

‘I WILL SAVE MY PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS’

THE INFLUENCE OF EZEKIEL 36:28B-29A; 37:23B

ON MATTHEW 1:21

Nicholas G. Piotrowski

Summary

Matthean scholars are nearly unanimous that LXX Psalm 129:8 [MT 130:8] is the allusive background to Matthew 1:21 notwithstanding formidable semantic differences. Ezekiel 36:28b-29a; 37:23b, however, provides a more convincing and more fruitful conceptual background for Matthew's programmatic verse. Semantic and thematic considerations bear this out. The result of reading Matthew 1:21 through the lens of Ezekiel 36:28b-29a; 37:23b is the selection of frames for reading the rest of the gospel in terms of the prophet's vision for Israel's restoration from exile.

1. Introduction

The first gospel begins with a startling declaration that Jesus ‘will save his people from their sins’. There are only two verses in the entire Old Testament where salvation is from an internal moral enemy. Ezekiel 36:29a reads, ‘And I will save you from all your *defilements*’.¹ Ezekiel 37:23b reads, ‘But I will save them from all their *assemblies in which they sinned*’. All other uses of שָׁמַר/σώζω (‘save’) in the OT regard historically identifiable oppressors external to a group or individual.²

¹ All translations are the author's own.

² John E. Hartley (‘**יָשַׁע**’, *TWOT*: 1:414-16) provides a plethora of examples that demonstrate ‘the majority of references to salvation speak of Yahweh granting deliverance from real enemies and out of real catastrophies’. The only example he provides of the verb **יָשַׁע** outside this ‘majority’ is Ezek. 37:23 which ‘[develops] a theological meaning in that God saves by forgiving sin’. J. F. Sawyer (‘**יָשַׁע**’, *TDOT*: 6:450-63) provides even more examples, yet only two ‘refer to cleansing from ritual impurity’: Ezek. 36:29 and 37:23. See also Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel* (2

Given this rarity, Matthew's declaration at 1:21 that Jesus will 'save his people from their *sins*' is extraordinary on a semantic level. Should this direct interpreters back to these two texts in the OT to reflect on the meaning of Jesus' name and calling?³ If so, the reader's surprise is doubled by the observation that in Ezekiel 36:28b-29a; 37:23b it is YHWH himself who saves from sins.⁴ But the evangelist asserts that

vols.; NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997–1998): 2:357, 414. For salvation from oppressing nations see Exod. 14:30; Num. 10:9; Deut. 20:4; 33:29; Josh. 10:6; Judg. *inter alia* 2:16-18; 1 Sam. 4:3; 7:8; 2 Sam. 3:18; 22:4; 2 Kgs 16:7; 19:34; 2 Chr. 32:22; Neh. 9:27; Ps. *passim*; Isa. 37:20, 35; 49:25; Jer. 42:11. For salvation as a re-gathering of exiles see 1 Chr. 16:35; Jer. 30:10-11; 31:7; 46:27; Zech. 8:7, 13; 10:6; 12:7. For eschatological salvation, see especially Isa. 25:9; Jer. 23:6; 30:7; Zeph. 3:17-19; Zech. 9:16. For salvation from worldly troubles such as poverty, famine, illness, injustice, or an individual's plight see Exod. 2:17; 2 Sam. 22:28; 2 Kgs 6:26-27; Job *passim*; Ps. *passim*; Prov. 20:22; 28:18; Jer. 2:27-28; 11:12; 17:14; Ezek. 34:22; Hab. 1:2. Psalm 51:14 [12 in English texts] does speak of salvation in the context of guilt, but only the joy of salvation (שְׂשׂוֹן יִשְׁעֶךָ) without explicitly naming from what the psalmist is saved. Rather, Ps. 51:16 [14] uses the verb נָצַל (deliver) to speak of the deliverance from blood-guiltiness. The reference to the 'God of my salvation (יְהוָה יִשְׁעִי)' in the same verse is not necessarily related to the aforementioned deliverance from guilt. Rather, the moniker derives itself just as naturally, if not more so, from the up-building of the walls of Jerusalem in 51:20 [18]. Again, in Ps. 79:9 יֵשַׁע is used to describe God, most naturally in light of the hope for national deliverance from foreign enemies in vv. 6-7. The actual verb used to speak of deliverance from sin, then, is נָצַל. So too Ps. 39:9 [10]. See also Werner Foerster ('σῶζω and σωτηρία in Later Judaism', *TDNT* 7: 980-89) for the use of the verb in Second Temple Jewish texts. Nothing there comes close to this usage. See also n. 8.

³ To be sure, popular etymology is enough to explain the relationship between Jesus' name and יֵשַׁע (Werner Foerster, 'Ἰησοῦς', *TDNT*: 3:289-90). But the question remains, whence the concept of salvation from sins?

⁴ According to Herbert Braun, *Qumran und das Neue Testament* (2 vols.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1966): 1:7-8; 2:81, 'Rescue from sin is in Qumran ... as in the rest of Judaism, God's and not the Messiah's work'. See also H.-J. Fabry, 'יֵשַׁע [in the] Dead Sea Scrolls', *TDOT* 6:448. John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005): 99, comments that this makes Matt. 1:21 'initially surprising'. To be sure, *T. Levi* 18:9, 11QMelch 2:6-8, *1 En.* 10:20-22, and *Tg. Isa.* 53:4-7 do put forward other figures (W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (3 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988–1997): 1:210), though without the key word, 'save'. See also Str-B 1:71-74 for other non-canonical examples. But Ulrich Luz, *Matthew* (3 vols.; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001–2007): 1:95, and Lidija Novakovic, *Messiah, the Healer of the Sick: A Study of Jesus as the Son of David in the Gospel of Matthew* (WUNT 2/170; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003): 70, point out that while these figures may be triumphant over sin, they do not grant forgiveness for sins (see also D. A. Carson, *Matthew* (EBC 8; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984): 76), which is clearly at least part of Jesus' calling to 'save' (cf. esp. Matt. 26:28). Novakovic (*Messiah*, 67, 72) observes that while 'in 1.21 Matthew does not speak about forgiveness of sins, but the salvation from sins', throughout the gospel it becomes clear that '[d]eliverance from iniquities is rather understood as deliverance from the consequences of sins, which becomes a visible sign that the sins have been

Jesus will accomplish this task.⁵ The importance of these considerations is heightened by the observation that Matthew 1:21 is programmatic for the entire Matthean narrative.⁶ It defines the protagonist's mission in terms of key theological concepts that pervade the narrative: sin, salvation, and the ecclesia.⁷ Matthew 1:21 has a primacy effect, therefore, preparing the reader to understand the rest of the narrative in terms of who Jesus is, who 'his people' are, and what salvation 'from their sins' looks like. It sets the table for the rest of the gospel.

All these elements taken together—the extraordinary calling to *save* from *sins*, the unprecedented naming of someone other than YHWH to accomplish this, and the programmatic nature of 1:21—more than strongly suggest that a proper reading of the first gospel cannot be accomplished without sufficiently grappling with this key verse. While this article in no way provides a complete exposition of this *crux interpretum*, it does challenge one piece of conventional wisdom: Matthean scholars have consistently identified LXX Psalm 129:8 [MT

forgiven'. Even in *Pss. Sol.* 17:22-25 the Messiah purges *Jerusalem* without forgiving people. The purification of the people is left to God alone in *Pss. Sol.* 18:5 (Novakovic, *Messiah*, 71).

⁵ The emphatic use of αὐτός achieves the same effect: *Jesus*, not some other figure, saves from sin. *Jesus*' calling, then, results in the name, and the name is indicative of the calling to *save*. Hence the conjunction, γάρ, connecting the name and the calling. Charlene McAfee Moss, *The Zechariah Tradition and the Gospel of Matthew* (BZNW 156; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008): 16, says the 'etymology is assumed by the γάρ'.

