

Chapter 6

The Evangelium Infantum, the abandonment of children, and the infancy narrative in Matthew 1 and 2 from a social scientific perspective

1. PRECIS

Scholars argued from a form critical perspective that the original social setting of the *Evangelium Infantum* in Mark 10:13-16 should be seen as a miracle story. According to Sauer (1981:42) the phrase 'to place his hands on them' ($\tauίθημι τὰς χεῖρας ἐπ...οr ἐπιτίθημι τὰς χεῖρας$) expresses 'ein typischer Ritus der Heilungspraxis'. Schmithals (1986:447-448) understands Mark 10:13-16 against the background of the healing of ostracized children. The same setting can thus be assumed with regard to Matthew 19:13-15. Subsequently, this essay shows that the Greek verb $\tauίθημι$ semantically complements the word $\acute{e}κτίθημι$. It is proposed that $\acute{e}κτίθημi$ is used in this regard to denote 'being put out of the home', while $\tauίθημi$ denotes 'accommodating someone'; this especially concerns ostracized children. To bless your child or to give your child a name, implies to accept the child in your house. The father proclaims the name of the child, and by proclaiming the name recognizes it as his own. 'Through the proclamation of the name the child becomes legally existent' (Van Selms 1954:90).

The type of background against which one can read the *Evangelium Infantum* can also serve as the background to the story about the birth of Jesus, at least as told in Matthew's story. According to Matthew's narrative strategy the birth record of Jesus (Mt 1:1-17) paves the way for the birth narrative as such (Mt 1:18-25); and the birth narrative in its turn paves the way for the story of King Herod versus the newborn King of the Jews (Mt 2:1-23). Instead of leading God's people Herod, appointed by Caesar as King of the Jews, killed children and in response was feared. Susan Scrimshaw (1984:445), therefore, postulates 'dynastic politics' as the 'proximate reason' for Herod's infanticide. Jesus on the contrary -

being an adopted child (Mt 1:19-20) - touched (Mt 19:13-15) and healed children (Mt 21:14) and in response was honored in the temple by children as Son of David (Mt 21:15).

This 'challenge and response' can be studied from the social scientific perspective of honor and shame as pivotal social values (cf Malina 1981:25-50). 'Honor, like all other goods in first-century Mediterranean society, is a limited good.... [S]ince honor is the pivotal value (much like money in our society), nearly every interaction with non-family members has undertones of a challenge to honor' (Malina 1981:29-30). Dickemann (1984), studying infanticide from a cultural anthropological perspective, mentions resource competition among individuals and families in pre-industrial societies competing for other valuables besides land and geopolitical power.

Human history is full of cases of competition for access to office (read: economic and reproductive dominance) most especially among royalty. We should expect that the greater the value of the office, the greater the benefit of assassination of potential competitors.

(Dickemann 1984:429-430)

In an earlier study Dickemann (1975) found that the practice of infanticide was used in hunter-gatherer, horticulturist, and stratified agrarian societies for purposes ranging from population control to maintenance of the social structure (cf also Scrimshaw 1984:440).

Being born into an honorable family makes one honorable. One of the purposes of genealogies as birth records is to point out a person's ascribed honor. Honor can also be ascribed to a person by 'notable persons of power' (Malina 1981:29), like God, the king or aristocrats. 'While [first-century Mediterranean] people are defined by others and because of others, they are in fact unable to change undesirable situations. Hence the need for divine intervention' (Malina 1991:71). A person can also acquire honor by 'excelling over others in the social interaction that we shall call challenge and response' (Malina 1981:29). In Matthew's narrative world Jesus is portrayed as born from despised outcasts, but being adopted as Son of Abraham, Son of David, Son of God.

In the first century Mediterranean society certain families and institutions were ascribed to be irretrievably shameful, like prostitutes and tax collectors (cf Malina 1981:46). Holiness was associated with divine order, and exclusivistic particularism (cf Neyrey 1991b:276-277). Prostitutes transgress these boundaries and do not retain the politics of purity. They are symbols of chaos. They 'respect no lines of exclusiveness' (Malina 1981:47). John Pilch (1988b:64) put it as follows:

(The) rules in Leviticus 11-15 listing and explaining why certain things are clean and unclean...to derive from the post-exilic era (after 537 BCE) or approximately contemporaneous with Ezra's determination to restore holiness to the community by dissolving 'mixed-religion' marriages (Ezra 10:10-11). Society was deeply concerned about being 'holy like the Lord is holy' and purifying marriages seemed one way to restore and maintain a holy community.

(Pilch 1988b:64)

Matthew's story about the genesis and infancy of Jesus forms an appropriate parallel to what many find to be perhaps the most distinctive aspect of Jesus' ministry (cf Horsley 1989:182 note 42) - his association with the 'least' (i a Mt 25:40, 45), the 'children' (i a Mt 18:3; 15:26), the 'little ones' (i a Mt 18:14) and 'sheep' (Mt 18:12; cf also Mt 10:36 and 15:26). The use of these names/labels portrays the care and love of Jesus, as God-with-us (Mt 1:23) and shepherd of God's people (Mt 2:6). Against this background it is so much more comprehensible that the *Evangelium Infantum* in Mark 10:13-16 as well as in Matthew 19:13-15 should have been placed between the debate on divorce (Mk 10:1-12/Mt 19:1-12) and the rich young man's question about the implications of obeying the law in terms of compassion (Mk 10:17-31/Mt 19:16-22) (cf i a Wenham 1982:113-118; Robbins 1983:54-55).

This essay reinforces some of the most important details from the contributions recently made by Jane Schaberg (1987), Richard Horsley (1989), and Craig Blomberg (1991) regarding a 'sociological' interpretation of the Matthean infancy narrative. As Blomberg mentioned, these studies underscore Wiedemann's (1989:49-83) observation that 'infancy and childhood narratives in the ancient Roman world regularly prepared their readers for the later adult status and roles maintained by their protagonists'. Specifically, this essay continues the above-mentioned line of interpretation through its connection of the infancy narrative with the *Evangelium Infantum*, and by initiating an interpretation of Matthew 1 and 2 in terms of a social scientific model of honor and shame as well as a patron-client social interrelationship.

2. THE ORIGINAL SOCIAL SETTING OF THE *EVANGELIUM INFANTUM*

Since the time of the Reformation Mark 10:13-16 has been associated with the practice of baptizing children (see the overview by Ludolphy 1973:31-51 of the working history of Mark 10:13-16). This is still so in modern times (see i a Cullmann 1948:65-73; Jeremias 1958:61-68; Lindemann 1983:77, 97-99). Today this

direct association between the baptizing of children and the *Evangelium Infantum* is not generally accepted (see i a Aland 1961:67-71; Klein 1970:68-69; Schweizer 1975:112; Gnilka 1979:81; Sauer 1981:27-29; Derrett 1983:1-3; Ringshausen 1986:34-42; Schmithals 1986:44546).

As far as form is concerned, Mark 10:13-16 demonstrates the characteristics of what Martin Dibelius called a 'paradigm' and Rudolf Bultmann an 'apothegm'. Without going into detail about this, what it amounts to is that the *Evangelium Infantum* is a micro-narrative which should be formally distinguished from, for example, the parable and the miracle story. Bultmann pointed out that the children in this story should be seen as the 'idea', that is, a symbol of some concern - as though we here had to do with a parable: 'das Bild wird zur Sache selbst' (Bultmann 1970:215). Sauer (1981:41-45) has, however, very convincingly shown that Mark 10:13-16 is a combined form which shows more of the characteristics of a miracle story. Influential studies have independently or consciously supported Sauer in this view (see Derrett 1983:1-2; Ringshausen 1986:41).

What is immediately noticeable is that the introduction to Mark 10:13-16 demonstrates strong similarities with other healing narratives where the disabled are brought to Jesus as a performer of miracles, with a call on him to heal them (cf Klein 1970:59; Pesch 1977:131; Sauer 1981:41 and particularly Schmithals 1986:445). For our purposes the following terminological aspects of this research can be pointed out:

- * 'brought to Jesus' (*προσφέρω*): in the Synoptic Gospels this expression is often used to refer to the bringing of the disabled and the sick closer, so that they can be healed (Mk 2:4 par; Mt 4:24 = 14:35; Mt 8:16 par; Mk 1:32 (*ἔθερον*); Mt 9:2 par; Mk 2:3 (*φέροντες*); Mt 9:32; 12:22; 17:16 par; Mk 9:17 (*ἵνεγκα*); cf also - *φέρω*: Mk 1:32; 2:3 par; Lk 15:18; Mk 7: 32; Mk 8:22; Mk 9:19-20 par; Mt 17:17; Ac 5:16; exceptions: Mt 18:24; Lk 23:14;
- * 'that Jesus should touch them' (*ἅπτομαι*): in the Synoptic Gospels this expression is used only in relation to miracle stories and the raising of the dead (Mk 1:41 par; Mt 8:3/Lk 5:13; Mk 3:10 par; Lk 6:19; Mk 6: 56 par; Mt 14:36; Mk 5:27-28 par; Mt 9:20-21/Lk 8:44; Mk 30-31 par; Lk 8:45-46; Mk 7:33; 8:22 (*Ινα αὐτοῦ ἀφητα!*); Mt 8:15; 9:29; 17:7 (with reference to raising from the dead); Mt 20:34; Lk 7:14; 8: 47; 22:51; exception: Lk 7:39);

