

# NEW TESTAMENT AND JUDAISM OF THE NEW TESTAMENT PERIOD

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ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION

## TWO ANTI-JEWISH MONTAGES IN MATTHEW

by

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### I

If one knows both Hebrew and Greek, and is able to apply the method of literary criticism to the analysis of the synoptic Gospels, one finds that probably all the passages expressing an anti-Jewish tension came into being only in the Greek stage of those Gospels, and one notices that in most cases these changes in the original Hebrew narratives and sayings appear in only *one* of the three Gospels or are the work of *one* Evangelist. This is important for the study of the origins of Christianity and should have a great impact on the so-called Christian-Jewish dialogue. Another fact which is often forgotten is that a critical literary analysis does not reveal in the synoptic tradition any traces of a process of re-Judaisation. This is natural: there was only a progressive de-Judaisation of early Christianity.

These facts are decisive for the understanding of the Gospel of Matthew. From one aspect this Gospel is exceptional: while as regards the other two synoptic Gospels, especially Mark, we can speak of tension with the Jews, only in Matthew can we discover genuine anti-Jewish passages. At the same time, Matthew is in many instances the only Gospel to contain ancient original material not appearing in the other two synoptic Gospels, while some pericopae are only there preserved in their more original Jewish setting. How can we explain this contrast?

My task here will be limited: I will analyse only two examples of apparent anti-Judaism in Matthew in order to show the method sometimes adopted by the Evangelist.

Let us begin with the easier example! The seven woes against the Pharisees recorded in Mt. 23:1-36 are mostly better preserved than the parallel passages in Luke. Matthew is more conservative in preserving the invective of Jesus, while Luke abbreviates and rewrites, evidently with the aim of removing difficulties in understanding for his Gentile readers: he did the same thing with the Sermon on the Mount.

But Matthew introduced an important change in the words of Jesus following the passage about the custom of building tombs for the prophets.

*Luke* reads (11:49 - 51):

This is why the Wisdom of God said: I will send them prophets and messengers, and some of these they will persecute and kill,

so that the blood of all the prophets shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it shall be required of this generation.

Jesus quotes at the beginning of this passage a saying which contained a prophecy similar to the one preserved in the Book of Jubilees (1:12):

“And I shall send witnesses unto them, that I may witness against them, but they will not hear, and will slay the witnesses also, and they will persecute those who seek the Law.”

The original Hebrew of “those who seek the Law” was evidently דורשי התורה (= expounders of the Torah); therefore Matthew is closer to the original source quoted by Jesus when he speaks of God’s sending “sages and scribes” (rather than “messengers”, as Luke has it). But at other points Luke, and not Matthew, expresses faithfully Jesus’s intention. This saying is the conclusion of Jesus’s invective against the Pharisees; at this point he leaves them and passes over to “this generation”. It is a prophecy of doom and speaks about the catastrophe of the destruction of the Temple, which will overtake “this generation”, and is expressed in similar vein to predictions of doom by the ancient prophets.

Matthew’s tone is different. He likes to blend the sayings of Jesus with those of John the Baptist, and vice versa. So the beginning of our passage is an elaboration of John’s words in Mt. 3:7; the “vipers’ brood” are now the Pharisees, who are condemned to hell. Jesus’s quotation of a pre-Christian prophecy parallel to Jubilees 1:12 becomes in Matthew’s account a condemnation of the Pharisees in the form of an exaggerated description of persecution of the first Christians by the synagogue. Matthew here depends upon a good source, which he himself quotes in Mt. 10:17-18, but in the passage under discussion (23:34) the source has been distorted; it was not

*Matthew* reads (23:32 - 36):

You have filled up the measure of your fathers. You snakes, you vipers’ brood, how can you escape being condemned to hell?

Therefore I send you prophets and sages and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of Abel the righteous to the blood of Zechariah the son of Berachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly I say to you, all this will come upon this generation.

new material but the dire phantasy of the Evangelist that created this verse in which Jews – or Pharisees – are accused of crucifying the Christians!

