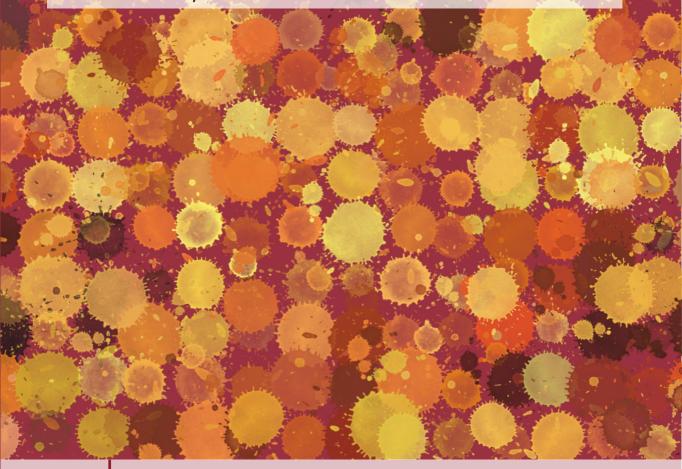# RECONCILIATION, FORGIVENESS AND VIOLENCE IN AFRICA

BIBLICAL, PASTORAL AND ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES

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MATTHEW'S RECONFIGURING OF SALVATION IN A CONTEXT OF OPPRESSION

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INTRODUCTION

Socio-historically both the story of Jesus narrated by Matthew, and the community he wrote for, can be located within Rome's sphere of influence (Wainwright, 2017:30).[2] According to Jonker (2018:6), it is important to take both these contexts (the world in and behind the text) into consideration when interpreting the biblical text in Africa. In reading the biblical text simply with a comparative paradigm, as is often done in studies undertaken by African scholars, a direct relationship between the world(s) constructed in the text and various African contexts is often assumed. Jonker has instead argued for an analogical paradigm that relates the textual communication to its socio-historical setting of communication (the world behind the text). While both the setting of Matthew's story and that of Matthew's communication must therefore be taken into consideration, the point of departure should be the contextual engagement of the constructed realities with the social-historical circumstances of the time of textual formation (Jonker, 2018:12–13).

Matthew's story of Jesus (the world in the text) is primarily set in Roman-occupied Galilee and Judea with its protagonist, in the words of Sim (2012:73), ultimately "brutally executed in Roman fashion by Roman soldiers on the orders of the local Roman governor." The composition of the Gospel itself occurred approximately two decades after the disastrous Jewish revolt against Rome. In this period its audience would have been exposed to a relentless Roman propaganda campaign[3] that sought to humiliate the defeated Jewish people with which Matthew's community had a close association (Sim, 2012:63, 73). While it is a speculative enterprise to attempt to reconstruct the precise social history of a text like the Gospel of Matthew (the world behind the text) in terms of its patterns of scriptural citation, it remains important to read it in terms of the broad context of its protagonist and initial readers.

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1   The author is presently an associate professor in New Testament studies at Stellenbosch University, and Chair of the Department of Old and New Testament.

2   If Matthew was written in Antioch, the seat of the provincial governor and the permanent posting of four legions, the presence of the Roman Empire would have been impossible to ignore (Carter, 2001:77; Sim, 2012:73).

3   Cf. The triumphal procession of Jewish captives and loot from the Temple in Jerusalem through Rome, coins minted especially to celebrate the capture of Judea, and the reallocation of the levy of the annual Temple tax for the restoration of the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus (Sim, 2012:73).

It is clear from Matthew that they were subject to the economic exploitation, political oppression, military power and idolatry that characterised the Roman Empire (Hays, 2016:108; Sim, 2012:73).

Matthew as counter-narrative

It has been argued by Warren Carter (2001:93-167) that Matthew can be read as a counter-narrative. As a counter-narrative it instructs its audience to live as an alternative community guided by a vision of a more just society than that embodied in the rhetoric and practices of the dominant Roman imperial culture.[4] While Carter focuses on the inherent conflict between Roman imperial theology and Matthew's description of Jesus as saviour, God's salvific agent, other recent studies have argued for a more ambivalent relationship between the Roman Empire and the Gospel of Matthew (Wainwright, 2017:33-34). This ambivalence is evident in Matthew's presentation of individual Romans as being either good or bad[5] and the Roman Empire as being both the instrument and object of God's wrath. It is important for African interpreters of the New Testament to note this ambivalence in the text instead of only interpreting it in line with a view that supports their particular interest (e.g. the church should follow the Matthean church in collaborating or confronting contemporary dominant power structures).

