

Research Article

Jesus' Association With Jews And Gentiles In Matthew's Gospel: A Comparative Study

ABSTRACT

This paper compares, discusses and evaluates Jesus' association with Jews and Gentiles. It argues that Matthew balances off Jesus' affinity with Jewish and Gentile elements throughout his gospel. Even though Matthean Jesus went beyond the established barriers of the Jewish culture of the time in his dealings with Gentiles, he maintained a balanced affinity with his Jewish culture. Jesus' attitude is normative for Christians in their transactions with people of other ethnic groupings in contemporary societies, and in maintaining a cordial relationship with one's culture. The church should create an enabling environment for peaceful co-existence among people today. It should champion tolerance and good neighbourliness in contemporary societies. The church should educate her members to promote their cultural heritage that does not conflict with biblical principles; respect the culture of people other than one's own; and treat people of different cultures with dignity and respect. This paper provides a detailed analysis of Matt 1:1-17; 2:1-12; 8:5-13 and 9:1-8; 10:5-15 and 28:18-20; 14:13-21 and 15:32-39; and 15:21-28 as basis to determine Jesus' Jewish-Gentile interactions in Matthew's Gospel within the socio-cultural context of his time.

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INTRODUCTION

The history of Christianity is replete with issues of ethnicity.² As such, the issue of ethnicity in Christianity has engaged scholars for centuries.³ Of special interest to biblical scholarship is Jesus' approach to ethnicity.⁴ In view of this, Jesus' attitude towards people of different ethnic backgrounds in the Gospels has been a subject for discussion among these scholars.⁵ The Gospel of Matthew stands out due to its apparent Jewish leanings.⁶ With the rise in Matthean theology on ethnicity, the issue has gained tremendous coverage.⁷

This study compares how Matthew associates Jesus with Jews and Gentiles and draws implications for the present and future. This paper examines Matthean Jesus' Jewish and Gentile ancestries in Matt. 1:1-17. The next

² D. E. Prince "Preaching about race: Keeping the big picture in view". Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, Mar 13, 2017; R. W. Stacy, "Colossians 4:11 and the ethnic identity of Luke", *Eruditio Ardescens*, 2.1(2015): 1-15.

³ J. D. Hays, "Six ways the Bible changed my perspective on ethnicity", *The Gospel Coalition* 2018: 1-4; J. Tisby, "Putting race in biblical perspective", *Christian Research Journal* 38.04(2015), 1-9; B. Sanou, "Ethnicity, tribalism and racism: a global challenge for the Christian Church and its mission", *The Journal of Applied Christian Theology* 9.1(2015): 94-104; D. Senior, "Between Two Worlds: Gentiles and Jewish Christians in Matthew's Gospel", *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 61.1(1999), 1-23.

⁴ see J. Jones-Carmack, *Relational demography in John 4: Jesus crossing cultural boundaries as praxis for Christian leadership*, 2016.

⁵ G.T. Gombis, "Racial reconciliation and the Christian gospel," *ACT 3 Review* 15.3 (2006): 123-125; Jones-Carmack, *Relational demography in John 4*, 1.

⁶ A. Innocent, *Particularism in the Gospel of Matthew*, 2018, 1; J. Willitts, *The friendship of Matthew and Paul: a response to a recent trend in the interpretation of Matthew's Gospel*, *Historical Theological Studies* 65.1(2009), 1-21; G. K. Khual, *Ethnicity in the Gospel of Matthew with its Application to ethnic issues in Burma*, Doctoral Thesis, 2003, 83-287; D. Senior, "Between Two Worlds", 1-23.

⁷ For example, see Senior, "Between Two Worlds", 1-23; Khual, *Ethnicity in the Gospel of Matthew*, 83-287; Willitts, "The friendship of Matthew and Paul," 1-21; H. Freeman, "The Great Commission and the New Testament: An Exegesis of Matthew 28:16-20," *Baptist Journal of Theology* 1.4(1997): 18, 20; G. N. Stanton, "Revisiting Matthew's Communities." *Historical and Theological Studies* 52.2&3(1996): 376-394.

section compares the roles of Gentiles and Jews in the birth narrative of Jesus in Matt. 2. The third portion compares Jewish and Gentile characters in Jesus' healing of Jews and Gentiles in Matt 8:5-13 and 9:1-8. The fourth section compares Matthean Jesus' commissioning of his disciples to preach in Matt 10:5-15 and 28:18-20. The next section compares Matthean Jesus' feeding of the multitude in Matt 14:13-21 and 15:32-39. Discussion and evaluation of Jesus' association with Jews and Gentiles followers.

A comparative phenomenological methodology was adopted since theological interpretations of events needed to be compared with scientific theories to ascertain the meeting point. "The goal in phenomenology is to study how people make meaning of their lived experience."⁸ For the purposes of this article, the following elements are defined: Ethnicity-as "perceived differences –which include one or more patterns such as culture, religion, language, national origin, and historical experience by which groups of people distinguish themselves and are distinguished from others in the same social environment."⁹ John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith gives six features of ethnicity: (1) a collective name, (2) a common myth of descent, (3) a shared history, (4) a distinctive shared culture, (5) an association with a specific territory, and (6) and a sense of solidarity;¹⁰ Ethnic identity: as "the sense of self an individual acquires through identification with an ethnic group;"¹¹ Ethnocentrism is the conviction or the feeling that one's own ethnic group should be treated as superior or privileged;¹² Judaism is a religious tradition and cultural grouping existing from post-exilic times, historically connected with the land of Palestine.¹³ Jews: as descendants of the twelve tribes of Israel (whose ancestors are the twelve male children of Jacob). Gentiles: as people who are non-Jews.

