

DO THE PROPHETS AND THE LAW QUIT PROPHECYING
BEFORE JOHN? A NOTE ON MATTHEW 11.13

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It would seem that, if 11.12 includes John the Baptist in the time of the kingdom... then 11.13 places him outside the time of the law and the prophets; for 11.13 supplies the explanation (γάρ) for v. 12, and, if the latter statement includes John in the new time, then evidently the latter must exclude him from the old time. ἕως will then be inclusive in v. 12 but exclusive in v. 13.

So write Davies and Allison,¹ and their opinion is shared by many. To the question posed by the title of this essay, they are then bound to reply in the affirmative. Yet in the next paragraph, they strongly insist that neither Jesus nor Matthew could rightly be called antinomian, and prefer to speak of the kingdom displacing the Mosaic law from central stage. They conclude: 'What that means for the Mosaic Torah is an open question not answered by Mt 11.12-13 par.'²

The questions relating to the interpretation of Mt. 11.13 are especially complex because each decision generates a new permutation of possibilities. None of the interrelated exegetical and historical judgments can be tackled in isolation; each has an effect on all the others. In what follows, I propose to lay out rather briefly a series of exegetical judgments that shed some light on this saying (and its parallel in Lk. 16.16). Although each point could be discussed at much greater length, there may be some advantage in stating them briefly and tying them together in this way so as to explore whether or not this interpretation can command broader assent.

1. D.C. Allison and W.D. Davies, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988-), II, p. 257. They here cite R.H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on his Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), p. 210.

2. Allison and Davies, *Matthew*, II, p. 258.

I shall begin with Matthew's portrait, and then progressively introduce considerations from Luke and Q.

I

Matthew insists that there is something about Jesus' ministry that John the Baptist does not understand, and is ill prepared to accept (Mt. 11.2-6). To the question 'Are you ὁ ἐρχόμενος?' Jesus responds by describing his ministry in terms that allude to several passages in Isaiah, notably 35.5-6 and 61.1, but probably also 26.19; 29.18-19; 42.7, 18. Certainly Isaiah 61 was regularly interpreted in an eschatological framework;¹ it is widely recognized that the influence of the Isaiah texts on Mt. 11.5 extends beyond mere vocabulary to the very structure of the sentence. Almost as widely recognized is the fact that Jesus' use of the Isaiah texts, according to Matthew, omits any mention of judgment: 'the day of vengeance of our God' (Isa. 61.2); 'he will come with vengeance, with divine retribution he will come to save you' (Isa. 35.4).² What this suggests is that the Baptist had questions about Jesus' identity because he could see in him no powerful work of judgment. Whether or not Matthew understands the baptism 'with Holy Spirit and with fire' (3.11) to be one baptism (the fire exercising a purifying role) or two (the fire indicating judgment), the images of the winnowing fork, the gathering of the wheat into the barn and the burning of the chaff (Mt. 11.12) leave no room for doubting that in Matthew's view John the Baptist preached, *inter alia*, impending judgment.³ Jesus' reply, then, studiously avoiding mention of judgment even when citing texts that intermingle blessing and judgment, suggests that the judgment is delayed, even while the promised blessings are being fulfilled in his ministry. In its context, the macarism

1. Cf. J.A. Sanders, 'From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4', in J. Neusner (ed.), *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults* (SJLA, 12; Leiden: Brill, 1975), pp. 75-106; M.P. Miller, 'The Function of Isa 61:1-2 in 11QMelchizedek', *JBL* 88 (1969), pp. 467-69.

2. See J. Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations* (London: SCM Press, 1958), p. 46; J.D.G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1975), p. 60; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, II, p. 245.

3. Whether or not this judgment took on apocalyptic overtones (denied by J. Ernst, *Johannes der Täufer: Interpretation—Geschichte—Wirkungsgeschichte* [BZNW, 53; Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1989]), or was simply directed against the ungodly, is irrelevant to my case.

of 11.6 confirms this point: John the Baptist has begun well, and must not fall away at this juncture. If he can see the messianic blessings fulfilling Scripture, he must be content to wait for the judgments still to come.

The point to bear in mind, then, when we try to decide whether or not Matthew places John the Baptist in the kingdom, is that he has already made clear how little the Baptist understood. Matthew and his readers know that Jesus is going to the cross, that the eschaton is delayed, that judgment is not on the immediate agenda—but John the Baptist does not.

