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OBSERVATION OF CELESTIAL PHENOMENA
IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

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2016

Signed Declaration

I hereby affirm that I have composed this thesis and that the work is my own. The work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Hongsuk Um

Date

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Abstract

A close reading of the gospel of Matthew highlights the striking reports of the observation of distinct celestial phenomena in the narrative (e.g. 2.1-12; 3.16-17; 17.5; 24.29-31). However, the motif of celestial phenomena in Matthew lacks a full or even comprehensive investigation. These have been addressed only in part both in journal articles and in individual chapters of various books. Looking at these celestial phenomena as interrelated parts of the evangelist's wide theological perspective in the gospel, this study explores Matthew's description of these occurrences in relation to the contemporary perspective on celestial phenomena and astrological application. It seeks to assess what meaning and significance the Matthean representation of celestial phenomena was designed to have in the process of the gospel narrative and for the readership. In so doing, this study discusses the conception of heaven and the attitude towards celestial phenomena in the Graeco-Roman world in the Second Temple period, the *Sitz im Leben* of the Matthean community, and the significance of the heaven motif in the gospel narrative, as preliminaries to the investigation of Matthew's portrayal of celestial phenomena. This study will show that the motif of celestial phenomena in Matthew carefully crafted and thoughtfully arranged plays a significant role in authenticating the identity of Jesus.

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Chapter 1
Introduction

1. Thesis

Heaven, in classical antiquity, signified the firmament, the arch of heaven over the earth, and all that was above the earth. This upper world was also believed to be a dwelling place of god(s).¹ From the definitions of the word “celestial”, that is “1. of or pertaining to the sky or material heavens; 2. of or pertaining to heaven, as the abode of God (or of the heathen gods), of angels, and of glorified spirits; 3. of a divine or heavenly nature”,² and of the word “phenomenon”, that is “something (such as an interesting fact or event) that can be observed and studied and that typically is unusual or difficult to understand or explain fully”,³ any observable events in heaven would have been classified as “celestial phenomena”. Since heaven as the dwelling place of god(s) is a more spiritual, non-physical, and invisible domain, the events to be classified as “celestial phenomena” should be restricted to the observable occurrences in the visible heaven, such as, astronomical, meteorological, or supernatural.⁴ These celestial phenomena have captivated mankind as *fascinosum* and *tremendum* since time immemorial. A close reading of the gospel of Matthew highlights the striking usages of the observation of distinct celestial phenomena in the narrative.

1. A star in heaven in the so-called Jesus’ infancy narrative (2.1-12)
2. The opening of heaven, the descent of the Spirit of God as a dove upon Jesus, and a voice from heaven after his baptism (3.16-17)
3. A sign from heaven requested to Jesus by the Pharisees and Sadducees (16.1)
4. A voice out of the cloud in Jesus’ transfiguration (17.5)
5. Jesus’ eschatological sayings with reference to the sun, the moon, and the stars (24.29-31)
6. The darkness over the whole land at the time of Jesus’ death (27.45)
7. An angel descending from heaven at Jesus’ resurrection (28.2)

¹ Helmut Traub, "Ouranos," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, (ed. Gerhard Kittel,

² *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. “Celestial,” accessed 14 June 2014, <http://www.oed.com/>.

³ *Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online*, s.v. “Phenomenon,” accessed 14 June 2014, <http://merriam-webster.com/>.

⁴ As will be discussed later in Part I, in the classical antiquity the two spheres of heaven were viewed as a single immense entity denoting two facets of a compound whole. Accordingly, although heaven as the dwelling place of god(s) was invisible, any occurrences in the visible heaven were understood as taking place in association with the invisible dwelling place of god(s) reflecting the divine government of the earthly world from heaven.

This study investigates the Matthean portrayal of these celestial phenomena, which has a close connection with the presentation of Jesus in the gospel narrative. It explores Matthew's description of these occurrences in relation to the contemporary perspective on celestial phenomena and astrological application,⁵ and seeks to assess what meaning and significance the Matthean representation of celestial phenomena is designed to have in the process of the gospel narrative and for the readership.

For this aim, the exploration of the celestial phenomena in Matthew in this study is confined to the spatial events that are reported to have actually happened and observed in the narrative. Hence, albeit 5.45, 16.2-3, and 7.25-27 make references to celestial occurrences, they are excluded from the examination, since the first two do not belong to the category of observation but to general descriptions of sunrise and rain and of weather forecast, and the last to a parable. For the supernatural phenomena in 3.16-17 and 17.5, they are portrayed as actual events at least to Jesus or possibly to John the Baptist and the crowd, and to Jesus' disciples respectively. Although a sign from heaven in 16.1 is not an actual event but a request that is declined, this heavenly sign would have been a distinctly observable phenomenon in its nature, had Jesus have performed the request. It needs an exploration. For the cosmological events of 24.29-31, while these phenomena have not yet taken place in the gospel narrative, the fact that it is Jesus who proclaims this prophecy gives the readership the conviction of such eschatological events, which they do not see yet. Along with the rest of the pericopae in the list, this passage requires a thorough investigation.

It is true that the synoptic evangelists also employed this celestial motif in their gospels. Most of these features, apart from the case of the appearance of a star (2.1-12) and the descending of an angel (28.2), are present in other synoptic gospels as well. e.g. the celestial events both after Jesus' baptism (3.16-17//Mk 1.10-11; Lk 3.21-22) and in his transfiguration (17.5//Mk 9.7; Lk 9.34-36), the request of a sign from heaven by the Jewish authorities (16.1//Mk 8.11), Jesus' use of the interpretation of the appearance of the heavens (16.2-3//Lk 12.54-56), the eschatological events with the coming of the Son of Man (24.29-30//Mk 13.24-26; Lk 21.25-26) and the darkness that accompanied Jesus' death (27.45//Mk 15.33;

⁵ Although "astronomy" (a natural science that deals with the study of celestial objects, such as stars, planets, comets, nebulae, star clusters and galaxies, and phenomena that originate outside the Earth's atmosphere) and "astrology" or "celestial divination" (a system of divination founded on the notion that the relative positions of celestial bodies are signs of or causes of human affairs and natural events) belong to different categories in the modern era, in earlier days no strict distinction was made between them. They were used interchangeably depending on emphasis (cf. Steve Fuller, *Thomas Kuhn: A Philosophical History for our Times*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 80, n. 107). So are they in this study, unless otherwise stated. Likewise, such attributive adjectival terms as "celestial", "heavenly", "astronomical", "astral", "astrological", and "meteorological" are used interchangeably as well, unless otherwise stated.

Lk 23.44-45). However, this is due to the evangelists' sharing the same body of traditions.⁶ It is nonetheless the case that these phenomena have a prominence in Matthew that is not evident in the other canonical gospels. The decision to limit the field of study to the first gospel was made for three reasons. First, the distinctive usage of the heaven language throughout the gospel vividly distinguishes Matthew from the other gospels. It presents the evangelist's⁷ particular interest in the upward heavenly realm and its connection to God. His use of the forms of οὐρανός occurs 82 times in his gospel, which makes up over 30% (82 of 273) of the total uses of οὐρανός in the New Testament⁸ and exceeds the combined usage of the three other evangelists.⁹ The unique Matthean phrase of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν appears 32 times, and is never found elsewhere in the OT, the NT, or any earlier literature of the Second Temple period. While 12 times parallel with of ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ in Mark and Luke (4.17; 5.3; 8.11; 10.7; 11.11, 12; 13.11, 31, 33; 19.14, 23; 22.2), 20 times appear without any parallel with it (3.2; 5.10, 19a, 19b, 20; 7.21b; 13.24, 44, 45, 47, 52; 16.19a; 18.1, 3, 4, 23; 19.12, 20.1; 23.13; 25.1). The evangelist's expression of God as of ὁ πατήρ ὑμῶν τὸν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς (13 times, 5.16, 45; 6.1, 9; 7.11, 21c; 10.32, 33; 12.50; 16.17; 18.10c, 14, 19) or ὁ πατήρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος (7 times, 5.48; 6.14, 26, 32; 15.13; 18.35; 23.9) is used far more frequently than in any other gospels (only twice in Mk 11.25, 26 *vl.* and once in Lk 11.2 *vl.*).¹⁰ Second, the placement of the unique Matthean story of the so-called star of Bethlehem (2.1-12) within Jesus' infancy narrative signifies the importance of

⁶ For this study, the generally accepted two-source theory (Mark and Q) is followed for the composition of Matthew. For the detailed discussions on the synoptic problem, see William Reuben Farmer, *The Synoptic Problem: A Critical Analysis*, (2nd ed.; Macon, GA.: Mercer University Press, 1976); David L. Dungan, *A History of the Synoptic Problem: The Canon, the Text, the Composition, and the Interpretation of the Gospels*, (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1999); C. M. Tuckett, *The Revival of the Griesbach Hypothesis: An Analysis and Appraisal*, (SNTSMS 44; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Austin M. Farrer, "On Dispensing with Q," in *Studies in the Gospels: Essays in Memory of R.H. Lightfoot*, (ed. R. H. Lightfoot and D. E. Nineham; Oxford: Blackwell, 1955); M. D. Goulder, *Luke: A New Paradigm*, (JSNTSS 20; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989); Mark S. Goodacre, *The Synoptic Problem: A Way through the Maze*, (BS 80; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001); Mark S. Goodacre, *The Case against Q: Studies in Markan Priority and the Synoptic Problem*, (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2002); Martin Hengel, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Collection and Origin of the Canonical Gospels*, (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2000).

In this study, "Q" refers to material considered to be in a written source used by Matthew and Luke, as delineated in James McConkey Robinson, Paul Hoffmann, and John S. Kloppenborg, *The Critical Edition of Q: Synopsis including the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Mark and Thomas with English, German, and French Translations of Q and Thomas*, (Minneapolis, MN.: Fortress, 2000).

⁷ In this study, the author of the first gospel will be referred to as "Matthew" or "the evangelist".

⁸ In this study, the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Masoretic text, and the Septuagint will be called the OT, the NT, the MT, and the LXX respectively.

⁹ Comparing its occurrence in other Gospels (18 times in Mark, 35 times in Luke, and 18 times in John), we can imagine how important this heavenly theme was to Matthew.

¹⁰ In Luke 11.13 appears ὁ πατήρ [ὁ] ἕξ οὐρανοῦ instead of ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.

the motif of celestial phenomena to the evangelist and to his readership. Although constituting total 2 out of 28 chapters, the weight of infancy narrative is far heavier than its length. Brown even claims that this infancy narrative stands as the entire “gospel in miniature”.¹¹ In this infancy narrative, Jesus’ divine identity as the Christ is established for the first time. It is through the celestial phenomenon and its interpretation that this identification is confirmed. This suggests how prime this celestial motif was to Matthew in his gospel composition.¹² In this way, from the beginning of the gospel, the evangelist draws his readers’ special attention to the celestial motif. As will be argued in this study, this motif plays a significant role in authenticating Jesus’ identity in the process of the gospel narrative. Finally, the detailed and carefully arranged descriptions of the celestial phenomena in the gospel further reveal Matthew’s special concern for this motif: e.g. the adaptation of the Markan account of Jesus’ baptism (the change of the phrase εἶδεν σχιζομένους τοὺς οὐρανοὺς (Mk 1.10) to ἰδοὺ ἠνεώχθησαν οἱ οὐρανοί (3.16) and σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα (Mk 1.11) to οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα (3.17)), the combination of the Jewish leaders’ request for a sign from heaven (16.1) with the interpretation of the meteorological signs (16.2-3),¹³ and the Matthean observation of an angel of the Lord καταβάς ἐξ οὐρανοῦ at Jesus’ resurrection (28.2). These features mark the portrayal of these celestial phenomena in Matthew as distinct from the other gospels’, and require more serious exploration.

This study looks at these celestial phenomena as interrelated parts of Matthew’s wide theological perspective in the gospel. It is not concerned with the astronomical or astrological theories connected with these celestial pericopae, nor with calculating the dating of Jesus’ birth or death, nor with engaging in historical confirmation or otherwise of these stories, although these aspects will be mentioned during the discussion where relevant. Instead, it seeks the significance of celestial phenomena in their narrative contexts and their intended functions in the gospel narrative and towards the readership. Accordingly, its interest is more in the interpretation attributed to these described events.

¹¹ Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of The Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke*, (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1979), 8, 183, 232. For a detailed discussion of the significance of the Matthean infancy narrative, see Brown, *Birth of The Messiah*, 25-232.

¹² Although the appearance of πλῆθος στρατιᾶς οὐρανόυ is mentioned in Luke 2.13, it is deficient to argue from it that Luke uses the motif of celestial phenomena as centrally as Matthew does. Nolland even states, “the doxology is not from a scene in heaven.” (John Nolland, *Luke*, (WBC 35A-C; Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1989-93), 1.108).

¹³ Matthew changes the phrase σημεῖον ἀπὸ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ in Mark 8.11 to σημεῖον ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ (16.1). This phrase is used for the voice from heaven φωνὴ ἐκ τῶν οὐραμῶν in 3.17 (this time heaven is in plural). Albeit not with the word “heaven”, ἐκ is also used for the voice from the cloud φωνὴ ἐκ τῆς νεφέλης in 17.5 to signify the phenomenon from heaven.

This study makes a contribution to Matthean scholarship through the investigation of the celestial phenomena presented in the gospel of Matthew, an aspect of the gospel, which has not previously been considered in a systematic or unified manner. It will contribute to the understanding of the Matthean perspective on celestial phenomena as well as the contemporary astrology, and will shed important light on the Matthean perception of Jesus' identity.

2. Survey of Previous Approaches

There have been a number of studies in relation to the motif of celestial phenomena in the gospel of Matthew. Yet, these have been focused on either individual pericope or non-astral facets of the theme, and addressed only in journal articles or as a part of larger research projects. The celestial phenomena in the first gospel lack a full and comprehensive investigation.

2.1. *Matthew 2.1-12*

The Star of Bethlehem pericope has been of a constant interest to the Matthean scholarship. Its explorations in the patristic period and the reformation era reflected anti-astrological perspective. Known as the first scholar to have written a full-scale commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, part of which has been preserved, Origen approached the pericope from the point of view of contemporary astronomy and gave the pericope an allegorical interpretation. While his contemporary Christians regarded philosophy, including astrology, as a source of error and heresy and were reluctant to engage with the contemporary cosmological application,¹⁴ "it is with Origen above all other Christian writers of the patristic

¹⁴ Although the school of Alexandria, e.g. Clement of Alexandria, was open to philosophy, it was still more common for the early church to dissent from pagan philosophy. The NT disapproves philosophy (Col 2.8; cf. *Did* 3.4). The Marcionite and Gnostic errors were condemned due to the teachings of pagan philosophy: see Hippolytus, *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium*, (trans. Miroslav Marcovich; PTS Bd 25; Berlin: W. De Gruyter, 1986), 7.29 and passim; Tertullian, *Traité de la prescription contre les hérétiques*, (trans. François Refoulé and Pierre de Labriolle; S.C. no 46; Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1957), 7. Referring to the relationship of astrologers, magi and philosophers as heretical sects in *The Prescription of Heretics* (43.1), Tertullian claimed in his *On Idolatry* (9.18):

You know nothing, astrologer, if you know not that you should be a Christian. If you did know it, you ought to have known this also, that you should have nothing more to do with that profession of yours ... He cannot hope for the kingdom of the heavens, whose finger or wand abuses the heaven (Tertullian, "On Idolatry," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of*

period that the cosmos comes alive in the figurative and general sense that the physical cosmos becomes an important area of speculation within Christian theology,” as Scott states.¹⁵ According to Origen, the regular movements of the heavenly bodies demonstrated the existence of God and divine providence.¹⁶ Their movement “with such majestic order and plan that never have we seen their course deflected in the slightest degree” was a sign of the presence of rationality.¹⁷ This indicated that the heavenly beings were alive and possessed rational souls. Thus, it was made possible for them to receive commands from God, which were made only to living and rational beings.¹⁸ He believed that heaven and earth were part of a single unity so that the events on earth had customary matches in heaven and so did the events in heaven on earth. For Origen, there was also a certain relationship between events in heaven and the position of the stars. The stars were acting as signs of future affairs on earth as in Genesis 1.14 and Jeremiah 10.2.¹⁹ These ideas of heavenly bodies and their relationship with God and mankind are applied to Origen’s commentary on 2.1-12. For him, the Nativity star is not an ordinary fixed star “but is to be classified with the comets which occasionally occur, or meteors, or bearded or jar-shaped stars, or any other such name by which the Greeks like to describe the different forms.”²⁰ This identification of the star makes a perfect sense to Origen so that it could leave the heavens and come down to earth to guide the magi to Jesus. As a living rational soul, the star is working as a sign for the birth of Jesus and signifies his true identity as divine.

Albeit active in adopting the astrological concept of the celestial phenomena as divine signs, however, Origen rejects the pagan astrological practice within the church. For him, the star signs are a kind of moving writing traced by God’s hand in the sky, for the divine powers, such as angels or good daemons, to read. Thus, human beings cannot have accurate knowledge of these signs.²¹ Although admitting the magi’s futuristic knowledge through the

the Fathers down to A.D. 325, (ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson; Albany: AGES Software, 1997), 3.121).

All the quotations of the church fathers in this study are cited from *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, unless otherwise stated.

¹⁵ Alan Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars: A History of an Idea*, (O ECS; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 120-21.

¹⁶ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, (trans. Henry Chadwick; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 8.52; Origen, *Origen on First Principles: Being Koetschau's Text of the De Principiis*, (trans. G. W. Butterworth and Paul Koetschau; Gloucester, MA.: Peter Smith, 1973), 4.1.7.

¹⁷ Origen, *Origen on First Principles*, 1.7.3.

¹⁸ Origen, *Origen on First Principles*, 1.7.3; cf. Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 8.67.

¹⁹ Origen, *The Philocalia of Origen: A Compilation of selected Passages from Origen's Works made by St. Gregory of Nazianzus and St. Basil of Caesarea*, (trans. George Lewis; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1911), 23.15, 19, 20.

²⁰ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1.58.

²¹ Origen, *The Philocalia of Origen*, 23.1-21.

observation of star movements, he asserts that they lost their magical powers after finding the Christ.²² Similar interpretations were suggested by other Church Fathers, such as Ignatius of Antioch and Tertullian of Carthage.²³ They asserted that after having found Christ or been converted they lost or abandoned their magical powers. Tertullian suggested that the command to the Magi to go back by another way (2.12) was a coded order that they give up their occupation. Likewise, Gregory of Nazianzus composed poems saying “how even the Magi were converted, abandoned their craft, and adored Christ.”²⁴ Theophylact even claimed that the star of Bethlehem should not be a subject for astrological investigation, because “it was not a star such as we see, but a divine and angelic power that appeared in the form of a star.”²⁵

The same anti-astrological attitude as the early church was carried on in the reformation era.²⁶ Calvin, among the reformers, is renowned for his contributions to the acknowledgement and establishment of the scientific investigation of nature.²⁷ Through adoption of an approach based on the idea of accommodation,²⁸ Calvin developed a new way of reading the Scripture in relation to the interaction of biblical interpretation and the natural sciences. This hermeneutical approach has had a deep impact on subsequent post-

²² Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 1.60.

²³ Ignatius of Antioch, "Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, (ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson; Albany: AGES Software, 1997), 19; Tertullian, "On Idolatry," 9.4ff.

²⁴ Gregory of Nazianzus, "De Sangti Gregorii Poematibus," in *Patrologiae Graecae*, (ed. J. P. Migne and Religion and Technology Center Inc.; Helotes, TX.: Religion and Technology Center, 2003), 37.424A-29A; M. L. W. Laistner, "The Western Church and Astrology During the Early Middle Ages," *HTR* 34, no. 4 (1941): 258.

²⁵ Theophylact, "Enarratio in Evangelium Matthaei," in *Patrologiae Graecae*, (ed. J. P. Migne and Religion and Technology Center Inc.; Helotes, TX.: Religion and Technology Center, 2003), 123.161C; Basil of Caesarea, "Homilia in Sanctim Christi Generationem," in *Patrologiae Graecae*, (ed. J. P. Migne and Religion and Technology Center Inc.; Helotes, TX.: Religion and Technology Center, 2003), 31.1469A-75A; Chrysostom, "Commentarius in Sanctum Matthaeum," in *Patrologiae Graecae*, (ed. J. P. Migne and Religion and Technology Center Inc.; Helotes, TX.: Religion and Technology Center, 2003), 57.63.

²⁶ Cf. some of the Lutherans, such as Melancthon, Rhaeticus, Chemnitz, Brahe, and Kepler, practised astrology. Like the early church, they also rejected its fatalist precepts (John Warwick Montgomery, *Cross and Crucible: Johann Valentin Andreae (1586-1654), Phoenix of the Theologians*, (IAHI 55; Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1973); Sachiko Kusakawa, *The Transformation of Natural Philosophy: The Case of Philip Melancthon*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Charlotte Methuen, "The Role of the Heavens in the Thought of Philip Melancthon," *JHI* 57 (1996): 385-403).

²⁷ Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, (2nd ed.; Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 230-35.

²⁸ For Calvin, as McGrath states, natural science was “able to probe more deeply than theology into the natural world, and thus uncover further evidence of the orderliness of the creation and the wisdom of its creator” (Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 209). According to him, the Bible should not be read literally at its face value as if it is a textbook for astronomy, geography or biology. Instead, it should be taken as presenting revelation accommodated “in culturally and anthropologically conditioned manners and forms” (McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 208).

enlightenment and modern commentators. Calvin's commentary on the star of Bethlehem displays his special interest and knowledge with regard to astronomy. He states,

[The star of Bethlehem] was not agreeable to the order of nature, that it should disappear for a certain period, and afterwards should suddenly become bright; nor that it should pursue a straight course towards Bethlehem, and at length remain stationary above the house where Christ was. Not one of these things belongs to natural stars. It is more probable that it resembled a comet [or a meteor], and was seen, not in the heaven, but in the air. Yet there is no impropriety in Matthew, who uses popular language, calling it incorrectly a *star*.²⁹

Unlike Origen, Calvin saw celestial beings as no more than lifeless substance in a remote distance. They were occasionally involved in the earthly events according to God's special arrangement. Likewise, the star of Bethlehem for him was appointed by God "to draw the magi into Judea that they might be witnesses and heralds of the new King."³⁰ Both the sign of the star from heaven and the following commendation of the magi were God's provision to announce that Jesus is Christ the King. The Nativity star account is to help the readers affirm Jesus' divine majesty.³¹ Concerning the magi's discovery of the meaning of the star sign, Calvin argues that the discovery of the implication of the star sign had no connection at all with astrology. For him, the divine meaning hidden in celestial phenomena is restricted within the limits of nature. Hence, the magi's recognition of the significance of this event was not from their astrological knowledge but a divine bestowal through "a new and extraordinary revelation" of the Spirit.³²

Both approaches of Origen's contemporary astronomy and Calvin's accommodation serve well to acknowledge the significance of the Star of Bethlehem as a divine sign from God. However, their and the church fathers' anti-astrological interpretations of the magi story in the episode display deficiency. They do not sufficiently account for why Matthew introduces and approves the magi's power in the first place if he had to decline their power as magical. Besides, they lack the textual evidence to verify their claims. Matthew does not supply any clue to suppose so. Their strong standpoint against the pagan fatalistic astrology leaves Matthew's intention for the magi's involvement in the Gospel and for his readers barely touched.

Since the time of Kepler in the 17th century, the current of approach has turned to the astronomical search for atypical celestial events that might be regarded as a sign for the birth

²⁹ Jean Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

³⁰ Calvin, *Harmony of the Gospels*.

³¹ Calvin, *Harmony of the Gospels*.

³² Calvin, *Harmony of the Gospels*.

of Jesus, in the decade before his birth, that is to say between 14 and 4 BC. Three major suggestions have been proposed: a comet; a supernova, that is, a new star; and a planetary conjunction.³³ Other scholars, such as Allison, even suggested an angel.³⁴ Adopting a tradition-historical approach in his book *The Birth of the Messiah*, Brown has focused on the investigation of the origin and function of the astronomical event. Although he touches its astrological implication briefly, his work is spent mostly in identifying its allusion to the OT.³⁵ According to him, Jesus' birth at Bethlehem represents his Davidic sonship, and the homage of Gentiles (the magi) signifies his Abrahamitic sonship (cf. 8.11). He finds its compositional background from the Balaam narrative in Numbers 22-24. Various features are submitted for their parallelism (e.g. a divine revelation to Balaam/the magi, the coming of Balaam/the magi from the East, an attempt of wicked kings to destroy Moses/Jesus, the assistance of the king's advisors and the magi/Balaam, and their departure). It is argued that the motif of astral event represents the fulfilment of the prophecy of Balaam, which predicts the advent of the Davidic messiah. Notwithstanding these fine works, however, their discussions of the celestial motif are confined to this narrative of Jesus' birth. The motif of Matthean conception of celestial phenomena as a whole is not sufficiently dealt with.

2.2. *Matthew 24.29*

There have been investigations of the cosmic events with the coming of the Son of Man in 24.29. They are primarily concerned, however, with the Matthean eschatology. Their focus has been on the interpretation of the seemingly cosmic catastrophic language.³⁶ Scholars, such as Wright, France, and Gibbs, have claimed that the cosmic events in the pericope refer to the fall of Jerusalem as symbolism for socio-political change. According to Wright, such

³³ These suggestions will be explored in detail in Chapter 6.

³⁴ Dale C. Allison, "The Magi's Angel (Matt. 2:2, 9-10)," in *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 17-41.

³⁵ Brown, *Birth of The Messiah*, 25-232.

³⁶ For claims for the fall of Jerusalem, see N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, (London: SPCK, 1996), 341-46; Bruce J. Malina, "Jesus as Astral Prophet," *BTB* 27, no. 3 (1997): 83-98; Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia: Jesus' Eschatological Discourse in Matthew's Gospel*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 187-97; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 920-29; cf. R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament: His Application of Old Testament Passages to Himself and His Mission*, (1st ed.; London: Tyndale Press, 1971), 227-39; for arguments for a cosmic catastrophe, see Edward Adams, *The Stars Will Fall From Heaven: Cosmic Catastrophe in the New Testament and Its World*, (LNTS 347; London: T & T Clark, 2007), 133-81; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988-97), 1.357-70; John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005), 983; David C. Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew*, (SNTSMS 88; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

cosmic language is derived from the OT imagery for the fall of a political entity (e.g. Isa 13 and 34 for Babylon and Edom). “Language about sun, moon and stars being darkened or shaken has as its primary reference a set of cataclysmic events *within* the space-time universe, not an event which will bring that universe to its utter end,” he states.³⁷ This metaphorical use of universal catastrophic language became a linguistic convention in Jewish apocalyptic literature. This tradition was employed in Matthew. For Wright, such an idea that the created world would come to an end in a literally cosmological sense was “quite unJewish”.³⁸ He affirms, “within the mainline Jewish writings of this period, covering a wide range of styles, genres, political persuasions and theological perspectives, there is virtually no evidence that Jews were expecting the end of the space-time universe.”³⁹ Hence, the events expected in the discourse should be regarded within “the this-worldly ambit” as the fall of Jerusalem.⁴⁰

After an examination of the relevant Jewish and Graeco-Roman eschatological context, ranging from the OT prophetic, discourse, via Jewish apocalyptic and related literature, to Stoic cosmological teaching, Adams has argued against Wright’s claim that the cosmic language in the pericope should be read as envisioning eschatological cosmic destruction as a necessary portent to re-creation.⁴¹ According to him, the alteration and omission of the Isaianic texts and the resemblance of the vocabularies to the LXX of Joel 2.10 and 4.15-16 within the passage propose that the passage had better be read as “a freely formulated ... conflation of related OT texts”⁴² rather than as a mere quotation of the LXX text. The facts that the usage of the cosmic catastrophe language in later OT prophetic messages conveys a more solely eschatological allusion⁴³ and that none of the examinations of the relevant post-biblical texts displays the reference to the destruction of city or nation⁴⁴ attest that the cosmic catastrophe language in 24.29 should be viewed as a eschatological cosmic catastrophe in a real sense rather than metaphorically. From the Jewish comparative data, which are divided

³⁷ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 209.

³⁸ N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, (Second impr., with corrections. ed.; London: SPCK, 1993), 285.

³⁹ Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, 333.

⁴⁰ Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, 285.

⁴¹ Although the most space is allocated to the interpretation of the Markan passage in the investigation, it is suggested that its interpretation holds for the parallel in 24.29-31.

⁴² Adams, *The Stars Will Fall From Heaven*, 155; cited from J. Verheyden, "Describing the Parousia: The Cosmic Phenomena in Mk 13,24-25," in *The Scriptures in the Gospels*, (ed. C. M. Tuckett; BETL 131; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1997), 540.

⁴³ John J. Collins, "From Prophecy to Apocalypticism: The Expectation of the End," in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, (ed. John J. Collins, Bernard McGinn, and Stephen J. Stein; New York: Continuum, 2000), 129-61; Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity*, (London: SPCK, 1982).

⁴⁴ Adams, *The Stars Will Fall From Heaven*, 52-100.

into two groups: the texts expressing prefatory celestial disturbances (*1 En.* 80.4-8; *LAB* 19.13; *4 Ezra* 5.4b-5; *Sib. Or.* 3.796-804; 5.346-49) and the texts envisaging a cosmic catastrophe (*1 En.* 1.3b-9; 102.1-3; *1 QH* 11.19-36; *T. Mos.* 10.3-6; *2 Bar.* 32.1; *Apoc. Zeph.* 12.5-8; *Sib. Or.* 3.675-81), Adams suggests that the celestial phenomena belong to the latter group.

Pointing out the absence of “historical Jesus” studies concerning the sky dimension of life in the second temple period, Malina has approached Jesus’ final discourse by means of the social scientific category of territoriality.⁴⁵ With the construction of a model of celestial territoriality through the adaptation of a model of territoriality to the pre-industrial world of the ancient Mediterranean, he argues that sky and land were believed to be organically connected, comprising a single environmental and social unit for the contemporaries of Jesus. Skyscape was considered to affect landscape. According to him, “the perception of the various spatial division(s) of the sky, from ancient armillary spheres to sky visions, always has a territorial dimension.”⁴⁶ As pre-industrial peoples perceived territory as “marking off a group of persons who were organically related to the area which they occupied,”⁴⁷ the same concept of social territoriality was equally applied to the celestial territoriality in the first century Mediterranean. Every sky phenomenon was considered to convey significance and effect upon those living below. The main concern of ancient astrology was to distinguish and transmit information about the celestial phenomena. Malina contends that the comparison of Jesus’ final discourse with the first-century Hellenistic astrology clearly verifies the presence of language typical of ancient Mediterranean astrology.⁴⁸ With these assumptions, Malina argues that Jesus in 24.29 speaks as an “astral prophet”⁴⁹ proclaiming the coming destruction of Jerusalem. Malina’s approach through the social scientific category of territoriality brings about useful insights in understanding the Matthean ideas of the relationship between heaven and earth, the celestial phenomena, and the historical Jesus.

⁴⁵ Malina, "Jesus as Astral Prophet," 83-98.

⁴⁶ Malina, "Jesus as Astral Prophet," 89.

⁴⁷ Malina, "Jesus as Astral Prophet," 92; cf. Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, *Portraits of Paul: An Archaeology of Ancient Personality*, (1st ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996); Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, "First Century Personality: Dyadic, Not Individual," in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*, (ed. Jerome H. Neyrey; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 67-96.

⁴⁸ Malina, "Jesus as Astral Prophet," 85-86.

⁴⁹ For Malina, “astral prophet” denotes someone who is “concerned with the interconnection between skyscape and events occurring among their own people” (Malina, "Jesus as Astral Prophet," 95). “Astral prophecy”, which they announce is “the proclamation of political change that results from the interaction of star-related, celestial entities with various human groups and to the proclamation of the outcomes of that interaction” (Malina, "Jesus as Astral Prophet," 84). According to him, prophecies of Ezekiel 1, 10, Zechariah 6.1-8, Daniel 7, 10.4-9, Enoch, and Revelation 1.4-21 fall into this category.

Albeit insightful and helpful, these groups of scholars focus either on the interpretation of the reality of the cosmic catastrophic language in the passage or Jesus' perceived identity. They miss out the overall Matthean attitude towards the astrological application to the celestial phenomena and the significance of the celestial theme in this pericope in relation to the other celestial passages in Matthew.

2.3. *Matthean Motif of Heaven*

The Matthean motif of heaven has also been explored. However, despite the frequent and varied applications of heaven language in the Gospel, it has received relatively little attention from the scholarship. The comparison of the unique Matthean phrase ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν with the phrase "kingdom of God" in Mark and Luke has led the scholars to think of the two as the same referent. It is thought of as Matthew's application of the Jewish literary tradition, that is, the reluctance to mention the divine name. In this regard, the language of heaven in Matthew has been treated as no more than just a reverential circumlocution to avoid saying the name of God.⁵⁰

Yet, there has been a recent counter-suggestion by Pennington.⁵¹ Claiming that this circumlocution hypothesis is unconvincing due to its lack of historical evidence, he argues that Matthew's uses of heaven language represent not just a circumlocution but more a case of metonymy, "where heaven refers indirectly to God, not a direct substitution out of avoidance of the divine name, but for a rhetorical and theological purpose: to contrast heaven (God's realm) with earth (humanity's realm)."⁵² Through the analysis of Matthew's "idiolectic"⁵³ use of heaven language, he contends that the Matthean theme of heaven with

⁵⁰ Gustaf Dalman, *The Words of Jesus considered in the Light of Post-Biblical Jewish writings and the Aramaic Language*, (trans. D. M. Kay; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902); Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, (3rd ed.; München: Beck, 1951-56), 1.172-85 on Matt 4:17; 1.862-65 on Matt 21:25; William F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew*, (AB 26; Garden City: Doubleday, 1971), 49; Thomas W. Manson and H. D. A. Major, *The Sayings of Jesus: As recorded in the Gospels according to St. Matthew and St. Luke*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 152; David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 90; Francis W. Beare, *The Gospel according to Matthew: A Commentary*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), 33; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew*, (WBC 33A-B; Dallas: Word, 1993), 1.1x; France, *Matthew*, 101-4.

⁵¹ Jonathan T. Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*, (NovTSup 126; Leiden: Brill, 2007).

⁵² Pennington, *Heaven and Earth*, 19-37; cf. Efraim Elimelech Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 1.70-71.

⁵³ By "idiolectic", Pennington follows Steiner's description, that is, "each living person draws, deliberately or in immediate habit, on two sources of linguistic supply: the current vulgate corresponding to his level of literacy, and a private thesaurus.... They form what linguists call an 'idiolect'" (George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, (3rd ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 47).

that of earth highlights the currently existing tension or contrast between God's realm and humanity's and emphasizes the forthcoming eschaton when the tension between the two realms will be resolved through Jesus. He maintains that this theme of heaven and earth plays a significant role in interconnecting and undergirding the Matthean Christology, ecclesiology, eschatology, and emphasis on the New Covenant.

Pennington's work on the Matthean theme of heaven reveals the evangelist's spatial, territorial use of the heaven language in his Gospel narrative. It also exhibits Matthew's dualistic, bipartite cosmology that heaven and earth are not two discrete and contradictory forces in the world but organically related domains all under God's sovereignty. Yet, while investigating the theological and pastoral purposes of the heaven motif, his work displays deficiency in exploring its astrological aspect for the evangelist or his readership. In other words, by focusing on the contrast between heaven and earth and its implications, Pennington is inattentive to the issue of how Matthew and his audience understood the way heaven organically relates to earth.

Although all these treatments have brought out various suggestions for the understanding of each pericope and the motif of heaven, nonetheless, these are still insufficient to account for the overall Matthean conception of celestial events. There has been no attempt to analyse these pericopae collectively from the perspective of a unified Matthean outlook on the significance of celestial phenomena. This will be the fundamental and new contribution of this study.

3. Concept of Ancient Astrology

In classical antiquity, astrology was a main means to explore celestial phenomena. It reflected the contemporary attitudes towards heaven and its relation to the earth as well as the heavenly events. The concept of ancient astrology furnishes a cornerstone in understanding the Matthean worldview on heavenly occurrences.

The overall conception of astrology in classical antiquity is based upon the view that history repeats itself; an event is assumed to recur if the matching circumstances are established.⁵⁴ This idea works as a fundamental principle of the modern meteorological prediction. Rain will be expected after the north wind blows, for instance, if rain came every time the north wind blew in the past. For the Chaldeans, who had no clear distinction

⁵⁴ Ivan Starr, *The Rituals of the Diviner*, (BM 12; Malibu Calif.: Undena Publications, 1983), 3-4, 9.

between science and religion and believed in the heavenly government of the earth, such a prediction was not confined to the natural phenomena but involved the human and political events. Hence, if in the past, when the north wind blew, the rain fell, the king had gone to war and was killed, these four events would forever be connected, and if the same meteorological circumstances prevailed again, the life of a king going to war would be considered to be in danger.⁵⁵ In this respect, these celestial phenomena were believed to convey the divine messages for the future events on the earth.⁵⁶ Human beings were supposed to interpret such signs correctly. This thought led the Chaldeans to collect as many data as possible about the world around them.

While astrology enjoyed its popularity and influence in antiquity as a standard model of interpreting past, present, and future events, Jewish and Christian theology is characterized by a harsh refutation of astrology. That Christian contributions to and adoptions of it have been known relatively little has given the impression that astrological practice was only for the pagans and was totally ignored or rejected by the Church. It was even regarded by and large as demonic.⁵⁷ Gundel claims, "right from the beginning Christianity refuted astrology's axioms and radically fought against them."⁵⁸ Likewise, Flusser maintains that "The Jewish people in Palestine and elsewhere had become completely immune to the attractions of the paganism against which the prophets [had spoken]."⁵⁹ This assertion of Jewish and Christian anti-astrological attitude appears to suggest that ancient astrology was in conflict with the sovereignty of God and limited to the pagan polytheistic mind. However, the presence of both positive and negative connotations of astrology in Scripture and the Jewish literature in the Second Temple period raises a question about such an understanding of ancient astrology.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ J. J. Finkelstein, "Mesopotamian Historiography," *PAPS* 107 (1963): 463-64.

⁵⁶ A. Leo Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East*, (TAPS 46; Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1956), 641-42.

⁵⁷ The repudiation of astrology is found in the writings of Church Fathers, such as Tertullian, Origen, Hippolytus and Augustine. It was condemned at the Council of Laodicea (365 CE), the Council of Toledo (400 CE), and the Council of Braga (560-65 CE).

⁵⁸ Wilhelm Gundel and Hans G. Gundel, *Astrologumena: die astrologische Literatur in der Antike und ihre Geschichte*, (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1966), 332; translated by Kocku von Stuckrad, "Jewish and Christian Astrology in Late Antiquity - A New Approach," *Numen* 47 (2000): 2.

⁵⁹ Quoted from James H. Charlesworth, "Jewish Interest in Astrology during the Hellenistic and Roman Period," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt II.20.2*, (ed. Hildegard Temporini, et al.; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1987), 945, n. 65.

⁶⁰ E.g. Gen 1.14-18; Num 24.17; Deut 4.19; 2 Kgs 23.5; 2 Chr 33.5-6; Job 9.9; 38.31, 32; Ps 19.1; Isa 47.12-15; 40.26; Amos 5.8; Gal 4.3, 9; Eph 6.12; Col 2.8, 20; 2 Pet 1.19; 3.10, 12; Jud 13; Rev 6.2-17; 7.1-3; *1 En.* 82; 18.13-16; 21.3-6; 83-90.

It is argued by scholars that the traditional Christian hypothesis on astrology was built upon a rather shallow assumption. According to von Stuckrad, the assumption of Jewish and Christian attitudes towards astrology is derived from the beliefs that:

1. It leads necessarily to polytheism,
2. It sets up a cult of heavenly entities,
3. It is strongly associated with fatalism and deterministic worldview.⁶¹

Astrology in association with astrolatry (worship of stars as gods) and cosmic determinism was commonly practised in the ANE and the Hellenistic world. These aspects of astrology, he comments, would not be acceptable for Jewish and Christian beliefs. Consequently, any astrological overtones in Jewish and Christian literature in late antiquity had to be treated not as part of mainstream Judaism and Christianity but as having emerged from outside. Due to the process of this “centralization”,⁶² he asserts, astrology throughout history has become incompatible with Jewish or Christian beliefs.⁶³ For von Stuckrad, “this assumption is not the result of careful examination of the documentary evidence but of a preconceived and misleading opinion about the basic ideas of astrology.”⁶⁴ Johnson, Payne, and Wilson also affirm, “Remarkably, there is a near total absence of biblical interaction when they [Church Fathers] justify their positions.”⁶⁵ Von Stuckrad maintains that such a great number of

⁶¹ Stuckrad, "Jewish and Christian Astrology," 2-3.

⁶² For the process of centralization, von Stuckrad follows Smith's description, that is,

as in the archaic locative ideology, the centre has been protected, the periphery seen as threatening, and relative difference perceived as absolute 'other.' The centre, the fabled Pauline seizure by the 'Christ-event' or some other construction of an original moment, has been declared, *a priori*, to be unique, to be *sui generis*, and hence, by definition, incomparable. The periphery, whether understood temporally to precede or follow the Pauline moment, or, in spatial terms, to surround it, is to be subjected to procedures of therapeutic comparison. (Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 143).

Cf. Burton L. Mack, *Who Wrote the New Testament?: The Making of the Christian Myth*, (1st ed.; San Francisco: Harper, 1995), 7-11; Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, (30th Anniversary ed.; Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009).

⁶³ Stuckrad, "Jewish and Christian Astrology," 3.

⁶⁴ Stuckrad, "Jewish and Christian Astrology," 1. Cf. Johnson, Payne, and Wilson also affirm, “Remarkably, there is a near total absence of biblical interaction when they [Church Fathers] justify their positions.”

⁶⁵ Philip Johnson, Simeon Payne, and Peter Wilson, "Toward a Contextualized Astrological Apologetic, with a Case Study for Booth Ministry Outreach," 36, no. 2 (2008): 187.

astrological connotations in Jewish and Christian writings in antiquity are still “too strong to be ignored entirely”⁶⁶ as from outside Jewish and Christian orthodoxy.⁶⁷

A similar argument has been brought out by Hegedus.⁶⁸ According to him, early Christian polemic against astrology could be described as such:

1. The argument of practical impossibility,
2. The argument of different destinies,
3. The argument of common destinies,
4. The argument of Νόμιμα Βαρβαρικά,
5. The argument from animals,
6. The moral argument,
7. Astrology as the work of demons,
8. Christian condemnations of astrology in a broader context,
9. Opposition to astrology in relation to early Christian doctrine,
10. Pastoral problems posed by astrology.⁶⁹

These forms of polemic were mainly against fatalism.⁷⁰ He states, “It was natural that fatalism was a primary focus of Christian argument since it was this aspect of astrology which seemed so evidently opposed to early Christian views of divine authority and human free will.”⁷¹ These arguments of early Christians, Hegedus remarks, were by and large a reiteration of Graeco-Roman arguments against astrology attributed to Carneades in the second century BC, who developed numerous points that became authoritative in anti-fatalist argumentation.⁷² Along with Jewish and Christian scriptures, beliefs and practices, these traditional arguments furnished the background out of which the early Christians developed the polemic, which was their most prevalent response to ancient astrology. The Christians’ use of traditional arguments, however, was rarely accompanied by an awareness of earlier philosophical debates concerning fate and free will. Hegedus points out that early Christian authors who attacked astrology neither engaged their opponents directly (except Tertullian) nor appeared to have any profound awareness of ancient astrological literature.⁷³ After a thorough analysis of early Christian polemic literature, Hegedus concludes, “for the most

⁶⁶ Stuckrad, "Jewish and Christian Astrology," 3.

⁶⁷ The Jewish and Christian references to astrology will be explored later in Chapter 3.

⁶⁸ Tim Hegedus, *Early Christianity And Ancient Astrology*, (6; New York: Peter Lang, 2007).

⁶⁹ Hegedus, *Early Christianity And Ancient Astrology*, 29-193.

⁷⁰ Hegedus, *Early Christianity And Ancient Astrology*, 23.

⁷¹ Hegedus, *Early Christianity And Ancient Astrology*, 23; cf. Gundel and Gundel, *Astrologumena*, 332-33.

⁷² Cf. Emmanuel Amand de Mendieta, *Fatalisme et liberté dans l'antiquité grecque: recherches sur la survivance de l'argumentation morale antifataliste de Carnéade chez les philosophes grecs et les théologiens chrétiens des quatre premiers siècles*, (Amsterdam: A. M. Hakkert, 1973), 49-68, 226-27, 340; Franz Boll, Carl Bezold, and Wilhelm Gundel, *Stern Glaube und Sterndeutung: die Geschichte und das Wesen der Astrologie*, (6th ed.; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1974), 24-25.

⁷³ Hegedus, *Early Christianity And Ancient Astrology*, 371.

part the astrology which early Christian writers attacked was a superficial caricature (e.g. unmitigated fatalism) of what could be (e.g. in Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos*) a complex and sophisticated branch of learning."⁷⁴ Presenting a number of archaeological and non-literary sources⁷⁵ as well as positive references to astrology in early Christian literature,⁷⁶ he argues that these demonstrate that it was still used in the beliefs and practices of early Christians. These arguments suggest that Jewish and Christian anti-astrological attitude would be better be seen as against the contemporary philosophical, cultural, and religious backdrop rather than astrology itself so as to dissuade the faithful Christians from pagan astrological pursuits.

Recent scholarship on astrology has suggested that ancient astrology should be regarded as a systematic way of interpreting the reality rather than as idolatrous superstition.⁷⁷ Emerging from a hermetic discourse,⁷⁸ von Stuckrad argues, astrology in antiquity shared the characteristics of the esoteric traditions. According to him, "esotericism" is not a concealed mysterious religion, but, rather it is a specific "'form of thought' as a characteristic way of interpreting the world."⁷⁹ It claims a higher knowledge through mediation and individual experience. This form of thought is said to consist of six characteristics, which are:

1. The idea of correspondences,
2. The concept of living nature,
3. Imagination and mediations,
4. The experience of transmutation,
5. The praxis of concordance,

⁷⁴ Hegedus, *Early Christianity And Ancient Astrology*, 371-72.

⁷⁵ E.g. burial inscriptions (ILCV 1336, 3305-14, 3330), Epitaphs (LICV 4377, 4379) and a painting on the north wall of the Christian baptistery excavated at Dura Europos.

⁷⁶ E.g. Matt 2.1-12, *Book of the Laws of Countries* by Bardaisan of Edessa (154-222/3 CE), Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* and *Recognitions*, Priscillian and the Priscillianists, and a baptismal sermon of Zeno, a bishop of Verona in northern Italy during the 360s. For the detailed discussion on these references, see Hegedus, *Early Christianity And Ancient Astrology*, 201-370.

⁷⁷ Kocku von Stuckrad, *Frömmigkeit und Wissenschaft: Astrologie in Tanach, Qumran und früh-rabbinischer Literatur*, (EH Bd 23/572; Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1996); Kocku von Stuckrad, *Das Ringen um die Astrologie: Jüdische und christliche Beiträge zum antiken Zeitverständnis*, (RVV Bd 49; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000); Stuckrad, "Jewish and Christian Astrology," 1-40; Mladen Popović, *Reading the Human Body: Physiognomics and Astrology in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Hellenistic-early Roman Period Judaism*, (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

⁷⁸ Hermetic texts are the pseudepigraphical literature dating from late antiquity that purports to contain secret wisdom, generally attributed to Hermes Trismegistus ("thrice-great Hermes"), who is a syncretism of the Greek god Hermes and the Egyptian deity Thoth. Hermes is said to have written several major texts, which formed the basis of the art or its evolution from the system of astrology that was inherited from the Babylonians and the Egyptians. Cf. Tamsyn Barton, *Ancient Astrology*, (2nd ed.; London: Routledge, 1995), 25-31.

⁷⁹ Kocku von Stuckrad, "Western Esotericism: Towards an Integrative Model of Interpretation," *Religion* 35 (2005): 81. For von Stuckrad's view on esotericism, see Stuckrad, "Western Esotericism: Towards an Integrative Model of Interpretation," 78-97; Kocku von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge*, (London; Oakville, CT: Equinox Pub., 2005); Cf. Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism*, (SUNY; Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); Wouter J. Hanegraaff et al., *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

6. The notion of transmission.⁸⁰

According to him, in late antiquity the heavenly and earthly events were believed to be connected and to reflect one another. He maintains that the esoteric doctrine of correspondences is in accord with the very idea of astrology, “as above, so below”. From these ideas, he defines astrology as

a concept of interpretation describing the *quality* of a given time, i.e. the essence of simultaneously and synchronically occurring events which are connected to inherent symbols and meaning. The measuring instruments for this purpose are the zodiac and the stars’ movements.⁸¹

It stands as “esoteric thinking’s central discipline”.⁸² Accordingly, astrology as a specific worldview should not be regarded as a superstition or apostasy or as leading to star cult or fatalism. He states, “instead of assuming a causal and mechanistic influence of the stars, astrologers try to establish analogies and symmetric correspondences between the planetary zone and the earth.”⁸³

Popović also maintains that ancient astrology should be regarded as a way of interpretation through observation and reasoning. Highlighting its systematic approach to celestial events, he classifies astrology in antiquity as ancient science. He states,

The methods and reasoning of ancient ... astrological learning do not compare with modern standards of scientific research, nor can it be assumed that, comparable to the modern period, a notion of natural science as a separate domain of intellectual inquiry was perceived. This, however does not invalidate characterizing these arts and their interest in the fabrics of reality as scientific. Science is not detached from social reality, it is a historically defined activity conducted by people in different contexts. What counts as scientific knowledge may differ over time and place depending on context.⁸⁴

According to Popović, astrology in Graeco-Roman world was characterized as τέχνη, conjectural bodies of knowledge requiring much practice and experience. The presence of astrological texts in the Jewish literature in the Second Temple period is said to represent the appropriation of such knowledge from constant practice and learning experience.⁸⁵ From this

⁸⁰ Stuckrad, "Western Esotericism: Towards an Integrative Model of Interpretation," 81-82; Cf. Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism*, 1-19.

⁸¹ Stuckrad, "Jewish and Christian Astrology," 6.

⁸² Stuckrad, "Jewish and Christian Astrology," 5.

⁸³ Stuckrad, "Jewish and Christian Astrology," 5.

⁸⁴ Popović, *Reading the Human Body*, 212.

⁸⁵ Popović, *Reading the Human Body*, 221-32; cf. Mladen Popović, "Astronomy and Astrology," in *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism*, (ed. John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2010), 400-401; Popović, "Horoscopes," 752-53.

feature of ancient natural science, he presents ancient astrology as “a means to get a grip on reality in a systematic way” enabling people “to predict the movements of sun, moon, and planets, and also to predict, from their perceived character in relation to the zodiacal signs, their influences on earthly affairs and the lives of people.”⁸⁶ Extending von Stuckrad’s clarification, he argues that ancient astrology was not only about understanding the quality of time through the analogy between heavenly and earthly matters (“as above, so below”) but also “the whole structure of reality” “such that everything in it was intricately interwoven with everything else.”⁸⁷ Hence, heavenly elements such as planets and zodiacal signs are also connected to types of people. For him, ancient physiognomy represents a distinct effect of the mixture of a planet on the mixture of the human body. There can be scholarly debates regarding the definition of ancient astrology. For our purpose, however, it is sufficient to note that astrology in classical antiquity was regarded as a way of interpreting the reality.

These approaches of von Stuckrad and Popović complement the conception of ancient astrology through the emphases of its different aspects. Von Stuckrad’s emphasis on the esoteric doctrine of correspondences, “as above, so below” signifies the ancient belief of the interconnectedness of the universe, the macrocosm-microcosm concept, which generated a specific worldview on the cosmic dimensions between God and the world. Popović’s emphasis on the systematic process represents the ancient practice of the objective science. Accordingly, astrology in classical antiquity stood as a well-respected discipline to reckon with the meaning of celestial phenomena for the earthly world. These approaches appear most plausible to describe the concept of ancient astrology and to account for the positive references to the astrological practice in the Jewish and Christian literature.

4. Method and Outline of the Present Study

The main tool with which this study will be pursued is the history-of-traditions methodology. The governing assumption of this school of thought is that every idea has its prehistory, and the key to understanding significant ideas is to discern and trace their historical development. In this scenario, knowing the Graeco-Roman and Jewish attitude towards celestial phenomena is critical. This provides the definitive point of reference for understanding Matthew’s subsequent thought about celestial phenomena. Along with the history-of-traditions methodology as a major tool, redaction criticism will also be employed. This

⁸⁶ Popović, *Reading the Human Body*, 213.

⁸⁷ Popović, *Reading the Human Body*, 213.

criticism is useful in that differences and similarities among the synoptic gospels can be highlighted. This will point out distinctive ideas of Matthew on the motif of the observation of celestial phenomena.

In investigating the significance of celestial phenomena in Matthew, this study will be broken into two major parts. Under the title “Observation of Celestial Phenomena in the Ancient World”, Part I, divided into two sections, will explore Graeco-Roman and Jewish attitudes towards celestial phenomena during the Second Temple period. Chapter 2 also in two sections will look into the Graeco-Roman attitude towards celestial phenomena. It will first examine the pre-Hellenistic attitudes towards celestial phenomena that may have influenced Hellenistic astrology. Then, it will explore Graeco-Roman astrology and the astral religion in Syria, which is assumed to be the provenance of Matthew. Chapter 3 explores the attitude towards celestial phenomena in the Jewish context. Divided into two sections, the first section will examine the concept of heaven, the heavenly council, and the astrological references in the OT. The second section will follow the same investigation in the Jewish literature in the Second Temple period. In doing so, Part I will furnish the contemporary worldview on heavenly occurrences, which may have influenced the evangelist’s uses of the motif of celestial phenomena in Matthew.

Part II, titled “Observation of Celestial Phenomena in the Gospel of Matthew”, will consist of three sections. Chapter 4 will discuss the *Sitz im Leben* of the Matthean community. Through the reconstitution of the authorship, the intended readership, and the provenance of the gospel, it will suggest the ethnic, social, and geographical boundary of Matthew. This will help to understand the attitude towards celestial phenomena, which the evangelist may have employed to deliver his gospel message to his readership. Chapter 5 will examine the significance of the motif of heaven in Matthew. Although the heaven language in Matthew has been regarded as a reverential circumlocution to avoid the name of God, its usages demonstrate the theological significance of the heaven motif. The analysis of the implication of the heaven motif will provide a vital foundation in understanding the significance of celestial phenomena in Matthew. Finally, Chapter 6 will investigate the references to celestial phenomena portrayed in Matthew (2.2-12; 3.16-17 and 17.5; 16.1-4; 24.29-31; 27.45 and 28.2). Seeking to discover the background and implication of those references in association with the Jewish and Graeco-Roman traditions and other synoptic gospels, it will account for the significance of the motif of celestial phenomena in Matthew and for the readership. Chapter 7 will summarize the findings of this study followed by the conclusion that can be drawn from it.

Part I.

Observation of Celestial Phenomena in the Ancient World

Observation of Celestial Phenomena in the Pagan Context

This is the first of two chapters aimed at investigating the conception of heaven and the attitude towards celestial phenomena in classical antiquity, and so to furnish the contemporary worldview on heavenly occurrences, which may have influenced the evangelist's uses of the motif of celestial phenomena in Matthew. As mentioned in Chapter One, ancient astrology was a main means to explore the contemporary celestial phenomena. The investigation will be focused on the beliefs and practices of astrology in antiquity.

The present chapter examines the Graeco-Roman attitude towards celestial phenomena. Despite the lack of clear evidence to show how and from where the Graeco-Roman world developed their approaches to celestial phenomena, it has been increasingly apparent that they were established in association with the Mesopotamian conceptions.⁸⁸ The methods and data used in constructing their models of the universe represent the significant influence of those of the Babylonians.⁸⁹ Babylonian diviners, such as Berossus,⁹⁰ a priest of Bel, and Sudines,⁹¹ were generally credited with bringing the Babylonian celestial divination to the Greek world. Babylonian rules for the rising and setting of the Moon reappear scarcely changed in Pliny's encyclopaedia and in Vettius Valens.⁹² In addition, Meton and Euctemon's attempt to reform the calendar in Athens in about 432 BC was based on an intercalation system much like the Babylonian methods.⁹³ Though not as influential as the Mesopotamian, Egyptian astrology also affected the Hellenistic worldview on celestial phenomena. The reference to astrology in Diodorus of Sicily's writing between 60 and 30

⁸⁸ In this study, Mesopotamia, Babylon, and Chaldaea are used interchangeably, unless otherwise stated.

⁸⁹ See G. J. Toomer, "Hipparchus and Babylonian Astronomy," in *A Scientific Humanist: Studies in Memory of Abraham Sachs*, (ed. Erle Leichty and Maria de J. Ellis; Philadelphia: The University Museum, 1988), 355-62.

⁹⁰ Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.129; Pollio Vitruvius, *On Architecture*, (trans. Frank Granger; London: W. Heinemann, 1934), 9.2.1, 9.6.2, 9.8.1, pp. 226-27, 246-47, 254-55; Berossus, *The Babyloniaca of Berossus*, (trans. Stanley M. Burstein; Malibu, CA: Undena Publications, 1978).

⁹¹ Valens Vettius, *Anthologies, Livre I*, (ed. Joëlle-Frédérique Bara; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989), 9.12, p 339, 21.

⁹² B. L. van der Waerden, "Babylonian Astronomy. III. The Earliest Calculations," *JNES* 10 (1951): 21.

⁹³ A. C. Bowen and B. R. Goldstein, "Meton of Athens and Astronomy in the Late Fifth Century BC," in *A Scientific Humanist: Studies in Memory of Abraham Sachs*, (ed. Erle Leichty and Maria de J Ellis; Philadelphia, Pa.: The Samuel Noah Kramer Fund, 1988), 39-81; D. R. Dicks, *Early Greek Astronomy to Aristotle*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1970), 87-88.

BC shows that Egypt of the Ptolemies was established as the home of Hellenistic astrology.⁹⁴ Egyptian calendar was employed by astronomers and astrologers until the time of Copernicus. These suggest that it is worth exploring the Mesopotamian and Egyptian conceptions of heaven and celestial divination for the understanding of the Graeco-Roman view. Such an analysis will also help the investigation of Israel's conception in the next chapter, since the OT references to heaven and celestial phenomena appear to share many ideas with the neighbouring countries.

Hence, this chapter will begin with pre-Hellenistic astrology in Babylonia and Egypt, which could have laid the foundation of the Graeco-Roman perspective about celestial phenomena. Next, it will explore the Graeco-Roman attitude towards the heavenly phenomena through the examination of its philosophical concept of heavenly realm and the aspects of Hellenistic astrology. Then, finally, it will investigate astral religions in the Graeco-Roman world, especially in the geographical area of Syria, for it is generally regarded as the most likely place of origin of the Gospel of Matthew.⁹⁵ This analysis will show that heaven in the Graeco-Roman world was believed to be the divine realm that governs the earthly world, celestial phenomena to be the divine way of communication, and their interpretation to be a way to understand God's will for the earthly world. Moreover, the description of astral religion in the region of Syria will suggest that Matthew and his community were familiar with the astral religion and shared the Hellenistic idea of heavenly government of the earthly world.

1. Pre-Hellenistic Observations of Celestial Phenomena

1.1. *Mesopotamian Observation of Celestial Phenomena*

1.1.1. Heaven as a Territory of Divine Beings

The inhabitants of Mesopotamia displayed a great interest in the observation of celestial phenomena from the very early stage of history.⁹⁶ According to their polytheistic religion,

⁹⁴ Cf. Diodorus Siculus, *Diodorus Siculus: Library of History*, (trans. Charles Henry Oldfather; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1933), 1.81.

⁹⁵ The provenance of Matthew will be explored in Chapter 4.

⁹⁶ Cf. Berossus, reported by Pliny the Elder, counted 490,000 years of observation of heavenly occurrences carried out in Chaldaea (Gaius Plinius Secundus, *Natural History*, (trans. H. Rackham, W. H. S. Jones, and D. E. Eichholz; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956), 7. 193; cf.

the stars or constellations were associated with some “great gods”. Like other multiple deities that were assumed to rule various cities deciding their historical and daily life events,⁹⁷ these heavenly gods were considered to govern the earthly world. In this way, heaven for the Chaldeans was a territory of divine beings. One of the earliest lists of star names found in the Old Babylonian “Prayer to the Gods of the Night” of about 1800 BC reflects this assumption:

May the great gods of the night, Shining Fire-Star, heroic Irra, Bow-star, Yoke-star, Sitaddaru, Mushussu-star, Wagon, Goat-star, Goatfish-star, Serpent-star, stand by and put a propitious sign on the entrails of the lamb I am blessing now⁹⁸

This prayer shows that already at this early stage heaven was believed to be a divine realm and the stars to be gods capable of affecting earthly events.⁹⁹ The most prominent of the heavenly beings were the moon-god “Sin” and the sun-god “Shamash”. The lesser ones were Venus (Ishtar), Jupiter (Marduk), Saturn (Ninurta), Mars (Nergal), and Mercury (Nabu). Each of these planets was believed to be in charge of certain provinces.¹⁰⁰ These divine stars are addressed in a number of prayers and rituals from various sources. They show that the astral gods were treated as just as divine as the other deities. One of the examples is the so-called “Prayer to the Gods of the Night”:¹⁰¹

Diodorus Siculus, *Histories*, (trans. C. H. Oldfather; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1946), 2.31.8; Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Divinatione*, (trans. William A. Falconer; Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1964), 1.19; 2.46).

⁹⁷ A. L. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization*, (Rev. ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 187-89; Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 15-16, 86-87, 234; H. W. F. Saggs, *The Greatness that was Babylon: A Sketch of the Ancient Civilization of the Tigris-Euphrates Valley*, (New York: New American Library, 1968), 166-67; Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis: The Story of Creation*, (2d ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 47.

⁹⁸ G. Dossin, "Prayer to the Gods of the Night," *Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale* 32 (1935): 279.

⁹⁹ One of the first surviving traces to the existence of celestial divination comes from a Sumerian document concerning Gudea, who reigned in Lagash from around 2122 to 2102 BC (A. Falkenstein, ""Wahrsagung" in der sumerischen Überlieferung," in *La divination en Mésopotamie ancienne et dans les régions voisines*, (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1966), 64-65). It records Gudea's dream in which the goddess Nisaba was studying a tablet on which were set down the constellations to build a temple in accordance with the stars. This tells of the belief of the significant influence of the celestial phenomena over the establishment of earthly works.

¹⁰⁰ For the detailed description of each planet-god, see Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness*, 121-29, 134; Wolfgang Heimpel, "The Sun at Night and the Doors of Heaven in Babylonian Texts," *JCS* 38 (1986): 127-51; Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, 139, 195, 197, 205; Saggs, *The Greatness that was Babylon*, 322-24, 327.

¹⁰¹ A. L. Oppenheim, "A New Prayer to the 'Gods of the Night'," *AnBi* 12 (1959): 287-88, reading from line 19.

Samas-star, [...] -star, Marduk-star,
 Nabu-star, [...] -star, Eritu-star,
 and enter, you, (too) Istar (i.e. Venus),
 great queen--
 he who mentions (all of) you (stars) is sure to obtain what he desires.
 I conjure (all of) you, pure heaven, pure earth,
 pure upper stars, pure lower stars,
 pure gods, pure goddesses ...
 My lips are clean, my hands washed ...
 I have called you, stars in the north, the south, the east, and the west--
 the famous stars (as well as) the lesser stars that the eye cannot see (well),
 the casual observer cannot observe,
 those of (the paths of) Anu, Enlil, and Ea--
 Surround me, all of you, gather around me! ...

I have prepared for you a pure sacrifice,
 scattered for you pure incense, ...
 Stand by today that I may obtain what I want! ...

Remove and drive away (all) the evil from the body of NN, son of NN --may I, NN, son
 of NN, be well and happy again upon your supreme command which never changes ...
 In case of evil portended by confused dreams, by omens, [there follows a long list of
 bad omens] (if you dispel all this) then I shall sing the praise of your great divine
 powers!

This prayer makes a request to the stars, just as to other gods, to counteract the evils, which a
 bad omen warned about. The text ends with a ritual, including offerings of food and incense,
 to be performed with the prayer.¹⁰² The similar prayers to the heavenly beings also appear in
 the *Maqlu* texts (a collection of exorcism spells to counter the effects of witchcraft)¹⁰³ and
Shurpu texts (a collection of magical prayers to end diseases sent as divine punishment for
 sins)¹⁰⁴.

[Incantation. Be it released], great gods,
 [god and] goddess, lords of absolution,
 [NN, son of] NN, whose god is NN...
 [who is ...], sick, in danger (of death), distraught, troubled,
 who has eaten what is tab[oo] to his god, ...
 [There follows a long list of possible misdeeds.]
 may the Warrior Shamash, may mentioning them release,
 may TI.BAL, SAG.KUD, Kajamanu, Immerija release,

¹⁰² Oppenheim, "A New Prayer to the 'Gods of the Night,'" 288-89.

¹⁰³ For various versions of the texts, see Oppenheim, "A New Prayer to the 'Gods of the Night,'" 292, 296.

¹⁰⁴ Saggs, *The Greatness that was Babylon*, 296; Bruno Meissner, *Babylonien und Assyrien*, (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1920-25), 2: 229.

may the Bow-star, the Pleiades, Sirius, Mars Narudu release,
may Hendursanga, the star Sibzianna release ...¹⁰⁵

This prayer also lists a series of planets and fixed stars as gods. All versions of these prayers to the gods of the night reveal the assumption that the celestial bodies paid attention to human affairs and requests, and might take a hand in them. Magical rituals involving astrolatry are also found in the *Namburbi* texts (a collection of spells to negate the evils warned by a variety of omens); the thirteen texts were used for astral omens.¹⁰⁶ All these prayers and rituals show that the celestial bodies were believed in and treated just like the other deities.

1.1.2. Divine Order of Deities in the Heavenly Realm

While these prayers and rituals demonstrate the Mesopotamian practice of worship of the celestial beings, not all the astral deities are considered equal in status to the Chaldaeans. Rather, it is assumed that there is a divine order of deities in the heavenly realm. The celestial gods are believed to be under control of the king of the gods. *Enûma Eliš*, the Mesopotamian epic of creation, exhibits this theology.¹⁰⁷ It tells how the present universe was shaped and organized, with the emphasis of Marduk's sovereignty in the universe as the king of the gods and his assignment of the stars and planets to gods.¹⁰⁸ After the report of his creation of heaven and the earth, it reads:

He created stations for the great gods;
The stars their likeness(es), the signs of the zodiac he set up.
He determined the year, defined the divisions;
For each of the twelve months he set up constellations.
After he had de[fin]ed the days of the year [by means] of constellations,
He founded the station on Nbiru to make known their duties (?).
That none might go wrong (and) be remiss,
He established the stations of Enlil and Ea together with it.

¹⁰⁵ Erica Reiner, *Šurpu. A Collection of Sumerian and Akkadian Incantations*, (Osnabrück: Biblio Verlag, 1970), 13.

¹⁰⁶ Richard I. Caplice, *The Akkadian Namburbi Texts: An Introduction*, (Los Angeles: Undena Publications, 1974), 7-9, 21-22.

¹⁰⁷ The composition of the text probably dates to the mid-second millennium BC, with regard to the use of the Akkadian language and of the Sumerian materials (Enlil was the hero), and its reading as part of the New Year Festival during the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods. See Thorkild Jacobsen, "Mesopotamia," in *Before Philosophy: The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man*, (ed. Henri Frankfort and H. A. Groenewegen-Frankfort; New York: Penguin Books, 1974), 183-84; Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, 12. For its criticism, see Bernard F. Batto, *Slaying The Dragon: Mythmaking in the Biblical Tradition*, (1st ed.; Louisville, Ky.: John Knox Press, 1992), 35.

¹⁰⁸ Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, 18-41.

He opened gates on both sides,
 And made strong locks to the left and right.
 In the very centre thereof he fixed the zenith.
 The Moon[-god] he caused to shine forth; the night he entrusted (to her).
 He appointed her, the ornament of the night, to make known the days
 `Monthly without ceasing to go forth with a tiara.
 At the beginning of the month, namely, of the rising o[ver] the land,
 Thou shalt shine with horns to make known six days;
 On the seventh day with [hal]f a tiara.
 At the full moon thou shalt stand in opposition (to the sun) in the middle of each
 [month].
 When the Sun[-god] has [overtaken] thee on the foundation of heaven,
 Decrease [the tiara of full] light and form it backward.
 [At the period of invisibility draw near to the way of the sun,
 And on [the twenty-ninth] thou shalt stand in opposition to the sun a second time. ...¹⁰⁹

After the shaping of the universe, the gods confer kingship on Marduk, hailing him with fifty names.¹¹⁰ Marduk is elevated over Enlil, who was seen by earlier Mesopotamian civilizations as the king of the gods. It reveals the Chaldaean's belief in the divine kingship of Marduk (Enlil) over all the astral deities, which were set in the sky to guard according to his appointment.

1.1.3. Celestial Phenomena as the Heavenly Writing¹¹¹

Marduk's sovereignty over the celestial beings is also mentioned in a seventh-century text from Assur. It portrays Marduk as the god who drew "the constellations of the gods" on the starry sky.¹¹² There the sky is described as the "lower heavens" made of jasper and Marduk as being able to draw or write upon it. The text reveals the fundamental assumption of the Chaldaeans concerning the celestial phenomena that the stars are the "heavenly writing" inscribed on the firmament as a way of divine communication. The same belief is noticed when Neo-Assyrian king Sennacherib (704-681 BC) claimed of his capital city Nineveh that its "plan was drawn since time immemorial with the heavenly writings". By saying this, he indicated that, when the gods drew the stars upon the sky, they also drew up the plans for

¹⁰⁹ Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, 42-45.

¹¹⁰ Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, 59.

¹¹¹ According to Rochberg (Francesca Rochberg, *The Heavenly Writing: Divination, Horoscopy, and Astronomy in Mesopotamian Culture*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1), the "heavenly writing" was "a poetic metaphor occasionally used in Babylonian royal inscriptions to refer to a temple made beautiful 'like the stars' (literally, 'like the heavenly writing')". Cf. Alasdair Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea*, (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1989), 4; Erica Reiner, *Astral Magic in Babylonia*, (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1995), 9; Wayne Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1998), 15, 226.

¹¹² Cf. Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, 3, 13-15.

that city.¹¹³ Here again, celestial phenomena are regarded as a way of conveying the divine messages, this time, for the earthly events. This further reflects the assumption that the gods were not only inseparable from all possible natural phenomena by virtue of the Mesopotamian cosmology, but were also responsible for the associations between phenomena in nature and events in human society. Hence, if anyone could read and interpret celestial events, they could predict gods' wills or future events for the city, country, or even the whole world.¹¹⁴ Reiner states, "a fortuitous occurrence and a subsequent good fortune or misfortune were linked in the Mesopotamian mind, as they were in many early cultures, ... not so much as cause and effect, but as a forewarning and a subsequent event."¹¹⁵ The compilations of such linked pairs in the form of a protasis (*if x occurs*) and an apodosis (*then y will take place*), the so-called omens, made up the largest single category in Assurbanipal's library, ca. 300 tablets out of perhaps 900 total.¹¹⁶ The abundant collection and analysis of the Babylonian celestial phenomena reflect their strong belief in the celestial omens.

The most significant series of celestial omens was *Enūma Anu Enlil* (EAE). "When [the gods] Anu, Enlil [and Ea established in council the plans of Sky and Earth]."¹¹⁷ Consisting of ca. 70 tablets, it comprises 7,000 omens and corresponding predictions. The predictions in EAE are made in accordance with the observation of celestial phenomena:

[If] in the eighth month, on the eleventh day Ishtar disappeared in the East and stayed away from the sky for two months and ... days, and became visible in the West again in the tenth month on the ... days, the harvest of the land will prosper.¹¹⁸

The series contains omens from anything that happens in the heavens. Divided into four sections by topic, "Sin", "Shamash", "Ishtar", and "Adad", it respectively deals with the lunar phenomena (e.g. halos, conjunctions, and eclipses), the solar phenomena (e.g. halos,

¹¹³ Daniel D. Luckenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924), 94.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Piotr Michalowski, "Presence at the Creation," in *Lingering Over Words: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Literature in Honor of William L. Moran*, (ed. William L. Moran, et al.; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1990), 395.

¹¹⁵ Erica Reiner, "Babylonian Celestial Divination," in *Ancient Astronomy and Celestial Divination*, (ed. N. M. Swerdlow; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999), 21.

¹¹⁶ Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, 16; Starr, *The Rituals of the Diviner*, 1.

¹¹⁷ The translation from Barton, *Ancient Astrology*, 12. Although its composition is dated during the Kassite period (1651-1157 BC), some of its prototype forms exhibit that the omens were already current in the Old Babylonian period (1950-1651 BC). For the dating of its composition, see David Pingree, "Mesopotamian Astronomy and Astral Omens in Other Civilization," in *Mesopotamien und seine Nachbarn: Politische und kulturelle Wechselbeziehungen im Alten Vorderasien vom 4 bis 1 Jahrtausend v. Chr.*, (ed. Hans Jörg Nissen and Johannes Renger; Berlin: Reimer, 1982), 613; Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, 224-25.

¹¹⁸ Erica Reiner and David E. Pingree, *Babylonian Planetary Omens: Enūma Anu Enlil Tablet 63, The Venus Tablet of Ammišaduqa* (Malibu, Calif.: Undena Publications, 1975), 29, 2.

colours, sundogs, and solar eclipses), the meteorological phenomena (e.g. thunder, lightning, rainbows, and winds) and earthquakes, and the predictions from fixed stars, planets, meteors, and comets.

Here, it should be noted that the Babylonian celestial divination was not so much to prophesy accurately the forthcoming future. According to Cornelius, who discusses the concept of “participatory significance” in regard to omens, “an omen is only an omen if recognized as such... and its significance is dependent on the participation for those who it is present.”¹¹⁹ In other words, the omen is only “significant for someone who perceives it as significant” as opposed to “the modern... attitude which assigns an apparently non-participatory significance to events.”¹²⁰ Bottéro makes the distinction that the future for omen interpreters of antiquity was “not a ‘real future’, an absolute future which would take place inevitably” but rather “a future which the gods had decreed *hic et nunc*” and these same gods could be prevailed upon to alter the course of events extrapolated by the diviner in regard to “divine decisions that touched upon the future of the interested party.”¹²¹ Persuaded, perhaps, by ritual sacrifice or prayer, the gods might be merciful in the same way a king “was free..., to put off the punishment of someone he had originally condemned.”¹²² It has been conjectured that the majority of consultations “concerned matters of public and private concern, mainly asking what should be done, instead of requests for a straight ‘secular’ prediction of the future”.¹²³ The emphasis of the Babylonian priest may therefore have been more about what “should” happen than what “would” happen. “A possible prediction in the context of ancient divination is incidental to the main task, which is to consult with the gods.”¹²⁴

1.1.4. Reciprocal Relationship between Celestial Divination and Mathematical Astronomy

Along with celestial divination, there developed the foundations for a mathematical astronomy in Mesopotamia. From the mid-seventh century BC, the diviners kept the so-called “astronomical diaries”, a night-by-night record of the astronomical observations of

¹¹⁹ Geoffrey Cornelius, *The Moment of Astrology: Origins in Divination*, (London: Arkana, 1994), 147.

¹²⁰ Cornelius, *The Moment of Astrology*, 147.

¹²¹ Jean Bottéro, *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 33.

¹²² Bottéro, *Mesopotamia*, 33.

¹²³ Cornelius, *The Moment of Astrology*, 147.