Theories of Ethnicity

Existential/primordality and constructivist/instrumentality are alternative anthropological perspectives on ethnicity.¹⁴

Existentialism/Primordality: views ethnicity as an obvious cause of human behaviour. It views ethnicity and ethnic identity as an unchanging essential idea of how people understand themselves as a cultural group and how they are understood by others. In this view, ethnicity rests on a "bedrock" of cultural differences from others.¹⁵ This bedrock of difference from others may involve kinship, religion, language, attachment to a place, custom, or 'race.' That is, it incorporates what we commonly think as the substance of ethnicity and ethnic identity. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz calls these attachments "assumed givens," emphasizing that though they are different from "person to person, society to society, and from time to time," they are perceived as permanent, natural, and even spiritual, so that they have an overpowering and even coercive force in and of themselves, beyond any practical necessity or common interest.¹⁶ For those theorists who view ethnicity from this perspective, it is seen as an inherent part of human social life, based on the desire of individuals to identify with a group.¹⁷

Social Constructivism/Instrumentality: views ethnicity as a social construction that has its history. Thus, although ethnicity may be based on pre-existing cultural differences and group memories, any particular ethnic landscape is a response to changing realities, both within a group and in the larger society of which it is part.¹⁸ For social constructionists, ethnic traditions and boundaries are not fossilized "age-old" patterns but are repeatedly reinterpreted over time, particularly with regard to political power and economic resources. From a social constructionist perspective, ethnicity rests less on a bedrock of culture than it does on the shifting sands of history and political power. Anthropologists Frederik Barth, in his classic study *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*,¹⁹ opened the way for a constructionist view of ethnicity.²⁰

Paul Deouyo argues that human beings naturally belong to one ethnic group or another. He explains that ethnicity, should not be confused with ethnocentrism and tribalism - a common problem on the African continent.²¹ or Buell and

⁸ H. Starks & S. B. Trinidad, "Choose Your Method: A Comparison of Phenomenology, Discourse Analysis, and Grounded Theory." *Qualitative Health Research*, 17.10(2007): 1372-1373.

⁹ Nanda & Warm's, "Stratification," 349-350.

¹⁰ J. Hutchinson & A. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 22-31.

¹¹ Nanda & Warm's, "Stratification," 350.

¹² J. Piper, "Issues of Race in the text", 1.

¹³ Shin & van Aarde, "Matthew and Paul", 1356.

¹⁴ R. E. Blanton, "Theories of ethnicity and dynamics of ethnic change in multi-ethnic societies." *Perspectives* 112.30(2015): 9176-9181; Nanda & Warm's, "Stratification", 350-351.

¹⁵ Meier & Ribera, *Mexican Americans/American Mexicans*, 1.

¹⁶ C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 259.

¹⁷ Nanda & Warm's, "Stratification", 350, 351.

¹⁸ M. Di Leonardo, *Exotics at Home: Anthropologies, Others, American Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 1-20.

¹⁹ F. Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland, 1998), 1-177.

²⁰ Nanda & Warm's, "Stratification," 351.

²¹ P. Deouyo, "The Concept of Mang-Djala with Reference to Church Unity in a Context of Ethnic Diversity: The Case of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon," (KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa: 2013), 26; J. J. Carney, *Rwanda Before the Genocide* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), 70-120.

Hodge, ethnicity will endure so long as humanity exists.²² Ethnicity gives an individual identity and belongingness.²³ Ethnicity is a blessing to humanity if properly understood.²⁴

Ethnicity in Oriental Socio-Cultural Context

This section discusses ethnicity in the socio-cultural context of the Greco-Roman world. It concentrates on ethnicity in the Greek, Roman, and Jewish cultures. This provided the basis for evaluation of the biblical texts. The objective was to discover the socio-cultural context of the biblical texts. Throughout recorded history, ethnicity has been a major cause of human division.²⁵

