MATTHEW’S APPROPRIATION OF THE PROPHETIC RÎB-PATTERN AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR HEAVEN AND EARTH PASSING AWAY IN 5:18 AND 24:35

This essay will assess intertextual links between Matthew, Deuteronomy and Isaiah by showing how the images and ideas from the OT covenant lawsuit (i.e., rîb-pattern) illuminate Matthew’s unfolding narrative. In particular, it will be argued that Matthew adapts three key themes from the OT covenant lawsuit, namely prophet, witness, and blessings / curses. In so doing, the Evangelist builds up a marked typological structure whereby Jesus stands as a new Moses-like covenant mediator, summoning witnesses, and invoking macarisms and woes, fitting substitutes for OT blessings and curses.

Heaven and Earth as Witnesses to the Covenant in the OT

Heaven and earth appear in several OT texts that feature the covenant lawsuit, a subgenre related to the broader genre of prophetic lawsuit. Regarding the latter, Nielsen suggests, “There has long been considerable agreement among scholars that the OT contains prophetic speeches couched in the form of forensic discourse. It has been possible to dispute which texts belong to this category, and just how this literary form is to be defined, but these are matters of only secondary importance.”¹ Due in large measure to the pioneering form-critical work of Hermann Gunkel and Joachim Begrich, the notion of a “prophetic lawsuit” genre was well established based on a recurring literary structure known as the “rîb-pattern.”² The term rîb derives from the Hebrew

root meaning “to bring a complaint.” The precise structure of the rib-pattern varies, but at least five common features emerge from the biblical data: (1) an introduction (an appeal to witnesses and an explanation of YHWH’s right to accuse); (2) interrogation/cross-examination; (3) accusatory address (historical speech recounting YHWH’s faithfulness); (4) official indictment; and (5) a decree (either negative threats or positive warnings). 

Several OT prophetic texts reflect this pattern to varying degrees. Micah 6:1–6 is illustrative given its close conformity to the structure above. The prophet introduces his lawsuit summoning the people to “Hear what YHWH is saying . . . Hear, O mountains, the controversy (rib) of YHWH (vv.1–2).” He continues with an interrogation: “What have I done to you, O my people (v. 3)?,” followed by an accusatory address recounting the redemptive acts of YHWH in Israel’s history: “For I brought you up from the land of Egypt and redeemed you (vv. 4–5).” The official indictment and the final decree are conflated in vv. 5–8 given the prophet’s rhetorical juxtaposition of the “letter” and “spirit” of the law. The people are, at the same time, indicted for disingenuous sacrifice (vv. 6–7) while also being warned to reorient themselves to YHWH’s expectation for them to, “do justice and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God (v. 8).”

The more particular classification of a covenant lawsuit stems from Herbert Huffman’s attempt to locate the specific Sitz im Leben of the prophetic lawsuit speech. Huffman finds that the unique appeal to such things as the heavens, earth, mountains, hills, etc. in three strategic texts, namely Isa 1:2–3; Jer 2:4–13; Mic 6:1–8, is the key to a covenantal context. He bases this

---

1. Nielsen, “Yahweh as Prosecutor and Judge,” 16; See also Harvey “Le ‘Rib-Pattern,’ 178.
conclusion on two observations. First, the lawsuit structure above, along with the unique appeal to both natural and heavenly phenomenon (i.e., heaven and earth) appear in Deut 4:26; 30:19; 31:28 in connection with covenant ceremonies. These same phenomena, then, reappear in later prophetic trials scenes because they are, likewise, “witnesses to the (prior) covenant.”\(^5\) Second, there exists a parallel in the Hittite international treaties dating from the latter half of the second millennium that also features this inclusive list of both divine and natural witnesses. Huffmon maintains that such natural phenomena were “invoked as witnesses (and deified), presumably because the curses and blessings—part of the covenant—involved these natural phenomenon.\(^6\)

Heaven and earth first appear as witnesses in the book of Deuteronomy. Historically, Israel had nearly reached the end of their fortieth year following their deliverance from Egypt (1:3). Only the Jordan River separated them from the Promised Land. Yet before they were allowed to cross, Moses shared some words in what OT scholars have come to identify as a covenant renewal treaty.\(^7\) Peter Craigie identifies two occasions that formed the basis for this event, namely the impending military conquest, and Moses’ appointment of a successor given his impending death. It is, therefore, a ceremonial occasion though the emphasis is not so much on the ceremony as it is the words of Moses: “These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel (1:1).” In Deut 4:26, Moses summons heaven and earth as witnesses against Israel based on his foresight of Israel’s covenant infidelity. This first appeal comes in a transitional sermon (Deut 4:1–40) at the end of Moses’ historical prologue (Deut 1:6–4:40), but before the actual


\(^6\) Ibid., cf. also C. Houtman, Der Himmel im Alten Testament: Israels Weltbild und Weltanschauung (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 130, who states, “as guardian of the observance of the covenant . . . ‘heaven and earth’ in Deuteronomy have the same function as the elements of the cosmos in ancient oriental, international treaties” (my trans.).

\(^7\) Peter C. Craigie, The Book of Deuteronomy (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 22, maintains that the biblical covenants show remarkable similarities to the Near East vassal treaty though “the Hebrews adapted the treaty form for their own use in order to express the nature of their relationship with God.”
presentation of the law (Deut 4:44–26:19). It represents a latent curse, implicit within the covenant, which Moses will later expand upon more fully (Deut 27:1–29:1).  

Moses will appeal again to heaven and earth as witnesses in 30:19, 31:28, and 32:1. The first occurs in Moses’ concluding charge to Israel calling them to covenant faithfulness. In this way, the witness motif frames the heart of Moses’ message in 4:44–29:1. More striking is how 30:19 appears in what is considered the culmination of Moses’ speech with his call to decision. Moses has set before Israel two ways—life and death (30:15). Craigie states, “The whole course of his address has been leading up to this moment in the renewal ceremony when the people would declare their allegiance . . . . The heavens and the earth, permanent and unchanging features of God’s creation, would bear silent witness . . . to the faithfulness of the people.”

The reference to heaven and earth as witnesses in Deut 31:28 occurs during Moses’ appointment of Joshua, which is quickly followed by the final appeal to the heavens and the earth in the Song of Moses (32:1). One might expect Moses to conclude this covenant renewal ceremony with a sense of optimism. Yet he ends the way he began, anticipating Israel’s infidelity and, hence, necessitating a witness. YHWH commands Moses and Joshua to write a song that it “may be a witness for me against the sons of Israel (31:19).” In his final act before his death, Moses turns over the book of the law to the Levites to be placed in the ark (31:26) and summons the elders and officers of the people that he may “speak these words in their hearing and call heaven and the earth to witness against them (31:28).” The very first words of the Song are, “Give ear, O heavens, and let me speak; let the earth hear the words of my mouth (32:1).” G. E. Wright maintains that, “basic to the Song is one distinguishable form which the psalmist has

---

Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 30–32, 139.

Ibid., 366.
elaborated, namely the divine lawsuit, or *rib*.” Moses appears to have composed an imbedded covenant lawsuit, based on Israel’s pattern of infidelity retrospect and prospect, which functions itself as a witness within that larger covenantal treaty.

As witnesses to the covenant, heaven and earth serve an important functions in Deuteronomy. Insofar as Moses’ audiences would have heard echoes of Gen 1:1, as well as other appeals to heaven and earth throughout the patriarchal narratives, they represent unchanging structures that testify to the permanence of the covenant established with Abraham, expanded at Sinai, and renewed here in Deuteronomy. While the specific referent of heaven and earth is debated by scholars, it is likely that they represented the two spheres between which all created things existed, namely the cosmos. They might be considered, as such, *functional* merisms.

The covenant lawsuit pattern reappears in later prophets, namely the covenant lawsuits of Isaiah 1, Jeremiah 2, and Micah 6. Isaiah 1:2–3 will serve as a representative text. Following the superscription (1:1), Isaiah wastes no time summoning witnesses to hear YHWH’s complaint against his people: “Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the LORD has spoken (1:2a).” The phrase recalls Deut 32:1 with only slight variation. Isaiah is not an innovative prophet for he is merely continuing the pattern established by Moses as a covenant law enforcer. The Song of Moses serves as his rhetorical reserve here, and throughout the book, as the same witnesses

---

10 Wright, “The Lawsuit of God,” 26. But see J. R. Boston, “The Wisdom Influences upon the Song of Moses,” *JBL* 87 (1968) 166–178, who has identified conceptual antecedents of the Song within Israel’s wisdom tradition. Nevertheless, the centrality of the Song’s prophetic roots is evident in its literary structure: 1) the official summoning of witnesses (v.1); 2) an accusatory address (vv. 4–6); 3) an official indictment (vv. 15–18); and 4) a final decree (vv. 19–29).

11 Houtman, *Der Himmel im Alten Testament*, 130, following Driver, *Deuteronomy* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1901), states: “‘Heaven and earth,’ the two large, unchanging and eternal elements of the cosmos created by God can be particularly well suited as witnesses since they remain while humans follow each other” (my trans.).

12 Wright, “The Lawsuit of God,” 48, observes that in Hittite treaties they were either gods, or the categories into which all the gods would have fallen in polytheistic thought. Israel, however, “demythologized” such interpretations so that “there was no sense of nature’s being inanimate in either heaven or earth.”

convene in a courtroom setting to hold Judah accountable for her breach of covenant. Watts maintains that, insofar as they resurface later in Isaiah (44:23; 45:8; 49:13), heaven and earth could be thought of as “attending YHWH throughout the Vision.”

