

The Rhetoric of Hearing: The Use of the Isaianic Hearing Motif in Matthew 11.2–16.20

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Matthew 11.2–16.20 follows on the heels of the initial stages of Jesus' ministry to Israel (4.17-11.1) and narrates the increasingly polarized responses of various Matthean characters and character groups to Jesus' preaching and healing ministry.¹ It focuses on questions about Jesus' identity as he teaches, heals, feeds crowds, and engages in and withdraws from conflict with his antagonists. The various responses to Jesus' identity in this section of Matthew range from attribution of his power to Beelzebul (12.24) to the notion that he is John the Baptist *redivivus* (14.1-2) to faith that he is the Messiah, the Son of David (15.21-28; 16.13-20). Interwoven among these responses is the motif of hearing, which derives from Matthew's reliance upon the hearing motif from Isaiah. Matthew's hearing motif is properly considered a subtheme of his motif of understanding. While the theme of understanding has received significant focus in Matthean studies, there has been less attention to the secondary motif of hearing.² Nevertheless, the

hearing motif is integrally connected to Matthew's theme of understanding. An exploration of its backdrop in Isaiah illuminates the impact of the hearing motif on Matthew's plot and his implied reader.³

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The Relationship of Hearing and Understanding in Matthew 11.2–16.20

The plot of Mt 11.2–16.20 begins with John the Baptist's question focused on the identity of Jesus: "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" (11.3).⁴ Matthew takes up this question in subsequent pericopae from different angles.⁵ First, Jesus himself answers John's question by referencing the

Brown, *The Disciples in Narrative Perspective: The Portrayal and Function of the Matthean Disciples* (SBLAB 9; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 6-12, 18-24.

¹ Carter understands Mt 11.2–16.20 to be the gospel's third narrative block, focusing on responses to Jesus. Warren Carter, *Matthew at the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2000), 249.

² Gerhard Barth provided the foundation work on the theme of understanding in "Matthew's Understanding of the Law," in G. Bornkamm, G. Barth, and H. J. Held, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 58-164. For a review of the literature on understanding as it relates to the Matthean disciples, see Jeannine K.

³ For a discussion of the concept of the implied reader using narrative-critical methods, cf Brown, *Disciples*, 123-28. In the rest of the essay, "reader" will be used as a shorthand to indicate this construct of the "implied reader."

⁴ The NRSV will be used for biblical quotations unless otherwise specified.

⁵ Cecilia Deutsch identifies the theme of Jesus' identity in 11.2–13.58. Cecilia Deutsch, *Hidden Wisdom and Easy Yoke: Wisdom, Torah and Discipleship in Matthew 11.25-30* (JSNTSup 18; Sheffield: JSOT, 1987), 24.

language of Isaiah 35 and 61, which points to Israel's restoration. Then Matthew takes up a comparison of John and Jesus in which he implies that Jesus is the one who ushers in the kingdom (11.11-15) and who himself embodies wisdom and Torah (11.19, 25-30). After the narration of various controversies between Jesus and his adversaries followed by Jesus withdrawing from them (12.15; 14.13; cf also 15.21; 16.4), the question of Jesus' identity is once again explicitly raised by Herod (14.1-2), who wrongly supposes that Jesus is John the Baptist raised from the dead. In the rest of Matthew 14-16, the plot centers on Jesus' feeding of the crowds and his healing ministry before moving to the climactic confession of Jesus as the Messiah by his disciples at 16.13-20, a pericope that clearly culminates the emphasis on Jesus' emerging identity in 11.2-16.20.

Related to the plotting of Jesus' identity in this section of Matthew are the varied responses to Jesus by the characters who interact with him. As who Jesus is becomes more clear, the responses to him grow more polarized. "Revelation and disclosure of the identity of Jesus are the context for the rejection... [and] acceptance motif[s]."⁶ Between John's questioning of Jesus' Messianic identity (11.2) and Peter's dramatic confession of Jesus as Messiah (16.16), we witness a range of responses. These include lack of repentance and rejection (11.16-24; 13.53-58); challenge (12.1-14, 38-45; 15.1-11; 16.1-4); attribution of Jesus' Messianic deeds to Satan (12.22-28); understanding (11.25-30; 16.13-20); misunderstanding (14.1-2; 15.15-20; 16.5-12); little faith (14.22-33);⁷ and great faith (15.21-28). It is in the subplot of responses to Jesus that the reader encounters the motifs of hearing and understanding, since it is primarily other characters *in relation to Jesus* who are described by the terms for hearing and understanding.

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An interesting pattern emerges as the reader follows the concepts of hearing and understanding through this

⁶ Deutsch, *Hidden Wisdom*, 24.

⁷ Cf also the disciples' little faith fleshed out in the feeding miracles at 14.13-21; 15.32-39. As Versepunt notes, "The deliberate parallels between [the second feeding miracle] and the first feeding account render the disciples' continued lack of insight into the mighty power of Jesus all the more incomprehensible for the reader..., impressing upon him the utter foolishness of their 'little faith'" (19). Donald J. Versepunt, "The Faith of the Reader and the Narrative of Matthew 13.53-16.20," *ISNT* 46 (1992): 14-19.

section of Mt 11.2-16.20. We could liken the pattern to that of a tag-team relay. In Mt 11.2-13.52, hearing rather than understanding is the preferred way of talking about responses to Jesus and his teaching. In Mt 13.1-16.20, understanding becomes a crucial rubric for these responses. The overlapping of terms for these two concepts in the parables discourse of Matthew 13 (13.1-52) provides the most detail on the relationship between the two concepts. Language of hearing, which is prominent in Matthew 11-12, shifts to language of understanding in the parables discourse, with understanding serving as an important concept of reception in Matthew 14-16.

Analysis of the specific occurrences of terms for hearing and understanding illuminates the following contours: Language for hearing and understanding (in relation to reception of Jesus and his message) is used by both Jesus and the narrator.⁸ Jesus refers to the importance of *hearing* in Matthew 11-12 four times⁹ and only once in Mt 13.53-16.20 (in explicit connection with understanding; 15.10). In addition, Matthew indicates that hearing is thematic in chapters 11-13 through the *inclusio* at 11.2 and 14.1 (using ἀκούω) as well as the reference to hearing in the fulfillment quotation of 12.18-21 (12.19).¹⁰ Once the reader arrives at the parables discourse in Matthew 13, references to hearing abound, with the term ἀκούω occurring sixteen times in Jesus' speech.

⁸ In Matthew's plot, it is not at all surprising to encounter regularly the verb for hearing (ἀκούω), since reporting what various characters hear from other characters is prevalent in narration. Therefore, greater attention will be given to ἀκούω in Jesus' speech as well as occurrences that are shown to be prominent via strategic placement (e.g., Mt 11.2; 14.1, where ἀκούω forms part of an *inclusio* around Matthew 11.13).

