John the Baptist as a Rejected Prophet in Matthew:
The Benefits of Narrative Criticism and Discourse Analysis
When Establishing Matthew's Perspective of the Religious Leadership

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1.   Introduction

Scholars have extensively studied Jesus as a rejected prophet in Matthew. Michael Knowles,[1] David L. Turner,[2] and Mark F. Whitters[3] have each researched Jesus as a rejected prophet in the Gospel of Matthew. Nevertheless, Matthew's narrative suggests that this rejected prophet motif extends to other subjects in his Gospel account as well, specifically John the Baptist. Moreover, according to Matthew, the blame for the prophets' rejection rested with the religious leadership.

Despite the extensive research, scholarship has yet to produce much work on the subject of John the Baptist as a rejected prophet as of late. Martin Dibelius[4] and Carl H. Kraeling[5] provided foundational works that studied John the Baptist's role as a prophet. Wolfgang Trilling connected Jesus and John the Baptist as rejected prophets.[6] Turner describes John the Baptist as a "Penultimate Rejected Prophet"[7] but Jesus is the "Ultimate Rejected Prophet."[8] However, Jesus's role as a rejected prophet is often the primary focus of research, and rightly so. However, Matthew's narrative context implies that John the Baptist's rejection by the religious leadership, starting in Matthew 3:7, serves as another micro-theme undergirding Matthew's narratorial

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[1] Michael Knowles, *Jeremiah in Matthew's Gospel: The Rejected-Prophet Motif in Matthaean Redaction* (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 310.

[2] David L. Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 150.

[3] Mark F. Whitters, "Jesus in the Footsteps of Jeremiah," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly 68,* No. 2 (April 2006): 230.

[4] Martin Dibelius, *Die urchristliche Überlieferung von Johannes dem Täufer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1911), 133-134.

[5] Carl H. Kraeling, *John the Baptist* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), 44-45.

[6] Wolfgang Trilling, "Die Täufertradition bei Matthäus," *BZ* 3 (1959): 271-89.

[7] Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23,* 129.

[8] Ibid., 151.

framework of the rejected prophet motif. It seems Matthew desired to apply this theme of a rejected prophet to a broader portion of his literature.

Thus, the following article will attempt to demonstrate that Matthew's rejected prophet motif permeates his narrative context. Indeed, he intended to show how Jesus and anyone sent as prophets to the religious leaders were rejected. He places much of the blame on the religious leadership, not the people. I will demonstrate this view with Matthew 3:7 as a text that illustrates His perspective that the religious leaders were responsible for rejecting the prophets the Lord sent to them.

I have selected Matthew 3:7 because it provides a foundation for understanding how Matthew presented the reaction of the religious leaders toward John's message of repentance. Since John's primary message is contained in verses 7-12, it is reasonable to use it as a focal point of demonstration. However, the preposition ἐπί has led to different readings of 3:7 that could impact our interpretation of the text. Thus, I will also address the syntax of the passage using narrative criticism and discourse analysis as tools for arriving at a hermeneutical position in hopes of understanding Matthew's intent.

Matthew 3:7 has generated different readings of the Greek text. Indeed, the different renderings could also generate different interpretations. The Greek text of Matthew 3:7 reads, Ἰδὼν δὲ πολλοὺς τῶν Φαρισαίων καὶ Σαδδουκαίων ἐρχομένους ἐπὶ τὸ βάπτισμα αὐτοῦ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς·[9] The way one grammatically understands ἐπί in 3:7 has generated different readings. The BDAG presents ἐπὶ as a "marker of purpose"[10] in Matthew 3:7, thus rendering ἐρχομένους ἐπὶ τὸ

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[9] Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the Greek New Testament are from Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th Edition (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012).

[10] BDAG, 366. The L&N also presents ἐπὶ in the same way as the BDAG. See Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United

βάπτισμα as "coming for baptism." The NASB and NRSV translations follow this rendering. By contrast, the NIV, ESV, and NET translations present ἐπί as only signaling location, thus rendering ἐρχομένους ἐπὶ τὸ βάπτισμα as "coming to where he (John) was baptizing." Which rendering was intended by Matthew's Gospel? The rendering "coming for baptism" promotes the notion that the religious leaders were coming to receive John's baptism, while the rendering "coming to where he was baptizing" leaves room for the interpretation that the religious leaders were coming to observe the baptism event, but not necessarily receiving John's baptism.

Biblical commentators are varied on which rendering to follow. Some commentators follow the BDAG and translate ἐρχομένους ἐπὶ τὸ βάπτισμα as "Coming for baptism" in 3:7.[11] Other commentators diverge and translate ἐρχομένους ἐπὶ τὸ βάπτισμα "Coming to the baptism."[12] Thus, there is consistent discussion surrounding the interpretation of this text.

