

**REVISITING THE DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST
IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 27: 50-54
FROM THE PROVERB, “*UA MAI VAI O
TAGALOA TALU SILI MA VAIAFAI*”**

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by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis will endeavour to use a Samoan hermeneutical lens to interpret and better understand the crucifixion of Jesus found in the Gospel according to Matthew 27:50-54. Based on Matthew's presentation of the Death and Crucifixion of Jesus, I plan to explore the Samoan proverb '*Ua mai vai a Tagaloa talu Sili ma Vaiafai*' to see how this proverb can help tease out the three cataclysmic events unique to Matthew (Earthquake, Torn Veil of the Temple, and Resurrection of the Dead) as a revelation of Jesus' Messianic divinity. Are these three events metaphorical, a demonstration of reversal that through death, we find life? Is John trying to say that without death, we will never ever be able to taste the glory of life everlasting? Furthermore, is Matthew turning an exclusive story into an inclusive Gospel? I will firstly describe the proverb used in this study in relation to the myth it comes from. Secondly, I will explore the Gospel of Matthews background followed by my exegesis of the selected passage which is Matthew 27:50-54. Thirdly, I will analyse my exegesis of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ with the meaning of the Samoan proverb described in the first part. In conclusion, I will look ahead as to how this thesis will contribute to Biblical scholarship and contextual interpretations, especially for the Samoan community.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memories of my great grandparents late Rev. Lu'ulau Sao and Manuli. It is also dedicated to my beloved grandmother Amataga and mother Fa'aitiiti whose prayers, advices and hope were for me to enter Malua Theological College and carry on my namesake Luulau's legacy. I would love to dedicate this thesis to my dear wife Fa'auiga Taulagi, and our two lovely children, Malua Leaso Taulagi and Fa'aitiiti Amataga Taulagi. I also dedicate this thesis to all my families in New Zealand, Australia, and Samoa. Last but not the least, I want to dedicate this thesis to all people of the villages of Ga'utavai and Sili, as well as the *EFKS* Ga'utavai and *EFKS* Iva for their unconditional love and support.

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Fa'afetai, Fa'afetai, Fa'afetai tele lava. Fa'amanuia tele le Atua.

List of Abbreviations

EFKS	Ekalesia Fa’apotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa
MTC	Malua Theological College

Introduction

Purpose of this Research

This thesis will endeavour to use a Samoan hermeneutical lens to interpret and better understand the crucifixion of Jesus found in the Gospel according to Matthew. However, before beginning I would like to start out with an observation about the Samoan worldview(s) from our Samoan beliefs (myths and legends)? There are Samoan myths and legends that go back before Christianity hit our shores, which were orally passed from generation to generation. It is common practice that landmarks such as lands, village names, lakes, rivers, and seas, are named according to these myths. This practice provides validation of such myths. Some believe that myths are inauthentic stories and are more likely folktales. But I affirm myths as authentic stories because they preserve stories of how people in a particular culture view their world. Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Taisi suggests that “Myth [. . .] is equated with history.”¹ Barry B. Powell too considers myths important: “myths tell of the origin [. . .] of the universe [. . .] and ourselves.”² The authentication of myths such as the Samoan myths about landmarks as mentioned suggests that myths are considered sacred stories preserving the importance of our sense of belonging to a particular space and place in our families, villages, cultures, and histories. One example of those myths is the story about Tagaloa where the proverb used in this study as a hermeneutic comes from: “*Ua mai vai o Tagaloa talu Sili ma Vaiafai.*”

Orally presented stories pose downfalls such as different versions of the same story and, miscommunication whereby some things are prone to be added or omitted in

¹ Tupua Tamasese Ta’isi, “*Resident, Residence, Residency in Samoan Custom*,” 93. Tui Atua Tamasese Ta’isi is the former Head of State of Samoa and is one of the most recognized Samoan scholars on our indigenous references and understanding.

² Powell, *Classical Myth*, 6.

translation. Some modern orators and elders have attempted to retell these myths so that they become more reliable and authentic (to suit landmarks and names that exist). Debates occurred between villages and families in their attempts to prove the authenticity of a myth they argue belong to them. Thus, many versions of a story or myth are to be considered based on a particular family's and village's version. The version of the myth used in this study is from my village of Ga'utavai a part of Sili.

The worldview of the New Testament as dualistic which is God versus Evil speaks of Jesus as the Son of God who was with his people (Jews) and Gentiles to save them from Evil. Jesus Christ as the Messiah lived with these people. Some accepted Him as the Messiah. Most Jews rejected Him as the Messiah. The Jews were expecting a Messiah riding a chariot with a sword to save them from their enemies. The Jews are still waiting for that Messiah as their rightful King to free them from opposing empires.

The Crucifixion of Jesus

Jesus' passion episode where Jesus was crucified was considered as validation of the Jew's claims that Jesus wasn't their Messiah. Thus, the story about Jesus Christ is looked at a myth for some people. However, we regard it a true story. Each Evangelist has his own views of the story of Jesus Christ. New Testament Scholars have different views of the story. The point I am trying to make here, is that there are different views about who Jesus is as portrayed by the gospel authors and these views could be looked at as influenced by various and different worldviews of the authors and the interpreters or readers of the texts. One of the reasons for these various and different approaches to seeking more understanding of Jesus as Messiah is to make more sense the important meaning of Jesus' salvific ministry in the reality of life a reader or interpreter encounters. This is the reason behind my interest to revisit the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ from my understanding or view of our Samoan myths in our Samoan worlds. In doing so,

I will firstly describe the proverb used in this study in relation to the myth it comes from. Secondly, I will explore the Gospel of Matthews background followed by my exegesis of the selected passage which is Matthew 27:50-54. Thirdly, I will analyse my exegesis of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ with the meaning of the Samoan proverb described in the first part.

Matthew's Crucifixion Narrative

I have selected Matthew's account for this study because Matthew as a Jewish Gospel emphasizes Jewish culture and tradition. My Samoan perspective used as part of the reading framework in this study is part of my Samoan culture. Thus, I see Matthew's Gospel and my emphasising of my Samoan Cultural world as having a connection. Matthew was presenting Jesus ministry as a ministry that brings together the Jewish and Gentiles communities. The Samoan myth I am using in this study speaks of bringing different villages together to live in harmony.

There are other reasons why I have chosen Matthew's account. In accordance with Matthew's narrative when Jesus died, three great events occurred that clearly reveal Jesus as the Son of God. First, there was the earthquake. Second, it was the temple curtain torn. Third, the dead arise and visit Jerusalem. Compared with other Gospels, Mark does not mention these three things, but the veil of the temple was only torn, but no other mention in any other Gospel.

This selected text is vital for me because, according to Jewish worldviews, the Messiah was their saviour. Yet, he was not supposed to die. However, when he did die, he not only saved the Jews but the whole world. That is, in the death of Jesus, the barriers which separate and divide people was destroyed, thus we are no longer others, but one family of God, brothers and sisters redeemed and forgiven by his body and blood, inheritors of his Kingdom.

The Death of Jesus Christ is a profound story that is recorded by each Gospel writer (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) within their own set narratives and depiction of Jesus the Son of God. Despite being the same story, we can refer to it as the crucifixion of Jesus retold by four different sources. This explains why each account has its own emphasis and own message dependent on each Gospel's theological emphases in relation to their intended audience.

Growing up in an EFKS upbringing where it was a must to attend church services, I have lost count of sermons where Ministers have preached about Jesus death narrative. I can honestly say they have all shared their own unique way of retelling the story. Not forgetting all Easter services, and witnessing every skit performed and the various plots whether from one Gospel or a harmonization of Gospels in order to re-enact the death narrative of Jesus Christ. Therefore, I will examine Matthew's presentation of Jesus' crucifixion.

Based on Matthew's presentation of the Death and Crucifixion of Jesus, I plan to explore the Samoan proverb '*Ua mai vai a Tagaloa talu Sili ma Vaiafai*' to see how this proverb can help tease out those three events unique to Matthew (Earthquake, Torn Veil of the Temple, and Resurrection of the Dead) as a revelation of Jesus' Messianic divinity. Are these three events metaphorical, a demonstration of reversal that through death, we find life? Is John trying to say that without death, we will never ever be able to taste the glory of life everlasting? Furthermore, is Matthew turning an exclusive story into an inclusive Gospel? These are just some of the questions that are raised as I think of this text and proverb.

