

The Light Burden of Discipleship: Embodying the New Moses and Personified Wisdom in the Gospel of Matthew

Patricia Sharbaugh

DISCIPLINESHIP IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL is marked by paradox. Disciples are asked to give up all security, face persecution, and possibly lose their lives to follow Jesus, and yet this life of discipleship is described as easy, a light burden. The paradox at the heart of discipleship is rooted in its relational nature. Relationship is central to both Christology and discipleship in Matthew. The relationship of discipleship requires absolute trust, demands obedience and whole-hearted commitment, and at the same time offers as gift, the rest that comes with dwelling in the presence of God.

Matthew's Christology is forged in a history characterized by turbulence, changes in leadership, and volatility.¹ By reaching back to tensive metaphors in the Jewish tradition, Matthew grounds his Christology in Second Temple Judaism and provides stability and continuity for his community. Exploring the meaning of the Jewish symbols and metaphors that Matthew uses to express his Christology leads to deeper awareness of the implications of Matthew's Christology for discipleship. Jewish symbols, metaphors, and narratives are not merely labels to define or identify Jesus in Jewish terms but pro-

¹ The Gospel of Matthew was written by a Jewish Christian and addressed a mixed community of Jewish and Gentile Christians in the wake of the social, political, and economic upheaval that resulted from the Jewish revolt of 66-70 CE ending in the overthrow of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple, and the collapse of the Jewish state. W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *The International Critical Commentary on the Gospel According to Matthew* 3 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991-1998), vol. III: 692-707; cf. Ulrich Luz, "Matthew's Anti-Judaism: Its Origin and Contemporary Significance," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 19. 6 (D 1992): 405-15; Donald Senior, C.P., "Between Two Worlds: Gentiles and Jewish Christians in Matthew's Gospel," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 61.1 (Jan 1999): 1-23.

vide the theological lenses Matthew employs to reason and understand the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

Two symbols, Jesus as the new Moses and Jesus as personified Wisdom, converge in Matthew's Gospel as Jesus issues an invitation to potential disciples: "Come to me all you who labor and are burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light" (Matt 11:28-30). While there are many ways to approach an exploration of the primary influence of Jewish symbols, metaphors, and narratives on Matthew's Christology, this essay will focus on the convergence of these two symbols in Jesus' invitation because these symbols are deeply rooted in Second Temple Judaism, are central to Matthew's Christology, and express the deep relationship between Christology and discipleship in Matthew.

A. M. Hunter claims that the invitation is so central to Matthew's message that the rest of the gospel is merely commentary.² W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison describe the invitation as "a capsule summary of the message of the entire gospel."³ Clearly, the invitation is central for understanding Christology and discipleship in Matthew and the use of both Mosaic and Wisdom imagery in this passage is indicative of how essential Jewish symbols, metaphors, and narratives are for Matthew's theological reflection. This essay will begin with an exploration of the Mosaic and Wisdom imagery that lies behind the invitation, discuss how this imagery informs Matthew's Christology, and conclude with the implications of Matthew's Christology for discipleship.

Jesus' invitation to discipleship (Matt 11:28-30) appears only in Matthew. This invitation concludes a section of Matthew that focuses on the identity of Jesus as the source of revelation. Jesus is the source of revelation through his intimacy with God (v. 27), and the recipients of revelation are those who are infants (v. 26) and who accept Jesus' invitation (vv. 28-30).⁴ The prayer and revelation sayings (vv. 25-27) are Q material also found in Luke (10:21-22).⁵ The addition of

² A. M. Hunter, "Crux Criticorum – Matt 11:25-30: A Re-appraisal," *New Testament Studies* 8.3 (April 1962): 241-9.

³ Davies and Allison, vol. II: 296.

⁴ Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. *The Gospel of Matthew* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1991), 168.

⁵ In both Matthew and Luke, the prayer and revelation sayings follow the woes to the Galilean cities and are surrounded by themes of acceptance/rejection and revelation/hiddenness. In Luke however, the motif of acceptance/rejection is focused on the mission of the disciples and the peoples' response to that mission while in Matthew the focus shifts to the identity of Jesus and the significance of his words and

Jesus' invitation (vv. 28-30) to Matthew marks the most significant redactional difference between Luke and Matthew's use of Q in this passage.⁶ The meaning of this addition is debated. Because both Mosaic and Wisdom themes appear in the invitation, interpretations of the passage traditionally choose either a Mosaic or Wisdom theme as the dominant lens for deriving meaning from the text.⁷ Reading the passage as a convergence of both themes, rather than forcing interpretation down either a Mosaic or Wisdom path, sheds light on both Christology and discipleship in Matthew. Understanding the full significance of this convergence requires both attentiveness to the distinctive contribution of each theme and recognition of how a more profound Christology emerges when these themes are held together.

JESUS AS THE NEW MOSES

Matthew's depiction of Jesus as the new Moses in Matthew 11:25-30 is not an isolated occurrence in his gospel. There is a developed Mosaic/Exodus typology that occurs in the first eight chapters of Matthew's Gospel, is picked up again in 11:25-30, and is evident in the account of the Transfiguration in Chapter 17.⁸ Matthew's use of Mosaic images and typology in narrating the life of Jesus is not surprising given the widespread use of Mosaic typology in the Bible and the large number of literary works that center on Moses in first century Palestine.⁹

deeds. Celia Deutsch, *Lady Wisdom, Jesus, and the Sages* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996), 54-5.

