

## **Mission in Matthew against the Horizon of Matthew 24.**

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### **Introduction.**

The classic text with which to begin a study of mission in Matthew's Gospel is undoubtedly Matthew 28:16-20. At a symposium on 'The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles' held in April, 1998 in Norway, the papers presented on Matthew's Gospel could be summarized under the heading 'the Gospel of Matthew and the Great Commission', for the focus centered on the interpretation of these four key verses.<sup>1</sup> They are crucial to any theory about whether the evangelist revokes or redirects the missional perspectives of Matthew 10, to any hypothesis about the importance of mission in the Matthean agenda and any convictions about the projected recipients of that mission – whether the mission is to be inclusive of both Jews and Gentiles, or now directed to the Gentiles only. In missional as well as chronological terms, they have a good claim to be the 'last word'.

Yet it is equally clear that the final verses of Matthew's Gospel cannot be interpreted in isolation. It is the Gospel in its entirety that gives content and depth to the words of the Risen Christ in Mt 28:18-20. Viewed against the broader canvas of the Gospel, the disciples are not the only ones who have been 'sent': prophets in the past (11:13, 21:34-36) culminating in the work of John the Baptist (11:10), and 'prophets, sages and scribes' still to come (23:34). Jesus is the One sent by God (10:40), and it is finally the Human One who will send the angels (13:41, 24:31). The authority behind all mission is ultimately God, and it is God who has given all authority to the Risen Christ. So mission needs to be understood broadly as the way in which God seeks out the lost.

It is not possible within the parameters of this paper to pursue all facets of this multi-dimensional theme. The scope of this paper is to bring Mt 28:16-20 into creative dialogue with another Matthean text that is of great importance for understanding mission in Matthew's Gospel, namely Mt. 24:1-31. This paper proposes that these verses of the eschatological discourse offer a vital intra-textual horizon for the interpretation of the 'great commission', and for an understanding of Matthew's missional perspective as a whole.

The 'great commission' shares a number of important connections with this section of Matthew's eschatological discourse (Mt. 24:1-31). First, both have as their focus the 'future' in relation to the chronology of the narrative. Both passages look beyond the narrative time of the Gospel to an implied imminent future. Second, both give prominence to imperatives that the Matthean community<sup>2</sup> could read as directly applicable to themselves and their context. The significance of these imperatives will be evaluated below. Third, the setting of both 'revelations' invites the reader to connect them. In both passages, the disciples come to Jesus on a mountain, and the

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<sup>1</sup> See *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles*, eds. Jostein Ådna and Hans Kvalbein (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, Paul Siebeck, 2000) 17-86.

<sup>2</sup> In using the term 'community', I do not mean to imply a single, uniform gathering, but, as presented in sociological studies such as those by Saldarini, Overman and Stanton, a complex cluster of communities.

evangelist emphasizes that they are alone with him. This is in contrast to the mountain-top teaching of chapters 5-7, where a reference to the presence of the crowds frames the narrative (5:1, 7:28-29).

More specifically, there are some close verbal connections between the two passages. One of them is the phrase 'end of the age' in Mt. 28:20, which as both the final words of the Risen Christ, and the conclusion of the Gospel explicitly recalls the question of the disciples in Mt. 24:3 as to what the sign of Jesus' coming and the **suntel eia" tou aijwou"** will be. The nature of the answer which Matthew 24 gives to the disciples' question forms the framework for understanding the concluding words of the Gospel. This fourth connection between the passages will be discussed in more detail below.

The fifth significant connection between the passages is the reference in Mt. 28:19 to **panta ta; e;nh**, who are to be the recipients of the disciples' mission. This recalls the statement in Mt. 24:14, where the good news of the God's reign is to be preached as a testimony to all the nations<sup>3</sup> – **pa'sin toi" e;nesin**. The connection between the mission to the nations and the end that is drawn by both passages will be the subject of further discussion below.

A further connection between the passages lies in the parallel between the future 'power and great glory' of the Human One in Mt. 24:30 and 'all authority in heaven and on earth' (Mt. 28:18) of the Risen Christ. Both passages allude to Daniel 7:13-14, implicitly in Mt 28<sup>4</sup>, and explicitly in Mt. 24:30. There is, however, a contrast implied here as well; although the Risen Christ has already been given all authority, his presence among the disciples in Matthew 28 does not yet constitute the **parousia** of Mt. 24:3, 27-31, as it is not yet apparent to all (**w'sper gar h;astroph; e;exercetai apo; ajatolw; kai; fainetai e;w" dusmw;h, ou'tw" e'stai h;iparousia tou' uibu'tou' ajqrw; pou;**, Mt. 24:27).

