

Did Matthew Know He was Writing Scripture?

Part 2

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Der Beitrag versucht zu zeigen, dass Matthäus sein Evangelium von Anfang an als (Heilige) Schrift geschrieben hat. Der erste Teil diskutierte als Grundlegung ein Verständnis von Heiliger Schrift als Kondensat von widerfahrener Offenbarung. Der vorliegende Teil wendet dieses Verständnis exemplarisch auf zwei verschiedene Texttraditionen innerhalb der jüdischen Literatur der hel-

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SUMMARY

The article seeks to demonstrate the possibility that the Gospel of Matthew was from the outset written with the intention that it would function as (Holy) Scripture. Part 1 discussed the understanding of Scripture, within the Biblical texts themselves, as deposit of the revelatory acts of God. Part 2 applies this understanding to various strands

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RÉSUMÉ

L’auteur veut ici démontrer que l’Évangile de Matthieu a pu être rédigé dès l’origine dans l’intention qu’il fonctionne comme Écriture (sainte). La première partie de l’article a soutenu la thèse selon laquelle, dans les textes bibliques eux-mêmes, l’Écriture était considérée comme le dépôt des actes par lesquels Dieu s’est révélé. Cette seconde partie applique cette conception à divers cou-

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4. Scripture writing in the Hellenistic-Roman period

Whereas Josephus and Philo wanted to limit the number of authoritative Scriptures, there is plenty of evidence that during this period other Jews instead continued to compose Scripture-like texts. The Qumran library is full of examples of this activity, with many parabiblical psalms, bibli-

lenistisch-römischen Zeit an Das erste Makkabäerbuch und das Matthäusevangelium werden als Beispiele dafür herangezogen, wie die Erfahrung von Gottes aktiver Teilhabe an gegenwärtigen Ereignissen dazu führte, dieses Geschehen in der Form einer neuen (Heiligen) Schrift zu vergegenwärtigen. Dadurch war es möglich, dieses neue Offenbarungshandeln sowohl mit der bisherigen Heilsgeschichte zu verknüpfen als auch für die zukünftige Beziehung zu Gott fruchtbar zu machen.

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of Jewish literature from the second century BC to the second century AD. First Maccabees and the Gospel of Matthew serve as case studies of how the experience of God’s revelatory activity resulted in Scriptures which were intended to commemorate these acts in light of the history of salvation so far and to facilitate meaningful encounters with them for the time to come.

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rants de la littérature juive dans la période allant du ii<sup>e</sup> siècle avant au ii<sup>e</sup> siècle après J.-C. Il effectue ensuite une étude de cas sur le premier livre des Maccabées et l’Évangile de Matthieu pour montrer comment l’expérience de l’activité divine de révélation a eu pour résultat la rédaction de textes scripturaires ayant pour but de commémorer ces actes à la lumière de l’histoire du salut et de permettre l’accès à ceux-ci pour les temps à venir.

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cally-styled narratives and law-codes as authorised by Moses, Enoch and other ‘biblical’ characters. The Enoch library is another prime example of a corpus of texts that clearly claims authoritative, ‘scriptural’ status on the basis of the fact that the content of the books is the result of various revelatory experiences.<sup>1</sup> For a historical understanding of what it means to write or to intend to write Scripture, the narrow idea of inspiration found in



Philo and Josephus does not suffice. If the Hebrew Scriptures themselves provide the model for what Scripture is, then their character as testimonies of experienced *revelation* seems to me to be a more helpful category than their inspired status, which focuses predominantly on the divine guidance in writing those texts. With such a concept it is possible to explain plausibly why authors during the Second Temple Period wanted to write Scripture and why some of these writings actually gained an authoritative, Scripture-like status at least within particular groups.

1) The most important reason why certain writers continued to produce 'Scripture' is simply that they lived in a religious environment in which Scripture was regarded as the appropriate means of witnessing and preserving God's revelation. This point is often overlooked: In a religious community within a cultural climate that has a tradition of venerating written documents as authoritative and as a (secondary) medium of God's communication with his people, every new 'author' who wanted to present a message as divinely authorised had to decide if he wanted to communicate his God-given insights as potential Scripture or not.<sup>2</sup> This does not infer, however, that the intended audience would immediately and automatically receive it as God's word. And even if they did, it does not follow that its status as a message from God would endure past its immediate context. Some messages are time-bound and pass away within their time; only a small proportion outlive their primary use to become part of a community's spiritual heritage and to be valued as enabling the recognition of God's will and other ways of communication with God beyond the actual 'Sitz im Leben'.

