The Great Commission as the Climax of Matthew's Mountain Scenes

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Many have attempted an explanation of the mountain setting of the Great Commission, but existing proposals fail to account for both the situation of the Matthean community and the use of mountain scenes in the Gospel. This article reads Matthew’s Gospel in light of Jewish opposition to the community’s proclamation of Jesus, an opposition that likely reasserted the preeminence of Moses’ authority and teaching. The mountain of the Great Commission serves as the culmination of the convergence of the Son of God and Moses themes throughout the Gospel in which Matthew argues that Jesus, Son of God is the only one to whom the community owes worship and obedience.

Key Words: Matthew, Christology, Great Commission, Son of God, Moses, mountain, Sinai

Many scholars have proposed explanations for the mountain setting of the Great Commission, but current proposals fail to account for both the Sitz im Leben of the Matthean community and the trajectory of mountain scenes in the Gospel of Matthew. Specific issues of the Matthean community, pre- or post-70, intramural or extramural, and so on, will be set aside, because the argument of this article rests on the more general reconstruction of the Matthean community preaching the significance of Jesus as the Son of God with the Jewish opponents’ counter assertion focusing on the authority of Moses. Responding to this conflict of allegiance, Matthew redactionally highlights the significance of Moses and the mountain setting as a place where Jesus is shown to be the Son of God. This article will not interact with all of the themes present in the Great Commission; rather, it will focus on how Matthew uses the Great Commission as the culmination of a trajectory that runs throughout the Gospel to show that Jesus as the Son of God is the one to whom the community owes worship and obedience.

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Matthean scholarship is indebted to Terrence Donaldson’s work, *Jesus on the Mountain: A Study in Matthean Typology*. We accept Donaldson’s conclusions that the mountain has a theological and symbolic function in Matthew that confirms Jesus’ Sonship, but his downplaying of Sinai allusions demands reevaluation especially in light of the Christological comparisons to Moses. While not altogether rejecting Donaldson’s contribution, we wish to reevaluate the significance of mountains in Matthew on the basis of the *Sitz im Leben* of the community and the allusions to Moses. The scope of this article is narrower than Donaldson’s monograph, focusing on scenes in which the mountain serves as a theological symbol through which Matthew asserts the preeminence of Jesus as the Son of God in the context of allusions to Moses: 3:13–4:11, 14:15–33, 17:1–13, 28:16–20.

**MOSES IN JEWISH LITERATURE**

This article presupposes that the Matthean community encountered Jewish resistance to its message about Jesus, and this Jewish response reasserted the supremacy of Moses. Both sides in this dispute would want to claim Moses, whose importance for Second Temple Judaism and Matthew should not be overlooked. In general, Diaspora Judaism expands on the Pentateuch with a more elaborate and panegyrical presentation of Moses as a hero or sage. Palestinian authors tend to emphasize Moses’ role as prophet and mediator of God’s revelation. Moses’ significance is at least

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2. This narrow range explains the omission of texts that have strong allusions to Moses (e.g., infancy narrative), that allude to Moses and contain the mountain (Sermon on the Mount), and that portray the Son of God in an elevated place (Gadarene demoniacs). Perhaps, following Donaldson, commentators have been reluctant to attribute much significance to the mountain setting in 14:23, but this is sandwiched between an allusion to Moses in a feeding miracle and a confession of Jesus as the Son of God, so it has significance for our study.

3. For overviews of Moses’ importance, see Alex Graupner and Michael Wolter, eds., *Moses in Biblical and Extra-Biblical Traditions* (BZAW 372; New York: de Gruyter, 2007); John G. Gager, *Moses in Greco-Roman Paganism* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972). Necessary for this article’s thesis is the assertion of Moses’ preeminence, and there are at least two plausible proposals: (1) a Jewish contingent within the Matthean community overemphasized the importance of Moses at the neglect of the Son of God, or (2) the surrounding Jewish community responded to the Matthean community’s preaching about Jesus with the assertion of Moses’ authority. Of these, the latter situation is more probable because the polemical nature of the Gospel accords better with outside opposition.


5. Moses is seen as God’s servant (Exod 14:31; Num 12:7, 8; Deut 34:5;Josh 1:1–2; Dan 9:11; Mal 4:4; Josephus, *Ant.* 5.39; Bar 1:20; 2:28) and an example of virtue (Sir 45:4. Cf. 2 Bar.
remembered in Judaism in his roles as prophet, priest, king and lawgiver. 6
Undergirding these roles is that Moses was the recipient of divine instruc-
tion that was passed down to the people. 7
Matthew draws on this favorable tradition and presents Jesus in terms
of the existing paradigm of Moses. 8 In Matthew’s birth narrative, similari-
ties to Exodus’s depiction of Moses can be detected: appearance of an angel
to the father, murder of male children, flight from birthplace, and the death
of one seeking the child’s life. 9 Jesus ascends the mountain (5:1), teaches

17:4). Some of these passages describe Moses as the servant of God in terms of him as the
lawgiver. The roles of prophet (Deut 34:10; Sir 46:1; 2 Macc 2:4) and lawgiver (1 Esdr 8:3; 9:39)
are ways to describe Moses’ role in mediating revelation that he received by hearing God’s
voice (As. Mos. 1:14).

6. Prophet: Num 12:6–8; Deut 34:10, Hos 12:14/13; Philo, Dec. 175; Mos. 2.187; Gig. 56; Spec.
1.65; Mat. 103, 125; Somm. 2.189; Josephus, Ant. 2.327; 5:20; esp. Ant. 4.329; Gal 3:19; Heb 8:5–6;
cessor in the prophetic office. Moses’ prophetic vision of the future is described in Ezek. Trag.
83–89 (cf. 4 Ezra 14:5). One of the key authenticators to the prophetic office is the performing

Priest: Ps 99:6; Philo, Mos. 2.71, 75, 141, 153. Josephus is careful to present Aaron alone, at
the exclusion of Moses, as the priest (esp. Ant. 3.190; 4.83), but Moses performs priestly duties
(sprinkling of blood: Ant. 3.197, 204–6; performs sacrifices: Ant. 2.269; 4.101; and intercedes to
God: Ant. 3.22–23, 4.194).