Samoan Proverb

*‘Ua mai vai a Tagaloa talu Sili ma Vaiafai’*³ is a commonly used Samoan Proverbial expression from a Samoan myth *alagaupu*⁴ which derives from my village of Gautavai.⁵ My understanding of this proverbial expression is that Tagaloa⁶ had to suffer the consequences of Sili and Vaiafai’s actions. I discovered this proverbial expression at a young age through cultural speeches also through villager’s conversation. What I have also discovered is that there are many versions of the story behind the proverb, which has made me curious and provides the impetus for this thesis. As I mentioned earlier, it is common for Samoan proverbs to have different versions which is also referred to as *‘talalasi’*.⁷

Aim of Research

The aim of this thesis is to see whether or not the crucifixion of Jesus according to Matthew can be retold in the Samoan context of the myth above. Thus this thesis will explore Matthew 27:50-54 based on the Samoan Proverb *‘Ua mai vai o Tagaloa talu Sili ma Vaiafai’* in order to understand death from a Samoan contextual worldview”.

³It is a Samoan proverb translated *Tagaloa’s stream has turned salty, because of Sili and Vaiafai*.

⁴ *Alagaupu* are phrases that are derived from Samoan tradition myths and legends. It is different from *muagagana*, they are derived from the Samoan environment and the human life.

⁵ *Gautavai* is a populated place and is located on the big island of Savaii in Samoa. It is situated on the south east of the island in Palauli district.

⁶ *Tagaloa* is a high chief title of *Gautavai* and *Sili*.

⁷ *talalasi*, is understood to mean “many versions”. The fact that in Samoa, one story has many versions, just like this myth. There are many versions of this myth recorded which have issued from other Samoan writers. But I will emphasize on one of the versions of the story as taken from the elders of my village.

Chapter Outline

This thesis will be divided into five sections: Chapter One focuses on the Background of Gospel of Matthew; Chapter Two will encompass a review of literature in order to provide the traditional thoughts on this passage and how they validate my exploration of Matthew from a Samoan hermeneutical perspective; Chapter Three will be the Methodology and Samoan Reading Perspective section, providing the structure and Samoan lens by which to read Matthew 27:50-54; Chapter Four will be the Exegesis and Analysis of the text; lastly the Conclusion will summarize all the main points of the paper providing an overview of the work completed and contributions this paper will have on biblical scholarship not only in Samoa but worldwide.

Chapter 1

Background and Context of Matthew

Chapter One will provide a brief background and context of the Gospel of Matthew, looking at dating, authorship, place of writing, setting, and purpose to establish how the theme of universalism is dealt with and handled by Matthew in the passions of Christ. In particular, the focus on universalism will then shift to the story of Jesus' crucifixion in Matthew 27: 50-54, the main text of this study, wherein Jesus' particularism (only for the lost sheep of the house of Israel) comes into conflict with three cataclysmic events and the proclamation of the Centurion (universalism), "this man indeed is the Son of God".

Background:

The Gospel of Matthew has been traditionally viewed as a manual or handbook for the Christian believer. It provides instructions and teachings for a community in flux due to the social, political, and religious changes of the times. The disciples within are paradigms for Matthew's Christian community, offering insights on how Jesus' story provides answers for coping with the various instabilities to encourage and motivate his readers, then and now. Matthew provides a 'transparent' solution for the needs of his readers by shaping and moulding the various pericopes from his sources of the historical events of Jesus and his disciples.¹ What I mean is that Matthew interpreted the events of Jesus' time and fashioned a narrative for his audience without losing its historical characteristics. By doing so, Matthew provides a hermeneutical model wherein we as

¹ Donald Alfred Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary v.33A (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1993), xlii.

readers can extrapolate meanings and significances from the texts.² However, these significances must be anchored in a faithful fidelity to the text. Therefore, the events during the times of Jesus lends itself to the events and times of Matthew and his community and provides the same model for the contemporary reader of Matthew's Gospel. By penning such a Gospel, which has no ancient predecessor, Matthew carefully crafted a Gospel based on historical data and references to inspire and promote the values, morals, and ethics that Jesus taught his disciples in the past, that Jesus is teaching his community presently, and that Jesus will continue to teach the world.

As Matthew constructed his narrative of Jesus, there were many imperative theological and thematic issues and concerns that had to be addressed.³ Of the many themes found within, the one that continues to fascinate and intrigue is the tension between the particularism of Matthew's pro-Jewish Gospel and the hints of universalism echoing throughout his narratives, maybe a response to his community and their issues. According to Boris Paschke, "Particularism restricts the offer of salvation to the people of Israel (cf. Mt 10:5-6; 15:24). Universalism offers salvation to all peoples (cf. Mt

² Ibid.; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, ed. Helmut Koester and James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 15–18.

³ Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, lix-lxiv. Fulfilment, Christology, Righteousness and Discipleship, Law and Grace, Church (community), Eschatology, Salvation-History; see also: Günther Bornkamm, Gerhard Barth, and Heinz Joachim Held, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, New Testament Library (London: SCM Press, 1963); John P. Meier, *Matthew*, New Testament Message v. 3 (Wilmington, DE: M. Glazier, 1980); Francis Wright Beare, *The Gospel According to Matthew: Translation, Introduction, and Commentary*, 1st U.S. ed. (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1982); William David Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, vol. 1, 3 vols., International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988); Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1988); Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991); Donald Senior, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Interpreting Biblical Texts (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997); David C. Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism: The History and Social Setting of the Matthean Community* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998); Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000); R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2007); Luz, *Matthew 1-7*.

28:19).”⁴ However, before discussing this issue, it is important to first layout the historical background of the Gospel to ground and support the context from which the issue of universalism with the pro-Jewish audience of the Gospel.

Dating:

The Gospel of Matthew is believed to have been written after the fall of the Temple in 70 CE and before the turn of the century 100 CE, with most biblical scholars believing that the Gospel was written between 80-95 CE.⁵ The evidence to support that it was written after the destruction of the Temple is found in Matthew 22:7 with an explicit reference to its destruction after the tribulations in Matthew 24. The cut-off period of 100 CE is presupposed by points of contact in the *Epistle of Barnabas* (5: 8-12 with Matthew 5-7; 8-9, 23-24) and *1 Clement* (24:5 with Matthew 13:3-9 and 46:6-8 with Matthew 18: 6-7) in Rome before the turn of the century.⁶ Furthermore, arguments made by many scholars to date Matthew after the fall of the Temple to the end of the 1st century concerns the so-called ‘Jamnian Period’, a time after 70 CE in which the Jewish Leaders sought to re-consolidate Judaism and persecuting any other movements that sought to disrupt its reconstruction, i.e., the Jewish Christians.⁷ Thus this time frame falls within the

⁴ Boris Paschke, *Particularism and Universalism in the Sermon on the Mount: A Narrative-Critical Analysis of Matthew 5-7 in the Light of Matthew’s View on Mission* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2012), 1.

⁵ Beare, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 7; Davies and Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 1:128; Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 8; Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*; Dale C. Allison, ed., *Matthew: A Shorter Commentary* (London ; New York: T & T Clark International, 2004); Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 59.

⁶ Davies and Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 1:128; Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 58.

⁷ Davies and Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 1:134. Davies and Allison gives a detailed discussion to link Matthew with the Jamnian Period and that the pro-Gentile attitudes and inclusion did not replace, but run parallel with the pro-Jewish mission.

proliferation of this Jewish Gospel beyond the borders of the lost sheep of the House of Israel.

Authorship:

There is no consensus about who the author is, however, the only clue that is supported by most is that the author is Matthew from the title of the Gospel which is believed to have originated as early as 100-125 CE of the second century (*εὐαγγέλιον κατὰ Ματθαῖον*) from the writings of Papias that are recorded by Eusebius.⁸ Whether the author was Matthew the disciple named in 9:9 and 10:3 of the Gospel or an anonymous author, the consensus opinion by scholars, the author was a teacher in his community with a keen awareness of Jewish writing style, Greek, and extensive synagogue training.⁹ What this implies is a Jewish-Christian author and audience. Additional context of the dilemmas inherit in church/community building.

Place of Writing:

The only consensus that most scholars agree upon is that the Gospel of Matthew had to be written in a large city with many Jews. The large city explains the rapid spread of the Gospel and the presence of Jews is based on the predominant Jewish references found within. Some scholars have argued for a Palestinian origin due to Papias's suggestion of an Aramaic version, however, most scholars believe that Matthew's Gospel was originally written in Greek, therefore a non-Semitic origin is suggested.¹⁰ Therefore,

⁸ Ibid., 1:8; Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*; Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 59.

⁹ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 8; Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, lxxvi; Allison, *Matthew*, xii; Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 60.