Scholars debate the role of the covenant lawsuit in Isaiah. But despite the absence of some of the literary components in Isaiah 1, Nielsen maintains that “the editing of these elements . . . has occurred with the trial as a conscious model.” The author includes, for example: a summoning of witnesses (v. 2a), an accusation against Israel because of her apostasy (v. 2b–3), and a decree announcing the threat of destruction (v. 18–20). What is missing, however, is the record of any defense or an official verdict. Nielsen suggests that these were strategic omissions because the two metaphors—father/son and owner/animal (v. 3)—would have accomplished the same rhetorical objective. He states, “It is the combination of the incomplete legal case with the two metaphorical images which automatically awakens sympathy for Yahweh and antipathy for Israel, and demands a negative judgment upon the latter.” Later prophets, it seems, did not feel compelled to slavishly follow the lawsuit structure since their audiences “knew the fundamental structure upon which the lawsuit rested.” Isaiah’s appeal to heaven and earth, then, was sufficient to draw the audience into the original Deuteronomic lawsuit.

Matthew’s Appropriation of the Prophetic Rîb-Pattern

As noted above, central to the covenant lawsuit form is the prophet who summons witnesses and pronounces blessings and curses. The following analysis will determine the degree to which

18 Ibid.
these three themes are also prominent in Matthew. Before proceeding, however, it is important to qualify what one might expect to find with regard to intertextual links as one transitions from an antecedent OT text characterized by law (Deuteronomy) and prophecy (Isaiah) to the First Gospel with its biographical impulse. This essay, it should be noted, is not arguing that Matthew imports the *rib*-pattern from the OT wholesale. Yet it is suggesting that the covenant lawsuit provides a fitting forensic backdrop within which the Evangelist unfolds the controversy between Jesus and the religious officials, who represent unbelieving Israel. Thus, while the tradition remains framed by the memory of heaven and earth in its original Deuteronomic / Isaianic contexts, Matthew adapts the images of the covenant lawsuit as a new message for his day.

*Jesus as a New Moses-like Covenant Mediator in Matthew*

Dale Allison has set forth a compelling case for a pervasive Mosaic typology across the First Gospel suggesting that Matthew has intentionally framed his presentation of Jesus in order to invoke images of Moses.\(^\text{19}\) Although not without his detractors, it will be argued here that the title “prophet” remains an appropriate designation for Matthew’s Jesus even if certain elements of the prophetic experience and expression are missing from the First Gospel.\(^\text{20}\) Like Moses, Jesus’ own prophetic role transcends the ordinary functions of Israel’s prophets given his role as a covenant mediator. In what follows is a brief analysis of those Matthean texts which, according to Allison, are meant to invoke the character of Moses.\(^\text{21}\)

---


\(^{21}\) This list was adapted from Allison, *The New Moses*, vii. I have omitted three questionable texts (the Miracles of Matthew 8–9; The Servant of Deutero-Isaiah in Matt 12:15–21; and the demand for a sign in Matt
Space precludes a comprehensive treatment of all fifteen of these alleged Mosaic texts. Given that the narrower goal of this essay is to demonstrate the implications of Matthew’s appropriation of the rib-pattern for the meaning of the passing away of heaven and earth in Matt 5:18 and 24:35, this survey will limit itself to those Mosaic texts in close proximity to the embedded discourses in which those target passages are found, namely Matt 4:17-7:29 and 21:1–26:2.23


---

12:38; 16:1), which Allison himself cautiously maintains as possible typological allusions, and one additional text (the Death of Jesus in Matt 27:45–54) that Allison more firmly denies as Mosaic.

22 Allison does not consider Matthew 23 as part of Matthew’s fifth discourse. While space precludes a full treatment of the arguments for, and against, an ED that spans chs. 23-25, the present author agrees with Jason Hood, “Matthew 23–25: The Extent of Jesus’ Fifth Discourse,” JBL 128 (2009): 527–43, that Matthew’s fifth discourse should include Matt 23-25. To be consistent with this position, then, I have combined here what Allison’s separates into the categories of “Matthew 23” and the “Eschatological Discourse.”

several observations to support a Sinai typology. First, Matthew’s ὄρος motif (cf. 4:8; 15:29–39; 17:1–8; 24:3; 28:16) is thought to invoke the mountain in Exodus, and recounted in Deuteronomy, where Moses received the Law. Second, the phrase Matthew uses to refer to Jesus ascending the mountain, ἀνέβη εἰς τὸ ὄρος (5:1), occurs twenty-four times in some form (ἀναβαίνω + εἰς τὸ ὄρος) in the LXX, eighteen of which are used of Moses in the Pentateuch. Third, that Jesus “sits” (καθίσαντος) on the mountain evokes Deut 9:9 MT recounting how Moses “remained” (שָׁם) or “sat,” on the mountain “forty days and forty nights.” Fourth, concluding the SM (8:1), the phrase Matthew uses to refer to Jesus descending the mountain (καταβάντος δὲ αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄρους) parallels Exod 34:29 LXX recounting Moses’ descent from Sinai (καταβαίνοντος δὲ αὐτοῦ ἐκ τοῦ ὄρους).

Regarding Matt 5:5, 8 (Two Beatitudes), although he resists any dogmatic claims, Allison observes that exegetical history has often linked Moses not only with one who is “meek” (πραΰς – 5:5, cf. Num 12:3) but also with the one who shall “see God” (5:8, cf. Exod 33). Allison suggests that the link between Jesus and Moses as one who is “meek” is even more manifest in Matthew’s later uses of πραΰς (cf. 11:29; 21:5). Strengthening the Mosaic typology here is the allusive link, noted in the NA, between Matt 5:5 (κληρονομήσουσιν τὴν γῆν) and Deut 1:8 (κληρονομήσατε τὴν γῆν) and Deut 1:21 (τὴν γῆν ἀναβάντες κληρονομήσατε). These Deuteronomic texts feature Moses’ role as one who had promised Israel inheritance of the land.

In Matthew 5:17–48 (Jesus and the Torah), Allison believes the Moses typology is extensive. Matthew is only being conventional in portraying Jesus as another lawgiver like

24 Allison, The New Moses, 174–75. Of these 8 occur in Deut 1:24, 41, 43; 5:5; 9:9; 10:1, 3; 32:49.
25 Ibid., 175. For this translation of שָׁם (“sat”) see b. Meg. 21a.
26 Ibid., 181.
Moses who “receives the old revelation of Sinai plus additional, new revelation.” The so-called “antitheses” (5:21–48), which Allison believes is a misnomer, do not overturn the Torah, but stand beside it and supplement it. In so doing, they illustrate what is expressly stated in the preamble to this section of the SM (5:17–20), namely, that Jesus has come not to abolish but to fulfill the Law (5:17–18). Allison has no problem, then, speaking with some qualification of a “messianic Torah,” by which he means “. . . the First Evangelist interpreted the Messiah’s teaching as an eschatological law against which the first law is to be measured.” A notable emphasis of this messianic Torah is the way in which the Law is interiorized. A comparison of several of the antitheses show this to be true: anger ← murder (5:21–22); lust ← adultery (5:27–28). Allison points to Jer 31:31–34 as a key subtext for this reading of the SM.

In Matt 7:13–27 (The SM’s Closing Triad), Allison suggests five reasons this section of the SM might invoke the memory of Moses from Deuteronomy. First, both contain warning passages (7:13–14, cf. Deut 28–30) directed against those who will fail to obey the Law. Second, the “two way” theme is featured in both Matthew (7:13–14) and Deuteronomy (11:26; 30:1, 15). The NA, for example, identifies an allusive link between Matt 7:14 (ἡ ὁδὸς ἡ ἀπάγουσα εἰς τὴν ζωὴν) and Deut 30:15 (τὴν ζωὴν καὶ τὸν θάνατον). Third, Matt 7:15–23 and Deut 13; 18 both address the issue of false prophets. Fourth, there are several semantic links between Jesus’ words in Matt 7:24–27 (Πᾶς οὖν ὁστὶς ἀκούει μου τοὺς λόγους τοῦτους καὶ ποιεῖ αὐτοὺς) and Deut 31:12 (ἀκούσονται ποιεῖν πάντας τοὺς λόγους τοῦ νόμου τοῦτου). Fifth, Jesus’ “two builders” metaphor in Matt 7:24–27 (ὁικοδόμησε) links semantically with Deut 28:15–30 (οἰκοδομήσεις).

---

27 Ibid., 185 (emphasis original). The degree to which Jesus’ interpretation of the six OT laws is “new” is tempered by how some of his interpretations are implied in the OT. Perhaps Richard Hays, “The Gospel of Matthew: Reconfigured Torah,” HTS 61 (2001), 165–90, best captures this thrust with his “reconfigured” Torah.
28 Allison, The New Moses, 185.
Finally, the recurring transitional formula in Matt 7:28–29 (Καὶ ἐγένετο δότε ἑτέλεσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς, cf. also 11:1; 13:53, 19:1, 26:1) is thought to invoke a similarly repeated transitional formula in Deut 31:1, 24, and 32:45 (καὶ συνετέλεσεν Μωυσῆς). Allison, draws attention to the pervasive use of such formulas across the OT.²⁹ For several reasons Deuteronomy surfaces as a potential subtext for Matt 7:28–29. As in Deuteronomy, the first part of Matthew’s formula is more stable than the latter part, yet all of the formulas follow the same basic form.³⁰ In addition, although one might hope for more shared language, the phrase τοὺς λόγους τούτους occurs in three Matthean texts (7:28; 19:1; 26:1) and two Deuteronomic texts (31:1; 24). Finally, that the broader macrostructure of Matthew’s Gospel alternates narrative and discourse betrays structural affinities with Exodus-Deuteronomy where law and narrative often alternate.

