

Matthew's Portrayal of Jesus

Son of David, a New Moses, and Son of God

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Although the Gospel of Matthew appears at the beginning of the New Testament, many scholars believe that the Gospel of Mark was written first.¹ Yet while Matthew follows the basic order and storyline of Mark, Matthew weaves new material into it, especially many teachings of Jesus, some of which are shared with the Gospel of Luke and others that are unique to the First Gospel. Some aspects of Matthew's Gospel, such as his influential Sermon on the Mount and his references to the church (Matthew 16:18; 18:17), the only ones in any of the Gospels, made his treatment of the ministry and mission of Jesus particularly important to early Christians.² These factors and the way its author frequently used Jewish scripture helped make Matthew a natural bridge between the Old and New Testaments, and this may have led to Matthew's Gospel being placed first in the canon.³ An important result of this Gospel's

prominent placement is that Matthew's presentation of Jesus is the first that most Bible readers encounter.

As a result, even though Matthew is often harmonized and blended with Mark and Luke as one of the Synoptic Gospels, its unique perspective of Jesus of Nazareth is fundamental to our understanding of Christology—that is, the way early and contemporary Christians understand who Jesus was and how he helped bring about salvation. Before analyzing Jesus Christ through the Matthean lens, we will first analyze that lens to more fully appreciate its structure, methods, potential purposes, and likely audience. We will then consider how Matthew's Gospel went beyond Mark's by beginning with a story of Jesus's divine conception and miraculous birth. Written to show how Jesus was the "Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1), this infancy narrative also introduced the image of Jesus as the New Moses, ideas that were developed in the rest of the Gospel. In addition to demonstrating that Jesus was the "Son of the living God," Matthew also placed emphasis on Jesus's role as the Son of Man, one who would not only suffer and die for us but also rise from the dead and one day return in glory. These aspects of Matthew's presentation of Jesus are important to Latter-day Saint readers, whose own understanding of these elements of Jesus's person and work are often strengthened by Restoration scripture and testimony. As we study the Matthean Jesus, our own testimonies of Christ can then deepen as we come to know him better.

Matthew, a Jewish Gospel?

Tradition attributes authorship of this Gospel to Matthew the publican, or tax collector, whom Jesus called to follow him and who was later named an apostle (Matthew 9:9; 10:3).⁴ Despite this attribution, the author of Matthew was also well acquainted with Jewish scripture, traditions, and various messianic expectations of his day. In fact, his familiarity with and use of such material led to Matthew's Gospel being described "as the most Jewish book of the New Testament."⁵

With over sixty quotations from the Old Testament, along with many other allusions, Matthew quotes the Old Testament at least twice as often as any other Gospel writer.⁶ In particular, Matthew lists at least thirteen specific instances where Jesus said or did something that expressly fulfilled a prophecy that would have been familiar to a Jewish audience (Matthew 1:22–23; 2:5–6, 15, 17–18, 23; 4:14–16; 8:17; 12:17–21; 13:14, 35; 21:4–5; 27:9–10, 35).⁷ As an example, Matthew's first fulfillment statement declares Jesus's miraculous birth as fulfilling Isaiah 7:14 where a "virgin" conceives and bears a son who would be called Emmanuel, "God *with us*" (Matthew 1:22–23; emphasis added).⁸ After introducing this name in the first chapter, Matthew forms an *inclusio*, or literary bookend, with the final verse in the Gospel: "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, *I am with you alway*, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matthew 28:20; emphasis added). Every sermon, miracle, and interaction between these two bookends shows Jesus fulfilling his Emmanuel role.

In spite of Matthew's supposed Jewishness, he also displays greater harshness toward the Jewish leaders than any other Gospel writer. For example, Matthew records a long string of Jesus's scathing rebukes of the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23. He also lists Jesus's harsh judgments and prophecies of destruction (Matthew 24). Nevertheless, while Matthew's Jesus does not hold back his criticism of certain Jewish leaders and behaviors, he never speaks negatively about the law of Moses. Matthew's portrayal of Jesus shows him upholding key Jewish traditions such as "Go not into the way of the Gentiles" (10:5), "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (15:24), Jesus facilitating Peter to pay the temple tax (17:24–27), and "Pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day" (24:20). Unlike the other Synoptics, in Matthew's account Jesus is never accused of breaking certain traditions of the elders (e.g., plucking grain on the Sabbath, eating with unwashed hands, not fasting, etc.). Instead, Matthew shows Jesus being questioned about why he allows his *disciples* to do these things but is never confronted for

personally breaking these traditions of the law himself. On at least one occasion, Jesus appears to have defended certain traditions that would have been revered by many in a Christian-Jewish audience due to centuries of tradition (see Matthew 23:3). Unlike Luke's Sermon on the Plain, Matthew's Sermon on the Mount appears to emphasize the importance of the law: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (5:17–18).

