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Doing as the elect do: Matthew 7:21 within Deuteronomistic and Matthean election theology

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Matthew 7:21 is an exegetically challenging verse: it provides a complex formulation of Matthew's election theology. Simultaneously, this text is systematically theologically challenging, due to its emphasis on doing the will of God. This article argues that Matthew 7:21 and Matthean election theology must be understood within the matrix of Deuteronomy and Deuteronomistic perspectives on election. Entrance into the kingdom of God is a divine gift, which finds fulfilment in Jesus Christ. This divine and incongruous gift, however, must be accompanied by doing the will of God. Faith is not merely a cognitive matter but also an active calling to be perfect (Mt 5:48). The recipients of this election can be identified primarily as the Jews, but in Christ, the circle of the divine family is extended to include the Gentiles. Matthew's concept of election can thus be described as Christological, complex, consonant with the Old Testament, and ethically active.

Contribution: By studying and contextualising Matthew's election theology, this article contributes to a richer and more dynamic understanding of election in Reformed theology.

Keywords: election; Matthew; Deuteronomy; Deuteronomistic; Torah; Israel.

The jubilarian, Francois Viljoen, has convincingly demonstrated in several publications that the Torah is essential to the Gospel of Matthew (Viljoen 2016; 2018).[1] One cannot fully grasp the first Gospel without seriously engaging with the texts and teachings of the Old Testament. Not only is the Sermon on the Mount the Christological explication of God's will or Torah for the (Matthean) people of God, but various theological themes from the Old Testament are revisited and redefined considering the incarnation and ministry of Jesus Christ.

One such theme is the election of God's people. Throughout the Old Testament, the concept of election serves as a recurring thread in the historical narrative of God's interaction with the world, particularly with Israel. The book of Deuteronomy and other *Deuteronomistic* works place particular emphasis on God's sovereign choice of his people.[2] Matthew, at several key moments in his Gospel, takes up this theme and integrates it with Christological reflection and pastoral exhortation to his audience.

A striking instance is found in Matthew 7:21, where Jesus defines who will enter the kingdom of God. This verse is not only exegetically challenging; it also unsettles conventional Reformed doctrines of election. In this passage, the elect – those who will inherit the kingdom – are identified as those who do the will of God. The jubilarian aptly observes that 'doing the will of God is what Matthew regards as the distinguishing mark of the disciple community' (Viljoen 2018:131). Does this verse undermine the *sola gratia* of salvation and election, as the Canons of Dordt state, and does it deny any assurance about one's salvation (Luz 1985:405–406)?

Exploring the concept of election in the Gospel of Matthew is therefore not only of exegetical-theological interest but also a systematic-theological imperative from a Reformed perspective. This article seeks to place Matthew 7:21 within the broader framework of Matthean election theology. It argues that Matthew interprets Deuteronomistic patterns of election considering the coming of Christ.[3] In this framework, doing justice and obeying God's commandments are

1.This article is dedicated to Prof. Francois, as an appreciation of his work, the long-standing ties between our institutions at Potchefstroom and Apeldoorn, and the connection we have as biblical scholars and brothers in Christ.

2.I use the term *Deuteronomistic* in a theological sense, as a description of a theological system that connects important themes (election, Torah, kingship, cult, etc.) to the covenantal relationship with YHWH. Deuteronomy provides the most comprehensive description of this theology, but its content can also be found in other books of the Old Testament (cf. Zenger 2006:149–155, 201–202).

3.This contribution will focus on the election of God's people. I acknowledge that other forms and aspects of election theology, such as the election of priests and land, can also be found in the Old Testament and are vital for Matthew. The scope of this article, however, invites limiting to this one fundamental form of election in the OT and Matthew.

