



"Binding" and "Loosing": The Matthean Authorizations

Author(s): Richard H. Hiers

Source: *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 104, No. 2 (Jun., 1985), pp. 233-250

Published by: [The Society of Biblical Literature](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3260965>

Accessed: 10/06/2014 21:51

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



The Society of Biblical Literature is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of Biblical Literature*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

“BINDING” AND “LOOSING”:
THE MATTHEAN AUTHORIZATIONS

RICHARD H. HIERS

The University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611

The sayings about binding and loosing reported in Matt 16:19 and 18:18 have given rise to a wide range of interpretations. Catholic scholars often have read them to mean that Jesus thereby authorized the establishment of the Roman Catholic Church, the primacy of Peter in its government, and the apostolic power of excommunication.¹ Protestant commentators, on the other hand, tend to argue that the sayings either are inauthentic, since found only in Matthew, or else must surely mean something other than that Jesus bestowed sacerdotal authority on Peter or other apostles. Protestants also have been eager to point out that nothing is said in either passage about the transmission of authority by apostles to any successors.² What did Jesus authorize Peter and the others to do in these sayings? Critics have offered a variety of interpretations, generally with considerable assurance; in particular:

1. That the meaning is to be understood in terms of later rabbinic usage: thus, the authority to absolve or release a person from some sort of vow.³ Yet neither the context of 16:19 nor that of 18:18 suggests that it is a question of vows. Elsewhere, Matthew reports that Jesus told his followers to refrain from swearing at all (5:33–37). It is unlikely that Matthew understood Jesus to have authorized his followers to determine whether other followers should be released from vows.

2. That the meaning is to be understood in terms of later rabbinic usage: thus, the authority of the scribes (and ergo of the apostles) to determine which actions were forbidden and which permitted.⁴ J. R. Mantey also supports this line of interpretation but argues that the future perfect tenses signify that the disciples can only “ratify and obey” what

¹ H. Küng, *The Church* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1968) 256–57, 461–65.

² See, e.g., O. Cullmann, *Peter* (London: SCM, 1953) 207–12. Cf. *Pseudo Clementines*, §146, where Peter transfers “the power to bind and loose” to Clement and appoints him to be bishop (E. Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha* [ed. W. Schneemelcher; 2 vols.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965] 2. 569).

³ Z. W. Falk, “Binding and Loosing,” *JJS* 25 (1974) 92–100.

⁴ Str-B 1. 739–41; J. D. M. Derrett, “Binding and Loosing (Matt 16:19; 18:18; John 29 [sic]:23,” *JBL* 102 (1983) 112–17.

God has *already* decreed.⁵ F. Büchsel opposes this interpretation on the basis of Matt 23:8, which, he says, “rejects any attempt on the part of the disciples to assume the position of rabbis.”⁶ Matthew and Luke report that Jesus sanctioned obedience to the law, not its interpretation (Matt 5:17–19; 23:3, 23; Luke 16:17). Matthew can scarcely have meant that the disciples were authorized to set aside any of the laws of Moses! G. Bornkamm proposes that binding and loosing referred to the church’s judgments about doctrine and discipline, which would be “ratified” in the coming kingdom.⁷ He also urges that 16:19 refers primarily to Peter’s *teaching* authority, whereas 18:18 has to do with the *disciplinary* authority of the congregation.⁸ R. Bultmann proposed that Matt 16:18–19 is an early, though secondary, tradition “in which Peter is promised authority in matters of doctrine or discipline.”⁹ Nothing in its context, however, suggests that 16:18–19 had to do with either teaching or disciplinary authority.

3. That the meaning is to be understood in terms of later rabbinic usage: thus, the authority of the leaders of the church to exclude persons from the community by “pronouncing the ban” and to loose or lift such a ban. Strack and Billerbeck argue that the saying is to be read as authorizing *both* determination of forbidden and permitted conduct *and* “pronouncing the ban,” that is, exclusion from the congregation.¹⁰ They concede, however, that the latter explanation imputes to the verbs *dein* and *lyein* “a significance which they do not in themselves have.” Büchsel recognizes that the underlying Hebrew and Aramaic terms “only rarely . . . mean to impose or remove a ban, to expel from and receive back into the congregation,” but he nevertheless concludes that this “must” be the “true sense” of these verbs in Matt 16:19 and 18:18.¹¹

4. That the meaning is to be understood in terms of John 20:23, and thus refers to the authority of the disciples to forgive or withhold forgiveness of sins.¹² Bultmann viewed Matt 18:18 as a later variant of

⁵ “The Mistranslation of the Perfect Tense in John 20:23; Matt 16:19, and Matt 18:18,” *JBL* 58 (1939) 243–49.

⁶ “*Deō* (*Lyō*),” *TDNT* 2. 60–61. Thus also J. D. Kingsbury, “The Figure of Peter in Matthew’s Gospel as a Theological Problem,” *JBL* 98 (1979) 81.

⁷ “End-Expectation and Church in Matthew,” in G. Bornkamm et al., *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973) 45–46.

⁸ G. Bornkamm, “The Authority to ‘Bind’ and ‘Loose’ in the Church in Matthew’s Gospel,” *Perspective* 11 (1970) 37–50.

⁹ *History of the Synoptic Tradition* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963) 138, 258.

¹⁰ Str-B 1. 739a. Thus also H. Braun, *Jesus of Nazareth* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 72. ¹¹ “*Deō* (*Lyō*),” 61. See also J. Reumann, *Jesus in the Church’s Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968) 467 n. 48. Josephus used the terms *lyein* and *desmein* for banishment in the political sense (*J.W.* 1.5.2 §111).

¹² E. Fuchs, *Studies of the Historical Jesus* (SBT 42; Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1964) 152; F. Hahn, *Mission in the New Testament* (SBT 47; Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1965)

16:19, intended to signify "the Church's . . . given right to allow or withhold forgiveness of sins."¹³ But elsewhere Matthew seems to say that Jesus expected his followers to forgive those who offended them without need for special authorization or benefit of clergy: Matt 5:23–26; 6:12–15; 18:21–35. Matt 18:18 *may* refer to forgiving sins committed against someone else, though nothing in the context so indicates. If in Matthew's mind 18:18 went with 18:15–17, the passage more likely refers to the church's authority to condemn impenitent offenders!