The differences seem to center around how one understands ἐπί and its attachment to the accusative in 3:7. For example, Stanley Porter explains that ἐπί "is often used in terms of movement"[13] when attached to an accusative. Yet, regarding Matthew 3:7, Porter wonders "Is

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Bible Societies, 1996), 784. See also Charles Lee Irons, *A Syntax Guide for Readers of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2016), 24.

[11] John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 142; J. Knox Chamblin, "Matthew," in *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, vol. 3, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995), 727; Charles Lee Irons, *A Syntax Guide for Readers of the Greek New Testament,* 24.

[12] Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 77; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 110; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution,* Second Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 46; Matthias Konradt, *The Gospel according to Matthew: A Commentary,* trans. M. Eugene Boring (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2020), 48-49. D. A. Carson suggests that verse 7 may only mean "coming to where he was baptizing." See D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 103.

[13] Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1999), 160.

there a sense of purpose here, in which location gives way to intention?"[14] It seems there might

be no clear explanation for how one should understand ἐπί in 3:7. I suggest that a narrative

critical analysis and discourse analysis of Matthew's literary pattern and his repetitive themes

will help us answer the question of which rendering of ἐπί Matthew intended.

In this article, I will argue that, based on a narrative critical interpretation and a discourse

analysis, the literary context of Matthew 3:7 seems to support a rendering of Ἰδὼν δὲ πολλοὺς

τῶν Φαρισαίων καὶ Σαδδουκαίων ἐρχομένους ἐπὶ τὸ βάπτισμα αὐτοῦ·[15] that conveys that the

religious leaders only came to observe John's baptism, not participate. Furthermore, Matthew's

literary pattern intentionally highlights the religious leadership's rejection of John's ministry,

presenting John as a rejected prophet like Jesus.

I will address this topic through a presentation of the following sections: (1) the

preposition ἐπὶ in Matthew 3:7 should be understood as locative as it is in 3:13, (2) Matthew's

literary context promotes an overall disdain for the religious leadership, implying they did not

receive John's baptism, and (3) Matthew's Gospel presents a micro-theme of John the Baptist as

a rejected prophet.

1. Syntactical Considerations in Matthew 3:6, 7, 13

This section will make its case using the principles of discourse analysis. Discourse

analysis examines the text beyond the sentence structure as a unified whole.[16] So, scholars who

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[14] Ibid.

[15] "Behold when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism." Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

[16] Todd A. Scacewater provides a helpful introduction to the method of discourse of analysis and its use by New Testament scholars. See Todd A. Scacewater, "Introduction: Discourse Analysis: History, Topics, and Applications," in *Discourse Analysis of the New Testament Writings,* ed. Todd A. Scacewater (Dallas, TX: Fontes Press, 2020), 1-30.

use this method are concerned with more than just the words and themes, but how the author arranges the words and themes. This places authorial intent as a primary concern.

The grammar in Matthew 3:6, 7, 13 and similar syntax in Luke 3:7 and Acts 8:36 promote the idea that ἐπί in verse 7 is locative for John's baptism. V. 6 contains clear language indicating the crowds received John's baptism, which is not present in reference to the religious leaders in v. 7. The reader will also notice that ἐπί is used as a locative preposition in Matthew 3:13 for Jesus' baptism. Moreover, ἐπί precedes the infinitive of purpose (βαπτισθῆναι) in relation to Jesus' baptism in 3:13. Finally, this syntactical pattern is repeated in Luke's rendition of John's baptism message (Luke 3:17) and in Acts 8:36. The following section will explain why these points are relevant to understanding ἐπί as locative, in support of a rendering of ἐπί as "to" in verse 7.

First, 3:6 clearly shows that the crowds participated in John's baptism. According to v. 6, the crowds were ἐβαπτίζοντο ("baptized") ὑπ' ("by") John.[17] This language is not present in verse 7. Indeed, if Matthew intended for the reader to believe the religious leaders received John's baptism, then it would seem more likely that he would closely relate the religious leaders to the baptism of the crowds in v. 6. Instead, he differentiates between the receptivity of the crowds and the hypocritical rejection by the religious leaders.

Next, while ἐπὶ in 3:7 could be a "marker of purpose,"[18] Matthew used the same term as locative for Jesus' baptism in 3:13.[19] The phraseology in 3:13, Ἰησοῦς ἀπὸ τῆς Γαλιλαίας ἐπὶ τὸν

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[17] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 110.

[18] BDAG, 366.

[19] Wesley G. Olmstead, *Matthew 1-14: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019), 45.

Ἰορδάνην, is only showing that Jesus arrived from Galilee to the Jordan river for John's baptism. Furthermore, the emphasis in the text is not so much on ἐπί as it is on who participated in John's baptism, namely Jesus, and who did not, namely the religious leaders. Of course, in contrast to the religious leaders in 3:7, Jesus participated in John's baptism.[20] Also, what follows ἐπὶ in the text further illuminates how to render ἐπὶ in 3:7 correctly.

