



---

Jesus as the Davidic Temple Builder and Peter's Priestly Role in Matthew 16:16-19

Author(s): MICHAEL PATRICK BARBER

Source: *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 2013, Vol. 132, No. 4 (2013), pp. 935-953

Published by: The Society of Biblical Literature

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42912475>

#### REFERENCES

Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:

[https://www.jstor.org/stable/42912475?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/42912475?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents)

You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



The Society of Biblical Literature is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of Biblical Literature*

JSTOR

## Jesus as the Davidic Temple Builder and Peter’s Priestly Role in Matthew 16:16–19

MICHAEL PATRICK BARBER

mpsbarber@yahoo.com

JP Catholic University, Escondido, CA 92025

It is widely accepted that Matthew presents Jesus as fulfilling Jewish eschatological expectations, particularly, Davidic hopes. However, although Jesus frequently speaks positively about his disciples’ participation in the cult in Matthew’s narrative (e.g., 5:23–24), little attention has been paid to Matthew’s interest in Christ’s fulfillment of the cultic dimensions of future hopes. In fact, ancient Jewish sources repeatedly express not only the belief in an eschatological temple but also expectations of a reformed and/or new priesthood. In this article, I argue that such hopes inform Matt 16:17–19. I begin by arguing that Jesus’ building of the church is best understood in light of Matthew’s Davidic Christology, an aspect of the evangelist’s portrait of Jesus that many scholars have noted. Specifically, building on the work of others, I contend that Jesus’ response to Peter’s confession involves allusions to Davidic traditions of temple building (cf. 2 Sam 7:12–13; 1 Chr 17:7–10) (e.g., Adna, Meyer, Wright). Going on, I demonstrate that Jesus’ description of Peter’s role in the following verses seems to portray him as one holding a priestly role. In particular, as many scholars have noted, Jesus’ words to Peter appear to echo the description of Eliakim in Isaiah 22 (e.g., Davies and Allison, Hagner, Willis). What is frequently overlooked is that this passage describes Eliakim as wearing garments usually associated with the high priest (cf. Isa 22:21 with Exod 28:4), an aspect of the passage not lost on Jewish readers (e.g., *Tg. on Isaiah*; *b. Ta’an.* 29a). “Binding” and “loosing” also seem linked to responsibilities typically associated with the priesthood (teaching, judging, mediating divine forgiveness). In light of this I argue that this passage provides Jesus with the perfect quarry: if the church is a temple, its leadership is naturally described in terms related to priestly responsibilities.

---

<sup>16</sup> ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ Σίμων Πέτρος εἶπεν· σὺ εἶ ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος.

<sup>17</sup> ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτῷ· μακάριος εἶ, Σίμων Βαριωνᾶ, ὅτι σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα οὐκ ἀπεκάλυψέν σοι ἀλλ’ ὁ πατὴρ μου ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς. <sup>18</sup> ἀγῶν δέ σοι λέγω

ὅτι σὺ εἶ Πέτρος, καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ πέτρᾳ οἰκοδομήσω μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν καὶ πύλαι ἄδου οὐ κατισχύσουσιν αὐτῆς.<sup>19</sup> δώσω σοι τὰς κλεῖδας τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν, καὶ ὃ ἕαν δήσης ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔσται δεδεμένον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, καὶ ὃ ἕαν λύσης ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔσται λελυμένον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.

<sup>16</sup>Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” <sup>17</sup>And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. <sup>18</sup>And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup>I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” (Matt 16:16–19 RSV)

It is widely accepted that Matthew presents Jesus as fulfilling Jewish eschatological expectations.<sup>1</sup> However, although Jesus speaks positively about participation in the cult in Matthew’s narrative (e.g., the saying about offering one’s gift at the altar in 5:23–24), little attention has been paid to the evangelist’s interest in the fulfillment of the *cultic* dimensions of Jewish hopes. In fact, ancient Jewish sources repeatedly not only express a belief in an eschatological temple (e.g., Isa 2:2–3; Ezek 37:26–27; 40–48; Mic 4:1–2; Ps 87:5–6; Tob 14:5; Sir 36:13–14; 2 Macc 1:29; 11Q19 47:1–18) but also anticipate a reformed and/or new priesthood (e.g., Isa 66:21; Mal 3:3; Ezek 40:45–46; 1Q28b 3:22–23; CD 4:1–6). Indeed, Matthew has Jesus quote directly from Isa 56:7, a passage describing worship in the eschatological sanctuary (cf. Matt 21:12).

In this article, I will look at Matt 16:17–19. Here Jesus responds to Peter’s declaration of his messianic identity with a promise to “build” (οἰκοδομήσω) the church “upon” a “rock” (ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ πέτρᾳ) (v. 18). In fact, many scholars have noted that Jesus’ words appear to evoke traditions concerning the construction of the temple upon a foundation stone.<sup>2</sup> I will build on such work, showing how the roles of both Jesus and Peter seem related to temple imagery.

<sup>1</sup>Scholars have noted how various aspects of Matthew’s narrative present Jesus as fulfilling Jewish eschatological hopes, for example, Jesus’ messianic identity (e.g., 1:1), his ministry in Galilee (4:12–16), his healings (e.g., Matt 11:5), his concern for the lost twelve tribes of Israel (19:28), his role as the Danielic Son of Man (e.g., 26:64), and so on. For further discussion, see Roland Deines, *Die Gerechtigkeit der Tora im Reich des Messias: Mt 5,13–20 als Schlüsseltext der matthäischen Theologie* (WUNT 177; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 469–500; 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), 152–83; 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); Joel Willitts, *Matthew’s Messianic Shepherd-King: In Search of ‘the Lost Sheep of the House of Israel’* (BZNW 147; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007).

<sup>2</sup>See, e.g., W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (3 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988–97), 2:626–68; Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis, “The Revelation of the Sacral Son of Man: The Genre, History of

## I. DAVIDIC CHRISTOLOGY IN MATTHEW

Jesus' statement about building the church is a response to Peter's profession of faith,  $\sigma\upsilon \epsilon\acute{\iota} \delta\acute{o} \chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\acute{o}\varsigma \delta\acute{o} \upsilon\iota\delta\varsigma \tau\omicron\upsilon\theta\acute{o} \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon \tau\omicron\upsilon\theta\acute{o} \zeta\acute{\omega}\nu\tau\omicron\varsigma$  (16:16). Matthew's formulation of Peter's confession appears to be influenced by Davidic traditions. For one thing, the Davidide was frequently described as the Lord's  $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$ .<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, while it is certainly true that there were hopes for non-Davidic messianic figures in ancient Judaism (e.g., a priestly messiah), in the context of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus' messianic identity is clearly linked to his Davidic pedigree. The following are just a few of the ways Matthew appears to underscore the Davidic nature of Jesus' messianic role.

1. "*The Son of David.*" Matthew begins his Gospel by connecting Jesus' role as the  $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$  to his identity as the son of David (1:1). The genealogy that follows further underscores Jesus' Davidic lineage.<sup>4</sup> As scholars note, its division into three sets of fourteen generations also seems to highlight its Davidic nature, since fourteen is the numeric value of David's name in Hebrew. This reading is supported by the recognition that David's name is the *fourteenth* name in the list.<sup>5</sup>

---

Religions Context and the Meaning of the Transfiguration," in *Auferstehung – Resurrection: The Fourth Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium. Resurrection, Transfiguration and Exaltation in Old Testament, Ancient Judaism, and Early Christianity (Tübingen, September 1999)* (ed. Hermann Lichtenberger and Friedrich Avemarie; WUNT 135; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 272–74; G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (New Studies in Biblical Theology 17; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 187; R. J. McKelvey, *The New Temple: The Church in the New Testament* (Oxford Theological Monographs; London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 193–94; Ben F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1979), 185–202; N. T. Wright, "Jerusalem in the New Testament," in *Jerusalem, Past and Present in the Purposes of God* (ed. Peter W. L. Walker; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 57; Ben Witherington III, *Jesus, Paul, and the End of the World: A Comparative Study in New Testament Eschatology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 89.