King: Two debated passages in the Pentateuch may refer to Moses as king: Exod 4:2 and
Deut 33:4–5. Also debated is Ezek. Trag. 62–82; cf. Josephus, Ant. 2.233. For a discussion of this,
of Jewish Religion (WUNT 2/173; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004) 90–102. Philo envisions the
kingly office following the prophetic, so that the ideal king is a prophet (Virt. 216–18). Moses
fits these roles but also includes the aspect of divinity (Mos. 1.158). Moses is seen as king and
high priest (Mos. 1.334); king, philosopher, prophet, high priest, and lawgiver (Mos. 2.2–3); and
bearing the four capacities of perfect ruler: kingship, priesthood, prophecy, legislator (Mos. 2.
187). De Vita Mosis 1.1 begins the panegyric that continues through the work as Moses is the
embodiment of virtue (e.g. Mos. 1.115ff.). Acts 7:35 describes Moses as an ἄρχων. Hebrews 3:1–6
describes Moses as a faithful servant over God’s house, which may refer to God’s kingdom (cf.
Num 12:7; 1 Chr 17:4–14).

Law-giver: E.g., “law of Moses”: Josh 8:31, 32, 23:6; Judg 1:16; 4:11; 1 Kgs 2:3; 2 Kgs 14:6;
21:8; 23:25; 2 Chr 23:18; 25:4; 30:16; Ezra 3:2; 7:6; Neh 8:1; Dan 9:11, 13; Tob 1:8; 7:12, 13; Bar 2:2;
Sus 1:3, 62; 1 Esdr 8:3; 9:39; prophet of the laws: Philo, Virt. 51; Spec. 2.104; mediator of God’s
laws: T. Mos. 3.12. In Dec. 10, Philo says that God directly gave the Ten Commandments and
the rest of the laws were through Moses (cf. Josephus, Ant. 3.93–94). Aristaeas presents Moses
as having divinely endowed ability to legislate (Let. Aris. 139; cf. Josephus, Ant. 3.180). It is this
idea of Moses as a lawgiver that the rabbinic literature emphasizes. Perhaps most instructive
for the NT period is Mark 10:1–10 (cf. Matt 19:1–12). Another example is that Jesus affirms
Moses’ prescription of offerings for healings (Mark 1:44; Matt 8:4; Luke 5:14). Moreover, NT
writers connect Moses’ authority to the synagogue (Acts 15:21; cf. Matt 23:2–3) which may be
the center of Matthew’s opponents.

7. E.g., 2 Esdr 14:3–9.
8. The NT texts do indicate that early Christian communities were explicitly comparing
and at times contrasting the roles and statuses of Jesus and Moses (John 1:17; 6:32–35; 9:27–29;
1 Cor 10:2–4; 2 Cor 3:14–18; Heb 3:1–6).
137–94; Charles H. Talbert, Matthew (Paideia; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010) 37–38. These events
do result in the fulfillment of the prophecy of Hosea 11:1: “Out of Egypt I have called my son”
the people, and then descends the mountain (8:1), events that correspond to the transmission of the law through Moses at Sinai. Moreover, in this teaching, Jesus explicitly references the Mosaic law (5:21, 27, 33, 38, 43), which reinforces the allusions to Moses that Matthew is making with the narrative. Jesus’ great miracles may resonate with Moses’ plagues, and even the request for signs to authenticate their ministries is similar (e.g., Exod 7:8; Matt 12:38; 16:1). Moreover, the institution of the Lord’s Supper during the feast of Passover should not be divorced from the figures who instituted the rituals (cf. Exod 24:8; Matt 26:8).

**Sinai and Zion in Jewish Literature**

In early Jewish literature, Sinai is the most significant mountain as the place of the giving of the law. At Sinai, God draws near to both Moses and Israel, the former in authorizing him to lead, the latter through the ratification of the covenant. While Sinai’s theological significance is fixed as it looks back on Israel’s foundational events, Zion takes on the meaning of the present and future hope and becomes a medium through which religious life and identity are experienced. It is seen as a place of God’s enthronement (Isa 24:23; Ezek 20:33, 40; 34:11–16; 43:7; Zech 14:8–11), as a place where the Davidic king will be enthroned (Pss 2:1–11; 78:68–72;
Many Second Temple authors reassert the significance of Sinai as a cosmic place of contact between the human and the divine. Sinai can function as a place of revelation (Apoc. Ab. 21–23; Jub. 1:1–5, 26; 6:19; 48:2; 2 Esd 3:17–19, 14:3–9), and Josephus describes it as the exceedingly high dwelling place of God (Ant. 2.264; 3.76, 82). Matthew has five mountain references in the narrative framework that are unattested in Mark (Matt 4:8; 5:1; 8:1; 15:29; 28:16); moreover, Matthew omits Mark’s mountain in only one narrative (Mark 5:5, 11). Further, many significant events in Matthew occur on the mountain: the temptation, Sermon on the Mount, feeding of the 4,000, transfiguration, teaching on the Mount of Olives, and the Great Commission. From the point of view of Matthew’s redaction, it is already apparent that the mountain has great significance for Matthew, and the specific themes connected with it will emerge in the analysis of the texts. Subsequent to Matthew, the rabbis reasserted the significance of Sinai and the law of Moses. Donaldson comments “One other point to note about Mount Sinai is the increased emphasis it received in Rabbinic tradition, even to the point of displacing Zion. In view of the Rabbinic emphasis on Torah, such development is not surprising.” The subsequent texts will focus on Matthew’s mountain scenes in which the Son of God and Moses themes are present.