⁶ For discussion of the redactional differences see Davies and Allison, vol. II, 272-93; Deutsch, *Lady Wisdom*, 55-8.

⁷ Dale C. Allison Jr., *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 233; Deutsch, *Lady Wisdom*, 56-7.

⁸ Davies and Allison, vol. II, 296-7. Allison refers to a number of commentators who affirm the use of Mosaic typology as central in Matthew (Allison, *The New Moses*, 140, n. 3) e.g., Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1977), 110-19; Michael Goldberg, *Jews and Christians: Getting Our Stories Straight* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 144-9; H.M. Teeple, *The Mosaic Eschatological Prophet* (SBLMS 10; Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature, 1957), 74-5. Allison also points to scholars who do not see Mosaic typology as central to Matthew (Allison, *The New Moses*, 18, n. 27) e.g., T. Saito, *Die Mosevorstellungen im Neuen Testament* (Europäische Hochschulschriften Series 23, Theology, vol. 100; Bern: Peter Lang, 1977), 51-72; A. Sand, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (Regensbruger Neues Testament; Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1986).

⁹ Wayne S. Baxter refers to a number of works centered on the life of Moses, e.g. *Testament of Moses*, *The Key of Moses*, *De Vita Moses*, *Apocryphon of Moses*, *Book of Mystical Words of Moses*, *The Chronicle of Moses*, *The Eighth Book of Moses*, *Apocalypse of Moses*, *2QapMoses (2Q21)*, *Midrash of Moses' Death*, not to mention the large body of literature that either comments on Moses or involves definite Mosaic imagery: e.g., *Jewish Antiquities*, *Pseudo-Philo*, *Apocalypse of Abraham*, *Jubilees*,

Biblical authors use Mosaic typology to tell the stories of many of Israel's heroes, including Joshua, Gideon, Samuel, David, Elijah, Josiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah.¹⁰ Lying behind the use of typology is the theological belief that there is one God behind history and therefore coherence between events and communities. While new and unexpected events occur, continuity prevails because the same God acts through these events. Typology is also a way to encourage stability for a community in the midst of change. Dale C. Allison writes, "Typology, which puts its perceivers in two stories at once, can provide an instant history for a community."¹¹ The new situation is seen in light of the old and this confluence of stories appeals to the emotions and gives birth to and nurtures a community's symbolic universe.¹² Furthermore, seeing one life through the lens of another provides a way to express great meaning with few words.¹³ In using Moses as a lens for both understanding and articulating the significance of Jesus, Matthew employs a traditional interpretive tool of Second Temple Judaism in order to acknowledge one God behind history, provide continuity and stability for his community, and express valuable Christological insights.

The intimacy between Moses and God that leads to both revelation and salvation for the people of Israel is the major theme of the Mosaic imagery that lies behind Matthew 11:25-30. Three Mosaic texts form the foundation for Matthew's theological reflection on Jesus in these verses: Exodus 33:11-23, Numbers 12:1-8, and Deuteronomy 34:9-12.¹⁴ The linking of these three texts is not isolated to Matthew's Gospel but also occurs in theological reflections on the subject of seeing God in the writings of Ecclesiasticus, Philo, the church fathers, and in rabbinic literature as well.¹⁵ Important dimensions of the relationship between Moses and God, particularly when understood as the source for Matthew's theological reflection on the relationship between Jesus and God, are glimpsed in each of these texts. Numbers 12:1-8 emphasizes meekness as a primary characteristic of Moses (v. 3). Deuteronomy 34:9-12 indicates that when Mo-

various targums, and midrash. Wayne S. Baxter, "Mosaic Imagery in the Gospel of Matthew," *Trinity Journal* 20. 1 (Spring 1999): 69-83.

¹⁰ Allison, *The New Moses*.

¹¹ Allison, *The New Moses*, 277.

¹² Allison, *The New Moses*, 277.

¹³ Allison, *The New Moses*, 12.

¹⁴ Allison, *The New Moses*, 220.

¹⁵ Ecclesiasticus 45: 3-5; Philo, *Legum Allegoriae* 3:100-3; Philo, *Quis Rerum Divinarum Heres*, 262; *Sipre on Numbers* § 103; *Sipre on Deuteronomy* § 357; See Allison, *The New Moses*, 220-1.

ses dies, Israel remembers him as one whose life, words, and actions mediated the life, words, and actions of God.¹⁶ Exodus 33:11-23 emphasizes the soteriological implications for the people of Israel of Moses' relationship with God.

The Christological implications of drawing from Chapter 33 of Exodus—as a way to reflect on the relationship between Jesus and God—are deepened through attention to the context of the dialogue between Moses and God.¹⁷ Introduced with a statement expressing the closeness of their relationship, “The LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a person speaks with a friend” (Exod 33:11), the dialogue in Exodus 33:11-23 between Moses and God comes at a crucial time for the people of Israel. It occurs between the sin of the people in Chapter 32 and the renewal of the covenant in 34. At stake is the status of the relationship between God and Israel in the face of Israel's blatant disobedience to the covenant. Israel's future is hanging in the balance and is ultimately to be determined by the relationship between Moses and God.¹⁸ The relationship between Moses and God is vital to the entire Exodus narrative, and from the beginning this relationship involves the people of Israel. When God first calls Moses by name, he gives him the task of leading the Hebrew people out of slavery under Pharaoh into the Promised Land (Exod 3:4-12). Moses is told that he will be able to complete this task because God will be with him (Exod 3:12).