2) A second reason is that the already accepted Scriptures provide hope for a future intervention of God in the fate of his people and this world that would even surpass the experiences of the past. A new covenant, a new David, a new creation, a new song to sing, a new way to experience God's being with his people – all these eschatological promises are part of the already existing Scriptures and they teach the hearer to watch out for God's future actions.<sup>3</sup> And if Scripture is the deposit of God's revelations, we should expect that whenever somebody believes in the realisation or the fulfilment of these promises they will be compelled to testify to it. One way to do this is writing a new Scripture, as the case of the book of Ezra-Nehemiah has shown (see Part 1, pp. 104-5). As we will see, 1 Maccabees is a further good exam-

ple of an author who saw the prophetic promises about Israel's restoration and a peaceful existence within secure borders as fulfilled in the time of the Hasmonean ruler Simon. As a result he wrote a book that is biblical in style and which received at least a kind of semi-canonical status through the Septuagint. The same can be said about the community in Qumran, which is based on the experience of living in the last days and being elected and guided by God through special revelations which were given for their own time.<sup>4</sup> There would be no New Testament if the followers of Jesus in the first century had subscribed to the opinion of Philo and Josephus, but we have evidence throughout that they were urged to write new books for the new message because God was experienced as having spoken to them anew in a previously unheard and unseen way. Yet the necessity of a new Scripture did not mean the end of the existing ones but their completion, because the revelation brought about by Jesus was – despite his disturbingly 'strange' fulfilment of the messianic expectations – seen as a legitimate and necessary continuation of God's acts in Israel.

3) It can be demonstrated, I think, that the writing of Scripture (or attempts to write Scripture) is connected to those periods in Israel's history when God was experienced as being more directly active than in others. The famous dictum of the nineteenth-century historian Leopold von Ranke, according to which all epochs are equally close to God, might need to be reconsidered in this light.<sup>5</sup> In Israel the time of the early monarchy, the last period of the Kingdom of Judah, the exile and the immediate post-exilic period were obviously considered as times when God was experienced more directly than in other periods. These had been the times when historical developments came to fruition and conclusions could be drawn with the benefit of hindsight based on the outcomes of God's activities. The way to commemorate these events and to make them spiritually profitable for the future was the production of new and/or redaction of already existing Scriptures. The Jewish writings after Ezra leave no doubt that this pattern continued into at least the beginning of the second century AD.

Three events were regarded (although in different ways by different groups, which consequently resulted in a split within Israel's scriptural legacy) as revelatory and therefore worthy to be remembered scripturally: First, the Hellenistic crisis and the fight of the Maccabees for the freedom of



Israel, which looked for a moment like the fulfilment of prophetic promises and the beginning of a new Davidic-like kingdom. In addition, the help of God in the fight against the much stronger Seleucid forces and the miraculous victories Israel achieved in their fight against them seem to have supported the idea that a biblical age had returned; parts of the Qumran library and the historical books dealing with the Hasmonean period can be seen as its scriptural ‘deposits’. Secondly, the coming of Jesus was experienced by some of his contemporaries as a revelatory event that surpassed everything before it and which could be seen as the culmination of everything laid down in the Torah and the Prophets. Other Jews were not willing to see Jesus in such a light, not because they thought the time of the prophets or of God’s revelatory actions had ceased, but because they were unable to see Jesus as the fulfilment of the promises contained in the Law and the Prophets. Only a few decades later, and this is the third example, some Jewish authors recognised instead the destruction of the Temple and of Jerusalem in the year 70 as an event that had to be dealt with on a biblical scale. This is evidenced by the Jewish pseudepigraphic writings in the name of Jeremiah, Baruch and Ezra, which were trying to cope with the events of the year 70 and to make them intelligible within God’s history with his people.

To conclude this point: Writing Scripture is the result of the experience of an event in which God set or changed the direction of history for his people. Therefore, the decisive periods within salvation history are also the decisive periods for writing Scripture. The initial question of this essay, whether it is possible to assume that Matthew intended to write Scripture, can therefore be answered in the following way: First, he was living in a religious environment that was used to testifying to God’s extraordinary revelatory deeds by means of writing Scripture. Secondly, he recognised Jesus as the fulfilment of Israel’s hope as laid down in ‘the prophets and the Law’ (Matt 11:13; 5:17), and, finally, he experienced the revelation of Jesus (Matt 16:17) not only as the climax of past hopes but also as the beginning of a new era within salvation history which will last until ‘the end’ (τὸ τέλος, Matt 24:14). Accordingly, the only feasible way to witness to it was to communicate it as Scripture.

## 5. Two case studies

I want to demonstrate finally how authors could mark their writings as texts intended-to-become Scripture – as texts offered to their religious communities with the aim of them being received in the same way as those already considered to be biblical books.

### 5.1 First Maccabees as intended Scripture

In his *History of New Testament Times with an Introduction to the Apocrypha* (1949), R. H. Pfeiffer (1892-1958) already observed that the author of 1 Maccabees planned his book as a sequel to the books of Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah in order to complete the history of his people down to his own time.<sup>6</sup> The Book of Chronicles starts with the genealogy of the people of Israel and narrates the story up to the Cyrus edict which is a fitting end to a history of God’s people starting with the sons of Jacob/Israel (1 Chr 1:34; 2:1).<sup>7</sup> It is the end of an epoch and the beginning of a new one. The focus according to the edict is the ‘House of God’ to be built in Jerusalem (2 Chr 36:22-23).