II

In the next verses, John is presented as a prophet, but also as more than a prophet. The distinction is important, and turns on two elements. First, the term 'prophet' is notoriously slippery in the first century. Until a decade or two ago, it was a truism in much New Testament scholarship that Palestinian Jews in the first century believed that the age of prophecy had passed, and if God wished to speak he did so indirectly via the *בדקיקל*. In 1982, Aune protested that the use of 'prophet' in Josephus demonstrates that when prophecy is studied 'historically' instead of 'theologically' one must conclude that the phenomenon continues right through the disputed period.¹ But Aune himself is forced to draw attention to important distinctions between canonical prophecy and prophecy of a later period.² Some of the distinctions have been nicely teased out by Horsley, who shows that in the first century the word 'prophet' could refer to a diviner, that is, someone who predicts the future (cf. *Ant.* 13.11.2 §311; 15.10.5 §§373-78; *War* 2.8.12 §159), to an 'oracular prophet' who, like many of the biblical prophets, preached a message of judgment and repentance against the social and religious sins of their age (cf. *War* 6.5.3 §§300-309), or to certain eschatological figures such as Elijah (cf. *Mal.* 3; *Sir.* 48.10) or Moses (cf. *Deut.* 18.15-18; *1QS* 9.11; *4Q175*; *Jn* 1.45). In the New Testament a minor pagan poet can be labelled a 'prophet' (*Tit.* 1.12), presumably because he is inspired by the Muse. Clearly John was considered by many to be an eschatological prophet.³ That made him 'greater' than popular diviners;

1. D.E. Aune, 'The Use of *προφήτης* in Josephus', *JBL* 101 (1982), pp. 419-21.

2. D.E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 106-21, 139, 153, 195.

3. Aune, *Prophecy*, pp. 129-32.

it even made him 'greater' than oracular prophets.

Secondly, the quotation of Mal. 3.1 in Mt. 11.10 is clearly meant to explain the assertion that John the Baptist is a prophet who is more than a prophet. Like Mal. 4.5-6, Matthew interprets Mal. 3.1 as a prophecy about Elijah. But the effect is to make John the Baptist (i.e. Elijah) the messenger who is preparing the way for Jesus. Matthew is saying, then, that John's greatness is tied not only to his role as an eschatological prophet, but to his role as an eschatological prophet who prepares the way for another, that is, Jesus.

If this delineation of the flow of Matthew's argument is sound, then before we conclude that John the Baptist joins Jesus in the kingdom, and the $\xi\omega\varsigma$ in 11.13 is exclusive, we must factor into our assessment Matthew's insistence, in this pericope, on the preparatory nature of John the Baptist's role.

III

Rightly understood, v. 11 heightens the distinction between John and Jesus. We may usefully observe four things.

First, although it is common to treat v. 11a in isolation, it is almost impossible to think of v. 11b circulating on its own. The two halves of the verse are cast in antithetic parallelism; it is simplest to assume that they always belonged together.

Secondly, as to its authenticity, it is difficult to imagine any context in which Christians would have articulated a gentle 'put-down' of the Baptist by beginning with such effusive praise as that which is recorded in v. 11a.¹

Thirdly, although it does not follow that the present setting of v. 11 is authentic, and most modern scholars deny it, that does not relieve us of the obligation to determine what Matthew meant by the saying in this context. In the light of the flow of the argument from v. 2 to v. 10, the first part of v. 11 must not be pressed to mean that John the Baptist is greater than everyone without exception, *including Jesus*. John the Baptist's superiority over other prophets (of whatever kind) rests on the fact that, as an eschatological prophet, he prepares the way for Jesus. The inevitable assumption is that Jesus is greater than he. Verse 11a must therefore mean that John the Baptist is the greatest born of

1. On the unity and authenticity of v. 11, cf. J. Schlosser, *Le règne de Dieu dans les dits de Jésus* (2 vols.; EBib; Paris: Gabalda, 1983), I, pp. 159-61.

woman, that is, the greatest person ever, *up to that time*. That makes him greater than Moses, greater than David, greater than Solomon, greater than Isaiah, and so forth. But if v. 11a is read with the preceding verses, he is less than Jesus, for he prepares the way for him.

