

The Missional Audience of the Gospel of Matthew

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THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW reflects an intense concern for mission, not only in the final command to “disciple all nations” (28:19-20) but also in an extended discourse (9:35–10:42) and other prominent features of the narrative. Although this concern is evident to casual readers as well as scholars, it has not yet received sufficient attention in scholarly debates about the audience expected by the Gospel’s author.¹ Often scholars have discussed the expected audience and the concern for mission as though they were unrelated issues, a tendency encouraged by the long-standing assumption that the Gospel was written in and for the same local community.² This “local-community hypothesis” has functioned to increase confidence

¹ I will call the final redactor “the author” regardless of the extent to which he made use of pre-existing traditions. Decisions to incorporate traditional material, like other authorial decisions, reflect conscious or unconscious assumptions about the people who would hear and interpret the text (i.e., the “expected audience”). Since the author chose to remain anonymous, “Matthew” is used here as a designation for the text, not the author. “The Gospel” is also an abbreviated title for the text.

² George D. Kilpatrick (*The Origins of the Gospel According to St. Matthew* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1946] 130) helped pioneer this reading strategy for Matthew, drawing on Burnett H. Streeter’s claim (*The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins* [London: Macmillan, 1924] 12) that “[t]he Gospels were written in and for different churches.” Richard Bauckham (“For Whom Were the Gospels Written?” in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* [ed. Richard Bauckham; Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998] 9-48, esp. 13-22) challenges this long-standing “consensus” as never having been proven, only assumed. An exception to the tendency to address mission and audience as separate issues is Martin Hengel (*The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Collection and Origin of the Canonical Gospels* [Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000] 77), who mentions that Matt 28:16-20 suggests a widespread audience for the Gospel. Also see Daniel W. Ulrich, “True Greatness: Matthew 18 in Its Literary Context” (Ph.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1997; available from University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, MI) 62-65; and Daniel W. Ulrich and Janice Fairchild, *Caring like Jesus: The Matthew 18 Project* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 2002) 13-21.

in inferences about the expected audience, since the author would have known his³ own community well. Unfortunately, like many interpretive frameworks, the local-community hypothesis has tended to obscure evidence that does not fit within the frame.

Critics of the local-community hypothesis have also neglected the theme of mission, even though attention to it could strengthen their arguments. Richard Bauckham has argued tellingly that the widespread circulation of the Gospel of Mark would have led the authors of Matthew and Luke to expect similar results and that this expectation was realistic in light of the networks of communication and hospitality that existed among first-century Christians.⁴ Nevertheless, these arguments have been too easily dismissed owing to Bauckham's apparent neglect of the evidence within each Gospel.⁵ External evidence can show that historical conditions favored the rapid and widespread circulation of a text like Matthew, but that point is already certain because it is a logical prerequisite for the circulation that occurred.⁶ The more difficult questions have to do with authorial intent: How

³ Elaine Wainwright ("The Gospel of Matthew," in *Searching the Scriptures*, vol. 2, *A Feminist Commentary* [ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza; New York: Crossroad, 1994] 635-77, esp. 637, 639) observes the androcentric perspective of the text. Although the author's gender is uncertain, I will use masculine pronouns for convenience.

⁴ Bauckham, "For Whom?" 12-13, 26-30; also Michael B. Thompson, "The Holy Internet: Communication between Churches in the First Christian Generation," in *Gospels for All Christians* (ed. Bauckham), 49-70. Bauckham ("For Whom?" 31) asserts in passing that Matt 28:18-20 implies awareness of "a worldwide Christian mission."

⁵ David C. Sim ("The Gospels for All Christians: A Response to Richard Bauckham," *JSNT* 84 [2001] 3-27, esp. 9, 16) objects to the neglect of internal evidence. Philip F. Esler ("Community and Gospel in Early Christianity: A Response to Richard Bauckham's *Gospels for All Christians*," *SJT* 51 [1998] 235-48, esp. 241) counters Bauckham's point regarding the Marcan precedent by suggesting that the authors of Matthew and Luke may have wanted to avoid circulation lest their work be "savaged" in the same way that they had treated Mark! It is unlikely that they had such a negative view of their work. Warren Carter (*Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000] 560 n. 73) objects that Bauckham "seems to confuse [the Gospels'] subsequent effect with their initial focus." Although confusion on such a basic point seems unlikely (see Bauckham "For Whom?" 26), Bauckham's neglect of internal evidence has left him open to this charge.

⁶ Edouard Massaux (*Influence de l'Évangile de saint Matthieu sur la littérature chrétienne avant saint Irénée* [Louvain, 1950; rev. ed. BETL 75; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1986]) documents the early reception of Matthew by citing early allusions beginning with the letters of Ignatius of Antioch, ca. 107 C.E. Helmut Koester (*Synoptische Überlieferung bei den Apostolischen Vätern* [TU 65; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1957] 24-61) denies that Ignatius and other second-century authors had a written Gospel, arguing that apparent allusions are the result of common oral traditions or OT backgrounds. Wolf-Dietrich Köhler (*Die Rezeption des Matthäusevangeliums in der Zeit vor Irénäus* [WUNT 2.24; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987] 73-96, 525) tends to agree with Massaux but offers a more nuanced analysis, allowing for various explanations of possible allusions. Although individual allusions are debatable, there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate the widespread circu-

widely did the author expect the Gospel to circulate and by what means? The text itself provides the best available evidence for answering those questions.⁷

I agree with Bauckham in rejecting the local-community hypothesis but not with his claim that the Gospel of Matthew was written for “all Christians.”⁸ An analysis of evidence related to the theme of mission will show that the author expected missionaries⁹ to proclaim and teach the Gospel wherever they were welcomed in the Greek-speaking world. It is unlikely that the author expected “all Christians” to welcome these missionaries but very likely that he expected a large and expanding audience for the Gospel. Although he may have had ties to one or more local communities, they should not be equated with the expected audience.

I. References to a Missional Audience

The Gospel contains both explicit and implicit references to its expected audience. Among the explicit references are two similar predictions in Matt 24:14 and 26:13 as well as the final command in 28:19-20. The repetition of “all nations” in 24:14 and 28:19 suggests that these passages should be read in connection with each other.

A. Predictions (24:14; 26:13)

In Matt 24:14, as part of a series of revelations concerning the end-times, Jesus declares that prior to the *parousia*, “this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed in the whole inhabited world as a testimony to all nations” (καὶ κηρῦ-

lation and popularity of Matthew in the early second century. Also see Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990) 273, 315; W. D. Davies and Dale Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (3 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: Clark, 1988, 1991, 1997) 1. 130-31.