In terms of the first, the parable in Matthew 22:1-14 can be interpreted as a direct, metaphoric reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE by Rome. In the parable, a king in response to the elite spurring his repeated invitations to attend his son's wedding, sends his troops to kill them and burn their city. The burning of cities was a common punitive imperial tactic. The parable's reference to a city specifically destroyed by fire (Matt 22:7) also matches Josephus's account of the burning of Jerusalem (Carter, 2001:82). Read in this manner the parable depicts Rome as God's chosen agent for punishing the Jerusalem elite for rejecting Jesus just as he had used the imperial powers, Assyria (Isa 10:1-7) and Babylon (Jer 25:1-11), as his punitive agents in the past (Carter, 2001:83). Instead of Jesus saving his people from the Roman Empire, his rejection by the Jerusalem elite had thus three decades later resulted in their punishment by God through Rome's destruction of their city.

Other sections of Matthew can, however, be read as referring to the specific eschatological fate of Rome in the final battle between the forces of evil and the righteous. Leading up to this battle there will be a great tribulation (Matt 24:15-27) perpetrated by those who end up being "a corpse where eagles gather" (Matt 24:28).

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4   Satan's third attempt to test Jesus in Matthew is to show him all the kingdoms of the world, which assumes that Satan controls their fate. The power of Rome over others is thus implicitly due to Satan (Sim, 2012:74). The community of Matthew was therefore to resist both the power of Rome and the Evil One who gave it its power.

5   Positive depictions of individual agents of the Roman Empire are that of the centurion of Capernaum (Matt 8:5-13), Pilate's wife who describes Jesus as righteous and innocent (Matt 27:19). Negative depictions include Pilate (Matt 27:11-26) and the soldiers who guard the tomb of Jesus (Matt 27:62-66; 28:4, 11-15) (Sim, 2012:74).

Sim (2012:75) translates the plural of ἀετός in Matthew 24:28 not as "vultures," which are usually drawn to carrion, but as 'eagles.' The gathering of eagles at a corpse for Sim represents the legions of the Roman Empire, who had the eagle as their standard, that have been vanquished by the Son of Man. The arrival of the Son of Man and his angels, which brings the great tribulation to its conclusion, is thus understood as being described in military terms (Matt 24:29-31). The sign of the Son of Man can be interpreted as his military standard (Matt 24:30) in view of it being accompanied by a trumpet (σάλπιγξ), which was commonly used by Roman legions for battlefield signals, being sounded (Matt 24:31). These images, according to Sim, therefore evoke the eventual military defeat of Rome. After its defeat, God will furthermore judge Rome along with all the nations (Matt 25:31-46). God's universal vengeance and eternal punishment will thus also befall them (Sim, 2012:75).

While the abovementioned interpretations of Carter and Sim need not be accepted without critique, they illustrate what Botha (2011:21-48) has convincingly argued, namely that the Roman Empire provides a complex context for interpreting early Christianities, in that they not only resisted its power but also often imitated its imperial practices and imagery (cf. The depiction of God as a ruler who judges and punishes his enemies). It is thus important for the church in Africa to attempt to understand the fine line walked by communities like Matthew's between resistance and accommodation, protest and negotiation (Carter, 2006:24) when engaging with their own communities' context when appropriating the sacred texts of Israel.

It is not just Matthew's relationship with the Roman Empire that is complex. Its relationship to Jewish hope is also unclear because the precise nature of this hope itself is often vague. After surveying four different types of literary evidence,[6] Wright (1992:319) comes to the conclusion that while there was no fixed view of the Messiah in the first century, messianic themes and ideas based on Hebrew biblical passages and motifs were current. While explicit references to a messianic figure are comparatively rare therein, a common theme is that of a great reversal in the future which would result in their vindication with the defeat of their enemies. Liberation from Rome, the restoration of the temple, and a life of enjoying the fruits of their land are common elements congruent with this hope (Wright, 1992:300). Furthermore, though a Messianic hope in Judaism is commonly expressed in symbolic language it often has a very this-worldly notion of a ruler, or judge, who would arise from within Israel and who would enact the divine judgement and vengeance on Israel's oppressors. This enactment of judgement often involved military action.

It is important to note that forgiveness and national restoration are at times causally linked in Israel's Messianic hope (Wright, 1992:300) and that the antithesis between national and individual, and "political" and "spiritual" salvation is therefore an anachronism in view of the available literary evidence (Wright, 1992:322). It is thus a question if the same hope for the national-political liberation of Israel is evident in Matthew's extensive use of the Old Testament, or if he had deliberately deleted

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6   Wright (1992:319) surveyed the Psalm of Solomon, as well as various texts from Josephus, Qumran and selected apocalyptic writers.

references to political deliverance. In order to attempt to answer this question, this chapter will, after a brief overview of intertextual references related to Matthew's hope for political salvation, focus on Matthew 1:21 to ascertain how he envisions his community's hope for salvation while living under the yoke of the Roman Empire.

MATTHEW'S USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Intertextuality understood, in line with Richard Hays (1989:15), as "the imbedding of fragments of an earlier text within a later one" plays an important role in clarifying the salvific intent of the Matthean Jesus. Intertextually Matthew is permeated with Old Testament passages and motifs due to the Jewish practice of thinking in scriptural categories (Hartman, 1970:133).

