



MATTHEW,
Disciple and Scribe

The First Gospel
and Its Portrait of Jesus

Patrick Schreiner

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Baker Academic

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

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Introduction

I don't think I quite understood the beauty of the Gospels until I grasped that they were laced with the Jewish Scriptures. Don't get me wrong. It was not that I had been reading them in isolation from the OT, for I understood that the Gospels continued the story of Israel. I read them as answering the hopes of the Jewish people. I comprehended that the evangelists presented Jesus as the solution to Israel's plight, and I sought to read Jesus in light of his historical and ethnic background.

What I had failed to see was that Jesus was presented as the continuation of the story in the *form* the story was written. The truth of a story is often carried in its arrangement, in the inspired world it evokes. It was not merely Matthew's words, but also the placement of those words, the portraits the evangelists painted, the *way* they told their stories that revealed their convictions about him. If we can compare the First Gospel to an oil painting, earlier I understood that I was looking at a Jewish painting through which the author expressed certain convictions about Jesus of Nazareth, but I neglected to step closer and concentrate on the brushstrokes to see that each drop of paint was chosen with care and had certain resemblances to previous portraits.¹ The artist had put together a portrait that made sense if you stepped back, but treasures could be brought forth if one moved a little closer and lingered for a moment.

This book is simply an attempt to step closer to the First Gospel's portrait. My claim is that a close analysis of Matt. 13:52 reveals that Matthew becomes

1. Paul Ricoeur describes a text not as a reproduction of reality but a re-presentation of it. Thus texts are like paintings rather than photographs. While a photograph holds everything in it, a painting focuses on essentials and eliminates uninterpreted material. Ricoeur and Klein, *Interpretation Theory*, 40–42.

a teacher in the style of Jesus:² “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.” Luke 6:40 says, “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher.” Matthew expounds the wisdom of Jesus by becoming a scribe and teacher to future generations, mediating the instruction of his sage. To put this in the First Gospel’s terms, Matthew is a “discipled scribe” who learned to bring out treasures new and old from his teacher of wisdom (13:52).³ Jesus formed an alternative scribal school; one of the main ways he instructed them in the paths of wisdom was to reveal the relationship between the new and the old, with himself at the center.⁴ Matthew was one of these trained scribes who passed on Jesus’s teaching to future generations. He wrote about Jesus’s life in a rich and multilayered way, incorporating the new (found in Jesus), and the old (how Jesus’s life fulfilled the story of Israel).

Person	Description	Task
Jesus	Teacher-Sage	Offers wisdom instruction concerning the new and the old (the secrets of the kingdom)
Matthew	Discipled Scribe	Learn, write, distribute, and teach the material from his sage

Though Jesus as a teacher of wisdom plus Matthew as a scribe is not the only lens through which we should look at the First Gospel, and these images certainly don’t exhaust the content of Matthew, they do provide an entry point into Matthew’s aims and theology.⁵ This study could take many detours and turns, some of which I was tempted to explore, but my aim is specific and narrow: to focus on *how* Matthew as the scribe passes on the wisdom of Jesus—listening to his use of the new and the old.⁶ I attempt to pay close attention to the OT echoes in Matthew’s writing style and attend

2. Bauckham, *James*, 30.

3. There is debate about whether Jesus is better described as a “teacher of wisdom” or “wisdom incarnate.” I will focus on the reality of Jesus as a teacher of wisdom, but I don’t think the two ideas are mutually exclusive. See the argument of James Dunn, “Jesus: Teacher of Wisdom or Wisdom Incarnate?”

4. A *sage* or *teacher* is someone who offered various forms of teaching that could be called wisdom, while a *scribe* (though related) is someone who put such material in writing and so preserved it for later audiences. Sometimes the two categorizes do collide, since a sage can also be a scribe. Jesus ben Sira is described as a sage and scribe.

5. Jesus being a teacher-sage-rabbi is not opposed to Jesus being the Son of God, Son of Man, messiah, and king. Allison (*Constructing Jesus*, 31) is right to call one of his chapters on Jesus “More Than a Sage: The Eschatology of Jesus.”

6. Admittedly, this book is not meant to be a full theology of Matthew. There are portions of Matthew not covered and topics significant to Matthew never broached.

to the development of the Jewish story in and around Jesus. In this sense, I am asking questions revolving around the topics of biblical theology and hermeneutics.

The first two chapters argue Matthew is the disciple and scribe following his teacher and sage of wisdom.⁷ This becomes the metaphor I employ for the rest of my study of the Gospel. Through Jesus's life and teachings, he instructed his disciples on the nature of the relationship between the new and the old. I also explore Matthew's convictions and method in a more summative fashion because doing so allows for a more comprehensive summary and analysis than the later chapters will afford. The initial chapters also form the basis for the second half, giving some methodological parameters and a lens through which to view the rest of the study. The first part is therefore titled "The Scribe Described."

I extend the argument in part 2 (the bulk of the book), but in a different way. Rather than continuing to argue that Matthew is the scribe, or further supporting Jesus as a teacher of wisdom, I turn to "The Scribe at Work." If the first part "tells," then the second part "shows." Part 2 of the book thus demonstrates how Matthew brings out treasures new and old by examining some themes and characters in his writing. Therefore, it does not develop the argument in the same fashion, but attempts to argue by illustration. I examine Matthew's presentation of Jesus as David, Moses, Abraham, and Israel. Though I have separated these people (David, Moses, Abraham, Israel) and concepts (kingdom, exodus, family, exile), they ultimately interweave. In the ancient world, teaching through comparison (σύγκρισις) was ubiquitous.⁸ This technique was even part of the preliminary exercises in rhetorical education. Each of these portraits will examine the new, while continually going back to the old to see the treasures of Matthew's literary style and the wisdom he gained from his teacher.

7. Jesus as a teacher for Matthew uniquely highlights his pedagogical function. He is also a sage in that he is the dispenser of wisdom (though sage as a distinct class of people is debated). He is also a rabbi, which technically means "my great one" but functions as an honorific for teachers. Thus John 1:38 transliterates rabbi as "teacher." See the short section on Jesus as teacher (rabbi) in Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 354–55. The Gospels collectively affirm that Jesus is a rabbi (Matt. 26:25, 49; Mark 9:5; 11:21; 14:45; John 1:38, 49; 3:2; 4:31; 6:25; 9:2; 11:8) and teacher (Matt. 8:19; 9:11; 10:24, 25; 12:38; 17:24; 19:16; 22:16, 24, 36; 23:8; 26:18; Mark 4:38; 5:35; 9:17, 38; 10:17, 20, 35; 12:14, 19, 32; 13:1; 14:14; Luke 6:40; 7:40; 8:49; 9:38; 10:25; 11:45; 12:13; 18:18; 19:39; 20:21, 28, 39; 21:7; 22:11; John 1:38; 3:2, 10; 8:4; 11:28; 13:13, 14; 20:16). Keener (*Historical Jesus*, 187) says, "It is unlikely that Galilean Jews who saw themselves as faithful to God's law would have made a hard-and-fast distinction among the categories like charismatic sage, teacher of wisdom and teacher of Scripture."

8. Hermogenes, *Progym.* 8; Quintilian, *Inst.* 9.2.100–101.

While studies on Jesus as the new (fill in the blank) are accumulating as fast as apps on an iPhone, my analysis is distinctive in two respects. First, I enclose the study with the argument that Matthew is the *discipled scribe* instructed by his teacher of wisdom on how the new and the old interact. Looking at Matthew's style and form instructs readers about the nature of Jesus's teaching and the content of Matthew's discipleship. Matthew was forming a certain type of person through his narrative—or making disciples and thus fulfilling Jesus's command in the Great Commission. A study like this is not merely a search-and-find game or a study in parallelomania, but an attempt to view Jesus as his apprentices did, learn from their wisdom, and thereby appropriate this type of thinking into our intuitive processes.