⁷ Patristic testimonies that the Gospel was written in Hebrew (or Aramaic) by the apostle Matthew in Judea for a Jewish audience are dubious from the perspective of most modern scholars. See Davies and Allison, *Matthew* 1. 7-58; also Margaret M. Mitchell, “Patristic Counter-Evidence to the Claim that ‘The Gospels Were Written for All Christians,’” *NTS* 51 (2005) 36-79. All of the patristic sources are probably dependent on Papias as quoted in Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.

⁸ In the context of an article sharply criticizing other scholars for their unproven assumptions, Bauckham’s quick dismissal of the possibility that non-Christians were among the expected audience of any of the Gospels is glaring. It also contradicts the more careful discussion by Bauckham’s co-author, Richard Burridge. See Bauckham, “For Whom?” 10; Richard A. Burridge, “About People, by People, for People: Gospel Genre and Audiences,” in *Gospels for All Christians* (ed. Bauckham), 113-45, esp. 130-44.

⁹ A missionary is defined here as someone who traveled in order to teach or proclaim a gospel. A Matthean missionary is one who proclaimed or taught the Gospel of Matthew or traditions typical of that Gospel.

χθήσεται τοῦτο τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ οἰκουμένῃ εἰς μαρτύριον πᾶσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν). In the second prediction (26:13), Jesus declares concerning the woman who anointed him: “Whenever this gospel is proclaimed in all the world (ὅπου ἐὰν κηρυχθῆ τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦτο ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ κόσμῳ), what she has done will be told in memory of her.” Repetition suggests emphasis, and the attribution to Jesus shows that the prediction is reliable from the author’s perspective.

The references to “the whole inhabited world” (24:14) and “the whole world” (26:13) show that “all nations” in 24:14 and 28:19 cannot simply mean people of various nationalities living in or near the author’s home city. The author apparently expected “this gospel [of the kingdom]” to be proclaimed to an ethnically diverse audience throughout the known world. Although the extent of the author’s geographical knowledge is difficult to determine, he was fluent in Greek, the *lingua franca* of the eastern Roman Empire. The empire facilitated and sometimes forced extensive travel, so the author was likely to have encountered people representing various parts of the empire. The author was also well versed in Jewish Scriptures and would have known something about the nations mentioned there. Thus, he would have been familiar with most of the ethnic groups that had been incorporated into the Greek and Roman empires.

If these interpretations of “all nations” and “the whole inhabited world” are correct, then the meaning of “this gospel” becomes crucial for understanding how widely the author expected his work to circulate. The close relationship between Matt 24:14 and 26:13 suggests that “this gospel” (26:13) is an abbreviated reference to “this gospel of the kingdom” (24:14). “This gospel” in 26:13 must refer to more than an account of the woman’s actions, since 24:14 is a general reference to the church’s proclamation before the *parousia*. The word εὐαγγέλιον (“gospel”) occurs just two other times in Matthew, both in summary statements about Jesus “proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom” (4:23; 9:35); therefore, εὐαγγέλιον can encompass both Jesus’ own message and the church’s message about him. What is especially striking about the predictions in 24:14 and 26:13 is the author’s use of the demonstrative adjective τοῦτο, which specifies that the gospel in question is the one immediately at hand. In the absence of any other explanation, listeners to the Gospel of Matthew would have been likely to associate “this gospel [of the kingdom]” with the narrative they were hearing at the time.¹⁰ If the author sought to convey that idea, then he expected the Gospel of Matthew to reach a widespread audience.

A possible objection to this interpretation is the anachronism involved in having Jesus refer to a text that had not yet been composed, but such quirks are typical

¹⁰ Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 130; Graham N. Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (London: Clark, 1992; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993) 17.

of Matthew. Many sayings attributed to Jesus seem more relevant for the audience of the story than for the audience *within* the story.¹¹ These proleptic sayings are part of a larger rhetorical strategy for including the Gospel's audience among the people being taught by Jesus.¹² In extended speeches, the person reciting the Gospel could shift subtly from the role of the narrator to that of Jesus, and listeners could assume the role of disciples. Taken together, these literary devices would have encouraged listeners to imagine that Jesus was addressing them directly. Listeners would have been expected to ignore the anachronisms that resulted from this technique.

A second possible objection is that first-century Christians would not have used εὐαγγέλιον with reference to a written text. In Mark and the letters of Paul, εὐαγγέλιον refers to oral proclamation. In all four Matthean uses, it appears with the verb κηρύσσω ("proclaim"), suggesting that oral proclamation is still in view. Nevertheless, these terms do not preclude a reference to the oral performance of a scripted narrative. For example, in 2 Chr 36:22-23 LXX, Cyrus commands that an edict be proclaimed (κηρύξαι) throughout the Persian Empire both in speech and in writing. The edict narrates that "the Lord of heaven has given me all of the kingdoms of the earth and has commanded me to build a house for him in Jerusalem." In Acts 15:21, James observes that "Moses for many generations in every city has had those who proclaim him [τοὺς κηρύσσοντας αὐτόν] by reading aloud each sabbath in the synagogues."

Helmut Koester has argued that, prior to 150 C.E., the extant uses of εὐαγγέλιον all refer to oral proclamation as opposed to a written text.¹³ His thesis is debatable;¹⁴ but, even if it were certain, it would not exclude the possibility that εὐαγγέλιον was used by some Christians in the late first century as a designation for a scripted narrative. Those who circulated the Gospel of Mark must have had some name for it, and εὐαγγέλιον would have been an obvious choice based on the opening line: ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ("The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ" [Mark 1:1]). Moreover, if the author of Matthew thought of Mark as a εὐαγγέλιον, it would help to explain the use of τοῦτο ("this") in Matt 24:14 and 26:13. The author's extensive use of Mark suggests that he considered it valuable but inadequate. The predictions in 24:14 and 26:13 served to preauthenticate the more complete Matthean narrative in contrast to other Gospels that listeners had heard or might hear in the future.

¹¹ For example, 5:11-12; 7:15-23; 10:18 (cf. 10:5b-6); 13:18-23; 18:5, 15-20. See Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* (2nd ed.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) 109.

¹² David B. Howell, *Matthew's Inclusive Story: A Study in the Narrative Rhetoric of the First Gospel* (JSNTSup 42; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1980) 106, 172-74, 218-21, 225.

¹³ Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 26.

¹⁴ Stanton (*Gospel for a New People*, 13-18) refutes Koester, concluding that εὐαγγέλιον in Matt 24:14 and 26:13 refers to the Gospel of Matthew. Also see Robert H. Gundry, "ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ: How Soon a Book?" *JBL* 115 (1996) 321-25.