- 'the disciples rebuked the people' (*ἐπιτυμάω*): this expression is frequently used in the New Testament with regard to miracle stories (Mk 1:25 par; Lk 4:35; Mk 4:39 par; Mt 8:26/Lk 8:24; Mk 9:25 par; Mt 17:18/Lk 2; Mk 10:48 par; Mt 20:31/Lk 18:39; cf also Lk 4:39 and the so-called Markan seal of confession in Mk 3:12 par, Mt 12:16/Lk 4:41; outside the framework of the miracle story one has the word *ἐπιτυμάω* as far as the Synoptic Gospels are concerned, only in the so-called Petrine confession in Mk 8:30, 32, 33 par, and in the Lukan redaction in i a Lk 17:3, but also in the Lukan material in Lk 19:39 and 23:40);
- 'do not prevent the children' (*κωλύω*): this word, on its own, does not concern the baptism tradition, despite what Cullmann and Jeremias, among others, inferred from Acts 8:36; a form of baptism could be expected to be formulated interrogatively, while *κωλύτε*) in the Synoptic Gospels only occurs as an imperative or assertion in the indicative (Klein 1970:69; Pesch 1977:132; Sauer 1981:41); what is certainly noticeable is that this verb appears in Matthew only in relation to the parallel context, namely Matthew 19:14, and in Mark two times more in one and the same pericope which has a miraculous exorcism as its theme (Mk 9:38-41): 'Es ist ganz evident, daß im Hintergrund dieser Perikope Probleme urchristlicher Wunderpraxis stehen. Μὴ κωλύετε erweist sich somit als ein Terminus, der Raum dieser Praxis zumindest nicht unüblich war' (Sauer 1981:42); 1 Corinthians 14:39 is the only place in the New Testament where the expression *μὴ κωλύετε* occurs outside the referential framework of the 'Wunderpraxis';
- 'Jesus put his arms around the children' (*ἐναγκαλίζομαι*): this expression appears only here in the New Testament and, on the strength of Proverbs 6:10 and 24:33 (Septuagint), among other references, is conveyed by 'put one's arm around', which has an affective connotation of compassion; Diodorus Siculus (one year BCE) used it by implication in the context of the healing of children: 'Kybele schließt die kleine Kinder in die Arme [ἐναγκή] u. heilt sie [σώζω], wenn sie krank sind'; cf also Arndt & Gingrich 1957:261); it is therefore also possible 'daß *ἐναγκαλισάμενος* auch in Mk 10:16 eine Heilgestus beschreibt' (Sauer 1981:42);
- 'Jesus put his hands on the children and blessed them' (*τίθημι τὰς χεῖρας ἐπὶ... or ἐπιτίθημι τὰς χεῖρας...*): according to Sauer (1981:42) we here have to do with 'ein typischer Ritus der Heilungspraxis' (cf Mk 8: 2; Mk 5:23 par [*ἔθηκεν*]; Mt 9:18; Mk 6:5; 7:32; 8:23; 25; 16:18; Lk 4: 40; 13:13; Ac 28:8; cf also Ac 3:7).

To bless your child or not to bless your child is to accept him/her in your home or to abandon him/her. The question that we would like to debate is whether the Greek word τίθημι has a semantically complementary function to the word ἐκτίθημι in the technical sense. 'Ἐκτίθημι' is used in this context to refer to 'putting out of the house' and τίθημι to 'accommodating'. Our argument is that putting a child out of the home was often the lot of unwanted children such as the handicapped. The same fate falls on children 'born of unlawful unions' (cf Wisdom of Solomon 4:6). Physically and mentally disabled children, the blind, those with only one eye or one arm, the leprosy, the deaf and the dumb were often ostracized in this way (Stockton 1983:90). The Roman philosopher and statesman, Seneca, who was a contemporary of Jesus and well known for his call for a charitable attitude (see Dibelius 1961:1694-1695), refers to incidents in this connection (see Boswell 1984:21 note 26; cf Rawson 1986:170-200).

Apart from the fact that Schmithals (1986:44748) described the *Sitz im Leben* of the *Evangelium Infantum* in Mark 10:116 as that which should be understood against the background of the healing of ostracized children, he also notes that Jesus' acceptance of the children, which is apparent from his action, should be seen as a condemnation of the practice of 'turning the children out of the home'. Persons, such as widows and orphans, who had no connection with a patriarch were necessarily marginal to the society (Countryman 1989:167-168). If accommodating the rejected child forms the original *Sitz im Leben* of Mark 10:1 16, it also forms the fundamental social setting of the Matthean parallel in Matthew 19:13-15. In my view the same social setting can be assumed to be the background of the narrative about the birth of Jesus, at least as told in Matthew's story. If the social world of the Matthean infancy narrative as a micro-contextual world mirrors this particular setting it follows that it has to correlate with what happened in the macro-social world. This is actually what we subsequently want to argue.

3. THE ABANDONMENT OF CHILDREN

In the second or third century CE, the anonymous writer of the well known letter to Diognetus (cf Wilson 1988:763 note 4) referred to the widespread Hansel and Gretel phenomenon that children were put out of homes:

For the distinction between Christians and other men, is neither in country nor language nor customs. For they do not dwell in cities in some place of their own, nor do they use any strange variety of dialect, nor practise an extraordinary kind of life....Yet while living in Greek and barbarian cities, according as each obtained his lot, and following

the local customs, both in clothing and food, and in the rest of life, they show forth the wonderful and confessedly strange character of the constitution of their own citizenship. They dwell in their own fatherlands, but as if sojourners in them; they share all things as citizens, and suffer all things as strangers. Every country is their fatherland, and every fatherland is a foreign country. They marry as all men, they bear children, but they do not expose their offspring ($\delta\lambda\lambda' \text{ οὐ } \rho\int\tau\text{tou}\sigma\iota \tau\alpha \gamma\epsilon\nu\nu\omega\mu\epsilon\nu\alpha$). They offer free hospitality, but guard their purity....

(The Epistle to Diognetus V, *Loeb Classical Library* 1965:358-361)

The Greek word $\rho\int\tau\text{tew}$ translated above as 'expose' is used in several places to refer to the ostracizing action of 'putting someone out of the house or country' (see Liddel & Scott 1961:1572). This casting away of children should probably be seen as part of primitive means of controlling population growth and ensuring survival (see Boswell 1984:10-33; Countryman 1989:22). 'The society tends to mandate infanticide in areas affecting the entire society in either ecological (overpopulation) or social (illegitimate) domains' (Scrimshaw 1984:448). In many societies records witnesses that 'adulterous conception was offered as grounds for infanticide (Daly & Wilson 1984:489). In some tribes males were said to assist upon the death of any child whose features suggested a nontribal sire. Cases are recorded that 'deformed children were described as ghosts or demons, with the rationale for infanticide expressed in terms of a struggle with hostile supernatural forces' (Daly & Wilson 1984:492). Susan Scrimshaw (1984:443) refers in this regard to stories told by the Yaudepu Enga of New Guinea about 'supernatural beings who take abandoned children and rear them to live privileged lives'. According to M H I Galaal (in Daly & Wilson 1984:494) 'infanticide of healthy children was alleged to occur for purely magical reasons...Somali (Africa) parents used to dispose babies born under inauspicious astrological signs 'in the days before Islam came to the Somali lands'.

Several references to the casting out of children are encountered in the writings of, among others, Lactantius (*Institutiones Divinae* 5.9), Justin Martyr (1 Apol 27), Clement of Alexandria (*Paedagogus* 3.3), Seneca (*Controversiae* 10.4.16) and Tertullian (*Ad Nationes* 1.3.16). It is in particular the Greek event word - $\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\tau\acute{\iota}\theta\mu\acute{\iota}/\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\theta\epsilon\sigma\acute{\iota}\varsigma$ and the Latin 'exposito' that are used to refer to this ostracizing action. It often took place under the pretext that it was a religious 'sacrificial action'. The practice in the Middle Ages of 'donating' children to cloisters with ecclesiastic approval and regulation (Deroux 1927), should be seen in the same light.

Just as the words 'hot' and 'cold' cannot be used in a semantically independent manner - the one finds its meaning in terms of the other - the meaning of the Greek word ἐκτίθημι is complemented by the word τίθημι which can indicate, among other things, an act of 'assigning/appointing someone to a particular task, function, or role' (cf Louw & Nida 1988:483). It is in other words an act of 'choosing'. 'Choosing' need not always imply 'selection', but also the 'acceptance' or even the vocation to the fulfillment of a specific role. The name given to a child by the parents was sometimes related to the identification and vocation to fulfill a particular role or perform a task (cf Patte 1987:23-28 with regard to Joseph's name of 'Son of David' in the Gospel of Matthew, as well as the designation of 'God-with-us' given to Jesus). Joseph 'names the child, thus socially and legally accepting him as his own' (Duling 1991b:12). In this connection it is important to note that the parental custom of blessing a child and placing one's hands on that child (cf the analogy in Mark 10:16 - κατευλόγει τιθεὶς τὰς χεῖρας ἐν' αὐτά relates to the action of 'accepting in the home' as opposed to 'putting out of the home'. To bless your child is to promise help and care. (Horst 1961:1650 refers in this connection to Ruth 4:13-16.) As a result of the covenantal relationship between a child and his father, one of the most important signs of honor that a child can show his father is to care reciprocally for him when he is old, and to bury him (cf Neyrey [1991c]). The Greek word τίθημι is also used for this (see Ac 7:16), as well as προστίθημι (see Ac 13:36 - προσετέθη πρὸς τοὺς πατέρας αὐτοῦ - which literally means 'to entrust your father to his fathers') (cf Louw & Nida 1988:531).

It is known that Old Israel in its *Umwelt* took more care of its children than its neighboring peoples. In Psalm 106:37 Israel is called out to abandon the heathen practice of child sacrifice (see especially the comprehensive study by Stager & Wolff 1984 in this regard; cf also Thompson 1986:38-42; Countryman 1989:27 note 11). This does not however mean that this custom was no longer practiced by the Israelites. In Ezekiel 16, God's covenant with his people is compared to finding a little girl who had been rejected at birth, but who had been cared for by God as her parent in terms of a covenantal agreement. In Stephen's speech the putting out of Moses (see Louw & Nida 1988:728) in a death-basket is also described using the Greek verb ἐκτίθημι (Ac 7:21; cf LXX Ex 2:3).

