

The nature of the law's fulfilment in Matthew 5:17-20: An exegetical and theological study

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PREFACE

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between Law and Gospel remains something of a conundrum for biblical scholarship. A significant factor contributing to this difficulty is the interpretation of Matthew 5:17, and in particular what is meant by Jesus' having come "to fulfil" the Law and the Prophets. What precisely is meant by "to fulfil the Law and the Prophets" is an exegetical enigma. Utilizing an eclectic array of methods, including literary, historical, and theological approaches, this study attempts to articulate the nature of fulfilment in Matthew 5:17. We begin by surveying a selection of previous contributions, from which we deduce four possible interpretations. Next, we outline the historical, literary, and theological contexts, in order to provide the background for the exegetical and theological discussions that follow.

This leads us into a thorough exegesis of Matthew 5:17-20, with special attention directed towards the key term πληρώω. We argue that πληρώω is best understood in light of its usage elsewhere in Matthew, highlighting its salvation-historical significance. In addition, we argue that the focus on the Law *and the Prophets*, Matthew's understanding of the prophetic function of the Law (11:13), and the so-called antitheses of 5:21-48, lead us to understand "to fulfil" as the realization of what the Law and the Prophets – the Old Testament – pointed towards. When Jesus says that he has come to "fulfil" the Law and the Prophets he means that all that they anticipated has now come about in him.

But it is important to move beyond regular historical-critical methods of exegesis and also to examine the passage in light of its biblical-theological significance: what did the Law and Prophets anticipate? Our study attempts to advance discussion of πληρώω in this passage by considering how 'biblical theology' might aid us in understanding what precisely was pointed towards by the Old Testament. We therefore discuss the bearing of a theology of the kingdom of God on Matthew 5:17. The significance of the concept of the kingdom of God/heaven – mentioned three times in Matthew 5:17-20, central in both Matthew's Gospel and the Sermon on the Mount, and descriptive of Jesus' mission (4:17) – has often been overlooked in the interpretation of this passage. In addition to regular arguments made on the basis of historical-critical exegesis – including discussion of the nature of πληρώω in Matthew's Gospel, the sense in which the Law prophesies, and the contribution of the so-called antitheses of 5:21-48 – we argue that the biblical-theological theme of the kingdom of God clarifies a salvation-historical reading of these verses. The concept of the kingdom of God provides a helpful lens through which to understand the nature of the fulfilment brought about by Jesus.

When the theme of the kingdom of God in the Old Testament is considered, it is seen that this concept summarizes the Jewish hope – it is what the Law and the Prophets pointed towards. Therefore, when it is said that Jesus has come “to fulfil” the Law and the Prophets, an eschatological or salvation-historical reading shows that what the Law pointed towards has arrived in the teaching and ministry of Jesus. But a biblical-theological reading of the kingdom of God helps us to add a measure of precision to this statement. Jesus “fulfils” the Law and the Prophets by bringing into being what they anticipated: the kingdom of God, to which the Old Testament looked forward, has come. What the Law and Prophets anticipated was the arrival of the kingdom of God. “Fulfilment”, then, should be construed in terms of this motif. Jesus fulfils the Law and the Prophets by inaugurating the kingdom of God, which they anticipated. This bypasses discussions over whether it is primarily Jesus’ teaching or Jesus’ life that is in view, since the kingdom of God is inaugurated through both.

(Key words: Matthew, law, fulfilment, kingdom of God/heaven, biblical theology)

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Figure 1: Cartoon depicting the Law/Gospel debate on a political level. 2

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND METHOD

1.1 Background and Problem Statement

1.1.1 Background

As a pastor I frequently find myself thinking about how Old Testament texts, which I preach and teach, are to be applied to the church in light of their New Testament fulfilment. This question is rooted in the ongoing discussion regarding the relationship between the Law¹ and the gospel² – a question which is far from settled. How much of what is written in the Old Testament is applicable to Christians today? What laws should twenty-first century citizens living in South Africa obey? Which ones may be dismissed? This problem has been well illustrated by the South African satirist Jonathan Shapiro, known as Zapiro. In his comic published in the *Mail and Guardian* on 23 November 2006 (Shapiro, 2007:25), Zapiro depicts the leader of the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP), Rev. Kenneth Meshoe, declaring that homosexuality is a sin on the basis of Leviticus 18:22. The comic proceeds to test Meshoe's consistency by asking for his take on other matters forbidden in the Old Testament, such as whether his friend should be put to death for working on the Sabbath (cf. Ex. 35:2). Zapiro's point appears to be that no-one consistently lives up to the requirements of the Old Testament, and therefore the argument from Leviticus 18:22 against homosexuality fails (see figure 1 below).

¹Unless otherwise stipulated, "Law" will refer to the Mosaic corpus, the Torah or Pentateuch. "Law" should be understood as it would have been understood in the New Testament milieu; the Law of Moses (cf. Moo, 1999:321f). This dissertation will follow Meier (2009:11) by using "Law" when referring to the entire Mosaic Law, and "law" when referring individual commands, whether contained in the Mosaic Law or not.

²By 'gospel' we mean the good news that Jesus the Messiah has come and inaugurated the kingdom of God through his life, death, and resurrection. Cf. Pennington's (2012:16) recent definition: "the New Testament authors define 'gospel' as Jesus' effecting the long-awaited return of God himself as King, in the power of the Spirit bringing his people back from exile and into the true promised land of a new creation, forgiving their sins, and fulfilling all the promises of God and the hopes of his people." The question of the law's relationship to the 'gospel' asks what the coming of this gospel means for the Christian interpretation of the Mosaic Law.



Figure 1: Cartoon depicting the Law/Gospel debate on a political level.

This satirical depiction well illustrates the larger issue: which parts of the Old Testament are New Testament Christians to observe? Clearly, an answer to this question is of the utmost importance for the field of ethics, as demonstrated in figure 1. In order to address this larger question of the Law and the gospel we must ask how the New Testament itself understands the Old Testament. This means asking how Jesus, Paul, and the General Epistles understand the continuity of the Law in light of the coming of the Messiah. This in turn works itself out in a number of key New Testament passages on the subject of the Law. Of these, Matthew 5:17-20 is among the most important.

1.1.2 Problem Statement

Our enquiry relates broadly to the question of the relationship between the Law³ and the gospel. The lack of consensus on this question has been widely recognized. Greg Bahnsen

³ In the Lutheran understanding the word "Law" refers to that aspect of God's Word which commands (Moo, 1999:321). Cf. Luther's comments on the Law: "We must know what the law is, and what the gospel is. The law commands and requires us to do certain things... The gospel, however, does not preach what we are to do or to avoid... [it] says: 'This is what God has done for you.'" (Luther, 2005:125)

(1999:93) admits: “The New Testament does not yield an answer to [this] question easily and without problems.” Walter Kaiser (1999:180) complains: “There is such a veritable Babel of voices and positions that one wonders what the waiting and watching church must think and make out of all this confusion on the part of her scholars!” According to P.G. Nelson (2006:4), answers to the question of the relationship between the Law and the gospel “vary widely”.

Underlying the greater question of the relationship of the Law to the gospel is the question of how the New Testament understands the Law. The problem is that the New Testament seems to affirm both continuity and discontinuity (cf. Rom. 7:12; 8:4; 1 Tim. 1:8; Rom. 6:14; 10:4; 2 Cor. 3:9). A copious amount of literature has been written over the past few decades attempting to deal with this problem. In light of such studies, Moo (1999:319f) remarks: “the last two decades... have witnessed a remarkable resurgence of interest in the theology of the Mosaic Law. A deluge of books and articles has examined virtually every bit of evidence and from almost every conceivable perspective. Yet nothing even approaching a consensus has emerged.”

When we turn to Jesus’ view of the Law we encounter this same perplexity. In Matthew 5:17-20, the “most extensive discussion of this issue anywhere in the gospel tradition” (France, 2007:177; cf. Viljoen, 2011:386), Jesus appears to favour continuity, even though in other passages he appears to favour discontinuity (cf. Matt. 5:17-20; Mark 7:14, 19; John 1:17). J.P. Meier (2009:3) articulates the problem in the following way:

“The real enigma is how Jesus can at one and the same time affirm the Law as the given, as the normative expression of God’s will for Israel, and yet in a few individual cases or legal areas teach and enjoin what is contrary to the Law, simply on his own authority.”

Certain scholars have preferred to emphasize that Jesus rejected the Law, others that he embraced a dialectic in which he embraced the Law in words but rejected it in practice, and still others that he upheld the Law (Meier, 2009:3). Meier has found all of these positions ultimately untenable: “I [am] convinced that, although I may not be right in my positions, every other book or article on the historical Jesus and the Law has been to a great degree wrong” (2009:3). Thus the question of Jesus’ attitude to the Law remains open.

In order to understand what measure of continuity/discontinuity Jesus understood there to be, one has to deal with precisely what he means by the statement that he came “to fulfil”

(πληρῶσαι) the Law and the Prophets. According to Moo (1992:457), “how one interprets the word ‘fulfil’ becomes the basis for, or expression of, divergent interpretations of Jesus and the Law.” This study will focus on the most important passage dealing with Jesus’ view of the Law: Matthew 5:17-20. Moo (1999:350) states that this passage “deserves to be ranked among the most important New Testament pronouncements on the significance of the Law for the new Christian era.” However, its interpretation has not always been clear. Commenting on this passage, Snodgrass (1992:368) remarks: “[Matthew’s] statements on the Law seem to defy understanding.” And Walaskay (2002:417), referring to the same passage, adds: “This passage is one of the most difficult in the New Testament.” When Jesus says that he has not “come to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to fulfil them,” what does he mean? Is Jesus setting forth the real intention of the Law? Or is he confirming or establishing the Law (Stanton, 1992:741f)? According to Allison (1999:59), “the proposals are so many [that] perusal of the commentaries can lead to increasing confusion.” Davies and Allison (1988:485f) list nine of “the gamut of possible interpretations” of the nature of “fulfil”: (1) “fulfil” means “add to”; (2) “fulfil” means “establish”, “make valid”, or “bring into effect”; (3) “fulfil” means “obey”; (4) Jesus “fulfils” the Law by observing it perfectly in his own person and ministry; (5) Jesus “fulfils” the Law by bringing in a new Law which transcends the old; (6) “fulfil” means that Jesus brings out the Torah’s original intention and expands its demand; (7) Jesus “fulfils” the Law by enabling others to meet the Torah’s demands; (8) Jesus “fulfils” the Law by bringing a new righteousness, namely the spirit of love; (9) “fulfil” is eschatological: Jesus fulfils the Torah’s prophecies. Warren Carter (1994:85f) also stresses the diverse interpretations Matthew 5:17 has received: “the content of these four verses continues to be debated by scholars. For example, the verb ‘fulfil’ in verse 17 has been widely discussed.” More recently, John Nolland (2005:218) believes that fulfilment must be understood in the context of the antitheses to follow (Matt. 5:21-48); he holds that Jesus offered a new depth of insight into what the Law requires. There appears to be no consensus on the matter.

Important to understanding the meaning of ‘fulfil’ in Matthew 5:17 is understanding its use in the rest of Matthew’s gospel. R.T. France (1989:166) believes that ‘fulfilment’ is the “central focus of [Matthew’s] theology.” Quoting Frankemolle, France (1989:167) proposes that Matthew’s use of the verb πληροῦν “indicates in the briefest and most pregnant way Matthew’s fundamental theological idea.” The prominence of Matthew’s ‘formula-quotations’ indicate their importance for Matthew (1:22-23; 2:5-6, 15, 17-18, 23; 3:15; 4:14-16; 5:17; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:14, 35; 21:4-5; 26:54, 56; 27:9-10). According to France (1989:171),

these quotations “have been the object of extensive study.” However, as Carson (1984:27) tells us, the problems raised by these passages “have been extensively studied with very little agreement.” Therefore room remains for a discussion of Matthew’s fulfilment idea, specifically as it relates to 5:17.

In light of this lack of consensus on Jesus’ attitude to the Law in general, and to the precise meaning of fulfilment in Matthew 5:17 in particular, it is worth turning again to the exegesis of this critical passage. In seeking, then, to ascertain the nature of the Law’s fulfilment in Matthew 5:17-20, the main research question is: **What precisely does it mean that Jesus has come to ‘fulfil’ the Law?** This question will be the focus of this study.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

1.2.1 Aims

The aim of this study is to determine the meaning of πληρώ in its literary, historical, and theological contexts. It is hoped that a contribution will thereby be made to the ongoing discussion of the Christian’s relationship to the Mosaic Law.

1.2.2 Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

1. To arrive at a clear understanding of the main positions on the meaning of πληρώ in Matthew 5:17 (chapter 2).
2. To locate Matthew 5:17-20 clearly in its historical, literary, and theological context (chapter 3).
3. To determine the meaning of πληρώ in Matthew 5:17 on the basis of historical-critical exegesis (chapter 4).
4. To provide a theological analysis of Matthew 5:17-20 in which ‘biblical theology’ is brought to bear upon the exegetical considerations of the previous chapter (chapter 5).
5. To draw all these strands together into a coherent statement of the meaning of πληρώ in Matthew 5:17 that advances the discussion of this passage’s contribution to the study of Jesus’ relationship to the Law (chapter 6).

1.3 Methodology, Outline of Chapters, and Thesis Statement

1.3.1 Methodology

As indicated in the subtitle – an exegetical and theological study – this dissertation attempts to use the tools of both exegetical (including literary) and theological analysis in addressing to the research problem sketched above. It is our contention that the latter in particular has not been sufficiently applied to the interpretation of this passage, especially when considered in light of ‘biblical theology’⁴.

In his discussion of method in Matthean studies, Stanton argues for the priority of redaction criticism:

“I am convinced that redaction criticism must remain as the basic tool for serious study of Matthew,⁵ but its results are more compelling when they are complemented by some (but not all) literary critical approaches and by the careful use of sociological insights” (1992:7).

Thus Part 1 of Stanton’s work discusses these three methods – redaction criticism (1992:23-53), literary criticism (1992:54-84), and sociological perspective (1992:85-107) – arguing that they should be regarded as “friends, not enemies” (1992:109):

“We shall see further and more clearly if we accept that these three methods are complementary: each one can be used more effectively with the support of the other two” (1992:109f).

Reflecting on the writing of his Matthew commentary, Nolland refers to his work on Matthew as “committedly eclectic” (France & Nolland, 2008:273). He thinks that “the studious implementation of a method of enquiry” often leads to “narrowness”. So he describes his commentary as “redaction-critical” and proceeds to list additional methods employed across his work: narrative criticism, rhetorical criticism, structuralist approaches, sociological studies, reader response theory, and others (2008:273f).

⁴ Defining ‘biblical theology’ is problematic. We discuss the definition of ‘biblical theology’ in chapter 5.

⁵ Later he adds: “If my observations are valid, some of the basic assumptions which have been made in redaction critical study of Matthew do need to be reconsidered. But there are no grounds for abandoning a method which has been very fruitful” (1992:51).

Stanton and Nolland highlight the need for the employment of multiple methods relevant to the exegesis of the text. This dissertation stands in agreement with this assessment. The methods employed follow broadly what is known as the “historical-critical method”. This method, according to Hagner, “indicate[s] nothing other than the good use of reason and the various tools available in understanding and interpreting the Bible” (2012:5). Hagner elaborates:

“The historical method is indispensable precisely because the Bible is the story of God’s acts in history. The salvation-historical narrative that begins in Genesis comes to its climax in the NT account of the appearance of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, at a specific time and place. Since the records and narratives of these salvation-historical acts of God in the Bible are themselves products of history, written by individuals located in specific times and places, it is vitally important to immerse ourselves in the history of that era and that culture. If we are to understand these things, they must be studied historically, using the tools and methods of historical research.”⁶

This aligns with the definition of the grammatico-historical method as set out by Blomberg:

“The grammatico-historical method... refers to studying the biblical text, or any other text, in its original historical context, and seeking the meaning its author(s) most likely intended for its original audience(s) or addressees based on grammar and syntax” (2012:27).

Wright has, rightly I think, complained about the unnecessary split in New Testament studies that has divided it into “Introduction” (the historical task) and “Theology” (1992:13):

“On the one hand, studying the theology of the New Testament depends on some belief, however vague, that certain things that *happened* in the first century are in some sense normative or authoritative for subsequent Christianity. On the other hand, studying the history of early Christianity is impossible without a clear grasp of early Christian beliefs.”

⁶ Hagner and Young describe this method and its relevance for Matthean studies at length in their *The Historical-Critical Method and the Gospel of Matthew* (2009:11-43), where they “outline an approach to the [historical-critical method] that includes a rationale for its continued use”.

Wright proceeds to define an epistemological model, which he calls “critical realism” (1992:32ff). This position attempts to critique both Enlightenment certainty (hence “realism”) as well as postmodern suspicion (hence “critical”). In Wright’s words:

“I propose a form of critical realism. This is a way of describing the process of ‘knowing’ that acknowledges the *reality of the thing known, as something other than the knower* (hence ‘realism’), while also fully acknowledging that the only access we have to this reality lies along the spiralling path of *appropriate dialogue or conversation between the knower and the thing known*’ (hence ‘critical’)” (1992:35).

Across the section of his work dealing with method⁸, Wright argues for the place of literary (1992:47-80), historical (1992:81-120), and theological (1992:121-144) tools. He outlines his task as follows:

“Literary, historical and theological exploration of the New Testament, and particularly of Jesus and Paul, is our goal.”

We could say that the goal of the present paper is the same, although on a much smaller scale – the interpretation of a single pericope. Bringing all of the above together, then, we may outline the methodology of the present project as follows. Using the tools of the historical-critical method (including redaction criticism), literary (including elements of narrative criticism) and theological analysis (described in chapter 5), we will attempt to determine with some measure of precision the nature of πληρώω in Matthew 5:17.

1.3.2 Outline

We will begin in chapter 2 by conducting a literature review, in which we discuss briefly previous contributions to this question. The chapter will be more descriptive than critical, leaving the latter for chapter 4. We will begin with the well-known monograph by Banks on the Law in the Synoptic Gospels (1975) and proceed diachronically to describe and discuss the positions held by scholars such as Moo (1984), Davies and Allison (1988), Luz (1989), Westerholm (1992), Hagner (1993), Thielman (1999), Charles (2002), Loader (2002), Nolland (2005), Deines (2008), Ross (2010), *et al.* We will conclude by tabulating their views and drawing some initial conclusions.

⁷ Wright’s italics.

⁸ Wright calls this section “Tools for the Task” (1992:31-144).

In chapter 3 we attempt to 'set the stage' for the exegetical and theological analysis in the chapters to follow. Following the methodology set out above, this chapter will attempt to lay out the historical, literary and theological backgrounds to Matthew's Gospel. Historical considerations will focus particularly on the nature of the Matthean community and their relationship to the synagogue. Literary considerations will pay some attention to structure, but will focus mainly on matters such as plot, with a view to placing Matthew 5:17 in the Jewish milieu as set out by Wright. Some attention will be given to the immediate literary context consisting of the Sermon on the Mount and, in particular, the so-called 'antitheses' of 5:21-48. These considerations will in turn be brought to bear in chapter 4 on Matthew 5:17-20. Regarding the theological context, two matters in particular will be discussed with a view to incorporating the implications into the argument of later chapters. First, the kingdom of God/heaven in Matthew's Gospel. Here we wish to establish its prominence in terms of the New Testament expectation, in Matthew's Gospel and, particularly, in the background to the Sermon on the Mount. Second, Matthew's theology of fulfilment will be highlighted as providing the necessary background to understanding πληρώω in Matthew 5:17. Here we argue that the word does not refer exclusively to predictions, but should be understood typologically as Old Testament patterns brought to their historical climax in the happenings of Jesus' life and ministry. These three considerations, then, prepare the way for an exegetical study of Matthew 5:17-20.

This exegetical study is the task of chapter 4. Here we will begin by providing the text and a translation of Matthew 5:17-20. Following this we will discuss briefly the sources and origin of the passage. Next, a grammatical and syntactical analysis of the passage will be provided so as not to clutter the following discussion unnecessarily. This will then be followed by a thorough exegetical analysis of the passage, beginning with its structure and followed by discussion of various matters important to determining its interpretation. Foremost among these matters is the meaning of the key term πληρώω. This word will be discussed lexically and, most importantly, will be considered within its Matthean context. We will then consider several objections levelled against the particular interpretation of πληρώω at which we arrive. Finally, we will discuss the remaining three verses in this pericope, verses 18, 19, and 20, with a view to determining their meaning and their relationship to 5:17. At the end we will list our conclusions.

The final task is to provide a 'theological analysis' of the passage. Chapter 5, then, begins by drawing attention to the call for the recovery of doctrine in the interpretative process. After a brief discussion of the movement known as the *Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, we

will discuss and define the concept of 'biblical theology', which this paper understands as the task of bringing the Bible's "storyline" to bear on its parts, and its parts, in turn, to bear on the overall "storyline". Having articulated what we mean by 'biblical theology', we will turn to its application. Here we discuss the kingdom of God, arguing that it provides a concept that provides unity to the biblical storyline. Finally, we consider the bearing this theology of the kingdom has on our interpretation of Matthew 5:17.

1.3.3 Thesis Statement

This leads to our central argument:

When πληρώω in Matthew 5:17 is considered with regard to both its literary context (the arrival of the kingdom) and its biblical-theological significance (the story of God establishing his reign), it emerges that the term refers to the arrival of God's kingdom, not merely to the life and teaching of Jesus.

This is further established by several additional exegetical observations, which we discuss prior to concluding.

Chapter 6 attempts to synthesize the arguments of the preceding chapters, explore the significance of the study, and suggest avenues of further research.

CHAPTER 2: A LITERATURE SURVEY ON THE MEANING OF ΠΛΗΡΩΩ IN MATTHEW 5:17

2.1 Introduction

We will begin by surveying previous contributions to our question. What does Matthew mean by πληρώω in 5:17? According to Davies and Allison (1988:485), “the gamut of possible interpretations is quite long”. A decade later Allison (1999:59) appears no more certain: “the proposals are so many [that] perusal of the commentaries can lead to increasing confusion... certainty cannot be obtained.” With the passing of another decade, Allison’s claim may have been established. Modern commentators continue to offer differing viewpoints: πληρῶσαι refers to “a new depth of insight into what the Law requires” (Nolland, 2005:219); “to expound the true meaning and intent of the Law” (Talbert, 2010:81); “[to] bring them to their divinely intended goal” (Turner, 2008:162; Mitch & Sri, 2010).⁹ Consensus continues to elude New Testament scholars.

In this section we will delineate scholars’ positions on the meanings of πληρώω in Matthew 5:17. Since it is not possible to discuss every author who has contributed an interpretation, we will limit ourselves to several of the foremost over the past three decades. We will begin with Robert’s Banks’ influential monograph on Jesus and the Law and proceed diachronically towards recent interpretations. Finally, we will categorize the various positions and list some initial conclusions.

2.2 Robert Banks (1975)

Banks (1975:203) begins by noting the “fundamental importance” of Matthew 5:17-20 for understanding Jesus’ attitude to the Law. He (1975:207) begins his discussion of the meaning of πληροῦν by discussing the verb with which it is contrasted: καταλύειν. He (1975:207) points out that where καταλύειν is linked to νόμος in pre-Christian passages the sense “is clearly ‘abolish’ or ‘annul’” (cf. 2 Maccabees. 2:22; 4 Maccabees. 5:33), and he claims that this sense is also attested in classical Greek.¹⁰ Turning to the “disputed term”, πληροῦν, Banks (1975:208) is critical of “widespread interpretation[s]” that set out the “true

⁹ For a rather novel interpretation, see Patte (1987:72): “Fulfilling the law is allowing the law to mold one’s will, to define one’s vocation.”

¹⁰ We will examine this in greater detail in chapter 4.

meaning”, “spirit”, “intention”, or “basic principles” of the Law, thereby “completing”, “perfecting”, or “expressing” its full significance. His criticism centres on the failure of such interpretations to account for the term’s usage in both the LXX and in Jesus’ milieu. Banks (1975:208) is also critical of interpretations that give πληροῦν the sense of “validate”, “establish”, or “confirm”, not a sense in which the LXX uses πληροῦν. Passages using this word “speak of the ‘fulfilment’ of a prediction, promise, threat, undertaking or obligation” (Banks, 1975:209). When we look at the New Testament usage of the word, we see many passages in which fulfilment is spoken of in relation to both Old Testament prophecies and the Law. Following Barth, Banks (1975:209) takes this word as indicating the “realization” of what was referred to. Following Descamps, Banks emphasizes “the quality of newness” which is a “central aspect of the term” (1975:210). This “newness” is illustrated in the antitheses that follow (5:21-48). But Banks thinks there is more to the term than mere “transcendence of the Law”. Central to his understanding is “the Law’s function in pointing forward to that which has now arrived in its place” (1975:210). Banks cites Matthew 11:13, which refers to not only the Prophets, but also the Law, as prophesying. This leads to his central argument:

“precisely the same meaning should be given to the term πληροῦν when it is used of the Law as that which it has when it is used of the Prophets” (1975:210).

The prophetic teachings, he continues, point forward to the actions of Christ and have now been realized in a far greater way. The Mosaic laws similarly point forward to the teachings of Christ and have now been more profoundly realized. Thus Banks (1975:210) concludes by seeing both continuity and discontinuity in 5:17:

“The word ‘fulfil’ in 5:17, then, includes not only an element of discontinuity (that which has now been realized *transcends* the Law) but an element of continuity as well (that which transcends the Law is nevertheless something to which the Law itself *pointed forward*)”.¹¹

For Banks, therefore, fulfilment is eschatological in that what the Law pointed forward to has arrived in Jesus’ actions and teachings. Banks’ conclusion regarding Jesus and the Law, then, is that Matthew 5:17-20 is not concerned so much with illustrating Jesus’ stance

¹¹ Italics original.

towards the Law, but rather with how the Law stands with regard to him: “as the one who brings it to fulfilment and to whom all attention must now be directed” (1975:226). The focus of the passage is thus Christological in that it demonstrates the authoritative teaching of the Messiah.

2.3 David Wenham (1979)

Wenham (1979:92) begins by noting that Matthew 5:17-20 has caused “great difficulty to many Christian interpreters”. The reason for this is that exegetes have had trouble reconciling the conservative statements in Matthew 5:17-20 with more “liberal” statements elsewhere in Jesus’ teaching¹² and in the New Testament at large¹³. Wenham’s article is an evaluation of Bank’s proposal, delineated above, that we understand the Law in Matthew 5:17-20 as pointing forward to Jesus and thus being fulfilled in his coming and in his teaching.

Wenham (1979:93) objects to Banks’ contention that πληρῶσαι be taken to mean “fulfil and transcend” on the grounds that the context supports rather the idea of “fulfilling and so establishing”. “Establish” contrasts better with “abolish” in verse 17b, Wenham (1979:93) argues, than does “transcend”. Furthermore, “establish” makes better sense of verse 19, where Jesus’ followers are to uphold the Law.

Unsatisfied with Banks’ interpretation of Matthew 5:17-20, Wenham (1979:94) turns to his own exegesis of this passage. In order to show that these verses do not “express a rigorist attitude to the law, at variance with Jesus’ known teaching elsewhere”, Wenham directs our attention to the context in Matthew’s gospel as well as to the probable context in Jesus’ ministry. First, he points out that verse 16 is a call to good works, while verse 20 compares Jesus’ standard of righteousness with that of the scribes and Pharisees. This illustrates that “Matthew’s concern... is for righteous living” (1979:94). Second, he argues that this is also the case in Jesus’ ministry more broadly. He suggests that people¹⁴ were charging Jesus with being a libertarian who was abandoning the Law for which the scribes and Pharisees

¹² Deines (2008:64ff) lists multiple texts in Matthew “supporting a new understanding of the Torah in the Kingdom of God”: cf. 5:21-48; 7:12; 8:3, 22; 9:10f; 11:11-15; 11:28-30; 12:1-8, 9-14; 15:1-11, 32-39; 16:19; 17:24f; 18:3; 19:3-9; 21:12f; 21:31f.

¹³ For instance, Jesus’ attitude to the Law in Mark’s gospel (cf. Mark 7:19), the teaching of Paul (cf. Rom. 10:4), and the letter to the Hebrews (cf. Heb. 10:1).

¹⁴ Probably conservative groups, such as the Pharisees, concerned for the upkeep of the Law.

stood. Wenham (1979:94) argues that this context makes sense of Matthew 5:17-20, since verse 17 is a denial of an accusation rather than a simple rhetorical device. On this reading, “Jesus came not to denigrate or displace, but to uphold the Old Testament revelation” (1979:94). Wenham moves on to verses 18 and 19, which “stress the divine authority of the Old Testament Law” (1979:94). So Jesus is not overthrowing the Old Testament Law, but maintaining it. Commenting on verse 20, Wenham (1979:94) claims that “the standards of the kingdom are actually far higher than those of traditional Judaism”, since one will not even enter the kingdom unless one’s righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. Wenham (1979:94) summarizes his exegesis as follows:

“Jesus rejects the charge that he is a law-breaker who is lowering standards by asserting his endorsement of the Old Testament and by claiming that his standards are actually higher, not lower, than those of the supposedly pious defenders of the law, the scribes and Pharisees.”

When it comes to the larger question of how these verses relate to other New Testament verses that stress greater discontinuity,¹⁵ Wenham argues (1979:95) that it is particularly the “ethical standards” that are in view in Matthew 5:17-20, and so these verses do not contradict other passages where discontinuity with respect to the “ritual and ceremonial law” is in view. He basically maintains the traditional distinction of moral, civil, and ceremonial Law, arguing that it is particularly the moral Law that continues to be upheld. The moral Law is then fulfilled in a way distinct from the ceremonial laws. The moral laws have not been superseded, “but rather are included in the new Christian framework of reference”. His conclusion (1979:96) is that Matthew 5:17-20 is “a strong statement about the continuing authority and relevance of the Old Testament and its laws for Christians”. Furthermore, “there is no necessary contradiction between this and other more ‘liberal’ New Testament passages”.

Therefore for Wenham Matthew 5:17-20 in general and πληρῶσαι in particular do not refer to the coming into being of that to which the Old Testament Law pointed (contra Banks), but

¹⁵ For instance, Mark 7:19.

state the eternal validity of the Old Testament Law in the face of Jesus' opposition. To "fulfil", for Wenham, is to "uphold".¹⁶

2.4 Douglas Moo (1984)

Douglas Moo's treatment of Jesus and the Law in general, and of Matthew 5:17-20 in particular, has been set out in several places over the past three decades.¹⁷ I will refer mostly to his 1984 essay, since it is the most thorough, and since the more recent articles lay out essentially the same argument.

Moo's article addresses "the question of the relevance of the Mosaic law for Christian ethics" (1984:3). He hopes to discover Jesus' "fundamental approach to the issue of the authority of the Mosaic law for his followers". Naturally this includes an extensive discussion of Matthew 5:17-20, which he takes as "the single most important passage in determining the relationship between Jesus and the law" (1984:17).

He begins by considering first the antitheses in 5:21-48, since 5:17-19, he claims, can be properly understood only in their light (1984:17). He looks particularly at two dominant interpretations (1999:348). The first holds that Jesus is reasserting the intended meaning of the Old Testament verses against the Jewish misunderstandings of his day. The second holds that Jesus' command goes beyond the Old Testament meaning, deepening it. Moo (1999:348) seeks to show "that neither of these options is adequate as an overall summary of Jesus' stance on the law in this passage". After examining the first two antitheses, Moo (1984:19) agrees that they could be taken as a "radicalization" or "deepening" of the Law, but he takes issue with this interpretation because "they suppose Jesus is 'doing something to' the law." Rather, he (1984:19) thinks that "Jesus... enunciates principles neither derived from, nor intended to extend, the meaning of the laws which are quoted." This is central to his argument in verses 17-20. Regarding the third antithesis, Moo (1999:349) thinks that Jesus is far more forthright than the Law in his teaching on divorce, and that it can scarcely be said that his teaching grows directly out of the Old Testament passages. The notion that

¹⁶ It appears that Wenham has shifted somewhat on his understanding of "to fulfil" in recent years: "[Jesus] is 'fulfilling' them, bringing in full the righteousness to which they are pointing and going even higher than the Scribes and Pharisees" (2008:200).

¹⁷ First, his article in the *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* entitled: *Jesus and the Authority of the Mosaic Law* (1984); second, his article on *Law* in the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (1992); and third, his essay in the combined volume *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, entitled *The Law of Christ as the Fulfilment of the Law of Moses: A Modified Lutheran View* (1999:319-376).

Jesus is expounding the Mosaic Law does not fit the fourth antithesis either; nor is it clear in what way he “deepens it”. In the fifth antithesis Jesus prevents his disciples from using the principle of *lex talionis* in personal relations (1984:22); he thus neither abrogates nor expounds it (1999:350). That neither interpretive principle fits the whole can most easily be demonstrated in the sixth antithesis, in which there is no Old Testament verse to substantiate the putative command to hate one’s enemy. Jesus’ command does not abrogate any Old Testament commandment, and neither is it a natural extrapolation from Old Testament teaching (Moo, 1984:22). Moo’s conclusion is therefore that “none of the usual characterizations of Jesus’ handling of the Old Testament is sufficient to embrace all the evidence” (1984:22). Thus he thinks that “a larger category is needed to explain the overall relationship between the Mosaic commandments cited and Jesus’ own teaching” (1999:351). This larger category he locates in the authoritative teaching of Jesus:

“... the dominant note, hinted at in the emphatic ‘I say to you’, testified to by the crowds at the conclusion of the Sermon and observed in all the antitheses, is the independent, authoritative teaching of Jesus, which is neither derived from nor explicitly related to the OT” (1984:23).

It is this Christological principle that makes up the centre of Moo’s argument in Matthew 5:17-20. He begins by noting that “the phrase ‘the law and the prophets’ has an important bearing on the exegesis of v. 17” (1984:24). Although it generally refers to the Old Testament Scriptures, Matthew has given the phrase his own particular nuance that highlights the Old Testament in its commanding function. This is based on the fact that νόμος is used alone in verse 18, and on the mention of ἐντολῶν in verse 19. Moo suggests that this nuance is present in 5:17 as well (1984:24). For Moo (1984:24), “the determination of the meaning of ‘fulfill’ in this context is a notorious crux.” The difficulty lies in establishing its significance in reference to the commands. In what sense are the Old Testament’s commands ‘fulfilled’?

Moo suggests three factors that need to be taken into account in any interpretation: (1) Septuagintal usage of πληρῶω; (2) the meaning of καταλύω as “abolish”; (3) the focus in Matthew 5 on Jesus’ teaching as opposed to his actions¹⁸. These considerations immediately rule out several alternative interpretations, leaving the following three possible

¹⁸ Such as working miracles, or his death and resurrection.

understandings of Jesus fulfilling the Law: (1) he 'fills up' the Law by expressing its full intended meaning; (2) he 'fills up' the Law by extending its demands; (3) he 'fills up' the Law by bringing that to which it pointed forward (Moo, 1984:24). In order to decide which of these three yields the most satisfactory explanation of Matthew's meaning, Moo (1984:25) first surveys and then investigates Matthew's usage of πληρόω, and next the use the antitheses make of the Old Testament.

First, Moo looks at the usage of πληρόω in Matthew, which he calls "manifestly eschatological and salvation historical" (1984:25; 1999:351). This is seen both in Matthew's 'formula quotations', which show how an Old Testament prophecy or event has come to 'fulfilment' in the life of Jesus, and more particularly in 11:13, where Matthew refers to the Law as prophesying, thus showing that not only the prophets possess a 'prophetic function'. "Integral to Matthew's gospel, then, is a scheme of salvation history that pictures the entire Old Testament as anticipating and pointing forward to Jesus" (Moo, 1999:351).

Second, Moo (1984:25; 1999:351) returns to his understanding of the antitheses outlined above. If the antitheses are primarily neither bringing out the true intention of the Law nor "deepening" or "radicalizing" it, then Jesus must be bringing new demands which are related only indirectly to the Old Testament commands, Moo (1984:26) argues. This being the case, the Law may then be viewed as anticipating Jesus' teaching: "Jesus fulfils the law by proclaiming those demands to which it looked forward" (1984:26); 'fulfil' therefore means "accomplishing that to which the Old Testament looked forward" (1999:352).

Moo is thus in agreement with Banks' 'eschatological' interpretation delineated above. Moo and Banks both highlight the important Christology of the passage. According to Moo (1999:350) there is a great emphasis on what Jesus says as binding on his followers, which is precisely what left the crowds so astonished (cf. 7:28-29). But he does not go as far as Banks, who says that Matthew 5:17-20 is not about Jesus' witness to the Law but the Law's witness to him. Moo (1984:28) agrees with the interpretation that in Matthew 5:17-20 "Jesus upholds the continuing validity of the entire OT Scriptures," but then he adds, "but [Jesus] also asserts that this validity must be understood in light of its fulfilment." For Moo, therefore, πληρόω must be understood in the same way as in the formula quotations and 11:13: as bringing into being that which was anticipated in the Law.

2.5 Davies and Allison (1988)

Davies and Allison (1988:481) take 5:17-20 to be “an anticipation of objections” that prevents the Gospel’s readers from concluding, in the verses to follow, that Jesus is setting aside the Torah, and also shows that what Jesus does require goes beyond the Torah.