⁶ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:210; David B. Howell, *Matthew's Inclusive Story: A Study in the Narrative Rhetoric of the First Gospel* (JSNTSup 42; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1990): 101-102; N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God, vol. 1; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992): 385; Mark Allan Powell, 'Plot and Subplots of Matthew's Gospel', *NTS* 38 (1992): 195, 199; Donald J. Versepunt, 'The Davidic Messiah and Matthew's Jewish Christianity', *SBLSP* 34 (1995): 108; Novakovic, *Messiah*, 63, 73-75; Warren Carter, *Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004): 110-111; Boris Repschinski, "'For He Will Save His People from Their Sins'" (Matthew 1:21): A Christology for Christian Jews', *CBQ* 68 (2006): 253-57; George Wesley Buchanan, *The Gospel of Matthew* (2 vols.; MBC 1; Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2006): 1:82. See also Fred Burnett, 'The Undecidability of the Proper Name "Jesus" in Matthew', *Semeia* 54 (1991): 123-44; Moisés Mayordomo-Marín, *Den Anfang hören: Leserorientierte Evangelienexegese am Beispiel von Matthäus 1-2* (FRLANT 180; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht): 261, 269-70; David D. Kupp, *Matthew's Emmanuel: Divine Presence and God's People in the First Gospel* (SNTSMS 90; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 56-58, 168-69, 173.

⁷ See especially 26:28 where these themes constellate again in a climactic way.

130:8] as the allusive background to Matthew 1:21.⁸ It is argued here, however, that Ezekiel 36:28b-29a; 37:23b provides a more convincing and more fruitful *conceptual* background for Matthew's programmatic verse. A number of semantic and thematic similarities between the Matthean and Ezekielian contexts bear this out. Reading Matthew 1:21 with the intertext of Ezekiel 36:28b-29a; 37:23b illuminates Matthew's soteriology in terms of the exile and the re-enthronement of David's house at the time of restoration, and Matthew's ecclesiology in terms of end-of-exile covenant renewal expectations.

2. LXX Psalm 129:8 as the Allusive Background to Matthew 1:21?

If Matthean scholars see an OT background for Matthew 1:21, they credit LXX Psalm 129:8.⁹ The two texts share an identical pattern of subject, verb, direct object, and indirect object. To these scholars the Psalm's 'he will redeem Israel from all his lawlessness' is behind

⁸ Eugen Hühn, *Die alttestamentlichen Citate und Reminiscenzen im Neuen Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1900): 2; Willoughby C. Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Matthew* (ICC; New York: Scribner's, 1913): 9; Alan Hugh McNeile, *The Gospel according to St. Matthew: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Indices* (London: MacMillan & Co., 1915): 8; G. D. Kilpatrick, *The Origins of the Gospel according to St. Matthew* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1946): 53, 93; M.-J. Lagrange, *Évangile selon Saint Matthieu* (7th edn; Paris: Lecoffre, 1948): 15; Robert Horton Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel, With Special Reference to the Messianic Hope* (NovTSup 28; Leiden: Brill, 1967): 127-28; George M. Soares Prabhu, *The Formula Quotations in the Infancy Narrative of Matthew: An Enquiry into the Tradition History of Mt 1-2* (AnBib 63; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1976): 239; Joachim Gnllka, *Das Matthäusevangelium* (2 vols.; 2nd edn; NTKNT; Freiburg: Herder, 1992-1993): 1:19 n. 23; Novakovic, *Messiah*, 64-67, 72; Nolland, *Matthew*, 99 n. 63; Repschinski, 'He Will Save', 255. The NA²⁷ also lists Ps. 130:8 [LXX 129:8] as 'relevant' for Matt. 1:21. A few dissenting voices (Frederick W. Danker, *Multipurpose Tools for Bible Study* (3rd edn; St. Louis: Concordia, 1970): 92; Helen Milton, 'The Structure of the Prologue to St. Matthew's Gospel', *JBL* 81 (1962): 180) have contended for a background in Judg. 13:5, but have not accrued much of a following. Craig A. Evans, *Matthew* (NCBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 43-44, contends that Matt. 1:21 'probably reflects the Song of the Suffering Servant (Isa. 52:13-53:12)'. The key word, 'save', however, is lacking. The most suggestive non-canonical texts from Str-B 1:71-74 include *T. Levi* 18:9; *I En.* 10:20-22; *Pss. Sol.* 17:26-46. See also 11QM^{elch} 2:6-8 and *Tg. Isa.* 53:4-7. In all of these, however, the semantic links are even more wanting than LXX Ps. 129:8. Given the evangelist's preference for the Hebrew Scriptures and their canonical function among the first Christians, moreover, an OT referent is preferred.

⁹ See n. 8 and n. 15.

Matthew's 'he will save his people from their sins'. The syntactical and thematic similarities are obvious. The *semantic* similarities, however, are lacking.

MT Psalm 130:8: ¹⁰	LXX Psalm 129:8:	Matthew 1:21:
<u>יְהוָה יַפְדֵּה</u>	καὶ αὐτὸς λυτρώσεται	αὐτὸς γὰρ σώσει
<u>אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל מִכָּל</u>	τὸν Ἰσραήλ ἐκ πασῶν	τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ
<u>עֲוֹנוֹתָיו</u>	τῶν ἁνομιῶν αὐτοῦ.	τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν.
And <u>he</u> will redeem	And <u>he</u> will redeem	For <u>he</u> will save
<u>Israel</u> from all	<u>Israel</u> from all	<u>his</u> people from
<u>his</u> iniquities.	<u>his</u> lawlessness.	<u>their</u> sins.

For one, the same verb is not used. The Psalm has a form of λυτρόω ('redeem'), while Matthew uses a form of σώζω ('save'). This is an important distinction because in Matthew 1:21 the association between Jesus' name and his mission is semantically based on the Hebrew verb יָשַׁע ('save'), whose Greek analogue is σώζω.¹¹ Given that Ἰησοῦς ('Jesus') was popularly related to the verb יָשַׁע (even outside of Palestine and by Hellenists)¹² it is odd not to find יָשַׁע in MT Psalm 130:8. One would expect an OT background that carries the key word that invokes the significance of Jesus' name per Matthew 1:21.¹³ Second, the direct object is not the same. The Psalm's object is τὸν Ἰσραήλ ('Israel'), while Matthew's is τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ('his people'). While the change makes sense, a rationale for the change is lacking. It seems strange in light of the genealogy and Matthew 2:6 that the author should deviate from using Ἰσραήλ. Finally, the indirect objects are not semantically identical either. In the Psalm Israel is redeemed ἐκ πασῶν τῶν ἁνομιῶν αὐτοῦ ('from all his lawlessness'), while in Matthew Jesus' people are saved ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν ('from their sins'). Again, the conceptual relationship is evident. But what necessitates a change at all if they are so similar?¹⁴

¹⁰ Key: agrees with Matthew; different pronoun; synonym.

¹¹ See Georg Fohrer, 'σώζω and σωτηρία in the Old Testament', *TDNT*: 7:970-78.

¹² For example Philo, *Mut.*, 121-22 and Sir. 46:1 both use a form of σωτηρία to explicate the qualities and actions of men named Ἰησοῦς. Neither, however, save from *sins*.

¹³ Even Gundry (*Use*, 127), the most commonly referenced proponent of the LXX Ps. 129:8 background, says, '[t]he most remarkable thing about this quotation is that although it is given as the reason for the name Ἰησοῦς, פִּדְיָה instead of יָשַׁע appears in the Hebrew'.