Since Koester's argument relies on a sharp distinction between oral and written communication, it is important to note that almost all reading in the first century was oral. The lack of punctuation or even spaces between Greek words meant that public reading required advance preparation and even memorization. The small minority who could read still preferred oral communication, so the most desirable way to "read" a Gospel was to hear it performed.¹⁵ Oral proclamation of gospel narratives had continued for decades before a written script (i.e., Mark) became popular enough to survive.¹⁶

Like other Gospels, Matthew was clearly designed for oral performance. The repetition of sounds is the primary means by which the author communicated the organization of the narrative, including the extended speeches.¹⁷ The author's strategy to include readers in the audience of Jesus' speeches would have been most effective in a context where an audience heard those speeches performed aloud. Observations such as these led Graham Stanton to comment, "It is hard to think of a single Matthean stylistic technique which would be more appropriate for silent study than for reading aloud."¹⁸

In a culture that preferred speech to writing, an author who scripted a Gospel for oral performance would have been likely to retain vocabulary that emphasized the oral component of the communication. Thus, it comes as no surprise that the author used εὐαγγέλιον and κηρύσσω rather than ἀναγινώσκω ("read") when referring to performances of the Gospel of Matthew. The author may also have preferred κηρύσσω in 24:14 and 26:13 because, unlike ἀναγινώσκω, it connotes communication to a widespread public. Matthew 10:27 epitomizes this idea: "What I say to you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in the ear, declare (κηρύξατε) on the rooftops." This saying employs hyperbole in commanding disciples to act as heralds (κήρυκες), whose task was to shout public messages on behalf of those who sent them. Like a ruler sending out heralds, Jesus commands the disciple missionaries to announce the news of God's empire to all who will listen, first within Israel (10:6-7) and later among all nations (24:14; 28:19-20).¹⁹

¹⁵ Paul J. Achtemeier, "Omne verbum sonat: The New Testament and the Oral Environment of Late Western Antiquity," *JBL* 109 (1990) 3-27.

¹⁶ Although letters were also composed and read orally, the written text would have been more prominent in that genre, since it would have served to authenticate the bearer's claim to represent the author (see 2 Thess 2:2; 3:17). In contrast, the canonical Gospels were originally anonymous, probably to keep the attention on Jesus.

¹⁷ Bernard Brandon Scott and Margaret E. Dean, "A Sound Map of the Sermon on the Mount," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1993 Seminar Papers* (ed. Eugene H. Lovering, Jr.; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993) 672-725.

¹⁸ Stanton, *Gospel for a New People*, 74.

¹⁹ Warren Carter (*Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations* [Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001] 57-74, 171-79) has argued that the Gospel is a counternarrative that uses imperial language to announce God's empire in contrast to Rome's. The evangelist's use of κηρύσσω in 24:14 and elsewhere appears to fit this pattern.

In light of the general preference for oral communication in late antiquity, it is reasonable to ask why anyone would script a gospel narrative at all. The most likely reason was to ensure that the narrative could be memorized and performed accurately across distances in space and time. If the author's purpose was only to instruct his own congregation, then there would have been less need to write.²⁰ The scripting of Mark and Matthew does not by itself disprove the local-community hypothesis, since an insular community (i.e., one that was unwilling or unable to share its traditions) could have scripted a gospel narrative in order to preserve it over time. Even so, when the fact of writing is viewed in light of other evidence in Matthew, the facilitation of a widespread mission appears to have been the predominant motive.

B. A Command (28:19-20)

The evangelist's hope for a widespread audience also finds expression in 28:19-20, where Jesus commissions his disciples to "go therefore and disciple all nations, baptizing them . . . and teaching them to obey all I have commanded you" (πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, βαπτίζοντες αὐτοὺς . . . διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν). The fivefold repetition of πᾶς ("all") in 28:18-20 not only echoes the prediction in 24:14 but also culminates a pattern of generalizing rhetoric in sayings attributed to Jesus throughout the Gospel. Expressions such as "all," "every," "many," "everyone who," "the one who," "whoever," "whatever," or "whenever" repeatedly assert the universal relevance and authority of Jesus' teaching.²¹ This is not the sort of rhetoric one would

²⁰ Bauckham ("For Whom?" 29-30) makes this point with regard to geographical distances. Mitchell ("Counter-Evidence," 48-51) interprets two accounts of Mark's composition by Clement of Alexandria, quoted in Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 2.15.1-2; 6.14.5-7, as an indication that patristic authors saw the request of Peter's listeners in Rome as sufficient cause for the writing of a Gospel. These passages do not state the listeners' motives explicitly, but *Hist. eccl.* 2.15.1-2 hints that they (including Mark) wanted to preserve Peter's teaching and make it available to other churches.

²¹ For example, "many" (expressed with πολλοί used as a substantive in 7:22; 8:11; 19:30; 20:28; 22:14; 24:5, 10, 12; 26:28); "everyone who" (expressed with πᾶς plus a substantival participle in 5:22, 28, 32; 7:8, 21, 26; 11:28; 13:19, or πᾶς plus an indefinite relative clause in 7:24; 10:32; 19:29; 21:22); "the one who" (expressed with a substantival participle in 5:4, 6, 10; 7:13, 14, 21; 10:22, 37 [bis], 39 [bis], 40 [bis], 41 [bis]; 11:15; 12:30 [bis]; 13:9, 43; 19:12; 21:44; 23:20, 21, 22; 24:13, 15); "every" (expressed with πᾶς modifying a substantive in 12:31; 13:41; 13:52; 15:13); "whoever," "whatever," or "whenever" (expressed with relative clauses, which may or may not include ὅν or τις as generalizing particles, in 5:19, 22 [bis], 32, 39, 41; 10:14, 33, 38, 42; 11:6, 27; 12:32 [bis]; 13:12 [bis], 23; 16:25 [bis]; 18:4, 5, 6, 18 [bis], 20; 19:6, 9, 11; 20:26; 21:44; 23:12 [bis], or expressed as a temporal clause introduced with ὅταν in 5:11; 6:2, 5, 16; 10:19, 23; 24:33). This list adds to the examples in Jeffrey Alan Gibbs, "Let the Reader Understand: The Eschatological Discourse of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel" (Ph.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1995, available from University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, MI) 52-57.

expect to hear in an insular community, but it is consistent with the view that the expected audience was missional in character.