Regarding καταλῦσαι, Davies and Allison (1988:483) understand this, in line with its usage in 24:2, 26:6, and 27:40, to mean “‘abolish’ or ‘annul’”. They (1988:484) understand “the law and the prophets” to be refer to the entire Old Testament, the former to the Pentateuch and the latter to the rest of the Old Testament. So the claim is that Jesus is not in any sense doing away with the Old Testament.

“The crux of v. 17,” they argue, “is the meaning of πληρῶ” (1988:485). They then proceed to list some of “the gamut of possible interpretations”, concluding with the ideas (1) that Jesus fulfils the Law “by bringing a new law which transcends the old”, and (2) that the fulfilment is eschatological in that the Messiah whom the Torah anticipated “has come and revealed the law’s definitive meaning” (Davies & Allison, 1988:486). Regarding the former, 5:21-48 makes it clear that Jesus’ commands are new. Regarding the latter, the verb most likely carries prophetic content for the following reasons. First, πληρῶ frequently expresses Jesus’ fulfilment of an Old Testament prophecy; second, “the prophets” are mentioned alongside “the law”¹⁹ in verse 17a; third, the parallel idea expressed in Matthew 11:13 illustrates the prophetic function of the Law; and fourth, ἕως ἃν πάντα γένηται in verse 18 probably refers to events that are predicted, illustrating Matthew’s interest in prophecy. Thus Davies and Allison (1988:487) come to a similar conclusion as do Banks and Moo: “When Jesus declares, ‘I came... to fulfil’, he means that his new teaching brings to realization that which the Torah anticipated or prophesied: its ‘fulfiller’ has come.”

Davies and Allison, then, maintain that fulfilment is predominantly an ‘eschatological’ concept in which what the Law pointed towards has been realized in the coming, and particularly in the teaching, of Jesus. In particular, their perspective holds that fulfilment includes the idea of “bringing a new law which transcends the old” (1988:486). In this sense, “to fulfil” means to ‘complete’ the Law. Jesus is presented as fulfilling the Law by being the prophet it predicted, and as completing it by the teaching he brings.

¹⁹ The phrase “The Law and the Prophets” refers to the entire Old Testament. See chapter 4 for discussion.

2.6 Ulrich Luz (1989, 2005)

Luz considers these verses to be among “the most difficult ones of the gospel” (1989:259) and their contribution to Matthew’s understanding of the Law to be “highly controversial”. He thinks that Matthew belongs to a conservative Jewish community that has experienced some influence from traditions that are more liberal towards the Law. Matthew is thus “point[ing] the way” (1989:260) in the inevitable tension.

The interpretation of this verse, according to Luz (1989:260), depends on the meaning of καταλύω and πληρώω, and on whether they are referring to (1) Jesus’ teaching or (2) Jesus’ ministry. If πληρώω refers to Jesus’ teaching, it may mean “to bring out (the Law) in its true meaning”, or “to add”, “to supply, complete or make perfect”. If it refers to Jesus’ ministry, πληρώω may mean that the story of Jesus “fulfils”, in a salvation-historical sense, the promises of the Law and the Prophets; or that Jesus “fulfils” the demands of the Law and the prophets by his obedience; or that Jesus has “fulfilled” the Law through his death and resurrection, thus bringing it to its end.

After surveying the *history of interpretation* which “shows how difficult it is to find a *precise* meaning for Matt. 5:17”, Luz (1989:264) suggests two ways forward: (1) the meaning of πληρώω and καταλύω; (2) the Matthean context. Regarding the former, Luz takes καταλύω to mean “abolish” and πληρώω to focus more on Jesus’ deeds than on his teaching. Regarding the latter, Luz points to the fulfilment formulas (1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14) and to 3:15, highlighting that each of these references is concerned with Jesus’ *actions*. The difficulty is that the immediate context (5:16, 20) appears to point to Jesus’ actions, whereas the antitheses appear to point to his teaching. Luz concludes, on semantic grounds, that fulfilment of the Law should be understood in light of what Jesus does. The use of καταλύω suggests that it is Jesus’ obedient *practice* of the Law that is in view as opposed to the fulfilment of the promises of the Law and the Prophets. Luz finds evidence of Matthew thinking of fulfilment in terms of both the “demands of the prophets” and the “obedience of... Jesus”, and even in the teaching of Jesus. He concludes (1989:265) that, while he wants to take account of these additional ideas (e.g. Jesus’ teaching), the emphasis is on Jesus’ deeds.

For Matthew, then, πληρώω is “an exclusively Christological verb” (1989:265), since it is something only Jesus (and John the Baptist) does. The word ἦλθον in verse 17 shows that this fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets is an integral aspect of Jesus’ mission. This

“Christological element” is then carried on into the antitheses. But Luz relates the *primary* significance of πληρώ in Matthew 5:17 to Jesus’ actions – especially to his obedience to the Law. He does not, however, exclude nuances that emphasize fulfilment in the sense of the coming about of prediction.²⁰

2.7 J.P. Meier (1991, 2009)

Meier’s views are expressed in several places. His *Law and History in Matthew’s Gospel* (1976) is his most thorough exposition of Matthew 5:17-20. *The Vision of Matthew* (1991) commits a chapter to these verses. Finally, his recent work on Jesus and the Law, *A Marginal Jew Volume 4: Law and Love* (2009), unfortunately offers barely any treatment of Matthew 5:17-20 on the grounds that it does not contribute to our understanding of Jesus’ view of the Law because it was the creation of Matthew or his community.²¹

Since Meier expresses essentially the same idea as do Banks and Moo his views can be treated briefly. Like others, he concentrates on Matthew’s use of “to fulfil” in contexts connected with prophecy (1991:225). Most occurrences of the word, or of related words, refer in some way to the prophets, eschatological fullness, or final consummation. He (1991:226) even thinks that the reference to “fulfilling all righteousness” in 3:15 is related to prophecy. So, to sum up Meier’s view, “to fulfil” in 5:17 means “to fulfil prophecy” (1991:226). Both this verse and the question of the Law must be understood in light of Matthew’s concern to show the fulfilment of prophecy. Further confirmation of this understanding is found in 11:13, where the Law is the subject of the verb “prophesied”. This indicates that Matthew thought of the Law, in both its ethical and prophetic utterances, as pointing forward to Jesus (1991:227). Now that the fulfiller has come the Law no longer occupies the central place it previously held. Meier (1991:227) clearly estimates this to be of tremendous significance: “Another Copernican revolution had taken place.” Meier may thus be placed alongside Banks and Moo as a proponent of understanding πληρώ in Matthew 5:17 in its eschatological sense.

²⁰ Luz’s view remains substantially unchanged in his newer commentary on Matthew: “We should thus most likely think that Jesus fulfilled the law through his obedience” (2007:217). However, he now believes more strongly than in 1989 that proponents of the salvation-historical prophetic view have got it wrong (2007:214).

²¹ “One wonders if there is anything in this verse that is not a Matthean creation” (Meier, 2009:71).

2.8 Klyne Snodgrass (1992)

Snodgrass (1992:369) argues that the Law in Matthew can be properly understood only “through a ‘prophetic’ reading that sees love and mercy as its real focus”. He thus urges us to take Matthew’s references to the *prophets* seriously (1992:370).

He is critical of certain traditional-historical and redactional approaches that attempt to reconstruct the situation in Matthew’s community, distinguishing between Matthean redaction and the concerns of a conservative Jewish Christianity²² (1992:371f). Such interpretations, he insists, make Matthew “to say the opposite of his intent” and have thus “always been suspect” (1992:372). Instead, using the insights from literary approaches, Snodgrass (1992:372) sees 5:17-20 as “intended to protect against any reading of the ‘antitheses’ or other sayings of Jesus that would suggest that the law has been set aside”.

What, then, is the meaning of πληρώ in these verses? For Snodgrass it does not refer to Scripture’s “predictive function”, and it must be contrasted with the idea of destroying. This means that “Jesus came to affirm and to bring the Law and the Prophets into reality by his teaching and life. The intent of ‘fulfil’ must include the idea of doing or accomplishing.” Therefore Snodgrass understands “to fulfil” as referring not to the prophetic function of the Law (contra Banks, 1976; Moo, 1984) but, in contrast to καταλύω, to its affirmation through Jesus’ teaching and life. The Law is fulfilled especially in its demand for love, justice and mercy, which have become the ideas around which the Law is now organized (1992:376). While “Matthew’s understanding of the law is an unfinished agenda” (1992:376f), Snodgrass helpfully reminds us of the role of the prophets and their emphasis on love and justice in this passage.

2.9 Stephen Westerholm (1992)

The Mosaic Law is the main focus of Matthew 5:17-48, according to Westerholm (1992:44). Jesus fulfils – he does not abrogate – the Law. He (1992:44) helpfully begins by setting this saying in the larger context of the coming of the kingdom of God (cf. 4:17; 5:3): “From Matthew’s perspective... the starting point of any discussion of Jesus’ relationship with ‘Moses’ must be an understanding of Jesus’ role in the dawning ‘kingdom of heaven’.” It is within this context – the dawning of God’s rule – that Jesus’ relationship to the Mosaic Law

²² He criticizes particularly Guelich (1982) and Meier (1976) for using such a method.

must be understood. When we do this it becomes apparent that certain departures from the Law cannot be seen simply as transgressions. That Jesus has not “set aside” the Law points to the fact that Jesus has not denied the Law’s divine status or the requirements it sets forth. Rather, Jesus has “fulfilled” “the Law and the Prophets”. Matthew is insisting that the righteousness proclaimed by Jesus does not lead to abandoning the Law’s requirements (cf. 5:19); “rather it transcends them, a more perfect embodiment of the divine will” (1992:47). To understand the sense in which the righteousness Jesus proclaims “transcends” the Law of Moses, we must look at the antitheses in verses 21-48.

Westerholm (1992:52) surveys the antitheses in order to show the manner in which they illustrate what Jesus expects and how it relates to the Mosaic Law. For each one he points out that in Jesus’ teaching the Law is not abolished but transcended. Jesus’ commands go beyond the commands to avoid anger (5:21-26) and lust (5:27-30); Jesus requires stricter standards on divorce (5:31-32), oaths (5:33-37), justice (5:38-42), and treatment of enemies (5:43-47). Regarding the latter, for instance, “the love of those steered by God’s love will transcend the limits of human benevolence to include all of God’s creatures” (1992:55). In each of these six examples, Jesus has not done away with but gone beyond the mere requirement of the Mosaic teaching.

So Jesus neither sets aside the Law nor simply restates it. Instead, Jesus fulfils the Law. His commands “transcend the law by prescribing the goodness of God as the standard for his children” (Westerholm, 1992:56). Westerholm’s contribution is to place our understanding of Jesus’ fulfilment of the Law in the context of the dawning of the kingdom of God. When we do this we understand that the kingdom inaugurated by Jesus does not set aside or nullify the Mosaic Law, but transcends it by being a fuller expression of God’s will.

2.10 Donald Hagner (1993)

Hagner’s (1993:103) translation of 5:17 indicates his understanding of this verse: “Do not think I have come to destroy the law or the prophets. I did not come to destroy them but to bring them to their intended goal.” It may be that opinions were circulating that Jesus had come to abolish the Law (1993:104). This opinion may have come about due to Jesus’ interpretation of the Law, which to many appeared to contradict the Law. Matthew’s response is to emphasize that Jesus has not come “to destroy” the Law or the prophets but “to fulfil” them.

“The precise meaning of πληρῶσαι... is a difficult question that has produced much debate” (Hagner, 1993:105). He finds the idea of ‘fulfil’ as “to do or obey the commandments of the OT” unsatisfactory because the word πληροῦν never describes obedience to the Law in Matthew, and also, because it misses the immediate context which refers to Jesus’ teaching (1993:105f). He also does not see “fulfil” as a reference to Jesus’ life and the accomplishment of his death and resurrection because this does not make sense of the context, in which Jesus’ deeds are not in view (contra Luz), and because this fails to make sense of verse 18. He understands “fulfil” as referring to Jesus’ teaching the Law so as to “establish”, “complete”, or bring out the true meaning of the Law through definitive interpretation. This sense of “fulfil”, he says, best fits the context and maintains verse 18’s strong commitment to the Law while simultaneously “affirming the new definition that comes with fulfilment”. So Hagner (1993:106) concludes that πληρῶσαι should be understood as “to bring to its intended meaning”.²³ For him, the coming of the Messiah and his kingdom means that a definitive interpretation of the Law is now possible. The Messiah’s teaching does not destroy the Law; rather it “penetrate[s] to the divinely intended meaning of the law”. Since the Law and the Prophets pointed to Jesus, he alone is able to point to their true meaning, so bringing them to fulfilment. Hagner thus presents the idea of fulfilment neither in the salvation-historical sense of Banks, nor in the confirming/upholding sense of Wenham, but in the sense of Jesus as the Law’s interpreter.

2.11 E.P. Sanders (1993)

Sanders (1993:211) does not treat Matthew 5:17 at length. He does, however, cite it in the context of the antitheses as part of his argument that Jesus did not oppose the Law but required stricter standards (1993:210). Obedience to Jesus’ requirements in the antitheses would not require breaking the Law. Sanders thus lists each of the antitheses with a view to illustrating that they are in fact not against the Law. Matthew 5:17-20 is, then, a preface to the antitheses. It illustrates that Jesus is not against the Law, but also that the “law does not go far enough” (1993:211). Sanders cites Jesus’ teaching against divorce (Matthew 19:8) as evidence not that Jesus opposed the Law but that Moses’ leniency on the divorce question was the fault of his hearers, not of the Law itself. Furthermore, Jesus’ teaching about loving one’s enemies (Matthew 5:43f) is not against the Law, since the Law never demanded

²³ Hagner (2003:202) reaffirms this interpretation in a recent article on Matthew and the Law: “The meaning of πληρῶσαι in 5:17 is ‘to bring to its intended meaning’” (cf. Hagner, 2004:266).

hatred of one's enemies. Sanders' (1993:212) conclusion is that this section of Matthew does not show Jesus' opposition to the Law - "heightening the law is not opposing it" - but "a kind of criticism" is implied by the need for its intensification. While Sanders does not contribute directly to the question of the meaning of "fulfil", he has shown through his study of the antitheses that the Law's fulfilment does not mean that Jesus was in any sense opposed to the Law; nor would he have been understood by his contemporaries as doing away with the Law.

2.12 Frank Thielman (1999)

Thielman (1999:49) refers to Matthew 5:17-20 as Jesus' "programmatic statement about the Law's fulfilment". It makes up an integral part of his argument that Matthew's view of the Law is more complex than is recognised by scholars who simply maintain that Matthew (and/or Matthew's Jesus) upheld the Law. Thielman (1999:48) acknowledges that there is much continuity between Jesus and Moses, but adds that discontinuity is also present.

Matthew 5:17-20 should be interpreted within the larger framework of 5:17-48, in which Matthew sets out his convictions concerning the Mosaic Law (Thielman, 1999:49). Matthew wishes to use this passage, Thielman continues (1999:50), to "provide his readers with a hermeneutical key for understanding the complex relationship that he and his community had with the Mosaic Law", as well as to dispel misinterpretations which may be present within the community.

Thielman (1999:51) contrasts "what was said to the people who lived long ago" with the phrase "But I say unto you" in the antitheses (5:21-48). How can Jesus teach the fulfilment of every detail of the Law while contrasting his own instructions with the Law's commands? This question leads us into his discussion of the meaning of πληρώ in these verses.

The term πληρώ in Matthew's gospel most often refers to the realization of biblical prophecies about Jesus. Furthermore, that Jesus places "the Prophets" alongside the Law in 5:17, and that in 11:13 the Law prophecies, both indicate that Matthew may have intended "fulfil" in 5:17 to have this prophetic nuance (Thielman, 1999:51). The main difficulty with this understanding of the meaning of "to fulfil" is that the Law consists primarily of commands, and it is difficult to ascertain precisely how commands can 'prophecy'. In order to understand how this works we must look closely at the antitheses. When we do so we find that Jesus "replaces a Mosaic command with instruction that expresses the ethical goal toward which the Mosaic Law points" (Thielman, 1999:51). So, when a particular Mosaic

Law attempts to legislate a situation representing the less than ideal, Jesus nullifies it in that he demands a radical change in the situation, which if obeyed would render the legislation superfluous (1999:52). This means that the antitheses illustrate the way in which Jesus' ethical teaching fulfils the prophetic element in the Mosaic Law by bringing it to completion: "Jesus 'fulfils' what 'was said' in the Mosaic law by bringing it to its divinely intended goal" (1999:52). Thielman (1999:52f) proceeds to illustrate how in each of the antitheses Jesus takes what was present in the Mosaic Law to its ultimate conclusion. This, then, is how Jesus "fulfils" the Law: "Every part of the law pointed collectively toward the fundamental principles that comprise Jesus' teaching" (1999:58). Jesus does not, therefore, require submission to every detail of the Law but to the "fundamental principles" (1999:48) espoused in his teaching.

Thielman therefore presents a view of the Law fairly similar to that of Banks and Moo, with emphasis on its 'prophetic' dimension. His method is to clarify the meaning of "fulfil" by looking at the antitheses, which illustrate, through six contrasts, that this idea encapsulates both continuity and discontinuity. It is therefore insufficient to say merely that Jesus 'upheld' the Law; a correct (i.e. contextual) understanding of πληρώω in these verses shows that Jesus' teaching goes beyond what was required in the Mosaic corpus by getting to the principles underlying that corpus.

2.13 Greg Bahnsen (1999, 2002)

Bahnsen's view of the Law – which has become known as 'theonomy'²⁴ or 'reconstructionism' – places the emphasis on continuity. The Law – and for the theonomist this includes the 'civil' law – is holy and should form the basis of the Christian ethic, including the way in which the state is governed. Because of its stress on continuity, Bahnsen places great emphasis on Matthew 5:17-20, which he sees as a foundational text in support of his position.

He (1999:112) argues primarily for two points: (1) the Law of God is good in its demands, and (2) those demands are universal and thus not applicable to Israel alone. It follows from this that the modern interpreter may not "arbitrarily" (1999:113) assume that a command is

²⁴ The position of theonomy on the law is most completely set out in Bahnsen's *Theonomy in Christian Ethics: Third Edition* (2002 [1977]). For a response see Barker and Godfrey, eds. 1990. *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*. For Bahnsen's response to this response see his *No Other Standard: Theonomy and Its Critics* (1991).

not binding unless Jesus himself says so. For Bahnsen (1999:113), Matthew 5:17-19 is “the decisive word on this point”. This passage, he (1999:114) argues, illustrates that Christ did not come to “change our evaluation of God’s laws”; instead he came to fulfil them. Bahnsen’s (1999:114) exegesis highlights the following: (1) Jesus twice denies that his coming means the abrogation of the Old Testament commandments; (2) until the physical universe expires, nothing of the Law will pass away; (3) God therefore disapproves of anyone who teaches that any of the Old Testament Law may be broken. The Law of God abides unless otherwise revealed by the Lawgiver. Bahnsen (1999:114) sees this passage as an overall statement of Jesus’ position on the Law in which any statements to the effect of its abrogation must be aligned: “Whatever statements we find about the setting aside of the law... will have to be integrated into the broader and absolute dictum of the Messiah himself.”

Bahnsen (2002:54) considers πληρῶσαι to be “the most crucial word for our understanding of this passage”. After listing and critiquing several positions on the term, Bahnsen (2002:67) concludes that πληρῶ in Matthew 5:17 should be understood as “confirm and restore in full measure”. His position is based on its contrast to καταλύω; he argues that since Jesus did not come to *abrogate*²⁵ the Law, and since ἀλλά heightens the contrast, the meaning of πληρῶσαι will be “directly contrary” to the meaning of καταλύω (2002:68). Since “confirm” is the antithesis of καταλύω, it best makes sense of the meaning of πληρῶσαι (2002:70). Bahnsen (2002:70-72) proceeds to argue, furthermore, that an examination of the usage of πληρῶ in the LXX and the New Testament demonstrates that “confirm” or “establish” is an attested meaning of the term. He (2002:73) concludes as follows: “Given the preceding contextual and lexicographical [*sic.*] considerations πληρῶσαι in Matthew 5:17 must be taken to mean “confirm”.

This interpretation of πληρῶ is seen clearly in Bahnsen’s response (1999:387f) to Moo’s essay on the Law in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*: “I think it is as plain as the hand before my face that Jesus in this text does not teach discontinuity with the Mosaic commandments, but upholds their every minute detail.” “Contrary to Moo,” Bahnsen (1999:388) continues, “Matthew is not here using *pleroō* in an ‘eschatological’ sense, meaning to accomplish what

²⁵ Bahnsen’s italics.

the Old Testament ‘prophesied.’” Instead, he argues that “confirm” (cf. 1999:298) and “uphold” fit the immediate context more appropriately.²⁶

So Bahnsen does not pit his exegesis into the discussion *per se* of Jesus’ view of the Law or of Matthew’s community. Rather, he sees Matthew 5:17-19 as a key verse, an “absolute dictum” (1999:114), establishing not merely Jesus’, but all of Scripture’s, view of the Law. But he (1999:115) does admit that “a tremendous amount of homework remains to be done... with plenty of room for error and correction.” This will be the task of the present dissertation in chapter four.

2.14 J. Daryl Charles (2002)

Charles labours to show that the “greater righteousness” demanded by Jesus in 5:20 does not set aside the Mosaic Law but stands in continuity with it. When Jesus demands “greater righteousness”, he is not speaking against the Law but against an ethic present in the religious establishment of the time.²⁷ For Charles (2002:6) it is important to understand Matthew’s concept of “righteousness”. His argument is that Matthew’s concept of righteousness does not disregard the Law; rather it is expressed in *doing* the Law.

Matthew’s concept of “the Law” may be illustrated by the struggle it reflects with Pharisaical Judaism.²⁸ The Christian community is being charged with being out of step with Judaism²⁹ on the issue of the Torah and the Prophets (2002:7). The phrase “do not suppose” should thus “be understood as a rhetorical device in a polemic against popular opinion... that Jesus’ coming was to abrogate the ‘Law or the Prophets’” (2002:7). In reply to this charge, Jesus is saying that the possibility that his mission is about annulling the Law should not even be considered; he is “dealing with a fundamental misunderstanding of his mission” (2002:8).

²⁶ For a critique of Bahnsen’s understanding of ‘fulfil’ as ‘confirm’ here, see Poythress (1991:363-377). Cf. Ross (2010:358): “Ultimately, it is the theonomic worldview that dominates Bahnsen’s lexicography...”

²⁷ Charles seems to see this as the case both for the time of Jesus and early Christianity.

²⁸ Charles does not elaborate on the nature of this particular form of Judaism. Cf. Saldarini (2001:3): “The proliferation of hypotheses about the Pharisees shows how poorly they are understood.” Cf. also Cohick (2013:673-679).

²⁹ Charles is referring particularly to Judaism as practised by the Pharisees. Although the diversity of Judaisms is frequently recognized by modern scholarship, Hagner’s (2012:40) caution must be born in mind: “Contemporary scholars stress the variety of first-century Judaism, and rightly so. At the same time, however, all varieties of Judaism share common elements that qualify them to be a form of Judaism.”

In the antitheses (5:21-48) it is not the Law itself but the *halakah*, interpretations of the Law, that Jesus rejects (2002:8). This leads into Charles' discussion of Matthew 5:17. "While much exegetical ink has been spilled in attempts to render precisely the verbs πληρῶσαι and καταλύσαι, understanding the context in which they appear as well as their proper relationship to one another – one of contrast – is critical to their proper sense in Matt 5:17" (2002:8). His argument is based on two exegetical considerations: (1) the actions described by πληρῶσαι and καταλύσαι are mutually exclusive; (2) the immediate context of 5:17 does not allow a "prediction-verification" or "transcending" sense to "fulfil"³⁰ – even though the verb carries this sense elsewhere in Matthew (2002:8). The context, Charles continues, includes good works (5:16) and "better righteousness" (5:20) in order for disciples to be commended in God's sight. Since Matthew 5-7 (as opposed to Matthew 1-4, which speaks of *eschatological*³¹ fulfilment) draws attention to Jesus' teaching, the focus of this section is *didactic* and not eschatological. This sense is confirmed by the antitheses of 5:21-48, where Jesus calls for obedience to the commands required by love. Since Matthew's primary concern (in this section) is the debate with Judaism over the role of the Law, and not the arrival of eschatological promise, the emphasis, Charles argues (2002:9), is on *doing*, *obeying*, and *keeping*. This consideration, along with the fact that καταλύσαι is set in opposition to πληρῶσαι, shows that Jesus was not setting up a new teaching or setting aside the Torah: "Matthew's aim is transparent: the ethical demands of the law were not to 'cease'" (2002:9). This is further confirmed in 5:18, where both the introductory phrase ἀμὴν γὰρ λέγω ὑμῖν and the notion that not the "smallest" detail of the Law would "pass away" confirm the permanence of the Law (2002:10).

The effect of Jesus' emphasis on the Law details, as well as the hyperbolic speech for rhetoric effect, all contribute to emphasize the "durability" (2002:10) of the Law. For Charles, then, fulfilment should be understood against the backdrop of early Christianity's debates with Judaism as an emphatic statement concerning Jesus' position on the Law, which stresses its permanence. Charles is thus similar to Bahnsen in that he sees in this concept of fulfilment confirmation rather than prophetic fulfilment, and to Luz in that he places emphasis on obedience.

³⁰ Charles is opposing in particular the work of Banks here; but his critique includes the works of many scholars who have seen a similar sense to "fulfil" in this passage. Cf. Carson, 1984:142.

³¹ Charles' italics.

2.15 William Loader (2002)

The focus of Matthew 5:17-48 is on God's will (Loader, 2002:165). The passage breaks into two parts: (1) statements of principle (5:17-20); (2) exposition of Torah (5:21-48). Loader (2002:165) also notes the primacy of verse 17: "The opening statement is of primary significance for the whole passage, indeed for Matthew's picture of Jesus as a whole." That Jesus did not intend to overturn Torah³² possibly reflects another view known to Matthew; this is also implied by 5:18-19 (Loader, 2002:166). In light of this possible background, Matthew has here a categorical statement that Jesus came to do the opposite of abolishing the Law and the Prophets. "Keep the whole Law!" Jesus is saying (Loader, 2002:166). The following verses (vv. 18-19, 20, 21-48) make it clear that what is in view "is confirming and upholding the validity of the Law and the Prophets" (2002:166). This, then, is how Loader understands πληρῶσαι in verse 17. He sees this verb as particularly significant in light of its Matthean usage to denote the fulfilment of Scripture in Jesus' ministry. While this may account for the mention of the prophets in verse 17, it is more likely that πληρῶσαι should be understood in light of 3:15, where "to fulfil all righteousness" means doing what God demands (Loader, 2002:167). The focus in 5:17, however, is not as much on Jesus doing God's will as on Jesus causing God's will to be done (2002:167); Matthew portrays Jesus' mission as fulfilling God's will by causing it to be done. The emphasis falls particularly on the Law and upholding it, although Loader adds in a footnote (2002:167): "The Matthean use of πληρῶσαι 'fulfil' demands something more than 'uphold'." Against Banks, Loader rejects the idea that Jesus replaces the Law, since that would be the opposite of the meaning of 5:17. But this does not discount Banks' argument that the statement be read in light of Matthew's Christology. This in turn prompts the question of how God's authority in Jesus relates to God's authority in the Law and the Prophets. Matthew appears to be saying that there is no conflict between the two because, although it remains God's authority, Jesus brings something new in salvation history (Loader, 2002:168). So the new does not abrogate the old. Rather, Jesus upholds the Law and the Prophets "by giving them authoritative interpretation" (Loader, 2002:168).

In saying this, Loader attempts to bring together some of the various understandings sketched above. Like Wenham, Bahnsen, and Charles, he sees Jesus as upholding the Law. Like Banks, Moo, and Theilman, he sees salvation history and the prophetic dimension

³² Loader (2002:1) defines Torah as "The Law of Moses, preserved in the Pentateuch".

as important. And, like Hagner, he sees Jesus as giving the Law and the Prophets an authoritative interpretation.

2.16 Wells and Zaspel (2002)

Wells and Zaspel's "New Covenant Theology" (2002) represents a growing school of interpreters who are dissatisfied with both 'Dispensationalism' and 'Covenant Theology'. They argue that it is the Law of Christ as opposed to the Law of Moses that is binding on Christians in the modern era^{33,34}. In their defence of New Covenant Theology, Wells and Zaspel (2002:77-138) devote four chapters to the history and exegesis of Matthew 5:17-20. Since this is one of the most thorough treatments over the past decade it is worth briefly outlining their position.

Their assessment of this passage is not understated: "the whole of NT theology grows out of this pivotal statement of Jesus" (2002:78). When it comes to 5:17, Wells and Zaspel (2002:109) attempt to answer the following question: "What is [Jesus'] purpose in coming as it relates to the law of Moses?" "Do not think" (Μὴ νομίσητε) may reflect a charge against Jesus; it may, however, be a rhetorical device intended for emphasis. Wells and Zaspel (2002:111) regard καταλύσαι simply as Jesus' claim that he will not "invalidate" the Law or the Prophets. Turning to πληρῶσαι – "the key word to the entire discussion" (2002:111) – they begin by examining the Matthean usage of the word. The term πληρῶω may refer to "filling up" (13:48; 23:32); it may be redemptive-historical, as in the "fulfilment formulas"³⁵ (1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 27:9; cf. 26:54, 56), illustrating that Jesus' actions "fulfil" something foreshadowed in the Old Testament; or it may imply "prediction/verification" (21:4-5). Jesus' arrival means that God's purposes are reached (2002:112). They conclude that the term should "be understood in an eschatological sense" (2002:112). The Law had a prophetic function in which it anticipated Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God. The arrival of that kingdom affects the way the Law is understood: "Christ brought the 'full' eschatological intent of the Law to final realization" (2002:113).

³³ By "modern era" they are referring to Christians in the twenty and twenty-first centuries.

³⁴ Moo's essay in *Five Views on Law and Gospel* (1999) basically argues for the New Covenant Theology position, even though Moo himself never uses the term. Cf. Schreiner (2010:232), who refers to Moo's essay in this volume as "what is often called the new covenant view."

³⁵ For more on Matthew's "fulfilment formulas" see the following chapter of the present dissertation.

Given the prominence of πληρώω in the Gospel, Wells and Zaspel (2002:113) proceed to argue that this concept sums up Matthew's entire theological purpose: "this is his trademark, his primary thrust emphasized over and over again, even without the use of the term." They contend that, since the concept of fulfilment pervades Matthew's entire Gospel, which argues that Jesus is the fulfilment of redemptive history, it is unsurprising that chapter 5 is no different: Jesus came "to fulfil" (2002:115). Wells and Zaspel's treatment of this passage is thus in line with those of Banks, Moo, and Thielman, arguing for what they call "eschatological continuity" (2002:86). This concept then becomes integral to their overall approach to the Law, which understands the Law of Moses to find its fulfilment in the law of Christ (2002:160). The "safest rule," they (2002:166) argue, "is to obey all that Christ commands... Treat him as the new Torah." In short, because the Law has been fulfilled, it has run its course as the primary reference point for obeying God's will.

2.17 John Nolland (2005)

Nolland (2005:216) sees Matthew 5:17-20 as preparatory to the antitheses to follow in verses 21-48. The denial in verse 17, then, may be taken as anticipating objections to what Jesus will teach in the antitheses (2005:217). The use of καταλύω likely reflects Jewish polemic against Christians who seek to overturn the Law, but "what Jewish polemic seeks to discredit as an attempt to overthrow the Law, Christian faith knows to be the true fulfilment of the Law" (2005:218).

In a similar fashion to Wenham and Bahnsen, Nolland (2005:218) thinks "fulfil" must be interpreted against its counterpart, "annul". Furthermore, it must also "illuminate" the upcoming antitheses, where Matthew is clearly not "reaffirming the status quo" (2005:218). Since in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is presented as a teacher, "to fulfil" must focus on what Jesus does as a teacher. Nolland thinks that seeing "fulfil" in this way dismisses many of the possible senses in which "fulfil" has been understood: to add; to replace with a new law that transcends; to replace with the spirit of love; to confirm; to live out the Law's requirements; to empower others to do the Law; to fulfil the prophetic content of the Law and the Prophets (2005:218). Furthermore, Nolland (2005:154, 219) considers 5:17 a bridge between the senses of 'to fulfil' in 3:15 and in the formula quotations. If this were the case it would bring together the "uphold" and the "eschatological" interpretations sketched above.

Nolland (2005:219) also notes that the interest in 5:17 "is clearly with the practical implementation of the directives of the Law (and the Prophets)". Jesus is then claiming "to

enable God's people to live out the Law more effectively."³⁶ This becomes clear only through analysis of the upcoming antitheses (vv. 21-48), which display Jesus offering "a new depth of insight into what the Law requires" (2005:219). Nolland's exegesis amounts to this: When "to fulfil" is understood both in light of its usage elsewhere in Matthew (cf. 3:15; 'formula quotations') and in the antitheses to follow (5:21-48) it becomes apparent that Jesus the teacher enables his disciples to live out the Law by more clearly explaining its essential demands. His view is thus similar to that of Hagner (cf. 1993:106), who understands πληρῶσαι as to "bring to its intended meaning". The difference, however, is that Nolland has a nuance of advancement in his understanding: "a new depth of insight". This view may be distinguished from either of the two main interpretations we have sketched so far: fulfilment as "upholding" and fulfilment as "eschatological". Perhaps we could label it fulfilment as "advancement".

2.18 R.T. France (2007)

France's view is set out in both his *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (1989:191-197) and his recent NICNT commentary *The Gospel of Matthew* (2007:177-191). Since his view follows largely the contours already set out by Banks and Moo it is not necessary to treat it at length.

The entire passage (5:17-48) may be understood as treating a single theme: "the fulfilment of the law" (2007:177). What we have in this passage is a "presentation of the law of the new covenant, as both in continuity and in contrast with the OT law" (2007:178). The key to understanding the extent of that continuity/discontinuity is to ascertain what is meant by Jesus' "fulfilling" the Law and the Prophets (2007:181). France's argument is built on two contextual observations: (1) that "fulfil" plays such a major role in the formula quotations, denoting the realization of that to which Scripture pointed; and (2) that in 11:13 we find a reference to the Law prophesying, illustrating that even the Torah looked forward to a time of fulfilment (2007:182f). Based on these points, France (2007:183) paraphrases Jesus' words:

"Far from wanting to set aside the law and the prophets, it is my role to bring them into a new era of fulfilment."

³⁶ This appears to contradict what Nolland (2005:218) wrote on the previous page: "many of the proposed senses of 'fulfil' can be dismissed: [senses like] to empower others to live out the Law's demands..."

France thus stands in the line of interpreters who see πληρώ in Matthew 5:17 in an eschatological sense describing the coming into being of that to which the Law looked forward.

2.19 Walter Chantry (2008)

Chantry is not a Matthean scholar, nor does he make a major contribution to the discussion delineated above. However, his recent article on *The Christian and the Moral Law* (2008) well illustrates a conservative Reformed view of the passage in question.

While Chantry (2008:57) acknowledges that verse 17 refers to the entire Old Testament, he draws from the fact that verse 19 refers to *commandments* and verse 20 to *righteousness* that it is “undeniably clear that our Saviour intends his primary focus to be on the moral law or the ethical teachings of the Old Testament”. Jesus is here denying that the ethical behaviour of the kingdom contradicts the morals of the Old Testament. What then does he mean by “fulfil”? “If we allow Jesus to speak for himself,” argues Chantry (2008:58), “the meaning of *fulfil* is plain.” Since verse 18 declares that everything will be *accomplished*³⁷, Jesus is referring to what is to be done. According to verse 19, Chantry continues, this fulfilment relates to commandments and morality: “it means the actual practice... of the ethical requirements. The Law and the Prophets will be substantiated in Christ’s kingdom by being done!” For Chantry, then, “to fulfil” is to do.

How does he reconcile his view with the fact that no Christian can obey every Old Testament command? He (2008:59) answers with recourse to the three-fold division of the Law: “By the wider context of Scripture which does distinguish between moral, ceremonial and civil law.” He (2008:59) goes on to state that “anyone who has failed to admit these distinctions has fallen into serious error in handling the Scriptures.”³⁸ Having made this distinction, Chantry can then argue that Jesus’ focus in verses 17-20 is entirely on the moral law.

³⁷ Chantry’s italics.

³⁸ Cf. the comments of France (2007:180): “It is sometimes suggested that Matt. 5:17-20 is concerned only with the moral law, not with the ceremonial and civil laws of the OT. But this convenient distinction of the law into three categories has no biblical basis, and cannot be traced back earlier than the Middle Ages. Moreover, such a selective approach is difficult to square with Jesus’ insistence on the importance of the smallest details of the law (v. 18) and the “smallest commandments” (v. 19).” However, see Ross, *From the Finger of God: The Biblical and Theological Basis for the Threefold Division of the Law* (2010; cf. Carson’s response [2013:223-236]).

Not many modern interpreters, not even those of the Reformed school³⁹, follow Chantry's exegesis of Matthew 5:17. However, his position illustrates the position of some in the Reformed church and continues to have influence.

