

Salt and Light: Reading Matthew 5:13–16 within the Context of the Matthean Community

Frans-Johan Pienaar

Regent University School of Divinity

Abstract

The pericope of Matthew 5–7, known traditionally as the Sermon on the Mount, has provided scholars with fertile ground for research over the last two millennia. However, one finds scant evidence of scholarly exegesis that reveals an understanding of the Sermon’s message from within the fractured social situation of the diverse Matthean community following the first Jewish War. Some scholars assert that the writers of the Gospels had no particular audience in mind when writing. This approach would make the Sermon a collection of generic proverbs or universally applicable tropes. Conversely, this study suggests that the social situation of the Matthean community is not only foundational but essential when reading the commands found in the pericope. The research investigates the historical and social context in Syria, Galilee, and Judea post AD 70 and the first Jewish revolt. This focus on the social situation

is used as a lens through which to read Matthew 5:13–16. This study postulates that following the destruction of Jerusalem, the Matthean community would have experienced great angst, giving rise to a temptation to assimilate in order to survive. However, Matthew 5:13–16 instructs this community, “Be salt and light. Do not hide your light under a bushel and do not assimilate into the community and become useless.”

1. Introduction

The Sermon on the Mount has been a topic of discussion amongst Christian theologians and interpreters throughout the history of the Church. This study, however, proposes that the wealth of research on the *Sitz im Leben* of the Matthean community has not been sufficiently explored in exegeting specific passages. Rather, it seems that interpreters have been content with reading the Gospels as if they were only universal documents (see Bauckham 2008). This has led to an abstraction of the Gospels’ teaching turning it into

Keywords

Matthew 5, Sermon on the Mount, Matthean community, discipleship, Jewish war, salt and light

About the Authors

Mr. Frans-Johan Pienaar is a native-born South African currently completing his Ph.D. in Biblical Studies: New Testament at Regent University in Virginia Beach, Virginia. He lives in Virginia Beach with his wife, Marionette and their two sons.

franpie@mail.regent.edu

a set of moral truths that can be applied to any context as if written for that context. This is not the way the Pauline or the General Epistles are read. Contrariwise, in the epistles scholars always emphasize the original audience and their situation. This study asks why the same method is not applied to the Gospels. Consequently, this study proposes that considering the Matthean community's context allows a fresh dimension of the text to come to the fore. A note to the reader: when this article refers to the *Matthean community*, it simply refers to the original recipients of the Gospel and not to a sectarian community that manipulated the words and works of Jesus to suit their agenda.

This study proceeds as follows: 1) it provides a brief description of various historical readings of the Sermon on the Mount; 2) it investigates the *Sitz im Leben* of the Matthean community; 3) it reads Matthew 5:13–16 in light of the reconstruction of the Matthean community's context; 4) finally, it provides a contemporary reflection.

2. The History of Interpretation: A Brief Overview

This section briefly surveys various historical readings of the Sermon on the Mount. Due to space limitations, it cannot reproduce all the historical readings but rather reviews the ones that it deems most influential in the modern Christian context.¹ Quarles (2011, 4–11) identifies the following readings of the Sermon on the Mount in the Christian tradition: 1) those who believe that the Sermon on the Mount applies to all Christians; 2) those who believe it applies only to those Christians who wish to attain holiness; 3) those who maintain Christians should not and cannot obey the Sermon on the Mount; 4) those who believe it is possible to keep it inwardly

despite one's actions to the contrary. Again, this is not an exhaustive list of all the possible readings, but these readings are, in this study's opinion, the most common in a Western church context.

The Didache (written around AD 100) is the earliest Christian document outside of the New Testament that mentions the Sermon on the Mount, and it represents the first group of Christian interpreters of the Sermon (Holmes 1989, 135–147). The Didache takes for granted that the Sermon on the Mount is the epitome of Christian discipleship. This is the earliest witness to how Christians received the Sermon on the Mount, and it applies the Sermon to all Christians. This makes it an indispensable resource for recovering the way the Matthean community understood the Sermon. The Didache is structured by employing the idea of “two ways” (Holmes 1989, 135). Quarles (2011, 4) notes that these two ways reflect the two ways mentioned in Matthew 7:13–14. The Didache uses the phrase “you will be perfect” in multiple locations, and according to Quarles (2011, 4), these are allusions to Matthew 5:48. To be perfect would mean to imitate Christ's teaching presented in the Sermon. Thus, for Quarles (4), the Didache uses the Sermon on the Mount to characterize “the ideal disciple.” This reading of the Sermon on the Mount was also espoused by John Chrysostom (d. AD 407). Chrysostom (2015, 18.236; 22.280), whose homilies constitute the oldest extant treatment of the Gospel of Matthew as a whole, pointed out that some Christians had been characterized by the qualities represented in the Sermon on the Mount. Therefore, Chrysostom exclaimed, “Let us not consider that these commandments are impossible.” He believed obeying these commands came naturally for believers.

Secondly, in the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas (1948, part 2.1, question 108) recovered the distinction first made by Ambrose in the fourth century between *counsels* and *precepts*. Precepts were commands that all

¹ For a fuller treatment, see Quarles (2011) and Kissinger (1975).

Christians had to follow (Aquinas 1948, part 2.1, question 108). Counsels, for Aquinas, were guides for those who wished to attain true holiness. Quarles (2011, 7) explains that “Counsels were intended for the spiritually elite and could be fulfilled only through withdrawal from society to monastic life.” The third group, namely the dispensationalists, do away with this schema and declare the Sermon on the Mount unnecessary for Christians. Lewis Chafer (1948, 5:97) contends that the Sermon was intended for Jews before the cross and is thus inapplicable to those living after the death and resurrection of Jesus. Finally, and of particular interest to this study is the fourth and final group.

Luther rejected this distinction because Aquinas did not take seriously the “two kingdoms” the Christian constantly finds themselves inhabiting (Schreiner 2007). Schreiner lays out Luther’s view as follows:

The believer will oppose every evil within the limits of his office and may go to court to remedy some violence or injustice. The Christian may go to war, be a governor or a lawyer, or work in any other computation. The Christian may maintain their households, swear roads, and engage in secular affairs. Nonetheless, they never do these things “as Christians.” The Christian is acting in these positions as a secular person. The two persons in each Christian must move in their own proper sphere. (Schreiner 2007, 116)

Luther thus believed that the Christian is innocent as long as he keeps a “Christian heart” (Schreiner 2007, 105–113). This view became the contemporary confessional view. For this group, actions are immaterial; as long as one confesses that one is a Christian, all else is forgiven. Public behavior is of no consequence as long as what one does privately remains within Scriptural bounds. This is because, as Schreiner (2007, 105–113)

notes, Christians engage in these activities as secular people. Furthermore, the confessional group proposed that the demands in the Sermon are primarily to help the believer recognize that they are a sinner in need of forgiveness (Hall 2021).² For Luther and the confessional group, it seems that the Matthean community might as well have sacrificed to Caesar as long as they realized they were sinners and believed in their hearts that Christ was their savior. Ulrich Luz (2007, 209) comments on this Lutheran tendency saying, “Matthew’s goal is that the life of Christians should operate to the glory of God as faith’s witness ... there is for the evangelist no hiddenness of the Christian life *sub contrario*, no tendency toward an ecclesiological variant of the two-kingdoms doctrine.”

