

PETRI LUOMANEN

# Entering the Kingdom of Heaven

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen  
zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*

101

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**Mohr Siebeck**

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Herausgegeben von  
Martin Hengel und Otfried Hofius

101





Petri Luomanen

# Entering the Kingdom of Heaven

A Study on the Structure of  
Matthew's View of Salvation

Mohr Siebeck

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# Preface

The present book is a revised version of a doctoral dissertation accepted by the Faculty of Theology at the University of Helsinki in 1996. I first spotted the theme, originally formulated as ‘Works and salvation in Matthew’s gospel,’ in a list containing possible topics for a master’s thesis. Professor Heikki Räisänen who was responsible for ‘setting the trap’ had marked the title with an asterisk indicating that the theme would also provide a starting point for post-graduate studies. Nevertheless, I bit the bait and found myself hooked on the theme. The master’s thesis had to be followed by a licentiate thesis and the doctoral dissertation before it was possible to draw the strands together to form an overall picture of Matthew’s view of salvation.

All the time, starting from my very first attempts to understand Matthew until the publication of this second edition of the dissertation, I have had the privilege of consulting Prof. Heikki Räisänen. His constructive criticism combined with the encouragement and intellectual freedom he gives to his students have been of unparalleled significance for the completion of this project. For Prof. Graham Stanton, who acted as my ‘opponent’ — or ‘examiner’ as he rather called himself — in the public defense of my dissertation, I am grateful for making the occasion a memorable session of scholarly discussion. In his person a firm Matthean expertise combined with a good sense of humor and a bit of ‘devil’s advocate’ to make the discussion in the public defense enjoyable and easy to follow for the audience, without giving up the standards of an academic discussion and an ‘examination.’

I owe thanks for Prof. Stanton also for the hospitality I was able to enjoy during my earlier study trip to London and Cambridge and for the time he spent there for reading the drafts of my dissertation. Professor Kari Syreeni (University of Uppsala) and Associate Professor Lars Aejmelaeus (University of Helsinki) also helped me to go forward with my dissertation with their comments and criticism. I also express my gratitude for Prof. Martin Hengel and publishers for accepting this book in the WUNT 2 series.

It has not been possible here to take into account all the comments I have received about the original dissertation (from Graham Stanton and others), partly due to practical reasons, partly due to my own limited power of comprehension. With few exceptions the most recent literature has been taken into account in the footnotes.

Some things have fascinated me throughout years. One of them has been Matthew's gospel which has, however, perhaps lost some of its original spell, now that the dissertation is completed and my scholarly interests as a post-doc fellow at the Department of Biblical Studies are directing me to other areas of study. However, one source of fascination has not stopped bewildering and surprising, intriguing and inspiring me, not even after years of daily study and shared labor. To her, who captured my heart, my wife Tiina, and to our children Laura, Eveliina and Juhana, I dedicate this book.

Järvenpää, January 1998

Petri Luomanen

# Table of Contents

Preface .....	V
Table of Contents .....	VII
Abbreviations .....	XIII

## Part One History and Method

<i>Chapter 1: Introduction</i> .....	3
<i>Chapter 2: Survey of Previous Research</i> .....	7
1. Good News and Good Works as the Basis of Salvation .....	7
1.1. Salvation by works .....	7
1.1.1. H. Windisch .....	7
1.1.2. B.W. Bacon .....	9
1.1.3. G. Bornkamm .....	10
1.1.4. S. Schulz .....	11
1.1.5. W. Marxsen .....	12
1.2. Salvation by grace .....	13
1.2.1. G. Barth .....	13
1.2.2. E.P. Blair .....	15
1.2.3. W.D. Davies .....	16
1.2.4. Other 'Pauline' interpretations .....	17
1.3. Salvation by works and grace .....	17
1.3.1. G. Strecker .....	17
1.3.2. U. Luz .....	19
1.3.3. D. Marguerat .....	21
2. Covenant as the Basis of Salvation .....	23
2.1. Matthew and the covenant of the Old Testament .....	23
2.1.1. W. Trilling .....	23
2.1.2. H. Frankemölle .....	25
2.1.3. B. Charette .....	26



2.2. Matthew and Jewish covenantal nomism .....	28
2.2.1. B. Przybylski .....	28
2.2.2. R. Mohrlang .....	29
2.2.3. K. Syreeni .....	30
2.2.4. D. Seeley .....	31
3. Evaluation of Previous Research .....	32
3.1. Evaluative remarks .....	32
3.2. Framing the object of the study .....	34

### *Chapter 3: Methodological Considerations* ..... 37

1. Tracing Salvation in Matthew's Gospel .....	37
2. The Holistic Comparison of Patterns of Religion — E. P. Sanders' Approach .....	40
3. Studying the Structure of Matthew's View of Salvation .....	44
3.1. The basic concepts .....	44
3.2. 'Getting in' in Mt and the structure of Matthew's view of salvation .....	47
3.3. Viewpoint A .....	49
3.4. Viewpoint C .....	50
3.5. Viewpoint B .....	50
4. The Methods to be Used in the Text Analysis .....	51
4.1. Matthew's narrative unity .....	52
4.2. The significance of Matthew's plot .....	54
4.3. (Re)constructing the situation of the readers .....	56
4.4. Social scientific approach .....	58
4.5. Redaction criticism —study of an editor's theology? .....	60
4.6. Analysis of Matthew's vocabulary .....	63

## Part Two Analysis

### *Chapter 1: Analysis of Getting in and Staying in the Kingdom (Viewpoint A) and in the Company of Jesus (Viewpoint B)* .. 69

1. Mt 5:17-20, Exceeding the Righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees (Viewpoint A) .....	69
1.1. Introduction to Mt 5:17-20 .....	69
1.2. The redaction of Mt 5:17-20 .....	70
1.3. The interpretation of Mt 5:17-20 .....	80
1.3.1. To fulfill the law and the prophets .....	80
1.3.2. Until everything takes place .....	82
1.3.3. The least commandments .....	83

1.3.4. Ambiguities in Matthew's presentation .....	86
1.4. Salvation in Mt 5:17-20 .....	91
2. Mt 7:15-23, Avoiding False Prophets (Viewpoint A) .....	93
2.1. Introduction to Mt 7:15-23 .....	93
2.2. The redaction of Mt 7:15-23 .....	93
2.3. The interpretation of Mt 7:15-23 .....	97
2.4. Salvation in Mt 7:15-23 .....	99
3. Mt 8:18-27, Leaving the Dead to Bury Their Own Dead (Viewpoint B) .....	100
3.1. Introduction to Mt 8:18-27 .....	100
3.2. The redaction of Mt 8:18-22 .....	102
3.3. The redaction of Mt 8:23-27 .....	104
3.4. The interpretation of Mt 8:18-27 .....	104
3.5. Salvation in Mt 8:18-22 .....	106
4. Mt 11:25-30, Taking Jesus' Yoke (Viewpoint B) .....	109
4.1. Introduction to Mt 11:25-30 .....	109
4.2. The redaction of Mt 11:25-30 .....	110
4.2.1. Verses 11:25-27 .....	111
4.2.2. Verses 11:28-30 .....	112
4.3. The interpretation of Mt 11:25-30 .....	115
4.4. Salvation in Mt 11:25-30 .....	119
5. Mt 13, Belonging to the Group of Jesus' Followers (Viewpoint B) ..	121
5.1. Introduction to Mt 13 .....	121
5.2. The main lines of the composition .....	121
5.3. Interpretation .....	123
5.4. The disciples' understanding and salvation .....	126
6. Mt 13:24-30,36-43, Being not Like the Weeds (Viewpoint A) .....	127
6.1. The redaction of Mt 13:24-30 .....	127
6.2. The redaction of Mt 13:36-43 .....	131
6.3. The interpretation of Mt 13:24-30,36-43 .....	134
6.3.1. The world, the kingdom of the Son of Man and the kingdom of the Father .....	135
6.3.2. Dualistic traits of the explanation .....	137
6.3.3. The setting in real life .....	138
6.4. Salvation in Mt 13:24-30,36-43 .....	140
7. Mt 19:16-22, Keeping the Commandments and Abandoning Riches for the Sake of Jesus (Viewpoints A and B) .....	142
7.1. Introduction to Mt 19:16-20:16 .....	142
7.2. The redaction of Mt 19:16-22 .....	143
7.3. The interpretation of 19:16-22 .....	144
8. Mt 19:23-20:16, Following Jesus (Viewpoints A and B) .....	146
8.1. The redaction of Mt 19:23-20:16 .....	146

8.2. The interpretation of Mt 19:23-20:16 .....	148
8.3. Salvation in Mt 19:16-20:16 .....	151
9. Mt 21:28-32, Taking the Example of the First Son (Viewpoint A) ..	156
9.1. Introduction to Mt 21:28-22:14 .....	156
9.2. The redaction of Mt 21:28-32 .....	157
9.3. The interpretation of Mt 21:28-32 .....	161
9.4. Salvation in Mt 21:28-32 .....	162
10. Mt 21:33-46, Producing the Fruit of the Kingdom (Viewpoint A) .....	164
10.1. The redaction of Mt 21:33-46 .....	164
10.2. The interpretation of Mt 21:33-46 .....	166
11. Mt 22:1-14, Wearing Wedding Clothes (Viewpoint A) .....	168
11.1. The redaction of Mt 22:1-14 .....	168
11.2. The interpretation of Mt 22:1-14 .....	174
11.3. Salvation in 21:33-22:14 .....	177
12. Mt 25:31-46, Taking Care of the 'Least of my Brethren' (Viewpoint A) .....	179
12.1. Introduction to Mt 25:31-46 .....	179
12.2. The redaction of Mt 25:31-46 .....	180
12.3. The interpretation of Mt 25:31-46 .....	184
12.3.1. All the nations or all the gentiles .....	184
12.3.2. The least of these my brethren .....	185
12.3.3. The list of charitable works .....	186
12.3.4. The Matthean setting of the final judgement .....	187
12.4. Salvation in Mt 25:31-46 .....	190
<i>Chapter 2: Analysis of Getting in and Staying in the Community of Matthew (Viewpoint C) .....</i>	<i>194</i>
1. Mt 28:16-20 (3:1-17; 10:5-6), Mission and Baptism .....	194
1.1. Introduction to Mt 28:16-20 .....	194
1.2. The redaction of Mt 28:16-20 .....	195
1.3. The interpretation of 28:16-20 .....	204
1.3.1. The significance of baptism .....	204
1.3.2. Universalism and particularism in Matthew's salvation history .....	210
1.3.3. Jesus' presence among his disciples .....	213
1.4. Salvation in Mt 28:16-20 .....	215
2. Mt 26:26-30, The Eucharist .....	218
2.1. Introduction to Mt 26:26-30 .....	218
2.2. The redaction of Mt 26:26-30 .....	219
2.3. The interpretation of Mt 26:26-30 .....	220

