

The purpose of the theological patterns in Jesus' healing stories in the Gospel of Matthew

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Matthean scholars have predominantly viewed Jesus' healing ministry through the lens of 'fulfillment of prophecy', which connects his healings to David the shepherd and the fulfilment of the covenant, the restoration of the covenant people, and the establishment of the new covenant. This interpretation has largely emerged from an analysis of Jesus' healing ministry as a singular event. However, it is necessary to revisit previous studies that have posited that the stories of Jesus' healings were arranged in a larger context and theological perspective, rather than as a disjointed list of individual events. In particular, the healing events in Matthew 8–9 appear to have been arranged with the intention of teaching discipleship, indicating that the healing stories in the Gospel of Matthew, while scattered, are part of a cohesive pattern of theological themes. These themes include the forgiveness of sins, compassion and mercy, healing through faith, and confession of Jesus as the Messiah. The author of Matthew employs this pattern to systematically present a theological perspective that acknowledges Jesus as divine and confesses him as the Messiah.

Contribution: This study aimed to analyse the pattern of these theological themes as they appear in Jesus' healing narrative. The repetition of these themes serves to establish Jesus' divinity and reinforce the confession of him as the Messiah. Furthermore, the pattern of theological themes in the healing narrative suggests that it was constructed during a period of transition for the Matthean community, as they moved from Judaism to Christianity. The pattern highlights the community's confession of Jesus as God and their efforts to solidify their faith.

Keywords: Jesus' healing; the Gospel of Matthew; theological pattern; Matthean transitional community; disease and healing in the Mediterranean world.

Introduction

The interpretation of Jesus' healing ministry from the perspective of 'fulfillment of prophecy' has been a predominant approach among Matthean scholars (Wilson 2014:290–292). This perspective suggests that Jesus' healing ministry is equivalent to that of David the shepherd, who will bring about the fulfilment of the covenant, the restoration of the covenant people, and the establishment of the new covenant (Mt 3:15–17; 4:12–13). However, this approach results from studying Jesus' healing ministry as a series of singular events, and it is necessary to reconsider previous studies that argued that the healing stories of Jesus were arranged within a larger theological context rather than as a disjointed list of individual events (Hull 1974:144). For instance, it has been observed that the healing events in Matthew 8–9 were arranged with a theological intention of teaching discipleship, indicating that the healing stories of Jesus, though scattered, follow a consistent pattern of theology. This pattern includes recurring theological themes such as 'forgiveness of sin', 'compassion and mercy', 'healing through faith' and 'confession of Jesus as the messiah'. It is noteworthy that the author of Matthew's theology is specific and systematic in presenting this pattern.

The purpose of this study is to analyse the theological themes implied in Jesus' healing narrative. Although several theological themes appear in the narrative, the primary focus is to solidify the faith of Jewish Christians by confessing Jesus as a divine being and the messiah. The repetitive pattern of these theological themes in the healing narrative is intended to reinforce the belief of the Matthean community in Jesus as God at a time when it was transitioning from Judaism to Christianity.

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The transitional situation of the Matthew community and divine identity of Jesus

The Gospel of Matthew not only provides a window into the context of the Matthean community but also exposes the conflict between this community and Formative Judaism. The Matthean community, engaged in the process of separating from Judaism because of their conflict, was in a transitional state of establishing its Christian identity (Saldarini 1994; Shin 2020:4; Sim 1998; Stanton 1992:280). It appears that while the Matthean community was establishing its Christian identity, they actively sought to affirm Jesus as a divine being. Thus, it appears that the Matthean community was evolving into a Christian community that recognised Jesus' divinity, naturally diverging from Judaism. Several factors demonstrate the process of separation of the Matthean community from Judaism. Firstly, a difference in the attitudes towards law compliance and the core teachings of the community is evident (Mt 5:17–18). The disciples of Jesus were already breaking free from the obligation to obey the law and distancing themselves from Jewish teachings and rituals. Their emphasis shifted towards learning and practising the teachings of Jesus (Mt 12:1–8; Shin 2019:3). Unlike the Pharisees who stressed the importance of law observance, the Matthean community emphasised the importance of obeying Jesus' words. The Matthean community's commitment to following Jesus' teachings while showing reluctance to fully adhere to Jewish law implies their intent to acknowledge Jesus' divine identity. This becomes evident when Jesus manifested his divine authority by declaring that he possessed all authority in heaven and on earth and commanded his followers to adhere to his teachings (Mt 28:18–20). This, however, does not imply that the Matthean community completely abandoned its obligation to comply with the law. Jesus said, 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them' (Mt 5:17). Jesus did not agree with the Pharisees' interpretation of the existing law, but he was still referred to as the master of the law. This shows that the Matthean community used Jesus' teaching as an indicator of a new faith without completely abandoning compliance with the law. Consequently, the Matthean community was persecuted by the Jews (Mt 5:10). The conflict over the observance of the law attests to the Matthean community's transitional state towards a new Christian community that moved away from Judaism.