These various striking connections between Mt. 28: 16-20 and Mt. 24:1-31 compel the careful reader to interpret them in close dialogue with one another.

### **The 'Eschatological Discourse' as a window on the 'present' for Matthew.**

One of the most significant difficulties in bringing these two texts into dialogue is in identifying a chronological sequence in Matthew 24: 4-31. It is clear that the commission of Mt. 28:19-20 pertains the present time for the Matthean community, but it is by no means so clear where the present time begins and ends in Matthew 24.

In *Eschatology in the Making: Mark, Matthew and the Didache*, I have argued that the progression of Mt. 24:4-31 is best understood as a 'two-sequence schema'<sup>5</sup>. By this I mean that there are two parallel chronological sequences in these verses that span the past, present and future for the Matthean community, from different perspectives. The first sequence begins at verse 6, and encompasses the immediate past of the Matthean

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<sup>3</sup> In order to avoid pre-judging the issue of whether **ta; e;nh** includes or excludes Israel, I will use the term 'nations' rather than 'Gentiles' as the translation of this term. For some comments on this issue, see U. Luz, 'Has Matthew abandoned the Jews? A Response to Hans Kvalbein and Peter Stuhlmacher concerning Matt 28:16-20', in *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles*, 64.

<sup>4</sup> So W.D. Davies and D. C. Allison Jr., *Matthew* Vol. III, (ICC, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997) 688.

<sup>5</sup> See. Vicky Balabanski *Eschatology in the Making: Mark, Matthew and the Didache* (CUP 1997, 2005) 153-179, especially table 4, 155-156.

community, the period shaped by the Jewish War. This corresponds to the opening of the second sequence, beginning at verse 15, describing the necessity of flight during the Jewish War.

The present for the Matthean community is characterized by suffering, *ql iyi*", and the second section of each sequence opens with a reference to this (verses 9, and 21). In both sequences, prominence is given to false prophets leading many – even the elect – astray. In the first sequence this is addressed in v.11, and in the second it is the issue addressed by verses 23-28. The opening verses of the passage, vv. 4-5, form a prelude to the two chronological sequences. They also refer to false christs who lead many astray, and set the scene for the present experience of the Matthean community.

Each sequence ends with a description of the future – the End – from different perspectives. In the first sequence this is verses 13-14, and in the second, verses 29-31. The description of the first sequence depicts the completion of the mission to the nations and the gathering-in of those who have remained faithful. It answers the first part of the disciples' question in v. 3 – when will this be? – with the statement 'then the end will come', verse 14. The second sequence depicts the cosmic signs that are to accompany the end, as well as the gathering-in of the elect, and answers the second part of the disciples' question – what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age? – with the 'sign of the Human One/Son of Man', verse 30.

There is not scope with the parameters of this paper to rehearse the details or nuances of the argument. The hypothesis of two chronological sequences has received affirmation by Luz in the third volume of his commentary<sup>6</sup>, and I maintain the claim that a two-sequence model best explains the Matthean redaction of the eschatological discourse.

One implication of the two-sequence schema for our current discussion is that the *present experience* of the Matthean community is particularly apparent in certain sections of Mt. 24:1-31, namely 4-5, 9-11 and 21-28. False prophets, who are successfully misleading many, are present experience for Matthew. Suffering, with hatred by *pantwn twh ejnwnh* on the one hand, and hatred within the community networks on the other are also present experience. Even allowing for the more stylized language of apocalyptic thought expressed in this discourse, this paints a darker and more vulnerable picture of the Matthean community's experience than our reading of the Gospel as a whole would normally reconstruct. In particular, our reading of the conclusion of the Gospel – the 'great commission' – would normally lead us to envisage a community that had the resources and freedom for at least some of them to 'go, make disciples, baptize, teach' and practice the commandments as they understood them, interpreted as the *halakah* of Jesus. Does the apparently positive, even optimistic, tone of Mt. 28:16-20 negate the connection between it and the eschatological discourse that I have proposed?