In Matt 21:1-26:2 Allison finds a number of Mosaic texts. For example, in his portrayal of Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem (21:1–17), Matthew presents Jesus to be “the prophet-king like Moses.”³¹ Included here are a few of his more persuasive arguments. First, the use of the definite article by those who hail him as “the prophet” (ὁ προφήτης, 21:11) aligns with the general expectation of a prophet like Moses from subtexts like Deut 18:15. Second, the conflation of the kingly (21:5) and prophetic (21:11) offices of Jesus here parallels extra-biblical tradition depicting Moses as a prophet-king.³² Third, Matthew’s appeal to Zech 9:9 (Matt 21:5) presents Jesus as “meek” (πραῢς), a trait that, as argued above in Matt 5:5 and 11:29, was conferred upon Moses based upon Num 12:3. Fourth, Matthew’s observation in 21:15 that the religious officials saw τὰ θαυμάσια ἃ ἐποίησεν parallels the final verse of the Pentateuch: τὰ θαυμάσια. . . ἃ

²⁹ Ibid., 192, notes the variation of the basic form: “These are” + type of teaching + agent of teaching in Lev 26:46; 27:34; Num 30:16; 36:13; Deut 31:1, 24; 32:45.
³⁰ Ibid., 193: Introductory element (καὶ in all but one case) + (συν)τελέσω + subject (Jesus/Moses) + type of authoritative speech delivered.
³¹ Ibid., 253.
³² Ibid., 249.
ἐποίησεν Μωυσῆς (Deut 34:12). Finally, the image of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey (Matt 21:2, 5, 7) parallels Moses’ journey back to Egypt in Exod 4:20, a Mosaic subtext also standing behind the infancy narrative (cf. Matt 1:18–2:23).

Regarding the Mosaic motif in the ED (Matthew 23–25), it should be noted that Allison claims, at least for Matt 23 that, “the concern of the passage lies elsewhere.” Yet Allison may have too quickly dismissed a Mosaic typology. First, if the parity between the SM and the ED is taken into account, then the initial macarisms (5:3–12), together with the woes of the ED (23:13–36), may be have been intended to invoke the “blessings” and “curses” of Deuteronomy (e.g., Deut 30:1) and, hence, the character of Moses. The evidence for such a conclusion would depend both on the structure and extent of the ED, and its relationship to the SM within the unfolding plot of the Gospel, which will be addressed more fully below. Accordingly, an ED spanning Matt 23–25 strengthens the plausibility of a Mosaic typology in ch. 23. Second, among the many Deuteronomic allusions in Matthew 23 noted in chapter four above, one in particular carries peculiar Mosaic overtones. Jesus’ concluding lament over Jerusalem (23:37), which likens his compassion for Israel to a hen who gathers her chicks under her wings” (ὑπὸ τὰς πτέρυγας), invokes similar imagery from the Song of Moses (Deut 32:11) where it is an eagle that “hovers over its young . . . spread[ing] his wings (τὰς πτέρυγας).”

Allison is more optimistic about a Mosaic typology in Matt 24–25. First, as in Matt 5:1–2 and 15:29, where the Mosaic theme is evident, Jesus here sits (καθημένου) upon a mountain (ὄρους) reflecting upon, in this scene, the “the end of the age” (συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος, 24:3). Insight into the future was, according to extrabiblical tradition, also granted to Moses on Sinai and Nebo. Second, a comparable scene occurs in the Gospel’s concluding pericope (Matt

---

33 Ibid., 253.
34 Ibid., 254. Eg., Ezekiel’s Exagoge; Jub 1:4; Ep. Aristeas 139; LAB 19:10; 14–16; 2 Bar 59:4–11.
28:16–20) where upon ὄρος (28:16) Jesus refers to the συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος. Despite a few grammatical issue, Allison leaves open the possibility of Mosaic features here if only because “those who read and reread Matthew will link 24:3 with at least three other passages, in all of which Jesus is like Moses.”

Third, one should not discount a few key Deuteronomic allusions. For example, in the closing transitional formula of the ED, Matthew observes: “when Jesus had finished πάντας τοὺς λόγους τούτους” (26:1). Such an editorial comment, with the peculiar addition of πάντας, matches the concluding editorial comment in Deut 31:1 observing that Moses “spoke all these words [πάντας τοὺς λόγους τούτους] to Israel.”

*Maρτύριον as a Function of Covenant Lawsuit in Matthew*

If Jesus stands in Matthew as a new Moses-like covenant mediator, then is he also to be understood in this role as summoning witnesses? The witness theme has not gone unnoticed by NT scholars. Allison A. Trites, in his comprehensive work *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, traces the μαρτ- word group across the NT. Subsequent studies on individual corpora have consistently appealed to his conclusion that, “The principle background for the New Testament concept of witness . . . is to be found in the Old Testament lawsuit.”

In what follows, it will be shown that the juridical terminology of the OT lawsuit also stands behind Matthew’s use of the μαρτ- word group. Coupled with the preceding discussion of Matthew’s Mosaic typological structure, then, I will suggest that Matthew’s Jesus does indeed summon witnesses as a new Moses-like covenant mediator. In arguing this point I will trace the witness motif across the First Gospel taking account of the more salient texts that feature the μαρτ- word group and which have greater bearing on our target passages (Matt 5:18; 24:35). In addition, the

35 Ibid., 255.
significance of the μαρτ- word group notwithstanding, any assessment of Matthew’s forensic interests must also account for the juridical connotations associated not only with his use of the δικ- and κριν- word groups, but also relevant imagery associated with the OT lawsuit.

Regarding the lexical data in Matthew as it relates to the μαρτ- word group, the following chart summarizes the data and includes, for the sake of comparison, other NT writers.37

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>μαρτυρία</th>
<th>μαρτυρίαν</th>
<th>μαρτυρέω</th>
<th>μαρτυρίας</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(“testimony”)</td>
<td>(“testimony/witness”)</td>
<td>(“bear witness”)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark = 1x</td>
<td>Mark = 3x</td>
<td>Mark = n/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke = 2x</td>
<td>Luke = 1x</td>
<td>Luke = n/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John = n/a</td>
<td>John = 14x</td>
<td>John = 33x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revelation = 5x</td>
<td>Revelation = 9x</td>
<td>Revelation = 4x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts = 13x</td>
<td>Acts = 2x</td>
<td>Acts = 11x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of NT = 12x</td>
<td>Rest of NT = 9x</td>
<td>Rest of NT = 8x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of NT = 26x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ψευδομαρτυρία</th>
<th>ψευδομαρτυρία</th>
<th>καταμαρτυρέω</th>
<th>ψευδομαρτυρέω</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(“false testimony”)</td>
<td>(“to bear witness against”)</td>
<td>(“to bear false witness”)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark = n/a</td>
<td>Mark = n/a</td>
<td>Mark = 1x</td>
<td>Mark = 3x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John = n/a</td>
<td>John = n/a</td>
<td>John = n/a</td>
<td>John = n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revelation = n/a</td>
<td>Revelation = n/a</td>
<td>Revelation = n/a</td>
<td>Revelation = n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts = n/a</td>
<td>Acts = n/a</td>
<td>Acts = n/a</td>
<td>Acts = n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of NT = 1x</td>
<td>Rest of NT = n/a</td>
<td>Rest of NT = n/a</td>
<td>Rest of NT = n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From this lexical data it becomes immediately apparent why the witness theme in the Johannine literature has drawn such attention.38 The noun μαρτυρία (“testimony”) and verb μαρτυρέω (“to bear witness) are especially prominent in John and Revelation relative to the other Gospels, and indeed the rest of the NT. Nevertheless, Matthew’s twelve occurrences of the μαρτ- word group

---

37 This chart is adapted from, Trites, The New Testament Concept of Witness, 66–77, and is updated with reference to the NA28. Two other rare forms in the Gospels include: διμαρτύρομαι (“to warn”), found 1x in Luke, 9x in Acts, and 5x in the rest of the NT, and συνεπιμαρτυρέω (“to testify at the same time”), found 1x in Hebrews.

betray his own forensic interests. Also notable is Matthew’s peculiar interest, relative to rest of the NT, in false testimony manifest in several cognates featuring the ψευδο- prefix. 39

Regarding the lexical data associated with the δικ- and κριν- word groups, the following chart summarizes the data: 40

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>δικαιόω (“justify; vindicate”)</th>
<th>δίκαιος (“righteous”)</th>
<th>δικαιοσύνη (“righteousness”)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matt 11:19</td>
<td>Matt 20:4</td>
<td>Matt 3:15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 12:37</td>
<td>Matt 23:28</td>
<td>Matt 5:6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 9:13</td>
<td>Matt 23:29</td>
<td>Matt 5:10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>καταδικάζω (“condemn”)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 10:41 (3x)</td>
<td>Matt 23:35 (2x)</td>
<td>Matt 5:20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 13:17</td>
<td>Matt 25:37</td>
<td>Matt 6:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 12:7</td>
<td>Matt 25:46</td>
<td>Matt 6:33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 12:37</td>
<td>Matt 27:19</td>
<td>Matt 21:32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>κρίνω (“to judge”)</th>
<th>κρίσις (“court; judgment”)</th>
<th>κρίμα (“lawsuit; judgment”)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matt 5:40</td>
<td>Matt 5:21</td>
<td>Matt 7:2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 7:1</td>
<td>Matt 5:22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 7:2 (2x)</td>
<td>Matt 10:15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 19:28</td>
<td>Matt 11:22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Matt 12:24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Matt 12:18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Matt 20:18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

39 Matthew’s peculiar interest in false testimony is manifest, as might be expected, association with Jesus’ trial (Matt 26:3–28:20.).