This intertextual link with the Old Testament is crucial for understanding Matthew's engagement with the Roman Empire. Carter (2001:202–203), for example, refers to the following intertextual references which all evoke a context of imperial oppression:

- (a) Two fulfilment texts in Matthew 1:22-23 and 4:15-16 evoke Isaiah 7-9 and suggest that almost all fulfilment texts derive from and evoke imperial situations.
- (b) Isaiah is quoted in Matthew 8:17 (Isa 53:4); 12:17-21 (Isa 42:1-4, 9) and 21:5 (Isa 62:11, in part). Matthew thus regularly uses texts from the context of Babylonian imperialism in his narrative of the work of Jesus.
- (c) Matthew 2:23 may be citing or alluding to Isaiah 4:3, which refers to God's reign being restored in Jerusalem, which is an imperialist vision. Matthew 2:23 may recall Judges 13 and with it the context of Israel's imperialist struggle with the Philistines.
- (d) Two quotes from Zechariah 9-11 (9:9 in Matt 21:5; 11:13 in Matt 27:9-10) anticipate the defeat of all of Israel's enemies and the establishment of God's reign or empire.
- (e) In Matthew 2:17-18, Jeremiah 31:5 is cited from Jeremiah's ministry in the context of the growing Babylonian imperial threat.
- (f) Hosea 11:1 is cited in Matthew 2:15 and recalls the exodus liberation in the context of Assyrian imperialist rule.
- (g) Matthew 13:34 cites Psalm 78 that surveys Israel's unfaithfulness and God's contrasting faithfulness that results in their deliverance from Egypt by him.

Carter (2001:202–203) proposes that these inter-texts, shaped by different experiences of various imperial threats in the history of Israel, address Matthew's community's experience of Roman imperialism. Similarly, Zacharias (2017:18–19) has shown how Matthew's interaction with Davidic messianism through the use of typology, formula quotations, allusions, and clustered echoes at major junctures of his narrative both evoke the restoration of Israel as a nation, and reconfigures the hope associated with it. While the Son of David is, for example, portrayed as a violent messiah in both Ps Sol 17 and the Dead Sea Scrolls, Matthew's Davidic messiah is instead presented as a humble king and a healing shepherd (Zacharias, 2017:191).

In the light of this reconfiguring of Israel's hope in the Son of David typology, it is a question if a similar process is evident in Matthew's references to salvation. Has he in other words deliberately reconfigured the hope of Israel by toning down the references to political liberation contained therein? Along with John the Baptist's

calling for the confession of sins (Matt 3:6) and Jesus forgiving sins (Matt 9:2, 5, 6), three texts are often singled out by commentators (Davies & Allison, 1988:210; France, 2007:54; Nolland, 2005:98) as clearly articulating Matthew's understanding of the salvific work of Jesus (Matt 1:21, 20:28 and 26:28). The focus of this chapter will be on Matthew 1:21 as a test case for how Matthew appropriated Israel's hope for salvation as it is articulated in the Old Testament. This is important since the dynamic of appropriating authoritative traditions in an African context should be done in an analogical manner to how these traditions were appropriated in biblical times in text like Matthew (Jonker, 2015:299).

THE ONE WHO WILL SAVE HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS

The announcement of the angel in Matthew 1:21 programmatically describes Jesus as the one who will "save his people from their sins" (αὐτὸς γὰρ σώσει τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν) thereby marking the importance of the theme of salvation[7] in the Gospel of Matthew.

Interpreting the nature of Jesus' mission

The interpretation of the nature of the announced salvation has usually been conducted along two lines of interpretation.

The first line of interpretation is that the announcement of imminent salvation envisions the spiritual renewal of Israel. For example, according to France (2007:54), the angel's words signal that any political expectations evoked by the Davidic theme of his prologue is not in line with Jesus' true mission. His ministry, which begins with a call to repentance from sin (Matt 3:2, 6; 4:17), instead focuses on teaching, healing and exorcism, and forgiving sins (Matt 9:6) and culminates in his death "as a ransom for many" (Matt 20:28), "for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt 26:28). Jesus as the son of David thus does not conform to the popular messianic expectation in that there is no mention of freedom from the oppression of the governing powers (in contrast to Ps. Sol. 17) which indicates the religious and moral, instead of political, character of the messianic deliverance brought about by Jesus (Davies & Allison, 1988:210). According to Davies and Allison (1988:174), who follow this line of interpretation, "His kingship neither involves national sovereignty nor does it restore Israel to good political fortune. Jesus' kingdom is instead one which can be present even in the midst of Roman rule. The Messiah's first task is to save his people from their sins (1:21), not deliver them from political bondage."[8]

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7   Even though Matthew does not use salvation language to the extent Luke does he does refer to the saving role of Jesus in Matthew 8:25; 9:21–22; 14:30; 27:42 (Nolland, 2005:98).

