mysterious quality of revelation and places more emphasis on obedient response.

¹⁴'Magi', 8. He also notes that Graeco-Roman evaluation of magi is ambiguous, while Jewish midrash citing Exodus 7-9 and the Balaam midrash in Philo present them as fools.

2.13-15

In this pericope, Joseph is again given revelation, signalled by ἰδοὺ, angel and dream. Again we note the pattern of Joseph's immediate obedience, emphasised by verbal repetition, in taking the child and his mother to Egypt. This obedient response is confirmed by the narrator as fulfilment of scripture.

2.16-18

Having tried to use deception for his own gain, Herod later realizes¹⁵ he himself has been deceived (ἐνεπαίχθη, 2.16). Here the word is used to express Herod's point of view, mocked in the sense of 'deceived'.¹⁶ His initial lack of integrity means that he now views God's intervention as a deception (2.12,16). Herod receives revelation indirectly, yet his lack of concern for the truth and for morality, lead to a particularly violent reaction. In his article on the 'rhetoric of comprehension', Kingsbury notes Matthew's contrasting characterisation of the magi and Herod: whereas the magi 'see' divine revelation, 'understand' it aright, and respond to it by 'receiving' Jesus, Herod, although he, too, 'hears' divine revelation and 'understands' it aright, nevertheless responds to it by 'repudiating' Jesus.¹⁷ Perhaps Herod is right to be troubled if he perceives the coming of the King of the Jews as a threat to his own power, but he fails to recognise the coming of the Christ as the agent of God's eschatological salvation.¹⁸ In this sense, I suggest that, while he may understand revelation aright, his understanding is incomplete and clouded.

2.19-23

This pericope, the last mention of Joseph in Matthew, follows a similar literary style to 2.13-15. Joseph is again given revelation (ἰδοὺ, angel, dream), and again, he responds in obedience (emphasised by verbal repetition). Further revelation directs him from the more general 'land of Israel', to Galilee, and thence to Nazareth, confirmed by the narrator as fulfilment of scripture.

7.2.1 Summary

From our examination of these alternating pericopae in Matthew's special material, we note the following points of relevance to our theme. Claims to revelation cause

¹⁵ἰδὼν ὅτι (2.16) is also used at 27.3, when Judas saw that Jesus was condemned, and at 27.24 when Pilate saw that a riot was beginning, carrying the sense of 'perceived' or 'recognized'.

¹⁶Apart from Lk. 14.29 and here, used only in connection with Jesus' passion (20.19; 27.29,31,41); so the ones who have been mocked here, respond by themselves mocking Jesus.

¹⁷'Rhetoric', 362.

¹⁸Contrast the centurion's understanding of authority, 8.8f.

division, and here at the beginning of his gospel Matthew sets out this division which will then be worked out in subsequent chapters. Herod's opposition represents a misunderstanding of the nature and mission of Jesus, to 'save his people from their sins' (1.21). This will be reflected later in the narrative pattern that the coming of the Kingdom brings salvation and judgement, climaxing in the passion narrative. The Jewish leaders interpret the scriptures correctly and they know the one born is the Christ (cf. Pilate, 27.11,17 and 22.29,37). Yet they do nothing in response to this knowledge. This initial lack of discernment and obedient response, as well as a lack of concern for the truth, leads to deception and violence. This dynamic is in sharp contrast to that exhibited by Joseph and the magi. They respond obediently to the grace of God's revelation, and this is closely followed by further episodes of revelation.

One of the main ways in which revelation is given here is by means of dreams. Gnuse¹⁹ suggests that dreams were a form of theophany which regarded God respectfully as a distant deity. 'Contemporary Jewish midrash used dreams as a mode of divine revelation due to respect for God and Matthew may be following this tendency for the sake of the feelings it would elicit among his audience.' This may be so in the birth narrative which may also reflect the tradition of Joseph as a dreamer. In the rest of the gospel there is only one other reference to revelation in a dream (27.19), and revelation is given more directly by God in other ways. Here at the beginning of his narrative, the main emphasis is on the divine initiative.

Matthew sustains this dynamic of the Jewish leaders' failure to discern revelation throughout his gospel narrative. The next mention of opponents is of the Pharisees and Sadducees (a redactional combination) in their encounter with John the Baptist (3.7). Many of them come to John for baptism, but with prophetic insight,²⁰ he realizes they are coming for the wrong reasons: there is no evidence of repentance,²¹ and their reliance on descent from Abraham is no guarantee of eschatological salvation (3.9-12). Following references in 5.20 and 7.29, the scribes and Pharisees make another major appearance in 9.3. Here, typically, they do not engage with Jesus directly, but 'say to themselves' (9.3, cf. 9.11, where they ask his disciples; also 9.34, cf. 12.24). In 9.11 they seem more concerned with social manners than seeking the truth, and appear to have already decided the issues related to Jesus' authority (9.3,34; cf. 12.24). Matthew carefully distinguishes their

¹⁹'Dream Genre', 118.

²⁰They deny that he is a prophet, although the people, in contrast, recognize him to be such; 14.5; 21.26; see also 17.12; 21.11.

²¹See also 11.18, 20-24; 21.25,32.

response from that of the crowds (9.33; 12.23). Chapter 10 describes Jesus' mission to Israel and chapter 11 Israel's rejection of Jesus. This forms the context for chapter 12 when the Pharisees first speak to Jesus directly (12.2). The content and purpose of their contact is still not to do with seeking the truth, but with the more peripheral actions, not of Jesus himself, but of his disciples. Their first direct question to Jesus, 'Is it lawful ..' (εἰ ἔξεστιν, 12.10), is not a genuine question, but has as its purpose 'that they might accuse him', and concludes with their plotting to destroy him (12.14). The rest of the gospel recounts how they achieve their plan. This failure in discernment on the part of the Jewish leaders, foreshadowed in the birth narrative, comes to climax in the longer block of material in the passion narrative.²²

7.3 The Passion Narrative

The whole of the passion narrative raises many questions of interpretation, including that of authority and legal procedure. In terms of our motif, the trials before Caiaphas and Pilate, the mocking at the cross and the two incidents involving the Jewish leaders following the resurrection, form the culmination and outworking of a failure in discernment. Matthew interweaves two stories of contrast: between Jesus and Peter, and between Jesus and the religious leaders. Matthew is mostly following Mark here, and changes to Mark's wording as well as additions to Mark's story will be noted where appropriate.

26.57-68 The trial before Caiaphas

Following Jesus' teaching in the temple, the Jewish leaders would like to seize him (κρατῆσαι),²³ but fear the crowds.²⁴ Then various groups of opponents²⁵ in turn come to argue with Jesus, until they do not 'dare to ask him any more questions' (22.46). The scene is set when Jesus has finished his teaching including woes and parables ('all these sayings', πάντας τοὺς λόγους τούτους, 26.1), and he predicts his death for a fourth time (26.2; cf. Deut. 31.1-2; 32.44-6). τότε is used by Matthew at significant points to move the story on, here at 26.3.

Matthew has already carefully distinguished between the 'crowds' who discern Jesus to be a prophet and Son of David, from 'all the city' of Jerusalem, who were 'stirred'

²²Matera, *Passion Narratives*, 81, 'The drama in Matthew is not the secret of Jesus' identity, as in Mark, but the rejection of the Messiah by Israel'.

²³21.46; also 26.48,50.

²⁴Throughout the passion narrative, there is no mention of Jesus being afraid.

²⁵Chief priests and elders, 21.23; chief priests and Pharisees, 21.45; disciples of the Pharisees and Herodians, 22.15f.; Sadducees, 22.23; a lawyer of the Pharisees, 22.34.

(ἐσείσθη, 21.9-11; 21.14-16,26; cf. 2.3). Matthew also distinguishes between the leaders and the people at 23.1-12 and 23.13ff. The Jewish leaders, here the 'chief priests and the elders of the people', *gathered* (συνέχθησαν), *took council together* (συνεβουλεύσαντο), *by stealth* (δόλω²⁶) in order to arrest Jesus and kill him (26.3-5). One of the main features of Matthew's presentation of the Jewish leaders is their lack of integrity. They do not come together to discern the truth nor to seek understanding, but to carry out their predetermined agenda. Thus, at the first trial, Caiaphas' questioning of Jesus is not a genuine search for the truth of the matter, but is rather a pretext for a previously stated purpose, that of killing him (12.14; 26.4). Similar to the way in which Herod was not prepared to go to Bethlehem, but sent the magi (2.8), the leaders are not prepared to go out to Jesus, but send 'a great crowd with swords and clubs' who seize him (26.47,57), thus forcing Jesus to come to them (contrast 11.28).