Contrary to what Aquinas said (1948, part 2.1, question 108), the Sermon on the Mount does not contain abstract virtues which only the best Christians aspire to. Instead, it has practical, real-life examples of how to love one’s neighbor, something Jesus was serious about (Matthew 22:36–40). Furthermore, in the first century, contra Luther, people did not compartmentalize their public and private lives. Rather, Saldarini (1994, 100) comments that “Religion, economics, and private associations were all embedded” in societal and familial life. It was all intertwined (see Luz 2007, 208–209). Thus, what one does in public or at work was just as sacred as what one did in private, or in the Christian community. Christ is not an inward, subjective God, only interested in the individual’s interior, private life; rather, he is a missional Christ who seeks to redeem and transform society through people shaped by his teachings.

² This is commonly summed up in the “Romans Road to Salvation:” The Law shows me I am a sinner; Jesus dies for my sins; I turn to Jesus; Now I am saved. I include a reference here to Christianity.com (i.e., Hall) to show the prevalence of such thinking.

This study proposes that the corrective to the interpretations of Aquinas, Luther, and Chafer is to take the context of the Matthean community seriously. One has to recognize that there are real recipients behind the Gospel, as Saldarini (1992, 27–43, 84–123) and Luz (2007, 45–60) have masterfully pointed out. Furthermore, this community was required to obey the words in Matthew 5:13–16, not only in their personal lives but in their public lives as well. Only once one bears this in mind can one’s eyes be opened to what the text is trying to convey.

Most articles and commentaries written about the Sermon on the Mount hardly ever reflect with any depth on the social situation of the Matthean community. The works by Luz (2007) and Saldarini (1992) are exceptions. However, even with them, the social situation is rarely brought to bear on specific texts but is usually only applied in a generic sense to large passages. The unique contribution of this study is to consider the Matthean community’s experience, bring it into conversation with a specific text, and show what the text required of them under these circumstances. Thus, it is not to discount the findings of these other studies. Rather, it brings their insight to bear on Matthew 5:13–16.

Some of the historical interpretive tendencies briefly sketched above point out that the Sermon on the Mount is usually treated as a set of moral imperatives that can be applied to any contemporary situation. The difficulty with this approach, according to Wright (2021a; 2021b), is that it is “like listening into half of a phone conversation.” Levine (2014, 9) helpfully notes that,

There’s an old saying in biblical studies ... that a text without a context is just a pretext for making it say anything one wants. But the more we know about the original contexts, the richer our understanding

becomes. The greater our appreciation for the artists and composers who created the works initially.

Consequently, Wood (2021, 1) contends that proper “research seeks to engage the reader in understanding the original audience in its cultural turmoil, political pain, and religious identification.” This investigation into the political, religious, and cultural turmoil allows the reader to begin to step into the shoes of the original audience. Following this the reader might be able to commiserate with the shock the Matthean community may have felt at being told to be “salt and light.” This study thus spends some time investigating who the Matthean community was and what their world was like.

3. The Matthean Community

Ample research has been done on the nature of historical investigation in the Gospels and how tenuous this type of investigation might be. On the one hand, it is possible to privilege one type of hermeneutical framework over another as can be seen in some western readings of the biblical text (Ramantswana 2016, 1). This can lead to an interpretation that simply reflects the interpreter’s culture rather than allowing the text to speak for itself, especially when that interpreter crosses cultural boundaries, like when someone from the west comes to Africa. This can and has led to some severely skewed interpretations of Scripture.³ Justin Ukpong (2002) presents a measured analysis arguing that there needs to be an appreciation of different methods and ways of looking at the text of the Bible, especially in terms of appreciating minority readings of a certain text. However, this

³ An example of this is Apartheid, when white South Africans used Scripture to defend their overt racism.

problem is not alleviated by privileging one cultural reading over another. According to Ramantswana (2016),⁴ this is the difficulty with many of the post-colonial hermeneutical frameworks. Whilst these readings may in some ways offer new ways to look at a specific text or situation they can just as easily twist the actual message of the text to suit their own political and social ideologies.

Rather, this study argues along with Hans-Georg Gadamer (2013, 306–307) and David Horrell (2020)⁵ that the interpreter must be aware of their own particular worldview and try as best they can to allow the text to speak independently of their own cultural assumptions (see also Ramantswana 2016). This is not entirely possible because nobody can escape their own culture and read from nowhere. But it does allow for the possibility of what Gadamer (2013, 306–307) calls a fusion of horizons. This fusion of horizons occurs when the interpreter allows the text to speak to their own preunderstandings and adjusts those preunderstandings according to what the text is communicating (306–307). This fusion of horizons is what this study attempts to do by bringing the historical situation of the Matthean community to bear on a specific text and then extrapolating what that means for contemporary Christians. Its unique contribution lies not solely in the nature of the Matthean community, or the exegesis of Matthew 5:13–16, but in bringing these two together in order to thoroughly exegete the text and extract some deeper meaning from it.

⁴ This can be seen in Ramantswana's conclusion that the solution to colonial interpretations is "the production of alternative knowledge." Whilst it can be fruitful, it can very easily become just as domineering and imperialistic if it is elevated to the status of "ultimate methodology." See 2016, 197.

⁵ See especially chapter 9.

This study does not rehash many of the arguments regarding the location of the Matthean community or the dating of the Gospel. Other scholars have dealt with these at length, and the reader can refer to them if necessary (Sim 1998, 10–12; Luz 2007, 45–60; Saldarini 1992, 27–43, 84–123; McIver 2012, 18; Brown and Meier 1983; Wood 2021, 7; Morris 1992, 76; Foster 2004; Garland 2001; Turner 2008).⁶ One comment of interest made by McIver is that the Matthean community is in a city.⁷ McIver (2012, 18) asserts that this is evidenced by Matthew's lavish use of the term *πόλις* (city). Matthew's Gospel uses it twenty-six times compared to Mark's eight (McIver 2012, 18). Suffice to say, this study, along with Hagner (1993, LXXII–LXXV), Luz (2007, 58–59), and Saldarini (1992, 85 fn 1), assumes a date of around AD 80–85, and that the community is somewhere in a city within the Syro-Palestinian area. The reason for this assumption is that the Gospel itself does not say where this community is located, so Saldarini's caution (2007, 84) should be heeded—any proposal in this regard is bound to be speculative. However, regardless of the exact location of the community, their experience would have been similar in any Syro-Palestinian city. This is due to the cultural milieu produced by Hellenization (Pienaar 2022, 19–20, 56–61).⁸ This next section briefly describes this common experience in Hellenistic society.