5. That the meaning is to be understood in connection with Matt 10:23; 11:20–24; and 19:28: thus, in effect, that the authority of Jesus and his disciples would be "binding at the Judgment," that is, that the judgment which he and they pronounced upon the cities of Israel would be ratified at the judgment before the Son of man.¹⁴

It is surprising that none of these interpretations attends to passages where terms for binding and loosing appear in intertestamental Jewish sources or elsewhere in the NT. Interpreters who rely on Strack and Billerbeck's *Kommentar*, which is primarily "erläutert aus Talmud und Midrasch," often seem to suppose that the intertestamental literature is of little or no importance as background for NT terminology and beliefs. Terms for binding and loosing appear with a wide range of meanings in the OT: for example in Judg 16:6, 13; Job 38:31; Isa 22:21, 66:1; Ezek 20:37; Tob 3:13, 7:11 (cf. *1 Enoch* 6:4). None of these passages anticipates the later putative rabbinic usages. The terms also appear with various meanings in the NT, for example, in Matt 22:23, 23:4; Luke 8:29; Acts 20:22, 22:4; Rom 7:1; 1 Cor 7:39.

I. Binding Demons and Freeing Demoniacs

Most commonly, however, in intertestamental writings and in the NT the terms "binding" and "loosing" refer to the binding of Satan or satanic beings (e.g., demons) and the loosing of such beings or their erstwhile victims. A familiar example is in the story of Tobit, where the angel Raphael has the task of binding (*dein*) the demon Asmodeus, which had been afflicting the virtuous Sarah, who was thereby delivered

51. See also J. A. Emerton, "Binding and Loosing—Forgiving and Retaining," *JTS* 13 (1962) 325–31; Bornkamm, *Tradition and Interpretation*, 269–70; and Küng, *The Church*, 330–35.

¹³ *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 141.

¹⁴ A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1968) 371 n. 1; *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung* (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1951) 416–17. See also Bornkamm, "Authority to Bind," 46. Cf. 1 Cor 6:1–3. Other interpretations also have been proposed. C. Kähler, for example, urges that the saying derives from an epiphany report intended to legitimate the Gospel's content by establishing Peter's "proto-apostolic authority" ("Zur Form- und Traditionsgeschichte von Matth. XVI.17–19," *NTS* 23 [1976] 36–58).

or released (*lyein*) from the demon and her affliction (Tob 3:17; 8:3). The cognate verb *apolyein* is used with respect to freeing of persons from demons in Josephus's description of exorcistic cures he claims to have witnessed (*Ant.* 8.2.5 §46).

Several instances of such terminology occur in *1 Enoch*, *Jubilees*, and the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, mainly in connection with accounts of the previous "binding" of evil spirits in the days of Noah and of the prospective binding of Satan or Belial at the end of the age. Certain of the "watchers," notably Azazel and Shemyaza, had corrupted the world of human beings. Consequently, God commanded Raphael, "Bind Azazel hand and foot, and cast him into the darkness . . . and let him abide there forever. . . . And on the day of the great Judgment he shall be cast into the fire" (*1 Enoch*, chaps. 6–9; 10:4, 11–13). In *1 Enoch* 88 we read that the "fallen" angels, described as "stars" and "beasts"—evidently the "sons of God" from Gen 6:1–4—"were bound hand and foot and cast into an abyss of the earth," apparently by the angels Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and Phanuel.¹⁵ Such also was to be the fate of sinners who had not experienced judgment during their life on earth.¹⁶

From the standpoint of the writer of the Similitudes of *1 Enoch*,¹⁷ on the other hand, the hosts of Azazel remained at large during the present age: they had not yet been overcome but would be bound in chains and cast into "the burning furnace" on "that great day" of judgment.¹⁸ This punishment is decreed "for their unrighteousness in becoming subject to Satan and leading astray those who dwell on the earth" (*1 Enoch* 54:6). Future eschatological punishment and imprisonment of the "host of heaven" are also anticipated in the late canonical apocalypse of Isa 24:21–22.

Perhaps the most significant intertestamental references to the binding or overpowering of Satan and the demons are found in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*. The classic passage in *T. Levi* 18:10–12 refers to the activities of the "new priest" whom God would raise up as king in the era to come:

And he shall open the gates of paradise,
And he shall remove the threatening sword against Adam.
And he shall give to the saints to eat from the tree of life,
And the Holy Spirit shall be on them.

¹⁵ See also *1 Enoch* 90:23–24; *Jub.* 5:6; cf. 1 Pet 3:19–20; 2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6–7.

¹⁶ *1 Enoch* 103:5–9; cf. Matt 22:13. See also *1 Enoch* 90:23–26.

¹⁷ *1 Enoch*, chaps. 36–71. Whether dated in the first century B.C. or the first century A.D., the Similitudes, like the rest of the intertestamental writings, indicate the range of Jewish beliefs circulating or forming in the days of Jesus and the early church, between the canonical OT writings and the later rabbinical traditions.

¹⁸ *1 Enoch*, chaps. 54–56. See also *1 Enoch* 69:28.

And Beliar shall be bound by him,
And he shall give power to his children to tread
upon the evil spirits.

Similar hope comes to expression in *T. Sim.* 6:5–6 and *T. Zeb.* 9:8. The assurance that human beings will have power to "tread upon" or subdue the evil spirits means that these spirits will no longer be able to harm them. Such clearly seems to be the meaning of Jesus' statement to the seventy when they return from their mission, reporting that they have found the demons subject to them in his name: "Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you" (Luke 10:19). The "enemy" here, of course, is Satan.