Children were abandoned for various reasons. Apart from a survival motive, or religious considerations, children were often 'thrown away' because of an unwanted marriage and pregnancy (Boswell 1984:19). In the Wisdom of Solomon (4:3-6), for example, these children are considered as 'born of unlawful unions'. Jane Schaberg (1987:55-56) understands the first-century Mediterranean society's attitude towards the status of the child carried by the pregnant, betrothed woman,

like Mary as Matthew's story describes it, in the light of the depiction which appears in the Wisdom of Solomon as well as in Sirach. These texts contain references to the divorce of a seductress who became pregnant:

So it is also with a woman who leaves her husband
 And produced an heir by a stranger.
 For first, she disobeyed the law of the Most High;
 Second, she committed an offense against her husband;
 And third, she committed adultery through fornication (*ἐν πορνείᾳ*)
 And produced children by a strange man.
 She will be led away unto the assembly,
 And punishment will fall on her children.
 Her children will not spread out roots,
 And her branches will not bear fruit.
 She will leave her memory for a curse,
 And her disgrace will not be blotted out.

(Sirach 23:22-26; translation by Trenchard, *Ben Sira's view*, 95; cf Schaberg 1987:217 note 154)

A similar attitude toward the children of adultery appears in the Wisdom of Solomon:

But the children of adulterers will not come to maturity,
 and the offspring of an unlawful union will perish.
 Even if they live long they will be held of no account,
 and finally their old age will be without honor.
 If they die young, they will have no hope and no consolation in the day
 of decision...

For children born of unlawful unions
 are witnesses of evil against their parents when God examines them.

(Wisdom of Solomon 4:3-6; RSV - cf Schaberg 1987:56)

In the Old Testament the analogical reference in Ezekiel 16:3 to the abandonment of a child was precisely the result of an undesirable mixed marriage. Incisive studies have already been done on the prohibition on mixed marriages during the reign of the last Judean kings in particular (see i a Epstein 1942). This was mainly the effect of Ezra's post-exilic marriage reforms (see i a Bossman 1979:32-38) which, at the

time of first-century Pharisaic purification, led to divorce being justifiable on the basis of Mosaic law (see Mk 10:1-10 and par). This state of affairs led to the ostracism of the 'impure' wife and her oldest child (cf Bakon 1981:119; Meijer & Meijer 1984:817; Goodnick 1988:17178; Weaver 1986:145-169 with regard to the period of the Roman Empire). The debate between Jesus and the Pharisees on whether or not divorce was justified (Mk 10:1-10), and his empathy with and touching (during a meal in the house of a Pharisee) of an impure woman who was called a 'sinner' and had been put out of the house (Lk 7:36-50) should probably be understood against this background.

It is still a modern-day phenomenon. The South African newspaper, Transvaler, on 25 June 1991 carried a report about young women being put out of their homes:

In an unusual demonstration in Nazareth, Israel, yesterday [24 June 1991], about fifteen young Arabian woman protested against the killing of women by their male relations as a result of shame they had brought on their families. These women say that about forty young women are killed every year after extra-marital pregnancies, unsanctioned love affairs and wanting to marry men not considered suitable by their families.

(Transvaler 1991:7; translation from Afrikaans)

These outcasts are generally abandoned to all types of social evils. Although a married/betrothed woman remained, in some sense, a 'member of the father's house' in which (she) was born...and would return to (her family) if she was divorced or left widowed and childless' (Countryman 1989:160), in New Testament times people of other fringe groups, the 'hoi polloi' (Horsley & Hanson 1985:69), who tried to exist outside the circle of normal family care, were often the only refuge of the outcast woman and/or child. In Matthew 4:23-25, 15:29-32, these people were referred to as the Jewish crowd (*oi öxλοι*). They were the people outside the circle of the normal caring household, and could easily starve along the way. They included physically and mentally disabled persons. The Jewish historian, Josephus, frequently refers to this socio-economic group - the 'bandits' (see Horsley 1979:37-63) - who were socially despised according to Jewish purification customs (see i a Neusner 1973a:15-26), were put out of homes, and refused admittance to the temple and synagogues (cf Elliott 1991a:100). Saldarini (1988:44) refers to them as the 'expendable class, about 5-10%, for whom society had no place or need. They had been forced off the land because of population pressures or they did not fit into society. They tended to be landless and itinerant with no normal family life and a high death rate'.

The Christian apologist, Lactantius (ca 250-ca 325) pointed out that children abandoned thus often fell prey to wild animals or sexual abuse (*Institutiones Divinae* 5.9). Also Justin Martyr (ca 165) argued that Christians should be taught not to put their newly born children out of their homes, since almost all such children, both daughters and sons, would be abused as prostitutes (1 Apol 27). Clement of Alexandria (ca 160-215) also called attention to this wretchedness and noted that men would later unwittingly have sexual intercourse with their own children, who had become prostitutes (*Paedagogus* 3.3). Tertullian (ca 160-ca 212) objected to the custom of putting children out of the house since the children would suffer. He acknowledged that it was not usually the parents' intention to harm their children, and that strangers would sympathetically adopt the children and care for them better than parents could themselves because of the parents' limited resources (*Ad Nationes* 1.3.16).

Throughout the Middle Ages the church received children who had been ejected from their homes, and it functioned as a sort of children's home. In a certain sense the church thus facilitated the ostracizing practice. Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologiae* 2a.2ae.88.9, 2a.2ae.189.5, 2a.2ae.189.5.2; *Quodlibetales* 3.5.11.12, 4.12.23, 4.12.23.7) studied in detail the teaching of children in the cloisters, and questioned whether children who did not yet understand what it was all about could be bound by a lifelong oath, and whether such children had any place in the cloister. It would appear that this did not, in fact, reflect true concern for the children, but that the large number of children put out of their homes and given to the church by their parents disrupted church life (see Boswell 1984:29). This practice of 'sacrificing children' was called 'oblatio' and by the first century CE it had already been identified as distinct from 'expositum' (see Boswell 1984:14 note 4) by Seneca (*Controversiae* 10:4:16).

By the Middle Ages it had become important for the church to regulate the baptism and the claiming back of 'expositi' (see Boswell 1984:16). Ecclesiastical practices of the sixth century are known to us which even organized the sale of children. Within the Benedictine Order, in particular, we find that 'oblatio' was sanctioned. Parents were forbidden to have any further say in the instruction and formal education of these children. The instruction of these children was also distinct from the normal instruction given to children in the cloisters (see Boswell 1984:17). At first, only the children of aristocrats were received, but later children from parents in the peasant society were also taken in. In the thirteenth century the papal *Decretum Gratiani* began to forbid the practice of 'oblatio', and attempts were made to avoid receiving children under the age of eighteen in the monasteries (Boswell 1984:25).

From the socio-historical information given above, it is clear that the micro-social world mirrored in the context of the Matthean infancy narrative correlates with what is found in the macro-social contextual world in which Matthew's story as a whole makes sense.

4. THE MATTHEAN INFANCY NARRATIVE

4.1 Jesus' birth record (Mt 1:1-17)

According to Lucretia Yaghjian (1992:3) a genealogical record is a kind of certificate of status in terms of ascribed honor: 'it certified the bearer as an official member of his culture in good standing, and conferred upon him the cultural credentials of role and status apposite to his ancestral heritage'. The thrust of the Matthean genealogy can therefore be considered as to point out that Jesus is the (adopted) son of Joseph, and therefore the son of David and of Abraham. From the Matthean narrative point of view a child of David and of Abraham is not someone primarily characterized by a certain biological descent but in terms of what he/she will do, his/her vocation. In Matthew 3:7-9 the true children of Abraham are described as people doing certain things: 'they bear fruit that befits repentance' (3:8), or, more generally, they bear good fruit (7:17).

The continuity of Abraham's line was maintained in extraordinary ways: four mothers are mentioned in an otherwise male genealogy. The mention of Tamar as the mother of Perez (Mt 1:3) alludes to the tortuous way in which Judah begot Perez and Zerah (Gn 38:6-30); Rahab, the mother of Boaz (Mt 1:5), was the foreign prostitute who helped the Israelite spies at Jericho (see Joshua 20); Ruth, the mother of Obed (Mt 1:5), was also a foreigner (see Ruth 4); the very designation of the mother of Solomon as 'the wife of Uriah' (Mt 1:6) reminds the readers of David's dubious behavior (see 2 Sm 11) (cf Patte 1987:19).

4.2 The birth narrative (Mt 1:18-25)

The genealogy paves the way for the nativity story. Matthew's story presupposes that Joseph knows something about Mary's pregnancy. It seems that he thought that she had committed adultery (cf Brown 1979:125-128); 'Since he [Joseph] plans to divorce her [Mary] at all events, he must be taking it for granted that she is guilty of unchastity' (Beare 1981:68). However, the narrative does not describe how Jesus was conceived (*γεννώω*) but rather the reason why Mary's pregnancy should not be perceived as shameful; that which is conceived in her is not impure but is of the Holy Spirit, and thus holy.

The Greek construction, τὸ γὰρ ἐν αὐτῇ γεννηθὲν ἐκ πνεύματος ἔστιν ἄγιον, underscores 'holy'; the text opposes diverging evaluations of Mary's pregnancy, either as something that is shameful and a cause of disgrace and rejection (Mt 1:19) or as something that one should not fear because it is of God (Mt 1:20). The divine is defined in terms of holiness, that is, in terms of a value ('the ultimate euphoric value' - Patte 1987:27).

Joseph, when wanting to divorce Mary, is described as 'her husband'; 'just,' or righteous; 'unwilling to put her to shame' (Mt 1:19); Joseph, when taking Mary into his home, is described as 'Son of David', obeying (Mt 1:24), without fear (Mt 1:20), adopting Jesus by giving him his name (Mt 1:25) and transmitting the vocation to be 'Son of David', 'Son of Abraham (Mt 1:1), 'Son of God'.