In the Mediterranean world of the first century, the state used religion to control the people and prevent any official rebellion against Rome (Magie 1950, 1.572; Price 1984, 179; Horrell 2008, 57).⁹ This religion expressed

⁶ Brown and Meier propose one of the following options, 1) Jerusalem, 2) Alexandria, 3) Caesarea Maritima, 4) Syrian Countryside, 5) Phoenicia, or 6) Antioch.

⁷ As a result, Antioch seems to fit the bill of both Syro-Palestine and a city. However, this remains speculative.

⁸ What follows below is largely taken from Pienaar (2022).

⁹ See Price (1984, 59) for a chart of all the Imperial Temples in Asia Minor.

itself in the Imperial Cult, which is essentially the worship of the Roman Emperor (Magie 1950, 1.572; Price 1984, 179; Horrell 2008, 55). All of the Roman Emperors had temples in Asia Minor and had divine honors paid to them by the people of the Empire (Magie 1950, 1.572; Price 1984, 179). The Imperial Cult in Asia Minor provided a convenient way for people to show their loyalty to Rome and for Rome to gauge their loyalty; Rome saw loyalty to the Imperial Cult as loyalty towards Rome and vice versa (Magie 1950, 1.572; Price 1984, 179). Tacitus (1888, Ann. 4.36–37) affirms this in his *Annals* that when the people of Cyzicus in Phrygia neglected the cult of Augustus, Rome charged them with abusing Roman citizens.

Similarly, Sepphoris in Galilee was decimated by Rome for rebelling against the Empire after Herod's death in 4 BC (Berlin and Overman 2002, 1–14; Wood 2021, 80). Non-conformity to the Cult was seen not only as a challenge to the Empire but a challenge to the essence of society itself (Horrell 2008, 57). It threatened to unravel the cultural continuity and political stability that the Imperial Cult provided (54–57). Price (1984, 248) asserts, “The (imperial) cult ... enhanced the dominance of local elites over the populace, of cities over other cities, and Hellenistic over indigenous cultures. That is, the cult was a major part of the web of power that formed the fabric of society.” This led the elites to exert a good amount of social pressure on people who would not conform to the social norm and jeopardize the elites' standing with Rome.

Furthermore, it had the possibility of bringing divine disfavor and a worsened economic situation by offending the gods (Sordi 1986, 5, 203). Everybody believed that the gods needed to be appeased for society to prosper (Wright 2021a, 23). If the crop failed, Dionysus was angry because he had been neglected. Therefore, in the community's eyes, anyone who refused to honor the gods through various rituals and festivals was not

merely eccentric but was placing the entire community in danger. Such a person was a liability to society.

However, as Wright (2021a, 23) points out, “the Jews were exempt from all this.” They were a recognized religion in the Roman Empire. Therefore, they were not required to participate in the worship of the Roman gods (24). The only requisite was that the Jews pray to their God for the prosperity of the Romans. This, however, ceased in AD 66, and mayhem followed.

The precursor to the First Jewish Revolt was when Florus, the procurator of Judea, marched into Jerusalem and ordered his soldiers to kill and capture some Jews. Wright and Bird (2019, 101) note that, “He even had some Jewish leaders flogged and crucified.” Wood (2021, 83) recounts that a riot ensued, Florus returned to Caesarea, and in response the Jews stopped offering the daily sacrifice in the Temple on Rome's behalf. According to Wood (2021, 83) this provocation was the beginning of the end for the Jews. Berlin and Overman (2002, 7) note that in May of AD 67, Vespasian led the Roman army into Galilee. Vespasian started his conquest with Gabara in Northern Galilee. Here, Horsley (2002, 95) recounts that Vespasian “Finding no combatants in the town, ‘... slew all the males who were of age ... and also burned all the surrounding villages and towns,’ enslaving the remaining inhabitants.”¹⁰ Vespasian next turned to Yodfat in the northwest of Galilee and then to Gamla in the northeast before finally setting his sights on Jerusalem. Wood's (2021, 83) vivid description is worth noting:

The sound of war would have permeated through the valley and across the lake, causing the Jews in the surrounding villages and towns to hear as their countrymen perished. The smoke of the fires would hang

¹⁰ See also, Josephus (1937, *J.W.*, 3.132–134).

heavy across the lake, and eventually, when all has gone silent, the Army marched south using roads that brought them past cities, Kineret lake, villages, farmland, and synagogues. The terror from merely seeing the might of Rome with its banners, war machines, horses, and legions would have been immense, and the knowledge that Rome would dig in to finish their campaign [would have been] an unbearable horror.

Horsley (2002, 99) notes that “some villagers did resist the Roman reconquest, in which the Roman troops systematically slaughtered and enslaved the people and destroyed their villages without consideration of whether combatants were present.” Titus then marched to Jerusalem.¹¹ Rainey and Notley (2015, 393) describe the siege that followed:

After the lengthy five-month siege, the soldiers pillaged the city, murdering and looting as they went. John and Simon were captured. The former begged for his life and was imprisoned for the remainder of his life. Simon son of Giora was put in chains and taken to Rome for the triumph (War 6:433). Most of the city now lay in ruins. Only portions of the first wall and the three towers were left as a testimony to the former strength of the city and the Roman power that brought the Jewish resistance to its knees.

The Temple had fallen; there was blood in the streets; everything was on fire. Titus marched his spoils of war north into Caesarea Philippi for an elaborate procession and celebration. Josephus (1737, *J.W.*, 7.2–3) notes that some of the prisoners were used as entertainment; some were thrown

¹¹ Whilst Vespasian was leading a conquest against Judea, Nero died, so Vespasian returned to Rome to take over as emperor. Vespasian sent his son, Titus, to complete the conquest. Titus is the one who laid siege to Jerusalem and destroyed it.

to wild animals, and others were forced to engage in “battles to the death.” Others were crucified (Wood 2021, 85; Josephus 1737, *J.W.*, 7.2–3). Furthermore, in the city of Antioch, Titus took the spoils from his conquest of Jerusalem and set them at the city gate, which led to the Jewish quarter in the city. It served both as a humiliation and a reminder (Brown and Meier 2004, 32). Rome had been defied and the vengeance was swift, decisive, and deadly.

Saldarini (1994, 91–92) argues that Jesus’s replacement of ethnic kinship with fictive kinship (i.e., calling someone brother who obeys his father’s will) led to a sharp conflict between the Jewish leadership and the Christian community. Thus, when the Christians started to claim the Jewish exemption, the Jews were anything but accommodating (Wright 2021a, 24).¹² Wright (2021a, 24) observes, “To be a Jesus-follower was therefore to claim a new version of the standard Jewish exemption clause, and to do so with the full awareness that this was bound to be risky and unpopular, both with the Jewish community and with the wider civic, not least Roman, society.” Christians, as a result, were hated by the general populace because of their profoundly antisocial behavior (Schutter 1989, 11; Bechtler 1998, 84). Furthermore, having Christians lay claim to Jewish privileges while not living like a Jew could lead to a backlash against the Jewish community, as had happened during the revolt, which was still fresh in the mind of the Jewish community. Consequently, Christians trying to hide under the Jewish exemption clause were summarily ejected by Jews from the synagogues.