⁹ Possibly seven, given the text-critical issue at LU5; 13.9 and 43. In each case, the issue is the presence of ἀκούειν following ὡτα. ὁ ἔχων ὡτα [ἀκούειν] ἀκούετο. It is most probable that the inclusion of the infinitive in each case is secondary, since (1) the longer phrase occurs elsewhere in the Gospels (e.g., Mark 4.9,23); and (2) there is little reason for scribes to drop the infinitive if original. Cf Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (3^d ed.; Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1971), 29.

¹⁰ Eco notes the importance of placement as an indicator of a theme, referring to the "strategic placement" of theme words or ideas (as distinct from reiterative placement). Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 26. For more on the *inclusio* of 11.2 and 14.1, cf the discussion below.

Alternately, the key terms for understanding do not occur in Matthew until the parables discourse of chapter 13. In that chapter, *συνίημι* occurs six times (13.13, 14, 15, 19, 23, 51). Following the parables discourse (Mt 13.53–16.20), terms for understanding, specifically *συνίημι* and *νοέω*, occur six times.¹¹ Across Mt 13.1–16.20, these two terms for understanding come from the

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mouth of Jesus, except at 16.12, where it is the narrator who uses the term to describe the disciples. So there is a general movement regarding the placement of the Greek words for hearing and understanding, from hearing in Matthew 11–13 to understanding in Matthew 13–16.¹² The effects of this movement for the reader of Matthew will be explored in the final section of this paper. First, however, we will explore the motif of hearing in Mt 11.2–16.20, especially as it intersects with the same theme drawn from Isaiah.

The Motif of Hearing in Matthew 11.2–16.20

In Matthew 11–12, the importance of hearing Jesus rightly is introduced in relation to his emerging identity.¹³ The introduction of the hearing concept then blossoms in the parables discourse where hearing takes on primary significance and where it is interwoven with the theme of understanding. As the theme of understanding takes over and the motif of hearing recedes, there is one more significant occurrence of the hearing

¹¹ *Συνίημι* at 15.10 and 16.12 (With the adjectival *ἀσύνετος* at 15.16); *νοέω* at 15.17; 16.9, 11.

¹² Exploration of the hearing motif in Matthew focuses on the lexical level, since the motif is signaled primarily through the word *ἀκούω*. Yet a narrative analysis of this motif will necessarily look beyond lexical occurrence to ways in which (lack of) hearing is portrayed in Matthew's story. As Neyrey observes regarding Matthew 12, "The Scribes and the Pharisees... are clearly *not* listening to 'greater than Jonah' or 'greater than Solomon'. Some people, then, are willfully refusing to listen to the voice of God's messengers"; Jerome H. Neyrey, "The Thematic Use of Isaiah 42,1-4 in Matthew 12." *Bib* 63 (1982): 461. In this way, comprehending hearing as a narrative-conceptual motif in Matthew is the broader aim of this study.

¹³ Characterization in ancient narration is much less about character development (which is primarily a psychological category and so a modern one) than about character revelation. That is, it is typical for ancient biographers to gradually reveal what they understand to already be a part of a person's nature (*φύσις*). See my discussion of this issue in Brown, *Disciples*, 49-53.

motif in 11.2–16.20, where it is paired with understanding (15.10). An important connection that emerges at each of these key "hearing junctures" is Matthew's placement of Isaianic quotations (cf 11.5; 12.18-21; 13.14-15; and 15.8-9) alongside the motif of hearing. This connection suggests that to grasp the import of Matthew's hearing motif it will be important to examine the Isaiah texts he cites and reflect upon how they are used in relation to hearing. We will examine in turn the four junctures of Isaiah quotations and Matthew's hearing references: 11.2-19; 12.1-32; 13.1-23; and 15.1-20.

Matthew 11.2-19

Matthew uses *ἀκούω* three times in the passage that introduces 11.2–16.20, emphasizing the prominence of the hearing motif by its initial placement. In re-

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sponse to John the Baptist's question of whether Jesus is the one they are expecting, Jesus responds, "Go and tell John what you hear (*ἀκούω*) and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear (*ἀκούω*), the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them" (11.4b-5a; cf Isa 35.5). According to Matthew's Jesus, anyone hearing his message and seeing his works (*τὰ ἔργα τοῦ χριστοῦ*; 11.2) should be able to recognize that the restoration of Israel heralded in Isaiah has begun. That hearing is an important part of right response to Jesus is further emphasized at 11.15: "The one who has ears ought to hear" (*ἀκούω*; my translation).¹⁴ The same phrase will recur twice in the parables discourse of chapter 13, tying Matthew 11–13 together by means of the hearing motif.

Another indication that hearing is significant in this section of Matthew is its usage at 11.2 and 14.1 in similar ways in two passages that are structurally connected. At 11.2, John hears while in prison of the deeds of the Messiah (*ἀκούσας... τὰ ἔργα τοῦ χριστοῦ*), which prompts his question to Jesus through John's disciples. At 14.1-2, Herod hears reports (*ἤκουσεν... τὴν ἀκοήν*) about Jesus' miraculous powers and comes to the mistaken conclusion that he is John the Baptist risen from

¹⁴ Or "the one who has ears to hear ought to hear." Cf discussion of this text-critical issue above.

the dead.¹⁵ The ties between these sections include the subplot related to John the Baptist and references to both John and Herod hearing about Jesus' activity and wondering about his identity. In particular, Jesus' activity is described in a similar way in both stories. In Mt 11.2-5, the deeds of the Messiah are described by miraculous activity: the blind receiving sight, the lame walking, the leprosy cured, the deaf hearing, the dead raised. At 14.1, Herod has heard reports of Jesus' miraculous powers.¹⁶

In addition, the placement of these two stories is significant. Mt 11.2-19 introduces increasingly diverse responses to Jesus' identity by asking in John's voice, "Are you the one who is to come?" After narrating the various ways characters answer this question and react to Jesus, Matthew introduces the parables discourse to illustrate in parabolic form the range of responses to Jesus. Almost immediately after the parables discourse,¹⁷ Herod's confused identification of

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Jesus with John the Baptist emphasizes the importance of recognizing rightly who Jesus is. This lead story is followed by narration focused primarily on more positive responses of the disciples, the crowds, and the Canaanite woman.¹⁸ Finally, the whole section culminates in Peter's confession on behalf of the disciples of Jesus' true identity as Messiah (16.16).