The 'true righteousness' (δικαιοσύνη - that which 'exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees' (Mt 5:20) - is expressed in love, given without discrimination to deserving and undeserving alike (Mt 5:44-48). 'The "just" man is merciful, as God is merciful' (Beare 1981:68). Four of the five instances of the verb 'to have compassion' (σπλαγχνίζομαι) and five of the eight instances of the verb 'to have mercy' (ἔλεέω) occur in the Matthean narrative in connection with healing and in almost every case the titles "Lord" and/or "Son of David" appear as part of the semantic field (Duling 1991b:10).

Except for the narrator, it is only the Jewish crowd (Mt 9:27; 12:23; 20:30 and 21:15) and the Gentiles (Mt 15:22), who address Jesus as 'Son of David' and not the disciples or the Jewish leaders. All these pericopes deal with healing and all, except Matthew 15:21-28, deal with the healing of the blind in one way or another. Matthew 21:9, the entry into Jerusalem, is an exception because it does not deal directly with healing. However, the entry bears a close relation to the following incident of healing that takes place inside the temple and leads to a climax when 'children in the temple' honor Jesus as the 'Son of David' (Mt 21:15).

5. REMARKS ABOUT JESUS IN MATTHEW'S STORY

Earlier in the present essay we pointed out that the name/label 'Son of David' in the Matthean story had to do with the assigning of and vocation to fulfill a specific caring role (cf also Duling 1991b), and that it had special reference to Jesus' role as God-with-us in saving the people from their sins. From a social scientific point of view 'sin' can be described as deviance and uncleanness. Sinners are people out of place (Neyrey 1991b:274).

It is generally acknowledged that Mary Douglas (1966:41-57), to date, has come forward with the most comprehensive explanation of the 'rationale of Israel's purity system' (cf Countryman 1989:24). According to Douglas, God's holiness

means wholeness and completeness, not only in God, but in God's creation. Consequently, all of creation should portray the divine order relating to classification as well as discrimination (cf Neyrey 1988:68). This 'divine order' is - expressed notably by the Greek word ἅγιος (cf Van Staden 1990:1): "Ἄγιοι ἔσεσθε, ὅτι ἅγιος, κύριος ὁ Θεὸς ὑμῶν (LXX Lv 19:21; cf also 1 Pt 1:16). In this analogous formula the word ἅγιος may be replaced by the word τέλειος: "Ἐσεσθε οὖν ὑμεῖς ὡς ὁ Πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐρανίος τέλειος ἐστιν (Mt 5:48) - 'You must be whole just as your Father in heaven is whole'! It is also in this connection that Matthew, in association with Psalm 107:10 (LXX Ps 106) (see Gundry 1975:107), refers to the destitute in Galilee as those who live in the land in the shadow of death (Mt 4:16). For the victims of socio-religious ostracism, the 'people living in darkness', the gospel of Jesus, which proclaimed that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, was like the dawning of a light (Mt 4:16). Jesus program of works and the target of his works is summarized as follows in Matthew 4:23-25 (NIV; cf also Mt 9:35-38):

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, the epileptics and the paralyzed, and he healed them....

(Mt 4:23-25)

According to Gerd Theissen, Jesus' miracles were aimed at the socially despised in Galilee. Matthew 15:29-32 (cf also Mt 4:23-25) is an example of such a report.

Jesus left there and went along the Sea of Galilee. Then he went up into the hills and sat down. Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the dumb and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them. The people were amazed when they saw the dumb speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel. Jesus called his disciples to him and said, 'I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me for three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way'.

(Mt 15:29-32)

On the basis of these verses it is clear that Jesus not only healed the unfortunate of all types of diseases and deviances; these people comprised the hungry crowd to whom, at Jesus' request, according to the Gospels, the disciples had to give bread, which led to the miraculous multiplication of the loaves. It is also striking that, in many places in Matthew, these 'people' were called the 'least' (*οἱ ἐλαχίστοι* - i a Mt 25:40, 45), the 'children' (*τὰ παιδία* - i a Mt 18:3; *τὰ τέκνα* - i a Mt 15:26), the 'little ones' *οἱ μικροί* - i a Mt 18:14) and 'sheep' (*τὰ πρόβατα* - i a Mt 18:12; cf Mt 10:36 and 15:26).

The metaphorical use of 'sheep' (*τό πρόβατον*) in Matthew 9:36 and 18:12 correlates with the expressions 'the lost sheep of Israel' (*τὰ πρόβατα τὰ ἀπολωλότα οἴκου Ἰσραήλ*) in Matthew 10:6 and 'the little children' (*τὰ παιδία*) in Matthew 18:3-5, as well as 'the little ones' (*οἱ μικροί*) in Matthew 18:6, 10, 14 (cf Mt 10:42). The use of these names portrays the care and love of Jesus, as 'God-with-us' (= *Εμμανουὴλ*; cf Mt 1:23). Matthew relates that Jesus, himself a socially despised person from the viewpoint of the Pharisees (cf Mt 12:24; cf Malina & Neyrey 1988), did not himself experience alienation from God, but God's presence. Matthew also related that Jesus healed the blind and the crippled, as 'unclean' socio-religious outcasts, 'in the temple' (= *ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ*) (Mt 21:14) and that 'children in the temple' (= *ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ*) honored Jesus as the 'son of David' (Mt 21:15).

John Pilch convincingly argues that healing incidents (for example 'lepers') in the Gospels provide evidence that human illnesses 'were thought to be a source of pollution, not contagion, and that Jesus' 'cure' invariably involved establishing new self understandings so that these formerly 'unclean' and excluded from the holy community now found themselves 'clean' and within the holy community (Pilch 1988b:60; cf also Pilch 1991).

5. CONCLUSION

The aim of this essay is only to suggest that the Matthean infancy narrative can be interpreted from the perspective of the social pattern of challenge and response in terms of the ascribed and acquired honor of two kings. From our insight into the macro-social contextual world we know that Herod the Great was ascribed honor by an earthly emperor when he was declared King of the Jews by the Roman senate in 40 BCE (cf i a Ferguson 1987:328-329). However, although he was a Judean by religion, his racial descent was Idumaean (cf Brandon 1973:219). Inferred from Matthew's narrative world we are told that Jesus is made honorable because of divine intervention in spite of his disgraced birth record (Mt 1:1-17) and shameful birth (Mt 1:18-25). Herod acted as patron among the people through agriculture

and commercial enterprises (cf Brandon 1973:219) but the response to his program was fear (cf Mt 2:22) and Jewish hostility (cf Assumption of Moses 6:2-7). Jesus fulfilled the role of shepherd (*ποιμανεῖ τὸν λαὸν* - Mt 2:6) towards the 'lost sheep of the house of Israel' and leader who guided God's people (*ἡγούμενος* - Mt 2:6), and was honored by them as Son of David. Other characters are also on stage and play their roles in the Matthean infancy narrative, like *inter alia* the Magi and the chief priests and teachers of the law in Jerusalem. However, we did not touch upon their actantial roles. A more thorough social scientific analysis of the infancy narrative in terms of the plot of Matthew's story and its post-seventy CE contextual world has still to be done.

Specifically, it becomes clear that in Matthew's story God is shown 'to be one who sides with the outcast and endangered woman and child' (Schaberg 1987:74). The narrator retold the tradition of the divine intervention which caused Joseph's acceptance of the messianic child and his mother. Therefore, Jane Schaberg is on the right track when she understands Matthew's emphasis of God as Father as an indication that the Jesus-movement, as Matthew understood and described it, is the commencement of a new (fictive) family, a family of God (cf Mt 23:9). By making the child and not the father the model for entry into the reign of God, Jesus 'reversed the hierarchical assumptions that governed all of life' (Countryman 1989:188). Likewise, John Riches (1980:132-133) has drawn a ('valuable'- according to Countryman 1989:188 note 21) connection between this tendency and Jesus' disregard of purity. The Matthean Jesus' attitude towards the status of women as well as children represent the deliberate breaking down of boundaries. The new way was for all to assume the position of children or slaves (Mt 23:11-12; cf Countryman 1989:189). 'If my reading of Matthew's infancy narrative is regarded as a possible reading, other ears may recognize its echoes in the rest of this Gospel' (Schaberg 1987:77).

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Authorial Index

A

- Abrams 38, 41, 106, 107
 Aguirre 15, 24, 113, 114, 132, 135, 137, 141
 Aland 264
 Anderson 31
 Annandale 159, 160
 Arndt & Gingrich 265
 Ashton 7, 8
 Aulén 68, 159

B

- Bacon 12, 23, 24, 112, 252
 Bakon 270
 Bal 248
 Balch 147
 Balz 49, 112
 Barr, D L 18, 24, 25, 26, 40, 49, 114, 132, 137
 Barr, J A 21, 26, 27, 160

- Barth 6, 7, 12, 22, 132, 189, 252, 253
 Barth & Steck 152, 156, 162, 163
 Bateson 206
 Bauckham 70
 Baur 1, 249, 260, 248
 Beardslv 154
 Beare 16, 65, 66, 74, 81, 87, 256, 259, 272, 273
 Berger 152, 157, 158, 159
 Berger & Luckmann 214
 Best 14, 88, 199
 Betz 22
 Betz & Grimm 190, 209
 Bieneck 67
 Blair 12, 50, 252
 Blok 105
 Blomberg 263

- Boers 22, 139, 146, 183, 185, 186
 Boobyer 183, 195
 Boomershine 31, 32
 Boomershine & Bartholomew 32
 Borg 206, 216, 217, 226
 Bornkamm 9, 12, 14, 15, 17, 54, 60, 61, 63, 120, 252
 Bornkamm, Barth & Held 12
 Borsch 18, 24, 49
 Bossman 59, 269
 Boswell 266, 267, 268, 271
 Bousset 60
 Braaten 255
 Brandon 275, 276
 Braumann 97, 175
 Brooks & Warren 105, 106
 Brown, C 209