Secondly, the Matthew community, as portrayed in the Gospel of Matthew, was a sect that engaged in a process of defining its Christian identity while still maintaining ties with Judaism. In general, a newly formed sect would use special terms to distinguish itself from the group it formerly belonged to (Overman 1990:16–19). The Matthean community tried to distinguish itself from Judaism by using the term 'righteous' in reference to how they considered themselves as more religious and righteous than Jews. Judaism used 'righteous' in the context of emphasising social justice, but the Matthew community defined 'righteous' as a means of showing that they were more religious and righteous than

Jews. Therefore, 'righteousness' in the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount is a Christian term of apocalyptic nature, not a Jewish term (Hagner 1993:93). This difference in the use of terms indicates the Matthean community's shift from Formative Judaism towards a Christian community that followed Jesus. The Matthean community following Jesus illustrates that they recognised Jesus as a divine being.

Finally, the Matthean community, being a sect, exhibited hostility towards Jewish religious leaders (Overman 1990:19–23). It is not surprising that the Matthean community, which was in the process of separating from Judaism, criticised Jewish leaders. In particular, the Jewish religious leaders were offended by Jesus' challenge to their interpretation of the law, as law interpretation was a distinct authority of their own. The Jewish religious leaders emphasised law observance but were accused of being whitewashed tombs that looked beautiful only on the outside (Mt 23:2–3). They were merely religious individuals whose actions did not match their words. However, the Matthean community's criticism of Jewish religious leaders for their hypocrisy and irreligious activities does not necessarily imply complete separation from Judaism, as the community did not insist on breaking the law. Thus, the Matthean community was in a transitional state, moving away from Jewish faith values and establishing Christian faith values. It was in the process of establishing a new Israel that formed a new relationship with God (Guelich 1982:29), presenting an opportunity for Jews to newly establish themselves as members of the Matthean Christian community (Mt 8:11–12, 21:43).

In summary, the Matthew community faced a number of challenges in their transitional state. One such challenge was defining the relationship between God and Jesus for members coming from a Jewish background. In order to establish Jesus as a divine being, Matthew gave authority to Jesus' interpretation and teaching of the new law, portraying him as God. While the book of Matthew does not explicitly refer to Jesus as a divine being equal to God, there are verses that reveal his divinity, such as the Immanuel idea in which God is with the crowd when they believe in Jesus (Mt 1:23; 18:18–20; 28:18–20) as well as the phrase 'Son of God'. Matthew also emphasises Jesus' divinity in conjunction with the worship of his disciples. This highlights the need for the Matthew community to emphasise Jesus as the only being equal to God as they transitioned from Judaism to Christianity. Therefore, the theological pattern of Jesus' healing stories reflects the Matthew community's transitional situation in which Jesus had to be described as a divine being worthy of the faith of the community members.

Disease in the 1st century Mediterranean world and the healer Jesus

The investigation into the reception of Jesus' healing by the author of Matthew and members of the Matthew community involves both theological and medical anthropological

inquiry (Davies 1996:22–23). The utilisation of medical anthropological research to understand the medical system of the ancient world is of great value to the interpretation of the Bible in many respects (Singer 1989:1194). Thus, it is appropriate to apply medical anthropology to the interpretation of the New Testament narratives of disease healing. Nevertheless, such an approach is likely to receive criticism regardless of its findings because contemporary medical science tends to view the medical practices depicted in the New Testament as socio-cultural customs rather than as genuine medical practices. Prior to analysing Jesus' healing ministry, it is necessary to examine the definition of disease and healing in the 1st-century Mediterranean world and the perception of Jesus as a healer.

Disease and healing in the 1st century Mediterranean world

The World Health Organization (WHO) defined health as the pursuit of physical, mental and social well-being.¹ Medical anthropologists have defined health as a person's sense of well-being within their social context (Pilch 2000:24). Therefore, to understand the healthcare and disease healing practices of the 1st-century Mediterranean world, one must adopt a medical anthropology perspective. This is because individual intentions were largely determined by the customs of their communities in the ancient Mediterranean world, and communities determined the social reputation and status of individuals, holding the authority to expel or alienate certain individuals from their communities (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1992:71). In ancient society, an individual's identity was determined by the community to which they belonged, rather than being an independent entity. Thus, their role and status were defined by the customs, rituals, religions and areas of life within their society (Van Aarde 2019:2). Diseases were also understood according to community customs and standards, and patients with illnesses received medical support according to the cultural and religious practices of their communities. When a person fell ill, their family and friends would care for them, and then healers (i.e. doctors) would interpret the patient's disease based on the customs and practices of their community and administer treatment accordingly (see M'bwangi 2021:4–6).

In light of the cultural differences in understanding diseases, disease classification and interpretation differ between ancient societies and modern medicine. Thus, while modern medicine identifies epilepsy as a disease caused by abnormal emission of microscopic electrical signals among nerve cells in the brain, ancient societies perceived epilepsy as a spiritual disease. The cultural differences in understanding diseases result in differing interpretations of diseases between 1st-century Mediterranean society and modern society. This underscores the importance of a medical anthropological approach in interpreting the disease healing narratives in the New Testament, as ancient societies perceived diseases

through the lens of their cultural customs and practices (Scheper-Hughes & Lock 1987:6–41).