Note: The manuscript is a contribution to the collection titled Francois P. Viljoen Festschrift under the expert guidance of guest editor Prof Albert Johannes Coetsee.

integral elements of divine election. For Matthew, this calling is intensified and reoriented, considering the incarnation, Christ's ministry, and the Sermon on the Mount. Faith in Matthew's Gospel is not merely an internal disposition but an outward expression of faithful and fruitful devotion to the Lord. The Christ-following community is marked by the confession that Jesus is Lord (Mt 16:16), and – drawing upon his abiding presence (Mt 7:23–27; 28:20b) – demonstrates their election by obeying his will (Mt 7:20; 28:20a). Therefore, he proclaims, 'many are called, few are chosen'.

Election in Deuteronomy and Deuteronomistic theology

As previously noted, the concept of election is not a uniquely Matthean construct. Preuss (1991:29) calls it 'the center of the Old Testament', while Moberly (2013:41) asserts that it plays 'a major role in the Hebrew Bible'. The theme of election is especially prominent in the book of Deuteronomy and in Deuteronomistic theology more broadly, where it is understood as a summary expression of 'God's faithfulness to the promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in giving an offspring to inherit the land' (Wright 2003:217). There are foundational aspects of divine election that can be distinguished in Deuteronomy and related literature.

Election cannot be taken for granted

The earliest reflections on election in the Old Testament appear in the prophetic book of Amos. Dated to the mid-8th century BCE with a possible exilic or post-exilic redaction, Amos connects two core ideas that together convey a key message: divine election cannot be presumed upon (Snyman 2012).

In Amos 3:1–2, the prophet recalls the Exodus. YHWH has led his people out of Egypt and through the wilderness into the Promised Land (cf. Am 2:10). This salvific event continues to define the contemporary recipients of the book, as the prophet addresses 'the whole family I brought up out of Egypt' (Am 3:1: כל-המשפחה אשר העליתי מארתץ מצרים). The prophetic speech begins with a strong assertion of Israel's unique relationship with God: 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth' (Am 3:2: רק אתכם ידעתי מכל משפחות האדמה). Most commentators rightly interpret this statement as a reference to God's election of Israel (Eidevall 2017:122–123; Van Leeuwen 1985:99–103; Wolff 1969:214–216).

Although Amos does not use the root בחר – the explicit term for election – the use of ידע conveys a similarly intimate and selective relational dynamic. Amos understands YHWH's historical dealings with Israel as an expression of grace and uses this history as a foundation for his message of judgement (Eidevall 2017:122; Snyman 2012). Amos 3:2 both affirms Israel's election and stresses that this election carries obligations. When those obligations are neglected, they become the basis for divine judgement (Barton 2012:71).

This tension intensifies in Amos 9:7, where the prophet declares:

> Are you not like the Cushites to me, O people of Israel? Did I not bring Israel up from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?' נאם יהוה.
>
> [לוא כבני כשיים אתם לי בני ישראל נאם-יהוה הלוא את-ישראל העליתי מארץ מצרים ופלשתיים מכפתור וארם מקיר]

Two implications arise. Firstly, Israel's election is not grounded in any intrinsic superiority (Van Leeuwen 1985:331). We will return to this point. Secondly, election is conditional (Am 9:8a; Snyman 2012). If God's people live in opposition to his will, their chosen status is relativised, reduced to the same level as his dealings with other nations. Nevertheless, the election is not annulled entirely – there remains a remnant of the house of Jacob (Am 9:8e; Timmer 2015:50–53; contra Barton 2012:74).

Thus, Amos emphasises that election is foundational to Israel's identity, yet not a guarantee of security. As Barton (2012:103) puts it: 'Israel's privileged position as YHWH's people was a matter of choice on his part […] and is maintained only as long as Israel keeps its side of the bargain.'

Election is based on sheer grace

The gracious nature of divine election, already implicit in Amos 9:7, is a recurring emphasis in other Old Testament texts. Election is not merited by Israel's virtues but is rooted entirely in God's love and mercy.

Deuteronomy 7:7–8 offers one of the clearest and most foundational affirmations of this gratuitous character of election (Versluis 2017). After affirming Israel's status as God's 'treasured possession' (Dt 7:6: סגלה), the text explicitly denies that this choice was based on any inherent greatness: they were 'the smallest among all peoples' (Dt 7:7: המעט מכל-העמים), a reference to the size of the Canaanite nations in verse 1. Instead, the basis for election lies solely in YHWH himself – his love, his faithfulness, and his covenant with the patriarchs (Dt 7:8; cf. 4:37–38; 10:15). 'The smallest people may know that they have the mightiest God' (Labuschagne 1987:125).