Brown, R E	Crossan	Dibelius
272	11, 198, 219, 234, 236, 257, 259, 222	5, 6, 190, 195, 230, 264, 266
Brown, R E et al	Cullmann	Dickemann
16, 87	18, 48, 74, 265	262
Brown, S	Culpepper	Dodd
15, 82, 83,	187	156, 170
Bultmann	D	Dormeyer
5, 6, 7, 174, 185, 189, 196, 210, 230, 264	Daly & Wilson	28
Butcher	267	Doty
106	Daniélou	31, 33, 230
C	88	Douglas
Calloud	Daube	58, 216, 273
28	101, 173	Duling
Capra	Davies	147, 268, 273
206	12, 23, 50, 112, 252	Duling & Perrin
Carlston	Dawsey	268
24, 25	44, 45	Dunn
Charles	Deist	257, 258, 259
173	29, 185	E
Clark	Deist & Burden	Ebeling
13, 80	38	189
Clark & De Waard	De Jonge	Ellingworth
26	1, 2, 184	29
Cohen	De Kruijf	Elliott
207, 207	67, 71	58, 59, 212, 270
Combrink	Delling	Ellis, I P
3, 12, 19, 24, 29, 30, 31, 32, 131, 133, 139, 147, 253	67	102
Conzelmann	Den Heyer	Ellis, P F
19, 60, 63, 131, 133, 246	26	24, 93, 201, 220
Cope	Deroux	Engelbrecht
25, 55	267	57
Countryman	Derrett	Epstein
214, 266, 267, 268, 270, 273, 276	65, 264	269
	De Villiers	F
	29, 31	Fascher
		257

Ferguson	Gaston	Hamburger
275	50	221, 222
Filson	Genette	Hamerton-Kelly
12, 252	248	21
Foerster	Gerhardsson	Hare
60	50, 63, 191, 192, 194, 197	12, 13, 80, 252
Fohrer	Gibbs	Hare & Harrington
152	47, 72, 130	81
Frankemölle	Giblin	Harrington
11, 13, 15, 16, 50, 70, 81, 84, 87, 111, 112, 137, 140, 200	102, 225	11, 13, 18, 25, 48
Freyne	Glasswell	Hartman
125, 126, 223	23, 112	4
Friedrich	Gnilka	Hatch
196, 250	264	173
Frye	Goodnick	Hauck
26, 187	270	163, 177
Fryer	Grech	Held
183	12	6, 7, 96, 197, 201, 202, 218, 219, 252
Fuchs	Green	Heller
120, 230, 236, 237, 243, 244	12, 13, 80	250, 251
Fuller	Grundmann	Hengel
16, 87	13, 78, 81	67, 70
Funk	Gundry	Hickling
188, 237	4, 23, 56, 99, 256, 274	11
G	Gunkel	Higgins
Gaechter	5, 151, 152, 156, 159, 162, 229	67
23, 24, 26, 60, 112	Güttgemanns	Hill
Galland	9, 10, 28, 237, 244	18, 23, 25, 44, 49, 51, 52, 59, 67, 68, 71, 72, 74, 19
28	H	Hirsch
Garland	Haenchen	230, 237, 238
14, 78, 96, 221	14, 78	Hoffmann
Gärtner	Hahn	161
4, 17, 110	26, 48, 49, 60, 67, 69, 251	Hollenbach
		214

Holst 79	Jülicher 120, 230, 231, 232, 236, 240, 243, 244	133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 180, 220, 224, 230, 237
Horsley 147, 263, 270		
Horsley & Hanson 270	K	Kissinger 120, 231
Horst 268	Kähler 2, 15, 16, 120, 177	Klauck 14, 88, 236, 243, 244
Howard 28	Kamphaus 71, 100	Klein 264, 265
Hubbard 123	Kaplan 255, 258	Klijn 174
Hultgren 59	Karris 26	Kline 23, 112
Hummel 11, 15, 47, 63, 84, 120, 200, 252, 255	Käser 177, 179, 178	Klostermann 60, 202
Humphrey 25	Katz 249, 252, 253, 254, 255	Koch 152, 159, 160, 163, 169, 172, 174, 175, 177
Hurtado 60	Kealy 8, 48	Kraft 1, 2
I	Keck 18, 19, 49, 51, 52	Kratz 257
Iber 8	Kelber 26, 49, 123	Krentz 183, 188, 189
J	Kenney 38, 39, 41, 42	Kretzer 12, 13, 26
Janzen 177	Kesich 10	Kümmel 2, 5, 6, 7, 67
Jeremias 16, 68, 69, 87, 116, 174, 175, 196, 209, 210, 263, 265	Kilpatrick 3, 4	Küng 186
Jones, D L 70	Kingsbury 2, 11, 12, 15, 16, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 31, 44, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 57, 60, 64, 67, 68, 69, 71, 72, 87, 92, 99, 102, 121, 129, 132,	Künzel 13, 200
Jones, G V 237		L
		Lai 28

Lämmert		Ludolphy	81, 92, 99, 100,
108		263	101, 110, 132,
Lange		Lührmann	136
2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 50,		181, 209	
218		Luz	Meijer & Meijer
Lanser		12, 13, 15, 16,	270
129		22, 80, 81, 87,	
Lapide & Kung	2	139, 219	Minear
255			14, 15, 82, 85,
Lapide & Moltmann			86, 89, 94, 96,
255			219
Lategan		M	Montague
10, 29, 94, 101,		Malan	32, 186
182		29, 96	
Lategan & Vorster		Malbon	Montefiore
238		123	56, 221, 224
Léon-Dufour		Malina	
26		58, 214, 262,	Mowinkel
Liddel & Scott		275	70
267		Malina & Neyrey	Muienberg
Lightfoot		147, 212	159
123		Mandelbaum	Murphy-O'Connor
Lindemann	152	248, 249, 251	133
263		Markert	
Linnemann		151, 154, 156,	N
120, 145, 233,		157, 158, 160,	Neusner
234, 237, 239		161, 162, 163,	58, 217, 222,
Loader		176	249, 251, 252,
155, 158, 163		Martin	253, 254, 270
Lohmeyer		4	
23, 101, 112,		Marxsen	Neyrey
117, 122, 125,		9, 19, 24, 101,	58, 59, 147,
128, 130, 135,		113, 117, 118,	212, 216, 262,
221		119, 123, 127,	268, 273, 274,
Lohr		130, 131	275
24		Matthey	Nickle
Louw		83, 84	11
29, 147, 154,		McConnel	Nida & Taber
156		4, 22, 132, 140	29, 156, 168
Louw & Nida		McKnight	Nolan
268		28, 161	18, 19, 49, 50,
		Meier	51
		13, 16, 17, 18,	
		21, 49, 50, 51,	O
		52, 53, 55, 73,	Osiek
			210

Overman	Rawson	Rost
147	266	173
P	Reimarus	Roth
	79	222
Patte	Resseguei	Rothfuchs
27, 28, 29, 256, 268, 272, 273	31	4
Pearson	Rhoads	S
255	31	
Pelser	Rhoads & Michie	Sabourin
28, 29, 232, 234, 237	31, 239	26
Perkins	Richardson, A	Saldarini
221, 248, 258, 260	183, 201	217, 270
Perrin	Richardson, P	Sand
8, 9, 15, 18, 48, 91, 147	221, 222, 223	17, 18, 22, 62, 63, 73, 75, 139
Pesch	Riches	Sauer
4, 72, 195, 196, 199, 264, 265	205, 276	261, 264, 265
Petersen	Richter	Schaberg
30, 31, 32, 39, 44, 90, 91, 92, 102, 107, 118, 142, 144, 205, 214, 237, 238	152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 162, 163, 169, 170, 175	263, 268, 269, 276
Pilch	Riebl	Schenk
59, 218, 262, 263, 275	257	16
Piper	Riesner	Schenke
88	26	196
Pokorny	Ringhausen	Schider & Stenger
67, 70	264	28
Polzin	Robbins	Schille
30	263	3
Przybylski	Robinson	Schlatter
57, 141	25	4, 59, 123
R	Rogers	Schmid
	Rohde	13, 23, 60, 81, 112
Rast	Rolland	Schmidt
2, 5	24	5, 183
	Ronen	Schmithals
	215	210, 255, 256, 261, 264, 266
		Schnell
		181

Schniewind	Stendahl	Tödt
17, 24, 50, 81, 113	3, 4, 23, 112	69
Schoeman	Stockton	Travis
206	266	6, 159
Scholes	Strack & Billerbeck	Trilling
107	221, 223	11, 13, 17, 18, 20, 21, 50, 73,
Schweitzer	Strathmann	80, 84, 95, 101, 124, 132, 136
183	84	
Schweizer	Strecker	Tucker
12, 210, 253	3, 4, 11, 12, 15, 16, 20, 21, 22, 50, 63, 87, 132, 133, 134, 135, 137, 138	162, 173, 187
Scrimshaw	Streeter	U
261, 262, 267	3	
Sellin, E	Stuhlmacher	Uspensky
154	188	31, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 44, 45, 46, 105, 106, 129, 144
Sellin, G	Suhl	V
231, 232, 236	63	Van Aarde
Senior	T	24, 29, 31, 32, 52, 56, 57, 66, 71, 72, 83, 128, 139, 147, 163, 168, 169, 175, 176, 185, 200, 202, 211, 213, 216, 219, 226, 230, 235, 251
Sheridan	Talbert	
96, 102	237	Van der Loos
Sibinga	Tannehill	209
113	31	
Sigal	Tatum	Vandermoere
138, 139	18, 49	76, 105, 107, 123
Snodgrass	Theissen	
236	190, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 215, 218, 227, 228, 274	Van Eck
Stager & Wolff	Thompson, H O	123
268	222	
Stambaugh & Balch	Thompson, W G	Van Huyssteen
223	12, 25, 87, 96,	180, 185
Stanton	Thompson, Y	
147	268	Van Iersel
Stark		67, 69, 123, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197, 201
254		
Stein		
9		