¹⁰ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 9; Davies and Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 1:138.

the wide-spread consensus is that Matthew was written somewhere in Syria with most supporting the city of Antioch.¹¹ Antioch supporters point to the connection between Matthew (16:17-19) and Petrine Christianity as well as the early uses by Ignatius of the Gospel of Matthew in Antioch. Furthermore, Antioch had a large Jewish population and the Greek language was predominantly used. Altogether, Antioch provides the fertile grounds upon which the author deals with his increasingly diverse community and their coming to terms with the teachings and practices of the Matthean Jesus. Furthermore, Antioch was the home-church of Paul who also had a large following of Gentile believers. Thus bringing into contact both communities that Matthew needed to address.

Setting and Purpose:

As discussed in the section regarding the time of composition, Matthew writes after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. After the revolt, the Pharisees and their descendants become the dominant Jewish faction instituting social and religious processes to ensure the continuation of Judaism after their defeat. In direct conflict with Pharasaic/Rabbinic Judaism are the Jewish Christians, whom Anthony Saldarini refer to as deviant Jews.¹² They are still Jews, but do not adhere to the program set forth by the Jewish leaders. Therefore, the Gospel of Matthew tells the story of how this deviant group, the Jewish Christians are to envision Judaism in their new environment and situation, recreate and reconstruct central religious symbols, search for and discover God's will for their present circumstances, and institute a new course of action for their

¹¹ Davies and Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 1:139; Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 9; Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, lxxv; Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 58; Allison, *Matthew*, xiii.

¹² Anthony J. Saldarini, "The Gospel of Matthew and Jewish-Christian Conflict," in *Social History of the Matthean Community: Cross-Disciplinary Approaches*, ed. David L. Balch (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 38.

new community.¹³ In addition, Matthew has to also deal with a rapidly growing Gentile community that has adhered to and are becoming a part of this Jesus movement.¹⁴ Not only is this community preoccupied by the forces from the outside, the inner forces of how to get Jews and Gentiles to work in harmony around their belief in Jesus Christ becomes another caveat of how this very Jewish Gospel has turned into a universal faith.

In Jesus crucifixion, Matthew brings the Jewish/Gentile issue to the surface, using universalism to demonstrate how the Gospel has now moved beyond “the lost sheep of the House of Israel” and into Samaria; the Gentile nations through the three cataclysmic events; the profession of the Centurion soldier.

Summary:

What we have in the Gospel of Matthew is a creative composition of how the author saw fit to organize and redact the sources available to him in order to tell the story of Jesus’ life, teachings, healings, crucifixion, resurrection, and final commission. Furthermore, he edited and arranged his story in such a manner to promote a certain belief and resolve community problems. Especially when the community he intends to bring together in harmony and peace are his Jewish and Gentile communities. The Gospel of Matthew originates in a Jewish Christian community and is written by a Jewish Christian author, yet its message is centred on a Jesus Christ that was for everyone.¹⁵ The next chapter is a literature review of how scholars have viewed the Passion of Jesus as found in Matthew 27: 50-54. Their work will be used to guide the exegetical portion of the thesis

¹³ Ibid., 39.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 46–48; Saldarini, “The Gospel of Matthew and Jewish-Christian Conflict,” 41.

in order to compare the traditional interpretation of the biblical text with my Samoan hermeneutical lens and methodology.

Chapter 2

Literature Review of Matthew 27:50-54

Chapter Two will examine some of the scholarly literature by authors that have contributed to the understanding of the Crucifixion of Jesus in Matthew. Although not extensive, this literature review will assist in highlighting the focus of my thesis in showing how the Samoan Proverbial expression explains further some of the issues expressed by these authors in their findings.

Daniel M. Gurtner¹

Daniel Gurtner compares the tearing of the temple curtain with the death of Jesus in Matthews's gospel. This highlights one of the three events that takes place during Jesus' death. Gurtner illustrates the importance of the unveiling of the *velum scissum* by examining the 'function of the curtain' and the 'cessation of the function'. Moreover, it is important to determine the rending of the veil as a symbolic factor, thus examining the meaning of this symbolism. In addition, this understanding of Matthew's contextual interpretation of the meaning and significance of the death of Jesus is connected to the Temple, a key component of Jewish identity.

Alister McGrath²

Alister McGrath discusses this section of Matthew under the subheading, "The Death and Burial of Jesus." In this section, McGrath discusses how Jesus dies on the

¹ Daniel Gurtner, *The Velum Scissum: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, (United Kingdom: University of St. Andrews, 2005), 183-195.

² Alister McGrath, Matthew 27:50-54, *NIV Bible Commentary*, (Hodder & Stoughton: London, 1996). McGrath also drew on the importance of women. Notice how Matthew names them (27:55-56), so that they will not be forgotten. Finally, Jesus is buried in a borrowed tomb, the

cross. The imagery of darkness settling over the land, paints a picture of how the ‘Light of the world’ (John 8:12) has been extinguished. This allows for the series of events to take place, the tearing of the veil, the earthquake and the rising of the dead in Jerusalem. These events point to the significance of Jesus death. For McGrath, the opening of the tombs point ahead to the resurrection of Christ. However, the tearing of the ‘curtain of the temple’ is of particular interest. The ‘curtain of the temple’ was an important feature of the Old Testament tabernacle (Exodus 26:31-35). It was included in order to provide a means of restricting access to the ‘most holy place’ – the region of the tabernacle which was regarded as sacrosanct.

Jonathan J. Hostetler³

According to Hostetler’s view, he stated that, at the time of Jesus’s crucifixion, the soldiers and the Roman centurion crucified Jesus and the two thieves. There three major bad attitude revealed by the soldiers and the crowd during Jesus crucified. First, the soldiers divided Jesus’ garment and cast lots for his robe. Secondly, the crowd taunted and insulted Jesus. And the last, they also said, “If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross and save yourself”. Despite these attitudes, Jesus did not retaliate, but He forgave them before He died. In addition, there were three major events which happened when Jesus gave up His spirit and died. Firstly, this was the earthquake. Secondly, there were many tombs were opened and people came out who had been dead. Lastly, the large curtain (or veil) in the temple was torn from the top to the bottom. These signs revealed

women are still there, keeping vigil by the tomb, at the end of this long day – the first Good Friday. The prophesy of resurrection has not been forgotten, however – at least, not by the Jewish leaders. In order to forestall any attempt on the part of the disciples to steal the body of Christ, and thus spread false rumours of this resurrection, they request Pilate to place a guard on the tomb.

³ Jonathan J. Hostetler, *Matthew Explained: The Gospel Story of Jesus as King*, (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1988).

that this was the Son of God. This was known when the centurion declared, “Surely, this was the Son of God”.

James L. Mays⁴

According to James L. Mays, the narrative of Jesus’ passion can be seen as inserts of how God is in control, although the world thinks that they are the ones to push the narrative forward. These inserts within the story develops God’s active role within the narrative of Jesus’ passions as an illustration of Jesus never being alone in the process to fulfil salvation.

William MacDonald⁵

William MacDonald discusses in this piece the suffering of Jesus Christ during the most brutal hours he beard on the cross or in most common term the “three hours of the darkness’. From 12 noon to 3pm Jesus takes all sins and transgression with him to cross

⁴ James L. Mays, Matthew, *Harper’s Bible Commentary*, (Manhattan, NY: Harper and Row, 1988).

⁵ William MacDonald, Matthew, *Believer’s Bible Commentary*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008). The first insert takes place when Jesus was arrested. One of the disciples took up the sword and Jesus told him to put it back in the sheath. Then Jesus said “Those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword”. This saying by Jesus is a testament of his faith. He expressed his confidence that God could protect and defend him. Jesus’ righteousness was not a theory but rather a righteousness which was lived and practiced. The second insert highlights Judas’ suicide as a divine judgement. Judas’ act illustrates how God’s sovereignty is able to cross over into human history. The third insert is about Pilate’s wife who warned her husband not to have anything to do with Jesus the innocent man. She told him of her dream. In those days dreams were interpreted as a mode of revelation. In this insert, the Evangelist doctrine of sinlessness is not a human judgment but rather a divine intervention. The fourth insert is about Pilate washing his hands and protesting his innocence of the death of Jesus. In this insert the term people refer to the people of God. The people (people of God) cried out may his blood will be on them and their children. Here Matthew is shifting the blame for the death of Jesus to Torah-Israel. This explains the disaster of AD 70. It does not mean the Jews were guilty of deicide but rather their judgement was fulfilled when Matthew wrote these words. The fifth insert occurs at the death of Jesus. There was an earthquake, rocks were split and graves opened and so many saints were raised bodily. After Jesus’ resurrection, they appeared too many in the holy city following Jesus. This story contradicts Paul’s teaching. Nothing is said about what the Saints did between Good Friday and Easter. This emphasises the resurrection of Jesus as the victory over death. The sixth insert is the story of the guard at the tomb. It discusses the events in which the guards experienced an earthquake and the appearance of an angel which left the guards with fear as dead men.

for the sake of our salvation and redemption from the wrath of God. The death and the resurrection Jesus Christ reflects in similarity, the torn of the veil. The death of Jesus caused the veil to be torn from top to bottom, a miraculous act for only God Himself can disassembled the Holiest Place where he dwells. The tearing of the veil in contrast to the death of Jesus meant that access to connect with the Almighty in spirit is granted but only through Jesus. Jesus' death offers a promised place for all souls to receive redemption from God Himself through accepting Jesus' flesh and blood.