¹² It is this same exemption that Paul shelters under in southern Greece when accused by the Jewish leadership of teaching illegal forms of worship in Acts 18. Gallio, the proconsul, concludes that this is an internal-Jewish dispute and therefore outside of his purview. However, Wright (2021a, 24) notes that this exemption does not really apply elsewhere in the Roman Empire. See Acts 18:14–16.

This expulsion placed Christians in a precarious position. Suetonius (1914, *Nero* 16) recounts that Nero's persecution of the Christians was not merely for the fire, but because he deemed their religion to be "a novel and malicious superstition." They no longer had the safety net that belonged to the Jews. They were considered to be atheists and this, as Wright (2021a, 23–25) observes, was "illegal." Tacitus (1888, Ann. 15.44) recounts the violent nature of this persecution: some Christians were fed to wild beasts in the arena; others were nailed to crosses; still others were dipped in wax and set alight to serve as lamps in Nero's Garden. Nero killed the Christians merely for bearing the name *χριστιανός*. Pliny the Younger (*Frontline* n.d.) killed Christians if they would not recant their Christian faith and pay homage to Caesar (de Ste Croix 1964, 28–33). Le Roux (2018, 51) affirms that local citizens could bring Christians before civic magistrates, leading to their death. Therefore, the Christian proclamation that Christ is Lord and, as a result, Caesar is not, was hazardous. This was a tumultuous time in the Empire. Persecution was a daily reality, and it was deadly.

This was the social world of the Matthean community. Their experience of one of the most violent genocides of the first century was fresh in their memory. Their homes had been destroyed; their families killed. Daily reminders were set up in the town square. They were no longer under the cover of a recognized religion. Exiled by their own (i.e., the Jews), they were in constant danger of being punished by Rome for the capital crime of atheism.

Furthermore, the temples functioned as the meeting places for the trade guilds. The marketplace was dedicated to one of the local Roman gods, making these inaccessible to the Christian unless they were willing to proclaim allegiance to these gods. Naturally, the community was hard-pressed to hunker down, isolate, and fly under the radar. If nobody knew they were a Christian, and if they bought and sold from one another, nobody

would be any wiser. However, to the horror of the readers of Matthew's Gospel, he records Jesus proclaiming:

"You" are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. "You" are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (Matt 5:13–16; ESV)

Jesus's command to this community trying to survive a severely hostile society is to "be salt and be light." Not to hide, but "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt 28:19–20, ESV). If the social and cultural situation discussed above is kept in mind, the Sermon on the Mount takes on greater meaning. In the next section, the Matthean community's situation is brought into conversation with a passage from the Sermon.

4. Matthew 5:13–16

This study now turns to the text of Matthew 5:13–16. First, it should be noted that Matthew's Gospel falls within the genre of ancient biography. Thus, it does not necessarily correspond to what contemporary persons would call *history* in the sense that it provides a chronological step-by-step account of Jesus's life. Rather, the Gospels provide, like ancient Greco-Roman biographies, a window into the life of Jesus through a

literary presentation of his life and deeds. However, Keener (2019) notes on this point that this does not imply that the Jesus conveyed in the text is made up by the author. Rather, he (2019, 171) observes that ancient biographers did not invent their own stories but conveyed that which they deemed to be historically true even if it was contextualized in a different manner.¹³ Keener (2019, 404–415) along with Bauckham (2008) explains, that this is why there was a premium on eyewitness accounts in the production of these biographies. However, whilst these biographies, which the Church calls Gospels, are accounts of Jesus’s life and ministry, that is not all that is conveyed through them. For example, Saldarini (1994, 85) states that the Gospel of Matthew conveys the life and experiences of the Matthean community through the story of Jesus and his disciples. These correspondences are not “one-to-one” but, through a careful reading of the Gospel, it is possible to discern some clues as to the social situation that Matthew and his readers were confronted with. This is the aim of this study. Therefore, having presented the general life situation of Christian communities in northern Galilee and Syria, it now turns specifically to Matthew 5:13–16 in order to ascertain the Gospel’s message.

Ἑμεῖς ἐστε τὸ ἅλας τῆς γῆς· ἐὰν δὲ τὸ ἅλας μωρανθῇ, ἐν τίνι ἀλισθήσεται; εἰς οὐδὲν ἰσχύει ἔτι εἰ μὴ βληθὲν ἔξω καταπατεῖσθαι ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Ἑμεῖς ἐστε τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου. οὐ δύναται πόλις κρυβῆναι ἐπάνω ὄρους κειμένη· οὐδὲ καίουσιν λύχνον καὶ τιθέασιν αὐτὸν ὑπὸ τὸν μῶδιον ἀλλ’ ἐπὶ τὴν λυχνίαν, καὶ λάμπει πᾶσιν τοῖς ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ. οὕτως λαμψάτω τὸ φῶς ὑμῶν ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ὅπως ἴδωσιν ὑμῶν τὰ καλὰ ἔργα καὶ δοξάσωσιν τὸν πατέρα ὑμῶν τὸν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.¹⁴

¹³ Keener (2019, 210) observes elsewhere that in the Greco-Roman world getting one’s facts right was a matter of honor and thus something all biographers intended to do.

"You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:13–16, NRSV)

Firstly, it is necessary to mention two methodological positions. It is noted that, according to Luz (2007, 203–24), critical scholarship posits that the sources behind this Matthean text are an amalgamation of Matthean redactions and the Q sayings. This study is not interested in these hypothetical reconstructions but rather engages with the text as a final product.¹⁵ Secondly, this study is produced in a Western context and thus reflects primarily on the Western church’s syncretism and their recent period of peace with secular society. This is not to discount the various communities in China, India, the Middle East, and parts of Africa in which this is not the case. Its purpose is rather to encourage the Western church to brace itself for the tides that are turning and to draw on the example of the Matthean community to remain faithful when the cultural tide turns, as it surely will.

The sentences Ἑμεῖς ἐστε τὸ ἅλας τῆς γῆς (You are the salt of the earth) and Ἑμεῖς ἐστε τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου (You are the light of the world) are

¹⁴ Matthew 5:13–16; All quotations from the Greek New Testament come from the NA²⁸.