Matthew changes the object of Jesus's invective; it is no longer "this generation" which is condemned to a horrible disaster but the Pharisees, and the guilt of "this generation" becomes the guilt of the Pharisees. While Jesus had said that "the blood of all the prophets ... *may be required from this generation*", Matthew changed this to "*upon you may come all the righteous blood ...*". This is a reflection of the famous words, which appear only in Matthew (27:25): "His blood be on us and on our children!" The same thing is done with the repetition of this phrase at the end of the saying. But here Matthew betrays himself; in v. 36 he retained from his source the words "this generation" which he had tendentiously changed when they appeared on the previous occasion. Thus, by small changes, Matthew transformed this passage into a violent condemnation of the Pharisees, and indirectly of the Jews. A similar small change is that, while Luke speaks about "Zechariah who perished", Matthew refers to Zechariah "whom you murdered".

But this is not the end of Matthew's montage. In Luke 13:31-33 we read that a number of Pharisees came to warn Jesus that Herod Antipas wanted to kill him, to which Jesus replied that he wanted to die in Jerusalem as a prophet. Then follows his lament over Jerusalem, the city that murders prophets. In its original setting, as preserved in Luke, this lament had nothing to do with the Pharisees. Jesus himself – according to none other than the Gospel of Matthew! – knew that the Pharisees of his day abhorred religious persecutions: "If we had been alive in our fathers' time, we should never have taken part with them in the murder of the prophets" (Mt. 23:30). But Matthew not only omits this warning by the Pharisees about the imminent threat to Jesus's life and Jesus's answer, but even uses Jesus's lament over the city that murders the prophets as a climax to the words of condemnation of the Pharisees, placing it immediately after aforementioned passage (Mt. 23:32-36), already manipulated by him, thus making it, so to say, the crown of the accusation against the Jews.

## II

Our second example of Matthean anti-Jewish montages is a logion which can be reconstructed from Matthew and Luke. Verses in which parts of the logion appear are the following:

Mt. 7:21-22

Lk. 6:46

Lk. 13:26

Mt. 7:23

Lk. 13:27

Mt. 8:11-12

Lk. 13:28-30

"Not everyone who calls me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my heavenly Father. When that

day come, many will say to me: 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, cast our devils in your name, and in your name perform many miracles? Did we not sit at table with you and did you not teach in our streets?' And then I will tell them to their face: 'I never knew you; out of my sight, you evildoers!' There will be wailing and grinding of teeth, when they see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob ... in the kingdom of God, and themselves thrown out.<sup>1</sup> And men will come from east and west, and from north and south, and sit at table in the kingdom of God. Yes, and many who are first will be last, and the last first."

Jesus did not like a "cult of personality", and rejected admiration of his person. Only those who do the will of the heavenly Father will be saved. When a woman in the crowd called out: "Happy the womb that carried you, and the breasts that suckled you!" he rejoined: "No; happy are those who hear the word of God and keep it" (Lk. 11:27-28). This is the meaning of our logion; but there is also another element in it. Jesus rejected those who would draw privileges from the fact that Jesus had been with them, or even because they had performed supernatural deeds in his name. Jesus "never knew" these followers, with their misplaced pride, who at the same time did not do the will of God, and they would be condemned at the end of days. When Jesus speaks about those who "will come from east and west, and from north and south", he alludes to Psalm 107:2-3: "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south". Speaking in the future tense, Jesus quoted the biblical verse as a prophecy of the future gathering of dispersed Israel. We learn, moreover, from the mention of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in our logion (cf. also Mk. 12:26-27 and parr.) that Jesus thought of the last judgment, the resurrection and the gathering of Israel from every land as components of one eschatological event.

The second part of the saying is preserved in Lk. 13:26-30, in a pericope which underwent a strong redaction and which is a composition of fragments of Q<sup>2</sup> and can be found in a better form in Matthew. The first part of the saying (Mt. 7:21-22) is preserved only in Matthew<sup>3</sup> in good

<sup>1</sup> In this reconstruction, we have changed the second person plural of Lk. 13:28 to the third person plural.

<sup>2</sup> Lk. 13:22 is a geographical redactionary note; the question in v. 23 has its parallel in Mt. 19:25, Mk. 10:28, Lk. 18:26. The parallel to v. 24 is in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 7:13-14); v. 25 originates from the parable of the ten virgins (Mt. 25:10-12). Then follows the second part of our logion. By combining the various fragments into one pericope, the redactor wanted to treat the theme of the few saved. The pericope in Luke has nothing to do with the modern heading, "The condemnation of Israel", given to it in the synopsis of Huck and Liebmann (No. 165).