The disparities in the perception of diseases and medical systems between the 1st-century Mediterranean society and modern society warrant a medical anthropological approach in the interpretation of the Bible's healing narratives. It is imperative to rely on previous research on how the 1st-century Mediterranean society conceptualised the human body, disease and healing in the interpretation of the Bible's disease and healing events (Culpepper 2016:3). This approach is especially pertinent in understanding the miracles of Jesus' disease healing in the Gospel of Matthew, which should also be examined from a cultural anthropology perspective within the context of the 1st century. It should also be noted how the healing of diseases by historical Jesus was reinterpreted by his disciples and taught to readers of the Formative Judaism era. This is because it is difficult to determine whether the portrayal of Jesus as a healer depicted in the Gospel of Matthew reflects both the nature of historical Jesus' ministry and the situation of the Matthew community that interpreted his ministry.

Characteristics of the healing miracles of Jesus

In the ancient world, religious leaders held significant spiritual power and exercised authority through various roles, including healing and fortune-telling. They led and taught people, often identifying themselves as priests, abbots, clerics, mediums or healers (Davies 1996:26). Healing, in particular, was primarily achieved through the performance of cultic or ritualistic practices in the temple (Wilson 2014:29–30). The New Pythagorean wandering preacher, Apollonius von Tyana, was also referred to as a miracle worker. Although he was often negatively associated with the title of a magician, he was also considered a wise man (Van der Loos 1968:294–296). Hanina Ben Dosa, a well-known figure in Galilee during Jesus' time, possessed a special talent for curing diseases, even from long distances (Talbert 2010:113). Additionally, there are accounts of Vespasian, the Roman emperor, using saliva to heal a blind man (Rom. Hist. 65.8; Talbert 2010:122).

The aforementioned examples serve as evidence of the existence of miracle workers similar to Jesus in the Mediterranean world. Crossan (1993:307–308) and Smith (1978:137–138) suggest that Jesus' healing miracles are comparable to those performed by magicians of that time. In ancient society, individuals who performed magic or miracles were viewed as 'divine humans' and enjoyed social status and success (Smith 1973:228–229). Those who regarded Jesus' healing miracles as equivalent to those of the magicians considered him a sorcerer (Smith 1973:228–229). Jesus' adversaries accused him of either performing miracles through the power of evil spirits or confusing the people (Mt 12:14 and 24; Job 7:12; Mk 3:22). In response, Jesus asserted that he drove out the demons through the power of God's Holy Spirit (Mt 12:28). The demons recognised Jesus as the Son of God and begged him not to torment them (Mt 8:29).

¹The World Health Organization's definition of health and disease was discussed at an international health conference held in New York on 19–22 June 1946, and this definition is stated as the mission of WHO on its website.

Therefore, Jesus' healing ability was established through the Holy Spirit of God, and he conducted his messianic ministry as the Son of God (Mk 3:28–30).

Jesus' healing ministry in the Mediterranean world was distinct from the practices of other healers, such as sorcerers and magicians, as it was based on his messianic ministry and the power of God's Holy Spirit rather than on general medical methods. According to Arnovius, a primitive Christian dialectician, Jesus was a divine healer who performed healings without the aid of any substance or ritual (Bryce & Campbell 2019:43), further supporting the idea that his healing ministry was prophetic and representative of God's kingdom. The description of Jesus as a prophet or 'Elijah' in Matthew 11:5 also reinforces this claim. Prophets in ancient Israel were known to prophesy and heal diseases with unique powers and authority (2 Ki 5:1–19; Davies 1996:24). While not identical, Boring (1991:57) notes that Jesus' healing was similar to the healing performed by prophets of ancient Israel. Jesus' healing ministry was not simply that of a doctor-like healer that modern people would think of (Craffert 2003:254) but was a manifestation of his unique spiritual power as a divine being who dealt not only with humankind's sins but also their diseases. Davies (1996:26) notes that Jesus' possession of special spiritual power was not simply a matter of his individual consciousness, but rather a manifestation of the presence of God with him. The author of the Gospel of Matthew likely developed Jesus' healing ministry according to a specific theological pattern in accordance with his own theological perspective, as Jesus' healing ministry was seen as a means of declaring the kingdom of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. In summary, Jesus' healing ministry was distinct from other healers of his time and was seen as a manifestation of his unique spiritual power as a divine being.

The theological pattern in Jesus' healing stories

The story of Jesus healing diseases and casting out demons is not limited to a single incident but encompasses approximately 15 cases of Jesus healing multiple sick people over a long period in one spot.² Given the context of the Matthew community and the 1st-century Christian community's view of Jesus as a healer, it is necessary to examine the theological patterns of Jesus' divine identity and healing objectives as expressed in Matthew's account of his healing miracles. Table 1 shows a brief summary of the theological pattern in Jesus' healing stories.