8   Davies and Allison (1988:210) emphasise that the deliverance accomplished by Jesus is religious and moral in nature since it removes the wall of sin between God and the human race and that Matthew says nothing about the liberation of Israel from the governing powers that were oppressing them. It thus differs in this regard from Ps. Sol. 17 which addresses both the sin which separates people from God and their political liberation (Carter, 2001:192).

The second line of interpretation supports the opposite view that Matthew 1:21 expects the political liberation of Israel. In this approach Israel's national-political salvation, involving their deliverance from Roman imperialism is taken as the most natural meaning of "saving his people" (Hagner, 1993:19) in view of it being linked to the etymology[9] of Jesus' name which recalls the conquest of the promised land by Joshua. Novakovic (2003:73–75) has argued in this vein that "salvation from sins" should be understood as the undoing of the consequences of sins (e.g. illness).[10] Since the ultimate consequence of Israel's sins was her continued exile (i.e. the Roman occupation) her political deliverance should therefore be seen as part of her salvation. This is evident in the reference to the Babylonian exile in the preceding genealogy (Matt 1:1-17) which reminds the reader that the sin of Israel had in the past caused a rift with God. By linking Jesus to the Babylonian exile (the deportation to Babylon and not their return) Matthew indicates that he, as the saviour, is Emmanuel, the one who restores God's presence as the son of David and the son of Abraham (Repschinski, 2006:257). Through him God will bring the exile of Israel to an end (Charette, 1992:64–77).

According to Charette (1992:20, 61–62), the theme of recompense is an integral part of Matthew's story of socio-political salvation which is impossible to understand without recalling the similar story in the Old Testament. The Old Testament scheme of recompense is centred on the land in that the covenants of Abraham, Sinai and David all relate to the promise, entrance and ruling of the land (Luomanen, 1998:26). For Matthew, the Sinai covenants are of special importance since it links blessing and curse to obedience of the law with the latter resulting in the conquest of Israel and her subsequent exile. Even though the nation had set a wrong course, the prophets expressed the hope that a righteous remnant would remain and that they would be restored in the promised land (Luomanen, 1998:26). Carter (2001:76, 84) has therefore argued that Matthean soteriology includes deliverance from all forms of bondage as was expected of the coming Messiah. The Matthean Messiah would thus enact God's political, socio-economic and military salvation of Israel since moral, political and social salvation are entwined with each other in Jesus' genealogy (Carter, 2001:79, 84). All that changed for Matthew is that the according to him Jesus does not save his people through military means (Carter, 2001:85).[11]

While it would be anachronistic[12] to assume that Matthew's reference to salvation from sins implies that he envisioned Jesus' mission as being solely to save individuals

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9   The name, the Greek form of Yeshua, is according to popular etymology related to the Hebrew verb עשי ("to save") and noun העושי ("salvation"). It should be noted that despite Jesus' name meaning "Yahweh is salvation" Matthew ascribes the salvation from sins to Jesus and not God (Novakovic, 2003:64)

10   Notice that Matthew does not refer to the forgiveness *of* sins but rather to the salvation *from* sins (Novakovic, 2003:72).

11   His second coming in Matthew 24:29-31 can, however, according to Sim (2012:75), be described in military terms.

12   It is anachronistic because it assumes a division between the religious and the political spheres which was not made in the ancient world (Carter, 2001:75–76).

from their moral and spiritual failings[13] (Charette, 1992:87) it is evident that Jesus, according to Matthew, had not saved his people from political oppression. When Matthew continues the Old Testament story through his genealogy the hope for the restoration of a remnant was still unfulfilled (Luomanen, 1998:26). Even if the intent of Jesus' ministry announced by the angel in Matthew may have been the political liberation of Israel (the second line of interpretation outlined above) it had not happened in practice for Matthew's readers. While the people of Jesus' (τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ) sins had been atoned for they had not been saved from its consequences. Not only in Matthew's narrative of Jesus' life, but also in his own context, Israel remained in exile. Luz (1989:95) therefore observes that the statement that he will save the people "from their sins" does not reflect the usual Jewish hope that the Messiah will eliminate sinners (Ps. Sol. 17.22–25) or that he judges the sinners and lawless (1 Enoch 62.2; 69.27–29) but that it instead reflects the Christian experiences with Jesus.

The experience of Matthew's community was that a spiritual and not political liberation had occurred (Charette, 1992; Luomanen, 1998:27). The national-political deliverance of Israel would also not easily have been accomplished in the period after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. This reality necessitated Matthew to reinterpret the messianic hope of his community. The great reversal would, according to him, now occur at the end of this age when the meek shall inherit the land (cf. Ps 37:11 [Ps 36:11 LXX]). The inheritors are, furthermore, no longer only the physical descendants of Abraham, nor is the land to be identified with Canaan. In line with the expected cosmic renewal (Matt 19:28), already expressed by Isaiah 60-66, the new people of God will instead inherit a renewed creation and not just the land promised to Moses. While the future coming of the Son of Man in Matthew would thus irrevocably transform the world, Matthew's message for a community living in the interim period under Roman occupation needs to be reflected on.