Matthew's use of Isaiah in 11.2-19 confirms the importance of the hearing motif for the evangelist at this junct-

ture. First, his introduction to the citation makes it clear that what people are hearing and seeing in the ministry of Jesus should confirm his true identity (11.4). Second, the citation, which is actually a conflation of borrowed language and phraseology from Isaiah (Isa 35.5-6; 61.1; cf also 29.18),¹⁹ further elaborates on the motif of hearing in Matthew's narrative. One of the specific activities appropriated from Isa 35.5-6 is the restoration of hearing to the deaf. As we will see in more detail below, the theme of hearing/not hearing is an important one in Isaiah. According to Isaiah, part of what God will do when Israel's restoration is enacted is to unstop the ears of God's wayward people, who are metaphorically pictured as deaf. Isa 35.5 provides a vision of restoration, when "the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped."²⁰ In this way, the Isaianic connection made at Mt 11.5 affirms both who Jesus is as the enactor of restoration and one proper way of responding to his identity, namely, hearing rightly who he is and what he is bringing. As Matthew affirms at the end of this pericope in relation to John's precursory ministry to Jesus: "The one who has ears ought to hear" (11.15: ὁ ἔχων ὦτα... ἀκούετο).²¹

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Matthew 12.1-32

In Mt 12.1-32 the motif of hearing is again paired with an Isaianic quotation. The pericope begins with the withdrawal of Jesus following a confrontation with the Pharisees (12.15). This is the first of three such withdrawals (ἀναχωρέω) which follow confrontations with Jesus (cf also 14.13; 15.21).²² Yet as he withdraws from

¹⁵ Matthew then narrates in proleptic form the death of John at the behest of Herod (14.3-12).

¹⁶ At 14.2, Matthew uses δυνάμεις. Note the use of the same term at 11.20 to sum up Jesus' activity as it has been described in 11.2-19.

¹⁷ Luz signals the presence of an inclusio around Matthew 13 at 12.46-50 and 13.53-58 by pointing to the theme of Jesus' family with associated catchwords. Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20* (trans. James E. Crouch; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 301. This, in turn, points to 11.2-6 and 14.1-12 as lead stories for their respective sections (11.2-13.58; 14.1-16.20) in 11.2-16.20, both of which are pointedly focused on Jesus' identity and misunderstanding about it. Deutsch delineates 11.2-13.58 as a discreet section of narrative (*Hidden Wisdom*, 21-22).

¹⁸ The portrayal of disciples in Matthew is not uniformly positive, however. At times, they provide an example to emulate, as when they leave their work to follow Jesus (4.18-22). At other points in the narrative, the disciples exhibit less than ideal discipleship (Brown, *Disciples*, 91-93, 119-20). For example, they are routinely defined by "little faith" (8.26; 14.31; 16.8; 17.20; cf 6.30). Matthew also portrays the crowds in mixed fashion in the narrative (e.g., 12.23; 13.11-13).

¹⁹ W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 2.242.

²⁰ There seems to be a dual level to the hearing motif in Isaiah: both physical restoration of hearing (35.5) and restoration of insight (metaphorical hearing) are in view (e.g., Isa 42.18-19; 48.6-8; 50.4-5; 52.13-15; cf 6.9-10). In fact, Isa 35.5 may well involve the return of both physical and metaphorical hearing, given the abundance of metaphor throughout the chapter.

²¹ Another proper response is to avoid stumbling over Jesus (11.6). The stumbling motif is often related to misunderstanding Jesus' identity in Matthew; see, e.g., 11.6. For a helpful discussion of the connection of these themes, cf Andrew H. Trotter, "Understanding and Stumbling: A Study of the Disciples' Understanding of Jesus and His Teaching in the Gospel of Matthew" (Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 1986), 229-30.

²² Note also 16.4, where καταλείπω is used.

controversy, Jesus is once again approached by the crowds, who bring their sick to him. Jesus heals the sick and warns them not to reveal his identity (12.16). It is at this point in the narrative that Matthew includes a fulfillment quotation from Isa 42.1-4.

This particular Matthean Old Testament citation has generated much discussion and debate, not only because it is one of the lengthier Matthean fulfillment quotations but also because of questions regarding its connection to its Matthean context.²³ Early offerings on the topic of the contextual connections of 12.18-21 (Isa 42.1-4) focused on the way in which the quotation, particularly 12.19, illustrates the Messianic secret motif immediately preceding the quotation: “[Jesus] ordered them not to make him known” (12.16). More recent suggestions have worked to take seriously why a full four verses from Isaiah make their way into Matthew’s narrative. Beaton, for example, emphasizes that the Isaiah text as well as its appropriation by Matthew focus on the theme of justice coming through God’s chosen servant.

The inclusion of Isa 42.1-4... offers a scriptural basis for the countercultural perspective of Jesus’ messiahship and kingship (11.6). In addition to depicting a compassionate servant who identifies with and aids broken humanity, it links these deeds with justice Matthew’s Jesus, in a non-confrontational manner, offers justice to the poor, sick and lame and to the harassed crowds burdened with the weight and oppression of the legal interpretations of the Jewish establishment (cf 9.36; 15.1-20; 23.4, 24).²⁴

In his thesis, Beaton suggests that Matthew’s fulfillment quotations are bi-referential. To use the terminology of narrative criticism, the quotations function both at the story and at the discourse levels of the narrative. For Beaton,

the quotation’s function in the story of Jesus highlights three ideas: the secrecy motif, the Pharisaic threat of Matthew 12, and the healings performed by Jesus as an expression of his compassionate ministry (12.19-20a). On the discourse level, Matthew is showing the reader that Jesus fulfills the Messianic expectation to establish justice (12.18, 20b-21).²⁵

Beaton’s work helpfully argues for and attends to the multiple connections between the Isa 42.1-4 citation and its context in Matthew. I would point out an additional connection, this one focused on the hearing motif in Matthew drawn from Isaiah. In the center of the Isaiah quotation, this affirmation is made about the servant of the Lord: “He will not wrangle or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets” (12.19; Isa 42.2). As Neyrey has noted, if we compare Matthew’s rendering of the latter half of this verse with both the MT and the LXX, we see that Matthew has heightened the emphasis on hearing as a human response.²⁶

MT: ולא־ישמיע ... קולו

LXX: οὐδὲ ἀκουσθήσεται ... ἡ φωνὴ αὐτοῦ

Matt: οὐδὲ ακούσει τις ... τὴν φωνὴν αὐτοῦ

The active voice of ἀκούω in Matthew’s form of the citation focuses attention on the responsibility of the hearer for what is heard. As Neyrey comments, “Matt’s version is... rendered in a direction which points less to the speaker’s plan *not* to be heard and more to rejection by the hearers themselves.”²⁷

This instance of the hearing motif from Isaiah is shaped by Matthew toward his subplot of the varied responses to Jesus’ identity, which is then illustrated and elaborated in the context of Matthew 11–12. For example, Matthew 12 highlights the negative response of the Pharisees toward Jesus. They accuse Jesus’ disciples of breaking the Sabbath (12.1-14). They attribute Jesus’ authority not to God but to the prince of demons (12.22-32). In fact, in the latter pericope, it is when the Pharisees *hear* that the people wonder if Jesus is the Son of David that they claim he drives out demons by Beelzebul (12.24). They do not hear in a right

²³ For a thorough treatment, cf Richard Beaton, *Isaiah’s Christ in Matthew’s Gospel* (SNTSMS 123; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Since discussion of the text forms used in the Matthean Old Testament citations falls outside the parameters of this paper, cf Beaton as well as Gundry and Stendahl on this topic. Robert H. Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in Matthew’s Gospel with Special Reference to the Messianic Hope* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967); Krister Stendahl, *The School of St. Matthew* (2d ed.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968).