This reading is entirely in line with Matthean theology—indeed, with the theology of all four canonical Evangelists. They read the Scriptures as pointing to Jesus, as preparing the way for him, but there is no doubt in their mind as to his relative status as compared with any of the antecedent witnesses. Thus in the next chapter we are assured that Jesus is greater than the temple (12.6), greater than Solomon (12.42). Son of David Jesus may be, but, on the appropriate exegesis of Ps. 110, he is also David's Lord (Mt. 22.41-46). Matthew is steeped with fulfillment passages that assure us that the focus of antecedent revelation was to point the way to Jesus. John the Baptist is now declared to be part of that train.¹ But because he is the last part, the eschatological prophet who immediately prepares the way of the Lord, he is declared to be greater than any other person.

Thus the first part of v. 11, while declaring that John the Baptist is the greatest person who has ever lived (implicitly: *up to that point*), is, in the context of this chapter, astonishingly christocentric. The 'greatest' John the Baptist may be, but he derives such greatness from his unique eschatological role in preparing the way for Jesus.

Fourthly, if this is a correct delineation of the flow of Matthew's argument, we are in a better position to understand the second half of v. 11. There is little merit in the suggestion that the meaning of v. 11b turns on a distinction between the kingdom now and the kingdom in its consummated form, as if the passage were saying that the least in the kingdom *then* will be greater than John is *now*.² Quite apart from the fact that this interpretation seems unbearably trite,³ it is irrelevant to the context. In a pair of comparisons between 'A' and 'B' and between 'B' and 'C' such that 'B' is declared to be greater than 'A' and 'C' to be

1. Similarly in the Fourth Gospel: John's entire significance is tied to his truthful witness to Jesus (Jn 10.40-42).

2. So, *inter alios*, W.C. Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St Matthew* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912), pp. 115-16; A.H. McNeile, *The Gospel according to St Matthew* (London: Macmillan, 1915), p. 154; J.C. O'Neill, *Messiah: Six Lectures on the Ministry of Jesus* (London: Cochrane, 1980), pp. 10-11.

3. So, rightly, Gundry, *Matthew*, p. 208.

greater than 'B', the basis on which the comparison is made must be preserved from one pair to the next, or all coherence is lost.

The same weakness forces us to dismiss another interpretation of v. 11b that has drawn significant support. On this reading ὁ μικρότερος refers to Jesus: he is not 'the least' but 'the younger', that is, 'the lesser' in a purely temporal sense.¹ This view assumes that John the Baptist, like Jesus, is in the kingdom, and therefore nudges the interpreter to a similar reading of v. 13. Very frequently this view draws strength from a comparison of the respective ministries of John and Jesus, in particular from a comparison of Mt. 3.2 and 4.17: both John and Jesus preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near'. Should one not on this ground conclude that both the Baptist and Jesus are in the kingdom?²

It must be admitted, however, that the primary reason why ὁ μικρότερος is read this way is because the passage as a whole is difficult; the expression itself does not cry out to be taken this way. Moreover, the appeal to Mt. 3.2 and 4.17 to establish the proposition that both John the Baptist and Jesus were in the kingdom is misguided. It fails to recognize their respective redactional settings. John the Baptist preaches the nearness of the kingdom in the context of being identified as the one who prepares the way for the Lord (3.3), and who announces the imminent arrival of one whose sandals he is not fit to carry (3.11). It is this later figure who will baptize in the Holy Spirit and fire (3.12). By contrast, Jesus preaches repentance and announces the nearness of the kingdom (4.17) in the context of being identified as the one who fulfills Isaiah 9 by the onset of his ministry in Galilee: 'the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned' (4.16). Thus despite the formal similarity of the one-line summaries of the respective ministries of John and Jesus, Matthew has taken pains to distinguish those ministries. Perhaps more importantly, it is surely incongruous to think of Jesus as

1. This view goes back to the church fathers: cf. Chrysostom, *Hom. on Matt.* 37.3; Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* 4.18. In more recent times it has been adopted, with varying degrees of certainty, by O. Cullmann ('Ο ὀπίσω μου ἐχόμενος', *ConNT* 11 [1947], p. 30), M. Brunec ('De Legationi Ioannis Baptistae [Mt 11.2-24]', *VD* 35 [1957], pp. 262-70), BDF §61(2), and M. Zerwick (*Biblical Greek* [Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1963], §149). We need not linger over interpretive curiosities, for example that ὁ μικρότερος refers to angels (Ambrose).