Healing of diseases and forgiveness of sin

The relationship between Jesus' healing of diseases and sin has been the subject of ongoing debate. While Jesus' healing primarily involves the restoration of the patient's physical and mental health, the forgiveness of sin is occasionally

2. Typical healing events are as follows. Healing a leper (Mt 8:1–4), healing a servant of the centurion (Mt 8:5–13), healing the fever of Peter's mother-in-law (Mt 8:14–17), healing a paralytic in Capernaum (Mt 9:1–8), saving the daughter of a government official (Jairus) (Mt 9:18–26), healing a haemorrhaging woman (Mt 9:20–22), healing the two blind people (Mt 9:27–31) and healing the mute who was possessed by a demon (Mt 9:32–34).

TABLE 1: Classification of Jesus' healing stories based on the theological pattern.

Theological pattern	Jesus' healing story
Healing of diseases and forgiveness of sin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus heals many (Mt 8:16–17) • Jesus heals a paralytic (Mt 9:1–8)
Beseekingness and Mercy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The healing of two demon-possessed men (Mt 8:31) • Jesus heals the blind and mute (Mt 9:27–28) • The faith of the Canaanite Woman (Mt 15:22) • The healing of a boy with a demon (Mt 17:14–15) • Two blind men receive sight (Mt 20:30–31)
Healing of diseases and faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The faith of the centurion (Mt 8:10, 13) • A dead girl and a sick woman (Mt 9:22) • Jesus heals the blind and mute (Mt 9:28)
Jesus' healing and confessing him as 'Lord'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The faith of the centurion (Mt 8:6) • Jesus calms the storm (Mt 8:25, 29) • The faith of a Canaanite woman (Mt 15:22, 25, 27) • The healing of a boy with a demon (Mt 17:15) • Two blind men receive sight (Mt 20:30–31)

mentioned as a part of the healing process. The Jewish community held the belief that sin was the cause of diseases (Marcus 2000:221). The Old Testament supports this view, stating that those who disobey God will face diseases and disasters. For instance, Deuteronomy 28:20–28 provides a list of inevitable diseases and disasters that will befall disobedient Israelites,³ thereby emphasising that disease outbreaks are a consequence of sin. Moreover, it attributes the punishment to God, thereby establishing a direct correlation between sin and disease. This concept appears to have been ingrained in Jewish ideology and contributed to the development of a culture that linked diseases with sin (Jn 9:2–3).

According to Jewish literature, humans suffer from disease because of sin, and even the descendants of Adam are unable to escape disease because of sin (4 Es 3:21–22; Shin 2020:7).⁴ The Jewish historian Josephus also asserted that disease is linked to sin, and that Herod's severe illness was considered a punishment from God for his sins (Josephus *Ant.* 17.168; Whiston 1987:462). If someone were to commit the crime of defying God and challenging His authority, he or she would face disciplinary action, which could make them ill. In ancient society, those who suffered from physical disabilities such as being lame and amputated hands or feet were believed to have been judged by God and punished for their sins (Neusner 2002:38).

Drawing from the Old Testament and Jewish literature explored earlier, the present study aims to examine the relationship between disease and sin as inferred from Jesus' healing miracles. In Matthew 9:1–8, an argument erupted between a scribe and Jesus when he healed a paralysed man who was carried by his friends, and declared forgiveness of his sins (Mt 9:1–8). The scribe questioned Jesus about his authority to forgive sins. Jesus claimed that the Son of Man has the power to forgive sins on earth, indicating a link between confessing sin and healing of diseases. In Jewish society at that time, a stroke was commonly believed to be caused by sin, as evidenced in Jewish literature such as the

3. Plagues, wasting disease, fever and inflammation, scorching heat and drought, blight and mildew, tumours, festering sore and the itch, madness, blindness and confusion of mind.

4. '[F]or the first Adam, burdened with an evil heart, transgressed and was overcome, as were all who were descended from him. Thus the disease became permanent' (4 Es 3:21–22).

case of the man who was paralysed for ordering the destruction of the sanctuary courtyard (1 Maccabees 9:54–55; Garland 1988:338). Paralysis was regarded as a stroke, and the man who went against God by ordering the destruction of the sanctuary courtyard suffered from paralysis. Unlike in the first book of Maccabees, where the paralysed man was not mentioned to have been cured, Jesus immediately declared forgiveness of sin without questioning the sin of the paralytic (Mt 9:2). The lack of concern among the witnesses regarding the sin of the paralytic is because the Jewish perception of sin being the cause of strokes was reflected in the healing story of the paralytic. Therefore, Jews in the era of Jesus believed that diseases were caused by sin.

