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## The Death of Jesus as Atonement for Sin

The teaching of Jesus' death as atonement for sin has received renewed attention recently in biblical and theological studies. Some of this attention has been in reaction to the omnipresent mantra of critical scholarship that such teaching was a later creation of the church in order to provide a more suitable interpretation of the death of Jesus. Both the Symposium on Exegetical Theology and the Symposium on the Lutheran Confessions at Fort Wayne, held in January 2008, took up the challenge of engaging this debate. The four articles in this issue were first delivered as papers during these symposia.

David Scaer addresses the tendency of Lutherans to see atonement as a doctrine easily separated from—and less important than—justification. He demonstrates the intimate interrelationship and interdependence of these doctrines as well as the current challenges being issued against a proclamation of the atonement that is faithful to the teaching of the Scriptures, especially of Jesus in the Gospels. The remaining three articles each focus on the atonement as proclaimed in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John respectively. Jeffrey Gibbs, author of the recently published Concordia Commentary on Matthew 1-10, explores the variety of texts in which Matthew proclaims the atonement. In addition to his emphasis on Jesus' substitutionary role as the New Israel, Gibbs gives significant attention to showing how Matthew proclaims the death of Jesus as the eschatological visitation of the Father's divine wrath over all sin. The article by Peter Scaer introduces us to some of the modern debate and then focuses on the teaching of atonement in Mark. Not only does he review the traditional texts proclaiming atonement (especially Mark 10:45), but he also probes how Jesus (and subsequently Mark) use the Lord's Supper and Baptism in order to proclaim Jesus' death as atonement. My article addresses the challenge that the fourth evangelist does not understand Jesus' death as atonement for sin by demonstrating ways in which this Gospel proclaims atonement that are in concert with the more explicit atonement teaching in 1 John.

Debate about the atonement in our circles used to center around the legitimacy of proclaiming the atonement also according to the *Christus Victor* model rather than strictly using the more familiar Anselmic model. Much more is at stake in the current debate. We hope these articles will help readers to ground their teaching of the death of Jesus as atonement for sin in the very Gospels that narrate our Lord's exemplary life lived and laid down in our stead to pay for the world's sin and conquer our foes, death and Satan.

Charles A. Gieschen  
Associate Editor

## The Son of God and the Father's Wrath: Atonement and Salvation in Matthew's Gospel

Jeffrey A. Gibbs

In this study on atonement and salvation in Matthew, I want to begin with a completely obvious comment and then return to it at the end. The obvious comment has two parts, and the first part is this: Matthew's Gospel is about Jesus and what he does, as we read in Matthew 1:1: "The book of the origin of Jesus."<sup>1</sup> The second part of the obvious comment follows quickly, also in chapter 1, when the angel declares to Joseph, "You will call his name 'Jesus,' for he himself will save his people from their sin" (Matt 1:21). The Hebrew equivalent for the Greek name "Jesus" is, of course, related to the Hebrew verb "to save."<sup>2</sup> The name signifies the work, and this is what the Gospel of Matthew is about: Jesus who will save. We will return to this promise at the end, but here I want to assert that "salvation" is not *exhausted* by the concept of "atonement" or "forgiveness." I will offer a few comments in this regard at the end of the essay.

The task at hand, however, is to investigate the concept of the atonement in Matthew. Traditionally, "atonement" theology has to do with the doctrine of the vicarious work of Christ, his saving deeds done in the stead and in the place of others. The Gospel of Matthew delights in proclaiming such a substitutionary work, and that in very large strokes. To be sure, there are specific words of the Lord Jesus that declare that his death has atoning significance. These sayings, such as Matthew 20:28 and 26:28, are well-known and have received much attention. This essay, however, will focus on larger strokes in Matthew's narrative, following a straightforward, three-part presentation. The first part will examine Matthew's theology of Jesus as the "replacement" or "substitute" Son of God, the summation and representative of the nation of Israel. The second part will examine the significance of the death of Jesus in Matthew. The

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<sup>1</sup> The translation of the term *γένεσις* in Matthew 1:1 and 1:17 is debated; see Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1-11:1*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 71-72.

<sup>2</sup> See the discussion in R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 53.

third part will then briefly examine two key texts (Matt 20:28 and 26:28) in light of these larger themes.

### I. The Son in Place of the Son: Jesus as the Summation and Substitute for Israel

Traditional Christians who confess the ecumenical creeds are inclined to invest a particular meaning in the simple sentence, "Jesus is the Son of God." That meaning, of course, is the truth that for Jesus to be "God's Son" means that he is fully "God of God, Light of Light." Without meaning in any way to suggest that Matthew does not proclaim this truth, we would be missing the Matthean mark if we were to limit our understanding of Jesus as God's Son to this creedal teaching. In light of Old Testament (OT) backgrounds and by means of his own remarkable hermeneutic, the first evangelist invests the identity of Jesus as God's Son with a meaning that is vicarious at its very core. Three texts early in the Gospel's story proclaim this truth: the flight into Egypt (Matt 2:14-15), the Baptism of Jesus (Matt 3:13-17), and the temptation in the wilderness (Matt 4:1-11). Each presents a vicarious "Son of God" Christology.