This focus on the Temple in Jerusalem might be one of the reasons why the author of 1 Maccabees took up the task of writing Scripture once more: The Temple had been plundered and desecrated again, but God’s active intervention for his people and his election of a new leadership rescued the Temple and the people once more.<sup>8</sup> Yet in doing this the author of 1 Maccabees did not feel the need to treat the whole of the intervening period in the same way: The period from Alexander the Great and Darius III of Persia up to Antiochus IV Epiphanes is covered by the first nine verses only, after which the focus is on the circumstances that led to the rise of the Hasmonean dynasty. Alexander is described as coming ‘from the land of Kittim’, a biblical term for one of the descendants of Javan (Gen 10:4; 1 Chr 1:7) and used mainly to describe the Greek people in the West (Num 24:24; Isa 23:1, 12; Jer 2:10; Ez 27:6), whereas in Daniel 11:30 it is used for the Romans. Common to both, Greeks and Romans, is that they came on ships. Alexander is not mentioned by name in the Hebrew Bible but clearly alluded to in Daniel’s vision of the goat coming from the west and destroying the ram from the east, which points to Darius III (Dan 8:3-7; 11:3). In the later books of the Hebrew Bible Darius is often used as the name for the Persian king, and the phrase ‘King of the Persians and the Medes’ is also a biblical label. It



can be demonstrated further that the characterisation of Alexander in 1 Maccabees 1:2-3 is based on Daniel 8:5-8.

This is just one example of the biblical style of 1 Maccabees; other elements are the inclusion of poetic, psalm-like texts and prayers; the quotation of official documents as in the book of Ezra; the anachronistic use of 'Israel' for the Judean people, etc. It is widely suggested that the original language of the book was Hebrew and it is to be assumed that the style was a kind of Biblical Hebrew; this is supported by the Greek translation, which is not in the style of the Greek Hellenistic world 'but in the style of the Greek scriptures, the Septuagint' as Bartlett points out. He suggests the possibility that this was done in an attempt 'to associate the book with other writings accepted by the Jewish community'.<sup>9</sup>

The other biblical book with a profound influence on 1 Maccabees is Judges: there the sins of the tribes of Israel allowed foreign nations to plunder them. In the time of the biblical judges the Israelites had to hide their harvest before the foreigners, while in 1 Maccabees the Israelites need to hide the scrolls of the Law which the enemy seeks to destroy so that they might annihilate Israel as a nation. The situation in the time of Gideon is especially telling, with Israel hiding in caves before the Midianites like the faithful in the time of Antiochus IV (Judg 6:2, cf. 1 Macc 2:28-30). Then God chose Gideon to rescue his people; although he belonged to an unimportant clan within the tribe of Manasseh (Judg 6:15) he received the promise that God would be with him (6:16). In the same way the Hasmoneans were members of an unimportant priestly clan (1 Macc 2:1) but they were chosen to rescue Israel as God had once chosen Gideon. They were those 'through whom deliverance was given to Israel' (1 Macc 5:62). As Gideon destroyed the altar of Baal and the image of Asherah in his father's house (Judg 6:25-28) and instead built an altar for YHWH, so did the Hasmonean brothers: they destroyed the foreign altar which was erected in their hometown Modein (1 Macc 2:24-25) and cleansed Jerusalem from idol worship and the 'desolating sacrilege on the altar' in the Temple (4:45, cf. 1:54; 6:7) before erecting a new altar according to the Law of God (4:47-54). As in Judges, the end of the story is not a happy one: Gideon returned to a form of idolatry and his son Abimelech, who usurped his position of leadership, was driven by worldly ambitions and no longer by the spirit of God. Judges 9 reports

internal slaughter and rivalry and the ending of 1 Maccabees is equally gloomy: the Hasmonean Simon and two of his sons were killed by Simon's son-in-law and another son only just escaped (1 Macc 16:11-22). The storyline ends with a short comment on John Hyrcanus, the only surviving son of Simon, but without revealing anything about his long career as high priest (135-104 BC) apart from the short summary:

The rest of the acts of John and his wars and the brave deeds that he did, and the building of the walls that he completed, and his achievements, are written in the annals of his high priesthood, from the time that he became high priest after his father (16:23-24).

This summary is clearly reminiscent of the concluding remarks in the Book of Kings (1 Kings 11:41; 22:39; 2 Kings 8:23; 10:34; 12:19; 20:20 etc.).