Matthew probably intended readers to understand ἐπί in 3:13 as a locative term since he followed ἐπί with an infinitive of purpose (βαπτισθῆναι),[21] unlike the accusative noun in 3:7 (βάπτισμα).[22] Since the infinitive of purpose, βαπτισθῆναι, in 3:13 is associated with Jesus' baptism, then it is unlikely that βάπτισμα in 3:7 was intended to be understood as an event where the religious leaders were planning on participating in John's baptism. The infinitive of purpose is Matthew's "marker" that water baptism will occur. What about in Luke's parallel (Luke 3:7)? Is there an infinitive of purpose in the event of a water baptism?

Luke 3:7 and Acts 8:36 both have βαπτισθῆναι as an infinitive of purpose in the context of an actual water baptism event. In Luke 3:7, the crowds are the audience of John's rebuke, and βαπτισθῆναι is present,[23] unlike the accusative noun βάπτισμα in the parallel text, Matthew 3:7. It is sensible that βαπτισθῆναι is found in Luke 3:7 because the crowds receive John's message

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[20] Robert H. Gundry is correct when he states, "Matthew would hardly let the Pharisees and Sadducees come to show repentance by submitting themselves to baptism; hence, they simply come "to the baptism," presumably for critical observation." See Gundry, *Matthew,* 46.

[21] Ibid.

[22] The infinitive of purpose is sometimes indicated by a preceding τοῦ. This is the case in Matthew 3:13. See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2001), 590-91; James A. Brooks and Carlton L. Winbery, *Syntax of New Testament Greek* (Washington, D.C: University Press of America, 1979), 133.

[23] Olmstead, *Matthew 1-14,* 45.

positively (Luke 3:10-15). No such positive response is found in Matthew 3:7-10 where the message is directed at the religious leaders. Thus, Luke 3:7-15 implies that the crowds were baptized.[24] Also, Luke used ἐπί followed by the infinitive of purpose, βαπτισθῆναι, in Acts 8:36 when the Ethiopian eunuch desires to receive baptism. Acts 8:36 reads, ἦλθον ἐπί τι ὕδωρ, καί φησιν ὁ εὐνοῦχος· ἰδοὺ ὕδωρ, τί κωλύει με βαπτισθῆναι; ("When they came to water, then the eunuch said, "Behold water! What is preventing me from getting baptized?"). The same formula of ἐπί preceding the infinitive of purpose, βαπτισθῆναι, is found in Acts 8:36 as in Matthew 3:13; thus, establishing some consistency of syntactical expression in Matthew and Luke.

Based on the previous rationale, it is reasonable to assume that the infinitive of purpose (βαπτισθῆναι) is found in the text when the action of water baptism is intended in Matthew 3, and in a few cases of Luke's writings (Luke 3:7; Acts 8:36). The term ἐπί is locative in Matthew 3:7 and 13 according to the syntax and is greatly dependent on how the "baptismal" term is functioning in those particular verses.

Donald A. Hagner has also contributed to this discussion regarding the text. According to Hagner, Matthew 3:7 has ἐρχομένους ἐπὶ τὸ βάπτισμα ("coming to the baptism") while Luke 3:7 has the construction βαπτισθῆναι ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ("to be baptized by him").[25] Hagner's insights are helpful and imply that Matthew did not intend to portray the religious leaders as receptive to John's baptism.

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[24] Luke 3:7 does have an alternate reading in D. The alternate reading βαπτισθηναι ενωπιον αυτου ("baptized before him") rather than βαπτισθῆναι ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ("baptized by him"). The alternate reading is awkward and does not significantly affect the interpretation of the text. It is still clear that the crowds received John's baptism.

[25] Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 49.

Matthias Konradt correctly points out that John's message of judgment against the religious leaders in 3:7 (γεννήματα ἐχιδνῶν, τίς ὑπέδειξεν ὑμῖν φυγεῖν ἀπὸ τῆς μελλούσης ὀργῆς;)[26] flows better in the context if the religious leaders had not come to receive baptism.[27] The religious leaders incriminate themselves by arriving at John's baptism to observe with an unrepentant attitude.[28] John the Baptist mockingly recognized their hypocrisy.[29] Matthew's context also helps one have a correct interpretation of ἐπὶ in Matthew 3:7.

Granted, Luke and Acts may not provide the most robust supporting case for this article's thesis due to their distinction from Matthew's Gospel. However, they provide external evidence demonstrating the use of an infinitive of purpose in a Greek sentence. Perhaps the strongest case is found within Matthew's literary context. This is the thesis of the following section.