Summary

The combined efforts of these scholars have provided key concepts and ideas with which to analyse Matthew 27:50-54. The discussion of the three events after the crucifixion as well as the idea of death to redeem and restore, rather than to tear down and destroy will be highlighted in my exegesis through the Samoan lens of the "*Ua mai vai o Tagaloa talu Sili ma Vaiafai*," which will now be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Methodology and Samoan Hermeneutics

In Chapter Three, Narrative Criticism and my Samoan Hermeneutics will be explained. This will allow for an easier transition into the exegesis as the reading lens and methodological approach to guide and impact the interpretation of Matthew 27:50-54.

Narrative Criticism

Narrative criticism, attempts to critically analyse series of stories. A concise description by Elizabeth Malbon, equivalent to Mark Powell, is that narrative criticism is a new biblical approach derived from literary criticism. The widely held assertion is that it is the most prominent method to study the Gospels and the Book of Acts.¹ To understand this criticism is to know the difference between ‘the story’ and ‘the discourse.’ The story asks the ‘what’ and the discourse asks the ‘how’ question. Together, they are integrated to give the content of a narrative wherein the story becomes the discourse or ‘story as discourse.’

Narrative criticism contains specific elements such as character, setting, plot and rhetoric which will be further discussed below.² The following four (4) elements of narrative criticism are derived from Malbon’s model of communication of approaching texts.³

¹ Mark Allen Powell, "Narrative Criticism," in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids, M.I.: Paternoster Press, 1995), 239.

² Elizabeth Struthers. Malbon, "Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean," in *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 33.; David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie, eds., *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of the Gospel*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 7.

³Malbon, "Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean," 27.

Character

Characters are those with names, nicknames, portrayals and are known within the narratives by their words and actions. They are also recipients of what others speak to or about them. They help to unfold the plot of a narrative. In characterization by Malbon, there is ‘telling’ and ‘showing’. Clearly emphasised, ‘telling’ is by the author and ‘showing’ is a product of a reader.⁴

Setting

As Malbon indicates, setting refers to time and space. It is the question of when and where the event takes place. It determines the reaction of characters involved in the story.

Some settings give a specific location, others are connotationally symbolic.⁵ Setting constitutes worlds like social, cultural and political. Worlds like these can be identified by the reader who reads the narrative or an episode.

Plot

The plot, as Malbon suggests, is a derivative of the interaction between the characters and setting. In relation to these two elements, things change in time and space as we normally know in the reality of things in the modern world. Consequently, the sequence of events, the order of incidents, its duration and frequency change as well. Since there is a play between characters there is also conflict in suspense. Conflict in Malbon’s mind, is the key to the plot unfolding. To reiterate, characters, setting and plot are all elements of a particular story. From the integration of these three principles,

⁴Ibid., 29.

⁵ Ibid., 31.; Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of the Gospel*, 7.

evolves the fourth and most important constituent, emphasising *story-as-discourse*, called the rhetoric

Rhetoric

Rhetoric in Matthew is narrative based.⁶ The integration of characters, settings and the plot offer persuasive ways to read this Matthean account. The idea, by Malbon, is for the author to persuade the reader, in order for the reader to ‘understand’, ‘share’ and ‘extend’ what the author implies.⁷ Rhoads, Dewey and Michie advance their meaning by changing the ‘what’ to ‘how’, as a way not only to persuade but to ‘transform the reader or the audience’.⁸ The audience is labelled as the *ideal audience* that reads a story in any respective way. Thus for Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, this could be possible since the actions of the real audience cannot be produced or ‘predicted’ in the same way that I, as a reader, reads Biblical stories.

Narrative Criticism and Samoan Hermeneutics is not a new undertaking. Other Malua Theological students have incorporated the methodology and hermeneutics to address contextual reading of biblical text. Toalima⁹ utilises narrative approach to read Mark 7:24-30 as a seduction of Jesus, whereas Fautanu¹⁰ dialogues his military experience as a hermeneutic to read the narrative of the Centurion in Mark 15. My use of narrative criticism will provide the structure by which to closely facilitate an investigation of all being saved. That in death and despair of the Jewish Saviour, hope is enacted with

⁶Malbon, "Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean," 34.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹.Tutoatasi Toalima, "The Seduction of Jesus: An Alternative Reading of Mark 7: 24-30." Malua Theological College, 2017.

¹⁰ Arnold.Fautanu "'The Role of the Centurion in the Crucifixion of Jesus": A Soldier's Reading of Mark 15:1-39"." Bachelor of Theology, Malua Theological College, 2018.

the life that springs forth from the broken body and spilt blood of Jesus Christ on the cross. This is also alluded to in the three events particular to Matthew, the tearing of the veil, the earthquake, and the raising of the dead in Jerusalem.

Samoan Hermeneutic

‘Ua mai vai a Tagaloa talu Sili ma Vaiafai’ is a commonly used Samoan Proverbial expression from a Samoan myth (*alagaupu*) which derives from my village of Gautavai. The proverb is roughly translated into English as follows, “The waters of Tagaloa were made salty because of Sili and Vaiafai.” My understanding of this proverbial expression is that Tagaloa had suffered the consequences of Sili and Vaiafai’s actions. I discovered this proverbial expression at a young age through cultural speeches also through villager’s conversation. What I have also discovered is that there are many versions of the story behind the proverb, which has made me curious to this day. It is common of Samoan proverbs to have different versions which is also referred to as *‘talalasi’*.

I will begin with how the title Tagaloa came about for the villages of Sili and Gautavai. Funefeai was a famous warrior who lived in Sili with his wife Sinalaua who is the daughter of Tuiatua Fepuleai. Sinalaua was renowned for her beauty. It was her beauty which attracted Tagaloaalagi the god of Samoa to gain her as his wife. Therefore, Tagaloaalagi went to Funefeai in Sili and offered his title of Tagaloa for Funefeai as well as his orators who will sit on the left and right side of Funefeai with palm leaves to bring shade to Funefeai. These are the eight orators: Sae and Fataloto from Vaiafai, Tugaga and Tagaloasataoa from Safune, Gale and Tuiasau from Vaisala and Mataafa and Talivaa from Sili. All these were offered by Tagaloaalagi in return for having Sinalaua as his wife.

As Fune was distant in line for the title of Tagaloa, he decided if he was betrayed by Tagaloaalagi, he will cut off his head. Sina the wife of Fune was taken to be the wife of Tagaloaalagi, and all the host of Tagaloaalagi gave to Funefeai, such as the title

Tagaloa and his *Tafa'i*, his war canoes; *Tailetai*, *Tailevai* and *Faatalatalasemataeemo* and etc. Thus the title Tagaloa is the high chief title for our village.

The Story: Water Has Turned Into Blood At The Afusau Waterfall

The fact that in Samoa, one story has many versions, just like this myth. There are many versions of this myth recorded by other Samoan writers.¹¹ But I will emphasize one version of the story from the elders of my village.¹² I was moved by their narrative about the cause of Faatuliaupolu's murder.

One of Sili and Vaiafai's traditional sport is known as the snaring of the '*agamani*'¹³ or the fish from the river which crawls all over the rocks like crabs. The village of Sili uses small nooses (*moia'a*) made from coconut fibre (*pulu popo*), which are effectively locked with coconut midrib (*tuaniu*). The sport would begin from the most inland waterfall, before the youths move on to the central waterfall and finally to the most seaward waterfall Afusau, where the champion of the competition is finally announced.

From inland, a large river¹⁴ flows through the village of Sili, carving into two (2) sections as it continues down to Gautavai cascading into three waterfalls. The most inland

¹¹ Lofipo Siamoa. Peilua, *O le Vaofilifili o Samoa*, Auckland: Samoan Multimedia Group Ltd, 2002, 123-124., and Fuimaono Nao'oia F. Tupua, *O le Suaga o le Va'atele*, Apia: Malua Printing Press, 2017, 246-247.