Nevertheless, despite the common description that "Matthew was written to persuade the Jews that Jesus was the promised Jewish Messiah,"⁹ our understanding of the Gospel's original audience may need to be slightly more nuanced. Matthew's inclusion of gentiles who recognize Jesus—such as the magi or wise men who worship Jesus as the true King of Israel at the beginning (Matthew 2:11) and the centurion at the foot of the cross who acknowledges him as the Son of God at the end (27:54)—and the Risen Lord's final directive that his eleven remaining disciples take the gospel to all the world (28:16–20) might suggest that it was also directed to a mixed Jewish-gentile Christian audience.¹⁰ Matthew's apparent hostility toward Jewish leaders might partially have been the result of first-century Jewish Christians struggling with the emerging rabbinic leadership of the Jewish community after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70. The early Christian community, consisting of both Jewish and gentile Christians, may also have been struggling to combine the seemingly exclusive promises made to the house of Israel in the past with their newfound Christian faith. Nevertheless, the Jewish aspects of Matthew provide particular insight into how Jesus's earliest disciples may have gradually come to understand how he was in fact their Messiah—one who was not only the kingly successor to David and a prophet like Moses but also the actual Son of God who came to suffer, die, and rise again and who would come again in glory.

Bring Forth a Son

When it comes to actually beginning his Gospel, Matthew does not follow Mark's lead in commencing his story with an account of the ministry of John the Baptist leading up to Jesus's baptism. For Mark, Jesus was the Son of God because the Father declared it so when he proclaimed after the baptism, "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11). Jesus's divine identity was then confirmed as he acted and taught with authority throughout his ministry. Nevertheless, the Marcan proclamation by the Father could be interpreted in such a way as to promote an adoptionist Christology—that is, a belief that Jesus was a fully human figure who was adopted by the Father at the baptism, much as the royal kings of Judah had been "adopted" as the Lord's representatives at their coronations (see Psalm 2:7).¹¹ Perhaps to counter such a misunderstanding, Matthew decided, and no doubt was inspired, to begin his Gospel with a narrative account of Jesus's divine conception and miraculous birth. In addition to establishing Jesus's unique conception, Matthew could also have been using his birth narrative to make additional connections with the Old Testament.¹² According to noted biblical scholar Raymond Brown (1928–98), this "conception christology" was the focus of a prologue (Matthew 1–2) that answered important questions such as *who* was Jesus (1:1–17), *how* did he come into being (1:18–25, Jesus's genealogy), *where* did he go (2:1–12, Bethlehem, where he was recognized by the magi), and *from whence* did he come (2:13–23, back from Egypt, where his family had gone to escape Herod).¹³

In addressing the question of *who* Jesus was, Matthew's work begins with two words, *biblos geneseōs*,¹⁴ an important phrase that echoes Genesis 2:4 (the generations of the heavens and the earth), 5:1 (the generations of Adam), and 6:9 (the generations of Noah). As Brown further notes, Matthew begins his Gospel account as an inversion of the Genesis account; where Adam's genealogy lists his descendants, Jesus's lists his ancestors.¹⁵ Abraham holds a prominent place in Matthew's description of Jesus's identity.¹⁶ Matthew's

first verse ends by declaring that Jesus was “the son of Abraham.” The genealogy list immediately following that declaration begins with Abraham as the first ancestor mentioned (Matthew 1:2).¹⁷ Eric Huntsman, a BYU professor of ancient scripture, notes that, “while much of Jesus’s genealogy focuses on his role as the Son of David and the king of Israel, the reference to Abraham can also be seen as expanding his role as a blessing to all nations and peoples. . . . Although overall [Matthew’s] gospel comes from the perspective of a Jewish author writing for a Jewish audience, he also seems to have been writing when a growing number of gentiles were coming into the Church, and there are important references to gentiles in his Gospel.”¹⁸ Huntsman also observes that Old Testament genealogies serve “an important function in establishing kinship, confirming a family’s position in the House of Israel, and validating claims to important royal or priestly positions.”¹⁹ Unlike Luke (Luke 3:23–38),²⁰ Matthew follows the Old Testament pattern of fathers *begetting* sons. In addition to the men, Matthew included five women in this list: Tamar (Matthew 1:3), Rahab and Ruth (1:5), Uriah’s wife (1:6), and Mary (1:16).²¹ Perhaps Matthew included Mary with this list of women because they, too, were seen as either sinners or outcasts. Or maybe Matthew was simply showing how gentiles would also have a part in Jesus’s work and ministry, since they appear in his ancestry.²²

Nevertheless, perhaps the clearest statement of *who* Jesus is in the opening chapter of Matthew comes during the angelic annunciation to Joseph, in which he is told, “Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 1:20), a statement that makes clear that Joseph the carpenter was not the actual father of Mary’s expected child. Rather, the conception had come about by divine agency. For Latter-day Saints, this divine agency is clarified through Restoration scripture, which clarifies that Mary, a precious and chosen vessel, conceived and was overshadowed “*by the power of the Holy Ghost*” (see Alma 7:10; emphasis added). The angel then continued with Joseph, “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for

he shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). The word *for* in this context implies that the reason Joseph should name him Jesus is *because* he will save. While there is no logical connection between salvation and the name Jesus in English or *Iêsous* in Greek, there is a correlation in Hebrew, where the name *Yehôshua* is taken to mean "Yahweh is salvation."²³ Matthew underscores this connection of Jesus with YHWH, the Lord of the Old Testament, with the first formula quotation from Isaiah: "Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, *God with us*" (Matthew 1:22–23; emphasis added).