#### *The Flight into Egypt (Matt 2:14-15)*

Matthew 2:14-15 reads as follows: "And he (Joseph) got up and took the child and his mother during the night, and he departed into Egypt and he was there until Herod's death in order that the thing that was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled saying, 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'" As is well known, the citation within this text is from Hosea 11:1, which translates readily from the Hebrew, "For Israel was a youth and I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." The Septuagint (LXX) follows the Masoretic Text (MT) closely, with the noteworthy exception of reading at the end, "out of Egypt I called his children." Matthew has hewn closely to the Hebrew text which, in its context, is referring to the Exodus from Egypt. As is common in OT texts that refer to the Exodus, Hosea 11:1 refers in the singular to the nation as God's "son" (see especially Exod 4:22 and Deut 8:5).<sup>3</sup> In the context of Hosea, however, the prophet refers to God's "son" at the time of the Exodus only to contrast that earlier, constituting event with Israel's later apostasy: "The more they

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<sup>3</sup> Although not widely acknowledged, it is a fact that OT texts refer to the nation of Israel as God's "son" more often than to any other person or entity. Along with Exodus 4:22 and Deuteronomy 8:5, one can refer to Jeremiah 3:4, 19; 38:19-20; cf. also Deuteronomy 1:31; 32:6; Jeremiah 6:26. See also G. Fohrer, "υἱός, υἱοθεσία," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 8:340-354, esp. 351.

were called, the more they went away; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols" (Hos 11:2 ESV).

If the original context of Hosea is referring to the *nation* as God's son, and Matthew 2 claims that *Jesus'* movement to and back from Egypt "fulfills" Hosea 11:1, in what sense can this be true? It is widely acknowledged that Matthew is employing a typological hermeneutic. The first Exodus by the nation, God's "son," was an anticipation of a second, greater "Exodus" by Jesus, God's true and greater Son.<sup>4</sup> This view is a commonplace in Matthean studies, and it results in this conclusion: Matthew is proclaiming that Jesus, God's Son, is the embodiment, the summation, the singular representative of the nation of Israel and of her history. He is, in the familiar phrase, Israel reduced to one.<sup>5</sup> Jesus is the Son of God.

### *The Baptism of Jesus (Matt 3:13-17)*

The second unit that presents a vicarious sonship theology is Matthew's account of Jesus' Baptism in 3:13-17. Recall the verses that lead up to the well-known event. John the Baptizer has begun his ministry, calling Israel to repentance. The response is astounding; Jerusalem and all Judea and all of the region surrounding the Jordan come out. Israel is streaming out to John and being baptized by him as they confess their sins (Matt 3:1-6). In response to the unrepentant religious leaders, however, John proclaims the coming judgment of the Mightier One. On the Last Day he will winnow the grain, separating wheat from chaff (Matt 3:7-12). And John is right about the Mightier One, for John speaks as the voice of Isaiah

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<sup>4</sup> See the important discussion of R. T. France, "The Formula-Quotations of Matthew 2 and the Problem of Communication," *New Testament Studies* 27 (1981): 233-251. He comments on the citation of Hosea 11:1 at Matthew 2:15 that "we have both a surface meaning based on the central geographical term and also a variety of christological implications available to those with the scriptural knowledge and perceptiveness to dig deeper into Matthew's purpose"; see "The Formula-Quotations of Matthew 2," 244. Ulrich Luz oddly both acknowledges Matthew's typological hermeneutic and also avers that Matthew does not recognize that he has misunderstood Hosea 11:1 as a prediction; see *Matthew 1-7: A Continental Commentary*, trans. Wilhelm C. Linss (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 146. It is hard to see how both of Luz's statements about Matthew could be true. In contrast to Luz, W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison reject the view that Matthew was "naively oblivious to the switch in referents when he applied Hosea 11.1 to Jesus, not to the people." They, too, perceive a typological understanding of Jesus "in the place of the nation." See *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3 vols., International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 1:263.

<sup>5</sup> On Jesus as Israel, see the marvelous discussion in David E. Holwerda, *Jesus and Israel: One Covenant or Two?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 31-58.