Second, though I will examine titles and trace phrases, I will do so through the *narrative presentation* and connect figures to their great acts in redemptive history. To divorce a person from their great acts is to empty them of their importance. Who is Achilles without the Trojan War? Who is Odysseus without the odyssey? And who is Alexander the Great without his conquests? For Matthew, character and plot forge a close connection. Jesus's characterization is inherently tied to his participation in the plot. Or maybe better, Jesus's characterization is tied to character(s) and plot(s). And Matthew's canvas is larger than the first and last words of his book (and everything in between), for it both stretches backward, pulling from Israel's Scriptures, and points forward to the new creation. As Graham Stanton says, "The Old Testament is woven into the warp and woof of this Gospel; the evangelist uses Scripture to underline some of his most prominent and distinctive theological concerns."⁹

9. Stanton, *Gospel for a New People*, 346.

PART 1

The Scribe
DESCRIBED

*Scribes speculated about the beginning and
the end and thereby claimed to possess the
secrets of creation. Above all, they talked, they
memorized and remembered, they wrote.*

Jonathan Z. Smith

1

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Matthew, the Discipled Scribe

Placing Matthew

Open your Bible and turn to the first page of the NT. There you will find the Gospel of Matthew speaking about the messiah in an unexpected form: a genealogy.¹ The Gospel's first words unveil Jesus through the prism of OT characters. Jesus is messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham. In the genealogy, Matthew depicts Jesus not through the judgment of an ignorant disciple, an agnostic politician, or the questioning crowd but through the eyes of a Jewish scribe who is convinced Jesus is the messiah, the hope of his people. To read the Gospel of Matthew well is to read it with the Jewish story line—all twenty-four books that precede it—rumbling in the mind.² It

1. My argument in this book does not completely rest on Matthean authorship, though it will be assumed throughout. Certainly, Matthew as the author coheres with my thesis. Being a tax collector may imply he knew something of scribal techniques, though the amount of training is hard to know for sure (see Chris Keith's *Jesus' Literacy* for a literacy overview). It also fits to have someone who was an eyewitness of Jesus. Byrskog, Bauckham, and Hengel have all recently emphasized the role of eyewitnesses in their works. However, it could also be the case that the author was a disciple of a disciple of Jesus. If there is no relation to Jesus, then my argument is less convincing. For the sake of variety, I will use various ways of identifying the Gospel of Matthew, including some that imply Matthean authorship. Although the authorship of the First Gospel is disputed and the manuscript did not originally circulate with a formal title identifying who wrote it, very early in the church tradition this Gospel was associated with Matthew. On the basis of manuscript evidence from the second or early third century, Simon Gathercole ("Earliest Manuscript Title") has argued for an earlier use of titles than most assume. However, also see van der Toorn's chapter on authorship in antiquity, in van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*.

2. The Tanak—the Hebrew Bible—has twenty-four books, which the OT of the Christian Bible counts as thirty-nine. The difference in number is because the Hebrew collection considers the twelve Minor Prophets as one book and does not divide some of the longer books into two parts.

is impossible to take two steps in Matthew's narrative without also taking a few steps back to see how each new tale interacts with a previous one.³

By beginning this way, Matthew tips his hat toward his method. Matthew functions as the scribe who learned from his teacher and sage how to make disciples by illuminating how Jesus fulfills the old. Without understanding the fluctuation between the new and the old, Matthew's narrative can be a confusing and curious piece. The database of a genealogy makes little sense unless one sees this as a historical *and* theological retelling. The temptation and baptism before Jesus's ministry warp into moralistic tales unless one relates these stories to Israel's past. The Sermon on the Mount is a beehive of misunderstanding unless one sees Jesus as the true and better Moses, David, and Solomon. And Jesus's death is merely a tragedy unless one sees that he fulfills all the Scriptures. Matthew's genealogical opening reveals that he is requesting his readers to engage his narrative through the lens of the new and the old.⁴

Matthew's persuasion is that "the shadows of the Old Covenant are not deceptive wraiths; they are 'fore-shadows' which enable readers to understand better that which comes in Christ."⁵ The old system needed the moment of maturation, and that moment came in the messiah. The Gospel of Matthew is best understood with one eye looking back and the other eye attuned to the tectonic shifts from the old story. The form and content of the genealogy reminds readers of the old account while also introducing them to the new story. Like any good writer, Matthew depicts the familiar but with a twist; the Gospel, after all, is a furthering of the story, not a repackaging. To put this most simply, one can read Matthew's Gospel ably by asking three questions of the text: How does this echo Israel's story? How does Jesus fulfill Israel's story? How does it move the story of Israel forward?

Matthew reads both history and current events in a certain way, and any reading of this Gospel that neglects quotations from, allusions to, and echoes

3. Though this study largely examines Jewish backgrounds since this seems to fit the best with Matthew's emphasis, it would be interesting to write a book in a similar vein focusing on Greco-Roman backgrounds as a companion to this one.

4. The new and the old could be understood simply as what some call biblical theology. Carson ("Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology") asserts, "Everyone does that which is right in his or her own eyes and calls it biblical theology." By biblical theology, I mean what Geerhardus Vos ("Idea of Biblical Theology," 15) says when he describes it as "nothing else than the exhibition of the organic progress of supernatural revelation in its historic continuity and multiformity." More specifically, I am looking at redemptive history through a literary and canonical approach. See Klink and Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology*. While their work is helpful, its categories are too tight.

5. Clowney, *Church*, 55. Though Clowney refers here to the old covenant in contrast to the new covenant in Hebrews, I am not claiming that the old covenant equals the OT.

of Israel's Scriptures misses Matthew's lesson. The Gospel presents a figural reading of Jesus's life as the *master* discourse.⁶ Through images and metaphors, he shows how Jesus walks in Israel's shoes while also bringing them to their destination. The genealogy instructs readers that the *content* of Matthew's Gospel is contained in its *form*. As Hans Urs von Balthasar argues, "The content [*Gehalt*] does not lie behind the form [*Gestalt*] but within it. Whoever is not capable of seeing and 'reading' the form will, by the same token, fail to perceive the content. Whoever is not illuminated by the form will see no light in the content either."⁷

Through his form, Matthew clarifies things about the Jewish narrative that were shadowy while also revealing new turns in the plotline. Matthew provides *explanation by emplotment*. His organization of the Jesus event explains the significance of the Jesus event. Events that are solitary and singular do not innately tell a story nor do they shape identity or culture. Yet when they are connected with other events and put into a plot, they then become intelligible and noteworthy. Narratives are stories that arrange and shape events into a coherent whole; they are like the numbering system in connect-the-dots children's books; if the numbers are removed, all that remains is a chaotic set of dots. However, if the numbers are followed, they will create a coherent picture.

For too long Gospel scholars have been prone to look away from the numbers rather than opening themselves up to the narrative itself. This appears in many forms: sometimes by comparing discrepancies between Gospel writers, other times by trying to figure out the "correct" order of historical events, and other times reaching for the community or tradition from which the stories sprang. Yet each of these methods peers *through* the narrative rather than *at* it. The beginning of Matthew's Gospel instructs us to look at the form and the content through the history of Israel. This book attempts to look *at* the narrative of Matthew as a whole through the numbering system Matthew himself provides: the new and the old.

Matthew, the Discipled Scribe

My argument is that *Matthew is the discipled scribe who narrates Jesus's life through the alternation of the new and the old*. The image I employ has its source in Matt. 13:52:

6. I use the term figural here because it seems to be a mediating term between typology, allegory, and inner-biblical exegesis. See chapter 2, where I also use the term "shadow stories."

7. Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, 151.

Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.

διὰ τοῦτο πᾶς γραμματεὺς μαθητευθεὶς τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν ὁμοίός ἐστιν ἀνθρώπῳ οἰκοδεσπότη, ὅστις ἐκβάλλει ἐκ τοῦ θησαυροῦ αὐτοῦ καινὰ καὶ παλαιά.

The word usually translated as *trained* (μαθητευθεὶς) is related to the Greek word for *disciple* (μαθητής). Matthew’s verse could therefore be translated: “Therefore every *discipled scribe* for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out his treasures new and old.”⁸ Jesus tells them that a *scribe* (someone who works with texts) who becomes a *disciple* (following Jesus as a teacher of wisdom) can produce great things for the kingdom of heaven.⁹ The metaphor “master of a house who brings out treasures” is an image for interpretation, for the entire chapter is about right interpretation and understanding of Jesus’s parables.¹⁰ The word picture suggests strategic selection in what is new and old.¹¹ Treasures must be presented, stored, and organized in some sort of structure. In the words of one scholar, Matthew here betrays his method.¹² The Gospel itself demonstrates how Matthew accomplishes the scribal task mentioned in 13:52. Though this is not the only perspective through which one should view Matthew’s writing, it does provide a helpful grid to lay over his presentation. Several indications suggest that Matthew presents his readers with the modus for his entire Gospel, but I will limit myself to two brief comments here.

8. The dative phrase τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν could be taken as sphere (in the kingdom of heaven), respect (concerning the kingdom of heaven), or dative of advantage (for the sake of the kingdom). I lean toward taking it as a dative of advantage or interest. Carson (“Matthew” [1984], 332), Orton (*Understanding Scribe*), and Luz (*Matthew 8–20*, 286) agree.