The Son of David

Matthew, more than any other Gospel writer, emphasized a royal Christology—a belief that a Davidic king would rise up, be anointed to take the throne, and restore Israel's kingdom again. David himself, like Saul before him, had been anointed king of Israel (see 1 Samuel 10:1; 16:13; 2 Samuel 5:3). David was the greatest of Israel's kings and clearly held a significant place of honor for biblical authors, with his name appearing more than any other name in the Bible (1,085 times).²⁴ Despite his later personal failings, David remained faithful to the Lord and received a covenant and promise from the Lord that he would always have a descendant to reign in the house of Israel, with God promising to be his father (see 2 Samuel 7:12–16). Because David, his successors, the high priests, and some prophets were all anointed, each could be referred to by the title "messiah" (Hebrew, *māšîaḥ*; Greek, *christos*), which means literally "anointed one." David's ruling line lapsed following the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of Zedekiah in 586 BC, but royal psalms and prophecies held out the hope for a restoration of both the kingdom and the Davidic throne. As a result, in the intertestamental period prophecies and hopes for a restored Davidic kingdom led to

the expectation of a future anointed king who would be a particular messiah or even “*the* Messiah.”²⁵

Matthew presents Jesus as this Davidic Messiah more clearly than any of the other Gospels. For instance, he uses the title “son of David” for Jesus nine times (see Matthew 1:1; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30–31; 21:9, 15; 22:42). In contrast, the title “son of David” appears only three times each in Mark and Luke and is absent in John, the idea appearing only once in that Gospel as “the seed of David.”²⁶ Because royal succession was patrilineal, Matthew’s infancy narrative focused on Joseph, unlike Luke’s, which was largely told from the perspective of Mary. Jesus’s genealogy is that of Joseph, his foster father (see Matthew 1:16), and in the annunciation to Joseph, the angel specifically identifies the carpenter as “Joseph, thou son of David” (1:20). In order to legally claim Jesus as his own son, thereby making Jesus an heir to the Davidic throne, Joseph accepts Mary’s baby when he is born, giving him a name (1:25) and thereby adopting him into the Davidic line.²⁷ Matthew’s Davidic focus can also be seen in how he organized his genealogy of Jesus into three sets of fourteen generations in a manner that emphasizes Jesus’s descent through David’s line (from Abraham down to David, from David to the Babylonian captivity, and from the exile down to Christ; 1:2–17). While the number fourteen has little meaning to an English or Greek reader in a genealogical context, in Hebrew, the name David was associated with the number fourteen because of an alpha-numeric Hebrew code known as *gematria*. The numerical values of the Hebrew consonants *dalet-vav-dalet* add up to fourteen.²⁸ It is possible that Matthew purposely organized the pedigree in such a way that he could create a 14-14-14 pattern that repeated Jesus’s connection to King David three times.²⁹

Another possible link between Jesus and David occurred at the triumphal entry. Shortly before David’s death, he directed his servants to have his son Solomon “ride upon [his] own mule, and bring him down to Gihon: And let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him there king over Israel” (1 Kings 1:33–34).

Jesus, as “the son of David,” also rode on a mule in the Kidron Valley, past the Gihon Spring, before triumphantly entering into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:1–11). The significance of these various elements all coming together seemed to have a powerful effect on the gathering crowd. As Jesus rode, the multitudes shouted a significant refrain from Psalm 118:25–26: “Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest” (Matthew 21:9; emphasis added). The crowds that day seemed to be caught up in the belief that Jesus was the long-awaited Son of David who had finally come to restore the Davidic throne, which led either them or Matthew to insert the title “Son of David,” something that the other three Gospels do not note.

The connection with Psalm 118 is significant. Psalm 118 forms part of the Jewish *Hallel* (comprising Psalms 113–18 and 136). The *Hallel* was recited each year on special occasions, including Passover. This particular psalm was a triumphant passage anticipating the long-awaited coming of the Messiah. Jesus validated this particular interpretation when referring to his own second coming in Matthew 23:39: “Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.” Ironically, these triumphant *Hallel* verses shouted by the crowd (Psalm 118:25–26) are bracketed by allusions to rejection in verse 22, “The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner,” and verse 27, “God is the Lord, which hath shewed us light: bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar.” Jesus’s entry into Jerusalem thus ironically sets the stage for him, as David’s heir, to be rejected by the leaders of the people and then be slain as a lamb. By shifting from a royal Christology to a more atonement or redemption Christology, Matthew was thus able to prepare his readers for something that many at the time of Jesus did not expect: their king was in fact a sacrifice that would open the door for the future day when Jesus would once again return like a lion for a second triumphal entry to begin his eternal reign as King of kings.

A New Moses

Moses prophesied of a future great prophet when he wrote, “The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken” (Deuteronomy 18:15).³⁰ A few verses later, Moses informs us that God would “put [his] words in [this prophet’s] mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that [God] shall command him” (18:18).³¹ Matthew signals that he saw Jesus as this promised prophet in his infancy narrative by pointing out similarities in the birth stories of these two deliverers. Then, having established this motif, he presents Jesus as a New Moses throughout much of the rest of his Gospel, using this typology to illustrate important aspects of the Messiah’s work by showing how Jesus was the great lawgiver, provider, and deliverer of the New Testament.