<sup>3</sup>See Scott W. Hahn, "Kingdom and Church in Luke-Acts: From Davidic Christology to Kingdom Ecclesiology," in *Reading Luke: Interpretation, Reflection, Formation* (ed. Craig G. Bartholomew, Joel B. Green, and Anthony C. Thiselton; Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), 300 n. 32, for a catalogue the OT passages describing David/the Davidic king with "anointing" terminology (1 Sam 16:13; 2 Sam 19:21; 22:51; 23:1; 1 Kgs 1:38–39; 2 Kgs 11:12; 23:30; 2 Chr 6:42; 23:11; Pss 2:2; 18:50; 20:6; 28:8; 84:9; 89:20, 38, 51; 132:10, 17) and 302 n. 47 for a list of texts where the term is linked to the eschatological Davidide (Pss. Sol. 17:32; 4Q252 V, 3; 4 Ezra 7:28; 12:32; 2 Bar. 70:10; 72:2).

<sup>4</sup>The only named individual in the genealogy who is given a title is "David the King" (cf. Matt 1:6).

<sup>5</sup>See the discussion in Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 2:163–65. On the *gemetria*, see also John P. Meier, *Matthew* (New Testament Message 3; Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1980), 4; Ralph Martin, "Approaches to New Testament Exegesis," in *New*

2. *Born in the City of David.* Matthew emphasizes the significance of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, the city that is both David's hometown (e.g., 1 Sam 16:1; John 7:42) and the place where, according to Matthew, the messiah was to be born (cf. Matt 2:4).
3. *The Baptism of the "Son of God."* Matthew's account of Jesus' baptism seems to evoke Davidic and Solomonic traditions. When Samuel anointed David, the Spirit of the Lord came upon him (1 Sam 16:13). Solomon, the son of David, was taken down to a river on the day of his anointing (1 Kgs 1:38–40). Not surprisingly, then, the Spirit comes down upon Jesus at his baptism, an event that takes place at a river (Matt 3:16). That Davidic allusions are in play is strongly supported by the fact that the voice from heaven identifies Jesus as God's son.<sup>6</sup> As is well known, language of divine sonship was frequently linked to the royal son of David and the eschatological Davidide (e.g., 2 Sam 7:14; Pss 2:7; 89:27; 2Q252 V, 3–4; 4Q174 1–2, 21 I, 9; 1Q28a 2:11–12 and 4Q369).<sup>7</sup>
4. *Jesus' Davidic Exorcistic and Healing Powers.* Jesus' exorcisms and healings are particularly tied to his Davidic identity. Those seeking healing specifically address him as υἱὸς Δαυὶδ (Matt 9:27; 20:31). This title is also linked to his role as an exorcist (Matt 15:22). Notably, David was associated with exorcistic and healing abilities (see 1 Sam 16:14–23; Josephus, *A.J.* 6.166–68; 11QPs<sup>a</sup> XI, 2–11; *L.A.B.* 60:1). Solomon also had a reputation as an exorcist and healer (see Josephus, *A.J.* 8:42–49; *Apoc. Adam* 7:13; cf. also Wis 7:17–22).<sup>8</sup> That Matthew links such activity to Jesus' messianic role is clear (see 11:2–6).

---

*Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods* (ed. I. Howard Marshall; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 246.

<sup>6</sup>The language evokes Psalm 2, which has been tied to enthronement ceremonies. See, e.g., John H. Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms* (SBT 2/32; Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1975), 111–13; Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms* (NIBCOT; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 44.

<sup>7</sup>See, e.g., John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1995), 162: "The individual most often designated as 'the son of God' in the Hebrew Bible is undoubtedly the Davidic king, or his eschatological counterpart." Likewise, see Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* (London: Collins, 1973), 194–95: "The title came to be given preferably to the just man, and in a very special sense to the most righteous of all just men, the Messiah son of David" (p. 195).

<sup>8</sup>Especially important is the combination in Josephus's account of Solomon's exorcistic abilities with his role as healer (see *A.J.* 8.45). For a fuller discussion and bibliography, see John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 2, *Mentor, Message, and Miracles* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1994), 689; and, more recently, Anthony Le Donne, *The Historical Jesus: Memory, Typology, and the Son of David* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009), 93–183.

5. *The Son of David Enters the City.* The description of Jesus riding on a colt into a city amid a shouting crowd resembles the scene of Solomon's coronation (1 Kgs 1:33, 38). Matthew explicitly ties Jesus' entrance into the city to Zechariah's eschatological prophecy of a coming king (Zech 9:9), a passage modeled on Solomonic traditions.<sup>9</sup> The crowd's acclamation flows naturally from such allusions: ὠσαννὰ τῷ υἱῷ Δαυίδ (Matt 21:9).<sup>10</sup>
6. *The Passion of the Davidic King.* Jesus' royal identity is especially underscored in Matthew's passion narrative. Jesus suffers as βασιλεὺ τῶν Ἰουδαίων (Matt 27:29, 37). Caiaphas also directly links Jesus' supposed identity as the "Christ" with divine sonship status (Matt 27:63: ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ). Likewise, those at the foot of the cross appear to link his messianic role with his reputation as the son of God (Matt 27:42–43). As I mentioned above (no. 3), the combination of status as the "anointed one" with sonship language especially fits well with Davidic traditions. In light of this it is perhaps significant that Jesus' passion is consistently linked with imagery from Davidic psalms (e.g., Matt 27:46 = Ps 22:1; Matt 27:29 = Ps 22:8)—that is, Jesus' suffering is cast in Davidic terms.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, there are numerous parallels between David's suffering and Jesus': (1) like Jesus, David was himself betrayed by a confidant (1 Sam 15:21); (2) David went up to the Mount of Olives when his life was being sought, the same place Jesus ends up after the Last Supper (1 Sam 15:23; Matt 26:30); (3) like Judas, David's betrayer hanged himself (1 Sam 17:23; Matt 27:5).

Moreover, aside from the larger context of Matthew's Gospel, that Peter's confession would involve recognition of Jesus' *Davidic* messiahship is strongly suggested by one further element in Matthew's account of Peter's profession—an element not found in the Markan and Lukan parallels—namely, a reference to Jesus' divine sonship: ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος (Matt 16:16). As we have mentioned, divine sonship was frequently linked to Davidic traditions.

## II. THE SON OF DAVID AND TEMPLE BUILDING

We now turn to Jesus' language of "building" upon a "rock." The terminology here appears related to the Davidic echoes in Peter's confession. Strikingly, not only

<sup>9</sup> See P. D. Hanson, "Zechariah 9 and the Recapitulation of an Ancient Ritual Pattern," *JBL* 92 (1973): 48–50; idem, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 317–20; Wilhelm Rudolph, *Haggai, Sacharja 1–8, Sacharja 9–14, Maleachi* (KAT 13/4; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1976), 170; Le Donne, *Historiographical Jesus*, 194–96.

<sup>10</sup> It should also be pointed out that the crowd's action of spreading garments on the ground before Jesus (Matt 21:8) mirrors the way the people greet the newly crowned king in 2 Kgs 9:13.