Then they struggle to find a case against Jesus by seeking *false* (diff. Mk. 14.55) testimony from many false witnesses (26.59f.), and the wording of these verses immediately raises the question of what is true and what is false, as well as, perhaps, different levels of truth. Eventually, two witnesses come forward, like the others. Matthew does not describe them as either *false* witnesses, or bearing *false* testimony²⁷ (diff. Mk. 14.57), and Matthew may be interpreting the saying as a passion prediction. Yet their words are not assessed for their truth value, but in order to further the leaders' own ends. A consequence of their lack of integrity is that they are unable to recognise the truth when it is declared.

Having failed to recognise the truth here, Caiaphas imposes an oath²⁸ on Jesus in order to extract the truth (26.63). The high priest thus calls on the name of God, not in a genuine, but in a manipulative way. He demands an answer, *tell us*,²⁹ then with supreme irony and lack of integrity, declares the ambiguous answer Jesus gives under oath to be blasphemy, whether or not this was legally the case. Matthew again moves the story forward with τότε, making Caiaphas' dramatic action in tearing his robes a response to Jesus' declaration. His question to the whole council is rhetorical in nature, τί ὑμῖν δοκεῖ; No member of the council is likely to disagree with their

²⁶Cf. Herod *secretly*, λάθρᾳ, 2.7.

²⁷Two witnesses are needed for legal testimony; see Deut. 17.6; 19.15; Num. 35.30; cf. 18.16.

²⁸ἐξορκίζω, a solemn oath in God's name is imposed on another in order to guarantee the truth of words or deeds (Gen. 24.3; 1 Kings 22.16).

²⁹The demands they make on Jesus continue: 'prophesy to us'; 'save yourself'; 'let him come down now' (26.63,68; 27.40), and are similar to their earlier demands to Jesus for a sign, 12.38; 16.1.

leader's opinion, and so they answer, 'He deserves death'.³⁰ This violent reaction of sentence of death and mocking is the practical outworking of their lack of integrity and lack of discernment (so too Herod's violent reaction, 2.16-18).

In our chapter 2 we noted how the events of the crucifixion are in some respects a parody of the transfiguration. Similar parallels are evident here where Jesus' exchange of words with Caiaphas can be seen as a parody of Peter's confession (16.13-20).

Chapter 16

v.16 σὺ εἶ ὁ χριστοῦς
v.16 ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος
v.17 ἀπεκάλυψέν σοι
v.18 μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν
v.28 ἕως ἄν ἴδωσιν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ
ἀνθρώπου ἐρχόμενον ἐν τῇ
βασιλείᾳ αὐτοῦ

Chapter 26

v.63 εἰ σὺ ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ
v.63 κατὰ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος
v.61 τὸν ναὸν τοῦ θεοῦ
v.64 ἀπ' ἄρτι ὁψεσθε τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ
ἀνθρώπου καθήμενον ἐκ δεξιῶν
τῆς δυνάμεως καὶ ἐρχόμενον ἐπὶ
τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ

The verbal correspondence between these passages is striking, including *χριστὸς* and *υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ*, as is the fact that *τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος* is an addition by Matthew in each case. Both passages are also heavy with christological themes. Caiaphas makes the connection between temple, Messiah and Son of God; Jesus declares to Peter that he will be the rock on which the Messiah's new temple (*ekklesia*) will be built. Both passages also link revelation, eschatology and Jesus' vindication, as shown in the Son of Man sayings (16.28; 26.64).³¹ Although Peter and Caiaphas are addressed as individuals, they have corporate responsibility: Peter as representative disciple and Caiaphas as representative Jewish leader. Of particular significance, in 16.17 Peter's declaration of the truth about Jesus is stated to be revelation given to him by the Father, in response to Jesus *asking*. In 26.63 Caiaphas' words are not given to him by God: he ironically declares the truth without knowing it, in response to his *demanding* an answer of Jesus. Although the statement declares the truth, he does not perceive it as truth, but as blasphemy.

³⁰Brown, *Death*, 837, notes that in Lev. 24.10-16, Num. 35.12, the whole community puts to death the 'blasphemer', and that therefore the whole Sanhedrin must participate in the blasphemy judgement.

³¹Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 390: in the last Son of Man saying (26.64) Jesus speaks publicly to the high priest, to announce judgement, in contrast to his earlier teaching to the disciples.

Caesarea Philippi was noted as a place of revelation, and it is the furthest place away from Jerusalem to which Matthew specifies Jesus travelled. Jerusalem and the temple were understood as traditional locations of revelation, and here, with irony, in the house of the high priest and at night, revelation is not given to the high priest and the council. Senior³² notes the similarity between 26.25,64 and 27.11. In each case someone more or less hostile to Jesus 'poses a question in terms that *reveal the answer*. ...The question of Caiaphas is not "who are you?" but "are you the Christ, the Son of God?" Hence in each case Jesus' reply *confirms* a truth already expressed by his inquisitor (although unconsciously or ironically).' The effect of these parallels, in relation to Jesus, is to draw attention to his innocence. In relation to Caiaphas, his lack of moral integrity, his lack of humility and openness to receive a gift of revelation by God, mean that he is unable to discern the truth about Jesus.

The main literary feature of the whole trial is that of irony. The Jewish authorities appear to be in control (26.57; 27.1-2), whereas Matthew has indicated that in fact everything happens according to God's will (26.56). They say they do not want to arrest Jesus during the feast, but this is then what they do (26.2,5). Although the Jewish authorities pass judgement on Jesus, he, as Son of Man, will judge them (26.64,66). Caiaphas stands to accuse Jesus (like the wicked accusers in Ps. 27.12; 35.11); this contrasts with Jesus whom they will *see, seated* on the judgement throne (26.62,64). Although they appear to be concerned with keeping the law, there are many points in the episode at which their application of the law is suspect. They are seeking *false* witnesses,³³ the high priest tears his robes,³⁴ utters blasphemy,³⁵ and the trial takes place at night (27.1).³⁶

In an ironic way, the Jewish leaders do not realize that by their actions they are part of the way prophecy is to be fulfilled.³⁷ By arranging his death, they make the prophecy about the destruction of the temple possible.³⁸ Also in a more general sense, their mocking and abuse of Jesus fulfil his role as God's servant (12.18-21). Although, as we have seen, there is no direct revelation from God, the similarity of

³²*Passion*, 227f., 176f. (italics original).

³³Forbidden in Ex. 20.16; Deut. 5.20. See also 15.19; 19.18.

³⁴Matthew (diff. Mark) puts more emphasis on the tearing, possibly reflecting the wording of Lev. 21.10 which forbids the tearing of sacred vestments; LXX, τὰ ἱμάτια οὐ διαρρήξει.

³⁵They *hear* what Jesus says as blasphemy, not as the truth, and thus they themselves are guilty of blasphemy.

³⁶Compare the ironic contrast between 'false testimony' (26.59) and 'it is not lawful' (27.6); see Heil, *Death*, 69.

³⁷Heil, *Death*, 18.

³⁸Whether the prophecy is taken to refer to Jesus' body or to the actual destruction of the temple; 23.38; 22.7; signalled by God's act in tearing the curtain (27.51).

the vocabulary and the passage as a whole to the central episode of revelation to the disciples suggests that the truth is here being revealed, albeit in an ironic way.

27.11-26 The trial before Pilate

The trial before Pilate (27.11-26) is the political means by which the Jewish leaders carry out their intentions (27.1-2).³⁹ As in the birth narrative, the issue concerns the King of the Jews, and involves discernment within a context of politics and power. Here, Jesus as the true king, and Pilate, king Caesar's representative, meet. Twice in the account of the trial, the language of revelation is used. Pilate's reaction to Jesus' lack of response to all the charges brought against him is that he 'wondered greatly' (θαυμάζειν λίαν, 27.14; λίαν being redactional). Elsewhere, θαυμάζειν is used to describe the reaction (of men, crowds or disciples) to Jesus' miracles, and frequently leads to a question concerning Jesus' identity.⁴⁰ It may be significant that on four of these occasions there is a subsequent clause, λέγοντες (three times) and ἐδόξασαν. In Pilate's case Matthew only states that he 'wondered greatly', and took the issue no further at this stage.