There is a text that shows more clearly the relationship between forgiving sin and disease healing. According to Matthew 8:16–17, Jesus drives out demons, heals the sick and takes on the weight of human diseases as prophesied in Isaiah 53:43. In order for this claim to be credible, the suffering servant in Isaiah 53:3–5 must first be identified. Isaiah 53:3–5 says ‘we are healed’ because the servant took up and bore the ‘infirmities’ and ‘sorrows’ in place of humankind. The core of this debate is whether the ‘infirmities’ and ‘sorrows’ mentioned in Isaiah 53:3–5 refer to sin in context. Van der Loos (1968:255–259) argues that it is difficult to conclude that sin is the cause of all diseases, as evidenced by Job’s hardships and diseases (Job 2:1–5). Also, Jesus stated that the man born blind was not blind because of his own or his parents’ sin but rather for the glory of God to be displayed in him (Jn 9:1–3). Additionally, Paul asked God to heal his disease, but instead, God said that the disease allowed him to live in grace (2 Cor 12:6–10). Therefore, it is not conclusive in the Bible that all diseases are caused by sin.

On the other hand, some argue that the ‘infirmities’ and ‘sorrows’ that Jesus took on should be seen as diseases caused by sin. Isaiah 53:3–5 says that Jehovah’s servant carried the punishment that the people were supposed to receive for their sins. The servant of Jehovah was pierced for the sin of the people (Is 53:5) (Kenner 1999:273). Furthermore, it is stated that the ‘servant of God in distress’ took responsibility for his people’s sins, including their infirmities and sorrow (Is 53:6). What is particularly noteworthy is that it implies that Jesus bore the weaknesses and infirmities of the people when it says he took up our weaknesses and infirmities (Goldingay & Payne 2006:304; Wilson 2014:89). Therefore ‘infirmities’ and ‘sorrows’ can be interpreted as physical or mental illnesses resulting from sin (Baltzer 2001:408–409).

In the Gospel of Matthew, the forgiveness of sin seems to be implied in Jesus’ healing ministry. There are only a few instances in which Jesus explicitly declares forgiveness of sin during his healing ministry. This is because healing a specific person implied that the person’s sins had already been forgiven. According to Garland (1988:339), Jews at the time believed that ‘redemption and healing came after forgiveness of sin’. Therefore, Matthew’s theological view, which asserts that Jesus’ disease-healing ministry is naturally accompanied by a declaration of forgiveness of

sin, is implied in the text. Furthermore, the Gospel of Matthew often mentioned that Jesus had the authority to forgive sin. Jesus came to this world to ‘save his people from their sins’ (Mt 1:21) and he had the authority to forgive sin (Mt 26:28). Jesus’ authority to forgive sin is demonstrated in the story of Jesus declaring forgiveness of the paralytic’s sin. The fact that Jesus healed diseases, even when there is no explicit mention of forgiveness of sin, implies that he had already forgiven the sin. Matthew emphasises Jesus’ authority to forgive sin and portrays him as the messiah who forgave sin, which only God can do.

Beseekingness and Mercy

In the healing accounts of Jesus, the recurring themes of ‘beseekingness’ and ‘mercy’ have been identified as a significant pattern. In particular, those who were possessed by demons, blind or epileptic were depicted as pleading with Jesus for mercy (Mt 8:31; 9:27–28; 15:22; 17:14–15; 20:30–31). The Gospel of Matthew uses the verbs ‘beseek’ (*παρακαλέω*) and ‘show mercy’ (*ἐλέεω*) to describe these encounters. Although the two words are not always found together in the same paragraph, the demand for ‘mercy’ by those seeking healing already implies a sense of ‘beseekingness’. This paper seeks to analyse the theological implications of the author of the Gospel of Matthew’s use of ‘beseekingness’ and ‘mercy’ in the context of Jesus’ healing narratives.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus encounters demons in the province of Gadara who beseech him, saying, ‘If you drive us out’ (Mt 8:31). The language used by the demons in this passage differs from the voice of the devil in Jesus’ temptation narrative (Mt 4:1–11). In the temptation narrative, the devil appears as a supporting character who acknowledges Jesus as the Son of God. Jesus’ temptation narrative marks the start of his public life and confirms that he is the Messiah sent by God. The core of the conversation between Jesus and the devil reveals the devil’s recognition of Jesus’ authority (Gundry 1982:160). However, in the Gadara story, the demon-possessed man is described as continuously begging Jesus (Mt 8:31), with the word *παρακάλουν αὐτὸν* indicating an incomplete verb meaning ‘continuously requesting of one’s demand’. In Judaism, the term *παρακαλέω* is typically used when humans need God’s comfort, as true comfort is believed to be found only in God. Moreover, ‘comfort’ is a comprehensive term that symbolises messianic salvation (Is 40:1). Therefore, the author of the Gospel of Matthew uses the term ‘beseek’ in the story where the demons, which are spirits, acknowledge the authority of Jesus with the theological intention of revealing Jesus as the Messiah.