Both Jesus and Moses had unusual infancies and childhoods. Both were born into poor families who were part of a conquered people. Both were spared from infanticide while most around them were not. Both were raised by a stepfather. In an inverse connection, Moses was born as a slave and became a prince in the royal house of the king; Jesus was “born King of the Jews” (Matthew 2:2) but became the ultimate servant and, as a child, was visited by the kingly magi in his humble house. Neither Jesus nor Moses seemed to have a permanent, settled home in their own land. Hosea wrote, “When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt” (Hosea 11:1). This statement could be interpreted by seeing Israel collectively as the *son* that was called out of Egypt, and thus a statement that spoke to Israel’s past experiences. Moses could also be seen as this saving son, or this verse could refer to Israel as a whole. Matthew chooses to interpret the Hosea passage typologically, seeing Hosea’s statement as being consummated in the story of Joseph’s taking Jesus and Mary to (and later from) Egypt (see Matthew 2:13–15).³²

There are also symbolic connections with Moses’s miraculous crossing of the Red Sea on dry ground, which Jesus echoes by crossing the Sea of Galilee, not by dividing it but by walking on it (Exodus

14:13–31; Matthew 14:24–33). After leading the children of Israel out of Egypt, Moses fasted for forty days while on Mount Sinai (Exodus 34:28); Jesus also fasted for forty days in the wilderness (see Matthew 4:1–2). Divine interactions on mountaintops, under cover of thick clouds, resulted in transfiguration and shining faces for both (Exodus 19:9; 24:16; 34:29; Matthew 17:1–12). Heavenly bread and miraculous loaves were provided in abundance for both Moses's and Jesus's followers (see Exodus 16:16; Matthew 14:19–21; 15:32–39). Both were repeatedly questioned on points of the law and their authority for carrying out their missions (see Numbers 12:1–2; 16:1–3; Matthew 22–23). Likewise, Moses and Jesus both instituted a richly symbolic meal for their people to perpetually remember their deliverance from captivity and bondage (see Exodus 12; Matthew 26:26–30). Latter-day Saint readers may find further similarities between Moses and Jesus in two sets of incidents related in the Pearl of Great Price and Joseph Smith's New Translation. In the first set, both went into a place apart to spend time with God in preparation for their appointed missions (see Moses 1:1–11 and Joseph Smith—Matthew 4:1). In the other, immediately following their experiences with God, both were directly and personally confronted by Satan (see Moses 1:12–22 and Matthew 4:2–11). Jesus overcame all three temptations he faced, showing his power over the devil. Moses, the great prophet, tried three times to cast out Satan but failed until he called upon the name of the Only Begotten in his fourth attempt that finally succeeded.

The very organization of Matthew's Gospel might reflect the motif of Jesus as the New Moses. Between the infancy narrative, which introduces *who* Jesus is as the Son of God and of David, and the passion and resurrection narratives at the end, which illustrate *what* he came to do, the body of the Gospel can be divided into five sections. Many scholars have noted that each of these sections concludes with a major discourse, each of which ends with phrases such as, "When Jesus had ended these sayings" (see Matthew 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1): the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5–7); the Mission Sermon (chapter 10); the Sermon in Parables (chapter 13); the Sermon on the

Church (chapter 18); and his End of Times and Judgment Discourse (eschatological, or “last days,” prophecies in chapters 24–25). Many see this organization as an intentional allusion to the five books of Moses and yet another attempt to directly appeal to a Jewish audience, the fivefold division of Matthew being analogous to the five books traditionally attributed to Moses. If Moses delivered the law in five books, Jesus, the New Moses, delivered his teachings in five sections, each culminating in a major sermon.³³

Arguably the most important and direct tie between Jesus and Moses is the fact that both delivered life-altering commandments to their people. Matthew, unlike the other Gospel writers, was careful to point out that Jesus delivered his sermon, much like Moses, from a mountain (see Exodus 20; Matthew 5–7). Few things are more “Matthean” than this sermon with its beatitudes and requirements that stretch disciples beyond the outward elements of the law of Moses and give them the pattern for Christian behavior. By fulfilling every jot and tittle of the law of Moses (Matthew 5:18), a point that would have been especially important to Matthew’s audience, he embodied every principle of the higher law he taught in all his sermons.

Jesus as the Son of God

Although Matthew’s infancy narrative presents Jesus’s conception as divine, it does not explicitly call Jesus the Son of God. Nevertheless, various witnesses, both otherworldly and human, attest that Jesus was in fact God’s Son. Ironically, Satan along with his followers also declared Jesus’s true identity. The devil opened his first two direct temptations by attacking that identity: “If thou be the Son of God . . .” (Matthew 4:3, 6). The demoniacs of Gergesenes cried out, “What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God?” (8:29). Only in Matthew’s account do we see Jesus’s disciples so dramatically affected by his walking on the water that they “worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God” (14:33). Additionally, when the

centurion at Golgotha “and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God” (27:54; compare Mark 15:39).³⁴ The question of Jesus’s relation to God became the defining feature of his trial before the leaders of the Jews. “And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God” (Matthew 26:63). Jesus’s response was confirming enough that the high priest rent his clothes in rage, condemning Jesus for blasphemy (see 26:64–66).³⁵

