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ATONEMENT IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	The Anchor Bible
<i>ABD</i>	<i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
AnBib	Analecta biblica
ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
ASNU	Acta seminarii neotestamentici upsaliensis
<i>BBR</i>	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BDAG	Walter Bauer, Frederick William Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , 3 rd edition
BDB	Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologiarum lovaniensium
<i>BibRev</i>	<i>Bible Review</i>
<i>BJRL</i>	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands Library</i>
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentary
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CNT	Commentaire du Nouveau Testament
<i>CRBS</i>	<i>Currents in Research in Biblical Studies</i>
<i>CurTM</i>	<i>Currents in Theology and Mission</i>
<i>DJG</i>	<i>Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels</i>
<i>EBC</i>	<i>The Expositor's Bible Commentary</i>

Ébib	Études bibliques
<i>ETL</i>	<i>Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses</i>
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>The Expository Times</i>
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
HDR	Harvard Dissertations in Religion
HTKNT	Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
<i>IBS</i>	<i>Irish Biblical Studies</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament—Supplement Series
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament—Supplement Series
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
NAC	The New American Commentary
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NIDNTT</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i>
NIGTC	The New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIVAC	The NIV Application Commentary
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum, Supplements
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>

PNTC	The Pillar New Testament Commentary
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
<i>RSPT</i>	<i>Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques</i>
<i>SBLSP</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers</i>
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
<i>StBibT</i>	<i>Studia biblica et theologica</i>
<i>SWJT</i>	<i>Southwestern Journal of Theology</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
<i>TynBul</i>	Tyndale Bulletin
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

PREFACE

I first became interested in the subject of the atonement in Matthew's Gospel while doing a paper on Matthew 27:51-54, the passage that describes the miraculous events surrounding Jesus' death. Later I did extensive research on Matthew 1:21 and its significance in the narrative of Matthew's Gospel. I thought hard about focusing my whole work on the role of 1:21 in Matthew. Yet, I decided instead to trace the theme of atonement throughout Matthew's Gospel. That way I am able to look at 1:21, 27:51-54, and a number of other key passages and then tie them all together under the theme of the atonement in Matthew's Gospel.

Now that I have completed my dissertation I want to express my gratitude to a number of people. I would like to thank Dr. Cook for serving as my advisor. He has not just been a scholarly mentor; he has also been a good friend. I would like to thank the church where I currently pastor for being supportive throughout my doctoral studies and allowing me to take the time I need to study while pastoring the church. In particular, my secretary, Shirley Campbell, has been especially helpful. I have tried my best to balance full-time studies and full-time pastoring. At times I have been stretched nearly beyond limit, yet God's grace has always been sufficient. I am glad that I was able to serve the Lord in the local church while pursuing my doctoral degree because that service has kept my focus on God's ultimate call on my life: preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

My parents, Lonnie and Brenda Jackson, have been most supportive, not only during my dissertation, but throughout my life. They have been an encouragement and a help through every step of my academic and professional career. I am so blessed to have such wonderful, caring parents. Last and most importantly, I want to thank my Savior,

the Lord Jesus Christ. Though doing a dissertation is a rigorous project, it was made bearable and even enjoyable by the fact that I was studying the very death of Christ. To me this work has been more than academic; it has been an attempt to deepen my own faith and to help other people realize the saving significance of Jesus' death as presented in Matthew's Gospel.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Martin Kähler famously wrote that the Gospels were “passion narratives with extended introductions.”¹ To some, this statement is truer of Mark’s Gospel than of Matthew’s, for it is thought that Matthew does not give the same significance or central focus to the death of Jesus that Mark does. For instance, Morna Hooker writes, “The theme of Jesus’ death does not dominate his gospel as it does in Mark’s. The reason is perhaps that Matthew’s gospel, being much larger than Mark’s, incorporates other material—e.g., long blocks of teaching—which means that our attention is not concentrated on the cross in the way that it is by Mark.”² This perception of Matthew’s Gospel may be the reason why the atoning significance of Jesus’ death in Matthew is a neglected subject. Though atonement in Mark and Luke has received recent attention,³ I know of no thorough work dedicated exclusively to the saving significance of Jesus’ death throughout Matthew’s Gospel.⁴

¹Martin Kähler, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), 80 n. 11. Though speaking primarily of Mark’s Gospel, Kähler admits that the same holds true for Matthew if one takes away the infancy narrative and the larger blocks of Jesus’ teaching.

²Morna D. Hooker, *Not Ashamed of the Gospel: New Testament Interpretations of the Death of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 68.

³Peter G. Bolt, *The Cross from a Distance: Atonement in Mark’s Gospel*, NSBT 18 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004); John R. Kimbell, “The Atonement in Lukan Theology” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008).

⁴This need was pointed out several decades ago by Birger Gerhardsson, who wrote, “An exhaustive treatment of the atonement theme in Matthew would require a whole monograph” (“Sacrificial Service and Atonement in the Gospel of Matthew,” in *Reconciliation and Hope*, ed. R. Banks [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974], 27). This dissertation is my attempt to provide such a monograph.

This neglect is brought into focus by John Carroll and Joel Green, who state, “Perhaps because of its similarities to the Gospel of Mark—on which, most scholars believe, the first evangelist was dependent—Matthew’s presentation of the death of Jesus has not received the attention given Mark’s or Luke’s.”⁵ Carroll and Green mention only a few works that are dedicated to understanding the death of Jesus in Matthew, yet both of them are focused primarily on the passion narrative.⁶ Though Carroll and Green offer their own contribution to an understanding of Jesus’ death in Matthew, it is limited to a single chapter within a larger work dedicated to the subject of Jesus’ death in early Christianity. This neglect reveals the need for further investigation into the saving significance of Jesus’ death throughout Matthew’s Gospel, for Matthew does not simply reduplicate Markan atonement theology, but adds some distinctive material and insights himself to the theological importance of Jesus’ death (e.g., 1:21; 8:16-17; 12:6; 26:28; 27:51b-53).

Thesis

This dissertation demonstrates that Matthew has a more developed theology of the atonement than scholars have assumed up to this point and that this theology pervades his Gospel rather than being relegated to a couple of verses (e.g., 1:21; 20:28; 26:28) or simply to the passion narrative. Not only is the death (and resurrection) of Jesus the climactic event in Matthew’s narrative, but the significance of this event is more developed than typically acknowledged. Matthew has a theology of the atonement, which he explains in his Gospel. Matthew does not have a precise theory of atonement

⁵John T. Carroll and Joel B. Green, *The Death of Jesus in Early Christianity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 9.

⁶Donald P. Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew: A Redactional Study*, BETL 39 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1975); idem, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1990); John Paul Heil, *The Death and Resurrection of Jesus: A Narrative-Critical Reading of Matthew 26-28* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).

like one would find spelled out in a textbook of systematic theology. However, Matthew gives a number of hints and indicators of *how* Jesus' death results in salvation and the forgiveness of sins.⁷ As David Turner correctly points out, though Matthew does not provide a comprehensive doctrine of atonement, what he says is sufficient. He writes, "No doubt there are some unanswered questions, but the general thrust is clear."⁸

Matthew's thrust is clear despite the fact that the words "atonement" or "atone" are not used in his Gospel, for the idea of atonement can be present even when the precise vocabulary is not.⁹ As Joel Green and Mark Baker point out, "Evidently, if we are to gain our bearings regarding the meaning of the atonement in the New Testament, we will be less interested in the appearance of particular *vocabulary* and more concerned with the *concept* of atonement, which we will define broadly as 'the saving significance of Jesus' death.'"¹⁰ Though I will define atonement more specifically than Green and Baker, I agree with them that the concept of atonement can be present even when the vocabulary is not. In this dissertation I will define atonement as the saving act of God by which he deals with the problem of sin and restores humanity to his favor through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross.¹¹ As one can see from this definition, my

⁷Thus, I disagree with Mark Allan Powell's statement: "Matthew does not explain *how* Jesus' death brings these benefits. We should not be hasty in ascribing to Matthew a substitutionary view of atonement or presume that Jesus' death is a sacrifice for sin....Matthew seems content in affirming *that* Jesus' death brings forgiveness of sins without speculating as to how or why it does so" (*God with Us: A Pastoral Theology of Matthew's Gospel* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995], 11 n. 22).

⁸David L. Turner, *Matthew*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 489.

⁹In contemporary English translations the words "atone" or "atonement" are found very little, if any, in the New Testament. The NIV uses "atonement" or "atoning" 5 times (Rom 3:25; Heb 2:17; 9:5; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). The NRSV has 4 occurrences (Rom 3:25; Heb 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). The ESV, NAB, NKJV, and NASB have no occurrences. The Greek words translated as "atonement" or "atoning" by the NRSV and NIV are ἰλαστήριον (Rom 3:25; Heb 9:5), ἰλάσκομαι (Heb 2:17), and ἰλασμός (1 John 2:2; 4:10).

¹⁰Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 36.

¹¹For similar, helpful definitions, see, e.g., Daniel L. Migloire, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 405; C. M. Tuckett,

focus will be on Jesus' death rather than on his resurrection. Christ's resurrection is addressed where it is relevant, yet the main focus of this dissertation is on the atoning significance of Jesus' death.

Methodology

To demonstrate that Matthew has a more developed theology of the atonement than scholars generally assume, specific passages in his Gospel will be addressed that indicate the theological significance of Jesus' death.¹² To reveal the theological significance of these passages, exegetical work is done that takes into consideration the immediate context of each passage, Matthew's overall narrative, and relevant Old Testament background. Verses or passages are interpreted in light of their context with the use of historical-grammatical analysis. Also, Matthew's narrative comes into play in interpretation. Matthew 1:21 is a programmatic statement that leaves unexplained *how* Jesus saves his people from their sins. Thus, the reader is encouraged to go through the narrative with the goal of discovering how Jesus saves his people. The climactic point in Matthew's narrative is the death of Jesus. Thus, each passage leading up to the passion narrative is interpreted in light of where the narrative is headed, namely, toward the death of Jesus in the passion narrative.

Along with the immediate context and Matthew's narrative, attention is given to relevant Old Testament background. In particular attention is given to Old Testament

"Atonement in the NT," in *ABD*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:518; R. W. Yarbrough, "Atonement," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander et al. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 2000), 388. I also understand atonement to involve a substitutionary and penal element. For a biblical defense of penal substitution, see, e.g., John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 133-63; Thomas R. Schreiner, "Penal Substitution View," in *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views*, ed. James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 67-98.

¹²Passages are chosen based on their contribution to atonement theology. Thus, passages that simply mention Jesus' death but do not explain the theological significance of it will not be investigated (e.g., 9:15; 12:40). The goal of this dissertation is not to trace the theme of Jesus' death throughout Matthew's narrative, but to explain the theological significance of Jesus' death in terms of atonement.

allusions found in the text that help clarify the saving mission of Jesus. These allusions will be especially significant in relation to Jesus' role as the Suffering Servant prophesied by Isaiah. An allusion is when an author refers back to a previous writing without directly quoting from it, and he does this to enhance his own writing or point.¹³ Douglas Moo helpfully describes an allusion as that which "utilizes Scriptural words and phrases without introduction and without disrupting the flow of the narrative."¹⁴ Finding or proving Old Testament allusions in the New Testament is not a precise scientific affair; there will always be a certain level of subjectivity involved.¹⁵ However, the following factors will be taken into consideration in the attempt to determine whether an allusion is present in Matthew's Gospel: history of interpretation, shared vocabulary, quotations or allusions from the same passage or book elsewhere in Matthew, and related ideas in the Old Testament passage and the context where the proposed allusion is found.¹⁶

Though I accept Markan priority and will occasionally point out redactional insights based on this assumption, my work does not stand or fall with the reliability of the two-source hypothesis. The primary goal will be to interpret Matthew as it stands. In terms of historical Jesus research, I will deal with issues of historicity when appropriate. For instance, I examine whether the ransom saying was spoken by Jesus himself. However, this is not the focus of my work; the focus is on *Matthew's* specific

¹³A quotation is a direct, marked reference to a previous work, an allusion is an indirect reference, and an echo is an unintentional reference. However, it is not always possible to distinguish between what is intentional and unintentional, and so some scholars use the categories, allusion and echo, interchangeably at times. See Gary T. Manning, Jr., *Echoes of a Prophet: The Use of Ezekiel in the Gospel of John and in Literature of the Second Temple Period*, JSNTSup 270 (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 13-14.

¹⁴Douglas J. Moo, *The Old Testament in the Gospel Passion Narratives* (Sheffield: Almond, 1983), 20.

¹⁵Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 29; Michael Thompson, *Clothed with Christ: The Example and Teaching of Jesus in Romans 12.1-15.13*, JSNTSup 59 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), 30-31, 36.

¹⁶For more on determining if an allusion is present, see Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 29-32; Thompson, *Clothed with Christ*, 28-36; Manning, *Echoes of a Prophet*, 3-15.

contribution to atonement theology in the New Testament.¹⁷

Review of Previous Research

This review of previous research does not attempt to be exhaustive, but it does attempt to show the pressing need for further, more definitive research on the theological significance of Jesus' death throughout Matthew's Gospel. As pointed out above, though there have been works dedicated to Matthew's passion narrative, there has not been any thorough work done on Jesus' atoning death throughout Matthew. Plus, a number of scholars argue that in Matthew Jesus' death does not have any soteriological significance. His death simply serves as an example, or what Matthew does say about Jesus' death is simply borrowed from Mark without any unique development or elaboration. In what follows, it is shown that what scholarly work has been done on Jesus' death in Matthew has yet to grapple with his unique contribution to New Testament atonement theology.

Jesus' Death: An Example

Some scholars approach Jesus' death in Matthew primarily as an example of obedience. Over three decades ago Birger Gerhardsson wrote an article entitled "Sacrificial Service and Atonement in the Gospel of Matthew." He argues that, unlike Hebrews for example, Matthew's Gospel does not present Jesus' atonement as an exclusive, one-time event. Rather, it is a sacrifice in which his followers are called to participate by giving their lives in service to him. Jesus' sacrifice is unique in that he alone is sinless, and thus his followers can trust in this sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. However, it is not a sacrifice that they simply reap the benefits from; rather, they too must offer the spiritual sacrifice of taking up their cross to follow him. Thus, their

¹⁷I will refer to the author throughout as Matthew even though the Gospel itself is anonymous. This practice is for ease of communication, but it is also because a persuasive case can be made for Matthean authorship. However, the results of this dissertation are in no way affected by the precise identity of the author. For a recent argument for Matthean authorship, see Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2009), 180-84.

sacrifice is intermingled with his sacrifice. He states, “In spite of his eagerness to demonstrate that Jesus’ death was in all points perfect, Matthew shows no inclination to clearly distinguish Jesus’ sacrificial death from the martyrdom of his followers.”¹⁸

Gehardsson tends to play down the significance of atonement theology in Matthew, particularly in key passages like 1:21, 20:28, and 26:28. According to him, Jesus does not save his people from their sins solely by his death; the ransom saying does not even occur in the context of atonement; and the Eucharistic saying about the forgiveness of sins has more to do with the practical benefits of receiving communion than being a doctrinal statement about Jesus’ atoning death.¹⁹ Gehardsson is right to remind us that Jesus’ death in Matthew is not only about the forgiveness of sins; it is also a call for us to take up our cross and follow Jesus (10:38; 16:24). However, he is misguided in downplaying the unique, saving significance of Jesus’ death in Matthew, for in Matthew Jesus’ death saves from sin (1:21), liberates the captives (20:28), provides the forgiveness of sins (26:28), and even releases from death (27:51b-53). In Matthew, Jesus is much more than an example; he is our Savior.

Georg Strecker has consistently downplayed the saving significance of Jesus’ death in Matthew’s Gospel. In his contribution to Matthean theology, *Der Weg der Gerechtigkeit: Untersuchung zur Theologie des Matthäus*,²⁰ he argues that the central focus for Matthew is not Jesus’ atoning death but the imperative of obedience—the way of righteousness. He thinks that the ransom saying in 20:28 focuses on Jesus as an example of servanthood rather than on his atoning death.²¹ He also downplays Matthew’s addition of “for the forgiveness of sins” in 26:28, claiming that it was in the

¹⁸Gehardsson, “Sacrificial Service and Atonement,” 33.

¹⁹Ibid., 25-26.

²⁰Georg Strecker, *Der Weg der Gerechtigkeit: Untersuchung zur Theologie des Matthäus*, 3rd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971).

²¹Ibid., 183-84.

tradition that Matthew had but was not of particular interest to him.²² In his *Theology of the New Testament*, he also minimizes Jesus' atoning death in 26:26-28. He states, "Here too—as in the baptismal sacrament—obedience to the word and deed of Jesus is realized; here too there is no reflection on the atoning effect of Jesus' death. The decisive thing is not the 'why' but the 'that' of the atoning work."²³ This is not surprising since Strecker claims that a reflection on the atoning significance of Jesus' death is lacking in Mark and Luke as well.²⁴

Another scholar that has recently downplayed Jesus' atoning death in Matthew is Petri Luomanen. His book is entitled *Entering the Kingdom of Heaven: A Study on the Structure of Matthew's View of Salvation*.²⁵ As the subtitle suggests, Luomanen's focus is on Matthew's structure of salvation, which addresses the connection between grace and demand in Matthew. He basically follows E. P. Sanders in suggesting a modified version of covenantal nomism in Matthew's structure of salvation.²⁶ Thus, the death of Jesus in Matthew is not about getting in but about staying in the realm of God's people. Luomanen states, "In Matthew's pattern, atonement is restricted to the sphere of staying in without any fundamental role in the process of inclusion."²⁷ He goes on to affirm, "In Matthew's pattern of salvation, the main function of Jesus is to make possible a life of obedience to God."²⁸ In fact, he claims that 1:21 does not even relate to Jesus' saving

²²Ibid., 221-22.

²³Georg Strecker, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 391.

²⁴Ibid., 362-63, 408-09.

²⁵Petri Luomanen, *Entering the Kingdom of Heaven: A Study on the Structure of Matthew's View of Salvation*, WUNT, 2nd ser., vol. 101 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998).

²⁶Ibid., 281-84.

²⁷Ibid., 283.

²⁸Ibid., 285.

death. He states, “On the whole, then, it seems that in Matthew’s mind the omen of Jesus’ name was not connected to his sacrificial death but to his prophetic mission among the people of Israel. In Matthew’ view, Jesus was not sent to die for his people but to heal their diseases, preach repentance and lead them into eternal life through his authoritative interpretation and proclamation of the law.”²⁹ Again, the focus is on obedience rather than on Jesus’ saving death.

C. J. den Heyer, in *Jesus and the Doctrine of the Atonement*,³⁰ also thinks that Matthew interprets Jesus’ death more as an example than as an atonement for sin. Concerning Matthew’s understanding of Jesus’ death, he states, “Jesus’ death on the cross is not a source of grace or reconciliation. Rather, the dramatic event bears the character of an ‘example.’ Anyone who chooses the way of Jesus can be confronted with torture and suffering.”³¹ Thus, he denies the soteriological significance of Jesus’ death in Matthew, suggesting that Jesus’ death serves as an ethical instruction rather than as an atoning sacrifice.

The outstanding Matthean scholar, Ulrich Luz, continually minimizes or ignores the saving significance of Jesus’ death in Matthew’s Gospel. For instance, in his book, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*,³² Luz does not interact with Matthew’s understanding of Jesus’ death at all.³³ This is not altogether surprising in light of what Luz says about Jesus’ death in his massive commentary on Matthew. Commenting on the ransom saying in 20:28, he states, “In connection with this passage numerous

²⁹Ibid., 226.

³⁰C. J. den Heyer, *Jesus and the Doctrine of the Atonement*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM, 1998).

³¹Ibid., 82.

³²Ulrich Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

³³For this neglect, see Daniel M. Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew’s Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, SNTSMS 139 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 127 n. 169.

questions are raised today about the nature and meaning of Jesus' atoning death, but there is little in Matthew that provides an answer for the questions."³⁴ He goes on to say, "For Matthew the idea of a ransom or 'substitute' is probably less important here than the radical nature of Jesus' service."³⁵ Luz thinks that Matthew does not present a theology of atonement; rather, Matthew mainly emphasizes Jesus' death in terms of example and service. He claims that in Matthew "atoning death and the idea of a vicarious suffering do not play a central role."³⁶

Jesus' Death: An Undeveloped Theme

Some scholars fail to acknowledge or emphasize Matthew's unique contribution to the atoning significance of Jesus' death. They think that what Matthew offers is borrowed from Mark and thus his contribution is neglected. Vincent Taylor wrote a couple of books on the subject of Jesus' death. One of them was entitled *Jesus and His Sacrifice: A Study of the Passion-Sayings in the Gospels*.³⁷ Taylor explains his work as "a careful investigation of the Passion-sayings, with a view to discovering how Jesus interpreted His suffering and death."³⁸ He focuses his attention on Mark, Luke, 1 Corinthians 11:23-25, and John. As one can see, he basically ignores Matthew's unique contribution to this subject. Since no passion saying exists in M according to Taylor, he simply looks at Matthew in terms of his changes to Mark. Yet, what he offers is not very

³⁴Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 546.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 409.

³⁷Vincent Taylor, *Jesus and His Sacrifice: A Study of the Passion-Sayings in the Gospels* (London: Macmillan, 1948). Other works by Taylor related to Jesus' death include *The Atonement in New Testament Teaching*, 2nd ed. (London: Epworth, 1945) and *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: A Study in New Testament Teaching* (London: Macmillan, 1941).

³⁸Vincent, *Jesus and His Sacrifice*, vii.

much. Even Matthew's significant addition of "for the forgiveness of sins" in 26:28 is only given a single paragraph, and Taylor argues that this phrase does *not* limit forgiveness to Jesus' death.³⁹

Kenneth Grayston's book, *Dying, We Live: A New Inquiry into the Death of Christ in the New Testament*, examines what the various books of the New Testament have to say about Christ's death.⁴⁰ Interestingly, he begins with Paul's writings because he claims that Jesus said "very little about his death" and thus it was not understood until post-Easter.⁴¹ Yet, when he comes to the Gospels, he minimizes the emphasis that Matthew places on the atoning significance of Jesus' death. For instance, concerning the Matthean addition of "for the forgiveness of sins" in 26:28, he simply states, "Matthew is a collector and arranger of material. When his liturgical tradition presents him with the statement that Christ's blood is poured out for the forgiveness of sins, he records it even if it does not match his previous teaching—reflected in the liturgical prayer of Jesus—that forgiveness is available to those who repent and forgive others."⁴² In light of 28:16-20, he says, "Matthew ends where his interest really is, not with the death and resurrection but with the teaching of Jesus."⁴³ He does not think that Matthew has a developed theology of atonement, and he argues that he adds nothing to Mark's understanding. He says, "But Matthew has nothing to add to Mark's understanding of the death of Christ—if indeed he grasped it."⁴⁴ Thus, he deals at great length with Mark's

³⁹Ibid., 127; see also 79-80.

⁴⁰Kenneth Grayston, *Dying, We Live: A New Inquiry into the Death of Christ in the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

⁴¹Ibid., 6.

⁴²Ibid., 353.

⁴³Ibid., 227; see also 354.

⁴⁴Ibid., 236.

Gospel, while simply sprinkling brief comments about Matthew and Luke along the way. Thus, in Grayston's work Matthew's understanding of the death of Jesus is neglected and minimized.

Raymond Brown's work, due to its layout, also neglects Matthew's unique contribution to Jesus' atoning death. His work includes two massive volumes on the death of Jesus in the Gospels.⁴⁵ No one interested in Jesus' death in the Gospels and especially in the passion narratives can neglect Brown's work on this subject. However, in two ways his work reveals why a dissertation like the one proposed here is worthy of pursuit. First, as the subtitle reveals Brown only addresses passages that begin with Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane and end with him being placed in the tomb. He does not even examine the Last Supper section and Jesus' comments on the bread and the wine (e.g., Matt 26:28). Second, Brown approaches the Gospels from a horizontal viewpoint rather than from a vertical viewpoint.⁴⁶ He does not deal with what Matthew has to say about the passion as much as he does what the Gospel writers as a whole have to say about the passion. He does have brief sections on what, for instance, Matthew contributes, but it is contained within a structure that goes through the passion narrative section by section rather than Gospel by Gospel. Thus, the unique emphases of the Gospel writers can be lost within this structure. I hope to do two things in contrast to Brown's work: to look at Jesus' death throughout the Gospel and to look at it within Matthew's story alone.

Jesus' Death: The Dawning of the New Age

For some, Jesus' death in Matthew is primarily about the dawning of the new age. The emphasis, according to them, is not on atonement but on the eschatological

⁴⁵Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave*, 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1994).

⁴⁶Gurtner, *Torn Veil*, 127 n. 165.

significance of Jesus' death. Delvin Hutton wrote a dissertation on the theology of Matthew's passion narrative entitled "The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Mt 27:51b-53): A Study of the Theology of the Matthean Passion Narrative."⁴⁷ He argues for an eschatological significance of Jesus' death in Matthew in light of the events recorded in 27:51b-53. His method entails a redactional study of Matthew's passion narrative along with a history of the tradition to determine Matthew's unique contribution to the passion narrative. He states his thesis as follows: "The prodigies which accompanied the crucifixion of Jesus, epitomized in the resurrection of the holy ones, were a testimony by the evangelist Matthew to the inbreaking of the Messianic Age with its attendant resurrection of the saints of God and, thereby, to the eschatological significance of Jesus' passion and death."⁴⁸

In contrast to the focus of my dissertation, Hutton focuses entirely on a few verses in the passion narrative rather than on Matthew's view of Jesus' death throughout his Gospel. However, Hutton does provide a few comments about other passages in Matthew at the end—comments that diminish the atoning significance of Jesus' death. Hutton emphasizes the eschatological significance of Jesus' death in Matthew's Gospel, yet while doing so he denies a soteriological understanding of Jesus' death. For instance, Hutton does not think that Matthew viewed Jesus' death as a vicarious atonement for sins.⁴⁹ Even in light of 1:21, 20:28, and 26:28, Hutton belittles a soteriological understanding of Jesus' death. He says that 1:21 does not relate to Jesus' atoning death, 20:28 is not representative of Matthew's independent understanding of the cross, and 26:28 is the result of liturgical influence rather than being from Matthew himself.⁵⁰ Thus,

⁴⁷Delvin D. Hutton, "The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Mt 27:51b-53): A Study of the Theology of the Matthean Passion Narrative" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1970).

⁴⁸Ibid., 15.

⁴⁹Ibid., 161-67.

⁵⁰Ibid., 162-63, 64, 66.

he states, “We must conclude that none of the passages examined support the traditional soteriological interpretation as Matthew’s dominant theology of the passion and death of Jesus. This is corroborated by the fact that none of the Matthean passion predictions (16:21; 17:22f.; 20:18f.; 26:2) contain statements concerning the expiatory significance of Jesus’ death and that in the First Gospel the Servant concept of Deutero-Isaiah is not related to Jesus as the suffering one, but rather as miracle worker (8:17; 12:17-21).”⁵¹ He goes on to say, “Thus for Matthew the passion of Jesus is nothing less than the necessary prelude to the parousia of the Son of Man.”⁵² I hope to correct Hutton’s negative appraisal of Matthew’s understanding of Jesus’ death by showing that Matthew does view Jesus’ death as an atonement for sin while also viewing it in relation to the inauguration of the new age.

Donald Senior wrote his dissertation on Matthew’s passion narrative in 1972 at Louvain University. A few years later an adaptation of that work was published entitled *The Passion Narrative According to Matthew: A Redactional Study*. This is a very valuable work on Matthew’s presentation of Jesus’ passion. Working on the assumption of Markan priority, Senior explains Matthew’s particular contribution to the passion narrative. Thus, it is not a traditional commentary on the passion narrative that deals with historical background material; rather, it focuses on Matthew’s unique presentation of the passion in relation to Mark, hence its subtitle. In doing so, Senior contributes much to our understanding of Matthew’s view of Jesus’ death. The limitation of Senior’s work is that it deals exclusively with the passion narrative. It does not extensively address the death of Jesus throughout Matthew’s Gospel. Moreover, it emphasizes the eschatological significance of Jesus’ death to the neglect of its atoning value.⁵³

⁵¹Ibid., 166-67.

⁵²Ibid., 173.

⁵³Senior, *Passion Narrative*, 62, 311-12.

Senior's second work on the death of Jesus in Matthew, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew*, is a more popular work, which focuses on the theology of Jesus' death rather than on redactional issues. The book is broken into three parts: (1) Preparation for the Passion, (2) The Passion of Jesus, and (3) The Passion of Jesus: Matthew's Message. Senior addresses the theme of Jesus' death in Matthew's Gospel leading up to the passion narrative. However, though helpful, the bulk of the book still addresses the passion narrative. Like his first work, it emphasizes how the death of Jesus ushers in the new age of salvation. For instance, he says, "In Matthew's theology the death and resurrection of Jesus stands at the center of sacred history, marking the inauguration of the new and decisive age of salvation."⁵⁴ What he fails to point out or emphasize, though, is the substitutionary nature of Jesus' death. Not once does he mention that Jesus bore God's wrath on our behalf. Evil is defeated at the cross, but Senior fails to explain how. I hope to correct this lack in Senior's work by dealing more extensively with the theme of Jesus' death throughout Matthew's Gospel and by explaining more clearly how Jesus' death atoned for sin in Matthew.

Jesus' Death: A Literary Theme

The focus for some scholars is on the literary value of Jesus' death in Matthew's narrative. Ronald Witherup wrote his dissertation on the climactic role of Jesus' death in Matthew 27, which is entitled, "The Cross of Jesus: A Literary-Critical Study of Matthew 27."⁵⁵ As the subtitle suggests, Witherup engages in a literary-critical investigation of Matthew 27 rather than a historical or redactional investigation. His focus is on the text of Matthew itself, not what is behind the text. His thesis is that chapter 27 is the most important section in Matthew's passion/resurrection narrative, and

⁵⁴Senior, *Passion of Jesus in Matthew*, 38; see also 135-36, 143, 157.

⁵⁵Ronald D. Witherup, "The Cross of Jesus: A Literary-Critical Study of Matthew 27" (Ph.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1985).

that in this chapter four themes from Matthew's Gospel are brought together: (1) salvation history, (2) prophecy and fulfillment, (3) discipleship, and (4) Jesus as the royal Son of God.⁵⁶ He also argues that the Son of God theme, or the christological theme, is the most important of the four, and that it is through this theme that the others are understood.⁵⁷ Witherup argues that the cross in Matthew 27 is central in the passion/resurrection narrative, and he also claims that the cross is the climactic point in the section beginning with 16:21.⁵⁸

One of the weaknesses of Witherup's work is that the atoning significance of Jesus' death is not emphasized as much as Matthew's narrative warrants. Witherup does stress the salvation historical shift that occurs at Jesus' death, a shift from an exclusively Jewish faith to the inclusion of the Gentiles.⁵⁹ However, the basis for this shift, i.e., the atoning death of Jesus, is not examined in a thorough manner. For instance, he argues that the cry of dereliction is more about hope and victory than genuine despair. He fails to mention God's rejection or wrath in relation to Jesus' cry of dereliction.⁶⁰ Such treatment overlooks the fact that Jesus died in our place to release us from sin (see 20:28; 26:28). It appears that his intent of emphasizing the christological element in Matthew 27 has overshadowed the soteriological element at least in regard to Jesus' atoning death for sin. Another limitation, at least in relation to my purpose, is that his work focuses primarily on one chapter in Matthew. Though helpful in his comments about the climactic role of the cross in Matthew, his work is limited to the passion narrative and to

⁵⁶Ibid., xi, 311-13.

⁵⁷Ibid., 352-53.

⁵⁸Ibid., 251. Witherup follows Kingsbury's threefold outline of Matthew based on a similar phrase used in 4:17 and 16:21.

⁵⁹Ibid., 316-19.

⁶⁰Ibid., 273-74.

one chapter in that narrative.⁶¹ In contrast to Witherup's work, this dissertation focuses on passages throughout Matthew's Gospel that relate to Jesus' death and thus provides a comprehensive account of atonement in Matthew.

Dale Allison is one of the co-authors of a major three-volume commentary on Matthew's Gospel.⁶² Though this commentary is helpful in pointing out allusions to the Suffering Servant in Matthew's Gospel and in emphasizing the significance of Jesus' death in Matthew's narrative, it minimizes what we can know from Matthew about the meaning of Jesus' atoning death. It denies any Matthean contribution to *how* Jesus' death atones for sin. Davies and Allison write, "Even when 1.21 and 26.26-9 are taken into account it is impossible to construct a Matthean theory of the atonement. We have in the Gospel only an unexplained affirmation. But perhaps that is inevitable. For the ancients atonement and its attendant themes were firstly matters of experience, not rational reflection."⁶³

Allison denies that Matthew offers an explanation of Jesus' atoning death; thus, he focuses on the climactic theme of Jesus' death in Matthew's narrative instead. In an article entitled "Anticipating the Passion: The Literary Reach of Matthew 26:47-27:56," Allison argues that the passion narrative (along with the resurrection) serves as the climax of Matthew's Gospel.⁶⁴ He states, "In many ways the entire narrative leans forward, so to speak, to its end, so that the reader of Matthew 1-25 is never far from

⁶¹However, Witherup does have a brief section where he traces the theme of Jesus' death throughout Matthew's narrative (131-40). Yet, this section is focused more on his death as a literary theme; it fails to examine the theological, atoning significance of Jesus' death.

⁶²W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, ICC, 3 vols. (London: T & T Clark, 1988-97).

⁶³*Ibid.*, 3:100.

⁶⁴Dale C. Allison, Jr., "Anticipating the Passion: The Literary Reach of Matthew 26:47-27:56," *CBQ* 56 (1994): 701-14.

thinking of the ensuing chapters, 26-28.”⁶⁵ He even argues that the death of Jesus is one of the key theological themes in Matthew. His comments about the importance of this theme are helpful in reminding us of the need for further research on the subject of Jesus’ death in Matthew. Allison states,

There is no consensus regarding the central theological theme of the First Gospel. Jack Dean Kingsbury believes that the book is dominated by the title ‘Son of God’ and all that it connotes, whereas R. H. Fuller supposes that the First Evangelist was primarily concerned not with christology but with ecclesiology. R. T. France, on the other hand, offers that ‘the essential key to Matthew’s theology is that in Jesus all God’s purposes have come to fulfillment.’ Another suggestion has been made by Scot McKnight, according to whom there are four ‘major themes’ in the First Gospel: christology, the kingdom of heaven, salvation history, discipleship. I do not wish in this place to enter into detailed review of any of these proposals. I wish only to observe that they all suffer the disadvantage of not explicitly referring to the death of Jesus. How can this be correct? Jesus’ demise dominates the plot, it is referred to often (both directly and indirectly), it is foreshadowed in divers ways, and, alongside the resurrection, it concludes the book. It is, therefore, never far from the mind’s eye of the careful listener. One might, then, propose another theme as the center of Matthean thought: Jesus died and rose, or with a nod towards R. T. France, he died and rose to bring God’s purposes to fulfillment.⁶⁶

It may be asked why a Matthean scholar like Allison (or Powell or Luz) fails to recognize how Matthew explains not only the why but the how of atonement. I suggest it is in part due to the reluctance in giving full weight to the penal substitutionary aspect of atonement. Once one allows that Jesus atoned for sin by bearing God’s wrath on our behalf then the contribution that Matthew offers to atonement theology becomes clearer.

Jesus’ Death: An Atoning Sacrifice

Though some scholars recognize the atoning significance of Jesus’ death in Matthew, they do not give look at this theme throughout Matthew’s Gospel or they fail to allow Matthew’s unique emphasis to shine forth. Leon Morris has written important books on the subject of the atonement.⁶⁷ The most relevant work, though, for my topic is

⁶⁵Ibid., 701.

⁶⁶Ibid., 713. Allison goes on to suggest that rather than choosing one theme, Jesus’ death should be added to the list of major themes in Matthew (714).

⁶⁷E.g., Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,

The Cross in the New Testament.⁶⁸ It is a survey of New Testament teaching on the atonement. A lengthy chapter devoted to atonement teaching in Matthew and Mark is entitled “The Cross in Matthew and Mark.” Though it is a helpful chapter on what Matthew has to say about the death of Jesus, it does not allow Matthew’s contribution to the atoning death of Jesus to stand on its own, but rather is treated alongside of Mark. Morris does this, he states, because their treatment of the cross is so similar.⁶⁹ However, by combining Matthew and Mark, he fails to grapple with Matthew’s unique contribution to the subject of atonement within his particular narrative.

Yet, Morris does rightly emphasize the significance of the cross in both Gospels. In a statement similar to Kähler’s, he affirms, “It is not too much to say that the Gospels are books about the atonement.”⁷⁰ He also argues that the death of Jesus in these two Gospels is a substitutionary death where, as the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, Jesus bore God’s wrath on our behalf.⁷¹ He believes that both Gospels have a developed theology of the atonement. He states, “From all this it is apparent that these two evangelists have a very far-reaching understanding of the atonement, even though they do not choose to expound it in set terms...these writers do have a very great deal to say on the subject. It is simply untrue to affirm that they are not concerned with the significance of the cross.”⁷² Nevertheless, it is unfortunate that in this important work Morris failed to emphasize Matthew’s unique contribution to atonement theology.

John Paul Heil wrote *The Death and Resurrection of Jesus: A Narrative-*

1965); idem, *The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1983).

⁶⁸ Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965).

⁶⁹ Ibid., 15.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 13.

⁷¹ Ibid., 32, 39-41, 42-49, 54-55.

⁷² Ibid., 62.

Critical Reading of Matthew 26-28, which was published in 1991. Heil's work focuses primarily on the passion narrative in Matthew. He provides only a small section on the theme of Jesus' death leading up to the passion, where he looks at the infancy narrative, John the Baptist, conflict with Jewish authorities, the passion predictions, and the resurrection from the dead. Heil's work is a narrative-critical reading with a special focus on the implied reader. Though it provides insight into Matthew's passion narrative and the significance of Jesus' atoning death, it is a short work (only 118 pages including bibliography) and it primarily deals with the passion narrative.⁷³ His work does not give significant attention to passages dealing with Jesus' death preceding the passion narrative.

What may be the most recent work on the death of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel is *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus* by Daniel Gurtner, which was published in 2007. Gurtner attempts to explain the meaning of the torn veil in Matthew, which will also give insight into how Matthew understood Jesus' death and its significance. He points out that though each of the Synoptic Gospels records the torn veil in relation to Jesus' death, none of them explains its meaning. To discover the meaning he first looks at neglected Jewish background information in the Old Testament and in Second Temple and rabbinic sources. Yet, priority is given to the meaning of the veil in Matthew. His conclusion is that the torn veil in Matthew is an apocalyptic event that shows that open access is now available to God through Jesus' death—an access not available since the Garden of Eden.

In a sense, Gurtner's examination into the meaning of Jesus' death in Matthew is secondary to his search for the meaning of the torn veil. However, he does contribute

⁷³Concerning Jesus' atoning death, Heil argues that Jesus saves his people from their sins (1:21) by his death, and he believes that the use of Zech 13:7 in 26:31 presents God as the author of Jesus' death (*Death and Resurrection of Jesus*, 8, 40).

significantly to a Matthean understanding of Jesus' death.⁷⁴ We learn the following about Jesus' death in Matthew: it is related to his role or purpose, it is part of his identity, it is necessary and expected, he will be raised, his death is the death of an innocent prophet like John the Baptist, it is imminent, it occurs by crucifixion, it is instigated by the Jewish leaders, it serves as a ransom, it results from betrayal, and it results in the forgiveness of sins.⁷⁵ He argues that 1:21 and 26:28 serve as an *inclusio* in Matthew to show that salvation and the forgiveness of sins result from Jesus' death.⁷⁶ He even believes that 27:42 may indicate "a degree of penal substitution."⁷⁷ He succinctly states, "Matthew's portrayal of Jesus' death is explicit as a wilful, atoning act by which people are rescued from their sins."⁷⁸ Though Gurtner's work on the torn veil does contribute to our understanding of Jesus' atoning death in Matthew, it is not a study dedicated to this issue in particular. Its main focus is the meaning of the torn veil in Matthew.

Conclusion

This review of previous research has shown that the unique contribution that Matthew makes to a theological understanding of Jesus' death is typically ignored or denied. If the death of Jesus in Matthew is studied, it is often done in the context of the passion narrative and the atoning significance of his death is generally overlooked. Too often Mark's presentation of Jesus' death is allowed to overshadow Matthew's unique contribution. What is needed is a thorough examination of Jesus' atoning death throughout Matthew's Gospel. As Joel Green helpfully explains, "Any treatment of

⁷⁴Gurtner, *Torn Veil*, esp. 126-37.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 136-37.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 127-30.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 137.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*

Jesus' death in the First Gospel must move beyond the boundaries of Matthew's passion narrative."⁷⁹ My goal in this dissertation is to do just that, to show that a theological understanding of Jesus' death is present in Matthew and that it pervades his Gospel. I intend to show that Matthew offers unique contributions to the atoning significance of Jesus' death.

⁷⁹Joel B. Green, "Death of Jesus," in *DJG*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 154.

CHAPTER 2
ATONEMENT PRIOR TO THE
PASSION NARRATIVE
PART 1

He Will Save His People from Their Sins (1:18-25)

This chapter and the next will examine four key passages in Matthew's Gospel related to Jesus' atoning death, passages that occur prior to the passion narrative. The first passage to be examined is 1:18-25, which recounts the birth of Jesus Christ. This passage explains how Joseph became the legal father of Jesus by naming him (v. 25), which in turn made Jesus a legitimate heir of David (vv. 1-17).¹ With the proper Davidic credentials, Matthew presents Jesus as the Messiah, the promised deliver of God's people (vv. 1, 16-17). As the Messiah, Jesus has a God-given role to fulfill. That role is spelled out in verse 21 where an angel tells Joseph what to name Jesus and how his name will encapsulate his mission. The angel said, "She will give birth to a son, and you will give him the name Jesus for he will save his people from their sins" (v. 21). The name Jesus ("Yahweh is salvation") spelled out his mission: to save his people from their sins. In Luke's Gospel the angel also identifies Jesus' name (though the angel tells Mary in this instance, see 1:31), yet the angel does not explain the reason for the choice of this name. Only in Matthew's Gospel is Jesus' name explained in order to state that his mission was to save his people from their sins. The significance of this is found not only in its uniqueness but also in that it shows that Matthew's Gospel begins with a clear emphasis on Jesus' mission, a mission which I will argue was fulfilled at the cross. If this

¹R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 47; Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*, 2nd ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 53, 138-39.

interpretation is correct, then that means that Jesus' saving death is not downplayed or simply relegated to the passion narrative in Matthew's Gospel; rather, his death is emphasized from the beginning and is presented as the very means by which Jesus accomplishes his God-given mission.

The focus of this section will be on verse 21 and what it says about Jesus' mission in Matthew. I will first explain the significance of this verse in Matthew's narrative. Then, I will deal with issues related to his mission such as the identity of "his people" and of the sins from which they needed saving. Finally and most importantly, I will explain how Jesus saved his people from their sins, i.e., by his atoning death.

A Programmatic Statement

The angel's statement in verse 21 is not only unique to Matthew; it also serves as a programmatic statement in his narrative. By programmatic, I mean that this verse establishes the mission of Jesus, which in turn sets the stage for the rest of Matthew's narrative and thus determines how his narrative is to be read.² His narrative is to be read as the story of how Jesus provides salvation for his people. As George Wesley Buchanan says about this verse, "This is a basic theme of the entire Gospel according to Matthew."³ The significance of 1:21 in the narrative is supported by the following factors. First, the pronouncement is strategically located at the beginning of the Gospel and thus sets the tone for the remainder of the narrative. After the genealogy (vv. 1-17), Matthew records

²On the programmatic significance of 1:21 in Matthew's narrative, see Mark Allan Powell, "The Plot and Subplots of Matthew's Gospel," *NTS* 38 (1992): 195; Warren Carter, "To Save His People from Their Sins (Matt 1:21): Rome's Empire and Matthew's Salvation as Sovereignty," *SBLSP* 39 (2000): 381, 397; Minoru Nakano, "Jesus the Savior of God's People from Sin: A Study of Matthew's Soteriology" (Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate University, 2001), 4, 117; Martin Hasitschka, "Matthew and Hebrews," in *Matthew and His Christian Contemporaries*, LNTS 333, ed. David C. Sim and Boris Repschinski (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 90; Lidija Novakovic, *Messiah, the Healer of the Sick: A Study of Jesus as the Son of David in the Gospel of Matthew*, WUNT, 2nd ser., vol. 170 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 63-64, 73-75.

³George Wesley Buchanan, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The Mellen Biblical Commentary (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1996), 1:82.

the birth of Jesus (vv. 18-25), and it is within this description of his birth that the angel's pronouncement is found (v. 21). As Warren Carter writes, "The verse, located in the Gospel's opening chapter, exercises a 'primacy effect' whereby content located at the beginning of the Gospel shapes its audience's expectations, understandings, and questions throughout the whole work."⁴ Similarly, Donald Versepunt states, "The key position of this angelic revelation at the outset of the story forbids us to underplay its importance for deciphering the remainder of the narrative."⁵ Throughout the narrative the reader is led to ask how Jesus saves his people from their sins.

Second, the announcement comes from an angel and thus represents the voice of God. Angels play a critical role in Matthew's Gospel during the events surrounding Jesus' birth and childhood (1:20, 24; 2:13, 19) and also during the resurrection narrative (28:2, 5). The only other place where angels are involved within the narrative of Matthew is when they come to attend Jesus after his temptations in the wilderness (4:11). Jesus mentions angels on a number of occasions primarily in connection with the final judgment (13:39, 41, 49; 16:27; 24:31; 25:31).⁶ The activity of angels within the narrative, though, is mainly at the beginning during the events surrounding Jesus' birth and childhood and again at the end after he is resurrected. In both places, the angel provides a revelatory word related to Jesus: who he is and what he will do, how to protect him, or the announcement that he is risen. In each case, the angel's word is considered God's word and thus accurate and authoritative.⁷

⁴Warren Carter, *Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), 76.

⁵Donald J. Versepunt, "The Davidic Messiah and Matthew's Jewish Christianity," *SBLSP* 34 (1995): 108. For a look at the significance of how each Gospel begins, see Morna D. Hooker, *Beginnings: Keys that Open the Gospels* (London: SCM, 1997).

⁶Other times when Jesus mentions angels are 18:10; 22:30; 24:36; 26:53; cf. 4:6; 25:41.

⁷See, e.g., Luke 1:19; Rev 1:1; 22:16. For more on the role of angels in imparting divine revelation, see Maxwell J. Davidson, *Angels at Qumran: A Comparative Study of 1 Enoch 1-36, 72-108 and Sectarian Writings from Qumran*, *Journal for the Study of Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series* 11

Third, the angel's announcement has to do with the naming and purpose of the main character of the narrative. The main character of Matthew's Gospel is Jesus Christ. His Gospel begins with a genealogy of Jesus, then discusses his birth, baptism and temptations in the wilderness, then recounts his teaching and miracles, after which it concludes with his death, resurrection, and authoritative commission to his followers. In the Bible a person's name was significant (cf. 1 Sam 25:25). This is especially true with Jesus since he is the main character of Matthew's Gospel and his name was given by an angel. The angel said to call him Jesus "for he will save his people from their sins." Ἰησοῦς is the Greek form of יְהוֹשֻׁעַ ("Joshua"), a Hebrew name that along with its shortened form יֵשׁוּעַ meant "Yahweh is salvation."⁸ Thus, Jesus' name reflected his mission which was to save his people from their sins.⁹ As David Seeley expresses it, "In this sense, he is what he does: salvation."¹⁰ Matthew presents Jesus as the Savior of God's people. The emphatic use of αὐτός in 1:21 along with its juxtaposition to Jesus emphasizes this point: it is *he*, i.e., Jesus, who will save his people from their sins.¹¹ In light of the significance of Jesus' name and its connection to his mission, whenever that name appears in Matthew's narrative and it appears over 150 times, it would remind the reader of his mission to save his people from their sins.¹²

(Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 34-35, 74-78, 310-11.

⁸For more on the Hebrew background of Ἰησοῦς, see Werner Foerster, "Ἰησοῦς," in *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 3:289-90.

⁹According to Sir 46:1, the same was true with Joshua. It reads, "Joshua son of Nun was mighty in war....He became, as his name implies, a great savior of God's elect" (NRSV).

¹⁰David Seeley, *Deconstructing the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 22.

¹¹W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, ICC (London: T & T Clark, 1988-97), 1:210; Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 77 n. 30.

¹²Mark Allan Powell, *God with Us: A Pastoral Theology of Matthew's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 3, 5; Warren Carter, *Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist*, rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 169.

Fourth, it is a surprising announcement. It is surprising because it says that Jesus the Messiah will save his people from their *sins*, and there is no mention of political or national liberation in this announcement or in the rest of Matthew. This is surprising and unusual because it emphasizes messianic salvation from sin, which Ulrich Luz says is “unusual as a Jewish hope.”¹³ Brian Nolan even says, “That mankind is saved from sin through Jesus the Christ is without precedent.”¹⁴ Now there was not a single, uniform messianic expectation among Jewish people in Jesus’ day; however, a reoccurring, central idea was that the Messiah would defeat Gentile enemies and establish peace in Israel.¹⁵ John J. Collins writes, “The messiah was, first of all, a warrior prince, who was to defeat the enemies of Israel.” He goes on to state, “This concept of the Davidic messiah as the warrior king who would destroy the enemies of Israel and institute an era of unending peace constitutes the common core of Jewish messianism around the turn of the era.”¹⁶ Thus, the Jewish people expected their Messiah to save them from Roman tyranny; yet, Jesus’ mission was to save them from their sins, not from their enemies. This implies that their real enemy was their own sin rather than Rome. The strangeness of this announcement about the Messiah saving from sin would influence how Matthew’s Gospel was read, particularly how it was read or heard by a Jewish audience.

Last and most importantly, though 1:21 says that Jesus will save his people

¹³Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 95.

¹⁴Brian M. Nolan, *The Royal Son of God: The Christology of Matthew 1-2 in the Setting of the Gospel*, *Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis* 23 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 129 n. 1.

¹⁵See, e.g., *Pss. Sol.* 17:21-25; 4 *Ezra* 12:31-34; 2 *Bar.* 39-40, 72; 1 *En.* 62:1-2.

¹⁶John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature*, Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 13, 68. Similarly, N. T. Wright states concerning first-century Jewish expectation, “The main task of the Messiah, over and over again, is the liberation of Israel, and her reinstatement as the true people of the creator god. This will often involve military action” (*The New Testament and the People of God*, vol. 1 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992], 320). See also Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 201; France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 54.

from their sins, it does not tell how.¹⁷ This appears to be intentional. Matthew tells us who will do the saving (Jesus), who will be saved (his people), and what they will be saved from (their sins). Yet, at this point he does not tell us how Jesus saves: he does not specify the means of salvation. That will be explained as the narrative unfolds. Boris Repschinski points out that in 1:21 three future tense verbs with direct objects are used with increasing significance and length: she will bear a son, you shall call his name Jesus, and he will save his people from their sins. Since the first two are fulfilled in chapter one, the reader expects the other one to be fulfilled as well. The lack of fulfillment in chapter one leads the reader to discover in Matthew's narrative how and when Jesus saves his people from their sins.¹⁸ Thus, not only is the statement in 1:21 unique to Matthew's Gospel, it is critically important for reading his narrative. Matthew 1:21 is a programmatic statement in his Gospel.

Who Are His People?

Having established the significance of 1:21 in Matthew's narrative, it is now time to examine this verse in more detail. Though 1:21 explains that Jesus will save his people from their sins, a number of questions need to be asked and not just how he will save them. Mark Powell explains, "In other words, as soon as we have established that Jesus' mission is to save his people from their sins, we will have to ask, Who are his people? What are their sins? and, How will he save them?"¹⁹ These three questions will serve as an outline for the rest of this section on 1:21.

First, who are his people? There is no scholarly consensus on the identity of

¹⁷Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 1:210; Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Christbook: Matthew 1-12*, vol. 1 of *Matthew: A Commentary*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 31-32; Daniel M. Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, SNTSMS 139 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 128.

¹⁸Boris Repschinski, "For He Will Save His People from Their Sins' (Matthew 1:21): A Christology for Christian Jews," *CBQ* 68 (2006): 254.

¹⁹Powell, *God with Us*, 5.

λαός in 1:21. Some think it refers to Israel,²⁰ while others see it as a reference to the church (i.e., people who follow Jesus comprising both Jews and Gentiles).²¹ To say that they are *his* people shows some type of connection to Jesus. It could mean the Jewish people because Jesus himself was a Jew and he came to be their Messiah. Yet, it could also refer to his people in the sense of his followers.

The most convincing argument for interpreting “his people” in 1:21 as a reference to Israel is the use of λαός in the rest of Matthew.²² This word is used 14 times in Matthew.²³ In seemingly every other place it is used in Matthew, λαός refers to the Jewish people. However, in a couple of these instances the word is used in a context that also speaks of Gentiles. For instance, the reference to λαός in 4:16 apparently speaks of the Jewish people, particularly those in Capernaum (4:13-14); however, it occurs in a quotation from Isaiah 9:1-2 that mentions “Galilee of the Gentiles” (4:15), and so the reference here possibly broadens the meaning of λαός to include Gentiles or at least

²⁰E.g., Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 95; Joachim Gnilka, *Das Matthäusevangelium*, HTKNT (Freiburg: Herder, 1986-88), 1:19; Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 97; Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News according to Matthew*, trans. David E. Green (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975), 31; Carter, “To Save His People,” 390; Repschinski, “For He Will Save His People,” 255-56; Donald Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1990), 118-19; Petri Luomanen, *Entering the Kingdom of Heaven: A Study on the Structure of Matthew’s View of Salvation*, WUNT, 2nd ser., vol. 101 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 225-26; Nakano, “Jesus the Savior,” 5, 118; Hasitschka, “Matthew and Hebrews,” 88, 91.

²¹E.g., Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, WBC, vol. 33A (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 19-20; Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 1:210; Francis W. Beare, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 71; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 23-24; Powell, “Plot and Subplots of Matthew’s Gospel,” 196 n. 27; John P. Meier, *The Vision of Matthew: Christ, Church and Morality in the First Gospel* (New York: Paulist, 1979), 54 n. 17, 200; Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 131; Novakovic, *Messiah, the Healer of the Sick*, 66.

²²Luomanen makes this argument stating, “Since all the other occurrences of the word λαός are clearly connected to the historical people of Israel, Mt 1:21 is to be understood accordingly, in light of Matthew’s salvation history: Jesus is to save his own people, that is, the historical Israel, from their sins” (*Entering the Kingdom*, 225-26).

²³See 1:21; 2:4, 6; 4:16, 23; 13:15; 15:8; 21:23; 26:3, 5, 47; 27:1, 25, 64.

foreshadows Jesus' mission to the Gentiles via his followers (28:18-20).²⁴ In 4:23, Jesus teaches and preaches throughout Galilee and heals all the diseases "among the people" there. This refers to the Jewish people in Galilee, yet again it is immediately followed by a reference to Gentiles (4:24-25). This is significant in light of Matthew's narrative that contains a pervasive Gentile inclusion theme. This theme begins as early as the opening verses in Matthew where four women are mentioned in the genealogy who all have Gentile connections.²⁵ This theme also concludes Matthew's Gospel with a commission to make disciples of "all nations" (28:18-20). In between these two emphases on Gentile inclusion, there are numerous places in Matthew where this same theme is emphasized.²⁶

Along with the pervasive Gentile inclusion theme in Matthew, other factors also argue against *λαός* being an exclusive reference to Israel in 1:21. For one thing, if *λαός* exclusively refers to Israel in 1:21, then Jesus' God-given mission failed for in the end his people rejected him (27:25). It is highly unlikely that Matthew would write his Gospel in a way that resulted in Jesus' mission being a failure. Moreover, it is possible that 1:21 is an intentional allusion to Psalm 130:8. Robert Gundry, for instance, argues that it is a free translation of Psalm 130:8.²⁷ Yet, if this is the case, why does Matthew change "Israel" in Psalm 130:8 to "his people" in 1:21? Such a change seems a little odd and unexpected if Israel is intended in the first place (cf. 2:6). Gundry gives the

²⁴Luomanen concedes this point, but he does not think it carries much weight since the use of *λαός* in 4:16 comes directly from the LXX (*Entering the Kingdom*, 225 n. 18). Yet, I fail to see why this matters since Matthew inserted the LXX reading and he did it possibly to make the point that God's people includes more than historical Israel.

²⁵Keener, *Gospel of Matthew*, 78-81. The presence of Gentiles in Jesus' genealogy shows that Gentiles also comprise God's people, and significantly this point is made prior to the mention of "his people" in 1:21.

²⁶See 2:1-12; 3:9; 4:15-16; 8:5-13; 12:18, 21; 15:21-28; 21:43; 22:8-10; 27:54.

²⁷Robert H. Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel*, NovTSup 18 (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 127-28. For others who think that 1:21 was influenced by Ps 130:8, see Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 1:209; Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 19; Nolan, *Royal Son of God*, 128; Hasitschka, "Matthew and Hebrews," 91.

following reason, “For ‘Israel’ Mt substitutes ‘his people,’ perhaps in view of the catholicity of the Church.”²⁸ As Novakovic points out, since Matthew has no qualms about mentioning Jesus’ ministry to Israel (see 15:24), a credible reason for the change from “Israel” to “his people” is lacking.²⁹ Thus, it seems that Matthew may have intentionally made the change because he understood “his people” to refer to both Jews and Gentiles. At the very least, the change to “his people” involves a certain level of ambiguity that would give Matthew room to use this phrase to refer to Jesus’ followers rather than to the Jewish people alone.

One other reason suggests a broader interpretation of λαός in 1:21, and that is Jesus’ statement in 21:43. Jesus said, “Therefore, I say to you that the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.” Interestingly, the word for “people” here is ἔθνος rather than λαός; plus, ἔθνος is singular rather than plural and so is not the typical way of speaking of Gentiles. Thus, rather than simply referring to Gentiles, this may be a reference to the church.³⁰ Regardless, it certainly speaks of a group of people that includes Gentiles. Thus, though a different word is used, this verse still shows that God’s people involves more than Jews: Gentiles also will be part of God’s people. In light of this verse, Davies and Allison state, “So the majority of commentators are probably correct to identify ‘his people’ with the ecclesia of both Jew and Gentile.”³¹

Thus, though initially λαός would be understood as a reference to Israel, as Matthew’s narrative unfolds the reader discovers that “his people” includes more than Jews (e.g., 3:9-10; 8:10-12). It involves Gentiles as well; it involves all those who are

²⁸Gundry, *Use of the Old Testament*, 128.

²⁹Novakovic, *Messiah, Healer of the Sick*, 64-65.

³⁰Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 325; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, WBC, vol. 33B (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 623.