While under Rome

In dealing with representatives of the Roman Empire the Matthean Jesus encouraged his disciples to be as accommodating as possible in that they were to walk a second mile if commanded to walk a single one (Matt 5:40-41), love their enemies (Matt 5:44), and pay all taxes due to Caesar (Matt 22:21). It further appears that Matthew intends the reference to a mile as a metonymic for the legitimate demands of Roman soldiers within the power-structure of the Roman Empire (Baasland, 2015:236) and that the non-resistant attitude Jesus advocates is not to be restricted to this specific demand. It is also noteworthy that while Jesus was embroiled in a fierce public conflict with the Jewish leadership he, according to Matthew, had a less combative relationship with the representatives of the Roman Empire. Not only did Jesus respond positively to the faith of the centurion whose servant had been ill (Matt 8:10), but is it another centurion who after Jesus' crucifixion confesses that he was the Son of God (Matt 27:54).

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13 Matthew usually prefers to use the verb ἀφίημι to refer to the salvation of sins (Repschinski, 2006:255).

A possible explanation for this nuanced depiction of Jesus' relationship with the Roman military could be that the catastrophic events of 70 AD had convinced Matthew that resistance against Rome was futile. Therefore his community had to be very careful in their dealings with the functionaries of the Empire. This strategy allows Matthew to propagate an ethic of appeasement while waiting for the general and specific judgement of God. Rather that fighting on all fronts (Romans, Jews and internal opponents)[14] it is instead a case of carefully choosing the conflicts one gets caught up within Formative Judaism and waiting faithfully for God's judgement of those too powerful to challenge (Rome) in the present. This strategy of Matthew would necessitate that he redacts Israel's hope for political salvation based on the promises of the Old Testament. It is thus apparent that the world of Jesus and his ministry constructed by Matthew was influenced by his own context. It is, however, an open question if Matthew's redactional activity supports the proposal that he consistently reconfigured the hope of his community in order to temper the political aspects thereof. In order to investigate Matthew's redaction and appropriation of Israel's hope his interpretation of Psalm 129:8 (LXX) in Matthew 1:21 will be studied as a test case.

MATTHEW'S REDACTION OF PSALM 129:8 (LXX)

The announcement by the angel in Matthew 1:21 has been described as a "deliberate echo" (France, 2007:53), "echo" (Carter, 2001:83) or an "allusive quotation"[15] that is wholly independent of the LXX (Gundry, 1967:128). It is therefore important to clarify what is meant by the terminology used to describe these different types of intertextual references. This is especially important since the presuppositions of interpreters often determines the identification and interpretation of intertextual references.

Quotation, allusion and echo may be understood as points along a spectrum of intertextual references with the first two being used intentionally (Hays, 1989:23, 29). Allusions are distinguished from echoes by their deliberate use by an author.[16] Quotations in turn are distinguished from allusions in that they can only apply to a text while the latter can allude to a particular passage, place, person, theme, action or event (Lucas, 2014:110). The higher "volume", to use the term of Hays (2002:53) for the degree of repetition of words and syntactical patterns, of quotations also

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14   See Sim (2012:62–78).

15   Matthew 1:21 is, according to Gundry (1967:128), not a straightforward quotation of Psalm 129:8 (LXX) but rather an allusive quotation since it he has reconfigured its wording. According to Hartman (1970:138) it can be described as a "twisted" quotation that has the salient function of drawing attention to a new interpretation in line with how it has been redacted. It is thus a question if this new interpretation should be based on its "surface meaning," which any reasonable reader may grasp, or the deeper meaning thereof which only a reader with specialised knowledge can access (France, 1981:241). In this chapter the terminology of Hays will be followed and Matthew 1:21 will be simply described as an allusion.

16   Lucas (2014:110) defines echoes as unintentional references to a particular passage, place, person, theme, action, or event that are in principle capable of being recognised by the audience or author.

differentiates it from allusions. It is in terms of volume that Matthew 1:21 can be understood as an allusion of Psalm 129:8 (LXX).

In order to understand an allusion the readers (or hearers) of a text must recognise it as such (Hartman, 1970: 134–135). Furthermore, for communication to take place a common interpretive tradition or contextual guideline is necessary to indicate how the author understood the text (Hartman, 1970:142). In this regard, France (1981:233) has asked how sophisticated readers need to be to understand the formula quotations in Matthew 2. The same can be asked of Matthew 1:21 as an allusion. This is especially important if it is also to be understood as an example of metalepsis,[17] or metonymy (Carter, 2001:83), in that its partial allusion to Psalm 129 (LXX) evokes the whole thereof.