If one purpose of the author's rhetoric was to assert the universal authority of Jesus, then it is important to consider whether the author's vision for mission existed more in theory than in practice. To be sure, the author's vision was rooted in christological beliefs and apocalyptic hopes, not in practical calculations of what was humanly possible. On the other hand, the author would not have wanted the difficulty of Jesus' missionary command to be an excuse for failing to obey it. The author insisted that faith in Jesus' universal authority must bear fruit in practice (see 7:21-27; 28:19-20). A mission to all the ethnic groups in the known world could have appeared plausible to the author, since by then there were Christian congregations in many cities around the eastern Mediterranean. Even if the author did not envision the proclamation of the Gospel to every individual without exception, he evidently believed that God would empower the extension of Matthean missions throughout the known world (cf. Rom 15:17-21; Acts 1:8; 5:38-39).

The essential tasks of the Matthean missions become clearer as one examines other key terms in 28:19-20. The imperative verb translated "disciple" (μαθητεύσατε) can encompass both the calling and the training of followers for Jesus. In Matt 27:57 and Acts 14:21 the emphasis is on the initial call, whereas in Matt 13:52 it is on training. Three participial modifiers in 28:19-20 suggest that both meanings are in view. "Going" (πορευθέντες) echoes the earlier commission to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel in order to proclaim (κηρύσσετε) the good news of the reign of heaven (10:6-7). The participles πορευόμενοι in 10:7 and πορευθέντες in 28:19 each recognize that travel was a necessary means by which heralds fulfilled their role. Baptism marked initiation into discipleship for those who had repented in response to Christian proclamation.²² In light of the predictions in Matt 24:14 and 26:13, the reference to baptism (βαπτίζοντες) in 28:19 presupposes the successful proclamation of "this gospel." "Teaching [διδάσκοντες] them to obey all that I have commanded you" alludes at least to the sayings of Jesus recorded in the Gospel and probably to the entire narrative. "All that I have commanded you" echoes the conclusion of the final discourse ("Now when Jesus had finished saying all these things . . ." [26:1]), which in turn echoes the conclusions of the previous discourses.²³ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison argue cogently that the verbal revelations of Jesus cannot be separated from his life and that the entire narrative is therefore in view.²⁴ The mission commanded in 28:19-20 thus includes proclaiming and teaching the Gospel of Matthew to all nations.

²² See Matt 3:1-6; Mark 1:4-8; Luke 3:1-22; Acts 2:14-42; 8:4-13, 26-40; 10:34-48; 16:1-15; John 4:1-2.

²³ David R. Bauer, *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (JSNTSup 31; Bible and Literature Series 15; Sheffield: Almond, 1988) 132-34.

²⁴ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3. 686.

In order for the narrative to serve as both a script for proclamation and a guide for teaching, the author needed to address listeners with varied levels of commitment to discipleship. In the late first century, Christians were a tiny minority in the Roman Empire, but their numbers were increasing rapidly, perhaps by as much as 40 percent per decade.²⁵ Growth at that rate could not have occurred without many people hearing Christian proclamation for the first time. One occasion for reaching people who were not yet followers of Jesus would have been the attendance of newcomers at gatherings of existing house churches. In 1 Cor 14:23 Paul expressed concern about the impression that the Corinthians' worship might make on such newcomers.²⁶ Since they represented the potential for growth, their first experience of the Gospel would have been important to an author interested in discipling all nations. The presence of committed disciples would also have been important, not only because of their need for ongoing education but also because of their ability to proclaim, teach, and model the Gospel for others. When missionaries were welcomed by households who were not yet followers of Jesus, the initial goal would have been proclamation of the Gospel, with further instruction to follow if the reception was favorable. Different reading strategies could have enhanced the Gospel's effectiveness as a resource for both proclamation and teaching. Where most listeners were unfamiliar with the Gospel, a complete performance would have provided an overview of Jesus' birth, ministry, death, and resurrection.²⁷ Where most people already knew the story, the recitation and explanation of parts of the narrative could have taken priority.²⁸

These considerations challenge the tendency of some scholars to downplay the author's interest in reaching listeners who were not already Christian.²⁹ They

²⁵ Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996) 4-13; Keith Hopkins, "Christian Number and Its Implications," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6 (1998) 185-226; Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 29.

²⁶ Carolyn Osiek and David L. Balch (*Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997] 17) note that many houses had areas open to the public.

²⁷ Burrige ("Gospel Genre," 140-44) argues that Christian Gospels fit the genre of βιοί (ancient biographies), which were typically performed in their entirety after supper. A complete performance of Matthew would have taken about three hours.

²⁸ Justin Martyr (*1 Apology* 67) reported ca. 150 C.E. that Christian worship included reading the "memoirs of the apostles" for "as long as time permits" followed by teaching and exhortation. This comment does not indicate how much time was available, nor does it preclude an authorial expectation that the Gospel would be performed in its entirety for new listeners. Reading strategies may have changed as more people became familiar with the story. See Stanton, *Gospel for a New People*, 75.

²⁹ For example, Carter (*Matthew and the Margins*, 7) asserts: "Equally implausible is a view that claims an evangelistic function. While some of the material might be used to gain new followers of Jesus, the gospel material is generally concerned with forming disciples out of those already committed." Carter's antithesis between "an evangelistic function" and "forming disciples" seems overdrawn, especially since the text uses the same verb (μαθητεύω) for both functions.

also show the insufficiency of asserting that the Gospel was written for a small, local community for the purpose of calling the community to mission.³⁰ That assertion obscures part of the purpose of the Gospel, which was not only to spur missionary activity but also to serve as a script for proclamation and a guide for teaching by missionaries. Both missionaries and their listeners should be included in discussions about the audience expected by the author. The author evidently saw a need to motivate some listeners to participate in a mission to all nations, but that observation does not demonstrate that the expected audience was a community that had previously lacked zeal for mission.

C. *A Relevant Parable (13:1-9, 18-23)*

Although Matt 24:14; 26:13; and 28:19-20 are the most explicit indications that the author expected a widespread missional audience, other evidence points in the same direction. For example, a phrase closely related to “this gospel of the kingdom” is “the word of the kingdom” (τὸν λόγον τῆς βασιλείας) in the interpretation of the parable of the sower (13:19). The parable and its interpretation show that “the word of the kingdom” must be scattered widely, since it will bear fruit in only some of its hearers. The author evidently expected the number of people who heard the Gospel to be larger than the number who would respond faithfully; nevertheless, the author hoped that the results among faithful responders would be more than sufficient to justify widespread proclamation. This interpretation of the parable would have served to motivate proclaimers of the Gospel of Matthew in the face of discouragement and rejection. It would also have challenged listeners to respond like the good soil.³¹

II. Provenance and Audience

Under the influence of the local-community hypothesis, questions about the provenance and the audience of the Gospel have often been conflated.³² They are separate issues, but the possibility that they may be related merits some attention here. Many scholars have concluded that the Gospel probably originated in or around Antioch in Syria.³³ Antioch was a large, cosmopolitan city with extensive

³⁰ Ulrich Luz (*Matthew 1–7: A Continental Commentary* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992] 84-87) takes this position.