<sup>11</sup> For a fuller discussion, see Stephen P. Ahearne-Kroll, *The Psalms of Lament in Mark's Passion: Jesus' Davidic Suffering* (SNTSMS 142; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

was the son of David known as the “son of God,” he was also closely linked with temple building. This connection is especially evident in Nathan’s oracle, in which the son of David’s role as son of God appears closely linked to his role as the temple builder.

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. <sup>13</sup>*He shall build a house for my name*, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. <sup>14</sup>I will be his father, and *he shall be my son*. (2 Sam 7:12–13)

David said to Solomon, “My son, I had it in my heart *to build a house* to the name of the LORD my God. <sup>8</sup>But the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ‘You ... shall not build a house to my name, because you have shed so much blood before me upon the earth. <sup>9</sup>Behold, a son shall be born to you; he shall be a man of peace. I will give him peace from all his enemies round about; for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quiet to Israel in his days. <sup>10</sup>*He shall build a house for my name. He shall be my son, and I will be his father*, and I will establish his royal throne in Israel for ever.” (1 Chr 17:7–10)

Likewise, 4Q174 links Nathan’s oracle to hopes for the eschatological temple. Given that in Matthew 16 Jesus is identified with terms frequently associated with the Davidide, it seems likely that the description of him as a “builder” would have been read as belonging to the same Davidic matrix, particularly traditions of the son of David’s temple-building activity.<sup>12</sup>

That Jesus explains he will build his church on a “rock” further reinforces the impression that such imagery is in play. In Jewish tradition, temples and other cultic sites were typically linked with “stone” imagery (see Gen 28:10–22; Isa 8:14–15; 28:16; Zech 4:7–9; *m. Yoma* 5:2; *b. Yoma* 54a–b; *Lev. Rab.* 20:4; *Num. Rab.* 12:4; *Bet ha-Midr.* 5.63; *T. Sol.* 23:6–8; 4 *Ezra* 13:36).<sup>13</sup> Jewish tradition specifically linked

<sup>12</sup>See esp. Otto Betz, “Die Frage nach dem messianischen Bewusstsein Jesu,” *NovT* 6 (1963): 20–48; Meyer, *Aims of Jesus*, 179–80; James D. G. Dunn, “‘Are You the Messiah?’ Is the Crux of Mark 14:61–62 Resolvable?” in *Christology, Controversy, and Community: New Testament Essays in Honour of David R. Catchpole* (ed. David G. Horrell and Christopher M. Tuckett; *NovTSup* 99; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 8–9.

<sup>13</sup>See, e.g., Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 2:626–28; Witherington, *Jesus, Paul, and the End of the World*, 89; McKelvey, *New Temple*, 193–94; Meyer, *Aims of Jesus*, 185–202; Peter Schäfer, “Tempel und Schöpfung: Zur Interpretation einiger Heiligtumstraditionen in der rabbinischen Literatur,” in idem, *Studien zur Geschichte und Theologie des rabbinischen Judentums* (AGJU 15; Leiden: Brill, 1978), 122–33; Eduard Schweizer, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (3rd ed.; NTD 2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981), 222; Wright, “Jerusalem in the New Testament,” 57; D. A. Carson, *Matthew* (2 vols.; Expositor’s Bible; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 2:367; Bernard P. Robinson, “Peter and His Successors: Tradition and Redaction in Matthew 16:17–19,” *JSNT* 21 (1984): 101 n. 26; Fletcher-Louis, “Revelation of the Sacral Son of Man, 272–74.

the construction of the temple by the Davidide to stone imagery. This is especially clear in Zech 4:7–9, a passage that describes the Davidide Zerubbabel building the temple:

“Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain; and he shall bring forward *the top stone* amid shouts of ‘Grace, grace to it!’”<sup>8</sup> Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, <sup>9</sup>“The hands of Zerubbabel have *laid the foundation of this house*; his hands shall also complete it. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you.”

Because Zerubbabel was linked to an action that the prophets tied to the eschatological age—namely, rebuilding the temple—it seems this passage may likely have been read messianically.<sup>14</sup>

Jesus’ response to Peter that he will “build” the church thus appears connected to the Davidic imagery already evoked by the apostle’s confession; that is, as the “son of David” he will build the eschatological temple, here identified as the church.<sup>15</sup> In fact, Jesus’ promise to “build” (οἰκοδομέω) the church parallels the language of the saying attributed to him at his trial, namely, that he would rebuild (οἰκοδομέω) the temple (cf. Matt 16:18 with 26:61; 27:40). Of course, such accusations are leveled in the same context in which he is questioned about his messianic identity and his role as the “son of God” (Matt 26:63).

Furthermore, this kind of temple-community imagery closely parallels material in the Dead Sea Scrolls, where the community is also understood as a sanctuary (see 1Q28 8:4–10; 9:3–6; 4Q174 1–2, 21 I, 2–7). In fact, in a remarkable parallel to Matt 16:18–19, 1Q28 even describes the sect’s leadership as the *foundation* of the temple community.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, we might note, the word ἐκκλησία itself was related

<sup>14</sup>Since the rebuilding of the temple after the exile was part of the prophets’ eschatological vision, Zerubbabel’s building project probably triggered eschatological expectations. In fact, Zerubbabel was described with messianic-like prophecies (see Hag 2:21–23; Zech 4:6–10; 6:9–15). See Frederick Carlson Holmgren, *Israel Alive Again: A Commentary on the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* (ITC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 24; Shemaryahu Talmon, “‘Exile’ and ‘Restoration’ in the Conceptual World of Ancient Judaism,” in *Restoration: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Perspectives* (ed. James M. Scott; JSJSup 72; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 133–41, 154; Le Donne, *Historiographical Jesus*, 202–3.

<sup>15</sup>See Hans Kvalbein, who links Jesus’ words in Matthew 16 with the trial scene later in Matthew 26 where Jesus’ Davidic identity is linked with the charge that he claimed to rebuild the temple (“The Authorization of Peter in Matthew 16:17–19: A Reconsideration of the Power to Bind and Loose,” in *The Formation of the Early Church* [ed. Jostein Ådna; WUNT 183; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005], 155).

<sup>16</sup>George R. Beasley-Murray (*Jesus and the Kingdom of God* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986], 184) highlights the striking similarities between this scroll and what is found in Matt 16:18–19: “In [1Q28 8:1–10], twelve men and three priests constitute the *foundation* of the community.... This is not to suggest that Matthew 16:18 is in any way dependent on the Qumran passage; it does show, however, that the ideas in the former passage were abroad in Judaism



to liturgical contexts; it is used throughout the LXX to translate להק, a term typically employed for the *liturgical* assembly.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, the language in Matt 16:18 bears a striking similarity to that found in ch. 7. In 7:24 Jesus compares the one who does his words to a “wise man” (ἀνδρὶ φρονίμῳ) who “built” his “house” upon “the rock” (ὅστις ἠκοδόμησεν αὐτοῦ τὴν οἰκίαν ἐπὶ τῇν πέτραν). It seems quite possible that by linking the images of (1) a *man of wisdom* and (2) *building a house upon a rock*, Matthew intends an allusion to Solomonic imagery; the son of David was known both for his wisdom and for his construction of the temple.