40 This chart was adapted from Bandy, The Prophetic Lawsuit, 59–94 and Benno Przybylski, Righteousness in Matthew and His World of Thought (SNTSMS 41; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 77–104. The following survey of the δικ- and κριν- word groups will, by necessity, be selective giving priority to those terms found in forensic contexts.

41 I will assume the consensus view that has emerged since the seminal work of Przybylski who argued that δικαιοσύνη, and its cognates, refers, primarily, to “the demand of God on man to live according to a certain norm, the law” (p.105) This would include both moral and juridical connotations without denying that the term could have different nuances based on a given context. Hagner, “Law, Righteousness, and Discipleship in Matthew,” WW 18 (1998): 367, for example, argues for the sense of “eschatological ‘justice’” in Matt 5:6, and a reference to the “history of salvation” in Matthew’s use of the term in 3:15 and 21:32 (e.g., “the way of righteousness” in the latter).

42 The two noun forms, κρίμα (m.) and κρίσις (f.), derive from the verb κρίνω, meaning “to judge.” Cf. Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains (New York: UBS, 1988), 1:552–555, where κρίμα is included within a broad semantic domain labeled “Courts and Legal Procedures” within which it occupies the narrower subdomain of “Judge, Condemn, Acquit.” It is defined as: “to decide a question of legal right or wrong, and thus determine the innocence or guilt of the accused and assign appropriate punishment or retribution – ‘to decide a legal question, to act as judge, making a legal decision, to arrive at a verdict, to try a case’ (in the passive ‘to stand trial’).”
Some general patterns are worth noting before assessing select texts featuring forensic language. It is striking, for example, how variations of the μαρτ-, δικ-, and κριν-word groups cluster around three particular sections of Matthew’s Gospel. They appear 13x in Matt 4:17–7:29 featuring the SM and Jesus’ most sustained teaching on the Law, 17x in Matt 11:2–16:20 where Jesus’ identity necessitates a response from his listeners, and 12x in Matt 21:1–26:2 featuring the fifth discourse and the climax of the conflict between Jesus and the religious officials. The focus of Matthew’s forensic language, then, generally follows the contours of the conflict between Jesus and the religious officials. If this trajectory is comparable to an OT covenant lawsuit, then the controversy culminates in Matt 22:46, and the subsequent woes of Matt 23:13–36, where Jesus is portrayed as winning the debate and reducing his opponents to silence. Such imagery has, according to Trites, a parallel with the Fourth Gospel and conceptual antecedents in Isaiah 40–55 where the pagan nations are brought to silence following the testimony of YHWH.43 Following this juridical encounter with the religious officials, the trial of Jesus takes center stage where the silence of Jesus is notable (cf. 26:63; 27:12). His refusal to participate as a self-attesting witness is explicable only in light of the implicit witness of his own mission and vocation up to that point in the Gospel, and the seemingly even more persuasive μαρτυρία made explicit in the disciple’s enduring, and expansive, vocation (10:18; 24:14, cf. 28:18–20). This over-arching lawsuit trajectory should, of course, be evident from a closer reading of relevant Matthean texts.

It is fitting that OT lawsuit language would be prominent in Matt 4:17–7:29, which also features Matthew’s most sustained interest in Jesus as a new Moses-like covenant mediator. While the μαρτ- word group is not explicitly featured in this section, the witness motif is implied

by the author’s use of vocabulary from the δικ-, and κριν-word groups, and imagery associated with the OT lawsuit across the SM.

Regarding the δικ- word group, five of Matthew’s seven distinctive uses of δικαιοσύνην appear in the SM. It is featured twice in the list of macarisms (5:3–12) within the SM’s Introduction (5:3–16). Structurally, the term completes the first four macarisms (vv. 3–6) addressing kingdom attitudes with a reference to those who πεινῶντες καὶ διψῶντες τὴν δικαιοσύνην (5:6). It serves the same function for the next four macarisms (vv. 7–12) addressing kingdom conduct with a reference to those who δεδιωγμένοι ἐνεκεν δικαιοσύνης (5:10).44 The term then appears one more time in these initial verses of the SM in Jesus’ implicit indictment of the religious officials where he claims that: έὰν μὴ περισσεύσῃ ὑμῶν ἡ δικαιοσύνη πλεῖον τῶν γραμματέων καὶ Φαρισαίων, οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθητε εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν. (5:20). Two other occurrences of δικαιοσύνην appear in the final section of the SM’s Core (5:21–7:11) focusing on “Horizontal Righteousness” (6:19–7:11). Matthew 6:1, for example, warns against practicing one’s δικαιοσύνην before men, while in 6:33 Jesus encourages the disciple’s to ζητεῖτε δὲ πρῶτον τὴν βασιλείαν [τοῦ θεοῦ] καὶ τὴν δικαιοσύνην αὐτοῦ. While of these five occurrences Hagner believes that the reference to δικαιοσύνην in Matt 5:6 alone should be understood, not as personal righteousness, but eschatological “justice,”45 it is perhaps better to read all five of these occurrences in the SM as conceptually related, with the reference in Matt 5:20 having a controlling hermeneutical role.46

46 Przybylski, Righteousness in Matthew, 97, who appeals to the same observation in Bernhard Weiss, Das Mattheusevangelium und seine Lucas-Parallelen (Halle: Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1876.), 202. This is not, however, to give up any eschatological dimension for as Dumbrell, “The Logic,” 7, states, “eschatological gift meant for Jesus ethical display.”
Regarding the meaning of δικαιοσύνην in Matt 5:20, then, in his detailed contextual study of the term in the SM, Przybylski concludes,

Δικαιοσύνην is a term which refers to conduct according to a norm which in this case is the law. Both the disciples and the scribes and Pharisees have righteousness insofar as both groups live according to the demands of the law. This, however, does not mean that the righteousness of the two groups is identical. Jesus demands that the righteousness of the disciples is to exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. This does not mean that the disciples are to live according to a different law but that they are to live according to a different interpretation of the law. . .47

Evident in this description is a fundamentally moral and juridical component of δικαιοσύνην. But it is, as Hagner has observed, “[A] new way that rests upon the true meaning of Torah now delivered by the Messiah.”48 Accordingly, a “Messianic Torah,” as Allison posits, remains an appropriate shorthand.49 While the disciple’s righteousness is primarily in view here (cf. ὑμῶν), it is the righteousness of the religious officials against which Jesus’ notion of greater righteousness is compared. From an OT lawsuit perspective, then, an implicit controversy is established between Jesus, as a Moses-like covenant mediator, and the religious officials who emerge later in the Gospel as representative of unbelieving Israel.50

Regarding the κριν-word group, the theme of judgment features prominently across the SM. The moral and juridical norm of Jesus’ Messianic Torah, in contrast to the inferior

47 Przybylski, Righteousness in Matthew, 87.
48 Donald Hagner, Matthew 1–13 (WBC 33a; Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1993), 109. It is just this point where the present study parts ways with Przybylski who goes on to maintain that Jesus’ interpretation of the law includes “an extremely meticulous and strict interpretation which appears to be based on a principle related to making a fence around Torah.”
49 Allison, The New Moses, 185.
50 It is in light of this context of Matt 5:20 that the other occurrences of δικαιοσύνην in the SM can be understood. Jesus’ Messianic Torah, then, is the object of the disciple’s hunger in 5:6, and the standard for which they are persecuted in 5:10, a persecution that will come ultimately at the hands of the religious officials (cf. 10:17; 23:34). Jesus’ Messianic Torah has, nevertheless, a visible component that if left unchecked could alter one’s motives, hence the warning to προσέχετε δὲ τὴν δικαιοσύνην ὑμῶν μὴ ποιεῖτε ἐμπρόσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων (6:1). It is no coincidence that Jesus condemns the religious officials in prophetic fashion for this same vice in the woes of Matt 23:23ff. Yet what 6:1 states negatively, 6:33 states positively holding out reward for those who ζητεῖτε δὲ πρῶτον τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν δικαιοσύνην αὐτοῦ. In all these occurrences of δικαιοσύνην, Jesus sets up the moral and judicial norm of his Messianic Torah in contrast to the inferior δικαιοσύνην of the religious officials.
δικαιοσύνην of the religious officials, is still in view (cf. 5:20). Thus, the very first antithesis (5:21–22), featuring two references to τῇ κρίσει for ὁ ὀργιζόμενος τῷ ἀδελελφῷ αὐτοῦ (5:22), betrays a way in which the religious officials kept the letter of the law (i.e., murder) but failed in its Spirit (i.e., hate). In addition, the contrast with the inferior δικαιοσύνην of the religious officials is much clearer in the culminating section on judging others in Matt 7:1–5 where Jesus states: Μὴ κρίνετε, ἵνα μὴ κριθῆτε· ἐν ᾧ γὰρ κρίματι κριθήσεσθε (7:1–2a). Jesus’ scathing reference to ὑποκριτά (7:5) anticipates his later indictment of the religious officials in the ED (cf. ὑποκριταί, 23:23ff.).