The 8th-century prophet Hosea likewise underscores the unearned character of Israel's election (Kwakkel 2012). God's care for his people was not a response to their obedience but the outworking of divine initiative. YHWH created his people (Hs 8:14), found them in the wilderness (Hs 9:10), adopted them in his household as his child (Hs 11:1), and nurtured them as a father (Hs 11:3; Kakkanattu 2006:44). The relationship between YHWH and his people is very special (Oeming 2018:264). The response expected of the people is simple: to acknowledge and honour YHWH alone (Hs 13:4). Yet instead of gratitude, Israel turned away (Hs 11:2) – acting like a prostitute (Hs 5:3–4; 9:1), becoming detestable in God's sight (Hs 9:10; Kakkanattu 2006:104). Judgement is pronounced, but never without hope. God's love remains steadfast (Hs 14:5 MT). This enduring love defines God's election as radically distinct from human choice – it is faithful, covenantal, and irrevocable (Hs 11:9; Grindheim 2005).

In both Deuteronomy 7 and Hosea, election is portrayed as an unmerited gift rooted solely in God's covenantal love and faithfulness. Israel cannot claim any merit for their status; God chose it for reasons that lie entirely within himself. To borrow a phrase from the Dutch Experiential-Reformed theology: God had 'reasons within himself' (*redenen in zichzelf*) for electing his people.

Election is not a static moment, but a dynamic process

The previous texts have shown that election in Deuteronomy and Deuteronomistic literature is not confined to a single event in history. Although God did indeed choose Israel at specific points – such as the calling of Abraham (Neh 9:7) or the Exodus – election remains vulnerable when God's people go astray. In this theology, election is not a sealed status but a living relationship that must be continually embodied in covenantal faithfulness (Timmer 2024:61).

Two examples illustrate this dynamic nature of the election. In Deuteronomy 10, God's love for the patriarchs is extended to their descendants: YHWH has chosen the addressees (Dt 10:15). This present and active election calls for a response. The people are exhorted to 'circumcise the foreskin of your heart' (Dt 10:16: מלתם ערלת לבבכם), love the stranger, and serve YHWH (Dt 10:19–20). Election is thus not merely a historical claim – it is something to be actualised through moral conduct.

Deuteronomy 30 revisits and deepens this theme in the context of exile and promised restoration (Dt 28–29). Here, YHWH is the one who will circumcise Israel's heart (Dt 30:6), enabling them to love him fully. The renewal of the covenant and the restoration of Israel's election are tied to obedience (Dt 30:16). The addressees are given a solemn choice: life and good (Dt 30:14, 16), or death and evil (Dt 30:17–18). This is not a friendly suggestion but a covenantal imperative: life, as the goal of election, must be chosen and enacted (McConville 2002:430). Yet this call to obedience is not symmetrical with God's initial election. Divine choice precedes human response, and even the ability to choose rightly is attributed to God's work in the people (Dt 30:6). In this theological framework, obedience is both a fruit of divine initiative and the confirmation of election (Otto 2017:2017).

These texts clarify that election is not a once-for-all declaration but a relational and moral dynamic. God's choice initiates the covenant, but the lived expression of that covenant – doing the will of YHWH – is essential to maintaining the relationship. Election, then, is not merely a past event but an ongoing calling into holiness and faithful practice.

The renunciation of election?

The preceding discussion has emphasised the dynamic nature of election in Deuteronomistic theology. This naturally raises a pressing question: can Israel forfeit its election?