¹⁴ Hubert Frankemölle, *Jahwebund und Kirche Christi: Studien zur Form- und Traditions-geschichte des 'Evangeliums' nach Matthäus* (NTAbh 10; Münster:

Robert Gundry and Lidija Novakovic provide the most thorough answers to these semantic questions.¹⁵ They both see the change from λυτρώσεται ('he will redeem') to σώσει ('he will save') 'as an adaptation of the verse to the etymology of Jesus' name, whose Hebrew root **שׁע** is in the LXX most commonly translated with σώζω'.¹⁶ The importance of the Hebrew verb **שׁע** is, of course, rightly noted. The problem with this explanation is, however, that it works only if it is first established that LXX Psalm 129:8 is the background, which is yet to be proven. Conversely, this thesis does not explain why a verse without the key word **שׁע** is chosen when it is so important in establishing the meaning of Jesus' name in Matthew 1:21. The change from Ἰσραήλ to τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ, they contend, accounts for 'the catholicity of the Church'.¹⁷ It is hard to gainsay that Matthew has universalistic concerns, but again this assumes the LXX Psalm 129:8 background; it does not establish it. In regard to the change of indirect objects, Gundry points out that '[ἀ]μαρτία and ἀνομία stand side by side in the LXX as translations of **עו**'¹⁸ and Novakovic observes that ἀμαρτία was 'already an established constituent of Christian vocabulary' while ἀνομία is a polemical term for Matthew.¹⁹ Again, these are helpful observations, but they do not establish that LXX Psalm 129:8 is the background. All these arguments presuppose LXX Psalm 129:8 is the background and suggest the legitimacy of the changes if the former assumption is right.

Another shortcoming to this thesis is that it has yet to be shown how LXX Psalm 129 bears on the rest of Matthew. If 1:21 is programmatic for the first gospel, as is often claimed,²⁰ then how does LXX Psalm 129 [MT Psalm 130] illuminate Matthew's story? To be sure, many have demonstrated in what manner Jesus saves his people from their

Aschendorff, 1974): 216 n. 110, argues that because the focus on sins is so prevalent in Matthew 'the usually-assumed LXX influence from Ps. 130:8 is to be rejected'.

¹⁵ See Gundry, *Use*, 127-28 and Novakovic, *Messiah*, 64-67. Gundry is followed by Carson, *Matthew*, 76; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew* (2 vols.; WBC 33; Dallas: Word, 1993): 1:19; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:209; Luz, *Matthew*, 1:91; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007): 53 n. 46. See also n. 8.

¹⁶ Novakovic, *Messiah*, 65; Gundry, *Use*, 127-28.

¹⁷ Gundry, *Use*, 128; Novakovic, *Messiah*, 65-66.

¹⁸ Gundry, *Use*, 128.

¹⁹ Novakovic, *Messiah*, 65.

²⁰ See n. 6.

sins.²¹ It has not been shown, however, how the Psalm elucidates Jesus' person and work, in what manner he provides salvation, what sins are, or who Jesus' people are for the sake of reading the Matthean narrative. If it is the background to Matthew 1:21, and if Matthew 1:21 does contain the programme for all of Matthew, then the reader is left wondering what the Psalm contributes to the gospel as a whole.

It seems, therefore, that the only grounds for reading this theoretical background is its syntactical order. Beyond that, there seems to be no reason for identifying LXX Psalm 129:8 as the textual precursor to Matthew's programmatic statement.²²

3. Ezekiel 36:28b-29a; 37:23b as the Conceptual Background to Matthew 1:21

As mentioned, Ezekiel 36:29 and 37:23 are the only texts in the entire OT where salvation (יִשְׁלַח) is from anything other than external threats.²³ Thus Matthew 1:21, where *salvation* is from *sins*, has an immediate affinity with these verses. Moreover, the key words of Matthew 1:21—forms of σώζω ('save'), λαός ('people'), and ἁμαρτία (noun: 'sin')—are present in Ezekiel 36:28b-29a and 37:23b.²⁴ These observations, together with thematic contextual links between Matthew 1–2 and Ezekiel 34–37, strongly suggest that the conceptual background for Matthew 1:21 has been identified.

²¹ Wright, *New Testament*, 384-90; Verseput, 'Davidic Messiah', 108-115; Novakovic, *Messiah, passim*; Repschinski, 'He Will Save', 257-65.

²² Gundry (*Use*, 127) does point to Titus 2:14 in support of his reading. The semantic links between Titus 2:14 and LXX Ps. 129:8 are intact, however, making Paul's use of the Psalm *less* of a support for its use in Matthew where the semantics differ. Titus 2:14b's ἵνα λυτρώσῃται ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ πάσης ἀνομίας ('in order to redeem us from all lawlessness') does, nonetheless, show that the Psalm was in use among the first Christians. But, Titus 2:14c's καὶ καθάρισεν ἑαυτὸν λαὸν περιούσιον ('and to cleanse for himself a special people') reads like LXX Ezek. 37:23's καὶ καθαρῶ αὐτοὺς καὶ ἔσονται μοι εἰς λαόν ('and I will cleanse them and they will be to me a people'). Paul's conflation suggests that, *just as much as the Psalm*, Ezek. 37:23 was in the air too. If Matthean scholars are committed to Gundry's reading, Titus 2:14 and the argument here show how Ezek. 37:23 should be read alongside the Psalm.

²³ See n. 2.

²⁴ Ezekiel 36:28b-29a has forms of יִשְׁלַח/σώζω ('save') and יִשְׁלַח/λαός ('people') and 37:23b has forms of יִשְׁלַח/ρύομαι ('save'/rescue'), יִשְׁלַח/λαός ('people'), and יִשְׁלַח/ἁμαρτάνω (verb: 'sin').

MT Ezekiel 36:28b-29a:²⁵

והייתם לִי
לעם ואנכי אהיה לכם
לאֱלֹהִים וְהוֹשַׁעְתִּי
אתכם מכל
טְמֵאוֹתֵיכֶם

And you will be to me a
people, and I will be to
you God, and I will save
you from all your
defilements.

LXX Ezekiel 36:28b-29a:

καὶ ἔσεσθέ μοι εἰς
λαόν καγὼ ἔσομαι ὑμῖν
εἰς θεὸν καὶ σώσω ὑμᾶς
ἐκ πασῶν τῶν
ἀκαθαρσιῶν ὑμῶν.²⁶

And you will be to me a
people, and I will be to
you God, and I will save
you from all your
impurities.

Matthew 1:21:

αὐτὸς γὰρ σώσει
τὸν λαόν αὐτοῦ
ἀπὸ τῶν
ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν.

For he will save
his people from
their sins.

MT Ezekiel 37:23b:

וְהוֹשַׁעְתִּי אֹתָם
מכל מוֹשְׁבֵייהֶם
אשר חָטְאוּ בָהֶם
וְטָהַרְתִּי אֹתָם
וְהוֹרֵלִי לֵעָם וְאֲנִי
אֶהְיֶה לָהֶם לֵאלֹהִים

But I will save them from
all their assemblies in
which they sinned, and I
will cleanse them, and they
will be to me a people and I
will be to them God.

LXX Ezekiel 37:23b:

καὶ ρύσσομαι αὐτοὺς ἀπὸ
πασῶν τῶν ἀνομιῶν
αὐτῶν ὧν ἡμάρτοσαν ἐν
αὐταῖς καὶ καθαρίω
αὐτοὺς καὶ ἔσονται μοι
εἰς λαόν καὶ ἐγὼ κύριος
ἔσομαι αὐτοῖς εἰς θεόν.

And I will rescue them
from all their lawless
deeds in which they
sinned, and I will cleanse
them, and they will be to
me a people and I, the
Lord, will be to them God.

Matthew 1:21:

αὐτὸς γὰρ σώσει
τὸν λαόν αὐτοῦ
ἀπὸ τῶν
ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν.

For he will save
his people
from their sins.

Of these semantic links, the strongest point of contact between Matthew 1:21 and Ezekiel 36:28b-29a; 37:23b is the prophet's use of רָשַׁע/σῶζω ('save') in reference to an internal moral threat and Matthew's naming of Jesus in light of his mission to save (σῶζω) his people from sins. The reason Matthew emphasises the meaning of Jesus' name with the explanation that 'he will save his people from

²⁵ Key: agrees with Matthew; different pronoun; synonym; verb and noun share same root.