9. The verb employed in this verse is ἐκβάλλω, which more generally means expulsion: to “expel” or “send out” rather than “bring forth” or “bring out.” Modern translations stem from a conflation of Luke 6:45, which uses προφέρω. In his commentary on Matthew, Origen even changed the verb to Luke’s (*Commentarium in evangelium Matthaei* 10.15.1). Peter Phillips (“Casting Out the Treasure”) capitalizes on the “expulsion” meaning of ἐκβάλλω and reinterprets the verse to mean that the discipled scribe expels the new and old in their storeroom to make way for the kingdom of heaven. However, ἐκβάλλω can have the more sedate meaning of “bring out” (see BDAG 299; Matt. 12:20, 35), and this meaning more closely aligns with Luke 6:45 and Matt. 12:35.

10. Jesus compares himself to a “master of a house” (οἰκοδεσπότης) in Matt. 10:25. In the same text he calls himself a teacher, and his followers disciples. They are slaves to him the master. The next two verses also reflect the tradition of wisdom by speaking of things hidden, revealed, and proclaimed on the housetops (10:26–27). Interestingly, in Prov. 9:1–6 Lady Wisdom is both a householder and a teacher.

11. Spellman, “Scribe Who Has Become a Disciple,” 45.

12. Fuller, *New Testament in Current Study*, 83. Orton (*Understanding Scribe*, 166) says, “In any case, there is a great deal of evidence that the author has received a thorough training in Jewish exegesis and writing, the most tangible aspect of the traditional art of the scribe.”

First, both early and modern interpreters have argued that γραμματεὺς μαθητευθεὶς (the discipled scribe) depicts Matthew. Origen, one of our earliest commentators on Matthew, viewed this verse as representing the disciples as scribes of the kingdom.¹³ B. W. Bacon and Krister Stendahl also argue for a form of this theory, but from a redaction critical perspective.¹⁴ In addition to Origen, Bacon, and Stendahl, many modern commentators also provide a passing comment to the same effect.¹⁵ Second, a larger contextual hint also confirms my suspicion that Matthew is the scribe: the first word of his Gospel. Many argue that the beginnings of Matthew and Mark are actually their titles. Thus Mark's title would be "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the son of God." Matthew's would be "the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Βίβλος γενέσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ Δαυὶδ υἱοῦ Ἀβραάμ, Matt. 1:1). The Greek word that Matthew begins with is βίβλος, which can also be translated as "scroll" or "record."

If this is the title for Matthew's Gospel, then he is describing his entire work as a scroll.¹⁶ Even if one isn't convinced that the first eight words of Matthew's narrative contain the title, Matthew begins his description of the life of Jesus by speaking about his scroll. The scroll was a primary tool of the scribe. If anything defined what the scribe did, it was the surface on which the scribe wrote (βίβλος), the tool employed (σχοῖνος), and the action of writing itself (γράφω). Therefore, Matthew begins his narrative by referring to his work as a scroll. He lets his readers know that he is the scribe penning the life of Jesus. Before we explore Matthew's work under this banner, a few key

13. Origen questions how the disciples can be scribes when Acts 4:13 says that they are unlearned and ignorant. His solution is that one becomes a scribe when one receives the teaching of Christ, but on a deeper level when one, having received elementary knowledge through the letter of the Scriptures, ascends to things spiritual. *Commentary on Matthew* 10.15 (ANF 10:423; GCS 10:9–10).

14. Bacon (*Studies in Matthew*) asserts Matthew modified Mark in order to show the chief duty of the Twelve was to be scribes made disciples for the kingdom of heaven. Stendahl (*School of St. Matthew*) famously argues from the eclectic quotations that this practice was the product of a Jewish-Christian scribal school that searched for prooftexts. My proposal is not the same as Stendahl's, though there are some affinities.

15. Daniel Harrington (*Gospel of Matthew*, 208) comments that this "self-portrait of the evangelist" is a very widespread view, one might say almost the universal view. The majority view is that 13:52 describes Matthew, with many extending it to the disciples. See, e.g., Carson, "Matthew" (1984), 333; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 225; Morris, *Gospel according to Matthew*, 362; Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 570. Yet Byrskog (*Jesus the Only Teacher*, 241) says there is no conclusive evidence for this, and the context speaks against this view.

16. One could argue that the word βίβλος covers only the genealogy. However, βίβλος can mean either a "brief written message" (cf. Matt. 19:7) or a "long written composition" (cf. Mark 12:26; Luke 3:4; 20:42; Acts 1:20; 7:42; Rev 20:15). I think the case I present in this chapter supports the idea that it covers his entire work. Allison ("Matthew's First Two Words") discusses the use of βίβλος.

concepts from 13:52 need more analysis if we are to move forward: disciple, scribe, and treasures new and old.

Discipled by the Teacher of Wisdom

Matthew is a disciple.¹⁷ The term μαθητής (disciple) occurs only in the first five books of the NT and appears the most in Matthew and John. Seventy-eight times it appears in Matthew's work.¹⁸ The term means that someone is an adherent, pupil, apprentice, or follower.¹⁹ More specifically, a "disciple" is regularly defined in the realm of knowledge and learning. Jesus even said, "It is enough for the disciple [μαθητῆ] to be like his teacher [διδάσκαλος]" (10:25). According to BDAG (609), μαθητής is "one who engages in *learning* through *instruction* from another" or "one who is rather constantly associated with someone who has a *pedagogical* reputation." A disciple is thus someone who learns, who understands, who gains wisdom. This lines up with Matthew's presentation of the disciples as a whole, for as Markus Barth (and many others after him) has noted, Matthew omitted or interpreted differently all of the passages in Mark's Gospel that speak of the lack of understanding on the part of the disciples.²⁰ Barth even claims that the "faith" (πίστις) concept in Paul, John, and Mark is transferred to "understanding" (σύνημι) in Matthew.²¹ Regardless of whether the entirety of Barth's claim is true, the characteriza-

17. Discipleship in Matthew has been viewed usually under two lenses: redaction criticism or narrative criticism. See Bornkamm, Barth, and Held, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*; Luz, "Disciples in the Gospel according to Matthew"; Sheridan, "Disciples and Discipleship in Matthew"; J. Brown, *Disciples in Narrative Perspective*; Wilkins, *Discipleship in the Ancient World*; Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*; Edwards, "Uncertain Faith"; Edwards, *Matthew's Narrative Portrait of Disciples*. Many of them note that the disciples' understanding functions to highlight Jesus as an effective teacher.

18. Wilkins (*Discipleship in the Ancient World*, 172) claims that Matthew has a special interest in the disciples as literary figures. "Matthew's gospel is at least in part a manual on discipleship. While all the major discourses directed at least in part to the μαθηταί, . . . and with the disciples called and trained and commissioned to carry out the climactic mandate to 'make disciples' in the conclusion of the gospel, Matthew has constructed a gospel that will equip the disciples in the making of disciples."

19. Wilkins (*Discipleship in the Ancient World*, 43–91) explicitly ties discipleship into the notion of scribes and wise men.

20. Barth, "Matthew's Understanding of the Law," 106. My claim is not that the disciples in Matthew are portrayed only in a positive light—they certainly have conflicting traits. As Verespüt ("Faith of the Reader") notes, even at the end of the Gospel, Matthew speaks of their hesitation (28:17).

21. Though I am not convinced that this transfer can be substantiated, multiple scholars (Conzelmann, Byrskog) note the particular interest of Matthew in "understanding." Nine times Matthew employs σύνημι, but none of them occur before chap. 13, and six of the nine occur in chap. 13 itself (13:13, 14, 15, 19, 23, 51; 15:10; 16:12; 17:13).

tion of the Matthean disciples does uniquely highlight their *understanding* of Jesus's teaching.²²

My proposal is Matthew is gifted in knowledge and wisdom by his teacher, Jesus.²³ Jesus's statement in Matt. 23:8, "You have one teacher," carries with it significance that goes far beyond the immediate context.²⁴ The idea of Jesus as a teacher of wisdom becomes an important concept for Matthew's presentation as a whole and also informs readers how to view Matthew's role.²⁵ Yet a brief survey of the titles of "rabbi" or "teacher" in the Gospels doesn't quite clarify what type of teacher Jesus is. Is he a teacher like those in the synagogues? Some scholars compare him to the Pharisees Hillel or Shammai. Others draw a correlation between Jesus and the Teacher of Righteousness or the eccentric John the Baptist. Should his pedagogical function be a subcategory of his prophetic role? Or is the best comparison with the Greco-Roman philosophers of the day? Is he a teacher and wise man primarily like the Jewish kings of the past? And if he is a teacher, then what wisdom did he pass on to his scribe? These are all legitimate questions, and while I won't address all of them, Matthew as a whole, and 13:52 more specifically, gives some assistance along these lines.²⁶

Though no title or term can fully capture who Jesus is, and Matthew uses many descriptions, Jesus as the *teacher of wisdom* makes sense both in the context of Matthew and in chapter 13.²⁷ In fact, Matthew reserves the title of

22. See Byrskog (*Jesus the Only Teacher*, 221) for a similar suggestion. Sirach claims, "Every understanding person knows wisdom. . . . Those who are *understanding* in words become wise themselves, and pour forth precise parables" (Sir. 18:28–29 AT).