2. The Religious Leaders' Attitude Toward Baptism in Matthew

The context of Matthew paints a negative picture of the religious leaders overall that implies they would not have responded positively to John's baptism, thus rendering ἐπί as "to" in Matthew 3:7. I contend that Matthew's Gospel presents an even more negative picture of the religious leaders than Mark and Luke. However, those Gospels certainly present the religious leaders in a negative light. Yet, Matthew avoids any positive presentation of the religious leaders. In the following section, I will show that Matthew presents an overall negative picture of the religious leaders that impacts the rendering of ἐπί due to the following reasons: (1) Matthew 3:7 directed John's message against the religious leaders in contrast to Luke 3:7, (2) Matthew

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[26] "Brood of vipers, who directed you to flee the coming wrath?"

[27] Matthias Konradt, *Israel, Church, and the Gentiles in the Gospel of Matthew,* trans. Kathleen Ess (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 106.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Blomberg, *Matthew*, 77.

used repeated negative labels for the religious leaders such as "Brood of Vipers" (Matt 3:7;

12:34; 23:33) more so than the other Synoptic Gospels, and (3) where Mark and Luke present a

positive presentation of the religious leadership, Matthew neutralized any positive representation

of the religious leaders as in the case of Joseph of Arimathea (Matt 27:57; Mark 15:43; Luke

27:50).

It is necessary to note that in Matthew 3:7, the author directed John's message against the

religious leaders, unlike Luke's version, where John directed the message toward the crowds

(Luke 3:7).[30] Matthew grouped the Pharisees and Sadducees in 3:7, demonstrating a united front

against John.[31] Since both groups did not see eye-to-eye theologically,[32] the grouping is unique

and revealing as it relates to Matthew's intent,[33] and Matthew intended to show the religious

leaders negatively in 3:7 and through the remainder of his Gospel.

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[30] W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr. comment, "In Luke the multitudes come to be baptized. But could Matthew have envisaged his chief villains, the Pharisees, together with the Sadducees, submitting to John's baptism (cf. 21:25)?" Davies and Allison Jr. also reference John 1:24-25 where the religious leaders send some to investigate John and his baptism. See W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, vol. 1, International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 303–304.

[31] Craig S. Keener highlights Matthew's emphasis on the religious leadership. Keener explains that Matthew's use of the Q source suggests that Matthew probably narrowed Luke's use of Q, not the reverse. Keener posits, "Matthew has far more reason to focus on the Pharisees and Sadducees than Luke has to omit them." See Craig. S. Keener, " 'Brood of Vipers' (Matthew 3.7; 12.34; 23.23)," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament,* 28.1 (2005): 4-5.

[32] Josephus described the variations of the different Jewish religious sects in *J.W.* 2.118-166.

[33] According to John P. Meier, since Matthew's grouping of the Pharisees and Sadducees was a rare historical occurrence, he argues that this is clearly an example of Matthew editing Q and is probably unhistorical. Meier's comment highlights the uniqueness of Matthew's presentation of the religious leadership. However, I hold to the position that Matthew's grouping of the Pharisees and Sadducees is historical because it stands to reason that both groups would tolerate each other to an extent and unite against new movements like John the Baptist as they were against Jesus and Paul (Matt 22:23-24; Acts 23:1-11). Furthermore, Luke (Luke 3:7) was focused on the reception of the "crowd" as a whole rather than narrowing to the reaction of the Jewish religious leadership as Matthew did (Matt 3:7). See John P. Meier, "John the Baptist in Matthew's Gospel," *Journal of Biblical Literature,* 99 no. 3 (Sep. 1980): 389.

Indeed, throughout Matthew's Gospel, the religious leaders are highlighted as united, even more so than in the other Synoptic Gospels. One author demonstrates this in the following table:

Table 1[34]

Matthew	*Mark*	*Luke*
3:7: **Pharisees** and Sadducees	7:1: **Pharisees** and Scribes	5:21: **Pharisees** and Scribes
5:20: **Pharisees** and Sadducees	Also **7:5**	Also **5:30**
12:38: **Pharisees** and Sadducees	8:31: Chief Priests, Scribes, and Elders	6:7: **Pharisees** and Scribes
15:1: **Pharisees** and Scribes	10:33: Chief Priests and Scribes	7:30: **Pharisees** and Lawyers
16:1: **Pharisees** and Sadducees	11:18: Chief Priests and Scribes	9:22: Chief Priests, Scribes, and Elders
Also, 16:6, 11, 12	11:27: Chief Priests, Scribes, and Elders	11:53: **Pharisees** and Scribes
16:21: Chief Priests, Scribes, and Elders	14:1: Chief Priests and Scribes	14:3: **Pharisees** and Lawyers
20:18: Chief Priests and Scribes	14:43: Chief Priests, Scribes, and Elders	15:2: Pharisees and Scribes
21:15: Chief Priests and Scribes	Also 14:53	19:47: Chief Priests and Scribes
21:45: Chief Priests and **Pharisees**	15:1: Chief Priests, Scribes, and Elders	20:1: Chief Priests, Scribes, and Elders
23:2: **Pharisees** and Scribes	15:31: Chief Priests and Scribes	20:19: Chief Priests and Scribes
Also, 23:13, 14, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29		22:2: Chief Priests and Scribes
26:57: High Priest, Scribes, and Elders		Also 22:66
27:41: Chief Priests, Scribes, and Elders		23:10: Chief Priests and Scribes
27:62: Chief Priests and **Pharisees**		

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[34] Justus A. Freeman, "Matthew's Use of a Jeremianic Perspective in John the Baptist's Message: An Indictment of the Jewish Religious Leadership" (Ph.D. diss., Irving, B. H. Carroll Theological Seminary, 2021), 71-72.