²⁶ Some texts of the Lucianic recension and Theodoret do read ἁμαρτιῶν in place of ἀκαθαρσιῶν (Joseph Ziegler, ed., *Ezekiel* [vol. 16 of *Septuaginta Vetus Testamentum Graecum: Auctoritate Societatis Litterarum Göttingensis editum*; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1952]: 265), but are too late to have influenced Matthew.

their sins' is above all to draw the reader's attention to Jesus' role as Saviour and that from which he saves. Sins are not an external aggressor, even if their consequences may manifest themselves as such. Rather, sins are actions individuals and groups take contrary to the revealed will of God. They do not happen to someone, but by someone. And it is specifically Jesus whose name is derived from the Hebrew word **יֵשׁוּעַ** who accomplishes a salvation for his people from such internal moral bondage. Ezekiel 36:28b-29a and 37:23b are the only places in the OT where the verb **יָשַׁע** is used to promise salvation from anything close to this. Therefore, the presence of **יֵשׁוּעַ** in Ezekiel 36:28b-29a; 37:23b puts these verses in an exclusive class for their potential to relate to the etymology of Jesus' name in reference to the internal moral oppressor that is sin, so clearly emphasised in Matthew 1:21.

The other semantic commonalities between the texts strengthen the link between Matthew and Ezekiel. Matthew 1:21 has forms of **λαός** ('people') and **ἁμαρτία** (noun: 'sin'); Ezekiel 36:28b-29a has a form **עַם/λαός** ('people'); Ezekiel 37:23b has forms of **עַם/λαός** ('people') and **חַטָּא/ἁμαρτάνω** (v: 'sin'). All are concerned with the divine possession of a people through rescuing them from moral failings.²⁷

The thesis is not without its problems, however. For one, while all three texts say the people will be saved, the specific object from which they will be saved is different. In Ezekiel 36:29 salvation is 'from all your defilements/impurities (**מִכָּל טְמֵאוֹתֶיךָ** ἐκ πασῶν τῶν ἀκαθαρσιῶν ὑμῶν)'. In Ezekiel 37:23 it is 'from all their assemblies/lawless deeds (**מִכָּל מוֹשְׁבֵי תֵיָהֶם** ἀπὸ πασῶν τῶν ἀνομιῶν αὐτῶν)'. Yet in Matthew 1:21 salvation is 'from their sins (**ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν**)'. Ezekiel 37:23b does, however, include

²⁷ Of course in looking for volume of words, two texts (Ezek. 36:28a-29b and 37:23b) will usually come out ahead of one (Ps. 130[129]:8). That said, these two texts in Ezekiel are not alien to each other; they are both part of the same larger context with a consistent theological focus. So while they may be two texts, separated by a (mere) chapter, they share the one *concept* (salvation from sins) as part of a single larger context. As W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann remind us (*Matthew: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 26; New York: Doubleday, 1971): LXII) authors like Matthew did not read the OT in terms of chapter and verse of course: '[n]ot only would the whole context of a cited passage have to be searched—if indeed a gospel author wished to discover what we call a "verse"—but the whole context would usually be known by heart'. In such a world, texts like Ezek. 36:28a-29b and 37:23b are easily conflated for citation when they contribute the same concept to the larger context. All the same, this reading would still work if only Ezek. 37:23b were under consideration.

the prepositional phrase ‘in which they sinned (אֲשֶׁר חָטְאוּ בָהֶם / ἡμάρτοσαν ἐν αὐταῖς)’ to describe the people’s assemblies/lawless deeds. Given the great similarities between Ezekiel 36:28-29 and 37:23 as they inhabit the same larger context, therefore, it is not hard to see why Matthew would have taken these passages together and understood the collective ideas of defilements/impurities (36:29) and assemblies/lawless deeds (37:23) as one of ‘sins’. Moreover, while it is true that ‘uncleanness’ in Ezekiel 36:29 may not be the same thing as ‘sins’ (the LXX renders טְמֵאוֹתֵיכֶם as τῶν ἀκαθαρσιῶν ὑμῶν), in Ezekiel they appear to be very much related in that 36:33 states that the coming *cleansing* will be of the people’s ‘sins/iniquities’ (טְהִרִי אֶתְכֶם (מִכָּל עֲוֹנוֹתֵיכֶם)).

Second, the personal pronouns are different between Ezekiel and Matthew, the former naming YHWH as the Saviour and the latter naming Jesus. The same issue arises when considering to whom the people belong: the pronouns have changed. In Ezekiel they are a people unto YHWH; in Matthew they are Jesus’ people. This, however, is no obstacle for it is quite readily apparent from Matthew’s narrative that Jesus is in some way YHWH among his people (1:23; 2:2, 11 in the immediate context; cf. also 28:17, 20).²⁸ The changed subject does not

²⁸ In regard to Matt. 1:23, Frankemölle (*Jahwebund*, 19) says ‘Jesus is the epiphany of God on Earth’ (emphasis original). Regarding 2:2, 11 Heinrich Greeven (‘προσκυνέω’, *TDNT*: 6:763) has observed that ‘[w]hen the NT uses προσκυνεῖν [‘to worship’], the object is always something—truly or supposedly—divine’. While C. F. D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977): 175, points to occasions in Jewish texts where προσκυνεῖν means merely homage, Davies and Allison (*Matthew*, 1:248) argue that falling in prostration (as the magi do) is commonly thought of as an exclusive posture for worship of God in all of Judaism (Matt. 18:26 being one of few exceptions). Similarly, see Gnllka, *Matthäusevangelium*, 1:40-41. J. Duncan M. Derrett, ‘Further Light on the Narratives of the Nativity’, *NovT* 17 (1975): 104, has concluded that ‘in bowing before him they acknowledged the deity, Yahweh, whose worship they were facilitating’. But see also Peter M. Head, *Christology and the Synoptic Problem: An Argument for Markan Priority* (SNTSMS 94; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 127-31. Kupp’s argument (*Emmanuel*, 226-27), based on 4:10, that Jesus is not here portrayed as divine is lacking. Jesus implies in no way that he himself is not divine when he states that only God should be worshipped. To the contrary, given that Jesus believed that God alone should be worshipped, why does *he* receive worship from others (8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 20:20; 28:9, 17)? In fact, Mark Allan Powell, ‘A Typology of Worship in the Gospel of Matthew’, *JSNT* 57 (1995): 4-5, makes the case that Matt. 4:10 is proof positive that Jesus is presented as divine in light of the rest of the gospel’s use of προσκυνέω. Larry W. Hurtado (*inter alia*, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003): 332, 337-38; *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God?: Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005): 145-48, 158-59; *God in New Testament*

inhibit the thesis, but brings out rich theological insights for understanding who Jesus is in the rest of the gospel.²⁹

To summarise, it appears that Ezekiel 36:23b-29a; 37:23b is the conceptual background to Matthew 1:21. This reading has several semantic advantages over reading LXX Psalm 129:8 as the textual precursor. Both Ezekiel and Matthew use the key words יָשַׁע and σωζω in otherwise unprecedented ways, whereas the Psalm does not even use these key words that are so necessary for the point of the evangelist's thematic verse. Moreover, there is a high volume of semantic links between Ezekiel 36:23b-29a; 37:23b and Matthew 1:21 ('people' and 'sins') that are lacking in the Psalm.

4. The Contexts of Ezekiel 34–37 and Matthew 1–2

Steven Moyise says that discovering such backgrounds

is the bread and butter of many 'Old Testament in the New' studies and aims to show that a particular allusion or echo can sometimes be more important than its 'volume' might suggest ... [I]t is not the loudest instruments in the orchestra that give a piece its particular character. Sometimes, subtle allusions and echoes, especially if they are frequent and pervasive, can be more influential than explicit quotations.³⁰

But Robert L. Brawley asks, '[h]ow is it possible to guard against whimsical correlations between texts and to recognize solid appropriations of textual patterns from precursors?'³¹ Richard B. Hays's test points are useful here.³² They are availability, volume

Theology (Nashville: Abingdon, 2010): 60-61) has written extensively on this point in the broader first-century context. So too Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008): 130-31, 179-80. But see also James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Christianity in the Making, vol. 1; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003): 340-48, 853-54.