CONVERGENCE OF MOSES, MOUNTAIN, AND SON OF GOD

This article identifies in the Great Commission three themes that run throughout the Gospel of Matthew: Moses, the mountain setting, and the Son of God. We will briefly survey three scenes to show how the Great Commission climaxes the Christology that Matthew has developed with

16. Several of these passages do not mention Zion explicitly; rather, an alternative designation is used. For example, the word שֶׁכֶר (“Zion”) does not appear in Ezekiel, but גַּבֵּהַ (“my hill”) in Ezek 34:25 clearly refers to Zion. The author of Hebrews contrasts Sinai and Zion. Sinai is the place of unendurable revelation (Heb 12:18–21), but humans through Christ “have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering” (Heb 11:22, nrsv).

17. See George J. Brooke, “Moving Mountains: From Sinai to Jerusalem,” in The Significance of Sinai: Traditions about Sinai and Divine Revelation in Judaism and Christianity (ed. George J. Brooke, Hindy Najman, and Loren T. Stuckenbruck; Leiden: Brill, 2005) 73–89, which argues that the Qumran community focuses beyond the place of revelation to Moses and law. While I am not entirely convinced of his argument for the Qumran community, it is certainly not the case for the Matthean community that is looking to Jesus with his authoritative teaching. Even the voice in the transfiguration emphasizes listening to him (Matt 17:5), and the Great Commission is a command to spread his teaching (Matt 28:20).

18. Donaldson, Jesus on the Mountain, 73.

the convergence of the Son of God and Moses allusions on the mountain settings. While the baptism and temptation narratives do not tightly interweave the Moses and Son of God themes, Matthew abuts the Son of God in the baptism to the Moses-like figure in the temptation. Matthew emphasizes Jesus’ unique status in the baptism account through apocalyptic imagery. But the climax of the baptismal account is the voice from heaven wherein Jesus is declared to be God’s Son: “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased” (Matt 3:17, NRSV). Matthew is adapting Mark 1:11 which in turn draws from Ps 2 and Isa 42. Psalm 2 belongs to the category of coronation or enthronement psalms in which God enthrones his king on Mount Zion. Craigie comments on the king’s speech “At the heart of the [royal] covenant is the concept of sonship; the human partner in the covenant is son of the covenant God, who is father.” The context of Isaiah 42 is the installation of God’s chosen servant. This conglomeration of quotations that pictures the Son of God as obedient foreshadows the temptation narrative wherein he will prove his Sonship.

Matthew rips Jesus from the divine declaration of baptism directly into the desert place; whereas Luke, perhaps uncomfortable with this abrupt Christological shift, inserts the genealogy of Jesus. Jesus’ exile into the wilderness alludes to the exodus and wilderness wanderings, and 40 may signify several events: Moses’ time in the desert after fleeing Egypt, Israel’s years in the wilderness, or Moses’ time of fasting on the mountain. Matthew includes the apology for a human baptizing the Son of God (3:13–15). The opening of the heavens alludes to Ezekiel 1:1 as the beginning of an apocalyptic revelation but more significantly to Isaiah 64:1 (63:19 LXX). Isaiah cries out for Israel’s redeemer to “tear open the heavens and come down” (Isa 64:1 NRSV). When this imagery is understood in light of Matthew’s use of Messiah (1:1, 18, 21) and the eschatological implications of John’s confession in 3:11–12, the Christological import is remarkable (cf. Donald A. Hagner, Matthew [2 vols.; WBC 33A–B; Dallas: Word, 1993–95] 1:160). The descent of the Spirit, contained in all four Gospels, also seems to draw on Isaiah (Isa 11:1; 42:1, 61:1). This proclamation is usually understood to allude to one or a combination of passages: Gen 22:2, Ps 2:7, Isa 42:1, with a combination or double-allusion to the latter two being the most probable. See Robert Gundry, The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew’s Gospel (NovTSup 18; Leiden: Brill, 1967) 29–32; D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in Matthew–Mark, (rev. ed.; Expositor’s Bible Commentary 9; Grand Rapids: Zondervan) 109.


23. Ibid., 1:67.

24. Obedience can already be detected in Jesus’ submission to baptism “to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt 3:15).

25. Most scholars agree that Q contained significant temptation material and that Matthew more likely preserves the original order than Luke. See Donaldson, Jesus on the Mountain, 87–104; Ulrich Luz, Matthew (trans James E. Crouch; 3 vols.; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001–7) 1:148.

26. See Matthew J. Harrington, The Gospel of Matthew (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007) 65, although he primarily sees this as reference to Israel and not Moses. The allusions to Israel are attractive, and in some ways connected to Moses, but there is legitimate cause for distinguishing Moses from Israel and favoring a Moses interpretation in this passage. Certain allusions apply more specifically to Moses than Israel: fasting 40 days and nights, speaking to stones, ascent up the mountain, and viewing the kingdoms of the earth. For more on Jesus as Israel, see David D. Kupp, Matthew’s Emmanuel: Divine Presence and God’s People in the First Gospel...
thew's addition of “and forty nights” (4:2) may be explained as a direct allusion to the Sinai experiences of Moses, Elijah, and possibly Abraham (Moses: Exod 24:28; 34:28; Deut 9:9, 11, 18, 25; 10:10; 2 Bar 76; Elijah: 1 Kings 19:8; Abraham: Apoc. Ab. 12:1–3). The emphasis here seems not to be on Sinai as the place of the giving of the law but as a place of nearness to God and authentication of the prophet's authority. While Satan couches his temptation in terms of the baptismal declaration of Jesus' Sonship (4:3, 5), testing (Exod 20:20), speaking to rocks for nourishment (Num 20:7–8), and request for signs all draw on the Moses tradition (Num 16–17). The temptation narrative ends on the mountain with Jesus viewing the kingdoms as Moses viewed the promised land (Deut 3:27 [Pisgah]; 34:1–4 [Nebo]). Jesus again counters Satan's temptation by quoting Deuteronomy, and proves his Sonship in contrast to Moses' disobedience. The mountain theme thus serves as a marker of the Son's legitimate claims to authority and his special meeting with God—two ideas that Matthew will continue to develop.