40, and he is the promised manifestation of Elijah of old (cf. Matt 11:7–15). John is right about the Mighty Judge. Then that Judge shows up for the purpose of being baptized, and John cannot accept it. He actually tries to hinder Jesus from doing what he wants to do.<sup>6</sup> Jesus, whose very name says what he will do, explains, “Allow it now, for to fulfill righteousness in this way is fitting for us” (Matt 3:15). John, then, allows it, and Jesus is baptized.

What was John’s problem? It was the utter contradiction between what he had proclaimed about Jesus as Mighty Judge and what John had proclaimed about the Baptism that he himself was administering. John’s Baptism was for people who needed to repent and confess their sins. Although there is no explicit statement about the sinlessness of Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel (presumably this is John’s problem), he knows and believes that the Mighty Judge does not need to repent. But Jesus’ answer is at least sufficient for John to acquiesce. So we have to inquire, however briefly, as to the meaning of Jesus’ words to John in Matthew 3:15.<sup>7</sup>

“Allow it now.” Acknowledging John’s confusion, Jesus teaches him that *now*, in the present time of the reign of God, this is how it will be. I would argue that Jesus’ words are implicitly acknowledging that *then*, on the final great day of judgment, it will be as John was preaching. The reign of God, however, has come, now, in the present time, in a strange and paradoxical way.<sup>8</sup>

“It is fitting for us.” Together, Jesus and John will do something that is fitting, something that fits. This deed will reveal the course of how God will be a gracious, saving king.<sup>9</sup> The action of Jesus being baptized corresponds in a profound way with the entire shape of Jesus’ ministry.

<sup>6</sup> The verb *διεκόλωθεν* is a classic example of how context can lend a conative force (“he tried to hinder”) to an imperfect indicative. John tried to hinder—but it did not work!

<sup>7</sup> The interpretation of Jesus’ words in 3:15 is greatly debated. See Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:325–327, for a summary of seven general positions.

<sup>8</sup> The term “now” (*ἄρτι*) occurs seven times in Matthew. Three times (23:39, 26:29, 26:64) it occurs in the phrase, “from now” (*ἀπ’ ἄρτι*), and refers to a specific moment in time. Twice the term alone refers to a specific moment (9:18, 26:5). Once, the phrase is applied to a key moment in salvation history, “From the days of John the Baptist until now” (11:12). I suggest that a similar salvation-historical significance accompanies Jesus’ words to John in 3:15. For the theme of God’s unexpected ways in Christ’s manifestation of the reign of God, see Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1–11:1*, 209.

<sup>9</sup> The plural pronoun “for us” (*ἡμῖν*) underscores the salvation-historical nature of what is happening at Jesus’ Baptism. This is not just something for Jesus to do; John plays his role as well, as the forerunner.

"To fulfill all righteousness." In Matthew's Gospel, "to fulfill" possesses virtually a technical meaning. It means "to enact the scriptural plan of salvation." It means "to do the deeds planned long ago by God." It means "complete the story."<sup>10</sup> If this is the meaning of "fulfill," then "righteousness" in Matthew 3:15 also likely has a salvation-historical sense, as it often does in the Psalms and in Isaiah, and as it also does elsewhere in Matthew.<sup>11</sup> "Righteousness" in the OT is often paralleled with "salvation"; Psalm 71 is a parade example. The sense of Jesus' words to John, then, will be something like this: "Allow this strange thing *now*, John, for this will be a fitting event in how God's plan of salvation is being carried out." So Jesus goes down into the place of sinners. He assumes the posture of sinners. He goes down into the water, into the place where John has summoned Israel to go. He is literally standing in the place of Israel.

Heaven responds in double fashion. Look! The Spirit descends, showing that Jesus is the Servant of Isaiah 42, the one upon whom God puts his Spirit (cf. Matt 12:18-21). And look, a voice comes from heaven and declares the identity of Jesus: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased" (Matt 3:17). It is common in New Testament (NT) studies to find here an allusion to Psalm 2:7, "You are my son, today I have begotten you." I have elsewhere argued directly against this view and for a more likely allusion to Jeremiah 31 (LXX Jeremiah 38).<sup>12</sup> This is a chapter that Matthew knows well; he has already cited it the "Rachel weeping" passage in 2:18. Matthew probably also alludes in 26:28 to the "new covenant" of Jeremiah 31. Note well: the phrase "beloved son" (ἀγαπητός υἱός) occurs in the LXX in only two places. The first is the binding of Isaac in Gen 22, a text which is not in view here in Matthew 3. The second occurrence of "beloved son," however, occurs in Matthew's well-known LXX Jeremiah 38, where the nation of Israel is referred to as God's "beloved son."

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<sup>10</sup> Davies and Allison conclude that the phrase "to fulfill all righteousness" "refers to Jesus fulfilling prophecy. . . . So when Jesus fulfils all righteousness, he is fulfilling Scripture." See *Matthew*, 1:326.