³¹Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 1:210.

connected to Jesus and only those who are connected to Jesus. As D. A. Carson states, “The words ‘his people’ are therefore full of meaning that is progressively unpacked as the Gospel unfolds. They refer to ‘Messiah’s people.’”³² Jesus did come to save the Jewish people (10:5-6; 15:24-26), yet by the end of Matthew we learn that the Jewish people have largely rejected Jesus and the way has been opened for Gentiles to come into the kingdom (21:43; 28:18-20).³³ Thus, “his people” is defined not by nationality or genealogical descent but by connection to Jesus Christ. His people are his followers, namely, the church.

What Are Their Sins?

The second question to answer is: from what sins did Jesus come to save his people? Nakano points out four different words that Matthew uses for sin. These words are *ἁμαρτία* (“sin,” e.g., 1:21; 3:6), *παράπτωμα* (“transgression,” 6:14-15), *ἀνομία* (“lawlessness, wickedness,” e.g., 7:23; 24:12), and *ὀφείλημα* (“debt,” 6:12).³⁴ Matthew also uses *ἁμαρτωλός* (“sinner,” e.g., 9:13; 11:19), yet his most common word to describe sinful behavior is *πονηρός* (“evil, wicked”). This word is used 26 times in Matthew, though 2 instances speak of bad fruit (7:17-18) and 4 most likely speak of the devil as the evil one (5:37; 6:13; 13:19, 38).³⁵ Matthew understood that humanity, including Israel, is

³²Donald Carson, *Matthew*, in vol. 8 of *EBC*, ed. Frank E. Gæbelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 76. Similarly, France states, “*His people* will be in the first instance the Jews (Matthew uses this term *laos* particularly for the chosen race), but the man who wrote 28:19 must have expected a wider application ultimately” (*Matthew*, TNTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985; reprint, 2000], 78). See also Richard Beaton, *Isaiah’s Christ in Matthew’s Gospel*, SNTSMS 123 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 94 n. 36.

³³Salvation for the Gentiles does not mean that salvation is no longer available to Israel. Matthew’s Gospel ends with Jesus’ commission to make disciples of all nations, and Israel would be considered one of those nations. As France states, “The commission is of course to go far *beyond* Israel, but that does not require that Israel be excluded” (*Gospel of Matthew*, 1114). Yet, the commission does relativize Israel’s unique status, for now Israel is simply one of the nations to be evangelized.

³⁴Nakano, “Jesus the Savior,” 110.

³⁵So, e.g., NIV, NRSV, NAB.

sinful and in need of God's salvation. The fact that his people are sinful and thus need to be saved shows up at the very beginning of Matthew's narrative in the genealogy. That genealogy is made up of notorious sinners like Manasseh (1:10); it also includes sinners like David who committed adultery with Uriah's wife, Bathsheba (1:6). Plus, Matthew emphasizes the Babylonian exile which speaks of Israel's sin and broken relationship with God (1:11-12, 17).³⁶ Jesus confirms this by speaking twice of "the lost sheep of Israel" (10:6; 15:24) and twice of "a wicked and adulterous generation" (12:39; 16:4). Being lost and wicked, they need to be saved and brought back into God's fold. Thus, the genealogy sets the stage for the need of salvation.

Interestingly, Matthew does not say that Jesus will save his people from their sin, but from their sins (plural). Thus, Powell states, "No thought is given here to a universal condition of fallen humanity that must be transcended if humans are to enjoy fellowship with God. The concern, rather, is with individual offenses by which people violate the will of God."³⁷ However, this interpretation minimizes the depth of human sinfulness as presented in Matthew's Gospel. It is true that salvation from sins entails the forgiveness of sins (9:2, 6; 26:28) and deliverance from God's wrath (3:7). But in light of the pervasive nature of sin in Matthew's Gospel, it is likely that he understood salvation from sins also to mean being delivered from the power or control of sin.

Matthew's view of sin is rather far-reaching.³⁸ It flows out of the heart (15:19); it affects our motivation (6:1-6, 16-18), our attitude (5:22), our thoughts (5:28; 9:4), and our speech (5:37; 12:34), not to mention our deeds. Thus, sin is not simply a wrong action; it is something that originates in the heart and affects who we are. Sin also

³⁶Repschinski, "For He Will Save His People," 256.

³⁷Powell, *God with Us*, 6-7.

³⁸Nakano wrongly minimizes the powerful grip of sin in Matthew's Gospel. He states, "Matthew does not think that the human heart itself is deterministically evil. In other words, one can choose to do good by one's free will, in spite of one's evil inclinations in the heart" ("Jesus the Savior," 111). The pervasive nature of sin in Matthew as well as the need for Christ's atoning death argue against his view.

has a connection with an evil power outside of us, and that powerful figure is the devil. Matthew records how the devil tempted Jesus to sin, though he was unsuccessful (4:1-11). He also says that sins like dishonesty come from the evil one, who is the devil (5:37). That is why Jesus taught us to pray not only to be kept from temptation but also to be delivered from the evil one (6:13). Thus, to be saved from sins requires not only being forgiven of our sins but also being delivered from the tyranny of our sins. In light of Matthew's description of sin, it would be hard to think that one is saved from sins unless one's life is emancipated from the pervasive influence that sin has on a person's life (cf. 20:28).

Understanding Matthew's view of sin helps us to steer clear of wrongly assuming that Jesus came to provide salvation from Rome's tyranny. As Davies and Allison state, "Jesus saves his people 'from their sins'. This underlies the religious and moral—as opposed to political—character of the messianic deliverance. Liberation removes the wall of sin between God and the human race; nothing is said about freedom from the oppression of the governing powers (contrast Ps. Sol. 17)."³⁹ Warren Carter thinks this understanding of salvation is too restricted. He argues that it is anachronistic to separate political salvation from spiritual salvation. When Jesus came to save his people, they were under the foreign domination of Rome's power and thus a political salvation was intended.⁴⁰ He points to the political sins mentioned in the genealogy and the fact that Rome was under Satan's control (4:8). He also argues that the diseases Jesus healed were related to political oppression (4:23-25).⁴¹ Thus, the salvation Jesus brought

³⁹Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 1:210. Similarly, Beare states, "The promise of salvation which is carried in the name Jesus is defined in spiritual terms, as salvation from sin. There is an implicit repudiation of the notion that the function of the Messiah is to win an earthly dominion for Israel, or to deliver the nation from subjection to an alien power" (*Gospel according to Matthew*, 70-71). See also Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 19; France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 54.

⁴⁰Carter, "To Save His People," 380.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 390-91.

was not only spiritual and moral; it was also deeply political.⁴²

The typical Jewish expectation was that the promised Messiah would liberate Israel from its political enemies. All foreign, nationalistic oppression would be lifted and sovereignty would be restored to Israel. However, the statement that Jesus will save his people from their *sins* appears to argue against an overly political interpretation of salvation. Jesus' primary goal was to save his people from their sins not from Roman tyranny. Nowhere in Matthew does Jesus speak of Rome as the enemy. The enemy is always sin or Satan (e.g., 1:21; 6:12-13; 16:23). If anything, Rome is used to punish Israel when they destroy the Temple in response to Jesus' prophecy (24:2). Israel is not saved from Rome; Israel is defeated by Rome. Thus, neither the primary goal nor the means of salvation was political in nature. This does not mean that the salvation Jesus provided had no political implications. It certainly did. Along with his atoning death as his mission Jesus had the announcement of the kingdom of heaven as his message, and the latter certainly suggested that Rome's dominion would be short lived. Yet, Jesus did not come to overthrow Rome immediately or in the expected manner. In fact, his real focus was not Rome, but sin that separates his people from God. And the means of dealing with this problem, as I will now argue, was not political revolt but his atoning death.

How Will He Save Them?

As mentioned earlier, the angel's announcement in 1:21 does not specify *how* Jesus will save his people from their sins; it simply says that he will. Scholars disagree on how Jesus saves his people from their sins in Matthew. Davies and Allison mention various ways that Jesus saves his people: by his atoning death, his healing ministry, and his abiding presence. They suggest, "Perhaps, then, Matthew thought that Jesus saved his

⁴²For a full treatment of this issue, see Carter, *Matthew and Empire*.

people from their sins in a variety of ways.”⁴³ Along with his atoning death, Novakovic argues that Jesus’ healing ministry is the means of saving his people from their sins.⁴⁴ David Kupp emphasizes Jesus’ death and his abiding presence as the means of salvation in Matthew.⁴⁵ What these suggestions have in common is that they all mention Jesus’ atoning death, and they all mention something along with it as the means of salvation in Matthew. Yet, some minimize or even deny the role that Jesus’ atoning death plays in saving his people from their sins. Though Carter thinks that Jesus’ death is one answer to the question of how he saves his people from their sins, he does not think it is the only answer or even the final or ultimate answer.⁴⁶ Luomanen does not think that 1:21 relates to Jesus’ death at all. He states, “On the whole, then, it seems that in Matthew’s mind the omen of Jesus’ name was not connected to his sacrificial death but to his prophetic mission among the people of Israel. In Matthew’ view, Jesus was not sent to die for his people but to heal their diseases, preach repentance and lead them into eternal life through his authoritative interpretation and proclamation of the law.”⁴⁷

Contrary to Luomanen’s view, Jesus’ atoning death is the means of salvation in Matthew. Davies and Allison are probably right to suggest other means along with Jesus’ death, yet his death is the primary or ultimate way that Jesus provides salvation in Matthew’s Gospel. Three factors support a clear connection between salvation from sins and Jesus’ atoning death and in the process point to his death as the primary means of salvation. First is the use of σωζω in Matthew’s Gospel and its strategic placement in the

⁴³Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 1:210.

⁴⁴Novakovic, *Messiah, the Healer of the Sick*, 74.

⁴⁵David Kupp, *Matthew’s Emmanuel: Divine Presence and God’s People in the First Gospel*, SNTSMS 90 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 96-97.

⁴⁶Carter, “To Save His People,” 397.

⁴⁷Luomanen, *Entering the Kingdom*, 226.

context of Jesus' death (27:40, 42, 49). Second is the connection between salvation from sins and forgiveness of sins, of which the latter is clearly based on Jesus' atoning death (26:28). Last, the fact that Jesus' death (along with his resurrection) is climactic in Matthew's narrative points to it as the decisive element in providing salvation from sins. Thus, though Jesus teaches and heals, he ultimately provides salvation by his atoning death (20:28; 26:28).

σώζω in Matthew. σώζω is used 15 times in Matthew's Gospel.⁴⁸ What one discovers in Matthew is that Jesus' saving mission is multifaceted: he saves from sin (1:21), he saves from sickness and disease (9:21-22), he saves from danger (8:25; 14:30), and he saves eschatologically (10:22; 19:25; 24:13).⁴⁹ Yet, it is unwise to separate these forms of salvation too strictly. Matthew uses σώζω to describe the healing of a woman with a hemorrhage (9:21-22). Previous to this use, in the same chapter, there is an explicit connection between healing and the forgiveness of sins. Jesus said to the paralytic who was brought to him, "Be of good cheer, child, your sins are forgiven" (9:2). In this episode forgiveness of sins and healing of the body are intertwined (cf. Ps 103:3; Jas 5:15). Jesus proves his ability to forgive sins by healing the man. This relationship between forgiveness and healing fits well with Matthew's likely connection between Jesus' healing ministry and his atoning work on the cross (8:16-17). Thus, even when σώζω is used in connection with physical healing, it still relates to salvation from sins.

This connection is also seen in uses of σώζω where the disciples are saved from danger. Sin did not cause the storm on the sea; however, the disciples' plea to save them likely pointed to more than deliverance from natural disaster to Matthew's

⁴⁸See 1:21; 8:25; 9:21, 22 (2x); 10:22; 14:30; 16:25; 19:25; 24:13, 22; 27:40, 42 (2x), 49.

⁴⁹Luomanen divides the use of σώζω into two main categories: (1) salvation from affliction or disease (8:25; 9:21-22; 14:30; 27:40, 42, 49) and (2) eschatological salvation (10:22; 16:25; 24:13; 24:22). He does not place the use of σώζω in 1:21 or 19:25 into either category (*Entering the Kingdom*, 38-39). I think 19:25 is another occurrence of eschatological salvation.

community. It would be difficult to read a phrase like “Lord, save us” (8:25) without thinking of spiritual salvation as well (Acts 2:21; Rom 10:13), particularly in light of the similarly theologically loaded word for drowning (ἀπόλλυμι, “to perish”) used right after the disciples’ plea for salvation.⁵⁰ The same would be true with Peter praying for the Lord to save him while he was sinking in the water (14:30). Concerning eschatological salvation, this is salvation from God’s judgment which leads to eternal life, and thus it too is connected to salvation from sins (10:22; 19:25; 24:13; cf. 3:7). In the story about the rich young man, Matthew connects being saved (19:25) with gaining eternal life (19:16-17). Thus, salvation in Matthew primarily speaks of salvation from sins, which is the first way Matthew introduces salvation in his Gospel (1:21).

Interestingly, whenever a subject is used in relation to σώζω, it is Jesus who does the saving (1:21; 8:25; 14:30; 27:40, 42). In the case of 9:21-22, the woman’s faith is the subject yet it is clearly directed to Jesus who actually saves or heals her. In a few cases no subject is provided; it simply speaks of being saved (10:22; 19:25; 24:13, 22). The only other references are of a person who saves himself in the sense of preserving his own life in a sinful manner (16:25) and of Elijah saving Jesus from the cross, which of course did not happen (27:49). What is clear is that the one who saves in Matthew is Jesus. As Morris says about the emphatic nature of αὐτός in 1:21, it means that Jesus, i.e., “he and no other,” will save his people from their sins.⁵¹

⁵⁰Blomberg writes, “‘Save’ and perish (‘drown’) refer first of all to the disciples’ physical lives, but by Matthew’s time they have become the standard terms for spiritual salvation and destruction. Matthew may well intend a double entendre here” (*Matthew*, 149). Matthew uses ἀπόλλυμι several times to speak of those who are lost (10:6; 15:24; 18:14) as well as to speak of God’s judgment (10:28; cf. 10:39; 16:25). For others who interpret the plea, “Lord, save us,” as a reference to more than physical deliverance, see Luomanen, *Entering the Kingdom*, 225 n. 17; Werner Foerster, “σώζω et al.,” in *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 7:990; Michael Green, *The Meaning of Salvation* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1965; reprint, Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 1998), 116.

⁵¹Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992; reprint, 1999), 29.

Not only is it clear that Jesus alone saves in Matthew, but it is also clear that the basis of this salvation is his atoning death. Matthew makes this connection between salvation from sins and Jesus' death by strategically placing σωζω in the context of Jesus' death on the cross. People who passed by the cross sarcastically demanded that Jesus save himself to prove that he was the Son of God (27:40). The religious leaders protested that though Christ had saved others he could not save himself from crucifixion (27:41-42). This appears to be Matthew's way of showing us that Jesus saves via the cross. He cannot save himself and others at the same time because the way he saves others is by not saving himself: the way he saves others is by giving his life as a ransom for them on the cross (20:28). As Daniel Gurtner points out, "The 'saving' nature of Jesus' death is underscored even on the cross (27:42), where he is mocked for being unable to 'save' himself by coming down off the cross. The irony is that in remaining on the cross and dying, he is fulfilling his 'saving' role, which was depicted at the very outset of the first gospel."⁵² Similarly, Hagner states, "Matthew's readers, however, would not have missed the irony that it was in not saving himself that he *was* saving others (cf. σωζειν as used in 1:21)."⁵³ Jesus saved others by not saving himself, that is, by dying for them on the cross. Thus, it appears that Matthew's use of σωζω in the context of Jesus' death connects Jesus' saving mission to his atoning death.

Forgiveness of sins. An interesting fact about Matthew's use of σωζω is that after 1:21 this word is never explicitly used again in connection with sins. In fact, the only other place in the New Testament where σωζω is used in relation to sins is James 5:15, 20 (cf. Luke 1:77; 1 Tim 1:15).⁵⁴ However, since 1:21 speaks of Jesus saving his

⁵²Gurtner, *Torn Veil*, 137.

⁵³Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 839. See also Osborne, *Matthew*, 1035; Turner, *Matthew*, 663; Novakovic, *Messiah, the Healer of the Sick*, 74.

⁵⁴This fact is pointed out by Novakovic (*Messiah, the Healer of the Sick*, 73 n. 247), yet she includes Luke 1:77 as well though it uses σωτηρία rather than σωζω.

people from their sins (ἁμαρτία), it may prove helpful to see how Matthew speaks of dealing with the sin problem in his Gospel. Interestingly, every place where ἁμαρτία is used in Matthew's Gospel it is used in relation to the forgiveness of sins (3:6; 9:2, 5-6; 12:31; 26:28). Though 3:6 speaks only of confessing sins, it is clear that they were confessing their sins in order to be forgiven. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus has the authority to forgive sins. He said to the paralytic, "Be of good cheer, child, your sins are forgiven" (9:2). Later Matthew records Jesus speaking of his death as the means of forgiveness. Jesus says, "For this is my blood of the covenant that is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (26:28). Matthew alone adds the phrase "for the forgiveness of sins" to Jesus' statement here at the Last Supper, and Matthew alone leaves out the explicit reference to forgiveness in relation to John the Baptist's ministry (cf. Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). Thus, it appears that Matthew connects the forgiveness of sins exclusively to Jesus.⁵⁵ It is Jesus alone who forgives sins and he does this based on his atoning death. As France says, "Jesus' mission is 'to save his people from their sins' (1:21), and the theme of God's undeserved forgiveness recurs throughout the gospel, until it is focused in the important inclusion in Matthew's version of the words at the last supper of the phrase 'for the forgiveness of sins' (26:28)."⁵⁶

Thus, Matthean salvation involves the forgiveness of sins—forgiveness that removes the barrier that separated God from his people. Thus, the names "Jesus" ("Yahweh is salvation") and "Immanuel" ("God with us") are connected (1:21, 23): Jesus saves from sin so that the barrier that impeded fellowship with God's presence is now removed. On this connection John Meier states, "Matthew may also be hinting that sin is precisely what separates God from his people and that therefore Jesus, the savior from

⁵⁵Senior, *Passion of Jesus in Matthew*, 69; Gurtner, *Torn Veil*, 134; Novakovic, *Messiah, the Healer of the Sick*, 74 n. 249; Robert L. Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet: A Socio-Historical Study*, JSNTSup 62 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 57; Walter Wink, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition*, SNTSMS 7 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 36.

⁵⁶R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 269.

sin, is the one who makes God present to his people again.”⁵⁷ Our sins obstruct fellowship with God (Isa 59:1-2); therefore, we need to be forgiven in order to be restored to God’s favor and experience his presence. In a way, Jesus is Immanuel because he is first our Savior.

This exclusive connection of forgiveness to Jesus may seem absent in what is traditionally called the Lord’s Prayer (6:9-13). Here Jesus simply tells his disciples to ask the Father to forgive them without mentioning himself as a mediator or without any reference to his atoning death. Does this mean that forgiveness comes from God the Father without any connection to Jesus or his death? David Seeley thinks so. He states, “Here is outlined a coherent scheme of salvation, which lacks all reference to Jesus. Forgiveness takes place between a person and God the Father. Whether it occurs or not depends on the person’s own initiative. There is no need here for Jesus or his atoning death.”⁵⁸ Seeley does think that certain passages point to the atoning significance of Jesus’ death (e.g., 26:28), yet he thinks that Matthew had different views of how salvation was accomplished—views that cannot be reconciled with one another.⁵⁹

Seeley incorrectly holds that Matthew’s view of salvation is incoherent and in particular that Jesus’ words about forgiveness in chapter 6 omit any need for his atoning death. The following reasons reveal that Seeley’s view is incorrect. First, it is Jesus himself who tells them to pray this prayer. They do not come up with this prayer themselves; Jesus tells them how to pray and assures them of the Father’s forgiveness.

⁵⁷Meier, *Vision of Matthew*, 54 n. 18. Similarly, Hasitschka writes, “Bringing together the two namings of Jesus in Mt. 1.21 and 1.22-23 offers the conclusion that salvation from sin through Jesus is at the same time the way into a new relationship with God which is marked by the experience that God is with us through the mediation of Jesus” (“Matthew and Hebrews,” 92). David Bauer also sees a connection between “Jesus” in 1:21 and “Immanuel” in 1:23, yet he argues that the connection means that God dwells among his people in Jesus in order to save them (*The Structure of Matthew’s Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*, JSNTSup 31 [Sheffield: Almond, 1988], 125-26).

⁵⁸Seeley, *Deconstructing the New Testament*, 40.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 21, 48-49.

Second, it is true that we should seek forgiveness from the Father, yet that forgiveness is mediated to us through Jesus Christ (9:2, 6). When the Lord's Prayer is read in light of Matthew's narrative, it becomes clear that the forgiveness for which the disciples pray is based on Jesus' atoning death (26:28). Thus, because Jesus did not mention his death at this time does not mean that he thought his death was irrelevant to the issue of forgiveness. He did not have to provide a complete theology of forgiveness at this moment.

The climactic role of Jesus' death. The death of Jesus Christ is not an appendix in Matthew's Gospel; it is foreshadowed from the beginning and its theme permeates his Gospel.⁶⁰ Joel Green writes, "The cross casts its shadow across the entirety of Matthew's Gospel."⁶¹ Allison says, "Throughout the First Gospel, then, the end, so often foreshadowed and prophesied, is like the Jesus of John's Gospel: it draws all to itself."⁶² From the beginning the Gospel is heading in the direction of the cross: the cross is climactic in Matthew's Gospel. This emphasis on the cross does not set aside the importance of the resurrection or the Great Commission in Matthew's Gospel. However, as Powell points out, Matthew's passion narrative is developed and drawn out, while the resurrection and the Great Commission seem a little hurried.⁶³ Not only does the passion narrative contain two chapters to the one chapter of the resurrection; but in terms of

⁶⁰For the climactic role of Jesus' death in Matthew's Gospel, see, e.g., Powell, "Plot and Subplots of Matthew's Gospel," 187-204; Dale C. Allison, Jr., "Anticipating the Passion: The Literary Reach of Matthew 26:47-27:56," *CBQ* 56 (1994): 701-14; J. D. Kingsbury, "The Significance of the Cross within the Plot of Matthew's Gospel: A Study in Narrative Criticism," in *The Synoptic Gospels: Source Criticism and the New Literary Criticism*, BETL 110, ed. Camille Focant (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1993), 263-79.

⁶¹Joel B. Green, "Death of Jesus," in *DJG*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 155. Similarly, speaking of Matthew's Gospel, Senior writes, "The shadow of the cross of Jesus falls across the entire Gospel" (*Passion of Jesus in Matthew*, 17).

⁶²Allison, "Anticipating the Passion," 702.

⁶³Powell, "Plot and Subplots in Matthew's Gospel," 197.

verses, there are 141 verses in the passion narrative and only 20 verses dedicated to the resurrection and the Great Commission.⁶⁴ It is not that Matthew belittles the resurrection; it is simply that his primary focus is on the passion.

This emphasis on the cross becomes apparent from the beginning of his Gospel. The themes presented in the birth narrative prepare the reader for what takes place in the passion narrative.⁶⁵ The following are a few examples. Jesus' mission is to save his people from their sins (1:21), and he accomplishes this task through his death on the cross (20:28; 26:28; 27:41-42). The magi worship Jesus as king of the Jews (2:2), and Pilate writes on the inscription over Jesus' head, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews" (27:37). Just as Herod attempts to kill Jesus (2:16-18), so do the religious leaders in Jerusalem, and they succeed (26:57-68; 27:11-26). No wonder John Meier referred to Matthew's birth narrative as "a proleptic passion narrative."⁶⁶ Thus, as early as the birth narrative we see Matthew laying the groundwork for the presentation of Jesus' death as the climax of his Gospel.

The death of John the Baptist foreshadows Jesus' death in Matthew's Gospel. The message of John the Baptist and the message of Jesus are identical: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has drawn near" (3:2; 4:17). Since they share the same message, it is likely that they will share the same fate. And the fate that John faces is execution (14:1-12). Thus, the death of John the Baptist foreshadows Jesus' death.⁶⁷ Allison points out several ways in which John's death is similar to Jesus': John is killed under Herod the

⁶⁴It is true that 27:57-66 is dedicated to Jesus' burial and the guard at the tomb, both of which prepare for the resurrection. However, only chap. 28 specifically addresses Jesus' resurrection.

⁶⁵See John Paul Heil, *The Death and Resurrection of Jesus: A Narrative-Critical Reading of Matthew 26-28* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 7-14.

⁶⁶Meier, *Vision of Matthew*, 32.

⁶⁷For a helpful discussion on how John the Baptist's death foreshadows Jesus' death, see Senior, *Passion of Jesus in Matthew*, 23-26. See also Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet*, 59; Wink, *John the Baptist*, 27-28.

tetrarch and Jesus under Pilate the governor, both are seized (κρατέω, 14:3; 21:46, etc.), both are bound (δέω, 14:3; 27:2), both are thought to be prophets, which causes Herod as well as the chief priests and Pharisees to fear the crowds (14:5; 21:46), both Herod and Pilate reluctantly execute John and Jesus (14:6-11; 27:11-26), and both John and Jesus are buried by disciples (14:12; 27:57-61).⁶⁸ Though some of these comparisons would hold true with any that are executed (e.g., being seized and bound), it seems clear that Matthew intends John's death to foreshadow Jesus' execution on the cross. The similarities and wording are too precise to be missed. As John Paul Heil states, "The passion and death of John the Baptist despite his being a prophet respected by the people prepares the reader for the similar fate of Jesus."⁶⁹

The Pharisees begin to plot Jesus' death in 12:14. Later in the same chapter Jesus implicitly refers to his approaching death by speaking of the sign of Jonah. He said, "For as Jonah was in the belly of the huge fish for three days and nights, so the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth for three days and nights" (v. 40). To be in the heart of the earth speaks of his death; to be there only three days and nights speaks of his resurrection. Even before the Jonah saying Jesus had already implicitly referred to his death in the saying about the bridegroom being taken away (9:15). As the Gospel unfolds though, Jesus begins to predict his death more often and more explicitly (16:21; 17:12, 22-23; 20:17-19). Jesus said that he came "to give his life as a ransom in place of many" (20:28). That was his God-given mission. Jesus warned of his coming death in a parable about wicked tenants (21:33-44). The landowner sent his son thinking the tenants would respect him; yet they killed his son instead (vv. 38-40). This parable only motivated the Pharisees to want to arrest him (vv. 45-46).

The passion narrative begins with Jesus' words, "You know that the Passover

⁶⁸Allison, "Anticipating the Passion," 702.

⁶⁹Heil, *Death and Resurrection of Jesus*, 14.

is two days away, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified” (26:2). After Jesus makes this prediction then the religious leaders plot how to kill Jesus (26:3-5). Matthew is showing that what happens to Jesus is not an accident or something that takes him by surprise. Rather, it is Jesus’ authoritative prediction that sets into motion the plot to take his life.⁷⁰ During the Passover feast, Jesus predicts that he will be betrayed and he affirms that his betrayal and death will fulfill Scripture (26:24, 54, 56). In fulfillment of Scripture, Jesus would pour out his blood for many for the forgiveness of sins (26:26-28; cf. Isa 53). Jesus’ death is so significant and climactic in Matthew’s Gospel that it results in the tearing of the temple veil, the resurrection of many saints, and the confession of Gentiles (27:51-54).

In light of the climactic nature of Jesus’ death in Matthew’s Gospel, it makes sense that his death is the means by which he fulfills his God-given mission of saving his people from their sins. His mission is not complete until he gives his life as a ransom for many (20:28); his mission is not complete until he pours out his blood for the forgiveness of sins (26:28). Presenting the cross as the climax of his Gospel is Matthew’s way of showing that Jesus saves his people from their sins by dying for them on the cross. As Bauer states, “The climactic movement towards the cross indicates, further, that by dying as the obedient Son of God, Jesus gives his life as a ransom for many (20.28), thus saving his people from their sins (1.21; 26.28).”⁷¹ Jesus acts as a Savior throughout Matthew’s Gospel, but not until his atoning death does Jesus truly save his people from their sins. As Powell explains, “The plot of Matthew’s Gospel describes how this purpose [to save his people from their sins] came to be fulfilled, to some extent in Jesus’ ministry, but, ultimately, only in his death.”⁷² Similarly, John Paul Heil states, “It is by his death, then,

⁷⁰Donald P. Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew: A Redational Study*, BETL 39 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1975), 19.

⁷¹Bauer, *Structure of Matthew’s Gospel*, 144; see also 66, 102.

⁷²Powell, “Plot and Subplots in Matthew’s Gospel,” 196.

that Jesus finally completes his role as the one who ‘will save his people from their sins.’”⁷³

Conclusion

This unique angelic announcement in 1:21 serves as a programmatic statement in Matthew’s Gospel and emphasizes the importance of Jesus’ saving mission and death from the start. Though the announcement does not explicitly refer to Jesus’ atoning death, the rest of Matthew’s Gospel makes it clear that it is by his death that Jesus ultimately saves his people from their sins. Thus, the significance of the atonement is not secondary to Matthew’s interests. He begins his Gospel by focusing our attention on Jesus’ mission to die for the sins of his people to provide salvation. He begins his Gospel by focusing on the cross.

The Baptism of Jesus (3:13-17)

The next passage to address is 3:13-17, which describes Jesus’ baptism by John. After presenting John the Baptist’s ministry (3:1-12), Matthew tells how Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River. At first John was reluctant to baptize Jesus saying that he needed to be baptized by Jesus instead. Yet, Jesus insisted saying, “Allow this to happen now, for thus it is proper for us to fulfill all righteousness” (v. 15). So John consented and baptized him. When Jesus came out of the water, the heavens were opened and Jesus saw the Spirit of God come down like a dove and rest upon him. Then a voice from heaven spoke, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased” (v. 17).⁷⁴ Thus, at his baptism Jesus is publicly declared to be the Messiah and anointed by

⁷³Heil, *Death and Resurrection of Jesus*, 8.

⁷⁴It is debated whether what Jesus experienced at his baptism (i.e., the opened heavens, the descending dove, and the heavenly voice) was private and visionary or a public phenomenon. Mark’s version reads like a private experience (1:9-11), while Luke’s account seems more public and objective for it speaks of the Spirit coming down “in bodily form like a dove” (3:22). Matthew’s change from “you are my Son” to “this is my Son” may show that he viewed this as an objective experience; however, the change could have been for the reader’s sake. For more on this issue, see Joan E. Taylor, *The Immerser: John the*

the Spirit to carry out the work of the Messiah, a work that he begins after his temptations in the desert (4:1-11, 17). Jesus' baptism is also recorded in Mark 1:9-11 and Luke 3:21-22.⁷⁵ The unique additions found in Matthew's version include John's attempt to avoid baptizing Jesus, Jesus' statement about fulfilling all righteousness, and the switch from "you are my Son" to "this is my Son" (v. 17).

Jesus' baptism, as presented by Matthew, prepares the way for his atoning death and foreshadows it. It is not that Jesus saves people by being baptized; it is rather that his baptism was an essential step toward his atoning mission and points toward it. Since Jesus' baptism commences his ministry as the Messiah, a connection between his baptism and death would be significant.⁷⁶ It would show that his atoning death is fundamental to his saving mission. Three factors in Matthew reveal a connection between Jesus' baptism and his death: (1) Jesus was baptized on our behalf as an identification with sinners, (2) at his baptism Jesus said it was necessary "to fulfill all righteousness" (3:15), which, as I will argue, speaks of fulfilling God's plan of salvation, and (3) the heavenly pronouncement spoken at his baptism incorporates Old Testament allusions that reveal that Christ's mission was to suffer and give his life on behalf of his people. All three of these factors point to a Matthean connection between Jesus' baptism and his atoning death.

Baptist within Second Temple Judaism (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 264-69; Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 358-59; France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 118-19.

⁷⁵The Gospel of John does not explicitly mention Jesus' baptism by John. However, John 1:31-33 records John's testimony that the Spirit came down as a dove and remained on Jesus, which is an implicit reference to his baptism.

⁷⁶Osborne helpfully points out that at his baptism Jesus was not adopted by God as his Son, but commissioned to fulfill his role as Messiah. He states, "This can hardly be an adoption scene, as some have said. It is clearly a commissioning scene. Jesus was Son of God before this (cf. 1:23; 3:15 [*sic*, 2:15])" (*Matthew*, 125 n. 25). Similarly, see Blomberg, *Matthew*, 82.

Why Jesus Was Baptized by John

The historicity of Jesus' baptism by John is basically unquestioned in biblical scholarship. In historical Jesus studies, it is deemed as one of the most certain things that we know about Jesus. Günther Bornkamm states, "The fact that Jesus let himself be baptised by John belongs to the data of his life which cannot be doubted."⁷⁷ E. P. Sanders considers Jesus' baptism to be one of eight "almost indisputable facts" about Jesus' life.⁷⁸ The criterion of embarrassment strongly supports its historicity, for it is very unlikely that followers of Christ would make up such a story. It is unlikely because Jesus' baptism could cast doubt on his sinless, divine status, and it could appear to give John a superior role in relation to him. The reason Matthew recorded John's attempt to avoid baptizing Jesus may have been due to this potential embarrassment.⁷⁹ Some may have misunderstood Jesus' baptism to mean that he needed forgiveness of sins himself. Thus, Matthew's Gospel makes it clear that Jesus did not need forgiveness. So why was Jesus baptized by John? What was the significance of this event? To answer these questions we must begin with an examination of the meaning of John's baptism. Understanding why John baptized people in general will shed light on why he baptized Jesus in particular.

Though baptism was not a new idea to the Jewish people of John's day, the manner and significance of his baptism was unique. John's baptism, though similar to Jewish proselyte baptism and the Qumran washings, had unique characteristics that set it apart from both of these practices. Jewish proselyte baptism was a one-time, initiatory event for Gentiles to enter the Jewish faith; yet John's baptism, though initiatory, was not

⁷⁷Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Irene McLuskey, Fraser McLuskey, and James M. Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 49.

⁷⁸E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 11. For more on the historicity of Jesus' baptism by John, see John P. Meier, *Mentor, Message and Miracles*, vol. 2 of *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 100-05.

⁷⁹Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet*, 57-58, 60, 164; Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 359.

self-administered and was intended for the Jewish people. Thus, John's ministry was directed to Jewish people who needed to repent in order to be ready for God's coming kingdom. The Qumran washings were eschatological in orientation as was John's baptism; however, unlike the Qumran washings, his baptism was not self-administered and it was a one-time event rather than a daily washing.⁸⁰ Thus, John blazed a unique trail in introducing a one-time, initiatory baptism of repentance to the Jewish people that he himself administered.

According to Matthew, John's baptism was an act of repentance in preparation for the coming kingdom of heaven. Three times John speaks of repentance (3:2, 8, 11), and the last time he specifically connects repentance to his baptism. He states, "I baptize you with water for repentance" (3:11). So to be baptized by John was to demonstrate repentance before God: it was a tangible act that showed remorse for sin and a dedication to do God's will. As Beasley-Murray states, "The baptism to which John called the Jewish people was therefore a 'baptism of conversion'; it marked the individual's turning from sin to God that he might henceforth live in obedience to Him."⁸¹ This act of repentance was connected to God's approaching kingdom (3:2). Thus, two emphases were predominant in John's baptism: a call to repentance and the announcement that God's kingdom was near.⁸² Morality was rooted in eschatology: John baptized people for repentance in order to prepare them for God's kingdom and judgment. This means that John's ministry assumed that Jewish people were not ready for God's visitation and

⁸⁰For a helpful, concise discussion on the relation of John's baptism to Jewish proselyte baptism and the Qumran washings, see D. S. Dockery, "Baptism," in *DJG*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 56-57. For more extensive discussion, see Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet*, 95-162, 206-13; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962; reprint, 1984), 1-44.

⁸¹Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 34.

⁸²Carson, *Matthew*, 99-100, 108; Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 32.

thus needed to repent in order to escape God's judgment (3:9-10).⁸³

Thus, the purpose of John's baptism was to prepare sinners for God's coming kingdom. So does this mean that Jesus saw himself as a sinner who needed to repent? It appears that Matthew did not think so, for he presents Jesus as one who pronounces forgiveness on others rather than needing forgiveness himself.⁸⁴ Matthew's exalted view of Jesus undercuts the idea that he saw his baptism as an act of repentance for his own sin. Early in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is presented as Immanuel ("God with us," in 1:23). He is able to forgive sins (9:1-8), he is worthy of worship (14:33), and one day he will judge the world (25:31-46). This type of person would not need forgiveness for his own sins. In the wilderness Jesus proved his ability to defeat Satan and sin by resisting repeated, powerful temptations without giving into sin even once (4:1-11). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus appears to distance himself from those who are sinful when he says, "You who are evil" (7:11), not "we who are evil."⁸⁵ During the passion narrative, Judas, Pilate's wife, and Pilate himself all recognized Jesus' innocence (27:4, 19, 24). Thus, there is no hint in Matthew that Jesus needed forgiveness for sins he had committed. So if not for his own sin, why did Jesus allow John to baptize him?

John Nolland lists 9 suggestions as to why Jesus was baptized with the least likely being that Jesus was seeking forgiveness for his own sin.⁸⁶ One suggestion that

⁸³Ben Witherington, "John the Baptist," in *DJG*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 386.

⁸⁴The New Testament consistently affirms Jesus' sinless status (see, e.g., 2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 1 Pet 2:22; 1 John 3:5). Notice that this is affirmed by Paul, Peter, John, and the author of Hebrews.

⁸⁵Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 47.

⁸⁶John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 152. The 9 suggestions are (1) Jesus felt led by God to do so, (2) he was convinced that John's ministry was legitimate, (3) he wanted to publicly embrace radical obedience to God, (4) he was identifying with sinners that he came to save, (5) he was joining the Baptist movement, (6) he came for assurance in light of the trials that awaited him, (7) he came to be anointed as Messiah by the one he viewed as Elijah, (8) he did it as an act of repentance just in case he had sinned (though he was not aware of any sin in his life), and (9) he sought forgiveness for his sins. For a similar list that includes sources, see Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 1:321-23.

initially seems plausible is that Jesus was baptized in order to join the Baptist movement and to be a part of the awakening that was occurring in Israel.⁸⁷ Jesus respected John enough to allow him to baptize him; plus, he praises him and his ministry later in Matthew (11:7-15). So maybe Jesus was baptized in order to join the renewal that was taking place in Israel without necessarily acknowledging his own sin. The problem with this view is that John's baptism was a baptism of repentance, and so Jesus would have understood his baptism as an act of repentance. Thus, his baptism must be connected to the sin issue in one way or another.⁸⁸ It is not enough to say that he was simply becoming John's follower or was embracing the renewal that was occurring in Israel. To be baptized by John meant that one was repenting from sin. The question, then, is: for whose sin was Jesus repenting? This is where Matthew's narrative sheds light on the issue.

Matthew's narrative suggests that Jesus came to identify with Israel, and so in being baptized he was identifying with their sin and repenting from it. This identification preserves the intent of John's baptism which is a baptism of repentance; yet in Jesus' case, his repentance was not for his own sins but for the sins of his people. He was representing them already in his baptism as the one who came to die for them. Matthew's narrative supports this viewpoint. Matthew presents Jesus as one who came to identify with his sinful people in order to save them. Like the people of Israel, Jesus went down to Egypt and then returned to Israel. According to Matthew, this was done in fulfillment of prophecy. He writes, "And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I called my son'" (2:15). Matthew takes a prophecy from Hosea and applies it to Jesus' sojourn in Egypt even though it originally referred to Israel.

⁸⁷E.g., Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel according to Mark*, BNTC (London: A & C Black, 1991; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 44.

⁸⁸Beasley-Murray explains, "A baptism which is characterized as a conversion baptism for the forgiveness of sins becomes radically different if there is neither conversion nor request for forgiveness" (*Baptism in the New Testament*, 48).

He could do this because Jesus came to represent and embody Israel as God's Son. And as God's Son, Jesus came to succeed where Israel failed. Israel failed repeatedly in the wilderness during its forty-year sojourn, yet during his forty days in the wilderness Jesus refused to succumb to Satan's temptations (4:1-11). Jesus so identified with his sinful people that he took up their sicknesses (8:14-17) and ate with those who were unworthy (9:9-13; 11:19). Ultimately, of course, Jesus identified with them by giving his life as a ransom in place of many (20:28).⁸⁹

The same appears to be true of his baptism. He was not baptized for his own sins; rather, he was baptized for the sins of his people. His messianic ministry, which was inaugurated at his baptism, was a ministry where he would save his people from their sins (1:21), and he would do this ultimately by his atoning death (26:28). Thus, his baptism prepares the way for his death, points toward it, and embodies it. As J. A. Gibbs explains, "Though without personal need of baptism, Jesus receives John's baptism and thus identifies himself, son of God, with sinful Israel. He quite literally stands with sinners. Jesus' baptism not only shows that he sums up Israel in existence and deeds; Jesus' baptism means also that he is with and for Israel to save."⁹⁰ Similarly, France states, "As Jesus is baptized along with others at the Jordan, he is identified with all those who by accepting John's baptism have declared their desire for a new beginning with God. He thus prepares for his own role in 'bearing their weaknesses' (8:17) and eventually 'giving his life as a ransom for many' (20:28) through shedding his blood for their forgiveness (26:28). If he is to be their representative, he must first be identified with them."⁹¹ At his baptism Jesus already begins to identify with his people's sin by

⁸⁹For more on the theme of Jesus as the new Israel in Matthew, see Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 70-79, 172-73; Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 95-97.

⁹⁰J. A. Gibbs, "Israel Standing with Israel: The Baptism of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel (Matt 3:13-17)," *CBQ* 64 (2002): 521.

⁹¹France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 120. For a similar interpretation of Jesus' baptism as an

being baptized on their behalf, and later at his death he will complete this identification which will provide salvation for his people.⁹² His baptism is not salvific for him or for his people, but it is an essential step in providing salvation for his people. Understanding this, Jesus spoke of his baptism as an act that would “fulfill all righteousness.” It is to this important statement that we now turn.

To Fulfill All Righteousness

Matthew alone records that John the Baptist tried to avoid baptizing Jesus. In response to John’s refusal, Jesus said, “Allow this to happen now, for thus it is proper for us to fulfill all righteousness” (3:15). This statement by Jesus is only found in Matthew’s Gospel. It is also the first time Jesus speaks in Matthew’s Gospel, the first time Matthew uses δικαιοσύνη (“righteousness”) in his Gospel, and the only place where Matthew uses this word in connection with Jesus. Thus, it would appear to be an important statement by Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel. Yet, despite its importance it certainly is not easy to interpret. Davies and Allison go so far as to acknowledge that a final interpretation is beyond our reach. After stating a number of possible options, they admit, “No firm decision can be reached. We remain in the dark.”⁹³ So what did Jesus mean by this enigmatic phrase, “to fulfill all righteousness”?⁹⁴ To help with this we must look at how

identification with sinners, see Keener, *Gospel of Matthew*, 132; Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 57; Morris, *Gospel according to Matthew*, 65; Tom Wright, *Matthew for Everyone: Part One* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 21-22; Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 76-77, 172.

⁹²It is interesting that on a few occasions Jesus used baptism terminology to speak of his upcoming death (Mark 10:38; Luke 12:50). This may lend strength to the idea that Jesus saw a connection between his baptism and his death (so Morris, *Gospel according to Matthew*, 65 n. 61). However, Matthew fails to record Jesus’ mention of his death as a baptism in parallel passages (20:23; 10:34). The reason for this omission is difficult to ascertain. Yet, it is not weighty enough to undermine Matthew’s portrayal of Jesus’ baptism as an identification with sinners, an identification that foreshadows his atoning death. For the argument that it does undermine Matthew’s connection of Jesus’ baptism with his death, see Benno Przybylski, *Righteousness in Matthew and His World of Thought*, SNTSMS 41 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 93.

⁹³Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 1:323.

⁹⁴For a list of options, see Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 1:325-27.

Matthew uses δικαιοσύνη (“righteousness”) in his Gospel.

The most popular interpretation today is that righteousness in Matthew consistently refers to the moral conduct demanded by God. Righteousness speaks of man’s behavior rather than of God’s saving activity. For instance, Ulrich Luz states, “I assume that in Matthew *dikaïosynē* always refers to the righteousness demanded by God and required of man’s actions.”⁹⁵ Benno Przybylski’s monograph, *Righteousness in Matthew and His World of Thought*, helped to establish the view that righteousness in Matthew always speaks of moral conduct. He argued that Matthew’s use of δικαιοσύνη was influenced by its meaning in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Tannaitic literature. The Old Testament only indirectly influenced its meaning for Matthew via the above mentioned Jewish literature, and Paul did not influence Matthew’s use at all. Matthew’s understanding of righteousness is seen, according to Przybylski, in how this word is used in redactional contexts where the context was not already established for Matthew. These two contexts are 5:20 and 6:1, and in both of these places δικαιοσύνη clearly means right conduct. If Matthew used δικαιοσύνη to refer to moral conduct in contexts where he was free to use the term as he wanted, then it is likely that he used it in the same way in other contexts as well especially when the moral conduct interpretation is at least plausible.⁹⁶ Thus, he concludes, “In all seven passages righteousness is seen as God’s demand upon man. Righteousness refers to proper conduct before God.”⁹⁷

Not everyone, though, has been persuaded by Przybylski’s case. Donald

⁹⁵Ulrich Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 35 n. 22.

⁹⁶Przybylski, *Righteousness in Matthew*, 3-4, 79-89, 105.

⁹⁷Ibid., 99. For the interpretation that δικαιοσύνη in Matthew’s Gospel consistently refers to moral conduct, see also Georg Strecker, *Der Weg der Gerechtigkeit: Untersuchung zur Theologie des Matthäus*, 3rd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971), 153-58, 179-81; David Hill, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings: Studies in the Semantics of Soteriological Terms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 124-30.

Hagner, for instance, takes another view.⁹⁸ He criticizes Przybylski for overemphasizing the influence of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Tannaitic literature in interpreting Matthew's use of righteousness and underemphasizing the direct influence of the Old Testament. Though acknowledging the danger of reading Paul into Matthew, Hagner also warns of driving too great of a wedge between these two thinkers. Just as Paul could use righteousness language in various ways, so could Matthew. It is not necessary to pin Matthew down to a monolithic understanding or usage of righteousness. In fact, according to Hagner, Matthew uses δικαιοσύνη to refer to God's saving activity in 5:6, 6:33, and 21:32. And the context, Hagner believes, favors this use in 3:15 as well. If righteousness refers to conduct demanded by God, then what command is Jesus obeying at his baptism. For the Old Testament nowhere commands baptism. Furthermore, Jesus' one act of baptism could not fulfill "all" righteousness, for God certainly expected more from Jesus than simply being baptized.⁹⁹ These two reasons show why, according to Hagner, it is misguided to interpret δικαιοσύνη in 3:15 as conduct demanded by God. Instead, δικαιοσύνη in 3:15 refers to God's saving activity. Jesus fulfilled all righteousness in his baptism because his baptism was necessary for him to carry out God's saving plan.¹⁰⁰

So who is right—Przybylski or Hagner? Does Matthew use δικαιοσύνη in 3:15 in an ethical sense or in a soteriological sense?¹⁰¹ It may be helpful to begin by looking

⁹⁸Donald A. Hagner, "Righteousness in Matthew's Theology," in *Worship, Theology and Ministry in the Early Church*, ed. Michael J. Wilkins and Terence Paige, JSNTSup 87 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 101-20.

⁹⁹This element of Hagner's argument is weak. If righteousness refers to conduct demanded by God, then this phrase simply means that Jesus, who desired to fulfill "all" righteousness, could not even leave out this one act (so France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 120 n. 16).

¹⁰⁰Hagner, "Righteousness in Matthew's Theology," 110 n. 5, 101, 112-18.

¹⁰¹The following argue for an ethical sense in 3:15: Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 142; Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 1:327; France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 119; Beare, *Gospel according to Matthew*, 99; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 81; Carson, *Matthew*, 107; David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NCBC (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1972), 96; Luomanen, *Entering the Kingdom*, 209 n.

at each of the occurrences of δικαιοσύνη in Matthew. Matthew uses the word 7 times, and each time the occurrence is unique to his Gospel. Mark never uses the word, while Luke uses it once and John uses it twice both in contexts not found in Matthew.¹⁰² In 5 of the 7 occurrences in Matthew, the location is the Sermon on the Mount (chaps. 5-7). Three of these almost certainly refer to one's conduct (5:10, 20; 6:1). In 5:10, it speaks of being persecuted for righteousness, i.e., for one's righteous conduct. In 5:20, Jesus said that unless our righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law we will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Though he is demanding more than mere external righteousness, the verses that follow show that he is still speaking of a righteousness that involves our conduct or lifestyle (5:21-48). In 6:1, it refers to "acts of righteousness," namely, giving, praying, and fasting (6:2-16). Thus, in these three places δικαιοσύνη refers to the moral or religious conduct demanded by God.

However, it is not clear that the same meaning is found in 5:6 and 6:33. In 5:6, Jesus speaks of hungering and thirsting for righteousness. It is true that in this same chapter δικαιοσύνη is used to speak of right conduct (5:10, 20), which suggests a similar meaning in 5:6. However, the second beatitude speaks of mourning (5:4), which probably refers to mourning over hardships or persecution.¹⁰³ And then the last beatitude speaks of being persecuted (5:10). Thus, the immediate context of 5:6 seems to favor the

51; Jaques Dupont, *Les Béatitudes*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Gabalda: 1958-73), 225-45. For those who argue for a soteriological use of δικαιοσύνη in 3:15, see Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 140; John P. Meier, *Law and History in Matthew's Gospel*, AnBib 71 (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1976), 76-80; Heil, *Death and Resurrection of Jesus*, 14; Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 76-77; Oscar Cullman, *Baptism in the New Testament*, trans. J. K. S. Reid (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1950), 15-22; F. D. Coggan, "Note on St Matthew iii.15: "Αφες ἄρτι οὕτως γὰρ πρέπον ἐστὶν ἡμῖν πληρῶσαι πᾶσαν δικαιοσύνην," *ExpTim* 60 (1948-49): 258; Gibbs, "Israel Standing with Israel," 521-22.

¹⁰²See Luke 1:75; John 16:8, 10.

¹⁰³For example, commenting on 5:4, Davies and Allison state, "In sum, God's own are on the bottom, the wicked on the top. So mourning is heard because the righteous suffer, because the wicked prosper, and because God has not yet acted to reverse the situation" (*Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 1:448).

view that in response to persecution, Jesus' disciples long for God's justice or vindication on the last day.¹⁰⁴ This view could also be true with 6:33, where Matthew explicitly refers to *God's* righteousness. This passage is the only time where he speaks of God's righteousness, and so it could very well refer to his vindication and salvation. God's deliverance is something we seek along with his coming kingdom. Viewing righteousness in 5:6 and 6:33 as a reference to God's salvation fits nicely with how righteousness language is often used in the Old Testament, particularly in Psalms and Isaiah, to speak of God's deliverance of his people.¹⁰⁵ Matthew was steeped in Old Testament thought, which only strengthens the possibility that he could have used righteousness language in this way to speak of God's promised salvation, as appears to be the case in 5:6 and 6:33.¹⁰⁶

So what about the meaning of δικαιοσύνη in 3:15? Here is a unique case, the only place where righteousness is used of Jesus. Moreover, it is the one place where righteousness is used in connection with an important word in Matthew's Gospel, namely, πληρώω ("to fulfill"). Matthew almost always uses πληρώω to refer to the fulfillment of Scripture.¹⁰⁷ The only two places that clearly have nothing to do with Scriptural fulfillment are 13:48 and 23:32, the former being used to refer to a full net and the latter to filling up the measure of one's sin. John Meier has pointed out the

¹⁰⁴Luomanen states, "In my view, the occurrence in 5:6 (and perhaps 6:33) does not refer directly to human activity in carrying out God's will." Instead, he argues, δικαιοσύνη speaks here of "God's acting on behalf of the afflicted" (*Entering the Kingdom*, 85 n. 44). Similarly, Hagner states, "The righteousness in view in this case would involve the salvific activity of God wherein the suffering and the oppressed will be lifted up" ("Righteousness in Matthew's Theology," 112).

¹⁰⁵See, e.g., Pss 31:1 [30:2 LXX]; 35:24 [34:24 LXX]; 71:2 [70:2 LXX]; 143:11 [142:11 LXX]; Isa 45:21; 46:13; 51:5; 56:1.

¹⁰⁶In the case of 21:32, the meaning of δικαιοσύνη is somewhat ambiguous though it most likely refers to moral conduct since John the Baptist preached what God required of his people. So Keener, *Gospel of Matthew*, 509 n. 149; Carson, *Matthew*, 450; contra Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 614.

¹⁰⁷See 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 5:17; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 26:54, 56; 27:9.

significance of fulfillment language used in connection with δικαιοσύνη in 3:15. Though acknowledging that δικαιοσύνη in 5:10, 20, and 6:1 refers to moral conduct, he argues that in 5:6 and 6:33 it refers to the divine gift of salvation.¹⁰⁸ This opens the possibility of interpreting δικαιοσύνη in 3:15 soteriologically as well, which he says is strengthened by the use of πληρώω in connection with it. Thus, since Matthew almost always uses πληρώω to speak of prophetic fulfillment, he argues that fulfilling all righteousness in 3:15 means “to fulfill every detail of God’s eschatological plan for salvation, marked out beforehand in prophecy.”¹⁰⁹

Davies and Allison agree with Meier that πληρώω speaks of prophetic fulfillment in 3:15, yet with some hesitation they disagree with him over the meaning of δικαιοσύνη.¹¹⁰ Since, according to them, δικαιοσύνη refers to moral conduct in every other place in Matthew except possibly 5:6, δικαιοσύνη in 3:15 most likely refers to moral conduct as well. Jesus fulfills all righteousness by obediently fulfilling the prophecies of the Old Testament made about him, prophecies that are alluded to in 3:17. They explain, “Jesus, knowing the messianic prophecies of the OT, obediently fulfils them and thereby fulfils all righteousness. Because prophecy declares God’s will, to fulfil prophecy is to fulfil righteousness.”¹¹¹ Similarly, France argues that we should understand πληρώω in a salvation-historical manner, while interpreting δικαιοσύνη as doing what God requires.¹¹² Yet, in fulfilling prophecy, Jesus was fulfilling the roles of Messiah and Servant of the Lord, for 3:17 alludes to Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1 and to

¹⁰⁸Meier, *Law and History*, 77-78.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 79.

¹¹⁰Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 1:326-27.

¹¹¹Ibid., 327.

¹¹²France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 119-20. Osborne also understands “to fulfill all righteousness” in a salvation-historical sense while interpreting “righteousness” morally (*Matthew*, 123-24). Strangely though, he does not think that “to fulfill” is used here to speak of prophetic or Scriptural fulfillment. It simply means to “bring to completion” (123).

these two roles respectively. And as the Servant of the Lord, Jesus would die for the sins of his people (Isa 52:13-53:12). So fulfilling all righteousness speaks of more than simply obeying prophecy; it speaks of accomplishing God's saving plan—a plan that includes Jesus' baptism and culminates with his atoning death on the cross.¹¹³

The common rebuttal involves the following: this view reads Matthew through the lens of Paul, it goes against the clear use of δικαιοσύνη in other places in Matthew (e.g., 5:10, 20; 6:1), it does not explain why Jesus said, “It is proper *for us* to fulfill all righteousness,”¹¹⁴ and this interpretation is too subtle. Yet, these arguments are not persuasive. It is possible that Matthew and Paul both got their idea of righteousness from the same source, namely, the Old Testament. It is not necessary for δικαιοσύνη to mean the same thing throughout Matthew; it does not in Paul's writings.¹¹⁵ Concerning Jesus' statement that it is proper “for us” to fulfill all righteousness, John did play a significant role in Jesus fulfilling God's saving plan for he announced his coming and baptized him. Like Jesus', John's role was a fulfillment of prophecy and integral to God's redemptive plan (cf. Isa 40:3; Mal 3:1).¹¹⁶ Finally, what appears subtle to us may not have been subtle to first-century Jewish readers steeped in Old Testament thought. Thus, it is likely that fulfilling all righteousness refers to accomplishing God's saving plan, and if so, here

¹¹³It is also possible that δικαιοσύνη in 3:15 echoes Isa 53:11, where similar language is used. It reads, “By his knowledge my righteous [δίκαιος] servant will justify [δικαιόω] many, and he will bear their iniquities.” France, though denying the soteriological use of δικαιοσύνη in Matthew, does think that this word possibly echoes Isa 53:11, where the Servant identifies with the sin of his people as Jesus identified with them in baptism (France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 120-21; see also Morris, *Gospel according to Matthew*, 65). If so, this Old Testament allusion strengthens my argument that Jesus' baptism is connected to his role as the Suffering Servant who dies for the sins of his people.

¹¹⁴Concerning this statement, Carson writes, “Both Jesus *and* John must ‘fulfill all righteousness,’ which renders doubtful any theory that ties the righteousness too closely to Jesus' death” (*Matthew*, 107).

¹¹⁵In the same letter, Paul can speak of God's saving righteousness (Rom 1:17; 3:21-22) and righteousness as moral conduct (Rom 6:18; 14:17).

¹¹⁶John P. Meier, *Matthew*, New Testament Message (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1980), 27.

is another indicator that Jesus' baptism was connected to his atoning death.

The Heavenly Pronouncement

In each Synoptic account of Jesus' baptism, there is a heavenly pronouncement by God the Father. Matthew is different from Mark and Luke in that he records the pronouncement in the third person ("This is my Son"); whereas the other two Synoptics record it in the second person ("You are my Son," see Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22). This change by Matthew shows the public nature of the Father's pronouncement, and it would also address his readers more directly about Jesus' role as the Son of God.¹¹⁷ Other than this difference, the Synoptic accounts agree on what the Father affirms about Jesus: he is his Son, he is beloved, and he is well pleasing to the Father. A similar Matthean pronouncement is found in 17:5 with the additional command, "Listen to him." The question then is whether this pronouncement highlights Jesus' role as the one who will die for the sins of his people. Is there a connection between the heavenly pronouncement and Jesus' atoning death? Yes. This connection is seen in light of the Old Testament background of the Father's pronouncement.

The Old Testament background for the heavenly pronouncement is generally understood to come from Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1.¹¹⁸ "This is my Son" comes from Psalm 2:7, and "in whom I am well pleased" comes from Isaiah 42:1. It is true that Matthew's change from the second to the third person makes the allusion to Psalm 2:7 less explicit, yet it is doubtful that Matthew changed it to the third person to mask this allusion. Rather, he changed it to reveal the public nature of the Father's pronouncement

¹¹⁷It is also possible that Matthew was aligning 3:17 with a similar statement in 17:5 (see Gundry, *Matthew*, 52-53).