2.20 Roland Deines (2008)

Deines (2008:53f) is writing against what has been called a "new consensus" in Matthean studies. Regarding the Law, this "new" or "emerging" consensus argues that the Christian Jews who made up Matthew's community lived according to the Law of Moses, with some basic alterations based on Jesus' teaching (2008:55). In short, this "new consensus" is on the side of continuity when it comes to understanding Matthew and his community's approach to the Mosaic Law. This community was then a "Law-Abiding Christian-Jewish Community" (2008:58). Deines (2008:58-63) surveys some of the most prominent texts in Matthew's Gospel that favour this position and concludes (1) that they merely demonstrate that Jesus was Jewish; and (2) that most of the verses merely describe certain behaviour, but do not necessarily require it. Instead, Deines' (2008:62) position sees Jesus as "the one who brings the Torah to its goal, end, or fulfilment, replacing it or transferring it into the remodeled religious and ethical hierarchy system based on his teaching."

Having stated his thesis, Deines (2008:70) turns to Matthew 5:17-20 – "the pericope [that] forms the cornerstone for both interpretative traditions". Since it is Matthew's first word on the Law, Deines sees it as "a kind of hermeneutical introduction to the Matthean theology of the Law". But it is not the first point, nor the main point, of Matthew's theology – rather, Christology and the kingdom of God occupy that position. Having made this clear, Deines (2008:74ff) turns his attention to Matthew 5:17. Against those who argue that 5:17 is a command issued by Matthew in order to demand a Law-observant attitude in the community, Deines understands πληρῶσαι

"as an exclusive Christological term, which could in the context of the First Gospel only be understood in the framework of salvation history which reaches its peak in Jesus".

³⁹ For instance, Vern Poythress' (1991:264) position is more in line with France's than Chantry's: "The coming of the kingdom of heaven means a fundamental advance in the working out of God's purposes."

Like France, Deines (2008:75) connects the verb to its usage in the fulfilment formulas⁴⁰ in which it carries this sense. Furthermore, πληροῦν is not the same as ποιεῖν, which Matthew uses elsewhere (and thus it does not carry the sense of “do”). Jesus fulfils the Law and the Prophets “through his entire mission that includes his teaching, his deeds and especially his messianic works up to his death and resurrection” (2008:75). This leads him to the following conclusion regarding the community and its response to the Torah:

“The Torah in its previous function cannot contribute to the now demanded eschatological righteousness, but as an expression of God’s will the Torah remains an important part of God’s word and revelation, leading and pointing to the ἐντολαί of Jesus... But from now on the obedience is oriented toward the kingdom of God” (2008:82).

“The Law remains a witness to the will of God. But its place in the history of God with the world has changed with the appearance of the Messiah” (2008:83).

This view essentially takes the views expressed above by Banks, Moo, and France and applies them to the discussion of the nature of the Matthean community. Helpfully, however, Deines interprets 5:17 in light of the broader issue of the kingdom of God. We will return to this point in the subsequent chapters.

2.21 Philip Ross (2010)

The subtitle of Ross’ book *From the Finger of God: The Biblical and Theological Basis for the Threefold Division of the Law* (2010) illustrates Ross’ purpose: to show that the traditional threefold division of the Law is biblically defensible. Although admitting that this division “cannot be assumed as a basis for interpreting Matthew 5:17-19” (2010:195), Ross (2010:198) still considers “the interpretation of this text... programmatic to any framework for the law, including the threefold division”.

Ross (2010:199) rejects the idea that πληρόω in Matthew 5:17 can have only one meaning: “possible meanings for πληρόω... should not be polarized.” He (2010:215) calls monolithic interpretations “wedge-driving exegesis”. Ross’ interpretation, then, takes the Old Testament context into account, especially Jeremiah 31:31-34, which “plays a significant

⁴⁰ On the ‘formula quotations’ in Matthew see France, 1989:171-181.

part in Matthew and provides an accurate sample of his approach” (2010:203). He (2010:215) contends that the interpreter, in determining the meaning of πληρώω, should not restrict the context to Matthew 5, or even Matthew’s Gospel, which would be “inadequate and unhelpful”. When we interpret πληρώω in light of Jeremiah’s new covenant, we see that Jesus

“fulfils the law and the prophets in his person and teaching, by his obedience, and in making his followers obedient. His fulfilment is eschatological, soteriological, and moral” (2010:214).

Ross’ approach is thus more of a ‘both-and’ than an ‘either-or’. His contribution is rather unique⁴¹ in that he chooses to bring out the sense of πληρώω by examining, in particular, Jeremiah 31 and scarcely treating the usage of the word in Matthew⁴².

⁴¹ Unique in modern scholarship anyhow. Ross is following Calvin (2009 [1558]: 277), who also read Matthew 5:17 in light of Jeremiah 31: “For [Christ] actually fulfilled it, by quickening, with his Spirit, the dead letter, and then exhibiting, in reality, what had hitherto appeared only in figures.”

⁴² In an appendix to his book, Ross (2010:357-370) discusses and critiques the definitions of πληρώω. However, in this extended discussion he fails to consider seriously Matthew’s usage of the word.

2.22 Table of Positions

The positions on the meaning of πληρώ in Matthew 5:17 may be tabulated as follows:

Understanding of πληρώ in Matthew 5:17	Interpreters in Support	Explanation
"To fulfil" means that what was anticipated has now been realized.	Banks (1975); Moo (1984); Carson (1984); Davies & Allison (1988); Meier (1991); Poythress (1991); Blomberg (1992); Thielman (1999); Wells & Zaspel (2002); France (2007); Deines (2008); Turner (2008); Chamblin (2010); Mitch & Sri (2010); Osborne (2010); cf. Gundry (1994).	Fulfilment in this verse should be taken in the same sense as in the 'formula quotations.' This would bring out the 'prophetic' or 'eschatological' idea in the term. Jesus, by his teaching and/or life/ministry, brings into being that which the Law anticipated.
"To fulfil" means that the Law is being upheld or confirmed.	Wenham (1976); Bahnsen (2002); Charles (2002); Loader (2002); Keener (2009).	That the Law is being upheld is the most natural sense of its contrast to καταλύω. Against critics who charge Jesus/Matthew/Matthew's community with antinomianism, Jesus affirms the eternal validity of the Law.
"To fulfil" means to bring a new law which transcends the old.	Davies & Allison (1988); Westerholm (1992); Sanders (1993); Nelson (2006).	The antitheses of 5:21-48 make it clear that Jesus' commands are new, surpassing the old.
"To fulfil" means that Jesus is obedient to the Law.	Luz (1989); Charles (2002); Bruner (2004); Chantry (2008); Ross (2010).	Both the use of καταλύω and the immediate context of 5:16, 20 point primarily to actions. Hence Jesus fulfils the Law by what he does.
"To fulfil" means that Jesus brings the Law to its intended meaning.	Hagner (1993); Loader (2002); Carter, (2004:75f); Nolland (2005); Talbert (2010); Schreiner (2010).	The coming of the Messiah and his kingdom means that a definitive interpretation of the Law is now possible. The Messiah's teaching does not destroy the Law, but brings it to its intended meaning.

Understanding of πληρώ in Matthew 5:17	Interpreters in Support	Explanation
"To fulfil" means that Jesus offers a new depth of insight into the Law.	Nolland (2005); Dunn (2013).	When "to fulfil" is understood in light of its usage both elsewhere in Matthew and the antitheses to follow it becomes apparent that Jesus the teacher enables his disciples to live out the Law by more clearly explaining its essential demands.

2.23 Conclusion

Evaluative remarks have intentionally been kept to a minimum. Rather than critically assessing each author and his view here, it is methodically preferable to dialogue with these positions when undertaking an exegesis of the passage in chapter four. For now we note the following:

- There are fewer prominent positions on this question than "the gamut of possible interpretations" catalogued by Davies and Allison (1988:485f) twenty-six years ago. Senses of πληρώ such as "add to," "enable others," and "bring a new righteousness which is the spirit of love" have largely fallen out of use. Furthermore, senses such as "Jesus fulfilling by perfect obedience" (see above) have not gained much support.
- Four interpretations in particular have received much support over the past three decades: (1) "fulfil" as eschatological; (2) "fulfil" as the Law being upheld; (3) "fulfil" as transcending the old; (4) "fulfil" as the Law being interpreted or deepened by Jesus. Thus it is among these schools that the discussion should predominantly be conducted.
- The particular sense chosen has bearing on the discussion of whether Matthew's community were Christian Jews or Jewish Christians (cf. Hagner, 2004:263-282).
- Few treatments of this passage take much note of Matthew's especially important theme of the kingdom of God/heaven.
- To decide between these positions numerous questions need to be addressed: Is Jesus/Matthew in the opening phrase of verse 17 employing a rhetorical device or addressing a real accusation? What is the best understanding of καταλύω? Does fulfilment refer to Jesus' teaching or Jesus' ministry? Is the focus of Matthew 5-7

didactic or eschatological? What should we make of the reference to the prophets followed by reference to commands? If the Law ‘prophesies’, in what sense does it prophesy? How should we understand the two “until” clauses of verse 18? In what sense will neither an iota nor a dot pass from the Law? Does “these commandments” in verse 19 refer to Jesus’ words or to the Law? How does verse 20 relate to verse 17? What is the place of the antitheses? Do they deepen the requirements of the Law or expound its true meaning? What bearing does this have on our Christology?

These and similar questions can be answered only by thorough exegesis, making the most of historical-critical, theological, and literary tools. This will be the focus of chapters four and five. First, however, we must lay the foundation for such a project by examining the historical, literary and theological contexts of Matthew’s Gospel.

CHAPTER 3: THE HISTORICAL, LITERARY, AND THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the ongoing discussion regarding the meaning of πληρώω in Matthew 5:17. We saw that there are several views on the subject and little consensus on the remaining exegetical and theological questions. It is the place of this chapter to 'set the stage' for a thorough exegetical and theological analysis in the following chapters. Who is the author of this Gospel? Whom is he addressing? What are his major concerns? How does Matthew 5:17-20 fit into the sweep of Matthew's Gospel? What is its theological relationship to the rest of Matthew's Gospel in general, and to the Sermon on the Mount in particular? It is to these questions that we now turn with a view to providing the necessary background for our study of πληρώω in Matthew 5:17.

We will proceed by dealing respectively with the historical, literary and theological contexts of Matthew's Gospel. Special attention will be paid to the theme of the kingdom of God in Matthew's Gospel since, as will become apparent, it is formative for understanding the nature of fulfilment in Mathew's Gospel in general, and in 5:17-20 in particular.

3.2 Historical Context

3.2.1 Author

The much-cited reference to Matthew in the *Fragments of Papias* has been greatly disputed over the years:

Ματθαῖος μὲν οὖν Ἑβραΐδι διαλέκτῳ τὰ λόγια συνετάξατο, ἡρμήνευσε δ' αὐτὰ ὡς ἦν δυνατὸς ἕκαστος (*Fragments of Papias* 3:16, in Holmes, 2007:740).

This statement leaves us with more questions than answers. France (1989:57f), after listing possible translations for each word, lays out several questions relating to the meaning of the statement: (1) Is Papias referring to Matthew's work alone, or does he understand Matthew as a corrective of Mark? (2) Is Papias referring to a document written in Hebrew, which then had to be 'translated' into Greek? (3) Is Papias describing a compilation of a collection of traditional material, or the composition of an original work? (4) What is meant by τὰ λόγια?

A thorough discussion of these matters is beyond the scope of this project. However, it may be worth noting France's (1989:60) conclusions.

"The result of our consideration of these four questions, then, is the belief that Eusebius correctly understood Papias to have taught (a) that Matthew was responsible for the authorship of the first gospel, and (b) that it was written in Hebrew or Aramaic.⁴³ And we have seen reason to believe that Papias is a witness to be taken seriously."⁴⁴

Kümmel (1975:121), however, assesses the evidence rather differently:

"Is it possible that Mt indeed originated with Matthew, one of the twelve...? The dependence of Matthew on the Greek Gospel of a non-disciple, the systematic and therefore nonbiographical form of the structure of Mt, the late-apostolic theological position and the Greek language of Mt make this proposal completely impossible."

While many have defended the reliability of Papias' testimony to Matthean authorship (cf. Guthrie, 1990:52f; Blomberg, 2009:156), we must agree with Carson (1984:19) that, "None of the arguments for Matthew's authorship is conclusive. Thus we cannot be entirely certain who the author of the first Gospel is." This issue has little bearing on our understanding of Matthew 5:17. For convenience we will refer to the author as 'Matthew'.

3.2.2 Date

The date of Matthew's Gospel is another disputed matter. The issue is over whether a pre-A.D. 70 or a post-A.D. 70 date is to be preferred.

In favour of a date prior to the fall of Jerusalem, John Nolland (2005:16) argues that the description offered in Matthew 24:21 cannot have been written after the war of A.D. 70 since "Matthew's account is not marked in the slightest by any attempt to soften the language to bring it more into line with what actually happened." Matthew's account scarcely resembles what eventually took place and is thus more likely to have been written prior to the war. Another argument in favour of an earlier date is the number of passages in Matthew which presuppose an extant temple (cf. 5:23-24; 17:24-27; 23:16-22; France, 2007:19). A third

⁴³ France deals with the problems this raises later in his book (cf. 1989:62-66).

⁴⁴ Cater provides a different interpretation of the reliability of Papias (2004:15-17).

argument in favour of an early date comes from Turner (2008:13f), who sees the allusions to Matthew in Ignatius⁴⁵ and the *Didache*⁴⁶ as evidence that Matthew was probably written earlier than is usually supposed.⁴⁷

On the other hand, Craig Keener (2009:42ff) lists several arguments for a date after A.D. 70. First, the Pharisees, with whom Matthew's Gospel engages more than do the others, became prominent adversaries of Syro-Palestinian Christianity only after A.D. 70. Second, Matthew reflects the Jewish worldview of the rabbis more closely than do the other New Testament authors, but it was only after A.D. 70 that the rabbinic movement became prominent. Third, Matthew's use of Mark's Gospel makes it likely that Matthew was written post-A.D. 70. This would have allowed sufficient time for Matthew to have read Mark, gathered his own traditional material, and compiled it into its present form. Fourth, Matthew separates the questions the disciples asked about the temple's destruction and the end of the world more clearly than does Mark (cf. Matthew 24:3 & Mark 13:2-4); this reflects a post-A.D. 70 perspective. Keener (2009:43) further notes that the mention of the fire in Matthew 22:7 also supports a post-A.D. 70 date.⁴⁸

This is not the place to outline all the arguments and counter-arguments surrounding this disputed question, or to attempt to settle the matter. Suffice it to say, with Nolland (2005:14), that there is only one "fixed point" in the debate: that Matthew reflects knowledge of the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. Nolland (2005:14) continues:

"NT critical scholarship has a curious capacity to identify as 'genuine' prophecy that failed to be fulfilled and, all too often, to insist that fulfilled prophecy is only after-the-event description dressed up as prophecy."

⁴⁵ Ignatius, in his letter to the Ephesians (19:1, 2), refers to the virgin birth and the shining star (cf. Matt. 2:2; 2007:197ff).

⁴⁶ *Didache* 8:2: "Nor should you pray like the hypocrites. Instead, pray like this, just as the Lord commanded in his Gospel: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread and forgive us our debt, as we also forgive our debtors; and do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one; for yours is the power and the glory forever" (trans. Holmes, 2007:355ff; cf. Matt. 6:9-13).

⁴⁷ Despite the difficulty of determining the date of the *Didache*, Holmes (2007:337f) provides several reasons to place the document late in the first century: the simplicity of the prayers, the concern to differentiate Christian and Jewish practice (8:1), the church structure consisting of bishops and deacons, the travelling apostles and prophets – all these factors reflect an earlier stage of the church, closer to the time of Paul and James.

⁴⁸ Cf. Davies and Allison (1988:132): "Mt 22.7, while it does not demand a date after A.D. 70, does strongly imply one." But cf. Gundry (1994:600).

This is due to scholars who assume that Matthew must have been written after A.D. 70 largely on account of the coming judgement on Jerusalem and the temple being mentioned (cf. Kümmel, 1975:119; Davies & Allison, 1988:131f). Nolland (2005:15) also doubts the attempt to date Matthew later on account of the developing alienation between the Matthean community and mainstream Judaism, because our knowledge of the situation at the time is so limited: “We have no well-delineated larger picture into which we can slot Matthew at the appropriate decade of development” (2005:16). Thus Nolland, for the reasons given above, (cautiously) prefers the earlier date: “I conclude, therefore, that the state of Mt. 24 excludes the possibility that Matthew wrote after A.D. 70” (2005:16). A recent summary of the discussion indicates no consensus on the matter: “Although some have understood Matthew to reflect certain pre-A.D. 70 interests, others have observed evidence of a post-A.D. 70 date at Matthew 22:7; 24:15-20” (Brown, 2013:576). On balance the earlier date may be preferable (cf. Hagner, 2011:76-92⁴⁹), but it is not possible to be certain.⁵⁰

3.2.3 Historical Circumstances

It is generally agreed that Matthew is writing to a Jewish audience (cf. Brown, 2013:575; Saldarini, 1994:1; Blomberg, 2009:151; Gurtner, 2011:26). The use of the Old Testament, the fact that explanations of Jewish customs are omitted (unlike in Mark), and the focus on Jesus as the new Moses (cf. Allison, 1994) all constitute strong arguments for a Gospel that is primarily Jewish in orientation.⁵¹ Discussion continues, however, about whether the accent should be placed on the Jewish or the Christian aspect of Matthew’s community. Specifically, the question relates to whether Matthew was addressing a Christian Judaism (Saldarini, 1994:194ff; Sim, 1998; Runesson, 2011:133ff) or a Jewish Christianity (Hagner, 2004:264; cf. Gurtner, 2011:26; Stanton, 1992:113ff).

In the previous chapter we saw what has been termed a “new consensus” (Deines, 2008:53). Deines is referring to the work of Foster (2004:253), who seeks to overturn the

⁴⁹ “In determining the date of Matthew scholars should exhibit openness to the possibility of a date earlier than critical orthodoxy currently allows” (Hagner, 2011:92).

⁵⁰ Gundry (1994:599-609) has set out the arguments for an earlier date which, according to France (2008:289), “still remain to be adequately answered.” Davies and Allison (1988:128) refer to scholars who hold a pre-A.D. 70 date as “a weighty minority”.

⁵¹ There are, however, dissenters from this thesis; cf. Hare (2009:2): “[Matthew] wrote for a church that contained Christian Jews but that was already largely Gentile Christian in composition” (cf. Stanton, 1992:132ff).

trend in modern scholarship that sees Matthew's community as basically Jewish: "This thesis challenges an emerging consensus in Matthean studies."

Representative of this "emerging consensus" are the works of Saldarini (1994) and Sim (1998). Saldarini, as the title of his book – *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* – suggests, argues that the accent should fall on the *Jewish* nature of Matthew's community (1994:1):

"The Matthean group is a fragile minority still thinking of themselves as Jews and still identified with the Jewish community by others."

Saldarini establishes this and related points by showing (1) the diversity of late first-century Judaism; thus those who followed Jesus were aligned to one of multiple expressions of the Jewish life (1994:11-26); (2) that Matthew's use of terms such as "Israel", "people", and "crowds" indicates that he understood his community to be Jewish (1994:27-43); (3) that the evident conflict in the Gospel is not between Matthew's Christian community and the Jews, but with the present Jewish leadership (1994:44-67); (4) that "nations" in Matthew does not refer to the replacing of Israel with the Gentiles (1994:68-83); (5) that sociological studies do not allow for clear-cut distinctions between Judaism and Christianity (1994:84-123); (6) that Matthew's discussions of Jewish law and customs match the legal debates of first-century Judaism (1994:124-164); and (7) that the Gospel's Christology aligns well with the thought-world of first-century Judaism (1994:165-193).⁵²

A similar argument is made by Sim (1998). After a detailed treatment of issues relating to the historical and social setting of Matthew's community, he (1998:299) concludes that "the Matthean community was first and foremost a Jewish group of believers in Jesus." A particular interpretation of the place of Matthew 5:17-19 for our understanding of Matthew's Gospel constitutes a major part of the evidence Sim (1998:126; cf. Du Toit, 2000:547) musters in support of his thesis: "These three sayings of the Matthean Jesus therefore affirm in the clearest of terms the continuing validity of the whole Mosaic law until the parousia... It is therefore legitimate to assume that the Matthean community both accepted the importance of the Torah and attempted to keep it in its entirety."

⁵² For a recent response to some of these points see Olmstead (2011:115-132).

Stanton (1992) and Hagner (2003) are among those who have argued to the contrary. Stanton (1992:128) argues that certain passages in Matthew referring to “their synagogues” (4:23; 9:35; 10:17; 12:9; 13:54) indicate a break between Jesus’ disciples and the synagogue. Additionally, it is the church (16:18; 18:17) which now stands in opposition to the synagogue (1992:129f). Furthermore, there seems to be a transference of the kingdom to a “new people” (1992:131; Matthew 21:43; cf. Olmstead, 2011:115-132). Finally, 28:15 appears to indicate distance between the Jews and the “new people” (1992:131). Stanton thus concludes that “Jewish Christian” better defines Matthew’s community (1992:124; cf. Gurtner, 2011:28). Hagner (2003:200) also points out several reasons to designate Matthew’s community as “Jewish Christian”. First, Matthew himself affirms that there is both old and new, continuity and discontinuity (13:52). He notes that *καὶνὰ* is mentioned first in this verse, prioritizing the new (also 9:16-17). Second, in discussing Matthew 5:17-19, he (2003:202) points out that it is not so much the Law as it is Jesus the Messiah that is the centre of Matthew’s Gospel.⁵³ The Gospel abundantly illustrates the authority of Jesus (cf. 7:28). This shift of focus away from the Law to the teaching of Jesus renders unlikely the thesis that Matthew’s community is a sect of Judaism. Third, the very fact that the Gospel is “Jesus-centred” as opposed to “Torah-centred” shows that the community must have departed significantly from traditional Judaism (Hagner, 2003:205). Hagner’s (2003:208) conclusion is that the appeal to Matthew 5:17f made by those who argue that Matthew’s community was a Jewish sect “will not bear the weight of the hypothesis”. One should rather, therefore, view the recipients of Matthew’s Gospel as Christian Jews.

This exchange, especially between Sim and Hagner, illustrates the place Matthew 5:17-20 has in the discussion of Matthew’s community. If one takes Matthew 5:17 as purely a statement emphasizing Matthew’s conservative view of the Law, it becomes part of an argument that Matthew’s community consisted of Christian Jews. If, on the other hand, one sees discontinuity as well as continuity in Matthew 5:17, it becomes part of an argument in favour of Matthew’s community consisting of Jewish Christians.

Much discussion in Matthean scholarship centres on the question of whether Matthew’s community had broken ties with the synagogue by the time of the Gospel’s provenance. Keener (2009:49) has recently defended the view that Matthew’s community had not broken

⁵³ This is in response to Sim (1998:123), who states: “The Mosaic law occupies a central place in the Gospel of Matthew.”

decisively with the synagogues: “I find in the Gospel an author and audience intensely committed to their heritage in Judaism while struggling with those they believe to be illegitimate spokespersons.” He thus believes Matthew to be writing to Jewish Christians who are fighting to remain part of their synagogue communities. Conversely, Hagner (2003:198) states, “My own conviction is that Matthew’s community *had*⁵⁴ broken with the synagogue, but that it remained in proximity to the synagogue and inescapably in an ongoing situation of debate and controversy with it.” Hagner (2003:197) believes this process was a “gradual transition”, since there appears to be no specific point at which the church was put out of the synagogue or persecution against Christians by Jews began⁵⁵ (cf. Luz, 2005:7-9, 210f).

Little is known for certain about the historical circumstances in which Matthew’s Gospel was written. A popular hypothesis is that it was written to those in Syria, perhaps in Antioch. Garland (2001:3) lists some of the reasons for this suggestion⁵⁶: (1) Matthew 4:24 reads that Jesus’ fame spread throughout Syria, whereas Mark 1:28 mentions only Galilee; (2) Acts 11:19-26 shows that Antioch hosted one of the largest Jewish-Christian communities outside Palestine; (3) it is an ideal location for bringing together the facts that Matthew was written in Greek and to a primarily Jewish community, since it was a Greek-speaking city consisting of many Jews; (4) Antioch was the scene of anti-Jewish riots in A.D. 40 and 66-70, which is a possible explanation for the anti-Jewish sentiment in the Gospel; (5) Peter’s prominence in Matthew might also be explained by an Antiochian provenance, since Paul mentions Peter as an influential figure in Antioch (Gal. 2:11-14).

Contending against what he calls the “current consensus in Gospels scholarship that each gospel was written for a specific church or group of churches,” Richard Bauckham (1999:865) has argued that the Gospels were written for general circulation around all the churches. He bases his suggestion on three arguments: (1) our evidence of the earliest

⁵⁴ Hagner’s emphasis.

⁵⁵ Some interpreters view the *Birkat ha-Minim*, the denunciation of “Nazarenes and heretics”, introduced into the synagogue liturgy toward the end of the first century as a definite point where Christianity and Judaism split (France, 2007:16). But France sees this as overly simplistic, because evidence of the *Birkat ha-Minim*’s introduction is uncertain and because of the unlikelihood of its universal imposition: “The specific point of ‘expulsion’... seems to me more a modern scholarly simplification than a realistic account of the likely pattern of relation between Jews and Christians in the first century.” For more thorough critiques arriving at similar conclusions, cf. Stanton (1992:142-145); Saldarini (1994:220f).

⁵⁶ He does so cautiously: “Unfortunately, the exact historical setting in which this gospel was composed and its date will probably never be known for certain” (2001:3).

Christian movements shows them to be a network in constant communication; (2) our evidence about Christian leaders (who probably wrote the gospels) shows them to have travelled widely; (3) our evidence from early Christian literature shows it to have circulated rapidly and widely. Bauckham's argument, according to Keener (2009:45), "is a helpful and necessary corrective to previous reconstructions of hypothetical communities, many of which piled guess upon guess about specific matters for which no data remain."⁵⁷ Perhaps we could say that Matthew wrote to a specific community, whilst bearing the probability of further circulation in mind. Since there is ample evidence that early Christianity struggled to determine the place of the Law in light of Jesus' arrival,⁵⁸ we may suppose that Matthew's community, too, especially if they had broken decisively with Judaism, found themselves trying to understand the Law and its fulfilment.

3.3 Literary Context

3.3.1 Genre

Richard Burridge's book *What Are the Gospels?* has become a standard work on the subject of genre and is regularly cited in the ongoing discussion. Burridge (2004:250) argues that Graeco-Roman biography provides the closest parallel to the genre of the Gospels:

"The four canonical gospels and Graeco-Roman βίος exhibit a clear family resemblance. The genre of βίος is flexible and diverse, with variation in the pattern of features from one βίος to another. The Gospels also diverge from the pattern in some aspects, but not to any greater degree than any other βίοι; in other words they have at least as much in common with Graeco-Roman βίοι, as the βίοι have with each other. Therefore, the gospels must belong to the genre of βίος."

While this position has been welcomed by many as a superior alternative to the canons of form criticism,⁵⁹ some have felt a measure of revision necessary. For instance, N.T. Wright (1992:390), while not denying Burridge's basic thesis – "there is no doubt that Matthew has

⁵⁷ However Keener (2009:45-51) goes on to argue that a case can be made for Matthew addressing a particular community in a particular situation.

⁵⁸ Cf. Acts 15:1ff; 21:21; Rom. 3:31; Gal. 2:16; 3:17ff; *et al.*

⁵⁹ Cf. N.T. Wright: "This possibility (viewing the gospels as biographies), long ignored because of the dogmas of form-criticism, is now supported in several studies..." Cf. also Pennington (2012:22).

written the story of Jesus as a Hellenistic-style *bios*, a biography” – adds that Matthew is also telling the story of Jesus as the climax of the story of Israel.⁶⁰

“Modern study of ancient secular biography has shown... that the gospels are *at least*⁶¹ biographies. But they are more than that. They are, in fact, Jewish-style biographies, designed to show the quintessence of Israel’s story played out in a single life.” (1992:402)

Jonathan Pennington’s recent work (2012) also proposes some additions to Burrige’s thesis. First, Pennington (2012:25) claims that Burrige’s argument is not sufficiently broad in that it fails to address adequately questions such as how the Gospels relate to virtue formation and how their genre affects their presentation of history. Second, he (2012:26) notes that the Gospels are distinct in their “kerygmatic nature”. Their theological framework owes more to the Bible than to Graeco-Roman βίοι. Third, he (2012:27ff) shows the distinctiveness of the Gospels by virtue of the incredible claims they make, their depiction of Jesus as the one who brings God’s reign, their illustration of Jesus’ divinity, their presentation of Jesus as contemporary and, finally, their focus on salvation: “This is *good news*⁶², not just a biography! Thus, more than any history or biography, the gospels have a message to preach; they are kerygmatic, not *merely* exemplary” (2012:31).

Matthew’s genre should be understood not only in light of Graeco-Roman βίοι, but also in light of the Jewish story of which it forms part, and which it climaxes (so Wright, 1992), and in light of its distinctive Christological claims (so Pennington, 2012). The fact that Matthew refers so frequently to *fulfilment* should lead us primarily to the Old Testament when asking what background most shaped the composition of his Gospel. In sum, when we read Matthew we are not reading a mere “life” of Jesus, we are reading the climax of a larger story. Matthew’s genre must be construed in the Old Testament milieu, for which it provides continuity or, better, fulfilment.

⁶⁰ It should be noted that Wright is referring to the first edition of Burrige’s work. In the second edition Burrige addresses this critique; see 2004:21n60 and 2004:263.

⁶¹ Italics original.

⁶² Pennington’s italics.

3.3.2 Structure

One of the most notable features of Matthew's Gospel is the five extended blocks of teaching (Matt. 5-7; 10; 13; 18; 23-25⁶³), which only Matthew records in this way. Strikingly, each of them ends with a similar summary statement – “καὶ ἐγένετο ὅτε ἐτέλεσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς...” (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1) – which has led many interpreters to argue that these statements provide the basis of Matthew's structure. Most influential has been the work of B.W. Bacon (1918:66), who argued that Matthew so structured his Gospel as to correspond to the five books of Moses in the Pentateuch: “its author intentionally constructed it upon just this plan of ‘five books’...” However, while the five discourses continue to be considered important to Matthew's structure, few would follow Bacon's conclusion that Matthew has deliberately structured his Gospel as a new Pentateuch. France (1989:144f) outlines various criticisms of Bacon's hypothesis: (1) from a literary point of view, there is insufficient support for the New Exodus or New Moses motifs to support Bacon's hypothesis; (2) Bacon's scheme does not account for significant parts of Matthew's Gospel; (3) the titles “preamble” and “epilogue” underplay the significance of the infancy narrative (chapters 1-2) and the crucifixion (chapters 26-28), especially since the crucifixion and resurrection are the climax of the entire work; (4) Bacon's hypothesis requires the placing of diverse categories under single headings; (5) the concluding formulas mentioned above refer only to the foregoing discourse, not to the narrative, and are better treated as transitions than conclusions. Thus Bacon's structural hypothesis fails to account for the diversified nature of Matthew's Gospel.

Another influential hypothesis relating to the structure of Matthew's Gospel is that of Jack Dean Kingsbury. Kingsbury (1989:ix) speaks of a three-part topical outline: 1:1-4:16; 4:17-16:20; 16:21-28:20. Verses 1:1; 4:17; and 16:21 each begin a new section. The outline is based on a scheme of salvation history in two epochs: the time of Israel and the time of Jesus. According to Kingsbury (1989:36), each section is composed in order to inform the reader of the Gospel's major purpose: the first section (1:1-4:16) describes the significance of the person of Jesus; the second section (4:16-16:20) describes his public ministry and proclamation; and the third section (16:21-28:20), his journey to Jerusalem and his passion.

⁶³ Commentators are divided over whether Matthew's fifth discourse consists of chapters 23-25 or 24-25. For the former, see Stanton (1992:165); for the latter, see Luz (2005:22): “It [Matt. 23] is not to be seen... as part of the final ‘great discourse,’ the judgment discourse, which encompasses only chs. 24-25.” Also, cf. Carter (2004:133): “The content and setting of chapters 23 and 24-25 are significantly different, suggesting six discourses.”

Matthew divides history into these two epochs, Kingsbury (1989:36f) continues, in order to place Jesus in the context of history directed by God with a view to drawing out implications for both Jews and Gentiles.

While agreeing that “both the geographical location and the style of Jesus’ ministry change radically at each of these points,” France (1989:152) asks whether the form of words justifies separating the sections, especially sections “which may be seen as to some extent self-contained units”. For instance, 16:21 takes place in the middle of the Caesarea Philippi incident. Peter’s declaration in 16:17-19 is balanced by the rebuke he receives in 16:22-23. To divide Matthew’s narrative at this point is to disallow these sections from being read in sequence. Thus France (1989:152) cannot allow 16:21 the weight Kingsbury ascribes to it:

“While 16:21 marks the beginning of a new emphasis in Jesus’ ministry, it does not mark the end even of the episode which immediately precedes it, let alone the end of a whole major section of the gospel.”

France’s own proposed structure is based on the geography of Matthew’s Gospel. He (2007:3) begins by assuming Matthew’s use of Mark’s narrative pattern, which presents Jesus’ ministry in three phases: Galilee, the journey from Galilee to Judea, and Jerusalem. Matthew structures his story in a similar fashion. After his more extensive prologue – focusing on the Scriptural fulfilment brought about by the Messiah – Jesus’ ministry is set in Galilee until 16:21, which announces his intention to travel to Jerusalem (France, 2007:4). Matthew also offers much material on the nature of discipleship on the journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. Matthew likewise treats Jesus’ arrival outside Jerusalem as if it were the first time Jesus had been there.⁶⁴ One major difference is that Matthew has Jesus return with his disciples to Galilee after the Jerusalem phase of the story,⁶⁵ returning to where the story began. France’s (2007:4) conclusion is that this “geographical outline” provides a better basis for discerning Matthew’s narrative structure than does the search for verbal divisions. Reading the Gospel in this fashion – continuous narrative from Galilee to Jerusalem, where

⁶⁴ Elsewhere France (2002:11-15) argues that Mark has kept this simple structure for its dramatic effect of drawing attention to the Galilean prophet who ventures into Judea. He (2007:3) finds the hypothesis that Jesus had already been in Jerusalem “far more historically plausible”. Furthermore, there are elements in both Mark and Matthew which suggest that Jesus had been there before (e.g. Jesus’ already-existing links with those in Bethany, and with the owners of the donkey).

⁶⁵ James Edwards (2002:503), following Markan priority, sees in Matthew’s return to Galilee the material Mark’s lost longer ending contained.

he is rejected, and then back to Galilee – helps us to appreciate it for its literary, not only its historical and theological, nature (2007:5). France (2007:vii-xv) thus outlines Matthew geographically in six major divisions:

- I. Introducing the Messiah (1:1-4:11)
- II. Galilee: The Messiah Revealed in Word and Deed (4:12-16:20)
- III. From Galilee to Jerusalem: The Messiah and His Followers Prepare for the Confrontation (16:21-20:34)
- IV. Jerusalem: The Messiah in Confrontation with the Religious Authorities (21:1-25:46)
- V. Jerusalem: The Messiah Rejected, Killed, and Vindicated (26:1-28:15)
- VI. Galilee: The Messianic Mission is Launched (28:16-20).

This would place Jesus' words in Matthew 5:17-20 in the initial Galilee stage of his ministry, in which his authority is being revealed in both his teachings (chapters 5-7) and his actions (chapters 8-9; cf. Brown, 2013:570f). The focus on Jesus' authority becomes significant in determining the nature of the so-called 'antitheses' of 5:21-48.⁶⁶

3.3.3 Plot

Virtually all agree that Matthew is writing out the story of Jesus as the Messiah of Israel who fulfils the prophecies of the Old Testament. Brown (2013:570) is typical:

“Matthew's purpose for writing... is to portray Jesus as God's authorised Messiah, who teaches and enacts the reign of God, and who ushers in the kingdom through his self-giving ministry and death.”

It is instructive to compare the 1992 edition of the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* with the 2013 second edition. In the former, McKnight (1992:526-541) writes the entry on Matthew's Gospel under three headings: origin, structure, and theology. In the latter, Brown's (2013:570-584) entry begins with “literary features and questions” including “plot”. This is illustrative of the growing place of literary concerns in Gospel studies. While this is

⁶⁶ See section 3.5.

not the place to treat literary matters thoroughly,⁶⁷ it may be worthwhile to make some important literary observations.⁶⁸

J.D. Kingsbury has been a forerunner in the field of literary criticism as applied to Matthew's Gospel. He has argued (1988:1f) that:

“Literary-critically, the Gospel of Matthew is a unified narrative... The story it relates is governed... by a single, overarching ‘evaluative point of view.’ Moreover, the action, thought, and interactions of the characters are all organized by means of a coherent plot. This plot has a beginning, middle, and artful ending.”

This plot, Kingsbury (1992:347) argues, is based on conflict: “The story of Jesus is one of conflict, so that its plot turns on conflict.” This conflict is between Jesus and Israel, particularly its religious leaders. The conflict is finally resolved at the end in the stories about Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus' death on the cross appears to the religious authorities as their victory in this conflict, but Jesus' resurrection ironically shows that the victory belongs to himself (1992:355).