2.3.1. The authority to forgive sins in Mt	221
2.3.2. A new covenant?	222
2.3.3. The relation of 1:21 to 26:28	224
2.3.4. Jesus and the temple	227
2.4. Salvation in Mt 26:26-30	228
3. Mt 18, The Congregational Discourse	231
3.1. Chapter 18 in Matthew's narrative	231
3.2. The main lines of the composition in Mt 18	232
3.3. The redaction of Mt 18:1-9	233
3.4. The interpretation of Mt 18:1-9	235
3.5. Salvation in Mt 18:1-9	239
3.6. The redaction of Mt 18:10-35	240
3.6.1. Verses 18:10-14	240
3.6.2. Verses 18:15-20	242
3.6.3. Verses 18:21-35	245
3.7. The interpretation of Mt 18:14-35	247
3.7.1. Verses 18:10-14	247
3.7.2. Verses 18:15-20	248
3.7.3. Verses 18:21-35	252
3.7.4. Matthew's interpretation of the excommunication rules	253
3.8. Salvation in Mt 18	257

### Part Three Synthesis

<i>Chapter 1: The Real Life of Matthew's Community</i>	262
1. Matthew's Community and Contemporary Judaism	263
2. Matthew's Congregation as a 'Christian' Community	265
2.1. A corpus mixtum?	265
2.2. The social status of Matthew's community	266
2.3. A community of equals	268
2.4. A sect or a community with sectarian characteristics?	273
2.5. The location of Matthew's community	275
<i>Chapter 2: Matthew's Symbolic Universe</i>	278
1. The Structure of Matthew's View of Salvation	278
2. Matthew and Jewish Covenantal Nomism	281
3. The Indicative and the Imperative in Matthew's View of Salvation	284

Appendix I .....	287
Appendix II .....	289
Bibliography .....	301
Index of Sources .....	321
Index of Modern Authors .....	336
Subject Index .....	340

# Abbreviations

The abbreviations used follow the style recommended in the Society of Biblical Literature Membership Directory and Handbook 1994, pp. 226-240 with the following exceptions and additions:

*Biblical books:*

Mt Matthew

Mk Mark

Lk Luke

Jn John

*Josephus:*

Ant. The Antiquities of the Jews

Bell. The Wars of the Jews

Vita. The Life of Flavius Josephus

*General:*

IQP The International Q Project

Q Q Source. When connected to verse numbers refers to a Q tradition behind the verses to be found in Luke.

For the abbreviations used in the statistics of the footnotes and in the Appendixes 1 and 2, see p. 63 ff. In addition, some generally known abbreviations are used.



Part One

History and Method





# Chapter 1

## Introduction

One of the controversial issues in Matthean scholarship is the question of the basic structure of Matthew's view of salvation. With some exceptions, most scholars accept that there are materials in Matthew's gospel reflecting the reliance of the editor and his community on God's salvific grace. Furthermore, it is usually assumed that Matthew summons his readers to take heed of the judgement where everyone is estimated only on the basis of one's attitude and actions towards one's neighbor. The central problem is how these two convictions relate to each other. Is God's grace the starting point which is followed by requirements directed to those who are already believers? Or should the priority be given to the final judgement, when grace would have only a subsidiary role? In theological language, the problem is often expressed by the terms 'indicative' and 'imperative,' the former denoting the achieved state of salvation, and the latter the requirements imposed by God.

Scholars have debated not only the relationship between the indicative and the imperative, but also on the contents of the former. Some have emphasized the idea of Jesus' continuing presence among the congregation, Jesus' turning to the sinners, or Jesus' sacrificial death as the expression of grace, while others have seen the starting point in the Old Testament covenant or Jewish covenantal thinking in general. Many have approached Matthew's soteriology from a Pauline perspective and have ended up in more or less negative judgements or even in the total denial of the indicative in Mt. On the other hand, some have claimed that the Pauline 'in Christ' is implicitly presupposed by Matthew.

The question about Matthew's understanding of salvation has been discussed for a long time, and it has been handled in several monographs in connection with other subjects. Yet no book (to my knowledge) devoted only to Matthew's soteriology has appeared thus far. Therefore, this study starts with the examination of the research history (Part One, Chapter 2). The

evaluation of the past research will reveal a need for a methodologically reflected approach to the structure of Matthew's view of salvation which has to be developed before the actual analysis. This will be done in Part One, Chapter 3, where a model for the analysis of the structure of Matthew's view of salvation will be developed starting from E.P. Sanders' 'holistic comparison of patterns of religion.' Sanders' approach is problematic as an overall description of an entire religion, but it suits well for a more modest attempt, namely for an analysis of a pattern of salvation in the Gospel of Matthew, provided some of its basic concepts such as 'getting in' and 'staying in' are given a more refined definition in the context of Matthew's gospel with the help of insights drawn from the sociology of knowledge (P.L. Berger and T. Luckmann, in particular).

Some currents of modern Biblical scholarship will be discussed at the end of the methodological considerations. It will be argued that due to the layered character of gospel traditions the insights of narrative criticism, reader response criticism and social scientific studies can be properly credited only in the context of tradition-historical analysis — unless a totally ahistorical interpretation is aimed at. Therefore, the text analyses in Part Two usually consist of four sections. The *introduction* to the passage under examination analyzes the position of the verses within Matthew's overall narrative as well as the main features of its composition. The *redaction-critical* part casts light on the pre-history of the text with special emphasis on Matthew's interaction with the traditions at his disposal, i.e. the process of redaction. The *interpretation*, drawing on the observations made in the previous sections, deals with standard exegetical questions that have to be discussed before it is possible to move on to the last section, where the actual structure of Matthew's view of *salvation* is analyzed by applying the method sketched in Part One. The collection of the texts to be analyzed, as well as the different viewpoints (A, B and C) used to characterize them, will be discussed in subsections 3.2-3.5 of the 'Methodological Considerations' (Part One, Chapter 3).

The results of the analyses will be synthesized in the last part (Part Three) of the study, starting from the level closest to Matthew's own life and times, namely the 'everyday reality' of Matthew's encounter with Jewish and Christian contemporaries. In this perspective it is possible to sketch out the contours of Matthew's 'symbolic universe,' starting again from Matthew's own 'emic' point of view and moving on to the 'etic' judgements of a modern analyzer. Last (and least), the results of the study will be mirrored in the context of the classic discussion about the relation of the 'indicative' and the 'imperative' in Matthew's theology.

Throughout the study, Matthew's relation to Judaism will be characterized as manifesting a twofold tendency towards social separation and ideological affinity. Matthew has not only broken with the local Jewish community (standing *extra muros*) but shows isolationist attitudes towards other Christian communities as well; in contrast to previous characterizations of Matthew's community this study argues that Matthew's community cannot be appropriately described as a *corpus mixtum*. On the other hand, the analyses will show how Matthew seeks to legitimate the stance of his community by drawing on Jewish traditions, even by composing passages where Jesus acknowledges traditional Jewish values. For instance, Mt 5:17-20, which opens the analytical part of the study, is heavily redacted by Matthew. Nevertheless, as it will be argued, in the other parts of the gospel the traditional Jewish law is broken by Jesus and his followers.

As regards Matthew's view of salvation his positive attitude towards Jewish 'ideology' will be evidenced by his view of salvation history, which presumes election and takes up the traditional deuteronomic scheme of God's prophetic emissaries repeatedly sent to announce future judgement unless people repent and turn from their wicked ways. Although the *structure* of Matthew's view of salvation resembles traditional 'covenantal nomism' in some other aspects as well, a closer look at Matthew's central convictions will reveal some fundamental differences with Jewish thought, of which Jesus' role and position as κύριος is perhaps the most important, showing that, on the whole, Matthew was not 'a proper Jew' any more.

Although Matthew's view of salvation as a whole has to be treated in the research, the main concern is to draw an overall picture of Matthew's soteriological ideas and their interrelation. In other words, readers interested in detailed questions like 'From what are people saved?' or 'How is the word σῶζω used in Matthew's gospel?' will perhaps get only partial satisfaction, since the question is treated from a more general point of view and the method of the study is constructed for the analysis of the structure of Matthew's view of salvation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Since to speak of 'soteriology' would give an anachronistic impression, I have preferred the expression 'view of salvation,' although the term 'soteriology' will be used occasionally. Irrespective of which particular term is used, it is clear that the whole question of the interdependence of the concepts relating to salvation is evoked by modern theological concerns. However, if we use the term 'view of salvation,' it is perhaps easier to keep in mind that Matthew was not a theologian in the modern sense of the word nor did he organize his religious beliefs according to the 'loci' of modern dogmatics. Furthermore, I do not think we take too much for granted if we assume that Matthew was a religious thinker who had some basic convictions which he tried to organize in one way or another.

In the following description of the research history, the interpretations of different scholars are grouped on a thematic basis. It is clear that a grouping like this cannot do justice to the finest features of interpretation; some scholars might be located under another heading as well. Nevertheless, I am convinced that a thematic presentation makes it easier for the reader to follow the main lines of the research history. The overall conceptual framework behind the thematic arrangement of the scholars is to be found in the distinction between the indicative and the imperative which has traditionally been used to describe the topic of the present study. The Protestant scholars in particular, who are in the majority under our first heading of the research history (Chapter 2, 1.), have explicitly used these terms in discussing Matthew's soteriology. Those who base their understanding of Matthew's soteriology on covenantal categories — and especially the Catholics among them — use these specific terms more occasionally. Yet it is possible to express the covenantal ideology, too, in terms of the distinction between the indicative and the imperative: God's gracious election forms the indicative basis which is followed by the imperative of his law. On the whole, however, it is clear that the distinction between the indicative and the imperative is nothing but the standard Protestant question, as to how 'Law and Grace' are related to each other, in semantic guise. Since it is questionable how well these categories are suited to the analysis of Matthew's own view of salvation we will try to develop a more neutral approach to Matthew's thought before we will move on to the analytical part of this study. Nevertheless, at this juncture we will still stick to the traditional terminology since it provides the best categorization for the survey of previous research.

## Chapter 2

# Survey of Previous Research

At the beginning of the 20th century, Matthew's gospel, and the Sermon on the Mount in particular, attracted scholars' attention as a means to construct the life of the historical Jesus. In the 1950s and 1960s, along with the breakthrough of redaction criticism, emphasis was laid on the study of the editor's theology. In spite of the changed point of view, the problems caused by Matthew's text remained approximately the same. Matthew's strong emphasis on the obedience to the law was interpreted against the background of Judaism, which at that time was seen as a degenerated form of the pure Old Testament religion and judged accordingly. The discussion reached a new phase only in the late 1970s when, through E. P. Sanders' works, a new picture of Judaism was brought to the attention of Christian scholars.

### *1. Good News and Good Works as the Basis of Salvation*

#### *1.1. Salvation by works*

##### *1.1.1. H. Windisch*

The 20th-century German discussion of Matthew's ethics or soteriology is almost impossible to describe without mentioning Hans Windisch's *Der Sinn der Bergpredigt* (1929). Although Windisch concentrated on the Sermon on the Mount in order to discover the teaching of the historical Jesus, his insights formed the basis for the later, more redaction-critically oriented discussion.