The healing story of the two blind men who implored Jesus for ‘mercy’ (Mt 9:27–31) provides insight into a prevailing prejudice within Jewish society at the time. Namely, the belief that there was no obligation to show mercy to the blind because of the perception that their condition was their own fault (Jn 9:11). While the mental burden of blindness was a significant hardship, the greater challenge for the blind in Jewish society was the religious alienation they experienced

(Davies & Allison 2012:135). The absence of the two men's names in the paragraph implies their social alienation (Luz 2001:47). As unclean beings, the blind were excluded from the local community and therefore unable to enjoy a normal social life. Religious alienation in ancient society resulted in the destruction of one's personal life, as being a member of the community was more important than being an individual. In other words, if someone was dismissed from the community for something shameful, they would not only lose their place in society but also their job, and they would be incapable of having a normal social life. Thus, the two blind men's plea for mercy implies the restoration of their social status (Hagner 1993:253; Luz 2001:49). The two blind men's cry to Jesus, 'Have mercy on us, Son of David', conveys their desire to restore their status (Mt 9:27). In the Gospel of Matthew, 'Son of David' refers to the Messiah, denoting not only his title but also his role as a healer (Davies & Allison 2012:135–136). Hence, the two men requested 'mercy' (ἐλεῆω), acknowledging Jesus' power to heal. During this era, Jewish communities used 'mercy' as a means of pledging allegiance to kings or bureaucrats. Subsequently, 'mercy' became a religious term employed to express the attitude one should adopt when seeking grace from God. 'Mercy' is God's unilateral grace bestowed on humankind in all areas (Mt 9:13) (Mackie 2021:721). Specifically, 'mercy' is a gift that God grants to human beings, and they must share this grace with others (Mt 18:33) (Kittel & Friedrich 1974:222–223).

Therefore, the author of the Gospel of Matthew using the term 'mercy' implies an intention to reveal the divinity of Jesus. In addition, a healing story in which two blind men referred to Jesus as 'Son of David' and requested 'mercy' (Mt 20:30–31) provides further evidence of Jesus' messianic identity. These two individuals recognised Jesus as the messiah and asked for his mercy, as indicated by their use of the title 'Lord' in conjunction with 'Son of David'. It is noteworthy that Matthew is the only Gospel author to use the phrase 'Lord, Son of David' (Davies & Allison 2012:548; Kingsbury 1976:1, 596). Matthew also employs 'mercy' and 'Lord' together in Matthew 17:15. Matthew describes Jesus, the son of David, as greater than the temple and as greater than King Solomon (Mt 12:6; 14:42) (Paffenroth 1999:553). Matthew's portrayal of Jesus (Lord) as the 'Son of David' is related to his terrestrial ministry. The two blind men approached Jesus because they recognised him as the 'Lord, Son of David', possessing the power and authority to heal. Matthew thus underscores their acknowledgement of Jesus as Lord while also emphasising his divine authority (Mt 9:27–28; 15:22; 20:30–31) (Kingsbury 1975:252–253). It is important to note that the term 'Son of David' is not a Christological term that precisely corresponds to the term 'Son of God'. Instead, these two terms are indicative of high Christology.

The healing story of the Canaanite woman's beseechingness for her possessed daughter can also be understood as a demonstration of Jesus' divine authority (Mt 15:22). The woman, a gentile and mother of a daughter, 'cries out' to Jesus for 'mercy' to heal her possessed child, seeking help as

a woman who is alienated from the community. As a widow with an only daughter, it is likely that she had no husband to help solve her problem. For example, from the incident of the centurion coming to Jesus on behalf of his sick servant for healing and the incident of the father with the demon-possessed son asking Jesus to heal his son, it can be inferred that the Canaanite woman did not have a husband (Mt 8:5–6; 9:18; 17:14–15). This inference can be made because, in Jewish custom, it is generally the fathers (husbands) who step in and resolve issues related to their children. The woman's plea for her daughter's healing is characterised by beseechingness and mourning, reminiscent of the language of the author of Psalms (Ps 109:26) (O'Day 2001:119; Shin 2014:6). In Jewish tradition, people of Israel ask God, the Creator, who has the greatest authority in heaven and earth, for help when facing difficulties (O'Day 2001:122). Despite being a gentile, the Canaanite woman recognises Jesus as the son of God and acknowledges his divine identity and authority. Therefore, the use of 'mercy' and 'beseechingness' in this healing story serves as a pattern of theological implications that reveal Jesus' divine identity and authority.

Healing of diseases and faith

In the accounts of Jesus healing the sick, the term 'faith' is frequently employed. It is the faith of the sick individuals, as well as those around them, that brought about Jesus' miraculous healings. This notion is evident in both the Gospel of Mark and the Gospel of Luke, where it is suggested that those who believe in Jesus' divine power and authority experience such miracles (Luz 2001:10). Furthermore, Matthew provides an example of a sick individual, as well as their family and those in their immediate vicinity, confessing their faith and receiving healing from Jesus Christ (Mt 8:10, 13; 9:22, 28).