N.T. Wright (1992) has laboured to show that the Gospels, including Matthew's Gospel, have the story of Israel as their backdrop. Israel's worldview, Wright (1992:243) argues, can be illustrated by answering four questions Jews asked: (1) Who are we? They are the chosen people of the creator god⁶⁹. (2) Where are we? They are in the Holy Land, and yet still in exile. (3) What is wrong? They have the wrong rulers: pagans and compromised Jews. (4) What is the solution? God must act to exercise his own rule, and in the meantime they must remain faithful to the covenant. Wright (1992:384) later applies this to Matthew: “if there is one thing commonly recognised about the gospel of Matthew, it is that the book has a thoroughly Jewish flavour.” Building on Powell's (1992) thesis that Matthew 1:21 is a “programmatically statement” anticipating the story of how that forgiveness will be accomplished, Wright (1992:385) points out that this plot “presupposes a previous story... the story of Israel, more specifically the story of exile”. This can be shown by the opening of Matthew's genealogy, βιβλος γενέσεως, which means literally “the book of Genesis”. Thus Matthew, Wright (1992:385) concludes, begins by attaching his plot to the larger plot of the

⁶⁷ For the larger discussion see Kingsbury (1988); Powell (1992).

⁶⁸ Carter (2004:132ff) devotes two chapters of his Matthean introduction to discussion of Matthew's plot.

⁶⁹ Wright (1992:xiv) deliberately places “god” in lowercase for reasons he explains in his preface.

story of the people of Abraham. Matthew's genealogy indicates where the emphasis lies for Matthew. It begins with Abraham in order to show that this is the story of Israel; it continues with David, because Matthew's story focuses on Jesus as the Messiah; and then, surprisingly, it deals with the exile, since second-temple Judaism saw itself as still in exile (Wright, 1992:385f). The genealogy thus outlines the story from the beginning:

“The genealogy then says to Matthew's careful reader that the long story of Abraham's people will come to its fulfilment... with a new David who will rescue his people from their exile” (Wright, 1992:386).

Wright's observation about Matthew's plot falling under the larger plot of the people of Israel will become important as we explore the meaning of πληρώω in the following chapters.

More recently, Carter (2004:140) has proposed that the plot of Matthew's Gospel be delineated by identifying six “kernels” (major branching points) and “narrative blocks”.⁷⁰ He (2004:140) argues that Matthew's intended audience would identify these six scenes as “central to the gospel's plot”:

1. 1:18-25 (1:1-4:16) – The story of Jesus is initiated by his conception and commission.
2. 4:17-25 (4:17-11:1) – God's saving presence is manifested in Jesus' preaching and healing.
3. 11:2-6 (11:2-16:20) – Jesus' actions show him to be God's commissioned agent, which calls for a response.
4. 16:21-28 (16:21-20:34) – Jesus teaches his disciples that he must face death and resurrection; this event shapes their discipleship.
5. 21:1-27 (21:1-27:66) – Jesus' conflict reaches its climax in Jerusalem, where he is rejected by the leaders, and is crucified, giving his life as a ransom.
6. 28:1-10 (28:1-20) – But God raises Jesus from the dead, thereby overcoming opposition, sin, and death. Jesus commissions his disciples to disciple the world.

This would place the Sermon on the Mount, and Matthew 5:17-20 in particular, in the section of Matthew's Gospel which demonstrates Jesus' authority in word and deed. Hence, France (2007:153) labels this section “The Messiah's authority revealed in his teaching”. Such

⁷⁰ These terms come from Chatman (1978). Carter is building on his earlier article (1992:463-81).

ideas incline us towards interpreting Matthew 5:17-20, as Banks (1975:226) has argued, along Christological lines rather than as addressing the Law *per se*.

We have spent extended time on the ‘plot’ of Matthew’s Gospel because, as we will seek to show in the following chapters, when this consideration is brought to bear on Matthew 5:17 it helps us understand the probable sense of πληρώω that Matthew intends. Few interpretations of Matthew 5:17 have taken sufficient account of literary considerations.⁷¹ Only when Matthew 5:17 is interpreted in light of Matthew’s ongoing narrative and the broader narratives within which it finds itself (cf. Wright) does the precise sense in which we should understand fulfilment begin to emerge more clearly.

3.4 The Sermon on the Mount

It is necessary for us to hone in on the particular discourse in which the passage under consideration in this dissertation is contained: the Sermon on the Mount⁷² (Matthew 5-7). Several scholars have highlighted the danger of treating the Sermon on the Mount as distinct from the Gospel within which it is found. For instance, Allison (1999:xi; cf. Stanton, 1992:739) begins his commentary with this complaint:

“Some people would say that the Sermon on the Mount is the quintessence of Christianity. I am not among them. The erroneous conviction comes from the unfortunate habit of viewing the Sermon in isolation.”

Later he (1999:10) adds, “The exegete of the Sermon should equally be an exegete of Matthew.” Thus the questions – historical, literary, and theological – that are asked of Matthew’s Gospel as a whole may equally be applied to the Sermon on the Mount.⁷³ Our purpose here, however, is simply to place Matthew 5:17-20 in the context of this discourse.

⁷¹ Patte (1987:70-73) provides something of an exception.

⁷² For a history of the Sermon’s interpretation cf. Guelich (1982:13-22).

⁷³ Stanton (1992:740) lists the following as particular questions for current interpretation: (1) Does Jesus simply interpret or clarify the Law of Moses? i.e. Is Jesus a “new Moses” who “goes up a mountain” in order to present on a “new Sinai” a “new Law” for a “new people”? (2) What is the relationship between Matthew 5-7 and Paul’s gospel of grace? (3) To whom is the Sermon addressed? (4) Are all parts of the Sermon to be interpreted literally? (5) To what extent are individual sayings dominated by the expectation of the approach of the end-times? (cf. Yang, 2013:845).

The Sermon on the Mount is the first and the longest of Matthew's five great discourses.⁷⁴ Keener (1999:160) points out that Matthew's two longest discourses are the first (Matt. 5-7) and last (Matt. 23-25), both dealing with the kingdom: the former with its ethics, the latter with its consummation. There have been many proposals for the Sermon's purpose: (1) character-formative: "the Sermon on the Mount functions primarily as a catalyst for the formation of character"⁷⁵ (Talbert, 2004:29); (2) inspirational: "The Sermon's primary purpose is to instill principles and qualities through a vivid inspiration of the moral imagination" (Allison, 1999:11); (3) Christological: "far from being a philosophical discourse on ethics, this is a messianic manifesto, setting out the unique demands and revolutionary insights of one who claims an absolute authority over other people and whose word... will determine their destiny" (France, 2007:156); and (4) ethical: "the sermon amounts to personal ethics for followers of Jesus... The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' authoritative teaching about the way believers should live today" (Turner, 2008:144). These ways of construing the Sermon's purpose are not mutually exclusive, and may be viewed as differing aspects of what the Sermon hopes to accomplish. Certainly, the impression from 7:28f is that the Sermon seeks to demonstrate the authoritative teaching of the Messiah which has been introduced by the earlier chapters (cf. Moo, 1984:23; France, 1989:165, 307).

The Sermon's structure is also greatly debated⁷⁶: "There is... no conformity of opinion regarding the architecture of the Sermon on the Mount" (Allison, 2005:173). We will not be able to discuss all the proposals here.⁷⁷ Talbert (2004:21ff) has surveyed several attempts to delineate the Sermon's structure, which include outlining it around the Beatitudes⁷⁸ (cf. Goulder, 1974); the Lord's Prayer (cf. Grundmann, 1968); chiasmic structures (cf. Luz, 1989); rhetorical readings (cf. Kennedy, 1984); triads (cf. Allison, 2005:195ff); and theological themes (cf. Guelich, 1982:37-39). Following the foregoing survey, Talbert (2004:25) outlines what he considers to be the "majority reading of its arrangement":

A. The Setting (4:18-5:2)

Unit 1 (5:3-16)

⁷⁴ A helpful, if somewhat dated, introduction to the scholarship of the Sermon on the Mount is Warren Carter's (1994) *What are they saying about Matthew's Sermon on the Mount?*

⁷⁵ Cf. The subtitle of Daniel Doriani's *The Sermon on the Mount* (2006): "The character of a disciple".

⁷⁶ "There are almost as many outlines of the Sermon on the Mount as there are commentaries on it" (Brooks, 1992:25).

⁷⁷ More detailed discussions include: Allison (1987:423-445; 2005:173-215); Carter (1994:41-44); Brooks (1992:15-28); Talbert (2004:21-26).

⁷⁸ Betz (1995:45f) discusses Augustine, the first to propose this outline, in some detail.

- 1) Portrait of and promises to disciples in the Beatitudes (5:3-12)
- 2) Portrait of and expectation of disciples (5:13-16)

B. The Higher Righteousness (5:17-7:12)

Unit 2 (5:17-48)

- 1) The continuing validity of the Law (5:17-20)
- 2) Illustrations of how Jesus fulfils the Law and the Prophets (5:21-48)

Unit 3 (6:1-18)

- 1) Principle for proper practice of piety (6:1)
- 2) Examples (6:2-4, 5-6, 7-15, 16-18)

Unit 4 (6:19-34)

- 1) Priorities and possessions (6:19-24)
- 2) Trusting God's provision (6:25-34)

Unit 5 (7:1-12)

- 1) Against judging (7:1-5)
- 2) In support of judging (7:6-12)

Unit 6 (7:13-27)

- 1) Living in line with God's will (7:13-14, 24-27)
- 2) Warnings about false prophets (7:15-20, 21-23)

C. The Ending (7:28-8:1): The effects of Jesus' teaching

Talbert (2004:26) maintains that, while there is agreement among scholars about the thought units, there is disagreement about the relation of the sections to one another and about the reading of the individual units. A basic outline of the Sermon takes its cue from the inclusio at 5:17 and 7:12, referring to the Law and the Prophets. The verses between make up the body of the Sermon, while the verses before (5:1-16) and after (7:13-28) deal with the introduction and conclusion respectively (Turner, 2008:143; France, 2007:181). Allison (1999:28), however, finds a more basic structure by noting the literary relationship between

4:23-5:2 and 7:28-8:1.⁷⁹ Both passages refer to “crowds”, “the mountain”, “going up”, and “teaching”. Allison therefore sees 5:3-7:27 as a distinct literary unit between these two passages. He concludes, “the simplest outline of the Sermon is this triad⁸⁰: Introduction (4:23-5:2), Discourse (5:3-7:27), Conclusion (7:28-8:1).”

On any rendering of the Sermon’s structure, 5:17-20 occupies a prominent place in the Sermon, amplifying the ‘greater righteousness’ that Jesus demands from his disciples:

“The ‘greater righteousness’ stands as the heading for the heart of Matthew’s Sermon, which begins with a preface in 5:17-18 and closes with the Golden Rule in 7:12” (Guelich, 1982:38).

Delineating the precise role of 5:17-20 in the Sermon is among the tasks of the following chapter. For now, we must describe its relationship to the following verses, commonly referred to as the “antithesis” (5:21-48).

3.4.1 The Antitheses

Allison (1999:60) refers to 5:21-48 as “the most difficult section of the Sermon on the Mount”. Many have objected to using the epithet “antitheses” to designate the unit of verses contained in Matthew 5:21-48.⁸¹ But the passage certainly implies some *contrast* between ἐπρέθη and ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν (5:21-22, 27-28, 31-32, 33-34, 38-39, 43-44). Noting that the term “antithesis” may imply a stronger contrast than δέ allows (Davies & Allison, 1988:507; Turner, 2008:165), we will continue to use it only because it has, however inappropriately, become the standard way of referring to each of the contrasts in verses 21-48.

These antitheses refer back both to 5:17 and 5:20. The former ensures that these contrasts are not taken as Jesus’ annulling of the Law (Nolland, 2005:228; Talbert, 2004:59); while the latter speaks of the “greater righteousness”, which the contrasts of 5:21-48 will illustrate

⁷⁹ This correspondence is reflected in Talbert’s outline above.

⁸⁰ Allison’s interest in triads stems from the idea that the Sermon on the Mount reflects confrontation with Jamnia (Talbert, 2004:23). Cf. Davies (1964:90): “In part at least, Matthew is the Christian answer to the Judaism emerging at Jamnia. The SM is the deliberate formulation of the Christian moral ideal and tradition at a time when the Mishnah was coming to birth in Judaism.”

⁸¹ “Although it is common for interpreters to speak of the six examples in 5:21-48 as antitheses, this is certainly a mistake” (Turner, 2008:165). France (2007:194) cautions against its use on the ground that “it was apparently first applied to [Matthew 5:21-48] by the Gnostic heretic Marcion, who saw them as marking Jesus’ decisive break with the OT law” (cf. Keener, 2009:181).

(Guelich, 1982; Davies & Allison, 1988:504; Carter, 1994:88; Moo, 1999:347; France, 2007:194). We will begin by briefly examining each antithesis and will then survey some of the ways they have been understood as a whole with regard to Jesus and the Law.

The first antithesis (5:21-26) is between the sixth commandment (Ex. 20:13) and Jesus' teaching that anger⁸² itself is a violation of God's will (5:21-26). This verse appears to teach that the actual act of murder is only the manifestation of an inward disposition that also makes one guilty before God (France, 2007:199). There is a shift in attention "from the outward act to the inward state" (Allison, 1999:62). Thielman (1999:52f) shows how there is both continuity and discontinuity here: Jesus "obviates" the Mosaic prohibition "by addressing the fundamental cause of the action that the Law was designed to curtail" (discontinuity); yet, in forbidding anger and commanding reconciliation, Jesus has forbidden murder (continuity). "Jesus' teaching, therefore, fulfills the law's prohibition of murder by forbidding the attitude from which murder springs" (Thielman, 1999:53). It may therefore be said that Jesus "deepens" the requirement, since few would argue that this represents the original interpretation of the command in Exodus.

The second antithesis (5:27-30) is taken from the next verse in the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:14). Again, Jesus' injunction does not contradict but goes beyond the requirement of the seventh commandment, getting to the heart, in which adultery finds its source. What the seventh commandment forbids is only the outward form of an inward desire that comes from the heart (France, 2007:204). Davies and Allison (1988:522) point out that there is no contradiction here between Jesus and the Old Testament, because one who does not lust will certainly not commit adultery. But, they continue, Jesus "does demand more than the decalogue". Jesus, then, upholds the Law but goes beyond what it addresses.

The third antithesis⁸³ (5:31-32) also does not contradict the Law but goes beyond what Deuteronomy 24:1-4 was addressing. Despite the fact that Moses allowed divorce – this was in any case a concession (Matt. 19:8⁸⁴) – Jesus rules that divorce is not what God wills

⁸² Some manuscripts add εικῆ to this saying (cf. KJV). But this reading is absent from the earliest witnesses. Since it is more likely that this reading was added to soften the difficulty of the saying, the majority of interpreters have seen it as a later addition (cf. France, 2007:191n41).

⁸³ Curiously, Wright (1996:289) treats this contrast as a subset of the word on adultery. He therefore speaks of "five 'antitheses'".

⁸⁴ Sanders (1992:211) notes that this passage comes close to criticism of the law, saying in effect: "Moses was too lenient, but it is 'your' fault, not really his."

for his disciples. Nolland (2005:247) thinks that the intention of the text is to challenge easy divorce. What does this imply about Jesus' attitude to the Law?⁸⁵ When taken in light of Matthew 19:8, Matthew seems to be teaching that Deuteronomy 24:1-4 is made "obsolete" since, if what God intended for marriage were honoured, there would be no need for this regulation (France, 2007:212). By appealing to creation in Matthew 19:8, Jesus "implies that his own teaching addresses the ultimate concern of the law itself" (Thielman, 1999:55). What we have in this antithesis, then, neither 'annuls' nor 'upholds' the Law as it stands in Deuteronomy 24.⁸⁶ Rather, we are presented with teaching on an entirely different plane.

The fourth antithesis (5:33-37) is between the Torah's teaching on oaths (Lev. 19:12; Num. 30:2; Deut. 23:21) and Jesus' prohibition of them. Since the laws about oaths exist in order to account for humanity's failure to be honest, Jesus reasserts the way God intended it to be. As with the divorce laws, if the truthfulness which God desires were truly practised there would be no need for laws regulating oaths (France, 2007:213). Jesus' prohibition, therefore, does not contradict the Law; rather it is in line with the Law's essential demand for truthfulness. Such teaching makes oaths superfluous (Davies & Allison, 1988:533); but it does not mean the Law has been made redundant, since the Law itself recognizes oaths to be unnecessary and prone to abuse (Thielman, 1999:55). Jesus' teaching, then, goes beyond specific regulations; rather, it prescribes an orientation of the heart that is completely in line with what God requires of his people.

The fifth antithesis concerns the Old Testament teaching about retaliation in relation to Jesus' teaching about non-resistance (5:38-42). It is often pointed out that what is forbidden here is not the teaching of such passages as Exodus 21:24⁸⁷ but their application to personal ethics (cf. Davies & Allison, 1988:542; France, 2007:217). Jesus is not revoking the standards of justice; rather, he is calling his disciples not to make use of these standards themselves (Keener, 2009:196). According to France (2007:217f), it is important to see that Jesus is not here establishing a new, more demanding set of rules, but establishing a "greater righteousness", that is, "a different understanding of how we should live as the

⁸⁵ Meier (2009:126f), having argued that Jesus was thoroughly Jewish in his identity and concerns and therefore law-abiding, notes "this glaring problem": "How then are we to understand the overall position of Jesus if he embraces and affirms the Mosaic Law and yet, in one case involving a major social institution permitted and regulated by the Law, brands divorce and remarriage as the sin of adultery?" This is the question his entire book is an attempt to answer (cf. 2009:3).

⁸⁶ For a more substantial treatment of the various exegetical and ethical difficulties in Matthew 5:31-32, cf. Davies and Allison (1988:527-532); Köstenberger (2010:225-232, 275-285).

⁸⁷ Cf. Lev. 24:20; Deut. 19:21.

people of God.” France (2007:218) goes on to ask whether Jesus’ teaching here contradicts the Law. He finds that, since the principle of *lex talionis* is irrelevant to personal ethics, and since governing personal ethics was not its intention, Jesus goes beyond anything advocated by the Law.⁸⁸ He then relates this back to 5:17: “The ‘fulfillment’ of the Law here consists in leaving it behind in favour of something of a different order altogether, the righteousness of the kingdom of heaven.” This contrast, then, neither ‘deepens’ the Law nor establishes its true intention. What it does do is demonstrate the radical nature of discipleship in the kingdom that Jesus proclaims.

The final antithesis (5:43-48) does not concern the teaching of the Law itself, but an interpretation that had become attached to the Law (so Davies & Allison, 1988:549; France, 2007:223). Hagner (1993:134) explains that while “μισήσεις τὸν ἐχθρόν σου” was not taught by the Old Testament, it was a commonly drawn inference from such passages as Psalm 139:21-22; 26:25 and Deut. 7:2; 30:7. Furthermore, since this interpretation had become associated with the text, this phrase would not have surprised Jesus’ listeners or Matthew’s readers: “The ‘neighbour’ meant fellow Jew; the ‘enemy’ meant Gentile” (Hagner, 1993:134; cf. France, 2007:223). It is on this point that Jesus challenges the common understanding and surpasses the Old Testament teaching (Davies & Allison, 1988:550). Although the command to love one’s neighbour is not being criticized, it is insufficient because it permits one to mistreat those who are not neighbours (*ibid.*). Jesus is therefore going beyond the Old Testament teaching entirely, demonstrating the nature of the greater righteousness (5:20) which is the result of the fulfilled Law (5:17).

There are generally three ways the antitheses have been read: (1) they state the *true intention/interpretation* of the Law; (2) in them Jesus *deepens* the Law’s requirements; (3) they illustrate Jesus’ divine authority *over against* the Law. We will look at each in turn. Since these verses function as an illustration of the principle in 5:17, discerning their precise meaning is critical to our purposes.

Some see the antitheses as Jesus’ stating or reasserting the true intention, or correct interpretation, of the Law. For instance, Hagner (1993:111) states that these six antitheses contrast “Jesus’ exposition of the true and ultimate meaning of the Torah with the more common, rabbinic understandings of the commandments.” Similarly, but with the nuance of

⁸⁸ “As in the case of divorce (5:31-32), Jesus’ teaching transcends a biblical regulation that arose as a concession to the hardness of the human heart” (Turner, 2008:174).

“transcendence”, according to Turner (2008:158), “Jesus has come to show forth the true, transcendent meaning of the law.” Talbert (2004:68) also argues in this manner: “Jesus’ [interpretation] aims to set forth the true intent of Scripture.”⁸⁹ Moo (1999:348) considers this to be the view held “probably by a majority of contemporary evangelical scholars.”⁹⁰ But according to Davies and Allison (1988:508), there are two problems with this approach. (1) “The third, fourth, and fifth [antitheses] are not susceptible to the proposed interpretation.” Moo (1999:348ff) also finds this approach unable to account for the details of each contrast. For example, he thinks that the Old Testament does not suggest that anger and lust were included in the prohibitions of murder and adultery; nor does Jesus’ teaching on divorce grow out of the Old Testament.⁹¹ (2) Jesus’ “But I say to you” locates the authority “in his own person” (Davies & Allison, 1988:508), rather than in his interpretation. Similarly, Moo (1999:349): “Jesus is placing his own authoritative demand alongside that of the Law. It is the ‘I say to you’ of the Messiah and Son of God, not the Mosaic law in any sense, that is the basis of the new kingdom demand.” In short, the problem with the ‘Jesus is stating the true intention’ view is that it cannot account for several of the examples Jesus provides. Furthermore, the response of the crowds at the end of the Sermon on the Mount (7:28-29) shows that Jesus was doing something far more radical.

Another view is that the antitheses deepen or ‘radicalize’ the Law. According to Moo (1999:348), this is “the view most widely supported in modern scholarship”.⁹² For instance, Hill (1978:119) states that 5:21-48 sets forth “the radical intensification of the demands of the law”. Sanders (1992:210) is also illustrative: “Here we ask only if in these passages (5:21-48) Jesus opposes the law. The short answer is that he does not: rather, he requires a stricter code of practice.” While this is certainly true for many of the contrasts, it cannot account for each of them. For instance, as Moo (1999:349) points out, it is hard to see what Old Testament commandment Jesus is ‘deepening’ in his teaching on retaliation (5:38-41). So, while Moo (1999:350) grants that Jesus is “deepening” the Law in some of the contrasts (the first and second), he believes that “a larger category is needed to explain the overall

⁸⁹ Cf. Carter (2004:75): “Matthew... presents Jesus as the one who brings the definitive interpretation of God’s will.” (cf. also Keener, 2009:181). Also, Przyłski (1980:81): “When the antitheses are viewed from the latter perspective, it becomes evident that Matthew himself viewed them as being representative of a new interpretation of the old law.”

⁹⁰ He also attributes this view to the Reformers.

⁹¹ Cf. Davies and Allison (1988:508): “the labelling of remarriage as adultery is not easily construed as in any way an interpretation or extension of OT law.”

⁹² However, Moo cites no examples more recent than 1982.

relationship between the Mosaic commandments cited and Jesus' own teaching." This leads us to a third view of these contrasts.

A third and more probable view of these contrasts is that they illustrate Jesus' divine authority *over against* the Law. After claiming that "no single method explains all of [the antitheses]", Moo (1999:350) suggests that what the antitheses do show us is Jesus' insistence upon what *he* says as binding on his followers. That his authority was strongly perceived is evident in 7:29: "He was teaching them as one who had authority..." The significance, suggests Moo (1999:349), lies in Jesus' placement of his authority "alongside" the Law: "It is the 'I say to you' of the Messiah and Son of God, not the Mosaic Law in any sense, that is the basis of the new kingdom demand." Similarly, France (2007:198) understands the "I tell you" as standing "alongside the Law on which it is based as a definitive declaration of the divine purpose." It therefore characterizes the entire discourse "as one of unparalleled authority" (2007:199). This takes us back to Banks' (1975:226) statement that these passages are not so much concerned about the Law as they are about Christology. What the antitheses do, beyond offering a true interpretation or 'deepening' the Law, is to present us with the lawgiver: here is the one through whom the will of God is revealed. Loader (2002:172f) brings out the force of what Jesus does: "The status of [Jesus'] antithetical statement is... not a second opinion, but an authoritative declaration made on his own God-given authority" (cf. Matt. 7:28-29; cf. Viljoen, 2013:11).

How do these contrasts (5:21-48) inform our understanding of πληρώω in Matthew 5:17? Several points may be made:

1. The third view above illustrates that the antitheses point to the authority of Jesus as the one who has fulfilled the Law. Now that the Messiah has come, it is to him that disciples must look for the definitive statement of God's will (cf. Moo, 1984:23).
2. The fulfilment of the Law means that Jesus' demands surpass the demands of the Torah without contradicting them. According to Davies and Allison (1988:508), the primary functions of the antitheses are: (1) to provide examples of the kind of attitude and behaviour Jesus requires; and (2) to show how his demands go beyond the Torah without annulling it. Obeying the Torah precisely, continue Davies and Allison (1988:508), is not enough, because the Torah does not communicate every command that is to be fulfilled. Jesus, then, does not 'abolish' the Law, but he does demand more. That which he demands is the 'better righteousness' of 5:20 (Davies

& Allison, 1988:509). “Fulfillment” is then the concept within which the continuity and the discontinuity of the Law are held together.

3. They indicate that a ‘fulfilled’ law is exhibited in a righteousness which is radically different from the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (5:20). France (2007:197) lists several attributes of this righteousness: (1) it promotes an inward concern for motive and attitude; (2) it goes behind rules in search of principles to govern conduct; (3) it goes beyond the mere avoidance of sin to the goal of discovering God’s will; (4) it goes beyond achievable righteousness (rule-keeping), looking towards an ideal (the Father’s perfection). This means that, since the Old Testament laws are ‘fulfilled’, some of them have no role in the life of the kingdom of heaven⁹³ (France, 2007:198; cf. Thielman, 1999:58). This does not mean that these laws are abolished, only that they are bypassed, left behind “as no longer needed when the life of the kingdom of heaven is fully implemented” (France, 2007:198).
4. The antitheses illustrate in what way the Law is fulfilled. Thielman (1999:51f) has shown that “The antitheses illustrate how Jesus’ ethical teaching identifies the prophetic element in the Mosaic Law and fulfils the Law’s ‘prophecy’ by bringing it to completion.” He begins by asking how Jesus can teach that the Law is ‘fulfilled’ and then go on to contrast ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν with ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη. He (1999:51) answers by exploring the term “fulfil”. Since Matthew often uses the term πληρῶ to refer to the realization of biblical prophecies about Jesus,⁹⁴ the term probably carries this nuance in Matthew 5:17. The antitheses, then, illustrate Jesus’ replacing the Mosaic command “with instruction that expresses the ethical goal toward which the Mosaic law points” (1999:51). In some cases the Mosaic Law legislates a situation which is itself a concession (e.g. divorce; cf. Matt. 19:8). In instances such as these Jesus “nullifies the command altogether by demanding a change in the situation itself so radical that, if it takes place, the legislation becomes unnecessary” (1999:52). Thielman (1999:52-58) proceeds to illustrate how this works out in each of the six antitheses. Fulfilment in 5:17, therefore, far from being at odds with the antitheses of 5:21-48, is illustrated by them. Now that Jesus has come, the prophecies have been

⁹³ France elaborates: “This applies to the regulations for divorce, when divorce itself does not happen; the rules for oaths, when swearing is itself ruled out; the judicial limitation of retribution, when not only retaliation but even resistance is declared unworthy of the kingdom of heaven” (France, 2007:198).

⁹⁴ For a more thorough discussion of the term πληρῶ and its significance in Matthew’s gospel, see the discussion below, as well as the next chapter.

'fulfilled' and God's will is expressed in Jesus' teaching, which goes beyond individual laws in the very direction the Law, when taken as a whole, points. Thielman's contribution to understanding the relationship between 5:17 and 5:21-48 has apparently not been brought to bear on recent interpretations of 5:17-48.⁹⁵

5. Of the interpretations of fulfilment in Matthew 5:17 delineated in the previous chapter, our survey of the antitheses best supports either the 'eschatological' interpretation (so Banks, 1975:210; Moo, 1984:26; Meier, 1991:226; France, 2007:183, *et al.*), where 'to fulfil' points to the realization of what was anticipated, or the 'transcending' interpretation (so Davies & Allison, 1988:486 Westerholm, 1992:47), where the law that Jesus brings 'transcends' the Law as the Old Testament states it. These six contrasts do show that the Law stands (so Wenham, 1979:94; Bahnsen, 2002:67; Loader, 2002:167), but it stands in a new way. The coming of the Messiah – to whom the Law and the Prophets pointed – means a radical reassessment of the Law as it stood prior to his coming. In Jesus, God's will has been made more perfectly known: "the Gospel insists that the kingdom righteousness which Jesus proclaims does not fall short of the demands of Moses, nor lead to indifference toward its requirements; rather it transcends them, a more perfect embodiment of the divine will" (Westerholm, 1992:47).

In the antitheses, then, we find the concept of fulfilment illustrated by six examples. The examples are not uniform in their assessment of the present standing of the Law; instead they illustrate both continuity and discontinuity. The continuity lies in the fact that the laws have not been done away with (cf. 5:18); the discontinuity lies in the fact that they can no longer be read except through the lenses of the kingdom of heaven which Jesus has inaugurated. It remains for us to explore this concept in Matthew's Gospel.

3.5 Theological Context

3.5.1 The Kingdom of God/Heaven

The kingdom of God was at the centre of Jesus' message and ministry: "That the focus of Jesus' preaching and teaching was the kingdom of God is universally acknowledged" (Farmer, 1987:126); "there is no doubt that the kingdom is the central message of Jesus'

⁹⁵ For instance, Nolland (2005:226ff); France (2007:191ff); Turner (2008:164ff).

teaching”⁹⁶ (Pennington, 2008:44). “Today, there is a general consensus among New Testament scholars that the theme of the imminent coming of the kingdom is central to the preaching of the historical Jesus” (Hannan, 2006:1). The Sermon on the Mount is placed in the context of Jesus’ announcement of the kingdom: “Ἀπὸ τότε ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς κηρῦσσειν καὶ λέγειν· ἤγγικεν γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν”⁹⁷ (4:17). Westerholm (2006:81) calls this the “substance of Jesus’ message”. It means, he (2006:82) continues, “that God is about to put things right and establish his righteous rule on earth”. According to France (2007:102), there is general agreement that the phrase “the kingdom of God” does not denote a specific time, place, or situation called “the kingdom”⁹⁸; rather the phrase “denotes the dynamic concept of God ruling.”⁹⁹ Therefore, nouns such as “kingship” or “sovereignty” better convey the sense of “kingdom of God”. France (2007:102) thus paraphrases 4:17 as follows: “God’s promised reign is beginning.”

The coming of God’s reign was the Jewish hope. Foundational to both the Old Testament and other Jewish writings was the expectation that God would act in such a way as to vindicate his people through the coming of his kingdom. Wright summarizes the hope of Israel:

“Most were hoping, some fervently, for a new turn in Israel’s fortunes. If there is one creator god, and Israel is his people, then this god must act sooner or later to restore her fortunes. Israel is still in a state of ‘exile’, and this must be put right” (1992:280).

“The fundamental Jewish hope was for liberation from oppression, for the restoration of the Land, and for the proper rebuilding of the Temple” (1992:299).

According to Wright (1992:302), the concept of “the kingdom of god” basically expresses the hope that Israel’s God is going to rule Israel and the world. “This complex concept picks up and joins together the whole social, political, cultural and economic aspiration of the Jews of

⁹⁶ Pennington (2008:44) labels this “a rare example of a truth that is held as a consensus among all Gospels scholars.”

⁹⁷ All quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from *Novum Testamentum Graece* (28th Edition).

⁹⁸ France (2007:102) adds that the phrase “the kingdom” is “a misleading abbreviation which is as conspicuously absent from the Synoptic tradition as it is dominant in modern discussion.”

⁹⁹ For a fuller study of France’s understanding of the Kingdom of God in the Synoptic Gospels, consult his *Divine Government* (1990).

this period, and invests it with the religious and theological dimension which, of course, it always possessed in mainline Jewish thinking” (1992:303).

It would take another chapter to list the evidence Wright (1992:302-338) cites in favour of his thesis. An example from 2 Maccabees 7 will suffice to illustrate the Jewish hope that God’s reign would be established and his faithful raised from death. Here we read of seven brothers and their mother who were arrested for refusing to give up Jewish customs and are subsequently being tortured to death. Here are some of the responses of the brothers to those torturing them:

“You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws” (7:9).

“One cannot choose to die at the hands of mortals and to cherish the hope God gives of being raised again by him” (7:14).

This is a small sample of the body of literature supporting the Jewish idea that God would act decisively to deliver his people. Waltke (2012:61) summarizes the kingdom of God in the Old Testament:

“In sum, the Old Testament’s story line represents the irruption of God’s particular kingdom into his universal kingdom,¹⁰⁰ which is under the rule of powerful hostile spiritual and political powers, to make himself known to all humanity as he is in himself.”

France (2007:102) sums up the evidence:

“The confident and repeated declaration by the Psalmists that ‘Yahweh reigns’ embodies the universal Hebrew conviction... that God, as the creator of this world, is in control of it and of all who are in it. But alongside this unquestioned datum of the eternal sovereignty of God there developed a sense that all was not as God would have it in his world, and with this the hope of a time to come when God’s rule would

¹⁰⁰ By ‘universal’ and ‘particular’ kingdom Waltke (2012:49) means “the external emerging kingdom of God (universal) and the internal emerging kingdom of God (particular).”

be more fully and openly implemented and acknowledged among the people of earth.”

The relationship between the Jewish hope and Jesus’ ministry is well brought out by Beasley-Murray (1992:19):

“In the teaching of Jesus... the kingdom of God has specific reference to the fulfilment of the promises of God in the OT of the time when God puts forth his royal power to end injustice and oppression by this world’s evil powers and to establish the rule of righteousness, peace and joy for humanity – in a word, to fulfil his purpose in creating the world.”

It is on this basis that Yarbrough (2012:107) can assert: “most scholars acknowledge the kingdom of God to have been an almost universally held concept in the world of Jesus’ time.” It is into this context that Jesus bellows his declaration that God’s rule ἤγγικεν¹⁰¹.

This concept¹⁰² of the kingdom of God/heaven is central to Matthew’s theology¹⁰³ (cf. Du Toit, 2000:545ff). The noun βασιλεία occurs 55 times,¹⁰⁴ while the phrase ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν occurs 32 times and is unique to Matthew; it is not found elsewhere in the New Testament. Most scholars have assumed “kingdom of heaven” to be the equivalent of “kingdom of God” (Davies & Allison, 1988:390) on the grounds that Matthew wants to avoid using God’s name: “‘Kingdom of heaven’ is a distinctively Matthean expression for the kingdom of God. There is little doubt that Matthew uses it in order to avoid mentioning the name of God” (Turner, 2008:107). But this notion has been seriously challenged in recent years, most notably by Pennington (2008:45): “this reverential circumlocution explanation for Matthew’s ‘kingdom of heaven’ proves indefensible.” As evidence Pennington cites the fact

¹⁰¹ “Dodd’s suggestion that ἤγγικεν should be translated “has come” rather than “is at hand” failed to establish itself” (Farmer, 1987:122). But cf. Davies and Allison (1988:392), who quote Dodd’s translation favourably.

¹⁰² It has been argued that “symbol” is a better way of understanding the kingdom of God than “concept.” Cf. Farmer (1987:120): “Perrin argued that the kingdom of God should be viewed as a ‘symbol’ rather than a ‘concept.’ This new approach to the kingdom has profound implications for many areas of Gospel studies.”

¹⁰³ Yarbrough (2012:108) devotes most of his essay on *The Kingdom of God in the New Testament to Matthew’s Gospel*, which he justifies on the basis that “its kingdom pronouncements are so numerous and pregnant with meaning.”

¹⁰⁴ The term occurs 121 times in the Synoptic Gospels.

that Matthew does, in fact, employ the phrase ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ four times¹⁰⁵ and uses the term θεός frequently. Furthermore, there is no evidence that “heaven” was used as a circumlocution in the first century.¹⁰⁶ Why, then, does Matthew use this phrase? “The answer is found in recognizing that Matthew’s ‘kingdom of heaven’ language is but one part of an elaborate theme of ‘heaven and earth’ woven all throughout the First Gospel” (Pennington, 2008:46). We do not have the space to develop this further here (cf. Pennington, 2007); suffice it to say that, while we continue to use the phrase somewhat interchangeably, Pennington has shown that there are distinct reasons for Matthew’s unique phraseology.¹⁰⁷

What is the significance of the kingdom of heaven/God in Matthew’s Gospel? How does it help us to understand πληρώω?

In an essay on the Law in the Sermon on the Mount, Westerholm (1992:44) begins his discussion of Jesus’ fulfilment of the Law by setting the claim of 5:17 in “the framework necessary for its intelligibility,” namely, “the dawn of God’s rule”. Deines (2008:71f) also understands the kingdom of God to be a “basic concept in the First Gospel as a framework in which the Law is to be understood”. Establishing this context has important consequences for the exegetical discussion in the following chapter.