³¹ Mary Ann Tolbert (*Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary-Historical Perspective* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989] 304) takes the Marcan version of this parable as evidence that Mark was written partly for outsiders.

³² Bauckham, “For Whom?” 16.

³³ Typical arguments for an Antiochene provenance include (1) early allusions to Matthean traditions in the letters of Ignatius of Antioch and in the *Didache*, (2) the prominence of Peter in some

communication with other parts of the Roman Empire and with a reputation among Christians as the launching point for missions (Acts 13:1-3). Beginning with Burnett H. Streeter in 1925, scholars have observed that an Antiochene provenance could help to explain both the Gospel's rapid and widespread circulation and its emphasis on mission to all nations.³⁴ An obvious corollary has not been as widely recognized, perhaps because it contradicts the local-community hypothesis: a church leader from Antioch would have been likely to anticipate the broad circulation that the Gospel in fact received.

A possible objection is that Antiochene Christianity was diverse, such that some churches may have supported the mission to all nations while others did not. If the author was part of an insular faction in Antioch, then an Antiochene provenance might still be consistent with the local-community hypothesis. Nevertheless, this argument has difficulty accounting for the author's obvious support for mission. It is unclear why one would associate the author with an alleged insular community rather than the pro-mission community.

A more cogent concern is that the theory of an Antiochene provenance remains unproven, especially since some of the arguments in its favor depend on the local-community hypothesis. For example, the allusions to Matthean traditions by Ignatius of Antioch in the early second century are persuasive only if one presupposes that the Gospel remained the in-house document of a local community for a significant period of time, perhaps a decade or more. In that case, the best way to explain Ignatius's familiarity with Matthean traditions may be that the Gospel was written in or near his home city. On the other hand, if the Gospel was originally intended for widespread circulation, it could easily have reached Antioch from elsewhere by the early second century. Even if some Matthean traditions originated in Syria, they could have circulated orally prior to the scripting of the Gospel, which could have occurred wherever those traditions had reached. The Gospel's provenance remains uncertain; but if its author had ties to Antioch, then it is unlikely to have been written for Antioch alone.

Warren Carter has assembled an impressive body of evidence showing that the Gospel of Matthew was relevant for people who were marginalized by the religious and political power structures of Antioch.³⁵ That evidence is valuable for interpreting Matthew, but it does not substantiate Carter's claim that the authorial audience³⁶ was limited to Antioch and the surrounding area. Carter does not show that

Matthean traditions combined with his known leadership in Antioch, (3) the reference to Syria in Matt 4:24, and (4) the presence of a large Jewish population there. See Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1. 138-47; Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 15-16.

³⁴ Streeter, *Four Gospels*, 500-504; also see Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1. 144; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) 5.

³⁵ Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 14-49.

³⁶ That is, the audience envisioned by the author while writing. For the term "authorial audience" and related literary theory, see Peter J. Rabinowitz, *Before Reading: Narrative Conventions*

the Gospel of Matthew was *uniquely* relevant for the social conditions that prevailed in Antioch. Instead, he states reasonably that those conditions were similar to the conditions in other large Greco-Roman cities. Presumably, he could start with a different city and demonstrate that the Gospel was relevant for an audience there. Fortunately, Carter's interpretations do not ultimately depend on locating the authorial audience in Antioch, as he himself notes.³⁷

A key point in Carter's unnecessary defense of the local-community hypothesis is his claim that the authorial audience was numerically small. He bases this claim on the saying in Matt 7:13-14 that those who find the way to life are few and on descriptions of the disciples as "small ones" (μικρῶν [10:42; 18:6-14]), "infants" (11:25), or "children" (18:1-5). These terms connote vulnerability. In addition, Carter interprets "smallness" to mean "few in number," citing Deut 7:7 ("you were the fewest of all peoples"). He concludes this argument by citing statistical evidence to show that meeting space in houses was limited and that Christians were a small minority of the population of Antioch in the late first century.³⁸

This case for a numerically small authorial audience is unconvincing. The saying about two ways (7:13-14) is like the parable of the sower (13:1-9, 18-23) in suggesting that the number of people who hear Jesus' teaching will be larger than the number who obey it. These sayings do not limit the size of the audience but rather challenge it to be faithful. Although μικρός can occasionally mean "few," it more often means "small in size," "low in social status," or "young in age." The word used for "fewest" in Deut 7:7 LXX is ὀλίγος, not μικρός. In thirty-six out of 165 uses in the LXX, μικρός is joined with μέγας ("great") to describe the totality of a group. In thirty of these instances the combination means "all the people regardless of social status." The "great" are leaders or people of high status; the "small" are people of low status. Both in ancient Israel and in the Roman Empire, the vast majority of people could be described as "small" by this definition. The significance of this evidence is enhanced by the fact that μικρός and μέγας also appear together in Matthew (e.g., 5:19; 11:11; 18:1-4). None of the uses of μικρός in Matthew requires the authorial audience to be few in number. Finally, the unproven assumption behind Carter's statistical argument is that the authorial audience was limited to people who were already Christian within a small geographical area. Instead of proving the local-community hypothesis, this argument merely restates it in numerical form.

and the Politics of Interpretation (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), esp. 20-21. Although Rabinowitz emphasizes that texts are historically located, his theory does not require a specific geographical location for the authorial audience of a text. Many of his examples are from literature written for publication throughout the English-speaking world.

³⁷ Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 16-27, esp. 16, 18.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 27-29; Osiek and Balch, *Families in the New Testament World*, 201-3; Stark, *Rise of Christianity*, 4-13.

III. Competition with Formative Jewish Synagogues

The evidence for competition between Matthean Judaism and formative Judaism includes the Gospel's polemical characterizations of Israel's leaders and its pointed contrasts between "their synagogues" and "my assembly" (4:23; 6:2, 5; 9:35; 10:17; 12:9; 13:54; 16:18; 23:6, 34). Studies of this conflict sometimes assume that it was limited to a small geographical area.³⁹ A more likely assumption is that the author expected conflict in multiple cities, much like the scenario portrayed in Acts.⁴⁰ Regardless of questions about historical accuracy, Acts is valid evidence here because it shows what was plausible to another author writing in the late first century.