In a passage unique to Matthew, Pilate's wife sends him a message that she has received in a dream (27.19). The truth about Jesus is revealed to and discerned by a non-Jewish woman (cf. 15.21-28). Here Matthew does not record any response or reaction at all on the part of Pilate to this revelatory message, similar to his lack of response to his own 'wondering'. The addition of this verse also serves to confirm, by revelation, that Jesus is righteous (δικαίος). This further highlights the Jewish leaders' lack of discernment in making their choice between the righteous Jesus and the 'notorious prisoner called Barabbas'.⁴¹

Pilate's lack of discernment and response to revelation in the religious sphere, is contrasted with what we are told about his perception in the political sphere. He *knew* (ᾔδει) the reasons why the Jewish leaders had brought Jesus (envy), and he *saw* (ἰδὼν ὅτι) that a riot was beginning (27.18,24; also 27.3; 2.16).⁴² This political acumen suggests that the questions posing the choice between Barabbas and Jesus (three times, 27.17,20,21) were not a genuine search for justice. Matthew has

³⁹Jesus is both mocked and executed by Gentiles as King of the Jews (27.27-31, 32-38), but mocked as Son of God and King of Israel by the Jewish leaders. See further, Wright, *Jesus*, 552.

⁴⁰9.33 and 15.31, both redactional; 8.27; 21.20.

⁴¹Emphasised redactionally: 27.17, 'release for you Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Christ'; different Mark 15.9, 'release for you the King of the Jews'; 27.20, 'ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus'; different Mark 15.12, 'to have him release Barabbas for them instead'.

⁴²Senior, *Passion*, 33,n.5, notes, 'The participle ἰδὼν or ἰδόντες is often used in Matthew to indicate a reaction to a person or event'. He uses ἀκούσας and ἀκούσαντες in a similar way.

specifically described the custom of the release 'to the crowd' (τῷ ὄχλῳ, 27.15, a redactional addition). It is the crowd who are called upon to discern between 'Jesus⁴³ Barabbas' and 'Jesus who is called the Christ' (27.18.) Pilate washes his hands in front of the crowd, (redactional, 27.24). The hand-washing, like the tearing of robes, is a manipulative act to absolve the individual and force a collective responsibility.⁴⁴ Pilate, like Herod, received revelation indirectly through the silent Jesus and his wife's dream. His political perception is astute, but he does not exercise an obedient response to revelation or show a concern for the truth.

Matthew has carefully distinguished between 'the crowds' (possibly Galilean pilgrims) and 'the city' (21.10f.), as part of his sustained contrast between Galilee and Jerusalem. Although Matthew's use of ὄχλος is not always consistent (e.g. 26.55), his usual use of the word earlier in his gospel is positive, depicting 'potential disciples', there does seem to be a difference between the crowds who receive Jesus' teaching, and those associated with Jerusalem who are more hostile. There is a long gap between the crowds in 23.1 and those in 27.15-26 (apart from 26.55). Even if 27.20 suggests a volatile crowd swinging one way and then the other, the final decision is interpreted by Matthew as having lasting consequences for the nation of Israel. So 'all the people' (πᾶς ὁ λαὸς) accept responsibility for his death (27.25);⁴⁵ meaning not only the chief priests and elders, nor only the crowds, but Israel as the people of God, as λαός generally means, and by extension to 'our children'.⁴⁶ Israel's lack of discernment of Jesus, signalled in chapters 11 and 16, here reaches a climax.

26.67-68; 27.27-31; 27.39-44 Mockings

Following the trials is the second of Matthew's three scenes of mocking. In the first mocking by the Sanhedrin (26.67f.), they continue to make their own demands on Jesus (προφήτευσον), misunderstanding and restricting the role of a prophet to one of special knowledge.⁴⁷ They fail to understand that Jesus has in fact just given them a prophetic word about a much more significant issue, the eschatological

⁴³Not all texts include Ἰησοῦν before Βαραββᾶν in 27.16,17.

⁴⁴Brown, *Death*, 835f.; cf. Deut. 21.7.

⁴⁵Three of these four scenes are linked by the phrase τὸ αἷμα αὐτοῦ (27.4,24,25), and the acceptance of the 'blood money' by the Jewish leaders in 27.6f. may foreshadow the acceptance of 'blood' in 27.25.

⁴⁶France, *Matthew*, 226, suggests that 27.25 is better translated, 'His blood *is* on us and on our children' rather than, 'His blood *be* on us and on our children', since there is no verb in the Greek, and Pilate asserts that he *is* innocent of this man's blood.

⁴⁷Cf. Luke 7.39.

judgement to be carried out by the Son of Man (26.64),⁴⁸ as well as having predicted Peter's denial and cock crow, fulfilled in the next pericope (27.75). Although Jesus is not blindfolded (as in Mark 15.65), the issue is still raised as to who can really *see* here.

In the second mocking by the Roman soldiers (27.27-31)⁴⁹, Matthew has edited Mark's account to increase the irony of Jesus being mocked as King of the Jews, as the title on the cross confirms (27.37). The Gentile soldiers give Jesus three ironic signs of kingship, robe, crown and reed,⁵⁰ kneel (γονυπετήσαντες) before him and hail him as King of the Jews. This is in direct contrast to the magi, also Gentiles, who fall down (πέσοντες) in genuine worship of the one born King of the Jews, and offer their gifts of three treasures (2.11).

Of the three mocking scenes, the third is the most striking (27.39-44). The mockings by the Sanhedrin and by the Roman soldiers, while significant, are more ritual in nature. The mocking at the cross takes on a more sinister nature. There are parallels here with the temptation story: three temptations and three groups of people mock (passers by; chief priests, scribes and elders; robbers); the use of the same words, εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ (4.3,6; 27.40). Throughout his gospel, Matthew's main focus is on Jesus as Son of God, and in this scene the question of the relationship between suffering and sonship is raised acutely. Matthew has introduced Son of God language twice into his source (27.40,43). As Donaldson has pointed out, Matthew's presentation of Jesus as Son of God incorporates two distinct Old Testament models of Sonship, that of enthroned king and humble obedience to God's will.

The story is set in motion by Jesus' acceptance of this double role (3.13-17), and by the attempt of the Tempter to play one off against the other (4.1-11). This diabolical pressure on Jesus to abandon the one in order to achieve the other continues right up to the crucifixion.⁵¹

Those who here mock, test and tempt Jesus, set these two concepts of suffering and sovereignty in opposition to each other, thereby failing to recognise this motif in scripture and aligning themselves with the devil. In both the temptation and the

⁴⁸Matthew omits Mark's reference to beating by the guards (Mk. 14.65), and thus makes the council responsible for all the different actions; he also adds χριστέ, so heightening their ironic declaration of Jesus' identity.

⁴⁹Matthew changes Mark's συγκαλοῦσιν to his more sinister συνήγαγον.

⁵⁰Redactional; cf. sitting at the 'right hand of Power', 26.64; see also 25.34.

⁵¹'Mockers', 11.

mocking εἰ is affirmative, 'Since you are the Son of God' and not just a possibility, 'If you are the Son of God'. The same sense may also be implied at verse 43, εἰ (God) θέλει. They also fail to recognise Jesus' choice by assuming he *cannot*, rather than he *will not* save himself (οὐ δύναται, 27.42).

Significantly, the points in the gospel which are singled out as revelatory incidents, confirm both that Jesus is God's Son, and that this sonship involves suffering. This is particularly so at the baptism, immediately followed by temptation, and at Caesarea Philippi, immediately followed by Jesus' prediction of suffering and calling Peter Satan (3.17; 4.1-11; 16.16, 21-23). The same pattern can also be seen in chapter 11, where Jesus describes his intimate relationship with the Father which is followed by Matthew's inclusion of Isaiah 42.1-4,9 (his longest OT quote) about the suffering of God's servant. After revelation of Jesus as God's Son at the transfiguration, Jesus twice speaks of suffering, here of the Son of Man (11.27; 12.17-21; 17.5,9,22).