Westerholm (1992:44) begins by noting that Matthew’s portrayal of Jesus’ ministry begins with the proclamation of the kingdom (4:17; 5:3): “something new, the truly decisive stage in the history of God’s dealings with his people, has begun.” Thus any discussion of Jesus and the Law must begin with an understanding of Jesus’ role in the dawning of God’s reign. Westerholm (1992:45f) proceeds to explain the meaning of this phrase (“God’s reign”) by examining three ways in which it was used. First, God’s rule refers to his control over all the events and people of history. Second, God’s rule is experienced particularly by those who submit to God, in particular by his chosen people, Israel. Third, since God’s rule is not fully

¹⁰⁵ Matt. 12:28; 19:24; 21:31, 43.

¹⁰⁶ Pennington argues these and other points at length in his book *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew* (2007:19-37).

¹⁰⁷ “Matthew prefers ‘kingdom of heaven’ not because of his aversion to referring to Yahweh as God, but rather to emphasize the heavenly origins and nature of the kingdom” (Green, 2013:474).

experienced in the world, there was an expectation of a dramatic shift in which present conditions would be transformed and God's reign would be established decisively.¹⁰⁸

Next, Westerholm (1992:46f) delineates Matthew's particular portrayal of Jesus' proclamation of God's kingdom: (1) It is the righteous who will participate in this kingdom; the wicked will be excluded. (2) But since that excludes so many, Jesus will not only announce the coming of the kingdom; he will make it possible for people to be made righteous.¹⁰⁹ (3) His coming thus represents the "decisive stage in salvation history" (1992:47) in which God's "rule", though not yet consummated, dawns in its future sense. The kingdom is therefore the dawning of God's eschatological rule. This lays the foundation for Westerholm's (1992:47) point regarding the Law:

"When Jesus' relationship with the Mosaic law is seen in the light of the dawning of the kingdom, apparent departures from the standards of the law can no longer be construed simply as transgressions... the Gospel insists that the kingdom righteousness which Jesus proclaims does not fall short of the demands of Moses, nor lead to indifference towards its requirements; rather it transcends them, a more perfect embodiment of the divine will."

It is in this sense that the concept of God's reign is significant for our study of Matthew 5:17. The context in Matthew's Gospel – of the dawning of the kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus – renders unlikely interpretations of Matthew 5:17 to the effect that the Law simply 'stands'. Something dramatic has happened in the history of God's dealings with his people: Jesus, God's Messiah, is here, and he has come to bring 'fulfilment'. It remains for us to explore this latter concept in our preparation for an exegetical discussion of Matthew 5:17.

3.5.2 Fulfilment

The use of the verb πληρώω is characteristic of Matthew's Gospel, being employed no fewer than sixteen times.¹¹⁰ That this is a particular characteristic of Matthew is brought out by Knowles (2006:62), who observes that "all but one of sixteen occurrences of πληρῶσαι are

¹⁰⁸ Wright (1992) has argued that this expectation of God's action was foundational to the first-century Jewish worldview.

¹⁰⁹ Westerholm (2006:97-103) elaborates on this point in his section on "The Cross and the Kingdom" in *Understanding Matthew*.

¹¹⁰ Matt. 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 3:15; 4:14; 5:17; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35, 48; 21:4; 23:32; 26:54, 56; 27:9.

unique to Matthew's Gospel."¹¹¹ This concept of 'fulfilment' is so prevalent in Matthew's Gospel that France (1989:166) believes it to be "the central focus of [Matthew's] theology." In fact, France (1989:166) calls this concept "Matthew's preoccupation".¹¹²

Knowles (2006:66) has warned that "it is possible to overemphasize the importance of explicit formula citations, for numerous less obvious quotations and allusions are also woven into the fabric of his language." For instance, πληρώω does not appear explicitly in Matthew 2:5-6, but the quotation is clearly in line with the rest of the 'formula quotations.' France (1989:167) also notes that incidences of πληρώω "are only the most visible signs of a whole orientation of thought which comes to expression in other ways." He (1989:168) begins by examining Matthew's prologue which, on the ground that it links Jesus with the purposes of God as revealed in the Old Testament,¹¹³ shows that Jesus' arrival is the culmination of that history. The verses which follow on from the prologue – the infancy narratives (1:18-2:23) – each focus on Old Testament quotations which have been 'fulfilled' by a particular aspect of Jesus' life. Thus all of chapters 1-2, according to France (1989:168), could be entitled "A presentation of Jesus as the fulfilment of the Old Testament." France's (1989:169) point is that, if Matthew begins his book like this, it can justifiably be said of him that he is preoccupied with the theme of 'fulfilment'.

The clause "to fulfil [or 'then was fulfilled'] what had been spoken by the prophet, saying...", with variations, introduces ten references to the Old Testament.¹¹⁴ These passages have become known as Matthew's 'formula quotations' and have been extensively studied.¹¹⁵ The formula is distinctive, since similar formulas have not been found in other literature of the period (France, 1989:172). In general, on account of some Old Testament parallels¹¹⁶, the purposeful πληρώω, the exclusively Matthean ῥηθέν (used only in passages that place attention on the Old Testament's predictions), and the regular mention of a 'prophet', this

¹¹¹ The exception is Matt. 26:56, which is parallel to Mark 14:49.

¹¹² Viljoen's (2007:302) assertion that "Matthew employs this motif very systematically in placing the ministry of Jesus within the unfolding plan of God" is an important observation for where this dissertation's argument is headed.

¹¹³ As evidence France (1989:168) cites the following: the echo of Genesis in the first two words (βίβλος γενέσεως); the title Χριστός; the names of Abraham and David; the way the list follows the royal line of Judah and is structured around the turning-points of the Monarchy of Judah.

¹¹⁴ Matt. 1:22-23; 2:15; 2:17-18; 2:23; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:35; 21:4-5; 27:9-10.

¹¹⁵ Cf. France (1989:171-181) and Brown (1993:96-121) for extended treatment of the text-form and origin of the formula quotations.

¹¹⁶ Cf. 1 Kings 2:27; 2 Chron. 36:21-22.

formula “is designed to prepare the reader for a solemn declaration of how God’s previously announced purpose has reached its due conclusion in Jesus” (France, 1989:172).

But even the ‘formula quotations’ do not sufficiently cover the scope of Matthew’s theology of fulfilment; they are “simply one expression of the total fulfillment theology which undergirds Matthew’s presentation of Jesus throughout” (France, 1989:184). France’s (1989:185) warning must therefore be heeded: “To restrict [Matthew’s] rich hermeneutic to one particular group of quotations or to the specific occurrences of the verb πληρώ is to fail to do justice both to Matthew’s theology and to his communicative skill.” A full-scale discussion of Matthew’s theology of fulfilment in general, or the formula quotations in particular, is outside the scope of the present project (cf. Viljoen, 2007:301ff). Instead, therefore, we offer several considerations bearing on the topic at hand.

First, fulfilment does not refer exclusively to mere predictions: “fulfilment in Matthew has as much to do with historical patterns as with prophetic predictions” (Turner, 2008:22). To construe fulfilment only in terms of prediction-fulfilment would not take into account all the senses in which Matthew uses the term (cf. 3:15; 5:17 with 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 21:4; 26:54, 56 and 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 13:14, 35; 23:32; 27:9). For instance, Kirk (2008:86f) cites both Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15 and Jeremiah 31:15 in Matthew 2:18 as examples of fulfilment meaning something more than fulfilling predictions.¹¹⁷ Rather, as Turner (2008:22) puts it, “Matthew’s fulfilment quotations more often contain Christian hindsight in which a historical event from the Hebrew Bible serves as a pattern for a NT event that it anticipated.” When Matthew records that what a certain prophet said was ‘fulfilled’, he may be referring to the culmination of a pattern represented by a certain event in the past. Thus the concept of fulfilment in Matthew ought to be understood as the culmination of history: “events in biblical history anticipate events in Jesus’ ministry in that Jesus fills them with new significance” (Turner, 2008:25). It is precisely this way of understanding Matthew’s use of πληρώ that makes sense of 5:17. What the Law and Prophets anticipated – as shown, for instance, in the fulfilment quotations – has now arrived in the person and teaching of Jesus.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Evans (2011:104): “In Matthew Jesus not only fulfils prophecy, he also fulfils the legal requirements of Torah.”

Second, 'typology' is a helpful way of describing Matthew's concept of fulfilment as delineated above. Noting the difficult history of the term 'typology',¹¹⁸ France (1989:185) maintains that one cannot do justice to the New Testament's use of the Old Testament "without recognizing the concept of ongoing patterns in the purpose of God whereby later events may be helpfully understood in the light of the earlier" (cf. Hamilton, 2008:230ff¹¹⁹). Further, he (1989:185f) maintains that "typology" is the best label for an approach to the Old Testament that sees it pointing forward to Jesus in more than a predictive way. Beale (2012:97) understands this as a basic presupposition underlying the New Testament authors' use of the Old Testament: "Christ is the goal toward which the OT pointed and is the end-time center of redemptive history, which is the *key to interpreting the earlier portions of the OT and its promises*."¹²⁰ This understanding of Old Testament typology¹²¹ squares with a salvation-historical¹²² reading of Matthew 5:17. Jesus' 'fulfilling' the Law and the Prophets means that the one to whom they pointed is here.

Third, Kirk (2008:77ff), building on this concept of 'historical' or 'typological' fulfilment, has proposed that we move beyond typological conceptions of the formula quotations and instead see that Jesus' life takes the shape of Israel's story. He begins by noting the insufficiency of previous approaches to explain fulfilment effectively, particularly of typology as mentioned above, because it lacks "sufficient explanatory force for conceptualizing fulfilment in Matthew" (2008:98). Instead he proposes that we "conceptualize" fulfilment in Matthew's formula quotations as "indications that Jesus is embodying the stories and scriptures of Israel, thereby showing himself to be the true Israel" (2008:90). If we adopt this "narrative perspective" (2008:91), we are able to see that Jesus did not merely embody principles but took the story of Israel to himself. That is, Jesus "fills" the Old Testament

¹¹⁸ Treier (2005:824) points out that since scholars disagree on the nature of prefiguration, and on the historicity of the types, "approaches to salvation history affect discussions about what would count as evidence for typological hermeneutics."

¹¹⁹ "Typological fulfilment in the life of Jesus refers to the *fullest expression of a significant pattern of events*" (Hamilton, 2008:233; italics original).

¹²⁰ Beale's italics.

¹²¹ Kirk (2008:90) is not convinced that 'typology' sufficiently conceptualizes Matthew's understanding of fulfilment: "In the end... we find that typological explanation lacks the explanatory power to account for Matthew's understanding of fulfillment."

¹²² The loaded concept of 'salvation history' has been understood in several ways. Here we follow Eloff's (2008:87) 'temporal' definition from his recent essay on Salvation History in Matthew: "salvation history [is] the *temporal-theological* aspects of Matthew's ideological point of view." Cf. also Rosner (2005:714), where 'salvation history' is understood as "redemptive history". According to Rosner, salvation history consists: (1) in that God has acted in history; and (2) in that all the books in the Bible unfold the narrative of these events.

Scriptures in the way an actor brings a new interpretation to a role and a new conclusion to a story (2008:91). Furthermore, we are able to see that Matthew is not looking for “patterns of activity” (as in the typological interpretation), “but for moments in a plot that is unfolding for the second time, only now with a different player cast in the role of Israel.” So Kirk’s (2008:92) thesis is that Israel’s story as plotted in both the Law and the Prophets is being reenacted by Jesus; this is how we should conceptualize fulfilment. Kirk (2008:93) also believes that this approach allows both the Old Testament and Matthew to be themselves without twisting the former or accusing the latter of incompetently handling the Old Testament. How does this understanding help us to make sense of Matthew 5:17? Kirk (2008:95) begins by asking how to reconcile the claim of 5:17 with the content of the antitheses. He opposes Garland’s interpretation that the antitheses provide God’s true intention for the Mosaic Law because Jesus was not opposing current interpretations, but setting his own teaching “as a counterpoint to the law itself” (2008:96). Furthermore, the summary statement at the end of the Sermon on the Mount portrays Jesus as speaking from his own authority (7:28-29). Thus,

“The difference is not simply that Jesus is giving a better, more challenging interpretation, but that he is setting himself up as a teacher with his own authority, not an authority derived from the subject matter of the law” (2008:96).

For Kirk (2008:96) the “narrative embodiment” outlined above helps because it “allows us to recognize that Jesus is replaying the law-giving moment of Israel’s story”, and because

“it enables us to recognize... the measure of continuity between the shape of the OT text cited and the event in Jesus’ life, while also allowing us to recognize that Matthew indicates that a new and different substance has come when Jesus ‘fills it up.’”

So instead of the Law “pointing” to Jesus, Jesus replays the law scene of Israel, giving it “new substance” (Kirk, 2008:97). Kirk’s (2008:98) point seems to be that conceptualizing fulfilment as Jesus’ reenactment of Israel’s story provides us with a helpful way of understanding the ‘fulfilment’ statement of 5:17. Whether this holds or not will have to be examined in the next chapter. For now we note that the way one conceptualizes Matthew’s theology of fulfilment in general, and the formula quotations specifically, has significant bearing on our understanding of the nature of πληρώω in Matthew 5:17.

In conclusion, then, we have seen: (1) that Matthew's use of fulfilment need not be understood only in terms of the fulfilment of predictions; (2) that 'typology', defined as an Old Testament pattern brought to its climax in the New Testament, is a helpful way to describe this; (3) but, following Kirk, typology may be an insufficient basis on which to conceptualize Matthew's meaning of 'fulfilment'. It may be more helpful to construe fulfilment in terms of Jesus' reenactment of the story of Israel. It is commonly understood that Matthew's larger usage of πληρώω must be brought to bear on 5:17. For instance, Knowles (2006:72) begins his discussion of the fulfilment quotations by noting the significance of 5:17:

"What this statement establishes in principle, Matthew sets out to explore in detail, whether by means of explicit fulfilment formulae, through scriptural quotations and allusions, or via typology."

The fulfilment quotations, then, provide a means of illustrating the principle explained in 5:17. This being the case, whether we take Matthew's broader agenda of fulfilment to refer to prophecy, typology, or the story of Israel, our approach to πληρώω in Matthew 5:17 must encompass the broader history of God's dealings with his people.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to lay the foundation for a thorough exegetical and theological study of Matthew 5:17. We have examined the historical, literary, and theological contexts with a view to arriving at some preliminary conclusions which we will summarize as follows:

- While we cannot be certain who wrote Matthew's Gospel, the issue has little bearing on the passage in view.
- There are good reasons to accept a pre-A.D. 70 date for the Gospel, although one cannot be certain.
- Matthew was probably written to Jewish Christians who had broken away, or were in the process of breaking away, from the synagogue.
- Matthew's genre is more than Graeco-Roman βίος; it must be understood in light of both its Jewish context and its Christological claims.
- In terms of structure, it is helpful to outline Matthew's narrative geographically rather than by verbal divisions. This structure places Matthew 5:17-20 in the initial Galilean stage of Jesus' ministry in which his authority is being revealed.
- A survey of Matthew's plot, especially as it fits into the larger Jewish story, also places Matthew 5:17ff into a section illustrating Jesus' authority in word and deed.

Literary considerations have not been brought sufficiently to bear on the interpretation of Matthew 5:17.

- The Sermon on the Mount may have several purposes, but foremost among them is its demonstration of the Messiah's authority.
- While there are many proposals for the structure of the Sermon on the Mount, it remains best to maintain a simple outline based on the inclusio at 5:17 and 7:12 (but cf. Allison, 1999:28). Whatever structure one adopts, 5:17 occupies a place of prominence, elaborating on the 'greater righteousness' Jesus requires.
- Several points may be made regarding the antitheses. (1) They do more than provide the true intention of the Law, or deepen its requirements; rather they illustrate Jesus' divine authority over against the Law. (2) They do not oppose the Law; they go beyond it. (3) They indicate what a fulfilled righteousness looks like in comparison to that of the scribes and Pharisees. (4) They illustrate the surpassing of the Torah. (5) They illustrate the way in which the Law is fulfilled: by Jesus' teaching that expresses the goal to which the Law itself pointed (Thielman, 1999:52). This helpful way of understanding the relationship between 5:17 and 5:21-48 has not been sufficiently taken into account in recent treatments of the passage. (6) They therefore best fit with interpretations that express the goal to which the Law pointed (eschatological), or interpretations that express 'transcendence' of the Law.
- The concept of the inaugurated kingdom of God/heaven (God's reign) means that a massive shift has taken place in the history of God's dealings with his people. Because the long-awaited kingdom of God has dawned in the life and ministry of Jesus, it is the time of 'fulfilment'. That Matthew 5:17 is placed within the context of this announcement (4:17) is highly significant.
- Matthew's broader usage of πληρώω must be brought to bear on our understanding of the term in 5:17. Matthew's 'theology of fulfilment' may be taken as referring to the coming about of what was predicted (predictive), the climax of historical patterns anticipated in the Old Testament (typological), or Jesus' enactment of Israel's story (narrative). The precise sense in 5:17 remains to be determined; however, taking cognizance of this concept in Matthew's Gospel helps us to see that our interpretation of 5:17 must be placed in the larger narrative of God's dealings with his people.

With this background in place we may proceed to our grammatico-historical exegesis and theological analysis of Matthew 5:17-20.

CHAPTER 4: EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF MATTHEW 5:17-20

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapters have highlighted the larger problem of the Law and the gospel as well as the lack of scholarly consensus on the manner in which Matthew 5:17-20 addresses it (chapter 1), previous attempts at finding a solution to the problem (chapter 2), and the background for working towards a solution ourselves (chapter 3). We come now to the heart of our study: exegesis of the text itself.

“Judging by the number and diversity of treatments, Matt. 5:17-20 poses one of the most perplexing passages in the first gospel. Yet these four verses offer one of the pivotal treatments of the subject of Jesus’ ministry and its implications for the Law” (Guelich, 1982:161).

We will begin with a brief delineation of the text and provide a translation. Making use of the historical-critical method of exegesis, we will then analyze the context before proceeding to a thorough analysis of the text and the problems it presents, working through verses 17 to 20. In chapter 5 we will seek to bring ‘biblical theology’ to bear on the exegetical position set forth by this chapter.

4.2 Text and Translation

4.2.1 Greek Text of Matthew 5:17-20 (NA²⁸)

17 Μὴ νομίσητε ὅτι ἦλθον καταλῦσαι τὸν νόμον ἢ τοὺς προφήτας· οὐκ ἦλθον καταλῦσαι ἀλλὰ πληρῶσαι. 18 Ἄμην γὰρ λέγω ὑμῖν· ἕως ἂν παρέλθῃ ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ, ἰῶτα ἐν ἡμῶν κεραία οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου¹²³, ἕως ἂν¹²⁴ πάντα γένηται.¹²⁵ 19 ὃς ἐάν οὖν λύσῃ μίαν τῶν ἐντολῶν τούτων τῶν ἐλαχίστων καὶ διδάξῃ οὕτως τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ἐλάχιστος

¹²³ Θ f¹³ 565; I^{lat} add και των προφητων, a late insertion of verse 17a.

¹²⁴ B* / 2211 omit ἂν.

¹²⁵ c adds caelum et terra transibunt, verba autem mea non praeteribunt, a late insertion of Matt. 24:35.

κληθήσεται ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν. ¹²⁶ὅς δ' ἂν ποιήσῃ καὶ διδάξῃ, οὗτος μέγας κληθήσεται ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν.

20 ¹²⁷Λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν ὅτι ἐὰν μὴ περισσεύσῃ ὑμῶν ἡ δικαιοσύνη πλεῖον τῶν γραμματέων καὶ Φαρισαίων, οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθητε εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν.

4.2.2 Author's Translation

17 Do not suppose that I have come to destroy the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to destroy but to fulfil. **18** For truly I say to you: until heaven and earth pass away, a single letter or mark will most certainly not pass away from the law until everything has taken place. **19** Therefore, whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.

20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness far exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will certainly not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

4.3 Sources and Origin

This dissertation assumes a two-source hypothesis in which Matthew almost certainly has before him some written form of Mark's Gospel, as well as 'Q'.¹²⁸ However, two provisos need to be added. The first is France's (1989:43) caution against over-simplification:

"I believe that the sort of complexity of source material and of contacts between developing gospel traditions which these more complicated solutions¹²⁹ envisage is historically more realistic than the rather artificial simplicity of the classical hypotheses¹³⁰."

¹²⁶ The rest of verse 19 is omitted by \aleph^* D W 579 bo^{ms} , but it is well attested by earlier witnesses (cf. Luz, 2005:188).

¹²⁷ Verse 20 is omitted by D, but is extremely well attested by multiple and superior witnesses.

¹²⁸ Cf. Luz (2007:18): "This commentary presupposes the two-source theory. Those who want to question the theory must refute much of the redaction-critical research on the Synoptics since 1945 – a truly bold undertaking that seems to me to be neither necessary nor possible" (cf. Stanton, 1992:23ff).

¹²⁹ France is referring to the likes of Sanders (1969), who suggested the need for a more complex solution to the Synoptic problem.

¹³⁰ By which he means both the Griesbach and Two-Document Hypotheses. France (2008:284) has maintained these reservations in his more recent work: "I have my doubts about the adequacy of a simple two-document hypothesis, and believe that the process of gospel-writing among the

The second proviso comes from Dunn (2011:40), who argues that Matthew likely drew on five or more collections of Jesus tradition. He thinks that an exclusively literary hypothesis ignores the oral culture of earliest Christianity as well as the oral character of the earliest transmission of the Jesus tradition. Not discounting Markan Priority, Dunn finds it “historically more plausible” that Matthew drew on both oral and written sources.¹³¹

It is not uncommon for Matthew 5:17-20 to be treated as a purely Matthean creation¹³² that may support multiple positions on the Law. Following form-critical methodology, Guelich (1982:134f), for instance, outlines “four different kinds of sayings” in these verses that find their original setting in the life of the early church: an ἤλθον saying (5:17), a legal saying (5:18), a sentence of holy law (5:19), and an entrance saying (5:20). Guelich (1982:135) points out that multiple suggestions have been made as to the sources behind this pericope, ranging from one traditional saying (5:18) to Matthew having drawn each of the four from his tradition. He points out, furthermore, that various interpretations have arisen owing to the complexity of the material with “its differing, at times conflicting, meanings” (1982:136). For Guelich, then, this pericope does not present a single, coherent position on the question of the Law (cf. Luz, 2005:188ff).

Luz (1989:257) also sees heavy Matthean editing in this pericope. With regard to Matthew 5:17, he considers πληρώω, νόμος/προφήται and their connection with ἤ to be redactional. Based on this redactional activity, Luz draws out two implications: (1) the saying cannot be attributed to Jesus or contribute to understanding Jesus’ view of the Law. (2) One should not use this saying to reconstruct an Aramaic original which would then constitute an interpretation of the meaning of πληρώω. Regarding verse 18, Luz (1989:257) views the situation of the tradition as “hopelessly unclear”. The verse could come from Q (cf. Luke 16:17), but he (1989:258) thinks it more likely that it goes back to special Jewish-Christian tradition. After discussing the difficulties, he (1989:258) concludes the following: “I consider the problem unsolvable, and there is nothing else to do except to interpret the verse as it stands.” He (1989:258f) considers much of verse 19 “linguistically Matthean”, but agrees

first-century churches was more complex and probably involved more varied contacts than a simple ‘Who-copied whom?’ approach allows for” (cf. France, 2007:20f).

¹³¹ Baum (2008:1-23) has recently argued that the evidence favours oral as opposed to written transmission. But cf. Davies and Allison (1988:97-127); Hagner (2012:148): “as far as probability goes, the Two Source hypothesis continues to be the most persuasive.”

¹³² Cf. Betz (1995:172): “Since these principles are found only in the SM... their formulation is best attributed to the author of the SM.”

with the “consensus of opinion” that verses 18 and 19 “come from strict Jewish-Christian law-observing circles, perhaps from debates and intra-Christian polemic about the validity of the Mosaic law.”¹³³ Finally, verse 20 should be considered redactional “according to almost universal judgment” (1989:259). For Luz, then, Matthew 5:17-20 is a hotchpotch of traditional (vv. 18-19) and redactional (vv. 17, 20) material. However, as Luz appears to admit, determining the precise origin of this passage and how Matthew used his sources is an unfruitful endeavour.

More recently, and also following a form-critical method, Meier (2009:41) complains against those who treat Matthew 5:17 as though it comes from the historical Jesus and solves the great difficulty of Jesus’ relationship to the Law:

“Alas, this apparently clear statement of principle is probably, at least in its present form, a creation of Matthew or his church. Matthew’s redactional hand is clearly visible in both the wording and the placement of 5:17.”¹³⁴

He continues (2009:42f):

“The evangelists, or the traditions before them, have drawn together various sayings of Jesus and the Law, plus various sayings of early Christians that were placed on the lips of Jesus. From these meshed materials, the Gospel writers composed mini-catechisms of moral instruction. In a sense, the task of a quester for the historical Jesus is to undo what the evangelists did.”

The validity of such methods has over the past two decades been heavily challenged. For instance, a recent volume edited by Chris Keith and Anthony Le Donne, *Jesus, Criteria, and the Demise of Authenticity* (2012), argues that the form-critical tools that have been employed in the past should either be dramatically modified or abandoned altogether.¹³⁵

¹³³ See chapter three of the present dissertation for a discussion of the provenance of this passage.

¹³⁴ Meier (2009:42) adds: “The reader must pardon me if I keep harping on this point, but it never ceases to amaze me that scholars who should know better keep citing Matt. 5:17-48 as the magic mantra that solves the enigma of Jesus and the Law.”

¹³⁵ Cf. Hooker (in Keith & Le Donne, eds 2012:1): “My chief plea... is for less dogmatism in our conclusions, and the recognition that all our results are only tentative. We know too little to be dogmatic, and it is probable that any rigid division of material into “authentic” and “non-authentic” distorts the picture. All the material comes to us at the hands of the believing community, and probably it all bears its mark to a lesser or greater extent; to confine our picture of Jesus to material which passes all our tests for genuineness is too restricting.”

Bauckham's *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (2006) has also challenged many form-critical assumptions.

Similarly, Snodgrass (1992:372) has criticized the method of both Guelich and Meier¹³⁶ for making Matthew say what he did not intend: "such interpretations have always been suspect. One can only sympathize with Matthew's readers if such interpretations were the conclusion they were to draw." Snodgrass then turns his attention to literary approaches because they concentrate on the Gospel as it stands and are aware of the limitations of an approach that seeks to determine the precise *Sitz im Leben* of the Matthean community.

Other commentators have drawn similar conclusions. Moo (1984:24), for instance, after noting the "complex and debated tradition history of the verses", suggests that it is more helpful to treat them as a single unit than as differing streams of early Christian tradition: "as a working procedure, we will seek to determine the meaning of each verse within its present context, since it is certainly legitimate to suppose that the final redactor, at least, intended them to be understood in relation to one another." France (2007:179), too, complains that certain form-critics have done "less than justice to Matthew's careful compilation of this discourse." He thinks that Matthew's ability as a composer must be taken seriously: "Whatever the origin of the sayings collected here, Matthew must have thought that they made coherent sense together, and it is our responsibility to try to discern that sense."

Furthermore, in response to scholars who hold that Matthew strung together multiple and even contradictory traditions in this pericope, Viljoen (2011:387) has recently argued that the evangelist has presented this passage in a "cohesive manner" in order to address his community's concerns over the Law's continuity. This is shown (1) by the literary context of Matthew 5:17-20, which illustrates that this passage fits well within the structure of the Sermon on the Mount (2011:391); (2) by the fact that the unit must be treated as a whole (2011:392); and (3) by the fact that it fits Matthew's broader argument (2011:393ff). "It is imperative," concludes Viljoen (2011:403), "not to read the different parts in an atomistic manner with clashing layers of tradition, but in its redacted and cohesive form." This has been the approach of many commentators (cf. Carson, 1984:141; Hagner, 1993:104;

¹³⁶ He is critiquing Meier's (1976) earlier work.

France, 2007:179; Turner, 2008:3, 161f). We are therefore justified in treating the text as it stands.¹³⁷

4.4 Grammatical and Syntactical Analysis

Μὴ νομίσητε: The aorist subjunctive with *μὴ* prohibits a specific action and may be taken as inceptive (Zerwick & Grosvenor, 1996:11); possibly “do not begin to suppose.” The aorist has the effect of prohibiting the action as a whole (Wallace, 1996:723). Zerwick (1963:79) adds that *μὴ* with the aorist subjunctive possibly forbids a future act. The negated aorist subjunctive may also indicate emphasis (so Mounce, 2009:314), although not to the degree of *οὐ μὴ* in verses 18 and 20. **ὅτι:** This conjunction supplies the content of what is not to be supposed and introduces the subject. **ἦλθον:** Here the constative aorist tells us nothing of the nature of Jesus’ coming, only that he came. **καταλῦσαι:** The adverbial infinitive denotes purpose: the purpose of Jesus’ coming was not to destroy. This precise form is used in 26:61 in reference to the destruction of the temple. **τὸν νόμον ἢ τοὺς προφήτας:** An appositional double accusative construction. The order is reversed in 11:13. The disjunctive *ἢ* is probably used, rather than the conjunctive *καὶ*, owing to the negative nature of the sentence (Davies & Allison, 1988:484). **οὐκ ἦλθον καταλῦσαι:** The repetition of the phrase makes it all the more emphatic (Hagner, 1992:104f). **ἀλλὰ πληρῶσαι:** The conjunction here is contrastive, while the infinitive again denotes purpose, this time stated positively. **ἀμὴν γὰρ λέγω ὑμῖν:** Semitism often used to make solemn pronouncements. **ἕως ἄν παρέλθῃ:** The subjunctive following the temporal conjunction denotes ‘until’ (cf. Wallace, 1996:479f). **ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ:** A compound subject with a singular verb (παρέλθῃ), signifying the two substantives as a collective whole.¹³⁸ **ἰῶτα ἐν ἡ μία κεραία:** Here again a compound subject is connected to παρέλθῃ. **οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ:** The double negation with the aorist subjunctive gives the phrase an emphatic future sense (Zerwick, 1963:149). **ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου:** The preposition is used here instead of the partitive genitive (Zerwick & Grosvenor, 1996:11), the more explicit preposition usage being a common feature of *Koine* Greek. **ἕως ἄν πάντα γένηται:** Here the subjunctive follows an indefinite temporal clause, possibly indicating future contingency from the perspective of the time of γένηται (cf. Wallace, 1996:479). **ὃς ἐὰν οὖν λύσῃ:** The relative pronoun has no antecedent

¹³⁷ “The genesis of this verse cannot be pinned down” (Davies & Allison, 1988:482).

¹³⁸ Wallace (1996:401) suggests that this construction occurs when an author wants to highlight one of the subjects (cf. John 2:2). But this explanation does not readily account for its presence in this passage.

and acts indefinitely with the aorist subjunctive: ‘whoever’. It indicates a generic subject of the condition stipulated by the verb λύση. Protasis begins third-class conditional clause. λύση echoes καταλύσαι from verse 17. The inferential conjunction οὖν draws a deduction relating to the νόμου of verse 18 and cannot therefore be referring to the teaching of Jesus.

μίαν τῶν ἐντολῶν τούτων τῶν ἐλαχίστων: The demonstrative functions as an adjective, pointing back to the νόμου of verse 18. Since all the commands are in view, ἐλαχίστων is a superlative adjective.

καὶ διδάξῃ οὕτως τοὺς ἀνθρώπους: Third-class conditional sentence continues. The subjunctive is in second dependent clause. ἀνθρώπους the direct object of the verb.

ἐλάχιστος κληθήσεται ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν: The apodosis in a third-class condition sentence stipulates the likely result were the protasis to be carried out.

ὃς δ’ ἂν ποιήσῃ καὶ διδάξῃ, οὗτος μέγας κληθήσεται ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν: Another third-class conditional sentence, this time with the subject of the apodosis made emphatic by the demonstrative οὗτος. βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν an attributive genitive: the heavenly kingdom.

Λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν ὅτι: The conjunction is likely inferential: “therefore”. Switch from third person (v. 19) to second person (v. 20) probably on account of the “stereotyped expression” ‘I say to you’ (Davies & Allison, 1988:499).

ἐὰν μὴ περισσεύσῃ ὑμῶν ἡ δικαιοσύνη: Protasis of third-class conditional sentence. Subjunctive referring to future condition.

πλεῖον τῶν γραμματέων καὶ Φαρισαίων: Comparative adjective with genitive of comparison. The adjective πλεῖον adds emphasis when following περισσεύσῃ (Blass, Debrunner & Funk, 1961:129).

οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθητε εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν: Apodosis with emphatic negation indicating result.

4.5 Exegetical Analysis

4.5.1 Structure of Passage¹³⁹

- 17a **Denial:** Μὴ νομίσητε ὅτι ἦλθον καταλῦσαι τὸν νόμον ἢ τοὺς προφῆτας
- 17b **Affirmation:** οὐκ ἦλθον καταλῦσαι ἀλλὰ πληρῶσαι.
- 18a **Explanation 1:** (γὰρ) ἀμὴν γὰρ λέγω ὑμῖν·
- 18b ἕως ἂν παρέλθῃ ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ,
- 18c ἰῶτα ἓν ἢ μία κεραία οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου,
- 18d ἕως ἂν πάντα γένηται.
- 19a **Application:** (οὖν) ὅς ἐάν οὖν λύσῃ μίαν τῶν ἐντολῶν τούτων τῶν ἐλαχίστων
- καὶ διδάξῃ οὕτως τοὺς ἀνθρώπους,
- 19b ἐλάχιστος κληθήσεται ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν·
- 19c ὅς δ' ἂν ποιήσῃ καὶ διδάξῃ,
- 19d οὗτος μέγας κληθήσεται ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν.
- 20a **Explanation 2:** (γὰρ) Λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν ὅτι ἐάν μὴ περισσεύσῃ ὑμῶν ἡ δικαιοσύνη
- πλεῖον τῶν γραμματέων καὶ Φαρισαίων,
- 20b οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθητε εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν.

4.5.2 Analysis

4.5.2.1 Introduction

Some commentators (e.g. Wenham, 1979:94; Nolland, 2005:216) see a thematic link between the κατὰ ἔργα of verse 16 and the focus on doing the Law in 5:17-20. While this may certainly be the case, the inclusio at 5:17 and 7:12 makes it apparent that a new section has begun dealing with Jesus' – and by extension his disciples' – relationship to τὸν νόμον ἢ τοὺς προφῆτας (cf. Betz, 1995:62; Osborne, 2010:179). However, given the prominence of

¹³⁹ Cf. Osborne (2010:180); Davies & Allison (1988:481); Turner (2008:161); Luz (2007:211); Talbert (2004:59).

the literary relationship between 5:17 and 7:12, we must not forget the larger context of the discourse itself, ending with the crowd's amazement at Jesus' authority in 7:29; nor must we forget the larger Matthean context in which Jesus, and the kingdom he brings, are presented as the fulfilment of Israel's hope.¹⁴⁰

What we find in 5:17-20, on the one hand, are the general principles, which are then illustrated by the antitheses of 5:21-48 (so Betz, 1995:167; France, 2007:178; Turner, 2008:161; Keener, 2009:175; Thielman, 1999:52). On the other hand, some see 5:17-20 rather as an anticipation of objections against what the antitheses appear to teach (so Davies & Allison, 1988:481; Hagner, 1993:103; Nolland, 2005:216). The former position implicitly emphasizes the positive statement – “I have come to fulfil” – while the latter implicitly emphasizes the negative statement – “I have not come to abolish.” We do not, therefore, need to choose between them. What we find in 5:17-20 is the answer to the following question: What does the coming of God's kingdom in Jesus mean for the Jewish Scriptures? By framing the question in this way, rather than speaking simply of ‘Jesus' relationship to the Law,’ we take better cognizance of this passage's place in Matthew's larger narrative.

4.5.2.2 Is Jesus Responding to a Real Accusation?

The first question to be decided is whether *Μὴ νομίσητε* is used simply for rhetorical effect (so Banks, 1976; Wells & Zaspel, 2002:109f; cf. Luz, 2007:213), or whether it addresses a particular accusation levelled at Jesus, probably to the effect that he was an antinomian¹⁴¹ (so Wenham, 1979:94; Davies & Allison, 1988:483; Hagner, 1993:104). The aorist subjunctive construction can be construed as evidence for either case. So Turner (2008:162) points out (following Zerwick) that traditionally these constructions forbid the beginning of an action, thereby suggesting that this charge was not actually levelled against Jesus.¹⁴² Conversely, Davies and Allison (1988:483) see *μὴ* with the “negative imperative”¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ These points were argued in chapter 3.

¹⁴¹ Luz (1989:260) treats this phrase as addressing Matthew's community. The charge in this case would not have been against Jesus but against ‘antinomian’ factions in Matthew's community. But Luz admits the insufficiency of the evidence: “A direct polemic, perhaps against antinomians, cannot be proved.”

¹⁴² Although Turner (2008:162) is non-committal: “it is not altogether clear whether the warning was preventative or curative.”