In the healing story of the centurion's soldier (Mt 8:5–13), a pattern of healing through confession of faith is identified. It is argued that Matthew's theological intention to highlight Jesus' divine identity and authority was implied by the centurion's complete confession of faith (Davies & Allison 2012:25). The theological intention is discernible in the text, particularly at the moment where Jesus acknowledges the centurion's confession and responds, 'let it be done just as you believed it would' (Mt 8:13). The Greek imperative manual verb simple past 'γενήθητω' (will be) can be interpreted as an invocation of God's will being done on earth. This is because the same verb is used in the Lord's Prayer to command that God's will be done on earth (Mt 6:10) (Luz 2001:11). If the Lord's Prayer is considered an authorised prayer to God, the centurion's confession of faith can be seen as a prayer, and the request made in faith has enabled the miracle of healing. Through this narrative, Jesus' messianic authority and identity, which brings healing and restoration, is further emphasised. Therefore, the story of the centurion's soldier confirms Jesus' divine identity through the centurion's confession of faith.

In the Gospel of Matthew, the concept of 'faith' serves as a criterion for inclusion and exclusion in the kingdom of God.

Confessing faith in Jesus is considered praiseworthy while rejecting Jesus results in exclusion from the kingdom (Mt 8:10–12; 13:42, 52; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30). The healing account of the centurion's soldier further illustrates this distinction. Although the centurion was a Gentile and a Roman soldier, he was praised by Jesus for his faith, while the unbelieving Jews, the native descendants of the country, are 'thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth'. (Jennings & Liew 2004:489). The centurion's soldier was also a gentile belonging to the Roman Empire, and according to the Jewish purity law, he was in a state of uncleanness as he was lying sick. The healing of the centurion's soldier was possible because the centurion believed in Jesus as the Son of God, despite his status as a gentile and a soldier of the Roman Empire. In contrast to the Jewish religious leaders, the centurion demonstrated his faith in Jesus by acknowledging his divine authority, using the military hierarchy as an analogy. Just as a soldier obeys orders, the centurion confesses to obey Jesus' divine authority. By confessing his faith in Jesus, his soldier was healed. Jesus praised the centurion's faith, stating that he had not seen such great faith even in Israel (Jennings & Liew 2004:485). Furthermore, Matthew emphasises the importance of confession of faith in the healing process. The centurion's soldier was healed when the centurion confessed his faith to Jesus, affirming Jesus' divine authority.

The narrative of the healing of a haemorrhaging woman, who had been suffering for 12 years, is also an example of the healing pattern through confession of faith (Mt 9:20–22). While on his way to heal an official's daughter, Jesus was touched by the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years, and who believed that by touching the edge of Jesus' cloak, she would be healed (Mt 9:20–21). The haemorrhaging woman intentionally touched Jesus' garment, and Jesus clearly knew what her action meant. This incident is reminiscent of the event in which Jesus held the hand of Peter's mother-in-law. Peter's mother-in-law became clean when Jesus reached out his hand and touched her (Mt 8:15). However, there is a clear difference between the healing of Peter's mother-in-law and the healing of the haemorrhaging woman. Even though there is no mention of the haemorrhaging woman confessing her faith, Jesus says that her faith saved her. It should be seen that the faith of the haemorrhaging woman led her to touch Jesus' garment and that Jesus' divine authority made the healing possible (Gundry 1982:173). This act of faith underscores the importance of believing in the divine authority and power of Jesus, which is equivalent to believing in the power and authority of God. The woman's unwavering faith in Jesus' divine authority and power led to her healing.

Additionally, the Gospel of Matthew features the terms 'faith' and 'salvation' in conjunction with one another (Mt 9:22), demonstrating the interrelatedness of these concepts in the account of the haemorrhaging woman's healing. In this context, 'salvation' primarily denotes the woman's liberation from her affliction, yet it is also plausible that she attained not only physical but also spiritual salvation (Hagner 1993:249;

Luz 2001:45). Faith functions not merely as a remedy for physical ailments, but as a way to become a citizen of God's kingdom. Matthew portrays faith as the sole means of attaining citizenship in the kingdom of God (ex, Mt 13:58). Consequently, Jesus' attribution of salvation to the haemorrhaging woman stemmed from her faith, and Matthew emphasised that salvation was of greater importance than her healing (Luz 2001:42). Ultimately, Matthew sought to underscore Jesus' divine identity and authority through his miraculous healings, with the faith of the afflicted playing a crucial role in recognising Jesus as the son of God.

Jesus' healing and confessing him as 'Lord'

In the Gospel of Matthew, there is a clear division between those who believe in Jesus as a divine being and those who view him solely as a wise human being. While the religious leaders and Judas Iscariot referred to Jesus as a 'teacher' or 'rabbi', his disciples and those who received healing from him consistently referred to him as 'Lord' (Mt 14:28; 16:22; 17:4, 21; 26:22) (Shin 2008:45). The individuals who received supernatural healing through Jesus and the crowds who witnessed the miracles were inclined to believe that Jesus was a divine being rather than an ordinary human. Those who were healed from diseases also addressed Jesus as 'Lord' (Mt 8:6, 25, 29; 15:22, 25, 27; 17:15; 20:30–31).