- Van Selms
261
- Van Staden
58, 274
- Van Tilborg
14, 77, 78, 79,
96, 147, 257
- Van Unnik
17, 85, 86, 110
- Vermes
68, 69, 223
- Verseput
117
- Via
23, 31, 32, 46,
91, 144, 236,
237, 239, 240,
241, 242, 243,
244, 245
- Vögtle
61
- Vorster
6, 9, 10, 26, 28,
29, 31, 91, 94,
112, 115, 117,
132, 141, 143,
156, 182, 209,
235, 238, 239
- Votaw
163
- W**
- Walker
12, 13, 14, 15,
20, 50, 63, 71,
80, 101, 124,
132, 133, 134
- Wanke
152
- Ward
215
- Weaver
270
- Weder
231, 236, 244
- Wenham
263
- Weren
13, 81, 85
- Whiston
215
- Wiedemann
263
- Wilckens
13, 81, 83, 123,
258
- Wilson
267
- Wink
17, 18, 73
- Witherup
256
- Wrede
2, 3, 8
- Wrege
55, 232
- Wright
205, 207
- Y**
- Yaghjian
272
- Yarnold
56, 57
- Z**
- Zimmermann
5, 6, 154, 159,
174
- Zorn
183

Index of Biblical References

A

- Ac 1:1 110
 Ac 3:7 265
 Ac 5:16 264
 Ac 7:16 268
 Ac 8:36 265
 Ac 13:36 268
 Ac 20:35 165
 Ac 26:2 165, 168
 Ac 27 213
 Ac 28:8 265
 Am 5:1-3 161
 Am 5:2 161

C

- 1 Cor 7:40 167
 1 Cor 11:23-24 194
 1 Cor 14:39 265
 1 Cor 15:20-23 259

D

- Dt 8:3 97, 195
 Dt 23:1 58
 Dt 23:1-8 216
 Dt 23:18 58

E

- Ex 2:3 268
 Ex 20:2-3 215
 Ex 30:11-16 221
 Ex 38:25 221
 Ex 38:25-26 221

G

- Gl 4:15 164, 168
 Gn 38:6-8 272

H

- Hs 6:6 55

Hs 11:9
 216

J

- Ja 1:12 165
 Ja 1:25 168
 Ja 5:11 168
 Jn 1:1-18 159
 Jn 5:28-29 257
 Jn 6:1-15 194
 Jn 6:22-40 194
 Jn 6:26-59 196
 Jn 6:41-59 194
 Jn 9:22 252
 Jn 12:42 252

K

- 1 Ki 1:8
 74

L		
Lk 1:45	Lk 7:39 165	Lk 11:28 166
Lk 1:48	Lk 8:3 168	Lk 12:16-21 234
Lk 4:35	Lk 8:4-8 265	Lk 12:35-48 172
Lk 4:39	Lk 8:11-15 265	Lk 12:37 167, 171
Lk 4:40	Lk 8:24 265	Lk 12:38 171
Lk 4:41	Lk 8:44 265	Lk 12:43 167, 171
Lk 5:13	Lk 8:45-46 264	Lk 12:56 97
Lk 6:11	Lk 8:47 173	Lk 14:15 167, 178
Lk 6:19	Lk 9:11 264	Lk 14:15-24 246
Lk 6:20	Lk 9:12-17 170, 172	Lk 15:4-7 233
Lk 6:20-21	Lk 9:51 168	Lk 15:18 264
Lk 6:20-22	Lk 9:60 170	Lk 16:1-13 234
Lk 6:22	Lk 9:61 167	Lk 16:19-31 234
Lk 6:24-26	Lk 10:17-34 170	Lk 17:3 265
Lk 6:39	Lk 10:23 98	Lk 17:7-10 233
Lk 7:14	Lk 10:30-33 264	Lk 18:2-8 234
Lk 7:23	Lk 11:11 167	Lk 18:9-14 234
Lk 7:36-50	Lk 11:27 270	Lk 18:39 265
	Lk 11:27-28 171	Lk 19:23-40 265

Lk 19:39 265	Mk 2:1-3:6 199	Mk 6:2 95
Lk 19:44 246	Mk 2:3 264	Mk 6:5 265
Lk 20:35 258	Mk 2:4 264	Mk 6:11 91
Lk 21:7 17, 54	Mk 3:10 264	Mk 6:30-44 195
Lk 22:30 246	Mk 3:12 265	Mk 6:31 194, 196
Lk 22:51 264	Mk 4:1-34 115, 199, 238	Mk 6:34 193, 194, 196, 197, 201
Lk 23:14 264	Mk 4:3-9 235	Mk 6:35-44 196
Lk 23:29 167, 171	Mk 4:13-20 235	Mk 6:37 202
Lk 24:13-35 159	Mk 4:26-29 233	Mk 6:39 196
Lk 24:52-53 246	Mk 4:28 17, 54	Mk 6:41 193, 194, 197, 201
Lv 11:15 263	Mk 4:35-41 14	Mk 6:42 197
Lv 19:2 58, 216	Mk 4:38 17, 54	Mk 6:45 197
Lv 19:21 274	Mk 4:39 265	Mk 6:56 264
M	Mk 4:42 91	Mk 7:3 58
Mk 1:15 131	Mk 5:23 265	Mk 7:24-30 197
Mk 1:16-14:11 91	Mk 5:27-28 264	Mk 7:31 197, 200
Mk 1:30-31 264	Mk 6:9 91, 92	Mk 7:32 264, 265
Mk 1:32 264	Mk 6:1-6 94	Mk 7:33 264
Mk 1:41 264	Mk 6:1-9; 32 90	

Mk 8:1-10 195, 196	Mk 9:25 265	Mk 13:1 17, 54
Mk 8:2 265	Mk 9:31 91	Mk 13:10 128
Mk 8:6 193, 194, 197	Mk 9:38-41 265	Mk 14:15 199
Mk 8:7 201	Mk 10:1-10 270	Mk 14:22 194
Mk 8:17-21 197	Mk 10:1-12 263	Mk 14:28 117
Mk 8:22 264	Mk 10:5 54	Mk 14:49 131
Mk 8:23 265	Mk 10:13-16 261, 263, 264, 266	Mk 15:1-5 159
Mk 8:25 265	Mk 10:16 265, 268	Mk 16:7 117
Mk 8:29 92	Mk 10:17-31 263	Mk 16:18 265
Mk 8:30 91, 265	Mk 10:32 91	Mt 1 263
Mk 8:31 91	Mk 10:35 17, 54	Mt 1-2 72
Mk 8:32 265	Mk 10:48 265	Mt 1-13 29
Mk 8:33 265	Mk 10:51 17, 54	Mt 1:1 64, 121, 273
Mk 8:38 97	Mk 11:21 17, 54	Mt 1:1-4:16 23
Mk 9:5 17, 54	Mk 11:27-12:40 199	Mt 1:1-4:22 41, 113, 115
Mk 9:9 91	Mk 12:1-2 235	Mt 1:1-17 116, 128, 261, 272, 275
Mk 9:17 264	Mk 12:29 216	Mt 1:2-17 137
Mk 9:19 100	Mk 12:32 216	Mt 1:3 272
Mk 9:19-20 264	Mk 13 117	Mt 1:5 272

Mt 1:6 272	Mt 2:1-23 261	Mt 3:13-4:11 116
Mt 1:16 109	Mt 2:2 64	Mt 3:13-4:13 124
Mt 1:18 64, 256	Mt 2:3-4 95	Mt 3:15 41, 75, 116, 122, 130
Mt 1:18-25 261, 275	Mt 2:4 64, 124	Mt 3:17 41, 43, 70, 75
Mt 1:19 273	Mt 2:6 263, 276	Mt 4:1 119, 129
Mt 1:19-20 262	Mt 2:13 64, 119, 129	Mt 4:1-4 97
Mt 1:20 70	Mt 2:13-23 116	Mt 4:1-11 28, 40, 41, 43, 77, 118
Mt 1:21 41, 42, 111, 116, 121, 130	Mt 2:16 64, 119, 129	Mt 4:3 70, 97
Mt 1:21-23 146, 147	Mt 2:19 119, 129	Mt 4:3-4 40
Mt 1:22 60, 111	Mt 2:22 276	Mt 4:4 122
Mt 1:22-23 46	Mt 3:1 21, 75, 119, 129, 134, 135	Mt 4:5-7 40
Mt 1:23 36, 41, 45, 111, 121, 129, 263, 275	Mt 3:2 75	Mt 4:6 70
Mt 1:24 273	Mt 3:3 74	Mt 4:8-9 41
Mt 1:25 273	Mt 3:4 74	Mt 4:8-10 40
Mt 2 263	Mt 3:6 121, 130	Mt 4:10 60
Mt 2:1 96, 119, 129	Mt 3:7 75	Mt 4:11 270, 274
Mt 2:1-12 43, 81, 116	Mt 3:7-9 272	Mt 4:12 41, 124, 119, 129
Mt 2:1-18 116	Mt 3:12 119, 129	Mt 4:12-17 116
	Mt 3:13 75, 119, 129	