Windisch's main point was to make a sharp distinction between the historical exegesis and the theological exposition of the Sermon on the Mount. According to him, the art of making distinctions was all too often forgotten in the theological research of his day. As an example, he took two theological currents both of which in their own way tried to resolve the problems created by Jesus' unconditional commandments. *The modern*

*interpretations of the imperative* understood Jesus' commandments as aiming at the ethics of mentality ('Gesinnungsethik'; W. Herrmann), at the total denial of law and ethics (H. Hartmann), at the right being and ethos instead of doing and ethics ('nicht Ethik, sondern Ethos, nicht Handeln, sondern Sein'; M. Dibelius) or at a total obedience and right mentality (R. Bultmann).<sup>1</sup> According to the *dogmatic solutions*, the purpose of Jesus' orders was to make people realize their own guilt and to effect repentance, conversion and a life in intimate relationship with God (C. Stange), or to drive people to despair, if Jesus' cross and forgiveness of sins are not connected with his commandments (G. Kittel).<sup>2</sup>

In Windisch's view both these lines of interpretation were wrong in presupposing that the literal fulfillment of Jesus' commandments is out of the question. In both cases, the Sermon on the Mount was burdened with ethical and religious theories and experiences strange to its original atmosphere.<sup>3</sup> According to Windisch, the Sermon on the Mount contains the *terms of entering* the kingdom of heaven. It forms a counterpart to the Mosaic stipulations in Deuteronomy where getting hold of the land is made dependent on the obedience towards the law. Jesus is a new lawgiver; the Sermon on the Mount is a new law for the eschatological kingdom of God.<sup>4</sup> The commandments are to be obeyed, and they can be fulfilled.<sup>5</sup> Jesus' teaching consists of prophesying salvation and damnation. It is pure ethics of obedience and therefore strange to Protestant theology.<sup>6</sup> Jesus accepts the core of Jewish legal thinking and shares with rabbis the ethics of obedience. The difference between Jesus and rabbis can be found in the role of the Golden Rule, which Jesus uses as a principle capable of displacing all the 'inhuman, cultic and ceremonial parts of the Torah.'<sup>7</sup>

Windisch is to be credited for his call to free the Sermon on the Mount from later theological superimpositions. His attempt to make a sharp

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<sup>1</sup> Windisch, 1929, 22-38.

<sup>2</sup> Windisch, 1929, 38-43.

<sup>3</sup> Windisch, 1929, 36-38, 42-43.

<sup>4</sup> Windisch, 1929, 10-11, 46-51. This is how Windisch describes *Matthew's* understanding of the Sermon on the Mount. He makes a distinction between Matthew's and Jesus' messages in principle, but in the final analysis they tend to be fused. See, for example, 1929, 61.

<sup>5</sup> Windisch, 1929, 69.

<sup>6</sup> Windisch, 1929, 90. The Catholic line of interpretation gains a more positive judgement, though not a full requital, since the rigorous commandments are applied only to the religious elite (1929, 22,44-45).

<sup>7</sup> Windisch, 1929, 47-48,106.

distinction between historical exegesis and theological interpretation is also welcome if we keep in mind that there is no such thing as the purely objective study of history. All the approaches and methods used in the exposition of ancient sources have their own assumptions and restrictions. Yet without an attempt to distance oneself from one's own theological framework, no genuine study of a religious document in its original setting is possible. Understandably, Windisch's study is marred with a picture of Judaism which is no longer appropriate. Nevertheless, Windisch is able to see the partiality of the New Testament's description of Judaism far better than some scholars after him.<sup>8</sup>

### 1.1.2. B.W. Bacon

Among the English-speaking New Testament scholars, B.W. Bacon's *Studies in Matthew* gained a position comparable in many respects to that of Windisch in Germany. Both studies were published, independent of each other, at approximately the same time with the final object of shedding light on the life of the historical Jesus. They both described Matthew as a sort of Christian legalist; both were frequently cited in the following decades.

According to Bacon's well-known interpretation, Matthew arranged his materials in five books, each containing an introductory narrative section and a discourse.<sup>9</sup> In Bacon's view, this five-fold division is similar to the Torah which consists of five books of the commandments of Moses. For Matthew, a 'converted rabbi' and a Christian legalist, the Mosaic arrangement of the Lord's commandments was the only conceivable one.<sup>10</sup> Matthew fights against Hellenization and lawlessness but ends up in 'neo-legalism.'<sup>11</sup> The story of the rich young man (Mk 10:17-22; Mt 19:16-22), for instance, shows how Matthew 'perverts' the more Pauline doctrine of Mk, according to which eternal life is not the reward for obedience and good works, into a neo-legalistic doctrine that differs from that of the scribes and Pharisees only by greater inwardness and greater emphasis on good works.<sup>12</sup> According to Bacon, Luke proclaims a new gospel but Matthew a new law, and it is not

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<sup>8</sup> For this, see below (Marxsen).

<sup>9</sup> Preamble (chapters 1-2); I Book: chapters 3-4 (narrative) and 5-7 (discourse); II Book: 8-9 and 10; III Book: 11-12 and 13; IV Book: 14-17 and 18; V Book 19-22 and 23-25; Epilogue (26-28). See, for example, *Bacon*, 1930, xvii.

<sup>10</sup> *Bacon*, 1930, 81.

<sup>11</sup> *Bacon*, 1930, 47.

<sup>12</sup> *Bacon*, 1930, 88-89, 356.



difficult to see which stands nearer to the proclamation of the glad tidings by the ‘Prophet of Galilee.’<sup>13</sup>

Bacon’s division of Matthew’s gospel into five sections parallel to the five books of Moses is seldom accepted as such, although nowadays hardly anyone denies that the arrangement of the words of Jesus into five great speeches in Matthew’s gospel goes back to the final editor of the gospel. Matthew may use Moses typology in some instances,<sup>14</sup> but there is no ‘Mosaic arrangement of the Lord’s commandments’ to the extent Bacon presupposes that would evince the work of a ‘Christian legalist.’ Of course, from this it does not follow that Matthew could not proclaim a new law by other means.

### 1.1.3. G. Bornkamm

Although the redaction-critical method was anticipated in some of the earlier studies (B.W. Bacon, for instance), a major breakthrough in Germany is usually connected to Günther Bornkamm’s article *Die Sturmstillung im Matthäusevangelium*, first published in 1948.<sup>15</sup> This article is also still of importance as regards this study, as we will see below (Part Two, Chapter 1, 3.). Yet in view of the overall understanding of Matthew’s soteriology, another seminal article of Bornkamm’s, *Enderwartung und Kirche im Matthäusevangelium*, is more important. Here he argues for an intimate relationship between Matthew’s eschatology and ecclesiology. Bornkamm takes up Windisch’s interpretation of the commandments of the Sermon on the Mount as the terms of entering the kingdom of heaven, but pushes the idea further by applying it to the other speech compositions of Mt as well. The parables in chapter 13, for example, show that Matthew’s church is not a community of the elect but a *corpus mixtum*, a mixture of good and bad members which can be sorted out only at the Last Judgement.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Bacon, 1930, 168. Though Bacon obviously prefers Markan and Pauline interpretations of Jesus’ proclamation, in some respects Matthew turns out to be more faithful to the historical Jesus. Matthew’s portrait of Jesus’ attitude towards the law, for example, is more to the point, since Jesus did not annul the ritual and ceremonial requirements but only subordinated them to the weightier commandments. The opposing of ‘grace’ to ‘law’ was Paul’s invention, not Jesus’, with whom the contrast lies between ‘grace’ and ‘merit’ (Bacon, 1930, 354-356).

<sup>14</sup> For this, see the Introduction to Mt 5:17-20.

<sup>15</sup> For the breakthrough of the redaction-critical method see, for instance, Stanton, 1985, 1891-1895.

<sup>16</sup> Bornkamm, 1961, 13-21. The term *corpus mixtum* is quite often used in descriptions of Matthew’s community. However, scholars seldom spell out their exact understanding of the term. A standard (dogmatic) meaning would be that there are both real members (in *re*) and nominal members (in *nomine*) in Matthew’s church.

# Index of Sources

## 1. Old Testament

<i>Genesis</i>		<i>Isaiah</i>	
45:9-11	203	5:1-7	178
		6:9	122
<i>Exodus</i>		6:10	236
4:19-20	70	8:23-9:1	27
20:13	144	8:23/9:1	167
24:1-8	223	9:3	117
24:8	223	10:27	117
33:12f	118	14:25	117
34:9-10.	223, 229	14:29	117
34:9	223	22:22	245
34:10	223	40:13	27
		42:1-4	167
<i>Leviticus</i>		47:6	117
4-5	227	51:1-2	27
19:17-18	243	53:12	222
19:18	144	58:7	186
		60-62	27
<i>Deuteronomy</i>		62:11	27
1:3,41	196	66:24	234
4:2,40	196	<i>Jeremiah</i>	
4:39-40	202*, 203, 204	1:7-8	203
4:40	196	2:20	117
5:17	144	5:5	117
6:1	196	31:15	27
6:5	155	31:31-34	222-224
11:25-30	204	38:31	222
12:11,14	196	<i>Ezekiel</i>	
19:15-20	243	18:5-9,15-17	186
31:16-21	218	45:18-24	224
31:23	203		
33:39-40	203	<i>Hosea</i>	
		6:6	13, 89
<i>Joshua</i>		11:1	70
1:1-5	203		

<i>Joel</i>		<i>Proverbs</i>	
3:1-3	186, 187	24:12	182
<i>Zechariah</i>		<i>Daniel</i>	
9:9	27	2:44-45	165
9:11	223	3:6	132
<i>Psalms</i>		7:13-14	201
2:3	117	7:14	202*, 203, 204
6:9	94, 95	11-12	83
62:13	182	11:35-35	83
78:2	122	12:3	83
146:7-9	186	<i>2 Chronicles</i>	
<i>Job</i>		36:23	201, 202*, 203, 204
22:6-9	186		

## 2. New Testament

<i>Matthew</i>		3:11-14	69
1-2	70		
1:12	224	3:12	129
1:18-20	69	3:13-17	206
1:21ff.	14	3:14-15	209
1:21	12, 29, 31, 33, 39, 54, 125, 224*, 225, 226, 228, 229, 230	4:3	69
1:22-23	70	4:6	196
1:23/28:20	199	4:8	135, 197
1:23	12, 22, 30, 69, 107, 194, 214, 215, 278, 282	4:9-14	192
2:1-12	70, 268	4:11	102, 127, 131, 143, 158, 195
2:4	125, 225	4:12-17	27
2:5-6,15,17-18	70	4:12	236
2:6	125, 225, 247	4:13	233
2:15	70	4:14-16	70
2:16-18	27	4:15-16	233, 268
2:16	65	4:15	167, 277
2:19-21	70	4:16	125, 225
2:46-50	185	4:17	12, 70, 209, 236
3:1-17	194*	4:18-22	22, 48, 70
3:2	70, 209, 236	4:23-25	22
3:3	27	4:23	70, 125, 196, 226
3:4	169	4:24-25	70
3:7-10	27, 209	4:30	38
3:7	103	5-7	100, 121
3:8	172	5:1	70, 179, 197
3:10	94	5:2	71
		5:5	122
		5:6	14, 71, 85, 158, 181
		5:12	98