2. See, for instance, W. Wink, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition* (SNTSMS, 7; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 33-35.

merely 'in the kingdom' (ὁ μικρότερος ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ). Finally, there is no commonality between the comparison in v. 11b and the comparison in v. 11a. On this reading it becomes necessary to read v. 11b as a declarative pronouncement of Jesus' superiority over John, while the evocative comparison of v. 11a is left dangling.

But if 'the least in the kingdom' refers to the least of Jesus' followers, the least Christian (from Matthew's perspective), without any reflection on whether the kingdom is present or future,¹ the basis of the comparison between John the Baptist and all who were before him returns in the comparison between the least in the kingdom and John the Baptist. He bore witness to Christ most immediately, as the eschatological prophet, so he supersedes Abraham or David or Ezekiel. But the least in the kingdom bears witness to Jesus, more clearly, immediately and knowledgeably than could John the Baptist; so in this regard the least in the kingdom is greater than John.

Apart from the fact that this seems the most natural way to take the Greek, this interpretation has several advantages. 1. It continues the defense of John begun at 11.2. The Baptist's query, sent by emissaries (11.2-3), does not spring from fickleness or weakness (11.7-8), nor does it cause him to forfeit his primacy among all those who preceded Jesus and pointed to him. It springs, rather, from his place and role in redemptive history. 2. This interpretation also continues the important theme of witness among the followers of Jesus (10.32-33). The least in the kingdom points to Jesus more clearly than all Jesus' predecessors, not excluding John, for either they live through the tumultuous events of Jesus' ministry, passion and resurrection (from which John was excluded), or they enter the kingdom after them (like many of Matthew's readers), and with the same understanding as that enjoyed by those who passed through them. Thus the ground is laid for the 'great commission' (28.18-20): clear witness to Christ before men and women is not only a requirement of the kingdom (10.32-33) and a command of the resurrected Lord (28.18-20) but the true greatness of the disciple (11.11). 3. This interpretation is also in line with Matthew's subtly expressed interests in explaining 'how we moved from there to here', that is, in closing the gap between what was understood 'back then' in Jesus'

1. So, rightly if cautiously, U. Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (EKKNT, 1.2; Zürich: Benzinger Verlag; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1985-), II, pp. 175-76.

ministry and what was understood only later.¹ Neither Matthew nor the modern interpreter can long think about such matters without pondering the redemptive-historical developments. 4. Above all, this interpretation is in line with the paramount concern of all four canonical Evangelists, that is, to articulate the supremacy of Jesus Christ in various ways. All the other cast members bear witness to him: John the Baptist and all those who, like him, came before Jesus, and all others who come after, including the very least in the kingdom.

The result of this exegesis, however, is that John the Baptist was not in the kingdom. That is in line with my first two points, and clearly has a bearing on how we interpret v. 13.

IV

We must venture a few observations on v. 12. If we dismiss the idiosyncratic interpretations of this extraordinarily difficult verse,² the remaining options turn primarily on two exegetical decisions. 1. Is the verb βιάζεται a deponent middle (the kingdom 'forcefully advances' or the like), or passive—and in this case is it being attacked (in a negative sense), or forcefully advanced (by God³)? 2. Should βίασται ἀρπάζουσιν be taken negatively, of those who are trying to pillage the kingdom (whether people or demons), or positively, of those who are (rightly) entering it by storm?

The studies of Moore⁴ and others⁵ have convinced many that the verb must be taken as a passive, *in malam partem*, in line with the distinctly

1. Cf. D.A. Carson, 'Christological Ambiguities in the Gospel of Matthew', in H.H. Rowdon (ed.), *Christ the Lord: Studies in Christology* (D. Guthrie Festschrift; Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982), pp. 97-114.

2. For example, J. Swetnam, *Review of Notes de lexicographie néotestamentaire*, by C. Spicq, *Bib* 61 (1980), pp. 440-42, argues that the kingdom of heaven has been suffering the violence of (faulty) interpretation; F.W. Danker ('Luke 16:16—An Opposition Logion', *JBL* 77 [1958], pp. 231-43) thinks that 'the violent ones' was a term that was first applied to Jesus and his disciples by the Pharisaic opposition (which could in theory allow for Jesus' ironic use of the expression, though Danker does not seem to explore the possibility).