Matthew again juxtaposes the portrayal of Jesus as a Moses-like figure with the declaration of him as the Son of God in the feeding of the 5,000 and the walking on water. While the note concerning the crowds fol-

(SNTSMS 90; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 64–66; A. D. A. Moses, Matthew's Transfiguration Story and Jewish-Christian Controversy (JSNTSup 122; Sheffield: University of Sheffield Press, 1996) 172–73. Wayne S. Baxter (“Mosaic Imagery in the Gospel of Matthew,” TJ 20 [1999] 73) offers a compromise by viewing Jesus primarily in terms of God's first son, Israel, but this implies Moses: “Jesus’ Sonship, then, is superior to Israel's both ontologically (Israel was God's son by adoption but Jesus by nature) and functionally (Israel was disobedient but Jesus perfectly obedient). Clearly for Matthew, then, the first son merely pointed to the last Son. The first exodus, led by Moses and ending in failure, anticipated the final exodus accomplished by Jesus, who never fails.”

27. See the discussion in Allison, New Moses, 165–72. It should be noted that the omission of “forty nights” finds support in two early uncials (א, D) and an early papyrus (101) and one of the earliest minuscules (892). The text of NA27, however, is better supported by early and the majority of manuscript evidence. Most importantly, the insertion finds support in some early uncials (א, C, L, W) and the Majority Koine Text.

28. See Exod 34:29; Deut 9:17–23; 1 Kgs 19:8. With the exception of the rain in the flood story, the only times that 40 days and nights appears in the Hebrew Bible are in the two accounts of Moses on Sinai and Elijah's encounter with God on Sinai. In Apoc. Ab. 14:2–4, an angel appears to Abraham at Sinai and assures him of his election and his authority to combat the evil one.

29. Baxter (“Mosaic Imagery,” 73) explains, “Jesus is the true Son of God because he obeys perfectly. It is precisely at this point that the Son of God and Servant themes intersect. These themes first converged in 3:17, where the heavenly voice doubly alluded to Ps 2:7 [Sonship] and Isa 42:1 [servanthood].” Baxter is correct to understand the temptation narrative as the culmination of the baptism narrative and authentication of the proclamation in 3:17. His assertion of Jesus’ Sonship as both ontological (3:17) and functional in the obedience of the temptation makes sense in Matthew’s scheme.

30. Although Dan Lioy (Axis of Glory: A Biblical and Theological Analysis of the Temple Motif in Scripture [New York: Peter Lang, 2010] 63) focuses on the voice from heaven as authentication of the Son, he is correct “that both the Holy Spirit and the Father authenticated and endorsed the Son for his ministry and work.” The voice in the transfiguration serves the same function for Lioy.

31. These scenes form a narrative unit with Jesus’ withdrawal and reentrance into public light. Moreover, Matthew seems to accept Mark’s association of the two scenes (Mark 6:51–52).
following on foot (οἱ ὄχλοι ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ πεζῇ; Matt 14:13 cf. Luke 9:11) and the designation of 12 baskets may allude to Israel, the strength of the allusion to Moses lies in the general framework of the feeding miracle with the most probable referent in the Jewish mind being the manna in the wilderness.\textsuperscript{32} Even at this point, there is an implicit contrast between Moses and Jesus, as Jesus himself performs the feeding miracle. After the feeding miracle, Jesus ascends the mountain privately.\textsuperscript{33} As it functioned in 4:8, the place of nearness also serves to authenticate and confirm Jesus’ status; in the temptation, the Son is confirmed as the obedient Son and here he is confirmed as Son of God with power over nature. After the mountain experience that Matthew does not detail in any length, Jesus walks on water, tells the disciples not to be afraid, and calms the storm.\textsuperscript{34} While John emphasizes the miraculous in this event (John 6:21) and Mark focuses on the disciples’ lack of understanding (Mark 6:51–52), Matthew focuses on the status of Jesus with the disciples’ confession “‘You are certainly God’s Son’” (Matt 14:33, \textit{nrsv}). Although Jesus bears some similarities to Moses, Matthew again emphasizes through the mountain experience that Jesus is to be worshiped as the Son of God.\textsuperscript{35}

Following Peter’s confession, “‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God’” (Matt 16:16), Jesus ascends the mountain in the transfiguration scene.\textsuperscript{36} Although distinctions are possible, there are strong links between Peter’s confession in 16:16 and the divine declaration in 17:5 that warrant interpreting them in light of each other.\textsuperscript{37} The parallels to Moses’

\textsuperscript{32} Luz (\textit{Matthew}, 2:311) thinks the prototype is Elisha in 2 Kgs 4:42–44, but the primary strength of this proposal is that a human performs the miracle. Grant R. Osborne (\textit{Matthew [Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010] 554–69}) attempts to show how this story alludes to both Elisha and Moses. Another proposal is that this event foreshadows the Last Supper and the Eucharist; see Paul Gaechter, \textit{Das Matthäus Evangelium} (Innsbruck: Tyrolia-Verlag, 1963) 478–80.