¹¹⁸See, e.g., Gundry, *Use of the Old Testament*, 29-32; Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 1:336-39; Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 58-59; Osborne, *Matthew*, 125; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 82; Carson, *Matthew*, 109; Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 50-51; L. L. Collins, Jr., "The Significance of the Use of Isaiah in the Gospel of Matthew" (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1973), 200.

or to speak directly to his readers about Jesus' identity. The allusion to Psalm 2:7 is still evident in Matthew for the son imagery would remind readers of Jesus' messianic identity, a theme already pronounced in Matthew (1:1-17; 2:1-12; cf. 3:2). Plus, in the temptation episode, Satan offers Jesus the kingdoms of the world if he will worship him (4:8-9). This satanic offer likely refers back to Psalm 2:8, where God promised to give his anointed one the nations; yet Satan tempts Jesus to gain the nations in an unlawful way. Very likely, therefore, Matthew had Psalm 2:7 in mind when recording the Father's affirmation, "This is my Son."¹¹⁹

In light of Matthew's explicit use of Isaiah 42 in 12:18-21, it seems quite likely that the heavenly pronouncement also alluded to Isaiah 42:1 even though 3:17 refers to Jesus as Son rather than servant. The likelihood of this allusion is strengthened in light of the Spirit descending upon Jesus at his baptism, a theme mentioned in Isaiah 42:1. France notes, "The link with the descent of the Spirit certainly makes an echo of Isa 42:1 strongly plausible, so that Matthew's readers would learn to see Jesus in the role of the 'servant of Yahweh' who would die for the sins of the people."¹²⁰ It appears, then, that Matthew intentionally connects the idea of sonship with the image of servant. Thus, Jesus is presented as both Messiah and Suffering Servant, or as the type of Messiah who suffers on behalf of his people (16:16, 21). Though Isaiah 42:1 does not speak of suffering itself, it does speak of the servant and later we see that this same servant will suffer and die for the sins of the people (Isa 53). Thus, by alluding to the servant passage in the heavenly pronouncement there is a likely allusion to Jesus' atoning death.¹²¹

¹¹⁹Contra Joachim Jeremias, "παλς θεου," in *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 5:701-02; France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 123; Gibbs, "Israel Standing with Israel," 512-15.

¹²⁰France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 123. Similarly, Stephen Dempster states, "The conceptual similarities with Isaiah are striking: inauguration to ministry by anointing of the Spirit to bring about justice or righteousness" ("The Servant of the Lord," in *Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity in Diversity*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann and Paul R. House [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007], 166 n. 115).

¹²¹This allusion to Jesus' death is strengthened even more if, as some think, fulfilling all

Already at his baptism, therefore, the Father affirms that Jesus is the Servant of the Lord who will die to redeem his people (1:21; 20:28).¹²²

Along with Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1, another possible Old Testament allusion in 3:17 is Genesis 22.¹²³ In Genesis 22, God tells Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, whom he loved. The LXX version of Genesis 22:2, 12, 16 uses ἀγαπητός to speak of Isaac as Abraham’s “only” son, the same word used in 3:17 to speak of Jesus as “beloved.” Meier points out that every time the LXX translates ὁ μόνος (“only”) as ἀγαπητός to speak of an “only (beloved)” child that child is one who has died or is destined to die.¹²⁴ The use of ἀγαπητός in this way is true of Isaac (Gen 22:2, 12, 16), Jephthah’s daughter (Judg 11:34), and the prophet’s words about mourning as one mourns over an only child who has died (Jer 6:26; Amos 8:10; Zech 12:10). Furthermore, as Leroy Huizenga points out, just as ἀγαπητός in 3:17 possibly alludes to Genesis 22, so also does the mention of the voice “from heaven” (see Gen 22:11, 15).¹²⁵ This allusion to Genesis 22 in 3:17 is also strengthened by the fact that Matthew’s Gospel begins with a reference to Jesus as “the son of Abraham”

righteousness echoes Isa 53:11, a verse that speaks of God’s righteous servant justifying many and bearing their iniquities.

¹²²The next section, which addresses 8:14-17, will deal more at length with the subject of the Servant.

¹²³A suggested, though unlikely, allusion to Jesus’ death is the dove that descended at his baptism. David Capes argues that the dove symbolized persecuted Israel and her sufferings (see Ps 74:19; 2 Esdr 5:26, 28). Thus, Jesus, who alone sees the dove in Matthew, may have realized from this sign that he too would suffer as the representative of Israel (“Intertextual Echoes in the Matthean Baptismal Narrative,” *BBR* 9 [1999], 47-48). However, it is quite difficult to determine the symbolic value of the dove here (see Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 1:331-34 for a number of possibilities). Plus, as Keener points out, it is the Spirit of God, not Jesus, that is symbolized by the dove (*Gospel of Matthew*, 133 n. 175).

¹²⁴Meier, *Mentor, Message and Miracles*, 188 n. 26.

¹²⁵Leroy A. Huizenga, *The New Isaac: Tradition and Intertextuality in the Gospel of Matthew*, NovTSup 131 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 154. This recent monograph by Huizenga argues for a fairly widespread Isaac typology in Matthew’s Gospel. Though this typology is not as significant or pervasive as Huizenga argues, it does appear to be present and recognizable in Matthew’s Gospel (contra Gundry, *Matthew*, 53). For Huizenga’s argument that an Isaac typology is present in 3:17, see 153-87.

(1:1) and the birth and naming of Jesus in Matthew 1:21 is reminiscent of the birth and naming of Isaac in Genesis 17:19.¹²⁶ Thus, an allusion to Genesis 22 in 3:17 is certainly possible if not likely, and if so, this allusion would highlight Jesus' sacrificial death already at his baptism. Abraham's son, Isaac, was spared; yet his greater son, Jesus (1:1), would be sacrificed for the sins of the people (1:21).¹²⁷

Even without the Genesis 22 allusion, however, the servant image from Isaiah 42:1 is able by itself to convey the suffering motif in light of the servant's role in Isaiah 53. As Craig Keener states, "It is not impossible (though not likely) that Mark's probable allusion to Genesis 22:2 retains some force; because Jesus is the son of Abraham as well as the son of David (Mt 1:1), Jesus' mission includes suffering as well as reigning. But the servant allusion makes that claim no less boldly."¹²⁸ Thus, the Father's pronouncement, which alludes to the servant image in Isaiah 42:1 and possibly to Genesis 22 and the sacrificial offering of his son, highlights Jesus' mission to die for the sins of his people.

Conclusion

Matthew begins his Gospel by laying out the mission of Jesus: he will save his people from their sins (1:21). In light of this mission, it is reasonable to see a connection

¹²⁶Huizenga, *New Isaac*, 139-51. Compare ἰδοὺ Σαρρα ἡ γυνὴ σου τέξεται σοι υἱόν καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰσαακ (Gen 17:19) to τέξεται δὲ υἱόν, καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦν (Matt 1:21).

¹²⁷The following are examples of those who see an allusion to Gen 22 in 3:17: Meier, *Vision of Matthew*, 59; Geza Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1961), 222-23; Dempster, "The Servant of the Lord," 166; Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 106-07; W. R. Stegner, "The Baptism of Jesus: A Story Modeled on the Binding of Isaac," *BibRev* 1 (1985): 36-46. France at least entertains the possibility (*Gospel of Matthew*, 123-24). Though he does not rule it out completely, Douglas Moo is doubtful that an allusion to Gen 22 is present at Jesus' baptism (*The Old Testament in the Gospel Passion Narratives* [Sheffield: Almond, 1983], 115, 327-28). For a discussion of Jesus as the new Isaac in Mark's baptismal account and in the New Testament as a whole, see Ernest Best, *The Temptation and the Passion: The Markan Soteriology*, SNTSMS 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 169-73.

¹²⁸Keener, *Gospel of Matthew*, 135.

between Jesus' baptism (which inaugurated his mission as Savior) and his atoning death (which completed that mission). In Matthew we see this connection. Jesus submitted to a baptism of repentance to identify with his lost, sinful people. In doing so he fulfilled all righteousness, which speaks of fulfilling God's saving plan. The Father himself affirmed the suffering role of Jesus at his baptism in allusions to Isaiah 42:1 and possibly Genesis 22. Jesus was baptized to begin his messianic ministry, a ministry that would culminate with his sacrificial death. Already at his baptism, then, Matthew is preparing his readers for the climactic, atoning death of Jesus.

CHAPTER 3
ATONEMENT PRIOR TO THE
PASSION NARRATIVE
PART 2

Jesus' Healing Ministry (8:14-17)

Chapters 8 and 9 comprise the largest block of healing miracles in Matthew's Gospel.¹ These two chapters fall within a larger section consisting of chapters 5-9. After being commissioned at his baptism (3:17), Jesus formally begins his messianic ministry in 4:17. The next five chapters then describe his messianic ministry in terms of teaching (chaps. 5-7) and healing (8-9). As France explains, "But it may reasonably be suggested that the Sermon on the Mount itself forms part of a larger section consisting of chapters 5-9, which sets out first the activity of the Messiah in teaching (chapters 5-7), then in healing and other miraculous activity (chapters 8-9)—thus illustrating the ministry of 'teaching, preaching and healing' which was introduced in 4:23 (a summary repeated at the end of the section in 9:35)."² Interestingly, in this section Matthew emphasizes Jesus' "authority" (ἐξουσία) both in relation to his teaching (7:29) and his healing ministry, of which the latter is connected to the forgiveness of sins (9:6, 8).

My focus in this section is not on Jesus' teaching or healings per se, but on how his healing ministry related to his atoning death, in particular, on how to understand Matthew's use of Isaiah 53:4 in 8:14-17. The significance of 8:14-17 in relation to Matthew's understanding of the atonement is that this passage is the only place in his

¹Craig L. Blomberg, "Healing," in *DJG*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 302.

²R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 132.

Gospel where he quotes from Isaiah's fourth Servant Song (52:13-53:12), a passage that graphically depicts the vicarious suffering of the Servant for his people's sins.³ If it is shown that Matthew used the fourth Servant Song to speak of Jesus' healing ministry with no connection to his death, then in light of the fact that he does not explicitly quote from this passage in the passion narrative it may call into question how much Jesus' atoning death really was a focal point for Matthew. It is not that Matthew's atonement theology stands or falls with how he used Isaiah 52:13-53:12 in relation to Jesus. The Apostle Paul explicitly quotes from the fourth Servant Song only twice (Isa 53:1 in Rom 10:16 and Isa 52:15 in Rom 15:21), and in neither place is the focus on Jesus' atoning death. Yet, this fact does not mean that Paul did not have a developed understanding of Jesus' atoning death; he certainly did. Nevertheless, if it can be shown that Matthew connected the fourth Servant Song with Jesus' atoning death, then this would further the argument that Matthew's theological understanding of Jesus' death was more pervasive and pronounced than often realized.

The context of Matthew's use of Isaiah 53:4, as explained above, is Jesus' healing ministry. Jesus healed a man with leprosy (8:1-4), a centurion's paralyzed

³For a convincing argument that Isa 53 teaches that the Servant's death is substitutionary and atoning, see Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 53-61. They list the following reasons in their argument: (1) the Servant suffers *for* others, (2) the Servant's suffering greatly benefits others, (3) the Servant suffers willingly (he is not a passive victim), (4) God is the one who punishes the Servant, (5) the Servant is sinless and righteous, (6) the Servant suffers for the sins of others, not for his own, and (7) the Hebrew word זָבַח ("guilt offering") is used to describe the Servant's death in v. 10, and this word is used in Leviticus of an offering that atones for sin (5:16, 18; 7:7). For others who argue for vicarious suffering in Isa 53, see, e.g., John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 376-77, 384-85; Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1997; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 275 n. 209; Robert R. Ellis, "The Remarkable Suffering Servant of Isaiah 40-55," *SWJT* 34 (1991): 23-25; contra Sam K. Williams, *Jesus' Death as Saving Event: The Background and Origin of a Concept*, HDR 2 (Missoula, MT: 1975), 107-11; R. N. Whybray, *Thanksgiving for a Liberated Prophet: An Interpretation of Isaiah Chapter 53*, JSOTSup 4 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1978), 29-76. For two fairly recent works dedicated to the Suffering Servant in Isa 53, see B. Janowski and P. Stuhlmacher, eds., *Der leidende Gottesknecht: Jesaja 53 und seine Wirkungsgeschichte mit einer Bibliographie zu Jes 53*, FAT 14 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1996); William H. Bellinger, Jr., and William R. Farmer, eds., *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998).

servant (8:5-13), Peter's mother-in-law who had a fever (8:14-15), and many others who were sick and demon-possessed (8:16). According to Matthew, these healings took place in order to fulfill Isaiah 53:4, which says, "He removed our illnesses and carried (away) our diseases" (8:17). Though both Mark and Luke record the same episode (see Mark 1:29-34; Luke 4:38-41), only Matthew quotes from the fourth Servant Song in Isaiah to show that Jesus' actions fulfilled prophecy. The only other place in Matthew where a Servant Song from Isaiah is explicitly quoted is in 12:17-21, where Matthew quotes from the first Servant Song, Isaiah 42:1-4.⁴

A Matthean Proof-Text?

A number of scholars argue that Matthew uses Isaiah 53:4 in 8:17 as a proof-text for Jesus' healing powers without considering the context of Isaiah 53 and without connecting the Servant concept to Jesus' atoning death.⁵ Initially, their case is rather impressive. There are three main reasons for questioning whether Matthew used Isaiah 53:4 in relation to Jesus' death: (1) the place in Isaiah 53 from which he quotes, (2) the

⁴The four Servant Songs in Isaiah are 42:1-9, 49:1-7, 50:4-9, and 52:13-53:12. The length of the first three songs, whether or not such songs comprise a single, thematic unit, and the identity of the so-called Suffering Servant are all debated issues. For more on these issues, see Christopher R. North, *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah: A Historical and Critical Study*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1956). Concerning New Testament studies, the biggest issue related to the Servant Songs is whether Jesus understood his mission and death in light of the Servant image. For the case that Jesus did not, see, e.g., Morna D. Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant: The Influence of the Servant Concept of Deutero-Isaiah in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1959). For the case that he did, see, e.g., R. T. France, "The Servant of the Lord in the Teaching of Jesus," *TynBul* 19 (1968): 26-52. For scholars on both sides of the issue, see Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant*, 2-16. I will argue that Matthew understood Jesus' death in relation to the Servant of the Lord, and I believe Matthew's interpretation stems from Jesus' own self-awareness as the Servant.

⁵E.g., Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 14; Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant*, 21-23, 83, 149; Lidija Novakovic, *Messiah, the Healer of the Sick: A Study of Jesus as the Son of David in the Gospel of Matthew*, WUNT, 2nd ser., vol. 170 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 129-30; C. K. Barrett, *Jesus and the Gospel Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1967), 39-40; Ferdinand Hahn, *The Titles of Jesus in Christology* (New York: World, 1969), 54; Richard S. McConnell, *Law and Prophecy in Matthew's Gospel* (Basel: Reinhardt, 1969), 120; Donald Juel, *Messianic Exegesis: Christological Interpretation of the Old Testament in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 120-21, 128-29; Leroy A. Huizenga, *The New Isaac: Tradition and Intertextuality in the Gospel of Matthew*, NovTSup 131 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 198-201.

context in which he applies the quote, and (3) the translation that he uses for the quote.⁶ First, in the two places where Matthew quotes from the Servant Songs he does not quote from places where the Servant atones for sin. Even his quote from Isaiah 53 speaks of taking away sicknesses not of bearing sins. Matthew never explicitly quotes from places in Isaiah 53 that speak of the Servant's act of bearing our sin (e.g., vv. 5-6, 11). Plus, in quoting from Isaiah 53:4 Matthew does not even finish the thought or verse. He fails to mention the part where the Servant is stricken by God. Novakovic thus concludes, "This means that Matthew interprets the prophecy not as atonement for sin, but as the taking away of literal sickness."⁷

Second, Matthew attaches these quotations from the Servant Songs to contexts that do not deal with Jesus' atoning death. Matthew uses Isaiah 53:4 in relation to Jesus' healing ministry and Isaiah 42.1-4 to highlight Jesus' healings and his unassuming ministry of justice to the nations. No unmistakable reference to Jesus' death is found in either passage. Thus, Hooker writes, "If the very quotations which would, used in certain contexts, make abundantly evident the identification of Jesus with the Servant who by his suffering expiates the sins of others are instead used only of his work in other spheres, then this is strong evidence that such an identification was never made, either by Jesus or by his earliest followers."⁸ Similarly, France states, "In view of the concentration elsewhere in the New Testament...on the theme of vicarious suffering and redemption in Isaiah's vision of the Servant, it is remarkable that neither of these two quotations focuses on this theme, either in the specific words quoted or in the context of Jesus' ministry to

⁶Richard Beaton lists four reasons why some do not think that the use of Isa 53:4 in 8:17 relates to Jesus' atoning death: (1) the context deals with healing not atonement, (2) Matthew's translation emphasizes physical healing, (3) the reader would not be thinking of the cross at this point in the narrative, and (4) Matthew does not say that Jesus suffered illness on our behalf (*Isaiah's Christ in Matthew's Gospel*, SNTSMS 123 [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002], 114-15).

⁷Novakovic, *Messiah, the Healer of the Sick*, 127.

⁸Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant*, 83.

which they are related.”⁹

Third, Matthew’s quotation of Isaiah 53:4 is more in line with the MT which emphasizes the Servant bearing physical illnesses rather than the LXX or the Targum which both offer spiritual interpretations of the MT. It is quite likely that Matthew provides his own translation from the Hebrew.¹⁰ Thus, unlike the LXX, for instance, that says that the Servant bore our “sins” (ἁμαρτίας), Matthew’s translation of Isaiah 53:4 speaks of how Jesus fulfilled the Servant’s role in removing “illnesses” (ἀσθενείας) during his healing ministry. Thus, Matthew emphasizes the literal fulfillment of the text, i.e., physical healing. If Matthew wanted to stress Jesus’ atoning death in this passage, why did he fail to quote from the LXX that clearly emphasizes atonement for sin? Why did he follow the more literal MT? Matthew’s translation of Isaiah 53:4, which emphasizes physical healing, seems to suggest that Matthew was only interested in using this verse to show that Jesus’ healings fulfilled Scripture without any reference to Jesus’ atoning death. Thus, in light of the arguments just mentioned, it appears to some that Matthew used Isaiah 53:4 as a proof-text for Jesus’ healing ministry and did not relate this passage to his atoning death.

⁹France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher*, 300-01. Unlike Hooker, France does think that Jesus viewed himself as the Servant. Yet, he does not think that 8:14-17 uses Isa 53 to foreshadow Jesus’ atoning death. He believes Matthew uses the Servant image to deal with the cross later on in his Gospel, but here the focus is exclusively on Jesus’ healing ministry (*The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007], 322-23 n. 56).

¹⁰Krister Stendahl, *The School of St. Matthew and Its Use of the Old Testament*, ASNU 20 (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1954), 106-07; Robert H. Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew’s Gospel*, NovTSup 18 (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 109-11; Novakovic, *Messiah, the Healer of the Sick*, 126-27; Joachim Gnilka, *Das Matthäusevangelium*, HTKNT (Freiburg: Herder, 1986-88), 1:308; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, ICC (London: T & T Clark, 1988-97), 2:37-38; Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 299. For a helpful discussion of this issue, see Beaton, *Isaiah’s Christ*, 111-14. Beaton tentatively agrees that Matthew is providing his own translation of the Hebrew text. For the view that Matthew did not translate the Hebrew text but rather used a modified version of the LXX, see Maarten J. J. Menken, *Matthew’s Bible: The Old Testament Text of the Evangelist*, BETL 173 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2004), 35-49; David S. New, *Old Testament Quotations in the Synoptic Gospels, and the Two-Document Hypothesis*, Septuagint and Cognate Studies 37 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1993), 104-05. Regardless of the source, the quotation from Isa 53:4 in Matthew’s Gospel emphasizes physical healing.

In spite of these arguments, there are good reasons for questioning the view that Matthew used Isaiah 53:4 as a proof-text without connecting it to Jesus' atoning death.¹¹ Matthew understood Jesus to fulfill the role of the Servant from Isaiah 53 not just in his ministry but also in his death. Four arguments are presented to support this view: (1) Matthew repeatedly alludes to the Servant image in relation to Jesus' death, (2) Matthew intends for all of Jesus' ministry to be understood in light of his saving mission which is ultimately fulfilled in his atoning death (1:21; 26:28), (3) Matthew does not make a neat separation between sickness and sin, and (4) Matthew uses βασιτάζω ("to carry, bear") in 8:17 which may hint at Jesus' role as sin-bearer.

The Servant in Matthew's Gospel

One recent New Testament introduction states, "There are more quotations and allusions to Isaiah 53 in Matthew than in any other NT book."¹² If one expands their observation to include all four Servant Songs in Isaiah, the Matthean emphasis on Jesus' role as the Servant is even more impressive. The New Testament quotes from the fourth Servant Song only seven times, and one of these times is in Matthew (Isa 53:4 in 8:17).¹³ Plus, Matthew also quotes from the first Servant Song (Isa 42:1-4 in 12:17-21). This quotation from the first Servant Song is Matthew's longest Old Testament quotation,

¹¹For those who see a connection between Matthew's use of Isa 53:4 in 8:17 and Jesus' atoning death, see, e.g., Donald Carson, *Matthew*, in vol. 8 of *EBC*, ed. Frank E. Gæbelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 205-06; Osborne, *Matthew*, 299-300; David L. Turner, *Matthew*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 235; Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 345; Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992; reprint, 1999), 198; Donald Senior, *Matthew*, ANTC (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 100; Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Sacra Pagina Series (Collegeville MN: Liturgical, 1991), 115, 117; Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 266; Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 66.

¹²Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2009), 222. According to them, Matthew has 1 quotation and 7 allusions (222 n. 80).

¹³The other six occurrences are Isa 53:12 in Luke 22:37; Isa 53:1 in John 12:38; Isa 53:7-8 in Acts 8:32-33; Isa 53:1 in Rom 10:16; Isa 52:15 in Rom 15:21; and Isa 53:9 in 1 Pet 2:22.

which according to David Hill, is “a fact which immediately suggests that the ideas expressed in it were important to the evangelist.”¹⁴ It seems clear from these quotations that Matthew understood Jesus’ ministry in light of the Servant image from Isaiah. This observation becomes even clearer in light of the numerous allusions to the Servant image in Matthew’s Gospel.¹⁵

Jesus’ ministry begins in Matthew at his baptism where Jesus took up the role of the Servant, for the Father’s pronouncement in 3:17 most likely alludes to Isaiah 42:1.¹⁶ Later in his ministry Jesus alludes to Isaiah 53 in his passion predictions (16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19). The ransom saying in 20:28 with the use of “many” and the idea of substitution likely alludes to Isaiah 53:11-12. When Jesus spoke of his death during the Last Supper in 26:28, there is a similar allusion to Isaiah 53:11-12.¹⁷ Jesus’ being spit on and slapped in 26:67 and 27:30 probably alludes to Isaiah 50:6 where the same actions and cognate words are used.¹⁸ Jesus’ silence before the Sanhedrin (26:63) and before

¹⁴David Hill, “Son and Servant: An Essay on Matthean Christology,” *JSNT* 6 (1980): 9. Hill’s article helpfully shows how the Servant image was important in Matthean Christology.

¹⁵Hooker argues that Jesus and the Gospel writers did not interpret his death in light of the Servant image from Isaiah. The quotation from Isa 53:4 in 8:17 she considers a proof-text. As for the possible allusions to the Servant Songs in Isaiah, she does not consider an allusion to be present unless it can be proved that the passage alluded to is the only possible passage that the writer could have had in mind (*Jesus and the Servant*, 62, 101). Such an unwarranted restriction on potential allusions predetermines the absence of allusions and results in a Servant-less Jesus in Matthew. For a critique of Hooker’s thesis and criteria, see Douglas J. Moo, *The Old Testament in the Gospel Passion Narratives* (Sheffield: Almond, 1983), 165-67.

¹⁶Though 3:17 also alludes to Ps 2:7 and possibly Gen 22:2, Hill argues that, in light of how the Spirit came down upon Jesus, the Servant theme from Isa 42:1 is dominant in this verse (“Son and Servant,” 8-9). Concerning the allusion to Isa 42:1 in 3:17, France states, “It is reasonable to infer that the figure of the Servant thereafter influenced His self-estimation” (“Servant of the Lord,” 41). For more on the Old Testament allusions in 3:17, see above in the section on Jesus’ baptism.

¹⁷For a defense of an allusion to the Servant in the passion predictions, the ransom saying, and the Last Supper saying, see the relevant sections below.

¹⁸The use of ἐμπτύω (“to spit on,” 26:67; 27:30) and ῥαπίζω (“to slap,” 26:67) most likely allude to ἔμπτυσμα (“spitting on,” only found in Isa 50:6 in LXX) and ῥάπισμα (“slap,” Isa 50:6). See Moo, *Old Testament in the Passion Narratives*, 139; Gundry, *Use of the Old Testament*, 61, 201; Allison, “Anticipating the Passion,” 704.

Pilate (27:12, 14) is probably an allusion to 53:7, where the Servant is likened to a sheep not opening its mouth in protest before its shearers.¹⁹ The two criminals who were crucified with Jesus in 27:38 may allude to Isaiah 53:12 that speaks of how the Servant was “numbered with the transgressors.”²⁰ Jesus’ burial in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man, may allude to Isaiah 53:9, which states, “He was appointed a grave with the wicked and the rich in his death.”²¹ If Matthew is intentionally alluding to this passage in Isaiah to make the Servant connection, then it may explain why he alone among the Gospel writers points out that Joseph of Arimathea was a “rich man” (27:57).²²

Two things stand out about these allusions to the Servant in Matthew’s Gospel. First, since Matthew has already identified Jesus as the Servant in chapters eight and twelve, it seems likely that these allusions were intentional.²³ Matthew has already explained to the reader that Jesus is the Servant of the Lord; thus, allusions to passages

¹⁹Donald Senior agrees, stating, “Matthew stresses Jesus’ silence more than the parallel in Mark does; despite their chorus of charges, ‘he made no answer’ (compare Mt 27:12-14 and Mk 15:3-5). The evangelist does not explicitly quote from the Suffering Servant song of Isaiah but clearly wraps the figure of Jesus in the mantle of that mysterious Israelite who bore abuse in silence and atoned for the sins of the people” (*The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew* [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1990], 111). See also Moo, *Old Testament in the Passion Narratives*, 148-51; John Paul Heil, *The Death and Resurrection of Jesus: A Narrative-Critical Reading of Matthew 26-28* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 72; L. L. Collins, Jr., “The Significance of the Use of Isaiah in the Gospel of Matthew” (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1973), 142-43. Contra Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant*, 87-89.

²⁰Turner, *Matthew*, 662-63; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, WBC, vol. 33B (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 838; Martin Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*, trans. Betram Lee Woolf (London: Nicholson & Watson, 1934), 187; Collins, “Significance of Use of Isaiah in Matthew,” 145-46. Moo is less certain about this allusion (*Old Testament in the Passion Narratives*, 154-55).

²¹Moo, *Old Testament in the Passion Narratives*, 144-45; Gundry, *Use of the Old Testament*, 146, 204; France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1089; Collins, “Significance of the Use of Isaiah in Matthew,” 146-48.

²²Other proposed allusions include Isa 53:2 in 2:23 (Turner, *Matthew*, 235 n. 18); Isa 53:11 in 3:15 (France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 120-21); and Isa 52:15 in 13:16 (Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 266).

²³This fits well with Moo’s comment on detecting allusions, “Appropriateness in the context, citation of the OT text elsewhere and the author’s characteristic style must be taken into consideration” (*Old Testament in the Passion Narratives*, 20).

like Isaiah 53 would be recognized by those who understood the mission of the Servant.²⁴ Furthermore, in some ways the allusions are more significant than the direct quotes because they show that the image alluded to was ingrained in the thinking of the author and thus comes out almost naturally. Also, they show that the author expected his readers to be aware of the image, and thus the allusions were presented without need of direct mention. As Moo explains, “The many allusions...should not be ignored and are perhaps more important than quotations, since the use of such casual references presupposes an acquaintance with the passage alluded to on the part of both writer and readers.”²⁵ Thus, the cumulative effect of the Servant allusions in Matthew is quite impressive and shows that Matthew intentionally connected the Servant image to Jesus both through direct quotes and by use of numerous allusions.²⁶

Second, these allusions show that Matthew was not using Isaiah 53:4 as a proof-text but understood the context of Isaiah 53 and the mission of the Servant. One thing that stands out about these allusions is that most of them occur during the passion narrative or in connection with Jesus’ statements about his death. Thus, Matthew understood Jesus’ death and not just his ministry in light of the Servant. This means that he was not engaging in atomistic eisegesis in 8:17; rather, he understood the context of the Old Testament passages from which he quoted and intended his readers to do the

²⁴Intentional allusions to the Servant in relation to Jesus’ death are also not unlikely in light of other places in the New Testament where this connection is made (see Luke 22:37; Acts 8:32-35; 1 Pet 2:22-25). Plus, it appears that the identification of Jesus with the Servant of the Lord goes back to the earliest strands of Christian faith, for the Servant title is used of Jesus in Acts exclusively in the early chapters when the church was still located in Judea (see 3:13, 26; 4:27, 30). See Joachim Jeremias, “παῖς θεοῦ,” in *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 5:700-01, 707.

²⁵Moo, *Old Testament in the Passion Narratives*, 169. See also Gundry, *Use of the Old Testament*, 3. The allusions also reveal that the Servant concept goes back to Jesus himself because if it were simply imposed by the Gospel writers it would probably be much more pronounced (Vincent Taylor, *Jesus and His Sacrifice: A Study of the Passion-Sayings in the Gospels* [London: MacMillan, 1937], 47-48; France, “Servant of the Lord,” 29).

²⁶France, “Servant of the Lord,” 28; Moo, *Old Testament in the Passion Narratives*, 125.

same. Matthew understood that the Servant in Isaiah 53 suffered vicariously for his people, and so he connected the Servant image to Jesus' death as well. According to Matthew, Jesus took up the role of the Servant at his baptism (3:17) and thus his whole ministry, including his death, was accomplished in light of this prophesied role. As Gundry helpfully summarizes, "Jesus fills the role of the Isaianic Servant receiving God's commendation (3:17), bearing the sicknesses of others (8:17), bringing good news to the poor (11:5), despising popularity (12:18-21), giving his life for us (20:28), enduring shame and suffering (26:67), and lying buried in a rich man's tomb (27:57)."²⁷

The Climactic Role of Jesus' Death

Matthew's narrative, which climaxes with Jesus' death on the cross, also points to a connection between Jesus' healing ministry and his atoning death. Matthew begins his narrative by explaining Jesus' mission. According to 1:21, Jesus' God-given mission is "to save his people from their sins." Earlier in the section on 1:21 we saw how this verse serves as a programmatic statement in Matthew's Gospel and thus how his Gospel should be read in light of this verse and its emphasis on Jesus' saving mission. It was also pointed out in the section on 1:21 how Jesus ultimately saves his people by dying for their sins (20:28; 26:28). Thus, in light of where Matthew's Gospel begins and ends—with the angelic announcement that Jesus' mission is to save his people from their sins and with Jesus' death where he gives his life as a ransom for many—it seems plausible that Matthew understood Jesus' healing ministry in relation to his death on the cross. As Beaton explains, "If Matthew considered the mission of Jesus within soteriological categories, as the statement 'to save his people from their sins' in 1.21 suggests, and held that Jesus' death and resurrection were central to this role, then to view the healing of

²⁷Gundry, *Use of the Old Testament*, 209.

sickness in light of the cross event seems a reasonable assumption.”²⁸

Matthew viewed Jesus’ ministry as a single, unified mission to save his people from their sins, and thus it would be untrue to Matthew’s intent to separate his Servant reference in 8:14-17 from his Servant allusions in the passion narrative, to separate his healing ministry from his atoning death. As Blomberg writes, “To the extent that Matthew can expect his readers to know more of his quotation’s Isaianic context, he may well be dropping hints, which will become clearer as Jesus’ crucifixion draws nearer, that Jesus is the Suffering Servant in other respects as well, most notably in suffering vicariously for the sins of humanity.”²⁹ Matthew was not only aware of the context of Isaiah 53; he was also aware of the context of his own Gospel. He used Isaiah 53:4 in light of the emphasis on vicarious suffering in that chapter, and he also used it in light of where his Gospel concludes, namely, with the climactic, saving death of Jesus. Thus, if one fails to read 8:14-17 in light of Matthew’s entire Gospel, then he fails to see the connection between Matthew’s use of Isaiah 53:4 in that section and how the Servant image quoted there is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus’ atoning death. Considering Matthew’s narrative is essential in correctly understanding how he uses Isaiah 53:4 earlier in his Gospel. Thus, Jesus’ healing ministry in 8:14-17 should not be disconnected from his saving mission set forth in 1:21 or his atoning death that fulfilled this mission (26:28). According to Matthew, Jesus fulfilled the role of the Servant not only by healing the sick but even more significantly by giving his life as a ransom for many.

The Connection between Sin and Sickness

What makes this interpretation even more probable is the fact that in the

²⁸Beaton, *Isaiah’s Christ*, 115. Similarly, Schreiner says, “The healing ministry of Jesus anticipates his death, in which the sorrows, diseases, and sins of his people would be atoned for” (*New Testament Theology*, 266).

²⁹Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 33.

biblical worldview and in Matthew's theology in particular there is a clear connection between sin and sickness. Thus, when Jesus heals sicknesses in fulfillment of Isaiah 53:4, it does not mean that his death was not also in view for the underlying cause of sickness is sin. This connection between sin and sickness is taught repeatedly in Scripture.³⁰ In the very next chapter following 8:14-17, Matthew explains the connection between sin and sickness. In 9:1-8, Jesus heals a paralytic that was brought to him by four men. Instead of immediately healing the man, Jesus says, "Be of good cheer, child, your sins are forgiven" (v. 2). The teachers of the law questioned Jesus' ability to forgive sins; thus, Jesus heals the man to prove that he, the Son of Man, has authority on earth to forgive sins (vv. 5-7). The healing of the paralytic was proof that Jesus as the Son of Man was able to forgive sins. The people could not see the man's sins being forgiven, but they could verify the man getting up and walking away. Thus, the man's healing showed that he had been forgiven by Jesus. Interestingly, later in the same chapter Matthew uses salvation terminology to refer to physical healing. Jesus said to the woman with a hemorrhage, "Your faith has saved [σώζω] you" (9:22). In light of this, Matthew's Gospel warns against separating between physical healing and salvation from sin.

In light of the connection between healing sickness and forgiving sin in chapter nine, it is misguided to separate Jesus' healing ministry from his atoning death. Since the forgiveness of sins is based on Jesus' sacrificial death (26:28), his healings would be as well for his healings were simply addressing the fruit or consequences of sin.³¹ Thus, just as Jesus forgave sins in light of his upcoming atoning death, so he healed sicknesses in

³⁰See, e.g., Exod 15:26; Ps 103:3; John 5:14; Jas 5:14-16.

³¹This does not mean that Matthew understood physical healing to be an automatic benefit of the atonement in the here and now; otherwise, a lack of healing would necessarily mean a lack of faith. It is much more pastorally sensitive and biblically accurate to connect healing to Jesus' atoning death in the sense that he purchased our full redemption on the cross (which includes a glorified body), yet this redemption will not be ours until his return (Rom 8:23). God is free to heal even now and he encourages us to pray for healing (Jas 5:14-16); however, complete, lasting healing awaits the final resurrection.

view of his death as well. As Carson states, “The healings during Jesus’ ministry can be understood not only as the foretaste of the kingdom but also as the fruit of Jesus’ death.”³² Similarly, Gundry writes, “The healings anticipate the passion in that they begin to roll back the effects of the sins for which Jesus came to die.”³³ This would mean that 8:14-17 deals not only with Jesus’ healing ministry but also with the death of the Servant of the Lord that makes healing possible.

The Use of βασιτάζω

One of the critiques against seeing a connection between Isaiah 53:4 in 8:17 and Jesus’ death is that Matthew does not present Jesus as bearing people’s sicknesses or becoming sick on their behalf. For instance, Novakovic states, “The servant of Yahweh as Matthew presents him in 8:17 is not a sick person who voluntarily accepts the substitutionary suffering as in Isaiah 53, but a mighty healer who frees the sick from their illnesses.”³⁴ This argument misses the point about the connection between Jesus’ healing ministry and his death. It is not that Jesus must become sick for the Servant image of vicarious suffering to be present; the time of suffering occurred at the cross. That is where Jesus bore the sins and sicknesses of humanity. Jesus’ healing ministry served as a foretaste of his vicarious suffering on the cross and pointed toward it.

The two verbs used in 8:17 to speak of Jesus’ ministry of healing sickness are λαμβάνω and βασιτάζω. In this context the former verb probably conveys the idea of “to

³²Carson, *Matthew*, 206.

³³Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, 2nd (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 150. Likewise, Osborne states, “Matthew uses Isa 53 often (20:28; 26:28; 27:12, 57) and likely intends a further nuance here, in which the healing of physical illnesses is a harbinger of the greater healing of spiritual illnesses at the cross” (*Matthew*, 299-300). Contra Birger Gerhardsson who argues that Jesus did not forgive sins or heal in anticipation of his atoning death (“Sacrificial Service and Atonement in the Gospel of Matthew,” in *Reconciliation and Hope*, ed. Robert Banks [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974], 31).

³⁴Novakovic, *Messiah, the Healer of the Sick*, 127.

remove, take away.”³⁵ However, βασταάζω probably means more than simply removing sicknesses; this word conveys the idea of bearing a burden.³⁶ This word is used only three times in Matthew. In the other two places, this word is used in the sense of bearing something or carrying something for another. In the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (20:1-16), verse 12 speaks of bearing the burden of the work and the summer heat. Here βασταάζω speaks of enduring difficult circumstances and suffering because of it. In 3:11, when John the Baptist speaks of his humble relation to Jesus, he most likely speaks of not being fit to carry Jesus’ sandals.³⁷ The idea here is that of carrying something for another person. In light of these two other uses that convey the idea of burden-bearing, it seems likely that the same idea is present with the use of βασταάζω in 8:17 as well.³⁸ It is not that Jesus bore their sicknesses in the sense of becoming sick in their place.³⁹ Rather, Matthew probably uses this word simply to hint at Jesus’ vicarious role that he will ultimately fulfill at the cross.⁴⁰ What makes this likely is that Matthew was aware of the context of the fourth Servant Song and its emphasis on vicarious suffering. However, even if the use of βασταάζω in 8:17 does not hint at Jesus’ burden-bearing at the cross, the former points listed above are able by themselves to make the connection between Jesus’ healing ministry and his atoning death.

Conclusion

Though Matthew’s use of Isaiah 53:4 in 8:17 appears as a proof-text to some, it

³⁵BDAG, s.v. “λαμβάνω.”

³⁶BDAG, s.v. “βασταάζω.”

³⁷Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 1:315.

³⁸Beaton, *Isaiah’s Christ*, 116.

³⁹Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 2:37; Gundry, *Matthew*, 150.

⁴⁰The LXX uses φέρω, whereas Matthew has βασταάζω. Why Matthew chose the latter instead of the former is not clear. Yet, both convey the idea of bearing a burden, and as pointed out above, Matthew was most likely translating from the MT rather than using or reworking the LXX.

is more likely that Matthew used this passage from Isaiah in light of the context of Isaiah 53. Matthew knew that the role of the Servant included dying for his people, and thus he alluded to this image in relation to Jesus' death. Matthew not only knew the context of Isaiah 53, but he intended his readers to understand his context as well. He intended his readers to see his use of Isaiah 53:4 in light of Jesus' mission to save his people by dying for their sins (1:21; 26:28). And since sickness is the result of sin, it is wrong to make a strict distinction between Jesus healing sickness and dying for sin. All of Jesus' ministry was done in light of the cross, which means that even Matthew's use of βασιτάζω in 8:17 may mean more than removing sicknesses; this word may hint at Jesus' sin-bearing death. In short, Matthew's use of Isaiah 53:4 in 8:17 is connected to Jesus' atoning death.

One Greater Than the Temple (12:1-14)

There is one more passage to be addressed under the heading of "Atonement Prior to the Passion Narrative." That passage is Matthew 12:1-14, which addresses Sabbath controversies involving Jesus and his disciples. Jesus allowed his disciples to pick some heads of grain on the Sabbath and then he healed a man with a shriveled hand. Since the Pharisees considered both of these actions to be work, they accused Jesus of breaking the Sabbath. Jesus responded by declaring two important truths related to the Sabbath, namely, that the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath and that it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath (vv. 8, 12). The Pharisees did not accept Jesus' justification and became hostile to the point of plotting how to kill him (v. 14). It was during this debate that Jesus said, "But I tell you that one greater than the temple is here" (v. 6). Later in the same chapter he said that he was also greater than Jonah (v. 41) and Solomon (v. 42). Though Luke records these last two "greater than" sayings (11:31-32), only Matthew records Jesus saying that he is greater than the temple. Mark does not record any of these sayings.

The purpose of this section is to determine if Jesus' statement about being greater than the temple sheds any light on Matthew's view of the atonement. Daniel Antwi says of 12:6, "It is quite probable that here we have the beginning of the tradition for atonement." He goes on to say, "The words point in a veiled way, at least, to the fact that Jesus was taking unto himself the role of the temple as an institution for atonement."⁴¹ Is this accurate? Did Jesus intend to replace the temple in Matthew's view? Is atonement for sin now found in Jesus and his death and not in the temple according to Matthew? I think a persuasive case can be made that in Matthew Jesus replaces the temple as the place of atonement and that the seeds of this reality are already sown here in 12:6 with Jesus' temple saying. Before making this case though, it will be helpful to examine the historicity of the events recorded in this passage and look a little more at the context in order to understand what Jesus meant by saying he is greater than the temple.

The Historicity of the Controversy Stories

Some doubt that the controversy story recorded here in 12:1-14 between Jesus and the Pharisees actually took place. Sanders, for instance, states, "It is very likely that the entirety of the pericope on plucking grain on the Sabbath (Matt. 12.1-8//Mark 2.23-28//Luke 6.1-5) is a creation of the church."⁴² This is also the view of Bultmann, for as he points out, why is criticism directed toward the disciples and not toward Jesus if this event were historical?⁴³ He assumes that Matthew and the other Evangelists were reading back into the life of Jesus conflicts that Christians were experiencing in their day. However, there are good reasons to believe that this controversy story and others between

⁴¹Daniel J. Antwi, "Did Jesus Consider His Death to be an Atoning Sacrifice?" *Int* 45 (1991): 21, 23.

⁴²E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 266.

⁴³Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, rev. ed., trans. John Marsh (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 16.

Jesus and the Pharisees actually took place.⁴⁴

First, since intra-Jewish conflict was a reality in the first century, it is plausible that conflict between Jesus (and his disciples) and the Pharisees could have existed. Keener points out that often strife is strongest among closely related groups.⁴⁵ Second, the criterion of multiple attestation is in favor of the historicity of the controversy stories. These stories are found in Mark, in John, and in Luke's special material as well.⁴⁶ Third, we know that Saul of Tarsus and other Pharisees persecuted early Christians (e.g., Acts 9:1-2; Phil 3:5-6). It is unlikely that such persecution occurred only after Jesus died and not to some degree before his death. It is more plausible that having engaged in conflict with Jesus himself the Pharisees would then also persecute his followers. In response to Bultmann's critique, there is nothing farfetched about the Pharisees criticizing Jesus instead of his disciples, because as their teacher he would be responsible for their behavior.⁴⁷

It is difficult to prove the historicity of the temple saying, since it is found only in Matthew. However, if it were Matthew's creation, one would think that the saying would be much clearer in its intent. Since the saying does not clearly explain how Jesus is greater than the temple, it suggests that the saying originates with Jesus, for it would have been prudent for him to be somewhat vague when speaking against the temple publicly. Thus, it seems likely that the temple saying is an authentic logion of Jesus.⁴⁸

⁴⁴The reasons for the historicity of the controversy stories are taken from Craig Keener (*A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 351-53). See also Yong-Eui Yang, *Jesus and the Sabbath in Matthew's Gospel*, JSNTSup 139 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 164-66.

⁴⁵Keener, *Gospel of Matthew*, 352.

⁴⁶Mark 2:23-28; John 5:1-9; Luke 13:10-17.

⁴⁷For more on this issue, see D. Daube, "The Responsibilities of Master and Disciples in the Gospels," *NTS* 19 (1972): 1-15.

⁴⁸Bertil Gärtner, *The Temple and the Community in Qumran and the New Testament*, SNTSMS 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 115. Gärtner agrees that this saying of Jesus is

The Context of the Temple Saying

The two episodes recorded in Matthew 12:1-14 revolve around the question of what is lawful to do on the Sabbath (vv. 2, 10).⁴⁹ According to the Pharisees, it is unlawful to pick grain or heal on the Sabbath. Yet, Jesus allowed both actions. Both episodes end with an authoritative pronouncement by Jesus about the Sabbath. The first episode ends with the statement, “For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath” (v. 8), and the second with, “Therefore it is lawful on the Sabbath to do good” (v. 12). Since the temple saying falls within the section on picking heads of grain (vv. 1-8), it is important to look closer at this section.

The law allowed people to pick heads of grain on other people’s property. For instance, Deuteronomy 23:25 states, “If you go into your neighbor’s standing grain, you may pick the ears with your hands, but you must not use a sickle on his standing grain.” So the problem was not picking grain; the problem was doing this on the Sabbath. The Pharisees believed that such an act was considered work and so was unlawful on the Sabbath. Reaping was prohibited on the Sabbath (e.g., Exod 34:21; *Jub.* 50:12-13; *m. Šabb.* 7:2), and evidently picking grain was interpreted by the Pharisees as a form of reaping. It is not clear whether the law itself considered picking grain and eating it on the spot to be an act of reaping.⁵⁰

Though the disciples were the ones picking grain, Jesus was targeted because he was responsible for the behavior of his disciples. Jesus responds to the accusation of the Pharisees first by reminding them of what David did in God’s sanctuary (vv. 3-4). First Samuel 21:1-6 tells how David went to Ahimelech the priest while fleeing from Saul and asked for bread for him and his men. The only bread the priest had was the

authentic, but he does not explain why.

⁴⁹These episodes are also found in Mark 2:23-3:6 and Luke 6:1-11.

⁵⁰For more on first-century Jewish interpretations of Sabbath regulations, see Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 2:307; Keener, *Gospel of Matthew*, 353.

bread of the presence, which was exclusively dedicated to the priests for consumption (Lev 24:8-9). Yet, the priest agreed to give this consecrated bread to David and his men after making sure they had not recently engaged in sexual intercourse (Exod 19:15). Though technically eating the bread of the presence was unlawful for David and his men to do, no word of condemnation is spoken of David's actions in 1 Samuel 21:1-6. The priest put compassion for the needs of people before strict, legal regulations. More importantly, he did this not just for anyone but for God's anointed servant, David.

Jesus reminds the Pharisees of this incident in David's life to argue that what his disciples did was lawful as well. If David and his men could eat consecrated bread, then certainly Jesus' disciples could pick heads of grain, for Jesus stands in a place of superiority to David (22:41-45). He is the promised Messiah, the rightful heir to David's throne (1:1-17). Because of who he was, David could eat the consecrated bread; as Messiah, Jesus had an even greater right to decide what could be done on the Sabbath. Thus, Jesus makes a christological argument here as to why his disciples could do what they did on the Sabbath.⁵¹ It is also possible that the compassion shown by the priest to meet David's needs might be relevant here as well. For later Jesus states, "If you had known what is meant by these words, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' then you would not have condemned the innocent" (v. 7). This quote from Hosea 6:6 originally spoke of faithfulness, yet the Greek translation can carry the idea of mercy or compassion. The Pharisees should have shown compassion toward the disciples since they were simply meeting their physical needs.⁵² However, though this may be true, the main point Jesus is

⁵¹So, e.g., France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 458-59; David E. Garland, *Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the First Gospel* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 136-37; Yang, *Jesus and the Sabbath*, 176-77; Antwi, "Did Jesus Consider His Death an Atoning Sacrifice?" 21.

⁵²Donald Verseput emphasizes God's compassion as the rationale for why David's behavior was accepted (*The Rejection of the Humble Messianic King: A Study of the Composition of Matthew 11-12* [Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1986], 162). However, he overemphasizes this point to the neglect and dismissal of David's authority and thus the authority of Jesus as justification for their behavior.

making is christological in nature.

Jesus also reminds the Pharisees of how the priests violate the law each Sabbath yet they are innocent (v. 5). The priests have to do work in the temple on the Sabbath as they offer sacrifices to the Lord. Yet, the law allows for this work even though it is the Sabbath. Doing work in the temple overrides normal Sabbath regulations. Thus, it appears that temple work is superior to the Sabbath itself. That is probably the rationale for Jesus' statement about being greater than the temple. If temple work sets aside Sabbath regulations, then one greater than the temple would as well.⁵³ This is especially true for one who is Lord of the Sabbath, i.e., the authoritative guide as to what is lawful on the Sabbath.

Who or What Is Greater Than the Temple?

Before looking more specifically at Jesus' temple saying, it is necessary to decide if Jesus was actually speaking about himself. The word *μείζων* is not masculine, but neuter. Thus, Jesus' saying could be translated, "The thing greater than the temple is here." There are a number of suggestions concerning the identity of the greater thing, including the kingdom of God, love, showing mercy to the needy, Jesus' interpretation of the law, and the new community of Jesus' disciples.⁵⁴ If *μείζων* does not refer to Jesus, the most likely suggestion is mercy since this is what Jesus calls for in the next verse (v. 7). Luz argues for this interpretation.⁵⁵ However, the reasons for seeing Jesus as the one greater than the temple are more persuasive.⁵⁶

⁵³So Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 2:314. Yang argues that the point has to do with the presence of God. The presence of God in the temple allows for the violation of the Sabbath, and now the presence of God in Jesus with his disciples does as well (*Jesus and the Sabbath*, 182-83).

⁵⁴For these and other suggestions, see John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 484 n. 16.

⁵⁵Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 181-82.

⁵⁶See, e.g., Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 2:314; Versepunt, *Rejection*

First, the neuter *πλείον* is used in 12:41-42 to speak of one who was greater than Jonah and Solomon. The reference in both of these verses appears to be Jesus. He is a greater prophet than Jonah and a greater sage than Solomon. Second, the reference to Jesus in verse 6 fits nicely with Jesus, the one than greater than David (vv. 3-4) and the Lord of the Sabbath (v. 8). The focus of this passage is more on Jesus and his superior role than on mercy. Last, the fact that Jesus was greater than the temple coincides with Matthew's view of how Jesus replaces the temple as the place of atonement. This last point will be addressed below.

Matthew may have used the neuter for stylistic purposes.⁵⁷ On the other hand, his use of the neuter may simply reveal a lack of precision in the Greek language. Blomberg explains, "If the neuter (rather than masculine) gender of the 'one' in v. 6 is pressed, then we should translate 'something greater than the temple is here' (cf. NIV marg.), referring to the new authority, teaching, and/or kingdom Jesus brings, not simply to his person. But such grammatical distinctions are often blurred in Hellenistic Greek."⁵⁸ Another suggestion is that the use of the neuter means that Matthew is focusing on Jesus' role rather than his person, a role that now involves him being the mediator between God and humanity.⁵⁹ Yet, whatever the reason was for the choice of *μείζον*, the identity of the one greater than the temple is Jesus.

of Humble Messianic King, 164; Daniel M. Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, SNTSMS 139 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 107; Boris Repschinski, *The Controversy Stories in the Gospel of Matthew: Their Redaction, Form and Relevance for the Relationship Between the Matthean Community and Formative Judaism* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 100; David D. Kupp, *Matthew's Emmanuel: Divine Presence and God's People in the First Gospel*, SNTSMS 90 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 76.

⁵⁷Daniel Wallace shows how the neuter adjective can be used of persons at times "for reasons of rhetoric, aphoristic principle, suspense, etc.," and then gives Matt 12:6, 41 as an example (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 295 n. 7).

⁵⁸Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 197 n. 38.

⁵⁹France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 461.

The Meaning of the Temple Saying

So what did Jesus mean by saying that he was greater than the temple? To answer this question, one must look at this saying in its immediate context of chapter 12 and then examine what Matthew has to say elsewhere in his Gospel about the temple. When understood not only in its immediate context but also in the larger context of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus' temple saying implies that he will replace the temple as the means of atonement.⁶⁰ Jesus is the new temple. This point is not explicit in 12:6. There is a certain level of vagueness to the temple saying, which I think argues for its authenticity. Yet, when this saying is read in light of Matthew's Gospel as a whole, it points to something more than being superior to the temple or its priests; it points to Jesus as the fulfillment of the temple as well as its replacement.

Two factors in the immediate context help to illuminate the meaning of Jesus' temple saying in 12:6. First, Jesus follows this saying with a quotation from the Old Testament (Hos 6:6), which says, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice" (v. 7). The same quotation was used earlier by Jesus in 9:13, where it occurred in the context of Jesus' eating with tax collectors and sinners (9:9-13). In response to the criticism of the Pharisees, Jesus claims that only the sick need a doctor. And as a doctor, he came to call sinners not the righteous. The mercy spoken of in 9:13 probably refers to the mercy he shows to sinners, mercy that should be emulated by others. The point for our purposes, though, is that such mercy is what God desires rather than sacrifice. It is true that the statement, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice," is probably a Hebrew idiom that means that

⁶⁰For more on the temple replacement theme in Matthew, see Gärtner, *Temple and the Community*, 114-16; Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New*, trans. Donald H. Madvig (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 86, 115; Michael Knowles, *Jeremiah in Matthew's Gospel: The Rejected-Prophet Motif in Matthaean Redaction*, JSNTSup 68 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 174-75; Kupp, *Matthew's Emmanuel*, 90-91; Warren Carter, *Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist*, 195-96; Sunik Hwang, "Matthew's View of the Temple" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002).

God desires mercy and not simply sacrifice.⁶¹ Yet, when read after Jesus' statement about being greater than the temple and when read in light of how Matthew's Gospel ends with the temple veil being torn in two (27:51), this Old Testament quote may suggest that sacrifice itself is no longer desired by God. Jesus himself will be the sacrifice that atones for sin (20:28; 26:28). As France explains, "The statement [about being greater than the temple] is not developed at that point, where its function is to underline the authority of Jesus in relation to legal issues (the sabbath), though the immediately following quotation of Hosea 6:6 with its downgrading of 'sacrifice' might well lead a Christian reader to see here already a pointer to the theology of the Letter to the Hebrews, focused on a new covenant with a new (heavenly) sanctuary and the supersession of animal sacrifice by the one sacrifice of Christ."⁶²

Second, in terms of the immediate context, later in the chapter Matthew mentions two other "greater than" sayings. Jesus is not only greater than the temple; he is also greater than Jonah and Solomon (12:41-42). The language of being greater than these Old Testament figures probably points to Jesus as their perfect fulfillment.⁶³ This is made clear in the case of Jonah, where it says that Jesus' death and resurrection were typified in Jonah's episode of being swallowed and then released by the huge fish (12:38-40). Just as Jonah was in the huge fish three days and nights, so Jesus was crucified and resurrected on the third day (16:21; 17:23; 20:19).⁶⁴ Thus, Jesus' death and resurrection

⁶¹Gurtner, *Torn Veil*, 105-06; Menken, *Matthew's Bible*, 229.

⁶²France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher*, 215.

⁶³For the typological use of the "greater than" sayings in Matthew's Gospel, see France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher*, 189-91.

⁶⁴Concerning the sign of Jonah in 12:40, Schreiner says, "Jonah's being swallowed by the whale signified God's judgment upon the prophet for his sin. So too Jesus is judged at the cross by God—forsaken by God himself (Matt. 27:46 par.; cf. Ps. 22:1)—because he took upon himself the sin of Israel and even the sin of the world" (*New Testament Theology*, 270). Though this interpretation would help buttress the thesis that Matthew had a developed theology of the atonement prior to the passion narrative, the sign of Jonah does not convincingly emphasize God's judgment upon Jesus. The emphasis appears to be on Jesus' resurrection which serves as a miraculous sign vindicating him as the Messiah. Plus, it is not

are the typological fulfillment of Jonah's experience. This idea of typological fulfillment also occurs before the temple saying. When Jesus was criticized for his disciples picking grain on the Sabbath, he reminded the Pharisees of what David and his men did in the temple. They ate the bread of the presence even though only priests were allowed to eat this bread. As pointed out above, Jesus is making a christological argument here. If David was allowed to do what was considered unlawful on the Sabbath, how much more could Jesus, who is greater than David, allow his disciples to pick grain on the Sabbath? By using this argument Jesus is putting himself in a place of superiority to David. Later he will do this even more explicitly when he reminds the Pharisees that David referred to the Messiah as "Lord" (22:41-46). By saying that he is superior to David, Jesus shows that the promises and role given to David in the Old Testament are fulfilled in him. Jesus, as the Messiah, is the typological fulfillment of David.

When you put all this together (David, the temple, Jonah, and Solomon), Jesus is saying that he is the fulfillment of the Old Testament. As Messiah, he is prophet (greater than Jonah), priest (greater than the temple), king (greater than David), and wise man (greater than Solomon).⁶⁵ Thus, when Jesus says that he is greater than the temple he is pointing out that he fulfills the very role of the temple and thus the temple is superseded by him. The way he ultimately fulfills the role of the temple is by dying on the cross to provide salvation and atonement for sin. As Meier states, "In his very person, and finally by his sacrificial death, Jesus replaces the Temple and all the sacrifices prescribed by the Law."⁶⁶

clear that the huge fish served as a vehicle of God's judgment upon Jonah. The fish actually saved Jonah from drowning and delivered him safely to dry land.

⁶⁵See France, *Matthew*, 214; Yang, *Jesus and the Sabbath*, 182.

⁶⁶John P. Meier, *The Vision of Matthew: Christ, Church and Morality in the First Gospel* (New York: Paulist, 1979), 84.

The Temple in Matthew

The temple in Matthew is a vast, somewhat unwieldy subject worthy of detailed study.⁶⁷ For instance, it is difficult to determine whether Matthew is anti-temple or not (cf. 8:4; 27:51). Though this work does not encompass a thorough examination of the temple theme, in what follows it becomes clear in two ways that Matthew understood Jesus as the replacement of the temple. First, Matthew presents Jesus as one who fulfills the very role of the temple. He mediates the presence of God and provides forgiveness of sins. Second, Jesus repeatedly announces the destruction of the temple and renders it superfluous by his atoning death on the cross.⁶⁸ Thus, it appears that Matthew understood Jesus to replace the temple as the unique place of atonement.

Jesus and the presence of God. Matthew begins and ends with an emphasis on the divine presence, and thus this theme forms an *inclusio* in his Gospel.⁶⁹ In chapter 1, Jesus is called Immanuel which means “God with us” (v. 23). Then the Gospel ends with Jesus’ promise, “Surely I am with you always even to the end of the age” (28:20). Also, in the middle of the Gospel we read, “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them” (18:20). This emphasis on the universal presence of Jesus reveals his divine status: no mere man could be at more than one place at one time. Thus, there is a connection between the universal presence of Jesus with his followers and the universal presence of God. In fact, the presence of God is uniquely found in Jesus and mediated through him. Matthew does not say that God was with Jesus; rather, he says that in Jesus God was with us. That is, Jesus mediates the presence

⁶⁷For a recent dissertation on this topic, see Hwang, “Matthew’s View of the Temple.”