²⁹ The comparison between YHWH and Jesus is especially poignant in light of the fact that in all of Ezekiel the emphatic personal pronoun, אֲנִי, is used only at 36:28 (Walther Zimmerli, *A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel* [2 vols.; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979–1983]: 2:249).

³⁰ 'Intertextuality and the Study of the Old Testament in the New Testament' in *The Old Testament in the New Testament: Essay in Honor of J. L. North*, ed. Steve Moyise (JNTSup 189; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000): 17.

³¹ Robert L. Brawley, *Text to Text: Voices of Scripture in Luke-Acts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995): 13.

³² *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989): 29-32.

(number of words), recurrence, thematic coherence, historical plausibility, history of interpretation, and satisfaction (how well the echo illuminates and draws the receptor's context together).³³ A potential echo does not need to pass every test to establish legitimacy—these are general moorings to guide artful interpretation—but we should expect to see some combination in each. The more we do, the more likely the reader is not just hearing voices. 'Availability' is not an issue for Matthew; it appears that the evangelist had the entire OT at his disposal.³⁴ The argument has been made above for the 'volume' of Ezekiel 36:28b-29a; 37:23b in Matthew 1:21. The following will consider the thesis in light of Hays's other categories.

On the issue of 'recurrence' data seem to be lacking but for *two climactic* moments in the gospel. First, Matthean scholars agree that 26:28 is the narrational culmination to the themes begun in Matthew

³³ For a recent and very helpful development of Hays see Leroy A. Huizenga, *The New Isaac: Tradition and Intertextuality in the Gospel of Matthew* (NovTSup 131; Leiden: Brill, 2009): 21-24, 53-65.

³⁴ Gundry, *Use*, 172-78; Soares Prabhu, *Formula*, 45-58; Graham N. Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992): 353-63; Maarten J. J. Menken, *Matthew's Bible: The Old Testament Text of the Evangelist* (BETL 173; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2004): 9-10, 280. Pace Luz (*Matthew*, 1:125-26) who contends that Matthew had only a copy of Isaiah, and Georg Strecker (*Der Weg der Gerechtigkeit: Untersuchung zur Theologie des Matthäus* (3rd edn; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971): 49-85), L. Vaganay (*Le problème synoptique: Une hypothèse de travail* (Tournai: Desclée, 1952): 237-40), and Martin C. Albl ('*And Scripture Cannot Be Broken*': *The Form and Function of the Early Christian Testimonia Collections* (NovTSup 96; Leiden: Brill, 1999): 179-90) who hold that Matthew used a *Zitatensammlung* (a circulating collection of proof-texts). Luz does, nonetheless, have to account for non-Isaianic references, and claims Matthew produced them from memory. If that was Matthew's practice it suggests that Matthew conflated Ezek. 36:28b-29a; 37:23b making use of key words therein. For a refutation of Strecker et al. see especially Soares Prabhu (*Formula*, 71-84, 104-106) whose summarising statement is helpful: '[Matthew's formula-quotations] are obviously a highly specialized group of quotations, with a very individual theological and hermeneutical slant. They are, on the whole, not messianic; they refer to events which, while no doubt significant for Mt's understanding of the life of Jesus, cannot be said to be the highlights of early Christian preaching; and they reflect a very personal method of interpreting Scripture, one which calls for a good deal of ingenuity in its application. These are not the characteristics of anonymous *testimonia*, but of a carefully fashioned redactional group of quotations' (73). See also Wilhelm Rothfuchs, *Die Erfüllungszitate des Matthäus-Evangeliums: Eine biblische-theologische Untersuchung* (BWANT 88; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1969): 57-89. Concerning Albl's work David Lincicum, 'Paul and the *Testimonia*: Quo Vademus?', *JETS* (2008): 304 n. 48, cf. 305-308, is right that 'many of Albl's conclusions are simply asserted without any clear criteria'.

1:21.³⁵ There, Jesus equates his death with the ‘blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the remission of sins’, which is strongly reminiscent of Jeremiah 31:31-34,³⁶ itself a parallel passage to Ezekiel 36:26-28.³⁷ That is, Ezekiel 36:26-28 and Jeremiah 31:31-34 have in common the promise that YHWH’s eschatological people will be marked by forgiveness of past sins and given new hearts with which to obey his laws henceforth. So while Ezekiel 36:28b-29a and 37:23b *per se* do not seem to re-emerge in the gospel, their prophetic parallel, Jeremiah 31:31-34, does bear on Matthew’s story at the very place where the theology of Matthew 1:21 reaches its highest point. If Ezekiel 36:28b-29a and 37:23b are indeed the conceptual background to Matthew 1:21, it is not surprising then that Ezekiel’s *concepts* re-emerge in Matthew 26:28, even if more in the language of the prophetic parallel Jeremiah 31:31-34. Second, commentators are consistent in identifying Ezekiel 37:12-13 as the background for Matthew 27:51b-52. If Ezekiel 36:28b-29a and 37:23b stands behind Matthew 1:21 (and 26:28) it is not surprising that the evangelist returns to Ezekiel 37 at another narrational climax: Jesus’ death (cf. 16:21 et al.).³⁸ Moreover, *pace* Ulrich Luz, this reading is of more than ‘little help in clarifying the sense of the text’³⁹ for Matthew has already selected Ezekielian frames as early as 1:21. Thus, the resurrected saints of 27:52 are Matthew’s poetic expression of the end of the exile in Ezekiel’s terms.

³⁵ Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:773; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:210; 3:474; Luz, *Matthew*, 3:381; Novakovic, *Messiah*, 73-74; Moss, *Zechariah Tradition*, 155; Repschinski, ‘He Will Save’, 257-61. See also Carter, *Storyteller*, 191-94.

³⁶ See Carson, *Matthew*, 537; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (2nd edn; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994): 528; Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:773; Carter, *Storyteller*, 193. O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2004): 301, draws a direct line from Matt. 26:27-29 back to Ezek. 36:24-28; 37:24-28. Repschinski’s argument (‘He Will Save’, 260-61 n. 53) for an Exod. 24:1-11 background to Matt. 26:28 does not preclude influence from Jeremiah or Ezekiel insofar as the prophets commonly draw on exodus motifs to break new theological ground. Matthew can, therefore, evoke the entire redemptive-historical thread that begins in Exodus and runs through the prophets (see Clay Ham, ‘The Last Supper in Matthew’, *BBR* 10 (2000): 53-69).

³⁷ Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (2 vols.; Louisville: John Knox, 1965): 2:235, 270-71; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2:249; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel* (Louisville: John Knox, 1990): 169; Block, *Ezekiel*, 2:356-57.

³⁸ See Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1975): 1-25, for the unique role Matt. 16:21 plays in establishing the narrative flow up to Jesus’ death.

³⁹ Luz, *Matthew*, 3:567.