<sup>11</sup> The study of Benno Przybylski, *Righteousness in Matthew and His World of Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press: 1980) has been extremely influential in its conclusion that "righteousness" in Matthew always refers to ethical conduct. However, he neglects the influence of Old Testament backgrounds. Donald A. Hagner rightly takes issue with Przybylski when he says, "No writer is obligated to use a word consistently; the meaning of a word must be determined from its immediate context. . . . [T]here is no reason to exclude the possibility that [Matthew] can understand δικαιοσύνη here not as moral goodness but as the will of God in the sense of God's saving activity." See *Matthew* 1-13, *Word Biblical Commentary* 33A (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 56.

<sup>12</sup> Jeffrey A. Gibbs, "Israel Standing with Israel: The Baptism of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel (Matt 3:13-17)," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 64 (2002): 511-526.

Matthew has already proclaimed that Jesus is God's Son in that he is the summation and substitute and representative of Israel, God's son (see above on Matt 2:15). That same "Jesus as Israel reduced to one" theology is also at the heart of the Father's words from heaven, and it is central to the meaning of Jesus' Baptism. If this is the case, then Jesus' Baptism is *truly fitting*, for it reveals the shape of his entire ministry as God's Son. He has come as the summation, the representative of the nation, as Israel. In his Baptism, then, he is "Israel standing with Israel," down in the water, down in the place of sinners where only he should not be standing. This is fitting because he has come to be in the place of sinners. The Baptism of Jesus shows the vicarious character of his entire ministry.<sup>13</sup> Jesus is the Son of God.

### *The Temptation in the Wilderness (Matt 4:1-11)*

We may take a more rapid glance now at the third "Son of God" text that follows immediately on the heels of the second, namely, Jesus' temptation in the wilderness (Matt 4:1-11). Key to the unit, of course, is the identity of Jesus as God's Son, and specifically, what "kind" of son Jesus will be. Satan's attacks posit a certain understanding, namely, that God's Son will either have power to use for his own needs or that God's Son will find unfailing protection from the Father regardless of the situation. In the final temptation, although "son" is not mentioned, the essence of "sonship" is surely present. A true son is obedient, subordinating his own will and wishes to that of his father. So perhaps one can summarize the import of the third satanic attack like this: To whom will you subordinate your will and wishes? Whose son are you going to be?

Jesus, of course, holds fast to his identity as God's Son. Most importantly for the present discussion, he does so in the wilderness while quoting from Deuteronomy 8 and 6, in which Moses recounts how Israel's time in the wilderness was a time when the nation failed, refusing to be the "son" that God had called them to be:

And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. Your clothing did not wear out on

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<sup>13</sup> Craig S. Keener aptly comments, "This baptism hence represents Jesus' ultimate identification with Israel at the climactic stage in her history: confessing her sins to prepare for the kingdom (3:2,6). Jesus' baptism, like his impending death (cf. Mk10:38-39 with Mk 14:23-24, 36), would be vicarious, embraced on behalf of others with whom the Father called him to identify." See *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 132.



you and your foot did not swell these forty years. Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the Lord your God disciplines you." (Deut 8:3-5 ESV)

In the place where Israel, God's son, failed, however, now Jesus-Israel succeeds. Importantly, this is God's plan for him thus to be attacked by Satan, for Jesus was led up into the desert *by the Spirit*, in order to be tempted *by the devil* (Matt 4:1). Jesus, God's Son, prevails where Israel, God's son, failed. In the desert, Jesus is the champion in the place of the people of God. Jesus is the Son of God.

### **Summary: Jesus as Israel**

Early in his Gospel, then, Matthew establishes a representative, vicarious meaning to the declaration, "Jesus is the Son of God." As I indicated briefly before, let me say that this "Israel" meaning does not exhaust the meaning of Son of God Christology in Matthew. As one reads other texts where Jesus is acknowledged as Son of God, for instance, one does not always find this corporate meaning. In the second storm-stilling scene (Matt 14:22-33), for instance, I have not been able to find Jesus portrayed as "Israel" there; rather, he is the Creator who has power to walk on the waves and to still the storm. Accordingly, one should not woodenly read every "son of God" text in Matthew and find exactly the same nuance.

Nevertheless, it seems certain that Matthew expects his hearers and readers to take this remarkable "Israel-Christology" with them as they read his Gospel. We, too, will return to it, content at this point to acknowledge that as the Son of God, Jesus has come to sum up the people of God, to represent them, to stand with them and identify himself with them, and to be their champion.

## **II. The Death of Jesus in Matthew: The Father Strikes His Son**

We turn now to the second major part of the presentation, that is, the meaning of Jesus' death in Matthew's Gospel. Four texts will receive brief attention because of their contribution to the atonement theology that is so important in Matthew's story of Jesus: Matthew 16:21-23, 26:31, 26:36-46, and 27:45-54.