⁶⁸After connecting these emphases in Matthew (i.e., the presence of God, the forgiveness of sins, and the destruction of the temple) with his temple replacement theme, I discovered that G. K. Beale has made a similar argument (*The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, NSBT 17 [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004], 177-79).

⁶⁹Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 41-42. Hwang, “Matthew’s View of the Temple,” 150-58.

of God and acts as God.

This role is reminiscent of the temple, for in the temple the presence of God was manifested. After the tabernacle was set up under Moses, the presence of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Exodus 40:34-35 reads, “Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of Yahweh filled the tabernacle. Moses was unable to enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of Yahweh filled the tabernacle.” The same was true with the dedication of Solomon’s temple. 2 Chronicles 7:1 says, “Now when Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of Yahweh filled the temple.” The Old Testament saw a connection between God’s temple and his presence. Thus, by calling Jesus “God with us” there is a hint that he is the new mediator of God’s presence. He is greater than the temple and thus other places where God’s presence was formerly manifested are now overshadowed by Jesus who is Immanuel. As Powell states, “In other words, the manifestation of God’s presence in Jesus Christ relativizes the significance of all other loci where God has previously been sought or found.”⁷⁰

Jesus and the forgiveness of sins. Matthew connects the forgiveness of sins with Jesus rather than with the sacrifices at the temple. We see this already in the ministry of John the Baptist. John performs his ministry out in the wilderness away from the temple. He calls the Sadducees a “brood of vipers” and warns them about the coming wrath (3:7-10), yet they were the group most connected to the temple franchise. Thus, John’s ministry was seen as an alternative to temple sacrifice.⁷¹ However, unlike Mark 1:4, Matthew does not explicitly connect the forgiveness of sins with John’s ministry,

⁷⁰Mark Allan Powell, *God with Us: A Pastoral Theology of Matthew’s Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 55-56.

⁷¹Robert L. Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet: A Socio-Historical Study*, JSNTSup 62 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 203-05.

most likely, because he wanted to make clear that forgiveness comes through Jesus Christ alone.⁷² This is confirmed by the fact that only Matthew added the phrase “for the forgiveness of sins” to Jesus’ words about his blood at the institution of the Lord’s Supper (26:28).

We see Jesus’ connection with the forgiveness of sins played out in 9:1-8. Jesus says to a paralytic, “Be of good cheer, child, your sins are forgiven” (v. 2). The teachers of the law saw this as blasphemy because only God can forgive sins. To prove that he had the authority to forgive sins Jesus heals the paralyzed man. The healing served as proof that Jesus’ pronouncement of forgiveness was effective. No one could see if the man’s sins were forgiven, but they could witness him get up and walk. And in light of the biblical connection between sin and sickness (e.g., Ps 103:3; Jas 5:15-16), Jesus’ ability to heal verified his pronouncement of forgiveness. By forgiving this man’s sins he was fulfilling his God-given mission to “save his people from their sins” (1:21). The paralytic did not have to go to the temple to be forgiven; he simply had to come to Jesus. This reality, by the way, fits with Jesus as Immanuel. Since he is God with us, he is able to forgive sins. Matthew recognizes Jesus’ divine status in showing that he is able to forgive sins.

In 8:1-4, Jesus instructed the man with leprosy to show himself to the priest and offer the gift commanded by Moses. Yet, he was healed by Jesus prior to going to the temple. Going to the temple simply allowed him to reenter Jewish society as a cleansed man. Plus, the focus of this story is not on the proper role of the temple, but on Jesus. Matthew probably inserted this story in its present location following the Sermon on the Mount to show that Jesus kept the law and thus abided by his own teaching (5:17-

⁷²Senior, *Passion of Jesus in Matthew*, 69; Gurtner, *Torn Veil*, 134; Novakovic, *Messiah, the Healer of the Sick*, 74 n. 249; Martin Hasitschka, “Matthew and Hebrews,” in *Matthew and His Christian Contemporaries*, LNTS 333, ed. David C. Sim and Boris Repschinski (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 92.

20).⁷³ Yet, Matthew is not simply showing that Jesus is obedient to the law. He is also highlighting Jesus' divinity and power. The leper bows down before Jesus and addresses him as "Lord" (v. 2). The two words used here (προσκύνω and κύριος) reveal to Matthew's readers that Jesus is worthy of worship.⁷⁴

It is important to read this story not just in light of its focus on Jesus, but also in light of the shift in salvation history that occurs in Matthew's Gospel with the death and resurrection of Jesus.⁷⁵ His death results in the tearing of the temple veil (27:51) and the christological confession of Gentiles (27:54). Following his resurrection, the door is open for Gentiles to enter the kingdom of heaven as seen by Jesus' commission to make disciples of all nations (28:18-20). These events reveal a shift in salvation history. Thus, during his earthly ministry it would have been completely appropriate for him to abide by the law's requirements in relation to cleansing. Yet, after Jesus' death and resurrection it would be unnecessary to go to the temple after one is healed. Jesus' death signaled the ending of the temple system. Thus, it is important to read Matthew's narrative in light of this shift in salvation history. What was seen as appropriate during Jesus' earthly ministry may not be necessary after his atoning death.

Furthermore, it is significant that the word used for "offering" in 8:4 is δῶρον. This word, which means "a gift," is consistently used by Matthew to speak of sacrifices offered.⁷⁶ The more usual word in the LXX for sacrifices, which is θυσία, is only used

⁷³Hwang, "Matthew's View of the Temple," 25.

⁷⁴Hwang also argues that the use of προσέρχομαι (v. 2) points to Jesus as the fulfillment of the temple since this word is often used in cultic contexts in the LXX (e.g., Lev 9:7; 21:17-18, 21) (ibid., 28-36). It is difficult to know if this view is correct since Matthew uses this word often in contexts that contain no cultic significance (e.g., 4:3; 8:19; 9:14). However, in this context with the use of προσκύνω and κύριος, Hwang's argument is at least plausible.

⁷⁵See John P. Meier, "Salvation History in Matthew: In Search of a Starting Point," *CBQ* 37 (1975): 203-15.

⁷⁶See 2:11; 5:23, 24 [2x]; 8:4; 15:5; 23:18, 19 [2x]. This word is used in Mark only once (7:11) and in Luke only twice (21:1, 4).

twice in Matthew, and in both places it is found in quotations from the Old Testament (9:13; 12:7). When one adds to this observation the fact that Matthew leaves out Mark's comment in the parallel passage about offering sacrifices that bring about cleansing (1:44), it appears that Matthew is showing that offerings at the temple were not atoning. Only Jesus' death can cleanse sin and atone for it (20:28; 26:28). As Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles state, "Matthew's sacrificial theology recognized Jesus as the one true and effective sacrifice. Consequently, all other sacrifices that sought atonement were now passé. Sacrifices were appropriate only when they expressed gratitude for forgiveness and cleansing for Jesus' atoning work, not when they sought atonement through performing rituals."⁷⁷

Jesus and the destruction of the temple. Jesus' relation to the temple in Matthew is somewhat complex. In some ways, Jesus appears supportive of the temple and its functions, at least in the sense of recognizing its role in the life of the Jewish people. He speaks of leaving one's gift at the altar in order to be reconciled with an offended brother, but then after being reconciled he says that one is to offer his gift (5:23-24). He does not denounce temple worship; instead, he shows the emptiness of sacrifices apart from love and reconciliation (cf. Mic 6:6-8). He tells a man with leprosy to show himself to the priest after being healed (8:1-4). The phrase εἰς μαρτύριον αὐτοῖς (v. 4) could be translated as "a witness *against* them" with the dative understood as a dative of disadvantage.⁷⁸ If so, then Jesus is taking an adversarial role toward the temple authorities. However, most likely it is best to translate the phrase more positively as "a testimony to them."⁷⁹ Thus, Jesus recognizes the proper role of the temple structure

⁷⁷Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, *Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown*, 222. This argument about Matthew's preferred use of δῶρον and his change to Mark 1:44 comes from them (221-22).

⁷⁸Hwang, "Matthew's View of the Temple," 28.

⁷⁹Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 6. This is how it is translated in the NIV, NRSV, NASB, and NKJV.

during his earthly ministry. However, as pointed out above, with Jesus' death and resurrection there is a noticeable shift in salvation history in Matthew. This shift points to the fact that what was considered appropriate or necessary during Jesus' earthly ministry is no longer necessary after his atoning death. And as Matthew's Gospel unfolds, we see that the temple is ultimately superseded by Jesus and his work on the cross.

In a question about paying the temple tax, Jesus advocates paying the tax so as not to offend (17:24-27). However, he acknowledges that in reality "the sons are exempt" from having to pay (v. 26). He was using the analogy of how the sons of kings do not have to pay taxes. Since the disciples are the sons of the kingdom, they should not have to pay the temple tax. Yet, again he recommends paying the tax to avoid offence. This incident may shed some light on Jesus' view of the temple and its fading role. Blomberg writes, "If God's people are freed from paying the tax for the temple's upkeep, they must be freed from the sacrifices for which the temple existed."⁸⁰

Later Jesus drives the money changers out of the temple (21:12-13). The connection between this event and the withering fig tree is not quite as evident in Matthew as it is in Mark, where Mark uses his sandwiching device to highlight the connection (11:12-25).⁸¹ In Mark there appears to be a clear connection that points toward the destruction of the temple. Yet, the connection may be present in Matthew as well. It is possible that he too intends Jesus' act of clearing the temple to be a prophetic act that points to the temple's eventual destruction (21:12-17).⁸² Jesus actually announces the temple's destruction in a number of places in Matthew following this

⁸⁰Blomberg, *Matthew*, 271.

⁸¹J. R. Edwards, "Markan Sandwiches: The Significance of Interpolations in Markan Narratives," *NovT* 31 (1989): 206-08; Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel according to Mark*, BNTC (London: A & C Black, 1991; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 265.

⁸²Blomberg, *Matthew*, 315; Kupp, *Matthew's Emmanuel*, 90.

event (22:7; 23:38; 24:1-2; cf. 26:61; 27:40). At his death the temple's destruction is foreshadowed by the tearing of the veil (27:51). Though this act pointed toward open access to God via Jesus' sacrifice, it also was an act of judgment upon the temple and its leaders. Thus, there is a clear emphasis in Matthew on the destruction of the temple, and this event is connected to Jesus' atoning death.

Gurtner argues that in Matthew Jesus is not anti-temple; he is simply against the corrupt leadership of the temple. He states, "When the composite elements of this portrait are brought together, we recognize that Matthew is positive towards the temple in general, affirming the validity of its sacrifices and the presence of God within it. Yet the temple's destruction is imminent not because Matthew sees intrinsic problems with it, but because it is mismanaged by a corrupt Jewish leadership."⁸³ Though it is true that Matthew condemns the leadership of the temple, he also sees the temple in light of a salvation historical shift where the temple itself is superceded by Jesus. Gurtner fails to give sufficient attention to this point. The primary point is not corrupt leadership; the primary point is the inadequacy of the temple in light of Jesus' atoning sacrifice (20:28; 27:51).⁸⁴

Conclusion

The temple saying in Matthew points to Jesus as the replacement of the temple and the place where atonement is made. The immediate context of the temple saying suggests this, which speaks of God as no longer desiring sacrifice and speaks of Jesus as fulfilling typologically the Old Testament. This is confirmed by the larger context of

⁸³Gurtner, *Torn Veil*, 99. For more on Gurtner's view of Jesus' relation to the temple in Matthew, see 98-126. For a work that correctly emphasizes the negative view of the temple found in Matthew, see Hwang, "Matthew's View of the Temple."

⁸⁴In the Greek, the word for "the temple" is in the emphatic position, which shows that Jesus is greater than the temple itself and not just the priests (Osborne, *Matthew*, 453).

Matthew's Gospel. In Matthew we learn that the presence of God is uniquely found in Jesus and mediated through him. We learn that the forgiveness of sins comes through Christ and his death on the cross. We also read how he pronounced the temple's destruction and then died for sins, which made the temple unnecessary. In light of all this, Jesus' statement about being greater than the temple suggests that he saw himself as replacing the temple as the place of sacrifice and atonement. As Kingsbury states, "Jesus himself supplants the temple as the 'place' where God mediates salvation to people."⁸⁵ Thus, according to Matthew, Jesus saw his atoning death as fulfilling the role of the temple in providing forgiveness of sins and access to God's presence.

⁸⁵Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story*, 30.

CHAPTER 4
ATONEMENT LEADING UP TO
THE PASSION NARRATIVE

The Passion Predictions (16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19)

Up to this point we have looked at Matthew's atonement theology in passages that relate to Jesus' death, but not in passages that relate to his death in an explicit manner. Moreover, only one of the passages examined so far contained actual words of Jesus, and that was the temple saying in 12:6. In this section we will look at a group of passages that record what Jesus reportedly said and ones that explicitly mention his death. These passages are typically referred to as Jesus' passion predictions. In Matthew, they are found in 16:21, 17:22-23, and 20:17-19.¹ Though Jesus has implicitly predicted his death up to this point (9:15; 12:40), these are the most explicit references to Jesus' death prior to the passion narrative. These predictions have the following in common: they are spoken to the disciples, they are spoken prior to the passion narrative and thus lead up to and prepare for the passion narrative, they explicitly predict Jesus' death, and they predict his resurrection on the third day.

The goal of this section is to determine what these passion predictions tell us about Matthew's atonement theology. What do these predictions tell us, if anything, about the atoning significance of Jesus' death in Matthew's Gospel? This section examines each of the passion predictions in order to determine what they add to one's understanding of Matthew's atonement theology. Yet, an important matter to discuss

¹Jesus predicts his death in 17:12; however, unlike the other three predictions, this one was not given to all the disciples, and it does not mention his resurrection (cf. 17:9). Plus, it does not add any additional theological content to what one already learns from the three main passion predictions. For the passion predictions in the other Synoptic Gospels, see Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34; Luke 9:22; 18:31-33.

first is the origin and authenticity of the passion predictions. Did Jesus predict his upcoming death and resurrection, or were these predictions placed in the mouth of Jesus by the early church?

The Origin of the Passion Predictions

According to Matthew, Jesus explicitly predicted his death and resurrection prior to his arrest and execution in Jerusalem. And Jesus not only predicted his death, but he interpreted his death and its significance in light of Scripture. This is the presentation that Matthew sets forth, yet this presentation has been questioned by past influential New Testament scholars like William Wrede and Rudolf Bultmann. An anti-supernatural bias is clearly the underlying rationale for their denial of Jesus' passion predictions. They could not accept the idea of predictive prophecy. Wrede writes, "That the prophecies of the passion are schematic and contain things which Jesus cannot have known, and in particular that Jesus cannot have prophesied the absolute miracle of an immediate return to life, is manifest."² Similarly, Bultmann's asks, "But can there be any doubt that they are all *vaticinia ex eventu*?"³ Bultmann casts doubt on the passion predictions not just because of his commitment to naturalistic explanations but also because the suffering Son of Man sayings (of which the passion predictions are a clear example) are not found in Q, and thus, he argues, they come from the Hellenistic church and not from Jesus.⁴

Along with an anti-supernatural bias and the absence of suffering Son of Man sayings in Q, Jesus' passion predictions are also questioned because in Mark's Gospel they serve a clear narrative function (and thus are supposedly the creation of Mark), the predictions contain information that is too specific and so could only be spoken after the

²William Wrede, *The Messianic Secret*, trans. J. C. G. Greig (Greenwood, SC: Attic, 1971), 87.

³Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 1:29.

⁴*Ibid.*, 30.

fact (e.g., 20:19 mentions the means of Jesus' death, namely, crucifixion), and the disciples do not seem prepared for the death of Jesus (or, of course, his resurrection). Because of these reasons, a number of scholars believe that Jesus' passion predictions are the creation of the early church and not words spoken by Jesus himself.⁵ The early church, they claim, placed these predictions in the mouth of Jesus to show that he was a divine Savior who knew that his death was coming and viewed it as part of God's redemptive plan.

In spite of these concerns, there are good reasons to believe that the passion predictions originated with Jesus.⁶ First, these predictions involve the use of the title, "the Son of Man." Only in 16:21 is the Son of Man not used, yet in the other Matthean predictions and in all of the ones found in Mark and Luke the Son of Man is used. Since the Son of Man is rarely used outside the Gospels⁷ and is almost always used by Jesus,⁸ it seems unlikely that the early church would create these sayings and place this title on

⁵Along with Wrede and Bultmann, see, e.g., Martin Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*, trans. Betram Lee Woolf (London: Nicholson & Watson, 1934), 225-26; Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Irene McLuskey, Fraser McLuskey, and James M. Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 154; A. J. B. Higgins, *Jesus and the Son of Man* (London: Lutterworth, 1964), 33-34; Hans Dieter Betz, ed., *Christology and a Modern Pilgrimage: A Discussion with Norman Perrin*, rev. ed. (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1974), 10-21; M. J. Borg, "The Jesus Seminar and the Passion Sayings," *Forum* 3 (1987): 81-95.

⁶See, e.g., Vincent Taylor, *Jesus and His Sacrifice: A Study of the Passion-Sayings in the Gospels* (London: MacMillan, 1937), 85-87; Hans F. Bayer, *Jesus' Predictions of Vindication and Resurrection*, WUNT, 2nd ser., vol. 20 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1986), 214-16; Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 2:1486-89; Douglas J. Moo, *The Old Testament in the Gospel Passion Narratives* (Sheffield: Almond, 1983), 110-11; Chrys C. Caragounis, *The Son of Man: Vision and Interpretation*, WUNT 38 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1986), 192-94; I. H. Marshall, "The Synoptic Son of Man Sayings in Recent Discussion," *NTS* 12 (1965-66): 349-50; Craig A. Evans, "Did Jesus Predict His Death and Resurrection?," in *Resurrection*, JSNTSup 186, ed. Stanley E. Porter, Michael A. Hayes, and David Tombs (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 82-97.

⁷Acts 7:56; Heb 2:6; Rev 1:13; 14:14.

⁸Richard Longenecker explains, "The term Son of Man occurs eighty-one times in the Gospels, sixty-nine of them in the Synoptic Gospels. And with just two exceptions, Luke 24.7 (where the angel quotes Jesus' words) and John 12.34 (where the people ask Jesus regarding his use of the term)—neither of which are true exceptions since both reflect Jesus' own usage—all of the occurrences are attributed to Jesus himself" (*The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity*, SBT, 2nd ser., vol. 17 [Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1970], 88-89).

Jesus' lips. Thus, the criterion of dissimilarity argues for the authenticity of these sayings. Second, the first passion prediction in Matthew is virtually inseparable from its context where Jesus rebukes Peter (16:21-23). It is rather doubtful that the early church would create a story where Jesus actually calls Peter "Satan." Thus, since the rebuke is directly connected to Jesus' prediction of his death, it appears that the prediction is authentic.⁹ Third, in light of John the Baptist's martyrdom, it seems likely that Jesus would have expected a similar fate, particularly since Jews at that time typically believed that God's true prophets would suffer and be killed (cf. Matt 5:11-12; 21:35-36; 23:29-39).¹⁰ And if Jesus understood that he would be killed, it is reasonable to think that he would have interpreted the meaning of his death and shared this meaning with his disciples. As C. K. Barrett states, "We thus reach the conclusion that if Jesus predicted his death (and there is no reason why he should not have done so), he also interpreted it."¹¹

Fourth, if Markan priority is accepted, it is noteworthy that hardly any significant alteration has occurred from the passion predictions in Mark to the ones recorded by Matthew and Luke. This argues against them being creations of the early church and highlights the fidelity with which the Evangelists passed on these sayings.¹²

⁹This point is argued by Maurice Casey in relation to Mark 8:31 and its context, yet the same would be true for Matthew. See Casey, *The Solution to the 'Son of Man' Problem*, LNTS 343 (London: T & T Clark, 2007), 201-02.

¹⁰Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 2:1486-87; Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 1:280. For the widespread Jewish belief that prophets would suffer martyrdom and the likely effect that this belief had on Jesus and his understanding of his mission, see David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 157-59, 178.

¹¹C. K. Barrett, *Jesus and the Gospel Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1967), 38.

¹²Taylor, *Jesus and His Sacrifice*, 85-86. In terms of Matthew, other than a few incidental omissions or additions, the main alterations involve the following: identifying the mode of Jesus' death ("kill him" in Mark changed to "crucified" in 20:19), specifying the time of his resurrection ("after three days" in Mark changed to "on the third day" in 16:21; 17:23; 20:19), and using a different word to speak of his resurrection (the active or middle of ἀνίστημι in Mark changed to the passive of ἐγείρω in 16:21; 17:23; 20:19). It is possible that these changes in Matthew were influenced by knowledge of the events after they

Fifth, in light of the disciples' ingrained preconceived ideas about messiahship, it is not surprising that they were caught off guard by Jesus' death in spite of his predictions. Taylor writes, "This argument cannot be said to be conclusive, if we have regard to the ideas of the disciples regarding Messiahship and remember how effectively attention to plain statements is limited by strong preconceptions."¹³ Last, contra Bultmann, there is no reason why these sayings should be excluded simply because they are not found in Q. Since we do not even possess the document known as Q, it is unwise to give it control over what is considered authentic. Moreover, as Dunn points out, the argument from Q "would be decisive only if Q had been intended to provide a complete inventory of Jesus' teaching or was the only Jesus tradition known to those who used it."¹⁴ In the end, then, it appears that if one is not controlled by an anti-supernatural bias, there are convincing reasons for upholding the authenticity of Jesus' passion predictions.

The First Passion Prediction (16:21)

Matthew 16:21 serves as a recognizable turning point in the narrative.¹⁵ From

occurred or by the liturgy of the early church. Yet, the fact remains that for the most part Matthew has faithfully passed on the sayings as he found them in Mark. As Taylor points out, "In substance the sayings are not *vaticinia ex eventu*, and such modifications as may have been made are not serious or important" (89-90).

¹³Taylor, *Jesus and His Sacrifice*, 88.

¹⁴James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, vol. 1 of *Christianity in the Making* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 800 n. 189. Brown rhetorically asks, "Yet since Q does not have a PN [Passion Narrative], would it have been a logical vehicle for preserving predictions pertinent to the passion?" (*Death of the Messiah*, 2:1479 n. 21).

¹⁵On the significance of 16:21, Craig Blomberg writes, "Inasmuch as the rest of the Gospel describes the events that culminate in the crucifixion and resurrection, this verse serves to introduce not only 16:21-28 but all of 16:21-28:20" (*Matthew*, NAC, vol. 22 [Nashville: Broadman, 1992], 259). Jack Dean Kingsbury is well known for dividing Matthew's Gospel into three sections (1:1-4:16; 4:17-16:20; 16:21-28:20) based on the formula Ἀπὸ τότε ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς used in 4:17 and 16:21 (*Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975], 7-25). For a critique of Kingsbury's outline that still gives weight to the importance of 16:21 in Matthew's Gospel, see R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 151-52; Janice Capel Anderson, *Matthew's Narrative Web: Over, and Over, and Over Again*, JSNTSup 91 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 161.

this point on Jesus, along with his disciples, moves in the direction of Jerusalem where he will face death by crucifixion. Jesus has hinted at his death prior to this point (9:15; 12:40), but from here on out he becomes more explicit in predicting his death and vindication. In the first passion prediction, Matthew summarizes what Jesus said rather than providing a direct quote. He writes, “From that time on Jesus¹⁶ began to point out to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests and scribes, be killed, and on the third day be raised up” (16:21). In this prediction, Jesus explains his fate (be killed), where it will occur (Jerusalem), who will do it (the elders, chief priests, and scribes¹⁷), what will follow (be raised up), and when (on the third day). This first passion prediction follows Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God (16:16). Rather than discrediting Peter’s confession, Jesus acknowledges that it was the Father who revealed to Peter that he was the Messiah (16:17). Yet, it is now necessary for Jesus to explain what type of Messiah he is. Thus, the passion prediction in 16:21 shows that, as Messiah, Jesus will suffer, be killed, and then be raised to life.

Some minimize the atonement theology found in the passion predictions.¹⁸

¹⁶A few manuscripts including \aleph^* and B^* read Ἰησοῦς Χριστός rather than simply Ἰησοῦς. It is difficult to determine which reading is original. Though R. T. France (*The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007], 630 n. 2) offers good reasons to accept the latter reading, it is quite possible that Ἰησοῦς Χριστός is the correct reading. The same phrase is used in 1:1, 18, and it fits the context well (see 16:16). Those who argue for this reading include Robert H. Gundry (*Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994], 338) and Leon Morris (*The Gospel according to Matthew*, PNTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992; reprint, 1999], 427 n. 39).

¹⁷A single article governs these three groups of people, and so they probably comprise a single group, namely, the Sanhedrin (see Morris, *Gospel according to Matthew*, 428; Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, ZECNT [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010], 635).

¹⁸Scot McKnight writes, “The passion predictions offer no theology of the atonement.” He goes on to say, “Clearly, Jesus thought he had to die, but the passion predictions simply offer no explanation to the effect or the saving value of a premature death” (*Jesus and His Death: Historiography, the Historical Jesus, and Atonement Theory* [Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005], 238, 239). Luomanen states, “Although the passion predictions anticipate Jesus’ death, Matthew does not use them to highlight the atoning character of death so much as to picture Jesus’ exemplary humility and submission to God’s will” (*Entering the Kingdom of Heaven: A Study on the Structure of Matthew’s View of Salvation*,

However, each of the predictions offers a unique contribution to Matthew's explanation of Jesus' atoning death. The first prediction does this by using the word δεῖ ("must"). This is the first time Matthew uses this word in his Gospel. Matthew uses δεῖ here to speak of divine necessity and in particular to "scriptural necessity."¹⁹ This is seen in 26:54 where the idea of Scriptural fulfillment is connected to the use of δεῖ. It reads, "But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?" Also, 17:10 says that Elijah must come first; he must come first because Malachi 4:5-6 predicted that he would. These passages in Matthew show that things "must" happen in a certain way because Scripture has prophesied that they would. That is why Davies and Allison argue that δεῖ "in Matthew is the functional equivalent of γέγραπται."²⁰ What is true in Mark is also true in Matthew: "The term δεῖ expresses a conviction that his suffering and death are in accordance with the will of God revealed in Scripture."²¹

By stating his prediction in this way, Jesus not only understood that he would die but that his death was part of God's redemptive plan as revealed in Scripture. His death was not an accident nor was it a failure; rather, it was God's will that Jesus die in order to redeem sinful humanity (20:28). Since δεῖ refers to Scriptural necessity, it is important to ask which Scriptures Jesus had in mind when he spoke of his death and resurrection. Davies and Allison list the following possibilities: Psalms 22; 34:19-22; 89:38-45; 118:10-25; Isaiah 52-53; Daniel 7; Hosea 6:2; and Zechariah 13:7-9. Yet, they follow these suggestions by stating, "Matthew himself, we suspect, will probably have

WUNT, 2nd ser., vol. 101 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998], 230). See also Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: An Introduction to Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 503.

¹⁹Higgins, *Jesus and the Son of Man*, 32. Similarly, see Moo, *Old Testament in the Passion Narratives*, 87.

²⁰W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, ICC (London: T & T Clark, 1988-97), 2:656.

²¹Morna D. Hooker, *The Son of Man in Mark* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1967), 107.

had Isaiah in mind above all.”²² It is quite likely that Matthew had more than one Scripture in mind when he said that Jesus must die and be raised to life.²³ Since the following passages are actually mentioned by Jesus in relation to his death or vindication or both, they are likely candidates: Psalm 118:22-23 (in 21:42); Psalm 110:1 (in 22:44); Zechariah 13:7 (in 26:31); and Psalm 22:1 (in 27:46). In light of the allusions to Isaiah 53 in the passion narrative, this too is a likely passage.²⁴ One passage that Davies and Allison do not mention, however, is Daniel 7. There are good reasons for believing that this passage also influenced Jesus and his predictions of his death and vindication.²⁵

First, all of the Synoptic passion predictions except 16:21 use the title Son of Man in them, and most likely Jesus’ use of the Son of Man came principally from Daniel 7.²⁶ Second, δεῖ is used around 45 times in the LXX, and only in Daniel is it used to speak of God’s sovereign will accomplished in history (see Dan Θ 2:28, 29 [2x], 45).²⁷ This use of δεῖ fits with how Matthew uses the word in Jesus’ first passion prediction in 16:21. Third, in the second passion prediction in Matthew, Jesus speaks of being given over (παραδίδομι) into the hands of men (17:22). A similar phrase is found in Daniel 7:25 where παραδίδομι is used to speak of being given over into the hands of the fourth beast (which may refer to Rome). Finally, Daniel is one of the few books that explicitly speaks of resurrection (12:2), and resurrection is something found in each of the passion

²²Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 2:656.

²³This would coincide with the plural use of γραφαὶ in 26:54 (Moo, *Old Testament in the Passion Narratives*, 109).

²⁴The following are possible allusions to Isa 53 in the passion narrative: Isa 53:11-12 in 26:28; Isa 53:7 in 26:63 and 27:12, 14; Isa 53:12 in 27:38; and Isa 53:9 in 27:57.

²⁵See especially J. Schaberg, “Daniel 7, 12 and the New Testament Passion-Resurrection Predictions,” *NTS* 31 (1985): 208-22. Moo denies a connection between Dan 7 and the suffering Son of Man (*Old Testament in the Passion Narratives*, 101-02).

²⁶Longenecker, *Christology of Early Jewish Christianity*, 90-91; R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1971), 136-37.

²⁷Caragounis, *Son of Man*, 198.

predictions in Matthew. One difficulty with understanding Daniel 7 as the background for the passion predictions is that in this chapter the Son of Man does not suffer; it is the saints who suffer. However, as Caragounis points out, since Jesus took the role of a substitute for his people (20:28), it was fitting for him to view the suffering of the saints in Daniel 7:25 as something he himself would face.²⁸ Caragounis states, “Since Jesus assumed this role [of substitute] it was natural for him to apply all those ideas, which in Dan 7 relate to the suffering of the saints, to himself and to see his role as the suffering Son of Man along the lines described in Dan 7 of the saints.”²⁹ If it is true that Daniel 7 (and in particular v. 25) makes up part of the Old Testament background for the passion predictions, then this would highlight the substitutionary nature of Jesus’ death. For in Daniel it is the saints who are handed over to the fourth beast, yet in the Gospels Jesus is the one who is handed over. It is Jesus who suffers and dies for his people, thus becoming their ransom in order to save them from their sins (1:21; 20:28).

The Second Passion Prediction (17:22-23)

Unlike the first passion prediction, here Matthew quotes Jesus directly. Jesus states, “The Son of Man is going to be handed over into the hands of men, and they will kill him and on the third day he will be raised up.” This second passion prediction follows the story of Jesus where he healed the demon-possessed boy (17:14-20). The disciples that did not witness the transfiguration attempted to heal the boy but were unsuccessful. After coming down from the mountain, Jesus cast the demon out of the boy and then instructed his disciples about the necessity and power of faith. After this he again predicted his death and resurrection with the result that the disciples were filled with grief (17:22-23). It is not clear how this second passion prediction fits in with the

²⁸Ibid., 200-01.

²⁹Ibid., 201.

context. What is clear is that it keeps the plot moving toward the climactic death of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel.

In terms of Matthew's atonement theology, a key element in this prediction is the use of παραδίδομι ("to be handed over, betrayed"), which is also found in the third passion prediction (20:18-19). This word is used 31 times in Matthew's Gospel. It can speak of being arrested or put in prison (e.g., 4:12; 10:19), being entrusted with something important or valuable (e.g., 11:27; 25:14), being betrayed (e.g., 10:4; 26:21), or being handed over to be crucified (e.g., 26:2; 27:26). The most concentrated use of παραδίδομι is found in the passion narrative: it is used 15 times in chapters 26-27. In this section it speaks of being betrayed or handed over to be crucified. Here in 17:22 Jesus does not specify who will hand him over or betray him, but we know from the rest of Matthew that it was Judas Iscariot who did this (e.g., 26:15-16, 24-25). However, since Judas's betrayal happened in fulfillment of Scripture, on a higher level it was God who ultimately handed Jesus over to be crucified (26:24, 31, 54, 56).³⁰ As Senior explains, "The 'handing over' of the Son of Man as signaled in the Passion predictions (17:22; 20:18-19; 26:2) is not a capricious accident of history but is the outcome of the divine will."³¹ The rest of the New Testament concurs, presenting God the Father as the one who ultimately delivered up Jesus to be crucified on our behalf (e.g., Acts 2:23; Rom 8:32). This observation is significant because it shows that Jesus' death was part of God's redemptive plan revealed in Scripture (1:21).

As mentioned above in the discussion on the first passion prediction, it is possible that the use of παραδίδομι in the passion predictions was influenced by Daniel 7:25.³² Not only is παραδίδομι used in Daniel 7:25, but it speaks of being given over

³⁰Osborne, *Matthew*, 661-62.

³¹Donald Senior, *Matthew*, ANTC (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 297.

³²John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 719; Caragounis, *Son of Man*, 199; McKnight, *Jesus and His Death*, 235; Schaberg, "Daniel 7, 12 and the

“into his hands” (i.e., the hands of the fourth beast, which may refer to Rome). In 17:22, Jesus speaks of being given over into the hands of men, and in 20:19 it specifically refers to being handed over to the Gentiles. The similar use of “into the hands of” (17:22) and the specific mention of Gentile powers (20:19) fit nicely with what is conveyed in Daniel 7:25. This connection receives further support in light of the use of the Son of Man in the passion predictions (Dan 7:13) and the promise of resurrection (Dan 12:2). As mentioned above, if Daniel 7:25 comprises part of the Old Testament background, this means that Jesus is presented as dying on behalf of his people for only the saints suffer in Daniel 7.

Another possible allusion for παραδίδομι in the passion predictions is Isaiah 53.³³ In the LXX, παραδίδομι is used 3 times in Isaiah 53, once in verse 6 and twice in verse 12. Isaiah 53 was quoted earlier in Matthew 8 and allusions to this chapter are evident in the passion narrative. Thus, it seems likely that an intentional allusion to Isaiah 53 is found in the passion predictions. Not everyone agrees with this viewpoint. Some argue that Isaiah 53 did not influence Jesus’ passion predictions.³⁴ For Bultmann and Hooker, Jesus did not view his life and mission in relation to the Isaianic Servant of the Lord. However, as argued in the section on 8:14-17, this is based on a minimalistic reading of the Old Testament which fails to recognize the various allusions to Isaiah 53 in

Passion-Resurrection Predictions,” 214.

³³Gundry, *Matthew*, 354; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, WBC, vol. 33B (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 507-08; Peter G. Bolt, *The Cross from a Distance: Atonement in Mark’s Gospel*, NSBT 18 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 52-53. Barnabas Lindars is less sure because of the absence of “for our sins,” yet he still suggests Isa 53 as a possible influence on παραδίδομι in the passion predictions (*Jesus Son of Man* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983], 64, 69, 82-83; cf. Barnabas Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic: The Doctrinal Significance of the Old Testament Quotations* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961], 80-81). Though R. T. France argues that Isa 53 lies behind the passion predictions, he does not think that an allusion to this passage can be found in the use of παραδίδομι (“The Servant of the Lord in the Teaching of Jesus,” *TynBul* 19 [1968]: 44-45).

³⁴E.g., Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 1:31; Morna D. Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant: The Influence of the Servant Concept of Deutero-Isaiah in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1959), 92-97; Kenneth Grayston, *Dying, We Live: A New Inquiry into the Death of Christ in the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 178.

Matthew's Gospel.³⁵

Thus, it seems likely that Isaiah 53 was in mind in the passion predictions. This is not simply based on the fact that παραδίδομι is found in Isaiah 53:6, 12 LXX; more significantly, it is based on how this word is used in that chapter and how its use there fits well with Matthew's understanding of Jesus' atoning death. Isaiah 53:6 says, "The Lord handed him over for our sins" (κύριος παρέδωκεν αὐτὸν ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις ἡμῶν). Isaiah 53:12 says, "His soul was handed over to death" (παρεδόθη εἰς θάνατον ἡ ψυχὴ αὐτοῦ) and "He was handed over because of their iniquities" (διὰ τὰς ἁμαρτίας αὐτῶν παρεδόθη). Twice it speaks of the Servant who was handed over for or because of the sins of the people. This substitutionary note fits with what Jesus says in 20:28 about giving his life "as a ransom in place of many." Moreover, the emphasis on *the Lord* handing over the Servant for our sins (Isa 53:6) fits with Matthew's emphasis that Jesus died as a result of God's will as presented in Scripture (26:31, 54).³⁶ Finally, being handed over "for our sins" (Isa 53:6) or "because of our iniquities" (Isa 53:12) fits with what Jesus said about pouring out his blood "for the forgiveness of sins" (26:28). The intended allusion to Isaiah 53 in the Matthean passion predictions, thus, appears rather strong.

The Third Passion Prediction (20:17-19)

Unlike the first and second passion predictions that occur fairly close together, two chapters separate the second and third predictions.³⁷ There is no mention of Jesus' upcoming death in chapters 18-19. These two chapters are focused on various teachings

³⁵According to Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, Matthew quotes and alludes to Isa 53 more than any other New Testament book, with 1 quotation and 7 allusions. Second to Matthew's Gospel is 1 Peter with 1 quotation and 6 allusions (*The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* [Nashville: B & H Academic, 2009], 222, 222 n. 80).

³⁶Moo, *Old Testament in the Passion Narratives*, 95-96.

³⁷This is not the case in Mark's Gospel. In his Gospel the predictions occur without any chapters in between them (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34).

that Jesus gave. Nevertheless, with the first two passion predictions the narrative is still moving toward Jesus' mission to die in Jerusalem for his people. This theme is picked back up again and reinforced in 20:17-19 with the third passion prediction. Matthew introduces the prediction by stating that Jesus was going up to Jerusalem (v. 17; cf. 21:1, 10), which as we know from 16:21 is the place where Jesus will die. Taking his disciples aside, Jesus says to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes³⁸ and they will condemn him to death. They will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked, flogged, and crucified; and on the third day he will be raised to life" (vv. 18-19). From the disciples' standpoint these predictions are an attempt to prepare them for Jesus' crucifixion, yet from the reader's standpoint they keep the narrative moving in the direction of the cross. As readers, we realize that Jesus' ultimate mission is to die for his people.

This is the longest of the three passion predictions. It is also more specific than the other two. This is the only prediction that explains that Jesus will be killed by Gentiles and that his death will occur by crucifixion. Actually, 20:19 is the first time in Matthew that crucifixion is *explicitly* mentioned as the means of Jesus' death. The specificity of this prediction causes most scholars to think that at least some of these details were added in light of the events that occurred. However, twice Jesus spoke to his disciples about taking up the cross and following him (10:38; 16:24), which at least implies that Jesus realized that crucifixion awaited him.³⁹ Even if this detail was added after the fact, the basic prediction of Jesus' death and resurrection goes back to Jesus himself.⁴⁰

³⁸The elders are not mentioned as they are in 16:21.

³⁹D. P. Secombe writes, "We cannot evade the implication that the cross saying represents an indirect prediction, not just of Jesus' passion, but of his death by crucifixion" ("Take Up Your Cross," in *God Who is Rich in Mercy*, ed. P. T. O'Brien and D. G. Peterson [Homebush, Australia: Anzea, 1986], 141). See also Bayer, *Jesus' Predictions*, 189 n. 42.

⁴⁰Yet, it makes sense that Jesus would be more specific about the details of his suffering and

Twice in this prediction παραδίδομι is used (vv. 18-19). I pointed out in the second passion prediction that this word most likely alludes to Daniel 7:25 and Isaiah 53. If so, then this allusion stresses the substitutionary nature of Jesus' death, an emphasis found elsewhere in Matthew (20:28; 27:42). The substitutionary nature of Jesus' death is possibly emphasized in another element found in the third passion prediction. Matthew records Jesus saying that the chief priests and scribes "will hand him over to the Gentiles" (v. 19). The Gentiles were mentioned here because only they could have Jesus crucified. However, there may be more to it than that in the use of this phrase. It is possible that being handed over to the Gentiles picks up on an Old Testament theme that speaks of being handed over to God's wrath. If so, then this too stresses the fact that Jesus died in our place: he died vicariously to atone for our sin.

Peter Bolt, in his book on the atonement in Mark's Gospel, argues that being "handed over to the nations or Gentiles" is "a theologically loaded term." He states, "To hand someone over to the nations (Gentiles) is equivalent to handing someone over to God's wrath." He further explains, "In this final passion prediction [Mark 10:33-34], Jesus states that he will be handed over to the nations. This is tantamount to being delivered over to the wrath of God."⁴¹ If this is true in Mark's Gospel, it would also be true in Matthew's Gospel because they use the same terminology.

Bolt provides evidence from the Old Testament and Second Temple Jewish literature to support his case.⁴² Psalm 106:40-41 reads, "And Yahweh was very angry with his people and abhorred his inheritance. He handed them over into the hands of the nations, and those that hated them ruled over them." Interestingly, παραδίδομι is used in this passage in the LXX (see Ps 105:41). Notice the link between the Lord's anger with

vindication as time went on.

⁴¹Bolt, *Cross from a Distance*, 56, 58.

⁴²Ibid., 56-58.

his people and his handing them over to the nations. God's wrath results in foreign oppression. To be given over to the nations means that his people are experiencing his wrath and judgment. Judges 2:14 says, "Yahweh was very angry with Israel and handed them over [παραδίδομι] into the hands of plunderers who plundered them. He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, and they were not able any longer to resist the presence of their enemies." Ezekiel 39:23 says, "All the nations will know that the people of Israel went into exile because of their sin, because they rejected me. I turned my face from them and handed them over [παραδίδομι] into the hands of their enemies, and they all fell by the sword." The Old Testament background for this concept of foreign oppression resulting from God's wrath against his people's sin is found in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 (see esp. Lev 26:27-28, 33).

The same idea is found in the Apocrypha. Baruch 4:6 says, "You were sold to the nations not for destruction. Rather, because you angered God you were handed over [παραδίδομι] to your enemies." A similar thought is found in 2 Maccabees 10:4 where the people implore the Lord that their sin would not result in them being "handed over [παραδίδομι] to blasphemous and barbarous nations." There is a recognizable link that includes the people's sin, God's anger, and his handing the people over to foreign nations to be oppressed. In light of this clear, repeated link, it is quite likely that this third passion prediction in Matthew emphasizes that Jesus would die as a consequence of God's wrath against him. He was handed over to the Gentiles to be crucified, and thus he was exposed to God's wrathful judgment. Most likely, this is why Jesus cried out on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Yet, Matthew clearly does not present Jesus as one worthy of God's condemnation. According to Matthew, Jesus was innocent (27:4, 19, 24). Thus, Jesus faced the wrath of God on behalf of his people who had sinned, on behalf of those who needed to be saved from their sins (1:21).

Like the other two predictions, this one also ends with an emphasis on Jesus'

resurrection. The passion predictions are also “resurrection predictions.”⁴³ If Jesus predicted his suffering and death, then it is most likely that he would have spoken of his vindication as well. Both Daniel 7 and Isaiah 53 spoke of vindication, and Jews believed in that day that vindication would follow martyrdom (see, e.g., 2 Macc 7).⁴⁴ Thus, McKnight says, “I overstate: it may be possible, but it is extremely unlikely for someone like Jesus to have thought of martyrdom without vindication.”⁴⁵

Matthew appears to be more specific than Mark in stating that Jesus will be raised to life “on the third day” (cf. “after three days” in Mark), though the two phrases may have been basically synonymous.⁴⁶ It seems likely, however, that the resurrection event itself along with early kerygmatic language (e.g., 1 Cor 15:4) influenced Matthew’s more specific language of “on the third day.”⁴⁷ Unlike Mark that consistently uses ἀνίστημι in the active or middle voice, Matthew consistently uses the passive of ἐγείρω. It is possible that Matthew wants to stress that it is God who raised Jesus from the dead and vindicated him. However, Mark’s use of ἀνίστημι recognized God as the author of Jesus’ resurrection as well, for the intransitive use of this word is used in Mark in places where God or Jesus raises a person from the dead (e.g., 5:42; 12:23, 25).⁴⁸ As with “on

⁴³Lindars, *Jesus Son of Man*, 62.

⁴⁴Evans, “Did Jesus Predict,” 91-92; James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM, 1990), 210-11.

⁴⁵McKnight, *Jesus and His Death*, 230. See also Taylor, *Jesus and His Sacrifice*, 88-89; Barrett, *Jesus and the Gospel Tradition*, 78; Caragounis, *Son of Man*, 196; contra Lindars, *Jesus Son of Man*, 73.

⁴⁶Caragounis, *Son of Man*, 196 n. 335; Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 2nd ed. (London: MacMillan, 1966), 378; Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 2:657 n. 28.

⁴⁷Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 477, 574; France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 633-34. The Old Testament background for being raised on the third day may come from Jonah 2:1 LXX (cf. Matt 12:40) or Hos 6:2. However, interestingly the latter passage is never used in the New Testament as a prediction of Christ’s resurrection.

⁴⁸Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 2:657, 657 n. 29. Similarly, Nolland writes, “The move from ἀναστῆναι to ἐγερθῆναι is little more than stylistic sense both can mean ‘rise’ and, in the present context, both are likely to assume the role of God in restoration (to life)” (*Gospel of Matthew*,

the third day,” Matthew’s use of ἐγείρω in the passive may have been influenced by liturgical tradition (1 Cor 15:4).

It is necessary to point out that Jesus’ resurrection played an integral role in his atoning work on the cross. The focus of this work is on Jesus’ atoning death in Matthew’s Gospel, but this does not mean that his resurrection was not important as well. Without the resurrection, Jesus’ death would not have been atoning: it would have been a colossal failure. It is the resurrection that vindicated Jesus and his work and showed that God accepted his atoning death on our behalf (e.g., Rom 1:4; 4.25). Matthew does not leave Jesus in the tomb, but tells how God raised him from the dead and how he appeared to his disciples and commissioned them to make disciples of all nations (chap. 28). With that said, it remains true that Matthew’s main emphasis was on Jesus’ atoning death. The passion narrative takes up a lot more space than the resurrection narrative in Matthew. Yet, both Jesus’ death and resurrection were essential in saving his people from their sins (1:21).

Conclusion

After our investigation of the atonement theology presented in Matthew’s passion predictions, it is difficult to understand how some can argue that there is little or no atonement theology found in these predictions. The use of δεῖ in 16:21 revealed that Jesus’ death was planned by God and that it fulfilled Scriptures like Daniel 7 and Isaiah 53, which refer to the substitutionary death of the Son of Man and Servant. The use of παράδομι in 17:22 and 20:18-19 also point to these passages in the Old Testament and further emphasize that ultimately it was God who handed Jesus over to be crucified. Finally, the phrase “handed over to the Gentiles” in 20:19 quite likely emphasizes that

687 n. 11). See also Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1966), 1:278 n. 1.

Jesus' death occurred as the result of God's judgment. The wrath of God was unleashed upon Jesus, yet it was not for his sin but for ours in order that we could be saved. As one can see, even though the passion predictions are not as explicit as some statements in the New Testament, for the careful reader these predictions convey a significant amount of explanation regarding Jesus' atoning death.

The Ransom Saying (20:20-28)

The ransom saying in 20:28 is the last passage prior to the passion narrative that is related to Jesus' atoning death. It follows Jesus' third prediction of his death (20:17-19) and precedes his triumphal entry into Jerusalem (21:1-11). The ransom saying is the most explicit and, along with 26:28, the most important passage in Matthew's Gospel in setting forth the meaning of Jesus' death.⁴⁹ In it Jesus states, "Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom in place of many." The context of the ransom saying is found in 20:20-28. There are two main sections in this passage: dialogue (vv. 20-23) and teaching (vv. 24-28).⁵⁰ The dialogue is the result of a request made by the mother of James and John for her sons to sit at the right and left of Jesus in his kingdom. The sons participate in the request, for Jesus speaks directly to them after the request is made. He tells them that they do not understand what they are asking, and then he asks them if they can drink the cup that he is going to drink. After they claim that they can, Jesus agrees that they will drink his cup but declines in promising them any position of glory in his kingdom, for only the Father

⁴⁹Blomberg writes on 20:28b, "This half verse preserves perhaps the most crucial teaching of Jesus about his self-understanding and conception of his mission" (*Matthew*, 308).

⁵⁰David L. Turner, *Matthew*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 485. Though this passage can be divided into two sections, this does not argue against the unity of 20:20-28. The teaching section in vv. 24-28 follows the dialogue in vv. 20-23 quite smoothly. Even some of the same themes are found in both sections (e.g., the status of the disciples, the call to suffer). For a good discussion on the unity of Mark 10:35-45 (which is relevant to Matthew's context in 20:20-28), see Brant Pitre, *Jesus, the Tribulation, and the End of the Exile*, WUNT, 2nd ser., vol. 204 (Tübingen: Mohr, 2005), 386-90.

can grant such a request. The teaching section which follows addresses the subject of servanthood. The other disciples needed this teaching as well, for when they became upset with James and John it was most likely the result of their own selfish desires. In his teaching on servanthood, Jesus contrasts how the Gentile rulers exercise authority with how a disciple is to lead. A disciple is to live a life of service; he is even compared to a slave. The climax of the passage is the ransom saying where Jesus presents himself as the supreme example of servanthood. As the Son of Man, Jesus came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom in place of many.

The ransom saying is also found in Mark 10:45. The saying in Mark is virtually identical with the one in Matthew, the only difference being how each begins (Matthew begins with ὡςπερ and Mark with καὶ γὰρ). The context is also the same. The main difference between the two contexts is that in Mark the two brothers ask for the exalted position, yet in Matthew it is their mother who makes the request of Jesus.⁵¹ Another difference is that Matthew omits the baptismal sayings found in Mark 10:38-39.⁵² In this section on the ransom saying I will do the following two things. First, I will argue for the authenticity of the ransom saying. Second, I will explain the meaning of the

⁵¹Some think that Matthew added that the mother made the request to protect the reputation of James and John (e.g., David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NCB [London: Marshall, Morgan, & Scott, 1972], 287-88). However, Matthew did not seem interested in protecting Peter's reputation earlier (16:22-23), nor does he really protect the reputation of James and John here (20:22-24). There is nothing implausible about the mother of James and John making this request on their behalf especially in light of the fact that she may have been Jesus' aunt (cf. 27:56; Mark 15:40; John 19:25; see Morris, *Gospel according to Matthew*, 508-09 n. 33). For the custom of women making bold requests in Jewish and Greco-Roman cultures, see Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 485.

⁵²Though a number of later manuscripts add the baptismal sayings in 20:22-23, the shorter reading that omits them is more widely supported (it is omitted in Alexandrian, Western, and Caesarean witnesses) and is more easily explained by an attempt to line up Matthew's reading with the one found in Mark (see Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 577). So why did Matthew omit the baptismal sayings found in Mark? Davies and Allison suggest that the omission may be due to an attempt to dissuade a sacramental reading of the baptismal metaphor in light of the nearby cup saying (*Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:89). Another suggestion is that since water baptism is mentioned later in 28:19, Matthew may have wanted to avoid a metaphorical use here (e.g., France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 758 n. 11; Senior, *Matthew*, 225).

ransom saying showing in particular how it alludes to Isaiah 53 and how it presents Jesus' death as substitutionary.

The Authenticity of the Ransom Saying

A number of scholars doubt that Jesus actually spoke of his death as a ransom in place of many, and thus they question the authenticity of the ransom saying.⁵³ The authenticity of the ransom saying is challenged on several fronts. Sydney Page points out 4 reasons why some scholars doubt the authenticity of the ransom saying: (1) the saying does not fit with the context on servanthood and Jesus as an example of servanthood (for he alone gave his life as a ransom in place of many), (2) the aorist tense of the verb (ἤλθεν) looks back on Jesus' life as something that has already occurred, (3) nowhere else in the Gospels does Jesus interpret his death in this way, and (4) the parallel passage in Luke 22:24-27 does not contain the ransom saying.⁵⁴

In spite of these objections a persuasive case can be made for the authenticity of the ransom saying.⁵⁵ Concerning the context, Jesus' mention of his death along with

⁵³E.g., Hastings Rashdall, *The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology* (London: MacMillan, 1925), 29-37, 49-56; H. E. Tödt, *The Son of Man in the Synoptic Tradition* (London: SCM, 1965), 202-11; Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, rev. ed., trans. John Marsh (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 144, 155; R. Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium* (Freiburg: Herder, 1976-77), 2:162-67.

⁵⁴Sydney Page, "Ransom Saying," in *DJG*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 661. D. E. Nineham adds another one, namely, that the ransom saying in Mark was added due to the prevalence of the redemption theme in Paul's writings (*The Gospel of St. Mark*, The Pelican New Testament Commentaries [New York: Penguin, 1969], 281). Though Paul does speak of Christ's death in redemption terms (e.g., Rom 3:24; Gal 3:13), λύτρον ("ransom") is never used in Paul's writings and ἀντίλυτρον ("ransom") is only used once and that in a disputed letter of Paul (see 1 Tim 2:6). Page turns this argument on its head by stating, "The evidence of early and widespread belief in the redeeming efficacy of Jesus' death (cf. 1 Cor 15:3; 1 Pet 1:18-19) is most easily explained if it goes back to something Jesus himself said" ("Ransom Saying," 661). For the argument that the ransom saying was not the result of Pauline influence, see, e.g., Reginald H. Fuller, *The Mission and Achievement of Jesus*, SBT 12 (London: SCM, 1954), 57; Taylor, *Gospel according to St. Mark*, 445-46.

⁵⁵For a defense of the authenticity of the ransom saying, see, e.g., S. H. T. Page, "The Authenticity of the Ransom Logion (Mark 10:45b)," in *Gospel Perspectives*, ed. R. T. France and D. Wenham (Sheffield: JSOT, 1980), 1:137-54; A. Feuillet, "Le logion sur la rançon," *RSPT* 51 (1967): 368-79; Peter Stuhlmacher, "Vicariously Giving His Life for Many, Mark 10:45 (Matt. 20:28)," in *Reconciliation, Law, & Righteousness: Essays in Biblical Theology*, ed. Peter Stuhlmacher and trans. E. Kalin (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 16-23; Pitre, *Jesus, Tribulation, and End of Exile*, 418-54; Leon

an explanation of it fits quite well with both the immediate and larger context of Matthew's Gospel. In the immediate context Jesus has already referred to the cup he will drink (vv. 22-23), and this cup most likely refers to God's judgment against sin that Jesus experiences on the cross (cf. 26:39, 42).⁵⁶ Thus, to speak of his death as a ransom fits quite nicely with the cup saying. Furthermore, the ransom saying is not out of place in Jesus' discussion on servanthood (vv. 25-27). Jesus' sacrificial death is an excellent example of servanthood, the very epitome of the servanthood that he would demonstrate before his disciples.⁵⁷ It is true that only Jesus' death was a ransom for many, yet it is also true that most of his disciples suffered and died as well because of their allegiance to him. As France states, "The death of the Son of Man is therefore portrayed here as the supreme example of unselfish service; he will give himself for others. His specific role as a 'ransom in place of many' is of course unique; what is to be imitated is the spirit of self-giving which inspires it."⁵⁸ Thus, his death did serve as an example to them, even though his death was unique in terms of providing salvation. The same thing occurs in 1 Peter 2:21-24, where the atoning significance of Jesus' death is explained while at the

Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 29-33; David Hill, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings: Studies in the Semantics of Soteriological Terms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 77-78; Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 587-90.

⁵⁶Some think that the cup mentioned in 20:22-23 is simply used as a metaphor for death (e.g., Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001], 543; Barrett, *Jesus and Gospel Tradition*, 46). A strong argument in support of this view is that, according to Jesus, James and John will drink this cup as well. Yet, the focus of 20:22-23 is not on the disciples, but on Jesus and his fate. Jesus specifically refers to the cup as "my cup" (v. 23). Furthermore, the cup saying in Gethsemane (26:39, 42) speaks of being the object of God's wrath, and so it would seem that the same idea would be present in this passage as well (see, e.g., Moo, *Old Testament in Passion Narratives*, 116-18; Osborne, *Matthew*, 739; Joachim Gnilka, *Das Matthäusevangelium*, HTKNT [Freiburg: Herder, 1986-88], 2:188). The disciples did not face God's judgment as Jesus did on the cross, but they did benefit from his atoning death and suffered themselves because of their relation to him (cf. France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 758-59, 1005).

⁵⁷Hill states, "The claim that the idea of sacrificing life itself on behalf of others is out of harmony with the theme of service indicates a very strange logic: self-sacrifice is the crown of service to others" (*Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings*, 77-78).

⁵⁸France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 761.

same time setting forth his death as an example of non-retaliatory suffering (cf. Phil 2:5-8; 1 John 3:16). If the ransom saying alludes to Isaiah 53, this only strengthens the view that this saying fits the context, for a discussion on servanthood is an ideal place to speak of the Suffering Servant. Concerning the larger context of Matthew, the ransom saying follows Jesus' third prediction of his death (20:17-19), and by this time it is fitting for Jesus to be more specific about the meaning of his death.⁵⁹ Also, just as 16:21 follows a discussion on Jesus' messianic status (16:13-20) and thus corrects any false ideas about a militaristic Messiah, so 20:28 corrects any wrong ideas about what it means to share in the Messiah's glory (20:20-23).

There is no a priori reason why the use of an aorist tense to explain the significance or purpose of Jesus' ministry means that the saying did not originate with him. The same summarizing aorist (ἤλθεν or ἤλθον) is used in other places in Matthew to speak of Jesus' ministry, and these places have a strong case for authenticity (e.g., 9:13; 10:34; 11:19).⁶⁰ Cranfield points out that “ἤλθεν can look back to his coming from God, which already was in the past: it need not imply that his whole life was in the past.”⁶¹ The fact that Jesus does not speak of his death as a “ransom” anywhere else in the Gospels does not mean that the saying is inauthentic. Jesus speaks of his death in sacrificial terms in the passion predictions in Matthew, and in 26:28 he explains that his blood will be poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Thus, when Jesus speaks of his death as a ransom, it is not out of place in Matthew's Gospel.

The absence of the ransom saying in Luke 22:24-27 does not undercut the

⁵⁹Luz states, “However we may solve the difficult tradition-history and –historical questions that this word poses, it is clear in the Matthean context that the Son of Man saying in v. 28 is not a foreign element that is incidental to the text; it is the high point of an organic train of thought that begins (v. 18) and ends (v. 28) with the suffering of the Son of Man” (*Matthew 8-20*, 546).

⁶⁰Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 579.