These aspects of the call of Moses in Exodus inform the Mosaic typology that Matthew employs to tell the story of Jesus. In the first chapter of Matthew, Joseph is told that Mary will bear a son and that he is to be named Jesus “because he will save his people from their sins” (v. 21). A fulfillment quotation from Isaiah follows: “Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him

¹⁶ George W. Coats, “Legendary Motifs I the Moses Death Reports,” in *A Song of Power and the Power of Song: Essays on the Book of Deuteronomy*, ed. Duane L. Christensen (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1993), 185.

¹⁷ There are obvious parallels between the prayer of Moses in Exod 33:11-23 and the prayer of Jesus in Matt 11:25-30. In both texts, reciprocal knowledge is declared and a promise of rest is introduced. The Exodus passage influences the order of phrases in Matthew as well. Allison (*The New Moses*, 226) points out that the Father knowing the Son precedes the Son knowing the Father in Matt 11:27. He argues that this is a reflection of Exod 33:12-13, where God's knowledge of Moses precedes Moses' request for knowledge of God.

¹⁸ The relationship between God and Moses is described in verse 11, “Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to his friend.” Moses' prayer to God (vv. 12-17) further elaborates on the closeness of this relationship. In that prayer, Moses makes two claims regarding his special status before God: God knows Moses by name, and Moses has found favor in God's sight (v. 12). Moses' special status before God is the thread that runs through this entire dialogue. See Donald E. Gowan, *Theology in Exodus* (Louisville: Westminster, 1994), 230.

Emmanuel,' which means 'God is with us'" (v. 23). Despite the fact that Jesus is not called Emmanuel by anyone in the gospel, Matthew relates Jesus to the meaning of this name. In the Jewish culture, the task of naming is taken seriously and is done with intent. A name is meant to indicate the identity and character of the person named.¹⁹ Through Matthew's account of the naming of Jesus, two significant components of God's call to Moses are tied to the root identity of Jesus. While Moses is called by God to lead the people out of slavery in Egypt and is assured that God will be with him, the baby conceived by Mary is the incarnation of these promises. Jesus isn't promised that God will be with him, but is himself the presence of God with the people, a presence that saves from slavery to sin. Furthermore, these promises frame Matthew's entire gospel. At the end of Matthew, Jesus tells the disciples to go to all the nations and baptize, and he promises, "I am with you always" (Matt 28:20). The baptized are freed from slavery to sin and Jesus, who from the beginning of the Gospel is associated with God's presence, is with the baptized "until the end of the age" (v. 20).

In addition to identifying Jesus with promises reminiscent of those associated with the call of Moses, Matthew ties the story of Jesus to Moses through the events narrated in Chapters 1-5. In the first three chapters of the book of Exodus, Pharaoh orders the death of all baby boys (thus ordering the death of Moses). Water saves Moses from death. Moses goes out into the wilderness and comes to the mountain of lawgiving. Similarly, in the early chapters of Matthew, Herod orders the death of all baby boys under the age of two (thus ordering the death of Jesus). Jesus passes through the waters of baptism, goes out into the wilderness, and comes to the mountain of lawgiving. The similarity between the story of Jesus and the story of Moses in these chapters establishes continuity between them so that the teaching of Jesus will be seen in light of the teaching of Moses. In addition, the many books centering on the life of Moses in Second Temple Judaism indicate that the story of Moses and his relationship to God are vital for understanding Torah, the way of life that Moses imparts to the people of Israel. Matthew's use of Mosaic typology highlights the essential relationship between Jesus' teaching and Jesus' life.

Matthew 11:25-30 emphasizes the continuity between Jesus and Moses and the deep connection between Jesus' teaching and Jesus' life. Jesus, like Moses, has an intimate and unique relationship with God. Just as Moses is known by God and finds favor with God, Jesus

¹⁹ Gowan, 76-80.

is known by God and finds favor with God. The intimacy of this relationship leads to revelation: “No one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (v. 27). The invitation that follows this statement contains important Mosaic themes that point to Jesus as Torah incarnate—the way to God for anyone who chooses to accept the invitation. Three phrases in the invitation (Matt 11:28-30), the offer of rest, the association between Jesus and yoke, and the description of Jesus as meek and humble, are of particular significance in evoking Mosaic memories as a means for understanding Jesus.

Jesus’ invitation, “Come to me...,” followed by the promise of rest, “...and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28), has a clear verbal parallel with Exodus 33.²⁰ The text in Exodus reads, “‘I myself,’ the Lord answered, ‘will go along, to give you rest’” (Exod 33:14). In order to appreciate the Christological insight that emerges from this verbal parallel, it is important to investigate what is meant by “rest” and the reason the promise of rest appears twice in the invitation (Matt 11:28-29).