### ***The Divine Necessity of Jesus' Death (Matt 16:21-23)***

As has been argued strongly by Jack Dean Kingsbury and a number of his students (including me), the Gospel of Matthew makes its second major

turn at 16:21.<sup>14</sup> Repeating precisely the Greek wording of 4:17, Matthew writes ἀπὸ τότε ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς, “From then, Jesus began” to show to his disciples the necessity of his suffering, death, and resurrection. For the first time in the narrative, the *telos* of Jesus’ own ministry is out in the open. As Peter immediately demonstrates, this is a goal that is impossible to comprehend within the categories of Second Temple Judaism and its eschatological, messianic expectation. Peter’s remonstrance, however, provides a valuable window into the significance of Jesus’ coming suffering and death in Jerusalem.

I would like to focus on a question of translation, and specifically on how to render Peter’s rebuke of Jesus in 16:22, ἰλεώς σοι κύριε. To set up the discussion, recall the obvious sequence of the unit. Jesus, for the first time, begins to show the *necessity* (δεῖ) — presumably the *divine necessity* — of his rejection, suffering, death, and resurrection in Jerusalem. Peter rejects this divine necessity and seeks to substitute his own plan, his own understanding of what Jesus should do. Jesus’ rejoinder to Peter is direct and savage: “Get behind me, Satan!” (Matt 16:23). Peter’s words reveal a merely human way of thinking, rather than the divine perspective.

What does Peter say? Literally, he says, “Merciful to you, Lord.” The scholarly literature seems to choose between one of two positions on how to understand this cryptic or elliptical statement by Peter. The first position is represented by most, if not all, the English translations: “Far be it from you, Lord” (ESV; cf. KJV), “Never, Lord” (NIV), and “God forbid, Lord” (RSV). This is the preference of Blass-Debrunner-Funk, and other commentators follow their lead.<sup>15</sup> The assumption here is that the two-word phrase “merciful to you” (ἰλεώς σοι) is the equivalent of the Hebrew interjection “may it never be!” (הֲלִי־לָהּ). The Hebrew term occurs twenty-one times in the OT, and in four instances the LXX renders it with “merciful [ἰλεώς] to X.” So, clearly it is possible that Peter’s words are a fervent interjection but nothing more specific.

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<sup>14</sup> Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 7–24, and Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1–11:1*, 38–47.

<sup>15</sup> F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and trans. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 128.5 [hereafter BDF]. See also Nigel Turner, *Syntax*, vol. III, in James Hope Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1963), 309, and Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:662.

The other way of translating Peter's response to Jesus in 16:22 is represented by BDAG and others.<sup>16</sup> In this understanding, Peter's short phrase assumes an optative verb with God as the subject: "[May God be] merciful to you, Lord. This will surely not happen to you!" Although the two possible understandings are clearly not entirely opposed to one another, the second, more full expression is the much more likely understanding, for the following reasons.

First, the LXX renders the 21 examples of the pertinent Hebrew interjection in four different ways, only four of which exhibit the construction "merciful to X" (2 Sam 20:20, 20; 23:17; 1 Chr 11:19). The most common rendering (nine times) simply offers the adverb *μηδαμῶς*, "by no means, certainly not" (Gen 18:25, 25; 1 Sam 2:30; 12:23; 20:2, 9; 22:15; 24:7; 26:11). So it can hardly be claimed that Peter's words are a typical or normal way of rendering the Hebrew interjection.<sup>17</sup>

Second, the adjective *ἔλεως* occurs in the LXX thirty-five times. In only four instances does it render the Hebrew interjection "Far be it" (2 Sam 2:20, 20; 2 Sam 23:17; 1 Chr 11:19; an idiomatic use also occurs in 1 Macc 2:21). The dominant pattern with *ἔλεως*, however, is to pair it with either *γίνομαι* or *εἰμί* in order to say that God will be or has been merciful/gracious to someone; this usage occurs a total of twenty-nine times.<sup>18</sup> This is the normal context for *ἔλεως*; one reference (LXX Isa 54:10) is even a declarative statement that actually elides the verb: "For the Lord said, '[I will be] merciful to you'" (*εἶπεν γὰρ κύριος ἴλεώς σοι*).

Third, and perhaps least importantly, the normal way of expressing the Hebrew interjection applies the expression to the speaker(s): "Far be it from me/us." In only four of the twenty-one occurrences is the Hebrew interjection aimed at a third party (Gen 18:25, 25; 1 Sam 20:9; Job 34:10),

<sup>16</sup> Walter Bauer, Frederick William Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), and Henry Alford, *Matthew – Mark*, vol. 1, part 1, *Alford's Greek Testament: An Exegetical and Critical Commentary* (1874; repr., Grand Rapids: Guardian Press, 1976), 175. Ulrich Luz seems to follow BDF, although he does note that other Greek parallels literally mean "May God be gracious"; see *Matthew 8–20*, trans. James E. Crouch, ed. Helmut Koester, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 382.