The most striking, and powerful, human testimony of Jesus’s divine sonship comes with Peter’s confession at Caesarea Philippi in Matthew 16:15–19. Mark’s version of this story records Peter saying, “Thou art the Christ” (Mark 8:29), and in Luke 9:20, Peter responded to the question of identity by saying, “the Christ of God.” In Matthew’s Gospel, however, Peter said, “Thou art the Christ, *the Son of the living God*” (Matthew 16:16; emphasis added). The Matthean Peter does not just know that Jesus is the chosen, anointed servant of God but also that he is actually God’s own Son. Mark and Luke both finished this part of the dialogue with Jesus charging them to tell no man (Mark 8:30; Luke 9:21), but Matthew instead has Jesus follow up Peter’s confession with a declaration on the nature and origins of Peter’s testimony, with the implication that he is expected to share it: “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but *my Father* which is in heaven” (Matthew 16:17; emphasis added). The apostolic revelation to Peter that Jesus was the Son of God is particularly meaningful to Latter-day Saints. Not only do we have apostles who are special witnesses of Jesus Christ, but many others of our number can receive such spiritual surety: “To some it is given by the Holy Ghost to know *that Jesus Christ is the Son of God*, and that he was crucified for the sins of the world. To others is given *to believe on their words*, that they also might have eternal life if they continue faithful” (D&C 46:13–14; emphasis added).

Perhaps most importantly, Jesus’s own actions, teachings, and the way he addressed God signaled his divine paternity. While all the

Gospels reveal that Jesus regularly called upon God as his Father, the title “Heavenly Father” (Greek, *ho patēr ho ouranios*), perhaps the most common title for God used by Latter-day Saints, is almost unique to Matthew. It never appears in Mark or John and only shows up once in Luke (Luke 11:13). By contrast, Matthew’s Gospel uses the phrase five times (Matthew 6:14, 26, 32; 15:13; and 18:35). The three instances used in chapter 6 all consist of Jesus referring to “your heavenly Father” while the two passages in chapters 15 and 18 refer to “my heavenly Father.” While there are dozens of other passages where Matthew refers to God as a Father or uses variations such as “your Father which is in heaven” (e.g., Matthew 5:16, 45, 48), “Father, Lord of heaven and earth” (Matthew 11:25), or simply “your Father,” it is those passages where he refers to God as “his” Father that reflect a special, more personal relationship (e.g., Matthew 7:21; 10:29; 11:27; 12:50; 15:13; 16:17; 18:10, 19, 35; 24:36; 25:34; 26:39, 42, 53).

Matthew, like the other two synoptic writers, included Heavenly Father’s own witness of the divinity of Jesus Christ at his baptism (see Matthew 3:17; Mark 1:11; and Luke 3:22) and at the Mount of Transfiguration (see Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:7; and Luke 9:35). In the baptism witness, Mark and Luke both record the voice as speaking directly to Jesus: “Thou art my beloved Son.”³⁶ Matthew’s version records the voice of the Father bearing testimony to the crowd: “This is my beloved Son.” In our dispensation, Heavenly Father personally introduced his Son in a grove we now call sacred, to a kneeling and pleading farm boy who would become the great Prophet of the Restoration. That introduction consisted of eight simple words: “Joseph, This is My Beloved Son, Hear Him!” (Joseph Smith—History 1:17). President Gordon B. Hinckley said, “Do you realize the import of that declaration? Here was God the Eternal Father, the Almighty, bearing testimony in words plainly spoken. No more important or compelling testimony has been given of the risen Lord than this testimony of his own Father.”³⁷ Following President Hinckley’s pattern, the inclusion of the baptism and transfiguration testimonies from God himself constitute the most important and

compelling witness of Jesus's divinity compared to all others presented in the biblical records.

Jesus as Son of Man

In all four Gospels, one of Jesus's most common ways of referring to himself was the title "Son of man." This term appears eighty-five times in the Gospels and four other times elsewhere in the New Testament. It is a particularly important title in Matthew, appearing thirty-two times in this Gospel as opposed to fifteen times in Mark, twenty-six in Luke, and twelve times in John.³⁸ Latter-day Saint readers have often been prepared in advance to see this title as a testimony of Jesus's divinity, particularly because James E. Talmage (1862–1933), a noted LDS author and long-time member of the Twelve, connected the expression "the Son of Man" with passages of Restoration scripture that identify God the Father as "Man of Holiness" (see Moses 6:57 and 7:35; compare D&C 78:20 and 95:17).³⁹ For us, the fact that Jesus was the actual Son of God with divine authority to teach, act, and eventually conquer sin and death is a given, and certain instances of Jesus's use of this phrase that seem to center on his authority may be particularly good examples of this. For example, at the healing of the man with palsy, Jesus proclaims, "But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house" (Matthew 9:6). Similarly, Jesus's teaching that he was lord of the Sabbath day or had come to save that which was lost (Matthew 12:8; 18:11) might be further instances of this usage.