⁶¹C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel according to Saint Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 343. See also Taylor, *Gospel according to St. Mark*, 444.

authenticity of the ransom saying in Matthew or Mark. It is quite possible that this passage in Luke is not based on Mark 10:42-45, but rather represents an independent tradition. Page makes this argument based on the difference in honor sought (in Luke it is present greatness whereas in Mark it is future glory), the striking difference in wording (only 21 of the 67 words in Luke 22:24-27 are found in Mark and several of them are definite articles, conjunctions, and personal pronouns), and the difference in setting (the upper room in Luke yet Jesus' later Perean ministry in Mark).⁶² It is quite likely that Jesus spoke on the theme of servanthood in response to the disciples' itch for greatness more than once. If Luke 22:24-27 is independent of Mark (and Matthew), then the absence of the ransom saying in the former carries no weight in the argument about what is authentic in the latter. If Luke is based on Mark and they record the same event in different settings, the absence of the ransom saying in Luke still does not mean that the ransom saying is inauthentic. Luke may have had his own reasons for omitting it.⁶³ Furthermore, the ransom saying has characteristics that point to an early Palestinian origin. As Page points out, "Features such as the title 'Son of man,' the avoidance of the divine name, the expegetic καί, the parallelism, the use of ψυχή rather than the reflexive pronoun, and the expression πολλῶν are unmistakably semitic, and thus favour a Palestinian origin."⁶⁴ In light of the early origin of this saying and the fact that no alleged reasons for denying its authenticity are convincing, it seems best to accept the authenticity of the ransom saying and to see it as originating with Jesus himself.

⁶²Page, "Authenticity of the Ransom Logion," 1:149-50.

⁶³Hermann Büchsel suggests that Luke omitted the story about the sons of Zebedee because it censured them, for Luke did this in 9:22 where he leaves out Jesus' rebuke of Peter found in Mark 8:33 ("λύω et al.," in *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967], 4:342 n. 17).

⁶⁴Page, "Authenticity of the Ransom Logion," 1:148. See also Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:99; W. J. Moulder, "The Old Testament Background and Interpretation of Mark x.45," *NTS* 24 (1977): 120. Even Tödt acknowledges the early, Palestinian nature of the ransom saying (*Son of Man in Synoptic Tradition*, 202-03). Contra Sam K. Williams, *Jesus' Death As Saving Event: The Background and Origin of a Concept*, HDR 2 (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1975), 213-17.

The Meaning of the Ransom Saying

Having argued for the authenticity of the ransom saying, we will now look at its meaning. In explaining the meaning of the ransom saying, three things will be examined: (1) what was meant by comparing Jesus' death to λύτρον ("ransom"), (2) the allusion to Isaiah 53, and (3) the substitutionary element found in this saying.

The meaning of λύτρον. Jesus says that he will give his life as "a ransom in place of many" (20:28). The Greek word used here for ransom is λύτρον. The only other place it is used in the New Testament is in the parallel passage in Mark 10:45. A similar word, ἀντίλυτρον, is found only in 1 Timothy 2:6.⁶⁵ It is possible that 1 Timothy 2:6 was influenced by the ransom saying.⁶⁶ Λύτρον occurs in the LXX some 20 times, usually in the plural form.⁶⁷ It is used for the price paid to redeem one's tithe (Lev 27:31), one's property (Lev 25:24, 26), a slave (Lev 19:20; 25:51-52), firstborn male Israelites that belonged to God (Num 18:15), or one's own life that deserved to be forfeit (Exod 21:30; cf. Num 35:31-32). In each of these instances, it always entails some price that has to be paid for the redemption to occur (Prov 13:8). As Morris points out, "The basic word, λύτρον, is used in the LXX in a perfectly straightforward fashion. It always denotes a ransom price."⁶⁸ In New Testament times λύτρον was used primarily for the price paid to

⁶⁵The most common word in the New Testament used to speak of redemption is ἀπολύτρωσις ("release, redemption"), which is used to speak of redemption in Christ in Luke 21:28; Rom 3:24; 8:23; 1 Cor 1:30; Eph 1:7, 14; 4:30; Col 1:14; Heb 9:15. The second most common word is ἀγοράζω ("to buy, redeem"), which is used in a salvific sense in 1 Cor 6:20; 7:23; 2 Pet 2:1; Rev 5:9; 14:3-4.

⁶⁶E.g., I. Howard Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 431; Büchsel, "λύω," 4:349; C. Brown, "Redemption . . .," in *NIDNTT*, ed. C. Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975-85), 3:197.

⁶⁷Λύτρον translates the following Hebrew words in the LXX: כֶּפֶר ("ransom," Exod 21:30; 30:12; Num 35:31, 32; Prov 6:35; 13:8), הַגְּאָלָה ("redemption," Lev 25:24, 26, 51, 52), פְּדוּיִם ("ransom," Num 3:46, 48, 51), פְּדוּיָא ("ransom," Num 3:49), פְּדוּיָן ("ransom," Exod 21:30), פָּדָה ("to ransom," Lev 19:20; Num 18:15), לְגַאֵל ("to redeem," Lev 27:31), and מְחִיר ("price," Isa 45:13).

⁶⁸Morris, *Apostolic Preaching*, 19.

release prisoners of war or slaves.⁶⁹

Some argue that when the Old Testament speaks of God as the Redeemer of his people, using for instance λυτρόω in the LXX, the thought is no longer that of a price being paid to redeem; rather, only the thought of deliverance remains.⁷⁰ This may be true of λυτρόω, but it is not true of λύτρον. Each instance of the latter in the LXX speaks of a redemption price. As Page explains, “It appears that the related verb *lytroō* can describe an act of deliverance which does not involve payment, but it is doubtful that *lytron* is ever used in this way. It specifically designates the means of deliverance and always seems to include the notion of cost.”⁷¹ Other words were available to speak of mere deliverance; plus, those who heard the word λύτρον would think of a price paid. As Morris states, “Good reason will need to be shown if it is claimed that they could use the redemption terminology without their words being understood in terms of this well-known and widely practised custom.”⁷² Of course, it is important to clarify to whom the ransom was paid. The ransom theory of the early church was certainly misguided in saying that Christ paid a ransom to Satan. Christ did not pay the ransom of his death to Satan; rather, he paid it to God the Father. As Büchsel states, “What has been said leaves us in no doubt but that God is the recipient of the ransom. Jesus serves God when He dies, and God inexorably demands suffering from His Son. God smites Him. All possibility that Satan might receive the ransom is thus ruled out.”⁷³ The vicarious nature of Jesus’ death,

⁶⁹Büchsel, “λύω,” 4:340.

⁷⁰E.g., Hill, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings*, 54-65; Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant*, 76; Brown, “Redemption,” 3:192-93.

⁷¹Page, “Ransom Saying,” 661-62. Similarly, see Moo, *Old Testament in the Passion Narratives*, 123-24; Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:95. Morris argues that not only λύτρον but also the words connected to it like λυτρόω always entail the idea of a ransom being paid (*Apostolic Preaching*, 11-53).

⁷²Morris, *Apostolic Preaching*, 15.

⁷³Büchsel, “λύω,” 4:344.

which will be discussed below, supports this claim.

Isaiah 53 as the background of the ransom saying. The Old Testament background for the ransom saying is disputed particularly in relation to Isaiah 53. Some argue that there is no intentional allusion in the ransom saying to Isaiah 53 and the Suffering Servant.⁷⁴ Various arguments are presented to support this view. First, the ransom saying speaks not of the Servant, but of the Son of Man giving his life as a ransom. The Son of Man image is not even found in Isaiah. Second, the linguistic similarity is lacking. The noun *λύτρον* is not used in Isaiah 53 LXX; its only occurrence in Isaiah is in 45:13. Plus, *λύτρον* is never used in the LXX to translate *קִפְיוֹ*, which occurs in Isaiah 53:10 to speak of the Servant's offering of himself.⁷⁵ The verb *διακονέω* ("to serve") never occurs in the LXX. The use of *πολλῶν* ("many"), which is found in Isaiah 52:14, 15; 53:11, 12 (2x), is too common of a word to be considered an allusion especially in light of the absence of other verbal similarities. Finally, since there is no convincing proof that the Servant image influenced Jesus and his mission in the Gospels, it is unwise to read that image from Isaiah 53 into the ransom saying.

Others argue that the ransom saying does allude to Isaiah 53.⁷⁶ First, the context of servanthood in 20:24-28 fits nicely with an allusion to the Servant of the Lord.

⁷⁴E.g., C. K. Barrett, "The Background of Mark 10:45," in *New Testament Essays*, ed. A. J. B. Higgins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), 1-18; Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant*, 74-79; Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 546. After stating that Isa 53 "played an important role in its [the ransom saying's] formation," Büchsel then claims that "there is no express or even clear allusion to Is. 53" ("λύω," 4:343 n. 22). It is difficult to understand how Isa 53 could play an important role in forming the ransom saying without being alluded to in the ransom saying.

⁷⁵Barrett, "Background of Mark 10:45," 5; Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant*, 77.

⁷⁶E.g., Page, "Authenticity of the Ransom Logion," 1:140-41; France, "Servant of the Lord," 33-37; Moulder, "Old Testament Background," 120-23; Moo, *Old Testament in the Passion Narratives*, 122-26; Taylor, *Jesus and His Sacrifice*, 101-02; Robert H. Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel*, NovTSup 18 (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 39; Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1997; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 270-84; Hans Walter Wolff, *Jesaja 53 im Urchristentum* (Basel: Brunnen Verlag, 1984), 60-62; Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:95-96; Osborne, *Matthew*, 743 n. 22; Gnilka, *Matthäusevangelium*, 2:190; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 582.

Hooker argues against this stating that the Servant in Isaiah is God's Servant and not the servant of others; thus, the image of serving others in the ransom saying does not fit with the Isaianic Servant.⁷⁷ Yet, as Watts points out, this is a false dichotomy. The way the Servant serves God is by serving others.⁷⁸ It is true that διακονέω in 20:28 does not occur in the LXX. Yet, in light of the abrupt, extensive use of διακονέω in New Testament times it is possible that this word was used in the place of the LXX's δουλεύω (which is used of the Servant in Isa 53:11).⁷⁹ In addition to the servant theme, the cup saying, which says that Jesus drank the cup of God's wrath, fits well with an allusion to Isaiah 53 since that chapter says that the Servant experienced God's judgment (see vv. 4, 6, 10).

Second, there are a couple of important verbal similarities between the ransom saying and Isaiah 53. There is the use of πολλῶν ("many") which occurs 5 times in Isaiah 53. The significance of this verbal similarity is not simply that this word is found multiple times in Isaiah 53 but that it is used in verses 11 and 12 in a remarkably similar way. In both the ransom saying and in Isaiah 53:11-12, the idea is that of dying for many.⁸⁰ Such a striking similarity does not appear to be coincidental. Also, δοῦναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ("to give his life") is very similar to Isaiah 53:12 that has παρεδόθη εἰς θάνατον ἢ ψυχὴ αὐτοῦ ("he handed over his life to death"). Notice the verbal links in the use of ψυχὴ αὐτοῦ and (παρα)δίδομι.⁸¹ Along with the other factors, these verbal similarities suggest an intentional allusion to Isaiah 53.

Third, the use of λύτρον to speak of Jesus' atoning death adequately captures the work of the Servant as described in Isaiah 53. In fact, it would be difficult to

⁷⁷Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant*, 74-75.

⁷⁸Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus*, 272-73. See also France, "Servant of the Lord," 34.

⁷⁹Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus*, 273.

⁸⁰Page, "Authenticity of the Ransom Logion," 1:140-41.

⁸¹Stuhlmacher, "Vicariously Giving His Life," 19.

summarize more adequately the work of the Servant in Isaiah 53 than with the idea of a ransom. As France states, “It would be hard to compose a better summary of the central thrust of Isa 53 than ‘to give his life as a ransom in place of many.’”⁸² Though λύτρον is not used in Isaiah 53 and only once in Isaiah (45:13), it is possible that the use of λύτρον in the ransom saying serves as “a free translation, or, perhaps better, interpretation” of קָפַץ in Isaiah 53:10.⁸³ Yet, Adrian Leske’s suggestion may be more likely. His suggestion is that, rather than being a translation of קָפַץ in 53:10, λύτρον “picks up the whole Isaian concept of divine redemption.”⁸⁴ In Isaiah 40-66, there is a clear, pervasive emphasis upon the Lord as the Redeemer of his people. The Hebrew לָקַח (“to redeem”) is used 22 times in Isaiah 40-66.⁸⁵ Though God’s people have been sent into exile because of their sin, the Lord will redeem them and bring them back to Israel. A key component in God’s redemptive work is the role of the Servant. His vicarious death as described in Isaiah 53 is the means of God’s redemption of his people.⁸⁶ Thus, in light of the larger context of Isaiah 40-66 and its emphasis upon redemption, λύτρον is a fitting way to

⁸²France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 762.

⁸³Moo, *Old Testament in the Passion Narratives*, 125. Similarly, see France, “Servant of the Lord,” 35-36; Fuller, *Mission and Achievement of Jesus*, 57; Higgins, *Jesus and the Son of Man*, 45-46.

⁸⁴Adrian M. Leske, “Isaiah and Matthew: The Prophetic Influence in the First Gospel,” in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins*, ed. William H. Bellinger, Jr. and William R. Farmer (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 1998), 169. Similarly, see Wolff, *Jesaja 53*, 61-62; Feuillet, “Logion sur la Rançon,” 388.

⁸⁵See Isa 41:14; 43:1, 14; 44:6, 22, 23, 24; 47:4; 48:17, 20; 49:7, 26; 51:10; 52:3, 9; 54:5, 8; 59:20; 60:16; 62:12; 63:9, 16. The LXX translates these occurrences with three different words: λυτρόω (41:14; 43:1, 14; 44:22, 23, 24; 52:3; 62:12; 63:9), ῥύομαι (44:6; 47:4; 48:17, 20; 49:7, 26; 51:10; 52:9; 54:5, 8; 59:20; 63:16), and σώζω (60:16). קָפַץ (“to redeem”) is used in Isa 51:11 (its only occurrence in Isa 40-66), and the LXX translates it with λυτρόω.

⁸⁶John Oswalt writes, “The whole thrust of chs. 49-52 is in increasing anticipation of the salvation of Israel. Then chs. 54 and 55 ring with the triumph of salvation realized. What has come between? Ch. 53” (*The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, NICOT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986], 51). Similarly, William Dumbrell writes, “The logic of the placement of Isaiah 54 and 55 suggests that all has been achieved by the suffering and death of Yahweh’s Servant (Isa. 53)” (*The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002], 126; see 123-26). See also Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 375-77.

describe the Servant's work in Isaiah 53.⁸⁷ Jesus, the Servant of the Lord, died to redeem his people from the slavery of sin.

Finally, though the ransom saying contains the Son of Man title and not that of the Servant, this is not a real problem. Jesus' preferred title, as revealed in the Synoptic Gospels, was the Son of Man. Most likely, he chose this title because it was less likely to be misconstrued compared to a title like the Messiah. Though Jesus understood his mission in light of the use of the Son of Man in Daniel 7, his understanding of his mission was not limited to this one passage. Jesus evidently merged the title of the Son of Man with that of the Servant and poured the responsibilities of the latter into the former.⁸⁸ Thus, though the emphasis in Daniel 7 is on the glorious reign of the Son of Man, Jesus can speak repeatedly of the suffering of the Son of Man. This is not simply because of the identification of the Son of Man with his suffering people in Daniel 7, but because Jesus used the Son of Man title in relation to the work of the Servant. Thus, the Son of Man title is not out of place here and does not discount an allusion to Isaiah 53.⁸⁹

The Substitutionary Aspect of Jesus' Death

Now we will look at whether the ransom saying emphasizes the substitutionary nature of Jesus' death. Page points out 4 compelling reasons why the saying does indeed

⁸⁷For more on the ransom saying in light of the redemption theme in Isa 40-66, see Leske, "Isaiah and Matthew," 167-69.

⁸⁸Taylor states, "This identification of the Son of Man with the Suffering Servant is so firmly established in the mind of Jesus that He can say of the former what in the Old Testament is said only of the latter" (*Jesus and His Sacrifice*, 256). See also Taylor, *Jesus and His Sacrifice*, 282; Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 276 n. 22.

⁸⁹Other suggested allusions in the ransom saying are martyr texts like 2 Macc 7:37-38 and 4 Macc 6:28-29 (e.g., Barrett, "Background of Mark 10:45," 11-13), the Son of Man passage in Dan 7 (e.g., McKnight, *Jesus and His Death*, 239), and Isa 43:3-4 (e.g., Stuhlmacher, "Vicariously Giving His Life," 22-25). Yet, *λύτρον* is not found in any of these passages either, though *λυτρόω* is used in Isa 43:1. Gundry persuasively discounts any allusion to Isa 43:3-4 (*Mark*, 592). An allusion to Dan 7 is possible in light of the Son of Man's identification with the saints who suffer, yet it is not as explicit as Isa 53. Though an allusion to intertestamental Jewish martyrdom theology is possible, it is not as convincing as an allusion to Isa 53. For one thing, Matthew has already alluded to this passage in his Gospel (see 8:17; cf. 12:18-21).

highlight Jesus' substitutionary death.⁹⁰ Those 4 reasons are as follows: (1) the use of λύτρον which implies the idea of cost, (2) the Isaiah 53 background, (3) a similar idea found in Matthew 16:26/Mark 8:37, and (4) the preposition ἀντί.

First, there is the use of λύτρον. As pointed out above, this word refers to a ransom, a price paid to release a prisoner of war or slave. The idea of cost connected to this word was seen in its use in the LXX. It is not just cost that is involved, but more specifically, an equivalent price must be paid before the desired release occurs. As Barrett helpfully explains in his discussion of λύτρον, “The primary meaning of course refers to the ransoming of a slave by the payment of an equivalent price.”⁹¹ He says, “In λύτρον the idea of equivalence is central...This sense of equivalence, or substitution, is proper to λύτρον.”⁹² This idea of substitution is clearly seen in Josephus's use of λύτρον in *Antiquities* 14:107. In *Antiquities* 14:105-09, Crassus, the governor of Syria, took money that was left in the temple after Pompey had destroyed it. Crassus intended to strip the temple of all its gold, but the priest Eleazar made a deal with Crassus. He gave him a bar of gold as λύτρον ἀντὶ πάντων (“a ransom for all,” 14:107). Thus, with Crassus's promise to accept this bar of gold instead of taking the rest, it served as a substitute. It was given to Crassus in place of the rest. As Morris explains, “There can be no doubt but that here a substitutionary meaning is to be attached to this expression—the bar of gold was to be a substitute for the treasures of the Temple.”⁹³ In light of this, it

⁹⁰Page, “Ransom Saying,” 662. For others who argue for a substitutionary emphasis, see, e.g., Büchsel, “λύω,” 4:342-43; Stuhlmacher, “Vicariously Giving His Life,” 23; France, “Servant of the Lord,” 36; Morris, *Apostolic Preaching*, 33-38; Moo, *Old Testament in the Passion Narratives*, 125; Gnilka, *Matthäusevangelium*, 2:190; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 583; Keener, *Gospel of Matthew*, 488. For those who discount a substitutionary emphasis here, see, e.g., Rashdall, *Idea of Atonement*, 37; McKnight, *Jesus and His Death*, 357; Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 546.

⁹¹Barrett, “Background of Mark 10:45,” 16.

⁹²Ibid., 6.

⁹³Morris, *Apostolic Preaching*, 36. Similarly, see Peter M. Head, “The Self-Offering and Death of Christ as a Sacrifice in the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles,” in *Sacrifice in the Bible*, ed. Roger T. Beckwith and Martin J. Selman (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 113; Hill, *Greek Words and Hebrew*

seems clear that Jesus' death, which was offered as a ransom for many, served as a substitute and thereby paid the price to bring release from the slavery of sin.⁹⁴

McKnight disagrees with this interpretation, arguing that λύτρον does not carry the idea of substitution. He says that a ransom is not a substitute but a price paid to release a captive. A true substitute would mean one slave being given for another slave. Thus, he argues, λύτρον does not imply substitution.⁹⁵ McKnight's argument pushes the metaphor of ransom too far and fails to take sufficient note of what the metaphor represents, namely, the giving of Jesus' life for others. His death was a ransom for many: it was his life for theirs. That points to substitution. As Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach state, "McKnight is mistaken, however, for the ransom in this case is not money but a life given up in death. This is precisely a substitute, for this life given up in death does take the place of other lives, which would have been given up in death."⁹⁶

Second, the allusion to Isaiah 53 in the ransom saying supports a view of Jesus' death that is substitutionary. The work of the Servant in Isaiah 53 is to bear the sins of God's people and to die in their place.⁹⁷ For instance, 53:5-6 reads, "But he was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his blows we are healed. All we like sheep have wandered, each man has turned to his own way; and Yahweh has laid on him the iniquity of us all." Notice the contrast between "he, him, and his" and "we, us, and our." The Servant,

Meanings, 78 n. 2.

⁹⁴Others who argue that λύτρον speaks of substitution include Stuhlmacher, "Vicariously Giving His Life," 23; David Seeley, "Rulership and Service in Mark 10:41-45," *NovT* 35 (1992): 246.

⁹⁵McKnight, *Jesus and His Death*, 357.

⁹⁶Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 71 n. 91.

⁹⁷On the substitutionary role of the Servant in Isa 53, see Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 53-61; Oswalt, *Book of Isaiah: 40-66, 376-77, 384-85*; contra Williams, *Jesus' Death*, 107-11.

though innocent before God (vv. 9, 11), was stricken and crushed by God (vv. 4, 10). He was judged by God, not for his own sin, but for the sins of the people. He bore the sins of the people as their substitute (vv. 11-12). In light of the substitutionary role of the Servant in Isaiah 53, the ransom saying, which alludes to this passage, also presents Jesus' death as an atoning, vicarious sacrifice.

Third, the ransom saying may bring to mind a similar idea found earlier in Matthew 16:26/Mark 8:37. In 16:26, it reads, "What profit is there if a man gains the whole world yet loses his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" This saying, which follows Jesus' first passion prediction (16:21), speaks of what can or cannot be given in exchange for one's soul. Though a different word is used (*ἀντάλλαγμα*, "something offered in exchange"), the idea of a substitute that is offered for one's life is similar to that found in the ransom saying. Concerning the two passages, Page writes, "This passage, which echoes Psalm 49:7-9, indicates that those who forfeit eternal life cannot buy it back. With the ransom saying Jesus claims that he can do for others what they cannot do for themselves."⁹⁸ Similarly, Büchsel states, "The saying plainly looks back to Mk. 8:37; Mt. 16:26. What no man can do, He, the unique Son of God, achieves."⁹⁹ We cannot give anything in exchange for our souls, yet Jesus can and did give his life in exchange for us. Thus, the idea of substitution in 16:26 may point to a similar idea conveyed by Jesus in the ransom saying.

Last, Jesus said that this ransom was "in place of many" (*ἀντὶ πολλῶν*). The preposition *ἀντὶ* typically means "in place of" or "instead of." Moulton and Milligan write, "By far the commonest meaning of *ἀντί* is the simple 'instead of.'"¹⁰⁰ Similarly,

⁹⁸Page, "Ransom Saying," 662. See Turner, *Matthew*, 488.

⁹⁹Büchsel, "λύω," 4:343. See also Brown, "Redemption," 3:196.

¹⁰⁰James H. Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), s.v. "ἀντί."

Stanley Porter states, “Although the basic sense of ἀντί is ‘facing, against, opposite’, the most widely applied sense in the NT, and well-known in classical and other Hellenistic Greek, is substitutionary (‘in place of’).”¹⁰¹ According to some, it is likely that ἀντί always carries the idea of “instead of” and never the weaker meaning of “on behalf of.” For instance, R. E. Davies argues, “A number of writers deny that ἀντί here has the sense of ‘instead of’ or ‘in exchange for’, but we have seen no evidence in the Greek of this period, nor of that before or after, to justify this idea. As we have discovered, in non-biblical Greek, in the LXX and in all its New Testament occurrences the idea of substitution and exchange are present.”¹⁰² Yet, even if this is not the case, it is certainly true that the most common meaning is “in place of” or “instead of,” and this typical meaning is found in the ransom saying particularly in light of its use in relation to λύτρον.¹⁰³ Thus, this preposition carries the idea of substitution here. As Morris states, “As with λύτρον so with ἀντί; both imply substitution, and we must interpret the passage in a highly unnatural manner if we are to overlook this.”¹⁰⁴ Similarly, France states that the idea of substitution is “central to λύτρον, and is even more obvious in ἀντί.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994; reprint, 2004), 144. For the primary idea of “in place of” or “instead of,” see also H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 100; C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 71; Morris, *Apostolic Preaching*, 34-36.

¹⁰²R. E. Davies, “Christ in Our Place—The Contribution of the Prepositions,” *TynBul* 21 (1970): 80; for his case, see 72-81. Similarly, see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 365-67. Wallace states, “The argument that ἀντί ever bore the mere sense of *representation* (i.e., = ὑπέρ) has a surprisingly slim basis” (365).

¹⁰³Contra BDAG, s.v. “ἀντί,” that places the ransom saying in the category of “in behalf of,” which is a questionable category for this word to begin with and definitely not the meaning that fits best with the context of the ransom saying. Dana and Mantey’s comment is apropos here, “The obscurity of this passage is not the result of linguistic ambiguity, but of theological controversy” (*Manual Grammar*, 100).

¹⁰⁴Morris, *Apostolic Preaching*, 37-38.

¹⁰⁵France, “Servant of the Lord,” 36. On the substitutionary element connected with ἀντί in the ransom saying, see, e.g., Hermann Büchsel, “ἀντί,” in *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 1:372-73; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 583; Osborne, *Matthew*, 742-43; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 308; Morris, *Gospel according to Matthew*, 512

Jesus gave his life as a substitute for many: it was his life for theirs. The “many” for which Jesus died probably carries the idea of “all,” for it is many compared to the one, not many compared to everyone else. This interpretation is supported by the fact that “many” is used to speak of “all” in Romans 5:15, 19; plus, 1 Timothy 2:6, which was probably influenced by the ransom saying, speaks of Christ Jesus giving himself as a ransom for “all.”¹⁰⁶ Less likely, the “many” may simply speak of the church.¹⁰⁷

Conclusion

It could be said that Matthew simply borrowed the ransom saying from Mark’s Gospel, and thus it does not tell us much about Matthew’s unique contribution to atonement theology. Delvin Hutton, for example, says that the ransom saying does not reveal the independent viewpoint of Matthew, for the idea of a ransom does not occur elsewhere in his Gospel in connection with Jesus’ death.¹⁰⁸ However, if Matthew did use Mark (which is most likely the case), he still chose to retain what Mark had. He could have omitted this saying as he did the baptismal sayings or as Luke may have done with the ransom saying. What Matthew chose to retain is important to his theology, not just what he added. As Meier points out, Matthew took over the ransom saying in Mark 10:45 because it fit his theology, and thus “the conclusion seems unavoidable that Matthew gave an important place in his theology to the death of the Son of Man as life-giving sacrifice.”¹⁰⁹ Matthew began his Gospel by stressing that Jesus would save his

n. 47; Hill, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings*, 78.

¹⁰⁶Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:95. See also France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 763; Jeremias, “πολλοί,” in *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 6:536-45.

¹⁰⁷Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 546 n. 42.

¹⁰⁸Delvin D. Hutton, “The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Mt 27:51b-53): A Study of the Theology of the Matthean Passion Narrative” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1970), 164.

¹⁰⁹John P. Meier, *The Vision of Matthew: Christ, Church and Morality in the First Gospel* (New York: Paulist, 1979), 143 n. 155.

people from their sins, and the ransom saying is a clear indicator that this occurs via his atoning death. As Turner explains, “Matthew 20:28 recalls 1:21 and anticipates 26:28. In 1:21 it is stated that Jesus will save his people from their sins. This play on the meaning of the name Jesus indicates that Israel’s root problem is not Roman occupation but sin. Matthew 20:28 shows *how* Jesus will deliver his people from their sins: he will pay a ransom that will free them from the bondage of alienation from God.”¹¹⁰ Thus, the ransom saying is extremely important in understanding Matthew’s view of Jesus’ death. It shows that his death fulfilled God’s plan of salvation, and it did this by being a ransom. Jesus died in his people’s place so that they could be freed from sin’s bondage and be brought back into restored fellowship with God.

¹¹⁰Turner, *Matthew*, 488.

CHAPTER 5
ATONEMENT IN THE PASSION
NARRATIVE PART 1

The Last Supper (26:26-29)

Up to this point we have examined passages in Matthew's Gospel prior to the passion narrative that highlight Jesus' atoning death. The rest of the passages to be examined are all found in Matthew's passion narrative (chaps. 26-27). The first of these is found in the Last Supper text and may be Matthew's most significant statement about Jesus' atoning death. After taking up the cup and giving it to his disciples to drink, Jesus says, "For this is my blood of the [new] covenant that is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (26:28). In light of the Old Testament allusions found in this verse, France believes that this verse contains "the most comprehensive statement in Matthew's gospel of the redemptive purpose and achievement of Jesus' death."¹ Similarly, Gurtner states that 26:28 is "the most important statement about Jesus' death in Matthew."² In terms of Matthew's atonement theology, this verse contains his unique addition of "for the forgiveness of sins" to Jesus' statement about his upcoming death. Also, 26:28 may very well form an *inclusio* with 1:21 and thus show that it is by his atoning death that Jesus saves his people from their sins.³ In light of these factors, 26:28 provides an important window into Matthew's understanding of Jesus' atoning death.⁴

¹R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 994.

²Daniel M. Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, SNTSMS 139 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 133.

³*Ibid.*, 127.

⁴Three main verses are typically mentioned in relation to Matthew's theological understanding of Jesus' death: 1:21; 20:28; 26:28 (e.g., W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical*

Context and Background

The context for 26:28 in Matthew's Gospel is the Passover meal where Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper prior to his death. Matthew specifically refers to this meal as the celebration of the Passover (26:2, 17-19). Though scholars disagree over whether Jesus' last meal with his disciples was actually a Passover meal, at the very least it can be said that the meal had paschal characteristics or overtones since it occurred during Passover week.⁵ This is true even if Jesus ate this meal a day prior to Passover as John's chronology may suggest.⁶ However, a persuasive case can be made that the Synoptic chronology is correct and that John's presentation can be harmonized with it.⁷ According to this chronology, Jesus celebrated the Passover with his disciples on Thursday evening and was crucified on Friday. Yet, whatever the relation to John's chronology, it seems clear that from Matthew's point-of-view this meal was a Passover meal. It is in this paschal context that Matthew presents Jesus' words about his upcoming death.

Four passages in the New Testament recount the Last Supper and Jesus' words of institution (Matt 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-22; 1 Cor 11:23-26). Three of

Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew, ICC [London: T & T Clark, 1988-97], 3:100). As shown in this work, a number of other passages also contribute to Matthew's atonement theology though these three are among the most important.

⁵N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, vol. 2 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 555-56; Vincent Taylor, *Jesus and His Sacrifice: A Study of the Passion-Sayings in the Gospels* (London: MacMillan, 1937), 116-17. For a strong case that Jesus' last meal was actually a Passover meal, see Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, trans. Norman Perrin (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), 15-88, esp. 41-62; I. Howard Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1980; reprint, Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997), 57-75, esp. 58-62.

⁶See John 13:1, 29; 18:28; 19:14, 31, 42.

⁷The relevant verses in John's Gospel can be interpreted in a way that aligns with the Synoptic chronology. For instance, the phrase "the day of Preparation" can simply refer to the Friday prior to the Sabbath rather than the day prior to Passover. See, e.g., Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1987), 175-78; Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 961-62; Donald Carson, *Matthew*, in vol. 8 of *EBC*, ed. Frank E. Gæbelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 530-32. For a harmonizing approach that aligns the Synoptic accounts with John's Gospel, see France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 980-85. In France's view the Last Supper was "an anticipated Passover meal," which was held a day before the official Passover (982; see Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 556-57).

them are independent traditions (Mark/Matt, Luke, and Paul),⁸ though some argue for only two independent traditions (Mark/Matt and Luke/Paul).⁹ The debate over which tradition comes closest to Jesus' original words and actions is unsettled and most likely will remain that way.¹⁰ The majority of scholars rightly view Matthew as dependent upon Mark's text for his description of the Last Supper.¹¹ Yet, though dependent, Matthew does make some changes to Mark. Hagner points out 6 main differences between the two accounts: (1) Matthew adds "eat" in verse 26 and makes it an imperative, (2) he changes "drink" to an imperative in verse 27 thus making it parallel with "eat," (3) he adds "for the forgiveness of sins" in verse 28, (4) he adds "with you" in verse 29, (5) he changes "the kingdom of God" to "my Father's kingdom" in verse 29, and (6) he omits Mark's "truly" in verse 29.¹² When the whole Last Supper text is taken into account, two other significant differences can be pointed out: Matthew adds "my time is near" in verse 18, and he specifically points out Judas as the betrayer in verse 25. Though some of these differences may be the result of liturgical influence on Matthew's Gospel (especially the imperatives "eat" and "drink"),¹³ this is not true of all the changes.

⁸E.g., Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper*, 38-40; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 365; Carson, *Matthew*, 535.

⁹E.g., R. H. Stein, "Last Supper," in *DJG*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 445; Clay Ham, "The Last Supper in Matthew," *BBR* 10:1 (2000): 54.

¹⁰Wright comments, "Debate will, no doubt, continue about what exactly Jesus said, and in what order, but since in any case we are dealing (a) with a Greek translation of a dense Aramaic original and (b) with sayings which were reused (and perhaps retranslated) again and again in the life of the early church, we should not expect to be able to attain complete precision" (*Jesus and the Victory of God*, 559). This does not discount the historical credibility of the New Testament Last Supper accounts (558, 562-63).

¹¹Donald P. Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew: A Redactional Study*, BETL 39 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1975), 76-88; Rudolf Pesch, *Wie Jesus das Abendmahl hielt: Der Grund der Eucharistie* (Freiburg: Herder, 1977), 25-32; Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*, 96; B. Klappert, "Lord's Supper," in *NIDNTT*, ed. C. Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975-85), 2:523; Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper*, 33, 161 n. 11.

¹²Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, WBC, vol. 33B (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 771.

¹³France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 992; Klappert, "Lord's Supper," 2:530; Marshall, *Last Supper*

Certain changes, in particular the addition of “for the forgiveness of sins,” appear to be theologically motivated. This addition makes explicit the purpose and significance of Jesus’ atoning death. Thus, Matthew’s presentation of the Last Supper should not be minimized or overlooked because it follows Mark’s text, for Matthew offers unique theological contributions to the Last Supper.¹⁴

The Last Supper text in Matthew can be broken down into the following sections: preparations for the Passover (vv. 17-19), Jesus’ prediction of his betrayer (vv. 20-25), the words of institution (vv. 26-29), and their departure to the Mount of Olives (v. 30). The words of institution include a word about the bread (v. 26), a word about the cup (vv. 27-28), and a promise of eschatological celebration (v. 29). The focus for us will be on verse 28 that describes Jesus’ death in sacrificial terms. This verse, along with its numerous Old Testament allusions, provides a rich understanding of Jesus’ atoning death in Matthew. The following aspects of Jesus’ atoning death are set forth in verse 28: (1) it results in the forgiveness of sins and the inauguration of the new covenant, (2) it fulfills the role of the Suffering Servant, and (3) it shows how Jesus saves his people from their sins (1:21). Before dealing with these three aspects, though, it is necessary to look at whether Matthew understood Jesus’ death as the fulfillment of the Passover sacrifice.

The Fulfillment of Passover

There are a few reasons why some view Jesus’ death as the fulfillment of the

and Lord’s Supper, 100.

¹⁴Contra A. J. B. Higgins, who states, “Matthew’s narrative of the Last Supper can quickly be disposed of, as it is merely an expanded and more liturgical form of Mark’s account” (*The Lord’s Supper in the New Testament*, SBT [Chicago: Regnery, 1952], 24). For a similar dismissal of Matthew’s account in favor of Mark’s, see Petrus J. Gräbe, *New Covenant, New Community: The Significance of Biblical and Patristic Covenant Theology for Current Understanding* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2006), 79 n. 53. For a careful investigation into Matthew’s contribution to the Last Supper, see Ham, “Last Supper in Matthew.”

Passover sacrifice in Matthew's Gospel.¹⁵ First, Matthew, like the other Synoptic Gospels, places the Last Supper and Jesus' words about his death in the context of a Passover meal (26:2, 17-19). Since Jesus' death in Matthew takes place in accordance with God's will as revealed in Scripture (26:24; 27:54, 56), it appears that it was no accident that Jesus died during Passover. Second, since there is no mention of the Passover lamb in Matthew's account, it is possible that Jesus saw his atoning death as the fulfillment of Passover. Rather than speaking of the lamb, Jesus spoke of his body and his blood. The focus, then, was on his sacrificial death, not the Passover lamb. Third, the early church certainly viewed Jesus' death as the fulfillment of Passover (1 Cor 5:7). In fact, the early church commemorated the Lord's Supper on a weekly basis rather than once a year as with the Passover feast. The Lord's Supper eventually replaced the Passover as the defining commemorative ritual in the early church. This replacement would probably not have occurred unless the early Christians saw in Jesus' death the fulfillment of Passover.

Though these arguments carry some weight, in Matthew's Gospel it is not clear that Jesus interpreted his death as the fulfillment of the Passover sacrifice. There is no explicit connection between Jesus' death and the Passover in Matthew. Nowhere does Jesus speak of the Passover lamb or identify his death with that lamb. Most likely, the lamb was omitted because Matthew and the other Evangelists recorded primarily those details in the Last Supper that related to the ongoing practice of the Lord's Supper in the early church.¹⁶ Thus, there would be no need to mention the lamb. Plus, such a detail would already be recognized by most readers of the Gospels particularly Jewish readers.

¹⁵See, e.g., Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*, 222-24; Osborne, *Matthew*, 945; Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 836; John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 71-72.

¹⁶Stein, "Last Supper," 446; Ham, "Last Supper in Matthew," 55 n. 11; Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:469. France argues that the lamb was not mentioned because there was none; the Last Supper in his view was held a day before Passover (*Gospel of Matthew*, 984).

This means that *the only* reason in *Matthew* to view Jesus' death as the fulfillment of Passover is the context—that Jesus died during Passover. This is probably why other New Testament writers interpreted Jesus' death as the Passover sacrifice (e.g., 1 Cor 5:7). Looking back on Jesus' death and when it occurred, they made the connection between Jesus' death and the fulfillment of Passover. However, if this theme is in *Matthew*, it is simply implied rather than spelled out. As Senior explains, “It is difficult to conclude whether or not he is linking in a significant way the theme of Passover with the death of Jesus. If it may be said that the theme is present, it must also be observed that *Matthew* does not exploit it in the remainder of the Passion narrative.”¹⁷

Forgiveness of Sins and the New Covenant

Matthew specifically connects Jesus' death in 26:28 to the inauguration of a covenant (“my blood of the covenant”) and to forgiveness (“for the forgiveness of sins”). If the covenant mentioned here is the new covenant, then these two ideas are intricately related for the promise of the new covenant in *Jeremiah* 31:31-34 included as its final blessing the forgiveness of sins (v. 34). As Morris states, “The new covenant is essentially concerned with the forgiveness of sin.”¹⁸ Thus, *Matthew*, in his unique addition of “for the forgiveness of sins” (cf. *Mark* 14:24; *Luke* 22:20; 1 *Cor* 11:25), is evidently making clear the connection between Jesus' sacrificial death and the inauguration of the new covenant—a covenant that at its heart involved full and lasting forgiveness. *Matthew*'s addition, then, appears to be theologically motivated. This addition, along with the Old Testament allusions present in this verse, reveals a

¹⁷Senior, *Passion Narrative*, 19 n. 3. For a concise discussion on why Jesus may not have interpreted his death as the Passover sacrifice, see Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper*, 88.

¹⁸Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 101. Walter Brueggemann says about *Jer* 31:34 and the promise of forgiveness: “The concluding statement may be the most crucial. The phrase is introduced by *ki*, as though this line states the basis for all the foregoing. All the newness is possible *because* Yahweh has forgiven” (*To Build, To Plant: A Commentary on Jeremiah 26-52*, International Theological Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991], 72).

developed understanding of Jesus' atoning death in Matthew.

As most scholars agree, the covenant mentioned in 26:28 is the new covenant.¹⁹ Both Luke and Paul understood the covenant that Jesus instituted at the Last Supper to be the new covenant (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25). Green points out two reasons why Matthew probably understood the covenant mentioned in 26:28 to be the new covenant prophesied by Jeremiah. First, by instituting a covenant at the Last Supper it is implied that Jesus was instituting a different (i.e., new) covenant. He was not simply celebrating the Passover; he was instituting a new covenant that would be ratified by the shedding of his blood. Second, in this context covenant may simply be an ellipsis for the "new covenant." Using covenant as shorthand for the new covenant is a practice witnessed in the Dead Sea Scrolls.²⁰ Even in the Old Testament, there are places where the new covenant is prophesied even when this specific terminology is not used (e.g., Isa 54:10; 55:3; Ezek 11:18-20).²¹ In fact, Jeremiah 31:31 is the only time in the Old Testament where the specific phrase "new covenant" is used.²²

From this evidence it appears that the covenant Jesus mentions in 26:28 is the new covenant. This becomes even more certain in light of Matthew's likely allusion to Jeremiah 31:34 in the phrase "for the forgiveness of sins." As pointed out above, forgiveness of sins is a central emphasis in the new covenant. Thus, by adding the phrase

¹⁹Joachim Gnilka, *Das Matthäusevangelium*, HTKNT (Freiburg: Herder, 1986-88), 2:401; Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 380; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 773; Osborne, *Matthew*, 968; Pierre Bonnard, *L'Évangile selon Saint Matthieu*, CNT (Neuchâtel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1963), 379; Donald Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1990), 67 n. 26; Herbert Leroy, *Zur Vergebung der Sünden: Die Botschaft der Evangelien*, Stuttgarter Bibelstudien 73 (Stuttgart: Verlag, 1974), 36. Contra Minoru Nakano, "Jesus the Savior of God's People from Sin: A Study of Matthew's Soteriology" (Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate University, 2001), 288, 289 n. 326, 308.

²⁰Joel B. Green, *The Death of Jesus: Tradition and Interpretation in the Passion Narrative*, WUNT, 2nd ser., vol. 33 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1988), 194-95. Green mentions the following examples of covenant ellipsis in the Dead Sea Scrolls: 1QpHab 2:1-4; 1Q34 2:5-6; 1Q28b 3:25-26; 1Q28b 5:21-22.

²¹Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose*, NSBT 23 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 158-79.

²²*Ibid.*, 146.

“for the forgiveness of sins” in a context that speaks of the inauguration of the new covenant, it appears that Matthew is intentionally alluding to Jeremiah’s prophecy of a new covenant in 31:31-34.²³ Matthew was certainly familiar with Jeremiah 31 for he quotes from it earlier in his Gospel (Jer 31:15 in 2:18). Since we know that he knew this chapter and had already thought of it in relation to his Gospel, it is certainly plausible that he would allude to it here in 26:28. A possible allusion to Jeremiah’s new covenant is found in 23:8-10, where Jesus tells his disciples not to be addressed by honorific titles such as “rabbi” or “teacher” for Christ is their only teacher and they are all brothers. This passage possibly alludes to Jeremiah 31:34 [38:34 LXX], which describes one of the benefits of the new covenant, namely, unmediated, universal knowledge of the Lord.²⁴ Jeremiah writes, “A man will not teach again his neighbor or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because all of them will know me, from the least of them to the greatest.” The ideas and the vocabulary are both similar in these verses (διδάσκω and ἀδελφός are used in 23:8 and Jer 38:34 LXX).²⁵ If 23:8-10 does allude to Jeremiah 31:34, then this only strengthens the case that “for the forgiveness of sins” alludes to this new covenant passage in Jeremiah.²⁶

²³Robert H. Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew’s Gospel*, NovTSup 18 (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 58; Douglas J. Moo, *The Old Testament in the Gospel Passion Narratives* (Sheffield: Almond, 1983), 306; Green, *Death of Jesus*, 195; Michael Knowles, *Jeremiah in Matthew’s Gospel: The Rejected-Prophet Motif in Matthaean Redaction*, JSNTSup 68 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 208-09; Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord’s Supper*, 100; Osborne, *Matthew*, 968; Carson, *Matthew*, 537; Klappert, “Lord’s Supper,” 2:533. Contra Petri Luomanen, *Entering the Kingdom of Heaven: A Study on the Structure of Matthew’s View of Salvation*, WUNT, 2nd ser., vol. 101 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 222-24; Scot McKnight, *Jesus and His Death: Historiography, the Historical Jesus, and Atonement Theory* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005), 287.

²⁴Knowles, *Jeremiah in Matthew’s Gospel*, 209-12; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 661. Luomanen believes that this passage in Matt 23 focuses on “equality among the members of the congregation” and is not an allusion to the new covenant in Jeremiah (*Entering the Kingdom*, 223 n. 11). However, are not both possible? Would not the universal knowledge of God in the new covenant result in a certain level of equality among the brothers?

²⁵Knowles, *Jeremiah in Matthew’s Gospel*, 212.

²⁶Matthew was not just familiar with Jer 31; he quotes from or alludes to other places in Jeremiah as well. Though some are more likely than others, Ham mentions several possible allusions to

Not only does Matthew allude to Jeremiah 31:31-34 and the prophecy of the new covenant; it is possible that he specifically mentions the *new* covenant in 26:28.²⁷ The Greek word *καλινῆς* (“new”) is found in numerous manuscripts including a few early ones like A, C, D, and W. Typically, scholars argue that *καλινῆς* was added in light of the liturgical influence that is found in Luke 22:20 and 1 Corinthians 11:25.²⁸ Though this is possible, it is also possible that Matthew himself used the word to speak of the covenant Jesus established with his blood. Carson admits that the textual evidence is “finely divided.”²⁹ In light of Matthew’s addition of “for the forgiveness of sins” and its likely allusion to the new covenant, it is certainly possible that Matthew also included *καλινῆς* to describe the covenant Jesus established. A plausible explanation for the omission of *καλινῆς* in some of the manuscripts is that a copier skipped this word because the word before it and after it ends in an identical way (*τῆς καλινῆς διαθήκης*).³⁰ This error is known in textual criticism as *homoioteleuton*. Thus, in light of external evidence that is fairly even on the issue, the addition in Matthew of “for the forgiveness of sins,” and a

Jeremiah in Matthew: 11:29 to Jer 6:16; 21:13 to Jer 7:11; 23:38 to Jer 12:7; 7:22 to Jer 14:14; 23:38 to Jer 22:5; 1:11 to Jer 27:20; 11:28 to Jer 31:25; 27:9-10 to Jer 32:6-9; 26:65 to Jer 36:24 (“Last Supper in Matthew,” 62 n. 50). By the way, Matthew is the only Synoptic writer to record how the people thought of Jesus in relation to Jeremiah (see 16:14).

²⁷Some scholars doubt that Jesus spoke of any “covenant,” for this is the first and only time this word is mentioned in Matthew’s Gospel (e.g., Sam K. Williams, *Jesus’ Death as Saving Event: The Background and Origin of a Concept*, HDR 2 [Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1975], 208-09). However, this single use actually argues for its authenticity, for Matthew is not adjusting Jesus’ words to themes he has already presented in his Gospel. It is fitting that Jesus would wait to speak of his death as a covenant during the Last Supper and just prior to his crucifixion. See Scott McCormick, Jr., *The Lord’s Supper: A Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 70-72.

²⁸E.g., Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 54; France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 987 n. 10; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 771.

²⁹Carson, *Matthew*, 537.

³⁰Ham, “Last Supper in Matthew,” 57 n. 22. Davies and Allison also acknowledge that this is a possibility (*Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:472 n. 119). Metzger is thus wrong in his assertion: “There is no good reason why anyone would have deleted it” (*Textual Commentary*, 54).

very likely explanation for its omission in other manuscripts, it is by no means a stretch to argue for the authenticity of *καλυῆς* in 26:28. As Gundry states, “The insertion of *καλυῆς* is better supported in Mt than in Mk and in view of the later allusion to Jer 31 (omitted in Mk) may be genuine.”³¹ If it is genuine, it only strengthens the already probable allusion to Jeremiah 31:31-34 in 26:28. Yet, even if *καλυῆς* is not genuine, Matthew is still most certainly referring to the inauguration of the new covenant in 26:28.

Now that it has been established that Matthew refers to the new covenant in 26:28 and connects this new covenant to Jesus’ death, it is necessary to explain why another likely allusion occurs in this verse that refers not to the new covenant but to the Mosaic covenant. The phrase “my blood of the covenant” is typically seen as an allusion to Exodus 24:8.³² In Exodus 24, the Mosaic covenant is formally ratified and accepted by the people.³³ In this chapter there is specific mention of “the blood of the covenant” (v. 8). So what does this likely allusion have to do with Jesus’ sacrifice and the inauguration of the new covenant? First, Exodus 24:8 is one of only two places in the Old Testament where *αἷμα* (“blood”) and *διαθήκη* (“covenant”) are used together in the same phrase, the other being Zechariah 9:11.³⁴ This connection between covenant and

³¹Gundry, *Use of the Old Testament*, 58.

³²R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 1998), 66-67; Moo, *Old Testament in the Passion Narratives*, 302-04; Gundry, *Use of the Old Testament*, 57-58; Taylor, *Jesus and His Sacrifice*, 136-38; Morna D. Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant: The Influence of the Servant Concept of Deutero-Isaiah in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1959), 81; Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 380; Osborne, *Matthew*, 968; John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 1079; David L. Turner, *Matthew*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 625; R. Alan Cole, *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1973), 186; Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 560; Senior, *Passion of Jesus in Matthew*, 66-67; Steven L. McKenzie, *Covenant* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2000), 88-89.

³³Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 97 n. 7, 99-100; W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1984), 93-94.

³⁴Moo, *Old Testament in the Passion Narratives*, 302. Some think that “my blood of the covenant” in 26:28 also alludes to Zech 9:11 (e.g., Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 560-61; Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1079). Though possible, the more likely allusion is Exod 24:8 for the wording is more similar (*τὸ αἷμα τῆς διαθήκης* in Exod 24:8 and *τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης* in 26:28) and so is the context, which has to do with the ratification of a covenant (Moo, *Old Testament in the Passion Narratives*, 302).

blood-shedding would be significant since Jesus was about to shed his blood to inaugurate the new covenant. Possibly, since the new covenant passage in Jeremiah does not explain the basis of the forgiveness promised,³⁵ the connection with Exodus 24:8 shows that a sacrifice would be required. Second, the allusion not only helpfully connects covenant with blood, but also apparently serves as a contrast to the covenant Jesus is now establishing.³⁶ As Luz explains, “Since it is the blood of *Jesus* that is at issue, it is implicitly clear that the allusion to Exod 24:8 is typological and that it means a different covenant from the one concluded at Sinai.”³⁷ Jesus was not confirming or reestablishing the old covenant; he was inaugurating the new covenant prophesied by Jeremiah. Unlike the Mosaic covenant that did not result in lasting forgiveness, Jesus’ sacrifice results in the forgiveness of sins and a restored relationship with God. As Klappert states,

The phrase ‘blood of the covenant’ echoes the words of Exod. 24:8 LXX...and makes a typological reference to the blood of the covenant sprinkled at Sinai. As the covenant on Sinai was then confirmed with the blood of sacrificial animals, the conclusion of the new covenant is now made effective through the blood of Jesus. Not only was a correspondence intended, however, but also a development. The sacrifice that was offered on Sinai to confirm the covenant long ago had no ultimate, atoning, sin-erasing power (Exod. 24:3-8). The substitutionary death of Christ, on the contrary, is superior to all the sacrifices of the old covenant.³⁸

The new covenant that Jeremiah prophesied and that Jesus inaugurated, unlike the Mosaic covenant, involves complete and lasting forgiveness; that means that other

See also France, *Jesus and Old Testament*, 66 n. 89; Paul Foster, “The Use of Zechariah in Matthew’s Gospel,” in *The Book of Zechariah and Its Influence*, ed. Christopher Tuckett (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 70.

³⁵Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 156.

³⁶Ham, “Last Supper in Matthew,” 64-66; Klappert, “Lord’s Supper,” 2:533; Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant*, 82. Thus, McKenzie is wrong to suggest that because Jesus alludes to the covenant at Sinai that he never spoke of a new covenant (*Covenant*, 88).

³⁷Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 380.

³⁸Klappert, “Lord’s Supper,” 2:533.

sacrifices are no longer necessary.³⁹ As the author of Hebrews explains after quoting from Jeremiah 31:34, “Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer an offering for sin” (10:18). Thus, the allusion to Exodus 24:8 not only shows the importance of blood-shedding in relation to establishing a covenant, it serves as a fitting contrast to the new covenant Jesus established.

Third, the ratification of the covenant in Exodus 24 involved some sort of “covenant meal.”⁴⁰ This is the only place in the Old Testament where such a meal occurs in the context of a covenant between God and his people (or humans in general).⁴¹ The allusion to Exodus 24:8, thus, may have brought to mind this covenant meal, a meal that celebrated open fellowship with God. Exodus 24:9-11 reads, “Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel...God did not stretch out his hand against the chief men of Israel. They saw God, and they ate and drank.” Though these chosen leaders saw God, they were not destroyed; rather, they enjoyed open fellowship with God. In the same way, the meal that Jesus celebrated with his disciples points toward unrestricted fellowship with God, both in the forgiveness of sins connected to Jesus’ sacrifice (26:28) and in the promise Jesus makes about celebrating this meal *with his disciples* in his Father’s kingdom (26:29, “with you” is a Matthean addition). Earlier in his Gospel, Matthew connected Jesus’ role as Immanuel (“God with us,” 1:23) with his mission as Savior (1:21). The result of Jesus’ salvation, thus, would be a restored relationship with God.⁴² Here we see that the means of

³⁹Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 156-57.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 100.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 100 n. 12.

⁴²Martin Hasitschka writes, “Bringing together the two namings of Jesus in Mt. 1.21 and 1.22-23 offers the conclusion that salvation from sin through Jesus is at the same time the way into a new relationship with God which is marked by the experience that God is with us through the mediation of Jesus” (“Matthew and Hebrews,” in *Matthew and His Christian Contemporaries*, LNTS 333, ed. David C. Sim and Boris Repschinski [London: T & T Clark, 2008], 92).

salvation—a salvation that results in a restored relationship with God—is the death of Jesus that inaugurates the new covenant, which is probably why Matthew adds “with you” and specifically speaks of his “Father’s” kingdom in 26:29. These additions, in the context of covenant, highlight a relationship with God that is restored and intimate and that is experienced exclusively through Jesus.⁴³

As pointed out above, Matthew alone adds the phrase “for the forgiveness of sins” to Jesus’ words about his blood during the Last Supper. Some argue that this phrase came from the liturgical practice of Matthew’s church.⁴⁴ Yet, it is more likely that this was Matthew’s own contribution.⁴⁵ The main point, though, is that this phrase was added to make a theological point about Jesus’ death and not simply because it was part of liturgical usage. Gehardsson disagrees, stating, “The words interpreting the significance of the cup are not part of a general doctrinal statement about the death of Christ, but deal rather with the practical benefit participants in the church’s Holy Communion can derive from it.”⁴⁶ Yet, throughout the passion narrative Matthew highlights the atoning significance of Jesus’ death (26:31, 39, 42; 27:42, 45-46, 51-53).

⁴³Another connection that Matthew, following Mark, makes with Jesus’ death is its relation to the kingdom of God (26:29). This connection shows that the atoning death of Jesus was not unrelated to Matthew’s message about the kingdom. In fact, he presents Jesus’ death possibly as the means of establishing the kingdom (see Taylor, *Jesus and His Sacrifice*, 141-42).

⁴⁴E.g., John P. Meier, *Matthew*, New Testament Message (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1980), 319.

⁴⁵Taylor writes, “The further Matthaean supplement, ‘unto remission of sins,’ is probably an interpretive addition made by the Evangelist. This is suggested, not so much by the content of the phrase, as by the fact that it is Matthew’s habit to expand his Markan source, and because in xxvi. 26-9 there is no sign that he is using any other source” (*Jesus and His Sacrifice*, 127). For redactional confirmation of this viewpoint, see Senior, *Passion Narrative*, 82-83.

⁴⁶Birger Gehardsson, “Sacrificial Service and Atonement in the Gospel of Matthew,” in *Reconciliation and Hope*, ed. Robert Banks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 26. For others who downplay the theological significance of “for the forgiveness of sins” in connection with Jesus’ death, see Georg Strecker, *Der Weg der Gerechtigkeit: Untersuchung zur Theologie des Matthäus*, 3rd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971), 221-22; Delvin D. Hutton, “The Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Mt 27:51b-53): A Study of the Theology of the Matthaean Passion Narrative” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1970), 166; Kenneth Grayston, *Dying, We Live: A New Inquiry into the Death of Christ in the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 353.

Thus, Matthew's focus in 26:28 is more likely on the atoning value of Jesus' death rather than simply on the benefit of taking the Lord's Supper, though the two are not mutually exclusive.⁴⁷ Matthew's addition was theologically motivated to spell out the meaning and purpose of Jesus' death. As shown above, Matthew's addition clearly alludes to Jeremiah 31 and the new covenant. Thus, Matthew makes clear what is implicit in Mark, namely, that Jesus' death inaugurated the new covenant and thus resulted in the forgiveness of sins.

Interestingly, Matthew not only adds "for the forgiveness of sins" to 26:28, but he also omits any mention of forgiveness in relation to John the Baptist's ministry (cf. Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). It is possible that Matthew omitted the mention of forgiveness in connection with John's preaching in order to preserve the parallel between the message of John and Jesus (3:2; 4:17).⁴⁸ However, when one combines this omission with the addition of "for the forgiveness of sins" in 26:28, it appears that something more is going on here. It appears that Matthew is clearly and exclusively connecting the forgiveness of sins with Jesus and in particular with his sacrificial death.⁴⁹ Though forgiveness is

⁴⁷Both Meier and Senior, though emphasizing the connection between "for the forgiveness of sins" and the practice of the Lord's Supper, also emphasize that this addition in Matthew spells out the atoning significance of Jesus' death (Meier, *Matthew*, 319-20; Senior, *Passion Narrative*, 87).

⁴⁸E.g., Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 382 n. 103; Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1081 n. 135. Though Carson thinks the omission may point to an exclusive focus on Jesus' death as the basis of forgiveness in Matthew, he too suggests the alignment of John's preaching with Jesus' as a likely reason for the omission ("Matthew," 538). Luomanen argues that in light of the absence of forgiveness of sins in 28:19, the reason for Matthew's omission in connection with John is because his idea of baptism centered on doing God's will rather than receiving forgiveness (*Entering the Kingdom*, 208-09, 220-21). Though creative, it is more likely that the omission in 3:2 and the addition in 26:28 have more to do with Jesus' atoning death than with Matthew's understanding of baptism.

