

TOO STRESSED TO BE BLESSED?  
SOCIAL STRESS THEORY AND  
THE AMBIGUITY OF MATTHEW'S HEALING SCENES

by

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **LOCATING A STRESS-FILLED READING**

This study focuses on a largely unexplored aspect of the healing narratives in Matthew's gospel. While previous scholarship has emphasized the role of Jesus in each scene, I instead explore aspects of the possible somatic and societal experience of the impaired person/people encountering Jesus and who experience healing.<sup>1</sup> Employing the sociological model of Social Stress in the Roman Empire, this study elaborates the possible circumstances and experiences of the impaired, both in their pre- and post- Jesus encounter ("impaired/healed") states. Both the Gospel and previous scholarship have largely neglected both situations by focusing only on the healer and on the moment of encounter and healing.

As such, this study is an exercise in informed imaginative readings of three of the healing scenes in Matthew's Gospel. This study will focus on the characters within the narrative and will explore possibilities for filling in the gaps of the stories. An ancient audience encountering Matthew's gospel held certain cultural assumptions about how one becomes impaired, the effects of that impairment, and what could result from healing. By relying on well-researched work on the societal structures that constituted Roman imperial society, as well as work by social science investigations of the impact of social stressors, this study imaginatively reconstructs possible societal stressors and the impacts those stressors may have had on individuals and communities, and then reads the healing stories with this broader framework in mind.

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<sup>1</sup> I choose to use the word "impaired" rather than "disabled" to recognize that not all impairments are disabling to the same degree or in the same ways, and to avoid the pitfall of assuming that social ostracization was characteristic of every impairment recounted in Matthew.

This study argues that, while Jesus' healings open up a new way of life for healed persons (as is often argued), this new way of life, experienced in imperial societal structures, has its own significant social stressors for the previously impaired person and others within their social network. Thus the healing narratives are complicated and ambiguous. Accordingly, this study discusses healing narratives as they relate to three structures of life under the Roman Empire: slavery (the centurion's slave, Matt 8:5-13), demonic activity (the Gadarene demoniacs, Matt 8:28-9:1), and family life (daughter of the Canaanite woman, 15:21-28).

In this chapter, I locate this study in relation to previous scholarship as it pertains to Matthean healing narratives generally. I categorize previous readings under four different headings (acknowledging that there may be substantial overlap): Redactional Readings, Social Science Approaches, Empire Studies, and Disability Studies. In each section, I review several key interpreters/interpretive approaches by outlining their approach and highlighting their contributions as well as drawing attention to areas that invite further research and different questions. The purpose of this chapter is to contextualize my research as part of the long tradition of engagement with Matthew's healing narratives and to introduce my contribution to this tradition.

### **Redactional Readings**

Theological readings have been a dominant approach to the miracle stories of Matthew.<sup>2</sup> These readings highlight themes of Christology, ecclesiology, faith, and/or

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<sup>2</sup> "Miracle stories" refers to any miraculous account in Matthew. Thus it includes accounts like Jesus walking on water or the feeding of the crowds in addition to the healing narratives.

discipleship as they are seen to be present in the miracle stories. The work of Heinz Joachim Held is representative of this approach.

### **Hans Joachim Held**

Relying heavily on a redactional approach to understanding Matthew's miracle stories, Held argues that Matthew, in his redaction of Mark's miracle stories, "must be understood as an interpreter with a definite goal in mind."<sup>3</sup> Matthew's interpretation of Mark is ruled by two redactional characteristics: the expansion or insertion of discourse material and the abbreviation of the narratives. Matthew's "abbreviation of particular narratives works out some particular theological theme, or more exactly, brings it into greater prominence than is the case with Mark."<sup>4</sup> Held holds this conclusion to be true as well for Matthew's expansion of individual miracle stories.<sup>5</sup> The three major themes Held observes that emerge in the Matthean redaction are theological, namely Christology, faith, and discipleship. It is not that these themes are mutually exclusive, but each miracle story has a prevailing interest in at least one of these three themes.<sup>6</sup> Held is meticulous in his review of each redacted miracle story in Matthew. He even suggests that the omission of two Marcan accounts (Mark 7:31–37 and 8:22–26) is because Matthew finds in them no point of departure for developing a theme of Christology, faith, or discipleship.<sup>7</sup>

In order to support his argument that Matthew is concerned with theology in a decidedly different way than Mark, Held reviews the forms of Matthew's miracle stories

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<sup>3</sup> Hans Joachim Held, "Matthew as Interpreter of the Miracle Stories," in *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), 165.

<sup>4</sup> Held, "Matthew as Interpreter," 169.

<sup>5</sup> Held, "Matthew as Interpreter," 193.

<sup>6</sup> Held sees the theme of Christology as predominant in 8:14–15; 8:16–17; 8:28–34; and 9:2–8. The theme of faith is predominant in 8:5–13; 9:18–26; and 15:21–28. The theme of discipleship is predominant in 8:18–27; 14:15–21; 14:22–23; 15:32–38; and 17:14–20.

<sup>7</sup> Held, "Matthew as Interpreter," 207–11.

and concludes that Matthew tends to use “the form of the conversation as against that of a miracle ‘narrative’...”<sup>8</sup> Using direct speech and counter-speech as the center of the miracle stories, Matthew changes the forms of his narratives. In addition to this, Matthew uses a stereotypical formal beginning and conclusion (unique to this Gospel), omits non-essential people and actions, links catchwords within a miracle story (such as καθαρίζω in 8:2-3; and ἐλθεῖν in 14:28-29), and emphasizes the role of faith in the supplicants’ request.<sup>9</sup>

Held sees this centralization of the conversation happening in Matthew’s redaction of the healing of the woman with the hemorrhage in 9:20-22 (cf Mark 5:25-34). He argues that the descriptive part of the Marcan narrative (Mark 5:29-33) is radically abbreviated down to a few more or less formal intimations at the beginning and the end of the pericope. All intervening scenes and subordinate persons (i.e. the multitude and the disciples) have disappeared so that only the encounter of Jesus and the woman remains. Through the abbreviation a clear bridge of a catchword has arisen (σώζειν) and in the middle now stands the “conversation” which reaches its climax with a saying about saving faith. These changes, according to Held, indicate that this story, for Matthew, is a bearer of doctrine.<sup>10</sup> This shift in form from miracle narrative to conversation demonstrates, Held argues, that Matthew is interested in providing instruction.<sup>11</sup>

After he reviews each miracle narrative with an eye toward theological themes and argues that the literary forms of Matthew’s narratives as conversations suggest pedagogical use, Held returns to the theme of Christology, arguing that the miracle stories are witnesses for Matthew’s Christology. He sees the miracle stories as illustrating Jesus’ identity as

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<sup>8</sup> Held, “Matthew as Interpreter,” 245.

<sup>9</sup> Held, “Matthew as Interpreter,” 225-41.

<sup>10</sup> Held, “Matthew as Interpreter,” 215-19.

<sup>11</sup> Held, “Matthew as Interpreter,” 232.

fulfiller of Hebrew scripture, servant of God acting with authority, helper of his congregation (i.e. the Matthean church), and one who makes his disciples sharers in his authority.<sup>12</sup> Thus, not only do individual miracle narratives emphasize aspects of Matthew's (and Held's) Christology, the miracle stories in toto testify to aspects of Jesus' identity.

In addition, Held views faith as pervasive in each miracle story, even if it is not the dominant theme. Held holds that faith is inherent in the supplicant's request to Jesus (if it is not explicitly mentioned by Matthew, Held supplies the theme).<sup>13</sup> Thus faith is a prerequisite to all the miracles, though not the thing that brings the miracles to pass. Jesus, as authoritative agent of God, brings the miracle about: "The material connexion between faith and the miracle, between the request and the hearing of it is bound up in the last resort with the early Christian fundamental conviction that in the history of Jesus 'the acceptable year of the Lord' has begun."<sup>14</sup> While the agency of the one healed is necessary, Held maintains that the focus of the miracle stories is on the *healer*, not the healed. For Held, the miracle stories "are intended to show the Church by means of the picture of the earthly Jesus who her Lord is and what provision she may expect from him."<sup>15</sup> In sum, Held maintains that Matthew's redaction of Mark's miracle narratives is guided by the themes of Christology, faith, and discipleship; adapted into conversations that highlight these themes; and intended to provide instruction concerning the person of Jesus, the role of the disciple, and the relationship between the risen Christ and the Matthean church. Held's analysis is,

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<sup>12</sup> Held, "Matthew as Interpreter," 253.

<sup>13</sup> Held, "Matthew as Interpreter," 276–77.

<sup>14</sup> Held, "Matthew as Interpreter," 284. Note that the phrase "the acceptable year of the Lord" is not a phrase used in the Matthew's Gospel. Clearly Held's own theological agenda is at work.

<sup>15</sup> Held, "Matthew as Interpreter," 299.

therefore, uninterested in the stress-laden social-somatic circumstances of the supplicant/impaired person.

### **Donald Senior**

Donald Senior adopts and expands Held's perspective in his 1997 short commentary on Matthew.<sup>16</sup> Senior follows the thematic outline set out by Held, that "themes of Christology (i.e. Jesus' power to heal) dominate in 8:1–17, that of discipleship in 8:18–9:17 and faith in 9:17–34."<sup>17</sup> Senior predominantly reads the healing narratives along the lines set out by Held. However, Senior considers the call of Matthew in 9:9–13, nestled in the middle of the block of healing narratives in 8:1–9:34, as a variation on the healing stories.<sup>18</sup> In response to Jesus' call of Matthew the tax collector, the Pharisees complain that Jesus associates with tax collectors and sinners (9:11). Jesus responds by saying, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick....For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners" (9:12b, 13b). Senior writes, "By means of this story Matthew extends the meaning of 'healing' to Jesus' inclusive ministry to tax collectors and sinners."<sup>19</sup> By linking of the call of Matthew with the healing narratives, Senior intends to demonstrate that "the healing stories are not simply a physical transformation of sick or possessed people; they extend beyond physical cures to profound spiritual transformation and healing whereby those who had been isolated or excluded are now drawn into the community and partake of its life."<sup>20</sup> Senior draws a parallel between the

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<sup>16</sup> Donald Senior, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Interpreting Biblical Texts, ed. Charles B. Cousar (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997).

<sup>17</sup> Senior, *Matthew*, 111.

<sup>18</sup> The call of Matthew is nowhere mentioned in Held's analysis since he is solely concerned with miracle stories.

<sup>19</sup> Senior, *Matthew*, 114.

<sup>20</sup> Senior, *Matthew*, 114–15.

metaphorical/spiritually “sick” with the impaired individuals in the healing narratives and between the metaphorical/spiritual “physician” and Jesus the healer in the healing narratives. In drawing these parallels, Senior equates two different forms of encounter with Jesus and subsumes the physical into the metaphorical/spiritual. By doing this, Senior foregrounds the metaphorical/spiritual at the expense of the somatic and societal. Further, his reading of the block of healing narratives (Matt 8:1–9:34) emphasizes the power, compassion, and authority of Jesus.<sup>21</sup> In one instance, Senior writes, “Through his healings the Matthean Jesus not only takes away the sufferings of God’s people but bears them himself.”<sup>22</sup> He promotes a spiritualized reading that draws attention away from healed physical bodies. His reading foregrounds Jesus’ activity and diverts attention from the impaired. Furthermore, by collapsing the distinction between impaired bodies and the metaphorical/spiritual “sick” (i.e. tax collectors and sinners), Senior’s reading of Jesus’ metaphor of the physician healing the sick (9:12b) implies a ready communal integration for spiritually “healed” yet physically impaired persons without any support for or examination of the contours of the impaired experience.

### **Ulrich Luz**

Ulrich Luz, in a section titled “The Miracles of the Messiah” in his 2007 *Hermeneia* commentary on Matthew, argues that “All Matthean stories intend to report actual

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<sup>21</sup> See Senior, *Matthew*. “Three miracles, each of them illustrating the majestic power and extraordinary compassion of Jesus the healer...” (111); “The cure of Simon’s mother-in-law is similar. No word is exchanged—the focus is entirely on Jesus’ power and commitment to heal” (112); “The exchange between Jesus and the centurion forcefully stresses Jesus’ unique authority” (112).

<sup>22</sup> Senior, *Matthew*, 112–13.

events...”<sup>23</sup> He makes this claim because he does not agree with the dominant view of modern Protestant interpretations (of which Held is a paradigmatic example) that the miracle stories served the didactic purpose of illuminating some “theme” concerning Jesus. He argues, “What Matthew gives us is not *doctrines* about faith and discipleship that are coded in a narrative way in the miracle stories but a narrative that reports how faith and discipleship *were established* by the Messiah’s acts of mercy.”<sup>24</sup> While Luz rejects thematic readings of the narratives, his focus is still clearly theological and Christological, which are constitutive of the church’s experience of faith and discipleship. Luz views the miracle stories, which he admits are predominantly healing stories, as “acts of mercy” upon Israelites in need. These miracles were special experiences of Jesus “that overcame the hopelessness of their need.”<sup>25</sup> Luz, however, neither explicates what this “hopelessness of their need” might be in either personal or societal-systemic terms, nor what might characterize a post-miracle life.

Instead he chooses to emphasize ecclesiological themes over the somatic and societal experience of the “impaired/healed” in the miracle stories themselves. He argues that every reaction to Jesus is in response to Jesus’ mercy. Within the Gospel, this includes the choice of the disciples to follow Jesus, the reactions (e.g. astonishment, expectancy) of the crowds, and even the negative commentary from the Pharisees who remain as outsiders. In the church, he sees the kerygmatic function of the stories as connecting the

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<sup>23</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8–20: A Commentary*, ed. Helmut Koester, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia – A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 52.

<sup>24</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 52.

<sup>25</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 52.

church to the person of Jesus; the mercy of Jesus calls the church into the inclusive story of Jesus. He refers to this as transparency. I will return to this below.

While Luz holds that the miracle stories may be real events that happened to real people, he concludes that these stories “tell how God was and is at work with Jesus and ‘with us.’”<sup>26</sup> It is not that he denies the miracle stories their kerygmatic function but that he sees the function differently than scholars who read thematically, like Held. For Held and Senior, the author of Matthew *crafts* the miracle stories with a particular theological theme in mind. For Luz, Matthew *reports* the miracle stories and any theological theme that emerges is a result of the church’s own experience. He contends that the miracle stories “become understandable only when we let ourselves be moved by them.”<sup>27</sup> He argues, “the reality of Jesus’ miracles consists not only of the story that once happened but also of the present experience it directly or indirectly creates.”<sup>28</sup> Luz attempts to hold together the reality of the event reported and the kerygmatic meaning that emerges out of that event through the experience of the church.

He refers to this kerygmatic function as “transparency.” He sees this happening on two levels. First, “indirect transparency” is how the church reads the story of Jesus as “our” story—as a foundational story that explains or causes the church’s own experience. “[The church] thus experiences Jesus’ story as the foundation of its own story. In this way it also experiences the continuity of God’s action before and after Easter, and recognizes that the

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<sup>26</sup> Note that this statement reflects his reading as theological (God), Christological (Jesus), and ecclesiological (“with us”), Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 58.

<sup>27</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 58.

<sup>28</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 54.

story of Jesus prefigures its own story.”<sup>29</sup> Thus the church experiences its relationship with Jesus as indirectly transparent, i.e. as mediated through the story.

The second level, “direct transparency,” is how “the Matthean miracle stories were also in an immediate sense a prefiguration or model of the individual’s own experiences.”<sup>30</sup> Here Luz argues that healings were constitutive of the disciples’ mission and thus essential characteristics of the church. That Matthew includes examples of how a lack of faith can hinder miracles, for Luz, is evidence that miracles weren’t always happening in the Matthean church. The notion of “direct transparency” is a clear instance of Luz reading the miracle stories kerygmatically and theologically.

While he holds that Matthew’s miracle stories recount actual events, Luz’s reading of them is ecclesiological. Below are excerpts from his commentary on 9:27–31:

- **27** “As do the blind, so the church itself turns to Jesus...”
- **28** “The two blind men turn to Jesus as their ‘Lord’ in the same way that the church does...”
- **29** “The faith of the blind men becomes for the church a model of its own faith...”
- **30a** “Jesus certainly did not heal everyone, but he does open the eyes of all by giving his church faith in God the Father.”<sup>31</sup>

Though he wants to caution against understanding identification with the blind men as merely spiritualizing the account,<sup>32</sup> he later struggles to avoid this very thing. He writes, “The physical healing of a blind man (9:27–31), for example, is but the kernel of what happens when blind people as whole persons are granted sight by Jesus and become his disciples,” and thus the report “opens up a realm of experience that is broader than what is

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<sup>29</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 53.

<sup>30</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 53.

<sup>31</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 49.

<sup>32</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 49.

simply reported.”<sup>33</sup> Reading these accounts with an emphasis on the church, Luz *still* reads the miracle stories as didactic about God and/or Jesus—who they are and what they can do in the lives of those who believe in them, which is to say that they are not *really* about the “impaired/healed” person at all. This reading neglects the circumstances of the “impaired/healed” in their somatic-societal state in the stories, even while holding that there *were* actual circumstances.

Finally, Luz summarizes his reading of the Matthean healing narratives this way:

It is not the natural law that is broken by the deeds of the Son of David; it is human suffering, human fear, threat, and blindness. It is not the power of the law of nature that is broken but the power of the devil (cf. Matt 9:34; 12:22–30). The miracles point not to the boundaries of causality but (with Jesus) to the end of the world ruled by sickness and suffering in the kingdom of God, or (with Matthew) to the Christ who as ‘God with us’ contradicts this world.<sup>34</sup>

Here Luz reads the healing narratives Christologically and ecclesialogically. Even in Jesus’ own description of his healing activity in Matt 11:2–6, the focus for Luz is on Jesus and the response of the church, not on the “impaired/healed” person. In 11:2–3 John the Baptist sends his disciples to Jesus to ask, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” (11:3). Jesus responds with a list of different types of healings pulled from several passages in Isaiah and possibly 1–2 Kings.<sup>35</sup> Luz reads this as Jesus evading the question concerning his identity and “referring to the present *time* of salvation that the questioners may experience.”<sup>36</sup> He goes on to state that this scene is concerned with the inclusive story of Jesus. He writes that Matthew is a “model of what is called *narrative Christology* and of how it lays a claim on people. Thus Matthew uses the Baptist and his

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<sup>33</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 53–54.

<sup>34</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 57.

<sup>35</sup> Isaiah 61:1; 29:18–19; 35:5–6; 42:18; 1 Kgs 17:17–24; 2 Kgs 4:18–37; 5:1–27

<sup>36</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 134.

disciples to show the way of understanding ‘on which the disciples also had to go and on which the people should go.’”<sup>37</sup> His reading of this exchange is not about the “impaired/healed” and their somatic-societal states, but instead about how the deeds of Jesus as presented in chapters 8–9 and as summarized in 11:5 are part of the Gospel’s call to hearers/readers to choose to become part of the story as disciples of Jesus. Although Luz is attuned to the way that suffering is the human condition, he neglects attention to the specific experiences of such suffering that are inherent in life lived in the imperial system of Rome and to the types of societal structures and circumstances to which the healed person returns. Further, his Christological emphasis on the Christ as the one who “contradicts this world” (i.e. sickness, suffering, fear, etc.) and on eschatology (i.e. the miracles point to the end of the world) could be read as assuming that encounters with Christ result in permanent and exclusively positive change.

### **W. D. Davies and Dale Allison**

W. D. Davies and Dale Allison also see the healing stories of Jesus as demonstrating the character of Jesus. They write, “He [Jesus] aids not those at the top but those on the bottom. Implicit, yet still unmistakable, is a dissatisfaction with the world as it is.... Things have gone awry and need to be righted.”<sup>38</sup> Yet by not elaborating what might have gone awry, and what being “righted” might involve, their focus remains on Jesus, as is often the case, relegating the person seeking healing and their plea into a marginal position. When the focus is on Jesus, the somatic experience of the one seeking Jesus’ help can disappear.

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<sup>37</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 135.

<sup>38</sup> W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew: A Shorter Commentary* (London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 128.

A few examples should suffice. First, their reading of Jesus' response (11:5) to John the Baptist's question "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect another?" is a prioritization of the spiritual over the somatic. They write, "...the miracle that heals only the body does not accomplish as much as the word that heals the mind and heart and brings eschatological salvation."<sup>39</sup> Here Davies and Allison promote a mind/body dualism that marginalizes somatic experience nearly to the point of irrelevance and assumes that eschatological salvation concerns only "spiritual" matters and has nothing to do with the body and its healing.<sup>40</sup> Second, their comments on the passage 12:9–13 (the healing of the man with a withered hand) are entirely concerned with the controversy surrounding Jesus' healing activity on the Sabbath.<sup>41</sup> There is not one mention in their discussion of this scene where they give attention to the causes or impact of the withered hand or to the resultant (possible) new life that comes from the healing. While Davies and Allison are not wrong in their emphasis on Jesus' teaching concerning the Sabbath (it's the emphasis given by the Matthew to the scene), it neglects to pay attention to the plight of the man with the withered hand. Third, in their comments on the exorcism of the demoniac in 12:22–32, they begin at 12:23 with the reaction of the crowds.<sup>42</sup> They fail to comment in any way on the demoniac, instead focusing on the controversial power of Jesus to cast out demons. Finally, in their reading of the account of the Canaanite woman requesting healing for her demon-possessed daughter (15:21–28), they view the healing as "incidental" to the scene

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<sup>39</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 175.

<sup>40</sup> That Matt 11:4–5 evokes the vision of Isa 25–35 of healed bodies, abundant food and fertility, and the establishment of God's reign/empire points to the contrary. See also 2 Baruch 72–74 and 4 Ezra 7 for examples of eschatological visions including somatic wholeness.

<sup>41</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 193–94.

<sup>42</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 198.

and, thus, not the point of the exchange.<sup>43</sup> What matters for Davies and Allison as interpreters of a story about Jesus is that Jesus acts on behalf of a Gentile because of her faith. In contrast, a reading that focuses on the woman and her daughter suggests that the healing of the daughter matters considerably, in which case the healing was anything but incidental.

Held, Senior, Luz, and Davies and Allison focus on Jesus as the central figure of the Matthean healing scenes and are concerned with Christological, theological, ecclesial, or eschatological themes. Their readings view the somatic transformation of the healed person/people as subordinate to the purpose of the narratives. What is most important in their readings is that Jesus is a healer and that, when Jesus heals, a *spiritual* transformation occurs. For Held and Davies and Allison, this spiritual transformation is often the result of Jesus' accompanying teaching in relation to the healing performed. Senior emphasizes how the healings "extend beyond physical cures to profound spiritual transformation..."<sup>44</sup> Luz works to demonstrate that Matthew's stories are written to transform the experience of the church through direct or indirect transparency.

In contrast to these scholars, I focus in this study on the supplicants and healed person/people, viewing their *somatic* transformation and societal relocation as primary, and recognizing the complex, ambiguous, and problematic aspects of these transformations. Though reading Matthew against the grain and resisting the tendency to focalize Jesus, I recognize that Christological, theological, ecclesial, and/or eschatological aspects may emerge out of a more nuanced discussion of the possible experiences of the "impaired" and "healed" persons.

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<sup>43</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 256.

<sup>44</sup> Senior, *Matthew*, 114.

### **Social Science Approaches**

An approach gaining traction over the last few decades is that of the social sciences. The social scientific approaches highlight larger social structures and systems that are assumed by the biblical authors.<sup>45</sup> They use sociological models as frameworks for investigating the biblical texts.

#### **Gerd Theissen**

Gerd Theissen's 1974 work *The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition* (translated from the German in 1983) takes a three-prong approach to analyzing the miracles stories present in Mark, Matthew, and Luke.<sup>46</sup> Theissen uses form criticism to analyze the miracle stories synchronically (structural), diachronically (history of tradition), and functionally (social location; *sitz im leben*). Though his primary avenue for inquiry is form criticism (with a structuralist bent), I have situated Theissen within the category of "Social Science Approaches" because the sociological aspect of the functional approach will be most useful for this study and transitions nicely to the work of social scientists discussed below.

Theissen's first section takes a synchronic approach to the synoptic miracle stories, cataloguing characters, motifs, and themes. In short, Theissen isolates seven characters/character types, and notes that a primary opposition occurs between divine and demonic characters with human beings often being in the middle position, as the "theatre of a

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<sup>45</sup> Bruce J. Malina, "The Social Sciences and Biblical Interpretation," *Int* 36.3 (1982): 229–42; David Rhoads, "Social Criticism: Crossing Boundaries," in *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 145–56.

<sup>46</sup> Gerd Theissen, *The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition*, ed. John Riches, trans. Francis McDonagh, *Studies of the New Testament and Its World* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

conflict between supernatural, extra-human forces.”<sup>47</sup> Other characters, however, can oppose the miracle-worker. The miracle-worker usually appears first in the scene.

After cataloguing characters, Thiessen catalogues motifs found in the miracle stories. He notes 33 different motifs, though each motif can have several variants. For example, variants for motif #2, the “appearance of the crowd,” include the miracle-worker bringing the crowd with him or attracting a crowd by his activity. Variants for motif #9, “difficulties in the approach,” include crowds hindering access to Jesus (Mark 2:4), disciples driving supplicants away (Mark 10:48), or Jesus’ own words discouraging further conversation (Matt 8:7).

A major element in Thiessen’s discussion of the motifs is whether they are boundary-crossing or boundary-stressing. For example, Thiessen writes, “The motif of difficulty articulates awareness of a boundary: the human will to overcome suffering is faced by apparently insurmountable obstacles. ‘Opposed’ to this motif is the boundary-crossing motif of faith, that is, those cries for help, pleas and expressions of confidence by which the suppliants ignore the difficulty.”<sup>48</sup> Boundary-stressing motifs would include skepticism and mockery (even that which entertains the possibility of a miracle) and criticism from opponents.<sup>49</sup> Thiessen further examines this notion of boundaries from the perspective of humans, the miracle worker, and demons.<sup>50</sup>

With characters and motifs catalogued, Thiessen lays out six different types of miracle stories that he labels “themes”: exorcisms, healings, epiphanies, rescue miracles, gift miracles, and rule miracles. With these themes in mind, he analyzes how motifs are

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<sup>47</sup> Thiessen, *Miracle Stories*, 89.

<sup>48</sup> Thiessen, *Miracle Stories*, 75.

<sup>49</sup> Thiessen, *Miracle Stories*, 75.

<sup>50</sup> Helpful charts outlining the motif fields can be found in Thiessen, *Miracle Stories*, 77–79.

used in different themes. For instance, gift miracles (miracles that make material goods available in a surprising way) are always final-stressed, meaning that the miracle is not so much described as inferred by the demonstration. Rule miracles (miracles that reinforce sacred prescriptions), on the other hand, can be exposition-stressed or final-stressed depending upon whether the miracle precedes the argument over the sacred rule or vice-versa. Overall, Theissen's analysis stresses that boundary crossing is a central theme of the miracle stories.<sup>51</sup>

In the second section of the book, which I note very briefly, Theissen looks at the history of transmission of the miracle stories (the diachronic approach). In this section, Theissen notes that redactional changes to a received tradition are more often than not a change in selection of the motif field rather than a new development. The change in motifs can result in compression (Matt 8:28–34) or expansion (Matt 15:24–28) of the received tradition. At times, a change in motif may result in a thoroughgoing change to the story (Luke 4:38–41). In short, the evangelists were bound, perhaps unconsciously, to a generic structure. It is through the addition, deletion, or rearrangement of motifs that they are able to highlight particular aspects of a miracle story previously unrealized.

The final section of Theissen's work is the most useful for this project (and the reason for its inclusion under this heading). In this section, Theissen argues "Primitive Christian miracle stories are symbolic interactions on the part of groups within ancient society" and that these miracle stories reflect "social factors which unconsciously influenced both story-tellers and audiences and, second, they project a particular form of

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<sup>51</sup> Theissen, *Miracle Stories*, 116.

social relationship.”<sup>52</sup> He first looks at the social conditions that contribute to the forms of the miracle stories and their social intention. In discussing social conditions, Theissen begins by distinguishing between notions of superstition and religion. He writes, “...’superstition’ is a belief rejected in a society, and ‘religion,’ to put it ironically, the officially recognized superstition.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, legitimacy of any form of miraculous activity is socially determined. Charismatic miracle-workers and magicians would both have operated outside of the socially sanctioned channels, but there are some key distinctions worth noting. Magicians did not need to be integrated in to society.<sup>54</sup> A miracle-worker “seeks followers quite openly, starts up missionary movements or founds ‘schools’ – not because he wants to be integrated into the existing pattern of social life..., but because he is looking for new patterns of life applicable to society.”<sup>55</sup> Thus the miracle-worker is often in open conflict with sanctioned authorities (e.g. Jesus’ conflicts with the Pharisees and Scribes). But what are the contributing factors to these conflicts?

Theissen discusses three factors that he sees as being involved in these conflicts. The first are socio-ecological factors. He cautions about making too strong a link between rural mentality and belief in miracles, but he does think that the rural area of Galilee, where these miracle stories took shape, influenced their themes and their character. These stories continued to be told in rural settings, but eventually found audiences in more urban settings as well.<sup>56</sup> A second factor is socio-economic concerns. He writes, “...the miracle stories in particular present themselves as forms of expression of lower classes, in the

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<sup>52</sup> Theissen, *Miracle Stories*, 231.

<sup>53</sup> Theissen, *Miracle Stories*, 232.

<sup>54</sup> Theissen, *Miracle Stories*, 242.

<sup>55</sup> Theissen, *Miracle Stories*, 242.

<sup>56</sup> Theissen, *Miracle Stories*, 249.

simplicity of their theology, the simplicity of their narrative, but above all in their subject matter.”<sup>57</sup> He observes that the specific situations described in the miracle stories (i.e. possession, hunger, disease, etc.) are “situations which do not strike as hard in all social groups.”<sup>58</sup> In short, he argues there is an undeniable degree of class correlation in the miracle stories, which reflects something of the concerns of peoples who created and perpetuated them.<sup>59</sup> The third factor is socio-cultural. By this he means that the miracle stories are cognizant of socio-cultural lines while also stretching the boundaries of those lines. On one hand, he observes that non-Jewish petitioners often articulate an awareness of the ethnic boundary and that the use of Aramaic words may be intended to demonstrate the superiority of Aramaic. On the other hand, “the resulting dynamic between the different ethnic groups tends to be expansive and missionary.”<sup>60</sup> In sum, he argues that “The miracle stories show that their social setting is the tension between different cultures and peoples...One of the roots of the ambivalence between boundary-crossing and boundary-stressing which is characteristic of their structure is thus a social one.”<sup>61</sup>

Theissen next moves to arguing that the miracle stories’ primary function was missionary, and that the miracle stories replace miracles.<sup>62</sup> Their missionary function, rather than a didactic function, is evident by the fact that they require “no special charism” for transmission, they lack ideas of discipleship and ethical teaching, and they were unlikely to have been spread by miracle-workers because they lack relevant techniques for

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<sup>57</sup> Theissen, *Miracle Stories*, 249.

<sup>58</sup> Theissen, *Miracle Stories*, 249.

<sup>59</sup> Theissen, *Miracle Stories*, 252.

<sup>60</sup> Theissen, *Miracle Stories*, 254.

<sup>61</sup> Theissen, *Miracle Stories*, 256–57.

<sup>62</sup> Theissen, *Miracle Stories*, 259.

working miracles (i.e. prayer, the name of Jesus).<sup>63</sup> “Publicity for primitive Christian missionary work was spread by Christians who were not themselves missionaries.”<sup>64</sup> In the broader picture, the Christian miracle stories are part of a larger uprising of charismatic miracle-workers in the first century.

Theissen ends his analysis of the miracle stories by discussing their existential function. He argues that they are about more than wish fulfillment and that they “point to Jesus’ redemptive action. This redemptive action is specific: Jesus defeats disease and demons.”<sup>65</sup> Here, as throughout, Theissen reiterates the point that those suffering in the miracle stories were *actually suffering*. He criticizes interpreters who would dismiss the miraculous elements as being interpretations of spiritualized or interiorized beliefs. Aware of the cultural distance between biblical scholars and the texts they study, he asks, “Have we really so firmly suppressed the elemental fears of disease, hunger, and death as to deny their existence in the past too?”<sup>66</sup>

While Theissen’s form and redaction critical approaches will be only somewhat useful, his discussion of the social functions of the miracle stories is a helpful springboard for further inquiry. What Theissen observes and reiterates is that the suffering apparent in the Gospel texts reflects real human, that is somatic, experience. For this study, however, it is not enough to note *that* people suffered, but to explicate *why and how* they suffered, and what difference, if any, Jesus’ miracle accomplished. What conditions of their social location may have accompanied the afflictions reflected in the healing narratives?

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<sup>63</sup> Theissen, *Miracle Stories*, 262–2.

<sup>64</sup> Theissen, *Miracle Stories*, 263.

<sup>65</sup> Theissen, *Miracle Stories*, 299.

<sup>66</sup> Theissen, *Miracle Stories*, 299.

## Evert-Jan Vledder

Evert-Jan Vledder, building on the work of Theissen, uses Conflict Theory to highlight and analyze the conflicts present in the miracle stories of Matthew 8–9.<sup>67</sup> Vledder says that five basic statements can be made concerning his model:

- (1) All conflicts are essentially conflicts of class/group *interests*. All human activities are driven by the drive to maximize one's own interests.
- (2) Closely related to the above is the urge to *survive*.
- (3) In basically all societies/groups there are those who in terms of *power and authority* are in positions of either domination or subordination.
- (4) Conflict almost always brings about *change*.
- (5) Conflict is *always present as a never ending spiral*.<sup>68</sup>

Vledder uses these guiding statements to argue that Jesus was in conflict with the Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes in a significant way even as early as chapters 8 and 9. He writes, "By giving too little attention to the dynamics of the conflict in the text, its full potential is not only reduced, but also the *real interests* of Jesus, being those of the underprivileged and suppressed, are understated...The acuteness of the conflict needs to be stressed in order to understand its dynamics in the Gospel of Matthew."<sup>69</sup>

Important for his argument is where he socially locates the Matthean church. Using Lenski's model of social stratification, Vledder concludes that it is "possible that the community of Matthew comprised members in and around the city including urban non-elite and rural peasantry. Thus the Matthean community predominantly consisted of non-elite."<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, this community was in the process of breaking away from formative Judaism, thus the tension in the gospel should be seen as "representing something of an

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<sup>67</sup> Evert-Jan Vledder, *Conflict in the Miracle Stories: A Socio-Exegetical Study of Matthew 8 and 9*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 152 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

<sup>68</sup> Vledder, *Conflict in the Miracle Stories*, 12.

<sup>69</sup> Vledder, *Conflict in the Miracle Stories*, 56.

<sup>70</sup> Vledder, *Conflict in the Miracle Stories*, 135–36.

*intra* and *extra muros* situation. The community is still within Judaism and yet it is outside as well, or at least *on its way out*.”<sup>71</sup> What this means for Vledder’s analysis is that the conflicts reflected in Matthew 8–9 occur at two levels: elite versus non-elite interests and parent Judaism versus burgeoning Jesus-follower interests.

Vledder reads each scene in Matthew 8–9 highlighting the conflict present and noting what interests are at stake. Vledder finds this conflict as early in the Gospel narrative as 8:1, “When he came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him.” These are the same crowds from 7:28 who were amazed by his teachings. For Vledder, this “suggests the presence of conflict: Jesus is regarded as having *more* authority than the scribes (cf. 7.29). The mere fact that the crowd accepts Jesus’ authority rather than that of the scribes, places the scribes in opposition to Jesus and vice versa.”<sup>72</sup> Whether the crowds will continue to recognize Jesus’ authority remains up in the air, that is, until “they eventually choose against Jesus in the passion narratives...”<sup>73</sup>

The centurion in 8:5–13, in terms of social stratification, was on the same level as the Jewish leaders, namely a member of the retainer class whose primary function was to serve the interests of the ruling class. The fact that he “acknowledges *Jesus* to be the one in command (and no one else)...contributes to the tension by implying that Jesus also has subordinates. He has God-given authority which once again threatens the authority of those in power.”<sup>74</sup> Vledder also uses conflict theory to understand the implications of Jesus’ healing at the request of a Gentile. He reads this as Jesus challenging “the privileged position of Israel” and heightening “the conflict further by declaring them [Israel] to be no

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<sup>71</sup> Vledder, *Conflict in the Miracle Stories*, 146.

<sup>72</sup> Vledder, *Conflict in the Miracle Stories*, 174.

<sup>73</sup> Vledder, *Conflict in the Miracle Stories*, 175.

<sup>74</sup> Vledder, *Conflict in the Miracle Stories*, 181.

longer in God's presence because of their lack of faith in Jesus and what he stands for."<sup>75</sup>

Thus, Vledder highlights conflict at two levels in this scene. First, Jesus' authority is in conflict with the authority of the Jewish leaders, and second, the Jesus movement is in conflict with formative Judaism.

The demoniacs at Gadara (8:29–9:1) also highlight various levels of conflicts of *interests*. In this scene, Jesus is in conflict with several groups. First, his authority continues to conflict with the Jewish leaders (though admittedly latent in this scene). Second, Jesus comes into conflict with the possessed demons, who "recognized that Jesus was the Son of God...but they did not acknowledge his authority."<sup>76</sup> The demons' interests were to remain undisturbed where they were; Jesus' interest was in liberating the demon-possessed person. Finally, Jesus also comes into conflict with the herdsman and the villagers. The loss of the animals was an economic hit for the herdsman, and therefore their economic interests were at stake. The text gives no indication why the villagers were opposed to Jesus, but Vledder argues "we have to read it in combination with the conflict with the herdsman."<sup>77</sup>

Throughout the exegesis portion of his book, Vledder spends the majority of his discussion focusing on Jesus and the conflicts in which Jesus is involved. However, in the final chapter Vledder delineates how these conflicts affect the beneficiaries of Jesus' healing activity. He notes that their "*process of improvement* starts with Jesus' mercy."<sup>78</sup> He sees this mercy as a "cleansing" process, restoring purity and restoring the sick and the sinners to the community, thus improving their situation. Vledder's reading of the healing scenes is

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<sup>75</sup> Vledder, *Conflict in the Miracle Stories*, 183.

<sup>76</sup> Vledder, *Conflict in the Miracle Stories*, 197.

<sup>77</sup> Vledder, *Conflict in the Miracle Stories*, 197.

<sup>78</sup> Vledder, *Conflict in the Miracle Stories*, 231.

monolithic, ignoring the ambiguity of the somatic and societal experience of the impaired in their post-“healed” state. Further, he perhaps overstates the purity element in the healing scenes. For example, he argues that Peter’s mother-in-law was unclean because she was sick<sup>79</sup> and that Matthew was unclean because he was a tax collector.<sup>80</sup> He is on firmer ground when he discusses the uncleanness of the woman with the hemorrhage, but there are significant arguments to be made that her hemorrhage did not make her unclean.<sup>81</sup>

Though Vledder is aware that social stratification plays a significant role in dictating the interests of parties involved in conflict, his treatment of the contours of that marginal position is limited. He does not discuss the types of stressors that existed for people of lower social status and how those stressors impacted health, he often exaggerates the role of purity concerns, and he views the healings as straightforward *improvements* of impaired/healed person’s condition without any recognition of possible ambiguities. While his work is useful for highlighting the way conflict is present in important ways throughout the Gospel, not only in the passion narrative, he lacks attention to the somatic and societal experiences of the impaired/healed which inform their interests and contribute to the conflict.

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<sup>79</sup> Vledder, *Conflict in the Miracle Stories*, 184.

<sup>80</sup> Vledder, *Conflict in the Miracle Stories*, 206.

<sup>81</sup> Amy-Jill Levine, “Discharging Responsibility: Matthean Jesus, Biblical Law, and Hemorrhaging Woman,” in *A Feminist Companion to Matthew*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marianne Blickenstaff (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2001), 70–87.

## **Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh**

In 1998 Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh published their *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, with a second edition published in 2003.<sup>82</sup> Their commentary relies on the work of anthropologists of agrarian societies and specifically the ancient and modern Mediterranean worlds.<sup>83</sup> A key assumption of social-science methodology is that industrial societies and agrarian societies are fundamentally different.<sup>84</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh write, "... the distance between ourselves and the Bible is *social* as well as temporal and conceptual. Such social distance includes radical differences in social structures, social roles, values, and general cultural features."<sup>85</sup> By employing models of social structures developed by anthropologists, Malina and Rohrbaugh read Matthew, Mark, and Luke with an eye toward the social structures assumed by the text. Models are "simplified, abstract representations of more complex real-world interactions," and, as such, are "cognitive devices to help unearth dimensions of a setting not at once apparent."<sup>86</sup> Models reflect what is generic and common in a culture, rather than what is specific and unique, and answer the question "How are things the same?"

Because only so much can be written down, "an author inescapably depends upon the general cultural knowledge a reader can supply from his or her own resources to

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<sup>82</sup> Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

<sup>83</sup> Though aware that there are significant differences, Malina and Rohrbaugh hold that the modern Mediterranean world is the closest analogue to the ancient Mediterranean world that we possess and therefore insights from modern Mediterranean anthropology can be cautiously employed in the development of models.

<sup>84</sup> For a list of 16 examples extrapolating the differences between industrial and agrarian societies, see Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 6–8.

<sup>85</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 2.

<sup>86</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 4.

‘complete’ the text.”<sup>87</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh argue that the Synoptic Gospels come from what anthropologists call a high-context society, a term referring to societies with a “broadly shared, well-understood knowledge of the context of anything referred to in conversation or in writing.”<sup>88</sup> In the ancient world, Malina and Rohrbaugh argue, “people had more in common and experience was far less discrepant. Thus writers could more nearly count on readers to fill in the gaps from behaviors socialized in a common world.”<sup>89</sup> Therefore, no matter who one chooses to focus on in the Gospel narrative, “whether Jesus, his hearers, later collectors of tradition, or the Gospel writers themselves, all of these assume the social system of the agrarian, Mediterranean world.”<sup>90</sup>

There are three aspects of the ancient Mediterranean world that are important for their understanding of the healing scenes in Matthew. First, and importantly, the ancient Mediterranean world was an “honor-shame society.” Honor and shame permeated public life. There are two types of honor, ascribed and acquired. Ascribed honor is honor that comes from being from a particular family or having a particular social role. Acquired honor is honor achieved as a result of one’s behavior. In either case, honor must be publicly recognized.<sup>91</sup> Second is the “central and public phenomenon” of challenge-riposte.<sup>92</sup> This is a competition between social equals in which a challenge (almost any word, gesture or action that might undermine honor) must be answered by a riposte (“a

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<sup>87</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 9.

<sup>88</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 11. By contrast, a low-context society is one that produces “highly specific and detailed documents that leave little for the reader to fill in or supply.”

<sup>89</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 12.

<sup>90</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 14.

<sup>91</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 370.

<sup>92</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 334.

response that answers in equal measure or ups the ante...”).<sup>93</sup> Third is the patronage system, in which reciprocity is key. “Patron-client systems are socially fixed relations of generalized reciprocity between social unequals in which a lower status person in need (called a client) has his needs met by having recourse for favors to a higher-status, well-situated person (called a patron).”<sup>94</sup> Patrons were wealthy and powerful individuals who could provide gifts to lower-status individuals or families or even to whole cities (known as benefaction). Brokers were those who mediated between patrons and clients. Social-scientific readings of the Gospels often speak of Jesus as the broker between God (the patron) and the people (the clients).

One area highlighted by social scientists of particular import for reading the healing narratives of Matthew is the ancient view of health and healthcare. Within this medical model, Malina and Rohrbaugh describe the “Three Zone Personality.”<sup>95</sup> The Three Zone Personality contains: 1) the heart/eyes which represent emotion-fused thought; 2) the mouth/ears which represent self-expressive speech; and 3) the hands/feet which represent purposeful action. These three zones show up repeatedly in the Gospels, as they were understood to constitute the human person. In the ancient understanding of health, “one’s state of being was more important than one’s ability to act or function. The healers of the ancient world thus focused on restoring a person to a valued state of being rather than an ability to function.”<sup>96</sup> Thus with the healing scenes many social-science readings

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<sup>93</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 334.

<sup>94</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 388.

<sup>95</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 418. Anthropologists also refer to this as the “zones of interaction.”

<sup>96</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 368.

highlight the transition in state (dishonored to honored; unclean to clean; deviant to normate) rather than the restoration of function.

The evil eye was a belief widespread in the ancient Mediterranean as an explanation for illness. It is rooted in the belief that negative attitudes, which originate in the heart, could be projected out by the eye, intentionally or not, causing real and physical effects (note the heart/eyes connection in this belief). Below I demonstrate how Malina and Rohrbaugh utilize the societal systems of honor/shame, patron/broker/client, and challenge/riposte in their interpretation of some of the healing scenes in Matthew.

Malina and Rohrbaugh understand the healing summary of Matt 4:23–25 to be a comment on the acquired honor of Jesus. The leper who kneels before Jesus in 8:2 behaves as a client before a broker or patron.<sup>97</sup> The healing of the paralytic in 9:1–8 contains a challenge-riposte exchange between Jesus and some scribes.<sup>98</sup> The hemorrhaging woman in 9:20–22 is reflective of purity concerns and the ostracizing of persons who are perpetually unclean.<sup>99</sup> Further, Malina and Rohrbaugh argue that because the fringes on Jesus' cloak were "originally intended as an apotropaic device...The woman obviously leans toward the older usage of the fringes, perhaps believing that someone has put the evil eye on her."<sup>100</sup> Jesus is labeled as deviant in 12:22–37 when the Pharisees argue that Jesus can only cast out demons by the power of Beelzebul.<sup>101</sup> As a final example, the Canaanite woman in 15:21–28, by requesting mercy, demonstrates that she understood Jesus, as the

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<sup>97</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 55.

<sup>98</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 59.

<sup>99</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, 61. Note that Amy-Jill Levine disputes a reading emphasizing purity concerns or ostracization in Amy-Jill Levine, "Discharging Responsibility: Matthean Jesus, Biblical Law, and Hemorrhaging Woman," in *A Feminist Companion to Matthew*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marianne Blickenstaff (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2001), 70–87.

<sup>100</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 62.

<sup>101</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 71.

Son of David, to have an obligation to meet her request. Though Jesus argues that his obligation is only to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” (15:24), her faith convinces him to heal her daughter.<sup>102</sup>

Malina and Rohrbaugh pay careful attention to how larger social structures and cultural norms operate throughout the Gospel of Matthew, but, in their interpretations of the healing narratives, their readings neglect attention to the “impaired/healed” person in the scenes. As with other interpreters, they focus on Jesus and how the scenes locate Jesus in the honor/shame and/or the patron/broker/client systems. Their readings fail to pay attention to the somatic and societal situation of the one petitioning and/or healed by Jesus.

### **John J. Pilch**

John J. Pilch uses insights and models from Medical Anthropology (MA) to assess the sociocultural aspects of healing in the Gospels. Following sociologist and anthropologist Peter Worsley, he stresses that human beings worry about good fortune and misfortune, of which health and sickness are one aspect. He uses a model of value orientation, developed by anthropologists Florence Kluckhohn and Fred L. Strodbeck, as a starting point for his analysis. They proposed “a systematic theory of cultural variations in values and/or value orientations...”<sup>103</sup> Pilch notes that “Values determine the identification of human misfortunes like illness, the appropriate and inappropriate responses to it, as well as the expected outcome of treatment, if, indeed, any is available.”<sup>104</sup> In short, this model addresses 5 common human problems and suggests 3 possible solutions for each problem.

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<sup>102</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 84.

<sup>103</sup> John Pilch, *Healing in the New Testament: Insights from Medical And Mediterranean Anthropology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 3.

<sup>104</sup> Pilch, *Healing in the New Testament*, 3.

Below is a chart of the model proposed by Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck and followed by Pilch.<sup>105</sup>

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Range of Solutions</b>		
Principal mode of human activity	Being	Being-in-becoming	Doing
Interpersonal Relationships	Collateral	Lineal	Individual
Time Orientation	Present	Past	Future
Relationships of humans to nature	Be subject to it	Live in harmony with it	Master it
View of human nature	Mixture of good and evil	Evil	Good

According to this model, Pilch argues that the New Testament idea of health emphasizes being-in-becoming (the notion that humans develop in stages), collateral relationships (with equals or kin groups) or lineal relationships (superiors, leaders, the government), present and past time orientation, subjection to nature (nature is uncontrollable), and a view of the human as both good and evil (“not neutral or correctable”).<sup>106</sup>

With this value orientation model in place, Pilch then lays out some specific Medical Anthropology (MA) terminology that he utilizes in his discussion of the Gospels. In general, *health* is well defined by the World Health Organization as a “state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity.”<sup>107</sup> For Pilch, this definition is useful because it highlights the way that health can be understood as a cultural construct. MA differentiates between *disease* and *illness*. *Disease* is concerned with abnormalities of human organs or organ systems. *Illness*, on the other hand, is “an explanatory concept that describes the human perception, experience, and interpretation

<sup>105</sup> Pilch, *Healing in the New Testament*, 4.

<sup>106</sup> Pilch, *Healing in the New Testament*, 12.

<sup>107</sup> Pilch, *Healing in the New Testament*, 24.

of certain socially disvalued states.”<sup>108</sup> *Sickness* is “a blanket term used to label real human experiences of disease and/or illness.”<sup>109</sup> *Disease*, as defined here, works well for describing sickness in a biomedical model (like that of the United States). *Illness* is in large part a social construct that relies not on knowledge of pathogens and viruses, but on how a human makes meaning of their sickness. Pilch further distinguishes these two subdivisions of sickness by defining outcomes of treatment. He writes, “*Curing* is the anticipated outcome relative to *disease*, that is, the attempt to take effective control of disordered biological and/or psychological processes. *Healing* is directed *toward illness*, that is, the attempt to provide personal and social meaning for the life problems created by sickness.”<sup>110</sup> Thus, from the MA perspective, “Curing is efficacious when biomedical changes take place; healing is efficacious when the people who seek it say it is.”<sup>111</sup> In short, *curing* does not always take place, and there is certainly no way of knowing if it did in the Gospels, but *healing* always takes place because healing is a restoration of meaning.<sup>112</sup>

Pilch begins by noting that, according to the definitions he has put forth, the Bible has no interest in disease but only in illness. Pilch’s review of the healthcare system as presented in Matthew considers three overlapping sectors: Professional, Popular, and Folk. Pilch categorizes Jesus as presented in Matthew as a folk healer. He notes that arguments concerning the source of Jesus’ authority and power support this categorization. Folk healers could be viewed simultaneously as effective yet illegitimate. Further, Jesus’ power is presented as intrinsic not learned, leaving room for the leveling of charges of

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<sup>108</sup> Pilch, *Healing in the New Testament*, 25.

<sup>109</sup> Pilch, *Healing in the New Testament*, 24.

<sup>110</sup> Pilch, *Healing in the New Testament*, 25.

<sup>111</sup> Pilch, *Healing in the New Testament*, 34.

<sup>112</sup> Pilch, *Healing in the New Testament*, 141.

witchcraft.<sup>113</sup> Pilch does, however, state that the type of folk healer Jesus is in Matthew is unclear.<sup>114</sup>

Pilch's model is helpful for delineating the distinctions between biomedical disease and sociocultural illness. Further, it highlights that how one understands their condition is just as important as how one gets into that condition. However, his work, in focusing on the event of the healing itself, tends to focalize Jesus by working to place him within the healthcare system. In addition, he often speaks of the healing scenes as having effects that change the social position of the one healed (moving from a disvalued state to a valued state). Though this reading takes seriously how meaning is made through a healing transaction, it does not attend to the lived circumstances of those involved either before or after the healing.

Overall, the social science approaches reviewed above (Theissen, Vledder, Malina and Rohrbaugh, and Pilch) concur that sickness was a reality for folks of the ancient world. Often, however, they focus on Jesus as the miracle-worker in conflict with his society (Theissen and Vledder), as part of the larger honor-shame system (Malina and Rohrbaugh), or as a player in the ancient "healthcare system" (Pilch). Their particular models of choice highlight the role of Jesus in a larger social structure. In contrast, this study will focus on the "impaired/healed" person, on how their social location involved social stressors that accompanied the somatic infirmities requiring the miracle-working abilities of Jesus, and on the possible ambiguous consequences of the miracle on the impaired person.

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<sup>113</sup> Pilch, *Healing in the New Testament*, 85.

<sup>114</sup> Pilch sees Jesus as a teacher-healer in Mark's gospel. Pilch, *Healing in the New Testament*, 85.

## Empire Studies

Imperial Criticism, or Empire Studies, is an approach that works to foreground the Roman Empire as a context for the New Testament writings.<sup>115</sup> It is interested in investigating the interactions between early Jesus-followers and the Roman Empire, as it is accessible through the New Testament texts. These interactions include how Rome and its power are engaged, represented, and negotiated in relationship to the authors' understandings of God's reign and God's purposes. This approach highlights the imperial dynamics in the text that are often neglected or intentionally overlooked in spiritualized, non-political, and religious readings of the New Testament.

### Warren Carter

Warren Carter is one whose work pays attention to the plight of the healed in the healing narratives. His imperial critical work on the Gospel of Matthew sees in the healing scenes a manifestation of the reign/empire of God that is in conflict with the Roman Empire. What the Roman Empire claims it does (provide peace and well-being for all) can only be accomplished with the establishment of God's empire.<sup>116</sup> While Carter recognizes that other scholars have done great work by noting the Christological, faith, and discipleship elements of the miracle stories, he argues, "Attention to Christology and discipleship, and communal conflicts and social identity has, ironically, diverted focus from the miracles themselves."<sup>117</sup> Carter, instead, wants to pay attention to the somatic transformations that occur. While Senior (above) was interested in extrapolating the

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<sup>115</sup> Warren Carter, *Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001), 1.

<sup>116</sup> Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 70.

<sup>117</sup> Warren Carter, "Jesus' Healing Stories: Imperial Critique and Eschatological Anticipations in Matthew's Gospel," *CurTM* 37.6 (2010): 488.

spiritual transformations that accompanied healing, Carter focuses on the somatic, specifically how the miracles reflect God's vision of societal well-being. Carter does this by foregrounding the socio-political context of Matthew as a text that emerges from and negotiates the Roman Empire.

He notes that the Roman Empire was one characterized by vast inequality, with a mere 2–3% controlling and consuming the majority of all the resources. The pervasiveness of poverty meant that 70–80% hovered around subsistence, with a few perhaps managing a stable, but by no means wealthy, existence.<sup>118</sup> He highlights the types of conditions in which many in the empire lived, conditions marked by “squalor, garbage, human excrement, animals, disease, crime, fire risk, overcrowding, natural disasters, and unstable dwellings.”<sup>119</sup> In addition, drawing on the work of Peter Garnsey, Carter outlines some of the diseases of deficiency that result from malnutrition, the types of contagious diseases to which malnutrition renders one more susceptible, and the ways that oppressive contexts can result in psychosomatic illnesses (i.e. paralysis and symptoms that ancient folks understood to be demon-possession).<sup>120</sup> With this foreground in mind, Carter concludes that the healing and exorcism stories “participate in and are forerunners of the transformed material existence that contrasts with and overcomes the damaging effects of the present age under Roman rule. These actions manifest the presence of God's reign or empire in the midst of Rome's empire even now.”<sup>121</sup> Carter's work highlights the socio-

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<sup>118</sup> Steven J. Friesen, “Poverty in Pauline Studies: Beyond the So-Called New Consensus,” *JSNT* 26.3 (2004): 323–61; Bruce Longenecker, “Exposing the Economic Middle: A Revised Economy Scale for the Study of Early Urban Christianity,” *JSNT* 31 (2009): 243–78.