The vocabulary from the δικ-, and κριν- word groups across the SM presupposes a forensic context. More specifically, Matthew establishes an implicit controversy between Jesus, as a Moses-like covenant mediator, and the religious officials who have an inferior δικαιοσύνην (5:20). From an OT lawsuit perspective, then, one would also expect other imagery such as blessings and curses and covenant witnesses. That the macarisms (5:3–12), together with the woes of 23:13–36, are comparable to covenant “blessings” and “curses” is by no means a foregone conclusion. I will argue below that such a conclusion is plausible. Yet if Matthew’s plot has any bearing on the Gospel’s unfolding logic, he may have intended for such imagery to become clear only after one encounters the woes of the ED.

Regarding witnesses, heaven and earth in Matt 5:18 are likely candidates based on their proximity to the controversy in Matt 5:20. In the OT, such cosmic entities were invoked by virtue of their permanence. Yet their “passing away” (παρέλθῃ) in the present context suggests that Matthew envisions an even more enduring witness. That Jesus’ disciples fulfill such a role is implied in the unfolding logic of the SM in vv. 3–16 leading up to the implicit controversy in Matt 5:20. Two observations are warranted here. First, the prophetic-like suffering described in
the final two macarisms (5:10–12) establishes a covenantal framework for kingdom discipleship. Second, the covenantal overtones of the “salt” and “light” metaphors (5:13–16) invest the disciple’s vocation with a witnessing function.51 This function is implicit but anticipatory of the overt reference to disciple’s witnessing function in Matt 10:18, to which we now turn.

Standing at the approximate center of Matt 8:1–11:1 is the Mission Discourse (10:1–42), which is replete with forensic overtones featuring terminology from the δικ-, κριν- and μαρτ- word groups. Jesus sends his disciples to τὰ πρόβατα τὰ ἀπολωλότα οἶκου Ἰσραήλ (10:6), and those who reject their message will incur a sentence more severe than Sodom and Gomorrah ἐν ἡμέρᾳ κρίσεως (10:15). While such an indictment implies a consummate judgment, the role of the disciples as preachers of the kingdom of heaven (10:7) until that time retains a forensic connotation. Central to the Mission Discourse, then, is the explicit depiction of the vocation of the disciples as prophetic witnesses, a theme that reaches back to Matt 4:17–7:29 and the prophetic-like suffering of the disciples in the SM’s introductory verses.

Regarding this prophetic character of the disciple’s vocation, the first indication of such a role is implied in the symbolic act of shaking the dust off their feet following their rejection by a house / city (10:14).52 It is made explicit, however, in the concluding verses of the discourse: ὁ δεχόμενος προφήτην εἰς ὄνομα προφήτου μισθὸν προφήτου λήμψεται, καὶ ὁ δεχόμενος δίκαιον εἰς ὄνομα δικαίου μισθὸν δικαίου λήμψεται (10:41). Here Jesus makes the reception of the disciples equal to that of his own reception (10:40), both of which are comparable to a prophet’s reception.53 Yet these verses also feature two occurrences of the δικ- word group in the pairing of προφήτης with that of a δίκαιος (man), a combination that will reoccur later in Matt 13:17 and

53 France, Matthew, 413.
In the present context, Gundry suggests that the idiom “denotes acceptance of Jesus’ messengers as prophets and righteous men,” where the latter refers to righteousness in conduct.⁵⁴

Regarding the witnessing function of the disciples, in the second of three occurrences of μαρτύριον, Jesus intimates the disciple’s fate claiming they will be brought before governors and kings: εἰς μαρτύριον αὐτοῖς καὶ τοῖς ἔθνεσιν (10:18). Trites observes, “As the witnesses in the Old Testament ‘stand’ before their judges and opponents, so the disciples of Jesus will ‘stand’ before kings, councils and governors.”⁵⁵ This reference to the disciples suffering μαρτύριον, along with the prophetic character of their vocation, makes explicit what was only implied in the SM’s final macarisms (5:10–12) and the “salt” and “light” metaphors (5:13–16). Yet in addition to linking intra-textually with the SM, the universal note manifest in τοῖς ἔθνεσιν anticipates the πᾶσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν of the ED (24:14), where μαρτύριον is explicitly linked with τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας, and the πάντα τὰ ἔθνη of the Great Commission (28:19). Despite the absence of explicit μαρτυρ- language in the latter, the concept of witness is still implied.⁵⁶ This conflation of the disciples’ preaching and witnessing roles is manifest in the relative ease with which Matthew is able to move from Jesus’ mandate to preach (κηρύσσετε, 10:7) to that of witnessing (μαρτύριον, 10:18) in the present Mission Discourse.

The seventeen occurrences of various juridical terms in Matt 11:2–16:20 is the most of any section in Matthew. His most sustained use of forensic language has been reserved for Jesus’ response to the hostility of the Pharisees (11:25–12:45). In the context of the Sabbath

---

⁵⁴ See Gundry, Matthew, 202, who also states that it may also carry the connotation of “righteousness as subject matter in teaching.”
⁵⁵ Trites, The New Testament Concept of Witness, 184. While H. Strathmann, “Μάρτυς,” TDNT, 4: 503, suggests that εἰς μαρτύριον αὐτοῖς has in view the Last Judgment and, thus, refers to incriminating evidence against their opponents, Trites agrees with Cranfield, The Gospel According to Saint Mark (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 397–98, who maintains that “it is surely better to allow for the various ideas which are involved in the witness-imagery rather than to insist on choosing between ‘witness to’ and ‘evidence against.’”
controversy (12:1–13), for example, Jesus restates the axiom from Matt 9:13, ἔλεος θέλω καὶ οὐ θυσίαν, and claims that if his opponents had known what this means they would not have κατεδικάσατε τούς ἀναιτίους (12:7). The same δικ- word is used, along with two other forensic terms, at the end of the subsequent controversy over the alleged demonic source of Jesus’ exorcising power (12:22–37). In a scathing rebuke of the religious officials, Jesus states: ὅτι πᾶν ῥῆμα ἀργὸν ὃ λαλήσουσιν οἱ ἁνθρώποι ἀποδώσουσιν περὶ αὐτοῦ λόγον ἐν ἡμέρᾳ κρίσεως, ἐκ γὰρ τὸν λόγον σου δικαιοθήσῃ, καὶ ἐκ τὸν λόγον σου καταδικάσῃ (12:36–37). Trites sees in this Beelzebul conflict a controversy comparable to the debates in John’s Gospel, both of which have conceptual antecedents in the OT lawsuit.57 Across these conflict stories, then, is a series of arguments and counter-arguments that develop the implicit controversy established in Matt 5:20 over righteousness as defined by Jesus and in contrast to that of the religious officials. The recurring axiom, ἔλεος θέλω καὶ οὐ θυσίαν (9:13; 12:7), where θυσίαν is equivalent to law-keeping,58 encompasses Jesus’ notion of greater righteousness and is the moral and juridical norm against which his opponents will be judged.59

Forensic language from the δικ-, κριν- and ματ- word groups clusters heavily across Matt 21:1–26:2 featuring the climax of the controversy between Jesus and the religious officials. Regarding the δικ- word group, the last of Matthew’s seven distinctive references to δικαιοσύνη appears in Matt 21:32 where Jesus appeals to John the Baptist in response to the challenge of his own authority by the religious officials (21:23–27). Jesus states, ἦλθεν γὰρ Ἰωάννης πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἐν ὁδῷ δικαιοσύνης, καὶ οὐκ ἐπιστεύσατε αὐτῷ. Przybylski maintains that, as in the other seven

57 Trites, The New Testament Concept of Witness, 190
58 France, Matthew, 355; Przybylski, Righteousness in Matthew, 191–92.
59 Three occurrences of δίκαιος appear in the embedded Parable Discourse (13:1–53). Matt 13:17 has been mentioned above by virtue of its paring of προφήτης with δίκαιος. The other two are notable for the governing contexts of judgment (13:43) and contrast with the “wicked” (13:49). In addition, one other occurrence of κατακρίνω appears in 20:18 in the last of three passion predictions in narrative block five.
δικαιοσύνη passages, ὡς δικαιοσύνη means “conduct which is in agreement to the will of God.” If so, then one might link John’s ὡς δικαιοσύνη with Jesus’ recurring axiom, ἔλεος θέλω καὶ οὔ θυσίαν (cf. 9:13; 12:7), and in contrast to the inferior δικαιοσύνη of the religious officials (cf. 5:20). The subsequent occurrences of δίκαιος, all of which are in the ED, also seem to follow this same pattern. In Matt 23:28, the religious official’s appearance of being δίκαιος, although attained through obedience to the law, remains only external. Three other references to δίκαιος in the ED (23:29, 35) can be considered together insofar as they juxtapose the inferior δικαιοσύνη of the religious officials with “those who were properly righteous in the past.” For example, they κοσμεῖτε τὰ μνημεῖα τῶν δικαίων (23:29), where δικαίων is parallel to προφητῶν. Their culpability is expanded to include πᾶν αἷμα δίκαιον ἐκχυννόμενον ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς (23:35).

Regarding the κρίν- word group, two occurrences of κρίσις appear in the ED but with differing connotations. First, Matt 23:23 refers to τὴν κρίσιν, carrying here the more positive connotation of “justice,” as a weightier provision of the law that the religious officials should have observed without neglecting the others. This accusation indicates that in Jesus’ recurring axiom, ἔλεος θέλω καὶ οὔ θυσίαν (cf. 9:13; 12:7), the notion of θυσίαν, understood as law-keeping, is not to be discarded but prioritized. Second, carrying the more negative connotation of “judgment,” Matt 23:33 records Jesus’ scathing query: πῶς φύγητε ἀπὸ τῆς κρίσεως τῆς γεέννης. Such a sentence betrays the gravity of their failure to attain the greater righteousness (cf. 5:20).