The two models of sonship, that is, 'humble faithfulness in suffering; sovereign rule in glory',⁵² come together in the following ways: Jesus' refusal to use God's power on his own behalf to rescue himself (27.40,42, parallel to the temptation to meet his own needs in 4.3, cf. 1.21); his refusal to perform a sign on demand (coming down from the cross, now, 27.40,42); and his refusal to abandon trust in God (being tempted himself to 'test' God, 27.43; 4.6). This demand for a sign, on their own terms, is answered by God in a major theophany, apparently not seen by them but seen by the centurion and others keeping watch (27.43,54). Jesus' refusal to perform a sign on the cross points to the true significance of what is taking place. 'He saved others; he cannot save himself' (27.42).⁵³

The pattern of revelation of Jesus as Son of God coupled with suffering has been part of Jesus' teaching, but is also something that required discernment to perceive. The different groups of mockers, by their very act of mocking, show their lack of discernment. Jesus' final words are neither heard nor understood correctly by the bystanders.⁵⁴ With an ironic switch of sequence, the situation is suddenly reversed. Jesus' intense suffering and death is followed by a series of cosmic events of

⁵²Donaldson, 'Mockers', 17; Verseput, 'Role and Meaning', 246.

⁵³Hooker, *Signs*, 57 (discussing Mark), 'Paradoxically, Jesus' refusal is interpreted by the evangelist as a *true* sign of the significance of what is taking place. .. Mark's readers will surely understand him to be saying that if Jesus *were* to save himself, he could not save others.'

⁵⁴Hooker, *Signs*, 106,n.46; ironically here because Elijah has already come in John, and he was put to death.

eschatological significance⁵⁵, true discernment and a declaration about Jesus as God's Son, ironically by those least expected to do so (27.54).⁵⁶ The reversal is also highlighted by the crucifier acknowledging the one crucified. Jesus' obedience shows the paradox of revelation, whereby God's power is revealed in his death.

Alternating scenes of discernment and non-discernment

From 27.51 onwards, Matthew returns in his style to that of narrator. In his record of events after Jesus' death, Matthew has included three redactional passages: the guard at the tomb (27.62-66), the bribing of the soldiers (28.11-15) and the commissioning of the disciples (28.16-20). These passages are interwoven with material from Mark, the burial of Jesus (27.57-61) and the empty tomb (28.1-10).

In the first scene involving the Jewish leaders after Jesus' death, Matthew shows how, for them, nothing has changed. They assemble, not, for instance, for repentance, but *gather* (συνήχθησαν, with its negative connotations) before Pilate, whom they call κύριε (27.62). This also takes place on the sabbath, like their previous plot to kill Jesus (12.14). Matthew does not record Jesus speaking to them the words they say they 'remember'.⁵⁷ They call Jesus a deceiver (ὁ πλάτης), and his whole life a deception (ἡ πλάνη),⁵⁸ and their assessment of what is 'better' and what is 'worse', also proves to be incorrect (28.13). They think they can make the tomb secure in two ways: by sealing the stone and setting a guard.⁵⁹ We also find an ironic juxtaposition of what Jesus said 'while he was still alive', and what they think his disciples might say after his death, i.e. 'He has risen from the dead'.

⁵⁵Καὶ ἰδοὺ; tearing of the temple curtain, shaking of the earth, splitting of rocks, opening of tombs, raising of saints (27.51f.).

⁵⁶Senior, *Passion*, 327, says of Mark 15.39, 'the centurion's confession comes as a sudden and dramatic *revelation*'; and of Matthew 27.54, that it is 'not so much a revelation as it is a *confirmation* of Jesus' identity'. However, it is still the case that in Matthew the centurion's declaration is specifically related to the cosmic and revelatory events they saw, rather than as in Mark, to Jesus' death.

⁵⁷Only indirectly at 12.40. 'Remembering' (here μιμνήσκομαι) is usually concerned with perception, as in 16.9. Matthew's usual phrase is τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ rather than μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας, as here; cf. 16.21; 17.23; 20.19; in each case different from Mark, 8.31; 9.31; 10.34. Nor did Jesus say, ἐγείρομαι ('I will rise'). His use is in the passive, suggesting that he would not raise himself, but be raised by God: ἐγεγρήναι, 16.21; ἐγεγρήσεται, 17.23, 20.19. ἐγείρομαι could also be translated, 'I am raised', which would increase further the Jewish leaders mis-assessment and reporting of what Jesus actually said. The words Jesus said, 'I will be raised', are confirmed to be true by revelation, 'He is not here; for he has been raised (ἡγέρθη; diff. RSV 'he has risen'), as *he said*' (28.6).

⁵⁸See further Stanton, 'Jesus of Nazareth'.

⁵⁹27.65, ὥς οἴδατε. RSV translation, 'Make it as secure *as you can*', including a footnote ... *as you know*. The Introduction to the RSV Interlinear, xviii, notes a similar use in Greek of 'to know how to' and 'to be able to', using both γινώσκω and οἶδα, and referring to 16.3 and 27.65. Significantly in 16.3, Jesus accuses the Pharisees and Sadducees of being able/known how to *discern* (γινώσκετε διακρίνειν) the sky, but not the 'signs of the times'.

Having labelled Jesus as a 'deceiver', the priests and elders themselves have to resort to further deception. Again they 'gather' (συναχθέντες, 28.12). Although they believe in resurrection (22.23), and they are told the truth by the guards, (ἅπαντα τὰ γινόμενα),⁶⁰ they take steps to cover it up. They resort to bribery with a *large* sum of money (contrast Judas' sum of thirty pieces of silver⁶¹). They tell the guards to say exactly what they have previously declared to be a 'worse deception' (27.64),⁶² thus proving their own role and motives to be more of a deception than before.

In a manner reminiscent of the birth narrative, Matthew here interweaves records of revelation and lack of revelation. The stories of Joseph of Arimathea and the women are each related in some way to the tomb.⁶³ Like the women who 'ministered' to Jesus in Galilee (27.55), he quietly does what is appropriate for a disciple of Jesus to do at that moment; his costly devotion in giving what he had (the tomb)⁶⁴ is immediately followed by a scene showing a complete lack of understanding about the tomb and the perpetration of a deception.⁶⁵ At the end of this passage concerning Joseph, Matthew records that two Marys 'were there sitting opposite the tomb' (27.61). Part of their following will lead them to be in the right place at the right time, to receive revelation. This is in contrast to the chief priests and Pharisees, who, after the day of Preparation, i.e. on the sabbath, gather before Pilate to plot; the women, obediently wait until after the sabbath, and then go to see the tomb (28.1).⁶⁶ 28.1-8 takes the literary shape of a revelatory experience, with similar features to those we have already observed in connection with the call narratives, including the use of revelatory language.

v.1 setting (after the sabbath; dawn)⁶⁷

v.2-3 divine confrontation (an angel descended)

v.4 fear⁶⁸

⁶⁰Similar to the phrase used by the guards at the cross, τὰ γινόμενα, who do recognize the truth.

⁶¹This may ironically suggest that it costs more to cover up the resurrection message than to arrange a crucifixion.

⁶²Cf. 26.5, where they end up doing what they said they would not do.

⁶³Matthew significantly omits Mark's note that he was 'a respected member of the council', 15.43.

⁶⁴He had *cut* the *new* tomb himself, and the cloth was *clean*, 27.59f; different Mark 15.46.

⁶⁵In a literary way, this is similar to the earlier juxtaposition of the record of one woman, who says nothing, and her costly devotion in giving what she had (ointment), immediately followed by a dispute about money and the beginnings of Judas' deception (26.6-13,14-16).

⁶⁶From Heil's narrative point of view (*Death*, 97), the resurrection may be 'promised' or 'expected' (the Marys sit facing the tomb, 'the locus of the expected resurrection of Jesus', p.94,98) as in the passion predictions (16.21; 17.22f.; 20.17-19), on the third day. However, in terms of discernment by the characters in the gospel, the resurrection was something unexpected and the passion predictions were consistently misunderstood (16.22f.; 17.23). What the women are doing here is being obedient, and, *as a result of this obedience*, place themselves in the right location.

⁶⁷Contrast Jesus' trial, at night, 26.57-75.