¹⁴³ Presumably they are referring to the subjunctive used imperatively.

as having more than rhetorical effect: “Do not think...’ rebuts a real misunderstanding: somebody thinks that Jesus came to abolish the law.”

While it is impossible to be certain, when we take a look at Jesus’ ministry more broadly – relaxing Sabbath legislation, eating with sinners and tax collectors, declaring all foods clean, and so on – it is not difficult to conceive of a provenance for this charge (cf. Wenham, 1979:94). As Guelich (1982:140f) points out: “The Gospel tradition gives ample witness that Jesus was in trouble with the Jewish leaders over the question of his actions and teachings regarding the Law.” Additionally, precisely the same phrase is used in 10:34, where it certainly appears that Jesus is addressing the notion that the Messiah would bring peace (Hagner, 1993:104). Furthermore, Deines (2008:73) has drawn attention to the importance of the immediate context for determining why Jesus appears to be defending himself in 5:17. First, in the Beatitudes Jesus promises participation in God’s kingdom without the Law and the Prophets. Second, in 5:11-16, by calling his disciples “salt” and “light”, Jesus ascribes to them features connected in Jewish tradition with the Torah. Deines (2008:73) argues that these two factors “may give the impression that the Torah as the basic tool for mediation between God and his people is pushed aside.” It seems likely, then, that Jesus is addressing an actual charge (cf. Betz, 1995:173). The accusation provides an opportunity to elaborate on why he did come. We will look first at the denial and then at the affirmation.

4.5.2.3 The Denial: καταλύω

Jesus did not come καταλύσαι τὸν νόμον ἢ τοὺς προφῆτας. Since the verb καταλύω provides the contrast to πληρώω it is important to establish its precise meaning in this context.¹⁴⁴ A scan over some of the relevant writings reveals significant use of the term. We find sixty-six occurrences in the LXX, seventeen in the New Testament, two in the Apostolic Fathers,¹⁴⁵ and sixty references in the writings of Josephus.¹⁴⁶ BDAG defines καταλύω, with reference to Matthew 5:17, as “do away with, annul, repeal”. Louw and Nida (1996), also with reference to Matthew 5:17, define καταλύω as: “to completely invalidate something which has been in force”. TDNT, again with reference to Matthew 5:17, defines it as “to invalidate.” Perhaps most instructive will be to survey Matthew’s other uses of the term.

¹⁴⁴ Betz (1995:175) provides parallel sayings from the apocryphal Gospels. Curiously, he does not discuss Matthew’s use of καταλύω.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Didache 11:2: But if the teacher himself be perverted and teach another doctrine to destroy these things, do not listen to him.

¹⁴⁶ These statistics were produced using *Logos Bible Software*.

Each of the three other uses of καταλύω in Matthew refers to the temple. In 24:2, predicting the downfall of the temple, Jesus says: ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, οὐ μὴ ἀφεθῆ ὧδε λίθος ἐπὶ λίθον ὃς οὐ καταλυθήσεται; in 26:61 the false witnesses accuse Jesus of saying: δύνάμει καταλύσαι τὸν ναὸν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ διὰ τριῶν ἡμερῶν οἰκοδομήσαι; and in 27:40 the onlookers deride Jesus on the cross: ὁ καταλύων τὸν ναὸν καὶ ἐν τρισὶν ἡμέραις οἰκοδομῶν, σῶσον σεαυτόν. In each of these instances it is clear that the verb denotes ‘causing something to no longer stand’. The commentaries, too, see in καταλύω the sense of “abolish” or “annul” (Davies & Allison, 1988:483; Hagner, 1993:105; Nolland, 2005:217; France, 2007:182; Turner, 2008:162).¹⁴⁷ It is based on this meaning that some (e.g. Wenham, 1979:93; Bahnsen, 2002:68) have argued that the sense “uphold” or “confirm” best defines πληρώω in contrast to καταλύω¹⁴⁸. Whether this suffices for defining πληρώω will be examined in our discussion of the word below.

4.5.2.4 The Law and the Prophets

What is meant by τὸν νόμον ἢ τοὺς προφήτας? Matthew uses this phrase again in 7:12, 11:13¹⁴⁹, and 22:40. It appears to denote the entirety of the Jewish Scriptures (cf. Betz, 1995:177). νόμος refers to the Pentateuch (cf. 12:5), while προφήται refers to the rest of the Scriptures (Luke 16:29, 31; Davies & Allison, 1988:484).¹⁵⁰ It is significant that τοὺς προφήτας is included here alongside the Law.¹⁵¹ This is especially the case since it is the Law that will be in view throughout the passages to follow. Why does Matthew include it? Firstly, God’s will – the requirements God places on his people – is stipulated not only by the Law but also by the Prophets (cf. Betz, 1995:178). But Hagner (1993:105) sees further significance in the inclusion of the προφήται in that it introduces the concept of fulfilment. Jesus does not fulfil only the Mosaic Law, but brings the fulfilment of God’s entire revelation. “The Messianic age has dawned in history, and with it comes the fulfilment of prophetic expectation” (Hagner, 1993:105). Guelich (1982:162) thinks that Matthew 5:17 has often

¹⁴⁷ Cf. also, Keener (2009:177): “to ‘annul’ it was to cast off its yoke, treating God’s law as void.”

¹⁴⁸ According to TDNT (1963), “The meaning of πληρώω in Mt. 5:17 cannot be determined simply by the contrast with καταλύσαι.” This is because in verse 19 λύω stands in antithesis to ποιεῖν as well as διδάσκειν.

¹⁴⁹ In this passage: οἱ προφήται καὶ ὁ νόμος; as will be seen, this passage is significant for the interpretation of πληρώω in 5:17.

¹⁵⁰ For a more comprehensive list of parallel citations see Keener (2009:177).

¹⁵¹ The commentators are divided on whether this saying is traditional or a Matthean redaction. For the former, see Davies & Allison, 1988:484. For the latter, see Luz 1989:257; Guelich, 1982:136ff; Nolland, 2005:216f.

been misunderstood owing to interpretations stressing Jesus' coming to "fulfill the Law" rather than "the Law and the Prophets." Therefore, to understand Matthew's concept of fulfilment correctly, we must understand it in terms of a climax of God's revelation to his people. Jesus does not only fulfil the Law; he is the one to whom every part of the Hebrew Scriptures – Law and Prophets – points. This leads us into our discussion of πληρῶσαι in verse 17.

4.5.2.5 The Affirmation: πληρῶ

What does it mean that Jesus has come πληρῶσαι τὸν νόμον ἢ τοὺς προφῆτας? Several considerations – lexical, contextual, and theological – must be brought to bear on our interpretation.

4.5.2.5.1 Lexically

First, we must consider the word lexically. BDAG lists six meanings for πληρῶ: (1) to make full, fill; (2) to complete a period of time, fill (up), complete; (3) to bring to completion that which was already begun, complete, finish; (4) to bring to a designed end, fulfil; (5) to bring to completion an activity in which one has been involved from its beginning, complete, finish; (6) complete. BDAG lists πληρῶ as it is found in Matthew 5:17 under (4) "to bring to a designed end", adding:

"depending on how one prefers to interpret the context, πληρῶ is understood here either as *fulfil*=do, carry out, or as *bring to full expression*=show it forth in its true meaning."

The legitimate senses from the usage of the word in ancient literature are insufficient to determine the precise sense in this passage. Thus BDAG notes the need to "interpret the context", which we will attempt below. Other lexicons are equally inconclusive. Louw and Nida (1996) list seven possible meanings,¹⁵² but place πληρῶ under the sixth sense, "give the true or complete meaning to something." They therefore translate Matthew 5:17: "I did not come to destroy but to give true meaning to". But this is simply one of several possibilities. TDNT discusses πληρῶ in Matthew 5:17 under the definition: "to fulfil a

¹⁵² (a) fill; (b) make complete; (c) finish; (d) provide fully; (e) proclaim completely; (f) give true meaning; (g) cause to happen.

demand or claim.”¹⁵³ They therefore understand the concept here as referring to fulfilment of the entire Old Testament as the will of God. Jesus, then, actualizes the will of God as made known in the Old Testament:

“He has come in order that God’s Word may be completely fulfilled, in order that the full measure appointed by God Himself may be reached in Him. His work is an act of obedience also and specifically in the fact that He fulfils God’s promise.”

We see from this short overview that BDAG conceives of πληρώω in Matthew 5:17 in terms of bringing something to its designed end; Louw and Nida as giving something its complete meaning; and TDNT as the actualization of God’s will. Clearly, lexical considerations alone cannot establish the meaning of this crucial term. The most important consideration will be the context in Matthew’s Gospel.

4.5.2.5.2 Contextually

In considering the context, three factors must be brought to bear upon our interpretation: (1) Matthew’s broader use of πληρώω; (2) Matthew 11:13; (3) the antitheses of verses 21-48.

4.5.2.5.2.1 Matthew’s use of πληρώω

Perhaps the most important consideration is Matthew’s broader use of πληρώω.¹⁵⁴ “The Matthean understanding of *to fulfil* must begin with his sixteen usages of πληρώω that indicate a definite interest in this verb” (Guelich, 1982:141). In chapter 3 we highlighted the prominence of πληρώω in Matthew’s Gospel: the verb is used sixteen times in statements that are almost exclusively Matthean. We will briefly examine three categories of usage.

On several occasions πληρώω is used in its basic sense of “to fill up”, as in 13:47, where the fishermen’s nets were ἐπληρώθη; or in 23:32, where Jesus tells the Pharisees, “πληρώσατε the measure of your Fathers.” These references have little bearing on the discussion.¹⁵⁵

Matthew’s frequent ‘formula’¹⁵⁶, ἵνα πληρωθῆ τὸ ῥηθὲν ὑπὸ κυρίου διὰ τοῦ προφήτου λέγοντος (1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 26:54, 56; 27:9), provides what

¹⁵³ They add that in the NT the demand is always with reference to the will of God.

¹⁵⁴ Remarkably, Betz (1995:178f) treats πληρώω without discussing Matthew’s use of the term. This derives from his view that the Sermon on the Mount is pre-Matthean (1995:1, 45).

¹⁵⁵ However, 23:32 may also have prophetic overtones.

we might call a ‘salvation-historical’ use of πληρώω. In each case, Matthew sees an event which transpired in the Old Testament as having reached its historical climax – its fulfilment – in the life, ministry, or death of Jesus. In this sense, then, ‘fulfil’ means that what was anticipated has now been ‘filled up’; or the trajectory which was set in motion by a particular Old Testament event has now reached its conclusion – ‘run its course’ – that is to say, has been fulfilled. Guelich (1982:142) correctly notes that “the redemptive historical motif so characteristic of Matthew is doubtless at work in 5:17 as well.”

The final sense in which πληρώω is used elsewhere in Matthew’s Gospel is found in the somewhat ambiguous reference in 3:15¹⁵⁷: πληρῶσαι πᾶσαν δικαιοσύνην. This reference is especially important since it is found in precisely the same aorist infinitive form as in 5:17¹⁵⁸. It may therefore be instructive in helping us establish the meaning of the word there. Jesus goes to the Jordan to be baptized by John the Baptist (3:13). But John, recognizing himself to be the inferior¹⁵⁹, tries to prevent him (3:14). Jesus’ reply amounts to saying that John must go ahead with baptizing him: ἄφες ἄρτι, οὕτως γὰρ πρέπειν ἐστὶν ἡμῖν πληρῶσαι πᾶσαν δικαιοσύνην (3:15). We must understand why it is “proper”, what “righteousness” means, and in what ways Jesus’ baptism “fulfils” it. Davies and Allison (1988:325ff) list seven ways that this statement has been interpreted. Ultimately they find the most convincing approach to be that this saying “refers to Jesus fulfilling prophecy.” The reasoning is as follows: of the sixteen occurrences of πληρώω in Matthew, thirteen have prophecy or the prophets as the subject. Of the three remaining, one is unrelated (cf. 13:48, above) and one is also related to prophecy¹⁶⁰ (23:32). This leaves only 3:15, making it highly likely that Old Testament prophecy is in view here too. This is further confirmed by the voice from heaven in 3:17, with its allusions to Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1, which shows that “scriptural hopes” (Davies & Allison, 1988:326) were being realized. By “fulfilling all righteousness”, then, Jesus is fulfilling Scripture: “Jesus, knowing the messianic prophecies of the OT, obediently fulfils them and thereby fulfils all righteousness. Because prophecy declares God’s will, to fulfil prophecy is to fulfil righteousness” (Davies & Allison, 1988:327). The basic meaning of δικαιοσύνη in Matthew, according to France (2007:119), is “the

¹⁵⁶ With minor variations.

¹⁵⁷ This statement is found only in Matthew.

¹⁵⁸ It is also the first statement made by Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel.

¹⁵⁹ This account may reflect embarrassment on the part of Matthew’s community that Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist (cf. France, 2007:119).

¹⁶⁰ Probably ironically (cf. Keener, 2009:554).

conduct which God expects from his people.”¹⁶¹ By participating in the act of baptism, then, Jesus is doing what God requires in order to fulfil the Old Testament. How does baptism accomplish this? “By indicating his solidarity with John’s call to repentance in view of the arrival of God’s kingship” (France, 2007:120). What is important for our purpose here is the prophetic sense in which πληρώ is used: Jesus has to be baptized by John to bring about the fulfilment of what was prophesied in the Old Testament. Nolland (2005:154) sees the language of 3:15 as providing a bridge between the active πληρώ in 5:17 and the passive in the formula quotations. Bringing these two uses together, Nolland (2005:154) asserts:

“The concern ‘to fulfil all righteousness’ is the concern to prepare for and see it in the kingdom of God as anticipated in Scripture and the Jewish faith.”

Jesus came not to abolish but to bring about that which was prophesied in the Old Testament. Jesus neither abolishes nor establishes the Law and the Prophets; he brings into being what they anticipated.

In sum, Matthew’s other references to the word πληρώ connote a sense of bringing into being that which was anticipated in the Old Testament. Both the formula quotations, with their sense that what was anticipated has now arrived, and Matthew 3:15, with its sense that Jesus is acting in accordance with what was predicted of him by the Old Testament, establish a meaning for πληρώ in Matthew 5:17 consistent with ‘prophetic’ or ‘eschatological’ interpretations of the verse. Hence Guelich (1982:141):

“Since Matthew’s characteristic usage obviously refers to the fulfilment of Scripture and since he has added *the prophets* to refer to the Scriptures as *the Law and the Prophets* in 5:17, it is most logical to understand *fulfil* in the typically Matthean manner.”¹⁶²

When Jesus says that he has come to ‘fulfil’ the Law and the Prophets, it must mean what the verb means elsewhere: that Jesus has brought into being that which the Law and the Prophets anticipated.

¹⁶¹ France (2007:120) also sees in this verse a verbal allusion to Isaiah 53:11, which mentions “the righteous one” who “will make many righteous”.

¹⁶² All italics Guelich’s emphasis.

4.5.2.5.2.2 Matthew 11:13

Matthew 11:13 is an important cross-reference in our discussion of the meaning of πληρώω in 5:17 because it shows us that Matthew conceives not only of the Prophets, but also of the Law, as prophesying: πάντες γὰρ οἱ προφηταὶ καὶ ὁ νόμος ἕως Ἰωάννου ἐπροφήτευσαν. Thielman (1999:51) admits this difficulty with his thesis: “The primary difficulty with this view¹⁶³ is that the law consists of commands, and it is difficult to know how commands can ‘prophesy’ or point forward to some eschatological fulfilment.” Curiously, Thielman attempts an answer with little recourse to Matthew 11:13.¹⁶⁴

But 11:13 helps us to see how Matthew conceives of the Law *prophetically* in 5:17. The verse has salvation history in view: “The point is that a key turning point has been reached, marking off the old from the new” (Hagner, 1993:308). Both the Law and the Prophets – the Jewish Scriptures – point towards a time which has now arrived with John the Baptist. A comparison with Luke 16:16 reveals some of Matthew’s “special interests” (France, 2007:431): the addition of the verb προφητεύω; the mention of the Prophets prior to the Law¹⁶⁵; and the addition of “all”. So, for Matthew, Jesus’ ministry (which began with John’s announcement), is the fulfilment of the Scriptures. Until John, the Old Testament pointed forward to a time of fulfilment that has now come (France, 2007:431). France also shows how this helps us understand fulfilment in Matthew 5:17: not only the Prophets, but also the Law prophesied/pointed forward to the fuller revelation of God’s will that came with the time of fulfilment in Jesus’ ministry. That Matthew understood the Prophets and Law as ‘prophesying’ (11:13) shows us that in his thought what they ‘prophesied’ is here in Jesus (5:17). Jesus thus fulfils the Law and the Prophets (cf. Moo, 1999:351; Turner, 2008:295; Meier, 2009:38; Deines, 2008:83).

4.5.2.5.2.3 The Antitheses (5:21-48)

“The programmatic statement about the law’s fulfillment in 5:17-20 should be interpreted in light of the antitheses in 5:21-47 and the concluding statement in 5:48” (Thielman, 1999:49). How do the antitheses of 5:21-48 help us to understand the meaning of πληρώω in Matthew 5:17?

¹⁶³ That is, that “fulfil” in 5:17 carries prophetic nuance.

¹⁶⁴ He makes passing mention of it later in his chapter (1999:72).

¹⁶⁵ “An inversion of the usual order which is so unusual as to compel attention” (France, 2007:431).

In the previous chapter we listed several conclusions regarding the antitheses of 5:21-48, which we will briefly summarize here.

1. They demonstrate Jesus' authority. The insistence is on what *Jesus* says as binding on his followers. The Messiah's coming means that it is to Jesus that disciples must look for the definitive statement of God's will (cf. Moo, 1984:23).
2. They show that Jesus' teaching surpasses the demands of the Law without contradicting them (cf. Davies and Allison, 1988:508).
3. They exhibit the nature of the righteousness Jesus demands in 5:20: (1) It is an inward concern with motive; (2) it goes beyond rules in search of principles; (3) it is more than the mere avoidance of sin; (4) its ideal is the perfection of the Father (cf. France, 2007:197).
4. They show us the manner in which Jesus fulfils the Law. Following Thielman (1999:51ff), we see how Jesus' teaching identifies the principle in the Law that he fulfils by bringing it to completion.
5. In light of the above, they best support interpretations of 5:17 emphasizing the 'eschatological' element of the Law.

We have yet to consider the contribution of Matthew 5:48 to our understanding of 5:17: ἔσσεσθε οὖν ὑμεῖς τέλειοι ὡς ὁ πατήρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος τέλειός ἐστιν. Does the οὖν here refer to the immediate context relating to love for one's enemies (5:43-47), or to the entire section beginning at 5:20? Most commentators (cf. Davies and Allison, 1988:560; Nolland, 2005:270; Turner, 2008:177; France, 2007:228) opt for both. While this verse certainly rounds off verses 43-47,

“its comprehensive phrasing also serves to sum up the nature of the whole new way of living which the six examples have together illustrated, and thus to put into a neat epigram the essential nature of the ‘greater righteousness’ introduced in v. 20” (France, 2007:228).

Disciples are to exemplify the character of their Father. Therefore, continues France (2007:228), Jesus is demanding an approach to righteousness which goes beyond keeping laws to the character of God himself.¹⁶⁶ The reference to τέλειός may echo Deuteronomy

¹⁶⁶ The Lucan parallel (Lk. 6:36) has Γίνεσθε οἰκτίρμονες καθὼς [καὶ] ὁ πατήρ ὑμῶν οἰκτίρμων ἐστὶν instead of Matthew's (5:48) ἔσσεσθε οὖν ὑμεῖς τέλειοι ὡς ὁ πατήρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος τέλειός ἐστιν.

18:13 (LXX): τέλειος ἔση ἐναντίον κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ σου.¹⁶⁷ Here it reflects God’s requirement of total loyalty (France, 2007:228; Turner, 2008:177). Matthew uses the term again in 19:21 – εἰ θέλεις τέλειος εἶναι, ὕπαγε πώλησόν σου τὰ ὑπάρχοντα – where it reflects an action of total commitment to God beyond merely keeping the rules. It is by promoting this standard of perfection, which goes beyond the requirements of the Old Testament Law, that Jesus “fulfils” it (France, 2007:229). According to Nolland (2005:271), these verses require disciples “to go all the way with the will of God, now seen with fresh clarity.” This is what obeying God’s will looks like in the kingdom Jesus has inaugurated. Nolland (2005:271) continues: “one cannot be content with some circumscribed version of obeying God’s will, as witnessed to in the Law and the Prophets.” What 5:48 does, then, is sum up the discussion of the antitheses for us. Jesus has fulfilled the Law and is now himself the one to declare the will of God. What is God’s will? That disciples would be perfect, exemplifying the character of God. This is what the Law and the Prophets were pointing toward.

How can we clearly apply this along the interpretive lines sketched above? If πληρώ in 5:17 is to be understood salvation-historically – Jesus ‘fulfils’ by being the one to whom the Law and Prophets point – the antitheses (1) reveal the authority of the lawgiver; and (2) provide examples of how Jesus’ teaching brings the Law to completion. The principle established by 5:17 – the one who brings completion to what was anticipated in the Jewish Scriptures – is illustrated in 5:21-48: This is who the Messiah is (following 5:17); this is what the Messiah demands (following 5:20; summed up in 5:48). These verses thus have *both* Christology and discipleship in view. But the former has not received equal attention. Such an interpretation corresponds with Matthew’s broader emphasis on the authority of the Messiah, as well as his emphasis on Jesus’ ethical teaching.

4.5.2.5.2.4 Conclusion

In bringing the context to bear on our interpretation of πληρώ in 5:17 we have considered, first, Matthew’s broader use of πληρώ, which he most often uses to connote the fulfilment

Cf. Bock (1994:604f), who notes that although the relationship between these two sayings is much discussed, there remains a diversity of opinions on the matter. Bock’s conclusion is that Matthew has chosen τέλειος in order to express the maturity required of one exercising mercy. Whatever their precise relationship, both passages exhort disciples to imitate their Father (cf. Davies & Allison, 1988:560f for a fuller discussion).

¹⁶⁷ However, Davies and Allison (1988:560) find the background to this saying in a conflation of Deuteronomy 18:13 with Leviticus 19:2.

of prophecy. Second, we considered Matthew 11:13, in which both the Prophets and the Law are said to ‘prophecy’, indicating that Matthew understands there to be a ‘prophetic’ dimension to the Law. Third, we considered the antitheses of 5:21-48, in which Jesus’ teaching is set alongside the Law, demonstrating his authority and showing by means of six examples the ‘greater righteousness’ demanded by this greater authority. A survey of the context, therefore, leads us to a prophetic, eschatological, or redemptive-historical reading of Matthew 5:17. This follows the conclusion of Deines (2008:74):

“πληρῶσαι [is] an exclusive[ly] Christological term, which could in the context of the First Gospel only be understood in the framework of a salvation history which reaches its peak in Jesus.”

By saying that he has come to fulfil, Jesus is saying that he has come to bring about that to which the Law and Prophets pointed. What that looks like in practice is then illustrated by the antitheses.

4.5.2.6 Objections

Several objections may be levelled against this interpretation.

First, it has been pointed out that both Matthew 5:16 and 5:18ff concern Jesus’ *ethical* teaching and that therefore it is not so much the *prophetic* element upon which Jesus elaborates. For instance, Charles (2002:3) has objected to the views of Thielman and others:

“*Good works* are the immediate context in which the following imperatives are to be understood. Hence, a distinctive ethic – indeed, an *enduring ethic* – is the burden of teaching recorded in 5:17ff.”¹⁶⁸

Again (2002:8),

“The immediate context in which 5:17 is found disallows us from applying a ‘prediction-verification’ or ‘transcending’ sense to the verb ‘fulfill’¹⁶⁹... Good works

¹⁶⁸ Charles’ italics.

¹⁶⁹ Charles (2002:8) does acknowledge that πληρῶσαι carries this sense elsewhere in Matthew: “The eschatological and typological sense of ‘fulfilment’ is mirrored in 1:22-23, 2:15, 17-18, 23; 4:14-

(5:16) and doing the 'better righteousness' (5:20) commend the disciple in the sight of God.”

Charles (2002:4ff) goes on to argue, against Thielman and others, that the prophetic reading described above does not reflect Matthew's perspective, because righteousness in Matthew has a proper regard for the Law, which is expressed by *doing* (cf. Wenham, 1979:93).

In response, several points might be made. (1) The perspective described above is not against the Law *per se*. In arguing that the Law has reached its goal, the prophetic perspective is not arguing that the Law is therefore invalid. The law as Jesus brings it has much continuity with the Law as Moses brought it; in fact it is in many cases stricter. (2) Charles pays insufficient attention to the prominence of πληρώ in Matthew's broader context. To assume a different meaning for a word than one established in twelve other occurrences, especially in a verse unique to Matthew, is a bold exegetical step that needs to be adequately justified. (3) The concept of "good works" is entirely compatible with the view against which Charles complains. If Jesus has indeed come to bring fulfilment to what was anticipated in the Old Testament, why would the good works of verse 16, or the greater righteousness of verse 20, mean anything less? The arrival of God's kingdom is in no way antithetical to the requirements of the Law; the antitheses show that the fulfilment Jesus brings requires stricter standards. As Sanders (1992:212) has said, "heightening the law is not opposing it." This objection, then, carries too little weight, since its emphasis (good works) can so easily be assimilated into the view it opposes.

Second, Philip Ross (2010:215) has recently complained about "the wedge-driving exegesis" which restricts the meaning of πληρώ in Matthew 5:17 to a single sense.¹⁷⁰ Instead, Ross (2010:214) proposes, we should understand the meaning in multiple senses:

“He fulfils the law and the prophets in his person and teaching, by his obedience, and in making his followers obedient. His fulfilment is eschatological, soteriological, and moral.”

16, 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:35; 21:4-5; and 27:9-10.” But he does not comment on the weight this carries in favour of the prophetic interpretation.

¹⁷⁰ Ross (2010:363) also attempts to revive the objection that πληρώ in Matthew 5:17 and 3:15 is in the active voice while elsewhere in Matthew it is in the passive. Meier (1976:80f), however, has dealt persuasively with this objection; he concludes: "the difference in voices does not prove any great change in the meaning of the verb."

Unfortunately Ross's view is not based on primary exegetical considerations. His (2010:199) argument begins with Calvin's interpretation of this passage, which reads it in light of Jeremiah 31. He (2010:199-214) then proceeds to elaborate at some length on the link between Jeremiah and Matthew's Gospel,¹⁷¹ concluding that aspects of Jeremiah's new covenant fulfilment are brought out in more detail "in the picture of the beloved son who fulfils the law and the prophets" (2010:214). While we can certainly affirm significant links between Matthew's Gospel and Jeremiah,¹⁷² and while there are undoubtedly new covenant overtones in this passage, Ross is surely mistaken to base his conclusion almost exclusively on this background. Remarkably, he hardly mentions either Matthew's use of 'fulfilment' language¹⁷³, or the contribution of the antitheses. Furthermore, his appendix on πληρώω (2010:357-370) also barely addresses these critical exegetical issues. One struggles, therefore, to take either his critique or his exegesis seriously.¹⁷⁴

A third objection to our interpretation above comes from John Nolland. Nolland (2005:218) argues that "'to fulfil' must focus primarily on what Jesus offers as a teacher." He bases this conclusion on several observations: (1) 'fulfil' must be taken as a counterpart to 'annul'; (2) the sense must illuminate 5:21-48; and (3) Jesus functions in the role of a teacher throughout the sermon. Nolland thinks that if this framework is rightly constructed, "many of the proposed senses of 'fulfil' can be dismissed." Among others he includes 'senses' like "to fulfil the prophetic content of the Law and the Prophets." So, for Nolland, "to fulfil" in its prophetic sense is ruled out by Christological considerations – that Jesus is being portrayed as a teacher. He (2005:219) continues: "the interest at 5:17 is clearly with the practical implementation of the directives of the Law (and the Prophets)." The fulfilment language, he concludes, has the purpose of enabling God's people to live out the Law more effectively; and the antitheses offer "a new depth of insight" into what that Law requires. It is significant that Nolland places "the Prophets" in parentheses. While one cannot complain against his position as far as it goes, it does not account well for the presence of the Prophets in

¹⁷¹ He (2010:203) does admit that Jeremiah 31 is not "an all-exclusive interpretive key to Matthew".

¹⁷² Cf. Knowles (1993:207ff).

¹⁷³ Ross (2010:363) makes mention of Matthew's broader use of πληρώω only in his critique of Carson in an appendix to his book.

¹⁷⁴ It is worth noting Carson's (2013:233) conclusion in a recent review of Ross's book, with reference to Ross's exegesis of Matthew 5:17: "nowhere does Ross carefully probe what strikes me as the most probable way in which 'to fulfil' and 'to accomplish' (5:17, 18) should be taken: *Tanakh*, the OT, is being taken in its anticipatory and predictive functions." Carson adds: "I remain convinced that this stance, carefully worked out, handles more exegetical details in Mt. 5:17-20 and elsewhere than any other."

Matthew's formulation. Nor does it deal adequately with the prophetic sense of πληρώ elsewhere in Matthew's Gospel – especially when Nolland (2005:154) draws on this sense in his interpretation of 3:15. Finally, while being based on a certain Christology (Jesus as teacher), it fails to take note of what it was about his teaching that caused such astonishment: ἦν γὰρ διδάσκων αὐτοὺς ὡς ἐξουσίαν ἔχων (7:29a). The preeminent Christological point is not that Jesus was a teacher but about what kind of teacher he was. It was the latter that left the crowds mesmerized.

Nolland's focus on Jesus as teacher does, however, raise an important question: in what sense does Jesus' teaching fulfil the Law and the Prophets? Luz (1989:264) solves this difficulty by relating fulfilment to Jesus' acting rather than his teaching.¹⁷⁵ But as Nolland has pointed out, and as Luz admits,¹⁷⁶ the antitheses point to Jesus' teaching. Thielman (1999:51ff) has perhaps offered the best explanation of how the antitheses illustrate the 'fulfilment' Jesus brings as a teacher. Thielman (1999:52) shows how each of the six antitheses addresses a "prophetic element" in the Law, which Jesus then brings to completion through what he teaches. (1) Jesus fulfils the prohibition against murder by forbidding the attitude from which murder arises (1999:53); (2) he makes the command against adultery unnecessary by prohibiting lust in the heart (1999:53); (3) his teaching on divorce, if heeded, makes the Mosaic requirements unnecessary (1999:55); (4) he forbids oaths, but commands that which would make them unnecessary (1999:55); (5) he takes the laws limiting retaliation, which were made to limit physical violence, to their full extreme, prohibiting retaliation at all (1999:56); finally (6), he follows the Law's own promotion of love for one's neighbour to the ultimate goal of loving one's enemy (1999:58). Thielman (1999:58) concludes:

"This is the way in which Jesus' teaching fulfils every aspect of the law. Every part of the law pointed collectively toward the fundamental principles that comprise Jesus' teaching."

The portrait of Jesus as a teacher, displayed most clearly by the antitheses, therefore need not count against the prophetic interpretation delineated above. If we maintain that 'fulfilment' has implications for both Christology and discipleship, we can see how Jesus

¹⁷⁵ Although he (1989:265) does not wish to preclude the concept of 'teaching' from the meaning: "The thought of teaching also belongs to the broader 'field of association' of 5:17."

¹⁷⁶ "But the Antitheses suggest that 5:17 has a relationship with the teaching of Jesus."

'fulfills' the Law by being the one to whom it points (Christology), and the one who describes God's will for his disciples (discipleship). The prophetic sense of fulfillment helps clarify the nature of Jesus' teaching as it relates to his fulfillment.

4.5.2.7 First Explanation: 5:18

The interpretation of verse 17 sketched above needs also to account for verse 18 (cf. Deines, 2008:76). In verse 18 Jesus explains that his 'fulfilling' of the Law most certainly does not mean its abrogation. ἀμὴν γὰρ λέγω ὑμῖν frequently precedes an emphatic and solemn statement. Thirty-one of fifty uses of this phrase in the Synoptic Gospels come from Matthew¹⁷⁷, who clearly views it as critical to his Christology. This phrase "presuppose[s] the superior status of the speaker over against those being addressed... '[Amen] I say to you'... reflects at least Jesus' implicit claim to be God's prophetic spokesman" (Davies & Allison, 1988:490; cf. France, 2007:184; Turner, 2008:163; Nolland, 2005:219). Here Jesus states the Law's continuity in most emphatic terms: "the everlastingness of each jot and stroke is a confession of the invariability and irreversibility of scripture" (Deines, 2008:76).

It is not ἕως ἄν παρέλθῃ ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ that the Law will pass away. This is shorthand for saying that the Law will never pass away.¹⁷⁸ Matthew is saying that "the validity of the Law is as enduring as heaven and earth" (Nolland, 2005:219f); or (following Luke 16:17) this phrase "is simply another way of saying, 'until the end of the present world order'" (Moo, 1984:26). This temporal nature of the Law's validity is suggested by Davies and Allison (1988:490) who, on the basis of 5:18d and 24:35, argue that the Law is not eternal, enduring only until the completion of all that Jesus describes in the eschatological discourse. Deciding between these two interpretations is dependent upon our understanding of the relationship between the two ἕως clauses in 18a and 18d, which we discuss below.

The emphasis is further ratified by the expression ἰῶτα ἐν ἧ μία κεραία οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου. By saying that not even an ἰῶτα (the smallest letter, a translation of the Aramaic *yod*), nor a κεραία (a small mark on a Hebrew letter¹⁷⁹) would pass away, Jesus' meaning, as is generally agreed, is that every last part of the Law stands (so France, 2007:185). The

¹⁷⁷ 5:18, 26; 6:2, 5, 16; 8:10; 10:15, 23, 42; 11:11; 13:17; 16:28; 17:20; 18:3, 13, 18, 19; 19:23, 28; 21:21, 31; 23:36; 24:2, 34, 47; 25:12, 40, 45; 26:13, 21, 34.

¹⁷⁸ France (2007:185) compares it to our "until hell freezes."

¹⁷⁹ According to Davies and Allison (1988:491), the precise meaning of κεραία has not yet been established beyond doubt. Cf. Luz (2005:202f).

especially emphatic οὐ μὴ further establishes this. This leaves us with two questions, however: (1) How can Jesus say that not even an ἰώτα will pass away from the Law, and then proceed to say some of the things he says in the antitheses? (2) What do we make of the fact that the focus has moved from ‘the Law and the Prophets’ to simply ‘the Law’? We will deal with each in turn.

In what sense can Jesus assert that not a ‘dot’ will pass from the Law and then go on to say some of the things he said¹⁸⁰? Davies and Allison (1988:491ff) suggest several factors to bear in mind in addressing this problem. (1) Matthew’s Gospel is less radical than is sometimes supposed. Some of Mark’s radical statements have been toned down; and, as has been shown, Matthew did not regard the teaching of the ‘antitheses’ as contradictory to the Torah. (2) There are Jewish texts that recognized the need for various modifications within the Torah¹⁸¹ without questioning the continuing validity of the Torah. The implication is that Matthew must have thought the same: “Even if [Matthew] did sense some tension between Jesus’ sayings and the Torah, he could only, as 5:17 makes plain, have thought in terms of fulfilment” (Davies & Allison, 1988:492). (3) There were differing attitudes towards the Law in the first century. First, there were those who expected Gentiles to become Jews and uphold the Law (cf. Acts 15:1, 5; 21:21; Gal. 6:13). Second, there those who believed the Law had been set aside.¹⁸² Third, there were those who supported relative freedom for the Gentiles but believed that Jews should maintain the Jewish law and tradition (cf. Gal. 2; 1 Cor 7:18; 9:19-21). Davies and Allison (1988:493) consider Matthew as being part of this third group, since we see his emphasis on Jewish Christians keeping the Law (5:17-20; 23:23), while not requiring the same of Gentiles.¹⁸³ This illustrates that for Matthew it was no problem to uphold the eternal validity of the Torah while still embracing circumcision. Fourth, Galatians 6:2 shows that Paul, and therefore at least some, considered Jesus to have brought his own law. The point is not that Matthew did not recognize tension; the point is that where tension is recognized there is an explanation: “the course of salvation-history may affect the Torah” (Davies & Allison, 1988:493). The understanding of verse 17 delineated

¹⁸⁰ E.g. forbidding oaths (5:33-7), defending the disciples plucking grain on the Sabbath (12:1-8), declaring all foods clean (Mark 7:19).

¹⁸¹ Davies argues this point at greater length in the *Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (1965:161).

¹⁸² See Luz (2005:193) for examples. Cf. Epistle of Barnabas 2:6.

¹⁸³ In support of this latter claim, Davies and Allison (1988:493) cite 28:16-20 for failing to mention circumcision, “which can only be explained if Matthew saw no need for it.” But this is an argument from silence. Jesus was commissioning his disciples to take his teaching to the world, not elaborating on what parts of the law must be maintained by the converts of that mission.

above should help us to see verse 18 not as forbidding the slightest change to the Law, but as upholding its authority – even after its fulfilment – in the face of being charged with its annulment.