It is on the issue of ‘thematic coherence’ where the semantic argument finds its greatest reinforcement. Ezekiel 34–37 is about YHWH’s regathering of Israel after the exile (34:11–16; 36:8–12, 24, 35; 37:15–22), the re-enthronement of David as their shepherd-king (34:23–24; 37:22–25), the cleansing of the people (36:25–29), and the covenant reaffirmation that YHWH will be their God (36:28; 37:23).⁴⁰ That is to say, the re-establishment of David’s throne and the cleansing of Israel will mark the end of the exile for YHWH’s people. They need this cleansing because of their violation of YHWH’s covenant and expressed will, the consequence of which is exile (*inter alia* 36:17–19).⁴¹ Salvation from such sin, therefore, brings the restoration from exile (36:28).⁴² In Ezekiel 36:16–38, the interconnectedness of several elements of salvation is important: the people are regathered from the nations (v. 24) to dwell in the land originally given to the fathers (v. 28), washed of their idolatry (v. 25), given new hearts and YHWH’s spirit (vv. 26–27), and taught to walk in YHWH’s statutes and judgements (v. 27) with YHWH as their God (v. 28). Verses 33–35 teach that all this will happen in one eschatological swoop; the people are cleansed from sin ‘in the day’ (בַּיּוֹם; ἐν ἡμέρᾳ; 36:33) that they

⁴⁰ The phrase ‘I will be your God and you will be my people’ is the common covenant formula throughout the OT. Thus a renewal of the covenant is in view, even if the word ‘covenant’ is not used (see von Rad, *Old Testament*, 2:235; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2:249; Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 168; Paul M. Joyce, *Ezekiel: A Commentary* [Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies [formerly JSOTSup] 482; New York: T&T Clark, 2007]: 199, 206, 211).

⁴¹ *Psalms of Solomon* 17 also teaches that Israel’s then-current national condition (understood no less in terms of 2 Samuel 7 in 17:4–5) is due to the people’s sin. Frankemölle (*Jahwebund*, 17) is right that salvation in Matthew is not political, but rather from sins, as are Davies and Allison (*Matthew*, 1:210), Hagner (*Matthew*, 1:19), and France (*Matthew*, 54) who emphasise the religious and moral nature of sins. That said, however, it is incorrect to conclude that there are no political dimensions to sin in Matthew’s narrative world. The people’s religious and moral failings have resulted in the current political state: domination by Gentiles (cf. Deut. 28:25, 33, 43–44, 48–52; see Verseput, ‘Davidic Messiah’, 108). Therefore salvation from sins will have concomitant ramifications in the political sphere. Nevertheless, Carter (*Storyteller*, 111) is incorrect to say that salvation in Matthew is from Roman control. Matthew’s concerns are with Israel’s internal ‘politics’; Roman control is only emblematic of the nation’s covenant standing in light of their sins. The gospel’s *intentio operis* is not rhetorical subversion of all imperialism (*pace* Warren Carter, ‘Evoking Isaiah: Matthean Soteriology and an Intertextual Reading of Isaiah 7–9 and Matthew 1:23 and 4:15–16’, *JBL* 119 (2000): 503–520). Rather the concern with Gentile domination only goes so far as what it says of Israel’s covenantal status. Rome is but a symptom, not the disease.

⁴² Other prophetic texts that correlate the end of the exile with forgiveness of sins include Isa. 52:13–53:23; Jer. 31:31–34; Mic. 7:14–19; Dan. 9:24.

return to the land and Edenic conditions flourish.⁴³ This is dramatically illustrated in the revitalised bones (37:1-14) which symbolise the resurrection of the nation that had died *via* exile.⁴⁴ The end is that 'David' will rule over his restored kingdom (37:24-25), and that YHWH's tabernacle of presence will be among them (37:27) forever (37:28). Collectively, this is the renewal of the covenant at the end of the exile.

The thematic coherence between Ezekiel 34–37 and Matthew 1–2 is obvious enough on one level—the concern with forgiveness of sins for example. Less commonly observed, however, are the concomitant events of the end of the exile, the re-enthronement of David, and the renewal of the covenant. The exile plays an important role in Matthew's genealogy. Of all of Israel's history Matthew 1:17 singles out Abraham, David, the exile, and the birth of Jesus. Given that Abraham and David (1:1, 2, 6) are redemptive-historical figures to whom YHWH has made covenantal promises, the exile (1:11-12) is presented as the obstacle to the fulfilment of those promises.⁴⁵ Jesus is then presented as the *telos* of the genealogy, and thus the solution to the problem of the exile and un-fulfilment of YHWH's covenant promises to Abraham and David.⁴⁶ Specifically, the genealogy and following context focus on David's house (1:1, 17, 20; 2:6). It seems then that Matthew has set his gospel at a time of ongoing exile, defined in terms of the empty Davidic throne. Says Joel Kennedy:

This tragic failure [of David's sin, mentioned in Matt. 1:6] ends with the catastrophic event of Israel's history, the exile, when kingship ceases

⁴³ In view here may also be ownership of one's ancestral land (Ezek. 36:28) as part of the end of the exile. See Nicholas Perrin, *Jesus the Temple* (London: SPCK, 2010): 145-48, for historical conditions under which Jesus' contemporaries would not have owned said lands, 'put[ting] on hold Israel's return from exile'.

⁴⁴ See Block, *Ezekiel*, 2:367-83; Jon D. Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006): 156-65.

⁴⁵ Along these same lines, see Verseput, 'Davidic Messiah', 107-108; Mervyn Eloff, 'Exile, Restoration and Matthew's Genealogy of Jesus ὁ Χριστός', *Neotestamentica* 38 (2004): 75-87; Joel Kennedy, *The Recapitulation of Israel: Use of Israel's History in Matthew 1:1-4:11* (WUNT 2/257; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008): 76, 79, 93-100, 108; Jason B. Hood, *The Messiah, His Brothers, and the Nations* (LNTS [formerly JSNTSup] 441; London: T&T Clark, 2011): 83, 85-86, 155-56, 159, 162.

⁴⁶ So too Wright, *New Testament*, 385-86. Kingsbury (*Matthew*, 44) says that the whole of Israel's history, guided by YHWH's promises to Abraham and David, 'which ostensibly had come to naught in the Babylonian captivity have attained their fulfilment in the coming of the heir of Abraham and David'. Similarly see Carson, *Matthew*, 62, 66-67, 95.

and the people are subjected to foreign rulers. The Old Testament story effectively ends here according to Matthew's scheme. Although the Old Testament records that a return takes place, a modest temple is rebuilt, and some basic aspects of national identity are maintained, there nevertheless continues 'exilic' conditions without a king and independent nationhood. Matthew indicates that the story is suspended here, but that it is by no means over, in that a new *ascent* has taken place, unknown to Israel until Messiah's coming.⁴⁷

The genealogy thus provides the setting for Matthew's gospel: YHWH's people are in exile because no Davidic king sits on the throne.

The quotation of Micah 5:1-3 [2-4 in English texts] in Matthew 2:6 reinforces this theological setting, for in Micah 5:2 YHWH hands the people over to exile 'until the time' (עַד-יָמָיו/ἕως καιροῦ) when this Davidic king is born.⁴⁸ Thus Micah foresees the exile persisting until the potentate's arrival.⁴⁹ Matthew 2:1-12 clearly emphasises that Jesus is this new Davidic king, and the quotation of Micah 5:1-3 brings with it the prophet's redemptive-historical schema.

It seems, then, that based on the genealogy and his use of Micah 5, Matthew has set the redemptive-historical context of his narrative in the terms of what Ezekiel envisages a solution to: the exile and lack of a Davidic ruler. Matthew's vision of the end of the exile, concomitant with the coming of David's heir, is shared with Ezekiel 34-37.

Additionally, Ezekiel 36:28; 37:23 describes the ecclesial-defining function of this end-of-exile salvation in the terms of the covenant formula, 'you will be unto me a people'. Hubert Frankemölle has argued that the Immanuel promise of Matthew 1:23 is Matthew's form

⁴⁷ Kennedy, *Recapitulation*, 100 (emphasis original); see also 32-35, 72, 76. Davies and Allison (*Matthew*, 1:187) agree that 'the appearance of Jesus [comes] at the end of the exilic era'.

⁴⁸ The Davidic emphasis of Matt. 2:6 is heightened if scholars rightly see a conflation of 2 Sam. 5:2//1 Chr. 11:2 into the quote of Mic. 5:1 [2 in English texts] (see Menken, *Matthew's Bible*, 255-63; Joel Willits, *Matthew's Messianic Shepherd-King: In Search of 'The Lost Sheep of the House of Israel'* (BZNW 147; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007): 101-107). See also Homer Heater, Jr, 'Matthew 2:6 and Its Old Testament Sources', *JETS* 26 (1983): 395-97, who argues that Matt. 2:6 brings Gen. 49:10, 2 Sam. 5:2, and Mic. 5:1 together.