3. Cf. G. Schrenk, 'βιάζομαι', *TDNT*, I, pp. 610-11.

4. E. Moore, 'Βιάζω, ἀρπάζω and Cognates in Josephus', *NTS* 21 (1975), pp. 519-43.

5. For example, C. Spicq, *Notes de lexicographie néotestamentaire* (2 vols.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), s.v.

evil overtones of βίασται ἀρπάζουσιν: 'the kingdom of heaven is suffering violence and violent men are seizing it', or the like. Nevertheless some scholars argue that βιάζεται is most naturally taken as a middle, probably in a good sense, and conclude that the second line therefore must also be read in a good sense: 'the kingdom of heaven is forcefully advancing and forceful men lay hold of it'.¹ Part of the debate has turned on the common assumption that both lines must be taken in a good sense or in a bad sense—an assumption which turns on the intrinsic parallelism and on the obviously cognate relationship of βιάζεται and βίασται. The assumption comes under strain when we discover that, if controlled word studies mean anything, ἀρπάζουσιν almost has to be taken in a bad sense, while a strong case can be mounted for taking βιάζεται as a deponent middle in a good sense. Although not usually mentioned as an option, taking both parts in their most obvious ways results in *antithetic* parallelism; the verse also then boasts a form of antanclasis (a figure of speech in which the same word is repeated in a different or even contradictory sense), based in this instance not on exactly the same word but on a cognate.

But whether the kingdom is forcefully advancing (which seems to be the case, judging by the miracle stories of chs. 8-9) while evil men are attacking it (note the warnings of ch. 10), or is univocally presented as being under attack, for our purposes the critical phrase in this verse is the first: ἀπὸ δὲ τῶν ἡμερῶν Ἰωάννου τοῦ βαπτιστοῦ ἕως ἄρτι. Because the ἕως in the next verse (v. 13) is so often taken in an exclusive sense, making John belong to the period of the kingdom and not to the period of the law and the prophets,² the crucial phrase in v. 12 is commonly understood to mean that John himself inaugurates the days of which Jesus speaks. But nothing we have discovered in the flow of the passage supports that conclusion; everything we have looked at so far militates against it. The expression 'from the days of John the Baptist' simply means 'from the time of the activity of John the Baptist'; the *terminus a quo* is thereby established. It was during that time that

1. The most recent support for this minority view is from G. Häfner, 'Gewalt gegen die Basileia? Zum Problem der Auslegung des "Stürmerspruches" Mt 11,12', *ZNW* 83 (1992), pp. 21-51.

2. Indeed, J.P. Meier ('John the Baptist in Matthew's Gospel', *JBL* 99 [1980], pp. 383-405) makes this the crux of Matthew's presentation of the Baptist, over against Lk. 16.16, which, in common with most interpreters, he understands in an inclusive way.

Jesus was baptized and began his public ministry; the text says nothing about the Baptist's participation in it, still less of his inauguration of it. The expression does not even assume John's death; it merely insists that it was during the period of John's ministry that the kingdom pressed forward (or was attacked). Comparison of the contexts of 3.2 and 4.17 puts Jesus' ministry, and Jesus' ministry alone, in a 'fulfillment' category. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why 4.17 is presaged by a short pericope that mentions that John has been put in prison. He does not belong to the period of Jesus' messianic, kingdom-revealing ministry. The words ἕως ἄρτι, whether they refer, as cast on Jesus' lips, to this point in his ministry, or, as many contemporary scholars think, to Matthew's period in the church,¹ do not constitute a *terminus ad quem* at which the forceful advance of the kingdom (or the passive suffering of the kingdom) comes to an abrupt halt, but simply signals the continuous advance of (or attack upon) the kingdom until the *now* in view.

Thus far in the chapter, then, there is still no reason whatsoever for thinking that the prophets and the law should not prophesy 'until John' (v. 13) in an *inclusive* sense.

V

Before turning to Mt. 11.13, perhaps I should draw attention to what is obvious to any reader of a Gospel synopsis, that although the closest parallel to Mt. 11.12-13 is Lk. 16.16 (where the two verses from Matthew appear in reverse order, and in slightly different form), the closest parallel to Mt. 11.2-19 as a whole is Lk. 7.18-35. These passages end in an aphorism that is different in the two accounts: Mt. 11.19b: καὶ ἐδικαιώθη ἡ σοφία ἀπὸ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῆς. Lk. 7.35: καὶ ἐδικαιώθη ἡ σοφία ἀπὸ πάντων τέκνων αὐτῆς. The most common explanation of the redactional differences is that Matthew has transformed the Q saying to support his Wisdom-Christology. If that interpretation is right, then in Matthew's form of the aphorism ἡ σοφία refers to Jesus as incarnate Wisdom, and Wisdom's 'works' are Jesus' works (an exegesis that is often tied to the mention of 'works' in 11.2). By contrast, in Luke's form of the saying John the Baptist and Jesus are clearly tied