5:13-16	70	7:13-27	21
5:14	135	7:13,14,22-23	93
5:16	132, 246	7:13-21	236
5:17-48	21	7:13-14	93, 255
5:17-20,32	77*	7:14	93, 199
5:17-20	5, 10, 69-92*, 70, 88, 132, 182, 191, 223, 249, 264, 280	7:15-23	93-100*, 96, 99, 239
5:17-19	71	7:15-20	97, 265, 272
5:17	70, 71, 72, 76, 80, 81, 93, 116, 119, 214	7:15,19,20	93
5:18-20	109	7:15	93, 94, 169, 181, 183, 247
5:18	72, 73, 74*, 75, 82, 83	7:16-18,21, 24-27	93
5:19	29, 71, 85, 280	7:16,17,20	127
5:20	12, 22, 49, 85, 94, 103, 120, 144, 209, 280	7:16,20	111
5:21-22	255, 256	7:16a/20	97
5:23-24	227	7:16b	94
5:25-26,39-42	268	7:17	132, 246
5:25-26	75	7:18	173
5:29-30	239	7:21-23	97, 100
5:31-32	252	7:21-22	97
5:37	132	7:21	49, 94, 144, 94, 158, 161, 255
5:43-48	187, 191, 251	7:22-23	94-96
5:46-47	250	7:23	98
5:46	158	7:24-28	87, 93
5:45	173	7:24-27	86
5:48	24, 144, 152	7:28-29	69, 124, 125, 148
6:1-18	268	7:29	199
6:4,6,8,15,18	208	8-9	12, 100, 109, 121, 233
6:7	114, 250	8:2	145
6:9	132, 246	8:5-13	268
6:10	24, 71, 82, 196, 243	8:5	233
6:13	132	8:10-12	27
6:14f.	114	8:11-13	161
6:14-15	12, 246	8:11-12	230, 266, 280
6:15	128, 241, 246	8:13	159
6:19-21	151	8:12	131, 132, 170, 176, 179, 193
6:24	75	8:16-17	101
6:25-34	151	8:17	12
6:28	117	8:18-27	100-109*, 104, 109, 141, 148, 154, 263, 276, 264
6:32	167	8:18	101, 103, 131
6:33	14, 31, 71, 85, 158	8:19-27	107
7:2	122	8:19-22	101, 102, 104
7:7-11	31	8:19,22,23	101
7:11	173	8:19	102
7:12,13-14	98	8:20-21	105
7:12	70, 80, 93, 214, 119, 191	8:21-22	102
7:13-29	93		

8:21	103	10:6	241, 247
8:23-27	101	10:7	209
8:23 ff.	12, 14	10:8	96
8:23	104	10:10	172
8:25-26	214	10:11	172
8:25	12, 38, 104, 225	10:12-16	174
8:27	106	10:13,16	124
8:28-34	101	10:16	94, 188, 247
8:29	108	10:16,17-25	188
8:31	65	10:17 ff.	267
9:1-8	221	10:17-22	38
9:1 ff.	12	10:17	94, 143, 263
9:1	233	10:18	167, 181
9:5	73	10:22	38, 225
9:8	106, 124, 199, 221, 229	10:23	73, 267, 276
9:9-13	48, 89*, 226	10:24-25	175
9:10-13	251	10:24,25	102
9:10,11	158, 251	10:24,40	17
9:11	102, 105	10:25	283
9:13	13, 114, 118, 195, 279	10:26	122
9:14-17	101	10:32-37	149
9:15	143	10:34	72
9:18-26	101	10:37	107
9:20-22	38	10:40-42	98, 188, 189
9:21	38, 225	10:40	65, 110, 160
9:22	38, 225	10:41-42	205
9:27-31	100	10:42	185, 188, 232, 234
9:28	159	11:1	71, 109, 131
9:32-34	100	11:1, 20	172
9:33-34	125	11:2-6	109, 116
9:33	124, 233	11:3	121
9:34	283	11:4-5	100
9:35	115, 196	11:5	12
9:36-38	12	11:6, 25-31	110
9:36	183, 188, 241, 247	11:7-19	160
9:37	96, 131, 147, 169, 172, 180	11:7-11	76
9:37b-38	103	11:11-12	163
10	231	11:11	161, 280
10:1 ff.	12	11:12-15	116
10:1,7-11,14	115	11:(12),13-15.	161
10:1,8	96 169	11:12,13	128
10:1	98, 221, 249	11:13	80
10:2	243	11:14	127, 144, 158, 172, 246
10:3	158	11:15	131
10:5-6	194*, 210, 278	11:16ff.	121
10:5,18,22-23	109	11:16-19	76
10:5,18	167	11:16	116
10:6,16	183	11:18	159, 160*, 162
		11:19	160

11:20-24	161	12:46-50	137
11:20	96, 116	12:49-50	207
11:21	12	12:50	94
11:25-30	109-121*, 110, 118, 120, 203, 204, 206, 207, 211, 226, 264, 279	13	121-127*, 137, 163, 171, 231
11:25-27	110, 115, 136	13:1-23	123
11:25	110, 111, 116, 127, 171	13:2,15,34	125
11:26-27	110	13:3	195
11:27-30	16	13:5	170
11:27	204	13:11	11, 126
11:28 ff.	12	13:12	127
11:28-30	30, 110, 111, 112*, 113, 114, 115-117	13:13,16	126
11:28	119	13:13	172
11:29	117	13:14-17	123
11:29c	115	13:14-15	126
11:30	86, 117	13:15	125, 225, 226, 236
12	121, 137	13:16	126
12:1-14	90	13:19	132
12:1-8	89, 110, 251	13:24-30, 36-43, 47-50	253
12:1	111, 115, 127	13:24-43	123
12:5-7	228	13:24-30, 36-43	94, 127-142*, 170, 182, 263, 265
12:7	13, 279	13:24-30	65
12:9-14	110	13:24	128, 171
12:11-12	248	13:27,52	164
12:12	118	13:29	138, 171
12:14	118, 156	13:30,40	128
12:18-21	114, 118	13:30,41-43	175
12:18,21	167	13:31-33	132
12:22-37	283	13:31-32	123
12:22-30	121, 137	13:31	127
12:22-24	100	13:33	127
12:24	156	13:34-35	123, 124
12:28	12, 163	13:35-14:12	115
12:29	249, 283	13:36-43	11, 65, 99
12:30	98, 232	13:36	128, 131, 195, 241
12:31-37	137	13:37b-40a	132
12:33	111, 127	13:39,40,49	132
12:34	173	13:39	181
12:35	93	13:40b	132
12:36	246	13:41-43	164, 280
12:38-45	137	13:41	11, 65, 134, 182
12:38	102	13:42	132, 170
12:39	131, 147, 180	13:43	183
12:40	236	13:44-46	65, 141, 266
12:41-42	161	13:44	171
12:45	132, 246	13:47-50	170
		13:47	171

13:49-50	132	16:23	139
13:49a,50	132	16:24-28	22, 187, 231
13:51-52	141	16:24ff.	14
13:51	124	16:25	38, 225
13:52	103, 115, 116	16:26	135
13:53-58	115, 138	16:27	182, 225
13:55	185	16:27b	182
14:1-2	115	16:28	135
14:1	111, 115, 127	17:1-23	232
14:3	145	17:1	197
14:10	242	17:2	131
14:14	218	17:4	148
14:15	131, 195	17:9	196
14:21	245	17:12	111
14:22 ff.	12	17:14-21	145
14:23	197	17:14-15	197
14:24-33	214	17:14	143-145
14:24	222	17:17	171
14:28-31	38, 196	17:22-18:35	231
14:28	131, 147, 180	17:22-23	219, 238
14:30	12, 225	17:24-27	231, 232
14:31	196	17:24	102, 233
15:1-20	89*	17:26	11
15:2	183	17:27	237, 242
15:8	125, 225	18	231-233*, 256, 257-260*
15:12-14	156	18:1-9	232, 233-242*, 238, 248
15:13,15	131, 147, 180	18:1-5	84, 91, 231, 257
15:13	139, 243	18:1-2	233
15:15	148, 242	18:1	235, 237
15:21-28	268	18:1b	233
15:24	210, 247, 278	18:3	49, 94, 234
15:25	145	18:3b-4	233, 234, 236, 239, 240
15:29-31	30	18:4	94, 114, 234, 236
15:31	124	18:4b	233
15:37	78	18:5	17, 236
15:38	245	18:6-9	232, 237, 257
16:2	131, 147, 180	18:6,7	76
16:11,12	94	18:6	185, 234, 237
16:13-16	231	18:7	135, 139
16:17-20	244	18:8	144, 181, 234
16:17-19	166, 231, 244, 245	18:9	49, 94, 144
16:18	11, 244	18:10-35	265, 240
16:19/18:18	249	18:10-14	232, 253, 255
16:19	84, 85, 196, 244, 249, 266	18:10,14	185
16:19a	245	18:10	233
16:19bc	245	18:12-20	14
16:21-28	231	18:12-14	14
16:21-23	219, 231		
16:21ff.	14		

18:12-13	241	19:3-12	231
18:12,13	241	19:7	196
18:12	158, 183, 241	19:10-12	143, 151
18:12b	242	19:10	132, 246
18:13	242	19:12	151, 240
18:13b	241	19:16-20:16	142, 146, 148, 151, 231
18:14-35*	247	19:16-30	151, 240
18:14	94, 158, 233, 243	19:16-22	9, 142-146*, 143, 142-144, 192, 266
18:15 ff.	240	19:16	102, 145, 163
18:15-35	247	19:17	49, 94, 144
18:15-22	243	19:17b	143
18:15-21	269	19:18-19	75
18:15,21	247	19:19	144
18:15-20	229, 242-245*, 244, 247, 250, 252, 257, 264, 276	19:20b	143
18:15-17,18,20	244	19:21	84, 146, 151
18:15-18	232, 244, 250, 253	19:22,25	243
18:15-17	14, 243, 244, 250, 253, 254, 255	19:23-20:16	141, 143, 148, 146- 156*, 266
18:15	253	19:23,24	39
18:17	231	19:23	49, 94, 144, 146, 152, 163
18:18-20	244	19:24	72
18:18-19	257	19:25-26	228, 279
18:18,19	243	19:25	39, 235
18:18	84, 85, 196, 221, 244, 245, 248, 249	19:26	148, 150, 279
18:19-20	244	19:27	148, 235
18:19	196, 243	19:28-29	280
18:20	12, 107, 199, 205, 216, 243, 244, 258	19:28,29	163
18:21 ff..	254	19:28	136, 143, 181, 182, 184
18:21-35	245-257*, 256	19:29	149, 181, 243
18:21-33	279 245, 252,	20:1-16	56, 143, 147, 149, 176, 240, 256
18:21	96, 102, 127, 128, 131, 143, 147, 158, 169, 172, 180, 195, 242, 247, 253	20:1	164, 171
18:23-35	176, 182, 232, 253	20:1,11	164
18:23	128, 171	20:13	176
18:30-35	247	20:15	150, 173
18:30	181	20:16	132, 148, 246, 280
18:31	131	20:17-34	231
18:32-33	246	20:17-19	156
18:34-35	279	20:19	167
18:35	114, 148, 246, 247, 252	20:20-28	219, 232
19-20	143	20:21	136
19:1-2	142, 143, 231	20:25	167
19:1	232, 277	20:28	12, 54, 229
		20:29-34	100