The Greek regarded the culture of conquered states as inferior to the Greek culture. They considered other ethnic groups as barbarian.²⁶ The Romans also considered other tribes as barbarians.²⁷ Stark has identified over 18 ethnic groupings in Antioch alone during the Roman rule. He explains that these ethnic groupings were antagonistic.²⁸ The Christian church at Antioch, however, rose above ethnic antagonism to exhibit Christian love to the admiration of onlookers. The followers of Jesus were called Christian first in Antioch (cf. Acts 11:19-26). Christian-Gentile mission, which took the gospel of Jesus Christ around the world, also began in Antioch (Acts 13:1-3; cf. Acts 11:19-26).²⁹ Recorded history has identified a sharp division between the Jews and the Samaritans.³⁰ The canonical Gospels alludes to the divisions between the Jews and the Samaritans.³¹ Matthew's Gospel mimics the culture of Judaism.³² One of Matthew's purpose in writing his Gospel was to legitimize or discredit some social belief/value system with his presentation of the life of Jesus.³³ Matthew's community included Jews and Gentiles.³⁴ Matthew's Gospel gives a positive outlook of the Gentiles.³⁵ However, there are particular anti-Gentile sentiments in the Gospel of Matthew.³⁶ Sim argues that the Gentiles in Matthew's community were not equal to their Jewish counterparts.³⁷ Shin and van Aarde write, however, describe the Matthean community as open to the Gentiles in spite of its law-observing perspective.³⁸ From the above, it is safe to posit that Matthew's Gospel relatively maintained ethnic diversity in the Greco-Roman world it emanated. Having established the socio-cultural context of the texts, the next section explores Jesus' association with Jews and Gentiles in Matthew's Gospel. The study limited itself to nine narratives: Matt 1:1-17; 2:1-12; Matt 8:5-13 and 9:1-8; 10:5-15 and 28:16-20; 14:13-21 and 15:32-39; and 15:21-28. In each of these narratives, how Matthew presents Jesus' association with Jews and Gentiles is examined.

Matthew 1:1-17

The narrative of Jesus' Jewish and Gentile ancestries in Matt 1:1-17. This account is followed by the narrative of Jesus' birth, 1:18-25. Matthew traces Jesus' genealogy to David and Abraham, 1:1. This seems to emphasize the Jewishness of Jesus, as compared to Lukan parallel, which traces Jesus' ancestry to Adam, the son of God, Luke 3:38.

Matthew, however, includes Gentile women in his narrative of Jesus' ancestry. These Gentiles include Tamar, 1:3; Rahab, 1:5; Ruth, 1:5; and the wife of Uriah (Bethsheba). Tamar was, possibly, a Canaanite (see Gen 38). Rahab was a Canaanite from Jericho (Josh 2:1; 6:25). Ruth was a Moabite (Ruth 1:4). The wife of Uriah was, probably, a Canaanite (1 Kgs 11:3; 1 Chron 3:5). It is worthy of note that these women ancestors of Jesus have associated with their husbands in the narrative: Tamar with Judah, Rahab with Salmon, Ruth with Boaz, and the wife of Uriah with David. With the exception of these Gentiles, Jesus' ancestors are Jews in Matt 1:1-17.

²² D. K. Buell, & C. J. Hodge, "The politics of interpretation: the rhetoric of race and ethnicity in Paul," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123.2(2004), 235; Philip Q. Yang, *From Ethnic Studies: Issues and Approaches* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), 42-43; Deouyo, "Ethnic Diversity," 26.

²³ See Ziring, 2019; Lluch, 2018; A. De Jong, *Ethnicity: Blessing or curse* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1999), 10-11; Deouyo, "Ethnic Diversity", 26.

²⁴ Deouyo, "Ethnic Diversity", 26; De Jong, *Ethnicity*, 20;

²⁵ Ziring, 2019; Lluch, 2018; De Jong, *Ethnicity*, 10-11.

²⁶ S. T. Keller, "Race, the Gospel, and the Moment", *The Gospel Coalition* (2017): 1-2; D. E. Aune, *The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament* (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 16-17.

²⁷ Keller, "Race, the Gospel," 1-2.

²⁸ Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 10-11.

²⁹ Prince, "Preaching about race", 1.

³⁰ Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 1.

³¹ See Matt 10:5; Luke 10:25-37; 17:11-19; John 4:1-42.

³² I-C. Shin, & A. van Aarde, "Matthew and Paul's Inclusive Tendencies: A Comparison." *Historical and Theological Studies* 61.4(2005),1356.

³³ Stanton, "Revisiting Matthew's Communities," 376-394; Graham N. Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992), 85-145.

³⁴ Sin and van Aarde, "Matthew and Paul," 1365; H. Kvalbein, "Has Matthew abandoned the Jew?" in Anan, J and Kvalbein, H (ed.), *The mission of the early church to Jews and Gentiles*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 46.

³⁵ See Matt 8:5-13; 15:21-28; 28:19; Kvalbein, "Has Matthew abandoned the Jew?" 55.

³⁶ For example, 18:17.

³⁷ D. C. Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism: The History and Social Setting of the Matthean Community* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 254.

³⁸ Sin and van Aarde, "Matthew and Paul," 1366.

Jesus’ Association with Jews in Matthew 1:1-17

Matthew’s account of Jesus Jewish ancestry has revealed the following in his relations to Jews: (1) Jesus’ ancestry is predominantly Jewish. (2) Jesus, as the son of David, identifies him as the king of the Jews.³⁹ (3). Matthew identifies Jesus as a Jewish Messiah in his gospel by referring to Jesus as the Son of David.⁴⁰ Thus, Matthew presents Jesus as a Jew. Having dealt with Jesus’ Jewish leanings, the study proceeds to explore his Gentile ancestry.

Jesus’ Association with Gentiles in Matthew 1:1-17.

Jesus’ genealogy in Matt 1:1-17 has revealed the following in his relation to Gentiles: (1) Matthew’s Jesus is identified with Abraham, whose blessings would extend to all nations including Gentiles (Gen 12:1-3). Thus, Jesus seems to be identified with Gentiles through Abraham. (2) The inclusion of the Gentiles women in the ancestry of Jesus also seems to identify him with the nations (Gentiles).