¹²⁴ Cornelius, *The Moment of Astrology*, 142. Cf. One of the possible rituals to avoid the evil omen was the *namburbi* rituals. Though barely referred to, they existed for every imaginable omen. Reiner argues, “we gather from those texts that list in catalogue form the events against whose evil consequences such rituals could be invoked” (Reiner, “Babylonian Celestial Divination,” 30).

planetary movements, which was subsequently compiled into monthly summaries. Dates of first and last visibility and precise positions in relation to the constellations were recorded. The Babylonian horoscope text was the astronomical record of the positions of the seven planets in the zodiac on the date of a birth, not in omen form. It even records calendric and meteorological data. The appearance of horoscope at the end of the fifth century BC shows that “the situation of the heavens at the time of a birth had come to be regarded as significant for the future of an individual.”¹²⁵ It represents that the individual had a room in the range of celestial divination.

It is important to note from these descriptions of the Babylonian celestial divination and mathematical astronomy that they did not conflict with each other but enjoyed a reciprocal relationship. In fact, celestial divination and astronomy, or religion and science, were not separate in Mesopotamian culture as they are in the modern sense. As Fuller puts it, the conflict between these two fields

is a product of the late nineteenth-century historical imagination. Only once the natural sciences had begun to assume religion’s role as the seat of authoritative knowledge in Western society did the previous history start to be written in terms of science’s deliberate attempt to wrench that role away from religion.¹²⁶

The distinctions of the form, content, or goal between celestial divination and astronomy did not present dichotomous implications of thinking but a diverse body of scholarship. Accurate astronomical knowledge was necessary for the correct interpretation of astral omens.

The analysis of the Babylonian conceptions of heaven and celestial phenomena demonstrates that their ideas were built up on their religious assumption. The polytheism of the Mesopotamians led them to see heaven as the divine realm under the sovereignty of Marduk, the king of the gods, and the celestial beings as their gods incarnated. Celestial phenomena were regarded as a way of communication from Marduk. They believed that such occurrences conveyed the divine messages, the omens, for the earthly world. In order to understand Marduk’s will or the forthcoming events on earth, they observed, researched, and interpreted the heavenly omens. Though the mathematical astronomy was developed in Babylonia, it was not a contrasting subject to celestial divination. Rather, they complemented each other and enjoyed a reciprocal relationship. These concepts of heaven and celestial phenomena were conveyed to the Graeco-Roman world.

¹²⁵ Francesca Rochberg, "Babylonian Horoscopy: The Texts and Their Relations," in *Ancient Astronomy and Celestial Divination*, (ed. N. M. Swerdlow; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999), 39.

¹²⁶ Fuller, *Thomas Kuhn*, 80, n. 107.

1.2. Egyptian Observation of Celestial Phenomena

1.2.1. Ancient Egypt and the Osiris Myth

The Egyptians, like the Mesopotamians, had a long history of observation of celestial phenomena. A system of time measurement according to the constellations appears in drawings and texts on the inner sides of coffin lids of the Tenth Dynasty (about 2100 BC). The cruciform paradigm, which portrays the travel of the Sun and the other retinue of heaven across the fertile belt beside the Nile from east to west, was copied in many great temples including one of the largest temples in the world, the temple of *Amen-Ra* at Karnak.¹²⁷ Their keen interest in the observation of astral movements generated the Egyptian calendar. Probably based on the mean date of the Nile flood at the beginning of the third millennium BC, the calendar provided a three-hundred-sixty-five-day year with twelve months of thirty days each and five “epagomenal” or extra days at the end of the calendar year. Led by the constellation of Sothis (Sirius), there were thirty-six constellations, known as *bakiu*, or decans. The rising of each constellation just before sunrise was taken as “the last hour of the night” for ten days, which made thirty-six for the year (excluding the epagomenal days). The risings of the decans in the night were used to divide the time into “hours”. Since at the time of the rising of Sothis, twelve were seen to rise before dawn, the night hours were twelve. This relatively simple calendar, compared to the Babylonians’, in which the arrangement of months changes between twenty-nine and thirty days, was modified late in the Hellenistic era by the addition of a leap day every four years.¹²⁸

Astrology also played an important role in the Egyptian religion. Heaven was believed to be the dwelling place of gods. Many of the Egyptian deities, often characterized as animals or animal-headed humans, were identified as Sun, Moon, planets, or stars (e.g. Mercury as “Seth”). So was the ruler as a son of the Sun and an incarnate deity. The association between astrology and religion was clearly demonstrated in the Egyptian myths. For example, in the tomb of Thutmose III in the Valley of the Kings near Thebes, the text of the *Amduat* or *Book of What is in the Underworld* appears on the burial chamber wall. Set out in 12 chapters or hours that mark the hours of the night, it begins with the lines:¹²⁹

¹²⁷ John Romer, *Valley of The Kings*, (1st ed.; New York: Morrow, 1981), 12, 21.

¹²⁸ For the detailed description of the Egyptian calendar, see David H. Kelley and E. F. Milone, *Exploring Ancient Skies: A Survey of Ancient and Cultural Astronomy*, (2nd ed.; New York: Springer, 2011), 263-67.

¹²⁹ Marshall Clagett, *Ancient Egyptian Science: A Source Book*, (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1989).

The writings of the hidden chamber, the places where the souls, the gods and the spirits stand. What they do. The beginning of the Horn of the West, the gate of the Western Horizon. This is the knowledge of the power of those in the Netherworld. This is the knowledge of what they do. the knowledge of their sacred rituals to Re; the knowledge of the mysterious powers; knowledge of what is in the hours as well as of their gods, knowledge of what he says to them; knowledge of the Gates and the way on which God passes; knowledge of the powerful ones and the annihilated.

During the first hour, the Sun orders the dead king to open the underworld's doors in order to begin the process of bringing light and life to the underworld. Its deities are awakened hour by hour. The dead king too is restored to life through an encounter with the scarab beetle god, who finally rolls the Sun up to the eastern horizon.

This idea of resurrection is one of the main themes in the Osiris myth. This most elaborate and powerful story in ancient Egyptian mythology concerns the murder of the god Osiris, a primeval king of Egypt, and its aftermath. It involved several vital components: the killing and dismemberment of Osiris by his brother, Seth; the persistence and success in the reconstitution of Osiris' body by his wife, Isis; Osiris' achievement of eternal life; the successful union of Osiris and Isis, which produced Horus; and Horus' revenge and triumph against Seth. According to Parker, the entire Osiris myth is based on astrological observation.¹³⁰ Each key element in the myth is argued to correspond with the lunar movement. Hence, the killing and dismemberment of Osiris by his brother, Seth, signify the night-by-night diminution of the waning moon. So the reconstitution of Osiris's body by his wife, Isis, signifies the waxing moon. The complete Osiris represents the full moon. He states, "The new crescent is the symbol both of the reborn Osiris as king of the dead and of his son and successor Horus as king of the living."¹³¹ He also associates the "dying Horus" with the waning moon. Agreeing with Parker's interpretation, Kelly and Milone even suggest that the occasional blood-red lunar eclipse could coincide with the killing of Osiris.¹³² All these calendar and myths illustrate that the ancient Egyptians believed the correspondence between heaven and earth and applied astrology to their religion and social structure. The monarchy stood as the representative of the heavenly realm on earth.

¹³⁰ Richard A. Parker, *The Calendars of Ancient Egypt*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950), 80.

¹³¹ Parker, *The Calendars of Ancient Egypt*, 80.

¹³² Kelley and Milone, *Exploring Ancient Skies: A Survey of Ancient and Cultural Astronomy*, 261.

1.2.2. Ptolemaic Egypt and the Hermetic Treatises

In the Hellenised Egypt of the Ptolemies, Egypt was established as the home of astrology. The writing of Diodorus of Sicily in between 60 and 30 BC states:

The positions and arrangements of the star, as well as their motion, have always been the subject of careful observation among the Egyptians, if anywhere in the world... they have observed with the utmost keenness the motions, orbits and stoppings of each planet, as well as the influence of each of them on the generations of all living things – the good and evil things, namely, of which they are the cause. And while they often succeed in predicting to men the events that will befall them in the course of their lives, not infrequently they foretell destruction of the crops, or, on the other hand, abundant yields, and pestilences... they have prior knowledge of earthquakes and floods, of the risings of comets, and of all things which the ordinary man regards as quite beyond finding out.¹³³

Since Persia conquered Egypt in 525 BC, Egyptian astrology developed under Mesopotamian influence. The astrological *ostraca*, listing the planets and the zodiac signs in the vernacular Demotic, dated between 175 BC and 132 CE, represent Babylonian figures. The Eternal Tables attributed to Egypt by writers of the first century CE and later were compiled from Babylonian almanacs. Nevertheless, however, there were still evidences that signified the development of genuine Egyptian astrology. For example, in the form of the zodiac, while the Mesopotamians included the two signs of the Balance and the Scorpion, the Egyptians called the sign the Horizon, for it marked the beginning of the Egyptian year. The Egyptian form of the zodiac can be found on the ceiling of a temple at Dendera. There also remain texts of Egyptian astrology. One of the papyri of the Roman period in Demotic, which goes back to the mid-second century BC, lists predictions relating to the positions of planets in zodiac signs at the time of the rising of Sothis. They concern kings of Egypt and wars with Syria and Parthia:

The King of Egypt will rule over his country. An enemy will be [his and] he will escape from them again. Many men will rebel against the king. An inundation which is that which comes to [?] Egypt. Seed [and] grain will be high in price [in] money, which is ... The burial of a god will occur in Egypt.¹³⁴

The “Hermetic” treatises, the corpus of texts attributed to the god Hermes Trismegistus or Asclepius and his circle, were key texts to understand Hellenistic astrology. With the discovery of the Nag Hammadi library written in Coptic, the Egyptian language written

¹³³ Siculus, *Library of History*, 1.81.

¹³⁴ Cairo Papyrus 31222, G. R. Hughes, "A Demotic Astrological Text," *JNES* 10 (1951): 258-59.

using the Greek alphabet, among which were Hermetic texts, it is suggested that the Hermetic literature originated in the fusion of Egyptian and Greek ways of thought.¹³⁵ The astrological texts in the “Hermetic” treatises were attributed to Petosiris, an Egyptian priest in around 341 BC, and Nechepso, an Egyptian king in the twenty-sixth dynasty (663-522 BC), who were said to have gained their knowledge from Hermes. They offer a variety of astral omens, horoscopic astrology, numerological schemes and teachings on plants and stones in connection with astral influences.¹³⁶ The texts reveal how the decans fitted in to the Hermetic conception of the universe. In the Hermetic selection of the fifth-century anthologist Stobaeus, Hermes teaches his son Tat:¹³⁷

I told you, my son, that there is a body, which encloses all things. You must conceive the shape of that body as circular, for such is the shape of the universe.

I conceive its shape as circular, even as you bid me, father.

And you must understand that below the circle of this body are placed the thirty-six Decans, between the circle of the universe and that of the zodiac, separating the one circle from the other; on the one hand they bear up, as it were, the circle of the universe, and on the other they circumscribe the zodiac, moving in a circle with the planets; they have the same forces as the movement of the All, by turns with the Seven.

And besides this, my son, you must know that there is yet another sort of work that the Decans do: they sow upon the earth the seeds of certain forces, some salutary and others most pernicious, which the many call daemons... Moreover, in their course in the sky, they engender for themselves under-ministers, servitors and soldiers. The under-ministers, commanded by the Decans, circulate floating in the ether, whose extent they fill, so that there is no space empty of stars in heaven, they help to maintain the order of the universe, and have their own energy, although it is subordinated to that of the Thirty-six. From the under-ministers come destruction of animals other than human, in one region or another, and the swarming creatures that spoil the crops.

Hermes’ instruction shows that the Egyptians believed the decans to be exempt from undergoing what the other stars do, in being made to stand in their stations or move, or be eclipsed by the Sun. Moreover, they are not only free but exercise power. Without their influence, no king is replaced, no city revolts, no famine, pestilence, flood or earthquake takes place. They even command humans, since they command the planets, which command humans. They are also considered to command the planets by the mediation of their sons,

¹³⁵ Cf. Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

¹³⁶ Cf. Wilhelm Gundel, *Neue Astrologische Texte des Hermes Trismegistos: Funde und Forschungen auf dem Gebiet der antiken Astronomie und Astrologie*, (12; München: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1936).

¹³⁷ Stobaeus, 1.21.9, 1.189, cited from Barton, *Ancient Astrology*, 27.

called daemons by the vulgar. These concepts of heaven and celestial phenomena in Hellenized Egypt established the astrology by the first century BC. Along with those of the Mesopotamians, these attitudes towards celestial phenomena were conveyed to the Graeco-Roman world.

2. Observation of Celestial Phenomena in the Graeco-Roman World

2.1. Greek Observation of Celestial Phenomena

Greek astronomy developed under Mesopotamian influence. The Greek star-names were translated from the Babylonian's as early as the sixth century. Eudoxus, Plato's younger contemporary, drew on Babylonian data not only in his description of the constellations but also in his use of the zodiac. Proclus in the fifth-century CE recorded that Theophrastus (372-280 BC) stated that his Chaldaean contemporaries had a remarkable theory predicting every event in the life and death of a human being.¹³⁸ Greek settlement in Persia after Alexander's conquests caused the migrations of individuals, such as Berossus and Sudines. As mentioned earlier, they brought astrology to the Greek world.

In many ways, the Greek religious assumption was similar to that of Mesopotamia. It was polytheistic. Heaven was regarded as a divine territory and the heavenly bodies as living and personal deities.¹³⁹ Divination was an important institution.¹⁴⁰ Though not in a form of a formal cult, the veneration of celestial beings was a common practice.¹⁴¹ Some Greek cities had cults of the sun and moon.¹⁴² The Pythagoreans in Magna Graecia apparently displayed

¹³⁸ Proclus, *Proclus' Commentary on the Timæus of Plato*, (trans. Thomas Taylor; Sturminster Newton: Prometheus Trust, 2005), 3.151.

¹³⁹ Cf. Richard Heinze, *Xenokrates: Darstellung der Lehre und Sammlung der Fragmente*, (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1892), frag. 15, 17; Fritz Wehrli, *Herakleides Pontikos*, (2nd ed.; Basel/Stuttgart: Schwabe & Co., 1969), frag. 111; Leonardo Tarán, *Academica - Plato, Philip of Opus, and the pseudo-Platonic Epinomis*, (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1975), Epinomis, 991c6-d5.

¹⁴⁰ Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*, 12-13.

¹⁴¹ Cf. Aristophanes, *Aristophanes' Peace*, (ed. S. Douglas Olson; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 406; Plato, *Cratylus*, (ed. C. D. C. Reeve; Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1998), 397c8-d2; Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*, (trans. Hugh Tredennick; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), 1074a39-b8; Aristotle, *On the Heavens, I and II*, (ed. Stuart Leggatt; Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1995), 284a11-13; Sophocles, *The Fragments of Sophocles*, (ed. R. C. Jebb, Walter George Headlam, and Alfred Chilton Pearson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1917), frag. 738; Euripides, *Euripides; Euripidis tragoediae ex recensione Augusti Nauckii*, (ed. August Nauck; Lipsiae: B.G. Teubner, 1908), frag. 781.

¹⁴² Julia Kerschensteiner, *Platon und der Orient*, (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1945), 186.

their belief in the divinity of the celestial beings¹⁴³ and even claimed the origin of the human soul from heaven and its return to it at death.¹⁴⁴ This idea of celestial divinity was further established through a philosophical approach, notably by Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics.

According to Plato, it was the demiurge (divine craftsman) that fashioned the universe after the pattern of the eternal forms, which are the source and perfection of all beauty and intelligibility in the world of becoming.¹⁴⁵ For him, the presence of intelligence *ipso facto* signifies that the presence of soul and mind (νοῦς) exists in soul (ἐν ψυχῇ).¹⁴⁶ The observation of celestial phenomena demonstrates that the heavenly bodies are alive and ensouled, since mind is present in it.¹⁴⁷ Despite the seemingly independent motion of the stars and planets, their movements are assigned by the demiurge.¹⁴⁸ The ecliptic is subdivided into seven paths for the heavenly bodies, 'visible gods', who run the universe for the demiurge.¹⁴⁹ This idea of heaven and stars as living and ensouled beings was shared with Aristotle¹⁵⁰ and the Stoics.¹⁵¹ From the celestial bodies' eternal and immutable motion, Aristotle regarded them as divine (θεῖος) or the divine (τὸ θεῖον).¹⁵² For him, these celestial bodies are not allowed self-movement but are directed by a mover outside of the heavens.¹⁵³ All the celestial phenomena ultimately depend on the transcendent mover who brings them into activity.

¹⁴³ Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, (12th ed.; Dublin: Weidmann, 1966), Epicharmus 23 B 8.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Aristophanes, *Peace*, 832-34; Diels and Kranz, *Die Fragmente*, Alcmæon of Croton 24A 1 and 12.

¹⁴⁵ Plato, *Timæus and Critias*, (ed. Robin Waterfield and Andrew Gregory; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 28c5-29a6, 53b4-7; cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 991a20-23.

¹⁴⁶ Plato, *Plato's Sophist: A Translation with a Detailed Account of its Theses and Arguments*, (ed. James Duerlinger; New York: P. Lang, 2005), 249a4; Plato, *Timæus*, 30b2, 46d4-6.

¹⁴⁷ Plato, *Timæus*, 36d8-e5.

¹⁴⁸ Plato, *Timæus*, 40a2-b2, 36c2-4, 34a1-4.

¹⁴⁹ Plato, *Timæus*, 34c-38e.

¹⁵⁰ For "stars", see Aristotle, *On the Heavens*, 292a18-21, 292b1f. For "heaven", see Aristotle, *On the Heavens*, 279a30-b3, 285a27-30.

¹⁵¹ Hans Friedrich August von Arnim and Maximilianus Adler, *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, (Editio stereotypa editionis primae. ed.; Stuttgartiae: Teubner, 1964), 1.120, 504, 2.593, 682. A. J. Festugière, *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*, (2nd ed.; Paris: Gabalda, 1950), 2.233-38.

¹⁵² For "divine", see Aristotle, *On the Heavens*, 292b28-93a2 (stars), 286a10f. (heaven). For "the divine", see Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1026a16-18 (stars); Aristotle, *On the Heavens*, 286a9-12 (heaven). For "stars eternal", see Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1073a34f.

¹⁵³ Aristotle, *On the Heavens*, 277b9-12, 288a27-b7, 288b22-30, 311a9-12. This idea is worked out at greater length in the *Physics* and the *Metaphysics* where it is argued that the eternal motion of the heavenly bodies is attracted by a prime mover which is itself unmoved (see Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1072b1-14; Aristotle, *Aristotle's Physics: A Revised Text with Introd. and Commentary by W.D. Ross*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), 256a33-57b13, 267b16f; Aristotle, *On the Heavens*, 277b6-9).

2.2. Graeco-Roman Astrology

As the Greek culture was inherited in the Graeco-Roman world, the Greek cosmologies were adopted and combined with Babylonian astronomy and celestial divination to bring forth Hellenistic approaches towards celestial phenomena. Like Babylonian approaches, Hellenistic approaches carried both religious and scientific aspects. The celestial bodies were regarded as deities, who governed the cosmos according to scientific principle. Ptolemy, while explaining everything in terms of four-element physics, understood the movement of the celestial bodies as due to “divine, unchangeable destiny”.¹⁵⁴ In the introduction to book 1 of the *Tetrabiblos*, he describes astrology as “means of prediction through astronomy”.¹⁵⁵ A poem in the *Greek Anthology* exhibits the contemporary concept:

I know that I am the creature of a day; but when I search into the multitudinous revolving spirals of the stars my feet no longer rest on the earth, but, standing by Zeus himself, I take my fill of ambrosia, the food of the gods.¹⁵⁶

This shows that there was still no strict distinction between the terms ἀστρολογία and ἀστρονομία in the Graeco-Roman world as there is in the modern world. A different term was chosen when it was needed to emphasize a different aspect. With reference to astrology, Cicero writes,

This is how those who defend horoscopes of birth (*natalicia*) argue their case. They assert that the circle of signs, called ‘zodiac’ in Greek, possesses a determinative power, such that each individual section of this circle has its own specific influence upon the sky and changes it, depending on which stars would be found at any given point in time in the relevant sections, or in the adjacent sections. Likewise, those stars called ‘planets’ have their influence – in a different manner – upon the above-mentioned power, *viz.* by entering precisely that section of the circle in which the birth of the one who is entering the world occurs, or into a section which somehow stands near it or is in harmony with it (then they speak of triangles or quadrants) ... This permits them to determine for each person the natural inclination, the character, spirit, and body, the active conduct of life, and everything that may concern him.¹⁵⁷

Festugière describes Hellenistic astrology with three aspects: “L’astrologie hellénistique est l’amalgame d’une doctrine philosophique séduisante, d’une mythologie absurde et de

¹⁵⁴ Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, (trans. Frank E. Robbins; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), 23.

¹⁵⁵ Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, 2.

¹⁵⁶ *The Greek Anthology*, (trans. W. R. Paton; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), no. 577.

¹⁵⁷ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, 2.89.

méthodes savants employées à contre-temps.”¹⁵⁸ According to him, each aspect refers to respectively:

1. The doctrine of cosmic sympathy,
2. The identification of the planets and stars as animate, living beings,
3. The astrological doctrine of methodological ‘aspects’.

First, “the doctrine of cosmic sympathy” as the philosophical aspect of astrology signifies the interdependent unity of the whole universe. Everything in the universe is interrelated within one universal chain of action and reaction. All of creation interacts either positively (sympathetically) or negatively (antipathetically).¹⁵⁹ This fundamental belief in the “sympathy” of all creation was connected with the notion of the reciprocal relation of the heavens and the earth:

C'est ainsi que le soleil, les planètes et les constellations, tous les astres dont la matière est un feu qui brûle éternellement sans se consumer jamais, se nourrissent des vapeurs issues du monde sublunaire; inversement, les astres ne cessent d'agir sur le monde sublunaire par les énergies qu'ils projettent, soit sur l'ensemble de ce monde, soit sur telle partie ou même tel individu singulier.¹⁶⁰

The belief that the earth influences the stars by means of the “nourishment” of its “vapours” had been advanced by the pre-Socratic philosophers Thales, Parmenides, and Heraclitus.¹⁶¹ The reverse influence of the celestial bodies upon the earth is evident in the effects of the sun on the alternation of day and night and the rhythm of the seasons of the year and of the moon on the tides of the sea and the occurrences of ebb and flow.¹⁶² Bouche-Leclercq emphasizes this doctrine of cosmic sympathy as “l'aliment inépuisable” and “[la] forteresse centraie de l'astrologie.”¹⁶³ This doctrine further generated the notion of humanity as a “little world” (μικρὸς κόσμος) or even “ornament of the world” or “world of the world” (κόσμου κόσμος).¹⁶⁴ Melothesia, a branch of astrology, assumed the correspondence between κόσμος and ἄνθρωπος not as symbolism or imagery but as literal truth, and believed that the

¹⁵⁸ Festugière, *La Révélation*, 1.89.

¹⁵⁹ Roger Beck, “Thus Spake Not Zarathustra: Zoroastrian Pseudepigrapha of the Greco-Roman World,” in *A History of Zoroastrianism*, (ed. Mary Boyce and Frantz Grenet; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 497; Barton, *Ancient Astrology*, 103-04.

¹⁶⁰ Festugière, *La Révélation*, 1.90.

¹⁶¹ Auguste Bouché-Leclercq, *L'astrologie Grecque*, (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1899), 75.

¹⁶² Cicero, *De Divinatione*, 2.34.

¹⁶³ Bouché-Leclercq, *L'astrologie Grecque*, 76-77.

¹⁶⁴ Festugière, *La Révélation*, 1.92-93; Bouché-Leclercq, *L'astrologie Grecque*, 76-77; Barton, *Ancient Astrology*, 106-07.

celestial bodies were assigned influence over the parts of the human body.¹⁶⁵ Likewise, this aspect of astrology brought about a causal influence of heavenly bodies on the sublunar world and provided the ultimate justification for an absolute deterministic or even fatalistic worldview.

Second, by “the identification of the planets and stars as animate, living beings” as the mythological aspect of astrology, Festugière states,

Le langage même manifeste ce tour d'esprit. les planetes se levent et se couchent, se voient, s'entendent, commandent, obeissent, paraissent hilares ou sombres, sont maîtresses de maison, etc., ... sans compter toutes les epithètes dont on les affuble pour dénoter leur attitude à l'égard des hommes.¹⁶⁶

It was the character of the respective deities that determined the kind of influence the different planets exercised over human beings. The identification of the planets with Olympian gods represented their association with the typical attributes of the gods in Graeco-Roman mythology. For example, the planet Zeus/Jupiter was viewed as benevolent and beneficial just as viewed in the traditional mythological view of Zeus/Jupiter as the “father of the gods”.¹⁶⁷ Other features of the heavenly bodies than mythology were considered for their characterizations as well. Kronos/Saturn was associated with old age because of the planet’s pale colour and slow movement.¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, the planets were categorized in various ways, e.g. as “beneficent” (Jupiter, Venus, and the Moon) and “maleficent” (Saturn and Mars),¹⁶⁹ “feminine” (the Moon and Venus) and “masculine” (the Sun, Saturn, Jupiter and Mars),¹⁷⁰ and “diurnal” and “nocturnal”.¹⁷¹ Likewise, the zodiacal signs were understood as animate beings, were associated with certain traits derived from mythology, and were classified as human or animal, fertile or sterile, whole or mutilated, simple or double,¹⁷² male and female.¹⁷³

Finally, Hellenistic astrology carried “the methodological aspects”, i.e. the angular (opposition, square, trine and sextile) relationships that could be established between the signs of the zodiac.¹⁷⁴ Festugière claims that this methodological aspect of astrology “a fait considérer cet art divinatoire comme une science” and reflects “comment la logique grecque

¹⁶⁵ Festugière, *La Révélation*, 1.92.

¹⁶⁶ Festugière, *La Révélation*, 1.95.

¹⁶⁷ Bouché-Leclercq, *L'astrologie Grecque*, 97.

¹⁶⁸ Bouché-Leclercq, *L'astrologie Grecque*, 94-95; Festugière, *La Révélation*, 1.96-97.

¹⁶⁹ Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, 38-39.

¹⁷⁰ Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, 40-41.

¹⁷¹ Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, 42-43.

¹⁷² Bouché-Leclercq, *L'astrologie Grecque*, 149-51.

¹⁷³ Bouché-Leclercq, *L'astrologie Grecque*, 154-55.

¹⁷⁴ Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, 72-75.

a pénétré dans ce domaine comme en tant d'autres".¹⁷⁵ The accurate astronomical knowledge was the necessity for the accurate astrological divination. As noted above, science and divination enjoyed a reciprocal relationship in the context of Hellenistic astrology. Here, this scientific knowledge of astrology should not be confused with or judged from the perspective of the modern understanding of science. Charlesworth states, "To speak of 'astrology' during the Roman period as 'pseudo-Science' is misleading and anachronistic."¹⁷⁶ Within the context of the Graeco-Roman antiquity, the primary role of Hellenistic astrology was to discover the divine will through the scientific methods.

These aspects of Hellenistic astrology brought forth various fields of astrological practice: e.g. (1) general or catholic astrology, (2) genethliology, (3) katarthic astrology, (4) medical astrology, and so on. Catholic or judicial astrology, which are based on portentous events such as eclipses, comets, meteors, Great Conjunctions, the aurora borealis, and so on, is concerned with the prediction related to the whole races, countries, and cities.¹⁷⁷ Genethliology stems from the notion that the positions of the planets at the moment of an individual's birth directly influence the future course of that person's life. The horoscope of the signs or ascendant (the point of intersection of the ecliptic and eastern horizon) was computed for the precise moment of birth and the relative positions of planets in the zodiacal signs at the time were interpreted by means of elaborate theories about their relationships. Developed from genethliology, katarthic astrology assumes that any person's act or undertaking could be influenced by the horoscope of its inception. Hence, an individual could choose propitious moments for various activities by means of katarthic astrology. It was somewhat less fatalistic than genethliology, since it assumed that with foreknowledge one could avoid what the planets had in store.

It also had links with medicine and magic. Dorotheus of Sidon, one of the most important writers on katarthic astrology in the first century CE, wrote a warning, which survives only in an Arabic translation made ca. 800 CE:

If a man wants to make a will, let him commence this when the ascendant or the Moon is in a tropical sign as it indicates that the will and the legacy will be changed. Let him make his will when the Moon is increasing [in latitude], decreasing in computation and increasing in light, and its motion is from the middle of the ecliptic ascending towards the seas [the North], and conjoining with a star in its station, and not under the [Sun's] rays. If it is under the [Sun's] rays [but] not in this sign but in another sign and emerging

¹⁷⁵ Festugière, *La Révélation*, 1.99.

¹⁷⁶ James H. Charlesworth, "Jewish Astrology in the Talmud, Pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and Early Palestinian Synagogues," *HTR* 70 (1977): 199 n.57.

¹⁷⁷ Bouché-Leclercq, *L'astrologie Grecque*, 368-71, 582; Frederick H. Cramer, *Astrology in Roman Law and Politics*, (Chicago: Aris Publishers, 1996), 11; cf. Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, 220-21.

from under the rays, then it does not indicate immediate death. Avoid making your will in the hour in which Mars is with the Moon or in the ascendant as if one makes his will at this hour it indicates that the will will not be changed, and the patient will die from this illness of his, and the will will not be executed after his death, but someone after him will refute him in his will and write in the will or steal the will.¹⁷⁸

Medical astrology or *iatromathematics*, which diagnosed illness and recommended therapies on the basis of the zodiacal signs, is based on the melothesia.¹⁷⁹ Each part of the body was assigned to different sign of the zodiac, to the decans, or to the planets. For example, Aries rules the head, Taurus the neck, and Pisces the feet, and so on.¹⁸⁰ A bad planet or an unfavourable aspect with one of the zodiacal signs was assumed to cause a problem in the corresponding body part. The Greek idea of the macrocosm and the microcosm reinforced the concept of the melothesia. Astrological healing was based on similar thinking. Plants, animals, stones and minerals were also “sympathetic” with the signs and planets.¹⁸¹

3. Astral Religion and Astrological Symbolism in Syria

In the Graeco-Roman world, this belief in a living heavenly realm was a common assumption.¹⁸² Based on the awe of this heavenly empire there was astral religion, though not as formal as the Christian religion. Though relatively little evidence survives of what pagan Syrians may have written about their religion, both literary and archaeological source, especially art, show that astral religion was current in the area of Syria.

Geographically, Syria had a close connection to Mesopotamia and was subject to Mesopotamian influences from long before. Akkadian cuneiform was the diplomatic language of Bronze Age Syria. Mesopotamian divination was well known, including the omens in *Enuma Anu Enlil*. The connection became even closer during the Iron Age, when

¹⁷⁸ Sidonius Dorotheus, *Dorothei Sidonii Carmen Astrologicum: interpretationem Arabicam in linguam Anglicam versam una cum Dorothei fragmentis et Graecis et Latinis*, (ed. David Edwin Pingree; Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1976), 321.

¹⁷⁹ S. J. Tester, *A History of Western Astrology*, (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1987), 23.

¹⁸⁰ Bouché-Leclercq, *L'astrologie Grecque*, 312, 318-22; Tester, *Western Astrology*, 23.

¹⁸¹ Bouché-Leclercq, *L'astrologie Grecque*, 315-16; Tester, *Western Astrology*, 24-25.

¹⁸² This thought is found in the civic cults of the Fertile Crescent, in mystery religions such as Mithraism (Roger Beck, *Planetary Gods and Planetary Orders in the Mysteries of Mithras*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), 16, 89; David Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries: Cosmology and Salvation in the Ancient World*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989)); Gnosticism (Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God & the Beginnings of Christianity*, (3rd ed.; Boston: Beacon Press, 2001); Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, (trans. R. McL Wilson; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983)); and the Middle and Neo Platonism (John M. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: 80 B.C. to A.D. 220*, (Rev. ed.; Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996); Richard T. Wallis and Lloyd P. Gerson, *Neoplatonism*, (2nd ed.; London: Duckworth, 1995)).

Syria was incorporated into the Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian empires. Aramaic, the chief language of Iron Age Syria, eventually replaced Akkadian as the vernacular of Mesopotamia. Even during the following Hellenistic period, the Aramaic language continued to unite Persian-controlled Mesopotamia and Roman Syria.¹⁸³ In the Graeco-Roman world, Syria stood as a major centre of Hellenism as well as one of the richest and the most important parts of the empire. Its temples, which are among the most famous examples of Classical architecture, are often decorated with astrological art.¹⁸⁴ Clear examples of astral religion and astrological symbolism may be seen in the temples of Hellenized Syria, particularly Harran and Edessa in the north, Palmyra in the Syrian Desert, Heliopolis, the modern Baalbek, in the Beqaa Valley of modern Lebanon, and Khirbet Tannur in the Nabataean kingdom on the southern and eastern fringes of Palestine.

Syrian astral religion in the Hellenistic world was connected with two contemporary religious trends: (1) the increasing importance of the sun-god and (2) a certain tendency towards what we may call "monotheism".¹⁸⁵ To illustrate the prominence of the sun-god, Vespasian's soldiers at the Battle of Cremona in the first Century CE are reported to salute the rising sun "after the Syrian custom".¹⁸⁶ By the third Century CE, the emperor Aurelian had even made the Syrian sun-god, as Sol Invictus, the official protector of the Roman Empire.¹⁸⁷ To illustrate a monotheistic tendency, while Syrian pantheons in the Bronze Age had been communities of equals, like the pantheons of Mesopotamia and of Classical Greece, resembling the ruling class of a city-state, by the Hellenistic period the pantheons had come to resemble the rulers of the Persian Empire. The chief god was no longer the first among equals; rather, he was seen as all-powerful, with the other gods viewed as servants merely carrying out his orders, much like the civil servants of a Great King or a Caesar. An astral version of this picture identified the chief god with the sky and his subordinates with the planets.¹⁸⁸ Throughout much of Hellenized Syria the chief god was Baal Shamin, the Lord of Heaven, sometimes identified with, sometimes separate from, Hadad, the rain-god.¹⁸⁹ Both

¹⁸³ H. J. W. Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980), 3-4; Edwin Yamauchi, "Aramaic," in *The New International Dictionary of the Bible*, (ed. E. M. Blaiklock and R. K. Harrison; Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), 38-41.

¹⁸⁴ H. J. W. Drijvers, "The Cult of Azizos and Monimos at Edessa," in *Ex Orbe Religionum*, (ed. Geo Widengren; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), 357-58.

¹⁸⁵ Stanley Mayer Burstein, *The Babyloniaca of Berossus*, (Malibu, Calif.: Undena Publications, 1978).

¹⁸⁶ A. Leo Oppenheim, *Letters from Mesopotamia: Official Business, and Private Letters on Clay tablets from Two Millennia*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 43-53; Pingree, "Mesopotamian Astronomy," 613-31; J. C. Greenfield and M. Sokoloff, "Astrological and Related Omen Texts in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic," *JNES* 48 (1989): 201-14.

¹⁸⁷ Burstein, *The Babyloniaca of Berossus*, 4-5.

¹⁸⁸ Vitruvius, *On Architecture*, 9.2.1, 9.6.2, 9.8.1.

¹⁸⁹ Bouché-Leclercq, *L'astrologie Grecque*, 550.

were identified with Zeus by Greek-speakers. Astrological art was used to represent this conception.¹⁹⁰

3.1. Edessa and Harran

Edessa and Harran were in the region where Anatolia, geographical Syria and northern Mesopotamia merge.¹⁹¹ In many ways Mesopotamian and West Semitic cultures were combined in this region, particularly in religion. An extensive literature in Syriac and Arabic provides most of the evidence. Harran had a distinguished history long before the Hellenistic era.¹⁹² The first written reference to the city and its famous shrine of the Moon was in a letter from Zimri-Lim, the king of Mari, ca. 1850 BC.¹⁹³ In the Neo-Assyrian Empire, Sin's temple, E-HUHUL, was restored by both Shalmaneser and Assurbanipal, and both Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal went to Harran for coronation at the hands of Sin of Harran. Nabonidus, the last Neo-Babylonian king, was a native of Harran and his zeal for Sin of Harran played a significant role in his downfall.¹⁹⁴ Coins minted in Harran during the Hellenistic and Roman empires show the continuation of the cult of Sin.¹⁹⁵ Before the classical period, Harran was part of a small kingdom, Osrhoene. Edessa was its capital city.¹⁹⁶ The polytheistic religion of Osrhoene was a mixture of Greek, Syrian, and Mesopotamian influences, including astral religion. Bel-Marduk and Nebo were the chief gods of Edessa. According to Drijver, Bel was

The kosmokrator, lord of the planets and stars, who guided the world and gave it fertility. He symbolized order in the cosmos and society, because he gave and guaranteed the laws. In his cult astrological practice kept an organic place, because astrology made known the divine creator of order.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁰ Thomas Little Heath, *Aristarchus of Samos: The Ancient Copernicus*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1981), 299-351.

¹⁹¹ Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs*, 9-10.

¹⁹² For a survey of Harran's archaeology and written history, see Kay Prag, "The 1959 Deep Sounding at Harran in Turkey," *Levant* 2 (1970): 70-78.

¹⁹³ Hildegard Lewy, "Points of Comparison Between Zoroastrianism and the Moon-Cults of Harran," in *A Locust's Leg: Studies in Honour of S. H. Taqizadeh*, (ed. W. B. Henning and Ehsan Yarshater; London: Percy Lund, Humphries & Co., 1962), 138-40; J. B. Segal, "The Sabian Mysteries," in *Vanished Civilizations: Forgotten Peoples of the Ancient World*, (ed. Edward Bacon and Henri Lhote; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), 202; Jürgen Tubach, *Im Schatten des Sonnengottes: der Sonnenkult in Edessa, Harran und Hatra am Vorabend der christlichen Mission*, (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1986), 129.

¹⁹⁴ Lewy, "Points of Comparison," 140; Segal, "The Sabian Mysteries," 202-03, 211; Tubach, *Im Schatten des Sonnengottes*, 130.

¹⁹⁵ Tubach, *Im Schatten des Sonnengottes*, 134-35.

¹⁹⁶ J. B. Segal, *Edessa, 'The Blessed City'*, (2nd ed.; Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press, 2005), 5, 9-15.

¹⁹⁷ H. J. W. Drijvers, "The Persistence of Pagan Cults and Practices in Christian Syria," in *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period*, (ed. Nina G. Garsoïan, Thomas F. Mathews,

Nebo mediated between humanity and his father Bel-Marduk, and was also the divine patron of Edessa's academics.¹⁹⁸ Atargatis, the famed Syrian Goddess, the equivalent of Aphrodite, was also worshipped in Osrhoene. Her most famous shrine, at Hierapolis or Mabbog, was not far away.¹⁹⁹ A temple to the sun stood somewhere near the Beth Shemesh Gate, which means temple of the sun. Likewise, stars and crescent moons were often on Edessa's coins. Julian says that the Edessans had worshipped the sun "from time immemorial".²⁰⁰ He associates the sun-cult of Edessa with Azizos and Monimos, who he says are Hermes and Ares.²⁰¹ In *The Teaching of Addai* (usually dated 400 CE), there is a story, which tells how king Abgar corresponded with Jesus. After Jesus' ascension, Addai, one of Jesus' disciples, was sent to preach the Gospel to Abgar and the Edessans.²⁰² In his sermon, Addai describes Edessa's religion:

I see that this city is filled with paganism which is contrary to God. Who is this [man-] made idol Nebo which you worship, and Bel which you honour? Behold there are those among you who worship Bath Nical, like the inhabitants of Haran [sic], your neighbours, and Taratha, like the inhabitants of Mabbog, and the Eagle, like the Arabs, and the sun and the moon, like the rest of the inhabitants of Haran who are like you. Do not be led captive by dazzling lights or the brilliance because everyone who worships created things is cursed before God.²⁰³

Here Bel probably denotes Marduk, the chief god of Babylon, although Sin was called "Bel Harran", Lord of Harran. Taratha is Atargatis. Bath Nical means "daughter of Nikkal". Nikkal, in turn, is NIN.GAL, the wife of Sin. Her daughter may have been Atargatis again. The Eagle may be the constellation Lyra, as among the Arabs, or the sun, as at Hatra, or it may symbolize the sky-god.²⁰⁴ According to the *Doctrine*, Addai told his new Christians to avoid pagan people and pagan practices, such as magic, divination in general and astrology in particular "... be ware of the pagans who worship the sun and the moon, Bel and Nebo,

and Robert W. Thomson; Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1982), 37; cf. H. J. W. Drijvers, *The Religion of Edessa*, (Leyden: E. J. Brill, 1976), 61.

¹⁹⁸ Drijvers, *Religion of Edessa*, 40-75.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Lucian, *The Syrian Goddess (de Dea Syria): attributed to Lucian*, (ed. Harold W. Attridge and Robert A. Oden; Missoula, Mont.: Society for Biblical Literature, 1976).

²⁰⁰ Julian the Apostate, "Hymn to Helios," in *The Works of Julian the Apostate*, (London: William Heinemann, 1913), 1.150.

²⁰¹ Apostate, "Hymn to Helios," 1.353-54.

²⁰² Addai, *The Teaching of Addai*, (trans. George Howard; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), vii, 3-11.

²⁰³ Addai, *The Teaching of Addai*, 48-49.

²⁰⁴ Drijvers, "Persistence of Pagan Cults and Practices," 38.

and the rest of those they call gods”²⁰⁵ These accounts make it clear that heaven and astral religion was an important part of the native religion of Harran and Edessa.

3.2. Palmyra

Located between the Euphrates and the Mediterranean coast, Palmyra is a large oasis in the Syrian Desert and presumably shared in the same social and political developments as the rest of the Fertile Crescent.²⁰⁶ It is likely that Palmyra was subject to the Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenian empires in turn and went through the same cultural changes as their neighbours.²⁰⁷ It became an important commercial centre in the mid-first century BC.²⁰⁸ No Greek or Roman writer ever wrote the history of Palmyra, except for its brief mention in Pliny the Elder’s *Natural History*.²⁰⁹ Fragments of a temple of the Hellenistic period were found in a probe trench in the present Temple of Bel, which is one of the largest and most elaborate temples of the Roman Empire. Its sculptures provide some of the most interesting evidence of astral religion at Palmyra. The temple is set on an artificial mound that dates back to the 2nd millennium BC and it is almost sure that this site has always been the site of a shrine. This sanctuary is walled and has a courtyard in the centre of it, and in the centre of the courtyard the cella, which is the original place of worship. Inside the cella are the altar where sacrifices were made and a sacred pool. Three staircases lead to the roof, where there may have been an observatory.

Bel-Marduk, the chief god of Babylon, was also the chief god of Palmyra.²¹⁰ In Greek inscriptions he was called Zeus and Jupiter by the Romans.²¹¹ An inscription on the temple of Bel reads that it was dedicated on 6 Nisan 32 CE, which is called “the good day” in

²⁰⁵ Addai, *The Teaching of Addai*, 70-71, 86-89.

²⁰⁶ H. J. W. Drijvers, *The Religion of Palmyra*, (Leiden: Brill, 1976); S. Cohen, "Tadmor," in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, (ed. Geoffrey William Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 4.509-10.

²⁰⁷ Jean Starcky and Micha Gawlikowski, *Palmyre*, (rev. et augm. des nouvelles découvertes. ed.; Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, 1985).

²⁰⁸ A. H. M. Jones, *The Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces*, (2d ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 218-19.

²⁰⁹ Plinius Secundus, *Natural History*, 5.21.88.

²¹⁰ Drijvers, *Religion of Edessa*, 3, 9-10; H. Gese, M. Höpfner, and K. Rudolph, *Die Religion Altsyriens, Altarabiens und der Mandäer*, (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1977), 226; Henri Seyrig, Robert Amy, and Ernest Will, *Le temple de Bêl à Palmyre*, (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1968-75), 227.

²¹¹ Seyrig, Amy, and Will, *Le temple de Bêl*, 229; Javier Teixidor, *The Pagan God: Popular Religion in the Greco-Roman Near East*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977), 115.

Palmyrene inscriptions²¹² and is the date on which *Enuma Elish* was read during the Babylonian *Akitu* festival.²¹³ The *Akitu* festival throughout Mesopotamia re-enacted the victory of cosmic order over primeval chaos and Babylon's version portrayed Marduk as victor over the monster Tiamat.²¹⁴ In Palmyra as in Babylonia and in Osrhoene, Bel also maintained the status quo in the universe by means of astrology. "Bel is the supporter of law and order par excellence and guides everything that happens."²¹⁵ His divine subordinates were the planets. This is clearly portrayed in the relief within the north *thalamos* of the temple, where the cult statue probably stood.²¹⁶ The ceiling is a square monolith. In the corners are four eagles, the birds of Zeus and of the Syrian sky god. They uphold a zodiac ring. The zodiac animals are the usual ones in Greek astrology.²¹⁷ Within the zodiac is a dome carved into the monolith. The dome is divided into seven hexagons, one at the centre surrounded by six others. In each hexagon is a human bust, identified by its attribute as one of the Greek planet gods.²¹⁸ Aphrodite is veiled, as everywhere in Syria. The Moon is female, as usual in Palmyra.²¹⁹ Bel as Jupiter stands in the central hexagon, surrounded by his subordinates, the divine planets.²²⁰ The message of the sculpture is clear. "Les bas-reliefs qui ornent la loge de son idole le representent comme un maitre des planètes du ciel étoile, du zodiaque, et par la du destin qui conduit le monde."²²¹ Bel is the supreme ruler of the universe and all other deities are his subordinates. The laws of nature, such as astrology, are his laws.

The lintel of the thalamus is also sculpted with a comparable relief. On it is an enormous eagle, wings outspread, holding a snake in its claws. The left side is largely destroyed, but beneath the right wing are stars, and a human figure with a halo of rays, probably the sun-god. Seven of the stars are noticeably more elaborate than the others, and one is placed on

²¹² H. J. W. Drijvers, "After Life and Funerary Symbolism in Palmyrene Religion," in *La soteriologia dei culti orientali nell'Impero romano*, (ed. Ugo Bianchi and M. J. Vermaseren; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1982), 725.

²¹³ Drijvers, *Religion of Palmyra*, 9; Drijvers, "After Life and Funerary Symbolism," 717.

²¹⁴ One of the reliefs on the Bel temple of Palmyra, which shows a snake-footed monster fighting two deities while other gods watch, probably represents a local version of Bel's combat with Tiamat. Cf. Drijvers, "After Life and Funerary Symbolism," 716-17; Seyrig, Amy, and Will, *Le temple de Bêl*, 95; Teixidor, *The Pagan God*, 136.

²¹⁵ Drijvers, "After Life and Funerary Symbolism," 717-18.

²¹⁶ Drijvers, "After Life and Funerary Symbolism," 717; Carl Watzinger, "'Palmyra,'" in *Pauly-Wissowas Realencyklopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche, 1949), cols. 262-77; Hans G. Gundel, "Zodiakos. Der Tierkreis in der Antike," in *Pauly-Wissowas Realencyklopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1972), col. 627.

²¹⁷ Malcolm A. R. Colledge, *The Art of Palmyra*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), 131.

²¹⁸ Colledge, *Art of Palmyra*, 38.

²¹⁹ Colledge, *Art of Palmyra*, 238.

²²⁰ Drijvers, *Religion of Palmyra*, 9; Drijvers, "After Life and Funerary Symbolism," 717; Seyrig, Amy, and Will, *Le temple de Bêl*, 1.45, 83.

²²¹ Seyrig, Amy, and Will, *Le temple de Bêl*, 1.229.

top of a disk. These are probably the seven planets, the disk-star being the sun. The eagle represents the god of the sky, Bel, and the snake is the sun's annual path through the sky, the ecliptic.²²² Once again, Bel, the lord of Palmyra, is shown as lord of the universe, sheltering the stars under his wings.²²³ A simpler version of this last motif is very common in Palmyrene art. This is the triad of Bel, three human figures, showing Bel flanked by Yarhibol and Aglibol, sun and moon gods, respectively. Statues of all three gods may have stood in the north thalamus.²²⁴

Baal Shamin, the West Semitic sky god, was also worshipped at Palmyra, although his temple was smaller and less important than Bel's. Like Bel, he was called Zeus in bilingual inscriptions.²²⁵ Functionally, both were sky gods. Elsewhere in Syria Baal Shamin was a god of agriculture because he provided the winter rains. In Palmyra, irrigation provided water for most purposes, but rain for pasturage was still important to the Arab herding population.²²⁶ Thus, perhaps they were seen as the same god, worshipped under different names by different ethnic groups.²²⁷ Baal Shamin was also portrayed in a triad similar to Bel's (sun-sky-moon). But, in his triad Aglibol was the sun and Malakbel was the moon.²²⁸ The message was the same, even though the gods involved did not have the same names. the god of the sky ruled the universe with the sun and moon as his chief helpers.²²⁹

3.3. Baalbek

Heliopolis, the Greek name of the modern Baalbek, is in the centre of Beqaa valley, one of the leading agricultural regions of geographical Syria. The name "Baalbek" probably refers to the regional god. After having been added to the Roman Empire in 63 BC, the god was identified with Zeus and Jupiter.²³⁰ Baalbek is most famous and important for the temple of

²²² For a discussion of the snake as a symbol of the ecliptic, see Beck, *Planetary Gods and Planetary Orders*, 53-56.

²²³ Drijvers, *Religion of Palmyra*, 9; Drijvers, "After Life and Funerary Symbolism," 717; Seyrig, Amy, and Will, *Le temple de Bêl*, 1.83.

²²⁴ Drijvers, *Religion of Palmyra*, 12-13; Drijvers, "After Life and Funerary Symbolism," 717; Seyrig, Amy, and Will, *Le temple de Bêl*, 1.229-30.

²²⁵ Colledge, *Art of Palmyra*, 24-25; Drijvers, *Religion of Palmyra*, 3, 13-14.

²²⁶ Seyrig, Amy, and Will, *Le temple de Bêl*, 1.232.

²²⁷ Teixidor, *The Pagan God*, 135, 137.

²²⁸ Drijvers, *Religion of Palmyra*, 16; Gese, Höpfner, and Rudolph, *Die Religion Altsyriens*, 227; Seyrig, Amy, and Will, *Le temple de Bêl*, 1.232.

²²⁹ Drijvers, *Religion of Palmyra*, 16, 89.

²³⁰ Friedrich Ragette, *Baalbek*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1980), 16; Joseph N. Hajjar, *La triade d'Héliopolis-Baalbek: Son culte et sa diffusion à travers les textes littéraires et les documents iconographiques et épigraphiques*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977), 219; Joseph N. Hajjar, *La triade d'Héliopolis-Baalbek: Iconographie, théologie, culte et sanctuaires*, (Montréal: Université de Montréal, 1985), 529-30.

Jupiter Heliopolitanus, which was one of the most important shrines of one of the most important gods in Syria. The temple itself is one of the largest of Classical Antiquity. Jupiter Heliopolitanus was portrayed as a cosmocrator in the same way as Bel of Palmyra and as the gods of Edessa and Harran.

Three gods were worshipped at Baalbek/Heliopolis, called Jupiter, Venus, and Mercury, or Zeus, Aphrodite, and Hermes. It is almost certain that they were the major Syrian gods, Hadad or Baal, Atargatis, and a young god similar to Adonis, whose native name is unknown.²³¹ No inscriptions label them with their native names, although Macrobius does say that “the god whom they revere as highest and greatest they have given the name of Adad” He also says that Atargatis was Adad’s partner.²³² The first two had dominated Syrian religion for millennia, making the equation quite likely.²³³ Mercury’s Semitic equivalent has not been identified with certainty, but such family groups of father, mother and son were common throughout geographical Syria.²³⁴

Jupiter was the most important of the Heliopolitan triad.²³⁵ Throughout Syria, in every historical period, Baal-Hadad was the god of fresh water, especially of the winter storms, but also of fresh water springs. By extension, he was the patron of agriculture, which was impossible without fresh water, and ruler of the sky, whence the rains came.²³⁶ In the Hellenistic period Hadad filled many of the same roles as Baal Shamin and Bel did at Palmyra and in northern Syria. Greeks and Romans saw all of them as equivalents of their own Zeus and Jupiter.²³⁷ Also, like all his counterparts, Jupiter Heliopolitanus was cosmocrator, or ruler of the entire universe, including the other gods.²³⁸ Astrological art was especially used to emphasize his role as cosmic emperor. There are a large number of dedicatory reliefs and votive statuettes. These are found throughout the Roman Empire, particularly in Syria. The god is portrayed standing at attention.²³⁹ He usually wears a gown with a variety of astral symbols on it. Sometimes these are merely disks or rosettes, but often they are busts of Helios and Selene or of all seven planet-gods, identified by their usual

²³¹ Henri Seyrig, "Le culte du Soleil en Syrie," 48 (1971): 369; Hajjar, *La triade d'Héliopolis-Baalbek*, 178; Hajjar, *La triade d'Héliopolis-Baalbek: Iconographie*, 512, 517.

²³² Ambrosius Aurelius Theodosius Macrobius, *The Saturnalia*, (trans. Percival Vaughan Davies; New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 1.23.17-18.

²³³ Hajjar, *La triade d'Héliopolis-Baalbek*, 195.

²³⁴ Seyrig, Amy, and Will, *Le temple de Bêl*, 99-100; Teixidor, *The Pagan God*, 35, 49.

²³⁵ Hajjar, *La triade d'Héliopolis-Baalbek*, 183.

²³⁶ Hajjar, *La triade d'Héliopolis-Baalbek*, 192-93, 217-19; Teixidor, *The Pagan God*, 54, 57.

²³⁷ Hajjar, *La triade d'Héliopolis-Baalbek*, 177, 183.

²³⁸ Hajjar, *La triade d'Héliopolis-Baalbek*, 221-23. Cf. idem, *La triade d'Héliopolis-Baalbek. Iconographie*, 224-25, no. 197

²³⁹ Hajjar, *La triade d'Héliopolis-Baalbek: Iconographie*, 500, 502-04.

attributes.²⁴⁰ In two examples, twelve busts for the twelve signs of the zodiac occur.²⁴¹ In another example, a statue of Jupiter Heliopolitanus from Sohne, near Palmyra, has the Bel triad on its chest.²⁴² Many examples have an eagle with wings outspread on the back.²⁴³ The image of the god wearing the planets means the same thing as the cupola relief and the eagle relief at Bel's temple in Palmyra: the chief god, the god of the sky, is supreme over the universe and the other gods, ruling the world by means of the planets and astrology.²⁴⁴ And, as elsewhere, the eagle was used to symbolize the sky-god, spread out over the earth.²⁴⁵ The fact that this iconography is found on dedications and *ex votos* implies that the ideas that it symbolized were common, well known to worshippers.

3.4. Khirbet Tannur

The last example of astral religion is Khirbet Tannur, a Nabataean site. Nabataean religion was much like that in the rest of Syria. The most important deities were those who controlled agricultural prosperity.²⁴⁶ Astrology and astrological symbolism were used to discover the gods' wills and to praise their power. Although many Nabataean temples and holy places are known, astral religion is most easily seen at Khirbet Tannur. It is a small temple atop Jebel Tannur (Mt. Oven), a solitary mountain, formed by the junction of the Wadi el-Hesa (the biblical brook Zered) and the Wadi el-Aban.²⁴⁷ It resembles many temples throughout Syria.²⁴⁸

A number of sculptures provide the evidence of astral religion at Khirbet Tannur. A large bust of Atargatis, with leaves and fruits growing from her face and hair, and a frieze of busts of the planet-gods probably decorated the façade. An eagle with outstretched wings

²⁴⁰ Gese, Höpfner, and Rudolph, *Die Religion Altsyriens*, 221; Hajjar, *La triade d'Héliopolis-Baalbek*, 90-91, 98-100, 223-24; Seyrig, Amy, and Will, *Le temple de Bêl*, 114.

²⁴¹ Hajjar, *La triade d'Héliopolis-Baalbek*, 223; Hajjar, *La triade d'Héliopolis-Baalbek: Iconographie*, 284, no. 233, 415, no. 321.

²⁴² Hajjar, *La triade d'Héliopolis-Baalbek*, 91; Hajjar, *La triade d'Héliopolis-Baalbek: Iconographie*, 211-14, no. 186.

²⁴³ Hajjar, *La triade d'Héliopolis-Baalbek*, 90, 106; Hajjar, *La triade d'Héliopolis-Baalbek: Iconographie*, 504.

²⁴⁴ Gese, Höpfner, and Rudolph, *Die Religion Altsyriens*, 222; Hajjar, *La triade d'Héliopolis-Baalbek*, 90, 101, 106, 222-25; Hajjar, *La triade d'Héliopolis-Baalbek: Iconographie*, 513.

²⁴⁵ Hajjar, *La triade d'Héliopolis-Baalbek*, 36, 106, 224.

²⁴⁶ Nelson Glueck, *The Other Side of the Jordan*, (New Haven, CT: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1970), 236, 238.

²⁴⁷ Glueck, *The Other Side*, 214; Nelson Glueck, *Deities and Dolphins: The Story of the Nabataeans*, (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1965), 74.

²⁴⁸ Glueck, *The Other Side*, 242-43; Glueck, *Deities and Dolphins*, 621; Avraham Negev, "The Nabataeans and the Provincia Arabia," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, (ed. H. Temporini and W. Haase; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1977), 605.

stood over the goddess' head, perhaps symbolizing the sky-god, as elsewhere.²⁴⁹ Of the seven planets, only Mars was missing, and that may be due to the accidents of preservation.²⁵⁰ A full-length relief of a male figure holding a thunderbolt and flanked by bulls, and thus resembling Zeus-Haddad, may have been the cult statue.²⁵¹ Glueck believes that this statue and the bust of Atargatis imply that the temple was dedicated to Zeus-Haddad and Atargatis, although no inscriptions say so.²⁵² However, the most interesting astral sculpture is a zodiac wheel held aloft by Victory.²⁵³ In the centre of the zodiac is a goddess. The mural crown she wears identifies her with Tyche or Fortune, who was a major deity throughout the Hellenistic period. Often she was also the power of the planets personified. But the 'Fortune of Khirbet Tannur' also has a crescent above her right shoulder, identifying her with the moon goddess, Selene. Over her left is an unknown symbol resembling a distaff. Glueck believes that the goddess is also Atargatis, who was indeed identified with Tyche elsewhere in the Hellenized Near East.²⁵⁴

The signs in the zodiac follow the usual Hellenistic iconography save for Aries (an Athena figure), Sagittarius (a young man with an arrow rather than a centaur) and Capricorn (a young woman instead of a goatfish).²⁵⁵ The sculpture praises the power and glory of Atargatis by identifying her with the personified power of astrology. Likewise, the façade of planet-gods praises Qos and Atargatis in the same way that the circle of planet-gods praises Bel in Palmyra. They rule the world and grant their worshippers' requests by means of the rules of astrology.²⁵⁶

4. Conclusion

This chapter has explored the pre-Hellenistic and Graeco-Roman conception of heaven and their attitude towards celestial phenomena, which may have influenced the use of celestial phenomena in the composition of the gospel of Matthew. The analysis of the pre-Hellenistic concepts showed that their polytheistic religion led them to view heaven as the realm of the multiple deities, which were identified with the stars or constellations. For the

²⁴⁹ Glueck, *The Other Side*, 221-22, 227; Negev, "The Nabataeans," 605.

²⁵⁰ Glueck, *The Other Side*, 221; Glueck, *Deities and Dolphins*, 471; Negev, "The Nabataeans," 607.

²⁵¹ Glueck, *The Other Side*, 227.

²⁵² Glueck, *Deities and Dolphins*, 143-44, 204-05. Cf. Negev, "The Nabataeans," 607; Hajjar, *La triade d'Héliopolis-Baalbek*, 195.

²⁵³ Gundel, "Zodiakos. Der Tierkreis in der Antike," cols. 628-29.

²⁵⁴ Glueck, *The Other Side*, 231; Glueck, *Deities and Dolphins*, 397.

²⁵⁵ Glueck, *Deities and Dolphins*, 415, 417, 426.

²⁵⁶ Glueck, *Deities and Dolphins*, 433-34.

Mesopotamians, these divine beings in heaven were worshipped and were believed to govern the earthly world from the heavenly realm. The heavenly beings, however, were not considered to rule the earth according to their own wills but to execute the will of Marduk, the king of the gods. In this way, the heavenly world was regarded as a kingdom governed by the sovereign Marduk. The movements of the heavenly bodies were assumed to represent the administration of the kingdom of Marduk. For the Babylonians, the celestial phenomena conveyed the divine message of Marduk for the government of the earth. They were believed to contain portents for the future events of the earth. Celestial divination by means of astrological interpretation was one of the prevalent ways to acknowledge the will of Marduk for the world in Mesopotamia. For the Chaldaean, this practice of celestial divination was not a superstitious magic but a well-disciplined science. The Egyptians had similar ideas to the Babylonians, especially by the stage of Ptolemaic Egypt. For them, the decans had power to exercise. They were involved in almost every event in the earthly world and were even believed to have power to command humans. These ideas of heaven and heavenly events were carried on to the Graeco-Roman world.

The polytheistic religious assumptions of the Hellenistic world caused the adoption and combination of the contemporary cosmologies with the Babylonian and Egyptian attitudes towards celestial phenomena. The Hellenistic philosophers, such as Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, saw heaven as a divine realm of the stars and constellations fashioned by the demiurge. These heavenly beings were considered alive with mind and soul. Their movements were believed to represent the divine government of the earthly world. Hellenistic astrology referred to “means of prediction through astronomy”. Along with the identification of the planets and stars as living beings, it contained two more aspects: (1) the cosmic sympathy and (2) the astrological doctrine of methodological “aspects”. Accordingly, the heavenly realm and the earthly world were assumed to be closely connected and to affect each other, mostly the heavenly influence upon the earth. Hellenistic astrology was well developed with the help of mathematical astronomy. Numerous fields of astrological practice were developed in the Graeco-Roman world.

Along with astrological practice, astral religion was also widespread in the Hellenistic world. It is no surprise to find the temples for astrolatry in Syria, which had a close connection to Mesopotamia and was subject to Mesopotamian influences from long before. The investigation of the astral religion in Syria, especially Edessa and Harran, Palmyra, Baalbek, and Khirbet Tannur, demonstrated that it was influential on the life of the inhabitants historically and culturally.

This chapter has demonstrated that the Graeco-Roman world understood the heavenly world as the kingdom of multiple deities governed by one sovereign deity and perceived celestial phenomena as conveying a divine portent for the coming events in the earthly world. The astrological practice for them was a scientific approach to interpret portents. Assuming Syria as the provenance of Matthew, the widespread astral religion in that region suggests that Matthew and his readership were well aware of astrological practice and were under its influence. This prevalent attitude towards celestial phenomena in the Graeco-Roman world may have encouraged Matthew to use the motif of celestial phenomena in composing his gospel.

Observation of Celestial Phenomena in the Jewish Context

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the Jewish attitude towards celestial phenomena around the time when the first gospel was composed, which the Jewish members within the Matthean community may have shared, so as to furnish the literary and religious context to the investigation of celestial phenomena in Matthew. It looks into the passages that describe celestial phenomena as well as the notions of heaven in the OT and Jewish literature in the Second Temple period. Furthermore, this chapter seeks to illustrate how the Jewish concepts of heaven and their attitude towards celestial phenomena have been developed during classical antiquity. In relation to the concepts of heaven, the analysis will be focused on its spatial facet among various aspects since the present study is on the observable events in heaven.

1. Observation of Celestial Phenomena in the Old Testament

The OT has much to say about heaven (שָׁמַיִם). It appears 458 times in the MT (the Hebrew שָׁמַיִם 420 times and the Aramaic שְׁמַיִן 38 times) and plays an important role throughout the Scriptures.²⁵⁷ The word שָׁמַיִם is widely employed in the Scriptures to accommodate various meanings corresponding to its context. This section begins with the analysis of the concept of heaven in the OT in relation to its spatial facet, which is generally recognized as an upper spatial territory above the earth, representing the sky, atmosphere, and outer space, as well as the habitation of God.²⁵⁸ After the analysis, it examines the biblical notion of divine council in the heavenly realm in relation to that in the ANE literature so as to illustrate how the ancient Israelites comprehended heavenly council and its relationship to celestial phenomena. Then, it investigates the Israelites' attitude towards celestial phenomena in the OT.

²⁵⁷ For the analysis of the usage of heaven in the OT in general, see Cornelis Houtman, *Der Himmel im Alten Testament: Israels Weltbild und Weltanschauung*, (Leiden: Brill, 1993).

²⁵⁸ Gerhard von Rad, "οὐρανός," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, (ed. Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley; TDNT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1985), 5.502-9; Mitchell G. Reddish, "Heaven," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (ed. David Noel Freedman; New York, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1992), 3.90-91; D. T. Tsumura, "šāmayim," in *NIDOTTE*, (ed. Willem A. VanGemeren; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 4.160-65; Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*, (1984-1985; London: SCM Press Ltd, 1985), 158-60.

1.1. Concept of Heaven

1.1.1. The Sky, Atmosphere, and Outer Space

The word שָׁמַיִם in the OT appears first in the creation narrative of Genesis (Gen 1.1). In this account, it is referred to as the רָקִיעַ, (firmament or expanse), the firm hard vault over the earth that separates the waters below from the waters above (Gen 1.6-8, 14, 20). This conception of heaven as the firmament is generally assumed throughout the OT (e.g. Job 22.14; Ps 19.1; 104.2; 148.4, Prov 8.27; Ezekk 1.22, 23, 25; Dan 12.3). It is considered to have foundations (2 Sam 22.8), supporting pillars (Job 26.11), and windows (Gen 7.11; 8.2; Isa 24.18; Mal 3.10). In this notion of heaven is included the atmosphere between the firmament and the earth. Birds are created to fly עַל-פְּנֵי רָקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם (Gen 1.20; cf. Deut 4.17; Ps 8.8; Dan 2.38). The recurrent OT phrase עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם, appearing 38 times in the MT, clearly illustrates the common assumption of this view. The report in 2 Samuel 18.9 that Absalom's head got caught in the branches of an oak, leaving him hanging וַיִּבֶן הָאֲרֶז בֵּין הַשָּׁמַיִם, also represents the idea of heaven covering midair. Often this word שָׁמַיִם conveys a broader connotation, referring to all that was above the earth with no thought of upper limitation, including the רָקִיעַ. There are located chambers for snow and hail (Job 38.22), the winds (Job 37.9; Ps 135.7; Jer 49.36), and the waters (Job 38.37; Ps 33.7; Jer 10.13). All the meteorological events, such as rain, snow, frost, dew, hail, thunder, wind, and clouds, are considered to come out from this heaven (e.g. Gen 8.2; Exod 9.22-35; Deut 11.11; 33.12; Josh 10.11; 1 Sam 2.10; Job 37.9; 38.22, 29; Ps 147.8; Isa 55.9-11; Jer 49.36; Zech 6.5).

In the רָקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם are also placed the heavenly bodies, such as the sun, moon, and stars (Gen 1.14-18; 15.5; Exod 32.13; Deut 4.19; Judg 5.20; Job 9.9; 38.31; Ps 8.3; Eze 32.8; Dan 12.3). The phrase כּוֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם occurs 10 times (Gen 22.17; 26.4, etc.). Although the celestial bodies are nowhere in the OT the subject of scientific investigation, it does not mean that the Israelites were ignorant of them. On the contrary, the OT exhibits that they were very conscious of the heavenly bodies and acquired certain knowledge of them. The Israelites, like their neighbours in the ANE, called the heavenly bodies by names, which were made after characters from various common animals and objects, and employed varied constellations and the zodiac in describing celestial phenomena, such as כִּיּוֹן (the planet

Saturn, Amos 5.26), עֵיֶשׁ (the Bear, Job 9.9), עֵיֶשׁ עַל־בְּנֵיהָ (the Bear with her sons, Job 38.31), כְּסִיל (Orion), מִשְׁכּוֹת כְּסִיל (the cords of Orion), כִּימָה (the Pleiades), חֲדָרֵי תַמָּן (the encirclers of the south), and מִזְרֹת (the Mazzaroth) (Job 9.9; 38.31-32; Ps 147.4; Amos 5.8; Isa 13.10).²⁵⁹ These namings of the constellations demonstrate the Israelites' broad astronomical knowledge covering the northern and southern celestial sphere. For the Israelites, these celestial bodies were not some lifeless substance, but were supposed to be living beings often personified.²⁶⁰ They were thought to "walk on the way", "come out" in the morning, and "go in" at night. The Psalmist declares, "The heavens are telling the glory of the Lord, their expanse proclaims the work of his hands" (Ps 19.1; cf. 148.1-4). He compares the sun to a bridegroom keen on performing his husbandly duties (Ps 19.4-5). Joshua 10.12-13 reports that the sun and moon were made to stand suddenly still and delayed going down. Judges 5.20 states, "The stars fought from heaven, from their courses they fought against Sisera." That the accounts of astronomical phenomena are placed along with those of meteorological occurrences in Job 38.19-38 represents that these events were considered to belong to the same category of celestial phenomena.²⁶¹ As a creation of God in nature (Gen 1.1), this heaven is supposed to be under God's government and subject to his judgment (Isa 13.13; 34.4; 50.3; 51.6; Jer 4.23-26).

1.1.2. Habitation of God

Heaven in the OT, "above the circle of the earth" (Isa 40.22), is also believed to be the habitation of God where his supreme abode is placed (Deut 26.15; 1 Kgs 8.30, 39; 22.19; Ps 2.4; 11.4; 103.19; Isa 66.1).²⁶² Enthroned in heaven, he sees all things, reigns as a king, and

²⁵⁹ For the detailed discussion on the identification of these constellations, see G. V. Schiaparelli, *Astronomy in the Old Testament*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), 54ff; N. Herz, "The Astral Terms in Job ix 9, xxxviii 31-32," *JTS* 14 (1913): 575-77; S. Mowinckel, *Die Sternnamen im Alten Testament*, (Oslo: Grøndahl, 1928), 52ff; O. Neugebauer, "The History of Ancient Astronomy," *JNES* 4 (1945): 1-38; G. R. Driver, "Two Astronomical Passages in the Old Testament," *JTS* 7 (1956): 1-11; Naphtali H. Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job: A New Commentary*, (Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, 1957), 158-61, 531; Marvin H. Pope, *Job*, (1st ed.; AB 15; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965), 70, 254; Friedrich Horst, Ernst Kutsch, and Hans Strauss, *Hiob*, (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1968), 1:146-47; H. H. Rowley, *Job*, (London: Nelson, 1970), 92, 315; David J. A. Clines, *Job 1-20*, (WBC 17; Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1989), 231-32.

²⁶⁰ I. Zatelli, "Astrology and the Worship of the Stars in the Bible," *ZAW* 103 (1991): 86-99; F. Lelli, "Stars," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, (ed. K. van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter Willem van der Horst; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 809-15.

²⁶¹ Cf. Samuel E. Balentine, *Job*, (Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys Pub., 2006), 649-57.

²⁶² Concerning the notion of God in heaven, Innes suggests that it emphasizes his separateness, transcendence and limitlessness (Donald K. Innes, "Heaven and Sky in the Old Testament," *EQ* 43 (1971): 148).

reveals himself from there (Gen 19.24; 21.17; 28.12, 17; Deut 26.15; 1 Kgs 8.32; Job 22.12; Ps 11.4; 14.2; 102.19; Lam 3.50; Isa 40.22; 63.15; 66.1). He is at times called “the God of heaven” (אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם, Ezra 1.2; אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם, Jonah 1.9; אֱלֹהֵי שָׁמַיָא, Dan 2.18; אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם, Ps 136.26). This heavenly realm is depicted as a royal court, where God is a king with divine beings at his service. These heavenly beings are considered to constitute a council: e.g. עֲדַת־אֵל (Ps 82.1), סוּד־קִדְשִׁים/קְהֵל קִדְשִׁים, (Ps 89.5, 7), סוּד יְהוָה, (Jer 23.18), סוּד אֱלֹהֵי (Job 15.8).²⁶³ The members of this heavenly council are spoken of with various titles, such as בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים (Gen 6.2, 4; Job 1.6; cf. Deut 32.8; Ps 82.6), בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים (Ps 29.1), בְּנֵי עֲלִיּוֹן (Ps 82.6), אֱלֹהִים (Ps 82.1), כָּל־אֱלֹהִים (Ps 97.7), and קְדוֹשִׁים (Job 5.1, 15.15[Q]; Zech 14.5; Prov 30.3).

1.1.3. More than One Heaven?

These two spatial notions of heaven have caused confusion among scholars whether heaven in the OT denotes more than one heaven. From the dual and plural forms of the word שָׁמַיִם, some scholars have asserted that it refers to dual heavens, reflecting the influence of Egyptian cosmology, or plurality of heavens as in the later apocalyptic literature (e.g. clouds, stars, and the habitation of God).²⁶⁴ Yet, these suggestions are generally to be rejected. As Bartelmus argues, the plural forms of heaven appear most likely to signify “der Himmel in seiner ganzen ungeheueren Ausdehnung” (The sky in its whole immense extent) rather than its numeric notions.²⁶⁵ Wright also states, “the Israelites intended to stress the sweep or

²⁶³ For the detailed discussion on the divine council in the OT, see J. Morgenstern, “The Mythological Background of Psalm 82,” *HUCA* 14 (1939): 29-126; H. W. Robinson, “The Council of Yahweh,” *JTS* 45 (1944): 151-57; Frank Moore Cross, “The Council of Yahweh in Second Isaiah,” *JNES* 12 (1953): 274-77; Gerald Cooke, “The Sons of (the) God(s),” *ZAW* 76 (1964): 22-47; Edwin C. Kingsbury, “The Prophets and the Council of Yahweh,” *JBL* 83 (1964): 279-86; Patrick D. Miller, “The Divine Council and the Prophetic Call to War,” *VT* 18 (1968): 100-07; Matitahu Tsevat, “God and the Gods in Assembly,” *HUCA* 40-41 (1969-1970): 123-37; R. N. Whybray, *The Heavenly Counsellor in Isaiah XL 13-14*, (SOTSMS 1; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971); E. Theodore Mullen, Jr., *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature*, (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1980); Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

²⁶⁴ For the debate on the morphology of the dual and plural forms of שָׁמַיִם, see Houtman, *Der Himmel im Alten Testament*, 5-7; Luis I. J. Stadelmann, *The Hebrew Conception of the World: A Philological and Literary Study*, (AnBib 39; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1970), 38-39.

²⁶⁵ Rüdiger Bartelmus, “Šamajim-Himmel: semantische und traditionsgeschichtliche Aspekte,” in *Das biblische Weltbild und seine altorientalischen Kontexte*, (ed. Bernd Janowski, Beate Ego, and

vastness of the heavenly realm from horizon to horizon.”²⁶⁶ Concerning the idea of multiple levels of heaven, the biblical concept is not as clearly defined as those in the apocalyptic literature. Stadelmann states,

The few references to different kinds of heaven are either so generic in their scope or metaphorical in their significance that an exact determination of the stages of the heavenly dome is impossible ... this space was not conceived as a structured complex of clearly distinguishable levels.²⁶⁷

These analyses manifest that heaven for the ancient Israelites was viewed as a single immense entity. In view of that, the two spheres of heaven are regarded by many scholars as denoting two facets of a compound whole; the visible sky and the invisible place of God’s dwelling. Moltmann describes these two aspects of heaven as “direct meanings” and “symbolic meanings”.²⁶⁸ Goldingay delineates the word שָׁמַיִם as meaning heaven “both in the physical sense of the sky and in the metaphysical sense of God’s dwelling.”²⁶⁹

While these two aspects are in general quite distinct in describing heaven in the OT, however, in a number of passages the distinction between the two is vague. Heaven appears to convey both aspects simultaneously. For example, it is recorded that God thundered against his enemies בַּשָּׁמַיִם (1 Sam 2.10; Ps 18.13). מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם/מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם God rained brimstone and fire upon Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19.24), rained bread (Exod 16.4; Neh 9.15), spoke to Moses (Exod 20.22), and threw large stones (Josh 10.11). Furthermore, מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם God’s angel also called to Hagar (Gen 21.17). Noting these facets of heaven so closely associated in the biblical passages, Kline remarks, “it may be difficult to determine in given cases whether ‘heaven’ refers to the visible or invisible heaven, or both at once.”²⁷⁰ Goldingay also acknowledges, “the passage ... sometimes leaves it unclear which is referred to.”²⁷¹ Observing such indistinguishable uses which hint at both aspects of heaven in the OT, it is questionable whether the ancient Israelites in fact had such a clear distinction between these two aspects of heaven as the modern world has. Innes states,

Annette Krüger; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 89; cf. Houtman, *Der Himmel im Alten Testament*, 6-7.