The terms "binding" and "loosing" appear in connection with the over-coming of Satan and demons in various NT passages. Reiterating the kinds of expectation represented in *Jubilees* and *1 Enoch*, the seer of Revelation 20 anticipates that at the end of the age, Satan will be bound but then loosed for a final time of affliction on earth:

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven holding in his hand the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound (*edēsen*) him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years were ended. After that he must be loosed (*lythēnai*) for a little while. . . . And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be loosed (*lythēsetai*) from his prison.¹⁹

In the Synoptic Gospels, the idea of a final outbreak or onslaught by Satan and his demons seems to be associated with the idea of a final "tribulation"²⁰ when, in effect, "all hell" will break loose. Millar Burrows called attention to CD 6:13: "And during these years Belial will be let loose in Israel." Burrows pointed out, however, that here reference evidently was to Belial's present activity.²¹

The terms "binding" and "loosing" also appear in the Gospels in connection with exorcisms. The *locus classicus* for "binding" is Mark 3:27 and parallels, the parable about binding a strong man and plundering his goods. The context makes it clear that the strong man represents Satan and/or his demons.²² In many of the reported exorcisms, the demon is

¹⁹ Rev 20:1–3, 7. See also Rev 9:14–15; cf. *Jub.* 10:7–11.

²⁰ E.g., Matt 6:13; Luke 13:14–15. See also Add Esth 11:5–9; 1QH 3:18; *Did.* 16:1–5. See generally A. J. Mattill, Jr., "The Way of Tribulation," *JBL* 98 (1979) 531–46.

²¹ M. Burrows, *More Light on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Viking, 1958) 132.

²² See H. C. Kee, *Community of the New Age: Studies in Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977) 108: "Jesus' exorcisms have the effect of binding the 'Strong Man' and thus presage the end of his control."

ordered or thrown out; to “cast out”²³ evidently means much the same thing as to “bind” a demon. Matthew follows Mark in describing Jesus’ exorcism of demons in terms of “binding” (Matt 12:29). Through exorcism or binding, the demon is brought under control by one who has superior power. The sense of Mark 3:27 is that by binding the demon the erstwhile demoniac is liberated from his afflicting demon. Thus binding and loosing occur simultaneously: the demon is bound while its victim is loosed.

The term *lyein* (“to loose”) occurs with just this meaning in Luke 13:16: “And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan has bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?” Here the terms *dein* (“to bind”) and *desmos* (“bond”) relate to Satan’s activity, presumably through the demons, in afflicting his victims. Another instance of this understanding appears in Mark 7:34–35 in the description of Jesus’ healing of the deaf man who had a speech impediment: “. . . and looking up to heaven, he said to him, ‘*Eph-pha-tha*,’ that is, ‘Be opened.’ And his ears were opened, and immediately the bond (*desmos*) of his tongue was released (*lyein*) and he spoke properly.” Here, as in several other places, especially in Mark, a healing or “miracle” story bears traces of an exorcism narrative.²⁴

A related idea is expressed by the verb *phimoun*, used in the exorcism story in Mark 1:25 = Luke 4:35. Literally it means “to tie shut” or “silence.” Silencing the demons elsewhere seems to have been part of Jesus’ technique in “rebuking,” that is, overpowering them.²⁵

²³ The verb commonly used is *ekballein*, e.g., at Mark 3:22; Matt 12:28. Similarly, several of the later Aramaic incantation texts declare that demons are banned, abolished, or bound from certain persons. See C. D. Isbell, *Corpus of the Aramaic Incantation Bowls* (SBLDS 17; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975) texts 13:3; 14:1–4; 37:5–6; 41:11–12; 42:5; 43:6–7.

²⁴ See C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (Cambridge: University Press, 1959) 252, commenting on Mark 7:34–35: “The idea is not of the particular part of the person being opened, but of the whole person being opened or released. . . . One whom Satan has kept shut up and bound is being released. . . . It is . . . the command that shatters the fetters by which Satan has held his victim bound.” See also A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1910) 306–10; J. M. Robinson, *The Problem of History in Mark* (SBT 21; London: SCM, 1957) 26–42; H. C. Kee, “The Terminology of Mark’s Exorcism Stories,” *NTS* 14 (1968) 243–44. See also H. Van der Loos, *The Miracles of Jesus* (Leiden: Brill, 1965) 357: “Why should not men in their turn be able to bind or release a demon?” Van der Loos refers to the ancient practice of binding the feet of the dead, lest they return to trouble the living. Perhaps we have a vestige of this practice in the chains attached to Marley’s Ghost in Dickens’s *Christmas Carol*. The Gerasene demoniac (who was “out of the tombs”) was bound with chains (Mark 5:1–4 and par.). The dead and the demonic, of course, continue to be closely associated in traditional Halloween motifs.

²⁵ E.g., Mark 1:34 = Luke 4:41; Mark 3:12 and par. See Cranfield, *St. Mark*, p. 78; and O. Bauernfeind, *Die Worte der Dämonen im Markusevangelium* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1927) esp. 72–77. Cf. Isbell, *Corpus*, text 43:1–3.

The term "to bind" is used, then, both with respect to the affliction of a person by Satan (or by demons) and to the binding of a demon (or of Satan) by an exorcist who thereby frees or looses the erstwhile victim. The terminology is reminiscent of and, in Mark 3:27 = Matt 12:29, associated with another expression, *harpazein* and its cognate *diarpazein*, "to seize, snatch or plunder."²⁶ Here the verbs refer to the activity of the exorcist in seizing or "liberating" the household, that is, the strong man's victims.

It seems, then, that in intertestamental writings and in the NT, the terms "binding" and "loosing" are commonly used in connection with the overcoming of Satan and/or the demons and the freeing of their victims, either in the past or at the judgment that is to come or during the remainder of the present age. In these various contexts those doing the binding and loosing include the holy angels (or archangels) of God, the coming messiah or priest, Jesus, and certain other exorcists.

II. The Commission of the Twelve as Exorcists

According to synoptic traditions, not only did Jesus himself exorcise demons;²⁷ he authorized or empowered his disciples to do so as well. The twelve were chosen, Mark says, so that they might be sent out to preach "and to have authority (*exousia*) to cast out demons" (Mark 3:14–16).²⁸ That they subsequently were so authorized and sent out is then reported in Mark 6:7 and parallels: "And he gave them power (*dynamis*) and authority (*exousia*) over all demons, and to cure diseases."

According to Mark 6:13, the twelve did "cast out many demons." Luke's account of Jesus' instructions to the seventy (10:1–16) does not mention demons or exorcism; yet on their return, the seventy exclaim that they have been successfully exorcising demons, indicating that they had invoked Jesus' name in doing so. Implicitly, at some previous time, Jesus had given the seventy power over unclean spirits. This meaning is

²⁶ See also Matt 11:12; 13:18; John 10:28–29.