Mt 4:13 124	Mt 4:25-5:2 116	Mt 5:13 81, 103
Mt 4:14 139	Mt 5 174	Mt 5:16 116
Mt 4:15 41, 83, 200, 212, 213, 217	Mt 5-7 42	Mt 5:17 53, 122, 130
Mt 4:16 217, 274	Mt 5-9 29	Mt 5:17-19 78
Mt 4:17 24, 121	Mt 5:1 40, 114	Mt 5:17-20 22, 138
Mt 4:17-16:20 23	Mt 5:2 116	Mt 5:20 42, 116, 141, 273
Mt 4:18 16, 124	Mt 5:2-3 178	Mt 5:21-48 6, 22, 138
Mt 4:18-22 103, 116	Mt 5:3 116, 147, 167, 168, 170	Mt 5:22 119, 129
Mt 4:19 87, 122, 221	Mt 5:3-7:27 115	Mt 5:31 22, 138
Mt 4:20 41	Mt 5:3-10 29, 151, 163, 164, 169, 172,	Mt 5:33-37 138
Mt 4:23 114, 116, 124, 153, 193	173, 175, 176, 177	Mt 5:38-42 22, 138
Mt 4:23-7:29 103, 113	Mt 5:4-10 168	Mt 5:43-48 77, 88
Mt 4:23-9:35 176	Mt 5:6 147, 167	Mt 5:44-48 273
Mt 4:23-25 217, 213, 218, 274	Mt 5:9 70, 71, 88	Mt 5:45 70, 71, 88, 220, 227
Mt 4:23-25:46 66, 115	Mt 5:10-12 75	Mt 5:48 56, 58, 88, 216, 274
Mt 4:23-51 114	Mt 5:11 167	Mt 6:1-18 6
Mt 4:24 124, 264	Mt 5:11-12 77	Mt 6:9 70
Mt 4:25 124	Mt 5:12 14, 77, 113, 135, 146	Mt 6:10 122

Mt 6:29 70	Mt 8:2 78	Mt 9:4 77
Mt 6:30 102	Mt 8:3 264	Mt 9:6 41
Mt 7:5 42, 89	Mt 8:5-13 7, 21, 62, 81, 136	Mt 9:10 124
Mt 7:11 70	Mt 8:8-13 7	Mt 9:11 17, 54
Mt 7:12 53, 116	Mt 8:12 14	Mt 9:13 121, 122, 130, 138
Mt 7:14 54, 119, 128	Mt 8:13 119, 122, 129	Mt 9:16 265
Mt 7:15 89, 103	Mt 8:15 265	Mt 9:18 265
Mt 7:15-20 88, 200	Mt 8:16 264	Mt 9:20-21 265
Mt 7:21 122	Mt 8:17 139	Mt 9:22 119, 129
Mt 7:22 89, 119, 129, 135	Mt 8:20 92	Mt 9:27 62, 63, 273
Mt 7:21 62, 116	Mt 8:23-27 14	Mt 9:28 124
Mt 7:21-23 225	Mt 8:25 17, 54, 61	Mt 9:29 265
Mt 7:23 89, 120, 129	Mt 8:26 7, 102	Mt 9:32 7, 264
Mt 7:24 99	Mt 8:28-29 70	Mt 9:34 212
Mt 7:28 23, 112, 138	Mt 9:1 124	Mt 9:35 114, 116, 135, 193
Mt 8:9 42, 124	Mt 9:1-13 55	Mt 9:35-38 217, 274
Mt 8:1 78	Mt 9:1-23 55	Mt 9:36 39, 84, 121, 275
Mt 8:1-4 62	Mt 9:2 174, 264	Mt 9:36-11:1 103, 116
Mt 8:1-9:35 103, 113, 116	Mt 9:3 39	

Index of Biblical References

Mt 10 88	Mt 10:42 84, 275	Mt 11:28-30 99
Mt 10:2 16	Mt 10:62 81	Mt 11:29 99
Mt 10:4 110	Mt 11 23	Mt 12:1 101, 119, 129
Mt 10:5 13, 81	Mt 11-12 95	Mt 12:1-8 56, 61, 138, 139
Mt 10:5-6 80	Mt 11:1 23, 112	Mt 12:2-5 85
Mt 10:6 84, 103, 113, 121, 135, 275	Mt 11:1-12:50 103	Mt 12:6 40, 130
Mt 10:6-8 146, 221	Mt 11:1-52 94	Mt 12:6-7 65
Mt 10:13-14 120	Mt 11:2-12:50 94, 113	Mt 12:8 61
Mt 10:17 46, 77	Mt 11:6 167, 178	Mt 12:9-13 65
Mt 10:19 119, 122, 129	Mt 11:7-8 215	Mt 12:9-14 139
Mt 10:22 120, 129	Mt 11:9 66, 74	Mt 12:13-21 122, 130
Mt 10:23 69, 81	Mt 11:12 99	Mt 12:14 65
Mt 10:24 54	Mt 11:13 53	Mt 12:16 265
Mt 10:24-25 85	Mt 11:18 75	Mt 12:17 139
Mt 10:28 119, 128	Mt 11:20-24 124	Mt 12:18 64
Mt 10:36 83, 85, 263, 275	Mt 11:23 101, 124	Mt 12:20 65
Mt 10:40 104	Mt 11:23-24 221	Mt 12:21 65
Mt 10:40-42 88, 199	Mt 11:25 101, 119, 129	Mt 12:22 65, 264
Mt 10:41 66	Mt 11:26 122	Mt 12:22-23 65

Mt 12:22-30 147	Mt 13:1-20 89	Mt 13:39 103
Mt 12:22-32 212	Mt 13:1-52 94, 93, 103, 141, 219, 220	Mt 13:39-40 120
Mt 12:22-50 55	Mt 13:2 114	Mt 13:41 125
Mt 12:23 273	Mt 13:6 224	Mt 13:49 120, 129
Mt 12:24 275	Mt 13:10 114	Mt 13:49-50 235
Mt 12:31-32 147	Mt 13:10-23 235	Mt 13:51 103
Mt 12:32 121	Mt 13:13 42, 65	Mt 13:51-52 88
Mt 12:34 14	Mt 13:16 198, 172	Mt 13:52 47, 64, 77, 141, 146, 224
Mt 12:38 77	Mt 13:19 77	Mt 13:53 94
Mt 12:38-42 55, 147	Mt 13:28 77	Mt 13:53-14:33 92, 94, 220
Mt 12:39 14, 77, 121, 129	Mt 13:31 233	Mt 13:53-17:27 31, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 113
Mt 12:43-45 147	Mt 13:33 235	Mt 13:53-58 94, 95, 96, 101, 102, 103, 121, 124, 202, 219, 224
Mt 12:45 256	Mt 13:33-38 47	Mt 13:54 95
Mt 12:46 124	Mt 13:34-40 125	Mt 14:1 101, 119, 129
Mt 12:46-50 86	Mt 13:35 23, 112, 139	Mt 14:28 29
Mt 12:50 70	Mt 13:36 96, 124	Mt 14:1-12 75, 95, 96
Mt 13 12, 15, 42, 219, 233	Mt 13:36-43 125	Mt 14:5 66, 77, 95
Mt 13:1 119, 124, 129, 135	Mt 13:38 14, 71, 77, 78, 103	

Mt 14:12-17 220	Mt 14:53-58 96	Mt 15:29 200
Mt 14:13-21 40, 96, 97, 113, 135, 147, 180, 181, 189, 191, 198	Mt 15:1-6 138	Mt 15:29-31 122, 130
	Mt 15:1-9 98	Mt 15:29-32 213, 270, 274
Mt 14:14 85, 97, 199	Mt 15:7 89	Mt 15:30 85
Mt 14:15 74	Mt 15:7-9 78	Mt 15:31 42, 64
Mt 14:17 202	Mt 15:10 42, 98	Mt 15:32 97
Mt 14:19 87, 201	Mt 15:10-20 98, 139	Mt 15:32-38 122, 130, 191, 192
Mt 14:22-33 61, 97	Mt 15:12 39	Mt 15:32-39 40, 97, 113, 147
Mt 14:23-25 220	Mt 15:14 14, 65, 78, 98, 221	Mt 15:36 87, 201
Mt 14:24-27 220	Mt 15:16 100	Mt 16:1 97
Mt 14:28 54	Mt 15:17-20 98	Mt 16:1-2 97
Mt 14:28-29 61	Mt 15:19 89	Mt 16:1-4 55, 98
Mt 14:28-33 92, 93, 220	Mt 15:21-28 7, 62, 63, 81, 82, 97, 122, 124, 130, 136, 273	Mt 16:1-12 203
Mt 14:30 61, 102		Mt 16:3 97
Mt 14:31 7, 97, 102, 225	Mt 15:22 63, 273	Mt 16:4 14, 77, 78
Mt 14:33 43, 71, 102, 225	Mt 15:24 89	Mt 16:5-11 220
Mt 14:34-16:20 92, 97, 100, 220	Mt 15:26 83, 200, 263, 265, 275	Mt 16:5-12 98
Mt 14:35 264		Mt 16:6 100, 102
Mt 14:36 264	Mt 15:28 119, 129	Mt 16:8 100

Mt 16:8-12 97	Mt 16:21-28 62, 99	Mt 17:20 7, 100, 102
Mt 16:9 113	Mt 16:21-28:20 23	Mt 17:22 100
Mt 16:11 77, 100, 147	Mt 16:22 62, 100	Mt 17:23 100, 101
Mt 16:12 97, 98, 110, 111, 220	Mt 17:1 40, 100	Mt 17:24 17, 54, 101, 223
Mt 16:13-14 66	Mt 17:1-13 100	Mt 17:24-25 84
Mt 16:13-16 97, 98	Mt 17:1-19 61	Mt 17:24-27 56, 92, 93, 101, 138, 204, 208, 218, 221, 224
Mt 16:13-20 16, 99	Mt 17:4 17, 61	Mt 17:24-35 16
Mt 16:16 43, 71, 220	Mt 17:5 70	Mt 17:25 102, 124, 219, 224
Mt 16:16-18 16	Mt 17:7 265	
Mt 16:17 125, 168	Mt 17:9-13 101	Mt 17:27 124, 221, 224
Mt 16:17-19 92, 93, 97, 178, 220	Mt 17:10 84	Mt 18-25 28
Mt 16:18 16, 98, 99, 125	Mt 17:10-13 18, 74, 75	Mt 18:1 114, 119, 122, 129
Mt 16:18-19 87	Mt 17:13 100, 101	Mt 18:1-19:1 103
Mt 16:19 16, 87, 99, 113, 125, 135, 147	Mt 17:14 54, 98	Mt 18:1-35 126
Mt 16:20 92, 100	Mt 17:14-18 62	Mt 18:1-55 125
Mt 16:21 24, 64, 92, 99, 100, 124	Mt 17:15 43	Mt 18:2 114
Mt 16:21-17:27 92, 100, 220	Mt 17:16 264	Mt 18:3 83, 263, 275
Mt 16:21-23 99, 100	Mt 17:17 100, 264	Mt 18:3-5 84, 275
	Mt 17:18 84, 119, 129, 265	Mt 18:6 84, 275