¹² To begin with it was the most difficult task to establish evidence in the past, from the living occupants of a place especially in my village (Ga'utavai), whether it is from a legend, or a tale. People were so reluctant to part with information about our people. My only hope for help these days is to let the elders of the community know, that this research is vital, who might part with such treasures only when they realize it is for the benefit of the whole country. Supplementary information may be shared from other people.

¹³ Another source says that *Agamani* is the name given to the *Igaga* (bait fish) when it gets larger. But according to Gautavai, the *agamani* is a natural fresh water fish found in the rivers of Gautavai.

¹⁴ From the inland ridge of mountains, flows a river down through the village of Ga'utavai to the sea.

waterfall Afulua, which is followed by Afupotopoto, then the Afusau waterfall, which is the most seaward of the three.

It was while they were trapping *agamani* one day, that the youths of Sili and Vaiafai noticed a stranger taking part in the competition. Faatuliaupolu the son of Tapututagitele and Manualesagalala from Salemuliaga was ambi-dextrous meaning equally skilled with each hand, in that he was adept with both hands in catching the fish with the noose in the first, the second and in the third waterfall. Tapututagitele was the daughter of Muliaga Vailolo from Amoa (Salemuliaga's section).

According to other versions of the story about the reason why Faatuliaupolu was murdered, one of the versions¹⁵ stated that the fact that he was an expert in the game and that he was a stranger may very well have provided a challenge which goaded the youths to extreme anger. On the other hand, some¹⁶ mentioned that the murder of Faatuliaupolu to his bathing in the river when he incited trouble with his whooping cries (*tuliususu*). According to the harmonized versions stated that the combination of his skilful performance in catching the *agamani* and his *tuliususu* had goaded the youths to kill him. It was mainly the jealousy of Sili and Vaiafai which made them murder Faatuliaupolu. Apparently, it was by the third waterfall that the crime was committed, turning the water into blood just as the saying that water has turned into blood at the waterfall Afusau. Due to the blood of Faatuliaupolu in the water another proverbial saying began that- "*Ua mai vai o Tagaloo talu Sili ma Vaiafai*" ("Tagaloo's stream has turned salty, because of Sili and Vaiafai").

¹⁵ The Late Sao Samuelu, the narrator of the story recorded in, *Samoa Ne'i Galo: Talatu'u ma Tala o le Vavau a Samoa, Vol 5*, mentioned, he was inclined to think that it was mainly the jealousy of the youths of Sili and Vaiafai which made them murder Fa'atuliaupolu.

¹⁶ Vaifale P; Salā Taputū of Lealatele village and Maleulu Tōrise of Lano village stated their view that the murder of Fa'atuliaupolu to his bathing in the river when he incited trouble with his whooping cries. Ministry of Education Sports and Culture (MESC), *Samoa Ne'i Galo: Talatu'u ma Tala o le Vavau a Samoa, Vol 5*. Dunelm Printing, University of California, Berkley, 1994.

The literal meanings of this Samoan proverb are the mournful and heart rending turn of events in order to speak about and to warn concerning the shameful act caused by a relative or by someone else in the village.

The story continues with Tapututagitele's lament (the grieving mother) on her son's murder. That's why Tapututagitele's lament to her relatives (Fale Salemuliaga) started from Salailua to Lealatele:

Salailua – Faatuliaupolu e, Talofa e. E ui lava o oe o le Tama a le Vaipaepae ma Aitu Tagata, ae fasia oe o fea o I ai Tui Tuato ma Tui Tolovaa? Faatuliaupolu e, Talofa e.

Gataivai - Faatuliaupolu e, Talofa e. E ui lava o oe o le Tama a Nuuli ma le Tunifo, ae fasia oe o fea o I ai Tiatia, Togiai ma Faala'a? Faatuliaupolu e, Talofa e.

Vaisaulu - Faatuliaupolu e, Talofa e. E ui lava o oe o le Tama a Falemai ma Poata, ae fasia oe o fea o I ai Fuga ma Mauga? Faatuliaupolu e, Talofa e.

Amoa, Saasaai ma Puapua - - Faatuliaupolu e, Talofa e. E ui lava o oe o le Tama a Olomaile ma Faleloa, ae fasia oe o fea Leuu ma Sealiimalietoa?

Lealatele - - Faatuliaupolu e, Talofa e. E ui lava o oe o le Tama a Malaeola ma Gafoaga, ae fasia oe o fea Tevaga ma Vaifale? Faatuliaupolu e, Talofa e.¹⁷

This started the war between the Salemuliaga clan and the Fale Safune (Tagaloa's villages). Due to another proverbial saying – "*Usu taotooto le fonu a Salemuliaga*"¹⁸ meaning, "Salemuliaga held a meeting and all laid down in fear and cowardice" to the Fale Safune. Because Fale Safune was most powerful at that time. At the end of the story Fale Salemuliaga won the war and the Fale Safune was defeated. ***Thus, this proverb is***

¹⁷ English translation included in Appendix. Samoan version provides a poetic flow to the lament of the mother.

¹⁸ In the village of Saipipi the name of the house (laoa) of the chief orator, Tātau who held the equivalent oratory duty as the Falefītu, is named *Tāotooto*.

used to make known a grievous wrong by one side upon the other, but through reconciliation by way of humility by the victim's side, it forged an everlasting bond. The water that had been made salty because of the killings has now been restored and is viable for consumption and used by the village today. The deaths from which springs forth life for the villagers today is an act that parallels the senseless death of Jesus Christ, a sin-less person killed like a murder in order to restore and redeem humanity today with life everlasting. This contextual parallel will be used to further understand the crucifixion scene.

Summary

Narrative criticism provides the reading structure with which to critically analyse the text based on characters, settings, plot, and rhetoric. It provides a step by step approach of how to extract meaning from a text by looking at who the characters are in the text, what is the setting and changes within, and how does the story teller tell the story and the key lesson that we should walk away with. In addition, the Samoan proverbial saying, “*Ua mai vai o Tagaloa talu Sili ma Vaiafai*” provides the cultural lens that influences and guides a Samoan’s understanding of life and death based on traditional teachings and lessons passed down from the ancestors. Thus together, narrative criticism through the Samoan reading perspective of “*Ua mai vai o Tagaloa talu Sili ma Vaiafai*” should provide an in-depth exegesis of Matthew 27: 50-54 regarding the life and death of Jesus Christ and its contextual meaning to a faith community. The next chapter will now focus on the exegesis of Matthew 27: 50-54.

Chapter 4

Exegesis of Matthew 27:50-54

Introduction

To interpret Matthew 27: 50-54, I will be using narrative criticism focusing on four elements: character, setting, plot, and rhetoric in order to understand the periscope within the overall narrative of Matthew. The interpretation will be guided by my experience and understanding from my Samoan lens “*Ua mai vai o Tagaloa talu Sili ma Vaiafai*”, laid out in the previous chapter of this thesis, as a Hermeneutic.¹ For purposes of this paper, the entire chapter will be focused on the study of the aftermath of Jesus’ crucifixion.

Matthew 27: 50-54 as a narrative reading and its placement in the Gospel of Matthew

There are various structures of the Matthean Gospel by which to make sense of the Matthean emphases. I have chosen Charles H. Lohr’s structure² because according to the

¹ My use of hermeneutic here is ‘as a perspective or as an eye to see or approach the text.’ For example, I am utilizing questions evoked from my experience and understanding of Samoan lens ‘*Ua mai vai o Tagaloa talu Sili ma Vaiafai*’, to guide my exploration of the text. For more understanding on hermeneutics, see David Jasper, *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 7-23.

² This structure is a *Chiastic/Concentric Model*. Charles H. Lohr, “Oral Techniques in the Gospel of Matthew,” *CBQ* 23 (1961): 427. This structure is part of Lohr’s attempt to identify the oral techniques Matthew used in the actual composition of his gospel.