<sup>119</sup> Carter, “Jesus' Healing Stories,” 492–93.

<sup>120</sup> Carter, “Jesus' Healing Stories,” 493–94; Peter Garnsey, *Food and Society in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 45–48.

<sup>121</sup> Carter, “Jesus' Healing Stories,” 496.

political realities of those healed in the miracle stories and anticipates an eschatological somatic and societal transformation. While his work notes the role that Jesus has to play in God's Empire, he does not ignore the immediate and somatic transformative power of the miracle stories. Nevertheless, he does not attend in particular detail to the complex societal circumstances and structures of imperial life to which healed people return to live their lives. Attention to these realities will be one of the contributions of this study.

### **Jerry Toner**

Using the social stress model (see chapter 2) as a lens for inquiry, classical scholar Jerry Toner looks to see how stress impacted the psychosomatic health of citizens/residents in the highly status-obsessed culture of the Roman Empire.<sup>122</sup> Toner notes the buffers that can ameliorate stress (i.e. "high self-esteem, strong relationships, and the perception of being in control") as well as the connection between poor physical health and a diminished capacity to cope with stressful events. While he is careful to avoid diagnosing any type of mental illness, he takes seriously that Rome was a society full of potential stressors and that the vast majority of non-elites facing difficult societal conditions may have been susceptible to many types of mental disorders, exacerbated by a lack of coping resources, even if we are unable to make definitive diagnoses. He considers the potential impact of the death of a family member, economic difficulties, military service or subjugation, natural disasters, infant mortality and grief, status insecurity, physical abuse, and the plight of slavery ranging from abuse to boredom. Though Toner is not looking at the healing scenes in Matthew's Gospel, his work on delineating social stressors in the Roman Empire is valuable for understanding the various types of circumstances that

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<sup>122</sup> Jerry Toner, "Mental Health," in *Popular Culture in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), 54–91.

people under imperial power would have had to negotiate—often unsuccessfully—and that often had negative impact on people’s lives.

My interests lie with the types of questions raised by Empire Studies. This study reads the healing scenes in Matthew as sites of imperial negotiation. The work done by Carter, Toner, and others illuminates the economic disparity and physical and mental consequences of life under imperial rule. Taking my cue from these insights, this study investigates the role of stress in the Matthean healing scenes. This study evaluates the types of stressors that may be present before the impaired person encounters Jesus. In addition, it considers the implications of the post-Jesus encounter state: how are the stressors alleviated, if at all? Whose stress is alleviated? Are new stressors introduced because of the healing? By doing this, I view the supplicant and recipient of the healing (not always the same person), not just Jesus, as characters worthy of investigation.

### **Disability Studies**

According to Avalos, et al, “As an academic discipline, disability studies arose mainly within the social sciences and the humanities.”<sup>123</sup> Disability Studies (DS) has created alternative models to understanding disability. Rather than the medical model, which is pervasive in Western society, DS suggests social and cultural models. The social model “differentiates between an impairment and a disability... impairment refers to certain physical or cognitive traits considered medically or biologically non-normative...Disability, however,

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<sup>123</sup> Hector Avalos, Sarah Melcher, and Jeremy Schipper, “Introduction,” in *This Abled Body: Rethinking Disabilities in Biblical Studies*, ed. Hector Avalos, Sarah Melcher, and Jeremy Schipper (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2007), 2.

refers to social and structural discrimination against persons with impairments...”<sup>124</sup> On the other hand, the “cultural model understands disability as a product of the ways that cultures use physical and cognitive differences to narrate, organize, and interpret their world.”<sup>125</sup> It wasn’t until the mid-1990s that DS began to influence biblical scholarship, allowing the field to break away from readings that tended toward medical diagnoses, assuming the impaired person in the text was acknowledged at all. The 2004 Society of Biblical Literature conference marked the first session of “Biblical Scholarship and Disability” providing “a venue for scholars and students to discuss and develop their research on matters of disability within biblical and cognate literature.”<sup>126</sup>

### **Robert Garland**

I begin this section looking at the work of Robert Garland.<sup>127</sup> Though his work is not specific to biblical studies, his book *The Eye of the Beholder* “is a landmark study that catalogues and describes many aspects of deformity, disability, and teratology.”<sup>128</sup> Garland’s work reviews a spectrum of disabilities in the ancient world, their potential causes, and societal responses to those afflicted.

Garland suggests an array of causes for disability in the ancient world. While parents were encouraged to expose children with congenital deformities, postnatally acquired disabilities would have been more prevalent and caused chiefly by

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<sup>124</sup> Candida Moss and Jeremy Schipper, “Introduction,” in *Disability Studies and Biblical Literature*, ed. Candida Moss and Jeremy Schipper (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 4.

<sup>125</sup> Moss and Schipper, “Introduction,” 4.

<sup>126</sup> Avalos, Melcher, and Schipper, “Introduction,” 3.

<sup>127</sup> Robert Garland, *The Eye of the Beholder: Deformity and Disability in the Graeco-Roman World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

<sup>128</sup> Nicole Kelley, “Deformity and Disability in Greece and Rome,” in *This Abled Body: Rethinking Disabilities in Biblical Studies*, ed. Hector Avalos, Sarah Melcher, and Jeremy Schipper (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 32.

malnutrition.<sup>129</sup> In addition, the lack of medical care for all but the most well to do of society would mean that even something as minor as a broken arm could result in permanent disability. Slaves were at excessively high risk for injury resulting in disability or deformity, whether from the physical toll of their work or the deliberate maiming by their masters.<sup>130</sup> He notes, additionally, that in a society in which warfare was common, one might expect to encounter disabled war veterans.

Attitudes toward the disabled varied as well. The majority of the disabled folks in Graeco-Roman society would have lived lives on the margins of society, though not all disabilities marginalize in the same way. The blind might find work as singers or poets; the physically deformed (i.e. hunchbacks, dwarves, the obese) might work as performers who exploit their deformity for their own gain; and those with mobility impairments may find work in skilled or semi-skilled occupations of sedentary nature.<sup>131</sup> Garland speculates that most would have eked out a living by begging, petty crime, and irregular part-time work. Unfortunately, our sources are meager when it comes to the poorest of the poor.

The disabled were sometimes viewed as exotic, especially, as Garland argues, to the emperor and others of the ruling class. He argues that the “imperial predilection for monstrosity surely reflects the jadedness of the imperial palette and the emperor’s ever-lengthening quest in a shrinking world for something new and exotic to relieve his aching boredom.”<sup>132</sup> While emperors may have been bored and elites may have been fascinated by the deformed and disabled, they were still extremely insensitive in their interactions.

He notes that deformed slaves were not likely exempted from their owners’ sexual

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<sup>129</sup> Garland, *Eye of the Beholder*, 13, 17–18, 20.

<sup>130</sup> Garland, *Eye of the Beholder*, 20.

<sup>131</sup> Garland, *Eye of the Beholder*, 32–35.

<sup>132</sup> Garland, *Eye of the Beholder*, 51.

desire<sup>133</sup> and that elites were capable of inflicting all kinds of harm. Further, in reviewing the many surviving images and works that caricatured different types of deformities, including dwarfism, obesity, hermaphroditism, blindness, clubfootedness, cretinism, and cyclopean deformity, Garland is struck by the fact that “conspicuously lacking throughout the entire series is any trace of sympathy for the condition of the deformed on the artist’s part or even any awareness that, as life’s victims, their repellent exterior may not be the consequence of a vicious character.”<sup>134</sup>

Despite attitudes toward the disabled that marginalized, exoticized, or inflicted further harm on the disabled, some accommodations were made by medical physicians. For the clubfooted, crutches or prosthetics may be available.<sup>135</sup> For the epileptic, a doctor could remedy the ailment if they knew the precise moment to apply their remedy.<sup>136</sup> What the remedy was is unclear. There were several proto-chiropractic techniques used on hunchbacks, though it is unlikely that these were successful.<sup>137</sup> Roman doctors frequently performed amputations on those whose limbs required it. Mental ailments were treated in a variety of ways including confinement, physical restraints, purging, blood-letting, special diet, controlled environment, and sleep inducing drugs.<sup>138</sup>

Overall, Garland’s work is thorough and thoughtful. He is aware of the limitations caused by the lack of sources outside of elite, male circles. While Garland is thorough in scope, he is often unclear about what he means by disability, often talking about deformity

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<sup>133</sup> Garland, *Eye of the Beholder*, 52–54.

<sup>134</sup> Garland, *Eye of the Beholder*, 121. The ascription of character traits to a person based on their physical appearance (physiognomy) was widespread.

<sup>135</sup> Garland, *Eye of the Beholder*, 125–26.

<sup>136</sup> Garland, *Eye of the Beholder*, 126–27.

<sup>137</sup> Garland, *Eye of the Beholder*, 127–29.

<sup>138</sup> Garland, *Eye of the Beholder*, 136–39.

and ugliness (neither of which are necessarily disabling) as though they are interchangeable with disability. He further neglects attention to the category of eunuch, which other scholars have noted as a disabling category (see Moss below). Regardless of its shortcomings, his work was foundational for asking questions about how the disabled/deformed were perceived in ancient society. His work is useful for interpreting the biblical texts because it challenges assumptions about the life of the disabled characters within the text. His exploration of attitudes toward the disabled in Greek and Roman societies sheds light on how disabilities could be marginalizing while stressing that not all marginalization is the same. For biblical studies, this is an important nuance to a discussion all too often weighed down by spiritualized and ecclesiological readings in which the disabled require restoration into the community above all else.

***This Abled Body: Rethinking Disabilities in Biblical Studies (2007) and Disability Studies and Biblical Literature (2011)***

These two volumes are noted here because they are two important monographs addressing disability in biblical studies. However, neither volume addresses healing in Matthew's Gospel. In *This Abled Body*, of thirteen chapters (excluding introduction and conclusion), only two deal with New Testament texts in particular. One is a reading of Mark 5:1–20 through the lens of mental illness while the other is a reading of Paul's epistles that highlights disability as a being at the heart of Paul's beliefs about humanity and God. Likewise, of the twelve chapters in *Disability Studies and Biblical Literature* only four deal with New Testament texts. Of those four, only Warren Carter's reading of John 5:3 addresses a gospel text. While both monographs look at the role of the impaired in the text, work to decenter Jesus, and correct misconceptions about disability in the ancient

world, neither addresses disability in the Gospel of Matthew. This study will address this lacuna.

### **James A. Metzger and James P. Grimshaw**

James A. Metzger and James P. Grimshaw approach some of the healing narratives in Matthew's Gospel by acknowledging their own experiences with disability. Metzger reads from a disabled perspective (he has been diagnosed with Ankylosing Spondylitis) while Grimshaw reads from the perspective of a caregiver (he cares for his wife who has been diagnosed with Rheumatoid Arthritis). Each interpreter contextualizes their perspective, names their methodological lens, and reads several healing narratives in Matthew accordingly. These passages are 8:5–13, 9:2–8, 12:9–14 (Metzger only), and 17:14–20

Metzger's context is that of one living with Ankylosing Spondylitis (AS), "a rheumatic disease that minimally involves inflammation of the spine and sacroiliac joints."<sup>139</sup> Because a characteristic of AS is chronic pain, Metzger argues that AS "is not the sort of disability that most are able to celebrate as distinction or reframe as mere variation."<sup>140</sup> Metzger's experience of disability is a reminder that not all disabilities disable in the same way. As an example, Metzger notes that his AS, a disease from which he wishes he were free, is a "'hidden disability'; that is, our challenges are due not to society's disabling gaze but primarily to somatic and psychic distress."<sup>141</sup> While he himself is keenly aware of his AS, society as a whole may assume him to be able-bodied and treat him as such.

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<sup>139</sup> James A. Metzger and James P. Grimshaw, "Reading Matthew's Healing Narratives from the Perspective of the Caregiver and the Disabled," in *Matthew*, ed. Nicole Wilkinson Duran and James P. Grimshaw (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 136.

<sup>140</sup> Metzger and Grimshaw, "Reading Matthew's Healing Narratives," 134.

<sup>141</sup> Metzger and Grimshaw, "Reading Matthew's Healing Narratives," 134.

Metzger assumes “a social or minority-group model of disability” which “locates disability in oppressive institutional structures, policies, and attitudes, all of which are anthropogenic and therefore ‘might be otherwise.’”<sup>142</sup> These structures, policies, and attitudes include an able-bodied prioritization of healing.<sup>143</sup> His reading of Matthew assumes this social model resulting in a resistant reading. Metzger’s reading highlights four problematic areas that must be addressed in the interest of the disabled.

Metzger begins by stating that “Most attractive in Jesus’ encounters with characters subject to pain and/or loss of mobility is a sensitivity and responsiveness to aversive experience of chronic illness.”<sup>144</sup> He is, however, aware that there are “irredeemably problematic” aspects to Jesus’ encounters with disabled folk. First, the four scenes that Metzger reads (above) “are really about something else other than disability or even healing...At no point is the experience of disability explored in its own right.”<sup>145</sup> Jesus remains the central character in speech and action. Second, “Jesus’ healings are outward demonstrations that God’s reign is being realized, but this new order does not tolerate human difference well...”<sup>146</sup> Metzger is troubled by the way that deviance is corrected rather than accommodated. Third, “the disabled and their representatives must ingratiate themselves to Jesus or first prove that they believe in his supernatural curative abilities.”<sup>147</sup> Throughout the Gospel, Metzger argues that “healing is viewed not as a right or as a free

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<sup>142</sup> Metzger and Grimshaw, “Reading Matthew’s Healing Narratives,” 135–36.

<sup>143</sup> See Kerry H Wynn, “Johannine Healings and the Otherness of Disability,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 34.1 (2007): 61–75.

<sup>144</sup> Metzger and Grimshaw, “Reading Matthew’s Healing Narratives,” 136.

<sup>145</sup> Metzger and Grimshaw, “Reading Matthew’s Healing Narratives,” 137.

<sup>146</sup> Metzger and Grimshaw, “Reading Matthew’s Healing Narratives,” 137.

<sup>147</sup> Metzger and Grimshaw, “Reading Matthew’s Healing Narratives,” 138.

gift but as a commodity..."<sup>148</sup> Finally, Metzger finds problematic "the Gospel's mystification of biologic illness as demonic possession, perpetuation of the causal link between sin and disability, and promotion of a fantasy of cure."<sup>149</sup> By "fantasy of cure" Metzger means that the healing scenes in Matthew suggest "that healing is immediate, complete, and lasting."<sup>150</sup> Metzger resists this and argues, "Many who are ill and/or disabled today cannot expect an immediate, complete, and permanent cure, even should they desire one; it is unrealistic, and faith communities that perpetuate this fantasy are doing far more harm than good."<sup>151</sup>

In the end, Metzger sees Matt 20:29–34 as holding promise for a liberative reading. The two blind men who ask Jesus for healing are not represented by others, address Jesus themselves, resist able-bodied attempts to silence them, and are not healed to achieve some paraenetic purpose. Despite the fact that the two blind men ingratiate themselves to Jesus, Metzger views this scene as having potential.

With Metzger, I too find problematic the promotion of a fantasy cure, in the Gospel and in more modern interpretations. Metzger, as a resistant reader concerned with advancing the interests of the disabled today, raises some important challenges to contemporary scholarship on the healing narratives. However, despite his attention to the disabled in the text and his work to decenter Jesus, Metzger does not explore the possible somatic and societal experiences of the disabled (or their petitioners) either before their encounter with Jesus or after their healing.

Grimshaw takes a different approach by identifying with the caregivers as they petition on behalf of the disabled. These caregivers include the centurion in 8:5–13, the

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<sup>148</sup> Metzger and Grimshaw, "Reading Matthew's Healing Narratives," 138.

<sup>149</sup> Metzger and Grimshaw, "Reading Matthew's Healing Narratives," 139.

<sup>150</sup> Metzger and Grimshaw, "Reading Matthew's Healing Narratives," 139.

<sup>151</sup> Metzger and Grimshaw, "Reading Matthew's Healing Narratives," 139.

friends of the paralytic in 9:2–8, and the father of the demon-possessed boy in 17:14–20.

His reading uses masculinity studies as a lens for inquiry. He writes:

The caregivers function as the ideal men who bond with Jesus and fit within Matthew's patriarchal system, a separate group of men (heirs of the kingdom, scribes, disciples) serve as failed men, poor examples, who are criticized for their lack of masculinity, and the third type are the disabled boys or men, classified as unmen, who must be immediately and totally transformed by Jesus from girls to men in order to be repositioned up the scale for a better masculinity.<sup>152</sup>

With this schematization in mind, Grimshaw proposes that the healing scenes are about reinforcing the established patriarchy. Matthew is concerned with "constructing a community where masculinity is primary" and Grimshaw sees Jesus' approach to healing as "using immediate and complete surgery to bring these disabled bodies back into proper relationship with the patriarchal system."<sup>153</sup>

He reads three scenes with an eye toward the way masculinity is played out by the characters. Jesus' hypermasculinity is on display, petitioners act in appropriate masculine ways to have their petition granted (e.g. are active agents in an exchange, show proper deference to Jesus, behave piously, demonstrate self-mastery, etc.), and the healed person is restored to the patriarchal system. Grimshaw calls each of these three healings "violent" transformations making unmen into men.<sup>154</sup> Grimshaw appears to be drawing a parallel between the activity of Jesus and the approach of modern insurance and bio-medicine to chronic disease. He writes:

I find the hypermasculinity in these passages quite suffocating, but also familiar. It seems to predominate in the medical contexts my wife and I are familiar with. Potent drugs and mighty surgeons are available to wipe out disease. Combative insurance companies must be conquered (or bonded with) in order to financially survive. My wife cannot receive insurance for physical therapy to manage chronic

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<sup>152</sup> Metzger and Grimshaw, "Reading Matthew's Healing Narratives," 146.

<sup>153</sup> Metzger and Grimshaw, "Reading Matthew's Healing Narratives," 146.

<sup>154</sup> Metzger and Grimshaw, "Reading Matthew's Healing Narratives," 147–49.

pain, but only for harsh chemicals and invasive procedures to swiftly wipe away acute pain.<sup>155</sup>

While I agree with Grimshaw that Matthew participates in the promulgation and legitimization of the patriarchal system of his day (especially in its presentation of Jesus having complete mastery over self, others, and the natural world), I hesitate to affirm his reading that the healing scenes are “violent.”

Further, Grimshaw’s reading lacks attention to the somatic and societal experience of the Matthean characters. While his attention to the caregivers *as caregivers* is important and illuminating, his assessment does not explore the role of stress on the somatic and societal experience of these caregivers. While his attention to masculinity is helpful, there is opportunity to continue exploring how the stress of compromised masculinity (the caregiver’s or the disabled’s) may have effected men in the ancient world and how that stress may have manifested itself somatically.

In both readings, the role of Jesus is decentered and the role of the disabled or the caregiver is highlighted. Metzger’s foregrounding of the disabled is for the sake of furthering the cause of the disabled today. His reading is, therefore, resistant and critical of ancient treatments of the disabled. Grimshaw’s reading is centered on how various characters in each examined scene perform (or don’t perform) masculinity and how his reading relates to his own role as a caregiver performing a matrix of masculinities. His reading is both sympathetic to the role of caregiving, but resistant to the way that masculinity and patriarchy are reinforced through the healing narratives. They both demonstrate ways that the Gospel assumes the abled-body as the ideal state of being and

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<sup>155</sup> Metzger and Grimshaw, “Reading Matthew’s Healing Narratives,” 150.

discuss the implications of that assumption for contemporary contexts. While both helpfully foreground the disabled and/or their petitioners in their readings, they lack attention to the somatic and societal realities that are hidden by the text.

### ***The Bible and Disability/Candida Moss (2017)***

In 2017, Baylor University Press published *The Bible and Disability: A Commentary*.<sup>156</sup> It is the first comprehensive commentary on the Bible through the lens of DS. The editors of this volume, recognizing that a book dedicated to DS of the New Testament had yet to be published, sought “to include a balanced representation of New Testament scholarship, commensurate with the division of material between the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Scriptures in the Bible itself.”<sup>157</sup> Rather than taking a verse-by-verse approach to the biblical books, this commentary looks at blocks of the literature “because of the purpose to introduce the reader to a comprehensive look at the way disability is represented in the Bible as a whole.”<sup>158</sup> Each contributor to the volume “read the Bible through the lens of disability, informed by the experience of human beings with disabilities.”<sup>159</sup> This commentary addresses a significant lacuna in DS scholarship.

Candida R. Moss wrote the commentaries for Matthew and Mark. In contrast to Metzger and Grimshaw, she highlights several places in Matthew where disability or impairment can be read as the ideal state for the disciple. However, she finds these moments in Jesus’ teaching rather than in his miracles. She begins by evaluating how disability appears in the Gospel:

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<sup>156</sup> Sarah Melcher, Mikeal Parsons, and Amos Yong, eds., *The Bible and Disability: A Commentary* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2017).

<sup>157</sup> Sarah Melcher, “Introduction,” in *The Bible and Disability: A Commentary*, ed. Sarah Melcher, Mikeal Parsons, and Amos Yong (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2017), 12.

<sup>158</sup> Melcher, “Introduction,” 13.

<sup>159</sup> Melcher, “Introduction,” 14.

Broadly speaking, disability appears in the Gospels in one of three ways: (1) in the miracle or so-called healing stories in which an impaired individual is ‘cured’ by Jesus; (2) as a metaphor for sin, ignorance, obstinacy, stubbornness, or other moral failing; and (3) in moments of silence in which traditional readings have tended to overlook the presence of disability or assume able-bodiedness in the text.<sup>160</sup>

Interestingly, her approach to Matthew tends toward highlighting the “moments of silence,” many of which are affirming of disability. She reads the genealogy of Matt 1:1–17 through the lens of infertility, noting that this “preeminent disability in the Hebrew Bible provides the context for the genealogy of Jesus.”<sup>161</sup> She considers how autoamputation and salvation are linked in Matt 5:28–30, 38–42 and how proprioceptive deficits (“an unawareness of movement, posture, and orientation in space”<sup>162</sup>) can be seen as “embodied examples of a moral advantage when it comes to almsgiving” (Matt 6:2–4).<sup>163</sup> Furthermore, in Matt 19:12, Jesus states that he would prefer his followers to live as eunuchs. Eunuchs were, in a sense, “performing disability....An embodied state that signified social subservience and subjugation is here held up as the desirable state for followers of Jesus.”<sup>164</sup>

Moss does, however, note that Jesus’ teaching associates sensory malfunction with unethical behavior and failure throughout Matthew. She writes, “In Matthew the senses are repeatedly linked to the activity of the heart. It is those who are pure in heart who will see God (Matt 5:3), while those who blaspheme are defiled because what comes out of the mouth (i.e. speech) proceeds from the heart (12:34, 15:18–9).”<sup>165</sup> In contrast to many of

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<sup>160</sup> Candida Moss, “Mark and Matthew,” in *The Bible and Disability: A Commentary*, ed. Sarah Melcher, Mikeal Parsons, and Amos Yong (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2017), 275.

<sup>161</sup> Moss, “Mark and Matthew,” 278.

<sup>162</sup> Moss, “Mark and Matthew,” 280.

<sup>163</sup> Moss, “Mark and Matthew,” 281.

<sup>164</sup> Moss, “Mark and Matthew,” 283.

<sup>165</sup> Moss, “Mark and Matthew,” 281.

these instances, she notes that the teaching in Matt 6:22–23 subverts this linkage. Jesus’ teaching that the eye is the lamp of the body works to encourage the hearer/reader of the teaching to evaluate their salvation. “While moral deficiency is connected to blindness (and elsewhere auditory impairment), the character of this moral impairment is not discernible in a physical sense....The rhetorical and exhortatory effects of this passage rest on the assumption that the listener is *not* sensorially impaired.”<sup>166</sup>

Moss’s evaluation of the Matthean text is important for DS because it demonstrates “that in its own time and in its composition the Bible does not unequivocally endorse ableism...”<sup>167</sup> However, Moss does not address a single healing scene or “impaired/healed” person in her comments on Matthew.

This study looks to address three shortcomings in DS’s treatment of Matthew. First, by reading specific healing scenes in Matthew it addresses a lacuna in DS scholarship in general. Second, by taking on a full-length reading of three particular healing scenes within a New Testament text it addresses a lacuna in New Testament studies more specifically. Finally, by reading the Matthean healing scenes with an eye toward the ambiguity manifest in the somatic and societal transformations of the characters, this study complexifies readings of the Gospel that promote the abled-body as the ideal and permanent state.

### **Conclusion**

In assessing previous scholarship, I have noted four distinct ways that the healing scenes in Matthew have been approached: redactional readings, social scientific approaches, Imperial Critical readings, and Disability Studies readings. I have established that traditional theological readings and many social scientific readings remained focused

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<sup>166</sup> Moss, “Mark and Matthew,” 282.

<sup>167</sup> Moss, “Mark and Matthew,” 277.

on the role of Jesus in the scene and do not give attention to the somatic or societal experiences of the impaired/healed person. Imperial Critical readings began to shift attention away from Jesus by foregrounding the Roman imperial context and its oppressive effects on the lives of people living under imperial rule. However, these readings do not especially foreground factors of stress and they fail to address how the resultant healed state is lived with its own complexities and stressors. Finally, Disability Studies readings have centered on the role of the impaired/healed in the narratives and corrected several misconceptions about disability in the ancient world. However, a full-length treatment of the healing narratives in Matthew with attention to the impaired has not been undertaken. This study addresses these areas by reading healing narratives across the gospel, highlighting possible experiences of stress in the circumstances of the impaired person (both before and after their healing), attending to the possible somatic and societal experiences of the impaired person in both their impaired state and their “healed” state, and resisting the Gospel’s promotion of a fantasy cure.

In Chapter 2, I outline the methodologies that are used to address the questions this study raises. Thereafter, I read multiple Matthean healing scenes using the outlined methodological approaches to highlight three aspects of stress-laden life under the Roman Empire: slavery (the centurion’s slave, Matt 8:5–13), demonic activity (the Gadarene demoniacs, Matt 8:28–9:1), and family life (the Canaanite woman and her daughter, 15:21–28).

## **CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY**

In the previous chapter, I reviewed four scholarly approaches to reading the Matthean healing narratives: redactional readings, social scientific approaches, Imperial Critical readings, and Disability Studies readings. I located my work as being indebted to these foundations. The redactional readings I reviewed attend to questions concerning the identity of Jesus and how Jesus' actions address the church, but they are restricted by their focalization on Jesus to the exclusion of those afflicted and are problematic in their denial of somatic transformation while favoring of spiritual transformation. While theological and Christological questions asked by theological readings are important, the focus of this study is on the stressful circumstances of the impaired characters and their advocates in the healing narratives. Social scientific and Imperial Critical approaches laid groundwork for considering larger social structures and social expectations assumed by the text, and highlighted how the New Testament and its characters reflect the highly stratified Roman imperial society. In this study I focus on the damage to human bodies and psyches that occurs in these stress-laden contexts. Disability Studies has raised new questions about the function of healing in the Gospels and challenged old assumptions about able-bodiedness reflected in the biblical narratives. This approach has opened up new avenues of inquiry and created space for my reading of the Matthean healing stories that focuses on stress-laden societal and somatic experiences, particularly factors of stress, of the impaired characters within the Roman imperial context.

In addition to this scholarly work and the methods I outline below, my family's experiences dealing with physical and mental illness has heightened my interest in the Gospel healing narratives. My mother lives with chronic and disabling rheumatoid

arthritis, while my sister navigates her diagnosis of bi-polar disorder. They have struggled to reconcile their conditions with their faith in God while being confronted with the often-abusive theology coming from their church communities. The evangelical churches of which they are a part have operated under the assumptions that healing is available for their conditions if they have enough faith. The burden of healing is thus placed on the impaired. This burden has often resulted in feelings of guilt for their perceived lack of piety and anxiety over their perceived status as marginal in their faith communities (if they lack the faith for healing, do they have enough faith to be involved in ministry at all?). Compounding the problem, belief in demons and demonic activity is still common in some evangelical communities. Demonic activity has also been blamed for their conditions (though with decreasing frequency). In this case, seeking medical treatment is discouraged since the real problem is spiritual, not physical. These well-meaning church members, often dealing with no such chronic impairment of their own, perpetuate harmful theological readings of the gospel healing stories that do not reflect the lived experience of the impaired. This study, in part, is born out of this disconnect between certain harmful theologies of healing and the actual lives of the impaired.

In the following chapters, I read three Matthean healing stories focusing on factors of stress in the impaired person's experience (and the advocate, where applicable), as much as that can be imaginatively reconstructed. I consider how their societal positioning is related to their impairment; how being healed might alleviate stress, introduce new and unforeseen stress, or complicate the severity of ongoing stress; and how healing affects a larger social matrix. With a scholarly, informed imagination, I offer readings that, with attention to possible stress-filled societal and somatic experiences of the impaired

characters, aim to challenge harmful theological readings of the healing narratives by highlighting the ambiguity of healing and nuancing interactions between the impaired, supplicants, and Jesus.

In order to reconstruct the possible experiences of these narrative characters, I draw on four methodological approaches: Social Stress Theory, Empire Studies, Disability Studies, and Narrative Criticism. I use these methods to illuminate the ambiguity of the healing scenes as well as to present possible interpretations that demonstrate how, under Roman imperial rule, societal stressors may have impacted the life of the “impaired/healed” characters in the narratives.

### **Social Stress Theory**

My key interest for this project lies in exploring how societal stress may well constitute part to the psychosomatic experience of those characters who encountered Jesus in the Matthean healing narratives. The Social Stress model is an approach to understanding the toll that stress can take on a person’s psychosomatic health and societal well-being. As such, it has a “distinctively sociological orientation.”<sup>1</sup> Thus it recognizes that mental illness is a social and somatic experience even as much as it is also an attribute of a particular individual.

As early as the 1930s, connections between socioeconomic status and personal health were observed. For example, in 1939, Faris and Dunham observed in Chicago residents a connection between low socioeconomic status and a high rate of

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<sup>1</sup> Carol S. Aneshensel and Jo E. Phelan, “The Sociology of Mental Health: Surveying the Field,” in *Handbook of the Sociology of Mental Health*, ed. Carol S. Aneshensel and Jo E. Phelan (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 1999), 3.

institutionalization in mental hospitals.<sup>2</sup> Another study published in 1958<sup>3</sup> by Hollingshead and Redlich “found an inverse relationship between mental illness and social class,”<sup>4</sup> namely that those of lower social status were more likely to suffer from some sort of mental illness than those of higher social status. In addition, Hollingshead and Redlich noted that socioeconomic status often marked differences in when, how, and which types of treatment for schizophrenia were sought. Individuals in higher socioeconomic classes tended to seek treatment at the early appearance of symptoms, entered treatment through medical channels, received treatment, and were often released into the care of their family. Contrarily, individuals of lower socioeconomic status sought treatment much later than their higher status counterparts, often entered treatment through legal rather than medical channels, and were more likely to go untreated or be institutionalized.<sup>5</sup> More recent studies have developed these early findings by expanding their field of inquiry beyond mental disorders for which treatment is sought. Researchers have examined a broader spectrum of psychological distress, including depressive symptomology, substance and alcohol abuse, and anxiety, further establishing that there is a relationship between low socioeconomic status and psychiatric disorders.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to emphasis on socioeconomic status, the Social Stress model further attends to the factor of gender, highlighting the distinct ways that some stressors affect

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<sup>2</sup> R. E. L. Faris and H. W. Dunham, *Mental Disorders in Urban Areas: An Ecological Study of Schizophrenia and Other Psychoses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939).

<sup>3</sup> A. B. Hollingshead and F. C. Redlich, *Social Class and Mental Illness: A Community Study* (New York: Wiley, 1958).

<sup>4</sup> Yan Yu and David R. Williams, “Socioeconomic Status and Mental Health,” in *Handbook of the Sociology of Mental Health*, ed. Carol S. Aneshensel and Jo E. Phelan (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 1999), 152.

<sup>5</sup> Yu and Williams, “Socioeconomic Status,” 152.

<sup>6</sup> Yu and Williams, “Socioeconomic Status,” 153–58.

men and women, particularly in terms of economics and childbirth/childrearing. These studies note that reactions to stress tend to differ based on the socialization of one's gender. Sarah Rosenfield helpfully summarizes:

...there is also evidence that gender differences in basic assumptions help to explain the differences between male and female psychiatric problems. Lower levels of mastery and self-esteem among females contribute to explaining their predominance in depressive symptoms in both adolescence and adulthood. The greater levels of emotional reliance and identification with others also helps explain women's higher incidence of depressive symptoms. In terms of externalizing problems, the differences in risk taking and risk aversion between males and females contributes to males' predominance in antisocial behavior.<sup>7</sup>

One study that examined the impact of job-related stress "found a lack of substantive complexity is detrimental to both men and women, but emerges as sex-typical types of disorder: women respond with demoralization, whereas men react with drinking."<sup>8</sup>

Another study found that "difficulty obtaining childcare and lack of paternal participation in childcare generate stress and emotional distress among employed wives, but not fathers."<sup>9</sup> In short, studies have shown that women are not "under greater stress and hence more prone to psychiatric disorder," but that men and women both respond to social stressors in equal measure though in gender-specific and highly socialized ways.

This is important for this study, especially in chapter 5 where I analyze how social stress affects families in the story of the healing of the Canaanite woman's daughter (Matt 15:21-28). By considering the socialization of gender roles in the first century imperial

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<sup>7</sup> Sarah Rosenfield, "Splitting the Difference: Gender, the Self, and Mental Health," in *Handbook of the Sociology of Mental Health*, ed. Carol S. Aneshensel and Jo E. Phelan (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 1999), 217-18.

<sup>8</sup> Carol S. Aneshensel, "Social Stress: Theory and Research," *Annual Review of Sociology* 18 (1992): 32.

<sup>9</sup> Aneshensel, "Social Stress: Theory and Research," 32.

context, a better understanding of how a sick child may have stressed their parents emerges.

Social Stress theory makes a clear distinction between stress associated with life-event changes and chronic stress. Life events “are discrete, observable events standing for significant life changes, with a relatively clear onset and offset, and made up of, once in motion, a relatively well-defined set of subevents describing the ‘normal’ progress of the event.”<sup>10</sup> Theorists define these types of stressors as beginning “with the announcement of the unfortunate news that begins the life change.”<sup>11</sup> Life-event stressors include such events as divorce, unemployment, or the death of a loved one. Chronic stressors, on the other hand, “do not necessarily start as an event but develop slowly and insidiously as continuing and problematic conditions in our social environments or roles” and “typically have a longer time course than life events from onset to resolution.”<sup>12</sup> What some may view as overlap between these two classifications of stressors may in actuality be “that two stressors, and not one, have occurred, and they have, in effect, been ‘spliced’ together.”<sup>13</sup> As an example, the loss of a loved one would be considered a life-event change while the felt absence of that loved one would be considered a chronic stressor. Theorists argue “chronic strains, event-related, and time-ambiguous events all contribute independently to depressive symptomatology, but chronic strains are most potent.”<sup>14</sup>

Social Stress Theory also investigates the types of coping strategies available to and utilized by the different groups. Multiple studies have demonstrated a connection between

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<sup>10</sup> Blair Wheaton, “Social Stress,” in *Handbook of the Sociology of Mental Health* (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 1999), 283.

<sup>11</sup> Wheaton, “Social Stress,” 283.

<sup>12</sup> Wheaton, “Social Stress,” 283.

<sup>13</sup> Wheaton, “Social Stress,” 283.

<sup>14</sup> Aneshensel, “Social Stress: Theory and Research,” 20.

perceived social support and mental health. R. Jay Turner and J. Blake Turner note, “A large portion of this very substantial research effort has been focused on the hypothesis that low levels of social support increase risk for depressive symptomatology....The connection between perceived social support and mental health status generally, and depression in particular, appears to be highly robust.”<sup>15</sup> Other studies have demonstrated that, in addition to the importance of social support, self-esteem has a stress-buffering effect. Peggy Thoits argues “self-esteem may enable the avoidance of stress, may mediate stress effects, may modify the impacts of stress, or may itself be influenced negatively by stress experiences.”<sup>16</sup>

For this study, any analysis of perceived social support and the role of self-esteem must necessarily be speculative. There is a certain amount of psychologizing required that is beyond the scope of this project. Instead, when relevant, this study will suggest possible systems of social support available to the impaired without speculating on the extent to which the impaired perceived this support or the extent to which the support had an ameliorating effect. In addition, rather than focusing on self-esteem (another facet of ancient identity impossible to analyze), this study will explore social status and how one’s ranking in society and its attendant lived circumstances could eliminate or exacerbate social stressors.

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<sup>15</sup> R. Jay Turner and J. Blake Turner, “Social Integration and Support,” in *Handbook of the Sociology of Mental Health*, ed. Carol S. Aneshensel and Jo E. Phelan (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 1999), 306.

<sup>16</sup> Peggy Thoits, “Self, Identity, Stress, and Mental Health,” in *Handbook of the Sociology of Mental Health*, ed. Carol S. Aneshensel and Jo E. Phelan (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 1999), 362.

Highlighting that “mental disorders are not randomly distributed throughout society, but tend to cluster more densely within some social strata than others,”<sup>17</sup> sociologists have proposed two explanations for this trend. The first is the social selection hypothesis, which argues:

that the association between SES [socioeconomic status] and mental illness is a function of health-related downward mobility. According to this view, the presence of psychiatric illness keeps individuals from obtaining or keeping jobs that would maintain their SES position or enhance social mobility. Thus, mental illness causes individuals to drift into lower SES groups or to fail to climb out of low SES positions at rates comparable to that of healthy adults.<sup>18</sup>

In short, this hypothesis suggests that mental illness causes downward mobility, thus creating the illusion that mental disorders disproportionately affect lower classes.

The Social Stress model, on the other hand, demonstrates that mental illness is intensified in lower status groups for whom stress-inducing factors are greater and stress-alleviating resources are not as readily available or accessible. This is known as social causation, that is, members of lower status groups “disproportionately encountered difficult, harsh, or traumatic life conditions,” which are exacerbated by a lack of or restricted access to coping resources.<sup>19</sup> In contrast to the social selection hypothesis, social stress theorists maintain, “with the possible exception of severe disorders such as schizophrenia, the empirical evidence supports the hypothesis of social causation.”<sup>20</sup>

Carol Aneshensel, a leading theorist of the social stress model, argues that stress and the deleterious health effects stress produces in individuals arise “as a predictable outcome

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<sup>17</sup> Aneshensel and Phelan, “Sociology of Mental Health,” 4.

<sup>18</sup> Yu and Williams, “Socioeconomic Status,” 158.

<sup>19</sup> Aneshensel, “Social Stress: Theory and Research,” 18.

<sup>20</sup> Aneshensel, “Social Stress: Theory and Research,” 18.

of ordinary social organization.”<sup>21</sup> She argues against the assumption that abnormal situations generate abnormal behavior. Instead, she argues that the types of disorders so often seen in response to stress could be considered “normal” or “predictable” responses and that “stressful life circumstances and their emotional consequences may be and often are experienced by perfectly ordinary people integrated into the normative structures of society.”<sup>22</sup> As an example, Aneshensel considers how unemployment is a natural part of a capitalist free-enterprise economy. Since unemployment is to be expected for some, reactivity to the stress of unemployment is to be expected. To be sure, “systemic conditions of tension are more prevalent among some social groups than others, largely as a consequence of inequality in the distributive system.”<sup>23</sup> This observation is pertinent for this study in that Rome’s economy was marked by stark inequality (discussed below).<sup>24</sup>

Utilizing Social Stress Theory, specifically the social causation approach, this study investigates the types of chronic stressors that lower strata persons could have encountered in the first-century Roman world. By looking at the characters in Matthew’s gospel that suffer somatically and societally, cautiously informed by Social Stress models and insights, this study imagines possible stressors associated with the impaired characters’ particular social location. While there is considerable distance between the contemporary societies investigated by Social Stress theorists and the Roman Empire (especially as primarily accessed in this study through a literary text), when Social Stress models are nuanced with Imperial Critical and Classical studies they can be useful tools for

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<sup>21</sup> Aneshensel, “Social Stress: Theory and Research,” 33.

<sup>22</sup> Aneshensel, “Social Stress: Theory and Research,” 33.

<sup>23</sup> Aneshensel, “Social Stress: Theory and Research,” 33.

<sup>24</sup> Gerhard Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984); Carter, *Matthew and Empire*; Friesen, “Poverty in Pauline Studies”; Longenecker, “Exposing the Economic Middle.”

investigating larger societal structures and their potentially stressful affects on people living in the Roman Empire as represented in the textual construction of the Gospel.

While, as Toner notes, sickness and impairment can be stressors in and of themselves, multiple studies have demonstrated that psychological stress from living in oppressive contexts can have somatic manifestations. In 1961, Frantz Fanon, a psychiatrist born in French colonized Martinique, wrote *The Wretched of the Earth*. In this work, Fanon analyzes the various illnesses and disorders he observed manifested by French-dominated Algerians during the colonial war. In one case, Fanon describes an Algerian man who experiences impotency after the interrogation and rape of his wife by a French soldier. Interestingly, the emotional stress of this violation of his wife resulted in somatic dysfunction. The man in question said:

And then several weeks later it dawned on me that she had been raped *because they had been looking for me*. In fact she had been raped to punish her for keeping quiet....it was the rape of a tenacious woman who was prepared to accept anything rather than give up her husband. And that husband *was me*. That woman had saved my life and had protected the network. It was my fault she had been dishonored.<sup>25</sup>

While the man's impotency was linked to the specific event of his wife's rape (what may be considered a life-event change by sociologists), Fanon describes other disorders that stem from the general environment of Algeria during the war against French imperial rule that "can all be characterized as being psychosomatic...because its determinism is psychic in origin."<sup>26</sup> He views these disorders as "being both a symptom and a cure. More exactly it is generally agreed that the organism...outwits the conflict using the wrong, but nevertheless economic, channels. The organism chooses the lesser evil in order to avoid a complete

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<sup>25</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 188.

<sup>26</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 216.

breakdown.”<sup>27</sup> That is to say, the brain outsources the effects of stress onto the body. Mental breakdown is avoided by recourse to physical breakdown. In particular, Fanon found muscular stiffness to be specific to colonial war. He argues, “This contraction, in fact, is quite simply a postural concurrence and evidence in the colonized’s muscles of their rigidity, their reticence and refusal in the face of the colonial authorities.”<sup>28</sup> Other symptoms include stomach ulcers, renal colic, menstrual disorders, hypersomnia due to idiopathic tremors, premature hair whitening, and paroxysmal tachycardia.<sup>29</sup>

More recently, in his essay “On Suffering and Structural Violence,” Paul Farmer, a physician and anthropologist, reviews two case studies of impoverished individuals in 1980s Haiti.<sup>30</sup> One study follows a young woman seeking to escape crushing poverty through sexual entanglement with a military officer (through which she contracted AIDS) and a low-paid servant position in a middle-class woman’s home. Once it was discovered that she was pregnant by another servant in the home, she lost her job and had to return home. She died from her disease without ever managing financial security. The other follows a young man who was forced into exile because of his comments resisting the military forces of the 1991 coup overthrowing the first democratically elected president. He was eventually arrested, beaten by these military forces, and left for dead. Farmer argues, “These afflictions were not the result of accident or of force majeure [*sic*]; they were the consequence, direct or indirect, of human agency.”<sup>31</sup> Farmer notes how oppressive

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<sup>27</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 217.

<sup>28</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 217.

<sup>29</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 217–19.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Farmer, “On Suffering and Structural Violence: A View from Below,” in *Social Suffering*, ed. Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das, and Margaret Lock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 261–83.

<sup>31</sup> Farmer, “On Suffering and Structural Violence: A View from Below,” 271.

structural violence limits choices and has physical ramifications. Both Fanon and Farmer demonstrate that oppressive circumstances can have harmful psychosomatic and societal effects, whether through structural violence that limits options or through psychological stress with somatic symptomatology. The Social Stress model, when nuanced by these understandings of psychosomatic responses, is useful for considering the physically ill or impaired in Matthew's Gospel as bodies living under the stress of the oppressive Roman Empire whose power was asserted through what Michael Mann identifies as four "networks of power," namely political structures, military resources, economic forces, and ideological constructs.<sup>32</sup>

Aislinn Melchior offers a word of caution in her piece "Caesar in Vietnam: Did Roman Soldiers Suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder?"<sup>33</sup> Melchior challenges the assumption that ancient Romans would have suffered PTSD because of their proclivity for battle. She notes recent medical research correlatively linking concussive injury to many cases of PTSD in soldiers returning from Iraq. The quantity and severity of these concussive injuries are increased by the technologies of modern warfare, specifically the development of explosive devices. The lack of explosives, paired with the pervasive presence of death in the Roman world (high infant mortality rates, public executions, animal sacrifice, and chronic warfare) suggest to her that perhaps the ancient Roman soldiers were less likely to be traumatized by battle and thus experienced a lower frequency of PTSD than is experienced by soldiers in modern times. While her conclusion

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<sup>32</sup> Michael Mann, *A History of Power from the Beginning to A.D. 1760*, vol. 1 of *The Sources of Social Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 22–28. I elaborate some of these stressors in the next section and throughout chapters 3–5 below.

<sup>33</sup> Aislinn Melchior, "Caesar in Vietnam: Did Roman Soldiers Suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder?," *Greece & Rome* 58.2 (2011): 209–23.

that Romans' general reality of "harsh experience may have conditioned a certain acquiescence to suffering and death" is perhaps too keen to psychologize ancient minds, her call to be "cautious when we map...our own experiences too neatly upon the past" is well taken.<sup>34</sup> Thus, I do not presume that the social stressors I highlight in this reading would have had the same effect on every person. The social stress model, like most social-scientific models, is used at a high level of abstraction, speaking in generalities rather than specifics. In this informed imaginative reading, I suggest *possible* stressors, their *possible* impact, and *possible* responses to those stressors.

### **Other Methods**

While Social Stress Theory is the primary lens through which I read the Matthean healing narratives, this theory is supplemented by using other methodologies as well. For this project, I also incorporate Empire Studies, Disability Studies, and narrative criticism.

#### **Empire Studies**

In order to assess the particular stressors possibly impacting characters in the narrative world of the Matthean gospel, including elements of structural inequality and violence, this study relies heavily on insights gained through Empire Studies. Empire Studies, or Imperial Criticism, is an approach that works to foreground the Roman Empire as a context for the New Testament writings.<sup>35</sup> As such, it is multi-disciplinary in its approach, utilizing insights gained through people's history approaches as well as from classical studies, the social sciences, and postcolonial studies. It is interested in investigating the interactions between early Jesus-followers and the Roman Empire, as it is accessible through the New Testament texts. These interactions include how Rome and its

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<sup>34</sup> Melchior, "Caesar in Vietnam," 221, 222.

<sup>35</sup> Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 1.

power are engaged, represented, and negotiated in relationship to the New Testament authors' understandings of God's reign/empire and purposes. This approach highlights the imperial societal and somatic dynamics impacting and/or evoked by the texts' rhetoric that are often neglected or intentionally overlooked in spiritualized, non-political, and religious readings of the New Testament. In addition, Empire Studies demonstrates that the New Testament texts have multiple contexts, rather than only a monolithic, and often unfairly represented, Jewish context.<sup>36</sup> Empire Studies further works against the idea of "privatized" religion in the ancient world, an anachronistic concept that does not accurately reflect the historical context of the ancient world.

Classical and archeological studies have probed historical sources, working to understand the ancient Greek and Roman worlds and matrices of power. Sources of knowledge from the ancient world typically come from an elite perspective. Coins provide an interesting glimpse into imperial ideologies of the ruling powers. For instance, the Flavian emperors made a conscious effort to connect their rule with that of the Augustan and Republican eras. Their coins mimicked the early empire's coins through various themes, including *capta*, *supplicatio*, *adoratio*, *restitutio*, and *fides* type scenes, which, in various ways, expressed the power and/or graciousness of Roman rule.<sup>37</sup> These coins were one way the Flavian emperors could break from the recent Julio-Claudian past. Carlos Noreña notes, "Coins were commodities in which two different regimes of value, the economic and the symbolic, converged and reinforced one another....In no other medium

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<sup>36</sup> Warren Carter, "Empire Studies and Biblical Interpretation," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation*.

<sup>37</sup> Jane Cody, "Conquerers and Conquered on Flavian Coins," in *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text*, ed. A. J. Boyle and W. J. Dominik (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 2003).

were simple messages transmitted under state authority so regularly, and so extensively communicated to so many individuals.”<sup>38</sup>

A second source of knowledge comes from monuments. Monuments served several purposes in the ancient world, often simultaneously.<sup>39</sup> Monuments were ways for a ruler to memorialize lives and ideologies as well as highlight important accomplishments, such as Augustus’ *Res Gestae*. They were also a way for local elites to compete for favor from Rome. This can be seen in Aphrodisias with the *Sebasteion*, which “was privately funded by local elite, dedicated to the imperial family, and stressed the relationship of that provincial city with Rome.”<sup>40</sup> Monuments also served as a way for some individuals to claim their place in the world or to escape the finitude of death through monumental representation. Plancia Magna, a wealthy woman in Anatolia and high priestess of the cult of Artemis, “was responsible for one of Perge’s most impressive public buildings during the Empire, its main southern city gate.”<sup>41</sup> In Rome, a baker named Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces built himself a distinctive and large tomb.<sup>42</sup>

A third source of knowledge is literature. Most of what survives from the ancient world is from the perspective of the ruling, especially male, elites, and as such represents their values, contestations, and perspective. However, these texts occasionally give insight into the lives of ordinary people. Consider Petronius’s *Satyricon*, which offers a glimpse

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<sup>38</sup> Carlos Noreña, “Coins and Communication,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Social Relations in the Roman World*, ed. Michael Peachin (New York: Oxford University Press, n.d.), 248–9.

<sup>39</sup> Warren Carter, “Monuments,” *The Dictionary of the Bible and Ancient Media*, 228–31.

<sup>40</sup> Davina Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered: Reimagining Paul’s Mission* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).

<sup>41</sup> Mary Taliaferro Boatwright, “Plancia Magna of Perge: Women’s Roles and Status in Roman Asia Minor,” in *Women’s History and Ancient History*, ed. Sarah Pomeroy (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 250.

<sup>42</sup> Lauren Petersen, “The Baker, His Tomb, His Wife, and Her Breadbasket: The Monument of Eurysaces in Rome,” *The Art Bulletin* 85.2 (2003): 230–57.

into the lives of the lower classes. His description of the experience of slaves, though biased and not first hand, offers some (cautious) insight into how Rome treated slaves, what kinds of power were at a slave's disposal, and the types of stressful situations a slave may encounter.

Important to note is how much of our knowledge comes from elite sources. In an effort to resist the call to identify with and reinscribe the perspective of the elite, male-dominated minority, scholars like Richard Horsley promote a from-below approach to history called People's History.<sup>43</sup> This approach focuses on the lives of ordinary folk in the Roman Empire. Horsley notes that the New Testament texts offer a rare "from below" perspective on the empire. However, the People's History approach is limited by the lack of sources. It therefore draws on models of power and imperial systems developed by social scientists.

Large-scale models of empire offer a holistic way to make sense of the disparate sources of knowledge while also highlighting the effects of those structures on the disenfranchised. Gerhard Lenski suggests a model of empire that is rooted in an agrarian-aristocratic context.<sup>44</sup> The guiding question for his analysis is "who gets what and why?" He sketches a highly vertically stratified society with a small minority consuming the resources produced by the vast majority. He suggests that while upward mobility was quite difficult, downward mobility was merely one environmental disaster away. One bad harvest or a year of drought could move a family from hovering above poverty to life-threatening hardship. Such factors were significant stressors for many.

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<sup>43</sup> Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Christian Origins: A People's History of Christianity*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005).

<sup>44</sup> Lenski, *Power and Privilege*.

Steven Friesen's economic model suggests what life was like for those living in cities of 10,000 or more.<sup>45</sup> He suggests that perhaps 3% of those populations were in the elite governing classes. Perhaps 7% were living a life with moderate surplus, with 60-65% hovering at or near subsistence level. He estimates that a further 28% were living consistently below subsistence level. Bruce Longenecker has further nuanced Friesen's model, arguing that as much as 17% of the population would have lived a life with moderate surplus, while 55% lived at or near subsistence. Longenecker suggests only 25% were living consistently below subsistence level, a slightly lower percentage than Friesen suggests.<sup>46</sup> Friesen's model, nuanced by Longenecker, is a helpful heuristic tool for reconstructing the economic context of Matthew's audience. These models helpfully contextualize the elite sources that survived and account for the silent majority living in economic hardship who often go unrepresented in reconstructions of history.<sup>47</sup>

While we do not know where the Gospel was written, many scholars suggest Matthew was written in Antioch in Syria toward the end of the first century.<sup>48</sup> Antioch is estimated to have had a population between 150,000–200,000 at that time.<sup>49</sup> Thus, if Matthew was written in an urban environment after the Roman destruction of the

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<sup>45</sup> Friesen, "Poverty in Pauline Studies."

<sup>46</sup> Longenecker, "Exposing the Economic Middle."

<sup>47</sup> For a classical study arguing for the existence of an ancient middle class, see Emanuel Mayer, *The Ancient Middle Classes: Urban Life and Aesthetics in the Roman Empire, 100 BCE–250 CE* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012); Carlos F. Noreña, "Emanuel Mayer. The Ancient Middle Classes: Urban Life and Aesthetics in the Roman Empire, 100 BCE–250 CE," *American Historical Review* 118.5 (2013): 1576–77; Philip A. Harland, "The Ancient Middle Classes: Urban Life and Aesthetics in the Roman Empire, 100 BCE–250 CE," *Canadian Journal of History* 49.1 (2014): 79–81.

<sup>48</sup> For a thorough discussion of arguments concerning Matthew's dating and place of origin, see Warren Carter, *Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 15–34, 35–54, 80–88.

<sup>49</sup> Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading*, The Bible & Liberation Series (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000), 17.

Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE, then urban life introduces particular stressors. While some of the stories included in the Gospel may have originally circulated orally in rural Galilee, locating Matthew in an urban center may have influenced the shape of these stories in their written form. Further, studies have demonstrated that cities had considerable interaction with their surrounding *chora*, siphoning resources from the rural *chora* into the elite-dominated urban center, even while providing markets for rural production and opportunities for employment.<sup>50</sup> Rather than attempting to explain what happened to the character to lead her/him to Jesus for healing, I consider some possible factors, both urban and rural, that may exert stress on the characters' circumstances and the ways these stressors may have resulted in the same types of impairments found in the healing narratives.