Why has the focus moved from τὸν νόμον ἢ τοὺς προφήτας (v. 17) to τοῦ νόμου (v. 18)? Does this mean that τοὺς προφήτας are no longer in view? Nolland (2005:219) sees this as an indication “that Matthew thinks in terms of a supporting role for the Prophets.” But given that ὁ νόμος καὶ οἱ προφῆται not only begins (5:17) but also ends (7:12) this section of the Sermon on the Mount, it appears unlikely that τοὺς προφήτας have fallen out of view between those parameters. Furthermore, the concept developed in the antitheses and continuing throughout Matthew is that the Law and the Prophets are summed up in the love command (cf. Matt. 22:36-40). This shows that Matthew’s Gospel at large keeps the focus on the entirety of the Jewish Scriptures, not only the Torah. There are therefore two probable ways to understand the exclusive reference to νόμος in verse 18: (1) it is shorthand for all the Scriptures, as in 23:23, where Jesus is clearly referring also to the Prophets; or (2) it is used in light of the fact that each example in the antitheses comes from the ‘Law’ portion of the Jewish Scriptures.¹⁸⁴ Either of these explanations suffices to explain the exclusive reference to νόμος without having to argue that Jesus has moved the point of reference particularly towards the commanding aspect of the Torah.

What is meant by ἕως ἃν πάντα γένηται? Does this set an end date on the Law? This clause should be matched with the preceding ἕως ἃν παρέλθῃ. France (2007:185) is somewhat uncertain regarding their relationship: “it is not clear how these two clauses relate to one another or whether they are making the same or different points.” But others express greater certainty: we should see these two phrases as “standing in synonymous parallelism: both refer to the outstanding consummation” (Davies & Allison, 1988:495; cf. Turner, 2008:163¹⁸⁵). This is in keeping with the phrase as it is used in 24:34, where the πάντα must refer to the events described by the Olivet discourse. What is in view, then, is the end; that is, the time when all the events that are set to happen have been fulfilled. Does this mean there is an end date for the Law? Davies and Allison (1988:495; cf. Guelich, 1982:144; Turner, 2008:163) think so: “a definite end to the law [is] set forth.” Nolland (2005:221) takes a similar stance: “The clause... seems most likely to be concerned to guarantee a

¹⁸⁴ “it will be the law which is the focus of the rest of ch. 5” (France, 2007:185).

¹⁸⁵ “[They are] essentially synonymous references to the end of the present world and the beginning of the eschaton.”

permanence to the Law until such time as every item on the Law's agenda has been achieved." France (2007:185) also entertains the possibility of this meaning because "everything happening" is the language of eschatological fulfilment (cf. 24:34), and because understanding verse 17 in terms of the Law and the Prophets being 'fulfilled' by the arrival of that which they anticipated might render the smallest details of the Law valid only until the point of the arrival of this fulfilment. This would furthermore provide a natural understanding of "not... until...", which appears to connote a temporary situation. But since Jesus claims not to be abolishing the Law (v. 17), and since verse 19 insists on the importance of "the least of the commandments", France (2007:186) thinks that verse 18 cannot be referring to the invalidation of even the tiny parts of the Law. He concludes, therefore, that this second ἕως "is not speaking of a time of [the jots and tittles] abandonment but of their intended goal." France (2007:186) paraphrases:

"The law, down to its smallest details, is as permanent as heaven and earth, and will never lose its significance; on the contrary, all that it points forward to will in fact become a reality."

Deines (2008:76) also links verse 18d and verse 17b: "ἕως ἄν πάντα γένηται... is to be interpreted like πληρῶσαι in 5:17 in a way that takes salvation history and eschatology into account and refers to the messianic mission of Jesus." Moo (1984:27) suggests that the Law's continued validity be understood in light of its fulfilment: "In all its details, the Scripture remains authoritative, but the manner in which men are to relate to and understand its provisions is now determined by the one who has fulfilled it." Jesus' fulfilment does not mean the jots and titles are to be abandoned, but that they are to be seen in a new way. How this new way works itself out is demonstrated in the antitheses of verses 21-48. Verse 18 does not, then, represent redactional confusion on Matthew's part¹⁸⁶; rather it affirms that the fulfilment of the Law does not mean doing away with the Law, at least for the present. The kingdom of heaven, which Jesus has inaugurated,¹⁸⁷ has come; as such, what the Law and the Prophets anticipated has arrived. Verse 19 makes it clear that the Law should be understood within the context of this kingdom's arrival.

¹⁸⁶ Guelich seems to suggest this when he refers to v. 18d as "an apparently contradictory statement" when compared to v. 18bc.

¹⁸⁷ Here we follow the interpretation of the Kingdom set out by Ladd (1993:66f).

4.5.2.8 The Application: 5:19

What Jesus has said about the Law in 5:18 – that (for now) it stands – has immediate application to the disciples he is addressing.¹⁸⁸ The third-class conditional sentence here probably presents a hypothetical situation (cf. Wallace, 1996:696-99). The bottom line is that since the Law stands no disciple may λύσῃ it.¹⁸⁹ This relates back to καταλύω in verse 17a. Since Jesus has not come to abolish the Law, Jesus' followers may not abolish it nor teach its abolition. It is possible that Matthew included this line in order to counteract antinomianism in his community (cf. Davies & Allison, 1988:485f; Hagner, 1993:109).

What is meant by ἐντολῶν τούτων τῶν ἐλαχίστων? Is Jesus referring to the νόμος of verse 18, or to his own teaching (cf. 28:20), to follow in the antitheses? Carson (1978:40), following Banks (1975:223), suggests the latter¹⁹⁰, but then rejects that view in his (1984:146) commentary on Matthew.¹⁹¹ The evidence is certainly in favour of seeing ἐντολῶν as constituting the commandments of the Old Testament: (1) the οὖν links us to what precedes; (2) there is a natural connection between ἐντολῶν and νόμου; (3) given what is to follow in the antitheses, it is more likely that a disciple might conclude that the Law might have been annulled, which Jesus categorically denounces (cf. Davies & Allison, 1988:496; Hagner, 1993:108). Hagner (1993:108) suggests that it is the entirety of the Law as taken up by Jesus that is in view, not its smallest detail. But the connection with verse 18 makes this unlikely. While Hagner may be correct about the saying's "hyperbolic" nature, the point remains that disciples are not in any way to 'relax' (ESV) the Law. By 'law', the commandments in verse 18 are in view (Nolland, 2005:221).

Jesus warns against not only personal annulling of the Law but also teaching others to annul it. Of the fourteen appearances of διδάσκω in Matthew, only the two references here and the reference in 28:20 have the disciples as the subject. The difference is that in 5:19 the disciples are to teach the Law, while in 28:20 they are to teach everything Jesus has

¹⁸⁸ There is some debate regarding the identity of Jesus' addressees. Here we follow Talbert (2004:13), who argues that the crowds in Matthew may sometimes be understood as disciples of Jesus: "It is these disciples, as well as those representative of the circle of the Twelve, that are the audience to whom the Sermon is given."

¹⁸⁹ Cf. Didache 4:13: "You must not forsake the Lord's commandments but must guard what you have received, neither adding nor subtracting anything" (2007:351ff).

¹⁹⁰ "They are the commands already given, and the commands still to come, in the Sermon on the Mount."

¹⁹¹ "It is hard to justify restriction of these words to Jesus' teachings."

commanded them. Because Jesus has ‘fulfilled’ the Law – because it has reached its conclusion in him – Jesus’ disciples are to uphold it (5:19; cf. Davies & Allison, 1988:498), but uphold it in its ‘fulfilled’ sense – namely in the teachings of Jesus (28:20; cf. France, 2007:188).

It is important to take note of the βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν, mentioned twice in this verse and again in verse 20. Few commentators have paid significant attention to the presence of this phrase here (cf. Davies & Allison, 1988:497; Luz, 1989:267ff; Hagner, 1993:109; Nolland, 2005:222f; Turner, 2008:163). We have already established the importance of the kingdom of God/heaven in Matthew’s theology and in the Sermon on the Mount. This whole discourse might be said to speak of life within the kingdom of heaven which Jesus has inaugurated (cf. France, 2007:188). The double reference to the kingdom here shows that discussions over Jesus and the Law should not eclipse the larger focus on God’s kingdom (cf. Westerholm, 1992:44). Disciples, or would-be disciples, who hope to be a part of God’s consummated reign must maintain a high view of the Law in both what they do and what they teach. The focus on the βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν in verses 19-20 helps us to understand the compatibility of verse 17 with verses 18-19. The Law and the Prophets pointed to the coming kingdom of God, which is now here in Jesus (v. 17). The kingdom’s arrival does not mean disciples can forget about or cease to teach the Law, since all has not yet been accomplished (vv. 18-19). It is the ‘already’ but ‘not yet’ paradigm of the kingdom¹⁹² that explains the Law’s continuity and discontinuity. It is surpassed because in Jesus the kingdom has ‘already’ come (v. 17). It continues to be valid because the kingdom has ‘not yet’ come in full (v. 18). Failure to apply the model of the inaugurated kingdom sufficiently to these verses perpetuates the confusion that surrounds them.

The expressions ἐλάχιστος κληθήσεται and μέγας κληθήσεται probably denote rank within God’s kingdom rather than entry into or exclusion from it (so Davies & Allison, 1988:497; Hagner, 1993:109; Nolland, 2005:222¹⁹³; France, 2007:188). Matthew often mentions the concepts of rank and rewards in his gospel (cf. 5:12; 10:41-42). The operating assumption is that those being addressed are already part of God’s kingdom; so it is how the disciples are to be regarded that is in view.

¹⁹² This follows the now well known synthesis of Ladd (1976).

¹⁹³ Although Nolland adds: “the practical effect of marginally allowing disregard of a least important commandment is to insist that anything short of a commitment to the whole of the Law in all of its detail is tantamount to excluding oneself from the kingdom.”

Bearing in mind the probability that Jesus' disciples¹⁹⁴ were being charged as law-breakers helps us to understand the urgency of this application. Matthew is concerned here to show that Jesus did not advocate the violation of the Law by his disciples. The application of his fulfilling the Law is not that it may now be annulled, but that it must be kept and taught. In light of the following verse, France (2007:187) suggests that Jesus had in mind a "doing" that surpassed the scribes and Pharisees, a "'doing' appropriate to the time of fulfilment." Verses 20ff illustrate that the way in which the Law is to be kept and taught will not remain unaltered. Foster (2004:197) helpfully brings this out:

"Such fulfilment was not equivalent to that expected by his opponents, it achieved observance of even the least of the commandments through following the new way of righteousness. In this sense Matthew's ploy is a rhetorical strategy. He agrees with the words of his opponents, but gives them a new meaning that allows him to claim both fulfilment of the law and a new way of fulfilling it."

The relationship between verses 19 and 20, then, demonstrates the sense of fulfilment for which this paper has argued. While Jesus' disciples are to uphold the Law (v. 19), they are to do so in a way surpassing that of the scribes and Pharisees (v. 20).

4.5.2.9 Second Explanation: 5:20

The conjunction γὰρ connects this verse to the preceding statement, completing a string of conjunctions that indicates the unity of this pericope (γὰρ [v. 18]; οὖν [v. 19]; γὰρ [v. 20]). It may be taken as either explanatory ("for") or perhaps inferential ("therefore"). Verse 20 is furthermore connected to verse 19 by its focus on τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν. For disciples to have good standing in God's kingdom they must not merely uphold and teach the Law (v. 19); they must do so in a way that exceeds that of the religious leaders of their day¹⁹⁵ (v. 20).

Here Jesus' authoritative declaration is again evident in the significant phrase Λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν, which is structurally equivalent to verse 18 (cf. Hagner, 1993:109; France, 2007:188). This provides a second explanation of the implications of his 'fulfilling' of the Law and the Prophets. Not only does no part of the Law fall away (v. 18), but disciples are to "exceed" or "surpass" the righteousness arrived at by merely keeping scrupulously the details of the Law

¹⁹⁴ And/or Matthew's community.

¹⁹⁵ Matthew 18:3-4 also juxtaposes the language of entry into the Kingdom with the language of rank within it.

– the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees – by going beyond its *prima facie* requirements and getting to its heart.

What does Matthew mean by *περισσεύση δικαιοσύνη*¹⁹⁶? The only other place in the New Testament where these words are used together is 2 Corinthians 3:9, where Paul contrasts the “ministry of condemnation” with the “exceeding” (*περισσεύει*) glory of the “ministry of righteousness” (*δικαιοσύνης*). But, as is well known, Paul’s concept of righteousness differs from Matthew’s¹⁹⁷ (cf. Davies & Allison, 1988:499). In his monograph on righteousness in Matthew,¹⁹⁸ Przybylski (1980:99) examines Matthew’s use of *δικαιοσύνη* and concludes that “Righteousness is seen as God’s demand upon man. Righteousness refers to proper conduct before God.” This ‘ethical’ understanding of Matthew’s concept of righteousness is widely accepted among Matthean scholars.¹⁹⁹ For instance, France (2007:119) states that Matthew’s usage of *δικαιοσύνη* “indicates a basic meaning of the conduct which God expects from his people.” Przybylski (1980:84) sees this understanding as operative in 5:20: “it is clear that on the level of Matthew’s own intention... the term ‘righteousness’ in 5:20 refers to the conduct demanded of the disciples.” But we must depart from Przybylski’s description of this conduct: “a conduct characterized by the meticulous observance of the Law.” The required conduct is not exclusively quantitative:

“Instead, Jesus expects, as the antitheses to follow show, a new and higher kind of righteousness that rests upon the presence of the eschatological kingdom he brings and finds its definition and content in his definitive and authoritative exposition of the law” (Hagner, 1993:109; cf. France, 2007:189).

Davies and Allison (1988:500), however, comparing 5:20 with 5:47,²⁰⁰ argue that greater righteousness is “a doing more” and is therefore “a quantitative advance”, although they do not deny “a qualitative advance” too. The dichotomy should probably not be pressed. We

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Davies and Allison (1988:499): “The word ‘righteousness’... expresses the essence of the sermon on the mount.”

¹⁹⁷ But cf. Wenham (2008:202ff), who finds much similarity between Paul’s and the Sermon on the Mount’s concepts of righteousness.

¹⁹⁸ Przybylski (1980:116) argues that “the concept of righteousness is used in the Gospel of Matthew to provide a point of contact between the religious understanding of first-century Palestinian Jews and the teaching of Jesus as Matthew understood it.”

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Hagner (2008:174): “Matthean scholarship has tended to follow the conclusion of Benno Przybylski that all seven occurrences of the word in Matthew refer to ethical conduct.” But Hagner thinks that this is not the case in 3:15 and 21:32.

²⁰⁰ *καὶ ἐὰν ἄσπασθησθε τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς ὑμῶν μόνον, τί περισσὸν ποιεῖτε;*

have already established that it is to Jesus and the fulfilment he brings that this section points. This being the case, the conduct demanded by God is not “meticulous observance” of the Old Testament, but radical observance of the teachings of Jesus – many of which are, of course, in continuity with the Old Testament. There is therefore both quantitative and qualitative advance. The “greater righteousness” in 5:20, then, is referring to the type of discipleship required by God. Matthew is referring to what God really desires from his people, as revealed by Jesus in the kingdom he has inaugurated.

The comparison is with the righteousness of γραμματέων καὶ Φαρισαίων. Who are these groups (cf. Hagner, 1993:109)? Saldarini (2001:160) provides a detailed analysis of both groups, concluding that for Matthew the scribes were legitimate teachers in both Jewish and Christian communities, whom Matthew occasionally attacks for their opposition to Jesus. In passages where “scribes and Pharisees” are treated together, Matthew usually presents the Pharisees as Jesus’ more active opponents (Saldarini, 2001:164). When it comes to 5:20,

“The scribes and Pharisees are presented as the pious and zealous official representatives of Judaism, whose practice and interpretation of the Bible may be contrasted with Jesus’ interpretation of how Christians and especially Christian leaders should lead life in the second generation of Christianity” (Saldarini, 2001:164).

While this is not the place to enter the voluminous discussions over the nature of the Pharisees,²⁰¹ we may point out that Matthew’s portrayal of them is largely negative²⁰² (cf. Nolland, 2005:224), although not exclusively so.²⁰³ Saldarini (2001:167) shows that, in comparison with Mark, Matthew “expands” the Pharisees’ role as Jesus’ opponents (cf. France, 2007:189). According to Cohick (2013:674), Matthew’s first two references to the Pharisees (3:7; 5:20) tell of an escalating conflict “over God’s requirements for righteousness”. As discussed in chapter three of the present dissertation, Matthew’s plot may be traced along the developing theme of conflict (cf. Kingsbury, 1992:347). Several of

²⁰¹ “The proliferation of hypotheses about the Pharisees shows how poorly they are understood” (Saldarini, 2001:3). “There is considerable scholarly debate over the precise meaning of the terms” (France, 2007:189).

²⁰² 3:7; 5:20; 9:11, 34; 12:2, 14, 24, 38; 15:1f, 12; 16:1, 6, 11, 12; 19:3; 21:45; 22:15, 34, 41; 23:13, 15, 23, 25, 26, 27, 29; 27:62.

²⁰³ 23:2 is a possible exception, but this verse is much debated. Cf. Nolland (2008:159), who thinks that these verses reflect the dependence of the disciples on the Jewish leaders for access to the Law. But Deines (2008:60) is not as optimistic about a positive portrayal of the Pharisees here.

Jesus' conflicts with the scribes and the Pharisees may help us to understand the sense intended in 5:20.

- Matthew 9:9-13. The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees consists in avoiding tax collectors and sinners, but the “greater righteousness” that Jesus desires consists in showing mercy: ἔλεος θέλω καὶ οὐ θυσίαν.
- Matthew 12:1-8. The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees manifests itself in strict obedience to the Sabbath requirements, but the “greater righteousness” Jesus – the Lord of the Sabbath – demands is revealed, again, in the exclusively Matthean ἔλεος θέλω καὶ οὐ θυσίαν.
- Matthew 15:1-20. The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees insists on keeping “the tradition of the elders”, which consists of such matters as hand-washing and eating ‘clean’ foods, but the “greater righteousness” demanded by Jesus is concerned with the heart (v. 8); it is what comes out of the mouth and proceeds from the heart that defiles a person (v. 18).
- Matthew 22:34-40. The “greater righteousness” demanded by Jesus may be summed up in the command to love God and neighbour. The scribes and Pharisees kept the Law to an extent but failed in these, τὰ βαρύτερα τοῦ νόμου (23:23).

Of course, the immediate context of verses 21-48 is the primary place to which we must turn in order to discover the sense of the greater righteousness demanded by Jesus. Since Jesus' words are more demanding than Moses', those who obey Jesus will inevitably exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (Davies & Allison, 1988:498). It is widely agreed that verses 21-48 illustrate the greater righteousness demanded of disciples in verse 20 (cf. Przybylski, 1980:80; Guelich, 1982; Davies & Allison, 1988:504; Carter, 1994:88; Moo, 1999:347; France, 2007:194). In chapter 3 we surveyed the antitheses, concluding that they demonstrate Jesus' authority as well as illustrate the concept of fulfilment. The Law stands, but it must now be read through the lenses of the kingdom inaugurated by Jesus. If the most devout keepers of the Law possess inadequate righteousness, something more is needed (Nolland, 2005:225). In short, 5:20 should be taken as indicating that righteousness in this kingdom – the kind of righteousness God desires – is not achieved merely by keeping the details of the Law. Rather, the Law pointed to Jesus, and it is to him disciples must look

for the authoritative declaration of God's will.²⁰⁴ In light of his fulfilment of the Law, Jesus demands of his followers a "greater righteousness," which is achieved by following his teaching.

4.6 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to establish the meaning of πληρώ by application of the historical-critical exegetical method, taking into account particularly observations from the literary context. We may sum up the findings of our exegetical analysis as follows.

- Stated positively, Matthew 5:17-20 provides the general principles of Jesus' relationship to the Law; these principles are then illustrated by the antitheses of 5:21-48 (so France, 2007:178; Turner, 2008:161; Keener, 2009:175; Thielman, 1999:52; *et al.*). Stated negatively, Matthew 5:17-20 anticipates objections against how the antitheses might be understood (so Davies & Allison, 1988:481; Hagner, 1993:103; Nolland, 2005:216).
- However, to place Matthew 5:17-20 better in its literary and theological context, we should not ask merely what this passage contributes to our understanding of Jesus and the Law, but how the arrival of God's kingdom affects the position of disciples vis-à-vis the Law and the Prophets.
- In all probability the provenance of this passage is found in the charge that Jesus (or Matthew's community) was a lawbreaker.
- πληρώ should, to some extent, be interpreted in contrast to καταλύω. The latter may be taken as 'causing something to no longer stand'.
- "The Law and the Prophets" includes all the Jewish Scriptures. The inclusion of "the Prophets" is significant because Jesus does not 'fulfil' merely the Law, but God's entire revelation.
- The meaning of πληρώ cannot be established by recourse to lexicons; its meaning needs to be established by its literary context.
- Contextually, Matthew's broader use of πληρώ indicates a sense in which what was anticipated in the Scriptures has reached its historical climax in the life and teaching

²⁰⁴ For a similar conclusion cf. France (2007:190): "Those who belong to God's new realm must move beyond literal observance of rules, however good and scriptural, to a new consciousness of what it means to please God, one which penetrates beneath the surface level of rules to be obeyed to a more radical openness to knowing and doing the underlying will of 'your Father in heaven'."

of Jesus. Since the verb is understood in its salvation-historical or prophetic sense elsewhere in Matthew, this sense should govern its usage in 5:17 as well. Additionally, Matthew 11:13 illustrates that in Matthew's mind both the Law and the Prophets have a 'prophetic' function in which they 'prophesy' towards what has now come about in Jesus. Finally, the antitheses of 5:21-48 illustrate both Christology (the authority of Jesus' teaching; cf. 7:28f) and discipleship (what God wills from his followers, now revealed through Jesus; 5:20). Matthew 5:48 concludes the antitheses by summarizing God's will for his followers: that they be perfect, exemplifying God's character; this is the direction in which the Law and Prophets pointed. All these considerations are consonant with a meaning of πληρῶ that denotes the culmination of salvation history in the arrival of Jesus and the kingdom he brings.

- In 5:18 both sides of 5:17 are affirmed. Jesus has not come to abolish the Law (5:17a); hence no part of the Law will pass away (5:18bc). But Jesus has come to 'fulfil' the Law (5:17b); hence, as the clause in 18d suggests, the validity of the Law should be understood in light of its fulfilment. The Law remains; but it is to be viewed in light of the arrival of the one to whom it pointed.
- In 5:19 Jesus states that, as a result of the enduring nature of the Law, disciples are both to keep it and to teach others to do the same. When compared with 28:20 we see that disciples are not to teach merely the Law but everything Jesus commanded them. Disciples are to uphold the Law in its 'fulfilled' sense: by obeying and teaching others to obey Jesus, the one to whom the Law pointed. Furthermore, the focus on the βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν reminds us of the broader context in which Jesus announces the dawn of God's eschatological rule. This sheds light on the difficulty of relating verse 17 to verses 18-19. The Law and the Prophets anticipated the arrival of Jesus and the kingdom. The arrival of the kingdom does not mean the cessation of the Law, but it does mean that what was pointed to has (partly) arrived. Because the kingdom is here the Law needs to be seen through the lenses of fulfilment. Yet because the kingdom has not yet come in full, disciples must continue to live and teach the Law. This 'already' but 'not yet' understanding of the kingdom helps us to make sense of the relationship between the Law's fulfilment and its continuance.
- In 5:20 Jesus explains the 'greater righteousness' God requires of his followers in light of the fulfilment Jesus brings by inaugurating God's kingdom. This righteousness is not achieved merely by keeping the details of the Law, but by obeying Jesus, the one to whom the Law and the Prophets point. God's will is

revealed most authoritatively in the teachings of Jesus; hence it is by obedience to him that greater righteousness is obtained (5:20) and the Law is fulfilled (5:17).²⁰⁵

- In short, the immediate and broader contexts point compellingly towards a prophetic or eschatological understanding of πληρώω in Matthew 5:17. Specifically, mention of the βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν three times in this passage brings to mind a broader focus on the inauguration of God's kingdom in the ministry of Jesus (4:17). The weight of this consideration has not been adequately applied to the question of the nature of πληρώω in this pericope.

While these exegetical considerations give much weight to a 'salvation-historical' reading of πληρώω in Matthew's Gospel, it remains to examine further the relationship between the kingdom of heaven in this pericope and a broader biblical theology of the kingdom of God. This will be the task of chapter 5. It is my contention that the reading of πληρώω outlined in this chapter may be further ratified when theological considerations are brought to bear on this passage.

²⁰⁵ It should also be noted that the passage addresses both antinomian (5:17-19) and legalistic (5:20) concerns (cf. Davies & Allison, 1988:500; France, 2007:191).

CHAPTER 5: THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF MATTHEW 5:17-20

5.1 Introduction

In chapter 1 the method outlined for tackling the riddle of Matthew 5:17 included both exegetical and theological analysis.²⁰⁶ The latter is the task of this chapter. In recent years there has been a significant call in the field of biblical interpretation to interpret Scripture *theologically*. The call is for the rediscovery of doctrine, the rule of truth, especially as received historically through the Church Fathers and the Creeds, when approaching the text. Reno (2006:10) is illustrative of this call:

“Irenaeus²⁰⁷ assumes that there is a body of apostolic doctrine sustained by a tradition of teaching in the church. This doctrine provides the clarifying principles that guide exegetical judgment toward a coherent overall reading of Scripture as a unified witness. Doctrine, then, is the schematic drawing that will allow the reader to organize the vast heterogeneity of the words, images, and stories of the Bible into a readable, coherent whole. It is the rule that guides us toward the proper matching of keys to doors.”

This position has become known as the *Theological Interpretation of Scripture*. It has sought to exert influence through means such as the *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Vanhoozer, ed. 2005), the *Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible*²⁰⁸, and the *Journal of Theological Interpretation*. Francis Watson (1994:vii) articulates the agenda of this movement when he says that “biblical interpretation should concern itself primarily with the theological issues raised by the biblical texts within our contemporary ecclesial, cultural and socio-political contexts” (cf. Treier, 2008²⁰⁹; Fowl, 2009²¹⁰). The point here is not to

²⁰⁶ This chapter employs the term ‘theological analysis’ to denote the bearing of central theological themes – in this chapter’s case ‘the Kingdom of God’ – on the passage at hand. We are considering the weight of this ‘biblical-theological’ theme on the meaning of πληρώ.

²⁰⁷ Reno is referring to Irenaeus’ statement that “anyone who keeps unchangeable in himself the rule of truth received through baptism will recognize the names and sayings and parables of the scriptures” (*Against the Heretics* 9.4).

²⁰⁸ “The Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible advances upon the assumption that the Nicene tradition, in all its diversity and controversy, provides the proper basis for the interpretation of the Bible as Christian Scripture” (Reno, 2006:12).

²⁰⁹ Treier (2008:11-36) outlines the story of this movement from Barth to the present.

²¹⁰ “The past twenty years or so have witnessed the explosion of scholarly writing devoted to the theological interpretation of Scripture” (2009:ix).

discuss *Theological Interpretation of Scripture* thoroughly, nor to employ its methodology,²¹¹ nor to offer a critique.²¹² I wish rather to point out that *Theological Interpretation of Scripture* is one avenue in which present hermeneutics discussions have sought to recover the role of theology in the interpretive process (cf. Westphal, 2012:70ff; Watson, 1994:vii).

But *Theological Interpretation of Scripture* is only one avenue in which ‘biblical theology’ has been employed.²¹³ The ‘theological analysis’ this chapter attempts employs the tools of a somewhat nuanced ‘biblical theology’, the definition of which we will discuss below. What insight might ‘biblical theology’ yield for our interpretation of πληρώ in Matthew 5:17? We must discuss (1) what we mean by ‘biblical theology’ and how one goes about it; (2) the ‘kingdom of God’ as a key way of expressing the theology, or the “storyline”, of Scripture; and (3) how tracing this “storyline” may apply to the present project.

5.2 Biblical Theology: Definition and Method

Space forbids a thorough discussion of precisely what is meant by ‘biblical theology’ – a topic which has in any case been dealt with extensively elsewhere.²¹⁴ Here we need only define what we mean by ‘biblical theology’ and how we will use this interpretive method to shed further light on Matthew 5:17.

Defining biblical theology is a perennial problem²¹⁵ (cf. Barr, 1999:1-17²¹⁶). A large part of the problem consists in the various schools that have over the past century or so labelled their tasks as ‘biblical theology’. Klink III and Lockett (2012) have surveyed the various ways in

²¹¹ On the methodology of *Theological Interpretation of Scripture* cf. Klink III & Lockett (2012:158ff); Treier (2008:23ff); Reno (2006:13).

²¹² For critiques cf. Carson (2011:187-207); Poirier (2010:107ff): “The label ‘theological interpretation’ has been used recently as a technical term to denote a certain approach to Scripture. This development is most unfortunate, not least because it implies that other approaches, especially historical criticism, cannot be equally theological in focus.”

²¹³ On the relationship between ‘biblical theology’ and ‘theological interpretation of scripture’ cf. Treier (2008:16-31); Klink III & Lockett (2012:157ff).

²¹⁴ Cf. Bartholomew (2005); Köstenberger (2012); Klink III & Lockett (2012); Beale (2011:1-15); Gentry & Wellum (2012:27-34); Scobie (2003:3ff); Carson (2000:89-104); Rosner (2000:3-11).

²¹⁵ The standard starting point is Gabler’s inaugural address *On the Proper Distinction Between Biblical and Dogmatic Theology and the Specific objectives of each* given in 1787 (in Sandys-Wunsch & Eldredge, 1980:133-144). For a modern discussion on the distinction between biblical and systematic theology cf. Carson (2000:89-104). For the history of biblical theology cf. Scobie (2000:11-20).

²¹⁶ “One of [biblical theology’s] weaknesses has been defining exactly what it is. The very idea of ‘biblical theology’ seems to hang uncertainly in the middle air, somewhere between actual exegesis and systematic theology” (Barr, 1999:2).

which biblical theology has been understood. By outlining five schools and their practitioners on the axes of 'history' and 'theology', they (2012:183) seek to "offer a degree of substance and clarity concerning the elusive idea of 'biblical theology.'" The five main understandings they discuss are:

1. Biblical theology as historical description (2012:29-56)
2. Biblical theology as history of redemption (2012:59-89)
3. Biblical theology as worldview-story (2012:93-122)
4. Biblical theology as canonical approach (2012:125-153)
5. Biblical theology as theological construction (2012:157-182)²¹⁷

The difficulty in precisely defining 'biblical theology' is seen in that, even after writing a book on *Understanding Biblical Theology*, Klink III and Lockett (2012:183) refuse to offer a definition.²¹⁸ Carson (2000:89) explains the reason for the reticence: "various scholarly camps operate with highly divergent definitions of [biblical theology], and therefore also entertain assumptions and adopt methods that cannot be reconciled with those of other scholarly camps." He (2000:90) adds: "the history of biblical theology is extraordinarily diverse. Everyone does that which is right in his or her own eyes, and calls it biblical theology."

Nonetheless, the term is not beyond definition. At the very least "Biblical theology is concerned to describe the inner unity of the Bible on its own terms" (Bartholomew, 2005:86). The subtitle of a recent volume of essays on biblical theology (Hafemann & House, 2007) helpfully summarizes its main tenet: "Mapping unity in diversity". The method of biblical theology employed in this chapter will closely align with both the second and third categories above: "biblical theology as history of redemption" and "biblical theology as worldview-story". These approaches seek to understand the thematic and eschatological connections between the parts of Scripture and the whole. We will follow the understanding of 'biblical theology' as set out by Rosner (2000:3-11) in the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. "Biblical theology," argues Rosner (2000:3), "is principally concerned with the overall theological message of the whole Bible." Biblical theology seeks to understand the relationship between the various parts of the Bible and the whole. In order to accomplish this, the literary, historical, and

²¹⁷ A helpful summary chart of the views and their respective methods is provided on pp. 186-189.

²¹⁸ "Defining biblical theology is notoriously difficult... Though bearing the title *Understanding Biblical Theology*, this book is not an answer to the problem of defining 'biblical theology.'"

theological dimensions of the various parts must be understood in relation to the whole canon. Utilizing the analogy of a construction site, Rosner (2000:5ff) outlines something of the methodological procedure employed by this understanding of biblical theology:

1. The tools of biblical theology are analysis and synthesis.
2. These tools are applied to both biblical concepts and biblical words.
3. The purpose is to construct a “whole-Bible” biblical theology, that is, a theology that spans across the entirety of the canon.
4. This is done whilst closely adhering to “the blueprint of the Bible’s ‘storyline’”.
5. The structure must be Christ-centred.

After briefly discussing these various components, Rosner (2000:10) is prepared to offer his definition of biblical theology, which brings them all together:

“Biblical theology may be defined as theological interpretation of scripture in and for the Church. It proceeds with historical and literary sensitivity and seeks to analyse and synthesize the Bible's teaching about God and his relations to the world on its own terms, maintaining sight of the Bible's overarching narrative and Christocentric focus.”

This largely follows the second sense listed above, “Biblical theology as history of redemption.” It does not, however, preclude the third sense, with its focus on “story.” Beale (2011:15, 161ff) brings together senses two and three, above, when he constructs his *New Testament Biblical Theology* not by attempting to locate a “central theme” but by delineating a “storyline” which, he argues, “reflects a unified story yet contains multiple themes that are incased in a narrativ canonical plotline.” Employing a method similar to that of Wright (1992:79), Beale (2011:161ff) maps out the complex balance between history and theology on the axis of “storyline”. He (2011:182) defines the content of this storyline as follows:

“Jesus’ life, trials, death for sinners, and especially resurrection by the Spirit have launched the fulfilment of the eschatological already-not yet new-creational reign, bestowed by grace through faith and resulting in worldwide commission to the faithful to advance this new-creational reign and resulting in judgment for the unbelieving, unto the triune God’s glory.”

Placing this “storyline” into the Jewish hope sketched in chapter 3 of the present dissertation provides us with a ‘biblical theology’ that traces the story of God’s “new-creational reign”

from its inception in the Old Testament through to its fulfilment in the New Testament in Christ and the kingdom he inaugurates. This chapter asserts that ‘to fulfil’ in Matthew 5:17 must be understood in light of the larger plot of ‘fulfilment’, as outlined by ‘biblical theology’, and as argued by, for example, Wright (1996), Bartholomew and Goheen (2004), and Beale (2011). When we apply ‘biblical theology’, therefore, we are seeking to ascertain what bearing this storyline has on the particular passage we are interpreting, as well as how that passage in turn contributes to the overarching storyline. Stated in terms relating to the question addressed by this dissertation, then, what bearing does the Bible’s “storyline” have on the sense of πληρώω in Matthew 5:17? Before we can discuss this, however, we must further examine the nature of this “storyline”, seeking to establish of what precisely it consists.

5.2.1 The Kingdom of God and Biblical Theology

There have been few attempts to write out a full theology of the Bible in recent years. While many reasons may be cited to account for this,²¹⁹ two stand out in particular, one relating to modernity and one to postmodernity. First, Bartholomew (2005:86) has pointed out that “the growing sense of the diversity of Scripture in modernity... militate[s] against the flourishing of biblical theologies of the Bible as a whole.” The frequent call of the historical-critical school has been to treat each part in its own right, and not to collapse the diverse contributions of the various biblical authors into one particular mould. The diversity of Scripture, then, has led many to discount the possibility of biblical theology (cf. Levenson, 1993:51ff). Second, postmodernists²²⁰ criticized particularly the ‘biblical-theological movement’²²¹ for its ‘modernist’ epistemology (Carson, 2000:99). Biblical theology, then, in so far as it is undergirded by modernist exegesis, fails to account for “theological diversity within the biblical texts” (Jeanrond, 1998:245f). Nonetheless, there have been several attempts to construe the theological thrust of the Scriptures as a whole. Recent years have seen not only the flourishing of Old and New Testament theologies, but also some attempts to construe the theology of the entire canon. Brevard Childs’ *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (1992) and Charles Scobie’s *Ways of our God* (2003) are two of the more notable attempts.

²¹⁹ Barr (1999:222ff) lists six types of “opposition to biblical theology” (cf. Balla, 2000:20-27).

²²⁰ Although postmodernism is difficult to define, it generally critiques Enlightenment epistemology, rejecting rationalistic approaches (Carson, 2000:98).

²²¹ For a succinct summary of the ‘Biblical Theology Movement’ see Bartholomew (2005:86-88).

Within Klink III and Locket's second and third types of biblical theology – biblical theology as history of redemption and biblical theology as worldview-story – much attention has been paid in particular to the concept of 'the kingdom of God' as a theme that provides a measure of unity to the Christian Scriptures. This has been evident in several works. Goldsworthy (2012:75), for instance, refers to the kingdom of God as the central theme in Scripture.²²² Scobie (2003:106) also refers to the kingdom of God as "a central biblical theme". Bartholomew and Goheen (2004:24f) structure their *Drama of Scripture* around the idea of 'kingdom'.²²³ Similarly, Gentry and Wellum (2012:24) have proposed "kingdom through covenant" as the central concept in mapping the narrative structure of Scripture. Yarbrough (2012:100) has recently written: "we could conceivably array all of biblical theology along an axis entitled 'kingdom of God'."