Nevertheless, without the benefit of Restoration insights, Jesus's listeners and perhaps even Matthew's readers might not have been prepared to understand Son of Man as the equivalent of Son of God. In fact, when the equivalent of this phrase was used in the Old Testament, it had two different possible meanings, and scholars have struggled to understand the title's history and New Testament usage.⁴⁰ From this perspective, the title itself is notoriously ambiguous. On

the one hand, in the Old Testament it generally refers to someone who is mortal (e.g., Psalm 8:4; Isaiah 51:12; and throughout the book of Ezekiel). On the other hand, the eschatological, or “last days,” figure described in Daniel 7:13 and 8:17 as “one like the son of man” who would come “with the clouds of heaven” led many Jews in the intertestamental period to expect a glorious, heavenly figure to return at the end of the world.⁴¹ Both of these meanings seem to have been important for Matthew.

During his ministry, some instances of this title seem to have portrayed Jesus as having a typical, and sometimes more humble than usual, mortal experience: for example, he is portrayed as being homeless (Matthew 8:20) or somehow scandalizing the religious establishment for enjoying normal human comforts such as food and drink more than did the ascetic disciples of John the Baptist (11:19). The frequency of Son of Man references increased as Jesus traveled to Jerusalem for his final week when his so-called passion predictions increasingly stressed his imminent suffering and death. An example of this is found in Matthew 17:22–23: “And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men: And they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry” (see also Matthew 16:13, 21–23; 20:17–19). Other allusions to Jesus’s betrayal and death (e.g., 12:40; 20:18, 28), together with these passion predictions, prepare the readers for the conclusion of Matthew’s Gospel, which consists of his passion and resurrection narratives (26:1–28:20). Just as Matthew’s infancy narrative answers christological questions of *who* Jesus was, Matthew’s concluding sections answer the major question of what he came to *do*, and several of the remaining Son of Man references in this section center on Jesus’s betrayal, suffering, and crucifixion (see 26:2, 24, 45).

Immediately after Jesus gave up the ghost on the cross, “the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent” (Matthew 27:51; parallels Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). Much has been written regarding the practical

and symbolic significance of this veil rending. R. T. France noted "the fact that such a tall curtain is torn from the top rather than from below indicates that this is God's work." He continued, "The tearing of the curtain suggests that as Jesus dies the transfer of authority from the old temple-focused regime (which has been responsible for his death) to the shortly-to-be-vindicated Son of Man is already taking place." Ultimately, this would mean that "access to God will no longer be through the old, discredited cultic system but through Jesus himself, and more specifically through his death as a ransom for many."⁴² T. J. Geddert listed thirty-five possible interpretive suggestions⁴³ for this event, including one that would have possibly held more meaning for Matthew's audience than those in Mark's or Luke's communities. The groaning of the earth and rending of the covering veil could be interpreted as heavenly responses from a heartbroken Father since the Jewish people were familiar with the practice of rending garments and deep lamenting at the suffering or death of a loved one.

The most common uses of Son of Man in Matthew, however, seem to be eschatological. An example of this is found in Matthew 16:27–28: "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom" (see also Matthew 10:23; 13:41; 16:27, 28; 19:28; 24:27, 30, 37, 39, 44; 25:13, 31; 26:64). Occurring throughout Jesus's ministry, such passages function to remind readers that despite Jesus's suffering and death, he will not only rise from the grave but also one day return in glory. As with other uses of the Son of Man title, Matthew has more eschatological uses than the other Gospels. In line with this, he presents a significantly longer version of Jesus's Mount of Olives discourse, in which he prophesied of the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the eventual destruction of the wicked at the end of days. While Mark's version consists of one tightly written chapter (Mark 13:1–37), Matthew's consists of two

that include more detail and additional parables of preparation and judgment (Matthew 24:1–25:46).

“I Am with You Always”

By looking closely at Matthew’s presentation of Jesus in view of his intended audience and his Gospel’s focus, we are able to better understand his unique testimony of Jesus Christ. Through his infancy narrative, he stressed that Jesus was the actual Son of God, something that various witnesses and Jesus himself attest throughout the Gospel. His use of the Old Testament and his connection of Jesus to the respected figures of David and Moses helped form a foundation for building faith among his Jewish followers to accept Jesus as the Son of Man and the Son of God, sent here to save us. While it is helpful to use a historical perspective to interpret and understand a book of scripture, we can easily get so caught up in the ancient world that we forget to bridge the gaps of time, space, and culture between our world and theirs. A powerful part of Matthew’s testimony of Christ is not reserved for history; it is found in *our* story. Matthew and other writers of scripture provide us with a set of lenses through which we can see Jesus in a particular culture and time, interacting with real people with real problems who desperately need divine help in fulfilling their earthly missions. But we can each find ourselves and lasting solutions in these accounts by applying these texts to ourselves and looking for the Lord’s hand in our own lives. Even though Matthew’s original words and primary audience are two thousand years removed from us, when we understand his intended meanings, overarching purposes, and literary techniques, we see that Jesus’s promises are not bound by space or limited by time. “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20) is just as true for us today as it was for Matthew’s original audience.