¹⁵ This study agrees with Matthew Thiessen (2020, 6) who writes that “I refuse to comment on something that I do not believe existed.” Those who disagree with this position have the burden of proof to produce textual evidence that proves otherwise, which up until now they have been unable to do.

structurally and grammatically identical. Keener (1999, 173) asserts that verses 14–16 elaborate on the point made in verse 13. Thus, in dealing with one passage, one deals with the other as well. This study deals with the salt first and then moves on to the light.

Firstly, why does Jesus use salt as a metaphor? This metaphor can only be understood in light of the use of salt within first-century society. Scholars agree (Luz 2007, 205; Brannan 2012, *Magnesians* 10;¹⁶ Davies and Allison, 1988, 472; Keener 1999, 172; Blomberg 1992, 102; Morris, 1992, 104) that salt was used as a preservative in the ancient world. Luz (2007, 205) along with Keener (1999, 172–173) agrees that it was also used as a flavoring agent to retard fermentation in manure and to treat wineskins. Nolland (2005, 212–213) adds that salt was a cleansing and purifying agent (see also Luz 2007, 205). Olley (2003, 16) boldly proclaims that the usage of salt has no religious connotation in these verses. He goes on to say, “there are no Old Testament or Jewish precedents” for salt containing any sort of religious symbolism (Olley 2003, 16). This study contradicts Olley’s thesis.

This study proposes that the usage of the phrase in Matthew’s Gospel is the same as the covenantal usage in the Old Testament. This observation has not been expounded on by most of the commentators of the Gospel.¹⁷ Although Davies and Allison (1988, 473) note the possibility of the Old Testament’s usage here, they conclude that, “it is quite impossible to decide which one characteristic is to the fore in Mt 5.13.” This study proposes that the retrieval of the use of the metaphor of salt in the Old Testament allows one to see how it is used in Matthew’s Gospel.

¹⁶ Ignatius mentions such a use in his letter *to the Magnesians*.

¹⁷ It is absent from Keener (1998), Nolland (2005), and Turner (2008) as well as Overman (1996, 76), Marshall (2004), and Morris (1992, 104).

In a seminal article, Garlington (2011, 715–748) sets forth “four central and overlapping notions” that inform one’s reading of “salt of the earth” in Matthew’s Gospel.¹⁸ Of central importance, for Garlington, is the notion that “salt is a covenantal concept” (716). Within this covenantal framework, Garlington notes four symbols connected to salt within the covenant of the Old Testament. Two of these are central to this study and are discussed below, namely salt as a symbol of *permanence* and *purity*.¹⁹

Leviticus 2:13 reads, “You shall season all your grain offerings with salt. You shall not let the *salt of the covenant* with your God be missing from your grain offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt” (ESV).²⁰ Garlington (2011, 717) notes that the threefold repetition of salt brings out its prominence. Furthermore, it is referred to as the “salt of the covenant.” Wenham (1979, 71) proposes that salt symbolizes the covenant itself in this verse. This is because Greeks and Jews are noted to have consumed salt together when they sealed a covenant (Latham 1982, 30–35; Davies and Allison 1988, 472).²¹ Numbers 18:19 expounds on the exact meaning of the covenant of salt: “All the holy contributions that the people of Israel present to the Lord I give to you, and to your sons and daughters with you, as a perpetual due. It is a *covenant of salt forever* before the Lord for you and for your offspring with you” (ESV).²² This covenant of salt is an eternal covenant. Wenham (1979, 71) comments, “so it was something that could not be destroyed by fire or time or any other means in integrity. The addition of salt to the offering was a reminder that the worshipper was in an eternal

¹⁸ This study provides an overview of Garlington’s findings, but see his in-depth analysis of the relevant texts as well.

¹⁹ see Garlington’s article for a discussion of salt as a symbol of covenant *fellowship* and *curse*.

²⁰ Typographic emphases added.

²¹ See Latham (1982) for the Greek sources and Davies and Allison (1988) for the Jewish materials.

²² Typographic emphases added.

covenant relationship with his God. This meant that the worshipper had a perpetual duty to uphold and keep the covenant law.”

Indeed, Wevers (1997, 304) asserts that “the salt as a preservative was thought to make the *διαθήκη* eternally valid.” The perpetuity and permanence of the covenant are further attested by the rendition of Leviticus 2:13b in the LXX.²³ The LXX text of Leviticus 2:13b reads *καὶ πᾶν δῶρον θυσίας ὑμῶν ἀλλὶ ἀλισθήσεται, οὐ διαπαύσετε ἄλλα διαθήκης κυρίου ἀπὸ θυσιασμάτων ὑμῶν, ἐπὶ παντὸς δώρου ὑμῶν προσοίσετε κυρίῳ τῷ θεῷ ὑμῶν ἅλας*. Wevers (1997, 20) paraphrase of the LXX reads, “You may not bring to an end, cause to rest, the covenant of salt from your sacrifice.” For Wevers (1997, 391) and Latham (1982, 40), this text emphasizes the permanence of the covenant and the loyalty it demanded from its adherents. Indeed, Garlington (2011, 717) concludes that this verse and the reoccurrence of salt in the passage underscores “the permanence and stability of the covenant, and thus the necessity of covenant faithfulness.”

Garlington (2011, 721) further notes that salt is used to symbolize purity. Dumbrell (1981, 12) attempts to separate the factors of *permanence* and *purity*. This, however, seems unwarranted as purity and permanence (or faithfulness) are always connected in the Old Testament. The purifying theme of salt in the Old Testament is found in a few passages. In Exodus 30:35, the offering is to be “seasoned with salt, pure and holy” (ESV). Quarles (2011, 78) notes that this passage suggests salt was a “symbol of purification.” In 2 Kings 2:21, Elisha throws salt into a contaminated spring and declares, “Thus says the LORD, I have healed this water; from now on neither death nor miscarriage shall come from it” (ESV). Davies and Allison (1988, 473) claim it is impossible to know which usage of salt from their

eleven possibilities is in view here. Hagner (1993, 99) ambiguously notes that salt is a necessity of life. This study agrees with Blomberg (1992, 102) that, “One must avoid assuming that all possible uses of salt were in view here.”

The two symbols of salt behind Matthew’s usage are covenant faithfulness and purity. Morris (1992, 103) alleges that the Matthean disciples oppose what is corrupt and function as a moral antiseptic to society; as a preservative. The word usually translated as “lost its taste,” (ESV) or “loses its saltiness,” (NIV) is *μωρανθῆ*. This word comes from the noun *μωρός*, which refers to a fool, or a godless person (BDAG 2000, 663). Indeed, Blomberg (1992, 102) contends that it does not refer to the scientifically impossible notion of losing its taste. Instead, it refers to the common problem in the ancient world of becoming “defiled.” If the salt is defiled with various impurities, it becomes worthless as a preservative (Turner 2008, 76; Blomberg 1992, 102). When this defiling has occurred, Jesus says that the only thing that remains is for one “to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet” (ESV). Blomberg (1992, 102) expounds this saying well when he asserts that,

“To be thrown out and trampled by men” neither affirms nor denies anything about “eternal security.” Rather, as Luke 14:35 makes even clearer, this phrase refers to the world’s response to Christians if they do not function as they should. Believers who fail to arrest corruption become worthless as agents of change and redemption. Christianity may make its peace with the world and avoid persecution, but it is thereby rendered impotent to fulfill its divinely ordained role. It will thus ultimately be rejected even by those with whom it has sought compromise.