23. About referring to Jesus as a teacher, Riesner ("Jesus as Preacher and Teacher," 185) claims, "It seems not too risky to assume that this was quite the way in which many contemporaries could have looked at Jesus." All four times when Jesus uses "teacher," he speaks to his disciples (10:24, 25; 23:8; 26:17–18). Jesus never speaks of himself directly as a teacher except to the disciples. However, outsiders also identify Jesus as a teacher twice to his disciples (9:10–11; 17:24).

24. Josephus (*Ant.* 18.63) writes, "Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, . . . a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure." Early church fathers also recognized the emphasis on teaching in Matthew's Gospel. Ignatius said in *To the Ephesians* 15.1, "There is then one teacher who spoke and it came to pass." Clement of Alexandria said, "God's first begotten Son, through whom God created all things and whom all prophets call Wisdom, is the teacher of all created beings" (*Strom.* 6.58.1).

25. Celia Deutsch ("Wisdom in Matthew," 46) argues that as wisdom is hidden and revealed, so too Jesus presents the secrets of the kingdom of heaven; as wisdom is a teacher who says her yoke is light, so too Jesus calls followers to discipleship; as wisdom is a prophet calling people to come to her and providing warnings, so does Jesus; as wisdom has agents through whom she works, so Jesus sends prophets, wise men, and scribes.

26. Many of these categories could even be combined. The error is to separate them.

27. See Dunn's fivefold argument for Jesus as a teacher of wisdom. Dunn, "Jesus: Teacher of Wisdom or Wisdom Incarnate?," 82–85.

“teacher” for Jesus alone in his Gospel.²⁸ But Jesus as a sapiential teacher has somewhat fallen out of use because of reactions to the Jesus Seminar’s use of it. Yet a wisdom approach to Jesus (and Matthew) brings some clarity to Matthew’s intentions.²⁹ By wisdom, I mean more than a genre—it is a skill *and* a concept.³⁰ As Raymond van Leeuwen claims, wisdom is a totalizing statement.³¹ Maybe even more appropriately for this project, Barton puts wisdom under the lens of a hermeneutic: “Wisdom is not just a body of knowledge, it is also *a way of seeing* which attends to what lies hidden as well as to what lies on the surface.”³² Four arguments justify viewing Jesus as a teacher, and more specifically a teacher of wisdom, in Matt. 13 and the Gospel as a whole: (1) the Hebrew

28. For an overview of Jesus as teacher and sage, see Keener, *Historical Jesus of the Gospels*, 186–95. John Yieh (*One Teacher*, 327) says, “My literary critical study of the Gospel has shown that, while presenting Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, the Son of Man, and Lord, all such titles can be found in other Gospels, Matthew features his Jesus, most extensively and most distinctively, as an authoritative Teacher of God’s will with eschatological significance.” Yieh argues that this is supported by the narrative, plot, and characterization.

29. The Jesus Seminar and those associated with it describe Jesus as a cynic sage. A notable exception is Ben Witherington (*Jesus Quest*, 185–96).

30. The nature of “wisdom” and “Wisdom literature” is much debated. Pemberton (*Life That Is Good*, 10) speaks of wisdom as a skill or expertise on one level, the second level builds on the first and expands the first meaning to include living a life that is good. When I speak of Jesus as a teacher of wisdom, I am arguing that wisdom is more of a macrogenre that fits over the whole of the Scriptures and punches its way through every genre in the Scriptures. Though Jesus teaches on wisdom—like Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job—in an explicit way, his entire ministry can and should be labeled as wisdom. In some sense this means wisdom should be understood not as a genre but more as a concept similar to holiness or righteousness. Wisdom is thus more of a skill, which Jesus passes on to his disciples. The genre of Wisdom literature is being questioned for a number of reasons. The literary form and content of Wisdom literature does not represent a clear genre distinction. Job, Ecclesiastes, and Proverbs have very little overlap in literary characteristics. They also fail to present unified teaching on the nature of wisdom. The only thing that brings the typically labeled “Wisdom books” together is that they “deal *explicitly* with wisdom questions and themes on a persistent basis” and have somewhat of a unique way of writing. See Jeff Dryden’s appendix (*Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, 243–64), on which I am largely dependent in this footnote. See also Kynes, *Obituary for “Wisdom Literature.”* Wisdom 7:24–28 says,

For wisdom is more mobile than any motion; because of her pureness she pervades and penetrates all things. For she is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her. For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness. Although she is but one, she can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets; for God loves nothing so much as the person who lives with wisdom.

31. Van Leeuwen, “Wisdom Literature.” Dunn (“Jesus: Teacher of Wisdom or Wisdom Incarnate?,” 80) claims that wisdom is “simply a way of speaking about God’s presence among his people and about God’s activity on their behalf.”

32. Barton, “Gospel Wisdom,” 94.

Scriptures' promise of a sapiential messiah, (2) the titles given to Jesus and his opponents in the First Gospel, (3) the specific content of the teaching of Jesus in Matthew, and (4) the immediate context of chapter 13.

First, Jewish literature looked forward to a sage-messiah. Job asks where wisdom and understanding are to be found (Job 28:12). Enoch claims that wisdom found no dwelling place on the earth (1 En. 42.2). The prophets therefore foretold the arrival of wisdom. Isaiah predicted that the sage-messiah would have “the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, . . . knowledge and fear of the LORD” (Isa. 11:2; 2 Chron. 1:10–12).³³ The terms “wisdom,” “knowledge,” “understanding,” and “fear of the LORD” parallel the concepts in Prov. 2:1–8, indicating the hope for a king like Solomon. Isaiah also refers to the servant as one who will “act wisely” (52:13). Later, Isaiah connects this with teaching, claiming, “All your children shall be taught [διδασκτούς] by the LORD, and great shall be the peace of your children” (54:13). Jeremiah 23:5–6 speaks of a Davidic “Branch” being raised up, “a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right” (NIV). Enoch said that the elect one will sit on the throne and out of his mouth will come all the secrets of wisdom, for the Lord of the Spirits has given them to him (1 En. 51.3; 63.2). The desire from times past was to have a wise ruler like Solomon. There is also a long tradition of wisdom being personified (Job 21; Prov. 1; 3; 8; 9; Sir. 1, 24; 11QPs^a 18; Bar. 3–4; 1 En. 42; 4 Ezra 5; 2 Bar. 48; Wis. 1–9).³⁴

The second argument for seeing Jesus as the teacher of wisdom is in the specific titles given to Jesus.³⁵ Matthew prominently presents Jesus as a teacher (διδάσκαλος) and instructor (καθηγητής).³⁶ The later term is unique to Matthew and portrays Jesus in the role of a tutor (23:10).³⁷ Jesus therefore has a unique instructor-student relationship with his disciples in Matthew. Matthew

33. Early Jewish and Samaritan literature indicates that Jews expect the messiah to be a teacher of godly wisdom. CD 6.11; 7.18; 4QFlor. 1.11; 11QMelch. 18–20; T. Jud. (A) 21.1–4; T. Levi 18.2–6; Pss. Sol. 17.42–3; 18.4–9; 1 En. 46.3; 49.3–4; 51.3. See this note in Witherington, *Christology of Jesus*, 180.

34. For a discussion of wisdom Christology, see Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 163–209.

35. In Gospel of Thomas 13, Jesus is compared to “a wise man of understanding.” For a wisdom perspective on Matthew, see Deutsch, *Hidden Wisdom*; Deutsch, *Lady Wisdom*; Suggs, *Wisdom, Christology, and Law*.

36. On ancient literacy, see Keith, *Jesus' Literacy*, who provides a more nuanced and helpful view of different levels of literacy and writing. He argues that “Mark and Matthew . . . place Jesus outside the scribal-literate culture” (141). Though I don't have time to respond to his argument in full, this does not work against my thesis. The “scribes of the law” would be particularly incensed by Jesus if he was not educated like them.