⁶⁸The fear of the guards is not overcome, but they 'became like dead men', 28.4.

- v.5-6 word of reassurance ('Do not be afraid'; 'Come, see')
- v.7 commission ('Go quickly and tell')
- v.8 obedient response (they departed quickly and ran).

As we noted earlier, one piece of revelation frequently follows another; so in their running with fear and joy, Jesus meets them. Although this meeting is described in a shorter way, the literary shape is similar:

- v.9 divine confrontation (Jesus meets them)
- v.10a word of reassurance ('Do not be afraid')
- v.10b commission ('Go and tell')
- v.11a obedient response (while they were going).

These two revelatory episodes are a prelude to Matthew's final account of revelation with which he ends his gospel, stressed by the double reference to 'going to Galilee' (28.7,10); thus emphasising that it is only by following Jesus that he can be seen. Again a similar pattern can be found:

- v.16 setting (the mountain in Galilee to which Jesus had directed them)
- v.17 divine confrontation (they saw him)
- v.17 doubt
- v.18 word of reassurance ('All authority')
- v.19 commission ('Go therefore')
- v.20 further reassurance ('ἰδοὺ I am with you').

Revelation calls for an obedient response. This is not specifically recorded here, but the assumption is that the disciples did as Jesus had commanded them, and, by not specifying they had done this, Matthew makes the commission something the disciples are continuing to do.

The response of the women is again contrasted with that of others - here the guards; they have both been at the tomb and experience the earthquake (27.66; 28.1); an angel appears to both (28.2-5); both fear (28.4,5,8); both go to tell others (ἀπαγγεῖλαι, 28.10,11; cf. 7,13). I suggest that the issue is not that 'the women tell the truth to the disciples, the guards tell a lie about the disciples',⁶⁹ but that they both tell the truth, which is received differently. It is the chief priests who do not discern the truth of what the guards tell them and are then obliged to perpetrate the

⁶⁹Davies and Allison, *Matthew III*, 659.

'fraud' about the disciples stealing the body which, by their own reasoning is 'worse than the first' (27.64). It is they who have become deceivers.

7.3.1 Summary

The way Matthew has interwoven these episodes at the end of his gospel reflects a pattern we have already observed: that one event of revelation, when responded to obediently, is followed by another, and that a lack of discernment, often related to a lack of moral integrity, leads in the opposite direction. Thus Joseph of Arimathea is obedient, while the Jewish leaders plan to cover up the truth; the women receive revelation in seeing, first the angel, and then Jesus himself, while the leaders perpetrate deception; the disciples, in obedience, go to Galilee, see the risen Jesus and receive his commission and promise.

This alternating sequence of events in the whole of Matthew's passion narrative has been examined by Heil⁷⁰ from a narrative-critical perspective. Such an analysis is helpful in setting contrasting scenes side by side and furthering mutual interpretation through examining the dynamic narrative structure.⁷¹ In terms of our theme, we have noted throughout the passion narrative, how an initial lack of discernment and understanding leads further along that path. In 28.11-15, in the last mention of opponents in the gospel, scholarly debate on the passage has frequently not taken sufficient notice of the location of this pericope between two others, both set in the context of and governed by revelation. All agree that 28.16-20 forms Matthew's substantial climax of his gospel, summarizing many of his themes, and that this is set in the context of revelation. I therefore suggest that 28.11-15, which ends Matthew's narrative theme of the conflict between Jesus and the Jewish leaders, also forms a summary and conclusion to his presentation of a *lack* of discernment of revelation. When viewed from this perspective, the significance of 28.11-15, is further heightened as a conclusion to the dynamic of failed discernment.

⁷⁰*Death*, esp. 2ff.

⁷¹He divides chapters 26-28 into three main sections (26.1-56; 26.57-27.54; 27.55-28.20) each of nine scenes. His tight analysis of the structure results in some strange divisions: for instance, he separates 27.55-56 (the women who witness Jesus' death) from the crucifixion scene, and 28.1 (the women going to the tomb) from the appearance of the angel. His themes of separation from Jesus' death, especially by Pilate, and the shedding of innocent blood, may not be as strong as he suggests.

7.4 Conclusion

Revelation calls for a response and for Matthew, a negative response and failure in discernment is primarily located among the Jewish leaders. Some reasons for and implications of this failure, as part of Matthew's consistently negative portrayal of the Jewish leaders, are suggested as follows.

1. Redaction criticism has drawn attention to Matthew's sharper anti-Jewish polemic, when compared with his source Mark.⁷² Here our main focus is on a theological motif, and as far as I am aware, the polemic has not been studied specifically in relation to discernment of revelation. In the last two pericopae in the gospel, Matthew places differing responses to revelation in a shocking juxtaposition. The final words in the gospel spoken by the Jewish leaders directly about Jesus, refer to him as 'that deceiver' and his life as a 'deception' (27.63f.).⁷³ In 28.11-15, Matthew counters this assertion by portraying the Jewish leaders as deceivers. Stanton has shown that Matthew was aware of the double accusation against Jesus by Jewish opposition that he was a magician and a deceiver.⁷⁴ The assessment of Jesus as a magician is reflected in chapter 12 by contrasting two ways of discerning Jesus' exorcisms - either by the prince of demons or by the Spirit of God (12.24,27f.). Matthew claims that Jesus performed exorcisms because of his special relationship with God (12.28); to deny this relationship and to attribute Jesus' exorcising power to evil, is blasphemy (12.31).⁷⁵

Polemic is also reflected in Matthew's presentation of the interpretation of scripture and its authorization. In the birth narrative we noted how the chief priests and scribes interpreted scripture correctly in the location of Bethlehem, but lacked obedience, contrasting the fulfilment of scripture Matthew narrates taking place around them (1.22; 2.15,17,23).⁷⁶ The first direct confrontation between opponents and Jesus concerns the interpretation of scripture, particularly over sabbath laws, and this again is contrasted with Matthew's longest OT fulfilment quotation (12.1-21). The issue of authority again surfaces at 21.23-27 in the temple.⁷⁷ A further lack of understanding of scripture and the nature of God takes place at the crucifixion when

⁷²Detailed by, for example, Stanton, *Gospel*, 148ff., and Kingsbury, 'Developing Conflict'.

⁷³Wright, *Jesus*, 658 notes that '(A) Messiah who died at the hands of the pagans, instead of winning YHWH's battle against them, was a deceiver, as the later rabbis (and Christians) said of Bar-Kochba'.

⁷⁴'Jesus of Nazareth', 177f.

⁷⁵See Sim, *Christian Judaism*, 135f. See also 10.25; 26,65.

⁷⁶Brown, *Birth*, 98f. notes that this is 'as if to emphasize that the whole of Jesus' life, down to the last detail, lay within God's foreordained plan'.

⁷⁷'(T)hey are in reality unable to "read" Scripture and discern its meaning.' Kingsbury, 'Developing Conflict', 61. See especially 9.3-13; 12.2-10; 15.1-3; 19.3-9; 21.16,42; 22.23-33, particularly 22.29.

the Jewish leaders tempt Jesus, in terms similar to those of the devil. Reflecting Matthew's use of stark alternatives, the Jewish leaders are not only portrayed by Matthew as cunning and dangerous, but also as fundamentally evil.⁷⁸ They demand what they would consider to be a revelatory sign (27.42f.), but have consistently failed to respond correctly to the revelation already given, and show that they are not in a relationship of trust with God. What, for Matthew, is a failure to discern scripture correctly, is coupled with a lack of concern for the truth and a lack of moral conscience and integrity. This is shown by a lack of response and obedience to Jesus' words which, for Matthew, express the will of the Father and in the frequent violent reaction to revelation (2.16-18; 12.14; cf. 14.3,10).⁷⁹

Their failure to discern the truth about Jesus, their incorrect interpretation of scripture and their lack of moral integrity has the effect of calling their authority into question. This is confirmed by Matthew in his juxtaposition of the last two pericopae in the gospel. In a revelatory context, Jesus declares that *all* authority has been given to him, the true discernor, and obedient, vindicated Son. This has the effect of legitimising Jesus' authority as well as relativising all other claims to authority; that of the Jewish leaders is flawed since they resort to bribery and deception.