The previous table demonstrates Matthew's consistent presentation of the religious leaders as a united group. Matthew was not concerned with differentiating between the different Jewish religious leadership sects[35] as much as showing a negative presentation of the religious leadership as a whole.[36] I agree with Matthias Konradt that, "As is well known, Matthew draws a thoroughly grim picture of the authorities."[37] The rest of the Gospel emphasizes the grim picture of the authorities in Matthew 3:7.

The second important feature to note is Matthew's use of the "brood of vipers" label for the religious leaders. Matthew used this label three times for the religious leaders (Matt 3:7; 12:34; 23:33). Matthew's use of the label is in contrast to Luke, who used the label only once (Luke 3:7), and Luke used the label for the "crowds."[38] Evidently, Matthew highlights the use of the term in the text because he considered the religious leaders the most unlikely to repent.[39]

Matthew repeatedly records similar accounts and terms to emphasize specific points in his narrative.[40] For example, the following table will show Matthew's repetition of accounts in the narrative.

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[35] Ibid., 72.

[36] On Matthew's grouping of the Pharisees and Sadducees, Ulrich Luz rightly notes, "Wichtig ist für Mt, daß die jüdischen Führer, deren Repräsentanten die beiden Gruppen sind, im Einklang miteinander gegen den Täufer (und Jesus) handeln" (What is important for Matthew is that the Jewish leadership, whom the two groups represent, act in alignment with one another against the Baptist (and Jesus)). See Ulrich Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus,* 1 (Teilband. Köln: Benziger, 1985), 206-207.

[37] Matthias Kondradt, "The Role of the Crowds in the Gospel of Matthew," in *Matthew within Judaism: Israel and the Nations in the First Gospel,* ed. Anders Runesson and Daniel M. Gurtner (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2020), 215. See also Konradt, *The Gospel according to Matthew,* 48-49.

[38] François Bovon, *Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1-9:50,* trans. Helmut Koester, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2002), 122; Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary,* vol. 3, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 113.

[39] I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text,* New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 139.

[40] Allen Williams, "The Relationship of Narrative Tie to the Plot of Matthew's Gospel" (Ph.D. diss., New Orleans, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1992), 119-174.

Table 2[41]

Account	References

1. The Stilling of the Storm Incidents	1. Matthew 8:23-27 and 14:22-33 (Jesus also Walks on Water).
	    a. Matthew 8:23-27 is also in Mark 4:36-41 and Luke 8:22-25.
	    b. Matthew 14:22-33 is only in Mark 6:45-51.

2. The Demoniac Incidents	2. Matthew 9:32-34 and 12:22-37.
	    a. Matthew 9:32-34 not found in other Synoptics.
	    b. Matthew 12:22-37 is only found in Luke 11:14.

3. The Feeding of the Multitudes	3. Matthew 14:13-21 and 15:32-38.
	    a. Matthew 14:13-21 is found in Mark 6:32-34 and Luke 9:10-17.
	    b. Matthew 15:32-38 is only found in Mark 8:1-10.

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[41] Freeman, 75-76.

Not only did Matthew emphasize similar accounts, but he also emphasized similar terminology in his Gospel. See the following table for examples of his record of similar terminology.

Table 3[42]

Terms	References
1. Brood of Vipers	1. Matthew 3:7, 12:34, and 23:33.
	a. Other Synoptics: The term is found only in Luke 3:7.
2. False Prophets	2. Matthew 7:15, 24:11, and 24:24.
	a. Other Synoptics: The term is found only once in Mark and Luke, respectively (Mark 13:22 and Luke 6:26).
3. Blind as a Description of the State of the Pharisees.	3. Matthew 15:14, 23:16, 17, 19, 24, and 26.
	a. Other Synoptics: The term is used this way only in Luke 6:39.

The previous tables show that Mark and Luke do not contain as many repetitious narratorial features as Matthew does. Matthew contains such narratorial features to emphasize essential

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[42] Ibid., 76.

points of the plot.[43] As J. D. Kingsbury puts it, "As a unified narrative, Matthew invites the reader or interpreter to concentrate precisely on the gospel story being told."[44] Mark L. Strauss also rightly explains, "Among the four Gospels, Matthew shows the most evidence of careful structure and design. The author is clearly a skilled literary artist."[45] In my case, Matthew's repeated emphasis on specific points in his narratives supports my thesis that it is unlikely he presented the religious leaders as coming for repentance since the context of his Gospel overwhelmingly highlights the rejection of John and Jesus by the religious leaders.