It is obvious, and the points mentioned above could easily be multiplied, that the author of 1 Maccabees is adopting a biblical *style*. According to my proposal he does this because he experienced events in the relationship between Israel and her God which he considered as being of a biblical *scale*. It is the scale that requires the style and the style follows the scale. This thesis is supported by the following further observations:

- 1 Maccabees 2:24-26: When Mattathias, the father of the Hasmonean brothers, was asked to sacrifice according to the foreign king's order he confessed his loyalty to the 'covenant of our ancestors' (2:20-21) and refused to do so. When instead another man from his town stepped forward and made the sacrifice, 'Mattathias became zealous and his kidneys were stirred. He built up passion for judgement, and running he killed him on the altar' (2:24). The author of 1 Maccabees comments on this outburst of anger with the help of a biblical analogy: 'He became zealous for the law, just as Phineas did against Zambri son of Salom', placing Mattathias alongside the biblical hero Phineas, who received an eternal covenant as a reward for his loyalty towards Israel's God.
- 1 Maccabees 2:51-64: The last words of Mattathias addressed to his sons are a summary of Israel's trials throughout her history from Abraham down to Daniel. All these men remained faithful to God and received their heavenly reward in return. The *distichoi* are carefully crafted to illustrate the obedience-



reward structure: The first *stichos* tells about the actions of the men in the active voice; the second *stichoi* are all formulated as divine passives. The author's intention is obvious: Now it is up to the sons of Mattathias to be tested and if they persist, they will be rewarded like their predecessors. Just as Jacob blessed his sons and Moses the tribes at the end of their lives (Gen 49:1-28; Deut 33), so did Mattathias before 'he was gathered to his ancestors', which is another biblical phrase (Judg 2:10).

- 1 Maccabees 3:16-22: Before the first battle between Judas and the Seleucids, Judas' men are afraid, being vastly outnumbered and wondering how they might attack a superior force. Judas reminds them that 'before Heaven there is no difference to save by many or by few', a line that is reminiscent of the 300 who fought with Gideon.<sup>10</sup> Judas ends his short speech with the conviction: 'He himself will crush them before us' (3:22); that is to say, God's active involvement in the battle for the sake of his people is taken for granted, even if it is described only cautiously.<sup>11</sup>
- 1 Maccabees 4:30-33: Judas Maccabeus and 10,000 Israelites face Lysias with 65,000 Seleucid troops. When Judas prays before the battle he compares his situation with that of David and Jonathan against the Philistines. In those times the 'Saviour of Israel' (ὁ σωτὴρ Ἰσραὴλ) smashed the enemy forces by the hand of David and Jonathan, and Judas prays the same for his army: That God might do something against the enemy by the hand of the few around Judas (4:31-33; in verse 32 three imperatives are addressed directly towards God requesting his action during the battle).
- 1 Maccabees 5:62: A divine passive – a veiled reference to the revelatory action of God – is used to describe the election of Judas and his brothers as the 'one family through whom deliverance was given to Israel'.
- 1 Maccabees 7:41-42 is another prayer offered by Judas before battle. He recalls how the angel of the Lord killed the 185,000 Assyrians before the walls of Jerusalem in the time of Hezekiah (2 Kings 19:32-35) and asks God to do the same here. God is urged into action with the imperative active σύντριψιον 'smash!' (verse 42) and the following verse 43 reads 'and the army of Nicanor got smashed' (σύνετριβη), taking up the same verb but this time in the passive voice. It was not Judas and his men who defeated the

enemy's army but God, as in the days of Isaiah and Hezekiah.

1 Maccabees admittedly is rather minimalistic in its description of God's revelatory activities – especially in comparison with 2 Maccabees<sup>12</sup> – and they disappear altogether in the later parts of the book. Instead, the worldly ambitions of the Hasmoneans become more visible and the last event properly reported is the killing of Simon and his sons. But such a distanced perspective which even admits to failed hopes is not inconceivable for 'biblical' historiographical writing because it is in line with the Books of Kings or Nehemiah, or Psalm 89 as another example, all of which finish without a clear perspective for the time to come.

One argument against the proposal that the author of 1 Maccabees saw his writing as a potential biblical book needs to be addressed, namely what he wrote in 9:27: 'So there was great distress in Israel, such as had not been since the time that prophets ceased to appear among them.'<sup>13</sup> This verse is central to the assumption of the 'cessation of prophecy' and it is widely used as the most important early proof-text for it (see Part 1, pp. 105-6). Can the author of 1 Maccabees claim 'biblical' authority without assuming a prophetic self-understanding? As we have seen, the connection between inspiration, prophecy and canonical status is first made by Josephus. It should not be presupposed for the time of 1 Maccabees and, as a matter of fact, not all biblical texts are actually prophetic writings or supposed to be so. Without such an understanding, based on later texts, the comment can even mean the exact opposite: Because the distress was so extraordinary in scope, a new Scripture was necessary since this was one of the established ways for Israel to cope with disaster.<sup>14</sup> The scale of the oppression was such that Israel could not sufficiently deal with it on the basis of the Scriptures that were already available. And it is not just the threat that was extraordinary but also the blessings which mark the peak of the book and of Simon's high-priesthood, which is painted with the colours of eschatological fulfilment (1 Macc 14:8-15). It is as if the unknown author wants to describe how God rewarded the zeal of the Maccabean brothers and how through them God brought a time of blessing that already had the taste of the eschatological kingdom of God. However, as in the times of the judges and the kings of Judah, the blessing did not last because of the sins of the next generation. The



book serves therefore as a powerful reminder of how God acted on behalf of his people, and this commemoration provides the foundation for and expectations of further actions by the same God for his people in the future, on condition that they would show the same commitment to his will as did Mattathias and his sons. This seems to be the main role of Scripture: To enable looking ahead on the basis of past experiences of God's active role in the course of the history of his people.