The chiastic Structure by C. H. Lohr

- “A 1-4 Birth and beginnings *Narrative*
- B 5-7 Blessings, entering the kingdom *Discourse*
- C 8-9 Authority and invitation *Narrative*
- D 10 Mission Discourse *Discourse*
- E 11-12 Rejection by this generation *Narrative*
- F 13 Parables of the kingdom *Discourse*
- E' 14-17 Acknowledgement by disciples *Narrative*
- D' 18 Community Discourse *Discourse*
- C' 19-22 Authority and invitation *Narrative*

evangelist it displays the key meaning of the gospel, that is chapter 13 or the parables of the kingdom. These parables speak of the importance of hearing and obedience as a way of becoming a member of God's kingdom. According to Lohr, chapter 13 is the central point that other teachings and works of Jesus revolve around. Lohr's consideration of chapter 13 as the central point of the Matthean presentation of Jesus' ministry, is the emphasis of the inner-texture interpretation in conjunction with Matt 27:50-54 the main text. However, the outer edges of the Chiasm A & A' represent the section wherein my exegesis text is places Chapters 26-28 Death and Rebirth (A'). The reversal of A' is Birth and Beginning (A) found in chapters 1-4. Is it possible that the pro-Jewish Gospel was meant to be a universal story and that Jesus' crucifixion and death was really meant to ensure life, I mean, Everlasting life? We shall see as we continue.

The selected passage, Matthew 27:50-54, as a narrative reading, studied in this paper is obviously placed in the last part of the Gospel of Matthew. Death and Rebirth, meaning even though the death is the end of human life, but there is still hope for the benefit of all people.

Character(s)

Simon from Cyrene

The carrying of the cross by Jesus shows great suffering yet through his suffering, God continue to help His people. This reflection of help was given to Jesus by a Cyrene man named Simon. He was ordered by Roman centurions to carry the cross alongside Jesus. This act by Simon of Cyrene is depicted as an example of coercion, forcing those who are not ready up their cross and together share the burdens faced by Jesus. This act

B' 23-25 Woes, coming of the kingdom *Discourse*
A' 26-28 Death and rebirth *Narrative*

is used to contrast the open expression of faith by the Centurion at the end of the crucifixion. The use of Simon of Cyrene represents all believers who are unaware of the power of Christ to transform. Although forced to help, afterwards he realized its power.

There is word going around in both Ireland and the whole of Britain that there exists an organisation under the name Simon the Cyrene. The belief and aim of the Simon the Cyrene organisation is to “share the burden”. The main purpose of the organisation is searching for ways to help homeless find homes and helping the general who need it. The example of Simon the Cyrene helping Jesus carry the cross has impacted movements and organisations in this period with the purpose to provide aid and help to those who need it the most in the world. This same act can also be defined as something done in the name of Jesus.

Jesus Christ

Jesus last moments on the cross certainly revealed his pain, his agony, and his extreme suffering as a human being. In Matthew 27:50, He cried again with a loud voice; this confirmed that he was in fact calling out to His Father. He was abandoned, and He was longing for comfort, for the intimate lovingness of His Father. Previously in v.46, He cried out, “*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthanni!*” which translated as, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Jesus, during His ministry, he was always closer to God, as He was always seeking His Father’s assistance when He needed it through His persistent prayers. He always tried to find some time alone, in a deserted place where He could pour out all His heavy burden to His Father, and His Father never left Him. Now, on the cross, He felt the pain, He felt the shame, and He felt that He was going to fail His Mission. Hence He cried out, one more time to His Father. He felt the pain, just like any other human being. Consequently, this is quite important with regards to the work that He was to be fulfilled, because in order for the suffering to be authentic, He must face it as a

human being. Because if He was going to encounter suffering in His divine being, then the Salvation for humanity would certainly be a counterfeit.

At the end of v.50, it confirmed Jesus breathed His last breath. It is a confirmation of His death. It confirmed that He actually died as a human being. His suffering finally comes to an end, and his enemies and adversaries were victorious, but only just for a few days.

Centurion

When Jesus breathed His last breath, indicating that He was indeed died, three supernatural events happened. The curtain of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth shook, and the dead arise and visited Jerusalem. These things could not have been happened in normal life, or coincidentally. As a witness to all these, the Centurion, together with his men, were terrified, and were certainly astounded. At the same time, He became a believer, uttered these words in v.54: “Truly, this man was God’s Son!”

A Centurion played a vital role in Pax Romana in Judea. He served as a chief officer in security patrols, enforcing law and order in the streets and any domestic dispute within the province. He was also the leader of the execution squads, like crucifixions. His responsibility was to serve as the overseer for the Crucifixion, ensuring that prisoners were executed according to Roman law. The life of the persecuted was his responsibility. In other words, the persecuted will die according to his sentence, no more and no less. For instance, in a crucifixion, his responsibility was to keep the persecuted alive until the cross. He was always present from the beginning during the trial, judgment, and persecution. He followed the whole proceeding from the beginning until its finale, a prisoner’s death. He would then report the event’s aftermath to his leaders, the Governor or the Emperor himself. In Jesus’ Crucifixion, the Centurion was seen as a man with a

diverse vision. He was not only witnessing the death of Jesus on the cross, but also he saw everything that was going on including the three cataclysmic events.

The women

Although the women characters are not in my specific textual narrative, their role in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus is important to note, as they take a more visible and prominent role to juxtapose the lack of participation by the disciples' of Jesus. They had followed Jesus from Galilee, out of their great love they had for him and his message throughout his ministry. But now, after following him on his long journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, they were resolute to not forsake him or disappear like the disciples. At the time of the crucifixion, the women stood afar off. Whether out of their own fears or their enemies' fury kept them at a distance, is not certain; however, it was an aggravation of the suffering of Christ that these women and Jesus' loyal followers stood a good distant from his sufferings. Perhaps they might have come nearer, if they could; but good people, when they are in suffering, must not think it strange, if those closest to them are shy and stand far off, because maybe seeing the person you love in such great pain and agony is more painful than any physical torment. Here in his sufferings, we see the motherly love of these women. Although painful, they still were present to be by the side of their Lord, no matter what the cost to their own personally wellbeing. Even though these women may not play prominent roles in the Jewish or Greco-Roman society at this time, or even the narrative of Matthew, they were present at the most important time of Jesus' ministry and life. Even at the time of Jesus death, they did not fear, even though they stood far away, but they were still there.

Setting

In verse 32 of Chapter 27, Matthew writes, “as they went out...” (ἐξερχόμενοι) to show that the death of Jesus takes place outside of the city of God, Jerusalem. Golgotha is a place outside of Jerusalem and back into foreign space to demonstrate the total rejection and ridicule of the Jewish Messiah. Not only has he been totally rejected by the Jews, his rejection is further amplified by the ultimate suffering and death outside of his home and amongst the foreigners in foreign space.

In the final phase, the scene fell upon Golgotha or also known as the Skull. It's location stand outside of the western walls of Jerusalem. The significance of Golgotha is not its purpose which is the place of execution, but rather its location, which is close to Jerusalem yet stand outside of it. Having Jesus crucified in Golgotha, emphasized the rejection of Him by the Jewish leaders and the nation of God, and the Gospel He brings belongs to the world outside of the walls of Jerusalem. In other words, Jesus brought the Gospel into Jerusalem, yet rejected, and it was proclaimed outside of Jerusalem by a gentile for not just Israel but for the universe.

Apparently in the Gospel of Matthew, in the day of the crucifixion of Jesus, though it was glorious in form of sun and daylight at first, suddenly drew dark and weary like the night even though it was still day time, and then again transformed back to a bright and sun filled day. The message portrayed by this was although man sin, there is always hope.

There are three locations significantly used by Jesus in his death through the Gospel of Matthew; Gethsemane – where Jesus prayed, the road to Pilate for judgement and where He carried His cross for His crucifixion and Golgotha. Is it possible that these outside of Jerusalem locations parallel the three cataclysmic events to foreshadow a Gospel that must go out to all nations, and to unite all nations under Jesus Christ?

Plot

The crucifixion of Jesus ends with his last cry and final breath. The Messiah, the Christ, God's anointed who was sent to free his people is dead. In His death, an earthquake occurred, which resulted to the tearing in half of the certain of the church, causing splitting of rocks and opened tombs raising the dead and those who were blessedly buried to rest.

The occurrence of the earthquake, compares to a hope that has been dashed or shaken violently. An earthquake represents a foundation that has been shaken and broken into many pieces. It is about starting anew day up the pieces and moving forward with a stronger foundation to withstand the next earthquake. It is this very suffocating journey taken up by the disciples that demonstrated their faith towards Jesus. Although it was Christ who delivers His message first, He became an example to His disciples³ who followed his teachings and believed in Him wholeheartedly. Discipleship can also be identified as serve, service, servant that is has been engraved in a Samoan from a very young age. It's the *faaSamoa* (Samoan-way) of serving or servant.⁴

To start with, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom, meaning that which was behind the veil is now seen. It could also reference the promise made to Israel as the elected is now void as in the encounter between Saul and Samuel (1 Samuel 15: 27). The Greek word *ἐσχίσθη* translated '*to tear*' meaning, '*cause to be in parts through force*'. That is, Jewish people have been forced to be apart from the prosperity they have received. They were no longer called the chosen people.