Further, after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE, Vespasian "imposed upon all Jews everywhere, male and female over the age of three, an annual tax payable to Jupiter Capitolinus at Rome."<sup>51</sup> Vespasian celebrated his victory through the use of *Judea Capta* coins, and he and his son Titus monumentalized their defeat of the Jews. Of particular interest, they constructed "the city gate in Antioch on the Orontes on which the golden cherubim from the temple were actually mounted" as well as the amphitheater in Antioch "which was built on the site of a synagogue, deliberately demolished for that purpose, and

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<sup>50</sup> Thomas F. Carney, *The Shape of the Past: Models and Antiquity* (Lawrence, KS: Coronado Press, 1972); Ramsay MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations 50 B.C. to A.D. 284* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); Mireille Corbier, "City, Territory, and Taxation," in *City and Country in the Ancient World*, ed. John Rich and Andrew Wallace-Hadrill (New York: Routledge, 1991), 211–39; Richard Alston, *Aspects of Roman History AD 14–117* (London: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>51</sup> Margaret Williams, "Jews and Jewish Communities in the Roman Empire," in *Experiencing Rome: Culture, Identity, and Power in the Roman Empire*, ed. Janet Huskinson (New York: Routledge, 2000), 329.

dedicated thus: ‘From the spoils of the Jews.’”<sup>52</sup> Where relevant, I consider how the destruction of the Temple, the ongoing financial burden of the annual tax, and the monumentalization of the Jew’s defeat by Rome in Antioch may also have accompanied, exacerbated, or contributed to the impairments that are reflected in Matthew’s narrative.

### **Disability Studies**

Disability Studies (DS) is a burgeoning area of biblical research and argues “disability is a complex mode of understanding human difference.”<sup>53</sup> DS have often taken two approaches to the healing narratives of the Gospels. First, some scholars interpret the biblical texts in ways that are liberating for the impaired today, such as Candida Moss’s approach to some of Jesus’ teaching in Matthew. As discussed in chapter 1, Moss reads Jesus’ teaching on autoamputation and proprioceptive deficits as models of discipleship.<sup>54</sup> A second approach is one that rejects the biblical healing narratives because they are understood to prescribe an able-bodied requirement for entering into the *basileia* of God. For instance, Hector Avalos argues that we should not use ancient texts for determining contemporary normative values.<sup>55</sup> Avalos and others see Jesus’ healing of the impaired as perpetuating the idea that able-bodiedness and inclusion in the *basileia* are inseparable in the Gospels.

A key strength of DS is that it recognizes that there are implications of interpretation for real people. James Metzger argues that the “fantasy cure” encouraged by

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<sup>52</sup> Williams, “Jews and Jewish Communities,” 330.

<sup>53</sup> Avalos, Melcher, and Schipper, “Introduction.”

<sup>54</sup> Moss, “Mark and Matthew.” This is not to suggest, however, that Moss reads all biblical texts as liberating.

<sup>55</sup> Hector Avalos, *The End of Biblical Studies* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Press, 2007).

the biblical text is dangerous for those living with impairments today.<sup>56</sup> Colleen Grant has challenged the way that the scriptures have often placed the responsibility for disease on the sinfulness of the individual as well as the burden for healing on their faith.<sup>57</sup> Kerry Wynn pushes further by arguing that not all disabled people want healing and that the able-bodied should not work to “fix” disabled bodies. DS argues that often healing is a priority for the able-bodied, not for the impaired person. At stake is the question of who is welcome into the faith community.<sup>58</sup> These readings often begin by recognizing the (often abusive) way that impaired folks in contemporary church communities have been marginalized by interpretations of the Gospel healing narratives and then work to read those stories in more liberating ways, either through reinterpretation or outright rejection.

This study takes seriously the concerns raised by DS and uses insights from this critical lens for reading the healing narratives in Matthew. First, this study focuses primarily on the impaired within the narratives rather than on Jesus, as with redactional readings, making visible the impaired bodies present in the text and, thereby, recognizing that they do more than function as merely mirrors for Jesus’ true identity. Secondly, it addresses the concerns raised by Grant, and others like her, by examining alternative ways to account for disability in the text, rather than relying solely on theological categories of “sin” and “faith.” By focusing on the social and somatic experiences of impaired persons in the ancient world, this study also questions these connections. Finally, by considering factors of social stress in each scene, both prior to and after their experience with Jesus,

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<sup>56</sup> Metzger and Grimshaw, “Reading Matthew’s Healing Narratives.”

<sup>57</sup> Colleen Grant, “Reinterpreting the Healing Narratives,” in *Human Disability and the Service of God: Reassessing Religious Practice*, ed. Nancy Eiesland and Don Saliers (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 72–87.

<sup>58</sup> Wynn, “Johannine Healings.”

this study sides with Wynn by asserting that being “healed,” as with being “disabled,” is a complicated and ambiguous experience and whether or not it is in the best interest of the impaired should be for the impaired person to decide. As shown in chapter one, able-bodied readings of the healing narratives often assume a monolithic permanency and positivity to the healing scenes. With DS, this study complexifies the idea that healings are permanent and that only positive transformations occur in the lives of those who are healed.

In sum, this study focalizes on the impaired within the text, highlighting their stressful social and somatic circumstances; views impaired characters as worthy of investigation in their own right; recognizes the likely ambiguity of characters in each healing scene; and challenges assumptions about the roles of sin and faith in connection with impairment.

### **Narrative Criticism**

Narrative Criticism was introduced into biblical criticism in 1979 with David Rhoads’ Society of Biblical Literature presentation entitled “Narrative Criticism and the Gospel of Mark.”<sup>59</sup> This approach was a shift away from traditional form, source, and redactional approaches to the gospels. Rather than cutting “the Gospels into small pieces of tradition and redaction, narrative criticism focused on the Gospels as *complete literary wholes*.”<sup>60</sup> Accordingly narrative criticism employed categories of plot, settings, characters, and rhetoric as well as various notions of narrators and readers or audiences to interpret

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<sup>59</sup> Petri Merenlahti and Raimo Hakola, “Reconceiving Narrative Criticism,” in *Characterization in the Gospel: Reconceiving Narrative Criticism*, ed. David Rhoads and Kari Syreeni, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 184 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 17.

<sup>60</sup> Merenlahti and Hakola, “Reconceiving Narrative Criticism,” 18.

gospel narratives.<sup>61</sup> Characterization, and the role of the reader in constructing characters, are especially important for this project. First, I introduce the work on character building of Baruch Hochman; then I turn to the role of readers by utilizing Umberto Eco's discussion of gap-filling.

Baruch Hochman, in his 1985 *Character in Literature*, identifies the sort of active work readers do in building characters as we engage narrative texts. Hochman argues that readers notice traits or features of characters and assemble these traits to form a character. He proposes "a sequence of eight categories that describe aspects of characters in literature, categories that allow us to conceptualize the images we form of such characters as we 'liberate' them from the texts within which they figure."<sup>62</sup> These eight categories, or spectra, involve: stylization/naturalism, coherence/incoherence, wholeness/fragmentariness, literalness/symbolism, complexity/simplicity, transparency/opacity, dynamism/staticism, and closure/openness.<sup>63</sup>

*Stylization* "has to do with some model or norm from which stylized characters deviate. The norm...is clearly resemblance to real people, which means some form of realism or naturalism of representation."<sup>64</sup> The type of text encountered as well as the expectations of the reader contribute to whether a character is judged as stylized or not. In the New Testament, perhaps the character of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37 could be considered a stylized character. If the reader expects a Samaritan to be selfish or refuse to help the injured Israelite, then the fact that the Samaritan helps the injured man diverges

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<sup>61</sup> David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 6.

<sup>62</sup> Baruch Hochman, *Character in Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 88–89.

<sup>63</sup> Hochman, *Character in Literature*, 89.

<sup>64</sup> William H. Shepherd, Jr., *The Narrative Function of the Holy Spirit as a Character in Luke-Acts*, SBL Dissertation Series 147 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 72.

from the reader's expectations. The impaired in the Matthean healing scenes are in general presented more on the natural end of the spectrum (though frequently with little elaboration), unless the reader does not expect the impaired to seek healing at all.

*Coherence* and *incoherence* are concerned with how the character is developed along a unifying structure. "This issue differs from stylization, as both maximally and minimally stylized characters can be quite coherent, or incoherent, as the case may be."<sup>65</sup> As with stylization, this category is judged by cultural norms. The impaired in Matthew are presented as coherent. First, there would be no reason for an impaired character in an ancient story to be surprising. Physical impairments were quite common in the ancient world, for a number of reasons.<sup>66</sup> Second, the characters' presence in the gospel is limited to the extent that incoherencies in behavior never arise.

Hochman's third category is *wholeness/fragmentariness* and concerns "the degree to which we sense a text presents us with a complete picture of a character."<sup>67</sup> The impaired characters in Matthew are fragmentary in that the evangelist does not provide much information, if any, concerning the lives of the impaired.

Fourth, Hochman proposes *literalism/symbolism*. Hochman stresses that characters are not real people and therefore are never fully literal. However, "the character may signify something outside itself, it may simply represent itself, or it may in some ways do both."<sup>68</sup> Historically, scholars have often read the healing narratives more symbolically than literally (see chapter one). The impaired in these readings become symbols of faith or rhetorical tools intended to teach something about Jesus' characterization. With the

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<sup>65</sup> Shepherd, Jr., *Narrative Function*, 74.

<sup>66</sup> Garland, *Eye of the Beholder*, 12–27.

<sup>67</sup> Shepherd, Jr., *Narrative Function*, 74.

<sup>68</sup> Shepherd, Jr., *Narrative Function*, 75.

introduction of Empire Studies, social science methodologies, and Disability Studies, scholars have begun to read these characters more literally. So, in the same way that Jesus is read as being literally himself, these impaired characters are also read as literally themselves.

Next, Hochman considers the *complexity/simplicity* of characterization. Essentially, the more traits that a character demonstrates the more complex s/he is. Impaired characters do not show many traits in Matthew. Further, those who petition on behalf of the impaired are also presented as having few traits. These characters are presented simply. Important to note, however, is “that modern introspection produces a complexity that could never have been matched by the characters of ancient literature.”<sup>69</sup> That is to say, we should not expect many characters, not least the impaired characters, in an ancient text to exhibit many traits.

Hochman’s seventh category is *dynamism/staticism*. “Dynamic characters are those which develop in the course of a work.”<sup>70</sup> In ancient texts, characters tend toward staticism, though there are exceptions to this. It could be argued that Jesus’ characterization in the Gospels is static, that is to say consistent and showing little development, while his characterization in *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas* is more dynamic. In *The Infancy Gospel*, Jesus is presented as a precocious child who learns appropriate ways to use his special abilities.<sup>71</sup> The impaired characters in Matthew, like most ancient characters, are more static than dynamic.

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<sup>69</sup> Shepherd, Jr., *Narrative Function*, 76.

<sup>70</sup> Shepherd, Jr., *Narrative Function*, 77.

<sup>71</sup> Christopher A Frilingos, “No Child Left Behind: Knowledge and Violence in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas,” *J ECS* 17.1 (2009): 27–54; Kristi Upson-Saia, “Holy Child or Holy

Finally, Hochman proposes the category of *closure/openness*. This category concerns “the degree to which the character’s conflicts and ambiguities are resolved with the work.”<sup>72</sup> Characters who are resolved are considered closed, perhaps they have died or their stories conclude with few to no loose ends. An open character would be one the reader continues to wonder about after the story ends, characters that “invite speculation on their future actions.”<sup>73</sup> Traditionally, the impaired characters in Matthew have been read as closed characters. Closure is secured by the healing of their impairment. As the story moves past these characters, so do its readers. This study, in contrast, reads these characters as open. It considers, through informed scholarly research, possible somatic and societal stressors that might have impacted their impairment and might have continued to be faced or are introduced after the healing.

Part of any audience’s role is to fill in the “gaps” that occur in any narrative. Umberto Eco, a novelist and literary critic, outlines eight areas of competency that an author assumes its audience has in order to fill in gaps in a story.<sup>74</sup> First is a “basic dictionary,” or a *shared lexicon*. This could be as simple as a shared knowledge that the word “princess” refers to a human woman or as complex as shared technical jargon. Second, the audience knows the rules of *co-reference*. That is to say “the audience uses the rest of a sentence or larger section of text to establish meaning.”<sup>75</sup> For example, in the sentence, “The boy went to the store and he bought a book,” the audience would know that the “he” in the second half referred back to the boy in the first half. Third are *contextual*

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Terror?: Understanding Jesus’ Anger in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas,” *Church History* 82.1 (2013): 1–39.

<sup>72</sup> Shepherd, Jr., *Narrative Function*, 78.

<sup>73</sup> Shepherd, Jr., *Narrative Function*, 78.

<sup>74</sup> Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader* (Bloomington: University of Indiana, 1979), 18–23.

<sup>75</sup> Carter, *Matthew: Storyteller*, 97.

*selections*, which “refer to using the larger context of the text and its world of origin to supply meaning for words.”<sup>76</sup> Eco uses the example of the word “whale” to illustrate this point. He writes, “a good encyclopedic representation of /whale/ should record at least two contextual selections: in a context dominated by the sememe «ancient», a whale is a fish; in the context dominated by the sememe «modern», a whale is a mammal.”<sup>77</sup> Fourth are *circumstantial selections*, or how an audience supplies information assumed by the text. Carter uses the example of leprosy to illustrate this point. Although the biblical text of Matt 8:1–4 (the cleansing of a leper) does not lay out all of the social and cultic implications of leprosy in the ancient world, “it is assumed that the audience is familiar with the regulations concerning skin disease in Lev 13–14.”<sup>78</sup>

Eco’s fifth category is *rhetorical and stylistic overcoding*. This refers to an audience’s ability to recognize a genre and then to understand the type of language used within the work (i.e. metaphor, hyperbole, etc.). Inferences from *common frames* and inferences from *intertextual frames* are categories six and seven. “Common frames refer to cultural practices (social, economic, domestic, religious, and so on) that may be assumed or referred to explicitly by a text,” while intertextual frames refer to “connections made from other literary traditions and texts...”<sup>79</sup> The eighth category is *ideological overcoding* which has to do with the ideological biases of the reader and the author. Shared biases can result in the reader accepting the point of view of the author. Conflicting ideological positions may result in the reader rejecting the author’s point of view.

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<sup>76</sup> Carter, *Matthew: Storyteller*, 97.

<sup>77</sup> Eco, *The Role of the Reader*, 19.

<sup>78</sup> Carter, *Matthew: Storyteller*, 98.

<sup>79</sup> Carter, *Matthew: Storyteller*, 99.

Eco's categories highlight useful dimensions for my reading. In particular, this study explores possible circumstantial selections that might make sense of the impairments that are pervasive in Matthew. Since the Matthean narrative does not provide information about the impaired characters beyond noting impairment and that Jesus heals it, this study does not presume that it can supply all of that information about the characters. Instead, the focus is on identifying possible socio-historical realities that may be assumed by the Gospel. Thus, for example, rather than asking how the slave in Matthew 8:5-13 became disabled, I ask how a slave in the ancient world may have experienced his/her position and what types of societal stressors accompanied or contributed to his/her impairment. After constructing possible scenarios that a first century audience might use to inform the backstory of the centurion's slave, I explore how Jesus' healing of the slave, at the centurion's request, may be understood. Depending upon how the gaps are filled, a reader may ideologically agree or disagree with Matthew's author.

In short, this study, using techniques of literary and narrative criticism in its exploration of the healing narratives, focuses on the final form of the Gospel text, and concentrates on characters with various impairments. Rather than asking how a narrative character became impaired, informed by some constructed understandings of the Roman world, I ask how an audience might fill in the gaps concerning a narrative character's impairment. I seek to employ some of the socio-cultural information the text assumes to fill in these characters' possible circumstances, particularly their social stressors, thus engaging in imaginative, yet informed, reconstruction.

## Conclusion

This study contributes to the field of New Testament scholarship in three specific ways. First, Social Stress Theory, though used by Jerry Toner in a general discussion of psychosomatic health in the Roman world (see chapter 1), has not been used as a primary methodological approach to the healing narratives in a Gospel.

Second, Social Stress Theory provides a paradigm for shifting focus away from Jesus and examining characters that are often viewed as little more than foils to Jesus or the disciples. In this way, this approach moves away from more traditional readings of Matthew that highlight themes of Christology, theology, and discipleship. Further, while Empire Studies often stress how the healing scenes demonstrate an in-breaking of God's Empire into Rome's Empire, there is little attention paid to the possible circumstances of the impaired persons' lives both before and after their encounter with Jesus. This study considers the somatic and societal experience on both sides of the encounter with Jesus, arguing that both the impaired and healed states often have their own sets of stressors and complexities.

Third, by expanding consideration to include the effects of the healing, this study contributes to discussions in Disability Studies. New Testament texts are documents used by churches, and, as demonstrated by DS, healing narratives are often read abusively, even if with the best of intentions. Thus any reading of the healing narratives ought to grapple with the concerns of the impaired within ecclesial communities today. These concerns include drawing attention to the fact that healing for the impaired is often a priority for the able-bodied, that not all impaired folks want or need healing, and that theologies that

associate sin with disability or faith with healing are inherently flawed and dangerous. This study addresses these concerns indirectly.

Though the healing narratives present each healing as desirable and beneficial, this study complicates this surface-level reading by its attention to the possible societal stressors present in both the impaired and the healed states. Attention to these stressors involved in the particular situations (slavery, the presence of demons, and household settings) indicates that a healed state presents its own types of complications and that no healing is guaranteed to be complete and permanent. That is to say, the healed person continues to face stressors in a disabling imperial system. By drawing attention to the impaired person and the network of stressors that accompany or complicate the impairment and the healed state, this study notes that not all healings are indisputably “good” and not all parties involved are affected by the healings in the same ways. This study contributes to DS by drawing attention to how healing in the New Testament is inherently ambiguous because the healed person continues to live under imperial rule in a stress-filled and demon-riddled world.

In what follows, I read three Matthean healing stories, highlighting social stressors and how those stressors result in ambiguous interpretations. Chapter 3 investigates the story of the Centurion’s request for the healing of his slave (8:5–13). This chapter identifies the disabling effects of slavery, along with its inherent stressors, as one possible means for understanding the slave’s condition. While the slave in this particular account is male, I also explore the stressors that uniquely marked the lives of female slaves. This chapter also examines how the healing of the slave may be read as problematic and impermanent since Jesus has merely returned him to the same disabling system.

Chapter 4 examines the exorcism of the Gadarene demoniacs (8:28–34). In this chapter, I read the exorcism of the demons as a commentary on the invasive presence of the Roman Empire in the lives of peasants in Gadara. I argue that the possession of the two Gadarene men resonates with the stressed experiences of folks in Antioch who have experienced Rome’s invasive military power during war of 66–70 CE and its aftermath. Using Social Stress Theory to underscore the acute and chronic stressors of the war, I suggest possible resonances that this story may have had in a post-70 Antiochene context that included stressors related to war and its ongoing effects. This chapter highlights the ambiguity created by the Gospel’s total inattention to the men’s exorcised state and the townspeople’s troubled response. In considering the ways that the exorcism alleviates or redistributes stress, I consider the effects on the one exorcised and the local inhabitants.

Chapter 5 discusses the healing of the Canaanite woman’s daughter (15:21-28). This chapter explores the way that stress affects a family unit by suggesting two possible scenarios for understanding the complex family dynamic between mother and daughter. One scenario will explore stressors affecting the family if the daughter is an infant whose possession symptoms caused her father to consider exposing her. The other scenario considers the stressors facing the family if the daughter was an adult, widowed woman whose symptomatology was interfering with her role as caretaker for her aging mother and her own child. This scene’s ambiguity is evident in the healer’s reluctance to listen to the mother, let alone heal the daughter. Chapter seven summarizes the conclusions drawn by this study. This chapter also considers the implications of my reading for understanding the healing narratives and identifies areas for further inquiry.

### CHAPTER 3 SLAVERY AND SOCIAL STRESS (MATTHEW 8:5–13)

Having located my argument in relation to previous scholarship on the Matthean healing narratives (ch. 1), and introduced my methodological approach (ch. 2), I now turn to Matthew 8:5–13, in which the healing of a centurion’s παῖς is narrated. Jesus has just entered Capernaum when a Roman centurion comes to him asking that Jesus heal his παῖς,<sup>1</sup> Jesus asks whether he should go to the centurion’s home and heal the παῖς.<sup>2</sup> The centurion responds, saying to Jesus, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my slave (παῖς) will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; And I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my slave (δοῦλος), ‘Do this,’ and the slave (δοῦλος) does it.” Jesus is amazed by the centurion’s response, identifies it as “faith,” praises him publicly, and heals the παῖς “in that hour” (8:13).

In this chapter, I argue that the healing of the centurion’s παῖς is a complex and stressful incident, and not an unambiguously good event as it is commonly presented to be. Using Social Stress Theory as a lens of inquiry, I hold that slaves under Roman rule lived stress-filled lives and those stressors are a significant factor in this παῖς’s condition of paralysis. Further, the centurion’s παῖς is healed back into an oppressive and stress-filled system full of debilitating stressors. The healing of the παῖς is troubling in that it restores

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<sup>1</sup> I read this passage as alluding to a post-70 Syrian context wherein Roman centurions were a staple feature in public settings rather than taking a Historical Jesus approach.

<sup>2</sup> While several English translations of Matthew read Jesus’ response to the centurion as a statement (“I will come and cure him” NRSV), many scholars argue that the response should be read as a question (“Shall I come and cure him?”) indicating Jesus’ resistance to healing the παῖς. See M. Eugene Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 8 of (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 226; Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 201–2; Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 10; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 120; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 313.

an exploitative relationship between the centurion and his παῖς and that the interests of the παῖς are never voiced, let alone considered or significantly addressed, in the story.

I begin with a brief discussion of the term παῖς and a review of various interpretations of this passage. I argue that previous work has failed to identify numerous stressors that might constitute the slave's situation and that reflect Roman slavery as an oppressive and stress-filled institution. Then I highlight general factors of stress as they pertain to slavery in the Roman Empire and note how these stressors can be seen in Matthean constructions of slavery. Throughout, I underscore some of the conditions of slavery and some of the contours of the experiences of slavery that subjected many Roman slaves to stress. Finally, I read Matt 8:5–13 suggesting three possible scenarios for understanding the relationship of the slave to his master and emphasizing how stress may have accompanied or been a factor in the slave's impairment.

### **Preliminary Issue: Translation of παῖς as “Slave”**

One of the biggest challenges for interpreting this passage is the translation of the word παῖς. The word can mean “slave” or “child.” How this word is translated matters for interpretation because it determines the type of power dynamic present between the centurion and his παῖς. As Theodore W. Jennings, Jr. and Tat-Siong Benny Liew note, “The dominance of identifying the centurion’s παῖς as ‘servant’ can also be seen not only in its ‘popularity’ among diverse interpreters but also in practically all ‘major’ English versions of the NT (KJV, RSV, NAB, NASB, NIV, NJB, NRSV, REB) in which this translation is adopted without even a single hint or footnote that alternative understandings may be available.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Theodore W. Jennings and Tat-siong Benny Liew, “Mistaken Identities but Model Faith: Rereading the Centurion, the Chap, and the Christ in Matthew 8:5–13,” *JBL* 123.3 (2004): 468.

Many scholars, including Hans Joachim Held<sup>4</sup>, Julian Sheffield<sup>5</sup>, Davies and Allison<sup>6</sup>, and Carter<sup>7</sup>, translate παῖς as servant/slave. Ulrich Luz<sup>8</sup> argues that the term should be translated “child.” Amy-Jill Levine suggests that both translations are equally viable.<sup>9</sup>

In this chapter, I will translate the word παῖς as “slave” rather than “child.” The decision to translate the word as “slave” rather than “servant,” the common English Bible translation, is deliberate. I suggest that the decision of translators of English Bibles to use “servant” rather than “slave” makes this passage more palatable for audiences, lends itself to an easy understanding of the centurion as a caring and kind master, and masks the power differential between the centurion and the παῖς. Merriam-Webster defines *servant* as “one who serves others; a public *servant*, especially” or “one who performs duties about the person or home of a master or personal employer.” Nothing in this definition highlights the inherent powerlessness of the servant. *Slave*, however, is defined as “a person held in servitude as the chattel of another” or “one that is completely subservient to a dominating influence.” The translation of παῖς as “slave” better highlights the power dynamics between the centurion and the παῖς, and possible maltreatment of the latter, however uncomfortable this translation may make modern readers.

Notably, however, there are several arguments in favor of translating παῖς as child which merit attention. Jennings and Liew note these arguments, but are not convinced by

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<sup>4</sup> Held, “Matthew as Interpreter.”

<sup>5</sup> Julian Sheffield, “The Father in the Gospel of Matthew,” in *A Feminist Companion to Matthew*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2001), 64.

<sup>6</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 119–22.

<sup>7</sup> Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 200–204.

<sup>8</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 10, n. 17.

<sup>9</sup> Amy-Jill Levine, “Matthew,” in *The Women’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 339–49.

them.<sup>10</sup> The arguments in favor of translation of παῖς as “child” are as follows. First, the centurion refers to the impaired person as παῖς consistently, but uses the word δοῦλος in verse 9 to unambiguously refer to a slave, begging the question of why the author used two different terms if referring to the same social status. Those who argue for a translation of “child” argue that the two words should be translated differently since they are not referring to the same social status, with παῖς as “child” and δοῦλος as “slave.” Second, “Matthew uses the word παῖς elsewhere (2:16; 17:18) to refer to a child rather than a servant.”<sup>11</sup> Third, this passage is similar to three other Matthean healing narratives where a parent petitions Jesus on behalf of a child (9:18–26; 15:21–28; 17:14–20). Fourth, Matthew does not use παῖς and δοῦλος synonymously elsewhere in the gospel. Matthew uses δοῦλος thirty-five times to refer to slaves. Matthew “uses the word παῖς and its diminutive, παιδίον, at least twenty-six times...” to refer to Jesus as a young boy or to refer to a child/children in general.<sup>12</sup> Finally, Matthew is quite “comfortable using παῖς or δοῦλος repeatedly within a short span,” so this usage “must be explained in terms other than synonymy or stylistic variation.”<sup>13</sup>

I now turn to the significant reasons why “slave” is a justified translation. Again, Jennings and Liew consider several arguments. First, around 13 BCE, “Augustus had legally banned soldiers below the ranks of senatorial and equestrian officers from marrying;” the ban was not lifted until around 197 BCE under Septimius Severus.<sup>14</sup> This ban, if it was consistently enforced, would mean that legally, the impaired person would not be

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<sup>10</sup> Jennings and Liew, “Mistaken Identities,” 469.

<sup>11</sup> Jennings and Liew, “Mistaken Identities,” 469.

<sup>12</sup> Jennings and Liew, “Mistaken Identities,” 470.

<sup>13</sup> Jennings and Liew, “Mistaken Identities,” 470.

<sup>14</sup> Jennings and Liew, “Mistaken Identities,” 470.

recognized as a child of the centurion. Of course not all soldiers complied and the παῖς would be a “child” regardless of the legal situation. Second, as Jennings and Liew are keen to point out, Matthew uses a different word for “son” in this same episode: υἱός. Jennings and Liew observe that, in Matthew, “παῖς, even when used to refer to a boy or a biological child tends to be more generic and aloof; that is, it does not contain the emotional attachment and investment of the word τέκνον.”<sup>15</sup> Υἱός, on the other hand, occurs no less than ninety times in Matthew and “each time the word seems to denote a lineage or relationship of descent (biological or metaphorical) that is absent from Matthew’s use of παῖς.”<sup>16</sup>

In short, the use of the term δοῦλος (8:9) and υἱός (8:12) in the same passage indicates to Jennings and Liew that παῖς cannot simply be translated as slave or son. They comment, “παῖς (or παιδικά) is one of the words that is often used to refer to the ‘beloved,’ or the passive member (usually though not necessarily an adolescent boy) of a same-sex relationship.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, they opt to understand the term to mean a boy-lover. Jennings and Liew, however, do not reference the fact that παῖς was a dehumanizing term for referring to male slaves of any age.<sup>18</sup> I will return to Jennings’ and Liew’s argument later in this chapter, but, for now, suffice it to say that παῖς is an ambiguous term. In this chapter, I choose to read the passage as if the impaired person is the centurion’s slave, aware of the term’s ambiguity.

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<sup>15</sup> Jennings and Liew, “Mistaken Identities,” 472.

<sup>16</sup> Jennings and Liew, “Mistaken Identities,” 472.

<sup>17</sup> Jennings and Liew, “Mistaken Identities,” 472–73.

<sup>18</sup> Moses I. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1998), 164.

### Previous Discussions of Matthew 8:5–13

Although I have examined previous scholarly approaches to the Matthean healing narratives generally in chapter 1, in this section I will examine interpretations of this passage specifically, following a similar thematic approach: redactional readings, social-science approaches, Empire Studies, and Disability Studies.

#### Redactional Readings

Hans Joachim Held reads the Matthean healing narratives from a redactional standpoint and categorizes the healing narratives as being about Christology, faith, or discipleship. He categorizes this passage under the theme of “faith.” Noting that there is no Marcan parallel for this passage, Held looks to Luke’s story to understand how Matthew uses his source material (in this case, Q). He argues that, because the dialogue of Matt 8:8–10 is so similar to Luke 7:6b–9, “the conversation between the centurion and Jesus, with the saying about the unique faith of this Gentile man, is the kernel of it.”<sup>19</sup> Each evangelist, to some extent, determines the framework within which the conversation will sit. According to Held, Matthew uses a framework of faith (as opposed to Luke who is more concerned with un/worthiness).<sup>20</sup> Held argues that the conclusion of the Matthean pericope uses faith as a catchword, while the request of the centurion is evidence of faith in the introduction to the pericope. Held writes, “[the centurion] assents to the hesitation of Jesus to come into his house and recognizes thereby the barrier that separates him from the people of God...On the other hand, however, his faith finds the way in which Jesus can

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<sup>19</sup> Held, “Matthew as Interpreter,” 193.

<sup>20</sup> Held, “Matthew as Interpreter,” 195.

give him unlimited help..."<sup>21</sup> The centurion's faith overcomes Jesus' hesitations and secures healing for his servant.

In relation to the focus of this study on factors of social stress experienced by the slave and their impact on his overall wellbeing, I find two points especially problematic in Held's reading. First, in his discussion of this passage, Held explicitly mentions the impaired man only twice (once as the "sick man" and once as the "servant"). His focus is entirely on the dialogue between Jesus and the centurion and the "extraordinary faith of the Gentile man..."<sup>22</sup>

Second, Held reads this scene as being about salvation: "In the first place it is clear that the faith intended here is not to be understood simply as faith in a worker of miracles, for this faith not only brings about the desired miracle (Matt. 8:13) but gains entrance into the kingdom of God."<sup>23</sup> Held reads this passage as primarily about the faith of a Gentile and the admission of Gentiles into the kingdom/empire of God. His reading largely ignores the social and somatic situation of the slave in favor of a discussion of the doctrinal issues of faith and salvation.

W. D. Davies and Dale Allison read this passage similarly to Held, neglecting the somatic and societal experience of the slave. They argue, "Mt 8.5-13, which consists primarily not of description but dialogue, typifies where Matthew's interest so often is: in what Jesus has to say."<sup>24</sup> They emphasize the dialogue between the centurion and Jesus and the role that faith plays in the scene. However, they diverge from Held in that they do

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<sup>21</sup> Held, "Matthew as Interpreter," 195. Important for Held's argument is his reading of Matt 8:7 (ἐγὼ ἐλθὼν θεραπεύσω αὐτόν) as a question rather than a promise.

<sup>22</sup> Held, "Matthew as Interpreter," 196.

<sup>23</sup> Held, "Matthew as Interpreter," 196.

<sup>24</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 119.

not read the scene as indicating salvation for Gentiles, but “in the salvation of the exiles as opposed to ‘the sons of the kingdom’, the wise and the privileged who have lived in Israel and beheld the Messiah, and yet do not believe.” Like Held, their focus on faith and salvation draws their attention away from the slave whose impairment is the impetus for the encounter between the centurion and Jesus. Further, their focus on the faith of the centurion results in neglect of the slave, the social stressors inherent in slavery, and the effect those stressors may have had on the physical health of the slave.

### **Social-Science Readings**

Malina and Rohrbaugh read this scene with a spiritualized version of the patronage system of the Roman Empire in mind. For them, this scene shows Jesus acting as a broker mediating between God (the patron) and the centurion (the client). They understand the centurion’s faith in terms of patron-client transactions: “Given such loyalty to the Patron, Jesus then brokers God’s healing power as requested.”<sup>25</sup> Tellingly, Malina and Rohrbaugh do not so much as even mention the slave in their brief analysis of the passage. Their attention lies only in the roles that the centurion and Jesus play within the patronage system. Further, in the final section of the commentary, “Reading Scenarios,” Malina and Rohrbaugh catalogue and describe various social systems that provide “the clues for filling in between the lines.” They list 81 scenarios described over 100 pages, yet there is no mention of slavery. This is a critical omission given the possible meaning of *παῖς* and the pervasiveness of the institution of slavery in the world from which Matthew’s gospel originates. Orlando Patterson estimates that, from 1–150 CE, 16–20% of the population

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<sup>25</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 55.

under Roman imperial rule were enslaved.<sup>26</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh ignore the magnitude of slavery as a social institution in the ancient world thereby making invisible the slave in Matt 8:5–13 and the social stressors that are inherent in the Roman slave system.

Evert-Jan Vledder reads Matt 8:5–13 through the lens of conflict theory. As I established in chapter 1, Vledder finds the roots of the conflict in Matthew on two levels: elite versus non-elite interests and parent Judaism versus burgeoning Jesus-follower interests. In this scene Vledder notes that from a social-stratification standpoint, the centurion's interests should be aligned with those of the Jewish leaders since they are all part of the so-called retainer class. Instead, the centurion, he notes, aligned his interests with those of his slave and of Jesus: "...there was something strange in the behaviour of the centurion in that he acted in the interests of his paralysed [sic] slave....Here we have an example of an owner who cared for his slave, and acted on behalf of the slave whose condition was very weak."<sup>27</sup> Further, Vledder finds the centurion's recognition of Jesus' authority to be a threat to the authority of the Jewish religious leaders. This tension between Jesus and the Jewish leaders is exacerbated by Jesus' contrast of "the faith of the Gentile with the unbelief of 'the sons of the kingdom' (8.11)."<sup>28</sup>

While Vledder's attention to conflict in this scene specifically is minimal, he reads Matt 8:5–13 as underlining the overall conflict between the interests of Jesus and of the Jewish leaders. He begins by noting that the centurion is on the same level as the Jewish leaders in terms of social stratification. That is, both the centurion and the Jewish leaders function as retainers ensuring that the ruling class's interests, especially those of the

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<sup>26</sup> Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 354.

<sup>27</sup> Vledder, *Conflict in the Miracle Stories*, 180.

<sup>28</sup> Vledder, *Conflict in the Miracle Stories*, 181.

Roman emperor, are served. He highlights that the centurion has voluntarily aligned himself with the interests of the non-elite by acting on behalf of a slave and by approaching a Jewish healer as a Gentile. Vledder summarizes, “Through his own action the centurion now becomes part of the weak. And although he still has some authority, he becomes a person on the edge of society.”<sup>29</sup>

Yet Vledder’s analysis of this passage ignores the stressful somatic and societal reality of the slave. Though he states early on that the “position and condition of the slave” contributes to the building up of conflict, his discussion of the slave’s condition ends with the acknowledgement that it is the impetus for the centurion’s encounter with Jesus. He makes no further comment on what the interests of the slave may have been or how those may have aligned with or diverged from the centurion’s or even Jesus’ interests. My reading, in contrast to Vledder, will consider the power dynamic between the slave and the centurion (a relationship that is inherently fraught with tension), serving to highlight the conflict between elite and non-elite interests.

### **Empire Studies**

Warren Carter reads this scene with an eye toward the power dynamics present between the characters. He argues that this encounter brings two empires face to face: Rome’s empire and God’s empire. No matter the cause of the slave’s impairment, whether it is a psychosomatic protest or the result of a beating, the detrimental impact of Rome’s empire on the slave’s body contradicts the “propaganda claims of Aristides and Josephus that Rome has healed a sick world.”<sup>30</sup> Carter’s reading highlights two important points that I will expound upon later. First, Carter is aware that slavery is a marginalized and

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<sup>29</sup> Vledder, *Conflict in the Miracle Stories*, 180.

<sup>30</sup> Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 200.

oppressed social position. He writes, "...Jesus' act is limited. While he heals a person enslaved by imperial power, he does not free him from slavery, but returns him, able-bodied, to active service."<sup>31</sup> Carter, though, notes, "Jesus' reference to God's future empire (8:11-12), however, contextualizes the act. The healing anticipates the very different world and time of God's empire established over all (2 Bar 73:1-2)."<sup>32</sup> While I agree that the healing narrative does offer this contextualization, I argue that the societal experience of the slave is not necessarily better because of this contextualization. The second point Carter makes is that "No reason for the centurion's concern, whether human decency or inconvenience, is offered."<sup>33</sup> This is important because, as argued below, even when masters might exhibit care or basic human decency, relationships between slave-owners and slaves are fundamentally unequal relationship marked by domination, subordination, and ownership, all enforced by violence and through precepts of the law.

### **Disability Studies**

As I noted in chapter 1, Disability Studies (DS) has paid little attention to the healing scenes in Matthew's gospel. One notable exception to this trend is the work of James A. Metzger and James P. Grimshaw. In a shared article, Metzger reads as a person living with ankylosing spondylitis and Grimshaw reads as a caretaker for a spouse with rheumatoid arthritis. Metzger has four specific problems with the presentation of healing in Matthew (outlined in chapter 1). These four general problems hold true for Matt 8:5-13 specifically. First, Metzger is troubled that most interpretations of the healing narratives are often about something else entirely. In this case, Metzger criticizes readings that stress how "the

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<sup>31</sup> Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 200.

<sup>32</sup> Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 200.

<sup>33</sup> Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 201.

exemplary faith of the Roman centurion foreshadows for readers the inclusion of gentile Christians ('many from east and west') in God's kingdom."<sup>34</sup> Unnoted by Metzger is a variant on that theme by Davies and Allison (above), namely the salvation of the "exiles" (diaspora Jews) over that of Jews living in Judea. This study, on the other hand, emphasizes the societal positioning of the centurion's slave and the social stressors inherent in the institution of Roman slavery.

Second, Metzger is troubled by the way the healing scenes remedy deviant bodies rather than embracing their difference. Metzger argues that throughout the healing stories in Matthew, Jesus "revises disabled bodies" implying that "impairment is not mere variation but a deficit that has no place in a divinely inaugurated utopia."<sup>35</sup> In Matt 8:5-13, this is done by the instantaneous healing of the slave upon the faith-filled request of the centurion.

Metzger's third objection is the requirement of ingratiation to Jesus or demonstration of belief in Jesus' powers. Though this is not true of every healing scene in Matthew, in this passage "rehabilitation follows upon the centurion's public confession of unworthiness before so illustrious a personage as well as an acknowledgement of Jesus' power over illness and the malevolent spirits that are so often its cause."<sup>36</sup>

Finally, Metzger is troubled by the assumption of demonic activity behind illnesses and the promotion of fantasy cures. "In 8:5-13, both the centurion and Jesus appear to assume that malevolent spirits are behind the daughter's [sic] illness..."<sup>37</sup> while in every healing scene of the Gospel, "it is suggested that healing is immediate, complete, and

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<sup>34</sup> Metzger and Grimshaw, "Reading Matthew's Healing Narratives," 137.

<sup>35</sup> Metzger and Grimshaw, "Reading Matthew's Healing Narratives," 137.

<sup>36</sup> Metzger and Grimshaw, "Reading Matthew's Healing Narratives," 138.

<sup>37</sup> Metzger and Grimshaw, "Reading Matthew's Healing Narratives," 139.

lasting.”<sup>38</sup> This study takes seriously Metzger’s critiques of the scene and highlights the ambiguity of the healing by focusing on the impaired slave’s stressed somatic and societal experience prior to and following his healing.

Grimshaw highlights the role of masculinity in his reading of Matt 8:5–13. This scene contains both un-masculine and masculine characters. Grimshaw argues that the “heirs of the kingdom” (8:12) are shown to be failed men, “they are not active and mobile but passive and thrown about.”<sup>39</sup> Further, the *παῖς*, which Grimshaw translates “son,” is “an unman. He is weak, passive, unable to move, the deformed male.”<sup>40</sup> The son, however, is the child of the almost perfect man, at least in Roman terms: the centurion “is in the familiar masculine realm of the military, has fathered a child, is active by moving toward Jesus and away from him, and shows his persistence with Jesus.”<sup>41</sup> Jesus is hypermasculine; he can heal by overcoming nature, even from a distance. “Jesus’ hypermasculinity violently eradicates the lack of masculinity and transforms the boy’s paralytic body to what now has the potential to grow into an abled-bodied man.”<sup>42</sup>

Critical to Grimshaw’s argument is the translation of *παῖς* as “son.” As will be demonstrated below, a slave could not be masculine in Roman terms because, inherent in its conditions, slavery is domination, or to use Patterson’s term, “social death.” In fact, according to what Patterson refers to as Roman “legal fiction,” a slave is defined as a *res*, a thing.<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, Metzger’s resistance to the reinforcing of masculine norms in the text

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<sup>38</sup> Metzger and Grimshaw, “Reading Matthew’s Healing Narratives,” 139.

<sup>39</sup> Metzger and Grimshaw, “Reading Matthew’s Healing Narratives,” 147.

<sup>40</sup> Metzger and Grimshaw, “Reading Matthew’s Healing Narratives,” 147.

<sup>41</sup> Metzger and Grimshaw, “Reading Matthew’s Healing Narratives,” 146.

<sup>42</sup> Metzger and Grimshaw, “Reading Matthew’s Healing Narratives,” 147.

<sup>43</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 31.

is an important contribution to the study of this scene whether one translates παῖς as slave or child.

### **Social Stress and Slavery in the Roman Empire**

As the review of previous discussions concerning Matt 8:5–13 demonstrates, the impairment and experience of the slave has been largely ignored, with Carter being an exception to the general pattern. In order to fill in the slave’s circumstances, I highlight some of the stressful aspects of the life of the enslaved under the Roman Empire.

#### **Preliminary Issue: Categories of and Responses to Social Stress**

Social Stress theorists categorize several types of stress that can helpfully be used to analyze wherein the potential stressors of being a slave lie. Using an engineering model as a guiding metaphor, Social Stress theorist Blair Wheaton understands stressors to “be an event or situation that *would* challenge the integrity of the organism *if applied at levels beyond the current elastic limit of the organism.*”<sup>44</sup> By this definition, Wheaton means that Social Stress theorists do not consider certain types of stressful occurrences to be stressors when they do not provide sufficient challenge for most people to consider them stressful (e.g., small, self-limiting problems that dissipate naturally) or when they fall below a threshold of importance (e.g., the loss of a job that is followed immediately by a new job). Stressors then, under this definition, are

*...a condition of threat, demand, or structural constraint that, by its very occurrence or existence, calls into question the operating integrity of the organism...Threats involve the possibility or expectation of potential harm. Demands involve the load component of the stressors, also commonly referred to as “burden,” or “overload.” The sense of being “pushed” by current life circumstances reflects this component of stressors. Finally, structural constraints referred to here are features of social*

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<sup>44</sup> Wheaton, “Social Stress,” 281. Italics original.

structure and thus are a function of social location. Classic concerns with insufficient means to attain goals, discrimination, underreward in social exchange (such as pay at work), or role captivity, are, by this definition, forms of social stress.<sup>45</sup>

At the heart of Wheaton's definition is a lack of control of one's environment or an inability to escape a burdensome situation, which, as will be demonstrated below, are both characteristic of enslavement in the Roman Empire. Wheaton suggests a range of stressor categories that function as a sort of continuum between discrete (or "life event") stressors and continuous/chronic stressors. I employ these five categories of stressors in this chapter to frame how stress could manifest itself in the lives of slaves.

Wheaton's first category, "daily hassles," is concerned with the demands of everyday life in one's environment. This category can be quite broad. It can range from irritating daily tasks, like a morning commute, to "episodic, irregular, microevents that cannot be anticipated daily,"<sup>46</sup> like losing one's keys. These daily hassles are generally not stressful to the point of challenging the integrity of the organism, per the definition above, though some could be. For instance, someone working in a hostile work environment may find daily hassles to be chronically and detrimentally stressful.

The second category denotes "nonevents," when an expected or desired event does not come to pass. This could include things like being passed up for a promotion or not being married by a certain age. The important qualifier for a nonevent is the possibility that change could have happened or the lack of the possibility of change.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Wheaton, "Social Stress," 281.

<sup>46</sup> Wheaton, "Social Stress," 284.

<sup>47</sup> Wheaton, "Social Stress," 285.

The third and fourth categories are closely related: traumas as isolated events and chronic traumatic situations that are repeated. "Traumas" are generally understood as being extremely serious and extremely overwhelming. Traumas are isolated events, while living in an ongoing traumatic situation is a chronic stressor. The distinction between the two categories has to do with the number of times the event occurs rather than the duration of the effects of the event. "For example, a single rape would be considered a traumatic event, but repeated, regular, and therefore expected sexual abuse is best thought of as a chronic traumatic *situation*."<sup>48</sup> Traumas can include a range of severe situations including war stress, natural disasters, sexual abuse and assault, physical violence, and parental death or divorce.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, "ecological stressors" are those that occur at any level of a social unit (family, school, work, neighborhood, city, etc.) and specifically affect those within that social unit.<sup>50</sup> Events like natural disasters and chronic stressors like crime or war fall under this category.

In addition to a range of categories of stress, there is a range of responses to stress. Recent research has highlighted four types of response to stress: fight, flight, tend, and/or befriend. The fight-or-flight responses are generated by the sympathetic nervous system and occur fairly suddenly "in order to prepare the body to respond to an emergency situation or acute stress."<sup>51</sup> Scholars think the tend-or-befriend responses are activated by

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<sup>48</sup> Wheaton, "Social Stress," 285.

<sup>49</sup> Wheaton, "Social Stress," 285–86.

<sup>50</sup> Wheaton, "Social Stress," 286.

<sup>51</sup> "Stress Effects on the Body," [Http://Www.Apa.Org](http://Www.Apa.Org), n.d., <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/stress-body.aspx>.

the release of the hormone oxytocin, which prompts affiliative behavior in response to stress, in conjunction with the dopamine and opioid systems of the brain to meet the basic human need for protective and rewarding relationships.<sup>52</sup> An increase in the hormone oxytocin has been linked to decreased “sympathetic reactivity, blood pressure, pain sensitivity, and cortico-steroid levels, among other findings suggestive of a reduced stress response.”<sup>53</sup> It is thought “under conditions of stress, tending to offspring and affiliating with others (‘befriending’) are at least as common responses to stress in humans as fight-or-flight.”<sup>54</sup> I consider these responses as part of a slave’s available options for responding to their stressed social location.

In what follows, I review the comparative work of Orlando Patterson in defining slavery and its constituent elements. Throughout, I discuss features of the life of slaves with an emphasis on the potentiality for stress and stressed responses.

### **Stressors of Enslavement**

Orlando Patterson is a sociologist who has done extensive research on the nature of slavery throughout time and across different societies. Though Patterson does not attempt to identify explicit stressors of slavery, there is little doubt that his discussion identifies an institution laden with stress for slaves. Patterson understands slavery as “one of the most extreme forms of the relation of domination, approaching the limits of total power from the viewpoint of the master, and of total powerlessness from the viewpoint of the slave.”<sup>55</sup> He

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<sup>52</sup> Shelley E. Taylor, “Tend and Befriend: Biobehavioral Bases of Affiliation Under Stress,” *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 15.6 (2006): 273–77.

<sup>53</sup> Taylor, “Tend and Befriend,” 274–75.

<sup>54</sup> Taylor, “Tend and Befriend,” 273.

<sup>55</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 1.

defines slavery as “the permanent, violent domination of natively alienated and generally dishonored persons.”<sup>56</sup> In order to argue his case, Patterson highlights three facets of the power relation between slave and master: social, cultural, and socio-psychological. I discuss each in turn.

### ***Patterson’s Facets of Power: Social***

The first facet of power in a slave-master relationship is social. Masters use violence or the threat of violence to coercively control their slaves. Social Stress Theory has demonstrated that stress levels are inversely related to socio-economic status<sup>57</sup>, so it should be of no surprise that various classicists and anthropologists highlight several types of stress-stimulating violence and/or degradation that a slave could anticipate encountering simply because of his/her social status, including physical chastisement, sexual exploitation, and psychological abuse.

Violence against slaves was a common feature of slavery.<sup>58</sup> As Patterson demonstrates in his comparison of slave societies, “there is no known slaveholding society where the whip was not considered an indispensable instrument”<sup>59</sup> and that “in every slave

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<sup>56</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 13.

<sup>57</sup> Yu and Williams, “Socioeconomic Status.”

<sup>58</sup> The conditions of slavery in the Roman Empire, as with any slaveholding societies, vary by the type of task(s) assigned and by the slave’s proximity to the owner, Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 173–74. Patterson’s comparative study determined several general patterns. First, slaves by birth could work in homes, in mines, or on the land while slaves acquired as adults could serve based on skill, in the military, or as official advisors. In Rome, “skilled and literate slaves came to dominate not only urban industries, but education, the arts, theater, and literature” (180).

<sup>59</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 4.

society the master has the power to inflict corporal punishment” upon his slave.<sup>60</sup> Moses Finley, in his discussion of corporal punishments of slaves, states it this way: “The potential or actual employment of naked force is of course an inescapable factor in the situation, but there is more to it than that. If a slave is a property with a soul, a non-person and yet indubitably a biological human being, institutional procedures are to be expected that will degrade and undermine his [*sic*] humanity and so distinguish him [*sic*] from human beings who are not property.”<sup>61</sup> Keith Bradley argues that the role played by physical coercion in a slave’s life is indisputable and that “there was no real restraint on the slave-owner, other than his own temperament or conscience, to prevent outrage or extremity if circumstance led to it...”<sup>62</sup> Slaves were answerable to their masters with their bodies and constantly lived under the threat, if not the reality, of violence. To be a slave was to live with the chronic stress of imminent and/or experienced violent, often arbitrary, punishment.

Finley elaborates three distinct ways in which slaves were answerable to their masters and/or the state with their bodies.<sup>63</sup> First, “corporal punishment, public or private, was restricted to slaves.”<sup>64</sup> While there were exceptions to this rule (children [especially boys], soldiers, treasonous free non-citizens, and Christians sentenced to capital punishment, to name a few), generally slaves were subjected to physical violence for a number of offenses, real or perceived. This was done through floggings, detention in an

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<sup>60</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 192–93; Richard Saller, “The Hierarchical Household in Roman Society: A Study of Domestic Slavery,” in *Serfdom and Slavery: Studies in Legal Bondage*, ed. M. L. Bush (London: Longman, 1996), 118.

<sup>61</sup> Finley, *Ancient Slavery*, 163.

<sup>62</sup> Keith R. Bradley, *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire: A Study in Social Control* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 122.

<sup>63</sup> Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, 135.

<sup>64</sup> Finley, *Ancient Slavery*, 161.

*ergastulum* (slave prisons), branding of the body, and possibly “exceptional acts of cruelty in which sadistic tendencies on the part of some owners stand out clearly.”<sup>65</sup> Subjection to this type of abuse, using Wheaton’s categorization, may be considered a chronic traumatic situation, wherein the slave is consistently subjected to the stress of at least the threat of the violent whims of his/her master.

Chronic stress, such as this prolonged subjection to physical violence, can result in long term strain on the body, causing an array of physical symptomatology including tension headaches and migraines, heart and blood vessel problems, stomach and bowel discomfort, erectile dysfunction and impotence in males, and irregular menstrual cycles and reduced sexual desire in women.<sup>66</sup> Slaves living in chronic traumatic situations were doubly damned because their role-captivity<sup>67</sup> prevented them from having significant recourse to the options of either fleeing from or fighting off their abuser.<sup>68</sup> The closest a

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<sup>65</sup> Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, 121. Bradley notes the brutality of Caligula in cutting off the hands of a slave, hanging them around the slaves neck, and parading the slave around a dining hall with a placard describing his crime of having stolen a piece of silver; Augustus who had a slave’s legs broken for taking a bribe; and Vedius Pollio who fed “to his lampreys a boy who had broken a crystal cup.”

<sup>66</sup> “Stress Effects on the Body.” <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/stress-body.aspx>

<sup>67</sup> Carol S. Aneshensel, Leonard Pearlin, and Roberleigh Schuler, “Stress, Role Captivity, and the Cessation of Caregiving,” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 34.1 (1993): 56. Role-captivity “refers to situations in which people are unwilling incumbents of social roles. The distinguishing characteristic of role captivity is not whether the role is difficult or stressful, but that the role is unwanted.”

<sup>68</sup> Acting on the instinctual impulse to run from one’s attacker in the moment was probably unavailable for slaves in most instances. They often shared living quarters with their masters and may not have been able to escape without inciting further violence. Running away from the master’s home in an attempt to gain freedom did happen, but was a risky choice for a slave to make. Keith Bradley notes that runaways were constantly on the move, avoiding authorities, lying about their identities, coping with the variables of weather and terrain, and risking their safety or recapture for provisions. Running away, therefore, was a distinct form of the flight response and should be differentiated from a slave’s inability to flee from a specific incident of violence as it occurred in the moment.

slave could come to “fighting” was through low-profile, disguised acts of resistance. James Scott has convincingly argued that disguised and anonymous forms of resistance are “always present in the public discourse of subordinate groups” but are “designed to have a double meaning or to shield the identity of the actors.”<sup>69</sup> Scott sees resistance in a variety of activities including, but not limited to, poaching, evasion, foot-dragging, tales of revenge, gossip, folk religion, and world-upside-down imagery.<sup>70</sup> Sandra R. Joshel and Lauren Hackworth Petersen argue the complaints of slave-owners in the surviving literature indicate ways that slaves in the first century may have resisted their domination, including, among a litany of other tactics, flight (i.e. running away), damage, theft, shirking, and carelessness.<sup>71</sup> These acts, however, could result in further punishment which a slave may deem as not worth the risk. Slaves could also turn to tending or befriending to ameliorate their stressful situations by redirecting their stressful impulses toward tending to and protecting their offspring or toward seeking meaningful relationships in other ways, perhaps by bonding with other slaves in the home or even by bonding with their abusive master.

While one-to-one comparisons between slaves in the ancient world and women in the modern world experiencing Intimate Partner Violence are not possible, the literature on why women stay in abusive relationships does shed some light on the type of cognitive maneuvering possible when living in a chronic traumatic situation. Studies have shown

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Keith R. Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, Key Themes in Ancient History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 126–28.

<sup>69</sup> James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 19.

<sup>70</sup> Scott, *Hidden Transcripts*, 198.

<sup>71</sup> Sandra R. Joshel and Lauren Hackworth Petersen, *The Material Life of Roman Slaves*, n.d., 13–17.

that in stressful situations, people tend to reframe their experience in a more positive light in an attempt to establish a set of illusions. “Using the term *illusion* does not suggest a non-fact-based reality but rather suggests that individuals might look ‘at the known facts in a particular light, because a different slant would yield a less positive picture.’”<sup>72</sup> Some slaves may have utilized the coping strategy of “befriending,” or caring, for their master to deal with the inherent stressors of their chronic traumatic situation.