In sum, what was experienced as extraordinary or exceptional (as could be seen from 1 Macc 9:27) and different from the everyday experience of God is what caused someone to capture those events as Scripture. This result can be used as a bridge to the Gospels, which are in a similar way historical narratives inspired by the fact that they relate something never seen before. In Mark's Gospel this is clearly expressed by the crowd after Jesus forgave and healed the paralytic in Capernaum (2:12: 'We have never seen anything like this ...' οὕτως οὐδέποτε εἶδομεν; par. Luke 5:26: 'We have seen unexpected things today ...' εἶδομεν παράδοξα σήμερον). Matthew places this comment at the end of the miracle chapters 8-9 and gives it an even greater weight: what Jesus has taught (note the astonishment of the crowds in Matt 7:28-29) and the miracles he did went beyond anything seen in Israel so far (9:33): 'And the crowds were astonished and said: Never before has something like this appeared in Israel' (καὶ ἐθαύμασαν οἱ ὄχλοι λέγοντες· οὐδέποτε ἐφάνη οὕτως ἐν τῷ Ἰσραὴλ). The passive voice of the main verb 'to appear' (φαίνω) can be taken as an allusion to a revelatory event caused by God.<sup>15</sup> This brings us back to the initial question: Is it reasonable to assume that Matthew, when he started to compose his Gospel, had a clear vision of writing a text which could, even should, be treated as Scripture in the long run?

## 5.2 The Gospel of Matthew as intended Scripture

There are indeed good reasons to assume that Matthew was motivated (inspired) to write with the purpose of writing Scripture. Such an assumption goes against the focus of current Matthean scholarship which is dominated by the (rather secondary) question of what the Gospel reveals about the conflict between the Jewish Christian community Matthew belongs to and their surrounding majority Jewish culture. Matthew is here predominantly a document of the 'parting of the ways' but no longer a book for 'all Christians', and sub-

ordinated to an alleged partisan dispute between two rival Jewish groups in the last third of the first century.<sup>16</sup> What the Gospel relates about Jesus is shaped according to the needs of this conflict without any intention to be true for all time and at all places for those who want to follow Jesus.

Against this prevailing view I would like to give more weight to the thought that Matthew has indeed written a *Gospel for all Christians* and that to do this he wrote it as Scripture because he wanted to testify to not just *a* but *the* fulfilling revelatory event in God's history with and for his people. This 'biblical' intention can clearly be seen at the beginning (linking back to the already existing history of God's people in the style of 1 Chronicles and 1 Maccabees) and the end (looking forward and making commands for the future of God's people) of this Gospel. This intention is further supported by the 'biblical style' and the careful attempts to intersect and contextualise the new Scripture with the already established Scriptures, but also by the impressive and amazing efforts *not* to allow contemporary (and therefore passing and marginal) events to surface strongly.<sup>17</sup> This conclusion, based on compositional observations, is strengthened by the historical argument developed above that at the time of Matthew there was no 'dogma' that Scripture-writing had come to an end; quite the opposite, the relative openness of the Hebrew canon makes it rather plausible that Matthew and the other authors of the Gospels saw themselves – as other Jews did – as successors of the previous 'biblical' authors.

The greatest weight, however, goes to the argument that the impact of Jesus' life, death and resurrection (which was undoubtedly taken as a historical event by Matthew) on his followers was experienced as a revelatory act of God that could only be dealt with in the form of writing Scripture.<sup>18</sup> The experience of and reflection on this new revelation of God within the history of his people called for a new Scripture-like preservation, memorisation and application by means of preaching and spreading the word. What can be learned from Jewish literature of the time is that contemporary events could be seen and understood in the light of Scripture in different ways: either Scripture was applied to enlighten the present in the form of commentaries (the *pesharim* from Qumran); or Scripture was rewritten to make it more applicable to a present situation which was considered to be in need of incorporation into the salvation history between God and his people (e.g. Josephus'



*Antiquities*); or contemporary events were commented on (or ‘sanctified’) by writing new books in the style of the established Holy Scriptures (e.g. 1 Maccabees, 1QHodayot). With regard to the ‘good news’ the Gospels wanted to communicate, it seems that the scale of the event was regarded as so different from what had happened before that it was not enough to adapt the story to an existing biblical style. Rather, this overwhelmingly new experience of God’s intervention called for a new genre, namely what we now have in the Gospels. There are no Gospels before Jesus and none after him. Some attempted to write further Gospels but failed to convince a large enough readership of their worth for them to become Scripture, which alone is an astonishing thing from a historical point of view.