\textsuperscript{33} Matthew’s switch from ἀπέρχομαι (“to go away”; Mark 6:46) to ἀναβαίνω (“to go up”; Matt 14:23) is significant because ἀνέβη εἰς τὸ ὅρος (“went up/ascended the mountain”) may allude to meeting with God at Sinai. Most strong are the connections to Moses’ ascending the mountain to hear from God and the people not ascending (e.g., Exod 19:3, 12, 13, 18, 20; 34:1–4). But the ascent up the mountain is not limited to Moses as the elders ascend partway in Exod 24:9, then Joshua and Moses go up further, and Moses ascends the mountain into the cloud. In later Jewish literature, ἀνέβη εἰς τὸ ὅρος can be associated with God’s presence (Ps 24:2) and receiving teaching from him (Mic 4:2; Isa 2:3).

\textsuperscript{34} The septuagintal tradition of God referring to himself as ἐγώ εἰμι is well established and should not be underestimated here, especially because it is followed by another title frequently used of God in the LXX, κύριος. The motif of walking on waves in the Hebrew Bible is ascribed to God (Job 9:8; cf. Ps 77:19; Hab 3:15).

\textsuperscript{35} Osborne (\textit{Matthew}, 577) notes the contrast between Jesus’ authority as God’s Son and the authority that Moses had.

\textsuperscript{36} Adela Yarbro Collins and John J. Collins (\textit{King and Messiah as Son of God: Divine, Human, and Angelic Messianic Figures in Biblical and Related Literature [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008]) argue that at least the terms “messiah” and “Son of God” seem to be equivalent for Matthew. Concerning Peter’s confession, “The close association of the two epithets here makes clear that they are equivalent for Matthew” (p. 142).

\textsuperscript{37} Luz (\textit{Matthew}, 2:355) and Moses (\textit{Matthew’s Transfiguration Story}, 114–15) interpret 16:13–17:13 as a literary unit; cf. Osborne, \textit{Matthew}, 642. Hagner (\textit{Matthew}, 2:489) notes that all
Sinai experience are strongest here. These parallels to Sinai are especially pronounced when compared to Mark. Simon S. Lee notes a number of redactional moves by Matthew and concludes “In his version of the story, Matthew mentions Jesus’ brilliant face, which is missing in Mark, and puts additional emphasis on the Moses-Jesus parallel to make the transfiguration another Sinai event.” Among the possible Moses allusions are the ascent on the seventh day (Exod 24:15–18), accompaniment by three named leaders (Exod 24:1, 9), description as a high mountain (cf. Matt 4:8; Philo, Mos. 2.70; Josephus, Ant. 2.264; 3.76, 82; Pseudo-Philo 3.76), shining face (Exod 34:29; Pseudo-Philo 12:1; 19:16), overshadowing cloud, the command to listen to Jesus (Deut 18:15; cf. Acts 3:22; 7:37), and the description of the event as a vision (Exod 3:3; Num 12:6). Moreover, Matthew alters Mark’s word order and places Moses before Elijah, who both had moutaintop experiences with God. While any one of these allusions may be


40. Matthew may heighten the parallel to the three named leaders as a literary unit, because one article governs the three nouns. This grammatical device has the subtle effect of emphasizing the unit and not three individuals. There is some textual support for an article before both the first and second names, but no manuscript evidence supports three articles. The evidence, both manuscript and internal, favors one article.

41. The cloud possibly could allude to the pillar of cloud, Moses’ Sinai ascent, the cloud in the tabernacle and temple, or as a place of apocalyptic vision as in Daniel and Ezekiel. Luz (Matthew, 2:396) cautions that the cloud motif extends beyond the Sinai motif and functions “as a widespread symbol for God’s presence.” With respect to the vision in Philo’s De vita Moses, Burton L. Mack (“Moses on the Mountain Top: A Philonic View,” in The School of Moses: Studies in Philo and the Hellenistic Religion in Memory of Horst R. Moehring [ed. John Peter Kenney; Studia Philonica Monographs 1; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995] 17) comments “The focus is upon the singular authority Moses attained by means of entrance into the presence of God, not upon the giving of the law, and not upon Moses’ ascent up the mountain according to the tripartite scheme of the soul’s path to heaven (Mos. 1.158).” Other Jewish texts attest that the cloud is a symbol for God’s presence (e.g., Exod 13:21–22; 40:34–38; 1 Kgs 8:10–11; 2 Chr 5:13–14; Neh 9:12, 19; Tg. Yer. 1; Qoh. Rab 9.7 § 1). But meeting God in the cloud also may entail commission and authority in one’s mission (Sir 45:4–5; Exod 19:9).

disputed, the overall weight of the evidence is compelling, but what is most remarkable is that as strong as the allusions to Moses are, they are clearly not the Christological focus of this scene. These Moses elements are sandwiched between Peter’s confession of Jesus as the Son of God and the voice from the cloud’s proclamation that Jesus is the Son. Matthew focuses on Jesus’ special status by designating him as “Lord” (Matt 17:4; cf. Mark 16:5 “rabbi” ; Luke 9:33 “master”), attributing the disciples’ fear to the voice (Matt 17:5; cf. Mark 9:6 and Luke 9:34, fear at appearance of Moses and Elijah), and emphasizing that the disciples only saw Jesus (οὐδένα ἔδειξα εἰ μὴ αὐτὸν Ἰησοῦν μόνον; Matt 17:8). Matthew reasserts to his community the importance of the baptismal proclamation with its replication in the transfiguration. Even more than the community listens to Moses, they must “Listen to him,” the Son (Matt 17:5). A. D. A. Moses concludes, “Matthew has used the transfiguration of Jesus as a polemic against the prevailing Moses, Sinai and law emphasis of the time.” In so doing, he has reasserted the importance of the Son of God.

THE GREAT COMMISSION

The Great Commission scene is noted for its complexity and drawing together of multiple themes in the Gospel of Matthew. This analysis will not deny the significance of themes such as the Son of Man or Mount Zion, but it will focus on Matthew’s trajectory of Moses being subordinated to Jesus as the Son of God. It is an attempt to identify one more strand of thought contributing to the Great Commission. We will not attempt to prove that Matthew summarizes the whole Gospel in this paragraph or attempt to discern the form. Our only interest is to show how Matthew culminates...
his trajectory of Moses allusions in mountain settings to show finally that the community must worship and obey Jesus alone.