### **Hearing Mt. 28:12-20 against the background of Mt. 24: 4-5, 9-11 and 21-28.**

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<sup>6</sup> U. Luz *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (Mt. 18-25), EKK 1/3 (Zürich/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Benziger/Neukirchener Verlag, 1997) 427. 'Ich rechne also mit Balabanski damit, daß für die Leser/innen mit V 15 ein neuer, parallel zu V 6-14 laufender Weissagungsstrang einsetzt.' The only real difficulty he sees with the hypothesis is verse 20, which I discuss *ad loc.* 162-165.

In their discussion of Mt. 28:16-20, Davies and Allison mention the great significance of these verses to William Carey and the nineteenth century Protestant missionary movement.<sup>7</sup> As Western interpreters, many of us find ourselves heirs to the optimistic, expansionist, colonial frames of reference that embraced this text as the rallying call for converting the heathen. Post-colonial readings of it are beginning to appear, which help us to observe our own reading strategies<sup>8</sup>, and they may alert us to the fact that even in this Gospel's very confident and inspiring conclusion, there are glimpses, for those who have eyes to see them, of the darker, more vulnerable side of the Matthean community's experience.

The first and most obvious aspect of the passage that causes the reader to glimpse the vulnerability of the disciples, and through them the vulnerability of the Matthean community, is the reference to doubt in verse 17: **kai; ijdonte" aujton prosekunhsan, oilde; ejdistasan**. Whether it is some or all of the disciples who doubt, it is striking that Matthew allows that among disciples who both see the Risen Christ and worship him, doubt can be present, and is not explicitly overcome. Many scholars note that it is not clear why Matthew refers to this doubting or hesitation.<sup>9</sup> Hagner proposes that 'Matthew wanted members of his community to apply the truth to themselves', and cites various scholars who argue for it as a plausible psychological experience.<sup>10</sup> But perhaps, rather than beginning with a psychological explanation, we might see it as an acknowledgement of the experience of the Matthean community as we meet it in Mt. 24, where the issue of false christs and false prophets would lead even faithful leaders to hesitate. An acknowledgement of the danger of being led astray implicitly undergirds even the resurrection encounter and commissioning of the disciples.

Second, Jesus' reassuring words in v. 20 – **kai; ijdou; ejw; meqfuhwh eijni pasa" ta" hmera"** – have another and more vulnerable side to them. They recall the experience of both Moses and Ezekiel in the Scriptures who shrink from their prophetic office, as well as Jeremiah's objection that he is too young<sup>11</sup>; each requires the reassurance of God's presence to perform what is required of them. It is likely that Matthew's community would have recognised the scriptural parallels and the implication in the assurance of Christ's ongoing presence that their community was similarly vulnerable.<sup>12</sup>

Third, it is quite explicitly Jesus' authority in heaven and earth that will enable Jesus' followers to make disciples, not the authority or power of the followers themselves. By contrast with Mt. 16:18-19, where the authority of Peter is emphasized, here there

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<sup>7</sup> W.D. Davies and D. C. Allison Jr., *Matthew* Vol. III, 687.

<sup>8</sup> An example is an unpublished Honours thesis by a former head of a missionary organisation Craig Bossey, *A Postcolonial Reading of Matthew 28:16-20* (Flinders University of South Australia, 2000). I look forward to the contributions of Nienke Pruiksmā and Daniel Patte on these issues.

<sup>9</sup> So for example Daniel J. Harrington *The Gospel of Matthew*, Sacra Pagina 1 (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press/Michael Glazier, 1991) 414; W.D. Davies and D. C. Allison Jr., *Matthew* Vol. III, 682.

<sup>10</sup> Donald A. Hagner *Matthew 14-28* Word Biblical Commentary 33b (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1995) 885.

<sup>11</sup> Ex. 4:10, 12, Ezek. 2-3, Jeremiah 1:6,8.

<sup>12</sup> John Chrysostom makes reference to this parallel in a homily 'As if to One Body'. See Manlio Simonetti, ed., *Matthew 14-28*. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, NT 1b (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2002) 313.

is a distinct absence of imputed power. The authority to go and make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them is and remains the authority of the Risen Christ, not of his followers. *All* authority has been given to Christ. The disciples are to pursue their mission knowing that everything they do is not in their own power and authority. This too implies a recognition of the fact that the authority of the disciples is always contingent, and that they may need to perform their tasks in vulnerability and suffering.