Matthew in particular, but the other New Testament authors to some extent as well, present themselves in their writings as being imbued with the habit of looking upon reality through the lenses of Scripture. This means that these authors were accustomed to seek understanding of extraordinary events in relation to Scriptures, and naturally this was even more so with respect to their experiences with Jesus and – through Jesus’ ministry, death and resurrection – with God himself. Nevertheless, the Gospels are written anonymously; this means the authors step back completely behind their work – again following the biblical example, where almost no book can be properly labelled as author-literature. Should this not be understood as to infer – in light of the possibility that the New Testament authors used the existing Scriptures as a model for their own writing – that their work aimed to transcend the limits of the authors so that it could be seen as a testimony to the revelatory work of God?

We have seen that the later Old Testament writings refer back to earlier Scripture as authoritative. Not-yet-Scripture quoting Scripture is an established form of making a connection to the already sanctified tradition. This means that if an author quotes Scripture in a text that is not yet Scripture but is composed in a Scripture-like format and comprising a Scripture-like content (namely a revelatory experience), he is borrowing authority from what is already authoritative and places his own scripture alongside the existing one. By doing this, the author is able to influence the reception of his writing; he might also be able to steer the way his writing is performed in public. Although we do not know when exactly regular readings

from Scripture started in the gatherings of Jesus’ followers after the first Easter, it is most likely that these regular meetings were not just social coming-togethers but included acts of worship similar to those in a synagogue where the reading of Scripture plays a prominent part.<sup>19</sup> It is therefore a legitimate question whether the early Christian writings were composed with the intention/hope to be read *alongside* established Scriptures, which also explains the many allusions and references to them within the New Testament writings. I assume that the Gospels (or any other writing within the New Testament) were never meant to be read in isolation but always as part of a literary web with other Scriptures (and perhaps within a setting of standardised liturgical elements). Therefore, scriptural or canonical embeddedness already needs to be taken into account as part of the production process: The Gospel of Matthew is intended to be read and understood with the help of Isaiah and the other prophets, and with the books of Moses and the Psalms. This ‘canonical’ embeddedness not only justifies but indeed requires a reading in ‘context’ with those books.

But if the Gospel is read, heard and preached alongside and as ‘co-text’ to existing Scriptures, does this not also affect the way in which it is perceived? In other words, a process was set in motion that finally turned a not-yet-but-intended-to-be-scripture into proper Scripture through the commitment of a believing audience to these ‘new’ texts about the new revelation of God. There is no reason to assume that the evangelist was completely unaware of this dynamic, even if it might go too far to assume that from the beginning Matthew was written to fulfil the need for a Christian lectionary, as G. D. Kilpatrick and Michael Goulder assumed.<sup>20</sup> But an author like Matthew knew what happened with Scriptures. He knew that Scriptures are expounded, preached and connected with other Scriptures. And consequently, for an author like Matthew, the idea of a textual understanding that goes beyond the capacity of its originator is not impossible but instead even likely. Scriptural intertextuality is an inherent quality of all New Testament writings.

Does this then open the possibility that the evangelists’ *word* about God’s revelatory actions was intended as the revelatory *word of God* as well? This is where the topic of inspiration comes in again but I heed to the wise counsel of Howard Marshall: ‘The doctrine of inspiration is a declaration that the Scriptures have their origin in God;



it is not and cannot be an explanation of how God brought them into being.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless I can at least offer two observations on the idea of inspiration which are worthy to be studied in more detail at another time:

1) Matthew has in his repertoire the idea of words given to believers by God's spirit which are not their own, as can be seen from Matthew 10:19-20. Clearly, the context is standing trial and not writing Scripture so one should not press this argument too far. Additional support, however, is provided by Matthew 16:17 where Peter's confession of Jesus as Son of the living God was qualified by Jesus as a divine revelation.

2) It is interesting that the description of the purpose of inspired writing according to 2 Timothy 3:16 fits the Gospel of Matthew extremely well; it is indeed a book full of teaching (διδασκαλία), reproach/correction (ἐλεγμός) and setting things straight (ἀπανορθώσεις) for the sake of an education in righteousness (πρὸς παιδείαν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ), so that the man of God may be competent for every good deed (πρὸς πᾶν ἔργον αγαθόν).