In Jewish and Christian writings from the first and second century CE, rest has an eschatological connotation and is associated with the messianic age and Sabbath.²¹ Eschatological reflections often indicate that the end will be like the beginning.²² Sabbath rest, which is associated with creation, will be restored when the messianic age dawns. This connection can be clearly seen in Hebrews 4:1-13. While Hebrews is not background for Matthew, it has been proposed that it is a kindred text.²³ Both texts point to eschatological rest as a gift for all who believe in and follow Jesus. The association of Jesus’ promise of rest with eschatology and the Sabbath is further indicated by the context of the invitation in Matthew. Eschatology is the major theme of Chapter 11, which precedes the invitation, and the invitation is followed by Sabbath controversies in Chapter 12.²⁴ Jesus’ promise of rest in Matthew is clearly associated with eschatology and the restoration of the Sabbath. Jesus is the herald of a messianic age, the beginning of the new creation. He ushers in the great Sabbath. The significance of the meaning of rest for Matthew’s Christological reflection is deepened, however, by its tie to Exodus 33. In Exodus 33:14, rest is associated with God’s promise to accompany the people of

²⁰ The word, ἀναπαύω (to give rest), is used in Matt 11:28; the LXX uses καταπαύω (to bring to rest) to translate ἠσυχία (provide rest, quiet) in Exod 33: 14. See Davies and Allison, vol. II, 287.

²¹ Davies and Allison, vol. II, 288.

²² Davies and Allison, vol. II, 288.

²³ Davies and Allison, vol. II, 288-9.

²⁴ Davies and Allison, vol. II, 289.

Israel. It is associated with God's presence. The use of the background text of Exodus 33:14 focuses the dawning of the new messianic age on its source, God's presence in the person of Jesus. In Exodus, God promises the rest that comes with his accompanying presence. In Matthew, Jesus is that presence.

The promise of rest occurs twice in the invitation: "I will give you rest" (v. 28) and "you will find rest for yourselves" (v. 29). The first mention of rest implies passive reception; rest is received as a gift by those who come to Jesus (v. 28). The second mention of rest ties the gift to an action on the part of disciples. Rest is not merely received, but is found by those who take Jesus' yoke upon themselves and learn from him (v. 29). Within the invitation is a proposal for a way of life that is paradoxically both gift and demand. Understanding this way of life is tied to the meaning of the second phrase with Mosaic undertones in Jesus' invitation, "take my yoke upon you and learn from me" (v. 29).

A yoke is a wood frame that is placed over the necks of two or more draft animals to join them together and allow them to use their weight efficiently to pull large objects. Interestingly, if the yoke is made and fits well, it distributes the weight of a heavy burden in a way that makes it light and easy to pull. The yoke that Jesus is asking disciples to wear is obviously not a literal yoke; nevertheless, this yoke is described as easy and meant to make burdens light (v. 30).

The harnessing of an animal to a yoke not only makes the burden of weight lighter, but also provides discipline and direction. For this reason, in the Old Testament and extra canonical writings, yoke is a metaphor for obedience, subordination, and servitude and is associated with both Torah and Wisdom. The expression, "the yoke of Torah," is used by Jewish teachers to urge students to a life characterized by obedience to God.²⁵ The use of Torah, in this expression, has a broad meaning referring to the full revelation of God and God's will for human beings.²⁶ In Second Temple Judaism, the person most closely associated with God's revelation and with the commandments was Moses. According to Davies and Allison, the association between Moses and Torah is the primary reason for Matthew's use of Mosaic typology.²⁷ The use of biographical analogies in Matthew 1-5, followed by a collection of Jesus' teaching (The Sermon on the Mount, Matt 5-7), clearly indicates to the reader that this new teach-

²⁵ Jer 5:5; Acts 15:10; Gal 5:1; 2 Bar 41:3; Dan 6:2; En. 48:9; *m. 'Abot* 3:5; *m. Ber.* 2:2; Davies and Allison, 289-290.

²⁶ Davies and Allison, vol. II, 289-90.

²⁷ Davies and Allison, vol. II, 297.

ing of Jesus has the same authority as the teaching of Moses. It is a new Torah. The invitation in Matthew 11 confirms this realization and moves beyond it. In Matthew 11, when Jesus urges his disciples to take up his yoke, he is in continuity with other Jewish teachers who use yoke to refer to the revelation of God and God's will for human beings. He does not, however, refer to the yoke of Torah, but to *his* yoke. He does not ask his disciples to learn Torah, but to learn Jesus.²⁸

This emphasis on Christology, who Jesus is at the deepest level, is strengthened by the phrase at the center of the invitation. In the middle of the invitation, Jesus expresses the reason disciples should come to him, wear his yoke, and learn from him. He says, "for I am meek and humble of heart."²⁹ This phrase is significant because not only does it clearly attest to the Mosaic coloring of Matthew 11:25-30, but it also indicates that for Matthew, the continuity between Jesus and Moses is based, not merely on external similarities (their teaching and actions), but also on deep relational characteristics affecting the quality of their relationships to God and to others.

The two words that Jesus uses, meek (ἄραυ=ἰ) and humble (ταπεινο/ἰ), differ slightly in meaning.³⁰ Meek (ἄραυ=ἰ), sometimes translated as kindness, is often used to express an attitude toward others, while humility expresses the condition of being poor and lowly. Humility is not a desirable quality in Greco-Roman society, but because God chooses the lowly, humility has a positive connotation in the Old Testament.³¹ Jesus claims he is humble of heart, pointing to the internalization of a lowly condition, an attitude of lowliness before God and others. Both terms, meek and humble of heart, are relational qualities. They are associated with obedience to

²⁸ Davies and Allison, vol. II, 291; cf. Morgens Müller "The Gospel of St. Matthew and the Mosaic Law-A Chapter of a Biblical Theology," *Studia Theologica* 46.2 (1992): 116-19.