The final important point in this section is that Matthew's context exhibits a negative portrait of the religious leaders that does not support an interpretation that calls for their desire to participate in John's baptism (3:7). For one, Matthew indicates that the religious leaders rejected John's baptism in later passages (Matt 11:16-19; 21:23-32). Secondly, Matthew ensured there was no positive representation of the religious leaders.

In two places after 3:7, Matthew indicates the religious leaders rejected the religious leaders. The first place is in 11:16-19 where Jesus explained the religious leaders rejected both his message and John's. The text reads:

16 Τίνι δὲ ὁμοιώσω τὴν γενεὰν ταύτην; ὁμοία ἐστὶν παιδίοις καθημένοις ἐν ταῖς ἀγοραῖς ἃ προσφωνοῦντα τοῖς ἑτέροις 17 λέγουσιν· ηὐλήσαμεν ὑμῖν καὶ οὐκ ὠρχήσασθε, ἐθρηνήσαμεν καὶ οὐκ ἐκόψασθε. 18 ἦλθεν γὰρ Ἰωάννης μήτε ἐσθίων μήτε πίνων, καὶ λέγουσιν· δαιμόνιον ἔχει. 19 ἦλθεν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐσθίων καὶ πίνων, καὶ λέγουσιν· ἰδοὺ ἄνθρωπος φάγος καὶ οἰνοπότης, τελωνῶν φίλος καὶ ἁμαρτωλῶν. καὶ ἐδικαιώθη ἡ σοφία ἀπὸ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῆς.

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[43] B. W. Bacon's work argued that Matthew's five discourses, each ending with the phrase "When Jesus had finished saying these things" (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1), presented the Gospel as a new Torah. Whether one agrees with Bacon's thesis or not, his contribution elucidated the structural intentionality found in Matthew. See B. W. Bacon, "The 'Five Books' of Matthew against the Jews," *Expositor* 15 (1918): 56-66.

[44] Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, Second Edition, Revised and Enlarged (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 2.

[45] Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 215.

> But what shall I compare this generation to? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces who call out to others saying, "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance. We sang a lament, and you did not mourn." For John came neither eating nor drinking, and you say, "He has a demon." The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, "Behold, a man who is a glutton and drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners." Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.

The religious leaders were concerned with Jesus' association with tax collectors and sinners (Matt 9:10- 11). Matthew highlights their unwillingness to listen to anything John or Jesus had to say.[46]

The second instance is in 21:23-32 where Jesus first questioned the religious leaders as to the origins of John's baptism, and then Jesus told a parable that highlighted the religious leaders' rejection of John's message. The text begins in verse 23 with the religious leaders' challenge to Jesus's authority. Then verses 24-27 read:

> 24 ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· ἐρωτήσω ὑμᾶς κἀγὼ λόγον ἕνα, ὃν ἐὰν εἴπητέ μοι κἀγὼ ὑμῖν ἐρῶ ἐν ποίᾳ ἐξουσίᾳ ταῦτα ποιῶ· 25 τὸ βάπτισμα τὸ Ἰωάννου πόθεν ἦν; ἐξ οὐρανοῦ ἢ ἐξ ἀνθρώπων; οἱ δὲ διελογίζοντο ἐν ἑαυτοῖς λέγοντες· ἐὰν εἴπωμεν· ἐξ οὐρανοῦ, ἐρεῖ ἡμῖν· διὰ τί οὖν οὐκ ἐπιστεύσατε αὐτῷ; 26 ἐὰν δὲ εἴπωμεν· ἐξ ἀνθρώπων, φοβούμεθα τὸν ὄχλον, πάντες γὰρ ὡς προφήτην ἔχουσιν τὸν Ἰωάννην. 27 καὶ ἀποκριθέντες τῷ Ἰησοῦ εἶπαν· οὐκ οἴδαμεν. ἔφη αὐτοῖς καὶ αὐτός· οὐδὲ ἐγὼ λέγω ὑμῖν ἐν ποίᾳ ἐξουσίᾳ ταῦτα ποιῶ.