### III. TEMPLE-COMMUNITY IMAGERY ELSEWHERE IN MATTHEW

Notably, Jesus appears to use temple terminology elsewhere in Matthew. Such imagery is probably in play in Jesus’ use of the cornerstone language taken from Ps 118:22 in Matt 21:42. For our purposes, it is important to note that the temple itself is the context of Psalm 118 (see v. 26: “We bless you from the *house of the LORD*”). Thus, it is widely acknowledged that the “cornerstone” it mentions is best understood as belonging to the temple.<sup>18</sup> In addition, as mentioned above, stone imagery was frequently connected with cultic shrines.<sup>19</sup> Nor should it go unnoticed that, in the near context of the parable, “stone” language is also elsewhere clearly linked with the temple (Matt 24:2; cf. Mark 13:1–2; Luke 21:5–6).<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, as many have shown, that Jesus follows the parable of the vineyard with a saying evoking temple terminology is probably not accidental. As virtually all scholars agree, the imagery of the story itself is likely related to Isaiah 5, where the LORD describes Israel as a vineyard (cf. Isa 5:1–2, 7).<sup>21</sup> Significantly, this passage

---

during the time of Jesus and the earliest church.” In addition, see 4QpIsa<sup>d</sup> (4Q164), which interprets the community as the temple of Isa 54:11–12, identifying the priests as the “foundation.” See Pilchan Lee, *The New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation: A Study of Revelation 21–22 in the Light of Its Background in Jewish Tradition* (WUNT 2/129; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 116.

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., Exod 12:6; Lev 16:17; 1 Kgs 8:14; 2 Chr 20:5.

<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., Michael F. Bird, *Jesus and the Origins of the Gentile Mission* (Library of New Testament Studies 331; London: T&T Clark, 2007), 158–59; Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:185–86; Seyoon Kim, “Jesus—The Son of God, the Stone, the Son of Man, and the Servant: The Role of Zechariah in the Self-Identification of Jesus,” in *Tradition and Interpretation in the New Testament: Essays in Honor of E. Earle Ellis for His 60th Birthday* (ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne with Otto Betz; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 134–48.

<sup>19</sup> Stone imagery was frequently linked with temples and sacred sites in the OT (e.g., Gen 28:10–22; Isa 8:14–15; 28:16; Zech 4:7–9; *b. Yoma* 54a; *Lev. Rab.* 20:4; *Bet ha-Midr.* 5.63; *Num. Rab.* 12:4; *b. Suk.* 49a, 53ab; *b. Mak.* 11a; *y. Sanh.* 29a).

<sup>20</sup> See Joel Marcus, *The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 120.

<sup>21</sup> The description of the construction of the vineyard in Matthew contains numerous points of contact with Isaiah 5: in both a “hedge” (φραγμόν) is set around it (περιέθηκεν/

seems to have been linked to the temple (see, e.g., *t. Me'il.* 1.16; *t. Sukkah* 3.15).<sup>22</sup> The cultic background of the parable and the citation of Ps 118:22 are further suggested by the fact that Jesus is speaking *in the temple* (Matt 21:23; cf. Mark 11:27). In this context, it seems particularly likely that Matthew's identification of Jesus with the cornerstone of Ps 118:22 suggests that he is somehow to be linked to the sanctuary.<sup>23</sup> Of course, this imagery fits well in Matthew's narrative, since Jesus has already stated, in reference to himself, "Something greater than the temple is here" (12:6).

However, the language chosen by Jesus seems to involve something *more* than simply himself—he is merely the "cornerstone." Many, therefore, recognize that Jesus is speaking of the community as forming a temple with himself.<sup>24</sup> This lends support to my reading of Matt 16:18 above. Since Matthew elsewhere appears to describe the community in terms of a temple, the possibility that such imagery is in play in Matthew 16 would seem to be strengthened.

---

περιέθρα) (Matt 21:33; Isa 5:2); in both passages we read that the builders "dug a winepress" (Matt 21:33: ὠρυξεν ἐν αὐτῷ ληνόν; Isa 5:2: προλήνιον ὠρυξα ἐν αὐτῷ); in both places we read that "he built a tower" (Matt 21:33: ἠκοδόμησεν πύργον; Isa 5:2: ἠκοδόμησα πύργον). See Steven M. Bryan, *Jesus and Israel's Traditions of Judgement and Restoration* (SNTSMS 117; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 54 n. 18; W. J. C. Weren, "The Use of Isaiah 5, 1–7 in the Parable of the Tenants (Mark 12,1–12; Matthew 21,33–46)," *Bib* 79 (1998): 1–26.

<sup>22</sup>For the connection between Isaiah 5 and temple imagery, see, e.g., Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20* (WBC 34B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 226–27; idem, *Jesus and His Contemporaries: Comparative Studies* (AGJU 25; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 397–401; Timothy C. Gray, *The Temple in the Gospel of Mark: A Study of Its Narrative Role* (WUNT 2/242; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 70–77; Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 684; idem, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel, with Special Reference to the Messianic Hope* (NovTSup 18; Leiden: Brill, 1967), 44; Marcus, *Way of the Lord*, 120; George J. Brooke, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 78–79; Bird, *Jesus and the Origins of the Gentile Mission*, 158–59; Philip Carrington, *According to Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 251.

<sup>23</sup>See Beale, *Temple and the Church's Mission*, 184: "Jesus applies the psalm's temple 'cornerstone' image to himself. That he has in mind such a self-identification is pointed to by noticing that Matthew 21 is also set in the context of the temple: (1) he cleanses the temple (21:12–13); (2) the physically handicapped come to him in the temple to be healed (21:14); (3) he is praised in the temple for his healings (21:15); (4) he speaks the parable of the tenants after he had 'come into the temple' (21:23ff.). Therefore, the implication is that rejection of Jesus as the 'cornerstone' of the temple ('the stone which the builders rejected') is equivalent to rejection of Jesus as the true temple ('this became the chief cornerstone'), which is in the process of being built." See also Gray, *Temple*, 70: "both the vineyard and stone imagery have a common reference: the temple." Likewise, see Bird, *Jesus and the Origins of the Gentile Mission*, 158–59.

<sup>24</sup>See, e.g., Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 515; Joel Marcus, *Mark: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (2 vols.; AB 27; Anchor Yale Bible 27A; New York: Doubleday, 2000 [vol. 1]; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009 [vol. 2]), 2:814–15; Michael Giesler, "The Rejected Stone and the Living Stones: Psalm 118:22–23 in New Testament Christology and Ecclesiology," *Letter & Spirit* 4 (2008): 93–98.

#### IV. PETER, THE KEYS, AND THE PRIESTLY ELIAKIM

As many scholars have noted, Jesus' bestowal of the "keys of the kingdom" on Peter in Matt 16:19 appears to draw on Isa 22:22, where the "key of the house of David" is given to Eliakim, a figure given the position of "chief steward."<sup>25</sup> Aside from the obvious parallel with the key imagery, Jesus' words mirror Isaiah 22 in a number of other ways:

1. Both texts relate the giving of authority, using idiomatic language (cf. "opening and shutting" in Isa 22:22; "binding and loosing" in Matt 16:19).
2. Both texts also contain Davidic motifs: for example, Isa 22:22 has "the keys of the house of David," while in Matthew 16 we find numerous links to Davidic traditions (e.g., Jesus' identity as "son of God," "anointed one"/"messiah," and temple builder).
3. As the church is built upon Peter in Matthew 16, the "weight of his father's house" rests on Eliakim in Isaiah (see Isa 22:24).
4. There seems to be a linguistic connection between the Aramaic words for "open" and "shut" in Isa 22:22 and the Greek words for "bind" and "loose" in Matt 16:19.<sup>26</sup> That Jesus addresses Peter as  $\text{Βαριτωᾶ}$  in fact strengthens the likelihood of an Aramaic connection.

Given these points of contact, it is not surprising that so many identify Isaiah 22 as the quarry for Jesus' words.