²⁶⁶ J. Edward Wright, *The Early History of Heaven*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 55.

²⁶⁷ Stadelmann, *Hebrew Conception of the World*, 41; cf. Ulrich E. Simon, *Heaven in the Christian Tradition*, (New York: Harper, 1958), 39.

²⁶⁸ Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 158, 160.

²⁶⁹ John Goldingay, *Daniel*, (WBC 30; Dallas: Word, 1989), 85.

²⁷⁰ Meredith G. Kline, "Space and Time in Genesis Cosmogony," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 48 (1996): 3.

²⁷¹ Goldingay, *Daniel*, 85; cf. Ernest Lucas, *Daniel*, (Leicester: Apollos, 2002), 102.

At any rate it is impossible to decide in which category certain passages should be placed. ... when Ezekiel (1.1) says that the heavens were opened and he saw visions of God, he does not mean that he observed the 'inverted bowl' of the sky to split, but that for him the barrier between the natural and the supernatural was removed.²⁷²

As shown in the biblical references to heaven, it appears that for the ancient Israelites there was no clear barrier between the two facets of heaven, the visible and the invisible or the figurative and the literal. The biblical conception of heaven flows easily between them.

1.2. Heavenly Realm

The biblical concept of heaven suggests a close association of celestial phenomena with the heavenly realm. Thorough examination of the biblical references to heavenly council reveals Israel's view of the heavenly realm and its relationship to celestial phenomena. This section explores (1) the biblical notion of heavenly council in relation to that in the ANE literature, (2) its description in the OT in relation to the earthly world, and (3) the conception of the host of heaven in heavenly council. It establishes an important foundation in investigating Israel's attitude towards celestial phenomena.

1.2.1. Divine Council

As discussed above, the heavenly realm in the OT is depicted as a royal court, where God reigns as a king and the heavenly beings serve him as members of a divine council (1 Kgs 22.19-23; 2 Chr 18.18-22; Job 1.6; Ps 82.1; Dan 7.10). The heavenly council and its members are called with various names. e.g. the assembly of El, the council of the holy ones, sons of God, sons of the mighty, gods, holy ones, etc. The expression of אֱלֹהִים for the council members illustrates their close association with, and their dependence on God.

This notion of the heavenly council, comprised of a ruling god and an assembly of gods, was also prominent in the literatures of Mesopotamia, Ugarit, and Phoenicia.²⁷³ These

²⁷² Innes, "Heaven and Sky," 146.

²⁷³ Thorkild Jacobsen, "Primitive Democracy in Ancient Mesopotamia," *JNES* 2 (1943): 159-72; Marvin H. Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts*, (VTSup 2; Leiden: Brill, 1955), 48-49; John Gray, *The Legacy of Canaan*, (2d rev. ed. 5; Leiden: Brill, 1965); Conrad E. L'Heureux, *Rank among the Canaanite Gods: El, Baal, and the Rephaim*, (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1979); Mullen, *The Divine Council*, 175-208; E. Theodore Mullen, Jr., "Divine Assembly," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (ed. David Noel Freedman; ABD; New York, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1992), 2.214-17; Smith, *Origins of Biblical Monotheism*.

materials, mostly the Ugaritic, present close parallels with its biblical depictions.²⁷⁴ The heavenly council in the Ugaritic texts are spoken of as *phr .ilm* (congregation of El/the gods),²⁷⁵ *phr bn .ilm* (congregation of the sons of El/the gods, *KTU* 1.4.III.14; *DULAT* 2.669), *dt .ilm* (assembly of El/the gods, *KTU* 1.15.II.7, 11; *DULAT* 1.152), *dr bn .il* (assembly of the sons of El, *KTU* 1.40.25, 33-34; *DULAT* 1.279-80), and *dr .il* (assembly of El, *KTU* 1.15.III.19; 1.39.7; 1.162.16; 1.87.18; *DULAT* 1.279-80).²⁷⁶ The members of this divine assembly are called *.ilm* (gods, *DULAT* 1.48-51), *bn .il/bn .ilm* (sons of El/the gods, *KTU* 1.16.V.10-25; 1.40.R.25, 41-42; 1.65.R. 1-3; 1.162. 16-17; *DULAT* 1.225-227), and *qdš/bn qdš* (holy ones/sons of the holy one (El), *KTU* 1.2.III.19-20; 1.2.IV.20-22; 1.16.I.10-11; *DULAT* 2.695-96). These members of El's divine council are placed among the deities of Ugarit in the Ugaritic pantheon list (*KTU* 1.47.29; *DULAT* 2.695-96).²⁷⁷

These analogous remarks about the heavenly council and its members in both biblical and Ugaritic literature suggest that the inhabitants in the ANE in general had various conceptions of the heavenly realm in common. As Heiser states, “the phrases **בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים**, **בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים**, and **בְּנֵי אֱלִים** have certifiable linguistic counterparts in Ugaritic texts to a council of gods under El, and ... the meaning of these phrases in the Hebrew Bible points to divine beings.”²⁷⁸ While the sons of El in the Ugaritic materials are envisaged as his physical

²⁷⁴ It is commonly agreed that the Ugaritic council was the conceptual precursor to the Israelite version of the divine council. See Marjo Christina Annette Korpel, *A Rift in the Clouds: Ugaritic and Hebrew Descriptions of the Divine*, (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1990); Hugh R. Page, *The Myth of Cosmic Rebellion: A Study of its Reflexes in Ugaritic and Biblical Literature*, (SVT 65; Leiden: Brill, 1996); Simon B. Parker, "Sons of (the) God(s)," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, (ed. K. van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter Willem van der Horst; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 794-98; Parker, "DDD," 204-08; John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, (JSOTSS 265; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); Smith, *Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 3-77; Mark S. Smith, *The early history of God : Yahweh and the other deities in ancient Israel*, (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2002), 145.

²⁷⁵ Manfred Dietrich, Oswald Loretz, and Joaquín Sanmartín, *Die Keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit: einschl. d. keilalphabet. Texte ausserhalb Ugarits*, (AOAT 24; Kevelaer; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Butzon und Bercker; Neukirchener Verlag, 1976), 1.47.29; 1.118.28; 1.148.9 (hereafter *KTU*); Gregorio del Olmo Lete, *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition*, (ed. Gregorio del Olmo Lete, Joaquín Sanmartín, and Wilfred G. E. Watson; 2nd rev. ed.; HONME 67; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 2.669 (hereafter *DULAT*).

²⁷⁶ This phrase corresponds exactly to **עֲדַת־אֱלִים** in Ps 82.1.

²⁷⁷ For the status of the Ugaritic deities, see Lowell K. Handy, "The Appearance of Pantheon in Judah," in *The Triumph of Elohim: From Yahwisms to Judaisms*, (ed. Diana Vikander Edelman; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1995), 33-35; Smith, *Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 43-45, 55-56; Michael S. Heiser, "The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004), 34-67.

²⁷⁸ Michael S. Heiser, "Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or henotheism?: Toward an Assessment of Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible," *BBR* 18, no. 1 (2008): 19.

descendants,²⁷⁹ however, the OT does not regard the divine beings as such. Rather, the term **בְּנֵי** appears to work idiomatically reflecting the common Semitic use of **בֵּן** for members of a class or group “belonging or adhering to, or in some way participating in the nature of, their ‘father’,”²⁸⁰ just as **בְּנֵי אָדָם** is for human beings.²⁸¹ As the title suggests, the divine beings in the heavenly council are in all respects subordinate and obedient to God, and completely dependent upon his will.

1.2.2. Divine Government of the Earthly World

The biblical references to the heavenly council reveal its profound involvement in the government of the earthly world. It is clearly described in Psalm 82:

- ¹ God (**אֱלֹהִים**) takes his stand in his own congregation; he judges in the midst of the gods (**אֱלֹהִים**).
- ² How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? Selah.
- ³ Vindicate the weak and fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and destitute.
- ⁴ Rescue the weak and needy; deliver *them* out of the hand of the wicked.
- ⁵ They do not know nor do they understand; they walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken.
- ⁶ I said, you are gods (**אֱלֹהִים**), and all of you are sons of the Most High.
- ⁷ Nevertheless you will die like men and fall like *any* one of the princes.
- ⁸ Arise, O God, judge the earth! For it is you who possesses all the nations.

As v1 indicates, this passage depicts the gathering of the divine council. **אֱלֹהִים** (God) is portrayed as standing in his divine council and judging in the midst of the **אֱלֹהִים** (gods). While the subject-verb agreement in v1a indicates that the first **אֱלֹהִים** denotes a singular entity (God), the second **אֱלֹהִים** with the preposition **בְּקִרְבֹּ** manifests the plural divine beings, for otherwise it is awkward to say that God stands in the midst of himself. Though

²⁷⁹ The Ugaritic mythology records that El fathered seventy sons (*KTU* 1.4.VI.46). These members of El’s divine family are placed among the deities of Ugarit in the Ugaritic pantheon list (*KTU* 1.47.29; *DULAT* 2.695-96).

²⁸⁰ Clines, *Job 1-20*, 19.

²⁸¹ Israel’s view of the status of divine beings has long been the subject of scholarly debate. While some argue that they were regarded as lesser deities in a pantheon, others put forth Israel’s monotheism and maintain that they were angelic beings, since the existence of other gods was hardly acceptable to such strict monotheism. Considering the biblical references, this study is inclined to view them as plural deities. For its detailed investigation, see Brendan Byrne, “Sons of God,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (ed. David Noel Freedman; New York, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1992), 6.156; Parker, “Sons of (the) God(s),” 784-800; Heiser, “The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature”.

the remarks about their ruling in v2-4 may allude to human rulers as the identity of these gods, they cannot be human beings, since they are said to die “like men, and fall like any of the princes” (v7).²⁸² In the same way and from the references to their unjust government (v2-5), they cannot be Trinity either. These features affirm the presence of the divine beings in the heavenly council.

The issue that is dealt with in this divine assembly is the unjust government of the earthly world (v2). God charges the divine beings (בְּנֵי עֲלִיּוֹן כְּלָכֶם, אֱלֹהִים, v7) with such mismanagement of the world. It is announced that, despite the Lord’s call to exercise just government (v3-4), they do not know its meaning and proceed in ignorance (v5). These divine beings are said to be put to death as a punishment (v7). The passage firmly illustrates that it is these divine beings that are granted the authority to govern the earthly world by God and are responsible for its mismanagement.²⁸³

This concept of divine government of the earth is further affirmed in Deuteronomy 32.7-9:

⁷ Remember the days of old, consider the years of all generations. Ask your father, and he will inform you; your elders, and they will tell you. ⁸ When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of man, he set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of *the sons of God*. ⁹ For THE LORD’s portion is his people; Jacob is the allotment of his inheritance.

Two different readings of the last phrase of v8 have been found in the manuscripts. While the MT and the Samaritan Pentateuch read it as “according to the number of בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל”, the majority of the Septuagint manuscripts and Qumran fragments (4QDeut^{b, q}) read it as “according to the numbers of ἀγγέλων θεοῦ/υἱῶν θεοῦ/אלהים בני”.²⁸⁴ The textual

²⁸² Cf. Cyrus H. Gordon, "Elohim in Its Reputed Meaning of *Rulers, Judges*," *JBL* 54 (1935): 139-44.

²⁸³ Although some may assert that the poetic expressions in the OT do not convey what the writer actually believes, Heiser argues,

Conceptual metaphors or poetic expressions are not based on what a person’s view of reality does *not* entail. Rather, the metaphor is a means of framing and categorizing something that *is* believed. Further, there is little coherence in the idea that theological content cannot be drawn from poetic texts. One wonders what moderns could know about the beliefs of any of the ancient Near Eastern civilizations if we eliminated from consideration what we read in their poetic epics. (Heiser, "Monotheism," 24).

²⁸⁴ John William Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Deuteronomy*, (SCSS no 39; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1995), 513; Paul Sanders, *The Provenance of Deuteronomy 32*, (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 156; Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, (1st ed.; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 514-18;

question of which reading takes priority over the other has long been the subject of scholarly debate. On the one hand, those scholars who support the former reading stress a preponderance of the support.²⁸⁵ They assert that the latter reading is an intentional error reflecting the well-developed contemporary angelology.²⁸⁶ On the other hand, those who support the latter reading emphasize ancient manuscript evidence.²⁸⁷ They claim that the former reading is “a kind of *tiqqun sopherim*, aiming to iron out a residue of polytheism from the biblical text.”²⁸⁸ These arguments, however, are both fallacious, since “no text should automatically be assumed superior in a text-critical investigation. Determining the best reading must be based on internal considerations, not uncritical, external presumption about the “correct” text.”²⁸⁹

The passage talks about the election of Israel in the context of divine plans in the distant past (v7). Those plans involved all the nations (v8a). Adopting the Qumran and the LXX reading of the “sons of God” for v8b, each nation was planned to be established within its

Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, (2nd rev. ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 269.

²⁸⁵ As Burrows notes, these scholars insist that “the age of a manuscript does not assure its importance; an ancient manuscript is not necessarily a good manuscript” (Millar Burrows, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, (New York: Viking Press, 1955), 347). Würthwein states, “as a general rule MT is to be preferred over all other traditions whenever it cannot be faulted either linguistically or for its material content, unless in particular instances there is good reason for favouring another tradition” (Ernst Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Biblia Hebraica*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 114).

²⁸⁶ Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament*, 43, 107-14; Stephen A. Geller, “The Dynamics of Parallel Verse A Poetic Analysis of Deut 32:6-12,” 75 (1982): 35-56; David E. Stevens, “Does Deuteronomy 32:8 Refer to ‘Sons of God’ or ‘Sons of Israel’?,” *Bib Sac* 154 (1997): 131-41.

This hypothesis, however, appears less than likely. It hardly accounts for the presence of the textual diversity in the Qumran material which contains both agreement and disagreement with the MT as well as the question why the Qumranites left so many texts unaltered if they were to alter this passage in their own fashion.

²⁸⁷ For these scholars, the prominence of the MT is not produced by “intrinsic factors related to the textual transmission, but by political and socioreligious events and developments” as Tov states (Emanuel Tov, “Textual Criticism (OT),” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (ed. David Noel Freedman; ABD; New York, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1992), 6.395, 407). In the cases of important textual divergences between the MT and the Septuagint, Heiser argues that “many textual studies have shown that the Qumran witnesses demonstrate the reliability of the transmission of the Hebrew text underlying the Septuagint” (e.g. *1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings*) (Michael S. Heiser, “Deuteronomy 32:8 and the Sons of God,” *Bib Sac* 158 (2001): 56; cf. P. Kyle McCarter, *1 Samuel: A New Translation*, (AB 8; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980); P. Kyle McCarter, *Textual Criticism: Recovering the Text of the Hebrew Bible*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 38; David Block, “Text and Emotion: A Study in the ‘Corruptions’ in Ezekiel’s Inaugural Vision,” *CBQ* 50 (1988): 418-42; Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 142).

²⁸⁸ Jan Joosten, “A Note on the Text of Deuteronomy xxxii 8,” *VT* 57 (2007): 549, 548-55; cf. C. Peter Wagner, *Warfare Prayer Strategies for Combating the Rulers of Darkness*, (Kent: Monarch, 1992), 90; Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 513-15; Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, (WBC 6A-6B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 6B.790-91, 796; Heiser, “Deuteronomy 32:8,” 52-74; J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy*, (Leicester: Apollon, 2002), 448.

²⁸⁹ Heiser, “Deuteronomy 32:8,” 55.

allotted boundaries according to the number of the “sons of God” (v8b).²⁹⁰ Jacob [the nation of Israel] is elected to be the Lord’s (v9). This reference to Israel as the allotment of the Lord’s inheritance in v9 reveals that the “nations” in v8 are assumed to be given as inheritances as well. The mention of the “sons of God” (v8) manifests that these are the ones who are given the rest of the nations as inheritances. The MT reading of the “sons of Israel”, however, leads one to interpret the passages as a statement that “Yahweh apportioned land to Israel, in the context of the creator’s distribution of land to all nations, according to their size and need.”²⁹¹ This interpretation is less than sufficient to account for v9. As Tigay states, “verse 9, which states that God’s portion was Israel, implies a contrast. Israel was God’s share while the other people were somebody else’s share, but [in the MT reading] verse 8 fails to note whose share they were.”²⁹² Accordingly, the Qumran and the LXX reading appear to make a better sense than the MT reading. This passage demonstrates the belief of the ancient Israelites that while Israel is governed by the Lord, the Gentile nations are given over to the divine beings. Assuming the later dating of the composition of Psalm 82,²⁹³ it becomes apparent that this divine government of the earthly world was generally believed among the Israelites.

1.2.3. The Host of Heaven

One of the most apparent parallels of Deuteronomy 32.8-9 in the OT can be found in Deuteronomy 4.19-20:

¹⁹ And *beware* not to lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, and be drawn away and worship them and serve them, those which the Lord your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven. ²⁰ But the Lord has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, from Egypt, to be a people for His own possession, as today.

The passage affirms the allotment of Israel to the Lord and that of all the other peoples to the divine beings.²⁹⁴ It reveals two important aspects of the divine council. First, v19 represents

²⁹⁰ Heiser suggests that the separation of the sons of man in this context indicates the dispersion of the nations at Babel in Genesis 10-11 (Heiser, "Deuteronomy 32:8," 70-71).

²⁹¹ McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 448; cf. S. R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy*, (ICC 5; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902), 355-56, 434; Jean Rennes, *Le Deutéronome*, (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1967), 152; Stevens, "Deuteronomy 32:8," 131-41.

²⁹² Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 302.

²⁹³ Cf. Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, (WBC 20; Dallas: Word Books, 1990), xxv.

²⁹⁴ For the detailed discussion on the issue whether Israel is included in “all the peoples” in Deut 4.19, see Nathan MacDonald, *Deuteronomy and the Meaning of 'Monotheism'*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 172-73.

that for the ancient Israelites the divine beings in the heavenly council and this heavenly host refer to the same group.²⁹⁵ While it is the sons of God in Deuteronomy 32.8 that all the nations are given over to, it is **צְבָא הַשָּׁמַיִם** in v19 that they are allotted to. The word **צְבָא** generally designates a military retinue or army. When it is used in connexion with the Lord, the term **צְבָא־יְהוָה** denotes his army in the heavenly realm (Josh 5.14-15; Isa 13.4-5; cf. Deut 33.2; 2 Kgs 6.17; 7.6; Isa 44.6; Joel 3.11). So does **צְבָא הַשָּׁמַיִם**. They are regarded as the creation of the Lord, the members of which constitute his heavenly army (Isa 40.26; 45.12; Ps 33.6; 103.21; 148.2-3; Neh 9.6). The host of heaven as the members of the divine council is clearly displayed in 1 Kings 22.19-23 (cf. 2 Chr 18.18-22):

¹⁹ And Micaiah said, ‘Therefore, hear the word of the Lord. I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right and on his left. ²⁰ And the Lord said, ‘Who will entice Ahab to go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?’ And one said this while another said that. ²¹ Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord and said, ‘I will entice him.’ ²² And the Lord said to him, ‘How?’ And he said, ‘I will go out and be a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.’ Then he said, ‘You are to entice *him* and also prevail. Go and do so.’ ²³ Now therefore, behold, the Lord has put a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; and the Lord has proclaimed disaster against you.’

Here, Micaiah’s vision of heaven depicts the picture of a royal court, where a king is sitting on his throne with his ministers and attendants surrounding him. The divine council is spoken of as **צְבָא הַשָּׁמַיִם**. This heavenly host stands in the council by the Lord on his right and left. When questioned, they come forward, stand before the Lord, share their ideas, and execute the will of the Lord. The passage demonstrates that the heavenly host are deeply involved in the earthly affairs, exerting important influences upon them. Though the actual term **צְבָא הַשָּׁמַיִם** is not used, **יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת** (Isa 6.3, 5) also alludes to the picture of the heavenly council. Like the sons of God in Psalm 82, it is announced that the heavenly host is subject to God’s judgment and would be punished, wear away, and wither away (Isa 24.21-23; 34.4). Second, Deuteronomy 4.19 further discloses that this host of heaven is composed of the celestial bodies: the sun, the moon, and the stars. For the ancient Israelites, the heavenly bodies were not some lifeless substance, but were assumed to be living beings

²⁹⁵ Cf. Sanders, *The Provenance of Deuteronomy 32*, 363-67; Herbert Niehr, "Host of Heaven," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, (ed. K. van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter Willem van der Horst; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 428; E. Theodore Mullen, Jr., "Hosts, Host of Heaven," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (ed. David Noel Freedman; ABD; New York, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1992), 302.

often personified.²⁹⁶ They are thought to “walk on the way”, “come out” in the morning, and “go in” at night. The Psalmist proclaims, “Praise him [the Lord], sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars. Praise him, you highest heavens” (Ps 148.3-4). It is also declared, “The heavens are telling the glory of the Lord, their expanse proclaims the work of his hands” (Ps 19.1; cf. 148.1-5). The sun is compared to a bridegroom keen on performing his husbandly duties (Ps 19.4-5). These heavenly beings are considered to be involved in a battle. Joshua 10.12-13, reporting the battle of Israel against the Amorites, says that the sun and moon were made to stand suddenly still and delayed going down. Judges 5.20 states, “The stars fought from heaven, from their courses they fought against Sisera.” The association of these celestial beings with the heavenly host is prominent throughout the OT.²⁹⁷

These aspects of the divine council in Deuteronomy 4.19-20 represent that the celestial bodies were regarded as divine members of the heavenly council in Israel.²⁹⁸ Such conception of the astral beings was not unknown to the ancient Israelites. It was already prominent among their neighbours in the ANE who called the divine assembly *phr kkbm* (assembly of the stars, in *KTU* 1.10.3-5) and its members *šmym* and *kkbm* (celestial ones and stars, *KTU* 1.19.IV.23-25, 29-31). They offered worship to these astral beings, the lesser deities in a pantheon. These gods possess derivative authority granted to them by El. Each of these gods is given a specific geographical region or a natural phenomenon to rule (*mlk*) as kings (*KTU* 1.2.I.24-25, 27-29) under the overarching sovereignty of El.²⁹⁹ These deities gather under the leadership of El to make the decisions concerning the destinies of nations and peoples that fall within the purview of the gods. The assignments of the heavenly council in the Ugaritic texts correspond well with those in the biblical passages. The numerous cases of astral worship throughout the OT reflect the similar conception of the celestial bodies as members of the divine council like that of the Ugarit. 2 Kings 17.16 states that the veneration of the astral beings was one of the causes that led to the fall of the Northern Kingdom. 2 Kings 21.3-5 (cf. 2 Chr 33.3-5) reports that King Manasseh in the Kingdom of Judah “bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshipped them. ... He built altars to all the starry hosts.” Under King Josiah’s reformation, it was found that incense had been burned to the sun, moon, the constellations and all the starry hosts in the temple of the

²⁹⁶ Zatelli, "Astrology and the Worship of the Stars in the Bible," 86-99; Lelli, "Stars," 809-15.

²⁹⁷ E.g. Deut 17.3; Job 38.7-8; Ps 33.6; 148.2-3; Neh 9.6; Isa 24.21-24; 34.4; 40.26; 45.12; Jer 8.2; 19.13; 33.22; Dan 8.10-11.

²⁹⁸ Zatelli, "Astrology and the Worship of the Stars in the Bible," 86-99; Niehr, "Host of Heaven," 429; Lelli, "Stars," 809-15.

²⁹⁹ Lowell K. Handy, "A Solution for the Problem of Many MLKM," *UF* 20 (1988): 58; Lowell K. Handy, "Dissenting Deities or Obedient Angels: Divine Hierarchies in Ugarit and the Bible," *Biblical Research* 35 (1990): 21; Lowell K. Handy, "The Authorization of Divine Power and the Guilt of God in the Book of Job: Useful Ugaritic Parallel," *JSOT* 60 (1993): 108.

Lord in Jerusalem (2 Kgs 23.4-5). Jeremiah 14.22 presents that **הַשָּׁמַיִם** is considered by his contemporaries as an astral deity (cf. Jer 8.2; 19.13; 32.29; 44.15-20). Other prophets also speak of astral worship in the Jerusalem Temple and on the housetops (e.g. Ezek 8.16; Zeph 1.5). Though such veneration of the astral beings is strongly forbidden and those who practise it are subject even to the punishment of death in Israel (Deut 4.19; 17.2-7; 2 Kgs 23.4-5; Isa 47.13-14), the OT does not deny the status of the celestial bodies as divine beings. The synonymous parallelism between the stars and the sons of God in Job 38.4-7 further affirms this notion; “where were you ... when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?” (cf. Isa 14.13).³⁰⁰

The investigation of the biblical references to the heavenly council demonstrates that it consists of the host of heaven, which signifies the astral bodies. Under God’s sovereignty, these heavenly beings are granted the authority to govern the earthly world. They gather to discuss issues for world management and execute the will of God. This conception may have led the ancient Israelites to believe the intimate connexion between the heaven and the earth, and to regard the celestial phenomena as conveying significant divine messages for the earthly world.

1.3. Celestial Phenomena as Divine Signs

Israel’s concept of the heavenly council, in which the celestial bodies take part in the government of the earthly world, displays an understanding similar to that of their neighbours’ in the ANE. This suggests that the ancient Israelites may share with fellow inhabitants in the ANE the concept that the celestial phenomena communicate significant divine messages for the earth. This section investigates the biblical references to celestial phenomena and seeks to illustrate Israel’s attitude towards such heavenly wonders in relation to the heavenly government of the earth. In doing so, it will first argue that the ancient Israelites regarded heaven as a source of divine revelation. It will show that seeking God’s visions from heaven was a conventional practice among the prophets. Then, it will explore the biblical passages that describe celestial phenomena, the meteorological, the supernatural, and the astronomical and illustrate that the heavenly wonders in Israel were viewed in association with God’s government of the earth (e.g. judgement and provision). For the correct interpretation of God’s revelation in heaven, the observation of celestial phenomena

³⁰⁰ See Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 538; cf. Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation, and Special Studies*, (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978), 443; Allison, "The Magi's Angel," 24.

was customary in Israel. This investigation will demonstrate that celestial phenomena were regarded among the Israelites as a divine mechanism by which God communicates his will and plans for the earth.

1.3.1. Heaven as a Source of Divine Revelation

As discussed above, heaven in Israel was believed to be the dwelling place of God. It was also assumed as a place where God communicates his wills or plans for the earth. In a number of places in the OT, it is reported that the Israelites received God's revelation from heaven and encountered celestial entities. Genesis 21.17 records that God heard Hagar's son crying and his angel called to Hagar מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם and revealed God's plans for her son. Likewise, the angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven to announce God's message (Gen 22.11, 15). Moses heard the Lord speaking from heaven (Exod 20.22). Nehemiah also reports God coming down and speaking to his people from heaven (Neh 9.13). Solomon's prayer in 2 Chronicles 6 displays his expectation of God's forgiveness and judgment from heaven. The king Nebuchadnezzar encountered in his visions a holy watcher coming down מִן־שָׁמַיִם (Dan 4.13, 23).

In addition, the OT records that certain prophets, such as Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah, received divine visions by looking up to heaven. Ezekiel states in Ezekiel 1.1, "heaven was opened and I saw מִרְאֵת אֱלֹהִים". The opening of heaven should not imply the split of the inverted bowl of the sky, but denotes that he was permitted to gaze into the divine council, which was believed to be in heaven.³⁰¹ This suggests that Ezekiel received these visions while looking up to heaven. This attitude is explicitly stated in Ezekiel 10.1; "Then I looked, and behold, אֶל־הַרְקִיעַ, that was over the heads of the cherubim something like a sapphire stone, in appearance resembling a throne, appeared above them." Likewise, Zechariah reports seeing visions from heaven in Zechariah 6.1ff (And I lifted up my eyes again and looked, and behold, four chariots were coming forth from between the two mountains). The notion of two mountains as related to a deity was well known in the ANE.³⁰² The Mesopotamian sun-god, Šamaš, was often portrayed in glyptic art as appearing between two mountains, which represents the rising sun. These mountains were located inside two opened

³⁰¹ Cf. Isaiah 64.1 speaks of the Lord rending heaven and coming down to aid the supplicant.

³⁰² Cf. Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament*, (HSM 4; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972), 79.

doors of the heavenly realm, signifying the gates of heaven.³⁰³ These references suggest that Zechariah saw visions of chariots coming out of heaven. The recurrent phrase עֵינַי וְאֶרְאָהּ (cf. Zech 1.18; 2.1; 5.1, 9), which denotes the direction in which the prophet looks, and the interpretation of the four chariots as אַרְבַּע רְחֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם (Zech 6.5) further sustain this interpretation. Similarly, Daniel reports receiving a vision of אַרְבַּע רוּחֵי שָׁמַיָא (Dan 7.2). He is said to have seen God’s vision by looking upwards (Dan 7.4; 8.3; 10.5). These references demonstrate that it was almost customary for the prophets to look up to heaven in seeking God’s visions. The OT shows that heaven was generally regarded as a vital source of divine revelation from which the Israelites could learn God’s plans for the earth.

For the ancient Israelites, heaven as the dwelling place of God indicates that anything that occurs in heaven was considered to be carried out under his sovereignty. Divine revelation is received not only from visions from heaven but also from occurrences in heaven. God’s involvement in heavenly occurrences is reported in a number of passages in the OT. Along with the general description of divine management of recurrent meteorological incidents, the OT speaks of distinct celestial phenomena, natural and supernatural, which announce divine involvement. They are represented in associations with God’s judgement against the sinners and his provision for his people. Daniel 4.31-32 reports that “קָלַל came from heaven” to announce God’s judgement upon the king Nebuchadnezzar. Thunder in heaven is portrayed as part of divine judgement against the enemies (“Those who contend with the Lord will be shattered; against them he will thunder in the heavens, the Lord will judge the ends of the earth”, 1 Sam 2.10; cf. 2 Sam 22.14; Ps 18.13; 29). Joshua 10.11 says that the Amorites were killed because “the Lord threw large [hail]stones from heaven.” Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because “the Lord rained brimstone and fire out of heaven” on them (Gen 19.24). In 2 Kings 1.10-14, the three captains and their one hundred fifty men were consumed by the fire of God מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם. The pericope of Noah demonstrates the judgement of God against the sinners by means of heavy rain and flood; “I will send rain on the earth forty days and forty nights; and I will blot out from the face of the land every living thing that I have made” (Gen 7.4). The employment of torrential rain, hailstones, brimstone and fire, as agents of divine retribution are also seen in Psalm 11.6 and Ezekiel 38.22. As for divine provision, Genesis 9.13-14 says that, after the destruction of the

³⁰³ Anton Moortgat, *Vorderasiatische Rollsiegel: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Steinschneidekunst*, (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1988), 23 and the seals no 219, 220; cf. Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*, (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 22-24.

earth in Noah's pericope, God established a covenant with Noah putting a sign of the covenant, קִשְׁתּוֹ in the clouds. The Hebrew word קִשְׁתּוֹ is used for both a rainbow and a bow.³⁰⁴ The appearance of a rainbow in heaven is considered to confirm God's covenant with mankind. God's provision for his people is also observed in the raining of bread from heaven in Exodus 16.4 (cf. Neh 9.15; Ps 78.24). The chroniclers record that God provided his answers to David as well as Solomon with fire מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם (1 Chr 21.26; 2 Chr 7.1). These references demonstrate that the Israelites observed incidents in heaven, meteorological and supernatural, assuming them as instruments with which God communicates his wills and plans for the earth. Not only through God's revelation but also from the observation of phenomena in heaven and on the earth the Israelites could infer divine messages for the earth.

1.3.2. Astronomical Phenomena as a Divine Communication

That the ancient Israelites regarded heaven as a source of divine revelation and meteorological and supernatural phenomena as a communication of divine wills or plans for the human world suggests that they also viewed astronomical phenomena in the same way as the other celestial phenomena. Israel's apparent sharing of the celestial conceptions with the inhabitants in the ANE and the prominence of celestial divination as one of the commonest ways of seeking the divine wills for the earth in the ANE further sustain this perspective. This section argues through the analysis of the biblical passages that describe astrological phenomena that the ancient Israelites like their neighbours perceived astronomical phenomena as God communicating his messages for the earthly world.

Genesis 1.14-18

Israel's attitude towards the astronomical phenomena is first revealed in the creation account of the celestial bodies (the sun, the moon, and the stars, Gen 1.14-18):

¹⁴ Then God said, 'Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for fixed times and for days and years; ¹⁵ and let them be for lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth'; and it was so. ¹⁶ God made the two great lights, the greater light to govern the day, and the lesser light to govern the night; *He made* the stars also. ¹⁷ God set them in the expanse

³⁰⁴ For the interpretation of the word קִשְׁתּוֹ, see Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 317.

of the heavens to give light on the earth,¹⁸ and to govern the day and the night, and to separate the light from the darkness; and God saw that it was good.

The interpretation of this passage is important in understanding Israel's attitude towards astronomical phenomena, since it, as the first statement of God's creation of astral bodies, provides their fundamental status and functions in the created world of God. First, the author firmly affirms God's sovereign authority over the astral bodies. However significant or divine tasks the celestial beings may carry out, they are "made" (עָשָׂה, v16) and "set" (נָתַן, v17) by God. As Westermann states, "there can be only one creator [for the author] and that all else that is or can be, can never be anything but a creature,"³⁰⁵ The movements of the astral bodies are seen as fulfilling the divine commands. They are described in a well-organized chiasmic structure:³⁰⁶

- A To divide the day from the night (14a)
- B To be for signs, for fixed times, for days and years (14b)
- C To give light on the earth (15)
- D To govern the day (16a)
- D' To govern the night (16b)
- C' To give light on the earth (17)
- B' To govern the day and the night (18a)
- A' To divide the light from the darkness (18b)

The creation of the astral bodies is mentioned at the centre of the structure (v16). The expressions הַמָּאוֹר הַגָּדוֹל and הַמָּאוֹר הַקָּטָן for the sun and the moon instead of the common Hebrew words שֶׁמֶשׁ and יָרֵחַ, which may allude to Shamash the sun god or Yarikh the moon god in the ANE, illustrate the author's intentions to prevent the potential confusion and to emphasize the role of the astral bodies as "lighters"³⁰⁷ for the earth. In this way, he

³⁰⁵ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1984), 127.

³⁰⁶ Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis 1-11*, (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), 42-43; Paul Beauchamp, *Création et séparation: étude exégétique du chapitre premier de la Genèse*, (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1969), 92-97; Odil Hannes Steck, *Der Schöpfungsbericht der Priesterschrift: Studien z. literarkrit. u. überlieferungsgeschichtl. Problematik von Genesis 1, 1-2, 4a*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1975), 105; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987), 21-22; cf. Sean E. McEvenue, *The Narrative Style of the Priestly Writer*, (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1971), 157-58.

³⁰⁷ The word מָאוֹר refers to light-bearer, luminary, light-giver. The term "lighter" is from Samuelson, which means "objects that cause space to be enlightened" (Norbert M. Samuelson, *The First Seven Days: A Philosophical Commentary on the Creation of Genesis*, (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1992), 77, 75-76).

sets their limits within the context of creation.³⁰⁸ The celestial beings stand in relation to the earth. Their functions are divided twofold. On the one hand, they work as the lighters to separate the day from the night (v14a, v18b) and to give light on the earth (v15, v17). Concerning the rather awkward expression “let them [the astral bodies/lighters] be לְמֵאֹרֹת (for lighters)” (v15), it is regarded as the use of tautology as in Numbers 15.39 (“it [the tassel] shall be for a tassel”) in order to stress the role of the astral beings “to give light”.³⁰⁹

On the other hand, the celestial beings work as the governors of the day and the night (v16, v18a). The astral government in this passage does not imply the kingly dominion over the earth. Rather, as Westermann states, “we are dealing here with the more abstract notion of ‘rule, dominate’ which we use to describe an elevation that dominates a landscape, or of ‘predominating influences.’” Day and night are dependent on the sun and the moon inasmuch as they are dominated by them’ (cf. Ps 136.7-9).³¹⁰ The parallel between v14b and v18a alludes to the manner of the astral government. For the ancient Israelites, the astronomical phenomena govern the day and the night, working as the indicators לְאֹתֹת and לְמוֹעֲדִים and לְיָמִים וְשָׁנִים. There have been various suggestions concerning the meaning of these terms and their syntactical relationship. While each term in v14b is prefixed by the proposition לְ, it is absent before “years”. This suggests that “days and years” go together. It is generally agreed that they refer to actual days and years. The regular rotation of the earth or the celestial bodies leads the Israelites to work out a temporal unit called a “day” and a larger unit called a “year”; i.e. the calendar. The second term מוֹעֲדִים is argued by many scholars to refer to the appointed times for special meetings, i.e. liturgical festivals, or the festivals themselves.³¹¹ The word מוֹעֵד contains the idea “to appoint” and “to gather”. Throughout

³⁰⁸ Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 129; cf. Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis*, (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1997), 110.

³⁰⁹ Cassuto, *Genesis 1-11*, 44-45; Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 23.

³¹⁰ Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 132; cf. Cassuto, *Genesis 1-11*, 45-46; Samuelson, *The First Seven Days*, 87.

³¹¹ Ludwig Köhler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament II*, (trans. M. E. J. Richardson; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 558; K. Koch, "mō'ēd," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, (ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 167-73; Beauchamp, *Création et séparation*, 114; Robert Davidson, *Genesis 1-11*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1973), 21; Donald E. Gowan, *From Eden to Babel: A Commentary on the Book of Genesis 1-11*, (ITC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 25; Samuelson, *The First Seven Days*, 78; Roger T. Beckwith, *Calendar and Chronology, Jewish and Christian: Biblical, Intertestamental and Patristic Studies*, (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 102; Walter Vogels, "The Cultic and Civil Calendars of the Fourth Day of Creation (Gen 1, 14b)," *SJOT* 11, no. 2 (1997): 163-80; James C. VanderKam, *Calendars in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Measuring Time*, (London: Routledge, 1998), 4; Thomas L. Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue: A Literary, Historical & Theological Commentary*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 135.

the OT, it is commonly employed to denote the time designated for “the tent of meeting” for the Israelites to offer special sacrifices (e.g. 1 Sam 13.8, 11; 20.35; 2 Sam 20.5) or the meeting itself (e.g. Josh 18.1; 19.51; 1 Sam 2.22; 1 Kgs 8.4). It is also used as a general term for the festivals and liturgical feasts (e.g. Lev 10.10; 15.3; 16.2; 23; Num 28-29; Is 33.20; Ezek 36.38; 46.9, 11; Zeph 3.18; Zech 8.19; Lam 1.4; 2.7, 22), notably Pesach (Passover, Exod 13.10; 23.15; 34.18; Num 9.2, 3, 7, 13; Deut 16.6), Sukkot (feast of booths, feast of tabernacles, Deut 31.10), and Shavuot (feast of the weeks, Lev 23). Though some scholars claim the natural seasons or “the cyclical rhythms of nature, such as the migration of birds” as the meaning of מוֹעֵד in this passage,³¹² there is hardly any case in the Torah where it refers to the natural seasons. This term as “the cyclical rhythms of nature” is only seen in Jeremiah 8.7 and Hosea 2.11 outside the Torah. Accordingly, this interpretation lacks textual evidence. Besides, if the author wanted מוֹעֵדִים to mean “the natural seasons”, the order “for days, seasons, and years” would have been more logical.³¹³ These references suggest that it is most probable to read the term as festivals in a liturgical context.³¹⁴ The astral phenomena determine the time for liturgical festivals or ‘the tent of meeting’ to fulfil special obligations.

Finally, with regard to the term אֶתֶת and the relationship between the three terms in v14b, there have been largely three suggestions on their interpretations. First, those who assert the meaning of מוֹעֵדִים as the natural seasons assume לְאֶתֶת as forming a hendiadys with לְמוֹעֵדִים, hence, “for signs of fixed times”. In addition, they read the waw conjunctive before לְיָמִים וְשָׁנִים explicatively as “which are”, while taking it between them connectively as “and”. According to their interpretation, the astral phenomena serve to “mark the fixed times, [which are] the days and the years”.³¹⁵ Yet, this interpretation is far less than sufficient and leaves many issues unresolved. As argued above, it is hardly plausible to see the days and years working as the explicative of the fixed times, since they

³¹² E.g. E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, (3rd. ed.; AB 1; Garden City, N.Y.; Doubleday, 1981), 6; H. Ross Cole, "Genesis 1:14 - Translation Notes," *AUSS* 45, no. 1 (2007): 63-67.

³¹³ For the detailed arguments, see Vogels, "The Cultic and Civil Calendars," 163-80.

³¹⁴ There are some scholars who read the term as ‘festivals and season’; cf. Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, (TOTC; Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1967), 49; Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 129-30; John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 30-31; John E. Hartley, *Genesis*, (NIBC 1; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2000), 46; David J. Rudolph, "Festivals in Genesis 1:14," *TB* 54, no. 2 (2003): 23-40. Wenham says, “What is clear is the importance attached to the heavenly bodies’ role in determining the seasons, in particular in fixing the days of cultic celebration. This is their chief function” (Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 23).

³¹⁵ Speiser, *Genesis*, 3-4; Herbert Chanan Brichto, *The Problem of "Curse" in the Hebrew Bible*, (JBLMS 13; Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature, 1968), 99; Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with New JPS Translation*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 9; cf. Patrick Wilton, "More Cases of Waw Explicativum," *VT* 44 (1994): 125-28.

refer to two different types of times. Moreover, they take the unverified “four distinct uses of the particle וְ . (1) introductory; (2) connective in hendiadys; (3) explicative; (4) plain connective” for granted.³¹⁶ Hamilton states, “Most questionable is his [Speiser’s] detection of hendiadys here.”³¹⁷ Second, a group of scholars who regard מוֹעֲדִים as liturgical festivals argue that the אֵת function to cover the rest of the terms in v14b, just as the lights in v15a cover v15b. According to Vogels, v14a (“Let there be lights in the vault of heaven”) is followed by the identical constructions of v14b (“let them be for signs”) and v15a (“let them be for lights”). This suggests for him that the לְ in both phrases functions in the same way. Therefore, just as the לְ before lights in v15a can be ignored for translation, so can the לְ before signs in v14b be.³¹⁸ This assumption leads scholars to interpret the astral movements as working as signs to determine the festival seasons and days and years.³¹⁹ However, this interpretation also appears to be deficient. Above all, it is difficult to see the same function of the לְ in both verses. As mentioned above, the לְ in v15a can be ignored because of the tautological construction: “let them [the lights] be for lights”. Yet, this interpretation cannot automatically lead to the same reading of v14b. Though Vogels argues that “If we ignore this ‘for’ in v15b, we also should ignore it in v14b,”³²⁰ there is hardly any ground to ignore the לְ in v14b. It does not form such a tautology. This leads to the third approach that reads the terms in v14b at the same level. Another group of scholars who assume מוֹעֲדִים as liturgical festivals interpret the astral phenomena as standing for signs and for festival seasons and for days and years.³²¹ The list of the terms in this reading of v14b presents the level of the speciality of astral phenomena. The regular movements of the astral bodies lead human beings to calculate chronological periods of time for daily lives. These calculations enable people to determine the festival seasons in liturgical context to fulfil special obligations. There appear at times even more special phenomena in heaven to convey divine signs, which refer to marks which are not normal but extraordinary for special recognition or treatment,

³¹⁶ Hamilton, *Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, 126.

³¹⁷ Hamilton, *Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, 126.

³¹⁸ Vogels, "The Cultic and Civil Calendars," 167-68.

³¹⁹ Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 130; Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 1.23; Hamilton, *Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, 126-27; Vogels, "The Cultic and Civil Calendars," 167-68.

³²⁰ Vogels, "The Cultic and Civil Calendars," 167.

³²¹ K. Budde, "Zum vierten Schöpfungstag," *ZAW* 36 (1916): 198-200; cf. K. Budde, "Wortlaut und Werden der ersten Schöpfungsgeschichte," *ZAW* 35 (1915): 65-97; Thorleif Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, (London: SCM Press, 1960), 132; Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, (Rev. ed.; OTL; London: SCM Press, 1972), 54; Willem Hendrik Gispen, *Genesis vertaald en verklaard* (Kampen: Kok, 1974), 59-63; Samuelson, *The First Seven Days*, 75-89; Gunkel, *Genesis*, 110.

such as eclipses of the sun or comets. The biblical references to such signs include the rainbow for Noah (Gen 9.12-13), or the stars for Abraham (Gen 15.5), or the sun (2 Kgs 20.8-10; Isa 38.7; Mal 3.20), or all the heavenly lights in general (Joel 3.3).³²²

This investigation of the creation account of the celestial bodies in Gen 1.14-18 shows the ancient Israelites' attitude towards the astral phenomena. The movements of the heavenly bodies are regarded as fulfilling the divine commands. Along with the general light giving roles, the astral beings are assumed to govern the day and the night leading human beings to understand and respond to their movements. As a way of earthly government, the astral phenomena are considered to convey the divine signs for the earth.

Astronomical Phenomena as Divine Signs

This attitude towards astronomical phenomena is revealed in various places in the OT. First, Israel's ample knowledge of the astral bodies and their movements suggests their endeavour to interpret the heavenly signs accurately. Although the celestial bodies are nowhere in the OT the subject of scientific inquisitiveness, it does not mean that the Israelites were ignorant of them. On the contrary, the OT exhibits that they were very conscious of the movements of the heavenly bodies and acquired rich knowledge of them. The Israelites, like their neighbours in the ANE, employed varied constellations in describing celestial phenomena, calling them by names, which were made after characters from various common animals and objects: e.g. כִּיּוֹן (the planet Saturn, Amos 5.26), עֵיֶשׁ (the Bear, Job 9.9), עֵיֶשׁ עַל-בְּנֵיהָ (the Bear with her sons, Job 38.31), כְּסִיל (Orion, Job 9.9; cf. Isa 13.10), מוֹשְׁכוֹת כְּסִיל (the cords of Orion, Job 38.31), כִּימָה (the Pleiades, Job 9.9; 38.31), and חֲדָרֵי תִמּוֹן (the encirclers of the south, Job 9.9).³²³ The Hebrew word כְּסִיל literally means a "fool". With the reference to מוֹשְׁכוֹת כְּסִיל, it gives the impression that the ancient Israelites derived from Orion the conception of one who foolishly defied the Almighty and was punished by being bound in the heavens, just as in the classical myth.³²⁴ These namings of the constellations demonstrate the Israelites' broad astronomical knowledge covering the northern and

³²² Samuelson, *The First Seven Days*, 78.

³²³ For the detailed discussion on the identification of these constellations, see Schiaparelli, *Astronomy in the Old Testament*, 54ff; Herz, "The Astral Terms in Job ix 9, xxxviii 31-32," 575-77; Mowinckel, *Die Sternnamen im Alten Testament*, 52ff; Neugebauer, "The History of Ancient Astronomy," 1-38; Driver, "Two Astronomical Passages in the Old Testament," 1-11; Tur-Sinai, *Job*, 158-61, 531; Pope, *Job*, 70, 254; Horst, Kutsch, and Strauss, *Hiob*, 1:146-47; Rowley, *Job*, 92, 315; Clines, *Job 1-20*, 231-32.

³²⁴ Cf. John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, (NICOT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986), 304.

southern celestial sphere. Furthermore, the reference to **מְזֻלֹת** in Job 38.32 indicates that the ancient Israelites were aware of the contemporary astrology and may have employed it to interpret the celestial signs. Despite various claims concerning its identification, it appears most likely a dialectical variant of **מְזֻלֹת** in 2 Kings 23.5, which is a common Semitic astrological term. The LXX transliterates both occurrences as $\mu\alpha\zeta\omicron\upsilon\rho\omega\theta$. While its meaning is uncertain, it is suggested that the word may have originated from Assyrian *manzaltu* or *mazaltu* (station, stand, or abode). The cognate words in Aramaic and Syriac denote ‘star of fortune, zodiac, and stations of the moon’. Accordingly, the term is most likely to refer to the constellations of the zodiac, the signs of the zodiac, or the zodiacal circle.³²⁵ These OT references to the constellations and the zodiacal signs may not verify that the ancient Israelites practised astrology. Nevertheless, they at least suggest that the ancient Israelites carefully observed the affairs in the heavenly territory and analysed them to discern the signs that they conveyed.

Second, Balaam’s oration in Numbers 24.17 illustrates Israel’s assumption of the close association of celestial phenomena with the earthly event:

I see it, but not now; I envision it, but not soon.
 A star marches forth from Jacob; a meteor rises from Israel.
 He strikes the brow of Moab, the pate of all the people of Seth.

The literary context of the verse, the so-called “Balaam pericope” (Num 22-24), records a series of poetic orations of Balaam, a pagan diviner. Although ordered to curse Israel by Balak, the Moabite king, he pronounces blessings over Israel bound by the authority of Israel’s God. Despite his pagan origin, Balaam’s orations in this pericope are presented as genuinely conveying God’s plan for Israel. Proclaiming the fourth oration, Balaam in Num 24.15-19 predicts the future conquest and subjugation of the Transjordanian lands by an Israelite king, probably King David. He begins his oration in v17 with reference to a vision of a celestial phenomenon. The verb **רָאָה** in the first couplet is used to indicate “to divine” (e.g. 1 Kgs 22.19), which leads to the technical terms for diviner, **רֹאֵה** (e.g. 1 Sam 9.9, 11, 19; 2 Sam 15.27; 1 Chr 9.22; 26.28; 2 Chr 16.7). The celestial phenomenon in the second couplet projects two parallelisms, one verbal, **רָאָה**//**קָם**, and one nominal, **שִׁבְטֵנוּ**//**כּוֹכַב**. From

³²⁵ Pope, *Job*, 255; Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: with an Appendix containing the Biblical Aramaic, coded with the numbering System from Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, (Peabody, Ma.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 561; Driver, "Two Astronomical Passages in the Old Testament," 4-8.

the nominal parallelism, שִׁבֵּט could be regarded as a meteor or shooting star, based on Akkadian *šibtu*, Aramaic *šebîṭ*, and rabbinic *shavit*.³²⁶ It leaves a “tail” in its wake, having the appearance of a staff or sceptre.³²⁷ Balaam foresees a celestial event of a rising of a shooting star. This celestial imagery also signifies the future emergence of an Israelite king, as Balaam’s oration that follows v17b displays. As discussed above, the heavenly host is assumed to be a ruler or governor of the earthly world in the OT. Joseph’s dream, in which he and his brothers are portrayed as stars and his parents as the sun and moon, suggests that human beings may be characterized as stars (Gen 37.9). In Isaiah 14.12-13, the Babylonian king is called “a shining one, son of dawn”. These references illustrate that a star in this oration refers to a hero or victorious king. This notion of a star as a king is maintained by the parallel word שִׁבֵּט. In ancient Egyptian iconography, the victorious Pharaoh strikes the enemy with his sceptre.³²⁸ In the OT, it refers to the king’s insignia (Gen 49.10 and Isa 14.5). A ruler is portrayed as the one who wields the sceptre (Gen 49.10, 16; Deut 29.9; Amos 1.5, 8; Ps 45.6). The parallel verbs יִרְדֹּף and קָם further signify the future emergence of a political leadership. While the verb יִרְדֹּף in general denotes marching or treading, as in Micah 1.3; 5.4-5, it is suggested from the parallelism in Ugaritic poetry that it contains the concept of sovereignty or dominion: e.g. *drkt//mlk* (sovereignty//rule, dominion), *ksi mlk//kḥt drkt* (the throne of kingship//the seat of dominion), etc.³²⁹ Hence, the first clause in v17b may illustrate a king or political leader marching forth from or reigning with sovereignty in Israel. In a similar sense, the verb קָם may be read as implying a political ascension, as in Judges 5.7 and 2 Kings 23.25. Accordingly, the second clause in v17b portrays the ascension of a sovereign ruler to power from Israel. In this way, Balaam’s vision in v17 contains multi-layered meanings. In one dimension, it describes the vision of an astronomical phenomenon of a rising of a meteor. In the other dimension, it predicts the future emergence of a political leadership. This demonstrates how celestial phenomena are interpreted as a divine sign and are applied to the prediction of Israel’s future. That such an interpretation of astral phenomena as a sign for the future of Israel was not rejected but was narrated as the authentic oracle of God in the OT illustrates that the ancient Israelites in general shared the

³²⁶ Berakhot. 48b.

³²⁷ Berakhot, 58b; David M. Fouts, “šēbet,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, (ed. Willem VanGemeren; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1996), 27.

³²⁸ E.g. James B. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East in Pictures relating to the Old Testament*, (2d ed.; Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), no. 317.

³²⁹ Cf. Manfred Dietrich, Oswald Loretz, and Joaquín Sanmartín, *The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts: from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places (KTU)*, (2nd ed.; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1995), 16 VI.23-24; Richard E. Whitaker, *A Concordance of the Ugaritic Literature*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972), 348, s.v. *kḥt*.

attitude towards astronomical occurrences, that they communicate divine messages for the earth.

Finally, the perception of celestial phenomena as a divine sign is further revealed in the announcement of **יִהְיֶה יוֹם יְהוָה**, the divine judgement upon the earth. As an introduction of a collection of oracles against pagan nations (Isa 13-23), Isaiah 13.1-18 describes God's judgement upon sinful humanity in terms of the "day of the Lord" (v6, 9). After portraying God gathering his immense and mighty army in v2-5, v6-13 describes the forthcoming day of the Lord. The judgment in v9-13 amplifies its universal nature. In this passage, it is stated that the celestial phenomena in v10 represent the onset of the day of the Lord:

⁹ Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, cruel, with wrath and burning anger, to make the earth a desolation, and to exterminate its sinners from it.

¹⁰ For the stars of heaven and their constellations³³⁰ will not flash forth their light; the sun will be dark when it rises and the moon will not shed its light.

The darkness of the sun, the moon and the stars in relation to the day of the Lord is also announced in the OT (Ezek 32.7-8; Joel 2.1, 10, 30-31; 3.14-15, Amos 8.9; Mic 3.6). All these passages portray the forthcoming judgement of God upon the earth. The celestial phenomena in these prophecies work as a sign to signify the emergence of the day of the Lord. As Wolff states, the word **מוֹפֵת** in Joel 2.30 refers to "that which is completely out of the ordinary and as such has sign character."³³¹ It further affirms that these events take place before the day of the Lord, as its prelude, not part of it.

Against this interpretation of celestial phenomena as a divine sign, however, some scholars have argued that it is mistaken.³³² Taking the pericopae of Isaiah 13 and Joel 2 as such cases, they claim that the cosmic language in those passages should be read metaphorically. They interpret the celestial occurrences as the portrayal of the fall of cities and nations. With reference to Isaiah 13, they claim that the mention of Babylon in 13.1 and the following depiction of Babylon's fall in 13.19-14.23 make 13.1-18 part of the description of the demise of Babylon. Wildberger writes that the use of catastrophic language "does not mean that order and the basic functioning of the entire world would grind to a complete halt," but refers to "Babylon's demise, an event that brought about the return of a chaotic

³³⁰ **כְּסִילֵיהֶם**, the plural form of **כְּסִיל** (Orion) usually represents 'constellations'. Cf. John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, (WBC 24; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985), 194; Oswalt, *Isaiah 1-39*, 304.

³³¹ Hans Walter Wolff, *Joel and Amos: A Commentary on the Books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 68.

³³² E.g. Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah: A Continental Commentary*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997); Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, 396; John Barton, *Joel and Obadiah: A Commentary*, (1st ed.; Louisville, Ky.: John Knox Press, 2001); France, *Matthew*, 922.

situation.”³³³ Barton also states, “In Isaiah 13, the ‘cash value’ of the transformation of the sun, moon, and stars is the overthrow of Babylon.”³³⁴ Likewise, concerning the celestial descriptions in Joel and other passages, France asserts that “in most of these passages the immediate context is of God’s threatened judgment on cities and nations, both pagan and Israelite; in the case of Joel the judgment is already actual in the form of the locust swarms which cut off the light of the sun.”³³⁵

However, these arguments are less than convincing, since their interpretations are not in accord with the contents of the passages. For Isaiah 13, after the superscription in v1, there is no indication in 13.2-18 that the oracle should be read metaphorically or is about the fall of Babylon. Explicit portrayal of the destruction of Babylon does not appear until v19. On the contrary, the mentions of *כָּל-הָאָרֶץ* (v5) and *תָּבֵל* (v11), and the implication of v12 clearly illustrate that the divine judgement in Isaiah 13.2-18 is universal.³³⁶ Likewise, for Joel 2.1-11, there is no mention of the locust invasion at all in this passage. Instead, the mention of the day of the Lord in its initial and closing verses represents that this unit as an *inclusio* is about the forthcoming judgment day. The comparison of Joel 2.1-2 with Zephaniah 1.15-16, which call the day of the Lord as *יום שׁוֹפָר וַתְּרוּעָה*, and *יום הַשֶּׁךְ וְאַפְלָה יוֹם עָנָן וְעֶרְפָּל*, further illustrates this reading. The clause *וּכְלֹנוּ וּמִי יִכְלֹנוּ* in v11 intimates that the judgment is upon all humanity. The portrayal of celestial phenomena in v10 illustrates that its dimension is universal and cosmic.³³⁷

With reference to the change of dimensions from the local disaster to the universal judgement of the Lord, Raabe argues that it is to be understood in terms of the literary device of “particularization”, which is a well-recognized feature of Hebrew poetry.³³⁸ It involves a move from the general to the particular. According to him, the discourse first envisages judgement on a universal scale then moves to a particular focus on one pattern, and the opposite order in the other. This approach appears to offer the most plausible reading of Isa 13. “The punishment of the whole world *in 13.2-18* is particularized and applied specifically to Babylon *in 13.19ff*,” as Raabe states.³³⁹ Stacey writes, “What is described here *in 13.9-13*

³³³ Wildberger, *Isaiah*, 25.

³³⁴ Barton, *Joel and obadiah*, 74.

³³⁵ France, *Matthew*, 922.

³³⁶ For the detailed discussion on Isa 13.1-18, see Oswalt, *Isaiah 1-39*, 296-308.

³³⁷ For the detailed discussion on Joel 2, see

³³⁸ Paul Raabe, "The Particularizing of Universal Judgment in Prophetic Discourse," *CBQ* 64 (2002): 652-74.

³³⁹ Raabe, "The Particularizing," 657. *Italics* are mine.

comes close to being an act of universal anti-creation.”³⁴⁰ Joel 2 could be interpreted in the same manner.

The investigation of the biblical references to celestial phenomena, meteorological, astronomical, and supernatural, has demonstrated that the ancient Israelites regarded heaven, the dwelling place of God, as a source of divine revelation. The heavenly wonders were considered to communicate God’s message for the earth. They were viewed in association with the divine government.

2. Celestial Phenomena in the Second Temple Jewish Literature

This section explores the Jewish attitude towards celestial phenomena in the Second Temple period through the analysis of the passages that describe celestial phenomena in the contemporary Jewish literature. After a brief survey of the contemporary concept of heaven, it will look into three bodies of Jewish literature: e.g. the Qumran documents, the pseudepigraphal and apocalyptic texts, and Philo and Josephus. The early Rabbinic literature, the Mishnah, is excluded from the examination, since, though it certainly contains earlier traditions than the date of its compilation (200-220 CE), it at the same time carries the attitude towards celestial phenomena at the time later than the composition of Matthew. This investigation will illustrate that the Jews in the Second Temple period viewed celestial phenomena as communicating divine messages for the earth.

2.1. *Concept of Heaven*

The general conception of heaven in the Second Temple period corresponds to that in the OT. In the LXX, both the canonical and the apocryphal, the Hebrew word שָׁמַיִם is almost exclusively translated to the Greek word οὐρανός. It functions in reference to the created order, celestial phenomena, in connection with the earth, and as the place of God’s dwelling. The considerable increase in phrases such as crying out to heaven, lifting hands and eyes to heaven, and receiving help from heaven in the apocryphal texts further reveals the use of the word heaven as an indirect reference to the divine realm.³⁴¹ This shows the close semantic

³⁴⁰ David Stacey, *Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, (London: Epworth Press, 1993), 101. *Italics* are mine.

³⁴¹ Expressions such as these occur some 22 times, especially in 1-3 Maccabees.

connection between שָׁמַיִם and οὐρανός. This notion of heaven is widespread in contemporary Jewish literature.

In the Pseudepigrapha,³⁴² while the use of heaven in meteorological and astronomical references is quite common (e.g. *1 Enoch*; *Joseph and Aseneth*; *Sibylline Oracles*), its most frequent use is for the reference to the divine realm. For example, in *1 Enoch* there are 25 references to the angels, watchers, and holy ones “of heaven” and more than 30 additional cases where heaven refers to the place of God or the angels’ dwelling. In *Joseph and Aseneth*, the majority of its 25 occurrences of the word “heaven” allude to the divine realm, referring to angels coming to and from heaven (14.3; 17.8-9; 19.5) as well as to the abode where personified Repentance lives (15.7) and the place of the name-filled Book of the Living (15.4). Likewise, most of the occurrences of the word “heaven” in *Testament of Abraham* refer to ascending to the presence of God (4.5; 7.4; 8.1; 15.11).

The most distinct use of heaven as the divine realm in the Pseudepigrapha comes from the apocalyptic innovation of journeys into the multiple heavens.³⁴³ Within the heavenly journey apocalyptic texts the usage of heaven undergoes a narrowing in semantic meaning. Astronomical and meteorological references, as well as other traditional OT uses of heaven, fade into the background relative to a focus on the various levels explored by the travelling seers. While the astronomical and meteorological elements are often mentioned when the lower levels of heaven are passed, the use of heaven becomes intentionally constrained by the purpose of explicating its apocalyptic mysteries to the reader. A comparison of *1 Enoch* with *2 Enoch* is instructive at this point. Unlike *1 Enoch* where there are over 80 astronomical and meteorological uses of heaven and a limited heavenly journey theme, in *2 Enoch* astronomical and meteorological references to heaven are quite rare.³⁴⁴ Instead, heaven is typically used in its highly developed apocalyptic sense, referring to specific levels,

³⁴² The term Pseudepigrapha refers to the body of literature typically defined as “the Early Jewish literature (largely in the 200 BC to 200 CE period) that resembles the Apocrypha or deuterocanonical literature but is not included in the Jewish or Western Christian canons, or in rabbinic literature” (James A. Sanders, “Introduction: Why the Pseudepigrapha?,” in *The Pseudepigrapha and Early Biblical Interpretation*, (ed. James H. Charlesworth and Craig A. Evans; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 13).

³⁴³ For the detailed discussion on the theme of heavenly journeys, see Alan F. Segal, “Heavenly Ascent in Hellenistic Judaism, Early Christianity and their Environment,” in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung*, (ed. Hildegard Temporini, Joseph Vogt, and Wolfgang Haase; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1980), 1333-94; Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); James Davila, “Heavenly Ascents in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls After Fifty Years: A Comprehensive Assessment*, (ed. Peter W. Flint and James C. VanderKam; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 461-85.

³⁴⁴ Although the various parts of *1 Enoch* have different dates and provenances, compared to *2 Enoch*, the work as a whole is earlier and therefore a diachronic distinction can still be observed between *1 Enoch* and *2 Enoch*.

only the first of which contains the meteorological elements. This reflects a particular trend in the apocalyptic description of the cosmos, one which evinces a shift in the use of the word "heaven". The same can be said for the *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah*. Chapters 6-11 of this work contain a seven-heaven journey. Within this journey, heaven occurs 76 times. Each of these uses refers to the various levels of heaven in the journey and the other typical uses of heaven (cosmological, astronomical, meteorological) are completely absent with the exception of two places. As Collins comments, "there is virtually no astronomical interest in this work."³⁴⁵

However, it should be noted that such narrowly apocalyptic usage of heaven is not commonplace throughout the Pseudepigrapha. There are in fact relatively few (if any) developed heavenly journey texts before the Christian era. As Collins states, "the familiar pattern of ascent through a numbered series of heavens, usually seven, is not attested in Judaism before the Christian era... for a Jewish writer who claims to have ascended to heaven (apart from 4 QM), we must wait until St Paul."³⁴⁶ Those texts, which are clearly pre-Christian, are undeveloped on this point and continue to use heaven in ways basically contiguous with the OT usage (e.g. portions of *I Enoch*). In contrast, those works, which contain heavenly journeys and thereby use heaven in a more particular and narrow way, are either post-Christian texts or composite works with Christian interpolations (e.g. *T. Levi 2*; *Apoc. Abr.*; *3 Bar.*; *Apoc. Zeph.*). Though the use of heaven in the Pseudepigrapha shifts slightly from the OT usage, it remains a flexible term with a wide semantic range.

The use of heaven language in the Qumran literature, though relatively infrequent compared to the apocalyptic literature,³⁴⁷ accords in many ways with the OT usage. Unlike the pseudepigraphal texts, heaven as the dwelling place of God is concentrated in a few texts (e.g. 4Q Wisdom poems 416, 418, 298, 521). Albeit there were some apocalyptic and polemic elements in the worldview of the Qumran community,³⁴⁸ the Qumran texts show relatively little interest in speculations about the content and composition of heaven. There are no multiple-heavens speculations as found in the apocalyptic material.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁵ Adela Y. Collins, "The Seven Heavens in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses," in *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys*, (ed. John J. Collins and Michael A. Fishbane; Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 76.

³⁴⁶ Collins, "The Seven Heavens," 46; cf. Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 127.

³⁴⁷ Cf. James C. VanderKam and Peter W. Flint, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their significance for understanding the Bible, Judaism, Jesus, and Christianity*, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002), 103.

³⁴⁸ John J. Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, (London: Routledge, 1997).

³⁴⁹ Wright, *Early History of Heaven*, 128-30; Carol Newsom, "Heaven," in *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, (ed. Lawrence H. Schiffman and James C. VanderKam; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1.339.

Under the influence of Platonism, the superiority of heaven over earth is fundamental to Philo of Alexandria. Accordingly, in his writings, albeit occasionally employed in reference to astronomical bodies, heaven is dominantly used as the dwelling place of God, as the pure and divine realm in contrast to the earth (e.g. *Opif. mundi* 27; *Spe. leg.* 1.89). In this way, he narrows the meaning of heaven for his own theological-philosophical purpose. The writings of Josephus reflect a different use of heaven from Philo's. Unlike Philo's theological-philosophical use of heaven, Josephus uses many standard biblical turns of phrase involving οὐρανός. Following astronomical uses, heaven is also frequently employed in phrases referring to lifting one's hands or eyes to heaven or objects (such as manna) coming down from heaven.

These Jewish literatures from the Second Temple period reveal noticeable streams of development of the concept of heaven, as the semantic flexibility of heaven is appropriated in different ways at different times. Yet, nevertheless, within the diversity they show many consistent threads in the use of heaven, both as a cosmological term and in reference to the divine realm.

2.2. *Attitude towards Celestial Phenomena*

This section deals with examples of Second Temple Jewish literature that disclose the contemporary Jewish attitude towards celestial phenomena. It will illustrate that the Jews at the time of the composition of Matthew viewed the heaven and the earth as closely associated and regarded celestial phenomena as revealing God's special plan for the earth as well as the individuals.

2.2.1. Qumran Documents

The first body of Jewish literature that will be considered comes from Khirbet Qumran. According to von Stuckrad, cult theology represented the contemporary Jewish thinking in the Second Temple era.³⁵⁰ The cultic order was considered a reflection of the cosmic order. Accordingly, the right interpretation of this cosmic order became of great significance (e.g.

³⁵⁰ Stuckrad, "Jewish and Christian Astrology," 10; cf. Baruch A. Levine, *In the Presence of the Lord: A Study of Cult and Some Cultic Terms in Ancient Israel*, (SJLA 5; Leiden: Brill, 1974); Jacob Milgrom, *Studies in Cultic Theology and Terminology*, (SJLA 36; Leiden: Brill, 1983); Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into Biblical Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School*, (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1985).

calculating a calendar for the celebration of the religious festivals at the correct time). This chronographic or cultic material was a great interest of the Qumran literature.

Situated in the Judaeen Wilderness next to the Dead Sea, Qumran was the home of a Jewish sectarian community for several centuries during the Second Temple period. The documents found in caves in the neighbourhood reveal a unique look at the beliefs of a group of Jews living at that period.³⁵¹ The inhabitants of Qumran were by and large religiously conservative and rather unfriendly to the Gentile world.³⁵² Among various documents, the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* (4Q400-407) describes in a liturgical way the thirteen Sabbaths included in one quarter of a year.³⁵³ The portrayal of the role of the gods/divine beings for the heavenly cult in those texts closely corresponds to that of the priests of the temple in Jerusalem. The divine beings perform such cultic/priestly duties in heaven:³⁵⁴

1. Serving God. Because he [God] set them [the divine beings] up for himself as the ho[ly of the holy ones, who serve in the holy of] holies (4Q400 1.i.10).
2. Recounting God's royal majesty and singing psalms. And they will recount the splendour of his kingdom, according to their knowledge, and they will extol [his glory in all] the heavens of his kingdom. And in all the exalted heights [they will sing] wonderful psalms according to all [their knowledge,] and they will tell [of the splendour] of the glory of the king of the gods in the residences of their position (4Q400 2.3-5).
3. Praising the design of God's cosmos. Sing to the God who is awesome in power [all the spirits of knowledge and of light], to exalt together the splendidly shining vault of the sanctuary of his holiness. [Praise him,] divine spirits, praising [for ever] and ever the main vault of the heights, all [its beams] and walls, all its shape, the work of its construction. The spirits of the holy of the holies, the living gods, the spirits of everlasting holiness above (4Q403 1.i.42-44).

³⁵¹ This study understands that the Qumran settlement and the caves with the scrolls belong together and that the texts found in the caves were the collection of manuscripts of the Qumran community used and read by sectarian members. For the scholarly debate to distinguish between sectarian and non-sectarian writings among the Dead Sea Scrolls, see Popović, *Reading the Human Body*, 8-10, no. 20.

³⁵² See S. Talmon, "The Community of the Renewed Covenant: Between Judaism and Christianity," in *The Community of the Renewed Covenant: The Notre Dame Symposium on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, (ed. Eugene Charles Ulrich and James C. VanderKam; Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 3-24; VanderKam and Flint, *Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*; Helmer Ringgren, *The Faith of Qumran: Theology of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, (trans. Emilie T. Sander; Expanded ed.; New York: Crossroad, 1995); John Joseph Collins and Robert A. Kugler, *Religion in the Dead Sea scrolls*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000).

³⁵³ Carol Newsom, *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice: A Critical Edition*, (HSS 27; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1985).

³⁵⁴ Florentino García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English*, (2nd ed.; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 419-23. This notion of the priestly cultic tradition was used by Philo (e.g. *Spec. Leg.* 1.66ff, *Mos.* 2.133-35) and the temple's cosmic symbolism by Josephus Flavius (*War* 5.217-18, cf. *War* 5.211-14, *Ant.* 3.145, 179ff).

This celestial and earthly connection is further revealed in the two fragments, collectively labelled 4Q186 and 4QMess ar (4Q534).³⁵⁵

... and his thighs are long and slender, and his toes are slender and long. And he is from the second column. There is a spirit for him in the house of light (of) six (parts), and three (parts) in the house of darkness. And this is the horoscope under which he was born: in the foot of Taurus. He will be humble, and this is his animal: Taurus. (4Q186 1.ii.5-8)

... and his head [...] terrifying [...] and his teeth are protruding. And the fingers of his hand are <th>ick, and his thighs are thick and each one is hairy. His toes are thick and short. And there is a spirit for him in the house of [darkness (of) ei]ght (parts), and one (part) from the house of light. (4Q186 1.iii.4-9)

[are] well ordered. [And] his [ey]es are between black and speckled (?). His beard is sp[arse] and it is wavy(?). And the sound of his voice is kind. And his teeth are fine and well ordered. And he is neither tall nor short, and that [] because of his horoscope. [] His fingers are slender and lo[n]g, and his thighs are smooth. And the soles of his feet [and the toes of his] f[et] are well ordered. And there is a spirit for [him] ... (4Q186 2.i.1-9)

... from the hand two [...] a mark; red is his hair and he has moles upon [...] and tiny marks upon his thighs [...] different from each other. (4Q534 i.1-3)

A number of scholars have argued that these documents cannot be characterized as a horoscope text as they do not contain any actual horoscopes of particular individuals or any explicit reference to the zodiacal position of planets known in antiquity.³⁵⁶ They maintain that these are a work of *physiognomy*, the practice of judging someone's personality from their physical appearance.³⁵⁷ Beginning with a certain part of the body, most probably the head in fig. 1 col. i.7, 4Q186 describes the human body.³⁵⁸ 4Q186 is suggested to be named as "4QAstrological Physiognomy", "un texte de physiognomonie zodiacale", or "4QZodiacal Physiognomy" by Alexander, Schmidt, and Popović respectively.³⁵⁹ Nevertheless, it should be noted that these physiognomic texts contain the belief that human being's physical

³⁵⁵ Popović, *Reading the Human Body*, 30-31. Cf. García Martínez, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 456, 263; cf. Géza Vermès, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, (3rd ed.; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 305-06; John Marco Allegro, "An Astrological Cryptic Document from Qumran," *JSS* 9 (1964): 291-94; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Major Publications and Tools for Study*, (Rev. ed.; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1990).

³⁵⁶ Cf. O. Neugebauer, *Ethiopic Astronomy and Computus*, (Wien: Verl. d. Österr. Akad. d. Wiss., 1979), 21; Roland Bergmeier, *Glaube als Gabe nach Johannes: Religions- und theologiegeschichtliche Studien zum prädestinarianischen Dualismus im vierten Evangelium*, (BWANT Heft 112; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1980), 78-79; P. S. Alexander, "Incantations and Books of Magic," in *Emil Schürer: The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.-A.D. 135)*, (ed. Géza Vermès, Fergus Millar, and Martin Goodman; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986), 364-65; M. Albani, "Horoscopes in the Qumran Scrolls," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls after Fifty Years: A Comprehensive Assessment*, (ed. Peter W. Flint and James C. VanderKam; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 287-88, 309.

³⁵⁷ For the detailed discussion on physiognomy in Graeco-Roman world Judaism, see Popović, *Reading the Human Body*, 85-118, 209-39.

³⁵⁸ For the textual analysis of 4Q186, see Popović, *Reading the Human Body*, 18-54.

³⁵⁹ Popović, *Reading the Human Body*, 19.

characteristics are determined according to the zodiacal sign in which he is born.³⁶⁰ 4Q186 represents an example of individual astrology at Qumran. The word עמורד in 4Q186 1.ii.6 clearly indicates the astrological connotation as a reference to either a zodiacal sign (Taurus), a zodiacal quadrant, or a certain phase of the Moon.³⁶¹ Following Popović's interpretation of 4Q186 1.ii.7-8 on the basis of the modified ascendant interpretation of Albani,³⁶² the word רוח in the construction of לרוח in 4Q186 1.ii.7-8 and 1.iii.8-9 refers to zodiacal spirits that are related to the zodiacal signs.³⁶³ This illustrates that each of the twelve zodiacal signs was believed to have a spirit, which has a close relationship with human beings and influences their lives. Furthermore, the noun מולד in 4Q186 1.iii.1, used as a technical term, refers to "people's nativities, that is, the configuration of heavenly bodies in relation to the zodiacal circle at the moment of birth."³⁶⁴ Such works are well known in general Hellenistic astrology.³⁶⁵ They are simple examples of "scientific" astrology, based on the principle that the human body is a miniature copy of the universe, or microcosm. If one's appearance is the result of one's nativity, it should be possible to use one's appearance to extrapolate backwards, and reconstruct the birth chart.³⁶⁶ *Physiognomy* remained part of Jewish tradition well into Talmudic times.³⁶⁷

The manner in which the documents are written has led some scholars to claim that this document represents only an extreme fringe of the Qumran community. Unlike other Dead Sea Scrolls, 4Q186 is written in a simple code using mixed scripts of Greek, paleo-Hebrew, and square Hebrew letters and in reverse order from left to right rather than the right to left usual in Hebrew and Aramaic.³⁶⁸ Lehmann argues that this method "only makes sense, if

³⁶⁰ P. S. Alexander, "Physiognomy, Initiation, and Rank in the Qumran Community," in *Geschichte - Tradition - Reflexion: Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag, Band I Judentum*, (ed. H. Cancik, H. Lichtenberger, and P. Schäfer; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 385-94; F. Schmidt, "Ancient Jewish Astrology: An Attempt to Interpret 4QCryptic (4Q186)," in *Biblical Perspectives: Early Use and Interpretation of the Bible in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Proceedings of the First International Symposium of the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Associated Literature, 12-14 May, 1996*, (ed. M. E. Stone and E. G. Chazon; STDJ 28; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 189-205.