> But Jesus answered and said to them, "I will ask you one question. If you tell me, then I will tell you by what authority I do these things. From where did the baptism of John come? From heaven or from men?" And they discussed among themselves, saying, "If we say from heaven, then he will say to us, 'Then why did you not believe him?' But if we say 'from man,' we fear the crowd, for all consider John as a prophet." And answering Jesus, they said, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Then neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

The religious leaders' response reveals that (1) the people's opinions are generally differentiated from theirs, and (2) they did not believe in John's message of repentance. Regarding the religious leaders' discussion, Craig Blomberg's comments elucidate their state

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[46] R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary,* vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 200.

of mind, "Their private debate about how to reply already indicts them."[47] David L. Turner

also elaborates, "The leaders feign ignorance to avoid their quandary (21:27a), but their

refusal to answer betrays their negative estimate of John."[48]

Since the religious leaders responded to Jesus' question with a non-answer, Jesus

further highlighted their rejection by sharing a parable about two sons and a landowner in

verses 28-31. The verses read:

> 28 Τί δὲ ὑμῖν δοκεῖ; ἄνθρωπος εἶχεν τέκνα δύο. καὶ προσελθὼν τῷ πρώτῳ εἶπεν· τέκνον, ὕπαγε σήμερον ἐργάζου ἐν τῷ ἀμπελῶνι. 29 ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν· οὐ θέλω, ὕστερον δὲ μεταμεληθεὶς ἀπῆλθεν. 30 προσελθὼν δὲ τῷ ἑτέρῳ εἶπεν ὡσαύτως. ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν· ἐγώ, κύριε, καὶ οὐκ ἀπῆλθεν. 31 τίς ἐκ τῶν δύο ἐποίησεν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πατρός; λέγουσιν · ὁ πρῶτος. λέγει αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς· ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι οἱ τελῶναι καὶ αἱ πόρναι προάγουσιν ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ.

> But what do you think? A man had two sons and approached the first one and said, 'Son, go today and work in the vineyard.' And the son answered and said, 'I will not.' But later, he changed his mind and went. Then the father approached the second son and said the same thing. And the son answered and said, 'I will, master.' And he did not go. Which of the two sons did the will of the father?" They said, "The first son." Jesus told them, "Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes go ahead of you into the kingdom of God.

Here, Jesus contrasted the religious leaders' rejection of John's message with the people's

reception of it. The parable highlights the pride of the religious leaders and the humility of

those who receive John and Jesus's messages, respectively.[49] The rejection of the John's

message is clearly in view because of what Jesus said in verse 32: ἦλθεν γὰρ Ἰωάννης πρὸς

ὑμᾶς ἐν ὁδῷ δικαιοσύνης, καὶ οὐκ ἐπιστεύσατε αὐτῷ, οἱ δὲ τελῶναι καὶ αἱ πόρναι ἐπίστευσαν

αὐτῷ· ὑμεῖς δὲ ἰδόντες οὐδὲ μετεμελήθητε ὕστερον τοῦ πιστεῦσαι αὐτῷ. ("For John came to you

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[47] Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, 320.

[48] Turner, *Israel's Last Prophet: Jesus and the Jewish Leaders in Matthew 23,* 147.

[49] Craig S. Keener, *Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 507-508.

in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the

prostitutes believed him. And seeing this, you did not change your mind later and come to

believe him"). Matthew's emphasis on the religious leaders' rejection of John's message is

further highlighted by the absence of any connection to John in the parallel passages of Mark

12:27-33 and Luke 20:1-9.

Matthew's Gospel also does not positively portray the religious leaders, unlike Mark

and Luke. In Mark 12:28-34, Jesus commended the wise answers of one of the scribes.[50]

When a scribe asks Jesus about what command is the greatest (12:28), Jesus responded in

verses 29-31:

> 29 ἀπεκρίθη ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὅτι πρώτη ἐστίν· ἄκουε, Ἰσραήλ, κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν κύριος εἷς ἐστιν, 30 καὶ ἀγαπήσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου ἐξ ὅλης τῆς καρδίας σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ψυχῆς σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς διανοίας σου καὶ ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ἰσχύος σου. 31 δευτέρα αὕτη· ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν. μείζων τούτων ἄλλη ἐντολὴ οὐκ ἔστιν.

> Jesus answered, 'The most important command is this, Hear, Israel, the Lord our God is one. And you will love the Lord your God with your complete heart, your complete mind, and your complete strength. The second is this, love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other greater command than these.

The scribe then responded to Jesus's answer by repeating the same commands Jesus stated

(vv. 32-33). However, the scribe explained that to love God and one's neighbor ἐστιν πάντων

τῶν ὁλοκαυτωμάτων καὶ θυσιῶν. ("Is more than burnt offerings and sacrifices"). Jesus saw

this answer as wise and responded in verse 34 εἶ ἀπὸ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ. ("You are not

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[50] For further discussion on this passage, see James A. Brooks, *Mark*, vol. 23, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 198; James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 373–374.

far from God's kingdom"). I do not find such a positive assessment of a scribe in Matthew's

Gospel.[51]

Also, Luke's Gospel contains three scenarios where Jesus had table fellowship with

the religious leadership (Luke 7:36-50; 11:37-54; 14:1-24). Even though the religious leaders

debate or question Jesus in each of these meals over principles of morality and Jewish law,[52]

it was considered an honor to share a meal with a counterpart in first-century Judaism.[53]

Moreover, such relational aspects with the religious leaders are not present in Matthew due to

his overall perspective regarding the irredeemable qualities of the religious leaders.