This question becomes particularly urgent in the so-called Book of Comfort in Jeremiah (Jr 30–33). The historical books of the Old Testament portray a consistent pattern of Israel deviating from YHWH's Torah, with exile representing the culmination of divine judgement. In exile, deep doubts arise about the nature and permanence of God's covenant with his people. Despite the exile, YHWH reaffirms his enduring love for Israel (Jr 31:3). He remains the Father who promises to lead his children home (Jr 31:9). However, the form of the covenantal relationship undergoes a fundamental transformation. The earlier covenant has been broken (Jr 31:31–32), but YHWH promises a new covenant – marked not merely by external obligation but by internal transformation. He will write his Torah upon their hearts (Jr 31:33–34), ensuring that they truly know him. This covenant is not only new but everlasting (Jr 32:40). Importantly, exile does not signify the annulment of divine election. Although Israel may feel abandoned, YHWH declares that his choice remains firm (Jr. 33:24–26). The promise of restoration, including return to the land, is grounded in God's unchanging commitment to his elect people (Sanders 1985:289–298; Staples 2021).

The covenant, as the formal articulation of the chosen relationship between YHWH and his people, has indeed a fundamentally different and discontinuous character since the exile. God's election persists – redefined but never renounced (cf. Lv 26:44; Oosterhoff 1987). This assurance and the broader dynamics of the election form the theological matrix within which the Gospel of Matthew reconfigures the concept of election.

Election in Matthew 7:21

Matthew 7:21 does not explicitly contain election terminology. Nevertheless, its wording and theological implications are best understood without referring to the concept of election.

Matthew 7:21 as the crosspoint in the Matthean election theology and other theological themes

Matthew 7:21 appears within the broader pericope of Matthew 7:15–23, which addresses the presence and discernment of false prophets (Davies & Allison 1988: 693–694). This unit is immediately preceded by the programmatic warning in verses 13–14, which emphasises the urgency of choosing the path that leads to life, echoing Deuteronomy 11:26–28 and 30:15–20 (Culpepper 2021:155). In matters concerning God and his commandments, 'there are no options' (Davies & Allison 1988:699). The narrow road of obedience to God – a way marked by discipline and suffering – is chosen by few. Many, both inside and outside the covenant community, prefer the easier road that leads to destruction. These warnings could reflect the lived experience of Matthew's audience, who, according to later passages (Mt 24:9–14), are anticipated to endure suffering for their faith (Culpepper 2021:156).

The afflictions of the elect, however, are not caused solely by external persecution. Within the community itself, there are dangers. Jesus warns his followers against false prophets (Mt 7:15–23). Verses 15–20 focus on the deceptive nature of

their behaviour; Matthew 24:3–8 later expands upon the content of their false teaching. Although they appear to belong to the faithful remnant of Israel – God's flock (Mt 9:36; 10:6; 15:24) – they do, in fact, 'destroy the community' as wolves (Culpepper 2021:157). Their influence deters others from walking the narrow path to eternal life (7:13–14). The elect is urged to exercise discernment and evaluate these individuals 'by their fruits'. In the Matthean theology, faith and works are inseparable: a good tree bears good fruit; repentance produces visible acts of righteousness (Mt 3:8).

Matthew 7:21 marks a pivotal transition in the pericope. The focus shifts from outward deeds to verbal claims, and from communal discernment in the present to divine judgement in the eschatological future (Davies & Allison 1988:711). The verse contains various noteworthy theological elements.

Firstly, the speakers address Jesus as Lord, a sign of the high Christology of Matthew and his addressees. The work of Jesus is synchronous with the work of the Father (Konradt 2022). Secondly, the relationship between Jesus and God is expressed in familial terms: Jesus is the Son, and God is the Father. This signals intimacy, hierarchy, and the authority to reveal and enact the will of the Father (cf. Mt 11:27) and to recognise God's children (Mt 7:23). Thirdly, Jesus is depicted as the Judge. He not only recognises who belongs to him (Mt 7:23) but also grants or denies entry into the kingdom of heaven. Christ is thus portrayed as the decisive figure in identifying the elect. Through Jesus – the Saviour (Mt 1:21; 20:28) and Judge – believers gain access to the Father and are confirmed as God's children (Mt 6:9; Luz 1985:406).