³⁶¹ For the interpretation of עמורד, see Popović, *Reading the Human Body*, 38-48.

³⁶² Albani, "Horoscopes in the Qumran Scrolls," 279-330.

³⁶³ For Popović's interpretation of 4Q186 1.ii.7-8, see Popović, *Reading the Human Body*, 172-208.

³⁶⁴ Popović, *Reading the Human Body*, 49.

³⁶⁵ Popović, *Reading the Human Body*, 85-103.

³⁶⁶ Bouché-Leclercq, *L'astrologie Grecque*, 313.

³⁶⁷ Ithamar Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 218-24.

³⁶⁸ Emil Schürer, *Emil Schürer: The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.-A.D. 135)*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986), 3.464-65; Charlesworth, "Jewish Interest in Astrology," 938-39; Popović, *Reading the Human Body*, 25-28.

astrology was not generally accepted, even in the Qumran community, and therefore had to be practised in hiding.³⁶⁹

Such a conclusion, however, appears rather deficient. Popović argues that the manner of these documents, contrary to Lehmann's claim, "signifies the high status that was accredited to its learning; the use of these writing techniques being a scribal means to limit accessibility to and availability of the expert knowledge to those who were suitable to understand it."³⁷⁰ Moreover, 4Q186 is not the only zodiacal document found in Cave 4. There are also other astrological documents found at Qumran, notably fragments in Aramaic of a *brontologion*, a work using thunderclaps and astrology to predict the future (4Q318). *Brontologia* were among the oldest and most popular varieties of lay mundane astrology.³⁷¹ A representative quote from the Qumran *brontologion* reads "and on the 13th and 14th, Cancer ... If it thunders in the sign of Gemini, fear and distress from the foreigners and of [...]"³⁷² The formula "if in the sign X it thunders ..." clearly resembles the typical if ... then ... format of Mesopotamian omen texts.³⁷³ According to Milik, 1QS 10.2-5 also refers to the zodiac; "When the lights shine forth from the Holy Dwelling-Place, and when also they retire (lit. are gathered) to the Place of Glory, when the constellations (of the Zodiac) make (their) entrance on the days of the new moon ..." ³⁷⁴

Furthermore, 4Q186 contains significant parallels with key documents of Qumran literature, e.g. the so-called Community Rule (Manual of Discipline). According to this work, both the universe and each human soul are a battleground for two spirits:³⁷⁵

He [God] created man to rule the world and placed within him two spirits so that he would walk with them until the moment of his visitation. they are the spirits of truth and of deceit. Those born of truth spring from a fountain of light, but those born of deceit spring from a source of darkness. In the hand of the Prince of Lights is dominion over all the sons of justice; they walk on paths of light. And in the hand of the Angel of Darkness is total dominion over the sons of deceit; they walk on paths of darkness. ... He created the spirits of light and of darkness and on them established all his deeds. (1QS iii.18-25)

³⁶⁹ M. R. Lehmann, "New Light on Astrology in Qumran and the Talmud," *RevQ* 32 (1975): 559.

³⁷⁰ Popović, *Reading the Human Body*, 15.

³⁷¹ Bouché-Leclercq, *L'astrologie Grecque*, 348, 363-64.

³⁷² García Martínez, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 451-52; cf. J. T. Milik, *Ten Years of Discovery in the Wilderness of Judaea*, (SBT 26; London: SCM Press, 1963), 42, 119; John Marco Allegro, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Reappraisal*, (Middlesex, Eng.: Penguin Books, 1964), 126.

³⁷³ Greenfield and Sokoloff, "Astrological and Related Omen Texts in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic," 202.

³⁷⁴ J. T. Milik, *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumrân cave 4*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 187.

³⁷⁵ García Martínez, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 6; cf. Vermès, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 65.

This document illustrates the dualism and determinism characteristic of the Qumran community. The phrases “fountain of light” and “source of darkness”, which bring forth the “spirit of truth” and “spirit of deceit” respectively, are similar to the house of light and the pit of darkness in 4Q186. The practice of dividing a person’s character into nine parts, some from the house of light, others from the house of darkness, in 4Q186 recalls the Qumran doctrine of the two spirits. The Qumran sect could regard the celestial signs and planets as the divine beings under the authority of the two spirits, apportioning light and darkness to individuals as God commands, as Dupont-Sommer suggests.³⁷⁶

As these features demonstrate, the manner in which 4Q186 is written hardly indicates that it was an unaccepted idea at Qumran. Rather, it could be regarded as the scribes’ deliberate selection to present an esoteric, mystical, zodiacal nature of the thought.³⁷⁷ Von Stuckrad states, “the specific astrolgoumena found at Qumran are not a kind of foreign body in the *yachad* but a consequent result of priestly discourses.”³⁷⁸ Charlesworth also notes, such an exotic style is also found “in a fourth-century CE silver amulet which contains in the Aramaic square script not only Aramaic words, but also transliterations of Greek and Latin words. The amulet, like 4Q186, belongs to a mystical, cryptic, and esoteric genre.”³⁷⁹ The astrological documents in Qumran reveal that its inhabitants had the assumption that the celestial signs affect human affairs and determine their characters. As Popović states, “They testify to a Jewish interest in astrological matters on a scientific level that matches similar texts from the Hellenistic world.”³⁸⁰ This also demonstrates that the contemporary Jews were not confused between astrology and astrolatry, which they harshly refuted. It is significant that fragments of astrological documents are found in such a conservative community. That such a conservative community as Qumran accepted astrology may suggest that it is likely that Hellenised Judaeans were even more open to astrology in all its varieties than were the Qumran community.

2.2.2. Pseudepigrapha Documents

The next body of Jewish literature to be explored is the collection of texts known as the Pseudepigrapha. Within this somewhat artificial group of texts, there is a wide range of attitudes towards astrology. At one extreme, there are authors, such as Artapanus and the

³⁷⁶ André Dupont-Sommer, “La secte des Esséniens et les horoscopes de Qumran,” *Acheologia* 15 (1967): 29.

³⁷⁷ Dupont-Sommer, “Secte,” 27; Charlesworth, “Jewish Interest in Astrology,” 939.

³⁷⁸ Stuckrad, “Jewish and Christian Astrology,” 11.

³⁷⁹ Charlesworth, “Jewish Astrology,” 192.

³⁸⁰ Popović, *Reading the Human Body*, 128.

anonymous Samaritan, sometimes called Pseudo-Eupolemus, who wrote in the late third or early second century BC. Their works are preserved in Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica*. They claim that astrology was first invented by, or at least known to, the Jews earlier than the Greeks. Artapanus asserted in his *En tois Ioudaikois* that Abraham taught astrology to the Egyptian priests of Heliopolis (καὶ τὴν ἀστρολογίαὺν αὐτὸν διδάξαι, cf. *Jos. Ant.* 1.167).³⁸¹ Likewise, Pseudo-Eupolemus argued that Abraham taught the astrological technique to Phoenicians and Egyptians. He even claimed that it was Enoch who first discovered the science of astrology from the teaching of the angels (Eusebius, *Praep. Ev.* 9.17.8).³⁸² The writings of Artapanus and Pseudo-Eupolemus reflect their attempt at Hellenistic Jewish propaganda. By showing that the Jews were an ancient people who had made important contributions to the contemporary Hellenistic culture, they tried to improve the image of the Jews.³⁸³

At the other extreme, seeking signs from the astral movements is condemned as evil and demonic. *I Enoch* 8.3 (probably composed in the early second century BC) says that such astrological practice was taught to men by the fallen angels; "Baraqel taught the auguries of the lightning; Kokabiel taught the auguries of the stars; ... Simsel taught the auguries of the sun; Sahrel taught the auguries of the moon." *Sibylline Oracles* 3. 20-24, 219-27 (probably composed in Egypt during the second century BC) praise righteous men who "do not worry about the cyclic course of the sun or the moon ... Neither do they practise the astrological predictions of the Chaldeans." The Book of *Jubilees* 12 (probably written in the second century BC) clearly condemns the astrological claim that the zodiac determines the yearly rainfall:

And in the sixth week, in its fifth year, Abram sat up during the night on the new moon of the seventh month (=Tishri, which commences the Jewish liturgical year), so that he might observe the stars from evening until daybreak so that he might see what events of the year would come to pass with respect to rain. And he was sitting alone and making observations. And a voice came into his head, saying, 'All of the signs of the stars and the signs of the sun and moon are in the hand of the Lord. Why am I seeking? If he desires, he will make rain morning and evening. And if he desires he will not send (it) down; and everything is in his hand.' (*Jub.* 12.16-18)

³⁸¹ James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, (1st ed.; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), 1.xxi-xxxiv, 889-903; A.-M. Denis, *Fragmenta pseudepigraphorum quae supersunt graeca*, (PVTG 3; Leiden: Brill, 1970), 186-95.

³⁸² Denis, *Fragmenta*, 198.

³⁸³ Charlesworth, "Jewish Interest in Astrology," 935; Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period*, (trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 1.69.

Apart from these two extreme perspectives, however, most documents in the Pseudepigrapha that refer to celestial occurrences are rather silent on the issue of astrological practice, i.e. individual or general horoscope. They are by and large focused on portraying the movements of the celestial bodies. This, however, does not indicate that the writers of these documents were against or ignorant of astrology. On the contrary, the descriptions of these events disclose that the writers were familiar with the astrological ideas. For example, *1 Enoch*, especially the *Astronomical Book* or *Book of the Luminaries* (*1 En.* 72-82), reveals the secrets of divine astronomy through the voice of Enoch who makes his way into heaven and is given a tour of the cosmos in which the angel Uriel, leader of the luminaries, explains to him its workings. Describing the movements of the celestial bodies, *1 Enoch* 72.1-37 and *1 Enoch* 75.2-3 adapt zodiacal ideas, calling the twelve signs of the zodiac “portals” or “apertures”:

The book of the courses of the luminaries of the heaven, the relations of each, ... which Uriel, the holy angel, who was with me, who is their guide, showed me; and he showed me all their laws exactly as they are, ... And this is the first law of the luminaries. the luminary the Sun has its rising in the eastern portals of the heaven, and its setting in the western portals of the heaven. And I saw six portals in which the sun rises, and six portals in which the sun sets and the moon rises and sets in these portals, and the leaders of the stars and those whom they lead. six in the east and six in the west, and all following each other in accurately corresponding order. also many windows to the right and left of these portals. ... (*1 En.* 72.1, 3-4)

... for those luminaries truly render service on the world-stations, one in the first portal, one in the third portal of the heaven, one in the fourth portal, and one in the sixth portal, and the exactness of the year is accomplished through its separate three hundred and sixty-four stations. For the signs and the times and the years and the days the angel Uriel showed to me, whom the Lord of glory has set for ever over all the luminaries of the heaven, in the heaven and in the world, that they should rule on the face of the heaven and be seen on the earth, and be leaders for the day and the night, i.e. the sun, moon, and stars, and all the ministering creatures which make their revolution in all the chariots of the heaven. (*1 En.* 75.2-3)

Moreover, the portrayals of the angel Uriel as “the leader of the luminaries” (cf. *1 En.* 80.1) and the fallen watchers as “stars” (*1 En.* 21.6-10) illustrate the close connection between angels and stars. The terms like “angels”, “archangels”, “watchers”, “holy ones”, “highest ones”, and “sons of heaven” overlap throughout the passages (*1 En.* 6.1-2; 14.1, 3; 20.1; 39.1; 69.1-7; 106.4-6). Enoch says, “their [stars’] motion is according to the number of angels” (*1 En.* 43.2). Popović states, “The distinction is not always sharply made between angels and spirits controlling the celestial elements and being equal to them.”³⁸⁴ This signifies that the

³⁸⁴ Popović, *Reading the Human Body*, 196.

celestial elements are regarded as animated beings.³⁸⁵ These spirited beings are considered to rule the earth in heaven working for the times, the years, and the days by controlling celestial, meteorological, and other processes of nature.³⁸⁶

the names of those who lead them, who keep watch so they enter at their times, who lead them in their places, in their orders, in their times, in their months, in their jurisdictions, and in their positions. (*1 En.* 82.10)

The governance of the heavenly bodies over the earth indicates the writers' assumption of the interconnectedness of the universe, the astrological macrocosm-microcosm. The movements of the celestial bodies are even understood as the sign of the divine plan for the earth:

The moon shall alter its order, and will not be seen according to its (normal) cycles. In those days (of sinners) it will appear in the sky and it shall arrive in the evening in the extreme ends of the great lunar path, in the west. And it shall shine (more brightly), exceeding the normal degree of light. Many of the chiefs of the stars shall make errors in respect to the orders given to them; they shall change their courses and functions and not appear during the seasons which have been prescribed for them. All the orders of the stars shall harden (in disposition) against the sinners and the conscience of those that dwell upon the earth. They (the stars) shall err against them (the sinners); and modify all their courses. Then they (the sinners) shall err and take them (the stars) to be gods. All evil things shall be multiplied upon them; and plagues shall come upon them, so as to destroy all. (*1 En.* 80.4-8)

The semi-technical nature of the book, which is devoted to the movements of the heavenly bodies, affirms that the writer is predicting actual celestial abnormalities. The language of celestial disorder may well be intended rather literally. This passage describes the winding-down of the current cosmic order as its terminus draws near. These celestial phenomena work as the ominous signs of the impending cosmic dissolution.

The similar celestial sign for the cosmic catastrophe is also stated in other documents:

Swords are seen at night in starry heaven

...

all the light of the sun is eclipsed in the middle from heaven,
and the rays of the moon appear and return to the earth. (*Sib. Or.* 3.798, 801-03)
and the sun shall suddenly begin to shine at night,
and the moon during the day.

³⁸⁵ Cf. Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars*, 56-62, 91-93.

³⁸⁶ Cf. *Jub.* 2.1; *1 En.* 60.14-22; *2 En.* 4-6; 11; 19; cf. M. E. Stone, "Lists of Revealed Things in the Apocalyptic Literature," in *Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in memory of G. Ernest Wright*, (ed. Frank Moore Cross, Werner E. Lemke, and Patrick D. Miller; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976), 414-52.

...
and the courses of stars shall change. (*4 Ezra* 5.4b-5)

Both passages predict abnormal celestial phenomena that work as signs before the actual events. The heavenly occurrences in *Sibylline Oracles* 3.798-80 (written in the period 163-45 BC) are signs that precede and announce the final upheavals caused by God's intervention in judgement. When the faithful see these happenings in the sky, they will know that final deliverance is at hand. Likewise, *4 Ezra* 5.1-13 (written near the end of the first century CE) outlines a series of turbulent events that precede the dawn of messianic salvation. These verses show that among the portents are included celestial disturbances. The thought of the reversal of the roles of the sun and the moon seems to resemble the tradition of the alternation of the solar and lunar cycles in *1 Enoch* 80.4-8. According to Box, the last line of *4 Ezra* 5.4b-5 "the courses of stars shall change" originally read, "the outgoing of the stars shall change."³⁸⁷ The "outgoing" refers to the portals through which the stars were thought to proceed. The alterations in the stellar paths accords with the first two lines of *4 Ezra* 5.4b-5. This time, unlike in *1 Enoch* 80.4-8, the shifts in the movement of the astral bodies do not signal the collapse of the cosmos. Rather they point to the nearness of messianic deliverance.

The most apparent advocacy of astrology in the Pseudepigrapha is illustrated in the *Treatise of Shem*, which is preserved in Syriac, probably composed in Aramaic in the last third of the first century B.C.³⁸⁸ This document belongs to a *calendologion*, a book which makes predictions concerning the character of a year from the zodiacal situation at the beginning of that year. Along with *physiognomies* and *brontologia*, such works were a common variety of lay astrology.³⁸⁹ The opening segment gives a good idea of the nature of the work:

The Treatise composed by Shem, the Son of Noah, Concerning the Beginning of the Year and Whatever occurs in it. *If the year begins in Aries*. the year will be lean. Even its four-footed (animals) will die; and many clouds will neither be visible nor appear. And grain will not reach (the necessary) height, but its rye will (reach good height) and will ripen. And the Nile will overflow at a good rate. And the king of the Romans will not remain in one place. And the first grain will die, but the last grain will be harvested. And from Passover [until the New Year] produce will have a blight. And the year will be bad, for a great war and misery will be on earth, and especially in the land of Egypt. And many ships will be wrecked when the sea billows. And oil will be valued in Africa; but wheat will be reduced in value in Damascus and Hauran; but in Palestine it will be

³⁸⁷ G. H. Box, *The Ezra-Apocalypse: Being Chapters 3-14 of the Book Commonly Known as 4 Ezra (or II Esdras)*, (London: Pitman, 1912), 44-45.

³⁸⁸ Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha*, 1.473, 601-04.

³⁸⁹ For lay astrology and calendologia, see Sven Eriksson, *Wochentagsgötter, Mond und Tierkreis: Laienastrologie in der römischen Kaiserzeit*, (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1956).

valued. And (in that region there will be) various diseases, and sicknesses, even fighting will occur in it. But it will be allowed to escape from it and be delivered.

The *Treatise* goes clockwise through the zodiac, Aries to Pisces. It claims to predict events, especially the next year's crops or the amount of rain to fall, from the sign in which the New Year begins.³⁹⁰ This notion is typical of all the twelve years and provides a significant link with the idea in *Jubilees* that Abraham was seeking through an observation of the zodiac to ascertain whether the year would be rich in rain. In the eighth chapter of the *Treatise of Shem*, an example of an astrological prediction is recorded. "And everyone born in Scorpio (will) survive (his birth), but at the end of the year he will be killed" (*Treat. Shem* 8.12). This demonstrates that the author of the *Treatise of Shem* assumed that the zodiac determined not only the features of each year but also the fate of each person. For him, both the year and the person are determined at the moment of origination.

The documents in the Pseudepigrapha that recount heavenly occurrences hardly touch the territory of celestial divination but mostly focus on calendrical issues. However, their descriptions of the astronomical movements of the celestial elements disclose the authors' attitude towards celestial phenomena. They believed the close connection between the heavenly world and the earthly world, the heavenly dominion over the earth, and the movements of celestial bodies as the signs of the divine plan for the earth.

2.2.3. Philo of Alexandria and Josephus Flavius

The final Jewish authors to be explored are Philo of Alexandria (ca. 20 BC-50 CE) and Josephus Flavius (37-100 CE). They both made use of the priestly cultic tradition, like the Qumran documents. Their description of the Jerusalem temple shows the correspondence between heaven and earth. Philo, in *De specialibus legibus* and *De vita Mosis*, explains the high priest's garment in a "vertical" manner:

Next there was a woven garment in the form of a breastplate upon it, and this was a symbol of the heaven; for on the points of the shoulders are two emerald stones of most exceeding value, one on one side and one on the other, each perfectly round and single on each side, as emblems of the hemispheres, one of which is above the earth and the other under the earth. Then on his chest there are twelve precious stones of different colours, arranged in four rows of three stones in each row, being fashioned so as an emblem of the zodiac. For the zodiac also consists of twelve animals, and so divides the four seasons of the year, allotting three animals to each season. And the whole place is very correctly called the logeum (logeion), since everything in heaven has been created

³⁹⁰ Alphonse Mingana, *Some Early Judaeo-Christian Documents in the John Rylands Library*, (Manchester: University press, 1917), 76-77.

and arranged in accordance with right reason (logois) and proportion... (*Spec. leg.* 1.86-88).

Thus, the cosmic harmony rang through the temple and 'joined the great cosmic worship wherein all creation manifested and worshipped the Creator.'³⁹¹ In *De vita Mosis* this is put explicitly:

Symbols of the zodiac are the twelve stones upon his chest arranged in four rows of three stones in each row, while the breastplate (*logeion*) as a whole represents that Principle [i.e., from the context, the *logos*] which holds together and rules all things For it was necessary that he who was consecrated to the Father of the world should have that Father's Son who is perfect in virtue to plead his cause that his sins might be remembered no more and good gifts be showered in abundance Yet perhaps it is also to teach in advance one who would worship God that even though he may be unable to make himself worthy of the Creator of the cosmos, he yet ought to try increasingly to be worthy of the cosmos. As he puts on his imitation (symbol) he ought straightway to become one who bears in his mind the original pattern, so that he is in a sense transformed from being a man into the nature of the cosmos, and becomes, if one may say so (and indeed one must say nothing false about the truth), himself a little cosmos. (*Vita Mos.* 2.133-35)

Philo does not only describe the cultic resemblance between heaven and earth, but also talks at some length about the planetary influences on agriculture and human fertility (*Opif. mundi* 101.113.117). In his tractate *De congressu eruditionis gratia* 50, he even says that οἱ ἀστρονομοῦντες καὶ Χαλδαῖοι possess the βασιλις τῶν ἐπιστημῶν. This vertical connection between heaven and earth is further developed to astrological prediction. He states that the celestial bodies work as signs of future events on earth:

And they [celestial bodies] have been created, as Moses tells us, not only that they might send light upon the earth, but also that they might display signs of future events. For either by their risings, or their settings, or their eclipses, or again by their appearances and occultations, or by the other variations observable in their motions, men oftentimes conjecture what is about to happen, the productiveness or unproductiveness of the crops, the birth or loss of their cattle, fine weather or cloudy weather, calms and violent storms of wind, floods in the rivers or droughts, a tranquil state of the sea and heavy waves, unusual changes in the seasons of the year when either the summer is cold like winter, or the winter warm, or when the spring assumes the temperature of autumn or the autumn that of spring. And before now some men have conjecturally predicted disturbances and commotions of the earth from the revolutions of the heavenly bodies, and innumerable other events which have turned out most exactly true: so that it is a most veracious saying that 'the stars were created to act as signs, ...' (*Opif. mundi* 58-59)

³⁹¹ Erwin R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, (BS 37; New York: Pantheon Books, 1953-68), 8.209.

Josephus Flavius was also well aware of the temple's cosmic symbolism. *De bello Iudaeorum* shows that the cultic symbolism could easily be turned into an astrological one; "The seven lamps that were branched off the menorah indicated the planets and the twelve breads lying on the table indicated the zodiac and the year" (*War* 5.217).³⁹² Smelik observes that "the representation of the luminaries by the menorah lamps, in the wake of Zechanah's fifth vision and Mesopotamian astronomy, was current in the days of Philo and Josephus."³⁹³ The association between heaven and earth is further illustrated in his description of the Second Temple destruction. He affirms that before the Temple's destruction unmistakable signs from God appeared in heaven to warn the Jews about its coming:

While they did not attend nor give credit to the signs that were so evident, and did so plainly foretell their future desolation; but, like men infatuated, without either eyes to see or minds to consider, did not regard the denunciations that God made to them. Thus there was a star resembling a sword, which stood over the city, and a comet, that continued a whole year.

Thus also, before the Jews' rebellion, and before those commotions which preceded the war, when the people were come in great crowds to the feast of unleavened bread, on the eighth day of the month of Xanthikos [Nisan], (Niese. April 25, Capellus. April 8) and at the ninth hour of the night, so great a light shone around the altar and the holy house, that it appeared to be bright daytime; which lasted for half an hour. This light seemed to be a good sign to the unskilful, but was so interpreted by the sacred scribes as to portend those events that followed immediately upon it. (*War* 6.288-91)

According to Josephus, a star stood over Jerusalem and a comet was visible for one year indicating not the Jewish victory but the triumph of Vespasian. "However, it is not possible for men to avoid fate, although they see it beforehand. But these men interpreted some of these signals according to their own pleasure; and some of them they utterly despised, until their madness was demonstrated, both by the taking of their city and their own destruction."³⁹⁴ (*War* 6.314-15) These passages suggest that celestial phenomena for Josephus were hardly meaningless but communicating divine plans for the earth. The Jews were to correctly interpret the astral signs. The observation of the heavenly phenomena to discover signs from God and the interpretation of time from the astral signs appear commonly practised among the contemporary Jews.

Josephus' description of the Second Temple destruction further reveals the Jewish conception of astrological fatalism. According to him, the destruction was not unilateral

³⁹² See also *War* 5.211-14; *Ant.* 3.145, 179ff.

³⁹³ W. F. Smelik, "On Mystical Transformation of the Righteous into Light in Judaism," *JSJ* 26, no. 2 (1995): 138.

³⁹⁴ The comet and other omens were usually interpreted similarly to Josephus' account. Cf. Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 3.8, Hegesippus *Hist. eccl.* 5.44, and Tacitus *Hist.* 5.13.

action from God but the result of the cooperation of two parties, God and men. On the one hand, it was determined by God from the outset. Josephus says, though one has to mourn for the loss of such a building, “one gains affluent consolation in the notion that man's works and cities are as dependent on fate as living creatures. However, one has to wonder about the accuracy regarding the turning of the times this fate exhibits because it correlates, as I have already mentioned, exactly to the month and even the same day the temple was first ignited by the Babylonians” (*War* 6.267-270), and “in the turning of the times the day scheduled by fate had now arrived” (*War* 6.250). On the other hand, the Jews were responsible for the execution of God’s plans. Josephus affirms that “these flames took their rise from the Jews themselves and were occasioned by them” (*War* 6.251). In other words, the burning of the Temple was the fault and guilt of the Jews themselves. The Jews, through righteous or sinful behaviour, are themselves responsible for their fate.³⁹⁵ Consequently, given the primordial blueprint of history and the responsibility of the Jewish people to make the plan come true, it is of fundamental significance to understand God's hidden message.

The investigation of the Jewish documents in the Second Temple period that describe celestial phenomena reveals that the Jews in that era were familiar with the astrological ideas. not only the scientific astronomy but also the astral prediction. The Jewish application of astrological techniques in their daily religious life and in the interpretation of a person’s physical characteristics, the character of a year, and history suggests that the Jews in the Second Temple period believed the intimate association between heaven and earth. the concept of macrocosm-microcosm. For them, celestial events were not only natural occurrences in a remote place but also represented divine messages for the earthly world.

3. Conclusion

This chapter has explored the Jewish concept of heaven and their attitude towards celestial phenomena through the examination of the references in the OT and the Jewish literature in the Second Temple period. The analysis of the heaven concept shows that heaven for the ancient Israelites was viewed as a single immense entity with two facets. on the one hand, the visible sky, atmosphere, and outer space, and on the other hand, the invisible place of God’s dwelling. Heaven as the dwelling place of God is depicted in the OT as a royal court, where God is a king with divine beings at his service.

³⁹⁵ Cf. *War* 6.99-110 and *Ant.* 16.394-99.

The OT concept of the divine council in heaven and its membership is similar to that in the ANE. Both the heavenly council and its members were spoken of with almost identical titles. The divine beings as “sons of God” were assumed to belong, adhere to, or participate in the nature of God, their father. They were commonly identified with the heavenly bodies (Ps 82; Deut 4.19-20; 32.7-9) and were granted the authority to govern the earthly world under God’s sovereignty. The movements of the celestial bodies were considered to represent the work of the heavenly council under God’s sovereignty. They were assumed to convey the divine signs for the events in the earthly world (Gen 1.14-18; Num 24.17; Ezek 32.7-8; Joel 2.1, 10, 30-31; 3.14-15, Amos 8.9; Mic 3.6). Not only the astronomical phenomena but also the meteorological and supernatural occurrences were understood to communicate the divine will and plans for the earth: e.g. the calling of an angel or the Lord from heaven (Gen 21.17; 22.11, 15; Exod 20.22; Neh 9.13), the vision from heaven (Ezek 1.1; 10.1; Zech 6.1; cf. Zech 1.18; 2.1; 5.1, 9; Dan 7.2, 4; 8.3; 10.5), the voice from heaven (Dan 4.31-32), the judgment from heaven (1 Sam 2.10; cf. 2 Sam 22.14; Ps 18.13; 29; Josh 10.11; 2 Kgs 1.10-14; Gen 7.4), torrential rain, hailstones, brimstone and fire (Ps 11.6; Ezek 38.22). The references to celestial phenomena in the OT demonstrate that Israel observed the heavenly events, astronomical, meteorological, and supernatural, gathered broad knowledge of those occurrences, and regarded them as a source of divine revelation for the earthly events.

This concept of heaven and attitude towards celestial phenomena in the OT is carried on in the Jewish literature in the Second Temple period. The uses of the word οὐρανός in the Pseudepigrapha and the Qumran literature show a close semantic connection with **שָׁמַיִם**. Concerning celestial phenomena, while there appears polemic against astrology in these documents, they also reveal that the Jews in that era were aware of and familiar with the astrological ideas: both the scientific astronomy and the astral prediction. These ideas were employed in describing the movements of the astral bodies. The planetary movements were sometimes regarded as signs from God for the earthly events. The Jewish documents of calendologia, physiognomies and brontologia clearly demonstrate the uses of astrological predictions. It suggests that there was no total rejection of astrology among the contemporary Jews but that such astrological ideas and practices were used to describe the celestial phenomena. The investigations of Chapter Two and Three have shown that both the contemporary pagans and Jews had a similar understanding of the concept of heaven and the heavenly realm. They both assumed the celestial phenomena could influence the personal and social events on earth.

Part II.

Observation of Celestial Phenomena in the Gospel of Matthew

Chapter 4

The *Sitz im Leben* of the Matthean Community

As preliminaries to the investigation of the references to the celestial phenomena in Matthew, Chapters 4 and 5 explore the *Sitz im Leben* of the Matthean community and the heaven motif in the first gospel respectively. It is important to reconstitute the social setting of the Matthean community. Through the reconstruction of the Matthean authorship, readership and provenance, the ethnic and geographical boundary of the first gospel will be delineated. It will help to appreciate properly Matthew's view on celestial phenomena. So will Matthew's conception of heaven and its usages in the gospel. These will provide a vital foundation in understanding the significance of the celestial phenomena in Matthew.

1. Authorship

The first gospel is technically an anonymous document. There is no signature of the author in the text and thus it is theoretically impossible to identify the original author. Traditionally, it has been ascribed to Matthew. It was titled εὐαγγέλιον κατὰ Μαθθαίου from the early second century CE. Most of the manuscripts, except the third century manuscript P1, named him as the author. This Matthew has been believed to indicate beyond doubt the apostle Matthew. The earliest reference that is available concerning the Matthean authorship appears in the comment of Papias in the early second century. He stated that “now Matthew compiled the sayings (τὰ Λογία) in the Hebrew (or Aramaic) language, and each other interpreted (or translated) it as they were able” (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.16, cf. 6.14, 25.4).³⁹⁶ This comment was understood as referring to the composition of the first gospel as it gave the name “Matthew” as its compiler. This “Matthew” was instinctively identified with the apostle Matthew. Consequently, canonical Greek Matthew was regarded as a translation of an earlier Hebrew version of the gospel written by the apostle Matthew. Papias'

³⁹⁶ For the detailed study on Papias' comment, see Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1971), 44 n3; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.7-8; Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1999), 209; James R. Edwards, *The Hebrew Gospel and The Development of The Synoptic Tradition*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 2-10.

view on the Matthean authorship of the first gospel was reiterated by Irenaeus, Pantaenus, Origen, Eusebius, and Jerome.³⁹⁷

The translation of Hebrew texts into Greek was relatively common in the early church. The discoveries of Hebrew copies of *Jubilees* and several Aramaic manuscripts of *I Enoch* reveal that they were the precursors of Greek *Jubilees* and *I Enoch*.³⁹⁸ Josephus' Aramaic *Jewish War* was later expanded and translated into Greek.³⁹⁹ Furthermore, Tertullian's *Apology* and Bardesanes's refutations of the Marcionites, which were the Greek translations of its Latin and Syriac versions,⁴⁰⁰ demonstrate that this way of writing, a first draft in the author's native language then its translation in another language as the final version, was fairly common in a bilingual culture like first century Palestine. The first gospel could have been one of such cases.

However, the patristic witnesses are insufficient to confirm the apostle Matthew as the author of the first gospel. Above all, Papias' testimony to the Matthean authorship does not verify that what Matthew wrote, τὰ Λογία, was the first gospel in its entirety. Brown argues that the word τὰ Λογία would have referred to the compilation of Jesus' "sayings" (teachings or revelation) in the usual sense of 'words' rather than the full gospel.⁴⁰¹ From the title of Papias's work Λογίων κυριακῶν ἐξηγήσεως, in which the word Λογίων indicates "the oracles of the Lord", Nolland also suggests that it is better to see τὰ Λογία as an ancient collection of "oracles", which were translated and used for other documents (e.g. the Gospel of Thomas, the document Q, etc.).⁴⁰² Even if τὰ Λογία represented the whole gospel of Jesus,⁴⁰³ it is still highly unlikely that the Greek Matthew was the translated version of the Hebrew gospel. Primarily, there is no extant Semitic Matthew, though there have been certain gospels with a Semitic origin in close association with Matthew (e.g. the Gospel of the Nazaraeans, medieval Hebrew forms of the Greek Matthew). Furthermore, the first gospel simply does not show any signs of having been indebted to Hebrew original.⁴⁰⁴ After a thorough investigation of the Hebrew gospel, Edwards presents a large number of

³⁹⁷ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.8.2, 5.10.3, 6.25.4, 3.24.6.

³⁹⁸ Cf. James C. VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today*, (London: SPCK, 1994), 35-40.

³⁹⁹ *War* 1.3; *Ant.* 1.7; *Ap.* 1.50; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.9.3.

⁴⁰⁰ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.2.4, 4.30.1.

⁴⁰¹ Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 209.

⁴⁰² Nolland, *Matthew*, 3.

⁴⁰³ For the argument that τὰ Λογία refers to the whole gospel, see Josef Kürzinger, "Papias von Hierapolis. Zu Titel und Art seines Werkes," in *Papias von Hierapolis und die Evangelien des Neuen Testaments: gesammelte Aufsätze, Neuauflage, und Übersetzung der Fragmente, kommentierte Bibliographie*, (ed. Josef Kürzinger Bd 4; Regensburg: F. Pustet, 1983), 69-89; Charles. E. Hill, "What Papias Said about John (and Luke): A 'New' Papias Fragment," *JTS* NS 49 (1998): 623; Edwards, *The Hebrew Gospel*, 4-6.

⁴⁰⁴ Nolland, *Matthew*, 3; Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 209-10.

quotations from it found in the early church.⁴⁰⁵ According to him, these references reveal much stronger correspondence with the gospel of Luke rather than Matthew or Mark.⁴⁰⁶ He argues that the author of Luke must have used the Hebrew gospel as one source.⁴⁰⁷ Thinking of such an abnormally high number of Semitisms in Luke, it would be most natural to expect a similar degree of Semitic influence on Matthew if it were a translated version of the Hebrew gospel. However, the first gospel omits all the Semitic material found in Luke. In addition, it does not display even the slightest sign of the work of a translator from a Semitic language but stands as the document originally composed in Greek with predominantly Greek sources. Edwards states, “rendering [the Greek] Matthew into Hebrew is like trying to place two magnets together.”⁴⁰⁸ This demonstrates that τὰ Λογία referred to by Papias had no association with the first gospel. Considering all these elements, it appears most plausible to regard the author of the first gospel and that of τὰ Λογία as different entities. In fact, there is no clear evidence that the Matthew referred to by Papias should be regarded as Matthew the author of the first gospel. Accordingly, the traditional view that the first gospel was a translation of the earlier Hebrew version by the apostle Matthew is fundamentally flawed.

Then, who could have written the gospel of Matthew? There has been a claim that Matthew should be seen as a work of a Gentile.⁴⁰⁹ The scholars who argue for this theory point out several features that a Jew would not employ: e.g. the story of the virgin birth, which appears in pagan literature yet not in Judaism (1.18-25), the rejection of Israel (21.43), the use of the term ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ without avoiding the use of the divine name, the Greek style of Matthew and the author’s corrections of Mark that could not have been made by one whose mother tongue was Hebrew or Aramaic, and Matthew’s conjunction of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, unthinkable for a Jew (16.5-12). These examples, however, are hardly strong enough to contraindicate the Jewish authorship of Matthew.⁴¹⁰ For the indicated features, the Matthean virgin birth story shows no parallel with the pagan ones but rather contains more of Jewish features (e.g. character (1.18-25), law (1.19), a new Moses, etc.). Concerning the rejection of Israel, it should be noted that Matthew’s hostility is not against the Jew in general but the Jewish leadership. For him, the kingdom of God is open to

⁴⁰⁵ Edwards, *The Hebrew Gospel*, 44-96, 263-91.

⁴⁰⁶ Edwards, *The Hebrew Gospel*, 107-18.

⁴⁰⁷ Edwards, *The Hebrew Gospel*, 125-53.

⁴⁰⁸ Edwards, *The Hebrew Gospel*, 254.

⁴⁰⁹ Cf. Kenneth W. Clark, "The Gentile bias in Matthew," *JBL* 66 (1947): 165-72; John P. Meier, *The Vision of Matthew: Christ, Church, and Morality in the First Gospel*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 17-25; M. J. Cook, "Interpreting 'Pro-Jewish' passages in Matthew," *HUCA* 53 (1984): 135-46.

⁴¹⁰ For a detailed discussion, see Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.21-32.

all the people, both Jew and Gentile (4.23; 28.19). The word θεός in ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ is not a sacred name for God but a common Greek word for a deity. The conjunction of the Pharisees and the Sadducees could be seen, not as Matthew's ignorance of the doctrinal conflicts of each other, but as his way of putting together Jesus' enemies, since he shows his awareness of the difference between the two groups in 22.23.

It is still possible that the apostle Matthew could have written the first gospel. However, with the assumption that the first gospel drew on Mark, it is highly questionable why an apostle, an eyewitness, had to heavily rely on a secondary source of a non-eyewitness rather than his own, albeit it is not inconceivable. It appears more plausible to view, considering the author's dialogue with contemporary Jewish thought and his skill both in Greek and in traditional Jewish interpretation of the OT, that the first gospel was written by an anonymous Jewish Christian author and was named in honour of Matthew, who was the author of the first and seminal gospel in Christian tradition, as Hengel suggests.⁴¹¹ Hengel argues that the titles of the gospels were accepted without opposition over a large province in the second century.⁴¹² Thinking of the early Christian network throughout the Empire, involving travellers whose words spread quickly among the Christian assemblies, early traditions concerning the authors of popular Christian works would be probably generally correct.⁴¹³ Keener also states, "no one in the years surrounding Papias's testimony challenged Matthean authorship; nor was Matthew the most obvious name to attach to the Gospel."⁴¹⁴ Then, from the early church tradition, which showed no hesitation in associating the apostle Matthew with both the Greek Matthew and τὰ Λογία as their author, "the 'Matthew' who is firmly anchored in the tradition of the Hebrew Gospel [τὰ Λογία] in patristic memory and testimony seems to be the same individual whose name is associated with canonical Greek Matthew," whether or not he was the apostle Matthew, as Edwards states.⁴¹⁵ The reason why the author of the first gospel attributed his gospel to Matthew could be that he was a member of Matthew's community or was one of his disciples.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹¹ Hengel, *The Four Gospels*, 48-53, 77.

⁴¹² Cf. Martin Hengel, *Studies in the Gospel of Mark*, (London: SCM, 1997), 81-82.

⁴¹³ E.g. 1 Cor 1.11; 11.16; 14.33; 16.12, 19; 2 Cor 9.2; cf. David Edward Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 215-16; Peter Stuhlmacher, "The Theme: The Gospel and the Gospels," in *The Gospel and the Gospels*, (ed. Peter Stuhlmacher; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 16; Richard Bauckham, "For Whom Were Gospels Written?," in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, (ed. Richard Bauckham; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 33-44.

⁴¹⁴ Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 39 n17.

⁴¹⁵ Edwards, *The Hebrew Gospel*, 256-57.

⁴¹⁶ Hill, *Matthew*, 55; Hagner, *Matthew*, 1.lxxvii; Keener, *Matthew*, 40. Cf. Edwards argues that the Matthean authorship of the first gospel was because it was composed for and addressed to the same

2. Intended Readership

The question “for whom was the gospel of Matthew written?” has been an ongoing issue among the Matthean scholarship. Like the case of the authorship, the text does not specify its intended audience. While many scholars assume that the evangelist had in mind a certain group of people as the intended readers of the gospel, Bauckham has challenged and refuted this widespread view and has argued that the gospels should be seen as universal documents written “for all Christians”.⁴¹⁷ This section will briefly argue that it is still more plausible to view Matthew as written for a specific group of people, living relatively close geographically and sharing the same ideas of belief. Then, it will explore the social location of Matthew’s intended readership.

Bauckham’s thesis on the gospel audience offers a valuable warning against the danger of regarding a gospel as an epistle. As Stanton has remarked, a gospel is different from an epistle in view of its genre and is expected to have composed for a relatively larger audience than that of an epistle.⁴¹⁸ Accordingly, it is certainly inconceivable that the evangelists wrote their gospels for exclusively single communities focusing on their own specific issues. Thinking of the gospels of Luke and Mark, Bauckham’s view may well appear reasonable. The former gives the impression that the author advocates a universal vision for Christianity.⁴¹⁹ The latter provides no clear signs that it is written for a specific community. Its theme of suffering discipleship could be seen aimed at a wider audience.⁴²⁰

Despite the rationale, however, Bauckham’s arguments are insufficient to account for the references in the gospels that appear to illustrate the evangelists’ assumption of the intended audiences. A variety of passages in the gospel of John seem clearly to reflect a situation of a specific community or communities closely linked that are under persecution:

Jewish Christian communities as the Hebrew gospel (Edwards, *The Hebrew Gospel*, 257-58; cf. Pier Franco Beatrice, "The "Gospel According to the Hebrews" in the Apostolic Fathers," *NovT* 48 (2006): 183-85). This theory, however, is not likely, since the Greek Matthew was not only written for Jewish Christians but also Gentile Christians. See the next section 4.2. *Intended Readership*.

⁴¹⁷ Bauckham, "For Whom Were Gospels Written?," 9-48.

⁴¹⁸ Graham Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 45.

⁴¹⁹ Wilson argues that the Lukan view for universalism can be found “in the notion that God is ‘impartial’ (οὐ προσωπολήπτως Ac. 10.34) and makes ‘no distinction’ (οὐθεν διέκρινεν Ac. 15.9) between Jews and Gentiles” (S. G. Wilson, *Luke and the Law*, (SNTSMS 50; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 104; cf. Robert Maddox, *The Purpose of Luke-Acts*, (SNTW; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1982); John T. Squires, *The Plan of God in Luke-Acts*, (SNTSMS 76; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)).

⁴²⁰ Cf. Theodore J. Weeden, *Mark - Traditions in Conflict*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971); Ernest Best, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*, (JSNTSS 4; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981); Whitney Taylor Shiner, *Follow me!: Disciples in Markan Rhetoric*, (SBLDS 145; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995).

e.g. the references to the dismissal from the synagogue (Jn 9.22; 12.42; 16.2),⁴²¹ the development of the “ghetto mentality” in John 15-16,⁴²² and the crisis occasioned by the death of the beloved disciples (21.20-23).⁴²³ With regard to the gospel of Matthew, a number of texts appear most naturally addressed to a specific situation of the community or a circle of communities; for example, the references to “your” or “their synagogues” (4.23; 9.35; 10.17; 12.9; 13.54; 23.34) which indicate the existence of a specific group of people with whom the author is intimate; the reference to the temple tax (17.24-27) that may well serve as an instruction for emerging members to the community to keep paying their tax;⁴²⁴ the reference καὶ διεφημίσθη ὁ λόγος οὗτος παρὰ Ἰουδαίοις μέχρι τῆς σήμερον [ἡμέρας] (28.15) that is more plausibly understood as addressed to a community in a situation where the Jews still used this argument against those who come to read Matthew; the instructions on church order (18.1-10), of the rabbis (23.1-7), and of the equality of status among the Matthean readers (23.8-12) which may well be applied to a specific situation. These references in John and Matthew demonstrate that it is more natural to think that those evangelists had in mind consciously or unconsciously the kind or kinds of people that they were addressing as they wrote. With regard to Luke and Mark, it could be argued that the relative paucity of evidence in those gospels is explained by the evangelists unthinkingly identifying their readers with themselves. Sim maintains, “it is ... possible, perhaps more probable, that the lack of identification of the readers points to the proximity between the author and the Christian community for whom he was writing.”⁴²⁵ All these accounts assert that it is less than probable that the gospels were universal documents for all Christians. “Bauckham provides no hard evidence that the gospels were open-ended texts intended for an unspecified readership. He merely assumes that this was the case because the gospels, unlike the Pauline epistles, provide no definitive indication of their intended readers,” as Sim states.⁴²⁶ Consequently, it is still more plausible to hold that Matthew had

⁴²¹ Cf. J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, (3rd ed.; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

⁴²² The phrase is from Ashton. He states, “Suffice it to say that chapters 15-16 presuppose a very different situation; the community has become a ghetto, and the commandment of faith in chapter 14 has been replaced by a love commandment that is markedly less universal than the ‘love your enemies’ of the Sermon on the Mount” (John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, (2nd ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 200).

⁴²³ For the role of the beloved disciple in John, see James H. Charlesworth, *The Beloved Disciple: Whose Witness Validates the Gospel of John?*, (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1995).

⁴²⁴ Cf. M. D. Goodman, “Nerva, the *Fiscus Judaicus* and Jewish Identity,” *JRS* 79 (1989): 40-44; Warren Carter, “Paying the Tax to Rome as Subversive Praxis: Matthew 17:24-27,” *JSNT* 76 (1999): 3-31.

⁴²⁵ David C. Sim, “The Gospels for All Christians? A Response to Richard Bauckham,” *JSNT* 84 (2002): 17.

⁴²⁶ Sim, “The Gospels for All Christians?,” 17.

in mind a certain group of people, living relatively close geographically and sharing the same ideas of belief, as his potential readership, where he was writing his gospel. The present study adopts this assumption that Matthew's gospel was not written to address any specific concerns of a single community as was the case of the Pauline epistles, but suggests rather a circle of communities was contemplated as the intended audience.

In identifying the social location of the Matthean community, the major concern has been how to interpret the seemingly apparent tension between the community and Judaism in the Gospel. Depending on the perspective and emphasis, there have been largely three proposals: a Gentile dominant Christian community separated from Judaism, a Jewish Christian community within Judaism, and a reoriented Christian community departing from Judaism.

2.1. Antagonistic Judaism

Though not the majority view, a certain number of scholars have stressed the distance between the Matthean community and Judaism in the Gospel and claimed that Matthew's readership was predominantly Gentile at the time of the Gospel composition.⁴²⁷ Initially, Clark argued that passages such as 8.12; 12.21, 39; 28.16ff, and the parables in 21.1-22.14 and in chapter 25 display the total repudiation of Israel and the corresponding privileged standing of the Gentiles in the community. He asserted that this attitude towards the Gentiles and Israel in Matthew suggests that the first Gospel was not written by a Jewish author but by a Gentile convert to Christianity.⁴²⁸ Likewise, Strecker maintained that the Jewish elements in the Gospel should not be thought coming from Jewish circles but from Gentile circles or an earlier Jewish Christian tradition preceding the evangelist's own day. For him, the final redaction of the Gospel illustrates the completion of the Matthean community's phase shift from its early Jewish Christianity to Gentile prominent Christianity.⁴²⁹ This idea of community transfer was shared by Trilling, though his distinction between Jewish and Gentile Christianity was not as sharp as that of Strecker's.⁴³⁰

⁴²⁷ Clark, "The Gentile bias in Matthew," 165-72; Wolfgang Trilling, *Das Wahre Israel: Studien zur Theologie des Matthäus Evangeliums*, (3d. ed.; München: Kösel, 1964); Douglas R. A. Hare, *The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel according to St. Matthew*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967); Georg Strecker, *Der Weg der Gerechtigkeit: Untersuchung zur Theologie des Matthäus*, (3d. ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971); Sjeff van Tilborg, *The Jewish Leaders in Matthew*, (Leiden: Brill, 1972); John P. Meier, *Law and History in Matthew's Gospel: A Redactional Study of Mt.5:17-48*, (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1976).

⁴²⁸ Clark, "The Gentile bias in Matthew," 165-72; cf. Tilborg, *The Jewish Leaders*, 171.

⁴²⁹ Strecker, *Der Weg der Gerechtigkeit*, 15-35.

⁴³⁰ Trilling, *Das Wahre Israel*.

While Trilling understood the transfer from Jewish to Gentile as from false Israel to true Israel, Hare insisted that “the transfer is from Israel to *another people*, non-Israel. It is this radical discontinuity between Israel and her successor which requires that we regard the rejection of Israel in Matthew as final and complete.”⁴³¹ For him, the persecution by Jewish opponents led to the community being excluded from the synagogues, resulting in the permanent distance between them. He states, “Matthew’s description of the synagogue as an alien Institution indicates that, whatever the cause, Christians are no longer members.”⁴³² Asserting that no Jew could write the statements in the Gospel such as 16.12, 21.7, and 22.37, Meier aligned himself with this group.⁴³³

2.2. *Intra Muros of Judaism*

Another group of scholars have stressed the strong Jewish character of the Gospel of Matthew. They argue that the Matthean community should be seen still residing within Judaism at the time of the Gospel composition.⁴³⁴ Pointing out the opposition between Christianity and Judaism from the phrase συναγωγή αὐτῶν (4.23, 9.35, 10.17, 12.9, 13.54, and ἑμῶν at 23.34), Kilpatrick has claimed that the Matthean community was excluded from the synagogues at the time of the Gospel writing.⁴³⁵ For him, yet, the Matthean opposition did not indicate its departure from Judaism. It was more against Pharisaism rather than Judaism as a whole; hence, an occurrence “within Judaism”.⁴³⁶ The Matthean community existed as essentially Jewish, yet “distinguished ... from the Synagogue”.⁴³⁷ Concurring with Kilpatrick’s view, Bornkamm maintains that “the struggle with Israel is

⁴³¹ Hare, *The Theme of Jewish Persecution*, 153.

⁴³² Hare, *The Theme of Jewish Persecution*, 125.

⁴³³ Meier, *Law and History in Matthew's Gospel*, 14-22.

⁴³⁴ George Dunbar Kilpatrick, *The Origins of the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1946); Günther Bornkamm, "End-Expectation and Church in Matthew," in *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, (ed. Günther Bornkamm, Gerhard Barth, and Heinz Joachim Held; NTL The New Testament Library; London: SCM, 1963), 15-51; J. Andrew Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism: The Social World of The Matthean Community*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990); J. Andrew Overman, *Church and Community in Crisis: The Gospel according to Matthew*, (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1996); Anthony J. Saldarini, "The Gospel of Matthew and Jewish-Christian Conflict," in *Social History of the Matthean Community: Cross-Disciplinary Approaches*, (ed. David L. Balch; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 37-61; Anthony J. Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology*; David C. Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism: The History and Social Setting of the Matthean Community*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998).

⁴³⁵ Kilpatrick, *The Origins of the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 110ff.

⁴³⁶ Kilpatrick, *The Origins of the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 122.

⁴³⁷ Kilpatrick, *The Origins of the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 123.

still a struggle within its walls.”⁴³⁸ For him, Matthew was “fighting on two fronts” against the antinomians on the one hand and non-Christian Jews on the other hand.⁴³⁹

This view is further developed with the use of sociological methods. In his monograph *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism*, Overman affirms that, “[a]t the time of the writing of the Gospel of Matthew ... [t]he people of Matthew's community did not understand themselves as ‘Christians’. On the contrary they were Jews.”⁴⁴⁰ Adopting the sociological conceptions from Blenkinsopp and Wilson, he defines the Matthean community as a Jewish “sectarian” group, that is, “a group which is, or perceives itself to be, a minority in relation to the group it understands to be the ‘parent body’ [formative Judaism].”⁴⁴¹ After the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, he maintains, there was no established Judaism as a unified group with leadership, but only the so-called “formative Judaism” – “a group which, like the Matthean community, was involved in a process of social construction and definition”.⁴⁴² Both the “Matthean Judaism” and formative rabbinic Judaism were “fraternal twins” competing to establish their legitimacy as God's *true* people.⁴⁴³ The formative Judaism eventually became the dominant form of Judaism, the parent body. The tension and struggle between the Matthean Judaism and formative Judaism in the Gospel represents a sectarian competition between these two emerging movements. Overman states, “The harsh language and epithets directed at the Jewish leadership betray the social location of the Matthean community; they were underdogs. The cautious and, at points, hostile response to the world further indicates the sectarian nature of the Matthean community.”⁴⁴⁴ Although the term Ἰουδαῖοι (28.15) may seem to disclose the

⁴³⁸ Bornkamm, "End-Expectation and Church in Matthew," 22.

⁴³⁹ Bornkamm, "End-Expectation and Church in Matthew," 24; cf. Gerhard Barth, "Matthew's Understanding of the Law," in *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, (ed. Günther Bornkamm, Gerhard Barth, and Heinz Joachim Held The New Testament Library; London: SCM, 1963), 162.

⁴⁴⁰ Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism*, 5.

⁴⁴¹ Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism*, 8; Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism*; Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism*; Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism*; Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism*; Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism*; Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism*. According to Overman, ‘The sect is a minority in that it is subject to, and usually persecuted by, the group in power. The dissenting group is in opposition to the parent body and tends to claim more or less to be what the dominant body claims to be’ (Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism*, 8). For the hypotheses of Blenkinsopp and Wilson, see J. Blenkinsopp, "Interpretation and the Tendency to Sectarianism: An Aspect of Second Temple History," in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, (ed. E. P. Sanders; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 2.1-15; Bryan R. Wilson, *Magic and the Millennium: A Sociological Study of Religious Movements of Protest among Tribal and Third-World Peoples*, (1st U.S. ed.; New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

⁴⁴² Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism*, 2.

⁴⁴³ The term is from Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism*, 160.

⁴⁴⁴ Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism*, 154.

evangelist's Gentile identity, Overman alleges that it is used, "as in many inscriptions and in Josephus, as a circumlocution for all Jews, or, more precisely, themselves."⁴⁴⁵

Saldarini and Sim concur in general with Overman's view of the social location of the Matthean community as a Christian-Jewish group within the orbit of formative Judaism. Saldarini clarifies the community in a relatively neutral and loose term as a deviant Jewish "group", that is, "a social unit that consists of a number of individuals who, at a given time, have role and status relations with one another, stabilized in some degree, and who possess a set of values or norms regulating the attitude and behaviour of individual members, at least in matters of consequence to them."⁴⁴⁶ Asserting that the Matthean adherents were exclusively Jewish and at the same time followers of the Christ, Sim refers to the community as a broader movement of "Christian Judaism".⁴⁴⁷ According to him, this unique identity of the Matthean community as Christian Jews led them to a social isolation from both their sibling Judaism and the surrounding Gentiles. The polemical languages against the formative Judaism, such as the rising up of ψευδοπροφήται and the increase of ἀνομία in 24.11-12 (cf. 7.15-23), reflect their separation from the synagogue-based Judaism at the composition of the Gospel. Matthew's strong expression of apocalypticism and his recourse to apocalyptic eschatology, which is originated from Judaism, illustrate social marginalization and even persecution from Judaism.⁴⁴⁸

According to Overman, at the core of the sectarian competition between Matthean Judaism and formative Judaism lay the issue of the interpretation of the law. "Who was recognized as the authoritative interpreters had a great deal to do with who emerged as the accepted and established movement."⁴⁴⁹ Against the arguments that the Matthean community was ignorant of the law or failed to keep it, he insists that the fact that Jesus was given the ultimate authority for the interpretation of the law did not weaken their fidelity to

⁴⁴⁵ Overman, *Church and Community in Crisis*, 401.

⁴⁴⁶ Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community*, 85-86; cf. Muzafer Sherif, *Group Conflict and Cooperation: Their Social Psychology*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul., 1966), 12. Saldarini states, 'Matthew and his associates have been called a 'group', the most general name available, because the designation 'community' implies to many people separation and independence from Judaism' (Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community*, 87). The usage of the kinship and household metaphor (e.g. the ἀδελφός language in 18.15, 23.8) and that of discipleship (23.8-10) demonstrate this characterization of the Matthean people as a "group". According to him, this Matthean "group" of people was eventually led to form a tighter group structure within the post-destruction Judaism due to the social conflict caused by their "critique of some community attitudes and practices with a deeply renewed sense of fundamental Jewish values" through Jesus (Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community*, 89).

⁴⁴⁷ Sim states, "The all-important noun correctly defines the religion of these law-observant followers of Jesus as Judaism, while the adjective nominates their affiliation to the one they considered to be the Christ" (Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 25).

⁴⁴⁸ Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology*, 220.

⁴⁴⁹ Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism*, 69.

the law. On the contrary, it challenged them more intensely to fulfil the law causing their righteousness to insistently surpass even that of the scribes and the Pharisees. Overman notes, “Matthew sees himself and his community as the guardians of the right understanding of the law and the prophets.”⁴⁵⁰ For him, this attitude is clearly attested in the statement in 5.17-20, which “command[s] obedience to the whole Torah.”⁴⁵¹ The antitheses after this statement illustrate how the law should work among the community.⁴⁵²

For Sim, such strong Jewishness of the Matthean group “comes not from the witness of a few Gospel passages but from the general perspective from which the evangelist writes. That is to say, Matthew writes from a thoroughly Jewish outlook and he constantly affirms the basic and distinctive tenets of Judaism.”⁴⁵³ As his definition of the community suggests, while the religion of “Christianity” generally points to the Gentile Christianity which demolished the distinctions between Jew and Gentile through the rejection of the basic tenets of the Jewish faith, the covenant between the Jewish people and God and the observance of the law, the Christian Jews were those who “observed the Jewish law in full according to the definitive interpretation of Jesus, and this included obedience to the laws of circumcision, tithing, purity and sabbath observance.”⁴⁵⁴

These scholars have also argued that this Jewish character of the Matthean community is demonstrated in its relationship with the Gentiles. Sim claims that the phrase ἕσθε ἐμισοῦμενοι ὑπὸ πάντων τῶν ἐθνῶν (24.9) demonstrates the conflict between the Matthean community and the Gentiles. Suggesting the Gentile persecution against the Matthean community from such description, he states, “It is quite understandable that this community was critical of the surrounding Gentile society and adopted a policy of avoiding and shunning it.”⁴⁵⁵ This anti-Gentile perspective is asserted to have been carried on throughout the Gospel. Although a favourable attitude towards the Gentiles, such as the healing of the Gentiles in 8.5-13; 15.21-28, may seem to refute this position, Sim maintains that it should be seen as nothing more than “an aberration in the context of Jesus’ mission, and its significance resides in the fact that Jesus could at time show mercy and compassion to Gentiles who expressed great faith in his power.”⁴⁵⁶ Concerning the term ἕθνη in 21.43, he translates it as “a people”, “either the Matthean community alone or Christian Judaism in

⁴⁵⁰ Overman, *Church and Community in Crisis*, 81.

⁴⁵¹ Overman, *Church and Community in Crisis*, 78; cf., 77-80.

⁴⁵² Overman, *Church and Community in Crisis*, 80-87.

⁴⁵³ Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 5.

⁴⁵⁴ Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 299.

⁴⁵⁵ David C. Sim, "The Gospel of Matthew and the Gentiles," 57 (1995): 39.

⁴⁵⁶ Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 224.

general”,⁴⁵⁷ rather than a nation. He argues that this pericope “demonstrates that Matthew’s Christian Jewish group claimed (albeit unsuccessfully) a leadership role within the Jewish community and within the Jewish religion.”⁴⁵⁸ The parable of the royal wedding banquet (22.1-14) is argued as reflecting the community’s “open-ended mission to the Jews”.⁴⁵⁹ All these features, for Sim, serve to illustrate that the Matthean community, in spite of this separation from Judaism and persecution from the Gentiles, did not change their attitude towards the law or the Gentiles but still remained as a strictly Jewish movement.⁴⁶⁰

Saldarini suggests a different interpretation from Sim concerning the Matthean attitude towards the Gentiles. According to him, since the Gospel story is primarily about Jewish affiliation, the Gentiles are not playing any significant role in it but are marginalized. When present in the Gospel, they are portrayed as stereotypes common to Jews, both in positive and negative ways.⁴⁶¹ Albeit the special role of certain Gentiles is acknowledged (e.g. the Magi, the Canaanite woman, the centurion who has his servant healed and the centurion at the cross), he downplays their significance by asserting that “the gentiles do not, however, become disciples, with all that that commitment implies. ... Matthew may be implying that they have some potential to be members of his group of believers-in-Jesus, but that they are not yet members, nor does the narrative imply that they will become so.”⁴⁶² Hence, for Saldarini, rather than anti-Gentile attitude as Sim insists, ignorance is more plausible description of the Matthean attitude towards the Gentiles.

Concerning the seemingly obvious reference of the community’s transition towards other nations and people (28.19-20), each scholar has proposed different interpretations. For Overman, the great commission for everyone everywhere in fact represents the evangelist’s eschatological belief. The final commission as a whole is not about the evangelistic mission to the Gentiles but about gaining authority within formative Judaism. This goal is believed to be achieved when all Jews and non-Jews are taught Matthean Judaism and have become disciples, that is, faithful followers of Jesus through strict observance of the law (cf., 24.14). In this sense, the commission is the evangelist’s “unrealistic goal ... theoretically affirmed”.⁴⁶³ He states, “If others hear about the message of Matthean Judaism, then the end will come. ... Mission, despite the modest interest in it in Matthew’s church, is related to Matthew’s view of history. The era or age will draw to a close and the age that promises a

⁴⁵⁷ Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 149.

⁴⁵⁸ Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 149.

⁴⁵⁹ Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 158.

⁴⁶⁰ Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 27.

⁴⁶¹ Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community*, 76-77.

⁴⁶² Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community*, 82.

⁴⁶³ Overman, *Church and Community in Crisis*, 408.

better life for Matthean Jews will draw near if the mission to the rest of the world is engaged.”⁴⁶⁴

Rather differently from Overman, Saldarini takes the great commission at face value as the evangelist’s re-orientation of his people to a new direction, the Gentile mission. He states, “Matthew’s emphasis on bringing non-Jews into the community... suggests that the community is moving toward a conversionist orientation that seeks to bring a mixed group of people into the community.”⁴⁶⁵ However, this does not indicate that the Matthean group is departing from Judaism and setting up a new religious movement. For Saldarini, the new community still remains submissive to the law. Hence, although belief in Jesus is the central requirement for the Gentiles to enter this new community, they are required to proselytize throughout Judaism and to demonstrate their belief through the observance of the law (28.20). According to him, all this transformation was not a present reality at the time of the Gospel composition but for the future, the Matthean adherents at the evangelist’s own day were distinct Jewish group within formative Judaism.

Although these scholars disagree with each other at some points, in general they concur that the Matthean group of people still remained as the distinct Jewish movement at the time of the Gospel composition, faithfully observing the requirements of the law. Although they do not deny the validity of the evangelistic mission towards the Gentiles, nonetheless, they do not admit that the Matthean community was involved in any of such mission in the evangelist’s own day.

2.3. Transition from Judaism to Christianity

The third group of scholars have embraced both the Matthean opposition against Judaism and the active Gentile mission in the Gospel and suggested the third view, a “mediating position”.⁴⁶⁶ They argue that the Matthean community at the time of Gospel composition was a Christian institution *extra muros* of Judaism; the members were still respecting the Jewish heritage on the one hand and were now taking the Gentile converts in on the other hand.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁴ Overman, *Church and Community in Crisis*, 411.

⁴⁶⁵ Saldarini, "The Gospel of Matthew and Jewish-Christian Conflict," 59-60.

⁴⁶⁶ The term is from Stanton, *Gospel for a New People*, 124.

⁴⁶⁷ Werner Georg Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, (Rev. and English ed.; Nashville, NY: Abingdon Press, 1975), 112-19; O. Lamar Cope, *Matthew: a Scribe Trained for the Kingdom of Heaven*, (CBQMS 5; Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1976), 214ff; C. F. D. Moule, "St. Matthew's Gospel: Some Neglected Features," in *Essays in New Testament Interpretation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 67-74; C. F. D. Moule, *The Birth of the New Testament*, (3rd ed.; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 124-28; Krister Stendahl, *The School of St. Matthew and Its Use of the Old Testament*, (1st American ed.; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968); W.

Adopting Coser's social conflict theory, Stanton, like Overman, regards the conflict between the Matthean group of people and Judaism as a dissent between a sectarian community and a parent body for the legitimacy of God's true people and of the true interpreters of Scripture (e.g. 12.24, 43-45; cf. 9.34; 10.25; 13.38).⁴⁶⁸ This dissent led two parties to the inevitable separation.⁴⁶⁹ He states, 'passages such as 23.34 and 10.23 which refer to persecution from town to town and, indeed, the "death and crucifixion" of those disciples sent out by Jesus, confirm that the relationship between church and synagogue is definitely not *intra muros*'.⁴⁷⁰ That any of references to scribes and Pharisees in Matthew are neither friendly nor approving but always hostile and bitter (7.29; 8.5-13, 18-21; 9.18-26; 22.35; ch 23) is argued as further reflecting that situation.⁴⁷¹ Now the ἐκκλησία (16.18, 18.17) founded by Jesus and his authoritative words stood over the συναγωγή αὐτῶν (4.23, 9.35, 10.17, 12.9, 13.54, or ὁμῶν at 23.34) and the instructions of Torah (7.24-27, 28.20).⁴⁷² According to Stanton, such strong rejection of Judaism implies the transfer of Israel's place to a new people (8.5-13, 15.13, 21.41, 43, 28.15). The Matthean church was now open to the Gentiles.⁴⁷³ Yet, this does not indicate that the Matthean readership abandoned the validity of the law and became an antinomian faction. For Stanton, the law was still authoritative for Matthew and his audience. The emphasis on the abiding validity of the law in 5.17-20 represents his response to such a claim by the scribes and Pharisees that the Matthean community abandoned the law.⁴⁷⁴

While concurring with Stanton's reconstruction of the *Sitz im Leben* of the Matthean community, Foster does not see Matthew as a polemic against the Jewish opponents. Rather,

A. Meeks, "Breaking Away: Three New Testament Pictures of Christianity's Separation from the Jewish Communities," in *To See Ourselves as Others See Us: Christians, Jews, "Others" in Late Antiquity*, (ed. Jacob Neusner, Ernest S. Frerichs, and Caroline McCracken-Flesher; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985), 93-116; Séan Freyne, "Vilifying the Other and Defining the Self: Matthew's and John's Anti-Jewish Polemic in Focus," in *To See Ourselves as Others See Us: Christians, Jews, "Others" in Late Antiquity*, (ed. Jacob Neusner, Ernest S. Frerichs, and Caroline McCracken-Flesher; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985), 117-44; B. Przybylski, "The Setting of Matthean Anti-Judaism," in *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity*, (ed. Peter Richardson, David M. Granskou, and S. G. Wilson; Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1986), 1.181-200; Donald A. Hagner, "The *Sitz im Leben* of the Gospel of Matthew," in *Society for Biblical Literature 1985 Seminar Papers*, (ed. K. H. Richards; Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1990), 243-69; Stanton, *Gospel for a New People*; Paul Foster, *Community, Law, and Mission in Matthew's Gospel*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004).

⁴⁶⁸ Stanton, *Gospel for a New People*, 98-110; cf. Lewis A. Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict*, (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964).

⁴⁶⁹ Stanton, *Gospel for a New People*, 123.

⁴⁷⁰ Graham Stanton, "The Origin and Purpose of Matthew's Gospel: Matthean Scholarship from 1945-1980," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, (ed. Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1983), 1915.

⁴⁷¹ Stanton, *Gospel for a New People*, 126-28.

⁴⁷² Stanton, *Gospel for a New People*, 128-31.

⁴⁷³ Stanton, *Gospel for a New People*, 131.

⁴⁷⁴ Stanton, *Gospel for a New People*, 49.

he argues that the tension in the Gospel “arose from both a pastoral and pedagogical concern to hold together a community that was struggling with its new task of incorporating recent Gentile converts into its midst.”⁴⁷⁵ According to him, the programmatic statements and the following antitheses in 5.17-48 were not the evangelist’s response to Jewish counter-propaganda, but rather his promotion of a higher authority, that is, Jesus the supreme interpreter and re-definer of Jewish traditions. Foster states,

This approach was aimed both pastorally and pedagogically at those long-term members who felt unease at incorporating Gentile converts into their community. The evangelist seeks to reassure such members of his group, whose heritage was in Judaism, that such a way forward does not abrogate their adherence to the law, but is in actuality the fulfilment of the law through a higher standard of righteousness.⁴⁷⁶

Likewise, for Foster, the seemingly anti-Gentile Jewish orientated mission statements in 10.5-23 are not to affirm the exclusion of the Gentile from the Matthean mission as Sim insists.⁴⁷⁷ On the contrary, they are to signify the value of the Jewish mission. This approach again carries pastoral and pedagogical aim for his mixed community. As Davies and Allison suggest,⁴⁷⁸ he understands the Matthean community at the time of the Gospel composition as facing the relative failure of the Jewish mission and the success of the Gentile mission. This context caused the members to disregard the value of the Jewish mission. The mission statements in this passage through the voice of Jesus are arranged to affirm that the members “are still to accept their part in evangelizing Jews, even until the return of the Son of Man.”⁴⁷⁹ The pericope which expresses the seemingly anti-Gentile attitude of Jesus in 15.21-28 in fact conveys Jesus’ change of mind. This clearly displays the transition of perspective on mission. The rest of the mission references in Matthew (21.43, 24.14, 26.13, and 28.16-20) promote the Gentile mission.

2.4. Evaluation

The scholars who claim the first view of antagonistic Judaism have emphatically pointed out the presence of tension between the Matthean community and Judaism. However, their dealings with the Gospel material present less than convincing proof that Matthew’s audience was thoroughly Gentile.

⁴⁷⁵ Foster, *Community, Law, and Mission*, 257.

⁴⁷⁶ Foster, *Community, Law, and Mission*, 257-58.

⁴⁷⁷ Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 158, 224.

⁴⁷⁸ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2.192.

⁴⁷⁹ Foster, *Community, Law, and Mission*, 226.

Above all, their claim for Matthew's complete and permanent rejection of Israel does not seem as obvious as they allege. Albeit there appears the opposition against synagogue and Israel is believed to have lost its status as the stewards of God's kingdom (21.43), nevertheless, the mission to Israel is anticipated in the Gospel (10.5-23, 15.21-28). The word ἔθνος in Matthew often refers to both Israel and the Gentiles rather than the Gentiles only (21.43, 24.14, 28.19, cf. 10.17, 23.34, 39).⁴⁸⁰ Nolland states, "when he [Matthew] speaks of 'all the ἔθνη', he no longer uses ἔθνη to distinguish Gentiles from Jews but rather refers to the whole of humanity."⁴⁸¹

Moreover, they fail to give proper attention to the patently Jewish references throughout the Gospel, such as the stress on fulfilment of the OT with the formula quotations to affirm Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus' fidelity to the law, the Matthean omission of Jewish customs in Mark (cf. 15.2 with Mk 7.3-4), which suggests that the readership were familiar with such customs, and the use of typical rabbinic patterns for certain discussions (e.g. 19.3-9). Although they propose that the Jewish elements in Matthew reflect the earlier tradition of the community and only the Gentile features demonstrate the evangelist's position, without any explicit example of it this appears unconvincing. Whether or not the materials belong to the earlier tradition or the evangelist's own day, once the final redactor collects and arranges those materials for his Gospel, the whole composition should be seen as reflecting his own convictions. Similarly, Stanton states, "Matthew incorporates earlier traditions with little or no modification simply because he accepts them and wishes to preserve them. Earlier traditions reflect Matthew's convictions just as much as his redactional modification."⁴⁸²

Furthermore, their dealing with Matthew's attitude towards the Gentiles lacks the balance, since the gospel presents both the pro-Gentile attitude and the seemingly anti-Gentile perspective. While Sim insists that there are at least four passages in the Gospel, which exhibit the evangelist's negative attitude towards the Gentiles (5.46-47; 6.31-32; 6.7-8; 18.15-17), they are rather quiet about this issue.⁴⁸³ This reconstruction of the social location of the Matthean community as thoroughly Gentile seems to have gone too far. The Gospel shows that they were still respecting the Jewish heritages.

The second group of scholars have made a commendable observation in locating the social background of the Matthean community within formative Judaism. They

⁴⁸⁰ Cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 23-24; Stanton, *Gospel for a New People*, 137-38; Nolland, *Matthew*, 879, 966, 1265-66.

⁴⁸¹ Nolland, *Matthew*, 1266.

⁴⁸² Stanton, *Gospel for a New People*, 135, cf. 23-53.

⁴⁸³ Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 227-29; cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.559; Hill, *Matthew*, 276.

acknowledge the existence of numerous formative Jewish groups in competition and conflict so as to claim their legitimate leadership after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. They validly point out that the Matthean group was one of the competing movements, yet eventually becoming separated from formative Judaism. In spite of these worthwhile observations, however, these scholars' reconstructions of the Matthean community appear to be problematic in a number of aspects.

First, their claim that the Matthean adherents remained as devoted Jews keeping all the requirements of the Torah are hardly persuasive. Though Overman reads the statement of 5.17-20 as affirming the eternal validity of OT law, the following antitheses in 5.21-48 do not allow as straightforward an interpretation as he promulgates. In these antitheses, as Foster states, "the Matthean Jesus does not uphold the law according to the contemporary traditional understanding, but modifies, redefines or even overturns its stipulations at a number of points."⁴⁸⁴ The subsequent antitheses dealing with divorce, oaths, and retaliation reflect this perspective. Contrary to Overman's claim, this series of antitheses represent that Jesus' interpretation of the Torah supersedes Jewish traditions. Foster maintains that "these new attitudes do in fact involve removing a permission given in the Torah casuistic rulings."⁴⁸⁵ Concerning the statement of 5.17-20, Hare argues that it "must be taken as a general statement, not as a requirement of literal observance of all precepts, many of which had long since become dead letters or had been drastically reinterpreted."⁴⁸⁶ This interpretation of 5.17-48 shows that while Jesus confirms the continuity and fulfilment of the law, his statement does not refer to a conservative "legalism (the literal and unchanging application of the law as regulations), as v.20 has already indicated."⁴⁸⁷ This makes it hardly possible to argue for the strictly law-observant identity of the Matthean community. Consequently, Barth's claim that the emphasis on the validity of the law in 5.17-19 represents Matthew's fight against antonimian opponents is found unlikely.

Considering this interpretation, Sim's definition of the Matthean community as "Christian Judaism" as being in sharp contrast to the Gentile Christianity seems an unnecessary over-classification. Once the requirement of Torah obedience is taken out, these two movements exhibit too many resemblances in their fundamental beliefs and traditions to be regarded as two discontinuous entities.

⁴⁸⁴ Foster, *Community, Law, and Mission*, 258.

⁴⁸⁵ Foster, *Community, Law, and Mission*, 50.

⁴⁸⁶ Douglas R. A. Hare, "How Jewish is the Gospel of Matthew?," *CBQ* 62 (2000): 270.

⁴⁸⁷ R. T. France, *The Gospel according to Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, (Eerdmans ed.; TNTC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1985), 117.