I find one more illustration of Matthew's perspective of religious leadership in the

account of Joseph of Arimathea, the man who provided the tomb for Jesus's burial. In

Matthew 27:57, Joseph of Arimathea is called a ἄνθρωπος πλούσιος ("rich man") who also

ἐμαθητεύθη τῷ Ἰησοῦ ("became a disciple of Jesus"). Yet, Mark 15:43 and Luke 27:50 record

Joseph of Arimathea as a βουλευτὴς ("member of the council").[54] There are two relevant

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[51] Regardless of the scribe's intentions, it is evident that this is one of Jesus's most positive assessments of a scribal leader in the Synoptic Gospels. See R. Alan Cole, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary,* vol. 2, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 273.

[52] A Pharisee considered Jesus improper to associate with a sinful woman in Luke 7:36-50. Another Pharisee was surprised that Jesus did not follow ceremonial washing in Luke 11:37-54. Finally, the religious leaders judge Jesus for healing on the Sabbath in Luke 14:1-24. In each instance, Jesus responded with teaching to correct the religious leaders.

[53] Sharing a meal was considered a very relational aspect of the Mediterranean culture that connoted friendship, respect, and trust. See Genesis 24:28-61; 2 Samuel 9:10; Psalm 41:9. See also M. A. Powell, "Table Fellowship" in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels,* Second Edition, ed. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown and Nicholas Perrin (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 925-931; Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Background Commentary,* Second Edition (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 210.

[54] Although, as a member of the council, Joseph would have been a man of influence and wealth. Josephus listed the council alongside chief priests and other δυνατοῖς ("powerful") men. See *J.W.* 2.336. See also Shaye J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah,* Second Edition (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 102-103

points to note here. First, Joseph was a member of the Jewish religious leadership. Second, Matthew avoided identifying Joseph with the religious leadership.

All of the previous narrative contextual factors provide a framework for rendering and interpreting ἐπί in Matthew 3:7. Matthew's unifying themes imply that one cannot ignore the negative portrayal of the religious leadership in his text. A consideration of Matthew's context incites the notion that it is doubtful he intended the reader to believe the religious leaders arrived to receive baptism by John. If this is the case, then it means ἐπί should be rendered as "to," and the reader should understand that the religious leaders were coming to observe or examine the baptism event out of curiosity.

3. John the Baptist as a Rejected Prophet in Matthew

Discourse analysis and a narrative critical methodology provide good tools for highlighting John the Baptist as a rejected prophet in the Gospel of Matthew. One may find much on the subject of Jesus as a rejected prophet in Matthew, but there needs to be more research on John the Baptist's role as a prophet rejected by his religious contemporaries. This would serve as a good micro-theme for scholars to work on in Matthew in the future.

Based on the above analysis of Matthew 3:7, one could surmise a micro-theme within Matthew's Gospel relating to a rejected prophet motif. If Matthew's habit of doubling reveals anything, then it reveals that he probably used several examples of rejected prophets to convey his point that the religious leadership was responsible for rejecting the prophets the Lord sent to them.

Conclusion

In this article, using Matthew 3:7 as an example, I have argued for applying Matthew's rejected prophet motif to John the Baptist as a micro-theme that permeates the

narrative. I have attempted to demonstrate this view with the help of narrative criticism and discourse analysis. The following paragraphs serve as a summary of my points.

First, the syntax in Matthew 3:7, 13 indicates that ἐπί is locative for the event of baptism. The syntax reveals the infinitive verb βαπτισθῆναι that follows ἐπὶ indicates a baptism was going to take place, as in the case of Jesus (Matt 3:13). Furthermore, the infinitive βαπτισθῆναι is found in Lukan texts (Luke 3:7; Acts 8:36) in the context of actual baptisms.

Second, Matthew's overall narrative presents a negative picture of the religious leaders that shapes how one should interpret 3:7. The context of Matthew indicates the religious rejected John's baptism (11:16-19; 21:23-32). Mark (12:28-34) and Luke (7:36-50; 11:37-54; 14:1-24)[55] present more positive pictures, in some places, of the religious leaders than Matthew. Also, Matthew avoided presenting the religious leaders positively compared to parallel passages in the other Synoptic Gospels.[56]

I hope this article might generate more interest in studying Matthew's presentation of John the Baptist as a rejected prophet in his own right. Narrative criticism and discourse analysis could serve as promising tools for evaluating Matthew's perspective regarding the religious leadership's rejection of the Lord's prophets.

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[55] Even though Jesus rebuked the religious leaders at his meals with them, the fact that he shared a meal with them in Luke is significant.

[56] See the following passages Matthew 27:57; Mark 15:43; Luke 27:50.

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