---

60 Przybylski, Righteousness in Matthew, 94–96; contra, Hagner, “Law, Righteousness, and Discipleship,” 367, who prefers to see a reference to salvation history here (cf. also 3:15).

61 Two references to δίκαιος appear in Matt 25:37; 46 and deserve passing comment. According to Przybylski, Righteousness in Matthew, 103, they are the exceptions to the normal use of the term as referring to those who obey the law in that they refer to the Christian righteous who will inherit eternal life.

62 Ibid., 102.

63 Ibid., 101.

64 France, Matthew, 873.
Regarding witnesses, one cannot fully appreciate the culminating use of the μαρτ- word group in this section without noting the high points of the implicit controversy across the First Gospel, and the explicit use of the witness motif since Matt 5:20. Based on contextual evidence it was Jesus’ disciples who, in the SM, emerged as the more enduring witnesses given the “passing away” (παρέλθη) of heaven and earth. This witnessing function was anticipatory of the explicit characterization of the vocation of the disciples as prophetic / suffering witnesses in the Mission Discourse (10:18). In the present narrative block the “passing away” (παρέλθη, 24:35) of heaven and earth is again in close proximity to the controversy between Jesus and the religious officials. As in the SM, so also here, the author envisions an even more enduring μαρτύριον (24:14) in light of the impermanence of heaven and earth, in this case the εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας. Yet this is to get ahead of the narrative given that the witness motif appears earlier in the ED.

In the midst of the woes of Matt 23:13–36 it is the religious officials who are portrayed as self-incriminating witnesses insofar as they μαρτυρεῖτε ἑαυτοῖς ὅτι υἱοί ἐστε τῶν φονευσάντων τοὺς προφήτας (23:31). Trites observes that such an indictment, “insists on the objectionable type of witness, i.e. the silent participator who consents by being a passive spectator.”65 By their treatment of YHWH’s prophets, the religious officials represent a history of cumulative guilt that has characterized unbelieving Israel.

Regarding the author’s third and final explicit use of μαρτύριον in Matt 24:14 (cf. 8:4; 10:18), Jesus claims that a definitive marker of τὸ τέλος is when κηρυχθήσεται τοῦτο τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ οἰκουμένῃ εἰς μαρτύριον πᾶσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν. Following Joseph Grassi, a number of Matthean scholars have proposed that Matthew’s peculiar reference

---

to τοῦτο τὸ εὐαγγέλιον is modeled after similar expressions in the book of Deuteronomy that refer to “this law written in this book” (Deut 28:58, cf. also, 28:6; 29:20, 27; 30:10, 31:9, 24, 26). That Jesus is setting his own Messianic Torah alongside Deuteronomy’s unique claim to be authoritative Torah is manifest in the function of each as εἰς μαρτύριον in their respective contexts. In Deut 31:25 (LXX) for example, Moses states: Λαβόντες τὸ βιβλίον τοῦ νόμου τούτου θήσετε αὐτὸ ἐκ πλαγίων τῆς κιβωτοῦ τῆς διαθήκης κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ ύμῶν, καὶ ἔσται ἐκεῖ ἐν σοὶ εἰς μαρτύριον. That Jesus is setting up his own Messianic Torah as even more enduring than Deuteronomy is evident in how it is juxtaposed with the passing away of heaven and earth in Matt 24:35, a text that appropriately summarizes the entirety of Matt 24:4–35.

One might ask, however, why Matthew shifts the witnessing referent from Jesus’ disciples (10:18) to τὸ εὐαγγέλιον. Yet multiple witnesses were a standard feature of the OT lawsuit form. Deuteronomy, for example, features no less than three witnesses: heaven and earth (e.g., 4:26), the Song of Moses (31:19, 21), and the book of the Law (31:26). Yet for Matthew, it is actually by virtue of the disciple’s vocation as prophetic / suffering witnesses that the εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας is not only more enduring, but also more expansive. The latter is evident in how τοῖς ἔθνεσιν recurs in three texts featuring witnessing imagery (i.e., 10:18, 24:14, and 28:19). While the Great Commission (28:19) lacks explicit μαρτ- language, the link between preaching and witnessing is manifest in Matthew’s conflation of the two tasks in the Mission Discourse (κηρύσσετε, 10:7; μαρτύριον, 10:18) and the ED (κηρύχοθησαται /μαρτύριον, 24:14).

In summary, the witness motif is indeed a vibrant image across the First Gospel. This important theme is carried along by various cognates associated with the μαρτ- word group, behind which stands the juridical terminology of the OT covenant lawsuit, as well as juridical...

---

connotations associated with the δικ- and κριν- word groups. There is, then, a discernable lawsuit trajectory across Matthew’s Gospel that includes an implicit controversy with the religious officials over their inferior δικαιοσύνη. The highpoints of this controversy surface in the arguments/counter-arguments of Matt 11:2–16:20, and the climax of the conflict in Matt 21:1–26:2. In the SM and ED, which frame the controversy, the author envisions an even more enduring μαρτύριον than heaven and earth, which are passing away (5:18; 24:35). That witness is specifically identified as τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας (24:14) secured by the disciple’s vocation as prophetic / suffering witnesses (10:18; 28:19). Coupled with Matthew’s Mosaic typological structure, then, it is apparent that Matthew’s Jesus does indeed summon witnesses as a new Moses-like covenant mediator. Yet it remains to be seen whether in this role Jesus’ reference to macarisms and woes in the SM and ED are, in any way, comparable to OT blessings and curses.

*Makárion and Oúai as Substitutes for OT Blessings and Curses in Matthew*

It was, among others, N. T. Wright who posited a roughly chiastic structure to Matthew’s five discourses with the parallel arrangement of the blessings and woes deliberately stylized so as to invoke the blessings and curses of the concluding chapters of Deuteronomy.67 Although the present author believes that Wright’s argument is essentially correct, it has too hastily conflated the OT concepts of blessing / curse with macarism / woe. That μακάριος and οὐαί are distinct from, yet fitting substitutes for, Deuteronomic blessings and curses will be argued based upon the near and far context in which these Matthean concepts are located. In so doing, it will seek to account for: 1) the recent lexical work on the OT concepts of “blessing,” variously rendering בָ러 (e.g., Gen 9:26)68 or אָשָׁר (e.g., Ps 1:1), “curse” (e.g., קלל – Deut 27:15), and “woe” (וֹאֶ, מָלָל).

---

68 בָּרָךְ is Qal passive participle. Other terms include בָּרָה (noun) and בָּרֲךָ (verb).
e.g., Hab 2:6), and their relationship to Matthew’s concepts of “blessing” (μακάριος) and “woe” (οὐαί); 69 and 2) the possibility that Matthew’s macarisms and woes are better traced to Deuteronomic blessings and curses as remembered by the prophet Isaiah.

**The Blessing and Curse from Deuteronomy to Isaiah**

The Deuteronomic blessings and curses that Wright refers to can be traced specifically to Deut 30:1, 19 (cf. also Deut 11:26) and the recurring phrase הברכה והקללה (LXX = τὴν εὐλογίαν καὶ τὴν κατάραν). Such texts, as noted above, invoke heaven and earth as witnesses (cf. Deut 30:19, 31:28, and 32:1) in anticipation of the covenant lawsuit (i.e., the rib-pattern) in later prophetic literature such as Isaiah. As one approaches Isaiah, then, the covenant lawsuit pattern remains intact in light of the prophet’s appeal to heaven and earth as witnesses to the covenant (Isa 1:2a). However, blessing and curse language remain quite variable. The phrase הברכה והקללה, and its LXX equivalent, does not appear in Isaiah nor are there any explicit blessings and curses in the sense of ברוך and קלל in close proximity to the opening lawsuit (i.e., Isa 1:2a). Such variation is, perhaps, best described as Isaiah’s contextualization of the covenant lawsuit form for a new audience. A closer look at the use of these, and related terms, across Isaiah, will help to clarify.

Regarding blessing language, some form of the ברך root is used eight times in Isaiah with all but one of them translated in the LXX by a form of εὐλογητός. 70 In such cases the term can

---


70 Isaiah 19:24, 25; 36:16; 51:2; 61:9; 65:16, 23. In Isa 66:3 the phrase in which ברך is found (“one who blesses an idol”) is translated by the LXX as “one who is blasphemous.”
refer to Israel as a blessing to others (Isa 19:24) or, more commonly, of divine blessing upon Israel and other nations (19:25), or “the seed of the blessed of the Lord” (65:23). It should also be noted that five of these occurrences appear in the latter half of the book, several of which appear in the final chapters of Isaiah. Less frequent is the Hebrew term אָשִּׁרְיָה, occurring 3x in Isaiah and always translated by a form of μακάριος in the LXX.\textsuperscript{71} Such occurrences have greater affinities with blessing language from the Psalter. While a more thorough treatment of the בְּרֻכָּה / אָשִּׁרְיָה distinction will be offered below, it is important to note here that the two terms are not synonymous. However, Isaiah’s indiscriminate use of both terms, neither of which are used explicitly within a forensic context, makes it difficult to determine their function within Isaiah’s opening covenant lawsuit. What can be observed, however, is that both terms, and the prophetic and wisdom traditions that lay behind them, remain appropriate concepts for the OT prophet working from a Deuteronomic, covenant lawsuit framework.