1. See for example O.L. Cope, *Matthew: A Scribe Trained for the Kingdom of Heaven* (CBQMS, 5; Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association, 1976), pp. 75-76; W.F. Albright and C.S. Mann, *Matthew* (AB, 26; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971) *in loc.*

together. If this more-or-less standard exegesis of Q7.35 is correct, then in Matthew's account there is additional reason for thinking John the Baptist must not be lumped together with Jesus—and once again this may have some bearing on how we interpret Mt. 11.13.

I have argued at some length elsewhere, however, that this interpretation of Mt. 11.19b // Lk. 7.35 is probably wrong.¹ For reasons that cannot be rehearsed here, I think that 'wisdom' in Mt. 11.19b is used much as in the canonical Wisdom literature, and has nothing directly to do with Christology. Both John the Baptist and Jesus are justified by their works—or, put more poetically, Wisdom is always justified by what she does. In the life of the Baptist, this issued in asceticism; in the life of the Christ, this issued in conviviality (11.16-19a). Both were justified; that is, wisdom was justified in both cases, even if 'this generation' does not appreciate either of them.

Although at first glance this may sound as if I am arguing against myself because John and Jesus are being bracketed together, in reality such a reading of 11.19b does not at all jeopardize the line of thought I am developing toward an exegesis of 11.13. Although John the Baptist and Jesus are linked together as both contributing to the justification of wisdom, they do so in very different ways. That is the point of the 'parable' in 11.16-19a, capped by the aphorism of 11.19b. All this is very much in line with the flow of the argument in 11.2-19: John the Baptist is praised and exonerated, but his significance is located in his witness to and preparation for Jesus Messiah. That is exactly the tone of 11.16-19.

Thus, whether the 'standard' exegesis of 11.19b is adopted, or the exegesis that I have supported, in both cases there are strong reasons for thinking that Matthew is interested in maintaining some strong *distinctions* between the Baptist and Jesus. In the second case, although their works are linked together in the justification of wisdom, the two men are so strongly distinguished in their respective roles in redemptive history that there is very little warrant left for thinking that Matthew presents John the Baptist as in the kingdom.

1. D.A. Carson, 'Matthew 11:19b / Luke 7:35: A Test Case for the Bearing of Q Christology on the Synoptic Problem', in J.B. Green and M.M.B. Turner (eds.), *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ* (I.H. Marshall Festschrift; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), pp. 128-46.

VI

We come to the critical verse, Mt. 11.13. It may help to set it out with its parallel in Lk. 16.16:

Mt. 11.13: πάντες γὰρ οἱ προφῆται καὶ ὁ νόμος ἕως Ἰωάννου
ἐπροφήτευσαν

Lk. 16.16: ὁ νόμος καὶ οἱ προφῆται μέχρι Ἰωάννου

In Matthew, the Sinaitic Syriac and one manuscript from the Bohairic version omit ὁ νόμος. This almost certainly springs from (1) the oddity of the order 'the prophets and the law'—as far as I know, the only text in the ancient world with this order, while 'the law and the prophets' is commonplace; and (2) the apparent incongruity of supposing that the law prophesies. In Luke, ἕως replaces μέχρι in several codices and in the Byzantine tradition; the verb ἐπροφήτευσαν is appended to the verse by D and Θ and a few minor witnesses. Both variants doubtless stem from assimilation to Matthew.

If we assume that Q stands behind both texts—a probable but by no means certain inference—then it is unmistakable that all four of Matthew's distinctive readings lean in the same direction: (1) the order 'the prophets and the law' tends to emphasize the prophetic function of Scripture; similarly (2) the modifier πάντες and (3) the verb ἐπροφήτευσαν; (4) the γὰρ ensures that this logion be read either as the explanation or as the summary of vv. 11-12, and thus a further articulation of the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus.¹

All sides recognize that ἕως can function either inclusively or exclusively; the context must decide. If one were to read this verse only in the light of 11.9-10a, one might well be warranted in thinking that, since both John and Jesus are the objects of prophecy (John in 11.9-10a, and Jesus throughout this Gospel), 'all the prophets and the law' exercise their prophetic function up to but not including the period of the Baptist, at which point those to whom they point—John and Jesus—put in their appearance. In other words, ἕως (11.13) is taken in an exclusive sense. But we have seen that element after element in the context argues against this interpretation. Moreover, whatever the function of γὰρ, it certainly does not skip over intervening verses and tie v. 13 to vv. 9-

1. In other words, γὰρ smoothes out the transitions once there is a new order in the clauses: cf. E. Klostermann, *Das Matthäusevangelium* (HNT, 4; Tübingen: Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 2nd edn, 1927), p. 98.