Secondly, slaves could only testify under torture at a criminal proceeding, which was one procedure, Finley argues, by which slaves were degraded and so distinguished “from human beings who are not property.”<sup>73</sup> Finley cites an inscription from Puteoli that is dated to the late republic or early Augustan era advertising for bids for a funeral director whose duties would include torturing slaves when requested.<sup>74</sup> The need for a slave’s testimony may not have been common and the prospect of torture would vary based on the slave’s proximity to their owner. Bradley clarifies, “Those who formed part of their owner’s retinue, accompanying him wherever he went, or those who attended in some other personal capacity—for example, waiters, dressers, barbers—were much better situated for picking up incriminating information than non-domestics.”<sup>75</sup> Thus some slaves may have lived with the anxiety of knowing their master’s secrets and the stress of potential torture in the event s/he were called upon to testify in court. Testimony under torture may be categorized under trauma, since for many it would not be a chronic stressor

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<sup>72</sup> Tracy Bennet Herbert, Roxane Cohen Silver, and Ellard, “Coping with an Abusive Relationship: I. How and Why Do Women Stay?,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 53.2 (1991): 313.

<sup>73</sup> Finley, *Ancient Slavery*, 163.

<sup>74</sup> Finley, *Ancient Slavery*, 163.

<sup>75</sup> Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, 133.

but, rather, an intense and sudden event. However, for some slaves who worked in a personal capacity for masters and knew their master's secrets, the potential to be tortured for testimony could be considered an ecological stressor as well since their role in a particular home made them more susceptible to the abuse.

Finley highlights as the third example of slaves' answerability with their bodies the slave's lack of agency by noting the "unrestricted availability in sexual relations."<sup>76</sup> Prostitution was a lucrative industry, and "all available evidence suggests a strong correlation between prostitution and slavery."<sup>77</sup> Yet prostitution is only one aspect of a slave's potential sexual exploitation. For Finley, "more interesting ...is the direct sexual exploitation of slaves by their masters and the latter's family and friends."<sup>78</sup> Because of their social location, slaves had no agency over their own bodies and masters had access to the slaves of their own homes for any purpose, including the indulgence of their sexual appetite. Martial's *Epigrams* have multiple allusions to sexual relations between masters and slaves, heterosexual and same-sex. In Shackleton Bailey's graphic translation, Martial writes, "Quirinalis doesn't think he should have a wife, though he wants to have sons, and has found a way to achieve this: he fucks his slave girls and fills town house and country estate with home-born knights. Quirinalis is a true paterfamilias."<sup>79</sup> Elsewhere, Martial ranks his sexual partner preferences, "I prefer a freeborn girl, but if none is available my second choice is a freedwoman. A slave girl is last in line, but if she is better to look at than

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<sup>76</sup> Finley, *Ancient Slavery*, 162.

<sup>77</sup> Jennifer A. Glancy, "Obstacles to Slaves' Participation in the Corinthian Church," *JBL* 117.3 (1998): 488. The enslaved prostitute was a common character in the popular literature. See, as examples, Xenophon's *An Ephesian Tale* and Plautus's *Rudens*, *Poenulus*, and *Pseudolus*.

<sup>78</sup> Finley, *Ancient Slavery*, 164.

<sup>79</sup> Martial, *Epigr.* 1.84 [Shackleton Bailey, LCL]

either, so far as I am concerned she'll be born free."<sup>80</sup> Martial's casual references take for granted that slaves were sexually subject to their masters and that slaves had no say in whether or not to accept their masters' advances.<sup>81</sup> "Sexual abuse was to be expected by [slaves] just as much as other forms of maltreatment"<sup>82</sup> and, welcomed or not, the slave had no power in the situation.

The stressors involved in the slave's chronic traumatic situation of rape by their master are numerous. For female slaves, the risk of pregnancy was high. With pregnancy came various possible complications including, among other things, miscarriage, stillbirth, infection, or the death of the mother during delivery.<sup>83</sup> Many female slaves also had to deal with a jealous mistress. Patterson's study indicates "in every slaveholding society, from the most primitive to the most advanced, [there] ran the additional risk of the jealousy and vengeance of the 'free' women of the household, especially the master's senior wife."<sup>84</sup> For both males and females, sexual subjugation might be experienced as a personal violation even though there was no legal standing for these slaves. In a society where honor and shame were crucial social categories, a slave was deemed by the dominant free to be

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<sup>80</sup> Martial, *Epigr.* 3.33 [Shackleton Bailey, LCL]. Other allusions can be found in 2.33; 4.66; 6.39; 6.71; 11.70; 12.58; and 12.96.

<sup>81</sup> Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, 118. Bradley does acknowledge that some slaves and masters became involved in relationships based on actual sentiment as marriage between a female ex-slave and her patron is allowed under Augustan legislation. However, this should not blur the fact that slaves had no choice in their use as sexual passives.

<sup>82</sup> Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, 118.

<sup>83</sup> Donald Todman, "Childbirth in Ancient Rome: From Traditional Folklore to Obstetrics," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology* 47 (2007): 82–85. Estimates for miscarriage and stillbirth could be as high as 20%, while the general infant mortality rate for ancient Rome is estimated at 300 per 1000. Maternal deaths are estimated at 25 per 1000 (compare that to the modern, Western maternal death rate of less than 10 per 1000).

<sup>84</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 175.

without honor and, thus, socially and legally, could not be shamed by a forced sexual act. From a slave's perspective, however, not only could he or she be forced to perform unwanted sexual acts, there was also no option to escape from the repeated violation and trauma and their concomitant stress.

### ***Matthew's Parables and Slaves' Bodies***

The slave's body as a site for stress by way of abuse is evident in the parables in Matthew. In "Slaves and Slavery in the Matthean Parables," Jennifer Glancy reviews and analyzes how Matthew's parables reflect and reinforce the Roman societal understanding that violence against slaves by their owners, other slaves, or third parties is a common and acceptable experience. Though her analysis does not identify the stressors present in these stories, she lays the groundwork to do so.

Glancy is troubled by interpretations that downplay the violent nature of the master-slave relationship. For example, she discusses the work of Bernard Brandon Scott who categorizes the parabolic master-slave relations under the broader system of patron-client relations. Glancy argues, "Despite certain similarities (e.g., the asymmetry of power relations) a slave is not a client, and an owner is not a patron. By collapsing master-slave relations into patron-client relations Scott distorts the parabolic representation of slavery."<sup>85</sup> Glancy is also troubled by interpretations that gloss over some of the more problematic aspects of the slave parables. Mary Ann Beavis sees the parables as subversive in that they reward slaves with more responsibility, show slaves as moral agents, and dignify the role of the slave. Glancy disagrees. Instead, she argues that the addition of

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<sup>85</sup> Jennifer A Glancy, "Slaves and Slavery in the Matthean Parables," *JBL* 119.1 (2000): 70.

responsibility as a “reward” (rather than an offer of manumission) reinforces hierarchical values, the representation of slaves as acting morally is not unique in ancient literature, and that the “parabolic representation of slaves and slavery participates in and reinscribes the most basic and problematic elements of the ancient ideology of slavery.”<sup>86</sup>

Glancy begins her assessment of the Matthean parables by first noting that many of the slaves depicted are what she labels “managerial slaves.” By this she means those slaves whose work is more skewed towards managerial tasks such as serving as messengers or emissaries (parables of the wicked tenants, 21:33–41, and the wedding banquet, 22:1–10), serving as financial agents (parable of the talents, 25:14–30, and perhaps of the unmerciful slave, 18:23–35), and serving as the *vilicus* over other slaves<sup>87</sup> (parable of the overseer, 24:45–51). Glancy highlights that managerial slaves would have “worked in close proximity to their masters, who were thus acutely aware of the quality of their work.”<sup>88</sup> In three parables managerial slaves are subject to corporal punishment by their masters who are displeased with the slave’s job performance, namely the unmerciful slave in 18:23–35 who is handed over by his master to be tortured until he could repay his debt, the overseer in 24:45–51 whom the master cuts into pieces and puts “with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth,” and the slave entrusted with a single talent in 25:14–30 who is thrown into “outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Working under close scrutiny of one’s master may be categorized as an ecological stressor since, in these parables, it is the role of the slave in the household’s hierarchy that

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<sup>86</sup> Glancy, “Slaves and Slavery,” 71.

<sup>87</sup> J. Albert Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 113.

<sup>88</sup> Glancy, “Slaves and Slavery,” 72.

precipitates the micromanagement. Further, the regular threat of violence can be categorized as a chronic traumatic situation.

However, violence by the master is not the only type of physical abuse to which a slave is subject. Slaves were also subject to violence by a third party. Glancy highlights the slaves subject to abuse by another slave of higher position (18:23–35), the slaves beaten by the overseer (24:45–51), and the enslaved emissaries in the parables of the wicked tenants (21:33–41) and the wedding banquet (22:1–10) who suffer violence to the point of death at the hands of third parties. Violent attacks by third parties can be categorized as traumatic events. Though in some cases there may be a chronic threat by third parties, it is likely that the slave’s master would eventually intervene to protect his property.

In short, “the representation of the slave’s body as the locus of abuse is thus pervasive in the Matthean parables, constituting the most prominent aspect of Matthew’s ideology of slavery.”<sup>89</sup> While Glancy is aware that in one sense these parables “depict slaves who enhance their own positions by diligently pursuing their owners’ interests,” she also notes “every Matthean parable that features a managerial slave also highlights the vulnerability of such slaves to physical abuse”<sup>90</sup> and, I argue, the ecological stressors and chronic traumatic situations that slaves suffered.

Glancy’s study illustrates two of Matthew’s underlying assumptions about slavery that can also inform an understanding of the relationship between the centurion and the παῖς of 8:5–13. First, the Matthean parables “promote the view that a slave’s moral

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<sup>89</sup> Glancy, “Slaves and Slavery,” 72.

<sup>90</sup> Glancy, “Slaves and Slavery,” 73.

purpose is to advance the interests of his or her owner.”<sup>91</sup> The centurion’s slave is of no use to him while he is paralyzed, as he is unable to advance the centurion’s interests (8:6). Second, the parables show that slaves are vulnerable to violence from their owners, other slaves, or free third parties. The general subjectivity of slaves to brutal violence should be considered when positing possible scenarios leading to the paralysis of the centurion’s slave. Was the slave tortured? Did the master beat him? Did another slave beat him? Did free third parties attack the slave? In general, Matthew’s parabolic portrayals of slaves “rely on and reiterate conventional views of slavery.”<sup>92</sup> That Matthew’s Jesus in 8:5–13 is not concerned with why the slave is paralyzed or that, by healing the slave, he is simply returning him to the same disabling and stress-laden system is not surprising given the construction of slavery in the Gospel. The social facet of power, namely the violent oppression of a slave by his master, is evident in Matthew’s general and noncritical portrayal of slaves in the parables and of Jesus’ lack of attention to the slave or his condition.

### ***Patterson’s Facets of Power: Cultural***

The second facet of power Patterson highlights in a slave-master relationship is cultural. Patterson stresses that a key component of enslavement was natal alienation. The slave, as a socially dead person, was “alienated from all ‘rights’ or claims of birth, he [*sic*] ceased to belong in his own right to any legitimate social order.”<sup>93</sup> This alienation extended

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<sup>91</sup> Glancy, “Slaves and Slavery,” 89; Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament*, 22–26.

<sup>92</sup> Glancy, “Slaves and Slavery,” 90.

<sup>93</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 5.

beyond immediate family to include remote ancestors and future descendants.<sup>94</sup> Patterson argues that natal alienation is what differentiates the slave-master relationship from other relationships of forced servitude, including concubinage and debt bondage.

The alienation of natal ties took various forms. Captivity through warfare was an important source of slaves for the Roman republic. Captivity, in its initial stages can be categorized as a traumatic event that violently separates the captive from their families and land in an attempt to destabilize both the captive and the captive's community of origin. The Roman practice of mass enslavement of conquered peoples continued into the imperial period.<sup>95</sup> Josephus claims that after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE, the Romans enslaved 97,000 people, mostly comprised of those of Jewish descent (*J.W.* 6.9). In the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries BCE, during the formative period of the development of the Roman slave sector, captivity was important for the recruitment of slaves.<sup>96</sup> By the first century CE, however, birth and the abandonment or sale of children were the sustaining means of enslavement.<sup>97</sup> Not all war captives were immediately placed in the slave markets; many

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<sup>94</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 5.

<sup>95</sup> Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, 33. "In the early fourth century the Romans are said to have reduced to slavery the entire population of the rival Etruscan city of Veii, an event whose historicity is open to debate but which may have produced as many as 10,000 slaves. For later periods, however, less contentious information is at hand, revealing that once acquired the habit of mass enslavement was never broken: thus in 256 BC during the first war against Carthage the siege of Aspis in Carthage's territory was followed by the enslavement of more than 20,000 captives; in 146 BC when Carthage was destroyed after a third war, 55,000 people were enslaved; in 25 BC after a ruthless campaign against the Salassi, an Alpine tribe, Rome sold 44,000 prisoners into slavery; and in AD 198 the emperor Septimius Severus took 100,000 prisoners after reducing the city of Ctesiphon in his war against the Parthians."

<sup>96</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 113.

<sup>97</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 129, 132.

were ransomed to family or friends, sold on the spot to itinerant dealers, or offered as payment to Roman soldiers.<sup>98</sup>

Once placed in the slave markets, the enslaved is separated from kin and homeland. Bradley states, “sale and all that it involved was only the culmination of a train of experiences likely to have had both physically and emotionally debilitating effects: capture, forced migration, deracination.”<sup>99</sup> Separated from family, isolated in a foreign land, confronted with a different language, and humiliated before total strangers, life in the slave markets could prove to be a highly stressful ordeal. In Wheaton’s taxonomy, life in the slave markets would be considered a chronic traumatic situation since it was made up of repeated and expected trauma until one was sold. If a slave on the markets desired to be sold, even if it meant exchanging one set of stressors for another, repeated failure to be sold could be categorized as “non-event” where stress is produced because of the absence of change.

Those who were born into slavery or enslaved because they were exposed as an infant, faced natal alienation of a different sort. Being born into slavery meant that the master’s home and language would be considered native to the slave, but the slave him/herself was not expressly part of the family, despite any use of familial language. Slave unions, called *contubernium*, existed despite being a legal impossibility; “...because slaves were technically not permitted to marry and could thus not produce legally recognizable families, the relationships which are attested must be considered concessions to slaves

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<sup>98</sup> Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, 33.

<sup>99</sup> Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, 116.

from their owners.”<sup>100</sup> This concession was generally in the master’s interest since allowing a sort of family life for the slave would encourage some contentment in their circumstances and diligence in their work.<sup>101</sup> However, even home born slaves who were allowed to “marry” and have children lived with the anxiety of the possibility of their own sale in the markets or the sale of their partners and/or biological children.<sup>102</sup> Bradley surveys the documentary evidence of slave sales during the imperial period and concludes, “Although owners encouraged servile familial life when it was in their interests to do so, those narrow interests did not permit any deep concern for the human relationships their slaves formed to intervene in their thinking when sale was decided upon.”<sup>103</sup>

Once in the slave market, slaves could be subjected to a variety of stressors as “the ability to be sold was the slave’s most compelling reminder of his [*sic*] status as a sheer

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<sup>100</sup> Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, 50.

<sup>101</sup> See Varro “As to the breeding of herdsmen; it is a simple matter in the case of those who stay all the time on the farm, as they have a female fellow-slave in the steading, and the Venus of herdsmen looks no farther than this. But in the case of those who tend the herds in mountain valleys and wooded lands, and keep off the rains not by the roof of the steading but by makeshift huts, many have thought that it was advisable to send along women to follow the herds, prepare food for the herdsmen, and make them more diligent” (*Rust.* 1.17.5 [Hooper, LCL]) and Columella “To women, too, who are unusually prolific, and who ought to be rewarded for the bearing of a certain number of offspring, I have granted exemption from work and sometimes even freedom after they had reared many children. For to a mother of three sons exemption from work was granted; to a mother of more her freedom as well” (*Rust.* 1.8.19 [Ash, LCL])

<sup>102</sup> Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, 53–63. The abundance of Egyptian papyrological evidence attests to an overwhelming majority of individual slave sales and no example at all of a husband and wife or of a husband, wife, and children being sold together. Though there is less documentary evidence available for the rest of the empire, Bradley reviews trends in what is available and argues, “It cannot be doubted that the generally negative picture for the stability of servile familial arrangements which the Egyptian records give was not applicable elsewhere as well,” 62.

<sup>103</sup> Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, 63.

commodity...”<sup>104</sup> Slaves in the slave markets were subject to a litany of potentially stressful indignities. Slaves could be expected to appear naked before potential buyers in order to be inspected. They were sometimes required to hold placards for their own advertisement. Young boys in particular who were to be sold as same-sex partners would have to undergo processes by which puberty would be delayed. These processes included depilating body hair, the application of various types of salves, or castration.<sup>105</sup> Even the mere prospect of castration would have been stressful since it was a painful, dangerous, and sometimes fatal process.<sup>106</sup> Castration could be done by the surgical removal of the penis and/or testes, the tightly tying up of the scrota in order to sever the vas deferens (less dangerous than surgery), or the crushing of the testicles (more effective and immediate than tying off the scrota).<sup>107</sup> Bradley notes, “...the possibility of being sold was a contingency with which any slave might have to contend, and that possibility is as important as the reality itself for understanding the psychological conditions under which slaves lived.”<sup>108</sup>

Deracination, or, as Patterson terms it, “natal alienation,” facilitated the master’s rights over the slave. This *de facto* position of slaves is true whether or not they were permitted a “marriage” and a “family.” Finley notes that family was a privilege “granted unilaterally by a slaveowner, and withdrawn unilaterally.”<sup>109</sup> He further emphasizes that masters could castrate their slaves to deny the possibility of family altogether or break up a slave family through sale. Any kinship ties a slave may have were tenuous at best. By

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<sup>104</sup> Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, 52.

<sup>105</sup> Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, 115–16.

<sup>106</sup> Vern Bullough, “Eunuchs in History and Society,” in *Eunuchs in Antiquity and Beyond*, ed. Shaun Tougher (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 2002), 1–5.

<sup>107</sup> Matthew Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch: Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity, and Christian Ideology in Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 33.

<sup>108</sup> Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, 116.

<sup>109</sup> Finley, *Ancient Slavery*, 143.

denying the slave kin, the master maintained “greater control and flexibility in the employment of his labour force and far more freedom to dispose of unwanted labour.”<sup>110</sup> The threat of losing one’s family by sale can be categorized as an ecological stressor. It is only possible because of the slave’s status within the social unit.

### ***Patterson’s Facets of Power: Socio-Psychological***

The third facet of power in a slave-master relationship that Patterson identifies is socio-psychological and has to do with transforming the relationship into one of natural superiority and obligation. “Slaves were always persons who had been dishonored in a generalized way.”<sup>111</sup> In fact, “universal in the master-slave relationship was the strong sense of honor the experience of mastership generated, and conversely, the dishonoring of the slave condition.”<sup>112</sup> In the Roman Empire, where honor and shame were key social categories, slaves were situated firmly as outsiders: “...those who do not compete for honor, or are not expected to do so, are in a real sense outside the social order...the sense of honor is intimately related to power.”<sup>113</sup> The lack of honor for slaves is intimately linked with their lack of agency. A lack of honor and lack of agency are ecological stressors since they are part and parcel to the status of slave and his/her social location.

Patterson argues that every slaveholding society must “find some way to clothe its beastliness, some idiom through which it can be made immediately palatable to those who exercise it. By the idiom of power I mean the principal way in which power is immediately

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<sup>110</sup> Finley, *Ancient Slavery*, 143.

<sup>111</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 10.

<sup>112</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 11.

<sup>113</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 13.

interpreted in socially and cognitively acceptable terms.”<sup>114</sup> He notes that the idiom of power has two aspects. First, the social aspect is either an acknowledgment of the coercive aspect of power with humanization through fictive kinship or the concealment of the coercive aspect by hiding it or denying it. The second aspect is conceptual and has to do with the notion of property which is especially important for understanding the Roman slave economy specifically, as it clearly elaborates and enforces the “natural” relationship between master and slave.

Proprietary claims apply to all kinds of relationships. As an example Patterson notes that “an American husband is part of the property of his wife....In actual and sociological terms a wife has all sorts of claims, privileges, and powers in the person, labor power, and earnings of her husband...”<sup>115</sup> The Romans also recognized that proprietary claims existed in various non-slave relationships and created a legal fiction in order to socially classify slaves. This definition emerged in the first century BCE. Patterson argues persuasively that the Roman legal definition of “property” was developed in part “as a means of distinguishing slaves from other persons” because slaves in the Roman economy, alongside landholdings, were “one of the most rapidly expanding sources of wealth.”<sup>116</sup> *Dominium*, the legal fiction developed by the Romans, emphasized “the categories of *persona* (owner) and *res* (thing)”<sup>117</sup> meaning “property was no longer a relation between persons but a relation between persons and things.”<sup>118</sup> Central to this definition was the granting of absolute power to the *persona* over the *res*, including a psychological aspect

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<sup>114</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 18.

<sup>115</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 22.

<sup>116</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 31.

<sup>117</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 31.

<sup>118</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 31.

that permitted an inner power over a thing.<sup>119</sup> Patterson concludes, "...it becomes impossible to comprehend why they should want inner psychic power over it unless we understand that, for most purposes, the 'thing' on their minds was a slave."<sup>120</sup> Thus, Roman legal terminology of property developed in large part as a response to the slave-master relationship. Further, the legal terminology intentionally skewed the relationship to the benefit of the master and the detriment of the slave, defined and treated as a "thing."

Defining a slave as property is part of the distribution of power. "Total power or property in the slave means exclusion of the claims and powers of others in him."<sup>121</sup> This exclusion of the claimed powers of others matters because, as Patterson argues, a slave was considered socially dead and thus "the idea of social death was also given direct legal expression in Roman law. The slave was *pro nullo*."<sup>122</sup> Social death has to do with the desocialization and depersonalization of the slave, the slave's natal alienation, which is, in Wheaton's taxonomy, an ecological stressor over which the slave had no control.

Patterson notes two conceptions of social death. On one hand, the *extrusive* model concerns an insider who has fallen. The slave became an outsider within his/her own society, "ceased to belong and had been expelled from normal participation in the community because of a failure to meet certain minimal legal or socioeconomic norms of behavior."<sup>123</sup> On the other hand is the *intrusive* model, of which Rome was typical. The slave was externally recruited, served as a symbol of the defeated enemy, and considered

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<sup>119</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 31.

<sup>120</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 31.

<sup>121</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 35.

<sup>122</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 40.

<sup>123</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 41.

the “enemy within.” In this case, it is the Roman elite defining the in-group and the out-group. The slave’s perspective is not considered when determining the slave’s status distinctions. The slave is the enemy, the “thing” that now belongs to a member of the in-group. The slave’s legal social status results in all of the societal stressors that oppress him/her and exacts a toll on his/her physiological and psychological well-being.

Slaves, of course, had some ameliorating buffers to deal with the ecological stress of their legal status as “things,” and there were options of resistance for asserting their humanity in the face of dehumanizing legal rhetoric. While fight and flight, in the sense of physically fighting one’s master or running away from a situation or the household, were options that came with potentially high risks of retaliation, more covert forms of “fight” that risked minimal retaliation were available to slaves. Scott reminds us that there are all kinds of disguised and anonymous forms of resistance practiced by non-elites that asserted their dignity in a dehumanizing context. And Joshel and Hackworth Peterson note that references to slave resistance litter the writing of the elite in their complaints about slave actions and misbehavior.<sup>124</sup> Any resistance, no matter how disguised, could serve as an ameliorating buffer to the stress of slavery and offer the slave a mechanism for combatting the dehumanizing nature of slavery.

Manumission of slaves was one mechanism by which Roman masters maintained socio-psychological control over their slaves and reinforced the social institution. While slaves in the Roman Empire could assume to be enslaved permanently, freedom was a possibility as Rome had a particularly high rate of manumission. Manumission was,

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<sup>124</sup> Joshel and Hackworth Petersen, *The Material Life of Roman Slaves*, 13.

however, never a guarantee and post-manumission life carried its own forms of control (discussed below). Slaves then lived with the anxiety of performing appropriately in order to earn their freedom or of saving their *peculium* (which could otherwise go towards meeting physical necessities) in order to purchase their freedom.<sup>125</sup> However, the master was under no obligation to grant freedom to his slave and there were no clear goalposts for obtaining the master's favor to guarantee manumission. In fact, the prospect of manumission served a social function of encouraging subordination, because, as Bradley notes, "it was the element of uncertainty which surrounded manumission which made freedom an effective form of social manipulation."<sup>126</sup> The delay or denial of manumission, especially for slaves who had reason to expect it, can be considered, in Wheaton's taxonomy of stress, a "non-event" since the absence of the act of manumission becomes a stressful ordeal.

Even upon manumission, stress did not disappear. The freed slave was now obligated to his/her former master (now his/her patron). Patterson highlights three

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<sup>125</sup> The *peculium* is a seemingly paradoxical element to slavery. Patterson writes, "The fundamental feature of slavery, in law, was the fact that the slave could not be a proprietor: he or she was, quintessentially, a property-less person....However, it is also true that in all slaveholding societies the slave was also allowed a *peculium*" (*Slavery and Social Death*, 182). Rather than understanding the *peculium* as payment for services, Patterson argues it should be viewed as an "investment by the master of a partial, and temporary, capacity in his slave to possess and enjoy a given range of goods," 182. A *peculium* was more of an incentive to obey one's master than a payment for services rendered. Patterson observes that societies that did not sanction or encourage a *peculium* tended to be the most brutal in general treatment. It is possible that the *peculium*, by incentivizing labor, encouraged slaves to obey and therefore discouraged masters from using violence to coerce their slaves. This is not to say, however, that the *peculium* eliminated violence. "For most slaveholding societies we simply do not know how often slaves were beaten and for what reasons, much less the internal factors that determined the frequency of the use of violence," 205.

<sup>126</sup> Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, 112.

claims Roman patrons could make on their freed slaves. First, a freed slave must demonstrate *obsequium* (proper reverence and gratitude). In fact, “in Rome a freedman [*sic*] could be charged with the crime of ingratitude and, if guilty, be reenslaved.”<sup>127</sup> I categorize the prospect of reenslavement as an ecological stressor since it was a risk of one’s status as a freedperson.

Second, freed slaves could be required to continue working for their former masters, legally known as *operae*. *Operae* had the potential to create material insecurity by the cooption of the freedperson’s time without any responsibility for his/her wellbeing. The anxiety of working for one’s patron, potentially without remuneration, while attempting to provide for one’s self and one’s family could be chronic as *operae* were enforceable and transferrable to the patron’s heirs. Finally, a patron held the right to half or even all of a freed slave’s estate upon his/her death, and the patron’s heirs could inherit the ex-slave’s estate.<sup>128</sup> The claims that the patron had over their freed-person benefited the patron in two ways: by eliminating the patron’s obligation to house and feed the ex-slave and by obligating the ex-slave to further service for the patron, enforceable by law. For the slave, however, these claims could result in the chronic stress of economic insecurity for him/herself and any dependents as well as the potential psychological stress of realizing that “freedom” was in many ways illusory.

These restrictions and obligations upon manumission, however, were in no way deterrents as “it is absolutely clear that slaves coveted freedom and were anxious to

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<sup>127</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 241.

<sup>128</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 242. The patron or his heirs always inherited the entire estate of female ex-slaves.

become whenever possible part of the great mass of ex-slaves.”<sup>129</sup> Though the ex-slave lost much material security by being manumitted, they would be granted Roman citizenship which came with many political and legal rights for them and for any children born after manumission. In short, upon manumission, the slave traded in one set of stressors concerning answerability with their body for a new set of stressors concerning economic insecurity. Though the trade was eagerly sought and gratefully accepted, the ex-slave continued in a stressful relationship marked by lack of power and lack of autonomy.

I have argued in this section that to be a slave was to be subject to a wide range of stressors. These included traumatic events such as captivity, rape, castration, sale, and testimony under torture; the chronic traumatic situations of persistent physical and sexual abuse; non-events such as the delay or denial of manumission; and the ecological stressors of lack of agency and the threat of reenslavement for freed slaves. These stressors were the expected and generally unquestioned somatic and psychological conditions of a slave in the Roman Empire: a life of subjection to coercive physical and sexual violence, genealogical isolation, and general dishonor as a socially dead person. If we read the term *παῖς* as “slave,” we can posit that this centurion’s slave lived a life marked by this range of stressful conditions of Roman slavery.

### **Stressors Relevant to the Slave’s Paralysis and Healing**

Interpreters of Matt 8:5–13 often overlook the impaired character of the slave and the stressful, impairing nature of slavery. In this section, I identify some stressors of slavery relevant to the life of the paralyzed slave. At the heart of my inquiry is the

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<sup>129</sup> Bradley, *Slaves and Masters*, 81.

relationship between the centurion and the slave and how that relationship contributed to the social stress experienced by the slave. I begin by considering the characteristics of the centurionate and how those characteristics might inform the type of master he may have been. Then I will posit three distinct scenarios regarding the types of roles the slave may have performed and the unique stressors present in those scenarios. Finally, I will read Matthew 8:5–13 highlighting the character of the slave.

### **Characteristics of the Centurionate**

Centurions appear in a handful of New Testament stories. In addition to this scene, there is the parallel story of Luke 7:1–10, in which the locals describe the centurion as loving the Jewish people and erecting a synagogue for them. In Matt 27:54, a centurion, present when Jesus dies and who observes the miraculous events accompanying Jesus' final breath, exclaims, "Truly this man was God's Son!"<sup>130</sup> In the parallel account of Luke 23:47, the centurion says, "Certainly this man was innocent." In Acts 10, the centurion Cornelius and his household "received the Holy Spirit just as we have" (10:47). In Acts 21:27–36, centurions and soldiers are called upon to intervene in an assault on Paul. They arrest Paul and send him before a tribune to defend himself. In Acts 27, a centurion is present on the ill-fated ship sailing to Rome and carrying Paul and some other prisoners. This centurion ultimately saves Paul's life by intervening in a conspiracy by the soldiers to kill the prisoners.

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<sup>130</sup> David Sim argues that the soldiers present at Jesus' crucifixion represent the worst type of Gentiles and that the centurion's confession is an ironic cry of defeat. David Sim, "The Confession of the Soldiers in Matthew 27.54," *HeyJ* 10 (1993): 401–24.

Luke-Acts portrays centurions as agents of compassion and knowledge, and overtly describes them as generous to the Jewish community, adamant about their inclusion as Jesus followers, and protective of church leaders. Matthew, on the other hand, does not elaborate on the character of centurions. If anything, Matthew's lack of description allows the reader to draw his or her own conclusions concerning the centurion's motives and character.

Interpreters often comment on the lack of details present in this scene as compared with Luke's version. Davies and Allison note that this passage, "which consists primarily not of description but dialogue, typifies where Matthew's interest so often is: in what Jesus has to say."<sup>131</sup> R. T. France writes, "Matthew typically omits material which he regards as unessential to the narrative, the warm relations between the centurion and the local Jewish community, and his use of Jewish elders as intermediaries."<sup>132</sup>

Commonly, New Testament scholars have filled in the gaps by attributing positive feelings and motives to the centurion, and constructing a positive relationship with the slave. Eugene Boring writes of the centurion in Matthew 8, "the man feels compassion for someone else who depends on him."<sup>133</sup> Vledder writes, "Here we have an example of an owner who cared for his slave, and acted on behalf of the slave whose condition was very weak."<sup>134</sup> Sheffield states that the centurion seeks "healing for a servant, someone even

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<sup>131</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 119.

<sup>132</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 309–10.

<sup>133</sup> Boring, "Matthew," 227. It should be noted that Boring prefers the translation of *παῖς* as "son" rather than slave.

<sup>134</sup> Vledder, *Conflict in the Miracle Stories*, 180.

'littler' and more marginalized than a child, out of (fatherly) concern."<sup>135</sup> Davies and Allison see this passage as a "favourable picture of the centurion..."<sup>136</sup> Christopher Zeichmann says that this passage is "one of the best examples of centurions being upheld for exemplary behavior..."<sup>137</sup> In favor of this reading is the generally favorable portrayal of centurions in other New Testament texts. However, a different picture emerges if we take into account that the centurion is the master of this slave and the agent or source of considerable stress in the slave's daily life.

Matthew does not provide any moral description, thus any judgment of the centurion's character is one imported by the reader. Unlike the Lucan account, there are no secondary characters vouching for the worthiness of the centurion nor is there a description of the slave as "highly valued" (Luke 7:2). This lack of detail evokes a number of potential scenarios between the centurion and his slave, yet the general scholarly consensus is that the centurion was a compassionate owner. In these readings, however, any consideration of the slave's dominated and stressed location is non-existent. Below, I will posit three possible scenarios for interpreting this scene, each constructing a possible stressful social location of the slave. I do not take a Historical Jesus approach nor do I view the Capernaum setting as historical. I assume a post-70 date for the final form of this story,

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<sup>135</sup> Sheffield, "The Father in Matthew," 64.

<sup>136</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 120.

<sup>137</sup> Christopher B. Zeichmann, *The Roman Army and the New Testament* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2018), 67.

which has some bearing on Antiochene and Judean relationships with the military legion and personnel located in the area.<sup>138</sup>

The centurion was a member of the retainer class, a group of about 5% of the population comprised of "a small army of officials, professional soldiers, household servants, and personal retainers" whose primary purpose was to provide "badly needed numerical support for the ruler and governing class in their efforts to maintain their essentially exploitative position in society."<sup>139</sup> Further, this class "performed the crucial task of mediating relations between the governing class and the common people" thus deflecting much of the hostility away from the governing class.<sup>140</sup> In short, retainers facilitated the establishment of societal hierarchical order and the movement of goods from the general population to the ruling elite. They also mediated much of the backlash that might arise because of this exploitative redistribution.

Members of the retainer class, however, shared in many ways the wealth and privileges of the ruling class. This was no less true for members of the centurionate. A centurion was the commander of a Roman century, a group of 80 soldiers. As Adrian Goldsworthy notes, a "centurion is better thought of as a grade or type of officer, rather than a specific rank."<sup>141</sup> A group of six centuries was known as a cohort, and a group of ten cohorts was known as a legion. At the time of Jesus, there was no Roman legion stationed in Judea. However, the Tenth Fretensis Legion was stationed in Syria (near Antioch) from

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<sup>138</sup> For more information on Roman imperial presence in and around Antioch during the first century, see Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 36–40.

<sup>139</sup> Lenski, *Power and Privilege*, 243, 246.

<sup>140</sup> Lenski, *Power and Privilege*, 246.

<sup>141</sup> Adrian Goldsworthy, *The Complete Roman Army* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2003), 69.

around 6–66 CE before moving against Jerusalem in the 66–70 war.<sup>142</sup> Antioch along with Alexandria “were important political centres [*sic*] with turbulent populations, and it was not uncommon for the soldiers to be employed against rioters in these cities.”<sup>143</sup> In addition, the Tenth Fretensis Legion was instrumental in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE.<sup>144</sup> I do not claim that the centurion present in the narrative of Matt 8:5–13 was a member of the Tenth Fretensis Legion, but it is worth noting that this legion has ties both to Syria and Judea around the time that the Gospel of Matthew is thought to have been written. After Rome’s victory over Jerusalem, Josephus tells us that Titus “exhibited costly spectacles in all the cities of Syria through which he passed, making his Jewish captives serve to display their own destruction” (*J.W.* 7.96 [Thackeray, LCL]). Folks who had witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem and/or the subsequent victory parades of captives/slaves in Antioch may have had decidedly negative views of the Roman military, including centurions.<sup>145</sup> How readers from these areas at the end of the first century related to soldiers from this legion in particular may have influenced their attitudes about the character of centurions generally that in turn informed their interpretation of this healing scene.

The centurion in Matt 8:5–13 is not specified as being a Roman legionary or as an auxiliary soldier. The *auxilia* were comprised of allied soldiers recruited to supplement

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<sup>142</sup> Robert Evans, *Soldiers of Rome: Praetorians and Legionnaires* (Cabin John, Md.: Seven Locks Press, 1986), 96–98.

<sup>143</sup> Goldsworthy, *The Complete Roman Army*, 143.

<sup>144</sup> Warren Carter, “Matthew’s Gospel: An Anti-Imperial/Imperial Reading,” *CurTM* 34.6 (2007): 428.

<sup>145</sup> For more detailed information on Roman presence in Antioch, see Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 35–53.

Rome's armies.<sup>146</sup> Auxiliary soldiers were present in Galilee in the royal army of Herod Antipas. These soldiers often adopted Roman military titles for themselves. However, there is some reason to suspect that a Roman centurion may be present in Capernaum even during Jesus' time. As Zeichmann argues, "Capernaum would be an ideal place for a regional centurion to be located: inter-regional roads crossed by the town, it was a port village on the Lake of Gennesaret, and it was on an international border; any single one of these qualities would warrant the presence of a provincial administration and thus a centurion to ensure protection."<sup>147</sup> Whether Roman or auxiliary, whether Capernaum or Antioch, as a military official, the centurion would be a member of Rome's "vital mechanism of imperial domination."<sup>148</sup> In fact, "soldiers were very visible representatives of Roman power, and indeed in many rural areas probably the only agents of imperial government likely to be encountered."<sup>149</sup> During peacetime, soldiers could serve as administrators for provincial governors; as builders of military bases, imperial monuments, and roads; as laborers in workshops or mines; or as policemen of sorts, enforcing and reinforcing imperial rule.<sup>150</sup>

The representation of soldiers as violent was not uncommon. "The brutal soldier was a familiar figure in Roman literature" and "Roman troops could be the brutal enforcers

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<sup>146</sup> Goldsworthy, *The Complete Roman Army*, 55.

<sup>147</sup> Zeichmann, *Roman Army*, 67–68.

<sup>148</sup> Joseph McDonald, "Status Quo and Lukan Complicity: Restoring the 'Dear Slave' of Luke 7:2–10," n.d.

<sup>149</sup> Goldsworthy, *The Complete Roman Army*, 146.

<sup>150</sup> Goldsworthy, *The Complete Roman Army*, 145–49; See also John Christianson, "The Construction of and Negotiation with the Roman Military in Matthew's Gospel" (PhD diss., Brite Divinity School at Texas Christian University, 2019). In it, Christianson argues that soldiers were always engaged in empire building through conquest or pacification. When one area was peaceful, the military was often exploiting that territory to engage in war elsewhere.

of Roman power in the provinces. As bearers of weapons, individual soldiers sometimes abused their position to threaten civilians and extort money from them.”<sup>151</sup>

Of particular interest is the role of the centurion as an enforcer of corporal punishment within the troops. Centurions carried a vine cane called a *vitis* to inflict beatings on their soldiers. “This corporal punishment appears to have been inflicted entirely at the whim of these officers...”<sup>152</sup> Reviewing visual commemorations and epigraphic evidence, Graeme Ward states, “As early as the first century CE, the *vitis* so identified centurions that it became metaphorical for the rank itself – its own badge of office.”<sup>153</sup> While it is true that “many of the interactions between soldiers and civilians were peaceful and beneficial to both sides,”<sup>154</sup> my emphasis here on these violent stereotypes and portrayals is an attempt to correct the general scholarly assumption that the centurion in Matthew is a good and compassionate character. These extra-textual factors suggest a much more complex character, and what is clear is that violent characteristics stereotype centurions as a source of stress for soldiers under their command, civilians under military control, and, of course, for a slave in a centurion’s possession. Such a slave was subject to the stressors of physical violence, sexual assault, and psychological abuse.

One final point of consideration is the types of slaves a centurion might own. Jesus dismissively asks if he should come to the centurion’s slave to heal him, but the centurion tells Jesus he is not worthy to have Jesus come under his roof (8:7–8). Presumably this

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<sup>151</sup> Goldsworthy, *The Complete Roman Army*, 151.

<sup>152</sup> Goldsworthy, *The Complete Roman Army*, 101.

<sup>153</sup> Graeme A. Ward, “Centurions: The Practice of Roman Officership” (PhD Dissertation, University of North Carolina, 2012), 28.

<sup>154</sup> Goldsworthy, *The Complete Roman Army*, 151.

exchange indicates the centurion lives in a home rather than at the military garrison, and the possession of property may indicate that he is a higher-ranking centurion. High-ranking centurions “enjoyed immense prestige, their holders living in substantial houses rather than barrack rooms in a permanent camp.”<sup>155</sup> If the centurion owned property, this slave could be a domestic worker. It is also possible that the centurion owned land requiring agricultural labor. If, however, the centurion lived in the garrison, then the slave could be a personal slave or a *galearii* (“helmet-wearer”), “who wore a simple uniform and performed service functions such as controlling the baggage and pack animals on campaign.”<sup>156</sup>

Considering these possibilities, I now posit three scenarios for understanding the impairment of the slave (8:6) and the particular social stressors that may have contributed to the slave’s condition: the slave as the sexually passive and penetrated participant in a pederastic relationship, as a domestic worker in the centurion’s home, and as an agricultural laborer on the centurion’s land.

### **Scenario 1: The Slave as Sexually Passive**

Jennings and Liew take a new approach to this passage in “Mistaken Identities but Model Faith: Rereading the Centurion, the Chap, and the Christ in Matthew 8:5–13.” In this article, Jennings and Liew argue that the *παῖς* in this scene should be understood as the centurion’s boy-lover. The crux of their argument lies in the ambiguity of the term *παῖς*. They demonstrate that, for Matthew, *παῖς* and *δοῦλος* are not synonyms, troubling the easy translation of “slave.” Further, they demonstrate that *παῖς* and *υἱός* are not synonyms,

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<sup>155</sup> Goldsworthy, *The Complete Roman Army*, 55.

<sup>156</sup> Goldsworthy, *The Complete Roman Army*, 103.

troubling the easy translation of “son.” They argue that the term *παῖς* should be understood as “more than a servant, other than a son.”<sup>157</sup> They then proceed to argue for a translation of *παῖς* as “‘boy-love’ within a pederastic relationship”<sup>158</sup> as “*παῖς* (or *παιδικά*) is one of the words that is often used to refer to the ‘beloved,’ or the passive member (usually though not necessarily an adolescent boy) of a same-sex relationship.”<sup>159</sup>

In support of their thesis, Jennings and Liew stress three things. First, Augustus banned soldiers from marrying. They cite this ban in order to argue that “son” is a poor translation choice for *παῖς* because any children born of an illicit union would be illegitimate. Though not explicitly cited, that Jennings and Liew opt to understand the term *παῖς* as indicating a pederastic relationship seems to indicate that they view the ban as promoting soldiers’ participation in same-sex relationships. Yet, as D. B. Saddington argues, “the ban operated mainly as a status determinant and in the area of inheritance law. Soldiers might, and did, form customary unions and raise families while on service.”<sup>160</sup> Goldsworthy even states, “Senatorial and equestrian officers were expressly forbidden to marry women from the province in which they served but the same did not apply to centurions...”<sup>161</sup> Thus the argument that a pederastic relationship would be the only viable sexual relationship allowed for a centurion is without support.

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<sup>157</sup> Jennings and Liew, “Mistaken Identities,” 468.

<sup>158</sup> Jennings and Liew, “Mistaken Identities,” 468.

<sup>159</sup> Jennings and Liew, “Mistaken Identities,” 472–73. Examples of this usage include *Epigrams* by Callimachus, Thucydides, and Xenophon. Xenophon’s usage is often concerned with the military in genera and the centurionate in particular.

<sup>160</sup> D. B. Saddington, “The Centurion in Matthew 8:5–13: Consideration of the Proposal of Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., and Tat-Siong Benny Liew,” *JBL* 125.1 (2006): 141.

<sup>161</sup> Goldsworthy, *The Complete Roman Army*, 104.

Second, Jennings and Liew highlight literary evidence suggesting that Roman soldiers would enslave young boys for sexual services and, further, that, as long as the submissive member of the relationship was not a Roman citizen, there were no legal repercussions.<sup>162</sup> Saddington is troubled by the textual support cited, stating, “the instances they quote are of centurions (and other officers) raping adolescent boys (and girls) in actual warfare or forcing themselves on unwilling young recruits.”<sup>163</sup> There is nothing in the evidence cited to suggest that the relationship between a military officer and a young adolescent male would be mutually caring and affectionate. Instead, each instance cited reflects the inherent violent and domineering power asymmetry between a military officer and a conquered body.

Third, Jennings and Liew cite archaeological evidence for the presence of young boys on Roman military sites. They write, “The number of boys’ footwear found at [Vindolanda] results in a comment—despite the archaeologist’s own acknowledged preference for an alternative interpretation—that some of the rooms ‘look ...more like a male brothel than anything else.’”<sup>164</sup> They conclude that centurions, because of their higher pay and larger living quarters, may have used slaves for sexual purposes, although it is not necessary that a boy-favorite be a slave. Zeichmann, noting that in a historical setting only auxiliary troops would have been stationed in Galilee, argues auxiliary soldiers would have “found their sexual outlet in ways less apt to cause unrest among their fellow

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<sup>162</sup> Jennings and Liew, “Mistaken Identities,” 476.

<sup>163</sup> Saddington, “The Centurion,” 141.

<sup>164</sup> Jennings and Liew, “Mistaken Identities,” 477.

Galileans..."<sup>165</sup> He cites graffiti at Herodium that suggests auxiliary soldiers used sex workers and animal livestock rather than participating in pederastic relationships.

The true test of Jennings' and Liew's argument, as they note, is whether this translation makes sense of other aspects of Matt 8:5–13. Contrary to many modern interpretations of the Greek sentence: ἐγὼ ἐλθὼν θεραπεύσω αὐτόν, Jennings and Liew do not read this as Jesus asking a question ("Shall I come and heal him?"), but as a statement ("I will come and heal him"). As support, they argue that Matthew rarely uses an emphatic ego to signify a question, and in the rare exceptions, Matthew inserts other obvious indicators: "a preceding verb 'question', a follow-up reply, or an interrogative particle 'if.'<sup>166</sup> "The idea that Matthew would construct a question solely on an emphatic 'I' is simply not consistent with her own semantic and syntactic habitus, particularly given the vast repertoire that she has demonstrated to be at her disposal."<sup>167</sup> Further, they argue that in Matthew's narrative world, there is little to suggest apprehension between Jews and Gentiles interacting by referencing the Gentile women in the genealogy, Capernaum (as "Galilee of the Gentiles"<sup>168</sup>,

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<sup>165</sup> Zeichmann, *Roman Army*, 70.

<sup>166</sup> Jennings and Liew, "Mistaken Identities," 479.

<sup>167</sup> Jennings and Liew, "Mistaken Identities," 480. Jennings and Liew intentionally use the pronoun "her" for referring to the author of Matthew. "The disjunction between the feminine pronoun and the masculine name (Matthew) is our way of reminding ourselves and others that writers of this and other canonical Gospels are anonymous (as were most women in the first century C. E.) rather than famous personalities," n. 7,

<sup>168</sup> Carter argues that it is better to understand this phrase as Galilee *under* the Gentiles. He writes, "Galilee of the Gentiles, a synonym for Zebulun and Naphtali, designates occupied status, a land *under* the power of, possessed by, belonging to, ruled by Gentile imperialists (cf. 2 Kgs 17:24–27). The term does not emphasize, as some have claimed, that Galilee was inhabited by non-Jews or was susceptible to Hellenization (though both are true), or that Jewish ethnicity and piety had almost disappeared, or that Jesus was looking only for Gentiles (both of which are not true; cf. 4:18–22, 23–35!) It signifies Roman control (Josephus, *J.W.* 7.216–17)." Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 115.

4:12–17) as location for Jesus' first ministerial headquarters, and Jesus' frequent interaction with Gentiles.

If Jennings' and Liew's argument that Jesus is making a statement, not asking a question, holds, then one must make sense of why the centurion refuses Jesus' offer. "Is the centurion not running the risk of offending the very person from whom he seeks help?"<sup>169</sup>

To address this concern, they consider the patron-client relationships in Roman society and the work of Ellen Oliensis. By coming to Jesus, the centurion becomes Jesus' client. Oliensis' work highlights the dilemma faced by the centurion in this situation, namely "the desire/need to please his beloved and the desire/need to please his patron."<sup>170</sup> In short, the centurion would be put in a position to compete with his boy-favorite to be Jesus' choice client while also competing with Jesus to be the boy-favorite's sole lover. "The centurion's rhetoric about not being 'worthy' of a house visit by Jesus (8:8) may be the centurion's way of avoiding an anticipated 'usurpation' of his current boy-love on the part of his new patron."<sup>171</sup> Saddington questions the evidence used to support this claim. Jennings and Liew refer to the story of Tibullus, Mesalla (Tibullus's patron), and Delia (Tibullus's beloved) wherein Delia is unfaithful to Tibullus with Mesalla. However, as Saddington argues, "At no point is there any suggestion that Messalla might replace Tibullus in Delia's affections."<sup>172</sup> This story is the only evidence offered by Jennings and Liew and it is hardly compelling.

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<sup>169</sup> Jennings and Liew, "Mistaken Identities," 478.

<sup>170</sup> Jennings and Liew, "Mistaken Identities," 483.

<sup>171</sup> Jennings and Liew, "Mistaken Identities," 483–84.

<sup>172</sup> Saddington, "The Centurion," 140.

Although Jennings and Liew agree that the παῖς could be a slave of the centurion, they do not take into account the sexually exploitative aspect of the relationship since pederastic relationships were acceptable only when the active partner was a free Roman citizen and the passive partner was not.<sup>173</sup> It is possible that the centurion held genuine affection toward his παῖς, but that says nothing about how the παῖς felt about the centurion. Nor does affection change anything about the relationship's power dynamic. Having affection towards the παῖς does not automatically imply that the centurion has the παῖς's best interests at heart.

Consider this passage from Martial:

When you see that I want it, Telesphorus, that I'm taut, you make large demands. Suppose I want to refuse, can I? And unless I say under oath "I'll give it," you withdraw those buttocks that let you take many liberties with me. What if my barber, with razor drawn above my throat, were to ask for freedom and wealth? I would promise, for he is not a barber, asking at such a time, but a bandit; fear is a peremptory thing. But once the razor is safely in its curved case, I shall break that barber's legs and hands together. To you, however, I shall do nothing, but with washed wool my cock shall tell your eager avarice to go suck. (*Epigrams* 11.58)

Here Martial clearly lays out the asymmetrical power dynamic between himself and his boy-lover and cupbearer, Telesphorus. Martial acknowledges that he will promise the boy anything so long as it results in his sexual satisfaction. When Martial is desirous of the boy,

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<sup>173</sup> A further factor in the degradation of the slave was the feminization that was associated with sexual passivity. Effeminacy was so despised that legal measures were taken to ensure the protection of vulnerable, free males. "... the passive sexual role in any form was regarded as degrading, but the homosexual abuse of slaves and of the growing number of eunuchs was widely accepted as normal, as long as the abuser assumed the active role. It was against homosexual *passivity* among the free-born that the Scantinian Law was directed, a passivity which was described by one orator as a crime for free man, a duty for a slave, and an obligation owed to his former master by a freedman." Michael Gray-Fow, "Pederasty, The Scantinian Law, and the Roman Army," *Journal of Psychohistory* 13.4 (1986): 450.

the boy holds a sort of power over him. He compares this to the type of power a violent offender may have over him when a weapon is drawn, in this case an enslaved barber with a razor. However, whenever the razor is sheathed, Martial admits that he would renege on promises made under coercion and violently punish the barber. He uses this anecdote to remind Telesphorus of his status in the relationship. Though Telesphorus may hold some power to make demands with Martial when Martial desires him sexually, when his desire is satisfied Martial will renege on all of his promises. Martial says he would not harm Telesphorus, yet his reference to fear being a “peremptory thing” and his promise of violence to the barber may be intended as a threat dissuading Telesphorus from acting in a way contrary to his status.

In short, being the boy-favorite slave of one’s centurion master was not a stress-free situation. If the centurion were a typical master, then there is no reason to assume that he exercised any restraint on physical violence, let alone verbal or psychological violence, simply because the slave was his favorite sexually. There would be no legal repercussions concerning nor moral outrage over such behavior. Even if being a boy-favorite offered the slave certain benefits, there would always be the stress of knowing that he could be replaced on a whim by another slave, be sold, or beaten, thus losing any benefits that status conferred. If the slave were castrated, this experience alone was profoundly stressful with severe pain and the possibility of death. In addition, there could be subsequent anxieties about the look of his body. One purpose of castrating young boys was to offset puberty thus keeping the boy looking prepubescent even as he aged. However, an effect of the lack of testosterone in the body often resulted in the taking on of physical characteristics more

typical of women, such as larger breasts.<sup>174</sup> Sidonius Apollinaris writes of one castrated male, “his breasts...hang down like a mother’s paps, though for a man’s breast even to protrude at all would have been disgusting enough” (*Epist.* 3.13 [Anderson, LCL]). If the centurion shared this disgust for men with large breasts, the slave would be under a certain amount of pressure to maintain a body type pleasing to his master, a task made all the more stressful by his own biology working against such an ideal.

Finally, and most importantly, a slave is never a consensual partner. The fact that the slave cannot say “no” does not mean his “yes” is consent. Willingly or unwillingly, he is at the mercy of the centurion, and possibly other soldiers if he is a slave living in the garrisons. Troublingly, any discussion of the slave’s powerlessness before his master is absent from Jennings’ and Liew’s discussion. Further troubling is their acceptance of the conclusion of the text wherein Jesus accepts as normative the centurion’s hierarchical outline of power, praises the centurion for his superior faith, and acts in the centurion’s interests without requiring discipleship from the centurion or consent from the slave. This is troubling because the slave’s body is not present, his voice is not heard, and his wishes are not considered. The stress-ridden institution remains unchallenged and firmly in place. Any reading that seeks to find a nurturing, mutual relationship between the centurion and the slave in Matt 8:5–13 is one that must ignore that, if a boy-favorite, the slave lived in the stress-filled chronic traumatic situation of sexual degradation and bodily chastisement with few options for agency, dignity, and resistance.

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<sup>174</sup> Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch*, 34.

## Scenario 2: The Slave in the *Familia Rustica*

Slaves in the ancient world were divided into two legal categories: *familia rustica* (those belonging to a rural household) and *familia urbana* (those belonging to an urban household). “The division was predicated on the assumption that the typical slave-owner maintained a residence or residences in the city stocked with slave domestics and owned landed property in the country that was worked, at least in part, with slave labour.”<sup>175</sup> Though this distinction was often marked by where a slave was located, the distinction could also be made based on the type of work done by the slave rather than the slave’s place of residence. The sexual subjection of a slave to his/her master was a feature of life for slaves under either classification. However, there were stressors unique to whether a slave was an agricultural or domestic slave. The stressors involved in being an agricultural slave are explored in this section.

There are four types of stressors particular to agricultural slavery that I will discuss in this section. In addition to arbitrary physical punishment and sexual abuse discussed above, these slaves were subject to violent punishment by the higher-ranking slave *vilicus*, at risk of malnutrition, subject to imprisonment in the *ergastula*, and susceptible to attack by third parties.