Metalepsis is a literary device that establishes an intertextual connection between two texts through what is explicit in the citation or allusion of one text by another, as well as an implicit connection thanks to the unstated resonances between them (Lucas, 2014:95). In the words of Hays (1989:20) metalepsis "functions to suggest to the reader that text B should be understood in light of a broad interplay with text A, encompassing aspects of A beyond those explicitly echoed." Metalepsis is thus a powerful device for evoking the message of a text by only explicitly engaging with a part of it. By quoting a fragment of a text which as a whole expresses the hope for political liberation, that is not apparent in the fragment quoted, an author may also conceal what is evoked by it from readers unfamiliar with the intertext. At the same time it would strengthen the hope of informed readers or hearers.[18] In interpreting the salvation intended by Matthew 1:21 it is, therefore, important to ascertain if it is an instance of metalepsis.

Hays (2002:53) has suggested seven criteria (availability, volume, recurrence, thematic coherence, historical plausibility, history of interpretation and satisfaction), as "modestly useful rules of thumb," for detecting metalepsis in a text.[19] Applied to historically orientated studies like this one only two of these criteria, availability and

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[17] The work of Richard Hays (1989, 2014, 2016) has called attention to the occurrence of metalepsis in both the letters of Paul and in the Gospels.

[18] Hays (2016:370) has remarked in this regard that sometimes it is the most important things that are unsaid and that the intended reader or hearer would therefore need to have the text referred to stored in their memory in order to "hear" what is unsaid.

[19] Hays (2002:53) defines them as follow: (a) Availability – The suggested source had to be available for both author and reader. (b) Volume – The degree of repetition of words and syntactical patterns must be sufficient for the intertextual relationship between the texts to be recognised. (c) Recurrence – It has to be determined how often the possible intertext is alluded to. (d) Thematic coherence – does it fit the argument of the text? (e) Historical plausibility – could the author and readers have understood the meaning of the supposed metalepsis? (f) History of interpretation – have others understood it as metalepsis? (g) Satisfaction – how satisfying is the metaleptic proposal? While Hays' criteria have been criticised by Porter (1997:82–84) they have been defended by Lucas (2014:93–111) and used by scholars like Eubanks (2013) and Beetham (2010). Porter links Hays' criteria of availability with an audience-orientated approach in that the cited text must also be available to the audience. Porter (1997:82–84) himself has chosen for an author-orientated approach instead of an audience-orientated approach.

historical plausibility, are important (Lucas, 2014:100).[20] In terms of Matthew 1:21 it is clear that the text of some Psalms were available to Matthew (as well as his intended readers) and that it is historically plausible that he utilised it and therefore the verse can be understood as an allusion to Psalm 129:8 (LXX) and an example of metalepsis.

As an example of metalepsis, Matthew 1:21 evokes both the salvation of individuals and that of Israel in that Psalm 129 (LXX) not only refers to the salvation of individuals in its opening six verses, but also to national salvation since Israel is called upon to "hope" in God and are reassured that he would redeem her in the final two verses.[21] It is, however, unclear if Matthew alludes to this nationalistic hope in Psalm 129:8 (LXX), that is only accessible to informed readers through metalepsis, to affirm it or if he intends to amend it. It is therefore necessary to have a closer look at his redaction of the Psalm.

Redacting the hope of Israel

When Psalm 129:8 LXX (καὶ αὐτὸς λυτρώσεται τὸν Ισραηλ ἐκ πασῶν τῶν ἀνομιῶν αὐτοῦ) is compared to its allusion in Matthew 1:21b (αὐτὸς γὰρ σώσει τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν) it is readily apparent that the allusion has been redacted by Matthew.

Two redactional changes are especially noteworthy. Matthew has, firstly, replaced "will redeem" ((λυτρώσεται) with "to save" (σώσει), possibly to create a closer link with the etymology of Jesus' name in that its Hebrew root ישע is in the LXX usually translated as σῴζω (Gundry, 1982: 23; Novakovic, 2003: 65). It is, however, not clear if Matthew has not also intentionally removed the allusion to Israel's political salvation from their present occupation by Rome (contra Carter 2001:84).

While the noun λύτρον (and its cognate verb λυτρόω) has a strong connotation with the end of Israel's exile,[22] the verb σῴζω can refer to a broad range of phenomena from which one can be saved (Keener, 1999:97) and does thus not specifically allude to Israel's political liberation. The broader meaning of σῴζω is evident in the manner in which Matthew uses it in his narrative. While it is only used in Matthew 1:21 in reference to sins as the phenomena from which subjects are to be saved, it is often used by Matthew in Jesus' eschatological speeches (10:22; 19:25; 24:13, 22) and in the context of his miracles (8:25; 9:21, 22; 14:30) and crucifixion (Novakovic, 2003:67).[23]

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20 The other criteria have a poetic or aesthetic nature. Identifying an occurrence of metalepsis is therefore primarily a qualitative and secondly a quantitative one (Lucas, 2014:100).

21 "O Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem (λυτρώσεται) Israel from all their sins" Ps 130:7-8 (129 LXX).

22 The verb "redeem" (λυτρόω) is, for example, used in the LXX for Israel's redemption or return from Egypt, Babylon and Assyria (Carter, 2001:84).