37. Winter, “Messiah as the Tutor.” Derrett (“Matt 23:8–10”) argues that the text is a midrash on Isa. 54:13 and Jer. 31:33–34. In Isa. 54:13 the result of the servant's work is that “all your children shall be taught by the Lord.”

refers to Jesus as a “teacher” implicitly or explicitly twelve times (8:19; 9:11; 10:24, 25; 12:38; 17:24; 19:16; 22:16, 24; 22:36; 23:8; 26:18). In Matt. 26 Jesus calls himself “the Teacher,” and many times in Matthew’s Gospel people come up to him, calling him “Teacher.” Witherington argues that Wisdom is regarded as *the* teacher in numerous sapiential texts.³⁸ Matthew also stresses that Jesus is the son of David (Solomon). Eleven times he speaks of Jesus as the “son of David” compared to four in Mark and Luke and none in John. He and Luke are the only Gospels to have the following words on Jesus’s lips: “Behold, something greater than Solomon is here” (Matt. 12:42).

On the opposite end, Matthew contrasts Jesus with the “scribes/teachers [γραμματεῖς] of the law” twenty-one times—negatively describing those who are associated with the Pharisees (2:4; 5:20; 7:29; 8:19; 9:3; 12:38; 15:1; 16:21; 17:10; 20:18; 21:15; 23:2, 13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29, 34; 26:57; 27:41). The Greek term for “teachers [γραμματεῖς] of the law” is the plural form of the same word as *scribe* in 13:52 (γραμματεύς). Therefore, those coming against Jesus could be rightly translated as the “scribes of the law.” Jesus, as the teacher, clashes with the “scribes of the law” but trains his own scribes in the true interpretation of the Scriptures. Jesus trains his scribes in Matt. 5–7 (first discourse); he chastises the scribes of the people in 23–25 (last discourse).³⁹ Matthew explicitly connects scribes/disciples to the title of teacher throughout his Gospel (8:19; 9:11; 10:24–25; 12:38; 17:24; 22:16). Thus, both the titles for Jesus and the opposition to Jesus in Matthew point toward Jesus as a teacher of wisdom.

The third argument for seeing Jesus as the teacher of wisdom is not only the titles but also the specific *content* of Matthew’s Gospel. As Byrskog writes, “Matthew characterizes Jesus not only by means of designations and titles, but also by informing the readers/hearers about what Jesus does.”⁴⁰ Matthew enhances the portrayal of Jesus as a teacher in a number of ways. He structures his book along five discrete discourses, many of which can be understood along the lines of the wisdom tradition.⁴¹ In fact, the process of gathering teachings together into blocks reflects the process of producing Proverbs.⁴² The first summary of Jesus’s ministry tells about Jesus and his teaching activity. “And he went throughout Galilee, *teaching* and healing in their synagogues”

38. Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 351.

39. Eight of the twenty-two references to scribes occur in Matt. 23.

40. Byrskog, *Jesus the Only Teacher*, 201.

41. I agree with Sneed (“Is the ‘Wisdom Tradition’ a Tradition?”), who pushes back against the concept that Hebrew Wisdom literature represents a worldview, tradition, and movement distinct from those of the priests and prophets. Part of my argument is that Jesus as the prophetic is also the sage. The titles don’t conflict but coalesce.

42. Murphy, *Wisdom Literature*, 49.

(cf. 4:23).⁴³ The Sermon on the Mount portrays Jesus as one who teaches with authority, not as “their scribes” (7:29). Matthew specifically closes out Jesus’s teaching with the remark, “When Jesus had finished saying all these things . . .” (26:1). “All these things” refers not only to the final discourse but also to all the earlier discourses and sayings in Matthew, since the other Synoptic Gospels lack this statement.⁴⁴ The Sermon on the Mount specifically portrays Jesus as an authoritative teacher who goes up on the mountain to instruct. Within the Sermon, Jesus asserts his authority over the Mosaic law. Additionally, as already mentioned, Matthew includes a prolonged attack on the scribal authorities of the day in chapter 23. In a section unique to Matthew, Jesus criticizes the Pharisees and scribes as teachers, providing the antithesis and parallel to the Sermon in many ways.

Matthew not only blocks the teaching material of Jesus and gives the antithesis to his teaching, but the teaching itself also mirrors explicit wisdom sayings. As Witherington points out, there are many echoes of Sirach in Jesus’s teaching that require explanation (compare Sir. 24:9 and 6:19–31 to Matt. 11:29–30; Sir. 23:9 to Matt. 5:34; Sir. 28:3–4 to Matt. 5:22; Sir. 29:11 to Matt. 6:19). The Sermon on the Mount uses terms and concepts that would have put Jesus in the tradition of a Greco-Roman philosopher as he speaks about what it means to flourish and be whole as a human being.⁴⁵ Jesus speaks as a sage when he says that the values of the world will be turned upside down and wrongs will be righted. “The concern for the righting of wrongs in the long run is one of the driving engines of all Wisdom literature, beginning even with Proverbs.”⁴⁶ Jesus also adheres to the act-consequence theory: good deeds will be rewarded and bad ones will be punished. This is another form that pervades the wisdom tradition. Jesus speaks of himself as having nowhere to lay his head (8:20), and a number of texts speak of wisdom searching for a dwelling place and sometimes finding one and other times not. Sirach 24:8–9 asserts wisdom seeks a resting place, while 1 En. 42.1–2 says, “Wisdom could not find a place in which she could dwell, but a place was found for her in the heavens. Then Wisdom went out to dwell with the children of the people, but she found no dwelling place.”

43. Byrskog (*Jesus the Only Teacher*, 270–75) argues that the healing is teaching.

44. Carter (*Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist*, 243), Patte (*Gospel according to Matthew*, 136), and J. Brown (*Disciples in Narrative Perspective*, 139) have all argued that the portrayal of discipleship in Matthew must include an analysis not only of the disciples as they are but also a consideration of discipleship reflected in Jesus’s teaching—the disciples as they should be. In other words, one must pay attention to the “actual disciples” and the “ideal disciples.”

45. For support of this statement, see Pennington, *Sermon on the Mount*.

46. Witherington, *Jesus Quest*, 191.

Jesus is also first worshiped by “wise men,” who bring Jesus gifts as the queen of Sheba brought gifts to Solomon (Matt. 2:1–12). Matthew claims that in Jesus’s life “wisdom is justified by her deeds” (11:19).⁴⁷ This is Jesus’s response to the people’s rejection of both John the Baptist and Jesus for their different lifestyles (11:6–9). Jesus comes eating and drinking, and the wisdom tradition itself has quite a bit about banqueting (see Sir. 31:12–32:6). Jesus claims that all things have been revealed to him by the Father (Matt. 11:25–27).⁴⁸ In the wisdom tradition, it was Wisdom herself who was entrusted with the secrets or revelation of God (Prov. 8:14–36; Wis. 6:22; 7:7; 9:17). Jesus speaks of creation theology similar to what we find in Proverbs and compares the beauty to the great sage Solomon (Matt. 6:25–30).⁴⁹ Sages perceived the cosmic order to have originated at creation and attempted to maintain it by the justice of divine rules. As James Dunn concludes, Matthew “stands alone within the Synoptic tradition in maintaining a full Wisdom Christology.”⁵⁰

Finally, and most important for our purposes, are the arguments from Matt. 13 for Jesus being a teacher of wisdom. Three points enhance the portrait of Jesus as a sage in chapter 13. First, the placement of Matt. 13 in the *structure* of Matthew. Chapter 13 sits structurally at the center of the Gospel and is a lens through which to view the entire book.⁵¹ At the center of the chapter Matthew indicates that Jesus’s kingdom parables are in fulfillment of Ps. 78:2, “I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter what has been *hidden* [κεκρυμμένα] since the foundation of the world” (AT).⁵² The connection between wisdom and what is secret or hidden is a common theme (Prov. 10:14; Job 3:21; 15:18; 28:21; Sir. 20:30; 41:14; Isa 29:14; 45:3).⁵³ Proverbs speaks of wisdom as something to be sought after like silver, searched for as *hidden* treasures (Prov. 2:4). Throughout the wisdom tradition, wisdom is spoken

47. Suggs (*Wisdom, Christology, and Law*) has a long discussion of 11:19’s relation to wisdom.

48. Deutsch (*Hidden Wisdom*) argues Matt. 11:25–30 has prominent wisdom themes related to Jewish texts.

49. In 8:19–22 a scribe comes to Jesus, asking if he can follow Jesus, and Jesus replies with a word about his homelessness. Homelessness is a well-known characteristic of wisdom (1 En. 42.1–3; Job 28:20; Prov. 1:28).

50. Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 206. For other studies on wisdom Christology, see Suggs, *Wisdom, Christology, and Law in Matthew’s Gospel*; Deutsch, *Hidden Wisdom and the Easy Yoke*; Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*; Gench, *Wisdom in the Christology of Matthew*; Singa, “Matthew’s Wisdom Christology”; Wainwright, *Shall We Look for Another?*; Gathercole, *Preexistent Son*; Macaskill, *Revealed Wisdom*.

51. Add to this that if Matthew is viewed through the narrative of Israel (as will be argued in the last chapter), then chap. 13 is instructing readers to read this section through the lens of the wisdom tradition.

52. David Wenham (“Structure of Matthew 13”) argues for a chiasmic structure in Matt. 13.

53. Though the word *hidden* is not always used in these contexts, the concept is regularly connected to treasures, since treasures would be hidden in ancient times.

of as hidden and secret but still able to be found.⁵⁴ If we expand our view of the structure as well, Celia Deutsch has argued, the clearest wisdom text is Matt. 11:25–30, which also speaks of the “things . . . *hidden*” by the Father (emphasis added). These five verses sit contextually in a “conflict section,” and Matt. 13 is the response and conclusion to this conflict narrative.⁵⁵ All sections of 11:2–13:58 have themes of revelation and concealment. Matthew 13 gives the reason for the dynamic of opposition and conflict: Jesus speaks to his disciples in parables about the *secrets* of the kingdom because they have become blind, but he will now enlighten them (13:13–15). What has been hidden (wisdom) is now revealed in Jesus. Notably, the word “understanding” (συνίημι) occurs only in and after chapter 13 in Matthew’s narrative.

Second, Matt. 13 should be viewed under the lens of wisdom because of the specific *form* of the chapter. Looking at the form matters because, as Sneed argues, the wisdom tradition was a mode of literature (though diverse) used to train young scribes through short pithy sayings.⁵⁶ These instilled the values, beliefs, and norms of ancient Israelite culture into those being trained.⁵⁷ According to Justin Martyr, “Jesus’ sayings were short and concise” (1 *Apol.* 4.5), possibly with the same aims. Jesus regularly taught using rhetorical forms designated by the Greek terms *χρεία* and *παραβολή*, which are connected to the Hebrew word *mashal*. Likewise, NT scholars give the larger label of *aphorisms* to Jesus’s teachings (i.e., pithy instructional sayings).⁵⁸ Throughout the OT it is the kings who are to be the patterns of wisdom. Matthew 13 specifically contains a collection of parables about the kingdom.⁵⁹ Unlike the parallels in the other Gospels, Matthew has nearly every parable in this chapter begin with the phrase “the kingdom of heaven is like.” The kingdom is the central theme in Jesus’s ministry, and therefore understanding Jesus as a teacher of wisdom pulls the entire Gospel together as Matthew focuses on Jesus’s revealing “the secrets” or “the mysteries” of the kingdom in chapter 13.⁶⁰ Matthew, as a wisdom teacher himself, cleverly reveals at the center of his Gospel the secrets of his teacher (13:11).

54. Macaskill, *Revealed Wisdom*.

55. Deutsch, *Hidden Wisdom*, 22–23.

56. From an oral perspective, wisdom is not only a form of literature but a mode of speaking as well.

57. Sneed, “Is the ‘Wisdom Tradition’ a Tradition?” 71.

58. Aune, “Oral Tradition and the Aphorisms.”

59. In ancient Mesopotamia, kings presented themselves as accomplished scribes and scholars. Assurbanipal (668–627 BCE) says, “I have learned the hidden secrets of the complete scribal art. With my own eyes I have seen the tablets of heaven and earth.” See van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 54.

60. In Dan. 2:27–28, Daniel answers Nebuchadnezzar and says, “No wise men [σοφῶν] . . . can show the king the mystery [μυστήριον] that the king has asked, but there is a God in heaven

Third, the *immediate context* surrounding Matt. 13:52 supports viewing Jesus as a teacher of wisdom. Right before Jesus makes the comment about scribes, he asks the disciples if they have “understood” (συνίημι) his parables (13:51). The disciples answer yes. The term “understand” is used twice in Prov. 2 (2:5, 9) and six more times in Proverbs as a whole (8:9; 21:11, 12, 29; 28:5; 29:7); the concept looms large for the wisdom tradition as a whole. But it is not only the words immediately preceding Matt. 13:52 but also the narrative following 13:52 as well. The story that follows concerns Jesus going to his hometown in Nazareth and “teaching” them in their synagogue (13:53–58, esp. v. 54). The people are astonished and ask, “Where did this man get this “wisdom” (σοφία, v. 56), and they are offended by him because he is the carpenter’s son. Matthew intentionally brackets 13:52 with wisdom themes. The next section will argue that the term “treasures” in 13:52 also has wisdom connotations.

Therefore, it is not only the Jewish hopes, the titles given to Jesus in Matthew, or the specific content of Jesus’s teaching in Matthew that point to Jesus as a teacher of wisdom, but the very *structure, form, and immediate context* of Matt. 13. At the axis of his Gospel, Matthew inserts multiple hints for how he himself reads Jesus’s life. Just as Jesus reveals the mysteries of the kingdom as the teacher of wisdom, so Matthew discloses the mysteries of his method (13:11). While “a disciple is not above his teacher” (10:24), Jesus gave his twelve disciples authority (10:1) and bequeathed to them revelation of the kingdom that they can pass on to the next generation. They do understand Jesus’s teaching (13:51). Matthew now reveals the secrets of the kingdom in his Gospel (13:11). When Matthew devotes a whole chapter to Jesus explicating the kingdom, he also inserts a statement about how he himself learned to illuminate the kingdom from his teacher-sage. Jack Suggs is right to conclude that Jesus as a wisdom teacher has been neglected in Matthew: “For too long, the traces of wisdom speculation present in Matthew have been treated as tangential or eccentric traditions foreign to the purpose and theology of the evangelist. They constitute, in my opinion, certain proof that one aspect of Matthew’s thought has been unfortunately neglected.”⁶¹

who reveals mysteries.” In the LXX, the word μυστήριον occurs over twenty times, but over half of them are found in Dan. 2. The word is used favorably to describe the way of divine wisdom in Wis. 2:22 and 6:22. As NIDNTTE says, “In almost every case where μυστήριον occurs in the NT, the term is found with vbs. denoting revelation or proclamation” (354).

61. Suggs, *Wisdom, Christology, and Law*, 18. For a response to Suggs, see M. Johnson, “Reflections on a Wisdom Approach to Matthew’s Christology.”

Matthew as the Discipled *Scribe*

Matthew is not only a disciple of Jesus the teacher of wisdom but also a discipled *scribe*. Labeling Matthew as a scribe should inform us about his task and how he will accomplish it. Although the word “scribe” (γραμματεὺς) in 13:52 might carry a nontechnical meaning, this does not necessarily mean historical scribal background can’t help inform Matthew’s usage.⁶² In fact, as Duling notes, it would be an oversimplification to suppose that scribes occupied only one category. Duling suggests at least six categories: (1) royal scribes, (2) public and private secretaries, (3) village and local scribes, (4) scribes of voluntary associations, (5) scribes who teach elementary education, (6) learned Torah scribes.⁶³ But in another sense all scribes were “sapiential scribes” who sought out wisdom (Sir. 39:1–3) and became sagacious.⁶⁴ William McKane has even argued that “scribes” and “wise men” were essentially synonymous as a class.⁶⁵ The above categories don’t have to be put at odds, and it is best to understand Matthew’s self-description as the combination of a royal, Torah, and sapiential scribe.⁶⁶ To put it more precisely, Matthew becomes wise by learning how to interpret the Torah from his sage-king.

In the OT, scribes were described as “scribes of the king” and “royal scribes” (cf. 2 Kings 12:11; 2 Chron. 24:11). Scribes would “chronicle the kings of Israel” (cf. 1 Kings 11:41; 14:19, 29).⁶⁷ In the OT we also learn that kings are faithful by following the Torah. Ezra was a “scribe of the Law of the God of Heaven” (Ezra 7:12), who was filled with wisdom concerning God’s law (7:25). Kings who were faithful to the Torah also produced wisdom. Matthew’s role was modeled on these portraits. He was a learned Torah-royal-sapiential scholar who penetrated prophecies and studied the hidden meanings of the Hebrew Scriptures.⁶⁸ He did so through the new Torah, the new king, or the royal law of Christ.

62. France (*Gospel of Matthew*, 544) asserts, “All that we are told about the background from which the Twelve have come gives us no ground to believe that any of them was a ‘scribe’ in the normal NT sense.” My analysis in this chapter suggests otherwise. In BDAG (206) γραμματεὺς is defined as one who has special functions in connection with documents, but it also includes as a subcategory “an expert in matters relating to divine revelation.”