²⁴ Beaton, *Isaiah’s Christ*, 165.

²⁵ Beaton, *Isaiah’s Christ*, 149-51.

²⁶ Jerome H. Neyrey, “Isaiah in Matthew,” 461.

²⁷ Jerome H. Neyrey, “Isaiah in Matthew,” 461 (author’s emphasis).

fashion, even as the people suggest the proper perspective toward Jesus' identity. Neyrey comments, "Belief vs. unbelief— clearly some are *not* listening to [Jesus'] voice."²⁸

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Matthew 13.1-23

After illustrating positive and negative responses in narrative form in Matthew 11-12 (with more emphasis on the negative than the positive), the evangelist crafts a discourse centered on a number of Jesus' parables to represent the right and wrong kinds of responses to Jesus. Wrapped around the parables discourse are two stories that touch on Jesus' familial connections (12.46-50; 13.53-58). That these two accounts function as an *inclusio* is signaled by their common catchwords, μήτηρ, ἀδελφός, and ἀδελφή.²⁹ The parallel stories highlight two contrasting responses to Jesus. On the one hand, familial connection to Jesus is extended to all who do the Father's will (12.50). Alternately, rejection of and stumbling over Jesus is illustrated by Jesus' hometown, who question the source of Jesus' authority and power (13.54-57) and in the end are typified by unbelief (13.58).

Between these two points, the right and wrong kinds of responses are played out in a series of parables told by Jesus (13.1-52). We hear of these responses in parabolic visions of good soil and "bad" soil (13.13-18), wheat and weeds (13.24-30), and good and bad fish (13.47-50). The focus on response is specifically tied to God's reign;³⁰ it is the possible responses to the message of the kingdom preached by Jesus that are the focus of Matthew 13.³¹ Proper responses to the kingdom

message include reception and fruitfulness (13.23), and prizing the kingdom above all else (13.44-46).

The motif of hearing plays out in the tension between these right and wrong responses. The prominence of the motif is evident both in its clustered focus in 13.13-19 and in its strategic placement at 13.9 and 13.43 in the repeated invitation, "The one who has ears ought to hear," which was introduced at 11.15. We will look at these two thematic moments in turn, beginning with the latter.

The expression, ὁ ἔχων ὦτα ἀκούετο, is repeated three times in Matthew 11-13, and its placement seems to be significant. The expression first occurs at 11.15 in the introductory passage revolving around John the Baptist. After John sends followers to question Jesus about his identity, Jesus identifies John for his hearers: John is "Elijah who is to come" (11.14). Then Jesus issues the call to hear. In

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this context, "The one who has ears ought to hear" is a *call to understand and accept* John the Baptist as the Elijah-type Messianic forerunner. Hearing is more than auditory perception; it is about understanding and acceptance. Similarly, the use of the expression at 13.9 and 13.43 in the parables chapter emphasizes hearing (ἀκούω) as understanding. The very first parable of Matthew 13 is the parable of the sower; and the admonition at the end of this parable ("the one who has ears ought to hear") refers to the various responses to God's reign illustrated in the parable. The phrase functions as a call to understand and respond rightly to God's reign. Ultimately, this right response involves bearing fruit as the good soil of the parable does. Finally, the same expression at 13.43 caps Jesus' explanation of the parable of the weeds requested by the disciples.³² In this instance, it again functions as a call to understand and ultimately to respond to God's reign as the righteous ones described in 13.43.³³

²⁸ Neyrey, "Isaiah in Matthew," 461. Much of the rest of Matthew 12 (12.33-45) continues to illustrate varied responses by contrasting good and bad fruit and in the inappropriate request for a sign from Jesus to prove his identity.

²⁹ Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 301.

³⁰ I am sympathetic to those who choose to translate βασιλεία in Matthew as "the reign (of God)" in order to indicate the more dynamic nature of the Greek term in its Gospels' usage, though I will use both "kingdom" and "God's reign" in the following discussion. Cf Carter, *Matthew at the Margins*, 571-72, n. 8.

³¹ The terminology "message of the kingdom" is explicit at 13.19. The standard introductory formula to the parables of this chapter is "The kingdom of heaven is like..." (13.24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47).

³² This expression occurs at the conclusion of both the first parable spoken to the crowds (13.3-9) and the first parable spoken to the disciples alone (13.37-43).

³³ As I note elsewhere, "this phrase occurs at key junctures in the [parables] chapter, capping off the first pericope in each major section. As such, it invites the reader to be one of those who listen carefully to... these parables, drawing the reader into Jesus' teaching in a more direct fashion." Jeannine K. Brown, "Direct Engagement of

In addition to the reiteration of the expression ὁ ἔχων ὦτα ἀκούετο, the clustering of ἀκούω in the early part of Matthew 13 is pronounced. In fact, we could describe 13.9-19 as a cacophony of references to ears and hearing, given the many occurrences of οὖς and ἀκούω.³⁴ To understand the significance of the hearing motif in this section of Matthew 13, we will need to determine the ways in which it is used. A close reading of 13.9-23 suggests that “hearing” is used in at least two senses. In some occurrences, ἀκούω is used to indicate mere apprehension of sound - hearing as physical act alone. For example, the first use of ἀκούω in 13=13 (from Isa 6.9) fits this sense: “Though seeing, they do not see; though *hearing*, they do not hear or understand.” At other points, ἀκούω indicates right reception of what is heard. In its second usage at 13.13, ἀκούω approaches the concept of understanding.³⁵ In fact, the two senses are interwoven throughout 13.13-23. Hearing as mere sound apprehension occurs at 13.14, 19-23, while hearing as movement toward or including understanding is implied at 13.15-16.³⁶

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Yet the intermingling of the two senses of hearing does not occur for the first time in Matthew 13. Rather, it begins in Matthew 11-12 in the sections we have already examined. In Matthew’s narrative, the reader has already encountered those who hear Jesus but do not rightly understand or interpret what they are hearing. John the Baptist is unsure that what he has heard indicates Jesus’ Messianic status (11.2-3). Herod, who hears of the miracles of Jesus, is characterized by an even greater misunderstanding of Jesus’ identity (14.1-2). The Pharisees also hear but do not understand who Jesus is (12.23-24). Hearing as mere auditory perception does not guarantee understanding. In contrast to mere auditory perception, however, Jesus calls all who have ears to hear, that is, to understand the import of

his words (11.15): “The one who has ears ought to hear.” In Jesus’ call to the crowds (cf 11.7) to hear rightly, we also notice Matthew speaking to the implied reader to use her ears according to their true purpose— for comprehension.