²⁷ Interpreters who urge that the Gospels portray Jesus as a *theos anēr* or miracle worker typically have little to say about his reported exorcisms and the cosmic dualism inherent in his expectation that the reign of Satan would soon give way to the kingdom of God. See, e.g., M. Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978); Braun, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 28–31. But see H. C. Kee, "Mark's Gospel in Recent Research," *Int* 32 (1978) 360: "It is unwarranted . . . to assume that there was in Hellenistic Judaism a paradigmatic figure of a divinized miracle-worker to which the early Christian image of Jesus was made to conform. . . ." As long ago as 1892, J. Weiss recognized that Jesus exorcised demons in preparation for the coming of the kingdom of God (*Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971] 74–83). See also O. Betz, "Jesus Heiliger Krieg," *NovT* 2 (1958) 116–37.

²⁸ Interpreters generally pay little or no attention to the disciples' exorcism of demons. See, e.g., E. Best, "The Role of the Disciples in Mark," *NTS* 23 (1976) 337–401.

corroborated by Jesus' reaction upon hearing their report: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority (*exousia*) to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you" (10:18–19). This statement, in effect, summarizes the substance of the kind of authorization reported in Mark 6:7 and parallels. This assurance and also, probably, Jesus' saying in Matt 10:16b, are echoed by Paul in Rom 16:20: "I would have you wise as to what is good, and guileless as to what is evil; then the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." What is new for Jesus' disciples is that they have found this power effective: they *have* been exorcising demons. Jesus' own authority over the demons had been a source of amazement from the beginning of his public activity (Mark 1:23–27 = Luke 4:33–36). Now the disciples too have authority over the demons—not, as often is asserted, because Satan has been bound,²⁹ but because, as stated in Luke 10:19 and elsewhere, Jesus has given them this power.

Our suggestion, then, is that the sayings about binding and loosing in Matt 16:19 and 18:18 may derive from an earlier statement or statements by Jesus authorizing Peter and the twelve to exorcise demons. The term *exousia* does not appear in Matthew 16 or 18, but these chapters unquestionably report that Jesus authorized or empowered his disciples to do *something*. Various synoptic traditions report that he authorized them to preach, exorcise demons, and heal. As we have seen, in early Jewish sources and elsewhere in the NT, including in sayings attributed to Jesus, the terms "binding" and "loosing" commonly refer to the binding of Satan (Beliar, etc.) and the exorcism of demons. It may be significant that the pronominal objects of the verbs "to bind" and "to loose" in both Matthew 16 and 18 are in the neuter gender. In the synoptics and other early Christian and Jewish literature, demons are generally designated by the neuter terms *daimonia* or *pneumata*.³⁰ Such, the seventy report, they have been able to overpower (Luke 10:17).

As is well known, the Synoptic Gospels all accord Peter a position of prominence among the disciples. No synoptic passages indicate that

²⁹ Interpreters commonly assert that Mark 3:27 means that Jesus had already bound or defeated Satan, perhaps at the "Temptation." Thus, e.g., J. R. Michaels, *Servant and Son* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981) 81–82. Such interpreters seem unaware of Bauernfeind's reminder that Mark does not include the Q "temptation scene" of Matt 4:3–11a = Luke 4:2–13 (*Worte der Dämonen*, 74–75, 78). Even the Q scene fails to show that Satan was bound or otherwise incapacitated. After Jesus' temptation, "the devil left him" or "departed," under his own power. Moreover, Satan continued at large as a serious menace to Jesus and his followers according to subsequent synoptic and other NT traditions, e.g.: Matt 6:13; Mark 8:33; Luke 22:31; John 12:31; 2 Cor 4:4; 1 Thess 2:18; 3:4–5; 2 Thess 2:9–10; 2 Tim 2:25–26; 1 Pet 5:8; 1 John 5:19; and, of course, Revelation.

³⁰ E.g., Mark 3:15; 6:13; Luke 9:1. See BAG, "*daimonion*," 2, p. 168; "*pneuma*," 4c, p. 682.

Peter was preeminent as a demon exorcist, but he is named first among those whom Jesus authorized to cast out demons in Mark 3:14–16 and Matt 10:1–2. He also appears among the foremost healers and exorcists according to Acts.³¹ Perhaps Peter was thought to have been the first or foremost of those whom Jesus authorized to "bind" demons.

Generally, however, the Synoptic Gospels and later accounts in Acts indicate that all of the twelve (and then later adherents as well) were empowered to exorcise demons. Such may have been the earlier meaning of the saying underlying Matt 18:18, which is directed to all of the disciples. Nothing in its present context, however, suggests that Matthew was thinking of demon exorcism in 18:18. There are hints or vestiges of possible exorcistic meaning in the Matthean setting for 16:19.

In both Luke 10 and the Matthean sayings in chaps. 16 and 18, a contrast and relationship are suggested between events that take place on earth and those that transpire (or will do so) in heaven. The Matthean saying declares that "what(ever)" Peter or the other disciples "bind on earth shall be bound in heaven." In Luke 10, the connection between exorcism of demons and the fall of Satan is this: through the defeat of his demons on earth, Satan, who is still powerful in heaven, is being overcome. The defeat of the demons means that Satan himself is doomed. This apparently is also the sense of Rev 12:7–11: the seer is assured that Satan *will* be defeated in heaven, though his final afflictions must afterwards be endured on earth (12:12). As in the saying in Mark 3 about binding the strong man, so it would seem also in the sayings in Matthew 16 and 18: the defeat of the demons on earth has its counterpart in the overcoming of Satan in Heaven. Heaven and earth are also associated with language about binding and loosing in the Aramaic incantation inscriptions reported by C. H. Gordon, who cites, for example, a bowl from Nippur, Babylonia, where Satan and evil spirits are addressed as follows: "Ye are bound with the great bond of the heavens and tied with the mighty great tie of the earth; ye are bound with the great bond that cannot be loosened and tied with the mighty tie that cannot be severed."³² The connection is even clearer in a text cited by Isbell: "All of you are bound and sealed—demons, devils, and liliths . . . conquered on earth and conquered in the heavens."³³ The idea that Satan and his

³¹ Acts 3:1–10; 5:12–16. On the supernatural potency of Peter's shadow, see P. W. van der Horst, "Peter's Shadow: the Religio-Historical Background of Acts 5:15," *NTS* 23 (1976) 204–12. When Acts 5:16 is read in the light of the preceding verse, it appears that Luke meant to say that Peter's shadow effected exorcisms.