⁴⁹ While Bruce Waltke, *A Commentary on Micah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007): 278, does not specifically identify Israel's plight as exile *per se*, he does say that עַד-יָמָיו means Israel's misfortune will be reversed only at the Messiah's advent. Douglas S. McComiskey, 'Exile and the Purpose of Jesus' Parables (Mark 4:10-12; Matt. 13:10-17; Luke 8:9-10)', *JETS* 51 (2008): 69, says '[t]he prophet sees Israel as abandoned until the Messiah appears and the remainder of the remnant is gathered, including Jews and Gentiles'.

of the same covenant formula.⁵⁰ Indeed, with one of the shortest phrases, ‘God with us’, Matthew has invoked the entire covenant theology of the OT.⁵¹ Thus, Matthew’s shared concern for the covenant and its ecclesial-defining aspects is evident only two verses beyond 1:21.

Moving on, if the evangelist is using Ezekiel to teach an end-of-exile fulfilment of YHWH’s covenantal promises, he must suppose that the exile persists in some sense. This raises the issue of ‘historical plausibility’. Scholars have increasingly argued (though not without dissension) that many Jews of the Second Temple period perceived their plight as one of ongoing exile.⁵² Moreover, the influence that Ezekiel had on Second Temple writers (especially at Qumran)⁵³ and its more subtle usage by early Christian writers,⁵⁴ lends to the plausibility that Matthew made use of the book as well.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Frankemölle, *Jahwebund*, 7-83.

⁵¹ Frankemölle, *Jahwebund*, 18. This covenant theology is also implied over the entire context of Matthew 1.

⁵² See Michael A. Knibb, ‘The Exile in the Literature of the Intertestamental Period’, *HeyJ* 17 (1976): 253-72; Wright, *New Testament*, 268-72, 299-301; N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God, vol. 2; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996): xvii-xviii, 203-206, 246-51, 576-77; James M. Scott, ed., *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Conceptions* (JSJSup 56; Leiden: Brill, 1997); James M. Scott, ed., *Restoration: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Perspectives* (JSJSup 72; Leiden: Brill, 2001); Michael E. Fuller, *The Restoration of Israel: Israel’s Re-gathering and the Fate of the Nations in Early Jewish Literature and Luke-Acts* (BZNW 138; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006): 13-101. But see also Francis Gerald Downing, *Making Sense in (and of) the First Christian Century* (JSNTSup 197; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000): 148-68; Ivor H. Jones, ‘Disputed Questions in Biblical Studies: 4. Exile and Eschatology’, *ExpTim* 112 (2001): 401-405. Some texts in question include Deuteronomy 28; Ezra 9; Neh. 9:36-37; Dan. 9:24-27; Tob. 14:5-7; Bar. 3:6-8; Sirach 36; 2 Maccabees 1-2; 2 Bar. 67:1-74:4; 1 En. 91-93; 4 Ezra 13; Jub. 1; Pss. Sol. 17:11-31; T. Judg. 23-24; T. Dan. 5; CD 1:3-11; 4Q404-406; Isa. Tar. 52-53; Philo, *Praem.* 28-29; Josephus, *A.J.* 20.5.1; *B.J.* 2.13.4-5; 20.8.6.

⁵³ See George J. Brooke, ‘Ezekiel in Some Qumran and New Testament Texts’ in *The Madrid Qumran Congress: Proceedings of the International Congress on the Dead Sea Scrolls, Madrid, 18-21 March, 1991*, ed. Julio Trebolle Barrera and Luis Vegas Montaner (STDJ 11; Leiden: Brill, 1992): 317-31; Gary T. Manning Jr, *Echoes of a Prophet: The Use of Ezekiel in the Gospel of John and in Literature of the Second Temple Period* (JSNTSup 270; London: T&T Clark, 2004): 22-99; Young S. Chae, *Jesus as the Eschatological Davidic Shepherd: Studies in the Old Testament, Second Temple Judaism, and in the Gospel of Matthew* (WUNT 2/216; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006): 95-172.

⁵⁴ See J. Grassi, ‘Ezekiel XXXVII. 1-14 and the New Testament’, *NTS* 11 (1964-1965): 162-64; C. Hassell Bullock, ‘Ezekiel, Bridge between the Testaments’, *JETS* 25 (1982): 23-31; Brooke, ‘Ezekiel’, 331-37; John Paul Heil, ‘Ezekiel 34 and the Narrative Strategy of the Shepherd and Sheep Metaphor in Matthew’, *CBQ* 55 (1993): 698-708; G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Manning, *Echoes*, 100-197; Robert H. Suh, ‘The Use of Ezekiel 37 in

Examining the ‘history of interpretation’ yields little but is no detriment. In fact, recent scholarship has proposed readings of Matthew 1 that fit extremely well with the thesis, even if they do not isolate Ezekiel 36:28b-29a; 37:23b as the background to Matthew 1:21. N. T. Wright proposes that the statement ‘he will save his people from their sins’ in Matthew 1:21 presupposes the backstory of exile.⁵⁶ Donald J. Verspeut, commenting on Matthew 1:21, says Jesus’ ‘appearance marked the end of the Age of Wrath and the renewal of God’s presence with Israel, [and] would deliver the nation from the sins that had caused God to turn his face from his people’.⁵⁷ Joel Willitts comments that

[t]he framework of the opening chapters of the Gospel perhaps suggests that for Matthew it was not until the arrival of Jesus, the divinely appointed heir of David’s throne—a throne that had been vacated for nearly half a millennium (586 B.C.)[—]that the Deuteronomic curses (Deut. 27–28) had begun to be reversed.⁵⁸

Boris Repschinski says,

Israel’s history of unfaithfulness put a distance between God and the people, expressed in the image of the exile. Thus, if Jesus is his people’s Messiah, he will have to save Israel from its sins and thus put an end to the rift between God and the people.⁵⁹

Indeed scholars are increasingly observing end-of-exile themes throughout Matthew 1, and verse 21 in particular.⁶⁰ This thesis provides another angle to approach similar theological conclusions that others have made for various reasons.

Finally, how ‘satisfying’ is this reading? How well does this proposed background draw things together in the immediate context and the gospel as a whole? When the reader perceives the contact between Ezekiel’s and Matthew’s narrative worlds an intertextual conversation emerges. By assuming, as Matthew 1:21 does, that Jesus’

Ephesians 2’, *JETS* 50 (2007): 715-33; Henk Jan de Jonge and Johannes Tromp, eds., *The Book of Ezekiel and its Influence* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007): 87-181.

⁵⁵ On Ezek. 37:23 particularly, see n. 22.

⁵⁶ Wright, *New Testament*, 385-88.

⁵⁷ ‘Davidic Messiah’, 108.

⁵⁸ Willitts, *Shepherd-King*, 99.

⁵⁹ Repschinski, ‘He Will Save’, 256.

⁶⁰ For the rest of Matthew, see Blaine Charette, *The Theme of Recompense in Matthew’s Gospel* (JSNTSup 79; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992); Adrien M. Leske, ‘The Influence of Isaiah 40–66 on Christology in Matthew and Luke: A Comparison’, *SBLSP* 33 (1994): 897-916; Chae, *Davidic Shepherd*; Perrin, *Jesus*, 59-61.

‘people’ need salvation from sins, Matthew has evoked Ezekiel’s definition of both ‘sin’ and ‘salvation’, and ‘David’s’ role in the new end-of-exile kingdom. Thus, with Ezekiel 36:28b-29a; 37:23b standing behind it, Matthew 1:21 pulls the genealogy and the quotation of Micah 5:1-3 together well and gives the narrative a consistent end-of-exile setting. If the reader asks *What time is it on the redemptive-historical calendar?*, the answer comes back that *The end of exile is dawning*. The warp and woof of the rest of Matthew’s gospel, then, becomes an end-of-exile story as the eschatological Davidide goes from cradle to throne. Thus, this reading of Matthew 1:21 is very ‘satisfying’ insofar that it gives the reader a robust theological frame for reading the rest of the narrative, to which we now turn.