What is frequently overlooked, however, is the fact that there are several indications that Isaiah 22 was understood as describing Eliakim as a *priestly* figure. In fact, that Eliakim was seen as a priestly figure is clear from the Targum on Isaiah 22; he is given a "turban" (v. 18), said to wear a "cincture" (v. 21), and receives "the key of the sanctuary" (v. 22). Likewise, the *Midrash Rabbah* specifically identifies Shebna, the man whose office Eliakim takes, as the "high priest" (see *Lev. Rab.* 5:5).<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup>The allusion to Isaiah 22 is caught by many scholars. H. Benedict Green explains that "a reference to Isa. 22:22 ... is inescapable" (*Matthew, Poet of the Beatitudes* [JSNTSup 203; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001], 135). See, e.g., J. A. Emerton, "Binding and Loosing—Forgiving and Retaining," *JTS* 13 (1962): 325–31; Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 2:640; Craig A. Evans, *Matthew* (NCBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 314; France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 625; Witherington, *Jesus, Paul, and the End of the World*, 90–91; Donald Hagner, *Matthew* (2 vols.; WBC 33A–B; Dallas: Word, 1993–95), 2:472; John T. Willis, "An Interpretation of Isaiah 22.15–25 and Its Function in the New Testament," in *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel: Investigations and Proposals* (ed. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders; JSNTSup 148; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 344–51; Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew* (SP 1; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 251; PHEME PERKINS, *Peter: Apostle for the Whole Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 69.

<sup>26</sup>In particular, see Emerton, "Binding and Loosing," 325–31; Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 2:640.

<sup>27</sup>For further discussion of the priestly role of Eliakim, see Beale, *Temple and the Church's*

How did ancient interpreters come to the conclusion that Eliakim was a priestly figure? This view appears to be rooted in the language of the Hebrew text of Isaiah 22 itself. Eliakim is portrayed as wearing the garments (a כַּתְנֶת [“tunic”] and a אַבְנֶט [“sash”]; Isa 22:21)—two garments specifically associated with the high priest (see, e.g., Exod 28:4).<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Eliakim’s role in the sanctuary may be suggested by Isa 22:24, where he is given authority over “every small vessel, from the cups to all the flagons.” Such table vessels appear elsewhere in contexts describing the cult, especially in connection with descriptions of the table of the bread of the presence.<sup>29</sup> That the LXX additionally speaks of Eliakim’s being “crowned” (στῆφανος; Isa 22:21) probably also relates to high priestly imagery, since we learn from other Jewish sources that the high priest was “crowned” (στῆφανος; Sir 45:12; 50:12; Zech 6:11; 1 Macc 10:20).

Given the priestly language associated with Eliakim’s role in Isaiah 22, it is probably significant that the imagery of “keys”—which are also associated with Eliakim in Isaiah 22—had priestly associations in ancient Israel. In 1 Chr 9:27, the priests’ responsibilities involve “the key” of the temple (בִּיעֲלֵיהֶם מִשְׁמֶרֶת וְהֵם עֲלֵי-הַמִּפְתָּח וְלִבְקָר). Moreover, Josephus suggests that keys played a central role in the ceremony in which one division of priests handed over the temple responsibilities to another:

For, although there are four priestly tribes, each comprising upwards of five thousand members, these officiate by rotation for a fixed period of days; when the term of one part ends, others come to offer the sacrifices in their place, and assembling at mid-day in the temple, take over from the outgoing ministers the keys of the building and all its vessels, duly numbered. (*Ag. Ap.* 2.108; Thackeray, LCL)

The priestly responsibility for the keys of the temple is attested also in the Mishnah. In *m. Mid.* 1:8 we read that, in the temple, “the eldest of the father’s house used to

---

*Mission*, 187–88; Bruce Chilton, “Shebna, Eliakim and the Promise to Peter,” in *Jesus in Context: Temple, Purity, and Restoration* (ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans; AGJU 39; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 319–52; idem, “Temple Restored, Temple in Heaven: Isaiah and the Prophets in the Targumim,” in Scott, *Restoration*, 343–49.

<sup>28</sup>Both garments are typically linked with the priests, particularly the high priest (כתנת: Exod 28:4, 39–40; 29:5, 8; 39:27; 40:14; Lev 8:7, 13; 10:5; etc.; אבנט: Exod 28:4, 39, 40; 29:9; 39:29; Lev 8:7, 13; 16:4). Josephus also links the two garments to the high priest (see *A.J.* 10.153–54). While the appearance of one of these garments may not be enough to establish a cultic connection, the fact that they appear together makes it difficult to deny that a priestly connection is intended.

<sup>29</sup>See, e.g., Exod 37:16; Num 4:7–15; 1 Kgs 7:50; 1 Chr 28:11–19; Jer 52:19; 1 Macc 21:22. Priesthood imagery may also be related to the fact that Isa 22:21 describes Eliakim as a father figure. In ancient Israel, the priesthood is linked to the idea of fatherhood. See, e.g., Judg 17:10, where Micah hires a priest for his personal shrine, saying: “Stay with me, and be to me a *father and a priest*.” Roland de Vaux explains that “the priest had inherited those religious prerogatives which, in the patriarchal period, had belonged to the head of the family” (*Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961], 345).

sleep with the keys of the Temple Court in their hand.”<sup>30</sup> The keys are also referenced in *t. Šeqal.* 2:25, where the priestly treasurer’s duties are laid out.<sup>31</sup>

Given the fact that the priests’ responsibilities are closely linked with the imagery of the “keys,” it is probably not a surprise that key imagery appears also in later texts relating God’s judgment on priests. Specifically, there is a tradition, attested in both the Pseudepigrapha and the rabbinic literature, that when the Babylonians destroyed the temple the keys of the sanctuary were somehow returned to the LORD because the priests had been unworthy stewards of them.

You, priests, *take the keys of the sanctuary* and cast them to the highest heaven, and give them to the LORD and say, “Guard your house yourself, because, behold, *we have been found to be false stewards.*” (2 Bar. 10:18; OTP 1:624)

Jeremiah, taking the keys of the Temple, went outside of the city and, facing the sun, he tossed them, saying, “I say to you, sun, *take the keys of the Temple of God* and keep them until the day in which the LORD will question you about them. Because we were not found worthy of keeping them, for *we were false stewards.*” (4 Bar. 4:4–5; OTP 2:419)

This verse [Zech 11:1] refers to the High Priests who were in the Temple, who took their keys in their hands and threw them up to the sky, saying to the Holy One, blessed be He, “Master of the Universe, *here are your keys* which you have handed over to us, for *we have not been trustworthy stewards* to do the King’s work and to eat of the King’s table.” (ʿAbot R. Nat. A. 4:5)<sup>32</sup>

“What did [Jeconiah] do?—He collected all the keys of the Temple and ascended the roof [of the Temple], and said, “Lord of the Universe! Seeing that *we have hitherto not proved worthy stewards*, faithful custodians for Thee, from now and henceforth, behold *Thy Keys* are Thine.” Two Amoraim [differ as to what followed]. One said: A kind of fiery hand descended and took them from him; the other said: As he threw them upward they did not come down any more.” (*Lev. Rab.* 19.6)<sup>33</sup>

This tradition is in fact widely attested (see also *b. Ta’an.* 29a; *y. Šeqal.* 6:3; *Pesiq. Rab.* 26:6; *Targ. II* on Esther 1:3). Given its appearance in 1 Chronicles, Josephus, and the Mishnah, the idea that priesthood was associated with key imagery cannot simply be dismissed as a later rabbinic development. There is no reason to doubt that Matthew’s Jewish audience would have been familiar with such associations.

<sup>30</sup>Translation from Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 591.

<sup>31</sup>See the further discussion in Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An Investigation into Economic and Social Conditions during the New Testament Period* (German 1923; repr., Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 165–66.

<sup>32</sup>Cited from Judah Goldin, trans., *The Fathers according to Rabbi Nathan* (Yale Judaica Series 10; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 37.