⁴⁹Senior, *Passion of Jesus in Matthew*, 69; Gurtner, *Torn Veil*, 134; Knowles, *Jeremiah in Matthew's Gospel*, 209; Frank J. Matera, *Passion Narratives and Gospel Theologies: Interpreting the Synoptics through Their Passion Stories* (New York: Paulist, 1986), 93; Lidija Novakovic, *Messiah, the Healer of the Sick: A Study of Jesus as the Son of David in the Gospel of Matthew*, WUNT, 2nd ser., vol. 170 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 74 n. 249; Robert L. Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet: A Socio-Historical Study*, JSNTSup 62 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 57; Walter Wink, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition*, SNTSMS 7 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 36; James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, SBT, 2nd ser., vol. 15 (London: SCM, 1970), 18 n. 39.

mentioned elsewhere in Matthew without connecting it to Jesus' death (6:12, 14-15; 9:2, 5-6; 12:31-32; 18:21-35), the teaching on forgiveness in Matthew always comes from Jesus; plus, 9:2, 6 specifically connects the forgiveness of sins with the authority of Jesus Christ. When one adds to this the fact that Matthew's narrative climaxes with Jesus' death as the basis for forgiveness (26:28), it becomes clear that for Matthew the forgiveness of sins is mediated solely through Jesus and based upon his sacrificial death.⁵⁰ Again, this observation confirms that for Matthew Jesus' atoning death was significant, emphasized, and spelled out in his narrative.

The Servant of the Lord

Along with a new covenant allusion, it is also likely that Matthew alludes to Isaiah 53 and the Servant of the Lord in 26:28. Three factors point in this direction: (1) the phrase "for many" (περὶ πολλῶν), (2) the verb "to pour out" (ἐκχέω), and (3) the mention of the covenant.⁵¹ Of these three, the first is the most important, and without it the other two would not be plausible allusions to Isaiah 53.⁵² Unlike Mark, the phrase "for many" in Matthew precedes the verb "to pour out." This change in Matthew may be the result of him choosing to emphasize "for the forgiveness of sins" and so placing it last instead of "for many."⁵³ If so, this only reinforces the argument that Matthew's addition of this phrase had theological motivation. The "many" for whom Jesus died, as shown in the section on the ransom saying, most likely refers to all.⁵⁴ Also, in the section on the

⁵⁰Contra Luomanen who argues that Matthew's theology of forgiveness is not coherent (*Entering the Kingdom*, 222). Others who see no unity in Matthew's understanding of forgiveness include Grayston, *Dying, We Live*, 210, 353; David Seeley, *Deconstructing the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 21, 48-49.

⁵¹R. T. France, "The Servant of the Lord in the Teaching of Jesus," *TynBul* 19 (1968): 37-39; Carson, "Matthew," 538-39. Contra Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant*, 81-83; Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 381.

⁵²France, "Servant of the Lord," 38.

⁵³Senior, *Passion Narrative*, 81; cf. Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*, 182.

⁵⁴Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*, 179-82, 229; Gnlika, *Matthäusevangelium*, 2:401; Hagner,

ransom saying we saw how the use of πολλῶν (“many”) alluded to Isaiah 53 and the Suffering Servant. This word is used 5 times in Isaiah’s fourth Servant Song, and in 53:11, 12 LXX it is used in a strikingly similar way, namely, with the idea of dying for many.⁵⁵ Thus, just as the use of “for many” alluded to Isaiah 53 in 20:28; the same holds true for its use in 26:28.⁵⁶ In fact, the allusion here in 26:28 explains how and when Jesus offers his life as a ransom for many: he does so by shedding his blood at the cross.⁵⁷ Redemption from sin is based on Jesus’ sacrificial death. Some think that Matthew’s use of περί instead of Mark’s ὑπὲρ (14:24) reveals another allusion to the Suffering Servant, since περί is used in Isaiah 53:4, 10 LXX.⁵⁸ Though possible, it is more likely that Matthew’s change is due to stylistic reasons since the two prepositions have overlapping meanings and can be used synonymously (Eph 6:18-19; Heb 5:1, 3).⁵⁹ If the change was theologically motivated, it is more likely that Matthew used περί because this word has “sacrificial connotations.”⁶⁰

The verb “to pour out” (ἐκχέω) is not used in Isaiah 53 LXX, yet עָרַךְ is used in

Matthew 14-28, 773; Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:95, 474; Gräbe, *New Covenant, New Community*, 210; contra Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 381.

⁵⁵S. H. T. Page, “The Authenticity of the Ransom Logion (Mark 10:45b),” in *Gospel Perspectives*, ed. R. T. France and D. Wenham (Sheffield: JSOT, 1980), 1:140-41.

⁵⁶Gundry, *Use of the Old Testament*, 59; Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*, 227; Gnllka, *Matthäusevangelium*, 2:401; Osborne, *Matthew*, 968; Peter Stuhlmacher, *Jesus of Nazareth—Christ of Faith*, trans. Siegfried Schatzmann (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 72; McKenzie, *Covenant*, 89; contra Grayston, *Dying, We Live*, 209-10.

⁵⁷Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:474; Turner, *Matthew*, 488.

⁵⁸Senior, *Passion of Jesus in Matthew*, 67-68; Jerome Kodell, *The Eucharist in the New Testament* (Wilmington, DE: Glazier, 1988), 101.

⁵⁹C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 63; Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 363.

⁶⁰Moo, *Old Testament in the Passion Narratives*, 132. In Leviticus and Numbers, the phrase περί ἁμαρτίας is used countless times to speak of a sin offering (חַטָּאת in Hebrew).

53:12 with the sense of “to pour out.”⁶¹ The Servant of the Lord poured out his soul to death. The verb ἐκχέω is a literal translation of this Hebrew word and, in light of the allusion to Isaiah 53 in “for many,” may allude to the Suffering Servant as well.⁶² While πολλῶν involves verbal similarity with Isa 53:11-12 LXX, ἐκχέω “shares conceptual similarity.”⁶³ Yet, even if ἐκχέω is not an intentional allusion to Isaiah 53, it at least describes Jesus’ death in sacrificial terms, for this word is often used in sacrificial contexts (e.g., Lev 4:7, 18, 25).⁶⁴ Jesus did not simply die as a martyr; he died as a sacrifice for sin. He gave his life on the cross so that the sins of many could be forgiven.

One final marker in 26:28 suggests an intentional allusion to Isaiah 53, and that marker is the mention of a covenant. As stated above, the new covenant is prophesied in the Old Testament even when this exact phrase is not used. Though Isaiah never uses the phrase “new covenant,” he speaks of this covenant and associates it with the Servant of the Lord (42:6; 49:8).⁶⁵ Thus, it appears that Isaiah is showing that it is the Servant who establishes the new covenant and he does this by his death (Isa 53).⁶⁶ This interpretation fits nicely with the joint allusion to Exodus 24:8 and Jeremiah 31:31-34 in 26:28, which showed that the inauguration of the new covenant is based on the shedding of Jesus’ blood. As France explains,

⁶¹BDB, s.v. “חָקַע.”

⁶²Moo, *Old Testament in the Passion Narratives*, 131; Green, *Death of Jesus*, 196; Gundry, *Use of the Old Testament*, 59; Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*, 178, 226-27; Gnllka, *Matthäusevangelium*, 2:402.

⁶³Ham, “Last Supper in Matthew,” 60.

⁶⁴Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*, 222 n. 5; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 773; Osborne, *Matthew*, 968.

⁶⁵Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 158-64.

⁶⁶Hooker, as usual, denies any allusion here to the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah. She is right to point out that there is no mention of blood-shedding in Isa 42:6 or 49:8, yet she is wrong to suggest that there is no blood-shedding in any of the Servant Songs (*Jesus and the Servant*, 82). Isa 53 certainly conveys the idea that the Servant sacrificed his life for many.

In Isaiah 42-53 Yahweh makes His Servant a covenant to the people, and this involves his vicarious death for their redemption. Jesus' words at the Last Supper, whose purpose is to explain how His coming death is to benefit them, allude not only to the covenant theme (in Ex. 24:8 and Jer. 31:31), but also to the work of the Servant in Isaiah 53. His work is to re-establish the broken covenant, but this can only be done by fulfilling the role of the Servant in his vicarious death. To make this point, Jesus chooses words from Isaiah 53 which are as deeply imbued as any with the redemptive significance of that death, in that they highlight its vicarious nature.⁶⁷

Again, the mention of "covenant" alone would not warrant seeing an allusion to the work of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah. Yet, in light of the use of "for many" in 26:28 (along with the other allusions to the Servant's work in Matthew, see, e.g., 3:17; 20:28), it is certainly plausible that the reference to the covenant hints at the Servant's work of dying to establish the new covenant.

The Connection between 1:21 and 26:28

Having shown how Jesus' death in Matthew is connected to the new covenant in Jeremiah and the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah, we will now see how Jesus' words about his death in 26:28 are connected to his mission spelled out in 1:21.⁶⁸ Matthew's Gospel begins by explaining the mission of Jesus, the main character of his Gospel. His mission is to save his people from their sins (1:21). The interesting thing about this verse is that it does not clarify *how* Jesus will save his people. It just says that he will. This programmatic verse, thus, serves to alert the reader to go through Matthew's Gospel with an eye toward discovering how Jesus saves his people from their sins. Here in 26:28 we have the clearest and fullest explanation in Matthew of how Jesus saves his people from their sins. Jesus saves his people by pouring out his blood for the forgiveness of sins. Thus, there is an intended connection in Matthew between the promise of salvation in 1:21 and the means or basis of that salvation in 26:28. Though the terminology is not

⁶⁷France, "Servant of the Lord," 39.

⁶⁸For more on the connection between 1:21 and 26:28, see the section above entitled "He Will Save His People from Their Sins (1:18-25)."

exact (σώζω in 1:21 and ἄφεσις in 26:28), both verses speak of ἁμαρτία and how it is dealt with by Jesus Christ.⁶⁹ Plus, the narrative itself favors this connection, for 1:21 is programmatic in nature, while 26:28 is climactic in nature revealing most clearly the intended result of Jesus' death. As Powell states, "The plot of Matthew's Gospel describes how this purpose [to save his people from their sins] came to be fulfilled, to some extent in Jesus' ministry, but, ultimately, only in his death."⁷⁰

Various scholars recognize this connection between 1:21 and 26:28 (and 20:28).⁷¹ For instance, Davies and Allison make the following comment on 1:21, "The passion already comes into the picture, for it is at the crucifixion that Jesus pours out his lifeblood εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν (26.28). Thus the entire gospel is to be read in the light of its end. In addition, 1.21 makes clear from the outset that, notwithstanding Matthew's insistent demand for human righteousness, salvation is the gift of God. This fact will be reiterated in 20.28 and 26.28."⁷² John Paul Heil states, "It is by his death, then, that Jesus finally completes his role as the one who 'will save his people from their sins.'"⁷³ Similarly, Gurtner points out that Jesus saves his people from their sins "by his sacrificial, atoning death (26:28)."⁷⁴ Gurtner actually argues that 1:21 and 26:28 form an *inclusio* and by doing so reveal in the unfolding of the narrative how Jesus ultimately

⁶⁹In Luke 4:18, ἄφεσις does convey the idea of rescue or liberation, yet this usage of ἄφεσις is unique in the New Testament and even here the usual meaning of forgiveness is probably implied (see I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978], 184).

⁷⁰Mark Allan Powell, "The Plot and Subplots of Matthew's Gospel," *NTS* 38 (1992): 196.

⁷¹E.g., R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 269; David R. Bauer, *The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*, JSNTSup 31 (Sheffield: Almond, 1988), 66, 102, 144; Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 381, 384; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 773; Carson, *Matthew*, 538. Surprisingly, Luomanen denies any connection between 1:21 and 26:28 arguing that in Matthew Jesus does not save his people from their sins by his death (*Entering the Kingdom*, 224-27).

⁷²Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 1:210.

⁷³John Paul Heil, *The Death and Resurrection of Jesus: A Narrative-Critical Reading of Matthew 26-28* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 8.

⁷⁴Gurtner, *Torn Veil*, 127.

saves his people by his sacrificial death.⁷⁵

The importance of this connection between 1:21 and 26:28 is that it shows how integral the atoning death of Jesus is in Matthew's Gospel. The naming of Jesus in 1:21 begins the Gospel with a focus on the salvation that Jesus will bring to his people. The cup saying in 26:28 shows that this salvation is based on Jesus' sacrificial death. Thus, the whole Gospel is bracketed by an emphasis on Jesus' saving work accomplished on the cross. The teaching in 1:21 and 26:28 is important, then, not only for what is found in these verses about Jesus' atoning death, but also in how these verses influence our reading of Matthew's entire Gospel. The cross is not an anti-climactic add-on in Matthew; rather, it is central to his purpose and narrative.

Conclusion

The cup saying in Matthew's Last Supper text is a high moment in his presentation of Jesus' death and its significance. This significance is seen in Matthew's unique addition of "for the forgiveness of sins." It is also seen in the Old Testament allusions to Jeremiah 31 and the inauguration of the new covenant and to Isaiah's Suffering Servant. By his death, then, Jesus inaugurated a new covenant that resulted in lasting forgiveness, and by his death he fulfilled the role of the Servant. Also, by his death Jesus provided salvation for his people. The programmatic promise in 1:21 is fulfilled in Jesus' death spoken of in 26:28. Summing it all up, Jeremias states, "This is therefore what Jesus said at the Last Supper about the meaning of his death: *his death is the vicarious death of the suffering servant, which atones for the sins of the 'many', the peoples of the world, which ushers in the beginning of the final salvation and which effects the new covenant with God.*"⁷⁶ Thus, Matthew's Gospel has at its heart a real,

⁷⁵Ibid., 127. Similarly, Hasitschka points out that 1:21-23 and 26:28 frame Jesus' entire earthly ministry in Matthew under the heading of the forgiveness of sins ("Matthew and Hebrews," 93).

⁷⁶Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*, 231.

pervasive focus on Jesus' atoning death. It is central to his Gospel, not peripheral and certainly not absent.

I Will Strike the Shepherd (26:31-35)

During the Last Supper in Matthew, Jesus predicts that Judas will betray him (26:20-25). Yet, we soon learn that Judas is not the only disciple to fail Jesus during his passion. In the section following the Last Supper (26:31-35), we learn that all of Jesus' disciples will abandon him including Peter, who will disown Jesus three times. This section is transitional in Matthew's passion narrative, explaining what happened after the Last Supper and prior to Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane.⁷⁷ Matthew 26:31-35 serves to heighten the tension of betrayal and abandonment and to keep the narrative moving toward its intended climax—the death of Jesus. In this section Jesus once again predicts his upcoming death. This time Jesus quotes from the Old Testament to predict his death. He says, “You will all desert me on this very night, for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered’” (v. 31). The Old Testament quotation comes from Zechariah 13:7, which shows the connection between Jesus' death and the failure of his disciples. The goal of this section will be to understand why Jesus quoted from this particular passage and what it says about his atoning death.

The Authenticity and Source of Jesus' Saying in 26:31

Some scholars doubt that Jesus quoted from Zechariah 13:7 to predict his death. For instance, George Buchanan thinks that Matthew put this quotation in Jesus' mouth after the fact to show that his death fulfilled Scripture.⁷⁸ Actually, a strong case

⁷⁷Senior, *Passion Narrative*, 89.

⁷⁸George Wesley Buchanan, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1996), 2:983. See also Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, rev. ed., trans. John Marsh (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 266-67, 306; Barnabas Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic: The Doctrinal Significance of the Old Testament Quotations* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 129-30.

can be made for the authenticity of this prediction.⁷⁹ First, as pointed out in the section on the passion predictions, there is nothing improbable about the assertion that Jesus realized that he would be persecuted and killed and that he attempted to understand his death in light of the Scriptures. Second, the quotation fits nicely in the context of 26:30-35, a section which describes events in the lives of the disciples that are historically sound. Certainly, no one would make up Peter's denial or the abandonment of Jesus by all his disciples. Third, the imagery of the shepherd and the sheep is a common one used by Jesus in the Gospels.⁸⁰ Fourth, the Book of Zechariah plays a significant role in Jesus' view of his death in the passion narrative, and so this quotation from Zechariah does not seem forced or out of place.⁸¹ Craig Evans explains, "Support of the authenticity of this tradition is found in the presence of the Zechariah pattern. That is, if Jesus entered Jerusalem to effect the prophecy of Zechariah, if his actions in the Temple precincts were in part inspired by Zechariah's eschatological vision, then he may have applied the image of the stricken shepherd to himself as well."⁸² Thus, there are convincing reasons to believe that Jesus himself quoted from Zechariah 13:7 to interpret his death and the impact it would have on his disciples.

It is difficult to determine the precise source of the quotation of Zechariah 13:7

⁷⁹For a thorough defense of the authenticity of this saying, see Brant Pitre, *Jesus, the Tribulation, and the End of the Exile*, WUNT, 2nd ser., vol. 204 (Tübingen: Mohr, 2005), 466-78. See also Taylor, *Jesus and His Sacrifice*, 145-47; Moo, *Old Testament in the Passion Narratives*, 186-87; Michael F. Bird, *Are You the One Who Is to Come?: The Historical Jesus and the Messianic Question* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 134-35.

⁸⁰See, e.g., Matt 9:36; 10:6; 15:24; 25:32; John 10. Wright argues that the shepherd image can be traced back to the historical Jesus (*Jesus and the Victory of God*, 533).

⁸¹For the importance of Zech 9-14 in the passion narrative, see, e.g., F. F. Bruce, "The Book of Zechariah and the Passion Narrative," *BJRL* 43 (1960-61): 336-53; Moo, *Old Testament in the Passion Narratives*, 173-224; Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic*, 110-34; Bird, *Are You the One*, 124-25.

⁸²Craig A. Evans, "Jesus and Zechariah's Messianic Hope," in *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus*, ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 385. Wright shows how the very actions of Jesus reveal an intentional effort on his part to align his agenda with the prophecies of Zechariah (*Jesus and the Victory of God*, 599-600). Thus, a quotation from Zechariah would not be unlikely for Jesus.

in 26:31. Some argue that Matthew was primarily influenced by Mark in his use of Zechariah.⁸³ Others think that Matthew followed the MT with a few modifications,⁸⁴ and yet others think that Matthew has been influenced by LXX^A particularly with his addition of τῆς ποιμνῆς (“of the flock”).⁸⁵ The only differences between Matthew and Mark in terms of the Zechariah quotation are a change in word order and the addition by Matthew of τῆς ποιμνῆς.⁸⁶ Since the phrase τῆς ποιμνῆς is only found in LXX^A, this version of the LXX has most likely influenced Matthew. The argument that Matthew influenced LXX^A is not persuasive because the latter did not change the imperative to an indicative like Matthew has.⁸⁷ Furthermore, as Luz points out, ποιμνῆς is a hapax legomenon in Matthew and so it likely came from another text.⁸⁸ Since basically all other versions of Zechariah 13:7, except the one in Matthew and Mark, use an imperative for “strike,” it appears that Matthew has taken over Mark’s quotation of Zechariah 13:7 and adjusted the latter part of it to conform to LXX^A.⁸⁹

The Use of the First Person Indicative

Jesus told his disciples, “You will all desert me on this very night, for it is

⁸³E.g., Foster, “Use of Zechariah,” 79-80.

⁸⁴E.g., Clay Alan Ham, *The Coming King and the Rejected Shepherd: Matthew’s Reading of Zechariah’s Messianic Hope*, New Testament Monographs 4 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2005), 70, 81; Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971), 298; France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 998.

⁸⁵E.g., Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:485; Gnllka, *Matthäusevangelium*, 2:406; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 776; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 530; Moo, *Old Testament in the Passion Narratives*, 185.

⁸⁶Senior, *Passion Narrative*, 91.

⁸⁷Gundry, *Matthew*, 530.

⁸⁸Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 387 n. 8.

⁸⁹Ibid., 387. Contra Maarten J. J. Menken, *Matthew’s Bible: The Old Testament Text of the Evangelist*, BETL 173 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2004), 222; Foster, “Use of Zechariah,” 80.

written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered’” (26:31). The word for “strike” is *πατάσσω*, which is used at times of a blow that is fatal (Acts 7:24; 12:23).⁹⁰ This is the idea conveyed in Zechariah 13:7, namely, that of a fatal blow that takes the life of the shepherd.⁹¹ This idea corresponds with Jesus’ use of the quotation: he is predicting his upcoming death. God is the one who delivers the fatal blow; Jesus is the one who receives that blow on the cross; and the disciples are the ones who are scattered. Yet, the disciples were only scattered for a brief period, for Jesus gathered them again in Galilee after his resurrection (26:32; 28:10, 16-17). Thus, in 26:31-35 we see how both Jesus’ death and the abandonment of his disciples were predicted by Jesus and were in accordance with Scripture.⁹² Nothing in Matthew’s passion narrative happens outside of God’s sovereign plan as foretold in Scripture. In fact, the passion narrative does not even begin until Jesus initiates it with his passion prediction in 26:2.⁹³

As pointed out above, nearly every other version of Zechariah 13:7 has “strike” in the imperative. The imperative is used in the MT, the Targum, the Old Testament Peshitta, and nearly every LXX manuscript.⁹⁴ Thus, Matthew and Mark are unique in their use of the indicative (“I will strike”). Understanding the reason for this change helps us to see the significance of this quotation in Matthew’s Gospel. Initially, it is important to point out that, compared to the MT or the LXX, the idea is basically the same in Matthew’s version. The one who speaks to the sword in Zechariah 13:7 MT and

⁹⁰Ham, *Coming King and the Rejected Shepherd*, 79 n. 236. See also Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 388.

⁹¹Thomas E. McComiskey, *Zechariah*, in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, ed. Thomas E. McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 3:1223; Anthony R. Petterson, *Behold Your King: The Hope for the House of David in the Book of Zechariah*, *Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies* 513 (New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 199.

⁹²Pitre, *Jesus, the Tribulation, and the End of Exile*, 456.

⁹³Senior, *Passion Narrative*, 19; Matera, *Passion Narratives and Gospel Theologies*, 87-88.

⁹⁴Krister Stendahl, *The School of St. Matthew and Its Use of the Old Testament*, ASNU 20 (Lund: Gleerup, 1954), 81. LXX^V has *πατάξω*, yet it is late and was most likely influenced by the Gospels (France, *Jesus and Old Testament*, 241 n. 6).

LXX is the Lord Almighty: he is the one who commands the sword to strike the shepherd, and so he is the author of the shepherd's judgment. Thus, even with the use of the imperative the death of the shepherd is attributed to God.⁹⁵ Yet, with the use of the first person indicative in Matthew this is even more clear and pronounced. It is not the sword, but God himself who strikes the shepherd ("I will strike"). Matthew does not change the meaning of Zechariah 13:7; he just makes it more explicit. He makes more explicit that Jesus' death is the result of God's judgment. As Nolland states, "The attribution of the action directly to God is striking. The sense of divine necessity in relation to the Passion has been strong enough, but this takes us a step further and identifies the fate that will befall Jesus with the judgment of God."⁹⁶

However, some argue that Matthew (and Mark) changed the imperative to the indicative simply out of grammatical necessity.⁹⁷ Matthew leaves out the first part of the quotation from Zechariah 13:7, the part that mentions the sword. Thus, with no subject mentioned it was necessary to change the imperative to an indicative. David New offers another suggestion, arguing that the change to an indicative was due to the context which uses the Zechariah quotation as a prophecy of Jesus' upcoming death (and thus the need for the future indicative).⁹⁸ Though both of these suggestions are plausible, neither of them tells the whole story. Matthew's change to the indicative is not just for grammatical clarity; it is also for theological clarity. It seems that Matthew wanted to emphasize

⁹⁵Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Zechariah 9-14*, AB, vol. 25C (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 384; Petterson, *Behold Your King*, 198-99; France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 998; Carson, *Matthew*, 541.

⁹⁶Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1089. Similarly, Gundry says, "By changing the imperative 'Smite' in the MT and LXX to 'I will smite,' Jesus suggests that God's action lies at the base of his passion" (*Matthew*, 530). See also Stephen L. Cook, "The Metamorphosis of a Shepherd: The Tradition History of Zechariah 11:17 + 13:7-9," *CBQ* 55 (1993): 464; Peter M. Head, "The Self-Offering and Death of Christ as a Sacrifice in the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles," in *Sacrifice in the Bible*, ed. Roger T. Beckwith and Martin J. Selman (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 124 n. 9.

⁹⁷E.g., Moo, *Old Testament in the Passion Narratives*, 184; Carson, *Matthew*, 540-41.

⁹⁸David S. New, *Old Testament Quotations in the Synoptic Gospels, and the Two-Document Hypothesis*, Septuagint and Cognate Studies 37 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1993), 86.

God's role in striking the shepherd. As Stendahl explains concerning Matthew's use of the indicative, "From the theological point of view the activity of God is emphasized thereby as the subject in the passion story."⁹⁹ Similarly, Bonnard states, "Le futur à la première personne du texte évangélique (πατάξω, je frapperai) veut indiquer que c'est Dieu qui frappera le Christ."¹⁰⁰ France too is open to this possibility. After acknowledging the change due to grammatical necessity, he states, "The one who strikes is in either case Yahweh himself, though the New Testament indicative may perhaps emphasize the divine initiative."¹⁰¹ The change to the indicative coincides with Matthew's emphasis in the passion narrative that Jesus' death is the fulfillment of God's will revealed in Scripture.¹⁰² In 26:24, it speaks of the Son of Man going (i.e., being betrayed and killed) "just as it is written about him." While praying in Gethsemane, Jesus submits to God's will which means that Jesus must die (26:39, 42). While being arrested, Jesus speaks of the Scriptures and the prophets being fulfilled (26:54, 56). It is clear in Matthew's passion narrative that, notwithstanding the role of the Jewish people and the Roman authorities, Jesus' death is ultimately the result of God's will. As Senior states, "The theme of the Passion as the fulfillment of God's plan is a basic one in all of the New Testament writings, made particularly clear by Matthew in his emphasis on Old Testament fulfillment (cf., for example, 26:15, 52-54; 27:3-10, 43, etc.) and the complementary attention to Jesus' filial obedience (cf. the insistent emphasis on the divine will in the Gethsemane scene)."¹⁰³ The use of the indicative in 26:31 fits well with this theme.

⁹⁹Stendahl, *School of St. Matthew*, 82.

¹⁰⁰Bonnard, *Saint Matthieu*, 381.

¹⁰¹France, *Jesus and Old Testament*, 108.

¹⁰²Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 777; Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 271-72.

¹⁰³Senior, *Passion Narrative*, 93 n. 2.

Yet, it is not just that Jesus' death is the fulfillment of God's will, but God the Father is the one portrayed as bringing judgment upon his Son. In 26:31, it reads, "I will strike the shepherd." As Bolt says, "This is a most significant observation for our understanding of the atonement. God the Father will be actively involved in striking the Son."¹⁰⁴ This observation fits too with a recurring theme in Matthew's passion narrative, namely, that in his death Jesus faces God's judgment on our behalf. Now it is true that Matthew does not use the terminology of "wrath," at least not in connection with Jesus' death (cf. 3:7); however, the pictures and images he uses in the passion narrative portray this idea in a graphic, powerful way. At the cross Jesus drinks the cup of God's wrath (26:39, 42). In order to save us, Jesus refuses to save himself: he gives his life for our salvation (27:42). Jesus' death results in the darkness of God's judgment and Jesus' cry of abandonment (27:45-46). Jesus is forsaken because he is being condemned for us.¹⁰⁵ Thus, the change to the indicative in 26:31 highlights God's role in striking Jesus and in doing so prepares the reader for this emphasis that is played out in the rest of the passion narrative.

The Context of Zechariah 13:7

The initial result of God's judgment upon Jesus was the scattering of the disciples. They abandoned Jesus at his arrest and crucifixion. However, after his resurrection Jesus gathered his disciples again and commissioned them to make disciples of all nations (28:16-20). The re-gathering and commissioning of the disciples imply their restoration. That restoration was based on his atoning death and victorious resurrection. Since Jesus was struck by God on their behalf, their desertion and unbelief

¹⁰⁴Peter G. Bolt, *The Cross from a Distance: Atonement in Mark's Gospel*, NSBT 18 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 108.

¹⁰⁵These passages related to God's judgment upon Jesus will be examined in the sections that follow.

could be forgiven. Salvation from sin is based on Jesus' atoning death. This connection between salvation and Jesus' death fits with the larger context of Zechariah 13:7.¹⁰⁶ The shepherd God strikes is not the worthless shepherd of Zechariah 11:15-17, but God's faithful shepherd.¹⁰⁷ This is made clear by the way this verse describes the shepherd: the Lord Almighty refers to him as "my shepherd" (רֹעֵי) and "my associate" (עֲמִיתִי). This latter phrase, especially when used in connection with נֶבֶךְ, speaks of one who enjoys closeness and intimacy with God.¹⁰⁸ Thus, the one whom God strikes is his faithful shepherd. Though initially judgment falls upon God's people as the result of the shepherd's death, the end result is the re-gathering of the people in the form of a remnant (Zech 13:8-9). Interestingly, the image of restoration described in Zechariah 13:8-9 contains covenantal language. Verse 9 says, "They will call on my name and I will answer them. I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'Yahweh is our God.'" Petterson says, "The people that emerge from this ordeal are pictured as enjoying a fully restored covenant relationship with Yahweh (cf. Exod 3:10; 5:1; 19:5-6), or even a new covenant relationship."¹⁰⁹ If the new covenant is in view, then the quotation of Zechariah 13:7 in 26:31 serves to reaffirm what Jesus has already said about his death being the basis of the new covenant formed with God's people (26:28).

¹⁰⁶Luz thinks that Zech 13:7 is a Christian proof-text that does not take into consideration the context of Zechariah (*Matthew 21-28*, 388 n. 15). For the view that Jesus did not simply use Zech 13:7 as a proof-text but knew the context of Zech 9-14, see Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 599-600; Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The End of the Ages Has Come: An Early Interpretation of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 35; Mark J. Boda, *Haggai, Zechariah*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 514-15.

¹⁰⁷Bruce, "Book of Zechariah," 343; Petterson, *Behold Your King*, 197-98, 200-01; Ham, *Coming King and the Rejected Shepherd*, 72; France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, 108, 154; Carson, *Matthew*, 541. Some argue that Zech 13:7-9 originally followed 11:17 and thus the stricken shepherd in its original context was the worthless shepherd of 11:15-17 (e.g., Cook, "Metamorphosis of a Shepherd," 456-57). For a defense of Zech 13:7-9 in its current context, see Paul Lamarche, *Zacharie IX-XIV: Structure Littéraire et Messianisme*, Ébib (Paris: Gabalda, 1961), 107-09; Meyers and Meyers, *Zechariah 9-14*, 384.

¹⁰⁸Meyers and Meyers, *Zechariah 9-14*, 386-87.

¹⁰⁹Petterson, *Behold Your King*, 200.

It is true that Zechariah 13:7-9 does not explain how the death of the shepherd leads to the restoration of God's people, yet the answer may be found in the verses that precede this passage. Jeremias explains, "There is no mention in Zechariah of the way in which the connection between the death of the shepherd and the purification of the people of God is thought to be made. The only help is a hint from the context, which says that on the day of the lament for the one 'whom they pierced' (12:10) a fountain will be opened 'for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness' (13:1). Thus a representative death for the flock may be thought of."¹¹⁰ It is quite likely that the fate of the shepherd in Zechariah 13:7 is connected with the one who is pierced in 12:10.¹¹¹ Being struck by a sword and being pierced are similar ideas.¹¹² Thus, the fountain mentioned in Zechariah 13:1 that is open to cleanse from sin and impurity is not only the result of the one being pierced in 12:10 but of the one being struck in 13:7. Cleansing from sin is the result of God's judgment upon the faithful shepherd. It appears that Jesus understood this; he understood that as God's faithful shepherd his death would result in salvation from sin. France states, "Jesus' application of the passage is explicit. He is this Messianic shepherd, and as such he is to be smitten. His Messianic work is to be accomplished through suffering, for only so can the predicted salvation come."¹¹³ As the context of Zechariah 12-13 makes clear, Jesus, the stricken Shepherd, bore God's wrath so that we could be saved.

¹¹⁰Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 297.

¹¹¹Petterson, *Behold Your King*, 238. McComiskey states, "The pierced one of 12:10 is to be identified with the shepherd in 13:7" (*Zechariah*, 3:1223).

¹¹²The word used for "pierced" in Zech 12:10, פָּקַע, often refers to death by the sword (Meyers and Meyers, *Zechariah 9-14*, 340). See, e.g., Judg 9:54; 1 Sam 31:4; 1 Chr 10:4; Isa 13:15.

¹¹³France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, 108-09.

The Stricken Shepherd and the Suffering Servant

In light of the allusions to Isaiah's Suffering Servant in Matthew's Gospel, it is important to consider the connection between the stricken Shepherd of Zechariah and the Suffering Servant of Isaiah.¹¹⁴ Both figures face God's judgment. God is the one who commands the sword to strike the shepherd in Zechariah 13:7. God is also the one who strikes the Servant for it is the Lord's will to crush him (Isa 53:4, 10). In fact, נָקַד ("to strike") is used in Zechariah 13:7 and Isaiah 53:4.¹¹⁵ Shepherd imagery is used in relation to both figures (Zech 13:7; Isa 53:6-7), and in each case their death results in the sins of the people being atoned for (Zech 13:1; Isa 53:5-6).¹¹⁶ Thus, it is certainly possible, if not likely, that Zechariah was influenced by the Suffering Servant in Isaiah. It is also possible that the change to the indicative in Matthew and Mark was influenced by the Suffering Servant image. Raymond Brown asks, "In the Zech passage the sword is told by God to strike the shepherd, but in Mark/Matt the 'I' who will strike the shepherd is God Himself. Has that reading been influenced by Isa 53:4, 10 where the Servant of the Lord is smitten or crushed by God?"¹¹⁷ Jeremias answers in the affirmative, arguing that Mark's change to the indicative was influenced by Isaiah 53.¹¹⁸ Joel Marcus agrees, stating, "God is still ultimately responsible for the smiting of the

¹¹⁴For a detailed look at this issue, see Lamarche, *Zacharie IX-XIV*, 124-47.

¹¹⁵Petterson, *Behold Your King*, 240 n. 124.

¹¹⁶Petterson mentions these and several other similarities between the stricken Shepherd and the Suffering Servant (ibid., 240-41). He thus concludes, "These similarities seem too numerous to be coincidental" (241). Lamarche is much more cautious, yet he also admits a possible link between Isa 53 and Zech 13:7 (*Zacharie IX-XIV*, 138). See also Ham, *Coming King and the Rejected Shepherd*, 73; McComiskey, *Zechariah*, 3:1215, 1223; Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (London: Tyndale, 1972), 198.

¹¹⁷Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 1:130 n. 27.

¹¹⁸Joachim Jeremias, "ποιμήν et al.," in *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 6:493 n. 78.

shepherd in the LXX, so Mark is making explicit what the LXX implies, but he may also be bringing in an allusion to Isaiah 53, in which God's people, who are compared to sheep, go astray, yet the Lord lays their sins on his righteous Servant, whom he causes to suffer for their sake (Isa 53:4, 6, 10)."¹¹⁹ The same may be true in Matthew. He has quoted from Isaiah 53 in 8:17 and alluded to this chapter at various places in his Gospel; thus, it is certainly possible that the phrasing of the Zechariah quotation was influenced by Isaiah 53:4, 10. At the very least, the phrase "I will strike the shepherd" agrees with what was taught about the Servant's death in Isaiah 53, namely, that it was God who struck Jesus on the cross.

Conclusion

Jesus' use of Zechariah 13:7 in 26:31 is more than a proof-text. It is more than an explanation of why the disciples abandoned him. It is an attempt to provide a theological understanding of Jesus' death. Jesus' death was the result of the Father's plan; in fact, it was God who struck Jesus on the cross. This is made explicit in Matthew with the use of the first person future indicative ("I will strike"). The result of Jesus' death would initially be the scattering of his disciples, but after the resurrection they would be gathered to him again. That re-gathering is more than a meeting; it conveys the idea of restoration and forgiveness. The same thought is found in Zechariah that pictures the shepherd's death as the means to cleansing and salvation (12:10; 13:1, 7-9). Once again we come back to the idea presented in 1:21, where it says that Jesus will save his people from their sins. It is at the cross that Jesus saves us from our sins, at the place where Jesus bore God's judgment on our behalf. This idea of Jesus as the substitutionary object of God's judgment is only confirmed in what follows in the passion narrative. We

¹¹⁹Joel Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, The Anchor Yale Bible, vol. 27A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 969. Similarly, Bolt says, "With the first-person form clearly identifying God (the Father) as the one who will strike the shepherd (the Son), Zech 13:7 is making the same point as Isaiah 53:10" (*Cross from a Distance*, 107). Bird points out that Jesus understood his role as Messiah in light of both the stricken Shepherd and the Suffering Servant (*Are You the One*, 98).

see this in the next section, which is Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane.

Jesus' Prayer in Gethsemane (26:36-46)

Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane is also recorded in the other Synoptic Gospels (Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:39-46), though it is not mentioned in John's Gospel.¹²⁰ As in Mark, the Gethsemane account in Matthew follows Jesus' prediction of his disciples' desertion (26:31-35) and precedes his arrest when he is betrayed by Judas and forsaken by his disciples (26:47-56). Jesus has predicted his death at various points in Matthew's Gospel, yet it is in Gethsemane that he finally comes to terms with the reality and immediacy of his approaching death.¹²¹ Though there are lessons to be learned about the need for watchfulness against temptation (e.g., 26:41), the main focus for us will be what Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane reveals about the nature of his atoning death.¹²² The cup saying (26:39, 42) will be the most helpful in revealing how Jesus' death relates to our salvation. However, a few other insights from this passage will be discussed as well, namely, the possible allusion to Genesis 22 in 26:36, the use of παραδίδομι in 26:45, and the significance of the phrase "the hour is approaching" (26:45) in relation to Jesus' death. Before looking at each of these insights into Jesus' atoning death, we will first examine briefly the historicity of the Gethsemane account.

¹²⁰However, John 12:27-28 may reflect tradition of Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane. As F. F. Bruce states, "This passage may be regarded as to some extent John's counterpart to the Synoptic narrative of the agony in Gethsemane" (*The Gospel of John* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983], 265). Jesus' prayer in John 17 appears much too different in tone and content, not to mention length, to be associated with Jesus' agonizing prayer in Gethsemane.

¹²¹France helpfully explains, "What is happening in Gethsemane is not the discovery of this as a new fact, but the need to come to terms in emotion and will with what he has already known in theory" (*Gospel of Matthew*, 1005).

¹²²Carson states that the main point of Matthew's Gethsemane passage is not instruction on watchful prayer but on how Jesus viewed his upcoming death (*Matthew*, 542). Contrast this with Matera's interpretation of the Gethsemane passage in Matthew where he focuses primarily on what it teaches us about prayer (*Passion Narratives and Gospel Theologies*, 95-97).

The Historicity of the Gethsemane Account

Some scholars cast doubt on the historicity of Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane. Bultmann, for instance, said that the Synoptic accounts of what happened in Gethsemane were simply legends.¹²³ However, the historical case for Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane is very strong.¹²⁴ Though various arguments are made for its historicity, the two main factors that support the historical value of the Gethsemane account are the criteria of embarrassment and multiple attestation.¹²⁵ Concerning the criterion of embarrassment, it is highly doubtful that any follower of Jesus would make up a prayer that puts his Lord in a place where he is overwhelmed with sorrow and hesitant to die on the cross. The raw presentation of Jesus' humanity in this passage is much too vivid and uncompromising to be the creation of later writers. It is also unlikely that anyone would craft a story that puts the disciples in such a bad light for they slept instead of supporting Jesus in prayer.¹²⁶

Second is the criterion of multiple attestation. Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane is not only recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels; it is also alluded to in Hebrews 5:7, and it is possible that the prayer recorded in John 12:27-28 may have been influenced by the Gethsemane tradition as well. Matthew was most likely dependent on Mark, and so Matthew would not be considered an independent tradition.¹²⁷ However, with Luke's

¹²³Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 267-68. See also Martin Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*, trans. Betram Lee Woolf (London: Nicholson and Watson, 1934), 211, 213; Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Irene McLuskey, Fraser McLuskey, and James M. Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 162.

¹²⁴See, e.g., James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (London: SCM, 1975; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 17-20; Pitre, *Jesus, the Tribulation and the End of Exile*, 491-504; Taylor, *Jesus and His Sacrifice*, 147-48, 151-52; Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 138; Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:492-93; Joel B. Green, "Gethsemane," in *DJG*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 268.

¹²⁵Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1095.

¹²⁶Green, "Gethsemane," 268.

¹²⁷E.g., Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 393; Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*,

extra material about the angel and the sweat like drops of blood (22:43-44) his account reflects an independent tradition at least in these verses. Add to this Hebrews 5:7 and possibly John 12:27-28, and there are three and maybe four independent accounts of Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane. Thus, the criterion of multiple attestation favors the historicity of this account. Concerning the argument that the disciples were asleep and so could not have heard Jesus' prayer, it is possible that they heard some of his prayer before they slept or while they were still drowsy but not asleep yet. As Craig Keener explains, "It may be easier to think that Peter, James, or John overheard parts of Jesus' prayer while drifting in and out of sleep than to surmise that the early Christians would have composed a prayer so exposing Jesus' vulnerability."¹²⁸ Plus, Jesus may have shared this episode with them after his resurrection.

The Cup Saying

Twice in this account Matthew mentions the cup that Jesus must drink, and he explains how Jesus prayed unsuccessfully to have this cup removed from him (vv. 39, 42). The cup metaphor was also used in 20:22-23. There Jesus asked James and John if they could drink the cup that he had to drink, and they said that they could. Jesus then told them that they would drink from this cup, which he specifically referred to as "my cup." In the section on the ransom saying, I argued that in light of how the cup metaphor is used in 26:39, 42 the cup in 20:22-23 was not simply a metaphor for suffering and death; rather, it included more specifically a reference to God's wrath. In this section I will defend the view that the cup in 26:39, 42 refers to God's wrath against sin.¹²⁹

3:491; Green, "Gethsemane," 265.

¹²⁸Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 633.

¹²⁹For those who understand the cup in Gethsemane as a reference to God's wrath, see, e.g., France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1005; Carson, *Matthew*, 543-44; Gnilka, *Matthäusevangelium*, 2:412; Osborne, *Matthew*, 979; Keener, *Gospel of Matthew*, 638; Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC, vol. 22 (Nashville:

The background for the cup metaphor in Gethsemane most likely comes from the Old Testament. Cranfield argues that in light of its Old Testament use the cup mentioned by Jesus in Gethsemane symbolized God's wrath that Jesus would face on the cross.¹³⁰ In contrast to this, Black denies that the cup metaphor in Gethsemane was influenced by the Old Testament and argues instead that it was influenced by rabbinic usage where it symbolized death rather than God's wrath.¹³¹ Before looking at the Old Testament use of the cup metaphor, it is important to point out the likelihood that it was the Old Testament rather than rabbinic thought that influenced Jesus' understanding of the cup metaphor. Blaising reminds us that the passion narrative is permeated with Old Testament allusions; plus, there is a direct quotation from Zechariah 13:7 just before the Gethsemane account and in Zechariah 12:2 the cup metaphor is actually used to refer to God's judgment.¹³² In light of the influence of the Old Testament on the passion narrative (not to mention on Matthew's Gospel as a whole), it is much more likely that

Broadman, 1992), 395; Leon Morris, *The Gospel of Matthew*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992; reprint, 1999), 668-69; Tom Wright, *Matthew for Everyone: Part Two* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 160; Moo, *Old Testament in the Passion Narratives*, 116; Bolt, *Cross from a Distance*, 67; Ernest Best, *The Temptation and the Passion: The Markan Soteriology*, SNTSMS 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 156; J. Warren Holleran, *The Synoptic Gethsemane: A Critical Study* (Roma: Università Gregoriana Editrice, 1973), 28-29; Reinhard Feldmeier, *Die Krisis des Gottessohnes: Die Gethsemaneerzählung als Schlüssel der Markuspasion*, WUNT, 2nd ser., vol. 21 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1987), 176-85; John R. Kimbell, "The Atonement in Lukan Theology" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008), 73-81; L. Goppelt, "πίνω et al.," in *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 6:153; Head, "Self-Offering and Death of Christ," 113; C. E. B. Cranfield, "The Cup Metaphor in Mark xiv.36 and Parallels," *ExpTim* 59 (1947-48): 137-38; Craig A. Blaising, "Gethsemane: A Prayer of Faith," *JETS* 22 (1979): 339-40; A. Feuillet, "La coupe et le baptême de la passion (Mc, x,35-40; cf. Mt, xx,20-3 ; Lc, xii,50)," *RB* 74 (1967): 372-76. For those who interpret the cup in Gethsemane simply as a metaphor for suffering and death, see, e.g., Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 396; Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 1:169-70; Senior, *Passion of Jesus in Matthew*, 80; C. K. Barrett, *Jesus and the Gospel Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1967), 46; Anthony T. Hanson, *The Wrath of the Lamb* (London: SPCK, 1957), 125-27; G. Stählin, "ὄργή," in *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 5:437 n. 386; M. Black, "The Cup Metaphor in Mark 14.36," *ExpTim* 59 (1948): 195.

¹³⁰Cranfield, "Cup Metaphor," 137-38.

¹³¹Black, "Cup Metaphor," 195.

¹³²Blaising, "Gethsemane," 340 n. 42.

the Old Testament rather than rabbinic usage determined the meaning of the cup metaphor in Gethsemane.

The cup metaphor in the Old Testament can be used in one of two ways. As Meier explains, “The cup...is the OT symbol of one’s fate as prepared by God, be it reward or punishment.”¹³³ Blessing, though, may be a better word than reward to speak of the former use of the cup. The psalmist speaks of “the cup of salvation” (Ps 116:13) and testifies that his cup runs over with blessings from God (Ps 23:5). This first use of the cup metaphor though is not the prominent one in the Old Testament. The typical way that the cup is used in the Old Testament is to speak of God’s wrath against those who have sinned. Cranfield demonstrates how 17 of the 20 metaphorical uses of כּוּס (“cup”) in the Old Testament speak of God’s punishment where the idea of divine wrath is typically implied. He also points out that the only other Hebrew word for “cup” (קַיִס) that is used metaphorically also refers to God’s judgment. That use is found in Zechariah 12:2.¹³⁴ However, there is one other Hebrew word for “cup” that is used in a metaphorical sense and that is כּוּסֵי אֵל; in its only 2 occurrences it also speaks of the cup of God’s wrath (see Isa 51:17, 22). It may be helpful to actually cite a few of these passages from the Old Testament that use the cup image to refer to God’s judgment and wrath.

Psalm 75:8 [75:9 MT]: “For in the hand of Yahweh is a cup foaming with wine fully mixed. He will pour it out, and all the wicked of the earth will drain it to the dregs as they drink it.”

Isaiah 51:17, 22: “Awake, awake! Arise, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of Yahweh the cup of his wrath, who have drained to the dregs the cup that causes men to reel.... Thus says your Lord and God, Yahweh, who pleads for his people, ‘Behold, I have taken out of your hand the cup that causes men to reel, the cup of my wrath. You will not drink it again.’”

Jeremiah 25:15: “For thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, to me, ‘Take this cup of

¹³³John P. Meier, *Matthew*, New Testament Message (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1980), 324.

¹³⁴Cranfield, “Cup Metaphor,” 137-38. The 3 uses of כּוּס describing a good fate are found in Pss 16:5; 23:5; 116:13. The 17 uses that speak of God’s judgment are found in Pss 11:6; 75:8; Isa 51:17 [2x], 22 [2x]; Jer 25:15, 17, 28; 49:12; 51:7; Lam 4:21; Ezek 23:31, 32, 33 [2x]; Hab 2:16.

the wine of my wrath from my hand and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it.”

Habakkuk 2:16: “You will be filled with dishonor rather than honor. Drink yourself and reveal your nakedness. The cup in Yahweh’s right hand will come around to you and disgrace will replace your honor.”

The metaphorical use of the cup in these passages is clear: it refers to God’s wrath and judgment against those who have sinned against him. This usage is also found in intertestamental Jewish literature as well as in the New Testament itself (e.g., *Ps. Sol.* 8.14-15; 1QpHab 11.10-15; Rev 14.10; 16.19). In spite of this evidence, some still doubt that Jesus used the cup image in this manner. For one thing, they point out that in 20:22-23 Jesus said that his disciples would also drink from the cup and certainly he did not mean that they would face God’s wrath against sin. Added to this is the difficulty that modern interpreters have with the idea of God’s wrath, and in particular with the idea of Jesus as the object of that wrath on the cross.¹³⁵

However, if the cup metaphor in Gethsemane was influenced by the Old Testament, which seems likely, then it was almost certainly used to refer to God’s wrath. The actual context in Matthew supports this view. Jesus’ anguish in facing the cross was excruciating and unbearable. He needed three of his disciples to help support him in prayer, though they failed him by sleeping instead. He said, “My soul is deeply distressed to the point of death” (v. 38). This statement probably meant that his sorrow was so great that it was about to kill him. David Hill notes that the phrase ἕως θανάτου “denotes anguish that threatens life itself.”¹³⁶ Jesus prayed that the cup would be taken

¹³⁵Luz states, “Thus I regard the interpretation of ‘cup’ as God’s wrath as a soteriological overinterpretation that probably never would have arisen without the influence of the interpretation of our text in the Reformation” (*Matthew 21-28*, 396). Even Davies and Allison who believe that the cup refers to God’s judgment state, “It is uncertain whether there is also the thought of Jesus, on behalf of others, becoming the object of God’s wrath for sin, although the suggestion that it is is plausible” (*Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:497).

¹³⁶David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NCBC (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1972), 341. Similarly, Meier states, “The sense is: Jesus could easily die of the sorrow which now overwhelms him” (*Matthew*, 323). For various suggestions on the precise meaning of “unto death,” see Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 1:155.

away from him if it were possible. He wanted to know if there was any other way for humanity to be saved other than the cross. He prayed earnestly and repeatedly before accepting the cup that the Father had prepared for him. Such intensity and agony do not seem to be the result of simply facing death, even the cruel death of crucifixion.¹³⁷ Yet, if the cup refers to God's wrath, then his great hesitancy and anguish make perfect sense. He did not want to face the disfavor and judgment of the Father. Jesus' actions in Gethsemane fit with how he responded on the cross. He cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" (27:46)? Jesus was forsaken on our behalf because he faced God's unmitigated wrath and judgment on the cross. Moo rightly makes the same connection in Mark's Gospel. He states, "In Mk. 14:36, the retention of the wrath connotation better explains the terror with which Jesus confronted this destiny and is compatible with the cry of dereliction (Mk. 15:34)."¹³⁸

So what about the use of the cup metaphor in 20:22-23? It is possible that the cup metaphor is used one way in 26:39, 42 and in another way in 20:22-23. While the former speaks of God's wrath, the latter may be used to refer to the sufferings that the disciples will face, which may even include death. Cranfield, who argues for the cup of wrath in 26:39, 42, thinks that in this passage the cup may be used in a somewhat diluted sense to refer to martyrdom.¹³⁹ Similarly, Carson says about the cup of God's wrath in Gethsemane, "Thus the meaning here is fuller than in 20:22-23 and anticipates 27:46."¹⁴⁰ The main problem with this view is that in 20:22-23 the cup is used primarily to speak of Jesus' fate. He says, "Can you drink the cup that I am about to drink?" Even when

¹³⁷As Osborne states, "The anguish is not due so much to his approaching death as to the fact that he will bear the sins of all humanity and thereby be separated from God" (*Matthew*, 979). Contra Senior who thinks that Jesus' agony is simply over the prospect of death and not over the role he will play as our sin-bearer (*Passion of Jesus in Matthew*, 80).

¹³⁸Moo, *Old Testament in the Passion Narratives*, 117.

¹³⁹Cranfield, "Cup Metaphor," 138.

¹⁴⁰Carson, *Matthew*, 544.

admitting that they will drink it, Jesus still calls it “my cup.” He calls it my cup because it uniquely belongs to him, for only he can bear God’s wrath and thus provide salvation for sinful humanity. As it says of Jesus’ mission in 1:21, “He *alone* will save his people from their sins.”¹⁴¹ Thus, even while acknowledging that the disciples will not bear God’s wrath, it is important to keep the idea of wrath connected to the cup metaphor in 20:22-23.¹⁴² The focus in 20:22-23 is not on the destiny of James and John, but on the destiny of Jesus. Yet, Jesus does say that they will drink the cup also. They too will suffer because of their relation to Jesus and his cross, though their suffering will not be atoning. Also, they will drink the cup possibly by participating in the salvation provided by Jesus on the cross. Bolt makes this argument, suggesting that the disciples drank the cup vicariously because Jesus drank the cup of God’s wrath on their behalf.¹⁴³ It is interesting that following the cup saying in 20:22-23 Jesus goes on to say that he will give his life “as a ransom in place of many” (v. 28). His death, so to speak, took the place of others. Regardless of the interpretation of the cup metaphor in 20:22-23, the cup in 26:39, 42 is used as a metaphor of God’s wrath against sin. The agony of Jesus’ prayer along with the cry of dereliction argues for this interpretation.

A Possible Allusion to Genesis 22

Some see a possible allusion to Genesis 22:5 LXX in the rare adverbial use of $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon$ in 26:36.¹⁴⁴ Including 26:36, the adverbial use of $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon$ is found only four times in

¹⁴¹According to Morris, the emphatic nature of $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\varsigma$ in 1:21 carries the idea of “he and no other” (*Gospel according to Matthew*, 29).

¹⁴²Moo, *Old Testament in the Passion Narratives*, 116-18; Osborne, *Matthew*, 739.

¹⁴³Bolt, *Cross from a Distance*, 69-71.

¹⁴⁴See, e.g., Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:494; Turner, *Matthew*, 631; Gundry, *Matthew*, 531-32; Osborne, *Matthew*, 978; Senior, *Passion Narrative*, 101-02; Holleran, *Synoptic Gethsemane*, 69-70; Leroy A. Huizenga, *The New Isaac: Tradition and Intertextuality in the Gospel of Matthew*, NovTSup 131 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 251; Green, “Gethsemane,” 266; contra Moo, *Old Testament in the Passion Narratives*, 325-28.

the New Testament (Luke 9:27; Acts 18:19; 21:4).¹⁴⁵ The same adverbial use of αὐτοῦ is found in Genesis 22:5 LXX. Actually, the same wording is used in both passages: καθίσατε αὐτοῦ (“sit here”). Mark 14:32 has ὧδε, and so Matthew’s change to αὐτοῦ seems to be a deliberate allusion to Genesis 22:5. This is supported by other hints that point to an intentional Matthean allusion to Genesis 22. Davies and Allison explain, “In addition to the parallels of wording and context just noted we observe that both Abraham and Jesus take along three people, that Abraham and Isaac separate themselves from others for worship or prayer, that both episodes are set on a mountain, and that each involves trial.”¹⁴⁶ Thus, Matthew is probably alluding to Genesis 22:5 and the story of Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac. If so, it is not clear if the allusion is meant to link Jesus with Abraham’s faith or Isaac’s sacrifice.

Senior suggests the possibility of both: “Matthew may wish to alert the reader that Jesus embodies both the faith of Abraham and the sacrificial spirit of Isaac.”¹⁴⁷ Green thinks that the allusion is meant to compare Jesus to Abraham, which would then emphasize Jesus’ faith in the time of severe trial.¹⁴⁸ Davies and Allison are unsure of the precise connection. They ask, “Is Matthew suggesting a parallel between Abraham’s faith and Jesus’ faith? or between Isaac’s sacrifice and Jesus’ sacrifice?”¹⁴⁹ Since Abraham was the one who said the words, “Sit here,” the allusion appears to connect Jesus’ obedient faith with Abraham’s. Plus, in Genesis 22 it is Abraham who is being

¹⁴⁵Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:494 n. 25.

¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 494.

¹⁴⁷Senior, *Matthew*, 303. Likewise, Osborne says, “Jesus becomes the embodiment of Abraham’s faith and Isaac’s sacrifice” (*Matthew*, 978).

¹⁴⁸Green, “Gethsemane,” 266. Luz discounts an allusion to Gen 22:5 in 26:36 because the allusion would be to Abraham’s faith rather than to Isaac’s sacrifice, and he thinks that an allusion to Abraham’s faith would not fit the Gethsemane account (*Matthew 21-28*, 395). Yet, an allusion to Abraham’s tested faith would indeed fit with Jesus’ agonizing trial in Gethsemane.

¹⁴⁹Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:494.

tested, not Isaac. However, in Jewish tradition Isaac's faith was also being tested. For instance, Judith 8:25-26 says, "In spite of everything let us give thanks to the Lord our God, who is putting us to the test as he did our ancestors. Remember what he did with Abraham, *and how he tested Isaac*, and what happened to Jacob in Syrian Mesopotamia, while he was tending the sheep of Laban, his mother's brother" (NRSV, italics mine). Since Jesus is referred to as the "beloved Son" in 3:17 and 17:5 (cf. Gen 22:2, 12, 16 where ἀγαπητός is also used) and it is his death that is the focus in Gethsemane, an allusion to Isaac's death is possible.¹⁵⁰ In the end, though an intentional allusion to Genesis 22:5 appears very likely in 26:36, it is difficult to ascertain the purpose of the allusion. Maybe Senior is right. Maybe Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane is meant to remind us both of Abraham's heroic faith and Isaac's willing sacrifice.

The Use of παραδίδωμι in 26:45

In 26:45, Jesus says, "Behold, the hour is approaching, and the Son of Man is about to be handed over into the hands of sinners." The Greek word for "handed over" or "betrayed" is παραδίδωμι, which is a very important word in Matthew's Gospel in relation to Jesus' death.¹⁵¹ When used to speak of Jesus' death and with a subject identified, the subject is typically Judas Iscariot (10:4; 26:15-16, 21, 23-25, 46, 48; 27:3-4). At other times the subject is identified as the Jewish religious leaders (20:18-19; 27:2, 18) or Pilate (27:26). Though God is never specifically identified as the subject of παραδίδωμι, it is possible that at times when the subject is unidentified he is the implied subject. In these cases Matthew may intend for us to see the passive use of παραδίδωμι as a divine passive where God is the one who hands Jesus over to be crucified (e.g.,

¹⁵⁰Huizenga makes these and other arguments to support the idea that Matthew is comparing Jesus' willing death to Isaac's situation (*New Isaac*, 255-56).

¹⁵¹See 10:4; 17:22; 20:18-19; 26:2, 15-16, 21, 23-25, 45-46, 48; 27:2-4, 18, 26. It is noteworthy that the bulk of the uses of παραδίδωμι in relation to Jesus' death occur in the passion narrative.