2. Matthew's presentation of the failure in discernment on the part of the Jewish leaders may have had important implications for Matthew's audience.⁸⁰ Matthew's anti-Jewish polemic is frequently studied in the context of trying to locate his community situation in relation to formative Judaism.⁸¹ 28.15 has been a key verse here. What precisely Matthew meant by the term *παρὰ Ἰουδαίοις* is disputed, as well as whether this can be taken to mean his community had separated from Judaism,⁸² or remained within.⁸³ If, as we have suggested, 28.11-15 forms Matthew's conclusion to his motif of a lack of discernment, this points to an interpretation of *Ἰουδαίοις* as those who have not received the gift of God's grace, either of discernment or revelation, and this is how 'the Jews' are shockingly

⁷⁸So Kingsbury, 'Developing Conflict', 60; esp. 12.34. Luz, *Theology*, 134,n.1, 'For Matthew Judas was *not* the personification of evil in mankind. If anyone played this part it was more likely the high priests and Pharisees.'

⁷⁹This too may be the fate of the disciples and those who pass on the revelation of Jesus (10.17f., 28).

⁸⁰Brown, *Birth*, 47,n.7, notes that Matthew's gospel was 'not primarily intended to convert or change hostile Pharisee authorities, but to give confirming, defensive arguments to Jewish Christians who had been bombarded by Jewish arguments against Jesus'.

⁸¹In the Introduction, we drew attention to the difficulties involved in this exercise.

⁸²For discussion see Stanton, 'Origin and Purpose', 1910-1921, referring to 28.15 on 1914.

⁸³So Sim, *Christian Judaism*, 149f.

described.⁸⁴ The juxtaposition of these two final pericopae draws attention to and justifies this separation, confirmed by revelation.⁸⁵

The revelatory words of Jesus in the great commission also serve to legitimate a more universal understanding of the significance of Jesus' death, signalled by cosmic events (27.51f.). In contrast to the Jewish leaders who remain in the city (28.11) and are concerned about the governor, the disciples are to go to *all* nations, who now replace 'the crowds' as potential disciples.⁸⁶ The scene legitimates a move away from Jerusalem as the prime location for revelation. This perspective is evident in Matthew's record of the magi, as Gentiles who have received and been obedient to revelation. They may also be seen by Matthew as representing the beginning of the eschatological pilgrimage of the nations, bringing gifts and offering right worship (8.11-12; Is. 60; Ps. 72). The worship of Jesus is also legitimated in the context of revelation. Herod, and by association the Jewish leaders, lack true worship. Genuine worship of Jesus, both as *genuine* and *of Jesus* takes place in and is justified by an event of revelation.

Examples of division generated by differing responses to revelation and signalled in the birth narrative, result in separation outside the story world of the gospel itself. In a similar way, the non-occurrence of the mission of the twelve during Jesus' lifetime (they are not sent out in chapter 10) and Jesus' commission of the eleven at the end, implies that mission will take place outside narrated time. This is the situation 'to this day' (μέχρι τῆς σήμερον [ἡμέρας]), where Matthew addresses his audience directly. This sharp division at the end of his gospel suggests a situation for Matthew's audience of separation from the Jewish parent body.

3. As well as offering an explanation of the Jewish leaders' failure in discernment, Matthew consistently portrays them as negative examples for his readers. From a redaction point of view, Matthew's presentation of the Jewish leaders has been assessed in various ways. They serve both as an effective foil to the majesty and

⁸⁴Only used elsewhere by Matthew in the phrase 'King of the Jews', 2.2; 27.11,29,31, all spoken by Gentiles. In 28.15 there is no definite article.

⁸⁵Hooker, *Not Ashamed*, 75, notes, in connection with the bribing of the guards, that for Mark, belief in the resurrection is an act of faith, whereas for Matthew it is a 'fact whose truth cannot be denied - except by those who deliberately refuse to acknowledge it'.

⁸⁶Some form of *πάντες* is repeated four times in 28.18-20: *all* authority, *all* nations, teaching *all* Jesus had commanded, *all* days. This points to and legitimates an unrestricted mission. See Moberly, *Bible, Theology*, 193f.; and discussion by Neusner, 'The Absoluteness of Christianity', 29, on how for Christianity salvation encompasses all of history, and for Judaism sanctification involves Israel in particular.

dignity of Jesus,⁸⁷ as well as an antithesis of the disciples.⁸⁸ According to Matthew, this lack of discernment has eschatological consequences. Along with his heightened anti-Jewish polemic, Matthew's heightened sense of the eschatological and apocalyptic dimension is reflected in the typical sharp distinction between the elect and the wicked and the strong sense of the identity of believers versus non-believers, described in terms of judgement, soon to take place, and punishment of the wicked. Those who have rejected the Son have rejected the last chance, for there will be no others (3.11-13; 21.33-46; 24.36-25.46). The followers of Jesus are the ones who have received revelation concerning the Son. 'Outsiders' fail to discern, frequently expressed in terms of hearing and seeing, who Jesus is, because they have not been given revelation from God. Although the Jewish leaders are frequently designated in this role as wicked and due for judgement, the 'apocalyptic viewpoint in Matthew is consistently used as a motivation to righteousness'⁸⁹ for believers also. This is consistent with Matthew's view that discernment of the truth about Jesus is the basis for inclusion in the new people of God.

Revelation thus has a legitimating and persuasive function for Matthew's audience. The reconstitution of the people of God, not limited to the Jewish *ethnos*, is justified, negatively by the Jewish leaders' failure to discern the truth about Jesus, and positively by the mission to both Gentiles and Jews. The function of apocalyptic, with its stress on revelation to the elect, combined with anti-Jewish polemic, serves to further Matthew's theological perspective of separation as part of the self-definition of his audience.

⁸⁷Senior, *Passion*, 338.

⁸⁸Van Tilborg, *Jewish Leaders*, 26,98. He also stresses the distance between Matthew's community and Judaism, and concludes that Matthew was not a Jew; p.171.

⁸⁹Hagner, 'Apocalyptic Motifs', 75.

Chapter 8

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In the last chapter, we discussed the ending of Matthew's gospel, and this brings us to the end of our study. I shall now summarise the work as a whole and draw some broader conclusions. In theology generally, it is fair to claim that the subject of discernment of revelation has not received a great deal of scholarly attention. The present study has described and analysed this motif in Matthew's gospel.

In the Introduction we saw how Matthew's gospel was located within both a literary tradition as well as an historical milieu of claims to revelation. In chapter 2, by tracing discernment of revelation as a significant motif running through the gospel, I showed that this is a pervasive concern of the evangelist. The presence of this motif draws attention to specific moments of discernment, as well as to its outworking in terms of moral obedience and suffering. Discernment is thus not an isolated theme; rather, it relates closely to other aspects of Matthew's theological dynamic.

In chapters 3 and 4 we turned to examine discernment of revelation in Matthew's literary background in scriptural and early Jewish texts. Our analysis of selected episodes of discernment in the OT traditions, particularly those associated with Abraham and Moses, as well as the wisdom traditions, showed that revelation is given to certain gifted people. At both individual and corporate levels, discernment is exercised and expressed in a moral life of obedience to God's commands.

In our examination of some early Jewish literature relevant to discernment, we looked at Daniel, select Qumran texts, Sirach and *1 Enoch*. Each writing demonstrated a relationship with previously given, now written, revelation, and used inspired interpretation as a way of making past revelation contemporary. Claims to revelation thus legitimated a particular interpretation of the written record, and also justified a group identity, usually involving a heightened sense of moral obedience and various degrees of separation from the parent body. Certain language was frequently used, both in respect of describing discernment (seeing, hearing, understanding), and differentiating between those considered to be inside or outside of a particular group (wise, seeing, righteous, holy; foolish, blind, sinners, wicked). Such background and analogies are important since they enable us to see that discernment of revelation is a feature of Matthew's tradition, and we are thus able to

understand better his use of similar motifs. The following general similarities and differences are relevant to our topic.

Matthew demonstrates continuity with the scriptural tradition in the way God relates to his people. Scripture provided categories for understanding, and claims to subsequent revelation needed to be consistent with scripture. This is not a matter of literary dependence, so much as analogy and resonance with ideas and concepts. For Matthew, Jesus is both part of that continuing tradition, and, at the same time, God's final and authoritative revelation. This is consistent with Matthew's understanding of the fulfilment of God's will in the dawning of the kingdom of heaven with the coming of his Son (1.1 - 4.16).