The reader, therefore, comes to Matthew 13 with these two possible senses for ἀκούω.³⁷ While some occurrences fit clearly into either one or the other of the two senses, there are some usages of ἀκούω that seem ambiguous. Specifically, the four usages at 13.16-17 do not seem to fit entirely either of the two senses already described. Mt 13.16-17 functions both as the culmination of the Isaiah quotation of IP4-15 and as a transition to Jesus’ interpretation of the parable of the soils which begins at 1p8. The further complexity of the hearing motif in 13.16-17 revolves around its eschatological nuance. The four uses of ἀκούω at 13.16-17 focus less upon sensory hearing or even hearing as understanding than upon *when* the hearing occurs. The disciples are considered blessed because they hear what many of the righteous and the prophets of former days longed to hear. It is unlikely that the contrast is between those who merely hear (the prophets of old) and those who hear and understand (the disciples).³⁸ The contrast of 13.16-17 is almost entirely a *temporal* one. What the faithful believers prior to the coming of the kingdom longed for the disciples now experience. They have experienced the arrival of Jesus, who heralds the kingdom, and beyond this, who inaugurates the kingdom in his preaching and

the Reader in Matthew’s Discourses: Rhetorical Techniques and Scholarly Consensus,” *NTS* 51 (2005): 29.

³⁴ Ears that either hear or do not hear; cf 13.9, 15, 16.

³⁵ As Luz notes, “seeing and hearing are not simply identical to understanding, but they are associated with it. ‘Seeing eyes’ and ‘hearing ears’ are the basis on which understanding can grow” (Luz, *Matthew* 8-20, 247).

³⁶ Wesley G. Olmstead, *Matthew’s Trilogy of Parables: The Nation, the Nations, and the Reader in Matthew 21.28-22.14* (SNTSMS 127; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 157.

³⁷ These are two of the possible senses of ἀκούω according to BDAG: “to have or exercise the faculty of hearing” (37) and “to hear and understand a message” (38).

³⁸ While Jesus indicates that the disciples are given knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom (13:n), Matthew does not seem to be *emphasizing* the disciples’ understanding in this section (Trotter, “Understanding and Stumbling,” 77). Rather, their knowledge consists of their being privy to Jesus’ interpretations of parables (cf 13.18-23, 37-43). The disciples’ own affirmation that they do understand (13.51) should be read with attention to the narrator’s point of view and to the narrative picture of what the disciples do and do not understand about Jesus’ teaching (e.g., 15.16; 16.8-12). Cf Brown, *Disciples*, 109-11.

miraculous activity.³⁹ The blessing bestowed on the disciples at 13.6 is precisely the eschatological blessing already proclaimed in the kingdom beatitudes (5.3-12). The time of the reversal of Israel's fortune envisioned in Isaiah's new exodus has arrived.⁴⁰

Our discussion of Matthew 13 thus far invites explanation of Matthew's usage of Isaiah 6 in the parables chapter. Isa 6.9-11 in Mt 13.14-15 is probably the most examined Isaiah text in Matthew, given the general tenor of the evangelist's usage, which seems to indicate that Jesus speaks in parables to encourage misunderstanding! It is significant that the text which Matthew cites here is the culmination of Isaiah's call narrative. When Isaiah sees a vision of God exalted and holy (6.1-4), he is immediately struck by his own uncleanness (6.5-7). After being purified, Isaiah responds to the call of Yahweh to go to the people of Israel (6.8): "Here am I; send me!" The nature of Isaiah's mission is then spelled out in Isa 6.9-13: Isaiah's audience is a stubborn, unseeing, and unhearing people.

And [the Lord] said, "Go and say to this people: 'Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand: Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed.'" Then I said, "How long, O Lord?" And he said: "Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is utterly desolate; until the LORD sends everyone far away, and vast is the emptiness in the midst of the land. Even if a tenth part remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains standing when it is felled." The holy seed is its stump.

In an intriguing study of Isa 6.9-13, Beale marshals evidence for his thesis that these verses express God's judgment upon Israel for its idolatry.⁴¹ The form of judg-

³⁹ Davies and Allison refer to the prophets and the righteous of old longing to see "the eschatological revelation of God" (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* [3 vols.; IC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988-97], 2.394).

⁴⁰ For the theme of the new exodus in Mark, cf Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark* (WUNT 2; Tübingen: Mohr, 1997).

⁴¹ G. K. Beale, "Isaiah VI 9-13: A Retributive Taunt against Idolatry," *VT* 41 (1991): 257-78.

ment is that of coming to resemble the objects of their worship, idols that can neither see nor hear. Beale finds support for this thesis first in the closely parallel language of Ps. 135.15-17a: "The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but they do not speak; they have eyes, but they do not see; they have ears but they do not hear." The psalmist's contention is that those who trust in idols will become like

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those very idols: "Those who make them and all who trust them shall become like them" (Ps. 135.18).⁴²

Beale finds significant support for his thesis from within Isaiah as well, particularly in the use of idol terminology at 6.13. The reference to burning the terebinth tree has parallels with Isa 1.29-31, where this language is tied to idolatrous practices. Beale concludes that both in Isa 6.13 and in 1.29-31 "rebellious Israel is metaphorically portrayed as becoming 'like' the idols ('cultic trees') which they worshipped. Israel will become like these trees, resembling their destructive destiny, as expression of the ironic principle abstractly stated in [Ps 135.18]."⁴³

If Beale is correct, then Isaiah's call is to proclaim a message to a people who will be unable to see, hear, or understand it, given their increasing resemblance to the unresponsive idols they have chosen to worship. If this is the fundamental nature of Isaiah's ministry, then it is not difficult to understand why hearing is an important motif in Isaiah. Any kind of reversal of this judgment will in all likelihood involve a call to see and hear truly (i.e., understand). In fact, this is what we see in Isaiah; as the eschatological vision of a new exodus is set forth, the call to hear is regularly reiterated.⁴⁴

As we turn to Matthew's use of Isaiah 6, we hear Jesus intentionally framing his ministry to Israel by evoking Isaiah's ministry to Israel: they are both called to preach a message in large measure to unresponsive and unhearing people. In Matthew's context, the evangelist offers this as an explanation for the variety of responses, many of them negative, which arise from Jesus' presence with and ministry to Israel. Matthew shapes the hearing motif, especially in the parables discourse, to suggest

⁴² Beale, "Idolatry," 258.

⁴³ Beale, "Idolatry," 260.

⁴⁴ Cf discussion of Isaiah's hearing motif below.

that adequate hearing is hearing that moves toward understanding. In addition, reception, acceptance, and fruitfulness in relation to what one hears are the ultimate goals of hearing. This seems to be the focus of the kind of hearing referred to in the interpretation of the parable of the soils:

“But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty” (13.23).