<sup>3</sup> The first verse of our logion (Mt. 7:21) has its parallel in Lk. 6:46.

form.<sup>4</sup> We were able to reconstruct the whole saying because of the parallel between Mt. 7:23 and Lk. 13:27. Thus we could add to our knowledge about Jesus's own understanding of his task.

The end of the saying, "Yes, and many who are first will be last, and the last first", exists only in Luke (13:28-30); Matthew deletes it because he has another use for this saying: it becomes, after characteristic changes, an anti-Jewish passage. Both Matthew (8:5-10) and Luke (7:1-10) record the story of Jesus's healing of the centurion's servant in Capernaum. The God-fearing Gentile centurion knows that Jesus is a pious Jew, and assumes that Jesus would not enter his house, in order not to be polluted by the impurity of Gentiles; therefore he says: "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed." Jesus heard this with astonishment, and said to the people who were following him: "Even in Israel I have not found such faith" – and the servant recovered.

Matthew makes a small but significant change in the words of astonishment spoken by Jesus. According to him, Jesus then said: "I tell you this; among *nobody in Israel* have I found such faith". And the Matthean Jesus continues (Mt. 8:11-12): "I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, but the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, the place of wailing and grinding of teeth." The Gentile centurion believed as did nobody in Israel; this is a sign, revealing the truth: the "sons of the kingdom", the Jewish people, Israel will be condemned to hell, while Gentiles will come and sit down with the righteous patriarchs in the kingdom of heaven. The clear literal meaning of the Matthean addition is today disturbing for Christians, but it can be expressed in a more theological or more conciliatory modern way: "Loyal trust is demanded of the rightful heir (Israel), whereas when the alienated (the Gentiles) demonstrate that faith, that trust, they are given equal place in the kingdom."<sup>5</sup> But what is there in Matthew to suggest that the place is "equal"? "The sons of the kingdom will be thrown into ... the place of wailing and grinding of teeth."

But let us return to the authentic logion of Jesus. The saying was originally coined against his false followers. Evidently Jesus already saw a danger in high claims by those who saw a special merit in their contact with his person. (This even applied to the apostles – see Mk. 10:37, Lk. 22:24.) But Jesus, though promising the Twelve a future glory, opposed an empty "cult of personality", requiring men to do the will of God. The false followers would finally be thrown out into the place of wailing and

<sup>4</sup> Only Lk. 13:26 has to be added after Mt. 7:22.

<sup>5</sup> The Anchor Bible; Matthew, Introduction, Translation and Notes, by W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, New York, 1971, p. 93.

grinding of teeth, when Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would be resurrected and when the dispersed Israel "would come from east and west, and from north and south". (Later Paul (Gal. 2:6) had to protest against the claims of "those who were reputed to be something"; he did not care what they once were.)

Matthew thus transformed Jesus's condemnation of his false followers, and the mention of the final gathering of dispersed Israel, into promises to Gentiles and condemnation of Israel, the "sons of the kingdom", to the outer darkness of hell. He replaced the Jewish people who would come in the last days "from east and west, and from north and south" (Lk. 13:29) with Christian Gentiles who would come from east and west and sit at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" (Mt. 8:11). Incidentally, he has forgotten to mention "north and south", but such mistakes did occur when Matthew depended upon a written text. It is completely clear that he means the Gentiles, because he speaks, in contrast to them, of the "sons of the kingdom" who will be thrown into hell (Mt. 8:12).<sup>6</sup>

But even this was not enough. Matthew not only cleverly changed the wording of his *Vorlage*, he also split up the original logion. He detached the last part of it, rewrote this according to his tendency and then added it to Jesus's words of admiration for a Gentile: "Among nobody in Israel have I found such faith". Matthew's message is that real faith is not to be found in Israel, which will be thrown into hell, but among the Gentiles, who will inherit the kingdom of God.