23 Repschinski (2006:257–258) has noted that after the announcement in Matthew 1:21c, Matthew does not link σῴζειν and ἁμαρτία again. With the exception of Matthew 3:6, he instead usually uses the noun ἁμαρτία in conjunction with the verb ἀφίημι (9:2, 5, 6; 12:31; 26:28). (Novakovic, 2003:67–68). Matthew also uses σῴζω in reference to physical affliction and eschatological salvation. It is, for example, used in regard to physical affliction in 8:25; 9:21; 9:22 (2x)

It can thus be argued that the programmatic statement in Matthew 1:21 anticipates Jesus' healing ministry and atoning death, which were not part of what is known of contemporary Jewish messianic expectations (Novakovic, 2003:74), and that in contrast to a Jewish nationalistic understanding of the son of David, Matthew instead depicts Jesus as the healing and dying son of David.[24] It is, however, unlikely that Matthew is thereby also intentionally removing all references to Israel's hope for political salvation, or that he wanted to conceal this hope from ordinary readers, by changing λυτρώσεται to σώσει in that he does not do this consistently in his narrative. Matthew has, for example, no qualms about using λύτρον in Matthew 20:28 which allude to various Old Testament texts.[25] The metalepsis between these texts and Matthew 20:28 makes it apparent that Jesus is, for Matthew, the promised Messiah who would remit Israel's sin and restore her as a nation. The literary context (the last supper of Jesus) of this allusion to the restoration of Israel, however, makes it clear that this restoration task of Jesus as the Messiah is for Matthew linked to his death and not to his Galilean ministry.

The second important redaction is the change of Ισραήλ (LXX) to τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ (Repschinski, 2006:255) which could be intended to indicate that Jesus has come to save his new people (the church) from their sins in that the pronoun (αὐτός)[26] indicates that those who follow him are in view. This would be in line with the shift in Jesus' focus from Israel to the nations that occur in the narrative of Matthew (cf. 4:18-22; 16:18; 18:18; 28:16-20). This interpretation is, however, implausible since neither the salvation of sins, nor the church has been a focus of Matthew in his narrative up to this point. Matthew also does not avoid referring specifically to Israel as the focus of Jesus' salvific activity since he explicitly uses Ισραήλ in Matthew 15:24 to describe the mission of Jesus. It is thus a question if it does not instead refer to Israel (Repschinski, 2006:255–256). The textual context of God's faithfulness to Israel (Matt 1:1-17), and the reference to Jesus being the shepherd for Israel (Matt 2:6), can in this regard be seen as support for taking Israel as the referent of τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ (Carter, 2001:79).

Novakovic (2003:66), however, argues that Matthew has used ὁ λαὸς αὐτοῦ in place of the Ισραήλ (LXX) in order to "refer to Jesus' church composed of both Jews and Gentiles." This is in line with the genealogy of Jesus (Matt 1:1-17) introducing him as the son of David and Abraham with the first representing the nationalistic covenant with the house of David[27] and the second the universalistic tradition in

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(Repschinski, 2006:257). Luomanen (1998:38) adds 14:30; 27:40; 27:42 (x2); 27:49 to this list. The verb σῴζειν is in turn used in 27:39-43 (Repschinski, 2006:264) to link the cross to salvation just as forgiveness of sins had been linked to it. For example, Jesus is ironically mocked as being able to save others (27:42–ἄλλους ἔσωσεν) but not himself.

24   In Matthew Jesus is called the "son of David" by those in need of healing (9:27-31; 20:29-34) and release from being possessed (15:22; 21:14-16) (Carter, 2001:78–79).

25   Cf. Jeremiah 31:15 [38:15 LXX] and Isaiah 40:2-10; 50:1.

26   The two personal pronouns (αὐτός) also have different antecedents (God in Ps 129:8 LXX and Jesus in Matt 1:21).

27   The reference to David as "king" (1:6) and his successors (1:6-11) recalls God's promise to him that his descendants would constitute an eternal kingdom (2 Sam 7:14; Ps 89:3-4) (Carter, 2001:78).

Second Temple Judaism[28] (Repschinski, 2006:252–253). If Matthew had intended to refer only to Israel as an national entity in Matthew 1:21 it is thus unclear why has he changed Ισραήλ (LXX) to τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ at all (Novakovic, 2003:65). The Gospel of Matthew thus presents Jesus as the fulfilment of both covenants. He is the saviour of Israel and the nations which reflects the situation of the Matthean church which was comprised of an increasing number of gentiles.

Conclusion

In conclusion Matthew's intent with his allusion to Psalm 129:8 will be summarised before a few hermeneutical remarks will be made about the interpretation of the biblical text in Africa.