21:1,2,34, 36,37	65	22:10-14	94
21:1-9	156	22:10-11	174
21:3	195	22:10	169, 170, 171, 173, 175, 265
21:5	27, 114, 118	22:10b	175
21:6	195	22:11-14	168, 171, 176, 266
21:8-11,26,46	125	22:11-13	168, 169
21:8-11	124	22:12	176
21:10-17	179	22:13	132, 171
21:12-17	156	22:14	11, 177
21:14-16	116, 227	22:15-46	157
21:16	116	22:15	195
21:18-19	156	22:16	65, 102
21:23	125, 168, 179, 225	22:22	171
21:25	159	22:24	102
21:26,46	124	22:30	280
21:28-22:14	50, 156-157*, 162, 166, 179, 263,	22:34-40	62, 84, 103, 146
21:28-32	132, 156-164*, 157, 158, 161, 175	22:34,41	128, 181
21:28-30	156	22:34	169
21:30	280	22:36	102
21:31,32	251	22:36,38	84
21:31	50, 94, 147	22:37	155
21:32	94, 160, 164, 174	22:40	80, 81
21:33-46	156, 164-167*, 175, 184, 278	22:46	179
21:33-45	23	23	138, 156
21:34-36	164	23:1ff.	157
21:34	171	23:1-13	249
21:34a,41,43	127	23:1	179
21:36	158, 171	23:2-3	116
21:38-39	175	23:2	12
21:39	165	23:3	85
21:41	165	23:4	117, 249
21:42-44	165	23:5-12	105
21:43,45	165	23:8-9	207
21:43	50, 163, 167, 172, 177, 181, 263, 266	23:8	102
22:1-14	128, 132, 156, 162, 168-178*, 173, 176, 182, 266, 280	23:10	223
22:1-9	173	23:11	91
22:1ff.	175	23:12	117
22:2	128	23:13-29	71, 192
22:3	171	23:13	94, 144, 245
22:4b-9	172	23:15	115, 138, 139
22:6-7	168, 174	23:23	89, 91
22:7	228	23:28	139
22:9	175, 242	23:34,37 98,	103, 106, 116, 263
		23:37-39	179
		24	108
		24:1ff.	187
		24:1-36	180
		24:1	179, 227
		24:2	148

24:3	132, 179	25:31b	182
24:4b-28	256	25:32	167, 175, 181
24:7	167	25:32,33	247
24:9-14	38, 180, 192, 256	25:34ff	182
24:9,14	185	25:34	135, 136,164
24:9	149, 167, 181	25:35-44	181
24:10-14	83, 191	25:36,43	181
24:10-14,24	258	25:37 ff.	17
24:10-12	83, 177, 256	25:37,38,39,44	181
24:11	83, 98, 241	25:40,45	185, 214
24:13,22	38	25:41	181
24:13	38, 109, 177, 193, 225	25:46	39, 49, 182
24:14	109, 167, 175, 181, 279	26:1	179
24:20	90	26:2	219
24:21-22	176	26:3,47	125, 225
24:21	135	26:5	125, 225
24:22	38, 225	26:12	218
24:24	98, 176, 177, 241	26:13	135
24:29-31	190	26:14-16	218
24:31	11, 65, 176	26:14	195, 242
24:34-35	74	26:18	102, 218
24:34	73, 82	26:21-25	218
24:37-44	180, 190	26:25	131, 147, 180
24:43	164	26:26-30	195, 209, 218-230*
24:45-51	176, 178, 180, 187, 192	26:26-29	219
24:51	170	26:26 ff.	12
25-26	146	26:26	197, 225
25:1-13	180, 187, 193	26:27,39	196
25:1	128, 171	26:27	196, 220
25:10-12	96	26:28	22, 27, 29, 31, 33, 35, 208, 222, 224, 228-230
25:10-11	95	26:29	136, 230, 280
25:10	95	26:30-35, 69-75	219
25:11-12	95	26:30	197
25:13	96	26:31	183
25:14-30	176, 178, 180, 187, 193	26:36-46	219
25:16	242	26:39	196
25:26-27	246	26:42	24, 82
25:26,39	181	26:47	125
25:30,41,46	39	26:52-54	230
25:30	170	26:55	125
25:31 ff.	17	26:60-61	227
25:31-46	8,4 87, 147, 167, 179- 193*, 180, 182, 187-191, 207, 208, 266, 267, 279, 280	27:1	125, 225
25:31	136, 181	27:3-10	65, 219
25:31a	190	27:3	158
		27:7	181
		27:15-26	268
		27:15	125
		27:19,24	219

27:20	125	1:32-34	101
27:21	171	1:35-38	101
27:24-25	125	1:39	196
27:24	125	1:40-45	100
27:25	179, 226, 263	1:40	144
27:29	144	2:1-22	100
27:32,57	243	2:1	233
27:39-49	38	2:9	72
27:40	38, 225	2:12	221
27:42	38, 225	2:18-22	101
27:48	173	2:23-28	110
27:49	38, 225	3:1-6	110
27:51-53	223	3:6	156
27:52-53	219	3:22	100
27:52	257	3:34-35	185, 207
27:62-66	219	4:1-34	121
27:64	125, 225	4:12	124
28:5	148, 171	4:13	124
28:7	196, 197	4:15	132
28:9-10	185, 197, 207, 219	4:21-25	122, 127
28:10	185	4:21,24	124
28:11-15	219	4:25	122
28:12	196	4:26-29	122, 130
28:16-20	14, 17, 25, 26, 33, 87, 90, 194-218*, 197, 198, 199, 200, 205, 207, 208, 210, 211, 216, 217, 220, 265, 266, 268, 270, 282	4:29	65
28:16-17	201	4:33-34	123, 124
28:16	185, 197	4:34	104, 123, 124
28:17	14	4:35-5:20	100
28:18-20	17, 23, 136	4:35-41	101, 169
28:18-19	196	4:35-36	196
28:18	196	4:35	101, 102
28:18b	199	4:36	104
28:19	167, 175, 181, 185, 225	4:38	102
28:19a	199	4:41	106
28:20	12, 30, 107, 109, 132, 196, 209, 215, 220	5:1-20	101
28:20b	199, 214	5:7	108
<i>Mark</i>		5:10	65
1:6	169	5:19	158
1:8	206	5:21-43	100, 101
1:15	12	5:25-34	38
1:21	233	5:34	158
1:23-28	169	6:1-29	115
1:29-34	100	6:1-6a	115
		6:6b-13	115
		6:6	196
		6:14-16	115
		6:20	257
		6:27	65
		6:31-34	63
		6:31,33,38	158
		6:33	63, 131, 195,

6:36	24	12:8	165
7:2	158	12:9	165
7:14-23	89	12:13-34	157
7:19	89	12:13-17	165
7:27a	212	12:13	168
8:31-33	219	12:28-34	103, 146
8:38	182	12:28-32	157
9:1	73, 135	12:28,31	84
9:2-32	232	12:29	155, 156
9:2-3	131	12:34	179
9:13	111	13:1	102
9:14-17	197	13:9-13	38, 83
9:14-29	145	13:9-10	167
9:15	143	13:10	167, 181
9:17	102	13:13	38, 149, 192
9:30-37	231	13:14	83
9:33-37,42-48	232	13:18	90
9:33-36	233	13:19	83
		13:21-23	97
9:35	91, 233	13:30-31	74, 76, 78, 79, 81, 82
9:37	110	13:30	73
9:37b	234	14:14	218
9:38-40	98, 232, 234	14:22	197, 219
9:38-39	238	14:23-24	196
9:41	110, 185, 232, 234	14:23	220
9:42-50	232	14:24	222
9:43,45	234	14:25	73
9:43	181	14:57-58	227
9:49	241	15:29-36	38
10:1-52	143	16:11,13,14	201
10:1	231	16:15	201
10:13-16	234	16:16	208
10:15	234		
10:17-22	9	<i>Luke</i>	
10:17	143	1:16,17	236
10:18	282	1:70	257
10:19	144	2:23	257
10:20,35	102	3:7-9	209
10:23	146	3:9	94
10:24	146	3:10-14	160
10:25	72	3:16	206
10:29-30	280	3:17	129
10:43-44	91	4:16-30	115
10:46-52	100	4:43	103
10: 52	158	5:23	72
11:25	246	6:27-28,32-36	251
11:31	159	6:29-30	268
12:1ff	177	6:40	175
12:2-5	164	6:42	111
12:6	166	6:43-49	93

6:43-44	94	12:51	72
6:43	94	12:57-59	75, 268
6:44b	94	13:16	249
6:45	93, 94, 97	13:18-21	132
6:46	94	13:23-27	93
7:1-17	100	13:24	95
7:24-35	76, 160	13:25-27	94-96
7:24-28	76, 79	13:25-26	96
7:26,28	77	13:25	95
7:28	161	13:26-27	96, 132
7:29-30	157, 158, 160, 161	13:28-29	161
7:30	160	13:28	132, 170
7:31-35	76	13:31	111
7:33-35	160	14:11	91
7:33	160	14:15-24	128, 168
7:35	160	14:23	173
7:41-43	246	14:28,33	241
8:1	103	14:30	158
9:2	103	15:4	241, 242
9:27	158	15:5-7	241
9:57-62	100	15:6	242
9:57-60	101, 102, 104	15:8-10,11-32	242
9:59	102, 104	15:11-32	158
9:59a	103	15:11-24	161
9:60b-62	107	15:30	159
9:60b	104	16:1-12,14-15, 19-31	75
9:61-62	101, 104	16:13	75
10:1-12	101	16:15	160
10:2	103	16:16-18	75, 77
10:4-11	151	16:16-17	76, 82
10:5-12	174	16:16	75, 103, 131
10:12-15	110, 161	16:17	71-73, 75
10:16	110, 160	16:19-31	75
10:17-20	110	16:29,31	76
10:21-22	110	17:1ff	76
10:22	204	17:1-4	245
10:29	160	17:1-2	76, 232
11:1-4	246, 251	17:3-4	232
11:14-15	100	17:3	243
11:23	98, 232	17:4	236, 242
11:31-32	161	18:14	91, 160
11:39,42,44,47, 52	103	18:17	234
11:49	106	18:25	72
11:52	245	19:22-23	246
12:22-32	151	20:15	165
12:27	117	20:19	111
12:33-34	151	21:3	158
12:39	164	21:16	241
12:51-53	72	22:18	158

22:20	35, 223	10:13	98
22:28-30	143, 147, 182	12:4-5	273
23:5	160	12:9ff	196
24:11,25,37	201	13:8-10	81
24:36-53	200		
24:36-49	201	<i>1 Corinthians</i>	
24:38-43	202	1:10-17	273
24:44	82	1:13,15	205
24:46-49	198	1:22	206
24:47	201, 208	3:1ff	273
		4:9-13	186
<i>John</i>		5:1-5	255
1:33	206	5:4-5	250
1:42	244	6:11	206
1:45	80	11:25	35, 223
13:20	110	12:1-3,7	97
13:38	73	12:12-13	273
20:19-23	200, 201	12:13	206
20:19-21	201	13:1	243
20:19	111	15:9	90
20:21-22	198	15:14	213
20:21	201	15:25-28	136
20:23	208		
20:24-29	201	<i>2 Corinthians</i>	
20:24	201	2:5-11	255
20:25	201	4:5	186
		6:4-5	186
<i>Acts</i>		11:23-29	186
1:5	206	11:23	186
1:6-12	199, 200		
1:8	199	<i>Galatians</i>	
1:8b	199	2:12	89
1:9-11	199	3:28	273
2:23	160	5:1	117
2:38	206	5:14	81
8:12	103		
9:11	242	<i>1 Timothy</i>	
10:10-16,28	89	5:19	243
11:2-10	89	6:1	117
13:36	160		
15:10	117	<i>2 Timothy</i>	
19:1-6	206	1:16-17	186
20:27	160		
28:31	103	<i>James</i>	
		5:14	186
<i>Romans</i>			
1:16	212	<i>2 Peter</i>	
3:21	80	2	97
6:1ff	17		
6:3-4	205		