³² "Aramaic Incantation Bowls," *Or* 10 (1941) 347.

³³ Isbell, *Corpus*, text 57. See also texts 7:13–15; 21:13–15; 43:3–4. The exact provenance of these bowls and their relation to first-century Judaism are uncertain. Scholars currently date the bowls in the sixth or the seventh century A.D. See D. C. Duling, "Solomon, Exorcism and the Son of David," *HTR* 68 (1975) 245–46. As in rabbinic Judaism, the incantations show

host must still be defeated in heaven is also intimated in the apocalypse of Isaiah (24:21–23) and the synoptic apocalypse (Mark 13:25).³⁴ The Matthean supplement to the Lord's Prayer in Matt 6:10, however, implies that God has already established his rule in heaven, where his will already is done, whereas his rule or kingdom has yet to be established on earth, where the Evil one (6:13) is still potent.

Looking more closely at certain features of the Matthean context, we find additional clues. There is the saying in Matt 16:18: ". . . and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." The sense appears parallel to Jesus' assurance in Luke 10:19 that the power of Satan shall not hurt his followers as they pursue the task of exorcising demons. Most commentators have urged that Hades corresponds to Sheol, not to Gehenna or hell, and that the meaning here, as the RSV translators interpret it, is "the powers of death." Bornkamm, with commendable ambiguity, renders the expression "the powers of the underworld," construing it to refer to the satanic tribulation that was expected to precede the appearance of the Son of man.³⁵ W. Manson expresses the meaning of "gates of Hades" as "Satan-Hades."³⁶ Several early Jewish and Christian sources closely link Satan and Hades: for example, *T. Reub.* 4; 1 Cor 15:24–27; and Rev 20:7–10, 13–14. Both Luke 10:17–19 and 1 Cor 15:26 refer to "the enemy" (*ho echthros*) and use the same verb to describe his subjugation (*hypotassein*). In the latter passage the enemy is death, implicitly associated with Hades and Satan. Thus also Heb 2:14 and Revelation 20. 1QH 3:18 refers to the opening of the "gates of Hell," evidently the place where the "worthless," that is, evil spirits, dwell. T. H. Gaster reports a later Jewish superstition that demons are released from the netherworld during weekdays.³⁷ In the *Gospel of Nicodemus* Hades is both a person and the place where "the dead who were bound were loosed from their

little evidence of the apocalyptic orientation typical of many intertestamental writings, though they do, obviously, preserve much of the cosmic dualism inherent in earlier apocalypticism.

³⁴ In Jewish thought, the final struggle preceding the messianic age was visualized as one not only between Israel and other nations but also between *überirdischen* powers. See P. Volz, *Die Eschatologie der jüdischen Gemeinde* (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1934) 84. See also E. G. Selwyn, *The First Epistle of Peter* (New York: Macmillan, 1947) 325: "In Ephesians, as in Luke 10:18 and Rev 12:7 ff., the spiritual powers of evil are thought of as in the heavenly sphere rather than in Hades." See Eph 6:11–12.

³⁵ *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Harper, 1960) 187. Elsewhere he identifies it with the anticipated satanic tribulation ("End-Expectation," 45 n. 5). Nevertheless, in his essay "Authority to Bind," Bornkamm does not even mention the possibility that Matt 16:19 might refer to demon exorcisms. Bornkamm says very little about Jesus' exorcism of demons in *Jesus of Nazareth*.

³⁶ W. Manson, *Jesus and the Christian* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967) 83.

³⁷ *The Scriptures of the Dead Sea Sect* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1957) 205 n. 14.

chains" and where Jesus ordered Satan to be bound.³⁸ According to Matt 6:13, Jesus viewed Satan ("the Evil one") as the instigator of the final tribulation, concerning which he taught his followers to pray that God might spare them.

That Satan was the enemy referred to by "the gates of Hades" is suggested also by the verb *katsichyein* in Matt 16:18: the gates of Hades shall not *overcome* you. In Acts 19:16, a possessed demoniac overpowers (*katsichyein*) and injures unauthorized Jewish exorcists who attempt to overcome some evil spirits by invoking Jesus' name. The same verb is used in *T. Reub.* 4: "Neither can Beliar overcome you." It is the *ischyros* ("strong man"), Satan, whom Jesus binds by exorcising demons (Mark 3:27). In Jesus' time, according to the Gospels, Satan and the demons were still thought operative and potent. As he sent his disciples out to defeat the demons, it would have been no light matter for Jesus to assure them that these demons and Satan could not overpower or harm them. A further meaning may be implicit in Matt 16:18–19: Since Peter (and/or the other disciples) has the power to bind and *loose*, the evil spirits, long ago bound in "Hades," cannot break loose and harm them unless—as would be quite improbable—the disciples should choose to release them before the time.³⁹ The point would be that the disciples need not fear that anyone else will loose the evil spirits, since this power is reserved to them. This assurance may be contrasted with Rev 9:1–19 and 20:7, which anticipate that demonic beings will be "loosed" to cause havoc near or at the end of the age. But in the Matthean version the disciples need not fear, because Jesus has given them power over the enemy, and nothing shall hurt them. Similar assurance is afforded in Luke 10:19 and in the addendum in Mark 16:17–18. The early church understood that Satan and the demons were still powerful on earth, but that Christians could resist them.

Another exorcistic clue is suggested in Luke 10:17. There the disciples report to Jesus that the demons "are subject to us *in your name*." According to Luke, Peter's disclosure that Jesus was "the Christ" took place shortly before the mission of the seventy (9:20). According to Matthew, it was immediately after this disclosure (16:16) that Jesus conferred authority on Peter to bind and loose. Was it, in part, through knowing Jesus' name—"Messiah" or "Christ"—that Peter was empowered to cast out demons? Paul later exorcised demons, invoking the name "Jesus Christ."⁴⁰ The synoptic story of the strange exorcist likewise shows

³⁸ "Christ's Descent into Hell," chaps. XX–XXII (Hennecke-Schneemelcher, *NT Apocrypha* 1. 472–75).