In the Gospel of Matthew, the title 'Lord' was generally used in three dimensions. In the context of the socio-political hierarchy of the time, people of high rank or officials were referred to as 'lord'. For instance, the Jewish religious leaders referred to Pilate as 'lord' (Mt 27:63). However, the reason why Pilate was referred to as 'lord' originated from the religious leaders' perception of the Roman Emperor as God. For early Christians, no one could be called 'lord' except Jesus, who was resurrected from the dead. Therefore, the religious leaders' reference to Pilate as 'lord' was a means of demonstrating respect for an authority figure (Luz 2005:588). From a theological perspective, 'Lord' was used to refer to God (Mt 4:7; 5:33; 9:38; 11:25; 21:9). Matthew employed 'Lord' to describe the Most High. In Matthew 5:33, for instance, Jews vowed in the name of God or the Most High (cf. 1 Clem 52:3). This verse is a quote from Psalm 50:14, which says 'sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High'. Matthew transformed the Most High of the Psalms into 'Lord' (Davies & Allison 2006:534). This suggests that the term 'Lord' in the Gospel of Matthew refers to God and that Matthew tended to view Jesus as a divine being.

Let us analyse the healing story in the Gospel of Matthew where Jesus is referred to as the 'Lord' from a Christian perspective. This allows us to examine Jesus as a healer from the viewpoint of Christianity. Of course, 'Lord' was not used independently but rather in conjunction with other Christian titles. In particular, 'Lord' and 'Son of David' are used together in Jesus' healing stories (Mt 9:27–31; 15:21–28; 20:29–34). However, the term 'Lord' used in Jesus' healing miracles generally has a confessional nature, regardless of the argument that it was used merely as a form of homage or

address. The two blind men's act of referring to Jesus as 'Lord' was a cry of confession of their faith. This confession is a model that demonstrates that the Matthew community confessed Jesus as 'Lord'. Making this confession is equivalent to giving worship to God in the Old Testament (Luz 2001:20).

We can observe the use of the terms 'worship' and 'Lord' in other healing miracle stories. When Jesus performed the miracle of the loaves and fishes, the disciples did not recognise his divine identity and power, although they confessed Jesus as the Son of God and worshipped him when he walked on water in the storm and boarded the ship they were on (Mt 14:33). In the story of raising the official's daughter from the dead and the story of the Canaanite woman, who begs for healing of her possessed daughter, there are verses where people worship Jesus and implore him, saying 'Lord, help me' (Mt 15:25).

The use of the term 'worship' in the healing miracle stories of the Gospel of Matthew is not limited to an earnest request for healing and recovery.⁵ The Jews restricted the object of worship to God alone. Matthew appears to have a theological intention of presenting Jesus as the same object of worship as God (Peterson 1992:84–87; Shin 2004:245). Particularly, Matthew 8:1–4 introduces a new type of cult. The leper's act of kneeling before Jesus implies that he worshipped Jesus, and this interpretation places Jesus in the same position as the temple or altar (Davies & Allison 2012:10). The Jews considered the temple and altar as sacred places of God's revelation, and equating Jesus with the temple can be viewed as equivalent to Jesus being worshipped and referred to as 'son of David' or 'son of God' (Luz 2007:114). Hence, the 'Lord' mentioned in the healing and miracle narratives of the Gospel of Matthew does not merely pertain to a man who performed miracles, but it also constitutes a confession of acknowledging Jesus as a divine being (Davies & Allison 2012:510). The use of 'Lord' in these stories portrays Jesus as the embodiment of God, and the author of the Gospel of Matthew presents Jesus as an object of worship.

Conclusion

The healing miracles of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew serve a theological purpose. A proper understanding of these themes contained in the healing narrative will not only help bridge cultural gaps between the 1st century and the modern church but also contribute to the formation of the faith identity of the modern church. The core of Jesus' healing ministry was the declaration of forgiveness of sin, which was believed to be the cause of disease in Jewish tradition. Therefore, solving the issue of sin was a priority in Jesus' healing ministry. The sick individuals' pleas for 'mercy' and their 'beseechingness' signify Jesus' authority and power as equal to God. Furthermore, the confessional nature of faith expressed by the sick individuals in these healing stories also serves to reveal Jesus' divine identity and authority. Additionally, the use of 'worship' as a means of messianic

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5.Mt 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 18:26; 20:20; 28:9, 17.

confession is present in Jesus' healing narratives. Finally, depiction of these narratives serves as scenes of worship to God. It is clear that the repetitive pattern of these theological themes contained in Jesus' healing narrative was intended to acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God and the Messiah, who is the object of faith.

The organisation of theological themes in the healing narratives by Matthew appears to have been deliberate and aimed at addressing and overcoming the transitional situation of the Matthew community. This community, in the process of transitioning from Judaism to Christianity, sought to demonstrate to its members, many of whom had a Jewish background, that Jesus Christ was the sole being who was equal to God.

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