The function of Matthew's allusion to Psalm 129:8

The redactional changes made in the allusion to Psalm 129:8 (LXX) in Matthew 1:21 appear to be influenced by the etymology of Jesus' name (λυτρώσεται to σώσει) and the passage's literary context (Ισραήλ to τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ) rather than Matthew's political ideology. This conclusion is supported by the observation that it does not appear as if Matthew intentionally wanted to deny all hope for the national salvation of Israel by changing specific words in Matthew 1:21 since they occur in the rest of his Gospel (e.g. λύτρον in Matt 20:28). The changes made in the allusion to Psalm 129:8 (LXX) are, however, in line with the shift that occurs in Matthew's narrative in his understanding of the nature and scope of the salvation to be hoped for. While the Matthean Jesus does not confront the agents of the Roman Empire in his Galilean ministry to effect political salvation through a military victory, his healings and exorcisms demonstrate God's power to restore all of creation. There is also a fundamental change in the way in which this all-encompassing victory was to be accomplished in that it is brought about by the death, and not victory, of the Messiah. Matthew has, furthermore, modified Israel's hope for salvation by the Messiah into a two-step process, enlarged the scope of his ultimate victory (from the Promised Land to a renewed creation),[29] and broadened the beneficiaries thereof (from Israel to all nations). It is also clear that for Matthew the church should not seek to be an agent of judgement since it is the sole prerogative of God to judge. This redefining of the geo-national scope and eschatological timing of Israel's hope for the Matthean community can possibly be ascribed to its new, mixed, ethnic composition and their experience of the Jewish war.

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28 The genealogy refers three times to Abraham (1:1, 2, 17) recalling God's promise to through him bless all the people of the earth (Gen 12:1-3) (Carter, 2001:78).

29 In view of Matthew's broader narrative the nature and scope of salvation it proclaims has been expanded to include all of creation (Matt 19:28). Matthew thus defies a narrow, purely spiritual or nationalistic, understanding of salvation.

The interpretation of the biblical text in Africa

It, finally, has to be asked what the engagement with Matthew's hope for salvation alluded to in Matthew 1:21 can contribute to the process of interpreting the biblical text in Africa?

It firstly, serves as a reminder that the church must always be aware of the difference between the hermeneutical presuppositions it brings to the text as its interpreter and the intent of the author thereof (Wainwright, 2017:34). While the inherent ambiguity of intertextual relations in the Bible necessitates that an interpretative choice has to be made as to their meaning interpreters must, however, be aware of their own ideology which influences these choices. The biblical text can thus serve as mirror for the church in Africa in which to examine its own ideology and susceptibility to the lure of power if it allows a rigorous critique of its own interpretation thereof (e.g. by noting which texts in Matthew are given prominence in the proclamation of the church). This is vital since Matthew, along with other biblical text, have in the past been used to provide an ideological basis for the Christendom which has itself often functioned as an empire (Wainwright, 2017:38). The text of Matthew is thus not just a counter-narrative to the Roman Empire or a text propagating non-violence that can be directly applied to any context but also a narrative which potentially can be used to subjugate others.[30]

Secondly, Matthew's appropriation of Israel's hope serves as a warning against being too dogmatic in our description of the intention of Matthew's numerous intertextual quotations, allusions and echo's. In this regard Hartman (1970:152) is correct in his assessment that interpreters should not expect too lucid answers to the question how Matthew uses quotations and allusions as communication, for our ears can only with some difficulty catch these faint nuances of the voices that reach us through the centuries.[31] Interpreters should thus be careful of only hearing the voices which support their political agenda. A reading of the biblical text along with a diversity of readers is therefore essential for hearing its full message.

Thirdly, noting the manner in which text like Matthew have appropriated their sources to address their own context can help contemporary interpreters to undertake analogical interpretations to address their own contexts.

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30 Matthew 1:21 can, for example, be used to justify the church's active involvement in the violent overthrow of governments in the present.

31 We also do not even know if we have the same Vorlage as Matthew with which to compare his use of the LXX, or how consistent he is in his theology or approach to the LXX. It has been suggested by Gundry (1982:23), for example, that Matthew is following the tradition behind Luke 1:77 in changing his text to "his people" and to "from their sins" (in the place of "from all his iniquities"). In response Novakovic (2003:65) has noted that there are, however, differences between Matthew 1:21 and Luke 1:77 in that Luke speaks about John and not Jesus, and that his people denotes God's, not Jesus' people. Furthermore, sins are linked to forgiveness and not salvation (it should, however, be kept in mind that Matthew has no qualms in shifting utterances of John to Jesus – cf. the reference to the forgiveness of sins during the last supper by Jesus in Matthew 26:28 which Mark 1:4 uses to describe the ministry of John the Baptist).

Finally, Matthew's appropriation of the Jesus tradition and the Old Testament in his context reminds the church in Africa that while there are many strategies in the New Testament for engaging with oppressive powers none allows the church to resort to violence. The church is instead called to suffer for God's righteousness (Matt 5:6, 10-12). The reality of God's eschatological judgement allows the church to witness to all through its words and deeds that are in line with the righteousness demanded by God (Matt 6:33), while avoiding a judgemental attitude in the present (Matt 7:1-2). Ultimately for Matthew it is God who will punish the wicked and reward the righteous, and not the church (Matt 25:31-46).

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