By the first and second centuries CE, hierarchical organization of slaves were “fully developed with a juridical framework” having a “threefold chain of command: the *procurator* (steward); *vilicus* (bailiff); and *praefectus, monitor, or magister* (overseer,

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<sup>175</sup> Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, 58.

foreman).<sup>176</sup> The *vilicus* in particular was often viewed negatively and stereotyped as a tyrannical bully, one who “terrorizes everyone under his control, rural and urban slaves alike.”<sup>177</sup> The agronomists Cato, Varro, and Columella responded to this societal apprehension concerning the uncontrollability of slaves in their agricultural handbooks. Cato lists characteristics and duties of the slave one should appoint as *vilicus* (*Agr.* 5), as does Columella (*Rust.* 1.8.1–14). Both lists praise the slave who is good at his work, stern with other slaves, able to motivate the other slaves without recourse to violence when possible, trustworthy to carry out the master’s interests, and limited in his socialization with others.

Motivating one’s slaves in order to make the farm as economically profitable as possible was primarily behind the concern for finding a *vilicus* who was able to walk that line of cruelty and leniency with his subordinate slaves. Of course, there were other ways to motivate slaves. Cato (*Agr.* 56–58) and Varro (*Rust.* 1.17.7) emphasize that slaves should not go hungry. Varro (*Rust.* 1.19.3) even goes so far as to suggest allowing the slaves to “own” their own livestock to make them more diligent in their work. While their advice is Italo-centric and concerned with large-scale farms, the advice they offer indicates the precariousness of the master’s control of the slave. What underlying stressors, then, exist between slave and master that contribute to the uncontrollability of rural slaves?

In order to consider the slave in Matt 8 as an agricultural worker, it is important to examine whether or not the centurion would have held agricultural property. In Matt 8:6 and 8:8, the centurion indicates to Jesus that he lives in a house. It is possible that the

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<sup>176</sup> Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament*, 103–4.

<sup>177</sup> Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament*, 104.

centurion's house had land requiring the work of a slave or slaves to manage and work it. It is also possible that this is a retired centurion who had settled on the land. Goldsworthy notes that "veterans continued to define themselves as members of their old unit even when they lived on for several decades,"<sup>178</sup> and Ward shows that centurions could be gifted with an allotment of land upon retirement.<sup>179</sup> Josephus notes that Vespasian reallocated land in Galilee to retired veterans: "About the same time Caesar sent instructions to Bassus and Laberius Maximus, the procurator, to farm out all Jewish territory. For he founded no city there, reserving the country as his private property, except that he did assign to eight hundred veterans discharged from the army a place for habitation called Emmaus, distant thirty furlongs from Jerusalem" (*J.W.* 7.216–17 [Thackeray, LCL]). Thus, it is possible that the centurion, whether active duty or retired, owned a slave whose primary assignment was agricultural labor.

If the centurion's slave were housed somewhere outside the centurion's home, perhaps on a remote agricultural property, he would have had some level of independence from the master, though not necessarily from a *vilicus*. Because the *vilicus* serves as an extension of the master and his authority, the *vilicus* was allowed to enact violent punishment if necessary.<sup>180</sup> The *vilicus* was responsible for the management of the estate in the owner's absence and was accountable to the master for his performance. Though Varro encourages the *vilicus* to rule with words rather than whips if possible, the likelihood of violent interactions between a *vilicus* and other slaves would be high. If the centurion were typically an absentee master, this meant this slave, as well as any others owned by the

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<sup>178</sup> Goldsworthy, *The Complete Roman Army*, 115.

<sup>179</sup> Ward, "Centurions," 178.

<sup>180</sup> Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament*, 105.

centurion, was subject to the authority of a *vilicus* who served as an extension of the master's authority and could be as cruel as the master if necessary. Thus, Patterson's conclusion that slaves working on the land of an absentee master "controlled the means of production, usually organized their own schedule of work, and had a fair degree of autonomy in conducting their personal lives"<sup>181</sup> is quite idyllic. These "freedoms" may have served as an ameliorating buffer to some extent, but the chronic stress of the possibility of violent punishment at the hands of a higher-ranking slave for unsatisfactory work was ever present.

Food insecurity and malnutrition were chronic ecological stressors, both psychological and physiological, for most non-elites in the ancient world, not just for slaves.<sup>182</sup> The agronomists Cato and Varro both agree that slaves should be adequately fed so as not to go hungry (Cato, *Agr.* 56–58; Varro, *Rust.* 1.17.7). This is equal parts rooted in concern for meeting the basic energy requirements of agricultural work and for pacifying slaves asked to do particularly difficult tasks. Assuming the centurion followed the agronomists' advice or shared their sentiments, it is worth noting "...the food rations (*cibaria*) that slaves were allotted were meant to be functional and little more."<sup>183</sup>

*Cibaria* typically refers to a grain that was used to make a sort of porridge or lower-grade bread that constituted most of a slave's diet. It also had other meanings, including "drinking-water, wine, oil, salt and grapes, as well as the *pulmentarium*, a sort of mash that

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<sup>181</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 181. Not discussed in this paper, but worth noting, is that if this slave was forced to work in large-scale mining, "the consequences were invariably disastrous for the lives of slaves" and in these types of situations "the spiritual, social, and material condition of the slaves reached its lowest level."

<sup>182</sup> Garnsey, *Food and Society*, 43–61; Friesen, "Poverty in Pauline Studies."

<sup>183</sup> Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, 81.

was eaten as a relish and that could be made from any number of ingredients according to season and availability.”<sup>184</sup> This type of diet met basic energy needs, but the low nutritional value of the breads was not easily absorbed. Further, if they wanted to supplement this diet, slaves were likely left to fend for themselves.<sup>185</sup>

Modern medicine has proven that vitamin B12 deficiencies, whether through lack of B12 in one’s diet or because of the body’s inability to absorb the vitamin, can manifest as paralysis.<sup>186</sup> Since B12 is primarily found in animal products or by-products and fortified cereals, it is unlikely that slaves’ diets provided it in any substantial measure. While the psychological stress of chronic food insecurity took its toll on slaves in one way, the physiological stress of malnutrition took its toll, potentially, in the very symptom of paralysis that Matthew’s account identifies (8:6).

A third stressor agricultural slaves faced was imprisonment in the *ergastula*, prisons designed specifically for the incarceration of slaves who misbehaved or were not trusted by the master or *vilicus*.<sup>187</sup> Joshel and Hackworth Peterson suggest that the *ergastulum* and

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<sup>184</sup> Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, 81–82.

<sup>185</sup> Varro suggests (*Rust.* 1.19.3) that slaves could keep livestock that were considered, more or less, their private property, however his text is Italocentric and concerned with slaves on large estates. It is unlikely that a provincial centurion on active duty, due to the migrant nature of his job, had large landholdings. If this centurion is retired, it is within the realm of possibility that the centurion had a large enough estate and enough expendable income to gift his slaves with their own livestock.

<sup>186</sup> Roberto A. Leon-Ferre, Benjamin Koch, and Lori J. Rosenstein, “A B-Wildering Case of Paraplegia: Cobalamin Deficiency,” *The American Journal of Medicine* 126.12 (2013): 1045–47.

<sup>187</sup> Columella (*Rust.* 1.6.3) suggests “for those who are in chains there should be an underground *ergastula*, as wholesome as possible, receiving light through a number of narrow windows built so high from the ground that they cannot be reached with the hand.” Further, slaves imprisoned by the *vilicus* could not be released, no matter the offense,

the practice of chaining slaves “indicate that some slaves tried to flee or fought their owners’ claims on their bodies and time.”<sup>188</sup> Slaves who run away may be responding with “flight” to the chronic stress of enslavement. Slaves who steal may be supplementing their diet, enacting revenge, or hoping to sell what they stole for a profit in an effort to supplement their diet or to save for manumission. For these slaves to be imprisoned when caught simply reinforces their subjugation, and the *ergastula* served as another manifestation of the chronic ecological stress under which they live simply because of their enslaved status.

Finally, agricultural slaves were exposed to violence from free third parties, a stress that may be as chronic as that of violence from one’s master or slave supervisor. Varro recognized this vulnerability and suggests building the farmstead on elevated ground to prevent robber bands from easily raiding the property (*Rust.* 1.12.4). The agricultural slaves in the Matthean parables of the wicked tenants (21:33–41) and the wedding banquet (22:1–10) both recount (fictional) tales of violence against slaves by third parties. Patterson notes that under Roman law, a slave “could seek redress only through his master” and “that crimes against slaves were punished less severely than comparable crimes against freemen.”<sup>189</sup> There were various types of crimes that a free third party could commit against a slave that a master may not deem worthy of responding to, especially if they did not interfere with the slave’s ability to work (i.e., rape, verbal abuse,

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without the approval of the master. In the case of absentee masters, these slaves could be imprisoned for extended periods of time.

<sup>188</sup> Joshel and Hackworth Petersen, *The Material Life of Roman Slaves*, 209.

<sup>189</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 195.

milder forms of violence like slapping a slave's face).<sup>190</sup> That a slave may have to put up with abuse from a free third party with no recourse for justice is an ecological stressor unique to enslaved persons. With the options of fight or flight being largely unavailable and at the risk of being heavily punished when attempted, an agricultural slave could turn to low-profile and anonymous forms of resistance or tending and befriending responses to buffer the stress; alternatively, the slave could internalize the dishonored status and live with the full impact of the stress on their minds and bodies.

Though slaves working the land may have experienced a sense of autonomy if their master did not live on the property with them, they were still susceptible to a range of stressors. These slaves were subject to violent punishment by the higher-ranking slave *vilicus*, at risk of malnutrition, subject to imprisonment in the *ergastula*, and vulnerable to attack by third parties. These stressors are in addition to any violence or sexual abuse they may have suffered at the hands of their master.

### **Scenario 3: The Slave in the *Familia Urbana***

Slaves in the home of the master lived with different types of stress than agricultural slaves. One stressor comprised being subject to the physical and sexual abuse of their masters, possibly more so than agricultural slaves living apart from their master. Another stressor involved physiological and psychological stress of food insecurity and malnutrition (similar to the agricultural slaves) along with the heightened stress of “daily hassle” tasks (like cleaning and table setting) because of the constant reminder of one's subjugated status and the potential for violent consequences if done incorrectly.

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<sup>190</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 193.

Much like agricultural slaves, the diets of domestic slaves consisted primarily of cereals and breads, with a smattering of other seasonal foodstuffs like olive oil and grapes, when available. While agricultural slaves would have been left to fend for themselves to supplement their diets, “domestic slaves in wealthy households, especially kitchen staff, were able to take whatever the master and his family did not want...”<sup>191</sup> It is possible that the centurion’s slave was able to supplement his diet from the centurion’s kitchen, with or without the centurion’s knowledge, but a B12 deficiency presenting itself as paralysis should not be overlooked. It is also possible that the centurion, upon finding out his slave has been eating the family’s scraps, is angered and considers this a theft worthy of violent punishment. Thus, food insecurity, even for domestic slaves in closer proximity to the master’s comforts, is a chronic stressor with psychological and physiological ramifications.

Domestic slaves in large households were often assigned particular tasks. “Investigation of the elite households at Rome in the Julio-Claudian era has shown how complex the urban *familiae* of the wealthy generally were,” with several titles evidenced including water-carrier, slave in charge of furniture, surgeon, food-taster, and marble-cutter, among many others.<sup>192</sup> Because of the nature of military life, it is unlikely that the centurion had a large retinue of slaves akin to what is seen in large Roman households. Imagining that the slave in this passage is one of a handful of slaves, if not the only, owned by the centurion would mean that the slave would be expected to perform multiple roles. These tasks would include basic household chores, such as cooking and cleaning, as well as other assigned tasks, such as grooming one’s master or educating of the master’s children.

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<sup>191</sup> Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, 83.

<sup>192</sup> Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, 62–63.

These routine tasks could become sources of stress if the master is overly particular or micromanaging the operation. Living in the same home as the master meant “the slave was under the constant supervision of the master and therefore subjected to greater and more capricious punishment and humiliation than those housed elsewhere.”<sup>193</sup> Social Stress research suggests “that persons who are closely and constantly monitored by their supervisors, who perceive that they are unable to make decisions about their work on their own, and who have no opportunity to disagree with their supervisors, will display increased levels of anxiety, low self-confidence, and low job satisfaction.”<sup>194</sup> While their research is primarily concerned with at-will work in a capitalist society, I argue that their findings can be cautiously used for considering the stress imposed upon slaves by the supervision of their masters, especially when trivial offenses may be met with violent punishment.

If one was unfortunate enough to live an enslaved life, it is important to note there were certain “advantages” to working in the home rather than on the farm, especially if one was a house-born slave. Patterson notes “in most precapitalist slave societies masters were reluctant to sell [house-born slaves],” and there is evidence from Roman Egypt that the sale of house-born children of slaves incurred legal consequences.<sup>195</sup> If the centurion’s slave was a house-born slave working in the home, it is possible that there were bonds of sentiment between the master’s family and the slave. Bonds of sentiment do not suggest that the relationship was any less exploitative. Rather, the slave may receive certain

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<sup>193</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 175.

<sup>194</sup> Mark Tausig, “Work and Mental Health,” in *Handbook of the Sociology of Mental Health*, ed. Carol S. Aneshensel and Jo E. Phelan (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 1999), 262.

<sup>195</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 175.

incentives amidst the generally stressful existence of slavery. Patterson argues “...it is certainly true that slaves of the household, whether born in the household or not, tended to assimilate their master’s culture at a faster rate than those quartered elsewhere, it must not be assumed that the household slave was necessarily better treated than the tenant or the field slave.”<sup>196</sup> While there may be certain advantages to being a domestic slave, they should not overshadow the serious and precarious disadvantages.

### **Contextualized Reading of Matt 8:5–13**

Having reviewed three possible scenarios of the slave and centurion’s relationship—whether as a boy-lover, rural slave, or domestic slave—and highlighting the stressors unique to those relationships, I conclude the chapter with a Social Stress informed reading of the scene.

Matthew 8:5–13 is the second healing scene in a narrative block of two chapters that recount nine healing stories, among other nature miracles and teachings concerning discipleship. It follows the Sermon on the Mount of Matt 5–7, wherein Jesus lays out ethical teaching and instructions concerning discipleship for life shaped by the “kingdom/empire of the heavens.” After Jesus descends from the mountain, a leper requests and receives healing from Jesus (8:1–4). Then Jesus returns to Capernaum where he has made his home (4:13). There the centurion requesting healing for his slave approaches him.

In the NRSV translation—a somewhat misleading translation as I will demonstrate below—the centurion says, “Lord, my slave (παῖς) is lying at home paralyzed (παραλυτικός), in terrible distress (δεινῶς βασανιζόμενος).” As noted previously, many

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<sup>196</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 175.

interpreters have found a compassionate master who merits all of the praise that Jesus will later heap upon him. This view is often based on the assumption that any concern for another's bodily integrity must be rooted in humanitarian sympathy paired with the fact that Matthew makes no moral judgment on the centurion or the institution of slavery. I argue that the centurion's request of healing for his slave does not necessarily indicate compassion. As Finley succinctly states it, "...one also attended to an injured cow and mended a damaged cart."<sup>197</sup> Further, that the institution of slavery and its inherent violent oppression of the enslaved go unmentioned upon in Matthew should come as no surprise. Slavery was assumed to be the natural order, and criticism of the institution in Roman society was rare and amounted to nothing in the way of an abolitionist movement. The centurion's request of Jesus, therefore, should not be assumed to be compassionate. While sympathy on the part of the centurion is a possibility, the typical relationships between master and slave, the general attitudes towards the institution of slavery in Roman society, and the stereotypical centurion behavior strongly suggest otherwise.

The centurion informs Jesus that his slave is "lying at home paralyzed." The word παραλυτικός is translated as "paralyzed," but are we to imagine quadriplegia, paralysis of the lower body only, or, perhaps, paralysis of a single limb (i.e. palsy)?<sup>198</sup> Matthew uses this word in two other instances. First, in 4:24 when "they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and παραλυτικούς, and he cured them." The second is in the story of the paralytic whose friends carry him to Jesus for healing in 9:2-8. The reference in 4:24 is sufficiently vague to warrant little speculation about whom or what Matthew imagines. The reference in 9:2-8

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<sup>197</sup> Finley, *Ancient Slavery*, 173.

<sup>198</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 312.

gives more information concerning what Matthew may mean by this term. The paralytic in that passage requires friends to carry him to Jesus. This could indicate any level of severity in paralysis, but it seems reasonable to suggest that it is likely that this man is a paraplegic or quadriplegic. That his friends must carry him indicates that his mobility is limited in such a way that he cannot walk alone or with aids, as is possible with some manifestations of palsy. I hold that the paralytic in 9:2–8 and the slave in 8:5–13 are both, minimally, paralyzed from the waist down, but possibly quadriplegic. In any event, the paralysis is severe enough to limit mobility without significant assistance.<sup>199</sup> This condition renders the slave relatively useless to his master, a situation that increases the slave’s stress concerning his fate.

Not only is the slave paralyzed, but also he is described as being “δεινῶς βασανιζόμενος” by the centurion. This is generally translated as “in terrible distress” (NRSV) “in terrible anguish” (NET), “suffering terribly” (ESV), “grievously tormented” (KJV), or other similar variations. The verb βασανίζω’s primary meaning according to Bauer’s Greek-English lexicon is “lit. of torture in judicial examination.”<sup>200</sup> It also carries a less common metaphorical meaning of being tortured by a disease rather than a person; this is often the understanding behind the translation in this passage. The verb is a present

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<sup>199</sup> It is worth noting that the centurion does not bring his slave to Jesus. Does the centurion lack the resources to move the slave? Is the slave’s condition too delicate to be moved? Does the slave protest the possibility of healing and therefore the centurion is intentionally silencing the slave’s wishes? Was the centurion’s encounter with Jesus random and the centurion’s request, therefore, on a whim? These are questions raised by the absence of the slave’s presence, but are outside the purview of this study.

<sup>200</sup> *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature: A Translation and Adaptation of the Fourth Revised and Augmented Edition of Walter Bauer’s Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der übrigen urchristlichen Literatur*, s.v. βασανίζω

middle participle functioning adverbially. When translated as “in terrible distress,” or some variation thereof, translators treat the participle as functioning as an attendant circumstance, namely, the slave is paralyzed and also in distress. However, it is possible, and I argue more likely, that this participle is a causal use of the verb’s more common meaning, that is, the slave is paralyzed because he was terribly tortured.<sup>201</sup>

A causal translation of the participle merits consideration since the lives of slaves were such that βασανίζω could lead to paralysis. First, slaves were questioned under torture anytime they were called to testify in legal proceedings. Centurions were by no means the wealthiest of retainers in the Roman system; they were, nonetheless, important and powerful people. If the centurion were dealing with legal matters, it is possible his slave would be called on to testify, either on behalf of or against his master.

Further, the usage of this verb in other places strongly suggests understanding this verb as torture. The primary usage of this verb in Josephus has to do with literal bodily torture at the will of another.<sup>202</sup> For example, Josephus recounts when the king of Jericho finds out there were spies in the land, “he straightway sent men after them, with orders to arrest and bring them up, that he might discover by torture (ἵνα βασανίσας μάθῃ) to what intent they were come” (*Ant.* 5.8 [Thackeray, LCL]). Elsewhere, Josephus narrates that when Herod learns that his brother Pheroras has been poisoned, “Beset with all sorts of

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<sup>201</sup> Herbert Weir Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), 457.

<sup>202</sup> Josephus uses βασανίζω forty-two times across *Jewish Antiquities* and *The Jewish War*. Of those, thirty-three instances are clear references to physical torture: *Ant.* 5.8, 8.33, 13.4, 15.9, 15.226, 15.227, 16.232, 16.247, 16.252, 16.256, 16.315, 16.317, 16.320, 17.56, 17.57, 17.64, 17.79, 17.119, 18.183, 19.34; *J.W.* 1.485, 1.528, 1.529 (2x), 1.577, 1.584, 1.586, 1.590, 1.592, 1.600, 2.85, 5.426, 6.345. Five further possible references to torture are *Ant.* 9.101, 11.82, 12.413, 16.249, and 18.154.

suspicions, the king put the women-servants and some ladies above that rank to the torture (ἐβασάνιζεν)” (*J.W.* 1.584 [Thackeray, LCL]).

In the Septuagint the uses are similar. Carter presents torture as a possible reason for the slave’s paralysis by noting that the Maccabean texts use this verb to describe “the torture of resistant Jews by the imperial tyrant Antiochus Epiphanes.”<sup>203</sup> In 4 Maccabees there is a story about Antiochus’ torture of seven brothers for refusing to denounce their traditions. The sixth brother, after watching five of his brothers tortured to death, says “So that if you think it proper to torture (βασανίζειν) us for not eating the unclean, torture (βασάνιζε)!” (11:16). R.T. France criticizes Carter for positing torture as a possible cause of the slave’s paralysis, saying, “The suggestion of Carter, 201, that it was the result of a beating or torture...is more imaginative than derived from anything in the narrative.”<sup>204</sup> However, given the typical meaning of the verb in the more than 60 instances of use in the LXX and Josephus, as well as the realities of a slave’s existence, Carter’s suggestion is not as “imaginative” as France would like to believe and not so easily dismissed.

Elsewhere in Matthew, this word is used to denote physical torture. In the parable of the unmerciful slave (18:23–35), the noun form of this word is used to describe the punishment of the slave by his master: “And in his anger, the lord turned him over to be tortured (τοῖς βασανιστάϊς) until he could repay his debt” (18:34). Thus, it is possible, as

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<sup>203</sup> Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 201. See 2 Macc 1:28, 7:13, 17; 9:6 and 4 Macc 6:5, 10, 11; 8:2, 5, 27; 9:7, 27, 30, 32; 11:16, 20; 12:4, 13; 13:27; 15:22; 16:3, 15. Ben Sira 4:17 uses this verb in reference to torture, but views it as a positive element of wisdom’s discipline in the faithful. Wisdom of Solomon also uses the verb four times referring to God’s punishment of God’s enemies (11:9; 12:23; 16:1, 4).

<sup>204</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 312, n. 33.

derived from the language of the narrative, that the slave was so terribly tortured or punished that it resulted in his paralysis.

However, if one insists upon an “attendant circumstance” translation of the participle, it is also possible that the stress of enslaved life resulted in a neurological disorder now known as “conversion hysteria” or “conversion disorder.” Manifestations of this disorder are sensory and motor and can “take many forms and are designated conversion reactions because the underlying anxiety is assumed to have been ‘converted’ into physical symptoms.”<sup>205</sup> Frantz Fanon seems to be encountering this disorder when he recounts the muscular rigidity of a man in the face of colonialism. He argues, “This contraction, in fact, is quite simply a postural concurrence and evidence in the colonized’s muscles of their rigidity, their reticence and refusal in the face of the colonial authorities.”<sup>206</sup> The experience of stressed conditions that may result in mental breakdown is converted to physical breakdown.

There are other possibilities for explaining the slave’s paralysis, of course. Malnutrition could be a factor, as well as a work accident, disease, or a particularly severe beating from the centurion himself. No matter whether the slave’s stressed socio-economic position contributed to his paralysis, the essential feature of the stress of an enslaved life is present in the centurion’s statement: the slave has no voice in choosing, accepting, or rejecting his own healing. Carter states it this way, the slave “cannot speak for himself or seek his own healing, he is owned by his master, with few legal rights, no economic

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<sup>205</sup> *BRITANNICA ACADEMIC*, s.v. “Conversion Disorder.”

<sup>206</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 217.

opportunities, and is useful only in furthering his owner's imperial interests."<sup>207</sup> Lack of bodily autonomy characterizes the lives of slaves and is behind every unique stressor in a slave's life.

Jesus responds to the centurion's request by saying, "Will I come and cure him?" (8:7). This question is understood to be a "rhetorical question which expresses doubt about helping a Gentile."<sup>208</sup> While the nature of Jesus' question poses interesting possibilities for discussing relations between Jews and Gentiles, I instead focus on the implications of Jesus' resistance for the slave. Assuming the slave did want to be healed and assuming the centurion is a Gentile, his healing is contingent upon how Jesus chooses to respond to his master's ethnicity. Jesus' question is dismissive and compassion is not a motivating force in Jesus' decision to heal the slave. Jesus' ethnocentric bias further marginalizes the slave.

The centurion overcomes the obstacle of his ethnicity by subordinating himself to Jesus. He tells Jesus that he is unworthy for Jesus to come under his roof but that Jesus can simply say the word and the slave will be healed (8:8). He appeals to Jesus by reference to their similar placements in hierarchical power structures: he is a man under authority and with authority in the Roman army while Jesus is a man under God's authority with the authority to heal the impaired (8:9).<sup>209</sup> Jesus is impressed with this centurion's assessment of his authority and praises the centurion by saying, "Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith" (8:10).

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<sup>207</sup> Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 201.

<sup>208</sup> Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 201; Boring, "Matthew," 226; Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 10; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 120; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 313.

<sup>209</sup> Boring, "Matthew," 226.

Joseph McDonald highlights in the parallel passage in Luke 7:2–10 what holds true also for this Matthean version, that “it is thus the centurion’s understanding of the person of Jesus that Jesus lauds...Without even meeting Jesus, he puts his finger unerringly on something that eluded Jesus’ Nazarene neighbors and the multitudes who witnessed the healer’s powerful works.”<sup>210</sup> Thus, the centurion’s “faith” that is so highly praised by Jesus is simply that he recognized Jesus as an authoritative agent of God. Subsequent interpreters of this passage overlook this point and strive to cast the centurion’s faith in ethical terms of compassion and sympathy towards his impaired slave, perhaps with the ethical teachings of the Sermon on the Mount in mind or by importing the clearly positive portrayal of the centurion in the Lucan parallel, with no acknowledgement of the centurion as an intentional source of stress for the slave.

Jesus then states, “I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (8:11–12). This sentence has been understood as either referencing Gentile inclusion into God’s kingdom/empire or as referencing the gathering of Jewish exiles/diaspora.<sup>211</sup> Yet, while these readings continue to affirm the centrality of the centurion, they miss the perspective of a slave in such a scenario. Would a slave hearing this story understand him/herself as being invited to this dinner? Or would they imagine themselves serving the invited guests, guests who, like Jesus and the centurion, rank high in hierarchical power structures? Should a slave understand from this story that only men of authority, who

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<sup>210</sup> McDonald, “Status Quo.”

<sup>211</sup> The former, Held, “Matthew as Interpreter”; the latter, Davies and Allison, *Matthew*.

control even the bodily integrity of slaves, are those who are welcome to the banquet? Yet, even if the slave did understand himself to be an invited guest at this eschatological banquet, it does little to change the chronic threats of violence and abuse in his daily life.

Since the centurion's faith is lacking any ethical or moral aspect, it could be argued that Jesus heals the slave in spite of the centurion's character, but that would ignore the fact that Jesus tells the centurion "Let it be done *for you* according to *your* faith" (emphasis mine). It is clear that Jesus is healing the slave for the centurion and with no regard for the wishes or attendant circumstances of the slave. As McDonald notes, Jesus "restores 'for him' his slave to his accustomed position of servitude" and replaces "him firmly into his societally-decreed niche, which is, at least legally, that of the lowest of the low."<sup>212</sup> Even if we assume that the slave would prefer to be healed, "he is still being made whole, by Jesus, to resume his place in a degrading institution that is at the foundation of an exploitative social hierarchy."<sup>213</sup>

Jesus then tells the centurion that his slave is healed according to the centurion's faith and the narrator confirms that the "slave was healed in that hour" (8:13). The slave's voice is never heard, his body is not present, and his agency is certainly not considered in this demonstration of Jesus' power. He is healed of his paralysis, yet many of the possible causes of the paralysis are left unchanged. If he was tortured for testimony, he is still a slave subject to the Roman legal system. If his master beat him, he is still that master's property. If he was malnourished, his diet is unchanged. If he was injured while working, he may still be expected to perform the same tasks. If he is suffering from what we now call conversion disorder, the chronic stressors of enslavement remain.

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<sup>212</sup> McDonald, "Status Quo."

<sup>213</sup> McDonald, "Status Quo."

Interpreters of this passage tend to focus on the faith of the centurion<sup>214</sup>, the inclusion of gentiles at the final banquet<sup>215</sup>, and/or the fact that Jesus heals the slave from a distance.<sup>216</sup> Similarities between this passage and Matt 15:21–28, the healing of the Canaanite woman’s daughter, are frequently cited.<sup>217</sup> Both scenes involve a gentile approaching Jesus for healing on behalf of another, both healings are granted because of the faith of the supplicant, and both healings are performed from a distance. Yet few interpreters, Carter being a prominent exception, consider this passage with the slave in mind.

The ambiguities of this scene are lost in translations that obfuscate the identity of the slave, preferring “servant” instead, and the possible nature of his suffering in replacing “torture” with a generic “distress.” Yet, the ambiguities can be seen when attention is paid to the social stressors inherent in the life of the enslaved. Slaves were subject to their master’s violent whims and sexual advances with no option for resistance. Slaves could suffer the trauma of being castrated, sold and separated from their families, or tortured for their legal testimony. Slaves could be forced by their masters to perform degrading, morally repugnant, or even mind-numbingly boring tasks. Slaves were often motivated with the prospect of manumission only to have the goalposts moved. When Jesus heals the

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<sup>214</sup> Held, “Matthew as Interpreter,” 193–97; Boring, “Matthew,” 226–27; Senior, *Matthew*, 112; Vledder, *Conflict in the Miracle Stories*, 182; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 120; Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 95; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 319–20; Metzger and Grimshaw, “Reading Matthew’s Healing Narratives,” 137.

<sup>215</sup> Senior, *Matthew*, 112; Vledder, *Conflict in the Miracle Stories*, 182–83; Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 9, 11; Metzger and Grimshaw, “Reading Matthew’s Healing Narratives,” 137.

<sup>216</sup> Senior, *Matthew*, 112; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 319–20.

<sup>217</sup> Boring, “Matthew,” 226; Senior, *Matthew*, 132; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 120; Jennings and Liew, “Mistaken Identities,” 492.

slave *for the centurion*, he reinforces the social location of the slave and all the characteristic stressors of slavery. “Jesus’ restoration of the slave is an implicit approbation of the relationship between master and servant...Jesus is not merely healing someone of a mortal complaint here: he is restoring or resurrecting a *relationship* as well as a person.”<sup>218</sup> The slave may have been restored, but he is restored to a master and into a highly stressed system that may well put him in the position of paralysis yet again. The façade of a fantasy cure of immediate healing gives way to the ugly reality of a stress-laden imperial system built on the backs of overly-stressed, marginalized bodies with little real chance of alleviation.

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<sup>218</sup> McDonald, “Status Quo.”

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DEMONIC POSSESSION AND SOCIAL STRESS (MATTHEW 8:28–34)**

In chapter 1, I discussed some of the major approaches that have been employed in interpreting the healing narratives in the Gospel of Matthew so as to locate my approach in this larger narrative. My focus is on contributing attention to the impaired characters in the text and examining the role of stress in their experiences and impairments. In chapter 2, I laid out the methodologies used in this project, particularly Social Stress Theory and Empire Studies. In chapter 3, I examined the social stressors present in the lives of slaves under Roman imperial rule in order to interpret the healing of the centurion's παῖς in Matt 8:5–13.

In this chapter, I explore social stressors in relation to Matt 8:28–34, wherein Jesus encounters two demon-possessed men in Gadara. In Matthew's account, the demons, speaking through two men, recognize Jesus as the Son of God and request to be cast into a nearby herd of swine. Jesus grants them their request, but the swine immediately drown themselves in the sea. In response to this dramatic spectacle, the locals request that Jesus leave their area, which Jesus does. The narrative then moves immediately into another miracle story around the healing of a paralytic (9:2–8). The Matthean story pays little attention to the two demon-possessed characters, focusing instead on the interaction between Jesus and the demons and Jesus and the townsfolk. Once the demons are cast out, the two formerly possessed men are excluded from the narrative. Any discussion about what stressors accompanied their possession, what their possession did for/to them, and how they responded to their exorcisms is absent.

In this chapter, I argue that social stressors are a significant part of environments in which demon possession is understood to be a common feature. While there are other accounts of demon possession in Matthew, I choose this scene for several reasons. First, it has a parallel in Mark's Gospel (5:1–20). Mark's version receives quite a bit of attention while this Matthean version, as discussed below, has received little consideration outside of commentaries. Second, the ambiguity of the straightforward "goodness" of Jesus' power to exorcise is explicit in this story. While releasing two men from demonic power would seem to be a good thing, the townspeople are upset by Jesus' activity and ask him to leave. This chapter uses Social Stress Theory to make sense not only of the demoniacs' condition, but also of the townspeople's reactions. Finally, this passage, though lacking many of the details of Mark's version, provides an opportunity to examine how Rome's colonizing power stresses the lives of provincial residents. Throughout I argue that the possession of the two men of Gadara reflects the stressed experience of the military invasion of the war of 66–70 CE and its aftermath. Using Social Stress Theory to underscore the acute and chronic stressors of the war, I suggest possible resonances that this story may have had in a post-70 Antiochene context.

I begin with a review of scholarship of this scene, highlighting the types of questions asked by contemporary scholars and how they approach the concept of demon possession. Then I review ancient depictions of the symptoms understood to be indicative of possession. In conjunction with this, I look at the two competing ancient ideologies for making sense of these symptoms: imbalance (the medical model) and invasion (the popular model). Using the invasion model, together with insights gleaned from postcolonial theory,

I investigate how this story reflects and resonates with the stressed experience of the Gospel's audience in Antioch during and after the war of 66–70 CE

### **Previous Discussions of Matthew 8:28–34**

Previous scholarship has paid little regard to the two demoniacs and, in relation to the central emphasis of this study, to the stressors in the experience of the demon-possessed. Below, I discuss some major approaches in scholarship for interpreting this scene, noting the ways that previous discussions influence this study and the ways that this study contributes to this scene's interpretive history.

### **Redactional Readings**

Taking a redaction-critical approach, Hans Joachim Held highlights how the Matthean account differs from the Marcan version in Mark 5:1–20. Especially interesting to Held is that Matthew lacks any word about the healing or the demoniacs' request to follow Jesus, which Held reads as indicating a lack of interest in these details for Matthew. Held argues, "The impression given on the whole is that Matthew preserves the essential elements of the Marcan narrative. What he omits are the descriptive non-essentials."<sup>1</sup> For Held, the "non-essentials" include the two demon-possessed men. Thus, Matthew's pared down telling of this story "produces a firmer concentration on the person of Jesus" and should be read Christologically.<sup>2</sup> He argues that the demons' questions, "What have you to do with us, Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?" (8:29), are Christological and eschatological since "Jesus has come to deliver the demons to the judgment of torment before the 'time,' before the final irruption of the rule of God."<sup>3</sup> For

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<sup>1</sup> Held, "Matthew as Interpreter," 173.

<sup>2</sup> Held, "Matthew as Interpreter," 173.

<sup>3</sup> Held, "Matthew as Interpreter," 174.

Held, this scene is about Jesus' power over demons and therefore "it is understandable that no interest is taken in the healing or in the people healed. The theme is the destruction of the demons, and Matthew expressly confirms that they died in the waters."<sup>4</sup>

Davies' and Allison's reading of this passage also focuses on the interaction between the demons and Jesus.<sup>5</sup> Unlike Held, they note that there are ethnicity issues at play (they argue that demoniacs are likely gentiles) though they do not elaborate on those issues in any meaningful way. Rather they highlight that Jesus is an eschatological judge with sovereign power who restores order to the land.

Ulrich Luz's reading of this passage notes how Matthew's redaction of the Marcan story emphasizes the power of Jesus rather than the plight of the demoniacs. He writes, "Obviously, for Matthew the demoniacs are not important in themselves. Their literary function is to 'mirror' the power of the Son of God. The abridgments are in the service of a positive intention for the narrative."<sup>6</sup> Luz does not resist the Matthean narrative's focus, but maintains it by highlighting that the demons feel Jesus' power, that Jesus does not engage in conversation with the demons/demoniacs, and that Jesus powerfully exorcises the demons with his words. Luz's reading of Matthew holds that "the issue is Jesus and the power of his word."<sup>7</sup> Mirroring Matthew, Luz pays no attention to the demoniacs, their stress-laden social position, or how the presence of the demoniacs contributed to the stress of the other residents of Gadara.

Each of these interpreters highlights the way Jesus' power over demons is depicted through this scene, but none of them takes any interest the circumstances of the demoniacs

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<sup>4</sup> Held, "Matthew as Interpreter," 174.

<sup>5</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 132–33.

<sup>6</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 25.

<sup>7</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 25.

as stressed people, nor do they consider the social stress inherent in the demoniacs' lives, pre-possession or post-exorcism. The possessed men disappear as the power of Jesus over the demons takes center stage.

### **Social-Science Readings**

In their Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels, Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh briefly discuss this scene (less than 80 words of interpretation) which they title "Jesus' Power over a Demon."<sup>8</sup> In this section they note that deviant behavior in the ancient world was considered dangerous and the deviant person was often ostracized. The two men described in this passage "fit the situation of demon-possessed persons, found here in a non-Israelite region (Gadara) and in an unclean place (tombs)."<sup>9</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, though, do not consider the stressors of the men's social location(s) that accompanied their symptoms of possession choosing instead to focus on the perceived radicalness of a Jewish Jesus interacting with gentiles in an "unclean" place.

Even in the section *Reading Scenarios* under the heading of "Demons/Demon Possession" they do not consider the stressors of colonized life that accompany possession symptomatology. They note that folks in the ancient world believed "every significant effect in a person's or group's life was believed to have been caused by a person, human or nonhuman."<sup>10</sup> There was a hierarchy to the cosmos and each level could control the levels below. Demons, on par with angels and spirits, ranked third below the "Most High God" and "Other Gods or sons of God" but above "humankind" and "Creatures lower than

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<sup>8</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 57–58.

<sup>9</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 57–58.

<sup>10</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 350.

humankind.”<sup>11</sup> While Malina and Rohrbaugh are concerned with what demons were capable of doing and to whom, my concern is with the role of social stress in environments in which people manifest symptoms of demon possession.

Evert-Jan Vledder’s conflict theory reading of Matthew 8 and 9 is concerned with how various levels of conflict are present throughout the miracle scenes. For Vledder, the exorcism of the two demoniacs is significant “in as far as it entails conflict and it contains the clearest examples of conflicting *interests*...”<sup>12</sup> He highlights four levels of conflict. First, the ongoing conflict with the Jewish leadership is manifest here through the subject of contact with gentiles. Specifically, Matthew picks up the theme of uncleanness and tells of how Jesus openly goes into “pagan country.” Vledder argues that the Jewish leaders would have regarded the demoniacs as ‘disgusting’ because of their unclean state. Jesus’ actions in exorcising the demons underscore the conflict between the Jewish leadership and Jesus. While the Jewish leadership is concerned with purity, Jesus identifies with the interests of the unclean and liberates “them from their unclean state in order to be reintegrated in society.”<sup>13</sup>

Vledder’s concept of “unclean” is somewhat muddled. He uses Lenski’s class/status categories for agrarian societies as a starting point, but then collapses the social status of unclean into Jewish ritual impurity. Lenski describes the unclean/degraded classes’ status as reflected sometimes by “inferior ethnic origins” or by “obnoxious or offensive characteristics of the occupation of the group.”<sup>14</sup> Vledder picks up on this but then argues that the centurion in Matt 8:5–13 and the tax collector of 9:9–13 are both considered as

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<sup>11</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 350.

<sup>12</sup> Vledder, *Conflict in the Miracle Stories*, 195.

<sup>13</sup> Vledder, *Conflict in the Miracle Stories*, 196.

<sup>14</sup> Lenski, *Power and Privilege*, 280.

part of the unclean *class* in Jewish estimation. First, Vledder clearly does not understand that Lenski's model is classifying people in terms of their power, privilege, and honor in an agrarian society. For Rome, the governing class's priorities and ideals dictated who got what and why. Secondly, Vledder fundamentally misunderstands Levitical purity legislation. As Amy-Jill Levine stresses, "Uncleanness is not a disease, and it implies no moral censure; it is a ritual state in which both men and women likely found themselves most of the time...The consequence of such cultic uncleanness primarily involves restriction from the Temple precincts."<sup>15</sup> The idea that ritual uncleanness, with a primary consequence of Temple restrictions, is somehow viewed as morally repugnant is nonsensical. Even High Priests of the Temple lived in unclean states from time to time, presuming that Leviticus 15:2 applied to all men at some point in their lives: "When any man has a discharge from his member, his discharge makes him ceremonially unclean." For Vledder to argue that the Jewish leaders viewed the demoniacs as disgusting because they were ritually impure is to confuse ritual purity with morality and to mischaracterize first-century Judaism.

Further, for Vledder to collapse social status with ritual purity misses much of the point of the scene. The demoniacs that Jesus encounters are both ritually impure (as they live among the tombs, see Lev 22:4 and Num 5:2; 9:10; and 19:13) and fall under the social category of "unclean" or "expendable." Their social status is not caused by their ritual impurity, though, perhaps, the ostracization caused by their social status (living in the tombs) may have resulted in their ritual impurity. In any event, they are two distinct categories that should not be collapsed or confused. Vledder's unnuanced approach to the

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<sup>15</sup> Levine, "Discharging Responsibility: Matthean Jesus, Biblical Law, and Hemorrhaging Woman," 78.

social location of the demoniacs, Jesus, and the Jewish leadership results in a rather uncritical interpretation. First, Jesus' entry into "pagan country" is not as scandalous as Vledder would like it to be. Second, the Jewish leaders would not necessarily have thought the demoniacs "disgusting" because they were ritually impure (though perhaps they were put off by the men for other reasons, e.g. fear of the demons, off-putting or aggressive behavior of the men, clothing, odor, etc.). Finally, if there is conflict between Jesus and the Jewish leadership it is not indicative of a critique on ostracizing purity regulations (as Vledder intimates), but as a reprimand to the social inequalities perpetuated by the leadership's complicity with Roman domination.

The second level of conflict Vledder identifies is between Jesus and the demons/demoniacs. According to Vledder, the demoniacs, though ostracized from the larger society, "were in *charge* of the area in which they lived. They had some interest in keeping the status quo."<sup>16</sup> The conflict is ended by Jesus' superior power over the demons when he casts them into the herd of swine.

Vledder's third and fourth levels of conflict are related. The third is between Jesus and the swine herders. Vledder emphasizes the economic impact of Jesus' action on the herders and how the death of the swine upsets the economic status quo. Similarly, in the fourth level of conflict, the city-dwellers have economic reasons to dismiss Jesus. According to Vledder, the city-dwellers lost a source of income (through taxes) with the destruction of the herders' swine. "Jesus, in taking up the interests of the expendables, (the demoniacs), threatens the vested interest of the pagan city."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Vledder, *Conflict in the Miracle Stories*, 196.

<sup>17</sup> Vledder, *Conflict in the Miracle Stories*, 198.

Throughout all of this conflict, Vledder sees implications for discipleship as the disciples are constantly asked to “identify with the interests of the underprivileged anew.”<sup>18</sup> However, Vledder’s emphasis on conflict and its implications for discipleship does not consider the social stressors of the demoniacs—though he does address the economic stressor of the herders and the city-dwellers—nor the way those stressors factor into a fuller reading of the characters in this passage.

### **Empire Studies**

Warren Carter reads this scene as akin to a political satire or cartoon. In his reading, Carter highlights the vulnerability and marginality of the two possessed men who “live physically on the margins, away from households, which defined gender and social roles, and economic and political involvement.”<sup>19</sup> These men were hostile and confrontational, intending to maintain their isolation. Carter reads the demons’ questions as an acknowledgement of Jesus as God’s agent and eschatological judge. Their request to be sent into the herd of swine—symbols of Roman commercial, religious, and military power—which subsequently drowns in the nearby water, is interpreted as God taking down Rome, an agent of the devil. After the destruction of the swine, Carter observes that no more attention is paid to the two exorcised men, but “focus falls on the disruptive impact of Jesus’ actions” which “destroyed a source of livelihood, wiped out animals used for various religious practices, and violated a mascot which represents political/imperial claims.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Vledder, *Conflict in the Miracle Stories*, 198.

<sup>19</sup> Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 212.

<sup>20</sup> Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 213.

In an earlier section of his commentary (4:23–24), Carter notes connections between demon possession and colonial oppression: “[Possession] can be a way of coping with and/or a form of protest against harsh (crazy) circumstances, a refusal to accept and adjust to economic, social, religious, and personal demands.”<sup>21</sup> Carter’s reading, then, indirectly asks the question that is so often overlooked by interpreters of this scene: in what sort of environment does demon possession emerge? Carter’s questioning opens up the characters of the demon-possessed men for my analysis of possession symptomatology in an environment of social stressors.

### **Disability Studies**

Interestingly, biblical scholars working in the area of Disability Studies have not taken up this passage. The longer and more detailed Marcan version of the narrative typically receives attention instead.<sup>22</sup> This study addresses this lacuna by focusing on the portrayal of the demon-possessed men in the Matthean version and considering what types of stressors exist in an environment where symptoms of demon possession emerge.

### **Conclusions**

Overall, attention to the stressful environment(s) in which demon possession arises has been lacking from previous scholarship. Christological and eschatological themes around Jesus’ power (Held, Davies and Allison, Malina and Rohrbaugh) as well as implications for discipleship (Vledder) predominate. In these readings, the possessed men serve as conduits for demons so that Jesus’ power can be displayed. This Jesus-centric

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<sup>21</sup> Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 126.

<sup>22</sup> Holly Joan Toensing, “‘Living Among the Tombs’: Society, Mental Illness, and Self-Destruction in Mark 5:1–20,” in *This Abled Body: Rethinking Disabilities in Biblical Studies*, ed. Hector Avalos, Sarah Melcher, and Jeremy Schipper (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 131–43; Moss, “Mark and Matthew,” 287–88.

approach, which has its merits, tends to obscure the characters of the men and the real life situations that their characterizations reflect. *Empire Studies* (Carter) begins to take seriously the plight of the demon-possessed though it stops short of asking how the social stressors of an environment intersect with the manifestation of possession in this scene. In what follows, I review the symptoms of possession as commonly understood and review two models for making sense of those symptoms: the medical model (imbalance) and the popular model (invasion). Then, highlighting social stressors, I posit that the invasion model of demon possession has certain resonances with the experience of invasive military forces in the region. Throughout I argue that Matthew's story reflects and resonates with the stressed experience of the Matthean audience in Palestine and Syria during and after the war of 66–70 CE.

### **Symptoms of Demon Possession**

The New Testament includes several accounts of people who are possessed by a demon or multiple demons (e.g. Mark 9:14–29; Matt 9:32–32; Luke 11:14–23; Acts 16:18). Paul W. Hollenbach helpfully delineates the criteria for identifying demoniacs in first-century Palestine. The most important criterion is a radically divided self, by which Hollenbach means “the demons possessing a person are seen to be both separate from the person and yet the self of the person as well.”<sup>23</sup> The second criterion is “strange and bizarre behavior which was often destructive either to oneself or others.”<sup>24</sup> These behaviors could range from the violent behaviors demonstrated by the demoniac in the Marcan parallel of this Matthean story (Mark 5:1–20) to the strange diet held by John the

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<sup>23</sup> Paul W. Hollenbach, “Jesus, Demoniacs, and Public Authorities: A Socio-Historical Study,” *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 49.4 (1981): 570.

<sup>24</sup> Hollenbach, “Jesus, Demoniacs, and Public Authorities,” 570.

Baptist (Matt 11:18). Other criteria could include impairments such as loss of speech (Matt 9:32; Mark 9:17; Luke 11:14), sight (Matt 12:22), or hearing (Mark 9:25).<sup>25</sup> Anna Rebecca Solevåg notes that there are temporal variations present in the Synoptics; the Gerasene demoniac of Mark 5:1–20 is said to be continually afflicted while the demon-possessed boy of Matt 17:14–21 and Mark 9:18–22 appears to have only temporary fits.<sup>26</sup>

Some of these accounts are included in summary statements about Jesus' power. Though these summaries do not provide lists of symptoms, other items in the summaries can, at least, exclude certain types of symptoms from consideration. For example, in Matthew there are three summary-type statements of Jesus' activity among his people. Matthew 4:23–24 states, "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, moon-struck, and paralytics, and he cured them." It is notable that demon possession is differentiated from sickness and those who are "moon-struck." Compare this to Matthew 17:14–20 where a father comes to Jesus on behalf of his moon-struck child. In this story Jesus cures the symptoms ("he often falls into the fire and often into the water") by casting out a demon that was causing them. Thus, in one instance Matthew associates demon possession with being "moon-struck" and in another differentiates them. As Solevåg points out, "[s]ome but not all of these descriptions involve some sort of erratic or violent behavior and out-of-place speech. This means that to cross the boundaries of socially accepted

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<sup>25</sup> Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs, and Public Authorities," 571.

<sup>26</sup> Anna Rebecca Solevåg, *Negotiating the Disabled Body: Representations of Disability in Early Christian Texts*, Early Christianity and Its Literature (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018), 101.

behavior could [in some people's view] categorize a person as demon-possessed, but the category is not exhausted by this factor."<sup>27</sup>

The term "moon-struck" (σεληνιαζομαι) is often translated as epilepsy in English bibles, which obscures for modern audiences how ancient audiences understood the condition. While Matthew's Gospel is nearly unique in the use of this term (astrologer Vettius Valens from the second century CE is the only other to use the term in extant sources)<sup>28</sup>, it "reflects an understanding of the harmful effects of the moon."<sup>29</sup> A handful of passages from the Hebrew Bible reflect this belief (Ps 121:6; Deut 4:19; 17:3) and a number of Greek Magical Papyri invoke the moon/goddess Selene to harm people (PGM 4.2241–58, 2622–2707, 2785–90). A medical treatise of the Hippocratic corpus named *On the Sacred Disease* argues that the symptoms of sudden seizures, rigid limbs, and frothing around the mouth (what many modern interpreters understand to be epilepsy) have "become known as sacred only because people do not understand its causes and have thus thought [they] must come from the gods."<sup>30</sup> All of this indicates that there was a popular notion that the moon goddess Selene could inflict illness upon humans and that the author of Matthew, at least in 17:14–20, either associates Selene with demons or extends Selene's power to be available to malevolent spirits. Thus Jesus' engagement in healing activities with the "moon-struck" is understood to be part of a cosmic conflict. Interestingly, "Malalas (*Chron.* 260–61) claims that Vespasian set up Cherubim and Seraphim from the destroyed Jerusalem temple outside Antioch and a statue of four bulls in honor of Selene. He honored

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<sup>27</sup> Solevåg, *Negotiating the Disabled Body*, 101.

<sup>28</sup> J.M. Ross, "Epileptic or Moonstruck?," *Bible Translator* 29 (1978): 126.

<sup>29</sup> Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 126.

<sup>30</sup> Solevåg, *Negotiating the Disabled Body*, 98.

Selene because moonlight aided the capture of Jerusalem.”<sup>31</sup> Carter argues, “Jesus’ healing of epileptics, or ‘moonstruck’ people, demonstrates God’s control over the moon (Gen 1:14–19) in defiance of Rome’s claims.”<sup>32</sup>

*The Testament of Solomon* offers further insight into the popular imagination around demonology. The text, which scholars date to sometime in the first to third centuries CE, suggests that some ancient folk assumed demons could cause every negative event in a person’s life. The testament is “a haggadic-type folktale about Solomon’s building the Temple of Jerusalem combined with ancient lore about magic, astrology, angelology, demonology, and primitive medicine.”<sup>33</sup> In it, Solomon summons several demons, through the power of a magic seal ring given to him by the archangel Michael, in order to interrogate them on their names, activities, locations, and which angel(s) is able to overcome them. Each demon is then subdued and assigned a task in the construction of the Temple. The testament serves as a sort of catalog of demonic activity. Three demons are of particular relevance.<sup>34</sup> First, Beelzeboul tells Solomon, “I bring destruction by means of tyrants; I cause the demons to be worshiped alongside men; and I arouse desire in holy men and appoint priests. I bring about jealousy and murders in a country, and I instigate wars” (T. Sol. 6:4). This demon, therefore, is understood to be behind various socio-

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<sup>31</sup> Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 127.

<sup>32</sup> Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 127.

<sup>33</sup> D. C. Duling, “Testament of Solomon,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Apocalyptic Literature & Testaments*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, vol. 1 of (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1983), 935.

<sup>34</sup> A third demon in T. Sol. is clearly influenced by the biblical story. Solomon interrogates a lion-shaped demon who says, “I involve the legions of demons subject to me for I am at the places (where they are) when the sun is setting. The name for all demons which are under me is legion” (11:3). When Solomon asks the demon what can thwart him, he replies, “By the name of the one who at one time submitted to suffer many things (at the hands) of men, who name is Emmanouel, but now he has bound us and will come to torture us (by driving us) into the water at the cliff” (11:5).

political disruptions. Second, Solomon confronts a demon that takes the form a woman with disheveled hair. This demon claims that her tasks include destroying minds and making bodies feel pain (T. Sol. 13:4). Third, the demon Rynx claims to “make off with minds and alter hearts” (T. Sol. 18:30). While I do not imply that this text was known by the author of Matthew, this text suggests that the belief that demons were pervasive and actively looking for ways to negatively influence peoples’ lives was common, at least among early Jesus followers.

Solevåg also highlights that there was a competing illness paradigm in the ancient world to the popular notion of possession/invasion. This second paradigm was connected to the professional medical tradition. “The medical writers agreed that the causes of madness were to be found in the body, and they developed various theories of mental illness based on the humoral theory and the Hippocratic notion of balance.”<sup>35</sup> In both models, the symptoms were similar. Hippocrates (*De Morbro Sacro* 1) and Lucretius (*De Rerum Natura* 3:487–494) both argued against (what modern’s understand to be) epileptic seizures as being caused by the gods, having instead a physical cause.<sup>36</sup> Aretaeus of Cappadocia lists anger, tearing of one’s own clothing, and violence against others as possible symptoms of mania.<sup>37</sup> Important for this discussion is the fact that, in the ancient world, these symptoms were noted, attributed to demons or disease, and categorized as deviant. What is rarely noted, though sometimes alluded to, is the environment in which such symptoms deemed to be demon possession might emerge. In what follows, I use the

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<sup>35</sup> Solevåg, *Negotiating the Disabled Body*, 97.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Grant, “Views of Mental Illness among Greeks, Romans, and Christians,” in *The New Testament and Early Christian Literature in Greco-Roman Context* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 2006), 369–71.

<sup>37</sup> Grant, “Views of Mental Illness,” 379.

invasion model for suggesting that the invasion of colonizing forces in the land are reflected in the invasion of demonic spirits in the body. The following investigates what stressors existed in the Roman Empire that contributed to an environment of possession/mania and how possession/mania may be understood in relation to those stressors.

### **Social Stressors and Possession**

Hollenbach argues for a link between possession symptomatology and social unrest, writing, “situations of social tension such as the following are often indicated as the causal context of possession: class antagonisms rooted in economic exploitation, conflicts between traditions where revered traditions are eroded, colonial domination and revolution...”<sup>38</sup> Richard Horsley also argues that societal factors contribute to possession symptomatology and utilizes research done among African people groups to demonstrate the link.<sup>39</sup>

Anthropologists and ethnographers have studied “spirit possession and other illnesses among African peoples” and found “that influences of and invasions by outside peoples and colonial powers were of central importance.”<sup>40</sup> Horsley has helpfully compiled many of these examples. Groups such as the Shona in what is now Zimbabwe, the Swahili, and the Zar cult of the Sudanese each had pre-existing spirit/spirit-possession cults. In these groups, new spirits were introduced when colonizing forces entered their culture. The Shona became possessed by the *shave* and assumed characteristics of foreigners (e.g.