Second, these scholars' claim of the Matthean community's anti-Gentile attitude seems unconvincing. In many cases Sim's reading of the texts, which are related to the Gentiles, is scarcely balanced but one-sided. A number of affirmative allusions to the ἔθνη are disregarded (12.21; 21.43; 24.14; 25.32; 28.19). Many of the texts that display the privileged status of non-Jews or the displacement of Jews (8.5-13; 15.21-28; 21.28-22.14) are not properly discussed.⁴⁸⁸ After a thorough examination of Sim's argument, Foster concludes that

The texts in the gospel that Sim reads as supporting his thesis are not only open to different interpretation, but these alternative understandings have more to support them both in terms of the plain sense of the text and in relation to the wider Matthean macronarrative. Moreover, Sim ignores or gives a cursory treatment of too much of the material in the gospel that appears to point in the opposite direction to which he is arguing.⁴⁸⁹

Likewise, Saldarini's view of the Gentiles in Matthew as marginalized in character seems unsound. If the Gentiles are marginal because of their brief contacts with Jesus or their undeveloped characters, in the same way the Jewish characters in the Gospel, who exhibit the similar relationship with Jesus or figures such as women or even some of the twelve disciples, should also be considered to be marginalized. But, the Gospel story does not treat them as such.

Overman's interpretation of the term Ἰουδαῖοι as self-designation of the Matthean members also turns out to be problematic. Although he is right in holding that the term should not be used to prove the evangelist's Gentile identity, this does not in itself justify reading the term as referring exclusively to the members of the Matthean community. The context apparently reflects the conflict between the formative Judaism and the Matthean community, or "between synagogue and church in his [Matthew's] day",⁴⁹⁰ as Stanton puts. It seems more plausible to read this term as revealing either the presence of Gentiles among Matthew's intended audience or separation of the Matthean community from formative Judaism. Again, the arguments for the anti-Gentile or Gentile-ignorant attitude of the Matthean community are found to have no support.

Lastly, once the Matthean community's ostracism from the synagogue, its law free character, and the favourable references to the Gentiles are acknowledged, their interpretations of the great commission in 28.19-20 seem unlikely. Saldarini's claim that the

⁴⁸⁸ For the critique of Sim's interpretation of these texts, see Foster, *Community, Law, and Mission*, 59-62.

⁴⁸⁹ Foster, *Community, Law, and Mission*, 64.

⁴⁹⁰ Stanton, *Gospel for a New People*, 131.

Matthean community was open to the Gentile mission but was not yet ready or active since they were still bound within Judaism loses its excuse. There is no reason why the reorientation of the Matthean community to Gentile mission should not be read as being realized in the evangelist's own time. The opposite reading of the passage indeed appears more realistic. Similarly, Overman's reading of the final commission as the evangelist's eschatological belief of the end of the present struggle in this world is unrealistic. It seems more legitimate to read the theme of teaching and making disciples along with πάντα τὰ ἔθνη as pointing to an evangelistic Gentile mission rather than as a means of gaining hegemony within Judaism. Sim's interpretation is even more absurd. After such favourable statements towards non-Jews and continuous mention of ἔθνος throughout the Gospel, which "inevitably alludes to the eventual mission to the Gentiles",⁴⁹¹ it is implausible that at the climax of his story, Matthew should without giving any reason command his community not to participate in the Gentile mission.

This reconstruction of the social location of the Matthean community as thoroughly Jewish emerges as having developed too extremely as well. The Gospel demonstrates that they were no longer under the authority of the Torah but of Jesus. They had departed from formative Judaism and were now expanding their community through the Gentile mission.

Finding the previous two hypotheses implausible, the third reconstruction of the *Sitz im Leben* of the Matthean group of people appears most harmonious with the Gospel material. The dissent between the Matthean community and the synagogue based Judaism on the issue of who the true Israel and the true interpreter of Scripture are led the two groups to an inevitable separation. Matthew and his readership respected the Jewish traditions, which were redefined and interpreted by Jesus. The place of the true Israel was open to anyone who accepts the authority of Jesus. The mission for the Jews and the Gentiles is actively practised. The evangelist was writing a gospel for his readership who were a mixture of Christian Jews and Gentile converts.

3. Provenance

This section explores the provenance of Matthew. Owing to the lack of sufficient internal and external information, its search is based upon probability rather than solid evidence. The dominant influence of the first Gospel upon the early church and the twenty six uses of "city"

⁴⁹¹ Hagner, *Matthew*, 14-28, 623.

compared to four of “village” in the narrative suggest that Matthew was composed in an urban locale and was used as the Gospel for a major church. The denoting features wealth in the Gospel (cf. 10.9; 18.23-25; 25.14-30; 27.57) imply a prosperous environment of the Matthean community. There has been suggested a variety of proposals for its origin, which can be divided into four groups. (1) Jerusalem or a Palestinian birth, (2) Pella in Transjordan, (3) Antioch in Syria, and (4) Alexandria or Phoenicia.

3.1. *Jerusalem or a Palestinian Birth*

Traditionally, the Gospel of Matthew has been supposed to have been written in Jerusalem or Palestine.⁴⁹² This view is derived from the seemingly apparent Jewish features in the Gospel (e.g. the devotional attitude towards the law (5.17-20), the presupposition of religious practices (23.2, 5-7; 24.20), the use of the Semitic words, such as *raka*, etc.) and the testimony of the church Fathers by the end of the second century. Irenaeus affirmed that the evangelist wrote “among the Hebrews in their own language”.⁴⁹³ The “anti-Marcionite” Prologue to Luke located Matthew in Judea, whilst Eusebius suggested Palestine.⁴⁹⁴ Proclaiming the polemic against formative Judaism in Matthew, Overman has suggested Galilee as the location of the Gospel composition since, for him, the Pharisees were the evangelist’s primary opponents and Galilee was the place where the Pharisees’ influence was greatest.⁴⁹⁵ Like Overman, Viviano notes the Matthean opposition to Judaism. He has argued for Caesarea Maritima as its provenance.⁴⁹⁶ He asserts that this city, in close proximity to Palestine, was in harmony with patristic tradition and at the same time was an important centre for early Christians (cf. Acts 8.40; 9.30; 10.1, 24). It held an ongoing dialogue

⁴⁹² Willoughby C. Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew*, (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1912); Martin Albertz, *Die synoptischen Streitgespräche: Ein Beitrag zur Formengeschichte des Urchristentums*, (Berlin: Trowitzsch, 1921); Theodore H. Robinson, *The Gospel of Matthew*, (MNTC; New York: Harper, 1928); Adolf von Schlatter, *Der Evangelist Matthäus: seine Sprache, seine Ziel, seine Selbstständigkeit: ein Kommentar zum ersten Evangelium*, (6. Aufl. ed.; Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1963); Julius Schniewind, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, (12. Aufl. ed.; NTD; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968); Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 1.105.

⁴⁹³ Irenaeus, *St. Irenaeus of Lyons Against the Heresies*, (trans. John J. Dillon and Dominic J. Unger; New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 3.1.1.

⁴⁹⁴ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, (1st ed. 28-28A; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981), 1.38-39.

⁴⁹⁵ Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism*, 158-59; cf. Overman, *Church and Community in Crisis*, 17-19.

⁴⁹⁶ B.T. Viviano, "Where was the Gospel according to St. Matthew Written?," *CBQ* 41 (1979): 533-46.

between Jews and Christians.⁴⁹⁷ It was also the home of a Christian school by the third century, producing a number of great teachers (e.g. Origen, Eusebius); Matthew could have been one of them.

This view, however, is hard to accept. Its major assumptions do not concur with the Matthean characteristics. As we have seen in the previous section, the first Gospel is not thoroughly Jewish for the exclusively Jewish readers. It contains numerous features for the non-Jewish Christians as well. The intended readership is both the Jewish and Gentile Christians. Besides, the testimony of the church Fathers emerges as unreliable. If the Gospel had been written in Palestine as they affirmed, then one would expect it to have been written in Aramaic, since Aramaic probably remained the dominant language for most people in that area.⁴⁹⁸ Yet, Matthew was written in Greek. This implies that the evangelist and his readers were more accustomed to Greek than Aramaic and suggests in turn that the location of the Gospel composition was somewhere other than Palestine, contrary to the church Fathers' claims. Moreover, it would be very difficult to explain the evangelist's silence on the Jewish war in the Gospel, had it been written in Palestine. Assuming the date of Matthew after 70 CE, the impact of war must have been devastating to the residents in Palestine. Yet, the way the war and the fate of Jerusalem were described is not specific but more general in nature. It is unconvincing to perceive the Matthean community as a first-hand witness to such catastrophe. Furthermore, the indications of prosperity in Matthew are not compatible with disaster having befallen Jerusalem or Palestine.

Concerning Overman's suggestion, to confine the influence of formative Judaism within the district of Galilee seems unsustainable. Viviano's arguments for Caesarea Maritima lack evidence for crucial issues. While arguing for the harmony with patristic tradition, Viviano does not clearly expound how the Jews could quickly resettle in the city after their leaving because of a massacre of Jews in Caesarea in 66 CE.⁴⁹⁹ He does not sufficiently account for the silence of Eusebius, who was himself a resident of Caesarea Maritima, on the issue of Matthew's community or his writing. This analysis demonstrates that it is erroneous to confine the provenance of Matthew to Jerusalem or a Palestinian region.

⁴⁹⁷ Cf. N. R. M. De Lange, *Origen and the Jews: Studies in Jewish-Christian Relations in Third-century Palestine*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

⁴⁹⁸ Cf. John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, (1st ed.; ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1991, 1994), I.255-68; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *A Wandering Aramean: Collected Aramaic Essays*, (SBL 25; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1979), 29-56.

⁴⁹⁹ Cf. Flavius Josephus, *The Jewish War*, (trans. H. St J. Thackeray; LCL; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 2.266-70, 284-92; Lee I. Levine, *Caesarea under Roman Rule*, (SJLA; Leiden: Brill, 1975), 29-35, 44-45, 63-64.

3.2. Pella in Transjordan

This view, suggested by Slingerland, is based upon the geographical description of *πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου* in 4.15 and 19.1.⁵⁰⁰ It is argued that Matthew and his community were located on the eastern side of the Jordan, since the phrase seems to describe the place on the western side of the river Jordan. According to Slingerland, 4.15 and 19.1 are the Matthean redaction of the LXX of Isaiah 8.23 and Mark 10.1 respectively. While the source texts contain *καὶ* and denote “Judea *and* beyond the Jordan” and “Galilee *and* beyond the Jordan”, he maintains that Matthew deliberately omits the *καὶ* and redirects the geographical perspective to westward. The phrase qualifies “Galilee” in 4.15 and “Judea” in 19.1. This redaction reflects the whereabouts of the Matthean community. For the most probable location, Slingerland suggests Pella of the Decapolis, to which, according to him, many of the Jerusalem church members fled before the Jewish war and which became an important Christian centre noted for scribal activity.⁵⁰¹

While this suggestion from the geography of the text presents certain potential, it is difficult to confirm that behind the omission of the connective *καὶ* was Matthew’s intention to clarify his geographical perspective. If so, it is questionable then why he kept *καὶ* in 4.25 as in its likely source Mark 3.8. Applying Slingerland’s argument to this case, the phrase contains the westward perspective. It can be equally asserted that Matthew was on the western side of the Jordan. If the evangelist was so concerned to omit *καὶ* at 4.15 and 19.1 to exhibit his whereabouts, he could have replaced the phrase in 4.25 with another region to prevent any confusion. Yet, he did not change it. The location of Matthew is again up in the air. Slingerland does not mention anything about this confusion.

Against Slingerland’s claim, a number of scholars have argued that the phrase *πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου* should be regarded independently as a standard expression for the Transjordan territories, as in many contemporary writings (cf. Jn 1.28; 3.26; 10.40; Josephus, *Ant.* 7.198; 12.222; 14.277).⁵⁰² According to Hagner, this eastern view of the phrase makes more sense. For the interpretation of 4.15, he states, “Jesus’ ministry in Galilee does extend into the region of the Decapolis across the Jordan (cf. 4.25), and Matthew may well have this

⁵⁰⁰ H.D. Slingerland, "The Transjordan Origin of Matthew's Gospel," *JSNT* 3 (1979): 18-28; Gerd Theissen, *The Gospels in Context: Social and Political History in the Synoptic Tradition*, (1st English-language ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 249-50.

⁵⁰¹ Slingerland, "The Transjordan Origin," 26.

⁵⁰² Cf. Hagner, *Matthew*; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*; Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 43-44.

in mind.”⁵⁰³ For 19.1, he maintains that the text shows Jesus’ route to south by crossing the river Jordan, which was the common way most Galilean pilgrims would take to Jerusalem avoiding Samaria.⁵⁰⁴ Davies and Allison have approached 4.25 with a similar perspective. They argue that the phrase refers to the south-east of the Jordan and the text represents four areas surrounding the centre of the world, Jerusalem. Galilee (north west), the Decapolis (north east), Judea (south west), and ‘beyond the Jordan’ (south east).⁵⁰⁵ This view of the phrase works well within each context with or without the connective καὶ. It appears better to see it as a standard expression for Transjordan territories. Thus, the phrase is unlikely to work as an indicator of the Matthean provenance. Accordingly, it is an unreliable claim, on the basis of this phrase, that Matthew and his community were located in the eastern side of the river Jordan. With regard to Slingerland’s claim for Pella of the Decapolis as the provenance of the Gospel, it appears unlikely. Sim argues that Matthew deliberately reduced the significance of Decapolis through excluding the references to it (cf. Mk 5.20; 7.31). “an odd redactional method if he were writing for a community in that region.”⁵⁰⁶ Its mention in 4.25 had better be seen, he states, “due to his [Matthew’s] eagerness to promote at this early stage in his narrative the popularity of Jesus in the areas surrounding Jerusalem.”⁵⁰⁷

3.3. Antioch in Syria

Finding a Palestinian and Transjordan region improbable as the provenance of the first Gospel, scholars have suggested the province of Syria as its place of origin.⁵⁰⁸ Matthew reports the Gospel expansion over Syria (4.24), although that proposition is absent in the Markan source (Mk 3.8). Of various proposals, Antioch has been argued for as the most

⁵⁰³ Hagner, *Matthew*, 1.73.

⁵⁰⁴ Hagner, *Matthew*, 2.543.

⁵⁰⁵ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.420.

⁵⁰⁶ Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 44.

⁵⁰⁷ Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 44.

⁵⁰⁸ Eduard Schweizer, *Matthäus und seine Gemeinde*, (Stuttgart: KBW Verlag, 1974); M. D. Goulder, *Midrash and Lection in Matthew: the Speaker's Lectures in Biblical Studies, 1969-71*, (London: SPCK, 1974), 149-52; Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 119; Georg Künzel, *Studien zum Gemeindeverständnis des Matthäus-Evangeliums*, (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1978), 251-56; Floyd V. Filson, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, (BNTC; London: A. & C. Black, 1977), 14-15; Seán Freyne, *Galilee, from Alexander the Great to Hadrian, 323 B.C.E. to 135 C.E.: A Study of Second Temple Judaism*, (Wilmington, Del.: M. Glazier, 1980); Leonhard Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament*, (trans. Jürgen Roloff; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1981, 1982); Hill, *Matthew*, 50-52; Ulrich Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, (EKKNT Bd 1; Zürich: Benziger, 1985, 1990), 1.73-75; Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, (SPS 1; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991), 73; Hagner, *Matthew*, lxxv.

probable location of the Matthean provenance.⁵⁰⁹ This view was first suggested by Streeter. He has put forward seven major arguments for his thesis.⁵¹⁰ First, he dismisses the whole patristic tradition that testifies to a Palestinian provenance for Matthew, affirming that they were based upon the unreliable tradition of Papias. Yet, despite their deficiency, he approves their claim that the Gospel did not come from Rome or Asia Minor and argues that it came from the eastern province. Second, from the early church's willing acceptance of the Gospel as authoritative despite its anonymity, Streeter argues that there must have been a sponsor of an important church behind the Gospel compilation, such as Rome, Ephesus, Alexandria, Caesarea, or Antioch. For him, such anonymity demonstrates that no hint of authorship was necessary for both the evangelist and the readers, since he was entrusted by such a great church. Among those churches, Streeter affirms that Antioch is the most probable. Third and fourth, the significant status of Peter in the church at Antioch (cf. Gal 2.11) corresponds well with his prominence in the Gospel (e.g. 10.2; 14.28-31; 16.17-19; 17.24-27). So does the contemporary situation of Antioch in that it had a very large Jewish population (cf. Josephus, *War* 7.109) and was the earliest Christian Gentile mission centre with the Matthean characteristics of Jewishness and the Gentile mission. Fifth, the mention of the official stater with two drachmae in 17.24-27 discloses Antioch as the place of Matthew, since, according to Streeter, such a situation was current only in Antioch and Damascus. Lastly, Streeter presents the epistles of Ignatius, who was bishop of Antioch in the early 2nd century, as external evidence. His writings appear dependent upon the Matthean text in various places (e.g. *Eph.* 19.1-3 upon chapter 2; *Smyrn.* 1.1 upon 3.15; *Pol.* 2.2 upon 10.16). Along with these citations of Matthew, Streeter argues that Ignatius' mention of "the Gospel" (*Phil.* 5.1-2; 8.2) indicates that only one Gospel was acknowledged in Antioch. This must refer to the Gospel of Matthew.

⁵⁰⁹ Burnett H. Streeter, *The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins, treating of the Manuscript Tradition, Sources, Authorship, & Dates*, (7th ed.; London: Macmillan and Co., 1951), 500-23; William Reuben Farmer, "The Post-Sectarian Character of Matthew and its Post-War Setting in Antioch of Syria," *PRS* 3 (1976): 235-47; John P. Meier, "Antioch," in *Antioch and Rome: New Testament Cradles of Catholic Christianity*, (ed. Raymond E. Brown and John P. Meier; New York: Paulist Press, 1983), 22-27; Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story*, (2nd ed.; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 152; Michael Crosby, *House of Disciples: Church, Economics, and Justice in Matthew*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988), 37; Robert H. Gundry, "A Responsive Evaluation of the Social History of the Matthean Community in Roman Syria," in *Social History of the Matthean Community: Cross-Disciplinary Approaches*, (ed. David L. Balch; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 62-67; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 609; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.143-47; Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 212-15; Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 53-62.

⁵¹⁰ Streeter, *The Four Gospels*, 500-23.

Unto these arguments, Davies and Allison have added two more.⁵¹¹ According to them, Matthew appears to belong to a group of Christian “scribes” (cf. 13.52), “in a manner reminiscent of the ‘rabbinic’ academy and the Hellenistic school.”⁵¹² Antioch provided an ideal environment for the writing of the first Gospel. On the one hand, there were a large Jewish and Christian population (Ignatius, *Phil.* 6.1; *Magn.* 10.3). On the other hand, the city was acclaimed as a centre of Christian study with strong links to Judaism (Cicero, *Archia* 3(4)). Around 180, Theophilus, a bishop of Antioch, employed exegetical methods similar to those of Jewish haggadah.⁵¹³ In the 3rd century, Lucian and Dorotheus, head of a Christian school in Antioch, demonstrated their knowledge of Hebrew and OT exegetical traditions (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 7.32.2). Moreover, they maintain that the presence of several points of contact between Lucian’s recension of the Greek bible and some Matthean citations of the OT demonstrates that both used the same readings. That Lucian was a resident of Antioch strongly indicates that Matthew was written in that city.

While this Antiochene hypothesis has been considered reasonably plausible by numerous scholars, some of Streeter’s arguments have been regarded as insufficient to place Matthew in Antioch. The existence of a large Jewish community in Antioch, it has been argued, is inadequate deficient as evidence, since there were such well-established Jewish communities all over Syria. Luz has affirmed that Peter’s prominence in the Gospel should not necessarily locate its birth in Antioch.⁵¹⁴ Likewise, Ignatius’ knowledge of Matthew or the idea that it was the only authoritative Gospel known in Antioch (even if it were true) have both been regarded as insufficient to verify the claim that the first Gospel was originated in Antioch. Matthew could have been written in some other place in Syria and brought his gospel to Antioch and disseminated it from there. As a probable candidate for such a location, Bacon and Kennard have put forward Edessa.⁵¹⁵ Alleging parallels between the Gospel’s special material (M) and various eastern religions (e.g. Zoroastrianism, Mithraism, and Buddhism), Osborne has also argued for the north-eastern city, Edessa. Besides, Davies and Allison’s arguments have been also claimed hardly affirming, since “it

⁵¹¹ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.144-46.

⁵¹² Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.145.

⁵¹³ Robert M. Grant, *After the New Testament*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 136-41.

⁵¹⁴ Luz, *Matthäus*, 1.74.

⁵¹⁵ For Kennard, the Jewish Matthew could not be located in Pauline Antioch (J. Kennard, "The Place of Origin of Matthew's Gospel," *ATR* 31 (1949): 243-46.). For Bacon, the writing style of Matthew, which does not supplement any extra explanation for Jesus’ words, was especially prominent in north-eastern Syria (Benjamin W. Bacon, *Studies in Matthew*, (New York: H. Holt, 1930), 15-23.).

is a long leap to postulate that the former [the scribal activity of the Matthean community] was the antecedent of the latter [that of the later Antiochene church].”⁵¹⁶

These objections clearly point out the weaknesses of some of the arguments of Streeter and Davies and Allison. Nonetheless, they do not eliminate the probability of the Matthean provenance of Antioch. Indeed, the large Jewish community in Antioch qualifies that city as one of the probable contenders. The fact that Peter remained as a significant figure in no other churches but the Antiochene church makes it still more plausible to connect Peter’s prominence in Matthew to Antioch than any other place.⁵¹⁷ Though some have asserted inconsistency between the seemingly Jewish theology in Matthew and the Pauline-orientated theology of the Antiochene church as well as Ignatius,⁵¹⁸ as has been already pointed out, Matthew contains both Jewish and Pauline aspects. Considering the situation of Antioch at the time of the Gospel composition, which had a large Jewish population while being a centre of Christian learning (cf. Acts 11.19-20), such mixed features of Matthew appear to correspond well with the city. That the common language of Antioch was Greek is compatible with the first Gospel that was written in Greek. Its distance from Palestine may well account for Matthew’s silence about the Jewish war. All these arguments show that Antioch still exhibits sufficient features to be qualified as the most probable provenance of Matthew.

With regard to the assertion that Matthew was composed somewhere in Syria and brought to Antioch and disseminated from there, it is hard to reject the possibility entirely. Yet, even so it appears unacceptable to claim Edessa as an alternative location. All those parallels Osborne draws between M material and eastern religions are “either not very close or not very relevant”, as Sim states.⁵¹⁹ Davies and Allison maintain that such oriental themes had better be seen from Jewish apocalyptic.⁵²⁰ Besides, the common language of Edessa was Syriac at the time of the Gospel composition.⁵²¹ That Matthew was written in Greek not in Syriac surely makes Edessa further unlikely as the provenance of the Gospel.

⁵¹⁶ Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 58.

⁵¹⁷ Cf. Glanville Downey, *A History of Antioch in Syria: from Seleucus to the Arab Conquest*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), 583-86.

⁵¹⁸ Kennard, "Place of Origin," 243-46.

⁵¹⁹ Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism*, 52.

⁵²⁰ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.143.

⁵²¹ Cf. Meier, "Antioch," 21.

3.4. Alexandria or Phoenicia

The claim for Alexandria as the provenance of Matthew came out from the rejection of Streeter's Antiochene hypothesis. Asserting the seemingly apparent Jewish and anti-Gentile aspects of the first Gospel, Brandon has claimed that the liberal Christianity of Antioch and the conservative Jewish Gospel of Matthew could not be compatible. As an alternative, he has proposed Alexandria as the place of origin.⁵²² For him, there existed a Jewish Christian community who fled to the city during the Jewish war. Many of the early Christian documents, such as the epistle of James, the epistle to the Hebrews, the letter of Barnabas and 2 Clement, were claimed to have been written in that city. Brandon maintains that the infancy narrative of Jesus' flight to Egypt exhibits a certain connection between the community and Matthew.⁵²³ However, this view suffers from very weak internal and external evidence. Internally, the anti-Gentile attitude of Matthew cannot be confirmed. Externally, almost nothing is known about the Christian community in Alexandria at the time of the Gospel writing.⁵²⁴ Regarding the composition of those Christian writings in Alexandria, Brandon does not supply any clear verification. It appears more of a conjecture.

On a similar ground as Brandon's, Kilpatrick rejects Antioch. Instead, he has suggested Phoenicia as the Matthean provenance.⁵²⁵ Kilpatrick's claim is derived from the two occasions of the Matthean change of the Markan expressions. First, the description of the Sea of Galilee. While Mark describes it as ἡ θάλασσα (Mk 5.13), Matthew reserves the phrase for the Mediterranean Sea and uses instead τὰ ὕδατα for the lake (cf. 8.32; 14.28-29). In addition, the evangelist alters βέβληται εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν in Mark 9.42 to καταποντισθῆ ἐν τῷ πελάγει τῆς θαλάσσης (18.6). Second, the description of the Canaanite woman. While Mark calls her Συροφουνίκισσα τῷ γένει (Mk 7.26), Matthew calls her γυνὴ Χαναναία (15.22). For Kilpatrick, the first distinction reveals that Matthew was in a port city. The second demonstrates Matthew's intention to defend his readership, that is, that the woman was a conservative and less-Hellenized lady in the Phoenician hinterland, the opposite of a native of the Phoenician coast. These alterations suggest some sort of connection between the evangelist and Phoenicia. That the major language in the

⁵²² S. G. F. Brandon, *The Fall of Jerusalem and the Christian Church: A Study of the Effects of the Jewish Overthrow of A.D. 70 on Christianity*, (London: SPCK, 1951), 217-43; cf. Tilborg, *The Jewish Leaders*, 172.

⁵²³ Brandon, *Fall of Jerusalem*, 226-27; Brandon, *Fall of Jerusalem*.

⁵²⁴ Cf. Meier, "Antioch," 19; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.139.

⁵²⁵ Kilpatrick, *The Origins of the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 130-34; cf. H. Benedict Green, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, (Oxford: University Press, 1975).

Phoenician ports such as Tyre, Sidon, and Berytus was Greek offers further assurance to Kilpatrick that that region was indeed the location of the Gospel composition.

Kilpatrick's suggestion, however, suffers from the similar deficiency as Brandon's. First, internal evidence is hardly convincing. There is no clear distinction between ἡ θάλασσα and τὰ ὕδατα in the Gospel. Matthew refers to the Sea of Galilee both as ἡ θάλασσα and τὰ ὕδατα (8.32). Hence, it is hard to affirm that Matthew was in a port city from this argument. Second, external evidence is weak. Very little is known about Phoenicia and Christian communities there at the time of the Gospel writing. Though Tyre and Sidon are mentioned in Acts 21.3-7; 27.3, the passages do not indicate the existence of Christian community in those regions. Moreover, it is doubtful whether the distinction can be drawn between the Hellenized cities of the coast and the less-Hellenized hinterland as Kilpatrick asserts, or even such distinction ever existed.⁵²⁶ Kilpatrick's arguments for Phoenicia as the provenance of Matthew bring out more scepticism than corroboration.

Having examined all these suggestions, the province of Syria appears to be the most probable location where Matthew was written. Were one to select the most likely city, Antioch stands out, although the possibility cannot be excluded that Matthew was composed in some other city in Syria, then brought to Antioch and disseminated from there.

4. Conclusion

Divided into three sections, this chapter has examined the *Sitz im Leben* of Matthew, the authorship, the intended readership, and the provenance of Matthew. The analysis of the traditional view of the apostle Matthew as the author of the first gospel has shown that it is possible but less than probable. The patristic witnesses that the apostle Matthew wrote the gospel in Hebrew and translated it into Greek are found hardly likely, as the Greek Matthew does not show any sign of translation from Hebrew or any connection to the Hebrew gospel. Considering that the early church had no hesitation to name the first gospel 'according to Matthew' and accepted Papias's testimony that a man named Matthew had written τὰ Λογία in Hebrew, it is argued that the first Greek gospel should be seen as having been composed by an anonymous Jewish Christian author, who was a member of a community of Matthew, or one of his disciples, who named it in honour of Matthew, the author of the first Hebrew gospel.

⁵²⁶ Cf. B. Lifschitz, "L'hellénisation des Juifs de Palestine," *RB* 72 (1965): 520-38.

The investigation of Matthew's intended readership has shown that the Matthean community was a Christian group parted from formative Judaism expanding their community through the Gentile mission. The patent Jewish aspects throughout the gospel (e.g. the stress on fulfilment of the OT with the formula quotations, Jesus' fidelity to the law, and the use of typical rabbinic patterns for certain discussions) serve to illustrate that Matthew and his readership respected the Jewish traditions, which were redefined and interpreted by Jesus. The mission to Israel anticipated in the gospel (10.5-23, 15.21-28) suggests the community's active involvement in it. The emphasis on the evangelistic Gentile mission (28.19-20) also proposes the Gentile membership within the community. This description of the Matthean community shows that both the Jews and the Gentile are included in Matthew's intended readership.

The reports of the Gospel expansion over Syria (4.24) and Peter's prominence in Matthew (e.g. 10.2; 14.28-31; 16.17-19; 17.24-27), who was the significant church leader in the church at Antioch (cf. Gal 2.11), point to Syria as the most probable provenance of Matthew. The existence of a large Jewish community and population and of the earliest Christian Gentile mission centre may have caused the Matthean attitude towards formative Judaism and the Gentile mission. As explored in Chapter 2, astral religion was prevalent in the geographical region of Syria. This reveals that the residents in that region were well aware of and familiar with astrological practice and regarded the heavenly events as divine signs. The *Sitz im Leben* of the Matthean community demonstrates that located in the region where astrological practice and astral religion prevail Matthew and his Jewish and Gentile readership were familiar with the astrological practice and interpretation. This indicates that celestial phenomena in Matthew could function as a valuable motif in delivering the gospel message.

Significance of the Heaven Motif in Matthew

This chapter looks into the usage of heaven language in Matthew. The frequent and varied applications of the word οὐρανός in Matthew (about 30% (82 of 273) of the total appearances of heaven in the NT)⁵²⁷ signifies the evangelist's particular interest in the upward heavenly world. This exploration will provide a vital foundation in understanding the significance of celestial phenomena in the gospel narrative.

This chapter will be divided into three sections. First, it will explore the concept of heaven in Matthew and will show that the evangelist had in his mind the similar idea of heaven as denoting two aspects of a compound whole as illustrated in the OT and the Second Temple literature. Next, against the generally-supposed view of heaven language in Matthew as a mere circumlocution to avoid the name of God, especially in the expression kingdom of heaven, it will be argued that this hypothesis is built upon a number of fallacies in methodology and historical evidence. Finally, this chapter will look into the significance of the use of heaven language in Matthew. In doing so, it will examine the combination of heaven language with other motifs in the first gospel, such as kingdom, fatherhood of God, and the theme of heaven and earth.

This investigation will show that the heaven language in Matthew manifests God's greatness without limit and his sovereignty and that it occurs to signify the distinction between the heavenly and earthly realms, rather than as a simple reverential circumlocution. It will also demonstrate that this heaven motif serves to express the antithesis between the Matthean community and formative Judaism and to assure the reader that the Christian community are the true people of God.

1. Concept of Heaven

The uses of heaven language in the first gospel demonstrate that Matthew used the word οὐρανός in a similar manner to the OT and among his contemporaries. That is, it refers both to the created order of the sky and atmosphere and to the habitation of God. For heaven as

⁵²⁷ The singular and plural form of οὐρανός occurs 27 times and 55 times in Matthew respectively. οὐράνιος occurs 7 of 9 times in the whole NT. Cf. Colin Brown, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, (Rev. ed.; Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1986), s.v. "Heaven", 2.192.

the space of the created order, birds are regularly referred to as the birds of the air (τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, 6.26; 8.20; 13.32). The future weather is interpreted through the observation of the colour of the appearance of the sky (τὸ πρόσωπον τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, 16.2-3). The Son of Man is foretold to appear in heaven on the clouds of heaven (ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, 24.30; 26.64). For heaven as the dwelling place of God, οὐρανός is referred to as the throne of God (5.34; 23.22). He is spoken of as the Father in heaven (ὁ πᾶτερ ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, 5.16, 45; 6.1, 9; 7.11, 21; 10.32, 33; 12.50; 16.17; 18.10, 14, 19) as well as the heavenly Father (ὁ πατὴρ ὁ οὐράνιος, 5.48; 6.14, 26, 32; 15.13; 18.35; 23.9). Heaven is also the place of promised rewards (5.12; 6.20; 19.21) and the normal realm of existence of the angels (18.10; 22.30; 24.36; 28.2).

There are instances in which heaven refers to both the physical and divine realms. For example, Jesus' act of looking up εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν as he blesses the loaves and fish in 14.19 refers to seeing both heaven as the physical sky, since it involves an earthly physical activity of "looking up", and heaven as the dwelling place of God from whom blessing is bestowed. Likewise, heaven from where an angel descends in 28.2 implies both the created order of the sky because of the physical involvement and the heavenly realm where the angels reside (cf. 18.10; 22.30; 24.36). A voice ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν at Jesus' baptism in 3.17 also denotes both the physical sky and the divine realm. These instances signify that Matthew understood heaven as denoting two aspects of a compound whole (visible and invisible) just like the OT and his contemporaries.

While the word οὐρανός conveys the ideas of both visible and invisible realms, the appearance of both the singular and plural forms of οὐρανός in Matthew (27 times and 55 times respectively) has generated various suggestions. There are largely three assumptions. First, most Matthean scholars view the plural forms as an evidence of Semitic interference on Matthew's Greek style.⁵²⁸ Just as the Hebrew and Aramaic words for heaven are plural **שָׁמַיִם/שְׁמַיָּם**, they assume that when οὐρανός is plural it must be through the influence of these Semitic lexemes. This reading may hold some truth, thinking of Matthew's use of the OT and Jewish tradition.

However, this view appears rather doubtful. The plural οὐρανοί is not widespread in the LXX, both the canonical and apocryphal, and the Second Temple literature, with exception of the *Wisdom of Solomon* and the *Testament of Abraham*. They occur only 8.4% (41 or 42

⁵²⁸ E.g. Beare, *Matthew*, 356; Hill, *Matthew*, 90; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.81, 328; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 64.

times out of 502 total uses) of the uses of οὐρανός in the canonical LXX,⁵²⁹ and 9.6% (11 times out of 114 occurrences) in the apocryphal LXX.⁵³⁰ These show that the singular οὐρανός for the plural שָׁמַיִם is such a standard in Septuagintal translation. Even in the phrases, “the heaven of heavens” and “heaven and the heaven of heavens” where one might expect plural forms, it is the singular (ὁ οὐρανός τοῦ οὐρανοῦ).⁵³¹ More than half of the plurals appear in the Psalms (29 of 51-52 instances) and most others in elevated prophetic speech or prayers.

With reference to these examples, Torm and Katz argue that they are not the result of Semitic influence but belong to the category of poetical and ceremonial speech. They should be classified as examples of the poetic technique of *pluralis majesticus* whereby the poet uses the plural to amplify or extend the expression.⁵³² Katz suggests that “the choice of οὐρανοί in some parts of the LXX is caused by the fact that שָׁמַיִם was introduced by a plural verb.”⁵³³ Likewise, the phrase, “the heaven of the heavens” or “heaven and the heaven of the heavens” need be nothing more than hyperbolic, poetic language intended to communicate the vast greatness and exaltedness of God. Koehler and Baumgartner state that this construction is “probably ... an expression of the superlative.”⁵³⁴

For the Second Temple literature, no plural forms of οὐρανός are extant in Philo, Josephus, nor in the Greek manuscripts from Qumran. Only in the Greek Pseudepigrapha are occasional plurals found. A count based on the *Concordance Grecque des Pseudépigraphes D'Ancien Testament* reveals that a maximum of 17% (47 of 282) of the occurrences of οὐρανός are plural. Yet, even this number is misleading in that the dating of many of these instances is certainly post-Christian. Moreover, many of the plurals are found in Greek manuscripts that are later translations from other languages, and a considerable amount of evidence later Christian interpolation. For example, nine of the plurals are found in the two recensions of the *Testament of Abraham* (1st Cen CE plus interpolations), and eight plurals occur in the section of the *Testament of Levi* that is almost certainly a later redaction and not

⁵²⁹ Deut 32.43; 1 Kgs 2.10; 2 Kgs 22.10; 2 Chr 28.9; 2 Esdr 19.6; Ps 2.4; 8.2, 4; 18.2; 32.6; 49.6; 56.6, 11, 12; 67.9; 68.35; 88.3, 6, 12; 95.5, 11; 96.6; 101.26; 106.26; 107.5, 6; 112.4; 113.11; 135.5; 143.5; 148.1, 4 (3x); Prov 3.19; Job 16.19; Hab 3.3; Isa 44.23; 49.13; Ezek 1.1; Dan (OG) 3.17

⁵³⁰ Jdt 9.12; 13.18; Tob 8.5; 2 Macc 15.23; 3 Mac 2.2; Pr. Man 15 [Ode 12.15]; Wis 9.10, 16; 18.15; Pss Sol 2.30; Dan (OG and Th) 3.59.

⁵³¹ The three-fold phrase always uses the singular (e.g. Deut 10.14; 1 Kgs 8.27; 2 Chr 2.5; 6.18; 2 Esdr 19.6). The plural does occur once in the two-fold phrase, ‘heaven of heavens’ (Ps 148.4) but other occurrences of two-fold phrase is singular (Ps 113.24; 3 Mac 2.15).

⁵³² D. Frederik Torm, "Der Pluralis Ouranoi," *ZAW* 33 (1934): 48-50; Peter Katz, *Philo's Bible: The Aberrant Text of Bible Quotations in Some Pilonic Writings and Its Place in the Textual History of the Greek Bible*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), 141-46.

⁵³³ Katz, *Philo's Bible*, 145.

⁵³⁴ Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicons of the Old Testament (HALOT) 4.1561.

part of the earlier Aramaic form.⁵³⁵ In addition, there are several books within the Pseudepigrapha that have no plural forms at all (e.g. *Life of Adam and Eve*, *Sibylline Oracles*, *4 Baruch*, and *Greek Apocalypse of Moses*). Thus, the Second Temple Greek texts align rather closely with the LXX. These surveys illustrate that Semitic morphology did not much affect Matthew's contemporaries or the LXX, most of which was translated directly from Semitic sources. Hence, it is rather difficult to comprehend the Matthean uses of the plural form of οὐρανός as an evidence of Semitic morphological influence. In addition, this Semitic influence view does not sufficiently elucidate why Matthew uses both the singular and plural forms of οὐρανός.

Second, Matthew's use of the plural form of οὐρανός has led some scholars, especially those who read the plural forms of οὐρανός in the LXX (canonical and apocryphal) literally, to argue that the evangelist had an apocalyptic belief in multiple layers of heaven. Collins states, "in the phrase 'who created the heavens and the earth,' which occurs in Judith, the Psalms, and Proverbs, οὐρανόι is probably a true plural, reflecting the idea of a plurality of heavens."⁵³⁶ However, it has been argued in the previous section that these suggestions are untenable. As Stadelmann observes, "the few references to different kinds of heaven are either so generic in their scope or metaphorical in their significance that an exact determination of the stages of the heavenly dome is impossible ... this space was not conceived as a structured complex of clearly distinguishable levels."⁵³⁷ Koehler and Baumgartner state that the construction, "the heaven of the heavens" or "heaven and the heaven of the heavens", which uses singular forms, "probably does not mean a number of different heaven but is an expression of the superlative."⁵³⁸

For the Second Temple apocalyptic literature, it appears that some multiple heavens views were extant in the 1st Cen CE. Certainly, Paul's reference to the "third heaven" in 2 Corinthians 12.2 suggests the existence of such a view in the first century CE. Yet, the more highly-developed seven-heavens views come from a later period. Collins argues, "the familiar pattern of ascent through a numbered series of heavens, usually seven, is not attested

⁵³⁵ See Marinus de Jonge, "Testament of Levi and Aramaic Levi," in *Jewish Eschatology, Early Christian Christology, and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: Collected Essays of Marinus de Jonge*, (ed. Marinus de Jonge; NovTSup 63; Leiden: Brill, 1991), 244-62; John Joseph Collins, "A Throne in the Heavens: Apotheosis in Pre-Christian Judaism," in *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys*, (ed. John Joseph Collins and Michael A. Fishbane; Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 56 n.11.

⁵³⁶ Adela Yarbro Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism*, (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 24; cf. Collins, "The Seven Heavens," 62.

⁵³⁷ Stadelmann, *Hebrew Conception of the World*, 41.

⁵³⁸ Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicons of the OT (HALOT) 4.1561.

in Judaism before the Christian era.”⁵³⁹ Similarly, Martha Himmelfarb states, “these apocalypses are by no means easy to date, but the works that contain seven heavens ... all seem to date from the first century CE or later.”⁵⁴⁰ Hence, it is possible that the slight increase of plural forms of οὐρανός in the Second Temple literature (including the NT) reflects the influence of developing multiple-heavens views. However, it should be noted that those later texts that clearly exhibit multiple heavens journeys also use singular forms of οὐρανός not plural οὐρανόι (e.g. *Apocalypse of Moses*, *3 Baruch*, and *1 Enoch*).⁵⁴¹ Furthermore, in Matthew there is neither heavenly journeys nor speculations about the levels of the heavens like those found in the later apocalyptic and rabbinic traditions. The Matthean use of heaven language when referring to the divine realm reflects a more generalized and generic understanding of God’s dwelling place. Therefore, while there is a chance that Matthew had a worldview that contained a belief in specific, clearly defined levels of heaven, it is going too far to assume from the plural forms of οὐρανός that the evangelist had a multiple levels of heaven view.⁵⁴²

Third, there has been a suggestion that each form refers to different aspect of heaven. Hans Betz, in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, postulates that the singular heaven is used in the sense of “sky” in conjunction with earth, while God’s realm is spoken of with the plural.⁵⁴³ Similarly, Ernst Lohmeyer states, “the singular is used wherever heaven and earth are combined in the unity of creation, the plural where ‘heaven’ means God’s world away from all the bustle and distraction of earth.”⁵⁴⁴ From the analysis of the plural use of οὐρανός in the Wisdom of Solomon in the LXX and the *Testament of Abraham*, Pennington also argues that there is “an intentional distinction of meaning between the singular and the plural” of οὐρανός.⁵⁴⁵ According to him, the pattern of singular versus

⁵³⁹ Collins, "A Throne in the Heavens," 46.

⁵⁴⁰ Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 127, n.14.

⁵⁴¹ The *Testament of Levi* has the most plural forms and these may be connected with a multiple-heaven schema, but as observed in the previous section, the heavenly journeys section is almost certainly a later redaction and not part of the earlier Aramaic form.

⁵⁴² Cf. Gustaf Dalman, *The Words of Jesus*, (trans. D. M. Kay; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1909), 93.

⁵⁴³ Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3-7:27 and Luke 6:20-49)*, (trans. Adela Yarbro Collins; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 119, 152, 184, 379, 395, 434, 474.

⁵⁴⁴ Ernst Lohmeyer, *The Lord's Prayer*, (trans. John Bowden; London: William Collins Sons, 1965), 114-15.

⁵⁴⁵ According to him, out of six occurrences of the term οὐρανός in the Wisdom of Solomon, three plurals are used to refer to God’s dwelling place (9.10, 16; 18.15), while the other three singulars to the physical sky (13.2; 16.20; 18.16). So is the case of the *Testament of Abraham*. See Pennington, *Heaven and Earth*, 112-14, 120-24.

plural usage is part of Matthew's "idiolect", or stylistic mode.⁵⁴⁶ The singular οὐρανός represents the visible (earthly) world, referring to the weather, clouds or skies, the stars and the flying birds. It also occurs in conjunction with earth (ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ) referring to the entire created world. Concerning the plural οὐρανόι, he claims that it signifies the invisible (divine) realm occurring in the phrases such as ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν and Father ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς. For him, the plural is also employed to describe other invisible and divinely-related objects and beings (e.g. the voice of God ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν at Jesus' baptism, αἱ δυνάμεις τῶν οὐρανῶν 'the powers of the heavens', and angels ἐν οὐρανοῖς). These scholars make insightful observations about the occurrences of both singular and plural forms of heaven in the first gospel. This view offers far better explanations of the Matthean use of heaven language.

This pattern, however, should not convey the impression that each form is exclusively confined to its designated aspect. There are four possible instances that do not appear to fit in with this distinction (e.g. 22.30; 23.22; 16.19 (2x)). These references illustrate that Matthew's selection of different forms of οὐρανός is not guided by merely meaning alone but also by emphasis. According to Robert Mowery, Matthew's Jesus uses different terms for different audiences. While the phrase "kingdom of heaven" is used for the crowds and disciples, the "kingdom of God" is employed for the Jewish leaders.⁵⁴⁷ An examination of the 82 occurrences of οὐρανός reveals that in no case does Jesus ever use a plural form when addressing his opponents (with the same possible exception of the mixed crowds in 22.2).

Consequently, the singular references in 22.30 (ἄγγελοι ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ) and 23.22 (ὁ ὁμόσας ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ) could be understood in the context of a sharp conflict between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. 22.30 comes near the end of a section of conflict between Jesus and the Jewish leaders (21.23-23.39), in which the Sadducees confront Jesus with an argument "designed to ridicule belief in the resurrection by a *reductio ad absurdum*."⁵⁴⁸ Similarly, Matthew 23 describes Jesus' rebuking the Pharisees for making arbitrary distinction between

⁵⁴⁶ By "idiolectic", Pennington follows Steiner's description, that is, "each living person draws, deliberately or in immediate habit, on two sources of linguistic supply: the current vulgate corresponding to his level of literacy, and a private thesaurus.... They form what linguists call an 'idiolect'" (Steiner, *After Babel*, 47).

⁵⁴⁷ Robert L. Mowery, "The Matthean References to the Kingdom: Different Terms for Different Audiences," *ETL* 70, no. 4 (1994): 398-405; Robert L. Mowery, "God, Lord, and Father: The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew," *BR* 33 (1988): 24-36. This view will be further discussed later in this section.

⁵⁴⁸ France, *Matthew*, 316. Cf. there is another suggestion that the prepositional phrase ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ is in direct (grammatical) parallel with the preceding ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει, thus explaining the singular (dative) form. See Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:227.

what made oaths binding or not, thereby encouraging evasive oaths and lying.⁵⁴⁹ With the same view, the plurals οὐρανοί in 16.18 could be understood within the context of Jesus' promises to his disciples regarding the kingdom of heaven.

The analysis of heaven language in the first gospel demonstrates that the author had the concept of heaven as denoting two aspects (physical and spiritual) of a compound whole. The occurrences of heaven language in Matthew in both its singular and plural form demonstrate that he had a certain pattern in using the heaven language.

2. Heaven as a Reverential Circumlocution?

The Matthean use of heaven language in both its singular and plural forms and its numerous appearances could have generated a scholarly interest in its significance in the first gospel. Yet, the heaven motif in Matthew has received relatively little attention from scholars. The comparison of the unique Matthean phrase ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν with the phrase ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ in Mark and Luke has led scholars to think of the two as the same referent.⁵⁵⁰ It is thought of as Matthew's application of the Jewish literary tradition, that is, the reluctance to mention the divine name, when changing the kingdom of God found in his sources. Hill states that the Matthean kingdom of heaven indicates "faithfulness to the Aramaic and avoiding the name of God."⁵⁵¹ Likewise, Albright and Mann understand that the Matthean use of heaven is "to save the devout from using even the substitute word *Adonai*."⁵⁵² Manson says that heaven functions as a substitute for the name of God, "another touch of Jewish-Christian piety".⁵⁵³ In this regard, the language of heaven in Matthew has

⁵⁴⁹ Donald A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, (ed. F. E. Gaebelein; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 479. This explanation of 23.22 is less certain than in the case of 22.30 since it is not entirely clear whether Jesus is speaking directly to the Pharisees or using this language rhetorically. Yet, the direct language of 'woe to you, scribes and Pharisees' makes this argument possible.

⁵⁵⁰ Dalman, *The Words of Jesus*; Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, 1:172-85 on Matt 4:17; 1:862-65 on Matt 21:25; Albright and Mann, *Matthew*, 49; Manson and Major, *The Sayings of Jesus: As recorded in the Gospels according to St. Matthew and St. Luke*, 152; Hill, *Matthew*, 90; Beare, *Matthew*, 33; Hagner, *Matthew*, 1.1x; France, *Matthew*, 101-4.

⁵⁵¹ Hill, *Matthew*, 90.

⁵⁵² Albright and Mann, *Matthew*, 49.

⁵⁵³ Manson and Major, *The Sayings of Jesus: As recorded in the Gospels according to St. Matthew and St. Luke*, 152.

been treated by and large as no more than just a reverential ‘circumlocution’ adopted in Jewish usage to avoid saying the name of God.⁵⁵⁴

This reverential circumlocution assumption is first claimed in *The Words of Jesus* by Gustaf Dalman.⁵⁵⁵ With the goal of expounding the forms and meanings of Jesus’ words, he examines fourteen “fundamental ideas” (e.g. the sovereignty of God, eternal life, son of man, son of God, and son of David) found in the Second Temple Jewish literature, especially the rabbinic materials. For him, the rabbinic sources’ use of words and phrases gives essential information for understanding the NT ideas. Within this analysis, he explores the issue of the substitution of the Tetragrammaton, the sacred name of God, with other names.⁵⁵⁶ He discerns how the Mishnaic tractates eliminated the divine name or replaced it with other words, such as heaven or the holy one.⁵⁵⁷ He maintains that this same circumlocution was present in other Jewish literature as well: e.g. Esther, 1 Maccabees and Daniel. For him, the NT references, especially Matthew, furnishes the connection between the Second Temple literature and the rabbinic materials. Dalman, then, suggests fourteen words or phrases, which, according to him, disclose the development of the avoidance of God’s name by Jews. Half of these lists are connected directly to the word heaven.⁵⁵⁸ From the comparison of these lists with the NT and the rabbinic examples, he claims that most Jews including Jesus followed the standard Jewish custom of avoidance of the name of God. The Matthean phrase kingdom of heaven, according to him, signifies one of reverential circumlocution. This idea of heaven in Matthew as a reverential circumlocution is followed by Strack and Billerbeck⁵⁵⁹ and became widely accepted by most scholars.

It is true that the avoidance of speaking the divine name was prevalent within Judaism. The Tetragrammaton is replaced by “Adonai”, “the Name”, or the Lord, κύριος.⁵⁶⁰ Heaven is used as a reference to God in the Mishnah: e.g. the kingdom of heaven (*m. Ber.* 2.2; cf. *b. Hag.* 5b), the fear of heaven (*m. ’Abot* 1.3; cf. *b. Ber.* 33b), the sake of heaven (*m. ’Abot* 4.11), and the name of heaven (*m. ’Abot* 4.4; cf. *b. Hag.* 16a). Likewise, there is no doubt that heaven in Matthew is also used to refer to God. in the Matthean phrase kingdom of heaven and in 21.25 (‘Is the baptism of John from heaven or from humans?’).

⁵⁵⁴ The term “circumlocution” refers to words “which move roundabout their subject rather than announcing it directly”, just as “passing away” is used for “dying” (Martin Gray, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, (2nd rev. ed.; Harlow: Longman, 1992), s.v. Circumlocution).

⁵⁵⁵ Dalman, *The Words of Jesus*.

⁵⁵⁶ Dalman, *The Words of Jesus*, chapters V-VIII.

⁵⁵⁷ Dalman, *The Words of Jesus*, 194.

⁵⁵⁸ The seven phrases are. 1) the voice (from heaven), 2) swearing by heaven, 3) reward, treasures in heaven, 4) names written in heaven, 5) bound, loosed in heaven, 6) heaven, and 7) from heaven.

⁵⁵⁹ Cf. Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*.

⁵⁶⁰ Cf. Louis Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology*, (London: Longman and Todd, 1973), 140-41; Urbach, *Sages*, 1.66-79.

However, it is questionable whether heaven in those cases is employed exclusively as a reverential circumlocution to avoid the divine name, as Dalman claims. An examination of Dalman's circumlocution hypothesis demonstrates that it suffers from a fallacious methodology and a paucity of contemporary evidence.

First, with regard to his methodology, many scholars question Dalman's manner of approach that organizes material around certain "ideas" supposedly in Jesus' mind. Casey argues that these "ideas" are "culturally German, and barely at home in first-century Judaism" in that they would hardly have been held by Jesus.⁵⁶¹ In addition, Dalman's methodology for using the Rabbinic materials is problematic. He utilizes rabbinic sources in his reconstruction of Second Temple and NT practices without critical examination of their state and dating. Owing to the codified nature of the rabbinic materials and uncertainty regarding the dating of specific rabbis, it is unsatisfactory to employ the rabbinic literature definitively as a direct window on to NT usage. Stemberger says, "one cannot automatically assume the continuity of an idea between two chronologically distant literary references."⁵⁶² Lattke affirms that such a compilation by Dalman raises "enormous methodological and hermeneutical problems for any critical researcher who is particularly interested in the provenance of the early traditions."⁵⁶³ Likewise, Meier states, "Jewish scholars ... have urged greater caution in the use of rabbinic literature to delineate the very different conditions of Judaism in pre-70 Palestine."⁵⁶⁴ However, Dalman jumps from NT phrases assumed to be reverential circumlocution to a series of rabbinic parallels. Dalman's arguments can do no more than suggest the possibility of a reverential circumlocution.

Second, the rabbinic sources are too diverse to verify the reverential circumlocution. While some rabbis announce anyone who pronounces the Tetragrammaton with its vowels (e.g. *m. Sanh.* 11.1; *b. Sanh.* 90a) as cut-off, another tradition orders that Jews should use the name when greeting one another (*m. Ber.* 9.5). It is stated that the priests in the temple would pronounce the [divine] name as it was written during the priestly blessing, but those in the provinces would not (*m. Sotah* 7.6; *m. Tamid* 7.2). Using the divine name as a greeting was encouraged for the faithful to recognize each other and as response to the corrupt teaching of some heretics (*m. Ber.* 9.5). Though a minority view, the direct name for God was pronounced by some Jews; forms of Elohim occur twenty-eight times in reference to the

⁵⁶¹ Maurice Casey, *Aramaic Sources of Mark's Gospel*, (SNTSMS 102; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 17.

⁵⁶² Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 48.

⁵⁶³ Michael Lattke, "On the Jewish Background of the Synoptic Concept 'The Kingdom of God'," in *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus*, (ed. Bruce Chilton; IRT 5; London: SPCK, 1984), 86.

⁵⁶⁴ John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus, Volume 3: Companions and Competitors*, (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 305.

Jewish God. However, Dalman’s arguments from the Mishnah cover only part of the rabbinic perspective. It is implausible to claim that the rabbinic literature shared the majority idea of heaven as a reverential circumlocution.

Likewise, the Second Temple evidence for circumlocution, which Dalman puts forward (e.g. Esth, Dan 4.23 [4.26 in the LXX and English] and 1 Maccabees), is barely sufficient to maintain his hypothesis.⁵⁶⁵ For example, in the case of Daniel 4.23,

וְדַי אֲמָרוּ לְמִשְׁבֵּק עֶקֶר שְׂרֵשׁוּתֵי דַי אִילָנָא
מַלְכוּתָךְ לָךְ קִימָה מִן־דַי תְּנִדַע דַי שְׁלִטָן שְׁמִיָא:

the phrase שְׁלִטָן שְׁמִיָא may appear as an example of a reverential circumlocution. However, the context and language of Daniel suggest a different reading. It could be understood to mean, “that there is a heavenly power” or “who the heavenly power is”. Moreover, the context and language of Daniel cast doubt on whether explaining the phrase as a reverential circumlocution is justifiable. The context of Daniel 4.23 effectively humbles king Nebuchadnezzar by emphasizing God’s universal greatness over all the kingdom of mankind. In this context, the Lord is called by epithets such as אֱלֹהֵי שְׁמִיָא (Dan 2.18, 19, 37, 44), (עֲלִיָא) אֱלֹהֵי (Dan 3.26; 4.2; 5.18, 21), and עֲלִיָא (Dan 4.17, 24, 25; et al.). Likewise, “heaven” in Daniel 4.23 works as another of these metonymic titles. The term “metonymy” denotes the name of a thing substituted by the name of an attribute of it, or something closely associated with it.⁵⁶⁶ Thus, one might hear that “both the White House and Downing Street criticized the action”, with “White House” and “Downing Street” serving metonymically for the U.S. President and the British Prime Minister. In Daniel 4.23, the word heaven serves a rhetorical purpose rather than a reverential one – to emphasize the universal greatness of the God of the Jews over all sovereigns. Similarly, Urbach maintains that the use of heaven in Daniel 4.23 is a metonymy of place, where the name of a place is substituted for the people (or person) of that place; heaven by itself is a short-hand metonym for God of heaven.⁵⁶⁷ He suggests that the God of heaven is to signify “the God who is God of the universe and not a deity of a given country or temple.”⁵⁶⁸ As another example in 1 Maccabees, there appear fourteen occurrences of heaven and none of God or Lord in 1 Maccabees. In all but two of the occurrences of “heaven”, there is a clear metonymic reference to God. In several

⁵⁶⁵ Although Dalman asserts that the absence of the word ‘God’ in the book of Esther represents the avoidance of the name of God, hardly any scholar follows this claim.

⁵⁶⁶ Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 305.

⁵⁶⁷ Cf. Gray, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, s.v. metonymy.

⁵⁶⁸ Urbach, *Sages*, 1.69, 72.

instances, the replacement of heaven for God is so abrupt that it renders the sound of the sentence rather odd. For example, “On their return they sang hymns and praises to *heaven*, for *he* is good, for *his* mercy endures for ever” (1 Macc 4.24). Here, heaven is functioning as a reverential circumlocution or metonymy of God. However, it is unclear whether this metonymic substitution is for reverential reasons or not. Concerning this issue, Oesterley suggests that although the usage of heaven in 1 Maccabees may stem from reverence for the divine name, it points to the first century BCE emphasis on God’s transcendence.⁵⁶⁹ This reading seems quite reasonable in light of the frequent use of the Second Temple expression “God of heaven” for the same purpose. As one other textual evidence, the use of heaven in the Qumran documents provides strong counter-evidence to Dalman’s theory. Of the approximately two hundred occurrences of heaven in the non-biblical documents, not one functions in the way of reverential circumlocution. In light of the thorough care taken with the divine name at Qumran, and the close chronological link between Qumran and the NT, the lack of the use of heaven in this way makes it difficult to argue for its usage before the later rabbinic period. The analysis of the references to heaven in these texts demonstrates that Dalman’s thesis lacks any strong textual evidence.

Finally, the word θεός appears in effect 50 times in the gospel contrary to Dalman’s claim that Matthew avoids using the divine name. Besides, along with the phrase ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν, Matthew also employs ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ four times (12.28; 19.24; 21.31, 43), unless these are seen as mere editorial lapses. It seems odd to claim that the kingdom of heaven is the Matthean example of a reverential circumlocution to avoid the name of God, while the same evangelist employs θεός numerous times in the same gospel.⁵⁷⁰ Furthermore, the divine name in Matthew, which is argued by Dalman to have been changed to heaven, is not the Hebrew or Aramaic Tetragrammaton but the generic term “God”. As Casey observes,

Dalman made an extraordinary and extraordinarily influential mistake. he attributed to Jesus the use of מלכותא דשמיא rather than מלכותא דאלהא on the ground that he was avoiding the divine name. But אלהא is not the divine name! It was the ordinary Aramaic term for “God”.⁵⁷¹

Pennington also states that Dalman “fails to distinguish between utterance of the Tetragrammaton and other techniques, and he neglects pointing out that when we move from Hebrew and Aramaic to Greek, the question of the actual four-letter divine name becomes

⁵⁶⁹ Cf. Urbach, *Sages*, 1.70.

⁵⁷⁰ William O. E. Oesterley, *An Introduction to the Books of the Apocrypha*, (London: SPCK, 1935).

⁵⁷¹ Clark, "The Gentile bias in Matthew," 169.

moot.”⁵⁷² The investigation of Dalman’s arguments demonstrates its deficiencies in viewing heaven in Matthew as used to avoid the name of God. This signifies that heaven in Matthew functions as more than just a reverential circumlocution.

3. Significance of the Heaven Motif in Matthew

The analysis of the reverential circumlocution hypothesis opens the door for a clearer understanding of the literary and theological uses of heaven in the gospel. The Matthean heaven language is most distinctly associated with the motifs of kingdom (ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν), fatherhood of God (ὁ πᾶτερ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς and ὁ πατὴρ ὁ οὐράνιος), and the heaven and earth pairing. The examination of heaven in its narrative setting and its interaction with these motifs reveals the significance of the heaven motif in Matthew.

Under the influence of the prevalent reverential circumlocution hypothesis, the motif of kingdom of heaven, the equivalent of the kingdom of God, has been commonly regarded as referring to God’s kingly reign. Heaven as God’s dwelling place or a royal court certainly manifests God’s sovereignty and universal government. This interpretation exhibits the grammatical understanding of the τῶν οὐρανῶν as a subjective genitive, thus, “God reigns”. Kingsbury states, “since the genitive ‘(of) Heaven’ (ton ouranon) is subjective in nuance and a metonym for ‘God,’ the purpose of the expression ‘the kingdom of heaven’ is to assert the truth that ‘God rules (reigns).’ Hence, ‘the Rule of God’ or ‘the Reign of God’ is a proper paraphrase of it.”⁵⁷³ After a thorough analysis of the kingdom of God sayings in the synoptic gospels, Stanton presents a list of six possible imports of it. (1) the kingdom has come or is at hand (e.g. 11.2-6, 12f; 12.28; 13.26; 21.31), (2) the kingdom is a place to be entered, a realm (e.g. 18.9; 5.20; 7.21; 23.13), (3) in the kingdom (e.g. 8.11; 11.11), (4) the kingdom is a possession or something to be sought (e.g. 5.3; 6.33), and (5) the future coming of the kingdom (e.g. 6.10).⁵⁷⁴ He states, “the kingdom of God [heaven] is God’s kingly rule, the time and place where God’s power and will hold sway.”⁵⁷⁵ Stanton’s summary shows that

⁵⁷² E.g. Casey, *Aramaic Sources of Mark's Gospel*, 17. He presents other techniques, such as ‘creeping circumlocution’ (writing using the form, ‘g*d’ or ‘G*d’ instead of the generic ‘god’) and the ‘divine passive’ (a passive voice verb is used to refer in a roundabout way to God’s actions, e.g. Matt 7.2). Pennington, *Heaven and Earth*, 23.

⁵⁷³ Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 134.

⁵⁷⁴ Graham Stanton, *The Gospels and Jesus*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 192-95. Albeit he states one more kingdom of God saying, its implication is already noted in the list.

⁵⁷⁵ Stanton, *The Gospels and Jesus*, 196.

the significance of the motif of kingdom of heaven as the “reign” of God is focused on its temporal aspects, whether the reign represents the “present” or the “future”.

However, consideration of the reverential circumlocution hypothesis indicates that Matthew’s kingdom of heaven is not confined to signify a monolithic conception of God’s kingly reign. There have been various alternative suggestions concerning the conception of kingdom of heaven.⁵⁷⁶ Morris remarks that the kingdom of heaven represents a kingdom that extends beyond the earthly realm.⁵⁷⁷ Guelich says that heaven “has a much broader function in his gospel ... [it refers to] God’s realm where, enthroned, he rules over all the world.”⁵⁷⁸ Likewise, Garland maintains that kingdom of heaven is not a pious inclination, but is to denote “God’s transcendent work and lordship that is coming down from heaven.”⁵⁷⁹ Schneider remarks that Matthew’s replacement of Mark’s kingdom of God to kingdom of heaven was to underline the spatial, heavenly background to God’s kingdom.⁵⁸⁰ While affirming God’s rule, these interpretations distinguish the spatial aspect of the kingdom. In effect, the word οὐρανός represents a metonymical reference to the realm of God above. The grammatical analysis of the τῶν οὐρανῶν further reveals this aspect.⁵⁸¹ The genitive could function as a genitive of source or origin, or an attributive genitive. The kingdom of heaven could refer to the kingdom that comes from heaven and with its origin in heaven,⁵⁸² or the heavenly kingdom, the kingdom whose characteristic relates to the divine, heavenly realm, as the opposite of the earthly kingdom respectively. As such, the combination of βασιλεία with οὐρανός inevitably raises some sense of a spatial aspect of the kingdom.⁵⁸³ The

⁵⁷⁶ E.g. Alan. H. McNeile, *The Gospel according to St. Matthew: The Greek text with introduction, notes, and indices*, (London: Macmillan, 1915); Clark, "The Gentile bias in Matthew," 165-72; Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News according to Matthew*, (trans. D. Green; London: SPCK, 1976); Robert A. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for Understanding*, (Dallas: Word, 1982); Joel Marcus, "The Gates of Hades and the Keys of the Kingdom (Matt 16:18-19)," *CBQ* 50, no. 3 (1988): 663-75; Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992); David E. Garland, *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the First Gospel*, (London: SPCK, 1993); Gundry, *Matthew*; Carson, "Matthew."; Robert Foster, "Why on Earth Use 'Kingdom of Heaven?': Matthew's Terminology Revisited," *NTS* 48 (2002): 487-99.

⁵⁷⁷ Morris, *Matthew*, 53.

⁵⁷⁸ Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 77.

⁵⁷⁹ Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 47.

⁵⁸⁰ Gerhard Schneider, "'Im Himmel - auf Erden': eine Perspektive matthäischer Theologie," in *Studien zum Matthäusevangelium: Festschrift für Wilhelm Pesch*, (ed. Ludger Schenke and Wilhelm Pesch; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1988), 287.

⁵⁸¹ Cf. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1996), 72-136.

⁵⁸² Cf. Gundry, *Matthew*, 43.

⁵⁸³ Ridderbos observes that “in the nature of the case a dominion to be effective must create or maintain a territory where it can operate. So the absence of any idea of a spatial Kingdom would be very strange” (Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1962), 343-44). Saucy also remarks that “while the emphasis of the term may be on the reign, one can hardly image a reign that has no realm” (Mark Saucy, "The Kingdom-of-God

kingdom preached by Jesus is from above with its origin in the realm of God and is opposite from the earthly kingdom. While still conveying the conception of God's rule with a temporal aspect, Matthew's kingdom of heaven signifies its spatial distinction from the earthly kingdom. This spatial sense of heaven can be detected in its combination with other motifs as well. Matthew's father who is ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς and ὁ πατὴρ ὁ οὐράνιος is the one who dwells in the place above distinct from the earth. In this manner, the motif of heaven signifies its sense of distinction from the earth.

The significance of the heaven motif could be further revealed in Matthew's use of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν and ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ. With regard to the appearance of these two phrases in Matthew, one group of scholars have argued that these phrases convey different referents in the gospel and the other group has maintained for the same concepts.

For the first view, several scholars claim that two phrases refer to different temporal tenses. Allen asserts that while kingdom of heaven refers to the message of the kingdom that Jesus declared as at hand and that will be inaugurated at the parousia,⁵⁸⁴ kingdom of God, on the other hand, implies a general phrase employed "to sum up that whole revelation of God to the Jewish people which was to be transferred to others."⁵⁸⁵ In a similar way, Pamment claims that kingdom of heaven in Matthew denotes "a wholly future reality which is imminent but otherworldly", while kingdom of God refers to "God's sovereignty actualized and recognized in the past and present here on earth."⁵⁸⁶ Albright and Mann state, "'kingdom of God' in the Matthean tradition is applied to the Father's reign after the judgment of the End, and 'kingdom of heaven' to the continuing community of The Man, lasting up to the time of the judgment."⁵⁸⁷ Manhoff maintains that the two phrases are distinct in meaning. For him, Kingdom of God, which is found exclusively in the Targums, was "an Aramaic Jewish idiom for God's perfect eschatological world," while kingdom of heaven, a rabbinic literature phrase, was "a different Hebrew idiom referring to the obligation to perform God's commandments."⁵⁸⁸

In spite of these various approaches, none of these suggestions in the first group is sufficient since they hardly sustain a referential difference between kingdom of God and

Sayings in Matthew," *BibSac* 151 (1994): 182). Cf. J. C. O'Neill, "The Kingdom of God," *NovT* 35 (1993): 130-41; Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, 2.240; Warren Carter, "Narrative/Literary Approaches to Matthean Theology: The 'Reign of the Heavens' as an Example (Mt. 4.17-5.12)," *JSNT* 67 (1997): 15.

⁵⁸⁴ Allen, *Matthew*, lxvii.

⁵⁸⁵ Allen, *Matthew*, lxviii.

⁵⁸⁶ Margaret Pamment, "The Kingdom of Heaven according to the First Gospel," *NTS* 27 (1981): 232.

⁵⁸⁷ Albright and Mann, *Matthew*, 155.

⁵⁸⁸ Harry Manhoff, "All of the Kingdoms: Semitic Idiom in the Synoptic Gospels and Related Jewish Literature" (University of California, 2001), vii.

kingdom of heaven in Matthew. For the temporal distinction view, the kingdom of heaven in 11.12 refers to a present reality as the violent people have been regarding it since the day of John the Baptist. The parables of the mustard seed and of the leaven (13.31-33) denote that the kingdom of heaven covers both its future consummation and present reality.⁵⁸⁹ In the parables of the hidden treasure and pearl of great price (13.44-45), one could respond to the kingdom of heaven instantly.⁵⁹⁰ The parallel of the kingdom of heaven and kingdom of God in 19.23-24 suggests that they stand for the same reality. For Manhoff's claim, whose assumption forces to argue that kingdom of God in other Synoptic gospels always conveys an eschatological meaning, the varied uses of kingdom across the Synoptics and their apparent parallels at many points illustrate this thesis to be untenable.

The deficiency of the first interpretation leads us to the second view. That is, both kingdom of heaven and kingdom of God in Matthew have the same referent but occur for some other reason. After the analysis of various uses of kingdom language in the synoptic gospels and the Second Temple literature, Davies and Allison state that kingdom of heaven is "nothing more than a stylistic variation of 'kingdom of God'."⁵⁹¹ For the variation of the phrase, some suggest that Matthew overlooked the kingdom of God references due to editorial error, or it was "a literary device used to draw the reader's attention to passages of special significance."⁵⁹² Albeit interesting, yet, the latter view is hardly tenable, since it cannot be verified that those passages with kingdom of God are more important than others in Matthew. For the former, there is no clear evidence to argue for or against. However, observing the way God and kingdom of God are used in the gospel narrative, it appears rather unwise to treat kingdom of God as an editorial error.

Having analysed the uses of various terms in the first gospel, Mowery argues that Matthew tends to use different terms for different audiences: the crowds and disciples on the one hand, and the opposed religious leaders on the other.⁵⁹³ He maintains that as part of this pattern "God" (including kingdom of God) appears when Jesus is addressing his opponents (32 of 50 times), but Father and kingdom of heaven is reserved for his disciples and the crowds (31 of 32 times). Mowery's assumption appears to demonstrate the Matthean word pattern reasonably well. As he asserts, only Jesus' opponents or those who reject him call

⁵⁸⁹ Daniel J. Harrington, *God's People in Christ: New Testament Perspectives on the Church and Judaism*, (OBT 7; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 22.

⁵⁹⁰ Harrington, *God's People in Christ*, 22.

⁵⁹¹ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.391-92.

⁵⁹² John C. Thomas, "The Kingdom of God in the Gospel according to Matthew," *NTS* 39 (1993): 141.

⁵⁹³ Mowery, "The Matthean References to the Kingdom," 400-03.

him “teacher” (8.19; 12.38; 22.16; 24.36), while Jesus’ disciples call him “Lord” (8.2, 25; 9.27-31; 14.28; etc.).⁵⁹⁴

The kingdom of heaven is generally employed in the discourse of Jesus addressed to his disciples and the crowds, while the kingdom of God occurs in the context of Jesus’ conflict with the religious leaders except the one in 19.24. The instance in 19.24 occurs in Jesus’ saying to his disciples. Concerning the use of kingdom of God in Matthew, Foster states, the “kingdom of God refers to God’s rule over both the obedient and disobedient, while kingdom of heaven exclusively designates his reign over those who become his family through faith in Jesus.”⁵⁹⁵

He argues that the four instances of kingdom of God (12.28; 19.24; 21.31, 43)⁵⁹⁶ work for “shock value”, occurring between two pivotal narrative markers of Jesus’ escalating conflict with the religious leaders (12.14 and 21.46).⁵⁹⁷ According to him, after the first pivotal marker in 12.14, where the Pharisees are said to plot how to destroy Jesus, Jesus enters into conflict with the religious leaders over whether he cast out demons by Beelzebul (12.22-32). The expression kingdom of God (12.28) demonstrates that the religious leaders did not simply reject the man Jesus, but also rejected God. Likewise, in the second pivot point in 21.46, where the religious leaders are explicitly said to want to arrest Jesus, the double uses of kingdom of God (21.31, 43) illustrate that those who reject Jesus’ coming reject the initiative of God to bring them into his kingdom (21.23, 45) and they will be rejected by God. “The tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you” (21.31). “The kingdom of God will be taken away from you” (21.43). In between the two pivot points, the occurrence of kingdom of God in 19.24 clearly works for “shock value”. After Jesus’ saying that it is difficult for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven/kingdom of God, the disciples are “greatly astonished” (19.25). The kingdom of God demonstrates that even the disciples, who gave up everything to follow Jesus (19.27), must continue to do so to maintain their honoured position. These uses of kingdom of God in Matthew demonstrate that the phrase is more than an editorial error. While denoting the same God’s kingdom, each term conveys different connotation. This analysis of the use of

⁵⁹⁴ Matthew presents Jesus as more than simply a ‘rabbi’, a human authority, but as ‘God with us’ the one with all authority. Cf. Luke T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, (Rev. ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 195.

⁵⁹⁵ Foster, “Why on Earth Use ‘Kingdom of Heaven?’,” 494.

⁵⁹⁶ Concerning the number of instances of kingdom of God in Matthew, there is also a textually-uncertain occurrence at 6.33. For this verse, the NA27 reads βασιλεία but has the following τοῦ θεοῦ in brackets, since the two major witnesses, \aleph and B both omit the latter phrase. Though Hagner and Davies and Allison argue in favour of the longer reading (Hagner, *Matthew*, 1.161; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.660), they are not weighty enough to override the significant external manuscript witnesses against the longer reading. Cf. Gundry, *Matthew*, 119.

⁵⁹⁷ Foster, “Why on Earth Use ‘Kingdom of Heaven?’,” 495.

kingdom of heaven and kingdom of God in the first gospel discloses that the heaven language in Matthew is a carefully selected term to distinguish “insiders” and “outsiders”.

This antithetic use of heaven language is also seen in its combination with the fatherhood of God. God as πατήρ is one of the most frequently occurring words in Matthew (44 times, only 4 times in Mark and 17 times in Luke). Combined with heaven (ὁ πατήρ ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς and ὁ πατήρ ὁ οὐράνιος), this term expresses the contrast between God and human fathers⁵⁹⁸ and is used to uphold the status of Jesus’ disciples and the crowds. Jesus speaks of God to the disciples as “your” father (in heaven/heavenly), while calling him as “my” father (e.g. 12.50; 16.27; 26.53). This illustrates the special relationship of Jesus’ disciples to God. Concerning the function of father in heaven in Matthew, Foster argues that it is to signify that God is the father who adopts Jesus’ disciples as his children and brings them into his heavenly kingdom.⁵⁹⁹ The disciples are to do good deeds to glorify their heavenly father. This testifies to their identity as God’s children (cf. 5.16, 45; 12.50). This, on the other hand, implies that the religious leaders are not part of God’s family (13.38-39; 23.15; 7.21-23). According to Foster, this father in heaven motif together with kingdom of heaven serves an important rhetorical and social purpose. Located in the context in which formative Judaism fared better in the larger society, the Matthean community was challenged to disparage their belief of Jesus as Messiah. The Jewish leaders asserted that Jesus as a Davidic messiah was not credible, since he did not establish Israel as a world power and deliver his people from the domination of Rome.⁶⁰⁰ Against such claim, the distinct usage of heaven language was Matthew’s way to signify that “Jesus was Messiah in ways the leaders of formative Judaism did not understand and to reaffirm to Jesus’ disciples that their identity, affirmation, and goal were in heaven and not on earth.”⁶⁰¹ Foster maintains that such effect of heaven language is most clearly manifested in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7).⁶⁰² In doing so, Matthew could re-ensure the readers’ identity as the true chosen people of God

⁵⁹⁸ Cf. Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 377; Margaret Davies, *Matthew*, (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 27. Some scholars regard the heaven and father combination as signifying God’s limitlessness compared to human limitedness. Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew*, (London: Rober Scott, 1928), 97; Horst R. Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 2:544.