The criterion for judgement is doing the will of God. Just as false prophets are judged by their fruit, so too all believers will be evaluated according to their conduct. Matthew makes a clear distinction between membership in the visible community and true election. Orthopraxy – faithful obedience – is the key marker of the elect (cf. Mt 13:24–30). Faith, for Matthew, is not merely internal assent but is evidenced through external deeds (Hagner 1993:187).

Even those who claim to have acted in Jesus's name (Mt 7:22) are rejected if their works were not grounded in an authentic relationship with him (Mt 7:23) or built on the solid foundation of obedience (Mt 7:24–27). Their charismatic acts are a continuation of what Jesus and his disciples themselves were doing (Mt 4:24; 11:4–5). Nevertheless, Jesus does not imply that salvation is earned. Hagner (1993:188) summarises it aptly: 'These persons are thus not criticized for their charismatic activities but for their dependence on them as a substitute for the righteousness taught by Jesus.' Entrance into the kingdom remains a gift of divine grace (Culpepper 2021:158; Luz 1985:410–411).

Matthew 7:21 thus resonates with the Deuteronomistic conceptions of election. Being part of God's covenant people does not guarantee salvation – 'belonging' is not equivalent to 'believing'. Election remains an eschatological gift of grace. It is not a static, past event but a dynamic identity that manifests itself in present obedience and future vindication. Matthew diverges from Deuteronomic tradition in his Christological focus: election is now decisively mediated through Jesus, who reveals God's will, grants salvation, and renders the final judgement.

Contextualising Matthew 7:21 in the Gospel of Matthew

As previously shown, the concept of election in Matthew 7:21 intersects with the broader themes in the Gospel of Matthew – particularly the validity of Israel's election and the Christological interpretation of Torah observance. The following section will explore these two themes and conclude with a synthetic reflection on Matthew's overall theology of election.

The validity of Israel's election in Matthew

Deuteronomistic theology affirms the continuity of God's covenantal election of Israel despite the people's repeated disobedience. In the context of Matthew's Gospel, the question arises whether this continuity persists or whether the *ekklesia* has replaced Israel as the people of God.

Earlier scholarship, notably that of Wolfgang Trilling (1959; cf. Frankemölle 1974), argued for a replacement model. Trilling (1959) contended that in Matthew, the e*kklesia* is the new and true Israel. He pointed to parables such as that of the wicked tenants (Mt 21:33–45) as evidence that Israel forfeited its election by rejecting Jesus (cf. Mt 27:25). Trilling (1959:70) states that, in view of Matthew 23:39, the conversion of Israel seems to be ruled out and judgement is imminent. The promise of the kingdom, he (Trilling 1959:35) argued, is transferred to 'other tenants' (Mt 21:41) – a universal church composed of Jews and Gentiles alike.

More recent scholarship, however, has recontextualised Matthew within its Jewish milieu. Runesson (2016:24, 182), a prominent voice in this movement, argues that Matthew must be read as a thoroughly Jewish text, with covenant and election functioning as central theological categories (cf. Kampen 2019; Saldarini 1994; Sim 1998). For Runesson (2016:187), the disciples are depicted as faithful shepherds tasked with leading Israel to salvation (Mt 10:17; 23:34), while the inclusion of Gentiles – although present – does not replace this primary focus. Doing the Torah remains the decisive criterion for remaining within the elect. 'The term "elect" indicates that God has acted first (…) but that people need to respond to this election to stay within the group of the elect/saved' (Runesson 2016:185). Election, he argues, is not denied to Israel; only those within Israel who reject God's will exclude themselves from the elect. The conflict in Matthew, then, is not between Judaism and Christianity, but within Judaism – more sociological than theological, focusing on leadership and covenantal fidelity (Runesson 1999).

Matthias Konradt (2014; 2022) offers a mediating position, which aligns closely with the present article's approach.