<i>1 John</i>		<i>Revelation</i>	
4:1-3	97	6:5	117
		9:14	249
		20:2	249

### 3. Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha and Early Patristic Works

<i>4 Ezra</i>		<i>Joseph and Aseneth</i>	
7:18-35	142	12, 11	154
7:37-38	187	13, 1	154
		15, 7	154
<i>5 Ezra</i>		<i>Odes of Solomon</i>	
2:20-23	186	33	110
<i>2 Maccabees</i>		<i>Testament of Levi</i>	
15:9	80	18, 10-12	249
<i>4 Maccabees</i>		<i>Testament of Gad</i>	
18:10	80	6, 1-4	254
<i>Sirach</i>		<i>Testament of Joseph</i>	
6:18-37	117	1, 6	186
6:18-31	117	<i>Testament of Benjamin</i>	
7:14	114	10, 8-9	190
7:35	186	<i>Testament of Job</i>	
19:13-17	254	3-5	154
28:1f.	114	<i>Gospel of Thomas</i>	
35:22	182	57	130
50-51	114	90	111
51	110, 117	<i>Barnabas</i>	
51:1-12	110	2:6	117
51:13-22	110	<i>1 Clement</i>	
51:23-30	110	16:17	117
<i>Tobit</i>		<i>Didache</i>	
1:16-17	186	6:2	117
3:17	249	7:1-3	198, 205
4:16	186	11-12	97
<i>2 Apocalypse of Baruch</i>		16:3-4	97
8, 2	227	<i>1 Enoch</i>	
41,3-5	120	62, 103-104	187
64, 6-7	227		
72, 2-73, 1	187		

Ignatius, *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*  
6 186

Polycarp, *Letter to the Philippians*  
6 186

#### 4. Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Texts

##### *Damascus Document*

CD 254, 269  
CD IX, 1-15 254  
CD IX, 17-20 243  
CD IX, 16-23 243  
CD XX, 17-18 255

##### *Manual of Discipline*

1QS 254, 269  
1QS I, 11-  
III, 12 259  
1QS V, 25-  
VI, 254  
1QS VIII,  
1-10a 259

#### 5. Josephus

*The Antiquities of the Jews* (Ant.)  
4, 19 243  
13, 408-415 249  
18, 117 217

6, 295-300 227  
7, 218 237

*The Life of Flavius Josephus* (Vita)  
257-258 243

*The Wars of the Jews* (Bell.)  
1, 107-116 249  
5, 412-413 227

#### 6. Targums, Mishnaic and Rabbinic Literature

##### *Targum Onqelos*

Exod 24:8 223

##### *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*

Exod 24:8 223, 224

##### *Mishnah*

'Abot 2,1 83  
'Abot 3,2 244  
'Abot 3,5 117  
'Abot 3,6 244  
'Abot 4,2 83

##### *Tosephta*

San 12,9. 120

##### *Babylonian Talmud*

Ned 39b 83  
Sabb 70b 83  
Sabb 153a 170  
Yebam 47a-b 217

##### *Mekilta Pisha*

5, 44-55 120

##### *Midrash Tannaim*

Deut 15:9 186

##### *Canticles Rabbah*

7,3. 142

##### *Numbers Rabbah*

141b 142



# Index of Modern Authors

- Abramowski, L. 203  
Aland, K. 95  
Albright, W.F. and Mann, C.S. 105,  
148, 153, 235  
Allen, W.C. 53, 78, 86, 144, 153, 235,  
243, 249  
Allison, D. 56, 64, 69, 71, 72, 81-83,  
88, 91, 93, 96, 97, 99, 101, 105-108,  
113, 114, 116, 118, 123, 129, 130,  
135, 209, 223, 224, 226  
Anderson, J.C. 53, 55, 61, 219  
Anderson, J.C. and Moore, S.D. 61  
Arens, E. 72  
Arvedson, T. 110  
Bacon, B.W. 9, 10, 15, 114, 238  
Baltzer, K. 201  
Banks, R. 72, 86  
Barth, G. 13-16, 18, 23, 33, 35, 72, 82,  
90, 98, 108, 114, 126, 150, 152, 173,  
175, 195, 200, 209, 214, 216, 217,  
243, 249, 250, 259, 285  
Barton, S.C. 151, 267, 270  
Basser, H.W. 249  
Bauer, J.B. 118  
Bauer, D.R. 61  
Bauer, W. 81, 205, 245.  
Bauer J.B. and Powell, M.A. 61  
Beare, F.W. 97, 108, 124, 129, 131,  
138, 238, 252  
Beasley-Murray, G. R. 17, 198, 205,  
215  
Becker, H.-J. 117, 118, 120  
Berger, K. 73, 149, 153, 154  
Berger, P.L. 4, 88  
Berger, P.L. and Luckmann, T. 45, 46,  
49, 51, 59, 60, 260, 272, 278  
Betz, H.D. 90, 110, 111, 117, 118  
Billerbeck, P. 117, 170, 205, 213, 244,  
249  
Blair, E.P. 15, 16, 33, 35  
Blenkinsopp, J. 273  
Boring, M.E. 95  
Bornkamm, G. 10, 11, 13, 16, 23, 38,  
101, 138, 177, 195, 233, 244, 253,  
254, 285  
Bovon, F. 158  
Brandenburger, E. 182, 185, 186  
Broer, I. 71-73, 79, 87  
Brooke, G. 42  
Brooks, S.H. 72, 79, 112-114, 243, 250,  
251  
Brown, S. 210, 212  
Bultmann, R. 8, 95, 110, 111, 147, 201,  
241, 242  
Burchard, C. 154  
Burnett, F.W. 147  
Burrige, R.A. 56, 57, 59  
Büchsel, F. 244, 249  
Carter, W. 56-58, 125, 145, 150, 151,  
153  
Catchpole, D. 129, 131-133, 183, 243  
Charette, B. 26, 27, 33, 35, 138, 222  
Chatman, S. 60, 62  
Christ, F. 14, 15, 17, 21, 22, 30, 33, 69,  
116, 119, 199, 211, 215, 224  
Cohen, S.J.D. 216, 217  
Conybeare, F.C. 198  
Conzelmann, H. 17, 18, 23, 215  
Cope, L. 180, 182-184, 267  
Coser, L. 269, 272  
Court, J.M. 184  
Crossan, J.D. 133  
Dahl, N.A. 219, 222  
Davies, M. 56, 58, 60, 63  
Davies, W.D. 16, 17, 33, 88, 216, 222,  
238  
Davies, W.D. and Allison, D. 64, 69,  
71, 72, 81-83, 91, 93, 96, 97, 99,  
101, 105-108, 113, 114, 116, 118,  
123, 129, 130, 135, 224, 226,

- Delling, G. 17  
 Derrett, J.D.M. 157  
 Deutsch, C. 105, 110-114, 116-120  
 Dibelius, M. 8, 110  
 Dodd, C.H. 201  
 Donaldson, T.L. 195, 197, 199, 200, 210-212  
 Drury, J. 150  
 Duling, D.C. 271  
 Edwards, R.A. 116  
 Eichholz, G. 150  
 Elliot, J.H. 274  
 Ellis, I.P. 201, 253  
 Esler, P.F. 59, 60, 88, 274  
 Feiler, P.F. 104  
 Filson, F.V. 105, 144, 152  
 Forkman, G. 239, 243, 244, 249-251, 253-255, 259  
 Frankemölle, H. 25, 26, 33, 35, 107, 201, 210, 213, 214, 220, 225, 226, 243  
 Friedrich, J. 17, 42, 131, 180, 186, 195, 200, 201, 208, 215  
 Fuller, R. 195, 201  
 Furnish, V.P. 184  
 Füglistner, N. 224  
 Garland, D.E. 237  
 Gaventa, B.R. 42  
 Gerhardsson, B. 123  
 Giblin, 201  
 Gibson, J. 162  
 Gniiika, J. 71-73, 79, 90, 93, 94, 96, 97, 106, 114, 116, 117, 129-131, 133, 138, 157, 159, 160, 163, 165, 167, 168, 170-173, 175, 180, 182-184, 186, 195, 197, 199, 200, 204, 205, 210, 222, 223  
 Grundmann, W. 93, 94, 99, 105, 106, 116, 131, 144, 146, 146-148, 150, 152, 157, 163, 168, 209, 232, 235, 237, 239, 241, 243, 247  
 Guelich, R.A. 72, 73, 85  
 Gundry, R.H. 65, 66, 76, 78, 94, 98, 104-106, 112, 113, 118, 124, 129, 131, 140, 145, 147, 148, 152, 157-159, 165, 184, 226, 232, 235-237, 239, 241, 242, 245  
 Hagner, D.A. 123, 129, 130, 135, 209, 212  
 Hamerton-Kelly, R.G. 82  
 Hare, D.R.A. 167, 177, 210  
 Hare, D.R.A. and Harrington, D.J. 167, 210  
 Hartman, L. 205, 206, 208, 217  
 Haufe, G. 167, 184, 210  
 Held, H.J. 13, 53, 100, 107, 168  
 Hengel, M. v, 17, 19, 42, 43  
 Hengel, M. and Deines, R. 42, 43  
 Heubült, C. 79, 90  
 Hiers, R.H. 249  
 Hill, D. 97, 98, 195, 209, 220, 222  
 Hoffmann, P. 110-112, 158, 168  
 Holmberg, B. 48, 274  
 van der Horst, 201  
 Hubbard, B.J. 195, 198, 200, 201, 203  
 Hübner, H. 72, 73  
 Hummel, R. 23, 90, 98, 105  
 Jacobson, A.D. 76  
 Jeremias, J. 96, 131, 148-150, 157, 159, 166, 170, 177, 180, 182, 183, 235  
 Johnson, B. 204, 274  
 Jones, I.H. 66, 189, 233, 235, 247  
 Jülicher, A. 129, 150, 161, 242  
 Kasting, H. 195, 210  
 Kea, P.V. 56  
 Kee, H.C. 222, 264  
 Keeling, M. 13  
 Kiilunen, J. 62, 105, 106  
 Kilpatrick, G.D. 195  
 Kim, M.-S. 103  
 King, N. 42, 70, 173, 182, 183, 235, 252  
 Kingsbury, J.D. 55, 105, 106, 125, 129, 130, 133, 134, 139, 195-197  
 Kloppenborg, J.S. 76, 95, 101, 168, 180  
 Klostermann, E. 116, 117, 147, 150, 152, 236, 241  
 Knibb, M. 259  
 Knowles, M. 222, 223, 227  
 Kretzer, A. 148-150, 157, 159, 239  
 Kupp, D.D. 19, 53, 54, 198, 201, 202, 215, 244  
 Kynes, W.L. 166  
 Laato, T. 42, 43  
 Lambrecht, J. 138, 157, 159-161, 167, 170, 175  
 Lange, J. 195, 204, 205  
 Leroy, H. 222, 223  
 Levine, A.-J. 162, 168  
 Linnemann, E. 96, 170, 173, 242, 247