The promise that Jesus will be present "where two or three are gathered" in his name (18:20) implies that the assembly in any given location could be small; nevertheless, the generalizing term "where" (ού) allows for a growing movement with assemblies in many different locations. This promise is closely related to a rabbinic saying that validated worship in synagogues: "Whenever two sit down together and occupy themselves with the words of Torah, the divine presence (שכינה) is among them" (*m. Abot* 3.3).⁴¹ The similarities and differences between these sayings suggest that the author of Matthew envisioned a movement similar to, and in competition with, the synagogues that were present in every Greco-Roman city (see Acts 15:21). The author claimed divine sanction for Matthean assemblies on a par with the claims made by the leaders of formative Jewish synagogues.

Whereas the study of Torah was central to the identity of formative Jewish synagogues, the author of Matthew also expected faithful disciples to learn and follow the Torah as interpreted by Jesus (5:19). Thus, he could allude to Jewish traditions with the expectation that many listeners would either know them or soon learn them. Even well-educated Jews would have needed instruction in order to interpret Jewish traditions according to the author's point of view, and the potential

³⁹ Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 30-36; J. Andrew Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism: The Social World of the Matthean Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); see also Stanton, *Gospel for a New People*, 113-45. On formative Judaism as a precursor to rabbinic Judaism, see Jacob Neusner, *The Formation of Judaism in Retrospect and Prospect* (South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism 19; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990) 35-62.

⁴⁰ For example, Acts 4:1-22; 5:17-42; 6:8-8:3; 13:13-52; 14:1-20; 17:1-15; 18:5-17; 19:1-10; 21:27-23:11; 28:17-28.

⁴¹ Craig S. Keener (*A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999] 455-56) cites *m. Abot* 3.2 and similar rabbinic sayings, arguing that the rabbinic tradition probably predates the version found in Matthew. Also see Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2. 790. The saying is numbered 3:3 in R. Travers Herford, ed., פירקי אבות, *Pirke Aboth: The Tractate "Fathers," from the Mishnah, Commonly Called "Sayings of the Fathers"* (New York: Jewish Institute of Religion, 1945) 66.

for instructing less informed listeners would have mitigated the disadvantage that they faced initially. The Gospel facilitates instruction by quoting legal and prophetic texts directly in order to demonstrate their fulfillment by Jesus. Since direct quotations supply the text being interpreted, they require less background knowledge than indirect allusions. Even extensive allusions do not demonstrate that the author wrote only for Jews.⁴²

Although the Gospel's polemics would have sparked opposition from the leaders of formative Jewish synagogues, other Jews and Gentiles may have been inclined to accept the author's justifications for an alternative movement involving house-based assemblies.⁴³ Those justifications would have gained ideological as well as numerical support through the conversion of Gentiles, since the Messiah was supposed to proclaim justice to the nations and give them hope (Isa 42:1-4, quoted in Matt 12:18-21).

The author's interest in proselytism is confirmed in another way by the accusation that scribes and Pharisees "cross sea and land to make one convert [προσήλυτον] and, whenever you do, you make that one twice as much a child of hell [γαέννης] as yourselves" (23:15). Whether accurately or not, the author believed that scribes and Pharisees proselytized widely⁴⁴ and that their converts would be much better off if they followed Matthean teaching. The objection in 23:15 is not to the idea of proselytism but to the alleged effect of Pharisaic teaching on those who receive it.⁴⁵ This saying would have been especially relevant in contexts where Pharisaic and Matthean missionaries were competing for adherents (see 16:5-12).

These considerations indicate that the Gospel would have appealed to listeners who were familiar with Jewish traditions yet sufficiently distant from the leadership of formative Jewish synagogues that they could accept Matthean intra-Jewish polemics. This conclusion is consistent with an authorial expectation that the Gospel should be proclaimed to anyone who would listen. It may also be consistent

⁴² See the allusions in letters of Paul, 1 Peter, and Luke-Acts, plus the view expressed in Acts 15:21 that the Torah had already been proclaimed to Gentiles.

⁴³ Anthony Saldarini (*Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994] 100-101) observes that many ancient Jewish synagogues met in houses. New Testament references to household gatherings suggest that Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus replicated this pattern.

⁴⁴ Martin Goodman (*Mission and Conversion: Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1994] 72-73) argues that Matt 23:15 could refer to the conversion of diaspora Jews to Pharisaism, although most of the evidence he cites suggests that προσήλυτος usually referred to someone who had been a Gentile. The text would reflect competition for adherents in any case.

⁴⁵ David E. Garland, *The Intention of Matthew 23* (NovTSup 52; Leiden: Brill, 1979) 129; see also James LaGrand, *The Earliest Christian Mission to "All Nations" in the Light of Matthew's Gospel* (University of South Florida International Studies in Formative Christianity and Judaism 1; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995) 145-56.

with descriptions of Matthean Judaism as a sect, since a sect could proselytize widely.⁴⁶

IV. The Rewards and Limits of Hospitality

The Gospel's sectarian polemics provide clear evidence that the author did not expect Matthean missionaries to be welcomed by all Jews. The extent to which the author could expect hospitality from others, including "all Christians," is a question that requires attention to other evidence in the Gospel, including the missionary discourse in 9:35–10:42 and the judgment scene in 25:31–46. This evidence will also yield additional insights into the means by which the author expected the Gospel to circulate widely.

The narrative portrays the disciples of Jesus as missionaries who are vulnerable because of poverty and persecution. When Jesus calls the first disciples, he makes it clear that they will share in his mission (4:19), and soon he authorizes them to do so (9:35–10:42). Following Jesus' example, the disciples are to proclaim that God's reign has drawn near (10:7; cf. 3:2; 4:17) not only with words but also with acts of healing. The disciples will share Jesus' vulnerability as well as his work. Like sheep among wolves, they will travel from town to town, depending on the hospitality of others, staying if they are welcomed and leaving if they are not (10:5–15). In spite of their innocence, they can expect to be hated, betrayed, tried, flogged, and crucified (10:16–23, 38–39).

Although Jesus predicts severe persecution, he also assures the disciples of God's protection and ultimate justice (10:26–31). A word of assurance that is especially relevant for this study appears at the end of the discourse:

The one who welcomes you [ὁ δεχόμενος ὑμᾶς] welcomes me, and the one who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. The one who welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward. And the one who welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. And as for whoever gives just a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple, truly I tell you, none shall lose their reward. (10:40–42)

This passage is full of generalizing rhetoric, which invites listeners to claim the promises for themselves. The substantival participles (translated "the one who . . .") are sufficiently general to include anyone who has practiced hospitality toward a "prophet" (προφήτην), a "righteous person" (δίκαιον), or "one of these little ones" (ἓνα τῶν μικρῶν τούτων). In the context of the missionary discourse, these terms describe the twelve disciples who are being sent out as emissaries of Jesus, although the same terms are used of others elsewhere (e.g., 1:19; 11:9; 13:17, 43; 18:6, 10, 14; 27:19). In 23:29–36, Jesus describes future emissaries as

⁴⁶ See Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community*, 92–93, 102, 109, 112.