First, we will determine if the allusions to Moses persist sufficiently in the Great Commission. The commonalities in the closings of the Gospels suggest that there is some broad outline or tradition shared by them. Davies and Allison attribute at least four features to Matthew’s redaction: mountain setting, command to make disciples, order to do all that Jesus commanded, and assurance of Jesus’ presence. And they argue, “These four elements are precisely what give the passage its Mosaic aura.”

Matthew seems especially concerned here to draw on themes of Moses as he has in previous mountain scenes in the Gospel. There is little need for Matthew to specify that the number of disciples is eleven, but it does alert the reader to the incompleteness of not having twelve. Thus, the background might be that Jesus’ leading is similar to Moses’ leading the twelve tribes in the desert.

Mark speaks of “worshiping” (προσκυνέω; 5:5; 15:19) infrequently, but Matthew places redactional emphasis on the worship theme. With the exceptions of the temptation and one parable (4:9, 10; 18:26), Matthew uses προσκυνέω to describe humans’ responses to Jesus in belief of his special status or role (e.g., 2:2, 8, 11; 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 20:20; 28:9, 17). Remarkably, the disciples assume the posture of worship of Jesus in three of the four scenes we have studied that contain the Moses, Son of God, and mountain themes (14:33; 17:6; 28:17). When these narratives about worship are read in light of the Sitz im Leben of the community with the conflict over the roles of Jesus and Moses, the actions of the disciples in worshiping Jesus can be understood as instructions for the community about proper worship. There is a further connection between this worship scene in Matt 28 and ch. 14. Only in these two scenes does the combination of doubt and worship appear together. Matthew 14:31–33 contrasted Peter’s doubt with the disciples’ worship of Jesus as the Son of God, which may also be read as instruction to the community. The phrase “but some doubted” in Matt 28:17 appears somewhat extraneous, but again the situation of the community informs us concerning its function. Matthew 28:17 offers a model through which to understand belief and doubt in response to the community’s message about Jesus. Hagner offers a similar explanation: “Also


48. See Kingsbury, “Composition and Christology,” 581. The verb “fall down” (πίπτω) can have a general use in Matthew, but when used in a context of worship, it bears a similar pattern to προσκυνέω. The temptation (4:9) and the parable (18:26, 29) are again exceptions, but when humans fall down, it is only before Jesus (2:11; 17:6; 17:15), and the disciples only fall before Jesus in worship at the transfiguration. There are no humans in the mountain setting of the temptation, but the final temptation is to worship improperly. The inclusion of worship, Son of God, Moses, and mountain themes in these scenes could be explained as a coincidence, but a more fitting explanation is that Matthew is using these themes to instruct the community about the importance of worshiping the Son of God.
to be noted is the fact that the confession of Jesus as Son of God is made only by believers (except where it is blasphemy), and only by revelation (16:17; 11:27; cf. 13:11). This distinction would have meant much to Matthew’s Jewish Christian readers confronted with the continuing unbelief of the majority of Jews.”

Much attention has also been given to the form and parallels of the commission that Jesus gives. Allison interprets this commissioning narrative as directly depending on Moses’ commission of Joshua in Deut 31. Allison’s analysis may be too rigid, because his structure leaves no room for important allusions to Jesus as the Danielic Son of Man. It is better to see Matthew drawing on a number of commissions with which he and his readers are familiar instead of positing a rigid recapitulation; moreover, the Great Commission must be interpreted within the context of what Matthew is doing in the Gospel as a whole. As a continuation of the assertion of Jesus’ preeminence in opposition to his opponents’ assertion of Moses, Matthew subtly shows the Son’s uniqueness by his claim. Jesus’ claim of authority becomes clearer as an allusion to his Sonship drawing again on the Davidic king of Ps 2. In both cases, God is the agent of δίδωμι and grants extensive authority to his Son, and the events of both scenes occur


50. Allison, New Moses, 266: “Just as the lawgiver, at the close of his life, commissioned Joshua both to go into a land peopled by foreign nations and to observe all the commandments in the law, and then further promised his successor God’s abiding presence, so similarly Jesus: at the end of his earthly ministry, he told his disciples to go into all the world and teach observances of all the commandments uttered by the new Moses; and then he promised his abiding presence.” He also identifies similar word order to Jesus’ “all that I have commanded you” in at least four LXX commissioning narratives, all of which belong to the Moses typology: Exod 7:2; Josh 1:7; 1 Chr 22:13; Jer 1:7. Two of these commissions involve Moses, and Allison contends that 1 Chr 22:13 and Jer 1:1–10 belong to a Moses typology. For a detailed study of the form as a prophetic statement, see Gerhard Friedrich, “Die Formale Struktur von Mt 28, 18–20,” ZTK 80 (1983) 137–83.

51. The specific reference of the Son in Matt 28 has generated much discussion in secondary literature. Certainly one can argue for allusions to Dan 7:13–14. These allusions are likely present, but this need not exclude allusions to the Son of God. The thesis of Kingsbury, “Composition and Christology,” 580, when applied to the whole Gospel may be a little strong, but it finds good support in Matt 28: “With the context of the First Gospel, such expression as ‘my son,’ ‘the son,’ and ‘son of God’ (8:29) are, whatever their origins, variants of the more comprehensive title ‘Son of God.’” First, Collins and Collins (see p. 390 n. 40) have shown that Son of Man frequently functions as an equivalent to the first-person pronoun. In the command for baptism, Jesus is commanding that disciples baptize in his name, but it more than just his name; it is his name on the level with the Father and Spirit. Second, the literary parallels to previous texts in Matthew, noted above, point toward the Son of God. Third, although there are some elements of an apocalyptic background (see, Heinz Geist, Menschensohn und Gemeinde: Eine redaktionskritische Untersuchung zur Menschensohnprädikation im Matthäusevangelium [Würzburg: Echter Vorlang, 1986] 383–84), Dan 7 alone cannot account for the significance of the mountain and Moses allusions. Lange (Das Erscheinen des Auferstandenen, 445) rejects the Sinai allusions in Matt 28:16 in favor of seeing this as an eschatological mountain of the Son of Man.
on a mountain. Further, Jesus’ assertion of authority references the power that Satan had promised him on the mountain:

God: δώσω σοι ἐθνή τὴν κληρονομίαν σου καὶ τὴν κατάσχεσιν σου τὰ πέρατα τῆς γῆς (Ps 2:8 LXX; “I will give you the nations as your inheritance and the ends of the earth as your possession”).