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<sup>38</sup> Hollenbach, “Jesus, Demoniacs, and Public Authorities,” 573.

<sup>39</sup> Richard A Horsley, *Jesus and the Politics of Roman Palestine* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2013), 87–90.

<sup>40</sup> Horsley, *Jesus and the Politics of Roman Palestine*, 87.

meticulous cleanliness, eating European foods). The Swahili experienced possession by the spirit of Jesus as an alternative to conversion.

Other groups, such as the Tonga and Zulu peoples did not have preexisting possession cults. “The Tonga along the Zambezi River were invaded by spirits with names such as *maregimenti* and *mapolis* (clearly representations of military regiments and the police) at the height of the invasion of the colonial state.”<sup>41</sup> The Zulu peoples also internalized the sudden impact of European colonization: “Spirit hosts would rage uncontrollably, run back and forth in a daze, tear clothes off their bodies, or attempt to kill themselves.”<sup>42</sup> What these studies suggest is “that illness and particularly spirit possession have everything to do with the invasion of alien forces, particularly colonial conquests and domination. Possession by and exorcism of spirits is important in the ways subordinated peoples deal with the invasive effects that outside forces far beyond their own comprehension, let alone control, have on their lives.”<sup>43</sup> Further, these studies suggest that the political context of the Palestinian region, particularly its experience with colonizing powers, is an important factor in understanding the introduction and development of the belief in demon possession in Judaism and early Christianity.

Though technically a period of “peace,” social tensions during the first century were high. In a post-70 context of Antioch, many residents and early Jesus followers remembered the trauma of the recent Jewish war against Rome and/or were living with its consequences: the devastation of home/homeland and attendant forced migration, destruction of the cultic/cultural center of one’s people (the Temple), food insecurity,

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<sup>41</sup> Horsley, *Jesus and the Politics of Roman Palestine*, 89.

<sup>42</sup> Horsley, *Jesus and the Politics of Roman Palestine*, 89.

<sup>43</sup> Horsley, *Jesus and the Politics of Roman Palestine*, 90.

excessive taxation, a pervasive military presence, and hostile social interactions with local populations.

Elie Karam, psychiatrist, and Michela Bou Ghosn, PhD candidate in Social Work, have argued that “war stressors occur not only during the actual unfolding of a specific war, but continue to emerge long after war is over.”<sup>44</sup> They provide a generalized list of war stressors that civilians frequently encounter. During the acute phase of the war (i.e. during the actual combat timeframe), civilians may encounter specific military threats (e.g. genocide, torture), sexual assault, loss of property, and/or the lack of food, water, or shelter. Following the acute phase, civilians are often burdened by the loss of jobs, resettlement or exile, family disruptions, continuous reminders of the war, and threats of future violence.<sup>45</sup> In the following review of the military conquests and re-conquests of Judea and Syria, these stressors become apparent as significant elements in the environment in which demon possession emerges and thrives. Further, the residual effects of the military conflicts for the region are reflected in the Matthean scene of the two Gadarene men possessed by demons.

### **Roots of Demonology in Judaism**

Examining the rise of demonology in Jewish history can highlight the connection between military invasion and possession symptomatology. During the third century BCE, when demonology took hold in Judaism, Judea was at the center of a conflict of clashing monarchs. This section provides a brief sketch of the social unrest that was present as

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<sup>44</sup> Elie Karam and Michela Bou Ghosn, “The Psychosocial Consequences of War among Civilian Populations,” *Current Opinion in Psychiatry* 16.4 (2003): 414. I will return to these stressors subsequently in order to outline the way that military invasion stressed the communities of Gadara, Jerusalem, and Antioch.

<sup>45</sup> Karam and Ghosn, “Psychosocial Consequences,” 414.

control of Judea was passed, through conflict and violence, from Alexander the Great through to the Romans. It is within these contexts of colonial violence that demonology develops within Judaism. I briefly sketch several centuries of war, then note the emergence of demons in this context.

After the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE, “Alexander’s great holdings soon were disputed among powerful rivals, important officers in his army.”<sup>46</sup> Of these rivals, Ptolemy and Seleucus, and their successors, remained in conflict over the regions of Judea and southern Syria for just over a hundred years. This series of conflicts is known as the Syrian Wars. Anatheia Portier-Young notes “the stressors of colonial rule are manifold, and were certainly felt by Judeans in this period,” namely the lack of political autonomy, conquest, taxation, and slavery.”<sup>47</sup> These conflicts sparked centuries of forced subjugation of the Judeans and created an atmosphere of systemic ecological stress, namely stressors that occur at any level of a social unit (family, school, work, neighborhood, city, etc.) and specifically effect those within that social unit (see below). Further, the residents of Palestine suffered the ancillary violence of warring powers, a chronic stressor over which they had no control. The consistent presence of military troops in their land would have been a strain on local infrastructure and food supplies. Josephus describes the suffering inflicted during the final Syrian war as being “in no way different from a storm-tossed ship which is beset on either side by heavy seas, [the Jews] finding themselves crushed between the successes of Antiochus and the adverse turn of his fortunes” (*Ant.* 12:130 [Thackeray,

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<sup>46</sup> James C. Vanderkam, *An Introduction to Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 11.

<sup>47</sup> Anatheia Portier-Young, *Apocalypse against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 63.

LCL]). This description intimates the stress of the helplessness experienced by the Jews and the uncertainty that comes with living in a war-torn region.

Under the reign of Antiochus IV (175–164 BCE), imperial violence increased as it was targeted directly at the Judeans. In sum, Antiochus replaced the high priest Onias III with Jason, his brother (2 Macc 4:7b–10); “the highest ranking official in Judaism thus became a direct appointee of the foreign overlord.”<sup>48</sup> The purpose of this was to provide larger payments from Jerusalem to Antiochus and to Hellenize the region. Richard Horsley calls the violence visited by Antiochus as unprecedented. Antiochus looted the Temple (1 Macc 1:21–24a), attacked Jerusalem and its inhabitants and established it as a Seleucid citadel (1:29–40), forced Jews to abandon their ancestral customs and rituals (1 Macc 1:41–50), and desecrated the Temple by allowing prostitution and unfit animal sacrifices to occur (2 Macc 6:3–7). Antiochus enforced his plan to assimilate the Jews violently. In 1 Macc 1:50–57 it reads:

[Antiochus IV] added, “And whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die.” In such words he wrote to his whole kingdom. He appointed inspectors over all the people and commanded the towns of Judah to offer sacrifice, town by town. Many of the people, everyone who forsook the law, joined them, and they did evil in the land; they drove Israel into hiding in every place of refuge they had. Now on the fifteenth day of Chislev, in the one hundred forty-fifth year, they erected a desolating sacrilege on the altar of burnt offering. They also built altars in the surrounding towns of Judah, and offered incense at the doors of the houses and in the streets. The books of the law that they found they tore to pieces and burned with fire. Anyone found possessing the book of the covenant, or anyone who adhered to the law, was condemned to death by decree of the king.

Under Antiochus, imperial violence was compounded because it took a variety of methods, intended not only to forcibly subjugate and intimidate, but to eradicate the Jewish cultural traditions and customs. Leo Perdue refers to this type of imperial action as the

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<sup>48</sup> Vanderkam, *Introduction*, 18.

colonization of the mind, wherein “empires attempt to control the diverse reality over which they rule. The desire is to inculcate among the colonials values conducive to the interests of the metropole and the importance of mimicking their civilization.”<sup>49</sup> The collective cultural trauma and the stress of that trauma on the people of the region caused by the colonization of their minds should not be underestimated.

Antiochus’ attempts to force assimilation resulted in several responses ranging from support to revolt.<sup>50</sup> The revolt led by the Hasmonean family was one that Antiochus, even with his imperial forces, could not defeat. The Hasmoneans, mimicking the imperial oppressors they had resisted, established themselves as leaders of Judea, expanding their domain to include Idumea, Samaria, and Galilee. While living in an era of self-governance, “the expansionist wars of the Hasmonean rulers, however, led to a series of wars between rival factions of the dynasty that entailed repeated destruction and forcible appropriation of the people’s resources.”<sup>51</sup> It was in the midst of such conflict among rival factions that the Roman Pompey Magnus established Roman dominion by conquering Jerusalem and claiming Judea. Beginning in 63 BCE, Rome became the reigning, oppressive, stress-inducing power over Judea for centuries to come.

Pompey was able to realize Rome’s territorial expansion into Judea because of a dispute between prospective rulers. After the Hasmonean Queen Salome Alexandra died in 67 BCE, her two sons, Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II, became entangled in a power struggle for succession to the throne. Both brothers invited Pompey to intervene, and Pompey took advantage of the invitation to secure Judea for Rome. Josephus writes:

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<sup>49</sup> Leo Perdue and Warren Carter, *Israel and Empire: A Postcolonial History of Israel and Early Judaism*, ed. Coleman Baker (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 30.

<sup>50</sup> See 1 Macc 1:10– 5 (cooperation), 1:60–63 (defiance); 2 Macc 7 (martyrdom).

<sup>51</sup> Horsley, *Jesus and the Politics of Roman Palestine*, 57.

For this misfortune which befell Jerusalem Hyrcanus and Aristobulus were responsible, because of their dissension. For we lost our freedom and became subject to the Romans, and the territory which we had gained by our arms and taken from the Syrians we were compelled to give back to them. (*Ant.* 14.77 [Thackeray, LCL])

Even Josephus, a client of Vespasian benefitting from the empire, can lament the loss of independence that came with Roman domination. Though Richard Horsley argues that “the effects of the initial Roman conquest led by Pompey in 63 BCE were nowhere near as severe for the Galilean and Judean countryside as were those of later reconquests,”<sup>52</sup> Josephus reports that 12,000 Jews died in the fighting while the numbers of dead among the Romans were trifling (*J.W.* 1.150). Even assuming that Josephus inflates his numbers, his emphasis on the severity of the siege underscores the cultural trauma that occurred because of Roman military presence.

Of special importance to the Jewish people was the Temple, and defilement of the Temple by Pompey’s entrance into it was one expression of Roman military might. Josephus laments Pompey’s act and goes so far as to describe it this way, “Of all the calamities of that time none so deeply affected the nation as the exposure to alien eyes the Holy Place, hitherto screened from view” (*J.W.* 1.151 [Thackeray, LCL]). For Josephus, Pompey’s action was a considerable psychological stressor on the Jewish people, exceeding even the terror of physical violence. Support for the notion that violations of the Temple result in psychological stress can be found in the scribal attempt to remove the eagles that Herod had established over the great gate of the Temple (*J.W.* 1.648–50). These scribes viewed Herod’s act as defiance of their ancestral laws and, since the eagle is a symbol of the

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<sup>52</sup> Horsley, *Jesus and the Politics of Roman Palestine*, 59.

Roman Empire, as a symbol of “Judea/Israel’s submission and Herod’s loyalty to Rome.”<sup>53</sup>

The two scribes told their accomplices “even if the action proved hazardous, it was a noble deed to die for the law of one’s country” (*J.W.* 1.650 [Thackeray, LCL]). Herod had them burned alive for their actions along with executing forty others who had been arrested (*J.W.* 1.648–55). These scribes found the introduction of the eagles on the Temple so stressful that they were willing to sacrifice their lives to have it removed.<sup>54</sup>

Horsley summarizes “The politics of Roman Palestine was set up and maintained by imperial violence. In Galilee during the century before the mission of Jesus, the people suffered repeated conquest, with the slaughter of people and the destruction of villages leaving collective trauma in their wake.”<sup>55</sup> The transitions of power from Alexander the Great through to the Roman Empire reflect an environment of chronic violent domination and exploitation of the people of Judea in which in which demonology was notably pronounced within Judaism and in which symptoms of demon possession manifested.

During the tumultuous periods under the Ptolemy, Seleucid, and Hasmonean rules, “Judean literature portrays a wide array of both benign and malign heavenly forces or spirits.”<sup>56</sup> These types of divine beings did not have a prominent role in Israelite tradition

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<sup>53</sup> Perdue and Carter, *Israel and Empire*, 236.

<sup>54</sup> Horsley, *Jesus and the Politics of Roman Palestine*, 64. Another example is the resistance mounted by the Galilean peasantry when Gaius Caligula attempted to have his image set up in the Temple. The villagers went on strike, as it were, refusing to plant their fields. Petronius, Gaius’s envoy, was inclined to defy his emperor because of the peasant resistance, but Gaius’s sudden death prevented further escalation and the Temple went undefiled. Horsley notes, “this action...manifests a remarkable collective discipline supporting nonviolent resistance in the face of the Roman military, which was poised to slaughter them, as well as the risk of mass starvation.” As with the scribes above, the stress of Temple defilement was so great that it provoked a “fight” response in the local peasantry.

<sup>55</sup> Horsley, *Jesus and the Politics of Roman Palestine*, 54.

<sup>56</sup> Horsley, *Jesus and the Politics of Roman Palestine*, 92.

prior to the third century BCE. The Book of Watchers in 1 Enoch 1–36 is an example of how the scribal circles worked “to come to grips with the invasive wars between the Ptolemaic and Seleucid empires that raged through Palestine.”<sup>57</sup> The Book of Watchers tells the myth of the “sons of heaven” descending to earth to conceive giants with the “daughters of men.” These giant offspring eventually died, but their spirits became perpetrators of the type of violence typical of the Ptolemies and Seleucids:

They were devouring the labor of all the sons of men and were not able to supply them. And the giants conspired to kill men and to devour them. ...Asael taught men to make swords of iron and weapons and shields and breastplates and every instrument of war. ... He showed them metals of the earth and how they should work gold to fashion it suitably, and concerning silver, to fashion it for bracelets and ornaments for women. (1 Enoch 7:3; 8:1–2)

Though the book pays less attention to the good angels, there are several named who are able to stop the evil spirits and punish them. Key to my argument is that the “‘sons of God’ in the prophetic books were a vague set of spirits in YHWH’s heavenly court,” but by the time of the Hellenistic imperial powers, “they generate a host of additional shadowy spirits or demons that haunt historical affairs.”<sup>58</sup>

In addition to 1 Enoch 1–36, the development of a concept of the devil also takes hold. “Terms such as *beliar* and *beliel*, implying general wickedness, become personified to the point that a demonic figure called Beliel is frequent in the Qumran scrolls.”<sup>59</sup> The book of Tobit tells of a demon named Asmodaeus who is killing the husbands of the character Sarah on their wedding nights (3:7–9). Raphael, a good angel, teaches Tobias how to thwart Asmodaeus (8:1–3). The Community Rule and the War Rule from Qumran both

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<sup>57</sup> Horsley, *Jesus and the Politics of Roman Palestine*, 93.

<sup>58</sup> Horsley, *Jesus and the Politics of Roman Palestine*, 94.

<sup>59</sup> Lester Grabbe, *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period*, vol. 2 of *Library of Second Temple Studies* 68 (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 257.

develop a large scheme model of opposed spirits, attempting to “explain how the God of Israel could still be ultimately in control of history, while at present foreign empires dominated their lives...”<sup>60</sup> As discussed above, the *Testament of Solomon* delineates a full blown demonology with a wide range of life’s experiences, from stomach aches to murder, being caused by demonic intervention. The destabilization to life and culture brought on by the violent struggle for the Judean land by foreign imperial powers put the Israelites in a position to make sense of their situation. The development of demonology during this period is one way that sense was made of the stressful experience of military invasion and violence. This can be seen in the *Testament of Solomon*, which attributes socio-political destabilization, such as destruction caused by tyrants and wars, to the direct influence of demons.<sup>61</sup> As these myths of evil spirits developed, they influenced popular imagination even as popular imagination contributed to the development of the traditions.

### **Social Tension in the First Century**

Social tensions under Roman colonial rule were not much better in the latter part of the first-century in Palestine and Syria than they were previously. At the time of Matthew’s writing, the Jewish war of 66–70 is over, with Rome victorious, but the memory of the fighting and the stressful effects of the violence are still present, including with those who fled north to a city such as Antioch. So how might Matthew’s story of the exorcised demoniacs in Gadara resonate with a post-70 Antiochene audience? I read this scene as a commentary from a post-70 perspective on the stressful experiences of military invasion and its aftermath. This story assumes an invasion model of possession symptoms and

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<sup>60</sup> Horsley, *Jesus and the Politics of Roman Palestine*, 94.

<sup>61</sup> *T. Sol.* 6:4 “I bring destruction by means of tyrants; I cause the demons to be worshiped alongside men; and I arouse desire in holy men and appoint priests. I bring about jealousy and murders in a country, and I instigate wars.”

incorporates experiences of colonial invasion into understandings of possession whereby colonized bodies are shown to bear the stressful burden of military invasion and conquest.

### ***Gadara as Symbolic of Imperial Invasion***

The story begins with Jesus arriving in the country of the Gadarenes. He and his disciples have just crossed the Sea of Galilee, going from Capernaum to Gadara. Upon arriving in Gadara, two demon-possessed men “coming out of the tombs” approach Jesus (8:28). I suggest that this location, a change from Matthew’s source material (Mark 5:1–20), is most important for reading this scene. While it has been argued that this location change, from Gerasa to Gadara, was due to Matthew “cleaning up” Mark’s sloppy geography,<sup>62</sup> I suggest that locating this story in Gadara foregrounds a site of colonial and military invasion and so prepares for a presentation of the stressful and destructive impact of Rome’s military force on colonized bodies.

Josephus recounts in *J.W.* 3.522–42 that Vespasian engaged in a naval battle with Jewish rebels, explicitly including Gadarenes, during the war on the Sea of Galilee. Vespasian’s troops outnumbered the Jewish combatants and his watercraft was superior to that of the Jews. Josephus claims that the Jews were afraid to approach the Romans, and, if any did attempt to do so, they caused no damage to the Romans but lost their own lives in their attempts. Josephus describes the carnage of the battle this way:

One could see the whole lake red with blood and covered with corpses, for not a man escaped. During the following days the district reeked with a dreadful stench and presented a spectacle equally horrible. The beaches were strewn with wrecks and swollen carcasses: these corpses, scorched and clammy in decay, so polluted the atmosphere that the catastrophe which plunged the Jews in mourning inspired even

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<sup>62</sup> W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, vol. 2 of *The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 79; Boring, “Matthew,” 231; Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 24.

its authors with disgust. Such was the issue of this naval engagement. (*J.W.* 3.530 [Thackeray, LCL])

According to Josephus, this battle ultimately resulted in 6,700 killed during battle, 1,200 executed, 6,000 forced into servitude in the building of Nero's canal, and 30,400 sold into slavery or gifted to Agrippa (who then sold them into slavery). "The remainder of this mob," Josephus says, "consisted, for the most part, of people from Trachonitis, Gaulanitis, Hippos, and Gadara, a crowd of seditious individuals and fugitives, to whom their infamous careers in peace-time gave war its attraction" (*J.W.* 3.542 [Thackeray, LCL]). This bloody naval battle demonstrated Roman military power in the region around the Sea of Galilee, including Gadara, and communicated that Rome brings "peace" only through violent intimidation and subjugation or willful assimilation. Its stress-filled impact for inhabitants of Gadara included not only the deaths of loved ones but also the terror of Roman military power.

Later, Vespasian invaded Gadara in preparation for invading Jerusalem, as it was the final stronghold of some rebels (*J.W.* 4.410–19). Gadara was a town divided. Vespasian had struck a deal with an embassy from the city: the city would yield to Rome if Rome would deal with the rebels within the city, indicating a division within the city of those who were pro-Roman and those who were anti-Roman. The rebels realized that they were outnumbered and that the Roman military was approaching so they decided to flee. But first they killed Dolesus, a man from a leading family in the city who was regarded as the originator of the embassy and thus an ally of Rome. Vespasian ordered Placidus, along with 500 soldiers on horseback and 3,000 foot soldiers, to pursue the fleeing Gadarene rebels. In the city of Bethennabris, Placidus and his troops violently defeated the Gadarene rebels

(*J.W.* 4.420–25). The violence in these scenes associates Gadara with military invasion and subjugation at the hands of Roman troops.

Additionally, Gadara had a long history of subjugation before the war of 66–70. Josephus recounts the numerous times the city was contested by and subjugated to different rulers. In *J.W.* 1.86–87 and *Ant.* 13.356, Josephus recounts a ten-month battle for control of the city between Alexander Jannaeus and Theodorus, son of Zeno. The siege of the city resulted in the deaths of 10,000 Jews. As is typical for military invasions, those surviving the conflict suffered from loss of property, the rape of local women, and further food insecurity. Pompey later rebuilt Gadara (*Ant.* 14.75). The city is subsequently annexed by Caesar to Herod (*J.W.* 1.396, *Ant.* 15.217) and, after Herod's death, it is annexed as part of Syria (*J.W.* 2.97, *Ant.* 17.320).<sup>63</sup>

The Gadarenes raised charges of excessive cruelty against Herod. Augustus intervened, acquitting Herod of guilt. Josephus writes,

Speeches about these matters were made on the first day, but the inquiry did not proceed farther on the following days, for the Gadarenes saw to which side both Caesar himself and his council were inclined, and since they expected, as they had reason to do, to be turned over to the king, they were afraid of being maltreated, and so some of them cut their own throats during the night, while others threw themselves down from high places or willfully destroyed themselves by jumping into the river. This was regarded as (self-) condemnation of their rashness and guilt, and consequently Caesar, without any delay, acquitted Herod of the charges made against him. (*Ant.* 15.358–59 [Thackeray, LCL])

This passage suggests that Herod's tyrannical rule of the region was so extreme that the residents would rather end their own lives than be subject to whatever punishment Herod and/or Augustus would come up with in retaliation for their accusations. It also reveals

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<sup>63</sup> A rare moment of Gadarene independence is described in *Ant.* 14.91.

how the powerful in a situation willfully interpret peasant actions in ways that most legitimate their rule.

The weight of these passages indicates Gadara to be a city well associated with imperial invasion, control, and negotiation. The suffering of the stress of military violence in Gadara resonates with the similar experience of war trauma that many in and around Antioch experienced during and after the Jewish War. I use Karam and Ghosn's discussion of war stressors<sup>64</sup> to consider the ways in which the Jewish War and its aftermath may have affected those living in and around, or who migrated to, Antioch. I also note how those stressors can be categorized within Wheaton's classification. As outlined in chapter three, Wheaton's five categories of experiences of stress are:

1. Daily hassles: concerned with the demands of everyday life in one's environment to "episodic, irregular, microevents that cannot be anticipated daily."<sup>65</sup> These daily hassles are generally not stressful to the point of challenging the integrity of the organism, per the definition above, though some could be. For instance, someone working in a hostile work environment may find that daily hassle to be chronically and detrimentally stressful.
2. Nonevents: when an expected or desired event does not come to pass. The important qualifier for a nonevent is the possibility that change could have happened or the lack of the possibility of change.<sup>66</sup>
3. Traumas: generally understood as being extremely serious and extremely overwhelming. Traumas are isolated events.
4. Chronic traumatic situation: ongoing trauma. The distinction between this category and category 3 has to do with the number of times the event occurs rather than the duration of the effects of the event. "For example, a single rape would be considered a traumatic event, but repeated, regular, and therefore expected sexual abuse is best thought of as a chronic traumatic *situation*."<sup>67</sup> Traumas can include a range of severe situations including war stress, natural

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<sup>64</sup> Karam and Ghosn, "Psychosocial Consequences." These stressors include specific military threats (e.g. genocide, torture), sexual assault, loss of property, and/or the lack of food, water, or shelter, the loss of jobs, resettlement or exile, family disruptions, continuous reminders of the war, and threats of future violence.

<sup>65</sup> Wheaton, "Social Stress," 284.

<sup>66</sup> Wheaton, "Social Stress," 285.

<sup>67</sup> Wheaton, "Social Stress," 285.

disasters, sexual abuse and assault, physical violence, and parental death or divorce.<sup>68</sup>

5. Ecological stressors: occur at any level of a social unit (family, school, work, neighborhood, city, etc.) and specifically affect those within that social unit.<sup>69</sup> Events like natural disasters and chronic stressors like crime or war fall under this category.

As with most classificatory tools, these categories include significant overlap and many stressors can be categorized in more than one way.

#### *Stressors during acute stage of the war*

Karam and Ghosn begin with stressors present during the “acute” phase of the war, that is during the war proper. The first stressor on their list is specific military threats, such as genocide or torture. This stressor highlights the ways that military violence is targeted at people (different from the stress of non-violent military presence). Rome was an agrarian empire and as such it grew through military conquest and forced subjugation of conquered peoples. The military was a necessary component of maintaining Rome’s claims to power; “...the army’s reputation functioned to intimidate and repress would-be opponents.”<sup>70</sup> Lenski notes, “Where coercive power is weak, challenges inevitably occur, and the system is eventually destroyed and replaced by another based more firmly on force.”<sup>71</sup> Military force, though not the only means of controlling an empire, was a critical part of any empire’s rule.<sup>72</sup> Thus, the use of military violence to coerce colonized people, like those in Gadara, Jerusalem, or Antioch, into submission is standard in imperial

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<sup>68</sup> Wheaton, “Social Stress,” 285–86.

<sup>69</sup> Wheaton, “Social Stress,” 286.

<sup>70</sup> Warren Carter, *Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001), 12.

<sup>71</sup> Lenski, *Power and Privilege*, 51.

<sup>72</sup> Mann, *History of Power*, 25–26.

invasions. The use of physical coercion can be classified as a traumatic event, or, if ongoing, a chronic traumatic situation.

Similar stress-inducing violence is evident in the fall of Jerusalem. In 70 CE Roman troops ended the Jewish war of revolt by entering and destroying Jerusalem and the Temple. Josephus describes the final day of the war this way:

Pouring into the alleys, sword in hand, [the Romans] massacred indiscriminately all whom they met, and burnt the houses with all who had taken refuge within. Often in the course of their raids, on entering the houses for loot, they would find whole families dead and the rooms filled with victims of the famine, and then, shuddering at the sight, retire empty-handed. Yet, while they pitied those who had thus perished, they had no similar feelings for the living, but running everyone through who fell in their way, they choked the alleys with corpses and deluged the whole city with the blood, insomuch that many of the fires were extinguished by the gory stream. Towards evening they ceased slaughtering, but when the night fell the fire gained the mastery, and the dawn of the eighth day of the month Gorpiaeus broke upon Jerusalem in flames..." (*J.W.* 6.404 [Thackeray, LCL]).

After Titus emerges victorious in his defeat of Jerusalem, Josephus writes that he later had the remainder of the city and its walls razed to the ground (*J.W.* 6.413); killed any surviving rebels, the elderly, the feeble, and brigands; used the tallest and strongest for his Triumph; and sent some to work in Egypt, others to their death in the theaters while the rest were sold into slavery (*J.W.* 6.414–18). Josephus claims that 97,000 were taken captive during the entirety of the war and over a million died because of it. Even assuming inflated numbers, the stress of violent military power was significant and the cultural trauma for survivors, including for those who made it north to Antioch, undeniable, both during the war and long after. The narrative set in Gadara evokes such stressful experiences.

Karam and Ghosn discuss sexual assault as a second war stressor. This stressor is part and parcel of the military violence that defeated people could expect to encounter.

Caryn Reeder considers the uses and significance of wartime rape within Roman sources to

shed insight on the relatively few instances of wartime rape referenced in Josephus and 4 Ezra concerning the war of 66–70 CE.<sup>73</sup> Roman literary works and historiographies provide evidence that the tactic was utilized to dishonor the subjugated and to destabilize the conquered communities. For example, “Homer’s *Iliad* contains several storylines concerned with the taking of women as war-prizes and the allotment of such prizes to commanders and soldiers (1.24–31, 131–147; 2.226–228; 8.289–291).”<sup>74</sup> For Livy, rape functions as practically a synonym for the capture of a city (21.57.14). Reeder highlights that wartime rape “is pervasive in Greek and Roman epic, historiography, and propaganda, so much so that the restraint of commanders and soldiers is remarkable (e.g., Polybius 10.13.1–2; Livy 26.50.1–4).”<sup>75</sup>

Roman material culture also makes associations between war victory and rape. The Sebasteion in Aphrodisias contains several reliefs depicting Roman military victory in sexualized ways. In one relief, Claudius is depicted with his knee holding down vanquished Britannia who is depicted as a woman with disheveled hair and with one bare breast. The expression on her face is one of anguish or petitioning for mercy. Claudius holds her by her hair with one arm upraised. Though the relief is broken, his pose suggests he is holding a spear or a sword. Carter argues that “Roman power is...sexualized as sexually violent power....Claudius prepares to penetrate the defeated people [Britannia]...By penetration, the ‘Father of the Fatherland’ produces more children/subjects/slaves for his empire-wide household.”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Caryn Reeder, “Wartime Rape, the Romans, and the First Jewish Revolt,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 48.3 (2017): 363–85.

<sup>74</sup> Reeder, “Wartime Rape,” 374.

<sup>75</sup> Reeder, “Wartime Rape,” 372.

<sup>76</sup> Perdue and Carter, *Israel and Empire*, 232.

Reeder's study demonstrates that rape was a common practice by the Roman military upon conquered people groups. She summarizes her survey this way:

In comparison with narratives of sexual violation outside war, stories of wartime rape display increased violence. Women and children are seized and dragged off. Their captors strip them naked and beat them. The victims may be raped by multiple offenders, and in some stories they are raped to death. Emphasizing the horror of wartime rape, women, children, and men commit suicide and are killed by their communities in order to prevent rape or redress the shame of rape.<sup>77</sup>

Further, since enslavement of conquered peoples was a common practice for Rome, any person caught up in the slave trade would be subject to their master's sexual advances, as I demonstrated in chapter three.

Curious for Reeder is how few references to wartime rape Josephus makes in *The Jewish War*. She argues that this is part of Josephus's intention to portray the Jewish people as honorable:

Since Josephus mounts a complex argument on behalf of the fundamental masculinity of the Jews, which is to say their humanity, honor, and status, he cannot include extensive reference to wartime rape (even if it would encourage sympathy for the defeated). The (Roman) ideological understanding of rape as the reification of defeat, enslavement, and emasculation would impinge on this larger argument, and may lie behind the exclusion of instances of wartime rape from *Jewish War*—except in the one case in which the rebels are acting like men to protect their women and children from the dishonor of rape.<sup>78</sup>

Even though Josephus tends to avoid the subject, he still has several references to the practice. First, Josephus indicates that he was commanded by Vespasian to marry a captive woman (*Life* 414). Since sexual access to conquered bodies was a reward of the victor, there is little question as to the ways in which Josephus could “use” his war booty, should he so choose. Secondly, Josephus recounts a story of the final days of the war in Masada where Eleazar calls upon his audience to protect their women and children from wartime

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<sup>77</sup> Reeder, “Wartime Rape,” 369.

<sup>78</sup> Reeder, “Wartime Rape,” 385.

rape by killing them (*J.W.* 7.381–85). Finally, Josephus accuses the followers of John of Gischala of rape (*J.W.* 4.560). Though Josephus’s explicit references to wartime rape are minimal, it is safe to assume that wartime rape did occur during the Jewish War of 66–70 CE based on the common practices of the Roman military. Wartime rape can be classified in Wheaton’s terms as a trauma experienced as an isolated event during the war, as a chronic traumatic situation for women who were taken captive and sold into slavery, and as an ecological stressor since rape in this context is an act of war.

One other source that Reeder considers is the account of the impact of the 70 CE defeat in 4 Ezra 10:22. Ezra has encountered a woman who is mourning the loss of her only son. Ezra, unsympathetically, tells her that her suffering is nothing compared to the greater suffering caused by the loss of the Temple and the destruction of the city. After listing the ways that the Temple was defiled and plundered, Ezra tells her of the suffering of the people:

Our free men have suffered abuse, our priests have been burned to death, our Levites have gone into captivity, *our virgins have been defiled, and our wives have been ravished*; our righteous men have been carried off, our little ones have been cast out, our young men have been enslaved and our strong men made powerless. (Emphasis mine)

Part and parcel of the humiliating and shaming actions of the Romans against the Jewish people was the sexual violation of Jewish women. While Ezra’s lament for the sexual assault is entwined with his devastation at the loss of the Temple, “his recognition of these raped bodies is one of the factors that brings about the vision of the restored Jerusalem in the following verses.”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Reeder, “Wartime Rape,” 382.

The experience of wartime rape is a traumatic stressor and even Roman writers recognized it as such. The anguished expressions of figures such as Britannia in the Sebasteion illustrate this, as do several literary sources. Diodorus Siculus (13.58.1–2 [Oldfather, LCL]) describes the torment of Greek mothers “enduring terrible indignities, and some were obliged to see their daughters of marriageable age suffering treatment improper for their years...they became frantic with suffering and vehemently deplored their own fate.” Livy (29.17.16 [Foster, LCL]) narrates how the people of Locri include in their list of grievances against the Carthaginians that “they defile matrons, maidens and free-born boys, dragged from the embrace of parents.”<sup>80</sup> The stress and trauma of rape is essential to understanding why it is used as a weapon of war and why people will go to extreme lengths, even murder, to prevent it. Although there is little about rape reflected in Josephus’ narratives, according to Reeder, there is no reason to doubt that those in the Matthean audience in Antioch, perhaps including those who had fled north from Jerusalem, were familiar, possibly first-hand, with rape as a tactic of warfare.

Karam and Ghosn’s third and fourth war stressors are closely related. Third is the loss of property and fourth is lack of food, water, and shelter. Descriptions of the destruction of Gadara during the conflict between Alexander and Theodorus indicate that the city was destroyed and 10,000 were killed (*J.W.* 1.86–87, *Ant.* 13.356). When Vespasian seized Gadara as the final stronghold before marching on Jerusalem several Jewish rebels were executed (*J.W.* 4.410–19). Josephus does not describe with many details what occurred when Vespasian took Gadara, but the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 provides a lens for seeing how Rome’s invasive military violence caused devastating personal losses to

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<sup>80</sup> Tacitus describes the rape of Boudicca, the Icenian queen, and her daughters that served as part of the motivation for Boudicca’s revolt against Rome in 60–61 CE (*Annals* 14.31)

residents that resulted in homelessness and extreme food insecurity. Josephus's description of the final day of the war in Jerusalem indicates that Roman soldiers were looting houses and that the fire set by Roman troops destroyed homes (*J.W.* 6.404). Presumably this fire would have destroyed any remaining crops and food stores. It is also possible that the decay of human corpses may have contaminated water supplies or that the possibility of violence kept people from being able to find clean water sources.

Josephus's description of Vespasian's siege of Gadara is similar. He writes:

Vespasian's first objective was the city of Gadara, which he carried at the first assault, finding it deprived of effective combatants. Entering the city he slew all males who were of age, the Romans showing no mercy to old or young, so bitter was their hatred of the nation and their memory of the affront which had been done to Cestius. Not content with setting fire to the city, Vespasian burnt all the villages and country towns in the neighborhood; some he found completely deserted, in the others he reduced the inhabitants to slavery. (*J.W.* 3.132–34 [Thackeray, LCL])<sup>81</sup>

This passage indicates that death and slavery were likely outcomes for most during a Roman military invasion, unless one was able to flee.

Knowing that most people in the ancient world lived at or perhaps slightly above subsistence level indicates that replacing homes and household essentials was not an easy matter.<sup>82</sup> With property destruction comes homelessness and displacement; extreme poverty and lack of resources leads to begging and, likely, banditry.<sup>83</sup> The trauma of loss of

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<sup>81</sup> There is a textual variant indicating that this story may be reflecting events that happened in Gabara rather than Gadara. However, Vespasian's military actions of slaughtering or enslaving the city's inhabitants and setting fire to the city are evident in his siege of Jerusalem as well. Josephus may cite a personal reason for Vespasian's actions, but those actions are not unique in occurrence.

<sup>82</sup> Lenski, *Power and Privilege*, 210–19, 266–84; Friesen, "Poverty in Pauline Studies"; Longenecker, "Exposing the Economic Middle"; Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society and Culture*, 2nd ed. (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 109–49.

<sup>83</sup> Horsley, *Jesus and the Politics of Roman Palestine*, 62.

property and food/water insecurity was only compounded by the downward social mobility that likely resulted.

The stressors in the section so far have been concerned with the lives of those immediately affected by war. The details Josephus provides concerning Vespasian's siege of Gadara and the war in Jerusalem indicate how Roman military forces behaved when invading a city and the military strategies adopted to force the submission of peasant populations. I am suggesting that some of those impacted first-hand by the violence (whether from Gadara or Jerusalem) fled north to Antioch, bringing with them both the experience and news of the terror.

However, during this same period, Josephus recounts that Jewish residents in Antioch, not only those who fled north, were also dealing with violence in their community. In *Jewish War* 7:45–62, Josephus narrates that a certain Jew named Antiochus had turned on his own people and blamed other Jews for plotting to burn down the city. Those Antiochus named explicitly were burned to death immediately, the Antiochene residents aware of the accusations “then rushed for the Jewish masses, believing the salvation of their native place to be dependent on their prompt chastisement.” At a later time when actual fires occurred in the city, the Jews were swiftly blamed as the Antiochenes were “inclined to believe the statements of Antiochus, and to imagine that they had all but seen with their own eyes the Jews setting fire to the town. And so, like maniacs, in a wild frenzy they all rushed upon the accused.” It took Titus's intervention to calm the violent city uprising.

This inner-city conflict is an example of horizontal violence. Horizontal violence is one dynamic of the imperial–colonial interaction. This term denotes the phenomenon

wherein “fractures, including violent fractures, occur among those under power especially as vertical power is exerted on them.”<sup>84</sup> Frantz Fanon describes the complexity of horizontal violence in French occupied Algeria this way:

The first thing the colonial subject learns is to remain in his place and not overstep its limits. Hence the dreams of the colonial subject are muscular dreams, dreams of action, dreams of aggressive vitality... The colonized subject will first train this aggressiveness sedimented in his muscles against his own people. This is the period when black turns on black, and police officers and magistrates don't know which way to turn when faced with the surprising surge of North African criminality... The muscles of the colonized are always tensed... The colonized are caught in the tightly knit web of colonialism. But we have seen how the colonist achieves only a pseudo-petrification. The muscular tension of the colonized periodically erupts into bloody fighting between tribes, clans, and individuals.<sup>85</sup>

Fanon's description highlights how horizontal violence can occur because the colonized feel constrained and as though they have no outlet toward the colonizer for their frustrations. He later notes that hostility can occur between the colonized who do not benefit from the empire and their colonized counterparts who do benefit.<sup>86</sup> Horizontal violence is also “a means of avoiding direct confrontation with the oppressor since the oppressed know that they cannot win such struggles.”<sup>87</sup> Antioch was under close imperial scrutiny (the buildup of troops and the post-70 activities of parades and monuments celebrating Judea's defeat) and there was pressure to prove loyalty to Rome. Attacks on Jews in Antioch, then, expressed alliance with the ruling elite as beneficiaries of Roman power while marking the Jewish population as unworthy of benefit.

This section has discussed war stressors that may have affected residents of Jerusalem, Gadara, and Antioch during the war of 66–70 and its aftermath, and considered

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<sup>84</sup> Perdue and Carter, *Israel and Empire*, 132.

<sup>85</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 15–17.

<sup>86</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 67.

<sup>87</sup> Perdue and Carter, *Israel and Empire*, 133.

how the general social unrest caused by the war in surrounding regions (i.e. in Antioch) resulted in horizontal violence against diaspora Jewish populations. Further, assuming that some Jerusalem residents fled north to Antioch, their shared stories of war violence could have had a profound effect on Antiochene Jews, suffering from horizontal violence, anxious that the war may come to their area. Diaspora Jews, Jesus-followers, and Jerusalem residents are connected by shared cultural trauma arising from experiences of war.

*Stressors following the acute phase war*

Karam and Ghosn differentiate between stressors that occur during the acute phase of military conflict (above) and those that occur after, perhaps long after, the war ends. Of these, the first is the loss of jobs. For most in the first century agrarian society, the loss of property (above), especially land, would result in the loss of livelihood. For those desperate for work and not enslaved by the Roman troops, the options may be to become day laborers, beggars, brigands, or, in extreme cases, to sell themselves into slavery. Loss of work, then, serves as an immediate trauma with the possibility of becoming a chronic traumatic situation. The loss of males, specifically targeted and killed by Roman invasions, results in the loss of a labor force in working the land and in supporting individual households (e.g. *J.W.* 3.132–33).

A second stressor in this category of post-war stressors is resettlement or exile. Antioch is some distance from Jerusalem, but Antioch had a significant Jewish population prior to the war. Antioch was also an important urban center. Jews fleeing Jerusalem may have gone to Antioch seeking employment opportunities and finding refuge in the local Jewish community. Regardless, those who fled Jerusalem to escape the trauma of the war were potentially entering into a chronic traumatic situation of stress from displacement.

Further, those who were enslaved during the war faced the alienation of natal ties and familiar geographical and cultural markers as they entered slave markets and were sold abroad. Their displacement was compounded by their isolation from their families, cultures, and traditions.

A third stressor in the post-war category is family disruptions. If Josephus's account of the slaughter and enslavement of thousands is to be trusted, it is unlikely that many families in Jerusalem during the war did not experience the loss of a parent, child, or sibling. The same is true of those who fled north to Antioch to escape the war in Jerusalem. The loss of a loved one due to war, violence, or captivity is a traumatic event. If that person was economically responsible for the family, their absence may result in a chronic traumatic situation of downward social mobility and struggles to survive.

Fourth, Karam and Ghosn note that, once the war is over, reminders of the war can cause stress. In Antioch and surrounding areas, reminders of Roman dominance and of their defeat of Judea were pervasive. Titus "exhibited costly spectacles in all the cities of Syria through which he passed, making his Jewish captives serve to display their own destruction" (*J.W.* 7.96). Roman rule over the region was handled by a governor in league with local elites who were responsible for "raising taxes, social order and defense, judicial matters, and supervision of the local government."<sup>88</sup> Military presence was pervasive to enforce the imperial will, with as many as four legions stationed in Antioch. Carter argues, "The economic and judicial systems that they administered, reinforced by military power, ensured Roman control reached far into people's lives."<sup>89</sup> Both Vespasian and Titus made

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<sup>88</sup> Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 38.

<sup>89</sup> Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 39.

visits to Antioch at key points during the war.<sup>90</sup> Titus visited circa 71 CE after his victory over Jerusalem. There he defended the right of the Jews in Antioch to stay there since their “own country...has been destroyed and no other place would now receive them” (*J.W.* 7.110). According to Malalas, Vespasian and/or Titus showed off their war booty and used bronze cherubim from the Temple for display outside the city gate to Daphne. Further, if Malalas’ report is accurate, Vespasian destroyed a synagogue and built a theater on the site “to insult [the Jews]” (Malalas 10.45). These emperors were intentional and strategic about reminding the Jewish folk in Antioch of their subjugated position and of Rome’s power to dominate, thereby maintaining, if not increasing, stress.

In addition, governmental buildings and other structures in the city (baths, aqueducts, theaters, the hippodrome, etc.) reflected imperial power and wealth. “Likely inscriptions on such rebuilt or new buildings attested Roman beneficences and proclaimed Roman presence and control.”<sup>91</sup> For example Tiberius had constructed a statue of Rome’s legendary founders Romulus and Remus that stood at the gate at one end of the main road and Trajan built an arch in the middle of that road. While monumentalizing of Rome’s power was considered a gift to Antioch by the imperial elites, the subjugated masses may have found these monuments to be psychologically stressful.

Compounding this stress was the reminder of Judea’s destruction through the minting of the *Judea Capta* coins.<sup>92</sup> After his victory over Jerusalem, Vespasian, in an effort to further humiliate the Jews, ordered the issuing of coins depicting Judea’s defeat and

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<sup>90</sup> Vespasian visited first in 66 CE as a military commander to assemble troops to attack Judea then again in 69 CE where his troops took an oath of allegiance to him as emperor. (*J.W.* 3.29; 4.630).

<sup>91</sup> Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 43.

<sup>92</sup> Cody, “Conquerers and Conquered on Flavian Coins”; Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered: Reimagining Paul’s Mission*, 35–38.

celebrating Rome's victory. These *Judea Capta* coins typically used the image of a bound woman personifying Judea. She could be depicted sitting or standing with a Roman victory trophy, a soldier, and/or a palm tree accompanying her. The point of these types of coins is to represent the provincial "as utterly defeated and the conqueror as all powerful."<sup>93</sup> *Judea Capta* coins were minted under Titus as well circa 80 CE. Vespasian not only minted coins specifically intended to humiliate Jews, he levied a tax on all Jews (*J.W.* 7.218). The tax, once paid into the Jerusalem Temple, was coopted by Vespasian and used to fund the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus in Rome. The gospel authorizes the payment of this tax, though it reframes its payment as a covert expression of God's sovereignty, not Rome's (*Matt* 17:24–27).<sup>94</sup> Humiliating coinage and unique taxation were both ecological stressors for Jewish folks and Jewish Jesus-followers, who suffered indiscriminately at the hands of Rome because of their Jewish heritage.

Finally, Karam and Ghosn's research has shown that there are often threats of future violence associated with life after a war. Roman anti-Jewish propaganda in and around Antioch created a narrative of Roman superiority and Jewish subjugation that could result in horizontal violence against the Jews. For example, in late 70/early 71 CE, Antiochene residents requested Titus to expel Jews from Antioch and/or to strip them of their citizenship. Titus denied both appeals, but these requests are evidence of a continued animosity towards Jews in Antioch. Local Jewish residents experienced this animosity to be threatening whether or not it ever resulted in further violence. These threats of further violence were an ecological stressor faced by Jews simply because of their status as Jews.

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<sup>93</sup> Cody, "Conquerers and Conquered on Flavian Coins," 105.

<sup>94</sup> Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 130–44.

Jews living in and around Jerusalem and Antioch during and after the war were subject to all sorts of stress caused by Roman military violence. Whether willingly or unwillingly, Jews in the region were caught in an environment of both actual and threatened violence that resulted in significant individual and cultural trauma. Matthew's choice of Gadara for his version of this exorcism story resonates with the military violence, loss of life, and targeted oppression experienced by Jews and the Gospel's audience in/near Antioch. The setting of the invaded land of Gadara serves to underscore the invasive demonic forces controlling the two men living among the tombs.

### ***Gadara as Site for Competing Shepherds***

Stephen Moore argues that the location of Gerasa in Mark's version emphasizes the exorcism in that location since the Hebrew root (גרש) means to banish, to drive out, or to cast out. For Moore, the location of Gerasa is an "appellation [that] constitutes a preexisting appeal to... [Jesus'] manifest destiny to drive out the powers that possess them."<sup>95</sup> Gerasa is changed to Gadara in Matthew's version. I have suggested one implication of this change of location is an association of Gadara as site of military invasion. Now I name a second implication. Gadara is also a Hebrew name with the root *rédî...g* meaning wall or, often, sheepfold (גדרה).<sup>96</sup> I argue that this image of Gadara as a sheepfold resonates with important emphases in Matthew's gospel, notably as a site in which Jesus, the Davidic shepherd, drives out, at least temporarily, the invading demonic forces.

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<sup>95</sup> Stephen D. Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse: Postcolonial and the New Testament*, ed. J. Cheryl Exum, Jorunn Okland, and Stephen D. Moore, *The Bible in the Modern World* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), 28.

<sup>96</sup> Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, "*rédî...g*," *BDB*, 154–55.

The Gospel presents Jesus as a shepherd of God's people. In Matt 1:1, Jesus is introduced as a son of David. While the figure of David evokes many things, it unquestionably evokes the image of a shepherd king. In Matt 2:5–6 the prophecy of Micah 5:2 is used to describe Jesus as a shepherd or ruler of Israel. In 9:35–36, Jesus shows compassion on the people "because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." Jesus' compassion is enacted through his healing power and serves as a critique of the societal leadership of chief priests and scribes who are allied with Rome. Finally, in Matt 26:31 as Jesus foretells Peter's denial, he quotes Zech 13:7: "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered." He thereby identifies himself with God's Davidic ruler. Young S. Chae notes that the Hebrew Bible "tends to reserve shepherd imagery for YHWH and, significantly, extends its use only for YHWH's Davidic Appointee."<sup>97</sup>

The allusion to shepherding in the city's name also recalls Psalm 23 where God is imagined as a shepherd who gives the sheep respite, protects them from impending evil, and provides abundantly for the sheep while their enemies look on. This utopian vision surely resonates with an imperially oppressed community in Antioch. Alternatively, Israel's kings are described as bad shepherds who have failed in their duties to care for the weak and vulnerable in society, instead ruling oppressively and indulging in excess (Ezek 34:1–10). The Gospel dismisses the elite alliance of ruling shepherds as "no shepherds" (Matt 9:36) and depicts God as a shepherd who seeks out the lost sheep and cares for, nurtures, and heals them.

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<sup>97</sup> Young S. Chae, *Jesus as the Eschatological Davidic Shepherd: Studies in the Old Testament, Second Temple Judaism, and in the Gospel of Matthew*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament. 2. Reihe 216 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 26.

The location of this story in Gadara rather than Gerasa, I am suggesting, contrasts the Roman and Roman-allied shepherds with Jesus as shepherd. The bad shepherds, the military invaders, have allowed God's sheep to suffer through the stressors of violence, hunger, isolation, and death. Their sheepfold is among the tombs, recalling those killed in Vespasian's invasive sieges of Gadara and Jerusalem, and their flock is stressed out and demon invaded. The possession of the bodies of these two men signifies the possession of Gadara, and by extension Jerusalem and Antioch, by Roman power.

However, Jesus is shown as working to restore and/or reverse the situation, albeit imperfectly. Matthew elsewhere depicts tombs as sites of life-giving transformation. At Matt 27:52–53, Matthew claims that, at the moment of Jesus' death, "the tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised." In 28:1–10, Mary Magdalene and another woman named Mary went to see the tomb only to feel an earthquake and encounter an angel informing them that Jesus had been resurrected. Located among tombs, this scene then positions Jesus as a source of life amidst death.

Thus, the setting in Gadara has two implications. It recalls a site of military invasion and, with both positive and negative images of shepherding, contributes to the larger picture in Matthew of Jesus as a Davidic shepherd king. The location, far from being a mere geographical correction, underscores Jesus as a good shepherd looking for the lost sheep of God who live with the stress of violent military invasion.

### **Social Stress and Matt 8:28–34**

When Jesus, the Davidic shepherd-king, walks into the invaded, stressed-out sheepfold that is Gadara, he is immediately greeted by two demonically invaded men who have come out from the tombs to meet him (8:28). Invaded bodies represent the body

politic. As discussed, Matthew has changed the location of Mark's version from Gerasa to Gadara, to evoke a site of imperial invasion. Matthew also multiplies Mark's one demoniac to two demoniacs. Davies and Allison catalogue nine possible reasons for Matthew's doubling of the demoniacs, including independent tradition, slip of memory, a fondness for doubling, and to amplify Jesus' power.<sup>98</sup> I suggest a three-fold possibility for Matthew's redaction. First, along the lines of Davies' and Allison's second suggestion, the change to two demoniacs meets the need for the plurality of demons in the scene since Matthew omits the name Legion from his version, as well as the qualifier "for we are many." Second, the doubling of the demoniacs intimates the severity of the stress caused by colonial subjugation and represents an invaded body politic. Third, two demoniacs reflects that societal bonding that occurs when people are subjected to domination. Scott writes that possession does "offer some practical redress, it gives voice to a critique of domination, and, in the case of some cults of possession, it frequently creates new social bonds among those subject to such domination."<sup>99</sup>

Yet, if Matthew is concerned to critique Rome's invasive military practices, why omit the name of "legion" from the story?

Matthew's version of this story is highly euphemized. Changing Gerasa to Gadara, with its two implications outlined above, evokes insider language as a key to understanding the story and the doubling of the demoniacs points to the multiplicity of the invading demons without explicitly naming the Roman troops.

Euphemization is a common way for oppressed people to express dissent in a coded way. James Scott says "euphemization is an accurate way to describe what happens to a

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<sup>98</sup> Davies and Allison, *A Critical Commentary*, 80.

<sup>99</sup> Scott, *Hidden Transcripts*, 142.

hidden transcript when it is expressed in a power-laden situation by an actor who wishes to avoid the sanctions that direct statement will bring.”<sup>100</sup> Euphemizing the story provides a layer of protection. By coding the story with insider knowledge (Gadara meaning sheepfold) and choosing a setting that geographically underscores Rome’s violently invasive tactics, Matthew has disguised the criticism “just enough to skirt retaliation.”<sup>101</sup>

Scott argues:

By the subtle use of codes one can insinuate into a ritual, a pattern of dress, a song, a story, meanings that are accessible to one intended audience and opaque to another audience the actors wish to exclude. Alternatively, the excluded (and in this case, powerful) audience may grasp the seditious message in the performance but find it difficult to react because the sedition is clothed in terms that also can lay claim to a perfectly innocent construction”<sup>102</sup>

Thus, it is not necessary that Matthew’s contestation of Roman imperial claims be explicit. For the Gospel’s Antiochene audience, who suffered the cultural trauma and stress of the war of 66–70 and its aftermath, the coded language may resonate with their experience, convey their discontent, and protect them from imperial repercussions.

### ***The Demoniacs***

The two men in Matt 8:28–34 belong to the social category of “expendables.”<sup>103</sup> Members of this class ranged “from petty criminals and outlaws to beggars and underemployed itinerant workers, and numbered all those forced to live solely by their wits or by charity.”<sup>104</sup> This class is the direct result of society producing “more people than the dominant classes found it profitable to employ” which meant “illegal activity was the

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<sup>100</sup> Scott, *Hidden Transcripts*, 152.

<sup>101</sup> Scott, *Hidden Transcripts*, 152.

<sup>102</sup> Scott, *Hidden Transcripts*, 158.

<sup>103</sup> Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 211.

<sup>104</sup> Lenski, *Power and Privilege*, 281.

best hope of those who fell into this class, and for the poorest peasants as well.”<sup>105</sup> This class seldom reproduced itself, but was sustained by the forced downward mobility of the class immediately above it. These unfortunate individuals were often the children of poor peasants and artisans that were left without an inheritance, those “who had got into trouble with the privileged classes and had turned bandits,” and those “dispossessed nobles or noninheriting sons of nobles who preferred outlawry and a life of illegal violence to demeaning labor or trade in any form.”<sup>106</sup> I suggest that military invasion and its concomitant stressors (described above), especially loss of property and displacement, may well have resulted in downward mobility of many into the expendables class. The stress of military invasion resulted in additional chronic economic stress.

Estimates for the size of this class vary. Lenski posits that this class typically constituted about 5–10% of the general population.<sup>107</sup> Within large cities (populations of 10,000 or more), Steven Friesen has suggested that as much as 28% of those cities’ populations were made up of people living “below subsistence.” Following C.R. Whitaker, Friesen argues that the “below subsistence” category includes “those incapable of making a living” and “those permanently in crisis.”<sup>108</sup> By imagining an Antiochene provenance for the gospel, residents of that area would live in a society in which up to a quarter of the inhabitants fell into this class. What this indicates is that these two men represent a class of people in Roman society that were hardly invisible, even if in the minority, and highly stressed.