“prophets” and emphasizes their continuity with the righteous prophets of the past (see 5:11-12).

Both Greco-Roman and Jewish customs required that emissaries be received as though they were the one who sent them. To honor or dishonor the emissary was to honor or dishonor the sender.⁴⁷ In keeping with that principle, Matt 10:40-42 promises that God will give the same reward to the hosts of Jesus’ emissaries as to the emissaries themselves. This promise helps explain why potential hosts are described as “worthy” in 10:13, since ἄξιος often denotes people who have earned an honor or benefit. The context defines a “worthy” household as one that will welcome Jesus’ emissaries and listen to them (10:14). Wherever missionaries were proclaiming or teaching the Gospel to their hosts, this passage would have honored the household and reinforced their hospitality and attention. At the same time, it would have enhanced the missionaries’ authority by giving them the status of emissaries from the Messiah and Son of God.

The importance of the promise in 10:40-42 is evident not only from its emphatic position at the end of the missionary discourse but also from its repetition and elaboration later in the narrative. One repetition occurs in 18:5: “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.” In the next verse, the vocabulary shifts from “one such child” to “one of these little ones,” also echoing 10:40-42. A dramatic elaboration of the same promise occurs in the scene of judgment that culminates the eschatological discourse (25:31-46).⁴⁸ One of the examples of hospitality—giving a drink—is the same as in 10:42. Moreover, the phrase “one of the least of these my brothers” (25:40, 45) intensifies the thought expressed by “one of these little ones” in 10:42, implying that Jesus’ emissaries will experience extreme vulnerability.⁴⁹ Once again, Jesus identifies himself with his emissaries, whom he describes as “brothers,” a term that is probably limited to disciples (see 12:49-50). “All the nations” (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη) echoes the wording of 24:14, suggesting that the people gathered for judgment have had an opportunity to hear the Gospel through the work of Jesus’ emissaries.

The elaboration of 10:40-42 in 25:31-46 clarifies the nature of the hosts’

⁴⁷ See Margaret M. Mitchell, “New Testament Envoys in the Context of Greco-Roman Diplomatic and Epistolary Conventions: The Example of Timothy and Titus,” *JBL* 111 (1992) 641-62; Keener, *Matthew*, 313-15, and the primary sources cited therein.

⁴⁸ H. Benedict Green, *The Gospel According to Matthew in the Revised Standard Version: Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975) 206.

⁴⁹ For scholarship identifying “the least of these my brothers” with disciple missionaries, see Keener, *Matthew*, 604-6; and the longer history in Sherman W. Gray, *The Least of These My Brothers: Matthew 25.31-46: A History of Interpretation* (SBLDS 114; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989). Élian Cuvillier (“Justes et petits chez Matthieu: L’interprétation du lecteur à la croisée des chemins,” *ETR* 72 [1997] 345-64, esp. 361) argues that the “least” and the “righteous” refer to two types of readers, respectively. The “least” are the disciple missionaries; the “righteous” are people on the borders of the Christian community who are hearing the gospel as a result of receiving a missionary.

reward and contrasts it with a severe punishment for those who fail to practice hospitality toward Jesus' emissaries. People who welcome and care for "the least of these my brothers" will be blessed by God, inherit God's reign, and enter into eternal life (25:34, 46). Opposite these worthy hosts are people who thought they were serving Jesus but did not practice hospitality toward his emissaries (25:41-45). Jesus' judgment against them correlates with the earlier prediction that "the love of many will grow cold" (24:12), since cold love would have been reflected in refusals of hospitality. The Matthean teaching that hospitality for Jesus' emissaries will be the criterion for judging all nations is remarkable. Together with 10:40-42, it shows that the encouragement of hospitality was a very high priority for the author. Meanwhile, these passages are evidence that the author could not expect hospitality from all ostensible Christians. The predictions of "cold love" were probably coming true. Even rhetoric that strongly encourages hospitality is evidence that it could not be taken for granted.

While advocating hospitality, the author also calls for circumspection because some potential guests will be "false prophets" (ψευδοπροφήται) who will disobey Jesus while calling him "Lord." They will lead many people astray and thus contribute to the lovelessness of the end times (24:11-12). The general warning to "watch out" (προσέχετε) for false prophets does not preclude welcoming them initially, since their lack of authenticity could only be determined through observation of their behavior over time (7:15-20).

Two brief comparisons will help to clarify the significance of this evidence. First, Paul and his companions relied on households both to facilitate their travels and to serve as the nuclei of house churches.⁵⁰ The tradition of hospitality within Pauline churches was so strong that they welcomed missionaries who sharply criticized Paul and preached "a different gospel" (ἕτερον εὐαγγέλιον [Gal 1:6-9; cf. 2 Corinthians 10-13; Phil 3:2]). Like the Gospel of Matthew, Paul's undisputed letters do not explicitly prohibit an initial welcome for rival missionaries. Instead, they insist that the churches he founded remain faithful to his gospel and acknowledge his apostolic authority. Even the anathema in Gal 1:9 would have required Paul's supporters to listen to the preaching of other missionaries in order to determine whether it agreed with his. In Phil 3:2, Paul called the preachers of circumcision κύνας ("dogs"), a metaphor strikingly similar to Matthew's λύκοι ("wolves"). The urgency of Paul's warnings stemmed partly from his physical absence, which meant that he could not fend off the "dogs" in person. Matthean warnings about "false prophets who come to you" (7:15; cf. 24:11) may reflect similar attempts by missionaries to prevent their hosts from turning to rival mis-

⁵⁰ Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983) 75; Roger W. Gehring, *House Church and Mission: The Importance of Household Structures in Early Christianity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004) 119-228.

sionaries in their absence. These warnings do not indicate that the author was settled nor that he wrote for an insular community.

A comparison of Matthew with the regulations in *Didache* 11–13 is also instructive. Both texts balance the values of hospitality and circumspection, but they do so in different ways. The *Didache* is similar to Matthew in teaching that visiting apostles and prophets should be received “as the Lord” (*Did.* 11:3). On the other hand, there is a significant difference in the criteria for recognizing false prophets. According to *Didache* 11, true apostles and prophets must not only adhere to correct teaching but also move on after one or two days. If they attempt to stay longer or request food or money, they are false (ψευδοπροφήται). *Didache* 12 allows travelers to stay longer than two or three days, but only if they support themselves by working. These regulations would have protected local communities from freeloading and self-interested pronouncements. They also would have severely limited the time available for ministry in established congregations by traveling apostles and prophets.⁵¹ Whereas both Matt 10:8 and *Did.* 11:8–9, 20–21 prohibit requests for money, Matthew places no limit on the time that guests may stay and thereby shows less consideration of the burden that unlimited hospitality could place on local communities. This evidence suggests that the author of Matthew and the Didachist viewed hospitality from different perspectives. Matthew’s social reinforcement of hospitality reflects the concerns of missionaries as they addressed the households or house churches that had welcomed them. The *Didache*’s regulations reflect the concerns of one or more local communities that needed to guard against abuses of their hospitality.