5. The Primacy Effect of Ezekiel 34–37 on Matthew’s Gospel

It is argued above that one of the major shortcomings of reading LXX Psalm 129:8 as the textual precursor to Matthew 1:21 is that the Psalm does not provide the reader with a useful frame for the rest of the gospel. Where LXX Psalm 129 is lacking in this regard, Ezekiel 34–37 is promising.⁶¹

⁶¹ Scholars who read Ezekiel 34–37 as a unit include Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 3-5; Chae, *Davidic Shepherd*, 40-49; Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 42. Since C. H. Dodd published his *According to the Scriptures: The Sub-Structure of New Testament Theology* (London: Nisbet & Co., 1952), exegetes have been increasingly interested in the way NT authors may have used OT quotes to index entire contexts. To be sure, Donald Juel, *Messianic Exegesis: Christological Interpretation of the Old Testament in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988): 19-22, does point out that Dodd’s method may reveal more the result of apostolic exegesis than the process, and that anyone is ‘capable of abstracting a verse or a sentence from its literary context’. Nonetheless, Juel’s critique is primarily of Dodd’s historical starting points and Christological conclusions. Dodd’s insight into OT contexts has withstood the scholarly test of time, and subsequent work has given weight to his theory. One of the most widely read works is Hays’s *Echoes*. He also finds, and works from the understanding, that quotations ‘can become a mode of troping: citations allude to their original contexts’ (155). John Miles Foley, *Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991): 7-8, 245, argues that when the referential meaning of a given word or phrase is agreed upon by author and audience, the summoned world can actually dwarf the referent itself. In regard to Matthew specifically, many follow Lars Hartman, ‘Scriptural Exegesis in the Gospel of St Matthew and the Problem of Communication’ in *L’Évangile selon Matthieu: rédaction et théologie*, ed. M. Didier (Gembloux: Duculot, 1972): 134, who says quotations elicit ‘a bundle of ideas connected with its context and/or its interpretation and usage’. Indeed Albright and Mann (*Matthew*, LXI) rightly call Dodd’s ‘a strong case’.

For one, this reading of Matthew 1:21 has the potential for opening up new understandings of Matthew's ecclesiology and ethic. Ezekiel 34–37 has much to say indeed about the make-up of the covenant people at the end of the exile and their obedience to YHWH's statutes. Jesus also has certain expectations for 'his people' in regard to the law—see Matthew 5–7; 19. By selecting a frame from Ezekiel 34–37, Matthew 1:21 evokes Ezekiel's prophecies of a new heart and new spirit for the covenant people (Ezek. 36:26–27; 37:14) which come to bear when Jesus speaks about the law and the heart (Matt. 5:8, 28; 6:21; 15:18–19). How can Jesus legitimately, at one and the same time, internalise yet also extend the reach of the law? Ezekiel interjects: the end of the exile is dawning and YHWH's covenant people are given a new heart and a new spirit with which to walk in YHWH's statutes and obey his laws (Ezek. 36:26–27).

This reading can also impact what it means to be 'saved from sins'. Outside of 1:21 σωζω occurs in the contexts of performing miracles, eschatological speeches, and the crucifixion. This leads Novakovic to argue that salvation is from the guilt and consequences of sin—the infirmities that afflict the people—and that Jesus' healings are 'a visible sign that the sins have been forgiven'.⁶² She concludes that '[t]he salvation from sins in Matthew 1:21 should be therefore primarily understood as salvation from the consequence of sins that is made possible through their forgiveness'.⁶³ Similarly, Jean Miler calls Jesus' name in 1:21 a 'global' way of speaking of Jesus' vocation, and a 'mixed prolepsis' accomplished in the passion and resurrection, and symbolically gestured in the healings along the way.⁶⁴ Could Ezekiel 34–37 stand behind all this? The ideas of healing and forgiveness meet in Matthew because they are both end-of-exile events concomitant with the coming Davidide per Ezekiel 34:11–31; 37:21–28.⁶⁵ In turn, every individual infirmity that Jesus heals serves as a microcosm of all of Israel, symbolically representing the nation's experience of exile and

⁶² Novakovic, *Messiah*, 67; see also Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* (2nd edn; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988): 45–46; Carson, *Matthew*, 76; Carter, *Storyteller*, 110.

⁶³ Novakovic, *Messiah*, 75.

⁶⁴ *Les citations d'accomplissement dans l'Évangile de Matthieu: Quand Dieu se rend présent en toute humanité* (AnBib 140; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1999): 26–27.

⁶⁵ See Wayne Baxter, 'Healing and the "Son of David": Matthew's Warrant', *NovT* 48 (2006): 36–50.

restoration. Indeed blindness, deafness, death and poverty are common metaphors for the nation in exile (*inter alia* Deut. 28:17, 21, 26, 28, 63; 29:27-28; Isa. 6:9-12; Ezek. 37:1-2, 11). And these are the very infirmities that Jesus heals (*inter alia* Matt. 11:5) to restore said individuals.

Finally, this reading of Matthew 1:21 begins the trajectory that moves the reader to the narrative's conclusion where the crucifixion is Jesus' penultimate restoration-from-exile act. His death (27:45-54) is a climax to the narrative, and the cataclysmic events surrounding it—which are unique to Matthew among the synoptics—are rich with restoration imagery.⁶⁶ This makes his resurrection the ultimate restoration-from-exile act, as the one who embodies Israel⁶⁷ enduring his own exile for sins and re-emerging from the grave in his restoration. This also evokes the revived bones of Ezekiel 37:1-14 when the dead saints in Jerusalem (Matt. 27:52-53) come out of their tombs in eschatological fulfilment of end-of-exile promises.⁶⁸

These considerations are just a splattering of the hermeneutical potential that a background of Ezekiel 36:28b-29a; 37:23b in Matthew 1:21 creates, and some brief suggestions of how the invocation of Ezekiel 34–37 guides the reader through Matthew.

6. Conclusion

This article argues that reading LXX Psalm 129:8 as the allusive background for Matthew 1:21 is deficient on semantic grounds and because of its inability to serve any defining function in Matthew's programmatic verse. Instead, it is here argued that Ezekiel 36:28b-29a; 37:23b is the conceptual background for Matthew 1:21. Semantic links, especially the shared otherwise-unprecedented use of $\sigma\psi\zeta\omega$, and all of Hays's test points bear this out, as does the ability of Ezekiel 34–37 to illuminate the rest of Matthew. According to Matthew 1:21 the

⁶⁶ Chae (*Jesus*, 327-40) and Daniel M. Gurtner (*The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus* (SNTSMS 139; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 144-52, 160-69, 159-201) have recently explored the exilic theology latent in the crucifixion.

⁶⁷ See William L. Kynes, *A Christology of Solidarity: Jesus as the Representative of His People in Matthew* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1991); Kennedy, *Recapitulation*.

⁶⁸ See also Grassi, 'Ezekiel XXXVII', 163; Block, *Ezekiel*, 2:389; Chae, *Jesus* 327-40.

name Jesus assumes that ‘his people’ need salvation from their sins which is tantamount to saying, judging by the background from Ezekiel, that they need to be forgiven of their covenant disobedience. When they are, their exile will end—an event that dovetails with the enthronement of the Davidic heir who leads this restoration (Ezek. 36–37). Thus, Matthew 1:21 distinguishes who Jesus is, explicates what time it is on the redemptive-historical calendar, and identifies the covenantal status of Jesus’ ‘people’. The rest of the gospel is the fulfilment of YHWH’s promise through Ezekiel to save his people from their sins.