<sup>33</sup>Cited from *Midrash Rabbah*, ed. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, vol. 4, *Leviticus* (trans. J. Israelstam and Judah J. Slotki; London: Soncino, 1983), 247.

Moreover, given the priestly imagery already found in Isaiah 22 and the fact that priests were associated with “keys,” it is not surprising that the Targum on Isaiah 22 specifically identifies the key given to Eliakim as “the key of the sanctuary.” In addition, each of the accounts relating the story of the keys of the temple being returned to the LORD includes specific mention of the fact that the priests had been unworthy “stewards.” The language appears to be closely tied to Isaiah’s description of Eliakim’s replacement of Shebna, which begins, “Thus says the Lord GOD of hosts, ‘Come, go to this steward [MT: סֹכֵן; LXX: ταμῖαν]...’ (Isa 22:15). Significantly, there is no other place in the MT where the terms “steward” and “keys” appear together. It should not be surprising, then, that the Talmud concludes its version of the legend with a quotation from Isaiah 22 itself (see *b. Ta’an.* 29a).

If in fact, then, Matthew 16 is drawing on Isaiah 22, as many scholars agree that it is, the appearance of temple-building imagery alongside Eliakim imagery is easily explained: Jesus is presented as describing the church as the temple, and so naturally Peter’s leadership is described in priestly terms. With 1 Chronicles 9 and Josephus, Matt 16:19 would then be an early witness to the later Jewish traditions that linked priestly duties to the language of keys.

## V. BINDING, LOOSING, AND PRIESTLY RESPONSIBILITIES

Further confirmation that cultic language is in view in Matt 16:17–19 may be found in the language of “binding and loosing” that concludes Jesus’ response to Peter. Debates about the precise meaning of the terminology in Matt 16:18 abound. The three most popular interpretive options relate the imagery of “binding” and “loosing” to (1) teaching authority, (2) authority over social boundaries, and (3) forgiveness of sins. As I shall explain, however, these three options appear to involve conceptual overlap, making it difficult to insist that any one meaning is exclusively in view. Moreover, what is striking for our purposes here is this: all three options link the language to responsibilities associated with priests.

First, many have viewed the language as relating to teaching authority. In rabbinic Judaism, the terms for “binding” and “loosing” (Hebrew אָסַר and הִתִּיר; Aramaic אָסַר and שָׂרָא) were associated with the responsibility of determining what was and was not “bound” by the Law (e.g., *b. Hag.* 3b; *b. Šabb.* 31a–b; *y. Ber.* 5b; *y. Sanh.* 28a; cf. Luke 11:52).<sup>34</sup> A particularly noteworthy passage is found in the

<sup>34</sup> Actions that were deemed not permissible by the Torah were declared “bound,” while actions that were allowable were considered “loosed.” See Joel Marcus, “The Gates of Hades and the Keys of the Kingdom (Matt 16:18–19),” *CBQ* 50 (1988): 449–52; Oscar Cullmann, *Petrus: Jünger, Apostel, Märtyrer. Das historische und das theologische Petrusproblem* (Zurich: Zwingli, 1952), 229–30; Gustaf H. Dalman, *Die Worte Jesu mit Berücksichtigung des nachkanonischen jüdischen Schriftums und der aramäischen Sprache* (Leipzig: Hinrichs 1898), 1:175; J. D. M. Derrett, “Binding and Loosing (Matt 16:19; 18:18; John 20:23),” *JBL* 102 (1983): 112–17; Veselin Kesich, “Peter’s Primacy in the New Testament and the Early Tradition,” in *The Primacy of Peter:*

*Sipre* on Deut 32:25, which speaks of such authority in connection with Eliakim's charge to "open" and "shut," a clear allusion to Isa 22:22. Other texts link the authority of "binding" and "loosing" to language of "opening" and "shutting" (see *b. Sanh.* 38b; *b. Hag.* 14a). It seems, then, that "binding" and "loosing" were terms that could easily be associated with Eliakim.

What is often overlooked is this: prior to the temple's destruction, definitive interpretation of the Law was especially associated with the priests, who clearly held an authoritative role as interpreters of the Torah (see, e.g., Deut 17:9; 2 Chr 19:8-11). In fact, it is well known that the priests are described as the principal teachers of the Law (e.g., Deut 17:11; Mal 2:6-7; Sir 45:17).<sup>35</sup> Even the Talmud traces the rabbinic authority to bind and loose to the priests' authority to rule on what was "clean" and "unclean."<sup>36</sup>

That Peter's power to "bind" and "loose" refers to *teaching* authority is suggested by the facts that (1) the episode immediately follows Jesus' instruction to beware of the teaching of the Pharisees (cf. Matt 16:5-12);<sup>37</sup> (2) Matthew later has Jesus use the terminology of "binding" in his condemnation of the Pharisees' teaching authority;<sup>38</sup> (3) terminology of "loosing" is also used in Matt 5:19, where Jesus uses the phrase as the antithesis of upholding the enduring validity of the Torah.

---

*Essays in Ecclesiology and the Early Church* (ed. John Meyendorff; Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1992), 51-52; Keener, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 429; Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 2:638-40. Strictly speaking, then, this authority could be described as teaching authority vis-à-vis correct interpretation of Scripture. See R. F. Collins, "Binding and Loosing," *ABD* 1:744; Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:473; Willis, "Interpretation of Isaiah 22.15-25," 347; E. Manns, "La Halakah dans l'évangile de Matthieu: Note sur Mt. 16, 16-19," *BeO* 25 (1985): 129-35; Günther Bornkamm, "The Authority to 'Bind' and 'Loose' in the Church in Matthew's Gospel," in *The Interpretation of Matthew* (ed. Graham N. Stanton; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 101-14. Bornkamm applies this to Matthew 16 and thus describes Peter as "the guarantor and authorized interpreter of Jesus' teachings" (p. 111). Likewise, see John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 681-82.

<sup>35</sup>See the discussion in E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice & Belief, 63 BCE-66 CE* (London: SCM, 1992), 170.

<sup>36</sup>See, e.g., *b. Hag.* 3b, where the authority of teachers of the law to render judgments regarding it appears in the same context as a discussion of the priests' authority. Derrett writes, "The power monopolized by the rabbinate in normative Judaism was once exercised in part by the priesthood and in part by the elders of the gate (Deut 22:15; Ruth 4:1; Lam 5:14)... The priesthood pronounced clean (*ṭaharâ*, *m. Neg.* 3:1), and unclean (*ṭôme'â*) without ifs and buts. After the destruction the rabbis inherited the responsibility of the priests. They began to pronounce actions or things 'tied, bound,' (*ʔāsûr*, cf. *le'esor* at Ps 105:22 above), and the reverse was *muttâr*, from the root *ntr*, *hipil hitîr*, 'to unfasten, loosen')" ("Binding and Loosing," 115).

<sup>37</sup>See Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 2:639. Note also that Pharisees were also at least sometimes priests themselves (e.g., Josephus was both).

<sup>38</sup>The language of the Pharisees' "sitting" on Moses' seat likely carries with it the connotation of "teaching" since, in Matthew, "sitting" is the posture of teaching (see Matt 5:1; 13:1; cf. also Mark 9:4 [cf. with 9:38]; Luke 4:20; 5:3). This may have reflected Jewish practice (*Gen. Rab.* 98:11; *Pesiq. Rab. Kah.* 18.5; though see *b. Meg.* 21a). That Jesus has the Pharisees' teaching authority in

Furthermore, as we have seen, it is clear that eschatological themes are in play in Matt 16:13–19. Significantly, the teachers of the eschatological age were usually described as *priestly* figures (e.g., Ezek 44:23; 4Q541 9 I, 2–3; 4QpIsa<sup>a</sup> 8–10 III, 18–25). Given such expectations, if Jesus is being portrayed as appointing Peter as the teacher of the eschatological community, it would be natural (if not even expected) for him to be portrayed as having a priestly role.