Gerd Theissen has argued that “wandering charismatics” literally fulfilled the teachings of the missionary discourse in rural Palestine and Syria from about 40 to 70 C.E. but that the practice of radical itinerancy declined as the movement found a home in Hellenistic cities.⁵² Since a strict refusal to carry money (10:9) would have made travel around the Mediterranean Sea difficult if not impossible, it is important to ask how such commands would have functioned in the context of a mission to all nations. The most likely answer is that, in the author’s view, the discourse continued to inspire support for missions that were faithful to the example of Jesus. The discourse could have functioned in this way whether or not its predictions and commands were being fulfilled literally.

Like other extended speeches in Matthew, the missionary discourse uses pre-

⁵¹ See Jonathan A. Draper, “Social Ambiguity and the Production of Text: Prophets, Teachers, Bishops, and Deacons in the Tradition of the Community of the *Didache*,” in *The Didache in Context: Essays on Its Text, History, and Transmission* (ed. Clayton N. Jefford; NovTSup 77; Leiden/New York/Cologne: Brill, 1995) 284–312; and Stephen J. Patterson, “*Didache* 11–13: The Legacy of Radical Itinerancy in Early Christianity,” in *ibid.*, 313–29.

⁵² See Gerd Theissen, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity* (trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978) 10–16, 116–19.

dictions to address concerns that were current in the author's time. The prediction that "you will be brought before governors and kings for testimony to them and to the nations" (10:18) is an obvious example of this device because it fits awkwardly with its temporal setting in the narrative (see 10:5). Regardless of how much actual persecution had occurred, the predictions in 10:16-25 would have reminded hosts of the missionaries' courage, dedication, and need for hospitality. Meanwhile, missionaries would have been reminded that their experience so far had been milder than the treatment that Jesus had experienced and foreseen for his followers. The result would have been to encourage missionaries and other disciples to persevere in the face of ordinary discouragements and possible persecution in the future.

The command to "heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and cast out demons" (10:8) would have been relevant in a different way. The author must have been confident that Matthean missionaries could heal through prayer in Jesus' name, since those authorizations would otherwise have led to disappointment among households that needed healing. To the extent that faith and forgiveness are conducive to health, the missionaries' interventions may have been effective (cf. 9:2-8). On the other hand, missionaries would not have needed to demonstrate extraordinary powers in order to retain credibility. If a sick person recovered, the household would have been encouraged to interpret the recovery as an answer to prayer in Jesus' name. Such healings would have led to new conversions or to stronger faith for those already converted. If a sick person did not show signs of recovery, the situation could have been explained with exhortations to have faith and persist in prayer (see 17:14-20).

By including instructions to travel without money or extra clothing (10:9-10), the author ran the risk that missionaries who compromised on those points might be discredited. That risk would have been reasonable, however, because households with the resources to host a missionary would probably have understood the need to carry money. A similar understanding is required from the audience of Luke-Acts. Rather than being troubled by the differences between Jesus' missionary instructions and Paul's practice, the audience was expected to view Paul as fulfilling the essence of the instructions (cf. Luke 9:1-6; 10:1-12; Acts 13:51; 20:33-35). The author of Matthew may have included instructions to travel without money or extra clothing in order to guard against a different risk, namely, that missionaries might lose credibility because of a shabby appearance. The costs and wear of travel made it likely that missionaries would be poorer than their hosts. After hearing Matt 10:9-10, hosts could view the missionaries' poverty as a mark of obedience to Jesus, not as a reason for shame. The same passage would have reminded missionaries that voluntary poverty and vulnerability were among the practices Jesus modeled and commanded.

Together with the Gospel's social reinforcement of hospitality, these considerations indicate that the author expected missionaries to present the Gospel to

their hosts. Although travel and hospitality could occur within a relatively small geographical area, other evidence has demonstrated that the author expected the Gospel to be proclaimed and taught throughout the known world. Thus, the emphasis on hospitality indicates the most likely means by which the author expected the Gospel to circulate. Again, the scenario is like one depicted in Acts (e.g., 16:14-15, 40; 18:7-8; 20:20-21). The author of Matthew expected missionaries to travel vulnerably from city to city, finding worthy households who would welcome them. The author hoped that these households would listen to the Gospel, acknowledge Jesus' presence and authority, accept baptism, receive ongoing instruction in discipleship, continue to practice hospitality along with the other teachings of Jesus, and watch out for other missionaries who might lead them astray. Whether the author expected these households to receive a written copy of the Gospel is unclear. Perhaps they were expected to use oral memory, but learning the Gospel in some form is clearly an aspect of the training prescribed in Matt 28:19-20.

V. Conclusions and Suggestions

All inferences about authorial intent are tentative, but the evidence discussed in this article demonstrates that the Gospel's emphasis on mission is relevant for determining the author's expectations regarding the extent and manner of its circulation. The author probably scripted "this Gospel" so that missionaries could more accurately proclaim and teach it to all nations as an essential part of the mission predicted in Matt 24:14 and 26:13 and commanded in 28:19-20. Future research on the Gospel's expected audience should take that purpose into account by abandoning the local-community hypothesis and by allowing for a more diverse and widespread audience than many scholars currently imagine.

Matthew appears to have been written from a translocal perspective even though much of the expected audience was settled. The Gospel's rhetoric reflects the interests of Matthean missionaries who relied on house churches and other households for hospitality and who proclaimed and taught the Gospel to their hosts. "Righteous" missionaries and their "worthy" hosts are each honored in this narrative. Both would have been essential to the success of Matthean missions, and both are promised the same reward.

The author's translocal perspective raises the possibility that he may have been one of the missionaries postulated here. The author may have expanded on Mark in various locations, drawing on other traditions that he remembered or read. The process of scripting a more complete Gospel would have taken considerable time and may also have spanned visits to several locations.⁵³ Although this possibility cautions against attempts to pinpoint the Gospel's provenance, it suggests new directions for research into the context and method of composition.

⁵³ Bauckham, "For Whom?" 36.



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