Fourth, the immediate context of Mt. 28:16-20 does not allow the motif of vulnerability and conflict to be far from the mind of the readers. The conspiring of the chief priests and elders to reinterpret the news of the open and empty tomb forms the backdrop to the 'great commission'. Matthew's depiction of the leaders orchestrating a 'cover-up', the complicity of the guards who willingly receive their bribe, and the passivity of the governor depicted in 28:14, do not allow the reader to assume that the context of the mission to which the disciples are about to be called is anything other than fraught and difficult.

In these ways, there is an undercurrent of adversity and vulnerability in Mt 28:16-20 that is in continuity with the depiction of the Matthean community's present experience found in Mt 24. Any grand and even triumphalistic ways of reading Mt 28:16-20 may reflect more about our own reading location than about that of the Matthean community. There is no necessary contradiction between the present experience of the Matthean community as depicted in Mt. 28:12-20 and Mt. 24: 4-5, 9-11 and 21-28; both passages allow us to see something of the internal and external pressures facing them.

There is a second important implication of the two-sequence schema discussed above for our examination of mission in Matthew's Gospel. This relates to the way in which both sequences in Mt. 24 give prominence to the mission to the nations as an eschatological imperative, and how the conclusion of the mission to the nations is linked with the end of the age.

### **The mission to the nations as an eschatological imperative, and its links with the end of the age.**

We have already observed the close verbal links between Mt 28:16-20 and Mt. 24 in the phrases **panta ta; eqnh/pasin toi" eqnesin** and **suntel eia" tou' aijho"**. It will be useful to give some further attention to where the references to the nations come in the two sequences in Mt. 24, and whether this sheds some further light on Matthew's concept of mission. What role does this mission play in Matthew's eschatological 'program', and in what way could it be linked to the end of the age?

The two-sequence schema postulates that each sequence falls into three sections – the immediate past for the Matthean community, including the Jewish War (Section A), their present experience, characterized by suffering, false leaders and community pressure (Section B), and the future, pertaining to the End (Section C). Hatred by **pantwn twh eqnwh dia; to; ofhomavmou**, v. 9b, is part of Section B, the present experience of the Matthean community, which suggests that at least some of the Matthean community is deliberately engaging in contact with the nations, and at considerable cost (9a: **tote paradwsousin ulma" eij' ql iyin kai; apoktenousin ulma"**). This might suggest that the Gentile mission was no new venture for the

Matthean community. Yet the prominence given to the Gentile mission, not only by the 'great commission', revoking as it does the missional restrictions of Mt. 10:5-6, but by many other aspects of the Gospel<sup>13</sup>, gives a strong impression that in some way, the Gentile mission was controversial. Before seeking to offer some reflections on this, we need to review the remaining references to the nations in Mt 24.

The other references to the nations fall within Section C of both sequences. V. 14 concludes the first sequence, and draws a close connection between the testimony to all the nations and the End: **kai; khrucqhsetai touto to; eujaggel ion th" basil eia" ej of h/th/oijkoumenh/eij' marturion pa'sai toi" egnasin, kai; tote hkei to; tel o"**. It is almost as though the proclamation to all the nations is not simply a precursor to the End, but an eschatological imperative integral to Matthew's *Enderwartung*.

Section C of the second sequence also refers to the nations in relation to the End, although in v. 30 they are referred to as **pa'sai ailful ai; th" gh"**.<sup>14</sup> This verse states that they will mourn at the appearance of the sign of the Human One/Son of Man, and witness his coming on the clouds of heaven with great power and glory. The mourning and the witnessing reflect well-known early Christian *testimonia*, drawn from Zech. 12:10-14 and Dan. 7:13-14.<sup>15</sup> Clearly the tribes of the earth are not incidental to the eschatological 'program' envisaged here, but an integral part.