This emphasis is important, given the tendency to dwell on the division between those who understand and those who do not in Matthew 13. A sharp distinction between the uncomprehending crowds and the discerning disciples has typically been seen at 13.10-17. As we will see below, the disciples do not earn this uniformly positive portrayal. In the end, beyond the crowds and the

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disciples, *the implied reader* is issued a call to hear rightly in Matthew 13. It is crucial to attend to the way in which Matthew’s audience is invited to use their ears to hear and understand through the explanation of the parable of the soils and particularly in the dual refrain: “The one who has ears ought to hear” (13.9, 43). Whatever is secret and hidden from various character groups in Matthew is fully disclosed to the reader of Matthew.⁴⁵

The connections between Isaiah 6 and Matthew 13 indicate that, even at the turning point between this age and the age to come, the prophetic message is not fully heard and grasped. One reason given in the parables chapter is the unexpected nature of the kingdom. The parables of the mustard seed (13.31-32) and yeast (13.33) at a minimum communicate the kingdom as seemingly inconspicuous and hidden in its early manifestation.⁴⁶ This helps to explain the varied responses, not all positive, to God’s reign as revealed in Jesus’ ministry. “Both parables teach that the coming of the kingdom begins not with a grand, public spectacle but

with a hidden presence.”⁴⁷ The result of these varied responses is eschatological judgment portrayed in the parables of the weeds (13.24-30; with interpretation at 13.36-42) and the fish (13.47-50). At the end of the age, though not until then, all allegiances will be seen clearly.⁴⁸ While evildoers will be punished, “the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (13.43).

Matthew 15.1-20

The final combination of Matthew’s hearing motif with an Isaianic text citation in Mt 11.2–16.20 is found at Mt 15.1-20, where Jesus cites Isa 29.13. During a dispute over why his disciples do not follow hand-washing traditions of the elders, Jesus turns the tables on the Pharisees and scribes by accusing them of disobeying the Torah itself in their focus on keeping such traditions. Then Jesus invokes Isaiah’s condemnation of the hypocrisy of his day to combat the hypocrisy Jesus perceives in his opponents: “This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines” (Mt 15.8-9; Isa 29.13).

Even though the Isaiah quotation itself does not focus on hearing, the context from which this quotation is taken highlights the Isaianic theme of hearing

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and understanding. First, immediately following the citation verses, the reader of Isaiah hears the result of the people’s hypocrisy: “So I will again do amazing things with this people, shocking and amazing. The wisdom of their wise shall perish, and the discernment of the discerning shall be hidden” (Isa 29.14; LXX: τὴν σύνεσιν τῶν συνετῶν κρύψω for the latter clause). Second, in subsequent verses, the reversal of Israel’s fortune is envisioned (29.17-24). In this reversal context, the language of hearing is invoked: “On that day the deaf shall hear the words of a scroll, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see” (29.18; LXX begins: καὶ ἀκούσονται ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ).

⁴⁵ Cf the final section below.

⁴⁶ Though supremely valuable, as communicated by the twin parables of the hidden treasure (13.44) and the costly pearl (13.45-46).

⁴⁷ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2.421.

⁴⁸ There is emphasis in the parable of the weeds on *delayed* judgment, since it is not so very easy for Jesus’ followers to determine “weeds” from “wheat” (13.28-30).

It is not surprising, then, that Jesus follows the citation from Isaiah with these words to the crowds (15.10): “Listen and understand” (ἀκούω and συνίημι, respectively).⁴⁹ In Isaiah, what had been hidden from God’s people because of hypocrisy and superficial worship will be made clear (“the deaf will hear...”) in the final day. Matthew seems to evoke this wider Isaianic context in his shaping of 15.1-20. In Jesus, the potential for restored hearing (and so understanding) has arrived. As people observe the ministry of Jesus and his interactions, the invitation to hear and understand emerges. Yet there is no guarantee that all will respond with proper hearing and understanding. The motif of hearing/not hearing derived from Isaiah finds its way into Matthew’s telling of the story of Jesus.

Hearing and Not Hearing in Isaiah

As we have looked at the intersection of Matthew’s hearing motif and his use of Isaiah citations in 11.2–16.20, it has become clearer that Matthew had a significant store of material in Isaiah from which to draw this motif. With each of the Isaiah citations explored above, we have begun to discern the contours of the theme of the hearing motif from Isaiah. Although this study focuses primarily on Matthew, an overview of significant ways in which *hearing* and *not hearing* emerge in the final form of Isaiah will assist our exploration of this borrowed theme in Mt 11.2–16.20.⁵⁰

From the beginning of Isaiah, the importance of hearing is hallmarked, as the heavens and earth are called to *listen* to God’s complaint against his people

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(*שמע*; 1.2), and the people are called to *hear* God’s complaint themselves (*שמע*; 1.10). In addition, the theme of Israel’s incomprehension, which is often tied to their ability to hear (e.g., 6.10; 29.18-24; 32.3-4), is introduced at the very beginning of the book (1.3): “The ox knows

⁴⁹ The fact that Matthew’s Jesus speaks these words to the crowds, who have been described as lacking knowledge of the kingdom secrets at 13.11, should make us cautious of asserting that the crowds are unable to hear or understand in the end.

⁵⁰ My exploration of Matthew’s use of Isaiah does not depend on any particular view of Isaianic unity or authorship. For a discussion of the hearing motif with attention to issues of authorship, cf R. E. Clements, “Beyond Tradition-History: Deutero-Isaianic Development of First Isaiah’s Themes.” *JSOT* 31 (1985): 101-6.

its owner, and the donkey its master’s crib; but Israel does not know, my people do not understand (יִבִּי). In fact, in the Septuagint of Isaiah 1, Israel’s choice or ability to hear becomes the deciding factor in their destiny (καὶ ἂν θέλητε καὶ εἰσακούσητέ μου... ἂν δὲ μὴ θέλητε μὴδὲ εἰσακούσητέ μου; 1.19-20).⁵¹

The theme of hearing is centrally focused by way of Isaiah’s call narrative in 6.1-13. Isaiah’s mission focuses on an audience who is unable to hear and understand his message.⁵²

‘And he said, “Go and say to this people:
Keep listening (*שמע*), but do not comprehend;
keep looking, but do not understand:
Make the mind of this people dull,
and stop their ears, and shut their eyes,
so that they may not look with their eyes,
and *listen* (*שמע*) with their ears;
and comprehend with their minds,
and turn and be healed” (6.9-10).⁵³

This aspect of Isaiah’s mission receives continued emphasis beyond Isaiah 6. Israel’s obduracy expressed in their inability to hear, raised in a programmatic way in the Isaianic call narrative, is reiterated across Isaiah.⁵⁴ In Isaiah 30,

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for instance, not only is Israel described as rebellious “children who will not hear (*שמע*) the instruction of the

⁵¹ These verses conclude the first oracle of Isaiah (1.2-20).

⁵² If Beale is correct, they are unable to do so because of their idolatry, which renders them more and more like the deaf and blind idols they worship (“Idolatry”).