10a. If John the Baptist is not only a prophet but a person about whom prophetic words have been spoken, it is important to note what those prophetic words are: that is, v. 10b is not less important than v. 10a. John the Baptist still remains a prophet, but more than a prophet: he is the one who immediately prepares the way before Jesus. In that he points to Jesus, he is at one with 'all the prophets and the law'; his unique greatness consists in the clarity and immediacy of his ministry vis-à-vis Jesus the messiah, not in terms of his performing something radically different. It is worth noting that Matthew does not include the words ἀπὸ τότε ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ εὐαγγελίζεται (Lk. 16.16). Had he done so, it would have been slightly harder to deny that Matthew was thinking of Mt. 3.2, despite the peculiar redactional distinctions between 3.2 and 4.17, already noted. Matthew's silence in this regard removes even the possibility of misconstruing the ministry of the Baptist.

The logical links that connect vv. 10, 11, 12 and 13 seem fairly clear. And if this line of interpretation is right, then ἕως is inclusive: all the prophets and the law prophecy up to and including (the time of) John the Baptist. What all of them, including John, are prophesying, is the coming of Jesus and the dawning of the kingdom.

VII

All of this is surely in line with Matthean theology. Jesus has not come to abolish the law and the prophets, but nor has he come to maintain them or to intensify them: he has come to 'fulfill' them, and πληρῶω in Matthew (16 occurrences) always has a prophetic or predictive meaning. Nor is it a question of the prophets prophesying and the law legislating: both the law and the prophets 'prophecy'.¹ Thus obeying Moses' commands becomes a testimony to who Jesus is (8.1-4); exercising faith in Jesus associates the believer, whether Jew or not, with the patriarchs in the long-awaited kingdom (8.5-13); Jesus' healings fulfill Isa. 53.4 (Mt. 8.14-17). Unlike John's disciples, who fast, Jesus' disciples enjoy the presence of the bridegroom (9.14-15)—yet another piece of evidence that Matthew does not regard John as already in the kingdom.

1. I here follow the essential point of R. Banks (*Jesus and the Law in the Synoptic Tradition* [SNTSMS, 28; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975], *in loc.*), even though I cannot adopt his exegesis of 5.17-20 in every particular.

Much more evidence could be adduced, but the basic line is surely well established: Matthew views the coming of Jesus and the dawning of the kingdom as that to which the law and the prophets point. Whatever function 'law' has in its nature as *lex*, its primary function, in Matthew's emphasis, is prophetic and predictive. True, judging by his actual exegesis of scriptural passages, Matthew frequently makes this predictive function of Scripture depend on complex typologies rather than on simple verbal predictions. But that, of course, is part of what enables the early Christians to insist that the Jewish Scriptures are so christocentric. Whatever this means or does not mean for the continued observance of 'law' as *lex* is not Matthew's chief interest, especially not in Matthew 11—though admittedly he does drop some interesting hints elsewhere.

The chief point to observe, then, is that one of Matthew's central themes is the way in which antecedent revelation points to Jesus and the kingdom he announces and inaugurates. He does not allot the same honor to the Baptist, however careful he is to say positive things about him. In short, my exegesis of Mt. 11.13 is entirely in line with some of the main thrusts of Matthean theology.

VIII

It would take us too far afield to subject Lk. 16.16-17 to detailed study, but three things may usefully be said.