I have suggested that the mission to the nations is envisaged in these two sequences of Mt. 24 not just as a pragmatic reality of the community's present experience, but as an eschatological imperative that is integral to the (presumably imminent<sup>16</sup>) coming of the End. If this is accepted, it means that the commission of Mt. 28:16-20, *mutatis mutandis*, can also be understood as an eschatological imperative, pending the end of the age. As such, the task of making disciples, baptizing them and teaching them to obey all that Jesus has commanded would be *an aspect* of God's mission, not the sum total of it – a subset of God's wider mission, in which the disciples are called and enabled to participate. It is a continuation of the eschatological harvest set out in Mt. 9:35-38, and begun in the mission discourse of chapter 10.<sup>17</sup>

I stated above that the Gentile mission appears to have been controversial in some way within the network of Matthean communities, although it was at least in some quarters a present reality. It is possible that its inclusion as an eschatological imperative – a necessary precursor to the End – was a development in Matthean theology/eschatology that not all the community accepted. Neither Zech. 12:10-14 nor Dan. 7:13-14, the early Christian *testimonia* mentioned above, required a Gentile mission. Zech. 12:10-14 explicitly states that it is the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem who will mourn, and in verse 12-14 it is the house/tribe of

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<sup>13</sup> These include the Gentiles prominent in the genealogy, including Rahab, a Canaanite (Josh. 2:6), Ruth, a Moabite (Ruth 1:4), Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite (2 Sam. 11:3); the Magi, Mt. 2:1-8, the reference to Galilee 'of the Gentiles', Mt. 4:15, and the formula quotation with Gentiles as the focus, Mt. 12:18-21: 'and in his name the Gentiles will hope.'

<sup>14</sup> It is interesting that this phrase is identical with LXX Gen. 12:3, which promises blessing through Abram to **pa'sai ailful ai; th" gh"**.

<sup>15</sup> The two are conflated, for instance, in Revelation 1:7. See the discussion in W.D. Davies and D. C. Allison Jr., *Matthew* Vol. III, 360-61.

<sup>16</sup> On this, see *Eschatology in the Making: Mark, Matthew and the Didache*, 173-175.

<sup>17</sup> For a discussion of the eschatological nature of the mission in chapter 10, see *Eschatology in the Making: Mark, Matthew and the Didache*, 141.

David, Nathan, Levi and the Shimeites that are grieving. In Dan. 7: 13-14, all peoples, nations and languages are given to the Human One/Son of Man as part of his dominion, glory and kingship, but this can be readily interpreted as subservient peoples, the spoils of victory. Dan. 7: 13-14 does not of itself require a Gentile mission.

A text that does seem to invite a theology of Gentile mission is Isaiah 42:1-4, which Matthew quotes at length in Mt. 12:18-21:

12:18] **Idou;olpai" mou oñ h'etisa**  
**olagaphto' mou eij' oñ eujdokhsen hlyuchmou:**  
**qhsu to;pneumamou ep'auñton,**  
**kai;krisin toi" eqnesin apaggel ei'.**  
<12:19] **ouk ejrisei ouje;kraugasei,**  
**ouje;akousei ti" ej tai" pl ateiai" thn fwnhn auñtou'.**  
<12:20] **kal amon suntetrimmenon oujkateaxei**  
**kai;linon tufomenon oujsbesei,**  
**efw" ah ekbal h'eij' niko" thn krisin.**  
<12:21] **kai;tw'ojnmati auñtou'eqnh ej piou'sin.**

In v.18d, we can translate the phrase as either 'he will proclaim justice to the nations' (or 'Gentiles'), or 'he will proclaim judgment to the nations (or 'Gentiles'). The former would give prominence to the mission of the disciples in the post-Easter period, whereas the latter foreshadows Jesus as the judge of all nations and peoples (Mt. 25:31-46). Perhaps it is not necessary to resolve this in one direction or the other; both meanings resonate for the Matthean readership. A similar ambiguity accompanies the reference to **krisi** in v.20c, but if one were inclined to downplay the necessity of a Gentile mission on the basis of these verses, v.21 hardly allows this; 'in his name the nations/Gentiles will hope'. The fate of the Gentiles is shown to be integral to God's purposes, faithfully carried out through God's servant. By drawing on Isaiah and other scriptures, Matthew emphasizes that this is part of Israelite tradition. His emphasis on the Gentiles is Matthew's way of bringing this aspect of Israelite tradition into stark relief.