Similarities between Jesus’ Associations with Jews and Gentiles in Matthew 1:1-17

The studies on Jesus’ association with Jews and Gentiles above suggest some similarities between them. Table 1 below gives a snapshot of the similarities between them.

Table 1

The Similarities Jesus’ Associations with Jews and Gentiles in Matthew 1:1-17.

Jews	The Gentiles
Jesus has Jewish ancestry	Jesus has Gentile ancestry
Jesus is associated with Jews through David as a king	Jesus is associated with the Gentiles through Abraham, whose blessings are extended to the Gentiles

From Table 1, Jesus has both Jewish and Gentile ancestry. Jesus is the king of the Jews through David; he is the means through which the Abrahamic blessings overflow to the Gentiles. Thus, Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus Christ identifies him with both the Jews and the Gentiles. The next section analyses the visit of the Maggi from the East after the birth of Jesus in Matt 2:1-12.

Matthew 2:1-12

The narrative of the visit of the Maggi, Matt 2:1-12, is sandwich between the birth narratives of Jesus (1:18-25) and the escape of Jesus to Egypt (2:13-15). From this narrative, we can glean the roles of Gentiles and Jews in the visit of the Maggi in Matt 2:1-12. The Maggi, King Herod, the chief priests and scribes play varied roles in this narrative.

Jesus’ Association with Jews in Matthew 2:1-12

From the narrative of the visit of the Maggi (2:1-12), the following could be inferred with regards to Jesus’s association with the Jews: (1) The chief priests and scribes identified the place of the birth of Jesus, Bethlehem of Judea. Their knowledge in prophecy helped identified the birthplace of Jesus (2:6), and the Christ of prophecy (2:4-6).

Jesus’ Association with Gentiles in Matthew 2:1-12.

From the above narrative, 2:1-12, the following could be gleaned with regards to Jesus’s association with Gentiles: (1) the Maggi addressed Jesus as “the king of the Jews” (2:2), recognizing his ethnic background as a Jew; (2) the Maggi worshipped Jesus (2:11); (3) the Maggi presented gift to Jesus. These gifts, gold, frankincense, and myrrh (2:11), seem to point to his messianic work for all humanity. In sum, the Maggi recognized Jesus’ ethnic and universal roles as both the king of the Jews and the messiah of the world.

Similarities between Jesus’ Associations with Jews and Gentiles in Matthew 2:1-12

The studies on Jesus’ association with Jews and Gentiles in Matt 2:1-12 above suggest some similarities between them. Table 2 below gives a snapshot of the similarities between them.

Table 2

The Similarity of Jesus’ Associations with Jews and Gentiles in Matthew 2:1-23.

Jews	The Gentiles
Their knowledge of prophecy helped identified the birthplace of the Christ of prophecy	The inquiry helped draw the attention of Jerusalem to the birth and birthplace of the Christ of prophecy

39 See U. Luz, *Theology of the Gospel of Matthew* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 86, 111.

40 Ibid.

From Table 2, both Jews and Gentiles placed roles in identifying the birthplace of the Christ of prophecy. The next section analyses Jesus' healing of paralytic Gentile and Jew in Matt 8:5-13 and 9:1-8.

Matthew 8:5-13 and 9:1-8

This section analyses Jesus' healings of a Gentile (Matt 8:5-13) and a Jew (Matt 9:1-8). The purpose was to investigate similarities between Jesus' association with Jews and Gentiles in the two narratives.

Jesus' Association with Gentiles in Matthew 8:5-13.

The narrative of Jesus' healing of a Centurion's servant, a Gentile, in Matt 8:5-13 is sandwich between the narratives of Jesus' healing of a leper in Matt 8:1-4, and Jesus' healings of many, including Peter's mother-in-law, at Peter's house in Matt 8:14-17. The literary context of the healing of the Centurion's servant seems to portray that the Jews took the healings for granted. Except for Peter's mother-in-law, who served Jesus after her healing, the other supposedly Jews expressed no recorded appreciation.

Analysed in this literary context of apathy towards Jesus' healing of supposedly Jews by Jews, the encounter between Jesus and the Centurion in Matt 8:5-13 shines forth. A Centurion pleaded with Jesus about his servant who was ill and tormented (Matt 8:6). Jesus resolved to go to the Centurion's house to heal the servant (v. 7). The Centurion admitted his unworthiness for Jesus' visit, but ask Jesus to speak to heal his servant (v. 8). The Centurion expressed faith in Jesus' ability to heal (v. 9). Jesus marvelled at the Centurion's faith (v. 10). Jesus made a pronouncement that the Gentiles would be heirs of the kingdom of heaven (v. 11), excluding the Jews may miss out (v. 12). Jesus healed the Centurion's servant based on the Centurion's faith (v. 13).

The immediate literary context of Jesus' healing of the Centurion's servant suggests that the Centurion's faith should be weighed in the context of the healing of the leper in 8:1-4 and healing of the many, including Peter's mother-in-law, in 8:14-17. As such, the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy in Isa 53:4 embraces both Jews and the Gentiles. The analyses below centre on Jesus' association with the Gentiles in Matt 8:5-13.