²³ All LXX quotations come from Rahlfs (1979).

The purpose of this passage is to remind the disciples that they are sent into the world to redeem it. If they become defiled by shrinking back from this duty through assimilation, they are worthless. They are to be cast out into the streets like garbage.

Moving on to verses 14–16, the sense seems to be more straightforward. Jesus declares that the disciples “are the light of the world” (ESV). Keener (1999, 174–175) notes that the Jews would have found this correlation alarming (see also Davies and Allison 1988, 471). In the Old Testament, Israel was to function as the light to the nations. However, Jesus said that it is his disciples who are the light of the world (Keener 1999, 174–175; Davies and Allison 1988, 471). Davies and Allison (1988, 471) add that in Matthew’s Gospel, it is no longer “the Temple, Torah, or Israel who are “salt or light of the world ... but Jesus’s followers.”²⁴ Next, the disciples are likened to a city on a hill. Hagner connects this city with Jerusalem because it is built on a hill, and in the Old Testament it is said to be a light (Hagner 1993, 100). Others like Luz (2007, 207) and Nolland (2005, 214) argue that this connection is unwarranted because the noun πόλις (city) does not have a definite article. Some, like Blomberg (1992, 102) and Morris (1992, 105), do not discuss the matter. The purpose of the metaphor, according to Luz (2007, 207) is clear: the reason someone builds a city on a hill is so that it can be seen from a distance; otherwise, they would have built it in a valley.

Similarly, someone lights a lamp to give light to the environment around it. Finally, Matthew’s Gospel links the two metaphors with the

adverb οὕτως (in the same way; ESV). They are to shine their light before men by “doing good works” (ESV). This, in turn, will cause those who see them to glorify God. The command to be salt and light reinforces the same idea.

Quarles (2011, 79) contends that the parallelism between Matthew 5:13 and 5:14 further strengthens this conclusion. The sentences Ὑμεῖς ἐστε τὸ ἅλας τῆς γῆς (You are the salt of the earth) and Ὑμεῖς ἐστε τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου (You are the light of the world) are structurally and grammatically identical (Quarles 2011, 79). Indeed, Quarles insists, “This parallelism suggests that the metaphors of ‘salt’ and ‘light’ have roughly the same sense.” Certainly, for Quarles, “You are the light of the world” means, “that the disciples of Jesus will be characterized by righteousness and purity and that their righteousness will move others to glorify God and seek to be transformed by Him in a similar way.” Blomberg (1992, 103) summarizes that meaning well when he says,

Both metaphors of salt and light raise important questions about Christian involvement in society regarding all forms of separatism or withdrawal. We are not called to control secular power structures; neither are we promised that we can Christianize the legislation and values of the world. But we must remain active preservative agents, indeed irritants, in calling the world to heed God’s standards. We dare not form isolated Christian enclaves to which the world pays no attention.

²⁴ Nolland (2005, 213) notes that in the Jewish texts Adam, God, and the servant are also designated by light.

5. Conclusion: A Contemporary Reflection

This study concludes by reflecting on the practical significance and applicability of these verses to the church today. Thus, the mode of language will shift from scholarly and analytical to personal and exhortatory.

One can imagine the difficulty this text posed to the Matthean community. After their expulsion from Judaism and their startling designation as atheists, their initial impulse would have been to isolate themselves from the wider world. If this proved too difficult, the temptation of assimilation into the culture through syncretism or a return to Judaism would have proved an appealing alternative. The community may have been sizable and prevalent, as McIver (2012, 230, also *passim*) suggests; but they were undoubtedly marginalized by society. Pushed by external forces into this proverbial corner, the Matthean community needed to choose between assimilation and isolation. Matthew's Gospel, however, adds a third option to this list—"be salt and be light." They were not to become defiled by assimilating into the culture or returning to Judaism and so become worthless. Nor were they to hide or fly under the radar and wait for the Temple to be rebuilt and the Kingdom of Israel to be restored. The Gospel urges the community to shine its light before men; to do the good works of the Kingdom so that God may be glorified. The Matthean community is not only to exist in society; they are to live as sent ones. Indeed, Jesus's final words, according to Matthew, are "go, make disciples of all nations, teach them everything you have learned from me, baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. [You do not need to return to the Temple, for] I am with you" (Matthew 28:18–20; author's interpretation). Jews held the common belief that God's presence was in the Temple and thus would have desired to return to it and rebuild it. However, Jesus says, "I am with you, go into the world." These three commands, to be salt, to be light, and to go as sent ones proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom, are

not abstract virtues as Aquinas thought. They are real-life commands with real consequences if they are obeyed.

If the community obeyed these commands, the results could be catastrophic. One could witness to another regarding Jesus in the morning, and by evening one's whole family could be brought before the magistrate for advocating an unsanctioned religion. For these Christians, taking up one's cross was not merely a nice idea but an ever-present reality. Waking up to go to church at 9:00 a.m. does not qualify as suffering. Placing a bumper sticker of a fish on our car does not constitute bearing witness.

Christianity has devolved into something inward, governing only our personal lives (Hauerwas 2006, 60). Christianity has excised the ethical thrust of the Sermon on the Mount by proposing that the most important thing is accepting Jesus as a "personal savior" (60). This led to what Bonhoeffer (2001, 43) termed "cheap grace." Bonhoeffer contends that cheap grace is "as doctrine, as a principle, as a system. It means forgiveness of sins as a general truth; it means God's love as merely a Christian idea of God. Those who affirm it already have their sins forgiven." However, these generalities can only persist if one believes that Jesus is not the Son of God and that he did not live as he did (Hauerwas 2006, 60). Davies (1969, 148) asserts that these commands in the sermon, "point beyond themselves to himself, as their source." Indeed, Christians now become witnesses of the Messiah through obedience to his commands. One does not simply trust in Jesus for salvation and then get on with one's life. The purpose of Jesus's coming is not to take Christians to heaven one day, but to bring God's Kingdom to earth.