The programmatic nature of this quotation, the longest in Matthew's Gospel, gives it the prominence of a 'mission statement'. It distills the nature of Jesus' ministry – not only his compassion and his unobtrusive approach, but also his ultimate eschatological victory of bringing **niko" thn krisin**. If there were controversy about the necessity of a Gentile mission, this text gives a strong affirmation of it as being in keeping with God's purposes, foreshadowed in Isaiah's servant song, and enacted in the person of Jesus.<sup>18</sup>

This may shed some light on the current debate as to whether the mission to the nations envisaged in Mt. 28:16-20 is inclusive of an ongoing mission to the Jews, or has now reached a stage in which they are no longer to be the recipients of a concerted

<sup>18</sup> The second servant song, though not cited explicitly by Matthew, gives further prominence to this theme. Isa. 49:6-7 states that 'it is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.' This may resonate with the story of the Magi in Mt.2, who observe the star at its rising and come to worship Jesus.

mission. Hans Kvalbein and Peter Stuhlmacher have become the proponents of the former position<sup>19</sup>, and have made Ulrich Luz the main spokesperson for the latter, though he is not at ease with their portrayal of his position.<sup>20</sup> Luz' own viewpoint, stated baldly, is that Matthew does not exclude a continuation of the mission to Israel, but is not particularly hopeful as to its prospects.<sup>21</sup> The contribution that this paper makes to the discussion is to see the Gentile mission as one aspect of the broader mission of God. Matthew understands it as an eschatological imperative, in keeping with Jewish messianic hopes, particularly as they are articulated in Deutero-Isaiah, and Isa. 42: 1-4 in particular. Any Jew who is open to embracing this vision of God's reign is implicitly included in the mission, for the eschatological program includes both Jews and Gentiles.

I have been referring to an eschatological 'program' implicit in Matthew's portrayal of mission, not only in the obvious missional texts of Mt. 10, Mt. 28:16-20 and Mt. 12: 18-21, but also in the eschatological discourse of Mt. 24:1-31. I will now turn to the two sequences in Mt. 24, and examine them for the light they may shed on the Matthean expectations of the end times.

### **An eschatological program of the end times?**

In v. 7, wars, famines and earthquakes form the backdrop to the immediate past of the community. It is not portrayed as their direct experience; rather, the community will hear of these things (v.6). They are designated as the beginning of the birth pangs, and are therefore the opening of the eschatological program. In the parallel sequence, the experience of those in Judea during the Jewish War is the counterpart to this; it is not the end, but belongs to the birth pangs that accompany the last days.<sup>22</sup> In this way, Matthew at once incorporates the Jewish War and destruction of the Temple into his eschatological program, while denying that it is the sign of the End.

From the viewpoint of his eschatological program, the present is viewed as a time of great suffering (vv. 9, 21-22), that has already been shortened according to God's divine mercy (v. 22). The combination of the aorist passive **ekol obwqhsan** followed by the future passive **kol obwqhsontai** gives the sense that a divine program that curtails their suffering has already been decreed, but their experience of this shortening is not yet present reality. The activity of false christs and false prophets is viewed as part of the eschatological program; the community must endure while it waits to greet the coming of the true Christ. In keeping with Dan. 7, the true Human One/Son of Man will be apparent to all, the faithful and detractors alike (Mt. 24:27-8).

The final part of the eschatological program is to follow immediately and suddenly – **eujew" de;meta; thn ql iyin twh hmerwh ekeinwn**. Cosmic disorder is to herald the

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<sup>19</sup> H. Kvalbein, 'Has Matthew abandoned the Jews?', in *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles*, 45-62, Peter Stuhlmacher, 'Matt 28:16-20 and the Course of Mission in the Apostolic and Postapostolic Age', *ibid*, 17-44.

<sup>20</sup> U. Luz, 'Has Matthew abandoned the Jews? A Response to Hans Kvalbein and Peter Stuhlmacher concerning Matt 28:16-20', in *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles*, 63-83.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 69. I find Luz' position more convincing, and look forward to further discussion of it in the forthcoming final volume of his commentary.