Jesus' encounter with the Centurion and subsequent healing of the Centurion's servant is instructive. The following can be gleaned from the passage: (1) The Centurion expressed faith in Jesus' ability to heal his servant (v. 8); (2) The Centurion expressed his unworthiness to host Jesus in his house, v. 8; (3) Jesus responded to the Centurion's faith and the Centurion's servant (vs.10-13); (4) Jesus recommended the faith of the Centurion, and assured the audience that the Gentiles would share the kingdom of heaven with the Patriarchs of the Jews, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (v. 11).

Jesus' Association with Jews in Matthew 9:1-8.

The narrative of Jesus' healing of a paralytic, supposedly, a Jew, in Matt 9:1-8 is sandwich between the narratives of Jesus' healing of the Gadarene demoniacs in Matt 8:28-34, and Jesus' calling of Matthew in Matt 9:9-13. The literary context of the healing of the person with paralysis seems to portray a common theme of rejection by those who think they were worth financially or spiritually. In the immediate context before, 8:28-34, the inhabitants of the Gentiles city of Gadarene rejected Jesus because of possible economic loss. They, thus, begged him to leave the place (8:34). In the immediate context after (9:9-13) the Pharisees rejected Jesus because of eating with tax collectors and sinners (9:11). Jesus' reply to the Pharisees (9:12-13). In the narrative of the healing of the paralytic (9:1-8), some scribes accused Jesus of blasphemy for forgiving the sins of the person with paralysis. By imposing themselves judges over what is blasphemy, the said scribes presume themselves spiritually worthy to pronounce the said judgement on Jesus. Thus, Jesus is rejected by both Jews and Gentiles.

It is in this context of rejection that the faith of the friends of the paralytic comes to the fore. This incidence probably occurred in Capernaum. The friends of the paralytic, hearing of Jesus' arrival in town, carried their sick friend, possibly to Jesus to heal him (v. 2). Jesus recognized their faith, forgave the sins of the paralytic, v. 2, and later healed him (vs 6-7). The paralytic responded in faith to Jesus. The audience glorified God for the healing of the paralytic (v.8). Some scribes, however, accused Jesus of blasphemy in forgiving the sins of the paralytic (v. 3). Jesus' encounter with the paralytic, his friends, and the scribes is instructive. The following can be gleaned from the passage: (1) The friends of the paralytic, presumably, had faith in Jesus (v. 2); (2) The paralytic, acting upon Jesus' instruction to act in faith (v. 7, cf., v. 6); (3) The scribes, however, considered Jesus' forgiveness of his sins as blasphemy (v. 3).

Similarities between Jesus' Association with Jews and Gentiles in Matthew 8:5-13 and 9:1-8

The studies on Jesus' healings of the Centurion's servant (Matt 8:5-13) and the paralytic (Matt 9:1-8) suggest some similarities between them. Table 3 below shows the similarities between them.

Table 3

The Similarities between Jesus' Association with Gentiles and Jews in Matthew 8:5-13 and 9:1-8.

Gentiles	Jews
The Centurion expressed faith in Jesus	The paralytic and friends expressed faith in Jesus
The Centurion pleaded with Jesus to heal his servant	The friend of the paralytic took him to Jesus, probably, for Jesus to heal him
Jesus recognized the faith of the Centurion	Jesus recognized the faith of the friends of the paralytic

From Table 3, both the Jews and Gentiles expressed faith in Jesus. Also, both the Centurion and the friends of the paralytic served as channels through which the servant and the paralytic received their healings. Jesus also recognised the faith of the Centurion and the friends of the paralytic. The next section analyses Jesus' commissioning of his disciples to minister to Jews only (Matt 10:5-15) and to Jews and Gentiles in Matt 28:16-20.

Matthew 10:5-15 and 28:18-20.

This section analyses Jesus' commissioning of his disciples to minister to Jews (10:5-15) and Jews and Gentiles (28:16-20). The purpose was to investigate similarities between Jesus' association with Jews and Gentiles in the two narratives.

Jesus' Association with Jews in Matthew 10:5-15

The pericope of Jesus' commissioning of the Twelve disciples, 10:1 (also called the apostles, 10:2), 10:5-15, is sandwiched between the narratives of the call and mission of the Twelve, 10:1-4; and the narrative of the coming persecution, 10:16-25. A common theme that runs through the immediate context is that in fulfilling the mission of their call, the disciples (the Twelve) may encounter persecution.

It is in this context of persecution that Jesus' commissioning of his twelve disciples, also called apostles, 10:2 that the current narrative comes to the fore. In this pericope, Jesus commanded his disciples not to visit the Gentiles, not the Samaritans, 10:5. Jesus specifically directed the Apostles to minister to the Jews, v. 6. The content of their preaching was that "The kingdom of heaven is at hand", v. 7. The Apostles are to accompany their preaching with healing and miracles, v. 8. They were also assured of the divine provision of their daily needs for food, clothing, and shelter, vs 9-11. Those who receive the Apostles and their message will receive divine blessings, vs 12-13. However, those who reject their message will receive divine punishment vs 14-15.