Regarding curse language, while there are no occurrences of the noun form of קָלָל in Isaiah, it occurs verbally six times.\textsuperscript{72} In addition, some form of its LXX equivalent, κατάρα, occurs twice.\textsuperscript{73} Much more common in Isaiah, however, are the Hebrew terms רָא (18x), אוֹי (3x), translated consistently in the LXX as οὐαί.\textsuperscript{74} It should also be noted that רָא / אוֹי appears within the immediate context of Isaiah’s opening covenant lawsuit where he summons heaven and earth as witnesses to the unfolding lawsuit between YHWH and Israel (Isa 1:2). The prophet laments: “Alas (רָא / אוֹי), sinful (חָטָא) nation, people laden with iniquity, offspring who do evil,

\textsuperscript{71} Isaiah 30:18; 32:20; 56:2. The LXX of Isa 31:9 also features μακάριος with no apparent Hebrew equivalent. LXX Isa 31:9 mistakenly renders רַע.
\textsuperscript{72} Isa 8:21, 23; 23:9; 30:16; 49:6; 65:20.
\textsuperscript{73} In Isa 64:9 κοτέρα translates רָא, and in Isa 65:23 it translates בַּלָע.
\textsuperscript{74} אוֹי is featured in Isa 1:4, 24; 5:8, 11, 18, 20, 21, 22; 10:1, 5; 17:12; 18:1; 28:1; 29:1, 15; 30:1; 31:1; 33:1; 45:9, 10. רָא appears in Isa 3:9, 6:1; and 11; 24:16.
children who deal corruptly! who have forsaken the LORD, who have despised the Holy One of Israel, who are utterly estranged” (Isa 1:4). Regardless of whether the הוי / οὐαί language connotes the same degree of malediction as the more formal curse (e.g., קָלִל), it is used by Isaiah in these opening verses in a forensic sense that invokes Deuteronomy’s covenant lawsuit. Wildberger comments on this juridical context noting that the root חטא (“sin”) “. . . is used to designate the violation of a firmly established order which is used to give guidance to someone when coming into contact with the deity.”75 In addition, he also observes the Deuteronomic link in the reference to the rebellious son (Isa 1:4), imagery reminiscent of the Song of Moses.76 This data betrays Isaiah’s affinity for the הוי / οὐαί distinction over the more formal curse language, while still functioning within a governing covenant lawsuit framework.

In summary, in his use of the terms μακάριος and οὐαί, Matthew’s memory of the covenant lawsuit from Deuteronomy is mediated by Isaiah. Accordingly, if μακάριος / εὐλογητός and ἀσώρι / μακάριος are appropriate concepts for the OT prophet working from a Deuteronomic, covenant lawsuit framework, then Matthew has chosen to foreground the ἀσώρι – וֶשְׁפִּיר distinction over the more formal curse language, while still functioning within a governing covenant lawsuit framework. There is less semantic variability with the curse as Isaiah has already made the shift from the expected קָלִל to הוי / οὐαί. The use of οὐαί in the ED, then, would not be an unexpected departure for Matthew who also presents his Jesus as a prophet functioning within a covenant lawsuit framework.

**Μακάριος in the SM**

For the abovementioned argument to be sound, more should be said about the רָוָה / ἀσώρι distinction, especially given recent scholarly work on the topic and its implications for

76 Ibid., 23.
Matthew’s use of μακάριος in the SM. What follows is a summary of that work followed by a discussion of how Matthew has shaped his macarisms so as to reflect both the prophetic and wisdom traditions of the OT corresponding, respectively, to his Christological interests in Jesus as prophet and sage. It will be argued that, as in Isaiah, the SM’s μακάριος are appropriate substitutes for covenant blessings (i.e., ברוך) allowing Matthew to foreground the אשׁרי–wisdom tradition while still functioning within a governing prophetic lawsuit framework insofar as human flourishing inherent in the state of אשׁרי / μακάριος is attained through ברוך.77

Jonathan Pennington argues that Matthew’s macarisms are better understood as continuing the אשׁרי–wisdom tradition of the OT. In the SM, then, Matthew’s Jesus “begins his public ministry by painting a picture of what the state of true, God-centered human flourishing looks like.”78 Perhaps the most compelling reason for seeing the Jewish concept of אשׁרי behind Matthew’s μακάριος is the LXX’s consistent rendering of the Hebrew Bible’s אשׁרי as μακάριος.79 Given this one-to-one translational relationship between the two terms, one can trace the conceptual antecedents of μακάριος, as well as its more narrow semantic range, to the Hebrew’s Bible’s use of אשׁרי. Of the 44 occurrences, most are found in the Psalms (26x) and Proverbs (8x), and all appear as a construct intensive plural, meaning that “it is always followed by and connected with the who being described as ‘asher: ‘asher is the one who. . . .”80 The rare occurrences of the term outside of the wisdom literature reflect the same pattern of meaning. In Isaiah, for example, the term is used twice to describe the happy state of a person in the midst of suffering (Isa 30:18) as well as the one who will flourish under the coming king (Isa 32:20).

78 Ibid., 10.
79 Ibid., 9; See also Janzen, “ʾAŠRÊ in the Old Testament,” 216.
Collectively, this lexical data reveals how, across the OT, “ʾashrê is making an appeal to true happiness and flourishing within the gracious covenant God has given.”

By contrast, the Hebrew word בָּרֹכָה, and its cognates, appear almost 400 times in the OT and are rendered consistently by the LXX with some form of εὐλογητός. Of these occurrences, a majority appear in Genesis, Deuteronomy and Psalms. Coupled with the corresponding curse, the terms reflect “formal pronouncements by someone in authority – either from God directly or from an authorized mediator: usually a king, priest, or clan patriarch.”

Insofar as בָּרֹכָה and אָשְׂרֵי are regularly used to describe the same recipients, Pennington observes “[T]here is indeed an organic relationship between bārak and asre, namely that ‘receipt of that which blessing [bārak] has to bestow qualifies a person or group to be called ‘ʾāshrê.’” While this link does not mean the two terms are synonymous, it does imply that, in the OT, “true human flourishing and well-being can only be found in relationship with God and through alignment with his coming kingdom.”

For Matthew, then, the בָּרֹכָה dimension of his macarisms, understood as God’s favor upon individuals and nations, is implied, and the human flourishing inherent in the pronunciation of Ṣ ري / μακάριος is attained through בָּרֹכָה.85

One might object that if Matthew had wanted to make a thematic connection with the blessings (ברוך) of Deuteronomy he would have made a more explicit semantic link between the SM’s blessings and בָּרֹכָה / εὐλογητός. Yet for two reasons I will argue that Matthew has shaped his macarisms so as to account for both the prophetic and wisdom traditions of the OT. First,
recent scholars have endeavored to unite Matthew’s Christological interests in Jesus as both prophet and sage. Grant Macaskill, for example, has shown that such a view recovers the variegated character of the First Gospel with its strongly sapiential and apocalyptic character.\footnote{Grant Macaskill, Revealed Wisdom and Inaugurated Eschatology in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 195.} Macaskill suggests that the notion of “revealed wisdom,” where a revealer-figure discloses a body of truth followed by divine enabling, better accounts for how sapiential, prophetic and apocalyptic elements are “juxtaposed, fused and hybridized” within the First Gospel.\footnote{Ibid., 195.} His notion of “revealed wisdom,” then, suggests an inseparable link between the prophetic and wisdom traditions within Matthew’s “soteriological paradigm.”\footnote{Ibid.} Indeed, in his extensive treatment of Matthew 21–25, where sapiential, prophetic and apocalyptic elements again converge, Alistair Wilson is compelled to examine the theme of judgment against the background of the Wisdom tradition and the prophetic tradition.\footnote{Wilson, When Will These Things Happen?, 81.} Second, as argued above, the prophetic lawsuit and wisdom traditions are already integrated in Isaiah. Accordingly, if Matthew’s memory of the covenant lawsuit from Deuteronomy is mediated by his Isaianic intertextual disposition, then \( \text{ἐρήμωσις} / \text{μακάριος} \) remain appropriate concepts for his presentation of Jesus as a prophet working from a Deuteronomic, covenant lawsuit framework.

In summary, it is by virtue of both Matthew’s Isaianic intertextual disposition that the SM’s \text{μακάριος}, together with the \text{oúai} of the ED, should be understood as fitting substitutes for Deuteronomic blessings and curses. The semantic range of \text{μακάριος} allows Matthew to accomplish at least two rhetorical goals. First, as Pennington has observed, it allows him to set forth Jesus as the only One able “to finally explain, model, and effect the true state of human
flourishing both now and in the future," that is, in the inaugurated kingdom of heaven; and 2) invoke early in his Gospel OT covenant lawsuit imagery that would become more manifest in the unfolding controversy with the religious officials in the ὦαί of the ED.

**Ὠαί in the ED**

Unlike μακάριος, it is considerably easier to trace Matthew’s ὦαί to the prophetic traditions of the OT even if a narrower link with covenant curses remains tentative. It is Garland’s work to which Matthean scholars consistently appeal for the conceptual antecedents of the ED’s “woes” (23:13–36). Although the ὦαί expression can carry several different connotations in the OT, and indeed across the First Gospel, within the ED Garland concludes, “The Old Testament pattern of the menacing prophet is certainly the background for the woes in chap. 23, and there is no need to look elsewhere. . . .” What follows is a brief summary of his argument upon which I will argue that, as in Isaiah, the ὦαί of the ED are appropriate substitutes for covenant curses (e.g., ἔχθρα) in Matthew. And, based on both the near and far context of ED, such ὦαί language allows Matthew to foreground the governing prophetic lawsuit framework while still retaining elements of wisdom that coincide with the ἀσὴρ–wisdom tradition of the SM’s μακάριος.