One of many examples of this principle can be found in Jesus’s judgment before Pilate. On that occasion, the leaders of the Jews had

to decide whether they wanted Jesus or a “notable prisoner” named Barabbas released and freely forgiven (Matthew 27:16). Barabbas had been charged with sedition, murder, and robbery (see Luke 23:18–19).⁴⁴ The contrast was clear: the people were asked to choose between an insurrectionist and a peacemaker, between one who took life and one who gave it, between one who stole (see John 18:40) and one who freely gave to others. The crowd demanded that Barabbas be released and Jesus be crucified. It is easy to feel unkind feelings toward Barabbas. He was guilty but got released while an innocent Jesus was punished. Symbolically speaking, however, this is *our* story! In a sense, *we* are Barabbas. We are guilty and deserve punishment, yet we can be released because Jesus suffered in our place. When seen in this light, Jesus is no longer defined impersonally as the son of David, or son of Abraham, or as the New Moses. He becomes the personable Son of God who says, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

Like John, Matthew ends his Gospel by saying nothing about the ascension. He goes one step further than John, however, by showing that “for those of us who believe in him, keep his commandments, and trust in his promises, he is ever with us.”⁴⁵ Matthew’s ending is a fitting conclusion to his monumental witness of Jesus Christ as Emmanuel, or God with us. “Go ye therefore, and teach *all nations*, . . . teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo *I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen*” (Matthew 28:19–20; emphasis added).

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Notes

1. This paper would not have been possible without Eric Huntsman's many hours of mentoring, encouraging, and editing during the research, writing, and revisions of this chapter. Thanks also to Nicholas Frederick for his suggestions and support at critical points along the way.

To see how the Gospels were ordered in various collections, see Edgar J. Goodspeed, *The Formation of the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1926), 187–203; Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 296–97. See also Amy Easton-Flake, “Marcan Christology: Narrating the Christ,” in this volume.

2. See Richard Neitzel Holzappel, Eric D. Huntsman, and Thomas A. Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 62–63.
3. The overwhelming consensus up through the middle of the nineteenth century was that Matthew was written first. “For more than a century after that it became the almost unquestioned scholarly consensus that Mark came first and that Matthew and Luke drew on Mark and on . . . a single lost document to which they both had access.” R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 20. More recent scholarship has shown the data to be too multifaceted and complex for a clean-cut, two-document hypothesis. Many scholars still believe in the priority of Mark, but they leave room for all the Gospel writers to be influenced by each other over time. For a useful introduction to the nuanced issues involved, see Mark Goodacre, *The Synoptic Problem: A Way through the Maze* (London: T&T Clark, 2001).
4. This is owing to the attribution of authorship to Matthew in key early Christian manuscripts (N, B, D, L, W, f^1 , f^{13} , Byz, L) as well as to information provided by important early Christian writers such as Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* 3.1.1) and Eusebius (*Ecc. Hist.* 3.39.16, 6.14.6, 6.25.4).
5. R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 71.
6. John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 29–33.

In these pages, Nolland also noted that “there is an obvious likelihood that [Matthew] knows the OT in Greek.” Matthew’s usage of Old Testament passages is difficult to categorize, however, because he uses at least “fourteen different approaches to the generation of the wording of the quotations, . . . the overall impression is of a man who freshly scrutinizes [OT texts] . . . in Greek, Hebrew (not always the Hebrew of the preserved MT), and occasionally in Aramaic.” For further verification of this, France observed that the Gospel of Matthew “as a whole does not read like translation Greek. The clearly Semitic turns of phrase and other features suggesting an Aramaic origin are largely confined to the sayings-material rather than to the narrative.” France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher*, 63–64. This conclusion was first introduced by Matthew Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), 271–74. Matthew’s writing clearly reflects familiarity with multiple language traditions and an ability to draw conclusions and applications from a wide variety of linguistic forms.

7. Mark only did this once (Mark 15:28), and Luke did it twice (Luke 4:21; 24:44). John included seven such statements, all situated within the last twenty-four hours of Jesus’s mortal life (John 12:38; 13:18; 15:25; 17:12; 19:24, 28, 36), with Jesus himself making the first four connections. See F. P. Viljoen, “Fulfilment in Matthew,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 28, no. 1 (2007): 301–24.
8. No other New Testament author used the title Emmanuel. For a useful study of how Matthew’s Gospel interprets Hebrew Bible prophecy, see David L. Turner, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Books, 2008), 68–73. For this specific prophecy, see Jason R. Combs, “From King Ahaz’s Sign to Christ Jesus: The ‘Fulfillment’ of Isaiah 7:14,” in *Prophets and Prophecies of the Old Testament*, ed. Aaron P. Schade, Brian M. Hauglid, and Kerry Muhlestein (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2017), 95–122.
9. See LDS Bible Dictionary, “Gospels,” 653.
10. Holzapfel, Huntsman, and Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament*, 67–69.