²⁹ In the context of Matt 11:28-30, this phrase stands out because it does not contain a catchword that ties it to the other phrases and disrupts the parallelism of those verses. It disrupts the synonymous parallelism of verses 28ab and 29ad, and it is likely that his phrase is a Matthean addition. Davies and Allison, vol. II, 290.

³⁰ In the LXX, ἄραυ=ἰ is used to translate נָחַם in Num 12:3. For a discussion of the association of ἄραυ=ἰ and ταπεινο/ἰ in the Old Testament and its use in Matthew's Gospel see Luz, vol. 1: 190-4, vol. 2: 173-4; see also Allison, *The New Moses*, 222-3; Davies and Allison, 290-1.

³¹ Terrence G. Kardong, *Benedict's Rule: A Translation and Commentary* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical, 1996), 160-1; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary* (trans. James E. Crouch; ed. Helmut Koester; 3 vols.: Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001-2007), vol. 2, 173.

Torah, Wisdom, and righteousness.³² They express an attitude of love that allows the self to retreat to the background for the sake of others.³³

Jesus links both words together, a linkage that occurs in the Old Testament as well (Isa 26:6; Zeph 3:12; cf. Prov 16:19).³⁴ In Zephaniah the qualities of meekness and humility are associated with eschatology. On the day of the Lord, the faithful are urged to seek justice, seek humility and seek the Lord (Zeph 2:3). Likewise, the saved remnant will be humble and lowly (Zeph 3:12). Zechariah associates meekness with the Messiah king, who will come meek and lowly and riding on a donkey (Zech 9:9). While the words “meek” and “humble” are not used in the Servant Songs of Isaiah, the Servant embodies these attitudes. The Servant takes upon himself the sins of the world, allows himself to be led to slaughter, and will not quench a faltering wick (Isa 53:4-12; 42:3). These Old Testament texts inform Matthew’s use of meek and humble to describe Jesus. Jesus is the Messiah king who rides in on a donkey (Matt 21:5). He brings in the eschatological age and inherits the earth because he is meek (Matt 5:4). He is the Servant, who takes away infirmities, bears diseases and will not quench a smoldering wick (Matt 8:17; 12:15-21).³⁵ In Matthew, descriptions of Jesus as meek and humble indicate that Jesus is the eschatological Messiah who will travel the path of the Suffering Servant in order to save all who will follow and believe in him.³⁶ In the invitation, those words are tied to Moses, and it is important to discuss the Christological significance of this connection.

In the Old Testament, Moses is a model of humility. Numbers 12:3 states, “Now, the man Moses was very meek, more so than anyone else on the face of the earth.” Despite the fact that Moses is described as a unique leader of Israel because he speaks to God face-to-face (Num 12:6-7), is entrusted with God’s house (Num 12:7), and beholds the form of God (Num 12:8), he is at the same time remembered for his extraordinary meekness. In fact, Ben Sira claims that meekness is the reason that Moses was chosen. In a passage that begins by recalling that Moses had “fearful powers,” performed “swift

³² H. H. Esser, “Humility,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* 3 vols., Colin Brown, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971-1976), vol. 2, 259-64.

³³ Luz vol. 2, 174.

³⁴ Luz vol. 2, 173.

³⁵ For a discussion of the connection between Moses and the suffering servant in Matthew, see Allison, 233-5.

³⁶ Allison, 233-5; Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Christology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 26-47.

miracles,” and was given God’s commandments for his people (Sir 45:2-3), it is stated, “For his trustworthiness and meekness, God selected him from all mankind” (Sir 45:4). This statement is followed with reference to the friendship between Moses and God and how this friendship is connected to “the commandments, the law of life and understanding” that is taught to Israel (Sir 45:5). The Old Testament and other Jewish writings remember humility as the distinguishing characteristic of Moses, the reason he was chosen to lead them from slavery, the reason he was able to listen to God, and the reason he was entrusted with Torah.³⁷

In Matthew, Jesus’ reference to himself as meek and humble of heart evokes a connection to Moses’ relationship with God that was a source of salvation and revelation. Matthew’s primary reason for using Mosaic typology is to connect Jesus’ teaching to Torah, but this connection is not merely external. It is not simply that the new teaching of Jesus is equal to or even slightly superior to the teaching of Moses, and the point is not merely that God is the source of both teachings. Instead, Matthew is making a deeper connection. The teaching of Jesus cannot be separated from the person of Jesus. Jesus is the exemplar and the embodiment of the revelation of God. Morgens Müller writes,

The transformation apparent in the Gospel of Matthew is not that the old Law is being superseded by a new Law of Jesus. It is not a question of doing away with part of the Mosaic Law. The change is rather that in a way the Mosaic Law is being embodied in Jesus in order that it may speak with a new voice through him. Where in ancient Judaism the Mosaic Law was the foundation of the covenant and representative of God’s salvation of his people, Jesus as the son of God is now being proclaimed as ‘the Torah Incarnate.’³⁸

When the invitation is read through a Mosaic lens, the Christology revealed emphasizes the revelation of God’s presence and will for human beings in the person and teaching of Jesus Christ. Jesus doesn’t merely promise rest, he *is* rest. He doesn’t merely bring a new law but *is* the new law.