Konradt recognises Matthew's nuanced distinction between Jewish crowds and their leaders. While rejecting Trilling's supersessionism, he also moves beyond a purely sociological reading. For Konradt (2014:11; 2022), Matthew narrates an intra-Jewish debate over Torah, centred on the identity and authority of Jesus as Son of God, Son of David, and Son of Abraham. Konradt's (2014) main thesis regarding the *ekklesia* confirms:

> The ecclesia […] is, in other words, the eschatological community of salvation gathered by Jesus or in the mission, which is qualified by the confession of Jesus as the Son of God (16:16) and a life in accordance with his teachings (28:20a) and which gathers in his name (18:20). Its nucleus is the circle of disciples that Jesus created during his ministry *in Israel*, which, according to the Matthean conception, is open to people from all nations post-Easter. (p. 336)

He notes that 'a new "system of coordinates" emerges from the formation of the ecclesia and the inclusion of Gentiles in the salvation grounded in Jesus' death and resurrection' (Konradt 2014:350). The difference between Jesus and his opponents is thus both sociological as well as theological, while the reality of differentiation is also textually underlined by Matthew by describing the meeting places of the Jewish leaders as 'your synagogues' (Mt 4:23; 9:35; 10:17; 12:9; 13:54; 23:34).

Thus, Matthew does not negate Israel's election. Rather, the election is reframed around Christ. As Runesson (2016) rightly observes:

> It is hardly possible to understand Matthew's story and focus on Israel without also acknowledging the notion of Israel's election as implied. […] Election is a given, and functions as the primary criterion behind Jesus's choice of audience. (p. 182)

Within that frame, the Torah continues to play a crucial role.

The Christological definition of Torah

As noted in the introduction, the jubilarian has rightly emphasised the centrality of the Torah for understanding Matthew. In Deuteronomistic theology, obedience to the Torah is the concrete expression of Israel's election. Matthew continues this tradition, but now in a Christological key. Two passages in particular highlight Matthew's hermeneutic of Torah and its connection to divine election.

Firstly, Matthew 5:17–20 establishes the enduring significance of the Torah. Jesus explicitly denies that he has come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; instead, he has come to fulfil them (5:17–19). The Christ-following community is called to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees through active obedience to the Torah (5:20). Righteousness here is both quantitative – 'doing more than others' (5:47) – and qualitative – 'being perfect' as the heavenly Father is perfect (5:48; Hoppe 1991). This vision of Torah observance, 'seconding Sinai' (Kampen 2019:91; Najman 2003), is linked to eschatological reward: only those who practice and teach the commandments will enter the kingdom of heaven (5:19–20). Doing the Torah is the submission to the burden of the kingdom of God (Mt 11:28–30).

Secondly, Matthew 15:1–20 offers a hermeneutic key for interpreting Torah considering Christ. When accused of violating the tradition of the elders (Mt 15:2), Jesus responds by exposing the Pharisees' misuse of the *korban* practice to bypass the commandment to honour one's parents (Konradt 2020:525). According to Hoppe (1991), Jesus not only critiques the letter but also the spirit of their interpretation, emphasising that true obedience demands mercy (cf. Hs 6:6). Moreover, Jesus reinterprets purity laws by relocating purity from external ritual to the inner disposition of the heart. For Matthew, doing the Torah under Christ's lordship entails both internal transformation and external acts of mercy and righteousness.

Matthew's concept of election

An important part of the Gospel of Matthew is dedicated to formulating who belongs to the inner circle of God's elect. Matthew 21:28–22:14 offers the most comprehensive expression of election theology in the Gospel. There are distinct key themes that emerge from these parables:

Firstly, the election of Israel is maintained. The parables in Matthew 21 and 22 do not envision the replacement of Israel as God's chosen people with the Christ-following community. Instead, the parable of the wicked tenants takes place in a vineyard, an allusion to the image of Israel in Isaiah 5. The parable of the banquet functions within Jewish eschatological expectations for Israel (Ps 107:1–9; Is 25:6–8; 1 En 62:14; Davies & Allison 1988:453). The criticism that is uttered by Jesus is not directed towards Israel in general but to the religious leaders who hear his teaching (Mt 21:23, 45; Konradt 2014:171–172). They are the leaders who abuse their power (21:35–36, 38). They say that they do God's will while refusing to repent (21:30–32). They are invited to come to the divine feast but refuse to come and even abuse the prophets (Mt 22:6–7). The common Israelites are cordially invited to go into the vineyard (Mt 21:28) and come to the banquet (Mt 22:8–10). In Matthew's Gospel, the inclusion of Gentiles is rare (Mt 8:5–13; 15:21–28), but the Gentiles become an object of divine grace post-Easter (Mt 28:18–20).