³ Fernando F. Segovia describes this general definition of discipleship: "discipleship would be understood more generally in terms of Christian existence - that is, the self-understanding of the early Christian believers as believers: what such a way of life requires, implies and entails" (Segovia, "Introduction, 2).

⁴ Vaitusi Nofoaiga, *A Samoan Reading of Discipleship in Matthew*, (Atlanta, Georgia: SBL Press, 2017), 4.

Furthermore, the rocks were split. The word 'earth' in Greek *σχίζω* meaning '*as a place to lay a foundation ground*'. That is, the foundation of Jewish lives and their beliefs were cracked and destroyed. On the other side, the rocks were split. Jewish laws were written on the rock in prehistoric times of Moses. That was the covenant between the Israelites and their God wrote on the rocks. But now, they were split, meaning there is no more covenant, no more treaty, no more relationship between God and the Jews.

Lastly, the dead arise and visit Jerusalem. This revealed the resurrected Christ. Even though, Jewish people were removal and set apart from the salvation, but there was a chance, there was a hope for them in God's salvation.

Rhetoric

The Gospel of Matthew speaks about a community in-flux as the Matthean community comes to terms with how to live as a united community representing the Kingdom of Heaven. We see these ideas of separation and reunification being addressed in Matthew's presentation of his Gospel of Jesus Christ. Simon Cyrene was a Jew but who lived in the Greek Diaspora. A man who helped Jesus in carrying the cross. The Jews held a belief that they hold salvation as the elected and they shouldn't mingle or associate with the unclean, the defiled. However, by Simon Cyrene helping Jesus carry the cross, it sends a message that the Jewish people and the Gentiles are needing to come together. They need one another if ever they are to see the Kingdom of Heaven, a universal Matthean concept to unite his fractured community.

On the other side, the actions of Pilate and the high priests suggested another purpose for the Gospel of Matthew. The Jewish high priests lead Jesus to be judged before Pilate and sought his prosecution, which resulted in a crucifixion. They pleaded the sentence of crucifixion. Ironically, the man whom the high priests sought to be executed was the Messiah of their nation. However, Pilate; the voice of the Gentiles, opposed the

crucifixion of Jesus for he was aware of the Lord's innocence. The story suggests that it wasn't the people of the nations that prosecuted Jesus but it was the doing of His own people; the Jews. In the end, the resurrection of Christ ripped apart and destroyed like an earthquake the barriers which distinguished the elected or chosen people of God, re-establishing all those who have faith in Christ as heirs to the Kingdom of God, both Jews and Gentiles. Thus the use of Simon to begin the crucifixion scene and the proclamation of the Centurion at the end of the crucifixion rounds out the pro-Jewish Gospel into a universal message for all.

In the Gospel of Matthew, in the time period of the death of Jesus, three miraculous events were revealed. 1) The curtain of the temple was torn in to two, from top to bottom. An event that represented the demolition of the Jewish and its hold on excluding others from salvation. The tearing of the curtain of the temple offered not only Jews but the Gentiles to receive salvation and blessings and welcomed also as heirs to the Kingdom of God. The tearing of the curtain also meant the church welcomed people of the nation to praise, share, and worship with them the one and only true God. The God that was hidden behind the holy of holies by Israel and now revealed through Christ's crucifixion by the ripping of the veil. 2) The rocks were split.

These rocks have long been understood as the foundation of the Jewish belief, their laws, written on stone tablets that ensured the promises of the covenant were being upheld by the Jews on their end. The laws which were given to govern and make right the Jewish people as the elected before a Holy God have now been split. The Jews have long used these laws to justify their separation from the world and uphold their standing as the only elected of God worthy of salvation. Unbeknownst to them, they were supposed to have been God's co-creator in the world, like wisdom, bringing all of God's creation back into a right relationship with Him. A sign once used to separate and exclude, has now been

destroyed, and in its place faith is restored, like that of the ancestors, like Abraham, who had faith way before the laws. Finally, 3) the dead arise from tombs and visit Jerusalem.

This occurrence as reported by a centurion and people of the nation whom themselves declared saying “Truly this man was God’s son”. This declaration was spoken by a Gentile rather than a Jew as a sign that the message of salvation has now gone out to the nation as was the wish from the onset, when Israel was tasked with such a mission from the Old Testament. The rising of the dead and the visit to Jerusalem references the Day of the Lord, when the vindicated will find their place in God’s Kingdom. The day that was marred by the untimely death of the Messiah, the chosen one of God, dashing the hopes of many whom saw in him the hopes of their future, has now been reshaped by God to represent the day of victory for all believers. The untimely death as mission accomplished is seen in the unity of the heirs of the kingdom in Jerusalem, where God resides. The city which started the whole proceeds becomes the place of renewal and restoration for all who believe.

Narrative Critical Analysis:

This interpretation was guided by my experience and understanding from my Samoan lens “*Ua mai vai o Tagaloa talu Sili ma Vaiafai*”, laid out in the previous chapters of this thesis, as a Hermeneutic. No comparison can be made with the death of Jesus Christ and the assassination of Faatuliaupolu from my hermeneutic. But it was the factors and events that occurred during the death of Jesus that the story of Faatuliaupolu’s assassination is used to highlight and expand for a better understanding by a Samoan reader.

Faatuaupolu was a skillful fisherman and good with both hands showing a fisherman who has the ability to feed his family and village. He was considered a reliable breadwinner both within the family and the village context. He was both a skilful

fisherman and an able hunter. Yet, he was killed because of those skills. It was because of Sili and Vaiafai's jealousy over Faatuliaupolu's fishing expertise and skills. In the light of Jesus as a skillful fisher of men himself, Faatuliaupolu's abilities are compared. Jesus could be looked upon as a skillful fisherman because he promised his disciples that he will make them fishers of men. Jesus as fishermen is for both land and sea. Jesus was killed while he was a healer, teacher, and preacher – as he fished for men. His death happened because his own people, the Jews were envious of his supposedly divine authority and power to heal and to provide for anyone in need. Furthermore, Jesus was killed by the Roman soldiers. After Jesus' death, tensions continued between Jesus' followers and Jewish leaders, and so as the Romans. Returning to the Samoan legend, this is the reason why Tapututagitele, Faatuliaupolu's mother cried, because she had lost not only her son, but their breadwinner whom they relied upon. Hence the reason why she questioned where was the family during the time her son was killed. Where were Leū'u and Seāli'imālietōa? Where were Tevaga and Vaifale? Where were Faga and Mauga? Where were Tiatia, Fa'ala'a and Togiā'i? Where were Tuitolova'a and Tuātō? This symbolised the motherly love and affection of Tapututagitele for her son, making it their fault, her and the family for not being there for the son, in contrast to the women that were there, yet stood afar, but were present during his last breathe. Faatuliaupolu's death caused tensions and wars in the aftermath, between Salemuliga and Falesafune, but in the end, the mother's plea for justice and her humble admittance of ceasefire, helped to heal and bring together the village. They ended up living in peace. More importantly, the peace restored returned the water that was made salty, good water for all. Hence the reason why the water was salty, due to the death of Faatuliaupolu. But because of the covenant made between the two villages. This is the river of Sili which serves the whole

district of Palauli. This covenantal compromise goes beyond sharing water literally but serves as a concept between the relations of orators to share their speaking duties.

This legend and the phrase, “*Ua mai vai o Tagaloa talu Sili ma Vaiafai*,” opens up the story of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ according to Matthew, to more detailed and personal understandings of the pains and sufferings endured; as well as, the devastating pain and suffering left behind after his death. Jesus’ death occurred because his own people, the Jews were envious of his power to heal and to provide for all in need. Jesus was killed by the Roman soldiers, due to the Jews insistence, so as not to make a martyr of him. After Jesus’ death, tensions continued between Jesus followers the Jewish leaders, and so as the Romans. But, Jesus’ death after all was to save all including the Jewish leaders who planned the killing of Jesus and the Roman soldiers whom carried out the despicable act, and all the powers to be that rejoiced at Jesus’ death. In other words, Jesus’ death was to bring peace to all sides regardless of what they did to him.