³⁹ See *Jub.* 10:1–13; *I Enoch* 10:4–10; *Jude* 6–7.

⁴⁰ Acts 16:18. So likewise Peter in the *Acts of Peter* §11 (Hennecke-Schneemelcher, *NT Apocrypha*, 2. 293).

a connection between knowing Jesus' name and success in exorcising demons (Mark 9:38–41 = Luke 9:49–50), though in Acts 19:16 unauthorized exorcists invoke Jesus' name to no avail. Even in entirely secular settings up to the present time, the names "Jesus" and "Christ" or both together are frequently invoked by persons in trying circumstances. Several of the Aramaic incantation texts state that the demons are "bound" by exorcistic spells pronounced (or written) in the name of certain divine beings, often angels or circumlocutions for God.⁴¹

The reference to "keys" of the kingdom of heaven in Matt 16:19 also has possible exorcistic connotations. In Revelation 20 an angel is seen coming down from heaven at the end of the age, "holding in his hand the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain," in order to seize and bind Satan and imprison him in "the pit" for a thousand years. Here, as in Matthew 16, "key" is associated with "binding" and also with "the pit," that is, Hades, and it is clear that all this has to do with overpowering Satan. In the one case, it is the key to the pit; in the other, the key to the kingdom of heaven. In Rev 1:18, the risen Jesus declares, "I have the keys of Death and Hades," again suggesting power over against the forces of evil. The connection between the "keys of the kingdom of heaven" and "binding and loosing" in Matt 16:19 then may well be this: when the disciples bind Satan and the demons, the latter's erstwhile victims are loosed and made ready for their new life in the kingdom of heaven.

Further support for our hypothesis may be gained from the wider context of the synoptic and other NT accounts of Jesus' activity. According to the synoptic reports, Jesus' pattern of activity consisted primarily of preaching repentance and the future coming of the kingdom, and healing and exorcising demons.⁴² These activities are inherently inter-related. Both the preaching and the healings and exorcisms were preparatory to the coming of the kingdom of God. Strange as it may seem to many modern interpreters, Jesus evidently took Satan and the work of exorcising demons literally and seriously.⁴³ At all events, we have no

⁴¹ See Isbell, *Corpus*, e.g., texts 1, 3, 4, 7, 10.

⁴² See R. H. Hiers, *The Kingdom of God in the Synoptic Tradition* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1970; Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1979); *The Historical Jesus and the Kingdom of God* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1973). Passages such as Mark 1:15–39 and par.; and other texts, such as Acts 10:38 and 1 John 3:8, are illustrative.

⁴³ Relatively few interpreters recognize this point, and those who do generally do not emphasize it. See, e.g., H. D. A. Major in H. D. A. Major et al., *The Mission and Message of Jesus* (New York: Dutton, 1938) 31; V. Taylor, *The Gospel According to Mark* (New York: Macmillan, 1955) 239; M. Burrows, *An Outline of Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1946) 124–25; E. C. B. MacLaurin, "Beelzeboul," *NovT* 20 (1978) 157; P. Guillemette, "Un enseignement nouveau, plein d'autorité," *NovT* 22 (1980) 245–46. For recent discussion of the demonic in Hebraic tradition and the New Testament, see

basis in the texts for supposing otherwise. The disciples were called for the purpose of extending Jesus' own work: when he sent them out, he authorized them to proclaim that the kingdom had come near and that people should repent, and to cast out demons and heal.⁴⁴ According to the synoptic sources, this was the only explicit authorization Jesus gave his followers during his lifetime. It is reasonable to conclude that the binding and loosing he authorized them to perform were related to this task rather than to some otherwise unspecified activity.⁴⁵ Jesus had described his own exorcistic activity in terms of binding and loosing. The twelve (and also the seventy) were commissioned to extend the reach of Jesus' activity into larger circles. The saying in Matt 16:18b–19, then, appears to derive from a saying functionally equivalent to the authorization reported (though not presented) in Luke 10:19: "Behold, I have given you authority . . . over all the power of the enemy." This latter saying clearly echoes *T. Levi* 18, where the verb "to bind" is used explicitly with reference to the overcoming of Belial.

The binding of demons, devils, evil satans, and the like is a characteristic interest in the Aramaic incantation texts, for example, 1–5, 7, 10, 13, 14, 17–19, 21, 26, 27, 35, 38, 44–47, 50–52, 58, 60. The theme of loosing also appears in these texts: the exorcist's bonds cannot be loosed (21:4, 14); those whose demons (and the like) are bound or banished are, by implication, freed, saved, or loosed from these evil beings (texts 35:3–4; 37:5–6; 44:1–2; 47:2–3; 58:3). It may be that Jesus interpreted his activity with reference to Isa 61:1: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me . . . to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening to those who are bound." As we have seen, opening and loosing refer to freeing from satanic bonds of affliction (Mark 7:34–35; Luke 13:16). The Holy Spirit also functions in connection with the binding of Belial or Satan in *T. Levi* 18:11–12 and Matt 12:28. Luke presents the saying of Isa 61:1 in slightly different form as Jesus' "inaugural sermon" (Luke 4:18). Releasing captives through exorcising demons and

J. B. Russell, *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977) 174–248. Concerning the difficulty modern interpreters experience in dealing with Jesus' exorcistic activity, see R. H. Hiers, "Satan, Demons and the Kingdom of God," *SJT* 27 (1974) 35–47; *Jesus and the Future* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981) 62–71.

⁴⁴ Cf. Büchsel's assertion: "Jesus does not give to Peter and the disciples any power to enchant or free by magic" (*TDNT*, 2. 60). It was not, of course, a matter of enchantment or magic, but rather of exorcising demons by the power of God in preparation for the coming of the kingdom of God.