17:22; 26:2).¹⁵² With the emphasis in Matthew's passion narrative on God's sovereign will and in particular on the fulfillment of Scripture (26:24, 54, 56), it seems fitting to understand God as the one who ultimately hands Jesus over to be crucified. The passive use of παραδίδωμι in verse 45 may hint at this interpretation. Though Judas is specifically mentioned in verse 46 as the one who will betray Jesus, in the passion narrative of Matthew we realize that God too is involved in this process and that it is his sovereign will that is being accomplished in Jesus' death. As Harrington explains, "Of course, in the story line this is Judas. But the assumption is that everything takes place in accordance with God's will ('the Son of Man is being handed over')." ¹⁵³ Similarly, Davies and Allison state concerning verse 45, "As in 17.22, God probably stands behind παραδίδοται."¹⁵⁴ Possibly, Carson is right in suggesting that Matthew intends "a studied ambiguity" in the use of παραδίδωμι where it is difficult to discern whether God or Judas is the actor.¹⁵⁵ Maybe Matthew intends for us to see both as actors but in different ways: Judas as the betrayer and God as the one who gives Jesus up to be crucified for our sins.

The emphasis on God's role in handing Jesus over to be killed corresponds with what Jesus said earlier about God striking the shepherd (26:31). Though Judas and the Jewish religious leaders, not to mention Pilate, are responsible for Jesus' death and thus guilty before God, ultimately it was the plan of God that Jesus be crucified. This

¹⁵²On the use of the divine passive of παραδίδωμι in Matthew, see, e.g., Osborne, *Matthew*, 661-62, 738, 945; Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 2:734; Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 720; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 507-08, 785. Paul uses παραδίδωμι with God the Father as the subject in Rom 8:32 and thus as the one who gave Jesus up at the cross for our salvation (cf. Rom 4:25).

¹⁵³Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, SPS (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1991), 374.

¹⁵⁴Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:501. Similarly, Green believes that "divine agency" lies behind the use of παραδίδωμι in Mark 14:41 (*Death of Jesus*, 261). Brown also understands the use of παραδίδωμι in Mark 14:41 to be a divine passive (*Death of the Messiah*, 1:212). Though acknowledging God as the subject in 17:22, Hagner and Osborne both believe that Judas is the implied subject here in 26:45 (*Matthew 14-28*, 785; *Matthew*, 982, respectively).

¹⁵⁵Carson, *Matthew*, 393.

focus on God’s plan as revealed in Scripture highlights that Jesus’ death was not the death of a martyr and certainly not the death of a criminal; rather, his death was God’s gracious provision for sinful humanity. Jesus was handed over by God so that we could be forgiven of our sins and restored to God’s favor. Also, as argued in the section on the passion predictions, it is likely that παραδίδωμι in connection with Jesus’ death alludes to the death of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53. Three times in that chapter this word is used (Isa 53:6, 12 [2x] LXX). Thus, once again we are reminded that Jesus’ death fulfills the role of the Servant who bore the sins of the people.¹⁵⁶

“The Hour is Approaching” (26:45)

As his death drew near, Jesus said to his disciples, “The hour is approaching” (v. 45). Similarly, in 26:18 Jesus said, “My time is near.” When Jesus refers to “the hour” or “my time,” he is referring to the same thing, namely, his redemptive death that will soon take place in accordance with the Father’s plan. Davies and Allison state, “‘The hour’ has more than literal meaning. It refers to the last part of Jesus’ ministry, when he sacrifices himself for others.”¹⁵⁷ A similar use of “the hour” is found in John’s Gospel where it refers to Jesus’ death and glorification (e.g., 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1).¹⁵⁸ When in 26:45 Jesus says that the hour is approaching, the word Matthew uses is ἐγγίζω (“to approach, draw near”). In 26:18 he uses ἐγγύς (“near”). Earlier in his Gospel, Matthew used ἐγγίζω in connection with the proclamation of the coming kingdom of heaven (3:2; 4:17; 10:7). This word can be used in an ordinary way of what is

¹⁵⁶Bolt points out another possible allusion to the Suffering Servant in the cup saying, which reflects passages like Isa 51:17, 22. He explains, “Isaiah’s next chapter shows that it is the servant’s death that has exhausted the cup of God’s wrath on behalf of Israel. Jesus now predicts that, as the servant of the Lord, he will drink the cup of God’s wrath” (*Cross from a Distance*, 67). For more on the allusion to Isa 53 in the use of παραδίδωμι, see the section above on the passion predictions.

¹⁵⁷Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:501.

¹⁵⁸Harrington states, “Here *hōra* (‘hour’) is used something like it is used in the Fourth Gospel—to describe the time of Jesus’ passion and death as the decisive moment in salvation history” (*Gospel of Matthew*, 374). See also Osborne, *Matthew*, 982; contra France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1001 n. 8.

approaching without any eschatological connotation (21:1, 34), yet the precise form ἤγγικεν, which is used in 26:45-46, is used elsewhere in Matthew always in connection with the coming kingdom. Matthew's use of ἤγγικεν may be coincidental, yet this use may make a connection between Jesus' death and the dawning or arrival of the kingdom of heaven. The use of ἤγγικεν in verse 46 simply speaks of the arrival of Judas, yet its use in verse 45, in connection with "the hour," may suggest an intended relation between Jesus' death and the promised kingdom. If so, then Jesus' death, as presented in Matthew's Gospel, is the means by which the kingdom of heaven is established or possibly the means through which one enters that kingdom.

Some think that this connection is far too subtle to be accurate. For instance, Nolland states, "Matthew's earlier uses of ἤγγικεν have all been in connection with the coming of the kingdom of heaven. Is ἤγγικεν ἡ ὥρα intended to create an echo and to suggest a connection between the approaching fateful hour and the coming of the kingdom? The paralleled use of ἰδοὺ ἤγγικεν in v. 46 counts against this, as does the sheer complexity of the set of ideas that would need to be generated out of the allusion."¹⁵⁹ Meier disagrees, stating, "The verb for 'is at hand' was also used to express the nearness of the kingdom (e.g., 4:17); by Jesus' death, the kingdom will break into this world in a new and definitive way."¹⁶⁰ The attractive thing about the connection that Meier suggests is that it ties together two important, pervasive themes in Matthew: the kingdom of heaven and Jesus' atoning death. It is not clear if this connection can be made solely based on the use of ἤγγικεν; however, it is possible. Plus, it appears that Matthew has already made this connection between Jesus' death and the kingdom in 26:28-29.¹⁶¹ If he does so here in verse 45, what is not clear is the precise relation

¹⁵⁹Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1104.

¹⁶⁰Meier, *Matthew*, 326.

¹⁶¹Taylor, *Jesus and His Sacrifice*, 141-42. For more on the relation between Jesus' death and the kingdom of heaven in 26:28-29, see above in the section on the Last Supper.

between the two. How Jesus' death specifically relates to the kingdom is not spelled out. It could be that his death is the means by which one enters the kingdom of heaven, or it could be that the kingdom begins to dawn not just with Jesus' preaching and miracles, but more significantly with his atoning death. Either way, the atoning death of Jesus is not unrelated to the kingdom of heaven as promised in Matthew's Gospel.

Conclusion

Though an intentional allusion to Genesis 22 in 26:36 has been pointed out, it is not clear what the purpose of that allusion actually is. It is possible that it highlights Jesus' sacrificial death in comparison to Isaac. The use of παραδίδομι in 26:45 likely points not only to the role of Judas in handing Jesus over to be arrested, but also to the role of God the Father. The emphasis on God the Father's role means that Jesus' death fulfills God's sovereign plan as revealed in Scripture. Whether or not the phrase, "the hour is approaching," in 26:45 is linked to the coming kingdom of heaven is uncertain. If so, it shows that Jesus' atoning death is connected in some way to Matthew's pervasive emphasis on the kingdom. Thus, Jesus' death is not an addendum in Matthew, but functions climactically in his narrative. Finally and most importantly for our purposes, the cup saying seems clearly to speak of Jesus as the object of God's wrath against sin. Thus, Jesus is presented in Gethsemane as the one who will bear God's wrath and judgment on the cross for us so that we can be saved. Again, we see that Jesus saves us from our sins by his atoning death.

CHAPTER 6

ATONEMENT IN THE PASSION NARRATIVE PART 2

The Crucifixion of Jesus (27:39-42, 45-46)

We now come to the climactic moment in Matthew's Gospel, namely, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.¹ Matthew 27:26 tells how Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified. Following this, Matthew records what happened leading up to Jesus' actual crucifixion (27:27-34), what took place while Jesus hung on the cross (27:35-50), and what took place after Jesus died (27:51-54). The focus of this section will be on the events that took place while Jesus was hanging on the cross. In particular, we will look at Jesus' refusal to save himself (vv. 39-42), the darkness that covered the land (v. 45), and Jesus' cry of dereliction (v. 46). Each of these key events sheds light on Matthew's understanding of Jesus' atoning death.²

¹As David Turner states, "All of Matthew's narrative points toward the death of Jesus....In a sense, all of Matt. 1-25 introduces the passion narrative of Matt. 26-28, and the death of Jesus is the center of the passion narrative" (*Matthew*, BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008], 667). For the climactic role of Jesus' death in Matthew's Gospel, see J. D. Kingsbury, "The Significance of the Cross within the Plot of Matthew's Gospel: A Study in Narrative Criticism," in *The Synoptic Gospels: Source Criticism and the New Literary Criticism*, BETL 110, ed. Camille Focant (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1993), 263-79; Dale C. Allison, Jr., "Anticipating the Passion: The Literary Reach of Matthew 26:47-27:56," *CBQ* 56 (1994): 701-14.

²Some think that the Barabbas scene (27:15-26) also highlights Jesus' atoning death, for the guilty Barabbas was set free while the innocent Jesus was crucified. Schreiner explains, "The release of Barabbas (Matt. 27:15-23 par.) also operated at a symbolic level, for hereby Jesus saved one of his people from his sins. The innocent one died on behalf of the guilty one" (*New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008], 273). Similarly, see N. T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone: Part Two* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 178; Warren Carter, *Matthew: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist*, rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 194. Though this interpretation is attractive, I am still not convinced that this was Matthew's intent in relaying the event. His emphasis appears to be on the Jewish rejection of Jesus as Messiah. The Jewish people accepted responsibility for Jesus' death (vv. 24-25), failing to realize that they were seeking the crucifixion of God's Messiah. Even a Gentile like Pilate's wife recognized what they did not (v. 19). Thus, they chose Jesus Barabbas instead of Jesus Christ (v. 17). Senior correctly refers to the Barabbas scene as "The Choice: Jesus or Barabbas" (see

Jesus' Refusal to Save Himself (27:39-42)

Not only did Jesus suffer the horrendous physical pain of the cross, but he also endured the psychological pain of mockery and abuse. Crucifixions carried out by the Romans often took place in busy areas where they served as a deterrent against crime and invited public ridicule upon the criminal being crucified.³ Jesus' crucifixion involved this type of public abuse. Matthew mentions three different groups that heaped abuse upon Jesus while he was on the cross: the two criminals crucified with him (vv. 38, 44),⁴ those who passed by the cross (vv. 39-40), and members from the Sanhedrin (vv. 41-43).⁵ These three groups taunted Jesus and sarcastically urged him to come down from the cross and save himself in order to prove that he was the Son of God. The main issue in this passage for our purposes is what this mockery scene says about how Jesus' death is related to salvation. In particular, we will examine the significance of Matthew's use of *σώζω* in relation to the cross.⁶

The Passion Narrative according to Matthew: A Redactional Study, BETL 39 [Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1975], 234-62). For the reading, "Jesus Barabbas," in v. 17, see John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 1164, 1168 n. 344.

³Joel B. Green, "Death of Jesus," in *DJG*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 147, 151; Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 49-50, 87.

⁴The two criminals crucified with Jesus may be an allusion to Isa 53:12, where it speaks of the Servant's being numbered with the transgressors (Turner, *Matthew*, 662-63; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, WBC, vol. 33B [Dallas: Word Books, 1995], 838; Martin Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*, trans. Bertram Lee Woolf [London: Nicholson & Watson, 1934], 187). If so, it shows that Jesus died to fulfill the role of Isaiah's Suffering Servant.

⁵Senior agrees that this last group refers to the Sanhedrin, but he doubts the historicity of their presence at Jesus' crucifixion (*The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew* [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1990], 133). However, it is certainly possible that the ones who condemned Jesus and handed him over to Pilate to be crucified came to witness Jesus' death. Though not persuaded himself, Brown believes that it is plausible that some of the Sanhedrin members were present at the cross (*The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave* [New York: Doubleday, 1994], 2:1027-28).

⁶Another significant statement is found in v. 40 where it says that Jesus claimed to be able to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days. On how Jesus' sacrificial death replaces the role of the temple in Matthew, see the section above entitled "One Greater Than the Temple (12:1-14)." In that section I argue that Matthew presents Jesus as the new temple, for in him God's Presence is mediated (see 1:23) and by his death the forgiveness of sins is provided (see 26:28).

The first use of σωζω in Matthew's Gospel is found in 1:21. Here Jesus' God-ordained purpose is set forth: to save his people from their sins. The angel's words in 1:21 serve as a programmatic statement in Matthew's Gospel, and thus his Gospel is to be read in light of this important verse.⁷ Since this verse does not explain *how* Jesus will save his people from their sins, the reader is encouraged from what follows in the narrative to determine how Jesus saves his people. An important clue is found in the repeated use of σωζω in relation to Jesus' death in Matthew's narrative. Four times σωζω is used in connection with Jesus' death (27:40, 42 [2x], 49). This episode entails the strongest concentration of the use of this word in Matthew's Gospel.⁸ Since each of the uses refers to Jesus' being potentially rescued from the danger of the cross, it may appear that the use of this word is rather straightforward (i.e., it simply means "to rescue from danger") and thus contains no soteriological emphasis. However, in light of the presence of σωζω in Matthew's programmatic statement in 1:21 connected with the climactic nature of Jesus' death in his Gospel, it appears that something more is going on here. By using σωζω at the scene of the cross, Matthew intends for us to see that it is by Jesus' death that he saves his people from their sins. Matthew begins his Gospel by emphasizing that Jesus will save his people from their sins, and he ends his Gospel by showing that Jesus saves them by not saving himself, i.e., by dying for them on the cross (26:28).

This observation that Jesus saves his people by his death becomes clearer in how the mockery is actually stated. Members of the Sanhedrin mock Jesus, stating, "He saved others, but he cannot save himself" (v. 42). The statement, "He saved others," probably refers to acts of deliverance that Jesus performed during his ministry,

⁷For more on the significance of 1:21, see the section above entitled "He Will Save His People from Their Sins (1:18-25)."

⁸The second largest concentration is found in 9:21-22, where σωζω is used 3 times in the context of Jesus' healing ministry.

particularly healing people from sickness (9:21-22; cf. 8:25).⁹ Jesus was able to help and save others, they jeered, but he cannot help himself. Yet, that is the point that Matthew wants to emphasize. Jesus cannot save himself and save others at the same time. If he saves himself from the cross, then he cannot save others because the way he saves others is by giving his life on the cross as a ransom in place of many (20:28). Stott explains, “Meanwhile, the rulers sneered at him, shouting: ‘He saved others, but he can’t save himself!’ Their words, spoken as an insult, were the literal truth. He could not save himself and other simultaneously. He chose to sacrifice himself in order to save the world.”¹⁰ Either Jesus saves himself or he saves others. Jesus chose not to save himself and thus he died in our place; only then was he able to save us from our sins. Notice the clear substitutionary element found in Jesus’ refusal to save himself so that we could be saved. As Gurtner states, “It would be difficult in 27:42 to fail to observe an atoning significance of Jesus’ death, perhaps even as explicit as indicating a degree of penal substitution.”¹¹

Later in verse 49 $\sigma\acute{\omega}\zeta\omega$ is used again in relation to Jesus’ being delivered from the cross. Some standing by the cross said, “Let us see if Elijah comes to save him.” Elijah was viewed as an eschatological figure, one even connected with the Messiah’s

⁹So Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 1035; D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in vol. 8 of *EBC*, ed. Frank E. Gæbelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 577.

¹⁰John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 78. Similarly, Hagner states, “Matthew’s readers, however, would not have missed the irony that it was in not saving himself that he *was* saving others (cf. $\sigma\acute{\omega}\zeta\epsilon\iota\nu$ as used in 1:21)” (*Matthew 14-28*, 839). On this irony of Jesus’ not saving himself in order to save us, see also Osborne, *Matthew*, 1035; Turner, *Matthew*, 663; Carson, *Matthew*, 577; Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992; reprint, 1999), 718; Ronald D. Witherup, “The Cross of Jesus: A Literary-Critical Study of Matthew 27” (Ph.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1985), 269-70; Lidija Novakovic, *Messiah, the Healer of the Sick: A Study of Jesus as the Son of David in the Gospel of Matthew*, WUNT, 2nd ser., vol. 170 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 74.

¹¹Daniel M. Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew’s Exposition of the Death of Jesus*, SNTSMS 139 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 137. Though some may quibble over Gurtner’s mention of “penal” substitution, it is clear that an act of substitution is taking place on the cross. And if Jesus’ death on the cross appeased God’s wrath, and it did (see 26:31, 39, 42; 27:45-46), then penal substitution is a fitting way to describe his death even in Matthew’s Gospel.

coming (e.g., Mal 4:5-6). In later Jewish tradition, Elijah was seen as a rescuer of those in need.¹² Thus, it makes sense that those by the cross waited to see if Elijah would deliver Jesus from death, particularly since they apparently misunderstood Jesus to be calling out for Elijah (vv. 46-47). The ironic thing about the mention of Elijah at Jesus' death is that not only would Elijah not save Jesus from the cross, but Elijah had already been martyred himself. According to Jesus, John the Baptist fulfilled the role of Elijah and he was killed by Herod Antipas (11:13-14; 14:1-12). As Keener states, "The narrative again bristles with irony: far from being able to help Jesus, 'Elijah' was his forerunner in martyrdom."¹³ Thus, like John the Baptist, Jesus will die as well. Again we see that Jesus will not be saved from the cross; rather, he will save us via the cross.

Darkness over All the Land (27:45)

Verse 45 says that from the sixth hour until the ninth hour, that is, from noon to 3:00 P.M., darkness covered all the land. The widespread darkness at the cross is recorded in each of the Synoptic Gospels (Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44). The primary focus of this section will be on the theological meaning of the darkness in relation to Jesus' death. Yet, before looking at this theological meaning, one must ask whether the darkness was real and if so what caused the darkness.

Some do not think that the darkness in 27:45 refers to historical reality; rather, they argue, it is used as a literary or theological device by Matthew. Thus, they do not think that Matthew intended the darkness to be understood as a real event that took place on the day of Jesus' death.¹⁴ Though it is certainly true that Matthew is making a

¹²J. Jeremias, "Ἠλ(ε)ίας," in *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 2:930; Kingsbury, "Significance of the Cross," 274.

¹³Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 684.

¹⁴Gérard Rossé claims that the darkness is theological rather than historical (*The Cry of Jesus on the Cross: A Biblical and Theological Study*, trans. Stephen Wentworth Arndt [New York: Paulist,

theological point in recording the darkness, it is also appears that he understood the darkness as a real event. The time indicators suggest this, for he specifically records how long the darkness lasted (“from the sixth hour to the ninth hour”).¹⁵ More importantly, it appears that in Matthew’s narrative Jesus’ cry in verse 46 is in response to this perceived darkness. Though suggestions are made for the natural cause of the darkness (e.g., a sirocco, very heavy cloud cover),¹⁶ it is best not to speculate on possible natural causes for the darkness—causes that Matthew nowhere mentions. The focus for Matthew is on the darkness as a miraculous event that God brings about in response to the death of his Son, Jesus Christ. The darkness is not simply an act of nature; it is an act of God that communicates something about Jesus’ death. This focus on the divine nature of the event is not to say that God did not use natural causes to bring about the darkness (cf. vv. 51-52), but it is to say that this is not where the emphasis lies.¹⁷ The emphasis is on God’s response to Jesus’ death.

So what is the theological meaning of the darkness? Moo lists 8 interpretations of the darkness that occurred when Jesus died ranging from the activity of demons to the

1987], 15-16). Ulrich Luz interprets the darkness as a literary device similar to the silence in Rev 8:1. He explains, “The cosmos holds its breath. It is as if v. 45 were a cosmic vacuum. The readers sense that something world-shaking—literally—is about to happen” (*Matthew 21-28*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005], 544). Though not completely ruling out the possibility that the darkness was real, Davies and Allison still suggest, “It is probable that, without any factual basis, darkness was added in order to wrap the cross in a rich symbol and/or assimilate Jesus to other worthies” (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, ICC [London: T & T Clark, 1988-97], 3:623).

¹⁵Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 2:1034.

¹⁶R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 1075; Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1205. The cause of the darkness, though, was not an eclipse because Passover took place at full moon, and eclipses do not occur at this time. Though Luke 23:45 can be understood as an eclipse (e.g., BDAG, s. v. “ἐκλείπω”), it is not necessary to interpret his wording in such an astronomically precise manner (see I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978], 875; Barnabas Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic: The Doctrinal Significance of the Old Testament Quotations* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961], 90).

¹⁷Craig Blomberg states, “It is better to see here a genuinely supernatural event, though, given the coming earthquake, it is not impossible that some kind of natural event was supernaturally timed” (*Matthew*, NAC, vol. 22 [Nashville: Broadman, 1992], 419).

pouring out of God's wrath that afternoon.¹⁸ Since darkness could be understood in the ancient world to convey different ideas, it is necessary to determine how Matthew himself probably understood the darkness. To determine Matthew's interpretation of the darkness, 3 factors are to be kept in mind: (1) the meaning of darkness in the Old Testament, (2) the way Matthew uses the concept of darkness earlier in his Gospel, and (3) what interpretation of the darkness fits best with Matthew's presentation of Jesus' death in his passion narrative.

First, let us begin with the Old Testament. Since Matthew was deeply steeped in and influenced by the Old Testament, it is best to start here when attempting to understand his interpretation of the darkness. This starting point is especially necessary in light of the influence the Old Testament has upon Matthew's passion narrative in the form of quotations and allusions, not to mention his emphasis upon the fulfillment of Scripture (26:24; 27:54, 56).¹⁹ Often the two suggested Old Testament allusions for the darkness are Amos 8:9 and Exodus 10:22.²⁰ Amos 8:9 specifically says that the sun would go down "at noon." Exodus 10:22 uses almost the same language as that found in 27:45: ἐγένετο σκότος...ἐπὶ πᾶσαν γῆν (Exod 10:22), σκότος ἐγένετο ἐπὶ πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν (Matt 27:45). Matthew may have even changed Mark's ὅλην to πᾶσαν to signal this allusion to Exodus 10:22.²¹ In both places, darkness is used to refer to God's judgment.

¹⁸The 8 suggestions listed by Moo are (1) "the mourning of nature at the death of a great man," (2) "a general apocalyptic sign," (3) "demonic activity," (4) "the inauguration of a new era of *Heilsgeschichte*," (5) "the intervention of God," (6) "the wrath of God," (7) "the 'Day of the Lord,' combining judgment with deliverance," and (8) "a parallel to the darkness of creation" (*The Old Testament in the Gospel Passion Narratives* [Sheffield: Almond, 1983], 342-43). For similar suggestions, see Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:621-22.

¹⁹Brown points out the need to look to the Old Testament in order to discover the meaning of the darkness (*Death of the Messiah*, 2:1035).

²⁰E.g., Carson, *Matthew*, 578; J. C. Fenton, *The Gospel of St Matthew*, The Pelican Gospel Commentaries (Baltimore: Penguin, 1963), 442; Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 2:1035.

²¹Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 572; Senior, *Passion Narrative*, 293-94. Also, as Fenton points out, the darkness was the ninth plague and came just before the final plague, namely, the

Darkness is used repeatedly as a sign of God's judgment in the Old Testament particularly in relation to the coming day of the Lord. The prophets warned that the day of the Lord would be a day of darkness (e.g., Isa 13:9-10; Joel 2:1-2; Amos 5:18, 20; Zeph 1:15). The day of the Lord would be a day of darkness for all the unrepentant because God's terrible judgment would take place on that day. Thus, it appears that Matthew understood the darkness at the cross to refer to God's judgment—a judgment so great and terrible that it foreshadows the eschatological day of the Lord.²²

This interpretation corresponds with how Matthew uses the idea of darkness elsewhere in his Gospel. Though John is typically viewed as the Evangelist that makes the most out of the theme of darkness, Matthew also emphasizes this theme throughout his Gospel. In fact, Matthew mentions “darkness” more than John does.²³ The first thing to point out about Matthew's use of darkness is that it is always used in a negative sense. As Davies and Allison state, “Notably darkness is consistently pejorative in Matthew.”²⁴ Darkness can refer to God's judgment in connection with the last days (24:29). It can also be used to refer to hell. Three different times Matthew uses “darkness” as a picture of what hell will be like (8:12; 22:13; 25:30). Thus, darkness conveys the idea of God's judgment upon the wicked. Interestingly, Matthew is the only Evangelist to use the image of darkness to describe hell. In light of the unique and repeated emphasis in

death of the firstborn son. This observation reveals an interesting connection between the ninth plague and the darkness at the cross, for at the cross darkness also preceded the death of Jesus, God's Son. Plus, just as the darkness lasted for three days in Egypt, it lasted for three hours at the cross (*Gospel of St Matthew*, 442). In light of this connection, it is surprising that Moo discounts any allusion to Exod 10:22 in the darkness at the cross (*Old Testament in the Passion Narratives*, 343).

²²For more on the connection between the darkness at the cross and the eschatological day of the Lord, see Moo, *Old Testament in the Passion Narratives*, 343-44; Senior, *Passion Narrative*, 293-94.

²³John has 9 references to darkness: σκοτία (1:5 [2x]; 6:17; 8:12; 12:35 [2x], 46; 20:1) and σκότος (3:19). Matthew has 10 references: σκοτεινός (6:23), σκοτία (10:27), σκοτιζομαι (24:29), and σκότος (4:16; 6:23 [2x]; 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; 27:45). The last word, which is found in 27:45, is used 7 times in Matthew.

²⁴Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:622 n. 58.

Matthew that hell is a place of outer darkness, it seems likely that he would also understand the darkness at Jesus' death in this way as well. If this observation is correct, it supports the idea that the darkness at the cross refers to God's judgment.

The darkness as a sign of God's judgment fits perfectly in Matthew's passion narrative. Matthew specifically states in 26:31 that it is God himself who will strike Jesus on the cross. He uses the first person singular to describe God's judgment, "I will strike the shepherd." God's judgment fell upon Jesus at the cross. Jesus prayed in Gethsemane where he referred to his upcoming death as drinking the cup of God's wrath (26:39, 42). Understanding darkness as a reference to God's judgment fits with this theme, particularly if the darkness signaled God's judgment upon Jesus. Now it is possible that the darkness pointed to God's judgment upon the people of Judea for rejecting and killing the Son of God (cf. 27:25). In fact, the phrase "over all the land" (ἐπὶ πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν) may simply refer to darkness over all the land of Judea rather than over the entire world.²⁵ Yet, even if the darkness does symbolize God's angry judgment upon Judea—a judgment that would occur with the destruction of Jerusalem, it also points to his judgment upon Jesus, our sin-bearer. As will be seen below, this emphasis fits with Jesus' cry of dereliction in verse 46.²⁶ If the darkness was merely a sign that Jesus was a great man or that God was angry with the people of Judea, why did he cry out as he did? Jesus cried out because he was forsaken as the object of God's wrath. Thus, the darkness that covered all the land in verse 45 most likely speaks of God's judgment—

²⁵France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1075; Osborne, *Matthew*, 1036; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 843; Carson, *Matthew*, 578. Matthew can speak of "all" the land without meaning the entire world (see 9:26, 31; cf. Exod 10:22). Interestingly, in *Gos. Pet.* 5:15, it specifically refers to darkness coming down "on all of Judea" while Jesus was on the cross. For the view that according to Matthew, darkness covered the entire world, see Pierre Bonnard, *L'Évangile selon Saint Matthieu*, CNT (Neuchâtel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1963), 405; Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 543; David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NCBC (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1972), 354.

²⁶Carson writes, "But it is also a judgment on Jesus; for out of this darkness comes his cry of desolation (v. 46)" (*Matthew*, 578). Osborne too makes this connection between the darkness of God's judgment falling upon Jesus and his cry of abandonment in response (*Matthew*, 1037).

a judgment not only upon Judea, but also upon Jesus. As Osborne helpfully summarizes, “This darkness is a harbinger of the coming final judgment (as in Amos, Joel, Zephaniah), and the judgment is vicariously on Jesus as the atoning sacrifice for sin.”²⁷

The Cry of Dereliction (27:46)

After mentioning the darkness that covered all the land, Matthew tells how Jesus cried out in agony from the cross. He cried, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” This quotation is from Psalm 22:1 (22:2 MT; 21:2 LXX).²⁸ It is the only saying from the cross that Matthew records. Mark also records this saying, but Luke and John do not.²⁹ This saying in Matthew, traditionally called “the cry of dereliction,” is one of the most challenging verses in the Gospels. As Hagner says about this cry, “This is one of the most impenetrable mysteries of the entire Gospel narrative.”³⁰ In light of the theological complexities of this saying, a lot of interpreters have difficulty accepting it at face value. It is hard for many to believe that Jesus was truly abandoned by the Father on the cross. To avoid viewing this as a true abandonment, a number of suggestions are made. In what follows I will examine each of these suggestions and show why they are

²⁷Osborne, *Matthew*, 1037. For others who emphasize that the darkness points to God’s judgment upon Jesus as the one who bore our sin, see Carson, *Matthew*, 578; Morris, *Gospel according to Matthew*, 720; Peter G. Bolt, *The Cross from a Distance: Atonement in Mark’s Gospel*, NSBS 18 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 126; John R. Kimbell, “The Atonement in Lukan Theology” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008), 103-06; Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 72; S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., “The Death of Christ,” *BSac* 125 (1968): 12.

²⁸Mark’s quotation of Ps 22:1 is in Aramaic and so is Matthew’s except for the address (“My God, my God”), which Matthew records in Hebrew. The change to Hebrew (ηλι ηλι) may have been Matthew’s attempt to explain why some misunderstood Jesus to be calling for Elijah (Ἠλίαν) in v. 47 (so Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 843-44; Gundry, *Matthew*, 573; Keener, *Gospel of Matthew*, 682-83). Jesus’ cry was probably originally in Aramaic, his native language (Morris, *Gospel according to Matthew*, 720).

²⁹The Gospels record 7 sayings from the cross: 1 in Mark/Matthew, 3 in Luke, and 3 in John. Following the traditional order, the cry of dereliction in Matthew would be Jesus’ fourth saying from the cross (see, e.g., Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey* [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997], 347-48).

³⁰Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 845.

inadequate. Then I will argue that the cry of dereliction shows that Jesus was truly forsaken by the Father because of our sin.

First, some deny that Jesus ever said these words from the cross. For instance, Bultmann believes that the cry of dereliction was an interpretation made by the Evangelists of Jesus' later cry at the time of his death (Mark 15:37; Matt 27:50).³¹ Thus, the cry of dereliction was a later insertion where the words of Scripture were put into the mouth of Jesus, evidently to show that his death fulfilled prophecy.³² Yet, this hypothesis is not very persuasive. If later writers were putting Scripture in Jesus' mouth, it is highly doubtful that they would have chosen this passage—a passage that so strongly emphasizes Jesus' abandonment and despair. As Gundry states, "Concerning the cry of dereliction, it is hardly possible that legend would have put the language of despair into the mouth of Jesus."³³ Thus, the criterion of embarrassment strongly supports the authenticity of this saying. The context in Matthew does as well. The genuineness of this saying fits well with Matthew's context where it explains the misunderstanding about Elijah in verse 47. Again, Gundry says, "A genuine reference to Ps 22:2 by Jesus explains the confusion with Elijah and is wholly fitting for Jesus to have made at his last moments on the cross."³⁴ Thus, there are good reasons for accepting the historicity of the cry of dereliction.³⁵

³¹Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, rev. ed., trans. John Marsh (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 273.

³²George Wesley Buchanan, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The Mellen Biblical Commentary, (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1996), 2:1014; Robert W. Funk and Roy W. Hoover, eds., *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1993), 126, 268.

³³Robert H. Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel*, NovTSup 18 (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 203.

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵Lindars says, "The genuineness of this saying, as actually spoken by Jesus, can hardly be disputed" (*New Testament Apologetic*, 89). C. E. B. Cranfield agrees, stating, "We are on the firmest historical ground here" (*The Gospel according to Saint Mark* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959], 458). See also Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel according to St. Mark*, 2nd ed. (London: MacMillan,

Second, some argue that Jesus only *felt* forsaken, but in reality he was not forsaken by God. He was crying out in response to what seemed to be God's rejection, yet he was not actually abandoned by God.³⁶ The first problem with this view is that it places us as better judges than Jesus as to what was actually happening to him on the cross. He only *felt* forsaken, yet we know he really was not. In light of how Matthew describes Jesus in his Gospel (1:23; 11:27), it is better to see Jesus as one who would know if he were abandoned by the Father. Another problem with this interpretation is that it does not line up with how Jesus has described his death in 26:31 and 26:39, 42, as being struck by God and as drinking the cup of God's wrath. These verses speak of true abandonment.³⁷ Thus, the view that Jesus only felt forsaken does not do justice to the cry of dereliction.

Third, a rather ingenious interpretation is that Jesus quoted from Psalm 22:1 with the rest of the passage in mind. Thus, his cry, though involving real suffering, was ultimately a cry of faith and victory since Psalm 22 ends with the vindication of the one who suffered unjustly. Witherup states, "These are not words of utter despair and defeat...On the contrary, they are words of hope and victory, spoken from the depths of human suffering and signifying total trust in and surrender to God."³⁸ Similarly, Senior believes that Jesus' cry is actually one of "raw, unadorned faith in God."³⁹ His cry is a

1966), 594; David H. C. Read, "The Cry of Dereliction," *ExpTim* 68 (1956-57): 260; Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 2:1085-88; James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, vol. 1 of *Christianity in the Making* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 780-81.

³⁶E.g., Vincent Taylor, *Jesus and His Sacrifice: A Study of the Passion-Sayings in the Gospels* (London: MacMillan, 1937), 160. Often quoted is T. R. Glover's statement, "I have sometimes thought there never was an utterance that reveals more amazingly the distance between feeling and fact" (*The Jesus of History* [New York: Association, 1921], 181).

³⁷Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 844; Carson, *Matthew*, 579; Morris, *Gospel according to Matthew*, 721; Wright, *Matthew for Everyone: Part Two*, 189-90; Moo, *Old Testament in the Passion Narratives*, 274-75; Read, "Cry of Dereliction," 261-62.

³⁸Witherup, "Cross of Jesus," 274.

³⁹Senior, *Passion of Jesus in Matthew*, 136.

cry of faith because of the larger context of Psalm 22. As Senior explains, “Only the first line is quoted but the spirit of the entire psalm is at work here.”⁴⁰ Though attractive in some ways, this view has its problems. Most significantly, this view does not do justice to the actual verse that is quoted. The verse quoted speaks of anguish and being forsaken, not of faith and victory. If Jesus or the Evangelists wanted to emphasize victory, they could have chosen a verse later in the psalm. As Morris explains, “To this it may well be retorted that if this was the case almost any other verse in the whole psalm would convey the meaning better than those Jesus actually quotes.”⁴¹ In fact, stressing later ideas in Psalm 22 actually undercuts the very verse that Jesus does quote. Thus, Blomberg says, “The view that Jesus’ quotation of Ps 22 anticipates the vindication found in the larger context of the psalm stresses what does not appear in the text at the expense of what does.”⁴² A cry of victory here, while he is still on the cross, does not fit with Matthew’s presentation of Jesus’ death, a presentation that repeatedly emphasizes that Jesus’ death occurred as the result of God’s judgment (26:31, 39, 42; 27:45). Thus, the cry of abandonment fits much better. As France rightly says in response to this view, “But that is to read a lot between the lines, especially after Gethsemane where Jesus has accepted that he must drink the cup to the full: he did not expect to be rescued. The words Jesus chose to utter are those of unqualified desolation, and Matthew and Mark (who alone record this utterance) give no hint that he did not mean exactly what he said.”⁴³

⁴⁰Ibid., 137. For others who take this view, see e.g., L. Paul Trudinger, “‘Eli, Eli, Lama Sabachthani?’: A Cry of Dereliction? or Victory?” *JETS* 17 (1974): 235-38; R. E. O. White, “That ‘Cry of Dereliction’...?” *ExpTim* 113 (2002): 188-89.

⁴¹Morris, *Gospel according to Matthew*, 721.

⁴²Blomberg, *Matthew*, 419. Similarly, Carson states, “The chief difficulty with this is that though OT texts are frequently cited with their full contexts in mind, they are never cited in such a way that the OT context effectively annuls what the text itself affirms” (*Matthew*, 578-79).

⁴³France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1076. For a similar dismissal of the view that this is a cry of victory in light of the larger context of Ps 22, see Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:625; Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 550-51; Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Churchbook: Matthew 13-28*, vol. 2 of *Matthew: A Commentary*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 747; Moo, *Old Testament in the*

The best interpretation of this saying is to take it at face value, namely, as a reference to Jesus' real abandonment by the Father. This interpretation fits with a pervasive, developing theme in Matthew's passion narrative in which Jesus is step by step abandoned by everyone, a theme that culminates with him being abandoned by his own Father. As Rossé explains,

It is not to be doubted that Mark (and Matthew) presents the passion as the entrance of Jesus into an ever greater loneliness, having been repudiated by the crowd, by the disciples, and by the religious authorities. In line with this orientation of the passion, the reader can discern nothing other in the sole articulate cry of the Crucified than the culminating point of his loneliness: the passion leads Jesus to abandonment even on the part of God.⁴⁴

This abandonment was why Jesus quoted from Psalm 22:1 and not later in the psalm. He was acknowledging the reality of being forsaken by the Father. Interestingly, Jesus does not refer to God as "Father" from the cross; this is the only time in Matthew where Jesus addresses the Father as "my God." Thus, as France points out, this change in address is significant showing "a change of mood" even from his prayer in Gethsemane where Jesus still addressed God as "my Father" (26:39, 42).⁴⁵ Of course, Jesus was quoting from a Scriptural passage that actually contained the address "my God," yet the fact that this is the only time in Matthew where Jesus addresses the Father in this manner appears significant.⁴⁶ The intimacy between the Father and the Son was in some way interrupted

Passion Narratives, 271-72; Rossé, *Cry of Jesus on the Cross*, 103-07; Stott, *Cross of Christ*, 81; Bolt, *Cross from a Distance*, 129-30; Read, "Cry of Dereliction," 261. If there was any intention of bringing to mind the latter part of Ps 22, that intention would be to focus on Jesus' resurrection, not on his victory during death (Carson, *Matthew*, 579; Moo, *Old Testament in the Passion Narratives*, 272).

⁴⁴Rossé, *Cry of Jesus on the Cross*, 104. Similarly, Luz states, "Furthermore, v. 46 is for the readers of the passion narrative the climax of a clearly recognizable narrative thread. First, Jesus is abandoned by the disciples (26:56), then also by Peter (26:69-75); finally, he is completely alone in the midst of his enemies, and now appears to be abandoned even by God" (*Matthew 21-28*, 550-51). See also Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:625; Osborne, *Matthew*, 1037.

⁴⁵France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1076.

⁴⁶Cf. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 2:1046.

while Jesus was on the cross (cf. 11:27).⁴⁷

This interruption in fellowship was due to sin—not Jesus’ sin but the sin which he bore on our behalf. Morris explains, “So terrible is it to bear the sin of the world that it led to this awful separation. Sin separates from God (Is. 59:2), and so it would seem does sin-bearing.”⁴⁸ Similarly, Osborne states, “He has become the sin offering, and at this dark moment God must turn away from sin.”⁴⁹ This separation fits with the repeated emphasis in Matthew’s passion narrative that in his death Jesus faced God’s judgment and wrath (26:31, 39, 42; 27:45). His cry is in response to the darkness, which as shown above, refers to God’s judgment, even God’s judgment upon Jesus. Thus, as our sin-bearer, Jesus did not simply *feel* forsaken; he was forsaken on our behalf. This is the point that Matthew stresses. The significance of this cry is all the more noticeable in light of the fact that this is the only saying from the cross that Matthew records, and this is the only time that Jesus speaks in chapter 27 other than a few brief words to Pilate in verse 11. The focus for Matthew is on Jesus’ abandonment that resulted from him bearing our sin on the cross.

Not everyone agrees with this interpretation. For instance, Luz says, “Seeing a soteriological dimension in this prayer-cry, perhaps in terms of 1:21; 20:28; and 26:28, is remote from the text.”⁵⁰ Also, Taylor states, “We may dismiss at once ‘the traditional interpretation,’ if by this is meant the view that the saying implies that Jesus was

⁴⁷Yet, by calling him “my God” Jesus still affirms his faith in God (so France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1076-77; Morris, *Gospel according to Matthew*, 722; Read, “Cry of Dereliction,” 261). It is unnecessary to suggest that the separation on the cross injured the Trinitarian relationship within the Godhead. The focus of the separation is not on ontological separation but on God’s judgment. Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach rightly acknowledge the presence of God the Father even at the cross (cf. John 16:32). They go on to say, “The language of ‘abandonment’ or ‘forsakenness’ is a metaphorical way of referring to divine judgment” (*Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 72 n. 93). For more on how the cry of dereliction relates to the Trinity, see Bolt, *Cross from a Distance*, 135-41.

⁴⁸Morris, *Cross in the New Testament*, 48.

⁴⁹Osborne, *Matthew*, 1037-38.

⁵⁰Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 551.

abandoned by the Father and, as a substitute for sinners, endured the pains of the lost.”⁵¹ Yet, the Father’s abandonment of Jesus is exactly what Matthew intends for us to understand by Jesus’ cry. Matthew understands Jesus’ death as occurring under the judgment of God, and thus there must be an explanation for this judgment. It was certainly not because of Jesus’ sin (for he had none); rather, it was because of our sin. Jesus faced God’s wrath because he was our sin-bearer. As Carson summarizes, “In this cry of dereliction, the horror of the world’s sin and the cost of our salvation are revealed.”⁵²

Conclusion

Several events took place while Jesus was hanging on the cross. People mocked Jesus and urged him to come down from the cross and save himself in order to prove that he was the Son of God. The religious leaders said, “He saved others, but he cannot save himself” (v. 42). Unbeknownst to them, their taunt was an accurate theological statement about Jesus’ atoning death. Jesus saved others by not saving himself, that is, by dying for them on the cross. Darkness covered all the land while Jesus was on the cross (v. 45). This darkness symbolized God’s judgment, a judgment that fell upon Jesus and caused him to cry out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me” (v. 46)? Jesus was truly abandoned and judged by God because he was our sin-bearer on the cross. He was forsaken in the wrath of God. Yet, this is not the end of the story. As the next section shows, God’s vindication of Jesus did occur in the events that followed (vv. 51-54).

⁵¹Taylor, *Jesus and His Sacrifice*, 159.

⁵²Carson, *Matthew*, 579. Similarly, Hagner says, “There remains, to be sure, the deep mystery of the abandonment experienced by Jesus on the cross. Although we cannot penetrate that mystery, its meaning is surely to be related to the procuring of the forgiveness of sins through the redemptive death of the Son spoken of earlier in the narrative (1:21; 20:28; cf. 26:28)” (*Matthew 14-28*, 749). Michael Wilkins even argues that in the cry of dereliction one finds the foundation for penal substitution (*Matthew*, NIVAC [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004], 903).

The Torn Veil and the Resurrected Saints (27:51-54)

Following Jesus' death in Matthew's Gospel a number of miraculous events take place (27:51-54). These include the following: the tearing of the temple veil, an earthquake, and the resurrection of many saints from the dead. After recording these events, Matthew mentions how a Roman centurion and his companions acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God (v. 54). This confession, along with the miraculous events, shows that though God forsook his Son on the cross (vv. 45-46) he later vindicated him with signs that pointed toward the power of Jesus' death and the fact that he is God's Son.⁵³ Greater vindication would follow with Jesus' resurrection (28:1-10). Though the other two Synoptic Gospels record the torn veil and the centurion's confession (Mark 15:38-39; Luke 23:45, 47), only Matthew mentions the earthquake and the resurrected saints. Though the significance of the earthquake will be addressed briefly, the main focus of this section will be on the torn veil and the resurrection of the saints.⁵⁴ The focus will be on what these two miraculous events tell us about Matthew's understanding of Jesus' atoning death.

The Torn Veil (27:51a)

The first miraculous event or sign that Matthew mentions following Jesus' death is the tearing of the temple veil (v. 51). Along with the question of historicity, there is the problem of deciding which veil Matthew is referring to, the outer veil or the

⁵³As Davies and Allison point out, after being silent for a number of chapters, God now vindicates his Son with "a shower of astounding miracles" (*Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:629).

⁵⁴Though not without theological significance itself, the main purpose of the earthquake in Matthew's narrative is to lead up to the climactic sign, which is the resurrection of the saints. As Delvin D. Hutton states, "It is toward this climactic goal that these first three signs—the earthquake, the splitting of the rocks, and the opening of the tombs—move; for in the resurrection of the sleeping holy ones the eschatological significance of Jesus' death becomes transparently clear" ("The Resurrection of the Holy Ones [Mt 27:51b-53]: A Study of the Theology of the Matthean Passion Narrative" [Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1970], 131). See also Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 566-67; Senior, *Passion Narrative*, 311-12.

inner veil. After addressing the issue of historicity and attempting to identify the specific veil, I will examine what the torn veil has to say about the significance of Jesus' death.

The historicity of the torn veil. Of course, it is impossible to prove definitively the historicity of the torn veil. For one thing, if the veil that was torn was the inner veil then only the priests would have known of its destruction. And as Keener points out, it is highly unlikely that the priestly aristocracy would have made public knowledge the tearing of the inner veil during Jesus' death.⁵⁵ Furthermore, outside the Gospels there is no independent record that the veil of the temple was torn in two on the day of Jesus' death.⁵⁶ When these factors are combined with the apocalyptic events recorded in connection with the torn veil (vv. 51b-53), some argue that the tearing of the veil was merely symbolic and theological rather than historical.⁵⁷

When judging the historicity of this event, it is misguided to judge it based on what is normal or natural. This event was certainly not normal. The tearing of the temple veil was a unique, supernatural event connected to the one-time death of God's Son. Those who hold to a naturalistic worldview will not accept the torn veil as historical, since it involves a miracle. Those who allow for the possibility of the miraculous will be more open to Matthew's presentation of the torn veil being

⁵⁵Keener, *Gospel of Matthew*, 687.

⁵⁶France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1079 n. 27. Robert Plummer refers to an early Jewish prophecy from the *Lives of the Prophets* (c. early first century AD) that mentions the destruction of the inner veil of the temple. He suggests that maybe this prophecy was influenced by the actual tearing of the veil during Jesus' death ("Something Awry in the Temple? The Rending of the Temple Veil and Early Jewish Sources that Report Unusual Phenomena in the Temple around AD 30," *JETS* 48 [2005]: 314). He also refers to other early non-biblical Jewish sources that record strange events taking place at the temple prior to its destruction in AD 70 (306-15). However, the fact remains that none of these sources explicitly mention the tearing of the temple veil at the time of Jesus' death.

⁵⁷E.g., Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:632; Francis W. Beare, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 536; W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1971), 352; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 781 n. 92.

historical.⁵⁸ What appears certain is that Matthew himself understood the tearing of the veil as historical and presents it as such in his Gospel. There is no indication in his narrative that he intends for this event to be taken as theological and not also as historical. The torn veil is mentioned right alongside Jesus' death (v. 50) and the centurion's confession (v. 54) without any indication that some events were historical and others were not. At the very least, then, it can be said that Matthew understood the tearing of the temple veil to be a historical fact. Concerning the question of how the tearing of the inner veil (the damage of which would have only been seen by the priests) became known to the Gospel writers, it is possible that after some of the priests came to faith in Jesus they shared this story with the church.⁵⁹ In fact, the tearing of the inner veil may have served as motivation for them to come to faith in Jesus, though this is nowhere hinted at in the New Testament.

The outer veil or inner veil? Scholars are divided over the identity of the torn veil in the Synoptic Gospels. Some think that the veil mentioned is the large, outer veil that separated the holy place from the courtyard. Davies and Allison, for instance, take this view. They provide a number of reasons why they think that the outer veil is intended and why the tearing of this veil served as a sign of Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70.⁶⁰ Their reasons are (1) the context that involves a prophecy by Jesus of the

⁵⁸Keener wisely states, "Modern readers who wish to settle their view of the event's historical probability may need to resort to presuppositions about the possibilities of the miraculous and about the reliability of the Gospel traditions as a whole" (*Gospel of Matthew*, 687).

⁵⁹Wilkins states, "Since only the priestly aristocracy would have known about the tearing of the veil, when only a few weeks later a number of priests became believers (Acts 6:7), they would have informed the Christian community of this event" (*Matthew*, 905). See also Keener, *Gospel of Matthew*, 687; Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Matthew* (London: Robert Scott, 1915), 401.

⁶⁰Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:631. For others who argue for the outer veil, see, e.g., Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1213; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 421; France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1079-80. France has evidently changed his view. In his first commentary on Matthew he sided with the inner veil (*Matthew*, TNTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985; reprint, 2000], 400).

temple's destruction (v. 40), (2) the other signs had an eschatological background, and this one would refer to the expectation by some that the temple would not continue in the new age (e.g., *1 Enoch* 90:28-29; *Jub.* 1:27; *Tob* 13:16-17), (3) all the other portents are public yet the inner veil would not be, and (4) Matthew's depiction loses its force if it refers to the much smaller inner veil. The first two reasons do not demand the outer veil; the tearing of the inner veil could also point to the temple's destruction and its cessation in the new age. The last reason is not persuasive either. The size of the veil is inconsequential; it was its significance that mattered. Their third point is the most challenging, for the other signs were public and the outer veil would provide a more public demonstration. Yet, it is doubtful that even the outer veil was seen by the centurion from Golgotha. According to Gurtner, neither of the proposed crucifixion sites is faced by the temple.⁶¹

Others argue that the Synoptic writers had in mind the inner veil.⁶² This view is the most likely interpretation. There are three reasons why the inner veil was probably intended. First, the inner veil was much more significant than the outer veil, for it marked off the holy of holies. Actually, the outer veil carried "no true cultic significance."⁶³ Thus, the veil torn was probably the inner veil. The rending of it would express more effectively and graphically the setting aside of the Old Testament sacrificial

⁶¹Daniel M. Gurtner, "The Rending of the Veil (Matt. 27:51a *par*): A Look Back and a Way Forward," *Themelios* 29 (2004): 7. See also Senior, *Passion Narrative*, 308 n. 2; contra Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1213. The difficult phrase, καὶ τὰ γενόμενα, in v. 54 may simply refer to the splitting of the tombs that resulted from the earthquake since the resurrected saints did not appear until after Christ's resurrection (Osborne, *Matthew*, 1047; cf. France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1083).

⁶²E.g., BDAG, s.v. "καταπέτασμα;" Carl Schneider, "καταπέτασμα," in *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 3:629-30; Gurtner, *Torn Veil*, 199; Keener, *Gospel of Matthew*, 686; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 848-49; Plummer, *Gospel according to S. Matthew*, 401; Bruner, *Churchbook*, 759; Wilkins, *Matthew*, 904-05; Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Sacra Pagina Series (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1991), 400; G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, NSBT 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 190-91.

⁶³Schneider, "καταπέτασμα," 3:629.

system and the corresponding open access to God for all people. As Senior says, “It was the inner veil, protecting the Holy of Holies, that had cultic significance and it is obviously the symbolic rending of this veil that Mark and Matthew intend.”⁶⁴ Second, though the lexical evidence by itself cannot settle this issue, the use of *καταπέτασμα* (“curtain, veil”) in the LXX at least favors an interpretation of the inner veil in the Synoptic Gospels. It is true that *καταπέτασμα* is used in the LXX for both veils,⁶⁵ yet it is more often used for the inner veil.⁶⁶ Plus, though *κάλυμμα* (“veil”) is used at times for the outer veil (and the precinct veil), it is never used for the inner veil. Only *καταπέτασμα* is used for the inner veil.⁶⁷ Gurtner even argues that *καταπέτασμα* is the default term for the inner veil in the LXX, and when a different veil was intended by the use of *καταπέτασμα* then syntactical clues were provided.⁶⁸ In light of this evidence from the LXX, it would appear that if the Synoptic writers had a different veil in mind they would have made this clear.

Last, the references in the Book of Hebrews are significant. Hebrews is the only other book in the New Testament where *καταπέτασμα* is used, and in each of its occurrences it clearly refers to the inner veil (6:19; 9:3; 10:20). Now this by itself does not mean that the Synoptic writers used *καταπέτασμα* in the same way. What is significant, though, is that in these references we find an early Christian understanding of

⁶⁴Senior, *Passion Narrative*, 308 n. 2. In light of the inner’s veil significance, Keener states, “In my opinion, the specification of ‘the’ curtain (27:51) strongly favors the inner curtain” (*Gospel of Matthew*, 686 n. 243).

⁶⁵This happens even in the same context in Exod 26: *καταπέτασμα* is used here to refer to the inner veil (vv. 31-33) as well as the outer veil (v. 37).

⁶⁶Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 2:1111; Daniel M. Gurtner, “LXX Syntax and the Identity of the NT Veil,” *NovT* 47 (2005): 345-46.

⁶⁷Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 2:1111.

⁶⁸Gurtner, “LXX Syntax and Identity of NT Veil,” 344-53. The primary clue, according to Gurtner, is the use of locative genitives, which serve to designate where in the temple the veil is located. These genitives are used to show when a veil other than the inner veil is in mind.

the tearing of the inner veil and its theological significance, a significance that is connected to Jesus and his sacrificial death. Is it too farfetched to suppose that this understanding was influenced by the tradition that the temple veil was torn in two the day Jesus died? And if so, would this not show that the inner veil was in view?⁶⁹ I think so. Thus, in light of the reasons just mentioned, the inner veil is more likely in view in 27:51.⁷⁰

The significance of the torn veil. The first thing to point out about the torn veil is that it was an act of God that took place in response to Jesus' death. In fact, all of the events recorded in verses 51-54 occurred as a result of Jesus' death.⁷¹ Verse 51 begins with the words *Καὶ ἰδοὺ*. Matthew alone begins the section that follows Jesus' death with these words (cf. Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). *Καὶ ἰδοὺ* alerts the reader to the significance of the events that follow and emphasizes their supernatural nature.⁷² This phrase also shows that these events are the direct result of Jesus' death (v. 50).⁷³ In response to Jesus' death, God acted in a mighty way in tearing the temple veil, causing an earthquake, and resurrecting saints from the dead. The plethora of divine passives in this

⁶⁹Keener also presents this argument (*Gospel of Matthew*, 686). For more on the connection between Hebrews and Matthew in relation to the inner veil, see Martin Hasitschka, "Matthew and Hebrews," in *Matthew and His Christian Contemporaries*, LNTS 333, ed. David C. Sim and Boris Repschinski (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 90.

⁷⁰Though I think the inner veil was intended, the outer veil could have also signaled the coming destruction of the temple as well as open access to God apart from the temple (Carson, *Matthew*, 580; Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 566). Yet, the latter point is made much more clearly if the inner veil was in view.

⁷¹Witherup, "Cross of Jesus," 277.

⁷²David Garland points out how often in Matthew the phrase *καὶ ἰδοὺ* announces "divine intervention" (see, e.g., 2:9; 3:17; 4:11; 8:24; 17:5; 28:2-3, 9) (*Reading Matthew: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the First Gospel* [New York: Crossroad, 1993], 260). Gurtner similarly highlights how this phrase always introduces something that is "unexpected" and many times something that is "theophanic in nature" (*Torn Veil*, 141-42). See also Witherup, "Cross of Jesus," 278-79.

⁷³France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1079; Senior, *Passion Narrative*, 307.

section underscores God's action.⁷⁴ Aorist passive verbs permeate this passage: ἐσχίσθη (v. 51), ἐσείσθη (v. 51), ἐσχίσθησαν (v. 51), ἀνεώχθησαν (v. 52), ἠγέρθησαν (v. 52), ἐνεφανίσθησαν (v. 53), and ἐφοβήθησαν (v. 54). The divine passive in verse 51 (ἐσχίσθη) shows that the temple veil was torn by God. The phrase ἀπ' ἄνωθεν ἕως κάτω ("from top to bottom," v. 51) also highlights that this was an act of God.⁷⁵

So what is the theological significance of God's act of tearing the temple veil in response to Jesus' death? Unfortunately for us, neither Matthew nor the other Synoptic writers take the time to explain the meaning of the torn veil.⁷⁶ Though various suggestions are made,⁷⁷ the two most likely are that the torn veil was a negative sign of God's judgment upon the temple and Jerusalem and a positive sign of open access to God apart from the sacrificial system. In fact, these two signs go together and both are meant by the torn veil.⁷⁸

The torn veil signifies both *judgment* on the temple and *salvation* apart from temple sacrifice, which thus opens the way for Gentiles to be saved as well. First, the torn veil signifies judgment on the temple. The destruction of the temple, which literally occurred in AD 70 at the hands of the Romans, is mentioned by Matthew a number of times leading up to Jesus' death. Though it is clearer in Mark due to his sandwiching

⁷⁴Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 566; Senior, *Passion Narrative*, 313 n. 5.

⁷⁵France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1080; Gurtner, *Torn Veil*, 184-85.

⁷⁶Gurtner, *Torn Veil*, 1; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 849.

⁷⁷Remarkably, Timothy J. Geddert makes a total of 30 suggestions (*Watchwords: Mark 13 in Markan Eschatology*, JSNTSup 26 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989], 141-43). Senior lists only 3: (1) the end of the sacrificial system, (2) the destruction of Jerusalem, or (3) open access to God (*Passion Narrative*, 308-10). For other suggestions, see France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1080.

⁷⁸For those who see the torn veil as both a negative sign of God's judgment upon the temple and a positive sign of open access to God for all, see, e.g., Osborne, *Matthew*, 1043-44; Wilkins, *Matthew*, 905; Senior, *Passion Narrative*, 311; Beale, *Temple and the Church's Mission*, 189-90; Witherup, "Cross of Jesus," 280-81. Bruner creatively summarizes these two emphases: "The split veil of the temple says two truths about the temple: (1) judgment ('it is all over!') and (2) salvation ('it is all open!')" (*Churchbook*, 757).

technique in which the clearing of the temple occurs between the cursing and withering of the fig tree (see Mark 11:12-21),⁷⁹ it is possible that Matthew too intends Jesus' clearing of the temple to be a prophetic symbol of its upcoming destruction (21:12-17; cf. 12:6).⁸⁰ After denouncing the scribes and Pharisees with a series of woes (23:1-36), Jesus then announced the desolation of the temple. He said, "Behold, your house is left to you desolate" (23:38). The word "house" can refer to Israel as a whole or to their temple. Yet, as France points out, the latter is most likely here: "While the *house* might refer to Israel as a whole (cf. 10:6; 15:24), the context here directly before ch. 24 indicates that the immediate reference is to the temple (where the words are spoken), whose fate will symbolize God's judgment on his people."⁸¹ Speaking of the temple, Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be demolished" (24:2). One of the main accusations against Jesus was that he claimed to be able to destroy the temple (26:61). In fact, this accusation was made while Jesus was on the cross (27:40), and thus very close to Matthew's mention of the torn veil.