- Lohmeyer, E. 73  
 Luck, U. 120, 138, 204, 20  
 Luz, U. 19-23, 33, 35, 50, 52, 56, 66,  
 71-74, 76, 79, 81, 82, 86, 87, 90, 93,  
 94, 96-99, 103, 105-107, 113, 114,  
 116, 119, 125, 127, 130-132, 138,  
 139, 142, 144, 149, 187, 209, 210,  
 226, 233, 237, 244, 245, 249, 253,  
 254  
 Lührmann, D. 95, 111, 158, 168  
 Maddox, R. 184, 189  
 Maher, M. 120, 224  
 Malbon, E.S. 61  
 Malina, B.J. 201, 213, 262, 270, 271  
 Malina B.J. and Neyrey, J.H. 262, 270,  
 271  
 Manson, T.W. 96, 98, 129, 180  
 Marguerat, D. 21, 22, 34, 73, 98  
 Marxsen, W. 9, 12, 13, 18, 22, 32, 33,  
 47, 284  
 Matera, F.J. 55  
 McCane, B.R. 107  
 McKnight, S. 216  
 McNamara, M.S.C. 42  
 Meeks, W.E. 270  
 Meier, J.P. 72, 73, 79, 82, 87, 166, 167,  
 175, 195, 197, 199, 200, 210  
 Merkel, H. 159  
 Meyer, E. 110  
 Michaelis, J.R. 184, 189  
 Michel, O. 195, 201, 204  
 Minear, P. 94, 97, 124  
 Mohrlang, R. 29, 30, 33, 35, 222, 224  
 Moore, S.D. 53, 55, 60-62  
 Moreland M.C. and Robinson, J.M. 76  
 Nepper-Christensen, P. 177, 208  
 Neusner, J. 41, 42  
 Nickelsburg, G.W.E. 42, 120  
 Niese, B. 250  
 Norden, E. 110  
 Oepke, A. 204  
 Orton, D.E. 105  
 Overman, J.A. 60, 88, 89, 239, 249,  
 250, 263, 268, 273-276  
 Pamment, M. 163  
 Pesch, W. 239, 241, 244, 250, 251, 253,  
 254  
 Plummer, A. 117  
 Powell, M.A. 53-55, 61  
 Przybylski, B. 15, 28, 29, 33, 34, 85,  
 224  
 Räisänen, H. v. 20, 60, 88, 98  
 Reumann, J. 17, 85  
 Rhoads D. and Michie, D. 54, 60, 62  
 Robinson, J.A.T. 182, 183  
 Robinson, J.M. 72, 76,  
 Saldarini, A.J. 42, 124, 168, 226, 264,  
 269, 270, 273-275  
 Salo, K. 60  
 Sand, A. 24, 80, 82, 96, 105, 118, 131,  
 145, 148-150, 152, 153, 159, 168,  
 170, 171, 177, 182, 236, 249  
 Sanders, E.P. 27, 28, 31, 40-44, 47, 58,  
 60, 63, 89, 120, 218, 238  
 Sanders E.P. and Davies, M. 58, 60, 63  
 Sato, M. 95, 168  
 Schaberg, J. 198, 203-205  
 Schäfer, P. 88  
 Schenk, W. 65, 66  
 Schieber, H. 200, 201  
 Schlatter, A. 83  
 Schmid, K.L. 97  
 Schnackenburg, R. 118, 148, 149, 152,  
 157, 159, 161, 163, 168, 175, 236,  
 239  
 Schnider, F. 150  
 Schrage, W. 22, 23  
 Schulz, S. 11, 12, 33, 47, 73, 94-96,  
 102, 103, 111, 112, 147, 157, 168,  
 241, 242, 284  
 Schweizer, E. 73, 82, 83, 85, 86, 93,  
 98-100, 105, 106, 111, 129, 132,  
 133, 144, 147, 148, 150, 152,  
 157-159, 161, 168, 170-174, 177,  
 182, 184, 185, 187, 204, 209, 210,  
 220, 232-235, 237, 241, 242, 249,  
 253, 254  
 Schürmann, H. 76  
 Scroggs, R. 273, 274  
 Seeley, D. 31, 35, 55, 222, 224, 229  
 Senior, D. 220  
 Sim, D.C. 138, 175, 184, 188, 268  
 Standaert, B. 56  
 Stanton, G.N. v. 10, 55-57, 59-61, 86,  
 88, 90, 113, 114, 117, 125, 166, 184,  
 186-188, 190, 226, 239, 259, 260,  
 266, 269, 271, 272, 283  
 Stark, R. and Bainbridge, W.S. 88, 273,  
 274

- Strecker, G. 15, 17-19, 21-23, 33,  
71-73, 79, 82, 83, 86, 90, 97, 108,  
112, 114, 118, 124, 126, 131, 132,  
144, 146, 146, 147, 149, 150, 152,  
158, 159, 195-199, 208-210, 213,  
216, 220, 241, 243, 244, 247, 256,  
257, 285
- Streeter, B.H. 95, 168
- Suggs, M.J. 118, 119
- Syreeni, K. v, 11, 30, 31, 35, 46, 51, 61,  
62, 70, 76, 77, 80, 88, 100, 124, 125,  
179, 230, 268, 270, 282, 283
- Tagawa, K. 30
- Taylor, D.M. and Moghaddam, F.M.  
269
- Taylor, J. E. 217, 269
- Theison, J. 132
- Theissen, G. 58, 268, 277
- Thompson, W.G. 100, 105, 108, 231,  
233, 235, 239, 243, 248, 251, 253,  
254, 256
- Thyen, H. 209
- Trilling, W. 23, 24, 33, 72, 80, 90, 152,  
157, 168, 170, 172, 174, 175, 177,  
201, 202, 208, 213, 236, 237, 250,  
285, 286
- Uro, R. 101, 103, 151, 173, 210, 217
- Walker, R. 87, 210
- Watson, F. 274
- Weder, H. 95, 96, 129, 131-133, 147,  
150, 157, 159, 161, 172, 174
- Weiser, A. 247
- Wellhausen, J. 236
- Wenham, D. 123
- White, L.J. 183, 268, 270
- Wilckens, U. 184
- Wilson, B.R. 269, 274
- Windisch, H. 7-9, 11-13

# Subject index

- Antioch, 56-58, 150, 275, 276  
Ascetic, 84, 101, 150, 151, 153, 154, 159, 266  
Atonement, 28, 92, 217, 223, 229, 283  
Authorial audience, 56-58  
Baptism, 17, 159, 177, 194, 201, 204-209, 215-217, 220, 228, 268, 273, 278, 279, 281-283  
Biography, 45, 56, 57  
Catholic, 8, 24, 25, 33, 152  
Christology, 11, 12, 16, 23, 98, 100, 114, 155, 211, 282  
Church, 10, 11, 23-25, 27, 30, 56, 72, 99, 100, 139, 168, 175, 184, 197, 211, 213, 256, 257, 265, 266, 273, 274  
Church-sect typology, 273, 274  
Circumcision, 90, 216, 217, 283  
Commissioning gattung, 200, 201, 203  
Communication model, 53, 54, 56  
Community, Jewish 5, 106, 107, 109, 119, 139, 216, 217, 253, 264, 270, 275  
— of Matthew, 5, 10, 11, 19, 20, 22, 24, 30, 32, 35, 47, 50, 51, 84, 89, 90, 97, 99, 100, 124, 135, 138-140, 155, 156, 175, 188, 193, 216, 221, 228, 229, 238, 249-252, 256-260, 263-278, 282, 283  
Composition, 4, 13, 15, 18, 58, 60, 75-77, 79-81, 84, 101, 109, 110, 115, 121, 123, 134, 137, 156, 179, 195, 199, 204, 214, 227, 232, 233, 237, 245, 248, 250, 253, 258  
Confession, 97, 155, 185, 231  
Conflict theory, 269, 272  
Conversion, 8, 107, 150, 153-155, 211, 212, 217, 220, 236, 266, 273  
Corpus mixtum, 5, 10, 11, 22, 23, 30, 33, 35, 99, 100, 138, 175, 176, 178, 256, 257, 260, 265, 266, 271, 272  
Covenant, 3, 20, 23, 25-31, 33-35, 37, 41, 42, 120, 201, 213, 214, 217, 218, 220, 222-224, 229, 230, 259, 264, 281, 283, 284  
— New covenant 27, 29, 30, 33, 35, 37, 222-224, 229, 264, 281, 283, 284  
— Covenantal nomism, 30, 146, 155, 178, 216, 217, 262, 281-284, 27-31, 35, 41-44, 92, 120, 121, 142, 146  
Creed, 146, 155, 156  
Crowds, 21, 63, 69, 70, 101, 121, 123-126, 134, 137, 140, 141, 156, 160, 168, 179, 185, 231, 247, 263  
David, 26, 69, 70, 116, 179  
Dead Sea Scrolls, 28, 29 (→Essenes)  
Deuteronomistic, 5, 25, 80, 166, 226, 228, 230, 263  
Deviant, 88, 92, 269  
Disciples, 12, 14-16, 19, 21, 22, 30, 39, 48, 50, 51, 70, 87, 89, 101-106, 109, 116, 118, 121-127, 133, 134, 137, 140-143, 146, 147, 146-151, 153, 154, 156, 166, 167, 175, 177, 179, 180, 185-188, 194, 195, 197-199, 201, 202, 207, 209-211, 213, 214, 218-221, 225, 227, 230-233, 235-239, 245, 247, 259, 264, 280-282  
Ecclesiology, 10, 11, 23, 211  
Egalitarian, 150, 151, 207, 259, 266, 268, 269  
Emic/etic, 4, 218, 262  
Entrance, 8, 10, 26, 39, 49, 85, 91, 92, 94, 109, 119, 127-128, 134, 140, 144-146, 151, 154, 155, 162-164, 178, 193, 227-228, 233-235, 239, 240, 255, 280, 282 (→Getting in/Staying in)  
Essenes/Qumran community, 98, 243, 250, 254, 255, 259, 260, 276 (→Dead Sea Scrolls)  
Eucharist, 17, 195, 208, 229, 230, 279, 283