Christians then are the ones who manifest that Kingdom on the earth through living like Christ and obeying his charge to be salt and light. Lischer (1987, 161–162) affirms this, noting that, "Our only hope of living as the community of the Sermon is to acknowledge that we do not retaliate,

hate, curse, lust, divorce, swear, brag, preen, worry, or backbite because it is not in the nature of our God or our destination that we should be such a people.” Indeed, Hauerwas (2006, 61) asserts, “The sermon, therefore, is not a list of requirements, but rather a description of the life of a people gathered by and around Jesus.” To be salt and light, then, is constantly to be visible to the world around us. To take the beatitudes and shine them before men so that God can be glorified. Bonhoeffer (2001, 113) contends “to flee into invisibility is to deny the call. Any community of Jesus which wants to be invisible is no longer a community that follows him.” Yoder (1984, 135–149) notes that the Constantinian shift in the fourth century changed what it meant to be a Christian. Before Christianity became a state religion under emperor Constantine, everyone who attended church was a Christian. It took exceptional conviction and courage to be counted as one. However, after Christianity became mainstream, the “doctrine of the invisibility of the church,” arose for the first time. This was the start of nominal Christianity, since everybody was doing it. From then on one could not be sure that “true Christians” were present among the mass of people. As a result, the Sermon on the Mount became good advice for those who really wanted to be holy. As for the rest, it remained optional. Some examples from the contemporary Christian situation in both the west and elsewhere are instructive for the application of this text.

In India, with the emergence of the new Hindu-only government under Narendra Modi (see Serhan 2022) Christians are forced underground. I have friends who serve these Christian populations, and they note the existence of “silent Christians.” These are Christians who dare not even mention the name of Christ in public, never mind acknowledge their allegiance to him, for fear of being expelled from the village. My friends have had the Indian Police show up at their houses demanding to see their documentation and inquiring about their reason for being in India. They

live in constant danger of imprisonment or deportation, as has already happened to one of their acquaintances.

In China, the Chinese Communist Party has often cracked down on Christians. Lai Jinqiang, a Chinese entrepreneur was arrested and put on trial for producing an audio Bible (Li 2020). Pastor Wang Yi was imprisoned in 2018 after being accused of “inciting subversion of state power” (Enos 2022). In Africa, one sees similar examples.

In Kenya, there have been numerous lethal attacks on Christian communities. In 2019 in an attack on a bus, eleven Christians were shot by the terrorist group al-Shabaab (Bulut 2020). Four years earlier in 2015 terrorists from the same group singled out and killed 147 Christian students at Garissa University College (Bulut 2020). In Nigeria, there are multiple reports of violence, kidnapping, and murder committed against the Christian population (Gilbert 2022). One Nigerian priest was tortured to death and a woman was captured and set on fire because of “blasphemy” (Chimtom 2022). The same has happened in other African countries like Eritrea, Burkina Faso, Mozambique, and Sudan.

In the West, the tide is already turning. A Christian baker who refused to bake a cake for a homosexual couple’s wedding was sued for discrimination (Slevin 2021, 1). A Christian professor was fired for challenging his students’ “progressive” views on marriage and sexuality (Morris 2019). It is now considered a hate crime if Christians advocate for biblical views on various topics in Scotland (Catholic News Service 2021, 1). The cost of being a Christian is increasing day by day as the culture reverts to its pagan roots. The benefits of being a Christian, similarly, are becoming less and less. The question this study leaves with the reader is this: will you be salt and light even if it costs you your life? This decision was laid before the Matthean community, and we have to face it today as well.

Works Cited

- Aland, Kurt, Barbara Aland, Joannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger. 2012. *Novum Testamentum Graece*. 28th ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft.
- Aquinas, Thomas. 1948. *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas: The Complete English Edition*. Translated by The Fathers of the Dominican Province. New York: Benzinger.
- Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. 2000. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bauckham, Richard. 2008. *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Bechtler, Steven R. 1998. *Following in His Steps: Suffering, Community, and Christology in 1 Peter*. SBL Dissertation Series 162. Atlanta: Scholars Press.
- Berlin, Andrea M., and Andrew Overman, eds. 2002. *The First Jewish Revolt: Archaeology, History and Ideology*. Oxford: Routledge.
- Blomberg, Craig L. 1992. *Matthew*. NAC vol. 22. Nashville: Broadman & Holman.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. 2001. *Discipleship*. Translated by Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss. Minneapolis: Fortress.
- Brannan, Rick, ed. 2012. *The Apostolic Fathers in English*. Bellingham: Lexham Press.
- Brown, Raymond E., and John P. Meier. 1983. *Antioch and Rome: New Testament Cradles of Catholic Christianity*. Mahwah: Paulist Press.
- Bulut, Uzay. 2020. "Christian Persecution in Africa: What Could Be Done to Help the Victims?" *Providence Magazine*, January 14. <https://providencemag.com/2020/01/christian-persecution-africa-help-victims/>.
- Catholic News Service. 2021. "Scottish Christian leaders say hate crime bill limits freedom to disagree." *UCA News*, February 18. <https://www.ucanews.com/news/scottish-christian-leaders-say-hate-crime-bill-limits-freedom-to-disagree/91453>.
- Chafer, Lewis S. 1948. *Systematic Theology*. Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary.
- Chimtom, Ngala Killian. 2022. "Despite persecution, Christians in Africa not losing hope." *Crux*, August 20. <https://cruxnow.com/church-in-africa/2022/08/despite-persecution-christians-in-africa-not-losing-hope>.
- Chrysostom, John. 2015. *The Homilies of Saint John Chrysostom: On the Gospel of Saint Matthew*. Translated by George Prevost. Oxford: Aeterna Press.
- Davies, W. D. 1969. *Sermon on the Mount*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Davies, W. D., and Dale C. Allison. 1988. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*. ICC. New York: T&T Clark.
- De Ste Croix, G. E. M. 1964. "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted? —A Rejoinder." *Past and Present* 27:28–33. <https://doi.org/10.1093/past/27.1.28>
- Dumbrell, William J. 1981. "The Logic of the Role of the Law in Matthew V 1–12." *Novum Testamentum* 23(1):1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853681x00016>
- Enos, Olivia. 2022. "China's Ongoing Persecution of Christians and the Case of Pastor Wang Yi." *The Heritage Foundation*, May 4. <https://www.heritage.org/asia/commentary/chinas-ongoing-persecution-christians-and-the-case-pastor-wang-yi>.
- Foster, Paul. 2004. *Community, Law, and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*.