Second, the terminology of binding and loosing is associated with the authority to include/exclude members of the community (see Matt 23:13).<sup>39</sup> This notion would be closely connected with teaching authority, since such competence implies the ability to define what constitutes acceptable behavior for members of the community.<sup>40</sup> Authoritative teachers thus have control over social boundaries.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, the terms “binding” and “loosing” seem especially linked with this idea also in Matt 18:15–20. Notably, this meaning is associated with such authority in the Talmud (*b. Mo‘ed Qat.* 16a).<sup>42</sup>

Of course, if juridical authority over the community is in view, it should be recalled that such power was also linked with priesthood in ancient Judaism. According to the Torah, “judging” the twelve tribes was principally a *priestly* task (see Deut 17:9; cf. also 2 Chr 19:8–11). This was particularly true in Jesus’ day. Josephus assigns the task of judging uniquely to the priests (see *A.J.* 2.165; 4.304).<sup>43</sup> Daniel Grossberg writes, “In Hellenistic times the high priest replaced the king as

---

mind is clear, for he explicitly states that they enjoy being called *ῥαββί* (Matt 23:7). Following this, Jesus condemns honorific titles, the first being *ῥαββί* (Matt 23:8). Thus, most commentators agree that the “seat of Moses” relates to teaching authority. See, e.g., Carson, *Matthew*, 2:471–72; Ulrich Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (4 vols.; EKKNT 1–4; Zurich: Benziger, 1985), 3:299; David L. Turner, *Matthew* (BCNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 546.

<sup>39</sup>See, e.g., Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:473; France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 626; Ulrich Luz, “The Primacy Text (Mt. 16:18),” *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 12 (1991): 46–47; Mark Allen Powell, “Do and Keep What Moses Says (Matthew 23:2–7),” *JBL* 114 (1995): 433–34; Carson, *Matthew*, 2:373; David L. Bartlett, *Ministry in the New Testament* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 71–76; John P. Meier, *The Vision of Matthew* (New York: Paulist, 1979), 113–14, 132; Schweizer, *Matthäus*, 242.

<sup>40</sup>This point has been made by others. See, e.g., Powell, “Do and Keep What Moses Says,” 434 n. 34; Bornkamm, “Authority to ‘Bind’ and ‘Loose,’” 109–10; David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew* (London: Oliphants, 1972), 262; Evans, *Matthew*, 315. Notably, Rudolf Bultmann recognized that Peter is here given authority to teach and discipline (*Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* [1921; 5th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961], 147).

<sup>41</sup>See Fletcher-Louis, “Revelation of the Sacral Son of Man,” 278; Herbert Braun, *Jesus: Der Mann aus Nazareth und seine Zeit* (Stuttgart: Kreuz, 1969), 94–95.

<sup>42</sup>See Craig Blomberg (*Matthew* [NAC 22; Nashville: Broadman, 1992], 254) and Keener (*Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 430), who see a parallel in the *mēbaqqēr* of the Qumran community (see 1Q28 5:20–21; 6:13–14).

<sup>43</sup>See Sanders, *Judaism: Practice & Belief*, 171: “In summarizing Deut. 31, in which Moses consigns the law to the priests and the elders, Josephus left out the elders” (*A.J.* 4.304).



the principal judge (cf. 2 Chron 19:8).<sup>44</sup> Indeed, “judgment” was closely linked with the high priest,<sup>45</sup> who was the president of the Sanhedrin (see 1 Macc 14:44; Acts 5:17; Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.194; *A.J.* 20.200, 251).<sup>46</sup> The Dead Sea Scrolls even seem to indicate that in the eschaton the messiah will defer to the priests in legal matters (see 4QpIsa<sup>a</sup> 8–10 III, 24–25). Likewise, Ezekiel explains that priests will be the judges in the future age (Ezek 44:23). Indeed, the priest’s juridical authority is attested in the Gospels, including in Matthew, where the priests play a prominent role in ascertaining the guilt of Jesus (see Matt 26:57–65; Mark 14:43, 53–64; Luke 22:54, 66; John 18:13, 24). In light of all this, it would seem that Jesus’ bestowal of unique juridical authority on Peter would have been easily linked with the priestly associations of his role already suggested by the context (e.g., the temple-community imagery, the allusions to the priestly Eliakim of Isaiah 22, keys).

Still others have linked the terminology of binding and loosing to the forgiveness of sins (see LXX Job 42:9–10; Sir 28:2; *Tg. Neof. Gen* 4:7; John 20:23).<sup>47</sup> Nonetheless, it should be recalled that forgiveness of sins was closely linked with the “juridical” implications of the authority to “bind” and “loose”. Willis writes:

... to “loose” refers to the divine power to forgive sins, and so to admit converts into and to restore penitent sinners to the church. To “bind” is to announce God’s judgment on unbelievers and impenitent sinners, and to excommunicate offenders from the church. “Binding” and “loosing” refer to the broad power of allowing or refusing entrance into the kingdom.<sup>48</sup>

Joachim Jeremias linked the authority of binding and loosing in Matt 16:19 and 18:18 to Jesus’ bestowal of authority over sins in John 20:23.<sup>49</sup>

It is important to mention that scholars have also noted that the terminology of “binding” and “loosing” could be employed with the meaning of “taking” and

<sup>44</sup>Daniel Grossberg, “Judge,” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 752. In addition, see Sanders, *Judaism: Practice & Belief*, 171.

<sup>45</sup>In particular, this role of the priest seems attached to the Urim and Thummim. Regardless of how these elements should be understood, it is clear that they were associated with the high priest and used for judgment (see Exod 28:30; Num 27:21; Sir 45:10; see also Lev 8:8; Ezra 2:63; Neh 7:65). For further discussions, see Cornelis Van Dam, *The Urim and Thummim: A Means of Revelation in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997); Wayne Horowitz and Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, “Urim and Thummim in Light of a Psephomancy Ritual from Assur (*LKA* 137),” *JANESCU* 21 (1992): 95–115; Anne Marie Kitz, “The Plural Form of ‘*ŪRĪM* and *TUMMĪM*,” *JBL* 116 (1997): 401–10.

<sup>46</sup>See G. H. Twelftree, “Sanhedrin,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 730.

<sup>47</sup>This option is most forcefully argued for by Kvalbein, “Authorization of Peter in Matthew 16:17–19,” 145–76.

<sup>48</sup>Willis, “Interpretation of Isaiah 22.15–25,” 346.

<sup>49</sup>Jeremias, *Neutestamentliche Theologie* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1971), 228.

“releasing” prisoners (see, e.g., Josephus, *B.J.* 1.111: δεσμεῖν/λύειν).<sup>50</sup> It is not hard to see how the terms came to be associated with “forgiveness.” It is helpful to recall that the idea of “forgiveness” is especially associated with the eschatological restoration hopes, where the “forgiveness” of Israel is linked with *return from captivity* in exile.<sup>51</sup> “Release” from exile was thus linked with the idea of “release” from sins. Indeed, 11Q13 2:4–8 makes the natural connection between the *release* from debt and *forgiveness* of sins in its description of the eschatological Jubilee.

Forgiveness of sins was also especially linked with cultic activity (e.g., Leviticus 4).<sup>52</sup> If Peter’s authority is linked with “forgiveness of sins,” then priestly authority again could naturally be inferred. After all, aside from priests what other figures were commonly linked with the process of forgiving sins? The answer: none. Indeed, in 11Q13 the agent of the eschatological “release” and “forgiveness of sins” is clearly a figure with a priestly name—Melchizedek.