Is such a framework for conceptualizing the theology of the Bible justifiable? Although not mentioned explicitly in the Old Testament,²²⁴ the kingdom of God has been increasingly recognised as a way of conceptualizing the Old Testament's theology that maintains diversity whilst providing a measure of unity. The case for the prominence of the kingdom of God in the Old Testament, at the very least the expectation of God's coming reign, has been well established elsewhere, making it superfluous to repeat the arguments here (cf. Bright, 1951; Beasley-Murray, 1986:17ff; Patrick, 1987:67ff; Goldsworthy, 1981:54ff; 2000:618f; Ladd, 1993:42ff; Fuellenbach, 1995:27ff; Waltke, 2007:143ff; 2012:49ff). We can therefore limit ourselves to several observations pertinent to the present project.

According to Patrick (1987:67), the "kingdom of God", previously well established as an "apt and well-grounded summation of OT theology", has been "eclipsed in current scholarship" due to the fear of imposing categories on the text. Patrick proposes to "fashion a model of synthetic concepts" with a view to reconsidering this trend. Against the tendency to reject synthetic approaches to the Old Testament, Patrick (1987:69) argues (1) that the canon presupposes some form of unified theological message, and (2) that it is possible to identify an idea even without the specific expression being present. He ultimately proposes that the kingdom of God "constitutes a scheme fitting to a significant portion of the OT text [that]

²²² "I stand by my initial suggestion that the central theme of Scripture is the kingdom of God defined simply as God's people in God's place under God's rule" (Goldsworthy, 2012:75).

²²³ Cf. Goldsworthy's (2012:97) critique.

²²⁴ This is the case only for Protestants. Fuellenbach (1995:25) points out that the phrase appears in the deuterocanonical book of Wisdom 10:10.

provides a unifying conception or common underlying theology for that portion.” Patrick (1987:70) begins by examining the concept of the kingdom of God in the Synoptic Gospels, showing, firstly, that the expression constitutes a heuristic scheme for understanding God’s purposes in history, and secondly, that the expression denotes God’s coming intervention “to redeem his people and pacify the world” (1987:71). In a point often made (cf. Bright, 1951:11; Fuellenbach, 1995:25; Wright, 1996:224²²⁵), Patrick (1987:72) points out that when Jesus used the phrase “kingdom of God” his hearers were familiar with the concept. He shows, furthermore, that the Old Testament antecedents are sufficient to justify Jesus’ use of the term, as well as that the Old Testament expressions denote roughly similar terrain to the expression “kingdom of God” as used by Jesus in the New Testament. Patrick (1987:76ff), however, does not fail to distinguish between Jesus’ concept of the kingdom of God and the Old Testament concept of divine sovereignty. Jesus’ kingdom, he (1987:79) argues, is eschatological and universal, while the language of the Old Testament is historical and focused on a particular nation. Patrick’s essay suffices to illustrate the continuity between the Old Testament concept of God’s sovereign rule and the New Testament proclamation of the kingdom of God – apparently so familiar to Jesus’ audience.

As part of his grand scale project to place Jesus properly in his Jewish milieu, Wright (1996:150) argues that Jesus is best described as “a prophet bearing an urgent eschatological,²²⁶ and indeed apocalyptic,²²⁷ message for Israel.” Wright is referring to the message of the “kingdom of god.” In chapter 3 we outlined Wright’s (1992:302) understanding of the kingdom of God as the concept which best expresses the Jewish hope that God would become King; his summary is worth quoting again here:

“This complex concept picks up and joins together the whole social, political, cultural and economic aspiration of the Jews of this period, and invests it with the religious and theological dimension which, of course, it always possessed in mainline Jewish thinking” (1992:303).

²²⁵ “The *story* which can be evoked by the phrase ‘kingdom of god’ may well be present even though the phrase itself is absent.”

²²⁶ Wright (1996:208) defines “eschatology” as “the climax of Israel’s history, involving events for which end-of-the-world language is the only set of metaphors adequate to express the significance of what will happen, but resulting in a new and quite different phase *within* space-time history.”

²²⁷ Wright’s understanding of the ‘apocalyptic’ genre is set out in his earlier work (1992:280-299): “Literature, history and theology combine to suggest strongly that we must read most apocalyptic literature, both Jewish and Christian, as a complex metaphor-system which invests space-time reality with its full, that is, its theological, significance.”

In *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Wright (1996:151) places Jesus and his message into this context: “anyone who was heard talking about the reign of Israel’s god would be assumed to be referring to the fulfilment of Israel’s long-held hope.” Wright (1996:198f) argues that what is often understood as Jesus’ ‘teaching’ should be characterized in terms of the story of the ‘kingdom of God’. He (1996:199ff), successfully in my view, demonstrates that when Jesus spoke of the ‘reign’ or ‘kingdom’ of God “he was deliberately evoking an entire storyline that he and his hearers knew quite well.” What does this storyline look like?

“Jesus was announcing that the long-awaited kingdom of Israel’s god was indeed coming to birth, but that it did not look like what had been imagined. The return from exile, the defeat of evil, and the return of YHWH to Zion were all coming about, but not in the way Israel has supposed” (1996:201).

Wright argues this and related points at length across part 2 of his work. It is sufficient for now is to note that the phrase ‘kingdom of God’ evokes a story, the story of Israel and her hopes.²²⁸ When, then, we read of ‘fulfilment’ – especially in the context of ‘kingdom’ – it is this story, this hope, which should be brought to mind. But this is to anticipate the next section of this chapter.

Other branches of Christendom have also taken cognizance of the role of the kingdom of God in sketching the biblical trajectory. Writing from a Roman Catholic perspective, Fuellenbach (1995:25) notes the way in which God’s sovereignty, which underlies the concept of the kingdom of God, finds its roots in the Old Testament. Following Patrick, he (1995:25) states,

“Many scholars employ the notion [of the kingdom of God] as a comprehensive theologumenon, as a heuristic scheme devised to synthesize the manifold texts of the Old Testament. Such a scheme can be comprehensive and synthetic without being exclusive... Jesus seemed to have raised the phrase *Kingdom of God* to the level of a heuristic scheme for understanding God’s purpose in human affairs.”

²²⁸ This is in keeping with Ladd (1993:45f): “When Jesus proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom of God, he did so against the background of Hebrew-Jewish thought, which viewed people living in a situation dominated by sin, evil, and death, from which they needed to be rescued. His proclamation of the Kingdom includes the hope, reaching back to the Old Testament prophets, that anticipates a new age in which all the evils of the present age will be purged by the act of God from human and earthly existence.”

Fuellenbach explores the background of the symbol²²⁹ of the kingdom of God under three expectations: (1) national-political (1995:27-41); (2) apocalyptic (1995:42-47); and (3) ethical (1995:48-50). His conclusion (1995:53) is important for our present argument:

“The symbol ‘Kingdom of God,’ therefore, was known to the audience that Jesus addressed... In the latest period of Old Testament thought the idea of the Kingdom of God had developed to the point where it could carry the full weight of being a great arch extending from the first chapters of the Bible to the last. Under it, all other elements and stories must find their place.”

Evangelical scholarship has also paid much attention to the prominence of this theme in recent years. Goldsworthy (1981:54ff), for instance, has argued that as early as Eden²³⁰ the theme of God’s kingdom is at play:

“We first see the Kingdom of God in the Garden of Eden. Here Adam and Eve live in willing obedience to the word of God and God’s rule. In this setting, the Kingdom is destroyed by the sin of man – and the rest of the Bible is about the restoration of a people to be the willing subjects of the perfect rule of God.”²³¹

Waltke (2007:144) refers to the coming²³² of God’s kingship as the concept which “best accommodates all of the blocks of writing in the Old Testament.” He argues at length (2007:144-169) to establish the following claim:

“The center of the Old Testament, the message that accommodates all its themes, is that Israel’s sublime God... glorifies himself by establishing his universal rule.”

²²⁹ On the language of the Kingdom as “symbol” as opposed to “concept” see Perrin (1976); cf. Farmer, 1987:120ff.

²³⁰ Goldsworthy (1981:54) is unfazed by the absence of the phrase “Kingdom of God” in the Old Testament because, he asserts, if the Kingdom of God is defined under the concepts of “God’s people” living in “God’s place” and experiencing “God’s rule”, “the basic idea is woven through the whole of scripture.” The rest of his book seeks to establish this claim.

²³¹ More recently, Goldsworthy (2012:218) has written: “The theme of the *kingdom of God* is a fruitful one to pursue throughout the whole of Scripture even though the actual term is found mainly in the Synoptic Gospels. The theological idea of God’s rule is everywhere in Scripture and is not confined to any one word or phrase” (cf. Rosner, 2000:9).

²³² He uses the word “irruption” (2007:144).

Waltke (2007:147) further calls this concept a “universal that embraces all the biblical text.” More recently, Beale (2011:19) sums up his survey of the Old Testament storyline along similar lines:

“The Old Testament is the story of God, who progressively re-establishes his new-creational kingdom out of chaos over a sinful people by his word and Spirit through promise, covenant, and redemption, resulting in worldwide commission to the faithful to advance this kingdom...”

The literature focused on the kingdom of God in the New Testament, particularly the Synoptic Gospels, is far too voluminous even to attempt a summary here. We can merely note the virtual consensus that the proclamation of the kingdom of God was at the centre of Jesus’ ministry (cf. Jeremias, 1971:96; Beasley-Murray, 1986:71ff; Farmer, 1987:126; Hagner, 2000:127; Hannan, 2006:1; Yarbrough, 2012:95ff; Green, 2013:468). Ladd (1993:54) is representative: “Modern scholarship is quite unanimous in the opinion that the kingdom of God was the central message of Jesus.” Ridderbos (1962:xi) declared that “in Jesus Christ’s proclamation of the kingdom we are face to face with the specific form of expression of the whole of his revelation of God.” The main divisions of Hagner’s recent *The New Testament: A Historical and Theological Introduction* (2012:xi, 68ff) are structured around the concept of the kingdom of God. Hagner sees his understanding of the New Testament within the framework of salvation history as “a distinguishing mark of the present book.” Furthermore, it has been pointed out that this concept is also present in the Pauline epistles, which Hagner (2012:343ff) entitles “The interpretation of the kingdom.”²³³

We see, therefore, that attention has been paid to the concept of the centrality of the kingdom of God by a variety of ecclesiastical traditions, including mainline scholarship (cf. Patrick, 1987; Wright, 1996), Roman Catholicism (cf. Fuellenbach, 1995), and evangelicalism (cf. Waltke, 2007; Beale, 2011; Goldsworthy, 2012). In sum, there is sufficient evidence to substantiate Bright’s (1953:10) claim made over half a century ago:

²³³ The subject of Paul and the Kingdom of God is beyond the scope of this essay. Cf. Kreitzer (1993:526): “While the explicit expression ‘kingdom of God/Christ’ is not widespread within the Pauline letters, the idea is a fundamental component of Paul’s eschatological perspective and underlies the whole of his teaching” (cf. also Donfried, 1987:175ff; Vickers, 2008:53ff; Ladd, 1993:45).

“While the complexity of the Bible is by no means to be minimized, there nevertheless runs through it a unifying theme which is not artificially imposed. It is a theme of redemption, of salvation; and it is caught up particularly in those concepts which revolve around the people of God, called to live under his rule, and the concomitant hope of the coming kingdom of God.”

Rather than laying out the case again for the prominence of the kingdom of God in the Old Testament, or sketching a fully orbited biblical theology of the kingdom, I wish to draw upon these well-established studies in order to substantiate the claim that there is a basic “storyline” along which Scripture can be traced, and which provides the backdrop of Jesus’ announcement that God’s kingdom has come. The concept of the ‘kingdom of God’ summarizes helpfully the nature of this “storyline” in which God’s people awaited a decisive action from God to liberate them from their oppressors. It therefore provides a clear link between the Testaments, placing Jesus’ announcement in the context of the hope of Israel. Admittedly, not everyone would refer to the above as ‘biblical theology’, but tracing this ‘theme’ or ‘storyline’ from the Old Testament into the New is consistent with ‘biblical theology’ as delineated in Klink III and Lockett’s second and third senses.²³⁴ This follows Bartholomew and Goheen (2004:12) in seeing the Bible as “a unified and progressively unfolding drama of God’s action in history for the salvation of the whole world.” What a (biblical) theology of the kingdom of God gives us, then, is a conceptual link between Jesus’ announcement of the arrival of God’s kingdom and the milieu in which that announcement occurred. We are provided with something of an overarching ‘metanarrative’ that finds the kingdom of God as a central theme; or an articulation of an Old Testament trajectory that finds fulfilment in New Testament eschatology.²³⁵

In this section we have argued that the kingdom of God is a central motif in the Christian canon; in chapter 3 we argued that the kingdom of God/heaven is a, if not the, central motif in Matthew’s theology. Matthew’s presentation of Jesus is couched in terms of ‘fulfilling’ the Old Testament hope, which might be defined in the request “your kingdom come” (cf.

²³⁴ Biblical theology as history of redemption (2012:59ff) and biblical theology as worldview-story (2012:93). There is some overlap in the senses of “theme” and “story” respectively.

²³⁵ According to Allison (1992:206), “perhaps the pre-eminent contribution of modern NT scholarship has been the demonstration that eschatology lies at the heart of Jesus’ message and indeed at the heart of all the NT.” Cf. Beale (2011:17): “NT research over past decades has made great strides in increasing our understanding that the beginning of Christian history was perceived by the first Christians as the beginning of the end times but not their consummation.”

Waltke, 2007:145; Wright, 1992:302f). How, then, might we bring these two overarching motifs to bear on Matthew 5:17?

5.3 The Bearing of a Theology of the Kingdom on Matthew 5:17

Having established a 'kingdom context' both in Matthew's Gospel²³⁶ (chapter 3) and in Scripture's "storyline" (above), we must now ask how this theological consideration helps us make sense of πληρώω in Matthew 5:17. Here I wish to argue that, given Matthew's desire to show that in Jesus the Scriptures have found their fulfilment – he is the one to whom they point – and given that the Scriptures point to the arrival of the kingdom of God, our concept of 'fulfilment' should be construed by this overarching motif. By saying that 'fulfil' means the coming into being of that to which the Law and the Prophets pointed, we are speaking of the arrival of God's kingdom. Such an understanding of πληρώω in Matthew 5:17 has the benefit of placing this pericope not only in the context of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and the context of Matthew's Gospel as a whole, but within the context of the sweep of Scripture's grand narrative. Essentially, what we are proposing is that the many studies which point to the prominence of the kingdom motif in Scripture be brought to bear on our interpretation of Matthew 5:17. If we take πληρώω to mean – as we argued in the previous chapter – that what was anticipated in the Old Testament Law and Prophets has now been realized in Jesus' teachings and ministry, in light of the foregoing argument we can add a measure of precision to what this means. Instead of referring vaguely to the content of 'fulfilment' as "Jesus' teaching", or "Jesus' ministry", a biblical-theological interpretation which considers the weight of the Old Testament expectation may lead us instead to construe the content of this fulfilment as the arrival of the kingdom of God, which Jesus proclaims and inaugurates. This would then bypass discussions over whether it is Jesus' life or teachings which are in focus, for the kingdom of heaven includes both.

Some further considerations may also support such a 'kingdom reading' of these verses.

5.3.1 The Kingdom of God/Heaven in the Sermon on the Mount

The kingdom of heaven is a theme central to the Sermon on the Mount, which is "a prescription for the distinctive life of those who are under the rule of God" (France,

²³⁶ "The central emphasis of Matthew is found in what is designated as the 'gospel of the kingdom,' the good news that the reign or rule of God has begun to be realized in history through the presence of Jesus Christ" (Hagner, 2012:201).

1989:164). It is curious that several of the Sermon's major treatments lack explicit discussion of its focus on God's kingdom.²³⁷ This possibly results from treating the Sermon in isolation from the rest of Matthew's Gospel.²³⁸ Hagner (1993:83), however, brings out its centrality:

“An adequate understanding of the sermon is... hardly possible apart from the context of the Gospel and the proclamation of the good news of the now dawning kingdom of God.”

Yarbrough (2012:113) also captures the centrality of the kingdom in the sermon:

“It is fair to say that the Sermon on the Mount in its entire sweep is suspended on a kingdom cord. Jesus' kingdom orientation does not diminish as he moves from the Beatitudes to subsequent divisions of this rightly hallowed discourse.”

There is good evidence that Yarbrough has not overstated the case²³⁹ (cf. Hannan, 2006:43ff; Westerholm, 1992:44-47; Blomberg, 2009:286f). God's kingdom is mentioned explicitly eight times throughout the Sermon (5:3, 10, 19 [x2], 20; 6:10, 33; 7:21). Several factors suggest the prominence of this motif (Yarbrough, 2012:113ff). First, the Beatitudes (5:3-12) are bookended by references to the kingdom, illustrating that those who possess these characteristics will²⁴⁰ share in life under God's reign (cf. Davies & Allison, 1988:445; Beasley-Murray, 1986:157-169). Second, as shown above, the passage upon which this dissertation is focused makes three mentions of God's βασιλεία (5:19bd, 20), illustrating that one's standing (v. 19) and even entry into (v. 20) God's kingdom are still in view. This fits with the overall thrust of the passage. Since Jesus upholds the Law, disciples are not allowed to teach its relaxation. Doing so would result in their being denied entry into God's kingdom, “the very thing their master is announcing and inviting them to accept” (Yarbrough, 2012:113). Third, a request central to the Lord's Prayer (6:9-13) is the request ἐλθέτω ἡ

²³⁷ For instance, Guelich (1982); Strecker (1988); Allison (1999); Talbert (2004); Vaught (2001).

²³⁸ Stanton (1992:739, 744) notes the tendency in Matthean scholarship across the latter half of the twentieth century to treat the Sermon in isolation from the rest of Matthew's Gospel.

²³⁹ According to Hannan (2006:4): “the author's meticulous concern for composition and structure, particularly the ordering of his text around the five or more great discourses in which he details Jesus' teaching on God's βασιλεία to his disciples and the crowds, has long been recognized.”

²⁴⁰ The fact that 5:3b and 5:10b use the present tense (ἐσιν) instead of the future, as in the rest of the Beatitudes, probably signals the present inauguration of the Kingdom (cf. 4:17; Turner, 2008:150); but it probably also makes use of the proleptic present, expressing confidence in a future verdict (Davies & Allison, 1988:446).

βασιλεία σου (v. 10), in which the eschatological reign of God is requested (cf. Beasley-Murray, 1986:147-157; Jeremias, 1971:100; van Aarde, 2011). Fourth, the kingdom of God is also central in terms of priority, as can be seen in 6:33, where disciples are exhorted, ζητεῖτε δὲ πρῶτον τὴν βασιλείαν.²⁴¹ The reign of God is to be the ultimate priority of the disciples. Fifth, entry into the kingdom is again the focus in 7:21, where Jesus makes it clear that only those who do God's will are guaranteed entry into it. The kingdom is therefore central to the Sermon's climax (Yarbrough, 2012:114). Finally, this kingdom emphasis must certainly have played a part in the crowd's astonishment as recorded in 7:28f. Jesus speaks with the authority of a ruler:

“He cast the entirety of human existence under the jurisdiction and eschatological verdict of himself as the gatekeeper of his domain” (Yarbrough, 2012:115; cf. France, 2007:299).

The centrality of the concept of the kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount in general must be brought to bear on the interpretation of the beginning of its main body. When this is done we see that ‘fulfilment’ ought to be construed in light of the reign of God that Jesus has inaugurated. Isolating πληρῶν from the context of βασιλεία results in much confusion in determining its nature.

5.3.2 The Salvation-Historical focus of Luke 16:16

Second, we must consider Luke 16:16²⁴², which is listed beside Matthew 5:17 in Aland's (1976:78) *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum* despite the fact that Davies and Allison (1988:482) believe 5:17 to have no parallel in Mark or Luke. Keener (2009:175) lists Luke 16:16f as a cross-reference but adds no comments, while most commentators are silent on the relationship between these two passages. Carson (1984:144) implies a relationship between the two passages by citing Luke 16:16-17 as evidence that Jesus is not setting aside the authority of the Old Testament.²⁴³ Moo (1984:23) considers this passage a “partial Lukan parallel” in which “Jesus clearly announces a fundamental shift in Salvation-history.” Jesus is not here announcing the termination of the Law, but referring to the fact that “the

²⁴¹ The addition of τοῦ θεοῦ is disputed.

²⁴² Ὁ νόμος καὶ οἱ προφῆται μέχρι Ἰωάννου· ἀπὸ τότε ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ εὐαγγελίζεται. Bock (1996:1350) refers to this verse as “an exegetical minefield in Lucan studies” because of the way it appears to divide God's plan into distinct periods.

²⁴³ Because it would make no sense of Luke 16:17.

period during which men related to God under its terms ceased with John” (Moo, 1984:23; cf. Bock, 1996:1354ff).

This reticence to comment on the relationship between these two passages relates somewhat to which hypothesis one adopts regarding the ‘synoptic problem’.²⁴⁴ Whatever their literary relationship, and especially if Matthew and Luke drew from a common tradition, it is evident that in Luke’s saying the time period of the Law and the Prophets has run its course on account of the preaching of the good news of the kingdom of God (so Bock, 1996:1356). Luke, then, sees salvation-history as climaxing with the arrival of the kingdom of God. The parallels between these two passages²⁴⁵ are evident:

Matthew 5:17-19	Luke 16:16-17
τὸν νόμον ἢ τοὺς προφῆτας (17a)	Ὁ νόμος καὶ οἱ προφῆται (16a)
ἕως ἂν παρέλθῃ ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ, ἰῶτα ἓν ἢ μία κεραία οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου (18b)	εὐκοπώτερον δὲ ἔστιν τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν παρελθεῖν ἢ τοῦ νόμου μίαν κεραίαν πτεσεῖν (17)
τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν (19bd)	ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ (16b)

Some additional factors are indicative of their correspondence. First, these two passages contain the only occurrences of κεραία in the New Testament. Second, the only connections between νόμος and βασιλεία in the Gospels occur in these two passages and Matthew 11:11-13 – the latter being the other Matthean parallel to Luke 16:16-17.

What does this suggest? We have already seen the link between Matthew 5:17 and 11:13 indicating a ‘prophetic’ sense to the fulfilment we read of in the former. We see here that

²⁴⁴ Luke could here be borrowing from Matthew, Matthew from Luke, or they could both be drawing from a common source (Q?). On this issue cf. Stanton (1992:28-41), who argues that the two-source hypothesis still makes the best sense of the data. Bock (1996:1352) briefly discusses the relationship between Matt. 11:12-13 and Luke 16:16; given the differences, he suggests, Matthew and Luke most likely drew from distinct sources for distinct settings.

²⁴⁵ Bovon (2013:465) is more interested in the differences: “Unlike Matthew, who takes as his starting point the kingdom and then works back to the Law and the Prophets, Luke offers us a chronological order corresponding to his theological vision of history.” Our point, however, is only to note the respective focus on salvation-history in the two passages.

there are several connections between Matthew 5:17-19 and Luke 16:16-17. These parallels indicate that the Lucan passage may shed some light on the Matthean. When considering the possible senses in which πληρώ could be understood, the links with the Lucan passage suggest that it should be taken in a salvation-historical sense. What the Law and the Prophets pointed to – namely the coming kingdom of God – has arrived in Jesus and can now therefore no longer be seen in precisely the same light.

It suggests further that ‘fulfilment’ and ‘kingdom’ should be conceptualized together. When they are we may understand fulfilment in terms of the eschatological arrival of God’s promised reign. This ‘salvation-historical’ reading of fulfilment enables us to avoid both a wooden adherence to and an antinomian dismissal of the Law. ‘Fulfilment’ speaks of the sum total of all that the Law anticipated: God’s kingdom, now inaugurated by God’s King.

5.3.3 References to the Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew 5:19, 20

In chapter 4 we noted that little attention has been paid to the bearing of τῆ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν in 5:19f on 5:17.²⁴⁶ This is all the more striking in light of its prominence in Matthew’s Gospel, and most particularly in the Sermon on the Mount itself. If the theme of the kingdom of heaven permeates Matthew’s Gospel,²⁴⁷ and makes up the heartbeat of the Sermon on the Mount, its presence in 5:17-20 suggests that significant exegetical attention be paid to its bearing on the discussion of πληρώ. It is to this point that I propose the discussion be advanced. Given the fact that πληρώ in Matthew has such frequent ‘prophetic’ or ‘salvation-historical’ overtones,²⁴⁸ and given that the ‘kingdom of God’ basically sums up the trajectory toward which the Jewish hope was orientated,²⁴⁹ the concept surely must have bearing on the key term πληρώ. The Law and the Prophets are ‘fulfilled’ precisely because the kingdom – that to which they pointed – has come. The references to the kingdom in 5:19f, then, fit this interpretation well: how disciples continue to respond to the Law in light of the arrival of that to which it pointed (the kingdom of heaven) has bearing on the way they will be received into it (5:19); in fact, entry to this kingdom will be denied to

²⁴⁶ Davies & Allison (1988:497); Luz (1989:267ff); Hagner (1993:109); Nolland (2005:222f); Turner (2008:16) *et al* do not comment on the relationship between βασιλεία in 5:19f and πληρῶσαι in 5:17.

²⁴⁷ I agree with Hannan (2006:5), who holds that God’s βασιλεία “is the central theological concept of the first Gospel” (cf. Du Toit, 2000:545f).

²⁴⁸ This point was argued in chapter 3.

²⁴⁹ This was argued both in chapter 3 and above.

those who fail to live up to the greater righteousness demanded by the arrival of the kingdom of heaven (cf. Hannan, 2006:52-57). In short, these references to the kingdom, especially in light of the theme's prominence in Matthew as a whole and the Sermon on the Mount in particular, make it likely that 'fulfilment' in 5:17 should be construed as referring to the arrival of that very kingdom.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to argue, by means of what we have termed 'theological analysis', that the biblical-theological concept of the kingdom of God provides a helpful interpretive lens through which to understand the concept of fulfilment in Matthew's Gospel, particularly in 5:17. When we bring both the Old Testament's and Matthew's broader theology of the coming of God's kingdom to bear on our understanding of Jesus' fulfilling the Law and the Prophets, we see in Jesus' words the introduction of a new epoch. This is further ratified when we consider (1) the prominence of the kingdom of heaven in the Sermon on the Mount; (2) the partial parallel in Luke 16:16f; and (3) the bearing of the three references to the kingdom in 5:19f on 5:17. While many studies have noted the prominence of the 'kingdom of God' in the Old Testament and in Matthew's Gospel, few, if any, have considered what that might mean when it comes to understanding Jesus' enigmatic statement in 5:17. Since Jesus came to 'fulfil' the Law and the Prophets – i.e. he came to bring what they anticipated to its salvation-historical climax – and since what the Law and Prophets anticipated was the arrival of God's kingdom, we can offer the proposal that this 'kingdom' constitutes the content of what has been 'fulfilled'. The Jewish hope as sketched in chapter 3 (cf. Wright, 1992:280ff) provides the backdrop for Jesus' announcement in 4:17 that the kingdom ἤγγικεν. This announcement in turn provides the context in which Jesus is said to have 'fulfilled' the Law and the Prophets. Drawing these frequently noticed strands together yields a viable understanding of Jesus' meaning in Matthew 5:17, as well as one that is consistent with the salvation-historical flavour Matthew usually attaches to πληρώω: all the hope contained in and expressed by the Law and the Prophets that God would reign as King has now been accomplished in Jesus and the kingdom he brings. The key phrase ἦλθον... πληρῶσαι should be understood in kingdom, not only Christological, terms: in him the long-awaited kingdom is realized.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Over the past five chapters we have attempted to answer the question, “what precisely does it mean that Jesus has come to ‘fulfil’ the Law”? This project has sought to bring multiple methods, including literary analysis, historical-critical exegesis, and biblical-theological analysis to bear in order to answer this question. We will briefly summarize the findings of each chapter before making some concluding remarks.

In chapter 2 we discussed previous contributions to the question of the meaning of πληρώω in Matthew 5:17. After surveying twenty such contributions we concluded that the present-day discussion of πληρώω in this passage may be reduced to four senses (with various nuances): (1) “fulfil” as eschatological; (2) “fulfil” as the upholding of the Law; (3) “fulfil” as transcending the old; (4) “fulfil” as Jesus’ interpreting/deepening of the Law. It was also noted that few treatments of Matthew 5:17 placed it explicitly in the context of the arrival of God’s kingdom.

In chapter 3 we attempted to provide the necessary background for an exegetical and theological analysis in the chapters that were to follow. We surveyed the historical context, with particular focus on Matthew’s community, concluding (following Hagner, 2003:208 and Stanton, 1992:126ff) that Matthew was writing to Christian Jews who had recently broken from the synagogue. Attention was also paid to the literary context, especially the plot of Matthew’s Gospel, so as to place the discussion of πληρώω in chapter 4 into the context of the story Matthew is telling. Further attention was given to the context of the Sermon on the Mount and, in particular, to the antitheses of 5:21-48, which play an important role in the interpretation of 5:17-20. Regarding the latter, we found (1) that the primary function of the antitheses is to point to the authority of the Messiah; (2) that they illustrate how the fulfilment of the Law entails the surpassing of the demands of the Torah without contradicting them; (3) that they indicate the nature of the “greater righteousness” demanded of disciples in 5:20; and (4) following Thielman (1999:51f), that they illustrate how the Law is fulfilled by bringing the prophetic element of the Mosaic Law to completion. In short, we found that the antitheses support a view of fulfilment in 5:17 that highlights its ‘eschatological’ or ‘prophetic’ nature, because they illustrate the manner in which Jesus’ teaching realizes the intention of the Law and the Prophets, bringing them to completion. Finally, we surveyed also the theological context of both the kingdom of God/heaven in Matthew’s Gospel, as well as Matthew’s theology of fulfilment. Regarding the former, we found the kingdom of heaven to

be central to Matthew's theological concerns, providing a context within which the latter, fulfilment, should be understood. We found, furthermore, that Matthew frequently uses πληρώ in the sense of "the realization of that which was anticipated". This, then, provided the necessary background for our exegesis of this passage.

In chapter 4 we undertook to provide an exegetical analysis of Matthew 5:17-20. We found several factors in favour of taking πληρώ in an eschatological sense: (1) the mention of the *Law and the Prophets*; (2) Matthew's general use of πληρώ; (3) Matthew's notion that the Law, too, *prophesies* (cf. 11:13); (4) the antitheses, which illustrate how Jesus' teaching brings the Law to completion. We therefore concluded that when Jesus says that he has come "to fulfil the Law and the Prophets" he means that he has come to bring about that to which they pointed. In him what the Law and Prophets pointed towards has been realized.

We also considered some objections to this understanding of πληρώ in Matthew 5:17, concluding that they do not sufficiently account for the evidence provided above, whereas the strengths of the objections are well accounted for by the understanding of πληρώ which we put forward. Finally, we considered the bearing of verses 18-20 on our interpretation of verse 17. Here we noted the importance of the phrase βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν, which is mentioned three times in these verses. This phrase indicates that the focus in this pericope is not exclusively on the Law, but that what Jesus says about the Law must be understood within the context of the kingdom of God, which Jesus has inaugurated (4:17). This provides the foundation for further discussion of the kingdom of God and its bearing on our interpretation of 5:17 in chapter 5 of this dissertation.

Chapter 5, then, built on the exegesis of chapter 4 by attempting to qualify our understanding of πληρώ. If πληρώ in Matthew 5:17 speaks of the realization of that to which the Law and Prophets pointed, to what did the Law and Prophets point? This chapter, utilizing both the insights of 'biblical theology' and previous studies conducted on the biblical theme of the kingdom of God, argued that the concept of 'the kingdom of God' provides definition to the "storyline" of Scripture. When we speak of the trajectory of the Old Testament – namely the Law and the Prophets – we are speaking about the expectation for and establishment of God's reign as King. Applying these insights to our discussion of πληρώ in chapter 4 yields the following result:

In Matthew 5:17, Matthew desires to show that in Jesus the Scriptures – Law and Prophets – have found their fulfilment (chapter 4). If the Law and the Prophets point

to the arrival of the kingdom of God (chapter 5), our understanding of fulfilment should be construed in terms of this motif. Jesus ‘fulfils’ the Law and the Prophets by inaugurating the kingdom of God, which they anticipated.

When, therefore, we speak of Jesus ‘fulfilling’ the Law and the Prophets, we are speaking of the arrival of the kingdom of God. This makes it unnecessary for us to decide between whether fulfilment comes by Jesus’ teaching or by Jesus’ life (cf. Luz, 2005:198f), since the kingdom of God is proclaimed in Jesus’ teaching and inaugurated in Jesus’ life. The proposal made by this dissertation, then, is that the prominence of the kingdom motif in the Christian canon be brought to bear on our interpretation of Matthew 5:17.

We concluded chapter 6 by making reference to some additional exegetical points in favour of the ‘kingdom reading’ adopted above: (1) the prominence of the “kingdom of heaven” in the Sermon on the Mount at large; (2) the focus on salvation history in the Lucan parallel (16:16f); (3) the three mentions of the kingdom in 5:19f.

While many previous studies have highlighted the importance of a salvation-historical reading of Matthew 5:17 (cf. Banks, 1975; Meier, 1976; Guelich, 1982; Moo, 1984; France, 2007 *et al.*), few, if any, have brought ‘theological considerations’ – such as the prominence of the kingdom of God in both the broader and the more immediate contexts – to bear on their arguments in favour of an ‘eschatological’ reading of Matthew 5:17-20. When Matthew 5:17 is read through ‘kingdom lenses’, we are able to clarify what is meant by Jesus’ ‘fulfilling’ of the Law and the Prophets: what the Law and Prophets anticipated – the kingdom of God – has now arrived in Jesus, God’s King. ‘Fulfilment’, then, should not be articulated in exclusively *Christological* terms – the Law and Prophets are not fulfilled *only* by his teaching, life, death and resurrection – but also in *biblical-theological* terms: what the Law and Prophets pointed towards is fulfilled in the arrival of the kingdom of God through Jesus.

It is hoped that our aim of arriving at a measure of precision regarding the nature of πληρόω in Matthew 5:17 has been met. We conclude with several final thoughts:

- The argument put forward in this dissertation adds further weight to the hypothesis that Matthew’s community consisted of Christians Jews (cf. Hagner, 2003; Stanton, 1992; Olmstead, 2011), as opposed to Jewish Christians (cf. Saldarini, 1992; Sim, 1998; Runesson, 2011), since it implies the changing of an epoch with the arrival of the kingdom, with Jesus’ teaching, not Torah, at the centre.

- It is not to be thought that the understanding of πληρώω sketched here excludes other senses in which the word could be taken.²⁵⁰ What is helpful about a salvation-historical understanding of πληρώω in Matthew 5:17 is that it explains the other senses as well: the coming of the kingdom does “uphold” the Law, albeit in a different way; furthermore, it does “transcend” in that it goes well beyond the demands of Torah; also, Jesus’ authoritative interpretation does “deepen” the requirements for righteousness. The understanding of πληρώω articulated here has the benefit of providing a framework within which other senses may be understood.
- This interpretation of πληρώω does not, however, leave much room for the interpretation, common in some Reformed circles, that sees only the “moral” law as being referred to in 5:17-20 (cf. Chantry, 2008:59; Hendriksen, 1973:292). Jesus is certainly referring to the Law in its entirety in this passage.²⁵¹
- The introduction of this dissertation highlighted the larger problem of the Law: which laws are applicable to Christians living in the twenty-first century? The findings of this paper support the view that Jesus’ law replaces the Old Testament Law, although standing in continuity with much of it (cf. Moo, 1999:319-376²⁵²). It is therefore to the Messiah, and not to Torah, that God’s people must look for instruction on God’s will.
- This paper suggests that research on ‘the kingdom of God in Matthew’ and ‘the law in Matthew’ should not follow separate paths, but that either should be in constant discussion with the other. More work could be done on understanding the law in Matthew in light of the kingdom. For instance, might not the “already/not yet” pattern of the kingdom be helpfully employed in making sense of the continuity/discontinuity of the Law?
- While many discussions in the field of biblical hermeneutics continue to orbit around defining the role of theology in biblical interpretation (cf. Porter & Stovell, 2012:20), it is hoped that this dissertation has provided an example of how (biblical-) theological

²⁵⁰ I am grateful to Dr Ben Dean of George Whitefield College in Cape Town for pointing this out to me upon my delivery there of a similar paper.

²⁵¹ According to the Westminster Confession of Faith, God gave ceremonial laws to the people of Israel which are abrogated under the New Testament (19.3); but his moral law is forever binding (19.5). While this division of the Law might be useful if granted *a posteriori* status, it does not work as an *a priori* assumption when approaching the text (Carson, 2013:236).

²⁵² “It is the law *as fulfilled by Jesus* that must be done, not the law in its original form” (Moo, 1999:353; italics original; cf. Moo, 1984:29; Dorsey, 1991:322ff). Note the title of Moo’s essay: “The Law of Christ as the Fulfilment of the Law of Moses: A Modified Lutheran View”.

interpretation *in addition to* regular historical-critical exegesis might be conducted. Perhaps further exegetical and theological studies may be undertaken in order to provide examples that complement methodological discussions.

The importance of the contribution of Matthew 5:17 to Matthew's theology has been well recognized.²⁵³ It is hoped that by further clarifying the nature of the former we might gain clarity on the latter.

²⁵³ I have tried to point this out throughout this dissertation.

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