63. Duling, *A Marginal Scribe*, 263–67.

64. Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 346.

65. McKane, *Prophets and Wise Men*, 40–47.

66. E. P. Sanders (*Judaism: Practice and Belief*) doubts that the Torah scribe exists. In *HALOT*, the Hebrew *soper* has four meanings: (1) scribe, secretary; (2) royal official, secretary of state; (3) secretary for Jewish affairs; (4) scholar of Scripture.

67. See Rollston, *Writing and Literacy*, 88.

68. Seraiah was the scribe for David (2 Sam. 8:17); his sons Elihoreph and Ahijah were scribes for Solomon (1 Kings 4:3); Shebna was the scribe for Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:18); Shaphan was the scribe for Josiah (2 Kings 22); Elishama was the scribe for Jehoiakim (Jer. 36); Jonathan was the scribe for Zedekiah (Jer. 37).

Though it can be tempting to think of scribes merely as those who wrote, most scribes in both Matthew's time and before Matthew's time engaged in at least four activities that mirror and illuminate Matthew's composition: (1) learning (2) writing/interpreting, (3) distributing, and (4) teaching.⁶⁹

The first activity of a scribe can be described as learning.⁷⁰ All of the rest of these roles and capacities depend on scribes being learned or educated.⁷¹ A scribe is one who knows things. They learned these things from their sages, kings, or public rulers. The OT evidence indicates that scribes were valued for the wisdom and understanding they possessed (1 Chron. 27:32), and they were known as "wise" (Isa. 33:18; 1 Cor. 1:20). Horsley confirms this, saying that the increasing information about scribes in the ancient Near East confirms that the cultivation of wisdom was integrally related to their function.⁷² Ezra, one of the most well-known scribes, is introduced as "a scribe skilled in the Law of Moses that the LORD, the God of Israel, had given" (Ezra 7:6), and "learned in matters of the commandments of the LORD and his statutes for Israel" (7:11). Ezra was responsible not only for reading the Torah to the people (Neh. 8:1–8) but also for its study (8:13). Ezra's fundamental commission sounds similar to Matthew's, especially with the emphasis on the "secrets of the kingdom" (Matt. 13:11). Ezra was to "write all these things that you have seen in a book; . . . and you shall teach them to the wise among your people, whose hearts you know are able to comprehend and keep these secrets" (2 Esd. 12:37).

One of the most famous descriptions of the ideal scribe is provided by Ben Sira, who attributes to scribes all areas of knowledge, government, and fame. The scribe "seeks out the wisdom of the ancients, and is concerned with prophecies" (Sir. 38:24–34; 39:1–11, esp. v. 1). The key thing for a scribe was to seek understanding, to become wise. Ben Sira's consistent description of scribes includes the fervent search for understanding. According to Hebrew sages, there were three ways to gain wisdom: "(1) Careful scrutiny of nature

69. Orton (*Understanding Scribe*, 161–62) comes to a similar conclusion when he says the ideal scribe includes the following elements: (1) the exercise of wisdom and the gift of special understanding; (2) the notion of authority; (3) the notion of righteous teaching, including the right interpretation of the law and the prophets; (4) a close association with true prophecy; and (5) a sense of inspiration. Later in the Christian tradition, scribes were known mainly for their copying, but this is not the picture presented by the OT or Matthew.

70. Horsley (*Scribes, Visionaries*, 72) says, "Asking for advice about upcoming events or plans, the scribes searched their repertoire for earlier predictions that might bear on the future events. By interpreting ominous things, wise scribes predicted the future for the king."

71. On the education of scribes, see van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 51–108. For Greek education from the time of Alexander the Great to the end of the Roman period, see Criboire, *Gymnastics of the Mind*. For Roman book publishing, see Winsbury, *Roman Book*.

72. Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries*, 71.

and human nature; (2) learning from the traditions of one's elders, the accumulated wisdom of previous generations; and (3) through encounter with God or a special revelation (Prov. 8 and Job 40–41).⁷³

These three points nicely typecast Matthew's wisdom and what it means for him to be learned or educated.⁷⁴ Matthew himself has a special revelation of God through the man Jesus Christ (point 3 above). "No one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Matt. 11:27). Wisdom is a divine gift—it comes from above—and Jesus has come to bequeath this gift to his followers as the son of David. Notably Sir. 39:1–11, when describing the ideal scribe, says, "If the great Lord is willing, he will be filled with the spirit of understanding" (v. 6, emphasis added). The implication is that the scribe needs to enjoy some kind of inspiration. When he pours out this knowledge, the scribe does so in a prophetic sense in that he conveys information and wisdom granted to him.

Matthew is also well known as the most Jewish of the Gospel writers. He intersects the Jesus story with the traditions of the elders (point 2 above). This mirrors what Ben Sira's grandson says about his grandfather in the Prologue: "So my grandfather Jesus, who had devoted himself especially to the reading of the Law and the Prophets and the other books of our ancestors, and had acquired considerable proficiency in them, was himself also led to write something pertaining to instruction and wisdom, so that . . . those who love learning might make even greater progress in living according to the law."

Matthew is the scribe who remembers Jesus speaking about the Law and the Prophets, about the new and the old. He demonstrates his expertise in the Hebrew Scriptures, showing interpreters how to put their Scriptures together as a unified whole, and also presents an interpreted view of Jesus's life that relies on Israel's past to explicate Jesus's significance.⁷⁵ He therefore comes to modern readers as the specialist on both the life of Jesus and the Jewish Scriptures. To understand one, you must understand the other. This

73. Witherington, *Jesus the Sage*, 12. Witherington adapted this from Crenshaw, "Acquisition of Knowledge."

74. Wisdom can be understood both as a learned skill and as the way a person can teach this practical intuition to another person. When I refer to Matthew's wisdom, I include his learned skill in interpreting both the new and the old. Matthew's and Jesus's wisdom intertwine. We get a sense of Jesus's wisdom only through Matthew's account (and that of the other evangelists).

75. In some ways Jesus and Matthew can be compared to Jeremiah and Baruch. Jesus is the prophet like Jeremiah; Matthew is the scribe like Baruch. Baruch's role as a scribe is an extension of the prophetic activity of Jeremiah. When Jeremiah is instructed to write a prophecy on a scroll (Jer. 36:2, 28), it is Baruch who writes at Jeremiah's dictation. Baruch must have played some role in the formation of the book of Jeremiah, and this was compatible with the profession of a scribe. In the same way Matthew shapes and forms Jesus's life as the scribe. Scribes are not merely redactors and compilers of tradition; they also shape tradition.

emphasis on understanding fits perfectly with how Matthew employs the term in 13:51–52. After Jesus has recounted the kingdom parables, he asks them, “Have you *understood* all these things?” They said to him, “Yes.” Then Jesus continues to speak about the scribe. Matthew’s Jesus uses the term “scribe” in relation to the disciples precisely because they have understood the parables.⁷⁶ A disciplined scribe is one who understands the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.

Finally and more briefly, as Matthew walks with Jesus, he learns how to scrutinize nature and human nature (point 1 above). Jesus commands them, “Look at the birds of the air. . . .” (6:26). He speaks of the outward performance of the scribes and Pharisees but also of their inward disease (23:1–36). Therefore, for Matthew, to be a scribe is first to be a learner. Matthew walks with his teacher, who claims to be from God, and as he does so, he learns to interpret the Torah from the one who claims to be the new Torah. Jesus instructs him about the tradition of the elders and makes observations about nature as the sage. Matthew thereby *learns* the ways of wisdom.

The second activity of a scribe is “writing.”⁷⁷ Having learned, Matthew also transmits his learning to future generations.⁷⁸ In Jub. 4.16–18, Enoch is identified as “the first who learned writing and knowledge and wisdom . . . and who wrote in a book the signs of the heaven.” While scribes worked on various forms of literature, both sacred and nonsacred texts, some evidence shows that sacred texts were handled with more care.⁷⁹ Baruch wrote down the oracles “from the mouth” of the prophet (Jer. 36:4 KJV). This image portrays Baruch as a faithful recorder, who transmits Jeremiah’s words. Tov notes the restriction for scribes recorded in rabbinic texts, stating that writings by a

76. In 13:52 διὰ τοῦτο, then, isn’t merely a literary device introducing a saying. Rather, Matthew is using it in a position of climax, linking the two verses together.