<sup>17</sup> Five times the Hebrew particle is rendered with the optative *μη γένοιτο* (Gen 44:7, 17; Josh 22:29; 24:16; 1 Kgs 20:3), and twice with the optative *μη εἴη* (Job 27:5; 34:10). Once (1 Sam 14:45) the LXX does not translate the particle at all.

<sup>18</sup> Exod 32:12; Num 14:19, 20; Deut 21:8; 1 Kgs 8:30, 34, 36, 39, 50; 2 Chr 6:21, 25, 27; 6:39; 7:14; Isa 54:10; Jer 5:1, 7; 27:20; 38:34; 43:3; Amos 7:2; 2 Macc 2:7, 22; 7:37; 10:26; 4 Macc 6:28; 8:14; 9:24; 12:17.

and in none of those four instances does the LXX translate with "mercy to you."

For the reasons given above, it seems clear that we should translate Matthew 16:22 in the direction suggested by BDAG, which also gives other supports from extant Greek literature: "[May God be] merciful to you, Lord. This will certainly not happen to you!"

If this more precise or full rendering is justified, what is the pay-off? Peter does not want Jesus to suffer the things in Jerusalem that Jesus has said he must, by divine necessity, undergo. Presumably Peter agrees with the idea that Jesus would go up to Jerusalem; he is, after all, the Messiah and Son of the living God. Peter's perspective, however, on how things should go with Jesus in Jerusalem is this: in Jerusalem, God should be merciful to Jesus. To think that way, however, is to think the things of men, and not of God. It is out in the open now: Jesus is going up to Jerusalem. He will not go up to receive God's mercy. At this crucial turning point in the Gospel of Matthew, Peter's words express a saving irony that only the reader of Matthew's Gospel can appreciate. Jesus will go up to suffer, and to die, and then, yes, to rise from the dead. What Jesus, however, will experience in his death in Jerusalem will be the opposite of God's mercy.

### ***Strike the Shepherd (Matt 26:31)***

A second text helps to nail down this remarkable, saving, atoning truth. Matthew 26:31 records how Jesus and the disciples moved from the upper room out to the Mount of Olives. The verse reads, "Then Jesus said to [the disciples], 'You all will be caused to stumble because of me on this night, for it is written, "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'"" Here the point to be made is a straightforward one, and it pertains to the wording of Zechariah 13:7. In both the MT and the LXX, the strange oracle is addressed to a sword: "O sword, rise up . . . strike the shepherd." One might perhaps be left in doubt as to whose is the hand that wields the sword, though the sword clearly will strike the shepherd in response to Yahweh's command. Jesus' words in Matthew 26:31, however, leave no doubt as to who the striker will be: "I will strike the shepherd." What Jesus now goes to experience is the hand of God, the Father's own hand, smiting him. We might note that, perhaps not surprisingly, Peter speaks out in this context and denies that he will stumble. He asserts, "Even if it is necessary for me to die with you, I will not deny you" (Matt 26:35). Peter thought the things of men in Matthew 16:22; here he shows the same error. Peter does not know that it is not necessary for him to die with Jesus. He will not die with Jesus; rather, he will deny the Master and all the disciples will fall away. Jesus will die

alone, apart from God's mercy (Matt 16:22), struck down by the Father's hand. Although the vocabulary is quite different from the LXX, Raymond Brown wonders whether this change to "I will strike" is an allusion to Isaiah 53:4, 10, where God was pleased to crush his Servant in order to redeem the people.<sup>19</sup>

### *The Cup of Wrath (Matt 26:36-46)*

We move quickly up to the next scene, in Gethsemane. Here commentators are, in my judgment, sometimes oddly reluctant to interpret the significance of Jesus' saying, "Let this cup pass from me" (Matt 26:39). They quickly opt for a mere "cup of suffering" or a "cup of sorrow" or "martyrdom."<sup>20</sup>

There is more here, however, than mere physical suffering. I can mention here a remarkable piece of biblical theology found in the Anchor Bible commentary on Obadiah by Paul Raabe. Obadiah 16 reads, "For as you have drunk on my holy mountain, so all the nations shall drink continually; they shall drink and swallow, and shall be as though they had never been" (ESV). Raabe's excursus, "Drinking the Cup of Yahweh's Wrath," systematically lays out what is a common prophetic metaphor, namely, that when Yahweh visits his wrath upon his enemies, it is like drinking a cup of foaming wine that makes one stagger and fall into shame, ruin, and death.<sup>21</sup> It is a remarkable and terrible metaphor. It is present here in the garden.<sup>22</sup>

The pieces are in place, and they add up. First, against Peter's wish, there will be no divine mercy in Jerusalem (Matt 16:22). Second, Yahweh himself will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be

<sup>19</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave: A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 130.