⁵³ Aitken notices that hearing (and seeing) are central to Isaiah’s experiences just prior to 6.8-13 and concludes that “the experience of Isaiah stands in part as a model of what is to be denied to the people through his preaching: Isaiah has ‘seen’ and ‘heard’— and, by implication, he ‘understands’; the people will also see and hear, but they will not understand.” K. T. Aitken, “Hearing and Seeing: Metamorphoses of a Motif in Isaiah 1-39.” in *Among the Prophets: Language, Image, and Structure in the Prophetic Writings* (ed. Philip R. Davies and David J. A. Clines; *JSOTSup* 144; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 19.

⁵⁴ A combination of hearing and Sight is present in most of the passages discussed here. Cf Beale’s discussion of lack of sight (which along with lack of hearing fits the wider theme of Israel’s incomprehension) and its frequent connection to idolatry; e.g., Isa 29.9-10; 42.16-20; and 44.8-20 (“Idolatry,” 272-74). As Clements observes, “the theme of Israel’s blindness and deafness, understood in a metaphorical and spiritual sense, is clearly of central importance to Isa 40-55” (Clements, “Isaiah’s Themes,” 102).

LORD,” but they actively oppose hearing from God by telling the prophets, “let us hear (שמע) no more about the Holy One of Israel” (30.9, 11). In addition, language of a people with ears but unable to hear is repeated at 42.18-20 and 43.8, even as these deaf ones are called to listen (42.18).⁵⁵ Finally, it is clear in Isaiah that the threat of judgment hangs over Israel’s obduracy. “I will destine you to the sword, and all of you shall bow down to the slaughter; because, when I called, you did not answer, when I spoke, you did not listen (שמע)” (65.12).

Yet it is not only the theological problem of hearing that is thematic in Isaiah. The solution to their lack of hearing and obduracy is also supplied. Isaiah anticipates a time when the hearing of the people will be restored. As Evans has noted, “after the judgment, there is restoration, in which perception returns (attended by righteousness, justice, and trust in God).”⁵⁶ So in Isaiah 29 we read, “On that day the deaf shall hear (שמע) the words of a scroll, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see” (29.17-18). The refrain of restoration of hearing (and sight) recurs in Isaiah 32: “Then the eyes of those who have sight will not be closed, and the ears of those who have hearing (שמע) will listen” (32.3).⁵⁷ These texts are set in the context of future redemption and envision a renewed hearing resulting in understanding as characteristic of God’s people. An eschatological reversal of the receptivity of Israel is set forth in contrast to their current obdurate state.

There is, however, a final way in which the motif of hearing weaves its way through Isaiah which complicates a simple temporal distinction between Israel’s current lack of hearing and their future ability to hear. The numerous injunctions to *hear* that occur across Isaiah imply that hearing which results in understanding is always a possibility. Isaiah’s audience (its hearers!) is

⁵⁵ Evans indicates that Isa 42.18f., although negatively cast with language of obduracy, hints of coming promise. “Second Isaiah declares that it is time for Israel to wake up and recognize what God has accomplished in recent times.” Craig A. Evans, *To See and Not Perceive: Isaiah 6.9-10 in Early Jewish and Christian Interpretation* (JSOTSup 64; Sheffield: JSOT, 1989), 44. This holds true for Isa 43.1-13 as well, where judgment and restoration are announced.

⁵⁶ Evans, *Isaiah 6.9-10*, 46. In addition to Isa 29.17-18; 32.3 (discussed above), cf also Isa 30.19-22.

⁵⁷ Cf also Isaiah 43, where the reversal of deafness is again echoed: “Bring for the people... who are deaf... and let them hear...” (43.8-9).

presumed to have the capacity to respond to these many injunctions. For example, Isaiah addresses rulers of the people whom he defines as “scoffers” to “hear the word of the LORD” (שמעו דבר־יהוה) (28.14). In fact, as the oracle continues, the prophet calls them to stop scoffing (28.22) and instead to “Listen, and hear my

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voice; / Pay attention, and hear my speech” (28.23). Clearly, even those with great propensity to *not* hear (scoffers) may respond to the call to listen. This idea is most potently communicated in the injunction to the deaf to hear and the blind to see (42.18; cf also 42.23). Yet it is not only the most stubborn or deaf who are called to hear. At 44.1, *all the people of Israel* are called to listen to Yahweh (cf also 48.1, 12). If these are real invitations to hear, then the possibility of reversal of obduracy for Isaiah’s audience is real as well.⁵⁸

This brief review of hearing in Isaiah should demonstrate that it is a significant Isaianic motif, especially as it belongs to the broader theme of Israel’s obduracy and lack of understanding. The hearing motif also finds some literary resolution in the eschatological reversal of hearing—the time will come when the people will hear and respond rightly to Yahweh. We have already noted in our discussion above that this same eschatological emphasis is discernible in the use of the hearing motif in Matthew 13. We will explore this and other connections between Isaiah and Matthew in the final section of this paper.

Hearing and Not Hearing: Polyvalence and Rhetoric in Matthew’s Use of Isaiah

At this point, a number of similarities between Isaiah’s and Matthew’s hearing themes become apparent.⁵⁹ First, the connection between hearing and understanding in Isaiah finds expression in Matthew as well. While the themes are often interconnected in individual passages

⁵⁸ Cf injunctions to hear across Isaiah: 1.2, 10; 18.3; 32.9; 33.13; 34.1; 47.8; 49.1; 51.1, 4. 21; 66.5. “The rhetorical call for attention [using “hear/give heed”] is one of the most characteristic stylistic features of prophetic diatribe and protreptic.” Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 182. Blenkinsopp provides examples from Isaiah as well as from across the Hebrew Bible.

⁵⁹ In this study, the focus from Matthew has been on Mt 11.2-16.20.

in Isaiah (cf explicit connection at 6.9-10; 43.9-10), the movement in Matthew is one in which hearing (Matthew 11–13) transitions to understanding (Matthew 13–16). Some instances of hearing in Isaiah (mere auditory perception) are contrasted with understanding, while in other cases hearing virtually includes understanding. Matthew picks up this patent connection to emphasize that hearing alone is not an adequate response to Jesus' ministry. Hearing that moves to understanding and then to obedience is right hearing (e.g., 13.23). It seems significant that the evangelist moves from language of hearing in Matthew 11–13 to that of understanding in Matthew 13–16. The effect of this connection and movement motivates the implied audience to strive to understand Jesus' message as they hear it.

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Second, a significant part of the contrast between not hearing and hearing in Isaiah as well as Matthew seems to be of an eschatological nature. The restoration of Israel's hearing in Isaiah will come "on that day" (ביום ההוא; 29.18), when God will act graciously toward Israel and hearing again will bring about understanding. As we have seen in our discussion of the Isaiah quotations in Mt 11.2–16.20, the hearing motif also emerges in those moments when the eschatological nature of Jesus' work is emphasized. This seems to be, in part, because Matthew highlights Isaiah precisely at those junctures in which the evangelist is emphasizing the eschatological activity of God in Jesus the Messiah. For example, we saw in Mt 11.2-19 that Matthew cites Isaiah's vision of the deaf hearing (11.5) as one indication that the Messianic age has arrived.