JESUS AS PERSONIFIED WISDOM

Matthew employs Mosaic typology throughout his Gospel and Mosaic themes lie behind and color the Christological meaning of the invitation. Significantly, Wisdom themes are also evident in the invitation. They deepen the Mosaic emphasis on the embodiment of

³⁷ Allison, 180-181; Davies and Allison, vol. II, 290.

³⁸ Müller, 114.

God's presence in the person and teaching of Jesus Christ. Wisdom literature recognizes daily life as the center of learning for the Israelites. It sees openness to God's presence in the midst of daily life as the source of both knowledge and revelation and emphasizes the immanence of God in creation.³⁹ Wisdom literature claims that the pursuit of Wisdom is the pursuit of life. Life is meant to be more than mere existence. Wisdom themes in Matthew deepen the Christological invitation to a relationship with Jesus as a source of life lived in communion with God.

Wisdom is meant to be savored and lived well, and living it well is both a gift and task. As gift, it is available for all, and all are invited to seek Wisdom. Yet seeking Wisdom is also a task that involves making good choices and nurturing personal qualities such as humility, diligence, prudence, integrity, fidelity, and fear of Yahweh.⁴⁰ These personal qualities are directed toward forming peaceful, other-directed, loving, and life-giving relationships with God and others. Kathleen M. O'Connor writes, "Relationships make life beautiful, challenge people at the core of their beings, and provide the most intense and surprising joy."⁴¹ The spirituality of wisdom literature is inherently relational and for this reason, Wisdom cannot be achieved but comes as gift to those who pursue her.

The invitation Jesus offers in Matthew 11 echoes invitations to study Wisdom found throughout wisdom literature. These invitations are issued by the sages and even by Wisdom herself.⁴² The closest parallel to Matthew 11 is the invitation to disciples that closes the Book of Sirach (Sir 51:23-30). This is significant because like the Gospel of Matthew, the book of Sirach was written during a time of conflict and crises in Israel. Sirach and Matthew respond in similar ways to the contemporary situations of their communities. Both writers appeal to the traditions of Israel in innovative and creative ways, not merely repeating old teaching but, instead, drawing fresh insights from the tradition in light of contemporary questions.⁴³

Written in the second century BCE, Sirach responds to the spread of Hellenism and the turmoil that the appeal and threat of Hellenism created for the people of Israel.⁴⁴ Sirach's innovative response to Hel-

³⁹ Roland E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 17-18.

⁴⁰ Kathleen M. O'Connor, *The Wisdom Literature* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1988), 41-51.

⁴¹ O'Connor, *The Wisdom Literature*, 51.

⁴² Prov 8:4-11, 32-36; 9:5 ff.; Sir 24:19-22, 51:23-30; Deutsch, *Lady Wisdom*, 56-7.

⁴³ O'Connor, 134-6.

⁴⁴ O'Connor, 135.

lenism was to connect personified Wisdom to the traditions of Israel. In the wisdom books that precede Sirach, Wisdom is personified as a woman, cries out in the market places and the streets, offers teaching to all, and is a bridge between human beings and God.⁴⁵ The teaching of wisdom literature is meant to lead the people of Israel to pursue communion with God in their daily lives, and while this teaching does not contradict and is not meant to compete with the teachings of Torah, until the writings of Sirach, there is no explicit connection between Wisdom traditions and Torah traditions.⁴⁶ In the book of Sirach, they are intertwined, both directing followers to the same goal, communion with God. Wisdom is the creation and Gift of God (Sirach 1), is found and flourishes in the worship of Israel and in the Temple of Jerusalem (Sirach 24), and most importantly is identified with Torah (Sirach 24).⁴⁷

The connection of personified Wisdom to the God of Israel and to Torah is the major theme and contribution of the book of Sirach.⁴⁸ This theme is expressed most clearly in three poems about personified Wisdom that appear in three key places in the book, the beginning (Sirach 1), the middle (Sirach 24), and the end (Sirach 51).⁴⁹ An exploration of these three poems yields important background for understanding the Christological significance of the Wisdom imagery in Matthew 11 by describing the deep connection between Wisdom and Torah.

The book of Sirach opens with a poem to personified Wisdom. The first part of the poem (Sir 1:1-8), discusses Wisdom's relationship with God. The poem asserts that Wisdom was created by God before all things (vv. 1, 4), is impossible for human beings to understand (vv. 2-5), is known only by God (vv. 6-7), and is poured forth as a lavish gift to all who are friends with God (v. 8). The second part of the poem (Sir 1:9-18) associates Wisdom with fear of the Lord. In the first part of the poem, Wisdom is described as God's movement toward human beings. In the second part of the poem, Wisdom is identified with the human's movement toward God.⁵⁰ This poem about Wisdom in Sirach is in continuity with her description in the book of Proverbs as the bridge between God and human beings.

⁴⁵ Prov 1:20-33; 3:13-18; 4:5-9; 8:1-9:5; 31:11-31; Sir 24: 51; Wis 7-9.