In light of this repeated theme of the temple's destruction leading up to Jesus' death—a death that resulted in the veil being torn, it seems that the torn veil symbolizes God's judgment on the temple. This judgment resulted in the departure of God from the temple at that time ("desolate," 23:38) and the physical destruction of the temple in AD 70.⁸² The fact that the veil was torn from top to bottom shows that God did the tearing

⁷⁹J. R. Edwards, "Markan Sandwiches: The Significance of Interpolations in Markan Narratives," *NovT* 31 (1989): 206-08; Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel according to Mark*, BNTC (London: A & C Black, 1991; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 265.

⁸⁰Blomberg, *Matthew*, 315; Beale, *Temple and the Church's Mission*, 179.

⁸¹France, *Matthew*, 332. See also Sunik Hwang, "Matthew's View of the Temple" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002), 61-62.

⁸²Contra Gurtner who doubts that the rending of the veil is connected to the destruction of the temple (*Torn Veil*, 11, 170). However, he does rightly emphasize that the torn veil symbolizes open access to God via Jesus' sacrificial death (188).

and also that the tearing was final and irreversible. Luz explains, “It is not simply partially torn so that the damage could be mended; it is irreversibly destroyed by a supernatural intervention.”⁸³ Thus, the torn veil shows that God has forsaken the temple, and it will therefore be destroyed.

Second, the torn veil also signifies free, open access to God apart from the temple, which would open the way for Gentiles to enter the kingdom of heaven. The symbol of open access to God not only fits with the rest of the New Testament (see Eph 2:11-22; Heb 6:19-20; 10:19-22), it also fits with Matthew’s Gospel. Following the torn veil and other events, a Gentile centurion and his companions confess that Jesus is the Son of God (v. 54). Though it is possible that these Gentiles did not understand completely what they were affirming, for Matthew and his readers their confession pointed to an authentic confession of Jesus as the Son of God.⁸⁴ In fact, this confession in verse 54 very likely echoes the confession of the disciples recorded in 14:33. The confession in 14:33 also takes place in the context of a miraculous event resulting in fear and wonder. Plus, in 14:33 as in 27:54, ἀληθῶς begins the confession, the word order is similar, and the definite article is absent in both places.⁸⁵ Thus, 27:54 probably echoes 14:33, showing that the Gentile confession is a legitimate confession acknowledging Jesus to be the Son of God.

The confession of the Gentiles brings together the theme of Gentile inclusion

⁸³Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 566.

⁸⁴France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1084 n. 50; Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 569-70; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 852; Gundry, *Matthew*, 578; Keener, *Gospel of Matthew*, 688; Senior, *Passion Narrative*, 327-28; Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 89-90. For a detailed, persuasive argument for the reading, “the Son of God,” see Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 2:1146-50.

⁸⁵Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1220. The absence of a definite article in v. 54 does not mean that the phrase should be read as “a son of God.” According to Colwell’s rule, definite predicate nouns that occur before a verb usually lack the article. Plus, there are a number of examples in Matthew where, though anarthrous, the idea is clearly that of “the Son of God” (e.g., 4:3, 6; 14:33; 27:40, 43). For more on this issue, see C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 115-16; Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:636.

that permeates Matthew's Gospel. From the beginning this theme is apparent. The genealogy includes four women who all have Gentile connections: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba.⁸⁶ In the second chapter we see Gentile magi from the east coming to worship Jesus as the King of the Jews (2:1-12). John the Baptist warns the Pharisees and Sadducees that God is able to raise up children of Abraham not simply from those of natural descent, but even from the stones (3:9).⁸⁷ Matthew quotes a passage from Isaiah 9 that speaks of "Galilee of the Gentiles" seeing a great light (4:15-16). Twice Jesus praises the great faith of Gentiles (8:5-13; 15:21-28). In describing the ministry of Jesus, Matthew quotes again from Isaiah (42:1-4), which says that Jesus "will proclaim justice to the nations" and "in his name the nations will put their hope" (12:18, 21). In two parables, Jesus speaks of Gentiles being incorporated into the kingdom even as resistant Jews are rejected (21:43; 22:8-10). Then there is the Gentile confession (27:54). Only after this confession is there a specific commission by Jesus to make disciples of all nations (28:19). It appears, then, that once Jesus died and opened up free access to God apart from the temple the way was now made available for Gentiles to come into the kingdom. That is why the Great Commission follows Jesus' death and resurrection in Matthew.

In reality, these two themes are interconnected. God's rejection of the temple and open access to him through Jesus' sacrificial death go together. With Jesus' death providing salvation and open communion with God (cf. 1:23), there is no longer any need for the temple. Thus, salvation is now open to Gentiles as well. As Moo explains, "It is probable that the evangelists regard the sign as both a negative judgment on the old

⁸⁶For a persuasive argument that Matthew lists the women because of their Gentile connection and in order to highlight his Gentile inclusion theme, see Keener, *Gospel of Matthew*, 78-81.

⁸⁷Concerning John's warning in 3:9, Hagner writes, "While it is unlikely that John had in mind the mission to the Gentiles (though he could have had in mind the universalism of the prophets), we may safely assume that Matthew and his church did understand the words as pointing in that direction" (*Matthew 1-13*, WBC, vol. 33A [Dallas: Word Books, 1993], 50).

Temple cult and the indication of a new soteriological era, since the inauguration of a new means of divine access necessarily renders obsolete the former, and an abolishing of the old implies the creation of a new.”⁸⁸ So, according to Matthew, Jesus’ death signals the end of the Old Testament sacrificial system and opens the door for Gentiles to come to God apart from animal sacrifice.

The Resurrected Saints (27:51b-53)

Though the other Synoptic writers mention the torn veil, only Matthew records that an earthquake took place at Jesus’ death followed by the resurrection of saints.⁸⁹ The uniqueness of these events opens a window into Matthew’s understanding of Jesus’ death. As in other places in Matthew, here is an example of Matthew’s unique contribution to the theological significance of Jesus’ atoning death.⁹⁰ However, these events are by no means easy to make sense of or interpret. There are numerous challenges involved in interpreting verses 51b-53. Why does Matthew alone record these events? Were these events intended to be understood as historical? Who were the “saints” that were raised? Did they rise during the death of Christ or after his resurrection, and what happened after they arose? No wonder Blomberg says that this event is “perhaps the most unusual in all of the Gospels.”⁹¹ As Wright explains,

This account presents all kinds of puzzles, not least at the level of what Matthew actually thinks is going on, and what he thinks it all means. Is the earthquake

⁸⁸Moo, *Old Testament in the Passion Narratives*, 338-39.

⁸⁹The source of these unique verses in Matthew is uncertain. Some like Senior argue for a Matthean composition (*Passion Narrative*, 318), yet it is more likely that these verses comprise a pre-Matthean tradition that he worked into his narrative (Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The End of the Ages Has Come: An Early Interpretation of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985], 40-46). Beyond this, not much can be said. As Nolland rightly states, “Mt. 27:51b-53 is hardly likely to be a purely Matthean creation, but it is impossible to say anything definite about its prehistory” (*Gospel of Matthew*, 1204). Hutton argues that these verses comprise a displaced resurrection passage that originally followed 28:4 (“Resurrection of Holy Ones,” 105-14, 153). Yet, the textual evidence for this view is nonexistent.

⁹⁰See 1:21; 3:15; 8:17; 12:6; 26:28.

⁹¹Blomberg, *Matthew*, 421.

intended to explain how the Temple veil was torn apart? Does he imply that the centurion and the others saw the tombs opening and corpses getting ready to emerge? Why does he say they only came out after Jesus' resurrection, two days later? What were they doing in between? And what happened to them next?⁹²

Though difficult, these few verses contribute considerably to Matthew's understanding of the significance of Jesus' death. After dealing with the issue of historicity, I will examine the theological significance of the resurrection of the saints in connection with Jesus' death.

The historicity of the resurrected saints. Many, if not most, scholars do not believe that the resurrection of the saints as recorded here in these verses actually took place. Though admitting that the dominant view of church history has been that these events were historical, Davies and Allison state, "We, however, discern in vv. 51-3 not history but a poetic or mythological expression of the profound meaning of Jesus' death."⁹³ Brown too argues that these events are apocalyptic descriptions rather than literal history.⁹⁴ Senior believes these events were intended as symbolic and theological, not as historical.⁹⁵ Even Evangelical scholars are challenged by these events. For instance, Hagner, though admitting that we cannot say for certain that Matthew was not recording historical events, thinks it is more likely that "the rising of the saints from the tombs in this passage is a piece of theology set forth as history." He goes on to say, "More likely, here as in the birth narratives a historical core of events, such as the darkness and the earthquake, has given rise to a degree of elaboration in the passing on of the tradition."⁹⁶ Similarly, Green, commenting on whether we should take these events

⁹²N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, vol. 3 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 633.

⁹³Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:632.

⁹⁴Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 2:1133-34.

⁹⁵Senior, *Passion Narrative*, 321-22.

⁹⁶Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 851.

as historical, states, “It is possible but unlikely that this is how Matthew intended us to read it. After all, he says that these bodies of the saints went into the holy city *after* Jesus’ resurrection.”⁹⁷

Admittedly, with the difficult chronological and theological issues involved it is tempting to read this passage in purely apocalyptic, non-historical terms. As D. Wenham states, “The attractions of this view are undeniable, but whether the suggested demythologization is legitimate and fair to the evangelist’s intention is less clear.”⁹⁸ Though not the easiest passage to interpret, there are serious problems with viewing this account as simple theological elaboration. A case can be made that Matthew meant for these events to be understood as historical occurrences. First, though the events described are of an apocalyptic nature, they occur within the context of historical narrative without any clear clues from the text that these events are non-historical. Again, D. Wenham’s comments are helpful: “The majority of Matthew 27 has all the appearance of being in intention a straightforward description of historical events, and there is no hint given of any changed intention in verse 51 or elsewhere in the chapter. On the contrary the earthquake is said to have been witnessed by the surely historical centurion, and the resurrected saints are said to have appeared to many.”⁹⁹ In fact, the words “appeared to many” are reminiscent of 1 Corinthians 15:6 where the resurrection appearances are recorded for apologetic purposes.¹⁰⁰ Some are not persuaded. Senior, for instance, believes that the chronological inconsistency of these events in light of the phrase “after his resurrection” shows that Matthew did not intend for these events to be

⁹⁷Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 2000), 302-03. Gurtner also casts doubt on the historicity of these events, opting for a purely apocalyptic reading (*Torn Veil*, 7, 152, 167-68).

⁹⁸D. Wenham, “Resurrection Narratives,” *TynBul* 24 (1973): 43.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰Osborne, *Matthew*, 1044.

understood historically.¹⁰¹ It is true that the phrase “after his resurrection” does make the narrative read awkwardly, but this difficulty is not enough to make us think that Matthew intended these events to be read non-historically.

Second, if we say that these events were non-historical, would we not also have to say the same for Christ’s resurrection? In the very next chapter Matthew describes Christ’s resurrection, where he records similar apocalyptic events such as an earthquake (28:2), the resurrection (28:5-6), and an angelic visitation (28:2). How can we say that the apocalyptic events in chapter 27 are non-historical but those in chapter 28 are historical? Yet, Brown makes this very attempt. He believes that because Christ actually appeared to certain individuals and the Gospels describe when these appearances ended and how Christ ascended back to heaven (things not recorded about the resurrected saints), that this means that his resurrection was historical yet the resurrection of the saints was not.¹⁰² I appreciate Brown’s commitment to safeguard the historicity of Christ’s resurrection, but I fail to see how resurrection appearances to *specific* individuals means that Christ’s resurrection is historical while appearances to “many” is not. Matthew clearly states that these resurrected saints appeared in a real place (“the holy city,” i.e., Jerusalem) and were seen by real people (“many”). As for Matthew not telling what happened to these resurrected saints, it simply was not necessary.

Third, we cannot reject these events as non-historical simply because among the Evangelists only Matthew records them. It is natural to wonder why the other Evangelists did not record such a spectacular display of God’s power, yet the same could be said for the resurrection of Lazarus in John’s Gospel. Why does John alone record this event? He even connects it to the reason why the Jewish leaders finally chose to

¹⁰¹Senior, *Passion Narrative*, 321. For other supposed literary clues that show Matthew intended a non-historical reading, see Kenneth L. Waters, Sr., “Matthew 27:52-53 as Apocalyptic Apostrophe: Temporal-Spatial Collapse in the Gospel of Matthew,” *JBL* 122 (2003): 501-02. Waters’s view is addressed below.

¹⁰²Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 2:1132, 2:1134 n. 93.

have Jesus killed (12:9-11), yet the Synoptic Gospels do not even mention it.¹⁰³ D. Wenham is right: “If it is recognized that the resurrection narratives in the gospels are extremely compressed and that the evangelists have been selective in their description, then it will not be regarded as surprising if they are found to have concentrated on the central event to the exclusion of other things.”¹⁰⁴ Last, these events are no less likely than the resurrection events in Christ’s earthly ministry. And as Osborne points out, resurrections are found in all the traditions behind the Gospels (Mark, M, L, John, and possibly Q) and thus fulfill the criterion of multiple attestation.¹⁰⁵ In light of these reasons, I believe that Matthew understood these events as historical and intended his readers to do the same.¹⁰⁶

The significance of the resurrected saints. The unique theological contribution that Matthew makes in verses 51b-53 is to show the connection between Jesus’ death and the resurrection from the dead. As Senior notes, “It is the *death* of Jesus which triggers the resurrection of the saints—this is the new feature Matthew brings to the synoptic tradition.”¹⁰⁷ Similarly, Hill writes, “What Matthew is daringly and dramatically symbolizing is the truth that the death of Jesus is life-giving: the dead rise,

¹⁰³Of course, not everyone accepts the historicity of Lazarus’s resurrection; yet it is more widely accepted than the resurrection of the saints in 27:51b-53. For those who accept the historicity of Lazarus’s resurrection, see Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John’s Gospel: Issues & Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 171-72.

¹⁰⁴D. Wenham, “Resurrection Narratives,” 44.

¹⁰⁵Osborne, “Resurrection,” 678.

¹⁰⁶Wright, a premier historical Jesus scholar, is open to the historicity of the resurrection of the saints in 27:51b-53. He writes, “Some stories are so odd that they may just have happened. This may be one of them, but in historical terms there is no way of finding out” (*Resurrection of the Son of God*, 636). Bruner also, though suggesting that Matthew is writing pictorially, states, “But I would not put a little resurrecting past the God of this Gospel either” (*Churchbook*, 761).

¹⁰⁷Donald Senior, “The Death of Jesus and the Resurrection of the Holy Ones (Mt. 27:51-53),” *CBQ* 38 (1976): 328.

so to speak, at the cross.”¹⁰⁸ It is clear from the rest of the New Testament that the resurrection of believers is causally connected to Christ’s resurrection (e.g., John 14:19; 1 Cor 15:20-23). Yet, here in Matthew we see a definite and unique connection between the resurrection of the saints (and thus the age to come) and the sacrificial death of Jesus. Davies and Allison make this point well: “Jesus’ death is a resurrecting death: the dead are revived by his dying. As he passes from life to death they pass from death to life.”¹⁰⁹

According to verses 51b-53, the day Jesus died God acted in power to vindicate the death of his Son. The earthquake was an act of God that resulted in the rocks splitting and the tombs opening.¹¹⁰ Each of these events led up to the resurrection of the saints. The saints were resurrected and went into Jerusalem evidently to bear witness to Jesus and his resurrection. Matthew does not satisfy our curiosity by identifying who these saints actually were. Most likely, they were “pious Jews.”¹¹¹ Beyond this suggestion, it is impossible to know the exact identity of these saints since Matthew does not tell us and maybe even he did not know.¹¹² What he does tell us about these saints is that there were many (πολλὰ), that their resurrection was bodily (σώματα),

¹⁰⁸David Hill, “Matthew 27:51-53 in the Theology of the Evangelist,” *IBS* 7 (1985): 79.

¹⁰⁹Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:633. For the life-giving power of Jesus’ death in Matthew, see also France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1082; Osborne, *Matthew*, 1044; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 850; Wilkins, *Matthew*, 906; Bruner, *Churchbook*, 760. Witherup, “Cross of Jesus,” 283. Though vv. 51b-53 teach that Jesus’ death had resurrection power, this passage nowhere states that Jesus descended into hell to release the dead (Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:633; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 849-50; contra Günther Bornkamm, “σεῖω, σεισμός,” in *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971], 7:200).

¹¹⁰It is possible that the earthquake also caused the veil to tear in two (Carson, *Matthew*, 581; Turner, *Matthew*, 667), yet Matthew does not make this point explicit.

¹¹¹France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1081. France suggests Dan 7:18, 21-22 as the possible Old Testament background for the use of ἁγίων in this context (1081 n. 41). Carson refers to these saints as “certain well-known OT and intertestamental Jewish ‘saints,’ spiritual heroes and martyrs in Israel’s history” (“Matthew,” 582). See also Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:633; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 421.

¹¹²For various proposals, see Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 2:1125-26.

and that, of course, they had been previously dead (κεκοιμημένων, “fallen asleep”).¹¹³ Furthermore, Matthew tells us that these saints were resurrected in response to Jesus’ death.

It is important to show that the resurrection of the saints occurred in response to Jesus’ death, for only then can we make the case that Matthew presents here a developed and unique understanding of the atoning significance of Jesus’ death. Actually, all the events recorded in verses 51-53 take place as a direct result of Jesus’ death. Matthew uniquely follows the record of Jesus’ death (v. 50) with the words Καὶ ἰδοὺ (v. 51). This phrase, as mentioned above, indicates that the miraculous events that follow (vv. 51-53) happen in response to Jesus’ death.¹¹⁴ The torn veil, the earthquake, and the resurrection of the saints all occur as a result of Jesus’ death. Of course, it is God who performs these miracles as the divine passives reveal, yet he performs them because of Jesus’ death. It is Jesus’ death that triggers God’s supernatural action, and this action by God not only vindicates his Son, but it also reveals the atoning significance of his Son’s death. Thus, Brown wrongly downplays the soteriological significance of this passage. He states, “As for soteriology, here Jesus’ death does not raise the dead; God raises them on the occasion of that death.”¹¹⁵ True, God is the author of their resurrection, but he raises them not simply on the occasion of Jesus’ death but based on his death.

Yet, some question whether God raised these saints on the day of Jesus’ death. The reason for this doubt is twofold. First, it seems to undercut the priority and preeminence of Christ’s resurrection, which is taught elsewhere in the New Testament

¹¹³The metaphor of sleep is used on various occasions in the New Testament to refer to physical death (e.g., John 11:11; 1 Cor 15:20; 1 Thess 4:13; 2 Pet 3:4). Concerning this metaphor, Senior notes, “It is interesting to observe that this expression is consistently used where the dead are spoken of in a context of resurrection expectation” (*Passion Narrative*, 315).

¹¹⁴France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1079; Senior, *Passion Narrative*, 307.

¹¹⁵Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 2:1137 n. 101.

(e.g., Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:22-23; Rev 1:5). According to this view, Jesus is resurrected first and only then are the saints resurrected. Second, the phrase μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ (“after his resurrection”) in verse 53 is difficult to interpret in terms of how it fits in the narrative. It is not clear whether this prepositional phrase should go with ἐξελθόντες or εἰσῆλθον, since both are syntactically possible.¹¹⁶ If the former is correct, then the saints were resurrected but did not come out of their tombs until after Christ’s resurrection. If the latter is true, then the resurrected saints though coming out of their tombs on the day of Jesus’ death did not enter into Jerusalem until after his resurrection. Both scenarios create problems. Why would resurrected saints remain in their tombs? And if they left the tombs where did they go prior to entering into Jerusalem? Did they remain in hiding until the day when Christ arose? Because of this awkwardness in the narrative, some contend that this phrase shows that the saints were not resurrected when Jesus died but after his resurrection. It may be helpful to look at the different attempts to make sense of this difficult phrase.

First, there have been both ancient and modern attempts to remove the accepted reading altogether. For instance, there is an attested variant that has a plural pronoun instead of a singular one (“after *their* resurrection”), yet it is weakly attested (Greek mss. 30, 220, and Ethiopic mss.). Moreover, it seems rather clear that this is a scribal attempt to solve a theological problem; thus, the existing, more difficult reading should stand.¹¹⁷ Davies and Allison argue that μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ is a secondary, scribal gloss.¹¹⁸ Yet, there is no textual evidence for this viewpoint. Others suggest that

¹¹⁶Turner, *Matthew*, 670 n. 6; France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1082.

¹¹⁷Allison, *End of the Ages*, 45-46; Gurtner, *Torn Veil*, 151 n. 64.

¹¹⁸Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:634-35. Somewhat reluctantly, Luz agrees with this interpretation (*Matthew 21-28*, 569). See also Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News according to Matthew*, trans. David E. Green (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975), 516; Ronald L. Troxel, “Matt 27.51-4 Reconsidered: Its Role in the Passion Narrative, Meaning and Origin,” *NTS* 48 (2002): 36-37.

Matthew himself inserted the phrase to safeguard the priority of Christ's resurrection.¹¹⁹ Yet, as Luz points out, the evidence for Matthean redaction is rather slim.¹²⁰ Rather than hypothesizing on how this phrase ended up where it did, it is better to explain its meaning in its current location.¹²¹

Second, some read this passage as an apocalyptic, non-historical description of the events surrounding Jesus' death, and thus figuring out the chronology of events is irrelevant. Now it is possible for those who read this passage non-historically to still connect the resurrection of the saints to Jesus' death as a symbol of the dawning of the new age (e.g., Senior), yet others sever the direct connection between Jesus' death and the resurrection of the saints. They sever this connection because they do not think that the resurrection of the saints occurred when Jesus died or even after his resurrection; rather, they argue that this resurrection has not yet occurred but will occur in the future. This is the view of Kenneth Waters. He creatively suggests that Matthew intended these events to describe not what had already happened but what would happen in the future. He argues that the resurrection of the saints refers to the future, general resurrection not to what happened on the day Christ died.¹²² He interprets this passage with a great deal of dependence upon Revelation, suggesting that the "holy city" refers to the new Jerusalem not the historical city (Rev 21:2) and the "saints" are not Jewish believers but

¹¹⁹Hill, "Matthew 27:51-53," 78; Waters, "Matthew 27:52-53 as Apocalyptic Apostrophe," 502-03; Plummer, *Gospel according to S. Matthew*, 403. This view was formerly held by Allison (*End of the Ages*, 42, 45-46).

¹²⁰Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 569.

¹²¹A suggestion that can be quickly dismissed is the idea that the phrase should stand as it is but that it means "after his [i.e., Jesus'] raising [of the saints]." Nolland, though suggesting this view, wisely recommends against it for it switches the author of resurrection from God to Jesus and in this passage the acts recorded are presented as acts of God in response to Jesus' death (*Gospel of Matthew*, 1216 n. 482). Brown also suggests this rendering, but he too refuses to follow it (*Death of the Messiah*, 2:1130).

¹²²Waters, "Matthew 27:52-53 as Apocalyptic Apostrophe," 489.

Christian martyrs (Rev 20:4, 6).¹²³ He suggests that these events involve a space-time collapse, which means the future collapses into the past and the heavenly into the earthly. Thus, this passage in Matthew is an “apocalyptic prophecy,” and so “it is not history, nor is it presented as history.”¹²⁴ A glaring flaw with Waters’ view is the amount of influence he allows Revelation to have on the reading of this Matthean text. He is correct that the mention of “the holy city” only occurs in one other place in Matthew, and there it probably does not refer to a concrete experience in Jerusalem (4:5). However, it is also quite clear that the devil did not take Jesus to the new Jerusalem either. Possibly, the most devastating weakness of Waters’s proposal is that the text says that the resurrected saints appeared to many in the holy city. To understand this appearance as anything other than a witness of Christ’s resurrection to a city that just rejected Jesus is difficult to maintain. Why would they appear to people in heaven?¹²⁵

Third, some believe that the syntax can be read in such a way as to show that though the tombs were opened when Jesus died the saints were not resurrected until after his resurrection. Calvin held to this interpretation.¹²⁶ J. W. Wenham agrees, basing his interpretation on how he reads the syntax of this passage.¹²⁷ He argues that καὶ ἐξελθόντες...πολλοῖς is a parenthetical remark breaking into the passion narrative and thus speaks of what occurred after the resurrection. However, this parenthetical remark has no subject and so is not a complete parenthesis. The subject (πολλὰ σώματα), he

¹²³Ibid., 495-96, 511.

¹²⁴Ibid., 514.

¹²⁵Brown believes that resurrection appearances in the holy city means that it took place on earth rather than in heaven (*Death of the Messiah*, 2:1131). See also D. Wenham, “Resurrection Narratives,” 43 n. 66.

¹²⁶John Calvin, *Commentary on the Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, vol. 17 of *Calvin’s Commentaries*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 1996), 324.

¹²⁷J. W. Wenham, “When Were the Saints Raised?,” *JTS* 32 (1981): 151-52. See also Osborne, *Matthew*, 1046; Carson, *Matthew*, 582; Wilkins, *Matthew*, 906. This reading is followed by a few modern translations (e.g., ESV, NLT).

thinks, should go with what follows (vv. 52b-53), resulting in a period after ἀνεώχθησαν (v. 52a). He concludes, “Then the succession of events on Good Friday is clearly delineated, and the whole episode of the resurrected saints is placed after the resurrection of Jesus, thus absolving the evangelist from the charge of depicting living saints cooped up for days in tombs around the city.” He admits that Matthew could have made things clearer by placing μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν αὐτοῦ at the beginning of the parenthesis, yet he reminds us that we all at times begin a sentence and then realize it might be misleading and so modify it in a clumsy manner. According to this interpretation, at Christ’s death the veil was torn and the earthquake occurred resulting in the tombs opening; yet, it was not until after Christ’s resurrection that the saints were raised and then went into Jerusalem. Though insightful, as France points out, the problem with this view is twofold. First, it breaks up Matthew’s “breathless series of paratactic clauses with aorist passive verbs.” Even more, it still leaves the tombs open prior to Christ’s resurrection.¹²⁸ Why would the tombs be opened yet no one resurrected until three days later?

This last suggestion is the most compelling of the three. However, though it removes the awkwardness from the narrative, it does not appear to be the most straightforward reading of these verses. In that reading, the saints rise from the dead on Friday but either stay in their tombs or at least stay outside of Jerusalem until after Christ’s resurrection. Gundry opts for the former stating, “Matthew probably means that the saints stayed in their tombs for several days even though their bodies had been raised to life.”¹²⁹ Brown sides with the latter. He takes “after his resurrection” to go with what follows rather than with what precedes it, and so he argues that the saints came out of their tombs on Friday, but did not enter Jerusalem until Sunday after Christ’s

¹²⁸France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1082 n. 45. Hill also criticizes J. W. Wenham’s view because it breaks up the ‘established, eschatological sequence’ of events (“Matthew 27:51-53,” 78).

¹²⁹Gundry, *Matthew*, 576.

resurrection.¹³⁰ Either of these suggestions makes legitimate sense of the text even though both are awkward historically. I lean toward Brown's view that the saints were resurrected the day Jesus died but they did not enter into Jerusalem until after Christ's resurrection. Why this is so, Matthew does not explain. Yet, J. W. Wenham's view is possible as well. It is grammatically clumsy, yet it makes better sense historically. Yet, whether one follows Gundry, Brown, or J. W. Wenham, each of their interpretations still connects Jesus' death to the resurrection of the saints. J. W. Wenham's view, which sees the saints rising after Christ's resurrection, still sees the tombs opening on the day of Jesus' death. Even an interpretation that downplays the historicity of these events can still make a connection between Jesus' death and the new age (e.g., Senior), yet this view suffers from not making this connection based on real events (and thus their purpose, which is to point to our future resurrection, is undercut). What is clear is that in his narrative Matthew places the story of the saints rising from the dead in the context of Jesus' death. Thus, no matter how one interprets "after his resurrection," this phrase does not take away from the intended connection between Jesus' death and the resurrection from the dead.

So what was Matthew's theological intent in making this connection? Why does he connect the resurrection of the saints with Jesus' atoning death? The purpose is to reveal the eschatological significance of Jesus' death. His death, along with his resurrection, ushers in the new age. According to Jewish expectation, the resurrection from the dead would not occur until the last day, and so by connecting Jesus' death to the resurrection Matthew shows that the end of the age has already begun to dawn. It is true that resurrections occurred earlier in Jesus' ministry (see 9:18-26; 10:7-8; 11:5), yet these miracles are better viewed as "resuscitations" for those who came back to life later died.

¹³⁰Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 2:1130. For the view that the saints left the tombs on the day of Jesus' death but did not enter Jerusalem until after Christ's resurrection, see also Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 850; D. Wenham, "Resurrection Narratives," 46.

Furthermore, Matthew clearly understood that “*the* resurrection” would not occur until the last day (see 22:28, 30). Yet, the resurrections in verses 51b-53, unlike those earlier in Jesus’ ministry, appear to be more than resuscitations. They appear to be a genuine resurrection.¹³¹

The fact that “many”¹³² were raised at once and raised as a result of Jesus’ death points to something more spectacular. In fact, this event is the only time in Scripture where multiple people are raised from the dead at the same time. Though Matthew does not specifically say, it is likely that he intends for us to understand that these saints were raised unto eternal life and so did not die again. Possibly they were taken to heaven as were Enoch or Elijah. Thus, their resurrection revealed that the end of the age had begun. Bornkamm states, “The point of this element in the story is unquestionably to bring out the eschatological significance of the death of Jesus. By His death the Messianic age is ushered in, and in later Jewish apocalyptic the resurrection of the dead is an integral part of this.”¹³³ Similarly, Hill says, “The same death that crowns the chosen people’s rejection effects as well God’s decisive in-breaking, the earthshaking

¹³¹Waters helpfully points out 3 characteristics of resuscitations in Scripture: (1) three parties are involved (God, the dead person, and the human agent), (2) only one individual is brought back to life, and (3) they later die again (“Matthew 27:52-53 as Apocalyptic Apostrophe,” 493). Since only God was involved in raising the saints in vv. 51b-53 and many were raised (and in particular those who were “asleep;” see 1 Cor 15:51; 1 Thess 4:14-15), Waters believes that the event in vv. 51b-53 was a resurrection not simply a resuscitation (493-94). Calvin agrees, stating, “It is more probable that the life which they received was not afterwards taken from them; for if it had been a mortal life, it would not have been a proof of a perfect resurrection” (*Harmony of the Evangelists*, 325-26). For others who view this as a genuine resurrection, see Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1217; Carson, *Matthew*, 582; Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 2:1132-33; Hill, “Matthew 27:51-53,” 83; contra Keener, *Gospel of Matthew*, 686.

¹³²Gundry argues that the use of “many” here refers to the resurrection of *all* Old Testament saints (*Matthew*, 576). Though πολλός can be used in the sense of “all,” here it means “many” in a more limited sense. Surely, not every Old Testament believer rose and went into Jerusalem, for the effect would have been extraordinary. Furthermore, the resurrection here was only proleptic, pointing ahead to the final resurrection in the future (see Keener, *Gospel of Matthew*, 686; Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, 634-35).

¹³³Bornkamm, “σείω, σεισμός,” 7:200.

beginning of the new age.”¹³⁴ Carson points out that the resurrection of the saints “testifies that the Last Day had dawned.”¹³⁵ Now Matthew does not want us to view this transition in the ages solely in connection with Jesus’ death, and that is where the phrase “after his resurrection” is significant. Since Jesus’ death is followed by his resurrection (chap. 28) and even in these verses there is mention of Jesus’ resurrection (v. 53), these two events, his death and resurrection, serve together as the turning point in salvation history for Matthew.¹³⁶ At his death and resurrection the new age begins even though it overlaps with the old age (see 28:20).¹³⁷

That an earthquake occurred on the day Jesus died points to the eschatological significance of Jesus’ death. It also points to the eschatological significance of his resurrection, for an earthquake occurred during Christ’s resurrection as well (28:2).¹³⁸ Only Matthew mentions these earthquakes in connection with Jesus’ death and resurrection. In the Old Testament earthquakes signified “the theophanic presence of

¹³⁴Hill, “Matthew 27.51-53,” 84.

¹³⁵Carson, *Matthew*, 582. For the eschatological significance of Jesus’ death, see also Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1214; Hutton, “Resurrection of Holy Ones,” 15, 41-48, 55; Senior, *Passion of Jesus in Matthew*, 157; Meier, *Vision of Matthew*, 34-35; Allison, *End of the Ages*, 46; Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, 635; Gurtner, *Torn Veil*, 162-63; Ulrich Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew*, New Testament Theology, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 136; Donald A. Hagner, “Matthew’s Eschatology,” *SBLSP* 35 (1996): 165-66; Scot McKnight, “Matthew, Gospel of,” in *DJG*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 534; contra Witherup, “Cross of Jesus,” 286-88; Troxel, “Matthew 27.51-54 Reconsidered,” 32-33, 39-40.

¹³⁶For a persuasive argument that Jesus’ death and resurrection serve as *the* eschatological event in Matthew and thus signal a definite turning point in salvation history, see John P. Meier, “Salvation-History in Matthew: in Search of a Starting Point,” *CBQ* 37 (1975): 203-15.

¹³⁷With the phrase “after his resurrection” in vv. 51b-53 the priority of Christ’s resurrection is safeguarded. Even though these saints are raised prior to Christ’s resurrection, this is only a proleptic act pointing to the final resurrection—a resurrection that *will* take place after Christ’s resurrection. Furthermore, they did not leave their tombs or enter Jerusalem until Christ himself first arose. Thus, vv. 51b-53 do not undercut the New Testament emphasis on the priority of Christ’s resurrection, though they do uniquely emphasize the importance of Jesus’ life-giving death.

¹³⁸It appears that Matthew intends for these two earthquakes (27:51b; 28:2) to be viewed as separate events and not as the same earthquake (Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, 636).

Yahweh.”¹³⁹ When God appeared on the scene, particularly in judgment, the symbol of an earthquake was used (e.g., Isa 5:25; 13:13; Jer 10:10; Nah 1:5-6). In fact, earthquakes were at times connected to the day of Yahweh and understood to signify that the end had come (e.g., Joel 2:10-11; *I Enoch* 1:6-7; *T. Levi* 4:1; 4 Ezra 6:13-16; 9:1-6).¹⁴⁰ Matthew himself connects the reality of earthquakes with the end of the age (24:7-8), as do other New Testament authors (Heb 12:26; Rev 8:5). This last point is significant. According to Matthew, earthquakes would signal the end of the age, and so by recording that an earthquake took place when Jesus died he was emphasizing the eschatological significance of Jesus’ death. With earthquakes occurring in the same context as resurrections, it is difficult to imagine Matthew not wanting his readers to understand that the new age had begun to dawn.

The Old Testament background for this passage may also support the eschatological significance of Jesus’ death. Though probably more than one Old Testament prophecy finds fulfillment in verses 51b-53 (e.g., Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2), the two most likely candidates are Ezekiel 37:1-14 and Zechariah 14:4-5. Brown argues that Ezekiel 37:12-13 is probably “the key passage” behind Matthew’s text.¹⁴¹ Ezekiel 37:1-14 describes the return of Israel from exile in the metaphorical language of resurrection. Dry bones are turned into a mighty, living army by the Spirit of God. The connections between 27:51-54 and Ezekiel 37:1-14 are readily apparent. Both describe a “shaking”:

¹³⁹M. V. van Pelt and W. C. Kaiser, Jr., “רעש,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 3:1160. For a helpful discussion on earthquakes in the Old Testament, in Jewish apocalyptic literature, and in the New Testament, see Bornkamm, “σειώ, σεισμός,” 7:196-200.

¹⁴⁰Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:341 n. 86; Hutton, “Resurrection of the Holy Ones,” 122-24; Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 2:1121-22; Gurtner, *Torn Veil*, 145 n. 30; John P. Meier, *The Vision of Matthew: Christ, Church and Morality in the First Gospel* (New York: Paulist, 1979), 33; van Pelt and Kaiser, “רעש,” 3:1160; Bornkamm, “σειώ, σεισμός,” 7:198.

¹⁴¹Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 2:1123. For the influence of Ezek 37 on this passage, see also France, *Matthew*, 400-01; Gundry, *Matthew*, 576; Wright, *Resurrection of the Son of God*, 633; Senior, *Passion Narrative*, 320; Meier, *Vision of Matthew*, 34; Hill, “Matthew 27:51-53,” 77-78; Osborne, “Resurrection,” 678.

in Matthew it is an earthquake, whereas in Ezekiel it is the rattling of the bones (37:7). Yet, in the LXX the same word is used for both: σεισμὸς. Both say that the Lord opened graves or tombs and brought the dead out of these graves. Both go on to say that these resurrected ones go into God's land, either the land of Israel or the holy city. In light of these connections, it seems likely that Ezekiel's prophecy influenced Matthew's understanding of these events. Matthew saw the earthquake and the resurrection of the saints as fulfilling this prophecy. However, Allison discounts the influence of Ezekiel 37 and argues for Zechariah 14:4-5 instead.¹⁴² He argues that a return to Israel is not the same as entering into Jerusalem, that if Ezekiel 37 were in mind surely bones would be mentioned, and that the theme of resurrection as vindication is too widespread in Jewish thought to guarantee a connection between these two passages.¹⁴³ He mentions four reasons why verses 51b-53 most likely allude to Zechariah 14:4-5 LXX: (1) both record a resurrection occurring just outside of Jerusalem, (2) both mention an earthquake, (3) both use σκίζω in the passive, and (4) both call those resurrected οἱ ἅγιοι.¹⁴⁴ There are several weaknesses, though, with Allison's view. As France points out, it is not obvious that the Zechariah passage speaks of resurrection, οἱ ἅγιοι most likely refer to angels in Zechariah 14:5, and there is no mention of the Mount of Olives in 27:51-53.¹⁴⁵ If the primary Old Testament background for 27:51-53 is Ezekiel 37:1-14, which seems more likely, then this would support an eschatological emphasis upon Jesus' death in these verses. There is evidence that in the Jewish thought of Jesus' day this prophecy from

¹⁴²Allison, *End of the Ages*, 42-44. See also Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:628-29.

¹⁴³Allison, *End of the Ages*, 43.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., 44.

¹⁴⁵France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1083 n. 47. See also Troxel, "Matt 27.51-4 Reconsidered," 42-43.

Ezekiel was viewed as a prophecy of eschatological resurrection.¹⁴⁶ Yet, if the Zechariah passage was in mind, then that would mean that it was read, as later Jewish interpreters did, as a prediction of the resurrection and thus this background would also support an eschatological emphasis in 27:51b-53.¹⁴⁷

Matthew realized that even after Jesus' death and resurrection the end of the present age had not fully come to an end (28:20). Like other New Testament writers, Matthew saw an overlapping of the ages brought about by Jesus' death and resurrection. We see this in Matthew's view of the kingdom of heaven. According to him, the kingdom is both a present reality (e.g., 12:28; 21:31) and a future hope (e.g., 5:20; 6:10). A foretaste of this future hope is experienced via the resurrection-power of Jesus' death. It is only after his death that the way is open for the Gentiles to enter the kingdom of heaven (27:54; 28:19). Thus, with Jesus' death and resurrection, there is a definite shift in salvation history. The new age has dawned, and the old age will soon come to an end.

Conclusion

This is the final passage in Matthew that highlights the atoning significance of Jesus' death. The torn veil shows that Jesus' death brought an end to the sacrificial system of the Old Testament and resulted in open access to God for all including Gentiles. The resurrection of the saints, which is unique to Matthew, shows that Jesus' death not only addressed the problem of sin but also the problem of death. Jesus' death defeated death, and it also revealed that at that moment the new age arrived though not in

¹⁴⁶Hill states, "In the Judaism of Matthew's day this great prophetic vision of Israel's spiritual renewal was interpreted as a type or symbol of the messianic salvation, of God's inbreaking at the eschaton" ("Matthew 27:51-53," 77). For evidence of early Jewish and Christian interpretations of Ezek 37 in terms of eschatological resurrection, see Hans Clemens Caesarius Cavallin, *Life After Death: Paul's Argument for the Resurrection of the Dead in I Cor 15* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1974), 107; Harald Riesenfeld, *The Resurrection in Ezekiel XXXVII and in the Dura-Europos Paintings* (Uppsala: Lundequists, 1948); Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel Chapters 25-48*, trans. James D. Martin, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 263-64; Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 2:1123; contra Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 567.

¹⁴⁷Allison, *End of the Ages*, 43-44.

its fullness. The old age of sin and death is still present and will be until Jesus returns (28:20), yet even now the last days have arrived and thus even now believers can begin to enjoy the benefits of the kingdom of heaven.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The thesis of this dissertation is that Matthew has a developed understanding of the atonement and that this understanding pervades his Gospel. This understanding is not simply relegated to the passion narrative or to a few verses in his Gospel (e.g., 1:21; 20:28; 26:28). Rather, Matthew emphasizes the significance of Jesus' atoning death throughout his Gospel. Plus, he adds some unique elements himself. It is not that Matthew presents a theory of atonement like one would find in a theological textbook, but he does elaborate on Jesus' atoning death sufficiently to provide an understanding of what Jesus' death accomplished and how. This concluding chapter summarizes my findings regarding the atoning significance of Jesus' death as presented in Matthew's Gospel and then offers a few implications of this study.

Unique Emphases in Matthew

Matthew adds a number of unique elements that provide insight into Jesus' atoning death. He alone begins his Gospel with a divine explanation of Jesus' mission. The angel said to Joseph, "She will give birth to a son, and you will give him the name Jesus for he will save his people from their sins" (1:21). This verse serves as a programmatic statement in Matthew's Gospel. The interesting thing about this verse is that it does not explain *how* Jesus will save his people from their sins. The reader is encouraged by this omission to read Matthew's narrative with the goal of discovering how Jesus provides salvation for his people. By the end of the narrative, the reader discovers that Jesus saves his people from their sins primarily by his atoning death on the cross (20:28; 26:28). Thus, Matthew's Gospel begins with a focus on the cross.

Matthew is the only Evangelist to record John's attempt to prevent Jesus from being baptized. In response to John's attempt, Jesus said, "Allow this to happen now, for thus it is proper for us to fulfill all righteousness" (3:15). Only Matthew records this saying of Jesus. It is the first time Jesus speaks in Matthew's Gospel, and it is the only time δικαιοσύνη ("righteousness") is used in connection with Jesus. Many argue that in Matthew δικαιοσύνη always refers to moral conduct prescribed by God, yet in places it appears that this word is used to speak of God's salvation (e.g., 5:6; 6:33). If so, it is possible that the same meaning is found in 3:15, especially in light of the word used in connection with it. That word is πληρώω ("to fulfill"), which is used predominantly in Matthew to speak of Scriptural fulfillment. It appears, then, that to fulfill all righteousness means to fulfill God's saving plan, a plan revealed in Scripture. This plan culminated with Jesus' death on the cross (26:24, 54, 56). Thus, Matthew's unique phrase about fulfilling all righteousness alludes to Jesus' atoning death on the cross.

After Jesus was baptized he began his ministry of teaching and healing. Matthew alone records how Jesus' healing ministry fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy about the Servant of the Lord. He quotes from Isaiah 53:4 and says that Jesus fulfilled this verse by healing people (8:17). This is the only time in his Gospel where he explicitly quotes from Isaiah 53. His quotation comes from a place in Isaiah 53 that does not speak of atoning for sin, and he uses it in a context that deals with Jesus' healing ministry rather than his death. Thus, it looks to some that Matthew used this verse as a proof-text and did not use it to refer to Jesus' atoning death. In contrast to this view, I think that Matthew quoted from this verse in light of the context of Isaiah 53, which speaks of how the Servant atoned for sin. Plus, I think that Matthew placed this quote in his narrative in light of where his Gospel ended, namely, with the sacrificial death of Jesus. Since there is a close connection in Matthew between sin and sickness (9:1-8), it is misguided to separate strictly between healing sickness and forgiving sin. Thus, just as Jesus forgave sins in light of his atoning death (26:28), so he healed bodies in light of that death as well.

Jesus healed people of their sickness because he would later atone for their sin, the very cause of their sickness. When one adds to this the many allusions to Isaiah 53 in Matthew—allusions that occur in connection with Jesus' death, it appears that Matthew understood Jesus to fulfill Isaiah 53:4 not just in his healing ministry, but in his atoning death as well.

Another unique contribution to atonement theology made by Matthew is the recording of Jesus' statement about being greater than the temple (12:6). This statement is not found in the other Gospels. It occurs in the context of a controversy over the Sabbath. To say he was greater than the temple implies that Jesus will replace the temple as the unique means of atonement. This interpretation is supported by a number of factors in the immediate context as well as in Matthew as a whole. Following Jesus' statement about being greater than the temple is the quotation from Hosea 6:6 where God says that he does not desire sacrifice (12:7). Throughout chapter 12 there is a typological theme where Jesus is said to be greater than David (vv. 3-4), greater than the temple (v. 6), greater than Jonah (v. 41), and greater than Solomon (v. 42). Jesus is greater than all of these Old Testament people or institutions because he is their perfect fulfillment. This typological theme suggests that Jesus is greater than the temple in the sense that he fulfills the intended role of the temple. Matthew's Gospel supports this conclusion. The functions of the temple are taken over by Jesus: the presence of God is mediated through Jesus (1:23) and the forgiveness of sins is based on his sacrificial death (26:28). Furthermore, with his death the destruction of the temple was foreshadowed with the tearing of the temple veil (27:51). Thus, Matthew shows even before the passion narrative that Jesus is greater than the temple: he is the new temple where God can be found and forgiveness can be received.

During the Last Supper, Jesus took the cup and said, "For this is my blood of the [new] covenant that is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (26:28). This may be Matthew's most important contribution to atonement theology. He is the only

Evangelist to add the phrase “for the forgiveness of sins” to the cup saying (cf. Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20). Plus, he alone leaves out the connection between John’s baptism and the forgiveness of sins (cf. Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). Thus, Matthew makes an unmistakable connection between Jesus’ death and the forgiveness of sins. This verse is also significant in revealing *how* Jesus saved his people from their sins. After 1:21, the word σῶζω is not used again in connection with ἁμαρτία (“sin”). Yet, every place where ἁμαρτία is used in Matthew it is used in relation to the forgiveness of sins (3:6; 9:2, 5-6; 12:31; 26:28). Thus, we can deduce from this fact that to save from sins involving forgiving sins. And the way forgiveness of sins is provided for in Matthew’s Gospel is by Jesus’ atoning death. Thus, by the time we reach 26:28 we realize that Jesus saves his people from their sins by his sacrificial death on the cross.

A final unique emphasis in Matthew occurs after Jesus’ death on the cross (27:51b-53). Matthew alone records that an earthquake occurred after Jesus’ death and that saints were resurrected from the dead and entered Jerusalem after his resurrection. There are a number of thorny issues related to this passage, yet theologically it emphasizes the life-giving power of Jesus’ death. His death signals the end of this age and the dawning of the age to come. What is unique about Matthew is not just the recording of the earthquake and resurrected saints in connection with Jesus’ death, but that these saints were resurrected at the time of Jesus’ death rather than after his resurrection. This is a unique emphasis not just in the Gospels but in the New Testament as a whole. It clearly emphasizes the resurrection-power of Jesus’ death and its connection with the age to come.

The Suffering Servant of Isaiah

Matthew views Jesus’ ministry and death in light of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah. This allusion to the Servant is evident already at Jesus’ baptism. After Jesus was baptized by John, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well

pleased” (3:17). Most scholars see an allusion in this statement to Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1. Thus, at his baptism Jesus is commissioned to fulfill the role of Messiah and Servant of the Lord. Most likely, these two roles were combined in Jesus’ understanding. Concerning Isaiah 42:1, there are a number of factors that support this allusion in 3:17. First, Matthew quotes from this same passage later, a passage that happens to be his longest Old Testament quotation (Isa 42:1-4 in 12:17-21). Second, as in Isaiah 42:1, the baptismal episode speaks of the Spirit who came down upon Jesus to empower him in his mission (3:16; cf. 12:28). Since the mission of Isaiah’s Servant involved atoning for the sins of his people (Isa 53), this allusion at Jesus’ baptism hints that he is commissioned not simply to do miracles but to atone for sins by his death on the cross.

In 8:17, Matthew actually quotes from Isaiah 53. This quotation is his only one from this chapter. Though he connects Isaiah 53:4 with Jesus’ healing ministry, this does not mean that Matthew failed to understand Jesus as the fulfillment of the Suffering Servant in his death. The cause of sickness is sin; so even his healings were done in light of his upcoming, atoning death. Furthermore, Matthew alludes to Isaiah 53 in connection with Jesus’ death numerous times in his Gospel. The use of παραδίδομι in the passion predictions (17:22; 20:18-19) probably alludes to Isaiah 53:6, 12 LXX, where the same word is used 3 times and used in a similar context. The use of πολλῶν (“many”) in the ransom saying, which occurs in the context of substitution, probably alludes to Isaiah 53:11-12 LXX. The same would be true of 26:28. Jesus was silent before the Sanhedrin (26:63) and before Pilate (27:12, 14). This silence points to his role as the Servant, who like a sheep did not open his mouth in protest (Isa 53:7). Two criminals were crucified with Jesus in 27:38, and this may allude to Isaiah 53:12 where it says that the Servant was “numbered with the transgressors.” Jesus was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, who was a rich man. Matthew alone refers to Joseph as a “rich man” (27:57), which probably points to an intentional allusion to Isaiah 53:9, which states, “He was appointed a grave with the wicked and the rich in his death.”

The likelihood of at least most of these allusions is strengthened by the fact that Matthew clearly understood Jesus' role in light of Isaiah's Servant (8:17; 12:17-21). It is interesting that all of these allusions to Isaiah 53 occur in contexts dealing with Jesus' death. This observation shows that Matthew saw Jesus' death as the ultimate fulfillment of his role as the Suffering Servant of Isaiah. It is true that Jesus began to fulfill this role in his ministry (8:17), yet even his ministry was accomplished in light of his atoning death. And as Isaiah 53 makes clear, his death would be substitutionary and atoning. He would die in place of his people, and by doing so, would atone for their sins.

A Substitutionary Sacrifice

Matthew repeatedly presents Jesus' death in substitutionary terms. He died in our place to provide the forgiveness of sins. In fact, Matthew often presents Jesus' death as the object of God's wrath. Thus, he bore God's wrath and judgment on our behalf so that we could be forgiven of our sins. Already in Jesus' baptism this emphasis is apparent. Jesus underwent a baptism of repentance not for his own sin but for the sin of his people. Just as Jesus identified with his people in going down to Egypt and returning to Israel (2:13-15) and in being tempted for forty days in the wilderness (4:1-11), so he identified with them in his baptism.

The use of $\delta\epsilon\iota$ in 16:21 speaks of Scriptural necessity. Jesus' death was not an accident; it was in accordance with the Father's plan. Jesus' death fulfilled Scriptures like Daniel 7 and Isaiah 53. It is likely that the use of $\pi\alpha\rho\alpha\delta\acute{\iota}\delta\omega\mu\iota$ in 17:22 and 20:18-19 alludes to Daniel 7:25 and Isaiah 53:6, 12 LXX. Isaiah 53 certainly speaks of vicarious atonement, yet Daniel 7 may as well. Only the saints suffer in Daniel 7, yet since Jesus viewed himself as a ransom given in place of many, it is likely that he understood that he must undergo suffering in place of the saints. Thus, his death would be substitutionary. In 20:19, Jesus is handed over to the Gentiles. In light of how this concept is used in the Old Testament, it probably refers to Jesus as the object of God's wrath and judgment. He

faced this judgment not for his own sin but for ours. The same substitutionary emphasis is found in the ransom saying (20:28). The preposition ἀντί (“in place of”) carries the idea of substitution as does the word λύτρον (“ransom”). Jesus gave his life as a ransom in our place securing our freedom from sin’s enslavement.

When predicting how his disciples would all forsake him, Jesus quoted from Zechariah 13:7. He said, “You will all desert me on this very night, for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered’” (26:31). The interesting thing about Matthew’s quotation is the change from the imperative (“strike”) to the first person indicative (“I will strike”). Thus, there is a clear emphasis on God’s role in striking Jesus on the cross. And in light of Zechariah’s context, Jesus’ death would result in cleansing and salvation (Zech 12:10; 13:1, 7-9). Jesus’ death provided cleansing for sin, for he died under God’s judgment to atone for sin. Since Jesus died in our place and was struck by God for us, we can now be forgiven and saved.

Before being arrested, Jesus prayed in Gethsemane agonizing over the fate that awaited him. He prayed that if it were possible that God would remove the cup from him. This cup referred to God’s wrath and judgment against sin. It was not that Jesus was simply afraid to die; he was terrified to face God’s unmitigated judgment on the cross. Yet, Jesus accepted God’s will and drank the cup of his wrath in full. While hanging on the cross, the religious leaders mocked Jesus by saying, “He saved others, but he cannot save himself” (27:42). It is significant that at the cross Matthew uses the word σῶζω 4 times (27:40, 42 [2x], 49). The reader would be reminded of the angel’s statement that Jesus would save (σῶζω) his people from their sins (1:21). Thus, it appears that the use of σῶζω at the cross is a hint that Jesus ultimately saves his people by dying for their sins. That seems to be the point made in 27:42. Jesus could not save himself and save others at the same time because the way he saved others was by giving his life as a ransom in place of many (20:28). Jesus saved us by not saving himself. He died in our place.

At the cross darkness covered all the land for three hours (27:45). The darkness may have symbolized various things, but it seems certain that it symbolized God's judgment. That judgment was not simply directed toward those who crucified God's Son, but also toward Jesus himself, the sin-bearer. The cry of dereliction supports this interpretation (27:46), for in response to the darkness Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus did not simply feel forsaken; he was forsaken by God in the sense that God's judgment rested upon him. He was judged for our sin. The events that took place at the cross, thus, show that Jesus died as a substitute. He bore God's wrath on our behalf so that we could be forgiven and saved.

The Results of Jesus' Atoning Death

Jesus' death resulted in the forgiveness of sins (26:28). This unique Matthean addition emphasizes that Jesus' death purchased our forgiveness from God. Forgiveness is not connected to John's ministry nor is it connected to the temple. Rather, forgiveness is found in Jesus and is based on his sacrificial death. In fact, Jesus' death inaugurates the new covenant. Though it is debated whether 26:28 refers to "the *new* covenant," a persuasive case can be made for this being the original reading. Even if it is not the original reading, the context itself points to the new covenant. Matthew mentions the forgiveness of sins in connection with this covenant, and forgiveness was one of the main benefits of the new covenant (Jer 31:34).

Jesus' death provided salvation for his people (1:21). Salvation certainly involved the forgiveness of sins, but it was not limited to forgiveness. In light of the drastic nature of sin in Matthew's Gospel, to save from sins would mean more than forgiveness. It would speak of being released from sin's power. This emphasis fits with how Jesus spoke of his death in 20:28, where he refers to it as a "ransom." A ransom is a price paid to release a prisoner or slave. Thus, Jesus' death released us from the prison of our sin.

Jesus' death provided open access to God. Matthew makes this clear in the tearing of the temple veil, which occurred after Jesus' death (27:51). The veil torn was probably the inner veil, the veil that separated the holy of holies from the holy place. The aorist passive and the fact that the veil was torn from top to bottom reveal that God was the one who tore this veil in response to Jesus' death. The tearing of the veil symbolizes the temple's coming destruction and open access to God for all including Gentiles. The Gentile confession following these events supports this interpretation (27:54). Thus, with forgiveness of sins provided, Jesus' death also allows for restored, open fellowship with God. Access to God is based on Jesus' atoning death.

Finally, Jesus' death resulted in eschatological life. In response to Jesus' death, an earthquake took place and saints were resurrected from the dead. Both of these events were eschatological events, and thus they signaled the dawning of the new age. Eschatological events occurring at Jesus' death shows that his death serves as a turning point in salvation history. Salvation is found in Jesus and his death, not in the temple. This salvation is available to all including Gentiles (27:54; 28:19). Not only does Jesus' death provide the forgiveness of sins and open fellowship with God; it grants new life—eschatological life. Jesus' death has the power to raise the dead. As hopefully one can see, Matthew has a strong understanding of the saving significance of Jesus' death, and he has made this clear throughout his Gospel.

Implications

The implications of this study are twofold. First, in terms of scholarly research, my dissertation will hopefully prevent future studies on Jesus' atoning death or on Matthew's theology from neglecting what Matthew has to offer to atonement theology in the New Testament. No longer can it be said that Matthew simply borrowed material from Mark or that he only emphasized Jesus' atoning death in a few verses or in the passion narrative. Matthew's entire Gospel will have to be examined when it comes to

Jesus' atoning death. Second, in terms of pastoral implications, my work will benefit preachers and teachers (as well as laypersons) in understanding that our salvation is based on Jesus' substitutionary death where he bore God's wrath in our place. Knowledge of Jesus' atoning death, as presented in Matthew, results in great peace and security in our relationship with God. We are saved from our sins, not by moral effort but by the atoning blood of Jesus. The result of this understanding is not only peace, but great praise to God. God is the one who offered Jesus as our sacrifice, and thus he is worthy of our praise and adoration.

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ABSTRACT

ATONEMENT IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

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This dissertation examines the theme of atonement in Matthew's Gospel in order to determine if Matthew had a developed understanding of the atonement and if this understanding pervaded his Gospel. Chapter 1 provides a review of previous research. This review demonstrates the need for a thorough study on atonement in Matthew's Gospel.

Chapter 2 examines two significant atonement-related passages that occur prior to the passion narrative. The first passage reveals that Jesus' mission is to save his people from their sins, a mission that he accomplishes by his sacrificial death. The second passage shows that the cross is in view even at Jesus' baptism and commission.

Chapter 3 looks at two more passages that occur prior to the passion narrative. In the first passage Matthew presents Jesus as the Suffering Servant, who fulfills this role initially in his healing ministry but ultimately in his sacrificial death. In the second passage Matthew reveals that Jesus is greater than the temple: by his death he replaces the temple as the unique means of atonement.

Chapter 4 explores key passages leading up to the passion narrative. The passion predictions are more theologically developed than generally realized. The ransom saying, though taken from Mark, reveals Matthew's emphasis on Jesus' atoning death.

Chapter 5 examines passages in the passion narrative. In these passages Matthew presents Jesus' death as the inauguration of the new covenant and the means of

forgiveness. Jesus' death results in the forgiveness of sins because he endures God's wrath and judgment in our place.

Chapter 6 reviews passages in the passion narrative that deal with what happened during Jesus' death and after it. Events that took place while Jesus died reveal that his death was a substitutionary sacrifice for our sin. Events that took place after he died present him as the means of open access to God and show that his death had life-giving power.

Chapter 7 sums up the findings presented in this dissertation. It highlights unique emphases in Matthew's Gospel related to atonement. It also emphasizes that Jesus' death was substitutionary in nature and salvific in its effect.

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