Matthew's presentation of Jesus as a gifted individual who receives and mediates revelation, is not therefore unprecedented: Abraham, Moses, Solomon, Ben Sira, the Teacher of Righteousness, Daniel and Enoch were all gifted in discernment. This is the case whether Jesus is viewed primarily in the prophetic tradition (Wright), the wisdom tradition (Borg), or the scribal tradition (Orton). This assessment also provides a balance to the well-known emphasis on Jesus as the new Moses (Allison), by setting Jesus in the broader perspective of wisdom and apocalyptic traditions.

We have also seen how claims to revelation create division: the grace of revelation established Israel in the truth as God's covenant people, over against other peoples. Various interpretations of the now written narrative of this relationship were justified by appeal to God-given revelation. Competing claimants used rhetorical language to persuade others to recognise, through a process of testing, that a claim to revelation was legitimate. This use of polemic and rhetoric had the effect of encouraging 'insiders' and denigrating 'outsiders'. This partly explains Matthew's emphasis on the moral responsibility of responding to and living in the light of such revelation, and on discernment as part of that way of life. Such moral emphasis is also part of his apocalyptic perspective, shown particularly in his doctrine of reward and punishment.

Having thus explored the background, in chapter 5 we examined Matthew's presentation of Jesus as the true discernor by means of a detailed analysis of 11.25-30. Here language signalling revelation abounds, and we saw how these verses form a decisive turning point in the gospel, following Israel's rejection of Jesus. Here Matthew establishes his christological claim for Jesus as God's Son having intimate

and reciprocal knowledge of God. As the Son and the source of true wisdom, he reveals the Father and is someone the truth about whom needs to be discerned.

In chapter 6, we discussed Matthew's presentation of Peter especially by means of a detailed analysis of 16.13-20. As a leading disciple, Peter forms a link with Jesus as the first to discern the truth about him. As representative of discipleship in general, Peter shows that discernment is something to be learned in the context of Jesus' continuing presence. Peter's failure as a disciple serves as both an encouragement and a warning. Discernment is on-going and costly: it is also fragile and necessitates continuing obedience.

In chapter 6, and especially in chapter 7, we continued to pursue our study of the dynamics of discernment and how revelation calls for a response. Here we found that discernment of revelation is quickly followed by subsequent episodes of revelation. By contrast, a lack of discernment leads to further inability to discern, and frequently to a hostile reaction to the bearer of revelation. For Matthew this type of negative response is often combined with a failure of morality and is primarily located among the Jewish leaders. This dynamic of discernment is consistent with Matthew's softening of Mark's harsh portrait of the disciples. He does not exonerate them completely, and this suggests that discernment, here expressed in terms of 'understanding', is partial and deepens over time.

In chapters 5 to 7 we thus demonstrated how discernment of revelation is a significant motif in Matthew's presentation of Jesus, Peter, the disciples and opponents. We also suggested some possible reasons for this, and these can be summarised as follows:

1. The authority of Jesus

The conviction that Jesus is the Son of God is one of the main assertions of Matthew's gospel. The OT records a theological dynamic: that although God can and does operate without human mediation, the normal pattern is that he acts and speaks through the agency of human beings (e.g. prophet, priest, king) who are called by him for that purpose. We have seen how Matthew's gospel is located in this theological tradition of revelation, as well as in an historical milieu of competing claims to revelation. In this context, Matthew's claim that Jesus was both recipient and true discernor of revelation is related to his claim regarding Jesus' authority. It is because Jesus, as the Son, has complete and intimate knowledge of God as Father, that he has the authority to reveal God (11.27; 28.18).

This assertion has the effect, not only of legitimating Matthew's claim for Jesus, but also of relativising all other claims to such authority. Matthew claims that Jesus is not only one revealer among many in a tradition of revealers, but that he is bearer of God's final and authoritative revelation. The observed recurring pattern of revelation, testing and obedience also serves to legitimate *Jesus* as God's Son. The more acute the testing, the greater the discernment; and the more significant the revelation, the greater the testing. This motif resonates with Matthew's use of the literary device of comparison (12.6,41,42). All of Israel's life was understood to have originated at Sinai: election, Torah and covenant, mediated by Moses. Thus, for Matthew to assert that Jesus was greater than Moses was a very radical proposition (17.1-13).

If Matthew's gospel serves to demonstrate and legitimate Jesus as God's Son, it also shows Jesus as a model and exemplar of discernment. Matthew's portrayal of Jesus as Son in a relationship where he received God's gift of revelation at the beginning of the gospel, is not incompatible with moments which give that relationship new definition and depth: moments of testing, attentive receptiveness and sustained obedience.¹ If this is a pattern for Jesus, the same is also the case for disciples: they too become children of God as Father and their on-going discernment takes place in the context of the *ekklesia* and Jesus' continuing presence. Christology and ecclesiology are intimately related. The recognition of a pattern of discernment and testing in the life of Jesus, sets up a similar expectation for the lives of disciples. Such a theodicy serves in part to explain their suffering and persecution (10.17f.; 13.21; 16.24-28).

2. *Literary strategy*

If Matthew's christological emphasis is highlighted by a more traditional redaction-critical approach, literary criticism draws attention to different dimensions. One of the themes noted in our review of Matthew's literary traditions was that revelation is not easily discerned. This may involve a lack of recognition that a particular event or encounter *is* revelation, as well as a failure to understand the meaning of that revelation. Disclosure and hiddenness are both integral to revelation and this means that discernment is needed to understand it. Matthew uses stories in his gospel in order to persuade his readers to see things differently; specifically to understand and accept that Jesus is the Son of God. Thus, how characters respond to Jesus becomes paradigmatic for his readers.²

¹Moberly, *Bible, Theology*, 223.

²See Edwards, 'Uncertain Faith'; Donaldson, 'Guiding Readers'.

We have seen how Matthew uses the story of Peter and stories of other individuals to convey particular moments of encounter with Jesus. This initial recognition of the truth about Jesus is often followed by further discernment and the development of its implications; these two are mutually reinforcing. The grace of revelation received creates an obligation to moral perfection and obedience. This is expressed not only in terms of obeying the law, now seen in relation to Jesus' teaching, but also in terms of faith (24.36). The disciples are ineffective without the continuing presence of Jesus (14.24; 17.14-18; 26.36-46,69-75; 28.20). In Matthew's apocalyptic outlook, the promise of reward and threat of punishment are double-edged motivators of on-going moral behaviour (7.21-23; 25.31-46).

In terms of discernment, opponents, especially Jewish leaders, are consistently portrayed as negative examples. They lack a concern for the truth, as well as conscience and moral integrity (2.1-6; 12.9-14; 16.1; 26.3-5). They have a hostile reaction to revelation, their understanding of the scriptures is defective, and they are hypocrites because they teach but do not act (2.16; 21.23-27; 23.2f.). Matthew's vilification of those 'outside' includes their failures in discernment, such as blindness and hardness of heart (15.12-14, redactional). Above all, they fail to recognise the truth about Jesus: his true origins and the true source of his authority and power (13.53-58; 12.22-28,46-50; 22.41-45).

Matthew also uses a recognised apocalyptic perspective, combined with that of an alternative, eschatological wisdom, to demonstrate to 'insiders' that circumstances are not what they seem.³ Jesus' teaching concerns a radical, alternative, eschatological wisdom and lifestyle, where the poor, meek and persecuted are blessed, the first are last, to lose life is to gain it (5.3-12; 19.30; 20.16; 16.24-27). As a corollary, 'insiders' are given a different way of assessing what and who is true or false (7.15-20; 24.23-28). Although opponents may claim to know who Jesus is, where he is from and the source of his power, 'insiders' know differently (13.53-58). Such knowledge reinforces a sense of common identity, not shared with outsiders.

3. *Sociological dimension*

We have seen how God's ways are mysterious, revelation involves hiddenness, and claims to revelation create division. The acknowledgement of Jesus as Son of God established the identity of Matthew's *ekklesia* over against other groups in contemporary Judaism. Discernment thus has a significant social dimension.

³Borg, *Meaning*, 69, notes that Jesus 'spoke differently because he had seen differently' and his use of aphorisms and parables as 'perception altering forms of speech'.