Jesus' commissioning of the Twelve Apostles is instructive. The following can be gleaned from the passage: (1) Jesus restricted the mission of the Twelve Apostles to the Jews, v.6; (2) Jesus specifically excluded ministry to the Gentiles and Samaritans by name, v. 5; (3) Jesus specifically mentions the content of the Apostles' preaching: "The kingdom of heaven is at hand," v. 7. (4) Jesus also instructed the Apostles to heal and do miracles, v. 8; (5) Jesus assured them of divine provision for their daily needs for food, clothing, and shelter, vs 9-11; (6) Acceptance of the Apostles and their message would bring divine blessings to the recipients, vs 12-13; and (7) rejection of the Apostles and their message would bring divine punishment, vs 14-15.

Jesus' association with Jews and Gentiles in Matthew 28:18-20

The narrative of Jesus' commissioning of the eleven disciples, 28:16 (the Twelve minus Judas Iscariot, cf. Matt 26:14, 47; 27:3-5), 28:16-20, follows the narratives on the Guard' report, 28:11-15, and ends the Gospel of Matthew. The Guard's report to the chief priest, 28:11, confirm the resurrection of Jesus from death. The immediate context gives credence to Jesus resurrection since the previous narrative reiterates Jesus' resurrection, and in the current pericope, the resurrected Jesus commissioned his eleven remaining Apostles, cf. Matt 10:1-4, 26:14, 47; 27:3-5.

In 28:16-20, Jesus assured his disciples that he had been given all authority in heaven and on earth, v.18. He, thus, commissioned them to be disciples of all the nations, vs 19-20. In disciplining the nations, they should go, baptize, and teach the nations. Jesus assured them of his presence with them, v. 20. From the narrative of Jesus' commissioning of his eleven disciples, the following could be inferred: (1) Jesus, who has been given all authority in heaven and on earth (v. 18), is with his disciples (v. 20b); (2) The eleven disciples instructed to disciple all nations, including Jews and Gentiles (vs 19-20a); and (3) they should disciple by going, baptizing, and teaching the nations.

Similarities between Jesus' Association with Jews and Gentiles in Matthew 10:5-15 and 28:18-20

The studies on Jesus' commissioning of his disciples to minister to Jews in Matt 10:5-15, and Jews and Gentiles in Matt 28:16-20 above suggest some similarities between them. Table 4 below gives a snapshot of the similarities between them.

Table 4

The Similarities between Jesus' Association with Jews and Gentiles in Matthew 10:5-15 and 28:18-20.

Matthew 10:5-15	Matthew 28:18-20
Jesus sends the Apostles, 10:5; cf. 10:1-4	Jesus sends the Apostles, 28:16; cf. Matt 10:1-4, 26:14, 47; 27:3-5.
Jesus, having given them authority, cf. 10:1, commanded them to heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, and cast out demons, v. 8.	Then, having been given all authority in heaven and on earth, v. 16, assures the disciples of his presence with them in discipling all nations, v. 20b.
The Apostles should minister to Jews, vs 5-6	The Apostles should minister to Jews and Gentiles, v. 19-20a

From Table 4, Jesus sent his disciples, the Apostles (10:1, 2), in both narratives Jesus and his disciples cared for the welfare of Mary, a Jewish woman. Also, there is the assurance of authority in both narratives. Moreover, in both narratives, the Apostles were sent to minister to others. The study proceeds to examine the similarities and differences in Jesus feeding of five thousand and four thousand in Matt 14:13-21 and 15:32-39.

Matthew 14:13-21 and 15:32-39.

This section analyses Jesus' feeding of his audience in Jewish territory, 14:13-21, and a Gentile territory, 15:32-39. The purpose was to investigate similarities between Jesus' association with Jews and Gentiles in the two narratives

Jesus' association with Jews in Matthew 14:13-21

The narrative of Jesus' feeding of the five thousand men, beside women and children in Matt 14:13-21 is sandwiched between the narratives of John the Baptist' death, 14:1-12, and the narrative of Jesus walking on water, 14:22-33. The literary context of Jesus' feeding of the five thousand men besides women and children throws more light on it. In the immediate context before, King Herod wanted to know who Jesus really was, Herod confused Jesus with a resurrected John the Baptist. To Herod, the powers at work with Jesus was supernatural, 14:2. In the immediate narrative after, Jesus' disciples, having experienced his miracle of walking on water, together with Peter's episode, resolved that Jesus was the son of God, 14:33. The current narrative, 14:13-21 reiterates the supernatural phenomenon by feeding a multitude with five loaves of bread and two fish, 14:17. Thus, the literary context of the feeding of the five thousand men, beside women and children, point to Jesus and the son of God, who inaugurated the kingdom of heaven.

In 14:13-21, Jesus was moved with compassion for the multitude who followed him, v. 14. He, therefore:

1. healed the sick among them, v. 14
2. fed them, vs 15-21.