⁴⁶ O'Connor, 146.

⁴⁷ O'Connor, 134-51.

⁴⁸ Once Sirach makes this connection, Wisdom continues to be identified with Torah. This association is explicit in Bar 3:9-4:4 and the Rabbinic materials, e.g. *b. Sanh.* 101a; *Exod. Rab.* 30:5; 33:1; *Deut. Rab.* 8:7; see Celia Deutsch, "Wisdom in Matthew: Transformation of a Symbol," *Novum Testamentum* 32.1 (Jan, 1990): 29-30.

⁴⁹ Deutsch, "Wisdom in Matthew," 137.

⁵⁰ Deutsch, "Wisdom in Matthew," 138-9.

In Chapter 24 of Sirach, that bridge is connected specifically with the Torah traditions of Israel. In making this connection, Sirach is using Torah in the broadest sense. Torah is both story and commandment, and both are essential in finding one's way to God.⁵¹ Wisdom envelops the earth and yet seeks and finds a resting place in the traditions of Israel. From this resting place, she invites all to her abundant banquet. The connection of Wisdom with Torah in this poem accentuates the relational nature of both traditions. The language of desire, hunger and thirst, is used to describe the relationship of disciples to Wisdom and of students to Torah. Tasting the fruit of Wisdom deepens the hunger and thirst of disciples because the fruit of Wisdom is sweeter than honey (Sir 24:19-20). Studying Torah leads disciples to taste Wisdom in a way that only fuels the desire for more understanding because Wisdom is deeper than the sea (v.27). The poetic language of Sirach 24 is not the language of task and demand; it is the language of love. By connecting Torah to Wisdom, Sirach asserts that Torah is not simply a set of principles to be learned, repeated, and imitated. Meditating on Torah shapes the way a person sees the world and feeds desire for communion with God.

Finally in Chapter 51, Sirach describes his own search for Wisdom. His search for Wisdom is described in the language of paradox. It required determination, discipline, and persistence and yet filled him with desire and devotion. It challenged him to the core of his being, and yet awakened in him awareness of beauty, understanding, purity, and a resolution to never forsake Wisdom (Sir 51:13-22). Having found Wisdom, the sage now invites others to come to the house of instruction (Sir 51:23-30). Gift and demand are intertwined in this invitation and Wisdom is associated with a yoke and with labor that is not burdensome, but provides a plentiful yield (vv. 26-27).⁵²

The three Wisdom poems in the book of Sirach emphasize the intimacy of the relationship between Wisdom and God, and Wisdom's invitation to human beings to enter into this relationship. This description of Wisdom is in continuity with poems extolling Wisdom throughout wisdom literature.⁵³ Sirach's innovative tying of Wisdom to Torah highlights the relational nature of Torah. Torah, like Wisdom, is a bridge between God and human beings. To study Torah is to enter into a relationship. This relationship requires discipline and

⁵¹ Deutsch, "Wisdom in Matthew," 145.

⁵² Wisdom's invitation to disciples to wear her yoke and receive rest appears in Sir 6:18-37 as well.

⁵³ Prov 8:1-9.5; 31:11-31; Sir 24; 51; Wis 7-9.

obedience that are not directed to a general presence, but to a particular God, the God of Israel. While it requires attentiveness, discipline and obedience, at the same time it is not a task that can be achieved or degree that can be acquired. It can only be entered into as a response to an invitation. It is fed by love and desire, nurtured through openness to its demands, and is ultimately received as gift.

The Christological significance of Jesus' invitation in Matthew 11 is deepened through exploration of these poems in Sirach. Jesus' invitation to disciples is in continuity with the sages of Israel but moves beyond them as well. The sages invite disciples to follow them on the same journey they themselves have undertaken, the search for Wisdom. Sirach invites his followers to the "house of instruction," and asks them to submit to Wisdom's yoke. Jesus invites disciples to come to *him* and submit to *his* yoke. Just as the Mosaic themes that lie behind the invitation point to Jesus as Torah incarnate, the Wisdom themes identify Jesus not with the sages of Israel but with Wisdom herself.

Mosaic and Wisdom themes converge in Jesus' invitation in Matthew 11. Each theme makes a distinctive contribution to the Christological meaning of the invitation. Mosaic themes emphasize the continuity between the teaching and lives of Jesus and Moses while also pointing to the way the revelation of Jesus is distinctive from the revelation of Moses. The intimacy of the relationship between Moses and God that leads to revelation in the form of Torah is the primary reason that Matthew uses Mosaic typology to understand and articulate the significance of Jesus. The Mosaic imagery in the invitation draws attention to the teaching of Jesus and the way that teaching is embodied by Jesus. Jesus is Torah incarnate; he is to be learned and followed in the way Torah was learned and followed in Israel. The Wisdom themes deepen and enrich this Mosaic typology by drawing it into the realm of relationship using the language of desire and love. The relational imagery of Wisdom awakens awareness to the surpassing abundance and gift of this relationship that can only be entered into as a response to an invitation. The convergence of themes highlights the particularity and exclusive demands of following Jesus but situates these demands in the deeper, wider, and broader context of the mystery of communion with God in the person of Jesus Christ.