⁴⁵ Thus also J. R. Michaels: "The church that Jesus will build is a house against which Satan's house, the 'gates of hell,' will be unable to stand. The work of binding and loosing—binding the strong man and loosing his captives—the work that dominated Jesus' ministry and filled his vision, will be the work of his disciples during the period of his absence" (*Servant and Son*, 301).

healing was a basic feature of Jesus' activity, according to all three Synoptic Gospels.

III. Binding and Loosing: The Meaning for Matthew and Later Christian Communities

We cannot be certain what binding and loosing meant to Matthew. The fact that he did not specify any particular meaning may indicate either that he assumed his readers would know that these terms referred to exorcism, as at 12:29, or that he intended to give them broader, if indeterminate, application. Possibly Matthew understood the saying as authorizing church leaders to make decisions regarding congregational order or Christian morality.⁴⁶ This sense is certainly suggested by the context of 18:18. Taken in connection with 18:15–17, v 18 seems to authorize the disciples (18:1) either to arbitrate disputes between church members (v 16) or to excommunicate the recalcitrant. Verses 19–20, which may have been intended to explain the import of v 18, assure the disciples that God will ratify their agreements. But they do not specify whether the agreements in question relate to arbitration decrees, excommunication, or doctrinal matters. The sayings about forgiveness (18:21–35) introduce a new topic in Matthew's book of church order and have no point of contact (*pace* John 20:23) with the binding and loosing saying in 18:18.

Matthew appears to have had something else in mind when he placed the earlier version, 16:19, in the context of Jesus' first and most striking passion prediction (16:13–23). None of the synoptic sayings indicates what Jesus may have expected concerning the fate of disciples who died before the coming of the kingdom of God. Possibly he believed that the kingdom would come before any of his followers should die. Matthew 16:28 and 24:34, which anticipate that some of Jesus' hearers would first die, may represent slight alterations of the viewpoint underlying Matt 10:23, in cognizance of the fact that some of Jesus' followers had died. Understandably, in Matthew's time, when most if not all of Jesus' first followers had died, it was important for Christians to be assured that their fellow believers and they themselves would indeed be delivered from death. As we have seen, death was often associated with Satan. We read in the *Epistle of the Apostles* 28 that Jesus promised not only the apostles but "all who through [them] will believe" that they would be released from "the prison and chains of the archons and the powerful fire." Similar concern may be expressed in such passages as 1 Pet 3:19–20 and Eph 4:8–9 and is certainly apparent in 1 Thess 4:13–17 and Rev 20:4–6. It may also be reflected in Matt 16:18b in its reference to the

⁴⁶ Thus, J. D. M. Derrett, "Binding and Loosing," *JBL* 102 (1983) 112–17.

"gates of Hades." If so, it could be that Matthew intended binding and loosing in 16:19 to stand for the authority given Peter and the other apostles for determining who would finally be permitted to enter eternal life and who would be excluded from it. Elsewhere Matthew anticipates that in the coming age, the twelve would have authority to judge the twelve tribes of Israel (19:28). If the apostles were to decide the fate of Jews later, why not also that of Christians now? The later popular conception of St. Peter as guardian of the "pearly gates" may not altogether misconceive Matthew's understanding of 16:19a, though Matthew does not expressly state that the keys of the kingdom of heaven also unlock the gates of Hades. Those released from the power of death might well hope to find entrance into the joys of eternal life in the kingdom of God soon to be established on earth. Matthew does indicate elsewhere his understanding that Jesus had authorized the twelve both to exorcise demons and to overrule the power of death (10:8). Conceivably Matthew intended the saying in 16:19 to mean that Peter was given power over against both Satan and death, that last enemy to be destroyed, according to Paul (1 Cor 15:24–26).

Even though both Matthew 16 and 18 give more generalized accounts of apostolic authority, other synoptic passages preserve explicit recollections that the church's leaders had been granted exorcistic power.⁴⁷ Until the days of Satan were over, the church would continue to need both power to exorcise the demons and assurance that the realm of Satan could not harm them. The synoptic sayings conferring upon the twelve authority to cast out demons do not provide that this authority would be transmitted to their successors. The leaders of the post-resurrection and, particularly, of the post-apostolic church would have wished to know that they had been properly empowered to exorcise demons. Probably Luke understood the success of the seventy (Luke 10:17–20) to mean that the leaders of the Gentile church were properly authorized by Jesus to subdue the demons.⁴⁸ This seems to be the point in Luke 10:19, and Luke reports the continuing use of healing and exorcistic power by Peter and other "apostles" following Jesus' resurrection and ascension.⁴⁹ Later tradition tended to emphasize the magical or stupendous features of such episodes, for example, *Acts of Peter* 11, *Acts of Thomas* 170. In the latter, a certain Misdaeus, wishing to cure one of his sons, who was possessed by a demon, goes to the tomb of an apostle with a view to availing himself of the healing and exorcistic properties of the apostle's bones. But since the bones had been removed, he uses

⁴⁷ Thus, e.g., Mark 3:14–15; 6:7–8; Matt 10:1; Luke 9:1; 10:17–19.

⁴⁸ Luke probably understood the "seventy" or "seventy-two" to represent the "seventy" or "seventy-two" Gentile nations or the mission of Jesus' followers to them. J. M. Creed, *The Gospel According to St. Luke* (London: Macmillan, 1953) 144.

⁴⁹ Acts 3:4–8; 5:12–16; 8:7; 16:18.

instead some “dust from the place where the bones of the apostle had lain.” Here we are only a step away from the kind of understanding represented in Acts 5:14–16, where Peter’s shadow effects cures. Bits of clothing from Paul’s body likewise supposedly healed the sick and cast out demons (Acts 19:11–12). In each case, it is implied that the apostles’ healing or exorcistic powers functioned *ex opere operato*. It is only a further step to later enthusiasm for apostolic relics and notions of their healing properties in medieval and more recent Catholicism. Such ideas, though ancient, are obviously far removed from the apocalyptic and dualistic orientation of Jesus and his earliest followers. Someone in the early community that used Mark’s Gospel likewise felt it important to assure his contemporaries that they were still more powerful than the demons and death: “[I]n my name they will cast out demons; . . . they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover” (Mark 16:17–18). Demons, of course, were thought of not only as causes of illness but also as deadly enemies.