⁵⁹⁹ Foster, "Why on Earth Use 'Kingdom of Heaven'?", 487-99.

⁶⁰⁰ For a summary of the various messianic expectations, see Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, 307-20; John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature*, (1st ed.; ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1995).

⁶⁰¹ Foster, "Why on Earth Use 'Kingdom of Heaven'?", 490.

⁶⁰² Foster, "Why on Earth Use 'Kingdom of Heaven'?", 497-99; cf. Pennington, *Heaven and Earth*, 242-49. Father in reference to God in the Sermon on the Mount is found in 5.16, 45, 48; 6.1, 4, 6 (2x), 8, 9, 14, 15, 18 (2x), 26, 32; 7.11, 21.

and “deter weaker members from apostasy to the ‘burden’ of formative Judaism as taught by the Pharisees and other religious leaders.”⁶⁰³

Also, there has been a theological and literary approach to explain this antithetic use of heaven language in Matthew. Pennington has suggested comprehending Matthew’s intention of the heaven motif from the use of heaven and earth pairing. He argues that the ultimate heaven and earth contrast in the first gospel establishes a foundation in constructing the Matthean theology. According to him, the combination of heaven and earth is used in three different ways in Matthew (copulative, thematic, and implied pairs)⁶⁰⁴ and functions in two distinct ways: as merismatic or antithetic.

On the one hand, the copulative pairs work in a merismatic way illustrating Matthew’s understanding of cosmos, which consists of heaven and earth.⁶⁰⁵ The future passing away of heaven and earth in 5.18 and 24.35 and the address of the father as “Lord of heaven and earth” in 11.25 demonstrate that the pair represents the entire created world. Pennington states, “this is a classic example of a merism (or merismus), where a unity or totality is communicated by juxtaposing the extremities.”⁶⁰⁶ On the other hand, the thematic and implied pairing works to disclose the ultimate distinction between heaven and earth. Throughout the gospel the thematic pairing of heaven and earth in association with other words or phrases demonstrates antithesis, comparison, tension or contrast (e.g. to swear neither by heaven nor by earth, 5.34-35; thy will be done, 6.10; to store up treasures, 6.19-20; binding and loosing, 16.19 and 18.18; all authority, 28.18). Hades and humanity are put into conjunction with heaven to demonstrate their antithesis. For Pennington, Hades is used in a strongly symbolic way as a counterpoint to heaven (11.23; 16.18). Likewise, humanity also represents a contrast between the heavenly and earthly realms (before men and before my father in heaven, 10.32-33; from heaven or of human origin, 21.25-26; flesh and blood and my father in heaven, 16.17).

According to Pennington, this theme of heaven and earth plays a significant role in interconnecting and undergirding the important Matthean theological themes, such as Christology, kingdom, fatherhood of God, ecclesiology, and eschatology.⁶⁰⁷ For Christology,

⁶⁰³ Foster, "Why on Earth Use 'Kingdom of Heaven'?", 489.

⁶⁰⁴ According to Pennington, the copulative pair refers to the “heaven and earth” pair appearing as one unit, not separated. The thematic heaven and earth pairs indicates “the expression heaven and earth but with some separation of intervening words or phrases.” The implied pair “comprises instances where heaven is used in conjunction with a word other than earth but one closely associated with it, thus making a less explicit pairing with the same purpose and sense.” Pennington, *Heaven and Earth*, 164-65.

⁶⁰⁵ For the detailed discussion, see Pennington, *Heaven and Earth*, 206-11, cf. 172-82.

⁶⁰⁶ Pennington, *Heaven and Earth*, 167.

⁶⁰⁷ Pennington, *Heaven and Earth*, 81-94.

throughout the first gospel Jesus is clearly aligned with the heaven side of the equation as compared to the human and earthly. His identity is very much defined through his connection with heaven and in contrast to the earth, which is repeatedly identified with the human (6.19-21; 18.18-20; 21.25-26; 23.9). For the theme of kingdom, kingdom of heaven is contrasted with all earthly kingdoms and societies. Likewise, for the subject of the fatherhood of God, God stands as the father in heaven to Jesus and his disciples, while the outsiders have merely earthly fathers (e.g. 23.8-9; 6.1-21). For ecclesiology, the two famous teachings on ἐκκλησία in Matthew both define the church (and/or its leaders) as having an authority that transcends the merely earthly to the heavenly (16.18-19; 18.17-20). Both of these passages have a high concentration of other key heaven terms, such as father in heaven and kingdom of heaven. Finally, for eschatology, the currently existing tension or contrast between heavenly realm and earthly realm will be resolved through Jesus by the forthcoming eschaton.

For Pennington, the strong contrast between heaven and earth in Matthew serves as part of a sharp “parting of the ways” polemic. From the use of heaven language Matthew could distinguish “insiders” and “outsiders”, thus emphasizing a break with Judaism and the separation of the Church from the synagogue. This served to legitimate and encourage the Matthean community that they are the true people of God.

These sociological and theological approaches towards the heaven motif in Matthew offer important guidance in comprehending its significance in the gospel narrative. Running throughout the first gospel, the theme of heaven and earth antithesis demonstrates a clear contrast between heavenly realm and earthly realm. This antithetic use of heaven language plays a vital role in constructing the Matthean theology. The combination of heaven language with the themes of kingdom and fatherhood of God reaffirms their identity as God’s true people, encourages them to stand firm in their devotion to Jesus in the current world of conflict, and challenges them to disregard the temptation to convert to formative Judaism.

4. Conclusion

This chapter has explored the significance of heaven language in Matthew, divided into three parts. The first part looked into the Matthean conception of heaven. Heaven in the first gospel refers both to the created order of the sky and atmosphere and to the habitation of God. Although both singular and plural forms of οὐρανός appear in Matthew, this does not

imply that the author had the idea of multiple heavens. Rather, it reveals the author's literary style of idiolect to use different forms for different aspects.

The second part analysed the most common view of the kingdom of heaven, the reverential circumlocution assumption, and argued that this hypothesis is hardly tenable. The evidence for heaven as a reverential circumlocution in the time of Jesus is simply too exiguous to support adherence to this theory. Though the rabbinic material reflects a real trend towards heaven as a reverential circumlocution, this remains to be proven. Besides, the variegated nature of first-century Judaism militates against postulating a definitive trend, even if it were rather widespread in the literature. Furthermore, this theory does not properly reflect the phenomena in Matthew.

The final part investigated the significance of the heaven motif in Matthew. It demonstrated that while the word οὐρανός as the metonym of God manifests God's kingly reign in a temporal sense when combined with the "kingdom" motif, its uses in Matthew, *viz.* "the heavenly father", "father in heaven", the heaven and earth pairing, and even "the kingdom of heaven", clearly exhibit the spatial aspect of the heaven motif as well. It was argued that heaven in Matthew serves to deliver the evangelist's theological and sociological purposes. The theme of heaven and earth runs throughout the first gospel and demonstrates a clear distinction between heavenly realm and earthly realm. The heaven motif helps establishing the Matthean theology, such as Christology, ecclesiology, eschatology, etc. The combination of heaven language with kingdom and fatherhood of God clarifies the identity of the Matthean community as the true people of God and encourages them to stand firm as Jesus' disciples in the world of conflict and hostility. This chapter has demonstrated that the heaven language was not a mere reverential circumlocution to avoid the name of God but was deployed as a significant motif to establish the Matthean theology. This indicates that the phenomena occurring in association with heaven convey a significant message in Matthew and to the readership.

Significance of the Celestial Phenomena in Matthew

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the significance of the celestial phenomena portrayed in Matthew through the investigation of their background(s) and implication(s). Divided into five sections, it will examine (1) the star of Bethlehem in 2.1-12, (2) the series of heavenly phenomena after Jesus' baptism in 3.16-17 and the voice from the cloud in 17.5, (3) the Jewish authorities' request for a sign from heaven in 16.1, (4) Jesus' eschatological sayings with reference to the sun, the moon, and the stars in 24.29-31, and (5) the final celestial phenomena at the death and resurrection of Jesus in 27.45 and 28.2. Taking place at significant moments of Matthew's story of Jesus, these events in or from heaven represent divine intervention and play an important role in revealing who Jesus is and his mission on earth.

1. The Star of Bethlehem in Matthew 2.1-12

The first celestial phenomenon in Matthew appears at the birth of Jesus in 2.1-12 in the form of the so-called "star of Bethlehem". As Hagner insightfully discerns, 2.1-12 "continues in the vein of haggadah wherein the historical narrative finds its primary purpose in the conveying of theological truth. The way in which the story is told is calculated to bring the reader to further theological comprehension of the significance of Jesus as well as to anticipate a number of themes or motifs that are to recur repeatedly in the gospel before the story is over."⁶⁰⁸ The motif of the astral event in this pericope plays an indispensable role in establishing the identity of Jesus and his mission on earth. This section will begin with considering the import and structure of the Matthean prologue. Next, it will look into the theological significance of Matthew 1. Then, it will explore the implication of 2.1-12. These analyses will lay the foundation for interpreting the significance of the astral event in the pericope of 2.1-12. Finally, it will investigate the significance of the phenomenon of the star of Bethlehem in 2.1-12 through the examination of its background and implication. This investigation will demonstrate that the motif of the star of Bethlehem, placed in the centre of the pericope, serves to establish two theological truths:

⁶⁰⁸ Hagner, *Matthew*, 1.25.

1. To firmly authenticate the identity of Jesus as the kingly messiah.
2. To redefine the prerequisite for the membership of “his people” (τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ, 1.21).

1.1. *Import and Structure of the Matthean Prologue*

Matthew begins the gospel of Jesus with his unique material of chapters 1 and 2. The temporal reference ἐν δὲ ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις in 3.1 and the introduction of the new subjects, John the Baptist and the adult Jesus (3.13) indicate the narrative shift to the new phase in chapter 3. The unique relation of this Matthean prologue with the rest of the gospel illustrates its special status in the gospel.⁶⁰⁹ It is generally regarded as the evangelist’s complex reworking of several bodies of pre-Matthean infancy traditions (e.g. a narrative concerned with Joseph and the angelic dream appearances, a narrative of an annunciation of Jesus’ birth, narratives of the opposition of the king Herod and the magi story, and a narrative patterned on the infancy of Moses, with the prefacing genealogy and the five formula quotations) so as to set up a profound theological statement, prior to the main body of the gospel.⁶¹⁰ Hagner states, “Matthew has taken his historical traditions and set them forth in such a way as to underline matters of fundamental theological importance.”⁶¹¹ He suggests its literary genre as “that of midrashic haggadah, designed to bring out the deeper meaning of the present by showing its theological continuity with the past.”⁶¹²

This Matthean prologue comprises five units (1.1-17, 18-25; 2.1-12, 13-18, 19-23).⁶¹³ After the presentation of the title (1.1)⁶¹⁴ and the genealogy of Jesus (1.2-17), each unit follows a shared narrative and linguistic pattern:

1. They begin with the genitive absolute followed by ἰδοὺ ἄγγελος κυρίου, except the third, which has ἰδοὺ μάγοι instead. These participles, which appear to be Matthean devices, carry the flow of the narrative.

⁶⁰⁹ Apart from the general similarity in style and thought (e.g. the formula quotations and the geographical motif), hardly any content in Matt 1-2 (e.g. the virginal conception, a birth at Bethlehem, the revelation of Jesus’ kingship through the celestial sign, and the Christological theme of Jesus as the son of Abraham, the son of David) reappears in the rest of the gospel.

⁶¹⁰ For the detailed discussion on the source of the infancy narrative, see C. T. Davis, “Tradition and Redaction in Matthew 1:18-2:23,” *JBL* 90 (1971): 404-21; Brown, *Birth of The Messiah*, 104-21; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.165-67, 190-95.

⁶¹¹ Hagner, *Matthew*, 1.2.

⁶¹² Hagner, *Matthew*, 1.2.

⁶¹³ Cf. William Varner, “A Discourse Analysis of Matthew’s Nativity Narrative,” *TynB* 58, no. 2 (2007): 214-27; Stephen H. Levinsohn, *Discourse Features of New Testament Greek: A Coursebook on the Information Structure of New Testament Greek*, (2nd ed.; Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2000), 202; cf. 183, 197.

⁶¹⁴ Cf. M. Eloff, “Exile, Restoration and Matthew’s Genealogy of Jesus ‘Ο ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ,” *Neot* 38 (2004): 78.

ταῦτα δὲ αὐτοῦ ἐνθυμηθέντος ἰδοὺ ἄγγελος κυρίου (1.20);⁶¹⁵
 Τοῦ δὲ Ἰησοῦ γεννηθέντος ἐν Βηθλέεμ ἰδοὺ μάγοι (2.1);
 Ἀναχωρησάντων δὲ αὐτῶν ἰδοὺ ἄγγελος κυρίου (2.13);
 Τελευτήσαντος δὲ τοῦ Ἡρώδου ἰδοὺ ἄγγελος κυρίου (2.19).

2. With the exception of the third quotation, these extracts portray the appearance of an angel of the Lord in Joseph's dreams, its command to him, and his consequent obedience. The shared term Χριστοῦ in 1.17 and 18 connects the first and second extracts.⁶¹⁶

The entire Matthean prologue is preoccupied with the portrayal of the advent of Jesus. While describing the very first part of Jesus' story, it establishes who he is and what his mission on earth is. It also conveys the evangelist's apologetic or polemical concerns against the Jewish leadership.

1.2. Theological Significance of Matthew 1

Matthew's prologue begins with the genealogy that functions as an introduction to Jesus (1.1-17). This pericope lays the profound foundation for the understanding of the Matthean story of Jesus. In 1.1, he is titled as the "son of David" and the "son of Abraham", a Davidic lineage and a true Israelite. This identification of Jesus is substantiated by the continuing genealogy in 1.2-17 that in effect summarizes the whole history of Israel. Jesus' bloodline begins with Abraham, the founding father of the nation of Israel. It indicates that the story of Jesus begins where the nation of Israel began. Hooker states, "in tracing Jesus' line back to Abraham, Matthew is telling us that Jesus has been part of God's plan from the very

⁶¹⁵ The seemingly odd beginning of the second unit in 1.20 can be justified from the shared narrative structure in 1.18-25, 2.13-18, and 2.19-23:

- (1) Appearance of an angel in a dream of Joseph (1.20a; 2.13; 2.19)
- (2) Command of the angel to Joseph and its explanation (1.20b-c; 2.13; 2.20)
- (3) Joseph's obedience (1.24-25; 2.14-15; 2.21).

This structure illustrates that the central character in these units is Joseph, who is first mentioned in 1.19. Then, 1.18 can be read as "forming a bridge from the end of the genealogy ending in 1.17 to Joseph's introduction in 1.19," as Varner suggests (Varner, "Matthew's Nativity Narrative," 217). Consequently, it can be assumed that the second unit begins in 1.20 with the genitive absolute and ἰδοὺ ἄγγελος κυρίου pattern.

⁶¹⁶ According to Guthrie, this term works as a "hookword" to staple together the seams of the discourse (George H. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), 12-14, 94-111). Varner suggests other instances of these "hookwords" in the infancy narrative: e.g. Ἰησοῦν/Ἰησοῦ in 1.25/2.1; the ἀνεχώρησαν/Ἀναχωρησάντων of 2.12/2.13 and the τελευτῆς Ἡρώδου/Ὅτε Ἡρώδης of 2.15,16 with Τελευτήσαντος δὲ τοῦ Ἡρώδου of 2.19 (Varner, "Matthew's Nativity Narrative," 217).

beginning of the nation.”⁶¹⁷ The summary of the genealogy in 1.17 corresponds to the three stages of Israel’s history. This indicates that the story of Jesus and the history of Israel are fundamentally linked.

Kennedy has recently argued that Matthew’s genealogy represents a recapitulation of the history of Israel.⁶¹⁸ According to him, the form and content of this genealogy demonstrate the influence from Gen 2.4 and 5.1, Ruth 4.18-22, and 1 Chr 1.27-3.19. It serves as “a highly compressed narrative that recapitulates the history of Israel in a teleological manner.”⁶¹⁹ He maintains that these aspects of Matthew’s genealogy reveal important elements regarding the status of Jesus. First, the genealogy in a unilinear teleological manner like Ruth’s indicates that Israel’s history has been designed for a goal and that the goal is accomplished in Jesus. For Kennedy, the inauguration of Israel with Abraham recalls God’s promise to him that he will be the father of a great nation (Gen 12.2). ‘The goal was to give a king, a ruler for God’s people, to provide the leadership to fulfill Israel’s call and mandate.’⁶²⁰ The purpose of using a teleological genealogy is said “to emphasize the last named individual as unique and the one toward whom all prior ancestors prepared.”⁶²¹ As Ruth’s genealogy points towards and culminates with David, the great king of Israel, Matthew’s does so with Jesus descending from Abraham through David. This represents that the goal is finally achieved in Jesus the Christ. Second, Matthew’s genealogy as a compressed narrative presents Jesus as the climax and completion of Israel’s history. “Each name in the genealogy”, Kennedy says, “serves as a reminder of stories from the Old Testament.”⁶²² 1.17 reveals that Matthew’s version of Israel’s history progresses in three stages: from Abraham to David, from David to the exile, and from the exile to Christ. While the first stage represents “the anticipation and *ascent* towards kingship, ... a promise and a call to be fulfilled, realized in David the king”, the second indicates “a tragic *descent*, a failure to fulfill God’s call for Israel”.⁶²³ Although the Israel’s story in the OT ends with exilic conditions without a king and independent nationhood, “a story essentially incomplete and without conclusion”, there is the final stage of Israel’s story for Matthew. “A new *ascent*

⁶¹⁷ Morna D. Hooker, *Beginnings: Keys That Open the Gospels*, (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1997), 29.

⁶¹⁸ Joel Kennedy, *The Recapitulation of Israel: Use of Israel's History in Matthew 1:1-4:11*, (WUNT2 57; Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 25-102.

⁶¹⁹ Kennedy, *The Recapitulation of Israel*, 78. For the discussion on Kennedy’s teleological and narratological genealogy, see Kennedy, *The Recapitulation of Israel*, 26-82.

⁶²⁰ Kennedy, *The Recapitulation of Israel*, 100.

⁶²¹ Kennedy, *The Recapitulation of Israel*, 75.

⁶²² Kennedy, *The Recapitulation of Israel*, 83.

⁶²³ Kennedy, *The Recapitulation of Israel*, 100.

has taken place, unknown to Israel until Messiah's coming."⁶²⁴ Kennedy's interpretation of Matthew's genealogy as a theological recapitulation of Israel's history provides an insightful view on Jesus as the son of David and the son of Abraham. Representing the climax and completion of Israel's history, he is the divinely anticipated character of the Christ (cf. Gen 12.2-3; 18.18; 2 Sam 7.12-14)⁶²⁵ as the fulfilment of God's promises to Abraham. Yet, it should not be overlooked that God's promises to Abraham are not only about being the forefather of Israel but also the forebear of "a multitude of nations" (Gen 17.4-5; cf. 44.19) and the one through whom "all the peoples of the earth" are to be blessed (Gen 12.3; 18.18 etc).⁶²⁶ Matthew's inclusion of four "non-Israelite" females (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba) in the genealogy and their portrayals as "heroines" show that the Gentiles are not excluded from God's plan but are part of it. This intimates that Jesus' coming as the fulfilment of Israel's history is not only for the Jews but also for the whole world.

While Jesus is introduced in a macroscopic way in his genealogy, 1.18-25 presents him in a microscopic way through the portrayal of his birth to his inner circle. This pericope discloses Jesus' divine origin and mission on earth through the angelic revelation in a dream. Dreams in antiquity were considered to "represent some objective experience that connected humanity with the will of the divine."⁶²⁷ They were believed to be a means of the divine communication to humanity.⁶²⁸ The appearance of an angel of the Lord in Joseph's dream represented the divine presence and ensured his message was fully authorised by God himself. The angelic revelation of the progenitive activity of the Holy Spirit presents the birth of Jesus as the fulfilment of the OT prophecy (1.22-23). The same pattern of divinatory dreams occurs again in 2.12, 13, 20, and 22, with explicit and implicit reports of angelic revelation. These dreams occur prior to the movements of the child Jesus, except 2.12 that occurs prior to the magi's return. Dodson states, "the divinatory nature of dreams invests the nature of Jesus' beginning with a sense of divine destiny and providence, which in turn underscores Jesus' authority and power."⁶²⁹ They also serve to represent the life of Jesus as the fulfilment of the OT prophecy. The divine identity of Jesus and his mission on earth are announced through the dream revelation. His name Ἐμμανουήλ, μεθ' ἡμῶν ὁ θεός together with his origin by the work of the Holy Spirit signifies the presence of God in Jesus himself.

⁶²⁴ Kennedy, *The Recapitulation of Israel*, 100.

⁶²⁵ For the detailed study of 1.1-17, see Brown, *Birth of The Messiah*, 57-95.

⁶²⁶ Cf. Thomas B. Dozeman, "Sperma Abraam in John 8 and related Literature: Cosmology and Judgment," *CBQ* 42, no. 3 (1980): 343-46; cf. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 1.302; France, *Matthew*, 35-37.

⁶²⁷ Derek S. Dodson, *Reading Dreams: An Audience-Critical Approach to the Dreams in the Gospel of Matthew*, (LNTS 397; London: T & T Clark, 2009), 1.

⁶²⁸ Cf. Dodson, *Reading Dreams*, 12-133.

⁶²⁹ Dodson, *Reading Dreams*, 169.

Although Matthew does not title Jesus as Son of God explicitly, this pericope gives a reader sufficient revelation that he is much more than just a “son of David” or a “son of Abraham”. He is announced to have come to earth to save τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν (1.21). Concerning the object of Jesus’ mission on earth, the phrase τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ would seem to refer in the first place to the historic people of God, Israel, in light of the genealogical identification of Jesus in the previous pericope. The word λαός is used to refer to the people of Israel throughout Matthew (e.g. 2.4, 6; 4.23; 21.23; 26.3, 5, 47; 27.1). Nolland comments, “‘his’ points to Jesus’ own embeddedness within this people. the people to whom he belongs.”⁶³⁰ However, it should be taken into account that even the genealogy in 1.1-17 conveys ‘the universalistic implications of the title “son of Abraham”’.⁶³¹ Given the polemic against Jewish authority throughout the gospel and Jesus’ great commission in 28.18-20, Matthew appears to redefine the identity of the people of God. “Even if at this stage Matthew’s readers have not yet recognized” this, France states, “they will not have to read far into the book before they become aware that the scope of salvation is being spread more widely.”⁶³² In this manner, ὁ λαός αὐτοῦ is to be interpreted as μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν (16.18) of both Jew and Gentile. Matthew, through the portrayals of Jesus’ genealogy, conception, and birth in chapter 1, identifies who he is and his mission on earth.

1.3. Implication of Matthew 2.1-12

The genitive absolute plus ἰδοὺ pattern in 2.1 (Τοῦ δὲ Ἰησοῦ γεννηθέντος ἐν Βηθλέεμ τῆς Ἰουδαίας ... ἰδοὺ μάγοι) indicates the beginning of a new unit. After the introduction of Jesus in macroscopic and microscopic ways in chapter 1, Matthew now portrays his early years in chapter 2 with his geographical movements. The exodus is a dominant overarching motif of the narrative.⁶³³ Its episodes parallel those in the opening chapters of Exodus: e.g. King Herod’s massacre of babies (2.16; cf. Exod 1.22), Jesus’ flight owing to the threat by Herod (2.13-14; cf. Exod 2.15), and Jesus’ return at the death of Herod (2.19-21; cf. Exod 4.19-20). There appear a number of textual parallels between the two narratives. ἐζήτει ἀνελεῖ (Exod 2.15)/ζητεῖν ... ἀπολέσαι (2.13), ἀνεχώρησεν (Exod 2.15; 2.14), ἐτελεύτησεν ὁ βασιλεὺς Αἰγύπτου (Exod 2.23)/Τελευτήσαντος δὲ τοῦ Ἡρώδου (2.19),

⁶³⁰ Nolland, *Matthew*, 98; cf. Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 105.

⁶³¹ France, *Matthew*, 53.

⁶³² France, *Matthew*, 53.

⁶³³ W. D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount*, (BJS 186; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1989), 82-84; Brown, *Birth of The Messiah*, 586; Harrington, *Matthew*, 46; Dale C. Allison, *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); Keener, *Matthew*, 107.

and τεθνήκασιν γὰρ πάντες οἱ ζητοῦντές σου τὴν ψυχὴν (Exod 4.19)/τεθνήκασιν γὰρ οἱ ζητοῦντες τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ παιδίου (2.20). Jewish literary sources on Exod 1.15 contemporary with the composition of Matthew (e.g. Josephus, *Ant.* 2.205-237, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*) expanded the Exodus material concerning Moses. They narrated that Pharaoh had been forewarned of a newborn Hebrew who was a threat to his kingdom either by scribes or through a dream, and this possibility filled him and all Egypt with terror.⁶³⁴ The pericope of 2.1-12 represents the Matthean parallel to this narrative. Bourke states, “the magi’s seeking out the King of the Jews and offering him their gifts has nothing to do with either the Moses or the Israel typology. But in the text as we now have it, their questionings (2.2) are the point of departure of the entire flight and massacre complex.”⁶³⁵ The so-called magi’s “prophetic warning”⁶³⁶ and the following episodes in this pericope serve to authenticate Jesus’ divine identity:

1. The magi’s interpretation of the astral event affirms that Jesus came as the kingly messiah (v2).
2. The OT quotation by the Jewish leadership further validates his identity (v5-6).
3. The magi’s homage to Jesus signifies that he is more than a human messiah (v11).

The membership of the people of God (τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ, 1.21) is also expounded on in this pericope through the contrasting portrayals between the Gentile magi and the Jewish leadership.

1.3.1. The Magi’s Interpretation of the Celestial Phenomenon

The observation of the celestial phenomenon and its interpretation as a herald of the birth of a king has led the magi to visit Jerusalem. Their inquiry after the new-born king of the Jews publicly announces the arrival of a long-awaited messiah. The word μάγοι originally referred to the exclusive members of a priestly caste of the Medes and Persians (Zoroastrians), who had special powers in interpreting dreams:

Furthermore, since they cannot always be ruled by kings who are philosophers, the most powerful nations have publicly appointed philosophers as superintendents and officers

⁶³⁴ Schlatter, *Der Evangelist Matthäus: seine Sprache, seine Ziel, seine Selbstständigkeit: ein Kommentar zum ersten Evangelium*, 32-37; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.192-94; Kennedy, *The Recapitulation of Israel*, 113-21; M. Bourke, "The Literary Genius of Matthew 1-2," *CBQ* 22 (1960): 161-64.

⁶³⁵ Bourke, "The Literary Genius of Matthew 1-2," 172.

⁶³⁶ Cf. R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Academie Books, 1989), 188.

for their kings. Thus the Persians, methinks, appointed those whom they call Magi, because they were acquainted with Nature and understood how the gods should be worshipped; the Egyptians appointed the priests who had the same knowledge as the Magi, devoting themselves to the service of the gods and knowing the how and the wherefore of everything; ... as a result of which they know the future better than all other men know their immediate present... (Dio Chrys., *Or.* 49.7)

Astyages asked the Magi - who'd interpreted his vine dream - if Cyrus was yet a threat. They thought he could safely be sent to parents. (Herodotus, *Hist.* 1.120)

Its meaning then expanded to embrace a variety of people who possessed superior knowledge and ability, including astrologers, soothsayers, and oriental sages in general.⁶³⁷ It is also used as a label for all sorcerers and magicians and even for quacks, deceivers, and seducers.⁶³⁸ In Jewish Midrash, the sorcerers in Pharaoh's court were identified as magi.⁶³⁹ The Matthean magi's manner of speaking in the text, such as, "observed", "his star", and "at its rising", shows that they were professional astrologers.

From the magi's association with magic, astrology, and sorcery, there has been an attempt to view them in a negative sense. It is claimed that the use of μάγος elsewhere in the NT is always disapproving (Acts 13.6, 8; cf. 8.9, 11).⁶⁴⁰ In the same manner, the appearance of the magi is maintained to represent the Matthean apologetic against false magic and astrology.⁶⁴¹ While admitting the magi's futuristic knowledge through the observation of star movements, the church fathers, such as Origen, Ignatius, and Tertullian, asserted that the magi's power was magical and was lost or abandoned when they found Christ or were converted.⁶⁴² Mann has even argued that the magi were Babylonian Jews who practised black magic.⁶⁴³ However, these arguments are barely plausible. There is hardly any hint of criticism against the magi or mention of them losing their powers in the text. Moreover, it would seem unlikely that Jews, if the magi were Jews, would ask for the location of the "king of the Jews". Hagner states, 'the whole tenor of the passage, and not simply the designation "magi," suggests non-Israelites.'⁶⁴⁴ Contrary to these claims, the Matthean magi

⁶³⁷ Josephus, *Ant.* 10.195, 216; cf. A. D. Nock, "Paul and the Magus," in *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World*, (ed. Arthur Darby Nock and Zeph Stewart; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 1.308-24.

⁶³⁸ Dan 2.2, 10 LXX; T. Reub. 4.9; Philo, *Spec. leg.* 3.93; Sophocles, *OT* 387; Plato, *Rep.* 572e; cf. Beck, "Thus Spake Not Zarathustra," 511-21.

⁶³⁹ Cf. *b Sanh* 101a, *Exod Rab* 1.18 (on Exod 1.22). Philo identifies Pharaoh's counsellors as magi (*Mos* 1.16.92).

⁶⁴⁰ Cf. *Didache* 2.2

⁶⁴¹ E.g. W. K. Lowther Clarke, *Divine Humanity*, (London: SPCK, 1936), 41-51; C. S. Mann, "Epiphany - Wise Men or Charlatans?," *Theology* 61 (1958): 496.

⁶⁴² Ignatius, *Letter to the Ephesians* 19.1-3; Tertullian, *On Idolatry* 9.4ff; Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.60.

⁶⁴³ Mann, "Epiphany," 496; Albright and Mann, *Matthew*, 12; Mark Allan Powell, *Chasing the Eastern Star: Adventures in Biblical Reader-Response Criticism*, (1st ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 4-13.

⁶⁴⁴ Hagner, *Matthew*, 1.27.

are portrayed as honourable characters throughout the pericope; they could discern the divine signs (v2b), willingly follow to offer gifts and worship to Jesus (v11), and are guided by a divine warning (v12). There is no hint of doubt or hesitation on Matthew's part in accepting the magi's interpretation. In addition, the introduction of μάγοι after the attention-arousing word ἰδοῦ associates their role with that of ἄγγελος κυρίου in the other units of the infancy narrative (1.20; 2.13, 19). In this manner, they could function as a channel of divine revelation.⁶⁴⁵ This suggests that Matthew does not disapprove the magi's astrological practice.

The magi's query ποῦ denotes that they were not unsure but certain about the birth of the king of the Jews. As Nolland remarks, the title "King of the Jews" is presumably meant to be an imprecise messianic designation on the lips of the Magi, of a kind that might be appropriate on the lips of non-Jews" (cf. 27.11, 29, 37).⁶⁴⁶ Though in the form of a question, the inquiry is effectively an assertion. Herod's reactions, viz. the inquiries of the birthplace of ὁ χριστός (v4) and of the exact time of the appearance of the star (v7) and the slaughter of the male children (v16) demonstrate that he embraced the magi's prophetic warning from their messianic interpretation of the celestial phenomenon. The expression ἐταράχθη (v3) suggests that all Jerusalem also acknowledged the magi's interpretation as authentic. The magi's inquiry of the "newborn" king of the Jews recalls the birth of Jesus in v1. Albeit there

⁶⁴⁵ With the description of the magi ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν,⁶⁴⁵ three different locations have been suggested as their origin (cf. Brown, *Birth of The Messiah*, 168-70; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.228).⁶⁴⁵

- (1) Persia, from the fact that the term μάγοι was originated from the Medes and Persian. The Persian costume of the magi in the early Christian art is thought to reflect this idea (cf. J. C. Marsh-Edwards, "The Magi in Tradition and Art," *IER* 85 (1956): 1-19).
- (2) Babylon, from the magi's practice of astral interpretation Babylon is assumed, since the Babylonians or Chaldeans were known for their well-developed astronomy and astrology. That a number of Jews had remained in Babylonia after the exile may suggest that Babylonians learned about Jewish messianic expectations and connected a star with him. It is in the description of the Babylonian court where the μάγοι appears most frequently in the OT (e.g. Dan 1.20; 2.2; 4.4; 5.7).
- (3) Arabia, from the magi's gifts of gold and frankincense (v11), for those gifts are mentioned in association with Median (northwest Arabia) and Sheba (Southwest Arabia) in Ps 72.15 and Isa 60.6. That four of the Arabian tribes took their names from stars illustrates that the Arabians were also well aware of astronomy (E. F. F. Bishop, "Some Reflections on Justin Martyr and the Nativity Narratives," *EQ* 39 (1967): 38).⁶⁴⁵

However, with such limited data but only ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν it is hardly possible to pinpoint one place as their origin. Though 2.11 may allude to Isa 60.6, the text does not provide any corroboration, such as a fulfilment quotation in v6. The absence of further description on their origin may indicate that it was of no importance in the pericope. Brown suggests, the phrase 'may be a borrowing which designates no precise locality' (Brown, *Birth of The Messiah*, 168).

⁶⁴⁶ Nolland, *Matthew*, 109.

is no explicit connection of Jesus with the newborn king, the context clearly alludes to it. Jesus is declared to hold a messianic kingship.

The reaction of all Jerusalem to the heavenly announcement contrasts with that of the Gentile magi. The word *ταράσσω* in 2.3 appears one other time in Matthew in 14.26, again in the passive form (*ἐταράχθησαν*; cf. Mk 6.50; Lk 1.12). In both occasions together with those in the synoptic gospels, the sense is more than “startled” and closer to “disturbed” or “unsettled”. Herod’s reaction could correspond to that of Pharaoh who “feared” when he learned of Moses’ birth (Josephus, *Ant.* 2.206). So too could have been that of all Jerusalem. This report that it was disturbing to them, not thrilling,⁶⁴⁷ points to their unwillingness to acknowledge their king. Known as “the holy city” (4.5; 27.53) and called the “city of David” (2 Sam 5.7, 9; 6.10, 12, 16; 2 Kgs 9.28; 12.22), Jerusalem was the centre of Jewish life and the stronghold of Jewish leadership. However, Jerusalem in Matthew is continuously united “in diametrical opposition to the born-king of the Jews” (15.1; 16.21; 20.17-18; 21.1, 10; 23.37; cf. 27.25).⁶⁴⁸ As Davies and Allison state, “it represents corrupt political power and corrupt political authority.”⁶⁴⁹ These conflicting attitudes of the Gentile magi and Jerusalem towards the heavenly revelation assist the reader in understanding the true identity of “his people” (*τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ*, 1.21).

1.3.2. The Validation by the Scriptural Justification

The advent of the messiah, revealed by the celestial phenomenon and interpreted by the magi, is first validated by the scriptural justification in v6. The formula quotation, which is the combination of Mic 5.2 and 2 Sam 5.2 (or 1 Chr 11.2),⁶⁵⁰ further associates Jesus with the kingly messiah. Bethlehem was the ancestral town of David, the land of Judah, where he was brought up and anointed as king of Israel by Samuel (1 Sam 16.1-13; 17.12, 15; 20.6, 28). The birth of the messiah *ἐν Βηθλέεμ* signifies the launch of God’s work for his people. The replacement of Ephrathah with *γῆ Ἰούδα* demonstrates the messiah’s connection with

⁶⁴⁷ Concerning the reaction of the populace of Jerusalem, there has been a claim that the word *ἐταράχθη* carries another meaning for the *πᾶσα Ἱεροσόλυμα*. Beare argues that it expresses the Jewish excitement over the long-awaited coming of the Christ (Beare, *Matthew*, 77). Carson maintains that it refers to their fear of Herod’s reaction that the magi’s news would provoke (Carson, “Matthew,” 86). However, it is less than satisfactory “to resolve this puzzle by giving *ἐταράχθη* a double sense; negative in the case of Herod, but pointing to the unrest of eager anticipation of the people of Jerusalem,” as Nolland states (Nolland, *Matthew*, 112). The text gives no suggestion of such a reading.

⁶⁴⁸ David L. Turner, *Matthew*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 81.

⁶⁴⁹ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.238.

⁶⁵⁰ For a detailed analysis of the citation, see Brown, *Birth of The Messiah*, 184-88; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.242-44; Nolland, *Matthew*, 114-15.

the tribe of Judah from which the Davidic messiah was expected to come (cf. 1.2; Rev 5.5; Gen 49.9-10 LXX).⁶⁵¹ The final line elaborates the messiah's role as a ruler; he will shepherd Israel the people of God. Jesus' birth ἐν Βηθλέεμ τῆς Ἰουδαίας (v1), which is identical to the answer of the Jewish leaders in v5, and his Davidic lineage demonstrates his close association with the messiah. The identity of Jesus as the Davidic messiah is established by means of the scriptural justification.

The depiction of the Jewish leadership in this pericope illustrates a revised implication of "my people Israel". While the Gentile magi are portrayed as passionate about the divine revelation from heaven, there is no indication of any response on the part of the Jewish authorities to the appearance of the star. Yet, regardless of this, the reference to the reaction of "all" Jerusalem in v3, which includes the Jewish leadership, reveals their unwillingness to accept it. Besides, albeit able to acknowledge the scriptural quotation and its correct interpretation, there is no indication that the Jewish leaders brought themselves to obedience by the celestial revelation of the advent of the messiah. According to Brown, the verb συναγω in v4 frequently appears "in Matthew's passion narrative to describe the assembling of Jesus' enemies against him, especially the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders (26.3, 57; 27.17, 27, 62)."⁶⁵² Their silence and inactivity in the face of Herod's conspiracy to eliminate Jesus and its execution (v7-8; cf. 2.16) may illustrate their alliance with Herod. Like in the case of Jerusalem, Matthew presents who would truly belong to "his people" (τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ, 1.21).

1.3.3. The Magi's Witness to Jesus

What has been revealed, interpreted, and validated is now finally witnessed in person. The identity of Jesus as the messiah is authenticated by the magi's homage to him. That the magi προσκυνῆσαι αὐτῷ with gifts (v11) represents an appropriate gesture of respect before a king. It is reported in several places in the OT. Ps 72.10-11 speaks of the kings from different nations offering gifts to the king, all kings falling down before him, and all nations serving him. Isaiah 60.1-6 foretells all nations and kings coming to the light with their wealth. V11 explicitly mentions the gifts of gold and frankincense (cf. Rev 21.23-26).

⁶⁵¹ Nolland, *Matthew*, 114.

⁶⁵² Brown, *Birth of The Messiah*, 174-75.

Psalms of Solomon 17.31 also refers to the heathen nations coming from the ends of the earth with gifts in hand to see the glory of the son of David.⁶⁵³

This word προσκυνέω, however, is frequently used in association with veneration and worship of the god(s) in the LXX.⁶⁵⁴ Its usages in Matthew appear to suggest its implication in this pericope as more than a simple homage paid to a king. Its almost exclusive uses for Jesus unlike other synoptic gospels (14.33; 28.9, 17; 8.2; 9.18; 15.25; 20.20),⁶⁵⁵ its combination with ἔρχομαι in v2, 8, 11, which denotes a cultic action in the LXX,⁶⁵⁶ and its association with πεσόντες, which is considered proper only in the worship of God in Judaism,⁶⁵⁷ suggest that the magi's homage could convey the idea of worship of divinity. According to Greevan, "Even where προσκυνεῖν seems to be no more than a gesture of gratitude or affectionate regard, there is always expressed in the act a recognition that the one thus honoured is God's instrument."⁶⁵⁸ Nolland remarks that προσκυνεῖν in Matthew, even where it is not used for religious worship towards Jesus, "is [still] used repeatedly ... in a manner which seems designed to blur, in the case of response to Jesus, the distinction between deferential respect and religious worship."⁶⁵⁹ Then, its usage in v11 could be viewed as intended to communicate the same ambiguity. The pericope may suggest that, even if the magi themselves thought that they paid homage to the king of the Jews, what they have done was in fact "worship" Ἐμμανουήλ, the son of God, in its proper sense.⁶⁶⁰ The magi's worship of Jesus authenticates his identity as the kingly messiah to be honoured. The Matthean readership could discern from this scene of devotion and adoration, that Jesus was more than a son of David, the king of the Jews; he was the manifestation of Ἐμμανουήλ, the son of God, the one to be worshipped.

⁶⁵³ Cf. Brown, *Birth of The Messiah*, 187-88; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.249-50; Hagner, *Matthew*, 1.31.

⁶⁵⁴ Almost three-quarters of its usages in the LXX are connected to the true God (Gen. 22.5; 24.26, 48, 52; Ex 4.31; 24.1; Deut 26.10; Ps. 5.7; 29.2 etc.) and to false gods (Ex 20.5; 23.24; 34.14; Deut 4.19; 1 Kg 22.54; 2 Kgs 5.18; Isa 2.8; 44.17 etc.).

⁶⁵⁵ In Mark, it appears two times to show deferential respect to Jesus (5.6; 15.19). In Luke, it appears three times for worship (4.7, 8) and for Jesus as its object only after the resurrection (24.52).

⁶⁵⁶ Cf. Unabridged Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Logos Research Systems, Oak Harbor, WA.

⁶⁵⁷ Cf. Philo, *Leg. Gai.* 116; *De decal.* 64; Mt 4.9-10; Acts 10.25-26; Rev 19.10; 22.8-9.

⁶⁵⁸ Unabridged Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. E.g. David three times before Jonathan, 1 Sam 20.41; David before Solomon's ministers, 1 kgs 1.47; Solomon before Bathsheba, 1 Kgs 2.19; Moses before Jethro, Exod 18.7.

⁶⁵⁹ Nolland, *Matthew*, 111.

⁶⁶⁰ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.236-37; Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 114; Keener, *Matthew*, 105; Turner, *Matthew*, 81.

1.4. *Significance of the Celestial Phenomenon in Matthew 2.1-12*

Perusal of 2.1-12 reveals that in the midst of both the announcement of Jesus' identity and the clarification of the membership of the people of God is located the star of Bethlehem. Not only does its presence initiate the episode, it is effective in accomplishing the two tasks in the pericope. This section considers the significance of the use of the motif of celestial phenomena in 2.1-12 through the examination of its background and meaning. Divided into two parts, it will begin with looking into the meaning of the astral event in association with the contemporary astrological interpretation. In doing so, it will first survey the general view on the appearance of an atypical star in the Greco-Roman world. Next, it will analyse the astronomical occurrences around the time of Jesus' birth that can be identified with the Matthean astral event and their astrological implications. Then, it will explore the implication of the celestial phenomenon in 2.1-12 in association with Jewish background. The constant connection of Jesus' birth with the OT references fosters this approach: e.g. "son of Abraham", "son of David", OT genealogy, the recurrent formula citations of the OT, and the stories of the patriarch Joseph, who went to Egypt, and of Moses, who was delivered from Pharaoh's massacre. This investigation will show that Matthew employed the widespread interpretation of Balaam's prophecy of the star so as to corroborate the birth of Jesus as the arrival of a Davidic messiah, the fulfilment of the OT prophecy.

1.4.1. *Astrological Interpretation of the Star of Bethlehem*

General View on the Appearance of a Star in the Greco-Roman World

It was a common view in the Greco-Roman world to regard the appearance of a special star in heaven as a signal of an important affair on the world. A number of astral events are reported in association with such occasions. Virgil writes that Aeneas was guided by a star to the place where Rome should be founded (*Aen.* 2.694). The appearance of a star, especially a comet, was assumed to signify disaster for the ruler or the country. According to Suetonius, when a comet appeared several nights in succession, Nero was deeply alarmed (*Nero* 36). Tacitus reports, "the general belief is that a comet means a change of emperor. So when a brilliant comet appeared, people speculated on Nero's successor as though he were already dethroned" (*Ann.* 14.22). It was said that a terrified Nero fulfilled the portent by executing many notable Romans. In like manner, Josephus mentions the appearances of a comet over Jerusalem for a year at the time of the fall of the city (*War* 6.3.289).

Yet, most of the reports were connected to the births of royal figures. Suetonius speaks of the legend that the Romans were warned by an astral portent some months before the birth of Augustus in 63 BC that a king would soon rule over them. This so frightened the republican senate in that it issued a law forbidding the rearing of any male child for at least a year (*Aug.* 94). The births of Mithridates IV Eupator of Pontus and of Alexander Severus were also thought to have been accompanied by the appearance of a star of great magnitude (*Scrip. Hist. Aug. Alex. Sev.* 13.5; Justin, *Ep.* 37.2). When the emperor Commodus was born, equal horoscopes were forecasted for him and his brother, and certain celestial signs were associated with his reign (*Scrip. Hist. Aug. Comm.* 1.3; 15.1). On coins of Alexander, of the Diadochi, of Caesar, of Augustus, of Alexander Jannaeus, and of Herod appears a star as the symbol of the king.⁶⁶¹ When Alexander Jannaeus minted coins bearing a star (with eight rays or six points, with or without a circle), he laid claim on his sovereignty's divine election made visible by the heavenly sign. This astrological sign for the birth of a great man was also remarked upon in the Jewish sources. In the late *Sefer ha-Yashar*, a new star, which appeared in the night after Abraham's birth, was taken by astrologers to announce such a birth (ch 8). Eusebius states, "in the case of ... remarkable and famous men we know that strange stars have appeared, what some call comets, or meteors, or tails of fire, or similar phenomena that are seen in the connection with great or unusual events" (*Dem. ev.* 9.1). As Pliny the Elder remarks, it was a popular belief that the birth of an important person is always specified by the appearance of a new, bright star (*Nat. hist.* 2.28).⁶⁶² The expression αὐτοῦ τὸν ἀστέρα in 2.2 reflects the fact that Matthew is thinking of such a popular astrological assumption.

Possible Identity of the Star of Bethlehem and Its Astrological Significance

Since the time of Kepler in the seventeenth century, there have been careful astronomical searches for atypical celestial phenomena that might be regarded as a sign for Jesus' birth before the time of his birth, that is to say between 14 BC and 4 BC. Various suggestions have been proposed. Yet, there has been a widespread hesitancy to view the celestial phenomenon in Matthew 2 as an actual event in history. G. Bornkamm writes, "The birth narratives in Matthew and Luke are too much overgrown by legends to be used for historical

⁶⁶¹ Cf. Max Kähler, "'Wir haben seinen Stern gesehen ...' (Mt 2,2)," *BiKi* 44 (1989): 179-86.

⁶⁶² It was also widely accepted that the births and deaths of great men were marked by heavenly signs. It was even assumed that a bright star appears for the rich, a small one for the poor, and the stars fade out with their deaths. Cf. *Midr. Ps.* on 148.3. "every righteous man has his star and it shines according to the brightness of his deeds."

assertions.”⁶⁶³ Referring to the biblical infancy stories, Hans Küng also says, “It is admitted, even by Catholic scholars, that these stories are a collection of largely uncertain, mutually contradictory, strongly legendary, and ultimately theologically motivated narratives.”⁶⁶⁴ Nicklas asserts, “the claim of the text to tell the truth lies beyond the level of historical correctness.”⁶⁶⁵ This argument may be valid in that there may have not been the appearance of a star to herald the birth of Jesus. However, Hagner argues, “there is no insuperable reason why we must deny that the tradition used by Matthew is historical at its core.”⁶⁶⁶ As Brown states, “subsequent Christian believers in retrospect may have *fastened on a remembered phenomenon as a sign of Jesus’ birth.*”⁶⁶⁷ It is worthwhile, therefore, to explore the identity of the Star of Bethlehem. There have been three major suggestions proposed.⁶⁶⁸

First, there has been a claim that the star refers to a nova or supernova, a nuclear outburst in the atmosphere of the white dwarf, a stellar remnant at the endpoint of stellar evolution.⁶⁶⁹ This explosion gives out a great amount of light for a few weeks or months, which can be sometimes observable even in the daytime (e.g. the stars of 1918 in the constellation of Aquila and 1901 in Perseus). The sequence of a supernova is much larger in scale than a nova. At the peak of the outburst the luminosity may be 4000 million times more than that of our Sun (e.g. the stars of 1006 in Lupus, of 1054 in Taurus, of 1572 and 164, etc.). Such unusual brightness of a star could have easily drawn attention of the magi. It is recorded that there was a probable supernova around 185 CE in the southern constellation of Centaurus.⁶⁷⁰ Chinese astronomers recorded a nova in 5-4 BC, which was visible for seventy days.

However, this theory emerges as less than likely. The appearance of a supernova in 185 CE is much too late to be considered. The star in the Chinese record in 5-4 BC is hard to be classified as a nova or supernova. According to Moore, the star in 5-4 BC could be identified with DO Aquilae appeared in the constellation of Aquila. Yet, he argues that it was “not the

⁶⁶³ Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 53.

⁶⁶⁴ Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian*, (London: HarperCollins, 1976), 451.

⁶⁶⁵ Tobias Nicklas, "Balaam and the Star of the Magi," in *The Prestige of the Pagan Prophet Balaam in Judaism, Early Christianity and Islam*, (ed. Geurt Hendrik van Kooten and J. van Ruiten; TBN 11; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 234.

⁶⁶⁶ Hagner, *Matthew*, 1.25.

⁶⁶⁷ Brown, *Birth of The Messiah*, 171.

⁶⁶⁸ For claims for a comet, see Brown, *Birth of The Messiah*, 171-73; Colin J. Humphreys, "The Star of Bethlehem, A Comet in 5 BC and the Date of Christ's Birth," *TynBul* 43 (1992): 31-56; for arguments for a planetary conjunction, see Mark R. Kidger, *The Star of Bethlehem: An Astronomer's View*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Michael R. Molnar, *The Star of Bethlehem: The Legacy of the Magi*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999); for a contention for a supernova, see Robert S. McIvor, "The Star of Messiah," *IBS* 24 (2002): 175-83.

⁶⁶⁹ Cf. McIvor, "The Star of Messiah," 175-83.

⁶⁷⁰ Patrick Moore, *The Star of Bethlehem*, (Bath: Canopus Publishing, 2001), 78.

sort of star to suffer an outburst major enough to make it a conspicuous naked-eye object. If it had behaved in this way, the after-effects would be traceable even now, probably at radio wavelengths, but nothing of the kind has been found. There is absolutely no chance that DO Aquilae was a supernova.”⁶⁷¹

Second, a comet is suggested as the probable star of Bethlehem.⁶⁷² Comets move around the Sun in regular but elliptical paths. When they come close to the sun and to the earth, they carry a striking luminous tail of gasses and dust. A moving comet with a brilliant tail could have offered good guidance leading to the discovery of the newborn king. While most comets are too faint to be seen, Halley’s comet is bright enough to be observed. It occurs every seventy-five to seventy-six years. From its appearance recorded in 240 BC in Europe, China, and Japan, it is calculated that it appeared in 12-11 BC.⁶⁷³ The Chinese text *Han shu* recorded an appearance of a comet in 5-4 BC. Origen argued for this view:

We think that the star which appeared in the east was a new star and not like any of the ordinary ones, neither of those in the fixed sphere nor of those in the lower spheres, but it is to be classed with the comets which occasionally occur, or meteors, or bearded or jar-shaped stars, or any other such name by which the Greeks may like to describe their different forms.⁶⁷⁴

The unique, brilliant, and mobile characteristics of a comet may match the Matthean description of an astral event. Besides, considering its appearance in 12-11 BC, which would have occurred in the zodiacal region of Gemini with its head towards Leo, its astrological interpretation as the arrival of a king corresponds well with the narrative. Leo was the astrological sign of royalty.⁶⁷⁵ Its brightest star known as Regulus represented “little king”. Moreover, its association with “lion” in Jewish background may well suggest the astral event in Leo as the arrival of the Christ. According to Boll, the “four living creatures” in the vision of the divine throne chariot in Ezekiel (1.5-14; cf. Rev 4.6b-7), which have the faces of a human being, lion, ox, and eagle (Ezek 1.10; cf. 10.14), correspond to four heavenly constellations. The “lion” is argued to correspond to the constellation of Leo.⁶⁷⁶ As discussed

⁶⁷¹ Moore, *Star of Bethlehem*, 81; cf. Humphreys, "Star of Bethlehem," 31-56.

⁶⁷² Humphreys, "Star of Bethlehem," 31-56.

⁶⁷³ According to Brown, Pere Lagrange, who was living in Jerusalem at the time, saw it come from the East, fade while it was overhead, and then “reappear” several days later as it set in the West (Brown, *Birth of The Messiah*, 171).

⁶⁷⁴ Origen *Against Celsus* 1.58.

⁶⁷⁵ Cf. Bouché-Leclercq, *L'astrologie Grecque*, 139, 438-39.

⁶⁷⁶ Franz Boll, *Aus der Offenbarung Johannis: Hellenistische Studien zum Weltbild der Apokalypse*, (Berlin: Teubner, 1914), 20-23; R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, (ICC; New York: Scribner, 1920), 1.122-23; Austin Marsden Farrer, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 91-92.

in chapter 3, twelve signs of the zodiac could have been envisioned as symbolic of the twelve sons of Jacob and the twelve tribes of Israel in Early Judaism.⁶⁷⁷ This association of Leo with a lion may refer in turn to “Judah” as indicated in Jacob’s blessing on Judah in Gen 49.9-10:

Judah is a lion's whelp; ...
He couches, he lies down as a lion,
And as a lion, who dares rouse him up?
The sceptre shall not depart from Judah,
Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes,
And to him *shall be* the obedience of the peoples.

The identification of Jesus as ὁ λέων ὁ ἐκ τῆς φυλῆς Ἰούδα, ἡ ῥίζα Δαυίδ (Rev 5.5; cf. Rev 22.16) may disclose the Jewish assumption of Leo as a sign of the zodiac that is directly identified with Christ.

Yet, despite this possibility, Halley’s comet seems too inadequate to be identified as the star of Bethlehem. Its appearance in 12-11 BC may still be too early to signify the birth of Jesus. Furthermore, comets were usually regarded as a sign of catastrophe as mentioned above. Hence, it would be odd to interpret its appearance as a sign of the birth of the Messiah.

Third, it is argued that the astronomical phenomenon should be seen as a planetary conjunction.⁶⁷⁸ Planets move around the sun according to their orbital speeds. There are times when two or more planets lie in much the same direction as seen from the earth, and so appear side by side in the sky. This conjunction may stand out among other stars. According to Kepler’s calculation, there was the so-called “great conjunction” of Jupiter and Saturn in the zodiacal constellation of Pisces in 7 BC. According to Moore,⁶⁷⁹ they were together on 27 May 7 BC. Then, they moved apart to approach each other again on 6 October. Another separation and a final approach took place on 7 December. This gathering and separating processes may have appeared as guidance to the magi. This outstanding phenomenon was accompanied by two other extraordinary occurrences. During and shortly after the event in 7 BC, Mars passed the conjunction. It all took place in the last decade of Pisces, exactly on the vernal equinox. This remarkable zodiacal place that the planets gathered at in those years made the conjunction even more outstanding.⁶⁸⁰ This rare heavenly spectacle must have been extraordinary enough to catch the attention of any astronomer.

⁶⁷⁷ Cf. Philo, *Quaes. Gen.* 4.164; *Quaes. Exod.* 2.75-78, 109, 112-14; *Som.* 1.214; *Quis her.* 176; *Praem. poen.* 65; Josephus, *War* 5.5.5.

⁶⁷⁸ Cf. Kidger, *Star of Bethlehem*; Molnar, *Star of Bethlehem*.

⁶⁷⁹ Moore, *Star of Bethlehem*, 42-43.

⁶⁸⁰ The precession of the equinoxes was well researched since the discovery of Hipparchus in 2nd century BC. Cf. August Strobel, "Weltenjahr, große Konjunktion und Messiasstern. Ein

However, Moore has argued that this theory is hardly tenable. First, the conjunction was not spectacular at all because of its low magnitude. According to him, while “Jupiter is always brilliant, but Saturn was more or less at its faintest, with a magnitude of +0.5, slightly inferior to the star Procyon in Canis Minor (the Little Dog) and the two whole magnitudes fainter than Sirius.”⁶⁸¹ Second, the minimum distance between the two planets, which was never much less than one degree, does not fit Matthew’s description of “a” star. They were a pair of stars.⁶⁸² However, Moore’s arguments seem doubtful. As to his first point, the pericope says nothing definite about the brightness of the star. As for his contention, the one-degree distance between the planets would not make a huge difference to the naked eye. The stars could have appeared as a single object. Considering all these possibilities, the Matthean star of Bethlehem in 2.1-12 emerges most likely to be the planetary conjunction in 7 BC.

In ancient cosmological thinking, the cycles of Jupiter and Saturn were exceptionally important. The rare triple conjunctions always raised substantial speculations.⁶⁸³ Jupiter, the royal planet, was usually connected with kingship and royalty, while Saturn, being the seventh star and thus signalling the Sabbath, was ascribed to the Jewish people. The latter was also regarded as representing the “westland”, i.e. Palestine. The constellation of Pisces was associated with the last days. Accordingly, this great conjunction implied the arrival of the ruler of the last days among the Jewish people or in Palestine.⁶⁸⁴ It signified the divine election and predetermination of the coming king.

Although the examination of the above theories suggests that the great planetary conjunction in 7 BC best matches the astral event in 2.1-12, yet, it cannot be proved that Matthew is referring to this particular celestial phenomenon in the pericope. Assuming that Matthew adopted the astronomical event that took place in the general time period of Jesus’ birth and reinterpreted it in association with his birth, the appearance of a comet still could be the one that Matthew may have selected. In either case, the message that Matthew seeks to deliver through the celestial motif in 2.1-12 remains the same. The identity of Jesus as a sovereign messiah is universally authenticated by means of a divine revelation from God in heaven.

themageschichtlicher Überblick," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt Band 20/2*, (ed. Wolfgang Haase and Hildegard Temporini; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1987), 1051.

⁶⁸¹ Moore, *Star of Bethlehem*, 43.

⁶⁸² Moore, *Star of Bethlehem*, 45.

⁶⁸³ Cf. Strobel, "Weltenjahr, große Konjunktion und Messiasstern," 988-1187.

⁶⁸⁴ Ethelbert Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story*, (London: SCM, 1960), 36-38; R. A. Rosenberg, "The 'Star of the Messiah' Reconsidered," *Biblica* 53 (1972): 105-9.

1.4.2. The Star of Bethlehem in Association with Jewish Background

There have been various proposals concerning the background of 2.1-12: e.g. Balaam's oracle in Numbers 22-24, the story of the Queen of Sheba (1 Kgs 10.1-10; cf. Ps 72.10-11 15; Isa 60.5-6), the birth account of Abraham in later Jewish legend, and the Jewish midrashic tradition about Moses' infancy.⁶⁸⁵ With reference to the motif of celestial phenomenon, many scholars have suggested that the pericope is a Matthean allusion to Balaam's oracle in Numbers 22-24.⁶⁸⁶ The rising of a star in 2.2 is argued to correspond to Balaam's astral prophecy in Numbers 24.17; "A star shall come out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel." According to these scholars, the two narratives display a measure of parallelism:

1. Both Balaam and the Matthean magi are Gentiles who come from the east and go on a long journey westwards
... From Aram Balak has brought me, Moab's king from the mountains of the east (ἀπ' ἀνατολῶν) (Numbers 23.7 LXX)
... behold, magi from the east (μάγοι ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν) (Matthew 2.1)
2. Both are associated with divination (Num 22.7; cf. Num 23.23). They receive God's revelation in heaven and announce his plan to raise a ruler for his people. The words for a 'star' and its 'rise' appear in both texts.
A star shall come out of Jacob (ἀνατελεῖ ἄστρον ἐξ Ιακωβ) (Numbers 24.17 LXX)
... for we saw his star at its rising (γὰρ αὐτοῦ τὸν ἀστέρα ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ) (Matthew 2.2)
3. The accompanying authorities in the two narratives, king Herod and king Balak, represent God's opponents; both seek to destroy God's people.
4. Balaam resists the king Balak and blesses Israel, as the magi trick Herod and offer homage to Jesus.
5. At the end of the story, it is told that "Balaam went off to his home" (Num 24.25) and the magi "went away to their own country" (2.12).
6. In late Jewish sources Balaam is described as a magician.⁶⁸⁷

Just as Balaam's star prophecy was fulfilled by the emergence of the Davidic monarchy (2 Sam 8.1-14), it is maintained that the association of the astral event with the birth of Jesus, who is portrayed as the son of David in Matthew 1-2, represents the emergence of a Davidic Messiah. Concerning the theological significance of the pericope, the focus is more on the

⁶⁸⁵ Brown, *Birth of The Messiah*, 114-16, 542-43; Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 104 n20.

⁶⁸⁶ Brown, *Birth of The Messiah*, 190-96; Joachim Gnilka, *Das Matthäusevangelium*, (HTKNT 1; Freiburg: Herder, 1986), 1.37; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.233-36; Gundry, *Matthew*, 27; George Wesley Buchanan, *The Gospel of Matthew*, (MBCNTS 1; Lewiston: Mellen Biblical Press, 1996), 87; B. T. Viviano, "The Movement of the Star: Matt 2:9 and Num 9:17," *RB* 103 (1996): 58-64; France, *Matthew*, 62; Johan Leemans, "'To Bless With A Mouth Bent On Cursing': Patristic Interpretations on Balaam (Num 24:17) " in *The Prestige of the Pagan Prophet Balaam in Judaism, Early Christianity and Islam*, (ed. Geurt Hendrik van Kooten and J. van Ruiten; TBN 11; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 238 n27.

⁶⁸⁷ Cf. Philo *Vita Mos.* 1.276.

presentation of the magi in comparison with Balaam rather than the celestial phenomenon. Brown states, “the echoes of the Balaam story would remind the reader familiar with the Bible and Jewish midrashic tradition that already in the OT God had revealed His salvific intent to Gentiles. The presence of Gentile worshipers in Matthew’s community was not the result of a failure in God’s plan for Israel; it was the continuity and fulfilment of a plan of salvation for those from afar to be accomplished through the Messiah and Israel.”⁶⁸⁸

The messianic interpretation of Numbers 24.17 was widespread in Judaism before Jesus’ time.⁶⁸⁹ In the LXX, the sceptre is translated by ἄνθρωπος and in a version transmitted by Justin Martyr as ἡγούμενος, which becomes *dux* in the Latin translation of Irenaeus’ *Adversus Haereses*.⁶⁹⁰ All three targums specify that the star is a reference to a king:

Num 24.17 – *A king* will emanate from Jacob, and *the anointed one* will be consecrated from Israel. (Tg. Onk.)

Num 24.17 – *A king* is to arise from those of the house of Jacob, and *a redeemer and ruler* from those of the house of Israel. (Tg. Neo.)

Num 24.17 – When *the strong king* from those of the house of Jacob shall rule and *the Messiah and the strong rod* from Israel shall be anointed. (Tg. Ps.-J.)

A similar exegesis is found in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*:

Then the Lord will raise up a new priest, to whom all the words of the Lord will be revealed; and he will execute a true judgment upon the earth in the course of time. And *his star will arise* in heaven, *as a king*, lighting up the light of knowledges as by the sun of the day ... (T. Levi 18.3)

And after this there shall arise for you *a star from Jacob* in peace. and *a man* shall arise from my posterity like the sun of righteousness, walking with the sons of men in gentleness and righteousness, and in him will be found no sin. ... Then he will illumine *the sceptre of my kingdom*. (T. Jud. 24.1, 5)

This messianic interpretation is also found at Qumran (4Q175; 1QM 11.5-9; CD 7.18-21). 4Q175, the so-called *Testimonia*, takes a quotation on messianic figure from Num 24.15-17 (... A star shall come out of Jacob and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel; *he* shall crush the temples of Moab and destroy all the children of Sheth). One of the battle hymns of 1QM 11.5-9 quotes Numbers 24.17-19 (A star will depart from Jacob, a sceptre will be raised in Israel. It will smash the temples of Moab, it will destroy all the sons of Seth. It will come down from Jacob, it will exterminate the remnant of the city...). While the two words ‘the

⁶⁸⁸ Brown, *Birth of The Messiah*, 196.

⁶⁸⁹ Brown, *Birth of The Messiah*, 195.

⁶⁹⁰ Cf. K. J. Cathcart, "Numbers 24:17 in Ancient Translations and Interpretations," in *The Interpretation of the Bible: The International Symposium in Slovenia*, (ed. Jože Krašovec; JSOTSS 289; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 511-20.

star' and the 'sceptre' are applied to a single figure in both texts referring to a descendent of David who will rule as a victorious king in the eschatological era and the royal messiah who will lead the people in the final battle respectively,⁶⁹¹ in *CD* 7.18-21 they refer to two different messianic figures.⁶⁹²

And the star is *the interpreter of the law*, who will come to Damascus, as is written 'A star moves out of Jacob and a sceptre arises out of Israel.' The sceptre is *the prince of the whole congregation* and when he rises 'he will destroy all the sons of Seth'.

This illustrates that different messianic expectations were developed within the community. Yet, despite different applications of the two words in Numbers 24.17, it remains constant that the Qumran community shared the same idea of Israel's final salvation through a messianic figure or figures. These texts suggest that a messianic interpretation of Balaam's star prophecy was firmly imposed itself among the Jews in the Second Temple period.

This reading custom was unaffectedly carried on in the early church. The church fathers interpreted Numbers 24.17 as foreseeing the incarnation. Justin Martyr, in his *First Apology*, states:

Another prophet, Isaiah, expressing thoughts in a different language, spoke thus. 'A star shall rise out of Jacob, and a flower shall spring from the root of Jesse, and in His arm shall nations trust.' Indeed, a brilliant star has arisen, and a flower has sprung up from the root of Jesse - this is Christ.

In *Dialogue with Trypho*, he remarks that it is possible to identify Christ with the star (*Dial.* 106.4). He again writes that he (Christ) "was called Joseph and Judah and a star by Moses."⁶⁹³ The star prophecy ascribed to Isaiah and Moses apparently refers to Numbers 24.17. Origen also identifies the star as Christ:

But let us see what he [Balaam] says in what follows; 'I will show him, though not immediately; I will bless him and he is not nearby.' In other copies, however, one reads 'I will see him, though not immediately.' If the latter variant is to be accepted, one will find it easier to understand that it is Christ – about whom he says in what follows 'a star comes forth from Jacob and a man will rise from Israel' – that is Christ whom must be seen.⁶⁹⁴

⁶⁹¹ Cf. Leemans, "To Bless With A Mouth Bent On Cursing," 75-77.

⁶⁹² Raymond E. Brown, "J Starcky's Theory of Qumran Messianic Development," *CBQ* 28 (1966): 55-56.

⁶⁹³ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 126.1.

⁶⁹⁴ Origen *Homilies on Numbers* 18.4.

An explicit quotation of Numbers 24.17 is also found at Irenaeus of Lyon (*Haer.* 3.9.2). The prevalent messianic interpretation of Balaam's star prophecy in the Second Temple era suggests that the early Jewish Christians could have read the celestial phenomenon in Matthew 2 as a fulfilment of Numbers 24.17. Therefore, it would be highly plausible that Matthew, being aware of this widespread interpretation of Balaam's prophecy, employed the image of the star from Balaam's oracle so as to corroborate the birth of Jesus as the arrival of a Davidic messiah, the fulfilment of the OT prophecy.

1.5. Summary

This section looked into the first celestial phenomenon in the first gospel: the star of Bethlehem at the birth of Jesus in 2.1-12. Placed in the unique Matthean prologue of chapters 1 and 2, this astral event is argued to authenticate the identity of Jesus as the messianic king. Divided into four parts, this section first discussed briefly the nature and structure of the Matthean prologue. The narrative represents the evangelist's reworking of the pre-Matthean infancy traditions that sets up a profound theological statement prior to the main body of the gospel. In this manner, Matthew's prologue could function as the entire "gospel in miniature".⁶⁹⁵ It belongs to the literary genre of midrashic haggadah, which brings out 'the deeper meaning of the present by showing its theological continuity with the past'.⁶⁹⁶

The second section focused on exploring the theological significance of Matthew 1 in relation to Jesus' identity as "the son of David" and "the son of Abraham". The inauguration of Jesus' story with the name Abraham, the forefather of the nation Israel, in the genealogy in 1.1-17 reveals that the story of Jesus represents a theological recapitulation of the history of Israel. Concurring with Kennedy's approach, it is argued that the genealogy could be seen as a teleological narratological genealogy. On the one hand, as a teleological genealogy, it presents Israel's history as moving towards a goal, which is revealed in God's promises to Abraham. "The goal was to give a king, a ruler for God's people, to provide the leadership to fulfill Israel's call and mandate."⁶⁹⁷ Placed at the end of the genealogy, Jesus represents the final achievement of this goal. On the other hand, as a narratological genealogy, it presents Israel's history in three stages: from Abraham to David, from David to the exile, and from the exile to Christ. While the first stage signifies an ascent towards kingship and the fulfillment of the promise in King David, the second represents 'a tragic descent, a failure to

⁶⁹⁵ Brown, *Birth of The Messiah*, 8, 183, 232.

⁶⁹⁶ Hagner, *Matthew*, 1.2.

⁶⁹⁷ Kennedy, *The Recapitulation of Israel*, 100.

fulfill God's call for Israel'.⁶⁹⁸ The final stage reveals a new ascent. The coming of Jesus as the Christ announces the climax of Israel's history. It is also argued that Abraham as the forefather of the nation Israel is also promised by God to be the forebear of 'a multitude of nations' (Gen 17.4-5; cf. 44.19) and the one through whom 'all the peoples of the earth' are to be blessed (Gen 12.3; 18.18 etc.). The history of Israel discloses accommodation of non-Israelites (e.g. four non-Israelite heroic females). This intimates that Jesus' coming as the fulfilment of Israel's history is not only for the Jews but also for the whole world. While Matthew's genealogy introduces the person of Jesus, the following pericope of 1.18-25 further reveals his identity and mission on earth. He represents the presence of God in himself. He has come to save his people (τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ). Although "his people" in the context may denote Israel to whom he belongs, 'the universalistic implications of the title "son of Abraham" revealed in the genealogy conveys the idea that "his people" connotes "my church" in 16.18.⁶⁹⁹ Through the genealogy and the infancy story of Jesus in chapter 1, Matthew introduces his identity and defines his mission on earth.

The third section analysed the pericope of 2.1-12. Changing the scene of the narrative to the contemporary world of Jesus' inner circle, Matthew 2 portrays the geographical movements of the child Jesus. The episodes in the narrative point to the exodus as its dominant overarching motif: e.g. King Herod's massacre of babies (2.16; cf. Exod 1.22), Jesus' flight because of the threat by Herod (2.13-14; cf. Exod 2.15), and Jesus' return at the death of Herod (2.19-21; cf. Exod 4.19-20). The narrative of 2.1-12 resembles the prophetic warning to Pharaoh before the exodus in the contemporary Jewish expansion on Exodus 1.15 (e.g. Josephus, *Ant.* 2.205-237). By means of the episode of the magi and king Herod, Matthew establishes the identity of Jesus and his earthly mission. The motif of the astral event functions as a main theme throughout the episode. Jesus' birth in Bethlehem of Judea demonstrates that his messianic kingship flows from Davidic lineage. This identity of Jesus is revealed through the astral sign of the star of Bethlehem. This divine revelation is carefully observed, correctly interpreted, and openly announced by the Gentile magi. It is corroborated by the Jewish leaders' quotation of the OT prophecy. So is his mission, that is, to shepherd the people of God Israel (v6). Matthew's portrayal of the magi's visit to the child Jesus authenticates his identity as the kingly messiah. The magi's worship to Jesus not only demonstrates their acknowledgement of his kingship, but also alludes to Jesus' divine identity as the manifestation of Ἐμμανουήλ. In this way, the Matthean motif of celestial

⁶⁹⁸ Kennedy, *The Recapitulation of Israel*, 100.

⁶⁹⁹ France, *Matthew*, 53.

phenomenon in 2.1-12 plays a significant role in authenticating the divine identity of Jesus and his mission on earth.

This section also demonstrated that the motif of celestial phenomenon also works to elucidate the borderline of Jesus' mission. The portrayals of the reaction to the astral event between the Gentile magi and Herod and all Jerusalem vividly identify those who belong to the true people of God. The description of the Jewish leadership even with all their scriptural knowledge shows that they are inadequate to represent the people of God. They are rather depicted as Jesus' opponents standing by Herod. By contrast, the Gentile magi are portrayed as bearing the attributes of the true people of God. They were able to discern the divine nature of the star of Bethlehem and correctly acknowledge its significance. Their reaction upon that revelation was to follow the sign faithfully and offer worship to the newborn king. The warning to the magi by God in a dream (v12), which occurs only to Joseph δίκαιος (1.19) in the infancy narrative, provides divine guidance (1.20; 2.13, 19, 22), and demonstrates the shepherding by God of his people.

The final section investigated the significance of the celestial phenomenon of the star of Bethlehem. For the people in the Graeco-Roman world, heaven represented a divine realm ruled by a supreme god. Any extraordinary astral occurrence reminded them of the supreme god's sovereign government of the earth from heaven. Such events were regarded as divine revelation to the earthly world. The analysis of the contemporary Hellenistic sources presented that the appearance of an atypical star in heaven was commonly regarded as a sign of the birth of a royal figure in the contemporary world. The examination of the likely astral occurrences around the time of Jesus' birth (e.g. a nova or supernova, a comet, and a planetary conjunction) showed that it is unlikely that the event in Matthew 2 actually occurred. It is suggested that Matthew adopted the astronomical event that took place in the general time period of Jesus' birth and reworked it in the narrative so as to demonstrate the advent of Jesus as the coming of the messianic king. Matthew's selection of this motif of astrological event and his presentation of it in the narrative without any negative indication or supplementary explanation suggest that he and his readers were familiar with the contemporary astrological understanding and practice.

Balaam's astral prophecy in Numbers 24.17 is argued to be the most plausible OT background for the celestial phenomenon in 2.1-12. A measure of parallelism appears in the two pericopae; the words "star" and "rise" appear in both pericopae. Both Balaam and Matthew's magi are Gentiles from the east and travelling westwards. Both receive divine revelation by way of astral sign of the arrival of a ruler for God's people. At the end of the story, both went back to their home country. Both king Herod and king Balak represent

God's opponents seeking to destroy God's people. The messianic interpretation of Balaam's prophecy was widespread in the Second Temple period. Just as Balaam's star prophecy was fulfilled by the emergence of the Davidic monarchy (2 Sam 8.1-14), the astral event at the birth of Jesus, the "son of David", signifies the emergence of a Davidic Messiah. Placed within the motif of the exodus, the appearance of the star of Bethlehem at the birth of Jesus represents the fulfilment of the astral prophecy. Jesus is firmly authenticated as the messianic king through the celestial phenomenon. This motif of heavenly event in 2.1-12 lays the foundation for the association of the coming occurrences of heavenly phenomena in Matthew with the authentication of the divine identity of Jesus.