<sup>20</sup> A. H. McNeile, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 287; John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 820, 1099; and Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 396.

<sup>21</sup> Paul R. Raabe, *Obadiah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 24D (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 206-254.

<sup>22</sup> Scholars who see a likely reference to the "cup of wrath" include D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin et al., vol. 8, *Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 543; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 3:4-97*; France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1005; Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 533; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary 33B (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 783; and Keener, *Matthew*, 638.

scattered (Matt 26:31). Now, in the garden, Jesus accepts the cup of wrath. He goes to his suffering and death, knowing what the Father's plan holds for him.

What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul!  
 What wondrous love is this, O my soul?  
 What wondrous love is this  
 That caused the Lord of bliss  
 To bear the dreadful curse for my soul, for my soul  
 To bear the dreadful curse for my soul?<sup>23</sup>

### *The Cry of Dereliction (Matt 27:45-54)*

We come, then, to the cry of dereliction and the confession of the centurion in Matthew 27:45-54. Jesus cites Psalm 22:1. We should not try to soften the text's evident meaning by suggesting that Jesus' citation of the first verse of the psalm thereby invokes the entire psalm, including the triumphant saving conclusion where God delivers the righteous one. I suppose that might be the case, though I have never seen much proof for this assertion. The words remain: "My God, my God, why did you forsake me?" (Matt 27:46).<sup>24</sup> The words are in question form, to be sure, because it is the psalm's own form. Yet here we see, perhaps, the deepest mystery of the faith, that the Father abandons the Son to rejection and wrath. This is the judgment day, as all the apocalyptic signs that break loose demonstrate (Matt 27:51-53). The judgment has come upon Jesus.

As whom does Jesus die? He dies as a number of things, to be sure, not least as the true King of the Jews. The Sanhedrin, however, condemns him for allowing himself to be called the Son of God, and the centurion and his fellows who were standing guard confess Jesus rightly, "Truly, this one was the Son of God" (Matt 27:54).

We may now recall the earlier "Son of God" Christology and especially the Baptism of Jesus. This Son of God embodies, stands for, is

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<sup>23</sup> Commission on Worship of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 543:1.

<sup>24</sup> France comments, "In the end, [Psalm 22] turns to joyful thanksgiving for deliverance in vv. 22-31, and some interpreters have suggested that it is the latter part of the psalm that Jesus has in mind as well as its traumatic beginning, so that this is in effect a shout of defiant trust in the God whom he fully expects to rescue him. 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." See *Gospel of Matthew*, 1076.

the people. He went down into the water, to stand in the place of sinners, and the Father was pleased; it was fitting for him to thus stand with sinners, and the Father acknowledged him as the Son of God. Now the Father is pleased to abandon the Son, who hangs in the place of the sinners, stricken by God, apart from divine mercy. His death is divine judgment. Moreover, precisely because he is the Son of God, his death is vicarious, taking wrath and judgment in the place of the people.

### III. Atonement Sayings in Matthew

We may now at last briefly turn our attention to two specific sayings of the Lord. My goal has been to offer the broad strokes of what I believe to be Matthew's atonement theology. If this presentation is coherent, then specific sayings find their place in that wider context. We turn first to the well-known ransom saying of Matthew 20:28.

The context reveals, not surprisingly, complete misunderstanding on the part of Jesus' disciples; James and John come with their mother and ask for greatness in the reign of Jesus. What should be noted, of course, is that this request comes *immediately* on the heels of the third passion prediction (Matt 20:17-19); the death and resurrection of Jesus is not registering at all with the disciples.<sup>25</sup> When the other disciples are indignant, Jesus takes the occasion to teach the strangely inverted realities and standards in the reign of God now present in himself. A great one is a servant. The first one is a slave. The Son of Man himself is the standard and example. He came not to be served but to serve, that is, to give, in the place of the many, his life as a ransom payment.