## 6. Conclusion

To draw a conclusion: I am quite convinced that it would be possible to demonstrate for nearly all writings in the New Testament that they were intended to be Scripture-like – that they were written to witness to what the authors have experienced as God's revelation in their own time but clearly not only for that time. The New Testament writers took this revelation as a continuation of what had happened in earlier times and this is why they used scriptural quotations so frequently to demonstrate the fundamental rooting of the new 'word' of God in that which already existed. To support this connection even further they adopted – albeit quite freely – a biblical or scriptural style for their own writings. It seems to me inconceivable that in doing so they would have been unaware of the implications this would have for their own writings if they were placed alongside existing Scriptures. The notion and awareness of Jesus being the ultimate revelation of God for the last times can be taken as the default setting of the New Testament authors even if not all of them express it as clearly as the unknown author of the Letter to the Hebrews (Heb 1:1-2). It is, after all, the cultural context of first-century Judaism that urged the followers of Jesus to present their experience with him as a revelatory event of God in

the form of new Scriptures. In turn these became, in a process similar to Jewish Scriptures (though in a much shorter period of time), a new entity which could be referred to as the New Testament, but not in the sense of replacing what thus became the Old Testament, but forming together with it (Holy) Scripture in the singular.<sup>22</sup> Together they form the testimony to God's revelatory acts from creation to the incarnation of God's mediator of creation. The redemption he brought about opened the way to the ultimate ends of God's history with his creation. And because this ultimate revelation of God in Jesus took place in the last days in an unsurpassable way, it subsequently made sense to discontinue the writing of new Scriptures, and to be content for the present time and the time to come with applying existing Scripture to the life of God's people.

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## Endnotes

- 1 See Michael A. Knibb, 'Reflections on the Status of the Early Enoch Writings', in *Authoritative Scriptures*, 143-154; George W. Nickelsburg, 'Scripture in 1 Enoch and 1 Enoch as Scripture', in Tord Fornberg and David Hellholm (eds), *Texts and Contexts: Biblical Texts in Their Textual and Situational Contexts* (FS L. Hartmann; Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1995) 333-354; *idem*, 'The Books of Enoch at Qumran: What We Know and What We Need to Think about', in B. Kollmann, W. Reinbold and A. Steudel (eds), *Antikes Judentum und Frühes Christentum* (FS H. Stegemann; BZNW 97; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999) 99-113; *idem*, *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 1-36 81-108* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001) 57: '... the corpus claims to be authoritative Scripture that is based not on other inspired texts but on direct revelations received by its primordial author'. For the discussion of Enoch in early Christianity see Deines, 'The Term and Concept of Scripture', 262-263.
- 2 Deines, 'The Term and Concept of Scripture', 276; see also Bockmuehl, *Revelation and Mystery*, 124-125.
- 3 For Gerhard von Rad the not-yet-fulfilled nature of the Hebrew Scriptures, in his own words 'a book of ever increasing anticipation', warrants a biblical theology, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. II: *The Theology of Israel's Prophetic Traditions* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1965) 319; see also Gese, 'The Biblical View of Scripture', on the unity of both testaments as witness to one unbroken