Matthew most directly emphasizes the eschatological restoration of hearing at 13.16-17, where the contrast is given between the disciples who are blessed because their ears hear the message of God's reign in Jesus and the prophets and righteous people of old who did not have the opportunity to hear Jesus' message. Clearly, in this case, the contrast is not between a rebellious, obdurate people and the disciples, since the prophets and righteous ones are said to have longed to hear what the disciples now hear (Mt 13.17). Instead, the contrast is primarily a temporal one. The disciples are blessed to be recipients of Jesus' ministry and preaching. This observation helps us make sense of the contrast in the parables chapter between the crowds and the disciples as

well. Since the crowds are those to whom the Isaiah 6 citation is directed, it is clear that they do not hear in a way that brings understanding. Yet, because the disciples are not only contrasted with the crowds (as ones who have been "given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven"; 13.11), but also with the prophets and righteous ones, whose only disadvantage seems to have been an eschatological one, we must be careful not to presume full understanding by the disciples. That they are privy to eschatological preaching (here, the parables and their interpretation) does not guarantee that they understand fully; it only shows their blessed stance in relation to those who do not sit at the same pivotal moment in God's salvation history and to the crowds who lack receptivity and are not privy to the full disclosure that the disciples receive (i.e., the parables' interpretations). "In the first contrast, the crowd's lack of receptivity and understanding is played against the disciples' possession of both... In the second contrast, the lack of historical fortune of the prophets and righteous men is contrasted with the disciples' good fortune."⁶⁰

A third similarity between the hearing motif in Isaiah and Matthew focuses on the calls to hear that resound across both writings. In Isaiah, the call is often to hear *the word of Yahweh* (e.g., 1.10; 28.14; 66.5; cf also 28.23). In addition, the in-

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junction to hear is a broad one; it goes out, for example, to Israel (44.1; 48.1, 12; 51.4), to all peoples or nations (18.3; 34.1), and to the faithful or righteous ones (51.1.7). In Matthew, the thrice-repeated refrain, "The one who has ears ought to hear" (11.15; 13.9, 43), comes on the lips of Jesus and is spoken in reference to John the Baptist's role in bringing God's reign into history and in reference to Jesus' parables. The call in each case is to understand; and the call is issued to characters at the gospel's story level as well as to the reader on Matthew's discourse level.⁶¹

In fact, given the invitations to hear, especially in Matthew 13, it is unlikely that hearing would be viewed as an activity only a select group could fulfill. Anyone

⁶⁰ Trotter. "Understanding and Stumbling." 75.

⁶¹ These are Chatman's terms for the two levels of narrative. Cf Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978); and Brown, *Disciples*, 35.

with ears can do it (11.15; 13.9, 43). And since in Jesus the eschatological moment for deaf ears to open has come (11.5), Matthew's reader will be encouraged to understand the calls to hear as true invitations to hearing and acceptance. In Matthew's view, his reader sits at the right time of salvation history: "Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear" (13.16).⁶²

Having explored the connections between hearing in Isaiah and in Matthew, we can now bring them together to address how the hearing motif functions in Matthew. Since ἀκούω is used in more than one way by the evangelist, even within the same passage, its polyvalence functions to encourage the reader toward proper hearing. By providing contrasting ways of hearing, from mere auditory perception to understanding to acceptance, the audience is invited to consider their own way of hearing.⁶³ The implicit question raised is, *What kind of hearer will I be?* When hearing without understanding happens, as when Herod hears reports about Jesus' activity but wrongly identifies Jesus as John the Baptist raised from the dead (14.1-2), the reader is challenged to hear in a superior way.⁶⁴ Those in the story that hear but do not understand provide a foil for the reader that encourages proper hearing.⁶⁵ As Combrink observes, "The commands to listen (and understand) (11.5; 13.9, 43; 15.10; cf also 17.5) would thus be relevant to the implied reader too as a challenge not to react in the same manner as Jesus' opponents."⁶⁶

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In addition, when hearing that leads to understanding, acceptance, and fruit bearing is described in the narrative, Matthew's implied reader is drawn to emulate this kind of hearing: "But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who *hears* the word and *understands* it, who indeed *bears fruit* and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty" (13.23;

⁶² For the argument that Matthew more directly addresses his reader in the gospel's five discourses, cf Brown, "Direct Engagement," 24-33.

⁶³ According to Phillips, successful seeing and hearing results in action. Gary A. Phillips, "History and Text: The Reader in Context in Matthew's Parables Discourse." *Semeia* 31 (1985): 125.

⁶⁴ Cf also 13.13 for hearing without understanding.

⁶⁵ For this reading effect in relation to the Matthean disciples, cf Brown, *Disciples*, 128-33.

⁶⁶ H. J. Bernard Combrink, "The Structure of the Gospel of Matthew as Narrative," *TynBul* 34 (1983): 89.

italics mine). As Olmstead says, "In this narrative, hearing in its fullest sense can never be separated from obeying. The one who does not bear fruit does not hear and understand."⁶⁷ This kind of full hearing is what is intended in the three calls to hear at 11.15; 13.9 and 13.43 (cf also 15.10): "The one who has ears ought to hear." The call is not simply to perceive sound physically. Matthew's Jesus is calling his audience to hearing that involves understanding and leads to acceptance. At the same time, Matthew is with rhetorical emphasis inviting his reader to this kind of right hearing.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have argued that Matthew picks up on Isaiah's motif of hearing / not hearing (especially in 11.2-16.20) and that his reliance on it can be seen more clearly by examining the Isaiah quotations in this part of Matthew. In addition, I contend that Matthew uses this motif in similar ways to its use in Isaiah, namely (1) to explain the rejection of God's message (through Jesus); (2) to point to the eschatological restoration of hearing (now begun in Jesus); and (3) to call the reader to true or full hearing, which evidences itself in understanding and acceptance. Matthew accomplishes this final task by weaving the Isaianic motif of hearing emphasized by means of Isaiah quotations into his subplot of varying responses to Jesus' ministry.

In this subplot, those who *hear* Jesus encompass the full spectrum of characters and character groups. In Matthew's story, Jesus' antagonists hear, John the Baptist hears, the disciples hear, and so do the crowds. Yet hearing does not guarantee right hearing, which expands to include understanding and even acceptance of Jesus and his message. While hearing can simply indicate auditory perception, at other points, hearing approximates understanding (11.15; 13.9; and 13.43) and paves the way for acceptance and fruit bearing.

Given the flexibility of ἀκούω in Matthew,⁶⁸ hearing functions as a rhetorical device that invites the reader into an active stance toward her own hearing.

⁶⁷ Olmstead, *Matthews Trilogy of Parables*, 109.

⁶⁸ To refer to auditory perception or to include understanding; cf discussion of Mt 13.1-23 above.

As hearing is used to identify various responses to Jesus' message and ministry, more than one way of hearing is proposed for the reader. This polyvalence in relation to hearing is a rhetorical strategy that draws the reader toward understanding and accepting Jesus and his teachings.

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