Matthew's fabrication is so subtle and clever that his bias is not obvious; Gentiles and Israel are not explicitly mentioned. The passage is so skilfully reworked that anyone reading it without great attention will not feel that the text has been rewritten. And the influence of Matthew is so strong that the heading "The condemnation of Israel", which fits the intention of Matthew, was given by Huck and Liebmann to their synopsis of Lk. 13:22-30 as well, although that pericope is devoid of any anti-Jewish tendency.

An instigation to hatred may have disastrous results, but it may also even become dangerous for those who initiated it. In a Greek Gnosticising Apocryphon<sup>7</sup> the good robber Demas asks Jesus on the cross: "Neither command me to depart into the lot of the Jews, for I see Moses and the patriarchs weeping sore and the devil exulting over them". And Jesus said to him: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Demas, that today thou shalt be with me in paradise; but the sons of the kingdom, the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and Moses shall be cast out into the outer darkness; there

<sup>6</sup> That in Luke the condemned evildoers are the false followers of Jesus is clear, even for those who are not prone to accept my reconstruction of the logion.

<sup>7</sup> *Narratio Josephi*, cap. III, 3-4, in *Evangelia Apocrypha*, ed. C. Tischendorf, Leipzig 1876; reprint G. Olms, Hildesheim 1966, pp. 465-6. The translation is taken from M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, Oxford 1924, p. 163. I hope to show elsewhere the Gnostic character of this Apocryphon.

shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth". Thus Jesus's words were twice re-written according to the same method and with a growing tension against the Jews. While in Matthew the Jews are condemned and the patriarchs are in the kingdom of God together with the Gentiles, according to the Apocryphon even Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and also Moses, weep together with the other Jews in hell. There are many manuscripts of this Apocryphon; evidently nobody perceived that this kind of anti-Judaism was heretical.

### III

Before drawing some conclusions about the nature of the Gospel of Matthew and its author, let us consider Matthew's modification of the meaning of the parable of the wicked husbandmen (Mt. 21:33-46; Mk. 12:1-12; Lk. 20:9-19). The original meaning is clear enough: the vineyard is Israel (Is. 5:7), the wicked workers are the (Sadducean) establishment, and the owner of the vineyard will come and put these tenants to death and let the vineyard to others (Lk. 20:15-16). Matthew deemed the vineyard to symbolise God's kingdom, in which his elect have a place, and so he added to Jesus's words: "Therefore I tell you the kingdom of God will be taken from you, and given to a nation that yields proper fruit" (Mt. 21:43). When I knew less about Matthew and accepted the common view that he was a Jewish Christian, I declined to believe that the "nation that yields proper fruit" was the Gentiles, but in fact any other interpretation is forced. Those from whom the kingdom of God will be taken are identical with Israel, "the sons of the kingdom" who will be excluded from it and thrown into hell (Mt. 8:12). They are contrasted with the nation to whom the kingdom will be given, namely the Gentile Christians.

Was Matthew, as is commonly thought today, a Jewish Christian, and was his Gospel a faithful expression on the one hand of the strong ties of early Jewish Christians with the Jewish religion, and on the other hand of their resentment towards their own people who declined to be converted to the new faith and even actively opposed the followers of the Messiah? Such an idea is plausible, as long as one has not thoroughly studied the Gospel itself and has not seen what the author wants to say in those cases where he does not accurately follow his sources. As said before, there are no traces of re-Judaisation in our Gospels; only a movement towards de-Judaisation is manifest. And when one applies the method of literary criticism, the following state of affairs becomes very clear. In cases where there are parallels to Matthean passages in other synoptic Gospels, and Matthew is in comparison to them more Jewish, then it is obvious that he did not re-Judaise but that the other Gospels de-Judaised, primarily because the original Jewish way of expression, which was better preserved in Matthew, was not readily comprehensible in Greek, and the specific Jewish items did not

interest Gentile readers. This kind of rewriting can clearly be seen when one compares the first "rabbinic" part of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew (5:17-6:18) with Lucan parallels. There one can also see that most of the passages omitted by Luke originally belonged to the Sermon.<sup>8</sup> Thus Matthew is not a re-Judaizer, but often preserves original words of Jesus more faithfully than the others. Matthew's faithfulness to his sources is by no means a sufficient indication that he was a Jewish Christian.