Here I will simply highlight two points of grammar. First, the prepositional phrase "in the place of many" almost certainly modifies the infinitive "to give." This is the normal Greek pattern, and, although it could modify "ransom payment," there is no need to take it that way. The act of giving is done ἀντί πολλῶν. The second point has to do with the normal force of the preposition ἀντί plus the genitive. The sense is "in the place of, instead of." Matthew uses this preposition five times. In Matthew 2:22, Joseph is afraid to go to Judea when he hears that Archelaus is ruling *in the place of, instead of* his father Herod who has died. Herod is not ruling; Archelaus is ruling in his place. In Matthew 5:38, Jesus quotes the *lex talionis* of "an eye in the place of, in exchange for an eye, and a tooth for a

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<sup>25</sup> For a clear and cogent study of the disciples and their incomprehension in Matthew 16:21-20:28, see Jeannine K. Brown, *The Disciples in Narrative Perspective: The Portrayal and Function of the Matthean Disciples* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002).

tooth." Replacement or exchange is once again the force of the preposition. Finally, in the wonderful and odd little story of the coin in the fish's mouth, Jesus instructs Peter to pay the temple tax *in exchange for you and me* (Matt 17:27). Given the sacrificial and redemptive overtones of the temple tax, even here it is possible, if not likely, that the sense of exchange and replacement is present.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, when Jesus teaches in Matthew 20:28 that he will give his life in the place of many as a ransom, this is a vicarious payment.<sup>27</sup> In the wider context of the Son of God dying under the wrath of the Father, the traditional interpretation of Matthew 20:28 receives firm support.

The second saying of Jesus is found in the words of institution, Matthew 26:28. Again, only brief attention is needed. Even as he institutes and begins the foretaste of the eschatological feast to come, Jesus offers an interpretation of his own death: "This is my blood of the covenant which is being poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." The prepositional phrase is *περὶ πόλλων*, and, to be sure, the force of *περὶ* plus the genitive is often a weaker sense of "concerning, about." It is also true, however, that there is a noticeable tendency in Koine Greek to use certain prepositions interchangeably; Blass-Debrunner-Funk suggests that this verse is an example of *περὶ* being used for *ὑπέρ*, "on behalf of."<sup>28</sup> In light of the larger context and the meaning Matthew assigns to Jesus' death, there can be little doubt that the Lord's words here also teach a vicarious, atoning significance to his blood that is being poured out for many.

#### IV. Atonement and Salvation in Matthew: Center and Fullness

I began this study with what might have been a suggestive comment, namely, that salvation is not *exhausted* by the concept of atonement. What I mean to say is this: The great good news is surely the events that proclaim that the Son of God has died a vicarious death and, in so doing, averted the wrath of God away from all who trustingly follow him. This death avails for present joy and confidence now, and it will also avail on the day of judgment.

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<sup>26</sup> See Carson, "Matthew," 393-395, and France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 665.

<sup>27</sup> One should note the LXX usage of "to give a ransom" (*διδόναι λύτρον*), all of which occur in contexts of exchange or sacrifice or payment for sins committed: Exod 21:30, 30; 30:12; Lev 19:20; 25:24; Num 3:48, 51. See the still valuable classic study of "Redemption" in Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 11-64.

<sup>28</sup> BDF 229.1.



The Son of God, however, did not just die. He also lived, and his ministry was one not just of preaching good news; he also healed, exorcized, and drove back Satan's power in all of its forms. Remarkably, the one explicit citation of Isaiah 53 in the entire Gospel occurs in Matthew 8:17, where it is given to show why Jesus was healing people and casting out demons: "When it had become late, they brought to him many demon-possessed people and he cast the spirits out with a word, and he healed all who were sick, in order that the thing that was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, saying 'He himself took our weaknesses, and he carried our infirmities'" (Matt 8:16-17). Physical healing is part of the ministry of the suffering servant. Jesus' miracles were portents of the new creation; they were anticipations of the good things to come. Jesus' signs and wonders were the in-breaking of the reign of God and the temporary reversal of sickness, sin's ally.

The Son of God did not just die. He rose from the dead. Just as Jesus died in our place, we must quickly and joyfully proclaim that he rose in our place. He rose vicariously, as the people of God. Salvation, Matthew would insist, is not just forgiveness, though that is the center. Salvation is not just the averting of divine wrath; it is also the restoration of the creation, and that means the driving back of death itself. Jesus dies as the Son of God. But he also rises as the Son of God. Here the mammoth work by N. T. Wright offers indispensable insight.<sup>29</sup> This is historical apologetics at its best; Wright attacks and undercuts an entire century of destructive biblical criticism. At the heart of his work, however, is this basic point: in the meta-narrative of Second Temple Judaism, "resurrection" is an eschatological, end-time category and event that entails the undoing of death and the restoration of God's creation. So, just as surely as Good Friday is the Judgment Day, suffered in our stead, so also Easter is the victorious Judgment Day, experienced in our stead. The Son of God rose in power. Jesus has come to save his people from their sins—and from all the effects of their sins. Therefore, even to this very day his New Israel lives in hope, baptizing and teaching until the end of days. He has atoned for sin by his vicarious death. He has inaugurated the last days by his vicarious resurrection. On the last day, the eternal life that he fully possesses for us and in our place will be fully ours. Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

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<sup>29</sup> N. T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. 3, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