11. There is some debate that adoptionist ideals did not emerge until late in the second century. For more evidence on this, see Michael F. Bird, *Jesus the Eternal Son: Answering Adoptionist Christology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017).
12. For example, there are many similarities between the baby Jesus and a young Moses that will be discussed later. Matthew's account shows the new star prophecy in Numbers 24:15–19 being fulfilled. The visit of the magi fulfills elements of prophecy found in Psalm 72:10–11, 15; Isaiah 60:3–6; and Micah 5:2. Joseph saving the young child from death by fleeing to Egypt is one way to apply Exodus 4:19 to Jesus's story.
13. Raymond E. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 53.
14. John's Gospel also uses a genesis prologue but does so to identify Jesus as an incarnate God.
15. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 67.
16. John the Baptist noted that some of the Pharisees were probably relying too much on their pedigree relation to Abraham for salvation when he said, "Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham" (Matthew 3:9).
17. Even though symbolic connections between the Father and Son in the New Testament and Abraham and Isaac in the Old Testament are not unique to Matthew's Gospel, his audience would have been the most likely to recognize such associations. Both sons were born through miraculous and divine intervention; neither birth should have been possible. Both pregnancies were heralded by heavenly messengers. Both sons were beloved by their fathers. The ultimate promises of future increase in posterity, possessions, and power could only be realized for each of the fathers through their sons' willingness to fulfill their purposes and foreordained roles. Both sons would carry the wood for their offering and be offered on or near Mount Moriah. Both sons questioned their fathers regarding the requirements for the sacrifice at critical points in both stories. Even if Matthew's original audience missed these symbolic connections between Jesus and Abraham, Jacob 4:4–5 makes a direct tie between them.

18. Eric D. Huntsman, *Good Tidings of Great Joy* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 22.
19. Huntsman, *Good Tidings of Great Joy*, 20.
20. For a discussion on the differences between the Matthean and Lucan genealogies, see Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 84–94.
21. John Nolland said, “There has been an extended but inconclusive debate about the precise reason for the inclusion of these women. Is there a single perspective from which each is included, and, if so, is Mary to be included under the same perspective?” Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 73.
22. Another possibility is connected with the fact that all five women mentioned had unique or unusual relationships with their partners. For expansion of these and other possibilities, see Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 73–74.
23. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher*, 53, notes that this interpretation of saving from sin would make sense to Joseph as well as Matthew’s readers only if they understood the underlying meaning of the Hebrew name. Furthermore, *Yehôshua* is translated as “Joshua” in English. It was the Old Testament Joshua who took Moses’s place and led the tribes of Israel into the promised land. A first-century Jewish-Christian audience would have likely recognized the angel’s christological connections between *Yehôshua*, the adopted son of Joseph, and Joshua as Moses’s successor. An understanding of Jewish scripture would also have allowed Matthew’s audience to make connections between Jesus’s saving work and that of YHWH in the Old Testament.
24. By contrast, the name “Jesus” appears 983 times, and the title “Christ” appears 555 times. King Saul’s name appears 394 times, and Solomon is mentioned only 281 times. Moses’s name appears 848 times, and Abraham/Abram is listed 285 times.
25. See the survey of Old Testament and intertestamental messianic scholarship by Stanley E. Porter, *The Messiah in the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 4–6.
26. See “Son of David” in the appendix.
27. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 132, 139; Huntsman, *Good Tidings of Great Joy*, 32–33.

28. *Dalet* is the fourth letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and *vav* is the sixth letter; $4 + 6 + 4 = 14$.
29. For other possible explanations for the 3 x 14 pattern, see Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 74–80.
30. Jesus validated this direct tie to Moses when he told the Nephites and Lamanites, “Behold, I am he of whom Moses spake, saying: A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you” (3 Nephi 20:23).
31. For more details concerning the Book of Mormon statements connecting Jesus with Moses, see S. Kent Brown, “Moses and Jesus: The Old Adorns the New,” in *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla: Literary and Historical Studies of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1998), 157–68, <https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/jerusalem-zarahemla-literary-and-historical-studies-book-mormon/moses-and-jesus-old-adorns>.
32. For discussions of how Hebrew Bible prophecies were used by New Testament authors (and how we as modern readers often continue to interpret them), see Nicholas J. Frederick, “The Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament Gospels,” in *Prophets and Prophecies of the Old Testament*, 123–60.
33. See France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher*, 143, and Holzapfel, Huntsman, and Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament*, 63–65.
34. This declaration of Jesus as Son of God is not unique to Matthew (see also Mark 15:39). Luke 23:47 records it differently: “Certainly this was a righteous man.”
35. For a sample list of potential sources the Sanhedrin might have used to condemn Jesus on legal grounds, see Leviticus 24:15–16; Deuteronomy 13:1–5; 17:2–7; 18:20–22.
36. Mark’s and Luke’s accounts reflect the wording from Psalms 2:7.
37. Russell Holt, *Special Witnesses of Christ* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2000), DVD.
38. See “Son of Man” in the appendix.
39. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (1915; repr. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 143–44, 151.

40. See, for example, the sometimes differing discussions of Larry Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earlier Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 290–306; Simon J. Gathercole, *The Preexistent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 253–71; and Adela Yarbro Collins and John J. Collins, *King and Messiah as Son of God: Divine, Human, and Angelic Messianic Figures in Biblical and Related Literatures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 75–100.
41. See Collins and Collins, *King and Messiah as Son of God*, 78–97.
42. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher*, 1080–81.
43. T. J. Geddert, *Watchwords: Mark 13 in Markan Eschatology*, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement* 26 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 140–45.
44. Luke and John both mentioned this man's name once. Mark mentioned him three times. In comparison, Matthew prolonged this story and specifically referred to Barabbas five times, perhaps emphasizing Pilate's hesitancy to kill an innocent man.
45. Eric D. Huntsman, *God So Loved the World* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 118–19.