In time, the original authority to exorcise demons and concomitant protection from the power of Satan were understood to mean that in the fellowship of the church one could be safe from the powers of the Evil one. This belief may have been inchoate in Matthew’s version in 16:18–19. Summarizing traditions reported in Justin, E. R. Hardy observed, “As in the traditional baptismal service to this day, on entering the Church one renounced the devil and all his works, and in that fellowship the great serpent and other demons were no longer to be feared.”⁵⁰ It is not surprising, then, to find a later Christian exorcistic formula that reads, “I bind, excommunicate, and destroy, I ward off, cause to vanish, all evil, accursed, and misleading pains and sickness, adversaries, demons, rebellious devils. . . .”⁵¹

IV. Conclusions

It is entirely possible that the saying about binding and loosing does not go back to Jesus himself. The usual interpretations noted earlier cannot plausibly be ascribed to the historical Jesus, since none of them is consistent with his beliefs or world view as represented in the synoptic sources. The first three Gospels do report that Jesus exorcised demons and authorized his followers to do so. Each uses the terms “binding” and/or “loosing” in describing Jesus’ exorcistic activity.

⁵⁰ E. R. Hardy in *Early Christian Fathers* (ed. C. C. Richardson; LCC 1; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953) 234.

⁵¹ From H. Gollancz, *The Book of Protection* (London: Oxford, 1912), cited by E. R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (New York: Pantheon, 1953) 2. 164. Similar formulas are to be found in the texts of the Aramaic incantation bowls; see Isbell, *Corpus*, e.g., texts 4, 5, 7, 10, 26, 27.

If we take seriously the substantial body of synoptic evidence which indicates that Jesus thought and acted in terms of the apocalyptic and dualistic thought world of some of his Jewish predecessors and contemporaries,⁵² we may reasonably infer that he would have used the expressions "binding" and "loosing" in the sense most commonly found in the intertestamental writings, namely, in connection with the task of overcoming Satan's powers. He himself was engaged in this work, and clearly he authorized his disciples to do likewise. We may have here what is still recognizable as a recension of this authorization. That Jesus and his disciples undertook to "bind" Satan and the demons was not merely an incidental aspect of their work. As and because the demons were being overcome on earth, Satan was being overcome both on earth and in heaven, and the end of his reign was being made certain and near.

Like his summons to repentance, Jesus' exorcism of demons was reported as part of his ministry for preparation for the kingdom of God. Jesus himself may have used the terms "binding" and "loosing" in authorizing his followers to exorcise demons. According to synoptic sayings, Jesus used these terms when referring to his own exorcising of demons. Alternatively, this terminology may have been adopted at some early stage in the transmission of tradition, perhaps in order to assure the church that its leaders had been duly authorized by Jesus to cast out demons and that these satanic minions would not be able to harm them. Matthew 16:18 makes explicit what is implicit in 16:19: that Peter has power over the minions of Satan. Likewise, Luke 10:19b specifies what is implied in 10:19a: that the demonic powers cannot harm Jesus' followers while exorcising them. Mark 16:17b–18 seems to contain a vestige of this same kind of understanding. The point in each case is that because Jesus had granted his followers power over the demons, the latter cannot harm them.

As the authorization sayings are formulated in Matthew, however, the meaning seems to have been extended more broadly. In their Matthean contexts they suggest that Peter and the others would have authority to deal with whatever problems might arise in the continuing years of the church.⁵³ Thus, Matthew 18:19 reads, literally, "If two of you agree on earth about *any* matter. . . ." Matthew may have intended his authorization to encompass not only matters of doctrine but also excommunication, and even determination of the ultimate destiny of church members.

⁵² See generally R. H. Hiers, *The Historical Jesus and the Kingdom of God; Jesus and the Future*.

⁵³ D. G. Duling has observed that Matthew tends to omit or tone down Marcan reports about Jesus' exorcising demons, replacing them with accounts of his healing in response to faith ("The Therapeutic Son of David: An Element in Matthew's Christological Apologetic," *NTS* 34 [1978] 392–410).

As Bornkamm suggests, in their present framework the sayings appear to presuppose the delay of the parousia,⁵⁴ since there would be no need for authorized church leadership unless it was expected that problems of the sort the congregation had already experienced might recur at least for a while longer. Matthew presumably was writing in the last decade or two of the first century A.D. By then, the matter of demon exorcism may have been less important than the church's need for leaders properly authorized to settle the growing range of controversies that were threatening to disrupt the common life. Perhaps it was now recognized that church leaders could exorcise demons if or when necessary, though few such exorcisms are reported in later NT literature. Several exorcisms are reported in the relatively early years of the church, according to Acts, but in listing various ministries of the Spirit early in the 50s (1 Cor 12:4–11), Paul does not include that of exorcising demons. Instead of focusing on exorcism, the anonymous or pseudonymous authors of the later canonical writings try to exercise what authority they can invoke in order to advise and direct their fellow Christians to preserve sound doctrine and proper moral standards. Early in the second century, Ignatius's resounding "Obey the bishop!" begins to assert the authority of the successors of Peter and the other "apostles" that was, perhaps, already implicit in the sayings in Matthew 16 and 18. Matthew's Gospel was known to Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, and it is possible that Matthew wrote it in and for the church at Antioch only a few years before Ignatius became bishop there. Thus the connection between Matthew's broad authorization of church leaders and Ignatius's claim to special authority may have been fairly direct. In following decades and centuries, of course, the authority of the churches' leadership would be defined more fully, along with the formation of the NT canon, creeds, and doctrines. But in Matthew's time it would have been only natural for the evangelist to take the saying (or sayings) about "binding" and "loosing"—which may already have been detached from such narrative contexts as Mark 6:7 = Matt 10:1 in which Jesus authorized his followers to exorcise demons—and to use them to buttress the authority of Peter, the twelve, and their successors for the life of the community.

We suggest, then, that Matthew expanded the scope of Jesus's sayings authorizing his followers to exorcise demons to include plenary authorization for the church's leaders to resolve whatever problems or issues might arise. The church's leaders could still exorcise demons, but this was now only one area of concern and responsibility in their task of guiding the church in its continuing days or years in the present age.

⁵⁴ Bornkamm, "Authority to Bind," 48.