Satan: ταῦτα σοι πάντα δώσω, ἐὰν πεσὼν προσκυνήσῃς μοι (Matt 4:8; “All these things I will give you if you fall down and worship me”).

Jesus: ἔδοθη μοι πᾶσα ἐξουσία ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς (Matt 28:18; cf. Rev 2:26; “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me”).

The most notable distinction is the extension of Jesus’ authority to include heaven. There are hints of Moses even in this assertion of Jesus’ authority. In ch. 4, Satan’s promise to give Jesus authority was made in the context of allusions to Moses, and a contemporary Jewish author has described Moses as receiving authority over all things. This stream of references to Jesus as the Son of God continues into the command to baptize in the Son’s name. Also not to be missed are the connections that this statement has to Jesus’ baptism by John with the presence of the Son, the Father in the voice, and the Spirit in the dove. It is probable that Matthew’s readers would think of Jesus’ baptism by John with the presence of the Son, the Father in the voice, and the Spirit in the dove. It is probable that Matthew’s readers would think of Jesus’ baptism where the voice declares that he is the Son of God. Admittedly, the phrase “Son of God” or a confession of Sonship does not occur in the Commission scene, but taken with the immediate references to worship, Ps 2, and the baptismal command and culminating both the Christological streams of the Gospel and the mountain theme, it is clear that Matthew is again presenting Jesus as the Son of God.

If Matthew is asserting Jesus’ preeminence as the Son of God above Moses, he may also be showing Jesus’ superiority by showing that Jesus’ mission and message are not ethnically bound as was the Mosaic law. The debate concerning precisely what Jesus meant by “all the nations” is not as important for this article as it is to state that the message of Jesus is more inclusive and less limited and thus greater than Moses’. Although Jesus’ authority, extending into heaven and earth, is significantly greater than Moses’, they both commission successors to continue that authority (Deut

52. Again, the Son of Man theme is present but remains beyond the scope of this paper: καὶ αὐτῷ ἐδόθη ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ ἡ βασιλεία (Dan 7:14; to him [the one like the Son of Man] was given dominion, glory, and kingship). See also Matt 11:27.

53. Philo, Mos. 1.155–6; cf. Ezek. Trag. 62–82. It should also be noted that the theme of authority appears in Dan 7:13–14.

54. It may be unsatisfactory to some that this paper does not deal more specifically with the precise nature of τὰ ἔθνη, which some interpret to be true Israel and others to exclude Israel. The focus of this paper, however, is Christological, and secondarily the Sitz im Leben of the Matthean community. It is probably best understood as a universalizing statement rather than one group at the exclusion of the other. See, France, Gospel, 1114–15; Craig S. Keener, The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) 719–20; Luz, Matthew, 3:629–631. Sparks (“Mosaic Typology,” 657–61) parallels Jesus’ preparation for the mission to all nations with Moses’ preparation of the conquest of nations.
31:23). Throughout, Matthew has shown that Jesus has greater authority than Moses, especially in the area of teaching. Moses commands the Levites to keep the book of the law, which was received from God (Deut 31:24–27). The presence of the mountain in the Great Commission leads the careful reader to Matt 5:1 and 8:1, where in the intervening Sermon on the Mount Jesus asserts the authority of his teaching. Here, beyond Moses, who received the law from God, Jesus commands the disciples to go διδάσκοντες αὐτούς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἔνετελλάμην ὑμῖν (“teaching them to keep/obey all that I have commanded you”; Matt 28:20).\(^{55}\) Jesus, as he indicated in 28:18, has final authority, not the least in the realm of teaching.\(^{56}\) Osborne rightly recognizes the comparison to Moses that demonstrates Jesus’ unique authority to command: “It is not that Jesus is a ‘new Moses’ walking up Sinai but rather that as God gave Israel their marching orders through Moses at Sinai, Jesus gives his disciples their commission here on this mountain.”\(^{57}\) So Matthew clarifies that the Son of God occupies a position of greater status and authority than Moses even in the comparison to Moses.

Some scholars have too readily dismissed the allusions to Moses because Moses never promised his ongoing presence; he promised God’s ongoing presence. Luz argues “A relationship to Moses traditions is not likely for the simple reason that in them the reference is to God’s presence with Moses or Joshua rather than to the continuing presence of Moses with the people.”\(^{58}\) Only two commissioning narratives in the OT conclude with a promise of divine presence, and both are dealing with the death of Moses (Deut 31:23; Josh 1:1–9). But it is precisely in this promise of Jesus’ ongoing presence that Matthew’s counterassertion against the elevation of Moses may be seen. In Moses’ commissioning narrative, God’s promised presence is given as comfort because Moses cannot offer this ongoing help. But at this point in the narrative, Jesus has already shown his superiority, especially

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55. W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison (“Matt 28:16–20: Texts Behind the Text,” RHPR 72 [1992] 89–98) argue that behind this text are several Hebrew Bible passages in which ἐντέλλομαι is used with Moses. John Nolland (The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text [NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005] 1270 n.86) objects to these allusions because in the Hebrew Bible, it is God and not Moses who is the source of the commands. Nolland’s criticisms are appropriate, but this might be the point that Matthew is trying to make: Jesus has a unique authority to command.