2. Celestial Phenomena in Matthew 3.16-17 and 17.5

The motif of celestial phenomena appears again in the so-called Jesus' baptismal narrative (3.13-17). Taking place right after Jesus' baptism, the series of heavenly events (the opening of heaven, the descent of the Spirit of God, and a voice from heaven) make a phenomenal moment for Jesus' ministry. So does the voice from the cloud after Jesus' transfiguration (17.5). This section looks into these celestial phenomena in 3.16-17 and 17.5 and seeks to present the significance of those celestial events in their pericopae and for the readership through the examination of their contexts, their background and implication, and their presentations in the narrative. It will demonstrate that the celestial events in 3.16-17 and 17.5 represent the divine designation of Jesus as the Son of God and lay a firm ground for his ministry.

2.1. *The Context of Matthew 3.16-17 and Its Reading*

Matthew 3.16-17 is generally considered to belong to 3.13-17, the so-called Jesus' baptismal narrative, which is the central section of the passage of Jesus' preparation for ministry (3.1-4.11). The adverb τότε in 3.13 and 4.1, Matthew's favoured connective at the beginnings of new sections,⁷⁰⁰ denotes that this pericope stands as a separate unit. The appearance of the adult Jesus and his baptism make this section distinct from the preceding story of John the Baptist (3.1-12) and the following episode of Jesus' temptation (4.1-11). Yet, the continual appearance of John the Baptist and the recurrent motifs of baptism and heaven illustrate its

⁷⁰⁰ It appears 89 times in Matthew, while six times in Mark and 15 in Luke.

close association with 3.1-12.⁷⁰¹ Many scholars see these two episodes, the preaching of John the Baptist in the wilderness (3.1-12) and Jesus' baptism (3.13-17), constituting a coherent section.⁷⁰² Luz comments, "It is in reality the climax of the previous story."⁷⁰³ Divided into two sections, 3.1-12 introduces John the Baptist (v1-6) and his speech (v7-12). It prepares the readers for the appearance of Jesus, the "mightier one" (v11).

After Jesus' infancy narrative, the phrase ἐν δὲ ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκεῖναις (v1) and the introduction of John the Baptist indicate the beginning of a new phase (cf. Mk 1.1). The preaching of John in v2, which is identical to that of Jesus (4.17), represents the core message of the gospel.⁷⁰⁴ While Mark and Luke sum up John's preaching as a βάπτισμα μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν (Mk 1.4, Lk 3.3), Matthew puts it into direct speech and magnifies its significance. μετανοεῖτε· ἥγγικεν γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. The imperative μετανοεῖτε, which conveys the ideas of judgment upon those who refuse to repent (cf. v8-10) and of salvation for those who confess their sins (cf. v6), makes the message very direct and personal. It also expresses a sign of urgency, because of the imminence of the kingdom of heaven (ἥγγικεν γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν).

The proclamation of ἡ βασιλεία for the first time in the gospel with the word τῶν οὐρανῶν makes a striking impact.⁷⁰⁵ It demonstrates the significance of the heavenly motif in Matthew. The background of the phrase "kingdom of heaven" is argued to be closely associated with the book of Daniel (e.g. "God of heaven", 2.18, 19, 37, 44; "God in heaven", 2.28; "Lord of heaven", 5.23; "King of heaven", 4.34).⁷⁰⁶ Concerning the meaning of the word βασιλεία, albeit Marcus claims that it implies the state of "ruling" rather than a territorial "realm",⁷⁰⁷ Carter argues that while "ruling" is the primary meaning, at times spatial and temporal aspects are present.⁷⁰⁸ Considering that heaven in Matthew is not for the reverential circumlocution but denotes the realm of God above as described earlier in this

⁷⁰¹ For the alternate view of the connection of 3.13-17 with 4.1-12 as the preparation of the adult Jesus for his ministry, see Nolland, *Matthew*, 150-69.

⁷⁰² E.g. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.285; Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 133; Robert H. Mounce, *Matthew*, (1; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 21; Morris, *Matthew*, 50; Gundry, *Matthew*, 41.

⁷⁰³ Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 140.

⁷⁰⁴ Cf. 5.3, 10, 19; 7.21; 8.11; 10.7; 11.11, 12; 13.11, 24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47, 52; 16.19; 18.1, 3, 4, 23; 19.12, 14, 23; 20.1; 22.2; 23.13; 25.1.

⁷⁰⁵ For a detailed discussion on "the kingdom of heaven" in Matthew, see Pennington, *Heaven and Earth*, 279-330.

⁷⁰⁶ Cf. David Wenham, "The Kingdom of God and Daniel," *ExpTim* 98, no. 5 (1987): 132-33; Craig A. Evans, "Daniel in the New Testament: Visions of God's Kingdom," in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, (ed. John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 509-23.

⁷⁰⁷ Joel Marcus, "Entering into the Kingly Power of God," *JBL* 107 (1988): 663-75; cf. R. T. France, "Divine Government," in *Biblical Interpretation and the Church: Text and Context*, (ed. D. A. Carson; Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1984), 30-44; France, *Matthew*, 102.

⁷⁰⁸ Carter, "Narrative/Literary Approaches to Matthean Theology," 15.

study,⁷⁰⁹ the Matthean phrase ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν should refer to “the kingdom that comes *from* heaven or is *in* heaven” or “the heavenly kingdom, that is, the kingdom whose characteristic corresponds to the divine, heavenly realm,”⁷¹⁰ rather than the “eign of God” or “God ruling”.⁷¹¹ Along with the perfect tense ἤγγικεν, which denotes that “that which has completed the process of ‘coming near’ is already present, not simply still on the way,”⁷¹² John’s message announces that “God’s reign from heaven is beginning” or “the heavenly kingdom is now taking control”.

This proclamation of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν draws attention upwards again to the heavenly government after the celestial revelation in 2.1-12. It reminds the reader of God who rules the world from or in heaven with the sovereign power. In addition, it distinguishes between the heavenly realm and the earthly world. The portrayals of Ἱεροσόλυμα καὶ πᾶσα ἡ Ἰουδαία καὶ πᾶσα ἡ περίχωρος τοῦ Ἰορδάνου (v5-6)⁷¹³ and πολλοὺς τῶν Φαρισαίων καὶ Σαδδουκαίων (v7) substantiate such a distinction. The former group comes to be baptized by John confessing their sins (v6); this signifies that they are under the heavenly reign. However, the latter comes ἐπὶ τὸ βάπτισμα (“to the baptism”, v7) not “to be baptized”. Considering their attitude towards John’s message in 21.25, 32, this description suggests that they are unlikely to be baptized. The following message of John against them (v7-10) illustrates that they do not belong to the heavenly kingdom. The combination of τῶν Φαρισαίων καὶ Σαδδουκαίων (v7), who are theologically disparate, with a single article implies that they form a single group. This unique Matthean construction constantly portrays the opponents of Jesus (16.1, 6, 11-12; 21.45-46).⁷¹⁴ This illustrates Matthew’s polemic against the Jewish leadership groups that shared a hostile stance towards his community. John’s message demonstrates that the ethnicity should not be the prerequisite for the membership of the kingdom of heaven, but the obedience to the gospel message. John’s speech about the coming of the “mightier one” who will execute the judgment in v11-12 anticipates the manifestation of the kingdom of heaven.

⁷⁰⁹ The phrase Πάτερ ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς and the concept of ‘heaven opened’ (3.16) represents the spatial element of heaven. See also Ulrich W. Mauser, "'Heaven' in the World View of the New Testament," *HBT* 9, no. 2 (1987): 40; Schneider, "'Im Himmel - auf Erden,'" 287-89.

⁷¹⁰ Cf. Warren Carter, *Matthew and The Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading*, (JSNTS 204; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 93; Theodor Zahn, *Das Evangelium des Matthäus*, (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus, 1922, 1984), 129; Wenham, "The Kingdom of God and Daniel," 134.

⁷¹¹ Cf. Kingsbury, *Structure*, 134.

⁷¹² France, *Matthew*, 103.

⁷¹³ The depiction of Jerusalem in 3.5, which is different from 2.3 (πᾶσα Ἱεροσόλυμα) and Mark 1.5 (οἱ Ἱεροσολυμίται πάντες), may reflect Matthew’s polemic against the Jewish leadership.

⁷¹⁴ There is only one other such a link of the two groups outside Matthew in Acts 23.7.

2.2. Authentication of Jesus from the Heavenly Realm

The appearance of the adult Jesus and his baptism in v13-17 indicate “the point in Matthew’s story where Jesus takes an active role.”⁷¹⁵ The series of celestial phenomena after Jesus’ baptism in v16-17 conveys the apocalyptic revelation and signifies the monumental moment of his life. According to Rowland, “apocalypse” refers to “the belief that God’s will can be discerned by means of a mode of revelation which unfolds directly the hidden things of God. To speak of the apocalyptic, therefore, is to concentrate on the theme of the direct communication of the heavenly mysteries in all their diversity.”⁷¹⁶ The opening of heaven and the following descent of the Spirit of God and a voice from heaven demonstrate the divine revelation from the heavenly realm to Jesus of Nazareth and those who witnessed his baptism. They represent the heavenly designation of Jesus as the Son of God and lay a firm ground for his forthcoming ministry.

2.2.1. The Opening of Heaven

As the first wonder in heaven, it is reported ἰδοὺ ἠνεώχθησαν [αὐτῶ] οἱ οὐρανοί (v16). As Rowland says, in the ancient antiquity “Divine space [Raum] ... is [believed to be] separated from men upon earth, through an impenetrable partition or wall. This wall must be broken through or opened up in order to enable the seer to look at heavenly things.”⁷¹⁷ The opening of heaven refers to the heavenly world drawing back its “veil” or “curtain” (cf. Ps 104.2; Isa 40.22) and “signifies that the seer has access to the secrets of the divine mysteries.”⁷¹⁸ This event of the opening of heaven is not uncommon in the Graeco-Roman world. In *Aeneid* 9, Turnus yells after Iris, “Iris, ... I see the heavens part asunder [*discedere*], and the stars that roam in the firmament. I follow the mighty omen, whoso thou art callest to arms!” (*Aen.* 9.18-22). Cicero writes that the parting of heaven signified an omen for the Romans. The rending of the heavens appears in a list of well-known omens that warned the Roman people of “mighty wars” and “deadly revolutions” (Cicero, *Div.* 1.43.97).

⁷¹⁵ Nolland, *Matthew*, 151.

⁷¹⁶ Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 14. Cf. Collins sees “apocalypse” as more “a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world” (John J. Collins, *Apocalypse: Morphology of a Genre*, (Semeia; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979), 9).

⁷¹⁷ Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 19.

⁷¹⁸ Leopold Sabourin, *The Gospel according to St. Matthew*, (Bombay: St. Paul, 1982), 1.274.

For the reader familiar with Roman traditions, this heavenly event may have anticipated an omen concerning Jesus' ministry.

The opening of heaven is also reported in various places in the OT and the Jewish literature:

καὶ ἠνοίχθησαν οἱ οὐρανοί (Ezek 1.1)
ἀνοίξης τὸν οὐρανόν (Isa 64.1)
ᾔψεσθε τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀνεωρότα (Jn 1.51)
ἰδοὺ θεωρῶ τοὺς οὐρανοὺς διηνοιγμένους (Acts 7.56)
καὶ θεωρεῖ τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀνεωγμένον καὶ καταβαῖνον σκεῦός (Acts 10.11)
καὶ ἰδοὺ θύρα ἠνεωγμένη ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ (Rev 4.1)
Καὶ εἶδον τὸν οὐρανὸν ἠνεωγμένον (Rev 19.11)
καὶ ἰδοὺ ἠεώχθησαν οἱ οὐρανοί (T. Levi 2.6)
εἶδον τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀνεωρότα (T. Abr. 7.3)

It expects the reception of divine revelation or provision from the heavenly world. The reference in Isaiah 64.1 (ἐὰν ἀνοίξης τὸν οὐρανόν) suggests the idea of the visitation of God for the salvation of his people.⁷¹⁹ The prophet in Isaiah 63.7-64.12 prays for God to look down and come down from heaven (Isa 63.15; 64.1) to redeem his people. Capes states, "For Matthew ... the prayer for God's visitation is satisfied by Jesus, the Immanuel presence of God, the one who promises to be with them until the end of the age."⁷²⁰ The opening of heaven may anticipate God's answer to the prayer of Isaiah 63-64 in Jesus. Yet, the lexical and syntactical presentation of the event proposes its close connection with that in Ezekiel 1.1:⁷²¹

καὶ ἠνοίχθησαν οἱ οὐρανοί καὶ εἶδον ὀράσεις θεοῦ (Ezek 1.1)
καὶ ἰδοὺ ἠεώχθησαν [αὐτῷ] οἱ οὐρανοί, καὶ εἶδεν [τὸ] πνεῦμα [τοῦ] θεοῦ (3.16)

Both phenomena take place beside a river (ἐπὶ τοῦ ποταμοῦ τοῦ Χοβαρ, Ezek 1.1, 3 // ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰορδάνην, v13) and against the backdrop of exile (Babylonian for Ezekiel; Roman for Jesus). The depiction of the opening of heaven is almost identical textually. The Spirit comes upon both Jesus and Ezekiel (ἐπ' ἐμὲ πνεῦμα, Ezek 2.2 // [τὸ] πνεῦμα [τοῦ] θεοῦ ... ἐπ' αὐτόν·, v16). Both hear the voice of God (ἤκουον αὐτοῦ λαλοῦντος πρὸς με, Ezekk 2.2;

⁷¹⁹ Cf. David B. Capes, "Intertextual Echoes in the Matthean Baptismal Narrative," *BBR* 9 (1999): 43-44; France, *Matthew*, 121.

⁷²⁰ Capes, "Intertextual Echoes in the Matthean Baptismal Narrative," 44.

⁷²¹ Cf. Origen, *Contra Celsus* 1.48; Capes, "Intertextual Echoes in the Matthean Baptismal Narrative," 42; France, *Matthew*, 121; David Mathewson, "The Apocalyptic Vision of Jesus according to the Gospel of Matthew: Reading Matthew 3:16-4:11 Intertextually," *TynBul* 62, no. 1 (2011): 92-93.

cf. ἤκουσα φωνὴν λαλοῦντος, Ezek 1.28 // καὶ ἰδοὺ φωνὴ ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν λέγουσα, v17). This parallelism suggests that the opening of heaven is the prelude to the divine commission of Jesus and the bestowal of the Spirit of God unto him for his prophetic ministry.

Matthew’s presentation of the opening of heaven differs from the Markan statement of Mark 1.10. While Mark focuses on describing Jesus’ personal experience (εἶδεν “he saw”), the emphasis of the Matthean version is more on the portrayal of the heavenly event itself. The Matthean characteristic ἰδοὺ (cf. 1.20; 2.1, 9, 13, 19) after the portrayal of Jesus’ baptism draws a special attention to the opening of heaven and makes the scene stand out vividly. This word ἰδοὺ, the second-person aorist middle imperative of εἶδον, appears at the two key points in this pericope and functions as a demonstrative particle to prompt attention with an acute accent as here. Together with Matthew’s change of the active form of the Markan statement to the passive, it places the heavenly phenomena into the centre of attention. Besides, the change of σχίζω “split” in Mark 1.10 to ἀνοίγω “open” in v16 signifies the apocalyptic perspective of the pericope. Furthermore, the textual variants of αὐτῷ following ἠνεώχθησαν reflect the uncertainty of the word in the text. Its omission in the important MSS (N* B vg^{mss} sy^{c,s} sa geo^B Ir Hil CyrJ Vig PsAmbr).⁷²² suggests that the text without αὐτῷ is weightier.⁷²³ Its absence with the above features makes the opening of heaven more a public event. These changes indicate that Matthew is more interested in presenting the celestial phenomena not as Jesus’ personal visionary experience but as a visible event that God in heaven has arranged. The portrayal of the opening of heaven illustrates Matthew’s cosmological understanding of heaven as a solid firmament in which is the heavenly council of God. The opening of heaven reminds the reader of the distinction between the heavenly world and the earthly world, and anticipates the divine communication.

2.2.2. Descent of the Spirit of God as a Dove

The opening of heaven leads to the descent of the Spirit of God as a dove. The words εἶδεν and ἐπ’ αὐτόν indicate that the seer and receiver of the revelation from heaven is Jesus. Matthew’s doubling of the verbs καταβαῖνον and ἐρχόμενον ἐπ’ (Mark and Luke have only the former) in 3.16 illustrates a great weight of the action of “coming down” to Jesus. This

⁷²² N* C D L W f^{1, 13} TR lat sy^{p,h} mae bo include the word.

⁷²³ Nolland states, “the addition of ‘to him’ seems an unlikely way for a scribe to conform the present text to the private revelation assumed for Mark and Luke, whereas its omission is understandable as allowing the text to express a simple idea” (Nolland, *Matthew*, 150).

highlights his close association with God in the heavenly realm or the kingdom of heaven. Many scholars have interpreted this heavenly event in connection with the Jewish tradition.⁷²⁴ The coming of the Spirit upon people was a common motif in the OT to represent their equipment for special tasks.⁷²⁵ Its coming upon an individual is assumed to be associated with the future messiah as in the well-known messianic prophecies in Isaiah. Isaiah 11.2 states ἀναπαύσεται ἐπ’ αὐτὸν [a son of Davidic lineage] πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ. In Isaiah 42.1 (ἔδωκα τὸ πνεῦμά μου ἐπ’ αὐτόν), the Spirit come down to anoint the servant of God. The reference in Isa 61.1 (πνεῦμα κυρίου ἐπ’ ἐμέ) also represents an anointing of a man of God for the preaching of the good news. Two passages in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* mention the coming of the Spirit upon a messianic priest:

καὶ πνεῦμα συνέσεως καὶ ἁγιασμοῦ καταπαύσει ἐπ’ αὐτόν (*T. Levi* 18.7)
καὶ ἀνοιγήσονται ἐπ’ αὐτόν οἱ οὐρανοί, ἐκχέαι πνεύματος εὐλογίαν πατρὸς ἁγίου (*T. Jud.* 24.2).

France states, “now as the Spirit ‘comes upon him’ Jesus is visibly equipped and commissioned to undertake his messianic mission.”⁷²⁶

The descent of the Spirit is depicted ὡσεὶ περιστερᾶν. Although some scholars interpret this phrase adverbially as a “dove-like manner”,⁷²⁷ it appears better to read it adjectively as “looking like a dove”. As France writes, its adverbial interpretation is “not easy to define, and in any case some visual form must have been required to make the descent of the invisible Spirit visible.”⁷²⁸ There have been a number of suggestions on the interpretation of the dove image.⁷²⁹ Most scholars find Noah’s story in Genesis 8.8-12 or the creation episode in Genesis 1-2 as its most probable background. For the advocates of

⁷²⁴ C. K. Barrett, *The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition*, (London: SPCK, 1947), 38-39; G. W. H. Lampe, "Baptisma in the New Testament," *SJT* 5, no. 2 (1952): 167; Leander Keck, "The Spirit and the Dove," *NTS* 17 (1970): 41-67; James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism Today*, (London: SCM, 1979); Paul Garnet, "The Baptism of Jesus and the Son of Man Idea," *JSNT* 9 (1980): 49-65; Hill, *Matthew*, 96-97; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.330-35; Harrington, *Matthew*, 62; Hagner, *Matthew*, 1.57-58; Capes, "Intertextual Echoes in the Matthean Baptismal Narrative," 46-49; Keener, *Matthew*, 132-33; France, *Matthew*, 121-22.

⁷²⁵ For the Spirit of God coming upon people, see Judg 3.10; 6.34; 11.29; 13.25; and 1 Sam 10.6; 11.6; 19.20.

⁷²⁶ France, *Matthew*, 121.

⁷²⁷ Keck, "The Spirit and the Dove," 63-67; Harrington, *Matthew*, 62; Hagner, *Matthew*, 1.58.

⁷²⁸ France, *Matthew*, 121-22.

⁷²⁹ For the description of the sixteen different views of the source of the dove motif, see Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.331-34.

Noah's account, the Spirit like a dove at the Jordan alludes to the dove in Noah's story.⁷³⁰ Citing 1 Peter 3.20-21 that compares Noah's deliverance from the water to Christian baptism, Capes states that Matthew "utilized the dove, resonating within the denouement of Noah's story, to construe Jesus' baptism as the end of judgment, the reversal of exile, the new creation, and the opportunity to herald the good news of God's presence and Kingdom."⁷³¹ Dunn also maintains that the dove's presence indicates the coming of the Kingdom of God after the time of judgment.⁷³² For the advocates of the creation account,⁷³³ the three elements of Jesus' baptism, *viz.* the Spirit of God, water and the image of a bird signify the connection between Genesis 1.2 and Matthew 3.16.⁷³⁴ According to them, the verb פָּרַח in Genesis 1.2 contains the idea of a bird's movement as used in Deuteronomy 32.11 to describe a bird. Rowland points to the Babylonian Talmud and Simeon b. Zoma's meditation on Genesis 1.2 (*b. Hag.* 15a), in which the hovering of the Spirit over the waters is depicted as a dove. "hovered over the face of the waters – like a dove which hovers over her young without touching [them]."⁷³⁵ It is argued that the dove's presence in Jesus' baptism signals the beginning of a new creation. According to the supporters of this interpretation, the coming of the Messiah in the early church represented the beginning of the eschatological age and was commonly associated with a new creation.⁷³⁶ 4Q521 is suggested to strengthen this new creation interpretation. Citing line 6 ("and over the Poor will His Spirit hover and the Faithful will He support with his strength"), Allison points out the application of the language of Genesis 1.2 to the description of the eschatological future.⁷³⁷ The image of the Spirit hovering over the water like a bird in Genesis 1.2 may present its connection to the baptismal narrative.

However, this association of the Spirit's descent as a dove with these accounts appears rather insufficient to parallel 3.16. Concerning the Noah's story, its link with the Spirit of

⁷³⁰ Cf. Lampe, "Baptisma in the New Testament," 167; Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 27; Garnet, "Baptism of Jesus," 49-65; Capes, "Intertextual Echoes in the Matthean Baptismal Narrative," 47-49; Keener, *Matthew*, 132-33.

⁷³¹ Capes, "Intertextual Echoes in the Matthean Baptismal Narrative," 47.

⁷³² Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 27.

⁷³³ Cf. Barrett, *The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition*, 38-39; Hill, *Matthew*, 96-97; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.334; Harrington, *Matthew*, 62; Hagner, *Matthew*, 1.58; cf. C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel according to Saint Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 54; Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel according to St. Mark*, (2nd ed.; New York: St. Martin's P., 1966), 161; Keck, "The Spirit and the Dove," 41-67; Joel Marcus, *Mark: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, (27-27A; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 1.159.

⁷³⁴ Cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.334.

⁷³⁵ Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 361. Trans. Dale C. Allison Jr., "The Baptism of Jesus and a New Dead Sea Scroll," *BAR* 18, no. 2 (1992): 58.

⁷³⁶ Allison Jr., "The Baptism of Jesus," 58-60; cf. Marcus, *Mark*, 1.164-66; Nils Alstrup Dahl, *Jesus in the Memory of the Early Church*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976), 120-40.

⁷³⁷ Allison Jr., "The Baptism of Jesus," 59-60.

God is obscure. With regard to Genesis 1.2, the association of the verb רָחַף with a dove is defective. Though *b. Hag.* 15a represents the association of the “hovering” of the Spirit with a dove, its late date barely does credit to the argument.⁷³⁸ Besides, both accounts do not contain the idea of “descent”. Aware of these issues, France suggests that the descent of the Spirit of God as a dove should be read as “that which draws on Noah’s dove flying above the waters of chaos (Gen 8.81-12) in combination with the metaphorical language of Gen 1.2 which speaks of the Spirit of God ‘hovering’ or ‘brooding’ over the face of the waters at creation.”⁷³⁹ This combination view compromises the missing element of each story and signifies “a ‘new creation’ typology underlying the baptism narrative.”⁷⁴⁰

However, this view still does not account for the absence of the motif of the “descent” of the Spirit. There have been various approaches to explore the dove motif in connection with the non-Jewish tradition.⁷⁴¹ Gunkel and Gressmann asserted that the motif derived from the ancient Near Eastern “Call to Kingship Sagas”, in which the choice of a king is decided by a bird that selects the right one from the many.⁷⁴² Bultmann pointed to Persian mythology, in which the divine power that signified the Spirit fills the king in the form of a bird.⁷⁴³ Dixon has recently suggested the interpretation of the Spirit’s birdlike descent from Greek mythology. According to him, Homer’s works had great influence in the Graeco-Roman world.⁷⁴⁴ They were ‘the rudiments of the ancient educational system’ and were used as a prototype for epics of the later poets (e.g. Apollonius of Rhodes and Virgil).⁷⁴⁵ It could be assumed that “Homeric motifs and figures of speech could easily have reached nascent

⁷³⁸ Cf. Israel Abrahams, *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels*, (New York: Ktav., 1967), 1.47-50. For the detailed arguments against the Genesis interpretation of the baptism, see Edward P. Dixon, "Descending Spirit and Descending Gods: A "Greek" Interpretation of the Spirit's "Descent as a Dove" in Mark 1:10," *JBL* 128, no. 4 (2009): 763-64.

⁷³⁹ France, *Matthew*, 122.

⁷⁴⁰ France, *Matthew*, 122.

⁷⁴¹ Cf. Hugo Gressmann, "Die Sage von der Taufe Jesu und die vorderorientalische Taubengöttin," *AR* 20 (1920-21): 1-40, 323-59; Hermann Gunkel, *Das Märchen im Alten Testament*, (Religionsgeschichtliche Volksbücher für die deutsche christliche Gegenwart 2 Reihe, 23 /26 Heft; Tübingen: Mohr, 1921), 145-71; Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, (trans. John Marsh; 2nd ed.; Oxford: Blackwell, 1968), 248-50; Dixon, "Descending Spirit," 765-79; Michael Peppard, "The Eagle and the Dove: Roman Imperial Sonship and the Baptism of Jesus (Mark 1.9-11)," *NTS* 56 (2010): 441-51.

⁷⁴² Gressmann, "Die Sage," 1-40, 323-59; Gunkel, *Märchen*, 145-71.

⁷⁴³ Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 548-50. For a critique of Gressmann, Gunkel, and Bultmann, see Keck, "The Spirit and the Dove," 54-63.

⁷⁴⁴ Dixon refers to the arguments of Hengel and Finley. Hengel states, “literary instruction ... was concentrated on one language, the Greek mother-tongue, and on one - it might almost be called the canonical - book, the epic work of Homer, especially the *Iliad*” (Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 1.66). Finley writes of the general popularity of Homer in the Hellenistic world, noting that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were as likely to be found on a Greek’s “bookshelf” as anything from the rest of Greek literature (Moses I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1977), 21).

⁷⁴⁵ Dixon, "Descending Spirit," 765-66.

Christian communities.”⁷⁴⁶ In Homer, the multiple deities in the heavenly realm visited the earth below and their descents to the human beings were commonly described with bird similes. For example, the *Iliad* describes that the descent of Apollo from Olympus was “like a swift, dove-slaying falcon, that is the fleetest of winged creatures” (*Il.* 15.237-38) and Achilles’ mother, Thetis, “like a falcon she leapt down from snowcapped Olympus, bearing the flashing armour from Hephaestus” (*Il.* 18.616-17). The descent of Athena is also said ‘like a bird of prey, long-winged and shrill-voiced, leapt down from heaven through the air’ (*Il.* 19.349-50). In the *Odyssey* 5, Homer writes that Hermes, the messenger god, going down to the nymph Calypso to discuss the future of Odysseus, “lighted upon the sea, and then sped over the wave like a sea-bird” (*Od.* 5.50-51). The descent of these deities to the mortal is to strengthen or encourage the epic hero. Such a Homeric use of bird similes was carried on by later authors (e.g. *Aen.* 4.238-61; cf. 9.18-22; *Arg.* 4.769). Dixon argues that the “descent” of the Spirit upon Jesus with a bird simile demonstrates the presence of a Homeric literary motif in Jesus’ baptismal narrative.

In a similar manner, Peppard has suggested a Roman omen as the source of the dove motif.⁷⁴⁷ According to Peppard, the flight of birds was commonly regarded by the Romans as an omen. The movement of an eagle among others was closely associated with the rise to imperial power. The accession of Claudius is predicted by a bird omen. “Claudius entered on his belated public career as Gaius’ colleague in a two-months’ consulship; and when he first entered the Forum with the consular rods, an eagle swooped down and perched on his shoulder” (Suetonius *Claud.* 7). An eagle omen is also reported to signify Augustus’ rise to power. “At Bononia, where the army of the Triumvirs Augustus, Antony, and Lepidus was stationed, an eagle perched on Augustus’ tent and defended itself vigorously against the converging attack of two ravens, bringing both of them down. This augury was noted and understood by the troops as portending a rupture between their three leaders, which later took place’ (Suetonius *Aug.* 96, cf. 94, 97). Further, the accession of Tiberius is predicted by an eagle omen. “Finally, a few days before the letter arrived recalling him from Rhodes [where he was exiled], an eagle - a bird never previously seen in the island - perched upon the roof of his house; and on the very eve of this welcome news the tunic into which he was changing seemed to be ablaze” (Suetonius *Tib.* 14). According to Peppard, eagle and dove were counter-symbols against each other in the Hellenistic world. While an eagle signifies “the ‘king’ and ‘most warlike’ of all birds, ... a ‘sure sign of empire,’ and an ‘omen’ of

⁷⁴⁶ Dixon, "Descending Spirit," 765; cf. Dennis R. MacDonald, *The Homeric Epics and the Gospel of Mark*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 1-8.

⁷⁴⁷ Peppard, "Eagle and the Dove," 441-51.

victory,”⁷⁴⁸ representing the Roman empire with military might, a dove is portrayed as “the timorous victim” and “unwarlike”⁷⁴⁹ as a symbol of fear or nonviolence. It is also depicted to represent Israel (*4 Ezra* 5.26), clemency, and a spirit of forgiveness (*LAB* 39.5). Exploring Jesus’ baptismal narrative, Peppard argues that the dove omen appoints Jesus as a counter-emperor. “This counter-emperor will rule not in the spirit of the bellicose eagle, but in the spirit of the pure, gentle, peaceful, and even sacrificial dove.”⁷⁵⁰ This interpretation of the dove motif in 3.16 matches with the contemporary understanding of the opening of heaven, which anticipated the divine omen for Jesus’ ministry. With the combination of Dixon’s proposal, this interpretation shows that the descent of the Spirit as a dove represents the empowerment of Jesus and heralds his ministry as a king. The combination of Noah’s account, Genesis 1.2, and Graeco-Roman understandings signifies that the descent of the Spirit of God as a dove to Jesus in 3.16 represents the beginning of the new creation through Jesus and the divine empowerment upon him for the forthcoming messianic ministry.⁷⁵¹

2.2.3. The Voice from Heaven

The heavenly phenomena after Jesus’ baptism culminate in the voice from heaven (οὐτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα). καὶ ἰδοὺ again draws attention to this feature of 3.16-17. The calling of Jesus as the ‘son’ signifies the equivalence of the titles “Son of God” and “Christ”. Here again Matthew’s portrayal of the heavenly voice differs from the Markan depiction:

σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα. (Mk 1.11)
οὐτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα. (3.17)

While Mark reports the event as Jesus’ personal experience by making the sentence a direct reference to Jesus using the second person singular, Matthew changes it to a public divine affirmation with the third person singular. It is uncertain who could be the intended recipient of the announcement in the context. It could have been directed towards the crowds standing nearby or just John the Baptist. Or it could have been “God’s acclamation of Jesus before the

⁷⁴⁸ Josephus *BJ* 3.122-4; *4 Ezra* 11-12.

⁷⁴⁹ Respectively, Ovid *Met.* 1.504-7; Horace *Odes* 4.4.29-32.

⁷⁵⁰ Peppard, “Eagle and the Dove,” 450.

⁷⁵¹ Cf. Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story*, 52.

heavenly court” as Nolland suggests,⁷⁵² assuming that Jesus was alone after the baptism. Regardless of its addressee, this revelation is clearly delivered to Matthew’s readers.

Many scholars have tried to find the possible OT allusions. Various OT texts have been suggested as the background of this heavenly voice: e.g. Gen 22.2; Exod 4.22-23; Ps 2.7; Isa 42.1; and Jer 38.20.⁷⁵³⁷⁵⁴ First, the parallel between the first line of the heavenly voice in Mark 1.11 (σὺ εἶ ὁ υἱός μου) and the words in Psalm 2.7 (υἱός μου εἶ σύ), which refers to a kingly messiah, is suggested to show the connection of the two texts. Assuming Marcan priority, it is argued that Matthew sees the same OT allusion behind the voice from heaven. Although Matthew’s wording is different from Mark’s in the change from second person to third, these scholars see no significant shift in meaning. Such a connection would authenticate the identity of Jesus as the royal Davidic messiah (cf. 1.1; 2 Sam 7.13-14; Ps 89.25). Second, the reference to τὸν υἱόν σου τὸν ἀγαπητόν in the LXX of Genesis 22.2, which is part of God’s command to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, has led scholars to assume its association with v17. The wording offers the similar structure to the heavenly declaration. The word ἀγαπητός in the context refers to the Hebrew אִיִּי meaning an “only” son. This connection may signify that Jesus as the “only beloved” Son of God is to fulfil the typology of Isaac through his sacrificial death and resurrection. Meier writes that “the idea of Jesus’ sacrificial death for sinners may be present in Matthew 3.17, joined to a son-servant Christology by way of Jesus’ identification with the original ‘son of Abraham’ (1.1), Isaac.”⁷⁵⁵ Third, the calling of Jesus as the Son of God is suggested to allude to the OT theme of Israel as God’s son. It is argued that the phrase υἱός μου was drawn from Exodus 4.22 (υἱὸς πρωτότοκός μου Ἰσραηλ) or Jeremiah 38.20 (υἱὸς ἀγαπητὸς ... ἐμοί) to signify Jesus as the fulfilment of God’s “son” Israel.⁷⁵⁶ Concerning the difference between ἀγαπητός in v17 and πρωτότοκός in Exodus 4.22, Bretscher states, “‘first-born’ could be taken as a term of value or endearment.”⁷⁵⁷ He cites various Jewish literary sources, which adopt the thematic parallel between “beloved” son and “first-born” (e.g. *Ps. Sol.* 13.9; *2 Bar.*

⁷⁵² Nolland, *Matthew*, 157.

⁷⁵³ Exodus 4.22-23 and Jeremiah 38.20 has also suggested as allusion to v17 by Paul G. Bretscher, "Exodus 4:22-23 and the Voice from Heaven," *JBL* 87 (1968): 305-11; Jeffrey A. Gibbs, "Israel standing with Israel: the baptism of Jesus in Matthew's gospel (Matt 3:13-17)," *CBQ* 64 (2002): 515-20. For them, the calling of Jesus as God’s son corresponds to the OT theme of Israel as God’s son. The voice from heaven signifies Jesus as the fulfilment of God’s ‘son’ Israel.

⁷⁵⁴ Beare, *Matthew*, 100; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.338-39; Harrington, *Matthew*, 62; Morris, *Matthew*, 68; Hagner, *Matthew*, 1.58; Nolland, *Matthew*, 157; France, *Matthew*, 123; Turner, *Matthew*, 120.

⁷⁵⁵ Meier, *Vision of Matthew*, 59.

⁷⁵⁶ Bretscher, "Exodus 4:22-23," 305-11; Gibbs, "Israel standing with Israel," 511-20.

⁷⁵⁷ Bretscher, "Exodus 4:22-23," 306-7. He asserts that this was the common interpretation in the ancient rabbis.

5.1; 21.21). Finally, the approval of God’s servant in Isaiah 42.1 is considered to correspond to v17. ὁ παῖς μου ἀντιλήμψομαι αὐτοῦ Ἰσραηλ ὁ ἐκλεκτός μου προσεδέξατο αὐτὸν ἢ ψυχὴ μου. The final clause in v17, ‘with whom I am delighted’, is argued to clearly reflect the Hebrew נִפְשֵׁי הַצֶּהֱרָה in Isaiah 42.1. The following remark in Isaiah 42.1 that God has put his Spirit upon him, which recalls the descent of the Spirit in v16, is maintained to assure their association. Concerning the absences of the term υἱός, Jeremias has suggested that the παῖς μου corresponds to the υἱός μου, arguing that παῖς can mean “child” as well as “servant”.⁷⁵⁸ For ὁ ἀγαπητός in v17, Nolland states, it could be ‘more readily explained as a natural change from ὁ ἐκλεκτός (“the chosen”) of Isaiah 42.1’.⁷⁵⁹ This connection may present Jesus as the “servant of God” who would die for the sins of the people.

However, each suggested OT allusion appears rather insufficient to account for the voice from heaven in v17. For Psalm 2.7, apart from the two words υἱός μου there is hardly any element that links it to v17. There is no mention about a “beloved” son or God’s being “pleased” with him. This makes hard to discern an allusion to Psalm 2.7 in v17. Likewise, Genesis 22.2 lacks the feature of God being “pleased” with the son. For Exodus 4.22 or Jeremiah 38.20, there is hardly any support in the text for the interpretation of Jesus as the representative of Israel. Turner states, “the sonship motif recalls the unique circumstances of Jesus’s conception and infancy (Matt. 1.16, 18-25; 2.15) and sets the scene for Satan’s test (4.3, 6). The sonship motif also implies Jesus’s Davidic connections (1.1; cf. 2 Sam 7.13-14; Ps. 89.27).”⁷⁶⁰ For Isaiah 42.1, its sonship motif is missing. Jeremias’ explanation for the link of παῖς with a “child” appears rather defective. France comments, “‘child’ is not the same as ‘son,’ and παῖς is not normally used in that relational sense.”⁷⁶¹ Acknowledging the deficiency of these references, scholars have suggested a combined allusion to Isaiah 42.1 and Genesis 22.2, or Psalm 2.7.⁷⁶² The voice from heaven authenticates the identity of Jesus as the Davidic messiah who would fulfil the role of the suffering servant through his ministry.

There has been another endeavour, deriving from the non-Jewish perspective to establish how those familiar with Graeco-Roman tradition would have understood the voice from heaven. Peppard has argued that the calling of Jesus as the “son of God” reflects the

⁷⁵⁸ Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, (New York: Scribner, 1971), 53-55.

⁷⁵⁹ Nolland, *Matthew*, 157.

⁷⁶⁰ Turner, *Matthew*, 120.

⁷⁶¹ France, *Matthew*, 123.

⁷⁶² Beare, *Matthew*, 100; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.338-39; Harrington, *Matthew*, 62; Morris, *Matthew*, 68; Hagner, *Matthew*, 1.58; Nolland, *Matthew*, 157; France, *Matthew*, 123; Turner, *Matthew*, 120.

ancient practice of adoption.⁷⁶³ According to him, Julius Caesar was considered divine during his lifetime. Tracing his divine genealogy to Aeneas, son of Venus, he propagated the image of Caesar's divine ancestry. He was declared a god of the Roman state (*divus Iulius*) after his assassination.⁷⁶⁴ His successor Octavian, his adopted son, was made *divi filius* or "son of god" (cf. Nicolaus of Damascus *Life* 8, 11, 13, 17-18, 29-30; Suetonius *Jul.* 83.2; *Aug.* 7.2; 94.11). The title *divi filius* was disseminated in coins, inscriptions, and monuments as part of official titulature.⁷⁶⁵ Peppard notes, "the 'son of god' title was what most enabled the transition to Octavian's rule to be interpreted in terms of Roman dynastic ideology."⁷⁶⁶ The subsequent Roman emperors were also called by this title. He further argues that Octavian's divinity was believed to be secured by divine ancestry just like Caesar's. His mother, Atia, was said to have been visited and impregnated by Apollo (Suetonius *Aug.* 94.4). For Octavian, his divine sonship was made by Caesar's adoption and begotten by divine ancestry. Peppard states, "to be 'son of god' in the Roman Empire, in the time period under consideration, meant primarily to be the son of the emperor - whether begotten or made. For the divine sonship of the Roman emperor, both begetting and adoption functioned to grant legitimacy, though in different modes. Both have resonance in a Roman understanding of father-son relations."⁷⁶⁷ For those familiar with non-Jewish, Roman tradition, Peppard argues, Jesus' baptism alludes to the Roman understanding of adoption to power. The dove omen and the announcement of the divine sonship from heaven signify the authentication of Jesus as a counter-emperor and the transmission of power from father to son.

2.3. Significance of the Heavenly Phenomena in Matthew 3.16-17 and 17.5

The appearance of the adult Jesus and John the Baptist in 3.13-17 represent the beginning of a new era. The message of "the kingdom of heaven" by John the Baptist draws the attention of the reader to the heavenly world and reminds them of God who rules the world from heaven with the sovereign power. This distinction between the heavenly realm and the earthly world is illustrated by the two contrasting responses by Ἱεροσόλυμα καὶ πᾶσα ἡ

⁷⁶³ Peppard, "Eagle and the Dove," 431-51; cf. John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2002), 67-69.

⁷⁶⁴ Cf. Lily Ross Taylor, *The Divinity of the Roman Emperor*, (Middletown: American Philological Association, 1931), 58-99; Stefan Weinstock, *Divus Julius*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); Ittai Gradel, *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 54-72.

⁷⁶⁵ Taylor, *Divinity*, 106.

⁷⁶⁶ Peppard, "Eagle and the Dove," 435.

⁷⁶⁷ Peppard, "Eagle and the Dove," 437.

Ἰουδαία καὶ πᾶσα ἡ περίχωρος τοῦ Ἰορδάνου (v5-6)⁷⁶⁸ and πολλοὺς τῶν Φαρισαίων καὶ Σαδδουκαίων (v7). This episode may recall to the reader the episode of the magi's visit to Jesus. The appearance of Jesus and his baptism by John the Baptist demonstrates Jesus' association with the heavenly kingdom.

The series of heavenly phenomena after Jesus' baptism in 3.16-17 are interpreted in association with the OT references and the contemporary conceptions. The opening of heaven anticipates God's apocalyptic revelation. The descent of the Spirit of God as a dove alludes to the combination of the OT references (Gen 1.2 and Noah's story in Gen 8.8-12) with the prevalent Graeco-Roman understandings, in which the gods come down from heaven with dove similes to strengthen the hero and appoint him as a counter-emperor. This event indicates the new creation through Jesus and "the divine act whereby God empowers him to accomplish the messianic ministry he is shortly to begin (Matt 4.17)."⁷⁶⁹ The voice from heaven alludes to the combination of Isaiah 42.1 and Psalm 2.7 or Genesis 22.2 and authenticates the identity of Jesus as the royal Davidic messiah. For those familiar with the Graeco-Roman tradition, the voice from heaven may have affirmed Jesus taking an emperor role. The calling of Jesus as the "Son of God" alludes to the ancient practice of adoption. Just as the Roman emperors were called by this title, Jesus' title the "Son of God" would signify the empowerment of Jesus for the role of an emperor. The series of celestial occurrences reveal the authentication of Jesus as an emperor empowered by God in heaven. Although conveying different ideas to the readership with different background, this series of heavenly phenomena after Jesus' baptism in 3.16-17 firmly establishes Jesus' identity as a divine king anointed or empowered by God in heaven to signify the beginning of the kingdom of heaven. The portrayal of the heavenly occurrences in 3.16-17 reveals Matthew's intention to present them as a public visible event arranged and performed by God in the heavenly realm rather than Jesus' personal visionary experience. In so doing, Jesus' identity is publicly announced and acknowledged just as in the case of the astral event at 2.1-12.

The same interpretation of the voice from heaven could be applied to the voice from the cloud in 17.5 (οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα). The reference to the appearance of the bright cloud in a high mountain in 17.5a (ἰδοὺ νεφέλη φωτεινὴ ἐπεσκίασεν αὐτούς) recalls the cloud which overshadowed Mount Sinai when Moses went up to meet God (Exod 19.16; 24.15-18). It represents the presence of God. The identical wordings of the divine voice in 3.17 and 17.5 indicate the same implication. The word ἰδοὺ,

⁷⁶⁸ The depiction of Jerusalem in 3.5, which is different from 2.3 (πᾶσα Ἱερουσόλυμα) and Mark 1.5 (οἱ Ἱερουσολυμίται πάντες), may reflect Matthew's dispute with formative Judaism.

⁷⁶⁹ Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story*, 52.

the command ἀκούετε αὐτοῦ, and the presence of the disciples as the recipients of the heavenly phenomena show that this voice from the cloud is a public event. Jesus' identity is again announced and acknowledged publicly.

3. Request for a Sign from Heaven in Matthew 16.1

Another reference to celestial phenomenon appears in the pericope of 16.1-4 where the Pharisees and Sadducees ask Jesus to show them a sign from heaven. Although Jesus does not perform any sign as demanded, the Jewish authorities' request for a heavenly sign plays an important role in revealing the contemporary Jewish attitude towards celestial phenomena and its significance in Matthew. This section will first look into the nature of the sign within the context through the analysis of the concepts of σημεῖον in the Graeco-Roman and Jewish contexts in the second temple period. Next, it will explore the implication of a sign ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ. In doing so, it will investigate the authenticity of Jesus' response in 16.2b-3 as some MSS omit the section and its significance in the pericope, since they provide a critical indication for the interpretation of the sign ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ. Finally, it will conclude with a discussion of the significance of a sign from heaven in the pericope.

3.1. Concepts of a Sign in the Graeco-Roman World

The word σημεῖον in the Graeco-Roman world referred to any visible or audible impressions which suggested or made possible certain perceptions or insights.⁷⁷⁰ It, along with its older form σῆμα, was generally used for a mark or object so that something or someone could be recognized: e.g. a mark on the lot (*Hom. Il.* 7.189), a finishing-point in a race (*Hom. Il.* 23.326), the voice of the crane for ploughing (*Hes. WD.* 450), ensigns for ships (*Ra.* 933; cf. *Hdt.* 8.92), the standard of the king (*Xenoph. Anab.* 1.10.12), a diadem of the royal house (*Xenoph. Cyrop.* 8.3.19), a warrior's shield (*Hdt.* 1.171; *Aesch. Seven* 387, 432; *Eur. El.* 256), etc. It was also employed to denote stars or constellation, since they provided information about times and places (*Eur. Rhes.* 528-30; *Eur. Ion* 1156-57; *Arat. Phaen.* 10). When occurred in association with a divine revelation, it served to clarify and confirm something or

⁷⁷⁰ Cf. K. H. Rengstorf, "Semeion," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, (ed. Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1985), 7.200-08; O. Hofius, "semeion," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Exeter: Paternoster, 1986), 2.626-33.

to lead from doubt to certainty. In the *Iliad*, the lightning of Zeus at the beginning of the expedition against Troy represented a favourable portent of the god (ἐναίσιμα σήματα, *Hom. Il.* 2.353; cf. *Hom. Il.* 9.236f). Some signs presaged calamity (e.g. Ζεὺς ἔτρεψε παραίσιμα σήματα φαίνων, *Hom. Il.* 4.381). In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus prayed to Zeus on his return home for signs of a uttered word and of wonder (*Hom. Od.* 20.98-101). A peal of thunder from Olympus that occurred without cloud in the sky and a woman's prayer to Zeus both served as a good omen for Odysseus (*Hom. Od.* 20.111). For King Alexander during the siege of the city Gaza, an incident of the dropping of a clod of earth on him by a bird, which was then killed in the machinery of a battering-engine, was regarded as an omen for the successful taking of the city. As predicted, despite the wound on the shoulder, Alexander took the city (τὸ σημεῖον ἀπέβη κατὰ τὴν Ἀριστάνδρου πρόρρησιν, *Plut. Alex.* 25). It is worthwhile to take into account for the present investigation that celestial phenomena were one of the major signs of divine assurance.

The σημεῖον is the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew word **תָּיִן**. Its occurrences in the LXX demonstrate that the Jews, like the contemporary Graeco-Romans, also regarded the σημεῖον as “a sign (as a rule, visually perceived, but occasionally also heard) by which one recognizes a particular person or thing, a confirmatory, corroborative, authenticating mark or token.”⁷⁷¹ It represents a token that conveys a clear message: e.g. the mark on Cain (*Gen* 4.15), the circumcision of the Israelites (*Gen* 17.10-11), the blood of the Passover lamb (*Exod* 12.7, 13), the keeping of the Sabbath (*Exod* 31.13, 17), tribal standards (*Num* 2.2), the twelve pillars set up after the crossing of the river Jordan (*Josh* 4.6), and so on. The ten plagues in Egypt (*Exod* 7.3; 10.2; *Ps* 78.43), the dividing of the Red Sea and the destruction of the Egyptian army (*Deut* 7.19) are all indications of the active presence of God. It is also used as a means of assurance and confirmation. For example, the death of Eli's sons on the same day (*1 Sam* 2.34), Saul's prophetic ecstasy (*1 Sam* 10.7-9), Isaiah's nakedness for three years (*Isa* 20.3), and Ezekiel's symbolic actions (*Ezek* 4.3) work as assuring portents of the fulfilment of the predictions. The rainbow after the flood (*Gen* 9.12), the change of Moses' staff into a serpent and the affliction of his hand with leprosy (*Exod* 4.1-8), and Joshua's oath to Rahab and her tying of the scarlet cord in the window (*Josh* 2.12-18) establish a certainty of the divine and inspired messages. This analysis of the concepts of the σημεῖον demonstrates that both the Gentiles and the Jews understood and used the word in a similar manner.

⁷⁷¹ Hofius, "semeion," 626; cf. Rengstorf, "Semeion," 204-7.

3.2. Sign as a Means of Authentication

The sign requested in 16.1 represents a means of confirmation. Its context shows that it is supposed to be the one that accredits Jesus' special status with God. After Jesus' miraculous healing and feeding of the crowds in which his divine authority is expressed (15.21ff), the Pharisees and Sadducees, who represent "official Judaism in its entirety",⁷⁷² approach him. The coming of the Jewish authorities to Jesus and their request for a sign after such miracles which have given rise to certain perceptions regarding Jesus' status indicate that they are demanding an evidence that authenticates beyond all contradiction that God is with him. Matthew has recorded an episode similar to this in 12.38-39. There too, after a miraculous healing followed by a talk regarding Jesus' authority (12.22ff), Jewish authorities, this time "some of the scribes and Pharisees", ask for a sign from him in 12.38. Commenting on this, France states, "the issue is now overtly christological, as the demand for a 'sign' is, ... in effect a questioning of Jesus' special authority. Jesus is putting himself forward as someone of unique status... Such a bold claim needs to be verified. If God has sent him, surely God will be prepared to authenticate him. 'We want to see a sign'."⁷⁷³ Here the sign represents a divine confirmation of Jesus' status. Considering the sequence and features of the two episodes that closely parallel,⁷⁷⁴ it appears reasonable to view the request for a sign in both pericopae as similar in intention.⁷⁷⁵

This sign as a means of the authentication of Jesus' divine status is further demonstrated in Matthew's presentation of the pericope. While following the sequence of Mark 8.10-13, Matthew, unlike Mark, portrays Jesus as coming to the region alone without his disciples by omitting the phrase μετὰ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ in Mark 8.10 (ἦλθεν εἰς τὰ ὄρια Μαγαδάν, 15.39). In describing the approach of the Jewish authorities, he adds καὶ Σαδδουκαῖοι to οἱ Φαρισαῖοι. They "come to" (προσελθόντες) Jesus, whereas the Pharisees "came out" (ἐξῆλθον) in Mark 8.11. The pairing of the Pharisees and the Sadducees with the single definite article οἱ has appeared in 3.7 to represent the enemies of John the Baptist. They appear this time as the enemies of Jesus (cf. 16.6, 11, 12). Their request for a sign is not made out of a desire to believe in him but to test him. Nolland states, "the idea of testing involved is oriented not so much towards discovery on the part of the one conducting the test, as towards the showing up of the one tested for what he or she is. the

⁷⁷² Hill, *Matthew*, 257.

⁷⁷³ France, *Matthew*, 487.

⁷⁷⁴ Cf. France, *Matthew*, 605.

⁷⁷⁵ Cf. Morris, *Matthew*, 413.

interest is in what is exposed when pressure is applied.”⁷⁷⁶ This presentation of the scene in 16.1 with the coming of the Pharisees and Sadducees as the tempters of Jesus in solitude and their request for a sign recalls the coming to Jesus of the tempter in 4.3. The combination of the words προσέρχομαι and πειράζω, which has been used in 4.3 to describe the tempter’s attempt to test Jesus, may well illustrate a specific link with 4.3.⁷⁷⁷ Garland states, “these sworn enemies (the Pharisees and Sadducees) take up where Satan left off (4.3).”⁷⁷⁸ That being the case, as the tempter’s test in 4.3ff is to demand Jesus to exploit the privilege of his divine status, the Jewish authorities’ request for a sign in 16.1 could be seen as a test of the same nature. Both the context and the presentation of the request for a sign in 16.1 signify that it is most reasonable to interpret it as the sign authenticating Jesus’ special status with God.

3.3. *A Sign from Heaven*

The Pharisees and Sadducees demand that this sign should be ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ. Some scholars have argued that the word οὐρανός here is a reverential circumlocution for God in that the phrase should be understood as “from God”.⁷⁷⁹ There is no doubt that the sign ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ conveys the idea of a divine origin, as “heaven” is regarded as God’s dwelling place. However, this interpretation is fundamentally flawed. As discussed in the previous chapter, it is fallacious to read the οὐρανός in Matthew as a mere reverential circumlocution. Rather, the pericope demonstrates that it is more natural to read οὐρανός literally as a spatial world. The request of the Pharisees and Sadducees in 16.1 displays that Jesus’ miraculous works in the previous pericope, which have all taken place “on earth”, have not been convincing enough for them to acknowledge his status with God. Then, it is conceivable that they are demanding an indisputable sign occurring “from heaven”.⁷⁸⁰ Matthew’s change of ἀπὸ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ in Mark 8.11 to ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ further suggests that the sign be of a celestial phenomenon. A similar phrase (ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν) has appeared in 3.17 to qualify the heavenly voice after Jesus’ baptism. ἐξ οὐρανοῦ in 28.2 illustrates the descending of the angel of the Lord from heaven. Albeit not accompanied by the word οὐρανός, a voice is reported to have been proclaimed ἐκ τῆς νεφέλης in 17.5. Considering that these celestial phenomena work as divine signs to certify Jesus’ status with God, it is plausible to suppose

⁷⁷⁶ Nolland, *Matthew*, 647.

⁷⁷⁷ Nolland, *Matthew*, 163.

⁷⁷⁸ Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 166.

⁷⁷⁹ Hill, *Matthew*, 257; Hagner, *Matthew*, 2.455; France, *Matthew*, 605.

⁷⁸⁰ Cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2.580; Keener, *Matthew*, 420-21.

that the phrase ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ is deliberately placed after the sign to indicate that it should emanate from heaven. This may even suggest what kind of a celestial phenomenon the Pharisees and Sadducees would expect.⁷⁸¹ This interpretation of a celestial phenomenon makes better sense as well if we note the subsequent reply of Jesus in 16.2-3, where he specifically mentions the appearance of οὐρανός while referring to meteorological signs.

There has been an argument regarding the authenticity of Jesus' response in 16.2b-3. The whole section (ὀψίας ... δύνασθε) is missing from a few MSS (Ⲭ B X Γ Γ¹³ etc. sy^{s,c} sa mae bo^{pt} arm). Since these include the earliest uncials Ⲭ and B, some scholars have argued that this reference should be regarded as a later interpolation.⁷⁸² For them, 16.4 follows 16.2a with no difficulty. It is maintained that this connection of 16.2a and 4, which parallels 12.38-39, shows that Matthew followed the same pattern here. According to Davies and Allison, the vocabularies used in 16.2b-3 are atypical of Matthew. They state, "εὐδία, πυρράζει and στυγύζω are NT *hapax legomena*; and γινώσκω + infinitive occurs nowhere else in Matthew."⁷⁸³ Various reasons for regarding the reference as secondary have been suggested.⁷⁸⁴ These arguments, however, are not strong enough to prove the hypothesis of a later insertion of 16.2b-3. The great majority of MSS including C D K L f¹³³ and the old Latin versions still retain this section of Jesus' response. Its structure of parallelism is typical of Matthean style (e.g. ὀψίας γενομένης // καὶ πρῶτ', λέγετε· εὐδία // [λέγετε] σήμερον χειμῶν, and πυρράζει γὰρ ὁ οὐρανός // πυρράζει γὰρ στυγιάζων ὁ οὐρανός). Besides, albeit that they are not present in the NT, the uses of the words εὐδία, στυγύζω and γινώσκω + infinitive are found in the LXX (e.g. Isa 7.15; 8.4). The words πῦρ, κρίνω and associated words are commonly employed in Matthew.⁷⁸⁵ Furthermore, a plural use of καιρός, which is not found in other synoptic gospels, is also found in 21.41. These show that it is still reasonable to regard this section as authentic. As Nolland suggests, the omission of this section in those MSS could have taken place, because "the weather images were incomprehensible to a scribe, or he was tripped up by the γεν- beginning shared by the second word of the omitted section and the beginning of the continuation."⁷⁸⁶

⁷⁸¹ Cf. Nolland, *Matthew*, 647-48.

⁷⁸² Streeter, *The Four Gospels*, 241-42; T. Hirunuma, "Matthew 16.2b-3," in *New Testament Textual Criticism*, (ed. E. J. Epp and G. D. Fee; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 35-45; cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2.580-81; France, *Matthew*, 604-05.

⁷⁸³ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2.581.

⁷⁸⁴ For the suggestions, see Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2.581.

⁷⁸⁵ Gundry, *Matthew*, 645.

⁷⁸⁶ Nolland, *Matthew*, 646; cf. Hagner, *Matthew*, 2.453; Gundry, *Matthew*, 323.

Concerning the issue of what kind of a celestial phenomenon is expected, Keener suggests that it could be a prediction of “a sign in the sky – which could request thunder and lightning (Virg. *Aen.* 8.523-26, especially *signum* in 8.523; 1 Sam 7.10).”⁷⁸⁷ Nolland thinks from the Matthean uses of the phrase that “the voice from heaven” as in 3.17 or 17.5 or the “sign of the Son of Man” in heaven in 24.30 could be appropriate candidates.⁷⁸⁸ It is difficult to define what the Jewish authorities expect. It could be only said that the sign should not be an ordinary occurrence but an extraordinary and indisputable event in heaven.

3.4. *Significance of a Sign from Heaven*

This sign from heaven does not occur as requested in the context. However, even without an actual celestial phenomenon, this pericope of 16.1-4 reveals the contemporary Jewish attitude towards celestial phenomena and its significance in Matthew. Above all, the Pharisees and Sadducees’ request for a heavenly sign demonstrates that not only the Gentiles but also the Jews believed that a celestial phenomenon could represent a God’s way of communication; they could convey divine messages to the earthly world. Moreover, it exhibits that a sign “from heaven” represents the divine affirmation and takes the ultimate authority over any claim on earth. In light of this revelation, their request after Jesus has revealed his divine status through the miraculous works on earth indicates that a wonder from heaven would stand beyond all contradiction as a sign of divine authentication of Jesus’ identity. This scribal attitude towards a sign from heaven establishes a firm foundation for the interpretation of celestial phenomena in Matthew. When they occur in association with Jesus’ status, these heavenly events should be regarded as God’s way of authenticating his divine identity.

4. Astral Prediction in Matthew 24.29-31

This section looks into the celestial phenomena predicted by Jesus in 24.29-31. 24.29-31 is replete with the language typical of ancient astrology. It portrays the celestial phenomena of the darkening of heavenly sources of light and the destruction of other cosmic bodies at the

⁷⁸⁷ Keener, *Matthew*, 421.

⁷⁸⁸ Cf. Nolland, *Matthew*, 647-48.

time of the coming of the Son of Man.⁷⁸⁹ Broken into three parts, it first analyses the narrative context of 24.29-31 and its literary unity. Next, it examines the immediate discourse context of 24.29-31, which will be 24.1-28 and 24.32-35, engaging with the claims of Wright and France that the centre of attention of Jesus' discourse in the text is the socio-political destruction of Jerusalem. It will be contended that the primary concern of Jesus' discourse in 24.1-35 is not with the historical fall of Jerusalem in the near future but to reshape the disciples' misconception of the consummation of the age, which makes the passage thoroughly eschatological. Besides, it will be argued that the prominent astronomical language in the passage presents Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet who could read the signs in the sky and predict the future events. Finally, it will focus on 24.29-31 and explore the source, contemporary understanding, and implication of the celestial phenomena, which it portrays. This will show that the cosmic events in the scene do not signify the socio-political change of Jerusalem but the climactic event of the coming of the Son of Man at the consummation of the age. This investigation will contend that the celestial phenomena in 24.29-31 stand as a sign both of the consummation of the age and endorse the reader's perception of Jesus as a divine prophet.

4.1. *The Context of Matthew 24.29-31 and Its Unity*

There have been various suggestions concerning the context of 24.29-31. While it is generally agreed that it belongs to the so-called Jesus' "Olivet discourse" of 24.1-25.46,⁷⁹⁰ some have argued that 23.1-39 should be seen as part of 24.1-25.46 as the formal accusation for the following judgement in the next discourse.⁷⁹¹ Reading Matthew's editorial change of ἐκπορευομένου ἐκ τοῦ ἱεροῦ ("just" leaving the temple, Mk 13.1) to ἐξελθῶν ἀπὸ τοῦ ἱεροῦ (moving away from the temple, 24.1) as representing Jesus' abandonment of Jerusalem, others have asserted a narrative break after 24.2 assuming Jesus' prediction of the temple demise as the envisagement of the tragic denouement of Jerusalem.⁷⁹² However, the

⁷⁸⁹ Catalogus Codicum Astrologicorum Graecorum (CCAG) 'VIII 3, 183, 3. if a star fall at night, the destruction of the king and the people; Ibid. 13. if a star fall, a sign of good for men; 123, 14. if a star fall upon the earth this night, the king diaphtherei those about him, etc. Saleuo. Lydus p. 89, 3. the elements (ta) of the Roman peace will be shaken; Manetho B 22.' Boll, *Offenbarung*, 130-35; arranged by Malina, "Jesus as Astral Prophet," 86.

⁷⁹⁰ Nolland, *Matthew*, 956; Hagner, *Matthew*, 2.682-3; Morris, *Matthew*, 593; Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 234; Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew*, (London: SCM, 2006), 201.

⁷⁹¹ E.g. Bacon, *Studies in Matthew*; Robert H. Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel*, (NovTSup 18; Leiden: Brill, 1975); Craig Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1990).

⁷⁹² E.g. Rudolf Pesch, "Eschatologie und Ethik: Auslegung von Mt 24, 1-36," *BibLeb* 11 (1970): 227; Fred W. Burnett, *The Testament of Jesus-Sophia: A Redaction-Critical Study of the Eschatological*

spatial shift in location ἀπὸ τοῦ ἱεροῦ (v1) to ἐπὶ τοῦ ὄρους τῶν ἐλαιῶν (v3), and the change of the audience from the “public” multitude to Jesus’ “private” disciples (v1)⁷⁹³ reveals that Matthew is signalling a transition in the narrative at this point. As Gibbs correctly states, “the time period of ‘Jesus in Jerusalem’ is bracketed by the citation of Ps 118.26 ... at Matt 21.9 and then ... at 23.39. With Jesus’ words that are addressed directly to Jerusalem in 23.37-39, the discourse that denounces the religious leaders of Israel is completed.”⁷⁹⁴ This fifth and final discourse of Jesus focuses on the theme of the final judgment along with Jesus’ parousia. After the discourse, the Matthean shared marker of Καὶ ἐγένετο ὅτε ἐτέλεσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς in 26.1 (cf. 7.28; 11.1; 13.53; 19.1) points to the shift of narrative to a new section, the so-called passion and resurrection of Jesus.

Following the introductory piece of 24.1-3, this final discourse of Jesus is divided into three parts: 24.4-35, 24.36-25.30 and 25.31-46.⁷⁹⁵ The thematic contrasts (e.g. “warnings and signs” vs “sudden, unexpected event”, “the danger of deception” vs the danger of “the lack of readiness”) illustrate the break of the discourse.⁷⁹⁶ The change of Jesus’ speech tone from confidence to uncertainty also displays the discourse transition. The first part (24.4-35) presents Jesus’ initial response to his disciples’ question of 24.3. The second (24.36-25.30) discloses the ambiguity about the timing of the coming of the Son of Man and its suddenness along with exhortations to be watchful and ready. The third (25.31-46) manifests the final judgment by the Son of Man. The first part of Jesus’ discourse (24.4-35) consists of five subunits. v4-5, v6-14, v15-28, v29-31 and v32-35.⁷⁹⁷ They introduce Jesus’ predictions, warnings and exhortations of various forthcoming woes. As with many other passages in Matthew, this discourse appears to be an assimilation of various traditions available to the evangelist, mainly Mark 13.1-27 and Q.⁷⁹⁸

Discourse in Matthew, (Washington: University Press of America, 1981), 18-24, 112-28; Gnlika, *Matthäusevangelium*, 2.311-13; Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology*, 158-59.

⁷⁹³ Although a transition to a “private” audience from a “public” is mentioned explicitly in v. 3, it can be assumed that the real “transition” in audience occurs when Jesus leaves the temple with his disciples in v. 1.

⁷⁹⁴ Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia: Jesus' Eschatological Discourse in Matthew's Gospel*, 168.

⁷⁹⁵ Jan Lambrecht, "The Parousia Discourse: Composition and Content in Mt., XXIV-XXV," in *L'Apocalypse Johannique et L'apocalyptique dans le Nouveau Testament*, (ed. Jan Lambrecht; BETL 53; Gembloux: J. Duculot, 1980), 312-13; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3.326-70; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*; Nolland, *Matthew*, 956; France, *Matthew*, 896-931. Cf. for various suggestions on the break point, see Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28: A Commentary*, (trans. James E. Crouch; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 179.

⁷⁹⁶ The phrases from Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia: Jesus' Eschatological Discourse in Matthew's Gospel*, 171.

⁷⁹⁷ For this structure, see below.

⁷⁹⁸ Matthew 24.1-3, 4-9, 13-14, 15-25, 29, 30c-1, 32-3 and 34-5 reveal close Markan parallels. The comparison of 24.26, 27 and 28 with Luke 17.23-4 and 37 alludes to Q as their source. Although the parallel between 24.10-12, 30-31 and *Did.* 16.3-6 may suggest that both *Didache* and Matthew had an

4.2. The Readings of Matthew 24.1-28 and 32-35

At the beginning of Matthew 24, Jesus departs from the temple after having made a prediction of its destruction (v2). He is now sitting on the Mount of Olives in v3 to deliver his final discourse. Mountain locations have been used for the divine revelation in the Gospel (e.g. 5.1; 17.1; 28.16).⁷⁹⁹ Its identification as the Mount of Olives here, where the eschatological events are prophesied to commence (Zech 14.4), signifies the eschatological association of the discourse.⁸⁰⁰ Although Wright and France argue that such a static mood of the discourse, that is, that there is no battle, no warlike stance, no earthquake, no splitting of the mountain, only Jesus' sitting and talking, hardly demonstrates any connection to the eschatological events of Zechariah in the scene.⁸⁰¹ Various features in the scene still reflect its close thematic link with the prophecy of Zechariah, such as, Jesus' move to the Mount of Olives after his accusation against Jerusalem and prediction of its destruction, his disciples' question about timing and signs, and Jesus' predictions of war, earthquake, fleeing and the coming of the Son of Man.⁸⁰² Considering the character of the prophetic events in Zechariah 14 "as clearly final as the author could make it" as McKenzie states,⁸⁰³ it becomes discernible that Jesus' discourse carries the eschatological aspect.

4.2.1. Matthew 24.1-3

The disciples' question of v3 plays a significant role in the interpretation of the entire discourse. It consists of two parts: the first asking about the timing of ταῦτα and the second about the sign of τῆς σῆς παρουσίας καὶ συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος. The single definite

additional source, which was not available to Mark (cf. J.S. Kloppenborg, "Didache 16.6-8 and Special Matthean Tradition," *ZNW* 70 (1979): 54-56.), considering the later composition theory of Didache, this material could be seen as Matthew's own redaction and *Didache's* use of it.

⁷⁹⁹ For the significance of mountains as the place of divine revelation, see Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1.422-23; Terence L. Donaldson, *Jesus on the Mountain: A Study in Matthean Theology*, (JSNTS 8; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985). See also Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story*, 30., who views the mountain as the scene of "end-time acts".

⁸⁰⁰ For the discussion of the Matthean allusion to Zechariah, see Clay A. Ham, "Reading Zechariah and Matthew's Olivet Discourse," in *Biblical Interpretation in Early Christian Gospels*, (ed. Thomas R. Hatina; LNTS 310; London: T & T Clark, 2007), 85-97; Clay A. Ham, *The Coming King and the Rejected Shepherd: Matthew's Reading of Zechariah's Messianic Hope*, (NTM 4; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2005); Paul Foster, "The Use of Zechariah in Matthew's Gospel," in *The Book of Zechariah and its Influence*, (ed. C. M. Tuckett; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 65-85.

⁸⁰¹ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 344; Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 189; France, *Matthew*, 894. Cf. while assuming its allusion to Zechariah 14, Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 345., defines the discourse as 'Jesus' paradoxical retelling of the great story found in Zechariah 14'.

⁸⁰² Cf. Harrington, *Matthew*, 332; Hagner, *Matthew*, 2.688; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3.336-37; Hauerwas, *Matthew*, 201; Adams, *The Stars Will Fall From Heaven*, 139.

⁸⁰³ John L. McKenzie, *A Theology of the Old Testament*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 305.

article shared by both the παρουσία and the συντελεία τοῦ αἰῶνος indicates their “conceptual unity”.⁸⁰⁴ This reveals that for the Matthean portrayal of disciples these two events were inseparable in their minds. The fact that the disciples ask the second part immediately after the first points to the close association of the two events in their conception. The plural ταῦτα alludes that the event is not a single occurrence to the disciples but part of larger phenomena. Jesus’ prediction of the destruction of the temple has led his disciples to focus their minds on the συντελεία. In this respect, albeit the first part of the question alludes to the destruction of the temple in a literal sense,⁸⁰⁵ the disciples’ close association of it with the “end” indicates that it conveys the eschatological connotation

Concerning the second part, some have maintained that it should be taken as synonymous with the first part.⁸⁰⁶ According to Wright, the term παρουσία in the text simply means “presence” “as opposed to *apousia*, ‘absence’; hence it denotes the ‘arrival’ of someone not at the moment present; and it is especially used in relation to the visit ‘of a royal or official personage’.”⁸⁰⁷ For him, since the disciples heard Jesus’ prediction of the destruction of the temple as his “‘coming’ to *Jerusalem as the vindicated, rightful king*,”⁸⁰⁸ the *parousia* in the question signifies Jesus’ “actual enthronement as king”.⁸⁰⁹ Accordingly, Wright contends that the phrase συντελεία τοῦ αἰῶνος refer to “the end of the present evil age ... Israel’s period of mourning and exile.”⁸¹⁰ Initially, Wright’s interpretation that the disciples’ long awaited expectations of Jesus’ enthronement and the subsequent end of the evil age are now associated with the destruction of the temple seems to explain rather well at first the combination of the two questions by the disciples. However, on account of the following factors, Wright’s interpretation fails to win approval:

1. These terms are Matthew’s editorial change of the rather vague remark of Mark 13.4 (ὅταν μέλλῃ ταῦτα συντελεῖσθαι πάντα) in a more clarifying way,
2. The term παρουσία for the second coming of Jesus was “already established in

⁸⁰⁴ Hagner, *Matthew*, 2.688.

⁸⁰⁵ France, *Matthew*, 890, 894-95; Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia: Jesus' Eschatological Discourse in Matthew's Gospel*, 178-79; Nolland, *Matthew*, 960; Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 190-91; Hagner, *Matthew*, 2.688; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3.337.

⁸⁰⁶ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 341-46; Lloyd Gaston, *No Stone on Another: Studies in the Significance of the Fall of Jerusalem in the Synoptic Gospels*, (NovT; Leiden: Brill, 1970), 484; Schuyler Brown, "The Matthean Apocalypse," *JSNT* 4 (1979): 12-14. These scholars regard the entire discourse of Jesus as talking about the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

⁸⁰⁷ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 341; cf. Henry G. Liddell et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, (new ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940), 1343.

⁸⁰⁸ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 342.

⁸⁰⁹ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 346.

⁸¹⁰ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 345-46.

- Christian usage by the time he [Matthew] wrote,”⁸¹¹ as France states,
3. The several usages of the phrase συντελεία τοῦ αἰῶνος in Matthew apparently denotes the end of the space-time order, concurrent with the final judgement (e.g. 13.39, 40, 49; cf. 28.20),
 4. Similar questions were common in Jewish apocalyptic literature (Dan 8.13; 12.6; 2 Esdr 4.33, 35; 6.7, 11-12; 2 Apoc. Bar. 21.18-19) and the rabbinic literature (*b. Sanh.* 98a; 99a; *Pesiq. R.* 1).⁸¹²

Accordingly, it becomes more plausible to read the second part of the question as referring to the (second) coming of Jesus and the consummation of the age.⁸¹³ Harrington states, “The reference to ‘your’ (=Jesus’) *parousia* (‘presence, coming, arrival’) prepares the reader to identify Jesus and the Son of Man whose *parousia* is described in 24.27, 37, 39. The ‘end’ ... alludes to the two ages/worlds pattern common in Jewish apocalypticism which distinguished this age/world from the one to come.”⁸¹⁴ In v3, the disciples of Jesus ask about the time of the destruction of temple and the sign of Jesus’ coming and the consummation of the world, which they think will take place simultaneously.

4.2.2. Matthew 24.4-28

From v4 onwards, Jesus delivers a discourse in response to his disciples’ question. The twofold question of v3 has led scholars to dispute where to make a transition from Jesus’ answer to the first part to the second.⁸¹⁵ However, such a division seems unnecessary, considering the “track record” of Jesus’ disciples’ deficiency in grasping their master’s intention in the Gospel of Matthew.⁸¹⁶ As Gibbs notes, almost whenever they approach Jesus with comments or questions, “there is always something that is deficient in their point of view”: either misunderstanding, failure to understand or lack of faith.⁸¹⁷ This happens with

⁸¹¹ France, *Matthew*, 895. Only 7 cases out of 24 times of its usage are found non-eschatological in the New Testament (1 Cor 16.17; 2 Co 7.6, 7; 10.10; Phil 1.26; 2.12).

⁸¹² Hagner, *Matthew*, 2.688; cf. Nolland, *Matthew*, 961.

⁸¹³ See Lambrecht, “Parousia Discourse,” 318; Victor K. Agbanou, *Le Discours Eschatologique de Matthieu 24-25: Tradition et Rédaction*, (Paris: Libraire Lecoffre, 1983), 39-40, 91; Gnilka, *Matthäusevangelium*, 2.312-13, 322; Morris, *Matthew*, 318; Hagner, *Matthew*, 2.688; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3.328-31; Nolland, *Matthew*, 960-61; Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 190-91.

⁸¹⁴ Harrington, *Matthew*, 332.

⁸¹⁵ See for the transition at v36, France, *Matthew*, 899; Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 234-36; for at v. 32, Brown, “Apocalypse.”; Randolph V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel according to St. Matthew*, (1st ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 223-28; Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, (NAC 22; Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 359.

⁸¹⁶ The term from Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia: Jesus’ Eschatological Discourse in Matthew’s Gospel*, 180.

⁸¹⁷ Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia: Jesus’ Eschatological Discourse in Matthew’s Gospel*, 179. Cf. 8.21, 25; 14.15, 28; 15.12, 15, 23, 33; 16.7, 22; 17.4, 10, 19; 18.1, 21; 20.20.

their eschatological understanding (e.g. 20.20-23; 17.9-13).⁸¹⁸ The same misunderstanding appears to be occurring in their question of v3. Such question is brought about from the disciples' assumption that Jesus' parousia and the end of the age will take place simultaneously with the Jerusalem temple demise. Jesus begins his discourse with a warning against the possibility of being misguided by the seemingly eschatological signs of the "end", such as impostors (allusion of Jesus' parousia, v5), wars and rumours of wars (allusion of the fall of Jerusalem, v6), and natural calamities of famine, earthquake (allusion of the eschatological judgement of God, v7); all of which may well correspond with their eschatological expectations. Through the affirmation that these are not the signs of the "end" (v6),⁸¹⁹ but the beginning of birth pangs (v8), he points out their misunderstanding about the "end", especially "when".⁸²⁰ He spends most of his discourse reshaping the disciples' misconception about the consummation of the age. Jesus' primary concern in his discourse is not with the destruction of the temple but with the cosmic "end". It is further clarified in the following discourse.

