

## A NOTE ON MATTHEW 24:10-12

By David Wenham

### A. A PRE-SYNOPTIC UNIT OF MATERIAL

One of the baneful effects of the Two Document Hypothesis has been that scholars have often too quickly dismissed non-Marcan material in Matthew and Luke as secondary and late. I become increasingly convinced that, if Matthew and Luke did use Mark, they also knew well early non-Marcan traditions of the life and teaching of Jesus. Matthew 24:10-12 is a case in point.

It is possible to regard these verses as Matthew's own composition. It can be explained (a) that Matthew had already used the parallel Marcan section (Mark 13:9-13) earlier in his gospel (in his 10:17-21), and so that he composed this section to avoid repetition; (b) that in this section he has drawn on, but reworded, Marcan material - compare Matthew 24:10b with Mark 13:12,13 and Matthew 24:11 with Mark 13:22; (c) that there are favourite Matthean terms like σκανδαλίζειν and ἀνομία in these verses.

But to classify these verses as Matthew's own work on these grounds is not adequate:

- (1) Matthew does not seem very concerned to avoid repetition in the section 24:9-14. In fact his 24:9b echoes 10:21b,22 very closely, and his 24:13 is an exact repetition of 10:22b. So at best he is very half-hearted in his determination to avoid repeats, and what we have to explain is why he avoided some parts of 10:17-21 but retained others almost word for word.
- (2) 24:10-12 are a unit with a definite structure and style. The structure is as follows:

- A. Καὶ τότε σκανδαλισθήσονται πολλοὶ
- B. Καὶ ἀλλήλους παραδώσουσιν
- B. Καὶ μισήσουσιν ἀλλήλους.
- C. Καὶ πολλοὶ ψευδοπροφήται ἐγερθήσονται
- C. Καὶ πλανήσουσιν πολλοὺς.
- A. Καὶ οὐκ ἔστι τὸ πληθυνθῆναι τὴν ἀνομίαν φυγήσεται ἡ ἀγάπη τῶν πολλῶν.

The observation of this chiastic structure makes it clear that we have here no collection of sayings carelessly strung together; it is rather a carefully structured section on the subject of a great apostasy.

- (3) Although various elements in the section could be Matthean, including the chiastic structure, three points weigh against this: (a) The fact that verses 10-12 seem to be a self-contained unit: if Matthew was responsible for the redaction of the whole section from verses 9 to 14, it is odd that he created a carefully structured small unit in the middle of the section. (b) The paratactic style with καί repeated: Matthew, as source critics have frequently observed, is much less fond of καί than Mark, and, if he used Mark when writing his gospel, he regularly changed Mark's καί's to δέ's; we would not therefore expect such a row of καί's, if Matthew were the author of verses 10-12. (c) The vocabulary of verse 12, which is quite untypical of Matthew: found only here in Matthew are πληθύνειν, ψύχειν, οἱ πολλοί (used as here with the definite article), ἀγάπη; the only obviously Matthean word is ἀνομία./1/

This evidence of vocabulary and style weighs against the view that Matthew created verses 10-12, and suggests rather that he is using a unit of tradition that he received.

## B. THE MEANING OF THE SECTION

### 1. *A possible background in Daniel*

We have seen that Matthew 24:12 is unMatthean in its vocabulary; it is also a verse that is rather hard to interpret. Thus (a) ἡ ἀγάπη used absolutely is unusual, and may either be taken as meaning 'love for men' (this fitting in with the context in verse 10) or 'love for God' (compare Revelation 2:4). (b) τῶν πολλῶν with the article is problematic. S. Brown's interpretation of it as an objective genitive (love for the many, i.e. for the

- 
1. Also the use of ἀλλήλους twice in 24:10b is unusual in Matthew. He uses the word elsewhere only in 25:32.

Gentiles) seems unlikely./2/ More likely the reference is to the many's love. But who then are the many (a significantly stronger expression than πολλοί without the article)? The phrase may be translated: the love 'of most', 'of the majority';/3/ in the Qumran Manual of Discipline 'the many' are the congregation of the community. Probably we are correct to take the Matthean phrase to mean a mass apostasizing by the congregation or by the majority of a group. We are reminded of the Danielic descriptions of 'many' joining themselves to the covenant-breakers (chapters 8,11,12), while some stand firm.

It is, in fact, the book of Daniel that may lie behind the rather problematic verse 12. A. H. McNeile in his commentary on Matthew noted that Matthew 24:12 could be connected with Daniel 12:4 LXX, which reads σφράγισαι τὸ βιβλίον ἕως καιροῦ συντελείας ἕως ὃν ἀπομανῶσιν οἱ πολλοὶ καὶ πλησθῇ ἡ γῆ ἀδικίας./4/ This translation differs significantly from the MT ישׁטוּ רבים ותרבה הדעה ('Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase ..'). The Hebrew is difficult, and commentators have explained it in various ways, e.g. by reference to Amos 8:11,12 with its portrayal of people running after the Word of