1. The presence of the clause ἀπὸ τότε ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ εὐαγγελίζεται helps to clarify the relationship between the time of 'the law and the prophets' and the 'now'. There is no verb ἐπροφήτευσαν (in the best witnesses) to help to establish the relationship (as in the Matthean parallel), but the ἀπὸ τότε clause signals a major redemptive-historical transition at the time of John. Until his time, the law and the prophets (were proclaimed?); from his time on, the kingdom of God is preached. Partly because there is no Lukan parallel to Mt. 3.2, fewer scholars have been tempted to place John on the kingdom side of the transition.¹

2. The connection between v. 16 and v. 17 is far from transparent. Scholars debate whether the two verses were connected in a pre-Lukan

1. See esp. J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke* (AB, 28, 28a; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981-85), II, pp. 1115-16.

source (Q?),¹ and whether or not v. 16 is dominical.² There is at present another debate over Q's view of the law.³ From our perspective the most intriguing element in the text is the tension between an apparent relegation of 'the law and the prophets' to the past (v. 16) and the massive support for the law in the next verse (v. 17)—a tension that cries out for an explanation.

3. If we try to resolve the tension within the framework of Lukan theology as a whole (however difficult the setting of this passage is in ch. 16), we immediately stumble across familiar themes. It is Luke's Gospel, after all, which says of the resurrected Jesus: 'And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself' (Lk. 24.27). 'He said to them,

1. Thus H. Schürmann (*Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu den synoptischen Evangelien* [Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1968], pp. 126-36) judges that 16.14-18 constituted a unity in Q; P. Hoffmann (*Studien zur Theologie der Logienquelle* [NTAbh NS, 8; Münster: Aschendorff, 2nd edn, 1972], pp. 53-56) denies it.

2. Many deny it: for example S. Schulz, *Q: Die Spruchquelle der Evangelisten* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1972), p. 263; G. Braumann, 'Dem Himmelreich wird Gewalt angetan', *ZNW* 52 (1961), pp. 104-109. E. Bammel ('Is Luke 16,16-18 of Baptist's Provenience?', *HTR* 51 [1958], pp. 101-106) answers in the affirmative to the question he raises; as we have seen, F.W. Danker thinks that the saying originates in the opposition charge. But many insist that both the 'enigmatic nature of the saying' and its 'positive estimate of the Baptist' argue for an origin in the ministry of Jesus: so I.H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Exeter: Paternoster Press; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 627; similarly W.G. Kümmel, *Promise and Fulfilment* (SBT, 23; London: SCM Press, 1957), pp. 121-24; E. Percy, *Die Botschaft Jesu: Eine traditionskritische und exegetische Untersuchung* (Lund: Gleerup, 1953), p. 199; N. Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1967), pp. 74-77.

3. The most commonly accepted view is that of Schulz (*Q: Die Spruchquelle*), who holds that Q represents the theology of a Torah-observing Jewish Christianity, intensified under the impact of charismatic experience. By contrast, H. Merklein (*Die Gottesherrschaft als Handlungsprinzip* [Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1981]) insists that the ethics of Q do not at all derive from Torah. Texts apparently contradicting his view (including Lk. 16.17) are judged to be late interpolations. More recently D. Kosch (*Die eschatologische Tora des Menschensohnes: Untersuchungen zur Rezeption der Stellung Jesu zur Tora in Q* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989]) takes a mediating line: in Q Jesus does not derive his ethics from Torah, but sees no opposition between his teaching and that of Torah. Lk. 11.41 and 11.42d are judged interpolations (even if fairly early ones). Cf. the first major rejoinder: G. Dautzenberg, 'Tora des Menschensohnes? Kritische Überlegungen zu Daniel Kosch', *BZ* 36 (1992), pp. 93-103.

“This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms” (24.44). Whatever we think of the details of Conzelmann’s thesis, it is Jesus who is rightly characterized by the label *Die Mitte der Zeit*;¹ John the Baptist belongs to the first period, the period of the law and the prophets, however transitional a character he is.

All of this suggests that Mt. 11.13 is not as far removed from Luke (or, for that matter, from Q and even from Jesus) as is often supposed. Matthew does not lump the Baptist together with Jesus in the kingdom. He assigns him the highest honor among those who pointed the way to Jesus. The prophets and the law do not quit their prophetic function with the arrival of the Baptist; rather, he caps them, for it is during his watch, during the course of his witness and preparatory ministry, that the kingdom of heaven begins its forceful advance or comes under attack. Whatever continuing validity the prophets and the law still enjoy now that the one to whom they have pointed has arrived and inaugurated the kingdom is not spelled out; what Matthew insists is that such validity and continuity as persist do so in reference to that which they anticipated. In such glories John the Baptist never participated; the least in the kingdom does.

1. H. Conzelmann, *Die Mitte der Zeit* (Tübingen: Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 5th edn, 1964).