Mt 18:8 119, 128, 129	Mt 18:24-27 221	Mt 19:19 122, 130
Mt 18:9 119, 128, 129	Mt 18:25 272	Mt 19:21 56, 57, 122, 130
Mt 18:10 84, 103, 275	Mt 18:28 85	Mt 19:27 57
Mt 18:10-14 221	Mt 18:31 85	Mt 19:30 56
Mt 18:10-35 147	Mt 18:32 86	Mt 20:17 102
Mt 18:12 83, 84, 200, 263, 275	Mt 18:33 85	Mt 20:17-19 224
Mt 18:12-14 83, 121	Mt 18:35 85	Mt 20:20-25 102
Mt 18:14 83, 84, 122, 200, 263, 275	Mt 18:55 119, 122, 129	Mt 20:22 40
Mt 18:15 85	Mt 19:1 112, 123, 124	Mt 20:30 63, 273
Mt 18:15-20 86	Mt 19:1-12 263	Mt 20:31 265
Mt 18:18 16, 87, 113	Mt 19:2-22:46 103, 113	Mt 20:33 17, 54
Mt 18:19 129	Mt 19:3-12 22, 138	Mt 20:34 264
Mt 18:19-20 146	Mt 19:13 103, 119, 128	Mt 20:39 41
Mt 18:20 36, 41	Mt 19:13-15 261, 262, 263, 266	Mt 21 65
Mt 18:21 85	Mt 19:16 43, 45, 56	Mt 21:1-9 60
Mt 18:21-35 62, 86	Mt 19:16-22 263	Mt 21:1-11 66
Mt 18:22 122	Mt 19:16-30 56, 97	Mt 21:3 60
Mt 18:24 264	Mt 19:17 119, 128	Mt 21:5 60

Mt 21:6 101, 121	Mt 21:36 75	Mt 22:46 119, 129
Mt 21:9 42, 60, 63, 64, 273	Mt 21:43 125	Mt 23 23, 29, 98
Mt 21:9-11 66	Mt 21:46 18, 66, 75, 77, 96	Mt 23:1 114
Mt 21:11 66	Mt 22 59	Mt 23:1-24 85
Mt 21:12 40	Mt 22:1-14 201, 229, 231, 233, 235, 240, 242	Mt 23:1-24:2 80
Mt 21:12-13 224		Mt 23:1-25 103
Mt 21:12-17 66, 101, 121, 122, 138, 224	Mt 22:4-7 241	Mt 23:2 125
Mt 21:13 224, 227	Mt 22:8-14 241	Mt 23:3 14, 78
Mt 21:14-15 65	Mt 22:11 241	Mt 23:8 54
Mt 21:15 63, 66, 224, 262, 273, 275	Mt 22:15-22 59	Mt 23:9 276
Mt 21:18-22 66	Mt 22:18 77	Mt 23:13 42, 147
Mt 21:21 112	Mt 22:23 119, 129, 135	Mt 23:15 14, 42, 71, 77
Mt 21:23 124, 146	Mt 22:23-33 59, 120, 129	Mt 23:16 65
Mt 21:26 18, 66, 74, 75	Mt 22:34 77, 78	Mt 23:16-22 78, 114
Mt 21:28-32 234	Mt 22:34-40 59, 138	Mt 23:17 14, 78
Mt 21:28-46 77	Mt 22:37-40 122, 130	Mt 23:23 42, 221
Mt 21:29 17, 110	Mt 22:40 53	Mt 23:24 78, 221
Mt 21:32 17, 75, 110, 147	Mt 22:41-46 63	Mt 23:27 14

Mt 23:27-28 78	Mt 24:30 69	Mt 25:40 83, 86, 200, 263, 275
Mt 23:29-32 14, 65, 71	Mt 24:31 69	Mt 25:41 119, 129
Mt 23:34 66, 77, 88, 104, 113, 135, 146.	Mt 24:36 41	Mt 25:44 62
Mt 23:34-35 77	Mt 24:37 69	Mt 25:45 83, 200, 263, 275
Mt 23:34-36 146	Mt 24:37-25:46 24	Mt 25:46 119, 128, 129
Mt 23:37 124	Mt 24:39 69	Mt 25:51 119
Mt 23:46 60, 103	Mt 24:46 167	Mt 26:1 23, 112
Mt 24:2 40, 102, 224	Mt 24:51 119, 129, 189	Mt 26:1-28:20 40, 41, 106, 113, 115
Mt 24:3 40, 120, 129	Mt 25:10 29, 119	Mt 26:3 124
Mt 24:3-25:46 80, 85	Mt 25:11 62	Mt 26:6-16 224
Mt 24:6 120, 129	Mt 25:23 119, 129	Mt 26:8 40
Mt 24:9 81	Mt 25:30 119, 129	Mt 26:10 119
Mt 24:13 81	Mt 25:31 69	Mt 26:12 40
Mt 24:14 81, 82	Mt 25:31-46 62, 104, 122, 147, 207	Mt 26:13 129
Mt 24:19 21, 120, 129, 134, 135	Mt 25:34 119, 129	Mt 26:14 110
Mt 24:22 21, 120, 129, 134, 135	Mt 25:35 138	Mt 26:14-16 40
Mt 24:27 69	Mt 25:36 86	Mt 26:16 40
Mt 24:29 21, 77, 89, 120, 129, 134, 135	Mt 25:37 62	Mt 26:17-25 54, 62
	Mt 25:38 138	

Mt 26:18 40, 54	Mt 26:56 40, 224	Mt 27:25 43, 64, 83, 96, 147, 200, 266
Mt 26:21 40	Mt 26:57 17	Mt 27:27-31 64
Mt 26:22 17, 54, 62	Mt 26:63 64, 72	Mt 27:28 256
Mt 26:25 17, 54, 62	Mt 26:64 69, 96, 72	Mt 27:29 65
Mt 26:26 40	Mt 26:65 72	Mt 27:34 71
Mt 26:26-29 41, 201	Mt 26:68 64	Mt 27:37 64, 65
Mt 26:27 40	Mt 26:69-74 224	Mt 27:39 40, 43, 96, 147
Mt 26:28 119, 129	Mt 26:69-75 40	Mt 27:40 71
Mt 26:29 201	Mt 27 256	Mt 27:41 71, 96
Mt 26:31 40	Mt 27:1 124	Mt 27:43 43
Mt 26:34 40	Mt 27:1-19 81	Mt 27:46 79
Mt 26:37 64	Mt 27:3 17, 110	Mt 27:50 122, 130
Mt 26:39 122, 130	Mt 27:3-10 17, 110	Mt 27:51 40, 136, 224
Mt 26:39-46 40	Mt 27:5 17, 102	Mt 27:51-53 259
Mt 26:41-42 64	Mt 27:11 64, 256	Mt 27:52 259
Mt 26:45-46 40	Mt 27:17 64	Mt 27:52-53 251, 256, 259
Mt 26:46 146	Mt 27:20 78, 96, 147	Mt 27:53 259
Mt 26:47 122, 124	Mt 27:22 64	Mt 27:54 43, 41, 71, 81
Mt 26:49 17, 43, 45, 54	Mt 27:23 43, 64	Mt 27:57-28:20 28

Mt 27:62-66 257	129 140, 146	1 Pt 4:14 165
	N	R
Mt 27:63 60	Neh 10:32-33 221	Rm 4:6 163, 164
Mt 27:64 251, 255, 256	Nm 3:7 144	Rm 4:7-8 167, 172, 172, 177
Mt 27:64-66 260		
	P	
Mt 28:7 248, 249, 251, 260	Pr 3:13 178	Rm 4:9 163, 164
Mt 28:10 41	Pr 6:10 265	Rm 14:22 167
Mt 28:11-15 80, 102, 122, 257	Pr 14:21 177	Ruth 4 272
Mt 28:13-15 257	Pr 16:20 177	Ruth 14:13-16 268
Mt 28:15 256	Pr 29:18 177	Rv 1:3 168, 172, 178
Mt 28:16 41, 130	Ps 23:2 196	Rv 14:13 166
Mt 28:16-17 41	Ps 32:1-2 172, 177	Rv 16:15 167
Mt 28:16-18 40	Ps 34:9 178	Rv 19:9 166
Mt 28:16-20 80, 81, 84, 104, 119, 121, 123, 124, 128, 137, 146	Ps 41:2-4 178	Rv 20:6 166
Mt 28:17 102, 104, 110, 111, 224, 225	Ps 94:12 178	Rv 22:7 167
Mt 28:18 49, 81	Ps 104 227	Rv 22:14 167
Mt 28:19 13, 21, 41, 80, 81, 136	Ps 106 274	S
Mt 28:19-20 123, 146	Ps 106:37 268	2 Sm 11 272
Mt 28:20 36, 41, 81, 120,	Ps 107:10 274	T
	1 Pt 1:16 58, 216, 274	1 Tm 1:11 165, 169
	1 Pt 3:14 165	1 Tm 6:15 165, 169
		Tt 2:1 165, 169