- WUNT 177. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Frontline. n.d. "Letters of Pliny the Younger to the Emperor Trajan." Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). Last accessed 1 February 2019. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/maps/primary/pliny.html>.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 2013. *Truth and Method*. Translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Garland, David E. 2001. *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary*. Macon: Smyth & Helwys.
- Garlington, Don. 2011. "'The Salt of the Earth' in Covenantal Perspective." *JETS* 54(4):715–48.
- Gilbert, Lela. "African Christians Face Deadly Violence in 2022." *News Week*, January 14, 2022. <https://www.newsweek.com/african-christians-face-deadly-violence-2022-opinion-1669128>.
- Hagner, Donald A. 1993. *Matthew 1–13*. WBC 33a. Dallas: Word Books.
- Hall, Emily. 2021. "What is the Romans Road to Salvation." Christianity.com. Last modified July 19. <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/salvation/what-is-the-romans-road-to-salvation.html>.
- Hauerwas, Stanley. 2006. *Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible: Matthew*. Grand Rapids: Brazos.
- Holmes, Michael. W., ed. 1989. *The Apostolic Fathers*. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Horrell, David G. 2008. *1 Peter*. New Testament Guides. London: Bloomsbury.
- . 2020. *Ethnicity and Inclusion: Religion, Race, and Whiteness in Constructions of Jewish and Christian Identities*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Horsley, Richard A. 2002. "Power Vacuum and Power Struggle." In *The First Jewish Revolt: Archaeology, History and Ideology*, edited by Andrea M. Berlin and Andrew Overman, 87–109. Oxford: Routledge.
- Josephus, Flavius. *The Jewish War: or, the History of the Destruction of Jerusalem*. Vol. 3. Translated by William Whiston. London, William Bowyer, 1737. <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/josephus/war-pref.html>.
- . *The Jewish War: or, the History of the Destruction of Jerusalem*. Vol. 7. Translated by William Whiston. London, William Bowyer, 1737. <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/josephus/war-pref.html>.
- Keener, Craig S. 1998. *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- . 2019. *Christobiography: Memory, History, and the Reliability of the Gospels*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Kissinger, Warren S. 1975. *The Sermon on the Mount: A History of Interpretation and Bibliography*. Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press.
- Latham, James E. 1982. *The Religious Symbolism of Salt*. Paris: Editions Beauchesne.
- Le Roux, Elritia. 2018. *Ethics in 1 Peter: The Imitatio Christi and the Ethics of Suffering in 1 Peter and the Gospel of Mark—A Comparative Study*. Eugene: Pickwick.
- Levine, Amy-Jill. 2014. *Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Li, Attoney. 2020. "Christian Entrepreneur Put on Trial for Making Audio Bible Players." *China Christian Daily*, December 17. http://m.chinachristiandaily.com/news/category/2020-12-17/christian-entrepreneur-put-on-trial-for-making-audio-bible-players_9785.
- Lischer, Richard. 1987. "The Sermon on the Mount as Radical Pastoral Care." *Interpretation* 41(2):161–162. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002096438704100205>

- Luz, Ulrich. 2007. *Matthew 1–7*. Hermeneia. Translated by James E. Crouch. Minneapolis: Fortress.
- Magie, David. 1950. *Roman Rule in Asia Minor to the End of the Third Century after Christ*. 2 vols. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Marshall, Howard I. 2004. *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.
- McIver, Robert K. 2012. *Mainstream or Marginal? The Matthean Community in Early Christianity*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- Morris, Andrea. 2019. “Judge Rules in Favor of Christian Professor After His Wrongful Termination for Challenging Students’ Beliefs on Sexuality.” *CBN News*. July 27. <https://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/us/2018/november/california-professor-fired-for-challenging-students-beliefs-about-sexuality-is-reinstated>.
- Morris, Leon. 1992. *The Gospel according to Matthew*. PNTC. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Nolland, John. 2005. *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Olley, John W. 2003. “‘You are the Light of the World’: A Missiological Focus for the Sermon on the Mount.” *Mission Studies* 20(1):9–27. <https://doi.org/10.1163/157338303x00034>
- Overman, Andrew J. 1996. *Church and Community in Crisis: The Gospel According to Matthew*. Valley Forge: Trinity Press International.
- Pienaar, Frans-Johan. 2022. *Called to Suffer: The Necessity of Suffering in Christian Formation in the Letter of First Peter*. Portland: WIPF & Stock.
- Price, S. R. F. 1984. *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Quarles, Charles. 2011. *The Sermon on the Mount: Restoring Christ’s Message to the Modern Church*. Nashville: B&H Academic.
- Rahlfs, Alfred. 1979. *Septuaginta: With Morphology*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft. Logos.
- Rainey, Anson F., and R. Steven Notley. 2015. *The Sacred Bridge: Carta’s Atlas of the Biblical World*. Jerusalem: Carta.
- Ramantswana, Hulisani. 2016. “Decolonising Biblical Hermeneutics in the (South) African Context.” *AcT* 36(24):178–203. DOI:10.4314/actat.v36i1.11s
- Saldarini, Anthony J. 1994. *Matthew’s Christian-Jewish Community*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Schreiner, S. 2007. “Martin Luther.” In *The Sermon on the Mount through the Centuries: From the Early Church to John Paul II*, edited by J. P. Greenman, T. Larsen, and S. R. Spencer, 109–128. Grand Rapids: Brazos.
- Schutter, William L. 1989. *Hermeneutic and Composition in 1 Peter*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Serhan, Yasmeeen. 2022. “The Hinduization of India Is Nearly Complete.” *The Atlantic*, May 27. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2022/05/narendra-modi-india-religion-hindu-nationalism/630169/>
- Sim, David C. 1998. *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism: The History and Social Setting of the Matthean Community*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark.
- Slevin, Colleen. 2021. “Christian Baker Sued Again for Refusing to Bake a Cake.” *Christianity Today*, March 24. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2021/march/colorado-christian-baker-jack-phillips-sued-lgbt-cake-court.html>.
- Sordi, Marta. 1986. *The Christians and the Roman Empire*. Translated by A. Bedini. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Suetonius. *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*. Translated by J C Rolfe. London: Heinemann, 1914. https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Suetonius/12Caesars/Nero*.html.

Tacitus. 1888. *Annals*. Translated by Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb. London: Macmillan and Co. <http://classics.mit.edu/Tacitus/annals.4.iv.html>.

Thiessen, Matthew. 2020. *Jesus and the Forces of Death: The Gospels' Portrayal of Ritual Impurity within First-Century Judaism*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

Turner, David L. 2008. *Matthew*. BECNT. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

Ukpong, Justin S. Musa Dube, Gerald West, M. Alpheus Masoga, Norman Gottwald, Jeremy Punt, Tinyiko Maluleke, and Vincent L. Wimbush. 2002. *Reading the Bible in a Global Village: Issues and Challenges from African Readings*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature.

Wenham, Gordon J. 1979. *The Book of Leviticus*, NICOT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Wevers, John William. 1997. *Notes on the Greek Text of Leviticus*. SBLSCS 44. Atlanta: SBL Press.

Wood, Carrie Lynn. 2021. "The Matthean Gospel in Time and Space: Spatial Dynamics and Propulsive Theology in Matthew 4:12–18." Ph.D. diss., Regent University.

Wright, N. T. 2021a. *Commentaries for Christian Formation: Galatians*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Wright, N. T. 2021b. "How to Hear the Other Half of the Bible's Conversation." N. T. Wright Online. Last modified July 6. <https://www.ntwrightonline.org/how-to-hear-the-other-half-of-the-bibles-conversation>.

Wright, N. T., and Michael F. Bird. 2019. *The New Testament in Its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Yoder, John Howard. 1984. *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.