- Everyday reality, 46, 51  
 Everyday life, 45-47, 117, 212, 213, 231  
 Excommunication, 99, 194, 232, 233, 242, 244, 248, 250, 251, 253-255, 258, 259, 265, 269, 270  
 Exile, 26, 27, 69, 166, 203, 224  
 Faith, 12, 15, 40, 89, 104, 106, 109, 159, 184, 212, 239, 282, 283  
 False prophets, 38, 83, 93, 94, 97-100, 108, 140, 176, 177, 236, 239, 247, 248, 256, 258, 265, 266  
 Food laws, 89, 90, 283  
 Forgiveness, 8, 14, 18, 22, 29, 37, 208, 209, 215-217, 220-225, 227-230, 245, 252, 253, 255, 256, 258, 259, 279-281  
 Formative Judaism, 244, 263, 266, 276  
 Genre, 56-58, 187, 255  
 Gentiles, 27, 89, 108, 139, 142, 162, 166, 167, 177, 184, 187, 188, 189, 190, 210-213, 217, 225, 226, 239, 250-251, 253-254, 268, 275-276, 279, 286  
 Getting in/Staying in, 41, 44, 47, 50, 69, 127, 140, 141, 164, 192-194, 215, 229, 240, 257, 258, 283 (→ Entrance)  
 Golden Rule, 8, 70, 80, 81, 89, 90, 93  
 Grid and group, 270  
 Hellenism, 9, 81, 90, 98, 99, 107, 111, 112, 117, 147, 204, 205, 217, 230, 267, 275, 276  
 Hellenistic-Roman, 267, 275  
 Historical Jesus, 7, 9, 10, 19, 161, 244,  
 Imperative/Indicative, 3, 6, 8, 11-13, 17-22, 24, 31, 33, 35, 55, 92, 126, 196, 259, 262, 284, 285  
 Israel, 11, 13, 18, 20, 23, 25-28, 42, 49, 54, 55, 69, 86, 109, 121, 124, 125, 139, 142, 143, 146, 147, 149, 155, 166-168, 175-179, 190, 209-212, 218, 219, 225, 226, 247, 264, 267, 276, 278, 281, 282, 285  
 — Israel mission, 109, 210, 212, 218, 267, 276  
 (→ Universalism/Particularism)  
 Jesus' followers, 51, 97, 98, 102, 105, 106, 119, 121, 127, 134, 137, 148-151, 154, 155, 167, 184, 186, 191, 193, 228, 231, 237, 240, 247, 257, 268, 270, 285 (→ Disciples)  
 Jewish leaders, 38, 69, 103, 121, 125, 137, 138, 156, 162, 166, 179, 193, 263, 275  
 Jewish-Christian, 29, 286  
 John the Baptist, 16, 69, 70, 75, 76, 94, 100, 106, 109, 110, 116, 129, 159, 161, 162, 164, 166, 175, 177, 202, 208, 209, 217, 220, 221, 236, 244, 247, 257, 281  
 Josephus, 217, 227, 249, 250  
 Judaism, 4, 7, 9, 11, 13, 14, 20, 21, 23-29, 31, 32, 34, 40-44, 88, 89, 92, 107, 120, 139, 155, 156, 211-213, 217, 227, 229, 237, 238, 244, 251, 252, 263, 264, 266, 268, 270, 273-276, 280, 283  
 Kerygma, 19, 33, 34, 108, 209, 217, 220, 221, 227, 228, 285  
 Kingdom of God, 8, 25, 29, 39, 78, 103, 136, 148, 162, 163, 165, 212, 234  
 — of Heaven, 8, 10-12, 15, 25, 39, 49, 63, 70, 78, 79, 84, 85, 91, 92, 94, 99, 100, 117, 126, 136, 141, 152, 191, 230, 233-236, 239, 240, 245, 249, 255, 282  
 Kinship, 269, 270  
 Last Judgement, 10, 13, 14, 18, 27, 33, 84, 179, 180, 182, 183, 185, 253, 260, 265  
 Law, 5-11, 13, 14, 16, 20, 21, 25-31, 40, 70, 72, 75, 76, 78-92, 98-100, 116-120, 152, 155, 214, 222, 223, 226, 245, 248, 249, 254, 264, 271, 279, 282-285  
 — and Gospel, 20  
 — and Prophets, 70  
 (→ Torah, Sabbath, Purity)  
 Legitimation, 5, 46, 50, 60, 88-90, 92, 154, 212, 221, 237, 248, 250, 252, 260, 264, 266, 271, 276, 282  
 Lord, 16-19, 102, 106, 109, 145, 155, 246, 263, 283  
 Lord's prayer, 12, 196, 246  
 Love Command, 87, 89, 90, 98, 152, 155, 185, 187, 191  
 Minor agreements, 62  
 Mission, 25, 38, 50, 80, 87, 101, 108, 109, 115, 138, 151, 167, 172, 174, 175, 179, 184, 185, 188, 189, 194, 198, 199, 201, 202, 207, 210-214, 218, 226, 227, 229, 230, 247, 250, 263, 265, 267, 268, 270, 276  
 (→ Israel Mission)  
 — instructions/command, 25, 50, 101, 109, 151, 167, 174, 198-199, 201, 202, 210, 270  
 Model of three worlds, 46, 51

- Moses, 9, 10, 15, 16, 70, 118, 223, 281
- Narrative, 4, 9, 19, 38, 52-57, 59-62, 65, 101, 103, 123, 125, 137, 142, 143, 150, 165, 179, 194, 195, 197, 201, 202, 206, 219, 225, 226, 231, 235, 237, 244, 246, 263, 278, 282, 284, 286
- Narrative criticism, 4, 52-54, 59, 61, 194
- New Testament, 9, 31-32, 50, 53, 71, 73, 94, 103, 111, 112, 114, 117, 128, 131, 143, 144, 158, 160, 169, 172, 173, 181, 196, 197, 201, 203, 204, 207, 236, 245, 249, 256, 257, 265, 266, 273
- Non-Christians, 93, 98, 184, 185, 189
- Old Testament 3, 21, 23, 25-27, 35, 69-71, 75, 80, 81, 84, 86-88, 92, 125, 126, 148, 175, 186, 187, 200-204, 209, 211, 212, 214, 223, 224, 227, 228, 230, 243, 248, 257, 281
- Parenthesis, 18, 21-22, 30, 70, 99, 100, 138-142, 153, 154, 157, 174, 176, 180, 184, 187, 189, 191-193, 259, 266, 279
- Particularism/Universalism, 109, 142, 187, 190, 191, 210, 212-213, 225, 250
- Pattern of Religion, 4, 28, 40-44, 47, 50, 51, 60
- Paul/Pauline, 3, 9, 10, 12, 13, 17-18, 21, 28-29, 33-35, 40-44, 81, 85, 90, 98, 110, 205, 206, 223, 257, 273, 276
- Persecution, 106, 108, 109, 149, 151, 267
- Peter, 38, 149, 151, 166, 214, 231, 235, 244, 245, 257
- Pharisees, 9, 12, 43, 63, 69, 75, 85, 86, 92, 98, 102, 103, 105, 116-120, 138, 139, 157, 160, 164, 165, 168, 191, 245, 249, 263
- Plot, 53-55, 118, 194, 195
- Presence, of God, 18, 203, 214, 215, 217, 218, 223, 227, 228, 230, 278, 282
- of Jesus, 19, 109, 203, 213, 218
- Shekinah, 18, 227, 243, 264, 282
- Prophets, 26, 27, 38, 70, 76, 79-81, 83, 93, 94, 96-100, 108, 116, 119, 140, 166, 175-177, 209, 214, 236, 239, 247, 248, 256, 258, 263, 265, 266, 281
- Proselytes, 154, 216
- Protestant, 6, 8, 11, 12, 23, 24, 33, 34, 108, 284, 285
- Purity, 89, 251, 253, 259 (→Law, Torah)
- Rabbinic, 14, 18, 26, 41-43, 83, 117, 142, 170, 173, 186, 213, 216, 217, 243, 244, 249, 263, 264, 282
- Rabbis, 8, 14, 244, 250
- Reader-response criticism, 52, 56-58, 61
- Real life, 45-48, 50, 51, 54, 57, 58, 138, 139, 155, 167, 194, 252, 262, 270, 282, 283 (→Everyday life, Symbolic Universe)
- Redaction Criticism, 4, 7, 10, 52, 60-64, 82, 87, 97, 101, 123, 168, 175, 198, 209, 210
- Repentance, 8, 80, 120, 161, 164, 209, 215, 217, 218, 220, 226, 236, 239, 254, 257, 258, 278-281, 283, 285
- Righteous/Righteousness, 12, 14, 15, 22, 23, 26, 28, 29, 31, 33, 47, 69, 85, 86, 92, 120, 162, 164, 177, 191, 209, 216, 257, 280, 281
- Romans, 162, 227, 237, 238, 267, 275
- Sabbath, 89, 90, 110, 118, 248, 251, 283
- Salvation, v, 3-8, 12-13, 15-24, 26-27, 29-35, 37-41, 43-51, 76, 80, 91-92, 97, 99, 104, 106, 109, 115-116, 119-121, 126-127, 136, 138, 140-142, 146, 148, 149, 151-155, 157, 162-164, 166-167, 174, 176-178, 184, 190-192, 210-216, 218, 224-230, 232, 239, 247, 250, 254-255, 257-260, 262-263, 271, 273-274, 278-286
- Salvation history, 5, 22, 23, 50, 76, 80, 116, 126, 157, 163, 166, 210-213, 218, 224, 226-228, 247, 263, 271, 278, 285
- View of Salvation, v, 3-6, 15-17, 19, 24, 29, 30, 32, 34, 35, 37, 39, 40, 44-51, 91, 92, 104, 121, 126, 141, 142, 146, 157, 162, 176, 210-213, 216, 218, 226-229, 232, 239, 247, 260, 262, 278-281, 284-286 (→Soteriology)
- Satan, 69, 121, 132, 137, 138, 249
- Scribes, 9, 69, 85, 86, 92, 98, 102, 103, 105-107, 109, 116, 120, 125, 138, 139, 157, 191, 238, 245, 251, 263, 264 (→Pharisees, Jewish leaders)
- Scriptures, 60
- Sectarian, 31, 229, 239, 269, 273-275

- Sects, 259, 273-275
- Sermon on the Mount, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16, 21, 22, 30, 69, 70, 77, 80, 81, 86, 93, 100, 119, 191, 199, 214, 232, 239, 256, 270
- Shema, 283, 117
- Sinai, 26
- Sociology/Social sciences, 4, 45, 46, 58-60, 273, 275
- Sociology of knowledge, 4, 45, 60
- Son of Man, 12, 16, 105, 133-137, 140, 141, 147, 164, 167, 175, 180, 182-184, 188, 190, 202, 203, 219, 276
- Soteriology, 3, 6, 7, 10-12, 15, 21, 28, 30, 32-34, 37, 39-44, 47, 55, 107, 108, 143, 286 (→Salvation)
- Symbolic universe, 45-51, 62, 91, 133, 135, 137, 151, 155, 195, 212, 213, 218, 221, 222, 227, 229, 230, 262, 278, 283, 285, 286 (→Real life, Everyday reality)
- Tannaitic, 28, 29, 118, 120
- Temple, 43, 90, 156, 179, 217, 227, 228, 230-233, 235, 237, 238, 268, 283
- Temple tax, 9, 227, 231-233,
- Torah, 8, 9, 11, 14-16, 18, 21, 25, 85, 88, 90, 117, 118, 213, 216, 223, 244, 249, 264, 282 (→ Law)
- Transparency, 19, 20, 38, 48, 50-51, 126, 167, 175-176, 184, 225, 238, 265
- Two-source theory, 62, 63
- Wisdom, 25, 110, 111, 117-120, 158, 207
- Yoke, 12, 30, 31, 109, 117-120, 264, 280
- Zion, 211, 212, 218





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