- 'Revelation History' (25ff.).
- 4 1QS I 9; V 9; IX 13, 19; the chapter on the two spirits (1QS III 13-IV 26) is one document of the new revelation for the eschatological community; the prologue of the Damascus Scroll (I 1-II 1) is another Scripture-like document that introduces a new epoch in salvation history which is marked by the Teacher of Righteousness who was raised up by God for this task (I 11). For a fuller treatment see Crawford, *Rewriting Scripture* and Bockmuehl, *Revelation and Mystery*, 42-56. Still helpful is also Otto Betz, *Offenbarung und Schriftforschung in der Qumransekte* (WUNT 6; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1960).
- 5 'Jede Epoche ist unmittelbar zu Gott, und ihr Wert beruht gar nicht auf dem, was aus ihr hervorgeht, sondern in ihrer Existenz selbst, in ihrem Eigenen selbst.' Leopold von Ranke, *Über die Epochen der neueren Geschichte* (Historisch-kritische Ausgabe, hg. v. Theodor Schieder und Helmut Berding; Aus Werk und Nachlaß 2; München: Oldenbourg 1971, 60); see also von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2.319-320.
- 6 Mentioned in John R. Bartlett, *1 Maccabees* (Guides to Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) 16-19. The same point is made by Moody Smith, 'When Did the Gospels Become Scripture?', 8.
- 7 1 Chronicles 1, from Adam to the descendants of Esau, is a prelude to the genealogy proper. The compiler of the genealogy works in a reversed order in the first part: the less important figures are mentioned first, so the sequence is not Shem, Ham, Japhet but Japhet, Ham, Shem, and in the case of Abraham Ishmael's descendants come first, followed by the ones born by his concubine Keturah, and only then Isaac's, where Esau's descendants are listed before Jacob's. With chapter 2 the pattern changes: after giving the list of the twelve sons of Jacob in 2:1-2 in their traditional, age-based order, verse 3 starts with the sons of Judah, who is only the fourth-born but nevertheless the bearer of the kingly promise and line.
- 8 2 Chronicles 34-35 is dedicated to the rediscovery of the book written by Moses and the celebration of the Passover festival according to what was found written in this book. In a similar way 1 Maccabees (and even more 2 Maccabees) is promoting the feast of Chanukkah as a remembrance day of a new intervention of God for the sake of the Temple (1 Macc 4:52-59, cf. 2 Macc 1:18; 10:1-8). Note that the decision to celebrate the dedication of the altar annually was made by Judas and his brothers and all the assembly of Israel. It is not God's commandment as are the feasts in the Pentateuch. There is also no miraculous event connected to the rededication as it is in 2 Maccabees.
- 9 Bartlett, *1 Maccabees*, 19.
- 10 Judges 7:1-7, see also 1 Samuel 14:6.
- 11 In 1 Maccabees 3:25 it is said that 'fear' has fallen upon the nations so that Judas and his brothers were feared. This is another biblical phrase which points to God as the one who puts fear on the nations, see Josh 2:9; Ps 105 (LXX 104):38; the idiom is also used in Jdt 2:28 for Holofernes and his army who made the nations tremble.
- 12 2 Maccabees, written in a literary *koine* Greek and not in the 'biblical' style of the Septuagint, is an example of a book that was not intended by its author to be Scripture but rather edifying and entertaining reading based on the detailed historical account made by Jason of Cyrene (2 Macc 2:23-31, see also the epilogue of the epitomator 15:37-39). Despite the authorial intent it received semi-canonical status, and the reason for this is that the book – much more than 1 Maccabees – describes God's active involvement in the course of events and highlights religious elements very strongly.
- 13 See also 1 Macc 4:45b-46; 14:41. For a similar scaling of distress see Mark 13:19.
- 14 Cf. R. Deines, 'How Long? God's Revealed Schedule for Salvation and the Outbreak of the Bar Kokhba Revolt', in A. Lange, K. F. D. Römhild and M. Weigold (eds), *Judaism and Crisis: Crisis as a Catalyst in Jewish Cultural History* (Schriften des Institutum Judaicum Delitzschianum 9; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2011) 201-234 (212-213, 233-234; see also the 'Introduction' to this volume, 7-22: 8-18); David C. Sim and Pauline Allen (eds), *Ancient Jewish and Christian Texts as Crisis Management Literature: Thematic Studies From the Centre for Early Christian Studies* (LNTS 445; London: T&T Clark International, 2012).
- 15 The same verb is used in Matt 1:20; 2:13, 19 for the appearance of the 'angel of the Lord' in Joseph's dreams which guided him (ἄγγελος κυρίου κατ' ὄναρ ἐφάνη αὐτῷ = Joseph; 2:13 ἄγγελος κυρίου φαίνεται κατ' ὄναρ τῷ Ἰωσήφ; 2:19 ἄγγελος κυρίου φαίνεται κατ' ὄναρ τῷ Ἰωσήφ); the verb is further used in 2:7 with regard to the star that appeared in the east and for the last time in 24:30 for the future revelation of the Son of Man from heaven (τότε φανήσεται τὸ σημεῖον τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐν οὐρανῷ).
- 16 See R. Bauckham, 'To Whom Were Gospels Written?', in *idem* (ed.), *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 9-48; in the same collection the chapter by Richard A. Burridge, 'About People, by People, for People: Gospel Genre and Audiences', *ibid.* 113-145, is pertinent to the question at hand; see also my paper 'From the Centre to the Margins: German-speaking Scholarship on Matthew's Gospel as a Case Study for Matthean Scholarship as a Whole' (SBL-Matthew paper 2009), available from <http://eprints.nottingham.edu>.



- ac.uk/1697/.
- 17 For the first argument see the vast literature on the use of the Old Testament in Matthew's Gospel, for the second see R. Deines, 'Jesus and the Jewish Traditions of His Time', *Early Christianity* 1 (2010) 344-371 (358-359, 368-370), where I discussed the meaning of the Gospels' reductionism with regard to the historical contingencies of the life of Jesus as essential for their presentation of him as Lord. This article (and also the one quoted in n. 14) is now available in Roland Deines, *Acts of God in History: Studies Towards Recovering a Theological Historiography* (ed. Christoph Ochs and Peter Watts; WUNT 317; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013).
- 18 Crucial in Matthew's account are the confirmation of Jesus' mission by God in the voice from heaven in the baptism scene (3:17) and during the transfiguration (17:5), which are mirrored by Jesus' acknowledgement of his sonship (11:25-27), and his obedience to the Father (26:39) to fulfil the Scriptures (26:54, 56).
- 19 Smith, 'When Did the Gospels Become Scripture?', 19.
- 20 For references see Smith, 'When Did the Gospels Become Scripture?', 5-6.
- 21 I. Howard Marshall, *Biblical Inspiration* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982) 44.
- 22 For this development see Ulrike Mittmann and Rouven Genz, 'The Term and Concept of New Testament' in *What is the Bible?*, 305-337; Tobias Nicklas, 'The Development of the Christian Bible', *ibid.*, 393-426. Two important books appeared after completion of this paper which are pertinent to the questions addressed: Michael J. Kruger, *The Question of Canon: Challenging the Status Quo in the New Testament Debate* (Nottingham: Apollos/Inter-Varsity Press, 2013); Tomas Bokedal, *The Formation and Significance of the Christian Biblical Canon: A Study in Text, Ritual and Interpretation* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014).