After the primary warning against the deception in v4-5, v6-14 continue to describe the end-time phenomena in the world. While the connecting adverb τότε in v9 conveys the sense of "at that time", "while this is still going on", τότε in v10 and 14 in a καὶ τότε form expresses logical sequence "and as a result".⁸²¹ This demonstrates that the events in v9-14 will be taking place simultaneously with the birth pangs in v8. Along with the third person description of the future events in v10-13, the necessity of Gentile mission and the following confirmation of the coming of the "end" in v14 undeniably exhibit the presence of eschatological motif.⁸²²

V15-28 depicts the end-time events with regard to Judea. While it is regarded by and large that the phrase τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἑρημώσεως in v15 refers to the destruction of the temple, the interpretation of the θλίψις μεγάλη in v21-22 has been quite a matter of debate.

⁸¹⁸ See Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia: Jesus' Eschatological Discourse in Matthew's Gospel*, 180.

⁸¹⁹ Although some assert that the τέλος in 24.6 and 14 refers to the destruction of Jerusalem (e.g. France, *Matthew*, 903, 908-10; J. Marcellus Kik, *Matthew Twenty-Four*, (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948), 38; Marie-Joseph Lagrange, *Évangile selon Saint Matthieu*, (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1948), 461.), in the context reconstructed it is clear that the τέλος in v6, 13 and 14 means the consummation of the age. See Nolland, *Matthew*, 967; Hagner, *Matthew*, 2.691, 696; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3.340, 44; Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia: Jesus' Eschatological Discourse in Matthew's Gospel*, 182; Leopold Sabourin, *L'évangile selon Saint Matthieu et ses Principaux Parallèles*, (Roma: Biblical Institute, 1978), 306; Ferdinand Hahn, "Die Eschatologische Rede Matthäus 24 und 25," in *Studien zum Matthäusevangelium: Festschrift für Wilhelm Pesch*, (ed. Ludger Schenke and Wilhelm Pesch; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1988), 118.

⁸²⁰ Cf. Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia: Jesus' Eschatological Discourse in Matthew's Gospel*, 180-81; Carson, "Matthew," 495.

⁸²¹ See Hagner, *Matthew*, 2.694; Nolland, *Matthew*, 965.

⁸²² For the interpretation of the ἔθνος in v14, see Foster, *Community, Law, and Mission*, 234-37.

France takes it as the oppression caused by the siege of Jerusalem in v15.⁸²³ For him, the linking γὰρ shows the close connection of v21 to the preceding. Josephus' description of the horrors of the first-century Jewish war presents parallel with the expressions in v21 (*War* 1.12; cf. 5.424-38, 512-18, 567-72; 6.193-213). The historical reports verify the decrease of horrors by the Roman capture after five months. However, the text seems to demonstrate more of its eschatological nature.⁸²⁴ The eschatological language in v21-22 parallels with that of apocalyptic.⁸²⁵ The references to πᾶσα σὰρξ and τοὺς ἐκλεκτοὺς imply all humankind and all true believers, hence, more than Jewish people. Besides, as Nolland states concerning Josephus, "this [*War* 1.12] is something of a rhetorical flourish at the beginning of his book on the war, and [he could make such a claim] since his days periods of tragic suffering on a huge scale have taken place."⁸²⁶ From this view, θλίψεις μεγάλη appears to be compatible with the eschatological affliction of the believers in v9-14.⁸²⁷

4.2.3. Matthew 24.32-35

V32-35 concludes the first section of Jesus' final discourse with a parable (v32-33) and asseverations (v34-35). From Jesus' discourse in v34 that πάντα ταῦτα predicted in v4-31 will take place within ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη, the generation of Jesus' contemporaries (11.16; 12.41-42; 23.36; cf. 10.23; 16.28), Wright, France and Gibbs argue for the historical destruction of Jerusalem as Jesus' primary concern in the context.⁸²⁸ However, Carson states, "This does *not* mean that the distress must end within that time but only that 'all these things' must happen within it. Therefore v34 sets a *terminus a quo* for the Parousia: it cannot happen till the events in v4-28 take place, all within a generation of 30 CE. But there is no *terminus ad quem* to this distress other than the Parousia itself, and 'only the Father' knows when it will happen (v36)."⁸²⁹ Accordingly, this verse hardly delivers any support for the socio-political interpretation of Jesus' discourse. The contents of 24.1-28 and 32-35 show that the entire discourse of Jesus in the passage is oriented to reshape his disciples' misconception of the consummation of the age. The socio-political interpretation of the passage seems unlikely.

⁸²³ France, *Matthew*, 915-16; Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 359-60.

⁸²⁴ Cf. Carson, "Matthew," 502; Morris, *Matthew*, 605.

⁸²⁵ For v21, see Dan 12.1; Joel 2.2; IQM 1.11-12; *T. Mos.* 8.1; Rev 16.18; Exod 10.14; 11.6; for v22, see Sir 36.8; 4Q385.3; *LAB* 19.13; *2 Bar.* 20.1-2; 54.1; 83.1; *2 Esdr* 2.13; Bar 4.3; *Apoc. Abr.* 29.13.

⁸²⁶ Nolland, *Matthew*, 975. The words in brackets are mine.

⁸²⁷ Cf. Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 198.

⁸²⁸ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 470; France, *Matthew*, 929-30; Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia: Jesus' Eschatological Discourse in Matthew's Gospel*, 205-07.

⁸²⁹ Carson, "Matthew."

4.3. Astral Prediction in Matthew 24.29-31

After the predictions and warnings about the end days, Jesus turns to what will take place at the time of his παρουσία καὶ συντελεία τοῦ αἰῶνος. The linking εὐθέως with μετὰ τὴν θλίψιν τῶν ἡμερῶν ἐκείνων presents its connection with the period of tribulation described in v21-22. In v29-31 Jesus foretells what will come after the tribulation. According to Beasley-Murray, the universal catastrophic language of v29 reveals the supernatural “reactions of nature” at the coming of God.⁸³⁰ Together with “the coming forth of the Lord”, this phenomenon represents the major characteristics of the OT theophany.⁸³¹ It is generally agreed that the language of v29 is derived from the LXX of OT prophetic passages (Isa 13.10 for v29bc; 34.4 for v29de; Joel 2.10, 3.3-4; 4.15-16; Amos 8.9). Its future tense exhibits its close relation with the coming “day of The Lord” for judgment and deliverance. In the OT, the prophetic use of this day of the Lord either looks forward to the eschatological judgment of God in history or refers to certain historical events (the judgment of God against particular nations).⁸³² The overall interpretation of v29-31 varies depending on the reading of v29.

Some scholars, such as Wright, France, Gibbs and Garland, interpret the celestial phenomena of v29 as the description of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.⁸³³ As mentioned earlier, for these, the tribulation depicted in v21-22 refers to the persistent oppression in Judea. Accordingly, the cosmic catastrophic events in v29 εὐθέως μετὰ τὴν θλίψιν τῶν ἡμερῶν ἐκείνων can hardly mean “what it says, since the sun and moon do still shine, heaven has not collapsed, and the Son of Man has not come on the clouds of heaven.”⁸³⁴ Hence, they insist that just as the OT references for v29 are predicted in the context of God’s judgment on particular nations (e.g. Babylon, Edom, Israel and Judah), v29 should be read in a similar manner.⁸³⁵ In addition, from the mention of the coming of the Son

⁸³⁰ The phrase from George R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 4.

⁸³¹ Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*, 4. 4.

⁸³² Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*, 13. Gerhard Dellling, ‘ἡμέρα,’ *TDNT* 2.948; G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible*, (London: Duckworth, 1980), 113, 219.

⁸³³ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 360-63; Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia: Jesus' Eschatological Discourse in Matthew's Gospel*, 195-97; France, *Matthew*, 920-23; Garland, *Reading Matthew*, 238.

⁸³⁴ France, *Matthew*, 921.

⁸³⁵ Cf. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 354-55; B. M. F. Van Iersel, "The Sun, Moon, and Stars of Mark 13, 24-25 in a Greco-Roman Reading," *Bib* 77 (1996): 84-92. While commenting on the parallel in Mark 13.24-25, they come to the same conclusion.

of Man ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν in v30, France finds the echo of Dan 7.13-14⁸³⁶ and argues that since “there is nothing in the imagery of Daniel to suggest a coming *to earth*,”⁸³⁷ the passage should “be interpreted not of a ‘coming’ to earth at the *parousia* but of a ‘coming’ to God in heaven to be given the universal dominion.”⁸³⁸ For him, the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in v29 stands as the earthly presentation of Jesus’ heavenly vindication and enthronement.⁸³⁹ For these scholars, Jesus’ prediction of the socio-political change of Jerusalem corresponds well with the prophetic tradition of the OT.⁸⁴⁰ In addition, Gibbs states,

because the entire story of Matthew’s Gospel has created a world in which the eschatological reign of heaven is already present in the time of the story in a powerful, hidden, and (at times) paradoxical manner ... [t]he implied reader has learned to view historical events within the story-world in eschatological terms. ... the implied reader has been taught that eschatological language can refer both to the end of history as well as to events within the course of history. ... This man, Jesus, will ‘come’ ... at the consummation of the age ... ; yet the ‘coming’ of this man will also take place when Jesus’ eschatological death and its accompanying signs occur, as well as when Jerusalem is destroyed.⁸⁴¹

This construal interpretation of v29 conveys many good observations. Matthew’s portrayal of Jesus in the OT prophetic tradition is certainly present in v29, as has been evident in the discourse so far. The observation of Gibbs that the reader views the events in Matthew “within the story-world in eschatological terms” is insightful.⁸⁴² So is his reading of “already” and “not yet” in the Gospel. The reader could have seen God’s theophany at the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem. However, this interpretation of v29 by France and Gibbs fails to win acceptance for a number of reasons.

First, it is dubious whether v29 can be taken incontrovertibly as conveying the same connotation of the OT text. Principally, it is correct that those passages in the OT are concerned with the divine judgment upon contemporary nations on one hand. However, they also exhibit the language of the day of The Lord against the whole earth (e.g. Isa 13.5-13; 34.4; Joel 2.10-12). And that is in fact where such astronomic distress language is employed.

⁸³⁶ France, *Matthew*, 396, 923-26; cf. Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia: Jesus’ Eschatological Discourse in Matthew’s Gospel*, 200-01.

⁸³⁷ France, *Matthew*, 396.

⁸³⁸ France, *Matthew*, 923.

⁸³⁹ France, *Matthew*, 924; Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 360-63.

⁸⁴⁰ Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia: Jesus’ Eschatological Discourse in Matthew’s Gospel*, 197; cf. Malina, “Jesus as Astral Prophet,” 89; Bruce J. Malina, “Religion in the World of Paul: A Preliminary Sketch,” *BTB* 16 (1986): 92-101.

⁸⁴¹ Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia: Jesus’ Eschatological Discourse in Matthew’s Gospel*, 195-96.

⁸⁴² Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia: Jesus’ Eschatological Discourse in Matthew’s Gospel*, 195.

For the juxtaposition of these two universal and national judgments, there have been various suggestions; either the national judgment represents “a type and even a beginning of the final judgment”,⁸⁴³ or the “cash value” of the cosmic distress is a national judgment,⁸⁴⁴ or the day of The Lord language is a later addition for a universal and eschatological implication,⁸⁴⁵ or both references are present in the authors’ mind.⁸⁴⁶ Yet, there is still no satisfactory consensus. Then, the contentions of France and Gibbs are not as supportive as they think in interpreting v29 as referring to God’s judgment upon Jerusalem. Besides, the comparison of the language of v29 with those of the related OT texts demonstrates that v29 is not a mere reproduction of the texts but a free conflation of those. If so, v29 can be, as Verheyden affirms, “a quite different text” to any of its sources.⁸⁴⁷ Moreover, the absence of an indication of any location for the astronomic distress in v29 suggests its independency from its sources.

Second, the contemporary usages of the astronomic language in Jewish apocalyptic and related literature,⁸⁴⁸ which carries relatively more significance for the interpretation of v29,⁸⁴⁹ demonstrates its employment for the portrayal of the approaching day of The Lord at the consummation of the age.⁸⁵⁰ The dissolution of the current cosmic order in all these references represents the supernatural “reactions of nature” at the visitation of God for the universal judgment, the typical pattern of theophany. Although Wright regards the celestial beings (sun, moon and stars) in the text as ‘the great powers of the world’ and takes these phenomena as the socio-political events (e.g. *T. Mos.* 10.4-5),⁸⁵¹ this interpretation seems improbable without any provision of the textual support. Even France acknowledges, “in the later apocalyptic [literature], ... it has apparently a more ‘end of the world’ reference appropriate to the focus of those works.”⁸⁵² Moreover, various portrayals of the end of the cosmos in the contemporary Graeco-Roman literature display the similar astronomic

⁸⁴³ Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: The English Text, with Introd., Exposition, and Notes*, (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965-72), 1.419.

⁸⁴⁴ Barton, *Joel and obadiah*, 74; Wildberger, *Isaiah*, 25.

⁸⁴⁵ R. E. Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 135.

⁸⁴⁶ Raabe, "The Particularizing," 652-74; Adams, *The Stars Will Fall From Heaven*, 156.

⁸⁴⁷ Verheyden, "Describing the Parousia," 540.

⁸⁴⁸ For the term “apocalyptic”, this study follows the definition by Rowland, that is, “the direct communication of the heavenly mysteries in all their diversity,” Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 14, 23-48., 14, 23-48; cf. Sim, *Apocalyptic Eschatology*, 23-31.

⁸⁴⁹ In deciding linguistic meaning, synchrony takes the priority over diachrony. See Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, *Linguistics & Biblical Interpretation*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 25-26, 131-35.

⁸⁵⁰ E.g. *1 En.* 80.4-8,⁸⁵⁰ *LAB* 19.13; *T. Mos.* 10.5; *Sib. Or.* 3.796-803; 5.346-49; *4 Ezra* 5.4-5. Cf. for detailed examination, see Adams, *The Stars Will Fall From Heaven*, 59-100.

⁸⁵¹ Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, 305.

⁸⁵² R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 533 n. 8. The word in bracket is mine

dissolution.⁸⁵³ They convey similar figures as in v29: the malfunction of the sun and moon; the falling of stars; the collapse of the heavenly vault; the shaking of the earth. All these descriptions from both Jewish and Graeco-Roman literature suggest that the astronomic distress was, as such, a characteristic expression for the portrayal of the consummation of the age.

Third, concerning the interpretation of the coming of the Son of Man in v30, it should be noticed that it is not only the Danielic vision that is in view. According to Adams, there are numerous differences between Daniel 7.13-14 and the phrase in the discourse. He argues that we should view the Matthean phrase as the combination of Daniel 7.13 and Zechariah 14.5.⁸⁵⁴ For him, the portrayal of the coming of the Son of Man in the scene alludes to the eschatological coming of God as predicted in the OT texts for the final deliverance and judgement. The expressions, such as “coming in clouds”,⁸⁵⁵ “with power and glory”,⁸⁵⁶ “with angels”,⁸⁵⁷ and “to gather his elect”,⁸⁵⁸ all demonstrate that it is God himself who is in the scene.⁸⁵⁹ Davies and Allison also state, “a cloud is the visible sign of the invisible presence of God and so a regular element of the theophany.”⁸⁶⁰ Verheyden points out that the use of the verb σαλεύω in v29, which is more frequently used in the LXX of the OT theophany texts, alludes to the coming of the Son of Man as a theophany.⁸⁶¹

Fourth, the context reconstructed thus far does not correspond with the interpretation of the downfall of Jerusalem. Although the destruction of the temple is referred to in v15-20, the θλίψις μεγάλης of v21-22 denotes not the temporary oppression but the ongoing eschatological affliction. From this perspective, the astronomic downfall immediately after those days can hardly imply a socio-political judgment on Jerusalem. Considering the OT concept of the coming day of The Lord and the contemporary images of the astronomic distress, it appears more reasonable to read v29 as the eschatological phenomena at the consummation of the age.

As for the readers in late antiquity, those events in 24.4-35 which Jesus foresaw to come at the end days were not very new or strange, since they were relatively common

⁸⁵³ E.g. *Consol. ad Marc.* 26.6-7; *Ben.* 6.22; *Thyestes* 835-84; *Hercules Oetaeus* 1102-17; *Pharsalia* 1.72-81; 2.289-92; 7.135-38. For detailed examination, see Adams, *The Stars Will Fall From Heaven*, 122-24.

⁸⁵⁴ Adams, *The Stars Will Fall From Heaven*, 148-49.

⁸⁵⁵ Exod 19.9; 34.5; Num 11.25; 12.5; 2 Sam 22.12; Ps 18.11-12; 97.2; Isa 19.1; Nah 1.3.

⁸⁵⁶ Isa 59.19; 66.18; Hab 3.3; cf. Ps 21.13; 46.1; 59.16; 66.3.

⁸⁵⁷ *I En.* 1.9; Deut 33.2; Ps 68.17; Zech 9.14-15.

⁸⁵⁸ Isa 11.11; 27.12-13; 43.6; 60.1-9

⁸⁵⁹ Adams, *The Stars Will Fall From Heaven*, 150-54.

⁸⁶⁰ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3.362. Cf. Exod 16.10; 20.21; Lev 16.2; Num 14.14; 1 Kgs 8.10-11; Ps 18.11; Ezek 1.4; 10.4; LXX Zech 2.17; etc.

⁸⁶¹ Verheyden, "Describing the Parousia," 546.

expectations for the “end” at that time. Numerous Jewish apocalyptic and related writings declared similar events to take place in the last days.⁸⁶² However, not only in Jewish literature but also in the contemporary Hellenistic astrology those events were common. The comparative listing that Malina provides clearly exhibits the presence of the same phenomena foreseen in both writings.⁸⁶³ Considering the previous exploration with references to the ancient astrology, it was no surprise for the Matthean readership to encounter the same predictions in both Jewish and Hellenistic astrological literature. In fact, it confirmed that those predictions were authentic interpretation of the divine revelation. Accordingly, the facts that Jesus’ discourse predicted the same eschatological events in Jewish literature and that it conveyed the contemporary astronomical language verified to the readership that he was an apocalyptic prophet of God who could read signs in the vault of the sky and proclaim their impact upon the land. Jesus’ prediction in v29-31 of the celestial phenomena of the darkening of heavenly sources of light and the destruction of other cosmic bodies undeniably justified their perception of Jesus.

4.4. Summary

This section has investigated the celestial phenomena in 24.29-31. Although Wright, France and Gibbs read it as the socio-political destruction of Jerusalem, the coherent reading of the pericope with its wider discourse context exhibits the improbability of such an interpretation. The discourse initiating questions by Jesus’ disciples in v3 clearly conveys an eschatological connotation. The following discourse of Jesus in the narrative is primarily concerned to reshape his disciples’ misconception of the consummation of the age. They are not to be deceived by any seemingly eschatological occurrences. Both the birth pangs in v9-14 and the great tribulation in v21-22 refer to the end time phenomena. The cosmic events predicted to take place εὐθέως μετὰ τὴν θλίψιν τῶν ἡμερῶν ἐκείνων in v29-31 represent the supernatural “reactions of nature” at the coming day of The Lord for the final judgment and deliverance. In this respect, the discourse is thoroughly eschatological. It gives no room for the interpretation of the socio-political change of Jerusalem.

The eschatological events that Jesus predicts in 24.4-35 parallel with the end time events in the contemporary Jewish apocalyptic and related literature. This leads the Matthean readership to perceive Jesus in a prophetic tradition of the OT. Such events were also found

⁸⁶² For the references of those events in Jewish literature, see Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3.338-64. Adams, *The Stars Will Fall From Heaven*, 52-100.

⁸⁶³ Malina, "Jesus as Astral Prophet," 85-86; cf. Boll, *Offenbarung*, 130-35.

relatively common in the Graeco-Roman literature. The comparative listing of Jesus' predictions and the Hellenistic astrology reveals the prominent presence of the astronomical language attributed to Jesus' discourse in Matthew. With the assumption that both Matthew and his intended readership were familiar with the ancient astrological world-view, Jesus' prediction of the celestial phenomena in v29-31 further assures the readers of the divine status of Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet who could read the signs in the vault of the sky and proclaim their impact upon the land.

5. Celestial Phenomena in Matthew 27.45 and 28.2

The final two celestial phenomena in Matthew take place at the death of Jesus in 27.45 in the form of darkness and at his resurrection in 28.2 as an angel of the Lord descends from heaven. These phenomena at such climatic moments again draw the reader's attention to the heavenly world and the messages that they manifest. This section will begin by considering the geophysical explanation for the three-hour period of preternatural darkness. This will show that regardless of its historicity, Matthew's focus is on the symbolic and theological significance of the phenomenon. Next, it will examine the meaning and significance of the darkness in Graeco-Roman context. This will suggest how a contemporary reader may have viewed the unanticipated darkness during the daytime. Then, it will explore its meaning and significance from the biblical background. A number of accounts at the death of Jesus echo the OT references; e.g. the mockeries of Jesus (27.43) for the portrayal of the suffering just one in Ps 22.8, the dying scream of Jesus (27.46) for Psalm 22.1, and the giving of vinegary wine to Jesus as a reaction to his cry for Psalm 69.21. The context suggests an OT background for the darkness at the death of Jesus. Finally, it will investigate the meaning and significance of the heavenly phenomenon at the resurrection of Jesus. This investigation will suggest that the darkness at the death of Jesus and the heavenly phenomenon at his resurrection signify the inauguration of the eschatological judgment of the world and the long awaited new creation of God, and represent Jesus as the harbinger of such cosmic, redemptive-historically climatic events.

5.1. *Darkness as a Divine Intervention*

There has been a discussion over what actually happened in 27.45, whether the darkness was a historical event or a symbolic imagery without any factual basis.⁸⁶⁴ It is not impossible that Matthew added the darkness without any genuine footing in order to deliver the significance of Jesus' death.⁸⁶⁵ However, the way that the evangelist describes the death of Jesus makes it difficult to concur with such an argument. He specifically mentions the occurring "hours" of darkness as he does for the final cry of Jesus in 27.46, which he portrays as real. Besides, the response of the centurion and other eyewitnesses at the cross in 27.54 is based upon the observation of darkness together with the tearing of the temple veil and the cosmic events in 27.51-53. These indications suggest that Matthew is more than likely to have believed that the darkness actually happened.

There have been various suggestions with regard to the nature of darkness; e.g. an eclipse of the sun, extraordinary solar activity, a darkening of the daylight by a fierce sand, dust storm ("sirocco") or volcanic dust, a cover of black storm clouds, etc.⁸⁶⁶ However, there is no way of knowing what exactly caused the phenomenon. Matthew simply states its occurrence without any elaboration. This way of portrayal leaves it open for any interpretation. It shows that the evangelist is not particularly interested in the specific origin of the darkness but in the announcement of divine intervention in the form of darkness. His focus is primarily on its symbolic and theological significance.

This darkness is said to have occurred ἐπὶ πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν. There has been an argument that the word γῆ here should refer to the "earth" in that the phrase should be interpreted as "over all the earth", since γῆ in Matthew almost always denotes the "earth" if the sense of "dry land" (as opposed to water) or "ground" (soil) is not clear from the context (e.g. 5.13, 18; 6.10, 19; 11.25; 12.42; 24.35; 28.18).⁸⁶⁷ It is maintained that when used in the sense of "land", γῆ is modified with a corresponding attribute (e.g. 2.6, 20, 21; 4.15; 10.15; cf. 9.26, 31). However, considering that the darkness was a well-timed local phenomenon, it seems better to interpret γῆ as "the land" in that the darkness took place "over all the land". Nolland states, "in light of the lack of intensifiers for 'darkness' and the proleptic nature of the

⁸⁶⁴ For the various suggestions, see Morris, *Matthew*, 719-20; cf. Taylor, *Mark*, 593.

⁸⁶⁵ Cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3.623.

⁸⁶⁶ Among these, a solar eclipse should be ruled out of the list, since it is astronomically impossible. The crucifixion took place on or near the Passover, which was celebrated always during a full moon. An eclipse is not possible with a full moon, since the moon is on the other side of the planet. Besides, a solar eclipse lasts only several minutes not three hours.

⁸⁶⁷ Cf. Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave: A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels*, (1st ed.; AB; New York: Doubleday, 1994), 2.1036; Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 543; Hill, *Matthew*, 354.

eschatology, the more modest scope of ‘land’ fits better. It also fits better with the sharp Jerusalem focus of the whole Passion Narrative.”⁸⁶⁸ Given these two alternatives, it appears right to interpret the word γῆ as conveying two implications. Hence, while it denotes the “land” historically and meteorologically, it could connote an idea of the “earth” as Matthew’s focus is on the symbolic and theological significance of the phenomenon as suggested. Brown says, “while the target of the OT oracles of judgment on the day of the Lord was usually Israel or Judea, the prophets scarcely confined the apocalyptic signs to one small corner of the earth.”⁸⁶⁹

5.2. Meaning and Significance of the Darkness in Graeco-Roman Context

The darkness in the daytime was not uncommon in late antiquity in the Graeco-Roman world. There are a number of texts that record the occurrences of an unexpected darkness that accompanied the death of great figures or of the fall of cities (cf. Eusebius, *Praep. Ev.* 8.14.50; Philo, *Prov.* 2.50). Such a phenomenon was commonly regarded as the activity of deities to constitute a bad omen and to represent cosmic sorrow (cf. Plutarch, *Tim.* 28.2). For example, describing the life of Romulus, Plutarch states, τοῦ μὲν γὰρ ἡλίου τὸ φῶς ἐκλιπεῖν at his departure or demise (*Rom.* 27.6). Ovid likewise reports that “sol fugit, et remouent subeuntia nubila caelum” (*Fasti* 2.493; cf. Cicero, *Republ.* 6.21-22; Livy, *Hist. Rome* 1.16). With regard to the death of Caesar, Plutarch describes that there was το περὶ τὸν ἥλιον ἀμαύρωμα τῆς αὐγῆς (*Caes.* 69.3). Virgil states, “Ille etiam extincto miseratus Caesare Romam, cum caput obscura nitidum ferrugine texit inopiaque aeternam timuerunt saecula noctem” (*Georg.* 1.467). Similarly, Josephus reports that δι’ ἃ καὶ τὸν ἥλιον ἀπεστράφθαι δοκοῦμεν ὃς καὶ αὐτὸς ἀηδῶς ἐπεῖδεν τὸ ἐπὶ Καίσαρι μῦθος (*Ant.* 14.309). Ovid portrays it as “solis quoque tristis imago lurida sollicitis praebebat lumina terris” (*Met.* 15.785). Pliny remarks that “Eclipses of the sun also take place which are portentous and unusually long, such as occurred when Caesar the Dictator was slain” (*Nat. hist.* 2.30). For the death of Pelopidas, Plutarch and Diodorus report that a solar eclipse occurred beforehand as its omen. ὁ μὲν ἥλιος ἐξέλιπε καὶ σκότος ἐν ἡμέρᾳ τὴν πόλιν (Plutarch, *Pel.* 31.2), σέκλιπειν τὸν τῆς πόλεως ἥλιον (Diodorus, *Lib.* 15.80.3). Dio Cassius notes that ὁ τε γὰρ ἥλιος ἅπας ἐξέλιπε at the death of Augustus (*History* 56.29.3). Portraying the death of Carneades, Diogenes Laertius states, ὁ τελευτῶντος δ’ αὐτοῦ

⁸⁶⁸ Nolland, *Matthew*, 1205; cf. Hagner, *Matthew*, 2.843-44; Keener, *Matthew*, 685.

⁸⁶⁹ Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 1036.

φασιν ἔκλειψιν γενέσθαι σελήνης, συμπάθειαν, ὡς ἂν εἴποι τις, αἰνιττομένου τοῦ μεθ' ἡλίον καλλίστου τῶν ἄστρον (*Vit. Phil.* 4.64).

These examples show that when a Hellenistic reader read the occurrence of preternatural darkness at midday on Golgotha, they would readily associate the death of Jesus with that of a great hero. There are a number of records that report the occurrence of a solar eclipse within few years of Jesus' death. For example, an eclipse of the sun is observed in parts of Greece, Asia Minor, and Syria on November 24th in 29 CE. Origen (*Contra Celsum* 2.33) mentions that Phlegon made a record of an eclipse along with an earthquake occurred in the reign of Tiberius (14-37 CE). Eusebius also reports that Phlegon mentions that there was a great eclipse of the sun in the 4th year of the 202d Olympiad, which would have been 32-33 CE (*Chron.* 47.174-75). These events and Matthew's portrayal of the indefinable darkness may leave a room for a contemporary reader to attribute the darkness to a solar eclipse. Considering that Roman emperors were commonly considered divine and were called the "son of god" as argued previously,⁸⁷⁰ it is more than likely that this unexpected darkness led Hellenistic readers to regard the unexpected darkness as the cosmic sorrow for the death of a son of god, which is in this occasion the death of Jesus. This celestial phenomenon of darkness is taken by Matthew as again authenticating Jesus' divine identity.

5.3. *Meaning and Significance of the Darkness in Jewish Context*

There have been largely three suggestions regarding the possible OT background for the darkness in 27.45; the Egyptian plague of darkness in Exodus 10.22, the darkness as a symbol of divine judgment in Amos 8.9, and the darkness of disorder before the creation of light in Genesis 1.2.

5.3.1. Darkness as a Sign of Divine Wrath

The preternatural darkness was the ninth plague inflicted upon Egypt. Exodus 10.22 reports,

ἐξέτεινεν δὲ Μωυσῆς τὴν χεῖρα εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν καὶ ἐγένετο σκότος γνόφος θύελλα ἐπὶ πᾶσαν γῆν Αἰγύπτου τρεῖς ἡμέρας (Exod 10.22 LXX).

This darkness is followed by the final plague, that is, the death of the firstborn at the time of the first Passover (Exod 12-13). There appear a number of parallels between the darkness in

⁸⁷⁰ Cf. Peppard, "Eagle and the Dove," 431-35.

Egypt and that at the crucifixion: (1) Both phenomena occur at the Passover context. (2) The word σκότος in both contexts occurs with the verb γίνομαι. This combination followed by a reference to ἐπὶ πᾶσαν γῆν appear only in Exodus 10.22 in all of the Greek OT and in 27.45. (3) Both texts have an almost identical spatial description (ἐπὶ πᾶσαν γῆν Αἰγύπτου, Exod 10.22 LXX // ἐπὶ πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν, 27.45)⁸⁷¹ and a note of the temporary duration of darkness (three days in Exodus and three hours in Matthew). (4) Immediately after both phenomena the blood of the firstborn is shed.⁸⁷² There has been an argument from these features that the darkness at the crucifixion reflects an act of divine wrath in Exodus 10.22.⁸⁷³ Cole states, “darkness at noon, by its paradoxical nature, was a fitting sign for God the Creator to give to those who had rejected the light of the world.”⁸⁷⁴ It may have not been difficult for a Jewish reader to recall the exodus darkness from this phenomenon.

5.3.2. Darkness as a Sign of the Judgment Day of the Lord

Darkness as a biblical sign of divine wrath appears most commonly in the prophetic proclamation. Jeremiah declares its occurrence as part of a judgment oracle in the context of Jerusalem’s continual rejection of God (ἐπέδω ὁ ἥλιος αὐτῇ ἔτι μεσοῦσης τῆς ἡμέρας κατησχύνθη καὶ ὠνειδίσθη, Jer 15.9 LXX). There the darkness is anticipated to take place “at midday”. Yet, where this motif of darkness appears most obviously as the manifestation of divine wrath are in the OT references to “the day of the Lord”, the eschatological judgment day:

Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming! Yes, it approaches, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of thick clouds! (Joel 2.1-2)
 The sun will be turned into darkness And the moon into blood Before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes (Joel 2.31)
 What will the day of the LORD mean for you? It will be darkness, not light! ... Truly, the day of the LORD will be darkness, not light, gloom without any brightness! (Amos 5.18, 20)
 On that day-- oracle of the Lord GOD-- I will make the sun set at midday and in broad daylight cover the land with darkness. I will turn your feasts into mourning and all your

⁸⁷¹ This parallel may further demonstrate that the word γῆ is here to be read in its more limited sense of the land of Judaea rather than of a worldwide darkness.

⁸⁷² Cf. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006), 230.

⁸⁷³ Cf. Henry Barclay Swete, *The Gospel according to St. Mark: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes and Indices*, (London: Macmillan and co., 1898), 384-85; R. A. Cole, *The Gospel according to St. Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, (1st. ed.; TNTC; London: Tyndale Press, 1961), 320; France, *Mark*, 651; Kelli S. O'Brien, *The Use of Scripture in the Markan Passion Narrative*, (LNTS 384; London New York: T & T Clark, 2010), 110-11, 141-44.

⁸⁷⁴ Cole, *Mark*, 320.

songs into dirges... I will make it like the time of mourning for an only child.... (Amos 8.9-10)

A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of thick black clouds, (Zeph 1.15)

Among these references, Amos 8.9-10 presents a close parallel to the phenomenon in 27.45.⁸⁷⁵ Like the darkness at the crucifixion, it announces the event of darkness ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς “at the middle of the day” (Amos 8.9). It specifically mentions ‘the mourning for an only son’ (**וַיִּתְּן לְבָכּוּת**, Amos 8.10) on that day, which could correspond to the death of Jesus.⁸⁷⁶

The word **וַיִּתְּן** is translated to ἀγαπητοῦ in the LXX. It is only Jesus that is called God’s ἀγαπητός in Matthew (3.17; 17.5; cf. 12.18). Both the passion narrative and Amos 8.9-10 occur in a Jewish festival context (cf. Tob. 2.6).⁸⁷⁷ Considering that Matthew has used the motif of darkness in the sense of “judgment” (8.12; 22.13; 25.30), along with “sin” (6.23) and “an absence of salvation” (4.16), the darkness at the crucifixion could signify the inauguration of an eschatological judgment of God.⁸⁷⁸ This interpretation could be further validated by the subsequent cosmological occurrences in 27.51-53, especially the earth shaking and the rocks rending. In a number of the OT references, these events function as a sign of the impending judgment day of the Lord. Some of these take place with darkness (cf. *T. Levi* 3.9; 4.1; *I En.* 1.3-8).⁸⁷⁹

I looked at the earth and it was waste and void; at the heavens and their light was gone; I looked at the mountains and they were quaking, and all the hills were moved (Jer 4.23-24)

Before them the earth trembles; the heavens shake; the sun and moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their brightness (Joel 2.10)

In my distress I called upon the Lord; to my God I called. From his temple he heard my voice, ... Then the earth rocked and shook; the foundations of the heavens trembled and quaked, because he was angry (2 Sam 22.7-8)

⁸⁷⁵ Cf. Dale C. Allison, *The End of the Ages Has Come: An Early Interpretation of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 26-30; Douglas J. Moo, *The Old Testament in the Gospel Passion Narratives*, (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 342-44; Ben Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001), 297-98.

⁸⁷⁶ Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009), 259.

⁸⁷⁷ Cf. O'Brien, *The Use of Scripture in the Markan Passion Narrative*, 111.

⁸⁷⁸ Given the biblical tradition that equates light with the divine presence, favour or salvation (Isa 9.2; 42.6; cf. Luke 2.32), the darkness at the death of Jesus could function as a symbol of the absence of God (Greg Forbes, "Darkness over all the Land: Theological Imagery in the Crucifixion Scene," *RTR* 66, no. 2 (2007): 86; Robert A. Guelich and Craig A. Evans, *Mark*, (WBC 34; Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1989), 2.506.). Jesus' cry of abandonment from the cross (27.46), which recalls Psalm 22.2, demonstrates that God is hiding his face.

⁸⁷⁹ Cf. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2.1121-23.

On that day God's feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, ... The Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west ... (Zech 14.4)

The mountains quake before him, and the hills dissolve; The earth is laid waste before him, the world and all who dwell in it. Before his wrath, who can stand firm, and who can face his blazing anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken up before him. (Nah 1.5-6)

5.3.3. Darkness as the Inauguration of the New Creation

The reference to the creation out of darkness in Genesis 1.2-3 could also be the biblical theological background of the celestial phenomenon in 27.45. Exploring Mark 15.33, Ortlund and Beale have argued recently that the darkness at the death of Jesus not only represents the eschatological divine judgment but also, “together with the return of light three hours later, is a cosmic, redemptive-historically climactic indication of the inaugurated new creation longed for with snowballing intensity throughout the OT.”⁸⁸⁰ According to them, the darkness together with emerging light is foretold only in Genesis 1.2-3 and Isaiah 60.1-2, which is an allusion to the former. They state, “just as creation began in darkness and yielded to light, so new creation began in darkness as Jesus hung on the cross and then yielded to light.”⁸⁸¹

Ortlund and Beale argue that there are a number of OT references that support this interpretation of darkness at the crucifixion. First of all, the theme of darkness and light runs right through the OT. The motif of light in the OT is said to signify not only natural illumination but also the dawning of creation (Gen 1.2-4), divine guidance to Israel’s way in the wilderness (Exod 13.21; Neh 9.12, 19; Ps 78.14), the Torah for the people of God (Ps 119.105, 130; Isa 51.4), joy (Esth 8.16; Ps 97.11; Jer 25.10), the opposite of darkness as moral category (Isa 5.20; 51.4; 59.9; Hos 6.5; Mic 7.9), and the Isaianic hope of restored world order (Isa 9.2; 30.26; 58.8; 60.1, 19-20).⁸⁸² It is also said to represent ‘the radiant luminosity of the face of God himself (Num 6.25-26; Ps 4.6; 34.5; 80.3, 7, 19; 89.15; cf. Ps 27.1; Mic 7.8)’.⁸⁸³ They state, “light is a whole-Bible motif, popping up at one crucial moment in redemptive history after another.”⁸⁸⁴

Besides, the references to darkness in Exodus 10.22 and Amos 8.9 also could be interpreted as a sign of cosmic judgment and new creation. For the exodus darkness, they state that it is one of “a series of de-creative acts, by which the original created order is

⁸⁸⁰ Dane C. Ortlund and G. K. Beale, "Darness over the Whole Land: A Biblical Theological Reflection on Mark 15.33 " *WTJ* 75 (2013): 225.

⁸⁸¹ Ortlund and Beale, "Darness over the Whole Land," 236.

⁸⁸² Ortlund and Beale, "Darness over the Whole Land," 225-26.

⁸⁸³ Ortlund and Beale, "Darness over the Whole Land," 226.

⁸⁸⁴ Ortlund and Beale, "Darness over the Whole Land," 226.

undone and a portion of the earth ... returns to primordial chaos” (cf. Ps 105.31, 34; 1 Cor 15.45; *Ant.* 2.308).⁸⁸⁵ According to them, the OT repeatedly portrays divine judgment upon Israel (Jer 4.23-28; cf. 12.4; 14.1-6) and the pagan nations (e.g. Babylon and Edom, Isa 13.10; 34; cf. Isa 24.23; Ezek 32.6-8; Joel 2.10, 30-31; 3.15-16) in terms of de-creation. They argue that such a description of divine judgment as the undoing of creation is very similar to what is portrayed in the Egyptian plagues. It is further maintained that the rest of the exodus story reflects a recapitulation of creation. Hence, the division of the Red Sea and the appearance of the dry land represent the division of land and sea in Gen 1 (cf. Ps 136.5-6, 13). Moses, the representative of Israel as a corporate Adam, becomes a new Adam. So do the promised land a new Eden, the Ten Commandments a renewed divine command, and the tabernacle a renewed mediation of the presence of God. For them, “this creation/de-creation/re-creation motif reaches its canonical climax ... in the death and resurrection of Jesus.”⁸⁸⁶ The portrayal of the tearing of the temple curtain in 27.51 is argued to signify the dividing of the waters of the Red sea (Exod 14.21; cf. Isa 64.1; *T. Levi* 18.6-8; *T. Jud* 24.1-3), thus, the dividing of heaven and earth in the creation account (Gen 1). All three passages are said to use the word σκίζω for the events.⁸⁸⁷ For Amos 8.9, Ortlund and Beale point to the eschatological context of new creation in which it is located. They state, “the second half of Amos is filled with eschatological loaded references to ‘the coming days’ or ‘on that day’ (4.2; 5.18, 20; 8.9, 11; 9.11, 13), culminating in the prophecy’s conclusion with Amos 9 that includes a promise of restoration for Israel in terms fraught with the language and categories of new creation (Amos 9.11-15).”⁸⁸⁸ It is again suggested that the eschatological judgment takes place in association with new creation.

Ortlund and Beale’s approach to read the darkness at the death of Jesus as the climax of a biblical theological trajectory that begins in Genesis 1.2-3 is insightful. Their interpretation of the phenomenon in terms of the de-creation and re-creation motif shows that darkness in the suggested biblical contexts not only signifies the end of the present world order but also works as preliminary to the forthcoming work of God; the ninth plague upon Egypt for the Exodus, divine judgment for the restoration for Israel, and chaotic darkness for the creation.

⁸⁸⁵ Ortlund and Beale, "Darness over the Whole Land," 228; cf. John D. Currid, *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1997), 113-17; G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2011), 59-61, 169-72.

⁸⁸⁶ Ortlund and Beale, "Darness over the Whole Land," 229.

⁸⁸⁷ Ortlund and Beale, "Darness over the Whole Land," 229; cf. James D. Newsome, *Exodus*, (1st ed.; Louisville, Ky.: Geneva Press, 1998), 54.

⁸⁸⁸ Ortlund and Beale, "Darness over the Whole Land," 230; cf. Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2012), 137.

Accordingly, the darkness at the crucifixion could be seen not only as representing the cosmic judgment but also as a sign that anticipates God's new creation. However, the identification of the darkness at Jesus' death as the inauguration of the new creation as Ortlund and Beale assert is unconvincing. They argue acceptably that Jesus' "death anticipates his resurrection, and his resurrection is meaningful only if he has truly died."⁸⁸⁹ The death and resurrection of Jesus should not be regarded as separate and unrelated events but as the events intimately held together. But, it does not follow that the darkness should convey the significance of the resurrection as well. As they admit, "Christ's death and resurrection are certainly distinct events."⁸⁹⁰ While the darkness pericope clearly indicates the inauguration of de-creation, it does not provide any indication of re-creation at the death of Jesus. Ortlund and Beale claim that the "early morning resurrection dawning was anticipated by the lifting of the darkness at three o'clock p.m. during Jesus' crucifixion. The de-creative darkness-followed-by-light of Friday afternoon anticipates the re-creative darkness-followed-by-light of Sunday morning."⁸⁹¹ However, as they state, "the darkness that hides the sun ... is followed narratively by the light of the early morning" in 28.1,⁸⁹² 27.45 presents no distinct reference to the return of light. This silence on the re-emergence of light may demonstrate that the theological focus of this pericope is thoroughly concentrated on the de-creation or the inauguration of eschatological judgment. Considering the intimacy between the death and resurrection of Jesus, then, it is contended that the de-creative darkness in 27.45 without any mention of light signifies the inaugurated eschatological judgment of God and at most anticipates the inauguration of the new creation, which will be revealed at the resurrection of Jesus.

The darkness in 27.45 further functions as a sign to authenticate the divine status of Jesus. Matthew reports that this celestial phenomenon takes place in the specific context of Jesus' crucifixion. In other words, the death of Jesus is the ultimate cause of such preternatural darkness. Considering that the darkness signifies de-creative judgment of God against those who reject him as the light of the world, it could be argued that the crucifixion was imposed upon Jesus because of his perceived rejection of God, in which case the crucifixion come to be the execution of divine judgment upon him, or alternatively the rejection of God himself. The forthcoming resurrection of Jesus in Matt 28 demonstrates the impossibility of the former reading. The celestial phenomenon at the death of Jesus authenticates Jesus' divine identity.

⁸⁸⁹ Ortlund and Beale, "Darness over the Whole Land," 236.

⁸⁹⁰ Ortlund and Beale, "Darness over the Whole Land," 236.

⁸⁹¹ Ortlund and Beale, "Darness over the Whole Land," 237.

⁸⁹² Ortlund and Beale, "Darness over the Whole Land," 237.

5.4. Meaning and Significance of the Descent of an Angel of the Lord

The final celestial phenomenon in Matthew takes place at the resurrection of Jesus in 28.2; καὶ ἰδοὺ ... ἄγγελος γὰρ κυρίου καταβὰς ἐξ οὐρανοῦ. After the portrayal of the death of Jesus, the evangelist begins a new pericope in 28.1 to describe his resurrection. He first depicts its context (28.1) and then reports the descent of an angel of the Lord that accompanies the resurrection of Jesus (28.2). The temporal context of the pericope sets an important theological foundation for understanding the significance of the heavenly event.

5.4.1. The Dawning of Light

The celestial phenomenon is reported to have occurred ὀψὲ δὲ σαββάτων, τῇ ἐπιφωσκούσῃ εἰς μίαν σαββάτων (28.1). Although Matthew somewhat confusingly uses the plural *σάββατα* twice here, unlike Mark 16.1-2, in which the singular *σάββατον* is used of the “sabbath” and the plural *σάββατα* to mean “week”, there should be no doubt that the former denotes the ‘sabbath’ (cf. 12.1, 2) and the latter ‘week’ (cf. Lev 23.15; Mk 16.9; Lk 18.12; *Did.* 8.1). The first phrase (ὀψὲ δὲ σαββάτων) indicates that the event takes place “after the Sabbath”. Although the word ὀψὲ could be thought to be used as an adverb (“late”) in that the phrase could be said to be “late on the Sabbath”, it appears better to read the word functioning as an improper preposition with the genitive referring to “after” as is the case for ὀψὲ τῆς ὥρας (e.g. ὀψὲ μυστηρίων, ὀψὲ τούτων, ὀψὲ τῆς μάχης).⁸⁹³ This reading corresponds to Mark 16.1 (διαγενομένου τοῦ σαββάτου). While omitting the account of a Saturday night activity in Mark 16.1, Matthew narrates that the event takes place on the first day of the week.

The second phrase (τῇ ἐπιφωσκούσῃ εἰς μίαν σαββάτων) further displays that the phenomenon happens “at the dawning of the first day of the week”. Although it could be argued that the phrase denotes “at the beginning of the first day of the week”, that is, “Saturday night”, as the sabbath ends at Saturday sunset on the Jewish reckoning (cf. Lk 23.54), this interpretation appears highly unlikely. It is inconceivable that the women go out to see the tomb when darkness settling. Besides, the chief priests’ command in 28.13 (the disciples came by night and stole the body of Jesus away) suggests that the event of 28.1 occurred in the morning. Furthermore, although Luke uses the word ἐπιφωσκειν as “beginning” in Luke 23.54 in the sense of the Jewish reckoning, its only other use in the

⁸⁹³ Cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3.663; Nolland, *Matthew*, 1245. For texts, see BDAG 746.

Bible, Nolland argues that it is Luke's usage that is odd.⁸⁹⁴ He states, "when reference is to doing something on the new day it was quite Jewish to think of the day as, for all practical purposes, starting on the following morning."⁸⁹⁵ All these suggest that it is most probably correct to interpret the phrase as meaning "at the dawning of the first day of the week".

Given this interpretation, Matthew's use of the word ἐπιφώσκειν that represents the coming of light draws special attention. As discussed above, the motif of darkness and light plays an important role for the indication of the inaugurated new creation longer for throughout the OT. After the portrayal of the darkness at the death of Jesus that represents the de-creative judgment of God, Matthew finally turns the focus onto the motif of light and explicitly reports the appearance of light as Jesus comes back to life. The coming of light on the first day of the week in 28.1 recalls the creation of light on the first day of creation in Gen 1.2. The resurrection of Jesus in this context could manifest the coming of a new Adam or the second Adam (cf. Rom 5.12-19; 1 Cor 15.20-22, 42-49; Lk 3.23, 38; Rom 8.29; Col 1.15, 18).⁸⁹⁶ God's new creation dawns with the second Adam.⁸⁹⁷ In light of the motif of de-creation and re-creation, the dawning of light after the darkness signifies the inauguration of God's new creation.

5.4.2. Descent of an Angel of the Lord from Heaven

The inaugurated new creation of God is further signified by the descent of an angel of the Lord from heaven. While the word ἄγγελος in the Graeco-Roman world denotes "one who delivers a message" (e.g. *Hom. Il.* 5.804, cf. 18.2), the phrase ἄγγελος κυρίου, the equivalent of the Hebrew מַלְאָכִי הַיְהוָה, refers in the OT to a heavenly figure that serves God. According to the biblical references, he does not only deliver divine messages but also executes tasks commissioned by God. He helpfully represents the interests of Israel (cf. Zech 1.12; 3.2). The OT describes that he protects Israel at the Red Sea (Exod 14.19), guides the people (Exod 23.20), resists Balaam (Num 22.22), helps Elijah (1 Kgs 19.7), smites the foes of Israel (2 Kgs 19.35), and fulfills many other commissions (Judg 6.11 ff.; 13.3 ff.; 2 Kgs 1.3, 15).

⁸⁹⁴ Nolland, *Matthew*, 1245, fn 8.

⁸⁹⁵ Nolland, *Matthew*, 1245-46.

⁸⁹⁶ Cf. Ortlund and Beale, "Darness over the Whole Land," 226; Robert A. Peterson, *Salvation Accomplished by the Son: The Work of Christ*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 463-99; Herman N. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1975), 53-57.

⁸⁹⁷ Cf. Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview*, (Overland Park, KS: Two Age Press, 2000), 97-99; Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 381-437.

An angel of the Lord has appeared at the beginning of the gospel to announce the advent of Jesus as the bringer of salvation for the people of God (1.20, 24; 2.13, 19). His reappearance at the end in the absence of Jesus in 28.2 anticipates a role similar to the first. While seen or heard in dreams at his first appearance, this time he is bodily present (28.3), rolling a stone, sitting on it, and visible to both the women and the guards, while announcing the resurrection of Jesus (28.5-7). The appearance of an angel of the Lord depicted in 28.3 vividly exhibits the glory of God; ἦν δὲ ἡ εἰδέα αὐτοῦ ὡς ἀστραπή καὶ τὸ ἔνδυμα αὐτοῦ λευκὸν ὡς χιῶν. His appearance, probably his countenance, ὡς ἀστραπή recalls the portrayal of the divine being who appeared to Daniel. Daniel 10.6 reports that his face was ὡσεὶ ὄρασις ἀστραπῆς.⁸⁹⁸ The portrayal of the angel's garment λευκὸν ὡς χιῶν shows that his presence even represents theophany. White is the colour of heavenly glory (cf. Dan 7.9; Acts 1.10; Rev 1.14-15; 3.5; 6.11; 7.9, 13; *1 En.* 71.1).⁸⁹⁹ Dan 7.9 describes that the clothing of the Ancient Days was white as snow (cf. Isa 1.18; Ps 51.9; Lam 4.7; *1 En.* 14.20; 62.15-16; 71.1; 87.2; 90.31-33; 2 Macc. 3.26; 11.8). The language of its Theod. text is almost identical to 28.3; τὸ ἔνδυμα αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ χιῶν λευκόν. The word ὡσεὶ of Daniel 7.9 (Theod.) is used in 28.3 in A, C, L, W, Θ, f¹³, 33 etc. This description of the angel recalls that of the transfigured Jesus in 17.2; ἔλαμψεν τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος, τὰ δὲ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο λευκὰ ὡς τὸ φῶς. Although it is only the word λευκός that is common between these two references, the depictions of the two figures are so similar. This parallel reflects that Jesus shares the glory of God. Nolland states, “the point is that such a figure carries with him something of the glory of God that both points to his being part of the transcendent supernatural order and the fact that he is acting for, and with the power of, God. The presence of such an exalted one at the tomb of Jesus points in turn to the exalted significance of Jesus himself.”⁹⁰⁰ Jesus' exalted significance is further signified with the descent of the angel from heaven. This occurrence recalls the descent of the Spirit of God from heaven at the baptism of Jesus (3.16). These are the only two occasions in Matthew that the word καταβαίνειν is employed to portray the coming of divine beings from heaven.⁹⁰¹ The divine status of Jesus is authenticated by signs from heaven, and the angelic revelation from heaven firmly confirms this view.

⁸⁹⁸ Cf. In *4 Ezra* 10.25-27, the heavenly Zion is described to have a face that flashes ‘like lightning’ and that the earth quakes at its voice. *3 Enoch* 22.9 describes that lightnings flash from the fiery face of a mighty angel and earthquakes accompany him.

⁸⁹⁹ Cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3.666.

⁹⁰⁰ Nolland, *Matthew*, 1248.

⁹⁰¹ Although the word καταβαίνειν is used in 11.23, there the thought is quite different.

5.5. Summary

This section has explored the final celestial phenomena in Matthew; the darkness at the death of Jesus in 27.45 and the descent of an angel of the Lord from heaven at the resurrection of Jesus in 28.2. While the darkness at the crucifixion appears to have been a factual event which occurred in Judea, Matthew's portrayal of the phenomenon without any elaboration suggests that he intends to portray the preternatural darkness as divine intervention and focus on the symbolic and theological significance of the phenomenon. The unexpected darkness in the daytime was commonly understood in Graeco-Roman world as a sign of the cosmic sorrow for the death of great figures, such as a king or a hero. This could have given the affirmation to a contemporary reader that Jesus was not a criminal but a great hero or even a son of god, given that Roman emperors were called the sons of god. The description of darkness in the context exhibits points of contact with biblical references as well. Three passages have been examined as the possible OT background; the Egyptian plague of darkness as divine wrath in Exodus 10.22, the darkness as a symbol of the judgment day of the Lord in Amos 8.9, and the darkness of disorder before the creation of light in Genesis 1.2-3. While all these references suggest credible significance of the darkness, it appears most plausible to interpret the darkness as the eschatological de-creative judgment of God as the indication of the inaugurated new creation longed for throughout the OT. According to this view, the suggested biblical references to darkness could be seen as indications of a biblical theological trajectory that was begun in Genesis 1.2-3.

In light of this interpretation of darkness, this heavenly event also authenticates the divine identity of Jesus. Divine judgment represents the consequence of the rejection of God. The darkness at the crucifixion of Jesus signifies that his death represents more than a death of a human being but the rejection of God himself.

As there follow the re-creative work of God after the biblical references to darkness, such as the exodus of Israel and the promise of restoration for Israel, the darkness at the death of Jesus is followed by the dawning of light. The specific mention of the "dawning" of light (ἐπιφῶσκειν) on the first day of the week in 28.1, which recalls the creation of light on the first day of creation, demonstrates the inauguration of God's new creation. This interpretation is further assured by the resurrection of Jesus that alludes to the coming of a new Adam. The appearance of an angel of the Lord at the resurrection of Jesus recalls the angelic revelation of Jesus as the bearer of salvation for the people of God. The portrayal of the appearance of the angel in 28.3, which exhibits both theophany and the transfigured Jesus in 17.5 represents the exalted significance of Jesus. The angel's descent from heaven

firmly authenticates this revelation. The final celestial phenomena in Matthew present Jesus as the bearer of eschatological divine judgment and of God's new creation. They authenticate Jesus as having the same status as God himself.

6. Conclusion

This chapter has looked into the significance of the motif of celestial phenomena in Matthew through the investigation of the background of the heavenly events and their implications. Taking place at the significant moments of Jesus' life in Matthew, these heavenly phenomena represented the divine authentication of his identity. After the introduction of Jesus son of David and son of Abraham as the climax and completion of Israel's history by means of his genealogy (1.1-17) and as Emmanuel through the angelic revelation (1.18-1.25), the episode of the magi and king Herod in 2.1-12 recalls the prophetic warning to Pharaoh in the contemporary portrayal of the exodus. The appearance of the star of Bethlehem at the birth of Jesus signifies the fulfilment of the OT prophecy (Num 24.17) and represents the arrival of the royal Davidic messiah. Matthew's depictions of the magi and the Jewish leaders further elucidate the object of Jesus' mission on earth revealed by an angel of the Lord in a divinatory dream in 1.21-23. The appearance of John the Baptist and his message of "the kingdom of heaven" in 3.1-12 anticipate the coming of a new era through the "mightier one". The arrival of an adult Jesus and his baptism in 3.13-17 represent the manifestation of the kingdom of heaven. Through the heavenly phenomena after the baptism in 3.16-17, Jesus is empowered to accomplish his messianic mission on earth and is vividly authenticated as the Son of God. Matthew's portrayal of the events, different from Mark's, makes them a public incident rather than Jesus' personal visionary experience. This must have assured the readers of Jesus' divine identity and their status as the people of God. The same event of the voice from heaven, with the exact wording as here, takes place with the particle ἰδοὺ at the transfiguration of Jesus in 17.5. In the same manner, this heavenly revelation authenticates Jesus as the Son of God and assures Matthew's readers. The next heavenly phenomenon does not take place in Matthew but is only requested by the Pharisees and Sadducees in 16.1-4. Although not answered as demanded, this request for a sign from heaven by the Jewish authority confirms that not only the Gentiles but also the Jews regarded a celestial event as a divine way of communication. Furthermore, the request after Jesus' miraculous works on earth signifies that a heavenly occurrence stands beyond all contradiction as an ensuring sign of divine authentication of his special status with God. The

Jewish authorities' intention in the request and Jesus' response in 16.1-4 elucidate the borderline of Jesus' mission on earth. Jesus' prediction of astronomical phenomena at the coming of the Son of Man in 24.29-31, although in the future, signifies his divine status as one who could read the signs in the vault of the sky and proclaim their impact upon the land. The final celestial phenomena at the death and resurrection of Jesus in 27.45 and 28.1 represent the inauguration of the divine judgment and the new creation of God. These events symbolise the climax of a biblical theological trajectory that began in Genesis 1.2-3. As the darkness in Exodus 10.22 and in Amos 8.9 function as a symbol of the divine wrath and judgment and there follow the exodus and God's restoration, the preternatural darkness at the death of Jesus signifies the eschatological de-creative judgment of God and the dawning of light at the resurrection of Jesus represents the inauguration of new creation. This judgment at Jesus' death indicates the close association between the crucifixion of Jesus and the rejection of God. The descent of an angel of the Lord from heaven represents the exalted significance of Jesus even like God himself. The final celestial phenomena in Matthew vividly authenticate Jesus' divine identity as equal to God himself.

The motif of celestial phenomena is not the only theme in Matthew that authenticates Jesus' divine identity. The Matthean dreams play an important role in establishing Jesus' identity (1.20-23; 2.12, 13, 20, 22). They also provide guidance for the movements of the child Jesus and serve to represent Jesus' life as the fulfilment of the OT prophecy. Similarly, the cosmological occurrences at the death and resurrection of Jesus (27.51-53; 28.2) contribute to Matthew's portrait of Jesus. Among these events, earthquakes occur some other times in the gospel (8.24-26; 24.7). Although differ in their attributes, they function to represent Jesus' divine status. These phenomena partake in the authentication of Jesus' divine identity in Matthew. While these divinatory events occur centring upon certain points of Jesus' life (the dreams at the infancy narrative and the cosmological events at the end of Jesus' story), the heavenly phenomena take place continuously signifying important moments of Jesus' life in Matthew. Together with these divinatory events, celestial phenomena serve to authenticate Jesus' divine identity.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

This study has investigated Matthew's portrayal of the celestial phenomena in the gospel, which presents a close connection with the presentation of Jesus, seeking to assess what meaning and significance it was intended to deliver in the process of the gospel narrative and for the readership. This concluding chapter will summarize the findings of the research followed by the conclusion that can be drawn from it.

1. Summary

Understanding the meaning and significance of the motif of celestial phenomena in Matthew requires a comprehension of the contemporary conception of and attitude towards celestial phenomena in the Graeco-Roman world in the Second Temple period. Divided into two parts, the first part of the thesis looked into the conception of heaven and the attitude towards celestial phenomena in the ancient world. The analysis of the Babylonian, Egyptian, and Graeco-Roman ideas in Chapter 2 showed that heaven in classical antiquity was believed to be a kingdom of multiple deities under the government of a supreme god. The stars and constellations were considered alive with mind and soul. These heavenly bodies were commonly identified with the members of the heavenly realm. The divine beings in heaven, called "sons of god", were worshipped and were believed to govern the earthly world from the heavenly realm, not according to their own will but the will of the supreme god. The movements of the heavenly bodies were assumed to represent the administration of the heavenly realm. The ancient astrology contained two other aspects of the cosmic sympathy and the astrological doctrine of methodological "aspects". Accordingly, the heavenly realm and the earthly world were assumed to be closely connected and to affect each other, mostly through the heavenly influence upon the earth. Celestial phenomena were considered to convey the divine message for the government of the earth. They were believed to contain portents for the future events of the earth. Celestial divination by means of astrological interpretation was one of the prevalent ways to acknowledge the divine will or plans for the world. This practice of celestial divination was not regarded as a superstitious magic but a well-disciplined science. Numerous fields of ancient astrological practice were brought forth

in the Graeco-Roman world. Along with the astrological practice, the astral religion was also widespread in the Hellenistic world. It is no surprise to find the temples for astrolatry in Syria, which had a close geographical connection to Mesopotamia and was subject to its influences from long before. The investigation of the astral religion in Syria, especially at Edessa and Harran, Palmyra, Baalbek, and Khirbet Tannur, demonstrated that it was influential on the life of the inhabitants historically and culturally as it may have been in other neighbouring regions. Assuming Syria as the provenance of Matthew, the widespread astrological practice and astral religion in that region suggests that the motif of celestial phenomena could have functioned as a valuable tool to Matthew for his gospel composition.

Chapter 3 examined the Jewish conception of heaven and attitude towards celestial phenomena through the examination of the references in the OT and the Jewish literature in the Second Temple period. Heaven for the ancient Israelites was a single immense entity with two facets, the visible sky and outer space, and the invisible royal court where God dwells with divine beings at his service. The depictions of the divine council in heaven and its members in the OT disclosed that the Israelites had a conception of the heavenly realm similar to their neighbours in the ANE. The members of the heavenly council were regarded as “sons of God” and were believed to govern the earthly world under God’s sovereignty. They were commonly identified with the celestial bodies (Ps 82; Deut 4:19-20; 32:7-9). For the ancient Israelites, the planetary movements as well as meteorological and supernatural phenomena represented the divine government over the earthly world. They were considered to convey the divine signs for the forthcoming events in the earthly world: e.g. astral sign (Gen 1:14-18; Num 24:17; Ezek 32:7-8; Joel 2:1, 10, 30-31; 3:14-15, Amos 8:9; Mic 3:6), the calling of an angel of the Lord from heaven (Gen 21:17; 22:11, 15; Exod 20:22; Neh 9:13), the heavenly vision (Ezek 1:1; 10:1; Zech 6:1; cf. Zech 1:18; 2:1; 5:1, 9; Dan 7:2, 4; 8:3; 10:5), the heavenly voice (Dan 4:31-32), the heavenly judgment (1 Sam 2:10; cf. 2 Sam 22:14; Ps 18:13; 29; Josh 10:11; 2 Kgs 1:10-14; Gen 7:4), torrential rain, hailstones, brimstone and fire (Ps 11:6; Ezek 38:22). These OT references demonstrated that ancient Israel was not ignorant of celestial phenomena but gathered broad knowledge of those events and interpreted divine signs that they revealed. The description of constellations, especially **מוֹשְׁכוֹת**, in Job 9.9 and 38.31-32 signified that ancient Israelites were also aware of contemporary astrology. This OT conception of heaven and the attitude towards celestial phenomena is carried on in the Jewish literature in the Second Temple period. The uses of the word οὐρανός in the Pseudepigrapha and the Qumran literature show a close semantic connection with **שָׁמַיִם**. Concerning celestial phenomena, these documents reveal both

explicitly and implicitly that the contemporary Jews were aware of and familiar with contemporary astrology: both the scientific astronomy and the astral prediction. A number of Jewish documents of calendologia, physiognomies and brontologia demonstrate that there was no total rejection of astrology among the contemporary Jews but that such astronomical and astrological ideas and practices were used variously to interpret the celestial phenomena. The first part of the thesis showed that both the Gentiles and the Jews in the Graeco-Roman world in the Second temple period shared a similar conception of heaven and attitude towards celestial phenomena, despite their different religious background. They both were aware of and familiar with the contemporary scientific astronomy and astrological prediction. They regarded heavenly events, *viz.* astral, meteorological, and supernatural occurrences as a means of the divine revelation for the earthly world. This signifies that heaven and celestial phenomena could have been useful motifs that Matthew could employ to deliver a message to both the Gentiles and the Jews.

Having investigated the conception of heaven and the attitude towards celestial phenomena in the Graeco-Roman world, the second part of the thesis turned to the investigation of Matthew's attitude towards celestial phenomena. As its preliminaries, Chapters 4 and 5 examined the *Sitz im Leben* of Matthew's community (the authorship, the intended readership, and the provenance) and the motif of heaven in the gospel. The reconstruction of the social setting of the Matthean community and the examination of the heaven language in Matthew laid the foundation for the understanding of the significance of the celestial phenomena in Matthew. Although the authorship of the first gospel has been ascribed to the apostle Matthew in church tradition, this view appeared inadequate. The thorough analysis of the traditional arguments showed that the Greek Matthew is less than probable to be a translated version of the Hebrew gospel of τὰ Λογία, which Papias stated that Matthew had compiled. The first gospel's heavy dependence on Mark suggested that the apostle Matthew is unlikely to be its author. The data that the Matthean authorship of the first gospel was not challenged in the early church and τὰ Λογία was believed to have been written by a man named "Matthew" suggested that the first gospel should be understood as attributed to "Matthew", the writer of τὰ Λογία, compiled by a Jewish Christian author, who was a member of Matthew's community or his disciples. The investigation of Matthew's intended readership signified that the Matthean community was a Christian group with both Jewish and Gentile membership. The patent Jewish aspects throughout the gospel (e.g. the stress on fulfilment of the OT with the formula quotations, Jesus' fidelity to the law, and the use of typical rabbinic patterns for certain discussions) demonstrate that the Jewish traditions were respected within the community. However, the hostile and bitter references to

scribes and Pharisees (7:29; 8:5-13, 18-21; 9:18-26; 22:35; ch 23) reflect the Matthean attitude against Judaism. The presentation of the law in the gospel represents that the community followed the law redefined and reinterpreted by Jesus. Together with the anticipation of the mission to Israel (10:5-23, 15:21-28) and the emphasis on the evangelistic Gentile mission (28:19-20), these features in the first gospel demonstrated that Matthew's community was parted from formative Judaism and was expanding their community through the Gentile mission. With regard to the provenance of Matthew, Syria was argued to be the most probable place of the gospel composition. The references in Matthew that the gospel is specifically reported to expand over Syria in 4.24 and that Peter, who was the significant church leader in the church at Antioch (cf. Gal 2:11), appears predominantly in the gospel (e.g. 10:2; 14:28-31; 16:17-19; 17:24-27) reflect the significance of Syria for Matthew. Moreover, that there existed a large Jewish community and the earliest Christian Gentile mission centre in Syria coordinate with the Matthean attitude towards the Jews and the Gentiles. The reconstruction of the *Sitz im Leben* of the Matthean community showed that the first gospel was written in the region of Syria by a Jewish Christian author for the Jewish and Gentile readership who were in polemic against the formative Judaism and under the influence of the astrological practice.

Chapter 5 explored Matthew's conception of heaven and the significance of the heaven motif in the gospel. The uses of heaven language in Matthew illustrated that the evangelist had the conception of heaven similar to the OT and his contemporaries. The occurrences of the word οὐρανός in both its singular and plural form indicated that he employed a literary style of idiolect to use different forms for different aspects. The analysis of the heaven language in the gospel demonstrated that the common interpretation of Matthew's heaven language as the reverential circumlocution to avoid the divine name God was fatally flawed. First and foremost, the word θεός in Matthew, which has been argued to have been avoided, is not the Hebrew or Aramiac Tetragrammaton but the generic term "God". Moreover, the word θεός and the phrase ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ, which some maintained were supposed to be avoided, are clearly present in Matthew. The examination of the methodology and sources of Dalman's arguments, with which the reverential circumlocution interpretation was widely spread, demonstrated their deficiency. That deficiency indicated that the motif of heaven in Matthew conveyed substantial theological and sociological significance. It was argued that while the term οὐρανός denoted the divine transcendence and sovereignty as the metonym of God, it also signified the clear distinction between the heavenly realm and the earthly realm. Through the use of heaven language, Matthew could align Jesus with the heaven side of the equation as compared to the human and earthly. His identity is very much defined through

his connection with heaven as well as in contrast to the earth, which is repeatedly identified with the human (6:19-21; 18:18-20; 21:25-26; 23:9). The distinct uses of the heaven-associated phrases (e.g. “kingdom of heaven”, “heavenly father”, and the “father in heaven”) for Jesus’ disciples and the crowds could reassure the Matthean community, who were in the polemic against formative Judaism, that they were aligned with the heaven side like Jesus.

Now what had been discussed from Chapter 2 to Chapter 5 laid the foundation for the investigation of the motif of celestial phenomena in Matthew. The contemporary Gentiles and Jews of Matthew shared the basic conception of heaven and attitude towards celestial phenomena that were believed to convey divine revelation. Matthew’s community consisted of both Gentile and Jewish members and was reaching out to gather more members (28.19-20). They were located in the region of Syria where the celestial influence was prevalent. The motif of heaven in Matthew played a significant role theologically and sociologically to define Jesus’ identity and to assure the community that they belonged to God in heaven. This suggests that celestial phenomena could have been a valuable motif that Matthew could use to deliver the gospel message to both Gentile and Jewish readers.

The investigation of Matthew’s portrayal of celestial phenomena through the exploration of their backgrounds and implications in Chapter 6 demonstrated that the evangelist used the motif to authenticate Jesus’ divine identity. The first celestial phenomenon took place at the birth of Jesus in the form of the star of Bethlehem in 2.1-12. Already through the genealogy in 1.1-17, Jesus was introduced as the son of David and son of Abraham representing the climax and completion of Israel’s history. Through the angelic revelation in a dream in 1.18-25, his divine nature as Emmanuel, the presence of God in himself, was announced together with his mission on earth to save “his people” that could be both Jews and Gentiles. Set in the episode of the magi and king Herod in 2.1-12, which resembles the prophetic warning to Pharaoh in the contemporary exodus depiction, the appearance of the star of Bethlehem publically pronounced the fulfilment of the OT prophecy (Num 24.17) and the arrival of the royal Davidic messiah. Even for the readers who were not familiar with Jewish tradition, this astral event represented the arrival of a great king. Jesus as a divine king was vividly authenticated through the celestial phenomenon. The appearance of an adult Jesus and his baptism in Matthew 3 indicated that he was now taking an active role in the gospel. The immediate events in and from heaven after Jesus’ baptism in 3.16-17 again vividly authenticated his divine identity as the Son of God. The opening of heaven anticipated divine revelation. The descent of the Spirit of God as a dove signified the new creation through Jesus and the divine empowerment upon him for the forthcoming messianic ministry. The voice from heaven pronounced Jesus’ divine status as the Son of God. This series of

heavenly events could have represented the divine authentication of Jesus as an emperor empowered by God in heaven to those familiar with the Graeco-Roman tradition. The divine sonship of Jesus is once again pronounced through the voice from heaven at his transfiguration in 17.5. The next two celestial phenomena in 16.1 and 24.29-31 do not take place in Matthew. Nevertheless, each reference plays an important role to authenticate Jesus' divine identity. Despite Jesus' miraculous works in 15.21-39, which have amply demonstrated his divine authority, the Pharisees and Sadducees require another sign from Jesus in 16.1. This indicates that the Jewish authorities believed that there were more authoritative means than Jesus' earthly works that could authenticate Jesus' divine identity beyond all contradiction. That they demand a sign from heaven as such a means represents the ultimate authority of celestial phenomena. This scribal attitude towards a heavenly sign affirms that not only the Gentiles but also the Jews believed in celestial phenomena as a divine way of communication in Matthew. This communal understanding indicates that heavenly events in Matthew when associated with Jesus could be interpreted as God's authentication of his divine identity. The reference to celestial phenomenon in 16.1 without a factual occurrence assures the reader of Jesus' identity. In a similar manner, although Jesus' prediction of celestial phenomena at the judgment day of the Lord in 24.29-31 does not occur in Matthew, the fact that he could read the signs in the vault of the sky and proclaim their impact upon the land authenticated his special status with God. The final celestial phenomena take place at the climax of Matthew's story of Jesus, his death and resurrection in 27.45 and 28.1. Matthew's portrayal of the darkness without any elaboration and the contemporary Graeco-Roman interpretation of the preternatural darkness in the daytime as a symbol of the cosmic sorrow for the death of a great hero or king, a son of god, laid the foundation for the symbolic and theological interpretation of the phenomena. They signify the climax of a biblical theological trajectory that has begun in Genesis 1.2-3. Representing the divine wrath, the darkness at the death of Jesus in 27.45 symbolized the inauguration of the eschatological de-creative judgment day of the Lord. The dawning of light and the descent of an angel of the Lord from heaven at the resurrection of Jesus in 28.1 demonstrated the inauguration of the anticipated new creation of God. That the darkness takes place at Jesus' crucifixion indicates the significance of Jesus in the execution of the divine judgment. It denoted the rejection of Jesus as the rejection of God himself. The description of the angel in 28.3, which resembles theophany and the transfigured Jesus in 17.5, represents the exalted significance of Jesus like God himself. The final celestial phenomena authenticated Jesus as having the same status as God himself. All the celestial phenomena in Matthew, taking place at significant moments of Jesus' life, vividly authenticate the divine identity of Jesus.

2. Conclusion

The motif of celestial phenomena in the first gospel has been an ongoing interest among scholars. However, their studies have been mostly focused on an individual event or very few events. What was lacking was a full and comprehensive investigation of Matthew's portrayal of the celestial phenomena. Looking at these celestial phenomena as interrelated parts of the evangelist's wide theological perspective in the gospel, this study has aimed to make a contribution to Matthean scholarship through the examination of the celestial phenomena in Matthew in a systematic and unified manner. It has shown that celestial phenomena in Matthew are a carefully crafted and thoughtfully arranged motif for the authentication of Jesus' divine identity benefitting from the sociological context of the community and the theological presentation of the gospel. The analyses of the contemporary conception of heaven and attitude towards heavenly events in the Graeco-Roman world in the Second Temple period and of the *Sitz im Leben* of the Matthean community have signified that celestial phenomena could have been an efficacious motif for the evangelist to present Jesus' divine identity to his readers, both the Gentiles and the Jews. The exploration of the motif of heaven in Matthew has demonstrated that the evangelist employed heaven as one of the central themes in the gospel to represent the clear distinction between the heavenly realm and the earthly realm and the intimate association of heaven with Jesus and his authority (e.g. ὁ πατήρ μου ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, δώσω σοι τὰς κλεῖδας τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν, 16.13-20; ἐδόθη μοι πᾶσα ἐξουσία ἐν οὐρανῷ, 28.18). In light of this sociological and theological context of Matthew, the investigation of the Matthean portrayal of celestial phenomena has shown that this motif, thoughtfully placed at significant moments of Jesus' life (e.g. at the birth, at the baptism, during the ministry, at the transfiguration, at the death, and at the resurrection) and carefully crafted as observable events, thoroughly functioned to authenticate Jesus' divine identity. Jesus has been presented as the fulfillment of the OT prophecy through the heavenly events as "the royal Davidic Messiah", "New Moses", "the Son of God", "an apocalyptic prophet" and even God himself. This motif also functioned to pronounce Jesus' divine identity to those who were not familiar with Jewish tradition or Christianity at all. For them, Jesus represented a great king, a son of god, empowered by a supreme god. This motif could have been an effective way to introduce him to the contemporary Graeco-Roman world. This study has demonstrated that the motif of celestial phenomena in the gospel serves to strengthen the christological claims of Matthew.

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