The division brought about by revelation serves as an explanation of Israel's rejection of Jesus. We have seen how it was not foreign to Matthew's tradition to ascribe to God the reason for people's lack of discernment, as part of the divine will.⁴ For Matthew, those who were once God's people are now no longer God's people, because they failed to discern the truth concerning Jesus and respond appropriately (13.53-58). Revelation thus legitimates Matthew's new 'community' of God's people and their separation from the parent body.⁵ While redaction critics may see the 'hardening of Israel' motif retrojected into the gospel material to explain Jesus' failed ministry,⁶ it can also be seen as part of the larger motif that competing claims about the truth of revelation bring division. Matthew expressed both continuity with the original revelation given to Israel and a new, different revelation given in Jesus.

Social identity is defined reciprocally, and if readers of Matthew's gospel acknowledge Jesus' identity and authoritative status, this would result in a change of perception of their identity also. If Jesus' identity is not defined in terms of place of origin, occupation or kinship (so 13.53-58) neither is this the case for Matthew's audience. Jesus' exclusive 'come to me' is an invitation to a new allegiance which relativises all other allegiances of an ethnic, family or social nature. This does not mean that such associations are eradicated, but that they are no longer of prime importance. Foremost is a matter of becoming child-like, coming to Jesus and accepting the gift of the grace of revelation, which takes eschatological precedence.

We can thus see how response to revelation causes division, but it remains unclear how such a theological perspective was actually translated 'on the ground'. Here we reflect one of the areas of most significant current debate concerning Matthew's gospel: his community situation in relation to current Judaism. Was Matthew responding to an already given situation of separation, or giving a theological rationale in a developing situation of hostilities?⁷ Bearing in mind that theological agenda and historical model are not necessarily co-terminus,⁸ and in so far as it is legitimate to make deductions from theological claims to community situation, then

⁴McLaughlin, 'Their Hearts Were Hardened', 24.

⁵Matthean redactional references to 'their synagogues': 4.23; 9.35; 12.9; 13.54.

⁶E.g., Lindars, *Apologetic*, 154-67.

⁷'Commentators' views on the relation of Matthew's community to Judaism may be summarised as follows: a Christian Jewish group, within a Jewish context: Davies and Allison, Gnilka, Harrington, Levine, Overman, Saldarini; some sort of break had taken place: Garland, Hagner, Hare, Kingsbury, Luz, Schnackenburg, Sim, Stanton, Strecker; Matthew was a gentile: Meier, van Tilborg.

⁸Lieu, 'Parting', 109. Rowland, 'Moses and Patmos', 286, refers to Jesus' conflict with the Pharisees in Matthew: 'the stories could have been merely a rhetorical device which tell us absolutely nothing about the life of the community and everything about the literary strategy of the author'.

Matthew's exclusive claim for Jesus' authority points to a situation of (probably recent) separation from his Jewish parent body. The special Matthean material at the beginning of his gospel shows how the coming of Jesus brings separation; and this foreshadows a separation from *the Jews* at the end (28.15). Examples of the division brought by revelation have been narrated throughout the gospel and finally result in separation *outside* the story world of the gospel itself.⁹ Matthew's addition of the birth narratives, setting the gospel in the context of God's history, and the addition of a great commission into *all the world*, also suggest a universal horizon.

The lack of clarity and consensus about Matthew's community does not mean that a search for possible gospel audiences and social locations is unwarranted, since historical and social scientific questions can still be asked. Yet we also need to be aware that such investigations can risk reducing the text to the status of a by-product of community. Matthew's gospel is from or for individual communities, as well as a primary witness to eschatological revelation. Matthew's claim for the authority and final revelation of God in Jesus may well have made his theology marginal to Judaism; his insistence on the validity of the law and the OT traditions may well have made his work marginal to an increasingly Gentile church.¹⁰ But it does not necessarily follow that Matthew wrote his gospel to effect an ecumenical goal or vision:

In one sense, then, our Gospel, as we interpret it, is a monument to a failed hope: its ecumenical goal, the unity of Jewish and Gentile Christian, was not achieved.¹¹

For Matthew, the question is not a matter of recognising and accepting differences, but of discerning God's truth for the world. Whether Matthew viewed his work as sectarian or ecumenical in outlook, his primary purpose in writing was to bear witness to God's truth for the world in Jesus. Revelation remains a gift of God's grace. His lack of precision about who is 'inside' or 'outside' reflects his belief in the hidden presence of the kingdom of heaven (13.24-30; 25.31ff.).

For further study

This study has explored the subject of discernment of revelation by focusing on one particular work. The same theme could profitably be explored in other NT writings where, for instance, each of the gospels has its own particular emphases. For Mark, discernment and faith are needed to penetrate the mysterious secret of Jesus'

⁹Kupp, *Presence*, 102.

¹⁰Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*.

¹¹Davies and Allison, *Matthew III*, 727; endorsed by Senior, 'Directions', 18f.

identity, if revelation in Jesus is not to remain hidden.¹² Luke's programmatic scene of Jesus at Nazareth draws attention to the gift of the Holy Spirit bringing eschatological healing in terms of perception (sight to the blind), and also foreshadows salvation, joy and assurance for all people.¹³ John's gospel is more overtly concerned with knowing the truth (14.6; 18.37f.) and human destiny is more exclusively related to acceptance or rejection of Jesus. Discernment of Jesus as the revealer from heaven is set in the context of a cosmological struggle between good and evil, light and dark.¹⁴

In the writings of Paul we find some similar concerns to those of Matthew. Paul's letters are of a different genre to the gospels, and reflect the self-conscious writing of a declared author. Paul appeals to revelation to justify his apostolic authority and teaching (1 Cor. 9.1f.; 15.1-8; 2 Cor. 4.6; Gal. 1.11-17). His letters also show a concern with on-going discernment, especially in relation to distinguishing between true and false prophets and prophecies (1 Cor. 12.8-10; 14.29; 1 Thes. 5.19-22; 2 Thes. 2.10-12). We see Paul, like Matthew, wrestling with the relation of new revelation to that previously given in the Jewish scriptures and traditions. Paul also addresses the issue of why many Jews have rejected the gospel, and again like Matthew, finds faith in Jesus critical (Rom. 10.9,13; 11.20). Both also show that spiritual discernment is needed to understand the paradoxical nature of God's will and wisdom made known in the 'foolishness' of the crucified Christ (1 Cor. 1.18-25; Matt. 16.21-28). Following on from Bockmuehl's study of revelation and mystery, this theme could be explored further in terms of how Paul uses discernment of revelation as a persuasive device.¹⁵

Conclusion

The NT writings understand that revelation begins with God and what God has done in Christ. The revelation of divine grace in Christ requires a response and is frequently misunderstood. Response to, or discernment of, revelation has a moral dimension, and there is an on-going interaction between discernment and discipleship. Discernment is not thereby reduced to an understanding of moral truths, but remains a matter of response to a transcendent, mysterious God, knowledge of whom is mediated by gifted individuals, paradigmatically, Jesus himself.

¹²See Marcus, 'Epistemology'; Johnson, 'Blind Man from Bethsaida' and 'Blind Bartimaeus'.

¹³Hamm, 'Sight to the Blind'; Culpepper, 'Seeing the Kingdom'.

¹⁴Thompson, 'God's Voice'.

¹⁵See Alexander, 'Sixtieth Part'; de Boer, 'Paul and Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology'.

We have seen in relation to Matthew's gospel how a text can work in a persuasive way in its own right,¹⁶ without a prior Christian claim to be revelation (even if later his gospel itself became accepted as part of revelatory tradition). In the Christian tradition scripture bears witness to God and to the revelation of God in Jesus. To those who engage with and are engaged by scripture, it continues to challenge readers as to where they stand.¹⁷ Matthew reflects both literary and conceptual continuities with his scriptural tradition, while at the same time demonstrating something radical and new in Jesus, the true discernor who, according to Matthew, is God's final and authoritative revelation for all peoples.

¹⁶Cf. Schnelle, *History and Theology*, 11.

¹⁷... the biblical way of understanding reality with its centre and source in a gracious God who does not overwhelm us with indubitable certainties but woos us out of our estrangement with the appeal of his costly grace'; Newbigin, 'Certain Faith', 350.

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