From the narrative of Jesus' feeding of the five thousand men, besides women and children, the following could be inferred:

1. Jesus' ministry to the multitude was out of compassion for them. Apparently, Jesus had gone to the place for a quiet time after being informed of the death of John the Baptist, cf. 14:13. Having seen the multitude and having had compassion for them, he ministered to them.
2. Jesus' disciples initiated the process of feeding the five thousand. They prompted Jesus to disperse the people so that the multitude might by themselves find food in the surrounding villages, v. 15.
3. Jesus challenged his disciples to feed the multitudes, v. 16.
4. The disciples admitted their limitation in feeding the multitude with the available provision of food, five loaves of bread and two fish, v. 17.
5. Jesus supernaturally fed the people out of the limited provision of food, vs 18-21.
6. The total number of people fed was five thousand men besides women and children, v. 21.
7. The leftover, after feeding the multitude, was twelve baskets full of the fragments, v. 20.

Jesus' Association with Gentiles in Matthew 15:32-39

The narrative of Jesus' feeding of the four thousand men, beside women and children, Matt 15:32-39, is sandwiched between the narratives of Jesus' healing of many people, 15:29-31, and the narrative of the Pharisees and Sadducees seeking a sign from Jesus, 16:1-4. The literary context of Jesus' feeding of the four thousand men besides women and children throws more light on it. In the immediate context before, Jesus healed many people, pointing to him as the Messiah of prophecy. In the immediate pericope after, the Pharisees and Sadducees seek a sign from Jesus, probably a sign that he is the Messiah of prophecy. The current pericope of feeding the four thousand, 15:32-39, further point to Jesus as the Messiah of prophecy.

In 15:32-39, Jesus had compassion on the multitude he ministered to, v. 32, and he fed them, vs 34-39. From

the narrative of Jesus’ feeding of the four thousand men, besides women and children, the following could be inferred: (1) Jesus’ feeding of the multitude was out of compassion for them, v.32. (2) Jesus initiated the process of feeding the four thousand men, beside women and children. Jesus explained that the multitude had been with him for three days. Possibly, their personal provisions might have run out in the wilderness, v. 33. Jesus explained to his disciples that the multitude had nothing to eat. Sending them away to find their own food might endanger their lives since they could faint on the way, v. 32. (3) The disciples’ response to Jesus seems to indicate that there were no surrounding villages to buy food from, v. 33.

Four, the disciples had seven loaves of bread and little fish, v. 34. (5) Jesus supernaturally fed the people out of the limited provision of food, vs 35-38. (6) The total number of people fed were four thousand men, besides women and children, v. 38. And (7) The leftover, after feeding the multitude, was seven baskets full of the fragments, v. 37.

Similarities between Jesus’ Association with Jews and Gentiles in Matthew 14:13-21 and 15:32-39

The studies on Jesus’ feeding of the five thousand men, besides women and children in Matt 14:13-21, and four thousand men, besides women and children in Matt 15:32-39, above suggest some similarities between them. Table 5 below gives a snapshot of the similarities between them.

Table 5

The Similarities Between Jesus’ Association with Jews and Gentiles in Matthew 14:13-21 and 15:32-39.

Matthew 14:13-21	Matthew 15:32-39
Jesus had compassion on the multitude, 14:14	Jesus had compassion on the multitude, 15:32

From Table 5, Jesus had compassion on the multitude. The next section deals with Jesus’ association with Gentile women in Matt 15:21-28.

Matthew 15:21-28

The narrative of Jesus’ encounter with a Canaanite woman in Matt 15:21-28 is sandwiched between the narratives of Jesus’ explanation of things that defile, Matt 15:10-20, and Jesus’ healing of many people, Matt 15:29-31. In Matt 15:10-20, Jesus deals with the Jewish tradition of defilement. Jesus’ concept of defilement differs from that of the scribes and Pharisees (cf. Matt 15:1-9; the dispute about defilement took place in Gennesareth, a Gentile city where Jesus heals many people who were sick, implying that Jesus and his disciples are defiled by mingling with Gentiles, see Matt 15:34-36). In Matt 15:29-31, Jesus heals several people, demonstrating his power to heal as the Messiah of prophecy (cf. Matt 11:2-6; Luke 4:18-21; Isa 60:1, 2). Matthew 15:21-28 contains apparent ethnocentric pronouncements of Jesus, confirming already established Jewish bigotry towards Gentiles in the first century Judaism. The context seems to portray that one’s attitude toward Gentiles influences his/her theology of defilement. In Matt 15:21-28, Jesus is not only dealing with a Gentile but also, he is dealing with a Gentile woman in public (talking to a woman in public defied social etiquette of the day).⁴¹

Jesus’ Apparent Ethnocentric Comments in Matthew 15:21-28

Jesus’ encounter with a Canaanite woman, a Gentile, is instructive. The following can be gleaned from the passage: (1) Jesus, at first, appeared to neglect the plea of the woman, v. 23; (2) Jesus’ initial silence could have encouraged the reaction of his disciples, v.23b; (3) Jesus’ answer, probably directed at his disciples, appears ethnocentric, v. 24; cf. 10:5; (4) Jesus referred to Gentiles as “dogs,” v. 26. Thus, Jesus initially appeared reluctant to minister to the Canaanite woman. Jesus’ attitude toward the Canaanite woman, though initially seemed unfavourable. Jesus’ initial reaction to the woman of Canaan, a Gentile, appears ethnocentric. This conformed the Jewish attitude toward Gentiles of the time. Jesus was a Jew and behaved as such. Jesus, however, emphasised the faith of the Canaanite woman.