Scholars have understood Matthew’s ὦαί in various ways. The two main views include ὦαί as an expression of lamentation, reflecting sorrowful pity, or malediction comparable to a curse. Garland suggests that the former is often set forth as an attempt to ameliorate the severity of the woes in ch. 23 given that the “tone of strider” there seems out of character for

---

In the end, however, it seems best to concede a wider semantic range for the οὐαί allowing Matthew to retain both connotations depending on the context and recipient. In Matt 18:7 and 26:24, for example, where the οὐαί is uttered against τῷ κόσμῳ, no malediction is apparent. The same could be said of Jesus’ οὐαί over pregnant women in 24:19. However, in Matt 11:21, where Jesus indict the Galilean cities, and in 23:13–36, where the hypocrisy of the religious officials in view, the context is clearly divine judgment. This juridical tone is evident not least in the presence of the μαρτ-, δικ-, and κριν- word groups in these same passages noted above. This contextual evidence, according to Garland, suggests that there are at least two distinct uses of οὐαί in Matthew with malediction standing behind the woes of the ED.

As an expression of malediction, Garland suggests that the οὐαί of the ED can be more directly linked with the prophetic curse of the OT. The Greek term οὐαί occurs sixty seven times in the LXX with the majority of these occurrences appearing in the prophetic literature (e.g., 22x in Isaiah). The most common Hebrew terms standing behind the οὐαί of the LXX are ἡλί (30x), ἠλί (15x), and ἂν (2x). Its function across this literature is even more difficult to categorize than its use in the First Gospel, and it occupies a far less one-to-one translational relationship with the LXX than its counterpart μακάριος. Westermann linked the origin of the woe cry in the OT to the covenantal curse based on their similarities in content and style. Critiques of Westermann, however, have noted the disparity between the curse and the woe calling their similarities merely coincidental. Erhard Gerstenberger suggested that the woe form was borrowed from the popular

---

95 Garland, The Intention, 64.
96 The Apocryphal books are ommitted. Other Hebrew terms translated by οὐαί are ἡλί (2x); ἂν (1x); and ἄλ (1x). Also, on occasions (4x) the LXX adds a οὐαί where there is no Hebrew equivalent (e.g., Jer 26:19).
97 Garland, The Intention, 73, observes three basic categories: 1) as a mourning cry in a funeral context meaning “Alas!”; 2) as an excited exclamation calling someone to attention usually translated as “Ah!” or “Ho!”; 3) introducing a threat or announcement of doom.
98 Westermann, Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech, 190–92.
ethics of Wisdom yet underwent “a considerable reshaping of its content as the woe was adjusted to the prophet’s message.” Gerstenberger’s observations are especially intriguing given the אָשֶׁר–wisdom tradition standing behind the SM’s μακάριος. Yet despite this influence of popular Wisdom ethics, Gerstenberger still concedes that the woe form eventually developed into a curse-like form. Such evidence points to an increasing trend in the OT towards malediction, comparable to the covenantal curse, even if there were exceptions to this general trend.

As for μακάριος so also here, one might object that if Matthew had wanted to make a thematic connection with the curses of Deuteronomy he would have made a more explicit semantic link between the ED’s οὐαί and ἡγεμόν / κατάρα. Yet for several reasons it will be argued that Matthew has shaped his woes, with the SM’s macarisms, so as to reflect both the prophetic and wisdom traditions of the OT. First, the argument above highlighting Macaskill’s work on Matthew’s Christological interests in Jesus as prophet and sage holds true as much for the woes.

Second, as argued above, Isaiah has already made the shift from the expected ἡγεμόν to ὁρίζω / οὐαί within a covenant lawsuit context. Accordingly, if Matthew’s memory of the covenant lawsuit from Deuteronomy is mediated by Isaiah, then the use of οὐαί in the ED would not be an unexpected departure for Matthew who presents Jesus as a prophet functioning within a governing covenant lawsuit framework.

Third, such an argument can be sustained for contextual reasons. Working concentrically toward the ED, one must not overlook the broader Mosaic typological structure and forensic themes in both the SM and ED noted thus far. Such themes provide the contours of Matthew’s

---

100 Garland, The Intention, 78. So also Waldemar Janzen, Mourning Cry and Woe Oracle (BZAW 125; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1972), 90, who notes a “vengeance-thrust” over and above a mourning quality.
101 Garland, The Intention, 78.
unfolding plot carried along by the implicit controversy between Jesus and the religious official that culminates in the ED. The immediate context of Matt 21:1–26:2 bears this out. For example, Matt 21:12–22 betrays a clear tone of malediction not least in Jesus’ “cursing” the fig tree. While no explicit curse language (e.g., κατάρα) is used in this pericope, scholars have consistently linked this event with the often bizarre, yet highly symbolic, acts of OT prophets. These same scholars, however, have also observed how the pericope is “... couched in the language forms of Jewish Wisdom literature.” France observes that the fig tree would have evoked OT subtexts where “the fruit of the fig tree is a prophetic symbol for the good life God expects from his people.” Both the prophetic and wisdom traditions, then, are manifest in this malediction that sets the stage for Jesus’ confrontation with the religious officials in the ED.

Regarding this confrontation, if the OT covenant lawsuit provides a fitting forensic backdrop within which the Evangelist unfolds the controversy between Jesus and the religious officials, then one might expect a clear indictment. Yet this is just what one finds given that, after twenty two chapters of escalating conflict between Jesus and the religious officials, the indictment is made explicit: “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you lock (κλείετε) people out of the kingdom of heaven . . .” (23:13). Accordingly, the “righteousness” that the scribes and Pharisees lack (cf. Matt 5:20) is, on the most basic level, related to their “locking people out of” the kingdom of heaven.

In summary, this section has demonstrated that Matthew’s concepts of μακάριος and οὐαί are fitting substitutes for OT covenant blessings and curses even if their semantic range allows for other connotations associated with Israel’s Wisdom tradition. Regarding μακάριος, as in

102 France, Matthew, 792; Wilson, When Will These Things Happen?, 97–99.
103 Wilson, When Will These Things Happen?, 99.
104 France, Matthew, 793.
Isaiah, it is an appropriate substitute for covenant blessings (i.e., ברוך) allowing Matthew to foreground the אשייר–wisdom tradition while still functioning within a governing prophetic lawsuit framework insofar as human flourishing inherent in the state of אשייר / μακάριος is attained through ברוך. Regarding οὐαί, as in Isaiah, it is an appropriate substitute for covenant curses (e.g., קלל) drawing upon the curse-like malediction of the OT. Assuming an ED that spans Matt 23–25, μακάριος and οὐαί invoke, as Wright suggests, Deuteronomic blessings and curses.

**Conclusion: the Passing Away of Heaven and Earth in Matthew 5:18 and 24:35**

In summary, this essay set out to show how the images and ideas from the OT covenant lawsuit (i.e., rib-pattern) illuminate Matthew’s unfolding narrative. Central to the covenant lawsuit form is the prophet who summons witnesses and invokes blessings and curses, three themes that are also prominent, if adapted, in Matthew. First, by virtue of Matthew’s Mosaic typological structure, the title “prophet” remains an appropriate designation for Matthew’s Jesus but should be conceptually expanded to include Moses’ unique function as covenant mediator. Second, the witness motif was shown to be part of Matthew’s broader forensic interests carried along by the μαρτ-, δικ-, and κριν- word groups, behind which stands the juridical terminology of the OT covenant lawsuit. Such forensic language builds up a discernable lawsuit trajectory across the First Gospel that includes an implicit controversy with the religious officials over their inferior δικαιοσύνη. In the SM and ED, which frame the controversy, the author envisions an even more enduring μαρτύριον than heaven and earth, namely τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας secured by the disciple’s vocation as prophetic / suffering witnesses. Third, the SM’s μακάριος and the ED’s οὐαί retain prophetic connotations while also manifesting conceptual antecedents within the OT Wisdom tradition. Collectively, these three themes build up a marked typological structure
across Matthew whereby Jesus stands as a new Moses-like covenant mediator, summoning
witnesses, and invoking macarisms and woes, fitting substitutes to OT blessings and curses.

Regarding the implications of Matthew’s appropriation of the prophetic rib-pattern for
the passing away of heaven and earth in Matt 5:18 and 24:35, I would suggest one in particular
that could be considered christological/ecclesiological. Peter Leithart recently recalled
Augustine’s notion of the totus Christus, upon which Leithart refuses to “choose between a
christocentric and an ecclesiocentric reading of the Bible.”105 In the same way, I suggest that
Matthew’s christological burden to portray Jesus a new Moses-like covenant mediator,
summoning witnesses, and invoking macarisms and woes, has ecclesiological implications for
kingdom discipleship. The latter is manifest in the prophetic / suffering witness of the disciples,
who are representative of the people of God. This vocation can be further defined as: 1) set in
contrast to the inferior δικαιοσύνη of the religious officials; 2) the basis for the witness of the
εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας, which is not only more enduring, but also more expansive by virtue of
the fact that; 3) it sets in motion the inauguration of a new covenant given that the conventional
witnesses vis à vis Deuteronomy (i.e., heaven and earth) are passing away.

105 Peter Leithart, Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture (Waco, TX; Baylor University Press,
2009), 173.