Secondly, the invitation to the kingdom of God is both sheer grace and a commandment. In the parable of the two sons, the father commands his sons to work in the vineyard (Mt 21:28, 30). The parable of the banquet describes the commandment to come in as a notice that the event to which they were invited was ready (Mt 22:3; Davies & Allison 1997:199). The latter parable is connected to a place that emphasises that the addressees are privileged: the king notifies them of a banquet to which they have not contributed. The following invitation of the common people shows the incongruity of divine grace: the people of the streets are honoured to share the joy of the king.

Thirdly, the parables emphasise the familial connection between God, Christ, and the elect. The parable of the two sons speaks about a father and his two sons. The parable of the wicked tenants paints an image of a father with a son, slaves,

and tenants. The parable of the banquet speaks about a father who draws his invitees into the intimate sphere of the feast for his son. The parables use household imagery to show that the elect enter an intimate relationship with both the Father and the Son, as the family of the King (Van der Watt 2000).

The third point also touches upon the fourth point, namely that in two of the three parables, the judgement is set because of the treatment of the son. Matthew reveals that the relationship with Jesus is vital for one's eschatological destination and that those who are rejected will dismiss and kill him. He is the heir (Mt 21:38), the honoured Son (Mt 22:2), the chosen one (Mt 12:18), and the one against whom rejection is measured.

Fourthly, attached to the call to come into the kingdom is an incentive to do God's will. The two sons are both commanded to work in the vineyard. Jesus underlines this aspect of work when he states that John came to them 'in the way of righteousness' (Mt 21:32), a description of 'the moral demands of divine revelation that lead to God and eternal life' (Davies & Allison 1997:170). The tenants in the parable are exhorted to produce fruit for which they are accountable (21:34, 41, 43). The clearest indication is the narrative about the guest without the appropriate wedding robe (Mt 22:11–14). Within the context of the parables, the wedding robe seems to note doing what Jesus has called them to do, namely doing God's will of the Sermon on the Mount (Culpepper 2021:419; Runesson 2016:384). Hence, Jesus finishes the parable sequence with the exclamation that 'many are called, few are chosen' (22:14). One can be invited, but only few exhibit the fruits of election in going in God's way of righteousness.

Election, for Matthew, remains grounded in God's covenantal grace toward Israel, is deepened through Christ, and is authenticated through doing the will of God. The influence of Deuteronomistic theology is evident but reinterpreted considering the Messiah. Jesus is not merely the herald of divine election; he is its incarnate centre. In him, those who are elect are gathered, called, and sent.

Conclusion

This contribution has argued that Matthew 7:21 and Matthean election theology must be understood within the matrix of Deuteronomy and Deuteronomistic perspectives on election. Entrance into the kingdom of God is not a human achievement but a divine gift. Election is the work of God, which, in the Gospel of Matthew, finds fulfilment in Jesus Christ. As Calvin (*Institutes*, III.24.5) aptly stated, Christ is 'the mirror in which we see our election'.

This divine and incongruous gift, however, must be accompanied by doing the will of God. Faith is not merely a cognitive matter but also – especially in Matthew – an active calling to be perfect (Mt 5:48). The love of God must clothe his elect and manifest itself in their actions as agents of mercy. The recipients of this election can be identified primarily as the Jews, but in Christ, the circle of the divine family is extended to include the Gentiles.

Matthew's concept of election can thus be described as Christological, complex, consonant with the Old Testament, and ethically active. There are more that can be said about the election in Matthew, particularly concerning the space and priesthood. The Gospel's rich complexity will continue to invite scholarly reflection and investigation. I hope that the jubilarian will long continue to bless us with his insightful work on the Gospel of Matthew.

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