IMPLICATIONS FOR DISCIPLESHIP

Imitation of Jesus lies at the very heart of the invitation in Matthew 11. Disciples are invited to come to Jesus, to wear his yoke, and to learn from him because he is meek and humble of heart. The Mosaic and Wisdom coloring of these few phrases points to deep relational connections between Jesus and God, Jesus' life and his teach-

ing, and Jesus and his disciples. Disciples of Jesus respond to the invitation by learning what Jesus teaches and embodying this teaching in their lives, particularly through internalizing the qualities of meekness and humility in their relationships with God and with others.

Only Matthew records Jesus saying, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. Amen, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter will pass from the law, until all things have taken place" (Matt 5:17-18). This statement accentuates the connection between Jesus' teaching, particularly his teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, and the teaching of Moses. It is characteristic of Matthew's attitude toward the law. It is interesting to note, however, that despite emphasizing that Jesus' teaching fulfills the law, Matthew does not simply present a collection of the teaching of Jesus, but interweaves that teaching with Jesus' healing ministry, and sets it in the broader context of his birth, life, passion, death, and resurrection. He writes a life of Jesus and, by writing a life, indicates that the teaching of Jesus cannot be separated from that life.⁵⁴ Disciples are to imitate the whole of the life of Jesus.

The invitation in Matthew 11 uses a small phrase to characterize the life of Jesus. Jesus is "meek and humble of heart" (v. 29). These few words express the intimacy of the relationship between Jesus and God as the source of revelation and salvation for disciples.⁵⁵ These words characterize both Jesus' relationship with God and his relationship with the world. The significance of this characterization of Jesus for Christology and discipleship in Matthew's Gospel is confirmed by the appearance of similar themes in the Beatitudes.

The Beatitudes introduce the first collection of Jesus' teaching in Matthew (Matt 5:3-10). Jesus blesses people living in particular conditions or characterized by particular relational qualities and assures them of eschatological reward. Among the relational qualities mentioned are the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, and the clean of heart. These personal characteristics reveal attitudes toward God and others that draw one into communion with God and lead toward eschatological rest. The personal qualities expressed in the beatitudes are most clearly fulfilled by Jesus, but their appearance in Jesus' blessings indicates that disciples are called to internalize these qualities as well. The challenge of imitating Jesus is that disciples, like Jesus, are asked to embody these qualities in a world that is hostile to God. Persecution, mourning, and hunger and thirst for righteousness can all

⁵⁴ Davies and Allison, vol. III, 707-18.

⁵⁵ See discussion of this above, 10-13.

be expected, and yet those who follow Jesus are assured blessings the world cannot give. This is the difficult task of discipleship in Matthew. As the invitation indicates, disciples are not merely invited to learn a set of principles Jesus teaches, they are invited to walk the same way Jesus walked in the world.

Walking the way Jesus walked in the world requires full, whole-hearted commitment in every aspect of life. The teaching of Jesus points to a horizon that can never be reached. Noting that many of the demands of the Sermon on the Mount seem to lie beyond human capability, Allison states that Jesus' teaching is meant to inspire the moral imagination.⁵⁶ This can be seen in the six paragraphs of the Sermon that are often referred to as the antitheses (Matt 5:21-48). Each of the paragraphs distinguishes Jesus' teaching from what has been taught before (Matt 5:21-48). In each case, this teaching requires a fullness of response that goes beyond what has been previously taught. While Moses said, do not kill, Jesus says, do not be angry (Matt 5:21-22). While Moses said, love your neighbor, Jesus says, love your enemy (Matt 5:43-44). In each case, the deepening of the commandment moves toward wholeness, completion.

While it seems nearly impossible for people to live without ever feeling anger or lust and to love even their enemies, striving to live toward this complete internalization of the commandments is transformative because it brings the whole of one's life into relationship with God. In fact, Jesus explicitly notes that the motivation for living this way is to imitate God. He says, "So be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt 5:48). Perfect is used to translate the Greek word, *τελειος*, meaning whole or complete. Disciples are urged toward wholeness because in imitating Jesus, they imitate God. This imitation cannot be limited to a portion of life because through this imitation, disciples enter into a transformative relationship that breaks through boundaries and cannot be contained. Through this relationship they become the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt 5:13-15).

Relationship is central to both Christology and discipleship in Matthew's gospel. Matthew reaches back to the Mosaic and Wisdom traditions of Second Temple Judaism to express as fully as possible the deep roots and profound meaning of the relationship between Jesus and God and Jesus and disciples. In Second Temple Judaism, both Torah and Wisdom revealed God and opened a path for disciples to walk so that through their lived experience they might encounter God. For Matthew, Jesus is Torah incarnate and personified

⁵⁶ Dale C. Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1999).

Wisdom. To encounter Jesus is to see God. In the midst of history, with all of its volatility, ambiguity, turbulence, and conflict, God's love looks like Jesus. Disciples are invited to follow Jesus so fully and completely that, transformed, they become the way for others to encounter God in the world. Responding to this invitation is paradoxically both gift and demand. It is very hard work and rest. It requires everything and yet gives us more than we can imagine. Matthew's teaching about discipleship has many dimensions, but the most important of them is the need to respond to the invitation to come to Jesus, take his yoke, and learn from him. The more deeply embodied our response to the invitation is the more fully we will be able to shoulder the light burden of giving our lives to God for the sake of the world. **M**