- 
2. 'The Matthean Apocalypse', *JSNT* 4 (1979) 9. Against his view, note: (a) there is some evidence for 'the many' meaning God's people or community (e.g. 1QS 6,7 *passim*); (b) there seems to be a contrast with verse 12: many will give up, but he who endures ...; (c) the other uses of πολλοί in verses 10-12 suggest the subjective sense; and, given the closely-knit chiasmic structure of verses 10-12, it is in no way anticlimactic to take the final τῶν πολλῶν subjectively.
  3. So RSV.
  4. McNeile, *The Gospel according to St. Matthew* (London, 1915) 347; also L. Hartman, *Prophecy Interpreted* (Uppsala, 1966) 168. Hartman claims that Dn. 11:32-35 is also important background to the Matthean passage (e.g. he even compares the instruction of the wise in Daniel to the preaching of the gospel in Matthew). We agree that there is a general similarity of thought between the two passages; but a definite connection is not clear.

God, and (more plausibly) by taking הַיָּד to mean 'humiliation', 'distress'. But what the LXX appears to have done is to have read some form of רָעָה (evil) for הַיָּד (knowledge), and perhaps to have taken יִשְׁטֹטֵן as coming from a verb meaning to 'apostasize'./5/

It is doubtful if the LXX is to be followed in this; but whether it is or not, the LXX is at least an early witness to an interpretation of Daniel 12:4 that brings us close to Matthew 24:12. Not that Matthew seems to be dependent on the LXX itself; he does not, for example, reproduce the LXX's reference to the 'land being filled' with unrighteousness./6/ If then Matthew 24:12 is based on Daniel 12:4, it is a translation independent of the LXX, but one that reflects a similar understanding of the text:

πληθυνθήναι	....	MT	ותרבה
ἀνομῶν	....	(text presupposed)	הרעה
τῶν πολλῶν	....		רבים

It must be admitted that the verbal parallels are not very close or extensive, but the parallelism of thought is notable.

The parallelism is the more striking if יִשְׁטֹטֵן in Daniel 12:4 was understood by some as 'they will apostasize', since this has a parallel in Matthew's 24:10a καὶ σκανδαλισθήσονται./7/ We have seen that in the chiasmic structure of verses 10-12, verse 10a balances verse 12; it may therefore be significant that verse 10a can also

- 
5. See on this R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Oxford, 1929) 331-333. For a modern commentator in favour of the LXX rendering see A. A. Di Lella in *The Book of Daniel* (Anchor; joint author L. F. Hartman. New York, 1978) 26. For a different view see J. Day, *VT* 30 (1980) 97-101.
  6. In this respect he is closer to the MT and Theodotion, the latter reading καὶ πληθυνθήσιν ἡ γυνῶσις.
  7. Even if Mt. 24:10a is not an echo of Dn. 12:4, it still has a possible Danielic background in Dn. 11:41, where indeed some LXX manuscripts have σκανδαλίζειν. So Mt. 24:10a and 12 are united in having a similar Danielic background, even if not more closely through Dn. 12:4.

possibly be tied up with Daniel 12:4. If we put 24:10a alongside 24:12, the point may be clearer:

24:10a	'And then will be offended many'	Dn. 12:4	'Many will apostasize'
12	'And because of the multiplication of lawlessness, the love of the many will grow cold'		'And evil will multiply'

The idea that Daniel 12 may lie behind Matthew 24:12 could be supported by the fact that there are other parallels between Daniel 12 and Matthew 24:/8/ for example, the immediately following verse in Matthew 24, verse 13, ὁ δὲ ὑπομένων εἰς τέλος, οὗτος σωθήσεται may be linked with Daniel 12:12 *הַנִּחַמְהוּ יְיָשָׁא*, Theod. μακάριος ὁ ὑπομένων. The 'desolating sacrilege' of Matthew 24:15 may be linked to Daniel 12:11. And most strikingly Matthew 24:21 is parallel to Daniel 12:1 (Theod.): καὶ ἔσται καιρὸς θλίψεως, θλίψεις οἷα οὐ γέγονεν ἀφ' οὗ γεγένηται ἔθνος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἕως τοῦ καιροῦ ἐκείνου. καὶ ἐν τῷ καιρῷ ἐκείνῳ σωθήσεται ὁ λαὸς σου. /9/

This evidence adds up to making McNeile's explanation of the background of Matthew 24:12 plausible, though not certain; and if verse 10 is also linked to Daniel 12:4, then the whole of verses 10-12 may be seen as portraying

- 
8. If verses 10-12 are thought to be out of their original general context, it could still have been their Danielic background that led to Matthew's positioning of the verses in this chapter.
  9. Note that σωθήσεται may link Dn. 12:1 and Mt. 24:13. Our consideration of Danielic background might lead us to revise our opinion about the non-Matthean origin of the section. The use of the OT is reminiscent of Matthew's use of the OT elsewhere, and Matthew has several other possible echoes of Daniel 12, e.g. in 13:43, 25:46, 28:20; also, some of the non-Matthean vocabulary, e.g. πληθύνειν, οἱ πολλοί could be explained as taken over from his OT versions. But still the paratactic style and some of the vocabulary (e.g. φύχειν, ἀγάπη) favour a pre-Matthean stage of tradition.

a Danielic sort of apostasy./10/

## 2. *The meaning of 'lawlessness'*

The one term in Matthew 24:12 that could not be paralleled very exactly in the LXX of Daniel 12 was ἀνομία (though the idea is very much at home in Daniel's descriptions of Antiochus Epiphanes). We might then be inclined to suspect that Matthew was responsible for the use of this favourite word of his.