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of the historical scenario discernable in the material of Mt. 24:15-20, see *Eschatology in the Making: Mark, Matthew and the Didache*, 101-134.



coming of the Human One/Son of Man<sup>23</sup>, all peoples will witness his vindication, and his angels will gather in the elect from the four winds.<sup>24</sup> In vv.13-14, the end of the first sequence and the first depiction of the End, there are two future passive verbs: **swqhsetai** and **khrucqhsetai**. In a similar way, at the end of the second sequence, vv.29-30, there are three more future passives: **skotisqhsetai**, **saleuqhsontai** and **fanhsetai**. This preponderance of future passives invites the reader to see them as divine passives and understand God as the subject of these actions. The only future passive where this might be controversial is **khrucqhsetai**, but even here, the context suggests that God may be the subject, and the human preachers who carry out the action may be the instruments. The fact that these divine passives are prominent at the end of each sequence (and also in v.22, which refers to the shortening of the days) suggests that Matthew and his fellow scribes think in apocalyptic terms of an eschatological program in which God has foreordained certain stages.<sup>25</sup> There are other future passives in the chapter, vv.7, 10, 11, 12 & 24; they are less obviously God's action, yet the form of the verbs does not allow us to assume too readily that the early hearers or readers of these traditions would have discounted a divine imperative behind these actions. Either way, the striking number of passive verbs in the two sequences of Mt. 24 gives the sense that the eschatological program being laid out is *God's mission*, and that human actions are subject to this mission, working either with God, or against God. Similarly the phrase **dei'gar genesqai**, v. 6, strengthens this impression. The final verse of the second sequence, v. 31, shifts to active verbs: **apostelei**, **episunaxousin**. Once the Human One/Son of Man has been publicly vindicated, his action in sending the angels and their action of gathering in the elect are clearly identified.

Certain actions are required of those who participate in God's mission. According to Mt. 28:16-20, it is primarily to 'make disciples'.<sup>26</sup> In Mt. 24:1-31 it is watchfulness and discernment, so as not to be led astray, and ultimately endurance: **olde;upomeina" eij' tel o" outo" swqhsetai** (Mt. 24:13). Against the broader backdrop of the Gospel, it is continuing to preach the central proclamation of both John the Baptist and Jesus: **metanoete: hggiken gar hbasileia twh ou'ranwh** (Mt. 3:2, 4:17). For the Matthean community network, it is also the judicious administration of the 'secrets of the reign of heaven' (Mt. 13:11).<sup>27</sup> There are various facets to mission in this Gospel, and they don't allow us to reconstruct too narrow a concept of mission for the Matthean community. Endurance was as much core business as teaching and preaching.

### Conclusion.

The links between Mt. 28:16-20 and Mt. 24:1-31 have been illuminating. By discerning the structure of Mt. 24, namely two parallel chronological sequences, and by noting the passages that portray the present for Matthew's community, both Mt.

<sup>23</sup> I understand **to;shmei'on tou'uibu'tou'ahqrwpou** as the triumphal *parousia* of Christ, not as an additional sign or emblem, such as the cross. The reference to a sign picks up the language of the disciples' question **tirto;shmei'on th" sh" parousia" kai;suntel eia" tou'aijwh"e**

<sup>24</sup> This may also reflect an eschatological reading of a further text of Deutero-Isaiah, namely Isa. 43:5-9, which refers to the gathering in of those who are called by God's name from the east, west, north and south and the vindication of God's salvation before all the nations.

<sup>25</sup> This is consonant with D. Orton's argument in *The Understanding Scribe: Matthew and the Apocalyptic Ideal* JSNT Supp.Series 25 (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1989), esp. 161-63.

<sup>26</sup> I consider the participles in vv.19-20, **poreuqente"**, **baptizonte"**, **baptizonte"**, to be subordinate to the finite verb **maqhteusate**.

<sup>27</sup> For a discussion of this, see *Eschatology in the Making: Mark, Matthew and the Didache*, 143-145.

24:1-31 and Mt. 28:16-20 allow us to glimpse aspects of the present reality for the Matthean community. Both are concerned with the mission to the nations and the close of the age. I have argued, with reference to Deutero-Isaiah, that this mission was viewed as an eschatological imperative that must precede the End. I have also proposed that this view was controversial within the Matthean community network, and that the emphasis on the Gentiles in the Gospel is Matthew's way of bringing this aspect of Israelite tradition into stark relief. An eschatological program is discernable in Mt. 24, and it invites us to understand 'the great commission' as part of that program. In conclusion, mission in Matthew's Gospel is not limited to the obvious missional texts – Mt. 28:16-20 and Mt. 10, but it is ultimately *God's mission* carried out through faithful servants in the past, present and future, and most significantly, through God's anointed One, to whom all authority has been given.