## VI. THE PRIESTHOOD OF THE DISCIPLES ELSEWHERE IN MATTHEW

If the suggestion that Peter is described as having a priestly role in Matthew 16 seems far-fetched, it should be pointed out that priesthood imagery seems linked to the disciples elsewhere in Matthew. In particular, that the apostles would have a priestly role may be suggested in the well-known saying in Matt 19:28 regarding their role in the future age. There Jesus explains that the Twelve will “sit [καθήμενοι] on twelve thrones, judging [κρίνοντες] the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt 19:28; cf. Luke 22:28–30). The imagery here clearly signals restoration hopes.<sup>53</sup> While many

<sup>50</sup>See also Job 38:31: “Can you *bind* [קשר] the chains of the Pleiades, or *loose* [פתח] the cords of Orion?” In addition, Judg 15:9, 10, 12, 13 speak of the Philistines’ “binding” (LXX: δέω) Samson, that is, as a prisoner (see also 16:5, 7, 11). Likewise, see Ps 105:8: “to *bind* [LXX: δέω] their kings with chains and their nobles with fetters of iron.” The term is used for “binding” prisoners in multiple places in the NT (see Matt 27:2; 14:3; Mark 6:17; 15:1, 7; John 18:12, 24; Acts 9:2, 14, 21; 12:6; 21:11, 13; 22:5, 29; 24:27; Col 4:3; Rev 19:14). The verb λύω is also frequently used for “releasing” prisoners in the LXX and Pseudepigrapha (see Tob 3:17; Jdt 6:14; Job 5:20; Pss 102:20; 105:20; 146:7; Isa 14:17; Jer 40:4; Dan 3:25; 3 Macc 6:29; 4 Macc 12:8).

<sup>51</sup>See, e.g., ἀφέσει (LXX Isa 58:6; 61:1; Luke 4:18); λύω (LXX Isa 40:2; 58:6; 3 Macc 6:27–29).

<sup>52</sup>That “forgiveness” is in view is explicit in Leviticus 4; the offerer is said to be “forgiven” (וְנִסְלַח; 4:26, 31, 35; 5:5, 10, 13, 16). Jacob Milgrom explains, “If God will accept his sacrifice he will be once again restored to grace, at one with his deity” (*Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB 3; New York: Doubleday, 1991], 245).

<sup>53</sup>The language of *twelve* tribes signals pan-Israelite restoration hopes. See Paula Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews: A Jewish Life and the Emergence of Christianity* (New York: Knopf, 1999), 98: “... if Jesus indeed taught that ultimately these twelve would judge the twelve tribes, then he was thinking eschatologically. To assemble the twelve tribes ... would take a miracle. But that, I think, is what Jesus was expecting.” See also John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew:*

have noted the regal connotations implied by the language of thrones,<sup>54</sup> what is often missed is that, again, as pointed out above, “judging” the twelve tribes was principally a *priestly* duty in Jesus’ day, especially in eschatological contexts.

Indeed, the saying in Matt 19:28 is surrounded by other motifs linked to priestly traditions, making it unlikely that the priestly connotations of the apostles’ role as judges in the eschatological age are accidental. For example, in the next passage, Jesus states: “And every one who has left houses or *brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands*, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold, and *inherit eternal life*” (19:29). The statement is clearly meant to describe the commitment made by the Twelve. Notably, however, the language of renunciation here appears to evoke the priesthood of the Levites, which was also attained through renunciation of kin:

Today you have ordained yourselves for the service of the LORD, each one *at the cost of his son and of his brother*, that he may bestow a blessing upon you this day. (Exod 32:29)

The one saying to his *father and his mother* “I have not seen you” and his *brother* he did not acknowledge and his *children* he disowned. (LXX Deut 33:9)

Likewise, as the apostles are said to “inherit eternal life” after renouncing “lands,” the Levites’ priesthood was linked to deprivation of property; rather than receiving *land* of their own, their *inheritance* would be the LORD (Num 18:20, 23; Deut 10:9).<sup>55</sup> Moreover, immediately before this saying in Matthew we read about a man who could not part with his possessions (19:16–22). In failing to renounce his property the man failed to be “perfect” (τέλειος; 19:21). The disciples, however, will receive what the rich man failed to attain (19:27–29). Notably, the word that appears here evokes the term used for the ordination of the Levites in the LXX (τελειόω).<sup>56</sup>

---

*Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 3, *Companions and Competitors* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 148–54; E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 98. That Matt 19:28 related eschatological hopes is suggested also by the appearance of the term *παλιγγενεσία* (“regeneration”). New creation motifs were connected to eschatological restoration (e.g., Isa 66:22). The word is also used by Josephus to describe the return of the Jews from exile (*A.J.* 11.66).

<sup>54</sup>See, e.g., S. Légasse, “Aproche de l’épisode préévangélique des Fils de Zébédée (Marc X.35–40 par.),” *NTS* 20 (1974): 161–77; Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 3:218.

<sup>55</sup>See Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis, “Jesus Inspects His Priestly War Party (Luke 14:25–33),” in *The Old Testament in the New Testament: Essays in Honour of J. L. North* (ed. Steve Moyise; JSNTSup 189; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 126–43; Dale C. Allison, *The Intertextual Jesus: Scripture in Q* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 63–64.

<sup>56</sup>See LXX Exod 29:9, 29, 33, 35; Lev 4:5; 8:33; 16:32; Num 3:3. See Albert Vanhoye, *Old Testament Priests and the New Priest according to the New Testament* (trans. Bernard Orchard; Studies in Scripture; Petersham, MA: St. Bede’s Publications, 1986), 50.

## VII. CONCLUSION

In this article I began by arguing that Peter's confession of Jesus' messianic identity in Matt 16:16 should be read against the evangelist's Davidic Christology. As we observed, from the first line of his Gospel, Matthew is intent on connecting Jesus' messianic role with his Davidic pedigree. Furthermore, Peter's confession links Jesus' role as "messiah" with language of divine sonship, language suggestive of Davidic traditions.

What follows seems best read against a cultic background. Taken in isolation, each element is perhaps only suggestive of such a reading. Together, however, the cumulative force of so many cultic echoes is hard to dismiss as accidental.

First, the association of Jesus with "building" language in 16:18 makes perfect sense within a Davidic matrix. Specifically, in context, such terminology appears to evoke Davidic temple-building traditions. Peter identifies Jesus as the son of God. Notably, the divine sonship of Solomon was closely linked with his role as temple builder in Nathan's oracle to David. Moreover, that Jesus is said to build the church on a *rock* reinforces such a reading: the temple was in fact linked to "stone" imagery. Of course, an association of the community with "temple" imagery finds a parallel also in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

In addition, it seems significant that Jesus' bestowal of keys upon Peter is likely derived from Isaiah 22. As others have noted, this Isaianic oracle has numerous similarities to Matt 16:18. What has been largely neglected is that this passage describes a figure who wears garments typically associated with the high priest. Not surprisingly, rabbinic sources explicitly recognize this priestly status. Furthermore, it appears that the image of keys was associated with the responsibilities of the priests. In this light, it is notable that the language of "binding and loosing" that follows seems related to duties tied to the priesthood.

In sum, the imagery comes together to form one coherent picture. Jesus is the Davidic messiah, who, like the son of David, will build a temple, understood as the community. Given that the community is described as a temple, it is no wonder that Jesus describes Peter's leadership role over it in terms of priestly authority; as God appointed the priestly Eliakim in Isaiah, Jesus establishes Peter as a priestly figure over the temple community.