As it is written, the death of Jesus took place to fulfill what was written, especially after Jesus professed, “It is done.” Although the Jews have been vilified in history for being the group responsible for this tragic event, ironically, Jesus was Himself, a Jew. Thus the death is doubly tragic when the death occurs at the hands of your own. Furthermore, the depiction of Jesus death as being caused by jealousy and the rejection. Yet, Jesus gave of himself wholly and fully to fulfil his purpose on earth. However, the people of Judea opposed him and passed the sentence that he should die; this same example of the cause of the death of Jesus is told from the narrative in the Gospel of Matthew. Faatuliaupolu is from Salemuliaga; Salemuliaga is a generation derived from Lafai the elder relative of Funefeai of which there is Falesafune; of which there is Sili and Vaiafai. They are all from one line and one family, however, all generations extinguished Faatuliaupolu. This originated the Samoan saying “*e le o se manu’a mai fafo, o le manu’a*

lava mai fale” meaning “it is not a foreign wound it is a wound from within”. Jealousy arose between the relatives for none compared to the skilful hands of Faatuliaupolu causing death to come to him.

However, what was supposed to be the end of Faatuliaupolu as a mark of shame and extinguishing him from the history of the village, was the cause of catastrophic events within the village such as wars and the undrinkable water due to the spilt blood of Faatuliaupolu. The water that was the lifeline of the village’s survival was made salty due to the blood being spilt needlessly. However, the cry of Faatuliaupolu’s mother at what has become of her beloved village due to her son’s untimely death, led to the reunification of the village when she chose compassion and forgiveness over the never-ending death of many other innocent participants of this feud. The parallelism with the three catastrophic events in the crucifixion of Jesus to the internal struggles between the Salemuliaga and Fale Safune clans of the village further creates a space for understanding the images as an exposition of Israel’s failure to be the co-creating partner of God for a universal message of salvation to the world, instead, their exclusive behaviors and practices isolated God’s plans to just them, which Jesus was needed to reassure its fulfillment, in his life, death, and glorious resurrection.

However, Jesus’ suffering and pains led to his victory on the cross as creation and all were redeemed by his blood. Thus all nations by way of faith are heirs to this kingdom. Through the ripping of the veil, the large earthquake and the opened tombs, a universal message goes forth to demonstrate that Jesus’ death was for naught, rather it was for the restoration of God’s ultimate plan for all of creation. Likewise, the legend of Faatuliaupolu, and the death of Faatuliaupolu caused by conflict between Salemuliaga and Falesafune; a dispute which cost many lives, but did not last. Both Salemuliaga and Falesafune made peace during their final encounters. Thus, Salemuliaga was to become

the *to'oto'o* and *fue*⁵ to speak and Falesafune was the spear and arrow that defended the speech of Salemuiaga. The clear conflict between men was no longer but they were made one.

⁵ Cultural implement that is hung on the shoulders of the orator and accompanies the staff during speeches by the orator during public and social gatherings.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

“Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his final breath.”¹ The pain, the agony, and the finality of death. The crucifixion of Jesus as demonstrated in this thesis was an attempt to understand the senselessness in Jesus’ death due to jealousy and hatred by his own people, as demonstrated in the use of my Samoan lens, the legend of Faatuliaupolu. The exploration was to show how biblical interpretation could be supported and further enhanced by using a Samoan lens of understanding to complement the traditional interpretation of scripture.

The thesis began by looking at the worldviews of a Samoan and their legends and myths to create meanings of the world around them and the function of the Biblical text to help order those meanings in a moral and ethical manner. To put these thoughts into action, the Biblical story of Jesus’ Crucifixion as found in Matthew 27:50-54 was viewed through the lens of the Samoan legend of Faatuliaupolu.

To further understand the traditional interpretation of the text, a historical background of the Gospel According to Matthew was provided to demonstrate a competent understanding of the Gospel and its message, focusing on universalism to address the issue faced by Matthew and his expanding multi-cultural community. Furthermore, a review of biblical scholars and literature on Matthew 27:50-54 was also conducted to illustrate the points of emphasis within this text to guide and order the exegetical analysis using Elizabeth Malbon’s understanding of Narrative Criticism.

¹ Matthew 27:50, NRSV in *New Revised Standard Version Bible with Apocrypha: New Testament*. Peabody Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing LLC, 2017, 25

Afterwards, a complete discussion of the methodological tool to be used in such an undertaking focusing on the four elements of Narrative Criticism: 1) Characters, 2) Setting, 3) Plot, and 4) Rhetoric. By focusing on these elements, the story of Jesus' crucifixion was further unraveled but this time, viewing the different aspects of the story through the understanding of the Samoan Legend of Faatuliaupolu. This legend was discussed at length to provide detailed context of what happened in order to help in making the Jesus story more meaningful for the Samoan reader. The sense of loss, jealousy, hatred, death, curse of undrinkable water, forgiveness, reconciliation, and unity. The interweaving of these concepts provide the crux of this thesis' aim. However, it must be noted that the thesis in no way attempts to compare Faatuliaupolu to Jesus, rather to examine how the elements within the legend could further enhance and bring more meaning to the story and humanities failures and successes to restore hope.

Finally, this exploration helped to reveal many things about the Biblical text as well as the Samoan legend that I was not aware of. The use of the three cataclysmic events have never been the focus of my understanding, rather, the treatment by the soldiers, Jesus' sufferings alone on the cross, Jesus' final words, and the proclamation of the Centurion. These have always been the main points remembered when speaking of the crucifixion, however, after this exploration, I have come to appreciate the depth of information that gets lost when we remember and recall from what others have said and taught us, rather, than going through and reading the Biblical text for ourselves. In addition to the text, I have also learned much more from the Samoan legend that I didn't know before, like Faatuliaupolu is stemmed from Laifai. Fune and Laifai are said to be brothers. At the end of the story, Faatuliaupolu's death instigated peace between the two rival of Sili and Vaiafai, and the district of Amoa where Salemuliga reigned.

Furthermore, the culmination of the story of Faatuliaupolu, initiated the endorsement and confirmation of the cultural titles or the responsibilities of Sili and Vaiafai, as well as the Salemuliaga. After peace was achieved between the two rivals, Salemuliaga was given the title, Tootoo ma le Fue, while the Falesafune (Sili and Vaiafai), was given the title Tao ma le Uatogi to protect the obligation of Salemuliaga as an orator.

Ua mai vai o Tagaloa, talu Sili ma Vaiafai is a cultural saying that has multiple meanings and contextual interpretations in the modern world. The intrinsic element in this saying is ‘sacrifice’. On the surface, the story is mournful and heart rending, reflecting a shameful act fuelled by wicked motivation. Yet, in the deeper structure, it revealed a sense of sacrifice. The shameful act instigated a good course. It acts and promotes peace, love, and harmony. It brings two incompatible parties in unity. It can be used to address conflicts within the Church Ministry, the village, families, as well as the community at large. Rather than considering it as from a pessimistic point of view, we can alter our view to be optimistic, bringing the good out of a wicked and mournful situation.

In conclusion, the undertaking of such a task has been a very educational and rewarding experience. The hope of this thesis was to demonstrate how a Samoan hermeneutic could be used in reading Biblical texts. In addition, it also adds to the scholarship of Biblical literature as well as culturally appropriate methodologies of reading Scripture. In looking ahead to the expansion of such an effort, how can the Samoan worldview incorporate Biblical texts as oratory expression of common and traditional proverbs, legends and myths. To God be the glory now and forevermore, Amen.

Appendix

English translation of Fa'atuliā'upolu's mother, Tapututagitele's lament found in Chapter 3 under Samoan Hermeneutics (p 40):

Oh! poor Fa'atuliā'upolu, poor Fa'atuliā'upolu

You are a son of Matofa, and where were Leū'u and Seāli'imālietoa?

Oh! poor, poor Fa'atuliā'upolu

You are the son of Malaeola and Gāfoaga. You were being killed and where were Tevaga and Vaifale?

Oh! my poor, poor Fa'atulā'upolu

You are the son of Pō'ata and Falemāi. You were being killed and where were Faga and Mauga?

Oh! my poor poor poor Fa'atuliā'upolu

You are the son of Nu'uūli and Tunofa. You were being killed and where were Tiatia, Fa'ala'a and Togiā'i?

Oh! my poor poor Fa'atulā'upolu

You are the son of Vaipaepae. You were being killed and where were Tuitolova'a and Tuātō?

Glossary

<i>Alagaupu</i>	Samoan proverbial expression
<i>Faasamoa</i>	Samoan way
<i>Fue</i>	Flying whisk
<i>Moia'a</i>	Small noose
<i>Pulu popo</i>	Coconut fibre
<i>Talalasi</i>	Many versions
<i>To'oto'o</i>	Orator's staff
<i>Tuaniu</i>	Coconut midrip
<i>Tuliususu</i>	Whooping cries

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