However, it may be relevant to observe that the terms ἀνομία and βδέλυγμα are closely associated, notably in the LXX of Ezekiel. Thus in Ezekiel 11:18 and 21 the two Hebrew terms חֲנֻכָּה and גִּזְשׁ are translated by ἀνομία and βδέλυγμα. Furthermore in the LXX of Ezekiel the Hebrew חֲנֻכָּה is frequently translated by ἀνομία, and the reference is almost always to 'lawlessness' in the city of Jerusalem, twice (8:6-17; 44:6,7) to idolatrous abominations in the temple. Elsewhere in the LXX חֲנֻכָּה is quite often translated by βδέλυγμα. This evidence makes it quite possible that 'the multiplication of lawlessness' in Matthew 24:12 is intended to refer to idolatrous 'lawlessness' of the sort supremely exemplified in the Danielic βδέλυγμα ἐρημώσεως./11/ The suggestion seems the more plausible when it is noted that the very phrase πληθύνειν ἀνομίας is found in the LXX of Ezekiel 16:51, translating the Hebrew וַתִּרְבֵּי תוֹעֵבוֹתֶיךָ-אֵת.

- 
10. This may help us with the interpretation of τῶν πολλῶν in Mt. 24:12, since Daniel, especially chapters 11 and 12, is full of reference to 'many' (with or without the article, as in Mt. 24:10-12) being affected by the desolating sacrilege and the events connected with it. The Danielic background and the parallelism of Mt. 24:10a and 12 might favour taking ἡ ἀγάπη of 24:12 as love of God, rather than love of men. But against this see Did. 16:3 (in a passage of great interest for the analysis of Mt. 24:9-28).
  11. The Hebrew of βδέλυγμα (ἐρημώσεως) is גִּזְשׁ, not חֲנֻכָּה.

The idea that 24:12 is describing idolatrous lawlessness would fit in, of course, with our earlier observations about the Daniel 12 background; only now our previous view that 24:12 echoes Daniel 12:4 has to be modified or supplemented, in that we are now suggesting also a possible Ezekiel background, notably to the use of ἀνομία (understood in the sense of idolatry). But this is scarcely a difficulty: the ἀνομία had no exact parallel in Daniel, and it is quite possible that the one Matthean verse is inspired both by Daniel 12:4 and by Ezekiel 16:51./12/

More substantially, it might be objected that ἀνομία elsewhere in Matthew does not have connotations of idolatry and that we are reading something unMatthean into the word. There is some force in this argument, but (a) we have seen reason to suspect a pre-Matthean tradition here, so that something slightly unMatthean is not surprising, and (b) in any case Matthew does not elsewhere use the phrase πληθύνειν ἀνομῶν, and it seems quite conceivable that ἀνομία may have connotations here that are not obvious elsewhere. Perhaps the term here has broad connotations of apostasy, including idolatry, but not only that; we are reminded of the 'lawlessness' of the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes, which was lawlessness of every kind, but which included as its supreme and most terrible manifestation the idolatrous altar in the temple.

### C. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

My conclusions are that Matthew 24:10-12 is pre-Matthean material, not a Matthean composition, and that the verses are describing an eschatological upsurge of apostasy in Danielic terms. These conclusions have all sorts of interesting implications and ramifications: (a) they mean that Matthew 24:10-12 describes much the same sort of thing as Matthew 24:15-22, the passage about the 'desolating sacrilege';/13/ this may be

12. For links between Daniel and Ezekiel see A. Lacocque, *The Book of Daniel* (London, 1979) 125 and *passim*.
13. In fact it is possible to view verses 10-12 as a sort of brief summary of the whole section from Mt. 24:9 to 28 - the period of the great θλίψις.

confirmed by Matthew's *oŷv* in his verse 15, and this is no doubt the reason Matthew incorporated the verses in chapter 24. (b) They may give us clues about the history of the material in Matthew 24:9-14: it is possible that Matthew is not here following Mark to any great extent, and that Matthew 24:9,13,14 belong together in a pre-Matthean stage of tradition, as well as Matthew 24:10-12. (c) They bring together Matthew and Paul, since in 2 Thessalonians 2 Paul describes the eschatological 'rebellion' or 'apostasy' and also the blasphemous 'man of lawlessness'./14/

---

13 (cont.)

Compare 24:9-28 ..... and ..... 24:10-12

- A. Handing over/  
hatred (v.9)
- B. Sacrilegious  
apostasy (vv.15-22)
- C. False prophecy (vv.  
23-28)

B1. Apostasy (v.10a)

- A. Handing over/  
hatred (v.10b)

- C. False prophecy  
(v.11)

B2. Apostasy (v.12)

14. I have discussed these implications and other ideas in a paper written for the Tyndale House Gospels Research Project and presented at a Project meeting in July 1980.