Jesus’ Positive Attitude toward a Gentile Woman in Matthew 15:21-28.

From the narrative of Jesus’ encounter with the Woman of Canaan, the following could be inferred: (1) Jesus commended the woman for her “great” faith, v. 28a; and (2) Jesus commanded her desire to be met, v. 28b. In sum, Jesus responded and granted her desire-her daughter was healed. Also, Jesus granted the wish of the woman. Moreover, Jesus praised the faith of the Canaanite woman. The next section deals with the evaluation of the study.

Evaluation

Jesus’s treatment of all people above the prevailing socio-culturally defined status of ethnicity in the first-century Greco-Roman world. Jesus accepted and interacted cordially with both Jews and Gentiles. He treated all people with

41 See Barbara Leonhard, “Jesus’ Extraordinary Treatment of Women,” *Franciscan Media*, 2017.

dignity and respect irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds. He recognized himself as a Jew (John 4:22). He, however, challenged the established segregation and hatred between Jews and Gentiles of his time. His actions and teachings seem to set in motion a process that would eventually neutralize the perceived superiority complex that was prominent in his day. Jesus recognized both Jews and Gentiles as worthy of salvation. It is fair to opine that Jesus appears to observe some Jewish biases against Gentiles (see Matt 10:5; 15:24; John 4:22), because he seems to suggest that Jews were his primary targets. However, putting Jesus actions and reactions in their literary contexts and against the socio-cultural context of the Greco-Roman world, he left a legacy for Christians to live at peace with each other and with the rest of humanity. Christians should live in unity in the face of ethnic diversity.⁴² The next section concentrates on the discussion and implications of the study.

Implications

Jesus' attitude toward ethnicity is a lesson for Christians today.⁴³ Thus, Jesus' disposition towards his ethnicity and relationship towards people of different ethnic background is normative for Christians. The church should intensify her education of members to equip them to live in harmony with each other. This would ensure peaceful co-existence with one another. To ensure that people of diverse ethnic backgrounds live at peace with each other, the following are recommended: The church should champion tolerance and good neighbourliness in contemporary societies. The church should educate her members to (1) promote their cultural heritage that does not conflict with Biblical principles; (2) respect the culture of people other than one's own; and (3) treat people of other culture with dignity and respect. Thus, the church ought to be the vehicle through which mutual peace, understanding and mutual respect could be achieved in the church and the wider society. Christianity ought to be a model for peace and tranquility in the world.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study compared Jesus' Jewish-Gentile interactions in Matthew's Gospel within the socio-cultural context of his time. Nine pericopes were examined: Matt 1:1-17; 2:1-12; 8:5-13; 15:21-28; 10:5-15; 28:16-20; 14:13-21; 15:32-39. The objective of the study was to glean some principles to guide the church on how to educate her members in their interactions with people of other ethnic backgrounds. The comparative phenomenological methodology was used to compare theological interpretations with scientific theories to determine their meeting point. Jesus related cordially with Jews and Gentiles, though he identified himself as a Jew. The followers of Jesus ought to embrace ethnic diversity and harmony and live at peace with all people.

The church should champion tolerance and good neighbourliness in contemporary societies. The church should educate her members to (1) promote their cultural heritage that does not conflict with Biblical principles; (2) respect the culture of people other than one's own; and (3) treat people of other cultures with dignity and respect. Thus, the church ought to be the vehicle through which mutual peace, understanding and mutual respect for one another could be achieved in the church and the wider society. Christianity ought to be a model for peace and tranquility in the world. Contemporary Christian church organizations ought to emulate Jesus in promoting peaceful coexistence with people of other ethnic leanings. The church should educate her members to respect the culture of people other than one's own and treat people of other culture with dignity and respect. This would make the church a medium for promoting peace, understanding and mutual respect for one another in the church and society at large.

While the interpretation advocated in this paper might not be entirely new, the study has provided additional information and detailed analyses of the Matt 1:1-17; 2:1-12; 8:5-13 and 9:1-8; 10:5-15 and 28:18-20; 14:13-21 and 15:32-39; 15:21-28 to compare Jesus' Jewish-Gentile interactions in Matthew's Gospel within the socio-cultural context of his time. The following additional information has been added to already existing literature: (1) Detailed analyses of Matt 1:1-17 to unravel the similarities between Jesus' associations with Jews and Gentiles in the text. (2) Detailed analyses of Matt 2:1-12 to discover the similarities between Jesus' associations with Jews and Gentiles in the text. (3) Detailed analyses of Matt 8:5-13 and 9:1-8 to investigate the similarities between Jesus' association with Jews and Gentiles in the text. (4) Detailed analyses of Matt 10:5-15 and 28:18-20 to find out the similarities between Jesus' Association with Jews and Gentiles in the text. And (5) Detailed analyses of Matt 14:13-21 and 15:32-39 to investigate the similarities between Jesus' Association with Jews and Gentiles in the text.

⁴² See J. D. Hays, "6 Ways the Bible Changed My Perspective on Ethnic Diversity," *The Gospel Coalition* (March 27, 2018): 1; J. Piper, "Issues of Race in Scripture," September 30, 2011.

⁴³ See Stanton, "Revisiting Matthew's Communities," 377, 385.

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