56. This authority in teaching is seen most clearly in the Sermon on the Mount. Here, Jesus has the authority to explain the law of Moses and offer his own teaching: “you have heard that it was said . . . but I say” (e.g., Matt 5:27, 38, 43). Although not covered in this paper because the Son of God theme is not as prominent, the Sermon is bracketed by Jesus’ ascending and descending the mountain (Matt 5:1; 8:1).

57. Osborne, Matthew, 1077.

58. Luz, Matthew, 3:620. While Luz does not exclude the possibility of Moses traditions, he favors the Son of Man. But he admits “Thus the biblical background of the text remains relatively general, we can surmise that the readers will construe the meaning of the text primarily from their reading of the Gospel of Matthew” (3:620). Luz is correct, and thus it is most likely to see the themes of Moses, Son of God, and mountain to converge in the ways they have in the aforementioned scenes.
through his resurrection from the dead. The resurrected Jesus, the Son of God, promises his own ongoing presence, which Moses could not.

The strength of the interplay between Moses and Jesus as Son is heightened by the location on the mountain. It is noteworthy that Moses and Jesus’ last physical activity occurs on a mountain, a theme that is surprisingly limited in Jewish texts although not exclusive to Moses. The careful reader is alerted to the significance of the mountain because Matthew describes it as “the mountain to which Jesus had directed them” (28:16). But Jesus’ instructions were more general and only instructed them to go to Galilee (28:10; cf. 26:32). Much effort has been spent both on deciphering which mountain Matthew has in mind in Galilee and to which mountain theological connections can be made.\(^{59}\) Zion could indicate a mountain of the gathering of the Gentiles, whereas Sinai is more connected to Moses.\(^{60}\) Even though we have established the allusions to Moses, it is necessary to look within the Gospel for the thematic context of the mountain setting, especially because of the way it stands out in the text. Kingsbury views the mountain as a setting that indicates certain theological emphases of Matthew: “The themes of eschatological revelation, of intimate fellowship with God, and of divine authority are integral to Matthew’s portrait of Jesus as the Son of God.”\(^{61}\) We may posit two primary functions that our brief survey has revealed when Son of God and Moses themes converge on the mountain. First, mountains function as places of closeness to and revelation from God. Second and more significant for our study, mountains function as places of authorization and legitimization of ministry or status. Although other themes such as the Son of Man and Moses allusions have been implicit, the only title or identification that Matthew has used specifically of Jesus in his mountain experiences has been the Son of God, so that “‘the mountain’ . . . in itself points to Jesus as the Son of God.”\(^{62}\) Thus, Matthew concludes by showing that Jesus’ unique role and status, in contrast to what the community’s opponents attribute to Moses, is confirmed on this mountain of commissioning.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps due to the richness of the closing section of Matthew, many commentators overlook the significance of the mountain setting. The strongest

\(^{59}\) For a treatment debating if a specific mountain can be seen here or just mountains in general, see Werner Schmauch, Orte der Offenbarung und der Offenbarungsort im Neuen Testament (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956) 67–79, esp. p. 79.

\(^{60}\) E.g., Isa 2:2–3; 25:6–10; Mic 4:1–4; Zech 8:20–23. While it is remarkable that Zion is the mountain associated with gathering the nations, it should be noted that the Great Commission is not commanding an ingathering of the Gentiles to this special mountain but a going out of Jewish disciples. This observation both questions the specific reference to Zion and downplays the significance of specifying an exact referent.


\(^{62}\) Ibid., 56–58.
parallels are to the first mountain scene in Matt 4, where Satan has authority over the kingdoms of the earth and offers them to Jesus. The obedient Son refuses to worship Satan, and in ch. 28 he declares that he has been given all authority. The obedience of the Son is thus vindicated by the reception of authority. In line with this understanding of the development of the mountain theme, Donaldson argues that the mountain in Matt 28 cannot be extracted from the mountain theme in the rest of the Gospel: “The mountain of 28:16 functions as a literary symbol that binds each of the other mountain scenes, and themes developed in them, to the closing scene of the Gospel.” 63 In the earlier passages that this article has surveyed, the mountain served as a place of authenticating and confirming Jesus’ Sonship, authority, and teaching; moreover, Matthew has emphasized that Jesus’ mountain experiences supersede Moses’. In several of the allusions to Moses in ch. 28, Matthew heightens the reference to Jesus as Son of God. The reference to eleven is expanded to be all nations. The authority to teach and command is expanded to include heaven; moreover, disciples are to be baptized in the Son’s name. Obedience is to the commands of the Son. And the promise of ongoing presence is that of the Son’s presence, not God’s presence as with Moses. Moreover, the mountain has become a place where the resurrected Son is worshiped.

The escalation of the Moses allusions serves a polemical function in the community. This article has attempted to interpret Matthew’s redactional emphases and theological points within the context of his Sitz im Leben. That his community experienced some sort of backlash at the preaching of Jesus as Son of God is incontrovertible, and it is likely that the reassertion of Moses’ authority and teaching accompanied this protest. In the baptism/temptation, feeding/walking on water, and transfiguration scenes, Matthew has shown that it is Jesus as Son of God, not Moses, who merits the community’s worship and obedience. This polemic undergirds the Great Commission where Jesus, the Son of God, promises what Moses cannot. He will be with the Matthean community “always, to the end of the age.”

63. Donaldson, Jesus on the Mountain, 175. He is correct in this statement even if he does not properly locate the final significance of the mountain. Donaldson wants to see this as an eschatological ingathering of the nations to Zion. Cf. Luz, Matthew, 3:616.