77. In the OT, the common Hebrew term for a scribe, סֹפֵר, is derived from the Semitic root סָפַר, which means a message that is sent. In the NT, the Greek term for scribe, γραμματεὺς, comes from γράμμα, meaning something drawn, most commonly with letters. While one needs to be wary of anachronism and recognize the priority of orality in the first century, scribes were the ones who would certainly have produced the more complex written texts. In David Carr’s discussion of Wisdom literature in ancient Israel scribal education (*Writing on the Tablet*, 126–28), he sketches an “oral-written” process in which the oral medium is primary, but writing is still central. Michael Bird (*Gospel of the Lord*, 46–47) notes that it was quite common among the literary elites of the Greco-Roman world to take notes, and Gerhardsson (*Memory and Manuscript*, 160–62) asserts the same for the Jewish context. See also Alan Millard, *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus*.

78. My argument does not depend on Matthew being the actual copyist. The “literacy” of Matthew is hard to know for sure. Matthew could have used a scribe for his work but still be the “voice” behind the tradition. This coheres with what we see in Paul and Peter’s Letters: “By Silvanus . . . I have written briefly to you” (1 Pet. 5:12, emphasis added).

79. See S. Charlesworth, *Early Christian Gospels*.

heretic, pagan, informer, Samaritan, or converted Jew are not acceptable.⁸⁰ Other internal evidence exists that scribes corrected their mistakes when they deviated from their base text.

But scribes in this period were more than just recorders; they were also interpreters.⁸¹ Matthew did not just copy Mark's material, nor did he merely sit down and tell a step-by-step story of Jesus. He adapted his narrative for his own purposes and therefore was a unique type of scribe. There is evidence that Ben Sira adapted wisdom traditions for his own purposes. Some of the texts found in the Judean Desert were original compositions rather than copies of earlier sources. As Emmanuel Tov has pointed out, "The majority of persons involved in the transmission of the biblical and other texts took more liberties than copyists of later periods. . . . Many scribes took an active role in the shaping of the final form of the text, and therefore the general term 'scribe' is more appropriate for them than 'copyist,' since it covers additional aspects of scribal activity and could easily include creative elements."⁸²

This is important to recognize for Matthew's narrative, because he is not just copying down the life of Jesus but also crafting it. As Orton says, Matthew is a "charismatic, creative interpretation of the scriptures in light of . . . the eschatological events going on around him."⁸³ More specifically, he crafts it under the shadow of Jewish history. Thus we must recognize both faithfulness and flexibility in the role of a scribe. Matthew is the discipled, careful, and creative scribe, bringing out treasures new and old *through his writing*.⁸⁴

80. Tov, *Scribal Practices and Approaches*, 9.

81. Van der Toorn (*Scribal Culture*, 115) asserts, "We may say that scribes, even in their most instrumental roles, impose their style, language, and ideas on the text. Acting as secretaries and transcribers, they are not phonographs in writing; they mold the material that reaches them orally." Matthew 2:4–6 gives some evidence of interpretation. According to Matt. 7:29, scribes also seemed to teach and therefore interpret. In Matt. 17:10, the saying that Elijah must come first is attributed to the scribes. Matthew 23:2 says that the scribes sit on Moses's seat, implying some sort of interpretation and teaching.

82. Tov, *Scribal Practices and Approaches*, 7.

83. Orton, *Understanding Scribe*, 168. Some may be nervous about this language of creativity, assuming that it contradicts the "correct" sense of the OT text. But by using the term "creative," I am simply asserting something similar to Moo and Naselli. "NT authors do not always use OT language as authoritative proof. . . . So when they appear to deduce a meaning from the OT or when they apply it to a new situation, they are not necessarily misusing the text or treating it as errant" ("Use of the Old Testament," 706). Later (709) they say, "It is unfair to apply a rigid concept of meaning to . . . an OT law and then charge him with misinterpreting the OT for going beyond what the OT specifically intends."

84. See Westerholm, *Jesus and Scribal Authority*. In Matt. 2:4 Herod asks "the chief priests and the *scribes* of the people where the Christ was to be born" (emphasis added). "They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet'" (2:5). They not only copied texts but also answered questions about the texts and therefore interpreted them.

Scribes were not only learners and writers, but their writings were also *distributed*. The evidence for this third task comes directly from Matthew. While we might think of scribes as writing notes in a dark room, Matthew gives evidence that scribes were “sent out.” In Matt. 23:34 Jesus says, “Therefore I send you prophets *and wise men and scribes*.” While the statement from Jesus should probably be interpreted as a “divine sending,” this is not opposed to distributing but coheres with it. Scribes needed their work to be transmitted to have its effect. They wrote, copied, and interpreted so that they could have a public hearing. If they themselves were “sent out,” then they would be the natural ones to “read aloud” the copies and interpret them for people. The scribe portrayed by Ben Sira “appears before rulers” and “travels in foreign lands” (Sir. 39:4). Scribes therefore, it seems, interpreted texts for others and distributed them as needed. Readers get some sense of this reality when Jesus castigates the scribes and Pharisees in Matt. 23, implying that they must have been involved in the distribution.

In Aelius Theon’s introduction to his *Progymnasmata* (written about the same time as Matthew’s Gospel), Theon says a person who wants to read aloud well and speak well should “write every day.”⁸⁵ It is challenging for a person to read fluently if they are not skilled at writing. Therefore, it makes sense that at times the scribe would be not only the writer but the reader. All writing in this time period needs to be embedded in the reality of oral communication. Most written texts were inscribed partly or mainly as guides in oral recitation. In a similar way, Matthew sends his scroll out into the future by copying down the record of his narrative. He transmits the knowledge he has obtained through parchment and reed pen and also through oral communication.⁸⁶ Many times scrolls functioned as aide-mémoire for scribes as they prepared for an oral performance. Matthew’s authority comes from being with Jesus, who sanctions him to be a faithful representative of the message that Jesus taught his followers. In many ways Matthew is “sent” by Jesus so that the message of the kingdom can be spread. “The mission of the NT scribe is the same as of the prophets and wise men.”⁸⁷ The scribe is a commissioned one and has the task of prophetic teaching. Scribes functioned as custodians, transmitters, and interpreters of the Scriptures. Now that Jesus

85. Aelius Theon, *Progym.* 2.61–62 (ed. Leonhard von Spengel); Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, 6–7.

86. A vast amount of literature exists on the transmission of oral and written material, which I don’t have the space to develop here. A good place to start is to look at Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript*.

87. Penner, “New Testament Scribe,” 16.

has arrived, a scribe needs to sit down and explain the Jewish Scriptures in the shadow of the messiah.⁸⁸

Finally, scribes are also viewed as *teachers* and therefore wise.⁸⁹ As Matthew walks with Jesus, he becomes wise. Proverbs 13:20 says, “Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise.” Matthew 7:29 notes how Jesus “was *teaching* them as one who had authority, not as their scribes” (emphasis added). While the point of this passage is that the scribes *do not* have authority like Jesus, the assumption is that they are supposed to have authority. This authority is confirmed in Matt. 17:10, when the disciples ask Jesus, “Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?” Their question to Jesus implies an authority attributed to the scribes. Matthew 23:2 also establishes the authority of the scribes, with Jesus saying, “The scribes and Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat.” It seems that in their role as scholar-teachers, the scribes had attained enormous prestige among the people and were given seats of honor and enjoyed esteem from the people. In a similar way, Matthew sets himself up as the authoritative teacher in the same tradition as his rabbi. He presents his Gospel as a learned and trustworthy transmission of Jesus’s life and teaching. David claims that the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple (Ps. 19:7). Readers are therefore not only to learn from Jesus but also to learn from Matthew’s *presentation* of Jesus. Matthew is the discipled, careful, and creative scribe who learns, interprets, distributes, and teaches readers about the messiah.

Treasures New and Old

We have seen how Matthew was trained by his teacher of wisdom and more broadly examined the work of a scribe. Now it is time to turn to the specific task of the wise scribe detailed in 13:52: “bringing forth treasures both new and old.” Matthew passes on the wisdom of his teacher by being a host who brings out goods for his guests based on his understanding and through interpretation. Treasures (θησαυρός) are not only the person’s cherished values, but also more general goods or commodities. These supplies are likely demarcated in the domain of knowledge when connected to the idea of disciple. The use

88. Byrskog (*Jesus the Only Teacher*, 245.) asserts that we learn more about the transmission of Jesus’s teachings in Matt. 16:13–20, where Peter is given authority to bind and loose. For the best explanation of what this means, see Leeman, *Political Church*.

89. This teaching was oral in nature. I don’t want to give the false impression that the first-century culture was a reading culture, for it was mainly an oral culture. Thus Isa. 29:18 predicts a time when “the deaf shall hear the words of a book.” See the first chapter of van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*. Phillips (“Casting Out the Treasure,” 12–13) even argues that the verb ἐκβάλλω in Matt. 13:52 could have the sense of “speaking” or “expelling” words.