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<sup>105</sup> Lenski, *Power and Privilege*, 281–82.

<sup>106</sup> Lenski, *Power and Privilege*, 283.

<sup>107</sup> Lenski, *Power and Privilege*, 283.

<sup>108</sup> Friesen, “Poverty in Pauline Studies,” 344; See Longenecker, “Exposing the Economic Middle” for a slightly different economic configuration.

Expendables lived daily with the stress of food insecurity and, generally, a lack of adequate shelter. Their survival would be dependent upon day labor, the charity of others, or theft. The marginality of the position of a member of the expendable class fills in the characterization of these two men. In addition to these socio-economic factors of stress associated with their social position (i.e. ecological stressors) is the chronic traumatic stress caused by the war of 66–70 and its aftermath.

These men, possessed as they are by invasive demons (euphemistically referring to Roman invasive military might), are constructed as hostile and unwelcoming to Jesus. The verb “met” (ὑπήντησαν) can carry a hostile sense of opposition.<sup>109</sup> That the demoniacs are also described as being so fierce (χαλεποί) that no one could pass that way supports this connotation of hostility. The term χαλεποί, as Carter points out, carries meanings of “violent” and “dangerous” often describing animals and rulers.<sup>110</sup> As expendables, the men would have been reliant upon the charity of others to survive. Thus, the demons’ hostility towards those who could provide the men means for survival replicates Rome’s inequitable distribution that siphons resources away from the masses to the benefit of the elite. Their animosity towards others further underscores their social alienation and the personal destruction resultant in colonized contexts.

Further, the hostility with which the demoniacs met anyone they encountered can be read as a reflection of the horizontal violence caused by imperial domination. This is not to say that people manifesting possession symptoms in the first century would have been

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<sup>109</sup> Walter Bauer et al., “Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature,” 837.

<sup>110</sup> Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 212.

actively aware that their hostility was “horizontal violence” nor, if a person were dealing with a mental illness, that their hostility would be any less directed at, for instance, the emperor were they to meet.<sup>111</sup> However, reading this story as a commentary on non-elite negotiation of Roman military invasion, a postcolonial optic focuses on how the stressors of colonial domination destabilize communities and breed resentment, especially between groups that benefit differently from empire.<sup>112</sup>

The demons, speaking through the men they have possessed, approach Jesus with hostility and shout, “What have you to do with us, Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?” The phrasing of the initial question is idiomatic and “highlights their differences with Jesus and their lesser authority as the questioners.”<sup>113</sup> The second question has to do with eschatology and Jesus’ role as eschatological judge since “some Jewish apocalyptic traditions understood demons to be active until the judgment and establishment of God’s new creation and empire...”<sup>114</sup> Combined, these questions reveal that the demons have knowledge about Jesus’ identity as one appointed by God and as having power over Satan. Euphemistically, these questions indicate that Jesus, as God’s agent, has power over Rome, represented as demons.

The demons notice “a large herd of swine feeding at some distance from them” and request, “If you cast us out, send us into the herd of swine” (Matt 8:30–31). Carter argues

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<sup>111</sup> Toensing reminds us “severe mental illness is not experienced as a rational choice or conscious strategy, as if one can turn it on and off.” The same holds for persons exhibiting possession symptomatology in the stressful context of invasive military violence. Toensing, “Living Among the Tombs,” 136.

<sup>112</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 67.

<sup>113</sup> Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 212.

<sup>114</sup> Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 212; See also Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 24; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 133.

that the use of pigs in the story further implies military dimensions. Though his reading is of the Marcan version of the story, some aspects of his argument apply to the Matthean version as well. First, Carter notes that “the request to be sent into the pigs expresses [their] submission to Jesus and imminent defeat even as it seeks to maintain domination not only over land but over what the land supports and what belongs to the local inhabitants...”<sup>115</sup> Typical of Rome is controlling the land’s production through taxes and tributes, generally paid in kind. The demons’ request then to be sent into the pigs can be read as Rome exploiting local production for its own ends, a practice that resulted in the stress of food insecurity of a large portion of the population under imperial rule.

Carter, among other scholars, notes also that the emblem of the Tenth Fretensis Legion, known for its prominent role in the violent invasion and destruction of Jerusalem, was a boar. “Given that wild boars were one of the animals used in the arena to attack human victims, the boar probably symbolized ferocity and lethal attack, along of course with male power and aggression.”<sup>116</sup> Even though Matthew does not name the demons in the story “legion” as Mark does, the symbolism of the pig as representative of the Tenth Fretensis Legion could still be recognizable as a further instance of euphemism. Thus, the pigs, symbolizing Roman military might, when invaded by the demons associate demonic power with imperial violence.

The demons’ request to be sent into the pigs is granted, but “suddenly, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and perished in the water” (Matt 8:32). The

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<sup>115</sup> Warren Carter, “Cross-Gendered Romans and Mark’s Jesus: Legion Enters the Pigs (Mark 5:1–20),” *JBL* 134.1 (2015): 148.

<sup>116</sup> Carter, “Cross-Gendered Romans,” 153.

sea holds certain significance both in Jewish tradition and in Roman claims to power. Carter highlights that the ancient Near Eastern view of the sea was as “a threatening, chaotic force which God controls...The evil powers of chaos rebel against God’s created order. God’s sovereign power subdues them...”<sup>117</sup> Carter goes on to cite references to the crossing of the Red Sea in Exod 14, Deutero-Isaiah’s likening of release from Babylonian oppression to the Exodus wherein God, again, overcomes the sea (Isa 43:1–1, 51:9–10), and the various Psalms where stormy waters are used metaphorically of evil or chaotic situations in which God rescues God’s people (Pss 69:1–3, 30–36; 124).

The sea was also understood to be part of Rome’s imperial domain. Philo says the Augustan house has sovereignty over land and sea (*Flacc.* 1.104). Josephus says that every land and sea was subject to the Romans while Caligula was emperor (*Ant.* 19.1). Josephus also calls Vespasian “master...of land and sea and the whole human race” (*J.W.* 3.402 [Thackeray, LCL]) and reminds Titus’s troops that they are “masters of well nigh every land and sea” (*J.W.* 6.43 [Thackeray, LCL]). In *Panegyricus* Pliny celebrates Trajan as ruler of land and sea (4.4). Carter clarifies, “This descriptor expressed Roman sovereignty over the sea, for example, through military power, control of pirates, taxes on production and fishing activity, and extensive trading activity that constituted Rome as the world’s ‘emporium.’”<sup>118</sup> Prior to this exorcism scene, Jesus calmed a storm on the Sea of Galilee (8:23–27), demonstrating God’s sovereignty in spite of Rome’s claims to control.

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<sup>117</sup> Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 210.

<sup>118</sup> Warren Carter, “Aquatic Display: Navigating the Roman Imperial World in Acts 27,” *NTS* 62.1 (2016): 85.

Thus, on the one hand, the whole of the exorcism reads as a commentary on the stress induced by Roman military invasion. Two Gadarenes are invasively possessed by demons, much like the land was invaded by Roman troops. The consequences of military invasion include the downward mobility into the economically stressed class of expendables. The possessed men are hostile and aggressive, even to those who may be able to offer help to them. The demons, speaking through the men, request to be sent into a herd of pigs, further emphasizing the military connotations by recalling the emblem of the Tenth Fretensis Legion. Jesus honors their request, but the demon-possessed pigs rush into the sea, precisely to the place that Jesus has already subdued. The stress-inducing, invasive Roman military is revealed to be a self-destructive force subject to God's control.

On the other hand, however, the state of the demon-possessed men is left to the reader's imagination since Matthew omits Mark's details about the man being found in his right mind and wanting to follow Jesus. Malina and Rohrbaugh write "Freeing a person from demons, therefore, implied not only exorcising the demon but restoring him/her to a meaningful place in the community as well..."<sup>119</sup> Yet, in Matthew's version of events, there is no indication that the two men were restored to their community, that the economic stressors of being members of the expendable class were alleviated, or that the exorcism resulted in a change in the men's symptomatology. The ambiguity created by the total absence of attention to

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<sup>119</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 350.

the men after the exorcism is only heightened as the story shifts to tell how the community was made uneasy by Jesus' display of power.

### ***The Townspeople***

After the pigs run into the sea, "The swineherds ran off, and on going into the town, they told the whole story about what had happened to the demoniacs. Then the whole town came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their neighborhood" (Matt 8:33–34). Reading this story as a commentary on Roman invasive presence, the townspeople's reaction to Jesus' healing activity demonstrates the various ways that people negotiated imperial presence. Consider this passage from Josephus:

For the leading men had, unbeknown to the rebels, sent an embassy to [Vespasian] offering to capitulate, alike from a desire for peace and from concern for their property, for Gadara had many wealthy residents...The Roman army now appearing, the Gadarenes admitted Vespasian with acclamation and received from him pledges of security together with a garrison of horse and foot to protect them against invasions of the fugitives; for they had pulled down their walls of their own accord without requisition from the Romans, in order that their powerlessness to make war, even if they wished, might testify to their love of peace. (*J.W.* 4.415, 417–19 [Thackeray, LCL])

Representatives from Gadara, noted as being wealthy residents (i.e. benefitting from Rome's rule), ask Vespasian to invade their city and to deal with local rebels on their behalf. Vespasian takes this opportunity to not only violently defeat the rebels but also to subdue the entire region of Peraea (*J.W.* 4.420–39). For some, Rome was viewed as an invasive presence, requiring exorcism. For others, especially those that stood to benefit from Roman practices and structures, Roman presence was welcomed, even invited.

Yet, Jesus' disruption of the status quo by exorcising the demons from the men at the tombs results in an introduction of stress for the townspeople. For many of these townspeople, living as some of the most powerless, the status quo is survival. Carter notes that the townspeople's conflict with Jesus contains multiple levels:

...*economic*, since the pigs are a source of food and income from sale and taxes; *political*, since Jesus has challenged their control and destroyed a symbol of Roman imperial control; *social*, since Jesus has taken the side of the expendables, at the expense of the elite; *ethnic*, since Jesus is a Jew asserting his authority among Gentiles; *religious*, since Jesus has destroyed an animal with important roles in religious rites.<sup>120</sup>

Thus, Jesus' activity in Gadara mimics Rome's invasive practices in terms of economic and property devastation. Some experience Jesus's power here, then, as a stress-inducing event and it must be resisted.

For those encountering this story in Antioch, this story highlights the ambiguity of their position as well. Some may interpret this story as good news, identifying with the exorcised men, since Jesus has exorcised and expelled demons from the two men and from Gadara. Understood as a fantasy of Roman expulsion from the body politic and from the sheepfold, this story resonates with a belief in God's power over Rome and an ultimate redemption of God's people. However, post-70, Rome's power is firmly established and freshly asserted. Others in Antioch may have identified more with the townspeople in expressing suspicion and concern that too much attention to Jesus the exorcist might be dangerous to them in a politically charged context where keeping their heads down is a better survival strategy. The stressful experiences of Antiochene Jesus followers provides

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<sup>120</sup> Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 213–14. This chapter has not addressed the Gentile issue, in part because it is so well rehearsed elsewhere. However, the passages from Josephus cited throughout this chapter about Gadara indicate that there was at least some Jewish presence in and around the city. Thus, drawing hard geographical lines around Jewish and Gentile territory seems untenable and beside the point.

space for ambiguous interpretations of this passage and various approaches toward negotiating Rome's invasive presence.

In this chapter I have read this story as a commentary on the invasive presence of the Roman Empire in the lives of peasants in Gadara. I have argued that the possession of the two Gadarene men resonates with the stressed experiences of folks in Antioch who have experienced Rome's invasive military power during war of 66–70 CE and its aftermath. Using Social Stress Theory to underscore the acute and chronic stressors of the war, I suggested possible resonances that this story may have had in a post-70 Antiochene context that included stressors related to war and its effects: suffering from specific military violence, sexual assault, loss of property, the lack of food, water, or shelter, the burden of loss of jobs, resettlement or exile, family disruptions, continuous reminders of the war, and threats of future violence. The story's inattention to the plight of the demon-possessed men creates an ambiguity around the healing since there is no indication of the type of relief (if any) the exorcism provided, whether physical, mental, or social. The ambiguity is further heightened by the townspeople's response to the exorcism by asking the exorcist to leave. This story demonstrates the myriad ways in which people negotiated Roman imperial presence: for some, it is a demonic force requiring exorcism, for others it is a beneficent force requiring deference. Yet others find more nuanced ways to negotiate empire. This is not to say that exorcising the demons was not good for the two men nor good news for the Gospel's audience, that conclusion is left to the reader to determine, but it is to highlight the interconnected nature of human society and to recognize the ambiguity of the scene: Jesus does not undo the Roman Empire. Jesus is shown to be a counter-invasive force, but an invasive force nonetheless.

## CHAPTER 5 FAMILIES AND SOCIAL STRESS (MATTHEW 15:21–28)

In chapter 1, I discussed some of the major approaches that have been employed in interpreting the healing narratives in the Gospel of Matthew. I situated my approach in this larger narrative, namely focusing attention on the often-neglected impaired characters in the text and identifying possible roles that stress, also previously neglected, played in their experiences and impairments. In chapter 2, I laid out the methodologies used in this project, including Social Stress Theory and Empire Studies. In chapter 3, I examined some of the social stressors present in the lives of slaves under Roman imperial rule in order to interpret the healing of the centurion's παῖς in Matt 8:5–13. In chapter 4, I explored social stressors in relation to Matt 8:28–34, wherein Jesus encounters two demon-possessed men in Gadara. Using insights from postcolonial theory, I located the Matthean scene in relation to social stressors caused by war in general, citing specific instances of note in the war of 66–70 CE, and how those stressors can be linked to the manifestation of possession symptomatology. In this chapter I examine social stressors in the context of a familial relationship, specifically in the relationship between the mother and daughter in Matt 15:21–28. I proceed in two ways. On one hand, I consider the ways in which the impairment of the daughter serves as a social stressor within the family, specifically for Justa.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, I explore social stressors potentially present in the possible circumstances of the unnamed demon-possessed daughter.

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<sup>1</sup> The *Pseudo-Clementine Epistles* name the Canaanite woman Justa. Following Elaine Wainwright, I will use the name Justa to refer to her so that “the naming of the woman may lead to her story being remembered in contemporary Christian telling of the story.” Elaine Wainwright, “Not Without My Daughter: Gender and Demon Possession in Matthew 15:21–28,” in *A Feminist Companion to Matthew*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2001), 126, n. 2.

In this scene, Jesus has left the region of Gennesaret and entered the region of Tyre and Sidon. While there, a “Canaanite woman from that region” came out to meet Jesus. She shouts for Jesus, whom she calls Lord and Son of David, to have mercy on her, for her daughter is tormented by a demon (15:22). Jesus ignores her, and his disciples ask for him to send her away. Jesus replies to his disciples that he was sent only to Israel (15:23–24). Still, she persists, and asks Jesus to help her. He tells her that it is not right for him to give the children’s/Israel’s food to dogs/her (15:26). She accepts the derogatory epithet of “dog” and counters that even dogs get crumbs from the table (15:27). Jesus, impressed by her persistence (or self-abasement?), which he declares to be faith, heals her daughter.

In this chapter, I argue that Justa’s appearance before Jesus requesting the healing of her daughter may be reflective of a complex home situation in which the daughter’s impairment is a significant source of social stress for her family. Using an informed imagination, I suggest two scenarios that reveal possible stress-filled family dynamics impacting Justa and her daughter, one in which the daughter is an infant and another in which she is an adult.

I choose this passage for two reasons. First, this passage has received considerable attention from various perspectives. Readings come from redactional studies,<sup>2</sup> feminist and sexuality studies,<sup>3</sup> post-poststructuralist approaches,<sup>4</sup> psychoanalytic theory,<sup>5</sup> and

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<sup>2</sup> Davies and Allison, *A Critical Commentary*, vol. 2; Boring, “Matthew”; Luz, *Matthew 8–20*; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*; Hauerwas, *Matthew*.

<sup>3</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); Wainwright, “Not Without My Daughter”; Lilly Nortjé-Meyer, “The Homosexual Body without Apology: A Positive Link between the Canaanite Woman in Matthew 15:21–28 and Homosexual Interpretation of Texts,” *R&T* 9.1–2 (2002): 118–34.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen D Moore, *Gospel Jesuses and Other Nonhumans: Biblical Criticism Post-Poststructuralism* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017).

empire and postcolonial studies.<sup>6</sup> Jesus' treatment of Justa, his dismissal and name-calling, has resulted in a litany of scholars either defending Jesus, or Justa, or both! However, few interpreters spend time considering the stressful circumstances of this family unit, what the daughter's impairment and healing may mean for the alleviation or escalation of those stressors, and how Jesus' response to the request for healing contribute to the family's stress. This study will address this lacuna in the interpretive history.

Secondly, this passage is unique in the Gospel because it contains both a female supplicant and a female impaired character. Therefore, it provides opportunity to explore possible stressors related to gender and varying ages within a family in the ancient world.

I begin with a discussion of previous scholarship, highlighting key approaches to the passage and the types of questions these interpreters have asked. Next, I review Social Stress Theory scholarship on how stressors impact family units. Then, I suggest two possible scenarios for imagining the complex family dynamic within which the daughter's impairment exists and contributes.

### **Previous Discussions of Matthew 15:21–28**

Previous scholarship has paid a considerable amount of attention to this passage despite its abbreviation of the fuller Marcan narrative (Mark 7:24–30). Of particular interest to scholars is the description of Justa as a Canaanite and Jesus' calling her a dog. Many previous scholars highlight only the ethnic component of the story, often defending Jesus against any suspicion of prejudice, while more contemporary approaches recognize the intersectionality of race/ethnicity with gender as well as factors of colonization. Below,

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<sup>5</sup> Melanie Baffes, "What Do We Do with This Jesus? A Reading of Matthew 15:21–28 through the Lens of Psychoanalytic Theory," *Pastoral Psychology* 63 (2014): 249–63.

<sup>6</sup> Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*; Musa Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000).

I discuss some major moves in scholarship for interpreting this scene, noting the ways that previous discussions influence this study and the ways that this study contributes to this scene's interpretive history. Because of the breadth of scholarship on this passage, this survey is necessarily selective.

### **Redactional Readings (Emphasizing the Gentile Mission)**

Heinz Joachim Held, taking a redactional approach, is concerned with how Matthew's changes to the Marcan source text change the emphasis of the pericope. He argues that the story, for Matthew, is about the gentile mission. He writes, "The position of the pericope in the outline of the Gospel makes clear that in it we are concerned with teaching. It contains, so to speak, the attitude of Jesus to a disputed question, namely the mission to the Gentiles."<sup>7</sup> Specifically, this passage is concerned with faith and is categorized by Held alongside Matt 8:5–13 (the healing of the centurion's slave) and 9:18–26 (the double healing of Jairus's daughter and the woman with the hemorrhage who touches Jesus' cloak). For Held, the faith of this gentile woman is what results in Jesus' healing whereas in Mark it "is made to appear as though Jesus was outwitted by the adroit and nimble-tongued woman."<sup>8</sup>

Held's redactional analysis fails to delineate what Justa's faith entails, which, according to Daniel Gullotta, is her inferior placement in relationship to Jesus and to the Jewish community.<sup>9</sup> The decided bias that "faith" is an unambiguously good quality results in the inability to see (or choice to ignore) the stress of the dehumanization that occurs to

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<sup>7</sup> Hans Joachim Held, "Matthew as Interpreter of the Miracle Stories," in *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), 199.

<sup>8</sup> Held, "Matthew as Interpreter," 199.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel N. Gullotta, "Among Dogs and Disciples: An Examination of the Story of the Canaanite Woman (Matthew 15:21–28) and the Question of the Gentile Mission within the Matthean Community," *Neot* 48.2 (2014): 334–36.

Justa because of her “faith.” Further, Held argues, “it is not the miracle as such that was important but the conversation which the healing brought forth.”<sup>10</sup> His emphasis on the conversation between Jesus and Justa obscures the impairment of the daughter in the story, downplays the somatic restoration, and ignores the social stressors present for children and women in the ancient world. By choosing a religious focus to his reading of the scene, Held removes attention from the societal, gender, and power elements also present in this scene.

Ulrich Luz’s reading of this passage focuses primarily on the ethnicity and faith of the woman as they contribute toward salvation-history and paranetic-existential interpretations. Like Held, Luz argues that the central focus of the passage is on the dialogue between Jesus and Justa and Jesus’ hesitation to fulfill her request because she is a gentile. Unlike Held, who does not define what faith means for the woman, Luz interprets her faith this way: “...she knows that Jesus is sent to Israel, and her faith is seen precisely in the fact that she nevertheless cries out to him.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, as with Gullotta, her faith is seen in her recognition of her inferior place.

Luz’s discussion of Jesus comparing Justa to a dog falls short of acknowledging the dehumanizing rhetoric that Jesus uses. Luz writes that, because “it was taken for granted that people fed house dogs with table scraps,” the insult is “thus not an expression of contempt because dogs were especially miserable animals, but only in the sense that the Gentile woman is not compared with a child.”<sup>12</sup> Luz minimizes the name-calling so that it is only understood as an insult in comparison to Israel’s portrayal as children. Perhaps Luz

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<sup>10</sup> Held, “Matthew as Interpreter,” 199.

<sup>11</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 339.

<sup>12</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 340.

believes that if Jesus had simply called her a dog without comparing Israel to children, there would be no reason to read the name-calling as insulting at all.

Overall, Luz's reading of this passage highlights ethnicity tensions within the Gentile mission. He suggests two modes of reading this story. First, Luz says that this passage, when read through the lens of salvation-history, might hold power for the modern church "if an interpreting church community were ready to identify with the Pharisees and scribes from whose territory Jesus withdrew rather than with the Canaanite woman or her daughter as is usually done."<sup>13</sup> In this way, readers may then recognize that they have denied the "explosive power" of the text and that their institutions are not where "church happens," but, rather, "church happens where God responds to human faith."<sup>14</sup> When read through a parnetic-existential lens, Luz suggests that this passage can hold power for the church when it is encountered as a story rather than as a mediator of doctrine (specifically, of faith): "For a story mediates experiences, and one can understand experiences, like stories, only by becoming part of them."<sup>15</sup> Luz's two modes of reading, however, are contradictory, in order to become part of the story, one must identify with the experiences of those in the story (parnetic-existential mode). Yet Luz has discouraged readers from identifying with anyone in this story, but rather to identify with characters in the preceding scene (salvation-history mode).

Luz's interpretation reads, to me, as an attempt to let Jesus off the hook for his demeaning words to Justa, ignoring the stress she suffers in her attempt to find help for her daughter. Further, Luz pays almost no attention to the situation of the daughter. He briefly

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<sup>13</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 341.

<sup>14</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 341.

<sup>15</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 342.

mentions her in 15:22 but only to argue that there is no evidence Justa is a widow or single mother. Neither the daughter nor her suffering appear again until his comment on 15:28, “Her daughter will get well.”<sup>16</sup> Luz’s emphasis on the faith of Justa results in the absence of commentary on the impaired daughter, her somatic experience of demon-possession, or her possible household situations.

W. D. Davies and Dale Allison are concerned, as with Held and Luz, with the Jew/gentile question above all else and they argue this passage “shows that, despite the priority of Israel, Jesus was, on an exceptional occasion, willing to share messianic blessings with a non-Jew because of her faith.”<sup>17</sup> They do not question the text’s Jesus-centric focus stating, “all three times the woman addresses Jesus she calls him ‘Lord.’ This helps keep her boldness in check. She may debate with Jesus, but that does not diminish her recognition of his superiority.”<sup>18</sup> Further, they downplay the nature of the insult “dog” by stressing that it references a housedog rather than a stray. By emphasizing the familiarity connoted by the diminutive noun for “dog,” Davies and Allison soften the dehumanization inherent in calling a woman an animal. Finally, because they are so focused on the ethnicity question, Davies and Allison do not even consider the gendered dimensions of the dialogue between Jesus and Justa. Nor do they consider the stressful situation of the daughter and how that stress impacts her family.

These redactional readings that focus on the person of Jesus may recognize that Jesus’ treatment of Justa was less than kind yet they do their best to excuse Jesus of this behavior, whether by ignoring the insult of calling Justa a dog or by softening the imagery

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<sup>16</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 341.

<sup>17</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 254.

<sup>18</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 254.

to connote a family pet. Their efforts to excuse Jesus' actions in this story result in a single-minded focus on the Jew/gentile question without attention to how gender, age, and power differentials contribute to Justa and her daughter's marginalized, stressful social locations.

### **Social Science Readings**

Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh's reading of this passage, like many other interpreters, focuses on the ethnicity of the woman. They highlight that Jesus has left Israelite territory (Matt 15:21) and that Justa is called a Canaanite, "a person native to Palestine, whose ancestors were to be ethnically cleansed from the land by order of the God of Israel,"<sup>19</sup> as evidence that the gentile mission is at the heart of this story. There is no discussion of the daughter or her possession, nor is there any attention to the stressful circumstances of Justa or her daughter.

Melanie Baffes offers a different social scientific reading of the passage with a commendable wider focus. She reads this passage through the lens of psychoanalytic theory, specifically notions of the True and False self. Troubled by interpretations that perpetuate an ideology of domination (with either Jesus or Justa as victor), her goal is to offer "a reading that does not privilege Jesus at the expense of the woman, but instead sees them both as empowered, learning and being transformed by their interaction with one another."<sup>20</sup> Baffes's reading is reader-centered and "explores how our minds are influenced by the text."<sup>21</sup>

Using D. W. Winnicott's notion of the True Self versus the False Self, Baffes argues that both Justa and Jesus are transformed through their encounter. Justa moves from

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<sup>19</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 84.

<sup>20</sup> Melanie Baffes, "What Do We Do with *This* Jesus? A Reading of Matthew 15:21-28 through the Lens of Psychoanalytic Theory," *Pastoral Psychology* 63 (2014): 251.

<sup>21</sup> Baffes, "What Do We Do?," 252.

compliance with socially mandated roles (False Self) to empowered self-hood (True Self). This transition is instigated by her compassion for her daughter and through her creative and witty exchange with Jesus. Baffes holds, “She goes beyond the limitations placed on her, demonstrates an authority different from the domination and subjugation paradigm prevalent in her culture, and, most importantly, experiences the presence of *herself*, an authentic, empowered selfhood.”<sup>22</sup> Jesus, on the other hand, moves from othering (False Self) to compassionate selfhood (True Self). His transition occurs during their exchange, wherein Justa’s actions “help establish who Jesus is and the meaning of his humanity and selfhood; they also free Jesus to see his ministry from a new perspective...”<sup>23</sup> As Justa and Jesus move from their False Selves to their True Selves, they experience “receptivity, openness, and mutuality in their relations with one another.”<sup>24</sup> Their intersubjectivity, according to Baffes, results in a co-creation of a new way to be fully human.

Baffes’s strength is in her use of a method that sees more in the scene than a religious issue of faith and the gentile mission or a power play wherein there can only be one victor. However, her reading ignores the daughter and the stress of her impairment completely and gives no attention to the stressful situation of the family.

### **Gender/Sexuality and Nonhuman Readings**

One of the few examples of an interpreter explicitly paying attention to Justa’s daughter is that of Elaine Wainwright in her essay “Not without My Daughter: Gender and demon-possession in Matthew 15.21–28.”<sup>25</sup> In this essay, Wainwright seeks to address this lacuna in scholarship by examining the healing of Justa’s daughter in relation to other

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<sup>22</sup> Baffes, “What Do We Do?,” 256.

<sup>23</sup> Baffes, “What Do We Do?,” 257.

<sup>24</sup> Baffes, “What Do We Do?,” 262.

<sup>25</sup> Wainwright, “Not Without My Daughter.”

healings within Matthew. She begins by noting that in Israel's textual traditions, more men than women are described as possessed, but that in Greek traditions more women than men are said to be possessed, though the spirits are not always malevolent (e.g. the Pythia of Delphi). These two "cultural determinants may have been functioning in the meaning-making processes of this community in relation to possession."<sup>26</sup> Therefore, it is difficult to attribute anything about the daughter's gender to cultural stereotypes. In a previous work, Wainwright has "argued that gender seemed to categorize healing in that males were commissioned to share in the healing ministry of the male healer Jesus (Mt. 10.8). Women were not so commissioned, but women's healed bodies configured the divine healing power mediated through Jesus."<sup>27</sup> Her work with this passage expands her own previous argument to consider how exorcism is categorized along ethnic lines rather than gender lines.

Wainwright argues that the use of the verb *ἰάομαι* to designate the daughter's healing, rather than *θεραπεύω*, is indicative of a new cultural designation. She notes that it is used elsewhere in Matthew only at 8:13 in the healing of the centurion's slave. The fact that both Justa's daughter and the centurion's slave are arguably gentiles is not lost on Wainwright. Further, by comparing the healing language used for Justa's daughter to that used for the (presumably) Jewish boy with epilepsy in Matt 17:14–18 (*θεραπεύειν*), Wainwright contends, "it seems...that a particular cultural label is considered more appropriate for Gentile recipients of healing and another for Jewish recipients."<sup>28</sup> Thus,

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<sup>26</sup> Wainwright, "Not Without My Daughter," 132.

<sup>27</sup> Wainwright, "Not Without My Daughter," 137.

<sup>28</sup> Wainwright, "Not Without My Daughter," 136.

healings of gentiles in Matthew contribute toward the Gospel's construction of ethnic differences.

Wainwright's attention to Justa's daughter is rare compared to most interpretations, but she, like many scholars, focuses on the ethnic question despite her attempts to consider the daughter's gender. Further, her essay does not consider the social location or social stressors of the daughter. My study will further the work of Wainwright by continuing the focalization on the daughter as well as suggesting a particular social location occupied by the daughter and possible stressors she and her family encounter within that location.

Lilly Nortjé-Meyer finds a positive example in Justa when read through what she calls a "homosexual lens."<sup>29</sup> Her hermeneutical lens "involves rereading and reexamining of [sic] of those passages that condemn homosexuals" and questioning interpretations to "identify the heterosexism and homophobia of biblical scholars."<sup>30</sup> She holds that homosexual readings resist narrow and normative prescriptions imposed by society of the self and create new definitions to challenge society to change.<sup>31</sup>

Nortjé-Meyer argues that this story has two models for removing boundaries and promoting theologies of inclusion. First, Justa resists imposed rules of purity by placing "herself outside the patriarchal structures of being unclean, silent, passive and a wife in a male-head family."<sup>32</sup> The basis for this argument is that gentiles, by being unclean, were part of the unclean class, and, further, that she was "a danger to corrupt the nation and the

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<sup>29</sup> For an explanation and defense of her use of the term "homosexual" see Nortjé-Meyer, "The Homosexual Body," 118-19.

<sup>30</sup> Nortjé-Meyer, "The Homosexual Body," 120.

<sup>31</sup> Nortjé-Meyer, "The Homosexual Body," 125.

<sup>32</sup> Nortjé-Meyer, "The Homosexual Body," 130.

reputation of Jesus and the disciples.”<sup>33</sup> Secondly, Nortjé-Meyer holds that Justa was a single parent who did not want the help of her family members; therefore, Justa resisted the monogamous family structure imposed by society (she offers no support for this claim).<sup>34</sup> Through her resistance to social boundaries, Justa is able to challenge Jesus to alter the purpose of his mission.<sup>35</sup>

Nortjé-Meyer reads Matt 15:21–28 as a story encouraging the inclusion of outsiders into the mission of Jesus and the church. However, much of her analysis is based on the false equivalency of cultic uncleanness and the social class comprised of the “unclean” in Lenski’s classifications of social stratification within an agrarian society. Amy-Jill Levine clarifies, “Uncleanness is not a disease, and it implies no moral censure; it is a ritual state in which both men and women likely found themselves most of the time...The consequence of such cultic uncleanness primarily involves restriction from the Temple precincts.”<sup>36</sup> As a gentile woman, Justa’s presence in the Temple would be restricted, but her status as “unclean” in the eyes of Jewish ritual purity laws does not indicate anything about her social status under the Roman Empire. Moreover, the Matthean Jesus rejects attention to the daughter partly on the basis of ethnicity (15:24) and cultic purity is nowhere mentioned in the passage. Further, Justa’s self-understanding would not necessarily have been as “unclean” and therefore unworthy. Additionally, Nortjé-Meyer speculates about Justa’s familial situation without support or evidence and does not pay any attention to the daughter and her impairment. Her inclusive reading, despite what it has to offer by way of

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<sup>33</sup> Nortjé-Meyer, “The Homosexual Body,” 130.

<sup>34</sup> Nortjé-Meyer, “The Homosexual Body,” 131.

<sup>35</sup> Nortjé-Meyer, “The Homosexual Body,” 131.

<sup>36</sup> Levine, “Discharging Responsibility: Matthean Jesus, Biblical Law, and Hemorrhaging Woman,” 78.

deconstructing societal norms, perpetuates the silencing and marginalization of the daughter and her stressful situation.

In a more recent volume, Stephen Moore takes a “post-poststructuralist” approach to the story. In this first part of his discussion, Moore argues that the epithet *Canaanite* opens “a scriptural temporal trajectory” that harkens back from the primeval histories through to the conquest narratives, recalling the ethnic violence visited upon the Canaanites by Israel because of God’s promises and under God’s command (Gen 17:8; Exod 3:8; Deut 20:17; Zeph 2:5). Justa, then, represents “an unerased remnant, a polluted people.”<sup>37</sup> Moore also argues that the description of Justa’s daughter as demon-possessed further plays on this ancient stereotype wherein the so-called “gods” that the Canaanites worship are no more than demons.<sup>38</sup>

Justa’s role as a Canaanite, according to Moore, works to queer time, both in the metanarrative (Israel’s beginnings through to the Matthean community) and in the gospel narrative. First, regarding the metanarrative, Moore notes “...polytheism self-deconstructs spontaneously in this scene in the face of a Christian mission from the future that invades the woman’s present and rewrites the mythic past.”<sup>39</sup> A gentile woman from the region of Tyre and Sidon would, historically, have been polytheistic, yet she uses Christological language and a worshipful posture towards Jesus. Further, Jesus is presented as accomplishing what Joshua could/did not, the “possession” of Canaan. Moore’s reading makes sense if one assumes that Justa and her daughter are intended to represent all Canaanites. The personification of whole people groups as women is not unusual. After the

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<sup>37</sup> Moore, *Gospel Jesuses*, 63.

<sup>38</sup> Moore, *Gospel Jesuses*, 65.

<sup>39</sup> Moore, *Gospel Jesuses*, 64.

destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, Rome released a series of coins depicting Judea as a conquered woman.<sup>40</sup> Reliefs of the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias present examples of people groups as women: Britannia is depicted as a disheveled woman being violently conquered by Claudius, and Armenia is depicted as a slumped over woman being held up by Nero (indicating that Armenia will be embraced by the Empire).<sup>41</sup> Thus, reading Justa and her daughter as representatives of all Canaanite people is a culturally reasonable way to explore the ethnic tensions present in the scene.

Secondly, the scene queers time within the gospel. The key question that Moore explores in this section is: “why is the Canaanite woman represented as a dog in this scene?”<sup>42</sup> While Justa’s obeisance in the face of Jesus’ insult is “intensely racialized and eroticized” and luridly “represents a national allegory, or nationalistic fantasy, less oriented to the actual conditions of the Rome-dominated present...than the mythic conditions of the archaic past,”<sup>43</sup> it also looks forward to Jesus’ last supper with his disciples. Investigating the ways that animality functions in Matthew, Moore argues that the slur of “dog” against Justa reveals the instability of the animal metaphor. Arguing that the last supper uses the metaphor of cannibalism, wherein Jesus’ disciples eat his flesh, Moore writes:

The dog-woman’s problem, Jesus would seem to be saying, is that she is not a sheep-woman. The more basic problem, she would seem to be replying, is that the sheep Jesus has culled from the flock to follow him must soon metamorphose into dogs so as to be able to heed their master’s command to devour his flesh and drink his blood, while he himself must morph into a sheep or some other sacrificial animal so that the ghastly feast may occur.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Cody, “Conquerers and Conquered on Flavian Coins”; Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered: Reimagining Paul’s Mission*.

<sup>41</sup> R. R. Smith, “The Imperial Reliefs from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 77 (1987): 119.

<sup>42</sup> Moore, *Gospel Jesuses*, 67.

<sup>43</sup> Moore, *Gospel Jesuses*, 66.

<sup>44</sup> Moore, *Gospel Jesuses*, 78.

Moore contends that the instability of the animal metaphor deconstructs what is “abominable,” namely being a Canaanite; instead, “The real locus of abomination in Matthew’s narrative, however, is the detestable death torture of its protagonist, coupled with...the anthropophagic devouring of his atrociously abused, altogether animalized body by those whom he earlier designated his true family (14:29).”<sup>45</sup>

The strength of Moore’s argument is his use of animality as a lens for reading the text. He provides new insight into thinking about Jesus’ usage of “dog” to label Justa and how, when considered alongside an animalized reading of the last supper, Justa does not simply acquiesce to the slur, but highlights the animality of both Jesus and his disciples. However, as with most readings, Moore neglects to consider the role of the daughter beyond that of a prop and the stereotype of Canaanites as being demon-possessed.<sup>46</sup> Following the focalization of the text, even if resisting its face-level assumptions, Moore pays scant attention to the stressful circumstances that may be present in the lives of Justa and her daughter.

### **Empire Studies and Postcolonial Criticism**

Warren Carter recognizes that the scene is located in a world full of prejudices and that Jesus is not exempt from them. These prejudices against the woman included ethnic (Canaanite heritage), cultural and religious (gentile), and economic and political (the cities of Tyre and Sidon require food from the rural areas), in addition to the fact that Justa is a

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<sup>45</sup> Moore, *Gospel Jesuses*, 79.

<sup>46</sup> He argues that Canaanites were associated with child sacrifice. “Paradoxically, however, concern for her child is the overriding trait of the Canaanite woman in our episode, while the Human One’s initial response to the child’s plight is so uncaring, so callous, as to invite the terms ‘inhuman’ or ‘unnatural.’” Moore, *Gospel Jesuses*, 78.

woman. However, Justa challenges these prejudices and demands inclusion in the purposes of God on behalf of her daughter.

Unlike interpreters who downplay the offensiveness of Jesus' insult, Carter recognizes that calling Justa a dog, even the diminutive puppy, is offensive. He agrees with Sharon Ringe's assessment, Jesus seems to be "caught with his compassion down."<sup>47</sup> Carter writes, "Her persistence in the face of Jesus' obstructions, her challenge to the ethnic, gender, religious, political, and economic barriers, her reliance on his power, and her recognition of his authority over demons comprise her faith."<sup>48</sup> In contrast to Gullotta, Carter interprets her faith to be about her rejection of exclusionary theology and her demand to be included rather than about her submissive posturing.<sup>49</sup>

Carter's commentary takes seriously the intersectional prejudices present in this passage, rather than focusing only on the Jew/gentile aspect. However, Carter's attention to the daughter's plight is minimal, instead focusing on the conversation between Justa and Jesus and how Justa advocates for her daughter. This study will use the imperial context of the scene not only to investigate the stressors facing Justa but the stressors facing her daughter.

Musa Dube takes a postcolonial approach to the story seeking "to illumine and problematize the power relations entailed in the construction of mission, empire, gender, and race."<sup>50</sup> One of Dube's foundational arguments is that the implied author of Matthew is trying "to present Jesus (his followers or Matthean community) positively toward imperial

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<sup>47</sup> Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 324; Sharon Ringe, "A Gentile Woman's Story," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. L. Russell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 69.

<sup>48</sup> Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 324–25.

<sup>49</sup> Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 321.

<sup>50</sup> Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 44.

powers,”<sup>51</sup> using, among other items, Jesus’ interaction with the centurion of 8:5–13, Jesus’ encouragement to pay the imperial tribute (22:15–22), and Pilate’s foiled attempts to excuse Jesus and recognition of Jesus’ innocence as evidence. She views the implied author of Matthew as actively competing for Rome’s favor and, thus, in partnership with the Empire and its imperializing ways.<sup>52</sup> Reading the story of Justa and her daughter as a land possession type-scene, she examines this text closely “for patriarchal and imperial perspectives” in the various elements of the story: setting, plot, and characters.<sup>53</sup>

The setting of the scene, in the region of Tyre and Sidon, with its female representative, a Canaanite, is in contrast to the previous scene, set in Jerusalem with its male representatives, the Pharisees. Dube argues that these geographical markers (Jerusalem and Canaan) are ideologically loaded, recalling “Israel’s political and cultural center” and “memories of conquering and possessing a foreign land.”<sup>54</sup>

As a type-scene for land possession, Dube categorizes the characters of Jesus, Justa, and the disciples as either imperializing characters (part of the group that writes the stories that authorize their agendas) or foreign victims (those who appear in stories written by imperializing characters). Jesus is, in her categorization, an imperializing character. He is “a traveler, whose divinity, class, race, and gender endow him with privilege and authority.”<sup>55</sup> From the perspective of the text, Jesus is a member of the royal class (“Son of David”) and a privileged people (the children who eat at the master’s table).

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<sup>51</sup> Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 132.

<sup>52</sup> Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 136–41.

<sup>53</sup> Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 145.

<sup>54</sup> Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 146.

<sup>55</sup> Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 146.

Justa is categorized as a foreign victim whose whole presentation is constructed by the imperializing author. In Dube's discussion of Justa, she notes that the mission to non-believers is presented as one of subjugation. To defend this claim, she highlights three aspects of the Gospel's message. First, the Great Commission depicts a Christ figure with absolute power over the nations. Second, the editorial change in this story from "a Greek, by race a Phoenician from Syria" (Mark 7:26) to "a Canaanite" (Matt 15:22) constructs "a relationship of unequals" as the Canaanite imagery "alludes to those who must be conquered and dispossessed."<sup>56</sup> Third, the plot constructs Justa (and therefore all non-believers) as one welcomed only as a dog "to follow, beg, and depend on their masters."<sup>57</sup> The imperializing writer depicts the foreign victim as desiring, even begging for, their subjugation.

Dube challenges readings that see Justa's claim to the children's dropped crumbs as the moment when Jesus changes his mind (or when Justa changes it for him), writing, "Such interpretations, however, are inconclusive from the text. What is clear is that the woman did not dispute the categories of 'dogs' and 'children' but insisted on being helped as a dog."<sup>58</sup> Dube notes, however, that the author of Matthew portrays Israel (the "children") as hostile to Jesus and resistant to his claims to authority even as Jesus claims his mission is only to Israel. She argues "Israel and Gentiles are both at the mercy of the implied author's quest for power" as she sees the Matthean community "painfully and unwillingly define itself as distinct from its parent group."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 148.

<sup>57</sup> Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 151.

<sup>58</sup> Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 151.

<sup>59</sup> Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 152.

The disciples are also imperializing characters. Dube reads them as representing the Matthean community or its church leaders. Functionally, they are a façade, “putting up a face of disinterest toward a Canaanite foreigner when it is interested, and stating an exclusive interest in Israel when it has already decided to include the other nations.”<sup>60</sup> The gospel throughout has been perfectly comfortable with including gentiles: “The appeal to the figure of Abraham (1:1), the four Gentile women in the genealogy (1:1–8), the Magi from the East (2:1–2), and John the Baptist’s warning to the Pharisees that God can raise children to Abraham from stones (3:9) all highlight that the implied author had a vision of the gospel going to all the nations from the start.”<sup>61</sup>

Overall, Dube reads this scene as promoting an imperializing agenda wherein authorized travelers enter into foreign lands to subjugate foreign people who are depicted as desiring their own subjugation. The portrayal of the Canaanite people as a woman further constructs the relationship of domination and subordination inherent in the imperializing project. However, Dube’s reading attributes a single motivation to the implied author that misses the ambiguity of a colonized situation whereby we would expect the Gospel’s author not only to mimic/replicate the imperializing context in which the Gospel is steeped, but also to resist its claims.

While Dube’s attention to the imperializing features of this scene are important and have certainly been used to justify imperializing agenda throughout history, she, like many others, neglects the social situation of a woman like Justa (since she rightly argues that Justa is a textual construct) within the Roman Empire, focusing instead on how her interaction with Jesus perpetuates imperializing ideology. Further Dube pays no attention

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<sup>60</sup> Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 154.

<sup>61</sup> Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 152.

to the impaired daughter at all, noting only that she is an absent, passive character “whose interests shape the progression and events of the story.”<sup>62</sup>

### **Disability Studies**

As with the exorcism of the Gadarene demoniacs, I know of no interpretations of this passage from a Disability Studies perspective. While a handful of interpreters have discussed the Marcan version of the Syro-Phoenician woman in Mark 7,<sup>63</sup> Disability Studies has ignored the Matthean version of this story.

### **Conclusions**

In general, the scholarly tendency is to focus on issues of faith and the gentile mission in interpreting this scene. By focusing on these dimensions, scholars have kept attention on Jesus and Justa, often neglecting the impaired daughter in the process. Baffes’s reading resists the pervasive domination/subjugation paradigm. Scholars such as Moore, Dube, and Carter have introduced new paradigms for reading the passage that consider animality as a metaphor and the imperial context that complicates a simple reading of Justa as a gentile. However, with the exception of Wainwright, none of the scholars discussed above gives any considerable attention to the daughter. Further, none of these scholars considers Justa and her daughter’s social locations and how the stress of their locations affects the family unit. In what follows, I first discuss how social stressors effect families,

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<sup>62</sup> Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 146.

<sup>63</sup> In Candida Moss’s commentary on Matthew and Mark, where she looks at several of the Marcan healing scenes, Moss merely lumps the Marcan version of the story into a brief discussion about whether demon possession should be considered a disability. She neither cites nor offers an interpretation of the Matthean version. Moss, “Mark and Matthew,” 286–87; Anna Rebecca Solevåg engages the Marcan version of the story using narrative prosthesis as a lens for understanding how the daughter’s disability is ascribed social meaning in the text. She does not discuss the Matthean version. Solevåg, *Negotiating the Disabled Body*, 41–49.

and then I suggest two possible scenarios for understanding the familial relationship of Justa and her daughter and how the stressors accompanying her daughter's impairment and healing affect that relationship.

### **Social Stressors and the Family**

In order to gain some access to possible household stressors experienced by Justa and her daughter I consider some contemporary studies regarding social stress and its effect on the family, fully aware that there are significant differences between modern and ancient families. Among a litany of variances, there are differences in who is considered a member of the family, how households were structured, how authority was exercised, how gender was performed, and the functions and roles of each family member. However, the work of Social Stress theorists at least alerts us to some of the possible dynamics of stress that may have been at work in an ancient household, specifically around the particular and interconnecting roles that individuals occupy within the home.<sup>64</sup>

William R. Avison is a sociologist who has explored the ways in which "individuals' mental health problems have consequences for others in their social networks, most notably, their family members."<sup>65</sup> Avison argues that "studies of caregiving and family burden provide interesting lessons for sociologists in understanding how the mental illness of a family member generates an array of chronic stressors that sometimes erodes the psychological well-being of parents, spouses, or adult children who provide care" and that mental illness, though well documented to be the result of social stressors, itself serves as a

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<sup>64</sup> Toner, "Mental Health," 67–70.

<sup>65</sup> William R. Avison, "The Impact of Mental Illness on the Family," in *Handbook of the Sociology of Mental Health*, ed. Carol S. Aneshensel and Jo E. Phelan (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 1999), 495.

stressor within a family unit.<sup>66</sup> As a stressor, mental health issues function as chronic rather than discrete stressors. That is to say, the presence of a family member with mental health issues acts as a continuous stressor within the family. Certain chronic physical ailments could also act as a family stressor. Though the level of strain “may ebb and flow with the individual’s symptomatology [there] remains an ever-present threat even when the individual is in remission.”<sup>67</sup>

Avison follows the work of Leonard Pearlin who discusses the types of stress that may arise from role occupancy (e.g. parent, child, employee, retiree, etc). Avison categorizes Pearlin’s types of stressors this way: (1) the excessive demands of certain roles, (2) inequities in rewards, (3) failure of reciprocity in roles, (4) role conflict, (5) role captivity, and (6) role restructuring.<sup>68</sup> How Justa and her daughter may have experienced some of these stressors in their various familial and social roles will be explored below.

When Pearlin speaks of excessive demands of certain roles, he is referring to “matters such as shift work, role overload, noise, dirt, dangers, and other noxious elements of the work environment and of the work itself...”<sup>69</sup> These stressors, as Pearlin notes, are highly subjective and are often only considered stressful when in combination with the other types of stressors he considers.

Inequity of rewards refers to the ways in which roles are intertwined with material rewards. Broadly, this category is concerned with whether a role occupant feels that “they

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<sup>66</sup> Avison, “Impact of Mental Illness,” 496.

<sup>67</sup> Avison, “Impact of Mental Illness,” 496.

<sup>68</sup> Avison, “Impact of Mental Illness,” 497.

<sup>69</sup> Leonard Pearlin, “Role Strains and Personal Stress,” in *Psychosocial Stress: Trends in Theory and Research*, ed. Howard B. Kaplan (New York: Academic Press, 1983), 9.

are receiving fair and just rewards for their efforts..."<sup>70</sup> As an example, Pearlin cites the unpaid labor of homemakers and how lack of recognition and appreciation contribute to their role stress.

Failure of reciprocity in roles refers to the perception of inequity in various sorts of relationships: marriage, parenthood, and occupation, to name a few. A breakdown in reciprocity can cause one to think that the "relationship is laced with unfairness and exploitation."<sup>71</sup> Pearlin argues that failure of reciprocity, wherein one feels as though they invest much more than another party in the relationship, can lead to stress, but this depends not only on the objective circumstances of the role but on "whether these circumstances are seen as an affront to cherished values or as a support of them."<sup>72</sup>

Role conflict is a way of describing when the various roles one person holds conflict with one another. This is not to say that all roles can or must conflict. Pearlin observes that, generally, people tend to ignore the claims of a less important role when role conflict arises.<sup>73</sup> However, "role conflict is most apt to lead to psychological conflict when the roles are of similar importance or equally unrelinquishable..."<sup>74</sup> As an example, Pearlin cites working-class mothers who often experience a conflict in their parental and occupational roles, as secondary childcare options are not as readily available to them. This experience suggests that social class can be a significant factor in role conflict and its severity.

Role captivity has more to do with a role being unwanted than with the conditions of the role itself. "The essential characteristic of role captivity, whenever it occurs, is that it

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<sup>70</sup> Pearlin, "Role Strains," 9.

<sup>71</sup> Pearlin, "Role Strains," 10.

<sup>72</sup> Pearlin, "Role Strains," 16.

<sup>73</sup> Pearlin, "Role Strains," 17.

<sup>74</sup> Pearlin, "Role Strains," 18.

entails an inescapable obligation to be and do one thing at the very time the individual wants to be and do something different. This conflict generates stress.”<sup>75</sup> Examples include retirees still wishing to work or childless adults wishing to be parents, or a family member like Justa having to care for a sick or possessed family member. Central to the concept of role captivity is the sense that a role is inescapable rather than a sense that the conditions of the role are difficult (though difficult conditions are not necessarily precluded).

Finally, role restructuring is a way of describing indirect stressors that occur because of life changes, including gains, losses, and changes of roles. Pearlin differentiates between scheduled and unscheduled life changes, within which gains and losses of roles occur. A scheduled life change is one for which individuals are socialized and prepared: marriage, parenting, employment, etc. An unscheduled life change is one for which individuals are not prepared: death of a child, premature death of a spouse, abrupt termination of employment, etc. Whether life changes are scheduled or unscheduled, Pearlin argues, they “do not automatically generate stress simply because they involve life changes. Rather, their connection to stress is largely indirect. They first act as levers for creating durable strains in economic, family, or other roles, and the strains stimulate stress.”<sup>76</sup> It is the restructuring of areas of experience that causes the stress, with unscheduled life changes contributing more than scheduled. Changes in roles can also be stressful, especially when expectations and behaviors shift. For example, elderly parents being cared for by their children may experience stress because “patterns of autonomy and

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<sup>75</sup> Pearlin, “Role Strains,” 19.

<sup>76</sup> Pearlin, “Role Strains,” 23.

dependence now tend to be reversed.”<sup>77</sup> The losses, gains, and changes of roles “can be significant sources of strain and stress,” even if indirectly.<sup>78</sup>

According to Avison, beyond the stressors arising from role occupancy, there are “ambient strains” that are “diffuse in nature and have a variety of sources.”<sup>79</sup> An example of an ambient strain could be the emotional inaccessibility or unavailability of the mentally ill person toward their dependents or caregivers. Additionally, “marriages in which one partner suffers from a mental disorder are frequently characterized by discord and conflict,” often with the conflict not being about the mental illness at all.<sup>80</sup> Finally, in addition to the chronic strain caused by ongoing symptoms or the anxiety of the threat of symptoms, those living with a mentally ill family member often experience discrete stressors that are the direct result of the mental illness, such as encounters with law enforcement, institutionalization, hospitalization, and job loss. Avison’s research is focused primarily on mental health, as most Social Stress Theory is, but the stressors described can be true of families with a chronically physically ill member. Further, the studies informing Avison and Pearlin’s individual research are based on modern families and on modern understandings of mental illness and health. Therefore, I will exercise caution in utilizing insights from their research.

To consider possible familial situations for Justa and her impaired daughter, I imagine their potential individual stressors and suggest how those stressors affect the family dynamic using Avison and Pearlin’s types of stressors related to family relationships and caregiving. In addition, I will note how those stressors can be categorized within

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<sup>77</sup> Pearlin, “Role Strains,” 24.

<sup>78</sup> Pearlin, “Role Strains,” 26.

<sup>79</sup> Avison, “Impact of Mental Illness,” 497.

<sup>80</sup> Avison, “Impact of Mental Illness,” 497.

Wheaton's classification categories. As outlined previously, Wheaton's five categories of experiences of stress are:

1. Daily hassles: concerned with the demands of everyday life in one's environment to "episodic, irregular, microevents that cannot be anticipated daily." These daily hassles are generally not stressful to the point of challenging the integrity of the organism, per the definition above, though some could be. For instance, someone working in a hostile work environment may find that daily hassle to be chronically and detrimentally stressful.
2. Nonevents: when an expected or desired event does not come to pass. The important qualifier for a nonevent is the possibility that change could have happened or the lack of the possibility of change.
3. Traumas: generally understood as being extremely serious and extremely overwhelming. Traumas are isolated events.
4. Chronic traumatic situation: ongoing trauma. The distinction between this category and category 3 has to do with the number of times the event occurs rather than the duration of the effects of the event. "For example, a single rape would be considered a traumatic event, but repeated, regular, and therefore expected sexual abuse is best thought of as a chronic traumatic situation." Traumas can include a range of severe situations including war stress, natural disasters, sexual abuse and assault, physical violence, and parental death or divorce.
5. Ecological stressors: occur at any level of a social unit (family, school, work, neighborhood, city, etc.) and specifically affect those within that social unit. Events like natural disasters and chronic stressors like crime or war fall under this category.

As with most classificatory tools, these categories include significant overlap and many stressors can be categorized in more than one way.

### **Social Stress and Family Life in the Ancient World**

In what follows I suggest two possible scenarios for understanding the relationship between Justa and her impaired daughter and the circumstances of stress in which they live. In the first scenario, I explore the possibility that the daughter is an infant and that her symptomatology has given rise to the possibility of exposure. In the second scenario, I consider the possibility that the daughter is an adult woman with her own children to care for. I explore how the daughter's impairment introduces stress into the lives of her

caregiver (Justa in scenario 1) and her dependents (her own child and her aging mother in scenario 2).