Matthew's dependence upon his written sources is at times somewhat paradoxical: when he wants to reveal his own opinion, he does not change his source radically but manipulates his *Vorlage* by small modifications and a clever rearrangement of material. We have analysed two outstanding examples of this procedure, both of which have shown that Matthew sees Israel as condemned and Gentiles as heirs of the kingdom of heaven. "The kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation that yields proper fruit" (Mt. 21:43). The third case is Matthew's parable of the marriage feast (Mt. 22:1-10; cf. Lk. 14:16-24). As the parable in Matthew's source probably already differed from the Lucan form, it is not easy to know precisely which are Matthew's manipulations of his material. He evidently changed the man who prepared a feast for his son's wedding into a king. In Matthew's version the invited guests not only stayed away but some of them "seized the servants" of the king who were sent to them, "attacked them brutally and killed them". This illogical, brutal behaviour of "the others" is taken from the parable of the wicked husbandmen (Mt. 21:35), which Matthew, as we have already seen, understood as a hint of the condemnation of Israel and the election of Gentiles. So the meaning of the following Matthean sentence is clear enough: "The king was furious; he sent troops to kill those murderers and set their town on fire" (Mt. 22:7). The destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans is the punishment for the wickedness of Israel. If so, it seems that the men who came to the feast were Gentiles. All these new elements are lacking in the parallel parable in Luke, which is similar to other parables in rabbinic literature.

It is true that many Jewish Christians were not opposed to evangelisation of Gentiles and that the Ebionites had their own mission to them, but in my opinion Matthew's is the only synoptic Gospel in which Israel as a whole is dispossessed and Gentiles take its place. This is not a Jewish Christian standpoint but an extreme position of a Gentile Christian. In asserting that Israel, the "sons of the kingdom", are condemned to hell and that the Gentiles will be the heirs of the kingdom of God, Matthew is of course far more extreme than Paul and even more simplistic than John. This is a vulgar anti-Judaism of many members of the early Gentile Church;

<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile see D. Flusser, *Die Tora in der Bergpredigt*, Duisburger Hochschulhefte 2, Duisburg 1973, pp. 102-113.



a similar position was later taken by Meliton of Sardis. Thus we cannot avoid the conclusion that Matthew was not a Jewish Christian but a Gentile who wrote his Gospel after the destruction of the Temple.<sup>9</sup>

It seems that the Gentile origin of the Evangelist can also be shown with the help of those few passages which record events of which only he had heard and which do not depend on a written source.<sup>10</sup> All these passages are written in a very vulgar popular Greek; they do not reveal any Jewish knowledge on the part of the author, and I could not even detect in them any knowledge of the Greek Bible. Thus we have to abandon speculations about Matthew as a representative of Jewish Christianity; he was evidently a Gentile and is the oldest witness of a vulgar approach which caused much harm to the Jews and did not promote a true understanding of the very essence of the Christian message.<sup>11</sup>

The aim of this article was not only to show the special character of Matthew and his method of montage; our treatise had other, more central aims. Not only in Matthew but also in the other synoptic Gospels the essential changes from the original tradition of Jesus's disciples were introduced only at the Greek stage of its development. This applies also to all the passages where tension against Jews and Judaism is felt. In my opinion, Matthew is the only synoptic Gospel which speaks of the condemnation of Israel as a whole. The veracity of the early tradition in the synoptic Gospels, which can be detected by scholarly methods, and the fact that tendentious tension against Jews and Judaism came into being only in the Greek stage of their development, are important not only for the Christian faith but also for the so-called Jewish-Christian dialogue. So too is the fact that – as can be shown through a comparison with other synoptic Gospels – a real anti-Jewish tension in Matthew is only a secondary element.

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<sup>9</sup> There is a possibility that this Gentile was only the last redactor of the Gospel, a possibility which should be investigated.

<sup>10</sup> See Mt. 4:24; 19:10-12 ("better not to marry"); 27:3-8 (the death of Judas); 27:62-66 (the guard at the tomb); 28:11-15 (the bribing of the soldiers).

<sup>11</sup> We finally accepted, more or less, the opinion of G. Stucker, *Der Weg der Gerechtigkeit*, Göttingen 1966; see especially pp. 34-35.