There are a few items to note before exploring my proposed scenarios. First, what does calling the woman a Canaanite indicate about Justa's characterization? This is a clear change from the Marcan version where she is described as a Syro-Phoenician woman. What does the moniker "Canaanite" connote? The Canaanites were the ancient enemies of the Israelites. They were the indigenous folk living in the land God promised to Israel, and the Israelites were given divine sanction to systematically annihilate them. Luz attempts to downplay the polemic of this epithet arguing that "Canaanite" was a "self-designation of the Phoenicians at the time of Matthew."<sup>81</sup> Stephen Moore (with whom I agree) finds this view implausible. Rather, the term recalls an extended tradition of animosity between the Israelites and Canaanites that includes primeval patriarchal narratives as well as the exodus, wilderness wandering, and conquest and genocide narratives.

The term Canaanite is a label given to Justa by the author and highlights the upcoming conflict between her and Jesus. The naming of Justa as Canaanite foreshadows how Jesus will treat Justa by positioning of her as an enemy of Israel, and therefore an enemy of Jesus. This might, for some readers, justify Jesus calling her a "dog." For the text to name Justa "as a 'Canaanite' is to mark her as one who must be invaded, conquered, annihilated; or, if she is to survive, then ... she must parrot the superiority of her subjugators and betray her own people and land. Basically, she must survive only as a colonized mind, a subjugated and domesticated subject."<sup>82</sup> The treatment she receives by

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<sup>81</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 338.

<sup>82</sup> Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 147.

Jesus because she is marked as “enemy” and “other” contributes substantially to her social stress (discussed below).

Second, there is no description of the symptomatology that the daughter is exhibiting. Justa only says that her daughter is severely demon-possessed (ἡ θυγάτηρ μου κακῶς δαιμονίζεται). As discussed in chapter 4, an array of symptoms/behaviors could qualify as resulting from demon possession. In Matthew the symptoms that may indicate demon possession include ferocity (8:28), loss of speech (9:32, 12:22), strange diets (11:18), loss of sight (12:22), ability to exorcise demons (12:24), and falling into fire or water (7:14–20, perhaps indicating an element of self-harm). The reader, then, is left to fill in the gaps of what symptoms the daughter is presenting. Is she unable to communicate? Is she exhibiting ferocity like the Gadarene demoniacs? Is she harming herself in some capacity? Or are there other symptoms that one could imagine she exhibits?

The adverb κακῶς may provide some direction for imagining her symptoms. It is used five other times in Matthew either as a modifier indicating enhanced severity (17:15, 21:41) or as a modifier describing those brought to Jesus for healing, where it is commonly translated simply as “the sick” (8:16, 9:12, 14:35). One passage of note is 8:16, where it is in a list that seems to indicate demon possession and sickness are two different categories. Perhaps the use of this word not only highlights the severity of the daughter’s condition but also indicates a general illness that is blamed on a demon. Maybe the daughter is extremely ill and the mother blames a demon for the trouble. As I suggest possible scenarios for Justa and her daughter’s social locations, I will examine how the daughter’s social stress interacts with physical illness and how physical illness serves as a familial social stressor for caretakers and dependents.

Third, some scholars have considered the question of Justa's marital status.<sup>83</sup> While most females in the empire could expect to be married by their mid to late teens, males typically did not marry until they were around thirty. This means that the age gap between a father and a child averaged at 40 years.<sup>84</sup> "Children were more likely to have a surviving mother than father since men were often ten years or so older than their wives."<sup>85</sup> Garnsey and Saller note that more than half of children would have lost their father by the time they reached their mid to late teens. While many men would have been widowed due to the dangers associated with childbirth,<sup>86</sup> many women would also have been widowed due to the natural aging of their significantly older husbands or their military activity. Therefore, if one imagines Justa's daughter as being an adult, then it is possible that her father has died and Justa is a widow. There are other reasons besides death that might explain the absence of Justa's husband in the scene. Perhaps he was away on business or at war. It is also possible that Justa has remarried and her husband is not that interested in providing care for his stepdaughter. In the scenarios that follow, I will presume in one scene that Justa is married and in the other scene she is not.

Finally, I do not attempt in this chapter to understand why Jesus calls Justa a dog. Jesus calls her a dog because the male Jesus *can* call her a dog, and his abuse of her is rhetorically justified by the moniker "Canaanite." I hold that most attempts to understand

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<sup>83</sup> Ringe, "A Gentile Woman's Story," 70; Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 322; Nortjé-Meyer, "The Homosexual Body," 131.

<sup>84</sup> Garnsey and Saller, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society and Culture*, 161.

<sup>85</sup> Sharon Betsworth, *Children in Early Christian Narratives* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 15.

<sup>86</sup> Maternal mortality rates are difficult to determine. For estimates see Michael Grant and Rachel Kitzinger, eds., *Civilization of the Ancient Mediterranean* (New York: Scribner's, 1988), 3:1357. See Ovid *Amores* 2.13 for an example of anxiety caused by fear of the mother's death during childbirth.

“why” are really attempts to excuse the behavior of this quite unpalatable presentation of Jesus.

### **Scenario 1: The Newborn Daughter is at Risk of Exposure**

For this scenario, I propose that Justa is a married woman from a non-elite class whose husband has decided to expose their daughter because her possession symptomatology, in his view, has made raising the daughter unjustifiable, a decision with which Justa disagrees. I imagine that the manifestation of the newborn daughter’s possession symptomatology was a congenital defect or an illness, perhaps epilepsy, that was the critical factor in the father’s decision to expose her. Under these circumstances, Justa’s desperation for her daughter’s healing may be the difference between life and death or freedom and servitude for her daughter. At this juncture, the stressors present would more readily affect Justa.<sup>87</sup>

Many scholars have noted a tension in the sources regarding children. “On one hand, there is an understanding of the child in the ancient world as one who was not valued, who was in a sense a ‘nobody.’ ...On the other hand, there are primary source inscriptions, funerary monuments, poems, letters, and more that demonstrate that children were valued members of the family.”<sup>88</sup> The story of Justa and her recently born daughter reflects, in some ways, both of these views of children. Jesus dismisses Justa and her request, thereby indicating that the daughter is not inherently worthy of his attention or of healing, while at the same time Justa pleads desperately on behalf of her daughter to secure

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<sup>87</sup> Though not discussed in this scenario, if Justa’s daughter were to be exposed and then sold into slavery, she would face a lifetime of chronic stressors. See chapter 3 for more information on the types of stressors that enslaved persons faced under the Roman Empire.

<sup>88</sup> Betsworth, *Children*, 5.

her well being. The tension of the daughter's worthiness, then, is resolved in this scene through Justa's persistence and unwavering defense of her daughter's value.

The *paterfamilias*, who had *ius vitae nesisque* (the power of life and death) over his children, made the decision to expose an infant. While some have taken this power to mean the *paterfamilias* held the unrestricted power to kill any member of his household at any time, "nothing at all suggests that this right was applied to children beyond their first infancy except in isolated cases."<sup>89</sup> In any event, it is clear that exposure of unwanted or unsupportable infants was a common practice, that the decision-making power belonged to the father, and that boys were preferable to girls, even if only ideologically.

Infanticide and exposure were practiced both in Greek and Roman communities for a variety of reasons: illegitimacy, inheritance issues specific to the elite, to choose the sex of the children to be raised, poverty, or to rid the family of a child with a birth defect or abnormality. It is difficult to know the rates at which children were exposed in the empire. Pliny's letters to Trajan regarding the *threptoi* (the exposed who are then raised in slavery) who were becoming a great issue in his province indicate that at least in the provinces of Achaea and Bithynia-Pontus the practice of exposure was widespread (*Ep.* 10.65–66). The practice seems widespread enough to be noticed, commented upon, legislated against, and found morally repugnant in some circles, but not so widespread as to cause any sort of instability in the population.<sup>90</sup>

The illegitimacy of the child could be cause for exposure, yet "the early age of girls at first marriage, together with the custom of remarriage, probably meant that Roman women

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<sup>89</sup> W. V. Harris, "Child-Exposure in the Roman Empire," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 84 (1994): 3.

<sup>90</sup> Harris, "Child-Exposure," 3–11.

experienced relatively few illegitimate pregnancies.”<sup>91</sup> Further, children took the social status of their mothers, thereby eliminating any claims to a father’s inheritance, therefore limiting the number of exposed illegitimate children from elite households. There is not enough information regarding the non-elite classes to indicate one way or the other the prevalence of exposure of illegitimate children.

Some elite fathers exposed their newborn child in order to protect the inheritance for their older children. Musonius Rufus criticizes exposure by the wealthy, saying

But what seems to me most monstrous of all, some who do not even have poverty as an excuse, and in spite of prosperity and even riches are so inhuman as not to rear later-born offspring in order that those earlier born may inherit greater wealth—by such a deed of wickedness planning prosperity for their surviving children....their parents rob them of brothers...<sup>92</sup>

Hierocles shares Musonius’s criticism. He believes that is natural to raise all (or, at least most) of one’s children, yet “most people seem to disobey this advice for a reason that is not very seemly: for they feel this way on account of their love of wealth and because they believe that poverty is a huge evil” (*Anth.* 4.75.14).<sup>93</sup> Though these philosophers are critical of the practice, their comments seem to indicate that the wealthy exposing their newborns for the financial security of older children was a common enough, or at least an abhorrent enough, occurrence to merit criticism.

Third, fathers may choose to expose a newborn in order to choose the sex of the child they raised. John Riddle has argued that Romans were more capable of controlling

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<sup>91</sup> Harris, “Child-Exposure,” 12–13.

<sup>92</sup> Cora Lutz, trans., “Musonius Rufus, the Roman Socrates,” in *Yale Classical Studies*, vol. 10 of (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947), 99, 101.

<sup>93</sup> Ilaria Ramelli, *Hierocles the Stoic: Elements of Ethics, Fragments, and Excerpts*, ed. and trans. David Konstan, vol. 28 of *Writings from the Greco-Roman World* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 79.

their own fertility with the use of oral contraceptives and abortifacients,<sup>94</sup> which begs the question: why would parents allow a pregnancy to go to term if the child was unwanted? Harris argues that abortions were dangerous, especially if a woman waited until the second trimester when she would know for sure that she was pregnant. “But a primary consideration was that parents who wanted male but not female offspring will have allowed pregnancies to go to term and then, if nature went against them, exposed their infant daughters.”<sup>95</sup>

Some primary sources indicate that girls were exposed more often than boys. For example, “twice as many contracts for the nursing of exposed girls have been found than for exposed boys.”<sup>96</sup> Additionally, Posidippus, a Greek comic poet in the late fourth century BCE, wrote “A son is always raised, even if one is poor; but a daughter is exposed, even if one is rich,”<sup>97</sup> and an Egyptian man in an infamous personal letter to his wife writes “If you chance to bear a child, and it is a boy, let it be; if it is a girl, expose it.”<sup>98</sup> Though it is difficult to discern with any certainty, the evidence suggests that the sex of the child could be a reason for exposure.

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<sup>94</sup> John M. Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1992).

<sup>95</sup> Harris, “Child-Exposure,” 15; For arguments against high rates of female infanticide/exposure see Donald Engels, “The Problem of Female Infanticide in the Greco-Roman World,” *CP* 75.2 (1980): 112–20; For counter-arguments to Engels’s claims, see Cynthia Patterson, “‘Not Worth the Rearing’: The Causes of Infant Exposure in Ancient Greece,” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 115 (1985): 103–23.

<sup>96</sup> Betsworth, *Children*, 10.

<sup>97</sup> Hermaphroditus fr. 11 Kock. Cited in Harris, “Child-Exposure,” 4. Harris notes that this couplet has been transmitted down out of context, but that the “comic exaggeration rests on a degree of perceived reality...”

<sup>98</sup> Oxyrhynchus papyrus 744. Betsworth, *Children*, 11.

The most common reason for exposing a child, it appears, was poverty.<sup>99</sup> Ray Laurence argues “exposing a child was thought of as the best way of saving an infant from a life of impoverishment or disability.”<sup>100</sup> Harris writes:

No economic historian of antiquity would doubt that many children were born into subsistence conditions in which simply feeding another child would mean taking food from members of the family who were already hungry. And in an agrarian society a bad harvest rapidly puts these choices into stark terms: one of the regular causes of child abandonment in pre-modern Italy was the *cattiva annata*.<sup>101</sup>

Several documents indicate that poverty was a reasonable cause for a family to abandon their child.<sup>102</sup> Aelian writes that a Theban law existed requiring families to raise their children unless they were extremely poor, in which case they were to turn the child over to the magistrates to be sold into slavery (*Historical Miscellany* 2.7). Pliny’s *Panegyric* (26.5–7) shows that economic need was causing some parents to limit their family size. Nerva and Trajan founded and extended the *alimenta* in Italy in an attempt to address the situation.<sup>103</sup> The evidence indicates that poverty was a primary consideration for limiting family size for many in the Empire.

Another reason to expose children was if the child was born with a disability or deformity. Seneca infamously suggested that it was a mercy to destroy “unnatural progeny” (*portentosos fetus extinguimus*) and drown newborns who were “weakly and abnormal” (*debiles monstrosique*) (*Ira* 1.15.2 [Basore, LCL]). Seneca the Elder writes, “Many fathers are in the habit of exposing offspring who are no good. Some right from birth are damaged in some part of their bodies, weak and hopeless. Their parents throw

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<sup>99</sup> For counter-arguments, see Engels, “The Problem of Female Infanticide in the Greco-Roman World”; Patterson, “Not Worth the Rearing.”

<sup>100</sup> Ray Laurence, “Childhood in the Roman Empire,” *History Today* 55.10 (2005): 22.

<sup>101</sup> Harris, “Child-Exposure,” 13.

<sup>102</sup> See also Menander *Epitr.* 254–55, *Perik.* 811–12; Plutarch, *Mor.* 497E.

<sup>103</sup> Harris, “Child-Exposure,” 13.

them out rather than expose them” (*Contr.* 10.4.16 [Winterbottom, LCL]). Soranus provides a highly detailed list of qualifications for exposure. In *Gynecology* 2.10, the only children worth rearing have a mother whose pregnancy was healthy, who were not premature, who cry vigorously at birth, who are sound in their limbs, whose senses work, whose orifices are unobstructed, and whose movements are not sluggish or weak. If his advice were followed with any regularity, this would certainly result in the exposure or infanticide of numerous newborns.

Both Senecas are vague regarding what specifically constitutes weak, abnormal, or damaged children. Soranus is no more specific in what constitutes weakness or sluggishness in a newborn. Harris argues “it is difficult to imagine, for instance, that victims of congenital blindness were often allowed to survive,” but that it is an overstatement to claim “deformed infants were generally exposed.”<sup>104</sup> Overall, Harris holds that some deformed or disabled infants may have been “promptly eliminated” by midwives, some exposed, and some raised by their parents.

Taking these causes for exposure into consideration, I posit a scenario in which Justa’s daughter was at risk for exposure because she was born with a congenital defect or an illness (perhaps epilepsy) that Justa attributed to demon possession. The *Testament of Solomon* reflects the belief that demons can attack newborns and that they cause a litany of impairments. For example, a demon claims, “In the wombs of women, I blind children. I also turn their ears around backward and make them dumb and deaf” (*T. Sol.* 12.2). Another, named Obyzouth, says “my work is limited to killing newborn infants, injuring eyes, condemning mouths, destroying minds, and making bodies feel pain” (13.4). The

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<sup>104</sup> Harris, “Child-Exposure,” 12.

demon Rhyx Alath claims to produce croup in infants (18.25). In the New Testament Gospels, demon possession is linked to a variety of physical ailments: blindness (Matt 12:22), muteness (Matt 9:33; Luke 11:14), ferocity (Matt 8:28; Mark 5:3–5), self-harm (Matt 17:15), seizures and convulsions (Luke 9:42), and fever (Luke 4:39).<sup>105</sup> In the ancient world, a litany of afflictions, it seems, was attributed to demon possession. A daughter born into poverty with an impairment, such as congenital blindness, muteness, seizures, or fever would be a prime candidate for exposure. It is possible to imagine a woman like Justa faced with the stressful reality of an impaired daughter and a husband who has decided to expose the daughter because it was fiscally irresponsible to raise such a daughter.

It is important to note that exposure was not regarded as tantamount to infanticide, even if it can be assumed that the majority of exposed infants died.<sup>106</sup> A key difference was that exposure was often done in hopes that the child would be taken in by another and raised. Exposed children were often left in conventional places where they were likely to be found (temples, well-traveled intersections, outside villages or towns, etc.).<sup>107</sup> Once exposed, though, a number of possible fates awaited the child.

Some feared that exposed children would be killed by wild animals or the elements: “...the dangers to be feared by luckless infants have been wild beasts, snakes, the freezing cold that threatens tender limbs, and lack of food...” (Seneca the Elder, *Contr.* 10.4.21

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<sup>105</sup> Luke 4:39 does not explicitly identify the fever as being from a demon, but the same verb (ἐπιτιμάω) is used for when Jesus casts out demons and when he casts out the fever, indicating an invasion etiology rather than an internal imbalance.

<sup>106</sup> Harris, “Child-Exposure,” 10.

<sup>107</sup> Harris, “Child-Exposure,” 9; Betsworth, *Children*, 10.

[Winterbottom, LCL]).<sup>108</sup> Other exposed infants who did not survive, especially those with certain impairments, may have died regardless of whether or not they were exposed. Still, other infants were exposed in places they were unlikely to be found to ensure that they did not survive. There is some evidence that the occasional exposed newborn became a changeling (e.g. Dio Chrysostom, *Disc.* 15.8), though “such substitutions were only common on the stage.”<sup>109</sup> Perhaps some were adopted, though there were means for formal adoption available to childless couples.<sup>110</sup>

Though most exposed children probably did not survive, of those who did, the most likely fate was enslavement. The opening line of the *Shepherd* of Hermas takes for granted that a child raised by another could be sold into slavery: “The one who raised me sold me to a certain woman named Rhoda, in Rome” (1.1 [Ehrman, LCL]). Pliny’s correspondence to Trajan presumes that a great number of *threptoi* have become a cause of great concern for his district. The *threptoi* were children who were exposed, raised by another, and sold into slavery. Pliny seeks Trajan’s official guidance on how to handle *threptoi* who are seeking emancipation (*Ep.* 10.65–66). The undated Theban law recorded in Aelian says that unwanted children of poor folk would be surrendered to the magistrates and sold into slavery (*Historical Miscellany* 2.7).

The Christian apologist Justin argues that the exposure of children results in their being raised to be prostitutes (a common circumstance for the enslaved). Justin’s concern is that he believes that parents who expose their children cause their children to be polluted (by their participation in prostitution) and that men who visit prostitutes may end

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<sup>108</sup> Harris suggests that the horror of children eaten by wild animals was one source of stories of children raised by wild animals. Harris, “Child-Exposure,” 8.

<sup>109</sup> Harris, “Child-Exposure,” 9.

<sup>110</sup> Harris, “Child-Exposure,” 10.

up in incestuous relations with their own kin (*Apol.* 1.27).<sup>111</sup> Clement of Alexandria shares a similar concern that men who visit prostitutes will unknowingly have sexual relations with their children (*Paed.* 3.3). Though these authors' concerns are with improper sexual relations among kin, they reflect the common conception that many exposed children were enslaved since most prostitutes were enslaved people.

Assuming that Justa's daughter is a newborn infant who has manifested some sort of symptomatology that is attributed to demon possession, such as congenital defect or seizures, Justa's husband may have chosen to expose rather than raise the daughter. If the family was poor, then raising a daughter with a physical impairment may not be fiscally responsible. The exposure of infants because of a physical deformity/inadequacy or economic strain was common,<sup>112</sup> but this does not mean that it was not a stressful decision for the parents to make. Harris observes that "the anguish of the parents...is not in any case to be underestimated, and what was commonplace to a social observer could be a crisis to individuals."<sup>113</sup> Toner notes "husbands deciding to expose infants cannot have been a psychological benefit."<sup>114</sup> In this scenario, the stress-laden decision to expose Justa's daughter is the difference between life and death or freedom and servitude.

Terence's *Heautontimorumenos*, a Latin play of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, includes a dialogue between a husband and wife, Chremes and Sostrana, who were divided on the subject of what to do with their newborn daughter (626–52). Chremes wanted the child to be killed, but Sostrana instead gave their newborn daughter to another woman to expose

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<sup>111</sup> "Justin's claim that most of the exposed survived has to be understood as part of his rhetorical strategy." Harris, "Child-Exposure," 11.

<sup>112</sup> Harris, "Child-Exposure," 11–13.

<sup>113</sup> Harris, "Child-Exposure," 16.

<sup>114</sup> Toner, "Mental Health," 67–68.

for her. Many years later Sostrana informs Chremes of what she did. He is upset over Sostrana's choice but says that he understands why she would disobey his orders and attributes it to "pity, maternal feeling." While this does not explicitly reference anxiety or stress, that Sostrana found a way around her husband's orders to ensure her child's survival indicates that choices regarding whether or not to raise a child were complicated and often stressful.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* from the early first century CE narrates a similar tale (9.666–797). In it, Ligdus commands his wife Telethusa to kill their expected child if born a girl. As he spoke to her, "their cheeks were bathed in tears, both his who ordered and hers to whom the command was given," (9.680 [Miller, LCL]) indicating the emotional toll this type of decision could take on both parents. During the night that Telethusa will deliver the child, Isis appears to her in a vision instructing her to put away her "grievous cares and think not to obey your husband's orders" (9.696–97 [Miller, LCL]). Telethusa secretly raised the child as a boy, without her husband's knowledge. When the disguised daughter was betrothed to another girl for marriage, Telethusa does everything she can to delay the wedding day, but eventually exhausts all of her options. Telethusa begs Isis to intervene, who transforms the daughter into a boy so that no one would know of her deceit. This story dramatically illustrates the incredible lengths this parent employed in order to ensure their child's survival. The heightened emotion around the command to kill the newborn, the goddess's recognition of the mother's "grievous cares," and the mother's desperation to protect her daughter from discovery of her sex all reflect the stress surrounding the decision to rear a child or not.

Granted, these are examples representing a literary trope in which women act

against the wishes of their husbands, but it seems likely that *real* women faced with the possibility of exposure could have been vocal in their desire to keep their child, even if they had no actual power to enact their desires. Justa's say in the decision to expose their daughter would depend very much on how accepting her husband was of her opinions and concerns. That Justa would approach Jesus to heal her daughter suggests that her desire to raise their daughter in spite of her impairment did not change her husband's mind. In this scenario, the daughter's possession symptoms are the primary reason for exposure, thus, if Justa can find a healer for her daughter, her husband may be willing to raise the daughter.

Justa's position in this scenario is stressful indeed. In terms of stress related to role occupancy delineated by Avison and Pearlin (above), Justa is faced with several acute and chronic stressors if her daughter is at risk of exposure. First, as a wife, she would be expected to be subordinate and submissive. As Toner explain,

The wife was subject to the whims of her husband...Wives were pressed to be chaste and obedient...[and] were expected to suppress their true feelings...This reflected the weight of emotional work that Roman society placed on its women, as a seemingly natural extension of the traditional division of labour. None of this can be expected to have been beneficial for the individual's mental well-being.<sup>115</sup>

Though it is impossible to know how *actual* marriage relationships played out in the home, the ideal (transmitted through the husband's perspective) would be that a wife was subordinate to and supportive of her husband as "her identity became associated with that of her husband" even as it "also remained strongly associated with her natal family."<sup>116</sup> Assuming this is a first marriage for Justa, there would most likely be a significant age difference between her and her husband, perhaps up to 15 years, with Justa being in her

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<sup>115</sup> Toner, "Mental Health," 68–69.

<sup>116</sup> Mary Harlow, *Growing Up and Growing Old in Ancient Rome: A Life Course Approach* (London: Routledge, 2002), 71.

late teens or early twenties. “Marriage at an early age might have enhanced the ‘virtue’ of submission and sense of subordination a young girl might have felt towards her husband, and increased his sense of superiority, dominance and paternalism...”<sup>117</sup>

If Justa’s petitions to her husband failed to change his mind concerning exposure, then she may experience several of the role occupancy stressors Avison and Pearlin describe. Because she is required to accept her husband’s decision to expose her daughter, she may feel that her role as a wife demands more of her than she wants to give. She may also feel a sense of failure of reciprocity in her relationship with her husband, as she has been a dutiful wife yet her husband dismisses her wishes. The extreme of role conflict comes to the fore in this scenario, as a woman is forced to live with the tension of her duty as a wife in a highly patriarchal family system and her desire as a mother to raise her daughter. Using Wheaton’s classifications, these stressors could be considered traumas, as they are serious and overwhelming, and ecological, as they were woven into the fabric of society for wives at the time.

### **Scenario 2: The Daughter has Dependents of Her Own**

In this scenario, I imagine a different, more complicated family structure for Justa and her daughter, in which the daughter’s stressors are foregrounded.<sup>118</sup> For this scenario, Justa’s daughter is a widow with a child of her own under 2 years old,<sup>119</sup> living at subsistence level as a non-elite in the urban center of Tyre or Sidon. The daughter’s

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<sup>117</sup> Harlow, *Growing Up*, 65.

<sup>118</sup> Though there are several reasons Matthew could recount this scene without mention of a husband or other male kin, the absence of men lends itself to the possibility that Justa and her daughter are isolated from any kin and have only one another to rely upon.

<sup>119</sup> I choose this age range to stress the child’s dependence upon his/her mother’s body for sustenance since 2 years old seems to be the average age of weaning a child, perhaps especially for lower class families, with evidence for earlier and later weaning ages. Beryl Rawson, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

symptoms developed after the death of her husband. This scenario is not connected to the previous scenario, but instead imagines a different context within which to understand the daughter's impairment and the stress she and her mother experience.

In this case, the daughter's symptomatology would affect a family in more complicated ways. On one hand, the daughter's symptomatology could be interfering with her ability to care for her child, (e.g. refusal to feed her child, a general disinterest in caring for the child, etc.). On the other, the daughter could be, at this stage in life, caring for Justa. Justa could be in her forties or older and her "adult" daughter is *her* caretaker. Thus, the daughter could be the critical lynchpin for caring for her mother in her old age and her own dependent child. With the daughter's husband deceased, the family unit could be seriously destabilized by the possession symptomatology of the daughter. If Justa is too old (or unable) to work and the child too young, Justa's daughter could be the primary financial and material provider for the family. Her inability to work or sporadic, even seasonal, employment could result in further food insecurity, homelessness, or the death of her child (already in precarious position because of high child mortality rates).

For this scenario, I assume a possession symptomatology that the medical writers of the ancient world would have diagnosed as mood disorders, namely melancholia or mania, which could potentially adversely affect the family dynamic. According to Soranus, "mania is an impairment of reason" and can be the result of a range of causes including grief and anxiety.<sup>120</sup> Admittedly, Soranus believes mania in women and children to be quite infrequent, but Aretaues of Cappadocia suggests that women can be subject to mania but

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<sup>120</sup> Grant, "Views of Mental Illness," 374.

that their cases are more difficult to manage.<sup>121</sup> According to Aretaeus, one of the symptoms of mania can include “madness attended with anger; and these sometimes rend their clothes and kill their keepers” (Aretaeus 3.6.4–5).<sup>122</sup> Galen says that melancholia is mood and behavior symptomatic and that all who have this disorder

exhibit fear or despondency. They find fault with life and hate people; but not all want to die. For some the fear of death is of principal concern during melancholy. Others again will appear to you quite bizarre because they dread death and desire to die at the same time (*De loci affectis* 3.10).<sup>123</sup>

The *Testament of Solomon* contains examples of the belief that demons are responsible for these types of symptoms. A demon named Asmodeus claims to “spread madness about women through the stars” (*T. Sol.* 5.8).<sup>124</sup> The demon Katanikotael claims to “unleash fights and feuds in homes” (18.15) while Rhyx Anoster claims to unleash hysteria (18.33). Further, the symptoms of anger and violence cited by the medical writers sound similar to the symptoms describing the Gadarene and Gerasene demoniac/s (Matt 8:28–34; Mark 5:1–20).

Assuming the daughter is a widow and primary provider in her home, I examine two distinct stressors caused by these new social positions in which she finds herself. First, there is the grief caused by the loss of a husband<sup>125</sup> and, second, the anxiety of being a primary caregiver and provider for her child and her mother. That her grief is interwoven with social stress is not a reflection of egotism or selfishness. Consider this literary

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<sup>121</sup> Grant, “Views of Mental Illness,” 379.

<sup>122</sup> Francis Adams, trans., *The Extant Works of Aretaeus, the Cappadocian* (London: Sydenham Society, 1856), 302.

<sup>123</sup> R. E. Siegel, *On the Affected Parts: Translation of the Greek Text with Explanatory Notes* (Basel, NY, 1976), 8, 190–91.

<sup>124</sup> It is also suggested this line means, “Perhaps the stars themselves are mad about women, that is, they are demons...” Duling, “Testament of Solomon,” 966.

<sup>125</sup> The daughter’s husband could have died for various reasons, including old age (as a large marriage gap was possible), disease, military combat, foul play, or an accident.

example, found in the conclusion of the *Iliad* (2 4.725–745), demonstrating the complex union of grief and anxiety resulting from the loss of a husband. In this scene, Andromache laments the loss of her husband Hector and reveals her anxiety about what his loss means for her and her people in various ways: the possible premature death of her child, the enslavement of her and the people of Troy, the grief caused to Hector's parents, and the anguish she feels of being unable to be with him when he died. "Her emotion is a compound of the raw sense of loss of her beloved husband and her understanding of what this means for herself and her son: it is a single, cognitive apprehension of what the death of Hector means to her... Andromache's grief is characteristic of those in need of protection,...especially with women and with the weak."<sup>126</sup> Thus, for the daughter to be grieved and anxious about the new social positions in which she finds herself (widow and primary provider) is a reasonable expectation, especially with little social protection to serve as an ameliorating buffer against the material ramifications of such a loss.

What matters for the construction of this scenario, then, is that his death brought grief, and therefore stress, to the now widow. According to Pearlin's stressors, the premature loss of a husband is an unscheduled life change that constitutes role restructuring (in this case, the loss of the role of "wife" and the gain of the role of "widow" and provider). The loss of a loved one is considered an acute trauma (Wheaton's third category) in that the stress caused by the process of dying ends with the death of the person. However, the stress of learning to live a life without the loved one is chronic (Wheaton's fourth category). Perhaps the daughter's bereavement went on too long, at least according to the opinions of her family and friends. Clark and Rose write, "Even

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<sup>126</sup> David Konstan, "Understanding Grief in Greece and Rome," *Classical World* 110.1 (2016): 9.

within the culture into which many of us were born, insanity is not easily distinguished from episodes of disturbance resulting from stages of life such as adolescence, separation, and dying. In general, every culture has limits of acceptable behavior in these situations.”<sup>127</sup> Seneca is concerned with the prolonged grief of a mother who has lost her son, saying, “Three whole years have now passed, and yet the first violence of your sorrow has in no way abated. Your grief is renewed and grows stronger every day—by lingering it has established its right to stay, and has now reached the point that it is ashamed to make an end” (*Cons. Marc.* 7 .1 [Basore, LCL]). Assuming the daughter’s grief seemed excessive in scale or duration, the medical doctors might have diagnosed the daughter with mania or melancholy. Justa may have understood her to be possessed by a demon.

A secondary stressor for Justa’s daughter has to do with becoming the primary provider for the home. The Matthean text says that Justa came out from “that region,” that is, the district of Tyre and Sidon. Thus, I imagine that she and her daughter live in a rural village in the area around these cities and that her husband, while living, practiced a trade, such as a blacksmith. With poverty being pervasive in urban centers of the empire, Justa and her daughter are representative of the urban poor. Steve Friesen has persuasively argued that as many as 90% hovered around subsistence levels even within the larger cities of the empire.<sup>128</sup> Bruce Longenecker, nuancing Friesen’s model, argues that perhaps as much as 17% of the population would have lived a life with moderate surplus, while 55% lived at or near subsistence and 25% were living consistently below subsistence level

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<sup>127</sup> Patricia A. Clark and M. Lynn Rose, “Psychiatric Disability and the Galenic Medical Matrix,” in *Disabilities in Roman Antiquity: Disparate Bodies A Capite Ad Calcem*, ed. Christian Laes, C. F. Goodey, and M. Lynn Rose (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 2013), 68.

<sup>128</sup> Friesen, “Poverty in Pauline Studies,” see table on 347.

(a slightly lower percentage than Friesen suggests).<sup>129</sup> Considering the significant ecological stressor of chronic food insecurity pervasive in the Roman agrarian society, the loss of a material provider would be significant.

The stress of entering the workforce as a woman would be significant, especially if she has no trade or special skills to offer.<sup>130</sup> Susan Treggiari has demonstrated that women participated in a variety of economic activities and “appear to be concentrated in ‘service’ jobs (catering, prostitution); dealing, particularly in foodstuffs; serving in shops; in certain crafts, particularly the production of clothes, ‘fiddly’ jobs such as working in gold-leaf or hair-dressing; certain luxury trades such as perfumery.”<sup>131</sup> Many of these jobs, however, would require special skills and some might require that the daughter be socially connected. Since the daughter has a young child who had not yet been weaned, she may be able to hire herself out as a wet-nurse. Keith Bradley has demonstrated that many wet-nurses came from lower economic classes, not just from the enslaved class.<sup>132</sup> Joshel writes, “Lacking the money, skills, and connections to enter other trades, the poor woman

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<sup>129</sup> Longenecker, “Exposing the Economic Middle.”

<sup>130</sup> For more information on employment options and opportunities for ancient women in both urban and rural contexts see Susan Treggiari, “Jobs in the Household of Livia,” *Papers of the British School at Rome* 43 (1975): 48–77; Susan Treggiari, “Lower Class Women in the Roman Economy,” *Florilegium* 1 (1979): 65–86; Walter Scheidel, “The Most Silent Women of Greece and Rome: Rural Labour and Women’s Life in the Ancient World (I),” *Greece & Rome* 42.2 (1995): 202–17; Walter Scheidel, “The Most Silent Women of Greece and Rome: Rural Labour and Women’s Life in the Ancient World (II),” *Greece & Rome* 43.1 (1996): 1–10; Thomas A. McGinn, *The Economy of Prostitution in the Roman World: A Study of Social History and the Brothel* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2004); Lena Larsson Lovén, “Female Work and Identity in Roman Textile Production and Trade: A Methodological Discussion,” in *Making Textiles in Pre-Roman and Roman Times: People, Places, Identities*, ed. Margarita Gleba and Judit pásztókai-Szeőke (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2013), 109–25.

<sup>131</sup> Treggiari, “Lower Class Women,” 78–79.

<sup>132</sup> Keith R. Bradley, *Discovering the Roman Family: Studies in Roman Social History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 13–29.

simply used or rather permitted someone else to use her body, the Roman hierarchies of gender and class sanctioning such use.”<sup>133</sup>

However, poverty could result in freeborn women turning to prostitution for income.<sup>134</sup> Thomas McGinn, using a comparative model, argues, “Modern studies of prostitution suggest that poverty, resulting from or combined with low wages, limited opportunities for work, disastrous events in the family economy, and a desire for relatively rapid and easy social mobility, has played a decisive role in influencing women’s choices to enter prostitution.”<sup>135</sup> The daughter’s ability to find work would only be made more difficult by possession symptoms that made her despondent, angry, or violent.

Avison and Pearlin’s list of role occupancy stressors gives language to the types of stressors the daughter faced after the loss of her husband and with the subsequent responsibilities as primary provider. First, the transition from dependent in the household of her husband to primary provider constitutes a role restructuring. She is no longer a wife, but she is a widow who is now the primary caregiver for both her child and her aging mother. The unscheduled life change of the death of her husband has resulted in a new set of roles for which the daughter may not have been prepared, materially or emotionally. The role restructuring could, as Pearlin suggests, result in other stressors. The daughter may experience stress if she felt that her new roles were placing excessive demands upon her. She may also experience the stress of role captivity, as the role of “widow” is not one that she wanted. These stressors could all become chronic if the daughter has little or no recourse to ameliorating buffers.

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<sup>133</sup> Sandra R. Joshel, “Nurturing the Master’s Child: Slavery and the Roman Child-Nurse,” *Signs* 12.1 (1986): 6.

<sup>134</sup> McGinn, *Economy of Prostitution*, 61.

<sup>135</sup> McGinn, *Economy of Prostitution*, 61.

Justa, on the other hand, faces stressors of her own. She too is a widow, but many women with adult children were.<sup>136</sup> For this scenario, I imagine that Justa is unable, or at least minimally able, to work. Justa's role in the family is complex because she is the *materfamilias*, yet she is also reliant on her daughter to care for her as she ages. Similarly to her daughter, she may be experiencing excessive demands since the death of her son-in-law. She may feel obligated to care for her grandchild while her daughter grieves, but she may also experience the stress of being unable to provide for her child and grandchild. With a small child in a poor family, breastfeeding would be a cost-effective way to provide for the child, but Justa would be unable to do that for her grandchild. If the daughter's symptomatology is causing her to be emotionally and physically unavailable to her own child, which Avison would consider ambient household stress, Justa may be feeling the added stress of food insecurity for the grandchild. Additionally, Justa is at an age where she may need to be cared for by her daughter. The transition from caregiver to care-receiver is a role restructuring that can be quite stressful. However, there is a sort of a role conflict that Justa may be experience since she may feel obligated to continue contributing some care for her daughter and grandchild while her daughter exhibits possession symptoms. The conflicting roles are that of mother/grandmother and aging dependent reliant upon her child for care. This is only compounded by an anxiety that, if her daughter's symptoms persist or worsen, Justa will have no one to care for her as she ages and that her grandchild will be at risk for all sorts of ills, such as extreme poverty or premature death. The

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<sup>136</sup> The customary age gap between men and women at first marriage could be upwards of 15 years. Assuming Justa's daughter is at least 20 (old enough to be married and to have a 2 year old child), it is statistically plausible that her father would be deceased. Saller argues that only 40% of non-elite girls would have a living father at the time of her first marriage. Richard Saller, "Men's Age at Marriage and Its Consequences in the Roman Family," *CP* 82.1 (1987): 32.

daughter's impairment and symptomatology introduce a complex web of stressors into the family unit that risk dismantling the family infrastructure.

### **Contextualized Reading of Matt 15:21-28**

Justa's desperate plea to Jesus, her persistence in spite of Jesus' refusal to engage, and her acceptance of the inferior status of "dog" may all reflect a woman who is desperate to save her child from abandonment and, likely, enslavement or death. Or it may reflect a woman who recognizes her daughter as the critical lynchpin ensuring the survival of not only herself but her grandchild. Or it may reflect an entirely different set of stressful circumstances not considered in this chapter. Whatever the scenario, "The image of the wicked Canaanites, who supposedly offer their children in sacrifice to their gods, is challenged by this fearless Canaanite woman who comes to smuggle out life for her daughter...She is articulating her humanity."<sup>137</sup> Justa's petition to Jesus is an act of amelioration for her stressful situation and that of her daughter.

Yet Justa must face one further social stressor before she receives the help she so desperately desires: Jesus' refusal to give the woman a hearing. Many scholars have interpreted this scene as part of a salvation-history model and argue "that the Gentile woman's story is included in the gospels to provide legitimation for admitting Gentiles into the Christian community."<sup>138</sup> However, Jesus has earlier granted the request of a gentile (the centurion in 8:5-13) and exorcised demons from two men in Gadara, presumed by many scholars to be gentiles. Further, when the woman first approaches Jesus she addresses him "as Son of David (v. 22) to remind the reader of the genealogy at the

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<sup>137</sup> Leticia Guardiola-Sáenz, "Borderless Women and Borderless Texts: A Cultural Reading of Matthew 15:21-28," *Semeia*.78 (1997): 77.

<sup>138</sup> Pui-lan Kwok, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995), 76.

beginning of the gospel (1:1–17),<sup>139</sup> a genealogy that conspicuously includes a Canaanite woman.<sup>140</sup> It does not seem that the gentile question is the only concern of the author. Elsewhere in Matthew (9:18–19, 23–26; 17:14–21), Jesus has healed children so it cannot be simply that Jesus does not find children, on the whole, unworthy of healing. What seems distinct about this passage is that a gentile *woman* approaches Jesus.

Several feminist scholars have highlighted the gendered dimensions of the encounter. Sharon Ringe writes, “we know according the customs of the first-century Palestinian society, this woman should have been invisible. No Jewish man, especially one with a religious task or vocation, expected to be approached by a woman (Jew or Gentile), except perhaps by one of the many women reduced to prostitution to support themselves.”<sup>141</sup> Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza writes, “The woman not only enters the public domain, but she does so speaking loudly.”<sup>142</sup> France Taylor Gench suggests, “the Canaanite’s success as a woman in the public arena is an indicator of a significant gender question in the story.”<sup>143</sup> Though the strict, gendered dichotomy of public/male and private/female space may be exaggerated, that Justa is a woman—especially one experiencing the significant family stressor of her daughter’s possession—approaching several men publicly may have been perceived as unseemly.

When Justa approaches Jesus, she cries out, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David. My daughter is severely demon-possessed!” (15:22). As Carter notes, Justa uses language

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<sup>139</sup> Kwok, *Discovering the Bible*, 73.

<sup>140</sup> This is not to say that the moniker “Canaanite” did not allude to a historical past in which Canaanites were Israel’s enemy to be conquered, but it does acknowledge that the gospel contains a tension wherein the Other is “othered” and included.

<sup>141</sup> Ringe, “A Gentile Woman’s Story,” 70.

<sup>142</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 99.

<sup>143</sup> Frances Taylor Gench, *Back to the Well: Women’s Experiences with Jesus in the Gospels* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 14.

that recognizes Jesus' authority over demons and his links with Davidic rule.<sup>144</sup> Mexican-American and postcolonial interpreters have read these affirmations as reflecting the "master discourse" reflecting the colonizers concerns and interests. Leticia Guardiola-Sáenz argues, "Matthew frames the woman as a weak and humble person who comes to see Jesus—the one whom the story presents as having power, regardless of the historical and political situation of the people of Israel in this historical moment."<sup>145</sup> Dube contends that Justa's requests are "a good example of depicting the targeted foreign people as those who beseech and need subjugation."<sup>146</sup> Kwok Pui-lan writes, "Although given a voice, the woman's speech is clearly framed in Christocentric and androcentric discourse. In Matthew she addresses Jesus as Son of David (v. 22) to remind the reader of the genealogy at the beginning of the gospel (1:1–17)...She also uses the title *Lord* to address Jesus, which actually reflects the Christological thinking in the early Christian community."<sup>147</sup> These interpreters recognize the way that Justa's speech reveals itself to be the construct of the author, which has historically been used to perpetuate ideologies of domination and subjugation.

However, James Scott's notion of public and private transcripts may provide an alternative reading that gives Justa agency without minimizing the stress-inducing abusive language she encounters from Jesus. He is worth quoting at length:

The fact is that the public representations of claims by subordinate groups, *even in situations of conflict*, nearly always have a strategic or dialogic dimension that influences the form they take....The power of the dominant thus ordinarily elicits—in the public transcript—a continuous stream of performances of deference, respect, reverence, admiration, esteem, and even adoration that serve to further convince

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<sup>144</sup> Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 322.

<sup>145</sup> Guardiola-Sáenz, "Borderless Women," 75.

<sup>146</sup> Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, 149.

<sup>147</sup> Kwok, *Discovering the Bible*, 73–74.

ruling elites that their claims are in fact validated by the social evidence they see before their very eyes....Most acts of power from below, even when they are protests—implicitly or explicitly—will largely observe the “rules” even if their objective is to undermine them.<sup>148</sup>

Though Jesus, as a Galilean peasant, is by no means a member of the Roman ruling elite, within the narrative framework of the Gospel, he is the commissioned, powerful agent of the God of Israel. And in his encounter with Justa, he holds all the social power. Justa must make her case to Jesus by validating his claims to power in order to work them to her advantage. Thus, Justa comes to Jesus, using the language with which she has the best chance of getting what she wants. She calls him by honorific titles that are foreign to her, using the language of the “dominant” to get his attention. Further, she imposes herself into his physical space when she kneels before him. While kneeling is a recognition of Jesus’ authority,<sup>149</sup> Guardiola-Sáenz observes, “With her own body she blocks Jesus’ way, putting herself as a boundary which Jesus should respect...”<sup>150</sup> Justa has certainly inconvenienced Jesus, but she has done nothing to merit retaliation (such as resorting to physical or verbal violence). Jesus *could* simply walk around her. But her persistence and playing by the rules of the public transcript, as much as she pushes the boundaries of that transcript, result in Jesus’ direct engagement with her for the first time.

However, his engagement is stress laden: he compares her to a dog that does not eat at the master’s table (15:26). Toner argues, “In a society where social status was so highly valued, public humiliation probably significantly undermined an individual’s mental

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<sup>148</sup> Scott, *Hidden Transcripts*, 92–93.

<sup>149</sup> Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 76, 81, 111, 199, 224, 312.

<sup>150</sup> Guardiola-Sáenz, “Borderless Women,” 78.

health.”<sup>151</sup> Despite what scholars have argued to soften the blow (above), this epithet is a shaming insult and a potential source of stress for Justa.

Some have argued that her acceptance of the insult “dog” constitutes the “faith” that Jesus will subsequently praise. Gullotta, for examples, despairingly argues, “The Canaanite woman’s sharp response is her acceptance that her ethnicity and status are comparable to that of a dog.”<sup>152</sup> Guardiola-Sáenz, however, resists interpretations in which Justa accepts the slur:

Contrary to the opinions of most interpreters, I argue that the Canaanite woman does not identify herself as a dog. When she says ‘Yes, Lord,’ she is agreeing with Jesus that it would be absurd to throw away the children’s bread to the dogs. But at the same time she reminds him that if even their dogs are eating from what their masters waste (which implies plenty), with more reason she is entitled to the bread.<sup>153</sup>

Going a step further, I argue that the Canaanite woman does not even want a place at the table. Nothing in the text indicates that she follows or becomes a disciple of Jesus, nor do she or her daughter appear in the narrative again. Justa has not come to join or displace the master’s children, she has come to gain healing for her daughter—and those are two very different matters.

The healer’s resistance to the mother’s plea introduces an ambiguity in the healing that is often overlooked by interpretations that seek to excuse Jesus’ behavior or praise Justa as a Gentile convert of sorts. A reading attuned to the social stressors that may have been present in the life of a woman like Justa reveals just how devastating Jesus’ dismissal of Justa could be. Further, the healing of the daughter does not result in a life lived free of stress. In my first imagined scenario in which she risks exposure as an infant, the healing

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<sup>151</sup> Toner, “Mental Health,” 67.

<sup>152</sup> Gullotta, “Among Dogs and Disciples,” 334.

<sup>153</sup> Guardiola-Sáenz, “Borderless Women,” 78.

of the daughter may relieve a certain type of stress in the family's life, but not all of the stress. Perhaps she has been saved from a life of enslavement, yet she, like the majority of non-elite people living in the Roman Empire, knows a life of chronic food insecurity and poverty. In my second imagined scenario in which she is a widowed mother caring for her own child and aging mother, the daughter's healing does nothing to alleviate the stress of being the primary provider for her dependents. Her options for employment and capacity for social mobility remain as limited as they were before her encounter with Jesus. As with the centurion's slave and the Gadarene demoniacs, though for quite different reasons, this healing is not unambiguously and straightforwardly good.

## CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION

Interpretations of the healing narratives in Matthew's Gospel have historically focalized on Jesus and treated the stories as though they are unambiguously good and permanent. In this study, I have argued that societal and somatic stressors were a significant factor accompanying, exacerbating, and, sometimes, possibly contributing to impairment. When the societal and somatic circumstances of the impaired characters are taken seriously as subjects worthy of inquiry, the healing stories are more complicated and ambiguous than has been typically acknowledged.

This approach to the healing stories contributes to New Testament scholarship in three specific ways.

First this study has introduced Social Stress Theory as a methodology for reading a New Testament text. Although Jerry Toner has used this theory to think more broadly about society stressors in Ancient Rome, the theory has not been applied in a more thorough fashion in New Testament studies.

Second, this study has taken a decided position on decentralizing Jesus. Instead, it focuses on marginalized characters that are often read as one-dimensional, or flat, and as foils for Jesus to reveal something about Jesus' character or mission. This approach is a shift from more traditional readings of Matthew that highlight themes of Christology, theology, discipleship, or ecclesiology.

Finally, this study has expanded interpretation of the healing narratives to consider the effects of the healing on the impaired person, the community, and the healer, thus contributing to discussions in Disability Studies. This study, though somewhat indirectly, addresses concerns raised by Disability Studies scholars about abusive readings of the

stories that promote a “fantasy cure,” project able-bodied priorities on impaired bodies, and ignore and silence the voices of the impaired in discussions around healing and wholeness.

In the first chapter, I discussed several dominant approaches to reading the Matthean healing stories: redactional readings, social scientific approaches, Imperial Critical readings, and Disability Studies readings. The discussion of scholarship demonstrated that redactional readings and many social scientific readings remained focused on the role of Jesus in the scene, ignoring the somatic or societal experiences of the impaired/healed person. Imperial Critical readings began to shift attention away from Jesus by foregrounding the Roman imperial context and its oppressive effects on the lives of people living under imperial rule, while Disability Studies readings have centered on the role of the impaired/healed in the narratives and corrected several misconceptions about disability in the ancient world. This discussion identified a lacuna in scholarship, in the form of neglect of the circumstances of impaired characters. To address this lacuna, this study has offered a reading of Matthew’s healing stories with explicit attention to the stressful somatic and societal circumstances of the impaired characters before and after their encounter with Jesus.

In the second chapter, I introduced the methodological approaches I used to read three specific healing scenes in Matthew. The first and primary method is Social Stress Theory, which argues that low social status has detrimental effects on mental health. Nuancing this research with anthropological and medical studies that demonstrate the physical effects of mental stress, I argued that low social status could result in impaired psychosomatic functioning. Because Social Stress theorists are considering the role of

stress of the modern world, my approach used insights from Empire Studies to modify the Social Stress model in order to map it onto the ancient world. Disability Studies provided a critical lens for inquiring about impaired characters in the text and challenging able-bodied assumptions in both the Gospel and its interpretations. Finally, recognizing that the impaired characters are literary constructs, I used techniques of narrative criticism to defend my reading of one-dimensional impaired characters as robust and multi-dimensional characters worthy of inquiry.

In the third chapter, I read the healing of the centurion's slave (8:5–13) through the lens of Social Stress Theory in order to examine the social stressors that were possibly present in the lives of slaves under the Roman Empire. Using Orlando Patterson's comparative study of slavery in different societies across time and geography, I delineated the sorts of stressors that slaves were subject to because of their social location as slaves. I also examined the relationship between the slave and the centurion, noting that the relationship is one marked by domination and exploitation, rather than compassion as is so often assumed. I presented three possible scenarios for understanding the relationship of the slave to the centurion: boy-lover, rural slave, and domestic slave. For each scenario, I described possible stressors the slave may have encountered. After establishing the litany of stressors that a slave may face in his/her day-to-day life, I interpreted the healing of the slave as an ambiguous event because Jesus heals the slave at the request of the centurion (not the slave) and on behalf of the centurion ("let it be done for you according to your faith," 8:13). Without consideration of the slave's desires, and in the total absence of the slave's presence, Jesus heals the slave to return able-bodied into an exploitative, stress-

laden relationship with his master, making this scene more ambiguous than has previously been acknowledged.

In the fourth chapter, utilizing research pertaining to war stressors, I considered how the war of 66–70 CE and its stressors inform a reading of the Gadarene demoniacs (8:28–34) in order to call attention to the societal circumstances in which demon possession symptomatology manifests. I argued that Matthew’s story reflects and resonates with the stressed experience of the Matthean audience in Syria during and after the war of 66–70 CE. My reading incorporated experiences of colonial invasion into possession understandings whereby colonized bodies are shown to bear the stressful burden of military invasion and conquest. I suggested that locating this story in Gadara foregrounds a site of colonial and military invasion, thus underscoring the stressful and destructive impact of Rome’s military force on colonized bodies. I also argued that this site recalls images, both positive and negative, of shepherding and contributes to the larger picture in Matthew of Jesus as a Davidic shepherd king looking for the lost sheep of God who live with the stress of violent military invasion. I noted the ambiguity of the townspeople toward Jesus’ activity and how the Gospel’s inattention to the plight of the demon-possessed men after their exorcism creates an ambiguity around the healing since there is no indication of the type of relief (if any) the exorcism provided, whether physical, mental, or social.

In the fifth chapter, I examined possible family dynamics of the relationship between the Canaanite woman (Justa) and her daughter (15:21–28). I argued that Justa’s appearance before Jesus requesting the healing of her daughter may be reflective of a complex domestic situation in which the daughter’s impairment is a significant source of

social stress for her family. I suggested two possible scenarios for understanding the family dynamic. First, I considered stressors affecting the family if the daughter is an infant whose possession symptoms caused her father to consider exposing her. In the second scenario, I considered the stressors facing the family if the daughter was an adult, widowed woman whose symptomatology was interfering with her role as caretaker for her aging mother and her own child. The ambiguity of this scene is found in the healer's reluctance to heal, begging the question: how "good" is a healing that is only granted with insult? Further, the healing remains ambiguous in that the daughter's healing is only concerned with her somatic experience, thereby doing nothing to address her societal experience of poverty and marginalization.

This study has focalized on the impaired characters in three Matthean healing narratives by taking seriously the stress-laden social circumstances of life under the Roman Empire. Using an informed imagination, I have suggested ways that readers might fill in the gaps of impaired characters and, in the case of Matt 15:21–28, their caregivers. Social Stress Theory has helpfully provided a model for considering the way that social status and psychosomatic health are linked while Empire Studies has provided an avenue of critical inquiry for examining the contours of life in the ancient world. Disability Studies has given rise to the critical examination of disability as constructed in the biblical texts and of interpretations that promote an able-bodied bias.

While this study is unable to examine every healing scene in Matthew, it presents an example of how impaired characters can be critically examined by paying close attention to stressors that present themselves in various social locations. Further, it introduces a methodology that takes seriously the psychological effects of those stressors without

psychologizing literary figures in ancient documents. While this study has chosen to interpret the texts based on social stressors present in the ancient world, contemporary readers, such as clergy or lay ministers, may choose to interpret the texts based on the social stressors of their communities by giving voice to the concerns and experiences of impaired folks in their respective communities.

Finally, Social Stress Theory could be applied to a whole range of stories, not just the healing narratives. The Gospel of Matthew reflects a stressed-out world with kings anxious about their rule, families fleeing opposition and becoming refugees, men and women walking away from family trades to follow an itinerant preacher, and those same people facing the political execution of their leader. Other Hebrew Bible and New Testament texts reflect different social stressors. What light might be shed by thinking about stressors in the exodus and wilderness wandering stories? What meanings might be made by considering the stressors facing women or slaves in the churches to whom Paul writes? This project is an initial foray into taking the stressful social locations of biblical characters and biblical audiences seriously.

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